

Alzheimer's art creates lasting memories

September 9 2009, by Jennifer Fitzenberger



Linda Scheck of UCI MIND ponders a painting by Alzheimer's patient Tim Dunn on display in Biological Sciences III. Dunn created "The Farm and Silo" during the mid-stage of the disease, when he had become less vocal and bolder in his artwork. The former science teacher said of his illness: "Life is sort of like a bridge game. You just play the hand you're dealt." Photo: Daniel A. Anderson

Nine paintings created through an Alzheimer's Association program called Memories in the Making are on display at UCI MIND.

As [Alzheimer's disease](#) plunged Tim Dunn deep into darkness, the former Santa Ana High School science teacher painted artwork in bright red, orange, yellow and blue.

"You'd think when people are lost and isolated in Alzheimer's that their paintings would be gloomy, but they're not. They're joyful and beautiful and loving," says Linda Scheck, community relations director at the UC Irvine Institute for Memory Impairments & Neurological Disorders.

Dunn's colorful work "The Farm and Silo" is on display at UCI [MIND](#) along with eight other paintings created through an Alzheimer's Association program called Memories in the Making.

UCI MIND advisory board member Jacque DuPont and local businessman Robert B. Rosenberg loaned the paintings to the institute, which installed them on a third-floor wall in Biological Sciences III.

Frank LaFerla, director of UCI MIND, says the art humanizes a disease that afflicts 5.3 million people in the U.S. and is the leading cause of dementia. Institute scientists are seeking potential treatments for Alzheimer's, which has no cure.

"The artwork helps our researchers identify with people they're hoping to help," LaFerla says. "It's vital to connect with real human beings suffering from the devastation of this disease."

Scientists don't know why people with Alzheimer's create such vibrant art. Though most have a tough time communicating verbally, they're usually able to express themselves in other ways, such as through dance, music and art.

"Patients go on a little adventure, and they paint," Scheck says. "If they have advanced dementia, they may forget they painted it, but the process and the sharing that occurs are powerful."

Kathy Terp, biological sciences academic counselor, is fascinated by the art. "I'm just amazed at what they're capable of doing when they get to that stage of life," she says. "This shows what's trapped inside."

The public may view the [artwork](#) during the institute's regular business hours. During an open house Tuesday, Sept. 15, UCI MIND will provide docent tours beginning at 4:30 p.m. The event will also feature a lecture

by Dr. Claudia Kawas on "How to Get Old: Lessons from 90-Year-Olds"
at 3:30 p.m. in the Biological Sciences III Lecture Hall, Room 1200.

Provided by University of California, Irvine

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