

Art Panel members Hollis Dixon and Jessica Hall in conversation with artist Frances Thomas

How do you feel seeing your art on the wall of a Trust building and what does this mean to you?

It's an excitement beyond excitement, wonderful to see something I created that I thought wasn't of any great value, and no one did, up on the walls of a Trust building and it's been purchased. I love the framing, it's a subtle containing edge, I'm so happy that you chose my work, it's fantastic and it feels like a miracle having had a mental illness all my life. Thank you.



How did you hear about the art project?

I heard about it through the Herts Mind Network in Hemel. I've painted there for 12-14 years, and another artist there told me about the art panel and emailed me Katie Tyssen's details. It's a source of interest, inspiration, value and joy and I'm so glad I heard about it, it's done for my ego more good than you'll ever know.

What appealed to you about the art project?

It appealed to me because it was basically for broken people, and society doesn't want to know about broken people. And society doesn't like it because it's a reflection of their failings. They want the mentally ill out the way because they are an embarrassment and a source of intrusive disgust. It's so wonderful for a person like me to be admired.

How has making this displayed art, and having it accepted by the art panel, contributed to your wellbeing and recovery journey?

On one level my well-being is boosted, but I do have some physical issues that will shorten my life, but my psychiatric well-being has been touched. It's boosted an internal satisfaction with myself rather than trying to win others over which is impossible. What's to say that the acorn that started here won't be an oak tree? It's a boost to my ego and a second chance.

Has your art-making continued/increased since having work accepted by the Art Panel? If so how?

I've had a little lapse recently for physical reasons. But one of my latest pictures has gone into the National Trust magazine. It's called Heaven's Gate. It shows our scattered dreams and the paths leading to eternal salvation. So how could I ever feel smaller than a snail after that? I've also done one with a duster, rather than a brush, based on a photo of West Wittering. The art is taking over again and I don't know where it will lead too.

How important to you was it that the Art Panel was made up of a mixture of people with different experiences of mental health: service users, carers, young people, mental health professionals, representatives University of Hertfordshire?

It's very important that it's a balanced view, not just one person choosing a pretty picture. The word that springs to mind is fairness and equality. All the things us people with mental health issues haven't been treated with.

How helpful did you find the themes: Hope, Resilience, Empowerment, Choice, Memory, Unspoken, Stillness, Journey?

They are all very helpful. I can relate all of my pictures to all of these words. They are all relevant to me in my life. Hope to carry on, Resilience of an elephants back, we long for Empowerment. Choice - we don't always have a lot of that maybe not so strong for me. Memory, Unspoken – I paint this, depict it, it's a wild passion in my heart. Stillness is so important to humanity, to find your soul can be still. Journey – we are all on one and I try to make the best of it.

How do you feel seeing the other people's art displayed here?

I think it's wonderful, the standard is extremely high.... actually who am I to say that? All art is an expression, how dare we judge one person's expression. It's from deep within the soul. And our expression is not governed.

What do you think are the benefits and disadvantages in having one consistent person throughout the art project?

I was delighted to meet Katie, she held the whole venture in her hand. It was easy to phone her. Katie is one intelligent arty person who is also a strong person who won't be swayed by anything or take any waffle. Meeting her I know why she's here.

Would you like to take part in any future creative projects with us?

Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!

Is there anything else, not already covered, about the art displays you want to talk about?

Thank you to all of you who have given your time to assess these paintings. Thank you for my second chance.