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Lake County artists *Brenda Heim* and *Doug Hays* have found fulfilling venues beyond galleries and museums as more medical communities embrace the importance of art to healing.

STORY BY MARY ANN DESANTIS PHOTOS BY FRED LOPEZ

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Brenda Heim and Doug Hays holding a maquette of their collaborative work — The Particle and the Wave.

eyes on the

artists

Art is the expression of the human soul and Lake and Sumter counties are alive with artistic talent. Artists, sculptors, actors and actresses... come inside and take a look at the beauty that fills their world and spills over into ours.

Once upon a time,

artists' ultimate goals were to see their works placed prominently in galleries and museums. While having art work in those venues is still an honor, abstract painter Brenda Heim and metal sculptor Doug Hays find installing their artworks in public environments, especially medical facilities, to be even more fulfilling.

"Our art can touch more people in well-planned spaces that combine beauty and functionality," says Heim. "We work from the standpoint that art is integral to the space and not just an addition."

Their works are included in the art collection for the South Lake Hospital's new lobby addition in Clermont. Two of Heim's large acrylic, ink and graphite canvas paintings flank a landing space above the lobby where Hays' anodized steel

sance splendor in Italy, where Michelangelo's tutor, Domenico Ghirlandaio, created vibrant frescoes on the walls of Florence's Hospital of the Innocents in 1445. In 1860, America's own Florence Nightingale said that art had as much effect on a physical body as it did on a mind. She believed that a variety of forms, brilliant colors, and light aided in patients' recoveries.

Nightingale most likely would have been a fan of the vibrant colors in Heim's paintings and the forged metal sculptures that Hays says imparts motion and expression. Heim's large acrylic and oil canvases at South Lake Hospital are representative of the Zen-like abstracts for which she is known.

"Normally art consultants would not consider abstract art for healthcare, but the artworks Heim and Hays produce have a strong intuitive relationship to archetype images that people associate with health, vitality and positive in-

trance. In addition, 45 employee photographs and other pieces of art were incorporated into the collection as a way to create a less stressful and more inviting environment for patients, family members, and visitors.

"Brenda and Doug's artwork is very contemporary, which we feel helps invoke a welcoming environment that is not typically found in medical facilities," says Kim Couch, community relations manager for South Lake Hospital. "We are focused on creating a healing, soothing environment throughout our campus and this piece helped to tie that into the expansion."

Creating sculptures for public venues is not new for Hays, whose iron creations are well known around Central Florida and the Southeast. His eye-catching 14-foot metal sculpture of a Florida heron in the Ferran Park fountain and his forged steel arch over McCulloch's

"Brenda's and Doug's work connect people to positive memories and associations..."

— Michael Lehman, Art consultant at Bobosart Art

sculpture is the focal point. The couple is also working with Cornerstone Hospice and Palliative Care of Lake and Sumter County on a project that would use art and sculpture for donors' naming opportunities.

"Some time ago, we shifted from working with individual clients to working with a team of consultants, and architects to create soothing and restorative environments," says Heim, who has worked as a commissioned abstract artist since 1989.

The link between art and healing is not a new idea. Ancient Greeks believed calm surroundings containing statues and mosaics contributed to the healing of minds and bodies. By the 15th century, hospitals were part of the Renais-

trospection," says art consultant Michael Lehman of Bobosart Art. The Orlando-based corporate arts consultancy group provides fine art and related services to corporations, architects, and interior designers and was instrumental in putting together the South Lake Hospital collection.

"In general, landscapes, warm and positive portraits, and nature photography work best in healthcare," says Lehman. "However, we find abstract art with strong references to nature or with positive and intuitive relationships to motion, vitality, and spiritual reflection is an excellent choice as well."

The hospital chose Heim's and Hays' design because it complemented the lobby space and created a focal point in the main en-

Alley, both in Eustis, blend the worlds of art and architecture. A long-time advocate for bringing art to the public, Hays believes today's competitive environment has actually led to a cultural Renaissance.

"We see an enormous number of highly talented artists right now, and they are discovering more opportunities than ever to be creative," he says.

Hays and Heim hope to use some of their creativity with Cornerstone Hospice and Palliative Care, where commissioned art could be unique remembrances for patients. The project initially began with a few ideas for Cornerstone's Conley House, but quickly expanded to other locations. With naming opportunities for rooms limited, Cornerstone looked for





other ways to recognize donors. Dedicating art pieces that enhanced gardens and public areas would be a natural fit in an environment that is often stressful and exhausting for families.

"We try to use soothing colors and art to make families more comfortable and to make the rooms look less sterile," says Nick Buchholz, Cornerstone Foundation's executive director. "We'd like to plan more areas for respite, but we have to rely on donor support to add this kind of art."

Heim and Hays have helped to design a donor handbook, *Giving and Remembrance through Art*, which offers a broad range of giving and philanthropic levels via fine art and sculpture. Buchholz said the pamphlet will be given to people who may be interested in placing a piece of permanent artwork to honor a loved one.

"Brenda's and Doug's work connect people to positive memories and associations and to the power of possibility in this life and beyond," adds consultant Lehman. "Their art is both reflective and restorative."

