

# Contemporary art in medicine: the Cleveland Clinic art collection

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**Abstract:** Fine art is good medicine. It comforts, elevates the spirit, and affirms life and hope. Art in the healthcare setting, combined with outstanding care and service, creates an environment that encourages healing and supports the work of medical professionals. As one of the world's great medical centers, Cleveland Clinic has always included the arts in its healing environment. The four founders and subsequent leadership encouraged artistic and musical expression by employees. Distinguished artworks have long hung on the walls. In 1983, an Aesthetics Committee was officially formed at Cleveland Clinic to address issues of art and design in Cleveland Clinic facilities.

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## Mission of the art program

The Cleveland Clinic Art Program, part of the Arts & Medicine Institute, was established at Cleveland Clinic in 2006. The mission of the Art Program is to enrich, inspire and enliven our patients, visitors, employees and community and to embody the core values of the institution: collaboration, quality, integrity, compassion and commitment. The art reflects an interest in underlying concepts such as innovation, teamwork and service, which

are fundamental cornerstones of Cleveland Clinic.

"When a patient comes to the hospital, it's like someone puts a steel curtain between them and the rest of the world," Iva Fattorini, MD, chair of the Arts & Medicine Institute told the Cleveland Plain Dealer. "The moment when you stop focusing on your disease is when the healing starts."

The Art Program is responsible for selecting new acquisitions for the Cleveland Clinic collection, acting in an advisory capacity to the Aesthetics Committee and the Department of Institutional Relations and Development to assist with donations of artworks to Cleveland Clinic, and providing services ranging from installation to inventory and upkeep of the collection throughout all Cleveland Clinic facilities. In addition, the Art Program curates and organizes exhibitions and related educational programming.

"It's sort of a tall order because we're looking to engage with a lot of different people. But mostly, it's about enhancing the experience here," Joanne Cohen, executive director and curator of the Art Program told Healthcare Design. "The Cleveland Clinic creates high standards for everything, so we thought that our art collection should be in keeping with that. We really wanted to raise the bar on having art in the hospital setting."

The Cleveland Clinic is a local, national and

international healthcare system, with 23.5 million square feet of real estate, worldwide. The system includes Cleveland Clinic's main campus in Cleveland, 11 regional hospitals in Northeast Ohio, Cleveland Clinic Florida in Weston and West Palm Beach, the Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health in Las Vegas, Cleveland Clinic Canada in Toronto, and 16 family health centers. The Art Program is responsible for fine art throughout the health system, as well as placing museum fine art posters in exam rooms, patient rooms, and staff corridors. To accomplish these goals, the Art Program has an executive director, two full-time curators, a department coordinator, and many hard-working unpaid interns. A full time preparator and full-time registrar maintain and inventory the growing collection.

### Contemporary art

The Cleveland Clinic art collection is comprised of nearly 4,500 artworks that reflect a commitment to supporting the local, national, and international arts communities. As Cleveland Clinic changes the paradigm of healthcare, the Art Program is changing the perception of artwork in a hospital.

"We tend to find that in a lot of hospitals, the art is like the art you would find in an airport: pretty landscapes, nothing that rocks the boat. It begins to take on a wallpaper effect." Ms. Cohen told *Healthcare Design*. "We wanted to have things that were unusual: things that might make you think, transport you to somewhere else, distract you, or grant you a moment of levity or beauty. These are all great experiences to have in a place that is so angst-ridden, where so many people are stressed out. Anything we can do to try and alleviate that, even in a little way, makes a huge difference."

The Cleveland Clinic collection focuses on the art of recent decades. Cleveland Clinic leadership believes that contemporary art fosters an environment of creative excellence, encourages dialogue, and challenges viewers to experience different points of view. Art that is "fresh off the easel" reflects the present-day lives of patients and visitors, and harmonizes with Cleveland Clinic's leading edge 21<sup>st</sup> century architecture.

