



# The RIVERDALE PRESS

April 9, 2009

## Art born of ailment

by Kevin Deutsch

Intravenous lines, drain tubes, and vials are not your typical art components. But a new installation at the Bronx Blue Bedroom Project takes those medical supplies and others associated with severe heart ailments and places them in a serene, idyllic context.

“Arterial Nests,” an installation by Riverdale resident and artist Michelle Frick, comprises a series of birds nests made of silicon shells wrapped in IV tubing and IV caps. Inside the nests are tiny eggs with the names of various heart ailments printed on them. Together, the objects constitute a kind of re-imagined medical lab.

Peaceful music, featuring the chirping of birds, plays as visitors roam the exhibition and consider the nests, as well as a silk-screen, reproduction of a 19th century heart diagram that hangs nearby.



Ms. Frick, 41, says she is playing with the associations between sterile medical tools and how people feel about them. By creating a pastoral setting teeming with life out of inanimate materials associated with illness and death, she attempts to re-contextualize the materials and affect the way people think of them.

“My interest lies in playing with these associations when these objects are re-contextualized by exploring the animate qualities they carry,” Ms. Frick says. “I’m pushing between the comfortable and the uncomfortable, playing with ideas like fear and resilience.”

Ms. Frick has plenty of experience with those emotions. Her 6-year-old son underwent a series of open-heart surgeries from his birth to age 4. At his bedside, she became fixated with the supplies doctors and nurses were using to help him. After her son recovered, Ms. Frick began to gather unused medical supplies from friendly nurses in the heart ward at Columbia University Medical Center, the same nurses who had helped her son following his surgeries.

The hospital paraphernalia that Ms. Frick developed an affinity for may trigger uneasy associations in others, she explains.

“I was daydreaming of life coming out of something dire,” Ms. Frick says. “It helped me cope and get a different perspective.”

Themes like resilience of the human body, advanced medical technology, fear, and waste are also explored in the installation.

The installation can be seen until April 27 at the Bronx Blue Bedroom Project, 309 Alexander Ave., apt. 3A. For more information, call 347-776-7504. ■