

A photograph showing the backs of two people, an older woman with white hair and a younger woman with brown hair, as they look at a large, vibrant abstract painting. A man in a blue shirt and white sash, likely a caregiver or guide, stands to the right, pointing at the artwork. The painting features bold colors like blue, red, and yellow, with stylized human figures. The scene is set in a gallery or museum.

# Unforgettable

How to make art and culture accessible to  
people with dementia and their loved ones



# Unforgettable

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*My father lived about 500 metres from the museum. He was given a lovely welcome, very friendly and relaxed. We then spent a relaxed, pleasant hour and a half looking at five artworks. The guide treated patient and carer exactly the same. It was lovely. My father took on a different role for a while – he was a museum visitor and he really enjoyed it. I, too, got special attention as his carer. My father – never a frequent museum visitor – was able to say what he had seen, as far as his dementia would allow. That surprised me. It was very special to experience this together, it was enriching for both of us.*

Arie Pinxteren, chair of the Zeeland division of Alzheimer Nederland

Art surprises, enriches and connects people. Based on our firm belief that museums should be accessible to everyone, we at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Van Abbemuseum are keen to welcome people for whom a museum visit might not be the obvious choice. The Unforgettable programme for people with dementia and their loved ones is a powerful example of this. Our two museums initiated the programme in 2013, with the support of two charities for the elderly: Fonds Sluyterman Van Loo and RCOAK.

Since the launch of Unforgettable, every year hundreds of people with dementia and their close relatives have enjoyed our interactive workshops and tours. Thanks to the positive results achieved in Amsterdam and Eindhoven, over

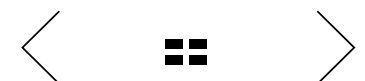
the past few years the programme has been successfully implemented in ten other museums in the Netherlands, with financial support from the Gieskes-Strijbis Fonds. Virtually every Dutch province now has a museum where people with dementia and their carers – informal or professional – can enjoy an Unforgettable tour. We are very proud of this result.

Scientific research by the VU medical centre has shown that Unforgettable not only scores highly with participants, it also helps create a dementia-friendly society. This has reinforced us in our conviction that museums meet a vital need in society. Accessibility, inclusion, hospitality and relevance are key values shared by the Stedelijk and the Van Abbemuseum, both today, and in the future.

Valuable experiences like the one described above have been made possible by the generous contributions of our partners and sponsors. We are deeply grateful to them for supporting the Unforgettable programme, the nationwide rollout and the scientific study of its effects. We are also looking forward to future partnerships that will make the cultural sector even more accessible to a wide audience, irrespective of age, background, beliefs or disabilities, in whatever shape or form.

Charles Esche  
Director, Van Abbemuseum

Beatrix Ruf  
Director, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam



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*'I just want to let you know that my sister Ria and I really enjoyed the Unforgettable tour at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. My sister was able to take part in "normal life" again for a short while. That meant a lot, and we will definitely be back!'*

Carer



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### Portrait of a Rich Mind

there comes a point in her life  
where she simply no longer knows  
that she no longer knows the name of her beloved  
what her beloved calls her  
when no one is listening  
he whispers it inaudibly in her ear  
and what was once so familiar  
is now a deafening blank

the forgetting disease is never far away  
you know her  
or you know someone who knows her  
or cares for her  
or curses her  
sighs, forbids, would like to forget  
but she is unforgettable

she teaches us who forget  
to see  
she teaches us who forget  
to see again  
she momentarily gives back to us who forget  
the familiar world  
where those who forget can finally speak again  
about what lies glittering  
in their rich mind

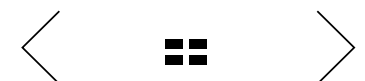
Rick Steggerda (2017)

Dementia is a growing problem all over the world. Unfortunately, it cannot yet be cured. Until a cure is found, it is important that we safeguard and improve the quality of life of people with dementia and their loved ones. One way of doing this is to develop meaningful activities for them that focus not on the disease, but on pleasure and social contact.

### Unforgettable Stedelijk and Unforgettable at Van Abbe

Since 2013 the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven have endeavoured to improve quality of life for people with dementia and their loved ones. They developed a special programme, known as Unforgettable, consisting of interactive tours and workshops. Unforgettable was based on the successful [Meet Me at MoMA](#) programme developed by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York.

During interactive Unforgettable tours participants examine and discuss a small number of objects in the museum. No prior knowledge of the objects is required. Unforgettable focuses on enjoyment of art and the individual experience. By sharing stories, recollections, associations and ideas, the participants come together and bring the objects to life. A specially trained guide helps get the process underway with stimulating questions and creative assignments.





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## Nationwide rollout and scientific study

Unforgettable Stedelijk and Unforgettable Van Abbe received an enthusiastic welcome and a lot of support in the Netherlands, not only from the people with dementia and their loved ones who took part in the tours and workshops, but also from other cultural institutions, the media and the healthcare sector.

Many other museums expressed an interest in developing their own programme for this particular target audience. In 2014, therefore, the Stedelijk and the Van Abbe started a major implementation and training process to prepare ten other museums for the introduction of their own programme for people with dementia and their loved ones. For three years, a specially appointed project coordinator worked for two months at each participating museum, implementing Unforgettable on location. The participating museums were selected both for their motivation and for their different organisational structures and collections, as well as their geographical distribution.

The national implementation process was supported, described and evaluated by a major scientific study performed by the Psychiatry Department of VU medical centre. The purpose of the study was threefold. Firstly, the museums and VUmc were keen to discover how a museum programme for people with dementia and their loved ones would be perceived and evaluated in the Netherlands. Secondly, the parties were curious as to the impact of Unforgettable on the museum staff working on it, the museum as an organisation and on society as a whole. Finally, the study also focused on factors that might help

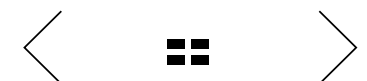
or hinder the implementation of similar programmes, and on identifying effective solutions to any obstacles that might be encountered.

The national implementation and training process is now complete and the results of the study are known. Despite the great differences in their collections, organisational structures, facilities and locations, the Unforgettable programme has been successfully implemented at all the participating museums.

## Structure of this publication

Other museums, and also care institutions, remain as interested as ever in Unforgettable. The Stedelijk and Van Abbe museums and VUmc have therefore decided to share the knowledge, experience and insights they have gained, as well as the study results. The purpose of this publication is to help anyone who is interested in setting up their own programme for people with dementia and their loved ones. It is targeted first and foremost at cultural institutions, but can also be used by institutions caring for people with dementia that wish to incorporate art and culture into their activities.

Besides extensive information on [the target group](#), [the design of the programme](#) and [the Unforgettable method](#) this publication also includes a detailed [roadmap](#) for establishing similar programmes. The roadmap reflects the study results concerning positive and negative factors that affect the implementation of Unforgettable.



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Other [important insights produced by the study](#) have been described by journalist Jannetje Koelewijn, on the basis of a round-table discussion with the researchers from VUmc in May 2017.

In short, this publication contains all the information you need to develop and apply your own Unforgettable method. We wish you every success and a pleasurable experience!

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*‘When I asked Wim what he thought of the tour he said, ‘Fantastic, I was finally able to say something again for once!’. Wim felt he had been heard, seen and taken seriously, and he went home feeling great. Isn’t that wonderful? It give me goose bumps.’*

Guide





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## What is dementia?

All over the world, dementia is an increasingly common phenomenon and there are potentially many people who might benefit from the Unforgettable programme. As a result of demographic ageing, over the coming decades the number of people with dementia is expected to double worldwide. Dementia becomes more prevalent with age. While the risk of dementia at age 65 is just 5%, by the age of 90 it has risen to 40%.

The term dementia comes from Latin, and literally means 'out of one's mind'. Dementia is a clinical syndrome that disrupts cognitive brain functions such as memory, language, action, recognition of objects and planning. This affects people's ability to function in their daily lives. The disruption to cognitive functions can be caused by a whole range of brain diseases. The most common is Alzheimer's disease. Other common forms include vascular dementia, frontotemporal dementia and Lewy body dementia.



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## Manifestations and symptoms

The various forms of dementia can be distinguished by the way they manifest themselves. The symptoms are related to the parts of the brain that are damaged by the disease in question.

### Alzheimer's disease

The first noticeable symptoms of Alzheimer's disease are largely memory and orientation problems, combined with visual recognition and language problems and/or difficulty in completing tasks. Memory problems initially present as short-term memory loss. People with Alzheimer's disease generally have difficulty remembering what just happened. As a result, they might ask the same question repeatedly or recount the same story over and over. At a later stage of the disease, the long-term memory can also be affected.

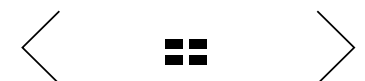
In the early stages of Alzheimer's people also develop orientation problems, which means they can suddenly lose their way, even in a familiar environment. At later stages they also lose their sense of time. Finally, they start to find it difficult to recognise people. Language problems (aphasia) manifest themselves as an inability to find the right word. People therefore become less alert in their responses, use shorter sentences and may need more time to recount a story.

Inability to plan and complete tasks (apraxia) indicates that the person is unable to perform the correct movements, even though they still have the motor skills required to complete the task. The brain can no longer make the connection between the intention and the ability to complete the action. This can make it difficult for people

to perform daily tasks such as operating equipment, doing housework and cooking, and they will gradually have more and more problems dressing and taking care of themselves. Visual recognition problems (agnosia) mean that people can no longer recognise objects and what they are used for, despite the fact that their sight is still intact. They might for example fail to recognise a chair as something they can sit on.

### Vascular dementia

Vascular dementia occurs when there is poor blood circulation in the brain, which can cause brain cells to become damaged or even die off. This causes changes in people's ability to perform daily tasks. As with Alzheimer's disease, people with vascular dementia may have language problems and difficulty completing tasks. Symptoms like slower thought processes, incontinence and problems with movement and walking, as well as symptoms similar to Parkinson's disease, can also occur. The location and severity of the circulation problems – for example a transient ischemic attack (TIA), a brain haemorrhage or a cerebral infarction – determine the symptoms a person experiences. Vascular dementia starts more abruptly than Alzheimer's. The irregularity of the haemorrhaging often means that deterioration occurs in large steps, with long stable periods between.



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## Frontotemporal dementia

The main sign of frontotemporal dementia, which in the majority of cases occurs before the age of 65, is behavioural change. Examples include loss of empathy, uninhibited or apathetic behaviour and/or stereotypical obsessive behaviour.

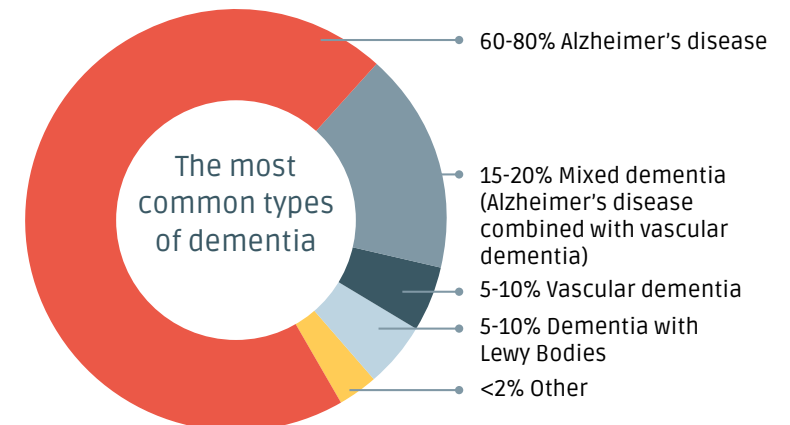
People with frontotemporal dementia lose their ability to empathise. They are unable to understand other people's emotions or put themselves in their position. Some people also have difficulty controlling their impulses, so they may express their emotions more vehemently or display socially inappropriate behaviour, including inappropriate eating, buying and sexual behaviour.

Apathy can be caused by changes in the brain, but it can also be affected by psychological factors such as feelings of depression or insecurity that come from the difficulties patients experience with daily tasks as a result of their dementia. Symptoms of apathetic behaviour include lack of initiative, little or no motivation to undertake any activities and lack of emotional expression. Some people display obsessive behaviour, such as adhering to a strict schedule for meals and activities, using standard expressions and repetition of certain movements.

Both uninhibited behaviour and apathy can occur to some degree, the key sign being that a person behaves in a way different from what was previously usual for them. In short, their personality changes.

## Dementia with Lewy Bodies

The most striking symptoms of Dementia with Lewy Bodies are disruption to motor skills and difficulty completing tasks, such as an inability to plan and execute complex tasks, as well as poor attention and concentration problems. Another characteristic symptom is hallucinations. Patients see, hear or smell things that are not there. Depression and delusions can also occur. Memory and the ability to perform normal daily tasks often remain intact for a long time with this form of dementia. People with Dementia with Lewy Bodies function better on some days than on others.



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## The effects of dementia

Dementia has a major impact on the lives both of people with the diagnosis and of the people around them. Depending on the severity and the form of dementia, people gradually experience more and more problems in their daily lives. Initially, a person with dementia might have difficulty shopping, paying at the checkout and using public transport. Gradually, problems will arise in other areas, such as cooking, keeping in touch with friends, housework and eventually also with personal care.

