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THE ART OF SILENCE

By

Lydia Anne Kowalski
B.S., Indiana University, 1971
M.C.P., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1973

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in Humanities

Department of Comparative Humanities
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

December 2017

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedication to

Dr. Patricia Condon

whose friendship, inspiration, and support

made this journey possible.

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ABSTRACT

THE ART OF SILENCE

Lydia Anne Kowalski

December 15, 2017

This dissertation argues that the role of silence is essential to experience the full aesthetic beauty of art in a museum setting. Museums have changed their focus due to socio-economic and financial pressures. They have changed from silent “temples” for art conservation and exhibition to places for interactive art education, entertainment, and social gathering. The results of these changes have been both positive and negative. Attendance has increased, enhancing the museum experience, engaging more diverse audiences in museum activities, and dispelling the “elitist” image of the museum. These changes, however, have resulted in the loss of a silent space to quietly experience a personal and emotional connection to art. As the world becomes more urban, noisier, and addictively connected to technology, this study argues the need to include a silent experience in the art museum. This will enhance visitors’ aesthetic, emotional, and educational experience with art.

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapters one, two, and three explore the role silence plays in spiritual, aesthetic, and learning engagement. Chapter four examines the singular experience of wonder and its profound influence on the appreciation of art appreciation. Chapters five and six present silence and art from two

perspectives: how artists reflect silence in their art works, and the silence viewers see in art. The final chapter seven presents a model for a room dedicated for viewing art in silence. This experience would provide an opportunity for visitors to connect personally, deeply, and emotionally with a work of art without influence from others.

Each of the chapters cites research examining how silence develops the capacity to observe art with more detail, create a more personal and emotional connection with art, and to experience the beauty of art for its own sake before looking at it from an historical and analytical perspective.

Further study is needed to assess the value of a silent experience in an art museum. This study provides evidence that silence can positively affect the visitors' involvement with art. Observing art in silence increases the visitors' ability to discover more detail in a work of art and connect personal experiences with it. In an increasingly noisy world, a silent space removes outside distractions and offers visitors an opportunity to have an emotional connection with the beauty of art.

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INTRODUCTION: A CULTURE OF NOISE

Auguste Préault, Le Silence
1842-43. Plaster, Diameter: 40 cm (15 3/4 in.)
The Art Institute of Chicago

In 2002, Max Picard wrote “Silence is the only phenomenon today that is ‘useless.’ It does not fit into the world of profit and utility; it simply is” (Picard 2002, 18). Whether or not silence “is” may be questionable in 21st century culture. The value of silence is not often recognized in a world where proficiency and expediency are the hallmarks of success, and where noise permeates our environment 24 hours a day. George Gorman noted, “We are conditioned by our age to be noisy [sic], so much so that we are almost afraid to be silent” (Sim 2007, 67). Susan Sontag echoes his remarks in her comment on art’s role in silence: “The art of our time is noisy with appeals for silence... One recognizes the imperative of silence, but goes on speaking anyway” (Sontag 1969, 12). There is an inner need for silence that calls out to us, but is ignored.

Silence is difficult to find in today's urban environment. The "imperative of silence" is no longer recognized; and a fear of silence has replaced the need for silence.

How has silence been largely silenced? Silence used to be part of the fabric of life. Most people lived in rural settings where nature's ambient sounds provided a sense of quiet. Social organizations such as churches, libraries, schools, and museums required silence as a sign of respect for their activities and to allow others to silently pray, study, read or ponder. Now, however, 80.7 percent of the U.S. population live in urban areas.¹ The "silent" ambient sounds of nature scarcely exist in an environment filled with traffic, people talking on their cell phones, and a constant barrage of advertisements in visual and aural form. Robert Wood addresses the problems of noise infiltrating modern life in his article "Silence, Being and the Between: Picard, Heidegger and Buber" (Wood 1994). He notes these three philosophers believe existence rests in the region of silence; that urbanized life is destroying this region; and that if it is lost from human lives, we will fail to understand ourselves.

In urban environments, certain institutions used to provide a sanctuary for silence. Now, churches have largely replaced silent contemplation with bands, choirs, and community discussion. Libraries are the community centers for many neighborhoods, and provide computer stations, meeting spaces, classes, and after-school drop-in centers. Schools have embraced interactive learning to engage students who are seemingly born with computer games in their hands. Museums encourage discussion, conversation, and the use of audiotapes and cell phones to access

¹ 2010 U.S. Census Bureau report

information in the galleries. Earbuds, iPods, text messages, tweets, snapchat and addiction to cell phones fill days and nights with sounds and interruptions. While technology provides access to immeasurable educational, business, and recreational opportunities, it is diminishing an aspect of life that people have had for centuries but now is increasingly elusive: a time of silence.

Does silence have a place and function in modern society? In this paper, I will look at the benefits of silence and offer a way to preserve a place for it in a museum. In preparing for this study, I looked at leisure activities that could be enhanced by silence, and public places that could offer a silent activity easily accessible to the general population. My search did not include formal spiritual or learning situations that require a substantial time commitment and attracts those already committed to experiencing silence.² Instead, I focused this study on secular and public places, and the kind of activities the general public engages in that could be enhanced by a time of silence. How could silence support and enhance these activities? What organizations could provide space and an environment for silent activities that would not conflict with their mission and program? How could space could be adapted to provide a positive silent experience? The pursuit of answers to these questions are part of my study.

Reflecting on traditional centers of silence, I chose to focus on the visual arts in a museum setting. Particularly, I will look at the role of silence as a way to support and enhance the appreciation and wonder of art. A museum gallery can be designed for silent observation. The visual arts are silent and can support a silent experience.

² e.g. meditation centers, college programs including silent pedagogy, monasteries

Museums have been the focus of many studies on aesthetics, learning, reflection, and spirituality connected to silence, and provide a dynamic platform from which to develop my topic. Museums serve a large and diverse public audience. Approximately 850 million people visit museums annually, more than the attendance for all major league sporting events and theme parks combined.³ I believe an experience of silence could be offered to broad range of visitors during a normal visit.

Now, however, museums are focused on increasing the ways to actively engage their visitors. Current museum education philosophy calls for a group dynamic based on conversation. This is not to imply that this interactive mode of learning is not important. Indeed, it has attracted wider and more diverse audiences to museums, and has resulted in more engagement with, and understanding of, art. However, there is still a place for silent observation of art in the museum. This study will develop a case for the importance of retaining a silent experience in the museum. I believe silence provides an alternative way of learning, and offers a singular opportunity for a visitor to connect with visual art.

If silence offers a special experience for the museum visitor, why is it widely disappearing from the museum? Traditionally, museums were places of silence where art and antiquities were collected for cultural preservation, for the edification of its visitors, and the narration of human history and culture through labels and lectures

³ American Alliance of Museums

(Falk & Dierking 2013). This quiet time of observation lost favor as it was connected with elitism and exclusion, and as societal changes mandated inclusiveness and interaction. Silence is no longer regarded as a positive experience culturally, and therefore does not serve marketing purposes (Falk and Dierking 2013; Henry 2007). Visitors look for and appreciate more engagement during their visit, and this opportunity has in turn created new revenue streams to support museum activities.

In the mid-1980s, social changes ignited a dramatic shift in museums' priorities. Visitors, rather than collections, emerged as the focus of museum activities (AAM 1984; Falk & Dierking 2013; Villaneuve 2007). Government funding as well as social pressures demanded that museums serve a more diverse community, including economically and racially disenfranchised populations. In response, museum education moved from a small subsection of museum activities to a major participant in planning museum exhibitions, teaching, and interpreting collections. In addition to signage and guided tours, interactive visitor activities began to focus more on developing personal context rather than the historical background of the museums' objects. And most dramatically, by the 1990s, technology began to deliver unlimited access to collections and information through websites, apps, and interactive games. Visitors now have control over their activity choices rather than solely being guided by museum professionals who set an agenda. Instead of the "ivory towers" of art and culture, museums became—and continue to develop as—centers for conversation, interactive learning, and leisure activity (AAM 1984; Berry and Mayer 1989; Falk & Dierking 2013; Moreno 2003; Museum Education Roundtable 1992; Villaneuve 2007).

Modern culture's dependence on technology is noted by Mara Adelman who observes that the need for people to connect is "magnified in our highly saturated, mediated communicative culture. This saturation is compounded by normative pressures, such as professional and social demands to stay perpetually connected and responsive" (Adelman 2014, 53). She notes that some people find humor in the new term "nomophobia"—a mental feeling of inadequacy due to lack of (or loss) of mobile phone contact. Her students take this seriously: "They confess that they would be 'lost' without their cellphones and they experience not only anxiety, but actual fear of being 'stranded' or deprived of a critical call or social opportunity" (Adelman 2014, 55). Museum visitors are accustomed to constant connection to iPods and text messaging, and find "non-connection" uncomfortable (Brogan 2010; Knap and Smith 2005; Maitland 2008; Richtel 2010; Trilling & Hood 1999). Is it any wonder that museum educators now embed their programs with technology and activities that might avoid disengagement from the visitors' connective activities?

While the public is responding positively to these initiatives, Sophie Gilbert also noted a downside to the increased use of cellphones in museum galleries in her article in *The Atlantic* (2016). Some museums encourage their visitors to photograph, document, and share their experience at the museum, and Gilbert observed a disturbing outcome. Many visitors were rushing through the museum taking photos of artwork, checking their phone's camera, and then moving on to the next piece without even looking at the art they just photographed! A photo may be useful to remind visitors of their visit and perhaps prompt them to find out more about the art, but if they have not

experienced the subtleties and “presence” of the original art, they have missed the point of going to a museum. Technology may help them recall their museum experience; but it interrupts their ability to focus on the “presence” of the art itself in the museum. The aura of the original painting cannot be captured in a photograph; the unique experience of seeing the colors and textures of the art work is gone; the mystical spirit of the artist cannot be perceived. This type of “seeing” can happen in a place of silence where focus is undisturbed by other activities.

Museum educators look for new ways to help visitors understand art. As a way to help the museum visitor become more engaged, museum educators involve them in group discussions to help them develop their own meaning-making. Meaning-making is based on current museum pedagogy that focuses on discussions among participants to ascertain the background and meaning of the art from their personal perspectives. It is based on a belief that each group member adds to the dynamic of learning, and each contribution helps create a pattern of thinking about an object (Jeffers 2003; Ritchhart 2007).

The new interactive educational model is a valuable, popular, and expanding museum experience. It has attracted thousands of visitors to museums who might not otherwise have considered going to one. People with little exposure to art and a museum cultural setting can be more relaxed with this approach to viewing art. It removes the sense of elitism that still hovers over museums. However, it should not totally dismiss the option of silence. Constant interaction leaves no room for individual, focused, silent observation and reflection about art without the influence of others.

George Prochnik notes that silence offers a “fertile pause” (2011, 13) that increases the power of attention. Research on museum visitor interaction demonstrates that other visitors, and people and things interacting with museum visitors (e.g. artists, museum educators, guides, interactive activities, games, etc.) strongly frame and shape what the visitor thinks about art (Falk and Dierking 2013; Ritchhart 2007; Vom Lehn, Heath and Hindmarsh 2001). Even a glance from one person at an exhibit will influence another visitor to look at the same painting or interact with an exhibit in a similar way. Susan Sontag commented on the need for silence and art: “Still another use for silence: providing time for the continuing or exploring of thought. Notably, speech closes off thought” (Sontag 1969, 19). Constant discussion and interaction does not allow time to develop new thoughts to add to a discussion.

Visitors often enter a museum directly from a noisy and complex world. They may bring this world into the museum by talking on cell phones and texting. When they pass through the museum doors, they are barraged with everything but art. They are faced with an onslaught of information: admissions procedures, directional signage, and lists of exhibits and special events. Immediately, their attention is divided into many directions. The museum store, café and restrooms beckon the visitor to the museum consumer world and away from the mission of the museum: the observation of art. Before entering a gallery, the visitor must consider the options of renting audiotapes, obtaining guidebooks, joining a gallery tour, viewing a film, or checking into a computer research area. If a family arrives with children, the interactive art rooms may be the first place they visit. What the visitor does not immediately do is see and think about

art. There is little preparation of the visitor to observe art, let alone think about art in silence. Instead, the focus is on a constantly interactive experience designed to keep pace with the noisy expectations of modern society, using as many methods as possible to prevent boredom, detachment, and isolation.

Can a museum offer a better transition than this plethora of distractions to help the visitor think and focus on art? Perhaps providing a silent place of transition to prepare to look at art would well serve the visitor. In this study, I will discuss this complex issue from many perspectives to show the importance of a silent place to experience a personal, emotional relationship with art. Chapters one, two, and three will explore the role silence plays in spiritual, aesthetic and learning engagement. Together, these disciplines make a powerful case for the preservation of, and engagement with, silence in the art museum. Chapter four explores the singular experience of wonder and its profound influence on the appreciation of art. I will demonstrate through research studies how wonder and silence uniquely affect how people “see” art. My goal is to create a case for the reintroduction of an opportunity for silent observation of art in museums, and to underscore the importance of fostering a place of respite to experience wonder in the midst of a busy and noisy modern life. Chapter five looks at silence and art as expressed by the artist and visual art. Some artists need silence to create art; and many works of art are interpreted as expressions of silence. This perspective offers another way for the viewer to connect silence with art. It provides an understanding of the power of silence in the creation and presentation of art, and extends the viewer’s silent art experience. Chapter six explores

how the visitor perceives silence in art. This completes the interactive cycle created between the artist, the art and the viewer. Finally, chapter seven offers a model for the museum to offer a silent experience of art. It includes a description of a potential “site” experience incorporating silence in the museum as a space for an intimate, emotional and formative experience. The site provides a transitional space which leads to and connects with the rest of the visitors’ museum activities. Suggestions for preparing the visitor for the silent experience and later museum exploration are included. Research will demonstrate how this silent experience offers the museum visitor a deeper, more meaningful preparation for the educational, intellectual and social understanding of art.

CHAPTER ONE

INNER SILENCE

A sixth grade class in Calgary was studying Eskimo culture and was asked to write a poem after observing an Inukshuk.⁴ One student beautifully captured the importance of silence in the culture of the people of the Arctic region of North America in the following poem. It reveals the symbolism, mystery, spirituality, and wisdom gained through the experience of silence as the student observed this object.

