Mindfulness and the Museum: Can Digital Delivery of Cultural Heritage Contribute to our Wellbeing?

«Dig*Italia*» 2-2021
DOI: 10.36181/digitalia-00035

Susan Hazan
Europeana Network Association

L'arte può contribuire al benessere personale, anche attraverso esperienze digitali? Questo articolo esplora l'argomento esaminando iniziative culturali e prodotti commerciali basati sulle tecnologie digitali, progettati per trasmettere emozioni positive. Dopo aver esaminato l'impatto di queste esperienze sugli utenti durante il recente lockdown, il contributo pone alcuni interessanti quesiti sul futuro di queste iniziative, che offrono spunti per ulteriori indagini scientifiche.

Introduction

Have you ever heard of Slow food? This is the direct opposite of fast food and teaches us to slow down the eating experience and learn to savour every morsel while at the same time being mindful about how food is cultivated, produced, and distributed. This means not only taking the time to swallow and digest our meals at a slow pace but also to be aware of the consequences of our actions and ensure that everyone has access to good, clean, and fair food. This paper discusses the effects of slowed down experiences in art, where the process of interacting with the artwork or museum objects suggests a slowing down of our usual pace so that we may savour the aesthetic experience in a mindful moment that contributes to our well-being.

Research has shown[1], how museums act as places of emotional nourishment, and how a visit to an exhibition and creative engagement with art may well reset our emotional compass, relieve mental stress, and even replenish our vigour. This paper looks at both at empirical research in the culture heritage sector as well as an-

[1] Guy Noble – Helen J. Chatterjee, *Museums, Health and Well-being*, Routledge, 2016; Helen J. Chatterjee – Paul M. Camic, *The health and well-being potential of museums and art galleries*, «An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice», 7 (2015), Issue 3: Culture, Museums and Well-being, p. 183-186. Published online (21 Aug 2015): <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rahe20/7/3>; Nina Simon, *The participatory museum – A guide for museums to working with community members and visitors.* <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/read/>.

ecdotal evidence that describes how mindfulness has a positive effect on both our emotional and physical health. However, to reflect on a time when many museums were closed during the Covid-19 pandemic, and access to collections and artistic creativity was more often delivered digitally, we also question whether these kinds of positive qualities could permeate these experiences in the same way without the physical, embodied experience of actually *being there*. This paper grounds the arguments in the recognition of the museum as location for moments of mindful experience resulting in opportunities to strengthen personal well-being and a range of beneficial interaction. Drawing on the range of physical museum experiences described here, we can deduce a set of criteria to examine artistic practices delivered digitally. We will evaluate the case studies discussed in the second part of this paper through the prism of these criteria where we can query whether art online may also serve to strengthen our well-being – albeit in a different way – despite their insubstantiality, and the temporality of their digital delivery.

Escapism, recalibration, and putting yourself in the picture

The Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdown was stressful for many of us and even unbearable for some. What better a place to trigger these calming processes than listening to our favourite music or escape into a chapter of a book. Alternatively, we might choose to stop and recalibrate in a liminal space, such as an art gallery, or a museum. This would not be a typical museum visit however, ticket office, a quick trot around the galleries, a cup of coffee in the café and the usual stop at the gift shop. This is a more deliberate decision, choosing a slowed-down version and the kind of visit where we take our time and savour each moment as we go; much in the same way that slow food recalibrates our experience around eating. This is not only about art as such – but a new way to consume art; perhaps better described as slow-looking or mindful nourishment. Phil Terry, founder of "Slow Art Day", explains how he became hooked on slow looking[2]:

> «It all started on a quiet day at an empty museum in 2008 - Terry said - when he decided to act like [he] was in [his] own living room and spend an hour with "Fantasia" by Hans Hofmann. According to Terry, Part of [Slow Art Day's] mission is to make the art experience more inclusive by creating a context where people will include themselves - he explains - For people who don't feel like the traditional Western museums are designed for them, it gives them a way into the art experience. If you just slow down and look at any kind of art, you discover that you can build a relationship with it».

According to Hofmann, this is made possible by the extraordinary space that fosters positive interaction, but when museums are closed, we need to consider

[2] https://www.slowartday.com.

whether we are dependent on the physicality of the museum setting to benefit from these kinds of positive art experience.

This section discusses the dynamic interaction with the physical museum both as described by practitioners in the field and in accordance with James Clifford's notion of a contact zone and how we negotiate this dynamic field. We also explore how we interact with the physical object in this zone by introducing the British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott's notions of the potential space between the subjective object and the objective object, as perceived as a transitional phenomenon. By suggesting a set of criteria to derive benefits from slow art we can then apply these criteria to the digital art experience. There are numerous ways where we consume our culture online and this discussion will consider whether, or if they contribute in any way to a similar, beneficial state of mind. Considering the addictive nature of screen experience, we will reflect on whether digital access impairs opportunities for mindful experience or a sense of well-being when art and cultural experiences are consumed online. Internet Addiction Disorder is a recognise psychiatric condition[3] that identifies how problematic computer or mobile phone use is a growing social issue and one that can ruin lives by causing neurological complications, psychological disturbances, and social problems. This presents as the compulsive interaction on social networking sites, video games, even obsessive emailing, and texting and of course, the well document excessive use of video games. The twist here is if the physical museum is to act as a respite from the obsessive use of the screen why would we even peer into yet another digital scenario for our recreation or potential well-being?

To think about the physical space of the gallery and the scenarios that suggest a sense of well-being, according to the the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing, museums are the ideal venue to host pro-active activities for people with mental health issues, supporting people in addiction and justice recovery as well as developing community projects for people aged over 55. This people-powered group runs an impressive range of activities, developed for everyone who believes that creativity and cultural engagement can transform our health and well-being. With a vision towards *a* «healthy world powered by our creativity and imagination» they advocate how museums play a pivotal role in community well-being, because they, not unlike «heritage venues, bring people together at the heart of their communities, which helps both their physical and mental health at every stage of their life»[4].

[3] Hilarie Cash - Cosette D. Rae - Ann H. Steel - Alexander Winkler, *Internet Addiction: A Brief Summary of Research and Practice*, «Current Psychiatry Reviews» 8 (2012), n. 4, p. 292-298.

[4] *Museums as Spaces for Well-being: A Second Report from the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Well-being*: <www.museumsandwell-beingalliance.wordpress.com>.

Experiencing an art gallery at a slow pace suggests entirely different ways of interacting with art. According to Jennifer Roberts, an art history professor at Harvard:

> «From the beginning, we've believed that slow looking is an act of radical inclusivity where the viewer includes themselves, rather than being lectured to or told how to look. This radical inclusivity we believe is key to opening up museums and galleries to many more people»[5].

This new, slow-paced relationship with the material art object is as much about the beholder as the beholden and this radical inclusivity can be described as a relationship that takes place in the staged, transactional space of the gallery. This can be seen as an opportunity to transpose ourselves into the picture frame and experience the art in a more profound way. What we need to ask is what happens as we cross the threshold of the museum space and why we seek out this kind of experience in the first place? Our default position throughout the workday tends to be staring into a screen of one sort or another, and particularly during the effects of the pandemic, many of our social interactions took place on screen. Moving away from the screen to the physical museum, and of equal importance interacting with the art in the presence of others is perhaps what drives us in the first place to seek out these mindful moments. The disadvantage of constant digital interaction means a certain dissonance when we find ourselves consuming art on the very same screen, we have just spent our workday peering into. If we reflect on how we can easily move to online shopping for many of our purchases or how diligently we have moved our screen-based office to the home, consuming our culture; music, opera, theatre, and art may be very different. We tend to consume our culture more often in the physical presence of others and as the pandemic lockdowns showed this basic and very powerful need to be in the company of others was palpably lost. During the interminable lockdowns, spontaneous performances in towns and cities around the world were reported where people sang or performed from windows and balconies to project the voice or musical performance to be heard and shared in the public space once again. These are the kinds of issues we need to broaden the discussion when we evaluate the various practices of culture delivered digitally, which, often are experienced from the solitude of the personal screen rather that in social and public spaces.

