



# the bodice project

## An Exhibit for Breast Cancer Healing

*I'd had a visual in my mind of this very thing. Thinking how wonderful it would be to sensitize our sex crazed society to the real body in all its varied forms. Not just the perfect model body, but the reality of the old and crinkly, the mutilated, the amputated, the war torn, life torn, so as to perceive the beauty of the imperfect too. Does that make sense?*

*The Bodice Project* promotes emotional healing of women and men facing the challenges of breast cancer. This exhibition was created by Cynthia Fraula-Hahn and Kathryn Bragg Stella in collaboration with the Bodice Project Board of Directors and with the support of Laura Dabinett, MD. The project brings together artists, breast cancer survivors, patients, and the public to share the triumphs, struggles, and losses of those dealing with breast cancer and its aftermath. Select artists from the Mid-Atlantic region have created torso sculptures, some of actual women and men who have undergone mastectomies or reconstructive surgery. These sculptures represent the physical and psychological scars of breast cancer. The artwork seen in this exhibition was created in collaboration with the breast cancer survivors who served as models for each sculpture. Each artist interviewed their model to give them the opportunity to provide creative input. This process proved to be valuable for breast cancer survivors to reflect upon their experiences with the artistic aspect of the project and its impact on their attitude about breast cancer in general. This is one of the many ways *The Bodice Project* supports inner healing. The thoughts of participating survivors can be seen on the walls, interspersed throughout the exhibition and throughout the text here.



**Cynthia Fraula-Hahn**  
***Blue Heron, 2014***

Acrylic on plaster/gauze body cast

During the process of wrapping my friend, who had a single mastectomy twenty years ago, I found that many friends had abandoned her. She supposed they just couldn't deal with what she had to endure at the time. This brought more loss and more heartbreak. I discovered that she felt great comfort and beauty in blue herons. It was a special touchstone with her sister, who also had breast cancer and a single mastectomy. Researching the blue heron, I found that in Native North American tradition, it represents self-determination and self-reliance, the ability to progress and evolve—the perfect image to use to honor my brave friend.



**Cynthia Fraula-Hahn**  
***Tiger Lily, 2014***

Acrylic on plaster/gauze body cast

This sculpture, like my friend who modeled for it, is bursting with life and color. I felt she needed an image that was delicate and strong. I chose the tiger lily. The tiger lily symbolizes courage, mercy, kindness and unconditional love.

Tiger lilies are associated with powerful aspects of femininity. My friend embodies these qualities, and her participation in being wrapped for *The Bodice Project* was an act of kindness and compassion.



**Tina Marie**  
**Body cast by Cynthia Fraula-Hahn**  
***The Possibilities Are Endless, 2015***  
 Ink, faux pearls, plaster/gauze body cast

Tina Marie, tattoo artist, specializes in areola restoration for women that have had mastectomies as well as eyebrows for women that have lost their eyebrows due to chemotherapy.

Emotional healing through art and tattooing gives Tina the opportunity to heal women while empowering them to take back control of how they want their bodies to be seen. Many people use the art of tattoo to turn scars into art, and express their journey through cancer, and their hopes for the future.

*I love this project because it's different. It shows what's really happening—I mean, what I think it shows is that even though you go through this...process—there's tomorrow—and that's what I care about. Tomorrow, always. I have to."*



**Cynthia Fraula-Hahn**  
***May it Open our Hearts..., 2015***  
 Acrylic on plaster/gauze body cast

The strength of this woman is a bright light that shines through her warrior spirit. Her light shines throughout our community. Her battle with cancer never stopped her from pursuing her healing talents, nor dampened her spirits during her journey through the darkness she lived with, and conquered.

On her body she bears a Buddhist prayer: "We meditate upon the Divine Light of that adorable Sun of Spiritual Consciousness, which stimulates our power of spiritual perception. May it open our hearts and enlighten our intellect."



**Cynthia Fraula-Hahn**  
***Big Heart, 2015***  
 Acrylic on plaster/gauze body cast

The big hearts, interlocking and interweaving, are my interpretation of this man who had breast cancer. After our meeting and conversation, I realized the image that kept coming to mind was his big heart. He is so kind and loving. He is a physician's assistant at the V.A. hospital and cares for hospice patients. He has also assisted six other men who have had breast cancer. Men also get breast cancer. I wanted to represent that men also get breast cancer. It was a very different experience dealing with a male figure. The explosion of hearts needed to be masculine and uplifting.

