



Philanthropists and artists are working together to champion the spirit-soothing, palliative power of beautiful artworks in both hospitals and clinics. **Claire Wrathall** reports

According to a collaborative study at Duke University Medical Center in North Carolina, people who give blood in clinics hung with works of art feel less discomfort than those who undergo the same procedure in rooms with blank walls. This is just one of many instances that suggest art can ameliorate suffering. Back in the 1850s, Florence Nightingale surmised that art had a role to play in medicine, observing in *Notes on Nursing: what it is, and what it is not* that “beautiful objects... have an actual bodily effect. Variety of form and brilliancy of colour in the objects presented to patients are actual means of recovery”.

It should come as no surprise, then, that, thanks to support from individual donors, increasing numbers of hospitals and medical institutions are beginning to acquire, exhibit, commission and encourage the making of art. It is a kind of philanthropy, the evidence suggests, that not only encourages patients to feel better, but boosts morale in

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This picture: Jennifer Steinkamp's digital projection *Mike Kelley 1* is the most popular work at the Cleveland Clinic. Top left: Ian Davenport is an artist patron of the charity Paintings in Hospitals





medical and auxiliary staff, creates employment for artists and engenders in its supporters the sense that they are doing some good, not just in a palliative sense but in pushing the boundaries of research. As Scott Mead – founding partner of the global corporate finance advisory firm Richmond Park Partners, a former partner and managing director of Goldman Sachs and a major supporter of the innovative arts programme at London’s Great Ormond Street Hospital – puts it, “Philanthropy often has to be further upstream from mainstream research. Some of it is speculative, let’s face it, but investing in situations before they’re 100 per cent proven is what philanthropists do. And based on the research I’ve read, the advice I’m getting and the feelings I have in my heart for this, art can make a difference, even though we don’t know for sure what that difference will be. You have to try new things, and support for them is more likely to come from philanthropists than the NHS budget, generous though that is. It’s the job of philanthropists in society to get out on the thin end of the branch.”

Certainly there is anecdotal evidence that fine art can make a difference. Take the museum-quality collection at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. Embracing more than 4,000 works by artists such as Marc Chagall, Salvador Dalí, Roy Lichtenstein, Joan Miró, Robert Rauschenberg and Ed Ruscha, it was established by Marcia Simon Weisman, wife of the entrepreneur and collector Frederick Weisman, founder of Mid-Atlantic Toyota, the first importer of Japanese cars into the US. In an effort to stimulate her husband’s memory following a serious head injury, she had begun to bring works from the couple’s home to the hospital in the hope that one might trigger a response. It was a hunch that paid off: his recognition of a painting



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From top: Edward Bawden’s two-part *Fantasy on Islamic Architecture* displayed at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. Stephanie “Steve” Shirley, a patron of *Paintings in Hospitals*, takes a special interest in autistic people’s responses to art. Artist Clare Twomey and her 2,200-object ceramic mural *Home* at Great Ormond Street Hospital

by Jackson Pollock, even before he’d remembered her, signalled the start of his recovery.

But for every UK hospital with first-rate fine art on its walls – London’s Chelsea and Westminster, for instance, which now has more than 1,000 works in its CW+ collection, from a resurrection by the Renaissance master Veronese to paintings (pictured above) by Edward Bawden and a set of Patrick Heron banners – there are many more without. “When my father passed away, the hospital was really grim: clinical, alienating, unfriendly, neglected,” recalls the Turner Prize-nominated artist Ian Davenport (pictured at work on previous pages), known

for his distinctive paintings of vertical lines. “For an artist interested in colour, the bleakness of the surroundings just made the whole experience even more terrible. Yet there’s increasing evidence that being around art can be amazing for people in terms of the way it can help make them feel better.”

Davenport is an artist patron of the charity *Paintings in Hospitals*, which exists to facilitate exhibitions of works from its own collection – as well as the Arts Council Collection – in hospitals, hospices, care homes and doctor’s surgeries across the UK, drawn from

more than 4,000 pieces by, among many, Josef Albers, Alexander Calder, Anthony Caro, Anish Kapoor, Paula Rego and Andy Warhol. Most of the works the charity owns were gifts or bequests from artists and their estates and collectors – Charles Saatchi, for instance, and the software entrepreneur-turned-philanthropist Stephanie “Steve” Shirley (pictured centre), founder of the FI Group (later Xansa and now part of the Sopra Steria Group), who has given away more than £67m to good causes.

