

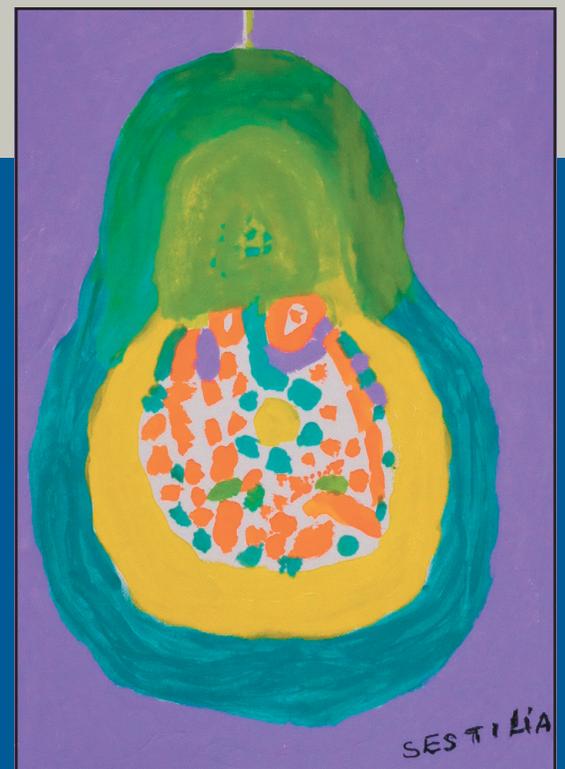
# ARTS & LIFESTYLES

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## 'Through Our Eyes'

opens at the LIM  
B29



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## COVER STORY

## 'Through Our Eyes' opens at the Long Island Museum

BY MELISSA ARNOLD

When you suffer from memory loss, even the simplest tasks can be maddeningly frustrating. Most people will experience simple forgetfulness as they get older — misplacing keys, not knowing someone's name right away and so on — but others will develop dementia, a debilitating condition that affects daily living skills and communication.

According to the World Health Organization, 47.5 million people have dementia and there are 7.7 million new cases diagnosed every year. Alzheimer's disease is one of the most common forms of dementia. As memory loss progresses, it can become difficult to communicate, and many people say they feel they're losing control over their own lives.

For more than a year, Day Haven Adult Day Services in Ronkonkoma has worked to engage participants struggling with memory loss through artistic expression. Now, the work of 15 artists from the program will be on display at the Long Island Museum, 1200 Route 25A, Stony Brook. The exhibit, aptly titled "Through Our Eyes," allows the artists to share themselves freely when using words might be too difficult.

"One of the first things someone with Alzheimer's disease loses is the ability to retrieve the right words," said Betsy Geary, program director at Day Haven. "Here, that conversation is elicited by art. It brings people together."

Day Haven is a social adult day services program for physically frail older adults and those with Alzheimer's disease. The program also provides support for caregivers.

Participants typically live with a spouse or adult child and spend the day exploring all kinds of recreational activities.

This isn't the first time Day Haven participants have experimented with their artistic talents — the center's Port Jefferson location, on Sheep Pasture Road, has had a dedicated art program for several years.

But the location in Ronkonkoma did not have an art program until recently, when the Long Island Museum stepped up to help. "We were able to provide a museum educator to help them get started with a dedicated art program," said Lisa Unander, director of education at the museum. "The response was wonderful; everyone was so engaged."

Beginning last September, a museum educator has made weekly trips to Day Haven, holding 2 1/2-hour sessions with interested participants, allowing them to explore visual art using a variety of mediums, including paints and clay. "(The educator) took the time to find out which mediums would bring out the creativity in the participants and what they felt most comfortable doing," Geary said.

As many of the participants at Day Haven are frail or deal with physical challenges, the educator also brought along a variety of stencils, special paintbrushes and other tools adapted to fit their individual capabilities.

Week after week, Geary was delighted to find that the participants were blossoming. "I've seen people literally thrive off of doing art. For some participants, we've watched them go from the simplest of art to a deep mode of self-expression. I've rarely seen anything like that in other settings."



Image from LIM

'Tree' by Gloria M. will be on view at the Long Island Museum from Nov. 19 to Jan. 3, 2016.

According to Unander, The Long Island Museum has worked for several years to ensure people with memory loss can enjoy their programs. Their initiative, called In the Moment: Art Engagement for People with Memory Loss, has benefitted more than 1,000 participants since its inception in 2011.

Museum staff members were trained by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City on how to adapt their programs to fit the needs of those with memory loss. Soon after, they began to offer exhibit tours just for them.

The museum's partnership with Day Haven is just the next step in making those with memory loss feel welcome and understood. Unander says the museum is working toward a spring conference for caregivers, medical staff and others on integrating art therapy with memory loss care.

Geary hopes that those who see the exhibit will leave with a greater appreciation for what those with memory loss can

achieve. "I want people to see that there is always potential to do something new that we can celebrate. Even though (we) can lose the usual ways of communicating, art really can bring us together in a conversation without words," she says.

"Through Our Eyes" will feature more than 30 paintings and clay creations, along with descriptions of the significance of each piece written by the artists or their families. The exhibit will run from Nov. 19 through Jan. 3, 2016. An artist reception will be held on Dec. 1, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The museum will also offer a free open house on Dec. 6, and a free "Senior Tuesday" event for people 62 and older on Dec. 8.

For more information, visit [www.longislandmuseum.org](http://www.longislandmuseum.org) or call 631-751-0066, ext. 212.

Images from LIM

**On the cover:** Counterclockwise from top, 'Flame' by Judith (Judy) D.; 'Bowl of Apples' by Helene P.; and 'Pomegranate' by Sestilia F.



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