



Mindful Art Making for Stress Relief

Your only job as an artist is to show up and be present. Mindful art practice will pay you back in greater sense of peace and meaning.

- AMY MARICLE

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ABOUT AMY:



Amy Maricle is an artist, art therapist, author, and blogger who wants everyone to experience the healing power of art. She works in Foxboro, Massachusetts and lives nearby with her family and two trouble-making, lovable pooches.



MINDFULNESS AND ART

Mindful meditation means focusing non-judgmentally on ONE thought or sensation rather than allowing your mind to flutter aimlessly here and there.

Artists and art therapists have recognized the power of the arts for mindfulness practice. Art therapist, Laury Rappaport states, “Art provides a focus – like a mantra or awareness of the breath moving in and out of the body.”

You can be mindful in anything you do. You can walk mindfully, talk mindfully, cook mindfully, even shower mindfully. MINDFULNESS is experiencing the moment you are IN. **We can make art mindfully and reap the benefits.**

Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist's Way* says it like this: “**Attention is an act of connection.**” And for me, it seems that if we can feel more connected by paying attention to our art making - both the process and the meaning in the images. That's a powerful anecdote against hopelessness, desperation, and suffering.

There are days I am carefree or playful in my art, and end up in a peaceful state of flow. Other days I'm very mindful and intentional, but I end up with a muddy-looking painting and a feeling of frustration. Observing myself and my feelings non-judgmentally is part of my mindful art practice, and part of what helps me enjoy the process, even when I dislike the product.

MINDFUL DRAWING EXERCISES

EXERCISE #1: MINDFUL LOOKING

Let's first just practice some mindful looking to see what that is like.

1. **Pick an object** that you see everyday.
2. Set a **timer for 2 minutes**.
3. **Now look at the object as though you have no idea what it is** – like you've never seen one of those thingies in your life. I invite you to engage your curiosity. Look at colors, shapes, textures, and light. What do you notice? What were you missing every other time you looked at it?

EXERCISE #2: DRAWING THE BREATH

(From Art Therapist, Susan Dahl)

1. Using colored pencil, pastel, or whatever you have on hand, as you breathe in, move your hand in one direction.
2. As you exhale, move your hand in the other direction, **alternating directions for each inhale and exhale.**
3. As you draw your breaths, notice what thoughts arise, but let them float by, **keeping the focus on the breath and the drawing.**
4. **Start with drawing 10 breaths** and work up to 20, or set a timer for 3 minutes.
5. Once you reach the goal time or number of breaths, you can continue to draw, **adding whatever inspires you**, or just put it aside.

EXERCISE #3: MINDFUL DRAWING

Go back to the object you were mindfully examining. **We are going to try to draw it**, even if you “stink” at drawing. This is a mindfulness exercise, not an art test, so I’d invite you to **let go of expectations** that it will look a certain way or be finished. Just focus on the process of seeing and allowing your pencil to move on the page.

1. Place your object in front of you.
2. Set a timer for 5 minutes.

3. Looking at your object, and with your pencil on your paper, **pretend your pencil or pen is a miniature ant walking across the edges and contours of your object**, ever so slowly. Looking intently at the details, allow your pencil to just move on the page, as though it were on the edge of your object.
4. Notice: Where does your ant go? Whenever I do this, I find so much more detail and beauty in my wobbly drawing than I ever expected.

Look at your drawing with non-judgmental eyes, you will find some beauty in its detail, even if it's a small area.

EXERCISE #4: EXPERIMENT WITH DRAWING SPEED

1. Set a timer for **5 minutes**.
2. Choose a pen, marker, or pencil and cut a sheet of paper to about 3 x 4 inches. **Choose a simple shape to draw in repetition**, such as a circle, triangle, square, or lines. You will draw the same pattern in all three rounds. (Refer to the "Easy Patterns to Facilitate Mindful Art Making" at the end of this e-book.
3. In each of the three rounds, pay attention to your body: your breathing, posture, thoughts, tightness or looseness of your grip on your pencil, etc. What do you notice? When you are done, look at all 3 drawings next to each other. What do you notice in the product?

