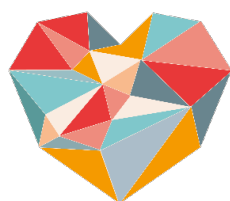




Meet me @ Middelheim Museum

middelheim
museum

Good practice nominated by

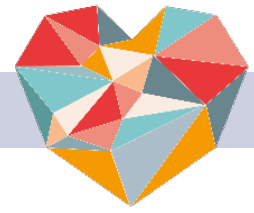


Dementia
in Cultural Mediation



With the support of the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The activity



Name of the activity

Meet me @ Middelheim Museum.

Guided tours for people with (young-onset) dementia and their caregivers.

Summary

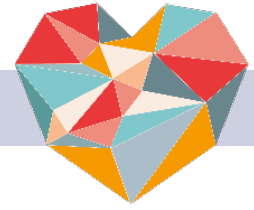
The Middelheim Museum is an art park in Antwerp, Belgium. Meet me @ Middelheim is a program that provides guided tours for people with mild to moderate (young-onset) dementia. During the tour, people come together with their caregiver to enjoy the art in the park. Together with the museum guide, a number of art works are viewed. In doing so, the slow art technique is used: looking together, sharing together. During the tour, interaction and conversation are central. This program follows the example of a project set up in New York called 'Meet Me @ MoMA'

(<https://www.moma.org/visit/accessibility/meetme/>).

The Middelheim Museum offers an overview of modern and contemporary art in an exceptional setting. The museum believes that art can be an important tool in connecting with the feelings, ideas and thoughts of people with (young-onset) dementia. Contemporary art in particular is open to interpretation and invites people to observe and discuss.

The guided tours are developed by specially trained educators who act as museum guides and also have experience as caregiver for a person with dementia.

Content



Target group

The guided tours are aimed at people with mild to moderate (young-onset) dementia.

The activity is open to residents from assisted living facilities and their caregivers (who may also be family members), as well as to individual visitors and their caregivers.

The activity takes place outside in the art park. Although the museum guides choose art works in quiet places, this is not easy in terms of acoustics for people with hearing difficulties. For people with a visual disability, the caregiver plays an important role and the museum guide applies the technique of visual description. Since the museum organises the guided tours only between April and October, the activity is accessible to people with physical disabilities. During other months, the unpaved paths in the park are very difficult to access by wheelchair. Also, it is too cold for them, and by extension for the whole group, in those months because of the slow art technique where everyone is sitting during the activity.

Objective

The aim is to make art accessible to people with (young-onset) dementia and to create a valuable experience for them and their caregivers where enjoyment is key.

Partners

In the prelude to the development of the activity:

- The MoMA in New York is the main source of inspiration for the activity. Together with the Flemish museums and FARO (Flemish Institution for the Cultural Heritage), the Middelheim Museum went to New York to meet the initiator and exchange information. The museum is allowed to use the name 'Meet Me @'. MoMA is no longer actively involved, but they still exchange material.
- Two museum guides from the Middelheim Museum visited Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and Van Abbemuseum to talk to the staff, get inspired and take part in a guided tour for people with dementia. Their program is called respectively:
 - Unforgettable Stedelijk (<https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/museum/inclusive-programming/unforgettable-stedelijk>)
 - Unforgettable Van Abbe (<https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/unforgettable-van-abbe-6/>)

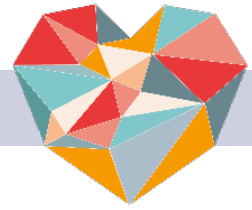
Support for the development of the activity:

- The Flemish Alzheimer League provided feedback on the content and approach of the guided tour. A lot of attention was paid to the welcoming of the people, the introduction, but also the moment of closing together.
- The Flanders Centre of Expertise on Dementia and the guides of the Middelheim Museum met several times to discuss the activity.

