



Joanna Rodriguez, 8, of Brooklyn and her sister Amanda, 13, look at the finished murals by Sparkill artist James Kimak on the sixth floor at the new Komansky Center for Children's Health. Amanda has been in and out of the hospital since she was a baby, and loves the renovated center.

Elizabeth Orozco/The Journal News

This is the fourth in a series on muralist James Kimak who has been commissioned by New York Presbyterian / Weill Cornell Medical Center to create New York-themed murals for its pediatric centers. The official ribbon cutting was June 2007, but the project is ongoing with a Bronx Zoo-themed clinic floor planned for 2008. This is an abridged version of the original article.

Kids' review of murals: 'Wow!'

A Sparkill artist's portraits of New York City brighten the walls of a new pediatric health center in Manhattan

Georgette Gouveia | The Journal News

Amanda Rodriguez has spent most of her 13 years at New York Presbyterian / Weill Cornell Medical Center in Manhattan.

"This has unfortunately been my second home" she says in a funny, poignant speech that is the emotional high point at the dedication of the hospital's Phyllis and David Komansky Center for Children's Health. So who better really to gauge the effect of the child-friendly center and its Big Apple-themed murals by Sparkill artist James Kimak?

"Oh wow!" the Brooklyn girl says as she and kid sister Joanna, 8, take a break at the Child Life Center, a playroom filled with computers, TVs VCRs and tropical fish. "This is so much better than it was before. His murals are just like going outside or being home."

The center's official opening feels like a graduation ceremony, and like all graduations, there is an air of new adventures and the sense of completion, of leave taking. For Kimak in particular, the days leading up to the event have been a opportunity to cast a backward glance and to spring ahead. "It's been an amazing learning experience for me," he says.

Murals brighten children's center (Continued)

Since the Journal News began a series of stories a year ago about Kimak's commission to create murals for the Komansky Center, he has mapped Fifth Avenue's Museum Mile in the NICU; turned the Family Lounge into an Impressionistic Central Park; charted East River Passages in the PICU; and transformed the Pediatric Procedures Suite into a panorama of the New York skyline.

He has just finished bringing his trademark mixed-media, collage-like approach to midtown scenes in the General Inpatient Pediatrics Unit. Here tiny yellow cabs inch along the facade of Grand Central Terminal and other landmarks, while riders on Bryant Park's pastel Le Carrousel gallop into other murals.

He is gathering images for the Coney Island/New York Aquarium designs that will grace the Pediatric Emergency Department which will complete the original commission. Kimak's association with the hospital won't end there however; He'll be creating murals for pediatric radiology and urology - on the American Museum of Natural History and sailing the Hudson River, respectively - as well as works, possibly on the Bronx Zoo, for the Pediatrics Sub-specialty Clinic in adjacent Helmsley Medical Tower.

The Komansky commission has opened up a whole new chapter in Kimak's career as a graphic designer and painter, and he's grateful to the students at area schools whose drawings he incorporated into kaleidoscopic designs that mend photography, digital; art and painting.

"The student's drawing add to the whimsical nature of what I wanted to do," he says.

He is just a grateful to philanthropists Phyllis and David Komansky, who \$25 million gift funded the center. There's is the story of an affluent but down-to-earth couple whose eldest daughter had surgery at the hospital in the 1970s, when medical facilities were especially frightening places for children and sterile walls brooked no artistic vision. David is humble about his contribution to the center.

"It's a pleasure to be able to fund it," he says. "You're lucky in life if something as meaningful to yourself as it is to the community. The murals are so warm and friendly. There's no mistaking where you are when you see them.

Kimak takes such praise in stride: "I am totally delighted by the work. At the same time, I'm not naive. This work, everything, is finite. At some point, I want to see what other opportunities are out there.

He's joined the Society for Environmental Graphic Design in Washington, D.C., updated his web site (kimakdesign.com) and returned to an early love, painting, with an eye to an exhibit later this year.

Hospital visitors may see a more painterly style to his future work, with open areas of color, as he tries to give patients, staffers and families a continually engaging environment without overstimulating them.

Says Kimak, "It's always been about balance."

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James Kimak incorporated artwork from Rockland, Westchester and New York schools into his murals, which meld photography, digital art and painting.