

Sol LeWitt wall drawings bring a splash of color to CWRU/Clinic Health Education Campus

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View of construction inside the CWRU-Cleveland Clinic Health Education Campus, Wednesday, February 27, 2019. (Marvin Fong / The Plain Dealer)

CLEVELAND, Ohio – Like many newer buildings at the Cleveland Clinic, the interior of the main building at the new Health Education Campus is very, very white.

Apart from areas accented in wood, the building evokes a snowy landscape, or the clean, bright look of a physician's coat.

Nevertheless, it's getting some serious splashes of color, thanks to the Clinic's Arts & Medicine Institute, whose mission is to integrate art and healing.



Roller paint rags are tossed to artists working on the Sol LeWitt installation at the CWRU-Cleveland Clinic Health Education Campus, Wednesday, February 27, 2019. (Marvin Fong / The Plain Dealer)

Last week, seven artists were using scaffolds and rags to re-create a pair of gigantic wall drawings by the late, great American artist, Sol LeWitt, a master of Conceptual Art whose creative output often consisted of written instructions carried out by others, in this case, posthumously.



The CWRU/Cleveland Clinic Health Education Campus, photographed in late November. Marvin Fong, The Plain Dealer

The main building at the Health Education Campus is part of a \$515 million jointly owned project of the Clinic and Case Western Reserve University at East 93rd Street between Chester and Euclid Avenues. The campus also includes a new CWRU dental clinic, north of Chester Avenue, also under construction. Designed by architect Norman Foster of England, the 477,000-square-foot main building will soon host CWRU's School of Medicine, School of Dental Medicine and the Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing, and the Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine. The programs will start moving in this month, and classes begin in July.



Sol LeWitt, LeWitt at Syracuse University. LeWitt (1928-2007) was a leader of the Conceptual Art movement. Photo courtesy Syracuse University.

LeWitt (1928-2007), fashioned a visually powerful art of rigorous logic and elegant form out of variations on basic geometric shapes, especially the cube.

"All the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair," LeWitt once said. "The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."



Mike Sobeck climbs scaffolding as he works on the Sol LeWitt installation at the CWRU-Cleveland Clinic Health Education Campus, Wednesday, February 27, 2019. (Marvin Fong / The Plain Dealer)

The big geometric abstractions, each measuring 23 feet 4 inches high by 37 feet 7 inches across, will adorn two large classrooms on the second floor of the new building over its east and west entrances. The wall drawings are about halfway through a month-long process that involves plotting precise pencil lines on the walls, laying down tape to create sharp edges, and then using rags to rub specific areas with multiple layers of precisely mixed washes of ink.

The idea is to produce a rich, luminous effect – like watercolor, but on the scale of a billboard.

“It’s very physical,” said Susan Danko, one of the seven artists, who has worked as an installer for 18 years at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland. “We are climbing all over the scaffolding like crazy people.”



Joanne Cohen, executive director of the Cleveland Clinic’s art program, holds Sol LeWitt artwork, to show what the background will represent inside the CWRU-Cleveland Clinic Health Education Campus, Wednesday, February 27, 2019. (Marvin Fong / The Plain Dealer)

One drawing will resemble a red-and-yellow stepped platform floating on a blue background. The image will simultaneously appear flat and robustly three-dimensional. The other drawing will resemble a fan made of triangular shapes unfurling on a rich, yellow background.

The LeWitt drawings represent the solution to a challenging problem that faced Joanne Cohen, executive director and curator of the Clinic's art program.

The art budget for the new building was small, so "we had to be really resourceful and figure out what we could do," she said.



Scaffolding used on the Sol LeWitt installation at the CWRU-Cleveland Clinic Health Education Campus, Wednesday, February 27, 2019. (Marvin Fong / The Plain Dealer)

Cohen, who joined the Clinic in late 2005, drew on connections to make things happen. She asked Carol LeWitt, the artist's widow, whether his estate would loan a pair of large wall drawings to the new building for free.

The answer was yes. The Health Education Campus can keep each work for 25 years. Typically, when such agreements end, the host institution agrees to paint over the artwork, but Cohen is hoping the loans will continue.