## Treatment and necessary adjustments

The treatment of these forms of dementia has thus far focused on ameliorating symptoms and optimising quality of life. Unfortunately there is as yet no cure for the underlying diseases.

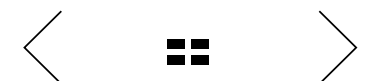
It is important that after diagnosis people receive support and guidance from those around them, and if necessary from professional caregivers, to help them deal with the effects of dementia. This is not merely a matter of coping with the practical effects, but also the emotional and social impact. Accepting that you will find it increasingly difficult to find the right words or need help with certain activities, can precipitate strong emotions, and undermine a person's self-image and self-confidence. Inability to remember what your partner, children and friends have told you can make conversation difficult, and make social contact more superficial and less fulfilling. For those who are close to the person with dementia it will not always be easy to deal with the changes in their functioning

and behaviour. Relatives often find caring for dementia patients difficult and some feel overwhelmed by the need for constant care and their changing relationship with their loved one.

Good support and guidance for the person with dementia can help prevent disturbances in their behaviour and mood, such as apathy, anxiety and depression. These disturbances are often caused when the person in question becomes stressed. This may result from dementia-related impairments, but can also occur when people ask too many questions or display a lack of understanding. Their vulnerability then makes people insecure, and in some cases they might even feel they cannot carry on.

## Quality of life

If you ask someone with dementia what they think is important for quality of life, they will list the things that are important to everyone: feeling comfortable, experiencing pleasure, enjoying where you live, having social contact, feeling at home, staying healthy, receiving good treatment and care in the event of illness, feeling accepted and integrated in society, feeling secure but retaining sufficient privacy, being able to give expression to their spirituality as they see fit, freedom and self-determination, feeling useful and having enough money to live on.<sup>1</sup> There are of course differences in the priority individuals give to these different factors. To maintain or improve quality of life for someone with dementia, it is therefore important to know what is particularly significant to them.





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## The significance of artistic and other activities

Research has shown that participating in different activities and types of leisure can help improve quality of life for people with dementia. Examples include exercise, cognitive stimulation through word and memory games, poetry, storytelling, and also ‘making’ art. It has recently been shown that even just looking at art can give a sense of pleasure similar to looking at one’s sweetheart. In both cases, the orbitofrontal cortex of the brain is activated, the part that is associated with experiencing pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

In recent years cultural programmes have therefore been developed in many countries for people with dementia, in disciplines ranging from singing in choirs and painting, to acting and looking at art. These programmes have been found to have many positive effects on the participants, reflected among other things in an increase in self-confidence and sense of identity, enhanced ability to express emotions, a feeling of satisfaction and wellbeing and less agitation and loneliness.

[A scientific study](#) by New York University into the tours for people with dementia and their loved ones provided by the Museum of Modern Art in New York found that both the people with dementia and their carers were more

cheerful immediately after the tour than before. The people with dementia also seemed to feel better about themselves. After their museum visit carers felt they were getting more support from those around them, and had fewer feelings of irritation, anxiety and depression. Responses during the tour were positive, and participants viewed the art and listened to the guide attentively. Virtually no negative responses were recorded. These results – both the positive assessment of the tour and the more cheerful mood afterwards – were confirmed by [the VUmc study](#) of the Unforgettable programme.

<sup>1</sup> Dröes, R. M., Boelens-Van Der Knoop, E. C., Bos, J., Meihuizen, L., Ettema, T. P., Gerritsen, D. L., ... & SchöLzel-Dorenbos, C. J. (2006). Quality of life in dementia in perspective: An explorative study of variations in opinions among people with dementia and their professional caregivers, and in literature. *Dementia*, 5(4), 533-558.

<sup>2</sup> Ishizu, T., & Zeki, S. (2011). Toward a brain-based theory of beauty. *PloS one*, 6(7), e21852. Trouw, 10-05-2011.

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*'The lady I accompanied felt like she had been on holiday. She would have liked to have stayed longer. It was lovely to see how she saw the artworks and to hear how she put her thoughts into words. It was a fabulous experience!'*

Care professional



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## Communication tips

It is important to communicate correctly with people with dementia and their loved ones, and this takes extra care and consideration. The behaviour and emotions of a person with dementia are determined not only by their disease, but also by their interaction with the people around them. The way you say something can therefore sometimes be more important than what you say.

If you address someone with dementia in the right way, you can ask lots of questions and raise many things for discussion. The keys points when making contact are sincerity, friendliness, patience, flexibility and tact. The museums stick to the following ten principles in their contacts with visitors on the Unforgettable programme:

### 1. Create a positive atmosphere

Be enthusiastic and friendly. Use open body language and smile a lot.

### 2. Be aware of how you make contact

Adopt an open attitude, show sincere interest and explore how you can best establish contact, both verbally and non-verbally. Make eye contact and use people's names as much as possible.

### 3. Be clear

Give clear and useful instructions that everyone in the group can follow. Take people through the tasks they are required to complete step by step.

### 4. Keep the conversation simple

Use clear, short sentences and normal words. Each sentence should contain only one message. Be aware of your tone, and avoid raising the pitch of your voice in a patronising manner.

### 5. Avoid overstimulation

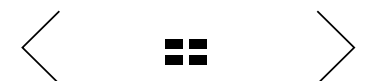
Stick to one stimulus at a time: look at one object, give one task, ask one question.

### 6. Listen with your ears, eyes and emotions

Listen carefully to what people say, but also observe their non-verbal communication.

### 7. Focus on what people can still do

Give compliments. Do not focus on what people are unable to do, constantly correcting or contradicting them, for example.



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## 8. Allow people to provide input themselves

Silence is not something to be avoided. Give people the time and space to respond in their own way, with words, looks, sounds or gestures.

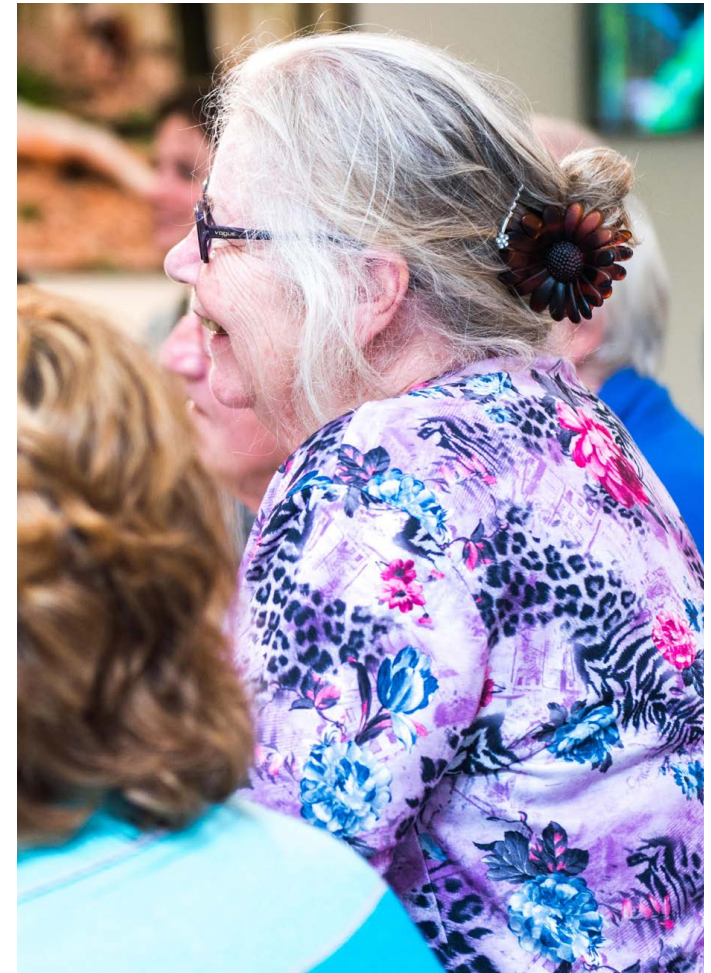
## 9. Respond warmly and supportively

Every answer, every contribution is valuable. If someone is irritated, angry or impatient, abandon your original goal and focus on what they are feeling. Always accept the person's perception, even if it does not coincide with yours.

## 10. Keep smiling

Humour is essential when communicating with people with dementia. Ensure you always laugh with, not at someone.

Specific things to consider when using the Unforgettable method are discussed in the chapter [‘The method – important things to consider’](#).





Ankie van Avezaath  
Guide at Singer Laren  
(Laren)



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Ankie van Avezaath  
Guide at Singer Laren (Laren)

*Unforgettable has reaffirmed my belief that art is by and for people. Looking at art using the Unforgettable method stimulates associative thinking, and that reveals surprising stories, feelings and hidden knowledge. I notice that participants like the fact that they are taken seriously. People with dementia look in a completely unbiased way and respond purely and sincerely. I enjoy that every time. Eyes that start to sparkle as the tour progresses – that says it all as far as I'm concerned.*

*The introduction of Unforgettable at Singer Laren has had major implications for the way I give tours, even to other groups. I now think the quality of the discussion of each work is more important than the number of works I include in the tour. I've also learnt that asking the right*

*question at the right moment encourages people to look properly, both cognitively and associatively. The fabulous discussions I have with visitors ensure that we look at the artworks from a different perspective every time. That gives me more personal satisfaction than giving a 'classic' tour where I do most of the talking.*

*Unforgettable has not only had an impact on those who take part and on my work at the museum. It has also had an effect on me personally. My mother is 92 and she unfortunately has memory problems these days. I now use what I've learnt from Unforgettable to make contact with her. Because I ask different kinds of questions we can have different, deeper and more satisfying conversations. Despite the fact that she repeats some things, I do my best to listen to her every time with genuine*

*interest. Even though that's not always easy, Unforgettable has taught me how vital this can be for her quality of life.*



## Unforgettable in practice

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### Required facilities

### The participants

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The Unforgettable programme provides interactive museum tours and workshops for people with dementia and their loved ones. The programme differs in a number of ways from those organised for other target groups. This chapter therefore considers the most important practical aspects of the Unforgettable programme.

## The Unforgettable programme

### For individuals and groups

The Unforgettable museums offer a guided tour for individual visitors once a month, on a fixed day and time. The tour is intended for people with dementia living at home and a companion. Unforgettable group tours can be scheduled on request. This option is popular with day centres, meeting centres and care institutions. If the museum has the facilities, Unforgettable workshops are also offered on a fixed day and time.

### Duration and number of objects

An Unforgettable tour or workshop generally lasts 90 minutes. This includes a welcome – sometimes including coffee or tea – after which, during the tour itself, four to six objects are discussed in the museum, based on a particular theme. During an Unforgettable workshop a maximum of two objects are discussed in the museum, after which participants work on a creative assignment in a specially equipped space.

In case of the monthly tours, a different theme and different objects are chosen each time, so there is

something new to see every month. This means that people can take part repeatedly if they wish.

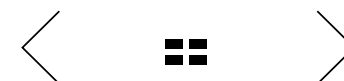
### The ideal day, time and group size

Unforgettable should ideally be planned at the quietest possible moment during regular opening hours. At all Unforgettable museums the monthly tour or workshop takes place on a weekday between 14:30 and 16:00. Group tours are scheduled in consultation with the requesting institution.

To ensure a calm atmosphere in which participants are able to concentrate on the museum objects, other receptions and tours are kept to a minimum during Unforgettable tours. The maximum group size depends on the space available at the museum. It varies from ten to fourteen per group, consisting of five to seven pairs (one person with dementia and a friend or relative).

### Price

To ensure the tours and workshops are accessible to as many people and care institutions as possible, the fee charged merely covers the costs of participation. The fee for the monthly tour ranges from €7.50 to €8.50 per person. The charge for a group tour is €75 or €85. In both cases, entry to the museum is included, and at some museums the price also includes a cup of tea or coffee.



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## The people running the programme

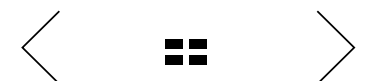
The success of Unforgettable is determined to a large extent by the people running it. [A scientific study](#) by VU medical centre found that visitors greatly value the dedication and friendliness of the museum staff. All participating museums have set up a pool of specially trained guides and hosts who run the tours and workshops as a team. Guides and hosts are both essential for the success of the programme.

### The guide

The guide leads the tour or workshop, is responsible for the content of the programme and for managing the group process. He or she provides a safe environment and pleasant atmosphere, encourages social interaction and provides intellectual stimulation and extra information, drawing mainly on [the Unforgettable method](#).

### The host

The host, often a museum volunteer, will focus on the wellbeing of the individuals in the group and on giving the guide practical assistance. He or she will ensure the group moves smoothly from one spot to another during the tour, focusing particularly on the safety of the participants and the objects. During discussions about the objects the host will sit in a strategic position to act as an extra set of eyes and ears for the guide. Depending on the size of the museum and the logistics of the building, Unforgettable museums use one or two hosts for each group.



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## Required facilities

Compared with an ordinary museum tour, which requires relatively few ‘extras’, a number of important facilities are needed for Unforgettable.

