

Mural Collaboration Aims to Heal Community

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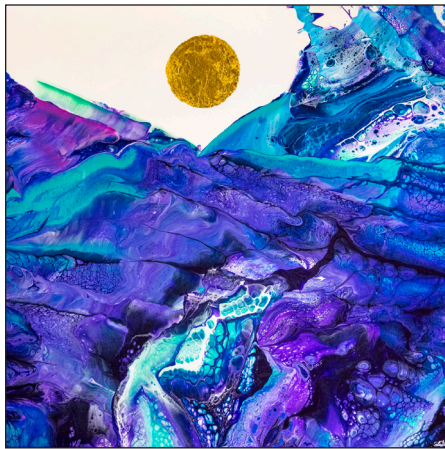
The past year has left our communities deeply scarred and in need of healing. For many of us, it brought loss, grief, hope, and a newfound awareness of the fragility of life. In response to this, Mayo Clinic Health System recently unveiled Phase I of an important project, the Healing Reflections mural. This is a collaboration between the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (UW-Eau Claire), Mayo Clinic Health System, and the Eau Claire community in an effort to heal our community and document the historic year of 2020.

For almost a year, the Healing Arts committee at Mayo Clinic Health System in northwest Wisconsin has been collecting compelling stories from employees, patients, and community members. The stories are centered around themes of healing, resilience, inclusion, diversity, hope, and economic hardship. Sharing the stories has given people the opportunity to reflect on their personal experiences from the past year. The concept of the Healing Reflections mural was developed by Todd Wright, MD, an orthopedic surgeon at Mayo

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“Under the Same Sun,” a mural panel created by Pa Kou Lee

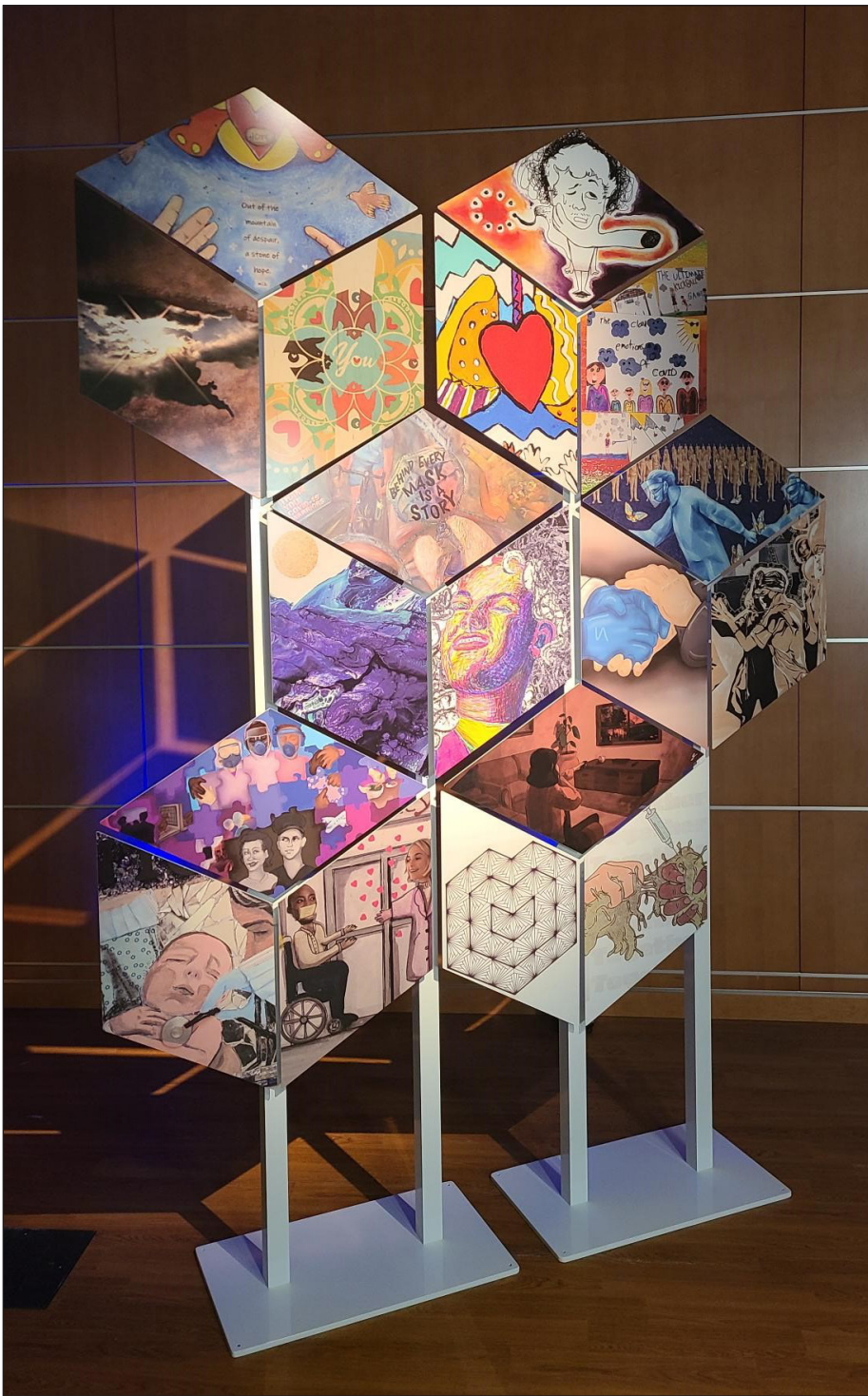
Clinic Health System, and Patricia Kleine, PhD, provost and vice chancellor for Academic Affairs at UW-Eau Claire. Stories are collected, and selected stories are sent to artists for inspiration. Artists receive two to four stories and then create a piece for the mural that represents one or more of the shared stories. The artists are local and range from art professionals to elementary school children. With the completion of the mural, a grand, diverse collection of artists’ renderings of personal experiences from 2020 will be on display.

