

Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence

A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

A Window Between Worlds
with Kim Abeles

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Edited by Suvan Geer and Sandra Mueller

**Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence
A Community Engagement Project**

A Window Between Worlds and Kim Abeles

Catalogue printed on the occasion of the exhibition:

Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence

An Exhibition & Installation by artist Kim Abeles

Presented by A Window Between Worlds in partnership
with the Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles.

March 1 – March 31, 2011
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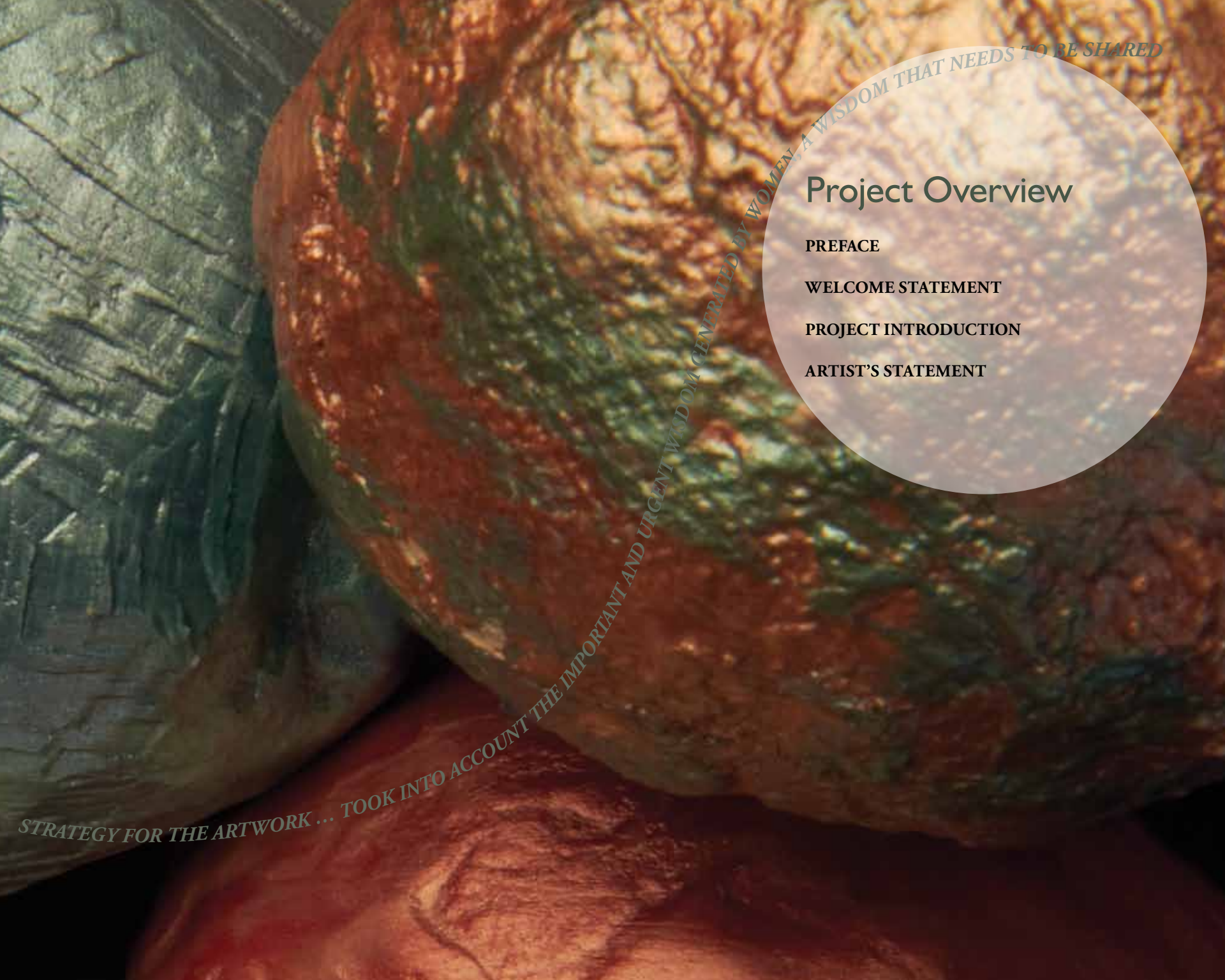
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STRATEGY FOR THE ARTWORK ... TOOK INTO ACCOUNT THE IMPORTANT AND URGENT WISDOM GENERATED BY WOMEN, A WISDOM THAT NEEDS TO BE SHARED

Project Overview

PREFACE

WELCOME STATEMENT

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

STRATEGY FOR THE ARTWORK ... TOOK INTO ACCOUNT THE IMPORTANT AND URGENT WISDOM GENERATED BY WOMEN, A WISDOM THAT NEEDS TO BE SHARED

Preface

Documenting a two-year, multi-partner collaboration with over 800 participants who speak in six different languages is challenging.

Most challenging, however, is attempting to depict in word and image the brave spirits of the women and children who participated, let alone account for the sheer hard work, ingenuity and dedication of the project team.

While the catalogue includes text of many kinds, the heart of this volume, and of the collaboration between artist Kim Abeles and A Window Between Worlds, is *The Handbook for Living*. Its classic presentation of treasured objects and sage words on soft gray pages belies its radical intention to awaken the community. When Abeles seamlessly allows the resiliency in a pearl created by one survivor to converse with the words of strength and wisdom from another, she weaves in print the compelling visual narrative of the exhibition, and seeds the stage for collective engagement.

Added content for this project, which was organized on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of A Window Between Worlds, is found in the essays. In “Lessons,” artist and writer Suvan Geer introduces

AWBW as an emboldened and successful nonprofit that brings art to domestic violence shelters and continues as an activist art project for its founder, Cathy Salser. The essays of performance pioneers Suzanne Lacy and Barbara T. Smith further extend the historical and geographical reach of this project back to the critical role played by artists in the battered women’s movement and forward to an international human rights agenda.

The catalogue opens with a welcome statement from the Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles, an exhibition, public programming and outreach partner. It also includes writings and artwork by the individuals who played a central role in the birthing of the project and wrote together The James Irvine Foundation Creative Connections Fund grant – artist Kim Abeles, AWWB founder Cathy Salser and myself as a community arts advocate. Abeles shares a statement specific to the project and later delves into her community art practice that spans from AIDS to the environment. Salser offers her inspiring founder’s story as an essay and then provides an “About AWWB” piece that presents a closer look into the organization’s innovative programs with shelters, survivors and the community.

My own “Call to Participation” is in the Community area of this volume along with an extensive Resources section that includes actions that we can take to address issues of domestic violence in our own lives, workplaces and communities. The Biographies section makes visible the experience and expertise of project contributors and the Acknowledgments area makes visible the many contributors to this project.

For those keen to know more about how this multilayered project unfolded, I would refer them to the “Project Diagram” in the Community area, which gives a visual overview of the project goals, partners, and audiences. For those keen to more about the rich intermix of art product and process, consult the “Making Pearls A Community Engagement Story” piece at the end of *The Handbook for Living*. But, the best way is to simply let your eye and heart guide you. And then join us awbw.org to create an online pearl. ●

SANDRA MUELLER
Project Chair, January 2011

Welcome Statement

As a representative of the Republic of Korea, I am delighted to host the *Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence* exhibition. For more than thirty years, the Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles has been a venue to promote artistic imagery that expresses beauty, awareness, peace, hope, and wisdom. I am honored to support the more than 700 survivors and community members who contributed to this project. Domestic violence is a worldwide tragedy that not only tears families apart but leaves both physical and emotional scars for a lifetime. However, this exhibition is a beacon of hope for all survivors of domestic violence to gain strength, self-esteem, and inspire support from the community to end this affliction forever.

I truly believe that this exhibition will go beyond sharing the artistic endeavors of our diverse communities in Los Angeles. This exhibition can make a difference in everyone's lives to create a violent-free society. I commend the courage of each artist who has expressed something deep to expose the truth in the form of beauty and wisdom. I anticipate that the *Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence* will not end today – much like a pearl, this exhibition will continue to shine, endure and reveal the true beauty within.

I would like to thank everyone who created, organized, and supported this event especially lead artist Kim Abeles, A Window Between Worlds and its founder Cathy Salser, Project Chair Sandra Mueller, Barbara T. Smith, Suvan Geer, Suzanne Lacy, The James Irvine Foundation, the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs and the Los Angeles County Arts Commission. The Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles is honored to collaborate to make *Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence* a great success. ●

JAEWON KIM
Director & Consul
Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles

HEESEON CHOI
Exhibition Curator
Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles



Project Introduction

Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence is a two-year community engagement project created by artist Kim Abeles in collaboration with A Window Between Worlds, the only national nonprofit dedicated to using art to end domestic violence. It is based on the powerful metaphor of pearls as treasures that form inside an oyster in response to a hurtful irritant.

An art project with a mission, *Pearls of Wisdom* reaches out to survivors and concerned community members to transform personal memories of domestic harshness into public lessons of courage, strength, solidarity, and clear thinking. Those lessons, which make up the *Handbook for Living*, are the illuminated core of this document. They are also the very human heart of the culminating exhibition at the Korean Cultural Center in Los Angeles in March 2011, as well as the ongoing community blog and online exhibition at www.awbw.org. The project is sponsored, in part, by a Creative Connections Fund grant from The James Irvine Foundation, with added support from the Department of Cultural Affairs, Los Angeles, the Durfee Foundation, the Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles, the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, Target and Women's Foundation of California.

May these words and the pearls that accompany them provide guidance, inspiration and much needed momentum for social change.

Statement from the Artist

KIM ABELES

Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence is a journey for all those involved¹ and as the artist creating this project, I always kept my focus on the generous participants. In particular, I looked in admiration to the women in the shelters who created their own pearls. What determination, wisdom, and courage it takes to move away from domestic violence toward a safer community. None of that journey is easy stuff. These are the women who kept this process, project and exhibition meaningful.²

The original strategy for the artwork, *A Handbook for Mothers*³, took into account the important and urgent wisdom generated by women, a wisdom that needs to be shared.

Society often limits its view of women in domestic violent environments to the role of a victim, rather than their more victorious roles as strong women and mothers leading families out of a horrible cycle of abuse. These women are not survivors, but rather, they are champions in the athletic and spiritual sense.

When do we let go of the horrific stories, our own, and the one we are being told? Abuse is not a badge. Let it go.

My own lifetime with domestic violence included family, strangers and relationships.⁴ I know the miracle of the fact that, today, both my daughter and myself are alive and healthy and I am now married to a very nice guy, as is my daughter. I grew to understand the problems presented by a lack of boundaries, the power of coercion and the results of negative, personal propaganda.

The trouble with the “story” is that the story is provocative, it accounts for the success of the Lifetime Movie channel, and the story becomes its own powerful mantra because we repeat it over and over until the abuser is no longer needed.⁵

The idea of the pearl is that the irritant in the oyster brings forth a beautiful treasure.⁶ So it is with domestic violence. Though we seek a peaceful and safe world for women and families, for now, what we have are beautiful pearls of women and their children who have been heroes and heroines moving forward with their brilliant, heartfelt messages to share with the rest of us. *Pearls of Wisdom* honors the courage of their efforts, and *End the Violence* is a pledge that all of us, one by one and with our collective voices, will end this senseless, violent episode in human history. That is the point.

