

Battered Barbie highlights horrors of domestic abuse

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By Samantha Fisher



Artworks: Nicole Fayard, left, and Stella Couloutbanis



Shocking: Barbie with a black eye and split lip – one of the images from Speaking Out

A Barbie doll with a black eye and split lip is being used to highlight the horrors of domestic abuse.

An exhibition, Speaking Out, running at Embrace Arts, the University of Leicester arts complex, hopes to get people talking about issues such as domestic violence and mental health, and to help sufferers come forward.

It also shows how men can be victims.

Seventeen artists are taking part. Other works includes dinner plates broken and glued back together, watercolour paintings and performances.

Dr Nicole Fayard, senior lecturer in French studies, came up with the idea after spending years researching violence against women.

She said: "The wonderful art is about survivors taking control of their lives after the event. It is meant to give hope that healing is possible and help is available.

"There are a lot of people out there who understand. Sufferers are not on their own, they can find help."

Dr Fayard said it was crucial people listened to the victims of such crimes.

She said: "What happens year after year is we hear about how terrible sexual abuse, rape and domestic violence are.

"Then it tends to be forgotten. What we don't hear about is survivors and it is the survivors we need to talk to.

"Latest figures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales estimate that in the past year, two million adults have been victims of domestic abuse.

"Nearly five million women – 30 per cent of the adult female population in England and Wales – have experienced some form of domestic abuse since the age of 16. This is a very worrying statistic."

Dr Fayard has been working with Stella Couloutbanis, visual arts manager at Embrace Arts.

Ms Couloutbanis said: "It is a very challenging subject but it has been dealt with in an interesting manner.

"I am surprised at the calibre of work we were sent. I would like a chance to show more."

Kate Walters, of Cornwall, has three watercolours in the exhibition.

She said: "I am a survivor of domestic abuse – I was affected for a long time." She said being creative helped people process experiences they might otherwise bury.

She said: "Talking about it was also good for me. The experience does still occasionally come out in my dreams.

"A doctor said to me once that domestic abuse victims are like survivors of a plane crash – it never completely goes away."

Carole Cluer produced the broken dinner plate art.

She said: "My work is about survival and I am interested in highlighting things people are uncomfortable with."

Pamela Richardson, chief executive of Women's Aid Leicester, said seeing a Barbie with a black eye was shocking.

She said: "Anything we can do to raise awareness is a good thing. Though it might seem controversial to some, that is the reality of people suffering from domestic abuse."

Speaking Out: Women Healing from the Trauma of Violence is at Embrace Arts, in Lancaster Road, until March 28.

People can ring the Leicester domestic abuse helpline on 0300 3031844.

Read more: <http://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/Battered-Barbie-highlights-horrors-domestic-abuse/story-20655957-detail/story.html#ixzz2wJyv7X6N>