

Professor David Kaiser introduced the recipient for the Kearsse Award in Psychology in the Liberal Arts curriculum to Kara Howard.

Last winter' my Abnormal Psychology students were to select a poet, author, musician, or artist who suffered from a mental illness -- for example, bipolar depression, schizophrenia, autism -- and discuss how the illness influenced his or her artistic creations. Kara Howard chose Swiss-born Adolf Wolfli, a man who was all four: poet, author, musician, and artist as well as violently insane.

Whereas most of my students stuck with the "usual suspects" for this assignment, writing about Van Gogh, or Sylvia Plath, Edgar Allan Poe, Ernest Hemingway, or Kurt Cobain -- all examples mostly provided to them by grown adults, in one way or another, except for Cobain, Kara chose Adolf Wolfli, a lesser known artist of the early 20th century. Wolfli suffered from schizophrenia in the early years of the 20th century and spent much of his life in an insane asylum. His work became known as an early example of "outsider art" and some of it is very reminiscent of William Blake in both intensity and subject matter, if not success.

A young writer must do two things if he or she is to develop: explore the world and find his or her own voice. Kara is succeeding at both.

It is my great pleasure to present her this year's award for general Education in psychology to Kara Howard for her work titled "The mind and creations of Adolf Wölfli"