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# Engagement with the visual arts increases mindfulness

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Engagement with the Visual Arts Increases Mindfulness

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Departmental Honors Thesis

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

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## Introduction

For many cultures throughout the ages, art has been synonymous with healing and has held a key role in many ancient spiritual and religious healing rituals.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, art has also been held as a hallowed and fundamental part of society and culture. However, the role of art is changing. Today the value of art-making is increasingly under scrutiny and often dubbed an unnecessary and unimportant luxury. Art is being slowly removed from school curricula and faces defunding. While art has never been more available, still too often art is quarantined in the isolated halls of museums and available only to the select few who have the luxury to go out of their way to be involved with the arts.

As art's role in contemporary society is increasingly questioned, another topic has enjoyed a surge in popularity: mindfulness. Contemporary psychology has seen a substantial increase in the study of mindfulness—in 2012 alone over 500 scientific articles on mindfulness were published, more than the total number of articles published about mindfulness from 1980 to 2000.<sup>2</sup> A large body of research indicates significant correlations between increased mindfulness and many positive psychological and physiological outcomes. These benefits suggest that mindfulness is a valuable tool for increasing general well-being and psychological health, and implies that mindfulness is likely to remain a popular subject of research in the near future.

Although both mindfulness and art have been proven to have a variety of positive outcomes, little research has explored the possible relationship between the visual arts and mindfulness. This is surprising given that the benefits of mindfulness and engagement with the

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<sup>1</sup> Mindfulness and the Arts Therapies: Theory and Practice. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2014: 12.

<sup>2</sup> Edo Shonin, William Van Gordon, and Mark Griffiths, "Mindfulness-Based Interventions: Towards Mindful Clinical Integration," [In English]. *Frontiers in Psychology* 4, no. 194 (2013): 1.

visual arts are very similar. Furthermore, the activities of mindfulness and art-making share several similarities, such as increased engagement with the present moment and regulation of attention.

Given this gap in research, I propose that engagement with the visual arts, through viewing but especially through creation, provides opportunities to cultivate mindfulness. Thus, interacting with art may result in many of the same psychological and physiological benefits of mindfulness. In this paper, I seek to demonstrate that interactions with art likely have more benefits than research has currently proven, that these benefits can be helpful for a wide population, and that engagement with any form of visual art likely results in many of the same benefits of mindfulness.

This paper first introduces the procedure for a study that was conducted to test the hypothesis that engagement with the visual arts increases mindfulness. Next, chapter one explores historical and modern understandings of mindfulness, provides examples of mindfulness, gives insight into misconceptions about mindfulness, and offers a brief history of the way the fields of psychology and art have incorporated mindfulness practices. Chapter two then examines several main benefits of mindfulness and engagement with the visual arts. In chapter three the methods, procedure, results from an experiment which was conducted as a part of this thesis are discussed. Qualitative and quantitative data gathered from this experiment will be included as examples throughout the paper after this point. Chapter four then examines why engagement with the visual arts may increase mindfulness through exploring the way that art keeps us fully engaged in the present moment. Chapter four also explains ways that one may cultivate an artistically mindful mindset outside of traditional mindfulness and art practices.

Finally, Chapter five discusses the implications a connection between art and mindfulness may have.

## **What is Mindfulness?**

### **Historical and Modern Definitions of Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a broad concept which is difficult to succinctly define. Henepola Guanaratana, a Buddhist monk and writer of *Mindfulness in Plain English*, explains this, saying that “mindfulness is extremely difficult to define in words—not because it is complex, but because it is too simple and open.”<sup>3</sup> Different disciplines and fields have varying definitions of mindfulness. Even the inventories mostly commonly used by psychologists to measure mindfulness levels, such as the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI), measure slightly different attributes and characteristics. Because of the subtleness of the concept, it is useful to examine both the traditional and modern understandings of mindfulness. Once the term is defined, this chapter describes examples of mindfulness practices and address common misconceptions about the term.

The concept of mindfulness first appears in ancient Buddhist writings. The Pali word for mindfulness is *sati*, which means “having awareness, attention, and remembering.”<sup>4</sup> *Sati* can also be understood as a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment, concentration, and development of the mind.<sup>5</sup> The concept of mindfulness also appears as the word *samma-sati*, or

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<sup>3</sup> Bhante, Guanaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*. 20th Anniversary ed. ed. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2011, 135.

<sup>4</sup> Daphne M. Davis and Jeffrey A. Hayes, "What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness? A Practice Review of Psychotherapy-Related Research," *Psychotherapy* 48, no. 2 (2011): 198.

<sup>5</sup> Windy Dryden and Arthur Still. "Historical Aspects of Mindfulness and Self-Acceptance in Psychotherapy." *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavior Therapy* 24, no. 1 (2006): 18-19.

“right mindfulness,” which is the seventh factor of the eightfold path in Buddhist tradition. Traditional Buddhist psychology relates mindfulness to a sense of curiosity, openness, compassion, and nonjudgmental attitude to anything that one may experience during the present moment.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the ancient Buddhist concept of mindfulness included aspects of general recollectedness, awareness, concentration, compassion, and self-possession. Together these traits were sometimes summarized as a “bare-attention.”<sup>7</sup> Originally mindfulness was cultivated through types of meditation such as *vipassana* (insight meditation) and yoga. These practices increase mindfulness through a focus on bodily sensations such as breath and movement, observation of internal states such as emotions and thoughts, and awareness of one’s surroundings.<sup>8</sup>

Contemporary psychology has kept many aspects of this traditional understanding of mindfulness. Usually mindfulness is conceptualized in a two-component model highlighting aspects of (a) awareness and attention and (b) acceptance.<sup>9</sup> The awareness and attention aspects of mindfulness are often described as having “a heightened or sustained attention to and awareness of current events and experience.”<sup>10</sup> In this definition, attention and awareness represent two distinct concepts. Awareness refers to the general observation and perception of the internal and external stimuli we are presented with at any given moment. Buchheld, Grossman, and Walach, the researchers who developed the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI), describe this awareness as a state of “choiceless awareness, where any and all experiences

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<sup>6</sup> Nina Buchheld, Paul Grossman, and Harald Walach, "Measuring Mindfulness in Insight Meditation (Vipassana) and Meditation-Based Psychotherapy: The Development of the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) by Nina Buchheld, Paul Grossman, and Harald Walach," *Journal for Meditation and Meditation Research* 1 (2001): 7.

<sup>7</sup> Dryden, "Historical Aspects of Mindfulness," 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> Davis, "What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness?" 199.

<sup>9</sup> Kirk Warren Brown and Richard M. Ryan, "Perils and Promise in Defining and Measuring Mindfulness: Observations from Experience," *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 11, no. 3 (2004): 243.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, "Perils and Promise in Defining," 243.



can be included as objects of observation.”<sup>11</sup> Attention is seen as the focusing of this awareness to highlight a specific stimulus or object.<sup>12</sup> Certain mindfulness practices focus on attention (i.e., concentration meditation), while others focus more on awareness (i.e., awareness or insight meditation), and others equally incorporate both aspects.

Awareness and attention are fundamental parts of mindfulness and are described in some manner in every definition of mindfulness provided by both ancient and modern sources.

Mindfulness is understood as a state of awareness and a practice that promotes this awareness.<sup>13</sup>

Jon Kabat-Zinn, the creator of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs, often defines mindfulness as the process of “becoming aware of what is on our minds from moment to moment, and of how our experience is transformed when we do so.”<sup>14</sup> Other researchers, such as Brown and Ryan (2004), describe mindfulness as “the monitoring, observing capacity of our consciousness. Mindfulness represents a heightened or sustained attention to and awareness of current events and experience.”<sup>15</sup>

Often individuals become confused about the difference between mindfulness and general thought. Guanaratana offers a helpful example to explain this difference based off the process of remembering your second-grade teacher: “If you are remembering your second-grade teacher, that is memory. When you then become aware that you are remembering your second-grade teacher, that is mindfulness. If you then conceptualize the process and say to yourself, “Oh, I am remembering,” that is thinking.”<sup>16</sup> Guanaratana further explains that mindfulness is a

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11 Buchheld, “Measuring Mindfulness in Insight Meditation,” 7.

12 Ibid, 243.

13 Davis, “What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness?” 198.

14 Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*, 2 ed.: Bantam, 2013: xxxiii.

15 Brown, “Perils and Promise in Defining,” 243.

16 Guanaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, 135.

form of nonconceptual awareness, meaning that mindfulness is a bare attention that “just looks.” He describes mindfulness as “observing all phenomena—physical, mental, or emotional—whatever is presently taking place in the mind. One just sits back and watches the show.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, mindfulness is being aware of the present moment and any thoughts or stimuli that arise during that moment. When practicing mindfulness, we do not allow our attention to focus on any particular stimuli or thought—instead we observe each of these things as they enter into our consciousness and then allow them to be replaced by the next stimulus. When engaging in normal, non-mindful thought however, we often are sidetracked by constantly appearing stimuli and are thus pulled out of the present moment because we begin focusing on one specific stimulus.

While attention and awareness comprises of the first component of mindfulness, the second component of mindfulness is acceptance. Here acceptance means a sense of openness and curiosity. Brown and Ryan combine both components to define mindfulness as “an *open* or *receptive* attention to and awareness of ongoing events and experience.”<sup>18</sup> Buchheld et al., describe mindfulness as a “moment-to-moment attentional, unbiased observation of any phenomenon in order to perceive and to experience how it truly is, absent of emotion or intellectual distortion.”<sup>19</sup> In this way, mindfulness allows us to consider our thoughts without “over-identifying with them and without reacting to them in an automatic, habitual pattern of reactivity.”<sup>20</sup> For example, when in a mindful state we may be more likely to notice our habitual reaction to a frustrating stimulus (i.e., starting to get angry because someone cut you off in

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, “Perils and Promise in Defining,” 245.

<sup>19</sup> Buchheld, “Measuring Mindfulness in Insight Meditation,” 6.

<sup>20</sup> Bishop, et al, “Mindfulness: A Proposed Operational Definition,” *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 11, no. 3 (2004): 232.

traffic), evaluate this event from a less emotionally biased standpoint, and then decide that the event is not worth a strong emotional reaction. Bishop et al. operationally define mindfulness as a form of “nonelaborative, nonjudgemental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is.”<sup>21</sup> In this way, when we are mindful, we are not only more aware of our experience during the present moment but we are also more accepting of whatever we are experiencing. For example, in mindfulness practices such as meditation, practitioners are instructed to be kind to themselves if they notice their mind wandering or if they are struggling. Mindfulness practices additionally teach individuals to give up expectations of the way a certain moment is supposed to go, thus allowing us to be more open to the unfolding of our experience instead of making value judgments. In sum, mindfulness encourages one to have an attentive, welcoming, and curious orientation to the present moment, unyoked from expectations or criticism.

During the development of the FMI, Buchheld and his colleagues distinguished four factors of mindfulness that summarize its aspects of attention, awareness, and acceptance. The first of these factors is “present-moment disidentifying attention,” which can be understood as detaching expectations and emotions from what one is experiencing that allows for an interpretation of reality that is less biased. Guanaratana compares this to an “impartial watchfulness,” during which individuals observe their thoughts without taking sides, making judgements, emotionally reacting, or attempting to control thoughts or reactions that may arise.<sup>22</sup> The second factor, “Nonjudgemental, nonevaluative attitude toward self and others,” is described as self-acceptance, tolerance, patience, and compassion towards oneself and others. The third

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Guanaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, 134.

factor, “openness to negative mind states,” is openness and acceptance of experiencing both positive and negative sensations. The final factor of mindfulness is “process-oriented insightful understanding of experience.” This can be described as a general, constant, and increased automatic awareness of every moment and all of one’s experiences, as well as an increased tendency to think about experience itself.<sup>23</sup> In totality, the operational definition of mindfulness as based on the FMI generally reflects the traditional understanding of mindfulness.

As described above, mindfulness has many different contextual interpretations and understandings. In the context of this paper, mindfulness is generally defined as “the moment-to-moment attentional, unbiased observation of any phenomenon in order to perceive and experience how it truly is, absent of emotion or intellectual distortion.”<sup>24</sup> For brevity’s sake, Buchheld’s definition can be summarized as an open minded, moment-to-moment awareness of current experience. Although other aspects of mindfulness, such as acceptance and compassion, are important in the traditional understanding of mindfulness, these aspects will not play an integral role in this discussion.

### **Examples of Mindfulness and Mindfulness Practices**

Not only a state of mind, mindfulness can also be understood as a practice.<sup>25</sup> Mindfulness practices or trainings can be described as “intentionally attending to the present moment with openness, acceptance, and care.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, mindfulness practices are activities in which individuals intentionally seek to cultivate and engage mindfulness. In Buddhist tradition mindfulness was usually cultivated through types of meditation and yoga. There are many

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<sup>23</sup> Buchheld, “Measuring Mindfulness in Insight Meditation,” 22.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Handbook of Mindfulness: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Guilford Press, 2015: 270.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

different styles of meditation; examples of common meditation styles include *vipassana* meditation (insight meditation), *zazen* meditation (Zen meditation), transcendental meditation, and loving-kindness meditation.<sup>27</sup> As a result of meditation's focus on cultivating awareness, attention, and openness, all forms of meditation can be considered mindfulness practices. Many different methods are used during meditation to cultivate mindfulness, including body scans, breathing exercises, or focusing on a mantra (a repeated statement), image, concept, or stimuli.<sup>28</sup> Both yoga and meditation are still used today to cultivate mindfulness.

Because mindfulness involves attention and awareness, mindfulness can arguably be practiced and cultivated during any moment in life that we are conscious and in control of our attentional facilities, not only when meditating or practicing yoga. Today, mindfulness is defined as a developmentally acquired psychological skill that can be improved through intentional practice.<sup>29</sup> Psychologists have additionally found that mindfulness is an inherent human trait that can be cultivated through many practices outside of those traditionally thought to increase mindfulness (i.e., meditation and yoga).<sup>30</sup> Thus, although many contemporary practices still use meditation as the main method of increasing mindfulness in interventions such as mindfulness based therapy (MBT), there is the potential that other practices and activities may also provide opportunities for individuals to practice and develop mindfulness. This concept is discussed in-depth at a later point.

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<sup>27</sup> Melissa Eisler, "11 Meditation Styles and Techniques Explained," <https://mindfulminutes.com/meditation-styles-techniques-explained/>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Buchheld, "Measuring Mindfulness in Insight Meditation," 15.

<sup>30</sup> Brown, "Perils and Promise in Defining," 246.

## Misconceptions About Mindfulness

Despite the many benefits of mindfulness that are described in the following pages, there are individuals who question the efficacy of the practice of mindfulness, saying it is unnecessary, unhealthy, advertised as an ultimate panacea, or unsuccessful. Perhaps in part to the popularity that mindfulness is enjoying, popular media sources such as newspapers and blogs are increasingly publishing articles that argue against mindfulness. One example is seen in *The Telegraph's* article, "The Mindfulness Backlash: Could meditation be bad for your health?" by Anna Hart. Hart explains her distress over her experiences in mindfulness by noting that, "I've wasted precious time that could have spent on something I love, and I've failed, again, at something seemingly everyone else finds both effortless and effective. I've given it my best shot, but mindfulness and me are not working out."<sup>31</sup> Like that author, those who are against mindfulness argue that mindfulness practices make them feel more stressed. Another frequent argument is that mindfulness essentially seeks "blank mental oblivion." As Theodore Zeldin, an Oxford University professor, historian, and President of the Oxford Muse Foundation wrote, "mindfulness and meditation are bad for people, I absolutely think that. People should be thinking."<sup>32</sup>

Most arguments against mindfulness, including the one mentioned above, result from a misunderstanding about what mindfulness really is. People who feel that mindfulness has failed them, or they have failed at it, often expect to feel a sense of relaxation and calmness after meditating or completing some other mindfulness practice. However, nowhere in any definition of mindfulness is a statement about relaxation, happiness, calmness, or bliss ever mentioned—

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<sup>31</sup> Anna Hart, "Mindfulness Backlash: Could Meditation Be Bad for Your Health?" *The Telegraph*, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

these concepts come from the overgeneralization of mindfulness and a limited subset of its demonstrated positive effects. Bishop et al. makes an argument against this very misconception, saying that “Mindfulness approaches are not considered relaxation or mood management techniques, however, but rather a form of *mental training* to reduce cognitive vulnerability to reactive modes of mind that might heighten stress and emotional distress or that may otherwise perpetuate psychopathology.”<sup>33</sup> Although humans naturally have the ability to be mindful, sustaining this form of attention for prolonged periods of time requires practice, time, effort, and experience. Although many studies have shown that mindfulness has positive benefits on even the most beginner practitioners, often times entering into a mindful state may not result in instantly recognizable benefits, particularly for those who are new to the practice.<sup>34</sup>

Some of the confusion around mindfulness also comes from individuals mistaking the concept of mindfulness with meditation. Although meditation is often used to cultivate mindfulness, it is only one of many mindfulness practices. If you recall the definitions established above of mindfulness, none of these definitions includes a description of sitting in silence, blocking out the world, or focusing only on oneself. In fact, mindfulness is often defined as a state of “open or receptive attention to and awareness of ongoing events and experience”—exactly the opposite of disengagement or blocking out one's surroundings.<sup>35</sup> Thus, many mindfulness practices actually increase our engagement with the world around us. Certainly, some forms of mindfulness practices, such as certain types of meditation, do emphasize a focus

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<sup>33</sup> Bishop, “Mindfulness: A Proposed Operational Definition,” 231.