What is it that creates the magic of the museum? After all it is an artificially spotlit, and staged production. But we do seek out this location with the specific intention to encounter art and recognise how this is profoundly different from our day to day lived life. Perhaps it could be compared to visiting a park or going to the seaside. But while a day out in the fresh air offers an outdoors respite from the

[5] Slow Art Day, April 10, 2021: <https://www.slowartday.com>.

humdrum of our daily experience, the museum takes place in an indoor physical space – a space can be described as liminal – separating the exceptional from the mundane. Once we enter the gallery, we find ourselves in a unique bubble that shields us from the outside while forcing us to immediately conform to a different kind of behaviour. There are often rules to follow; no running in the gallery, no eating beside the artwork, softening the conversation and the extraordinary spot-lit setting that somehow cuts us off from the outside world. But something happens in a museum gallery, something moves us, and it is very much about how we sense ourselves within the gallery as much as the way we interact with art in this space.

To be able to think about the shifting of identity and affiliation in the context of the museum, I will draw on James Clifford's concept of «contact zones»[6] to conceptualize the museum as a space of crossing and negotiation. As Clifford proposes «the museum's destiny as an institution that emerged with the national, bourgeois state and with industrial and commercial capitalism is linked to its global diffusion and local adaptations [where the institutions can be] linked with capitalist marketing and commodification». From this perspective, Clifford suggests we look to museums and museum collections as contact zones, or sites of crossing and negotiation. Clifford's use of the term "contact zone" refers to the «marketing of heritage, the display of identity as culture or art where he argues there is no doubt that the museum-structure of culture – objectified tradition, construed as moral/aesthetic value and marketable commodity – is increasingly widespread»[7]. This traditional understanding of the museum requires us to act almost piously in the shadow of fine art or cultural heritage. To be self-aware, however, and include ourselves in this scenario we must move through the contact zone and our traditional visitor's position places ourselves on equal footing with the commodified art in the gallery, that we had previously venerated. That demands new ways of experiencing art even to the degree of breaking through the invisible but highly palatable layers of veneration to invite the objects and artworks into our emotional space and placing ourselves in the picture.

Cultural experience, according to British psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott, begins with creativity first manifested in play. From the beginning, the baby has intense experiences in the potential space between the subjective object and the object objectively perceived. Winnicott describes these cultural experiences as between «me-extensions and the not-me»[8] and describes the development of culture experience through the relationship between mother and child. Building on his ear-

[6] James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 215.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 218.
[8] Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London: Routledge, 1971, p. 100.

ly theory of transitional objects and transitional phenomena[9], describes how babies "create" an object that acts in the intermediate area between internal and external reality, using this liminal space to interact with the world. Drawing on Jacques Lacan's 1949 paper *Le Stade du Miroir*, Winnicott extends the role of the reflection of self in the mirror in each individual's ego development, which, he argues, needs not only the visual perception of the separate mother, but also psychosomatic inter-relating and object-relating of the physical object[10] that comes to represent the baby's separation from the mother. These objects, according to Winnicott,

> «may take the form of a favourite toy, or a worn-out scrap of material that both comfort the baby, by projecting the image of his mother onto the object, while at the same time, instilling a sense of containment as the baby sees himself, as small and fragile, and the idea that he too can be comforted and cuddled in the same way as he hugs his toy. The move from object-relating to the more sophisticated object-use demands that the baby destroys the object in (unconscious) fantasy (placing the object outside of self), to then discover that the "object survives" destruction by the subject»[11].

Winnicott suggests how in the early stages of emotional growth, the baby can use the object, as she learns to feel as if this object is a subjective object, in so much as that it has been created by the baby herself. This exquisite process unravels over time, but if you are lucky, you might see that eureka moment in the twinkling that lights up in the baby's face. «This moment is where fantasy begins for the individual and where the baby can use the object (that has survived the fantastical destruction), that is now objectively perceived, has autonomy, and belongs to "shared" reality»[12].

The highly subjective interrelations with transitional objects and transitional phenomena occur in the early development of the individual self. At the same time these processes influence culture and are decisive in the formulation of a shared culture. Winnicott uses the term cultural experience, as inherited tradition, as an extension of the idea of transitional phenomena, and explains how we learn our culture through play. He argues that play «expands into creative living and into the whole cultural life of man, through drawing on our inner or personal psychic reality and projecting it onto the actual world which can be objectively perceived.»[13] Extending from the personal progressions, whereby individuals learn to

[9] Id., *Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena*, London: Heinemann, 1951.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 112. Winnicott is referring here to a baby being held, and handled satisfactorily, and the way the baby will use an object, and to feel as if this object is a subjective object and created by the baby.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 89-90.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 91.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

externalise their internal processes and formulate their own cultural experience, Winnicott also describes culture as «something that is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw, if we have somewhere to put what we find»[14]. The rather congenial image that Winnicott conjures up suggests the place, (originally the object), which is located in the potential space between the individual and the environment which is to be thought of:

> «As part of the ego organization, here is a part of the ego that is not a body-ego, that is not founded on the pattern of body functioning but is founded on body experiences. These experiences belong to object-relating of a non-orgiastic kind, or to what can be called ego-relatedness, at the place where it can be said that continuity is giving place to contiguity»[15].

These play spaces and fantastical representations extend as other objects are brought into the constellation of our private world, each demanding new organisational processing, and each extending our contiguity in the world. Children quickly learn to decode the cultural process that the objects surrounding them come to represent. In this way, objects represent the way we come to terms with the world and growing up with specifically culturally-charged artefacts at home or in school – photographs, videos, objects, and books that bind community networks and forge a common memory – serve to set the scene for the enrichment of personal identity and community affiliation[16]. As the baby internalises his own mother and learns to identify her as a separate being, so the gradual accumulation and integration of cultural objects helps us to internalise our collective selves, incrementally absorbing new objects into our psyche, as we evolve as culturally developed individuals.

Different objects stimulate this potential space in different ways. We often consider a museum to be populated by wondrous objects, however, the sometimes-banal object found in a local museum resonates with visitors precisely through their familiarity with the objects, even though they may belong more to the past than they do to the present[17]. The connections between home and museum serve to

[14] *Ibidem*, p. 99.

[15] *Ibidem*, p. 101.

[16] Arjun Appadurai, *Introduction: commodities and the politics of value*, in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things, Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge: University Press, 1986, p. 3-63. For a discussion on the social relations that objects represent and the value of objects as they circulate in society see also Alfred Gell, *Newcomers to the world of goods: Consumption among the Muria Gonds*, in A. Arjun (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, cit., p. 110-138.

[17] Sharon Macdonald, *On 'old things': the fetishization of past everyday life*, in Nigel Rapport (ed.), *British Subjects. An Anthropology of Britain*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 89-106.

forge closer bonds and a closer identification with the exhibition and *the* story effortlessly becomes *their* story as the mimetic object slips easily into collective memory. Some objects, however, are temporally or spatially detached from the visitor's own life and when encountered on display, demand that the distance between the visitor's own entrance narrative and the object's provenance be resolved for the encounter to be meaningful.

