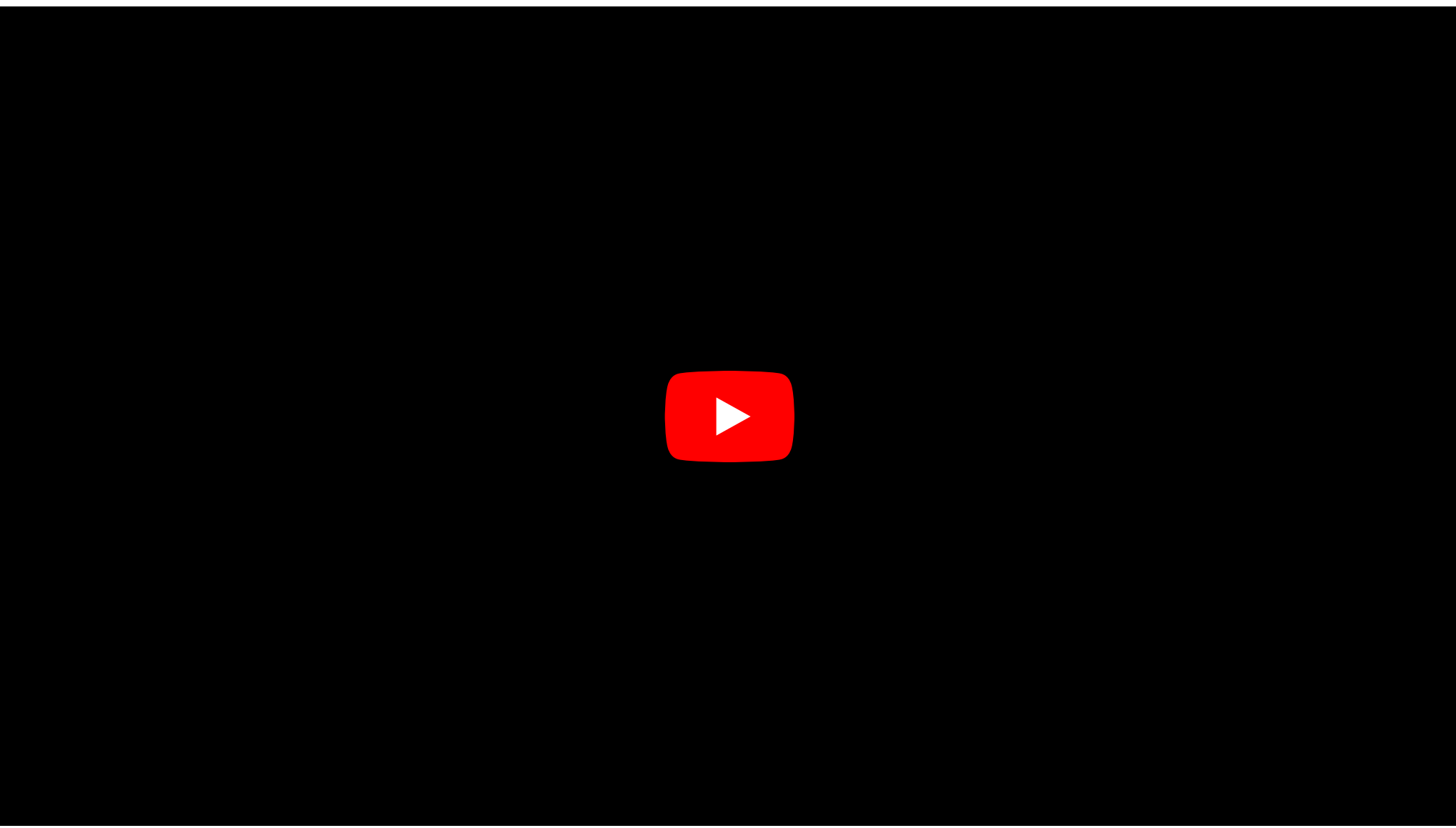


# The art of healing: hospital unveils sculpture to lift the eyes and spirit

Mobile sculpture brings a sense of balance to new specialist trauma hospital in Northumbria, says Richard Holt

17 June 2015 • 5:56pm



“I think artwork in a hospital should be either contemplative or distracting. How clever that this work succeeds in doing both.”

