

The Art Gallery As a Platform for Advocacy

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This work would not have been possible without the contributions of our collaborators at St. Luke Health Services (Oswego, NY), Loretto (Syracuse, NY) and Menorah Park (Syracuse) and our students and colleagues at SUNY Oswego.

ABSTRACT

Mushtare and Flanagan chronicle a campus exhibition and project intended to spread awareness of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. The project initially focused on engaging a college campus but expanded to facilitate multi-generational interactions involving three elder care facilities, students, health-care professionals, dementia patients and their families. The project's exhibition format gave voice to the local story of dementia and provided the opportunity for a number of people to participate in the project with varying levels of commitment and using a wide variety of expertise and experience. The authors/project managers describe the collaborative approach used to develop content and transform a gallery-initiated project to non-gallery spaces to reach different and important audiences. The project highlights a paradigm shift from gallery as exclusive authority and physical space to the gallery as a facilitator for community centered initiatives that demonstrate the power museums and galleries have as institutions when working on advocacy and awareness campaigns.

KEYWORDS

Alzheimer's, dementia, art, museum, gallery, advocacy

INTRODUCTION

Our global population is aging. In the next fifteen years, the United States Census Bureau predicts that one in five Americans will be age 65 or older. This trend will likely place strain on

our health care system and will challenge our communities to adapt to the needs of older adults. We initiated *Recollection: A Memory Loss Awareness Project* in 2012 to raise awareness about Alzheimer's and dementia among young adults in a college setting. The project was arts oriented and included the creation of new artworks, exhibitions, film screenings and professional development workshops. The project evolved into a collaboration with community partners and transformed non-traditional spaces into art galleries. We will use *Recollection* as a case study to explore how galleries and similar institutions can break barriers between generations and initiate conversations about social issues in a community.

BACKGROUND

Oswego, New York sits on the shore of Lake Ontario 35 miles north of the metropolitan Syracuse area. Historically, the city has played a substantial role in shipping and is nicknamed the "Port City". Oswego County, as a whole, is rural with a population of 120,000. Sixteen residential senior facilities serve our elders; a population that is growing as baby boomers age. Over 17% of residents live below the national poverty level. Oswego, like other communities in Central New York, struggles to attract and retain young professionals.

The State University of New York at Oswego lies on the western edge of the City of Oswego with a student population of over 8,000. The college is a predominant source of educational, cultural and entertainment opportunities for both college and county residents. SUNY Oswego has three gallery spaces including Tyler Art Gallery (main campus), Oswego Downtown (downtown Oswego) and the Metro Center (downtown Syracuse) that exhibit student work in addition to local, regional, national and international artists that regularly address social issues.

In the tradition of social themes, a retired SUNY Oswego art history professor proposed an exhibition to spread awareness of Alzheimer's disease and dementia to Tyler Art Gallery Director, Michael Flanagan. The professor's own family had been directly affected by the disease. The prevalence of the disease in conjunction with lack of awareness amongst our student population were important factors in deciding to pursue this project. In addition, we believed there was a strong potential for grant-based funding, which proved to be true. Entergy Corp., a national power company with a strong local presence, and the Anne B. and Leon J. Goldberg Foundation both felt the *Recollection* project had merit and provided significant support. Entergy grants, like many large corporate community grants, are most often awarded to projects that are perceived to have wide community benefit and address pressing social issues. The mission of The Goldberg Foundation, headquartered in Albany, NY, is specific to Alzheimer's-related issues, including education.

In mid-2012, a planning meeting was held for the exhibition and related programming for *Recollection: A Memory Loss Awareness Project*. Invitations to participate in the meeting were extended to community experts from local senior care facilities and campus representatives from variety of disciplines such as Counseling and Psychological Services, Health and Wellness, and Gerontology. Faculty members from the Art Department including the Department Chair, Cynthia Clabough, were heavily involved at all phases of the process due to the emphasis on visual art. Around this time, initial contact was made with the Central New York Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association at a support group held at a local senior care center. We are grateful that they were able to provide expert educational materials at each exhibition venue. After

several meetings, a vision emerged that included films, lectures and workshops in addition to an informative and interactive gallery exhibition.

