

# Creatively Engaging People with Memory Loss

Shelly Rollins: Schlitz Audubon Nature Center  
Ann Marie Craig: Museum of Wisconsin Art

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## Shelly Rollins



- Environmental Educator, Schlitz Audubon Nature Center since 2004
- Undergraduate in Fine Arts –Painting and Art History minor from Northern Illinois University
- Masters Degree in Education –Curriculum and Instruction with Outdoor Teacher Certification from Northern Illinois University
- Co-leading center SPARK! program since fall 2016

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## Schlitz Audubon Nature Center



Located on Lake Michigan in Bayside, WI  
(NE Milwaukee County)

Our mission is to conserve our land's diverse habitats on Lake Michigan and provide meaningful experiences and environmental education for all.

Conducting 18-20 SPARK! programs a year since 2016

**Spark sessions are held twice monthly:  
2nd Tuesday/3rd Thursday of every month except July/August.**



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## Ann Marie Craig

### Adult Programs Coordinator

Background in nursing and education, including art education

Creative Entrepreneur

Art + Wellness

SPARK! at MOWA

**SPARK! sessions are held twice monthly at MOWA:  
on the second Sunday and the third Wednesday**

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## Museum of Wisconsin Art

MOWA is a different kind of museum. We believe that where we live is important and we are passionate about Wisconsin. Everything we exhibit and talk about has been made by an artist with deep connections to the state. Our main "mothership" campus is in West Bend, Wisconsin.

MOWA | DTN is located in the beautiful St. Kate Hotel in downtown Milwaukee.



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In addition to its primary venues, MOWA partners with community organizations to make its programs and collections accessible and free in neighborhoods throughout the state.



In Madison, MOWA partners with the Governor and First Lady on an annually curated exhibition in the Governor's Executive Residence, where people can enjoy Wisconsin on a public tour.



MOWA partners with the trendy retirement campus of Saint John's on the Lake in downtown Milwaukee hosting exhibitions that are open to the public.

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- SPARK! is a cultural program for people with early to mid-stage memory loss and their care partners.
- Programs are designed to keep participants actively engaged in their communities by providing sensory experiences that stimulate conversations, provide peer support and inspire creativity through creative engagement, workshops and programs.
- SPARK! programs typically last 60-90 minutes and group sizes are limited, so please pre-register for the programs you plan to attend. Each program is unique and include topics such as cooking, art-making, drama/dance, music/song, poetry and storytelling.
- SPARK! programs are **FREE** for families to attend together in a comfortable environment led by specially trained staff and volunteers.

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- The SPARK! Alliance is a foundation of museums, nature centers, and cultural centers committed to programming for people with memory loss and their care partners.
- In 2009, the founding 10 institutions chosen by the Helen Bader Foundation (now, Bader Philanthropies, Inc.) established a forward-thinking program of collaboration and cross-connected policies and procedures that help new institutions and organizations begin engagement programs that are accessible to families living with Alzheimer's, dementia and memory loss.
- The SPARK! Alliance has continued to develop and grow as individual organizations and through collaborative trainings and program development. Hosting an annual engagement training and conference, the SPARK! Alliance works together to cultivate, strengthen and multiply programs centered on the art of memory loss engagement.

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17 years with 39 active program locations, including Iowa and Texas.  
COME GROW WITH US!



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- What does SPARK! stand for?
- SPARK! is not an acronym, it's something that happens between care partners when engaged in a stimulating and engaging experience – SPARKing a moment together – living in the moment.



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But first, a song.

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### Today's Activities: Kelly Jean's World

We will introduce the artist Kelly Jean Ohl and spend a little time in the world of texture. Before we create, we will experience sights, sounds, and sensations to help us relate to Kelly Jean's life and work. We will express ourselves every step of the way!

Notice the way we set participants up for success by using:

- uncomplicated materials
- large print resources
- simple, clear language and context
- affirmations of success
- sensory stimulation

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## Kelly Jean Ohl

Kelly Jean Ohl received a Bachelor's Degree in both Theatre and Art, as well as a Master of Arts degree with an emphasis in ceramics from Minnesota State University. She also earned a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Michigan. She taught foundation art courses at Winona State University for three years.

Her work has been featured and sold in over 70 galleries across 25 states. It is also in private collections in all 50 states and internationally in 17 countries.

Kelly Jean's work won first place in the 2024 WVAA Biennial at MOWA and as the winner, her work was exhibited as a solo show in our State Gallery as part of this year's Biennial.



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## Threads of Interconnectedness



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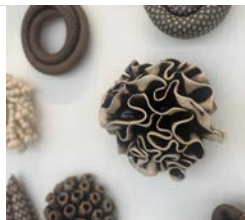
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Kelly Jean Ohl's work begins with the quiet rhythm of domestic work. She collects the textures, marks, and patterns made by household tools and handmade textiles – many gifted from her grandmothers – to impress a history of touch into soft clay. Although her pieces resemble natural elements like seed pods, eroded fossils, oceanic creatures or microscopic life, Ohl's intent is to create objects rooted in the material world yet open to interpretation – familiar, yet mysterious.



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After hand-carving, the surfaces are burnished, sanded, stained, and fired multiple times, allowing the clay to develop a tactile richness that rewards close looking. Oxides, slips, and natural materials create patterned layers, much like the growth rings of a tree or the shifting layers of earth. These humble forms and artifacts become the starting point for ceramic sculptures that explore memory, nature, and the subtle forces that shape us. Drawn to the meditative intimacy of hand-building, each of Ohl's pieces develops slowly, an amalgamation of marks and revisions that reflect both familial ties and the interconnectedness of the natural world.

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Exploring texture is a sensory process:

What textures do you see?

Music textures are layered or syncopated.

What does food feel like on your tongue?

Use a word to describe what things feel like.

Can you smell texture?

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## Time to create!



During an art project, people with memory loss will likely need lots of repetition of the instructions. We state things simply and give permission to do it their own way.

We are mindful of our material choices, avoiding things that are very tiny, very sharp, etc.

We give validation/praise and assistance, and we converse about their artwork without bombarding them with too many questions.

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## Closing out the SPARK! session

**Sing a song:** Happy Trails to You; So Long, Farewell; You Are My Sunshine; Show Me the Way to Go Home...

**Recite a slogan:** "I am important, I am a friend, I am loved, I will see you next time!"

**Affirmations and thank yous:** I'm so happy you were with us today!

Did you have fun?

Thank you for trying something new!



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## Past Program Highlights



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Past Program Highlights

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### Time for Trivia!



- What does SPARK! stand for?
- What types of organizations can host a SPARK! program?
- How much do we charge people to attend a session?
- Who should you contact if you want to start a SPARK! program?

If you are interested in bringing SPARK! to your community, contact...

Tricia Blasko  
 Director of Education  
 Racine Art Museum/RAM's Wustum Museum  
 262.636.9573 [tblasko@ramart.org](mailto:tblasko@ramart.org)

Visit <https://www.sparkprograms.org/> to learn more!

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### Closing Thoughts

What will you take away from this session? Any questions?




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Thank you!



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