For this project and exhibit, I had a particular good force in my thoughts: I wanted to exhibit the pearls, made by the women, children, and male advocates against domestic violence, with such beauty, that even the abusers would see the beauty. ●



Kim Abeles, Cocktail Shirts, 1993, Dress created from men's scorched shirts, Private collection.



Kim Abeles, *Cracks in the Sidewalk (II)*, 1995, Netting lace and broken plate, Private Collection.

NOTES

- 1** I was first introduced to *A Window Between Worlds* through an email from Suvan Geer. I later rekindled my interest after meeting Sandra Mueller at a advisory board session for Sabine Sighicelli's *Breaking in Two* film project. I remember both encounters well. Windows must have hit a spot in my heart early on. Sandra became the director of the Pearls project.
- 2** Men participated in this project and I am keenly aware that grown men are known recipients of domestic violence though precise numbers were hard to come by. Young boys are often attacked in violent situations.
- 3** Wisdom is best shared with others. Speaking as an individual, I do believe that the sequences of both my good and tragic interactions with men have led me to good wisdom, a wisdom that transcends families, lovers, schoolmates, and strangers. This wisdom leads to a promise of a better world where all people live in assured dignity, away from violence, war, and senseless loss.
- 4** To be honest, when things turn sour as a little kid, one does not expect anything different from that time forward. It's too bad. We begin to make our own sorrows and troubles: legal, sexual, and emotional, in any such order. This is the world as we know it; this is the world that was presented to us in our childhood.
- 5** To be frank, the men who violate women and families fall into a couple small categories: they are mentally ill, addicted to alcohol or drugs, or came from violent families and therefore express their own anger through someone they see as weaker. Let's help them, rather than letting them carry out their troubled thoughts toward the young and females.
- 6** The violent irritants need to be buried like some stiff corpse. I prefer to desire that we will arise from the depths, find our joys we can pass along, and treat the demented and the perverted.



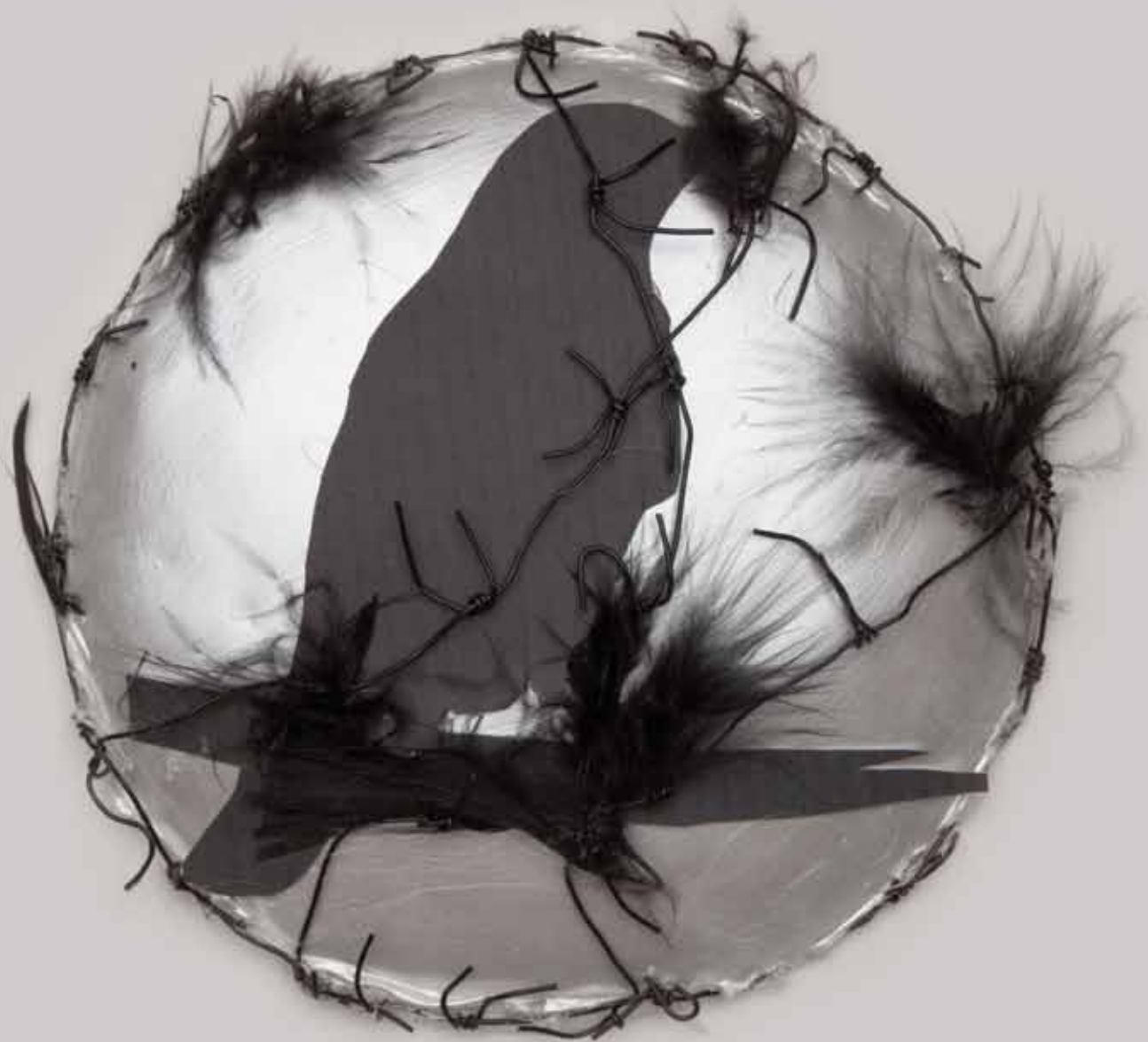


Handbook for Living

WHEN YOU ARE BLIND TO SEEING THINGS, YOU CAN'T SEE WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Handbook for Living

Eight hundred participants in shelters and workshops each shared their experiences with domestic violence in the process of making their very own pearl. They spoke their stories and wrote about their lives in order to transform their pain into a book of lived wisdom for themselves, their sisters, their children and their community.





*When all is said and done,
I'm the one who had to make the decision to get clean
and pursue my spiritual self ...
to get out of the relationship and love myself ...
to pursue my goals and live life.*



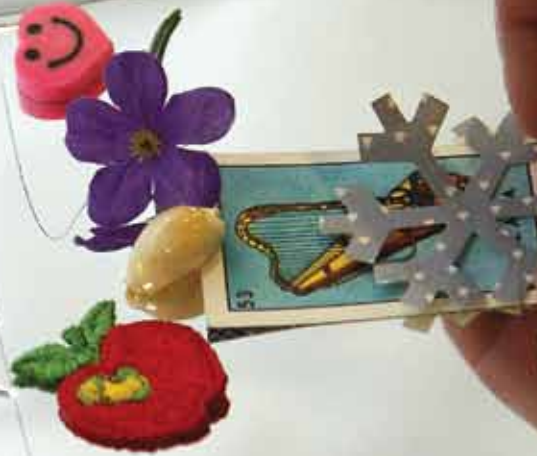
When “they” say it was
“just” verbal abuse
and a little pushing and shoving,
make no mistake about how deep the wounds go
and how long it may take to get
on the other side of everything.

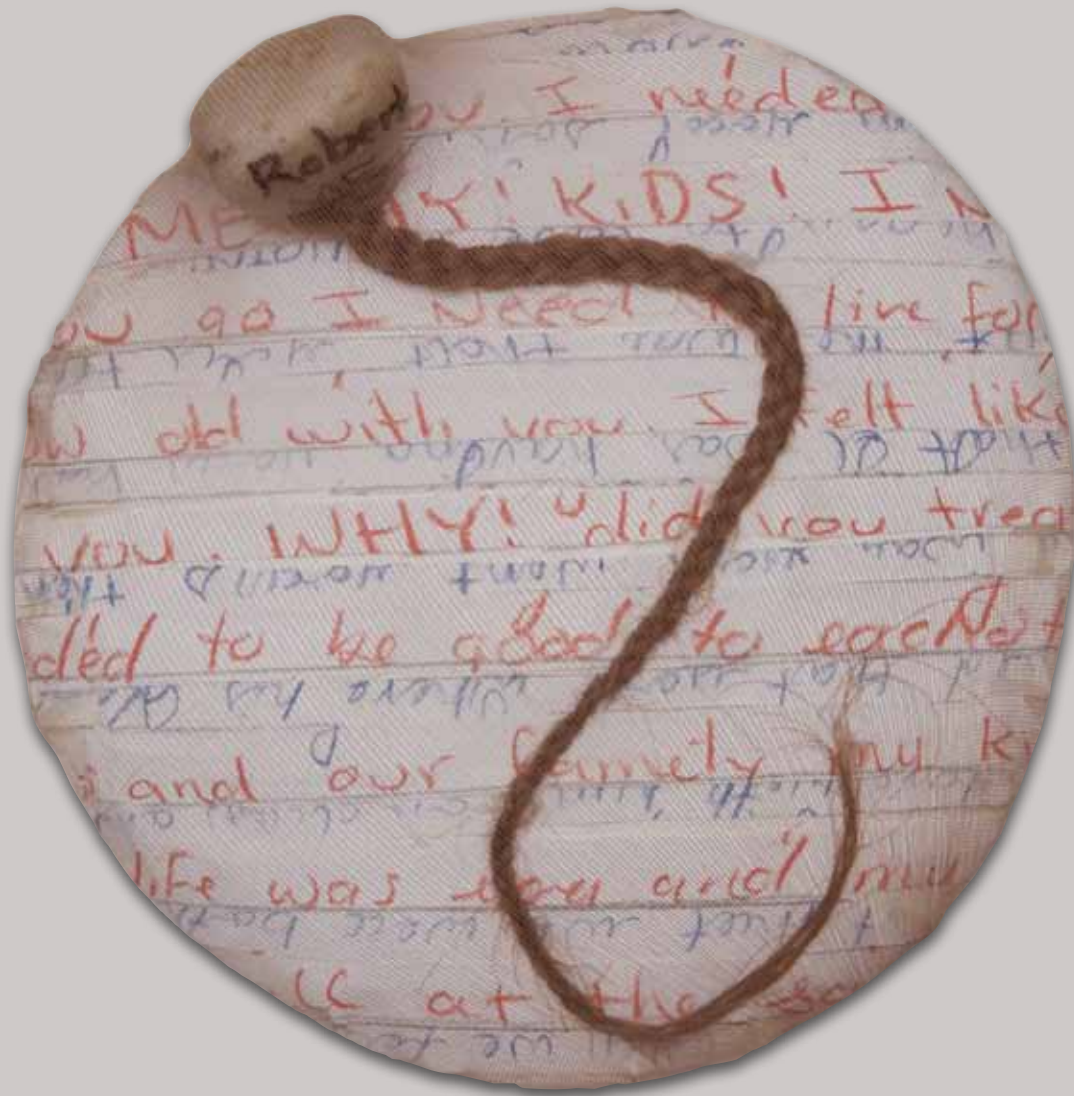
Anita

When I was younger I saw this movie where a guy named Bob was so phobic about everything that he decided he would just take baby steps to move forward. So, when I was escaping the environment I was in, and literally I had to escape with just the clothes on my back with my son, I pawned jewelry to buy a ticket to go to my parents. I had to think of the baby steps.

