

traditional end launching method. As a result, ships were launched sideways using a series of wooden blocks, chains, and ropes. To launch the ship, the launchmaster dropped a white board or handkerchief, signalling to the axemen to cut the ropes which then released the ship into the basin. This task took an immense amount of coordination and was witnessed by thousands. In fact, launchings were always the largest community gatherings of the year.

This exhibition is noteworthy in that it represents the museum's first venture into the world of travelling exhibits. The tour, which was made possible by a Federal Department of Canadian Heritage Museums Assistance Programme grant, will make stops in Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Manitoba over the next two years. It is hoped that patrons throughout the country will come to appreciate Collingwood's place in the development of our national marine heritage. The production of corvettes is a case in point. These vessels were named after towns throughout the country in an attempt to solicit support for the war effort. Town dignitaries were invited to Collingwood to launch the ships and to stock them with items of local significance. A ship produced at Collingwood thus instilled civic pride in another community, thereby creating a bond between distant communities, a bond which this exhibit hopes to rekindle. It is also hoped that the exhibition will provide an impetus to the preservation of marine heritage throughout the country.

Staff at the museum should be commended for their ingenuity in presenting this exhibition. Software for a touch-screen terminal was developed completely in-house. Patrons are able to call up information about each ship, including a description of its design and various components. This makes it possible to see each ship "virtually," if not physically. The exhibition was also designed to be easily transportable. While museums usually have room for a travelling exhibition, they often do not have space for its storage containers. This problem is eliminated here because the containers actually form part of the display itself. Curator Tracy Marsh calls it "the swiss-army knife of travelling exhibits."

On the whole, the exhibition does an excellent job in documenting the social history of shipbuilding in Collingwood. Through a combination of archival sources and artifacts, it chronicles both the achievements and struggles of those who participated in the industry. While much remains to be told about shipbuilding in Collingwood, particularly its economic aspects, it is at least heartening to know that efforts are being made to preserve the marine heritage of the area.

Brian Masschaele
Simcoe County Archives

Survivors - In Search of a Voice - The Art of Courage. ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM. 17 February to 22 May 1995. 60 p. catalogue.

Survivors - In Search of a Voice - The Art of Courage is the successful attempt of an assembly of breast cancer survivors and contemporary women artists to make the public sit up and take notice of a disease that will affect one in nine Canadian women. It is both a personal tribute to women who are sick or have died, and a strident political statement about the way our society deals with women with cancer. In addition, it stands as an example of commitment and political fervour in an aloof

academic and cultural elite museum community, surrounded by a larger community stretched to its limit with the needs of other social causes.

The exhibition, which consists of twenty-four works in very different media, was launched in the Roloff Beni Exhibition Room in the Royal Ontario Museum, in February 1995 and will travel to the Gallery Stratford, Stratford, Ontario, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in Halifax, the Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina, the Vancouver Art Gallery, The Winnipeg Art Gallery, and the Glenbow Museum in Calgary through December 1996. It should be mentioned that the exhibition at its inception was refused by the Art Gallery of Windsor, the National Gallery of Canada, and the Art Gallery of Ontario, citing, among other reasons, the lack of curatorial direction and the "sociological orientation" of the theme. Some critics have refused to review the show, and some artists refused to participate for reasons of career advancement. We should applaud the participants for their ability to grapple with an issue that still has the ability to close doors and is still in essence a taboo subject.

Undaunted, the supporters and committed artists of the show rose above the politics to produce a wide variety of intense testimonials of varying degrees of subjectivity. Patrons Barbara Amesbury and Joan Chalmers began the project after losing several friends to breast cancer and were frustrated at their own inability to help them. Understanding their need to do something for the cause, friend Nancy Jackman (now Nancy Ruth) gave them the catalogue from an American exhibition on a comparable theme, and suggested they try something similar in Canada. Amesbury and Chalmers realized that the time had come for an exhibition that would have an impact similar to that of the contributions of the arts community to AIDS fundraising. They then asked for advice regarding the particulars of an exhibition from dealers and friends in the arts community. In addition, they also paid the \$500,000 bill for the creation and distribution of the exhibition. Not to be thwarted by those who thought it could not or should not be done, the two women commissioned the twenty-four artists, insisting that the only criterion was that the works could fit in a truck. Granted, this loose and undirected mandate for commissioned art might very well have led to an assembly of works that do not work together to create a cohesive body; this is not the case. The results are remarkably united in their vision.

Artists were invited to meet with breast cancer survivors to learn more about the disease. Two lunches, hosted by Chalmers and Amesbury, were the beginning of the creative process for many of the artists. It is clear, from the responses of viewers at the opening and during subsequent months, that the works are moving testimonials. Some viewers have exhibited intense reactions to the works. As artist Barbara Steinem remarks, "We saw people weeping in front of the works. That was very powerful. It renewed my ideas about what art can do."

This exhibition, located in the lower level exhibition space of the ROM, is an eclectic grouping of multimedia pieces, ranging from Jane Buckles's sentimental papier maché sculpture of "Annie," a woman kneeling to watch a butterfly, to the conceptual works of Irene Whittome and Renee Van Halm. The exhibition room is brightly lit, and at first this seems harsh and clinical, but it is not out of place when one roams and absorbs the atmosphere of the works. The clinical nature of the room often mirrors the feelings of alienation illustrated by the pieces. In addition, the issues surrounding breast cancer are out, so to speak, in the harsh light of day.

