

Arts for health

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June this year saw the launch of a new national initiative in the provision of art for hospitals: Arts for Health. From its offices in Manchester Polytechnic's department of architecture and landscape Peter Senior, director of the programme, runs a consultancy service giving advice and help to hospitals, regional health authorities, and district health authorities participating or wishing to participate in arts programmes, and to architects of new and existing hospitals. He is ideally suited to this post, having spent 15 years as founder director of Hospital Arts Manchester, been arts consultant to the Department of Health and Social Security with input in the initial planning and design

stages of the low energy showpiece, St Mary's Hospital, Isle of Wight,¹ and done consultancy work for hospital arts projects in London, Sheffield, and Edinburgh: achievements that have culminated in accolades from both art and medical professionals. He was a member of the Attenborough committee of inquiry into the arts and disabled people (monitored by the Carnegie council, chaired by Sir Kenneth Robinson),² and his long term commitment to providing the arts to disadvantaged people—whether mentally or physically disabled, long or short term sick, or elderly—was recognised by a National Art Collections award for "forgotten heroes" of the arts (presented by Prince Charles) in 1987. It is also a tribute to Peter Senior that the first national consultancy service is to be run from Manchester, not London.

Peter Senior's participation in hospital arts began when he approached Manchester Health Authority asking to spend a sabbatical as artist in residence in a hospital. He received an enthusiastic response and spent a year as a volunteer at St Mary's, where he was given the old hospital kitchen to use as a studio. The first year was a resounding success and was followed by a paid secondment for a second year and one of six Arts in the Community awards from the Gulbenkian Foundation and Regional Arts Association. The Manpower Services Commission provided four art school graduate helpers for mural painting, graphics, fine art, and performance projects. From these beginnings grew the art team of 10 full time and four part time workers to be found in Manchester today.^{3,4}

Hospital Arts Manchester has placed over 3000 diverse works of art throughout three districts (figs 1-8). Over 10 years it has raised the £0.75m spent on this work from voluntary contributions and charitable trusts and through vigorous pursuit of business sponsorship. The cost to the health authority has been minimal. Likewise Arts for Health is to be self financing. Only Peter Senior's salary is paid by Manchester Polytechnic, where he worked as a senior lecturer in the faculty of art and design. The relation with the polytechnic has been symbiotic, Hospital Arts Manchester providing an outlet for much undergraduate and postgraduate talent in the form of course work placements, residencies, and commissions.

Arts for Health will provide a national focus for art schemes, advising on how to introduce art into health care, how to raise funds, and how to choose artists. The most innovative aspect of Hospital Arts Manchester from its first tentative beginnings in the early 1970s was the concept of art made or commissioned for a specific location rather than bought off the peg. Many hospitals had already bought art in this form and are continuing to do so. Hospitals such as St Thomas's, Lambeth, built up fine collections, employing their own curators. While wishing still to encourage the commissioning of good art for all health care buildings Arts for Health recognises that some modern work is far removed from



Withington Hospital, Manchester: main corridor. Mural painting by Letitia Atwell and Bob Baird

1 Members of the Isle of Wight Embroiderers' Guild with two works commissioned from them in 1986 for the new St Mary's Hospital

2 Manchester Royal Infirmary: entrance to the infants' clinic

3 Play area, Duchess of York Children's Hospital, Manchester

4 Operating theatre, St Mary's Manchester: Peter Senior's first major project as full time hospital artist, 1975. The intention was to transform the room into a jungle, incorporating light switches, clocks, and machinery in the designs. The murals have been substantially reworked by Steve Maquire of the first arts team

5 It's a goal! Mural at Booth Hall Children's Hospital, north Manchester, designed and painted by children from the family and children psychiatric unit. It covers three walls of the activities room and was the arts team's first experience of working with children