EXHIBITION CONTENT

The project planning committee decided to include student work in the exhibition and reached out to faculty in the department to encourage entire classes to contribute. Students enrolled in four separate courses during the calendar year contributed to the contents of the exhibition. Students in an introductory digital media course were challenged to design and present branding/logo concepts to the *Recollection* planning committee almost a year in advance of the exhibition. Developing a clear brand early was necessary for funding, publicity and establishing content for the exhibit. In addition, two illustration classes and one interactive media course designed work for the exhibition itself.

Logo & Branding

Students were asked to develop a logo for *Recollection* during the planning phase of the project when specific examples of work, films or workshops to be included had not yet been identified. This meant that student designers were asked to brand a somewhat abstract idea. Emphasis was placed on capturing the impact Alzheimer's and dementia have on individuals and families.

During the research phase most students focused on medical and scientific definitions and facts that led to representations of the destruction of the brain. A handful of students were able to move beyond visualizations of the brain and used metaphor to capture feelings of disparity and loss. The committee settled on a logo designed by Stephanie Armour-Dobrowolski (see fig. 1).

Her use of a wooden garden bridge demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the real impact of memory loss and offered a sophisticated use of symbolism to represent: inter-generational reminiscence and preservation of memories; the gap between knowing and unknowing; and the idea of moving forward to keep living. Stephanie's own family experience with Alzheimer's deeply shaped her understanding of the subject matter and connected her to the project. This case study in branding/logo development suggests that when dealing with public health and social issues, designers should seek narratives that capture personal experiences rather than relying solely on statistical, scientific data or encyclopedic data. The perspective gathered in qualitative research is important to communicating the human experience.

Interactive Installations

The semester before the *Recollection* exhibition was to be installed, student enrolled in a course titled, "Art Games and Participatory Forms" were challenged to design interactive experiences that would frame dementia as an issue relevant to all members of a community. They were also asked to promote empathy with and support for caregivers, families and individuals coping with Alzheimer's/dementia. Before beginning this project students studied how games and museum exhibits addressing social issues are designed to engage audiences¹.

The group started the research phase by learning about the normal process of aging and worked to break stereotypical views of older adults. Many students indicated that they have very little interaction with senior citizens beyond their own grandparents, which was a recurring theme with each group of students involved in the project. Many students assumed dementia was a routine part of aging. In addition to dispelling stereotypes, we also worked to develop a baseline

understanding of science and health related aspects of Alzheimer's and dementia from reputable sources like the Alzheimer's Association, World Health Organization and the National Institute on Aging. We turned to two PBS films, "The Forgetting: A Portrait of Alzheimer's" and "You're Looking at Me Like I Live Here and I Don't" to begin the study of the social impact of memory loss. The research at this stage was already much deeper than is common for a student design project, but it wasn't enough to develop engaging interactive experiences.

Professor Rebecca Mushtare approached the activity directors, Donna Rose and Diane Garcia, at St. Luke Health Services to set up interviews with a variety of staff (including nurses, aids, and facilities), residents and family members who consented to generate content for the project. The interviews were recorded and conducted by Mushtare and three students in the course. Friends, family and caregivers were asked questions about their experience of dementia including caregiving, diagnosis, motivation, advice, behavioral misinterpretations, funding and how to raise awareness. Residents were asked about what experience in their lifetime had the biggest impact on them, how they spend their time, who they like to visit with, and advice on how to encourage younger adults to spend more time learning from older adults. The interviews resulted in a complex human story of dementia. In addition to these interviews, a second group of students recruited young adults to be interviewed. Somewhat unexpectedly, the stories this younger generation shared about their own experiences with dementia and memory loss were powerful and brought clarity to the class about the impact dementia has on family members of all ages.

Students listened to the recorded interviews in small groups and made choices about what segments were best to transcribe and which worked particularly well as sound clips. They edited the interviews to capture the diversity, compassion and empathy represented in each of the answers. The content gathered from the interviews were included in two interactive installations: *Cards for Compassion* (see fig. 2) and *The Pathway* (see fig. 3).