This was the reaction of Royal Academy artist Alison Wilding to the huge mobile sculpture that dominates the reception area of the new specialist emergency care hospital – the first of its kind in England – that has opened in Cramlington, Northumbria.

The artwork, A Murmuration of Starlings, is the creation of [Juliet and Jamie Gutch](#) from Ilkley, West Yorkshire, a husband and wife team of artists specialising in mobiles.

The piece is five metres high and four metres wide and was commissioned by [Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#) as part of its healing arts programme.



Brenda Longstaff, who heads up the programme, said: “We wanted a striking sculpture that would act as a centrepiece to the building and help create a special environment for all. The mobile certainly delivers on that, and much, much more. From the moment of entering the hospital it will have an impact, creating a welcome sight for people to admire.”

The sculpture was created with input from Year 7 and 8 pupils from a local school, who submitted their own drawings of birds in flight that helped form the basis of the final design.

Juliet Gutch said: “It is really important to us that we give our communities the opportunity to contribute to areas which will impact on so many people. We have been delighted to work with the pupils at Cramlington Learning Village and we would like to thank them for being part of this fantastic project.”

She added: “A Murmuration of Starlings is like a living sculpture in the sky. Within the flock, each individual starling is responsible for maintaining the whole by working extremely closely with those immediately around them.

“We feel this is an excellent metaphor for how a hospital works and that a mobile, with its different parts moving harmoniously together, is the ideal artform through which to express this.”

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The healing powers of art therapy

There have been enthusiastic responses from all sides. Richard Cork, art critic and author of *The Healing Presence of Art: A History of Western Art in Hospitals*, said: “This mobile is just the sort of thing needed for a trauma hospital – something very lively, very joyful and dynamic that seems to be reaching up to the sky.”

Simon Wallis, director of the Hepworth gallery, Wakefield, said: “We like to think that going into hospital is like having a mechanic fix a part of our bodies that has gone wrong, whereas in fact it’s much more complex than that. Being able to engage with an original artwork helps overcome the sense that a hospital is a purely utilitarian space treating individual medical issues.”

There have been questions raised in the past about anything within a stretched health service that does not have a direct clinical purpose. But whilst the benefits of art are difficult to quantify, there is now near unanimity within the medical profession too that thought-provoking hospital environments are to be encouraged.

“People often feel frightened when they come to hospital,” said Dr Helen Holt, Consultant Physician at the Royal Bournemouth Hospital. “Entering a building which contains a beautiful work of art takes your mind to a positive place and can calm the sense of illness and fear, helping you take the first steps towards healing.”

Dr Becky Spelman of the Private Therapy Clinic said: “It can be easy to overlook the human aspect of patients’ needs. Decorative and imaginative touches that help make the hospital less clinical, and more nurturing, can make a real difference.”

This starling sculpture is hopefully a sign that the view of a hospital as a bleak and forbidding place is an idea that has finally flown the nest.



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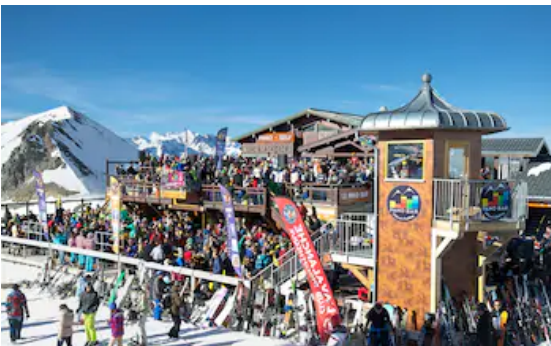
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