

# The Impact of Brushes With Cancer



Twist Out Cancer® provides psychosocial support to individuals touched by cancer through creative arts programming. What started in 2012 as a small, grassroots online community movement has evolved into an international non-profit organization that has touched over 240,000 people around the world through our community-wide programming, which is designed for previvors, survivors, caregivers, supporters, and artists.

Our Brushes with Cancer program matches individuals touched by cancer (Inspirations) with Artists to create a unique piece of artwork that reflects their personal journey with cancer. Those touched by cancer share their 'twist on cancer'—stories, feelings, and experiences with the Artist, which serves as the inspiration for the art. Since 2012, there have been 1,302 people who participated in our Brushes with Cancer programs as either an Inspiration or Artist. As a result, there are now 651 unique pieces of art in the world that represent 651 individual journeys with cancer. This report includes a few examples of the 85 works of art that were created in honor of our Inspirations in 2022.

After 10 years and more than three dozen Brushes with Cancer programs, we continue to see evidence that the experience is impactful for both Artists and Inspirations. Connections over the past decade continue to be strong and our Brushes with Cancer program offers healing for anyone touched by cancer.

More information is available at **[twistoutcancer.org](https://twistoutcancer.org)**.





These three images are works created from Brushes with Cancer Midwest 2022.

On May 1, Southern Brushes with Cancer participants and supporters gathered at Dripping Springs Distilling in Texas for the 2022 Brushes with Cancer Celebration and Arts Exhibition. This marked the first in-person Brushes with Cancer event in more than two years and attracted over 300 in-person and 100 virtual attendees, celebrating connections between the 35 Inspirations and 35 Artists.

The 2022 Midwest Brushes with Cancer Celebration and Arts Exhibition served as a Twist Out Cancer 10 year anniversary celebration. **Wanda Barcelona** and **Pentagram** contributed large-scale designs that illustrate the intersections made over the past decade. In November of 2022, 450 people gathered to celebrate 31 Artists and 31 Inspirations at the **WDR Museum** in Chicago.

## Brushes with Cancer Licensed Programs

In 2020, during the height of the pandemic, Twist Out Cancer launched licensed Brushes with Cancer programs to exclusive partners (corporations, non-profits, hospitals and educational institutions) that are committed to strengthening their employee and stakeholder engagement through a unique and transformative art experience. Participants in a licensed program connect with

their selected match 4-6 times over the course of 4 months, as well as have the opportunity to engage in two Twistshops® (group art therapy workshops) and peer-to-peer workshops led by trained facilitators. The workshops provide participants with an opportunity to connect with other program participants and process their experiences through an open-studio, art-making and sharing workshop. The program finishes on a high note with a celebratory art exhibition on display for participants and their colleagues to enjoy, as well as showcased in a virtual gallery. Licensed programs are fully customizable to fit the needs of the partner target audience. Integrating the program as part of an employee/community benefit may enhance team building and wellness commitments. As Twist Out Cancer is an IRS registered 501c3, licensed programs can be successfully positioned as fulfilling corporate social responsibility goals and program licensing fees may also be tax-deductible.

Through licensing our Brushes with Cancer program, we have had the opportunity to collaborate with General Motors Design Center, Rolfe Pancreatic Cancer Foundation and Wayne State University. Each of these partnerships were carefully structured and designed to meet the partners' specific needs.

For program and pricing inquiries please contact **August Spree**, Twist Out Cancer Director of Programs.



## “Mary Angel Warrior”

Inspiration [Mary Jenkins](#) and Artist [Kate Van Doren](#)

**Mary’s Twist On Cancer:** My experience with Twist Out Cancer has been wonderful. My artist, Kate Van Doren, has been amazing. Going in, I didn’t have any expectations. I wanted to embrace the full moment of having someone else learn about me, hear my story, and share it through an artist medium.

I want everyone to step into having their own experience with Twist Out Cancer. As a result of being a part, I gained a sister-friend for life!

