

ENRICHING LIVES THROUGH ART

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Wherever human beings have gathered, they have felt the urge to create something that can be seen, heard or performed. Through art, we give form to ideas, emotions and concepts, crossing boundaries of race, culture, politics and religion. It should never belong only to the wealthy, the educated or the privileged few. Painting, music, literature, dance, design and other creative pursuits accompany us through life, affecting us emotionally, psychologically and financially while influencing both personal and collective behaviour. Art can also leave a measurable impression on the brain. When a work of art captures our attention, or when we listen to music, the blood flow to the brain is believed to increase by as much as 10%; some compare the response to looking at a loved one. Scientists are taking the relationship between art and brainpower increasingly seriously, exploring how engagement with art may exercise the mind while enriching life and wellbeing.

The story begins with an inner need to create: a desire to express something of the soul and to exercise a talent that cannot remain silent. Money may follow, and a few artists have become very rich, but profit is rarely the whole purpose. Art invites thought, introspection, contemplation and reaction. The meaning does not belong to experts alone, although knowledge can deepen appreciation. When more people enter the world of art, the more widely knowledge and understanding can grow. The UK offers some of the world's finest museums, galleries, theatres, cinemas, art societies and cultural venues. When their doors closed during the 2020 pandemic—the longest interruption since the Second World War—the connection between art and its audiences had to take a different route. Through Zoom, YouTube and virtual tours, that connection survived and, throughout 2020 and 2021, often reached people in new ways.

When classrooms closed and familiar routines fell away, many young people lost more than lessons; they also lost daily opportunities to encounter the creative arts. Yet school is often where a lifelong relationship with art first takes root. A child looks, questions and reflects, gradually learning to imagine, communicate and see the world from more than one perspective. As educationalist Elliot W. Eisner observed, 'The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer.' In the 1940s, artists, including Picasso, Henry Moore and Henri Matisse, created prints for schools so that children could meet high-quality art first-hand. Many leading artists have since recalled that their own love of art began in the classroom, and with greater funding and more flexibility in the timetable many more children could continue that journey beyond.

The story of access to the arts is also a story of social mobility. US data dating back to 1850 suggested that family wealth played a major part in determining whether someone became an artist: the greater the family income, the more likely a person was to identify as an artist, musician, author or actor. Yet artists' average income remains typically below the national average, and minority groups are still less well represented in the visual arts and literature than in many other occupations. In 2022, the Government stated its intention to 'tackle cultural disparities and ensure that everyone, wherever they live, can enjoy the incredible benefits of culture in their

lives'. For that ambition to become reality, working-class communities need sustained support to produce the makers, musicians, creators, curators and directors of the future. Money in the art market remains distributed just as unevenly: most artists struggle while a popular few command enormous, sometimes eye-watering, sums. Banksy and Basquiat both struggled before their work began to sell for huge sums. If art is to enrich every life, the opportunity to create it must no longer depend so heavily on where a person's story begins.

Have you always wanted to learn more about art? Then start now with the Arts Society North West Norfolk who are hosting a talk by Ray Warburton, an accredited Arts Society lecturer, entitled 'Paintings inspired by Poems', at 2:00 pm at Sedgeford Village Hall. Full details **www.theartssocietynwnorfolk.org.uk**.