



*Perspective/Opinion*

## **Visual Art in Medical Education**

By Teresa Patitucci, PhD

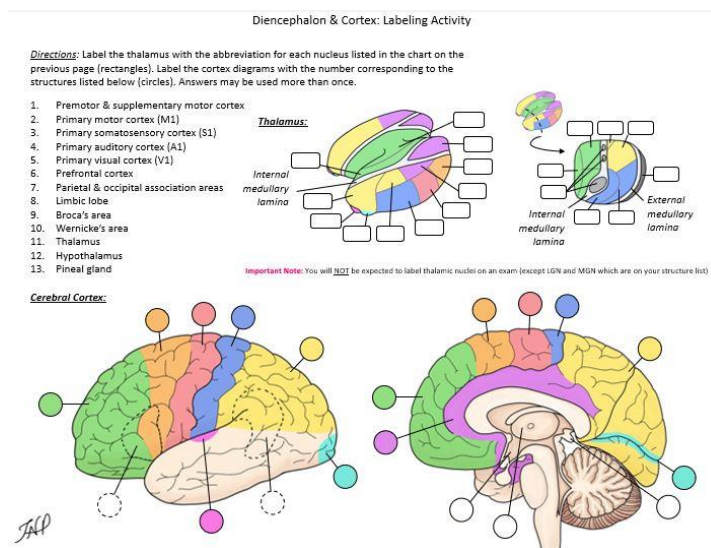
The humanities are often used to teach professionalism, including as a way to encourage emotional development through reflection, narrative, and creative arts [1]. Visual art, specifically, tends to be used in medical education to develop clinical observation skills, empathy, and social skills, or for stress relief and resilience building [2, 3]. Visual art has long been used to study anatomy for both reflection and learning content.

The anatomy lab is an important site for emotional development of a clinician, where learners work in teams to disassemble a body donor over time. This donor is often described as the student's "first patient," encouraging empathy, respect, and gratitude [4]. Unfortunately, many become desensitized to the experience over time, which can be mitigated through expressing appreciation for the donor, discussing feelings surrounding death, or creative activities designed for reflection on meaningful lab experiences. Many creative approaches also help learners appreciate the beauty and individuality of each body.

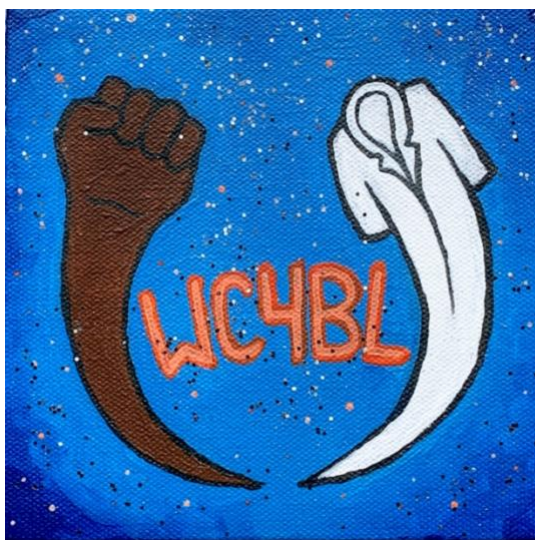
Visual art can be valuable for learning complex information, including the structure of the body. Anatomy is a highly visual discipline, where relationships between structures are crucial for understanding how form and function are related. Art has long been used to understand anatomy and continues to be used in education through approaches like drawing, sculpting, or even body painting [5]! Some approaches combine drawing with multisensory observation (touch) to combine 2D with 3D understanding [5]. Drawing teaches how to boil something down to its essential elements, including all major features and

relationships, learning to see the big picture first before zooming in to round out details, both in the drawing and their conceptual understanding.

I incorporate art into my MCW life in several different ways. I use my own artwork to create learning resources, creating simplified diagrams used in instructional videos or arranged as self-directed labeling activities. I also demonstrate various ways to visually display information when studying, like using line drawings, tables, or flow charts. Additionally, I have studied the use of written reflection in Clinical Human Anatomy courses to develop emotional intelligence and overall wellbeing, with a current project using creative expression to develop equanimity.



*Image from a labeling activity given to students in MedNeuro.*



*Piece made during a White Coats for Black Lives event.*

Personally, my primary reason for encouraging creativity is for expression, relaxation, and community-building. Throughout this past year, I have led groups through live painting demonstrations where everyone picks up a “goody bag” filled with art supplies and signs into Zoom to paint together. In one session in the M4 Art of Medicine Through the Humanities, we painted a landscape while reflecting on Match Day, which occurred shortly after the activity. For community-building, we have held “Paint and Chill” nights with MCW’s White Coats for Black Lives, SETforce, and the Central Wisconsin Campus.

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Finally, I invite you to join me in celebrating the arts together! Last year I created the MCW Art Club, which is an online forum to share music, visual art, poetry, or any other form of creativity! To participate, post a creation on our [Facebook page](#) or on Instagram or Twitter with #MCWArtClub.



*Piece made for M4 Medical Humanities course.*

*For further reading:*

1. Pfeiffer, S., Y. Chen, and D. Tsai, Progress integrating medical humanities into medical education: a global overview. *Curr Opin Psychiatry*, 2016. 29(5): p. 298–301.
2. Mukunda, N., et al., Visual art instruction in medical education: a narrative review. *Med Educ Online*, 2019. 24(1): p. 1558657.
3. Bell, L.T. and D.J. Evans, Art, anatomy, and medicine: Is there a place for art in medical education? *Anat Sci Educ*, 2014. 7(5): p. 370–8.
4. Grogan, K. and L. Ferguson, Cutting Deep: The Transformative Power of Art in the Anatomy Lab. *J Med Humanit*, 2018. 39(4): p. 417–430.
5. Shapiro, L., et al., Focused Multisensory Anatomy Observation and Drawing for Enhancing Social Learning and Three-Dimensional Spatial Understanding. *Anat Sci Educ*, 2020. 13(4): p. 488–503.

*Teresa Patitucci, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Cell Biology, Neurobiology & Anatomy at MCW.*