

Art at Mount Sinai

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Abstract

The Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York is a private institution with many public spaces. Over the years, Mount Sinai has acquired art to add vitality and interest to these public areas. This article provides brief details about some of the larger artworks and how they found their way to Mount Sinai's campus on Fifth Avenue. There is also a description of one smaller object that is held in the collections of the Mount Sinai Archives. The latter is an original sketch of a Mount Sinai physician, done by the famous medical illustrator, Frank H. Netter, M.D.

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THE MOUNT SINAI MEDICAL CENTER in New York is a private institution with many public spaces. Over the years, Mount Sinai has acquired art, through donation and purchase, to add vitality and interest to these public areas. The reasons for this are many. For one, a hospital is a place where people come for health care. It has long been thought, with some research behind it, that people who are ill or in distress, do better when exposed to beauty (1). Mount Sinai is also a busy workplace, with thousands of employees, medical staff and visitors spending time at the institution. It is of benefit for them too, to have visually stimulating artwork around the Medical Center. And in a larger sense, Mount Sinai is also a part of the urban landscape that is New York City. These artworks help define Mount Sinai's physical space as a landmark in the city.

This article provides brief details about some of the larger artworks owned by the Medical Center and how they found their way to the Mount Sinai campus on Fifth Avenue. There is also a description of one smaller object that is held in the collections of the Mount Sinai Archives. The latter, an original sketch of a Mount Sinai physician, done by the famous medical illustrator, Frank H. Netter, M.D., was transferred to the Mount Sinai Archives by the Department of Surgery. (In general, the dates listed are when the object was put on

display at Mount Sinai, not necessarily when the piece was created.)

“Gene Segment” (Fig. 1)

Artist: Ivan Chermayeff (1932–)

Location: Outside the Carl Icahn Medical Institute Building, Madison Avenue

Date: 1998

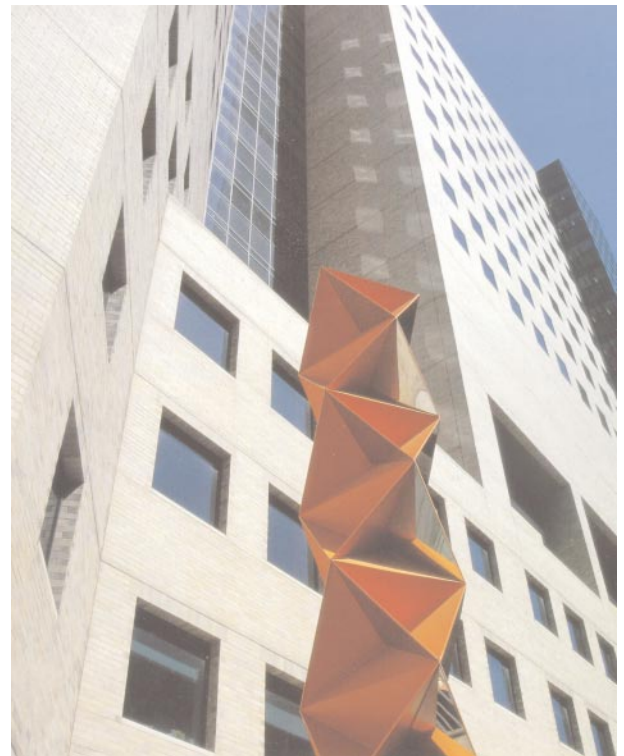


Fig. 1. “Gene Segment,” by Ivan Chermayeff. 1998.

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As noted in the January 5, 1998 issue of the newsletter, *Inside Mount Sinai*:

This piece...is an artistic representation and symbol of the cutting-edge research and exploration taking place in the building's laboratories and across our campus. Consisting of orange-colored steel and aluminum forms revolving and rising 28 feet, it is animated by spiraling, mirrored surfaces that reflect the changing seasons, clouds, and people walking by against the background of Mount Sinai's newest building.

The artist, Ivan Chermayeff, is a principal and founder of the New York design firm, Chermayeff and Geismar, Inc. The firm is known for many designs, including the iconic number 9, at 9 West 57 Street in New York and the logo for the Chase Manhattan Bank. Chermayeff studied at Harvard University and the Chicago Institute of Design, and graduated from Yale University School of Art and Architecture. He is an honored member of many professional associations, including the Industrial Designers Society of America and the Alliance Graphique Internationale. Chermayeff has received many honors and awards for his design work.