The entrance narrative, according to Doering[18], is the visitor's own internal storyline and she argues that they are marked with three distinct components: a fundamental way that individuals construe and through which they contemplate the world; their own information about the exhibition; and their own personal experiences, emotions, and memories. When objects, for example from a distant historical period, or a culture that is very different from their own are displayed, there may be little bearing on a visitor's own story line. The potential discrepancies between time and space need to be bridged through new indexes to enable the visitor to make his first step into the narrative, and to bridge the gap between the exhibition's narrative and his own. For instance, in Leicester Museum the exhibition "The Making of Leicester" bridged the gap between past and present with an eye to the future generations of Leicester, with the display of archaeological evidence of communities from the distant past. Described in their promotion as «Iron Age, Roman, Saxon and Medieval citizens in detail, including the reconstruction of the Glen Parva Lady, a Saxon woman from the year 500 AD», the past was deftly projected into the present, and the storyline was launched[19]. With over 2,500 years separating her from the visitors, this Saxon lady, who had remained anonymous over all these years, had become re-configured as the «Glen Parva Lady» and could now be mobilised to represent a common ancestry. Whether this was the way visitors contemplated the world, or conceptualized the past, the narrative aimed to link in with the visitor's own world and to resonate with his or her own emotions and memories. Naming the anonymous lady had made the unfamiliar, familiar, and the objects on display could be internalised in a continuum that had started more than two millennia before, moved in quick succession to the present and aimed to unite past and present, object and visitor, in a common heritage and shared future.

Cultural heritage and psychological well-being

Now that we have established how some of the ways that museum objects and artworks can be assimilated into our emotional space, how do we know that this is good for our psychological well-being? In the Autumn of 2008 Prof. Pier Luigi

[18] Zahava D. Doering, *Strangers, Guests or Clients? Visitor Experiences in Museums*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1999, p. 81.

[19] Jewry Wall, *The Making of Leicester*. <http://www.leicestermuseums.ac.uk/events>.

Sacco devised a survey to measure the impact of culture on the individual subjective well-being of the Italian Population[20]. The sampling was medium-large (n=1500) where he investigated the ways in which Italian residents consider whether culture has a relevant role as a determinant of individual psychological well-being or not. Using the individual Psychological General Well-Being Index (PGWB levels) he determined that a selected subset of 15 cultural variables turns out to perform among the best predictors of well-being. In his list of variables, notably, Painting exhibitions and Museums appeared 5th and 6th in the list of the higher levels of PGWBI, following Cinema, Theatre, Opera/Ballet and classical music. One wonders whether these results that reflected the preference for music and opera in this Italian sampling are similarly valid elsewhere or perhaps this investigation is specific to Italian culture. Sacco did note, however, a discrepancy between Italian communities where he identified a clear decreasing trend from north to south (1.3 points spread in favor of North) in terms of well-being. Inhabitants of Northern Italy show average PGWBI values 4 point higher than Southern citizens - this, according to the Sacco group, marked a statistically significant difference.

In a separate fascinating experimental evaluation of the impact of aesthetic experiences during different cultural activities, the same scientific group looked at emotional health by measuring cortisol levels[21]. The reduction of these cortisol levels as measured, before and after the cultural experience, indicated the level of stress and the subsequent reduction of stress that signalled increased well-being. The test experience took place during a visit to the vault of the Sanctuary of Vicoforte, Italy where the data was collected using a two-step method. In addition to the structured interview in relation to the individual's subjective well-being (a sample of 100 people), a sample of their saliva was taken, and the cortisol level measured, before and after the experience to test that moment of well-being as measured on a Visual Analogous Scale. Subjects reported an average 40% increase in well-being and a 60% decrease in the cortisol level as measured after the visit. The recorded cortisol level values dropped on average well beyond the decrease normally associated to its circadian cycle. According to Blessi and Sacco, the aesthetic experience seems to have a noticeable impact on individual physical and

[20] Enzo Grossi - Pier Luigi Sacco – Giorgio Tavano Blessi – Renata Cerutti, *The Impact of Culture on the Individual Subjective Well-Being of the Italian Population: An Exploratory Study,* «Applied Research in Quality of Life» 6 (2011), n. 4, p. 387-410: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225669666_The_Impact_of_Culture_on_the_Individual_Subjective_Well-Being_of_the_Italian_Population_An_Exploratory_Study>.

[21] Enzo Grossi – Giorgio Tavano Blessi – Pier Luigi Sacco, *Magic Moments: Determinants of Stress Relief and Subjective Well-being from Visiting a Cultural Heritage Site,* «Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry» 43 (2019), n. 1, p. 4-24.

mental health. In both examples, cultural participation intensity is significantly related to the response. Although these studies were of small scale, they did underline the potential of arts and culture as a new platform for public health practices and suggested new approaches to welfare policy design.

To explain what happens when we experience cultural heritage, Karly Allen prefers to use the term *mindfulness* describing the practice of paying attention to extend our capacity of looking without distraction. Allen notes:

> «So, in its simplest form, it's about focus, it's about coming back to the looking and when our mind is distracted, and our thoughts do come, because they will come, bringing ourselves back to that very simple practice of looking. And then beyond that, we find that in developing this looking and paying attention to the form of an object and coming into our own bodies in relation to the object, and in viewing the object from a place through the senses, we can find that opens up a much greater space for appreciation of the artwork, for deepening connection with it. And that, in turn can open up a greater, deeper connection with ourselves, what's going on for us in relation to the artwork»[22].

From this example of subjective experience, we can extend the connections with artwork in the museum scenario to objective, social actions and new ways to reinforce the way we can use these creative spaces and experiences to improve our sense of collective well-being. Charlotte Coates asks, for example, «what have museums got to do with loneliness? » and suggests how studies have shown that social isolation has a serious impact on physical health.

> «For many, a visit to a museum is a chance to get out of the house. It can lead to meeting new people and having more social interactions. Museums can interact with isolated people in a positive way. They are a safe space, where people from different backgrounds can have an opportunity to come together. There are many interesting museum projects tackling the issue of loneliness. These can take many different forms. For example, community programmes, volunteering opportunities or lifelong learning schemes»[23].

There are many ways to confront loneliness to choose from, a visit to an exhibition, a course at the local museum or even long-term volunteering in the museum. In all scenarios the liminal space of the gallery simultaneously seems to reset our internal compass and in the presence of others can possibly recalibrate our social contracts. According to Coates, «taken to another level Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) has been established that it contributed to our mental health where stud-

[22] Karley Allen, *Bringing together art and mindfulness in museums*: <https://forartsake.co.uk/karlie_allen/>.

[23] Charlotte Coates, *Loneliness and Social Isolation – How Can Museums Help?* <https://www.museumnext.com/article/loneliness-and-social-isolation-how-can-museums-help>.

ies have found that it can be as effective at preventing the recurrence of depressive episodes as antidepressants»[24]. Mindfulness can also have a positive effect on physical health. For example, many people use it as a technique to manage chronic pain. Therefor many museums around the world have opened their galleries to stage these positive experiences both for individuals and groups in a variety of activities. Mindful Mondays at the Beanery in Canterbury, UK invites visitors to «discover that you can experience the benefits of art without needing expertise. Unlock your inner passion and creativity by taking time to slow down, journey around The Beaney, and be inspired by the museum's collection»[25]. Elsewhere, the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania hosts Mindfulness at the Museum - a series of guided meditation sessions facilitated by skilled holistic practitioners designed to teach participants how to become in tune with the present. The staff describes how mindfulness meditation can help reduce stress, foster compassion, and improve memory. Each encounter is unique from the last, drawing synthesis between mind and body, leaving participants equipped with knowledge on how to lead a balanced life[26]. The Wexler Centre for the Arts in Ohio runs a similar scheme, called «On Pause». This drop-in session invites visitors to observe art while focusing on the moment with the power of meditation. The guided sessions begin with a discussion on meditation. Participants receive instructions by trained staff from Replenish: The Spa Co-op in Columbus. At the same time, the sessions also give people a chance to connect with other community members[27] and an opportunity to share these mindful moments with others.