**Kate’s Artist Statement:** Over the last six months it has been an honor and privilege to get to know Mary Angel Jenkins. Mary is a two-time cancer survivor. She is also an advocate, friend, mentor, mother, and an inspiration to everyone who meets her. When Mary was diagnosed with cancer she and her children were faced with becoming homeless. Thanks to the support of her church she was able to pay her household bills.

During her own treatment she became an advocate for others with cancer. Through her journey she realized that current cancer support systems focused more on research and less on patient support. Thus Mary took it upon herself to start a donation funded nonprofit called the Cancer Option Collaborative (previously known as Christians Overcoming Cancer). This program raises money and support for active cancer patients in regard to their physical needs during treatment.

During Mary’s second battle with cancer she chose to go through chemotherapy treatment quicker than recommended so that she could get back to helping others. Little did she know that this decision would weaken her heart and lead to heart failure. The rapid chemotherapy treatment also forced all of the skin on her hands and feet to painfully peel off. Fortunately she was able to heal her body, but her heart continues to be under stress in a state of failure.

Mary’s story speaks volumes to the person she is. She is a healer and a helper. So much so that she risked her recovery to help others.

To honor her I chose to paint a pair of hands, raw, and bigger than life just like Mary’s personality and kindness. The flower held in between the wrist of the hands is her favorite flower and also represents her ever present faith—a huge and important drive in her life. The broken butterfly in the palm of her hand signifies her health and what she gave up and continues to give up in order to help others to heal. The butterfly also represents her metamorphosis into a new person—a changed warrior. Warrior is written on her wrist, a word she says often to represent who she is now.

Always with a smile, always with a helping hand, Mary is the light through the darkness.

I am forever grateful to Mary for sharing her inspirational journey with me and helping me to see that everything works for good if you are quiet enough to listen.



Mary’s journey as a two-time Breast Cancer survivor, inspired and empowered her to heal and help those experiencing cancer. Her desire to serve others is fueled by Mary’s self-concept as a Warrior.

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*“Always with a smile, always with a helping hand, Mary is the light through the darkness.”*

## “The Ascent”

Inspiration [Jill Marceda Spruiell](#) and Artist [John Stumbaugh](#)

**Jill’s Twist On Cancer:** When my beautiful, adventurous and loving mother passed from cancer, I began packing up her things for donation, etc. I couldn’t help feeling that I was “erasing” her. By participating in Brushes with Cancer, there is a feeling of honoring, upliftment and hope. So beautiful! I am so grateful for the program, which has allowed me to grieve, heal and move on, while still remembering and honoring my mother.

**John’s Artist Statement:** It was a pleasure getting to know my inspiration Jill and learning about her mom, “Queen” Victoria. The fact that Jill was able to be by her mother’s side caring for her during Victoria’s battle with cancer was truly inspirational. Jill’s stories of her were fantastic and I hope she continues to share them.

During our interview process, Jill sent some wonderful photos of Victoria. One picture that caught my interest was one of Jill and Victoria’s last trips together to Machu Picchu, Peru. Victoria with her sunglasses on, hands in the air, and her ear-to-ear grin found a home on the front of the Stumbaugh family refrigerator. That photo and the story of Queen Victoria’s reluctant climb to the top became the inspiration for my artwork.

Special thanks to our BWC mentor Stephanie Held and the entire Brushes team for pairing us together!



Inspiration, Jill Marceda Spruiell, was a caregiver to her mother that passed away. Brushes with Cancer gave Jill the opportunity to reconnect with her mother after feelings of “erasing” her in going through the motions of the grieving process.

