

Mindful: Exploring Mental Health Through Art

Fuller Craft Museum

TEACHER GUIDE

Overview

Designed for grades 6-12, this guide provides a framework for preparing you and your students for a visit to the exhibition and offers suggestions for reflection and discussion, highlighting age-appropriate questions you might pose to students, along with basic background information for you to share.

The Fuller Craft Museum is a contemporary craft museum, and as such, this exhibit includes works of art from the five craft media: metal, ceramic, glass, fiber, and wood. You will learn more about contemporary craft during your tour of the museum.

Some of the narrative in this exhibition can be difficult for young people to understand or process without further discussion, but it's important for students to feel like they are a part of that discussion. We know that educating young people is one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences we can have. However, we live in a complex world where challenging issues can be difficult to teach and to learn. Rather than exclude young people from these conversations, we must ask them to explore their feelings and their knowledge on different subjects such as mental health, current world events, and social issues.

We look forward to welcoming you and your students!

Mindful: Exploring Mental Health Through Art

Exhibit Description:

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more people have a disability in the form of mental illness in developed countries such as the US than any other group of illnesses, including cancer and heart disease. One in four adults lives with a mental health condition, yet this common illness is often hidden and not talked about. *Mindful: Exploring Mental Health through Art*, a touring exhibition created by the Society for Contemporary Craft (SCC), breaks down societal stigmas and offers an opportunity to encounter and understand mental health through the lens of contemporary craft.

Mindful explores the impact that mental illness is having on society, and the role the arts can play to both encourage positive self-expression and guide effective mental health promotion and treatment. Featuring more than 30 works created by 14 contemporary artists, *Mindful* examines creative responses to mental health conditions through the inclusion of artworks made by artists

who have been diagnosed with or affected by mental illness. The exhibition touches upon topics of anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and tendencies, and PTSD and highlights a variety of techniques and forms.

Pre-visit Activities

Before visiting Fuller Craft Museum, we recommend that you and your students explore and discuss some of the ideas and themes in the exhibition. We have included some selected images from the exhibition, along with relevant information that you may want to use before or after your museum visit.

Thirty-Second Look

Activity Overview: Discovering the elements in works of art takes time. Use the following activity to prompt students to look carefully and to develop observational skills viewing a work of art.

Activity Objectives:

- To encourage close looking and improve critical visual skills.
- To highlight that spending more time with a piece of art is necessary to understanding it fully, even if it takes some patience.

Activity Steps:

1. Ask students how much time they think a person might spend, on average, looking at a work of art. Record their responses and discuss the factors they believe affect the amount of time they spend looking. After students have answered, reveal that the average amount of time people spend looking at one object in a museum is less than half a minute. Ask them if 30 seconds is enough time to spend with a work of art. Why or why not? Try the following experiment in small groups to test their answers.
2. Direct students to look at a work of art (in the classroom, use a poster or transparency) for thirty seconds. At the thirty-second mark, ask everyone to turn around and face away from the work of art (in the classroom, turn off projector or remove the poster).
3. Without looking back at the work of art, ask students to use their memories to answer questions based on their observations. Chart the words that students come up with to create a word bank. You might ask the following questions:
 - *What is the subject of the work of art?*
 - *How many (objects, people, etc.) are in the work of art?*
 - *How would you describe them?*
 - *How is each one dressed?*

- *What kind of setting is depicted?*
 - *Are there any animals in the work of art?*
 - *How would you describe them?*
 - *What sorts of colors are used in the work of art?*
 - *How many colors are used in the work of art?*
4. With students' interests piqued, have them look again at the work of art. Guide the students through a careful re-examination. Ask them how they would refine their "looking." Ask if there is anything on the list that isn't actually in the work of art. Explain that sometimes we believe we saw something when we didn't; or we might recall different colors than those actually used in the work of art. Ask them to explain how the detailed observation changed their understanding of what the work of art includes and depicts.
5. Ask students to explain their reactions to the work. Was their initial glance enough? Ask students if discussing and comparing observations with other people was helpful in understanding the work of art. Have the students explain their answers.

