

Zucker Hillside unveils sculpture as symbol of mental health recovery



Photo by Tom Momberg

Left to right, North Shore LIJ Senior Vice President Chantal Weinhold, Psychiatry Chairman Dr. John Kane, peer support mentor Brendan Foley and Zucker Hillside Executive Director Dr. Mitchell Shuwall join artist Robin Antar in unveiling her sculpture.

By Tom Momberg

Brooklyn artist Robin Antar has unveiled a new statue which serves the centerpiece to North Shore LIJ's Zucker Hillside Hospital's new green space at its Glen Oaks site.

The statue is titled "David's Knot in Flames," and was carved from 1,500 pounds of Turkish marble.

Antar started sculpting the piece months after her son David died in 2013 at the age of 26.

Antar donated the statue to the hospital and dedicated it in David's honor, as a way to thank the compassionate care the medical team at Zucker Hillside gave her and her family.

The stone is carved into a knot, which flows with the natural purple grain of the marble.

Purple is of some significance to the artist.

“It was young David’s favorite color and the secret code he whispered to me when life got hard and he needed help. I forgot all about this until I was carving the stone and saw the purple veins,” Antar said. “I carved the knot to represent David’s difficult life, and it breaks open into a flame to show how he rose above his hardships and finally as a soul, rose even higher to heaven itself.”

Unveiled last week, the statue was incorporated into a plaza and garden that were constructed in 2014 in the place of three former inpatient cottages. It stands in front of the hospital’s 36,000-square-foot psychiatric center that was completed in 2009.



“So in one sense, this space is really an extension of this new building, as it is now the view our patients and staff see through the windows of units in this building — from our lobby and all of the corridors of this building,” Zucker Executive Director Dr. Mitchell Shuwall said. “But this green space is really much more than that. This is a place that’s available to everyone. It’s a shared space of serenity, a place for wellness, reflection, for hope and for healing.”

The plaza in the green space was funded by private donations. People were able to, and are still able to, purchase bricks to have engraved and placed among the others. Many who contributed were patients, family members, doctors and other hospital staff.

HillCare Health Home peer support mentor Brendan Foley, who shared his own story of mental health recovery during the unveiling ceremony, said the way the hospital built the plaza was an appropriate metaphor.

“People who work in every aspect of this hospital are dedicated bricklayers,” Foley said. “They are people who are building other people up in their recovery.”

Recovery, as Antar noted, is not only important for those struggling with mental health — healing for which she hopes her artwork and the hospital hopes its new green space will contribute to — but also for those like herself who are affected by struggle, mental health or loss.

“This is an extremely difficult thing for a mother to do, but for me as a sculptor, it was a work of healing,” Antar said. “I would not be standing here today if I did not heal myself by creating this work of art. I believe that in the high care of Zucker Hospital helped my son to grow into a better man. It is my honor to donate this piece to one of the few places that helped David in his short life.”