

## The Curation of Creative Hospitals

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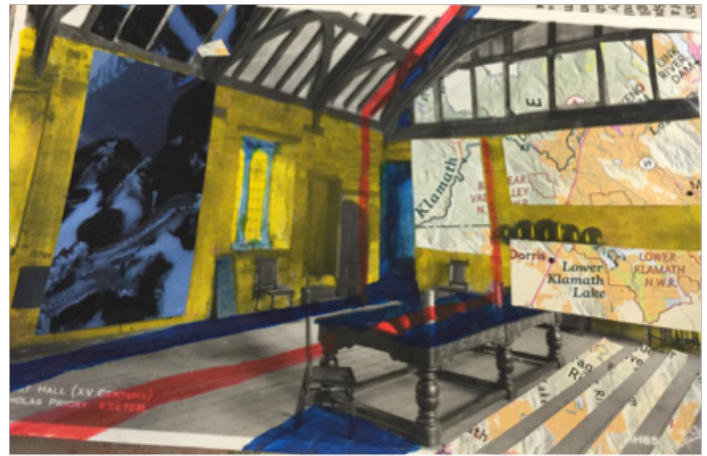
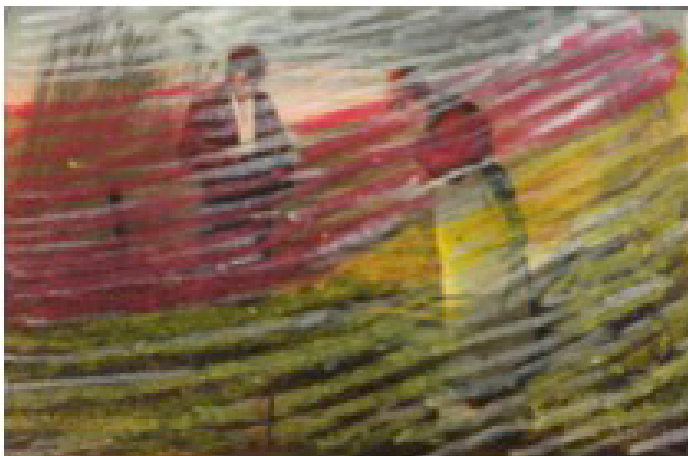
*“Little as we know about the way in which we are affected by form, by colour and light, we do know this... variety of form and brilliancy of colour in the objects presented to patients are actual means of recovery.”*

*-Florence Nightingale, 1859*

A movement toward purposeful art in hospitals can transform them into enriching, educational symbols that reflect the culture of the communities they represent.<sup>2</sup> In July 2016, my sister (a nursing student) and I (a medical student) visited art collections at three hospitals in Southern California and four hospitals in London, England. Featuring curated and donated pieces from local communities, patients, physicians and staff, the collections have unique histories but a common purpose to

create more caring environments. Notably, at the forefront of each curating decision is an emphasis on art in which viewers can reflect on their illness and wellbeing, as well as that of others. At each of the sites, a hospital arts representative gave us a private tour of the facility’s creative works, and all permitted us to share their opinions and goals.

The arts at Homerton University Hospital National Health Service (NHS) Foundation Trust, led by artist Shaun Caton, represent the diversity of Homerton’s patients and home borough of Hackney (<http://www.homerton.nhs.uk/about-us/art-in-the-hospital/>). Caton has organized over fifty exhibitions, many of which include art created by patients in the Regional Neurological Rehabilitation Unit (RNRU). Long-stay patients are referred to the RNRU art workshops as a form of therapy.



**Figure 1.** An example of the Homerton RNRU art workshop in which patient overlaid their unique addition onto old postcards.

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According to Caton, the workshops promote “psychological well-being and improve patients’ dexterity and communication skills.” He continually fundraises and brainstorms new workshop ideas - one recent project involved repurposing old postcards (Fig. 1). He also regularly encourages feedback, acknowledging that some visitors find certain displays to be controversial, while others feel that they educate the community. Ultimately, the arts at Homerton are sustainable because its culture is supported by the hospital. Further, the impact of workshops is recognized and incorporated into the medical plan for many patients. The diverse array of the arts, including sculptures, galleries, and a sensory garden help patients find respite while in the hospital environment.

Upon entering the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel, London it is evident that the art

program is ambitious, as there is a multitude of diverse pieces ([www.vitalarts.org.uk](http://www.vitalarts.org.uk)). Vital Arts is the arts organization for Barts Health NHS Trust, which runs the hospital and supports clinical aims with projects that include visual art, music, dance, and craft workshops. Vital Arts’ director, Catsou Roberts, seeks original, unique projects by artists who have not previously featured work in hospitals, so the results are “unexpected.” The hospital, located in a disadvantaged area of London, provides an uplifting environment that helps distract and engage people through innovative, site-specific art (Fig. 2). For example, the pediatric unit features ward-wide designs by critically acclaimed designers, as well as a rooftop garden and impressive two-story playroom with fantastical furniture and interactive animated videos. Roberts emphasized that it is crucial to consider the specificity of the patients using

the services where artwork is located, so that each project is relevant to those encountering it: demographics and the type of treatment being received are top considerations.

