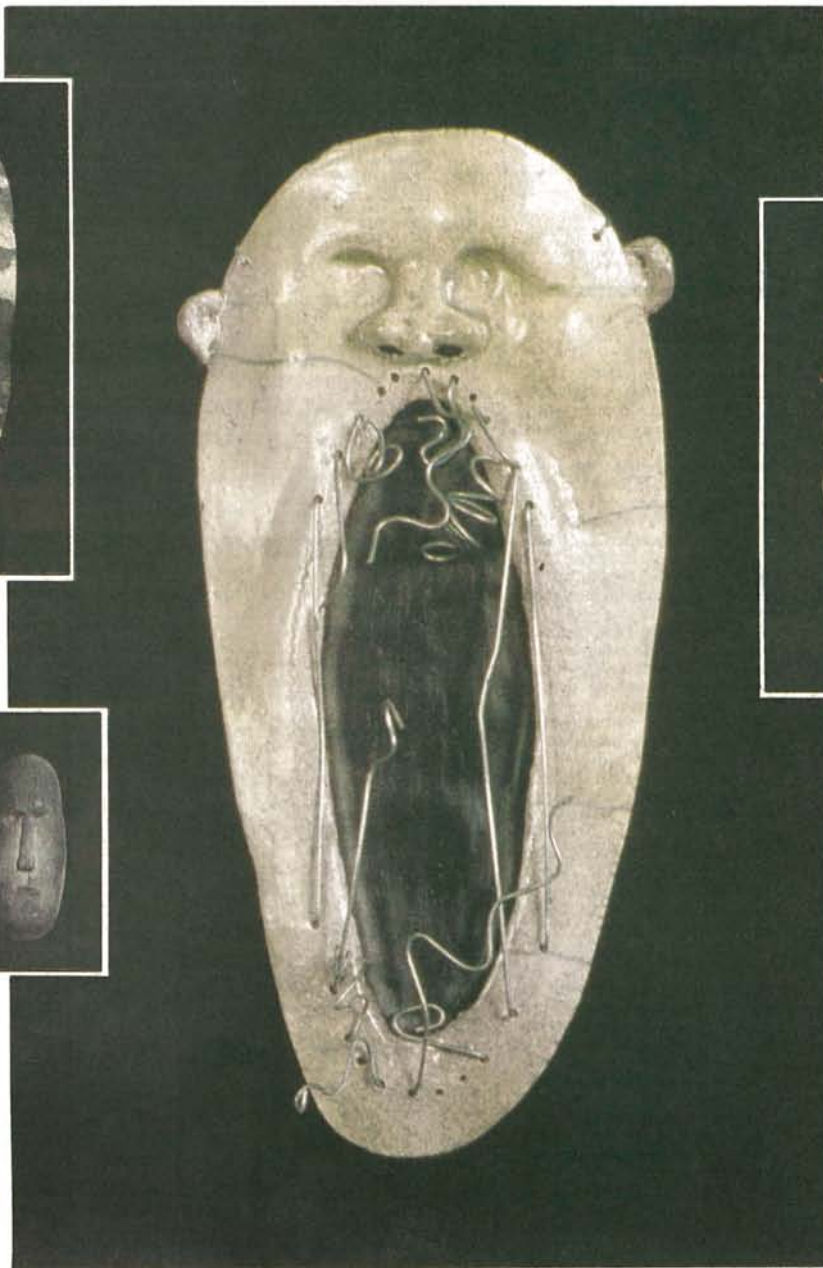




A mask titled "Vacancy" is an example of the raku-firing technique used by artist Kathryn Trenshaw.



Above: With "Silent Observers," Trenshaw makes a statement about bystanders who know about cases of child sexual abuse but refuse to do anything about it. Below: Trenshaw exhibits several clay masks made by adult survivors of child sexual abuse during an art therapy workshop.



Left: The signature piece of the "Breaking the Silence" exhibit deals with the need to speak out as a part of the psychological healing. Above: "I Won't See" depicts the fear and denial of adult survivors of child sexual abuse.



DON IPOCK/The Star

The exhibit

"Breaking the Silence" is on display at Union Hill Arts, 3013 Main St., through June 15. Gallery hours are 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays. Admittance is free. The exhibit is sponsored by the Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Abuse and Charter Hospital of Overland Park.

THE ART OF HEALING

By JILL WENDHOLT SILVA
Staff Writer

For adult survivors of child sexual abuse, Kathryn Trenshaw's art speaks louder than words. The imagery of her clay masks — lips wired shut, eyes squeezed tight, mouths that choke on silent screams — utters a powerful message. A collection of 60 of Trenshaw's raku-fired masks and 30 watercolors are part of "Breaking the Silence," an exhibit designed to raise awareness of child sexual abuse, at Union Hill Arts through June 15. The 27-year-old artist from Kalamazoo, Mich., started putting together the traveling exhibit in January 1990. "It was so logical that I use art as a part of my healing that I didn't really think about (an exhibit) until my therapist suggested it," she recalls.

