

Patrisha McLean teams up with midcoast artists for domestic violence awareness month



by Lauren Abbate
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With more than 20 art galleries and two museums, Rockland is now a destination for art in Maine. Credit: Lauren Abbate / BDN

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence and would like to talk with an advocate, call 866-834-4357, TRS 800-787-3224. This free, confidential service is available 24/7 and is accessible from anywhere in Maine.

ROCKLAND, Maine — In storefronts around the city this month, passersby will be confronted with artwork and banners depicting what it is like to be a victim of domestic violence in an attempt to raise awareness for an issue that has been amplified by a pandemic that offers victims little escape.

The event is a collaboration between Patrisha McLean, 45 local artists and about 20 survivors of domestic violence. The event expounds on a banner campaign that McLean began this spring when pandemic restrictions forced in-person awareness events to cease.

“It’s all about opening people’s eyes and getting the conversation going,” McLean said. “Artists have that capability of opening people’s eyes to things in unexpected ways.”

The banners have been in storefront windows from Rockland to Mount Desert Island over the last six months. But by adding an artistic element to the campaign in Rockland — known as the “Art Capital of Maine” — McLean is hopeful the message will resonate with a larger audience drawn in by the artwork.

In recent years, McLean has been an advocate for domestic violence awareness and created the non-profit Finding our Voices in 2019 to help victims share their stories.

McLean’s ex-husband singer/songwriter Don McLean pleaded guilty to domestic violence assault against her in 2016 in a high-profile court case. The assault charge was dismissed after he completed the terms of a plea agreement in 2017, though he paid fines for three lesser convictions.

The event will run for the duration of October, which is domestic violence awareness month.

About 50 Rockland businesses, from laundromats to restaurants, have agreed to display the banners — which consist of photos of survivors and a piece of their story — and an accompanying piece of artwork.

The artists were given the liberty to create work based on their interpretations of how domestic violence affects people, such as feeling isolated or silenced, as seen in Alan Magee’s contribution of a monotype he originally created in 1995 that depicts a woman with lips that are sewn shut.

By putting these works of art in windows along Main Street and elsewhere in the city, McLean said it will have more of an impact than if they were hung in a gallery.

“Everyone is going to see it,” she said. “You can’t help but see it.”

Correction: A previous version of this story incorrectly stated the outcome of the plea agreement.



Judy, a Camden interior decorator and one of 29 Survivors on the Finding Our Voices “Let’s Talk About It” banners, with Amy Lowry’s photograph “Shattered” in the window of the Farnsworth Museum. Credit: Courtesy of Patrisha McLean