



art *ambassadors*

SNAPSHOT | THE ART OF HEALING

Art can impact the viewer in many different ways. Art engages with the most personal parts of ourselves, evoking a range of emotional reactions, thoughts, feelings, memories, or associations, both positive and negative. Art may connect us to our childhood, or to yesterday, to an aspiration, a wish, a desire, or a longing.

With the help of two of the UMFA's Art Ambassadors, John Stitt and Sam Forlenza, PhD, this self-guide that you can enjoy at home will provide a snapshot of each of their larger in-gallery tours centered on mental health and wellness. So, let's grab a piece of paper and pencil to explore these ideas through art at the UMFA.

EXPLORING TRAUMA THROUGH ART

On John Stitt's tour, he explores how artists have created art as a means of dealing with and overcoming trauma in their lives—and what we can learn from them.

To start, think about and answer these questions.

- How would you define trauma?
- How do we experience trauma?
- How might artists show personal trauma through their works?



- Examine the painting—what do you first notice? How does it make you feel?
- What do you think the story behind this piece is? What clues can you find to support this narrative?
- Each of us responds differently to stress or traumatic events. How do you respond? Are there ways you avoid your emotions? Are there things you do to cope in a healthy way?

Retour de Marcus Sextus dans sa famille

Pierre Narcisse Guérin, baron
European, 18th and 19th century
Oil on canvas
UMFA1986.054

NOTES, SKETCHES, OBSERVATIONS:

Resilience

Valerie Kim Martinez

American

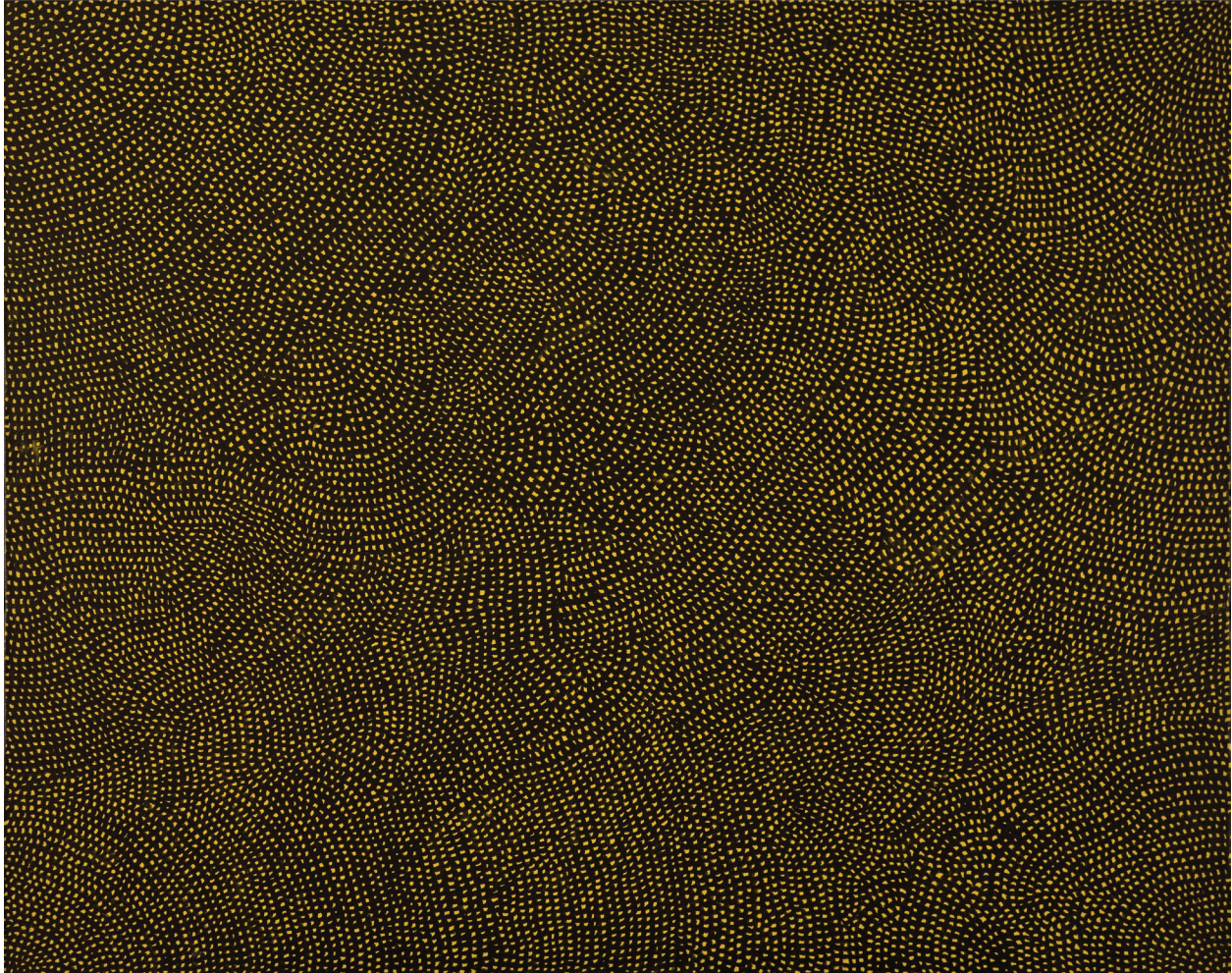
Oil on canvas

UMFA2001.19.1



- Take a minute and examine this painting. How do you think this piece relates to traumatic experiences or events? What parts of the artwork make you say that?
- What does the wolf make you think about? Does it relate to societal power structures, mythology and fairy tales, or personal experience?
- Does this painting speak to any experiences or events in your life?
- Why do you think this piece is titled "Resilience"? Do you think this title makes sense? Why or why not?

