

# Living Arts

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## Where Newbury Street meets Pine Street

By Nancy Stapen  
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

**W**hat does a Newbury Street gallery next to the Ritz-Carlton have to do with the Women's Inn at Pine Street?

Not much, on the surface. But that's not the way Ellen Miller, co-owner of the Miller Block Gallery, sees it. "Working on Newbury Street, you don't have to go very far to see the problems faced by homeless women in Boston. There are specific areas on the street where homeless women have stationed themselves. I wanted to do something for a long time, but I wasn't sure what form it would take."

The answer turned out to be an exhibit of art by women artists, with proceeds going to the Women's Inn, the largest such shelter in the Northeast. Beyond concern for the plight of homeless women, Miller's motivation is contained in the show's title: "The Art of Women Helping Women."

"The show is really about women helping women in a chain that has a wonderful circularity to it," Miller explains. The spark for the show was the appeal of "a friend of mine who embraced Pine Street, who asked me to help her. I wanted to support her and her cause." Miller accompanied her friend to a fund-raising dinner for

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Lorie Hamermesh's "Do You Have What to Wear?" is the show's emblem.

# Newbury Street helps Pine Street women

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the Women's Inn, where Globe columnist Linda Weltner was the featured speaker. Weltner's speech further inspired Miller, who describes it as "so empowering to listen to, because it was straight from the heart." Weltner recounted being asked by a friend to help a homeless woman, who had a child, get back on her feet. "She spoke of how it had helped her to help another woman get her life together - how in the process she had been helped too," says Miller. "I left there feeling that in my own way, I'd like to help these women too."

Miller contacted the staff at Pine Street, and the idea for a benefit exhibition was born. It crystalized when Miller saw a large painting by Boston artist Lorie Hamermesh on temporary exhibition at the Four Seasons Hotel. Hamermesh's painting shows four girls-cum-paper-dolls in a chain; one white, one African American, one dark skinned but with face obscured and one a ghostly silhouette. A tree, its roots visible in the earth, envelopes them in its leafy branches. "That image spoke exactly to my thoughts," says Miller. "The blank space suggests the sense of being invisible homeless women experience. The racial diversity implies the scope of the problem. And the rootedness of the tree and the chain of girls conveys connection and support. It was just critical to include the image," Miller continues, "because it epitomizes the notion of shelter and safety offered by Pine Street, and because those notions are associated with what we as women strive for in this world."

But the painting was already

sold, and not available to show. Nevertheless, it became the show's flagship: Miller and Hamermesh created a poster, in an edition of 500 (signed copies are available at the gallery for \$50, unsigned posters go for \$25, with all profits going to the Women's Inn). A generational link was added to Miller's supportive female chain when her mother offered to fund the production of the poster. "That kind of connection among women seems simplistic. But sometimes the simplest things are most powerful. And it's very practical - it gets things done. What I find so compelling about it is the way it takes on a life of its own."

Assuming an autonomous identity yet remaining linked to others is a theme that reverberates in the works included in "The Art of Women Helping Women." Sometimes this

occurs on the microcosmic level, as in Nan Tull's abstract rendition "Neutrinos." Tull represents the smallest particles in the universe as white and red dots floating in and above a milky wax surface. This vision of tiny things, each at once self-contained yet connected, is a metaphor for the accretion of small details that, forged into a whole, com-

prise the construction of identity.

Although macrocosmic in feel, Elizabeth Ives' painting of a Stonehenge-like post-and-lintel structure touches on similar ideas. Its stalwart forms, painted in beige and brown tones, recall human bones, alluding to the universal need to stand on one's own two feet. Ives' architectural structure, which reads as a building or door, also evokes the interconnected notions of shelter, personal journey and self-esteem. So too, roots and shelter are also at the heart of Nona Hershey's *chine colle* taglio prints of trees, part of her "Arborescent Interval" series. But Hershey's branches, extending from central trunk and cropped by the edges of the paper, imply a reaching

out beyond the self's inner core.

That inner core seems to flicker and materialize in Lisa Young's photograph of a lone nautical flag. Barely there, it too recalls a tree, flower, architectural form or person. Evanescent yet animated, Young's shimmering, attenuated presence seems to be in the process of becoming. Its seeming opposite is Lucy White's "Evergreen," a round, ready-to-burst leaf bisected down the middle, with one half embedded in green, the other in cream colored silk. Its pod-like form and natural palette suggest fertility, metamorphosis and growth - in organizer Miller's words, "the passage from downtrodden to reju-

venated, winter to spring." Although White's centrally placed leaf initially appears to be alone in its silk frame, it's actually encircled by two, even more deeply embedded leaves. Barely discernible, these read as shedded skins - or links in an invisible, but nonetheless potent chain.

Also included in "The Art of Women Helping Women" are works by Catherine McCarthy, Roberta Paul, Lillian Hsu-Flanders, Natalie Alper and Karen O'Neill Newman, who contributes a calligraphic version of a quote from Weltner's speech: "Wouldn't it be wonderful to find out that everything we do for others - we do for ourselves?"

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ELLEN MILLER  
Co-owner Miller Block Gallery

## THE ART OF WOMEN HELPING WOMEN

At: Miller Block Gallery, 11 Newbury St.,  
through May 30