<sup>34</sup> Gaëlle Desbordes, et al., “Effects of Mindful-Attention and Compassion Meditation Training on Amygdala Response to Emotional Stimuli in an Ordinary, Non-Meditative State,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 6, (2012): 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Handbook of Mindfulness*, 153.

on only the internal self. However, these styles of meditation are one of many forms of mindfulness practice.

It is additionally important to note that although mindfulness can be a state (temporary behaviors or feelings) or a trait (a stable characteristic), most individuals do not need to strive to achieve mindfulness in every waking moment of their day. Contrary to Theodore Zeldin's worries, mindfulness practitioners do not stop all their analytical, world-changing thinking. Indeed, advocates of mindfulness are not encouraging everyone to stop deep, existential thought in order to block out the world in pursuit of mental oblivion. In fact, mindfulness is a valuable tool that is used to increase our awareness of ourselves, the present moment, and our surroundings. Just like everything else in life, mindfulness must be balanced with other modes of thought, attention, and awareness.

Although much research has been done on mindfulness in recent decades, there is still more work to be done in understanding mindfulness, its applications, its practices, and its costs and benefits. Unfortunately, many people believe that because one form of mindfulness does not seem to work well for them, all forms of mindfulness are useless. For example, many people begin their journey with mindfulness through meditation—a form of mindfulness that takes intense concentration, patience, and that is often very difficult for beginners. These individuals simply need to find the form of mindfulness that works best for them, and they have plenty to choose from. We can cultivate mindfulness by focusing our awareness on our present experience no matter what we are doing. This means that anything you do—whether it is eating, walking through nature, breathing, paying attention to your body, cooking, or even washing dishes—could become an opportunity to practice mindfulness. This additionally means that one could use engagement with the visual arts as a method of increasing mindfulness.



This is one reason a connection between art and mindfulness may be useful—some people may find that mindfully engaging in an artistic activity has a lower barrier to entry than some other forms of mindfulness practices. Thus, engagement with the visual arts may be a form of mindfulness that is more accessible and less frustrating to some of the very people who are supposedly against mindfulness. In fact, many of the writers who argue against mindfulness list alternatives to replace mindfulness and often include painting as one example. Ironically, these lists also often include activities that are actually traditional mindfulness activities, such as deep-breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, and yoga. Mistakes such as these reveal that much of the ‘mindfulness backlash’ is simply a misunderstanding of what mindfulness is.

## **History of Mindfulness**

### **Mindfulness in Psychology**

Once relatively unknown to the western world, mindfulness is now a mainstream psychological construct and cognitive-behavioral practice. Mindfulness has also surged in popularity within the general American culture within the last few decades.<sup>36</sup> Mindfulness’ journey to America largely began with World War II—many American psychiatrists stationed in Japan returned home with a new interest in Japanese culture, Buddhist concepts, and mindfulness.<sup>37</sup> Psychologists began to incorporate mindfulness and meditation techniques into their psychotherapy practices—this trend was furthered by the humanist’s holistic approach to wellness and psychotherapy. The humanist model used mindfulness to help patients find personal transformation, greater than simple symptom relief, through gaining greater attention

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<sup>36</sup> Davis, “What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness?” 198.

<sup>37</sup> Dryden, “Historical Aspects of Mindfulness,” 15.

and awareness.<sup>38</sup> Other psychotherapy practices, such as Gestalt therapy, also began to use mindfulness to tap into creativity and to increase self-awareness. For example, Gestalt therapy asked patients to focus on stimuli experienced during the present moment, such as through increasing attention to thoughts or physical sensations, to cultivate self-awareness. Gestalt therapists additionally asked patients to release expectations so that they could become fully aware of whatever they are experiencing in the present moment.<sup>39</sup>

The 1950s and the 1960s saw a sharp rise in the number of books published on the topic of Zen Buddhism and mindfulness. Afterwards, the general American populace became progressively interested in Buddhism and the term “mindfulness” was frequently used for the first time outside of Buddhist culture and spheres.<sup>40</sup> By the 1990s, mindfulness had become a common topic of psychology research.<sup>41</sup> Today, dozens of mindfulness-based interventions and therapies are used in psychology—examples are mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), mindfulness cognitive therapy (MBCT), mindful awareness practices (MAP), and mindfulness-based art therapy.<sup>42</sup>

### **Mindfulness in Art**

As Buddhism and mindfulness increased in popularity in the 1950s and 1960s, these concepts also began to permeate the art world. Many artists and art movements of these decades became interested in eastern thought and philosophy, with some artists practicing Buddhism themselves and others simply being intrigued by its concepts. Ellen Pearlman, a writer, faculty

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>42</sup> Handbook of Mindfulness, 298.

member at Parsons School for Design, and a Buddhist practitioner, describes this in her book *Nothing and Everything—The Influence of Buddhism on the American Avant Garde: 1942-1962*. Pearlman explains that the devastation witnessed during World War II left many poets, writers, and artists exhausted and looking for a new way—many of whom turned to Eastern religions.<sup>43</sup> Pearlman writes that Zen Buddhism’s emphasis on “pacifism, nontheism, antimaterialism, and techniques of meditation and contemplation attracted many forward thinking individuals.”<sup>44</sup> The Dadaists, an avant-garde art movement from 1916 to 1924, and the Surrealism movement that followed it, are two such movements who were particularly fascinated with Zen philosophy.<sup>45</sup> Surrealism, an artistic movement that focused on channeling the unconsciousness as a way of increasing imagination, even had a motto that closely reflected a Zen kaon: “I came, I sat down, I departed.”<sup>46</sup>

Individual artists also became fascinated with eastern concepts, often studying Zen philosophy, or traveling to Zen monasteries and then sharing their new knowledge with their peers. One such example is Morris Graves, a Seattle painter and Dadaist. Graves had once been a worker on a merchant ship, and through his occupation had visited many cities in Asia. Throughout his lifetime, Graves was inspired by Asian aesthetics, the southern Sung tradition of Chinese painting, and Buddhism.<sup>47</sup> Graves is reported to have observed that artists have a natural inclination towards Buddhism, saying, “Zen stresses the meditative, stilling the surface of the mind and letting the inner surfaces bloom.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ellen Pearlman, *Nothing and Everything--the Influence of Buddhism on the American Avant Garde: 1942-1962*, Evolver Editions, 2012, XI.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>46</sup> Kary Larson, *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists*, Penguin Books, 2013: 78.

<sup>47</sup> Walter Smith, "Ad Reinhardt's Oriental Aesthetic." *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 4, no. 3/4 (1990): 25.

<sup>48</sup> Larson, *Where the Heart Beats*, 73.

Mark Tobey, a friend of Morris Graves's and fellow Zen aficionado, is another artist who took an interest in Buddhism.<sup>49</sup> Some of Tobey's most famous works include his "white writing" paintings that included calligraphic marks and symbols painted over a background of abstract brushstrokes.<sup>50</sup> An example of this style can be seen in Figure 1, showing Tobey's *Oncoming White*. Tobey began working on these paintings after spending a month in a Zen monastery outside of Kyoto in 1934. Tobey's interest in eastern philosophy was highly influential on many others in the arts.<sup>51</sup>

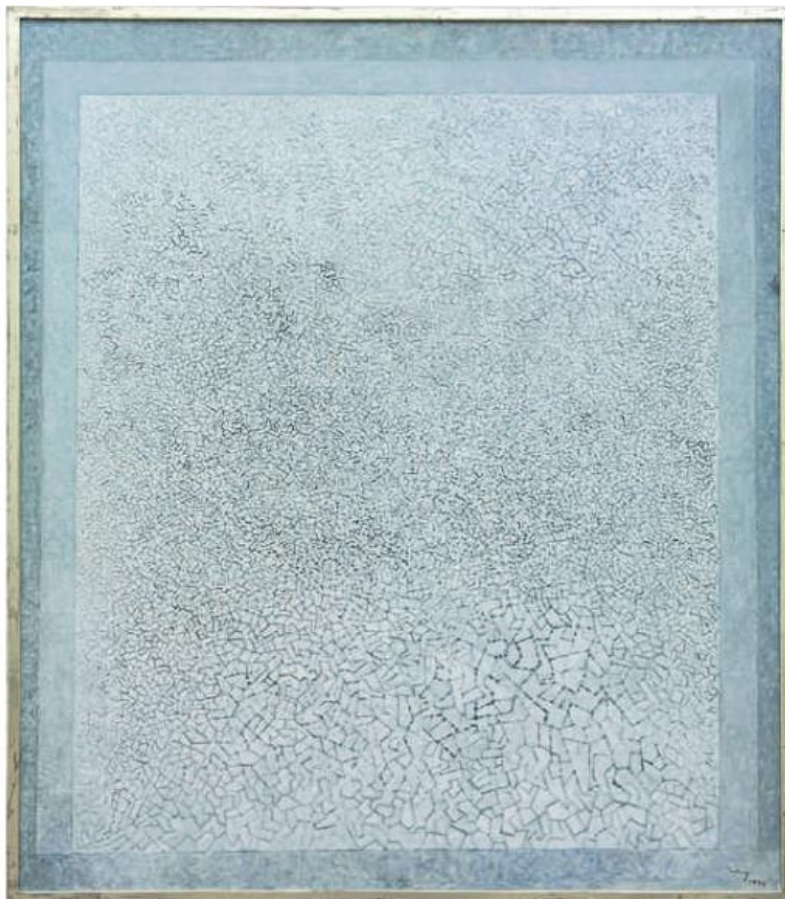


Figure 1. Mark Tobey, *Oncoming White*, 1972, oil on canvas, 241 x 203 cm

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>50</sup> "Mark Tobey: American, 1890-1976." <https://www.artsy.net/artist/mark-tobey>.

<sup>51</sup> Larson, *Where the Heart Beats*, 73.

Other artists, such as the abstract painter Ad Reinhardt, attended lectures in New York given by Zen teachers and extensively traveled in Asia and the Middle East.<sup>52</sup> Reinhardt also studied Asian art at New York University from 1946 to 1952, further cementing his interest in oriental art and thought.<sup>53</sup> Reinhardt's famous black paintings have been described as conceptually similar to the Hindu meditational diagrams called *yantras* because of their resemblance to a mandala in overall symmetry, orientation, and use of an all-over design without imagery.<sup>54</sup> The *Black Paintings* (1954-67) series is comprised of five-foot square canvases that had subtle shades of black which Reinhardt spent most of his later years creating.<sup>55</sup> Such a comparison is fitting because Reinhardt was reported to have used paintings such as these as



Figure 2. Ad Reinhardt, *Abstract Painting*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 60 x 60 in.

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<sup>52</sup> Smith, "Ad Reinhardt's Oriental Aesthetic," 26.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 37

<sup>55</sup> "Ad Reinhardt." [http://www.theartstory.org/artist-reinhardt-ad-artworks.htm#pnt\\_5](http://www.theartstory.org/artist-reinhardt-ad-artworks.htm#pnt_5).

focal points for meditation, “spending hours in his studio gazing at his works and meditating.”<sup>56</sup>

Reinhardt himself compared the act of creating and contemplating art to meditation, saying:

“Painting is... a matter of contemplation for me...Clarity, completeness, quintessence, quiet.”<sup>57</sup>

Art critics have compared viewing his paintings as a form of meditation as well, saying that because of their subtlety, these paintings require the viewer to linger in front of the canvases to see the differences in tones Reinhardt carefully created. Thus, the paintings become objects of contemplation for both artist and viewer, begging one to cultivate mindfulness and meditation by demanding prolonged, reflective attention.<sup>58</sup>

The 1940s also saw the rise of art therapy practices as their own unique discipline through the work of individuals such as Adrian Hill, Edward Adamson, Margaret Naumburg, and Edith Kramer. Naumburg and Kramer specifically developed art therapy in America, and Kramer founded the art therapy graduate program at New York University. Art therapy soon began to spread to hospitals, mental health facilities, shelters, correctional institutions, and other settings.<sup>59</sup> More recently, as artists have become more interested in mindfulness new art therapy practices were created such as Mindfulness Based Art Therapy (MBAT) and Mindfulness Exploration of Art Materials (MEAM). MBAT is a growing form of art therapy that combines art therapy exercises with curriculum drawn from programs designed to increase mindfulness, such as the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR) developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn.<sup>60</sup> MEAM is a task sometimes used in MBAT programs in which participants experiment with

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<sup>56</sup> Smith, “Ad Reinhardt’s Oriental Aesthetic,” 38.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>59</sup> "The History of Art Therapy." [Internet]. Arttherapyjournal.org. Edited and published by the Art Therapy Journal Contributors. Available from: <http://www.arttherapyjournal.org/art-therapy-history.html>. [Accessed 09 Apr 2017].

<sup>60</sup> Mindfulness and the Arts Therapies, 64.

several types of art media with the goal of staying mindfully aware of their different experiences with each media.<sup>61</sup>

The above examples demonstrate some ways that art therapist, artists, and art movements have intentionally engaged with mindfulness practices. Although these examples demonstrate the possibility that those who are engaged with the visual arts maybe be predisposed to enjoy mindfulness practices, the remainder of this paper argues that the practice of art is by nature a mindful practice. Thus, it is likely that one will enter a mindful state when creating art, even if they are not aware of mindfulness and its practices.

### **Research on Mindfulness and Art**

Before discussing the ways in which art may lead to increased mindfulness, this chapter first discusses the many benefits of mindfulness so that the importance of a correlation between art and mindfulness is clear. Below several main correlates of mindfulness are discussed. Because the benefits of engagement with the visual arts and mindfulness are greatly overlapped, this section will also describe some of the benefits of art-making.

#### **Decreased Negative Affect**

The most well-known benefit of mindfulness is its relationship to a decrease in anxiety, stress, and depression symptoms. Several meta-analyses of clinical studies have shown that higher rates of mindfulness are correlated with significant reductions in anxiety, depression symptoms, and negative affect (perceived negative emotions and experiences).<sup>62</sup> Higher

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>62</sup> Davis, "What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness?" 200.

mindfulness levels are also correlated with feeling more positive emotions (positive affect). Increasing mindfulness has been shown have a large effect on clinical populations (individuals studied for public health reasons) and a moderate effect on non-clinical populations. Long term follow-ups show that these mindfulness-induced changes are long lasting.<sup>63</sup> Together these findings show that mindfulness can make powerful and long-term changes in an individual's life, even after periods of intensive mindfulness practice has ended.

