



"Constant Reminder",
"Public Scrutiny"
& "Body Betrayal" by
Toronto artist
Barbara Cole

The politics of breast cancer

BY TANIA TREPANIER

My grandmother had a breast removed because of breast cancer.

We never really talked about it. The disease is usually a taboo subject, even when it affects your loved ones. And so it wasn't until last week when I went to see the Nova Scotia Art Gallery's exhibit "Survivors, In Search of a Voice: The Art of Courage", that I learned just how many women share the sometimes fatal experience of having breast cancer. One in nine women in Canada will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime, and the number of cases are growing at an alarming rate.

Twenty-four well-known women artists from across Canada who work in a variety of mediums were asked to produce art with breast cancer as the theme. Their works were not produced in isolation — instead, the artists listened to the stories and experiences of women who were survivors of breast cancer. Included in the show are a hooked rug, a quilt, a dress, photographs, paintings, sculptures, beadworks, and mixed media. The resulting exhibit is a stunning and powerful example of the political potential of art. Using the power of visual images to their advantage, artists are able to present social issues in ways that are provocative and influential.

Barbara Cole, a photographer based in Toronto who has never had breast cancer, took a series of glamorous portraits of herself in a skull cap (to represent the baldness that is the result of radiation therapy) and with a missing breast (photographic magic). Although the photographs have the look of a fashion magazine spread, they subvert expectations of "model beauty" by showing that a woman with no hair and one breast is also beautiful.

Another piece, by local artist Nancy Edell, is a superbly crafted hooked rug showing a woman lying on an operating table, presumably waiting to have her breast removed. On each side stand warrior women in breast armour. Edell writes that "they represent the courage of all those who have undergone cancer treatment."

The exhibit has been accompanied by a lecture series in which artists, scholars, medical students, and survivors of breast cancer have participated in panel discussions on the personal experiences and politics of breast cancer. Sue Sherwin, whose work in philosophy at Dalhousie University concerns medical ethics, spoke about the need to politicize breast cancer just

as AIDS has been politicized.

For the most part, breast cancer is considered an illness which affects unrelated individuals. Far too often, the political, environmental, and health issues are ignored or underemphasized. Women's health issues generally get less funding and less attention than illnesses that affect both men and women. Women's complaints of symptoms are not always taken seriously by their doctors. The field of medicine continues to be obsessed with treatment rather than prevention, and as a consequence less research dollars go into finding ways to prevent

breast cancer from striking in the first place. As environmental conditions continue to degrade, both women and men are exposed to toxic chemicals, electromagnetic fields, radiation, and chemically altered food, thereby increasing their chances of developing cancer. Furthermore, the average North American diet is so fat-heavy, it is not surprising that we have some of the highest rates of cancer in the world.

While it is important not to live in constant fear of finding that you or a loved one has breast cancer, there are ways that you can protect yourself and decrease the risk:

- Support environmental organizations that promote the use of non-toxic, non-chlorine bleached products.

- Learn how to do a breast self-examination. You can pick up an information sheet at most Shopper's Drug Marts (note: you have natural lumps in your breast, so it is important to learn what your breasts normally feel like so that you will detect anything unusual. Early detection can save your life!)

- If you eat healthy, you may decrease your chances of developing breast cancer. You should emphasize cereals, breads, other grain products, vegetables, and

fruits. Try to choose lower-fat dairy products, leaner meats, and foods prepared with little or no fat (olive oil is a good replacement for other fats). Also, there is some evidence that excessive intakes of salt, alcohol, and caffeine may increase your chances of developing cancer.

- Start talking about breast cancer with your doctor, friends, and family.

"Survivors, In Search of a Voice: The Art of Courage" runs until December 10th. at the art Tuesdays are free, otherwise admission is \$1.25 for students. This Sunday at 2 p.m., join Virginia Stephen on a tour of the exhibit.

Something old and something new

Why you never challenge your opening act to a game of road hockey

CONCERT

Grace Babies/The Pursuit of Happiness

Saturday, Nov. 18 at the Grawood

BY TIM COVERT

Last Friday night my friend Andrew Younger was commenting to me about the fact that The Pursuit of Happiness were booked for like the fifth year in a row or something to a Dalhousie venue and that their fan base just isn't here anymore.