Inukshuk

*Though it has no eyes to see,
no ears to hear, and no mouth to speak,
it is the guardian of the People
They build it to mark where they have been
and to bring good
fortune or bad. On the spot it stands,
It is the Inukshuk, built by the Inuit people
If you cannot understand its silence
You will not understand its words (Ebitz 2007, 121)*

⁴ An inuksuk is a human-made stone landmark or cairn used by the Inuit, Inupiat, Kalaallit, Yupik, and other peoples of the Arctic region of North America.

The message of this poem should not be lost on museum educators.

Silence Defined

What is silence? Do we all perceive it the same way? There are many different concepts of silence: the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “The state or condition when nothing is audible; absence of all sound or noise; complete quietness or stillness; noiselessness;” Max Picard described a “universe of silence” (2002); Bernard Dauenhauer notes the “ before, in-between and after” space between words (1980) as silence; Thomas Emmerig cites a “quality of mind” fostering a sense of silence in Messiaen’s music (2004); Buddhists describe an inner stillness of the mind; and John Cage had evolving theories on the existence of silence: “fullness of sound in quiet,” his discovery of the “absence of silence” during the performance of *4’33*,” and, finally, his conclusion that there is no silence because there is constant noise emanating not only from the environment but from one’s own body (Cage 1961, 1937). Silence is also linked with states of “peace, serenity, rest, tranquility, and/or an opportunity for concentration for the expenditure of thought energy....aloneness or singularity” (Stark 1963, 16). It is the basis for reflective and critical thinking, mindfulness, flow and meditation. For the purposes of this paper I will use the following definition: silence is an absence of “human made” noise and distractions (e.g. cell phones, text messaging, conversation, activities) and outside informational input affecting personal reflection. In this chapter, I will explore the concept of silence in three areas: religion, aesthetics, and education. Together, these will provide the underlying theories for the importance of silence in the observation of and engagement with art.

Spiritual Silence

In religious and spiritual practices, silence is the foundation for contemplative reflection and meditation for many believers including Zen Buddhists, Quakers, Catholics, and Sunnis (Sim 2007; Shultis 2013; Teahan 1981). In these spiritual environments meditation is focused on a connection to God and finding a deeper understanding of the inner self. Silent, reflective meditation promotes a stillness or emptiness of the mind. Freedom from distracting thoughts and disconnection from the world through silence helps focus attention, calm anxiety, and increase self-understanding (Adelman 2014; Andrews 2009; Barbezat and Bush 2014; Hempton 2014; Kolb 1984; Stark 1963; UCLA Mindfulness Awareness Research Center; Ueda 1995).

Reflective meditation focuses on “living in the present” and includes both introverted and extroverted reflection. Introverted reflection is used to attain inner emptiness for spiritual development; extroverted reflection aids learning or thinking about something specific (Goble 2014). Introverted reflection is used in spiritual practices. Extroverted reflection plays an important role in learning. Both types will be addressed in the learning/engagement section of this study.

For those who practice it, a life of deep meditative silence provides a sense of fulfillment through the search for truth. It encourages a deep connection with God, and an understanding of one’s inner self. Zen meditation seeks an emptiness of mind that clears it of preconceptions so that we may realize the *experience* of the moment rather than the *associations* of the activity. An example is the practice of the ancient art of the tea ceremony, *cha-no-yu*. A participant strives to focus on the senses—sight, smell,

taste and touch—and obtain a “ ‘cleansing’...a matter of purging sense perception and the mind of all conceptual associations...” and “finding the truth that is *going on* in the tea practices”(Graham 2000, 507). This heightened awareness achieved in silence helps the practitioner experience a greater intimacy with the immediate sensory sensations.

For some, silent reflection may lead to a state described as “sublime,” an experience of a supreme spiritual presence. It is a transcendent experience that lifts a person into a state of detachment from everything worldly into a profound spiritual realm. An example is found in the meditations of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). In her meditations, she heard the voice of God, leading her to become “the instrument by which God addressed and admonished mankind and the church.”⁵ Her sublime experiences resulted in revelations for religious practice and transcendental music still used today for meditation.⁶

In the Roman Catholic tradition, meditative contemplation of God is beautifully expressed through the writings and lectures of Thomas Merton. He sequestered himself in a Trappist Monastery where he only spoke during the celebration of Mass. For Thomas Merton total silence was essential to pray and reach God:

Words stand between silence and silence: between the silence of things and the silence of our own being. Between the silence of the world and the silence of God. When we have really met and known the world in silence, words do not separate us from the world nor from other men, nor from God, nor from ourselves because we no longer trust entirely in language to contain reality (Merton 1993, 93).

⁵ *Epistolae, Medieval women's Latin Letters*. <https://epistolae.ccnmti.columbia.edu>

⁶ e.g. “Canticles of Ecstasy” and “Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations”

Silence informs the practitioner. It allows the person to “speak” without words thoughts that cannot be expressed. Thomas Merton wrote prolifically about his relationship with God, and understood his thoughts evolved from silence, not conversation.

The Quaker religion also uses silence to find communication with God. Participants sit together in total silence for their spiritual practice. They only speak when they have found something to say that has been revealed during their silence. After a participant shares a thought, they again fall silent until someone else is moved to speak. This is called “living silence.” In some meetings, they meet and no one speaks. When this happens, it is called “dead silence,” for they believe the worshipers are not “centering,” are distracted, and cannot connect with God. It is only in silence that they find the silent words from God to share with others (Gorman 1973).

The concept of silence was greatly expanded by Max Picard (1888-1965). A writer, philosopher and deeply religious Catholic, he believed silence is an entire universe of its own. For Picard, silence is a vast space that surrounds everything, and from it emerges every thought and activity. His book on silence was the first significant treatise on the profound role silence might have on human existence. He said: “Silence is nothing merely negative; it is not the mere absence of speech. It is a positive, a complete world in itself” (2002, 8). He believed all knowledge and conversation is rooted in silence, and that it provides a way to connect the past, present and future.

These examples highlight the role silence plays in helping some people attain a deep spiritual connection and an inner knowledge of self. While it does not reflect a

universal concept of silence and religion, and is not the kind of contemplation useful for a museum visitor, it does provide a concept for how silence can create an environment conducive to focusing attention and fully experiencing a time looking at art. The next section provides an example, however, of how spiritual silence can connect directly to the observation of art.

Sublime Silence

Silence and the experience of the sublime is not only a concept of the mind based on the absence of sound. It is also a condition created in the mind while seeing landscapes or objects that invoke a feeling of silence.⁷ For some Russian Orthodox believers, the Russian icon provides a sublime spiritual experience based on silent contemplation. Icons of religious figures represent an unseen world, connecting the viewer directly to God. The colors, form, and spiritual representation of the icons create a profound emotional connection (Gasque 1988, 570-574). (Fig. 1) In his article “The Contemplative Character of the Oeuvre,” Paul Tanghe explains “the structure of the contemplation process fully corresponds to the structure of the art experience as an in-depth experience of the sublime” (Tanghe 2010, 130). Certain types of art provide a connection to a spiritual realm. Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches display statues of saints, paintings and other works of art that serve as connectors to spiritual contemplation. *Our Lady of Akita*, a wooden statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is believed to shed tears⁸ and gained worldwide followers after it was broadcasted on

⁷ The natural world often represents a silent place because of its absence of non-natural sounds

⁸ The image is known due to the Marian apparitions reported in 1973 by Sister Agnes Katsuko Sasagawa in the remote area of Yuzawadai, an outskirt of Akita, Japan.

Japanese television. This event illustrates a sublime level of spiritual experience from a religious work of art and the practice of faith.

Some feel, however, that this intense experience is not limited to religious art.

Jean-François Lyotard (1982) observed abstract art can lead to an experience of the sublime. He believed art presents something

non demonstrable...which stems from ideas for which one cannot cite (represent) any example and therefore enables the viewer to see beyond the object and find an understanding of something greater than the object. This brings about a change in the perception of 'selfhood' and which leads to a change in the viewer's behavior (Lyotard 1984 79).

He provides an example: "It will be 'white' like one of Malevitch's squares; it will enable us to see only by making it impossible to see" (White 1997, 130). (Fig 2) Because it has no identifiable image, Lyotard saw abstract art as a "void" that leads the viewer to deeper spiritual contemplation in search of an understanding of the work and its personal meaning to the viewer. Instead of an icon, it is the absence of an image that provokes a spiritual connection. Not all viewers experience this; some walk away from the art completely stupefied, confused, or even angry. I feel the experience of the sublime in art may be influenced by the religious belief of the viewer that is then reflected in the viewer's feeling of the sublime in a work of art.

Mark Rothko's abstract paintings on the interior of the Rothko Chapel demonstrates this potential in abstract art. The Rothko Chapel is a Center for Human Rights and an interfaith sanctuary that draws people in to reflect, meditate and ponder in front of Rothko's paintings. Fourteen black but color-hued paintings cover the walls of the Chapel. James Elkins described one visitor: "his eyes got lost in the shifting fields,

find forms and shapes” (Elkins 1951, 8). Many viewers have been moved to tears and reconciliation while sitting in the chapel and silently focusing on the paintings. (Fig. 3) In his book *Pictures & Tears, A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings* (2001), Elkins has documented this emotional response to art from the late Middle Ages to the 20st century.

This overview of viewers’ spiritual connection with art reveals the depth of experience possible while silently reflecting on art. This emotional state cannot be achieved through labels or discussions during a museum program as there is a distracted atmosphere that can remove the concentration on the art work (Ehrenhaus 1998; Zembylas 2004). Viewers tend to pay more attention to the written information or listening to other individuals than observing the work that is being discussed. A silent experience allows a connection to something greater than oneself inspired by the complex power of art and human emotion.

CHAPTER TWO

SILENCE AND AESTHETICS

The appreciation and understanding of art is the foundation of aesthetics.

Aesthetics is derived from the Greek word *aistheses*, meaning perception. Gotshalk (1962) describes the experience as a heightened perception of an object resulting in a psychical distancing from the surrounding world's distractions, letting the object guide the viewer through an emotionally based process. It is a process of total immersion in perception, allowing the view to get "carried away" by the art. Gotshalk describes this process: "Through transformation by the object in the aesthetic unison, the self is able to obtain in his own being the fullest possible apprehension of the object—intrinsic perceptual value and being, which is the aim of the aesthetic experience" (1962, 15). It is this aesthetic state that fosters the viewer's interest to explore art further and more deeply. It is an experience of undivided attention. Quoting Gotshalk again: "we should be able to respond vividly to silence as well as sound, to darkness no less than light" (1962, 24). George Stark (2017) explains that the viewer observes the complexity of the experience of the object and molds the pieces together into a spiritual and transcendent experience.

For the aesthetic theorist Immanuel Kant (1790), the experience of art was an interplay of cognitive and spiritual engagement. Beauty and morality are connected in

an objective and disinterested manner. Art is enjoyed for its own sake without expectation of reward or anticipation of gain or use from the object.

The Value of Aesthetics: Standards and Judgement

In the 18th century, the rationalist movement defined aesthetics as an internal “sense of taste” based on reason that sets a standard for beauty (3rd Earl of Shaftesbury 1737; Hutcheson 1725; Reid 1785.) This set the stage for the negative perception of aesthetics as value-laden that still influences the public’s concept of the aesthetic experience. The Earl of Shaftesbury wrote: “TASTE or *Judgment* ... can hardly come ready form’d with us into the World... Use, Practice and Culture must precede the *Understanding* and *Wit* of such an advanc’d Size and Growth as this. A legitimate and just TASTE can neither be begotten, made, conceiv’d, or produc’d, without the antecedent *Labour* and *Pains* of CRITICISM (C 3.164)” (Shaftesbury 2001). He tied aesthetics to moral sense and values based on goodness and spirituality. This view certainly set a high standard for the appreciation of art, and also helped form a conception that the aesthetic experience is elitist. This ideal and moral equation of aesthetics contributed to the formation of a negative view of the aesthetic experience, and led museums to create a more populist perception of art by removing it from a silent domain to one filled with discussion and activity.

Historically, museums have stated they have the knowledge and expertise to provide an aesthetic experience. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* provides a more expansive meaning for aesthetics that is particularly relevant to museums:

“designate, among other things, a kind of object, a kind of judgment, a kind of attitude, a kind of experience, and a kind of value” (2013). This tension between knowledge and aesthetic appreciation perhaps derives from the basic debate about the value of art among aestheticians. What is the value of art? One group of philosophers believe the value lies in the intrinsic qualities of the art work itself which is interpreted by the viewer from personal experience (Dewey 1958; Danto 1964; Gottshalk 1962). The other camp focuses on the highest understanding of the art work from the concrete analysis of its form, color, line, balance, etc. (Beardsley 1963, 1968). This would mean that only those with formal training could appreciate a work of art.

Roman Ingarden discusses the distinctions made by these two perspectives (Dziemidok 1983). He separates the two viewpoints by categorizing them as aesthetic experience and aesthetic evaluation. The first requires direct contact with a work resulting in an emotional connection with it; and the latter, an analysis the work based on artistic technique. The second requires knowledge, but it does not necessarily include aesthetic experience. He notes that art professionals often lose the immediate emotional impact of a work of art because they are so focused on defining it by its features. Variations on this analysis continue the debate of whether aesthetic enjoyment is necessary for the aesthetic evaluation (Fisher 1968; Graff 1970).

What might be a creative balance between the two types of aesthetic art experiences instead finds them in competition. Hence, the current preference by museum professionals to teach visitors the skills needed to correctly analyze and interpret art and discuss its significance with others. The problem, I believe, stems from

the use of knowledge to place a value and judgement on art, rather than allowing knowledge of the art to enhance one's appreciation of it. The aesthetic appreciation of art is possible with or without knowledge of art. A value assessment, however, makes art a commodity. Viewing art then ceases to be an aesthetic experience when art is turned into a product rather than experience.