The mother of a son with autism, Shirley is fascinated by the response of people with the condition to different





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Clockwise from above: Quentin Blake created 15 scenes for Elliott’s Room at Great Ormond Street Hospital. Some of his works put on display by Paintings in Hospitals. Hurvin Anderson and Sun Shade, one of the beach scenes Vital Arts commissioned him to do for the renal unit at The Royal London Hospital

sorts of art, and donated a body of work selected to appeal to those on the spectrum, who tend to prefer images that are balanced and symmetrical, or very detailed and technically drawn. “Reactions,” she finds, “are sometimes totally unexpected. A very quiet John Miller painting appealed to one autistic boy to the point of obsession. He liked it. He licked it. Another autistic adult felt all over a statue, in much the same way as a blind visitor did.”

As she explains, Paintings in Hospitals (of which she is also a patron, along with Lord Browne of Madingley, executive chairman of L1 Energy and previously CEO of BP, and Roger Phillimore, former chairman of Lonmin) enables loan exhibitions of anything between 10 and 80 works to be mounted for up to two years at a time in hospitals across the UK. Art may not be “critical or vital”, she says, “but it is important. It inspires better health. And it helps the well stay well. Aesthetic values enhance daily life and reduce its many stresses – they feed the spirit.”

Like Davenport, who has not just donated works to Paintings in Hospitals, but has produced a limited edition print for members of its Patrons Circle (entry to which begins with a donation of £500), artists tend to be keen to lend their support. Antony Gormley, Maggi Hambling and Bridget Riley are its other artist patrons.

The charity also raises funds by selling prints online, as does charitably funded organisation Vital Arts, which



self-reflective game. I believe in art for art’s sake, but I needed to be sensitive to the fact that the people seeing my work might be very unwell or very unhappy or in a very vulnerable position, and you cannot ride roughshod over that. So I deliberately wanted to work with imagery that was not so much platitudinous as benign and appealing, almost as an inversion of most contemporary art’s ambition to subvert.” The result was four huge monochrome pieces crowded with animals but disquietingly reminiscent of Picasso’s *Guernica* all the same.

supports a dynamic programme of exhibitions, workshops and artists’ residencies at the five hospitals in Barts Health NHS Trust. Recent highlights on its website included signed and numbered prints by Hurvin Anderson, derived from a trilogy of beach scenes (example pictured above) commissioned for the renal unit at The Royal London Hospital; Bob and Roberta Smith, whose enchanting series of paintings *The National Animals of the East End* runs along one of the main corridors of The Children’s Hospital at The Royal London; and Catherine Yass, whose transfixing lightbox *Sleep (Swamp)* can be found in Barts hospital.

Making art for a hospital can challenge artists to think differently too. “When Paintings in Hospitals approached me, it took me about 10 seconds to digest the idea and say yes,” says artist Tom Ellis, who, besides having a show at the Wallace Collection last year, produced a series of four large-scale works (example pictured overleaf) for GP surgeries across London. “I thought: this is really fascinating. But I knew I couldn’t go in and play a glib

As executive director and curator of the Art Program at the Cleveland Clinic, which has a collection of more than 6,300 contemporary works, Joanne Cohen (pictured overleaf with Jaume Plensa’s *Cleveland Soul*) is another cheerleader for the beneficial effects of art in medical practices, citing the results of a survey of 1,100 of the clinic’s in-patients, almost three-quarters of whom “said that their mood was improved by the presence of art”. She points to the popularity of a huge ethereal digital projection, *Mike Kelley 1* (pictured on opening pages) by the artist Jennifer Steinkamp, of a tree that gradually changes colour as it comes into leaf and then loses its foliage, before slowly coming to life again with the spring. “This is one instance where people rearrange the furniture so that they can sit and look at it. We have more patient testimonials about this than any other work. There’s something rejuvenating about it.”

