“I learned a lot about myself by looking at the paintings. I saw what my eyes saw.”

-Meet Me at MoMA participant

Oil on canvas, 64 x 51 1/4". Gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim. © 2007 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
The MoMA Alzheimer's Project:

Image, Expression, Alzheimer’s
Making Art Accessible to People with Dementia

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What is Meet Me at MoMA and how does it fit into the Museum’s overall educational programming?

• Interactive educational program specifically designed for people with Alzheimer’s disease and their caregivers

• Community and Access Programs

• Museum education and art education
What is the MoMA Alzheimer's Project?

• A nationwide expansion of the Museum’s outreach program for individuals living with Alzheimer’s disease and their caregivers

• An initiative funded through a two-year grant from MetLife Foundation
What are the goals of the project?

• Continue and improve the Meet Me at MoMA program;

• Determine best practices in creating, developing, and implementing art-looking gallery tours and related programming for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers in an art museum setting;

• Offer resources (publication, website, trainings) as well as ongoing and practical training to other museums, associations, organizations, and individuals interested in offering similar programs;

• Outreach to various outlets and communities to raise awareness of, and advocate for, the benefits of making the arts accessible to individuals with Alzheimer's and their caregivers.
Components of a Gallery Conversation

- Theme; sequence; rationale and transitions
- Communication, facilitation and learning strategies to take into account
- A couple of main thrusts or ideas that are conducive for conversation and exploration for this specific audience
- 3-5 discussion questions per work
- Several art historical points to include
- Looking at and discussing artwork: observation, description, evaluation, interpretation, connection
- Discussion-based activities
Far Away, So Close
Oil on canvas, 21 5/8 x 25 5/8" (54.9 x 65.1 cm). Lillie P. Bliss Collection
Oil on canvas, 29 x 36 1/4" (73.7 x 92.1 cm).
Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.
Oil on canvas, 51" x 6' 7" (129.5 x 200.7 cm). Gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim
Ludwig Kirchner. *Street, Dresden*. 1908 (reworked 1919; dated on painting 1907).
Oil on canvas, 59 1/4" x 6' 6 7/8" (150.5 x 200.4 cm). Purchase.
© by Ingeborg & Dr. Wolfgang Henze-Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern
Oil on canvas, 9 1/2 x 13" (24.1 x 33 cm). Given anonymously. © 2008 Salvador Dalí, Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Far Away, So Close
In Front of the Artwork

Oil on canvas, 9 1/2 x 13" (24.1 x 33 cm). Given anonymously. © 2008 Salvador Dalí, Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Observation (looking)

Description (naming what you see)

Interpretation (assigning meaning)

Evaluation (personal opinion)

Connection (to other areas of life, to other works of art)
What’s different about working with this audience?

- Repetition
- Yes/no
- Personal
- Narratives encouraged
- Side conversations okay
- Non-verbal communication
- Tangential comments
- Great interpretive freedom—wide range of responses
- Variety of expectations about the forms and functions of art and museums
- Wide range of cognitive abilities within the same group
- Unexpected behavior
Communication and Facilitation Strategies

• Do not create two planes of conversation

• Make eye contact with participants

• Talk directly to the person with Alzheimer’s disease, even if they are non-verbal

• Be patient and aware of facial expressions, body language, posture and gestures

• Emphasize and define key words

• Try to interpret what is being said and support participants at their own level of functioning
Communication and Facilitation Strategies (continued)

- Become a performer/facilitator
- Be supportive and show interest in the comments and interpretations of all participants
- Maintain a certain degree of lightness and humor
- Be relaxed and allow the conversation to go into unexpected directions
- Never correct or chastise any member of the group
- Validate frequently and with sincerity
Scenarios

- A person with Alzheimer’s disease constantly responds, but you don’t comprehend what the person is saying
- A caregiver is too enthusiastic and dominates the discussion
- A person with Alzheimer’s disease makes the same point repeatedly in front of different works
- A person with Alzheimer’s disease brings up topics that are completely unrelated to the discussion
- Participants’ interpretations are seemingly off base
- A caregiver and a person with Alzheimer’s disease constantly talk to each other during the group conversation
- There is very little verbal response from the group
The Program Offers a Person with Alzheimer’s Disease:

• Engagement in meaningful activity and opportunity for personal growth

• A forum for exploration and exchange of ideas without relying on short-term memory

• Access to personal experiences and long-term memories

• A means to make connections between individual experience and the world at large

• Mental stimulation and cognitive exercise, which preliminary research suggests offer health benefits

• The opportunity to become part of a community of interpreters

• A social setting where all participants are respected and valued as contributors
The Program Offers Caregivers:

• An opportunity to explore their interest in art while the person in their care is present, safe, and engaged

• Social engagement with other caregivers and the opportunity to share stories and challenges

• A respite, both physically and psychologically
The Program Benefits the Relationship Between the Person with Alzheimer’s Disease and their Caregivers:

- Looking at art provides an opportunity for communication and connection.

- Everyone’s participation is equally valued; both the person with Alzheimer’s disease and the caregiver can engage at various levels and feel validated and empowered.

- Participants learn about each other in different contexts and gain new understanding of each other’s ideas and interests.
Adaptations

• Assisted living facilities
• Adult day centers
• Support groups
• Memory programs
• Individual homes
• Hospitals
Partner Organizations and Other Resources

• The Alzheimer’s Association  
  www.alz.org

• The Alzheimer’s Foundation of America  
  www.alzfdn.org

• Aging and Dementia Research Centers

• The National Center on Creative Aging  
  www.creativeaging.org

• The Society for Arts in Healthcare  
  www.thesah.org