

Women Exposed is an annual art exhibit by women, for women. Its mission is two-fold: to create an opportunity for women artists, who make up only 3 percent of artists shown in major galleries and museums*, and to empower victims of domestic violence through education and financial donations. Money raised by the show is given to local domestic abuse shelter Middle Way House and its longer-term housing facility, The Rise.

On April 29, artists and volunteers from all over the world will gather for WE's 6th-year opening at Lodge 101.

WE was started by a group headed by Margaret Belton, a former IU art student and Middle Way House volunteer. It was in her capacity as a barista at Soma Café that she recruited me as an artist. At the time I was deeply involved in my *Inscribing Tradition on Female Body* project, which dealt with women in religion, particularly in Islam. It seemed like a perfect fit for my work, not to mention a good cause and an opportunity to meet local artists and residents. I gave her a piece and went to the opening at Gallery North. There I met fellow local women artists- strong, kind and talented, beautiful inside and out, WE had a blast.

When Margaret moved to San Francisco, Joy Hanford and Stef Shuster organized WEIII, after that, WE skipped a year. There was a good chance the show might disappear. Knowing how hard it is for female artists to find a venue for an exhibit, WE could not let that happen. Women make up only three percent of the artist in major museum and galleries.

I then miscarried; in the terrible and desperate-sorrow I felt in the face of death, WE assumed a whole new meaning and become a creative and a healing outlet. Determined to draw beauty from my pain, I returned to my primordial self and back to women. I attended the local female only Red Tent gatherings, and began channeling Frida Kahlo. She helped me to transcend the male critical art paradigm, which is so ready to dismiss feminine experience and emotion as legitimate subject matter. I had no time for the high art versus women's art/craft, status quo to end, my life was taking place NOW, in the present tense. I would look at Frida's, what I call, "a wounded deer" and the "baby in a jar" paintings and find solace in a similar way I imagine Christians might find solace in a dying Jesus on a cross with thorns, nails and blood. Kahlo's body was broken and reconstructed many times, but her spirit remained intact. Her personal was and is public and political.

Energized by my Feminist Art courses with Peg Brand and Judy Chicago, I rolled up my sleeves and went to work. Together with Joy Hanford and friends, WE set out to take the show to a whole other level. It found a new space and began including international and female affirming artist, starting with Barbel Rothhaar's *Milk & Honey* piece, a celebration of the joys and sorrows of breast-feeding, with stories from Germany and beyond. WE6 will re-visit society's often conflicted relationship with breasts, in the *Bloomington Breast Project*, consisting of 250 casts of Bloomington women's breast. And in a form of performance art, nursing mothers will take turns nurturing their children with their own milk in

designated areas in order to celebrate motherhood and overcome sexualized nipple-phobia in America.

WE creates a time and space to celebrate the joys and perils women face in their everyday lives. Art is never just a piece on a wall, a statue on a pedestal, a song performed. The stories WE tells are the voices our sisters, mothers, lovers, children yet to be born and daughters WE are yet to raise.

More than 90% of the victims are women. About 80% of the abusers suffer from personality disorders.** Majority being male, some abusers have been abused themselves, grew up around violence, felt abandoned and neglected. They are too busy surviving everyday themselves to see beyond their own pain to empathize or to assess the after effects of their actions. Rather, they claim victimhood over the women they abuse. They beat, rape, betray, sometimes kill, deceive, betray and lie to manipulate, abandon, gossip and slander to sabotage, intimidate and mute us to control. They bid us against each other like Zeus' Athena against Clytemnestra's Amazons to surrender. They are our fathers, brothers, husbands, our lovers, fathers of our children, children yet to be born, sons WE are yet to raise.

