

Jun 3, 2004

Murals add colour, smiles to hospital

Artist cheers up drab corridors
Paintings include pigs and dogs

DONNA JEAN MACKINNON
STAFF REPORTER

KRG Children's Charitable Foundation - Media Library

EXTORTED FROM

www.susybee.com

Artist Susy Bleasby is busy covering the corridor walls in the cardiac ward with a 60-foot-long underwater panorama featuring a snorkelling dog, splashing pigs and a bevy of fish, with big eyes and lavish lashes. To date Bleasby has painted 11 whimsical murals at the Hospital for Sick Children. Her cartoon-like people, animals and birds are designed to delight the eye and amuse both staff and young patients at Sick Kids.

Bleasby's hospital gig started 15 months ago with a phone call "out of the blue," she says. The hospital heard about Bleasby's art from her friend Joan Barrington (a.k.a. Bunkie the Clown) who entertains children at the HSC.

Bleasby's first commission, The Fish Bowl, was in emergency and since then other departments have been clamouring to have her cheerful murals on their walls, too. The Fish Bowl is in a low ceiling entrance to emergency. The artist painted all surfaces with aquatic creatures with anthropomorphic (human) qualities, including a fish with a fork and another sporting a toque. Along one long corridor in the "emerge" are cartoon children and fanciful birds sitting in branches gazing at stars. The emergency murals also include caricatures of nurses and staff who "befriended" Bleasby. "I liked working in emergency because it's open 24 hours and you get lots of feedback," says Bleasby, beaming as she gleans compliments from passers-by.

Steven Wise, president of KRG Insurance, is also director of the KRG Children's Charities, a foundation that has donated over \$1 million to the HSC. Wise's foundation gave money to improve the emergency department, medically, and for renovations to make it child-friendly. The initiative to make the ambience in emergency more pleasant included colourful murals by Bleasby. "I love her work, it takes away from the drabness of the hospital," Wise comments.

Bleasby, a self-taught artist and potter, enrolled in a course in classical animation after studying business at Queen's University. Two summers ago, she exhibited some paintings at The Distillery and was sold out. "I thought: There's something to this," she recalls. "I figured I could make a living out of creative stuff."

"I try to make the murals whimsical but not really kiddie," she says. Bleasby doesn't have any set timeframe in which to create her murals. Her subjects are simple and so are her colours — pastels, primaries and blue, pink nursery colours with no subtleties. Her technique is also simple: Bleasby only uses two small brushes. She is always mindful of her audience and many of the details in her murals are close to floor level so small children can enjoy them.

The commission at the HSC came at the right time in Bleasby's life. Her mother was very sick with leukemia and Bleasby was spending time with her at Princess Margaret Hospital. Mural painting took her away from her worry and, because it is a job with flexible hours, Bleasby could be with her mother when she was needed. "Also during all the time I spent waiting in Princess Margaret, I realized how drab hospitals can be," Bleasby says. Last Christmas Bleasby was working in oncology at Sick Kids when her mother had a relapse. "I had more understanding for the children in the cancer ward and sensitivity to the hospital environment," Bleasby says.

Bleasby stresses that her fees are from privately donated money and her supplies are donations from Home Hardware and Beauti-Tone Paint. She says that she doesn't want anyone to think that a child isn't getting a transplant because she has to be paid. Steve Tanner, Belleville's Chief of Police, helped raise money to fund the murals in the cardiac ward. His son Aron, 8, started life at Sick Kids. He was born with a congenital heart condition and was on a heart transplant list from eight weeks before birth. At 2, he fell, requiring life-saving brain surgery that was performed at Sick Kids. Thanks to the hospital's superior care, Aron is thriving and Tanner, who has participated in telethons, says he's eternally grateful.

Sick Kids hopes to raise enough private money for a permanent artist-in-residence position in order that Bleasby can continue her work indefinitely. The hospital estimates the cost to be about \$50,000 annually.

Wise is on this bandwagon and his foundation is committed to help keep Bleasby at her decorative projects as long as she wants to paint hospital murals. "When the kids see my murals, they are not in a hospital any more, but in a moment of magic," Bleasby says.

Murals add colour, smiles to hospital


[HOME](#) [COMMENT](#) [BUSINESS](#) [SPORTS](#) [ENTERTAINMENT](#) [LIVING](#) [SCIENCE & TECH](#) [WHEELS.CA](#) [TRAVEL](#) [CLASSIFIEDS](#) [CAREERS](#)

[Archive](#)
[Search](#)
[Saved Search](#)
[About the Archive](#)
[Search Tips](#)
[Pricing](#)
[Archive FAQ](#)
[My Account](#)
[Archive Help](#)
[Terms of Service](#)
[Login](#)

Document

[Start a New Search](#)

Buy Complete Document: **FREE** Abstract Full Text

Murals add colour, smiles to hospital; Artist cheers up drab corridors Paintings include pigs and dogs

[ONT Edition]

Toronto Star - Toronto, Ont.

Author: Donna Jean MacKinnon
 Date: Jun 3, 2004
 Start Page: G.15
 Text Word Count: 786

Abstract (Document Summary)

[Susy Bleasby]'s hospital gig started 15 months ago with a phone call "out of the blue," she says. The hospital heard about Bleasby's art from her friend Joan Barrington (a.k.a. Bunkie the Clown) who entertains children at the HSC.

Bleasby doesn't have any set timeframe in which to create her murals. Her subjects are simple and so are her colours - pastels, primaries and blue, pink nursery colours with no subtleties. Her technique is also simple Bleasby only uses two small brushes. She is always mindful of her audience and many of the details in her murals are close to floor level so small children can enjoy them.

The commission at the HSC came at the right time in Bleasby's life. Her mother was very sick with leukemia and Bleasby was spending time with her at Princess Margaret Hospital.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

Buy Complete Document: **FREE** Abstract Full Text