Cards for Compassion is a collection of fifty greeting cards with sound modules that weave together the words, wisdom and experience of those locally impacted by dementia. The installation was designed by students Tim Ano, Mallory Eckert, Katherine Morelli and Evander Russ. Each card tells the story of dementia from a unique and personal perspective, many of which offer conflicting points of view. The cards collectively represent the complex local story of dementia and together create an image of a swarm of butterflies meant to visualize the idea of community and the power of each individual within the community. The students' compassion is reflected in the attention to every detail of the cards. In a script typeface, the inside of each card on the right has a powerful call to action like "Be reassuring," "Have no regrets" and "Preserve the memories" and statements of comfort like "Community can be found here," "It impacts generations," "I am here for you" and "Sometimes the words are missing" (see fig. 4). The left hand side of the card includes an excerpt from the thirty second audio clip that plays when the card is opened. The text is large and clear so that older adults who have difficulty hearing the clip are able to read a portion of it. The back of each card is adorned with a butterfly different from all of the others and a statement about the symbolic use of butterflies. The installation as a whole had a strong and inviting visual impact that encouraged casual viewers to handle the cards (in addition to a small sign reading "please touch"). Cards hung freely on nails to make it easy

for viewers to remove the card for viewing and listening. The most powerful aspect of this installation is that each story has its own voice.

The Pathway is a series of 24 double-sided cards that hang from the ceiling and dance in the breeze. One side of each card contains either a photo or facts and statistics about dementia juxtaposed with a personal story on the reverse. For example, one card includes a quote from a family member, “With Alzheimer’s you don’t go through a lot of treatment, like when you’ve got cancer... you just hope for the best” and the reverse states, “Alzheimer’s is now the 6th leading cause of death in the United States.” Another card includes a quote from a caregiver that reads, “One day, they love you. The next day they don’t . And even though you know they’re sick... it’s a lot on a caregiver” and the reverse states, “The economic impact of dementia has been \$604 billion per year in the world and is expected to increase more rapidly.” The cards were designed to hang in two rows of twelve so that viewer goes on a journey through the “pathway” of facts and stories. The installation was designed by Katelyn Cardone, Sean Gnau, Tong Lu and Alan Wisniewski.

The students who designed *Cards for Compassion* and *The Pathway* reported that they had never worked so hard to continuously revise and refine their projects for exhibition. Student designer, Katherine Morelli elaborates,

This project has made me a more aware designer. In school, a lot of our projects focus on what we as the designer want to do, but this wasn’t the case here... I had never done such extensive research before. It not only helped our design and decision making, but it

helped me understand that design shouldn't always be about you. There is more to the world than our own lives and we, as designers, can help by doing projects like this.

The rounds of proofreading and attention to details like copyright were very important because the work they were creating was going to be published and public. They knew that the individuals who provided them with content would likely be a part of the audience of their work and they worked hard to make sure their informants were well represented.

A third group of students developed an alternate reality game² targeted specifically at college students to increase their real world interactions with older adults and their understanding of Alzheimer's and included quests like volunteering at an adult care facility. The students worked hard to consider ways to make the information relevant to their intended audience. Although designed for the exhibition, the project was not included because the student designers were not able to commit their time to oversee the game and make adjustments as the game was played. Despite the potential power of the project, the students walked away and left their game without a game master or a way to be played. Varied levels of commitment among student groups is expected, but in this case was disappointing given the community needs and expected benefit.

Illustration

To compliment the interactive installations, students in multiple illustration courses created two-dimensional works. Under the supervision of Professors Carla Senecal, Amy Bartell and Cynthia Clabough, students researched dementia from three different perspectives: the physiological, cognitive, and the emotional. The students translated their research and experiences -- the

subjective and/or objective -- into illustrations that not only represented the information/experience, but also furthered the viewer's understanding of the disease.

The pieces were created as diptychs, allowing students to juxtapose pieces to create a fuller portrait of Alzheimer's (see fig. 5). Many created pairs of pre and post Alzheimer's disease images that alluded to the element of time between the panels. The collection of illustrations capture moments of misunderstanding, humor, loss, and memory in a variety of styles including drawings, photorealism, and flat graphics. The pieces took a number of forms, but many included portraiture. Faces and facial expressions are recognized and understood by all audiences. Others used references to pastimes like Scrabble or drinking tea that became scrambled and confused over time. The familiar is often a good strategy to draw someone in to examine the unfamiliar. Student illustrator, Allison Rhode, explains that the weight of the subject matter was not lost on students,

Alzheimer's and dementia affect many of our families and people we love, so I felt personally invested in creating a powerful representation of this. The project really brought to light how heavily the responsibility of caretaking falls upon the family members of someone suffering from dementia. The stress of this can be immense and we should all strive to help lessen this burden, which can partially be done through raising awareness of dementia and it's widespread impact.