WE convenes once a year, and thanks to the tireless efforts of artists, volunteers, organizers and sponsors, and the community at large. Last year, WE took the show to the streets for the first time with Hoop Dance and African drums, eco-fashion and belly dance, and "wild womyn playing with fire" on Mayday under the Maypole on 6th Street. So great was the audience response last year, and response from the artists and volunteers to participate this year, that WE6 performance arts curator Sophia Travis in particular felt the need to extend the show to three days. There will be grand opening on Friday with both indoor and outdoor performances with Belly Belly dance troupe, members of Kali Ma fire dancers, salsa and tango lessons, singer Kati Glassier, Dena El Saffar and company to name a few. Some of the veteran WE singers like Merrie April Sloan and Kate Long will be performing on Saturday evening, Raging Grannies will take stage on Sunday morning following the Maypole dancers on the courthouse lawn. Bobby Jane Lancaster and others will then bring to show to official close.

Then there will be visual artists from far and away accompanying their local counterparts both in person and in spirit, including French-Italian painter Louise Arizzoli, German book-maker Karen Baldner, Spanish installation artist Maria Domene-Danes, UK born, raised in Africa- painter Fenella Flinn, Italian-Nicaraguan poet Mariel Coen, Mexican artists Palova Mond and Maria Luisa Sanchez, and twelve year old newcomer Hikari Nakagawa, of Japanese descent, will display their 2 and 3D at work at The Lodge. Joining them will be local, national, and locally-based international artists, including photographers Mia Beach, Rebecca Drolen, Julia Hinds, Elaine Suki Miller and Jeanne Smith; painters Jennifer Harrold and Charlene Marsh; printmakers, Hannah Shuler, Rachael Carson Gratz and Sarah Beth Noggle; and artists of other media.

The artwork in WE doesn't have to about female experience of a certain kind. The first year I organized, my piece was about the Berlin Love Parade and

straight and homosexual gaze. Joy had constructed a gigantic tree with a thousand origami folded cicadas pinned onto it. Laurel Leonetti weaved baskets of trash bags, Shu-Mei Chan had installed microphones under porcelain piles to listen in on the audience, Leslie Noogle re-interpreted doing dishes by piling them and hanging them down from the ceiling, Amy Brier had baby faces rolling on sand, to name a few. So was the case with performers; artwork was as varied, as WE artists.

Last year, WE had a theme for the first time: Red. As in our fire within, our passion, sins, and loves, as well as our bodies' cycle dance with the moon. Hence, WE stitched a *Red Quilt* to record and celebrate ourselves together with our female role models, mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers who have raised us. It will be displayed again this year, serving as the film screen and background. American women's "folk" art medium then will serve as WE's log of records, marrying the eastern oral tradition with the western printing, impermanency of the sound with attempted permanency of written word, in order to combine and celebrate the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of WE people.

This year the theme is "Every Body: Form Formlessness and Transfiguration." Hannah Edgerton is the visual arts curator: "WE is the culmination of "Every body's" efforts". This year's show explores a broader range of personal realities- physical, spiritual, metaphysical, metaphorical, geographical and other."

Importantly, though, the WE theme is never restrictive. Just as last year, artists were encouraged to create freely around and with the color red, WE6 artists interpret this year's theme as it manifests or functions in their own lives. As such, this year's opening will explore the individual within the collective, hence Every Body. That includes you as the audience. As the poet-man from my native land said, we are "to live like a tree, single and free, and like a forest, in brother & sister-hood."

WE invites you to join us again this year, maybe for the first time, gaze at our art, sing our songs and dance our dance, show us yours, transcend and transform.

For the complete list of artists and events please go to:
www.bloomingtonwomenexposed.org.

To learn more about the Middle way house please go to:
<http://www.middlewayhouse.org/>

Turkish-Georgian born American artist Filiz Cicek is a Register Nurse, scholar, journalist, and as the artists-curator. she have been one of the organizers of Women Exposed the last few years. Her work has been exhibited in major galleries and museums in Istanbul, New York, California, Chicago and The Kinsey Institute. She serves as the Regional Art Coordinator for the Feminist art Project. She teaches a Gender Sexuality and Popular Culture course at IU.

*American Association of Museums and Greg Allen, *NYTimes*, 5/1/05

**Terrie E. Moffitt and Avshalom Caspi, "Findings About Partner Violence From the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study", *National Institute of Justice*, July 1999

Lynn Melville, *Breaking Free from Boomerang Love: Getting Unhooked from Borderline Personality Disorder Relationships*, Melville Publications, 2004