This is definitely a low-key exhibition, short on flash and hype. The elements of the exhibition lend themselves to an interpretation free from the accoutrements of high-gloss production values. Artists' statements are located near enough to the works to make the connection, and far enough away to let them stand alone, free of textual interpretation. Initially the somewhat cluttered and undirected grouping is hard to follow, but when you let go of preconceived notions of what the order and flow should be, the show takes on a life of its own. This reflection of the chaotic subjects being represented ties the show together, a parcel of like ideas. The works come together, they adhere, and present a full picture. The viewer is caught in an unknown place, the "sick room" of society where those who are suffering are clearly heard. Harsh images of breast surgery and a subtle voice-over in Donna Kriekles's work, "If I Were to Need a Mastectomy" emphasize the reality of the gruesome procedures of mastectomy and contrast with more subtle textile works, such as "Do You Know How it Feels?" by Margot Fagan, and "July 7th" by Annette Françoise. Using the "traditional" female art form of quilting, the artists connect the regular activities of the life of women with the painful and chaotic, thus unleashing the art form from its static state. As Françoise says, "The work I created represents the physical and emotional side of cancer. The centre of the piece, like the disease, is quite chaotic and full of jagged shapes. The outside, the frame is order and how things should be." Margot Fagan drew on the Mennonite background of the survivor she dealt with to create a dress that reflects both Mennonite traditions of quilting and the elegant embroidery of the surgeon's hand across her chest.

Other pieces are more symbolic and removed from the day-to-day existence of cancer patients, and deal with the issues of continuity, destiny, and remembrance, issues at the forefront for anyone dealing with terminal illness. Wanda Koop's large-scale screen prints draping from the walls of the gallery tell of quiet moments, remembered places, and desired objects. The diaphenous, soft, flowing drapes reflect the intimate moments in places remembered through a soft filtered lens. Jane Ash Poitras's photo/sculptural memorial incorporates the letters of survivors and their families that she received after writing a letter to the editor of *The Globe and Mail*. Their poignancy and frankness allow us insight into the emotions and thoughts of women dealing with the prospect of death, and of the men and women around them: letters from children about their mothers, from husbands about their wives, and from mothers and fathers about their daughters.

The fragility of many of the works alludes to the fragility of the human body, such as the blown glass tubes and vials that contain miniaturized symbols of pain, containment, and death by Catherine Widgery entitled "Don't Touch/Please Touch." At the same time, other works confirm the strength and connection of mind and body, such as Aganetha Dyck's honeycomb, glass, and metal work entitled "Hive Bodice."

The most poignant work in the show may well be the painting by Mary Pratt entitled "Bread Rising." In this work, Pratt, who is best known for her vivid works which portray a heightened sensibility towards objects from the domestic realm, has created a cancerous growth in the very heart of the home--the kitchen. She combines the imagery of bread-making with the horror of cancer to reveal the exceedingly rapid growth of cancerous cells. The view of an unattainable world through the window, the ever growing cancerous bread, and the space in which it has been placed (the

kitchen) all contribute to an ominous vision of an unsustainable life. The sense of entrapment is clear and powerful. As Pratt says, "As the breast-like mound began to rise, its cells, like cancer cells, started to multiply at an ever-increasing rate. Suddenly it was out of control."

Other artists deal with issues of self-image and self-esteem, both of which take serious blows from the ravages of cancer. Susan Schelle's work consists of twelve ceramic plates decorated with singular articles of women's clothing, the wrappings and entrapments of a "beauty" oriented society. Dawn MacNutt's metal sculpture catches in stasis the motion of a woman caught in a breeze, one part of her chest ripped open into a gaping hole. As the sculpture is fine mesh metal, the body is transparent, the face blank. We see right through her.

The small exhibition catalogue that accompanies the show is a touching legacy to the women who did not survive, as well as a dose of hope for those who currently live with cancer. In it the reader will find photos of survivors, telling their stories between the images of the works in the exhibitions. Their smiling faces look out at us from happier times. They tell the tales of condescending doctors, of self-healing, of the commitment of families and friends, and of remission and relapse. As survivor Alison Bailes says, "I endured the radiation. For weeks, I couldn't sit, stand, or walk. The pain was so bad, I lived on Tylenol, but I survived. I didn't raise my kids all those years to make them orphans." As a survivor, husband Mack Kohout's poignant statement bears witness to the fact that the people left behind have a heavy burden to carry. The words of the survivors say more than any art object can in underlining the pain of these women and the people who are left behind.

The value of artworks and written accounts such as these is immeasurable. They are invaluable for their insight and candour and for their handling of the issues. How are the subjects presented? What is the curatorial force behind the idea? The institutions that have embraced "social issue" exhibitions should be applauded, as arguments to the contrary are, at best, limited by elitism and, at worst, ignorant of the history of art that has transpired over the past centuries. Documenting life and death around us is common subject matter for the artist. Let us not brush off lightly works steeped in subjectivity in order to laud more "theoretical" forms of contemporary art. Although this is not a glamorous or highly-polished exhibition, the value and meaning of the works is not lost on the audience.

Walking through the exhibition and reading the catalogue moved me, as I witnessed an empathetic and public acknowledgement of a previously closeted women's disease whose effects are felt by everyone.

Kate O'Rourke
National Archives of Canada

Reclaiming History: Ledger Drawings by the Assiniboine Artist Hoṇḡeeṽeesa. GLENBOW MUSEUM. Mounted at the Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina. 3 March - 30 April 1995. 95 p. catalogue.

The Glenbow Museum's exhibition *Reclaiming History* is a fine example of how fruitful co-operation between Native and non-Native peoples can be. The forty-four drawings by the Assiniboine artist Hoṇḡeeṽeesa of the Carry the Kettle First Nation