Workshops

Tyler Art Gallery offered two professional development workshops to promote art making and viewing with dementia patients were offered free to the public in fall 2013 to launch the *Recollection* project prior to the opening of exhibition.

Elizabeth Boivin, Executive Director of the Northeast NY Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, led a workshop on methods for using artworks to engage memory loss patients in conversation and storytelling. In the Alzheimer's and dementia population, Boivin has witnessed widespread benefits of engagement through art-generated conversations stating, "Caregivers are so happy to have an activity that made life feel 'normal' despite their loved one's diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease. It is a wonderful way to link the generations as well". Boivin previously worked directly with museum docents in this capacity at The Hyde Collection, Glens Falls, NY.

Boivin's extensive experience in the mental health field was evident as she conducted an up-to-date and succinct overview of Alzheimer's Disease prior to exploring sample artworks in categories such as "People and Activities" and "Animals". She carefully worked through detailed art conversation scenarios and offered practical information like "communication difficulties" followed by "communication techniques". Workshop participants gained an understanding of choosing conversation-generating artworks and approaches for facilitating that conversation. Attendees included SUNY Oswego students, faculty and staff as well as Oswego County employees who work directly with seniors.

In response to Boivin's workshop, we included a didactic panel in the exhibition explaining the benefits of art conversations for dementia patients accompanied by a well-suited painting from Tyler Art Gallery's collection, Howard Mandell's *Village in the City*, depicting a community engaged in a variety of everyday activities (see fig. 6).

To continue the professional development offerings related to the exhibit, Ann Thayer, Programming Manager of the Northeast NY Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, conducted a training session for Memories in the Making³. Thayer's workshop provided guidance on how to engage adults with dementia in painting with watercolors. Like Boivin, Thayer set behavioral expectations and suggested responses for attendees to consider when offering their own workshops with dementia patients. Attendees engaged in a simulation of Memories in the Making to demonstrate how to facilitate conversation. Thayer effectively conveyed the possibility of a meaningful visually generated experience even as verbal communication skills may fade. This session drew local college students and faculty members, as well as staff from St Luke Health Services who were already vital partners in the *Recollection* project. Seeley Cardone, an art therapy instructor at SUNY Oswego, noted the impact of the Memories in the Making program stating, "Participating in the workshop reminded me of the importance of exposing students to different ways creativity can be used to foster growth. Having the chance to make art and share our process further enhanced the experience."

Following the workshop, we collaborated with St. Luke Health Services in Oswego, NY to expand the existing creative arts program run by Mushtare to include a watercolor component facilitated by Flanagan. Although the watercolor activity is similar in structure to Memories in the Making, we decided to include participants both with and without dementia. Watercolors created by residents at St. Luke became an important aspect of the exhibition because they are one way we were able to capture the voices and experiences of those with dementia and memory loss.

Exhibit Guide

We produced a four-page gallery guide with the assistance of an Oswego graphic design student to accompany the *Recollection* exhibition. The cover featured the project's logo combined with the joined hands of a senior citizen and a younger person. Purple was chosen as a project's signature color for all printed material to connect the exhibition's appearance with the recognizable purple of the Alzheimer's Association. In addition to explaining the basis for each exhibition component, the Alzheimer Association's "10 Early Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease" were included in anticipation of a large student audience unfamiliar with the disease. The guide was also useful in illuminating the participation of St. Luke residents and staff in the creation of *Cards for Compassion*, *The Pathway* and the resident watercolor paintings.

GALLERY EXHIBITIONS

The first two venues for the *Recollection* exhibition were at SUNY Oswego managed gallery spaces. Tyler Art Gallery is on the main SUNY Oswego campus while SUNY Oswego Metro Center is within a small satellite location in downtown Syracuse. These spaces serve predominantly young audience members; an audience who may not realize the relevance of dementia. Students who created content for the exhibit had the opportunity to view their artwork and discuss their work with viewers. These spaces have physical qualities such as lighting and hanging systems that required little problem solving in terms of art installation. Housed in a building containing the Art, Music and Theater departments, Tyler Art Gallery's audience often enters the gallery in an open frame of mind expecting to be emotionally affected. Due to the multi-use nature the Metro Center we were able to reach a different audience there, including casual viewers and students on their way to class. These two locations were ideal to reach our young adult audience.

