

# Arts and Culture



## Transforming the Healthcare Experience through the Arts

Blair L. Sadler and Annette Ridenour  
Aesthetics Inc, 2009  
Price: US\$69.95

Art and science have polarised loyalties since before the Enlightenment, so we should not be surprised that many clinicians still view artistic intervention in healthcare as no more than a harmless adjunct to their work. But they should be reminded of Le Bon's observation that: "Science has promised us truth...it has never promised peace or happiness." Yet, peace of mind and a scrap of happiness are just what the sick need when they are in distress.

In *Transforming the Healthcare Experience through the Arts*, Blair Sadler, a highly experienced and influential administrator, and Annette Ridenour, president of Aesthetics Inc, have produced a sumptuous volume which contains, in addition to a number of informed overviews, no less than 36 well-illustrated case studies, where sensitive and sensible application of the arts, in their many forms have measurably improved the patient experience – and, in many cases, produced significant clinical and financial benefits.

The authors have written an attractive and accessible handbook rather than an academic treatise and readers should not be put off by that fact that its format resembles a promotional compendium for the artists and institutions whose works are illustrated. In fact, this arrangement makes it user friendly at an informed, lay level where it is most needed.

Its scope is wider than many people would have thought possible – it includes post-Katrina shelter art and Milwaukee

### Night and day

Artwork by Michele Angelo Petrone, MAP Foundation

"As time goes by, night follows day, and day follows night – a natural cycle without beginning, without end and without gaps. Life's cycle continues without interruption, or at least it should. I found myself caught between life and death, light and dark, banished to an unknown place – between night and day. The illness forced itself into my life where there was no place for it. The arrival of illness stole a place and time that should have been destined for better things."



### So much love

Artwork and quote by Michele Angelo Petrone, MAP Foundation

"A serious illness does for your appetite for love what steroids do for your appetite for food. When feeling low and vulnerable, your appetite for love can become insatiable. Fortunately, love came to me from so many different sources, some friends, from my lover – well that goes without saying, doesn't it. The nurses and counsellors and even the cleaners gave so much love. It means so much to me even now. Some of the doctors also expressed love. Is a doctor a better doctor if he (or she) is loving? Undoubtedly, no question of it."

multigenerational interface on a shoestring – and compels interest through lively narrative. If the book doesn't say anything particularly new, one must not forget there are multitudes out there for whom it will be both new and topical. Early names who blazed a trail a quarter of a century ago – Roger Ulrich in the US, Susan Loppert in the UK and Marily Cintra in Australia – would all agree that this trumpet call to administrators, clinicians and architects needs to be repeated at every opportunity.

The book contains rather too many one-liners to bolster the case studies introduced, not all of which are apposite and, again, some of the laudatory observations about the schemes described are repetitive and maybe too saccharine-coated for some

**The journey**  
Artwork by Michele  
Angelo Petrone,  
MAP Foundation



tastes. Nonetheless, in one sense it doesn't matter, as the book is all about selling ideas and enthusiasms and such emphatic enthusiasm no doubt helps to spread the message.

Mental health is touched upon, mostly covering dementia, and the lack of more numerous examples probably reflects the fact that successful applications are hard to find.

The correlation of arts with the recognised quality benchmarks of safety, efficiency, timeliness, equitability and patient-contentedness is rightly stressed in the observation that, as well as recording proven successes in arts interventions, it is equally important to focus research on the perceived experiences of patients in care. This cannot be overstated.

Strong emphasis is also placed on the role that creative arts, both visual and performance, have in the area of public health, encouraging self-awareness in an ever busy, preoccupied population who could do a lot more to prevent themselves becoming ill in the first place.

Perhaps the most important message is contained in Roger Ulrich's afterword when he says: "I applaud the book's call to action for more research on the effectiveness of various types of arts interventions in different care settings." This is the next area of research in a nutshell, albeit a pretty substantial nutshell.

It is all very well for those of us working in the field to say that colour, light, control of noise, external view, animation, privacy and spatial continuity all have a positive role to play, but we are years away from demonstrating which of these factors is the more important in any given setting. And following that, some new brave souls will have to tackle head-on the topic of distraction as therapy. If that one is cracked, then we will all be motoring very fast indeed, with happier patients at our side.

*Transforming the Healthcare Experience through the Arts* is available for purchase through [www.artandhealthcare.com](http://www.artandhealthcare.com) or at Amazon.com.



**John Wells-Thorpe is an architect, a former NHS trust chairman and co-author of *The architectural healthcare environment and its effects on patient health outcomes***

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**TRANSFORMING the HEALTHCARE EXPERIENCE THROUGH the Arts**  
BEATE L. SÆVER  
ANNETTE RUDENHORST