

ON THE COVER

All Hands In by Yolanda Peña Mazzoni

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist on December 2, 2022.

The human hand comprises 34 muscles, 27 bones, 48 nerves, and 123 ligaments. Its control takes up a quarter of the motor region in the cerebral cortex, and a disproportionate amount of the adjacent sensory region is devoted to what the hand feels: touch, pressure, and temperature. Truly a remarkable body part, just a few spread fingertips can bear a person's entire weight. The hand's dexterity allows us to manipulate tools, type novels, wield weapons, perform surgery, and play the piano. But it is more than a device for operating on objects. Hands have a social role. They can caress and soothe, slap and punch. And hands can hold other hands in friendship and solidarity, regardless of age, economic status, race, and gender. They can, therefore, be agents of equity and inclusion, leveling through mutual contact the disparities that separate us from each other.

Mindful of the February–March issue theme, *equity in health*, a cover image was selected with joined hands as a motif, representing people united despite their differences and expressing a common purpose. Of course, whether the artist had any of this in mind may be another matter. Yolanda Peña Mazzoni, based in Foxborough, Massachusetts, near Boston, and the mother of a school psychologist, says that *All Hands In* was part of an exhibition series with the chosen theme of “connections.” She feels that connections, meaning relationships between people, are “the most important thing we experience.” The painting was her exploration of this experience. She wanted to represent different people clasping hands, like a team, collaborating on something of value to all. Mazzoni feels that many avenues and opportunities exist for this kind of joining. Community, spirituality, ideas, places, objects, and one-to-one contact between individuals all provide the grounds for making connections. Thus, although not explicitly focused on health, the artist's intent in *All Hands In* is certainly compatible with our issue theme.

She was born in Puerto Rico, the child of Cuban parents, but spent her formative years in the Boston area. Her mother was a painter and always encouraged and supported artistic activity. Mazzoni went on to study fashion illustration at the New England School of Art and Design, then changed majors and received her degree in interior design. Her decision proved wise, and the field of interior architecture was a rewarding career for more than 30 years. Painting, however,

persisted as a side passion. The year 2022 marked a shift as she became Artistic Director of Artists for Humanity, a nonprofit organization that employs inner-city teens in art and design-related fields, serving clients in business and the wider community.

Mazzoni developed her talent in painting through workshops and studies at the Rhode Island School of Art and Design and the Art Students League of New York. Teachers and contemporary influences have included Alex Kanevsky, Tim Hawkworth, and Dean Fisher. Art history provided food for creative thought, especially Picasso's evolution from interpreting the work of other artists to expressing his own unique and revolutionary vision. Van Gogh's unusual use of color combinations is another fascination.

Her own preferences in subject matter incline to landscapes and portraits done in oil on canvas. Portraits, she finds, require careful analysis of another person's appearance and form. Over the course of painting, the interpersonal barrier that often exists between artist and human subject tends to break down, revealing the person more completely and intimately. Mazzoni finds this process exciting. Landscapes completed out of doors, in nature, are another preference. She likes the short working time they impose and the requirement to “really see” what is essential in a scene. In a sense, both landscape and portraiture involve sustained and very focused *looking*. Whether her artwork is “liked” remains secondary. She hopes instead to evoke an emotion, positive or negative, “to touch people in some way,” and to have a personal impact. Her art is not about producing “just a pretty picture.”

Reflecting again on *All Hands In*, it has become, for Mazzoni, a sign of the new direction she wants for her career. Moving from a corporate business environment to Artists for Humanity offered the chance to impact, in a positive way, the trajectory of young people's lives. Participating in the “connections” exhibit expressed this shift as she joined hands, symbolically, with youth and with people promoting their advancement. It is noteworthy that employment, neighborhood quality, community support, and access to services are also social determinants of health. Perhaps it is these combined elements of aspiration and collective effort that make her painting especially suitable for the journal's special theme issue.

 R. Walter Heinrichs
Art Editor