Discussion: What is craft?

Leading Questions:

- *What do you think craft is?*
- *What do you think of when you think of craft?*
- *What kinds of materials do you think craft objects are made out of?*
- *Is there anything in your house that you think could be an example of "craft"?*

While craft can be defined in a multitude of ways, it is primarily about the people and the objects they create. Before World War II, craft was primarily about functional objects, like kitchenware and furniture. In recent years, styles, techniques, and meanings of craft have expanded. What remains is the connection between the maker and the object. Every craft object has the mark of the craftsman or woman who made it rather than being identical to other objects like those made in factories.

There are five main craft media: ceramics, metal, wood, fiber, and glass. Today's craft artists are increasingly combining these materials and testing the limits of what craft means to them and their viewers. This exhibit includes works from all five craft media and many pieces that incorporate multiple different materials.

Reference Glossary

When talking about difficult topics like mental health, it is important to have an arsenal of relevant vocabulary. The following is a short glossary of some terms that are relevant to the exhibition:

Mental Health Terms

Anxiety: a feeling of nervousness or worry that persists.

Art Therapy: a mental health profession in which clients, facilitated by an art therapist, use the creative process and the resulting artwork to explore their feelings, foster self-awareness, manage behaviors and addictions, develop social skills, reduce self-anxiety, and increase self-esteem.

Depression: a condition of general emotional dejection and withdrawal.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): a clinical diagnosis to describe a set of reactions/symptoms, typically arising after exposure to a traumatic event.

Psychology: the science of the mind, mental states and human behavior.

Resiliency: the ability to bounce back after stress or adversity.

Ritual: any practice or pattern of behavior regularly performed in a set manner.

Social Justice: justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.

Suicidal Ideation: thoughts about or a preoccupation with how to end one's life.

Trauma: a deeply distressing or disturbing experience.

Wellness: the state or condition of being in good physical and mental health. Wellness is also an approach to healthcare that emphasizes prevention of illness and enhancing wellbeing.

Craft/Art Terms

Abstract: artwork that does not represent an object, place, or person in the physical world.

Context: the theme of and the environment in which a work was created such as, physical setting, historical time, social setting, political climate, etc.

Creative process: the process an artist takes to create a work of art.

Enamel: a glassy substance applied by fusion to the surface of metal or pottery.

Figurative: describes artwork, particularly paintings and sculptures, which are clearly based on real-life objects.

Functionality: the purpose of the materials and how it contributes to the purpose of the artwork.

Geometric vs. Organic: geometric shapes are manmade such as polygons or rectangles. Organic shapes are free forms and irregular shapes found in nature.

Gesture/Gestural: emotional lines and gestures that indicate movement and mood.

Literal: art that involves at least some form that is recognizable e.g. a bird, train, or person.

Medium: materials such as: blown glass, watercolor etc., used to create an artwork; or a category of art such as drawing, painting, or sculpture.

Metaphor: something used to represent something else; can also be referred to as a symbol.

Narratives: a spoken or written account of connected events; a story.

Texture: the surface quality of an artwork usually perceived through the sense of touch.

Uncensored: speaking, writing, or creating without limitation or influence from others.

Value: the lightness or darkness of a color.

Learning the vocabulary in this glossary relates to the following MA academic standards in the arts for grades 6 and above:

By the end of grade 8:

- 2.7 (*Elements and Principles of Design*) For color, use and be able to identify hues, values, intermediate shades, tints, tones, complementary, analogous, and monochromatic colors.
- 2.10 (*Elements and Principles of Design*) For shape, form, and pattern, use and be able to identify an expanding and increasingly sophisticated array of shapes and forms, such as organic, geometric, positive and negative, or varieties of symmetry.
- 5.5 (*Critical Response*) Demonstrate the ability to recognize and describe the visual, spatial, and tactile characteristics of their own work and that of others.
- 5.6 (*Critical Response*) Demonstrate the ability to describe the kinds of imagery used to represent subject matter and ideas, for example, literal representation, simplification, abstraction, or symbolism.