Bohdan Dziemidok's essay on "Aesthetic Experience and Evaluation" (1983), clearly makes a distinction between aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgment. The former is based purely on perception, while the latter places a value judgement on art. Dziemidok discusses Roman Ingarden's view that in aesthetic experience we can have direct and intuitive contact with aesthetic values, which are qualitative in nature. Artistic values, on the other hand, are not qualitative phenomena but, according to Ingarden, specific aspects of a "work of art that cannot be discovered in direct aesthetic experience; nor is it possible to have intuitive contact with them" (Dziemidok 1983, 56). There is a value to the development of perception during an individual's solitary, silent experience, but its essence is qualitative—not quantitative. In a society focused on measuring things to define value, the seemingly "unmeasurable" qualitative experience is not acceptable.⁹ It does not attract funding, or, it seems, modern audiences. Nor can it justify the expense of a museum education program. Program evaluation is measured by the number of participants and the quality of their responses. The single visitor gazing silently at a work of art and finding new insights into the meaning of art and life

⁹ There are many studies proposing to measure levels of art appreciation, but they are inconclusive.

cannot be measured. Perhaps a single individual's experience is not significant unless the person is a generous donor!

The description of the aesthetic experience is expanded by Joseph Addison's inclusion of imagination. He defined it as primary pleasures obtained by sight, and secondary pleasures of images remembered in the mind. The art itself provides "pleasing astonishment" and "delightful stillness and amazement" (Dziemidok 1983, 412). It is a pleasure derived from looking at or remembering the object itself without judgement or value. Edmund Burke (1757) expanded this notion further to include all the senses—not just vision—to engage all forms of artistic work.

In his book addressing arts in education, Elliot Eisner looks at this as the tension between efficiency and sensual experience. Efficiency supports recognition of form and fact; while sensual experience requires time and imagination. He observes "The arts liberate us from the literal" (Eisner 2002, 10) and allow the freedom of ambiguity leading to new discoveries. It is not the "facts" but the "soul" of art that feeds inspiration. This is harder to quantify and thus may not fulfill the evaluation expectations required of both museums and schools. This ambiguity of art is at the heart of this discussion. David Perkins describes art as "invisible" (Perkins 1994, 17); and Eliot Deutsch writes: "in the aesthetic experience, the inherent significance of the artwork presents itself to us as something to be recognized rather than as something to be known conceptually" (Deutsch 1996, 31). This is a concept reflected in art discussions by writers in neuro-science, aesthetics, education, and art (Dewey 1934; Perkins 1994; Steen 2006; Turner 2006; Zeki 2006).

Cognitive and Emotional Aspects of Aesthetics

Another way of examining these two definitions of aesthetics and offering a balance between them is provided in current psychology theory. It pairs cognitive and emotional processes to create an aesthetic experience in art (Chatterjee 2012; Chatterjee & Vartanian 2014). Aesthetic appreciation begins in childhood with emotional responses to art. As a person matures, the scope of art eliciting an emotional response expands to include abstract and ambiguous art. A number of studies in neuro-aesthetics and education have defined distinct stages of aesthetic development (Chatterjee 2003; Chatterjee & Vartaniona 2014; Housen 2007). These include spontaneous encounter, memory related processing to connect previous knowledge, classification of the art in time, place and construct, interpretation, and evaluation. This assessment combines aesthetic experience and aesthetic evaluation.

Many others, however, separate the two, with the aesthetic experience defining the encounter with art (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson 1990; Walsh-Piper 1994). In a paper for the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, the authors wrote: “viewers need to understand that ‘viewing art is its own reward’ and becomes an opportunity to ‘challenge their sense, their emotions and their knowledge” (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson 1990). Another study at the Calouste Gulbenkian Modern Art Center in Lisbon created an aesthetigram to map the experience of the participants in their study (Fróis and White 2013). The authors found that while the aesthetic experience can mix cognitive and affective areas, the most prevalent response across all visitors was that of reflection and perception influenced by memories and feelings. The emphasis was

varied by the types of art visited and the participants' depth of experience. The modernist paintings prompted more affective responses; and viewers with less knowledge of art focused emotionally on their personal meaning making with the art.

The study and debate on the meaning of aesthetics continues in both philosophy and psychology. The latter is still in early stages of studying this phenomena. Is aesthetics a rational, sensory or spiritual experience? Does it involve critical judgment and evaluation? George Stark embraces the complexity of these questions with his description of the role of silence and art in his article "Silent Images." He writes: "To some persons silence... might be a time for reflection; to synthesize the fragments of existence into a fused and distinct form, or to delve into abstract thought in penetrative quality...Thus, silence can simultaneously be a limiting or restrictive force, as well as offering vast spatial dimensions for exploration" (Stark 1963, 16). Both experiences are valuable but completely different in the roles they play in art appreciation.

Conclusion

This study focuses on aesthetic experience as the act of paying rapt attention to an object without critical analysis or evaluation. Silent contemplation is a time of pure observation that develops intense sensory perception of the work being observed. This results in an emotional experience that for some may include a spiritual dimension similar to that experienced during meditation. At this first stage of observation, the museum visitor does not form a judgment of the work, but observes details that connect it emotionally and cognitively to the visitor's personal experiences. The initial

aesthetic experience, then, supports singular and silent observation of art without intervention of explanation to allow the visitor to emotionally connect with a work of art. Further study of the art transforms the experience to an aesthetic appreciation based on knowledge and analysis of artistic technique. It is the silent, sensory, emotional appreciation of art that I propose needs to be provided in a museum to allow those visitors who choose to observe art without distraction.

CHAPTER THREE

SILENCE, ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING IN THE ART MUSEUM

Those who know do not speak

Those who speak do not know

Tao Te Ching

It is not easy to meet the needs of the extremely diverse crowds visiting museums. There is not a “one size fits all” format for designing exhibits and imparting information. Some visitors come with sophisticated knowledge of art. Some families come for entertainment and activities to occupy their children. Others seek a respite from their busy lives to enjoy art. Visitors may go to a museum monthly while others are visiting a museum for the first time, or have limited experience in a museum. People come from many different ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds. For those who are unfamiliar with museums, the experience may be uncomfortable, unrelatable, confusing, or even frightening. Data on audience attendance from research funded by the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund analyzed two significant types of museum visitors:

some 31 percent visit only once a year and another 35 percent visit less often than that. Thus, two-thirds of visitors are “infrequent,” and we can assume that at least some of those may be making their first visit to any art museum (Fleishman-Hillard, Inc. 1999). By one estimate, about 90 percent of visitors wander through the galleries of art museums without participating in any of the available educational programs (Eisner and Dobbs 1990, 217-235).

Clearly, a museum education program designed for the daily visitor cannot involve an experience requiring extensive preparation, training, or time commitment.

An article on “Silent Pedagogy: How Museums Help Visitors Experience Exhibitions” (Eisner and Dobbs 1990), described a fictitious but realistic account of a family’s visit to a museum. The parents had not been to a museum in many years and were taking their child for his first visit. As they entered the museum, they were met with four signs announcing current exhibitions. They were not familiar with any of them, and chose the featured exhibit on Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture. When they entered the exhibit they did not know which way to turn. A panel described the “genre” and “oeuvre” of the art on display. These words were not familiar to them. They looked at a Louise Nevelson sculpture and discussed how much work it took to make it. The next piece was a canvas by Helen Frankenthaler. It had splotches of color, and they did not know what to think about it. After forty minutes of a baffling art experience, the family left and went for a walk in the park.

The authors of the article note how confusing a museum can be to a new visitor. They then explain what they think will help visitors better experience a museum exhibition. Their response is derived from thirty one case studies of museums examining what museums do to help visitors. During this study, they noted a view of museum education by Sherman Lee widely held at that time: *“Merely by existing--preserving and exhibiting works of art—it [the museum] is educational in the broadest and best sense, though it never utters a sound or prints a word (Eisner and Dobbs 1990,*

218). As they compiled their case study experiences, the authors offered “Silent Pedagogy” as a solution for museum visitors’ confusion. Their concept of silent pedagogy is as follows:

use of non-spoken information that provides museum visitors with cues for perceiving, thinking about, and appreciating works of art. These cues include the way works are displayed, the themes that relate one work to others, the content of signage (wall panels and labels) that is provided, comprehensibility of the text, and the overall effectiveness of the installation. All of these and other elements can be used intentionally by those who conceptualize, design, and install exhibitions to help... [visitors...] gain some insight and satisfaction from the often subtle and complex works that adorn the museum’s walls... (Eisner and Dobbs 1990, 218)

Their conclusion reflects the types of exhibit design and installation that was prevalent from 1970-1990. It is silent information; however, not a silent environment. What Eisner and Dobbs presented was a traditional and still used basic informational format for visitors. This information is developed, shaped and presented by museum curators and exhibit designers who decide what is most relevant for the museum visitor to understand about each exhibition. This is a necessary and vital part of the museum’s teaching mission. It reflects the historic belief of museum professionals that shapes their program development: visitors must have training and educated guidance to appreciate and understand art (Burt 1977; Weil 1990).

Today, this is only one small part of the museum’s educational role. Interactive exhibits, computer stations, and activities have greatly expanded visitors’ options. Neither, however, allows for an unmitigated and purely emotional response to art.

Understanding Art

A variety of assumptions underlie the development of the art exhibitions and what is most effective not only to attract the attention of the visitor, but to develop the visitor's understanding of the art. This affects the type of information displayed and the ways in which the visitors are engaged. There are those wedded to the idea that learning the "facts" about an art work (e.g. the artist's concept, style, intention, historic placement, social influences) is essential for understanding art (Rice 1989); others argue there is no *one* interpretation for any work of art (Falk and Dierking 1992, 2013; Gadamer 1975). The current theory supports interactive learning and the use of modern technologies (Falk and Dierking 1995, 2000, Sternberg 1989) to allow the formation of a group's ideas on the art. The second of these options allows for individual open interpretation; the others require varying types of engagement with outside sources of information.

Group Meaning-Making

Current museum education theory espouses group meaning-making as the way to learn about and interpret art. In her article "Museum as Process," Carol Jeffers notes collective meaning-making removes the "aesthetic attitude" she claims has distanced museum visitors from art and placed it in an "exalted cloister" (Jeffers 2003). While she admits that the museum as a "sacred grove" supports reflection, she feels individuals do not "legitimize" knowledge, and that their aesthetic experience is elitist.

In support of her case, Jeffers observed 9 – 12 year old visitors to the Getty who spend their time alone on computers rather than in the museum galleries (Jeffers 2003, 113). “To these youngsters, there are no questions about reality and appearance; the virtual and the original are regarded as spectacles” (Jeffers 2003, 35). Not only for the younger generation, but those active on the web do not always recognize a difference between the reproduced art and the original art. To counter this, Jeffers states understanding art requires communal acts of creation through both discourse and listening to a spectrum of different voices from the community. She believes it is only through the lens of a community’s different perspectives that the true meaning of the art is revealed. Art must be discovered by making meaningful connections between the museum and the diverse communities it serves.

Communal activity prompts spontaneous and creative discussion in groups (Choi 2013; Falk & Dierking 2013; Jeffers 2003; Pringle 2009; Rose 2006; Villeneuve 2007; Vom Lehn 2001). Emily Pringle defines art practice as

a process of conceptual and experiential enquiry which embraces inspiration, looking, questioning, making, reflective thinking and the building of meanings. The pedagogic process instigated in the gallery or art museum resembles art practice in that artists seek to ‘teach’ skills including questioning and critical reflection and promote experiential learning (2013, 174).

She concludes that the results of museum led meaning making allow “Access...not only the opportunity to move freely through galleries, but also is intellectual, thereby unlocking the professional practices that influence visitor experience and meaning making” (2013, 47). In her article, “Shared Journeys, Curriculum Theory and Museum Education”(2006), Julia Rose states the museum educator’s role now is to analyze how

people develop meaning making through dialogue rather than teaching or guiding the visitor through a formal learning experience. This is a stimulating approach to getting visitors to learn from each other, the artist, and the museum professional to develop a context for and meaning of the art. However, there are issues that reveal a more diverse approach might be needed.

A number of studies highlight the significant influence of watching others at an exhibition. This affects how other visitors observe and think about art (Falk and Dierking 2013; Jeffers 2003; Ritchhart 2007; Vom Lehn and Hindmarsh, 2001). If the person engages with others, art interpretation becomes communal, and does not require a higher level of study to appreciate art. At the same time, the other visitors may distract the viewer from forming ideas without their influence, and does not allow for the individual who prefers to have a silent, personal engagement with art.

Technology and Interactive Learning

Technology has also played a role in interactive learning by using information technologies, computer games, and cell phone cameras in museum exhibits to engage the visitor. These are popular, especially with younger visitors who are highly engaged with social media to obtain information. This type of engagement, however, may not meet the definition of interactive education espoused by museum educators. In their article, "Misconstruing Interactivity" (Heath and vom Lehn, 2002), the authors note that the interactive learning is mostly between one user and a computer, with others watching or waiting in line for their turn to use the computer. In addition, after their

involvement with these computer activities, many visitors leave the exhibit without looking at the real objects on display. The authors describe the problem of this type of interactivity: “‘interactives’ are rarely designed to support or enhance social interaction; rather, in most cases they are principally concerned to provide individual users with the ability to operate or manipulate a system or object” (11). To fully implement interactive learning, exhibitions must be designed or staffed in a way that encourages involvement of visitors directly with each other.

There are examples of successful interactive experiences. Many of these are designed specifically for visiting student groups where there are teachers to assist in the activity organization. The District of Columbia’s Newseum involves visitors in discerning fact from fiction to report an incident that happened at a circus. A narrator introduces the topic and the visitors have five minutes to question circus members before writing an article on the event to meet the newspaper deadline. San Francisco’s Exploratorium provides an experience students will not forget. The museum staff dissects a real cow eyeball to explain how muscles move the eye, how the cornea is protected, and how the iris controls light entry. This intense experience is only for student groups, and would be difficult to provide for the general public (Krantz and Merritt 2011).

Silence and Learning

Something crucial, however, is missing as interactive learning becomes the main educational experience in a museum. The absent piece is the learning that happens in silence without the visitor being guided *what* to think. It is the freedom to

experience one's own response to an artwork, and to spend more intimate, personal time closely examining a work of art alone. This "open" thinking in silence has its basis in extroverted reflective pedagogy where the art of how to observe and find one's own perspective without outside interference allows a different type of learning and understanding. In his article "In Defense of Quiet Thought," Richard Fox notes that while conversation is valuable for socialized thought, the influence of others keeps the focus shifting from person to person and away from the individual's thoughts and interests (1995). This reflects the similar findings of Falk and Dierking (2013) on the distraction provided by other museum visitors when looking at art.

