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

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Abstract

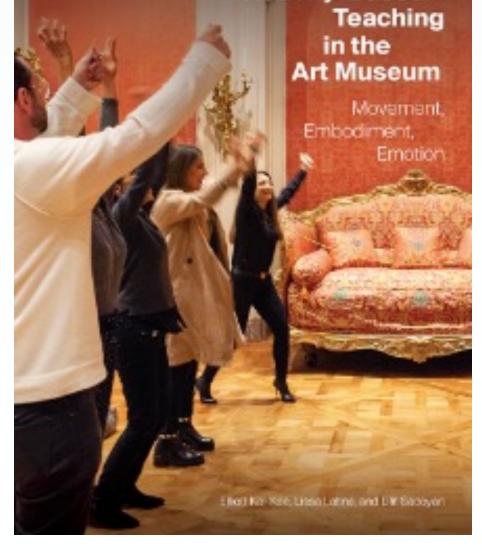
In 2020 museum educators Kai-Kee, Latina, and Sadoyan explored the theoretical framework of activity-based pedagogy through cognitive theory and a theory of play in the text, "Activity-Based Teaching in the Art Museum: Movement, Embodiment, Emotion." Within this interdisciplinary framework, play is explored 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

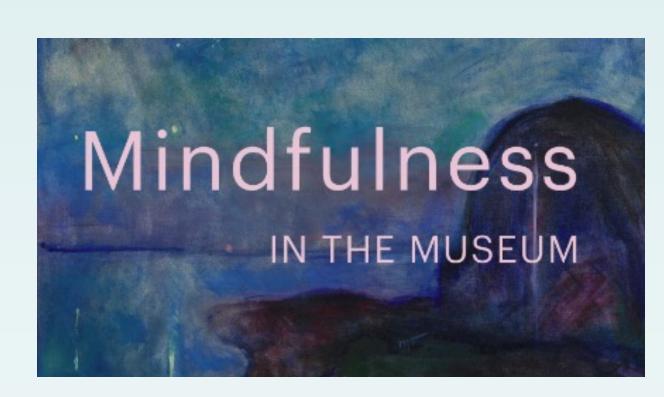


Additional museums reviewed:

- 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.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Carissa DiCindio, my advisor and teacher. It was in her Fall 2022 class, "Current Issues in Art Education Theory and Practice" that I wrote this research paper.

Thank you to the College of Fine Arts, Medici Scholars Program for providing funds to create and present this poster.

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