

The Art of Healing

The hospital's fine art collection of donated museum-quality pieces does much more than educate and beautify: It is a testament to the healing powers of art.

BY NANCY SOKOLER STEINER



Kellie Davies admires Alexander Calder's *Number 9* tapestry, displayed in the lobby of the S. Mark Taper Foundation Imaging Center.

The words echoed in artist Laddie John Dill's head as he shuffled through the corridors of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, working to regain his mobility after hip surgery: "Some day you'll thank me."

They accompanied him on other occasions throughout the years: while waiting for test results with friends or relatives and anticipating the delivery of his grandson: "Some day you'll thank me."

These words had been spoken to Dill more than three decades earlier by philanthropist and art patron Marcia Simon Weisman.

"I was a young artist at the time, and Marcia approached me about donating a piece to Cedars-Sinai," recalls Dill. "Back then, I couldn't imagine ever ending up in a hospital, but she told me, 'Some day you'll thank me.' And she was right."

Dill is referring to his gratitude for the fine art collection gracing the walls of Cedars-Sinai. "When you're looking at a Calder or a Lichtenstein ... it takes your mind off things," says Dill, who creates works combining natural pigments with man-made materials including glass, cement, and metal.

Marcia Weisman initiated the collection in the 1970s. When her husband, Frederick, was hospitalized, she brought one of his favorite paintings to his room. Inspired by how the art lifted his spirits, Weisman became convinced that art promoted healing. She donated several pieces to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, and convinced friends and other artists — including Dill — to contribute as well.

Today, the hospital's collection includes more than 4,000 museum-quality pieces, consisting of original paintings, limited-edition prints, and sculpture. It boasts works by such luminaries as Alexander Calder, David Hockney, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Pablo Picasso, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol.

Weisman was prescient in her intuition about the healing power of art. According to a National Endowment for the Arts report, art promotes health and well-being, and can have a positive impact on the mood of patients, their families, and the healthcare professionals who are tending to them.

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—BRUCE SAMUELS, MD

Cardiologist Bruce Samuels, MD, couldn't agree more. "The main purpose of our collection is to promote healing," says Dr. Samuels, who chairs Cedars-Sinai Medical Center's Advisory Council for the Arts. The group — comprising art professionals including artists, art consultants, and gallery owners — oversees the Medical Center's collection.

"As a physician, I was exposed to the collection daily and dove into the world of contemporary art," says Samuels, who was so impressed and

affected by the collection that he joined the Advisory Council for the Arts. "My goal is to see art play an integral part in our patients' lives."

Contributions to the collection come from a variety of sources: grateful patients, members of the Board of Directors, staff physicians, and word of mouth among members of the art community. "We've gotten some wonderful, unique pieces from donors," says Advisory Council member Jane Glassman.

Alice Lainer felt her two John Okulick sculptures would be in good company at the Medical Center. "We knew that Cedars-Sinai had a nice collection of Southern California artists, many of whom we've collected over the years," she says. "We were thrilled to find a place for the pieces where they would be enjoyed and appreciated."

The collection is also playing a key part in the rehabilitation process, with curator John T. Lange giving tours to certain patients who need to move around to aid their recuperation. "Patients are motivated to take a few extra steps or get out of their wheelchairs to get a closer look at the art," he says. One recent excursion, which normally lasts less than one hour, extended to 2½ hours. "Patients just kept asking to see more and

more, and it went longer and longer. Finally, the nurses had to put an end to it," says Lange.

Staff members are as enthusiastic as patients. "I'm very passionate about the art," says Kellie Davies, project manager at the S. Mark Taper Foundation Imaging Center. Davies was particularly struck by the response of children to the artwork. "I've seen a father scoop up his baby son and walk up to a picture. Having something to focus on helped to divert the toddler and calm him down," she says. "The art draws children in and distracts them in ways I didn't imagine possible."

In addition to its capacity to affect mood, the fine art collection serves another role. "It's a unique opportunity for us to help educate the community about the art and the artists," notes Lange, "and expose patients and visitors to a culture of the arts."

Ultimately, however, it's the healing power of

the art that drives the collection. As a patient — and one who has spent time waiting for friends and relatives undergoing procedures in the Medical Center — artist Laddie John Dill knows this well. "You're walking the halls and you're kind of nervous ... but to see something you can actually lock into that's worth looking at — not just a poster, but the real thing — really helps to alleviate the anxiety." ■

For more information on making a donation of art to the collection, call 323-866-7798