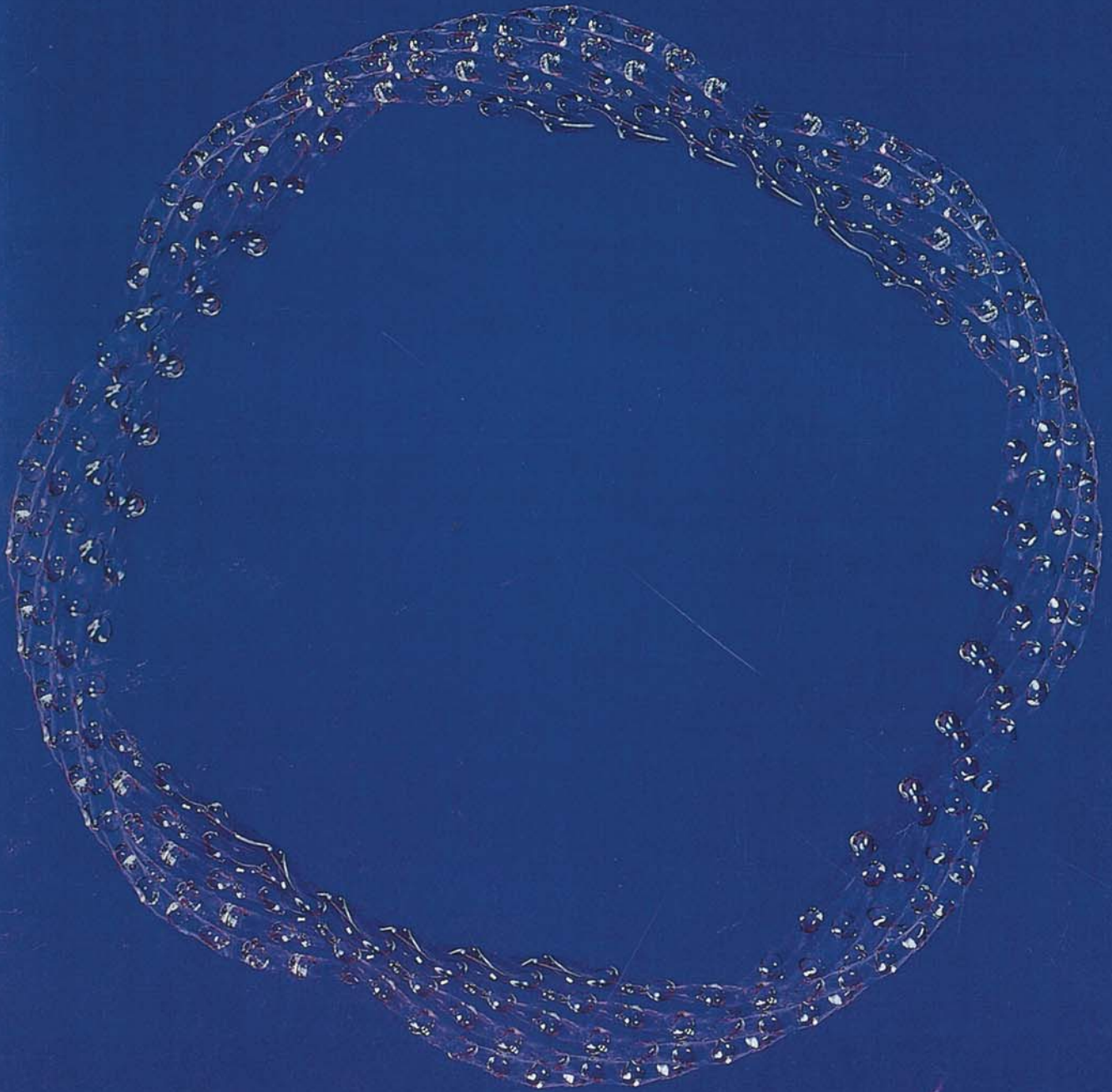


# Resurgence

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**ART FOR EARTH'S SAKE**

come of age with students taking responsibility for its continuing existence.

We hope that *Resurgence* readers might consider supporting the Small School through the Guardian

Scheme. You helped raise the initial capital for the buildings; can you now help to keep the project alive by becoming Guardians? For more details please contact Julia or Natalia at The Small School, Fore

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*Julia Meiklejohn is the Head of the Small School.*

USA

## ART IN UNGLAMOROUS PLACES

ANA FLORES

AS OF LATE, I am being called to places where people arrive broken — either by abuse, illness, toxic environments, or just bad luck. In the last year I have been invited to be an artist-in-residence in a maximum security women's prison and implemented an Arts and Healing programme at a psychiatric children's hospital. These are 'unglamorous places' in which to function as an artist, but the process of making art in these environments has been humbling and transformative.