*“I am so grateful for the program, which has allowed me to grieve, heal and move on, while still remembering and honoring my mother.”*

## “Diagnosis and Outcome”

Inspiration [Holli Davidove](#) and Artist [Bari Fleischer](#)

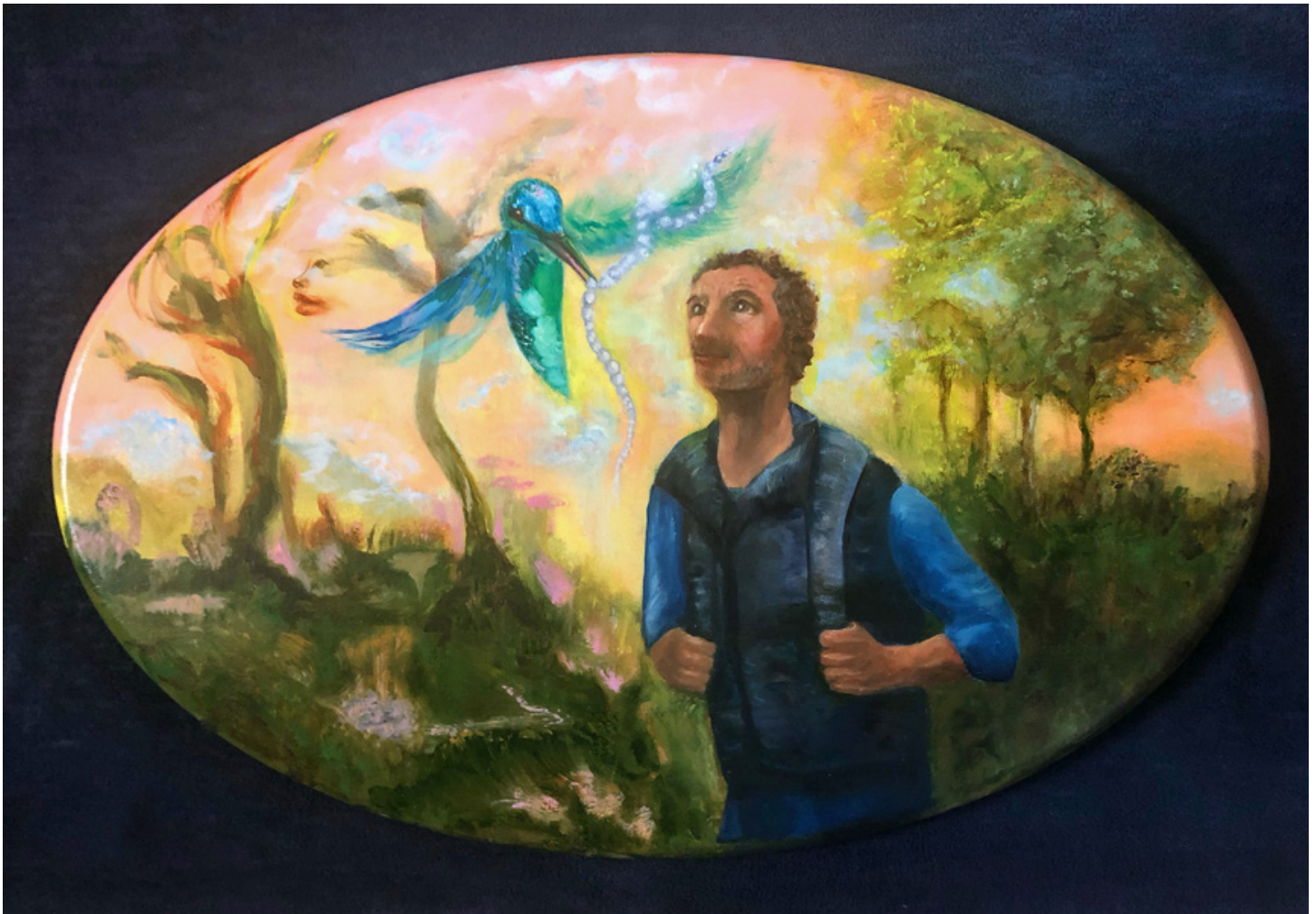
**Holli’s Twist On Cancer:** My experience with cancer led me to believe that having a positive mental attitude (PMA) and open communication with others was instrumental in fighting my battle with cancer and living a meaningful life. Being involved with TOC and working with Bari has really opened my eyes and challenged me to dive deep into the emotional journey I was on during my cancer battle. I have learned a lot about myself—both strengths and weaknesses—which is a true gift. I never stopped to think about myself. I was going through cancer, divorce and taking care of my 8 and 5 year old kids while working full time. I had no time for a pity party. I never thought to check in with myself or my kids and dive deep into how we were all doing. Keeping busy and having a positive mental attitude gave me strength. I now fully appreciate that you should be completely honest and open with your kids, family, and friends about how you are truly feeling emotionally and dealing with your cancer journey. Don’t forget to lean on others for support, since we need to be there for each other. I have learned you don’t need to be superwoman and do it all on your own. Don’t forget to talk to your family, friends and children and see how they are doing, too. The more you share, the better off everyone will be. Sharing open communication is powerful, uplifting, and priceless. Teamwork makes the dream work!

