

Betty Kern

About the artist: (Researching info on Betty Kern)

A new brochure is available to guide and inform staff, patients, and visitors about some of the artworks in the Health Center's growing art collection.

Art is everywhere at the Health Center.

The collection now comprises more than 1,400 pieces of art valued at more than \$1,000,000, thanks mainly to the generosity of individuals and artists who donate the pieces.

The brochure, *Healing Pathways*, was developed by the Health Center's Art Committee.

Available at the hospital information desk, *Healing Pathways* features the location and description of more than 20 various works of art created by accomplished artists.

"The art committee believes in the importance of an environment that gives the spirit a lift, encourages reflection and rest, generates creative thought, brings a smile, and relieves stress," says Linda Webber, Health Center art curator.

"Art can do those things. It has healing abilities for the spirit and the body. It enhances the environment and promotes the sense of a caring community. It's intended to strengthen self-worth and provide an aesthetic experience."

Among the art featured is Frank Stella's "River of Ponds" tapestry, with its overlapping and geometric forms draping the wall in the main lobby by the escalator.

A similar Stella tapestry is on display at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Also featured is "Line Drawing" by Sol LeWitt, located along the corridor of administrative offices.

His distinct use of color, line, and shape has brought him international appeal and recognition in the area of conceptual art.

LeWitt's works are on display in Connecticut fine art museums, and in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum, and the Museum of Modern Art.

Connecticut artist James Grabowski, who enjoys an international reputation, is also highlighted. His mural "The DaVinci Touch," awash with bold colors and shapes, hangs behind the main lobby's information desk.

The brochure also features sculptures by Wolfgang Behl, Jane Dedecker, James Stabeneau, and Bill Wood; paintings by Suzanne Howes-Stevens, **Betty Kern**, and Barbara Levin; murals by Tracy Kane and Linda Webber; bas reliefs by Bonnie Johnson; photographs by Isadore Berson; an original Babar the Elephant drawing by Laurent deBrunhoff; a commemorative quilt by Ruth de Groff; a collage by Felix Bronner; prints by Anni Albers and 19th-century Tokyo master Adno Tokutarto; and a mobile by Hans Stargardter.

Also included in the brochure is information about the "Tree of Life," the cement bas-relief sculpture by Wopo Holup, commissioned and funded by the State of Connecticut through the Connecticut Commission on the Arts and Department of Public Works 2000, and background on the Health Center's architectural style and the vision of its designer, Vincent Kling.

The art featured is in the mezzanine, main, and lower lobbies of the main hospital entrance and the administrative hallway.



The brochure also highlights outdoor sculptures on the upper and lower campus.

"The brochure offers just a small sampling that can be easily viewed," says Webber, "but we encourage everyone to look around and take a moment to appreciate the art that lies around almost every corner."

The Health Center's art program was conceived in 1979 by the auxiliary and was spearheaded by Celeste LeWitt, a Health Center volunteer and art enthusiast.

Soon afterward, an art advisory committee was formed, with membership including Connecticut artists; faculty from UConn, the University of Hartford, and Central Connecticut State University; Health Center employees; and auxiliary board members.

In 1984, the auxiliary donated the collection to the Health Center.

A Healing Hearth

By Theresa Sullivan Barger

Judy Potts is the kind of woman who counts her blessings - blessings like Ken, her loving husband of 41 years, and being able to dance at her son's wedding and play with her grandson.

Potts doesn't let her six-year struggle with ovarian cancer get her down. But because of her illness, she retired early, and she spends a lot of time in her Vernon home, especially in her living room.

So she welcomed the chance for a free consultation from interior designer Lisa Skelley as part of a program for women with ovarian cancer offered by the national Interior Redesign Industry Specialists organization.

Before she came, "There was something about the room that I was not comfortable with. I didn't know what it was," Potts says. "Now I love the room. Whether it made a difference health-wise, I don't know. But I feel better in the room."

Research shows a link exists between one's environment and one's outlook. Roger Ulrich, an architecture professor at Texas A&M University who is an international expert in "evidence-based design," concluded that hospital design influences patients and found a link between the physical design of health-care facilities and patient safety, stress levels, how well patients respond to medical treatments and overall quality of care.

