

## MACEWAN NEWS

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## Art that sticks

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What do art students, a hospital and electrical tape have in common? On the surface, not much. Look deeper, and you'll find something wonderful.

**A vision comes to life**

In January 2011, first-year sculpture students took on a project to warm the ambience at the University of Alberta Hospital for two weeks. *TapeWorks!*, funded by the Alberta Association of Colleges and Technical Institutes and MacEwan University, was the inspiration of fine art instructor Agnieszka Matejko, whose vision was for students to create a large-scale art installation in the hospital's atrium.

Alexandra Bischoff, one of the participants of the project, explained that the goals of *TapeWorks!* were to bring a sense of optimism to staff, patients and visitors at the hospital; to provide students with an opportunity to bridge the gap between the private side of art and public spaces, where art is intended to be seen; and for students to share their artistry with a broader audience.

**A sticky medium to work with**

Each student worked with a group to create an inviting piece in a section of the atrium. Students were free to create any concept they felt would be engaging, but needed to do so with the required medium – electrical tape. The tape was chosen because it is urban, untraditional and available in many vibrant colours, a critical factor in brightening the sterile hospital environment. The tape also goes up and comes down easily.

The artists encountered several challenges in creating their art, including adapting to tape as medium. Alexandra had to discover different processes to work with the tape as she found it quite rigid. Additionally, many participants initially underestimated how much space they needed to fill. Alexandra and the other students in her group, Alyssa Ellis and Casey Switzer, worked several hours a day for three weeks on their contribution, which featured brightly coloured birds on branches. Their theme was typical of many of the projects – a reflection of the outdoors and nature.

**Positive influence of art works both ways**

But Alexandra says the rewards of *TapeWorks!* outweighed the challenges. "I was exhilarated to use my skills to bring something back to the community," she says. She enjoyed interacting with people who watched her work, and the feedback about the pieces from hospital staff, patients and visitors was overwhelmingly positive. Viewers, who often made special trips to see the art, agreed that it did indeed brighten their spirits.

When the installations were removed, "people were sad that they were coming down," says Alexandra.

Although the installation was temporary, its impact on Alexandra's view of art was more lasting; the project gave her an understanding of the importance of public art and how it re-invigorates and comforts the people around it. "It was an experience I think [our audience] will remember more than just seeing a painting on the wall," she says.

For Alexandra, and for its viewers, *TapeWorks!* was art that sticks.

For more information about student research, visit the [Student Research Showcase event website](#).

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