

Form, function take shape in bras (Sunday Republican, Springfield, MA)

By BOB DATZ Staff Writer

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NORTHAMPTON – A bra that doesn't have to be worn can be made from almost anything: Coke cans, imitation bratwurst, seashells or little plastic Army guys, for instance.

Yet there is function behind the funky creations adorning the galleries at the Northampton Center for the Arts.

The individually themed, bra-inspired artworks at this fifth "Show Us Your Bra" exhibit will remain available for viewing through Nov. 13. Most of the pieces have already been auctioned off at an Oct. 22 opening gala that raised thousands of dollars to assist women after breast cancer surgery.

After the exhibit, the nonprofit Breast Form Fund will continue to benefit from the sale of 2006 calendars beginning in mid-November, with each month featuring one of the oddities judged most prize-worthy. "Bra-tistes" contributed 111 entries in this year's show.

"It doesn't matter if they're good or not," said Judith Fine, creator of the event and founder of The Breast Form Fund. "They had heart" in submitting the concepts – which are most often cute, funny or fanciful – to fill a serious gap. The fund helps post-mastectomy patients who are uninsured or underinsured to afford breast forms that restore a look and self-confidence.

The bras and their titles work in tandem most often. "The names are the starting point of the whole concept," Fine explained. "The names need to be clever."

Hence you get "Support for the Troops," with cups in stars and stripes fringed along the top with those toy soldiers. Or two renditions of the theme "Texas Hold 'Em" employing poker chips for the straps. One had playing cards tucked in pouches on either cup. The other featured a pair of roundly cupped hands to hold the valuables.

Such trendy themes have come and gone since Show Us Your Bra made its debut as a fun way for Fine to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Gazebo, her lingerie shop, in 1993. It was repeated in the store window by popular demand, but grew dramatically after Fine became certified to

fit women for breast forms, and the lack of medical coverage for them was apparent.

The Breast Form Fund was formed in association with existing charities and has been a free-standing nonprofit since 2004. Fine said she hopes to make it a national program in coming years. But centered in the Connecticut Valley, it has assisted almost 200 women to date.

Northampton orthodontist Linda Rigali brought no artistic resume to her work creating "The Bra-twurst" using shapely replicas of the celebrated sausage to make her point. She was tickled by the last exhibition two years ago to execute an idea. Her daughter Carolyn Clayton, on the other hand, submitted a high school art project, "Coca-Cola Corset," and has gone on to major in creative arts at college. Both works took third place in various categories and will appear on the show calendar.

"There's a lot of artists who do this, and there are a lot of people who aren't artists," Rigali said. "I straighten teeth."

Entries that were not sold or auctioned off remained available for purchase at prices ranging from \$10 to \$500 by calling Gazebo in Northampton at (413) 584-6673, which will also carry the calendars. Other calendar sale information is to be available on the exhibit's Web site, www.showusyourbra.org

IF YOU GO

Event: Show Us Your Bra

Where: Northampton Center for the Arts, third floor, 17 New South St., Northampton

When: Through Nov. 13

Hours: Tuesdays to Fridays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; weekends, noon to 4 p.m.

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