Activity: Deconstructing Artist's Statements

This activity can either be done pre-visit or in the galleries. All you need is paper and pencil, as well as a way for the students to see the images. In this activity, your students will have an opportunity to read and respond to one of several artists' statements. To begin, have each student select a name from the following list of artists whose work appears in the exhibition:

Kaitlyn Evans

Lyn Godley

Meredith Grimsley

Michael Janis

Jennifer Ling Datchuk

Next, as the students views their chosen artist's work, invite them to imagine themselves in the artist's place and envision the thought processes and/or stories behind the craft work(s). Have the student compose a half-page artist's statement on a scrap piece of paper, written from the artist's perspective. Have them explore what they believe is the artist's intent.

Once the student's writing is complete, have them read the actual artist's statement. Then invite the students to compare and contrast the two statements; theirs and that of the artist.

The following pages also include questions for deeper understanding of the artwork.

Kaitlyn Evans



Kaitlyn Evans, *To Let You See*, 2014, Silver, copper, enamel, glass, plastic

Statement:

I am overwhelmed with thoughts of the strange and unfamiliar containing forces that I will not be equipped to handle. Moving to unfamiliar city that appeared rough and its people unpredictable left me feeling vulnerable. It is difficult to articulate what I am ultimately afraid of, but I long for a sense of security and seek respite from emotions I do not fully understand. These insecurities have led me to make enameled handheld objects that contain my uneasy state. The unfamiliar becomes manageable in my hand, able to be contemplated, clutched, or tucked away.

Guiding Questions:

1. Evans created these enameled objects during a time in her life when she felt emotionally overwhelmed. How does her art, through the scale, medium, colors, etc., depict a sense of balance, harmony and comfort?
2. Mental health is often nourished by a sense of safety, security and caring relationships with others. Yet, sometimes this needed foundation is shaken. Evans created lovely objects to hold in her hand, to help restore her sense of ease. An object like this that serves as a reminder of care or security is often called a *transitional object*. Reflect for a moment on your own transitional objects: what are they? In what way do they provide you with a greater sense of ease?

Lyn Godley



Lyn Godley, *In Flight*, 2011, Charcoal, fiber optics and LEDs, digital print on paper

Statement:

I have always made things.

I have studied art since I was a young girl. Upon graduation I got involved in making things that people used in daily life, things that required the user interact with the work. Art and design calls to my soul, and I never feel closer to home than when I am creating. The need to make work that has some level of measurable interaction with a user drives the direction of my work.

My fiber optic work has merged much of my life; from my early training as a Fine Artist, through my 25+ year fascination with lighting, to my love of nature which I have enjoyed since I was a young girl. It was through my fascination with lighting that I found my way back to Fine Art, in the form of large-scale drawings lit with fiber optics. I found the inspiration for the imagery in nature. Walking through natural environments, watching birds fly, being on or near the water; imagery drawn from places and things that feed the soul.

Lighting has held deep meaning for me. My grandfather, an inventor, held over 90 patents on headlamp design and invented the automotive blinker. Lighting has bridged cultural myths and religion as symbolic of the energy that connects us all. In my work it reads as the connection between a constellation far above, and the soul's energy deep within; as an aura that connects us to something beyond, something that gives hope. It represents a connection of extremes: heaven and earth, black and white, even the artistic mediums of digital printing and charcoal, the oldest medium known to man.

The work has also shown to have physiological effect on the audience. During a solo exhibit in Cologne, Germany we found viewers would sit down and stay in the gallery for up to three hours and returning multiple times to do the same. Research has shown that the particular wavelength of

light we are using is the same as is used in light therapy, resulting in reduction of stress and actually calming the body. We are now experimenting with making the lighting in my work even more interactive with the audience.

I believe art and design has the responsibility to make this world a better place, to relieve suffering wherever we can. I think art has the power to transform. I believe that beauty is transformative.

I made things for the 15+ year run of my design company with Lloyd Schwan. I made things after his suicide and while I raised our three sons. I continued to make things while teaching at a University. Things which are beautiful, that have a level of interactive capabilities for the user, things that incorporate the magic of light.

I make things. It is who I am.