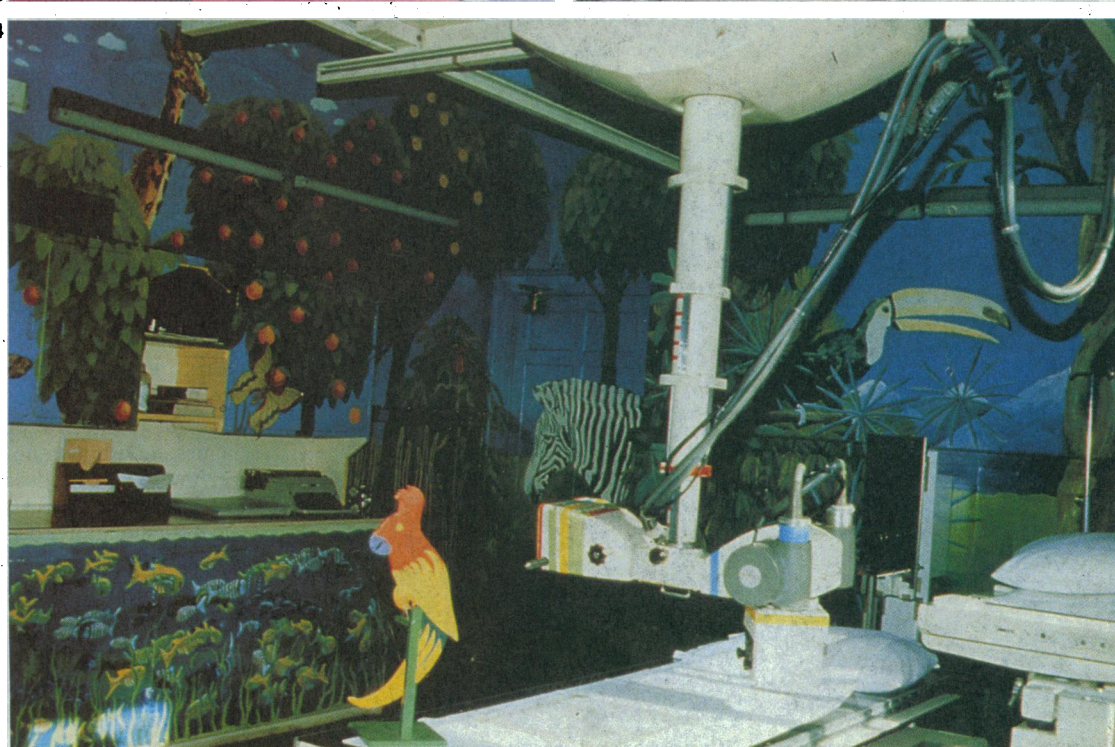
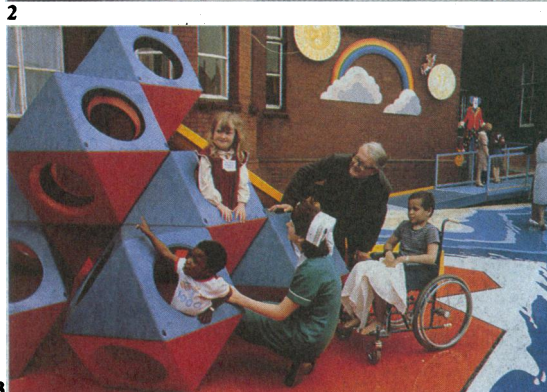
6 Penniless and Lonesome Cowboys playing at York House, Manchester Royal Infirmary. In the background is the Hollywood mural designed and painted by Liz Faunce of the arts team in consultation with elderly patients

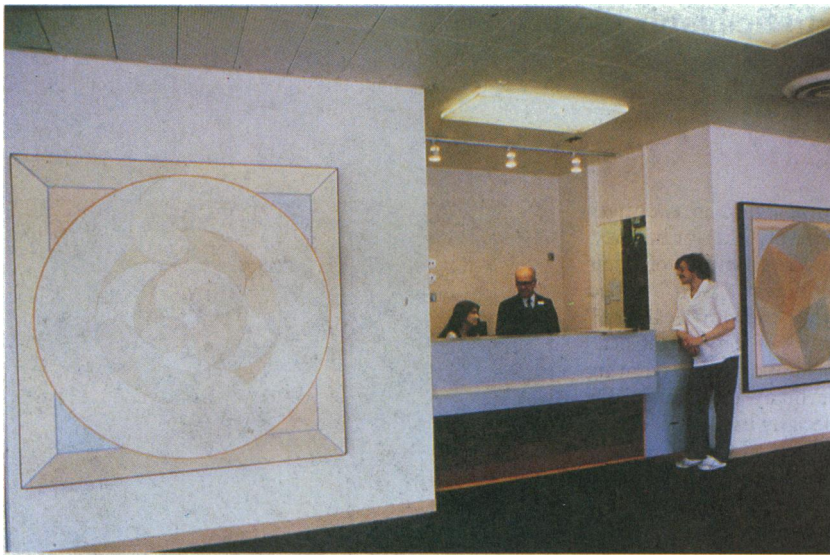
7 St Mary's Manchester reception area transformed by paintings by Brian Chapman

