

Journey to Recovery @ Doubting Thomas Gallery, 1/12

Is this the basis for a good time at an art gallery? Artist, writer and former licensed social worker, Andrea R. Taylor, is bipolar, was sexually abused through much of her youth, and suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome, borderline personality disorder and depression. The stigma of mental illness is so passé.

"I didn't believe that recovery was possible," said Ms. Taylor who has a bachelor degree majoring in psychology from Cleveland State University. "This belief was irrational," she said. Fortunately Cleveland can be a pretty friendly place for people with "issues" if you go looking. Much expertise in mental health is here.

"You need to believe in the irrational optimist. If you don't you won't see opportunity," said artist Colin Park of the West Side who a year-and-a-half ago encouraged Ms. Taylor to keep painting after her son, Jonathan who was bipolar killed himself in 2002. She then painted the colorful and captivating "Irrational Optimist."

Taylor, who grew up in Cleveland and lives in Euclid, is reading from her book "It's a Child's Fault, Too?" at 8pm Friday 1/19 at the Doubting Thomas Gallery during her road show presentation, "Friday, the 13th, no one heard me killing myself!!"

"I have to keep producing or I probably would cease to exist," said Taylor. And she produces. The show leads off with a short introductory plaque letting the viewer know what they are in for. Hung on the walls are mostly wildly colorful paintings with names such as: Dysfunctional Family, Cosmic Orphan, Non-Linear Process of Recovery, Wisps of World Peace, The Storm Within, Colorful Consumers, Life's Crazy Maze, Bipolar Blues, Soaring Out of Darkness Into Splendid Light, Just for Fun, and Here I Stand With a World of Possibilities Awaiting Me!

Bertha Williams, who lives in Midtown looked over the collection and said, "I understand it but I don't know why."

"Take this painting, 'Multi-faceted Recovery,'" said Kristen Weisman, a clinical psychologist from Ohio City who met Taylor three weeks before the opening. "It is wonderful! So different! So spectacular! In the painting 'Rage' the light force is equal to the rage. Beautiful!"

"I've experienced these things, family eruptions and family violence," Ms. Weisman continued. "In 'Mayhem' (which is about Taylor's late son), it is bleeding but magnificent! In 'Healthier Family,' she takes us there. She shows we can go there sometime but we can't hold onto it very long before it falls away."

Taylor, who calls herself a mental health services consumer, read from her book and spoke to a crowd of about twenty. "Move beyond surviving. I want to thrive!" she said. "There is a state of being too afraid to trust. Remember, we are lovable people."

"Keep going and we shall overcome!" announced someone in the audience who gave his name as Adolf.

Taylor described a bit what it is like to be on the down side of bipolar. "I've had to lock myself in my house and use all my energy to stay in. If I went out and someone looked at me funny, I'll erupt in rage."

"This show is an inspiration to anyone who can't express themselves like this. Holding it in does no good," said Adolf.

"Even though I live every day on the edge because of my dark struggle I see and ardently rely on the light of divine intervention!" said Taylor. During her presentation she also thanked the Cuyahoga County Mental Health Board. "In the midst of my abyss I always hear the words, 'Let there be light!' My goal is to thrive through the power of light and love!"

This show runs through January 27, at the Doubting Thomas Art Gallery, 856 Jefferson Ave. in Tremont. Hours: Friday & Saturday 6-10pm, 216-241-7800, Gallery Web address: <http://www.geocities.com/doubtingthomas2005>.