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Art and medicine intersect at digital exhibit

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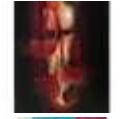
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Amy Jeffreys: The theme compassion relates to my pieces as they evoke an emotional response from the audience that triggers a recollection of a personal experience with loss. I strive to have the viewer respond to my own suffering by extending an understanding of this experience and therefore lending compassion.







The International Conference on Residency Education might not be the place you would expect to find a juried art exhibit. But since 2014, The Body Electric digital art exhibit has annually showcased visual art in a range of media, including photography, drawing, painting, sculpture and film.

Its co-curators Dr. Alison Crawford, a psychiatrist and assistant professor at the University of Toronto, and Dr. Lisa Richardson, a clinician-educator in the University of Toronto's Division of General Internal Medicine, both perform research in healthcare humanities, which applies fine arts and humanities disciplines to discuss or promote dimensions of human health and wellbeing.

"We are seeing more of using the arts in healthcare but it is not a big part of residency education. We approached the Royal College (of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada) who runs the conference, and they were very supportive of our idea for an art exhibit," Dr. Crawford said.

The digital exhibit receives submissions from artists, educators, researchers and health care practitioners. The selected pieces align with each year's conference theme and contribute to an understanding of medicine.

Dr. Crawford says she has seen a change in the reception toward the show.

"In the beginning, attendees were curious and interested, but now there is a cohort who attend looking for the show," she said. "And we have seen an increase in submissions, including from all over the world."

Medicine and art have long been intertwined, said Dr. Crawford. For example, as she wrote in the show's 2014 curatorial statement, medical learners historically "studied aestheticized anatomical drawings, and these drawings in turn heavily influenced the traditions of painting."

The show also helps physicians see their profession in new ways, according to Dr. Crawford.

"You often take your own discipline for granted so it helps to gain different perspectives," she said. "Using different disciplines to shed light on medicine helps us think about our own methods and philosophies. It is also an opportunity for self-reflection. A chance to think about how you use representation in your own practice, even if you are not an artist."

"And many of the pieces are from a patient perspective, so that also brings that into our awareness. Artists bring a lot of care and attention to their work and it invites us to do the same."