The Clinic's art program is paying for labor and materials to recreate the drawings, Cohen said. The cost is estimated in the low- to mid-five figures, she said.



Artist Megan Dyer worked on Sol LeWitt's "Wall Drawing #4" temporarily installed in 2009 at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Art institutions in Northeast Ohio have installed and removed various LeWitt wall drawings in recent years. After the new ones being installed at the CWRU/Cleveland Clinic Health Education Campus, there will be four on view in the region. (Lonnie Timmons III / Plain Dealer) The Plain Dealer

LeWitt's estate supervises the recreation of a wall drawing to ensure high standards of quality. According to the arts and medicine program, LeWitt produced roughly 1,350 wall drawings, comprising some 3,500 installations at more than 1,200 venues.

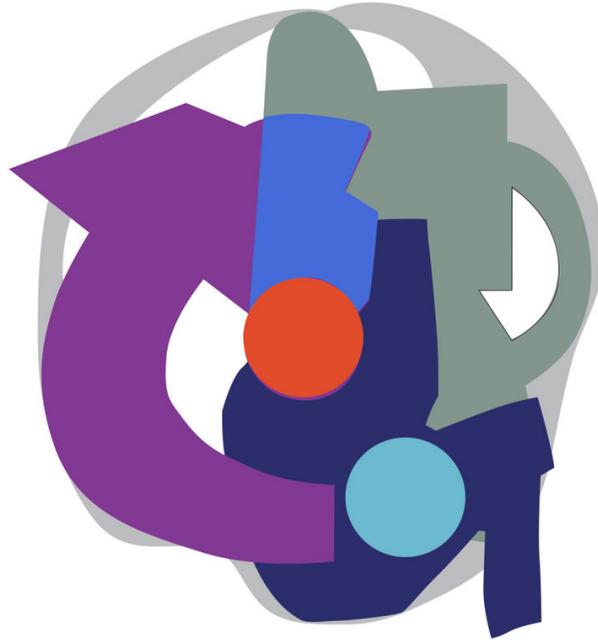
Such installations have continued since the artist's death in 2007. The Akron Art Museum and the Cleveland museum each have a LeWitt wall drawing. The new examples taking shape at the Health Education Campus will bring Northeast Ohio's total to four.



Mike Sobeck, left, and Davon Brantley, right, hold Sol LeWitt artwork, to show what is under installation at the CWRU-Cleveland Clinic Health Education Campus, Wednesday, February 27, 2019. (Marvin Fong / The Plain Dealer)

To make the new drawings in Cleveland, the LeWitt estate dispatched veteran installers Karen Tepaz and Gabriel Hurier to work with Danko, Michael Sobeck, Michael Lombardy, Joseph Goergen and Davon Brantley, all of Cleveland.

Cohen reached out to organizations including LAND Studio and the Cleveland Institute of Art to find artists willing and able to drop everything for a month to work on the LeWitts.



A study for one of four wall reliefs by Hayal Pozanti to be installed at the CWRU/Cleveland Clinic Health Education Campus.
Image courtesy Cleveland Clinic Arts & Medicine Institute

In addition to the Lewitts, the new building will feature four colorful, large-scale wall reliefs created by **Hayal Pozanti**, a native of Istanbul who lives and works in Los Angeles.

Pozanti created an alphabet of abstract shapes that encode major events in the histories of the four schools to be housed in the Health Education Campus, Cohen said.

Pozanti's works have yet to be installed. But as of Wednesday, the LeWitt team was hard at work mixing ink washes, and rubbing color onto the building's walls to produce the drawings.



Mike Sobeck, left, and Davon Brantley, right, hold Sol LeWitt artwork, to show what the background will represent inside the CWRU-Cleveland Clinic Health Education Campus, Wednesday, February 27, 2019. (Marvin Fong / The Plain Dealer)

The goal was the opposite of self-expression. The artists worked as a team to create a unified overall effect that didn't show the touch or hand movements of any individual.

"The object is stepping back and looking at it and not seeing any of us in it, so it's not like one person did it," Lombardy said. "I've been saying I have the ghost of Sol in me."