



cultural obsession with displaying the female body; it depicted sweet-16 parties, baby prom queens, awkward teens and a few images of women with eating disorders. This last topic became the focus of her next project, *Thin*.

Greenfield located herself at the Renfrew Center, an eating disorder treatment clinic in Florida, where many patients gave Greenfield access to their lives during and after treatment. These women shared everything by giving extensive interviews, providing their personal journals and allowing the camera to document their public and private moments. They are photographed next to their unrealistic drawings of themselves, being provoked to tears by a cupcake, wearing prescription hose and being weighed.

The women include some in their 40s and 50s, mothers and athletes—illustrating that eating disorders afflict a broad range of women. The images are emotional and powerful and, like all good art, provoke a response both visceral and intellectual. They uncover our cultural belief that appearance is identity and that transformation happens in physical ways, especially for women. The symptoms may look familiar, but these photographs give the subjects a chance to tell their own stories.

The book allows their stories to be contextualized and understood as manifestations of cultural attitudes towards the female body. Factors like the role of media, medicalization and family pressures appear clearly, while other issues remain difficult to crack. One girl doodles, “think of Mary-Kate

Olsen and all the other girls skinnier than you.”

While *Thin* interrogates the exploitative ways in which images of women are often displayed, it is worrying that Renfrew’s treatment is sometimes infantilizing and, at worst, ineffective. The book attempts to consider the larger social and cultural issues that have encouraged obsessions with food, restriction and body size—those profound influences which explain why nearly all of the patients in Greenfield’s book relapse.

WILD FIRE: ART AS ACTIVISM

EDITED BY DEBORAH BARNDT
Sumach Press

REVIEW BY LAURA BUCCI

Can academics go beyond their prescribed roles as researchers? At the environmental studies program at York University, some academics are indeed shifting their identities and blurring the boundaries between art, activism and academia.

Wild Fire brings together 17 essays by contributors from the program. Edited by Deborah Barndt, an activist, community-based educator and photographer, the essays are grouped around four themes: Art in Social Movements, Art as Activism, Eco Art and Art Heals.

Through their stories of community projects, the contributors demonstrate how art can be an effective tool for promoting social change. Art here encompasses many mediums, including jamming, mural painting, street performance, interventionist art and radio shows. As they confront stereotypes about academics, activists

and artists, the authors question and attempt to reshape their roles as facilitators.

Leah Burns, in her essay “Seriously ... Are You Really an Artist,” reflects on a mural project with a Toronto youth group. “Working as a group, we encountered and interrogated many assumptions about identity and arts practice.” Burns faced challenges in fulfilling expectations of the mural’s aesthetics while trying to respect the participants’ creative process.

The issue of the end product is a running concern for these contributors who prefer to emphasize process. As Barndt recounts: “At times it was a struggle for everyone to feel proud of our own product and not to see it as less than those whose work followed the larger, dominant global communication trends.” Producing a radio show helped one ethnic community in Nicaragua to raise awareness and promote discussion on issues important to them.

Oona Padgham discusses her work with detainees whose lives at a detention centre are steeped in isolation, fear and despair. She relates how art can bring women together socially and politically. Art here is not for public consumption, but its display outside the centre serves as an outreach tool to allies and activist communities.

A valuable resource to community workers, *Wild Fire* shows us what art, activism and academia can offer each other, and challenges us to reconsider how these are practised.

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