

Art commissions for Richard Desmond Children's Eye Centre

*Excerpts from the book *The Richard Desmond Children's Eye Centre, Moorfields Eye Hospital* (published by Wordsearch).*

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...a process of selecting artists to work in the building was underway under the guidance of ArtOffice. Penoyre and Prasad saw the opportunity to truly integrate art and architecture on the façade. The artist Alison Turnbull was selected to help compose the louvre elevation, and to decide on colours. 'Drawing is central to all my work. I'm also interested in architecture, so this was a great project for me. It wasn't so much about "making art" as it was about doing something really collaborative, with a definite outcome. I looked for drawings connected with optics and eye testing, and I came across the fragmented grids used when testing for macular degeneration.' This is progressive damage to the area near the centre of the light-sensitive retina that is responsible for detailed vision. The grids indicate the progressive loss of central and detailed vision, with the peripheral vision remaining clear. She also crumpled pieces of paper with grids sketched on them, to show that when you project an orthogonal pattern onto something that is folded, and then you flatten it out, the pattern becomes non-orthogonal.

The resulting positioning of the louvres resembles these 'wobbly' grids, and provides the façade with the desired visually swirling movement. With Turnbull's advice the team decided that rather than using colour for the louvre blades they should be three shades of silver grey. This exaggerates the effect of tonal variegation regardless of prevailing light quality.

Other art commissions:

On each floor a bridge crosses the zig-zagging lightwell which runs up the building separating the lift/stair cluster, acting as a break before entering the clinical areas and introducing a sense of space, scale and orientation. All of this happens against a most dramatic orientation device, a huge mural by artist Yuko Shiraishi. Not only does it connect the building vertically, it also increases this sense of 'bigness' while at the same time engaging people in the waiting areas.

More than thirty different colours are used in the mural, a reflection of the individual colour schemes for each floor, which were chosen in close consultation with the client. It contributes to the atmosphere of calm most conducive to healing and recovery, and to the reduction of stress most particularly needed in what Prasad calls 'the in-between times and the in-between spaces'; the waiting areas in particular. Throughout the waiting areas are counters with computers where the children can use the internet or play games, as well as more traditional play areas for younger children.

Lucy Casson and Samantha Bryan have also been commissioned to provide artwork within the hospital, a practice which the more enlightened clients of new hospitals are increasingly pursuing. Casson's two to three foot high creatures made from coloured terrazzo/plaster are attached high up the internal concrete columns in the waiting areas on the ground, first and fourth floors.

Samantha Bryan's fairies (mixed media sculptures constructed from wood and brass with hand dyed and stitched leather bodies, wire skeletons and clay heads) are contained in clear, circular domes chosen to compliment the circular windows on the east elevation. It's not hard to imagine the hours of fun that children will have as they gaze at these delightful scenes by both artists.