Figure 1. *Mindfulness in the gallery*

[24] *Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for preventing relapse in recurrent depression: a randomized dismantling trial*: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24294837>.

[25] Mindful Mondays at the Beaney Museum, Canterbury, UK <https://canterburymuseums.co.uk/participate/health-and-well-being/mindfulness-mondays/>.

[26] Mindfulness in the Museum, The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania: <https://icaphila.org/program_series/mindfulness-at-the-museum/>.

[27] Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio <https://www.wexarts.org/education/pause>.

> «For people who don't feel like the traditional Western museums are designed for them, it gives them a way into the art experience. If you just slow down and look at any kind of art, you discover that you can build a relationship with it»[28].

To return to the idea of a contact zone we see that a gallery can be re-conceptualized as a liminal space of crossing and negotiation – but this time with the visitor as the focus as opposed to the object. All these kinds of social interaction between visitors can reset a group for positive, mindful potential, and new social contracts can be inscribed through focused and directed action.

Once the museum moves online or delivers comparable content through an app, we need to consider whether we can find anything similar in the disembodied, remote encounters with art and explore how they could possibly offer similar, creative potential for mindful self-development. The following section explores a series of online experiences to examine whether they can contribute to mindful moments and our sense of psychological well-being.

The criteria and case studies

Based on the range of activities and experiences described here we can recognise certain conditions that seem to come together to set the scene for mindful experience in the physical museum gallery. Once we have understood what these components are we can define some basic criteria and then apply them to similar interactions in digital experiences to discern if they too create similar mindful moments for end users in any meaningful way. The following sections describe a series of case studies that are either based on or inspired by artistic practice. Each one is different but listing them and describing them here can serve as a useful framework to be able to think about these values.

- Interaction with others in the social space of the gallery
- The liminal bubble that the museum envelopes
- The uniqueness and exceptionality of the physical artwork

Webinars and online meetings

During the succession of lockdowns and the consequent isolation it produced, conferences and seminars in the cultural heritage sector were quick to move online. The MuseUnconference, The Museums Association, Museums+Tech confer-

[28] *Museums around the world will celebrate 'Slow Art Day' on April 10* - The Washington Post: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/slow-art-day-looking-at-art/2021/04/01/f6eaf2a0-916b-11eb-bb49-5cb2a95f4cec_story.html>.

ence and MusWeb conferences gathered in their members to online meetings, often to discuss the pertinent issues that concerned us all – cultural institutions in crisis. Conversations on resilience and recovery became the focus after the lockdowns were lifted where re-training opportunities could be discussed, and advice offered to support the new challenges. While clearly missing the warmth of human contact and the sense of comradeship, many pointed out the benefits of moving conferences online and noted their many advantages. For example, there was no wasted travel time, no expensive flights nor hotel stays. Opportunities to join international conferences were suddenly accessible and if you were content to move from your own comfort zone a little, time zones were readily negotiable and opened up conferences and webinars not only all around the world, but all around the clock. Networks such as the Europeana Network Association welcomed the new demand for online meetings and rose to the occasion with numerous solutions and opportunities for the Europeana community and beyond.

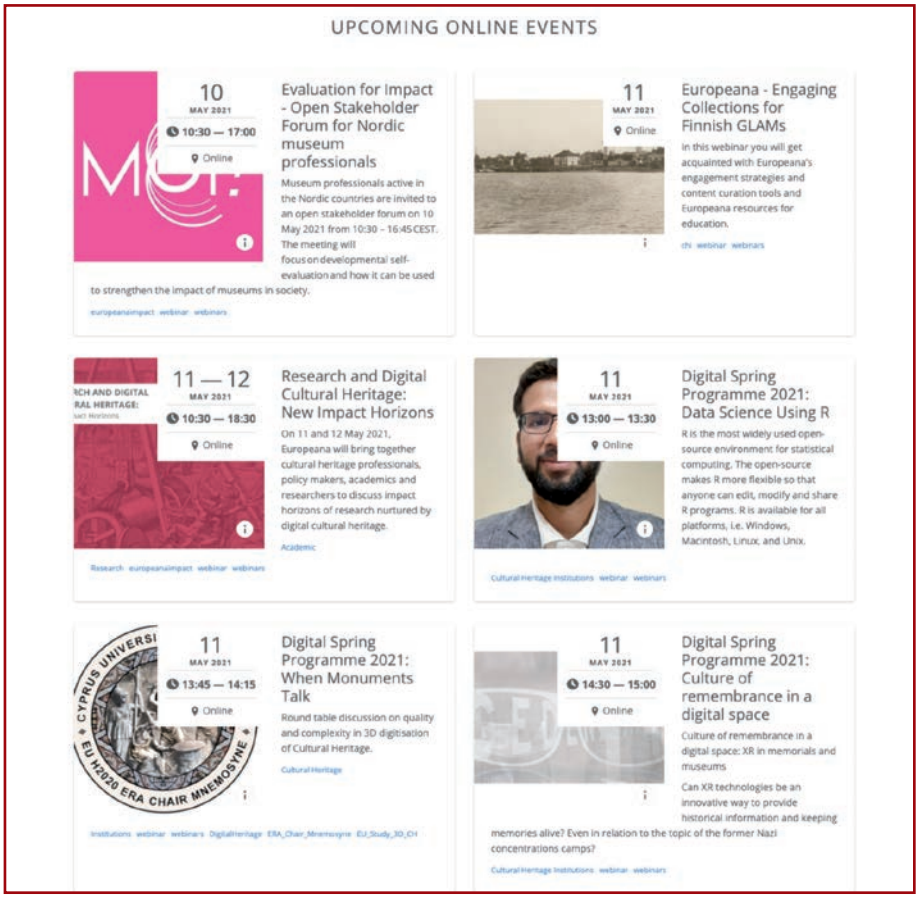

Figure 2. *Europeana Events*

There was something very democratizing about bringing together professionals who normally worked in a museum, library, archive, or school and were kind enough to open their homes and to share solutions to stay connected with their audiences. While the goal of these meetings was ostensibly knowledge sharing, just like the coffee breaks in a physical venue there were many welcome opportunities to chat and just spend time together. Everyone had their own, often poignant experiences to share, and the conversation often felt almost electric. Marianna Marcucci[29], from Invasioni Digitali, Italy described the Europeana Communicators Community series Culture at Home as «an incredible journey through museums, archives and libraries. People from every part of Europe together sharing their experiences to empower and inspire each other. Awesome! » The sometimes-hilarious intervention from the audience or panel – "you have your mic muted" comments broke the silent pauses. Obviously, these were not opportunities to greet and hug our colleagues as we might have done in a real conference, but they did go a long way to filling in the void and the lack of human closeness that the strict pandemic restrictions had introduced into our lives.