Contemplative Reflection and Learning

While museums are focusing their attention on interactive strategies for learning, some education systems are exploring the opposite trend: the engagement in contemplative learning to ground students in the present and experience studies—including art—more deeply and personally. This method turns away from the constant voices of discussion to the silent inner voice of personal investigation. It supports an unmediated experience of learning based on inner connections and personal "knowing" (Caranfa 2006, Grace 2011), intensive observation, and "beholding" (Zajonc 2013). This type of understanding goes beyond abstract knowledge to include a wider aesthetic and moral dimension, and connection with personal emotions. It is a holistic approach to learning that involves the whole person and a comprehensive understanding of oneself and one's role in and connection with the area of study.

The concept of learning in silence is supported by the growing use of contemplative pedagogy in American education (Barbezat 2012; Brady 2007; The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society). Based on the integration of mindfulness—meditation focusing on posture, breath and working with distractions¹⁰--into learning strategies, this practice helps focus attention, develop deeper understanding of the subjects being studied, foster curiosity, and incorporates emotion and personal meaning into the analysis and understanding of the topic being studied. It is also used to aid concentration by recognizing wandering attention (Zajonc, 85). It is believed mindfulness also aides “emotional balance, insight, and compassion” (Zajonc, 89).

Contemplation includes many kinds of practices to support the development of personal connection and insight, including silence, chanting, contemplative music, the creation of art, and prayer. ¹¹ Often connected with spiritual development, these practices are now being integrated into secular systems of learning. Educators may use periods of silence, contemplative exercises, writing, and bell ringing to help students center their thoughts and “behold” more intimately the meaning of the lesson. The use of silence in focusing attention, however, offers support for its role in looking at art.

Neuroscience researchers are conducting many studies evaluating the reasons and extent to which this practice of mindfulness works. These are focused on FA (focused attention, including TM or transcendental meditation) and OM (mindfulness-based meditation) (Raffone and Srinivasan 2009). Many studies have shown changes in

¹⁰ naropa.edu/documents/faculty/r_brown-development-of-contemplative-pedagogy.pdf

¹¹ The Tree of Contemplative Practices, The Center for Contemplative Practices, www.contemplativemind.org

the ability to maintain sustained attention and increased self-observational awareness during meditation. Research is still in its early stages, however, and there are some who feel the studies are too varied in design and measurement to produce conclusive results. The time spent practicing meditation seems to play a significant role in the effectiveness of the practice. Short term engagement (1 week) showed little change in awareness or attention span, with increased changes after long term practice (Tang, et al. 2015). For this reason, mindfulness meditation will not be incorporated in this study as the time for observing art is a short term, one time experience without training.

Mindful Learning

A different adaptation of this practice, *Mindful Learning* (Langer 1997), however, takes the concept of focus and uses it to provide a practical theory for increasing attention in a way that can be applied to short term experiences. In a number of studies, Langer has shown that asking people to explore an object in a mindful way greatly increases not only their ability to observe more detail and remember the experience more clearly and completely, but also to increase their “liking” of the art. Mindful learning involves finding novel and creative ways to observe something. Novelty helps people to keep their concentration focused. Langer’s research illustrates that constant, fixed attention without variety diminishes a person’s ability to concentrate.

In an experiment conducted with Andrea Marcus, Langer asked participants to look at two pieces of art. One group was instructed to notice what was different about the art. The other was asked to compare the two pieces. Both groups were then shown

the pictures with signatures underneath showing which painting was more popular to a third group of viewers. Their study found that the first group, who observed what was different about the art, was more apt to make decisions independent of the conforming (third) group who voted for their favorite painting than the second group. Comparing two stationary paintings did not provide as much stimulation and creative analysis. Another study found that encouraging participants to find unique distinctions in Civil War photographs observed more details related to that period of time, such as expressions and clothing.

This research presents a number of interesting observations. First, Langer developed her theory from watching students use computers. Unlike other studies that claim computer use is destroying a person's ability to concentrate, Langer realized the students were actually spending a long period of time focused intently on their computer games. Based on this, she decided to test her theory that constantly changing information was more stimulating and increased students' focus. Adapting this principle to learning about "stationary" material, such as paintings, she found that guiding people to look in different and new ways at an object or art work increased their attention and ability to observe and remember details. Also, those who were given information before engaging in a task tended to rely on the initial information and did not develop unique responses. Having information ahead of looking at art fixes the viewer's perception, and limits their ability to see more differences. The participants also did not remember their responses for as long as those who had individualized perspectives. Mindful learning encourages people to look more closely, look for differences in the

work of art, make personal connections with the subject, enjoy the object more, and remember the work for a longer period of time. This requires individual silent observation without reading other information or hearing others' ideas.

Skill Development in Reflective and Mindful Learning

Peter Grossenbacher identifies six skills used in reflective or meditative observation: "noticing, slowing, reflecting, distinguishing, recalling, and describing" (2014, 24). As in the practice of the tea ceremony, the participant clears the mind of all extraneous thoughts and focuses solely on the point of observation. It is a time of non-judgmental thought when the observer uses only senses to describe what is seen.

Unlike the spiritual practice of meditation that aims for an emptiness of mind, this type of observational fills the mind with thoughts about one specific object. Grossenbacher's skills emphasize the importance and ongoing refinement of the observation process.

Noticing leads to *distinguishing* and *describing* in more detail.

The need for *slowing* is a critical component to enable this sequence to take place. Silence helps slow the pace by taking away the noise that propels people to keep moving. Visitors who are walking with ipods and listening to audio-phones guiding them from object to object in a museum do not have an opportunity to practice observation skills as intently. The challenge of listening to information on art in a specific order removes the freedom of wandering and wondering in an undirected sequence without a prompt to get to the next object. The constant cue to move to the next object removes the visitors' ability to carefully and slowly observe and reflect upon a work of art.

What we have lost in our drive to be guided in timed observations and ongoing discussion is captured by the Sufi poet Rumi. He describes two kinds of learning in his poem, *Two Kinds of Intelligence*. The first is the collecting and memorizing of facts in formal learning situations; the second is an inner knowledge cultivated from deep personal thought:

This is another kind of tablet, one already completed and preserved inside you. A spring overflowing its springbox... a freshness in the center of the chest. The other intelligence does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid, and it doesn't move from outside to inside through the conduits of plumbing-learning. This second knowing is a fountainhead from within you, moving out (Rumi 2003, 127).

A person who is enveloped in sound or engaging in conversation cannot hear this inner voice of intelligence, but only gains information from the outside sources. Hearing the inner voice requires silent attention to one's own thoughts.

Flow

Yet another perspective on this type of observation is what the renowned Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls "Flow" (1990). This state of mind requires the intense focus of the practitioner. It does not involve the loss of self advocated by spiritual meditation, but rather the "loss of consciousness of the self" (1990, 64). A person becomes so deeply involved and interested in a topic that all distractions fade away and the sense of time disappears. It is a state of attentive thought, fixed on a topic, and described by those who experience it as a time of heightened enjoyment resulting in a sense of accomplishment. Flow is a mind controlled

state; the person decides to focus on something, and gains satisfaction from the total engagement. This can be applied to competitive activities (e.g. sports, competitive games, social situations, etc.) as well as to silent thought.

Looking at art particularly lends itself to the development of a flow state. During focused attention a person sees with more clarity. Csikszentmihalyi quotes a person who describes an experience of flow while viewing one piece of art:

There is that wonderful Cézanne “Bathers” in the Philadelphia Museum...which...gives you in one glance that great sense of a scheme, not necessarily rational, but that things come together...[That] is the way in which the work of art allows you to have a sudden appreciation of, and understanding of the world. That may mean your place in it, that may mean what bathers on the side of a river on a summer day are all about...that may mean the ability to suddenly let go of ourselves and understand our connection to the world... (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 107).

New revelations appear during a state of flow, arising from the total concentration of the viewer. This is another aspect of mindful learning that arises from a person's intense interest in a subject, activity or object.

Personal Meaning-Making

The National Art Education Association published a collection of articles examining many theories of art education currently in use in art museums. In his article, “Transacting Theories for Art Museum Education,” David Ebitz notes “Silverman identified ways that visitors create their own meanings out of experiences in museums,

influenced by their sense of self, their sense of community, and the personal agenda they bring to a museum visit" (2007, 25); and later quotes Hein: "the conclusions reached by the learner are *not* validated by whether or not they conform to some external standard of truth, but whether they make sense within the constructed reality of the learner" (2007, 34). Personal experiences may be shared during group conversations but silent time is needed to form these observations. Every visitor's perception is a unique experience that frames the way the visitor will further engage with art during the rest of the visit. A silent time thinking before hearing information about art allows a person time to develop a personal interpretation that may then be shared with others.

Caranfa links the work of Gadamer with John Dewey about the contemplation of art: "...an encounter with a work of art is, in the words of Hans-Georg Gadamer, total, complete and authentic; it involved 'the task of integrating it into the whole of one's orientation to a world and one's own self-understanding'" (Caranfa 2006, 90). This self-understanding with which art is concerned has not only temporal orientation as described by John Dewey, but also a timeless truth. A participant in a study on meaning making at the Calouste Gulbenkian Modern Art Centre in Lisbon reflected on her thoughts after viewing one work of art: "I related this moment to those moments when we contemplate the clouds in the sky and 'see' different images" (Fróis and White 2013). She realized how her interpretation of the artwork was shaped by her previous life experiences and studies of art.

Relational Aesthetics and Meaning Making

A different way of approaching a personal interpretation of art is the “relational aesthetics” for interactive art proposed by Bourriaud (2002). Unlike Gadamer, Bourriaud’s focus is on interactivity with other participants as well as with the artwork. Sunghye Choi discusses this concept and its impact on museum visitor engagement in his article “Relational Aesthetics in Art Museum Education” (2013). Bourriaud maintains the viewers should be the center of interpretation; and it is a social act requiring interactions with both other viewers and the art itself. To accomplish this, he requires artists to create artworks based on “encounters with others” and “intersubjectivity—what constitutes or mediates the relationship between humans and artworks” (55). The art is designed to encourage visitor participation by taking away pieces of the exhibition or interacting with it in some way.

Choi used the assumptions underlying Bourriaud’s theory—“cognitive, emotional, physical, social and cultural engagement with artworks as well as the result of what the artworks aroused in me as a visitor--”(55) to explore an exhibit that was not interactive. He wanted to test the narratives he constructed in relation to the disruptive narrative the artist Himid created in her work about slavery and the British Victorian Age as applicable to Bourriaud’s relational aesthetic.¹² He applied three steps to analyze Himid’s work:

1. Confirm the master narrative of the British Gallery

¹² Lubaina Himid, *Naming the Money*, 2007, Victoria and Albert Museum.

2. Deconstruct the master narrative through Himid's narrative intervention by noticing and participating in her works
3. Rethink his own life and perceptions as he looked at the objects (55)

Choi decided the complexity of the layers of his experience equaled what Bourriaud required for his theory of relational aesthetic, and deduced that this theory required participation "in relational art, not the presence of relational art" (56). In other words, Choi found he did not need interaction with the exhibit to find meaning in the exhibit.

What does this have to do with silence? Choi's conclusion was that active participation with art does not have to *physically* engage the visitor. It occurs, however, "when visitors project their identity cognitively, emotionally, and/or physically toward art objects" (56). Choi then cited Garoian,¹³ who maintains that visitor engagement requires autobiography, not third person narrative; and Black,¹⁴ who argues that physical involvement does not play a significant role in engaging visitors, but that thinking and discovery are the key factors. These three perspectives challenge Bourriaud's thesis and support the case for the importance of silent, individual viewing of art. How can the visitor autobiographically connect with art if the visitor is distracted by the activities and discussion of others? How can a visitor emotionally connect with art if the visitor is intimidated by other's opinions? Quiet contemplation supports immediate personal discovery, as well as ignites curiosity which may lead to further cognitive investigation about the art.

¹³ Garoian, C.R., "Performing the museum," in *Studies in Art Education*, Vol 42, No. 3, 2001, pp. 234-248.

¹⁴ Black, G., The engaging museum, Developing museums for visitor involvement, Routledge, New York, 2005.

Choi concludes that museum visitors need an immediate space to immerse themselves in art. He then cites the works of Falk and Dierking (2000), and Doering and Pekarik (1999) who endorse the need for “the personal context” and “entry narrative” for visitors to totally connect themselves with art. Finding their own way to delve into their personal history and experiences and weaving this into the art work’s story requires focused, personal time. Their personal interpretations serve to remove the barrier of commodification of art, and allow visitors to create their own meaning making before they are influenced by other sources.

To illustrate how important one’s personal identity with art can be, Choi recounts a study by Nashahibi¹⁵ of five museums that allowed visitors to write labels for the objects they observed in the museum exhibits. This exercise invited them to deeply examine and think about each art work and then write their own ideas into a description of the work they observed. Nashahibi found that visitor participation doubled as they engaged in analyzing the art and what it meant to them. During this silent, personal experience, each visitor created a personal narrative about the art, resurrecting personal emotional and cognitive information found during silent reflection. In a silent, reflective environment, there is time to connect one’s random inner thoughts, and resurrect memories and feelings that may arise from looking at art.

¹⁵ Nashahibi, S. M., 2000, “Visitor voices in art museums,” in *The Journal of Museum Education*, Vol 28, no. 3, 21-25.

Time for Silence

There is another requirement for this silent reflection to produce new ideas: lengthening the time spent observing art. Studies of museum visitors show they spend less than 30 seconds looking at one artwork (Hein 1998; Smith 2001; Worts 2003). Looking closely at art takes at least 15 minutes of silent observation (Housen and Yenawine 2007; Wheeling 2016). During a longer period of time, people notice more and more details. If a person only spends 30 seconds or even 2 or 3 minutes looking at a picture, most of the details will not be noticed. Merlin Donald (2006) describes the process of looking at art as moving from glimpses to more fixed stares.