*Double mastectomy depresses you. I've always been very natural, and I liked my natural breasts. I had a connection with my children through them. They spent eight years nourishing my kids. Now they're gone. So...you're also associating them with your womanhood, your sexuality.... I don't know what to say. What can you say?*





**Brad Hamann**  
***Wonder Woman, 2019***

Acrylic on plaster/gauze body cast

My wife Jane is my wonder woman. Our shared journey, from diagnosis, through surgery and chemotherapy, and continuing through recovery, began in the spring of 2017. It began mere days after deciding to return East, after living in New Mexico for seven years. We navigated a 27-foot U-Haul and an SUV with three cats 1,600 miles, just a few weeks after Jane's surgery, to our new home. We've gained much wisdom of ourselves and our relationship. Jane and I are filled with wonder at how positive the outcome has been. This painted cast of my wife's beautiful body represents a spiritual "letting-go" in our own lives, as we surrendered to the cancer diagnosis and to fate, and in the process, discovered an iron-strong will to support and hold each other through the darker days. This is an offering of thanks.



**Annie Wisecarver**  
***Misconceptions, 2019***

Gesso, acrylic on plaster/gauze body cast

On one side we see marketing for fashion, fitness, and the "most desirable lifestyles" creating false concepts of the "perfect breasts" and decrees that "these are the kind that are the most attractive" or "the gold standard." "These will get you what you want."

On the other side, cancer shows up and reality sets in, the darkness that sends its tendrils into a woman's body explodes all of these misconceptions and only the concept of survival remains.

*The first thing people do when they discover that you're a breast cancer survivor is they look at your chest. I mean, they just do! Like, "Oh, I see you still have two!" or "Oh gee, you have part of one," or whatever. It can't be helped. That's just what you do. You look.*

*But breast cancer survivors don't care after a while... they've been poked, they've been cut, they've been chemo-ed, they're glad to get up in the morning and do what they need to do....*



**Veronica Nehemias**  
***Fragile Yet Strong, 2019***

Acrylic on plaster/gauze body cast

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer and undergoing treatment, I felt fragile, fragmented. When brought back together with the help of family, friends and the medical team, my strength returned. Something like stained glass. This bodice illustrates how, together, it really works: the survivor...the glass pieces; the medical team...the lead that reassembles those pieces; family and friends...the laces that pull it all together.

In almost every part of the world the dragonfly symbolizes change, transformation, and adaptability.



**Kathryn Stella**  
**Victoria, 2015**

Gessoed linen, pastel, on plaster gauze body cast

Nike is the Greek goddess of victory. When I met Victoria, I was struck by her vitality and indomitable spirit. We spent an evening together with friends, laughing and having a great time, and I had no idea that she was undergoing reconstruction after a double mastectomy. I mentioned that I was getting ready to start a sculptural project to raise breast cancer awareness, and I wanted to model it after Nike. When Victoria told me her story, I realized I had found my Nike. Her very name means victory. She generously agreed to be my model, and shared with me during the plaster wrapping process that someday she hoped to have dogwood blossoms tattooed across her chest, in lieu of tattooed nipples. When I began the pastel work on the linen, I looked up the meaning of the dogwood blossom: "love, undiminished by adversity." I hope that Victoria's beautiful Nike spirit shines in some small way through this piece. *In memorium Victoria Invicta. Suis volans alis eternam dorum redit.* (In memory of Victoria, Unconquered. With her own wings she flies home.)

*I loved seeing the wrap when it came off because I looked at it and I thought, "Wow, that's me! And it's really beautiful!" I mean, I was just struck suddenly, that I'm still pretty. That doesn't happen all the time.*



**Bradley Sanders**  
**Body cast by Cynthia Fraula-Hahn**  
**Triple Goddess, 2016**

Wire, acrylic on plaster/gauze body cast

The *Triple Goddess*, a metal, hand-formed, winged heart, represents joy and the joy of living. The heart surrounds an icon of the heart chakra. The colors represent life, the spirit, the sun and the essence of life within us.

**Greg McNabb**  
**Reconstruction Venus, 2015**

Sweet gum wood

I was inspired by the large number of cancer survivors. Their determination to fight the disease is inspiring. This piece is carved from sweet gum, which is a very hard, dense wood.

I want to assure women who are struggling with the aftermath of surgery that true beauty does not come with the shape or form of your body but rather the beauty of your soul. It is who you are that makes you beautiful, not what you look like. It is the love in your heart and the care you express to others that will have an impact in the world.

I wanted the soul of the wood to shine through. It is the character, grain pattern and its flow that should be admired, not the simplistic representation of the breasts.



