



THE BENEFITS OF ART, MEDITATION AND STORYTELLING IN HEALTH CARE

By BETH CARROLL

Photography by MARK WASHBURN

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When Julie Püttgen (<http://www.turtlenosedsnake.com/thangkas.html>) was approached about the possibility of displaying her art at the Medical Center she knew immediately where she wanted the exhibit to go—the gallery space on the 4th floor hallway just outside two intensive care units. “I have very strong memories of this being a place of purgatory for a lot of people,” she says, “either someone they loved had been in some kind of traumatic accident, and it was unclear whether they were going to survive or not; or people knew they were keeping vigil for someone who was dying.” Using the long hallway as a kind of contemplative space where people could think would be using the space for good, she thought.

An artist and meditation teacher, Püttgen completed her Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) (<http://med.dartmouth-hitchcock.org/pastoral.html>) through the Chaplaincy Department here at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC) in 2014, and the many encounters she had with those dealing with illness are incorporated in her exhibit. Marianne Barthel, art program coordinator, describes Püttgen’s work as “a cross between Buddhist tapestry and the popular photo series Humans of New York (<http://www.humansofnewyork.com/>).” Her paintings are mounted on fabric scrolls sewn from bed sheets with accompanying words that tell stories that hint at the inner lives of the people they depict. “When you’re a patient in the hospital there is a tremendous longing for home and domestic space” says Püttgen, “using ordinary materials like bed sheets is part of telling the story of the sacred space of home.” The message seems to resonate with those who are dealing with difficult situations as evidenced in an email she received.

Recently I spent a weekend with my 92-year-old mom at DHMC. When she was sleeping I walked around, feeling sorry for my mom for good reason, and myself for not such a good reason. As I was walking, I read and viewed your art. It made me feel so much better. Thank you so much for sharing! It is all beautiful.
Nancy Bicknell Smith

Barthel says it’s not unusual to see people stop in the hallway to take in the exhibit. “It’s exciting to have a slightly different medium that really engages the public in a different way,” she says. “So much of our art is appreciated on the go, this exhibit really forces interaction—it almost creates a dialogue. You have to stop and read to understand it.” Püttgen hopes the exhibit can provide a lifeline to those struggling with illness. “I do think there is a healing possibility for public art in the hospital,” she says, “not just as a kind of escape from what’s troubling you, but as a way of engaging directly with it.”

Julie Püttgen’s work remains on view through March 30, 2015. It’s part of the 2015 Winter Rotating Art Exhibit (http://www.dartmouth-hitchcock.org/arts/rotating_exhibitions.html) at DHMC, which features the work of local and regional artists in seven different gallery-type spaces within the Medical Center.



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—Julie Püttgen, Artist & Meditation Teacher

To learn more about Julie Puttgen's artwork click here (<http://www.turtlenosedsnake.com/thankas.html>). Information on meditation classes and workshops can be found here (<http://www.justospace.com/>).