

Springtime Wanderings: Exhibiting Creative Projects



Activity, Time and Materials

ACTIVITY:

Artwork generated in either solitary or group settings through *Art for Life Program* activity plans can be exhibited. Whether the art is recipe cards with Fraktur, haiku created from weatherlore, watercolor paintings, photography, or Swedish *Dala* paintings, this outline can be used as a guide to exhibit that work. Sharing projects in a formal way gives participants pride in their achievements and serves as a vehicle for staff, family members, friends, and the elder residents to work together on a common endeavor. This interaction benefits the elder care facility as well as the larger community. The exhibit can be an event that brings family and friends into the elder care facility to interact with the residents in a positive situation.

TIME:

Six hours over five sessions. (However, the time can vary depending upon the number of people involved.)

MATERIALS:

- Access to a computer and printer for typing labels and the exhibit description
- Heavy board for mounting artwork and labels
- Self-adhesive photo corners (the large size is available in hobby, craft, and scrapbooking stores)
- Matte white printing labels for inkjet or laser printers, 2" x 4"
- For displaying the artwork: table easels or standing easels (when not using a wall), sticky tack or Command™ Poster Strips (when hanging on a wall)
- A small carpenter's level
- Scissors or paper cutter

Note: This list is variable and represents materials needed for a basic two-dimensional exhibit. With a little forethought, there are lots of opportunities for using recycled materials. Partner with your local frame shop. They will have scraps or off cuts of mat-board that they can donate. Your local print shop may have an industrial paper cutter and will likely donate a few minutes to cut paper and mat-board in uniform sizes.

“THREE PLAGUES” (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):

Exhibits are a great way to showcase creative activities. They are event-oriented, meaning they are designed to share individual or group work with others. They provide an excuse to gather together for a community reception to see what the “artists” have created. Such opportunities for social interaction, especially with family, can have a great impact on loneliness and feelings of isolation. Rather than feeling “helpless,” the “artists” can take pride in their accomplishments and see the completed exhibit as evidence that they are able to create and contribute to their community.

Individuals, care center staff, volunteers, and family members will all enjoy the joint effort of putting the exhibit together and seeing the final result on display. Exhibit development takes time, communication, production, and presentation—all of which helps to alleviate boredom.

It is important to note that the individuals who create the exhibit don’t necessarily have to be the featured “artists.” Individuals who may be shy about their own art or who would prefer to “orchestrate” an event may find this activity to be a creative outlet and their own opportunity to shine. Delegation of work according to one’s capacity addresses the sense of helplessness and fosters feelings of inclusivity.

ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDIES:

Barbara Bagan, Ph.D., ATR-BC, is a professor of expressive arts therapy at Ottawa University in Phoenix, Arizona. Bagan discusses the benefits that elders incur from producing and viewing art. Some of these benefits even apply to people suffering from Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer’s. Among the cited benefits for elders are reduced depression and anxiety that often arise with chronic diseases, as well as increased relaxation, socialization, playfulness, sense of control, and self-esteem. She also writes, “Neurological research shows that making art can improve cognitive functions by producing both new neural pathways and thicker, stronger dendrites. Thus, art enhances cognitive reserve, helping the brain actively compensate for pathology by using more efficient brain networks or alternative brain strategies. Making art or even viewing art causes the brain to continue to reshape, adapt, and restructure, thus expanding the potential to increase brain reserve capacity.”

*--Bagan, Barbara. “Aging: What’s Art Got to Do with It?”
Today’s Geriatric Medicine (website), May 7, 2013.
[http://www.todaygeriatricmedicine.com/news/
ex_082809_03.shtml](http://www.todaygeriatricmedicine.com/news/ex_082809_03.shtml)*

“The investigation was aimed to assess the link between visual art discussions and social interaction. The study was designed as a controlled intervention study. Participants were older women living in a block of specially designed older persons’ flats in Sweden. Reproductions of well-known artists’ works of art were used as an intervention instrument. Measurements were older women’s self-

reported social interaction. The results show significant improvement in the visual art group compared to the matched control group. The differences in ratings between the groups indicated increased social interaction in the visual art group, which continued to exist four months after the intervention. Visual art discussions encouraged reminiscence and stimulated the older women to be more socially active. The study is an example of how visual art could be used in order to stimulate older women to interact in a social network in order to remain in contact with the world instead of retreating from it.” [Abstract]

--Wikström, B.M. "Social Interaction Associated with Visual Art Discussions: A Controlled Intervention Study." Aging and Mental Health 6, no. 1 (February 2002): 82-87.