Innovation is a powerful brand attribute of Cleveland Clinic, where a fully staffed innovation center helps physicians develop, patent and bring inventions and intellectual property to market. As Cleveland Clinic charts new territory in healthcare, it is also pioneering a new approach to art in the hospital setting. The curatorial team seeks and exhibits artworks that feature unusual materials, or ordinary materials in unusual ways, as well as works that push boundaries in

subject matter, alter perceptions and test new ideas.

The Art Program ventures widely, collecting from artists who are emerging, in their mid-careers, or well-established. It collects art that addresses the human condition, global connections and diversity, popular culture, and the collaborative spirit. It finds work in all media: prints, works on paper, photography, sculpture, and video. Paintings, the mainstay of most corporate collections, are acquired but are less common at Cleveland Clinic, being considered somewhat challenging to place in the hospital setting because they are particularly fragile. Some of the artists in the collection include, Vik Muniz, Jennifer Steinkamp, Ori Gersht, David Korty, Los Carpinteros, Jonathan Borofsky, Willie Cole, David Levinthal, Kirsten Everberg, Robin Rhode, and Suzanne Caporael.

### Benefits of art in a hospital

Hospitals are stressful environments. They are places of extreme drama: birth, injury, death, and the saving of life are hourly occurrences, and people – patients and visitors -- suffer from a range of emotions, including anxiety and boredom. Artwork has the potential to alleviate these. Art can speed patients' recoveries, enhance the surroundings, and humanize the hospital. Research shows that art in hospitals adds to a good healing environment, which can speed recovery, reduce stress, and help to retain staff (1,2).

Artwork in a hospital functions differently than in a museum, gallery, or even corporate setting. Cleveland Clinic curators strive to help audiences understand and engage with the art. They accomplish this through explanatory wall labels, docent led tours, a self-guided audio tour of thirty-five highlights from the collection, and guest lecturers.

Curators never forget that art in a medical setting has as many meanings and purposes as there are caregivers and patients. It provides color and warmth, distraction from personal anxiety, levity and lightheartedness, a focus for meditation, a vehicle for escape – and not insignificantly, a way of helping patients and visitors find their way around the sometimes confusing maze of hospital buildings.

No one artwork can meet all these needs. But the collection as a whole can and does. Works are deliberately selected for diversity and variety. As visitors walk down the hallways and through the lobbies, they are exposed to a myriad of subjects, styles, artists, media, materials, and even frames.

Cleveland Clinic is notable among American medical centers to produce its focus on measurable outcomes in patient care. The Art Program is often challenged to

produce experimental results that demonstrate the extent of its contribution to the therapeutic environment in a quantifiable way. There have been a number of studies performed at Cleveland Clinic and elsewhere measuring the effect of music on patient outcomes (3). Music in the medical setting has been shown to reduce stress, reduce discomfort and anxiety, and even reduce the amount of pain medication needed post operatively. But there have been no equally rigorous studies on the therapeutic benefits of art, and no convincing study showing that any particular styles or periods of art are more or less beneficial to patient care than any others (3).

There is a movement in healthcare design toward what some call “evidence-based” art and design for hospital interiors. Although well-intentioned, this approach skews toward naturalism and landscapes, and generally rejects abstraction and distinctive imagery (4-6).

Cleveland Clinic believes that patients and visitors are open to a broader aesthetic. That conviction is justified by the overwhelmingly positive response of patients, visitors and caregivers to the artworks that have been installed in the more than 2 million square feet of new construction Cleveland Clinic has opened since 2008.