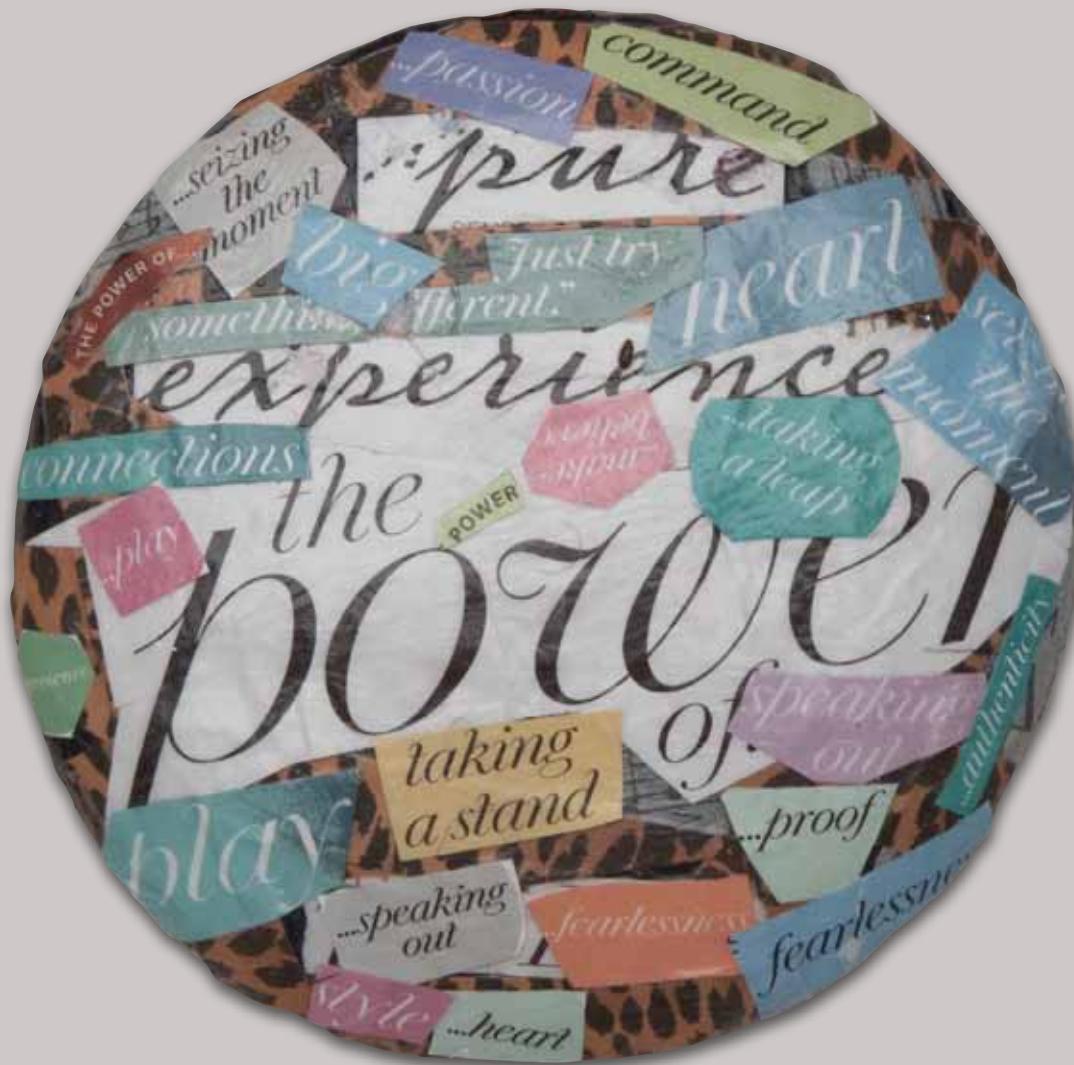
Baby steps to the car, baby steps to find a pawn shop, baby steps all the way and that's what got me through it. If I had to look at leaving as one big thing, I don't know if I would have been strong enough. But the little tiny steps are the ones that made the biggest impact in the things that I've done.... In a year, I was able to get into graduate school, which was really hard for me to believe that I could do that and be a full-time mother, go through a divorce, try to find time for myself and be strong for my son.

It is my hope to stay
together and continue with our dreams
to never become apart all
this far together.





*I was held down by a man
who never let me live or see my family.
I love and hate him at the same time.
Move on.*



Know that having an identity
separate from any relationship,
and taking time for yourself,
is so vital to being a happy and whole individual.



*Oh they need another opportunity we think.
There's no opportunity.*

You need to turn that corner and not look back.



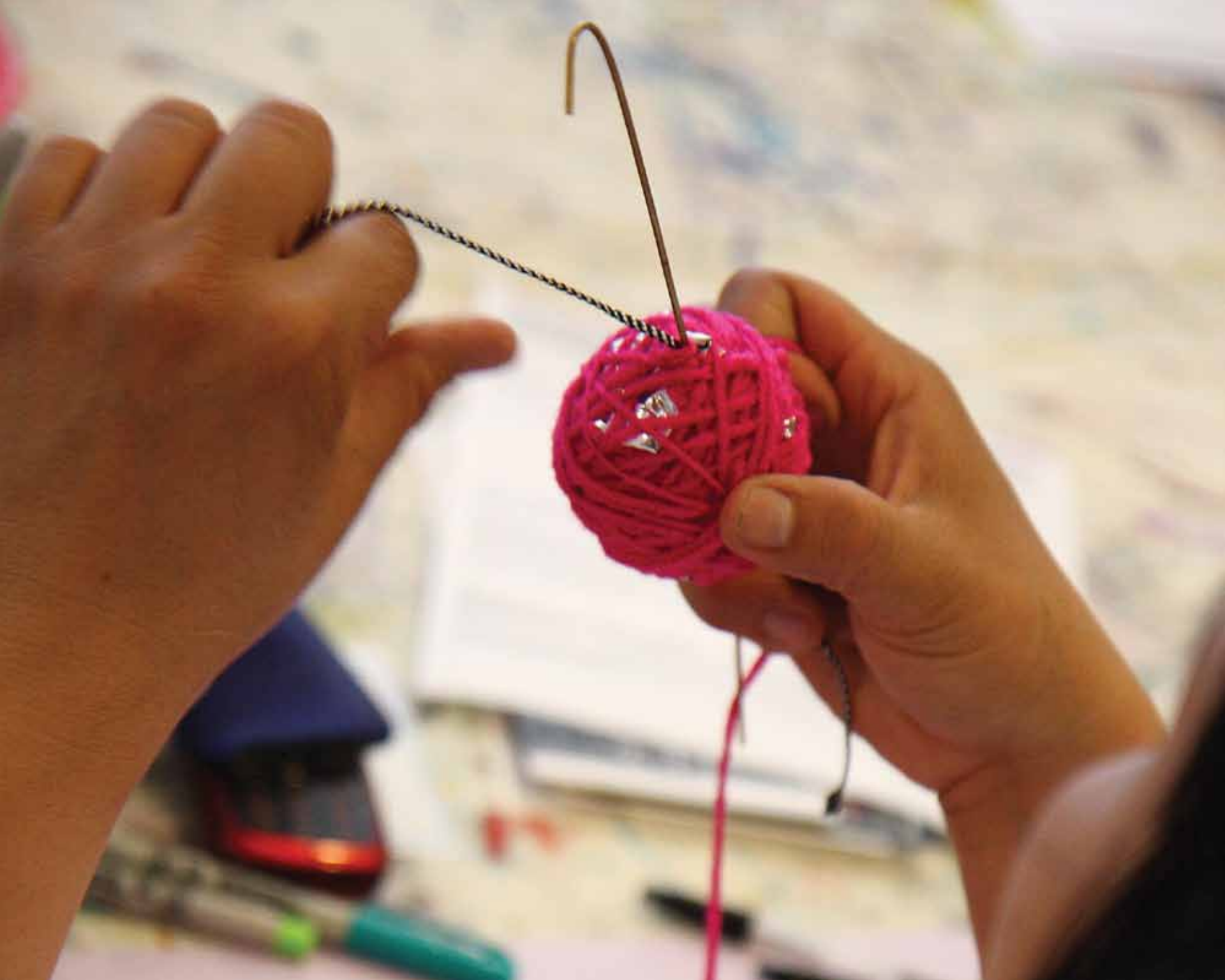
*Be brave and practice loving yourself,
believing in what you do,
so you can get out of it.*

Ann

I didn't have any family, I didn't have anywhere to go and I was afraid that they would take my children. They gave him a restraining order. But I lived with his family and his family would let him in. I didn't know what to do. He would say that he loved me and everything was going to change and that he wanted to be with his children.

But, the next month, he would hit me again. I was afraid to call the police because they were going to take away my children because I was with him. I asked for help. I asked strangers. They said, "go to the police, go to your social worker." But I was too afraid that I would lose my children. I went to a teacher who gave parenting classes and she helped me. She took me all the way to the shelter and thank god I went there.

Don't be afraid if you can't count on your family. Look for another way. There's always going to be someone that can help you. It might not be your family and it might not be your friend. But somewhere outside your circle there is someone, maybe someone you don't yet know, who can help.





Always keep spare keys.



If he wants you to be perfect, run ... run now!



Do it for the children.

*If I had found someone who had told me [that],
I might have made that decision way back when,
and I wouldn't have waited through eight years
of suffering at the side of this violent man.*



*If we're willing to walk through the pain,
we come out of it with incredible strength.*

*And when we do that,
we become the wisdom,
the strength, the bridges,
the compassion for others.*



Ayudemos a nuestros hijos a ser felices y saquémoslos de la violencia que los hace sentir devaluados.

Necesitamos hacer una diferencia, motivando a nuestros hijos, dándoles una mejor vida y haciéndolos sentir que existen y que son valorados.

Help our children to be happy and take them out of the violence that makes them feel worthless. We need to make a difference, motivating our children and giving them a better life and making them feel that they exist and have a lot of worth.

Rosa

Sometimes it's so difficult when you have children, to be on the street, no money, no job and to have to take care of them. There should be more communication, more teaching about violence. There are so many types of domestic violence starting with depriving you of your own liberty

They make you completely dependent until you're at the point where you can't even move without their command. They strip you morally. I think that sometimes what we're all hoping for is a counsel or advice from our own family – but, sometimes you have to make that decision by yourself.





We are
all responsible for the good of the community.

Neighbors should care for each other.

*Women should help each other
and be welcoming to those who need our help.*



*Change for the better is possible.
Men can be victims too.*



*If something makes you feel bad,
it probably is bad.*

*There is so much education for us now.
Ignorance cannot be an excuse anymore.
Care as much for yourself as you did for him.*



*Take care of yourself
and don't expect someone else to do it.
Don't think you need a man to complete you.*

Maura

Abuse had been a part of my life since childhood, and continued into my marriage. Leaving my husband, and taking our son with me broke the physical chain of violence – but, not until working with Windows was the emotional chain finally broken. I began the Pearls of Wisdom workshop feeling all the darkest memories of the hurtful things my husband would say and do. Then, I began to wrap all that negative energy up. Using spools of yarn, I contained all of the darkness inside of my pearl. I covered the darkness in plaster and paint that was full of light. That is the place Windows brought me, from darkness to light.