Often the lockdowns endured for months on end and gradually more and more social activities began to gather around Zoom windows. Virtual Mindfulness Meditation at the Frye Museum in Seattle moved online with free thirty-minute live virtual sessions of Mindfulness Meditation that were streamed on the museums their YouTube channel[30]. Participants were invited to join in these sessions to join *present-moment awareness* that the facilitators suggest «is essential to experience and appreciate any work of art but remind us that it can also be elusive, and we often find ourselves distracted or lost in thought». Similar meetings brought people together in all sorts of mindful activities together and even if they did so in the solitude of their homes, they were still somehow sensing a togetherness. What once took place as free weekly drop-in sessions in the Theater in the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles now moved to live online Mindful Awareness Meditation sessions via Zoom[31]. This is described by the Museum team as Mindful: «awareness meditation is the moment-by-moment process of actively and openly observing one's physical, mental, and emotional experiences. Mindfulness has scientific support, they argue, as a means to reduce stress, improve attention, boost the immune system, reduce emotional reactivity, and promote a general sense of health and well-being». For anyone who has taken part in these sorts of real time video communications may know how easily the veneer of the remoteness melts into a powerful sense of presence and *being there* together.

[29] https://www.mariannamarcucci.com/.
[30] Frye's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/FryeArtMuseum>.
[31] Hammer Museum: <https://hammer.ucla.edu/programs-events/2014/05/mindful-awareness-meditation>.

Of course, for those who had just spent interminable office hours in Zoom meetings all day probably would not welcome this additional screen time at the end of their working day even though it promised to be relaxing and is supposed to make you feel good.

Animal Crossing

To escape from tedium people, seek out many forms of distraction and even escapism. This paper is concerned with the cultural heritage sector and suggests that one of the ways we can combat boredom is to escape into the liminal bubble that the museum envelopes. When imprisoned in the confines of one's own home, and prevented from visiting a museum, nor any other place of cultural activity the computer turned into the perfect escape hatch. Video games are a well-documented for such distraction where players can lose track of time and even forgo food for the enthralling moments of escapism that these games provide. Internet addiction as a mental disorder, according to Cash is characterized by many hours spent in non-work technology-related computer/Internet/video game activities and like other mental disorders result in withdrawal symptoms often as a resulting in family conflict, as well as a diminishing social life with adverse work or academic consequences[32]. These scenarios are not innocent however, these enticing moments are built into the algorithms and serve to derive profit for the companies that build them. Clearly, time spent in such toxic kinds of distraction can be highly destructive. Matthew J. Dennis argues how digital well-being needs to be reimagined within a new conceptual paradigm[33], describing how with social media technologies (SMTs) terms such as *doom scrolling*, *zoom fatigue*, have become everyday labels for many under extended lockdowns. To preserve our digital well-being (DWB) he suggests this requires «a multidisciplinary approach, one that requires us to combine resources from empirical disciplines (psychology, sociology, STS), normative ones (ethics, law), as well as finding ways to practically apply these insights (design, engineering) ». In the same ways we develop other addictive behaviours, these are traps that are very easy to fall into yet can be especially difficult to get out of.

These disorders became particularly problematic during the lockdown that the San Francisco-based Center for Humane Technology, founded by Tristan Harris, suggested a series of Digital Well-Being Guidelines for Parents During the COVID-19 Pandemic[34]. I would suggest that every parent read through their guidelines that

[32] H. Cash et al., *Internet Addiction: A Brief Summary of Research and Practice*, cit.

[33] Matthew J. Dennis, *Towards a Theory of Digital Well-Being: Reimagining Online Life After Lockdown*, «Science and Engineering Ethics» 27 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-021-00307-8>.

[34] https://www.humanetech.com/digital-well-being-covid.

support parents to support their children. Amongst many other things they remind us that we need to manage our relationship with technology as it is already deeply threaded into our, and our children's lives. An interesting insight is that «All Screen-Time Is Not Equal». This is encouraging as they explain how although we seem to measure our screen time, we do not take into consideration what is happening on the screen and certain screen interactions can be, in fact, beneficial for our well-being. Additionally, although we tend to think of screen time as an individual activity, which it often is, there are opportunities for social interaction with more than one person sitting at the screen together or two people sharing a screen from remote locations. We all need to learn to consume our online experience in beneficial ways. Dr. Michael Rich, Harvard University, explains that «tech is not neutral. It is vying for our attention and is very good at grabbing and holding it». He recommends that parents and children get together to work out how to build a healthy lifestyle through planning and managing their time in a 24-hour day to include a reasonable amount of screen time that is measured and appropriate.

> «Thinking of their day as an empty glass, they should fill it with the essentials; enough sleep to grow and avoid getting sick, school, time to spend outdoors, play, socialize, do homework, and to sit down for one meal a day together as a family (perhaps the single most protective thing you can do to keep their bodies and minds healthy). Once these activities are totaled, remaining time can be used for other experiences that interest the child, such as the activity in question (Minecraft, Fortnite etc.) »[35].

One such distraction from the ennui of lockdown could be found in the popular video game Animal Crossing, that really took off during this period. This was discussed extensively over Museum forums especially when the Met adapted the Animal Crossing Pattern tool that supported the upload of open access images from the Met collection. This meant that players could collect and display five thousand years of art from around the world in their very own Animal Crossing *home*. The Getty Center and Getty Villa in Los Angeles too made it possible to import more than 70,000 pieces of artwork. At the same time this whimsy video game was thoroughly discussed in the museum community, often in outrageous terms for the flippant way that the games' museum and museum staff were staged.

While the game was intrinsically designed for children, many adults found their way onto the islands. The rules and the rich experience are complex and even necessitate their own wiki[36] that helps players negotiate their way around the non-linear persistent game world. The attention to detail serves to increase the sense

[35] Dr. Michael Rich, Harvard University: <http://communitywellnj.org/digital-well-being-guidelines-for-parents-during-the-covid-pandemic/>.

[36] Animal Crossing WIKI: <https://animalcrossing.fandom.com/wiki/Animal_Crossing_Wiki>.

of belonging. The whimsical colours and charming characters are accompanied by a delightful sonic backdrop. As you move across, sand crunches beneath your feet, while the wind whistles by you as you notice the subtle sounds of waves near the water. From time to time a soft piano plays in the background with the occasional acoustic guitar accompanying in soothing jazz riffs as you move around. This is not the violent confrontation that others seek out in games such as Fortnite and its endless clones; this is a quiet way to get your competitive energies aflame while you fish, chop wood and collect.

In addition to decorating your home with personalized artworks from prominent art museums, of special interest to the 'real-life' museum community was the Animal Crossing Museum. You are encouraged to treat your museum as if it was a living catalogue of your island experiences. The bugs you find, the fish you catch, and the fossils you discover are yours for taking – or donating to Blathers, the owl-character who is supposed to be an academic, brought to the island by Tom Nook to help build a pleasant museum where residents can go and admire the natural wonders of the land around them. Completing the museum, however, requires year-round play, since some fish and bugs only spawn during specific months.
Building your museum entail several steps:

- Donate 5 fish and/or bugs to Tom Nook
- Set up a space for the museum
- Wait for the next day for it to be built
- Donate 15 more fish, bugs and/or fossils to Blathers
- Wait for the museum to be built

Museum professionals were often outraged at the [mis]use of the museum in the game and even non-museum players found the museum staff almost repulsive. Some residents have referred to the Museum Director Blathers as the most annoying part of the entire experience, the only character, in comparison to many other Animal Crossing series' special characters, to have been created with his own surprisingly chronicled history[37]. Occasionally players have found his behaviour somewhat unethical. Madeleine Aggeler described Animal Crossing for an article in the CUT[38] as «a soothing, laid-back game in which I am a human who arrives on a deserted island with a handful of anthropomorphic animals and works to build a community; there are no other real objectives, and the game lacks any conflict. (The worst thing that has happened to me so far is getting stung by wasps while

[37] Blathers, Animal Crossing Wiki, Fandom: <https://animalcrossing.fandom.com/wiki/Blathers>.
[38] Madeleine Aggeler, *This Loathsome Owl Is the Only Bad Part of Animal Crossing*: <https://www.thecut.com/2020/03/animal-crossing-blathers-the-owl.html>.

chopping wood) ». However, she was so concerned with the character who ran the museum – who she called her «virtual nemesis» – that she discussed Blathers with her roommate, who has a master's degree in Museum Studies.

