

## **UC San Diego**

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06. Art as a Way of Knowing: The UC San Diego Art Program

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# Art as a Way of Knowing: The UC San Diego Art Program

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Though not an artist myself, I have always had an appreciation for art. Specifically, I've admired the power that art has to aide in communication, create emotional energy and heal<sup>1</sup>. Many years ago, at another organization, I instituted a poetry program. The purpose was to offer praise, recognition, and raise awareness for exemplary caring practices. The volunteer poets utilized a process of poetic transcription to create poetry using content from interviews conducted with nurse of the year nominees and their colleagues. There were approximately 20 nominees each year. At the annual luncheon to celebrate their achievements, each nurse's poem was read by an executive in front of an audience of their friends and family while the nurse's picture was shown on the screen. The collection of poetry also served as a living legacy of the real-world execution of Sister Simone Roach's caring model in practice<sup>2</sup>. The entire experience was very powerful. It was so loved that it that carried on for many years after my departure and transition to UC San Diego Health.

During orientation to UCSDH



**Judy E. Davidson DNP RN MCCM FAAN** serves as nurse scientist for the University of California San Diego Health. In this role she supports nurses with project development, research protocol development, presentation and publication skills.



**Jaclyn Russe BSN, RN, CCRN, CPTC** is a registered nurse and organ procurement coordinator with Lifesharing San Diego. She has been a critical care nurse for over a decade with time spent in the ICU, PACU, trauma, flight, and the US Navy. Her love of art started at a young age watching her grandmother paint. She is so happy to now get to share that love with fellow nurses and watch it convey emotions that may be otherwise hard to express.



Figure 1:  
"A Tribute to our Past"

in 2013, I noticed an absolutely stunning collage in the office of a new colleague. The artwork was of a nurse in traditional white attire entitled "A Tribute to our Past" [Figure 1].

I was incredibly moved by the piece; transformed by its beauty. I couldn't take my eyes off of it for quite some time and eventually struck up a conversation with the nurse who occupied the office, Linda Lobbestael, RN. Linda serves UCSDH as a professional development specialist, but she is also an artist and had created



Figure 2:  
See Me  
Melissa (Missy) Meehan RN

the piece herself. We talked about the artwork, and her passion for using art as a way of knowing. At that moment it occurred to me that it might be possible to create a program at UCSDH similar to my previous poetry project. However, instead of focusing purely on poetry, the program could be expanded to a more well-rounded display of artwork that encompassed a variety of mediums. Together, we brainstormed and finally landed on using art as a way of knowing, with intention, at the annual Evidence-Based Practice/Research Council-sponsored Inquiry and Innovation Conference.

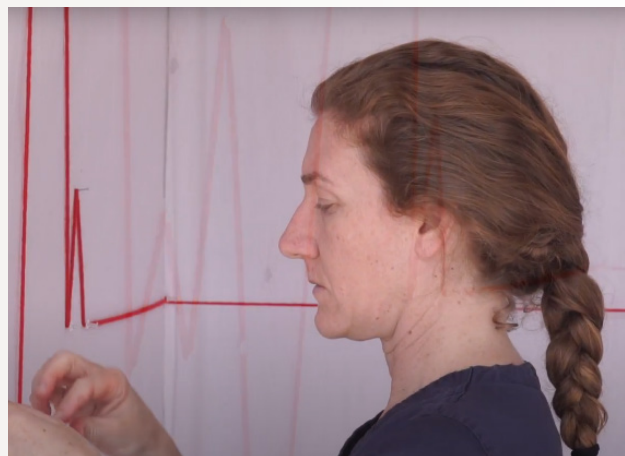
The structure for the art program was designed by Linda and it has endured the test of time. Since 2013 a call for art abstracts is solicited each January. Artists can be of any background. They write an abstract similar to the abstracts that are submitted for projects. The meaning behind their work is referenced/cited and is educational in nature. During in-person conferences, an art exhibit is created in the lobby and foyer of the event hall. Several artists also provide podium presentations. It is nearly impossible to narrow down the selection to insert in this article, and we apologize in advance for not being

able to show them all. The larger than life set of three paintings by Melissa (Missy) Meehan RN, “See Me” reminds all of us that the daily tasks we perform as healthcare workers are not the whole extent of our caring practice. Instead, to truly “see” a patient is to form a caring relationship that allows them to feel seen and connected with another human. [Figure 2]

