

# Healing THROUGH Art

**Painter and sculptor Alacia Stubbs believes that art truly inspires healing. So when she learned that Martha Jefferson was acquiring artwork to display throughout the hospital, she was excited to offer one of her pieces for addition to the permanent collection.**

"The hospital is a beautiful building in a lovely setting, so it's an uplifting experience," said Stubbs, who now lives in Queens, NY. "Having artwork on the walls is a lovely idea. I hope that in situations where there's tension or depression or uncertainty, my artwork and other pieces in the hospital will be soothing for patients and their families."

Stubbs' oil painting of trees stretching toward the sky is now displayed in Martha Jefferson's Proffit Road Emergency Department. Much of her artwork features plants and trees.

"I portray plants in an expressionistic way," said Stubbs, who earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Parsons School of Design in New York City and a Master of Arts in religion and the arts from Yale University. "I try to get across the vitality and energy of a plant and its daily struggle against insects, disease and harsh weather. I try to express plants' determination to grow and thrive and persevere."

An accomplished artist, Stubbs has exhibited her work in numerous group and solo shows at venues such as the Malette Gallery and the Lincoln Center in New York City; the Mills Pond House Gallery in Smithtown, NY; and the Silvermine Arts Center in New Canaan, CT. In 2006, she won the City of Charlottesville's ArtInPlace commission to create a ceramic sculpture for a public park in the city. The piece is now privately owned.

Stubbs experienced Martha Jefferson's Caring Tradition firsthand, in 2009 when her mother was in failing health and had to be hospitalized. Though her mother died in September of that year, Stubbs is grateful for the gentle care given by doctors, nurses and other staff members.

"I really felt that Martha Jefferson had a compassionate approach," recalled Stubbs. "People took time to answer my questions and explain things to me. It was a friendly, warm place."

Though art doesn't necessarily heal in the physical sense, Stubbs donated her painting because of the excitement she feels about contributing to the hospital's environment of beauty and comfort. She believes fine artwork can calm anxious spirits and cheer discouraged attitudes.



ALACIA STUBBS



"I've always enjoyed looking at art, and as an artist I feel exhilarated when I do," Stubbs noted. "It's like having a conversation. Artists say things [through their work] that I have thought about myself, as well as expressing things I haven't thought of before. It fills me with enthusiasm."

Thinking about the impact she hopes her art will have on Martha Jefferson patients and visitors, Stubbs

added: "My artwork, and that of others, may not offer a solution to immediate problems, but it may provide a temporary experience of beauty and peace. And perhaps in that moment of peace, patients and their families could feel hopeful. Perhaps it could calm a person down as they strive to make difficult medical decisions. It's a very humble offering for peace and composure." ▶

# Q&A

WITH ALACIA STUBBS

We sat down with Alacia Stubbs to talk with her about her love for art, how she got where she is today and why she believes so passionately in art as a part of the healing process.

**Q: What motivated you to become an artist?**

**A:** I wanted to submerge my personality in something much greater than myself: art. Tennessee Williams said something to the effect of: “When you begin as an artist, art is a vanity; but in the end, art is a humiliation.” I think Williams meant that every young artist thinks highly of her distinctive talent and assumes that early on in her career she will achieve revolutionary breakthroughs of originality. For me, what actually happened was a long struggle to find that maddeningly elusive “distinctive voice” — my own highly original way of saying anything about art.

**Q: When did you first begin to understand the healing power of art?**

**A:** I never thought of my own work except in the narrow terms of aesthetic problems to be solved. My attitude began to change when my mother’s health began to fail and she had to spend time in nursing homes. She asked me to bring a couple of my paintings and hang them in her room, where she could look at them when she was too tired to do anything else. I brought a painting of irises to remind her of our spring garden, along with a painting of our backyard in autumn. Over and over, my mother told me how much peace she felt looking at these paintings and reliving happy memories. My mother’s reaction to my paintings was that “aha!” experience for me.



Donor:  
Alacia Stubbs

Artist:  
Alacia Stubbs

Title:  
Untitled abstract  
landscape

**Q: How did you approach your art differently after that realization?**

**A:** My mother’s experience of feeling peace and joy while contemplating my paintings brought home to me forcefully the realization that the encounter with the beautiful brings with it a sense of psychic healing.

**Q: Why did you decide to donate your artwork to Martha Jefferson Hospital?**

**A:** After the experience with my mother, I was given a deepened insight into the meaning of practicing art. I began looking for ways to make the experience of contemplating beauty available in situations where spiritual relief might be deeply appreciated. When I learned that Martha Jefferson was amassing an art collection and placing artworks where they would be very accessible to patients and family members, it just made sense — and I was eager to donate.



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— Tennessee Williams