

R-Age

A Definition of Love

Document of a project commissioned by
Heart of Glass

by Alison Kershaw & Another Adele with Sandra Bouguerch in collaboration with people living with dementia in St Helens

A Reading Group about Dementia

Alison Kershaw is a contemporary visual artist and partner Adele Fowles is a performance artist: Another Adele. This is their first collaboration around the theme of dementia.

“We both have experience of someone living with Alzheimers Disease in our own families and so researching and developing this idea was very important to us personally. We have also invited artist Sandra Bouguerch to collaborate on R-Age.

In our practice we ask What is the role of the artist? (by which we also mean the writer, the poet, the film maker, the playwright) Perhaps the role of the artist in our society has been to look and interpret the world; to reflect life back to us; to offer a guide, a map or a model to inform our view. The artist looks at life from all angles, from inside out and from outside in. The artist may exaggerate, enlarge, focus in on details; look at colours, textures, sounds, shapes, moods, events or behaviours. The artist challenges our perceptions and preconceptions. He or she plays with ideas and materials and invents something new; the artist does something that nobody asked them to do.

Our part of the project is to think about and examine the way that writers, film-makers, poets and painters have interpreted, described and made sense of the experience of dementia by examining how it is for people living with the disease and the people around them. How have artists living with dementia used art to communicate? What do we learn about ourselves, the subject and the artist from their approaches.

The project was not a literature course - we are not English teachers. Adele read out loud to the participants, (which is a kind of long lost luxury from our childhoods) and we watched films together as well as providing texts to take away and a full reading list. The books, films and paintings were a way into discussions and sharing our own experiences. We recorded our discussions, parts of which form a sound track to the final film collaboration with Sandra Bouguerch: *R-Age (A Definition of Love)* Working with all the participants has been a real pleasure and we thank them for all their input.”



On the last day we all went to Crosby to see Antony Gormley's sculptural installation *Another Place*. The artist made a cast of his body and the "iron men" now stand stoically surveying the horizon, rooted to the sand and at the mercy of the elements. We had a picnic and posed for photos with all the books we'd read.

& A Laboratory of Creative Experiments

Whilst one group were reading about dementia in novels, films and poetry, our other participants worked with Sandra in the creative art studio.

“I am an interdisciplinary artist whose late father was diagnosed with Lewy Bodies dementia in 2012. Whilst in my care Terence enjoyed art, collaborating whole-heartedly throughout my artistic development, using video, sculpture, print and photography to create artworks.

My contribution to R-Age was facilitating a series of convivial creative sessions collaborating with the participants through a sharing of dialogue to spark creative responses based upon gesture and movement alongside themes of identity and memory.

A playful medium of cornflower mixed with water and PVA glue was explored as a unique *unstable structure* containing unusual properties, which depending on how it is handled is both solid and liquid. This medium increases with stress and acts differently depending on how much force you apply. We experimented with the sensory addition of colour, texture, food flavourings and additional memory objects.

The sessions were recorded throughout with video and photography, which was edited and mixed with the reading group's audio files to make a film encompassing the journey we all experienced.”

A Definition of Love

Love is work
 Love is the tedious
 repetitive
 day in
 day out
 boring, tiring chores
 mopping up
 feeding
 washing
 shopping
 appointments
 appointments

And in the midst of these
 and despite these,
 being with you
 listening
 paying attention
 cherishing
 valuing
 hearing

Importantly
 not forgetting,
 being heard
 listening to your
 own heart
 Finding space
 to be
 Who you are
 making sure
 You aren't lost

Working through
 Time passing
 Looking at you
 seeing past everything
 not forgetting anything
 as you forget everything

and
 connecting
 eyes
 hands
 and hearts

moments of
 fleeting
 explosive
 engulfing
 miraculous
 joy

Alison Kershaw



A Definition of Love

Love is acceptance
 Love is swallowing anger and
 laughing instead
 Love is a feeling that
 this cant go on
 And knowing it must
 and it does
 and it will

Love is acceptance
 Love is knowing that the
 weekends aren't ours
 And being grateful for the
 weekends we share

Love is a feeling of injustice
 And remembering to always
 remember
 that life isn't fair

Love is acceptance
 Love is biting your tongue
 so hard
 that it hurts

Love is a feeling that this was
 always so
 And always will be so,
 Let Be

Love is films and poems and art
 Love is music and dance
 and Shakespeare

Love is what will we have for tea?
 And who will walk the dog?

Love is walking the dog
 In the wind and the rain and the
 mud and the nettles
 And the sun

Adele Fowles



The Gulf Stream by William Homer hangs in the Metropolitan Museum Of Art in New York. In the novel *We Are Not Ourselves* by Matthew Thomas, Ed and his teenage son Connor visit the museum. Connor is surprised by his father's knowledge of the painting despite his failing memory.

What is Love?

Love is patient, Love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast
 it is not proud, it is not self serving, it is not angered
 it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth
 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres
 Love never fails

Love is Bill laughing at my grumpiness
 Love is Bill making me fish fingers for breakfast
 Love is Bill encouraging me to achieve the best when I preach in
 church, encouraging me when I have self doubt.