Guiding Questions:

1. Godley discusses the symbolism of lighting found in various cultures and religious traditions. She also states that in her work, light represents a connection of extremes. As you view Godley's art, how do you experience light? Do you believe she succeeds in depicting this sense of connection? Why or why not?
2. Godley states that her work often has a psychological effect on the audience. As you view her work, take a few moments to check in with your own body. Is your breathing shallow and fast or deep and slow (or somewhere in between)? Does viewing this artwork cause your body to feel more calm and at ease? Being aware of the present state of our bodies is a form of mindfulness. Take a few moments to not what you sense internally as you experience Godley's work.
3. Godley states, I believe art and design has the responsibility to make this world a better place, to relieve suffering wherever we can. Do you agree or disagree with her statement? How might art and design be used to relieve suffering?

Michael Janis



Michael Janis, *Echoes*, 2015, Kilnformed glass, glass powder imagery

Statement:

Human social interactions are complex behaviors. Often many are unaware of how they are acting, feeling and interacting with others. We live so often in a condition of being obscured from ourselves and others. The things that can isolate one can be social conventions, politeness; or it can be personal: timidity, self-fear or self-blindness, fatigue.

I used clear glass as a way of seeing through ones actions and intents. Each element of the glass works in *Echoes* depicts a pair of overlapped faces created in fused glass powder arranged so as to create a new, third face. The imagery suggests the struggle to balance the different worlds that collide together, of out of body experiences and of contrasting mixed state episodes.

I see the interaction of the non-aligned faces as a depiction of the fate of both the inner and outer worlds. I wanted to show a sense of connection between the worlds. One cannot change without leaning a little further into the shared world, and without recognizing that even in one's solitude, one is always at some point touching someone else.

Guiding Questions:

1. Janis uses the medium of glass to symbolize a way of seeing through actions and intents. *Transparency* is a quality of clear glass and a human characteristic as well. In human interactions, it means being open, candid and honest. How does the artist's use of glass enhance or illustrate his ideas about social interactions?

2. In psychology, a person's ability to understand human interactions in a way that sheds light on or helps solve problems is called *insight*. Insight is important for mental health as it helps prevent or resolve conflicts between people that might lead to distress or even violence. How does Janis's exploration of inner and outer conflict demonstrate insight? How have you experienced the struggle of balancing different opinions and world views?

Jennifer Ling Datchuk



Jennifer Ling Datchuk, *“one whiteness can cover three kinds of ugliness”*, 2014, Slip cast and hand built porcelain, steel wool, found trunk liner

Statement:

My work explores my experiences with identity, with the sense of being in-between, an imposter, neither fully Chinese nor Caucasian. I have learned to live with the constant question about my appearance: “What are you?” I find people are rarely satisfied with my answer. I explore this conflict through porcelain, which nods to my Chinese heritage but also represents pure white – the white desire I find in both cultures. My focus is the emotive power of domestic objects and rituals that fix, organize, soothe, and beautify our lives. Bound by these conditions, I stitch together my individual nature, unravel the pressures of conformity, and forever experience pain in search of perfection.

Guiding Questions:

1. Reflect on your own struggles with aspects of identity. How are your experiences similar to or different from those of the artist?
2. Datchuk states that domestic objects and rituals fix, organize, soothe and beautify our lives. Do you find this statement to be true in your own experience? What objects or rituals are important in your life?

Participating in this activity relates to the following MA standards in the arts for grades 6 and above:

By the end of grade 8:

- 6.3 (*Purposes and Meanings in the Arts*) Interpret the meanings of artistic works by explaining how the subject matter and/or form reflect the events, ideas, religions, and customs of people living at a particular time in history.
- 6.4 (*Purposes and Meanings in the Arts*) Describe how artistic production can shape and be influenced by the aesthetic preferences of a society.
- 9.3 (*Inventions, Technologies, and the Arts*) Identify and describe examples of how artists make innovative uses of technologies and inventions.
- 9.4 (*Inventions, Technologies, and the Arts*) Identify and describe examples of how contemporary artists use computer technology in their work.