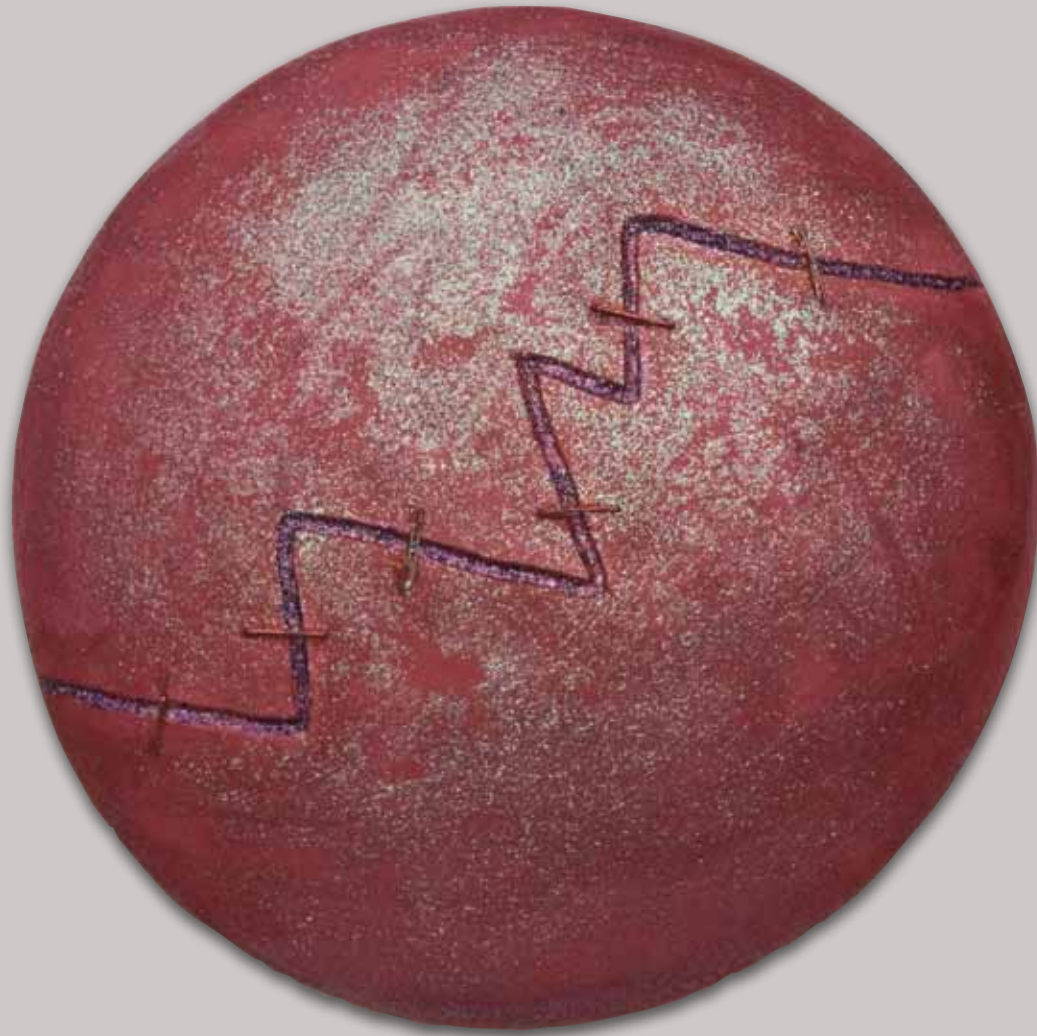
The most rewarding part though was seeing my four-year-old son open up that day. He had shut down and locked everyone out for a long time. Wrapping toys into his pearl, my son also touched a little toy cat. At the end of the workshop, the facilitator asked my son how he felt. Before, he could only say words like ‘mad’ or ‘angry.’ At that moment, he drew a big smiling face on his cat, and said ‘My cat is very happy now.’ Those are the most amazing words I have ever heard!





*You are only as sick as your secrets
and the shame of these secrets lives in the darkness.*

*Truth is light, healing,
and freedom from shame.*

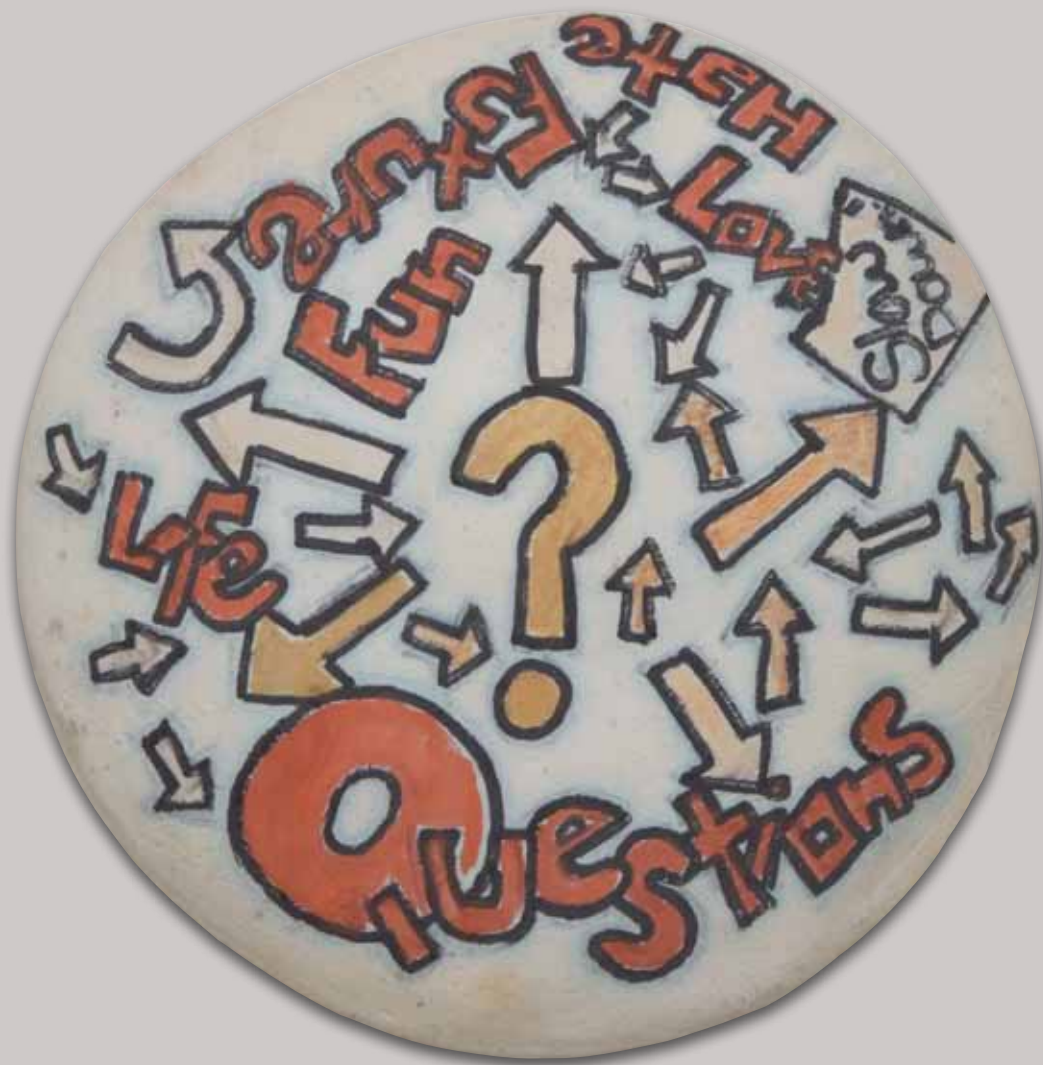


*Real love can be felt in the heart;
it cannot be pounded onto our bodies.*



*I want to keep fighting
to be the person I want to be,
rather than have the abuse define me.*

*Boundaries have saved me
from even myself.*



Dile no a la violencia.

Say no to violence.



*You will open your wings when you're ready,
and believe me you will fly.*

*Habrirás tus alas cuando tu sientas
que estás lista y creeme que volarás.*

Making Pearls: A Community Engagement Strategy

Central to its mission as a community engagement project, artist Kim Abeles designed the art making to ensure participation by the many different people affected by domestic violence.

This meant planning three types of workshops that asked the more than 800 participants to recast hurtful experiences of domestic abuse in their lives. Though the materials, settings and time frames varied, each workshop followed the powerful metaphor of a pearl transforming a hurtful irritant into a valued treasure. Abeles also worked with AWBW program staff to follow guidelines for working with shelters and ensuring client safety.

Each of the 70 workshops, near or far, began by Abeles sharing images of her own community-based artwork either in person for Los Angeles area workshops (often with a translator present) or via a video presentation on the DVD toolkit that AWBW sent to its statewide network of trained leaders. AWBW sent both pre-cast pearl discs and memento oyster journals for participants to reflect on their experience of creating a pearl. The journals stayed with the survivors, but the pearl discs, once transformed with paint, text and imagery, were returned to AWBW for the final exhibition.

Abeles also created a version, to engage children and pre-teens by using clay or play-doh to express the strong feelings that come with encountering domestic violence at a young age.

Children, and their advocate parents, also made parchment pearls with AWBW during the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence's national conference. Altogether more than 200 painted spherical pearls, 630 collaged pearl discs, 130 clay monster pearls and an ever-growing number of parchment pearls were created for the culminating installation. They will also be available as an online exhibition and community blog at **www.awbw.org**.



Reshaping experiences of control, severe words and violent acts into physical objects that acquire new meanings is hard, gut-wrenching work that begins with reflecting on the harm of past violence and ends with finding and sharing one's voice to create a tidal wave of change. Abeles, who is herself a survivor, offers the poignant prose that accompanies the images that follow.



*The irritant, the abuse, the assault
slipped into my oyster, my home,
my soul.*



*I could run or I could look to myself,
to my stronger core. My story is
worthwhile if it helps others avoid
the traps and the violence.*



*I'm not sure how my stories may end
violence, but I am willing to speak and
be part of the chorus that sings to the
masses.*



I find a place for my story so that it does not become an impoverished chant, repeated over and over to silent ears. I will replace my pity, my role as victim with empowerment and guidance for us all.



Like a doctor treating bones, I will mend my breaks with plaster and my scars will make me stronger.



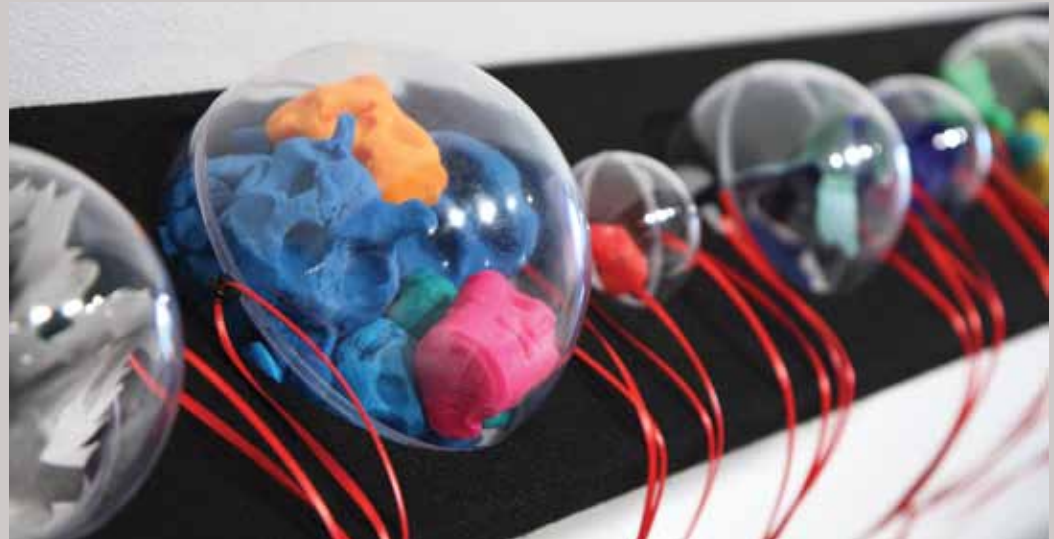
I share my words as I would with my younger self, if only someone had done this for me. I am not looking for comfort, I am looking for action!