Round 1: Draw at your natural pace.

Round 2: Draw very fast.

Round 3: Draw as slowly as you possibly can.

Which speed felt the most natural? Which felt the most calming? Freeing? Fun? Helpful? Which felt the most unpleasant? Do you think you should alter your drawing speed based on how this exercise made you feel and the product you created?

WHAT TO NOTICE IN MINDFUL ART MAKING:

It can be easy to feel distracted by critical thoughts about your art, your to do list, or thoughts of other things you'd rather be doing. Here's a little cheat sheet of some things you can tune into while you are art making to help you focus on the moment:

Notice your 5 senses:

- **Feel:** What does the marker feel like in your hand? Is it cool or warm, hard or soft? Smooth or rough? Does it glide on the paper or is there resistance? Are you slouching or upright? Is there a feeling of comfort or tightness in your grip? What about your shoulders? Your stomach?
- **See:** What are the colors and shapes you notice appearing before you? What does it remind you of? Can you look at what is appearing with curiosity instead of judgment about it's "quality?"
- **Hear:** What's the sound of the paint brush on the canvas? Is it a scratching, a nearly silent gentle touch? Or does the paint tube squirt like

a ketchup bottle? Are you also listening to music? Can you hear your breathing?

- **Smell:** What is the smell of the paint, clay, or marker?
- **Taste:** Are you drinking coffee or water while you work? What do you notice about it?

Notice Your Thoughts: As with other forms of mindfulness meditation, you can acknowledge thoughts that arise in a non-judgmental way. This is another way to begin letting go of your “inner critic’s” need to insult your work and get in the way of art making.

Notice Your Feelings: There are days I am carefree or playful in my art, and end up in a peaceful state of flow. Other days I’m very mindful and intentional, but I end up with a muddy-looking painting and a feeling of frustration. Observing myself and my feelings non-judgmentally is part of my mindful art practice, and part of what helps me enjoy the process, even when I dislike the product.

I want you to think about art making as self-care. You deserve to relax and let go through your art. Give yourself that permission.

EASY PATTERNS TO FACILITATE MINDFUL ART MAKING

Using a simple pattern is a great way to help the mind relax while drawing. It allows you to **focus on the process of creation through the 5 senses as you draw**. You can experiment with drawing patterns of the following shapes:

Circles, triangles, squares, rectangles, swirls, wavy lines, leaf shapes, ovals, etc.

Get variation in these shapes by experimenting with making them: longer, shorter, fatter, thinner, closer together, overlapping, further apart, different colors, the same color.

You can also make these patterns over an existing background you create with watercolor, marker, or acrylic paint.

HOW TO CREATE A MINDFUL ART PRACTICE

WHEN TO DO MINDFUL ART:

- Just after you eat breakfast or lunch
- When you first wake up
- After work
- When your kids are napping
- When you need a break at work for a few minutes
- Schedule time for art into your calendar just like any other meeting or plan

HOW TO TEMPT YOURSELF TO MAKE ART

- Leave a pen and art journal on your counter, dining table, work desk, bedside table, or in your car.
- Keep a pen and art journal in your bag.

- Leave your journal open so that when you walk by it, you are enticed to draw more.
- Set a timer for 5 - 10 minutes if that's all the time you have. You'll feel better for it.
- Clean up your art space to make it inviting.
- Organize your art supplies to make it easy to access them.
- Invite a friend over to make mindful art and have an "art date."

BONUS HOMEWORK:

- Set a timer for 5 minutes.
- Free write about your experience with mindful drawing - just write whatever comes to mind. Sometimes it helps to start with a particular sentence. You might start your free writing this way: "My experience with the Mindful Art workshop today was ..."
- When the timer goes off, stop.
- Underline words and phrases that stand out, then cut them out of your page. Create a loose poem with your words and phrases to create a poem.

SHARE THE LOVE

If you loved this e-book and the Mindful Art for Stress Relief workshop, please share your work on Instagram and Twitter using #mindfulartstudio.

I hope you enjoy your art making and can tune into the process. It's a real gift in my life and I hope I've offered it to you today.

Creatively Yours,

Amy