Tyler Art Gallery

In early 2014, an evening reception for *Recollection: a Memory Loss Awareness Project* was held to launch the exhibit. The gallery itself is somewhat typical featuring white walls, track lights and viewing under the watchful eye of a gallery attendant. Though typical in many ways, exhibit design consciously considered accessibility for wheelchair-bound visitors in wide aisle ways and lowered sight lines. “Please touch” signs were a necessary addition to encourage interaction with *Cards for Compassion* and *The Pathway* the interactive pieces because traditional gallery viewers are trained to look but not to touch.

The emotional content of the exhibition effectively countered the neutral features of the gallery. This particular iteration of the exhibit included a looping 14 minute film *No Hole in My Head* (2011) by Alison Segar that documents early onset Alzheimer’s in Abby Hale, 54, who is employed in the healthcare field and able to react to her situation a startlingly rational way. The film invigorated the gallery with sound and movement and gave a specific voice and human face to Alzheimer’s disease. The kinetic medium of film appealed to this audience in a way that static images do not. Museum studies instructor Mindy Ostrow brought her students to the exhibition and feels they were strongly attracted to nontraditional forms including the three-dimensional and interactive features of *The Pathway* adding, “The students were struck by the simplicity of the words, yet each card was ‘sending’ powerful personal quotes to the viewer, evoking a feeling of compassion in the viewer as well.”

An evening screening of Ann Hedreen's 2004 film *Quick Brown Fox* was arranged to coincide with the exhibition at Tyler Art Gallery. The film chronicles Hedreen's mother's battle with Alzheimer's disease and provides insight into Hedreen's self-education and resulting empowerment. Hedreen personally introduced her film and interacted with audience members after the screening. She noted the advantages of the arrangement stating, "Our film is full of visual metaphors and so it felt very natural to show it in conjunction with *Recollection*. Dementia is so hard to describe in words. Art and film can be very helpful. I was so moved that night by the viewers' thoughtful questions and responses to the film, and I think the exhibition context was a huge part of it."

The SUNY Oswego Metro Center

The State University of New York at Oswego's Metro Center located in downtown Syracuse includes a handful of classrooms, meeting rooms and offices that are entered from the multipurpose central space that includes a gallery, seating area and computer workstations. *Recollection* was installed in this central location and continued in an ancillary gallery space. The Metro Center is occupied primarily by adult student learners who work full-time and take graduate level courses in business, education and mental health counseling. The Metro Center is also home to the college's Active Aging and Community Engagement (AACE) Center whose mission includes engaging students to address the opportunities and complex challenges posed by the aging demographic and providing a single point of access for partnering with community organizations in these efforts. The Metro Center gallery space is one of twenty arts organizations that participate in Th3 that hold openings and events on the third Thursday of each month⁴.

Because of these characteristics, the Metro Center was uniquely positioned to expand the audience geographically and demographically.

The informal nature of this space, in comparison with the formal space of Tyler Art Gallery, required us to reconfigure *The Pathway* as a 3-sided dead-end path that fully immersed the viewer in stories, images and statistics while still remaining handicap accessible (see fig. 7). The remainder of the exhibit was unedited.

The comfortable furniture around the room encouraged people to sit, reflect and discuss the artwork in the space. Observations by staff at the Metro Center indicate that people were actively engaged in dialogues about dementia and Alzheimer's while the exhibit was up. One visitor took the initiative to email about her experience,

When I walked into the Metro location this evening I found myself surrounded by the amazing work you and your students did. ...The suspended cards made the first impact... like suspended thoughts and memories. The artwork touched me, but the cards with the voices haunted me. I can relate to so very many of the things said and the emotions not said.

Her perspective was similar to feedback staff at the Metro Center had received about the exhibit. Metro Center and AACE Director Kimberly Armani explains, "... it was widely viewed and discussed by students, faculty and other visitors. Often, the imagery and narratives in the exhibit

prompted visitors to share stories about their own experiences with friends and family members with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.”