He asked me if anybody could name a recent hit of theirs. True, there weren't many people there just before the show, and playing in the Grawood is a step down from the McInnes Room, but I was still keen on seeing the band. But I found myself seeing his point. Andrew theorized that a good deal of the audience probably came to see the Grace Babies and as this up-and-coming Halifax band took to the stage, I wondered if he was right.

Well, if some people had come to the Grawood to see just the Grace Babies they would have been justified in doing so. Their recently released CD *Lure* is a superb collection of boppy pop songs like "Modern," "King," and "Superbright" that fill you up with Mmmm Mmmmm goodness. On stage, they aren't much different except that you get to see Chris's over the top guitar posing. Well, he is a theatre student, so I guess we can excuse him. (It's not like he's a theatre student who's a newspaper editor or anything.) It wasn't the best show I'd seen them do but it was still pretty good. Unfortunately, the board



GAZETTE PHOTO BY DANIELLE BOUDREAU

TPOH guitarist Kris Abbott rocks out.

wasn't being especially well run for the Babies' set and the PA was consistently way too loud with a pretty noticeable feedback problem. And Damian's guitars kept breaking. The money he must spend on strings...Look in the *Gazette* in the future for a Grace Babies CD review, or buy it yourself. I guarantee you won't be disappointed.

After the Grace Babies' high energy set, The Pursuit of Happiness came on stage looking much older by comparison. The stereotype of the beat-up old band trying to fake the energy of their youth kept forcing its way into my mind as Moe Berg, clad in a Mr. Shit t-shirt, and the band tried hard to play through their first few songs with gusto. The new

tunes just didn't seem to click and neither did the band. As the third song ended, Moe looked kind of disappointed — with the size of the crowd, how dead they were, the size of the venue...whatever. He looked like a Mr. Shit and I was steeling myself for a bad show. Then one of the Grace Babies shouted something at the stage and I caught a glint in Moe's eye. It was about the game.

You see, the Grace Babies had been challenged to a game of street hockey by TPOH and had beaten them rather soundly: 10-0 and 5-4. Moe looked sheepish about it. He started complaining about how only two of the actual Babies' had played and how they had stacked

the team with their ringer friends. The Grace Babies yelled some stuff back; they started talking hockey — the great Canadian pastime. Moe kept complaining and started to smile. He thrives on causing a stir. When he launched into the next song, the show was completely different.

The band started rocking, and it was a good, hard, dirty, TPOH rock. Song after song of Moe Berg's sometimes rude and crude, but always truthful, pop ideas. Some new songs like "Kalendar" and "Gretzky Rocks" combined with past favourites, all oh so danceable. It took a while to get the crowd going but soon there were lots of people on their feet, including the entire lineup of the

Grace Babies.

"I'm Ashamed of Myself," "She's So Young," "Food," "Pressing Lips," "Nobody But Me," "Cigarette Dangles," and "Two Girls In One" all featured that same guitar crunch underneath the trademark sweet harmonies and biting lyrics. The bass and drums never missed a beat and would occasionally shine. The band started having more fun, started goofing around more, and seemed to be re-energized after every song. Moe and his co-guitarist (she can rock!) traded solos and the bass player kept molesting the back-up singer. She didn't seem to mind but I was getting a little creeped out by it. TPOH even made eternal trademark hit "I'm An Adult Now" sound as fresh as it did in the mid-80's.

The band ended their set with "Hard to Laugh" in which Damian from the Grace Babies sang a verse, with Chris and Kevin helping out on backup. The Grace Babies had covered TPOH's "Ten Fingers" earlier and it had sounded great. The image of the two bands together was poetic.

Exhausted though they were, TPOH played a two song encore including Kiss's "Strutter," which was really appreciated by the crowd. Though we clapped for more, a second encore was not to be.

Though Andrew may have been right, The Pursuit of Happiness proved on Friday that they are not a band in decline. The line between their decade old sound and the new pop of the Grace Babies is a very thin one. They can still put on an electric show and I for one will be there to see them whatever the size of the venue.