There is nothing new about artists going into unglamorous places: art history is full of artists creating beauty out of the seamier side of life, and starving artists renting studios in 'bad' parts of town. The fact that artwork has grown out of these forsaken places often increases public fascination and thus the relative value of the artwork. What is a fairly recent phenomenon is the concept of an artist working to revitalise the neglected psychic spaces in communities and the individuals within them.

These kinds of project are undertaken by 'community artists', a form of artist often seen as a poor cousin to the Fine Arts because their collective creative work runs counter to the Western concept that an artist must work alone to define her or his unique vision. In the case of com-

munity art, there is often nothing to be sold from these projects; yet these engagements have a tremendous spiritual value for both the participants and the artist. The resulting artwork is not always highly visible or permanent, and what is unique about these projects is that the entire creative journey is the focus rather than the end product.

Artists working in community art engineer a creative process that recognises, encourages and celebrates a collective vision and wisdom. The materials and techniques they use are not confined to the traditional categories of artist materials, and their collaborative working processes rely heavily on psychology and sensitivity to culture and place: tools rarely found in art-school training. As our social and environmental connections are increasingly severed, the role of the artist as a catalyst for community creativity and healing becomes more compelling. I asked three artists, whose work I knew personally, to share their stories of engaging communities in order to illustrate the range of possibility that this work has.

### Lauren Lysaght

*At the age of fifteen I was wrongfully imprisoned and then placed in a maximum security psychiatric hospital because of a law that existed in New Zealand during the mid 1960s entitled 'not under proper control law'. This law was mainly used to keep young female 'delinquents' contained. I believe this outrageous event in my life turned me towards art.*

*I usually work with the theme of social injustice. Over the years my exhibiting work has looked at poverty, home invasion and unemployment. I also have a great belief in the power of community art which has taken me to some weird*

*and wonderful places.*

*I have become very sensitive to the resources I use in my art. I pay particular attention to the use of materials that can be recycled back into the community. The materials for the project are first donated, then turned into art, and then donated back into the community.*

### Holly Ewald

*As a teenager I had a pivotal experience living with an indigenous family in Burnt Cove, New Brunswick. The embrace of the community, the shared meals, and stories gave me a model of what 'community' could mean, and I have tried to bring that into my art. It is the sharing of personal stories that brings us together. One of the ways in which I elicit personal stories from the communities I work with is in the form of hand-made books.*

*A recent project included eight Cambodian families in Providence, Rhode Island. With the help of a local Cambodian artist, Samnang Yong, I began workshops in a local library. Attendance was sporadic so I offered to work with each family within the intimacy of their home. I wanted to celebrate the families' cultural memories and dreams and create a meaningful bridge between generations using art.*

*Each working session would have a theme. The first was to share a special object or memory through collage; this then developed into the creation of accordion books using images and collage to share the dreams of the different family members. The process created poetic moments within the family space. Molly Soum, a mother of four who had escaped from Cambodia, shared with her children for the first time memories of her own childhood under the Pol Pot regime. She described riding on her father's shoulders through a field of oranges — this was the last time she ever saw her father.*

**Christiane Corbat**

*My work using direct casts of the body to create healing images began twenty years ago when I cast my own body as the 'Open Woman'. I made myself the way I truly knew myself to be; the sculpture symbolises my vision of fearlessness, a passageway where feelings of inadequacy or fear can't get stuck. The feathers inside her capture the light, the wasp nests covering her skin indicate her wildness and natural beauty. This piece changed my life. I became the 'Open Woman', taking on the very qualities I longed for by making an image of who I knew myself to be on a deep level.*

*People invite me into their homes, hospital rooms or hospice sanctuaries. Castings are also done in public spaces, cafes,*