For more than 22 years, Heim has specialized in site-specific work for private and corporate clients. Hays has worked exclusively with designers and builders producing commissioned, site-specific work and functional sculptures for more than 19 years. Both artists say they thrive in an environment where teamwork produces beautiful results and that's what led them to an affiliation with Lehman's consulting firm seven years ago.

"It's a marriage that happens between artists and the facility's designers," explains Heim. "Working with a team that includes architects, engineers, and designers as well as artists has nurtured and re-fueled my passion for commission work... touching a deeper part of my creative purpose."

"He, she, we"

Becoming a mover-and-shaker in the arts community was not in Hays' original career path. Armed with a bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of Central Florida in 1992, the Paisley, Fla. native worked as a substitute teacher while he learned the craft of blacksmithing.

"I forged and welded little things," he recalls. "The very core of metal sculpturing began in the blacksmithing tradition."

By the end of 1992, Hays had a portfolio to show to designers, architects, and galleries. The self-taught artist is now represented in galleries throughout the country. His elaborate forged steel stair railings grace exclusive homes, including one on the island of Martinique, and his elegant metal sculptures are seen in upscale neighborhoods like Heathrow near Orlando. He still enjoys "bringing life to steel, imparting a feeling of

motion and expression to an unyielding and heavy material." Current projects include metal and wood conference tables for a bank in Mount Dora as well as pieces for the Mount Dora Sculpture Garden.

Heim's Umatilla studio is filled with paints and large-scale works in progress. A native of Alliance, Ohio, she came to Florida in 1976 and attended Lake-Sumter Community College. Her paintings are influenced by calligraphy and punctuated by vivid colors and oversized brush strokes that evoke Zen-like qualities.

"My work is created in the same primitive manner as was in the beginning and is still a visual language — one that expresses raw emotion, primal sensuality and spontaneous

creativity," says Heim. "Through this process my work imbues and evokes energy, demanding of itself to be experienced."

She specializes in site-specific commissions and her works are included in a number of private, corporate and public art collections in Naples, New York, Vancouver, Luxembourg, and other places.

Heim and Hays met in the early-1990s when he forged metal bars to hang her tapestries. They describe each other as "muses who mutually inspire." They recently created a brochure called "He, She, We" that summarizes their journeys as both solo artists and collaborative partners.

"We work well together with design and planning because we have similar senses of rhythm and line," explains Hays.

Heim adds, "It's like musicians working together to compose a piece."

Both emphasize that their collaboration with each other is simply a third line of work. They work hard to keep independent careers.

"Every artist has a path of professional development," says Heim. "Right now ours is to bring art into environments that are accessible to the public. Doug and I share a common interest of working and placing art where it will touch more people's lives."

Want to know more?
www.DougHaysArt.com
www.HeimArt.com

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED:

Art for healing

Art consultant Suzanne Friedman knows how to find beautiful art. Earlier this fall, she perused art shows and galleries, talked to friends, and looked for local artists whose works would add a soothing dimension to the new Moffitt Cancer Center in The Villages. She wanted pieces that represented water, nature, life, and light — all subjects that resonate well in healthcare environments.

"The challenge was to find art that would flow together and would present the same theme," says Friedman, owner of Mendi Fine Art Source. "I also had to find artists who were willing to donate their works for at least six months."

The Moffitt Cancer Center officially opens in early December and among the cancer-fighting equipment will be 33 pieces of art by 11 different artists who all live in the area. Most of the art will rotate out every six months.

"The wonderful thing about this project is the artists were willing and open, and they felt privileged to be selected," says Friedman. "All of the art came from a feeling of service and giving."

Philanthropy runs deep in Friedman's philosophy about work and life. "It's all about service," she explains. "Wonderful things happen when you volunteer and give."

It was her own volunteer work with Alliance Healthcare Foundation and her donations of art for fundraising events that led to her assignment to find local artists for the center. She had the art custom-framed and then coordinated how the pieces would be displayed throughout the 50,000 square-foot facility.

All different mediums are represented in the collection: watercolors, acrylics, mixed media, colored pencil, pen and ink, photography, and more. Artists of all experiences levels were chosen for the project.

"Some have been artists all their lives, while others only a few years," Friedman explains. "Don Lubov, whose pen and ink drawings are showcased in an office area, is a seasoned artist who has had work in New York City galleries."

The long corridors are filled with beautiful pieces of art that seemingly transform the medical facility into a gallery. Comfortable chairs tucked into alcoves are surrounded by exquisite drawings, and dressing room décor features tranquil scenes that bring the outside light in.

The gallery-caliber results are indeed stunning and show why Friedman has been a sought-after fine arts consultant in both California and Florida since she opened her company in 1998. Her talent not only includes selecting the right pieces for a client, but also finding the perfect framing and placement. She also recognizes the messages that art can convey.

"Art teaches us about life," she says as she describes a series of wildlife giclées by photographer Margaret Shark in the hallway leading to the linear accelerator room. "In the pictures, the ibis shows us that life is full of ups and downs. The gators illustrate that sinking feeling we often have before we realize things will turn out okay."



Suzanne Friedman