

CASE STUDY:

Crafting of Considered Spaces; Mindful Making



NHS Lothian
Charity

Tonic
Arts

Crafting of Considered Spaces; Mindful Making

In the market town of Haddington in East Lothian, a purpose-built modern healthcare facility is operating with an innovative approach to community and social care. The East Lothian Community Hospital has a patient-centred outlook at its core, which is emphasised by a mission statement that focuses on creating a dignified environment to support people emotionally as well as clinically. With creative interventions and therapeutic art and craft as a key element of this strategy, the space itself is flooded with creativity as well as comfort; the touch and vision of various artists being felt throughout.

“Because of the specific location of the hospital,” Arabella Harvey, Director at Round Table Projects and Tonic Arts project curator, explains, “we decided in the strategy that we needed to flood it with reflections of landscape and heritage, through a series of creative commissions.” Amongst the planned projects, Lindsay Perth was invited to consider the importance of holistic

environments by leading on the development of a non-denominational Sanctuary, which would offer patients, visitors and staff the time and space to grieve and heal.



Sanctuary © Lindsay Perth, photo by Rebecca Milling

“I was driven by this idea of creating an environment that gives people a sense of calm, a breather, and something where you’re surrounded by handmade craft,” Lindsay says about the project. Having lost both her mother and



Sanctuary © Lindsay Perth, photo by Lindsay Perth

mother-in-law to cancer and as a result, experienced the uncomfortable nature of hospital environments first-hand, she was drawn to The Sanctuary as a place that could sensitively acknowledge both hurt and hope.



“When I looked at the plans for The Sanctuary room and the Courtyard, I wanted to find ways to connect to that person who is in that heightened state of alert, of that intense feeling that there’s a threat or there’s a dark cloud. So, I tried to think of ways where you could get a sense of light, the sky, the seasons and a sense of reflection.”

The finished project, influenced greatly by Lindsay’s own personal experiences, provides contemplative internal and external creative focal points, offering a moment of solace in times of emotional intensity. Collaborating with craft artists and designers Gary Kennedy, Aymeric Renoud, Charlotte Cadzow and Kenny Thomson, Lindsay has created a space that is aesthetically engaging, with soothing features like an undulating wave seat which is a gentle rolling landscape in wood, hand-made porcelain tiles and a coloured metal canopy sheltering tall wooden Courtyard seats. “What matters to me is that there’s nothing in there that’s manufactured,” Lindsay says. “Everything in there has a uniqueness to



Public Engagement Workshop by Lindsay Perth & Charlotte Cadzow. photo by Lindsay Perth

it. We use the words positive distraction a lot in art and mental health, and I believe in that.”

As well as connecting beautifully to nature and the elements in its design, The Sanctuary demonstrates what an artist’s awareness and role can bring to the overall patient and visitor experience. As Arabella notes, “The standard for sanctuary spaces in hospitals quite often is for them to be very minimal and empty; quite a

passive space. Lindsay felt the need for something more; she wanted the materials and the space to be tactile, and for there to be kindness and empathy in every kind of material decision that was made in the space.”

Numerous studies, including a [2011 British Medical Association report](#), have highlighted how imperative arts interventions in healthcare settings can be in the creation of happier and healthier hospital communities. Lindsay agrees that there is a healing quality in carefully considered spaces, especially when art, craft and design are placed at the forefront. “I personally think that art and our need for creativity, whether that’s making a chair, or painting a picture or crocheting a doll or making sculptures out of trash; all of it needs to be embraced and become the norm”, she says. “It’s not about colouring inside the lines, it’s about your individuality coming out for your wellbeing. I think when we are surrounded by craft, and design, it gives us a sense of presence.”



Kirkcaldy Patterns © Frances Priest, photo by Shannon Tofts

Alongside East Lothian Community Hospital, Arabella also managed an arts strategy at the newly redesigned Edinburgh Haematology Centre, which uses uplifting and absorbing works of art to create spaces for respite. The commissioned artists and makers were briefed to draw on the landscape, ecology and cultural heritage of the Firth of Forth and surrounding areas, and the final results include visually striking pieces that are mounted in locations around the hospital to improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of staff as well as people experiencing illness. Ceramic artists Frances Priest, Lorna Fraser and Lorraine Robson are among

eight practitioners that have created works that centre on motifs ranging from flowering plants and mussel shells to a Victorian archive of pattern books.

Like Lindsay, Lorna was able to draw on personal experience, having spent a significant amount of time at the hospital as her partner went through gruelling cancer treatment. "This ordeal brought home to me just how crucial it is to soften the clinical environment and how art can affect your ability to cope with what is happening to you," she says. "There is evidence that art in hospitals improves the psychological and physical wellbeing of patients,



Forth Flora © Lorna Fraser, photo by Shannon Tofts

staff and visitors. My intention was to create a thoughtful piece of work that can provide an opportunity for contemplation but complex enough to continually offer up new discoveries.”



Hospitals can sometimes be scary and disorientating places,”

Frances adds. “Stress has an impact on healthcare outcomes and so designing spaces that feel comfortable and welcoming can pay huge dividends. It suggests that a certain level of value is being placed on a space and the people within it.”

Both projects at the Edinburgh Haematology Centre and East Lothian Community Hospital are excellent examples of how artists can be instrumental in transforming the inpatient and family visitor experience through their craft. But for Lindsay, The Sanctuary is also a space that she wants everyone to feel welcome in; to normalise the idea of such spaces existing and being necessary in the first place.



“The Sanctuary is there for all times of our lives because life is stressful.

I want people to take a break, sit down, look at the blossoms, and feel the rain on the roof; to be in the moment. So, I hope it becomes a place that people have a sense of ownership over, where they can say ‘this is for my wellbeing, and I need this.’”

Words by Arusa Qureshi

The Art Strategy for East Lothian Community Hospital and Edinburgh Haematology Centre were delivered by Round Table Projects for NHS Lothian Charity’s Tonic Arts Programme.

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