Another unforgettable piece, made even more memorable by its unique viewing booth, was a [video](#) created by Laurel Prince MSN, RN [Figure

3]. The emotional video illustrated the burden that nurses bear in the workplace with work compression. The video was shown in a dark booth that the participant walked into and watched on a screen. Dramatic images of a nurse struggling to keep up with her work were depicted, culminating in a poignant call to focus on self-care as a matter of self-preservation. Later, the American Nurses Association published the link to the video in their electronic journal, *American Nurse Today*.<sup>3</sup> Laurel has moved on

Figure 3:  
Laurel Prince RN in video regarding self care.



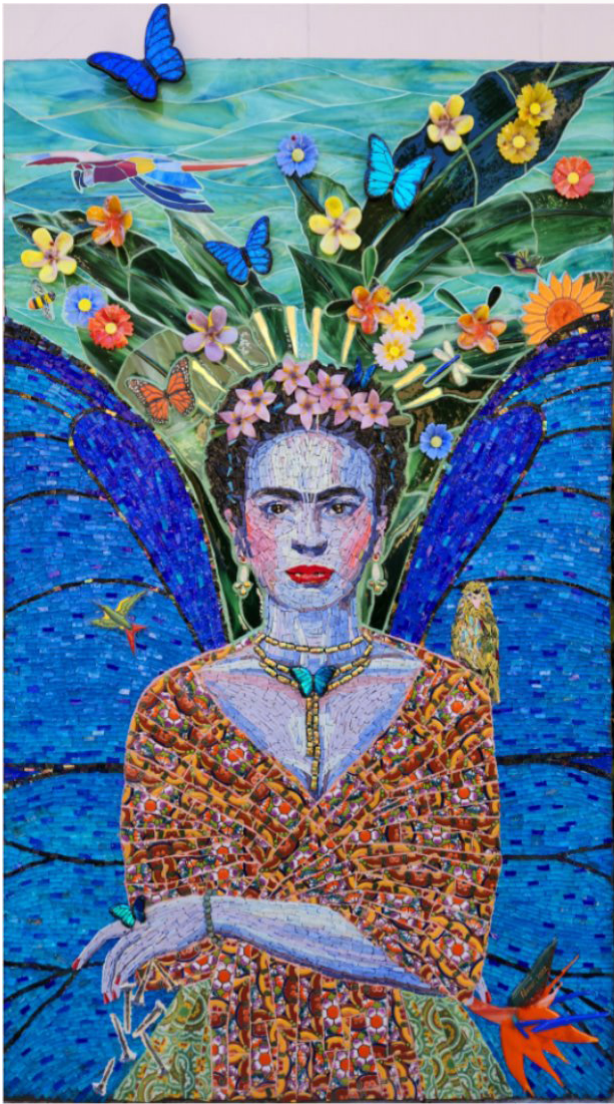


Figure 4. You can hear Rebecca's presentation of this award-winning artwork here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsCzWLtYj2c>

from UCSDH and is now a nurse in Washington state. Prior to her departure, she served on the Clinical Practice Council and was the originator of the STARFISH mnemonic, the framework of our professional practice model for many years. [Figure 3]

Each year, one piece of art is awarded the People's Choice Award by a vote of the conference participants. Rebecca Sauer RN has been awarded this honor multiple times. Her large mosaic pieces take nearly a year to make, are sold in art galleries and can be seen in her online [site](#). One of Rebecca's most poignant winning pieces was a large mosaic of the famed Frida Kahlo [Figure 4]. The piece represents Frida's transition from a painful life of suffering to an alternative life full of joy and freedom. Rebecca used Frida's inspirational story to personally

help her move through the pain of experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic and back into the world of creating art. [Figure 4]

In addition to artists who sell their artwork, many of our artists have also published their work in professional peer-reviewed journals. Linda Lobbestael, who originally co-developed the UCSDH art program, had her artwork featured on the cover of *American Nurse Today*, where it was awarded "People's Choice Award" [Figure 5].