When communicating about the activity:

- The Alzheimer's League Flanders helps to take care of communication.
(<https://www.alzheimerliga.be/nl>)
- The Flemish Council of the Elderly helps to disseminate the activity. For example, they dedicated a reportage to the guided tours in their magazine 'Actueel' from July 2018.
(<https://www.vlaamse-ouderenraad.be/vlaamse-ouderenraad-uk>)
- The Flanders Centre of Expertise on Dementia helps to spread the activity.
(<https://www.dementie.be/the-flanders-centre-of-expertise-on-dementia-for-the-international-audience/>)
- Dementia Friendly Ghent helps to spread the activity.
(<https://stad.gent/nl/samenleven-welzijn-gezondheid/gezondheid/dementie/samen-voor-een-dementievriendelijk-gent>)

Practical



Venue

The activity always takes place outside in the park among the works of art.

The following conditions are necessary for an ideal setting:

- a combination of park and art,
- ensure peace,
- close to toilets accessible for people in wheelchairs,
- comfortable seating: offering a portable folding chair for everyone (including the accompanying persons) and wheelchairs,
- easily accessible roads,
- only offered between April and October due to weather conditions: accessibility of paths and temperature due to sitting position (slow art technique: 3 to 4 works of art).

There are parking places nearby, but especially the two 'park and ride' places at the entrance of the museum where the guided tour starts are important. The museum guides are ready at the entrance before the guided tour starts to welcome all people, so that the attendant can then look for parking.

Day, time & duration

Guided tours are offered to individual visitors and their caregivers as well as to residents from assisted living facilities and their caregivers.

For individual visitors and their caregivers:

- Every third Sunday of the month from April to October
- Flexible registration (possible up to the last minute)
- Time: 2-4 pm (this was checked with the caregivers: ideal time because of other practical needs in the morning or afternoon)
- Duration: 1.5 hours + 30 min. closure
- Tour can take place from 2 persons (one individual visitor with caregiver)
- Cancellation possible on the same day until 11 am if weather conditions do not allow for a comfortable tour
- Museum as organiser

For residents from assisted living facilities and their caregivers:

- On request from April to October
- Booking at least three weeks in advance
- On a Friday, but in consultation with the museum guide can also be on another day (depending on the organization of the facility and when the van is free)

- Time: determined in consultation with the facility
- Cancellation possible on the same day until 11 am if weather conditions do not allow for a comfortable tour
- Duration: 1.5 hours + 30 min. closure
- Facility as organizer

Group size

Maximum 6 to 8 people with (young-onset) dementia + one caregiver per person with dementia.

The Middelheim Museum works with a maximum of 15 adults for this activity. A small group is important for 2 reasons:

- everyone must be able to understand each other, and
- there must be enough room to view the works of art from the different angles.

For the guided tours on Sundays, the maximum number is more flexible. On Sundays, things are a little less organized, as it is sometimes a pleasant excursion for participants with their families. Several family members can join.

Supervisors and hosts

The two museum guides who give the Meet me @ Middelheim tours have had training as museum guides. They have also written a thesis on the 'Meet me @' guided tours as part of their training as museum guides. They have both accompanied a parent suffering from dementia for many years. Since then, they have continued to pursue further training and engage in dialogue with the Flemish Alzheimer's League, as well as with the caregivers at the residential care centres.

Guided tours on Sundays for individual visitors and their caregivers:

- Two museum guides are present. They take turns discussing art works. The guide who does not speak takes care of the logistic support and facilitates the discussion of the art work by the colleague-guide.

Guided tours for residents from assisted living facilities and their caregivers:

- There is one museum guide. This museum guide also provides extra care on a practical level (carrying folding chairs, giving someone an arm or pushing a wheelchair). The museum guide should ideally be accompanied by a second museum guide. The park is large and if, for example, someone urgently needs to go to the toilet during the tour, it is sometimes necessary for the second museum guide to show someone the way.

Museum stewards do not play an active role in this activity.

Materials & facilities

Material:

- Two wheelchairs
- A portable folding chair per participant
- Sheet with stickers (special textile stickers so that it does not affect the clothing)
- A pen
- Postcard of one of the sculptures from the guided tour per participant
- Additional didactic material depends on the tour:
 - photographs: do not always seem to work with this activity
 - music: a radio cassette or mp3 which the guides bring along themselves; the museum has a few tablets available, but Wi-Fi in the park is not always very stable
- Gloves if there are people in the group with sight problems (some of the sculptures can be touched with care)

Facilities:

- Nearby toilets that are also accessible for wheelchair users
- A place where the group can meet to round off the tour (possibility of a drink)

Costs

For individual visitors and their caregivers:

- Free guided tours
- Can be cancelled until 11 am on the morning of the activity in case of bad weather.