EXHIBITIONS AT ELDER CARE FACILITIES

During the exhibition at the SUNY Metro Center, Kimberly Armani initiated conversations with local leaders in elder care about the exhibit and how art could be used to further our dialogs about elder care and aging in our community. As a result of these conversations, we were invited to install the exhibit at Loretto, a regional leader in elder care serving over 6,000 elders, at their Cunningham Skilled Nursing location in Syracuse, NY. The success of this first exhibit resulted in subsequent exhibitions at Menorah Park (Syracuse, NY) and St. Luke Health Services (Oswego, NY).

When the exhibit traveled to Loretto, adjustments were made to both the format and the content of the exhibit to account for a shift in both audience and space that were not planned when the *Recollection* exhibit was initiated. Our audience shifted from predominantly students and members of academia to a general audience of healthcare workers, families of elders and a significant number of older adults with hearing, vision and motor impairments. The exhibition space shifted from a room to heavily trafficked corridors and foyers typically used to display traditional forms of two-dimensional art.

We acknowledged a difference in audience but overlooked important details initially. For example, the panel and brochures introducing the exhibition assumed the context of SUNY Oswego by including the name of the art department and Tyler Art gallery but did not

acknowledge the project's association with SUNY Oswego. This was remedied for the Menorah Park and St. Luke Health Services versions of the exhibit.

When installing the work at each elder care facility we were cognizant that the content of the exhibit would be relevant to a large percentage of viewers and would likely evoke stronger emotional reactions than the exhibit had with younger adults in a college context. We edited out some pieces included in the gallery exhibitions that could be interpreted as insensitive to accommodate the audience and the limitations of the space. Initial reactions were particularly strong at Menorah Park in part because the exhibition had not been advertised in advance and the content caught individuals by surprise. In response, both a comment book and a comment board were added to invite viewers to express and process their thoughts about the contents of the exhibit. We expected a mix of comments but were pleasantly surprised to find that the postings were positive with sentiments like, "Thank you to all involved for caring. It helps knowing that you are not on this journey alone. Others care." Structured conversations, programming or other ways to contextualize the exhibit were important recommendations made by our elder care partners during post-project reflections⁵. For example, our partner at Loretto, Brenda McCutcheon, stated, "I think it would have been nice to have someone present at the project to engage those viewing. To share thoughts and how they interpreted the art, as there is learning in community and a sense of aloneness when you stand alone with your own thoughts." Our partners at each elder care facility discussed organizing a reception and producing a press release about the exhibition during planning phases, however limited resources (funding, personnel and time) prevented execution. Future projects should include a combination of formal activities (like guided tours, discussions or interactions with student artists/designers) and informal activities

(like comment boards) that are pre-designed and provided by the gallery at the start of each project. Templates for easy-to-implement structures for feedback and reflection would reduce the burden on elder care facilities to develop their own programming.

Our last major lesson about audience was the tendency of those with vision impairments to bring exhibit materials with words closer for ease of reading. At Loretto, we hung *The Pathway* cards low enough to be viewed from a wheelchair but discovered many of the cards had been tugged, ripped and repaired during the exhibition. To accommodate this inclination, we reprinted the cards and hung them using elastic line to allow for more movement which successfully addressed the issue at both Menorah Park and St. Luke Health Services. We were pleased to see that in a non-gallery context, viewers were much more likely to interact with the installation pieces because the space does not have a “do not touch” connotation. We were fortunate to have a conversation with Menorah Park’s occupational and low vision therapist Ann Whitaker about some of the typographic choices in *The Pathway*. She provided a number of suggestions that would make the text more accessible for our elders. Because the work was already published, and the students were on summer break, the pieces could not be adjusted. The exchange we had with Whitaker demonstrated a need to invite elder care professionals to provide feedback about accessibility during the development phases of future projects.

Space was an interesting design constraint to contend with at each of the elder care facilities. Limited wall space compelled us to significantly shrink the number of student digital illustrations exhibited in comparison to the earlier college venues. The editing process allowed us to highlight the strongest and most insightful student pieces. We decided the two interactive pieces, *The*

Pathway and *Cards for Compassion* would be included in each installation because they actively engage the viewer and provide context important to the exhibit overall.

