

Patricia Miller's Artist Statement (Extended)

I create abstract plywood sculptures depicting my intimate experience with anxiety and depression to ultimately promote mental health awareness. It is important to shine a light on mental health issues, because they typically go unseen and/or ignored. According to the World Health Organization, one million people worldwide commit suicide every year. That is an average of 3,000 people a day; one person every 40 seconds. In 2017, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported suicide as the tenth leading cause of death overall in the United States. The reports say there were over twice as many suicides (47,173) in the United States as there were homicides (19,510), yet all we hear and talk about are the homicides. Suicide is currently the second most common cause of deaths among college-aged students with more than 1,000 students taking their lives and nearly 24,000 attempting to each year (Appelbaum, 2006). Social stigma and discrimination makes it difficult for someone struggling with their mental health to be able to talk about it and seek necessary help. This is why it is crucial to stop the stigma and discrimination against mental illness and mental health issues, which is what my art aims to do.

I have always been interested in nature, specifically trees, and the many different forms it takes on in our lives. I can personally relate to the raw, cheap labeling and aspect of plywood, made of different layers for a certain purpose; ultimately, undervalued, unappreciated and overlooked. It took destroying an unsatisfying painting of mine to reveal all of the beauty hidden within the material, and to realize how strongly I identified with this material and process. I have a strong do-it-yourself work ethic centered around perfectionism, which is why physical effort and process is a prominent and integral part of my work. I use only two tools, a flat-head screwdriver and a hammer to tear apart sheets of plywood that were left whole or cut down to varying sizes. Once it is stripped to a thin sheet, I then soak,

break, and bend it into different positions. I am interested in relating the wood anthropomorphically to the human body through its form; expressing the emotional and physical wear and tear of life, and one reaching one's breaking point. I was drawn to this type of destructive or distressed process as a form of escape not only from the technical and conceptual pressures of art, but also the negativity inducing pressures of life. I consider my artwork to be personal and universal. I hope my work helps those who are struggling with their mental health to feel understood and not so alone. I also hope it encourages people to acknowledge and appreciate the beautiful and complex fragility that is within us and all around us.