



## 'Note to Self': Painful Reminders Of Crimes

By Michael O'Sullivan  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
Friday, September 2, 2005; WE47

LIVE ON FRIDAY evening from 6 to 8 (and thereafter via a real-time webcast), artist Mary Coble will invite the public to watch her body be tattooed with the first names of as many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender murder victims she can identify whose deaths have been the result of hate crimes. And that's without ink, so that the only record will be a temporary, yet slightly bloody, abrasion from which prints will be made and then affixed to the walls of Conner Contemporary Art gallery. It sounds painful -- after all, tattoos hurt, admits the artist, whose skin already boasts two inked designs, and some of whose previous art projects have involved inkless tattooing. In fact, she likens the sensation to the kind of minor "strawberry" you get from sliding into third base. Still, imagine doing that more than 400 times.

Called "Note to Self," the endurance project is estimated to proceed at the rate of 100 names every eight hours. Coble and her professional tattoo artist collaborator, Lea Smith, plan to remain in the gallery, without sleep, but taking occasional bathroom, food and cigarette breaks, until all the names are done, or until Coble can't take it anymore. "Six hours is a typical long stretch for a tattoo artist," says Coble, who is nevertheless optimistic that she will be able to go the distance and plans to take whatever precautions her doctor advises, having, for example, Neosporin, vitamins, antibiotics or whatever else is medically prudent on hand.

In the end, perhaps paradoxically, she does not anticipate that the tattooing will have been the hardest part.

That, she says, was researching the list. Calling her list highly idiosyncratic and personal, Coble does not claim that it's by any means comprehensive, given the fact that -- other than partial lists maintained by such organizations as the Human Rights Campaign, the Southern Poverty Law Center and Web sites such as <http://www.rememberingourdead.org> -- there is no central repository of information regarding the victims of hate crimes based on gender identification or sexual orientation. Couple that with the fact that many jurisdictions do not have laws acknowledging that such crimes exist, and it makes for a huge information gap. It's a hole that Coble doesn't hope to close, but to call attention to.

"This isn't intended to be a memorial," says the artist, who acknowledges only a superficial similarity between "Note to Self" and a notorious 1994 performance of artist Ron Athey, in which bloodied paper towels made from designs cut into the flesh of another performance artist were suspended above the audience's heads. According to her,

the work's conceptual underpinnings are only partly a reminder of our common humanity and shared pain.

"I want people to see a compilation of names," she says, "not to individually mourn, but to understand the broader scope. That this is going on, and people are not keeping track and taking note of it.

"I want it to be something that they can look at and relate to," she continues, "even if they're not in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. As a person, you can relate to the fact that these people are being killed simply because of who they are."

After all, notes Coble, who could be speaking metaphorically when she explains her choice of watercolor paper to blot the tattoos, "blood is about the same thickness as water."

*"Mary Coble: Note to Self"* begins Friday with a live performance from 6 to 8 at Conner Contemporary Art, 1730 Connecticut Ave. NW, second floor (Metro: Dupont Circle). A live webcast will be available 30 minutes before the performance and last until the project's completion at <http://rtsp://vhost116.his.com/webcast.sdp> or at <http://www.connercontemporary.com/artists/coble/webcast.htm> .

Software requirements: QuickTime or RealPlayer. Performance documentation will be on view Sept. 9 through Oct. 22 at the gallery, with an opening reception Sept. 9 from 6 to 8. Call 202-588-8750. After Friday's performance, the gallery will be closed through Monday, opening thereafter Tuesday-Saturday from 11 to 6.

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