NOTES, SKETCHES, OBSERVATIONS:



- Even though this piece is abstract, does it evoke an emotion or feeling? As your eyes wander, do you experience more than one emotion? Do your feelings change or deepen as you look longer?
- Artist Yayoi Kusama has struggled with mental illness (partially stemming from childhood physical and emotional abuse), and decided to voluntarily commit herself to a psychiatric hospital in 1977, while still making her magnificent art. Kusama created *Infinity Nets* to capture a sense of eternal love, the expansive universe, and a way to reflect on the self. How might this piece reflect the way people overcome trauma?
- What might Kusama have felt as she created this?
- Take a few minutes to create your “infinity net,” an abstract sketch that captures your emotions right now. How does it feel to make this piece? Will you include color like Kusama?

Infinity Nets

Yayoi Kusama
Japanese, born 1929
Oil on canvas
UMFA2011.2.2

NOTES, SKETCHES, OBSERVATIONS:

ART AND MENTAL HEALTH: SAM FORLENZA, PHD

In this tour, we will explore the way experiencing art can be a positive and beneficial experience for everyone. Let's spend some time with the art. Research indicates that the average museum visitor spends no more than 17 seconds observing a work of art. Hopefully you'll want to spend more time than that with these artworks.

In the book, *Art as Therapy*, Alain de Botton and John Armstrong propose that art is a "therapeutic medium" and they identify seven core psychological functions of art:

1. Remembering
2. Growth
3. Sorrow
4. Hope
5. Self-Understanding
6. Appreciation
7. Rebalancing

Let's consider these works of art through the lens of these psychological functions as the art raises questions, stirs emotions, helps us process feelings, helps us understand ourselves better, and encourages us be our best selves.

Doane Family Portrait

Theodore E. Pine
American, 1827–1905
Mahogany, brass, gilt
UMFA1980.041



Remembering — Art can help us preserve experiences.

Take one minute of close looking to explore this painting. Now ask yourself the following questions:

- Does this painting, or any part of it, transport you to or remind you of another place, real or not? How does that place feel to you now?
- Does the scene or the subject matter remind you of a specific time in your life? Or someone else's life? Your child's life or a child you know? How does that feel to you now?
- Does anyone in the painting remind you of anyone you have known, or would like to know, real or imagined?

Growth — Art can stretch us beyond our "comfort zone."

- It is okay to feel confused, uncertain, uncomfortable or even bored with art. Did this painting evoke any of those feelings for you initially?
- As you look at art more, do you become more comfortable with it, does it become more familiar to you? Does it foster liking?

Sorrow — Art can help us deal with or process sorrow or difficult emotions.

- This is an idyllic scene (an ideal). Childhood is portrayed as blissful and serene. Is this a totally accurate depiction of childhood or youth?
- We may not look at art to experience sorrow, but after careful looking, art may evoke sorrow or similarly sad emotions in us. Do you agree?
- Does anything in this painting remind you of a sad time, a loss of a friend, friendship, pet, or opportunity, which are all inevitable, and normal parts of life? How did you deal with or process these losses?

NOTES, SKETCHES, OBSERVATIONS:

Left | *Body Mask "Doroe"*

Unknown

Asmat, early 1990s

Rattan, sago fiber, paper mulberry bark, pigment, weaving, knotting

UMFA1998.575

Right | *Manimar mask*

Unknown

Asmat, 20th century

Wood, feather, grass, fiber, pigment, woodworking

UMFA2015.1.1



The Asmat masks and headdresses on this page and the next may denote power, authority, position, or healing. They come from the "realm of the ancestors." After careful looking, let's explore more ways art may affect us.

Hope — Art can encourage us and give us hope.

- You can find hope, encouragement and optimism in art. Are there special artworks here that give you a feeling of hopefulness?
- Are there works of art in your life that connect you to your ancestors?
- What do you hope for? For your future, for that of friends and family?
- Do you feel hopeful for yourself? What do you do when you don't?

Self-Understanding — Art can help us know ourselves better.

- Can you learn anything about yourself from these masks?
- As noted, these pieces possess special powers. What are your special "super powers," strengths, or abilities? Explain.
- What powers, abilities, or skills would you like to develop?
- Are you feeling encouraged to develop them? Why or why not?
- Are there ancestors who helped you to develop your abilities or talents? If you could speak to them today, what might you say?

Tatanua Mask

Unknown

New Ireland, mid 20th century

Wood, pigment, plant fiber,
carving, painting

UMFA1983.001.009



Appreciation — Art can give us “new eyes” to see what is there.

- Do you appreciate the family and friends you have now and the ancestors you have had in the past?
- Do you value what you have? The love of family or friends, abilities, resources, intellectual or physical gifts? Your own uniqueness?
- Can you be yourself and appreciate who you are?

Rebalancing — Art can encourage us to be our “best selves.”

- Do you carry your ancestors within you? As you remember them, do they ever guide you to be your best self? Inspire or motivate you?
- Was there someone who made you feel special?
- Who/what inspires you now? Who/what makes you feel special now?
- Are you able to maintain a sense of balance or equilibrium in your life? What do you do when you are unable to? When stressed?

NOTES, SKETCHES, OBSERVATIONS: