

# Discreet charm of private artworks

When does a private act become a performance? Is watering house plants or pretending to be a plant a work of art? Ask Diane Borsato, an artist whose performances are so discreet they are rarely detected by anyone other than herself.

Borsato's fame for making subtle art began in 2001 with a performance at the Montreal artist-run centre Skol, where she created the world's longest paper-clip chain. For 24 hours, 60 people linked one million paper clips together. Borsato built a rectangular rack on which to string it up like a huge curtain, which she then lit so it shimmered like water.

Titled *How To Make a Sculpture in an Emergency*, the performance/art is now listed on Page 24 of the *Guinness Book of World Records*. "It was a found performance that turned into this sublime modern sculpture," she says.

After finishing grad school at Concordia, Borsato did a master's in performance at New York University, but found it difficult living there after Sept. 11, 2001, when post-traumatic tension was still palpable. She ended up staying inside a great deal, making art with the plants in her apartment.

One performance in 2002 while still in New York was titled *Carrying My Heavy Bag*, in which she had porters at luxury hotels carry her backpack into the lobby and out again. "It was just so they could experience the weight of my life," she says. A year later, during a residency in Nice, she performed *Warm Things to Chew for the Dead*, in which offerings of food were left at gravestones.

*Squeeze the Cat*, on the other hand, is a performance based on *not* doing something. "I didn't squeeze the cat," Borsato says about the titled non-performance. "I was thinking about Yves Klein's famous *Leap Into the Void*, and that not leaping into the void seemed as much a gesture." It was al-



Diane Borsato's *Artifacts in My Mouth* is one of several of her conceptual artworks, part of the *Contact* series.

so a critique of the macho history of performance, "all that death-defying stuff," she says, referring to performers such as Vito Acconci or Australia's Mike Parr, who recently nailed his arm to a wall.

Borsato also started to wonder if

completing a task was necessary at all. "It's important that I complete a task," she says, "but not feel restricted by that." That led to what she calls "eating light." In a room filled with plants Borsato found in an old seminary in Quebec, she acted like a plant

by sitting still in the room, emulating the grace of plants. "The priests seemed to be doing something. They'd ask me what I was doing. They'd ask me to do a meditation of the 'Kind of,' and they'd just... It showed me how perfo-