VTS demonstration at Henry Schnakenberg’s South Beach, Staten Island
Ruth Caccavale

Discussion of Artwork:
**Gallery Guide comments are in italics.
- Put yourself into the role of an older person who has memory loss.
- First, look at the painting.
- What is the first thing you notice in this painting?
  o Participant: Describing what it would feel like to be in the scene
  o Participant: Noticed that the clothing does not look modern
- Does anyone have a sense of when this might have been painted? (1919)
- Participant: A lot of people are wearing black bathing costumes
- Participant: The top 2/3 of the painting are very calm and quiet
- Participant: I wouldn’t want to be one of the people on the beach.
  o Why do you say that?
- What else do you notice?
- Can you tell me what that child is holding?
  o Ruth pulls out plastic bucket and a bag of sand to be passed around (engaging another sense).
  o Besides the sand pail, what other things have people brought with them to the beach?
- What might it be like on the beach today versus back then?
- Are there other things you notice in the painting?
- Ruth points out the Ferris wheel: What associations do you have with Ferris wheels?
- Does anyone have an idea where this painting might be depicting?
- We’ve talked about some of the things that might be at the beach. How might it feel to be at the beach?
  o What sounds might you hear? What smells?
- What other thoughts do you have about the painting?
  o Participant: Nobody is eating.
- Does anyone have a favorite beach they have been to or would like to go to?
- Is this the kind of painting that you would want to have in your home?
- Artist background: The artist went to an arts show in the armory in NY to see European Art. It inspired him to become an artist and join the Ashcan School.
  o What does that suggest to you?
- Anything else that you see?
  o Participant: Lights and shadows on figures.

Conversation Debrief:
Tell me how this conversation was. What worked and what didn’t work?

- Participant: This was a great piece to talk about, because there was so much in it.
  - Participant: On my tours, I find that portraits work well.
  - Participant: I like talking about abstract art, because you can go so many places with it.
- Participant: Rather than identifying the beach, could you have gone further with participant’s comments about Santa Monica Beach, Jones Beach?
- How much did I ask about memory?
  - Participant: You allowed for the past or the present, and managed to stay away from memory.
- Participant question: Do you prefer to stand or sit when you lead tours?
  - Ruth likes to stand- she’s enthusiastic and moves around a lot.
  - Some people prefer to sit (so that they are in the group with the participants).
- As a guide, I often rephrase and repeat what others have said, so the whole group can hear.
- Participant: Balance VTS with balancing info- sliding in a little information when participants want it.
- Participants: Activity was not done using pure VTS.
- Participant: Ruth used storytelling to tell us about the painting. Ex: How the artist decided to become an artist after the Armory Show.
Discussion of Artwork:

** Gallery Guide comments are in italics.

- Let's first take a moment to look at the piece together.
  - This work is from the exhibition All Matterings of Mind.
    - AMOM focuses on transcendentalism and mindfulness.
- Let's try some mindful breathing while we're looking at this work of art.
- First question for you – after breathing does the piece look different to you? After you looked at it for a while?
  - Participant: I see squares.
- What else did you notice?
- I like the idea of discussing what this work could be made of.
  - Participant: The work looks like thin pieces of rope dragged through the paint.
- Participant: It’s hard to find a calm place in the work.
- Participant: From far away the photo reminds me of childhood. From close-up, it reminds me of teacher who helped me to meditate.
  - The way that this participant is making associations is wonderful.
- Other things that you notice about this work?
  - Participant: Notices the color. Points out the blue and orange in the piece.
- What are you wondering about now?
- Ruth explains how the canvas was stretched.
- Does anybody else have an association to this work?
  - Participant: toothpaste
- Participant: Does anyone think this is restful?
  - We are seeing differences depending on where we are standing where we are focusing our attention.
- What do we think of when we think of transcendentalism?
  - Transcendentalism: “Going beyond"
  - Mindfulness
- If you were going to name this work what would you call it?
  - The title is Untitled 88-9-4.
  - The artist was expressing an idea – you may have to see more of his work to understand the themes.
- After the Korean War, artists created work that were existential.
- Participant: Do you ever use tactile and sensory items when looking at this kind of painting?
  - Ex. Cotton
  - Participant: It would be nice to have different textures for participants to feel and then things to smell.
  - Scents – related to meditation.
    - Can use smells with aging people
Discussion of VTS

Other conversations you want to have about using VTS?

- Participant: When if someone doesn’t like the art? What conversation do you have at this point?
- Participant: How many people do you have on a tour?
  o Usually between 10-12 visitors on each tours (1:1 ratio of care partner to individual with dementia).
  o Some tours have two groups running at the same time.
  o Each group is led by two Gallery Guides.
- What suggestions do you have?
  o Participant: ½ hour is a long time at one work.
  o Participant: Arms on chairs would be helpful.
  o Participant: Look at four things in one gallery (instead of moving between galleries).