By the end of basic study in grades 9-12:

- 6.5 (*Purposes and Meanings in the Arts*) Interpret the meanings of artistic works based on evidence from artists' biographies, autobiographies, or videotaped or written interviews.
- 6.6 (*Purposes and Meanings in the Arts*) Describe and analyze examples of art forms that integrate practical functions with aesthetic concerns. For example, students listen for similarities and differences in work songs from various cultures.

Looking at and Talking About Art in *Mindful*

Let students know that the Museum is a safe space where they can talk about difficult topics represented in this exhibit. The exhibit addresses subjects such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicide. Although these topics are difficult, they are also extremely prevalent, and it is important to educate younger students before they are further exposed to the negative stigma surrounding common mental health problems.

Questions for the galleries

These questions will allow students to practice their critical visual skills and understand the works in the exhibit more fully.

- ***What's going on in this piece of artwork?***
- ***What do you see that makes you say that?***
- ***What else do you see?***
- ***How do you feel when you look at this piece?***
- ***What is the art work made out of?***
- ***What is the texture of this art work?***
- ***What markings and words do you notice, if any?***
- ***Can you identify any familiar shapes in the artwork?***
- ***Are there any patterns in this artwork?***
- ***Is the art work representing something realistic or is it abstract?***

- ***Does the art work symbolize anything? If so, what?***
- ***Do you like looking at this piece? If so, what do you like about it?***
- ***Do you not like looking at this piece? If so, what don't you like about it?***

These questions can be especially helpful when looking at some of the larger, more complicated pieces in the exhibit. Some of these pieces include:



Rose Clancy, *All for Naught, Forget Me Not*, 2015

Rose Clancy aims to invite personal reflection in all of her work, which often takes place in unclaimed spaces. Although this piece is exhibited in a museum, its large scale still makes the viewer think about how space and place is utilized. Her work also focuses on her biological history. As a child, her mother had an undiagnosed mental illness, resulting in Clancy experiencing both neglect and nurture. Many of her pieces reflect this experience.



Grace Kubilius, *Junk Bones*, 2014 and Grace Kubilius, *Oh How I Love You*, 2014

Grace Kubilius makes sculptures in the form of wearable objects. These objects mainly address her female identity. Her pieces are complicated because gender identity and experience can be very complicated and hard to navigate. She uses elements of paper mache, fabric, flowers, coffee filters, rope, and wood.

Exploring these questions in the galleries relates to the following MA academic standards in the arts for grades 6 and above:

By the end of grade 8:

- 1.7 (Methods, Materials, and Techniques) Use the appropriate vocabulary related to the methods, materials, and techniques students have learned and used in grades PreK–8.
- 2.9 (Elements and Principles of Design) For texture, use and be able to differentiate between surface texture and the illusion of texture (visual texture).
- 2.10 (Elements and Principles of Design) For shape, form, and pattern, use and be able to identify an expanding and increasingly sophisticated array of shapes and forms, such as organic, geometric, positive and negative, or varieties of symmetry.
- 5.5 (Critical Response) Demonstrate the ability to recognize and describe the visual, spatial, and tactile characteristics of their own work and that of others.
- 5.6 (Critical Response) Demonstrate the ability to describe the kinds of imagery used to represent subject matter and ideas, for example, literal representation, simplification, abstraction, or symbolism.

By the end of basic study in grades 9-12:

- 1.11 (Methods, Materials, and Techniques) Explore a single subject through a series of works, varying the medium or technique .
- 2.13 (Critical Response) Use color, line, texture, shape, and form in 2D and 3D work and

identify the use of these elements in the compositions of others.

- *5.8 (Critical Response) Demonstrate the ability to compare and contrast two or more works of art, orally and in writing, using appropriate vocabulary.*

By the end of extended study in grades 9-12:

- *5.11 (Critical Response) Analyze a body of work, or the work of one artist, explaining its meaning and impact on society, symbolism, and visual metaphor.*
- *5.12 (Critical Response) Demonstrate an understanding how societal influences and prejudices may affect viewers' ways of perceiving works of art.*
- *6.6 (Purposes and Meanings in the Arts) Describe and analyze examples of art forms that integrate practical functions with aesthetic concerns. For example, students listen for similarities and differences in work songs from various cultures.*

After your Visit

Have the students discuss their experiences. Ask them how they felt about what they saw or if they have any questions. Make sure to keep communicating with students even after the visit is over.