These changes in depression and anxiety may be in part derived by the way mindfulness allows us to stay present in the current moment and thus leads to decreased rumination. Rumination is term used in psychology to describe a form of mind-wandering that involves uncontrollably and repetitively focusing on distressing thoughts with no productive action to address these negative thoughts. Note that in the context of psychology the word "rumination" is different from standard definitions of the verb, "to ruminate" (to think deeply about something). In other words, rumination is our tendency to unintentionally allow our mind to wander away from the present moment and instead mull over unpleasant experiences, worrisome thoughts, or other negative emotions. The decrease in anxiety and depression that is correlated with mindfulness is largely due to its ability to keep individuals present in the current moment, thus decreasing their ability to ruminate. Because rumination is the habit most strongly correlated with symptoms of anxiety and depression, the decrease in rumination caused by mindfulness leads to a similar decrease in depressive and anxiety symptoms.<sup>64</sup> Even when not currently in a mindful state, mindfulness trains our brains to be more attentive to and in control of our thoughts. This means that even if someone is not currently in a mindful state, if they have higher

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, Blair E. Wisco, and Sonja Lyubomirsky, "Rethinking Rumination," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3 (2008): 400.



levels of trait mindfulness they are more likely to notice when they are ruminating and are more likely to stop that destructive thought process. Thus, greater interactions with mindfulness allows individuals to avoid the negative correlates of a wandering mind.<sup>65</sup>

Killingworth and Gilbert's 2010 study examined the relationship between mind-wandering, rumination, and unhappiness. This study found that 47% of the time people are thinking of something besides what is happening in the present moment. Additionally, 66% of the time that their mind wanders, they are thinking about something unpleasant. Interestingly, this study discovered that regardless of whether someone's mind wandered to pleasant or unpleasant thoughts, a wandering mind was correlated to greater unhappiness. This study revealed that in general, people are happier if they are paying attention to the present moment, even if what they are doing is an unpleasant task.<sup>66</sup> It may not be the negative subject matter of rumination that causes anxiety and depression. Instead, it may be the simple fact that when we ruminate, we are not succeeding at keeping ourselves and our minds in the present moment. Thus, practices that increase our engagement with the present moment, such as mindfulness, will cause a decrease in rumination and its many negative correlates.

Like mindfulness, the most well documented benefit of art is also decreased negative affect. Often described as relaxing or calming, art is proven to decrease anxiety and stress symptoms—thus leading to the recent increase of art therapy as relaxation and stress relief. Examples are seen in the use of art therapy sessions on college campuses during exams and in the increase in adults who use coloring books for relaxation purposes.<sup>67</sup> Studies have proven that

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<sup>65</sup> Davis, "What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness?" 200.

<sup>66</sup> Matthew Killingsworth and Daniel T. Gilbert, "A Wandering Mind Is an Unhappy Mind," *Science* 330, no. 6006 (2010).

<sup>67</sup> Sarah Halzack, "The Big Business Behind the Adult Coloring Book Craze." *The Washington Post* (2016). Published electronically March 12, 2016. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/the-big->

art making results in statistically significant decreases in both state (current and situational) and trait (a stable predisposition) anxiety as well as decreases in depression and tension.<sup>68</sup> Creative activities, such as art, have also been shown to decrease other negative states such as emotional distress and anger and increase positive emotions and moods.<sup>69</sup> The positive effects of art making have been shown to have long lasting therapeutic value, even when carried out over a relatively brief period.<sup>70</sup> Art therapy sessions and other non-pharmacological approaches to treating anxiety and depression have been shown to be as effective as prescribed anti-depressants.<sup>71</sup>

As adults seek to destress or cultivate mindfulness, they often seem to subconsciously understand that engagement with the visual arts is a valuable way to do this. One example of this phenomenon is seen in the drastic increase in adult coloring book sales that has paralleled with the increase in mindfulness popularity. While adult coloring books once an uncommon novelty, they are now a mainstream trend. This is seen in the sharp increase in adult coloring book sales, one publisher estimating that their sales increased from 1 million in 2014 to 12 million in 2015.<sup>72</sup> Adults who are interested in these books often cite the way coloring allows for relaxation and is an accessible, low barrier to entry way to express creativity as their reason for their increased popularity.<sup>73</sup> One participant in my survey reflected this sentiment, saying that they “use art as a

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[business-behind-the-adult-coloring-book-craze/2016/03/09/ccf241bc-da62-11e5-891a-4ed04f4213e8\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.79ad897948f0](http://business-behind-the-adult-coloring-book-craze/2016/03/09/ccf241bc-da62-11e5-891a-4ed04f4213e8_story.html?utm_term=.79ad897948f0). [Accessed 09 Apr 2017]

<sup>68</sup> Crystal R. Drake, H. Russell Searight, and Kristina Olson-Pupek, "The Influence of Art-Making on Negative Mood States in University Students," *American Journal of Applied Psychology* 2, no. 3 (2014): 69.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>71</sup> Deridre Heenan, "Art as Therapy: An Effective Way of Promoting Positive Mental Health?", *Disability & Society* 21, no. 2 (2006): 183.

<sup>72</sup> Halzack, "The Big Business Behind the Adult Coloring Book Craze."

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

form of mindfulness-based therapy, particularly when [their] mood gets low” and that they have “several Zen-based coloring books [*sic*].”

### **Attention and Memory**

Research has also shown that meditation and mindfulness practices result in enhanced attentional capacities. This includes gains in working memory capacity, greater ability to sustain attention during tasks, better ability to manage distractions, and increased informational processing speed. These cognitive gains contribute to a variety of other mental functions, including the ability to effectively regulate emotions and attention.<sup>74</sup>

Increases in working memory and higher performance on all measures of attention are directly proportionate to the amount of meditation practice an individual has had.<sup>75</sup> These increases in attention are seen at both the structural and functional levels of the brain. At the structural level, research has found a relationship between increased mindfulness levels and thicker brain regions associated with attention, sensory processing, and sensitivity to internal stimuli.<sup>76</sup> Although most of these experiments study meditation, data suggests that these findings are similar across other mindfulness practices as well.<sup>77</sup>

Engagement with the visual arts also cultivates attentional and observational gains. Chamberlain and Wagemans have shown that those who are engaged within the visual arts experience beneficial attentional and perceptual gains. Studies have found that drawing ability and artistic group membership are correlated to many perceptual benefits such as a reduction in

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<sup>74</sup> Davis, “What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness?” 200.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Sara Lazar, et al., “Meditation Experience is Associated with Increased Cortical Thickness.” *Neuroreport* 16, no. 17 (2005).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

perception errors and enhanced visual attention.<sup>78</sup> Like meditation, art also increases attentional flexibility (the ability to shift attention between different levels of focus).<sup>79</sup>

As research continues to prove art's ability to increase attentional and observational skills, a variety of fields are using art to train observation skills. These programs serve as evidence that the value of the visual arts extend far beyond purposes of relaxation or self-expression and can be useful for groups of all ages, interests, careers, and mindsets. Amy E. Herman is an art historian and attorney who has channeled her degrees into creating such a training program. Her program, called the Art of Perception, is used as a professional development course to train employees all over the world. Herman has successfully used this program with top officials in the United States military, law enforcement, medicine, and other industries including the FBI, NYPD, the Navy SEALs, and the peace corps.<sup>80</sup> Through this program she teaches participants about accurate observation and effective communication—all while using art pieces in museums and examples drawn from art history. In Herman's book, "Visual Intelligence: Sharpen your Perception, Change your Life," she describes that the program was inspired by how often lives depend upon someone's observational skills and how often we fail at accurately observing the visual details that lay before us in plain sight.<sup>81</sup> She uses the examples of a surgeon performing surgery or a first responder walking into an ambiguous situation as some of these important moments. Herman says her training sessions use "art as a new set of data, to help [participants] clear the slate and use the skills [they] use on the job."<sup>82</sup> In

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<sup>78</sup> R. Chamberlain and J. Wagemans, "Visual Arts Training Is Linked to Flexible Attention to Local and Global Levels of Visual Stimuli," *Acta Psychol (Amst)* 161 (Oct 2015): 185.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>80</sup> Sarah Lyall, "Off the Beat and into a Museum: Art Helps Police Officers Learn to Look." *The New York Times* (2016). Published electronically April 26, 2016.

<sup>81</sup> Amy Herman, *Visual Intelligence: Sharpen Your Perception, Change Your Life*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016: xiv.

<sup>82</sup> Lyall, "Off the Beat and into a Museum."

one of these sessions, Herman took a group of New York City police officers to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where participants realized how many visual details they were missing when they work on the job. One police officer said that in “some of the works of art she showed us, we wouldn’t notice the finer details... and we’re supposed to be professional observers.”<sup>83</sup>

The medical field is also using art’s ability to increase attention to visual details. Although observation skills are a vital tool that physicians must use every day, these skills are rarely formally taught in medical school curricula.<sup>84</sup> Ample evidence exists showing that medical students have inadequate physical examination skills, perhaps partially because of their lack of visual training.<sup>85</sup> To train students’ observational skills some medical programs are adding art and humanities courses to their curricula. These art courses are designed to increase student’s “visual literacy” through the practice of “active looking.” Interestingly, programs define active looking as the “ability to reason physiology and pathophysiology from careful and unbiased observation.”<sup>86</sup> Note that this definition largely overlaps the definition of mindfulness—“the moment-to-moment attentional, unbiased observation of any phenomenon in order to perceive and experience how it truly is, absent of emotion or intellectual distortion.”<sup>87</sup> Thus, these medical programs are using engagement with the visual arts to increase student’s capacity to mindfully engage with their visual surroundings.

The Bond University School of Medicine in Queensland, Australia, is an example of a school that is changing its curriculum to include more arts training to improve students’

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Katrina A. Bramstedt, "The Use of Visual Arts as a Window to Diagnosing Medical Pathologies," *Journal of Ethics* 18, no. 8 (2016): 1.

<sup>85</sup> S. Naghshineh, et al., “Formal Arts Observation Training Improves Medical Students' Visual Diagnostic Skills,” *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 23, no. 7 (2008).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Buchheld, “Measuring Mindfulness in Insight Meditation,” 6.

observational skills. Bond University added a medical humanities program to their undergraduate medical degree that includes a medical humanities workshop, a compulsory mixed media art creation and reflective essay assignment, a medical humanities week, and a community art exhibit entitled “Art is Good Medicine.”<sup>88</sup> Students enrolled in this program experienced an array of positive outcomes including increased visual skills and an increased appreciation for art. After completing the arts curriculum, 40 percent of the students said that they would continue to create or view art to reduce stress. With notoriously high burnout and exhaustion rates among medical practitioners and students, this ability to self-manage stress through art is an important finding.<sup>89</sup> Students additionally reported that the humanities and art programs helped them feel as if their science-driven education was more well-rounded, allowed them to re-humanize the patients that they interact with, and increased their feelings of empathy and compassion.<sup>90</sup>

A separate study by Naghshineh et al (2008) also examined the effects that an art intervention may have on medical students. This intervention, entitled *Training the Eye: Improving the Art of Physical Diagnosis*, had students complete art observation exercises, lectures that integrated fine art’s concepts with physical diagnosis training, and an elective life drawing session.<sup>91</sup> Twenty-four pre-clinical students participated in this intervention and were later compared to a control group of 34 classmates of similar levels of training. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, this study revealed that observation skills, including those that are directly used in clinical medicine, can be successfully trained through the study of art and medical imagery.<sup>92</sup> Students’ ability to describe visual details also improved

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<sup>88</sup> Bramstedt, “The Use of Visual Arts,” 2.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Naghshineh, “Formal Arts Observation Training.”

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

because of their time describing and discussing art—they employed more fine arts concepts such as color and symmetry when making physical diagnosis. This study also found that participants who attended eight or more sessions showed more improvements in visual observation skills than those who attended less, showing that increased engagement with the visual arts results in similarly increased observation skills.

These findings show that both mindfulness and art are correlated with increased attentional skills. Specifically, interactions with the visual arts leads to increased visual literacy and observational skills which are useful in many applied situations and occupations. Formal art and mindfulness trainings thus offer solutions to developing skills that are often difficult to teach with traditional educational or lecture courses. If interactions with the visual arts increases mindfulness, then incorporating such observational trainings into curriculum and training programs additionally offers the benefit of increasing participant's mindfulness levels.

### **Self-Knowledge, Self-Regulation, and Emotional Regulation**

Increased mindfulness levels also lead to greater self-knowledge, self-regulation, and emotional regulation. Research has shown that mindfulness is moderately correlated with emotional intelligence, openness to experience, self-actualization, clarity of emotional states, mood repair, and attention to emotions.<sup>93</sup> This is partially because of the increased attentional abilities mentioned above—mindfulness promotes a greater metacognitive awareness that allows for a decrease in rumination and an enhancement of attentional capacities through gains in working memory.<sup>94</sup> In other words, increased mindfulness gives an individual the ability to be

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<sup>93</sup> Brown, "The Benefits of Being Present," 830.

<sup>94</sup> Davis, "What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness?" 200.

more aware of the thoughts and emotions that they are currently experiencing as well the increased attention needed for better focus.

With this increase in self-awareness comes a greater ability to regulate one's behaviors and emotions. Increased awareness of one's thoughts allows individuals to avoid unhealthy thought or behavior patterns that may have gone previously unnoticed when in a non-mindful state. This in turn leads to a form of self-led behavioral regulation, enhanced well-being, and development of more effective emotional regulation strategies.<sup>95</sup> For example, a person who experiences panic states may become more aware of their thoughts, emotions, and breath with an increase in mindfulness. Thus, this individual may be more capable of detecting the psychological and physiological symptoms of stress once they begin, for example noticing a shortness of breath or anxious thoughts. This early awareness of stress symptoms may provide the individual an opportunity to address these emotions and thoughts before they escalate into a panic attack.<sup>96</sup> This self-awareness also leads to the use of more adaptive coping strategies when dealing with stressful situations and overall less perceived stressors.<sup>97</sup> The non-judgmental and compassionate nature of mindfulness additionally allows individuals to evaluate their thoughts and behaviors from a more objective perspective.<sup>98</sup> This increased openness leads to a higher likelihood of having a kind, accepting, and willingness to change attitude towards these observations.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Brown, "The Benefits of Being Present," 823.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 824.

<sup>97</sup> Netta Weinstein, Kirk W. Brown, and Richard M. Ryan, "A Multi-Method Examination of the Effects of Mindfulness on Stress Attribution, Coping, and Emotional Well-Being," *Journal of Research in Personality* 43, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Brown, "The Benefits of Being Present," 824.



Greater self-awareness, openness, and ability to regulate one's emotions is part of why mindfulness is correlated with the use of healthier emotional regulation strategies, increased empathy, and higher compassion.<sup>100</sup> Mindfulness is also strongly and negatively correlated with depression, rumination, emotional reactivity self-consciousness, anger hostility, unpleasant affect, mood disturbance, stress, anxiety, and impulsiveness.<sup>101</sup> Due to the increase in self-regulation that mindfulness provides, social psychologists and researchers Chang, Huang, and Lin theorize that mindfulness may allow individuals to better fulfil their basic psychological need for autonomy (feelings of agency and having control over one's life and behavior) and competence (feelings of self-efficacy and confidence). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness (feelings of having close relationships with others) are the three universal psychological needs that are proposed by the psychology theory of self-determination, a theory of human motivation and personality developed during the 1980s.<sup>102</sup> Fulfillment of these three needs is positively correlated with an increase in well-being, sense of authentic self, self-esteem, and well-being in work contexts. Lack of fulfillment of these needs is correlated with depression, burnout, and eating disorders.<sup>103</sup> Essentially, one's overall mental health is related to the extent that one's three basic psychological needs are met. Research shows that individuals with increased levels of mindfulness may be able to better understand themselves, their wishes, and their needs. This understanding allows for an individual to take actions to better meet those needs (self-regulation), which in turn makes the individual feel more in control of their life (increased autonomy), and more competent at meeting their needs.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Davis, "What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness?" 201.

<sup>101</sup> Brown, "The Benefits of Being Present," 829.

