

# Art in Medicine: Structured Observation of Artworks with Application to Patient Care

Cynthia A. Standley, Ph.D., The University of Arizona College of Medicine-Phoenix

## Purpose

Partnering with the Phoenix Art Museum, we offered our medical students a program in structured observation of artworks, understanding of fine arts concepts and application of these skills to patient care.

## Introduction

The Program of Art in Medicine is part of the *Ethics and the Arts* element in the Department of Bioethics and Medical Humanism with a focus on using art as a vehicle for exploring ethics. Artistic exploration is an effective way to gain insight into our perspectives on the world as well as a way to continually challenge those perspectives those perspectives. Art can challenge a viewer to experience an ethical dilemma and explore its implications in new and creative ways. One component of the Art in Medicine Program is to collaborate with the Phoenix Art Museum to engage our students in ethical reflection and conversation to ultimately improve care of and empathy towards patients.

## Goal

To use art work to improve the relationship between physicians and patients by:

- Improving observation, perception and communication skills
- Improving visual diagnostic skills
- Practicing skills in a different context and outside of content area
- Distinguishing between appreciation and preference
- Understanding personal bias
- Learning to see in order to heal



## Methods

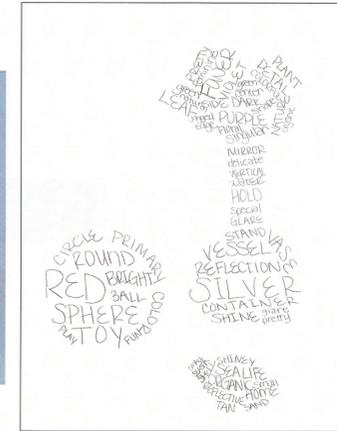
The program began in January 2012 and was opened to medical students in years 1-3 with a limit of 25 students participating at any one time. Sessions were held periodically throughout the year on a Wednesday evening during a time the Art Museum was open later with free admission. All sessions were facilitated by an art educator from the art museum as well as UA COM-P faculty. Each session lasted 1.5 hours and included pairing artwork with observation exercises in art concepts (color, light, form, etc.) and didactics to link artistic concepts with history-taking and physical exam skills. Students were given take-home follow up material to continue self-directed learning regarding the concepts discussed. Each session had a unique goal and covered a specific topic. Topics included questioning, descriptive language, conveying content, exploring bias, as well as many others.



**Figure 1: Theme: Conveying Content.** Activity "Blind Draw": While blindfolded, listen to a description of artwork and re-create it on paper (landscape, portrait, abstract painting)

### Goals of the session:

- Providing information using effective explanatory skills
- Listening effectively to arrive at an appropriate interpretation of information



**Figure 2: Theme: Descriptive Language** Activity: Using only words, "draw" an object in the museum.

### Goals of the session:

- Develop facility in generating descriptive language
- Develop sensitivity to meanings and shared languages

## Results

To date, 11 sessions have been held (3-4 per year). Not all students attended every session, but attended when schedules allowed. Attendance fared better when the activity was scheduled on non-exam weeks. As this is an evening program, it was challenging to motivate students to attend sessions after hours. However, the students that did attend felt that the program provided a great opportunity to see something different, enhanced their clinical skills of observation, and was enriching.

## Comments From Students

- *I think this is a wonderful approach for us to demonstrate greater empathy and compassion toward patients!*
- *This is a great program, and a great opportunity for us to see something different.*
- *Whenever I can't think of another way to approach a problem I remind myself of the discussions we had in regards to abstract art—there is ALWAYS another perspective to ponder and the fact that a perspective might not make sense to me does not mean that it isn't valid.*

## Challenges

- Resistance by students/faculty
- Distractions in learning environment?
- Faculty Development
- To value thoughtful reflection, creativity, critical awareness, humanistic values in medicine
- Curricular time
- For thought, discussions, creating art
- Institutional commitment
- To patient-centered care beyond mere words

## Discussion and Conclusions

The program has been successful in providing a different context for students to enhance their observation skills and ultimately provide students with opportunities to raise awareness and self-reflect on their care of patients. This program expands upon similar work initiated at medical schools/museums in other cities, but has broadened its impact beyond quantitatively documented improvement in observation skills. The program is realizing benefits across a range of clinical skills and mindsets. Our challenge now is to increase participation and offer additional avenues to generate student-interest in art-in-medicine.

## Future Plans

- Art Journaling
- Zentangle workshops
- Community outreach with art therapy
- Creation of art works by students based on patient encounters

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