By sharing her experiences with other adult survivors, Trenshaw also is trying to increase public awareness about the widespread and damaging effects of sexual abuse. Between one-quarter and one-third of the adult population was sexually abused as children, mental health experts agree: ■ One of three girls and one of seven boys are sexually abused by the time they reach age 18. ■ Eight-five percent of these children are abused by someone they know and trust. Children are abused by fathers, stepfathers, uncles, brothers, grandparents, neighbors, family friends and sometimes by aunts and mothers. ■ Sexual abuse happens to children of every class, culture, race, religion and gender. A growing number of adult survivors in their 30s and 40s are seeking treatment programs and support groups to ease their pain. Trenshaw does not claim to be an

POWERFUL MASKS EVOKE HORRORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE.

expert on the subject of child sexual abuse and is uncomfortable discussing the circumstances of her own because of the "sensational" nature of the subject. "I'm a survivor, and I'm real open about that," she says. "The big picture is that there is a huge problem out there. There are lots of people who have come to the exhibit who think they are the only one. "What I've tried to capture is the chaotic emotions of healing. It's been a very recent experience to share my art and incredibly empowering for me." The works express emotions such as fear, frustration, denial, secrecy, anger, rage, guilt, bewilderment and betrayal. They evoke strong reaction from many adult survivors. "What Am I Good For?" is a haunting mask shrouded in white gauze and bound by rope. The only visible facial feature is a mouth contorted into an eerily silent scream.

See CLAY, D-4, Col. 1

Clay masks speak of the horrors of child sexual abuse

Continued from D-1

"This piece was probably the most difficult piece for me to create and probably gets the most reaction from anyone," Trenshaw says. "If you can let your hands translate for your head and speak from the heart, it can be very cathartic."

"Does It Show?" portrays a face with the lips wired shut. "It's as if keeping the secret inside will make the person literally implode," the artist says.

"Silent Observers" includes 13 masks representing all the people who are aware of sexual abuse but do not speak out against it. "They close their ears and are tight-lipped," Trenshaw says. "They try to ignore it."

Trenshaw has found that adult survivors identify with the repeated image of a voice being ripped away. As a result, she has begun to use art therapy workshops to help them find a voice to express their emotions.

Last week, through visualization and relaxation techniques, she encouraged 50 adult survivors gathered at Charter Hospital in Overland Park to mold the wet chunks of clay into masks of their own pain.

As the adult survivors began molding, rolling, shaping and

pounding the clay, Trenshaw instructed them to use the hand mirror at the center of the table to examine their own facial expressions. Other shaping tools included pencils and newspaper. A box of tissue was within reach. "Remember while you're doing this, try not to get too into your head; let it come from your heart," she told the group.

A half-hour later, the finished masks re-emphasized the trauma of child sexual abuse. One face was breaking through a brick wall. Another face had puckered, angry lips. Yet another was wrinkled on one side, smooth on the other with a crevice-like scar.

When Trenshaw asked each survivor to explain the emotion behind the mask, the men and women responded with words and phrases representing the various stages of recovery from depressed to hope: "lonely," "still angry," "a little more relaxed," "ready to see the worst" and "free."

To prepare viewers for the exhibit of her works, Trenshaw displays an eight-minute videotape in which she talks about her reasons for creating it. She describes the tape as a "safe-guard" positioned near the gallery door.

At a recent early morning

"What I've tried to capture is the chaotic emotions of healing. It's been a very recent experience to share my art and incredibly empowering for me."

— Artist *Katheryn Trenshaw*

discussion session for employees of Union Hill Apts, Stacy Lamb, a social worker and director of treatment for the Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Abuse, answered questions about how adult survivors might respond to the exhibit.

"What goes on with them is a lot like Holocaust victims or post-Vietnam survivors," Lamb said. "Some of this may trigger a strong reaction, but I think it's important to remember we call them survivors."

The watercolor and ink drawings depict symbolism that is more hopeful in tone, including relaxing nude figures. They are intended to remind adult survivors that the process of psychological healing is "like a corkscrew — you're always moving up," Trenshaw told the group.

Another part of the exhibit includes a series of "benevolent

gargoyles" intended to be affixed to public buildings, sexual assault centers and homes to symbolically ward off harm.

To provide a place for viewers to sit and contemplate the images they have seen, Trenshaw incorporated two wooden benches that have become an interactive sculpture carved with messages of encouragement from other survivors. A book of poetry from viewers who were moved by the workshops or exhibits also accompanies the show.

Trenshaw initially planned for

the exhibit to travel in Michigan and surrounding Midwestern cities, but her scope continues to expand. Later this year the exhibit will have its first international showing in the Netherlands.

"I think my work is accepted as art that has a message and then it hits a broader population," Trenshaw says. But she is wary of being labeled "the incest artist."

"I am using this as an expression of my experience to help others, but I see myself moving on," she says.