

Creative Women



Fall 2009

# CWO

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CapeWomenOnline serves as a venue for the women of Cape Cod to share their ideas, experiences and resources while inspiring each other in their life's journey.

## Art & Alzheimer's: Making Memories

by Suzanne Faith



Two Figures/Black and Red, by Selina Trief Published courtesy of CCMOA

The ability to remember words and communicate fluidly with language is one of the first losses experienced with the onset of Alzheimer's disease. Families and professionals working with individuals diagnosed with dementia rely heavily on nonverbal exchanges and symbolic interpretations in order to express thoughts or interpret needs.

For many of us, nonverbal expression is often a component of our verbalization. We use our hands to signal, direct, and call attention to something. Learning symbolic interpretation, that is the emotion or idea behind what one is trying to express, is far more difficult.

Neuroscientists have long understood that although functional abilities are lost as the disease of Alzheimer's progresses, much of one's ability to comprehend visual art and music on a deep emotional level remains intact even if it may not be apparent to the casual observer.

In 2003, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City collaborated with John Zeisel, Ph.D., president of Hearthstone Alzheimer Care, to develop a groundbreaking program for individuals with dementia. "Meet Me at MoMA...and make Memories" used the paintings in the museum's collection to assist individuals with Alzheimer's in the communication process.



Floral Still Life, by Ada Rayner Published courtesy of CCMOA

With the assistance of a museum educator, participating individuals are given the freedom to express their emotions using observation and symbolic interpretation. No judgment is placed on any of their comments. Caregivers accompanying their family members learn new methods of communicating by observing how emotions can be expressed through the use of symbolism.

As art experiences become recognized as a non-pharmacological treatment approach to significantly reduce certain psycho-behavioral symptoms often associated with dementia and assist in the maintenance of cognitive functioning, more and more museums both nationally and internationally are looking expand their programming.

In November 2008, Amir Parsa from MoMA spoke to almost 200 professional and family caregivers at the annual Alzheimer's Services of Cape Cod & the Islands Awareness Conference about their specialized art program. He conducted a workshop at the Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis to expose local artists, museum educators, and gallery owners to the MoMA program, and to lay the groundwork for a similar program here on Cape Cod.

Rockland Trust and seven of the Cape's local cultural councils have generously granted funding to Alzheimer's Services to expand the art programming for those with Alzheimer's and their caregivers through out our local region. Alzheimer's Services has collaborated with CCMA and several Cape Cod galleries to establish The Arts & Alzheimer's Project. The project seeks to create a venue for Alzheimer's programming, and also gives local artists an opportunity to talk about their work.



Maid and Sea Serpent, by Martha Cahoon. Published courtesy of CCMOA.



### The Cape & Islands Art & Alzheimer's Initiative

Sponsored by Alzheimer's Services of Cape Cod, brings art & conversation into the lives of individuals living with memory impairment. Space is limited to five couples per group session.

#### Cape Cod Museum of Art, Dennis

3rd Monday of every month from 1 – 2:30pm  
Register each month with Linda McNeill-Kemp  
508 385 4477 ex 25

Other art galleries participating in the Cape & Islands Art & Alzheimer's Initiative

Sponsored by Alzheimer's Services of Cape Cod

<http://www.alzcapecod.com>

Contact Suzanne Faith

[suzanne@alzcapecod.org](mailto:suzanne@alzcapecod.org)

508 775 5656 to register for the above programs

Suzanne Faith, RN, BS Psych, is the Director of Client Services with Alzheimer's services. She traveled to New York to observe MoMA's program firsthand and learn techniques for implementation from Mr. Parsa.

Upon her return, Suzanne began working with museum educators at the Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis to help establish an ongoing program for the local Alzheimer's community.

The CCMA program provides an opportunity for individuals with memory impairment to engage not only with the art but also with other caregivers and peers.

The CCMA program meets the third Monday of each month at 1 p.m. Pre-registration is required to participate; please call 508-385-4477 ext: 16 to register or email Suzanne: [Suzanne@alzcapecod.org](mailto:Suzanne@alzcapecod.org)

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