

Martel documents breast cancer experience in new book, show at Art Gallery of Grande Prairie

# Sharing the creative process



By Alexa Huffman, Grande Prairie Daily Herald-Tribune  
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Visual artist Tina Martel sits in front of a portion of her exhibit, "Not in the Pink-The Creative Process," at the Art Gallery of Grande Prairie. Martel's exhibit features a series of sketches, photographs, painting and video, which she created during her breast cancer treatment. The visual art also appears in Martel's book, "Not in the Pink." The edits of the book are used in the exhibit. The book will be launched at the opening of the exhibit on Nov. 26 at 7 p.m. Alexa Huffman/Daily Herald-Tribune

When visual artist Tina Martel started going through breast cancer treatment in 2011, she decided to document the experience with a range of artwork.

Now her pieces and writing are being featured in a new book, Not In The Pink.

"While I was ill, I documented everything. I took photographs, I took video and I drew in my sketchbook," said Martel, who is also a Fine Arts instructor at Grande Prairie Regional College (GPRC).

"I collected the medical records. I collected all the letters and notes I got from people."

The experience of creating the book will be featured in Martel's exhibit, *Not in the Pink: The Creative Process*, at the Art Gallery of Grande Prairie (AGGP), which runs from Nov. 26 to Jan. 11.

"What I'm doing is showing the process of how an artist goes from an idea, a concept to the object," said Martel.

Martel's book will be launched at the opening of her exhibit on Wednesday Nov. 26 at 7 p.m.

In the exhibit, the page spreads of the book will be matted and hung on the wall. Martel's book edits, including post-it notes and crossed-out writing, will be hung above and below the page layouts.

Paintings from the book will also be included for a total of 200 pieces in the exhibition.

The idea of putting the book's writing process into an exhibit came after Martel talked to visitors in her studio.

"Over the last few years that I've been working on the book, what seems to happen is every time somebody came in my studio, I would have all these things on the wall and people would start to become engaged," said Martel.

The title of her book and her exhibit is a reference to not being healthy and the pink culture surrounding breast cancer awareness.

"I think, at the beginning, it had a lot of relevance but it seems to me now that a lot of people have jumped on board and it has become somewhat meaningless," said Martel.

While Martel says supporting the pink ribbon campaign is fine for some people, it just wasn't for her, a view shared by some of the other women she talked to when going through treatment.

"The symbol for me, having it in my face all the time, I started to get kind of resentful," said Martel.

"I think a lot of us do but we feel guilty about being resentful. I think maybe we've gone a little too far with it. It needs to have meaning restored to it again."

Martel says there are many myths surrounding breast cancer, including that it is an easy cancer to have.

Through her book and her exhibit, Martel hopes to dispel some of the myths.

"What I wanted was for people to understand that it's not just that you disappear for a few months and you come back and everything is great," said Martel.

"That's not how it works. It's a profound and life-changing experience."

Understanding breast cancer was also a process for Martel as she went through her treatment. After she was diagnosed, she read different books and websites about breast cancer.

However, Martel said the books seemed to have only two types of themes. The first was the idea of breast cancer being a spiritual journey.

"I'm not on a spiritual journey. I got sick. This was not my choice to walk down this road. This was thrust upon me, not embraced on any way, shape or form," said Martel.

The second types of books were the "how-to" books.

"I don't know how to have cancer. I've only had it the one time. I'm not expert," said Martel.

After seeing those types of books, Martel decided she wanted to create a book describing what someone with breast cancer might go through, based on her own experience.

With mixed media, Martel could express her own story with writing and other art forms.

While Martel was going through treatment, she had chance to write often, which started after people who knew her started calling to check how she was.

"You don't have the energy to talk to everybody so what I did is I put together an email list and I started writing updates," said Martel.

"A lot of them were funny and dark and they made you want to laugh and cry at the same time."

Martel's friends suggested putting the emails into a book and then Martel decided to combine her writing and her visual art.

“It seemed to me a way of processing what happened to me and filtering it through that whole visual art process and being able to take that into a form I hope people will find moving, interesting and informative.”

“It’s pretty graphic. I don’t really pull any punches about what happened.”

Both a hard cover and a soft cover version of Not in the Pink, will be available at the AGGP until the end of the exhibit.

The cost is \$30 for a soft cover copy and \$100 for a hard cover copy. The hard cover copy comes with two postcard size prints not featured the book.

The official site for the book is [notinthepink.ca](http://notinthepink.ca).

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