“From the smallest seed in the deepest hole you’ll bloom and be beautiful.”

Survivor, age 13

Children’s Pearls

This version of the pearls project gave participating children a positive way to handle the violence they have witnessed at home. Each child created a three-dimensional “fear monster” from clay or play-doh that safely sits in clear, round forms to create another kind of “pearl necklace” and add their young voices.



*Based on **The Monster in Me**, one of A Window Between Worlds myriad of projects for recovery from domestic violence.*

The Handbook for Living gives voice to all the pearls created in workshops across the state. They stand for the contributions of more than 800 participants – women, men, children and teens – whose work was elegantly woven into a common exhibition narrative at the Korean Cultural Center in March 2011.

The Project Workshops were organized by the following organizations:

A Change of Faces, Lancaster

Alternatives to Domestic Violence, Casa de paz,
Riverside County

All Peoples Christian Center, Los Angeles

Angel Step, Foley House, Whittier

Angel Step Inn, Downey

Angel Step Too, Long Beach

Asian Pacific Women's Center, Los Angeles

Asian Women's Shelter, San Francisco

BeARTrageous Community Workshops, Venice

Center Against Sexual Assault, Hemet

Center For Pacific Asian Family, Los Angeles

Crescent House Healing Center / Catholic Charities,
New Orleans, LA

Chicana Service Action Center, Los Angeles

CSU Chico Art Students, Chico

CSU Northridge Art Alumni, Los Angeles

CSU Northridge Community Workshops, Los
Angeles

Doves of Big Bear Valley, Inc., Big Bear

Foothill Family Services, West Covina

Good Shepherd Shelter, Los Angeles

Haven Hills, San Fernando Valley

Haven Women's Center, Stanislaus County

Healthy Start Program, Jurupa Unified School
District, Riverside

High Desert Domestic Violence Program, Inc.,
Victorville

Hope Gardens Family Center, Sylmar

House of Ruth, Claremont

Huff Art Center, Visalia

Human Options Second Step, Costa Mesa

Human Options Center for Children and Families,
Santa Ana

Huntington Park Police Department, Huntington Park

Laura's House, Ladera Ranch

Little Tokyo Service Center,

Valley Crisis Center, Merced

Marjaree Mason Center, Fresno

Option House, Inc

Pacific Clinics- Sierra Family Center, Glendora

PROTOTYPES – South LA, Los Angeles

Rainbow Services, San Pedro

Refuge House, Tallahassee, FL

Shasta Women's Refuge, Redding

South Asian Network, Artesia

San Pasqual Family Resource Center, Winterhaven

South Bay Community Services, Chula Vista

South Gate Police Dept., Family Violence Prevention
Project, South Gate

SPIRITT Family Services, South El Monte

Su Casa

Su Casa – Transitional

Survivor's Art Circle, Los Angeles

Shasta County Women's Refuge, Redding

David and Margaret Youth and Family Services,
La Verne

United American Indian Involvement, Los Angeles

Valley Oasis – Kaylas Place, Lancaster

WCCS

WOMAN, Inc, San Francisco

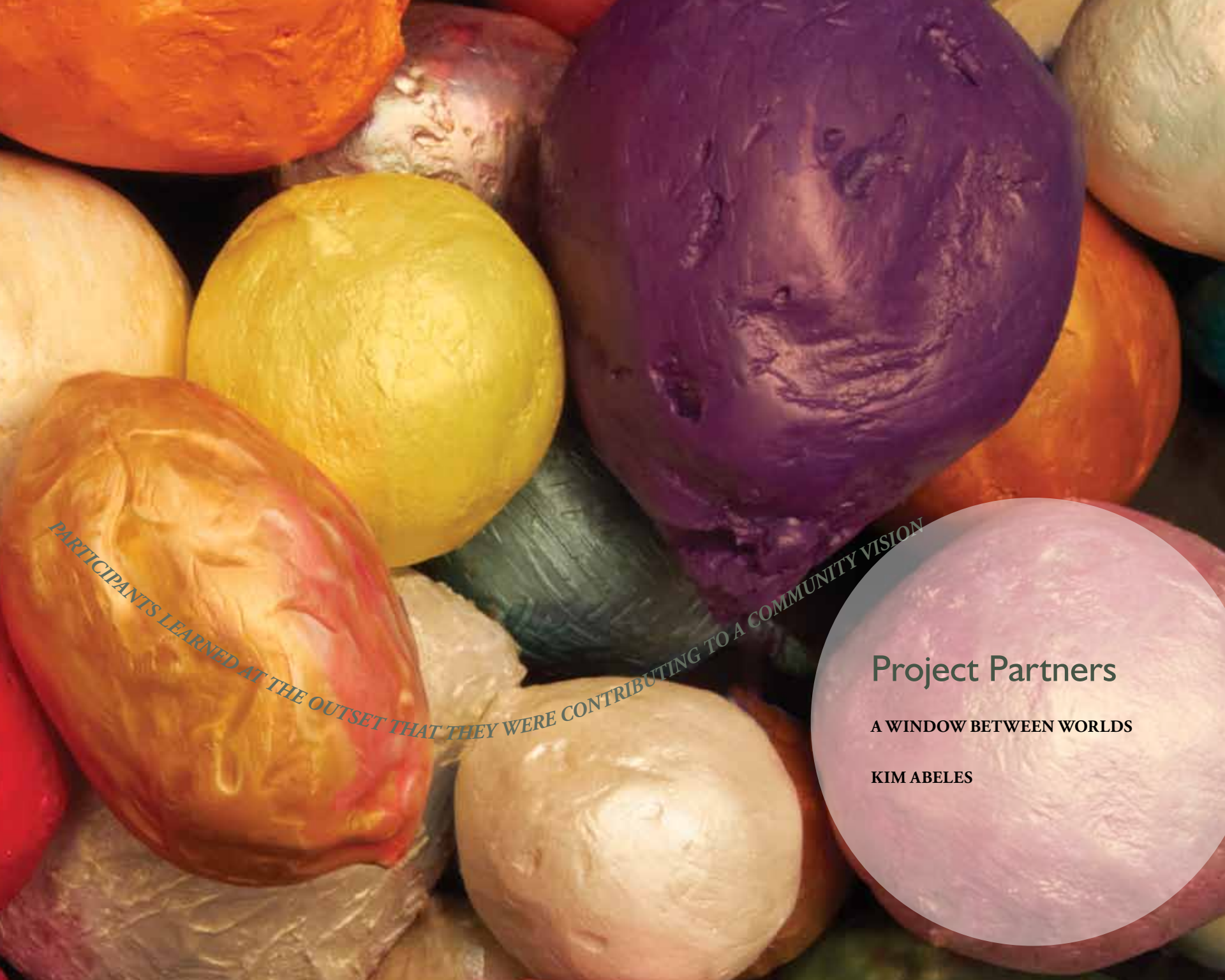
WomenCare Shelter, Bellingham, WA

Women's Shelter Program of San Luis Obispo
County, San Luis Obispo

WTLC, Orange

YWCA GLA, Angeles Mesa & Compton
Empowerment Center, Los Angeles





PARTICIPANTS LEARNED AT THE OUTSET THAT THEY WERE CONTRIBUTING TO A COMMUNITY VISION

Project Partners

A WINDOW BETWEEN WORLDS

KIM ABELES

A Window Between Worlds

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PARTNER

A Window Between Worlds (AWBW) is the only national organization dedicated to transforming lives and communities impacted by domestic violence by using art as a healing tool. In partnership with domestic violence service providers nationwide, AWWB reaches over 50,000 participants annually at 150 sites throughout Los Angeles and in 25 states – and the need for these programs is rapidly increasing.

AWBW programs provide weekly art workshops to women, children and teens seeking safety and support in shelters, transitional housing, and outreach centers. The workshops help them tell their stories, safely express their feelings, and rebuild their self-confidence.

AWBW actively supports partner agencies with workshop leader training, art supply and exhibit funding, personalized consultation and 24/7 access to an online support network that includes curriculum of over 400 art workshops, online program reporting, access to highlights, testimonials, tips and feedback from other leaders.

Support for AWWB comes from large and small contributions including grants from the generosity of many individuals and funders, including The Ahmanson Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, and The Capital Group Companies Charitable Foundation.



*AWBW Leader with 7-year-old boy who found the **Monster in Me** workshop was a key to unlock a new beginning.*

“Every time I don’t think I want to do art, but then I do it and I don’t feel angry anymore.”

Children’s Windows Participant, age 7

*"I am so proud of this. If I can do this with clay,
imagine what I can do with myself."*

Women's Window's Participant



AWBW PROGRAMS

Women's Windows

The AWWB Women's Program is a safe, gentle, and effective way for survivors to express and release painful feelings, as well as to overcome the abusive messages that they learned from their batterers. As women grow to believe in themselves, they are able to begin building a hopeful, healthy and secure future.

Children's Windows

Witnessing domestic violence has a devastating impact on children, who often lack the words to describe their experiences. AWWB Children's Programs give children and teens positive ways to handle their anger and pain – an essential step in breaking the chain of family violence for future generations. AWWB workshops provide them with a lifelong tool to explore their feelings, hopes, and dreams.

Public Exhibitions

Over the past 20 years AWWB, in collaboration with neighborhood shelters across the country, has held over 125 art exhibits that reached over 25,000 viewers. This first-hand visibility of survivor's voices cracks the hard shell of silence and neglect that surrounds domestic violence in our communities. The exhibitions have been placed in museums, art centers, colleges, department stores and even the US Senate Russell Building in Washington D.C. Many exhibits have included hands-on participatory components inviting viewers to join in the creation process and so call for an end to the violence. Selected exhibits are available to travel to assist communities in breaking the silence.

Community Involvement

AWWB also offers community engagement opportunities for artists and others to learn about domestic violence and support AWWB programs. These include annual exhibitions, hands-on art workshops with the Survivor's Art Circle and BeARTrageous Community Workshops, membership in the Artists' Advisory Circle and monthly volunteer opportunities. ●

"At the beginning I thought, 'How could cutting and gluing my thoughts on paper be helpful?' However, by the end of the session, I was in tears – healing tears. I could see how my abuser beat the sun rays out of my life. Just as the sun rays break through on a stormy day, I too will break through my storm and shine again."

Kim Abeles

COMMUNITY ARTIST PARTNER

My introductory remarks at each *Pearls* workshop included images of installations and artworks, which touched on specific issues that I have engaged through my work. I have tackled environmental issues with scientists, collective memory with youth and elders, representations of American Indians with the Lakota, and health education with clinics. This brief presentation immediately placed the *Pearls* project in the context of activist and conceptual art.

From the start, *Pearls of Wisdom* was created to negotiate between studio art and social interaction. Though personal healing occurred, *Pearls* was intended to offer art creation as a dynamic process for its makers, not as art therapy. Participants learned at the outset that they were contributing to a community vision.

