

Beautiful minds: The Midtown Misfits make art out of mental illness



By [Tamara Ikenberg | tikenberg@al.com](mailto:tikenberg@al.com)

on July 11, 2013 at 5:17 PM, updated July 11, 2013 at 5:29 PM

[MOBILE, Alabama](#)—"Blue Mary" is a beautiful expression of Mary Ann Taylor's depression.

Taylor's sad and saintly alter-ego has become the artist's signature.

"Blue Mary" symbolically tackles the issues that make Taylor's mind race, from working several jobs simultaneously as a single mother, to her childhood sexual abuse.

"I was labeled bipolar in 2009 and she began having an iconic look," Taylor said. "Painting her brings me peace and hope."

You can meet "Blue Mary" and her maker during [LoDa Artwalk](#) on Friday, July 12 from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at The Midtown Misfits art show at Blue Velvet Studio, located at 504 Church St.

The exhibit, which includes paintings, coasters, pottery and other offbeat objets d'art, will be on display through the first week of August.

Taylor is the founder of the Midtown Misfits, a collective of local artists including [Fred Marchman](#), Jean Marie Lee, Anderson Smith, Rhett Buckner, Lani Buckner, Georgia Reeves, Lars Britt and Zach DePolo and the late John Chamblin.

Like Vincent Van Gogh, and a multitude of creative geniuses, several of the Misfits are fighting some form of mental illness, from bipolar depression to schizophrenic affective disorder.

"Inevitably mental illness and creativity go together. All of the original Midtown Misfits have a mental illness and volunteer to educate the community about mental illness and art," Taylor said. "We strive to accept what is unknown. There are many dimensions of reality and the misfit's art is like a diary of adventures, fantasy, and the everyday cosmos that twists and turns into a hologram."

Taylor founded the group in 2005. Since then, the Misfits' talents have become known and appreciated throughout Alabama.

Currently, Misfit paintings created for Mental Health Awareness Month are hanging in the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery.

The Misfits present two art shows every year at their gathering place Peace Park on Collins St.

Blue Velvet owner Karen Cassidy is looking forward to sharing the Misfits' powerful point of view with Mobile art-lovers.

"I think there is a comical, almost whimsical feel to many of the pieces," she said. "The use of form and colors is comforting and fun."

Cassidy is particularly proud of one of Jean Marie Lee's paintings in the show. The piece, depicting a man and woman musician sitting on a porch, is based on a photograph taken circa 1910.

"There are claims that it's the porch of 504 Church St., presently the home of Blue Velvet Studio," Cassidy said. "That's a special piece to me and I'll probably ask to keep that at the gallery a while."

The Misfits' efforts to give back to society and educate the community about mental illness are essential in a world that often fears and misinterprets brain maladies.

"It's really so sad because you have a stigma. People are scared of you. A lot of friends leave you because they don't understand what's going on," Taylor said. "If you have a heart condition and you're on heart medication it wouldn't be any big deal."

By working one on one with community members, the Misfits are chipping away at the negative attitudes toward mental illness.

Taylor said all of the Misfits teach art. One of the places where members regularly share their skills is Mobile's [SOMI Club](#) (Survivors of Mental Illness) on Midmost Dr.

"We're really a community organization," Taylor said. "It's real important to us to reach out to the community and teach them about art."

After Artwalk, the exhibit will be available for viewing by appointment. Call 850-375-4481 or email bluevelvetstudio@hotmail.com.