Activity Plan

SESSION 1 (1 HOUR):

1. This activity plan outlines the basic components necessary to create an exhibit no matter what the project. The elder participants whose work is to be shown should be encouraged to actively be involved in the exhibit-creation process. Elders who did not create for the exhibit may find this activity to be enjoyable and should be encouraged to participate. It is important to make the exhibit look professional. Strive for consistency. Avoid clutter and unnecessary additions. Keep it simple and clean. The first thing needed is to select and organize a group of artworks (or stories, poems, embroidery, weavings, etc.) to be exhibited.
2. Then develop an exhibit title (see example to the right). Gather the exhibiting artist(s) and determine what to call the exhibit. This may be as easy as the name of the activity, e.g., *Watercolor Paintings by Care Center Residents*. The title could also be poetic, e.g., *Springtime Wanderings—Watercolor Paintings by Care Center Artists*.
3. Write an exhibit description (see example). Compose a couple paragraphs telling the viewer what the exhibit is all about. Tell them the title, who was involved (the art group, facility storytellers, club members), what the occasion was to create the exhibit (a class, an artist residency, or workshop), and what makes the exhibit special. Be sure to thank sponsors!

Springtime Wanderings

This exhibition showcases the artwork of fifteen Care Center residents. The artwork displayed was created during a six-week workshop with artist in residence Joesy Miller who demonstrated watercolor techniques in the activity room on Thursday afternoons in April and May. Many of the residents had never painted before. But now they can't wait for the weather to warm up so they can paint the June garden. Mary Jenkins, one of the workshop participants, said, "the watercolor painting has helped to loosen my fingers and the rainbow of color reminds me of growing up on the prairie."

The exhibit was mounted and installed by the artists with the help of office staff.

Thanks to Valley Framing and Down Home Printing who generously provided exhibition materials.

Joesy Miller

The Happy Sunflower, 2013
watercolor painting

4. Write text for artwork identification labels (see sample at the bottom of page 5). Include the **Artist Name** first. Every artwork should have a **Title** (even if it is “*Untitled*”), which is typically shown on the identification label in italics, followed by the **Date** and then the **Medium** (painting, photograph, poem, etc.)

5. One elder, activity staff, or volunteer should type the text into a computer for use in the next session.

SESSION 2 (90 MINUTES):

1. Using the text composed in Session 1, print and mount the exhibit descriptive panel (exhibit title with short description), as well as the labels. (See sample at the bottom of page 5.) The labels will be placed adjacent to their corresponding works of art during the installation stage.

Tips to make the exhibit readable for the visually impaired or for anyone older than forty years of age:

- For the exhibit descriptive panel, use a minimum font size of 28 pt.
- Use san serif fonts (no cursive or “fancy” type styles) and avoid light-colored type; use black or dark blue type on light paper.

Tips for label making:

- Identification labels and the exhibit descriptive panels should be typed and all should use the same font family.
- For identification labels, use a minimum font size of 20 pt.
- Print titles, descriptive panels, and identification labels out on adhesive mailing labels that can then be attached to a small rectangle of card stock or tagboard.
- The card stock or tagboard for each label should be the same kind, color, shape, and size.

2. Mount the artwork. Make all mounting boards the same size (even if the artwork is different sizes, use mounting boards that are

the same). A good way to determine the board size is find the largest artwork and add a minimum of two inches all the way around to determine the board size. Again, cut all boards the same size.



← Mounting or Backing Board: Use a rigid board, like mat board or tagboard. These can be colored, but the same color should be used throughout the exhibit. Above all, the backing should never compete with the art. White, cream, or taupe are the preferred neutral colors.

● Self-Adhesive Corners: Lay the artwork on the backing board and center it in the upper two-thirds, as shown at left. It is accepted practice to leave a bit more space below the artwork than above. Place an adhesive corner on each corner of the artwork and press down. Do one corner at a time and make sure to double-check that the artwork is still “square” on the mounting board. If it’s crooked, pull the corner off and start again.

SESSION 3 (90 MINUTES):

I. Install the exhibit. If possible, locate the exhibit in an area where there aren't a lot of distracting elements (signs, decorations, etc.). The goal is to showcase the artwork.