<sup>102</sup> Jen-Ho Chang, Chin-Lan Huang, and Yi-Cheng Lin, "Mindfulness, Basic Psychological Needs Fulfillment, and Well-Being," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 16, no. 5 (2015): 1150.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

Given the self-expressive and observational nature of art, art also naturally leads to an increase in knowledge and awareness. Through the act of creating art, the artist gains self-knowledge as well as a greater understanding of the world they live in. Laura Safar and Daniel Press, Boston-based art therapists and neuropsychologists, compare art to a mirror, saying that it plays a self-reflective role and allows artists to recognize themselves and their own concepts when looking at their art.<sup>105</sup> This increased self-understanding is largely derivative of the self-expressive nature of art, which allows artists to better understand their own experiences after they have worked through them in the form of art-making. These concepts were frequently reflected in my survey responses. One respondent said that when making art they “feel that I simultaneously lose and find myself—I feel at peace and at one with my body, I am able to calmly observe corporal feelings, but pay more attention to the spiritual self and my connection to the act of creation.” Another responded that they realized “art, the creative process and [their] personal and emotional health were all linked” and that through the process of art they are “learning more about [themselves] on both an emotional and physical level.” Another said that “being able to have a tangible representation of my life allows me to see changes in my thought processes and relive memories. This in an *[sic]* of itself helps my anxiety and I’m proud of my personal growth.”

An additional benefit of art as a form of self-expression is that it allows viewers to better understand the emotions and experiences of artists. Art is by nature a participatory process, in some ways equally involving the viewers and the makers. Just as art allows a form of self-expression for the maker, viewing art also allows for a time of self-reflection and may lead to an

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<sup>105</sup> Laura Safar, and Daniel Press, "Art and the Brain: Effects of Dementia on Art Production in Art Therapy," *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* 28, no. 3 (2011): 101.

increase in awareness and understanding. A survey respondent summarized this phenomenon, saying “art carries a plethora of emotions by both the creator and the one consuming it. It holds the unique ability to be personal and highly public.” Due to this paradox, art has the ability to give us insight into experiences, emotions, and identities that are not our own. One survey respondent explained this concept, saying that when viewing art by Latina artists in a recent trip to their local museum they realized that “the little I do know about the Latina culture is very skewed and viewed from a privileged perspective” and that “the art gave me new perspectives on the lives of people who live in a culture I know very little about.”

### **Concluding Remarks on Mindfulness**

The above listed examples are just a few of many benefits that increased levels of mindfulness provide. It is important to note that studies suggest these benefits continue outside of the timeframe an individual is engaged in a mindfulness practice. Longitudinal studies on the effects of mindfulness and meditation have shown that mindfulness practices can have a long-lasting impact on an individual’s every-day life—even after weeks have passed since an introductory mindfulness intervention.<sup>106</sup> In the following pages, this paper argues that art is one such activity that is a mindfulness practice that has yet to receive adequate research and attention in the psychological community.

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<sup>106</sup> Desbordes, et al., “Effects of Mindful-Attention and Compassion,” 1.

## Art and Mindfulness

As described above, engagement with the visual arts and mindfulness have both been shown to have a variety of positive outcomes. However, little or no empirical research has examined the potential correlation between art and mindfulness. This is surprising given that, to those engaged in the visual arts, a link between art-making and a state of mindfulness seems self-evident. Indeed, many creative art therapies are purposely expounding on this similarity, resulting in a new movement towards mindful creative art therapies. Mindfulness-Based Art Therapy (MBAT) is one such movement that unites mindfulness meditation practices with creative art based therapy to capitalize on the benefits of both.<sup>107</sup> However, even MBAT unites established mindfulness practices, such as breathwork and meditation, with art-making in order to induce a mindful state, instead of assuming that art-making naturally results in such a state on its own.

To address this gap in research, I conducted a pilot study that utilized an internet based survey to evaluate the potential connection between engagement with the visual arts and increased mindfulness levels. I hypothesized that individuals who were engaged with the visual arts would have higher levels of mindfulness than individuals who are not engaged with the visual arts. This study had 140 valid results, and analysis of data revealed a promising trend in the direction of my hypothesis. On average, individuals who reported higher engagement with the visual arts had higher levels of mindfulness scores, as measured by both the MAAS and the FMI, than those who were not involved with the visual arts. Although at times these differences were not significant, there is an obvious connection between engagement with the visual arts and increased mindfulness levels. While this preliminary data is promising, much more research is

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<sup>107</sup> Mindfulness and the Arts Therapies, 31.

needed to fully understand the potential connection between art and mindfulness. Detailed explanation of this study's methods, procedure, results, and discussion are presented below.

## **Study Report**

### **Participants**

Anonymous links to the survey were distributed via email to students and faculty of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga who were members of the Art Department and Honors College. A link to the survey was also distributed via online social media platforms such as Facebook. Anyone who clicked the link, agreed to the inform consent, and reported that they were of age 18 or older could participate.

One hundred and thirty-nine participants fully completed this online self-report survey between the dates of February 21st, 2017 and March 6th, 2017 and were included in the data analysis. This survey asked no demographic information of participants except for their age group. Eighty-six participants (61.9%) were age 18-25, 14 (10.1%) were 26-35, 8 (5.8%) were 26-35, 19 (13.7%) were 45-55, 11 (7.9%) were age 56-65, 1 was 66-75 (.7%), and no participants were over age 75.

### **Materials and Measures**

#### ***Mindfulness.***

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), trait version and the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) were used to measure participant's mindfulness levels. The MAAS is a 15-item scale designed to assess how often an individual is aware to what is occurring in the present moment, which is a core attribute of mindfulness. The MAAS has been shown to be a

valid and reliable scale for use with adult and undergraduate populations. Its 15-items appear in a six-point Likert scale (*almost always* to *almost never*) and include items such as “I find it difficult to stay focused on what’s happening in the present.” Higher scores indicate higher levels of mindfulness. Past research has shown community adult’s mean score to be 4.20,  $SD = .69$  and college student’s mean score to be 3.83,  $SD = .70$ .<sup>108</sup> Because the MAAS only directly assesses mindful attention awareness, which is only one of several aspects of mindfulness, the FMI was also used to evaluate mindfulness levels. The FMI is a valid and reliable 14-point questionnaire that asks questions pertaining to awareness, open mindedness, compassion towards others and self, and attention to the present moment. Its questions appear on a 4-point Likert scale (*rarely* to *almost always*), and include questions such as “I am open to the experience of the present moment” and “I am able to appreciate myself.” Higher scores indicate higher levels of mindfulness, with one item being reverse coded. The MAAS and the FMI comprised the first section of the survey, that was shown to all participants.

### ***Art Involvement and Demographic Questions.***

The remainder of the survey included 17 questions—one of which asked participant’s age, two asked about their involvement with mindfulness practices and how often they spend participating in sports and other forms of exercise, and the remainder asked about participant’s involvement with the visual arts. Items pertaining to visual arts involvement were only shown to participants who selected “yes” or “sometimes” to the question: “Are you involved with the visual arts in any way (e.g., making, viewing, teaching)?” This question was prefaced with instructions that operationally defined “visual arts.” All participants who selected “no” were

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<sup>108</sup> Kirk Warren Brown and Richard M. Ryan, "The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and Its Role in Psychological Well-Being," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 4 (2003).

directed to the end of the survey. Additional questions were shown to those who said that they make art, such as “What types of art medium do you use?”. The text of the entire questionnaire can be found in full at the end of this report.

## **Procedure**

### ***Survey***

Individuals who participated completed an anonymous online survey, delivered through the survey platform Qualtrics. Participants were first shown an informed consent letter that they could select “yes” to consent to the experiment and complete the survey or “no” to deny consent. If a participant selected “no” the survey ended and they were not shown any questions after the informed consent letter. Next, all participants completed the MAAS, the FMI, one demographic question that asked their age, the two questions about their participant in mindfulness practices and sports or exercise activities, and a question that asked if they were involved with the visual arts. After this, questions were displayed to participants based off their responses, as described in the previous section. The survey terminated with a thank you note to participants and contact information of the researcher in case participants had any questions or wanted more information about the study. The survey was active between the dates of February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017 and March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Data from the 140 sets of responses that were gathered are included throughout this paper.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data was imported from Qualtrics to Excel and SPSS for data analysis. First, mean MAAS and FMI scores were created for each participant. Because participant’s engagement with the visual arts did not result in a mean and easy to identify art involvement score, several tests were run grouping participants into categories based off responses to many of the different questions

pertaining to the visual arts.

After running these tests on the whole sample, additional tests were run comparing the mindfulness scores of only those in the age group that ranged from age 18-25. Data was separated in this way because past research with the MAAS has shown that college students have a lower mean mindfulness score than community adults,  $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = .70$  and  $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = .69$  respectively. Data from my sample reflected this age group variance in mindfulness levels. There was a significant difference between the MAAS mean scores of individuals age 18-25 ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) and individuals who reported being age 26 or older ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = .72$ );  $t(137) = 4.187$ ,  $p < .01$ . Age group differences in MAAS mean scores is depicted in figure 3 to help illustrate this. Note that age information was separated into six groups as follows; age 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, and 66-75.

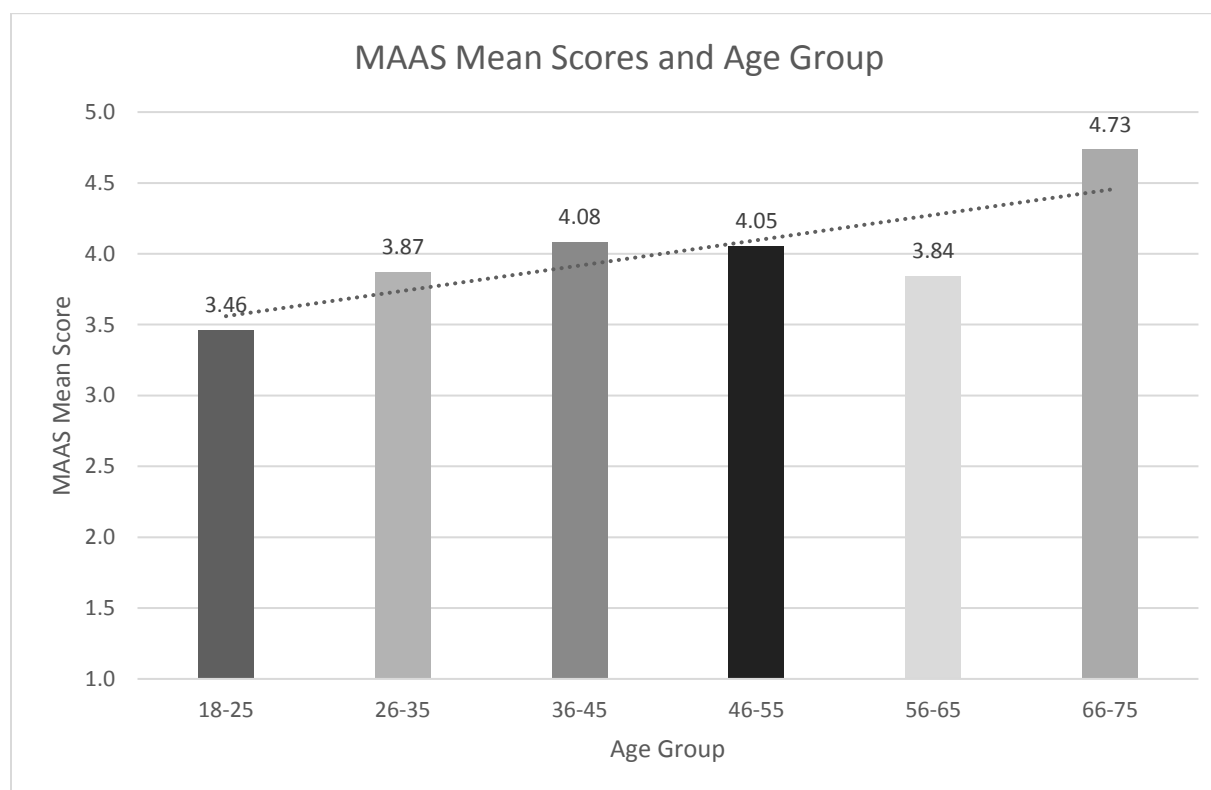


Figure 3. MAAS mean score differences across age groups.



## Results

### *All Participants*

Several tests showed a trend in terms of a relationship between an individual's engagement with the visual arts and their levels of mindfulness. One way that individual's engagement with the visual arts was measured was by how many art-related roles a participant held (e.g., artist, curator, art professor, etc). I found that individuals who reported having two or more art-related roles ( $n = 85$ ) had higher levels of mindfulness on average than individuals who reported having less than or equal to one art-related roles ( $n = 55$ ). Those with one or no art roles MAAS scores were  $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = .70$  and FMI scores were  $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = .53$  while those who reported holding two or more roles MAAS scores were  $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = .82$  and FMI scores were  $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = .53$ . This comparison is seen in Figures 4 and 5.

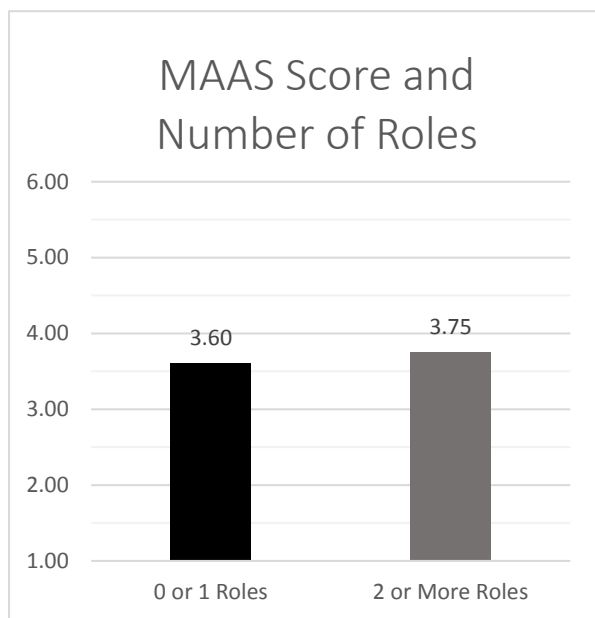


Figure 5. MAAS Mean Scores and Number of Art Related Roles



Figure 4. FFM Mean Scores and Number of Art Related Roles

This trend was also seen when comparing group scores of those who answered “yes” or “sometimes” ( $n= 42$ ) to question 3.2 (“Are you involved with the visual arts in any way?”) to those who answered “no” to this question ( $n= 96$ ). Those who said there were not involved in the visual arts MAAS scores were  $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = .79$  and FMI scores were  $M = 2.58$ ,  $SD = .59$  while those who reported they are involved with the visual arts MAAS scores were  $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = .72$  and FMI scores were  $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = .51$ . An independent samples  $t$ -test revealed that these differences in MAAS scores were  $t(136) = -1.653$ ,  $p = .101$  and differences in FFM scores were  $t(135) = -1.177$ ,  $p = .241$ . Because of the exploratory nature of this study, researchers used a significance level of 10%. Although these results were not statistically significant, there is again a clear trend that those involved with the visual arts tended to have higher levels of mindfulness scores. This comparison is seen in figures 6 and 7.

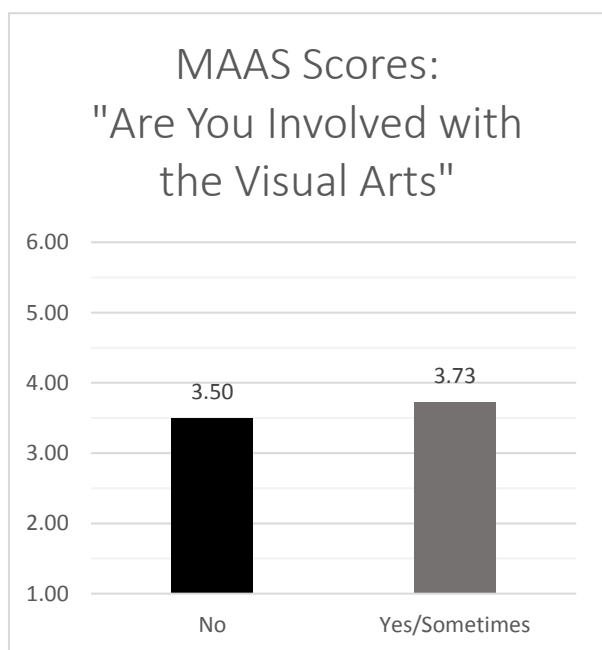


Figure 6. MAAS Mean Scores based on answer to "Are You Involved with the Visual Arts?"

