

Confessions

by

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True crime has always interested me so I started to make artwork based on these crimes. While I create these pieces I am listening to descriptions of these killers whether it be about their background, the crime or how they were caught and I feel this helps me to really know my subject matter. It helps me find out details about them that I can add to the pieces when I see fit. My senior project came about as a result of my interest in podcasting, which in turn, introduced me to the world of serial killers. I found myself wanting to learn more about the killers, how their mind worked and what made them do what they did. Each one of my pieces depicts aspects of a serial killer's crimes that are known only through the killer's minds or testimony. Based on these statements I make a piece that imagines a heinous scene, such as the shrine that Jeffery Dahmer planned to create for himself. With this first-person oral history as the basis for my imagery, I then added little elements that help to create the uneasy feeling that I have in my work.

In my painting *Angel of Decay*, which is based on Ted Bundy's crimes, each of the twelve heads look similar. Bundy didn't think of his victims as individual people; he just went after young women for how they looked not for their personalities. Bundy was a serial killer, necrophile, burglar and rapist who lured his victims to his car by faking an injury and asking for help, or by impersonating an officer. After killing the victims he would decapitate some of them and keep the severed head as mementoes. *Angel of Decay* depicts twelve generic severed heads that is not focusing on the gore of the scene but on the realization that Bundy did not see these heads as the actual human beings that they were; he instead, saw them as objects that he wanted to keep and look at daily.

Jeffery Dahmer is known for being a serial killer, necrophiliac, and cannibal. After he was arrested for his crimes he described them in detail. I am most interested in a drawing he did of a shrine he wanted to create for himself of all of the victims he had accumulated. Dahmer's victims died because he attempted to put them into a zombie like state so they would be submissive and not fight back or run away. When that plan did not work out he saved the skeletons of his victims to make his shrine. The drawing is a typical stick figure, but the note on the drawing states that the full skeletons and skulls he planned on saving from his victims would be painted. My painting *Shrine* incorporates this shrine drawing overlaid with my own painting as if I have collaborated with Dahmer.

The idea of taking a description of something and creating art out of it isn't new to the crime world. For decades, investigators have been taking information from eyewitnesses and having a composite sketch made to help catch suspects. Taking someone's verbal descriptions can be helpful in these cases but it is hard to know if someone is being untruthful or if they remember things incorrectly after what was most likely a difficult and stressful situation for them. The way I use verbal description doesn't require forensic accuracy. I take the word of these questionable people no matter how insane it sounds and making the pieces that they describe regardless of whether it is something that truly happened or was going to happen before they got caught. That part interests me is how these things are explained. A killer is not someone you could count on as a reliable source but that doesn't make what they describe any less interesting.

Grotesque artwork has been being created throughout history. Titian, Francisco de Goya, Frida Kahlo and Andy Warhol are just a few who have dealt with macabre imagery. Titian's piece *Flaying of Marsyas* is reminiscent of how Ed Gein hung his victims to become "dressed out like

a deer,” as stated by the sheriff deputy who found the gruesome scene. Ed Gein’s heinous crimes were also influential in my work. Gein is known for making masks out of the skins of the people he murdered and exhumed corpses, but he also made other trophies and keepsakes. When the cops searched his house they found many horrible things including clothes made from human skin and furniture and utensils made from skin and bones. Gein directly influenced a piece I made that is a skull which is used as a cereal bowl along with a spoon made from a bone. These are things that Gein used in his daily life. Gein began to make all these pieces shortly after the death of his mother. He wanted to create a “woman suit” so he could be closer to his mother by literally crawling back into the skin of women that reminded him of his mother.

Leon Golub used unstretched canvas for his work which is what I also used to create my piece, *Angel of Decay*. Golub made his pieces feel like they were done in a quick and violent style, and I feel as though my piece has the same feeling to it. The Met Breuer put together a collection of Golub’s pieces that were created between 1940 and 2004. This collection included a painting of a decapitated head that was constructed by scraping and beating the unstretched canvas. Golub’s 1966 piece *Gigantomachy II*, has a sculptural and sketch like feeling to the figures which creates the gruesome monster like style in which he portrays men. Although Golub’s pieces mostly depict his opposition to violence in his work, it is done so in a violent manner similar to my style. Golub’s piece had areas that were packed with mark making and areas of empty space that make the piece not have a specific location, which makes the focus of the piece the violence not what is going on in the background. Golub also doesn't focus on facial features of the figures to make them more general.

Joe Coleman painted portraits of murderers such as Charles Manson and Albert Fish. Although we both work with the theme of killers, he does it in a more direct way and I work more specifically with their verbal descriptions. Coleman's paintings have a main center point, which is a portrait of the murder. Then they have smaller sections that are different pieces of their lives that were influential to who they were. These portraits vary stylistically from mine because Coleman uses a single horse hair brush to create his entire piece, which is detailed and precise, while I use a much larger brush that ends with a much messier over all look and feel to them. Coleman style works well, especially considering all the work it must have taken these killers to continue what they were doing and not get caught for as long as they did. My style however, works well in comparison to how messy and violent these crimes were.

Listening to podcasts such as My Favorite Murder made me realize that having an obsession with true crime isn't just a morbid hobby and it is actually a healthy interest. My work is influenced by information that I hear from not only confessions and testimonies but also from true crime outlets. While I am working on my pieces I tend to listen to podcasts about the crimes. While I am working on a piece, I listen to details about the crime and the more I hear, the more I am able to figure out the elements of the piece. The information I listen to, even if it is information I already knew, helps to spark new ideas. This affects my work because I find when they are talking about the violent crimes I tend to work quicker, with messier brush strokes and more sketchy line work. Even when the pieces aren't related to the crime, just listening to them, the pieces overall have a feeling of discomfort that I am now embracing into the body of work.

Using serial killers testimonies and confessions, was the main way I was able to create all of my pieces. My pieces also stemmed from my interest in listening to true crime podcasts

and finding out more details about their demented minds. An abundance of killers have spoken out about their crimes and while listening to them any little element can be inspiration for a piece. As more information comes to light about these cases and future cases I am going to continue to listen and create new pieces based on what interests me. Most of my focus right now is on more recent killers but there are plenty of old cases that could be of great inspiration for not only a single work but for a whole series.

Works Cited

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Angel of Decay (2019), acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 20" x 140"

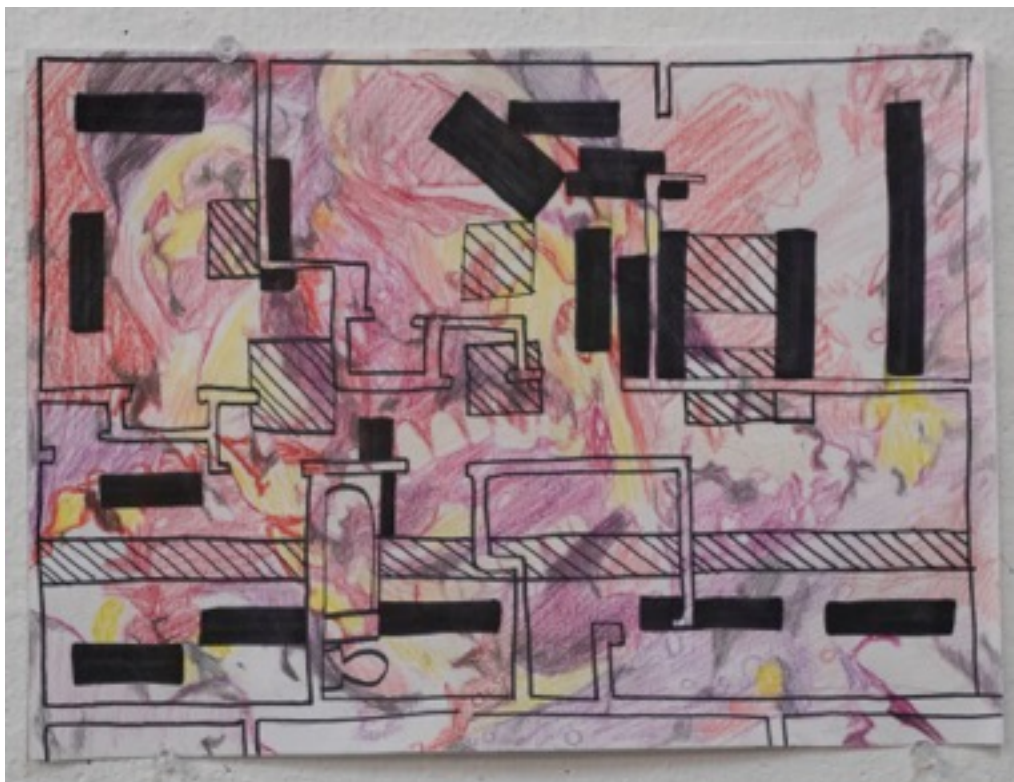




Cereal (2019), clay, 8"x12"



Shrine (2019), acrylic on wood panel, 24" x 36"



Not well (2019), acrylic and marker on canvas, 16" x 20"

Mapped (2019), colored pencil and marker, 11" x 15"





Ripper (2019), acrylic on canvas, 64"x 42"



Chess (2019), acrylic on canvas, 32" x 32"

Letter (2019), colored pencil and marker, 6" x 8"



Hail (2019), acrylic and oil on wood panel, 6" x 12"



Wonder (2019), acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 21" x 44"



Chained (2019), graphite, 14" x 17"