> «Blathers is very old-school and colonial, she said. For one, his collecting practices involve looting specimens from remote islands. Then there are his display methods. From what I've seen, they are severely lacking in engaging interpretation. There are basic ID labels, but nothing that truly inspires visitors and gives them the chance to learn more. Though I will admit it's a beautifully designed space, if a bit inaccessible».

And if this wasn't complicated enough, recent versions of Animal Crossing museums include an option to purchase art and donate to the museum but, while you must be sharp to identify the rarer fossils, you must be super proficient in determining which of the available artworks are real or fake. Jolly Redd, who sounds like a very dubious character, docks his boat in the harbour at the back of your island bringing a range of furniture and art with him. Some of the artworks are genuine while others are fakes. You are not allowed to donate the fake to the museum, and you can only buy one of his items. Evidently, all in all there are some 43 art pieces to find and donate. Once you make your purchase from Redd, it will be delivered to you the next day. According to Dr Laura Humphreys serious questions of museum standards, ethics, and legalities arise for Animal Crossing's resident Curator

> «Damning though the moral side of Blathers' live exhibits is, it is in fossils and art that he really gets into a legal mess. If a shady character living on a boat turned up at a modern gallery selling an original Leonardo Da Vinci for under five grands, any self-respecting curator would rugby tackle them to the ground and call Interpol. But Blathers willingly accepts priceless works of art without ever asking how you came by such a treasure, or for any kind of paperwork - a deliberate attempt to create plausible deniability, no doubt»[39].

The real da Vinci painting will have a woman holding an all-white ermine. In the fake version, the ermine will have raccoon-like circles around its eyes[40].

Finding Jolly Redd is not that simple. You'll need to find Blathers and drop into the conversation the idea of allowing art before Redd shows up. At this stage you must donate at least 60 objects to the museum (the standard fish, bugs, or fos-

[39] Laura Humphreys, *An investigation into Blathers*, 2 August 2020: <https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2020-08-22-an-investigation-into-blathers>.

[40] Lady with an ermine by Leonardo da Vinci, Image: Julia Lee/Polygon | Source images: Nintendo EPD/Nintendo: <https://www.polygon.com/animal-crossing-new-horizons-switch-acnh-guide/2020/4/23/21231433/redd-jolly-museum-art-fake-real-forgeries-list-complete-painting-statue>.

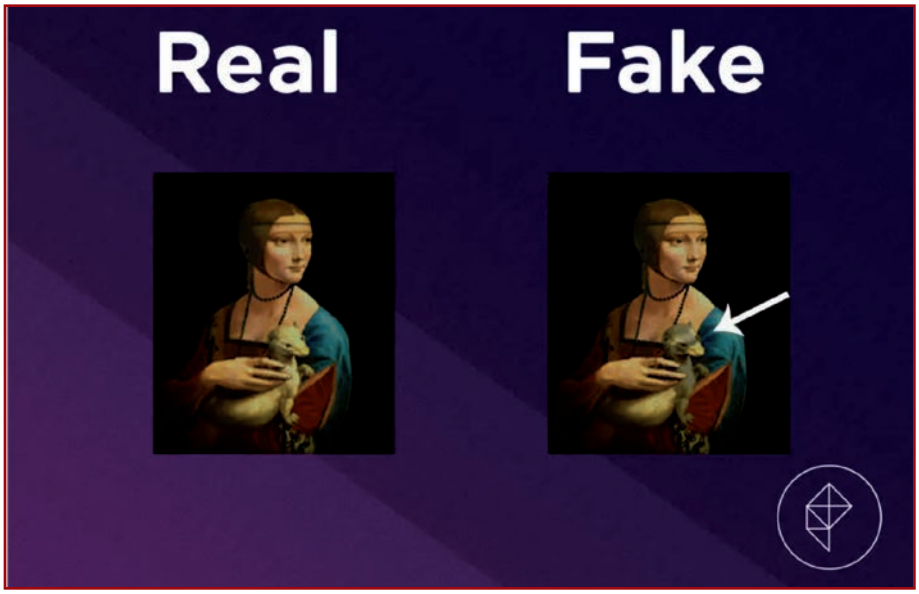

Figure 3. *Screenshot Lady with an ermine by Leonardo da Vinci, Image: Julia Lee/Polygon | Source images: Nintendo EPD/Nintendo*

sils). The following day, when Blathers mentions art, Isabelle will warn you of shady art dealers during her morning announcements. You'll then be able to find Redd roaming your island. Getting into art dealership demands dedication and a sophisticated understanding of the game's dynamics. Sadly, Animal Crossing is an expensive experience, because you need to purchase both a Nintendo Switch and the game itself. Once this not so trivial obstacle is overcome, the game makes an attractive option, and makes for a great case study for museum digital interpretation due to its popularity and wide take-up, as well as its mindfulness of creative role playing. Animal Crossing became popular during lockdown when the physical home had become restrictive, and this virtual home enabled a welcome flexibility and relaxing of boundaries.

For those who don't own a Nintendo Switch you can access numerous videos of the game on YouTube, for example those from Eurogamer[41] and ZackScottGames[42].

Is this kind of gaming addictive? Of course, it is. But at the same time, it is noticeably non-violent and soothingly relaxing. The uploading of built in or external museum content is simply decorative and gently distracting. Although the Met and Getty would prefer to think otherwise, owning and displaying the artwork has a

[41] *Let's Play Animal Crossing: New Horizons - WELCOME TO OUR ISLAND!*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VciTTCDW8yA>.

[42] *Animal Crossing: New Horizons - Gameplay Walkthrough Part 1 - First Day on a New Island*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qui_P7672OA>.

very nominal effect on the game itself and doesn't drive the narrative in any meaningful way. But if you are rationing your screen time as Dr Rich suggests, and seeking a little relaxing down time – why not find yourself a little stretch of an island and personalise your personal space with a few artworks while you are doing so?

New York Times - Close read

The next case study exemplifies the uniqueness and exceptionality of the physical artwork but instead of confronting the work in the physical gallery we are encountering the work up close and in very high resolution on our screen. Can it replace the original and unique and portrait? Of course not, but it can bring into sharp focus the art, the artist, and the story beyond the canvas. Jason Farago, critic at large for The New York Times, completely mesmerises us as he invites us to savour art slowly, closely, mindfully in his evocative series "Close Read". Published by the New York Times[43], each artwork is narrated as an unfurling, linear story that attracts our attention to the fine details, as if we are examining the canvas with a figurative magnifying glass in hand. In 2020 he helped develop the Close Read series, a digital initiative that articulates well-known artworks in exquisite detail. Each artwork in the series pulls us in, stage by stage into the artwork; accompanying our journey with fascinating minutiae as we go and drawing us deeper and deeper into the digital illusion before us on the screen.