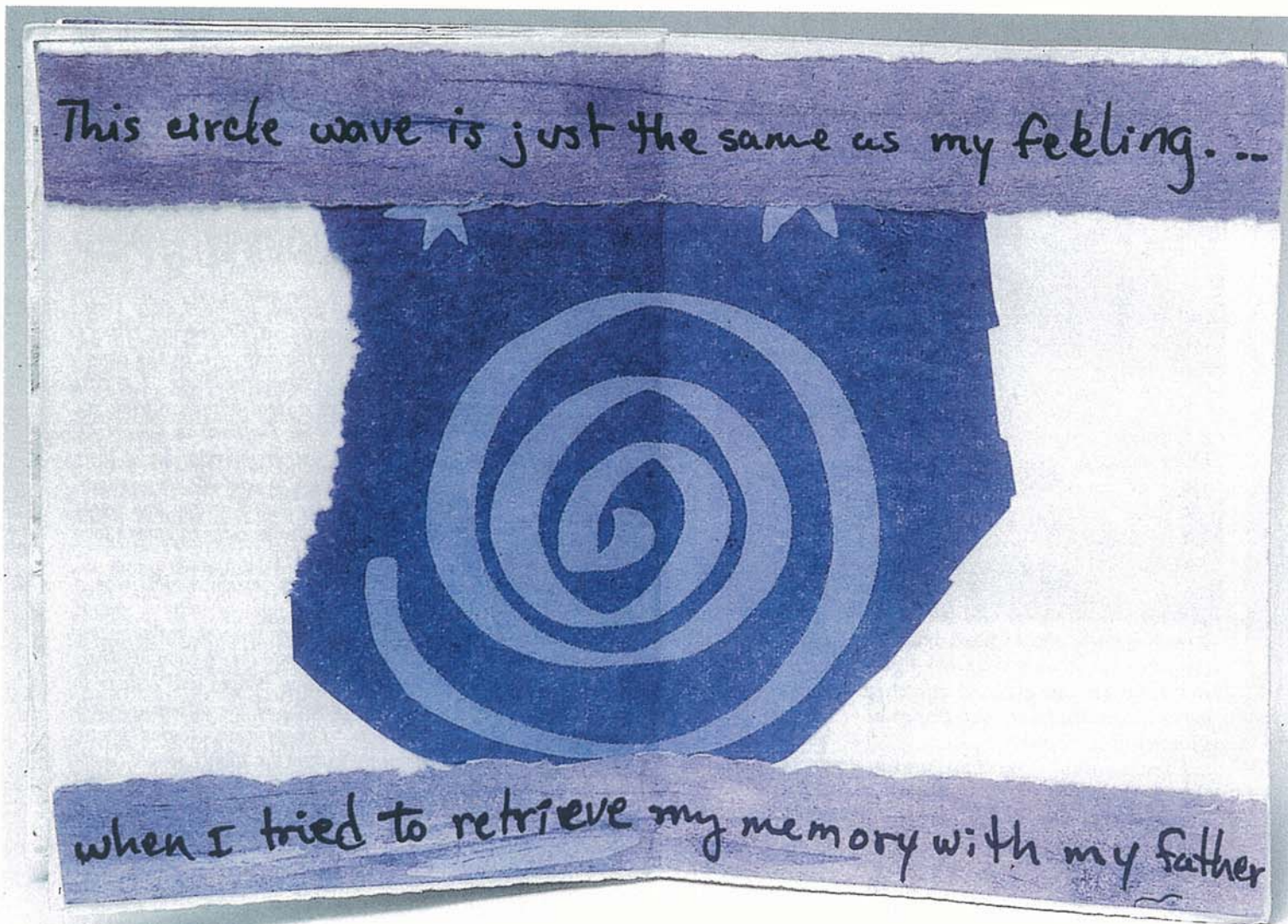
*libraries and museums. Not very much material is required for such a powerful event. What is needed is the willingness to express 'the magnificence of who we really are'. Since the mid-nineties I have been leading body-casting workshops called 'Hanging Out' for women with breast cancer, for Waking Dreams & Warrior Women, a nonprofit organisation based in Rhode Island. It explores the relationship between healing and art. The women create torso castings that articulate their hopes and fears and celebrate their essence.*

LYSAGHT, EWALD AND CORBAT are weaving creativity back into a larger whole rather than parcelling it into the selective realms of 'creative pro-

fessionals'. Their community-based projects all break down into simple tactile art processes that are meaningful at all levels of participation. The unique signature is relinquished, reminding us of a period before 'Art' when the artistic masterpieces in cultures were created by anonymous artists. Lauren Lysaght sums up this role of the community artist as an 'invisible orchestrator':

*I always aim to make myself redundant at the end of a project and the greatest compliment is to be told you are no longer needed. It means you have done your work. ●*

Ana Flores is a Cuban-born sculptor and community arts advocate.



*The Rain, by Molly Soum*