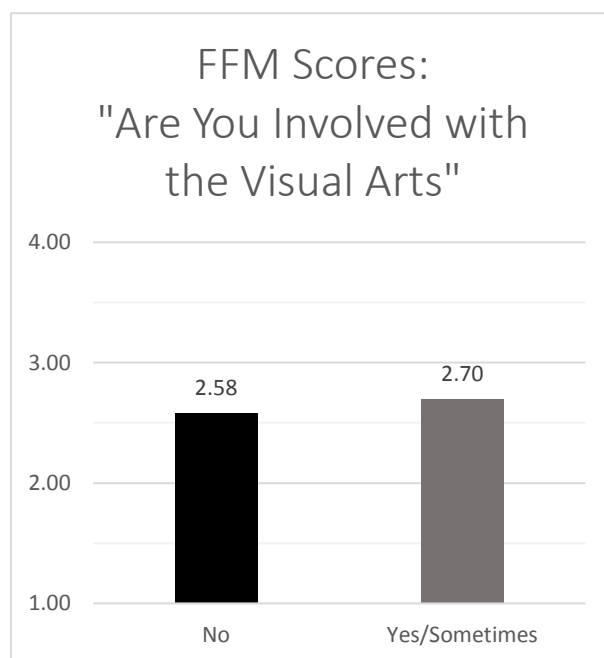


Figure 7. FFM Mean Scores based on answer to "Are You Involved with the Visual Arts?"

### ***Participants Ages 18-25***

After these tests were run with all participants, a new dataset ( $N = 86$ ) was created that only included data from participants in the first age group, age 18-25. This age group was selected because it represented the largest subset of the overall sample of respondents and was comprised of mostly college-aged students, which as described earlier, has different mean mindfulness scores than the general, older community of adults. Through creating this age-grouped sample, researchers could directly compare mindfulness scores of individuals within the same age group and thus remove the confounding variable of age related differences in mindfulness scores.

Tests with these scores resulted in much clearer data comparisons of mindfulness scores between those who were involved with the visual arts and those who were not. An independent samples  $t$ -test between those who answered “yes” ( $n = 35$ ) and those who answered “no” ( $n = 26$ ) to question 3.2 (“Are you involved with the visual arts in any way?”) resulted in significant differences between FFM mean scores,  $t(59) = 1.674, p < .10$ , and non-significant differences in MAAS mean scores,  $t(59) = -1.483, p = .143$ . These trends are depicted in Figures 7 and 8.

This trend was again evident when examining mean mindfulness differences between those who answered “definitely yes” or “probably yes” to question 3.11 (“Has art changed your own personal thoughts, mindset, life, or experiences?”) to those who selected “no” to question 3.2 (“Are you involved with the visual arts in any way?”). For this ANOVA, cases were excluded that answered “sometimes” to question 3.2 to better compare those who were certain of their involvement with the visual arts to those who were not at all involved with the visual arts. Participants who said that art had greatly changed their lives ( $n = 33$ ) had a significantly higher mean FFM mean score ( $f(1,57) = 4.04, p < .05$ ) and MAAS mean score ( $f(1,57) = 3.28, p < .10$ )

than participants who said they were not involved with the visual arts ( $n = 26$ ). These trends are depicted in figures 7 and 8.

This trend was also seen when comparing those who answered, “Describes me extremely well” to Q3.3\_3 (“I have invested a lot of time into art”) to those who said they were not involved with the visual arts (selected “no” to Q3.2). Participants who reported investing a lot of time into art ( $n = 24$ ) had a mean FFM score of 2.77 and a mean MAAS score of 3.63, which was higher than those who were not involved in the visual arts ( $n = 26$ ), FFM  $M = 2.46$  and MAAS  $M = 3.25$ . Thus, those who reported investing a lot of time into art had a significantly higher FFM mean scores ( $f(48) = -2.00, p < .10$ ) and MAAS scores ( $f(48) = -1.95, p < .10$ ) than those who were not involved with the visual arts. These trends are depicted in figures 7 and 8.

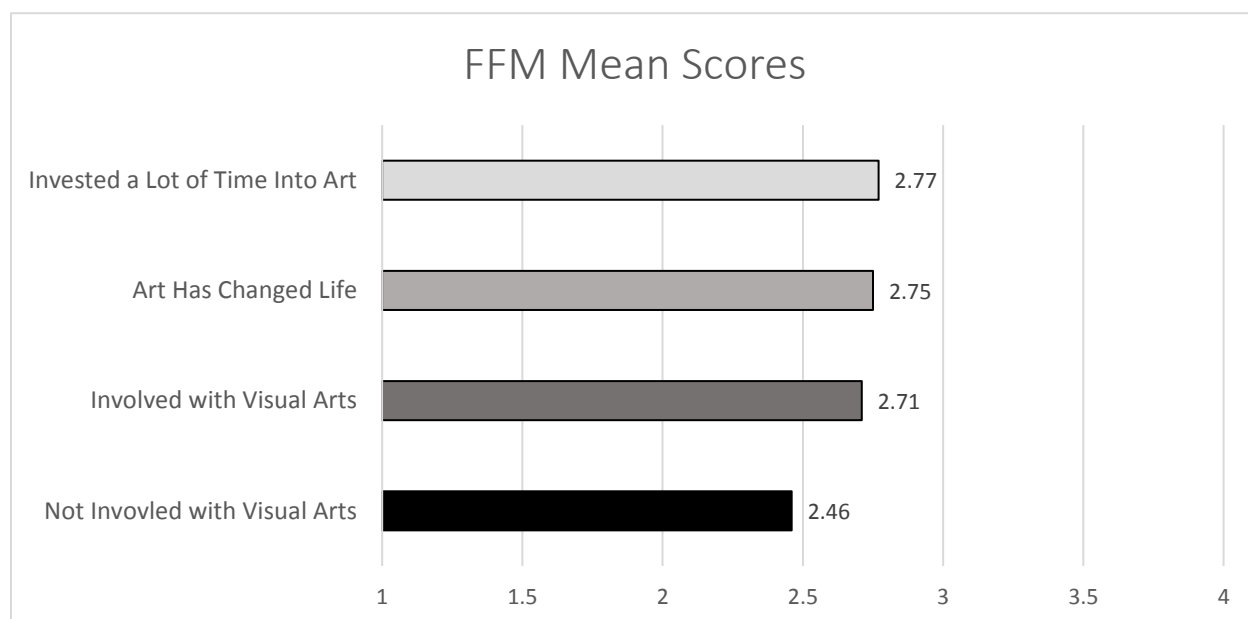


Figure 7. FFM mean scores comparing those who are involved with the visual arts and those who are not

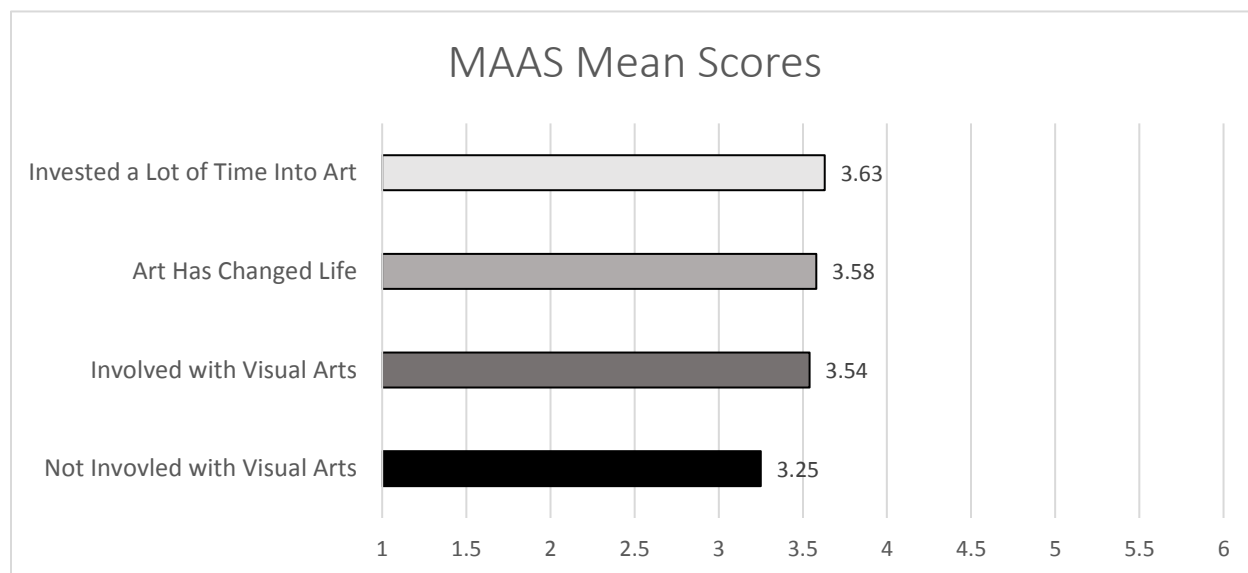


Figure 8. MAAS Mean Scores comparing those who are involved with the visual arts and those who are not

## Discussion

Based off on these data, it is apparent that those who reported higher engagement with the visual arts had, on average, higher levels of mindfulness scores as measured by both the MAAS and the FMI. Although at times these differences in means were not significant, there is an obvious trend in the direction of the researcher's hypothesis, that engagement with the visual arts increases mindfulness levels. A finding that interactions with the visual arts increases mindfulness would add great value to the efficacy and support of the visual arts, and this data serves as a useful example that there may indeed be a greater connection between art and mindfulness that research has yet to fully explore.

There were several limitations for this study, including several problems with sampling biases such as a relatively small sample size and lack of random sampling. This sampling bias may be in part why the data gathered from this survey did not exactly reflect the normative

scores of mindfulness levels, such as the MAAS normative scores. Additionally, future studies should consider asking participant's exact age, if they are currently enrolled in school, and the level of education they have had to better examine the influence that subject variables have on the overall data trends. This study was additionally limited by lack of a standardized method of evaluating individual's participation with the visual arts—future research should consider ways to obtain normative and standardized information about engagement with the visual arts so that the visual arts may be better studied in an empirical research setting.

This study serves as a useful pilot study that suggests that there may be a relationship between individual's engagement with the visual arts and mindfulness levels. Future research should continue to study the psychological and physiological effects that engagement with the visual arts has on the general non-clinical adult population and further evaluate the potential for a relationship between art-making, art-viewing, and mindfulness.

### **Ways Engagement with the Visual Arts Increases Mindfulness**

Although little research exists to formally connect the states of art and mindfulness, one can begin to see ways in which art and mindfulness may be linked when looking at their many shared outcomes and characteristics. Indeed, most of the benefits of both art-making and mindfulness are essentially the same, leading one to think that the activities that achieve these benefits must share many similarities as well. If there is a correlation between engagement with the visual arts and mindfulness, why might this correlation exist? The following section of this chapter will explore why the visual arts might be able to cultivate mindfulness.

## A Focus on the Present Moment

The largest shared attribute of a state of art-making and mindfulness is their intense awareness, attention, and involvement with the present moment. Indeed, the way mindfulness is defined in modern psychology—an open minded, moment-to-moment awareness of current experience—could also be used to describe the quality of attention artists utilize when engaged in art-making. The similarities between mindfulness and art-making are often self-evident to artists. Wendy Ann Greenhalgh, an artist, writer, and meditation teacher, eloquently describes this phenomenon in her book *Mindfulness & The Art of Drawing*:

“What I discovered was that the practice of mindfulness meditation evoked the same responses from me that drawing did. The state of mind I entered during meditation was qualitatively no different from the one I entered when deeply absorbed in drawing. From this point on, my creative life and my meditative life proceeded hand in hand...”<sup>109</sup>

This sentiment was also often echoed in the responses of my survey, one participant saying that “making and viewing art is a mindful experience of its own. The time it takes to create or fully understand a work through viewing is also a time for subtle introspection...”

Art’s ability keep us fully engaged in the present moment is likely the main reason engagement with the visual arts can cultivate mindfulness. In mindfulness practices, such as meditation and yoga, focus on one’s breath and body is used to keep individuals fully engaged in the present moment. In art, it is the focus on the actions of art-making that are used as tools for staying in the moment. Wendy Ann Greenhalgh, an artist, writer, and meditation teacher, describes this phenomenon in her book *Mindfulness & The Art of Drawing*: “when we are practicing the mindfulness of drawing, it is the movement of the pen across the page, the coordination of eye and hand, and the object we are drawing that become our mindful focus.”

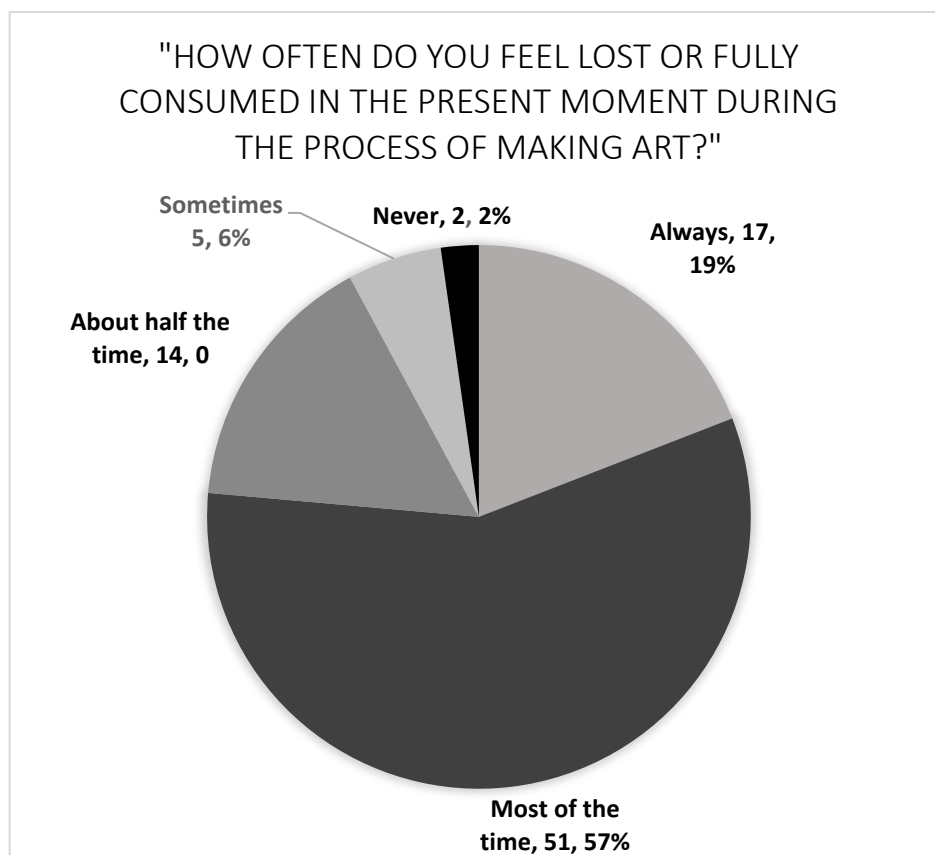
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<sup>109</sup> Wendy Ann Greenhalgh, *Mindfulness & the Art of Drawing: A Creative Path to Awareness*, Ivy Press, 2015: 10.

This is apparent to anyone who has spent time creating an art piece. Artists often find themselves enthralled with minute details that normally would go completely unnoticed, especially when creating an observational or realistic piece of art. For example, when drawing from a still life of everyday objects in one's home, suddenly an artist devotes hours of sustained attention on an object that they may have used every day for years and yet never truly noticed. Even in abstract drawing styles, where an artist is not using the world around them as a reference point, artists become fully engaged in the marks that they are making upon a surface.

The ability for art to keep one focused on the present moment was reflected in the data and responses gathered in my survey. One survey question specifically asked, "If you make art, how often do you feel lost or fully consumed in the present moment during the process of making art?" This question was shown to 89 individuals who reported that they make art, and sixty-eight (76%) of participants answered "always" or "most of the time" in response to this question. The specific breakdown of responses can be seen in figure 9. These data reveal a relationship between art-making and mindfulness, showing that 76% of my sample finds art to be a practice that regularly results in a state of increased mindfulness. This finding was also echoed in the qualitative data from my survey. One participant said: "I find art to be calming, reassuring, and it allows me to become more mindful of the present moment and immerse myself in my project and forget about the stressors of everyday life. I appreciate the little things in life because I can pay more attention to the details." Due to this engagement with the present moment, both art and mindfulness practices lead to a state of flow.