*What's really cool about the whole project, in general, is that there's so many people in so many different places—it just shows the whole diversity and individuality, more so than a lot of awareness projects. It helps to show the soul of what is happening inside of us.*





**Emily Vaughn**  
***The Mastectomy Venus, 2014***  
Crocheted acrylic yarn

The *Mastectomy Venus* is my tribute to my grandmother, Bonnie, who worked for the Manhattan Project during World War II, in the secret city of Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Her job operating a Calutron separated uranium for the creation of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. She died of breast cancer in 1977, as a direct result of her exposure to radiation during her time at Oak Ridge.

*There's a dialogue going on in this process, which is very special, about coming to peace with your situation. Because you've been amputated, essentially, and it's not something people are comfortable talking about. A woman's breasts—well, I hadn't thought about how much they would mean to me before I was told I was going to lose them.*

**Joan Bontempo**  
***Dichotomy, 2019***  
Ceramic, metal tube, stone



Jana is a mother, a grandmother, a daughter, and wife. She is central to four generations. Her red scar from radiation is a reminder of the fear, confusion, and painful reckoning with an uncertain future. It left her with lung damage and a life change. I asked what that moment was, when she heard in a doctor's office: "Breast cancer." "Outside, I had to control it. Deny it. It 'wasn't that big of a deal.' I was just going to go ahead and get this handled, nothing to worry about, I would say. I asked people to not fuss over me. I didn't want to let anyone in. I didn't want to worry my grown sons, I didn't want to worry my elderly mother. I thought I was a rock, but inside, I froze. I couldn't move. For the first time I was scared—for the first time I didn't know if 'it was going to be ok.' There were no answers. I couldn't think. I couldn't even ask questions. My life was going to change. Everybody's life was going to change. I thought my head was going to explode. Everything was a whirl...all these thoughts. I was afraid. I told no one."

**Cynthia Fraula-Hahn**  
***Ascension, 2014***  
Acrylic on plaster/gauze body cast



This sculpture is of a dear friend who has had a mastectomy and partial reconstruction. She said modeling for this project gave her a sense of community. After her surgery, she felt alone and different from other women. During the wrapping process she used the word "ascension" about her journey. The feathers turning into birds struck me as an image that would honor her. She teaches yoga, so the yellow represents the third chakra, which involves energy, vitality, desire and power. I wanted this piece to represent her beauty and bravery.

*In some ways you can think of it as a rite of passage into a different chapter of your life where you are entering into the realm of the elders—the wise women, you know. Always these things can bring you so far forward and open up your universe.*



**Kathryn Stella**  
**Reborn, 2014**

Gessoed linen, pastel on plaster gauze body cast

In Japanese culture the cherry blossom symbolizes rebirth after a time of trial. The bare cherry tree endures the deep, snowy winter to burst forth in bloom at the first warmth of spring. The abundant pink and white flowers call to bee and bird that life endures and soon there will be fruit on the branch once more. The human spirit is like the cherry, unconquered, it brings forth creativity and life with every opportunity. The breast cancer survivor focuses on the path ahead.

**Cynthia Fraula-Hahn**  
**Irises, 2014**

Acrylic on plaster/gauze body cast

This is the first sculpture that I painted. Although a woman may be beautiful and healthy, statistics predict that one in eight women will get breast cancer. My first model is lovely inside and out, thus I chose to represent her with irises. Irises represent faith, hope, wisdom and courage. All of these attributes are embodied in this woman, my friend. She is a nurse at the Martinsburg Hospital caring for the hospice care patients.



*You have to go through the negative. It's like grieving in a sense, and grief has its own timeframe. You can't just suddenly get to a place where you are ok with it, and suddenly one of the wise ones. It takes time.*

**Jed Rau and Elisa Rodero**  
**Durga, The Invincible One, 2017**

Acrylic on plaster/gauze body cast

The design began as a sash such as might be worn at a pageant or awards ceremony. The idea of a straight sash morphed into a spiral design—evolving, moving, beginning anew. This piece represents the breast cancer survivors saying to the world: I'm still here. Still a beautiful individual in whom others find value, regardless of my experience. I know myself better—I know how strong I am. Life is still an amazing adventure, and I appreciate it more deeply. My worth is enhanced and magnified by my strength.



**Cynthia Fraula Hahn**  
**Intertwined, 2017**

Acrylic on plaster/gauze body cast

The imagery of the paired fish represents this woman's love for her husband, and his for her. I had never had a model come with her husband when I wrapped someone. The opportunity to see them interact and their love for each other was palpable. Her attitude is uplifting, kind and strong. She is a mammography tech and shares her story with many women who are nervous about getting a mammogram. This woman is a true tower of strength.