### Place to receive visitors

During Unforgettable, a great deal of care goes into welcoming participants and getting to know one another. This sets the tone for the rest of the session, after all. Ideally, a quiet place in the museum should be used for this purpose.

### Name tags

During the programme the guide, host and all participants wear a name tag, preferably a sticker specially developed for textile, which remains attached but does not damage clothing. Use of name tags means that the participants do not need to remember the name of the guide and host. The guide and host can address the participants by name, thus involving them in the tour. The name tags are written and handed out at the start of the tour. Participants decide for themselves how they wish to be addressed.

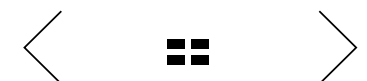
### Folding chairs

Unforgettable participants often have physical impairments, partly because of their age. To ensure that this does not hinder their visit to the museum, all participants and the host use [special folding chairs](#) while in the museum. The chairs ensure participants can sit comfortably while discussing the objects. If everyone sits,

including the people without dementia or any physical impairments, it promotes social interaction.

## Memento to take home

At the end of the tour all participants are given a memento to take home, often a postcard or printed image of one of the museum exhibits discussed during the tour. It is not only fun to end the visit with a gift, experience has also shown that the memento is subsequently used at home as a ‘conversation piece’. This ensures the visit lives on afterwards.





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## The participants

Unforgettable was developed initially for people still living at home, in the early stages of dementia. The museums never ask participants for a doctor's certificate, however. Anyone who finds the programme appealing is welcome. Furthermore, informal and professional carers are quite capable of assessing what a person with dementia can cope with. This means that the guide and host will not know beforehand exactly what stage of dementia they will be dealing with. It is therefore very important that thorough [preparations](#) be made for the tour or workshop, so that the needs of all participants can be catered for during their visit.

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*‘During the tour I gradually her  
enthusiasm grow. And to think  
my mother didn’t even want to  
go at first!’*

Carer



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An Unforgettable museum visit starts with careful preparations. By thoroughly preparing the groundwork, you will not only be able to ask the right questions during the tour, you will also be able to link participants' input seamlessly to the theme of the tour, the objects you discuss and the information you give at appropriate moments. By thinking carefully about the various possibilities beforehand, you can also respond quickly and effectively to the group dynamic and the needs of individual participants.

### Theme

An Unforgettable tour or workshop is based on a certain theme. The theme determines which objects you include in your tour, the perspective from which you discuss those objects and the creative assignments you include. The theme also gives the programme direction and structure, as it links the different objects and assignments.

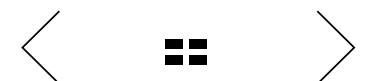
#### Tips for choosing a theme

There are many ways to choose a suitable theme. It is important, first of all, that the theme appeals to you and that it has some connection with what is on display in the museum at that moment. The theme should also be accessible, relevant and interesting for the participants, perhaps because it has some association with their daily lives. Finally, a theme should be broad enough to provide a range of openings for an absorbing discussion. Besides the

themes suggested below, you might also consider a theme based on a temporary exhibition or an historical or art historical theme, such as a certain genre, movement or a specific artist.

### Potential themes:

The 1960s (or another decade)	Hobbies
A special place	Home
Battles	Innovation
Celebrations	Love
Change	Music
Children	Nature
Collecting	Rituals
Desire	Sagas and legends
Fame	School
Family	Spirituality
Food and drink	Sport
Freedom	Travel
Friendship	Urban life
Games	Work



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## Choosing objects

As soon as you have settled on a theme for your tour, select a number of objects to discuss with the participants. The theme you have chosen will be an important factor in your choice of objects. They should all have some connection with the theme. This might be an explicit link – such as a realistic family portrait for the theme of ‘family’ – or it might be more implicit, such as a completely abstract painting whose only link with ‘family’ is in its title.

### Number

For a 90-minute Unforgettable tour you should prepare discussions of four to six objects, depending on the size of the museum. No more than two objects can be discussed in a 30-minute tour prior to a workshop. Keep in mind that not the quantity of object examined is most important, but the quality of the discussion.

### What kind of objects are suitable?

When choosing objects, consider what you think will interest the participants. It is advisable to choose a variety of objects if possible, featuring a range of styles, materials and techniques. This increases the likelihood that every participant will find at least one piece interesting.

Do not however make any assumptions about what the group can cope with. Don’t be afraid to choose objects on a difficult subject if they suit the theme – works featuring nudity, war or death, for example. Although the approach should always be positive, you never know how individual participants will respond to an object. If in doubt, consider whether you would be comfortable leading a discussion of

the object, and whether you think you will be able to create a safe and pleasant atmosphere. If so, feel free to include the object in your tour.

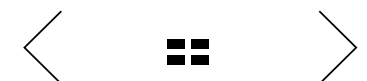
### De invloed van dementie op de reacties van de deelnemers

[The scientific study](#) by VU medical centre found that the form and severity of a person’s dementia can affect their enjoyment and how they respond to the objects shown. People in the early and intermediate stages of dementia generally appreciate the objects more, respond more actively and interact more with others during the tour than people with more advanced dementia.

Objects used in daily life in the past that evoke lots of memories tend to elicit lots of response. Artworks with a strong focus on nature have been found to lead to less response and interaction. Finally, people in the early stages of dementia tend to appreciate emotionally charged objects more, and be more eager to discuss them, than people with more advanced dementia. An increase in memory problems at this stage probably means that people have fewer associations with the narrative presented, and attention will therefore focus more on the colours and style of an object.

### Practical requirements and logistics

When selecting objects, you will also need to consider a number of practical matters, such as their location in the museum, the size of the object, and its position in relation to other objects in the gallery. Firstly, all areas included in the tour must be physically accessible for people with





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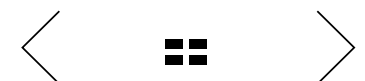
mobility problems, including wheelchair users. There must also be enough space in each gallery for the participants to sit around the piece in question. It is important that other museum visitors are not unduly inconvenienced by the tour. Of course the object must be clearly visible to everyone, so small objects in tall display cases will not really be suitable for an Unforgettable tour. You should also make sure to choose objects that are positioned in such a way that they are somewhat isolated from the other objects in the gallery. People with dementia sometimes have difficulty concentrating on one object if there are many others around it, or focusing on a small painting that is hanging next to a large one. It is also best not to discuss objects near busy passageways, doors, escalators or lifts, as passing visitors and additional noise cause a lot of distraction. Finally, in terms of routing and logistics, the objects should not be located too far apart.

### There is always a solution!

If the practical circumstances for viewing an object are not ideal, the piece will not be suitable for your Unforgettable tour, no matter how well it suits your theme. If the layout of the museum presents a problem, look for innovative solutions that keep any distraction to a minimum. For example, you could print a good-quality image of a small object in a display case to hand out to the participants as you discuss it.

### Memento

Now that you have decided which objects to include in your tour, it is time to choose a memento to give to the participants before they leave. You might like to give them a postcard of one of the objects you have discussed. Or perhaps you have another idea. You should at any rate ensure that the memento has a logical connection with the visit.



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*'Unforgettable was particularly good for my father. He's my mother's primary carer and it's hard on him, so we try to do nice things together as often as possible. This really hit the spot.'*

Carer



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### Deciding the best order

In the process of choosing your objects, you have ensured that they are all connected to your chosen theme, and you have considered the practicalities. You must now decide what order you will discuss the objects in. Start by deciding the most logical route through the building, involving the shortest distances.

Besides logistical considerations, an Unforgettable tour should ideally also build up gradually, to make the process easier for participants. Start the tour with an accessible work that clearly represents the theme. The tour can then move towards a greater level of abstraction – in terms of expression, or connection with the theme. To remain with the example cited before – a tour on the theme of ‘family’ – it is advisable to start with a family portrait and end with an abstract work whose only connection with the theme is its title. You might also decide to consider the chronology of the objects when deciding on the sequence.



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### Knowledge of the objects

You now have the framework for your tour. In order to be able to lead and prompt discussion with participants during the tour, you will need to inform yourself thoroughly about all the selected objects. There are two essential steps you must run through for each object: study it yourself by looking at it closely, and gather relevant information on it.

#### Examine it closely yourself

During the tour you will ask participants to look carefully at the object and invite them to share their observations with the group. To guide this process properly, it is important that you have studied the formal visual elements of the object thoroughly yourself. What do you see? What objects, individuals, colours, shapes and lines do you observe? What aspects of the composition draw your attention? What material is the object made of, and what technique has been used? What do you notice about the size? Can you say anything about the style of the work? By thinking about these formal elements yourself, you can help participants look at and describe the artwork during their visit to the museum. You can also point out interesting details relevant to your chosen theme that they may have overlooked.

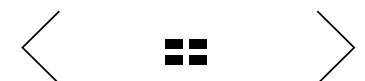
### Gather information

Once you have thoroughly analysed the objects' physical qualities, it is important to find out more about the chosen works. The fact that the goal of an Unforgettable tour is to have a meaningful discussion, focusing on the input and needs of the participants, does not mean you do not need to know anything about the object. On the contrary, in fact! By informing yourself thoroughly about the object, you will not only enhance your own understanding, you will also be able to use your knowledge at appropriate moments during the tour to contribute to the discussion.

Seek out information about the life and methods of the artist or maker, the time in which the object was made, any historical and art historical movements with which it is associated, the subject of the piece, how the museum acquired the object and how it was received by the public and critics when it was first made.

### Determine the relevance

Although you will find out a lot about the piece during your preparations, it is important to bear in mind that you will not be able to share all your knowledge with the group during the tour. While preparing, decide for yourself what information you think is essential, interesting and relevant in connection to your theme. The chapter '[The method – structuring a conversation](#)' contains tips to help you pick the right moment during the visit to provide the information.





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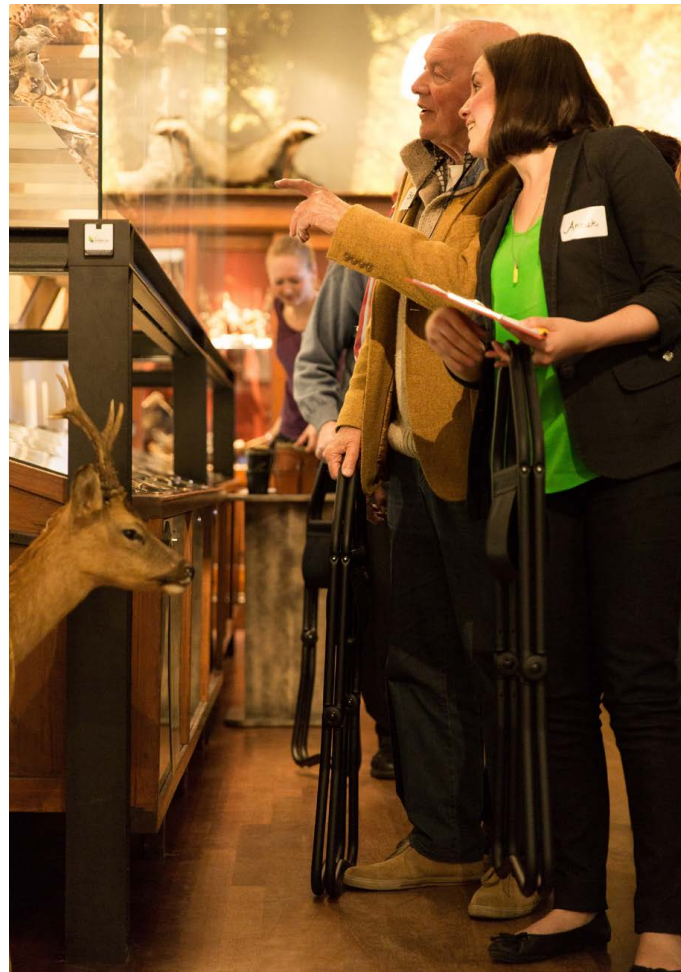
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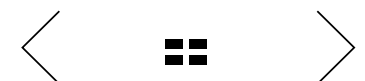
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## Devising questions and assignments

Now that you have found out more about the objects, it is time to connect with the participants. What questions and assignments will you use during their visit to encourage them to experience the object and interact with each other?

To complete your preparations, consider how you would like to structure the discussion and write down the questions you would like to ask the group. Asking questions and helping participants complete creative assignments is the basis of Unforgettable, so the following chapter is devoted entirely to the [Unforgettable discussion method](#).