*Figure 9.* Percentage breakdown of answers to "How often do you feel lost or fully consumed in the present moment during the process of making art?"

### **Flow State**

Flow is a psychology theory that can be described as an optimal experience in which an individual is fully engaged within an activity.<sup>110</sup> Much like a state of mindfulness, flow involves being fully consumed with the present moment and with task at hand. Flow is a total immersion into an activity that results in the “merging of action and awareness, centering of attention, and the loss of self-consciousness” as well as a strong feeling of control.<sup>111</sup> Flow is also a positively

<sup>110</sup> Stefan Engeser and Anja Schiepe-Tiska, "Historical Lines and an Overview of Current Research on Flow." Chap. 1 In *Advances in Flow Research*, edited by Stefan Engeser, 1-22: Springer Science + Business Media, 2012: 1.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

valanced (positive or enjoyable) experience that tends to bring feelings of enjoyment and happiness.

Many experiments in the last few decades have established an array of positive benefits and correlates of flow. For example, a flow experience is an optimal challenge that involves optimized physiological activation and full concentration—in other words, a state of flow uses all resources of concentration, skills, and talent to be able to meet the demand of the task.<sup>112</sup> Thus, a state of flow is linked to higher performance in creative activities, learning, and sports.<sup>113</sup> Flow states are also linked towards a more productive and fulfilling life, in which an individual strives towards skill development and personal growth. This is because flow state requires total use of skills, thus a person in search of a flow state will take on more challenging tasks and situations to meet that individual's gradual increase in skills. Thus, individuals pursue harder tasks without feeling a greater output of effort because of their total immersion in the flow activity. Therefore, flow is sometimes described as a state of “effortless attention,” just as mindfulness is. Additionally, flow is rewarding in and of itself, resulting in an intrinsic motivation to pursue task development and personal growth as well as a greater enjoyment while completing those tasks.<sup>114</sup> Because a state of flow is also essentially a mindful state, flow likely has many of the additional psychological and physiological benefits that mindfulness has.

Meditation and mindfulness are correlated with flow-experience because all of these activities and states strive towards full attentional control, deep concentration, effortless attention, and full involvement in the present moment.<sup>115</sup> Researchers have shown that

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<sup>112</sup> Corinna Peifer, "Psychophysiological Correlates of Flow-Experience," Chap. 8 In *Advances in Flow Research*, edited by Stefan Engeser, (2012):148.

<sup>113</sup> Engeser, “Historical Lines and an Overview,” 6.

<sup>114</sup> Peifer, “Psychophysiological Correlates of Flow-Experience,” 148.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

meditation and mindful practices can enhance an individual's ability to reach a flow state.<sup>116</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the Hungarian psychologist who first recognized and named the psychological concept of flow, often compared mindfulness practices such as yoga to a state of flow. In his book on flow Csikszentmihalyi wrote: “the similarities between yoga and flow are extremely strong; in fact, it makes sense to think of yoga as a very thoroughly planned through activity.”<sup>117</sup> Even when examining just the definition of flow—an experience in which an individual is fully engaged within an activity in the present moment—it becomes clear that a flow state can also result in a state of mindfulness. The opposite of this is usually true as well—most of the time when one is in a mindful state they are also fully engaged with the present moment, meaning they are experiencing a state of flow.

Mindfulness as a practice is not the only activity that often results in a state of flow. The act of creating art is often used as the perfect example of a state of flow. Thus, flow is an example of the ways that the states of art-making and mindfulness greatly overlap. Artists frequently sustain an extended state of effortless attention and often lose all sense of time<sup>118</sup> These descriptions are also outcomes of a flow state. Greenhalgh reflects this, saying “Being in the flow is something that all creative people—every person who has *ever* engaged in a creativity activity—will recognize.”<sup>119</sup>

Csikszentmihalyi often studied artists to create his theory of flow and frequently used them as examples of this state in his publications. In his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Csikszentmihalyi writes a chapter entitled “Flow through the senses: The joys of

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>117</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. 1 ed.: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008: Pages.

<sup>118</sup> Engeser, “Historical Lines and an Overview,” 2.

<sup>119</sup> Greenhalgh, *Mindfulness & the Art of Drawing*, 13.

seeing,” where he explains how looking and creating art serves as a flow experience. He explains the fundamental link between flow and art-making: “Humans began decorating caves at least thirty thousand years ago...it is likely that the major *raison d’être* of art was the same in the Paleolithic era as it is now—namely, it was a source of flow for the painter and for the viewer.”<sup>120</sup> Csikszentmihalyi also writes of ways that visual training through art can increase the amount of flow experiences one has during their daily life outside of the studio—a topic that is examined in the next section.

Because of the relationship between a state of flow and art-making, creating art often results in the many benefits of flow described in the previous paragraph. Research on the benefits of flow are thus valuable insights into the additional benefits that art may provide outside of the popular yet limited use of art for relaxation or entertainment. Because art-making and practicing mindfulness can both be associated with states of flow, one can argue that the state achieved while making or viewing art often results in a mindful state. Thus, flow state is one of many examples of the ways that art and mindfulness may be more similar than current research recognizes.

### **An Artistically Mindful Mindset**

Despite the evidence that even short sessions of mindfulness practice or art-making can long-lasting benefits, often individuals perceive art-making or mindfulness practices as something too time consuming or unattainable. Perhaps mindfulness practices seem too difficult to practice—they dislike meditation, feel as if they cannot get a quiet moment in their day, or never seem to find enough time to make it to the yoga studio. Many adults may also perceive art

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<sup>120</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, 76.

as something too time-consuming or demanding. Indeed, if one perceives art as an activity that requires extensive knowledge and training, expensive art supplies, and intensive amounts of time, the notion of using art to cultivate mindfulness seems impractical and unattainable for the average adult. Fortunately, not all art requires prolonged time or innate talent and not all mindfulness practices require a yoga mat and a quiet room. At this point, revisiting the meanings of ‘art’ and ‘mindfulness’ is useful to help elucidate the ways the average adult may be able to engage in a mindful and artist mindset.

### **Mindfulness Expanded**

Although yoga and meditation are frequently thought of as the main practices used to cultivate mindfulness, mindfulness can be practiced in any aspect of life. Nhất Hạnh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk who wrote a mindfulness guidebook called *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, explains that mindfulness can be practiced in any moment, location, or context. He describes how the act of washing dishes, drinking tea, or eating a tangerine can all be mindfulness practices. He explains this concept of bringing mindfulness into your everyday life by describing the act of “washing the dishes to wash the dishes”. He explains that there are two ways to wash dishes: “The first is to wash the dishes in order to have clean dishes and the second is to wash the dishes in order to wash the dishes.”<sup>121</sup> During the first way, one allows their mind to wander to anything besides the mundane task of washing dishes. During the second way, we are completely engulfed in the act of washing dishes, without thinking of anything else. Hạnh explains that when we allow our mind to wander from the present moment we “are sucked away into the future—and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life.”<sup>122</sup> When one can

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<sup>121</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1975, 4.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

practice mindfulness by staying fully engaged in any given moment during their day, suddenly mindfulness is not a practice that requires a quiet room or a set aside point of time. Instead, we can use our everyday moments to cultivate mindfulness.

### **Art Expanded**

Just as mindfulness is often thought of as a narrow subset of practices, art is also too often defined as the creation of an image or art object. Although art is often thought of as a photorealistic painting or drawing done by someone with innate talent, this is not actually a requirement of art. Through the years art has taken many forms, ranging from Renaissance master sculptures to Jackson Pollock's splatter-paint like action paintings to the color field paintings of Mark Rothko. Although painting is often a popular form of art, this is only one of countless possible art medias.

In the era of modern art, oftentimes the result of 'art' is not anything that at all resembles a painting, sculpture, or drawing. The artist Marcel Duchamp, a key figure of the dada and conceptual art movements, is one such example. Duchamp drastically changed the definition of art through his readymades, which were mass-produced everyday objects taken out of their original context and raised to the status of an artwork simply through the act of an artist dubbing them as "art," signing them, and placing them in a gallery.<sup>123</sup> Inspired by artists such as Duchamp, the conceptual art movement that began in the mid 1960's so fully revolutionized the definition of art that often art no longer results in a physical art-object at all. This is a concept so foreign to the average viewer with no formal art training that these conceptual practices may barely resemble art at all. Sol Lewitt, a conceptual artist and painter of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>123</sup> "Marcel Duchamp." The Art Story: Modern Art Insight, <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-duchamp-marcel.htm>.

exemplifies this expanded understanding of art when he said: “ideas alone can be works of art; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form. All ideas need not be made physical.”<sup>124</sup> LeWitt said that he was ultimately interested in ideas and not in the production of art-objects—and although this type of art may seem strange and unusual, it may be a form of art more accessible to certain individuals.

### **An Artistically Mindful Mindset**

If one takes this expanded understanding of art—that art is a specific mode of processing ideas and sensory cues that at times results in a physical art-object and at other times does not—then perhaps the idea of using art as a way to increase mindfulness does not sound so daunting to the average adult. Instead of hunting down an easel, expensive paints, and the perfect still life arrangement to get your daily dose of mindfulness, what if you simply lived your daily life a little more artistically and mindfully? Indeed, if art is more of a specific quality of thought, contemplation, and observation, one could apply this mindset to all areas of life, not just when perched on a stool with a paintbrush in hand.

Some mindfulness-based art therapy (MBAT) initiatives already have begun to capitalize on this concept. One such MBAT intervention piloted in 2010, entitled “Walkabout: Looking In, Looking Out,” had cancer patients enrolled into the intervention take an artistic and mindful perspective on something ubiquitous and commonplace—walking. Incorporating mindfulness into your average outdoor walk is a concept frequently used by mindfulness-based stress reduction programs to teach participants how to incorporate a more mindful approach into aspects of their daily lives. If individuals can apply a mindful approach to such everyday

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<sup>124</sup> "Sol Lewitt." The Art Story: Modern Art Insight, [http://www.theartstory.org/artist-lewitt-sol.htm#key\\_ideas\\_header](http://www.theartstory.org/artist-lewitt-sol.htm#key_ideas_header).

moments, why not also add a mindfully artistic approach as well? In this specific intervention, participants combined mindful outdoor walking with an artistic mindset by taking a digital camera along with them on several of their walks throughout the intervention. Participants were asked to take pictures of anything that they found pleasant or unpleasant during their walk and later selected ten of these photos to create a collage in future sessions.<sup>125</sup> Programs such as this teach individuals how to incorporate a mindfully artistic perspective into the commonplace moments of their everyday lives. If we were to take inspiration from conceptual artists, perhaps programs such as these can be further expounded upon.

Although this program still utilized the creation of a physical art-object (the collage based off of the photographs), it is likely that this step is not necessary to still gain the benefits of engagement with the visual arts. As an artist myself, I can testify to the changes in observation that walking around with a camera can create. With a camera in hand suddenly everything seems to have the potential for a fascinating photography. The texture of bricks, the shapes cast by the shadows of leaves below, the accidental abstract collage found in weathered and decaying posters all become engaging and thought provoking details that you otherwise may have never noticed. When walking with a camera in hand, suddenly you are keenly aware of these infinite, tiny moments around you and are kept fully engaged in the present moment to better observe these details.

While the above-mentioned study used this phenomenon to induce a mindful state when walking with a camera, eventually this perspective can be continued even when not holding a camera in hand. This quality of attention to one's surroundings is a skill set learned through

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<sup>125</sup> Caroline Peterson, "Walkabout: Looking in, Looking Out": A Mindfulness-Based Art Therapy Program." *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* 32, no. 2 (2015).



engagement with the arts—yet it is a skill that can be applied even when not holding a camera or a paintbrush. This example demonstrates that art is often the result of an artistic mindset—just as LeWitt said he was more interested in ideas, so is art often more about the mental process of observation and examination of our surroundings or concepts than it is about the final art object. One example of this is found in a section of Csikszentmihalyi’s book entitled “Flow Through the Senses: The Joys of Seeing.”<sup>126</sup> Csikszentmihalyi explains that any information that we process can lead to a state of flow, and one such often overlooked and ubiquitous sense is our sight. While people usually only use seeing for basic survival and directional reasons, the rich visual information we are constantly presented with can lead to continuous opportunities to enter a flow (and thus a mindful) state.

Csikszentmihalyi states that “the visual arts are one of the best training grounds for developing these skills” that allow us to use sight as a flow state. Through visual arts, individuals train both their conceptual and visual skills. Indeed, earlier I discussed ways that art leads to an increased awareness of one’s surroundings—often concepts learned from the studio translate to a greater ability to see the world around you in richer detail. Suddenly the most mundane objects, such as a teacup or a crack in the sidewalk, become fascinating examples of shadow, texture, and line quality. I remember a tangible change in the way I experienced the world after taking my first college level painting course. In this course, I had recently completed an assignment where we copied a master painting of our choice—I had chosen a famous impressionist landscape painting that featured a grove of trees. On my drive home one day after painting class, I found myself watching the trees that flashed by on the side of the road. I was amazed to realize how much more color variation I saw in the trees after having spent hours painting trees. No longer

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<sup>126</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, 109.

just a shade of ubiquitous green, the trees appeared to have dozens of shades of greens, yellows, blues, and browns that I could now more accurately recognize. Respondents of my survey echoed this sentiment, saying that art “affects my entire outlook on life...It is a way to see my surroundings in a very creative way...I believe it gives me an enlightened view of my world around me.” Another respondent said that they “appreciate the little things in life because I can pay more attention to detail.” One response summed it up, saying: “without art, life would be drab.”

As Csikszentmihalyi explains, once one has increased their visual observation skills through engagement with the visual arts, one can apply this artistic mindset to their general life outside of the art studio or museum. He summarized this by saying that now “not only great works of art produce such intense flow experiences; for the trained eye, even the most mundane sights can be delightful.”<sup>127</sup> He then uses an example of a man who rides a train to work every morning and compares the experience of watching the passing rooftops to living in a Sheeler precisionist painting. Although it often takes some form of visual training, such as visual arts training, or great intentionality to be able to gleam such rich details from your visual senses, once one has this mode of sight it can be applied to all of life. Unlike most flow activities such as yoga or meditation, seeing is immediately available during almost every moment of your waking life and does not require a special activity or allotted time to enjoy the benefits of a flow experience from sight. Due to the ubiquitous and immediate nature of sight as flow, Csikszentmihalyi says that “it is a particular pity to let it rest undeveloped.”

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 108.

This ability for interactions with the visual arts to fundamentally change the way one views, and thus interacts, with the world is frequently described by artists. One such example is found in *Where the Heart Beats*, a book by Kay Larson. Larson describes the influence that Seattle painter Mark Tobey had on John Cage. Larson describes a pivotal day when Tobey and Cage took a walk through Seattle to a Japanese restaurant. Although this walk would have normally taken just forty-five minutes, the artists spent several hours on the walk because Tobey was constantly stopping and pointing out interesting visual details to Cage. Cage later described the walk, saying that “He was constantly stopping and pointing out things to see, opening my eyes in other words. Which, if I understand it at all, has been a function of twentieth-century art—to open our eyes... Just seeing what there was to see.”<sup>128</sup> Cage describes this experience as something that completely changed the way that he saw the world, describing how just a few weeks later he realized how much aesthetic enjoyment he could glean out of simply studying the cracks in the pavement below his feet at a bus station. Larson uses this as an example of ways that bringing an artistic mindset to everyday life allows art to “implicitly move out beyond the frame, into the ordinary world...[dismantling] the conceptual walls—the value judgement and social norms—that separate the artwork from the pavement.”<sup>129</sup>

Other artists and art movements of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century continued to dismantle the boundaries that have traditionally separated art and life. Art critic Harold Rosenberg described this phenomenon in an article in which he discussed the American action painters, saying that “the act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist’s existence. The new painting has broken down every distinction between art and life.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Larson, *Where the Heart Beats*, 81.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

Allan Kaprow, an artist working through the 1950s to the early 2000s, embodies this concept of the blurring of art and life more than anyone else. In fact, he wrote the book entitled *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. Kaprow was mainly a performance artist who coined the art form of happenings, a type of performance art that purposely blurred the distinctions between artist and viewer, audience and participant, surreal and real, and art and life. The pieces were designed to complicate the definition of art, hoping to confront and dismantle the traditional notions of art as the precious, material art-object that is the product of a talented and trained artist.<sup>131</sup> Kaprow hoped to emphasize that art is not an object but is instead an action, activity, occasion, or an experience.<sup>132</sup> In the introduction to *Essays on Blurring of Art and Life*, editor Jeff Kelley explains that Kaprow could best be described as an artist who makes “lifeworks.”<sup>133</sup>

Kaprow’s theories on blurring the lines between art and life serve as my final example of the ties between art and mindfulness. In his essays *Performing Life* (1979), *The Real Experiment* (1983), and *The Meaning of Life* (1990), Kaprow takes the reader on a poetic journey where he completely redefines the meaning of art and compels the reader to reexamine the meaning of their life. Kaprow begins this journey by explaining what he means by blurring the lines between art and life. First, he describes several ways that artists have previously attempted to do so. He examines the conceptual artist Duchamp, who showed that any object can become a piece of art. With Duchamp’s works however, the artists and viewers still rely on the traditions of the art world such as the museum, the frame, the artist’s signature, and studying an object through the lenses of an educated art history mindset. Kaprow describes this as the Duchamp model, where

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<sup>131</sup> "Happenings." The Art Story: Modern Art Insight, <http://www.theartstory.org/movement-happenings.htm>.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, University of California Press, 1993: xii.