Though community-based work requires aesthetics to find its voice in the noisy art world, its true reason for being made is to activate social change. Hence, additional consideration was given to avoid the trappings of aestheticizing tragedy. Attention to the presentation aesthetics of the documentation is another key component of community projects. It is this element that makes visible the dynamics of social change, by first placing the project in real time

and space. Often enhanced with the inclusion of audio and video formats, this illumination transforms over a period of time. So, the documentation itself functions as both a content and aesthetic element.

Interdisciplinary artwork is made best by artists who cannot fathom making art only for its own sake; yet rely on the muse as in any other art genre. Creative thinking allows the unexpected to surface and echo with new patterns. All art work functions optimally when it reaches audiences outside, as well as in, the art community.



Though my work addresses a broad scope of environmental and social concerns, the soul of the work always engenders a discussion about the role of the individual in society. The individual is not a separate organism moving around independently, but rather a dynamic cog in the movement of all things from past to future. I am awestruck by our efforts, our foibles and our successes, and by the way these three possibilities are inseparable. ●

*Kim Abeles, **Run-off Dolphin Suitcase**, 1995.*

Storm drain run-off on steel and fabric structure fabricated by Abeles as a functioning suitcase and teaching tool. Funded by the Santa Monica Restoration Project. Collection of Lux Art Institute, San Diego.

The sculptural suitcase is used in classrooms for all ages to learn about storm drain run-off, littering and recycling.



Kim Abeles, **Paper Person**, 2010.

48-foot figure created from all the paper trash from visitors at the California Science Center (CSC) on Earth Day 2009, Collection of CSC.

The size of **Paper Person** was determined by the amount of paper trash generated for the day. It is on permanent exhibition at CSC's Ecosystems along with another Abeles project, **Smog Collectors**, Summer and Winter through out Los Angeles.



Kim Abeles, **Presidential Commemorative Smog Plates**, 1991.

Smog (particulate matter) on porcelain plates with their quotes about environment and industry written in gold. Private collections.

The stenciled plates were left out longer on a rooftop depending on the presidents' environmental policies.



Kim Abeles, **Smog Collectors** on a rooftop.

Stencils placed on plates or objects gather the heavy smog in the air, and when the stencil paper is removed, the image is made from the smog in the air. Private collections.





Art and Activism Essays

SUVAN GEER

SUZANNE LACY

CATHY SALSER

BARBARA T. SMITH

ART IS A LANGUAGE OF CREATION AND WITH IT WE CAN RE-IMAGINE THE SHAPE OF THE WORLD WE WANT

Lessons

Essay by SUVAN GEER

How do we learn? Strictly speaking, we learn mostly from hands-on, trial and error as well as by what we are told. That's why babies spend so much time doing things, and adults spend so much time listening and talking. We are all learning. We want to figure out this world and our place in it. We want to know how to survive and prosper. To do that we use everything we can – all our own experiences, what we read, scientific studies, people's advice, what we hear in the news and more.

The Pearls of Wisdom project Kim Abeles has created in collaboration with A Window Between Worlds (AWBW) is a learning project that uses art. The metaphor she's chosen is a powerful image: the making of a pearl. Just as an oyster slowly builds a comforting, smooth layer between its soft flesh and harsh grains of raw sand in its shell, Abeles' project asks participants to recast hurtful domestic experiences in their lives. Pearls of Wisdom offers an opportunity for abused family members to transform some of their memories of domestic harshness, physically reshaping severe words and violent acts into something with a different meaning – a meaning that they make strong and beautiful, and then offer to others to learn from.

For years, artist and activist Kim Abeles has used her art as a way to focus attention on the sometimes nearly invisible lives imbedded within big social issues like sexism, racism, religion, ecology and AIDS. Her numerous objects and installations have repeatedly called us to consider the hidden people laboring in sweatshops, the faceless children whose lives were changed by being allowed into desegregated schools, the covert effects on clean air of Presidential policies, or the cumulative contribution we each make to landfills with our daily garbage. Her many collaborative projects over the years have led school children to examine the paradoxes of celebrity within the concept of hero or role model, and have also encouraged teens to project their lives from the isolation of their rooms out into their neighborhoods.

For this art project Abeles has joined with A Window Between Worlds, an organization that is also an art piece, founded 20 years ago, and still overseen, by community artist Cathy Salser. Their collaboration seems a natural pairing. Abeles uses art's objects to probe for the human persona behind a social issue. Windows' ongoing mission is to use art making to help the survivors of domestic violence heal and reclaim power in their lives. Abeles and Salser both

regard art as being something beyond the visual objects it creates. Because of their works' direct engagement with social issues they walk alongside the footsteps of other contemporary artists once described by art historian and critic Arlene Raven as making "public-spirited art" or "art in the public interest." They join with artists like Suzanne Lacy and Barbara T. Smith, whose powerful words and images also grace this catalog, and whose equally powerful performance artworks from the 1980s onward have consistently explored themes of violence and the reality of women's lives.

Community Story Tree is an ongoing AWWB art project made in communities across the country. Participants are given one portion of a single tree on which they can share their own experiences with domestic violence. When joined, the pieces demonstrate that they are not alone in their pain and the real possibility of building a violence-free future. Completed Story Trees can be seen on-line and travel for display in public buildings, shelters and outreach programs to build public awareness and discussion.



These artists ... remind us that art is a language of creation and with it we can re-imagine and re-form the shape of the world we want to live in.



*Sandra Mueller's
BeARTrageous
Community "Pearls
of Wisdom" Project.
Venice, CA, 2010.*



Salser's ongoing art project, *A Window Between Worlds*, is not a traditional object, image, or performance. At base, AWBW is an idea, active in and presented to the public via a nonprofit national organization that she started just for that purpose. Starting an organization to make activist art may sound radical in a culture where art is primarily regarded as a product made to be sold, but it's not without precedent. In Los Angeles alone, other artists have done similar things. In 1976, activist Judy Baca formed the *Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC)* in Venice to keep alive and unrestricted the monumental mural projects of Latino life she was painting with the help of rival gang members. Actor and writer John Malpede founded the *Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD)* in 1985 to formalize his free workshops that use documentary-style performances and improvisation by homeless people in order to end the invisibility and isolation they live with and build a sense of community on Skid Row. Both these art organizations are still active and vitally involved with their communities.

AWBW is also intimately involved with its community. Back in 1992 Salser began her project as a nonprofit under the funding umbrella of the Southern California Women's Caucus for Art, whose members shared in her vision of art as a tool of personal and social

change and used their established organization to foster Windows' inception. Its community connections continue to deepen, with the numerous community shelter leaders, workshop participants, volunteers, staff and many collaborative artists. One such artist is arts organizer Sandra Mueller whose own practice of healing community workshops was inspired by AWBW, and whose activist community networking in Los Angeles was instrumental in bringing Abeles and Salser together for this project. Mueller is also co-editor of this catalogue and chair of the Pearls of Wisdom project.

Since the 1970s artists have been moving art from traditional museum or gallery arenas into the public realm where it is better situated to deal with the complexities, ambiguities and dysfunction of the real world. In those years Feminist artists like Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro converted an abandoned house into "Womanhouse" with their Valencia students. That house formed a series of walk-into art installations that illuminated and explored the experiences of women. Also active at that time was conceptual artist Joseph Beuys who founded the German Green Party and famously called for art to be considered more broadly, as "social sculpture"—a creative network capable of reshaping society itself with powerful ideas

and modeling behaviors. These early examples deeply charged the art world with a sense of the larger potential of art in society. They also form the philosophical and historical latticework surrounding Abeles' and Salser's art projects.

It is in this subtle but revolutionary vein that Salser's AWBW organization operates. The model of art she believes in and offers to the public with this project and other AWBW shelter workshops is of art as fundamentally a process of visualization and creation that is both a shared visual language and therapeutic act, essential to the health of its makers and its society. The aesthetics of her organization lie not in the works made in the workshops, but in the mindful way AWBW operates as a regenerative practice of respect for those who have been abused. Salser has stated that her organization's art workshops operate "as a 'window of time' for survivors of domestic violence to practice listening to their hearts, to practice respecting their thoughts and feelings, and to practice putting their visions for their lives into a tangible form, often for the first time – something they haven't had the safety to do in the face of domestic abuse. AWBW's revolutionary idea is that art making offers a window of creation to shape an independent and treasured Self.

Salser and Abeles, along with the other artists I have named and many more, all recognize that it is fundamental in the making of art that you will find and refine who you are, and how you see the world around you. Perhaps all artists and some of those who love art know this too. But I think in the rush of the general public to ogle art's final result or talk about what it costs, art's shaping of perspective is often lost. These artists, however, see and use the process of art's creation as itself a powerful sculpting tool. They actively engage the community in art's making because they see the real essence of art's importance to culture and society as the larger envisioning it can stimulate and nurture.

As we lose art from our schools and our children grow increasingly unable to express themselves outside of tweets and links, our society is becoming more polarized and erupting with fear. But with their commitment to using art's processes with non-artists via performances, murals, images, workshops or Pearls, community engaged activist artists like Kim Abeles and Cathy Salser are shifting the accepted paradigm about why art is valuable. They remind us that art is a language of creation and that with it we can re-imagine and re-form the shape of the world we want to live in. It's a vitally important lesson. ●



Kim Abeles, **Frankenstein's Hearts**, 2002, *Intersection for the Arts*, San Francisco and touring.

Youth interviewed elders and translated the material into visual art and text. Funded by the Surdna Foundation.

Forty teens and young adults interviewed elders in their communities. Workshop exercises encouraged the student participants to enter the Jungian-style world of visual interpretation: color, pattern, symbol, texture, and so forth. The wall-graphic is the legend for the biographical, visual language; and, body parts of the figure in the sarcophagus reflect the visuals of the life stories.

Serious Work

Essay by SUZANNE LACY

During 2010, seventy women in Spain were killed by their intimate partners. On November 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, two thousand men and women gathered in the center of Madrid, in Plaza de la Puerto del Sol, to remember and give name to these women.

As I write this essay, I have just returned from working for a year on *The Tattooed Skeleton*, a project about domestic violence in Spain. The cultural narrative is shifting: from seeing domestic violence as a criminal act of assault to understanding it as an infringement of fundamental civil liberties. We critically examined how narratives of gender violence from media and official political discourse in Spain are constructed, and whether they continue to be effective in the public domain; that is, how is the “story” of domestic violence told?

We began where all such inquiries should begin: *what do women say about their own experiences of domestic violence?* Women’s testimonials serve two functions: they begin each woman’s healing process, and they are our most direct source of public

information on the tragedy of domestic violence. In Madrid, we videotaped nine women hidden in a shelter, telling the stories that began in their body and were inscribed, over years, on their bones. They could not reveal their faces or identity for fear of losing their lives to their partners, who were trying, even as we taped, to track them down.

These nine women quite literally trusted us with their lives. Still very much alive was the story of a wife interviewed anonymously on television and subsequently killed by an enraged husband, who identified her by the ring on her hand. Over the course of the project, these nine women inspired the activists, government officials, media makers, students and artists working on the project.

At the end of the year a curious thing happened. I was surprised to find that these women felt that the taping, and the subsequent exhibition of the tapes, had been a turning point in their own healing process. How could this be? It was only an artwork. It seemed that they had begun to own the origination of this artwork and its process of making. They began to see themselves in a larger

context, where eradicating gender violence is a civil rights imperative. At each step of the project they participated, incognito, our interventions – in the Reina Sofia Museum, in a national award ceremony, and at the march on November 25 – and found their experience transformed from a personal tragedy to a source of inspiration. They were collaborators in the art, and making art was transformative.