*American Nurse Today* [ <https://>

Figure 5



www.myamericannurse.com/suicide-among-nurses-might-hurt-us/) included the story behind the artwork, developed to portray a nurse suffering from depression, in an issue dedicated to nurse suicide and suicide prevention<sup>4</sup>] Sara Pai RN NP also had her acrylic painting featured on the cover of American Nurse Today in another issue featuring information on nurse suicide.<sup>5</sup> [Figure 6]

Carrie Hudson Curcio Administrative Assistant' "Matters of the Heart" [https://www.carriannahudson.com/] pays homage to the classical anatomical depiction of the heart while utilizing caring words to describe each area of the heart, the piece was published in Critical Care Nursing Clinics.<sup>6</sup> [Figure 7]

Jeremy Passion RN's 'Portrait of a COVID nurse' [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7457917/ ] shows a nurse whose face is marred by long-term masking. The piece was published in an editorial written about the research conference and art exhibit<sup>7</sup> [Figure 8]

With virtual conferences, the



Figure 6

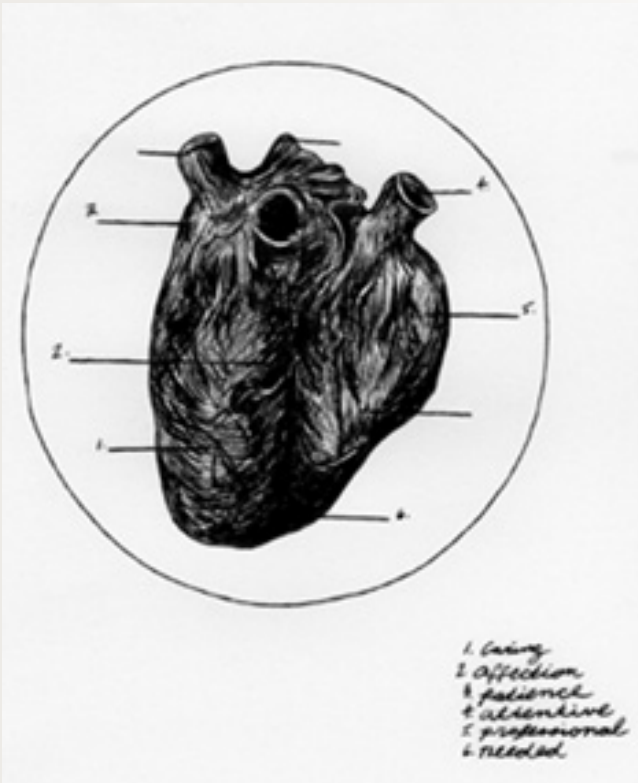


Figure 7



Figure 8

artwork is displayed both in picture format in the syllabus and during oral presentations given by the artist while they describe their work. Though an in-person up close and personal experience with art is preferred, the videotaped presentations about the art can be quite moving. After listening to Scott Deleuw's presentation about his multimedia collage "The Shell" (Click to listen) a conference participant commented, "I feel like I just had soothing therapy".

Combining art with research, evidence-based practice, and performance improvement presentations has been a great success. Each year, nearly 100% of those in attendance would recommend the program to others. Often participants comment that the most important lesson they learned during the conference was derived from an artist's presentation of their work. We believe we are the only team of nurses in any organization using art as a way of knowing in this manner.

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