



‘Wonderful Vision’ of Artist, Survivor

*Spellbinding exhibit highlights month of
cancer awareness programs*

Fear. Defiance. Doubt...and even joy.

These are just some of the many emotions breast cancer patients go through, and Marion Behr, an artist and cancer survivor, is familiar with them all. In the gripping new “Image Early” exhibit at the Somerset Art Association in October, Behr captures these feelings and more in a very unusual art form – recycled plastic “cradles” that once held women steady during their radiation treatments.

“Each sculpture has a cradle inside,” says Behr, who bent, cut and manipulated about three dozen shapes, adding papier-mâché, handmade paper, paint and other elements to create haunting semihuman forms. Her striking works of art, including “Courage,” “Jumping for Joy,” “Contemplation” and “Friendship,” are displayed at visitor height to evoke a very direct and personal viewing experience.

According to the art association, the exhibit is intended to “comfort, startle, celebrate, educate” and ultimately encourage people to get mammograms to help detect cancer in its early stages. Hence, the show’s title, “Image Early.”

Behr says she’s grateful to her children for reminding her to get a mammogram two years ago, because even though it revealed a malignancy, the lump was very small. The tumor was removed and she had six weeks of radiation.

Behr remembers lying on her cradle – which had been specially contoured to her body so she wouldn’t move. Initially, she felt anxious but her mind kept focusing on the lines and lines of cradles on the wall from “women who bravely laid here before me.

“I kept kind of envisioning human forms and imagining what they were thinking,” she says. “It was then that I decided to turn these blue plastic flat forms into abstract figures that would encourage others to get an early mammogram the same way my kids encouraged me.”

THE SCULPTURES

During the course of her treatments, Behr overheard conversations that were quite revealing.

Above, Marion Behr with ‘Rebirth.’
Below, ‘My Cradle –
Lights Coming Through
Blue.’ All photos:
Thomas Heller, except
above by Omri Behr.



"You hear often, 'Gosh, I'm afraid. Gosh, I've got to pull myself together,'" notes Behr, which later prompted the sculpture, "Pulling Oneself Together." On a more upbeat note, "Jumping for Joy" was inspired by a woman's elation upon finishing her radiation treatments.

"Detox," in the meantime, is a patchwork of color swatches, with a protruding "leg" that seems ready to stand up and cast off the toxic film on its body. In "Pre-reconstruction," meanwhile, the figure's breast has been replaced with a rusted pipe. Up close, however, the vibrant underside of the cradle appears to be filling the pipe with water, which is a source of life and healing.

One of the most telling works is "My Cradle," Behr's own, an erect figure bathed in shimmering layers of cool blues and greens "which triumphantly proclaims its creator as an artist defined by her creativity and not by a diagnosis," according to Somerset Art Association's special events coordinator Ellen Rannells.

"She's a very prolific, innovative artist," says Rannells, adding the October exhibit is about "the transformative power of the visual arts" and is intended to convey messages of hope and survival.

"I think that it's really important to be able to talk about what's going on inside of you," says Behr, noting that art has always been her way of making sense of her life. Behr was back in her studio almost immediately after surgery and says that once she began working on the sculptures, "I was so into what I was doing. It definitely distanced the cancer process...I think it was just an outlet that felt very right."



'Friendship'

Marc Behr, Marion's husband of 47 years, adds, "Art is her life. She takes the strangest things and turns them into art. She has a wonderful vision of what nobody else thinks about."

Over the years, her accolades have been many: Marion's award-winning artwork is in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution, the Newark Public Library, the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, the United States Embassy in Germany and the Royal Thai collection in Bangkok, Thailand. Her work has also been displayed in Japan,

Peru and Spain, among other countries.

INVENTOR AND AUTHOR

Art isn't her only foray into the limelight, however. Marion is also an inventor and author. In the early 1990s, she and her husband patented a new acid-free, environmentally safe graphic etching process that was listed as the "Patent of the Week" by The New York Times. Their invention grew out of a reaction she had to the acid used in etching. Together, the Behrs have traveled throughout the world lecturing about their acid-free process.

Marion has been a fervent spokesperson for women and home-based businesses. The author of "Women Working Home: The Homebased Business Guide and Directory," she also founded the National Alliance of Homebased Businesswomen. Her advocacy efforts have been featured on "Good Morning America," "Donahue" and "Woman to Woman" and in 1986 she was appointed a personal delegate to the White House Conference on Business by President Ronald Reagan. 

Raising Breast Cancer Awareness Through the Power of Visual Arts

Events at Somerset Art Association, Bedminster,
www.somersetart.org

Oct. 4-31, "Image Early" exhibit, sculptural totems expressing emotions felt by cancer patients during their journeys of treatment, hope and survival. Opening reception, Oct. 4, 2 to 4 p.m.

Oct. 8, 6 to 8 p.m. "Surviving Breast Cancer: Decades of Hope," panel discussion with medical professionals and breast cancer survivors in their 20s and beyond. With Dr. Kathleen Toomey, medical director, Steeplechase Cancer Center,

Somerset Medical Center, and Dr. Angela Lanfranchi of Surgical Associates of Central New Jersey, who has lectured internationally on breast cancer prevention. Suggested donation, \$10, with advance registration required. Call 908.234.2345.

Oct. 23, "Image Early" benefit, with a portion of the proceeds supporting the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Foundation. With cabaret singer, Susan Speidel performing Broadway show tunes. Hors d'oeuvres, wine, champagne and dessert. \$75 per person. Call 908.234.2345.

Survivor's Guide – Coping with Life after Cancer

More than 10 million people in the United States are cancer survivors and three out of every four American families have at least one family member diagnosed with cancer, according to the National Cancer Foundation. Here's some information adapted from the organization's research.

A TIME OF CHANGE

Those who have gone through cancer treatment describe the first few months as a time of change. It's not so much "getting back to normal" as it is finding out what's normal for you now.

The most common problems after cancer treatment include: fatigue; memory and concentration changes; pain; nervous system changes; swelling; mouth or teeth problems; changes in weight and eating habits; trouble swallowing; bladder or bowel control problems, and menopause symptoms.

WELLNESS PLAN

After cancer treatment, many survivors want to reduce the chances of cancer recurring and become concerned about their diet, stress or exposure to chemicals.

SUGGESTIONS:

Cut down on alcohol consumption. Research shows that drinking alcohol increases the chances of certain types of cancers.

Quit smoking. Research indicates that smoking can increase the likelihood of getting cancer.

Eat well. Healthy food choices and physical activity may reduce the risk of cancer. The American Cancer Society and the American Institute for Cancer Research's diet and fitness guidelines include: eating a plant-based diet and having at least five to nine servings of fruit and vegetables daily. Try to include beans in your diet, and eat whole grains (such as cereals, breads, and pasta) several times daily. Choose foods low in fat and salt. Maintain a healthy weight. For more nutrition tips, go to www.cancer.org and click on "Survivors" or www.aicr.org and click on "Cancer Survivors."

Exercise and stay active. Recent reports suggest that staying active after cancer can help lower the risk of recurrence and lead to longer survival. Be sure to consult with a doctor before beginning any exercise programs. Moderate exercise (walking, biking, swimming) about 30 minutes daily – or almost every day – can reduce anxiety and depression; improve your mood; boost self-esteem, and reduce fatigue, nausea, pain and diarrhea.

RESOURCES

For an extensive list, visit: www.survivorship.cancer.gov and search for national organizations. Or call 1.800.4.CANCER (1.800.422.6237) and ask for "National Organizations That Offer Services to People With Cancer and Their Families."