A busy corridor is a tricky place to install artwork because contemplation of the art cannot disrupt traffic. The exhibition at Loretto spanned three hallways surrounding the perimeter of a centralized elevator bank, which included seating and waiting areas. The Menorah Park's foyer location also had seating areas. These waiting areas provided a natural opportunity for viewing by taking advantage of idle time that was not available at Tyler Art Gallery or the exhibit's final location at St. Luke Health Services.

We utilized spaces at each elder care facility that had been previously adorned with two-dimensional artwork that had become regular, routine and unnoticed. The change in the contents of these spaces to the student illustrations generated a buzz and instigated active looking. The most complex piece to hang was *The Pathway*. Alcoves at both the Loretto facility and at Menorah Park provided perfect conditions to suspend the artwork from the ceiling without disrupting the primary floor space of the hallway. At St. Luke, the conditions were different in that entire hallway was lined with a handrail. Here we installed three cards from the ceiling between each illustrated diptych spanning the entire length of the hallway. Although the form was slightly different at each location, the visual impact was powerful and attracted attention and engaged the audience. We were able to expand the exhibition at St. Luke Health Services to include a large selection of paintings by residents created during our bi-monthly painting workshops modeled on the Alzheimer's Association's Memories in the Making program that began shortly before our first exhibition opened at Tyler Art Gallery (see fig. 8).

Installing the exhibitions at each of the elder care facilities was a unique and rewarding experience. At each location many staff members, residents and their family members engaged in conversations with us about the transformation of the space, the exhibition and individual artworks. Unlike in the traditional gallery setting, where installations are done in solitude, the installation became a performance and an event. This was an important, albeit unplanned, part of the dialogue about memory loss and about our students, the work they created and why they created it. Most conversations were curiosity driven and spanned everything from art-making and design processes to the content and interpretation of individual pieces. Viewers worked hard to verify they understood the content of the artworks.

The choice to install the exhibit at each elder care locations resulted in a significant impact on our local community that would not have been possible otherwise. To better understand how the exhibit touched each community, we conducted interviews with our key contacts and collaborators at each facility and asked them to share their observations and insight. Overall, our elder care partners expressed appreciation of the student work in the exhibition and a genuine interest in pursuing future collaborative art exhibitions. Many of our partners indicated that the variety of artwork and their unique features engaged viewers again and again. Diane Garcia, a collaborator at St. Luke Health Services, explained, “I think the art drew them in. Then they started reading. It was a good format to get the information to them... It was interesting and engaging -- every day there were people looking and reading.” Many of our conversations centered around the ability to use artwork to make tough issues approachable, especially those that people might otherwise avoid. Donna Rose, one of our partners at St. Luke Health Services,

described the complex nature of interacting with and experiencing the work in the exhibit, “It evokes some sadness, yet it evokes --- I don’t want to say joy, but it was the feeling that, someone gets it and they’re putting it out there. There were good feelings as well.” Visitors found comfort and hope in the idea of community and the reassurance that they were not going through things alone. The impact the exhibit had on each elder care facility was rich and complex, though hard to capture. Brenda McCutcheon, our partner at Loretto, poignantly summarized the effect the exhibit had on her community,

Recollection: A Memory Awareness Project stirred up lots of sharing, conversation, but most of all created a lens to look at memory loss that allowed you to enter the person’s story pictorially and anonymously. The pictures and images in the project were powerful. But to think of them in the light of someone else other than someone you love, allowed for easier conversation, it was not as close to home. Some of them created reactions rooted in fear, as how memory loss can sometimes be viewed as constrictive, it creates ‘tangles’ in the brain, are hard to face when you call that person mom, sister, husband, friend.

Brenda captures the idea that art can be a “safe” place to explore complex and challenging subject matter. The format of the work allowed new perspectives to be introduced and considered. Those that are impacted daily by Alzheimer’s and dementia often adopt coping mechanisms to deal with hard and painful realities. This can be particularly true of health care workers as Diane Garcia’s explains,

I saw a lot of nurses out there looking at it. I think it put it [Alzheimer's and dementia] in more perspective for them. When you work in it every day sometimes you lose it [perspective]... It becomes the norm so much.... It is like seeing something again for the first time, but you've known it.

Many of the stories and perspectives included in the exhibition originated from the staff, residents and their families at St. Luke Health Services nearly a year before the exhibition was installed. This particular group may have been more invested in the end product because of their initial contribution and may account for desire in other communities to want their voices documented using mechanisms like comment books. The time and space separating our first conversations about memory loss and when students edited those stories and narratives provided an additional layer of perspective from this group of participants.