**Roselyn Sanders Mendez**

***Battle Dress, 2014***

Metal recyclable materials

While I was working on the bodice, I was thinking about people's battle with cancer and the amazing strength that it takes to become a warrior, to fight for your life. I have lost friends and family to cancer, but I have also seen friends fight and survive. The bodice is a sort of battledress, a suit of armor. Part of the process of creating this was a prayer for a friend who was fighting.

My bodice is constructed of upcycled and scrap metal joined together with rivets and machine screws. I am very passionate about utilizing materials that people often throw away or overlook and giving them new life as a useful or beautiful object.

*Why shouldn't we make it known? I think mastectomy is sort of a mystery, and people don't really know what happens underneath the shirt, in general, so if it makes people more aware of the different steps in the process, about what it looks like, good. I mean, before, you don't know that you're going to have scars across here.*



**Sonya Evanisko**

***Unharnessed, 2016***

Wire, coral, live moss, fabric

The inspiration for this work comes from a brave woman, Alyssa. When genetics research identified the BRCA-1 gene in her, Alyssa decided at age 40 to have a prophylactic bilateral mastectomy. Alyssa was a single parent of an 8 and 10-year-old and the wait and see approach wasn't for her. She needed to be in control of her health and the practical thing to do was to plan sensible arrangements in advance for her children while she recovered. Being able to make these plans minimized their fears, as well as the disruption in their lives.



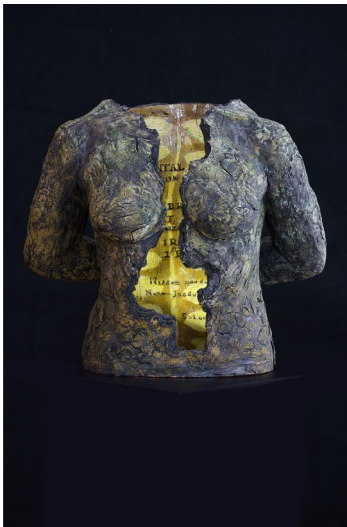
**Christian Benefiel**

***Networked, 2018***

Wooden Lattice

My mother is a breast cancer survivor. The gravity of the diagnosis, and the stark marker between the before and after, separates the lives of both survivors and supporters. I feel like it was, and still is, our role to be there, to support, to help, to listen, to encourage each other and face hard decisions together. A network resists, it cushions, it finds strength through connection. I do not look back on her struggle with any fondness or romance. However, I am as a result, keenly aware of how connected we are, and how very lucky I am to be able to return the support she has given me. For that I am greatly thankful.

*Whether you're stage one or stage four, you're trying to get to the next day. It's primal instinct. People say, "Oh you're so strong!" but what else can you be?*



**Anne Rule-Thompson**  
***Hidden Prayer, 2018***

Earthenware clay, slips, underglazes, glaze

If you are diagnosed with the BRCA-2 gene mutation, you have increased your risk of breast cancer from the average 12% to 72%. This was the reality for my friend, who courageously chose to undergo physical and emotional pain in order to defend her future. Solomon's seal is used in the sculpture as a symbol of her Ashkenazi Jewish heritage, an additional risk factor. As a yoga instructor, my friend relies on the meditative pose depicted here, the Hidden Prayer.

I am honored to have the opportunity to shed light on the positive medical advances that are saving women today...especially my beautiful friend!

*I think being wrapped is great. And I don't stand naked in front of anyone—but this was different.*

**Cynthia Fraula-Hahn**  
***The Golden Thread, 2020***

Acrylic on plaster/gauze cast



*The Golden Thread* represents the vital thread of purpose that weaves throughout the fabric of our lives. These golden threads represent Lou Ann Thompson, a native of Frederick County, VA, and my dear friend. Her inner strength shines through her regardless of her circumstances. And she has faced many challenges in her life.

Lou Ann has struggled with MS for many years, and adding breast cancer treatment proved to be a mighty challenge. But she did not let even this stop her engagement from the things she loved. She was involved with the Winchester Apple Blossom Festival for over 35 years, and not straying from her life's work, stepped up as president as she was recovering from her surgery. That is why I chose the imagery of apple blossoms. And then I remembered a phrase she had used...The Golden Thread.

This was the key for me for this sculpture, a golden thread running and connecting Lou Ann with her friends and family in her life. These people are the blossoms and Lou Ann is The Golden Thread that binds people's lives together. She inspires great love and loyalty in her friends and she never stops being the spirit she has been her whole life. She is the embodiment of love and compassion with her tendrils of gold embracing everyone. When asked about her feelings about *The Bodice Project*, she said: "*The Bodice Project* transcends the grief."

*Yeah, one breast is fine*

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