

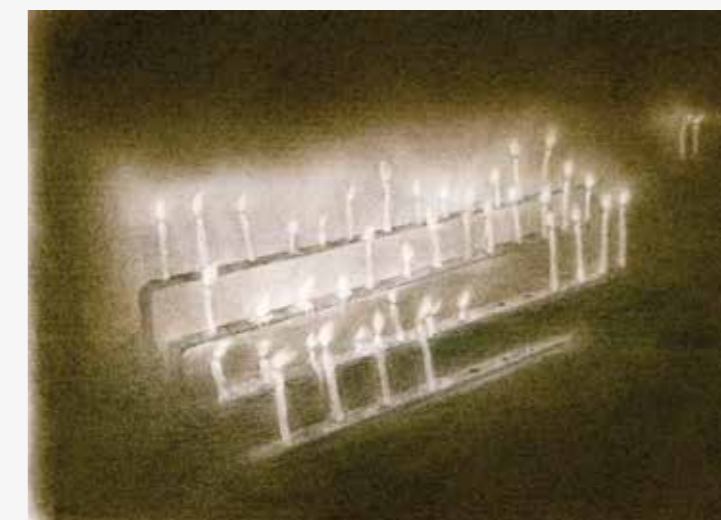


Lotus Pond at KKH



# Candles in a Church

Text and illustration by Chan Wee Lee



# Medicine and Art

Text and illustrations by Shashendra Aponso

“I WILL remember that there is art to medicine as well as science” reads a line from the modern Hippocratic Oath. My clinical mentors have demonstrated that medicine is certainly an art – one in which critical thinking and compassion are carefully blended together, where the artist often steps back to reassess management plans, and where the mind and scalpel serve as palette and paintbrush. For me, this line from the Hippocratic Oath strikes a special chord.

I have enjoyed painting ever since I was a child, and science and art have complemented each other at every stage of my life. As a schoolboy I relished sketching out coloured diagrams of the human heart during Biology, almost as much as I enjoyed comprehending the subject matter. During my undergraduate years at Stanford, I was awestruck by the whimsical anatomical drawings of Bernhard Siegfried Albinus and the impeccable details of Leonardo da Vinci’s anatomical sketches that I encountered in my Art and Biology class. Indeed, da Vinci is said to have written, on principles for the development of a complete

mind: “Study the science of art. Study the art of science. Develop your senses – especially learn how to see.”

How true these words are! While we, as students, strive to cultivate our powers of observation along our medical journey, medical artwork has been an invaluable aid. Frank Netter’s famous textbook illustrations have guided us through many a challenging dissection session, delineating human anatomy in exquisite detail and hues – the perfect example of how art contributes to the study of medicine.

On the other hand, medicine has often been the subject of many a work of art. Be it the rich symbolism of a human skull next to an hourglass in Dutch painter Philippe de Champaigne’s Still Life with a Skull, or the masterfully portrayed dissection in Rembrandt’s The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp, artists have strived to capture the meaning, gravitas and wonder surrounding their medical subjects.

During my time in the wards, I find that sometimes the most ordinary aspects of hospital routines can stir the mind and appear completely new and wonderful. It is these moments that I try to capture in my works. The fanned-out toes in the plantar reflex, the machine-like dilation of a pupil, and the dexterity of hands are just some of the subjects that I have portrayed in my digital paintings above. ■



Shashendra Aponso is a fourth year medical student at Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School. As a Sri Lankan who was born and raised in Oman, before completing his undergraduate studies in the US and moving to Singapore for medical school, Shashendra cherishes the diverse cultural experiences that come with having so many places to call “home”.



Chan Wee Lee is a first year medical student at Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School. In his free time, he enjoys running, rambling, and reading, particularly works by Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh. He hopes to be a physician-scientist one day.

This picture of the votive candles in the Slipper Chapel in Walsingham, Norfolk, England, was drawn with charcoal on paper. The chapel was built in the 14th century to serve English pilgrims.

Light has long played an important role in human culture. Darkness, the absence of light, was seen by early Man to represent danger and the unknown. It is no wonder that candles have been such powerful symbols in many cultures and religions. As one of the earliest sources of artificial light, the candle, work of bees and human hands, allowed mankind mastery over the darkness.

Votive candles are particularly poignant; people light them for the intention of a loved one, or for needs personal to themselves. To different people, these lit candles may have different meanings. To me, they represent, among other things, hope. In some ways, the medical profession is like a lit candle, bringing hope and support to people in need. ■