

CHALLENGING GENDER ROLES

■ Profiles show explores changing face of womanhood

by **OLAV ROKNE**

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Sometimes you have to suffer for beauty.

In a new show at Profiles Public Art Gallery, entitled *Home Body*, three Albertan artists have explored the roles women take on in society and how many of them suffer for beauty.

"I'm trying to balance out the Cinderella story," says Kim Bruce, who contributed seven works to the show, ranging from a gossamer-thin photographic transfer of ghostly seven-year-old girls in little white dresses to a stiletto pump shoe with a railroad spike running through the heel.

"It's called *The Last Spike*," Bruce says of the shoe. "It's about the pain of high-heeled shoes."

Along with Elizabeth Clark and Bev Tosh, Bruce has crafted subtle and layered multi-disciplinary works that seek to illuminate the differences in today's gender roles.

Bruce, who recently turned 50, says her work is an attempt to explore the directions feminism is going and to describe the roots of the movement.

"I had a formative Catholic education that taught me from a very young age that I'm supposed to be a bride and I'm supposed to stay home and I'm supposed to do all these things — but I didn't do that," she says.

She combines gender symbols such as hair and high-heel shoes with icons of labour such as railway spikes and kitchen aprons to evoke the sense of long-term struggle towards

equality.

"I don't think that young ladies today appreciate what happened during the 60s and 70s," she says.

"It's almost like they're saying, 'OK, you did that whole feminism movement and now it's done, so there's no reason to carry on from here.'"

Although less overtly political, another artist, Bev Tosh, is unveiling an installation work about the stories that make up a home and how feminism has changed that narrative. The work is based on old-style photograph albums with black pages and photographs presented simply on the wall with white captions.

"I took the theme to mean not necessarily women's work, but work that relates to a person at home," Tosh says.

"And archiving family and personal history is something that I see as work that is home-based. It's kept within families and passed down to generations."

The work, titled *Parallel Lives*, tells the story of a group of women who weren't necessarily known to each other, but whose lives have similar one-way journeys.

"What I'm doing is presenting them as sisters in an album — not in a literal way," Tosh says. "It has a lot for me to do with body language."

The third artist, Elizabeth Clark, has previously presented

a show at Profiles. In 2005, her work *Dress Code* was one of the gallery's all-time highest-attended shows.

Her works, which include corsets sewn together out of beauty products, housecleaning products and photographs, combine a sense of toil with a sense of body image.

The staff of St. Albert's Profiles Public Art Gallery have suffered through a series of

disasters in getting the show ready for opening. First, the heat wave that hit St. Albert last week occurred just as the air conditioning in the building wasn't functioning. The temperatures soared at the gallery, threatening to melt artworks made of wax. The subsequent storms on Tuesday caused flooding.

Home Body runs until June 30 at Profiles Public Art Gallery. For more information, please contact the gallery at 460-4310.

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