**Bari’s Artist Statement:** The human body is familiar territory for the subject matter of my work, however, it is usually based on personal experience. Having to visually represent another’s experience was something that was out of my comfort zone and quite challenging. Through my own artistic process, many conversations, and a few different iterations of the piece, I am finally able to represent my interpretation of my Inspiration’s experience in visual language.



**Diagnosis and Outcome** represents the duality of the cancer experience, seeing only black and white, lacking clarity in the face of a health crisis, but color and light after the gift of self reflection.





Peter's love for nature was instantly apparent to his Artist, Sheryl. The power of art allowed her to depict Peter, in his happiest and healthiest state—with nature.

## “Hope”

Inspiration [Peter Beck](#) and Artist [Sheryl Ann Noday](#)

**Peter's Twist On Cancer:** I was diagnosed with stage IV metastatic colon cancer in 2015. Although the prognosis was not good, I decided to try to live as normal a life as I could for as long as I was able. I have done chemotherapies, immunotherapies and experimental trials, but I also tried to increase my chances by dietary changes to eliminate sugars, meats, fried and processed foods and by staying physically active and working at my job. Seven years later, I am still living with metastatic cancer and undergoing continuous treatments, but am also still active and working, and I think that this has helped me fight off the disease for longer and be able to live a relatively normal life than if I had just undergone treatments.

**Sheryl's Artist Statement:** I created this painting after many conversations with Mr. Peter Beck. His love of nature was something I noticed right away.

During our time together, we shared many ideas, many conversations enveloping joys, as well as crises upon the planet we live. As a matter of fact, we rarely spoke about cancer. However, through our time together, he would mention the monthly chemo treatments and how he felt afterwards. I began to learn that even though he “danced with cancer,” he never stopped living. Taking up the art of “birding” during cancer and during a pandemic is certainly something to be

admired. I knew I wanted to create a painting whereby he could see himself doing what he loved, to see himself healthy in an environment in which he felt free.

This is the power of art. This is the power of healing.

We can change the current image of ourself to something new. Something that we prefer.

I call my work magical realism. I purposely chose an oval canvas. The oval shape—like an egg—represents new beginnings, something new being born.

In my painting, we see an oversized hummingbird carrying a strand of pearls in her beak presenting an offer. A gift. The pearls are a representation of hope. Something we can never have enough of, and “something,” “sometimes,” people give up too easily.

When we lose hope, we have nothing to look forward to.

I made an image so Peter could see himself in a beautiful, lush landscape doing one of his favorite things. In a state of hope, in a state of receiving all that is beautiful. All that is calm. Sometimes hard to find in a world that is racing. I aimed my brush in the direction to paint him happy and full of life. My hope is when he views the art there is an opportunity to be at peace, to be hopeful and be ready to receive gifts that seemingly come out of the blue.

## “Eternal Hope”

Inspiration [Zaneta Smith](#) and Artist [Curtis Hamilton](#)

**Zaneta’s Twist On Cancer:** Working with the Artist, Curtis Hamilton has been a truly wonderful experience. Curtis and I connected right from the start. His wife Lee is a nurse so we have a lot in common. I have felt like the match with Curtis was a match made in Heaven.

