

Unlock Your Emotional Superpower: How Art Trains Your Brain for Longevity

MAY. 8, 25

Viewing art activates 25 emotions in the brain, from awe to mystery to serenity. Here's how using art as emotional training can strengthen resilience and support longevity.

You already know art can move you — a painting that gives you chills, a sculpture that makes you pause, or an image that feels strange yet unforgettable. But what's happening in your brain isn't just appreciation. It's training.

According to a groundbreaking study published in *Scientific Reports*, visual art activates 25 distinct dimensions of emotion, far beyond simple joy or sadness. Researchers at UC Berkeley and the University of Amsterdam found that viewing art can spark awe, mystery, desire, serenity, even cosmic expansiveness, creating a complex emotional “map” that mirrors the richness of life itself.

“Art doesn't just reflect emotion, it trains us in how to feel it more richly,” says co-author Dacher Keltner, a leading researcher on awe and the science of emotion.

Creating A Map of Our Emotions

The study's findings are a game-changer. Yes, people reported common reactions like *admiration*, *serenity*, and *amusement*. But they also described more unexpected experiences, expansive, mind-bending sensations, like evoking the unknowable or sacred, imaginative, surreal states of mind, deep body

awareness and longing, sometimes unsettling, but meaningful confusion, and even a sense of the transcendent.

Our emotions flow along gradients, like awe shading into serenity, or confusion morphing into fascination. The result? **An emotional map** that mirrors the complexity of real life while offering a mirror for self-reflection.

Why Art Matters for Well-Being

Building **emotional granularity**, the ability to identify and name subtle emotions, is linked to better mental health, lower stress, and even physical resilience. It's not just poetic to distinguish between melancholy, nostalgia, or wistfulness; it's protective.

This is especially valuable in midlife, when hormonal changes, caregiving stress, and identity shifts can **cloud our inner compass**. By engaging with art, we practice decoding and expanding emotions, which strengthens:

- **Resilience** ? recovering faster from setbacks
- **Longevity** ? lowering stress and inflammation, which supports long-term health
- **Empathy** ? seeing and feeling more in ourselves and others

In short: training your emotional brain is as vital as training your body.

Try It Yourself: The 3-Minute Emotional Palette Test

You don't need to visit a gallery or buy expensive prints. Just do this:

- 1 **Choose three works of visual art:** Any era, any medium. Use a museum website, a book, or even Instagram.
- 2 **Look slowly.** Give each piece at least 30 seconds.
- 3 **Ask yourself: What do I feel? What does this image seem to be?** Use emotion-rich words like *awe*, *mystery*, *grief*, *nostalgia*, *serenity*, *craving*. Let them overlap.
- 4 **Journal it.** Write down what came up and what surprised you. Need some inspiration? Explore the

interactive emotions map created by the study's authors. It's a beautiful tool that lets you explore emotional responses across hundreds of artworks.

Engaging with art isn't a luxury. It's a practice, a way of building emotional intelligence that supports resilience, empathy, and longevity. The next time a painting or photograph pulls you in, pause. What you feel is more than fleeting; it's emotional strength training for your future self.

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