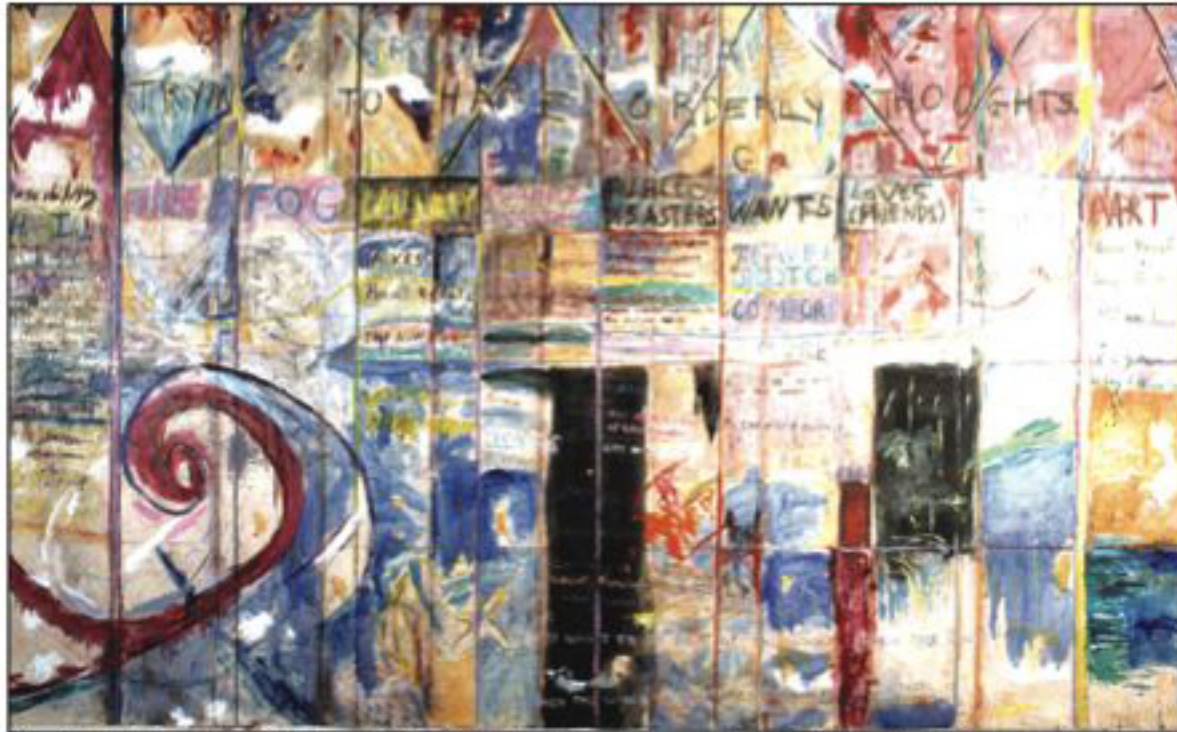


An adoption agency for art



JoAnn Rothschild, "Trying to Have Orderly Thoughts", 96" x 151" inches, mixed media, donated to St. Francis House through The Art Connection

Sandra Larson
Spare Change News

Thirteen people moving into permanent housing at St. Francis House in Boston will find something beyond a bed and a kitchen in their new digs.

Throughout the newly renovated space, beautiful, interesting, original artwork waits to soothe and stimulate the eyes, minds, and souls of once-homeless residents.

St. Francis House—like most places that offer food and services to poor and homeless guests—cannot normally buy original paintings for its hallways.

They didn't have to.

The art came at no cost, from the artists via a little-known Boston group that serves as a liaison between artists ready to donate art and nonprofit institutions who want art but are unable to afford it.

The Art Connection has placed 3400 pieces of art in 240 agencies over the past dozen years, including community centers, children's programs, schools, public housing, homeless shelters and rape crisis centers.

Artists donate their creations, said executive director Jim McDonald, for reasons ranging "from pragmatic to passionate."

For starters, "all artists want their work to be seen," he said. Sometimes artists are moving on to new terrain, he said, and don't know what to do with work from their earlier periods. Or they work in formats that don't fit well in most galleries—like JoAnn Rothschild's giant canvases—and may find in public institutions the space to display their work properly.

"And many artists are passionate about our mission," he said—making art available to people who have little

chance to access it otherwise.

Artist Nan Tull, who has donated about 40 of her works, said, "It gives it a new life when it goes into a new environment and is seen through others' eyes."

When the Victim Witness Assistance Program selected one of Tull's works, she said, "A woman there, a victim, whose son had been murdered, saw something in my piece that I wouldn't have thought of, something hopeful and connecting."

She likes how the agencies select art that's right for them. "We're not giving them work, they are selecting it."

The way McDonald describes the process, it sounds almost like an adoption.

"An agency has to provide us with a rationale for wanting art," he explained. "We want them to be in the right frame of mind. We let them know there may be costs involved, for instance framing. And the art has to hang in public spaces, not private offices."

McDonald wants recipients to see that the art has value, even though it is given for free. The donor artists are talented and

often widely known, with gallery shows and favorable press reviews on their resumes.

Recipient agency representatives come and view a portfolio of work to make their choices. "It's about a three-hour session," said McDonald.

The final handoff of the art is between the artist and the agency. After the donation, the agency owns the artwork. The Art Connection encourages holding a reception to celebrate the new arrival.

Tony Rello, manager of the Next Step housing program at St. Francis House, said he found the whole pro-

cess "not only productive, but fun."

Rello and a small committee that included a St. Francis House guest as well as other staff members went to The Art Connection to select pieces for their multi-floor building.

Some of the new art will hang in the busy first floor areas, where guests first arrive from the street to seek services, relax in the large atrium area or head for the dining room for breakfast or lunch.

Judging by the number of meals served—more than 800 each day—many eyes will see these paintings.

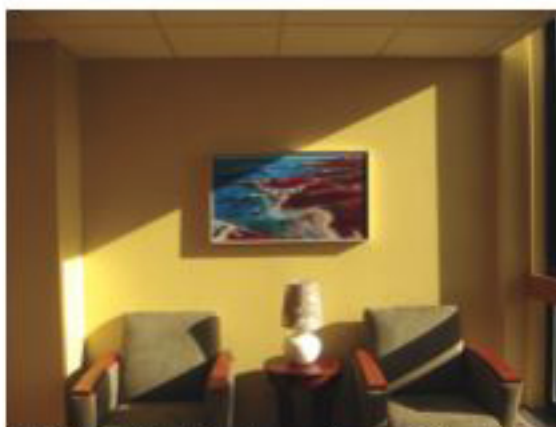
But to Rello, the artwork's impact doesn't stop there.

"Art touches your soul, touches your mind," he said. "It affects your self-esteem." He expects the new art to provoke thought and spark conversation.

"We looked for interesting art, not just pretty," he explained.

Several of the art pieces will grace the common areas of the new floor of housing. In its golden-colored "great room" residents can cook, eat, relax—and pause to contemplate the highly saturated colors of Prilla Smith Brackett's ocean shoreline painting.

"They brought our vision of housing to a whole new level," said Rello. "We never would have been able to have original art here."



Prilla Smith Brackett's oil on linen, in a new sitting area at St. Francis House



Nan Tull, "Letting Go", Encaustic & ink on hand-made paper, 23" x 16", donated to St. Francis House through The Art Connection

The Art Connection is always seeking new artists and agencies. For more information, including a gallery of art pieces, see www.theartconnection.org or call (617) 338-7668.

Artists whose work is pictured:

www.joannrothschild.com

www.nantull.com

www.prillasmithbrackett.com