Bill, not being aware of his gifts and talents,
 He's never been proud
 Never swearing (well, untill recently)
 Love is Bill asking me every day this week
 "Have you got another cold?"
 Bill standing in the cupboard asking
 "Is it safe to come out yet?" with a broad grin on his face
 He delights to make me laugh

Love is Bill, not remembering the bad times,
 Sometimes its good to have Alzheimers.
 Love is Bill, saying it as it is, he always tells the truth
 Love is us, facing an uncertain future - but doing it together
 Love is caring for each other and wanting the best
 Love is trusting each other - even though
 Bill cant remember where he is or who he is or who I am.

Love is hoping for a good future, for the best is yet to come.
 Love is an eternal hope that keeps us together - even when things
 are bad.

Love is persevering when its hard to love,
 hard to trust, hard to keep going

Love will win out, when all else fails
 Love remains when all else is gone
 This is what Love is.

Jane Burgess





Texts

This is the complete list of artworks, texts and films that we looked at during the project plus a couple of new books we've come across recently. You may like to read them yourself and share with friends. You may also have other books / plays and films you could suggest for future editions of this project. As well as reading, participants were encouraged to write their own journal - poems and thoughts about the project.

King Lear by William Shakespeare

Great Expectations by Charles Dickens

Elizabeth is Missing by Emma Healey

We Are Not Ourselves by Matthew Thomas

Still Alice by Lisa Genova (+ the film)

Iris (film) - based on biography *The Iris Trilogy* By John Bayley

The Corrections by Jonathan Franzen

The Bear Came Over The Mountain by Alice Munro

(+ film *Away From Her*)

Take Care, Son - The Story of My Dad and His Dementia

by Tony Husband

Stammered Songbook by Erwin Mortimer

The Mother and The Father (play) by Florian Zeller

The Forgetting by David Shenk

Paintings by William Utermohlen can be found at www.williamutermohlen.org

poems - a selection of poems including:

Do Not Go Gently Into That Good Night by Dylan Thomas

When You are Old and Grey and Full of Sleep by William Butler Yates

Sonnet LXXIII by William Shakespeare

Alzheimer's Things That Matter by Herb Collins

The Old Fools by Philip Larkin

You Are Old Father William by Lewis Carroll

Forgetfulness by Billy Collins

All The Worlds a Stage (from *As You Like It*....by William Shakespeare)

I Love Your Beautiful Mind by Paul Delaney (inspired by a visit to the Dementia Activity Group in St Helens)



You can find all the poems online and the books can be ordered at the library / online or at any good bookshop.

About Heart of Glass and the R-Age project

Heart of Glass is an arts commissioning project supporting work made with, for and about St Helens people and place. We support artists and communities to make ambitious new work, working with organisations throughout the borough to bring artists and the community together.

We are St Helens' response to the Creative People and Places programme, made possible by investment from Arts Council England (ACE). We are one of 21 Creative People and Places programmes supported by ACE across the country.

This initiative is designed to get more people involved in the arts and so far more than 50,000 people have played a part in our projects to date.

Heart of Glass invited Alison Kershaw to respond to a partnership with Adult Health and Social Care at St Helens Council, where discussion led to a focus on bringing artists and dementia carers together to provide respite and outlet through creativity.

A pilot project, R-Age was conceived as a creative intervention, to look at how the arts can be used to support dementia carers whilst offering worthwhile and creative sessions for the people they cared for.

Alison, Adele and Sandra's sessions offered diverse subject matter, inviting genuine and personal responses and conversations. Feedback from participants highlighted that the sessions offered challenging and engaging content as well as genuine respite, a unique opportunity in itself.

We hope that this project can set a precedent, encouraging opportunities for self facilitating groups and continuing support for dementia carers.

For more information visit www.heartofglass.org.uk



About Alheimers Society in St Helens

Policy drivers across England, Northern Ireland and Wales aim to ensure that all people with dementia and their carers are supported to live well with dementia. Improving the quality of services and improving the quality of life for people with dementia and their families is at the heart of Alzheimer's Society's 2012–17 strategy, *Delivering on Dementia*.

The St Helens Dementia Support Service aims to provide services developed specifically for people with dementia, carers and family members. The Support workers can provide information and ongoing support by phone, email, letter or face-to-face at the service user's own home or other appropriate location in accordance with the service user's preference and assessed need.

We aim to continuously seek to improve the quality of our services and to ensure that they are led and developed by those who use them. But we can't do it alone – we seek to work collaboratively where there are clear benefits for people with dementia and this art project has been of great benefit to the person diagnosed with dementia and their care giver.

If you are in need of support or would like further information please contact: St Helens Dementia Support Service
Tel: 0151 420 8010 e-mail: sthelens@alzheimers.org.uk

Details of artwork produced during the workshops. Photos by Sandra Bouguerch and Stephen King.



St. Helens Council

Leading the fight
against dementia
**Alzheimer's
Society**

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OF GLASS**



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
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