



September 10, 2012



Herron students, faculty create art to touch and be touched by Riley Hospital's children

Through Herron School of Art and Design's Basile Center for Art, Design and Public Life, Riley Hospital for Children at Indiana University Health has commissioned a suite of nine, large-scale ceramic tile murals. The works recently were installed at communications stations of the new hematology, oncology and burn units in the Simon Family Tower.

"This partnership embodies everything I think about as a native Hoosier when I think of Riley at IU Health," said Alicia Schulhof, the hospital's chief operating officer. "Herron has helped us and partnered with us in a way that is going to affect the life of every child that walks through our doors," she said.

Riley at IU Health specified the broad themes for the mosaics. The students—seniors Alex Arntzen, Stephanie Dishno, Chelsea Klumpp, Patrick Thompson and Josh Williams—produced five panels representing an English garden, an Asian garden, the Netherlands, Indiana, and Lakes and Ponds. Herron Assistant Professor Lesley Baker produced four panels depicting wet and dry African savannas. The works are two and half feet tall and range from 12 to 14 feet long.

Baker said, "For this project with Riley at IU Health, we were first approached in the late fall of 2011 and presented design concepts in December, with the last student mural being installed at the end of May. My design was approved in April and my tile installation was completed in August."

Schulhof said, "We challenged Herron to help us as we put forth the ecosystems for our patients and their families. They took that concept, ran with it and created just a beautiful project." The tiles have different textures and are in relief, and include flora and fauna typical to each of the themes. "The patients can actually reach out and touch it and feel it and really become a part of that environment," she said.

Baker approached American Art Clay Company in Indianapolis to donate materials for the students' murals. "We were very interested in participating," said Jeff Sandoe, senior vice president of sales at AMACO. "We thought it was a worthwhile project. Because Herron is artistically driven, they're going to use the material to see where it can go to facilitate their vision. We love knowing about that. For us it shows creativity, but it also shows the quality of the materials."

One of the nine mosaics, just prior to installation

Image credit: Herron staff

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“One of the unique aspects of Herron,” said Baker, “is the connection to the community through art projects. Normally you’re telling students what it’s like beyond the classroom, but in this case, they are truly experiencing and understanding how to become a working artist.”

Baker said developing a concept and presenting it is valuable for students, even if the concept is not chosen. “Maybe ten people present and two are selected,” she said, “but they’ve all had the opportunity. They’ve gone through the process. You submit it. You put it out there. You’re accepted. Or you’re not. And then you know how to adjust for the next one.”

A major expansion to the Sidney and Lois Eskenazi Fine Arts Center, which includes Herron’s ceramics facility, currently is underway. It will make more projects like this possible, with the addition of new graduate and undergraduate studios, gallery and classroom space, and more work area for public art.

“One of the most exciting parts of the Simon Family Tower expansion project has been the ability for us to bring together the needs of the family with the talents of the Herron School of Art and Design,” said Schulhof. “They created artwork that makes our environment comforting and welcoming for our families, who are going through a very difficult time. This is just one way that we can bring all the elements together to make our environment rich and warm and friendly for those families.”

Baker described the feeling of seeing the finished project: “It’s exciting when the work is installed, seeing it in this environment—this beautifully designed hospital. The way the panels are placed, they’re in a premier location. They’re really a focus of the floor.”

To view a video about this project go to:
<https://vimeo.com/47041810>

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