- ***What did you think about the museum?***
- ***Is there a piece or set of pieces that really stood out to you? What was their impression?***
- ***How did the exhibit make you feel?***
- ***What were some similarities/connections between the different pieces in the exhibit?***
- ***What did you like?***
- ***What did you dislike?***
- ***Do you have any more questions or thoughts?***

Making Art

Many of the pieces in the exhibit have ceramic elements. Clay is a great simple material for students to experiment with. The following activity uses clay and relates to the exhibit.

A Mindful Memory

Clay is a great medium with which to explore and regulate our emotional states. Due to its kinesthetic qualities, playing with a ball of clay can help us relax or focus. Clay can also help us retrieve a memory and use it to restore our sense of well-being. The created object can serve as a reminder to return to that sense of ease and rest.

Only clay for each student is necessary for this activity.

Playing with Clay

Invite students to sit comfortably in a chair with a ball of clay in their hands. Ask them to close their eyes, if that is comfortable, and just play with the clay. Invite them to become aware of their breathing and slow it down by breathing deeply in and out as they continue to squeeze the clay in their hands.

Next, as eyes remain closed, invite students to become aware of various shapes they might make with the clay in their hands. Have them reflect on the feeling of different shapes in their hand. How is a triangle different from a square?

After some time, ask them to open their eyes and shape the clay into different shapes again; this time as they watch the process. Suggest they try rolling the clay into a tube or flattening it with the palm of their hand. Ask students to reflect how they feel in their body during this process. Ask: does your heart rate slow or speed as you play with the clay? Did you become more relaxed or excited? Did you enjoy molding the clay into shapes? Does the process of manipulating the clay bring up memories of any kind?

Creating a Memory Object

Now ask the students to close their eyes again (or alternatively find a spot in the room to rest their gaze.) This time, as they play with the clay, invite them to bring to mind a happy event or peaceful place; one which holds fond memories. Invite them to use all of their senses, in their imagination, to bring this memory to life.

Ask: what would you see there? What would the temperature on your skin be like? Who is with you and what are they doing? What scents or smells are in this place? What sounds do you hear? What makes this place or event pleasant for you?

Now invite students to think about a simple object or symbol that reminds them of that place or event. What would it look like?

Ask them to open their eyes and mold their clay into a shape like this object or symbol. Don't worry if the clay doesn't look like your mind picture. It will serve as a reminder just for you.

Journal Entry

If time allows, ask students to take a few minutes to write about the memory of their happy event or peaceful place, using as many vivid sensory details as possible. Also, invite them to explore the emotions they experienced as they created their clay object. What does this small clay symbol mean to you?

Additional Resources

About the Society for Contemporary Craft (SCC)

The SCC aims to help people see the connections between creativity and daily life, highlighting the integration of hand, mind, and spirit. Presenting contemporary art in craft media by international, national, and regional artists since 1971, the Society for Contemporary Craft offers cutting edge exhibitions focused on multicultural diversity and non-mainstream art, as well as a range of classes and community outreach programs. SCC provides free quality art experiences showcasing the technical and creative processes artists use to make their art.

What is Mindfulness?

The dictionary defines mindful as a state of attentiveness or awareness. Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and a founder of the mindfulness approach in psychology says mindfulness is “paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally, to the unfolding of experience, moment by moment.” Mindfulness practices are thought to be helpful for stress because they bring us gently out of the clutter of our distractions into the beauty of the present moment. The arts (both the creating of and the witnessing of) have been a source of *mindful* activity long before there was a term to describe it. We invite you and your students to step into the present moment as you experience the art in this exhibition.

Online Resources:

<http://www.artnews.com/2017/03/14/mindful-exploring-mental-health-through-art-at-virginia-museum-of-contemporary-art-virginia-beach/>