For residents from assisted living facilities and their caregivers:

- Paid tours: €95 for the museum guide and a booking fee of €20 (due to booking office with which the city tourism department works).
- Can be cancelled until 11 am on the morning of the activity in case of bad weather.

Name tags

The museum guides have a badge from the City of Antwerp Middelheim Museum with their first and last name on. The participants may address the museum guide by first name.

At the beginning of the tour, the museum guide asks the participants if they would like to give their first name and put on the sticker. This makes the guided tour much more personal. The museum guide also sticks a sticker with the first name on it.

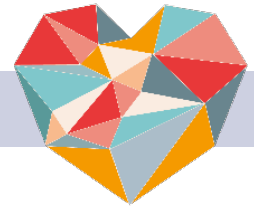
Memento

The museum guide hands out a postcard of one of the sculptures from the guided tour to the participants. The reason for this is that the Middelheim Museum considers it important to provide a memento. The souvenir can lead to discussions in a group or family setting afterwards.

Afterwards

Sometimes photographs are taken. Permission is always requested for this. When used for publication, a permission form is asked to be signed, usually in consultation with the accompanying person.

Communication & Registration



Communication

The activity is communicated in different ways. The focus of the communication is always on joining together and enjoying art in the park. The communication for the guided tours on Sundays emphasizes the conversation with people suffering from (young-onset) dementia, as the group can be larger due to several family members joining in.

Online communication by the museum's public activities department:

- General mailing before the start of the season (end of January) with repetition in April/May: to assisted living facilities; to previous participants, a number of educational programs such as ergotherapy and senior citizens' counsellors from the city
- On the museum website

Offline communication by the museum's public activities department:

- Handing out flyers in assisted living facilities or pharmacies

Occasional communication by external organizations:

- The Alzheimer's League Flanders
- The Flemish Council of the Elderly (advisory and consultative board of the elderly in the Flemish government)
- The Flanders Centre of Expertise on Dementia
- Via Elena de Riu from Dementia Friendly Ghent (cooperation between all kinds of partners to give people with (young-onset) dementia a full place in the city): mobilizes candidates for the guided tour.

Registration

Individual visitors (guided tour on Sundays):

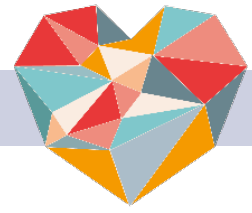
- Spontaneous participation, no registration required to make the activity as accessible as possible.

Supervisors of assisted living facilities:

- They can register by e-mailing or telephoning the museum guides or the head of public activities department.
- The final booking for a guided tour is made via the Middelheim Museum's website, where they are directed to the booking office's website for payment. It is also clearly stated there that they can contact the museum for additional information.

- Upon registration, a confirmation is sent via e-mail which includes the program. This also states that the guided tour starts at the main entrance where the museum guide will be waiting to welcome the group. A brief description of the route can be found on the museum website and the booking office.
- The museum guide always contacts the assisted living facility by telephone to confirm the activity, but also to tune the theme and approach to the needs. The museum guide will also ask if there are any special needs. For example, whether there are people with hearing, sight or physical disabilities.

Description & Program



First there is a personal welcome at the main entrance because it is the most accessible place. There, people are welcomed by the museum guide and wait for everyone to arrive. The welcome ritual is of the utmost importance in creating a welcoming environment.

This is followed by a clear introduction to reassure the group, in which the museum guides

- introduce themselves,
- and then the name stickers are made (ask permission before addressing the participants by their first name).

The introduction briefly touches on the history of the Middelheim Museum. Then a short explanation is given of the program and what they can expect:

- the number of artworks (3 or 4) they will be looking at,
- the theme (broadly chosen for interaction), and
- the aim, which is to look and enjoy together.

As for the choice of art works, for the guided tours for assisted living facilities, a number of themed tours have been developed that can be chosen when booking, while for Sundays, a new tour is always being developed.

