

## Three Critical Success Factors in Planning Healthcare Art Programs

Research has shown that appropriate artwork in the hospital setting can help reduce stress, the need for pain medication and length of stay. The principles of evidence-based design establish the foundation for selecting healthcare artwork. These guidelines indicate that nature is a healing element and that patients can be comforted when viewing familiar surroundings.

At Distinctive Art Source, all of our work is grounded in the principles of evidenced-based design. We help clients select artwork that is patient appropriate and facility appropriate. This often involves identifying images that reflect local landscapes, flora, fauna, recreation and lifestyles to create a familiar and comforting environment. We strive to customize each facility's art program by selecting artwork that represents the community, the locale and the hospital's guiding principles.

### Guiding Principles Shape the Foundation for An Art Program

When hospitals create art programs without direction or purpose, the art can become a visual distraction over time. The first step in creating an art program is to develop very clear guidelines or standards. These well-defined guiding principles help facilities manage the donation process while maximizing the benefits for the hospital, not the donor.

With an established system in place, the hospital will be able to gracefully accept or refuse artwork based on very specific parameters. These guidelines will be invaluable when a generous donor gifts a particular piece of art to the hospital or a staff member shares his or her talent in some way. In many cases, available or gifted artwork does not meet a hospital's needs or standards. Planning ahead can help prevent the development of reactive art programs by establishing a system for accepting, locating and acknowledging donations.

In addition to establishing donor parameters, guiding principles help create visual continuity that endures through the years and is not dependent on static committee members. When followed, they ensure continued support of the hospital's mission and brand.

Once the guiding principles are developed, the hospital can select appropriate images based on three critical success factors: content, placement and size.

Three Critical Success Factors:

#### 1. Content

Patients often feel separated from the community or isolated during their hospital stay. Familiar routines and surroundings have been replaced with stranger's faces, procedures, technology, machinery, odd noises and bright lights. Children have a difficult time adjusting to strange environments, and they are often separated from siblings, pets, and possibly one or both parents. It is hard for them to relax when all of their surroundings are unfamiliar and their days are full of strange faces and worried parents. Offering comfort to parents and children during a hospital visit can improve not only outcomes but also the hospital experience itself. Artwork can play a role in this type of stress reduction by offering positive distractions.

**Positive Distractions:** When a child views an image of a tree house and begins to talk about his dream tree house, or remembers the way the leaves smelled or the birds sounded the last time he was in a tree house, he has experienced a positive distraction. This allowed him to leave the moment and engage multiple senses in a happy memory. Remembering the tree house waiting for him may help his determination to get better and return to the pleasures that await him at home. If a parent can add to the conversation with memories of a tree house he built or climbed in as a child, recalling the sounds and smells experienced, the positive distraction has been shared.

Children's artwork can take many forms, all of which should be engaging, endearing and nurturing. Artwork that address all of these attributes can comfort children during their stay by helping them to realize from the moment they enter the hospital that they are in a special place for children being cared for by people who understand them.

**Engaging:** Artwork that elicits a response, starts a conversation, makes a connection or evokes a memory becomes engaging. When artwork engages viewers it provides a momentary escape or a positive distraction. Time spent discovering, remembering or escaping into artwork is time spent away from current stress.

**Endearing:** Children's artwork should evoke the joy of childhood. It should allow viewers of all ages to remember the days when anything was possible and most things were magical. Art that offers hope and possibilities, adds wonder and evokes joy is participatory artwork that provides positive distraction on many levels.

**Nurturing:** Children in a healthcare setting are away from the comforts of home and are often asked to participate in procedures that are unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Providing patients with artwork that portrays messages of love, protection, caring and comfort, can convey the staff's commitment to caring for patients physically and emotionally.

## 2. Placement

When deciding where artwork should be placed in the hospital setting, it is important to consider stress levels, length of viewing time and age of the viewer. Young children have only begun to build memories -- they experience the world as they are seeing it so

images do not evoke memories of past experiences. This may be a reason why color stimulation plays a large role in artwork aimed at young viewers. In contrast, adults have memories spanning many years that can be triggered through familiar imagery in artwork.

Artwork placed in areas of high stress (e.g., labs, exam rooms, emergency waiting rooms, procedure rooms, etc.) should offer serene, easily recognizable, full color spectrum scenes of nature with distant horizon lines and clear skies. The distant horizon line offers image depth and allows viewers to “enter the image.” The higher the stress level, the more important it is to offer comforting imagery. Familiar nature scenes can offer comfort as they remind the viewer he is close to home.

Low stress areas including elevator lobbies and corridors, have shorter viewing times. These locations offer different art opportunities. Placing memorable or identifying artwork in strategic locations can aid in way finding by establishing visual reference points as patients and families travel through the hospital.

When possible, artwork should be located so patients can view it directly from their natural patient position (in the bed, exam table or seat). The tendency to place art on the wall behind a row of seats (instead of across from it) should be avoided – the art will not be visible to patients when it is needed most.

Eye level is also important to consider when hanging artwork. Art installed at multiple heights can provide positive distractions as well as discovery opportunities to viewers (children and parents) of all ages and heights.

### 3. Size

Artwork size should be determined by the physical size of the intended space as well as maximum possible viewing distances. Images viewed from long distances should be clear and easily discernable from the furthest expected viewing distance. Art chosen for public spaces is usually larger than corridor or exam room art. Viewing images larger than life can provide details often missed when viewed in a natural setting. Grand scale art, now available in multiple mediums, can help create memorable spaces at reasonable costs.

When developing an art program, begin by defining goals and parameters to ensure long lasting success. Distinctive Art Source helps define goals, set donor acceptance parameters, plan budgets and provide options during the development stage. Our complimentary budget consultation can define and identify signature art costs as well as overall project art quantities and costs

Distinctive Art Source is a turnkey art consulting firm, working exclusively in healthcare. DAS guides clients through the process of creating customized patient-based art programs centered on patients, evidence-based design and client input. The company goals are twofold: to introduce unexpected art options and to involve local artists whenever possible. The firm's architectural background allows their team to blend seamlessly into the existing design process, providing facilities with necessary timelines and budgets to keep projects on schedule and within budget.

Established in 2003, Distinctive Art Source has served a pivotal role in creating patient-based art programs in millions of square feet of hospital space. DAS connects clients with hundreds of artists throughout the country to enable hospitals to conceptualize, visualize and realize the goals of their art programs.