

Brushed BOLD:

A Painting and Photography Exhibit

By Sarah Clarke Stuart | Photography by Jamie Borland

On October 6, 26.2 with DONNA and The Donna Foundation unveiled *Brushed Bold: A Painting and Photography Exhibit*. Fourteen breast cancer survivors, in various stages of recovery, were transformed into live canvases and photographed for this unique showcase deemed “a celebration of art and the human spirit.” The exhibit was featured at TacoLu’s annual “Tacos for TaTa’s” event and then moved to a gallery for the remainder of October. Lin Pomerantz, Finance Director for 26.2 with DONNA, says any remaining portraits will be for sale in their online store. “We will not be making any reproductions for sale – the original framed art is one-of-a-kind.” They are also printing a 14-month 2015-2016 calendar featuring photos from the exhibit.

Prior to the show, the artists and survivors were paired, and these relationships became essential to the spirit of the project. Each model told her survivor story, and the artist created a painting inspired by that story.

Here, we feature three of those survivors.

Donna
Deegan
and artist,
Willy Meyer

“It’s an important statement about beauty, body image and positive spirit in the face of adversity. It was fun to watch everyone sort of relax into it. Once we were painted we all felt ‘dressed.’”

—Donna Deegan





Donna Deegan reaches out for Willy Meyer to paint with a palette inspired by the beach, a place that brought Deegan solace and joy during her journey as a survivor.

Donna Deegan—survivor and Willy Meyer—artist

Donna Deegan's artist, Willy Meyer, generously donated the space where all of the painting sessions took place—his own Artistree Studio. Deegan says that the process was unlike anything she has ever experienced. She began the project by telling Meyer about the things that bring her peace and happiness. "I knew I wanted the beach...and a bit of a running theme. The rest was up to the artist and I was really pleased with the results."

Ultimately the beach became the main focal point. "For this project, I wasn't so much focused on a statement about the cancer experience as I was about what makes me tick. I run on our beaches almost every day and they are home to my race 26.2 with DONNA, as well. So it plays a big role in my daily life and in my quest to end breast cancer."

Beyond raising funds for breast cancer awareness, *Brushed Bold* empowers women, says Deegan. Cancer may have reshaped or scarred their bodies, but "this project says we are still confident and beautiful, and I

think that's a message all women need to embrace." She hopes that women will see that surviving cancer has a way of making a woman fearless.

The project itself required that the models overcome some degree of modesty. As Deegan points out, "It's not every day that a woman's breasts become a canvas!" But the participants knew it was a worthwhile project: "it's an important statement about beauty, body image and positive spirit in the face of adversity. It was fun to watch everyone sort of relax into it. Once we were painted we all felt 'dressed.'"

The issue of body image was a recurring one among many of the participants, she says. "One of the most difficult things for many women to deal with is either the loss of a body part or scars that they feel disfigure them. It can really be a big confidence issue. So many women struggle with their appearance." Many of the women who participated in *Brushed Bold* have gone through reconstruction. "All women struggle with body image to one extent or another. This is a great way to say beauty comes in all shapes, sizes, colors and styles."

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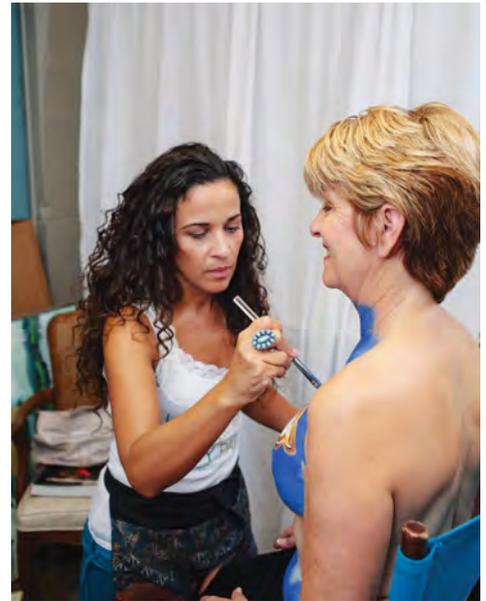
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Heather Aguilera paints a cross with two roses on Mary Binkler. The roses symbolize Pinkler's two teenage daughters who are her daily inspiration.

**Mary Binkley—survivor
and Heather Aguilera—artist**

According to body artist Heather Aguilera, “Body art is the most healing and transformational form of art I have ever witnessed.” She says that it’s all about capturing the inner beauty and passions of the model. “I had always wanted to work with women who have experienced breast cancer, because I know the beauty and healing factor of body art.”

Aguilera says she was extremely inspired by her model, Mary Binkley.

“When Mary and I spoke,” she says, “she shared her love of Christ and how her faith, family, and friends encourage her as a survivor.” Binkley is also passionate about gardening, and Aguilera learned that she likes to give away her roses and gardenias to friends. She painted a cross and roses to represent Binkley’s faith and her love for her roses. “I came up with two roses to represent Mary’s two teenage daughters, Ruth and Ann, who inspire her daily,” she says.

Binkley explains how deeply she was touched by the project: “Being part of this incredible experience was one I will always cherish. My husband, David, who has supported and encouraged my participation since the 2008 inaugural 26.2 with DONNA, asked to come and be part of the experience. While watching Heather paint me, David told me ‘I am so proud of you.’ That in itself was a gift.”

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Kristen Wiley poses for Jessica Baker as she paints a portrait of Lana Del Rey, one of Wiley's favorite recording artists. Del Rey's song lyrics "Feet don't fail me now, take me to the finish line" speaks to her journey through treatment.

Kristen Wiley—survivor and Jessica Becker—artist

Kristen Wiley was diagnosed with stage two triple positive breast cancer in January 2012. Her treatment included a double mastectomy with reconstruction, 29 chemotherapy treatments and 27 radiation treatments.

Wiley's oncologist recommended that she incorporate running into her daily routine to help with the fatigue from the treatment, so with the support and encouragement of a co-

worker, she began training for the 26.2 with DONNA in 2012. "I ran the 2013 marathon while still receiving chemotherapy," she says. "I ran the 2014 marathon and am currently training for the 2015 marathon."

The *Brushed Bold* project was something new and different for her. "I was quite nervous at first, as I have never participated in a project like this before," she says, "but my artist was extremely helpful and encouraging."

Her painter was Jessica Becker, a mural

“This project will hopefully help women understand that each of us is a unique piece of art that has been sculpted and molded over time.”

—Kristen Wiley

artist and native of Neptune Beach whose canvases have included the two-story building that houses TacoLu in Jacksonville Beach, and popular food trucks around town such as Chew Chew. But, unlike Heather Aguilera, Becker had never worked with the body as a canvas before. “When it came time to paint, I was a little nervous. I’ve never painted on someone’s chest.”

Collaboratively, the artist and model decided on a music-inspired theme. Wiley told Becker about her favorite recording artists, and Becker concluded, “Lana Del Rey would be a great fit for this project. I loved her song lyrics ‘Feet don’t fail me now, take me to the finish line.’” During the painting session, they had a lot of fun listening to the music together.

Wiley challenges survivors of breast cancer to see their scars as art. “There are many times when I looked at the transformation of my body post cancer, and I thought I was disfigured.” Now she sees those scars and changes as “badges of courage” in the face of adversity.

She chose to participate in the project because of her own issues with her post-surgery body image. “Body image issues are very real and can be quite debilitating regardless of one’s medical condition,” she says. “This project will hopefully help women understand that each of us is a unique piece of art that has been sculpted and molded over time.” The *Brushed Bold* project helped her gain perspective and appreciate and celebrate the beauty and life of her own body. 🐬

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