

ART

'White coat, warm heART'

Previously published at www.cmaj.ca

Art appears to have found a home in the halls of Canadian medical institutions. Sixty health science students, residents, and faculty from across Canada, submitted art to a juried show held in conjunction with the 2010 Canadian Conference of Medical Education, which celebrated the integration of science, arts and humanities.

Seventeen pieces were selected for

the exhibit, *White coat, warm heART*, at the conference in May in St. John's, Newfoundland by a jury that included Dr. Ruth Martin, Pamela Brett-McLean, Pat Grattan (the former curator of National Museum of Art in Newfoundland and Labrador), Barbara Sibbald and Carol-Ann Courneya.

According to organizer Courneya, the exhibit had three aims: to bear wit-

ness to the creative visions of our colleagues; to be more fully present in the midst of teaching and learning and caring; and to consider the deep current of creativity and artistic visions that contribute to the field of medical education.

CMAJ presents three of these works, along with excerpts from the artists' statements. — *CMAJ*

The Great Buddhist Physician Healer: U Saw Pe Ta

Dr. Steven KH Aung works in family, geriatric and integrated medicine, and teaches at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alta. He received the Order of Canada 2006, is the World Health Organization's advisor on traditional Chinese medicine and has written several articles and books on various aspects of traditional Chinese medicine as well as Chinese calligraphy and painting.

Artist's statement: I have been involved in traditional Chinese brush painting and calligraphy since I was a child, under the loving guidance of my father and grandfather, and later under Taoist and Buddhist masters. I am primarily interested in creating large spiritual paintings and calligraphic works expressing aspects of Taoist and Buddhist philosophy.

Being artistically creative has profoundly increased my well-being. I have much more balance in life and my well-being is put into harmony quickly, reliably, and gently. Artistic creativity makes me feel more integrated in terms of body, mind and spirit. Like a poet I am completely and utterly in the moment and absorbed when I work on art.

My experience making art has also had a positive influence on my professional work. It has helped me to heal my patients rather than just treat the illness or disease. The time spent creating art has also helped me maintain the healing energy and focus that is necessary for the long days I spend solving complex clinical problems. In addition, creating art has given me more insight into the nature of healing, suffering and spirituality (www.aung.com).



Steven KH Aung MD

The Great Buddhist Physician Healer: U Saw Pe Ta (2001). Chinese colourful ink on paper. 107 × 213 cm. *U Saw Pe Ta* was an imminent physician in ancient times, well known as an extraordinary and gifted healer.

Dear Diary, by M.D. Labyrinth, text by Tamar Rubin

1. I flew, I came alive, when I drew my arms through the crisp bright sleeves for the first time.
2. Med school's killing something inside you, he said.
3. I felt like a million bucks. I opened up a new bank account.
4. Now was the time for DNA,
5. and mixing with my future colleagues.
6. September turned to long December,
7. Bs to Cs. I passed my first semester.
8. I thought of him in winter, until the nodes between the branches grew sparser and were filled with soft green buds. Another love,
9. another summer in the lab. I dropped protein onto slides, and slides, and slides
10. until I found myself slipping off the edge; existential crisis number one.
11. He asked me to marry him, back home, on an escarpment overlooking the sea.
12. Our last summer together before clerkship, we collected shells on a quiet beach somewhere far away.
13. My first rotation was a never-ending bell-ringer.
14. The smell of coffee jarred me awake after long nights on call.
15. The constant beep and shake against my waist sent shivers down my spine.
16. Was I dying inside?
17. A walking dead man might as well make money.
18. They warned us we'd get stuck. I never thought it'd come as soon, or be as blunt.
19. I thought the pills I gave my patients might help.
20. When my first one died, I cried. I was jolted back to life.
21. I made my first correct diagnosis — on my own. I found my place.
22. Was that a light at the end of the tunnel?
23. The months dragged on. I thought about trading it all in for a fireplace and a good book.
24. Every night I fell asleep by my electric heater, reading.
25. I tossed the dice and hoped to land in a great Canadian city.
26. Screw the debt.
27. We bought a house.
28. I put on my lab coat and I knew that this time the weight of my stethoscope resting on the worn lapels would ground me. Less a noose, and more a gentle tug at the nape to keep me from floating up above the ground.

Nathan Stall and Tamar Rubin

Dear Diary, by M.D. Labyrinth (2009–10), mixed media. 46 × 96 cm. The text, to the right, appears in the art work.

Dear Diary, by M.D. Labyrinth

This art piece was created by the couple Nathan Stall and Tamar Rubin, who are both medical students. Stall studies at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ont., while Rubin attends the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ont.

Artists' statement: During our medical training, we are taught how to tell patients' stories. In this process we are encouraged to pare down their rich narratives and present a concise and accurate medical vignette — the “case report.” Unfortunately due to this process we lose a fascinating and

essential dimension of the “big picture” that initially drew us to medicine. Furthermore, the medical student's personal narrative is mostly irrelevant, and therefore largely untold.

