

## ART THAT HEALS

March 11-May 16, 2010

Tohono Chul Park

*"Art, in all its forms, is a powerful component of our life experience. Whether from an introspective or even a humorous origin it has the ability to change our point of view. It has the power to modify our moment. It has the nature to heal our attitude."*

Royce Davenport, exhibit artist

People have asked where the idea for the *Art That Heals* exhibit originated. It happened one morning a couple of years ago when, out of the blue, a woman suddenly appeared at the door to the exhibit department office bubbling over with an idea for an exhibit. While volunteering at a nearby hospice, she had been inspired by a vision of an art exhibit dealing with grief and how art can help heal the broken hearts of those whose loved ones have died. Since that chance encounter, I have been thinking about the woman's idea and I realized that art can be a source of healing in many ways beyond her original concept. A few months ago, I put out a call for submissions to artists, requesting that they share their responses to the theme of healing in art. We were inundated with submissions. In all, 134 artists submitted over 425 individual art works for consideration. Ultimately, I selected 68 pieces by 59 artists.



Kathleen Sharp, *Safe Passage*, quilt

In its most basic sense, perhaps, the act of making art can be cathartic, allowing artists to express themselves and what they are feeling and thinking. Consequently, it also can help individuals restore balance and health in their lives after experiencing loss, illness or suffering. Sometimes art contributes to healing in therapeutic settings with the guidance of expressive arts therapists who provide patients with art experiences intended to open channels of self expression that can lead to understanding and acceptance.

Our exhibit includes several artworks that were made by people dealing with intense grief, illness, or disillusionment. C.J. Shane's poignant wall sculpture made from clay and handmade paper was a means for her to deal with the tragic death of her 9 year-old son. Creative activity, ritual and repetition can temporarily alleviate the pain of grief and allow the heart to heal from losing loved ones, as demonstrated in Janet Miller's week spent painting snowflakes on her *Snow Day* piece and Ginny Tompkins' 100-day practice of photographing the sunrise and collaging the images into a painting. Quilts by Annie Gordon, Barbara Hall and Kathleen Sharp express their sense of loss and, in the process of designing and stitching them, helped them work through their grief. Susan Mrosek created her *Hopey Pokey* sculpture to memorialize her beloved sister who was also her creative partner.

Relationships between family members, particularly mothers and daughters, are the subject of several poignant artworks in the *Art That Heals* exhibit. Jean Bohlender's starkly emotional painting, *Empty Nest*, expresses the universal pain and loss experienced by mothers whose children have grown up and no longer need them as they once did. Barbara Cowlin's homage to her mother's memory incorporates the recipes that are her legacy. Joanne Garry transformed a family heirloom, her grandfather's baptismal gown, as a reliquary to contain memories of her mother; and the process of assembling it comforted her heart. Marti White's painting of her seriously ill daughter in a hospital bed helped her work through the terrifying images of that time that became embedded in her mind. In *Keeping What's Important*, a sculptural installation composed of 65 permeable fabric bags by Elise Deringer Wendte, the subject is maintaining healthy family relationships by allowing unessential sources of disagreement to filter out and fall away.

Karen Medley's clay sculpture explores the concept of vanity and her own self image that arose as a result of having skin cancer surgery on her face. Catherine Nash's artist book poetically relates a story of transformation via timeless natural images that have become, over time, a language of personal symbols. Since being diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia, teenager Alex Rivera has used digital art as a means expressing his emotions by letting his thoughts flow on paper. Jay Kyle

Petersen creates abstract images that document the conversion of negative energies into positive ones for himself and for others.

Considered from the perspective of those who view them, art images can serve as powerful objects of healing and influence. For example, icons and mandalas are meditative aids to prayer and spiritual centering. In Christian religion, icons are painted images of Christ, Mary and the saints on wooden panels, usually displayed in a church or a prayer corner in the home for veneration and communion with God. Contemporary icon painters featured in our exhibit, Sr. Carmela Rall and Miriam Tjader, practice this ancient art form that requires discipline and prayer on the part of the artist. Additionally, our exhibit features a devotional painting of Our Lady of Mount Carmel by Barbara Gurwitz that is an expression of her faith.

Mandalas are circular images used to calm the mind and visually focus one's attention in meditation. The word mandala is of Sanskrit origin and means center, circumference or magic circle. Our exhibit features a variety of mandalas, from Linda LoPilato's painted whirlpool with swimming dolphins, to Lucia Grossberger Morales' mathematically-calculated digital images, to circles made from hundreds of individual thumb prints by printmaker Mary Hood. Also on display is Bill Baker's photograph of a mandala-like design made by the natural force of wind on sand and a blade of grass. Andrew Rush's *Tondo* combines the concept of a mandala with dream imagery representing the energy stream of life that is God.

On a larger scale, walking the circular path of a labyrinth is an ancient form of meditation that has been revived in recent years. Beata Wehr's small labyrinth painting depicts a classical seven-circuit design that viewers may follow with their eyes. In a related sense, the spirals that Stu Jenks creates in nature and then photographs are acts of centering his own heart while Alix Maher's peaceful sculpture juxtaposes the calming spirals found in natural forms.

