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NEW CASTLE BUSINESS LEDGER PHOTO BY TERENCE ROBERTS

Arts education program enriches lives in many ways

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THIRTEEN years ago artist Brian Moss suffered the loss of his live-in girlfriend Marsha Maritz after a prolonged struggle with cancer. One of the offshoots of that devastating experience is the photography exhibit LUCID that Moss is currently displaying at the Delaware Center For Contemporary Arts (DCCA) as a slice of its Visual Arts Residency program.

Moss, a resident of Santa Monica, Calif., came to Wilmington to work with patients of the Wellness Community, a national organization that provides support to cancer patients and their families. Together Moss and a trio of local women undergoing cancer treatments assembled pinhole cameras that were used to create an array of images, including self-portraits and photographs of significant people in their lives.

Some of the portraits are displayed as a grid of negatives using multiple X-ray

About the Front Page Photo

Chris Adams, who is undergoing cancer treatment, talks about her work with Brian Moss, artist in residence at the Delaware Center for Contemporary Arts.

viewers as lightboxes. Moss has worked with negatives producing more than 50 prints of women in contemplative settings such as the lighthouse at Cape Henlopen and on the screened-in sunporch at one of the women's homes.

"The images present another way of looking at and thinking about the medical self-images which have typically negative connotations," explains Moss, 38. "The images take a very different approach, one that's more positive than negative."

The mission of DCCA's Visual Arts Residency program is to encourage participation of innovative artists that will result

in an infusion of challenging ideas and issues into Wilmington and the surrounding region. Utilized as a teaching tool, the art is designed to actively involve community participants in a the creative process.

Resident artists are provided a stipend, funds for materials, some travel money and a studio at DCCA. Residencies can comprise a gallery talk by the artist on their work, an exhibition in one of the galleries, a performance or installation of the community project at DCCA.

DCCA education programs have partnered with community groups such as the Latin American Community Center, Girls Inc. of Delaware and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Delaware. In September Malvern, Pa. artist Neila Kun will team up with the Wilmington Senior Center and Christina Cultural Arts Center on a book-making project that will explore past memories and future expectations.

"Our goal with these programs is connecting people to the understanding of contemporary art as related to the issues

that surround all of us and the world in which we live," explains Steve Lanier, DCCA's executive director. "Having artists in the Center helps to reconnect them to the community."

DCCA's Contemporary Connection program has partnered with Stanton Middle School in the Red Clay School District over the past three years. The collaboration brings art into the classroom, at no cost to the students. A professional artist works in the classroom with a teacher to develop an art project that links students to the core curriculum.

Launched in 1992, DCCA has partnered with 47 teachers in five elementary, middle, and high schools, in school districts throughout Delaware. A total of 38 inter-disciplinary projects have been undertaken since the program's inception.

At Stanton Middle School the programs included the creation of a ceramic mural based on the Five Kingdoms with sculptor Benjamin Schuman; a Chinese

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Dynasty project with Salena Beaudry; an exploration of the Industrial Revolution with Sasha Boyle; and a Roman civilization project with Philadelphia artist George Apotos. Over an eight week period last winter, Apotos teamed up with teacher Trish Meixell and her 13 seventh grade special education social studies students to create a tile mural (6 x 3 ft.) based on the class's studies of ancient Rome and its gods. Each was able to create their own tile illustrating a Roman god in profile form based on each student's own profile. The tiles also were decorated to depict that god's specialty—flowers, water, etc. These tiles became the border that surrounded an interior scene illustrating different aspects of Roman life.

As the mural concept began to unfold, the artist spent time demonstrating lessons on clay handling, image enhancement, design and composition. The mural is on permanent display in the 7th and 8th grade wing at Stanton Middle School.

"It was a wonderful project for

the children" notes Meixell.

"It got them thinking a lot more, which was reflected in a great hands-on effort. It really helped reinforce what they were learning in their studies. I enjoyed working with George since he communicated his concept very well to me and was very patient with the kids. It will help me be a more hands-on teacher in the future."

The Moss photography exhibit of local cancer patients is an example of how an important community issue can be presented in an artistic and enlightening way. It is sponsored by AstraZeneca and runs through mid-August.

"It's a perfect fit for us—a wonderful blend of arts and culture, healthcare, the local cancer community and the Wellness Community," said Eileen Cuniffe, AstraZeneca senior manager of corporate and community affairs. "Brian helped them think through their image which is important for people undergoing treatment. Not only to think about their story, but to capture it for themselves and their families."