

ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

Exhibition Review by Christopher Brown

The Art of Caring – 2019

**10th May – 14th June 2019, Lanesborough Wing, St Georges Hospital,
Tooting, London**

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Hospitals are strange places, separated from normal life, where we house the vulnerability and trauma of illness, where the corridors and signs seem endless, and things happen behind closed doors. Refreshing then to encounter this array of printed postcards splashed across the walls of the corridor leading to the first floor cafeteria deep inside St Georges Hospital. This open submission, inclusive exhibition comprises both artworks and wool words. There are over 200 pictures on display – or there were, but more on this later – and over 100 wool words created by student nurses in response to the Nurses Reaching Out project, which supplies woollen clothing for new born babies in Uganda.



The exhibition provides a rich, and moving, visual experience to those not so busy they can stop and look. Looking closely reveals imaginative responses to the International Nurse Day theme: 'Health for All'.



29. SUE CHALLIS -Care without Borders 1

Other themes, such as holding, touching and just being there, convey the caring side of human nature.



Pictures like these are clearly 'on theme' but with others their meaning was more idiosyncratic or hidden and I could not immediately see a correspondence. It was only when I was able to take a more leisurely view at home via the online collection that I could appreciate the breadth and depth of the exhibition.

I noticed the names of a few art therapists: Dean Reddick, Simon Richardson, and Asta Binkaускаite (see below).



The Sleep of Reason Brings Forth Numbers

158. Dean Reddick - The sleep of reason brings forth numbers



151. Simon Richardson - Swimming in Monet's Pond - Water Lilies



40. Asta Binkauskaite

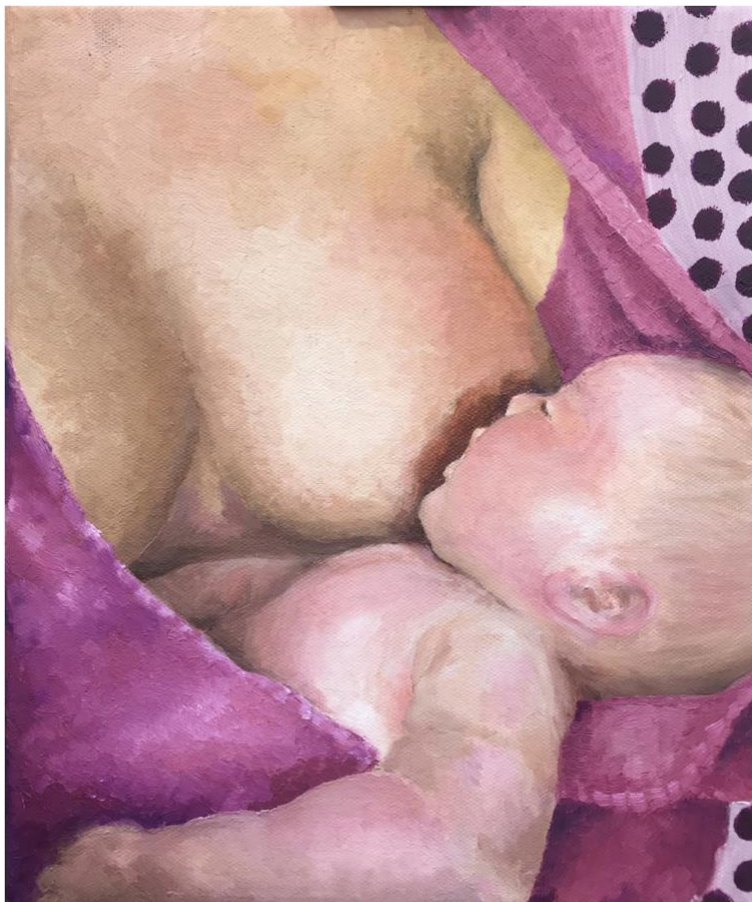
Their work brings a particular sensibility – artistically sophisticated and psychologically relevant. In fact, quite a few works were aesthetically sophisticated but it was the more simply stated ideas that moved me most, such as this one:



77. Peter Haugh - Dad's Room

The driving force behind the exhibition is Alban Low who is part of the artists' collective 'Collect Connect' who specialise in inclusive exhibitions. He has developed this annual exhibition over the past 5 years, which is supported by Kingston University and St Georges, University of London. Over the past 10 years, Collect Connect have worked with over 1500 artists and exhibited over 8000 artworks. Their ethos was originally developed to reduce the anxiety and stress involved in the process of getting art shown publically, which eventually led them to move out of the gallery and into the streets. In this way, class, privilege, entitlement, prices and payments, were all done away with and replaced by inclusive, free, digital submission with display in 'The Unsettled Gallery'. The gallery is both unsettled and unsettling. Artworks are placed in street or landscape locations to be taken away by whosoever encounters them and their further display is archived on the dedicated blog for each exhibition.

What is interesting in terms of the Art of Caring exhibition is the way some of this freedom to take away artworks appears to have crept in. Apparently, members of the public have been removing some of the postcards from the walls and taking them home. There was also another form of taking away through two pictures (see below) being removed by the curatorial team at St Georges, one contained a 'knife' and one was of breastfeeding – this is unbelievable given where the word 'nursing' comes from and that there is a Mother and Baby unit a few hundred yards away! They were instructed to do so by a senior manager, probably following a complaint, although this was not made clear to Alban Low, who felt that this becomes part of the narrative of an exhibition in a public space like this.



126. Anna Back



105. Chris Brown - NHS Preservation

The above picture (105) was originally titled 'NHS Cuts', but between submission and display became 'NHS Preservation', which was the title of another, linked, picture. While writing this piece I came across an article in the Observer with some shocking figures from a leaked draft of a document called the 'Interim NHS People Plan'. This report blames the government's decision to abolish bursaries for nursing students in 2015 for a staffing shortfall of 40,000 in 2018-19 that will increase to 70,000 by 2023 as demand grows faster than supply. They say that the huge drop in those applying to be nurses is directly correlated to the cuts in tuition and maintenance subsidies (Dennis Campbell, The Observer, Sunday 26 May 2019).

This exhibition's narrative is about caring, about the feelings it evokes: tenderness, passion, even aggression, which can be part of defending spaces where caring takes place. In one of her last interviews the psychoanalyst Hanna Segal said this: "The important thing is to keep a little fire burning; however small, however hidden. I find this extraordinarily helpful: we live in a mad world, but for those of us who believe in some human values, it is terribly important that we just keep this little fire burning. It is about trusting your judgement, and the power of love. A little trust, and a little care" (Jon Henley, The Guardian, Monday, September 8, 2008).

As I leave the hospital grounds I chance upon a relic from the past, a stone gateway sunk into the ground with a bronze bust atop it of John Hunter, who I later discover was the father of modern surgery at St Georges in the 18th century. In my mind this links to the two removed pictures – a father, a mother, a child – and I am suddenly filled with hope. Hope that human suffering can still be met with care. Hope that art can lift the spirit and help us remember the importance of human values.