## Lisette Dickhoff

Integrated care manager for Noord-Limburg at Hulp bij Dementie integrated care organisation (Venlo)



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## Lisette Dickhoff

Integrated care manager for Noord-Limburg at Hulp bij Dementie integrated care organisation (Venlo)

*We constantly hear that people with dementia should continue to live normally in society for as long as possible. I agree entirely – at least, as long as it's possible. I think it's utopian to think that people with dementia can always join in activities for people without the diagnosis. In my work I see how people with dementia quickly feel unsafe in today's hectic world. We don't yet have enough knowledge and understanding of the behaviour of people with dementia in our society, and they feel others don't understand them. As soon as their feeling of safety is undermined, they might start to feel too frightened to leave their home. Both the person with dementia and their carer then run a real risk of social isolation, loneliness and depression.*

*In this respect, Unforgettable makes an important contribution to the wellbeing of people with dementia and their family and friends. Programmes like this give them the chance to get out and meet people again, in a safe and inviting setting. During an Unforgettable tour, people with dementia can express themselves, and others listen to them. For a few hours they are no different from anyone else, they are simply one of them. Their companions are sometimes amazed by the knowledge, stories and ideas that come out during a tour. This can change people's image of people with dementia, not only among their relatives, but also among care professionals.*

*The times I joined a tour myself I really enjoyed what was happening around me. I have also started looking at art differently thanks to the programme. It gives me energy and I wish everyone could experience art in such a wonderful, pure way: not only people with dementia, but also the people around them. The common experience that is the crux of Unforgettable creates moments of pure joy for both the person with dementia and their companion.*

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The emphasis during an Unforgettable tour is on facilitating social contact. To do so, you ask the group open questions, connect the participants' input to the theme of the tour, the museum objects and the relevant background information, and invite everyone to complete a short creative assignment. The Unforgettable method offers clear guidelines for managing this process.

First, welcome the participants and introduce the theme of your tour in an appealing way. The structure of the subsequent discussion of individual objects according to the Unforgettable method breaks down into a number of steps: look, describe, interpret and connect. Incorporate interactive assignments into this structure, and provide relevant background information.

Prior to the tour you must decide how you want to start and what questions you want to ask the group about each object. The Unforgettable discussion structure ensures that all participants – even people who are not frequent museum visitors – can get to know the object step by step, and can provide input at every stage of the discussion.

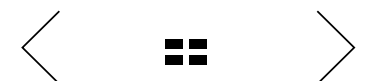
### Welcome and introduction

Start your tour in a quiet spot that you have selected in advance. Welcome the group to the museum and introduce yourself, the host and anyone else who is present. Then explain what will happen during the tour and how many objects you intend to discuss. Explain that you will not be

the only one speaking during the tour, but that you will be posing lots of questions to everyone taking part, because you are interested to hear how they see things, and what they have to say.

### Introduce the theme in an appealing way

After setting the right expectations, introduce the theme of your tour by asking an interesting question or giving the group a simple assignment. If the theme is 'a special place', you might ask the participants what place they consider special; if the theme is 'music', you could ask them if there is a song that has special meaning for them. On a '1960s' tour, you could show some photographs typical of the period and prompt participants to recount memories from that time. Icebreakers like these not only set the right tone, they immediately activate the participants and give you some insight into their level, as well as the group dynamic. Furthermore, the participants may tell you all kinds of interesting things about themselves that you can return to later.



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### Look: an easy first encounter

After a broad introduction, you will take the group into the museum to discuss the preselected objects. Every discussion of an object begins with an appropriate easy introductory question or assignment that prompts the participants to take a good look at the piece.

Your first question will set the tone and direction of the discussion. You should therefore ensure that you have a different opening question for each new object, appropriate for that object and the discussion you wish to have about it, in the context of your chosen theme.

#### Suggestions for questions:

- What is the first word that comes to mind when you look at this object?
- What is your eye drawn to first? Why is that?
- Does anyone recognise this object? What might it be used for?
- Do you recognise the place in this photograph? Has anyone been to a place like this? What did you think of it?
- There's a lot to see in this painting. Before we talk about it, let's look at it in silence for a minute.



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## Describe: what do you see?

After you have invited the participants to take a good look at the object, have the group describe it. During this step, the emphasis will be on enumerating the formal visual elements: the image, composition, forms, lines, colours, materials, techniques, structure, light and format. Having the participants described the physical attributes of the work ensures that everyone sees the object in its entirety, even those who are unable to take in everything at first glance.

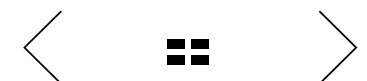
### Tips for managing this stage

The visual exploration of the piece serves as the basis for further discussion of the object. You can help participants with the process of looking by asking them specific questions, repeating comments already made and pointing out the elements that participants refer to. If a participant makes a remark related to interpretation of the piece at this stage, ask them what it is that prompted that particular idea. This allows you to smoothly bring the discussion back to the formal visual elements, without undermining a valuable comment.

As soon as all the main formal elements have been mentioned, briefly summarise what the group has discovered. Go through the entire object mentioning what can be seen. If you notice that an essential visual element has not been mentioned yet, point it out now before proceeding to the next step. This prevents the discussion from becoming derailed later as participants continue to point out what they see.

## Suggestions for questions:

- What can you see? What shapes, colours, objects, figures?
- What is the attitude of the figures? How would you describe their facial expressions? What do you think they are doing?
- How are the objects/figures positioned in relation to each other?
- What can you see in the background?
- Is there a lot of difference between light and shade? Where is the light coming from?
- What materials do you think the object is made of?
- What do you notice about the way this piece was made?



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## Interpret: exploring possible meanings

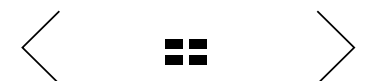
Once the group has listed all the formal visual elements of the object, you can then explore its meaning as a group. The questions you ask at this stage will not refer so much to what can actually be seen, as what the participants think it represents or says. You can use the formal visual elements as a basis, but you might also invite the group to think about other choices the artist made, or to imagine what the artist wanted to suggest with certain elements. Always base your questions on the theme of your tour.

### Every contribution is valuable

The answers given at this stage will probably vary considerably. There may be as many interpretations as there are members of the group. See this variety of possible meanings as an asset. At this stage it is not a matter of finding the 'correct' interpretation, but of stimulating the imagination of the participants and creating a safe environment in which they have the opportunity to recount their own stories in reference to the objects.

## Suggestions for questions:

- If you had to give this painting a title, what would you call it?
- Does the title the artist gave this work change the way you look at it?
- If this painting were the start of a story, what would happen next?
- If this painting were the end of a story, what do you think has happened?
- What time of day do you think it is?
- Where do you think this photograph was taken?
- What do you think this place smells like?
- What noises might you hear in this place?
- Why do you think the artist chose to show this person in this way?
- Choose one word that describes the mood of this piece.
- What might this object have been used for? How do you think it worked?
- What kind of people would have owned an object like this, do you think?
- What does this object say about the time or society in which it was made?





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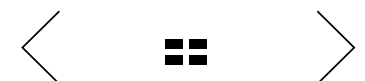
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## Connect: placing the object in a broader context

Besides assigning possible meanings to the piece together, it is vital during an Unforgettable tour that the object be placed in a broader context. Relating museum pieces to the world in which the participants live, other forms of cultural expression, world events, and cultural or natural history not only gives participants new insights into the object, but also into each other. The questions you ask at this stage will generally relate to participants' personal preferences and events in their daily lives, both now and in the past. This takes the social interaction and group dynamic to a more personal level. Again, you should base your questions the theme you chose for your tour.

### Suggestions for questions:

- Would you like to have this painting in your home? Why/why not?
- Have you ever done what the people in this piece are doing? What was the same about it, and what was different?
- Have you ever encountered an object like this outside a museum? Where? How was it being used?
- Does the town in this picture look like a town today? What might have changed, and what has stayed the same?
- Would you like to go to this place? Why/why not?
- Does the room in this photo look like the home you grew up in?
- Who would you like to have a portrait of?
- What do you think this painting tells us about this important world event?
- Compare this painting with the one next to it. How are they similar and how are they different?
- What would this object look like in a different setting?



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*'We have to absorb things,  
and that sometimes takes a bit  
longer. But we do learn from it!'*

Person with dementia



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## Creative assignments

Besides asking open ended questions, it is wise to include one or more interactive assignments in your Unforgettable tour. The purpose of these interventions is to increase people's interest in the piece. A creative assignment not only provides a nice change from listening and talking, it also enhances participants' enjoyment and creates a relaxed atmosphere. An assignment also gives you the opportunity to engage more senses, which allows participants who find it difficult to contribute to the discussion to participate after all.

During an Unforgettable workshop, the focus is on the creative assignment. Since you have more time and a specially equipped space at your disposal, you will be able to do more with the assignment.

### What kinds of assignment are suitable?

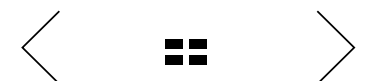
Assignments completed in the museum galleries or during a workshop must both meet the same requirements. A creative assignment needs to be adjusted to the level of the participants, and any physical impairments they may have. Everyone must be able to take part. The assignment should be clear and simple and must suit the theme of the tour. You can give the group the option of doing the assignment individually or in pairs, in which case they can help each other.

If the plan is to complete a short creative assignment in the museum itself, schedule it at an appropriate moment and always relate the result to the object you are discussing at that point. If you play a piece of music, ask the

participants if they think it suits the object and why. If you ask them to feel something, such as sheep's wool in the case of a painting featuring sheep, ask whether they think the artist depicted the wool well. Does it look the same way as it feels? If you relate the object to the assignment, the intervention will have added value in terms of the quality of the dialogue, and you will have made good use of it.

### Suggestions for interactive assignments:

- A simple drawing assignment
- Play a piece of music that goes with the object
- Adopt the same pose as a figure in the artwork
- Talk about the object in pairs



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If you are giving an Unforgettable workshop, ensure you have professional materials and arrange the space in such a way that it invites people to get to work immediately. Do not use craft materials that are clearly designed for children. Special materials that may be slightly unfamiliar, or perhaps surprising, are preferable as they can lead to unexpected outcomes. This will ensure that participants are more focused on the process than on the end result, thus preventing any subsequent disappointment. Showing a sample piece made beforehand can be a useful way of setting the creative process in motion.

After a creative assignment – either in the museum itself or after a workshop – always include a moment to discuss the results. Ask the participants how they felt when working on the assignment, if they are pleased with the result, and if the assignment has made them think differently about the objects they discussed.

### Sharing information

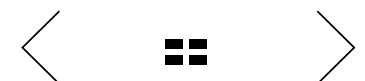
Though the goal of an Unforgettable tour is for the group to have a meaningful discussion, this does not mean that you may not share some background information as the tour guide. On the contrary: you can use your knowledge very constructively to enhance the quality of the discussion. However, there are a number of things you should bear in mind when sharing background information. The most important rule of thumb is that appropriate information should be shared at the appropriate moment. It is essential that the information suits the level of the group and the

theme of the discussion, and that it helps the participants to look at and think about the object. It should also enhance their engagement with and experience of the objects. Any other information you have gathered during your preparations that does not meet these requirements, should not be shared during the tour.

### Choose the right moment

As well as what you say, the point at which you choose to share your information – and what you subsequently do with it – determines the impact it has on participants. There are two moments during an Unforgettable tour that are appropriate for sharing information: if you can use your background knowledge to confirm what a participant has just said, or if you can direct the discussion to a new, deeper level by sharing what you know about a piece. If, for example, a participant remarks on the striking use of colour in an Expressionist painting, you could explain to the group how it relates to the use of colour by other Expressionists. If you link the participant's remark to the background information, they will feel they are being taken seriously, and are likely to feel proud of their contribution to the discussion.

You can also share background information during the tour without being prompted to do so by the group. The aim is to induce the participants to look at the object in a different way. You should at any rate ensure that you follow the information with an open question connecting the information to the participants' experience. Taking the Expressionist painting example again: if none of the participants remarks on the use of colour, you might





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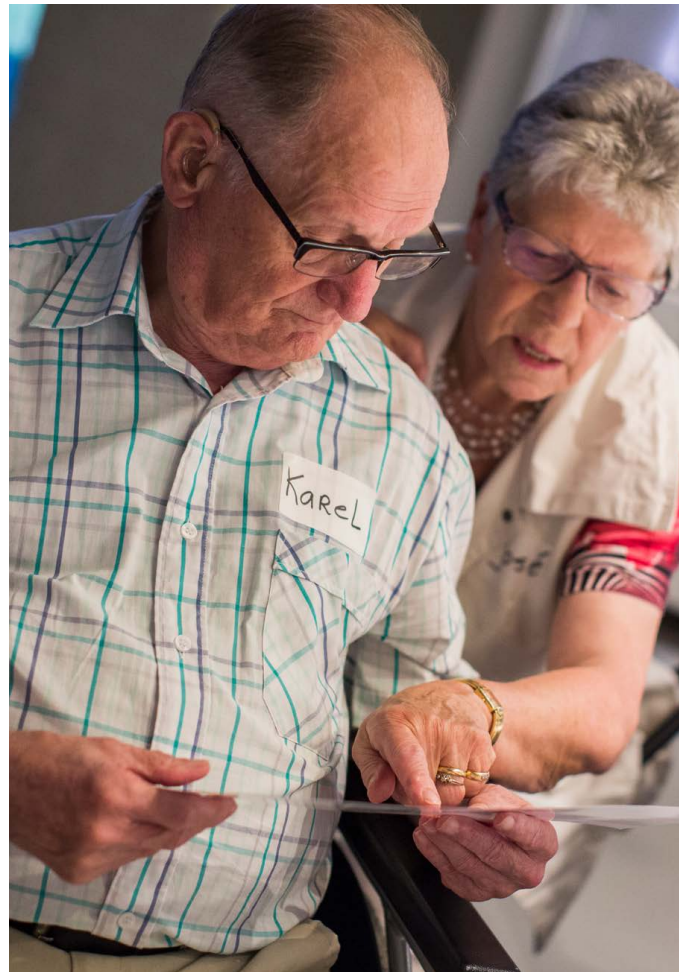
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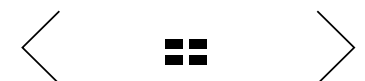
explain that the painting is an example of the Expressionist movement, which was known for its exceptional use of colour. You might then ask a question like 'Can you see that in this painting? Where exactly?'. This will ensure that the information takes the discussion to a deeper level, and has greater relevance.

