

Akron Beacon Journal/Ohio.com

Entertainment & Life

Art helps heal at Summa Health's Akron City Hospital

By Anderson Turner / ABJ/Ohio.com correspondent

Posted May 29, 2019 at 9:32 PM

Updated May 29, 2019 at 9:32 PM

"Arts in health and healing is the integration of any art form to a wide variety of health care and community settings for therapeutic, educational, and expressive purposes and has been proven to benefit patients, their families, and their caregivers."

— Americans for the Arts

The healing power of the visual arts, both in its use as art therapy and in its display, has been well documented.

Several area hospitals have made large commitments to the visual arts, including University Hospitals and the Cleveland Clinic, both of which employ full-time curators for their art collections.

An exciting development in local health care is happening with the opening of the new patient tower on Summa Health's Akron City Hospital campus. It's a state-of-the-art facility that also contains more than 50 pieces of art in various mediums, made by more than 40 featured artists with ties to Northeast Ohio.

Each of the tower's 108 private patient rooms, every birthing unit and NICU room features a piece of artwork to enhance the experience of being in the hospital for patients, visitors and staff.

Summa's website says the campus "embraces Summa's commitment to promoting a health care environment that surrounds and connects patients, visitors and staff with the healing powers of the arts." Touring the new building, one would find it hard to disagree with this statement.

Brightly lit and thoughtfully designed rooms and common spaces are greatly enhanced by different types of artworks in a variety of shapes, styles, colors and subject matter. It's a joyous and uplifting experience to see all of it at once, and hopefully that energy will translate to patients who need to spend time there.

The selection of the art in the new tower was done by members of the Summa's Leadership Council Curatorial Committee, led by curatorial chair Meg Harris Stanton of Harris Stanton Galleries.

A signature commission was awarded after a juried competition open to all artists with an Ohio connection.

The winning work is "A Way with Words," featured in the two-story main lobby. The piece is made out of polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, plaster, gold leaf, aluminum leaf, copper leaf, pigment and is quite large at 160.5 x 96 x 5.5 inches in size. It was created by Diana Al-Hadid, a Kent State University School of Art graduate and Canton native now working in New York.

The piece references "the leading role that Akron played in the rubber industry since the late 19th century, while the subject matter draws upon the even older impact of natural and man-made waterways on life in our part of Ohio." The artist uses different material to suggest light, water, mist and rock in an image of the waterfall at Lock 3 in downtown Akron.

Like all of Al-Hadid's work, this piece has an exuberant energy and sense of movement that defines her style. Perhaps most importantly, the energy and light the piece exudes fits well in the hospital lobby and even enhances the open spaces in this part of the building that features huge windows and expansive views.

"Shadows" is a digital ceramic frit on three glass panels by Taryn McMahon. The work is derived from a photo McMahon took of plant materials found in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, which was made into a print and then scanned for this project. The piece divides a section of the hospital located just off the main lobby area. It is light blue to dark blue and can be seen in the round.

This work enhances and is enhanced by the architecture of the building and feels full of life, as the imagery is recognizable but is also just out of focus. The style reflects much of the same energy and impressions as a walk through one of Akron's many parks.

Artwork goes all over the building and outside as well. There is a joyful and expressive work by sculptor Stephen Canneto titled “Beacon of Well-Being,” made from laser-cut stainless steel, plasma-cut dichroic and stained glass. The sculpture is central to the entrance of the tower and features several human forms joyfully chasing or playing with a multicolored ball.

“King’s Blue Persian Set with Scarlet Lip Wrap” is a blown-glass piece by internationally famous artist Dale Chihuly. Chihuly spent time teaching at the Kent Blossom Art Intensives in the early 1980s, and an exhibition of his work in 1999 drew thousands to the Akron Art Museum. He also created the blue polymer sculpture on the campus of the University of Akron.

He is famous for making works of glass that are bright in color and that highlight the motion and process of glass blowing, while also retaining a hand drawn or even gestural quality. This particular work is made of seven individual pieces that have placed inside a vitrine-topped pedestal.

There are dozens of works throughout the new building. One highlight is “Building Up” by Scott Goss, which is made of silkscreened, sandblasted, engraved, drawn and painted glass panels that have been fused. The work explores many of the large commercial or civic architectural forms in downtown Akron, as well as the houses found in its various neighborhoods.

Located in the waiting room on the fifth floor, the piece captures the sense you have when you are looking out of the many windows in this new building. Goss has played down architectural patterns in colors that range from a deep red to yellow, and has then taken recognizable house silhouettes and laid them over the colored patterns in white. The piece is three-dimensional and two-dimensional at the same time, and like so many of the works here, it has a dynamic sense of movement and presence.

While the artwork in the new patient tower at City Hospital is not a stand-alone exhibition, walking through the halls, it’s easy to think of the work that way.

The hospital should be congratulated for taking such an innovative approach to integrating art into its new building, and it will be exciting to see how the collection continues to grow and change over the years to come.

Contact Anderson Turner at haturner3@gmail.com.