David Perkins addresses this in his book *The Intelligent Eye* (1994). His term, “the hungry eye” (8) expressively captures the process of looking closely at art. The longer the eye lingers on one piece of art, the more the art reveals. Time is needed to collect and identify information about the art. In this process, Perkins connects experiential intelligence with reflective intelligence. The information a person draws from experiential intelligence feeds reflective intelligence (mindful learning). Reflective intelligence makes sense of the information provided by experiential intelligence. It also plays a role in slowing down the thinking process from the hasty observation prompted by experiential learning.¹⁶ He notes this helps the viewer to engage more thoughtfully. Perkins offers four dispositions that he describes as “a distinctive approach to cultivating both thinking about art and the art of thinking” (54). While he presents these without

¹⁶ Perkins describes this as the 10% solution for mental self-management (Perkins 1994, 54).

reference to other research, I found a similar list attributed to Lachapelle (2009). I will present Lachapelle's concepts further on in this chapter, where they are connected with a research study of visitors observing art.

Perkins connects the relevance of "the art of thinking about art" to "everyday" thinking, noting the need to take more time to consider options prior to making decisions. He emphasizes, however, that art offers a unique and special opportunity for silent reflection because art's physical presence helps foster and maintain the visitor's interest. As attention wanes during a period of observation, a viewer may pause, and then return to the visible source of concentration.

Khatchadourian (2015) notes that the visual-spatial arts are particularly suited to silent observation because they are silent in themselves. Silence becomes a *presence* in visual art and helps illuminate the *presence* of the art itself. This quality is noted by many artists, especially those who focus on nature and landscapes, such as Ansel Adams (*Yosemite and the Range of Light* 1979), Otto Modersohn (*Meadow Landscape in Summer with an Evening Cloud* 1917), Claude Monet (*The Haystacks, End of Summer* 1891), and Camille Pissarro (*The Haystack* 1872). I will discuss the role of silence in the creation and interpretation of art in greater detail in the chapter on artists and silence. This type of observation of art is not limited to art that only reflects silence. A period of time in silent observation is just as critical for observing art reflecting movement and activity. A wonderful example that illustrates the revelation of details as a visitor spends silent time viewing Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (1889) is recorded by Perkins in the following log:

1 st min	Energy everywhere. The tree spiraling up into the sky. The swirling sky, like currents in a seas. The moon upper right, concentric lines around it, moonglow. A strange impossible moon, its crescent almost closed. The landscape swirls like the sky. A church, a steeple. The steeple reaches up like the tree.
2 nd min	Houses, a village, Fields, a farming community, people. Energy lines everywhere. Is it the wind, a windy night? Is the flow in the sky the milky way? What spirit invests the picture? The energy flows everywhere, like a pulse, a bloodstream.
3 rd min	Circles in the sky echo one another, the moon's circle, the circles of the stars. No circles found below. What kind of a tree is that?—don't know. The land like a sea, in motion. The temperature? Warm, a summer's night, the stars blurred soft and brilliant. Van Gogh in ecstatic mood.
4 th min	The church again. Religious significance? Where do people fit in? The nestled village, engulfed in all this. All part of the flow. Smoke from the houses, swirling like the rest, joining the village to the sky.
5 th min	Horizontal motion, vertical motion, horizontal in the sky and horizon, vertical in the tree, the church, the smoke. The impossible moon. The fantastic landscape. The tree is like a flame. Is it windy? Still? Is the swirl the wind or some natural energy?
6 th min	Wind and flow of light and deep energy in nature all merged. Logic: It's not windy. The smoke from the houses goes straight up. Nature itself on the move.
Pause	Seeing nothing new. Nothing new. Look away.
7 th min	Look back. Sudden technical interest. The S motif, a graphic gesture, clear in the sky. And elsewhere. Follow a flow, all the way across the sky around the moon. The moon brings your eye back. You can't spin off into space, the moon stops you. The tree pulls your eye back.
8 th min	Look away again. Look back. Some of the circles have

dots in the center, stars. Didn't see before. Smoke echoes steeple echoes tree, the vertical motif. The land dissolves into the sky through these conduits, becoming sky.

9th min On the right, the landscape flows left like rapids. Right to left motion on the ground, left to right in The sky. Brings the eye back around. Leftward flow On the ground stopped by tree, lifted up into the Sky, brings the eye back around. The eye caught in the flow of the picture, like an eddy in a stream (Perkins 1994, 37-40).

It is interesting to study the progression of thought as the visitor spends longer time looking intently at the painting. The early comments are the most obvious, with some unanswered questions. There are circles everywhere. Is it windy? Everything is in motion. As time passes, the context of the painting begins to emerge...a village, where are the people? What does the church mean? A new observation: it isn't windy, the smoke is going straight up. (Tiring, a pause) Then a more complex observation, the S motif makes the eye move across the painting to the moon and returning back. Now there are more details the viewer did not see earlier, and conflicting movement. This log reveals the development of observations skills during a silent and much longer time than the usual museum visitor would spend. This gives credence to the benefits of more extended time to make sense of the details and develop a personal relationship with a work of art.

In a study based on Lachapelle's "Look First, Respond After" approach to looking at art (Lachapelle, Douesnard and Keenlyside 2009), researchers worked with 34 volunteers in two separate art viewing activities at a museum. In the first segment, the viewing length was chosen by the volunteers who could choose to look at one or more

pieces of art over a two hour span of time. Their viewing time averaged 140 seconds per piece of art. For the second segment, the viewing length was set by the researchers. The volunteers were asked to choose one piece of art and study it for at least 5 minutes.

The researchers looked for changes in four types of cognitive dispositions after the participants had spent time looking at art:

- a. Taking more time to look at and think about the work of art;
- b. Looking at and thinking about the work of art using a broad and adventurous approach;
- c. Looking at and thinking about the work of art in a clear and deep manner; and
- d. Taking an organized approach to looking and thinking about the work of art

They found significant growth in each category during the second segment, where participants spent more time looking at one piece of art. Most surprising to the researchers was the increase in broad, adventurous, and organized thinking during the longer viewing time (LaChapelle, et. al. 2009).

Jennifer Roberts, Elizabeth Cary Agassiz Professor of Humanities at Harvard University, wrote about the importance of students' extended observation time for the study of art in her article "The Power of Patience" (2013). She found it was important to design her curriculum to "decelerate" students and help them learn the patience needed to really *see* art, rather than just *looking* at it. By giving them an assignment to observe one piece of art for three hours, she encouraged them to let the subtle details

of the painting emerge. Her point was that it takes time to see; it is not immediate. Her assignment is like a brief immersion into Zen reflection; it is a slowing down of the tempo of life to experience one object more deeply for a long period of time in silence.

This is a difficult exercise for most people today because of their constant connection with technology (Bower 2014; Lindley 2016; Deresiewicz 2009; Tapscott 2009; Watson 2010). The constant movement of the eye becomes an overriding and rewarded habit. When this stimulus is removed, people say they are bored. However, this may not be a bad state of mind. Research illustrates that there are both positive and negative aspects to boredom (Barbalet 1999; Bench and Lench 2013; Harris 2000; Van Tilburg 2012). The positive aspects of boredom relate to how the visitor handles the extended period of observation. During the first minute of observation, the visitor may notice the most obvious details. After this point, most people are ready to move on. The viewer experiences restless boredom from the lack of stimulation. This prompts the mind to seek mental engagement. In their article "On the Function of Boredom" (Bench and Lench 2013), the authors note that "boredom organizes responses to a no longer stimulating environment," and that this search "facilitates pursuit of activities that increase the perception of meaning" (459-472). Boredom may lead to creativity as it prompts the brain to come up with a way to dispel the boredom (Barbalet 1999; Messud 2015). Roberts' students experienced this phenomenon during their 3 hours observation assignment. This supports Langer's research cited earlier about the need to find different perspectives to keep attention from waning. Boredom prompts the brain to find new ways of looking at art, and stimulates attention in the way movement in

computer games captures attention. Interactive experiences, however, are not the only way to keep visitors focused. Suggesting different ways of looking at art may pique the visitors' ability to see new things in art without being told in advance what they are.

Visitor Disposition and Silent Viewing of Art

Ron Ritchhart's work with Project Zero at Harvard University provides an additional dimension to Roberts' theory. He notes silent engagement requires the development of a "dispositional perspective on thinking" (2007, 138). Not only must the student or museum visitor have a time to use their ability to think, but they must also develop habits and patterns of thinking that help them think more comprehensively. Museum visitors arrive with a certain expectation of what their visit will be like. To enable them to direct their focus on art observation, museums need to provide visitors with an environment and tools that prepare them for their visit before they enter the galleries. Ritchhart promotes the development of a "culture of thinking" where visitors prepare for making connections with art both as individuals and as a collective group. While his examples focus on student groups visiting the museum, preparation would also help the museum visitor cognitively and emotionally for their journey with art. Deutch describes the need for being emotionally open to art before learning about it: "before we can relate to an artwork (or to a natural object) as an aesthetic object, one must suspend one's practical and other inhibiting interests in it...awakening our feeling to what is presented by the artwork" (1996, 31).

People are used to being constantly stimulated by technology and therefore find it hard to look at a stationary piece of art for very long. However, if asked to engage in this experience for a longer period of time, visitors will begin to see things they would not have noticed earlier. This strategy has been tested and adopted by a few art museum educators, including The New York City Museum¹⁷ and the Toledo Museum of Art.¹⁸ Their art curricula calls for at least 15 minutes of quiet observation before the class activity. The students' private, personal observations are then used to teach drawing and painting.

While only a few museums programs include long silent observation time in their art classes, medical schools are taking a leap forward in incorporating art observation into their medical training. Harvard, Yale, and the University of Pennsylvania medical schools find that intense art observation helps doctors and medical students increase their empathy toward their patients, improves their observational skills critical to patient diagnosis, and helps them become more reflective (Bailey 2015). Doctors and medical students are surprised at what they are learning from careful observation of art, and return to the museum to delve more deeply into specific works of art. Silence, observation and reflection lead to new connections with art and a better understanding of its connection to the viewer.

¹⁷ "Object Observation" Guide

¹⁸ "The Art of Seeing Art™"

Silence and Brain Activity

In addition to observational studies supporting silent observation of art, neuroscientific research demonstrates how silence supports creative and analytical thinking. During a time of silence, a subconscious transfer of information takes place in the brain that links the disparate pieces of information learned into new patterns. James Catterall has written extensively on this and notes: “*Silence*...refers to the neuro-function of involvement and learning in art and hypothesized processes of transfer from this learning. Research suggest that learning art...brings change to neural pathways and neuronal firing patterns” (2005, 6).

During silent time, cognitive restructuring takes place in the brain making new links between thoughts and emotions (Catterall 2005; Eccles 2005; Tang, Hölzel & Posner 2015; Zull 2002). Activities, conversations, and personal experiences are “information gathering times” collecting and adding information to the brain. Silent time¹⁹ allows the brain to process this information and make new connections resulting in new ideas. The creative “processing” of information is faster when distraction is minimal (Vartanian, Martindale & Kwiatkowsky 2007). Quiet time leads to a relaxed state of mind which heightens the creative process (Arenander 1996; Horan 2009).

James Zull (2011) describes the brain’s neural operations during silent time. This time includes sleeping and walking in nature, as well as reflective thinking. Chemical interactions in the brain transfer information between the frontal and back cortex. The frontal cortex engages the creative, discovery part of the brain; the back cortex absorbs

¹⁹ Neurological silent time can take place during sleep, rest, walks in nature, and silent thinking.

information from learning sources. Together, these two areas work to produce creative ideas and solutions to problems. This brain activity is active during mindful learning, flow, and reflection in addition to other periods of restfulness such as taking walks in nature, and sleeping.

An article in the *Creativity Research Journal* (Horan 2009) cites a number of studies on the connection of creativity and silent meditation. Researchers note that the creative process in the brain works faster when there is minimal distraction due to low levels of cortical interaction from outside stimulation. During meditation and reflection, the mind is relaxed but alert, and disengaged from “associative thinking habits” that divert focus from the creative process.²⁰ Eight sections of the brain involving emotions, introspection, memory formation, attention, and meta-awareness²¹ are altered during this time which contribute to the creative process (McKay 2003).

Applying this information to the silent observation of art, the visitor can make associations with art that may not happen during interactive activity, or in a gallery where visitors and activities are present. Silent time allows free association and open, individual creative thinking to happen. This unstructured learning allows the viewer to connect emotionally with art. It is how children begin to learn, and how adults reconnect with their emotional attachment to art (Schabmann et. al. 2015).

²⁰ This does not take place during the transcendence or bliss state, but as that state is integrated into a waking state.

²¹ Awareness of how you think

Summary

This chapter addresses how silence may facilitate learning, observation, and emotional engagement with art. Silent time has nearly disappeared from modern life. With the pressure of technology and social media putting its imprint on many types of communication, the “art” of immersing oneself in silence seems to be most prevalent in spiritual meditation. Museum education evolved from the concept of silent pedagogy (Eisner and Dobbs 1990) to the current practice of group meaning making. While this type of learning is valuable, few museums provide a setting for the opposite experience of personal, silent observation. Research studies in meditation, reflection, aesthetics, psychology, neuroscience, and cognitive development underscore the unique ways silence can affect learning, particularly in creative thinking about art. Silent observation can inform group discussion. It does not replace it, nor negate its positive contribution. The negative concept of aesthetics as an individual elitist activity does not consider the value of personal and emotional connection with art. Only in a silent “alone” space can a visitor find an understanding of art based on the visitor’s life experience. This reflective time for art is a gift that should not be lost. Peter Sellers aptly sums this up:

In our museums...we do not think to make equal space for the lacuna. We’re not making equal space for what’s missing. We’re not making equal space for what could not be said or what needs to be added because a previous generation was unable or unwilling. And for me this silence, this missing space, this lacuna is one of the most powerful places to work from and to work with (2010)

The next chapter will address one additional and unique aspect of silence and art. It is the experience of wonder. It only takes a moment to happen, but can have a

profound impact on a person's behavior, emotions and decision making. While it occurs in some spiritual and environmental experiences, it is often connected with art. It is a solo experience that provides an important reason for the preservation of silent observation in a museum.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE WONDER OF WONDER

A person may silently gaze at and ponder over a work of art, and draw meaningful, personal connections from it without feeling anything extraordinary. This is a thoughtful, interior time; a state of reflection. There is another experience connected with silence, however, that happens when a viewer sees an unexpected, surprising, and overwhelming object: a state of wonder. It is a moment when a viewer has no other response but to look with eyes open wide at a vision that jolts the viewer out of a normal routine. This moment does not happen in a group discussion, while reading about, or listening to information about art. Wonder results in silence. It is an enigmatic state that creates an extraordinary—and sometimes life changing—response from the viewer. It is this indefinable emotional experience that provides a unique and astounding dimension to the silent observation of art. For this reason alone, silence and art belong in the museum environment.

