

her home. This time Ana lay silent, a rosary in her hands. Maria sobbed at the foot of her bed. Ana's silence and the family's grief left me speechless.

I pronounced her dead, completed the death certificate and abruptly raced away. Rain pounded on my windshield as I distanced myself from Ana and her family. I felt an unexpected liberation, as though I was fulfilling my childhood fantasy of racing away from my own tenacious grandmother.

But the taste of freedom didn't last long. For the next few days I admonished myself for my actions, for failing to embrace Ana on that first urgent house call, and for failing to attend her wake. Three long days later, I called to follow up with the family.

"Dr. Pottie," Maria said in a radiant tone, "you should have seen the hundreds of people who showed up at her wake yesterday, even people who didn't speak Spanish!" This time Maria spoke in never-ending sentences. "I never knew so many people loved her; we cried, we sang, and the priest gave a 40-minute speech honouring her contribution to

the community. They had to open extra rooms and although we were supposed to leave by nine, everyone stayed 'til one in the morning. She was not just my grandmother, but a grandmother to the whole community, especially my friends whose grandmothers are far away."

Maria had comforted me. She had shown me how Ana's affectionately loquacious nature had touched many lives, including my own, and how she had ultimately become a thread binding together her community, a thread that would now continue through Maria.

And now, as I think back to my own grandmother, I realize she too must have felt my young spirit racing away. But, like Ana, she held tight, using that same binding thread to hold together my family and my Catholic Acadian community. A magical thread that makes racing away only another way to return home.

**Kevin Pottie**  
Assistant Professor  
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Ottawa, Ont.

### What did that poem mean?

The theatre has dimmed,  
leaving a moving lattice  
of luminescence,  
reaching from hidden darkness  
to touch a snowy screen  
with carbon images —  
a 40s film in black and white.

Here and there,  
a cigarette reveals a glowing tip,  
the source of languid trails  
of opalescent smoke,  
drifting ribbon-like,  
to rise and fade.

These evanescent clouds  
are like the phrases  
penned to touch imagination —  
and slip like rivulets of spring,  
between your fingers —  
if you try to grasp  
for meaning.

**Robert Dickson**  
Family physician  
Hamilton, Ont.

### Lifeworks

## Alternative anatomy

In *New Readings in Female Anatomy*, Newfoundland artist Pam Hall seeks to reinterpret traditional Western definitions of the female body. Hall spent

two years as the first artist in residence at Memorial University's School of Medicine in St. John's. The recent installation at the Carleton University Art



**Pam Hall**, *New Readings in Female Anatomy* (installation). Carleton University Art Gallery (March 4–April 15, 2002).

Gallery in Ottawa reflects her ongoing interest in "medicine and the body and how they encounter one and other."<sup>1</sup> Using historical depictions of the female body and on-site studies of medical specimens as part of her source material, Hall has created an ambitious multimedia installation incorporating prints and drawings, sculpture and extensive written and spoken text.

Hall presents her work in the guise of an academic reading room. Two library tables with four seats each occupy the centre of the room. Burgundy-coloured leather-bound books rest on one, *The Reading Table*. Three-ring binders of papers and a cardboard box of stubby pencils rest on the other, *The Writing Table*. Glass-fronted specimen cabinets occupy the wall behind the tables, and compact-disc players trans-

