

PROFILE

“Peggy Weiss Art Program Manager at The Harborview Medical Center”

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Peggy Weiss formerly director of Bank of America Gallery is on a very new mission- to bring art to the patient rooms, the exam rooms and the treatment rooms of Harborview Medical Center. Instead of trying to educate bankers about art, she is now working to provide a more aesthetic environment for patients and their relatives waiting for care or enduring illness and treatment.

Harborview is a King County owned hospital operated by the University of Washington as a teaching hospital. Harborview is the only Level One Adult and Pediatric Trauma Center in a five-state area. That means it sees hundreds of patients every year in its main facility and its clinics. The women's clinic alone offers translation in 73 languages to non-English speaking patients. It serves all the prisoners in the King County Jail as well as victims of domestic violence, the mentally ill, and many artists who have Basic Medical coverage.

Where is the art coming from? At the Hospital, the art purchased with the one percent of capital projects in King County can only hang in public areas. So Weiss had to find another source for art for the more private areas of the hospital. She is receiving small grants from inside the hospital and a staff campaign, but as she said “everything is a good cause here,” so she doesn't want to rely too heavily on those sources. She also has been soliciting gifts and has already received 74 art works. Most of them came from Martha Donworth who had a collection of contemporary Northwest artists and vintage photographs. The Howard Kottler Testamentary Trust also gave Harborview a major work in ceramics by Kottler. She purchased 16 woodcut prints by Lockwood Dennis which she described as affordable, personal and colorful. They are fairly realistic, as well as sophisticated technically and aesthetically, so they can appeal to a wide range of viewers.

Weiss is sympathetic to her patient and staff audience. If they don't like a work she installs, she is going to take it down. Her job is to create a better atmosphere and that can only be done in collaboration with the people in the hospital. For example, in her new lobby gallery she has installed the work of Mary Larson, a nurse at Pioneer Square Clinic. Larson, a self taught painter, does portraits of her clients at the clinic. The results are powerful and intense images of vivid looking people. People waiting for care instead of staring vacantly into space or leafing through a sports magazine are now enjoying these brilliantly colored oil paintings.

When Weiss first arrived on the job about nine months ago, she sent out an email to the entire staff to inquire if anyone was an artist. The results were startling. There were dozens of artists working at Harborview, including a fiction writer, an opera singer, a jazz singer, actors, and visual artists. These artists are now joining a group of dedicated administrators in advising on art possibilities at the hospital. A Performing Arts series has

already started with a free performance of Episodes of Moliere in the cafeteria presents by the Ensemble Training Intensive of the Freehold Studio/Theater Lab and she is working with writers groups such as Streetrites (Real Change) and the Summer Youth Program at Hugo House. One idea is to have poetry on the shuttle buses between the various hospital facilities. She asked 60 artists to make holiday cards for patients and the results were spectacular. It seems that Weiss has a magic touch. She is an incredibly talented administrator who knows how to bring together support from many different constituents ranging from her art- loving boss Tina Mankowski, Director of Community Relations, David Jaffe, Executive Director, and Johnese Spisso, Chief Operating Officer, the administrators of public art funds in Seattle and her fellow staff members at the Medical Center and most important, her new audience of the patients at Harborview Medical Center.

The next major event is an open house for “Artists at Harborview: Art Care 2003” on March 20. Contact Peggy Weiss if you are an artist with work in Harborview's collection, or if you have been treated as a patient at Harborview and have a particular perspective on the art at pweiss@u.washington.edu.