8 Play equipment and mural, Children's Hospital, St Mary's Hospital, Isle of Wight, designed and made by Anne Toms, art and craft centre, Albany prison

9 Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet visits Hospital Arts, Isle of Wight

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the experience of many patients, staff, and visitors. One way of bridging this gap is to have artists in residence. Through them the act of making and doing art is demystified; the process can be understood and both patients and staff alike can often be stimulated into making art themselves, negating the feeling that art has been imposed on them.⁵

Community participation

Arts for Health is not, however, merely an agency for placing artists in hospitals. Drawing on Hospital Arts Manchester's experiences of involving the local community (not only artists and performers but also schools, art galleries, guilds, and local businesses), the centre maintains two databases: a list of national and international sponsors, trust funds, and foundations (currently numbered at 300) and a list of past and present schemes. Senior urges the regional health authorities to select artists and performers: they should see themselves as patrons of the arts with a vital role in animating the environment of dull, brutal, uniform wards and corridors for the benefit of patients, staff, and visitors alike. He is anxious to distinguish Arts for Health schemes from the specialised clinically related activities of art therapists, though he agrees that the improvement to the look of hospitals has a generally therapeutic effect on the people who use them, stimulating discussion and providing landmarks. It is thus important that staff at all levels—whether hospital porter, senior administrator, consultant surgeon, or ward sister—are consulted at the earliest stages of a commission or a residency, as are bodies such as friends of the hospital and patients' associations. Critics who suggest that art produced in a hospital cannot be high art or even good quality art are failing to account for the social context and the careful consultations of staff, patients, and visitors, who hold particularly strong views on what they want to live with.

Senior aims to promote the ideals of Arts for Health to government ministers in both the arts and health sectors. He realises that even minimal encouragement from them will make an enormous difference to the provision of arts. Already he has enlisted the help of Sir Richard Attenborough, who has agreed to be the first president of Arts for Health, and of the Carnegie UK Trust, which has just announced the award of a major grant towards the programme. Support of this nature and schemes such as that at St Mary's, Isle of Wight, are an encouraging development that should help Britain catch up with countries such as Sweden and Holland, where a percentage of the costs of all new public buildings is reserved for the provision of art.

Further information from Peter Senior, Department of Architecture and Landscape, Manchester Polytechnic, Manchester M15 6HA.

- 1 Coles P. *The arts in a health district: guidelines based on a case study*. London: Department of Health and Social Security, 1985.
- 2 Committee of Inquiry into the Arts and Disabled People. *Report*. London: Bedford Square Press, 1985. (Attenborough report.)
- 3 Coles P. *Manchester Hospital Arts project*. London: Gulbenkian Foundation, 1987.
- 4 Hospital Arts Manchester. *Annual reports*. Manchester: Arts Centre, St Mary's Hospital, 1986-7, 1987-8.
- 5 Moss L. *Art and healthcare*. London: Department of Health and Social Security, 1988.

Further reading

- 1 Coles P. *Art in the National Health Service*. London: Department of Health and Social Security, 1984.
- 2 Moss L. *Art for health's sake*. London: Carnegie UK Trust, 1987.
- 3 Pearson A. *Arts for everyone*. London: Carnegie UK Trust and Centre of Environment for the Handicapped, 1985.
- 4 Levete G. *The creative tree*. Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1987.
- 5 *Art in hospitals: conference report*. London: DHSS, 1983.