*Here is a sample of comments:*

*“Thank you for sharing your beauty and inspiration with us.”*

*“Throughout my stay, I felt more like a cherished guest rather than the usual captive patient. Thank you.”*

*“The previous day was one of anxious waiting while our friend had a six hour surgical procedure. The artwork at the Clinic not only allowed us to pass the day enjoyably but it actually made a very difficult event in life more positive.”*

*“Cleveland Clinic magically blends the medicine of art and the art of medicine. The companionship of the artwork presses back against the natural course of human isolation. It lifts the Spirit, engages the mind, enlivens the soul, warmly embraces against the pain. The works reach out in friendship, and we welcome and appreciate them every single time.”*

*“One of my fondest memories as a patient at the Cleveland Clinic was viewing the art in the heart center. For me it had a very calming effect on what was a very anxious time for me...”*

## Commissions

“The artwork in our buildings is not an afterthought,” says Executive Director Joanne Cohen. “Art is truly an integral part of the environment.” In the case of new construction,

Ms. Cohen and her team may begin planning up to two years before the building begins. They collaborate with architects and administrators to discuss everything from lighting to patient flow in the different spaces. The team takes special pride in the site-specific artworks it was able to commission for the Sydell and Arnold Miller Pavilion, Glickman Tower – respectively housing the Cleveland Clinic’s prestigious Heart & Vascular Institute, Urological & Kidney Institute – and Hillcrest Hospital, a Cleveland Clinic Community Hospital.

For the Miller Family Pavilion, the Art Program commissioned *Cleveland Soul* by Catalan sculptor Jaume Plensa (featured on this Journal’s website). The figure, made up stainless steel letters seated on a giant five ton boulder, welcomes visitors to the hospital. The face is intentionally left blank to signify the “every person” who walks through the doors. Cleveland Clinic is a diverse and global environment, receiving over 4.2 million visits a year. Patients come for treatment from every state and from more than 80 countries. “We wanted an artwork at the new main entrance to the hospital that would speak to this diversity,” says Ms. Cohen. “Cleveland Soul embodies the Clinic’s global nature in that our bodies and souls are very similar, and language is one of the ties that bind us all together.”

Another commission, funded by an anonymous donor, *BlueBerg (r11i01)* hangs in the Great Hall in Glickman Tower (featured on this Journal’s website). “Artist Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle is the quintessential artist/explorer,” says Jennifer Finkel, Curator in the Art Program. “This sculpture, in particular, speaks to the innovation at the Clinic, as well as the marriage of art and science.”

Curators say that Manglano-Ovalle’s artwork evokes reactions ranging from awe and wonder to bewilderment. Manglano-Ovalle collaborates with architects, astrophysicists, meteorologists, and medical ethicists to create technologically sophisticated sculptures, and this iceberg is no exception. Comprised of 1650 blue aluminum rods and 521 plastic joints that were assembled like a giant Tinker Toy, *BlueBerg (r11i01)* evolved from a body of work based on actual scientific data of an existing iceberg drifting in the Labrador Sea. The 460-foot iceberg, # r11i01, was scanned by the Canadian Hydraulic Center using radar and sonar. Using data provided by the scientist, the artist then went on to spend more than a year working with Chicago architect Colin Franzen to create the first version of the sculpture, which was the prototype for the the Clinic’s 30 foot iceberg.

“Metaphors abound for an iceberg in the hospital setting,” says Ms. Finkel. “For instance, there is the fact that eighty to

eighty-five percent of an iceberg is below water. This relates to the hospital in that what a patient and/or visitor may not know is that for every one physician at Cleveland Clinic there are sixteen to eighteen people who support that physician, working behind the scenes on behalf of the patient.”

For a recent expansion and renovation at Hillcrest Hospital, a community hospital, Los Angeles based photographer Catherine Opie used Lake Erie as a backdrop for her site-specific commission. Growing up on the lake in Sandusky, Ohio and spending many seasons of her youth watching its waves break on the shore and experiencing the changing vistas from month to month, Ms. Opie wanted to capture Ohio’s inherent natural beauty throughout all four seasons. *Somewhere in the Middle* captures the dramatic skies and blue waters of a summer evening and the more solemn overcast skies and icy waters of a winter day. Ms. Opie reflects: “I want the piece to be a source of meditation and contemplation in which the viewer can be transported on a visual level as they either move past the piece or choose to sit with it. My hope is that this installation will be a place that visitors and staff seek out. For those from the area it will serve as a reminder of all that exists just outside the walls of Hillcrest Hospital, the entire world’s potential and natural beauty. For visitors new to the area I believe it will inspire awe and reflection on the great resources available to them in Northern Ohio.”

