

The Art of Storytelling (CREJ Healthcare Properties Quarterly April 2017)

In a healthcare environment, art can do plenty more than fill a blank space on a wall. A successful art program will provide positive distractions, enhance the design theme, and aid in wayfinding. Two of Design Studio Blue's recently completed healthcare projects have received overwhelming praise due to their well-coordinated art programs. Here are three tips on how art can tell a story with a fairytale ending.

First, appropriate art selection for healthcare is crucial. Artwork selected for a patient setting must decrease anxiety and anger while alleviating boredom. Crisp and clear landscape photography can transport the viewer to a peaceful place or to a positive memory. In Colorado, we are blessed to be surrounded by majestic mountains with expansive views and amazing sunsets. Utilizing a combination of macro and micro landscape and nature images are a nice balance. Viewers can become lost in thought gazing at a mountain lake at sunset or filled with curiosity over an enlarged image of a rain drop trickling down a reed of grass. Stay clear of animals, blurry, or busy abstract images as they may instill anxiety or confusion.

Two other factors for a successful art program include a strong theme and wayfinding attributes. Art can be the voice of a project that speaks in a dialect that all can understand. Art can speak volumes by pulling together all elements of a design theme and passively guide a visitor to their destination. For the new Emergency Department at St Joseph's/Candler Health System in Savannah GA, the theme was subtle Savannah. We wanted to represent the historic city in an unusual way, with imagery and vantage points not typically viewed or experienced. Every photograph and art piece is a focus on something of quality such as: a unique perspective, sense of light, texture, or color. In the waiting room, we highlighted the downtown skyline from historic rooftops and atop bridges and then led the patient along their journey to Triage with photography of decorative ironwork found on gates and fences. Within the exam spaces, images of statues throughout downtown Savannah over patients, providing comfort and distraction. Similarly, at the new Henderson Hospital in Henderson, Nevada, the art is uniquely themed to each floor by subject matter and color. The 2nd floor is themed Earthly Treasures with a focus on blues and browns of desert landscapes. Third floor is Luminous Skies with imagery of the expansive canyons and endless sunsets in shades of rust and salmon. The 4th floor is themed Desert Blooms with fresh, green succulent desert cactus. Again, we repeated and reinforced a theme with consistent imagery and color to guide patients, families, and staff to their destination.

A photograph hung in a corridor doesn't independently create a pleasant experience. It doesn't reinforce a corporate image, nor, tell the viewer which way to turn. However, with early planning, a strong theme, and appropriately selected artwork, a happy ending can develop with your next design project.



Image of St Joseph's/ Candler Outpatient waiting room with artwork featuring the Savannah Bridge.



Image of St Joseph's/ Candler Outpatient waiting room. A commissioned back-lit art piece softly glows in a corridor connecting department. The piece was created by a local glass artist with local materials.