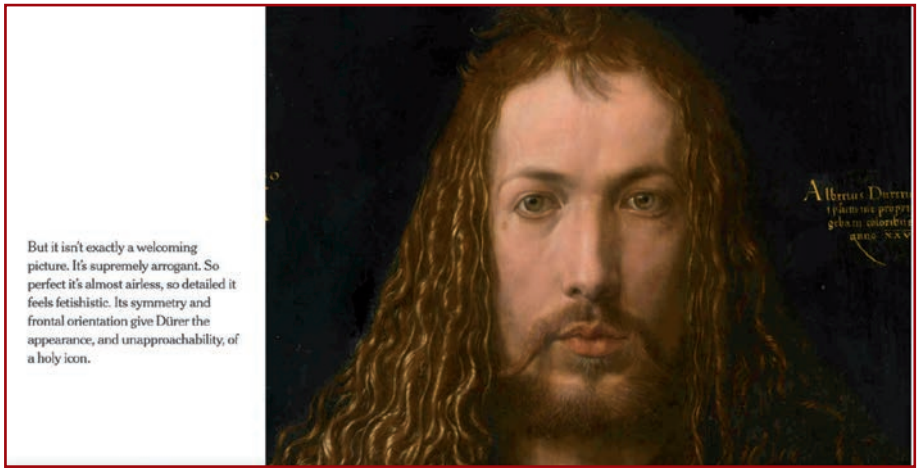

Figure 4. *Screenshot: Seeing Our Own Reflection in the Birth of the Self-Portrait, by Jason Farago*[44]

[43] Close Read: <https://www.nytimes.com/column/close-read>.

[44] *Seeing Our Own Reflection in the Birth of the Self-Portrait*: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/25/arts/durer-self-portrait.html>.

In the one-pager story of Alfred Dürer's portrait, Farago holds an intriguing discussion with the artist while beckoning to the reader to enter into the canvas with a kind of three-way conversation that is both alluring and enthralling.

> «Who are you, and what are you doing here? You, there in the mirror, there in the lens of your phone: What do you see? »

As we move to the next close-up, we are asked…

> «In the eyes of us poor moderns, it seems self-evident that a picture can capture who you are. That your posed image, your face and your clothing, express something essential about your personality. It's the myth on which every selfie stands».

Detail by detail our eyes are drawn to the young Alfred Dürer's soul. At the time of painting this self-portrait Dürer was only 28. Farago describes the man, the artist who looks back out at us with lifelike self-assurance, meeting our gaze. We could almost expect to find our own reflection in his eyes in the vivid close-up. More realistic than a photograph, more compelling than a mirror.

> «His small mouth is framed by a goatee, a trimmed beard and a bell curve of a mustache. Each whisker has been meticulously flecked, thanks to the relatively new medium of oil paint. They give this self-portrait a human presence, but also an alienating exactitude».

Figure 5. *Screenshot: Dürer's hand*

> «Dürer didn't literally think of himself as the Second Coming. He was as pious as any other German in the years before the Reformation. Where Christ raises his hand in blessing, Dürer points his inward, and invokes his God-given gift: the gift of art».

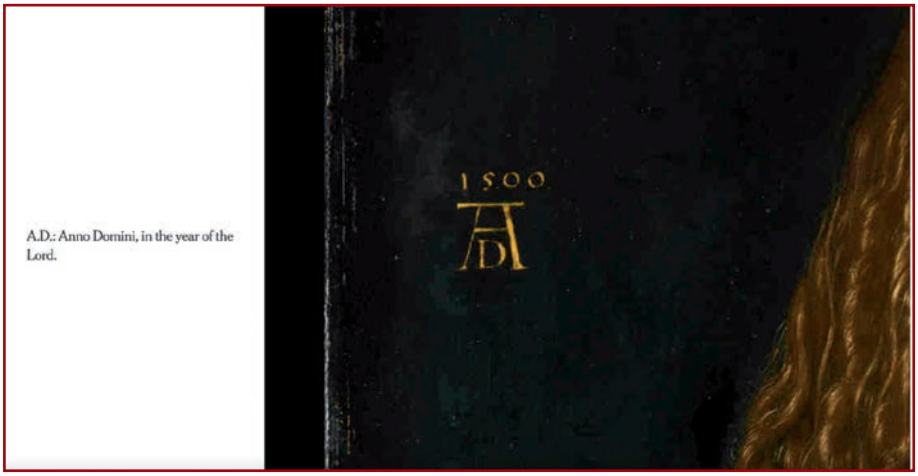

Figure 6. *Screenshot: Dürer Anno Domini*

Farago describes the date and the monogram that Dürer painted onto his canvass. Through this element we learn that Dürer painted during a crucial year, a turning point, and the artist, other than alluding to the idea of A.D.: *Anno Domini*, in the year of the Lord, was also reaffirming his own-self - Albrecht Dürer, lustrous in his initials. Farago reflects on this new kind of authorship, born with the rise of printmaking, in which the work of art is the product of invention and skill at once and becomes evident in this enthralling presentation of a work of art in this specific format

> «Dürer's monogram and Dürer's eyes. New learning and new media. The artist's perception of himself and the artist's brand offered to the world».

In addition to the Farago series, the New York Times has an exceptionally rich section on educational activities – a Lesson for the Day[45] where parents and teachers can find rich resources for home schooling and learning[46] that were perfect during the pandemic lockdown. This was when time was turned on its head, stretching minutes to hours and days to weeks and where mindful distractions became particularly valuable.

#Isolation – (re)creating slow art

This final case study is staged by the controversial platform, Facebook. Repeatedly in the news for its highly problematic and profit-driven environments

[45] New York Times, Lesson for the Day: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/09/learning/lesson-of-the-day-a-picture-of-change-for-a-world-in-constant-motion.html?searchResultPosition=2>.
[46] New York Times Learning: <https://www.nytimes.com/section/learning>.

and addictive services, the lack of regulation has resulted in an almost unstoppable dissemination of toxic content, fake news and even calls to violence. Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen recently told lawmakers in a Senate hearing «that the company systematically and repeatedly prioritized profits over the safety of its users, painting a detailed picture of an organization where hunger to grow governed decisions, with little concern for the impact on society»[47]. Kara Swisher's, popular articles in the New York Times and her "Sway" podcasts have tracked Facebook's nefarious activities for years, recently calling out the platform's architecture as rotten…

> «Maybe because the Journal reporting was so wide-ranging in its coverage of icky topics — from the toxicity of Instagram for teenage girls, to "let the celebs trash the place" rules, to a basic sense that whatever Facebook does is unfixable because the architecture is so rotten»[48].

It is not only Facebook that creates a false façade, but we should also heed from the words of Professor Shoshana Zuboff who – discussing the major players in our digital eco-system Amazon, Facebook, and Google – reminds us how…

> «In nearly every case the agents of institutionalization present their novel practices as if they are one thing, when they are, in fact, something altogether different. The realpolitik of commercial surveillance operations is concealed offstage while the chorus of actors singing and dancing under the spotlights holds our attention and sometimes even our enthusiasm. They sweat under the stage lights for the sake of one aim: that we fail to notice the answers or, better yet, forget to ask the questions:
> Who knows?
> Who decides?
> Who decides who decides? »[49].