Then the group walks to the first sculpture, where the museum guide places the group around the sculpture. All participants are seated. By sitting down, the museum guide creates an atmosphere that makes the participants more focused. The same structure is always followed:

- The museum guide first focuses on looking and experiencing. The guide stimulates them to look at the sculpture from different angles. The guide asks questions that lead to the observation of the work of art. It is important to give the participants some time.
- The museum guide proceeds to describe the work of art, namely what do the participants see? The guide lets as many people as possible speak. There is no wrong answer. The guide also repeats the answers. For people with poor eyesight, the guide uses the technique of verbal description. It is a method in which the work of art is described in a proper way, such as the size, the colour, the material, etc.
- The museum guide asks questions in order to reach an interpretation. If there are few reactions, the guide will fill in more information and if there are reactions, the guide will respond to that. A sense of humour is very important.
- Afterwards, the museum guide concludes with an explanation of the artist and the possible intention / background of the work (art historical information).

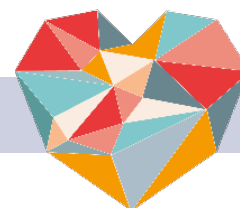
Then the group walks to the next sculpture where this experience process is repeated. During the guided tour, the presence of a second museum guide providing logistic support is a plus. This can ensure a certain continuity of the story. Moreover, that person can also help with listening to reactions. The two guides can switch roles when they discuss the next work of art.

At the end of the tour, people sit down together for half an hour on the castle's terrace (outside and easily accessible) where they can have a drink or eat a cake if they like. Chatting together is a

very important part of the tour. This is a very informal closing where the participants are asked about their experiences and reflections. The museum guides try to make contact again on an individual basis, paying attention to each participant. Depending on the response, the guides will also tell more or go deeper into the reactions. It is also a time for caregivers to talk to each other. This is also the moment when the postcards are given.

Finally, the group is escorted to the exit where they are picked up and waved goodbye.

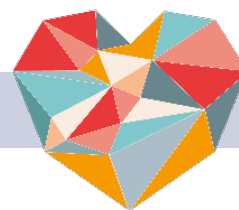
Evaluation



The activity is evaluated at the end of the tour. The museum guide asks questions and gauges the experiences of the participants. After the tour an evaluation form is also sent to the people who booked a tour via the website.

The caregivers of the participating residential care centres provide invaluable feedback. After all, they have a lot of experience in working with people with dementia. However, this does not happen structurally.

Checklist, when to do what



Three weeks before the activity

- ☐ Check whether the activity is clearly listed in the museum calendar.

The week before the activity

- ☐ Send personal e-mail to previous individual visitors inviting them for the guided tour on Sunday.
- ☐ The guide should contact the assisted living facility by telephone (discuss theme, needs).
- ☐ Share weekly museum calendar of all guided tours with guides, museum stewards and cafeteria staff to inform them when the activity takes place. This allows the museum guide to make last minute adjustments so that the ideal setting is created.
- ☐ Check that portable folding chairs and wheelchairs are in order.
- ☐ Check that sticker papers are in order.

The day before the activity

- ☐ Check weather conditions (cancel in case of bad weather).