Those most likely to respond positively to art, she has found, are patients with anxiety, post-traumatic



Clockwise from far left: **Jaume Plensa's Cleveland Soul** is one of over 6,300 works in the Cleveland Clinic's collection. **Joanne Cohen**, executive director and curator of the clinic's Art Program, with CEO and president **Delos M "Toby" Cosgrove**. **Tom Ellis and Works Like People II No 3**, one of the large-scale works **Paintings in Hospitals and the Wallace Collection** commissioned him to produce for GP surgeries across London

further three-year commitment to fund "and encourage much broader thinking and activity" in the GOSH Arts programme. "Being able to express themselves creatively can help children feel they are doing something that can be recognised and validated. They might even develop a skill or uncover a talent. Clinical observation suggests not only that children are happier and more positive," but that it may aid recovery. At the very least it fills the time.

stress disorder and breast cancer, which has led the clinic to do further, ongoing research into whether different kinds of art might also help specific conditions. To this end, one floor of the Sydell and Arnold Miller Family Heart & Vascular Institute features landscapes, one abstract works and the third a mix.

If its results concur with similar research conducted at three hospitals in Scotland – which, as reported in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, found that "contrary to a view that may prevail among some contemporary artists, patients who are ill or stressed about their health may not always be comforted by abstract art" – the likelihood is that landscapes will come out on top. Scottish patients, it turned out, preferred the "state of calm created by the blues and greens of landscape and nature scenes".

It's a finding borne out by a story the artist Sean Scully tells of a 14-year-old girl in the final stages of cancer, who had seen his photograph *Land, Sea, Sky* at an exhibition in Munich and asked for it to be set up at the end of her bed as she lay dying in a hospice. The image shows a strip of land – a grassy cliff edge in Norfolk – below wide stripes of blue sea and sky. "My guess is that she understood she was going into the space above the sea and the land," says Scully. "The whole incident, besides making me sad, made me proud to be an artist."

It was another child with leukaemia that first prompted Scott Mead to support the arts programme at London's Great Ormond Street Hospital, now called GOSH Arts. In 1992, one of his children, not yet a year old, spent six months there, often near death, eventually surviving thanks to chemotherapy. "I wanted to find whatever way I could to give back to the hospital," he says. "I served as a non-executive director of its trust board for five years, which was one way to help. And through the foundation I set up, I supported research into gene and stem-cell therapy, so that better and gentler

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treatments could be developed to spare others what my child went through."

Motivated by evidence that art can trigger a positive clinical response, he "also wanted to do something to improve the quality of the experience of being in hospital and hopefully the prognosis of children in long-term care". This would be achieved not simply by being surrounded by art, but by enabling them to create it, thereby alleviating the boredom that Dr Elizabeth Burns, a creative specialist at UCLH's Macmillan Cancer Centre, recently described on BMJ Opinion as "a hidden malaise of hospital life" and something that quite possibly impacts negatively "on health outcomes and performance".

"While in hospital, you feel you have no control over your own destiny," continues Mead, who in 2016 made a

Great Ormond Street Hospital is full of work by highly regarded artists too. But among the permanent installations – including a ceramic mural with casts of more than 2,200 toys and other objects by Clare Twomey (pictured on third page) and an interactive digital nature trail by Jason Bruges Studio to divert children's attention as they make the journey to the anaesthetic room and operating theatres – there's a 20m mural incorporating drawings of sea creatures by more than 100 children who have been treated here.

The most moving images to be found at GOSH, however, are those on the walls of Elliott's Room, the end-of-life care room on the paediatric and neonatal intensive care unit. Named after Elliott Walker, who was born with a rare genetic disorder and lived for just 10 days, it consists of 15 scenes

by Quentin Blake (pictured on previous page), commissioned – using money raised through Elliott's Brighter Future Fund – by his parents, who wanted "to provide a space for families and their children to have a quiet, peaceful time in their final hours together". "He's captured in pictures what I sometimes struggle to put into words," Elliott's mother Jenny said at the time of its opening. "They're beyond what I could ever have expected. They're really special."

And they are: poignant, beautiful, comforting, a welcome diversion from the daunting medical machinery that may be in the room – and more than that, an enduring memorial to the Walkers' beloved son. ♦

ART OF MEDICINE

Cedars-Sinai Art Collection, cedars-sinai.edu/about-us/art-collection. **Cleveland Clinic, Arts & Medicine Institute**, my.clevelandclinic.org/departments/arts-medicine. **CW+**, cwplus.org.uk. **GOSH Arts**, gosh.nhs.uk/parents-and-visitors/gosh-arts. **Paintings in Hospitals**, paintingsinhospitals.org.uk. **Vital Arts**, vitalarts.org.uk.

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