

FRAGILE: Handle with Care

The GlassBook Project, a product of Rutgers–Newark, instills student empathy for domestic violence victims through artwork that conveys their harrowing accounts.

In an art class at Rutgers–Newark, Helianna Taveras NCAS'10 was witness to heart-wrenching stories of victims of domestic abuse. To express her own heightened emotions and understanding of the accounts, she later made a dozen glass panels that, when bound, formed a glass book of sorts and conveyed Taveras's reaction, and those of the victims, to these dark tales.

Taveras's creation is one of many student glass book creations, interactive glass sculptures that symbolize domestic violence and child abuse. They are the products of "Problems in Arts," a class offered through the Department of Arts, Culture, and Media at the Newark College of Arts and Sciences that was introduced in the spring of 2009. The class evolved from a meeting between former high school classmates Nick Kline, a photography instructor, and Helga Luest, president of Witness Justice, a nonprofit she founded to support victims of violence and trauma. In the course, students researched domestic abuse, met mental health professionals and victims of trauma, and created glass books at a glass-making studio near campus.

The project, comprising two semesters of courses thus far, has generated exhibitions statewide and at the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C. Displaying the glass books at a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) conference in 2009 spawned the GlassBook Project (glassbookproject.org), one of the nation's best innovations for fostering empathy and heightening awareness, according to *Mental Health Weekly*. The glass books were the central exhibit at the Voice Awards in Hollywood, sponsored annually by SAMHSA to honor television and movie writers and producers for presenting dignified portrayals of people with mental health challenges. Meanwhile, a federal grant will help the team at the GlassBook Project develop glass book curricula for other universities.

For more images of students' art, visit magazine.rutgers.edu.



● Zach Huff NCAS'10

Womb

"I embedded the panes of glass within stuffed animals, making them appear busted up and ripped open to reflect the sudden change in a grouping of stuffed animals at the head of the bed, an iconic element in a bedroom. The glass allows people to see what sort of feelings lie just below the surface for survivors."

● Paula Neeves LC'91

Every Day

"Alcohol abuse is often a conduit for domestic abuse, especially in families—hence, the same type or 'family' of seven bottles, which represent each day of the week, a pattern, and the everyday experience of abuse and survival, which relates directly to the book's text, a poem. The one clear bottle represents the breaking of the pattern."

● Heriberto Maldonado NCAS'10

A View Inside the Fish Bowl ...

"My fishbowl represents the survivors of domestic violence: a representation of what truly is a survivor's view of the world, filled with love, hate, embarrassment, anger, and the total strength to move forward in the world and past that dark chapter in their lives."