## Summary and conclusion

After you have looked at, described and interpreted the object and placed it in a broader context – and, in the meantime, have completed an interactive assignment and shared background information where appropriate – you should summarise the most important points of the discussion. Do not provide any new information at this stage. Stick to what was actually discussed. Then stimulate the participants' curiosity by mentioning the next object you are going to discuss on the tour. Creating 'bridges' helps turn the tour into a single whole.

## Concluding the tour

Once you have discussed the final object in the tour, or the workshop has ended, you can conclude the day's programme. Take your time for this, ensuring that the participants leave with the feeling that their museum visit was complete. Mention the theme one last time, and briefly summarise the works you have discussed during the tour. You might show some images of the objects as a visual reminder. Thank the participants for their input, and invite them to attend another tour or workshop in the



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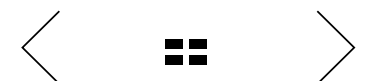
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future. Finally, hand out the mementoes. Try to make this a special moment, as the final moment of contact with each participant makes a great impression.

### Preparation v. letting go

It is important to remember that the Unforgettable discussion structure has been developed as a useful guide. It is not a rigid framework. During the tour, the looking, describing, interpreting and connecting stages will undoubtedly run into each other, and that is fine. It is more important to let the conversation flow than to stick rigidly to a predetermined structure.

You should however remember that the emphasis in the first part of the discussion should be on the formal elements of the object, before you start to explore the possible meanings with the participants. This will help you smoothly guide the group from the clear formal elements of the object to the more complex processes of interpreting and connecting.



Tineke Zeven  
Unforgettable host at the  
Mauritshuis (Den Haag)



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## Tineke Zeven

Unforgettable host at the Mauritshuis (Den Haag)

*My husband lived with vascular dementia for seven years. Our relationship changed during the course of the disease. We transformed from pals and equals into patient and carer. Nevertheless, right to the end, there were moments when we both experienced pleasure. So when I was asked to become a host on the Unforgettable tours at the Mauritshuis, I didn't hesitate for a moment. Being able to enjoy things together is so important for quality of life. Initiatives like Unforgettable create a specific opportunity for people to do this.*

*An Unforgettable tour takes a lot of energy and concentration on the part of the guide. As hosts, we support them and make sure the logistics run smoothly. The bond you develop ensures that the tours get better and better. Speaking to the participants directly – using their name – and the relaxed start to the*

*tour with a cup of tea or coffee creates an atmosphere in which all the guests feel at ease. So you often get spontaneous responses when we are looking at the paintings.*

*Recently a father and daughter took the tour. When we got to Johannes Vermeer's famous View of Delft the father suddenly, quite slowly, began to talk about the light in the painting. As a graphic artist he had long been concerned with the contrast between light and shade. His daughter was in tears. Her father had not spoken for six months. Moments like this are not only moving, they make me realise more and more how important it is to be able to make contact, particularly when dementia sets in. I'm glad I can do my bit towards that.*



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The Unforgettable discussion method provides a guide to ensuring all participants become actively involved in the tour. To promote a safe, positive atmosphere during the tour and to cope with challenging situations, it is important to communicate in a constructive way with people with dementia. It is also advisable to remain aware of your own role in the group dynamic, the way you ask questions and how you deal with the answers and responses of participants.

### The role of the guide and host

As the tour guide, you and the host will set the tone during the Unforgettable tour. Your approach and attitude to some extent determine the atmosphere of the visit. Considering the following points will help you promote a safe, positive atmosphere.

#### Interest, curiosity and vulnerability

First and foremost, it is important that you show genuine interest in the people before you and the stories they tell in response to the objects. Let the participants do most of the talking, and only speak yourself if you can add something to the discussion. It can help to make yourself a little vulnerable. Do not be afraid to mention something personal about yourself. After all, you are also inviting the participants to tell their personal stories.

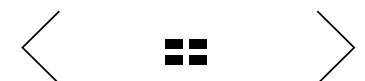
### Take charge

During the tour, remain enthusiastic and take a friendly, flexible and patient attitude, in both your verbal and non-verbal communication. Be aware of your speed and volume when you speak. Use open body language, look people in the eye and smile a lot. Make sure you take charge in an effective but friendly manner, by announcing that you are moving on to another stage of the programme, for example. When you arrive at each new object, remind the group of the theme of the tour, and explain which work you are going to examine next. If the participants have a clear idea of what is happening, they will be better able to concentrate on the content of the tour.

### Stay sensitive

Stay alert and sensitive at all times during the tour. How are the participants feeling? Are everyone's needs being met? Is there anything you might do to make their experience even more relevant? You can read a lot from the way participants respond to you and to each other. Their non-verbal communication also says a lot about how they feel about the experience.

Do not forget to use the knowledge and experience of the host assisting you on the tour. Refer to them frequently, and consult briefly if necessary. Moving between objects presents an opportunity to consult each other, for example. The host will mingle with the participants during the tour, so he or she can give you useful feedback that you can respond to. Finally, do not feel obliged to use the full 90 minutes. If you notice that the participants have seen enough, simply bring the programme to a close.





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## Calm is the magic word

Calm is the magic word when it comes to Unforgettable. Quality is more important than quantity. Take plenty of time and do not rush anything, particularly when moving from one object to another. These transitions give participants a valuable opportunity to see more of the museum, and make contact with each other on another level.

## How to ask questions

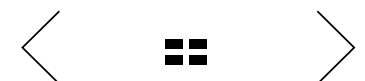
To prompt interaction, you will need to ask participants lots of questions during the Unforgettable tour or workshop. Two keywords for posing questions are 'open' and 'specific'. Your open and specifically worded questions should refer to the object you are looking at together and the contents of the discussion at that moment. Ask one question at a time and keep it as brief and specific as possible. Try to avoid using difficult words and complicated sentences. All the participants must be able to understand your question. If you notice that they do not understand it, downsize it by offering several possible answers from which the group can choose. This is less daunting than if participants have to think of the answer themselves.

## Phrase your question carefully

You must never use questions as a strategy to tell your story, so make sure to phrase your questions in such a way that you do not imply there is a correct or incorrect answer. Using words like 'might' and 'do you think', will create a

safe atmosphere, suggesting that any answer is acceptable. Rather than asking 'When was this painting made?', you might ask 'When might this painting have been made?' or 'When do you think this painting was made?'. You should also be aware of suggestive questions that steer participants towards a certain answer, so avoid phrases like 'don't you think', 'isn't it', 'certainly' and 'wouldn't you agree'.

Finally, do not forget that this programme was developed for people with dementia and a companion. Don't just direct your questions at the people with dementia, but also get their relatives, friends and carers actively involved. Alternate questions to the whole group with questions directed at one person, to ensure everyone gets a say. This will allow people who do not answer spontaneously to take part in the programme as well.



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*'Unfortunately my mother  
had forgotten almost  
everything by the time we got  
home. She no longer knew  
where she had been or what  
she had seen. But she was  
very jolly and she kept saying  
what a nice day she'd had!'*

Carer



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## Responding to the answers given

Besides carefully phrasing your questions, you must also be mindful of how you respond to the answers given by participants. It is above all essential to show genuine interest in the observations, perspectives, stories and ideas of all participants. There are no wrong answers during an Unforgettable tour. It is the variety of responses that makes the programme so special. Always listen attentively and never reject an answer, either verbally or non-verbally. Even if a remark does not seem to relate directly to the object you are looking at or the contents of the discussion at that moment, you must trust that there is something in the experience that has prompted the participant to make it. This makes the remark valuable by definition, even if it diverts attention from the object or theme. To direct the discussion back to the object and the theme, you can always fall back on the questions you have prepared.

### Silence and patience

Give the group the chance to answer questions by allowing enough silence. Sometimes the question has to 'sink in' before participants can put an answer into words. Dementia can also make it difficult to speak (aphasia), so it can take longer before participants are actually able to give an answer. Make sure not to fill the silence too quickly yourself by rephrasing the question, or asking another question too soon. A good rule of thumb is to count slowly to three before speaking again, and to then either repeat the question or give possible answers to choose from.

## Repeat answers

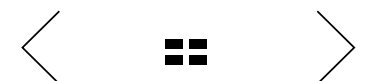
When a participant is answering a question, be patient and let them finish. Do not interrupt them and do not attempt to finish their sentence for them. Repeat the answer and if appropriate point out the aspect of the object to which they are referring. This reaffirms what they say and ensures that the rest of the group has heard the answer. It is also a good way to check whether you have understood the person correctly. This is particularly important if it is not immediately apparent what a participant has said.

## How to explore the response in more depth

Besides repeating answers, it is also important to explore responses in more depth. By asking participants to clarify or explain their initial answer, you can show that you are interested in what they have to say, challenge them to explore the subject in greater depth and ensure that the tour becomes a discussion rather than just a barrage of questions.

Try to link the answers given by finding connections with previous answers, or posing the question to the rest of the group. Asking something like 'Does everyone agree?' or 'Does anyone have any different ideas about this?' allows you to open your discussion with one member of the group to the group as a whole.

Going back to the group is another good technique if someone is dominating the discussion, or keeps repeating the same comment, which can occur quite frequently during an Unforgettable tour. Never ignore a remark, simply integrate it into the group discussion. Explicitly ask



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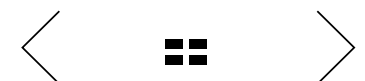
the others to respond to it, for example, or direct your next question to one specific member of the group.

### Focus on non-verbal communication

Besides verbal answers, participants can also contribute using non-verbal communication. It is important to explicitly mention non-verbal responses, especially when people have difficulty finding the right words. If someone starts to smile when you arrive at the next object, mention the fact: 'I see Mr. Smith is smiling. Do you like this painting?'. This makes people feel they have been noticed, even if they find it difficult to make a verbal contribution.

### Trust yourself

To conclude: don't be afraid to make mistakes. The tips above can help you guide people with dementia and their companions through the museum. Use them to find a strategy that works for you and the group. When you in your own genuine desire to give these people a pleasant afternoon at the museum, and you can't go wrong!





Esther Bánki  
Director of Natura Docet  
Wonderryck Twente  
(Denekamp)



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## Esther Bánki

Director of Natura Docet Wonderryck Twente (Denekamp)

*Everyone now and again I join an Unforgettable tour as a host. It always makes me so happy: the positive atmosphere and the discussions of the objects not only give the participants a good feeling, they make me feel good too. It's wonderful to see how the museum can play such an important role in society with a programme like Unforgettable.*

*Thanks to Unforgettable there is now a growing realisation that museum education should not just focus on teaching as such. We are now thinking about developing new programmes in the near future for other groups of people who would not necessarily consider visiting Natura Docet. Our collection has lots of potential for blind people and people with impaired vision, for example. The arrival of the Unforgettable programme has also led to professionalisation among our guides. Before, we didn't really have a strong*

*vision of what we wanted in terms of the structure and content of the tours given by our guides. We monitor that better now. We also place more emphasis on interacting with the group. I think the Unforgettable method has something to offer almost every group of visitors.*

*I took part in most of the training programme during the implementation period. Although I am unfortunately no stranger to dementia – my grandmother had Alzheimer's – Unforgettable has enabled me to recognise the signs more easily, and I now know how to make contact more effectively with people with dementia. This is incredibly useful, given the fact that sooner or later we will all encounter this disease.*



## Roadmap – developing your own programme

### PREPARATIONS

Assess the need

Appoint a programme  
coordinator

Structure of the programme

Arrange facilities

Assemble a team of guides  
and hosts

Train guides and hosts

Communication plan

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If you have been inspired by Unforgettable and wish to use the method for people with dementia and their friends and family in your institution, this roadmap will give you the tools you need to develop your own programme. It is divided into three sections: preparatory activities, activities related to the launch of the programme and tips for keeping it sustainable in the longer term. The results of [the scientific study](#) by VU medical centre into the national rollout of Unforgettable have been incorporated into this roadmap, so you can benefit from the findings immediately.

### PREPARATIONS

The bulk of the work when developing a programme for people with dementia and their family and friends occurs in the preparatory phase. Thorough preparations help guarantee the quality and sustainability of the programme.

#### Assess the need

First of all, it is important to explore the specific situation at your institution and the wishes of the local target audience. Why do you want to set up a programme for people with dementia and their family and friends? How would such an initiative fit into the museum's mission and vision, and its existing programmes? What initiatives for this group already exist in the region?