As two reflective medical students, we have found that artistic endeavors are an essential aspect of our personal medical education. Through our work we are able to tell the story of our medical training, sort out the challenges we face and make meaning out of our varied experiences.

It seems as though we are often expressing our frustration and disillusionment with medicine and medical education in our art. However, by own-

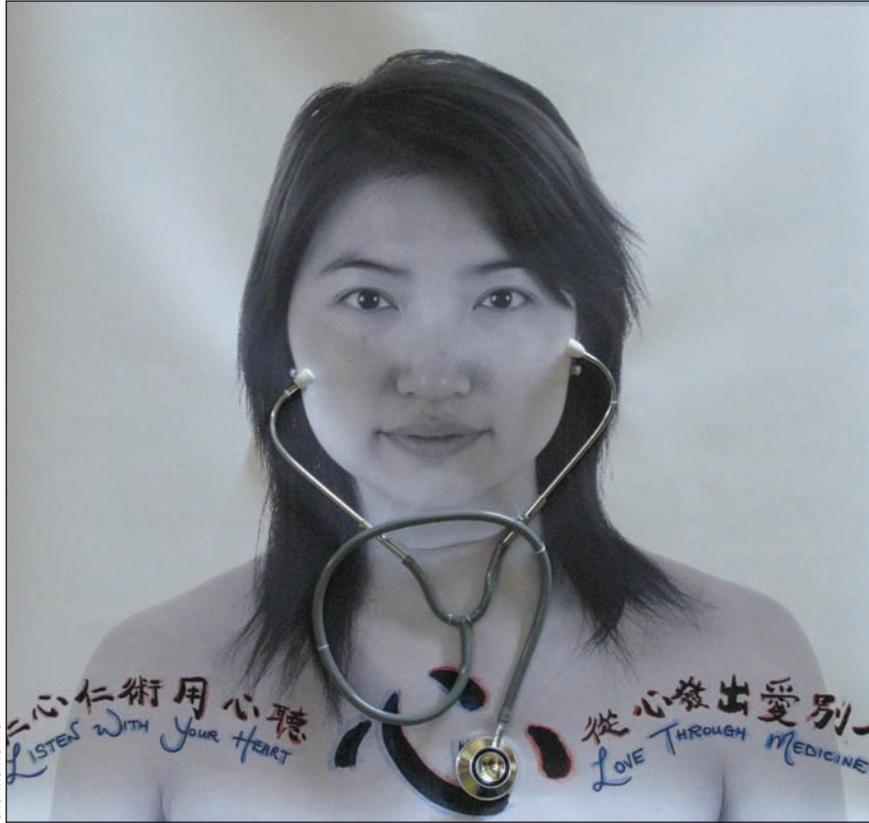
ing these feelings, and working through them at every stage of training, we believe we can help avert becoming jaded and “building up walls” between ourselves and our patients, something that plagues so many in medicine.

For us, art is not only an opportunity to reflect, but also an opportunity to spend time together. As a couple with busy schedules, engaged in a long-distance relationship, making time for fun and extracurricular activities is important. We are both creative: Nathan studied art history at McGill, and Tamar, the daughter of an artist, is an avid writer in her spare time. Creating art is one way we continue to unleash that creativity.

An empathetic and benevolent heart

Charmaine Ma BSc (Pharm), is a medical student in the class of 2013 at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.

Artist's statement: The Chinese character for heart dates to before 1200 BC (writings on oracle bone) and is a pictogram of the anatomical heart, depicting its four chambers and the flow of blood from the right atrium to the aorta. This character is a scientific and anatomic description of the heart, but it is also the artistic foundation of other Chinese characters such as love, which has the heart in its centre.



An empathetic and benevolent heart (2010), digitally printed on silk banner. 68 × 97 cm.

There is a Chinese proverb that states that empathetic and benevolent medicine can only be accomplished through an empathetic and benevolent heart. These four characters that make up this proverb are usually written on plaques or calligraphy pieces and given to newly practising physicians from patients and elders to hang in the office to encourage them and remind them of this premise.

Listening to our patients is an integral part of practice and listening involves not simply the ears but, more importantly, our hearts. A sincere and genuine heart is the beginning and end of medicine. Despite the many modern technological advances and evidence-based medicine we cannot forget that we are ultimately human. Medicine is a demonstration of love for humankind, curiosity for cure and a hope for the future.

As a young medical student I assume that all physicians entered this profession in the hope of genuinely helping others. Unfortunately our long training, heavy demands and busy schedules make even the keenest students dread the long on-call hours or extra patient at 3 am. For this reason, I constantly try to remind myself that empathetic and benevolent medicine can only be done through an empathetic and benevolent heart.