South London is served by University Hospital Lewisham and Greenwich, as well as Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Saskia Delman is the Arts Connect arts



**Figure 2.** The walls of the pediatrics unit, painted by Tatty Devine, boast bright, whimsical designs that distract patients and brighten the ambiance.



**Figure 3.** Past Lewisham patient and local artist Anthony Daley donated a series of paintings to the hospital.



**Figure 4. A large mural reflects the progression of history in the hospital's area.**

manager at the two hospitals, where she organizes the collection and commissions new projects (<https://www.lewishamandgreenwich.nhs.uk/lewisham-hospital-arts-programme>). She sources everything locally from frames and mounting tools to artwork, including pieces from patients wishing to express gratitude to the hospital community (Fig. 3). Delman emphasizes the importance of including the community in hospital art: displayed works often reflect local scenery and history (Fig. 4). Delman aims for “enduring art” that matches and soothes the patient population. For instance, one resident artist worked with staff members to reduce burnout and pediatric cancer patients to create a story based on their experiences. Delman’s goals are to help people navigate the facility

through visual cues (evident through the interior design and themed units), to “humanize the space” through familiar local sites, and improve patient well-being and satisfaction.

Denise Clayton-Leonard is the resident artist at Miller Children’s & Women’s Hospital Long Beach in Long Beach, California. As the founder of the Artful Healing Program (<http://www.miller-childrenshospitallb.org/families/artful-healing>), she brings art workshops to pediatric patients through donations and grant funding. Clayton-Leonard is tasked with organizing an annual art show featuring former and current pediatric patients, updating the art exhibits, and creating unique displays on each of the vibrant floors (Fig. 5). During our tour, we met a patient who was



**Figure 5. “Under Sea Adventure art” adorns one of the floors at Miller Children’s (left), while another patient was inspired by a workshop to create an imaginary creature (right).**



**Figure 6. Past patients and families donate personal art**

overjoyed to receive news that her piece was selected for the annual calendar compiled from patients' works. One pediatric patient with terminal illness was adamant that her last piece of art be completed. Clayton-Leonard helped her finish it and immortalized it on a wall where it can be viewed by family and friends. These are just two examples of



**Figure 7. An Andy Warhol piece on display**

how child life services and hospital artwork have synergistically improved patients' well-being.

The Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles, CA houses more than 3,500 pieces of artwork. Curator Debby Doolittle and her husband maintain the collection. The hospital does not commission art per se; all pieces are donated by artists including UCLA physicians. For example, urologist Richard Erlich is a proliferative artist with many works on display at Ronald Reagan. Furthermore, past patients and families have been inspired to create and donate art reflective of their healing experiences (Fig. 6). Doolittle organizes the art so that it is both "visually appealing and thematically cohesive."<sup>6</sup> She also uses art as a way-finding tool, evident in the vibrant animal photographs in the pediatric unit. Over time, the collection has accumulated a number of valuable pieces, including a recognizable Andy Warhol piece (Fig. 7). Doolittle is motivated by the belief that art is a language: different people are moved by different forms and styles.



**Figure 8. The Healer's Touch award sculpture stands outside the UCIMC entrance.**

UC Irvine Health in Orange, CA is host to many works of art organized by senior project manager Ellen Khoudari. All pieces that are incorporated into the hospital fit the theme of "nature-nurture." An outdoor sculpted award reflects this theme (Fig. 8), as does a water fountain with the hospital's motto of "Discover. Teach. Heal." Further, way-finding signs on different levels of



**Figure 9. Nature-nurture is emphasized in panels of cranberry plants**

the main hospital showcase unique plant species, beautifully pressed into glass panels, to familiarize visitors and patients. The hospital displays a mix of donated and commissioned works, while the maintenance and organization of the art is funded by the hospital. Remarkably, all patient and exam rooms display a piece, which speaks to the level of organization in the arts at UC Irvine Health. Lastly, the Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center stands out for its soothing, nature-themed art including a three-part panel of a cranberry plant (Fig. 9).

Critics of hospital artwork may argue that financial resources should go solely to patients and employees.<sup>3</sup> By following the example of successful models; however, hospital art collections can benefit the community and patients alike. First, hospital art must be of service to patient well-being. An effective way to implement this is to involve patients and visitors in the creation of art. Second, displaying local artists' work in a hospital gives the community a sense of pride and a setting for staff and visitors to heal. Gallery exhibitions bring community members together to experience and appreciate their culture. Art programming that creates this synergy between a community and a

hospital is sustainable, as it promotes a steady flow of funding and contributing artists. Lastly, this momentum boosts hospital art: as a collection evolves, it becomes easier to commission projects because artists are more likely to want their work on display at the hospital. Therefore, hospitals can and should be transformed from ordinary medical facilities into symbols of healing and culture. These seven hospitals and their art collections have inspired us as students and future healthcare professionals to be champions of this cultural shift.

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