At this stage, it is good to contact a museum that already provides programmes for this target audience to hear about their experience first-hand. It can also be useful to arrange for a meeting with local organisations that advocate for the wellbeing of people with dementia; in society; they know your potential participants better than any other organisation. If possible, try to join forces to explore whether there is a need for a new initiative.

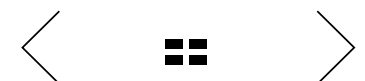
#### Support and mandate

Support is vital to the success of the programme. If you are still keen on the initiative after the orientation stage, it is then important to convince the rest of the organisation of the importance of setting up this new programme. The information about [the structure](#) and [effects](#) of Unforgettable in this guide might help you do so.

Because the launch of a programme for this target audience will have implications for several departments, it is important that the museum management gives you a mandate. As soon as this is secured, you can continue your preparations.

#### Appoint a programme coordinator

A programme coordinator is essential for the development of the programme. It is the coordinator's job to draft a clear project plan and budget, assure the quality of the programme, liaise with guides and hosts, form a link between the museum and the individuals/organisations



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using the programme, give presentations and manage external communications.

It is vital that the coordinator is able to make time for these tasks alongside their existing duties. Depending on the structure of the organisation, the coordination of Unforgettable was delegated to the Education, Marketing & Communication or the Bookings & Sales department. Another option is to put together a project group comprising a number of staff amongst whom these tasks can be divided.

### Structure of the programme

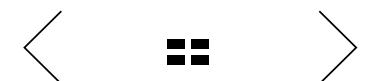
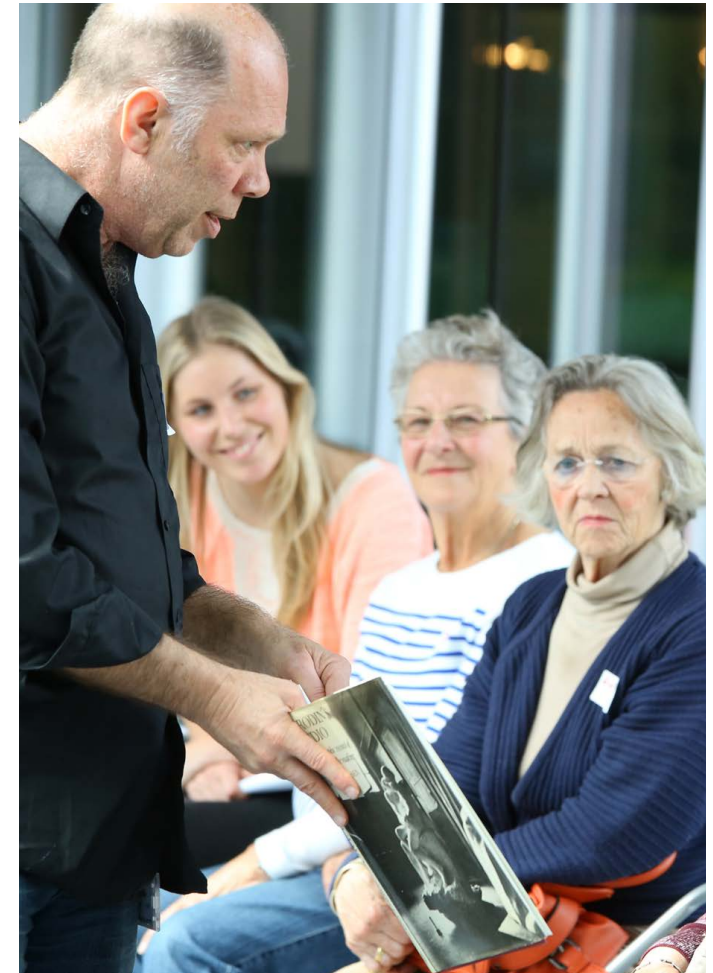
First, decide what exactly you want to do with your programme. Do you only want to offer tours, or do you also want to organise workshops? Or perhaps you have a completely different idea? The Unforgettable structure and method might give you some inspiration.

### Day and time

If you decide to organise a programme for individual visitors at a fixed time each the month, find a suitable day and time. The programme should ideally be scheduled at the quietest possible time during regular opening hours. Monthly tours at all Unforgettable museums take place from 14:30 to 16:00 on a generally quiet weekday.

### Coffee and tea?

Some Unforgettable museums offer participants tea and coffee on arrival. Though this is not obligatory, it is generally highly appreciated by participants.



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### Price

The Unforgettable museums have decided to charge a fee for the programme that merely covers the costs of participation. The fee for the monthly tour ranges from €7.50 to €8.50 per person. The charge for a group tour ranges from €75 to €85. In both cases, entry to the museum and the memento are included, and at some museums the fee also includes a cup of tea or coffee on arrival. Remember to add a new button to the cash register before the official launch of the programme.

### Maximum group size

The maximum group size depends in part on the space available at the museum. The maximum number ranges from ten to fourteen per group at the current Unforgettable museums, consisting of five to seven pairs (a person with dementia and a companion). Larger groups are not advisable, as they impair concentration and reduce the opportunity to participate, and also make it more difficult to preserve the calm, quiet conditions needed.

### Name

The name 'Unforgettable' (Onvergetelijk in Dutch) is reserved for the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the Van Abbemuseum and the ten museums involved in the nationwide rollout of the programme between 2014 and 2016. You should therefore decide on a new name that suits the programme you intend to offer. Choose an appealing name that emphasises the unique qualities of the programme, rather than the disease. The fact that it is a programme for people with dementia and a companion

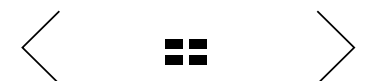
should be mentioned only in the subtitle. The Unforgettable museums have now stopped using the terms 'Alzheimer's' and 'carers', because the programme is also suitable for other forms of dementia, and for people who do not necessarily regard themselves as a carer of the person with dementia they are accompanying.

### Arrange facilities

A programme for people with dementia and their family and friends requires a number of extra practical facilities that must be arranged before the programme is launched.

### Access to the building

First of all, it is important that the museum is easily accessible for people who need to use equipment because of physical impairments. People with a walking frame, wheelchair or mobility scooter need to be able to enter the museum in a pleasant manner and move around the building easily, without encountering too many barriers. Give particular consideration to the size and accessibility of the galleries and the lift. Is the lift suitable for groups? If factors such as this present problems, it is advisable to tackle these issues before you actually start welcoming people with dementia to the museum, perhaps by reducing the maximum group size, or using two hosts rather than one.





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### Decide where to welcome participants

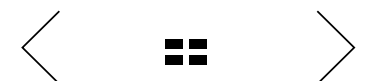
During Unforgettable, a great deal of care goes into welcoming participants and getting to know one another. This sets the tone for the rest of the session, after all. Ideally, a quiet place in the museum should be used for this purpose. This might be a relatively quiet corner of the lobby, or a pleasant spot in the education studio, the workshop or the museum café. The main thing is that participants can sit together undisturbed, perhaps with a cup of tea or coffee, and that they can hear each other, the guide and the host.

### Folding chairs

To ensure that physical impairments do not prevent people from visiting the museum, it is important that all participants have the opportunity to sit down during the tour. The Unforgettable museums have successfully used [specially developed chairs](#) for this purpose. They are lightweight and very stable, making them suitable for people with a physical disability. The trolley on which the chairs are kept could be stored in the lobby when they are not being used on an Unforgettable tour, so that other museum visitors can use them.

### Name tags

During the programme the guide, host and all participants wear a name tag, preferably a sticker specially developed for textile, which remains attached but does not damage clothing.



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### Include programme in booking system

Consider beforehand how people will be able to book a tour or workshop: by telephone, email or a booking form on the website? It is good to create an opportunity for personal contact, and to send a detailed letter of confirmation which, besides booking information, explains what the programme includes and how participants can get to the museum.

### Assemble a team of guides and hosts

Unforgettable is run by a team of guides and hosts. Both are vital for the success of the programme.

#### Guides

At the Unforgettable museums, tours and workshops are run by a group of four to six guides. They should ideally be people who already give guided tours for other groups, and have received a special training for the Unforgettable programme. Guides either work on a voluntary or freelance basis at the participating museums. Given the effort required to master the method, and to guarantee the quality of the programme, it is recommended that volunteers be given some remuneration for preparing and leading the tours.

It is also important that the guides in the team have the right personality traits for the target group. They should be friendly, flexible, patient, decisive and engaged. Experience has shown that people can be trained in the Unforgettable method, but that personalities are difficult to change.

### Hosts

Hosts are also people who work as volunteers at the museum. The size of the team varies from six to ten at the participating museums. Depending on the group size and logistics at the museum, one or two hosts assist each tour or workshop. When selecting the team, it was again found that the character traits mentioned above are vital for the quality of the assistance.

### Recruitment

You can recruit tour guides and hosts in various ways. You might for example organise an information meeting about the programme and the training. If this is not possible, an email containing information on the programme might be a good alternative. Guides and volunteers can then sign up for the team if they are interested. You might like to ask them to briefly describe their motives for signing up to help with selection.

### Training days for guides

Participants in the Unforgettable programme are particularly pleased with the pleasant approach and assistance provided by the guides and hosts. A tour or workshop for this target group requires extra care, attention and effort from those running the programme. Thorough training of people in the pool is essential for the success of the programme.



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### Training days for guides

Guides at the Unforgettable museums received an intensive training before providing tours and workshops for this target audience. They attended two full days of training, during which they learned more about the disease and the target group, and experienced what it is like to look at objects based on the Unforgettable method during a demonstration tour. All the steps in the method were then dealt with in detail, after which the guides practiced in the museum by discussing an object in accordance with the discussion structure. This was followed by a brief opportunity for reflection and feedback. The guides were then asked to prepare their first Unforgettable tour on paper. The project coordinator provided feedback on the preparations before the follow-up training day.

### Training hosts

Training hosts takes less time; a morning or afternoon is sufficient. The emphasis during this training should be on informing them about the target group, giving them tips for communicating with people with dementia and experiencing the Unforgettable method for themselves during a demonstration tour.

### Follow-up training day

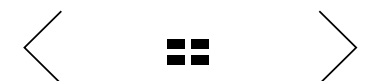
During the follow-up training day, guides and hosts get together for the first time to try out the programme in the museum. The purpose of the follow-up day is twofold: to give the guides an opportunity to practise the method in a safe environment, and to enable both guides and hosts to experience the practical aspects of the programme. The practice tours allow logistical challenges and inconvenient factors to be identified and resolved before you welcome

people with dementia and their companions to the museum. This gives the best possible guarantee that their visit to the museum will be a pleasurable one.

During the follow-up training day, each guide should give a 45-minute Unforgettable tour for his or her fellow guides, just as if it were a 'real' Unforgettable tour, complete with name tags, folding chairs and a participant in a wheelchair. After each practice tour there is a brief opportunity for reflection and feedback. It is advisable to ensure the entire team attends the whole day, as experience shows that each tour reveals new lessons that are useful for everyone.

### Communication plan

Reaching people with dementia and their carers is one of the biggest challenges that the Unforgettable museums face. It is therefore important to draw up a detailed communication plan during the preparatory stage, in collaboration with the museum's Marketing & Communication department. Besides contacting the press and providing information about the programme on the website and via social media, all Unforgettable museums also produced special flyers and posters that could be distributed and hung at various locations.



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### List of contacts

It is vital that you compile an extensive list of all stakeholders in the region, to help you contact potential participants. This might include organisations that advocate for the wellbeing of people with dementia and their loved ones in society, local authorities, care organisation, case managers, general practitioners and geriatricians, welfare, carers' and volunteer organisations, healthcare institutions, day centres and activity centres. These organisations can be useful for promotion and recruitment. Though it takes time to compile such a list of contacts, it is an essential investment, giving you an important basis for contacting potential participants. You could for example send them invitations and newsletters, even after the programme has launched.





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*‘The theme of the tour was  
“travelling”. Afterwards the  
host asked me if I’d been  
homesick, for home. I answered,  
“Homesick? Yes, I will be in a  
while, for here!”’*

Person with dementia



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You have made your preparations, and the framework of your programme is in place. Besides informing the entire museum staff and organising pilot tours, during which the guides and hosts receive the first groups of real participants at the museum, the emphasis in this phase is on the official launch of the programme and external communications.

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#### Inform museum staff

During the preparatory phase the guides and hosts who will run the programme have received intensive training. Other departments, including the visitor services department and security, will also have to cope with a new group of visitors. It is therefore important that they too are informed about the programme. You could send them an email with [tips on how best to interact with people with dementia](#), or organise a short meeting on the subject. Remember that thoroughly informing museum staff and giving them the opportunity to ask questions creates support for the programme within the organisation.

### Organise pilot tours

After the training days and follow-up training day, the guides and hosts should be ready to receive groups of participants at the museum. The next step is to organise a number of free pilot tours to which people with dementia and a companion are invited.

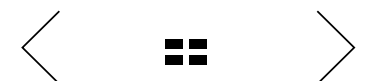
The pilot tour is the guides' and hosts' first opportunity to put the method into practice. Each guide should give a pilot tour and observe a fellow guide's pilot tour. The programme coordinator should also be present as an observer. After each pilot tour the programme coordinator will evaluate the process and outcomes in detail with the guides and hosts.