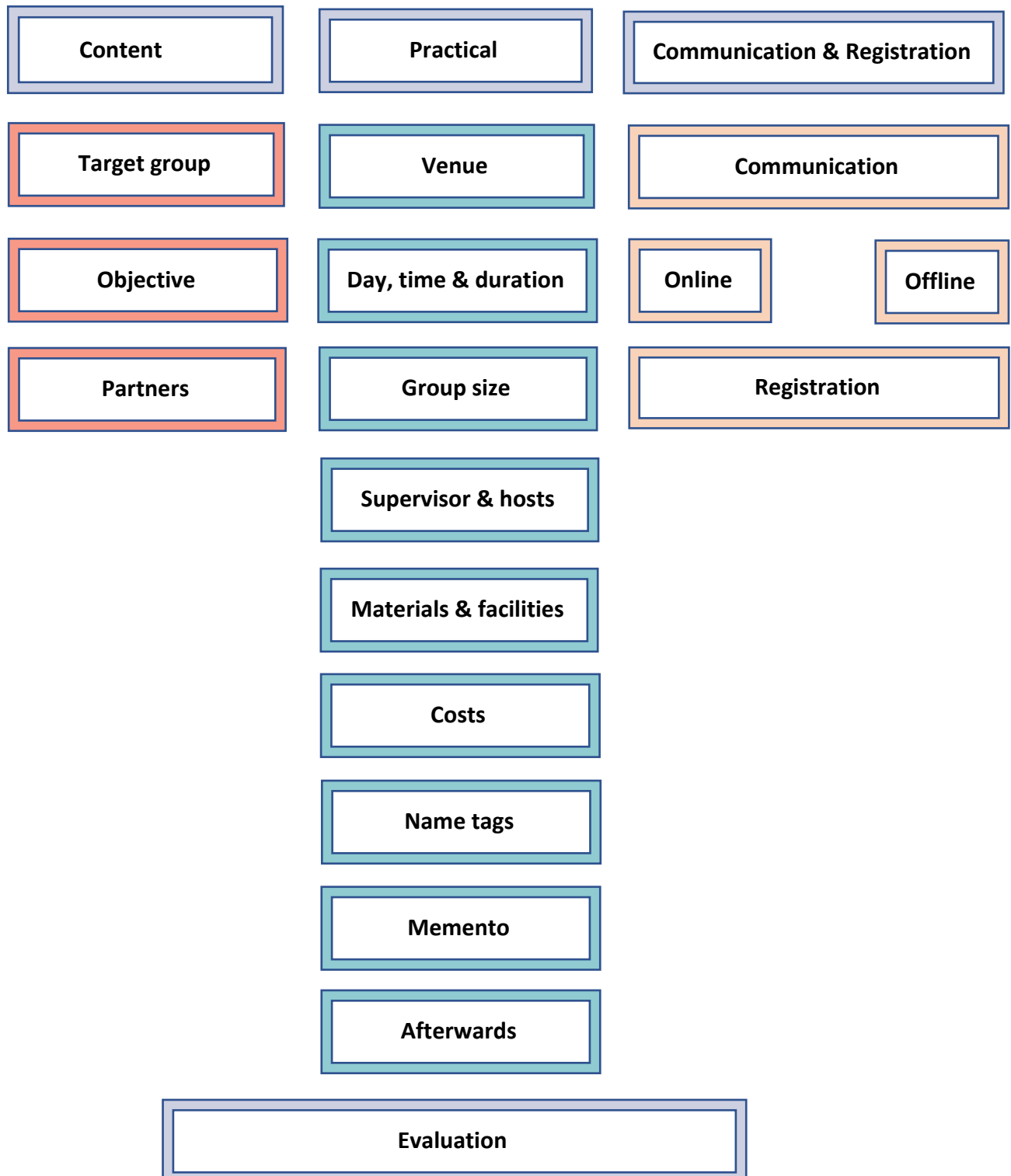
Day of the activity

- ☐ Check weather conditions (cancel in case of bad weather).
- ☐ Set up portable folding chairs and wheelchairs (with help from reception staff).
- ☐ Prepare sticker sheets with marker.

Corona

The activity was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, the activity could only take place during the months of July, August, September and October. The museum guides always wore a mouth mask which made them difficult to understand at times. Organising an alternative was and is not an option because the experience in the park is central to this guided tour. Moreover, it is precisely a target group that must be very careful during the corona period, and mixing generations is not recommended. For the guided tour on Sundays, individual visitors had to register during this period by mailing or calling the museum guides or the head of public activities department.

Points of attention



“The fact that participants in our program return month after month confirms the value and significance of these guided tours.”



Copyright Jan Dirkx

“During the walk between artworks, enjoying nature, caregivers can network with each other, which gives them great support.”

“People with dementia and caregivers are encouraged to look, experience and talk ... and that translates into memories, stories and humour.”



Copyright Jan Dirkx



Copyright Middelheim Museum

“Our guided tours are social happenings.”

“The way the museum guides engage the participants with dementia and patiently ask for their comments and impressions results in remarkable experiences for both the person with dementia and the caregiver.”