

# Art as Medicine: Creating and Curating Healing Breast Imaging Spaces

By *Helen Anne D'Alessandro, MD*



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Art has the power to transport and transform patients and their care experience, particularly in breast imaging. Transformative art should not have the provenance of gallery walls alone and can often be even more genuinely appreciated by patients in the health care setting. As a breast imaging radiologist and director of the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) Avon Foundation Comprehensive Breast Evaluation Center art collection for over 20 years, I have learned that treating breast imaging patients is an art as well as a science.

Hospital arts projects, particularly those involving breast imaging and breast care centers, have been shown to decrease stress levels, improve patient well-being, and enhance staff morale. Our breast care center team believes in the importance of creating a healing and caring environment through art and design to enhance the entire patient breast care experience.

Our goal is to use the power of art to provide an uplifting breast care environment and help decrease anxiety when patients present for screening, diagnostic examinations, and interventional procedures. When a patient at our breast center leans in to examine a piece in our collection, we feel we have succeeded in transporting that patient to a more soothing space via the art of distraction.

Our collection was established in 2002 with the assistance and generosity of a grateful breast imaging patient who is an arts patron and philanthropist. Over the past 20 years, we developed a permanent and expanding art collection through a unique affiliation with the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (SMFA), Boston. With annual donations from our founding patron, we have purchased student and alumni art each year from the school's art sale, which supports the SMFA student scholarship fund. Each artist is notified when their artwork is chosen for our permanent collection. A gallery artist information label is placed next to their piece, allowing interested patients and staff members to contact the artist.

Our collection was also personally inspired by my godmother, a brilliant artist and art professor. Her knowledge of the visual arts

and journey as a breast cancer patient over 30 years ago helped inform my decision to choose breast imaging as a subspecialty and influenced the way I treat patients today, always considering one's physical surroundings as an integral part of patient care.

We consider our breast center a dynamic gallery space with a rotating and permanent collection that constantly evolves with new technology, equipment, patient needs, and the pandemic. Our collection is composed of mainly original artwork including oils, watercolors, pastels, photography, silkscreens, pottery, and sculpture. Together these pieces integrate and incorporate a healing palette of colors and textures into our breast imaging clinic. We have chosen distinctive "wall power" pieces to create a strong visual impact. These pieces are appropriately placed where patients can specifically visualize and interact with them while mammography, ultrasonography, or a breast procedure is performed. We also address special patient needs by respecting patient privacy with frosted glass walls in our main waiting area, providing wheelchair accessibility, and placing art pieces in our consultation and changing rooms.

In 2019, we inaugurated our first Pink Power Pop-Up art exhibition honoring Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October. Our goals were to raise awareness of the importance of early breast cancer detection and feature inspiring art by local, national, and international female artists. Our first exhibition featured Boston artist Liz Roache, who exhibited her brightly colored abstract prints and colorful floral collages. The artist chose to "celebrate pink in a joyful way" and have her pieces "lighten the air like hopeful windows of optimism." We hosted a gallery opening event, and together with our patients and multidisciplinary oncology, surgical, and breast imaging staff members we celebrated our clinical/research mission and our dedication to providing outstanding patient care in a warm, welcoming environment. The artist, who is also a breast cancer survivor, generously donated a percentage of the proceeds of sales during the pop-up exhibition back to our breast imaging research fund.

Our special events team at MGH publicizes these exhibitions via our hospital newsletter, local network news programs, and social media channels. Partnering with different artists for these unique pop-up exhibitions helps create a more inclusive treatment environment representing our diverse patient population. These exhibitions also elevate great artwork off artist's studio floors and up onto hospital walls, enabling artists to engage a broader audience in a unique health care setting.

We incorporated our artistic mission into our teaching curriculum by creating a lecture for our MGH Breast Imaging Lecture Series for medical students, residents, fellows, and staff members. The lecture, titled "Art as Medicine: Creating and Curating Healing Spaces," is now part of our permanent breast imaging curriculum. As our graduating breast imaging fellows join their new academic or private practices, the lecture reminds them that first impressions of their future centers are incredibly important for their patients, and consideration should always be given to creating a warm, supportive caregiving environment.

We are always learning and are often consulted by breast imaging colleagues who are interested in creating art collections at their own institutions. By visiting dedicated breast center art

collections and art/photography fairs in the United States and abroad, we have garnered creative ideas to enhance our collection at MGH. Finding a collaborative and empathetic patron who can serve as an intermediary and champion is helpful, as is having a supportive division and department chief. Creating a website, print, and social media presence for informative purposes assists in spreading your mission and vision.

Artistic partnerships are also vitally important. Partnering with local art schools/societies, university/college art departments, and dedicated private collectors with interests in a specific artistic genre is worth exploring. Many major cities have dedicated design centers that can help foster relationships with design communities and businesses.

The visual images that breast imaging radiologists interpret daily are black, white, and shades of gray. Colorful creativity displayed on our clinic walls is always a welcome diversion. We look forward to elevating the patient care experience in the future for an even broader breast imaging patient population with our goal of uplifting all in the process.