At the time that I applied to be an Inspiration with *Brushes with Cancer*, I was seeking out an art therapist who could help me put my cancer journey to paper or some other kind of medium. All of my efforts fell by the wayside. I had started to give up.

Also, I at that time did not want to continue to talk about my cancer, I wanted to express what I had been through and was currently living with. I think I was tired of talking. I wanted to use my hands to “show my cancer journey”. To be matched with an artist of Curtis stature was both amazing and scary at the same time.

What would I say to him, how would I communicate what I have been through? Would he be turned off by my faith in God? Would he be bored with my cancer story?

When I talked with him for the very first time, I felt totally at ease. We talked about our families and our lives. I don’t even think we talked much about my cancers.

Conversations since have been fun and uplifting. Curtis encourages me to see the positive in things and to continue to go out and enjoy life. To not dwell on the negative. My negative in life has not been my cancers but my job situation. He has encouraged me to continue to find the job that will suit me best.

**Incorporating my faith:** My faith is at the center of my life and everything that I do. Curtis has sent me pictures of biblical characters that have truly lifted my spirit in my low times. He does not shy away when I speak about my faith.

**Expressive:** His art is so expressive. I can almost at times feel what he has created in his art. The emotions of those he has drawn. This is what I was looking for in my own life. I wanted to put to paper what I was actually feeling. Curt showed me through his art that it can be done. I am so grateful for this.

**Great Friend:** Curtis has also become a great friend. We have never seen each other in person. We have only talked over the phone. I have told him I feel like I have found a new friend. Working with Curtis has been a highlight for me. Not only did I get to know the Artist, Curtis Hamilton, but I was able to get to know the man behind the art.

I discovered a man who is passionate about his family; a man who is a wonderful blessing to his wife; a man with a great listening ear; a man who is a complete jokester; a man who takes his art seriously and a man who is a great husband to Lee and a great father and



In their *Brushes with Cancer* experience, Zaneta and Curtis found connection beyond the lines of cancer. The empowerment to share more than just her cancer identity, Zaneta was able to truly feel the emotions depicted in the final piece.

champion to his kids. He is very invested in the lives of his family. This is so admirable.

Thank you *Brushes with Cancer* for introducing me to Curtis Hamilton. He has both enriched and added value to my life. He has become one of the added blessings of having cancer.

Cancer has the ability to take so much out of a person’s life. Physically, emotionally and mentally. Cancer has the ability to take no prisoners. Cancer can be a very dark place to be in.

People like Curtis Hamilton and organizations like *Twist Out Cancer* are the lights in the dark tunnel of Cancer. They give you hope. They help you to focus on you and not the cancer. They let you know that you are more than your cancer.

**Curtis’ Artist Statement:** The artwork was inspired by my new friend, Zaneta. Over the past few months, we’ve talked about hope, enthusiasm, positivity, perseverance, frustration, health, family... She spoke of her Christian devotion and her spirituality. She made me aware of how people’s faith is a strong influence of how they view the possibility of life being positively influenced and affected by their devotion to their faith. And after reflecting on that concept and how hope is so strongly reflected in the young children, I decided to attempt to capture that commitment to “eternal hope” through their eyes and faces.