Currently, the mural is composed of 36 panels of artwork that illustrate 39 of the 95 stories shared thus far. One piece is by Pa Kou Lee, a certified ophthalmic assistant at Mayo Clinic Health System. Unique to the project, Pa Kou Lee both wrote her story and created the artwork titled “Under the Same Sun” to describe

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her struggles during the pandemic. She wrote, “The nights were getting longer, and I could feel myself sinking, struggling to keep my head above the waves of change and my own emotions, and struggling to carry what felt like boulders in my chest. I couldn’t help but cry.” She also shared the comfort she found talking with her mother about her experience as a child tending a garden as the warm sun shone down on her. “I was reminded that though I may feel weak and overwhelmed, I still have purpose. I am still protecting a garden, just a more human version of it under the same sun of my youth, which is the same sun that rises today, and in some way, I was comforted by that,” she wrote. Her story is represented in the mural by a beautiful, abstract expressionist acrylic painting of a bright gold sun shining over rough blue water.

The Healing Reflections mural is far from



Panels from the Healing Reflections mural. Artwork was created by community members, ranging from professional artists to elementary school children, based on stories submitted by Mayo Clinic Health System employees, patients, and community members.

help initiatives like this that recognize the work and sacrifice of our health care workers and others in our community.

This project began as a way to help the local community reflect and heal following the stress and loss from the difficult pandemic year. Through the sharing and telling of stories, the Healing Reflections mural provides an essential outlet for individuals to express their feelings and experiences. Sharing one's sorrows, hopes, and lessons learned allows an openness that invites healing.

The healing that was catalyzed by this project stretches beyond those who share their stories. "People heal by gaining insight and understanding to another's experience, and also by validating their own experiences," said Dr Wright. Through listening, reading, and viewing the stories of others, we can better heal ourselves. Understanding that we are not alone in a time when we are isolated from one another is crucial for our community to recover. Together we can learn from each other's struggles and begin to mend the scars of 2020 that run deep in our lives, families, economy, culture, and entire way of life.

Medicine can certainly address some of the challenges brought on by the pandemic, but through collaborating with others, we can work toward healing not only individuals but also entire communities. Through the Healing Reflections mural project, Mayo Clinic Health System, UW-Eau Claire, and our communities in northwest Wisconsin have come together to learn about each other, to give hope, and to heal. Fostering these connections and collaborations within and outside of medicine will help to ensure that our communities grow strong again.

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complete as stories are still being collected across the region. The completed mural will contain 135 panels. In addition, UW-Eau Claire has started a sister project, gathering stories and artwork from students, faculty, and staff to make 45 more artwork panels. Across the community, lessons of heartache, hope and healing are pouring into these collaborative art exhibits, and a grand display is planned for late

summer or early fall on the UW-Eau Claire campus. The completed Healing Reflections mural will stretch 9 feet, 6 inches tall and close to 60 feet in length with the stories and reflections of people all across the community.

Funding for the project was supported through a donation by the Tri-County Medical Society of Eau Claire, Dunn, and Pepin counties, whose physician members are keen to

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