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'Deconstruction:' Empowering cancer survivors through art

By Diane Claytor



Carson Kljavin, Joyce Mallonee, Alex Mallonee at a family barbecue in 2015. Photos provided

A very small group of family and friends will safely gather Jan. 24 to celebrate the 70th birthday of longtime Lafayette resident Joyce Mallonee. Sadly, she will not be in attendance. Mallonee died in October 2020 after courageously and gracefully battling cancer for 25 years. The celebration of her life concludes a five-day multimedia art exhibit, "Deconstruction," open to the public at Lafayette's Jennifer Perlmutter Gallery.

"Deconstruction" was conceived by Joyce Mallonee several years ago as a mental exercise, explains her son, Alex Mallonee, believing it was her way of coping with all the things that had been happening to her. As she described it, Alex Mallonee recalls, "she would imagine herself lying on a table with doctors removing, replacing or modifying parts of her body." But she was determined not to allow these bodily changes to affect how she approached life. "She always said this disease did not change her sense of self and she would not allow it to control her life or identify who she was," Alex Mallonee lovingly says.

In fact, describing this exhibit, Joyce Mallonee explained that the project was a creative way to show the journey she'd been through. "They can take stuff away from your physical form but they can't deconstruct your spirit," she wrote. "The point of this exercise is creating beauty and humor out of deconstruction. Creating a magical vision out of the road through adversity—the beauty of life, of loving, of laughing and creating."

An art major in college, Joyce Mallonee returned to the medium as a hobby in 2018, rediscovering her love of painting. Alex Mallonee believes this was a time of self-discovery for her. "She began approaching her life as an art project," he notes, "with cancer as the main viewing points." The concept of "Deconstruction" was born, although discussing the idea with some people resulted in less-than-positive reactions. No one is going to find this interesting, she was repeatedly told.

But when she mentioned it to her son, a filmmaker, director and producer living in New York at the time, his response was vastly different. "I think that's an amazing idea. Can I help?" Alex Mallonee remembers saying.

Together, mother and son conceptualized the exhibit and developed ideas about art pieces depicting the effects of cancer on Joyce Mallonee's body and mental state. They collaborated with a variety of artists to bring their ideas to life with humor and creativity. "Mom really wanted this show to be humorous," Alex Mallonee says, often referring to his mother in the present tense. "She didn't want it to be depressing. The reality of living with cancer is so heavy and humor was a huge coping mechanism for her."

Alex Mallonee believes that putting this show together helped his mom work through some of the issues surrounding her disease. It certainly helped him. Admitting that he had a difficult time dealing with his mother's illness as a younger man, he now says that collaborating with her on this project made the whole process far less painful. "It suddenly became much easier to talk about," he comments. "Just the way we were able to discuss it was so matter-of-fact. Instead of worrying about the time we had remaining, we were working together to create something special. I think that's what she wanted and I immediately felt so much more in tune with what she was going through."

Although Joyce Mallonee did not live long enough to see her work come to fruition, Alex Mallonee, with the help of his sister, Carson, finished the show on her behalf. "I want to share my mom's story and believe there are many people that will connect with it," he says. "My mom and I both believed that art can empower cancer survivors."

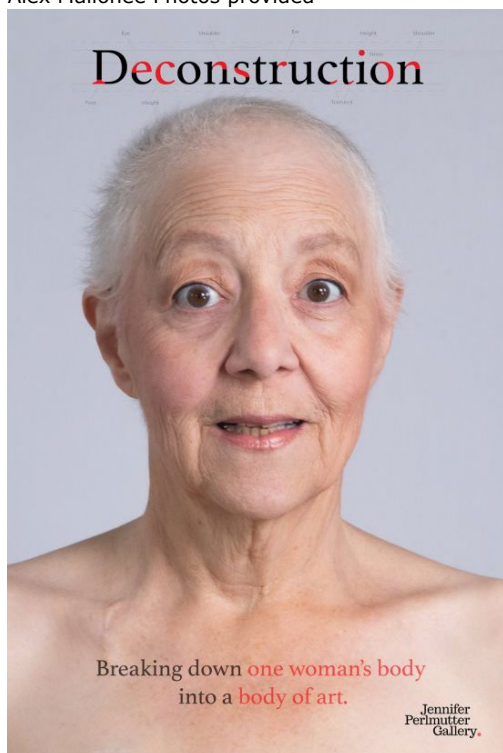
Because of COVID, the exhibit is quite different than how it was originally conceived. Viewing appointments must be made in advance (<https://calendly.com/deconstructionartshow>), fewer people will be allowed in and masks are, of course, required. Alex Mallonee hopes to have a second show at another time, "after COVID," he declares. He will also be producing a virtual exhibit, which he expects to have completed later this year and is filming a documentary on the entire "Deconstruction" project.

"Deconstruction," a loving tribute and celebration of life through art, opens at the Jennifer Perlmutter Gallery on Thursday, Jan. 21 and runs for five days. Seven artists, using a variety of mediums, have created eight pieces of work depicting Joyce Mallonee's personal journey, exploring themes of denial, vanity, humor and creativity as essential mechanisms for coping with cancer.

For more information, please visit <https://jenniferperlmuttergallery.com/2021/01/9233/> or www.facebook.com/deconstructionartshow



Alex Mallonee Photos provided



Joyce Mallonee Photos provided

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