We all know that by continuing to enjoy these free services we are obviously forfeiting something, but we find them so enticing; so deeply embedded in our daily interactions that it would be ridiculously hard to forgo them entirely. By being so deeply enmeshed in these platforms, where the owners continue to reap out their enormous investments, we have simply forgotten to ask these questions. In a similar way we are acutely aware that online gaming, or even texting can be severely addictive, social network platforms, as Haugen describes can be just as equally compulsive. At the same time, during the lockdown these social spaces often be-

[47] https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/10/05/facebook-senate-hearing-frances-haugen/.
[48] Kara Swisher, *Clamping Down on 'Spiritual Opium'*, «The New York Times», September 21, 2021.
[49] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, New York: Public Affairs, 2019, p. 231.

came a lifeline to our friends and families and a productive way to keep in touch with colleagues working remotely. This chapter, however, seeks identify mindful moments where artistic practice can offer a sense of well-being, especially with a slow art activity as the driver.

Several Facebook, Instagram and Twitter groups emerged during the pandemic lockdown; inviting people at home to create and upload highly creative, home-made interpretations, of famous art works. Created at a time when they couldn't leave their home and inspired by the art, they so missed as well as the company of others, group members were asked to choose an artwork and recreate it using everyday objects found in the home and photograph themselves as a counterpoint to the original artwork. Both images were then uploaded together; the photo of the original artwork with the staged actors imitating art and essentially reviving the long tradition of tableau vivant, staged online instead of in the theatre. One of the more popular groups, #Isolation (Изоизоляция | Izoizolyacia) currently boasts 563.3K members and was created by Ekaterina Brudnaya-Chelyadinova on March 30, 2020. Brudnaya-Chelyadinova who had previously inspired the «anti-handwritten flash mob» came up with the hashtag #Isolation and one year later explained why. «It was a time full of difficulties, grief and breakdown of the usual world, she described, but we know that thanks to the group and your direct participation in it, the pandemic was easier, saved mental health and strengthened spirit»[50]. The group rules were strict: the reproduction was required to be based on

Figure 7. *Screenshot from the #Isolation Facebook page*

[50] изоляция | Izoizolyacia: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/izoizolyacia/announcements>.

a specific artwork while work on films, TV series, cartoons, movie posters and posters, photographs, comics, and covers were rejected. Photos with blurred backgrounds, collages, filters, with faces pasted into the picture, or with the background of the picture in the photo were not allowed, while colour grading, brightness and contrast edits were possible. The group received two awards: The Runet Award, and Moscow Urban Forum Community Awards 2020 and in addition were shortlisted in the Headliner of the Year Award. They are now looking forward to a print version which will preserve all this creativity for the future.

One of the participants, Yulia Timoshkova remarked:

> «What is so tasty to eat in isolation? My Adele thinks about it from the portrait of Klimt. After all, so many delicious cookies, marshmallows, buns and chocolates were purchased for future use to survive the zombie apocalypse! Thoughts about them swarm like a living cloud around her beautiful head. The model is my daughter Antonina».

Figure 8. *Gustav Klimt "Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer", 1907, #Isolation*

A similar Facebook group, Quearteencasa, invites everyone to join the real-life painting recreation challenge[51]. The group description says that all you need to do is to pick a favorite painting and recreate it with household items. Elmira Kamalova, the administrator of the Quearteencasa Facebook group explains she was curious to find out more about the community. She knew that similar groups were popular all over the world and while she knew that the idea itself wasn't

[51] #quearteencasa: <https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=quearteencasa>.

original, Quearteencasa was dedicated to people from Spanish-speaking countries who could use the platform to engage in local art, things, and popular stuff. «Our members – explains Kamalova – come from Spain, Mexico and Argentina. And, according to Kamalova, some people, they come from Italy! ».

@tussenkunstenquarantaine (267k followers)[52] a similar art challenge was launched by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and, once it started growing, was picked up by the Getty Museum in Los Angeles[53]. The Netherlands social account Tussen Kunst & Quarantaine — which translates to "between art and quarantine". Clearly people taking up these challenges spent a lot of time and energy at a time when they were confined to the home and seeking meaningful distraction. The Tussenkunstenquarantaine rules were simple to follow:

- Choose your artwork
- Use 3 props from your home
- Share @tussenkunstenquarantaine (no photoshop allowed)

Judging by the images uploaded in this and other projects, friends, families, and isolated individuals spent hours, possibly days to get the perfect set. Attention to detail was at times astonishing and the trompe l'oeil effect was at times breathtaking. Often, I had to check which of the images was the "original" and which the staged one; and on closer inspection the objects incorporated were at times

Figure 9. *Screenshot @tussenkunstenquarantaine images*

[52] Tussenkunstenquarantaine: <https://www.instagram.com/tussenkunstenquarantaine>.
[53] Getty Museum Challenge: <https://twitter.com/GettyMuseum/status/1242845952974544896>.

totally hilarious. Makeup was perfected and period costumes were often invigorated with toilet paper and bath towels. Afterall, who keep a renaissance outfit in the cupboard these days? Was it the close reading of the artwork that made it all so enticing to the eye or the exhibitionism of the cosplay when these introspective moments were shared on the worldwide stage that made the group so engaging? These groups are continuing to go strong and with a world-wide supply of art to draw from, the potential seems to be endless.

I have to say that out of the thousands of images I have enjoyed over recent months this one from the #tussenkunstenquarantaine project keeps making me smile.

Figure 10. *Mark Rothko, White Center (yellow, pink and purple on pink), 1950, #Isolation Teffi Effie: «A humble family of four. Sponge cake with three types of soufflés and dark chocolate for coffee on the balcony, 2020».*

These case studies suggest than there are many rich, digital possibilities for slow art. Whether you have been cosplaying the paintings and creating a digital tableau vivant; enthralled by the closeups of the New York Times Closereads; engrossed in an information packed webinar; or simply hanging out with your friends in Animal Crossing these are not mere fleeting minutes but rather opportunities for quality time and a slowing down of our normal pace to savour some special moments. But how can we measure these kinds of activities to prove that they are truly mindful when they are often experienced individually; and more recently, in the privacy of the home? If only we could perform the Italian test to measure cortisol levels, we may be convinced that these can be valued as truly mindful moments.

Now that many countries are coming out of lockdown and returning to the public sphere, will we be taking any of these special experiences with us or will we be once more overwhelmed by the frantic pace of daily reality? My sense is that this has been a learning curve for all of us and hopefully, when we are able to return to our previously active lives, it might be useful to remember how some of this quality time and extraordinary experiences can stay with us through ongoing digital delivery and allow us to savour some of these sweet, mindful moments as we rush into our newly reclaimed daily lives. This kind of approach can inspire all those tedious and stressful activities that pile up throughout the day; usually driven by ongoing demands and tight schedules but simply result in having to struggle through it all. Once we become aware of these possibilities we can learn from our own experience and extend mindfulness to those around us; to our family and friends as well as in the workplace[54]. Perhaps we should stop, think, breath, and recalibrate, so that instead of hurtling through our lives at the speed of a freight train we might do better to slow down and start paying attention to our own thoughts; to the sounds and sights around us and remind ourselves to connect with the moment before it flies away.

Can art contribute to personal well-being? And can this happen through digital experiences? This paper explores the topic, by examining cultural initiatives and commercial products based on digital technology, designed to convey positive emotions. After examining the impact of these experiences on users during the recent lockdown period, the paper poses some interesting questions about the future of such initiatives, that should remain the object of further scientific investigation.

[54] Introducing mindful boundaries: a welcome from our new Europeana Network Association Chair: <https://pro.europeana.eu/post/introducing-mindful-boundaries-a-welcome-from-our-new-europeana-network-association-chair>.

L'ultima consultazione dei siti web è avvenuta a dicembre 2021.