“we found that non-art could be transformed into high art on the Western Model simply by framing properly.”<sup>134</sup>

He continues to speak of the evolution to un-art and the un-artist by giving two other examples of ways artists attempted to blur the distinction between art and life. The first, when artists tried to make galleries in the midst of life (for example through turning a garage into a gallery), still seemed to limited to Kaprow. The second, in which artists tried to see high art everywhere, seemed slightly more revolutionary to Kaprow. In this model, artists will frame everything they see in life through an artistic lens, such as seeing a cliff as a modern sculpture or people walking through the streets as a modern dance. However, because the artist has kept the traditional framing devices, values, and clichés of high art, Kaprow saw these models as still too limited.<sup>135</sup>

Kaprow refers to his model of life as art as “the real experiment” or “the whole situation.” In this model, Kaprow describes that “it wasn’t enough to discover that an elevator ride or a sandwich could be art; we had to ask where that art belonged, whom it was for, and why.”<sup>136</sup> In this model, the artist completely merges with the artwork, the viewers are a part of the work, and the work merges with its surroundings in such a way that it does not really exist by itself. Kaprow’s final model of life as art serves as a model of how one can merge mindfulness, art, and life into one ultimate experience. In this model, Kaprow asks that we apply a certain degree of attention and awareness to our present experiences. In fact, this attention is the exact same quality as a mindful awareness—he calls for us to be presently and openly engaged with our current experiences. Kaprow explains that once one is fully paying attention to the mundane

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 208.

details of their life, the usually unnoticed details of life suddenly become riveting and can be endlessly explored. Kaprow says that once this happens we are experiencing “lifelike art,” in which everything becomes an opportunity to explore the “familiar unfamiliar” and thus everything serves as a means to gain self-knowledge. He says that in this model, “art is connected to life and everything else. In other words, there is art at the service of art and art at the service of life.”<sup>137</sup> Thus, lifelike art allows us to connect art to all of life and to live a higher quality of life—this understanding of art is vastly different from the notion of art as an isolated, precious object that many deem an obsolescent luxury.

Through this process, lifelike art allows us to fully experience our everyday lives through an artistic mindset—without needing to worry about creating an art-object, aestheticizing one’s surroundings, or gaining an audience. Instead, the artist can simply be mindfully present and explore the untouched meaning that may be hidden in their everyday moments. Kaprow explains this transition, saying that instead of worrying about the normal traditions of art, he decided to bring an artistic, mindful awareness of his everyday life. He explains that this awareness changed how he interacted with even the most commonplace activities, such as brushing his teeth. He describes this, saying: “I decided to pay attention to brushing my teeth, to watch my elbow moving. I would be alone in my bathroom, without art spectators.” He goes on for several paragraphs in his book, describing how bringing this quality of attention to brushing his teeth allowed him to examine concepts he had never previously thought of. He explains that after attentively brushing his teeth for several weeks the experience served “as an eye-opener to [his] privacy and to [his] humanity.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 205.

In this example, Kaprow describes the way that lifelike art was at one with life and not in any way separate or distinct. He explains that “the purpose of lifelike art was therapeutic: to reintegrate the piecemeal reality we take for granted. Not just intellectually, but directly, as experience—in this moment, in this house, at this kitchen sink...”.<sup>139</sup> Once embed with this mode of artistic mindful awareness, everything in life may be found to have meaning. Additionally, you are actively experiencing and engaging with this meaning, not simply intellectually thinking about it. In this way, Kaprow describes lifelike art as the process of therapeutically weaving “meaning-making activity with any or all parts of our lives.” Through these experiences, we not only gain self-knowledge, but we also gain a greater engagement with the everyday moments of our lives: we live artistically and mindfully. He describes this process as small steps towards an eye-opening experience, much like a practice of mindfulness. Kaprow compares lifelike art to the practices of psychotherapies and mediational disciplines, saying that lifelike art allows us to place these practices into a contemporary context. Kaprow eloquently explains the connection between art, mindfulness, and life in his closing paragraph of *The Real Experiment*, saying:

Lifelike art can be, for therapy and meditation, a bridge into daily affairs. It is even possible that some lifelike art could become a discipline of healing and meditation as well. Something like this is already happening. If it develops more intentionally (and we don't know if it will), we may see the overall meaning of art change profoundly—from being an end to being a means, from holding out a promise of perfection in some other realm to demonstrating a way of living meaningfully in this one.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 218.

## **Discussion**

### **The Limited Context of Art**

As I have disused, the discovery of a correlation between art and mindfulness would have important implications for proving the efficacy of art-making, art courses, art therapies, and other forms of engagement with the visual arts. A link between art and mindfulness is a particularly timely issue, as mindfulness's popularity is continually on the rise while art is simultaneously receiving decreased funding and support. Mindfulness has become a mainstream topic, with dozens of apps in the marketplace available to buy, constant mindfulness trends appearing such as mindful eating, and articles on the topic frequenting top newsstand including a TIME magazine front cover issue in 2014.<sup>141</sup> Meanwhile, art is increasingly seen as a luxury and continually faces decreased funding not only in schools but also on the national federal levels. Below two examples, the limited context of art therapy and the decrease of art courses in public schools, are explored.

### **Art Therapy**

Despite the many proven and unproven benefits of art, art is utilized and practiced in an unfortunately narrow context and setting. Even art therapy, the field that mostly directly capitalizes on the psychological benefits of art, has a very limited usage of art. Art therapy experts say that too often art therapy is used in a limited framework that “emphasizes the identification and remediation of mental health concerns.”<sup>142</sup> Although art therapy can be

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<sup>141</sup> Pickert, Kate. "The Mindful Revolution: The Science of Finding Focus in a Stressed-out, Multitasking Culture." *Time*, 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Jordan Potash, Sarah Mann, Johanna Martinez, Ann Roach, and Nina Wallace, "Spectrum of Art Therapy Practice: Systematic Literature Review of Art Therapy, 1983-2014," *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* 33, no. 3 (2016): 119.



valuable for wellness programs, prevention purposes, rehabilitation, social action, lifestyle management, and assessment, too often art therapy is used exclusively in a therapy model.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, a literature review of the *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* revealed that 62% of the time art therapy is exclusively used as a therapy.<sup>144</sup> This study also showed that the populations art therapy is used with is extremely narrow and often limited to children, adolescents, psychotherapy patients, or other clinical populations.<sup>145</sup> One study found that more than 50% of studies that examined the usage of art therapy used only children and adolescent participants.<sup>146</sup> Although studies have shown that art therapy results in statistically significant improvements in psychological and physiological issues for individuals of all ages, the field of art therapy and its study continues to be extremely limited in its applications and targeted populations.<sup>147</sup>

Considering this limitation, a correlation between engagement with the visual arts and mindfulness would greatly add to the discussion on the efficacy of art therapy and the value of general engagement with the visual arts. Because of its surge in popularity, mindfulness has been a topic of thousands of studies in the last decades which have proven its efficacy for use on both clinical and non-clinical populations and shown its value for use with individuals of all ages. If art is shown to be linked to mindfulness, perhaps art will also enjoy a surge in popularity and it will be seen as an activity with valuable psychological benefits for a more diverse population.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Mathew W. Reynolds, Laura Nabors, and Anne Quinlan, "The Effectiveness of Art Therapy: Does It Work?". *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* 17, no. 3 (2000): 209.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>147</sup> Sarah C. Slayton, "Outcome Studies on the Efficacy of Art Therapy: A Review of Findings," *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* 27, no. 3 (2010): 115.

### **Art and Mindfulness in Schools**

Another example of the limited context of art is seen in the way that art is getting removed from school curricula—one 2012 study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), showed that all arts except for music education have dropped in the frequency that they are included in the curricula of public elementary schools. The visual arts specifically dropped from 87% in 1999-2000 to 83% in 2009-2010.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, 43% of all visual art specialist teachers reported that they taught at more than one school in 2009-2010. Public secondary schools also witnessed a decrease in visual art education in the past decade, dropping from 93% of schools offering visual arts in 1999-2000 to 89% of schools from 2008-2009. Although these cuts threaten many public schools, they especially hit those schools in impoverished areas. This study found that in schools where only 0-25% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches 95% of the schools offer instruction in the visual arts in 2008-2009, comparative to only 80% of schools with 76% or more students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in 2008-2009.

Meanwhile, mindfulness is increasingly incorporated into classrooms through non-profit initiatives such as MindUp and Mindful Schools.<sup>149</sup> This increase is largely because research on mindfulness that repeatedly shows its positive outcomes with children and adolescents as well as adults. If engagement with the visual arts does indeed increase mindfulness, then this juxtaposed relationship of popularity is extremely ironic. If schools wish to increase mindfulness yet are seeing cuts in art courses, they are incidentally removing the oldest and most common form of

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<sup>148</sup> B. Parsad and M. Spiegelman, "Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 1999-2000 and 2009-10," edited by U.S. Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, 2012.

<sup>149</sup> Lauren Cassani Davis, "When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom," The Atlantic, 2015.

mindfulness in schools—the visual arts. Furthermore, the school system already has thousands of trained professionals in the art field and comparatively few professionals trained in mindfulness techniques. Art also has the additional benefit of being a very accessible and entertaining form of mindfulness—something that makes it a very valuable mindfulness activity for younger children. To exclude art from curricula while attempting to including more mindfulness is ironic, counterproductive, and unsustainable.

As discussed earlier, several studies have found that the non-clinical adult population can gain many psychological and physiological benefits from creating art. However, this area is still lacking sufficient research because most studies on art are done in clinical settings and exclusively use art-therapy initiatives.

### **Conclusion**

I hope that as future research on art and mindfulness expands, we can remember Kaprow's call for the intentional development of lifelike art—a life that is lived mindfully, presently, artistically, and curiously even during our most commonplace and mundane moments. I propose a need for this intentional combination of daily experiences, art, and mindfulness. If we can manage to live our everyday lives a little more mindfully and bring the quality of curiosity and attention to everyday moments through an artistic mindset, perhaps we can capitalize on the benefits that mindfulness and engagement with the visual arts offer more often than just when on a yoga mat or in an art studio. Additionally, by carrying the mindsets of mindfulness and lifelike art into everyday settings, we allow for a larger population of people to experience the benefits of staying presently engaged with the current moment—not just those who are trained in painting, meditation, or art history. Through lifelike art, seeing as a flow experience, and

increased mindful awareness of our everyday surroundings the effects of having an artistic mindset can be beneficial even when not actively engaging in the making of an art-object. I believe that once research has established the connection between art and mindfulness, the general populace will soon be exposed to what many artists already know to be self-evident: engagement with the visual arts fundamentally changes our interactions with the world, creating a more mindfully aware, curious, and rich mindset that we view all our experiences.

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## Appendix A

### Survey Questions

#### Q1.1 INFORMED CONSENT:

Dear participant,

I am a student under the direction of Dr. Cunningham in the department of Psychology and Dr. Townsend in the Department of Art at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. I am conducting a research study to study the ways that interactions with the visual arts may lead to increased levels of mindfulness.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve completing a brief 15-minute anonymous online survey. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. If at any time you discontinue the survey, your results will be discarded. The results of the research study may be published, but all data gathered is anonymous and confidential.

There are no anticipated physical, emotional, or psychological risks or benefits with this study that affect the participant. Benefits to the psychological community may include a better understanding of the effects that engagement with the visual arts may provide, the populations that may benefit from engagement with the visual arts, and the relationship between art and mindfulness.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at 706-996-3330 or e-mail me at [vmp311@mocs.utc.edu](mailto:vmp311@mocs.utc.edu).

This research has been approved the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga's Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Amy Doolittle, the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board at 423-425-5563.

Additional contact information is available at [www.utc.edu/irb](http://www.utc.edu/irb).

You must be 18 or older to participate. Completion and submission of the questionnaire will be considered your consent to participate. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Lydia Fogo

[Vmp311@mocs.utc.edu](mailto:Vmp311@mocs.utc.edu)

Dr. Townsend

UTC Fine Arts Center, Room 335

Department 1301

615 McCallie Avenue

Chattanooga, TN 37403

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure. Please select 'Yes' if you consent to participate in this study and 'No' if you decline.







achieve that loose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.						
I do jobs or tasks automatically , without being aware of what I'm doing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find myself doing things without paying attention.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I snack without being aware that I'm eating.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q23 Instructions: Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Please indicate how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience. Please answer

according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

	Rarely	Occasionally	Fairly Often	Almost Always
I am open to the experience of the present moment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I sense my body, whether eating, cooking, cleaning or talking.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I notice an absence of mind, I gently return to the experience of the here and now.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am able to appreciate myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I pay attention to what's behind my actions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I see my mistakes and difficulties without judging them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel connected to my experience in the here-and-now	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I accept unpleasant experiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I watch my feelings without getting lost in them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In difficult situations, I can pause without	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

immediately reacting.				
I experience moments of inner peace and ease, even when things get hectic and stressful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am impatient with myself and with others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am able to smile when I notice how I sometimes make life difficult.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q2.2 Have you ever or are you currently involved in a practice that purposely utilizes mindfulness? (E.g., yoga, meditation, etc)

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Q2.3 How much time do you spend participating in some form of sport, exercise, movement art, or performance art? (e.g., dance, ball sports, running, acrobatics, etc)

- A great deal

- A lot
- A moderate amount
- A little
- None at all
- None currently, but have previously spent a substantial amount of time

Q25 How old are you?

- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- 66-75
- 75+

Q3.1 Instructions: The following questions will ask about your participation with the visual arts.

If you are not involved with the visual arts in any way, please select "no" to the first question and you will be redirected to the end of the survey.

Note that here, visual arts is defined as the fine arts, applied arts (e.g., graphic design), contemporary arts (e.g., computer art or photography) and decorative arts and crafts. Although in some cases visual arts may include practices that do not result in a physical art-object (e.g., a 2D, 3D, or digital product) such as performance art or conceptual art, this section of the study is intended for those who interact with actual art-objects through viewing, making, or studying at least some of the time. For the purposes of this study, 'visual arts' does not include musical arts, movement arts, or other forms of creative arts that never result in a physical art-object.

Q3.2 Are you involved with the visual arts in any way (e.g., making, viewing, teaching)?

- Yes
- Sometimes
- No

Q3.3 How well do the follow statements describe you and your affiliation with art?

	Describes me extremely well	Describes me very well	Describes me moderately well	Describes me slightly well	Does not describe me
Art is my hobby	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Art is my profession	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have invested a lot of time into art	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Art has greatly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

impacted my life					
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Q3.4 The following choices describe some ways you may be involved with the arts. Please select all roles that may apply to you.

- Artist
- Art Teacher/Professor
- Art Historian
- Curator
- Commercial or Applied Artist
- Art Therapist
- Hobbyist
- Art Enthusiast
- Art Collector
- Art Critic
- Art Dealer
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q3.5 How long have you been involved with the visual arts?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 3-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-20 years
- 20-30 years
- 30+

Q3.6 Have you received any formal art education? If so, please select the highest degree you have earned. (e.g., BFA, BA: Art History, BA: Museum studies, etc.)