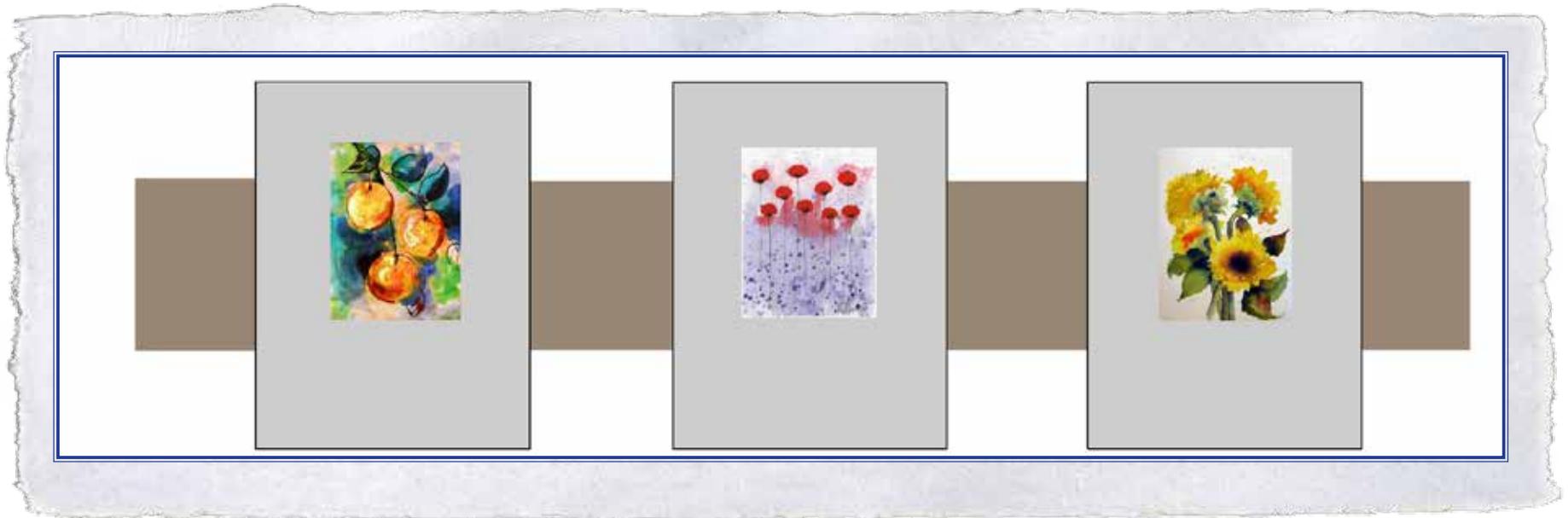
“Hang” mounted artworks at the same height with equal spacing between them. Use a level to insure that they are straight.

- If the artwork isn't too heavy, use poster strips to hang the artwork. Sticky-tack works well for labels.
- Display three-dimensional artwork on tabletops. To highlight the art and protect the table beneath it, place an appropriately sized piece of mat board or fabric underneath the object.
- Mount the labels adjacent to the artwork on the lower right side. Mount all the labels at the same height. Draw a line

on a broom handle or stick and use that as a guide for label height.

When displaying art, there may be a lot of pieces that don't seem to go together. There are tricks to help with the layout:

- Group pieces which have similar colors.
- Group pieces which have similar forms and shapes.
- Look for themes, e.g., put all the “animal” art together, “portraits” together, etc.
- Display artwork in groupings, keeping pieces that really “fight” with others off on their own.
- Use a design element to tie the group together, e.g., a colored paper strip can be placed behind the artworks (see sample below). Such paper rolls can be purchased in craft stores.



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SESSION 4 (1 HOUR):

1. This session involves the publicity and outreach necessary to draw the community to the exhibit, and the first step is to set a date for the reception.
2. Create and distribute invitations to the exhibit and publicize the reception in newsletters, emails, and on bulletin boards. Design the invitations and promotional material to match the “look” of the exhibit. Don’t forget to invite family members, friends, and exhibit sponsors and contributors.
3. Create and send a press release to the local newspaper. This can be very simple and should include information similar to the exhibit description. Local media will be pleased to have a great human-interest story, and the resulting story or photograph will make for great public relations for the care center. Additionally, this will make the “artists” instant celebrities and heighten their self-esteem.

SESSION 5 (1 HOUR):

1. Celebrate the exhibit reception with snacks and beverages.

AUTHOR • SALLY JEPPSON:

Sally is the gallery manager at the Jamestown Fine Arts Association (JFAA). In addition to her curatorial activities, she coordinates JFAA’s *Art for Life Program*. Jamestown was one of the pilot sites in the North Dakota Council on the Arts’ (NDCA) *Art for Life Program*, which places artists in elder care facilities. Sally worked with the NDCA to create a touring exhibition based on the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. The exhibit, which she coordinates, travels to libraries, cultural centers, and art galleries. In addition to this plan, Sally also developed another *Art for Life Program* activity plan. That plan utilizes illustrations from *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, which are used in conjunction with the creative storytelling method called *TimeSlips*.

Sally holds a BA in Art History and Anthropology and a MA in Art History from the University of California at Davis. She worked for the Plains Art Museum, in Fargo, North Dakota, for eleven years, ultimately becoming curator. In 2000, she relocated to Gackle, North Dakota, and began her current work in Jamestown. Sally has served on various boards, numerous grant panels, and has juried a variety of regional art exhibitions and projects. She and her husband, artist Deane Fay, operate an exhibition design and art consulting business, Starview Enterprises, Inc. Together, they create exhibits for museums, cultural centers, city and state institutions, and private businesses.

(All graphics and images provided by Sally Jeppson, Jamestown Fine Arts Association.)