

MINDFUL ART MAKING

Painting to Music

Practicing Mindfulness Through Art Making

Regular practice in mindfulness can have profound benefits in mental and physical health and overall well-being. Yet for many reasons, sitting still in formal meditation can be quite difficult, especially when first learning about meditation. Thankfully, there are many ways we can practice mindful attention and still experience the benefits. One natural way to do this is through creating art and listening to music.

In this exercise, you will use both creating artwork and listening to music to help focus your attention fully in the present moment. Gather your supplies, find a quiet space to create, and let's get started.

What You Will Need

- Watercolor Paints*
- Watercolor Paper
- Paint Brushes
- Cup of Water
- Paper Towels
- Your Favorite Music

*While the fluid quality of watercolor paints lends itself nicely to creating art to music, you can really use any art supplies you have on hand for this exercise. Maybe you have something else you already love to use. Or maybe you can simply borrow your kids' crayons or markers. Even if you only have a pen and paper, you can still participate and experience the benefits of mindful attention.

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Instructions for Getting Creative

We will begin by finding a quiet, well-lit place and setting up your space. Lay out your art supplies on a flat surface where you have room to work.

Take a moment to pause here before beginning the exercise. Notice where your body is supported by the chair and the floor. Take a deep breath with a long exhale. By pausing to bring our attention to these things before we begin, we are inviting our attention to the present moment and thus signaling to our mind and body that we are taking a moment to rest.

Next, turn on the music of your choice and take a moment to truly listen to what you hear. You may begin to notice different elements of the music. What instruments can you identify? Is the music solely instrumental or are there voices? Is the music loud or soft in volume? What is the rhythm? Fast or slow? How do all of these elements change as the song continues? As a new song begins? What is the timbre of the music? In other words, does it give off any mood or feeling?

As you notice all of these different elements of the music, you may even close your eyes while you listen and notice if any images come to mind. Maybe there are colors or patterns that you associate with the music. Maybe this visualization changes as the music changes.

Finally, begin to use your art supplies to create an image of the music. In other words, what would the music look like if you could see it? What colors would it include? What kind of lines or shapes would be present? There is no right or wrong answer here. We are simply practicing using our minds in more mindful and creative ways that may be a little different than our normal day to day.

Continue with your art making for as long as you have, the duration of a song, for a few songs, or even the entire album.

Tips for Creating Artwork Mindfully

It's Not About How It Looks

First and foremost, there is no right or wrong way to create during this exercise. Since the aim is practicing mindful attention, this art making experience is not about the final product. In other words, it does not matter how it looks. It is more about the experience of getting creative and how we use our minds differently when we engage in art making. So you can take a breath and let go of any expectations of the outcome or your artwork.

Focus on the Senses

To help keep our attention in the present moment, we can use our senses. As you work, you may notice how the art supplies feel in your hands. What do you hear as you work? Can you notice if the supplies make any sounds as you apply them to the page? Is there any scent or odor to the supplies? And of course, how does the image change visually as you work?

Be Kind to Yourself

Creating artwork can also give us an opportunity to notice how we respond to the experience. What is your inner dialogue like as you work? Are there thoughts of judgment popping up? Phrases like: *"This looks terrible."* Or *"I'm not an artist."* Are there thoughts of certain expectations or specific outcomes? Something like, *"This doesn't look at all how I wanted."* See if you can notice when these thoughts arise and offer yourself some kindness. Practice bringing in additional phrases like: *"You're doing this for the first time. It makes sense that it may not go as expected."* Or *"I'm so proud of you for trying something new."* Or *"Thank you so much for taking a break and doing something to care for yourself."*