

## Pictures of mental health

Posted on November 16, 2011 by Saba Salman

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In a Room, by William Ball

The painting here, depicting the torment of a lost past and an unknown future, is among the intriguing works in a new exhibition opening in London today which focuses on mental health. The arts event by charity [CoolTan Arts](#), an organisation run for and by people with experience of mental health issues that I've [blogged about before](#), includes collage, painting, sculpture to batik and drawing.

William Ball, the artist behind the piece above, *In a Room*, says his use of black and yellow reflects concepts of death and danger. Another of Ball's pieces, *Through a Window*, meanwhile, represents the optimism and growth he found at CoolTan; it is no coincidence that the artist also cares for the garden at the arts charity.

Ball has been a CoolTan regular since 2003 after a mental health crisis sparked by his mother's death a few years previously, redundancy and relationship breakdown. "My future looked very bleak, at 51-years-old my life seemed as if it was over." Almost sectioned and prescribed "heavy medication", Ball was introduced to CoolTan Arts by a friend: "The people were warm and supportive. I soon visited regularly and enjoyed being part of it."

The artist's story is testament to the charity's work which aims to change perceptions of mental ill health. The organisation, based in Southwark, south London, believes that mental wellbeing is enhanced by creativity.

Here are a few of the other pieces on show until November 30th at Carnegie Library in Herne Hill, south London.



Geometric Patterns, Marjorie McLean



View from the Southbank of Tower Bridge, Aaron Pilgrim



Untitled, Graham Newton



Through a Window, William Ball

The free exhibition opens today at a Library, 188 Herne Hill Road, SE24 0AG, and runs until November 30. For information call 0207 701 2696 or email: [suzie@cooltanarts.org.uk](mailto:suzie@cooltanarts.org.uk)



#### About Saba Salman

Saba Salman is a social affairs journalist, commissioning editor and a regular contributor to The Guardian. She also manages the blog for the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group, an umbrella body for third sector providers of social care.

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[Michelle Baharier](#) says:

November 16, 2011 at 1:25 PM

what a brilliant article

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[Lorraine Nicholson](#) says:

November 16, 2011 at 2:01 PM

As an advocate myself of the power of the arts to access deep healing from trauma by tapping into trapped emotions, I think that projects such as CoolTan Arts need more funding and recognition. I have been an ardent follower of this project for a few years now.

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**Saba Salman** says:

November 17, 2011 at 9:14 PM

Thanks for reading Lorraine, and well said re the lack of both funding and recognition.

[Reply](#)



**Bushy Kelly** says:

November 16, 2011 at 2:49 PM

Very moving article and as someone who has used mental health services since childhood as well as being a carer for family members I am well aware of the power of the arts to express that experience in many different forms.

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**Saba Salman** *says:*

November 17, 2011 at 9:18 PM

Thanks for commenting, I agree that the added value with this particular charity is the wide range of mediums and methods (the “many different forms” you mention are vital – one arts size does not all fit!) as well as the fact it’s user-led.

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