Colors can be soothing and buoying, or they can be depressing. Details as simple as removing clutter and placing furniture strategically can make a room more inviting and comfortable, designers say.

In homes, hospices and health-care settings, there has been a growing effort to create an uplifting environment for people who are ill. Artwork, calming wall colors and careful furniture placement promote good feelings.

For example, the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington has more than 1,500 original works of art in its collection, most of them donated, and the paintings, sculptures, quilts, photographs and murals are displayed throughout the hospital and clinics.

Seeing something of beauty is comforting in a time of stress, particularly when someone is dealing with illness - their own, a loved one's or a patient's, says Celeste LeWitt, a hospital auxiliary volunteer who started collecting art for the hospital in 1979 and since has worked with a team of volunteers to manage the collection.

When Farmington resident Ray Elling was recuperating from a hip-replacement operation, there were times when he felt too weak to read, he says. He appreciated the artwork in the waiting room and hallways at UConn. What he enjoyed most, he says, was watching a video on the TV in his room that showed each piece of the hospital's artwork in leisurely sequence.

"It's quieting and restful," says Elling. "I think it makes a difference."

At UConn's Neag Comprehensive Cancer Center, when patients face Dr. Joel Levine at his desk, they see four floral watercolors by artist Betty Kern on the wall behind him. More than half his patients ask about the artwork in his office, Levine says, and talking about the art allows doctor and patient to connect as people.

"The purpose of the art is to pull you away from yourself," says Levine, co-director of the Colon Cancer Prevention Program. "Stress-reduction is not just a feel-good thing."

The Comprehensive Cancer Center at Rhode Island Hospital in Providence completed a four-year redesign in 2005 aimed at promoting wellness through a warm, inviting, cheerful environment, says Sandy Stamoulis, who served as senior vice president for cancer services and oversaw the work before retiring.

"Our mission was, when patients came, we knew we couldn't cure everyone, but we sure as hell could care for them," the former chief nurse says. Skeptics may dismiss the effort as a gimmick, but Stamoulis says she has witnessed the effects first-hand and is glad she delayed her retirement to finish the project.

"It was probably the best thing I ever did in my life. I lost a sister to breast cancer. There were lots of times I would see her sitting in the dark and being very depressed," she says. "It made me very aware of how important it was to treat not just the physical, but the emotional and spiritual."

In the radiation oncology clinic at the Comprehensive Cancer Center, AquaVista 500 fish aquariums that are only 4-1/2 inches thick hang on the wall in the waiting area like works of art. Patients waiting for radiation treatments, and their families, sit on benches across from the aquariums, watching the fish.

"It really seems to have a soothing effect," says Deborah Crowell, the practice manager for the clinic's physicians' group. "It's kind of relaxing."

Multiple studies back up her observations, showing that just five minutes with real or simulated natural settings can lower stress, lower blood pressure and lift people's spirits, reports Ulrich, the architecture professor.

What works in hospitals works in homes, too, says Skelley, the redesigner who helped Potts with her home. Your environment affects your spirit, says Skelley, owner of LJS Interiors in Avon. Having colors you like and good design doesn't have to mean making your home look like a page from a magazine.

"People think decorating is about looking nice and spending a lot of money," she says. "It doesn't have to be expensive. It has to be about surrounding yourself with things that you love and things that are meaningful to you." Even before Skelley arrived to help, Potts had planned on painting the living room a deep lavender that reminds her of a sunset. Skelley suggested she buy some accent pillows in the same hue for her couch.

Skelley also moved the furniture to cluster it closer together and create a pathway from the entrance hall through the living room into the adjoining dining room. That eliminated the need to maneuver around furniture. Skelley also rearranged the chairs, grouped some angels from Potts' collection atop the entertainment center and made suggestions about accessories.

"It really made everything cozier and it really opened up the room," Potts says. "I don't know if [the alterations] changed my life, but they certainly have changed the feeling in the room. Friends say the room is so warm and cozy."