This is the healing of art: to see one’s isolated suffering transformed into a tale of hope; to see private tragedy transformed into public urgency; to see the words of women honored on the stage of cultural significance.

For twenty years artist Cathy Salser has worked to bring together the worlds of art, healing and activism on behalf of families split apart by domestic violence. She invested in teaching art to mothers and children escaping from violence and encouraged their articulations as a form of self-expression. As an artist she intuited that art could not only support healing of the women and their families, but it could serve a public education function.

*This is the healing of art ...
to see private tragedy transformed
into public urgency*



Suzanne Lacy *Three Weeks in May*, Los Angeles, 1977.

This performance consisted of a series of thirty city-wide events on rape in Los Angeles, bringing the topic to public consciousness through workshops, media events, art performances, speak outs and self defense demonstrations. At the center of the project activities was an installation of two thirty foot maps of Los Angeles. On one, Lacy documented daily the prior day's police reports with a bright red stencil. On the other she located the various resources to raise awareness and support victims. The piece was a model for activist engagement of broad audiences and the parallel presentation of art-like, and life-like pedagogic actions.



Suzanne Lacy, *The Tattooed Skeleton*, Madrid, Spain. 2010.

In *El esqueleto tatuado* – a year-long project for the Sofia Reina Museum – Suzanne Lacy took a position as an observer and commentator of Spanish popular and legal discourses through a complex work that engaged with artists, activists and officials who are trying to change the narrative of gender violence. She asked how private experiences are communicated in the public realm, and to what kind of effect?

This is why an artist of the caliber of Kim Abeles wanted to work with Salser and why Salser welcomed the demanding methodologies of a Kim Abeles community project. In *Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence*, they wedded art, politics and collaboration with personal transformation for the 800 participants. With this exhibition and publication, they begin the transformation of consciousness for the public who now engages with the project.

This is serious work. Around the world, violence against women “kills and disables as many women between the ages of 15 and 44 as cancer, and its toll on women’s health surpasses that of traffic accidents and malaria combined.”¹ Eradicating gender violence is one of the most urgent of our international agendas. Because of intensive lobbying by feminists in the 1970s, gender violence has moved to the international human rights agenda. This came as a result of lengthy and directed activism, and artists were part of that movement.

As important as it is to individual healing for a woman to see her struggle as part of a larger one, so

it is that every act of making oneself anew – through art in this case – should be received by its audience as a testimony to the need for global human rights. In *Pearls of Wisdom*, Salser and Abeles have produced an experience that operates not only as personal healing but also as public education. “Violence Against Women is neither unchangeable nor inevitable,” according to a UN Executive Summary. “A cohesive and strategic approach is needed from all actors, including governments, the international community ... local women’s groups, civil society organizations, academics and professionals.”² Let us add “artists” to this list and add *Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence* to this roster of activist projects. ●

NOTES

1 UNFPA State of World Population 2005: The Promise of Equality, p. 65.

2 UN Executive Summary, Ending Violence against Women: From Words to Action, Study of the Secretary General, 2006.

A Window Between Worlds

Founder's Journey

Essay by CATHY SALSER

I grew up painfully shy, and in the face of domestic violence art was my safe haven – and my voice. From my personal experience I knew that art, created at the right moment, could make a difference in people's lives.

When I began this work over 20 years ago, I thought it would be just one summer's art project. I loaded my trunk full of art supplies and set out, going from shelter to shelter, hoping to share art in a way that might make a difference. My idea was to offer art as a "window of time" for the women to practice respecting themselves, their voice and their visions for a new, violence-free life. I never imagined the

impact that "window of time" would have on so many lives or that today A Window Between Worlds would reach thousands of survivors each year throughout California and nationwide.

Over the past 20 years I have seen our art programs become a uniquely powerful tool of transformation and healing offered in the shelters. AWBW workshops are there – in a critical place, at a critical moment in the lives of survivors – carefully structured to create a pivotal island of safety for each person to discover in their own heart, voice, and language a meaningful vision forward.

But the window into awareness and transformation unlocked by this art does not stop at the personal level. It extends far beyond because it also opens a window of awareness within the broader community. Domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking – all happening right now in our communities – too often go unseen. Visibility can mean death for the victims. Yet the impact of the violence must first be seen to be stopped. This art provides survivors a safe way to speak and demonstrate publicly on their own behalf and, in the process, create broad social change.



Cathy Salser, *Portraits of Survivors Exhibition*, US Senate Russell Building Rotunda, Washington D.C., 1994

... a pivotal island of safety for each person
to discover in their own heart, voice, and
language a meaningful vision forward



To be working with artist Kim Abeles on the *Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence* project in our 20th anniversary year is an absolute joy, and I am so grateful for her partnership. Kim's vision of using art's physical acts to bind up emotional wounds has been a profound process for the survivors and community members who have participated. She has given us a potent metaphor of survival that is also a beautiful act of healing. I believe it embodies the very spirit of AWBW.

I am deeply grateful to the Korean Cultural Center of Los Angeles for partnering with us to host this exhibit, to Sandra Mueller for passionately nurturing this project from inception to completion, and to each artist, survivor, volunteer and shelter leader who has been part of the transformations and healing that have taken place in our workshops and projects over all of these years. What began as one voice has now been joined by tens of thousands, all united to make healing possible. Together, using art and creating safety, we are putting an end to the cycles of shame, silence and anger that fuel domestic violence. ●



Cathy Salser, **Hold Tight to That**, Acrylic on Paper, 1994. From the collection of Richard Orzechowski

During the first years of her shelter visits Salser collaborated with more than 30 of the women on a series of portraits. Over painting a raised surface embossed with their own words the images make their choice of visibility an act of power while affirming the strength, dignity and hope of survivors.

Art and Transformation

Essay by BARBARA T. SMITH

I've pondered the idea of A Window Between Worlds, wondering how does it function? It is said to be a living structure that engages victims of abuse with trained teachers and through art brings them from the place of darkness and paralysis into light and power. In thinking about it I've realized that I know this process intimately from my own rape experience and art.

It began for Cathy as she painted portraits of the women she discovered living and working in the trenches of domestic abuse shelters around the country but quickly grew to become the living organization that it is. Uniting the site of personal pain with humanitarian concern, she created a window through which survivors could take a fresh look at their lives.

AWBW became thus not just a gallery for engaging artworks with personal messages, but also a support organization by which transformational experiences can be replicated in others, and is an artwork itself.

This may be a novel view of what art is or should be, but it is grounded in the premise that art can exceed the reach of galleries and sales and become actual endeavors in life. Since the advent of abstract expressionism and performance art, where the art impulse is not coming from what life looks like but from the inner expression of an embodied artist, and the writings of such theorists as Allan Kaprow in his quest to merge art with life, such endeavors as AWWB became an obvious extension of this logic. Now there are many examples: Lewis MacAdams and his 40-year artwork to rescue the L.A. River, Leslie Labowitz and her pioneer sprout business that joins a living income with a visionary healing food, Betsy Damon whose performance art led her to creating huge river reclamation projects in China, Lauren Bon whose focus is on new ways of revitalizing a city or Aviva Rhamani who reclaimed a harbor and a quarry in Maine and dialogues regularly in public media conferences with experts on environmental principles. I could go on and on.

I see the parallel in my own work; how adolescent trauma can be rendered whole through transformational performances. Beginning blindly, I was initially compelled to create very dark and wrenching works. In the magic of art these became my teachers, and I could see my own deepest spiritual concerns. In reality each life crisis led to further artworks that further restructured my understanding and liberated my spirit. As one of my theologian friends made me see, the initial trauma becomes a GIFT of depth out of which we create art, heal others and ourselves.



*Brotman Hospital, Culver City, CA 1983.
The artist's battered face after she was raped and beaten severely with a large screwdriver.*

... the initial trauma becomes a GIFT of
depth out of which we create art,
heal others and ourselves



A big example for me was in 1983 when I was beaten up and raped by guy who broke into my house in the middle of the night. It took three performances over 3 years to fully process the experience. It was not by retribution and getting even nor by pretending that it didn't happen, but by deeply engaging my experience that I was able to gain its insight.

The organization that Cathy Salser founded, A Window Between Worlds, is not beholden to any ideology or art theory; it just works directly to tap the life force and insures that victims of abuse have teachers who can introduce them into the painful power of turning a terrible threat into a clear window. ●

Sheer Cliffs And Natural Bridges Performance,
University of Wisconsin, Madison and School of the Art
Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Ill., 1986.

The concluding performance in the series. The artist
stands before the audience as Kali, the slain Chinamasta,
who feeds the world from her own sacrifice.







Community

PROJECT DIAGRAM

RESOURCES

PARTICIPATION

PUBLIC DISPLAY OF SO MANY IRIDESCENT PEARLS EACH UNIQUE YET CONNECTED REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL METAPHOR

**The Pearls of Wisdom/
End the Violence
Project** celebrates the
collective power of art
to forge courage and
build momentum to end
domestic violence.

**A Window Between Worlds
(AWBW)** collaborated with
artist Kim Abeles, families
and advocates for two
years offering workshops,
gathering stories,
documenting the project
and producing exhibitions
and public programs.



Participants create pearls at these locations:

Abeles-Marchionno Studios, downtown Los Angeles
AWBW Training Studios, Venice
Sixty shelters across the state and beyond
National Conference on Domestic Violence, Anaheim
California State University campuses (Chico, Northridge)

Documentation amplifies the project:

Extensive video, audio and photo archives
DVD Toolkit with video also posted on YouTube

Public offerings extend the project outward:

Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles with programs & walk-thrus
Loyola Marymount University and CSU Northridge galleries
Exhibition catalogue with Handbook for Living and essays
Exhibits continue online at awbw.org

Outreach to forge allies and build awareness:

Pearls Advisory Board
Women's Caucus for Art, UNIFEM, 10,000 Men Against Violence
College outreach and K-12 tours @ KCCLA
AWBW Facebook community & volunteers

Project continues with actions:

Create a Pearl Online at awbw.org
Commit to No Violence in all relationships

Support makes broad community engagement possible:

The James Irvine Foundation; Department of Cultural Affairs, Los Angeles; Durfee Foundation; Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Arts Commission; Target; Women's Foundation of California and generous individuals.

Resources

Warning Signs of Abusive Relationships

When you:

- Feel nervous around your partner.
- Try to avoid his/her anger, are afraid to disagree or carefully control what you do or say.
- Must justify everything you do, everywhere you go and every person you see to your partner.
- Often do things to please your partner rather than doing what you think is right.
- Feel afraid to break up because your partner has threatened to hurt or kill you, the children, the family pet, or himself/herself.



When your partner:

- Criticizes or humiliates you in front of others or in private.
- Checks what you have been doing, looks through your belongings or tells you how to dress.
- Wrongfully accuses you of cheating.
- Prevents you from seeing your family and friends, from working or attending school.
- Takes your money, refuses to give you money or makes you ask for money for everyday needs.
- Scares you by throwing things, punching the wall or physically restraining or hitting you or the children.
- Acts like "Prince/cess Charming" one minute and a monster the next.
- Makes excuses and blames the abusive behavior on his/her childhood, alcohol or drugs, or bad temper.
- Pressures you into having sex or performing unwanted sexual acts.
- Tells you that if you changed he/she wouldn't abuse you.