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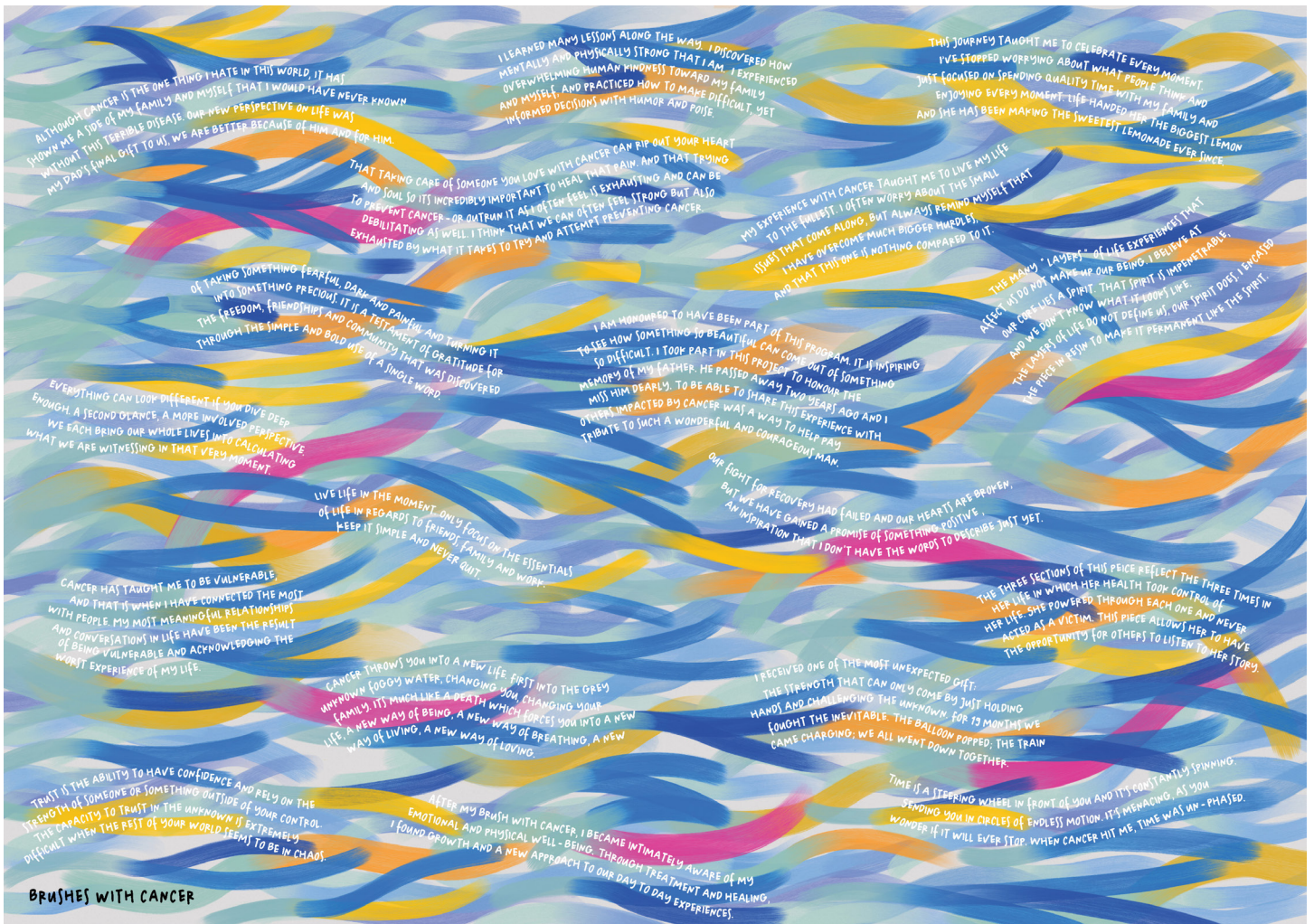


Artwork and stories from past Brushes with Cancer programs are available on the Twist Out Cancer website.

Want to join the movement? Contact us at [info@twistoutcancer.org](mailto:info@twistoutcancer.org) to sign up for our e-newsletter and stay up-to-date on all upcoming Brushes With Cancer programs, Twistshops, and other events. You can also email us for information on our Brushes With Cancer programs at [brushes@twistoutcancer.org](mailto:brushes@twistoutcancer.org).

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**A Brush with Cancer**, by Giorgia Lupi and Pentagram. Over the course of ten years, Twist Out Cancer has connected over 600 survivors, previvors, caregivers, and artists who have been touched by cancer. The above features 278 brushstrokes, which represent the collaborations between these individuals. Weaving in and out of each other, the design shows the deep connection resulting from the Twist Out Cancer community.