What is wonder? Plato called wonder the beginning of philosophy (Kearns 2015; Vasalou 2012; Verhoeven 1972). Plato's wonder is a verb describing curiosity, questioning, and the search for knowledge and truth. People wonder about things all the time, but it is not an experience of wonder. It is the act of questioning.

The verb wonder is related to, but different from the noun wonder. The noun wonder is a combination of the feelings of surprise, astonishment, and curiosity prompted by seeing something unexpected and beautiful. This feeling of wonder is inspired by an object. It is a highly emotional state that then leads to the verb wonder. Following the surprised feeling of wonder is the wonder of how this can object can be.

For centuries, people have said they felt wonder without being able to clearly describe their experience. Kearns writes “wonder appears to encompass intellectual, emotional, rational, ethical and –sometimes–indescribable qualities” (2015, 107). We know when we experience it, but not exactly what it is and where it comes from. It is different from an appreciation of beauty or the thoughtful examination of an object. Alexander Kozin tried to define the space between the two types of wonder and applied it to phenomenology. His conclusion adds to the mystery of this emotion: “What if *Wunder* and the corresponding act of wondering lies precisely at the dialectical juncture of the two co-constitutive components, in the ambiguity of the in-between” (2007, 299)? The emotion and the seeking come together upon meeting an unfamiliar object. They form what Bernhard Waldenfels and Anthony Steinbock described as “a primary mode of disclosure” (Kearns 2015, 107). However, no information is conveyed. Wonder is purely an emotional feeling that illuminates an object, stuns the viewer out of the realm of ordinary, and then reveals its mysteries. It is a moment of “WOW” when we just can’t believe our eyes. What we see is so amazing and emotionally moving that we must stop and observe every detail...and wonder. It is not comprehensible from the knowledge or experience a viewer has had previously. Wonder is an open space before

knowing. Wonder then leads to the act of wondering by arousing curiosity and questioning.

While it leads to something concrete—learning about the object either from observing more details or finding out information about it—it is hard to describe what the emotion of wonder feels like. In his *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion* (1999), Paul Ekman identified a list of fifteen emotions.²² Wonder is not among them. The inclusion of wonder as a defined emotion is an ongoing debate. Wonder is not included in most lists. Its lack of recognition may be because it was thought that wonder has no survival value; it is difficult to identify; or it is placed in a subcategory of surprise, awe, and amazement (Fuller, 2006).

There are many definitions associated with secular experiences of wonder. Parsons (1969) provides a number of them:

Mirari: To marvel at something beyond human power

Admirari: A state of wonder associated with natural science and nature

Wunde: German for wound, a breaking apart of something

Startle: Surprise at something unexpected

Llewellyn (1988) explains wonder with the word *thaumazein*, a confusing state such as facing two directions at once resulting in surprise and bewilderment. Husserl's word *staunen* addresses both the noun and verb of wonder as applied to philosophy, as the state of wonder leads to philosophical inquiry. Caranfa notes that "To live by wonder is

²² amusement, anger, contempt, contentment, disgust, embarrassment, excitement, fear, guilt, pride in achievement, relief, sadness/distress, satisfaction, sensory pleasure, and shame

to live without speaking: silence speaks and we listen” (2004, 216). Contemplation is described as a wonderstruck thinking that is neither willing nor scientific knowing; it is "non-utilitarian, non-volitional, non-emotional, non-analytical... an attitude of pure attention, an act of unselfish almost impersonal concentration, an incorporeal 'gazing' " (MacDonald and Haezrahi 1956, p. 36).

The state of wonder invokes silence. It leaves us speechless. Hove wrote “wonder and language, wonder and thought, do not co-exist. We have no words for what arises in wonder because it does not conform to, nor can it be absorbed into, the texture of habitual experience” (1996, 450). While entranced with wonder, speech, thought, and activity stop. Life’s rituals are inactivated. A person’s eyes open wide, the mouth drops open, and movement ceases.

The History of Wonder

The concept of wonder has a curious history. The earliest reference to the noun wonder may be the Sanskrit *Natyasastra*.²³ This text provides the details for conveying the *rasa*—or essence—of the drama of India. The objective of the dramatic presentation is to help the audience attain a state of wonder where they can reflect on profound spiritual and moral questions. The actors are trained to focus on one of the nine dominant emotions²⁴—including wonder—while enacting very controlled movements. Their productions resulted not in a re-creation of life, but a presentation of life in a

²³ “Science of Drama,” 5th century B.C.E. – 2nd century B.C.E.

²⁴ Love, laughter, sorrow, anger, energy, fear, disgust, wonder and peace

powerful moment of discovery. John Brown experimented in training Shakespearian actors in *Natyasastra* and found the results spellbinding for the audience because of the level of discovery and emotion in the actors' delivery. He notes that this happens because the actor's speech and delivery comes from a "state of being and the sensations that lie beneath conscious thought" (2005, 7). In this context, wonder may be linked to a reflective state; wonder is also often connected with the experience of the Divine (miraculous). Further research by Jesse Prinz (2007) suggests that strong emotions come from bodily changes, and that wonder can involve awe and reverence. This would explain the strong emotions felt by both the actors and audience in utilizing and witnessing the wonder in the *Natyasastra* training.

During the Renaissance, "wonder cabinets" displayed unusual objects. They were not artistic objects but oddities such as ostrich eggs, bones, insects, foreign artifacts, etc. that were not familiar to the general public, and therefore would surprise, astonish, and arouse curiosity in visitors. As human exploration continued, wonder became associated with the written journals of the "marvels" of explorers (Greenblatt 1990). Manuscripts described the explorations of Marco Polo,²⁵ Friar Jordanus,²⁶ and Mandeville²⁷ that led their readers into the wonders of imaginary travels in foreign places.

As studies in psychology and aesthetics developed in the 19th century, wonder became associated with an emotional experience linked with art and phenomenology

²⁵ Book of Marvels, 13th Century

²⁶ Marvels of the East, 1330

²⁷ Travels of Sir John Mandeville, 1356

(Deutsch 1996; Fisher 1998; Fuller 2006; Gadamer 1986, Kearns 2015; Kozin 2007; Reinerman-Jones 2013). Wonder is only experienced while gazing at a “thing;” it is object oriented. Most often, the object is one of beauty, particularly of art or nature. Kozin interprets Heidegger’s thoughts that people continue to philosophically wonder because “the world itself remains wondrous, because it is held together by the things themselves that are wondrous in themselves, by their thingness (*Dinglichkeit*)” (299). He expands on this to point out that “*Wonder* points to the ‘more’ of a thing” (2007, 296). There is a psychic distancing between the object and the visitor who does not possess the object and observes it in isolation from anything else. Buchanan believes that strong curiosity is sparked by wonder that then leads to sustained engagement as the viewer seeks to answer questions arising from the brief but vivid wondrous experience. It is here where the noun and verb wonder converge. Wonder leads to wondering.

The State of Wonder and Art

When we are in a state of wonder, we experience something beyond the thing itself. This is sometimes compared to the religious ecstasy experienced by some while viewing the Russian ikon or other spiritually connected objects. Kozin provides an example of this in his description of Pavel Florensky’s (1882-1943) explanation of the role of Russian icons in the Russian Orthodox religion. Florensky saw the icon as the way to experience the “holy.” Through the object, the viewer has a “‘sighting’ of mysterious and spiritual events” (303). It is a way of “seeing” beyond the object and connecting with the “Wholly Other” (303). The icon becomes, then, not a piece of art,

but a literal representation of a spiritual experience, and a source of wonder for those who are transported into this spiritual realm. Van Der Leeuw cites Schleiermacher's connection between art and religious wonder: "'Religion and art stand beside each other like two friendly souls whose inner relationship, if they suspect it, is still unknown to them'" (Van Der Leeuw 1963). The wonder of art transports the visitor to a new dimension of understanding of self as well as the object being observed. It is a secular spiritual experience when not associated with religious meditation.

The concept of "thingness" connects aptly to the silent observation of art since the viewer is focused on an object. Wonder arises from *looking* at the object. It is not only the aspect of *seeing*, but *openness* to seeing more intently; looking for the "more" of the object. This involves the kind of silent reflection and mindfulness discussed earlier, intensified by the emotion of wonder.

One of the requirements for wonder is that we are surprised (Buchanan 2007; Bulkeley 2008; Fuller 2006; Kearns 2015). What we see is totally unexpected. The surprise and resulting wonder stops us in our tracks. We can say nothing. Gadamer explains this as "struck dumb or speechless (*verstummt*)...we do not say that he has ceased to speak. When we are at a loss for words in this way, what we want to say is actually brought especially close to us as something for which we have to seek new words" (1986, 83). This speechlessness leads the observer to ponder, reflect and question. It is a silent time. One cannot speak, but only behold and let curiosity begin to develop a connection to the wondrous piece.

The terms wonder, awe and sublime are often used interchangeably. However, there are nuances in the definitions of these similar emotions that distinguish them from each other. Studies in neurophenomenology²⁸ explored both awe and wonder as experienced by astronauts during space travel (Keltner and Haidt 2003). These were the two emotions found most often in the astronauts' journals, and are often discussed as related—although different-- types of experiences. Keltner & Haidt defined awe as a powerful response to something vast, forceful, and larger than oneself. They note it is “the upper reaches of pleasure and on the boundary of fear” (2003, 297). It is this aspect of fear that differentiates awe from wonder. An experience of awe might be triggered by a volcanic eruption, meeting a person exuding overwhelming power, or experiencing extraordinary beauty, such as a the world from a spacecraft. Awe requires accommodation by the person to actively adjust physical behavior. It overcomes a person, sometimes resulting in a feeling of insignificance in the perceived presence of the sublime. Keltner and Haidt noted that awe is socially based and has to do with “collective interests” (300). The sight creating the awe is vast and observed by many. It results in a change in action. Decisions, therefore, may be decided by collective values, such as group actions during political upheaval, a sporting event, or a natural disaster.

²⁸ the study of mind, experience, and consciousness that incorporates tools and techniques from neuroscience and psychology with phenomenologically derived first person data

Wonder and the Sublime

Sublime feeling is linked with awe and wonder often experienced during an intense spiritual event. It includes both pain and pleasure when something begins as fearful but ends up with a perspective of beauty as long as the observer is not personally in danger (Burke 1958; Carson 2006; Kant 1892; Lyotard 1984). Examples are religious ecstasies, revelations, and perceived miraculous events. The experience of fear leads to an emotional resistance that reveals an understanding of something far greater than the experience itself, a personal response, and change of course similar to awe. The philosophers Kant (1914) and Burke (1958) connected the sublime with religious experiences that lead to one seeing beyond oneself into a spiritual realm.

Wonder differs from awe and sublime in its end result. Bulkeley describes wonder as “an abrupt decentring of the self when faced with a novel and powerful experience” (Reinerman-Jones, et. al, 2013, 298). This “decentring” results in *inner* reflection rather than the outer change of action connected with awe and the sublime. It happens in an intimate, personal setting rather than in a group experience. It is not connected with fear; it leads to curiosity. Both awe and wonder result in questioning. However, awe initiates an external response; and wonder inspires an internal change.

The scientists involved in the neurophenomenology study concluded that “awe motivates wonder, and wonder has the potential to change one’s perspective on life” (Reinerman-Jones, et. al, 2013, 298). The study also found that pre-existing beliefs influence emotions. For instance, people who were religious connected awe with religion, while those who did not profess religious belief expressed their emotions in

“more humanitarian terms” (306). Other research cited in this chapter maintains a separateness between the two due to the external/internal difference in responses. In my interpretation, wonder is the “gentler” of the two, does not include the aspect of fear or insignificance, and therefore relates more to art and aesthetic experience. It is this emotion that may occur during the silent observation of art in a museum setting.

Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) defined the sublime as an aesthetic (non-spiritual) experience related to postmodern art. Lyotard describes this as “enthusiasm” which catches the viewer in an event that is overwhelming to the viewer. In the case of abstract art, the art presents something “non demonstrable...which stems from ideas for which one cannot cite (represent) any example...” (1982, 4), and therefore enables the viewer to see beyond the object and find an understanding of something greater than the object. This brings about a change in the perception of “selfhood” (White 1997, 130) which leads to a change in the viewer’s behavior. In his article “Lyotard on the Kantian Sublime,” Anthony David quotes Lyotard’s description of an abstract painting: ‘It will be ‘white’ like one of Malevitch’s squares; it will enable us to see only by making it impossible to see” (David). Lyotard felt abstract artists desired to create work connecting to the invisible as a means to the spiritual. Lyotard’s definition, however, does not contain the fear or apprehension noted by the other definitions of sublime. He describes wonder. The experience of wonder in art may not be sublime.

Wonder, Art, and Silence

An extraordinary example of the wonder of art in silence is the Rothko Chapel in Houston Texas. A non-denominational place of meditation, the Chapel was designed by Mark Rothko working with Philip Johnson, Howard Barnstone and Eugene Aubrey. The mission of the Rothko Chapel is to inspire people to action through art and contemplation, to nurture reverence for the highest aspirations of humanity, and to provide a forum to explore matters of worldwide concern. Inspired by this concept, Rothko painted fourteen large, nuanced black paintings that cover all the walls of the chapel. Upon entering, the visitor is instantly and totally immersed in a silent, darkened setting. It is a complete surprise after the blazing, sunny heat of the outdoors. It stuns the visitor and takes time for the visitor to adapt to the environment and discover its meaning. Some visitors never experience this mystery. The environment is so intense and bewildering, they leave. Others find deep meaning and find it a life-changing experience. The visitor must go beyond the immediate wonder and surprise to dig deeper into thought provoked by the art. Mark Rothko designed his art and the chapel as a way to find spiritual meaning in silence and art while viewing the subtly changing light on the dark abstract paintings. His design for the chapel illustrates the power of surprise, wonder, silence and inner learning. This experience of wonder incorporates spirituality.