- No formal Art Education
- An Undergraduate Minor
- An Undergraduate Major
- A Graduate Major
- A Graduate Minor
- A Doctorate Degree
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q3.7 If you make art, how often do you currently make art?

- Daily
- 4-6 times a week
- 2-3 times a week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Once a year
- Once every few years
- I do not make art

Q3.8 What types of art medium do you use? (Select all the apply)

- I do not make art
- Photography
- Film/Video
- Painting
- Drawing
- Graphic Design
- Collage
- Ceramics



- Sculpture
- Printmaking
- Animation
- Crafts
- Illustration
- Computer Art/Design
- Mixed Media 2D
- Performance Art (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q3.9 If you make art, how often do you feel lost or fully consumed in the present moment during the process of making art?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never
- I do not make art

Q3.10 Do you think that art can create changes in people's mindsets, life, or experiences?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Might or might not
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Q3.11 Has art changed your own personal thoughts, mindset, life, or experiences?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Might or might not
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Q3.12 If art has changed your own personal thoughts, mindset, life, or experiences, in what ways has it done so?

## Appendix B

Answers to Q3.12: If art has changed your own personal thoughts, mindset, life, or experiences, in what ways has it done so?

*Note: Answers appear exactly as entered by respondents. Some personal identifying details have been censored for privacy purposes.*

1. I grew up in a family that emphasized physical activity through sports and outdoor activities, which I got heavily involved in because it allowed me to get in flow states where I felt like I was able to calm my mind and become hyper-aware of my actions without feeling attached to them. Four years ago I took my first photography class and found that I was able to get in a similar mindset while working with complex ideas rather than competing against others. I was instantly hooked and eventually changed majors in my freshmen year at [REDACTED] to pursue photography. As I have continued making art in college, my awareness of myself has become second nature and I have delved deeper into projects in order to escape from my self-consciousness by getting lost in my unique perspective of the world.
2. I have become more aware of expressing mindfulness through art through my students.
3. It has helped with my depression and helped me stay in the moment. I use art as a form of mindfulness-based therapy, particularly when my mood gets low. I have several zen-based coloring books and there was a time when I thoroughly enjoyed using charcoal. Unfortunately, I no longer remember how to use charcoal and therefore do not use it anymore. I also had enrolled in art classes for a time to help with my depression when I was no longer taking art through my high school.

4. Art helps to provide the individual with a sense of creative intelligence. Those who make art learn to think fast, make decisions, and execute ideas.
5. The act of anticipating, planning, and getting ready to make art is the first step into the "place" of making art. The mental/emotional shift happens when concentration on media, technique, concept, composition begin to merge. Often art will make itself as the piece progresses and that experience is outside myself yet being done by me, rather unique experience. Of course I can be working on an artwork and be thinking of what to have for dinner but the engagement with making art is captivating. The joy and intrigue of looking at original art is strong because I connect with the maker of the piece as I stand in the space where the artist was when the art was being produced. A vicarious joy. Making art can be calming, frustrating, challenging, exhausting, and rewarding. The amazing thing is to step back and appreciate what I have produced and sometimes I can respond "I made that"?! It's so strong! Wow. Yet artists often disapprove of their work which is a good motivator for making more art! The action and reward of making art is better than making a wonderful meal or party for friends as that is transient. The permanent artifact, the result of the efforts of problem solving and making is a reward unlike any other. The appeal of making art, then making better art, is a strong pull to make even more art. Engaging and captivating unlike any other activity.
6. I never feel more like myself than when I am creating artwork. I feel that I am fully able to sense not only myself but become completely aware of the intricate qualities of the medium I am working in. During my studio and art practices, I feel that I simultaneously lose and find myself—I feel at peace and at one with my body, I am able to calmly

observe corporal feelings, but pay more attention to the spiritual self and my connection to the act of creation.

7. Creates personal centering, well being, hope and pleasure, gratification of ability and experience through process and result, connection with others.
8. For me, the process of art making is a form of prayer and/or meditation. Art allows me to create a stream of consciousness, and make connections that otherwise would have gone unnoticed. Making also pushes me to only focus on what is currently in front of me (at least consciously) which is something I struggle with throughout everyday life. I work out emotions and problems I have recently dealt with.
9. I am a very excitable and sometimes brash person. I'm either going 100 mph or 20. I used to think that my creative process and art making was a given for me. I went to art school, excelled at it and was given lots of praise for my illustration work. I graduated, and then spent five years not touching pen paper. I was working in a creative field, but not specifically with illustration. I got very burnt out, very self conscious of my work and convinced myself that I was technically proficient, but not particularly inventive or creative. I turned my art making to working with my hands and design spaces, thinking that I somewhat creative 9-5 job was better than nothing at all. I got lost in the formulaic creative process of that world. I started seeing a therapist after realizing that I was in a very strange space. I started working on mindfulness, and awareness. I was surprised that a lot of the things I was working on were very much related to why I wasn't making art for myself anymore. I wasn't happy, I wasn't inspired and I was tired, all the time. It was the first time that I realized that art, creative process and my personal and emotional health were all linked. I realized that I wouldn't be ready and able to be in a place to

create unless I made huge changes in my life. I had created an ego surrounding my art in school, and ego and creativity work directly against one another. I moved to [REDACTED] was essentially unemployed for a few months before I started working at a creative agency. I had never worked in graphic design before, but the challenge of a new medium, the chance to work in illustration again and be self-motivated has really opened up a whole new work for my creativity. I have access to the outdoors, to great friends, to exercise and a support system that I didn't have in New York. I'm slowly weaving all the pieces together, slowly creating a sphere of creativity and happiness that can yield new art, and in that process learning more about myself on both an emotional and physical level.

10. Art has changed my life in the way that it has challenged my perspectives and allowed me to appreciate things that I would not otherwise appreciate.
11. Art is a way of taking away the blinders, of making new, interesting connections in life. There is no wrong answer, no impossibility, in the realm of art. It contains absolute freedom, where there is no judgement while experimenting, learning, playing and discovering. It is the closest to remaining ever curious as I was as a child. Without art, life would be drab, confined by my job. I don't know what I would do without it. It is due to my art education that I accredit my critical thinking and creative problem solving skills. It fosters success, or rather, diminishes the fear of failing. It has contributed to my understanding of reality, that things aren't always as they seem, and that your present experience is filtered through your past experiences. Art has been a catharsis through depression, trauma, and abuse, a way to look at and gain some understanding of life's difficult situations. I probably wouldn't be alive if it weren't for art.

12. Made me realize work and talent involved
13. Creating something gives me pride of accomplishment, satisfaction and happiness.
14. Art is a creative outlet that allows me to experiment with ideas, work with my hands, alleviate stress, and stretch myself.
15. I react emotionally to art. I believe that it opens me up to myself and the world in a way that otherwise I would not be.
16. Introduced me to great people,enabled me to enjoy myself and create and enjoy music.my children also play instruments.music has allowed me to travel as well
17. Great literature, poetry, and songs have influenced my life. When my life has been difficult, especially as a child, great writing was my escape.
18. It gives peace, confidence, surprise, joy, and sometimes bonding with friends, family.
19. Art has served as a coping activity. Creating something from nothing has helped me value time apart from economic stresses and underemployment.
20. Hadn't done any art in many years,after being a graphic design artist in the '80s.My wife of 32 yrs passed away [REDACTED].I had been in a deep depression.Have been working with my longtime friend,Artist [REDACTED] [REDACTED].Starting to look to the future again,and getting back into music,drawing,and photography.It saved my life.
21. I appreciate the talents of other artists knowing the time and energy I put into something is just as important as theirs.
22. Community and art go hand and hand. I am 100% in the present moment when creating

23. How I see myself and the world has changed, I can convey concepts with art that are not possible to explain with words, for example the interconnections that we all have, showing the fabric of the universe, the energy flow and transformation.
24. Adds beauty to everyday experiences and home; allows me to look at objects, scenes and nature in a different way (appreciation); makes me happy - especially public art projects
25. Too many ways to write about at the moment, but I will give you an example. This past Saturday I went to the Hunter Museum to view the new Female Latina artist exhibit. The art gave me new perspectives on the lives of people who live a culture I know very little about. The little that I do know about Latina culture is very skewed and viewed from a privileged perspective. The exhibit made me very aware of my limited knowledge on the subject, but also encouraged me to do further research to better understand the lives, struggles, and joys of these women.
26. Made me more sensitive to my environment. Made me more appreciative of color, color changes, shapes, elegance of shapes.
27. It lets me remove myself from current stress and find a calm place. But only when actively focusing on it.
28. Art has made me more aware of the world around me in my day-to-day life.
29. I have been around art my entire life, and I don't believe I would be the same person without it. Art lets me express my feelings without using words, as I am not a very talkative person. When I am creating art, I am only thinking about the art and nothing else.
30. It makes me feel more capable. Not only of creating more art, but also of critical thinking and making creative solutions to life.



31. I overanalyze most things in my life because of the way I was taught in art school.
32. More appreciative of ceramic objects.
33. You can express yourself in ways that words simply can't. It's a really nice feeling to look back at your artwork whether it's a doodle in your margins or an image you've worked weeks on and say, "Damn, I did that." Or if it's dance or yoga and you try something new or gain a new ability, it's a satisfying feeling.
34. It has caused me to think of time and space differently. I appreciate so much more of the little things that are put into every day pieces of art we forget are art.
35. Creating has provided a way to embody, and thereby externalize, experiences and thoughts.
36. Art carries a plethora of emotions by both the creator and the one consuming it. It holds the unique ability to be personal and highly public. Studying critical theory has definitely changed the way I think through everyday situations. Applying my love of art/design and the idea of visually solving challenges I related to my interest in climbing. Multiple ways to send a project based on me. I also have in general become a more open person to listening and understanding to other thoughts and opinions. Not that I agree but I'm able to listen and see their side. I have to create. I have physical urges to make things. I love the journey and process of making/creating/designing. Sometimes is selfish enjoyment and other times it's for someone. I have learned to see beauty is all circumstances and slow down to take in moments/nature/experiences. I could go on and on.
37. It has forced me to realise the beauty that flows out of being consumed with the present moment. It has allowed me to clear my mind while simultaneously contemplating life. It's an interesting, paradoxical peace.

38. Made me more present, allowed me peace in the chaos of a moment, given me structure to process thoughts, and created an expression of myself.
39. It has not.
40. it has made me aware of small instances and that nearly everything is beautiful, even death.
41. Observing art has especially changed my mindset, because it allows me to view the world from another's perspective, and also makes me question my own views and the artist's motives behind the art. Also, making my own art helps me to clear my mind and express myself.
42. I cannot think of specifics, I just enjoy making crafts so much that I feel it must have impacted me in some way.
43. It affects my entire outlook on life. The way I view almost everything; physically and spiritually. It is a way to see my surroundings in a very creative way. Art is a necessary part of my life. I believe it gives me an enlightened view of my world around me. Art is in every aspect of my daily life, drawing me to the experiential/spiritual.
44. I am aware of arrangements and details all around me. I am interested greatly in what makes people enjoy or dread looking at something, and what allows people to curate and trust the products that they buy. Art offered me an introspection that lead to further examination of the world's emotional, environmental and societal climate.
45. Crafting pieces for my home makes me feel peaceful and purposeful in my pursuit of creating a safe and nurturing nest for my people.
46. Reminding me of great themes and beauty

47. Art can change your mood in an instant, it can let you express emotions you never could in words. Art is a true form of communication, it can relieve depression but also let someone who has never experienced that begin to understand the condition.
48. drawing is a quiet place unlike most of time. i don't know that i have been changed by it, but perhaps it has provided an opportunity to be influenced by the quiet.
49. I have been doing art since middle school and it has always given me a sense if peace and focus.
50. Immersing myself in art daily has taught me to slow down and make conscious decisions.
51. By giving me the tools to reach out to others through the healing process of creating art.
52. I use drawing as a coping mechanism for my short attention span and my anxiety. Taking a break from homework and allowing devotion to visual creativity helps me relax fully. In class, I tend to draw while taking notes. This allows me to pay attention to whoever is speaking and remain present in the conversation or lecture, though some might think I look distracted.
53. I think art has an incredible power to change the way people see things- offering a perspective that they might not have experienced before.
54. Taught me to be accepting of my own interests and ideas.
55. Art has made my mind more creative and I am open to new experiences now.
56. It has allowed me see that you can deal with the stress of the world by depicting that stress in your aet
57. It has made me more open to others and any idea that I've never thought of.

58. It had provided a community that I previously never had. I can connect with people and experiences better because art is the common cord. The process of making has allowed me to process my thoughts and illustrate them in philosophical and conceptual ways.
59. I find art to be calming, reassuring, and it allows me to become more mindful of the present moment and immerse myself in my project and forget about stressors of everyday life. I appreciate the little things in life because I can pay more attention to detail
60. For me, art is similar to meditation. Every brushstroke requires presence and intention, and every painting/drawing broadens my perspective in some way or another. I would not be the same person I am without my connection to art, especially to color and form, because it taught me to look at the world in a new way.
61. Making and viewing art is a mindful experience of its own. The time it takes to create or fully understand a work through viewing is also time for subtle introspection and the complex ways brains make associations and take in visual stimulus. Making activates the body even in small ways, that allows the mind to either focus or wander.
62. Art has given me a community that i feel like I belong to. Art has also taught me to appreciate more things in life, it has taught me to manage time more effectively and to be patient, art has also been my personal outlet for emotions such as sadness, happiness, or even boredom.
63. "I am more accepting of mistakes. Things that others see as not being useful or broken can be transformed and given new life, a second chance. There was once a time when I might have discarded such an item before considering this.
64. I am constantly amazed by the fact that one person's vision can be completely different from another's though they may be looking at the very same thing. This realization has

lead to a correlation between one's artistic expression and general intent in life. I am more considerate of other viewpoints because of this. "

65. Art has made me a more open and compassionate person. I have been required to view uncomfortable and controversial topics in a way that I am not familiar every time. I am often a perfectionist and through art I have been more willing to make mistakes and accept the things that I cannot control and push through uncomfortable situations. Also, I have found that I think more critically about current events and topics of discussion and controversy.
66. For me, seeing art is a good reminder to just stop and listen. I am a very busy person (aren't we all) and coming across art (of any sort) just makes me stop and think about the bigger picture.
67. It has strengthened my communication skills, as well as allowed me to be more open-minded to other's feedback.
68. Learning about art and investing my time and energy into creating art has opened up many avenues of thought I had never considered before diving deeper into art. I am able to find more ways to convey conceptual thoughts into visual and physical form, and to use art as a tool for communication and expression.
69. Art is an experience. It provides opportunities to make mistakes, explore new things, and share ideas through various media.
70. When I took art history, I saw how art is related to other aspects of social life like economics, politics, culture, and ideology. As a sociology major, it was very impactful for me to think about art in this way. I also enjoy learning about art as a form of protest. In my daily life, the only contact I have with actually making art is through doodling and

knitting/crocheting. I find these activities relaxing, and I enjoy breaking up schoolwork with a creative outlet.

71. It makes you forget time and surroundings
72. It has made me who I am and makes me aware of my problems and feelings because dance is how I express those. It makes me feel good
73. I consider myself a very a.d.d. person, but when I'm making (physically creating) art, I often find that I zone into it so much that I forget to eat, I forget to check my phone, and sometimes I even stop hearing the sounds around me. Where as normally, if I'm trying to read or do math or write, I am very easily distracted by sounds, motion, smells, and my own thoughts.
74. Art allowed me to understand deeper meanings and analyze things with more attention.
75. Strengthened my confidence, challenged my beliefs, formed important relationships,
76. I started a journal when I came to college- by journal I mean i write about memories and experiences then doodle/draw/paint/glue things creating a collage of my life. Being able to have a tangible representation of my life allows me to see changes in my thought processes and relive memories. This in an of itself helps my anxiety and I'm proud of my personal growth.
77. Art has given me a way to express my own feelings and beliefs, as well as explore those of others. I have learned more about myself and society through theatre than I have in any other way.
78. Art has utterly changed the way that I view the world, my mindset, and my thought processes.