### Finding participants

Use the list of contacts you compiled during the preparatory phase to find participants for the pilot tours. To spread news of the programme as far as possible, it is a good idea to approach care institutions and day centres that are part of the same care organisation. Your invitation should explicitly state that pilot tours are being given at this stage, so that the group comes to the museum with the right expectations. Remember to start finding participants in due time, ideally around three to four weeks before the pilot tour is scheduled to take place.

### Draw up a schedule

Prior to each pilot tour, draw up a plan to hand out to all staff involved. This will at any rate include the guide, the host and the visitor services department. The plan should



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include the timetable for the tour, the contact details of the person who booked it and/or the individual participants, the theme and objects to be discussed, and any special points to be taken into consideration during the tour, such as the number of wheelchairs that have been reserved.

The plan is not only useful at the time of the tour itself. By continuing to draw up plans after the launch (the pilot phase), and making them available to guides at a central access point, they can check which themes and works have been discussed on tours over the past few months, and plan their next tour accordingly.

### Photographs for publicity purposes

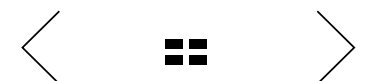
At the Unforgettable museums, photographs were taken by a professional photographer during one of the pilot tours, after obtaining the written consent of all participants. The photographs were used for publicity purposes, on flyers and posters, on the website and on social media. Photographs give the programme a personal touch. If possible, therefore, you should endeavour to take photographs during a pilot tour.

### Launch programme

Once the programme coordinator is satisfied that all guides and hosts have given a successful pilot tour, the museum is ready to launch the programme. The general public can be informed of the new programme, using the communication plan drawn up during the preparatory phase as a guide.

### Organise a kick-off

It can be difficult for potential participants to understand exactly what the programme entails. Personal contact between the museum and potential clients is therefore very useful. All Unforgettable museums organised an official launch after the implementation process was complete. The kick-off was intended for all stakeholders associated with dementia in the region – included in the list of contacts compiled earlier in the process – who were invited to the event some four weeks in advance. After being welcomed by the director and watching a brief presentation on the programme's structure and methods, all those present were taken on a short demonstration tour so that everyone could experience how Unforgettable works in practice. The afternoon was rounded off with a drinks party at which museum staff and guests were able to meet and talk in an informal setting.



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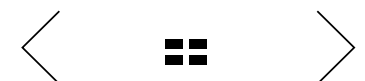
### Publicity online and in the press

Free publicity is very important for programmes like Unforgettable. Of course it must be announced on the museum's social media channels, in the newsletter and on the website. It is also advisable to send all the museum's press contacts and other stakeholders a press release.

There was a generally good response to the notification from the Unforgettable museums, particularly in the regional press. Some museums also organised a special tour for members of the press, to which one journalist from the written press was given exclusive access, in order to prevent too much distraction from external observers and cameras. The press tour generally resulted in an attractive spread in a regional or national newspaper.

### Communication materials

It is important that the communication materials are ready before the official launch of the programme. The new flyers, posters and other PR materials are important for communicating with the target group. It is advisable to make these materials available not only in the museum itself, but also in other places frequented by people with dementia and their companions, such as activity centres, GP practices, hospitals and libraries. After the kick-off, the Unforgettable museums therefore sent direct mail to all stakeholders associated with dementia in the region, again using the list of contacts. The stakeholders received a pack of publicity materials and an accompanying letter explaining the programme and asking them to display the material. You might also opt to send out a flyer with the museum's general direct mail.





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*‘During the tour the contact  
was different. By talking about  
works of art we caught sight of  
my mother’s emotions again for  
the first time in ages. That rarely  
happens on a normal day.’*

Carer



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### Continuation

To guarantee the sustainability and quality of the programme, it is important to evaluate how things are going on a regular basis, to stay in personal contact with participants and to keep up external communication efforts.

#### Evaluation and quality assurance

To assure quality, it is important that the programme be closely monitored. One way of doing this is to have the guide and host briefly evaluate each tour once it is over. In the early stages it is advisable for the programme coordinator to be present for this as well. A brief moment of evaluation gives the guide and host the opportunity to let off steam. Furthermore, it provides a chance to discuss solutions to any challenging situations that have arisen, which can be used if they occur again.

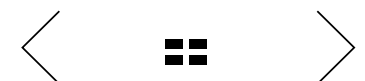
The Unforgettable programme coordinators join a tour every so often to check up on the content and quality. Once a year the guides and hosts should meet, ideally at the museum, to discuss how the programme is going. This is a perfect opportunity to share experiences, discuss any problems, make the necessary adjustments and tie up any loose ends. The agenda for the meeting is agreed with the guides and hosts.

### Relationship management

As mentioned, personal contact with participants is vital for the sustainability of the programme. You should therefore invest in the relationships you built during the preparatory and launch phases. An email or telephone call after the tour asking how participants experienced the visit not only sends a positive signal, their feedback can also be used to make any necessary adjustments to the programme. You might also opt to send people who have booked in the past a reminder a week before the monthly tour or workshop.

### External communication

In this phase, it is generating continued publicity for the programme that takes the most effort. Post regular notices on social media, emphasising how people enjoy the tours, and include some attractive photographs. Mention the tours regularly in your newsletter. Some museums send a short monthly press release to local and regional media giving the date, time and theme of the next monthly tour.



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### Presentations and demonstration tours

A programme for people with dementia and their friends and family really takes off once people experience the method themselves, or hear about the first-hand experiences of participants. It is worth your while to give regular presentations and demonstration tours. Activity centres for people with dementia are always looking for interesting subjects for presentations and many successful evenings have been arranged throughout the Netherlands, comprising a brief presentation on Unforgettable and a demonstration tour using PowerPoint. You might also consider organising a demonstration tour at the museum – for museum staff, for example, friends of the museum or case managers working in the region. They can then spread the word among people with dementia and their family and friends.

### Keeping up to date

World Alzheimer's Day takes place yearly on the 21st of September. This presents a great opportunity to draw attention to your programme. On and around this day, many activities are organised for people with dementia and their family and friends. Put together an attractive programme in your institution, including a free demonstration tour, and if possible work with another regional organisation to extend the reach of your activities.

Marleen Rozenbrand  
Education officer at the  
Zeeuws Museum (Middelburg)



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## Marleen Rozenbrand

Education officer at the Zeeuws Museum (Middelburg)

*The mission of the Zeeuws Museum is to connect different generations with the heritage of Zeeland, using the collection to prompt people to remember and to share life stories. It's fantastic to see how museum visitors show a genuine interest in each other's stories. The museum firmly believes that as many people as possible should be able to visit, and have the chance to tell their story.*

*The advent of Unforgettable has been highly significant for the Zeeland Museum, and it still is. We already saw during the implementation period how this method suits a whole range of target groups. We are generally in a rush in our daily lives, so people often don't take the time to look at things properly. I would like all our visitors to be able to experience our museum in the Unforgettable way. That is why we have now*

*trained all our guides in the Unforgettable method, so they can use it more broadly in their work.*

*Unforgettable allows participants to forget all the forgetting for a while. For me personally, it reveals people's strengths. People with dementia and their companions are our guests, and you can see they enjoy it. We hear from carers and care professionals that they enjoy being together during the tour, partly because the illness does not impact on the way the guides and volunteers approach the participants. In some cases they see, maybe just for a moment, who the person with dementia used to be. That moves me, and it makes me very happy. It is so special to be able to use Unforgettable to make a meaningful contribution to a dementia-friendly society.*





## Research results

Report by  
Jannetje Koelewijn

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*We were at the Stedelijk Museum, looking at Bal Tabarin, a 1907 painting by Jan Sluijters. A room full of people dancing beneath huge chandeliers with electric light bulbs, a novelty back then. My father – paralysed and almost blind, but completely clear-minded – put up his hand, and when Sander, the guy who was leading the tour, indicated it was his turn, he pointed to my mother, saying, ‘Let her tell you’.*

*So there she stood, my 83-year-old mother, at an advanced stage of dementia, in her best slacks and twinset. She looked like the French woman she had longed to be when she was young. A woman of the world, visiting exhibitions of Malevich and the Impressionists, buying postcards to stick in one of her fabulous scrapbooks. She straightened her back and gestured. ‘I see movement,’ she said, ‘I see light, I see revelry. Paris, Paris. Walking, walking, walking. So lovely, such fun’.*

*It was April 2013, and the Stedelijk had just started giving tours for people with Alzheimer’s. I still get emotional when I think of it. My mother – who died last year – could be so glum, so listless, so passive. But there, she was radiant. Bal Tabarin took her back for one brief moment to those beautiful spring days when she and my father strolled down the Champs-Élysées, through the Tuilleries to the Centre Pompidou.*

*In the evening, as we were eating at the nursing home, I asked her if she knew where she had been that day. She certainly did. ‘In Paris’, she said. ‘Your father and I, we’ve been to Paris for a few days.’ Then she looked at me uncertainly. ‘Haven’t we?’*

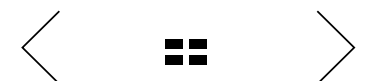
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It’s May 2017 and I’m sitting at a table with three women from VU medical centre (VUmc) who have completed a scientific study of Unforgettable. They looked at the effects of the programme on participants and their companions, on the guides, the museums and on society. More about that in a moment, but first we talk about the people with dementia they know personally.

Franka Meiland, health psychologist and senior researcher in the Psychiatry Department, had a mother-in-law with dementia who has now passed away. ‘She was always very cheerful with me, but she was very difficult with my father-in-law. She was supposed to go to the day centre, but refused to, and she resisted quite fiercely...’. In the final years of her life her mother-in-law lived in a nursing home.

Rose-Marie Dröes, professor of psychosocial support for people with dementia, who led the study, had an aunt with dementia who lived to the age of 106, and was ‘a lot of fun’ in the final years of her life, though she could be impossible at times. ‘I once got there at noon, and she told me I was far too late. She threw the box of cakes I had brought into the neighbours’ garden.’ She can laugh about it now.

She tells me how she has made dementia her life’s work. She studied human movement sciences at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in the 1970s, and she was an intern at the Sint Elisabeth Gasthuis hospital in Deventer, which was a psychogeriatric nursing home at the time. ‘The first time I went in there I couldn’t believe my eyes. You know





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that film *Awakenings*? Everyone had their head on the table. “My god, what is this?” I thought.’

Her task was to organise some exercise sessions and then observe whether the people got any better. ‘We took them to the gymnasium and, indeed,’ – she laughs out loud – ‘they came to life again. They responded to each other, to the therapist, to the balls and hoops. I thought, if we can achieve all this in just an hour, then the assumption that these people are no longer capable of anything is completely wrong.’

And Iris Hendriks, the junior researcher who did the ‘manual work’ on the Unforgettable study: the questionnaires and observations, the tallying and counting. She is the only one at the table who has never known anyone with dementia. Does she find it a frightening disease? ‘No,’ she replies, ‘it’s a nasty disease, but I’m not afraid of it.’

Someone else who is present at the discussion is Anouk Heesbeen of the Stedelijk Museum. She is responsible for Unforgettable, and has been working full-time implementing the programme at ten other museums for the past three years. She has a grandmother with dementia.

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## Effects of the programme

What effect does Unforgettable have on participants? Did the researchers at VUmc notice the same remarkable effect as Rose-Marie Dröes did at the hospital in Deventer?

Dröes: 'It does something to people, and the nice thing is that you also notice it in their companions.' She says companions as she dislikes the term carers, despite the positive associations with the word 'care'.

What did she notice in their companions? 'They were surprised at how their father, mother or partner behaved on the tour. Their attention to others in the group, the response to the paintings, the emotions they showed, their active involvement. And I'm surprised that this surprised them. They apparently didn't know that their loved one was still capable of this.'

Hendriks nods enthusiastically. 'I observed a tour at the Limburg Museum and I asked a woman taking part if she would complete the smiley face survey beforehand.' This was used to canvas the mood when participants arrived. 'Her daughter said, "No, no, my mother can't. She doesn't want to". The tour started and the woman was so cheered up by an old pram, and later an old stove. She began to tell us all kinds of things. Afterwards her daughter asked me to give her the survey, and said they would complete it together. We saw this a lot in the questionnaires: people with dementia responded much more positively than we expected.'

Meiland, who supervised Hendriks on the study, says, 'That was also true of the professionals who came. Someone said, "We always think people don't understand

and can't do anything any more, and now I've seen with my own eyes how someone can talk quite coherently about the Second World War".'

Dröes: 'People arrived in a good mood and left in an even better one. On average they went from a 4 on a 5-point scale to a 5 – the highest possible score. Their companions said things like, "My mother was so tired that evening". That's great! Then at least you know why they are tired. I think it's an eye-opener for society, that's the greatest achievement of this programme.'

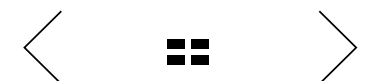
## Difference between art and heritage

Does it matter whether the participants look at art or at objects that were used in the past?

