

LAS VEGAS SUN

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Healing in art

Collection at Nevada Cancer Institute comforts, inspires

By **Kristen Peterson** <kristen@lasvegassun.com>

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The 200 pieces of contemporary art at the Nevada Cancer Institute represent a collection unrivaled in Nevada.

Ellsworth Kelly lithographs hang in a sitting area near the main lobby. Uta Barth nature photographs are featured above a help desk at the resource center.

Andy Warhol screen prints complement a waiting room and hang near a Robert Rauschenberg, which is down the hall from a Tim Bavington.

In a waiting area near the infusion suites, a Richard Bosman color etching, "Nightscape," breaks the reality of nearby pamphlets with sobering titles such as "Chemotherapy and You" and "When Someone in Your Family Has Cancer."

The mostly minimalist works are set in the facility's spa-like atmosphere, part of the co-founders' master plan of incorporating Strip-quality design and hospitality into the facility on Interstate 215 and Town Center Drive.

If one of art's highest aspirations is to lift the human spirit, that objective perhaps reaches its zenith at the institute, where art and design are meant to comfort and inspire patients and families at the state-of-the-art cancer research facility.

"The cancer community has many buildings that are lovely, but we wanted to take it one step further," said Heather Murren, president and chief executive of the institute. She founded the facility with husband Jim Murren, president and chief financial officer of MGM Mirage.

The Curator's Favorites

Michele Quinn, curator of the art collection at the Nevada Cancer Institute, has many favorites in the collection she helped organize. They include:

- Sing (Study-Green) by Tim Bavington
- L.A. UNCOVERED #9 by Robert Rauschenberg
- BLOOMING CACTUS by Elyn Zimmerman
- Nicola as an Orchid, Pink Nicola, Nicola by Gary Hume
- Green by Ellsworth Kelly
- Sunflower I by Ellsworth Kelly
- Sea State Five by Matthew Ritchie
- Peter Pans Flug by Glen Rubsamen
- Sunliners by Ed Ruscha
- TK 421 by David Ryan

"Our core competence is making beautiful and creative space that makes people feel special. So they took that care and put it in a medical setting. Everybody was motivated by a personal experience. We tried our best to put ourselves in the shoes of the patients and families and how they might feel."

In the art collection are works by established and emerging local, national and international artists, including Los Angeles artist John Baldessari, New Yorkers Leslie Wayne, Lisa Stefanelli and Arturo Herrera and Swedish-born artist Claes Oldenburg.

Michele Quinn, director of downtown's Godt-Cleary Projects and curator of the Nevada Cancer Institute's art collection, began gathering the works in October and November last year and by January was deep into purchasing.

Some of the art was part of Godt-Cleary's inventory. Other pieces were purchased from galleries in New York.

A Dale Chihuly sculpture in the lobby was donated by the artist. Sculptor Louis Longi's 25-foot bronze "Flight Invoked" is displayed out front.

There are no old masters in the collection -- by choice.

"It wouldn't work," Quinn said. "This is a progressive institution, so I think contemporary was a natural fit."

Much of the art incorporates nature imagery: Burt Barr's 2005 "Wave," a suite of five digital inkjet prints, are ocean scenes; Alex Katz's 1994 "Spruce" is an aquatint of the tree; and Ray Charles White's photo silkscreen on aluminum, "Resonate," is of raindrops falling on water.

Works by Edward Ruscha, Frank Stella, Donald Sultan and Sol Lewitt also are part of the collection.

Some of the more adventurous and daring pieces are works by abstract artist Elizabeth Murray and the late Saul Steinberg, whose whimsical color etchings greet patients at the admissions desk.

In lab areas, Ross Bleckner's aquatint etching "Cluster" and Tara Donovan's "Untitled" allude to cells on petri dishes under the microscope.

Docent tours will be offered through portions of the facility.

