

Mental health // News

New UK digital art school provides artist workshops and supplies for NHS mental health units

Online sessions will be led by artists such as Sutapa Biswas and Sarah Dwyer



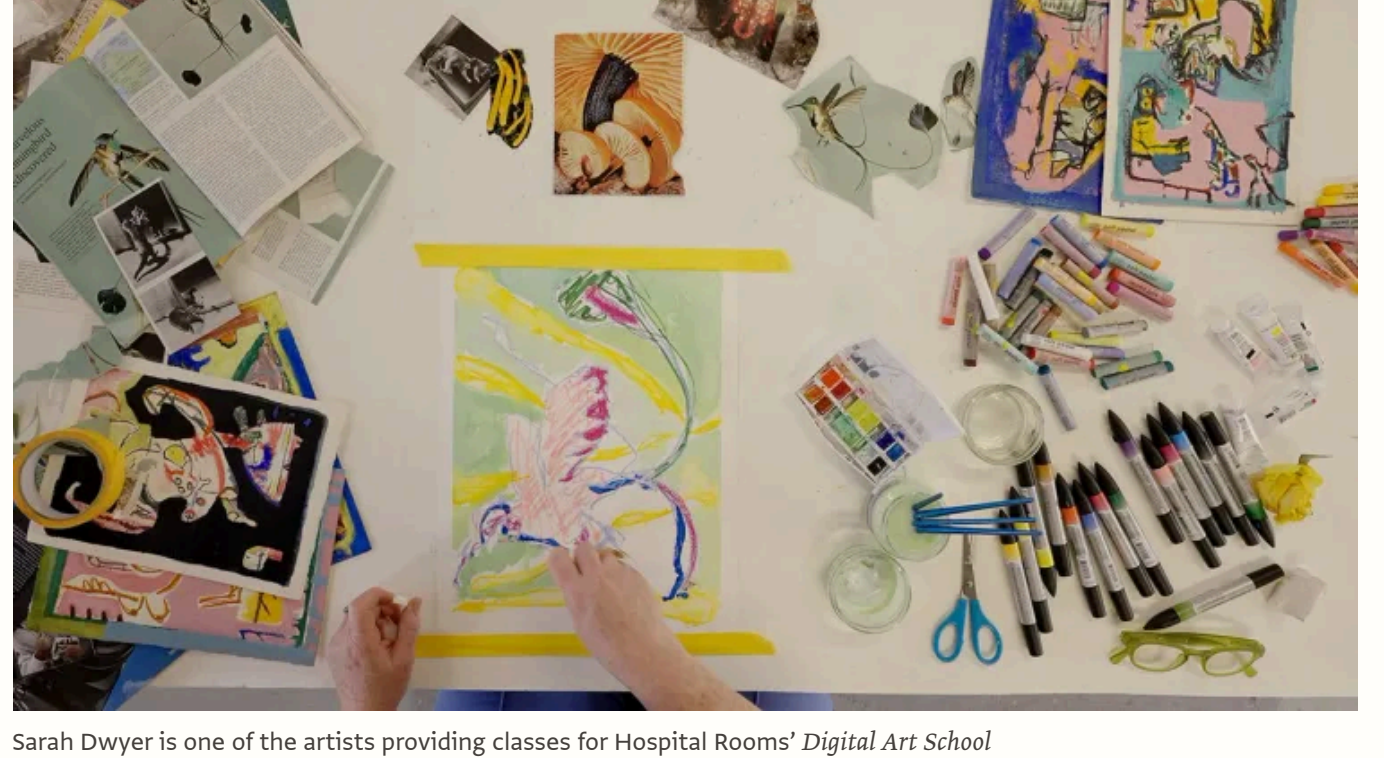
Sutapa Biswas is one of the artists supporting Hospital Rooms' Digital Art School Courtesy of Hospital Rooms

Gareth Harris
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Service users at mental health units across England will have access to free art materials under a new initiative established by the UK charity Hospital Rooms. The three-year *Digital Art School* project will also include free monthly, artist-led workshops available to watch live or on demand.

Participating artists include Abbas Zahedi, Dolly Sen, Giles Deacon, José Parlá, Ken Nwadiogbu, Michaela Yearwood-Dan, Sarah Dwyer, and Sutapa Biswas. Each inpatient site will also receive a bespoke materials box designed by Parlá and filled with art supplies donated by Winsor & Newton.



Sarah Dwyer is one of the artists providing classes for Hospital Rooms' Digital Art School Courtesy of Hospital Rooms

"I was an inpatient, now I am an artist," Dolly Sen says in a statement. "Contributing to this programme has uplifted me as both artist and human and I am sure will do the same for anyone who comes to it. When I was an inpatient, I would have loved this. It is like being prescribed stars when things feel dark. Here's to more light!"

Hospital Rooms aims to reach 180,000 inpatients diagnosed with severe mental illness through the initiative. Crucially a project statement says that all 58 NHS mental health trusts in England have registered to participate in the scheme.

The impetus for Hospital Rooms came when its cofounders, the artist Tim A. Shaw and the curator Niamh White, visited a friend who had been admitted to hospital following a suicide attempt. "We were struck by how inhumane the ward felt, so cold and clinical and also dilapidated," they recall. "At a time when she was so vulnerable, it felt like the environment was doing the complete opposite of what you'd want it to." The pair set up Hospital Rooms, which completed its first project in 2016 in the Phoenix Unit, a south-west London rehabilitation facility for people with schizophrenia.



Giles Deacon is one of the artist's providing classes for Hospital Rooms' Digital Art School Courtesy of Hospital Rooms

Digital Art School is supported by Arts Council England, the Art Explora-Académie des Beaux-Arts European Award and Pinterest along with Manuela and Iwan Wirth, the founders of Hauser & Wirth gallery, which has a longstanding partnership with Hospital Rooms. Last year, Hauser & Wirth's London gallery organised an exhibition, *Holding Space*, and auction in partnership with the charity and Bonhams, raising more than £430,000.

In recent years, a number of art-led campaigns have focused on the global mental health crisis including the Mindscales Initiative along with a major scientific research project led by the World Health Organisation and Jameel Arts & Health.

Mental health Museums & Heritage Artists Hospital Rooms

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