

Art Panel members Hollis Dixon and Kelly Seaman in conversation with artist Sarah Perryman

How do you feel actually seeing your art on the wall here?

I feel really proud and privileged actually; it has made me feel happy to see it there.

What has having your work displayed in Trust buildings meant to you?

I think it's amazing that ordinary people like me have had the opportunity to do something like this. I feel valued that something I have created has been good enough to be displayed on the wall to make others happy. I never considered I would have my art displayed in such a public place, where so many can see it. I feel lucky to have been involved in it. I wouldn't have had the self-belief to do it without this project being here.

What appealed to you about the art project?

For me it was an opportunity to give something back, I was receiving treatment and I felt so lucky and privileged to have had that treatment as it has helped me so much. The art project gave me the opportunity to put my art forward for something, which I never would have dreamed of doing before.



How has making this art contributed to your wellbeing?

I found it enjoyable, relaxing and nourishing - being creative feeds the soul. Also, as I'm a scientist I spend all day thinking about data and facts, it is all really controlled, and so this art project was appealing because it was a contrast to this normal everyday work life. It was great to engage the creative side of me that is mostly hidden. This has gone alongside my art psychotherapy in which my art making is both a means to access and process thoughts and feelings which are sometimes distressing. Not enjoyable as such, but meaningful, a way to communicate thoughts that are sometimes sub-conscious and so ultimately freeing and often enlightening.

Also, making these pieces meant an opportunity for me to give my family some insight into what is going on as each piece inevitably tied in with the therapy I was having. It enabled me in a small way to let my family know how things were going. It's easier to involve and engage people when there is something visual to look at. This art making has enabled me to show them the personal mental and emotional transformation I have gone through, through the art I have done. It's made us more connected as a family unit and this has been essential in my recovery.

How has having your work accepted by the art panel contributed to your recovery?

It's a wonderful feeling that these people that I hadn't met with had faith in me, and that they considered my images might mean something to whoever gets to see them here. I was over the moon actually, I was really thrilled. Considering I am someone with low self-esteem, it gave me a sense of purpose and of being valued, so this has helped my confidence and well-being.

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

The themes were brilliant, they were inspirational. When I was a child I loved copying images like animal pictures from Encyclopaedias - there was no thought process in mind, I just enjoyed drawing and painting. But this project inspired me to think deeply about what the themes meant to me and for each piece to have a story or meaning behind it. The only one that I was uncomfortable with was 'unspoken'. If I did create one for the theme of unspoken I imagine it would have been a depressing image so not one for a wall. All the others felt stimulating and fascinating to think about. Some of my images have come from within, especially the abstract ones, like 'journey' which portrays the highs and lows, the twists and turn of having my long-term psychotherapy. Whereas some have been inspired by art I have seen, like the image of birch trees. I always feel peaceful in quiet woodland, the stillness of the trees is calming, and I wanted to portray this. I'd seen an oil painting that inspired me and re-created something similar with my collage, which was very relaxing and therapeutic to do.

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

My work has definitely increased since the art panel and I actually have an art shed now, I used to have art materials in a bag under the table. I've has been making gifts for my family, stained glass artworks and paintings. It has given me a purpose and reason to continue to do art.

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 of the University of Herts?

It was really important to have different panel members, especially service users and carers, not only professionals and senior people making decisions. It is nice that everyone was included and all their opinions valued.

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

I was very impressed with the other artworks displayed here, so many talented people, and the numbers of people and art pieces involved in the project were amazing. If everyone benefited from the project in the way I did, then that's a lot of people who have been helped. I am proud to have been a part of it.

How important is it to you to have had communication with one consistent person throughout the art project?

It has been important to have had one person to deal with consistently in terms of continuity.

How did you hear about the art project?

I saw flyers in the waiting room in Waverley Road, but I didn't consider responding to them. Then my therapist handed one to me and wondered if I'd like to be involved. I needed a bit of a nudge as my low self-belief would not have allowed me to independently choose to do it.

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

Yes I would like to be involved in future creative projects.

Is there anything else you wanted to talk about that we haven't covered about your journey?

Submitting the art was quite scary, as I was worried about being rejected and that may have knocked my confidence. I didn't make the decision to submit my art, lightly. However, I figured that the panel would be a safe, non-critical audience, so that enabled me to go forward with it. I have come away with more confidence and self-belief.

It's great to see attitudes have changed and authorities now recognise that the atmosphere and appearance of hospital environments are important for everyone's wellbeing. The difference a nice picture, a plant and some music can make. My husband makes furniture and it's nice to think pieces of his furniture will be seen for years to come. Similarly, it's nice to think that my art work will be lasting for years to come, for others to enjoy.