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Art, Design, and Medicine

Making Time for Creative Expression

The Story of ArtThread

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It was the winter of 1973, and, having pulled a number seven in the draft lottery, nineteen-year-old college student Jay Allan Klein figured he was on his way to Vietnam. Yet when he reported for a routine draft physical, doctors didn't send him overseas. Instead they ordered him to see a urologist.

Klein found himself on a different sort of frontline altogether—battling testicular cancer in an era when few teens diagnosed with a malignancy of any kind survived.

Three-and-a-half decades later, Klein is cancer free and keenly aware of what cancer patients experience. He is committed to easing their physical and psychological distress. The story of ArtThread begins with Klein's survivorship, and with his experience as a musician, which gave him firsthand experience in how creative expression can remove

the feelings of acute isolation and uncertainty that can occur after diagnosis.

Fusing his arts and science background, he started federally funded research at the University of Florida, involving the role of creative expression and online technology for cancer patients. This work spawned the ArtThread Foundation (www.ArtThread.org), whose mission is to use innovative technology to make art and creative expression more available to those impacted by illness, physical limitations, or social consequence.

"ArtThread technology gives anyone in need the freedom to take a moment for creative expression—and we are all in need," says Pam Sullins, director of community outreach for the ArtThread Foundation. "In that moment, your distress can disappear because you are totally immersed

in the creative process."

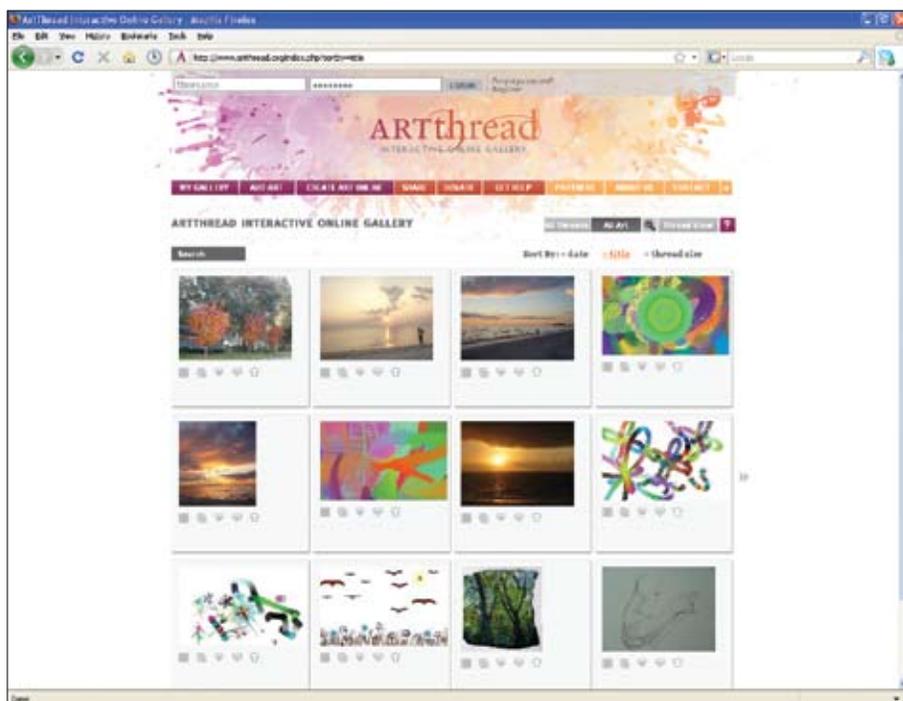
ArtThread uses its online technology and the power of art to build a global community that emphasizes the unique spirit in all of us while encouraging unity and support.

"In this day and age everyone knows someone, a friend, sibling, parent, or relative, dealing with cancer," says Klein, founder and CEO of the ArtThread Foundation. "With more than twelve million new cases globally last year, there are no longer 'have and have-nots.' The world community and the cancer community are one and the same, so the need for solutions is greater than ever."

The centerpiece of the Foundation's work is the ArtThread Interactive Online Gallery. The Gallery is an innovative, inspirational, and interactive place where people can do something highly unusual with their art: They can start or join an "art thread"—an interactive art-to-art conversation with family, friends, or anyone in the world. The ArtThread Gallery makes creative expression and art available everywhere: home, work, inpatient and clinical settings, schools, and throughout community organizations.

"Making art is great, but making it and sharing it is even better," says Klein. "Think of ArtThread as the fusion of a gallery and an infinite online graffiti wall. It is social networking with paint brushes!"

Those "paint brushes" come in a very unique form on the ArtThread website. ArtThread's proprietary online art-making tool, *Splash!*, makes it possible for everyone to make beautiful art anywhere. *Splash!* encourages fun and experimentation and often unpredictable results. Yet it also has great depth and is a great expressive tool



for even the most skilled artist. *Splash!* was originally created in a partnership with the Entertainment Technology Center at Carnegie Mellon University, cofounded by “Last Lecture” professor and visionary Randy Pausch.

“We asked the development team for a creative tool that would work for ages five to eighty-five, and they laughed at us,” remembers Sullins. “But they did it, and did it beautifully, and it fulfills our mission to enhance those opportunities for creativity.” The original team from Carnegie Mellon has now formed Electric Owl Studios and continues to work on new online art-making tools for ArtThread. A new version of *Splash!* was just released that makes artistic collaboration possible from anywhere in the world.

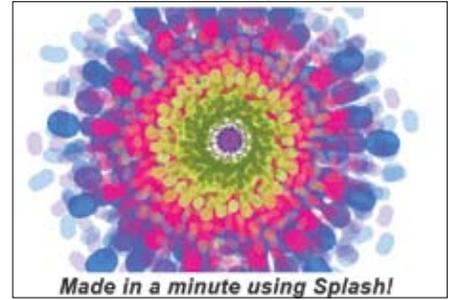
ArtThread also fulfills its mission by creating partnerships with other organizations such as VSA Arts of Florida, Shriners Hospitals, and the Creative Center: Arts

in Healthcare.

“We are thrilled to be working with ArtThread,” says Robin Glazer, director of the Creative Center, a New York City community organization that brings the world of art to more than 15,000 participants each year. “Our artists in residence are using the easy-to-use art sharing tools with inpatients, and we as an organization are using ArtThread’s online auction module as a fund-raising tool.”

“Our work with these various organizations clearly demonstrates the power of the ArtThread Gallery to enhance the mission and add value to the services of a wide array of initiatives,” says Klein. “Art becomes an advocate, a messenger, a facilitator, and a fund-raising tool. It’s just one product of our mission to bring creativity, connection, and community to anyone in need.” **sfm**

ArtThread interactive gallery pictured on opposite page. Art-making tool Splash! pictured below.



Two works created with Splash! by online users pictured above.

