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Donnamaria Bruton: Exhibit honors female beauty



Safety pins and Band-Aids might not add up to most people's impression of a perfect woman. But artist Donna Bruton wants to show students what a "perfect woman" really is in her collection, *Calculations for the Perfect Woman*, showing until March 16 at the HUB Gallery.

"The exhibition shows where the average woman is and how the media influences the definition of beauty," Ann Shields, head of the HUB-Robeson Galleries and Art on the Move, said.

Bruton, dean of graduate studies and an associate professor of painting at the Rhode Island School of Design, has developed a mathematical formula that determines the actual height, weight and volume of a woman according to modern beauty standards.

"I collaborated with a computer programmer to arrive at a mathematical equation that would give him an ideal standard," Bruton said.

The calculations were based on information given from a modeling agency, which gave the average height, weight and measurements of an average fashion model." He based the equation on the fact that the human body has the same density as water," Bruton said.

"Given someone's weight in ounces, we can calculate their volume in cubic inches. That was the foundation of the equation."

Through a set of ratios, Bruton was then able to determine the projections by entering any combination of body measurements into a computer.

"The paper dresses were all created to scale and were based on an evenly proportioned woman that is about a size 24," Bruton said.

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Aside from paper dresses, Bruton's exhibit also includes two self-portrait paintings of the artist using vases for the shape of her body and a dress made of safety pins.

"Straight pins were used to illustrate the pain or discomfort of forced effort, imposing judgement associated with maintaining one's figure," Bruton said.

The safety pin is also designed as a sort of protection, thus when one complies to this standard they are exempt or protected from a certain scrutiny, Bruton said.

Safety pins are just one metaphor among many in Bruton's work. One piece contains several Band-Aids used to construct a sweater.

"The Band-Aids are a metaphor for the wounded soul," Bruton said. Regardless of the eating disorder, the disease is based on some discomfort we have with ourselves, so I chose a top rather than a dress, because it embraces and heals the heart."

Some of the dresses, as well as body molds that were cast from actual body parts show the progression of the female body throughout life. They present the physical elements of the female body throughout the aging process from youth to middle age to deterioration and decay, Shields said.

It is only convenient that an exhibition focusing on self-image and the female body would be shown in the HUB-Robeson Center, a place where students come to eat, see and be seen.

"Hopefully in everyday passing people will maybe consider it more," Lauren Chyle, publicist for the HUB-Robeson Galleries, said. "I think it will make people aware of how ridiculous the standards for women have become."