The effort, made possible by an anonymous donor, joins similar art collections in health care facilities across the country, including the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.; Detroit Receiving Hospital and University Health Care Center in Detroit; Children's Hospital and Health Center in San Diego; and Los Angeles' Cedars-Sinai, which has a collection of 5,000 sculptures, prints and paintings.

Both the institute and Quinn declined to specify the amount donated to purchase the collection.

Paula Terry, director of the AccessAbility office with the National Endowment for the Arts, said that the growing trend of art in health care facilities creates a more humanizing environment.

"In some of the hospitals they have murals on the operating room ceilings," Terry said. "It changes the whole atmosphere of the medical center. It helps families relax more when visiting patients."

The movement got going in the 1970s, although the arts have been used in healing since ancient times, said Gay Hanna, executive director of the Society for the Arts in Healthcare. A member-based nonprofit organization in Washington, it advocates integrating arts into health care situations and executes recommendations by the National Endowment for the Arts, which provides the organization with annual funding of \$45,000 to \$50,000.

"We've got drugs and equipment that do great things, but the whole is the sum of all parts," Hanna said. "We're trying to humanize the medical model. It lets patients know that it's a sensitive, caring environment and patient-care center. It helps address relief from trauma.

"Both of my parents were in ICU units, and they had ICU psychosis because in there, there was nothing familiar."

For the Murrens, who are avid art collectors, placing a collection at the Nevada Cancer Institute had always been part of the plan.

Jim Murren majored in art history at Trinity College in Connecticut and studied art in Italy before moving to Wall Street. Heather Murren, whose mother was an artist, grew up in an art environment.

To create the institute's contemporary and soothing atmosphere, the Murrens brought in a design team that included the architectural firm Marnell Corrao Associates, which had its hand in work at Bellagio, Mirage and other Strip resorts. The team went through hospitality training with major hotels, an effort to carry that type of service into its health care facility.

"With any medical facility, it's understandable that the primary focus is on medical care, and it should be," Heather Murren said. "But there's a heightened awareness that says, 'Gosh, you're going to spend a lot of time in these places.'"

"Art is an essential component of life. It is the highest expression of humanity."



A SCULPTURE sits outside the Nevada Cancer Institute. The center has a collection of nearly 200 pieces of fine art.

Steve Marcus / LAS VEGAS SUN



A FOUR-PANEL suite of photographs by Uta Barth is displayed inside the Nevada Cancer Institute. The center has a collection of nearly 200 pieces of fine art.

Sam Morris / LAS VEGAS SUN



A PIECE by Ed Ruscha is shown in the Nevada Cancer Institute's cafeteria. The center has a collection of nearly 200 pieces of fine art.

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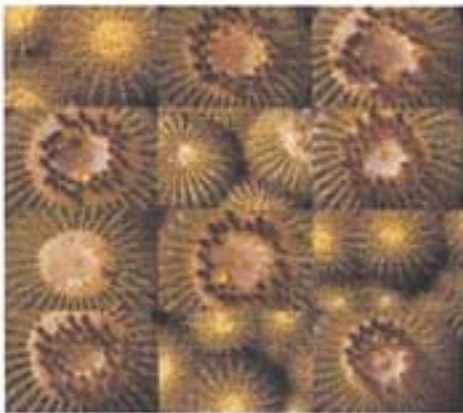
ARTWORK is shown in a conference room at the Nevada Cancer Institute. The center has a collection of nearly 200 pieces of fine art.

Sam Morris / LAS VEGAS SUN



MICHELE QUINN, curator of the art collection at the Nevada Cancer Institute, has many favorites in the collection she helped organize. Shown behind her is one of her favorites, Tim Bavington's painting, Sing (Study-Green), which hangs in the hallway outside the radiation treatment area.

COURTESY PHOTO



BLOOMING CACTUS by Elyn Zimmerman is one of the pieces in the art collection at the Nevada Cancer Institute.

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L.A. UNCOVERED #9 by Robert Rauschenberg is one of the pieces in the art collection at the Nevada Cancer Institute.

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