“Blue Talis” (Fig. 2)

Artist: Nancy Kozikowski (1943 –)

Location: Madison Avenue entrance to the Guggenheim Pavilion, over the stairs

Date: 1990

This large piece, 14 feet by 14 feet, was commissioned from the artist while the Guggenheim Pavilion was still under construction. As evident from the title, this work represents a talis, or prayer shawl, invoking Mount Sinai's roots in the Jewish community. Its position on the wall over the stairs makes it a focal point for people leaving the busy Plaza Cafeteria.

Nancy Kozikowski is a well-known textile artist and has been very active in the New Mexico art community. Her main body of work is in weaving, although she has also painted portraits. In her work, Kozikowski explores Native American, Southwestern, and abstract themes, often using geometric shapes. She has been involved in many exhibits and shows, and has pieces in various collections, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC.

“Central Park” (Fig. 3)

Artist: Henry Varnum Poor (1888 – 1970)

Location: Lobby of the Klingenstein Pavilion,



Fig. 2. Artist Nancy Kozikowski standing next to “Blue Talis” in her workshop. 1990.



Fig. 3. “Central Park,” by Henry Varnum Poor, shortly after its installation in the Klingenstein Pavilion lobby. 1954.

Fifth Avenue

Date: 1954

Also known as “Children and Central Park,” this large ceramic mural measures almost 8 feet by 19 feet and is composed of almost 250 nine-by-nine inch tiles. It shows scenes of families, the Central Park Zoo, the boathouse and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

This mural was given to Mount Sinai by the widow of Maurice Wertheim, a Mount Sinai Hospital trustee from 1945 until his death in 1950 at the age of 64. Mr. Wertheim was a founder of Wertheim & Co., an investment banking firm. He was an avid sportsman and chess player, and was committed to environmental causes. In 1947, he donated 1,800 acres of land in Suffolk County on the Great South Bay to serve as a wildlife refuge. As often happens, Mr. Wertheim had many ties to Mount Sinai beyond being a trustee. His daughter, Barbara, was married to long-time Mount Sinai physician, Lester Tuchman. His close friend and one of the executors of his estate was Mount Sinai Chairman of the Board, Mr. Joseph Klingenstein.

The artist, Henry Varnum Poor, was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Stanford University, Class of 1906, and received additional art training in Europe. He created art in many mediums. His portraits are in the collections of the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, as well as the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Poor worked in ceramics, and authored a book about it. He was also a well-known muralist, creating works for the Department of Justice and Pennsylvania State University. An educator in the field of art, Poor was a founder of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. Henry Poor died in 1970.

Bench (Fig. 4)

Artist: Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988)

Location: Southwest corner of Annenberg Building lobby

Date: 1977

This granite sculpture was given to Mount Sinai by Cynthia Hazen Polsky and her sons, just

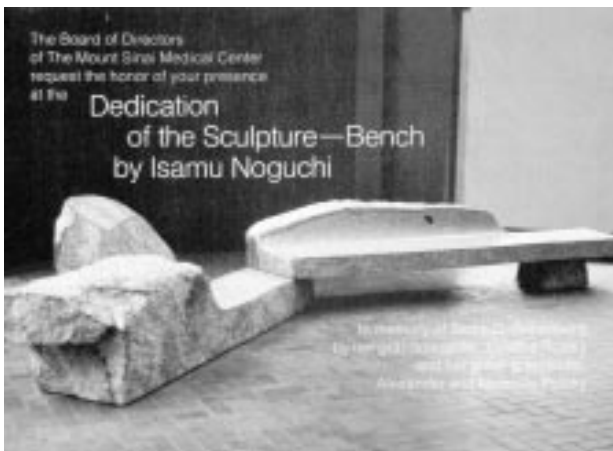


Fig. 4. The front of the invitation to the dedication of “Bench,” by Isamu Noguchi. 1977.

three years after the Annenberg Building opened. It was given in honor of Mrs. Sadie Annenberg, Mrs. Polsky’s grandmother, for whom the Annenberg Building is named. The bench is designed to be used as well as admired, and it frequently is.

Isamu Noguchi was born in 1904 in Los Angeles, and grew up in Indiana. However, his career was based in New York and he is considered an important sculptor of the New York School. In addition to this stone bench, he is responsible for other recognizable pieces around the city, including *Red Cube*, the painted steel cube on its edge with a hole in the middle outside the Marine Midland Bank at 140 Broadway (1968) and *News*, the stainless steel relief inside the Associated Press Building at Rockefeller Center (1938–1940). In 1961, Noguchi moved to Long Island City in Queens, and in 1985 he established the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum there.

“Sfera Grande” (Fig. 5)

Artist: Arnaldo Pomodoro (1926–)

Location: Nathan Cummings Plaza, Fifth Avenue side of the Guggenheim Pavilion

Date: 1974

Nathan Cummings, Mount Sinai trustee, 1971–1985, commissioned and donated this work to the Medical Center. The founder of the Consolidated Foods Corporation (later the Sara Lee Corporation), Mr. Cummings was an avid art collector and philanthropist. His generosity to Mount Sinai is witnessed today in the Nathan Cummings Basic Sciences Building, the Cummings Atrium and the Cummings Plaza, where the Pomodoro stands. Mr. Cummings died in 1985, but the Nathan Cummings Foundation, established in 1949, continues helping people to this day.

Arnaldo Pomodoro was born in Italy in 1926. A sculptor with an international reputation, Pomodoro did many similar spheres during this period. At the time of the gift, the artist described the work as a “destruction of form,” with the breaks in the outer wall an expression of “the potential destructiveness that emerges from our era of disillusionment.” The Guggenheim Museum in New York has a smaller sphere by Pomodoro, completed in 1964. The Museum’s description of their work also seems to apply to Mount Sinai’s *Sfera*:

Underneath the gleaming skin and solid flesh of the bronze lies a regulating machinery of cogs and gears, which Pomodoro calls “sign systems,” akin to the complex interlocking systems of language or of organic bodies. The sphere not only functions as a geometric shape and analogue of a living body or mineral form, but also suggests the globe of the earth. The equatorial rupture produces configurations sug-



Fig. 5. “La Sfera Grande” in its original home on the Cummings Plaza before the current Guggenheim Pavilion was built, 1974.

gesting land masses, and evokes the earth’s core and desiccated ocean beds. By eliminating frontality, Pomodoro invites the viewer to circle the globe, conveying a sense of uninterrupted rotational movement imitating the orbit of planets (2).

This artwork, perhaps more than any other, has become an important symbol at Mount Sinai. In photographs of the campus, the sphere is often contrasted with the triangular form of the Guggenheim Pavilion. It has also been incorporated as a component of the logo of the Mount Sinai Alumni Association.

“Howard Lilienthal, M.D.” (Fig. 6)

Artist: Frank H. Netter, M.D. (1906–1991)

Location: In the collection of the Mount Sinai Archives

Date: unknown

Howard Lilienthal was a noted surgeon, inventor, artist and sportsman. He served as chief of Mount Sinai’s thoracic surgery service from



Fig. 6. “Howard Lilienthal, M.D.,” by Frank Netter.

1900–1922, although he published many papers on general surgical topics as well. He was the medical director of Mount Sinai Hospital’s unit, Base Hospital #3, in France in World War I and was cited for the Distinguished Service Medal.

Born in 1861 in upstate New York, Lilienthal attended Harvard College and then Harvard Medical School. In 1887, he achieved the top score on the exams for a position on the Mount Sinai house staff, and was the first young doctor in the fifteen-year history of the house staff to choose advanced training in surgery over medicine. In 1925, Lilienthal published an early textbook in English on thoracic surgery, a title that was frequently reprinted. Lilienthal died in 1946 at the age of 85.

The artist, Frank H. Netter, M.D., was born in Brooklyn in 1906 and became a successful commercial artist in the 1920s. Then, at his mother’s request, he enrolled in the New York University School of Medicine, graduating in the class of 1931, and served a two-year surgical internship at Bellevue Hospital. In 1933, he joined the staff of the Mount Sinai Hospital Out Patient Department, working in the general surgery clinic. He continued working as an artist to support himself as he tried to start a practice. By the end of the 1930s, Netter had combined his two careers into the field of medical illustration, and over his lifetime achieved considerable recognition for his work. It

would be hard to find a doctor who trained in the second half of the 20th century who had not studied a medical illustration by Netter.

Netter is best known for a series of projects begun after World War II with the CIBA Pharmaceutical Company, which culminated in the multi-volume set of *The CIBA Collection of Medical Illustrations*. This work, arranged by organ system, required months of studying before the drawings for each volume were begun. Although Dr. Netter died in 1991, his work continues to be used and is currently available in digital format.

For additional information about the artwork described here or about Mount Sinai's history in general, please contact the author at the Mount Sinai Archives.

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