Source: *The Women's Center (Carbondale, IL)* at www.thewomensctr.org

*Domestic violence is always about control.
It can occur in any relationship,
to men as well as to women,
no matter what the race, religion,
socio-economic status, culture
or age of the partners.*

Action Steps You Can Take

How to help a friend at risk?

- Share that you are concerned for his/her safety.
- Acknowledge that he /she is in a very difficult and scary situation.
- Listen without judgment.
- Encourage participating in outside activities with friends and family.
- Continue to be supportive when the abusive relationship ends.
- Help develop a safety plan if asked.
- Encourage meeting or talking with people who can provide help and guidance.
- Remember that you cannot “rescue” him/her.

Source: National Domestic Violence Hotline at ncadv.org

How to help prevent domestic and sexual violence?

- Take responsibility to honor, respect and care for your family.
- Live courageously and offer help if you are ever the slightest bit concerned for someone else's safety.
- Let every person you love know that you hold their safety dear and you will help them if needed.
- Let every person you love know that you expect them to be nonviolent in all their relationships.
- Speak up when someone makes a sexist joke.
- Make sure your workplace has policies in place to support and protect staff that may be facing danger.
- Share your blessings; give what you can to organizations that help families to get ahead, even if these families are not known to you.

Source: Safe Place www.safeplace.org

Emergency Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline

English and Spanish

1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or www.ncadv.org

California Partnership to End Domestic Violence

(800) 524-4765 or www.cpedv.org

California 211 – Access to essential health and social services in California

2-1-1

U.S. National Teen Dating Violence Helpline

1-866-331-9474 or loveisrespect.org

National Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men and Women

1-888-743-5754 or www.dahmw.org

*More resource suggestions online
at **A Window Between Worlds**
www.awbw.org/resources*

Art for Healing and Support

You can:

- Give yourself, family & friends a window of time to do art together.
- Use art as a window of time to notice your needs and express your feelings safely.
- Join AWBW's Survivor's Art Circle for survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault.
- Donate to support the healing work of A Window Between Worlds.
- Become an AWBW Advocate by volunteering, hosting an art supply drive, holding an art party or creating an online campaign.

Please visit awbw.org to learn more.



Create Your Pearl of Wisdom
online at the AWBW.ORG Blog!



Christy

Because I never said no

I did not mean yes

I am now reconnecting with myself.

The Pearls of Wisdom workshop helped me move forward and change my behavior more than all my prior work with countless counselors, friends and advocates. Each stage revealed aspects of my long history of sexual abuse that I had become so adept at ignoring.

Writing on the reflective paper let me see how much I have detached myself from my story even though I had journaled about it on many occasions. Then dipping the bandage strips in water gave me a feeling of being in control and symbolically healing my own wounds. I always thought that the sexual abuse was my fault because I never fought off my abusers. From childhood to adulthood, I automatically detached my mind from my body and went numb. Just because I never said no doesn't mean that I said yes.

The day that I made my pearl I later found myself in danger once again. This time I spoke up and for the first time said "no."

*I am a warrior who protects others – but, most importantly,
a warrior who protects herself.*

... your shared wisdom(s)
can be a practical or philosophical suggestion,
life changing or a mere baby step



Call to Participation

SANDRA MUELLER

There is a sea change emerging in domestic violence activism that cries out for community involvement. With one in three women facing the prospect of experiencing violence in her lifetime, it is clear that the current intermix of government, social and nonprofit agencies alone will not suffice. What they do makes significant inroads. But, so much more is needed to muster funding for the current efforts, let alone prevent the eruption of family violence in the first place.

Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence is a community engagement project that addresses this need. It goes straight to the families cut open by the hostility of controlling threats, isolation and abuse and asks their advice on how we move forward. Though mainly women and their children participated in the more than sixty workshops during the two year project, family violence is not a gender issue – men as well as women are deeply affected.

In this public project, these are not just private stories of pain and courage. Like a Greek tragedy, the shared fragments of domestic abuse have a larger meaning that offers vital lessons that we so need. The hundreds of pearls created for this exhibition highlight a core social tragedy. However, it is public participation that creates the powerful Greek chorus to echo (and sustain) our communal and personal wills to end domestic violence.

The very public display of so many iridescent pearls, each unique in its symmetry yet connected one to another, represents a significant social metaphor. Because these accumulated stories are out in the open, they directly intervene in patterns of isolation needed to ensure survivor safety. Shelters, which offer empowering tools, resources and protection, are also actively about the safety of being hidden. Being covert unintentionally can add a layer of social invisibility. With Pearls, Kim

Abeles and the network of Windows leaders say, “We are all wounded. You have been wounded, you are not banished. Please come forward.”

I believe *Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence* tapped into a deep desire, for those who engage in the healing work and the survivors themselves, to speak and to have their strength be seen. Which is why more than 95% of the shelters statewide said yes when asked to participate. The opportunity to publicly contribute to the solution and prevention is compelling.

Now we broaden the call for participation for *Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence*, and ask the community to step forward. As Suzanne Lacy so poignantly states elsewhere in this volume, this is serious work. Survivors and especially those who are mothers intrinsically know there is only modest safety in improving just one’s own lot. True safety comes from the public’s willingness to muster the courage to learn what is happening both globally and even right next door.

Do take a window of time to create a “pearl” just as the survivors did and add your voice to the blog at awbw.org. In making your response public, you will stand in proud solidarity with all who have said “enough” to violence and discover your own inner fortitude. And, like our dear survivors, your shared wisdom(s) can be a practical or philosophical suggestion, life changing or a mere baby step. All are welcome, all are needed. ●

Biographies



Suvan Geer, *In Memory: Family/Trees*, Laguna Art Museum, CA. 2010

A charcoal drawing of a nest of old trees in my backyard was veiled with white silk. Onto that were projected old pictures of the family I never or barely knew, in places I dimly recall or never visited.



Anne Gauldin, *Making It Safe for Waitresses*, performance art by *The Waitresses*, Enterprising Fish Company, Ocean Park, CA, 1979. Part of *Making It Safe*, a project by Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz, with Ariadne and Communitas. Pictured: Chutney Gunderson Berry, Anne Gauldin.

KIM ABELES's installations and community projects cross disciplines and media to explore broad social issues. She has created artwork in conjunction with a unique range of collaborators such as the Bureau of Automotive Repair, Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project, California Science Center, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, and the Lakota Indians of South Dakota. In 1987, she invented a method to create images from the smog in the air, and *Smog Collectors* brought her work to national and international attention. *Kim Abeles: Encyclopedia Persona A-Z* toured the United States and South America, sponsored by the United States Information Agency. She has exhibited in twenty-two countries, including large-scale installations in Vietnam, Thailand, Czech Republic, England and China. She represented the U.S. in both the Fotografie Biennale Rotterdam and the Cultural Centre of Berchem in Antwerp. Her work is in numerous private and public collections including the Museum of Contemporary Art, California African American Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and is archived in the library collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Cooper-Hewitt Publication Design Collection of the Smithsonian. Abeles received fellowships from J. Paul Getty Trust Fund for the Visual Arts, California Community Foundation, Durfee Foundation, Pollack-Krasner Foundation, and the California Arts Council.

ANNE GAULDIN is a performance artist and graphic designer with many ties to collaborative projects. While a participant in The Feminist Studio Workshop at the Woman's Building in Los Angeles,

she received her MA in Feminist Art and Education from Goddard College. Gauldin co-founded two historically significant, collaborative feminist performance art groups: The Waitresses and Sisters of Survival (SOS). These artists actively moved art out of the gallery and literally into the streets. The Waitresses used humor to expose issues of working women and sexual harassment. Sisters Of Survival focused on anti-nuclear issues and initiated the project *End of the Rainbow* which engaged artists and activists in North America and Western Europe. Currently Gauldin co-directs WOW, a 20-year art collaborative that uses art and performance to reconnect women to nature and spirituality.

SUVAN GEER is an interdisciplinary artist who has written about art since 1983. Her essays and reviews have been published in various books and publications including the *Los Angeles Times*, *Public Art Review*, *Artweek*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *ArtScene* and *Art Nexus*. Her installations and artworks explore the experience of the ephemeral. Geer exhibits nationally and internationally and has work in the permanent collection of The Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii.

SUZANNE LACY is an internationally known conceptual/performance artist. Her works address significant social issues and engage local populations on issues of social justice. A founding member of the Feminist Studio Workshop at the Woman's Building in Los Angeles, Lacy pioneered the exploration of art as a force in the community and within the media. Lacy has been a driving force in the public art

movement for over twenty years, with her large scale, tableau-like installations and performances, all amplified by extensive media coverage. She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Lila Wallace Arts International Fellowship, and is the recipient of several National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships. She is the author of over 40 published articles. She is editor of *Mapping the Terrain*, a seminal book on public art and social activism. Lacy currently directs the Master of Fine Arts program in Public Practice at Otis College of Art and Design.

SANDRA MUELLER is an artist, community activist and communications professional. She has produced and published more than 50 print and interactive media titles. She earned a BA from the University of California, Berkeley in Intellectual History, and later studied painting and visual thinking at Mt. St. Mary's College. Both her community and personal artwork are steeped in the practice of engaging emergence – inviting mystery, choosing possibility and allowing forms to bring the 'unseen' to the surface. In 2003, she founded the BeARTrageous Creativity Workshops and Retreats for women. A long time A Windows Between Worlds supporter, she is a trained Women's Leader and serves as the AWBW Community Arts Advocate. She also serves as the Southern California regional coordinator for The Feminist Art Project and is on the national board of the Women's Caucus for Art. Mueller co-chaired the *"Multiple Vantage Points: Southern California Women Artists, 1980-2006"* exhibition at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery in 2007 and curated the *Breaking Free: Art as a Healing Tool* exhibition at the dA Center for the Arts in Pomona in 2009.

CATHY SALSER, artist, founder and executive director of A Window Between Worlds (AWBW), has spent the last 20 years working with battered women and their children, offering art as a catalyst for healing and empowerment. AWBW is a nonprofit now serving over 170 domestic violence shelters around the country, where its art workshops reach over 7,000 children and over 6,000 women annually. Salser is the recipient of a California Community Foundation Board of Governor's Award; a Citizen of the Year Award from the National Association of Social Workers, Region H; was recognized as a "Local Hero" by Bank of America, and has been honored at the White House as a National Presidential Scholar in the Visual Arts. She is a graduate of Williams College, Massachusetts and a recipient of their Bicentennial Medal for distinguished achievement in her field.

BARBARA T. SMITH, a pioneer of performance art, lives in Los Angeles. She began her groundbreaking work in the late 1960s and has performed throughout the U.S., in Europe and in Asia. Smith's ceremonial/shamanic performances, which often externalize her inner psychic and psychological material in mythic rituals, explore issues of gender, spirituality, and sexuality which are integrated into larger cosmic laws and structures. She is a recipient of three NEA grants, a Vesta award and a Lifetime Achievement award from the Women's Caucus for Art. Her work was included in the recent show of LA artists at the Pompidou in Paris, and in *"WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution"* at MOCA in Los Angeles, and PS1 in New York. A graduate of Pomona College, Smith received an MFA from University of California, Irvine.



Sandra Mueller,
Fossil Swirls Triptych,
Digital photos on Japanese
metal paper, 8" x 8" each,
2010.

Acknowledgments

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A Window Between Worlds is a non-profit organization dedicated to using art to help end domestic violence. Through creative expression, battered women and children recover a sense of renewal and power. Their images of hope, survival and strength educate the public and become “a window between worlds” for survivors taking steps to change their lives.

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