The natural world and its gifts of peace inspire artists such as Susie Gillatt, Ciri Johnson and Karen Piegorsch for whom water and water creatures have been a source of transforming personal experiences that they have documented in their artworks. Trees as a source of life are powerful symbols for Carol Connor, whose painting explores the wisdom trees can share, and Marion Wilkinson, whose wall shrine depicts the angel Gabriel guarding the tree of life. Julie Brokken's mixed media work sweetly shares the rejuvenating, childlike sense of wonder that she feels when gazing at the stars, while Carolyn King's colorful painting celebrates Mexican and Yaqui cultures' beliefs in the healing power of flowers. A self portrait merging into a southwestern landscape by Aida Algosaibi-Stoklos represents her experience of spiritual healing in the desert environment. After receiving a devastating cancer diagnosis, Victoria von Elbe was sustained and comforted by making a woodcut depicting a place of serenity and peace in the desert while, for Carolyn Quarnberg, creating a mosaic of Native-American-inspired healing motifs allowed her to express her artistic vision and ease her Parkinsons' suffering. Diane Fales' painting *Earth Mother* associates the infinite love of the earth and nature with the nurturing love of a mother. Jewelry artist Araya Pathwalker made stunning necklaces and earrings with natural stones that are known to have healing properties.

Buddha is an inspiring source of peaceful acceptance for many of us. Pat Aiken, who has painted inspirational images of the Buddha for much of her long and prolific life in art, shares with us a painting of Buddha carrying the sun which teaches us that we all have the power to live and love joyfully. Bhavani Devi's *Healing Buddha* painting cries tears of healing compassion, while Hank Tusinski's cast concrete "stone slab" depicts Amida Nyorai, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life, which is the embodiment of Compassion. Christie McMearty's devotional 3-dimensional mandala framing a Buddha image serves as a key to transport the viewer into the heart of the Buddha and the infinite Buddha nature for a deeper understanding of oneself.

Several works in *Art That Heals* are visible representations of prayer and support. The Tucson organization, Beads of Courage, is a true "Art that Heals" for children coping with serious illnesses by providing them with colorful beads for every procedure along their treatment journey, honoring the children's courage and providing a tool they can use to communicate what they have been through. Ben's Bells, another beloved Tucson organization, was inspired by the spirit of the founder's son, Ben Packard. For our exhibit, Ben's Bells has created an interactive Kindness Tree, and all are invited to hang their stories of kindness on it.

Susie Goodman says a prayer with each stitch she knits into her *Prayer Shawls* while Judy Tormoen makes *Healing Gourds* for friends who are suffering. The embellished gourd on display contains colorful papers, each inscribed with an inspirational thought that is to be withdrawn from it daily. Royce Davenport is a joyful artist who shares with us an artwork he made to honor his wife who worked as a flight nurse on life-saving helicopter missions and to wrap her in his protective love. Tom Martin's block print is inspired by the Japanese tradition of paper prayers where small works of art on paper are created and given to family and friends to express wishes for health and wellness. Carolee Asia's palmstones are a contemporary version of an ancient source of comfort and healing.

Shrines provide another source of consolation and our exhibit features a variety of them, from Junardi Armstrong's tiny shrine composed in a saguaro "boot" to Don Carlos shrine to Our Lady of Mercy that is traditionally-conceived but has a topical yet sardonic title. Pamela Powers' mosaic tabletop shrine carries a Buddhist message of non-attachment. And, while not a shrine, David and Paula Perino's *Tower of God* expresses the belief that various paths of belief all lead to God. Frani Bopp's painting, *Eternity*, is a serene image of an angel watching over the place where loved ones are laid to rest.

Many artists plumb their hearts and souls in the act of creating meaningful abstract paintings. Using brushstrokes and colors that have personal significance for her, Grace Calterone's *Reaching for the Moon* explores the concept of maintaining hope for what may or may not be attainable. Similarly, Suzanne Hesh's abstract paintings based on the Old Testament Psalms are her contemporary interpretations of the artistic tradition of using sacred texts as the source of creative inspiration and personal conversion. Janie Cohen's painting, *Birth*, represents, via expressive color, a renewal of her spirit after successful cancer treatment.

Taken as a whole, *Art That Heals* is a diverse exhibit representing many different artists' unique responses to the theme of healing through art. Yet within the exhibit there are individual themes and, if you notice, works placed near each other share something in common. Like a choir, there are many voices here, but together they create harmonies. The need for healing is something we all share and, as the artworks in this exhibit demonstrates, we may receive healing from each other, from nature, our religious and cultural beliefs, and most importantly, within our own resilient spirits.

Peggy Hazard  
Assistant Exhibit Curator

**PLEASE JOIN US FOR THESE CREATIVE, HEALING, INTERACTIVE EVENTS  
(FREE WITH PARK ADMISSION)**

**Help make Ben's Bells:**

Saturday, April 10, noon to 3pm, in the Children's Ramada

**Participate in the creation of a spiral sculpture from desert twigs with artist Selina Littler:**

at

Tohono Chul Park's 25<sup>th</sup> "Birthday Bash", Saturday, April 17, 10am to 2pm