

# Medicinal Art

By Gabriel Edmunds

A professor, psychiatrist, and artist came to East Tennessee State University to deliver a lecture entitled “Art can save lives.”

On Tuesday, Feb. 12, Dr. Eric Avery came to ETSU. His lecture was intended to show the audience ways in which art is capable of saving lives. Dr. Avery says there have been few studies yielding verifiable quantitative proof of this actually being possible. That is why his lecture focuses on the qualitative proof. Dr. Avery said that his lecture was supposed to be entitled “Can art change lives?” However, after a typo had occurred, he changed the entire lecture to present evidence rather than beg the question.

He began the lecture with a quick summary of his life. He graduated college with an art degree. He then decided to go to med school and get a degree in psychology. Because of this, he is sometimes referred to as “Dr. Art.”

One of Dr. Avery’s most compelling pieces of art and evidence is a structure of four walls. The wallpaper of these walls contains images of HIV infected blood cells and HIV condom filled piñatas hang from the ceiling. However, the important part of this piece was the function. While on display, the structure acted as a HIV and AIDS testing center.

However, some of his pieces are social commentary pieces. He created a toilet seat with raised lettering that imprints on the person sitting down. Also, from the inside of the toilet seat you can read the letters which say, “Abandon all hope ye who enter here.” Dr. Avery said, “From inside the toilet seat, we can see what a bad job we’ve done.” He calls this a “turd’s eye view.”

Dr. Avery says, “Art and medicine are related in space.” One of his students commented on this saying, “What he means to convey is visual communication.” Dr. Avery went on further with this topic saying, “I am creating a physical ‘space’ where art and medicine collide.”