The Time of Wonder

Wonder has another interesting characteristic: it is a fleeting experience (Buchanan 2007; Fisher 1998; Hepburn 1980). Buchanan notes that as one becomes familiar with the object, wonder fades. Wonder will not happen again with the same object once there is no surprise. Wonder has no attachments and no knowledge; it is pure emotion. As information is learned about an object, wonder diminishes and then disappears. Once a visitor starts examining and learning about the art object, the wonder (noun) about it disappears and is replaced by the (verb) wonder. Hepburn observes: "What displaces wonder is not simply discovery of the causal mechanism. Causal explanation reduces the isolation of an object or event, embeds it in an intelligible system of laws; whereas wonder is often enhanced (though I do not claim always) by the *isolation* of its object; it is often excited by suppressing the background that confers intelligibility or causal continuity..." (Hepburn 1980, 7). Wonder comes from not knowing, but is the spark that ignites the desire to learn more about an object.

Knowledge and Wonder

As a person learns more about art, wonder is harder to experience because the ability to experience the mystery of the unknown is more limited. Art appraisers, for instance, often first see technique and value in art, rather than feel an isolated emotional response to art. Their eye is trained to immediately look for specific attributes to fulfill aesthetic expectations. In her article "Aesthetics and a sense of

wonder,” Ruth Wilson cites publications by Carson²⁹ and Hart³⁰ noting that wonder “seems to be more pronounced in children than in adults” (Wilson 2010, 24). Children are continuously filled with wonder because they do not yet understand why things are the way they are. They are constantly surprised by things they see, and this leads to an insatiable curiosity about everything. Wilson observes that perception leads to thought in children, but “perception obeys thought” (25) in adults as suggested by the response of art appraisers to works of art. Once we have knowledge, it frames the way we see perceive something. We start thinking about an object before we allow ourselves to experience the object. Our silent stopping in surprise is replaced by the business of thinking about the qualities of the object. This is not to imply there is not silence in this latter reflection, but it is a silence without the unique experience of wonder.

Howard Parsons notes that the daily conditioning of habits and behaviors extinguishes “from awareness the qualitative uniqueness of things and hence the experience of wonder...” (1969, 86). Verhoeven espouses the need for adults to re-acquire the ability to wonder as it is the “beginning of wisdom” (1972, 42). Philo Hove writes “A world without wonder is bereft of possibility” (1996, 441). Opdal takes this further proposing that that wonder is the source “or even prerequisite for, the development of creative and critical persons” (Opdal 2001, 331). These quotes illustrate the problem and the resulting loss if adults lose their ability to open themselves to

²⁹ Carson, R., The sense of wonder, Harper and Row, New York, 1956.

³⁰ Hart, T., “Spiritual experiences and capacities of children and youth,” (2005) in E.C. Rhehlkepartain, P.E. King, I Wagener, and P.L. Benson (Eds.) The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA. pp. 163-178.

wonder. For wonder to happen, an adult must be willing to let go of the daily routine and allow a feeling of vulnerability to interrupt the secure routine of daily life (Ekman 1999; Greenblatt 1990; Hove 1996; Verhoeven 1972). It is a time when a person faces the limitations of his knowledge; something new and unexpected challenges what one knows. Wonder opens one's eyes to see things in a new way, to expose alternate possibilities, and fully experience life. In the short time of wonder, sudden stopping in silence totally focuses a person on the present object, and allows all the senses to experience the full impact of an unknown thing.

Wonder, then, requires surprise, beauty, silence, aloneness, and a sudden lack of explanation about what one is seeing. When museum educators focus solely on interactive learning, discussion, and technology, the opportunity for wonder is removed from the possibilities of the museum visitors. Why lose such a rare and beautiful experience? A museum visitor's lifelong interest in art begins with a spark from *within* the visitor, not from facts and information. Starting with facts puts "the cart before the horse."

Resonance and Wonder: Two ways to emotionally connect with art

This plea for wonder is not meant to negate the tremendous inspiration and joy that comes from learning information. Greenblatt discusses the tension between these two types of experiences in his article "Resonance and Wonder" (1990). Resonance starts with information and contributes to meaning making by connecting all the

cultural possibilities surrounding an object to create an understandable context for the visitor. This exploration of the history and culture of an object reduces the isolation of the object and imbeds it in a human presence. It makes the object personal and creates a relationship with between the object and the viewer. Greenblatt cites the State Jewish Museum as an example of resonance. The objects remind the viewers of the names, tears, prayers and suffering of the Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust and in 1389 when Jews seeking refuge in the Old-New Synagogue were slaughtered. Information about the objects gives the visitor a sense of history, of place, of value, and connection. It provides a reason for the object to be in the museum beyond conservation and preservation; it is not just an object on display. This is not an experience of wonder, but of deep connection and understanding of the object.

As Greenblatt continues his discussion, he explores the very different experience of wonder. For this example, he offers the sight of a contemporary Coca-Cola stand next to a Mayan excavation site. He had just visited the Mayan ruins and was talking with an engineer about them. The engineer said they were interesting, but had he noticed the near-by Coca-Cola stand? Greenblatt had not, so he returned to the site. While he had enjoyed his visit to the ruins and found them interesting and complex, he was stopped cold by the stand. It was completely unexpected. The builder had used ancient Mayan construction techniques to make an unusual and elegant shelter. Greenblatt was struck by its design-- observed it for itself, out of context with the surrounding culture—and immediately thought it would make a great exhibit in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. This response was completely opposite of his

discussion on resonance. His amazed wonder at the Coca-Cola stand removed it from its cultural context and put it into focus as a stand-alone object. He describes this as “enchanted looking...when the act of attention draws a circle around itself from which everything but the object is excluded, when the intensity of regard blocks out all circumambient images, stills all murmuring voices” (1990, 49). He then goes on to describe the uniqueness and power of a visual masterpiece. At his first sight of the Coca Cola stand, Greenblatt felt wonder.

He offers another example of the difference between wonder and resonance with the change in perception of art by the transfer of paintings from the Jeu de Paume to the Musée d’Orsay in Paris. Removed from their visual isolation in the former museum, the paintings take on resonance from the many diverse surrounding pieces; but the wonder of the paintings disappears. I had a similar experience comparing the two museum sites. I was moved to tears looking at Monet’s *Haystacks* alone in their gallery at the Jeu de Paume, but viewed them in a more intellectual context in the Musée d’Orsay. There was so much to see, and so much input from the surrounding artifacts, that the singular sense of wonder viewing one masterpiece alone was gone. It is a different “seeing” in the power of “aleness” of the object in one environment, and the “sociability” of the object in the other. Wonder is not about seeing an object in the context of other works, but as an isolated object of beauty, surprising in itself.

Greenblatt concludes that both experiences are needed, but the initial impact of wonder is critical prior to finding the resonance in a work of art. He then describes the experience of wonder at MOMA:³¹

MOMA is one of the great contemporary places not for the hearing of intertwining voices, not for the historical memory, not for ethnographic thickness, but for intense, indeed enchanted looking. Looking may be called enchanted when the act of attention draws a circle around itself from which everything but the object is excluded, when intensity of regard blocks out all circumambient images, still all murmuring voices... (Verhoeven 1972, 49).

Enchantment is a wonder-full way to describe the experience of wonder. There is a sense of joy and magic in finding a work of art so amazing that it transports the viewer out of the information filled world into one of astonishment and fantasy.

A new exhibit at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City captures all the aspects of wonder and silence discussed in these first two chapters. Designed by Doug Wheeler, *PSAD Synthetic Desert III* (1971 (Fig. 4) is a semi-acoustic immersive environment where the artist re-creates his experience of the silence of the desert. Limited to five people at a time, visitors sit silently on platforms overlooking a landscape of acoustic triangles. This exhibit captures silence, wonder, reflection, aloneness, and aesthetic abstraction in one room. I will delve into the details of this exhibit in the next two chapters as I look at different aspects of silence and art.

³¹ Museum of Modern Art in New York City

Conclusion

In this chapter, I isolated the feeling of wonder to highlight the profound experience that is possible through seeing unexpected visual art with “new eyes” in a silent environment. While Plato described the verb wonder as the birth of philosophy, I believe the noun wonder is the birth of living fully. It is an awakening of all the senses; a focusing of the mind to find the sparks to create new ideas; and the opening of the soul to allow a moving, transforming event to take place. It requires special attention to capture this in a busy museum. It requires an opposite state from the current trends in art exhibition. The museum would have to have the intent of creating an intimate, surprising, and silent space enclosing one beautiful work of art. The museum would have to prepare the visitor by providing a transitional space for them. The visitor will have to set aside time for what may be perceived in modern society as “wasted.” There will be no interaction with technology, no noise, no information, and no guidance. There will only be the moment of wonder.

Thus far, I have focused on the experience of wonder felt by the museum visitor. There is another connection, however, that brings an added dimension to the role of silence and wonder in art: the silence experienced by the artist and conveyed in the artist’s work. Silence and wonder play a critical role in the creative life of many artists. They have written about their need for silence, and the creative development that happens during silent time. Some of their art reflects silence, either purposefully by the artist while developing the work, or as a reflection of the artist’s state of mind during the creation of the art. Some viewers describe these works as “silent.” The pieces may

include subjects that are perceived as silent, often nature and abstract art. This view of the role of silence and wonder in the creation of art lends further weight to the important role it has in modern society. It is an aid to creativity and interior flexibility, and a space of freedom to find moments of enchantment without the constraints of “knowing.” It also adds another dimension from which the museum can draw to expand on the visitors’ silent experience with art.

This next chapter will explore the role of silence and wonder in artists’ creative lives, and explore some of the art works that the artist feels reflect silence. It is subjective and non-qualitative, but reveals the silent, mysterious world in which creative connections are made.

CHAPTER FIVE

SILENCE AND THE ARTIST

There is a dimension to silence and art beyond the visitor looking at art in silence. It is the silence influencing the artist. Some artists choose to enclose themselves in a silent place while working on their art; and some artists take their silent experiences and embed it in their art.

Visitors may or may not “see” the silence in the artist’s art. The personal expression of the artist may not connect with the experiences of the visitor. In this case, the visitor may need information about the artist to understand the artist’s intention. This does not diminish the visitors’ experience without this knowledge, but may enhance it later as the visitor learns more about the art. A silent environment supports the visitor’s reflection on the power of silence to influence the creation of art. If the visitor observes the art before additional study, the visitor might then return to visit the same piece and explore the differences in perception of the art with this new knowledge.

Creative Silence

What is creativity and is it connected with silence? How might silence influence an artist, and would this silence be reflected in the art? Throughout history, the process

of creating art was seen as mysterious. Artists could not explain exactly how their artistic vision came to fruition. Many artists say inspiration seems to come out of nowhere. It may be inspired by gods, or emerges from an unconscious process. Lu Chi wrote in 303 CE, “We poets struggle with Nonbeing to force it to yield Being; We knock upon silence for an answering music” (Bindeman, 74). Paul Klee (1899-1940) thought the ideas for the creation of art took place in the unconscious in silence (Bindeman 1988). Howard Hodgkin (1932-2017), a British painter, said of his painting process: “My own relationship with paint, when it finally works, is so unconscious – I don’t think it comes from the ‘unconscious’, but I’m not conscious of what I’m doing in a way that I could describe in word” (1998). Perhaps Orhan Pamuk, who won the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature, best sums up these artists’ thoughts in a quote from his book *My Name is Red* (2010): “Painting is the silence of thought and the music of sight.” Each of these artists cite the unconscious as the source of creativity.

Current research provides us with a better understanding of the creative process through advances in neuroscience brain mapping studies. Information pouring in from all the senses are collected in the brain. During silent restful time, these impulses are connected chemically and emerge as new configurations that produce new ideas (Zull 2011). It is the unconscious that transmits and organizes the millions of inputs to which an artist is exposed every day.

Making Art

How does the artist take this unconscious, silent input and translate it into a work of art? The psychologist Jaroslav Havelka described three functions in his book *The Nature of the Creative Process in Art, A Psychological Study* (1985) that take place during the process of creative activity: imagination, intentionality, and condensation.

Imagination is the ability to turn *real* perceptions and cognitive organization into *invented* images. This process takes both what has been seen and not seen from non-conscious, pre-conscious and conscious, and organizes it. Picasso (1881-1973) wrote “the artist is a receptacle for emotions that come from all over the place: from the sky, from the earth, from a scrap of paper, from a passing shape, from a spider’s web” (1972, 10). It is the information gleaned and organized from all the senses that results in the inspiration to make a work of art. The artist’s imagination turns this information into an artistic concept. An example of this ability to turn reality into an imaginative concept is described by Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother Theo:³²

At present I absolutely want to paint a starry sky. It often seems to me that night is still more richly coloured than the day; having hues of the most intense violets, blues and greens. If only you pay attention to it you will see that certain stars are lemon-yellow, others pink or a green, blue and forget-me-not brilliance. And without my expatiating on this theme it is obvious that putting little white dots on the blue-black is not enough to paint a starry sky.

³² Vincent van Gogh wrote more than 650 letters to his brother Theo.

This ability is unique to the creative person, not only in art, but any field that requires a synthesis of knowledge and inspiration to imagine something new, such as Frank Gehry's architectural design, Leonard Bernstein's music, or Samuel Beckett's plays.

Turning imagination into reality then requires intentionality—an inner drive to take these ideas and turn them into art. This drive to create is a compulsion for the artist to “speak” through creative action. Van Gogh said the only time he felt alive was while painting. For many artists, they have no choice but to create art. Without it, they feel incomplete. The poet Paul Valéry wrote of his experience:

The work offers us in each of its parts, *food* and *appetite* at once...
It continually awakens in us both thirst and a fountain...
In return for the freedom we give up, it rewards us by making us
love the captivity it imposes upon us...So the more we give, the more
we wish to give, all the while thinking we are receiving (Ghiselin, 102-
103).

Artists such as Dmitri Shostakovich continued to compose even under threats and persecution from the Soviet Union government. Although he was completely deaf, Beethoven continued to compose music to the end of his life. It is the source of their being to create art.