Our elder care partners indicated that the success of the project was that the exhibition traveled to multiple locations and to an audience who would not have seen the exhibit had it not traveled to them. In addition, all of our partners expressed that the community felt a sense of loss when the exhibit was taken down.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the most powerful, yet underdeveloped, features of the *Recollection* project was the level of engagement across generations at multiple stages of the project. Documenting the narratives of students, health care workers, and families impacted by dementia and Alzheimer's was a compelling way to invite the community to participate in the content creation for the exhibition. Each of the stories told is important to the complex story of memory loss. Expanding multi-

generational collaboration into the design and development phase more intentionally would be powerful, as evident in the positive response to the inclusion of artworks by residents of St. Luke Health services when the exhibit was installed at that location. A recent report, “Shaping an Age Friendly CNY,” released by F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse furthers this argument by indicating our local need for intergenerational social networks, and opportunities for older adults to exercise their skills and abilities to the community⁶. We also recognize that exhibitions that explore social issues have a responsibility to acknowledge and document the voices of the audience to help facilitate conversation. We recommend that future projects make a concerted effort to engage the community at each state of the project: content, design, exhibition and reflection.

Had we planned for the artwork included in *Recollection* to be displayed at elder care facilities from the start, the work produced would likely be quite different. Had student artists known early on about the elder care venues, content may have been unnecessarily altered in deference to an Alzheimer’s and dementia affected audience rather than respectfully addressing the group as mature and capable adults. They may have also worked harder and been more committed had they known the extent of their impact. As exhibition organizers, we may have constrained students to easy-to-hang two-dimensional works rather than risk the interactive installations that were popular among audience members. Recognizing that these works can be adapted to non-traditional spaces opens new possibilities for future projects. Sharing experimental forms in these contexts proved to be refreshing and rewarding. It is clear that any exhibitions designed to address social issues should be flexible so that they can adapt to unexpected places— as the gallery, in a traditional sense, may not be the most effective platform to facilitate discourse.

Because there were additions to the initial exhibition schedule, programming related to the exhibit was non-existent once it traveled to each of the elder care facilities. In the future we recommend offering pre-planned “packaged” programming in conjunction with the exhibition. Such content might include training for a volunteer exhibition docent, lesson plans for a professional development workshop that utilizes the exhibition, or artist talks that would bring student artist and designers to discuss their work at each location.

The art gallery is a powerful cultural institution and platform to explore themes and ideas. The gallery as a specific physical location, though, has limitations often related to class, education and level of convenience. Galleries have the ability to rally a group of artists and designers around a particular idea and to challenge them to help the community better understand their own story. *Recollection* demonstrates that the art gallery can leverage the power of visual form and initiate a community-wide inter-generational discussion on a social issue by bringing art to the audience rather than the audience to the art.

¹ For a discussion on designing games to foster empathy see, Jonathan Belman and Mary Flanagan, “Designing Games to Foster Empathy,” *Cognitive Technology* 14, no. 2 (2010): 5-15. For a discussion on designing interactive museum exhibitions see, Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2010. For a discussion on designing collaboratively with end-users/viewers see, Helen Armstrong and Zvezdana Stojmirovic, *Participate: Designing with User-Generated Content*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011.

² Alternate reality games are played in the real world and often use multiple media to tell a story. Students modeled their game on the work of Jane McGonigal. See Jane McGonigal, *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*, New York: Penguin Press, 2011.

³ Memories in the Making was founded in 1988 and provides a fine arts experience for people with dementia. See La Doris “Sam” Heinly, *Memories in the Making: A Creative Art Activity for People with Alzheimer’s Dementia*, Orange County: La Doris, 2010.

⁴ See <http://www.th3syracuse.com>.

⁵ Post-project reflections were conducted at each site. Methods include informal conversation while de-installing *Recollection*, formal interviews, and email exchanges.

⁶ The report discusses what an age-friendly city looks like and documents specific changes the community needs to make to become more age-friendly. See Charlotte Holstein, et al., “Shaping an Age-Friendly CNY: A Study on How to Retain and Engage Boomers in Our Community,” Syracuse: F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse, 2014.