

**Bra Humbug? Leggo my bra? 'Show us your bra' exhibit proves it pays to have a sense of humor** (Daily Hampshire Gazette)

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GO ahead. It's OK to laugh.

Yes, we're talking about breast cancer, and no one's pretending that's not serious stuff. But I dare say no one can visit the "Show us your bra!" exhibit at Thornes Marketplace in Northampton without cracking a smile. You walk into the gallery, and you're faced with the sight of 214 bras. Bras made out of Wonder bread wrappers, papier-mâché, tire treads, fishing lures, life preservers, lace, camera film, sneakers and sequins. Bras with titles like: Leggo My Bra; Bra Humbug; Bra-bie; Breast Stroke; Nice Pitts. Bras that are outrageous. Funny. Serious. Sad. Beautiful. Quirky. Strange. Clever. Weird. Bras that make you want to know just a little about the stories behind them.

The show, started in 1998 by Judith Fine, owner of the Gazebo lingerie shop in Northampton, raises money to help uninsured and underinsured breast cancer patients obtain prostheses and post-mastectomy bras. In this area, Moriarty Home Medical Supply Inc. of Florence and Gazebo both serve breast cancer patients. So far, according to Fine, about \$36,000 has been raised this year from sales of the entries, and the calendars and T-shirts that are also available.

### Artist and attorney

Jennifer Dieringer of Northampton is an attorney and she's the first to say that she's "not an artist at all," yet the bra she made is part of the exhibit. Molly Cantor of Leverett, on the other hand, who also has a bra on display, is an accomplished potter whose work is shown and sold at area galleries. One of the charms of the show, now wrapping up its stint at Thornes, is that it welcomes entries from anyone. Fine sums up the philosophy of the exhibit this way: "If you cared enough to make something, we will hang it."

To create "Legally Binding," Dieringer, 36, and her partner, John Frey, went to Wal-Mart on the hunt for Nerf balls. Dieringer used them to fashion the cups, and covered them with snippets of text from court decisions that have affected women. Where the nipples would be, she glued on photos of the two women U.S. Supreme Court justices, Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. "The idea was simple," she said, "but it was a lot harder than I thought." She was inspired, though, by her grandmother. About 20 years ago, Dinny Lothringer, who lives in New Jersey, underwent a double mastectomy. Today, at 81, she is a volunteer in her hometown who drives cancer patients to and from their medical appointments.

For Molly Cantor, 36, the potter, the motivation was the desire to use her artistic skills to help others. Cantor made a bra out of clay and, on the front where the cups would be, carved a pair of hands that are holding birds. It's a gentle image of "holding on and letting go," she said, in which viewers can find their own meanings. "A Bird in Hand" was awarded this year's third-place prize by the judges, local artists Mary Kasper and Greg Stone, and Linda Rosen, the project manager. "I felt so honored," Cantor said.

### Fire up the grill

S. Blake Walton of Northampton said she started out with "50 ideas at least." Of those, she actually worked on about four of them and finally settled on one to enter in the show. "BRA BQ – Some Like It Hot" had its beginnings when Walton brainstormed words that contained the word bra, or at least a version thereof. Barbecue, she decided, had definite possibilities.

Walton, who is a massage therapist and a photographer, made the bra itself out of a pair of oven mitts. Inside and around it, she displayed plastic tomatoes and other delectables, tucked a grilling fork on the side and mounted the whole display on a grill decorated with red chili pepper-shaped lights.

Walton, 54, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1993, and had a recurrence in 2000. Having undergone a mastectomy and chemotherapy she has been cancer-free for the past three years. For

any woman, breast cancer brings up feelings of "fear, anxiety and sadness," she said. Knowing that, Walton leads a support group for newly diagnosed women at Cancer Connection, the Northampton-based organization that offers support and services to cancer patients and their families. At a reception for all those who had made bras, Walton wore one of the creations she'd decided wasn't good enough to enter: a tin Wonder Woman breastplate held together by bungee cords and decorated with red sparkly lace. The event was a "complete delight," she said.

### 'The Pencil Test'

The pencil test, for those who aren't familiar with it, involves putting a pencil underneath a breast and seeing if it, well, stays there. If it does, you're ready for a bra. Northampton author Leslea Newman has immortalized the moment in a poem, "The Pencil Test, 1969":

Jenny and I, suddenly shy  
turn our backs to each other  
and undress, each of us armed  
with a pencil to tuck  
underneath our breasts.  
I wait, holding my breath...

In the exhibit, Newman's poem is paired with a bra made by first-place winner Jennifer Maestre of Concord. Newman had given the poem to Fine for use in the show. When Maestre's entry arrived, Fine decided to display them together.

Maestre, 44, heard about the exhibit from her mother, who had seen a notice about it during a visit to Northampton. "It just looked like a great cause and a fun thing to do," said Maestre, a sculptor whose work has been exhibited at the DeCordova Museum in Lincoln and at galleries in the eastern part of the state. She has often worked with pencils, nails "and other pointy things," she said. So it only made sense, she figured, to use that approach this time around. The bra she made consists of dozens of pencils connected with heavy-duty thread that she passed through holes she had

drilled in each one. "And I can tell you I spent a lot of time sharpening them," she said.

### The younger generation

Ezekiel Heter-Wegscheider, age 10, lives in Shelburne Falls. When his mother, Jane Wegscheider, told him she was going to make something for the show, Ezekiel decided he would too. He spent several afternoons after school making a bra out of brightly colored Legos. "It took me a long time to get the straps on," he said, as he described the challenges he faced. He kept at it, though, he said, in part because he knew that one of his mother's best friends had died of breast cancer. The exhibit, he said, is a good thing because "it helps lots of people."

### Not for women only

Though most of the entries were made by women, Ed Malinowski, 50, of Hatfield made two bras for the exhibit. In fact, Malinowski, a friend of Fine's who describes himself as a farmer, stonemason and artist, has participated in all four "Show Us Your Bra" exhibits. Working in an old hay barn at his farm, Malinowski used materials he had on hand – pieces of tire, a timing chain, a fan belt, spark plugs and baling wire – to make "The NASCAR Bra." Malinowski also made a "9-11 Bra," using small embroidered patch flags to signify "people coming together for a common cause."

### Wild horses

You've heard of Seabiscuit. Now there's "C-Biscuits AKA the Wild, Wild Breast Bra." "We figured people would get a kick out of that," said Geraldine Raucher, 41. Her family owns Heritage Farm in Easthampton and so, Raucher said, it was obvious that their entry would be about horses.

To get going, they gathered up some horse-related paraphernalia and went from there. Brad Miller, Raucher's sister-in-law's boyfriend, she said, was "the thinker" who figured out how to put it all together. A pair of horseshoes and leather blinkers worked quite

well for the cups, she said. Raucher's daughter, Abby, 10, braided baling wire to make the straps.

Raucher's decision to make a bra came as a result, she said, of her experience last year as a Gazebo customer. She had had a mastectomy, she said, and was also struggling emotionally. "I was not in good shape," she said of meeting Fine and her assistant, Emma Dostal. "I felt like my femininity had been taken away. They said they would take care of me, and they did. They are two really kind, good women."

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