Dröes: 'We did indeed consider certain aspects of the artworks – natural subjects, emotion, complexity, warmth – and whether that made a difference to how people responded.' She nods towards Hendriks. 'She knows the results.'

Hendriks: 'People responded more to objects than to paintings. That was true of everyone, whatever their background. We did however see that people with severe dementia tended to respond less in general.'

Dröes: 'That's understandable. People with slight or moderate dementia made more contact with others, responded more actively and were more positive about the tour whatever the objects covered. One striking thing was that everyone responded in a more subdued way, relatively speaking, to paintings that heavily feature natural subjects.'



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Nature seems to make people calm.'

Hendriks: 'We were in the Stedelijk, looking at a painting of two lamps by Isa Genzken, and I spotted a man and woman laughing about it together. They were really giggling. It turned out that the man had been an electrician. He thought it was really fantastic, while others in the group said very little.'

Dröes: 'The fewer associations people have with the narrative of the artwork because of memory problems, the more important colours and shapes are. That's understandable, because if your memories are gone you can't really associate.'

Meiland: 'It makes a difference if the guide prompts people to tell their stories. I was on a tour on the theme of music at which people were asked if they used to play an instrument, and what they played. People really started to respond.'

### Participant appreciation

Hendriks: 'One of the questions we asked the companions was what they had enjoyed most. Many of them said it was how their father, mother or partner had responded. The people with dementia often said the beautiful paintings, the lovely building. And the friendly welcome, the hospitality.'

Dröes: 'It's special, being given a guided tour. I got a guided tour of the Rijksmuseum for my birthday, arranged by my co-workers. I know what it feels like.'

Heesbeen of the Stedelijk Museum: 'And people don't get a different reception here because they have dementia.'

The dementia doesn't matter.'

Meiland: 'We heard that a lot, that people didn't feel stigmatised.'

Dröes: 'And you can say what you like about a piece. There are no wrong answers. That's nice for everyone, whether you've got dementia or not. If you are rewarded, you enjoy it. You forget yourself for a moment, feel good, appreciated and stimulated.'

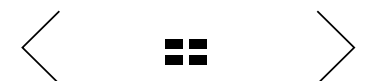
*When we walked past the mural by Karel Appel at the Stedelijk – the one with the three dancing figures – my father was keen to say something. He turned to the group as if he were the guide and said, 'I have a thing or two to tell you about this'. In his dark suit, his royal honours medal in the buttonhole on his lapel, he was once again the man he had always been, though he was now in a wheelchair.*

*'Mr. Wim,' Sander said, 'we're listening.'*

*'I've always liked Karel Appel's work', my father said. 'Particularly his Questioning Children. But for a long time I was the only one who did. You should know that' – he leaned towards the people around him – 'when Questioning Children was painted I worked at the town hall. This was 1949. I had just started as the youngest clerk in the Public Works Department.'*

*'Public Works', said one of the participants, a man of around my father's age. 'Pooh pooh.'*

*'Yes,' said my father, 'and Karel Appel, a young chap back then, had been asked to paint the walls of the canteen. He painted Questioning Children, which showed the hunger and misery of the children he'd seen in Germany after the war.'*



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*‘Oh yes,’ said the woman sitting next to my father, also in a wheelchair, ‘I remember that well. Hunger, hunger, hunger. Terrible.’*

*‘And this is my point,’ said my father, ‘when Karel Appel was finished, the officials at the town hall objected. They’d never seen anything so ugly. They refused to go and eat their sandwiches in the canteen.’*

*‘Sandwiches,’ said the woman next to my father, ‘delicious sandwiches.’*

*‘But I thought Questioning Children was fantastic’, my father said. ‘I still do. And there’s something else I want to tell you. It’s about the sketch Karel Appel made before. As the youngest clerk I was expected to keep the archives up to date, and so one day I found the sketch on my desk.’*

*‘Wow’, said Sander.*

*‘Yeah’, said my father. ‘I had to file it away. And to be honest, ladies and gentlemen, I did hesitate for a moment. Should I pocket the thing?’*

*‘You were going to steal the sketch?’ asked the man of my father’s age.*

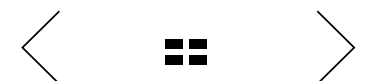
*‘Yes,’ said my father, ‘I wanted to steal it. But’ – he looked around proudly – ‘I didn’t.’*

## The guides

We turn to the subject of the guides, how they were selected and trained. That was Heesbeen’s job. ‘Here at the Stedelijk you had to apply internally, and then we decided who was suitable. But at some other museums, anyone was allowed to do the training. That led to some complex processes. It really matters in this job what kind of person you are. You have to be patient, friendly, interested in what the participants say, and not just in what you want to say. You have to be able to listen, be aware of non-verbal communication. I became stricter as the implementation process went on. I told the museums what the most important personal traits were. I can train someone to impart information effectively, but I can’t change a person’s character.’

Hendriks: ‘No, you can’t change someone’s character, but we did see that the guides, the other museum staff and the volunteers – even those who hadn’t been trained – became more optimistic after a few months about what people with dementia can do. They had started to see them more as individuals.’

Dröes: ‘Which is another example of people being surprised, which I was just talking about. “Hey, I thought these people couldn’t do anything anymore”.’



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## The implementation process

During the implementation of Unforgettable, Heesbeen spent two months at each of the ten museums, giving intensive training for guides and hosts. They first planned a tour on paper and then gave a pilot tour, at which they observed each other. Did some drop out? 'Yes they did,' she replies. 'There were people who could not cope emotionally, or who just weren't all that interested in what the group had to say. It took a lot of getting used to for some people. They had never asked anyone in their tour group a question.'

This was what the guides had to learn. How to make contact, how to adapt to the participants, how to use your body and your voice. 'How you phrase things is also very important. If you ask someone when a painting was made, he or she will think, "oh no, I don't know, so I won't say anything". But if you ask someone when they think it was made, they will be more likely to have a go. It creates a freer atmosphere.'

Now that the implementation is complete, she thinks it is better that museums work with paid guides for Unforgettable, rather than volunteers. 'You can ask more of people when you pay them,' she explains, 'and we demand quite a lot of them.'

At the museums that participated, the first thing was to assess whether both the management and the people on the workforce were motivated to do it. 'Top-down simply doesn't work', says Dröes. 'Nor does the reverse.'

Meiland: 'And you have to keep making an effort. However good the results, if you don't keep working at it, it will fizzle out.'

Dröes: 'It's also very important for the museum to have contact with local GPs and care institutions. You need them to send people, so you have to keep them interested. Invite them to take part in a tour themselves sometime. Let them hear what people say. And a short film on the website can also be very helpful.'

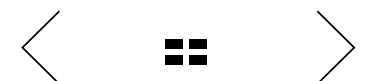
## A dementia-friendly society

Heesbeen, who studied art history, says she has learnt a lot from Unforgettable. 'How you look at life. How you look at the people around you. That they're just ordinary people, that you mustn't reduce them to a label. And that this way of giving a tour appeals to lots of people.'

Meiland: 'This way of looking is spreading from the museums into society. Staff at Albert Heijn are being trained in how to interact with people with dementia. And so are taxi drivers.'

Dröes: 'Unforgettable is often mentioned as a good example of how to create a dementia-friendly society. Did you know that the Dutch tourism organisation ANWB gave Unforgettable a bronze medal for the 'Most civilly-minded outing of 2016'?'

Heesbeen: 'We were in their magazine, which has two million readers.'





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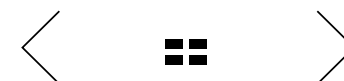
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What is Heesbeen's nicest memory of the tours? 'We had work by Tino Sehgal at the Stedelijk, a different performance every year for a month, and we also had that stripper, remember? A very attractive man. We went to watch him and one of the participants, who had been a nurse, went and danced with him. No inhibitions at all – and the nice thing about it was that normally he would make people feel uncomfortable. But now he was the one who felt uncomfortable.'

And what does Hendriks look back on most fondly? 'We were at the Zeeuws Museum, where they had an exhibition about the Dutch province Zeeland in the war. There were all these people from the surrounding villages, and everyone started recalling things. At the end the guide played We'll Meet Again by Vera Lynn. Someone started singing along quietly, someone else joined in and eventually everyone was singing along at the top of their voice. I found that really moving. There was also a woman who used to paint. "What did you paint?" the guide asked. "Male nudes." Everyone laughed, but she laughed loudest.'



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*'Unforgettable is one of my  
favourite tours. It's so special to  
be able to make the smaller world  
of people with dementia a little  
bigger through art.'*

Guide



## Frequently asked questions

What is Unforgettable?

How did Unforgettable come about?

How does Unforgettable differ from an ordinary museum tour?

What effect has the Unforgettable programme had?

Is Unforgettable suitable for all kinds of museums?

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### What is Unforgettable?

Unforgettable is a special museum programme for people with dementia and their family and friends. During an Unforgettable tour or workshop people with dementia and a caregiver, relative or friend enjoy a pleasant, inspiring afternoon visiting a museum. Together with a specially trained guide, they look at and discuss a small number of museum objects. No knowledge of the collection is required. Enjoyment of art and heritage objects is the main focus of the tour. Participants share stories, memories, associations and ideas, thus bringing the objects to life. The guide helps get the process started with stimulating questions and creative assignments, appropriate to the perceptions and experiences of the group.

### How did Unforgettable come about?

Unforgettable was developed by the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in 2013, following the example of the successful Meet Me at MoMA programme of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. From 2014 to 2016 the Stedelijk and the Van Abbe supported ten other museums in the Netherlands as they set up their own Unforgettable tours and workshops.

The nationwide rollout was accompanied by a scientific study by the VU medical centre (VUmc), which looked at the implementation and impact of the programme. At the moment, people with dementia and their loved ones can

take part in an Unforgettable tour or workshop at twelve museums, with diverse collections, spread throughout the Netherlands.

### How does Unforgettable differ from an ordinary museum tour?

The experience and perception of the participants is key in Unforgettable. The goal of the programme is to encourage social contact using the object in the museum. The guide does not act as an expert sharing his or her extensive knowledge with the group, but instead leads and encourages discussion with open questions and creative assignments. During an Unforgettable tour, participants are explicitly invited to share their associations with the objects and the stories that come to mind. To ensure they have ample opportunity to do so, the tour is relatively slow-paced, with around five objects being discussed in an hour and a half.



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### What effect has the Unforgettable programme had?

The fascinating thing is that programmes like Unforgettable not only improve the quality of life for people with dementia, they also have a positive effect on people around them and the relationship between them. A scientific study by VUmc has shown that both people with dementia and their companions on the tour or workshop are happier after taking part. The programme is rated very highly by those who take part. The social interaction during a tour and the friendliness and engagement of the museum staff meet with particular approval.

Interestingly, the programme also has an impact on the museum staff involved. A few months after the introduction of the programme they were found to have a more positive image of people with dementia. This suggests that the programme can help create a more dementia-friendly society.

### Is Unforgettable suitable for all kinds of museums?

Absolutely! The nationwide rollout of the programme showed that the Unforgettable method can be applied to all kinds of museum collections: pre-modern art, design, modern art, cultural heritage, natural history and contemporary art. The method can also be used outside museums, as part of daily activities in care institutions for people with dementia, for example. The most important

prerequisites for success are the motivation and effort of the people who work with the method. It is also important to draw up a project plan. This programme provides substantive and practical support for that process.



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### Experiences of involved staff members

Tineke Zeven  
Unforgettable host at the  
Mauritshuis (Den Haag)

### Quotes of participants

Carer (3)

Person with dementia (1)

Ankie van Avezaath  
Guide at Singer Laren  
(Laren)

Esther Bānki  
Director of Natura Docet  
Wonderryck Twente  
(Denekamp)

Carer (1)

Guide (1)

Carer (4)

Person with dementia (2)

Lisette Dickhoff  
Integrated care manager for  
Noord-Limburg at Hulp bij  
Dementie integrated care  
organisation (Venlo)

Marleen Rozenbrand  
Education officer at the  
Zeeuws Museum (Middelburg)

Care professional (1)

Carer

Carer (5)

Guide (2)



## Credits



VAN  
ABBE  
MUSEUM  
EINDHOVEN



FONDS  
SLUYTERMAN VAN LOO  
OUDERENPROJECTEN



**VSBFonds,**  
iedereen doet mee



HOFJE CODDE EN VAN BERESTEYN



Stichting tot steun VCVGZ

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This publication, produced by the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the Van Abbemuseum and VU medical centre (VUmc), provides a guide for the cultural sector addressing how to make art and culture accessible to people with dementia and their loved ones. The contents are based on the results of the nationwide rollout of the Unforgettable programme and the associated scientific study performed by the Psychiatry Department of VUmc.

Unforgettable was inspired by the Meet Me at MoMA programme of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It was developed by the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Van Abbemuseum in 2013, with financial support from two charities for the elderly: Fonds Sluyterman Van Loo Fund and Stichting RCOAK.

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Limburgs Museum, Mauritshuis, Museum  
Boijmans Van Beuningen, Museum Dr8888,  
Natura Docet Wonderryck Twente, Singer Laren,  
Zeeuws Museum

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