Other commissions include a second installation from Jaume Plensa entitled *Whispering*; eight glass elevator walls by New York based artist Alyson Shotz; a 95 foot long wall painting by New York based artist Sarah Morris; two video projections in a children’s lobby by Polish artist Dominik Lejman; and two paintings by Cleveland artist Hildur Jonnsson for a nondenominational chapel.

## Programming

Cleveland Clinic recognizes that educational programming is a key component in collecting contemporary art. Didactic wall labels accompany each artwork, providing a brief artist’s biography as well as information about the specific piece. The label lists collections, awards, and important exhibitions where the artist’s work has been included.

There are several options for tours of the collection. Trained docents, called Art Ambassadors, offer three different tours on Wednesdays and Saturdays for patients, families, visitors and staff. Curators in the Art Program will give tours to special interest groups. Or, a patient, visitor or staff member may decide to go on a self-guided

tour utilizing the Art Audio Tour, created by Acoustiguide. Funded by a donation, the Art Audio Tour (available in three languages: English, Spanish and Arabic) is free and features 35 highlights of the collection. The audio tour contains over an hour of content and includes commentary from curators, commissioned artists and employees.

The Art Program invites local and visiting artists to lecture for patients, families and employees. Many of these artists’ talks have centered on our current exhibition on view. As part of its mission to support the local arts community, the Art Program has a designated exhibition space to showcase artwork from regional artists, highlights from its own collection, and artworks on loan from galleries, corporate and private collections. Past exhibitions have dealt with themes as diverse as outer space to images of the Yangtze River and the Three Gorges Dam in China; from notions of empathy and art to portraiture and identity; from looking at the world from a bird’s eye view to experiencing our world through the lens of abstraction. “Exhibitions, artists’ talks, and panel discussions have allowed us to reach the broad audience we serve within our walls as well as our community,” says Ms. Cohen.

For patients who cannot leave their rooms, the Art Program created a Patient TV loop to bring artwork to the bedside. Played on a relaxation channel and a designated Arts & Medicine channel, the DVD loop features 150 works in the collection and is set to soothing music. This video is also played in waiting areas in Cleveland Clinic Community Hospitals and Family Health Centers. Ambulatory inpatients can enjoy art history lessons twice a month broadcast to the main campus, and to the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health in Las Vegas, via high definition videoconferencing from the Cleveland Museum of Art. Called Distance Learning, the program allows patients, families and staff to enjoy talks from the Medieval Age to the Modern Age, and from Rembrandt to Picasso through the world-renowned Cleveland Museum of Art collection.

Most recently, the Art Program began offering art tours once a month for people with memory loss and their care partners. This is a joint program between Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Alzheimer’s Association (Cleveland chapter). This tour, called Art in the Afternoon, is based on the Museum of Modern Art in New York’s Alzheimer Project and is intended for small groups of ten to twelve participants. These tours are designed to provide a forum for conversation inspired by individual artworks in the collection.

## Conclusion

Artwork on display at Cleveland Clinic functions on many levels, from activating spaces, to providing a means to escape and relieve stress, to provoking humor, to inspiring creativity and discussion, or simply to serving a utilitarian purpose like a way finding device as a visitor navigates their way from building to building. The artwork is formally integrated into the environment such that the visual culture at Cleveland Clinic is part of the overall vision of providing outstanding patient care based upon the principles of cooperation, compassion and innovation. In conclusion, I end with text from an artwork in the collection by Jonathan Borofsky: Art is For the Spirit.

## Acknowledgements

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