

Mindfulness in the Art Museum - An Exploration of Contemplative Theory & Practice

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Abstract

In 2020 museum educators Kai-Kee, Latina, and Sadoyan explored the theoretical framework of activity-based pedagogy through cognitive theory and a theory of play in the text, "Activity-Based Teaching in the Art Museum: Movement, Embodiment, Emotion." Within this interdisciplinary framework, play is explored through embodiment and affordances, skills, movement, the senses, drawing in the museum, emotion, empathy and intersubjectivity, and mindful looking. The authors offered a **review of 11 mindfulness programs** across the United States (US) and concluded that mindful looking is ripe for investigation. Expanding the survey of Kai-Kee et al. (2020), this paper investigates **10 additional museum programs** across the US to understand how mindfulness is conceptualized and experienced. The goal of this research is **to understand how contemplative practices can be integrated within art museum pedagogy** to shift the experience of teaching and the experience of learning/engaging with art.

Introduction

If museums are to expand their role as public serving institutions with social responsibilities, evidence of existing programs that partner with health/wellness professionals and/or integrate contemplative practices is crucial. The aim of this paper was to review current programs and pedagogical approaches museum educators use in mindfulness programs.

Guiding Questions:

1. Expanding the survey of programs outlines by Kai-Kee et al. (2020) what other mindfulness programs exist in the US?
2. In what ways, if any, has the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted existing programs?
3. What theories and/or pedagogies are applied within existing mindfulness programs?



Methodology

This study expands surveyed mindfulness programs across the US via:

- Website reviews of 9 museum programs .
- One informal interview with an educator (from one of the museums listed below).
- A mindfulness convening held at a large museum.

The initial 11 mindful museums:

- The Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington
- The Frye Art Museum
- The Hammer Museum
- The Phoenix Art Museum
- The Utah Museum of Fine Arts
- The Crow Museum of Asian Art
- The Crystal Bridges Museum of Art
- The Institute of Contemporary Art
- The Hood Museum of Art
- The Walters Art Museum
- The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston



Additional museums reviewed:

- The Portland Art Museum
- The Denver Art Museum
- The Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art
- The Wexner Centre for the Arts at Ohio State University
- The Carnegie Museum of Art
- The Phillips Collection
- The National Museum of Asian Art
- The Lowe Art Museum
- The Georgia Museum of Art at the University of Georgia
- The Getty Center

Results

1) Similarity in program logistics (in-person or virtual).

- a) Use of Mindful or Mindfulness in titles.
- b) Common timeframe was 30-45 minutes .
- c) Offered regularly (weekly).



2) Range of engagement with the museum's artwork.

- a) Directly related to artwork.
- b) Inspired by artwork.



3) Collaboration between educators and meditation facilitators.

- a) Often a meditation teacher was listed.
- b) Occasionally yoga studios were listed as partners.

4) Pedagogically, a variety of approaches, but mostly a mix of looking and dialogue.

- a) Embodied learning as discussed – (Hubard, 2007).
- b) Framework that infuses observation, interpretation, and dialogic teaching – (Echarri & Urpi, 2018).
- c) Activity-based pedagogies (Kai-Kee, Latina, and Sadoyan, 2020).

5) In response to COVID-19, virtual programs and archived recordings offered longevity and access.

- a) There continues to be virtual mindfulness museum programs.
- b) Some institutions invested in archived webpages for which any person can view and participate.

Conclusion

With this analysis, I present 4 implications for the museum education field:

- 1) There is visibility and flexibility with contemplative education and initiatives that center **wellness in museums are here to stay**.
 - a) This is important in relation to education and professional development for museum educators.
- 2) The extent to which museum educators articulate it within their own pedagogy is still in development and we would benefit from **research and publication**.
- 3) It would be fruitful to **partner with diverse meditation and yoga teachers**, particularly those who respect the historical and spiritual traditions.
- 4) **Perspectives from the participants** is needed.
 - a) Could be formal or informal evaluation of one-time or frequent participants.

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