



UCSF Department of Medicine ZUCKERBERG SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL



Creating Art From The Heart

In addition to their incredible work in clinical care, research, education and advocacy, the faculty and staff of the ZSFG Department of Medicine have an astonishing wealth of other talents. Some of these talents are in creative artistry in its many forms – painting, crafting, drawing and singing. This month we share the artistic endeavors of four members of our department whose life passions complement and balance the roles for which they are best known at ZSFG.

Portraits, Paint, and Paper

Julia Kay Rheumatology

Painter, printmaker, photographer, muralist and digital artist Julia Kay has been making art as long as she can remember. At Wesleyan University, she majored in art while unofficially minoring in computer science, then did graduate work at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

Throughout her career as a computer programmer she has continued to pursue her artistic interests.



Julia Kay

She joined the ZSFG Division of Rheumatology in 2017 as a research data analyst. Ms. Kay helps faculty members investigate quality measures and health disparities by analyzing information from complex databases. Her work at ZSFG

allows her to pursue her artistic curiosity. “I take

a theme and explore it as far as it’s of interest to me,” she said. “If I know what it’s going to look like when I’m finished, I don’t have so much of a need to make it. In order to learn, you have to let go of what you know.”

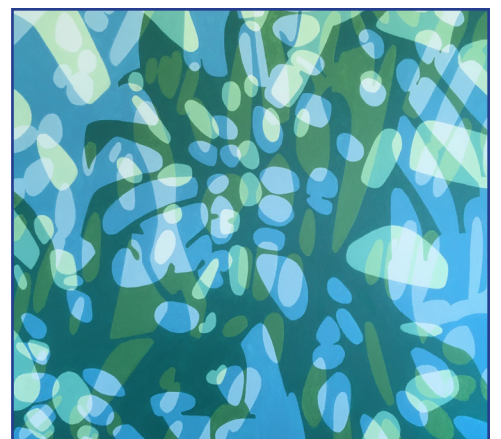
She has produced a huge body of work, including “Cave Canem” (Beware of Dog), a colorful mural of a pit bull and Rottweiler in Oakland, and “Sun Dances,” a large series investigating the interplay of light and shadows on tropical plants.

In 2007, she made a quick self-portrait. “I thought, “That didn’t take very long – I could do that every day,”” recalled Ms. Kay, who ended up creating more than 1,000 daily self-portraits. “It was the best thing I ever did as an artist.” After three years, she was ready to draw something else, but wanted to maintain her daily artmaking practice. She invited other artists to post photographs of themselves online, and got a huge response. “Artists all over the world were drawing themselves because they were always available, but they were really hungry to draw someone else,” she said.

Thus “Julia Kay’s Portrait Party” was born. It has inspired more than 1,000 artists from 55 countries to produce more than 50,000 portraits of one another. The group has hosted in-person meetups and mounted numerous exhibits. Some of those works are also featured in *Portrait Revolution: Inspiration from Around the World for Creating Art in Multiple Mediums and Styles*, edited by Ms. Kay.

The gorgeous full-color book groups portraits in

thematic categories, such as watercolor, realism, cool tones or people wearing hats. Perhaps most intriguing are spreads featuring multiple artists’



Detail of *Hiding in Plain Sight*, Julia Kay

interpretations of the same photograph. Using her computer programming skills, Ms. Kay created a database to organize this huge body of work.

She is now creating abstract pieces, such as throwing paint onto paper, cutting it into strips, then weaving them together. “I’m playing with creating structure from much uncontrolled elements,” she said. “That’s human existence – there’s chaos, but you can be an influence on it, even if it’s just the story you choose to tell.”

To see an artist talk by Ms. Kay, visit chicoartcenter.com/sun-dances.





Mobile created from natural materials by Robert Brody, MD. Additional works are located in Ward 13 at ZSFG and at Laguna Honda Hospital.

Things Spinning Freely
Robert Brody, MD
General Internal Medicine

The home of Robert Brody, MD, Professor of Medicine in the ZSFG Division of General Internal Medicine, is filled with more than 30 mobiles he has made himself from Viennese antique buttons, Indonesian seed pods, and other treasures collected from his world travels. His creations also grace the hallway of Ward 13 and Laguna Honda Hospital.

He made his first mobile around age 12 for a Cub Scout project. “It was captivating, both making



Robert Brody, MD

and watching it” said Dr. Brody. Then a few decades later, his sons wanted to put glow-in-the-dark stars on the ceiling. “I said, ‘I have another idea of what to do with those,’” he recalled. “Since then, just traveling and going to toy stores, bead stores, and seeing certain trees, there are all these things that are begging to be made into mobiles.”

Completely self-taught, he spends night and weekend hours honing his craft in a small workroom, and uses nylon filaments and thin wires to make

his creations.

“It’s pure physics and levers,” said Dr. Brody. “Trial and error. You build from the bottom up, find two pieces and balance them, then do the next one. Making knots is tricky. If I get frustrated, I stop and do it another time. It all comes down to choosing material that’s not too small, not too big – just right, like Goldilocks.”

Dr. Brody joined the ZSFG faculty in 1978 as a primary care

physician, and helped start UCSF’s first hospice program. He cared for many dying AIDS patients as medical director of Hospice of San Francisco, and later took the same position with the San Francisco Department of Public Health’s Health at Home program, which he still leads. Dr. Brody was also the founding director of the ZSFG (then SFGH) Pain Management Service, served as chair of the ZSFG Ethics Committee for many years, and leads advocacy around medical aid in dying.

Dr. Brody mostly views mobiles as a creative outlet. “The trickiest part is making them so they don’t collide and can spin freely,” he said. “In ethics, when issues come up, we try to look at something from all sides.”

He is always interested in people’s responses to his creations. “Some people don’t even see them, and others respond with enthusiasm,” said Dr. Brody. “I’m one of those people who looks up – if I see a space, it needs to be filled with a mobile.”

Comics While Caring
Constance Wu, MD
Internal Medicine Resident

Growing up, internal medicine resident Constance Wu, MD, drew hundreds of princesses, wrote and illustrated her own children’s books, and learned to draw manga-style comics.

During medical school at Harvard, she thanked some of her preceptors and professors by drawing pictures of them imparting their most memorable lessons. “People spent so much effort teaching us, and it was a nice way to help people feel like what they taught was valued,” said Dr. Wu. She also started drawing comics about funny and sometimes poignant moments during her training. “It helps me reflect on my experiences,” she said. “I use it as a form of processing.”

Dr. Wu usually mulls over ideas for weeks, then produces a comic in an hour or two. “I have a list of ideas, and then I’ll do a little spurt of drawing,” she said. She is careful to guard patients’ privacy, changing or omitting any identifying details. “I try to focus my work on my own reactions to a situation,” she said.

During the pandemic, Dr. Wu used her talents to create graphics to educate the public and combat misinformation through COVID-19 Classroom, an online resource created by Harvard Medical



Reveling in the Growth Mindset: Entrust, Constance Wu, MD

School students. She also collaborated with another medical student, Katherine Redfield Chan, MD, to create an illustrated children's book, *Ramona and Iris and the Coronavirus*, which they self-published on Amazon. Dr. Wu has also created hundreds of visual abstracts for 2 Minute Medicine, summarizing high-impact papers in an elegantly designed graphic.

Dr. Wu often sits next to patients at the bedside or in clinic, drawing pictures to help them better understand their condition. "For some patients, especially those who are older or use an interpreter, it can really help to slow things down and make sure we're on the same page," she said. "I had



Constance Wu, MD

one patient who didn't speak English and didn't want a procedure, even though it was very important. I drew a picture of their current state and what the procedure would do, and saw what questions they had. In the end they understood why they needed the procedure, and wanted to have it... Often in medicine, it's not just about the care, but the way people feel about what's going on."

Dr. Wu plans to become an oncologist, incorporating elements of geriatrics and palliative care. She also hopes to continue her basic science research, and making comics. "Part of me is always thinking about the patients' and families' journey," she said. "My aspiration is that my comics will resonate with people, help them feel better and less alone, and very respectfully shine a light on what patients and providers are going through."

To see examples of Dr. Wu's work, go to constance-wu.art.myportfolio.com.

The Musical Universe

Kamran Atabai, MD Pulmonary and Critical Care

Kamran Atabai, MD, Professor of Medicine in the ZSFG Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care, lived in Tehran until age 9, when his family fled during the Iranian Revolution. He was surrounded by sound – not just the call to prayer, but all kinds of music. "Tehran in 1978 was a disco inferno, with all this Western music," he said. "A



Kamran Atabai, MD (center), performs with his band Jahan in San Francisco.

lot of pre-Islamic culture came through poetry and song, and there are all these great Persian instruments."

He's always loved a wide range of music, including Leonard Cohen, Lou Reed, the Velvet Underground, Patti Smith, and Slayer. But it wasn't until 2014 when a friend gave him a guitar that he started to play music. That led to writing songs and forming the band Jahan – his middle name, which means "the universe" in Persian. Jahan's work incorporates elements of indie rock, folk, Persian music and other genres. As reviewer Jamie Robash described their album, *E Blues*, "There is space and time in these songs... the layers spill out in ways that envelop the listener... like a novel in musical form."

Jahan has produced two albums and are about to release a third. They have played shows at Café



Kamran Atabai, MD

International and the Hotel Utah Saloon. Dr. Atabai also produces evocative videos of his songs, including "Come With Me," which includes historical footage of Iran overlaid with contemporary images from his own life. "I put hours and hours into cutting and editing that video, and it has my whole life in it," he said. He finds artistic inspiration from the challenges he's experienced in life, but sees no overlap between his art and career. "It's

completely compartmentalized," said Dr. Atabai. "My music is the human being I was before I went down the path of my career – that person exploring the other lives they may have had."

Dr. Atabai looks forward to pursuing new creative directions, including studying *āvāz*, a style of Persian classical music characterized by a fluttering vocal style. At UCSF, Dr. Atabai divides his time between attending in the ICU and conducting research on the role of the extracellular matrix in regulating tissue remodeling and lipid homeostasis. His ICU weeks are all-consuming, but during his lab weeks, he finds time to practice, record, mix and edit his music. "Our careers can be so engrossing, but for me it's nice to have a balance of different interests," he said.

To listen to music by Dr. Atabai, visit tinyurl.com/JahanBand or tinyurl.com/ComeWithMe-Video.

Elizabeth Chur

Editors: Neil Powe, Laurae Pearson, Brooks Bigart

SPOTLIGHT

We celebrate Juneteenth and LGBTQI+ Pride Month!

Alexandra Velasquez, Nephrology, is a recipient of the UCSF Spirit of DOM 2022 award.

Mimi Margaretten, MD, Rheumatology, and, post-humously, **Anitha Toke, MD**, Nephrology, were selected as DOM Master Clinicians.

Steven Deeks, MD, HIV, ID, Global Medicine, received the 2022 Lifetime Achievement in Mentoring Award from UCSF Faculty Mentoring Program.

Priscilla Hsue, MD, Cardiology, received the 2022 Research Mentoring Award from the UCSF Internal Medicine Residency.

Carina Marquez, MD, HIV, ID, Global Medicine, and **Nynikka Palmer, DrPH, MPH**, General Internal Medicine, are 2022 recipients of UCSF Mid-Career Development Program for Research Faculty.