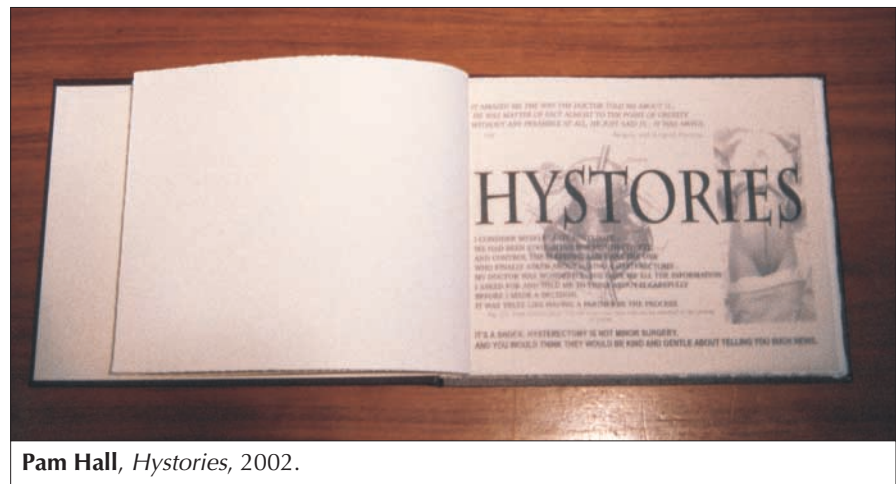
mitting recorded female voices line another wall. A series of 28 prints fill the remaining walls of the gallery. Hall titles these *Fragments from a Reconstructed Gynaepedia* to allude to the authority of established sources of knowledge and, also, to challenge them.

The prints constitute the dominant component of the installation. Initially, they consist of beautifully rendered anatomical studies of the female body printed through copperplate etching onto heavyweight rag paper. The resulting works suggest pages torn from some oversize, antique anatomy manuscript. To further the illusion, the prints are presented as numbered plates — but they are not hung consecutively, reinforcing the idea that this is a new order of things. Rather, they are linked through the relationships between the etchings themselves and additional visual images and text on each page. Hall has



**Pam Hall, *Fragments from a Reconstructed Gynaepedia*. Plate VII: *The Woman with Two Brains*, 2002.**

embellished her prints with a cornucopia of images, including reworkings of medieval depictions of the female body, of symbols for life, passion, wisdom, and digital images of the human brain, the human heart, and the *Mona Lisa*. Profuse handwritten notes, mainly in poetic form, fill the spaces between the images, providing a continuous verbal commentary. The sheer volume of visual and



**Pam Hall, *Hystories*, 2002.**

written material aims to show the complex experience of inhabiting the female body. It literally fills the gaps in traditional scholarship: that knowledge (indeed awareness) is not static, that it is derived from experience and process and requires continuous re-evaluation.

The other components of the exhibit function in the same way as the print cycle. At first they suggest conventional academic sources of knowledge. But the specimen cabinets are as loaded as the prints. Etched on the glass door on each cabinet are labels identifying their contents, but instead of designating a concrete category of objects, they designate emotions: “Anxiety,” “Ambivalence,” “Desire.” The cabinets are crammed with highly realistic latex and more idealized dental plaster casts of hands, breasts, male and female genitalia. Close inspection reveals they are miniature installations — one depicting a woman’s hand on her breast as she prepares to nurse — meant to be read not as literal objects but as visual expression

of the conflicting emotions inherent in the experiences they represent.

Hall achieves her intent most completely in the three bound books on *The Reading Table*, which were created in collaboration with a group of women. This collective approach acknowledges each woman’s unique experience of self while also communicating the role that anatomy plays in making this a shared experience. The books themselves are presented as modest but intrinsically precious objects gracefully telegraphing the range of their contents.

Hall’s work is all about the complexity, the nuance, the layers of meaning associated with occupying the female body. Since this work is constantly being revised and reshaped — effectively a work-in-progress — it would be interesting to consider how the project would change if Hall were to extend its reach to include the male body. As men or women, we all struggle with the same notion that the body we inhabit is a great deal more than the sum of standardized parts collected in traditional anatomical texts. Hall’s newest findings will appear as *ReWriting the Body: Towards the Reading Room* at the Grunt Gallery, Vancouver, May 17 to June 15.

**Vivian Tors**  
Ottawa, Ont.

#### Reference

1. Hall P. *Staying on ... an artist in the halls of science*. A report to the Canada Council Artists in Communities Pilot Program and the Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University, March 1999. [www.med.mun.ca/artistinresidence/pages/tocreportpam.htm](http://www.med.mun.ca/artistinresidence/pages/tocreportpam.htm)