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"(Lisa Lala's) piece 'Re-Power' (above) was the first piece I thought of when (interior designer) Stephanie Abramson first came into the gallery seeking art for Monarch," says Kelly Kuhn, owner and director of Blue Gallery. "Many of my collectors love (Lala's) work. They respond to her optimism. Plus, her pieces work so well with other artists' work, there is just a real willingness to complement other art that hangs adjacent to her paintings."

RESOURCE GUIDE: *360 Architects*, 300 W. 22nd St., 816-472-2000. *Blue Gallery*, 118 Southwest Blvd., 816-527-0823. *Contract Furnishings*, 3129 Main St., 800-824-1878. *Monarch Plastic Surgery*, 4801 W. 135th St., Leawood, 913-663-3838.

Welcoming. Warm. Inspirational: These are not words that usually come to mind at the mention of a trip to the doctor's office. But at Monarch Plastic Surgery in Leawood, a team of doctors and creative folks made it their mission to shatter stereotypes as they worked to create a new home for this aesthetically minded firm. Sure, there are waiting room chairs and some magazines for patients to peruse. But why flip through reading material when you are surrounded by a striking and unexpected gallery of art?

"I have never been in a doctor's office that has done it up quite like this," says Tracy Stearns of 360 Architects, who collaborated with the surgeons at Monarch to conceive the design of the facility located at the intersection of 135th Street and Roe Avenue. The idea was to make people feel comfortable while they wait for their appointment. "When you walk in, it's more like a nice hotel's reception area," Stearns says. "You definitely feel at ease," he adds. This feeling is largely due to the warm colors and beautiful art throughout.

Monarch's doctors agree. "The look at Monarch is refreshing," says Dr. Jeffrey Dillow. "(As soon as you enter), it is fun to be surprised by the art."

While planning for the wide variety of clients who would be visiting Monarch, it was imperative that the designers focus on ease of movement and personal space for visitors. "It seemed like, in our old office at College Boulevard and Nall Avenue, the patients going in and out were always on top of each other, so we wanted to have a little more room for



people,” says Dr. Richard Bene, one of the surgeons and partners at Monarch who was especially involved in the center’s design. “Patients and skin care clients can find their own spot somewhere and spread out, or they can sit in groups if that is what they want.”

This encouragement of interaction is also represented in Monarch’s art collection, especially in the works by local artist Lisa Lala. In her pieces “Bird Study” and “Re-Power,” birds congregate on overhead power lines and mingle in various cliques. Lala is represented by Kansas City’s Blue Gallery, and gallery director Kelly Kuhn explains: “Socialization is what the birds mean to the artist. She finds that there is a very similar way that the avian community mimics the human community, and the way that we maybe hang out in pairs, or threes, or maybe by ourselves. And (she mixes) ‘spirit birds’ in with the different groupings, which ties in with what the surgeons do at Monarch.”

In fact, the entire ambience of Monarch’s interior “represents the surgeons so well,” says Kim Bergen, the medical practice liaison at Monarch. “It’s modern but warm. Obviously, with what we do it needs to be a pleasing environment—not one that is uptight or has a pretentious feeling about it.”

A privately owned, true medical skin care facility, Monarch has six board-certified surgeons on site. “With this many plastic surgeons, we are able to provide a wide variety of specialized and cutting-edge services for our patients,” says Dr. Regina Nouhan, another of Monarch’s partners. “Some (visitors) will find the art soothing, while others will find it energizing or even thought provoking,” Nouhan continues. “Local artists were emphasized, as Kansas City has an abundance of talent right here, and we wanted to both take advantage of that and highlight it.”

The team put equal thought into the furniture—from waiting room chairs to consultation room pieces—most of which were purchased from Contract Furnishings with the assistance of Susan Rhyner. “(Each piece) was chosen for its neutral color palette (and its) strong, stylish quality,” Nouhan says. “And, though impressive, it still allows the art to be showcased.”



Designer Stephanie Abramson was responsible for bringing in much of the artwork and other finishing touches. "There is really nothing else like the new Monarch building in this area, which made it really fun to do," she says. "It definitely feels more like you stepped into someone's home—like you were invited there—instead of just feeling as if you are in a medical building."

The doctors and architects placed special emphasis on elements of flow and light while planning the layout of the building, Nouhan says. While the Monarch facility provides elective skin care and minor cosmetic procedures, "some of the clients are going through some pretty intense things—maybe they have lost a limb or have to have reconstructive surgery done," Stearns notes. "We put in a door in the back of the building, so (patients who weren't comfortable entering through the main foyer could) pull up in their car and come in the back way. (They can) leave through that door, as well, if they have had surgery and are not looking their best at that moment."

And visitors tend to respond favorably to the result, even if they have no idea how much thought and planning went into its creation: No matter the patient or the procedure, the positive feedback just keeps rolling in. "We continue to get compliments on Monarch's artwork almost daily," Nouhan says. Bergen has noticed the same thing: "You don't typically see this style here in the Midwest, and it has made some visitors say that it makes them want to lighten up their own homes. Who knew that coming to a doctor's appointment would be an inspiration for your own home decorating?" ▲

The art collection at Monarch Plastic Surgery includes Rich Bowman's "Big Valley" (opposite, top right and bottom left); bronze sculptures by Tom Corbin (opposite, top right, in the illuminated recess behind the reception desk); and Bernal Koehrsen's "When I Let Go of My Conditioned Mind a Cloud of Joy Opened Before My Eyes" (this page, above chair) and "Jagat II" (this page, center). Even the exam rooms are inviting and innovative: The Tolleson side chairs by Allsteel shown opposite (bottom center, from Contract Furnishings) are upholstered with a bronze vinyl fabric called Stratosphere.