The final step is condensation--a selection and placement of all the stimuli available to create a work of art. It is this process of control over the selection of stimuli that distinguishes the artist's creative work from the non-artist. The artist's imaginative selection—supported by a developed technique-- turns emotional and intellectual information into a work of art. Sir Stephen Spender, an English poet, observes the special skill it takes to write poetry:

Here is a string of ideas: Night dark, stars, immensity, blue,

voluptuous, clinging, columns, clouds, moon, sickle, harvest, vast camp fire, hell. Is this poetry? A lot of strings of words almost as simple as this are set down on the backs of envelopes and posted off to editors or to poets by the vast army of amateurs who think the illogical is to be poetic (Ghiselin, 114).

Art is not illogical. It requires an intimate knowledge of the art form combined with inspiration to know how to take a form and turn it into art.

Havelka (1968) applies this condensation concept to painting by citing Pablo Picasso's work, especially after 1920. In Picasso's most famous work, *Guernica* (1937), the artist has distilled his childhood emotions of terror, the Spanish cultural symbols of the bull and horse, and the tragedies of war to create a work of art that stuns the viewer with its profound and complex images. His ability to select these specific objects, colors, and surfaces to evoke an emotional response from the viewer illustrates the extraordinary ability of this artist to find a meaningful combination and presentation from a wide range of options. Havelka further notes that the artist is able to find infinite possibilities using the same materials repeatedly without boredom to create similar and different works of art. It is a never-ending rebirth in the creative process of an artist. The artist manipulates the same materials and but finds different ways to use them to express the intent of the work.

How does this process relate to silence? The free spirited inspiration comes from the silent unknown (pre-conscious and sub-conscious) as well as from daily experiences. These form an idea for art while the artist is at rest, sometimes in silent spaces where they choose to collect their thoughts. All begin with a "preparation stage" when they consciously and unconsciously gather images, ideas, and concepts from a

broad range of sources to help them put together a concept from which to work. This includes learning and perfecting the techniques of their craft: capturing and presenting light, texture, color, and materials in new ways; and intently observing both external and mental images. John Hayes, a cognitive psychology professor at Carnegie Mellon University, researched thousands of pieces of artwork and found that virtually every single “masterwork” was produced after year ten of the artist’s career (Clear 2014). Clear also cited studies by K. Anders Ericsson whose work noted artists need to work “10,000 hours” to become an expert in their field. This underscores how complex the creative process is. Every artist is constantly developing, reassessing and refining the skills needed to create a uniquely personal art form. This type of focus requires focused concentration and skill development often done in silence.

Some artists step away and let the new information “percolate;” others begin to experiment with materials and create through trial and error; some sketch or map out their concepts and carefully construct an art work; and others spend years waiting for a new artistic voice to emerge. Each path requires a selection process ignited by inspiration that results in a point of wonder when the artist finds the way to convey a personal artistic message. For some artists, this is a magical, spiritual experience; for others, it is the result of objective calculation or manipulation of words, sounds or images until the balance suddenly is just right. The surprise about finding the “answer” for the assembly of art results in a sense of wonder for the artist. The artist does not know how long this will take, but has an inner sense of when it happens. In his article on Matisse, Caranfa notes this is “the task of reflective interior original vision” (2014, 78).

Matisse talks about his need for reflection and meditation to find his “inner eye,” and that the binding element is silence: “For me now, silence and isolation are useful. Only superficial painters need fear them” (Flam 1995, 83). For many artists, silence aids their imagination, selection, and creation of art.

To illustrate more concretely how the creative process works, I offer some interesting insights on artists by Brewster Ghiselin, poet and academic, who studied the creative process. He writes about creative people from different backgrounds who described how they work. Each person talks about one or more of the processes discussed previously, but each has a different way of implementing it. Following are excerpts by a painter, a musician, a poet, and a writer/filmmaker illustrating their creative processes. Each illustrates how these artists struggle to find the right balance between formal training, technique, the childlike unencumbered freedom of creative expression, and the role silence plays in the creation of their work. The following comments also demonstrate how the creative process is universal across all types of creative endeavors—not just the visual arts.

Painter, Julian Levi (1900-1982)

Julian Levi, an American painter and instructor at the Art Students League in NYC, searched for a balance between his knowledge, skills, and emotions to create semi-abstract paintings of the sea. A New York Times art critic noted Levi was able to capture nature through sprays of color and non-specific shapes. His work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Art Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

I am seeking an integration between what I feel and what I have learned by objective criteria; an integration between the tired experienced eye and the childlike simple perception; but above all I hope to resolve the polarity which exists between an essentially emotional view of nature and a classical, austere sense of design (Ghiselin 1952, 56). **Julian Levi**

Levi reflects on the inspiration he receives from his emotions, what he has intellectually absorbed, and how he connects these two information sources with nature and design concepts to create art. He notes the difficulty of rediscovering and expressing fresh perceptions through a child's eye and understanding. These are complex considerations that require reflection and inner emotional understanding by the painter.

Musician, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) needs no introduction. A musical prodigy, he composed some of the world's most beautiful classical music. His account of his creative process notes how important silence was for the formation of his musical ideas.

When I am, as it were, completely myself, entirely alone, and of good cheer—say, travelling in a carriage, or walking after a good meal, or during the night when I cannot sleep; it is on such occasions that my ideas flow best and most abundantly. *Whence* and *how* they come, I know not; nor can I force them. Those ideas that please me I retain in memory....If I continue in this way, it soon occurs to me how I may turn this or that morsel to account, so as to make a good dish of it, that is to say, agreeably to the rules of counterpoint, to the peculiarities of the various instruments, etc. (34).
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Mozart's inspiration came from silent, alone time during which he acknowledges his musical concepts came out of nowhere he could identify. He notes the formal training and knowledge necessary to take the ideas that arise during that time and turn them into music. He selects musical ideas and adapts them to the requirements of the type of music he is composing, and for the instrument he is composing for.

Poet: Sir Stephen Spender (1909-1995)

Poet, novelist, and essayist, Sir Stephen Spender was a social activist whose writing focused on social injustice and class struggle. Outside of writing, Sir Spender was a political activist and early communist who travelled widely. His activities would suggest a lack of silence and calmness in his life; but his comments on his creative process indicate a strong need for both in order to write. A number of his musings illustrate the complexities of fulfilling his creative life.

The writing of poetry is an activity which makes certain demands of attention on the poet...he should be able to think in images; he should have as great mastery of his language as a painter has over his palette...a poet has to adapt himself...to the demands of his vocation... The problem of creative writing is essentially one of concentration... a focusing of the attention in a special way, so that the poet is aware of all the implications and possible developments of his idea... a spiritual activity which makes one completely forget, for the time being, that one has a body...In my own mind I make a sharp distinction between two types of concentration: one is immediate and complete, the other is plodding and only completed in stages (115-116). **Sir Stephen Spender**

To concentrate fully on the process of writing poetry, Sir Spender shuts out not only the world, but his own body as he focuses on his writing. He enters a spiritual, perhaps

trancelike state. His memories, images, and hard work contribute to the construction of each poem. His activist life must be shut-out to fulfill his need to write.

Writer/Filmmaker: Jean Cocteau (1889-1963)

Jean Cocteau (1889-1963) was a prolific writer, designer, playwright, artist and filmmaker. He was active in the art circles of Paris. Among his notable works is *Les Enfant Terribles* (1920), *Beauty and the Beast* (1946) and *Orpheus* (1949). Like Picasso, he saw the richness of daily life shaped by silent, unconscious inspiration hearkening back to the mysterious work of the gods.

These unknown forces work deep within us, with the aid of the elements of daily life, its scenes and passions, and, when they burden us and oblige us to conquer the kind of somnolence in which we indulge ourselves like invalids who try to prolong dream and dread resuming contact with reality, in short when work that makes itself in us and in spite of us demands to be born, we can believe that this work comes to us from beyond and is offered to us by the gods (79). **Jean Cocteau**

Cocteau looks deep within himself to find his inspiration. He wrote of his need to recluse himself from the world and how difficult it was to emerge and begin the art making process. As with many other artists, he perceives this as a kind of spiritual experience.

The creative mode does not matter. Learning and silent collecting of concepts takes place deep within the artist. From this information inspiration occurs; and the artist creates art. In these responses, we find a collection of insights that constantly

appear in artists' discussions about their work: the presence of emotion, the integration of ideas and inspiration from the silent unknown or unconscious. Creativity is a powerful, internal force that escapes capture by any scientific means, and surfaces without warning. Its birth is an experience of wonder by the artist. It is an "aha!" moment when the artist finds the way to create a work of art evolving in the mind.

Commonalities of Silence in Art

Reflecting on these artists' work reveals a complex set of processes, studies, forms, and experiences that together illustrate how silence can influence the creation of art. I have extracted what I shall call five "commonalities of silence" from artists' stories to further illustrate the role of silence in the creation of visual art. These commonalities include Selection and Silence, Art Medium and Silence, Atmospheres and Silence, Environments and Silence, and Place and Silence. At the end of this chapter are brief biographical sketches of some visual artists that illustrate these concepts in the development of their art.

Selection and Silence

The first commonality, Selection and Silence, illustrates how every artist must find a path to personal artistic growth and expression. The "soul" of each artist must grope to find the outward artistic expression of the inner emotion. Artists have challenges that impact and change their art-making. For some artists, it takes years to assimilate, make sense of, and find a "voice" or technique for these changes. For many,

it is not something that is discussed. For every artist, however, there is a time of silent pondering. It is the inner voice that makes an artist change technique, smash pottery, move objects around a canvas, paint over, change direction, or stop working altogether. This waiting and churning process takes its own time to break out of its self-protective cocoon. This is why Jacquette notes “every work is an autobiographic signature of a specially trained thinker” (2006, 42). The artist must be open to accept change; must be patient for the time it takes to find a way to express the change; and must deal with the personal resistance and fear that comes with creating something unknown. What emerges from this process is the personal expression of the inner life of the artist.

Sometimes this requires the artist to go outside the accepted boundaries of “established” art. In the midst of silence there may be turbulent emotions that come from challenging the status-quo and losing financial support from colleagues, dealers and buyers. Dale Jacquette writes about the challenge of this process:

Individuality is either present or not in an artist’s work. It cannot be successfully manufactured on demand. From such an aesthetic standpoint, it is as though the main point and purpose of art is to be recognizably individual, after the achievement of which the artists cannot afford to explore entirely new directions at the risk of losing an audience that has only been attracted in the first place to the novelty of the work, making further innovations comparatively less singular and autographic (51).

Some artists’ biographies note the dramatic new directions the artists take—even completely changing the medium of their art. This is not a noise-some process. It requires digging deeper into oneself, finding the meaning the artist is seeking, and having the courage to explore and develop a new creative voice. Some artists have

embraced Zen during this transformation. There is a connection to the reflective process of meditation that is played out in the concrete production of art: it is the development of present awareness and knowledge of the inner self. Cognitive and emotional changes take place even while gnashing teeth and destroying unaccepted art. The intellectual, emotional and mysterious “soul” of the artist grows in silence and aloneness to find the ultimate expression of art.

The Art Medium and Silence

The second commonality is the medium of the visual artist. Whether paint, clay, stone or film, there is a silent medium with “life” that the artist must find a way to express. This takes tremendous skill, patience and curiosity. Every artist looks for a way to find a unique and personal expression in their particular medium of art. The intensity and focus needed to test and discover the elements’ properties and forms requires undistracted attention. Elkins graphically describes the process of a painter:

A painting is made of paint—of fluids and stone—and paint has its own logic, and its own meanings even before it is shaped into the head of a Madonna. To an artist, a picture is both a sum of ideas and a blurry memory of ‘pushing paint,’ breathing fumes, dripping oils and wiping brushes, smearing and diluting and mixing... the material memories are not usually part of what is said about a picture, and that is a fault in interpretation because every painting captures a certain resistance of paint, a prodding gesture of the brush, a speed and insistence in the face of mindless matter: and it does so at the same moment, and in the same thought, as it captures the expression of a face (Elkins 2000, pp. 2-3).

While Elkins' writing here applies to paint, the same can be said of working with clay, stone, or photographic developing processes. Each medium has its own resistance, requires its own labors, and is part of the art maker's conscious awareness. How the medium is manipulated creates its "voice" sometimes revealing an artist's statement about silence. Jacquette observes that painters are "entranced by the quality of paint, and by the challenge of trying to make paint do what they want it to do when applying it to a surface...A painting is at once the laboratory and the permanent report of experiments that the artist has made working with the pigments" (55). A silent substance, paint absorbs the artist into its world until its spirit is released in art.

The ceramicist Claudi Casanovas was adamant about the silence of his clay blocks, and this seems to be representative of the feeling of many ceramicists about their medium (Casanovas, Coper, Rie, Turner). There is a silence to clay. It is a solid, stationary art form that projects a feeling of quiet normalcy. Whether cooking vessels or abstract forms, these objects seem weighted to the earth by their very substance. For many ceramicists, however, clay makes a statement beyond its apparent humbleness of origin. Jeffrey Jones (2004) discusses ceramics' ability to contain meanings of centuries of culture and discourse. He cites Norman Bryson's thoughts on still life:

The *things* which occupy still life's attention belong to a long cultural span that goes back beyond modern Europe to antiquity and pre-antiquity...behind the images there stands the culture of artefacts, with its own, independent history (Bryson 1990, 12)

For the artist working in clay, the slowness of the process reflects history and geological evolution. The earth has evolved over centuries creating the different types of clay with which the ceramicists work. It is the connection with this basic element of the earth that carries meaning far beyond the immediate image. The artist reflects this in the shapes and glazes of the art.

Jones further describes the life and work of Lucie Rie and Hans Coper, both of whom are known for the reserved, self-contained forms of their work. Both were émigrés from Austria and Germany in WWII, and endured tragedy and deprivation. They both live silently speaking nothing about their work. Jones looks deeper into their silence, however: “Silence not only surrounds them and defends them, it reveals and locates them too. That silence which hides them from us also shows us where they are” (Jones 2004, 14). The ceramic forms of this silent medium is the voice of the artist who does not speak.

Photography is another form of visual art where photo processing is often done in silence. The testing, inspiration and coming together—finding the right light, shadow and selection—takes place in a dark, quiet room. Bruce Cratsley described long hours of hard work in the darkroom perfecting the details of each photo. Roland Barthes describes an even more mysterious process—finding the *punctum*--something unexpected in the photo that gives it a “power of expansion” (Barthes 1980, 45). Out of the darkness and silence of photographic processing, the artist “transforms the reality without doubting it” (41). What is often missed is seen in a new light, and changes how

the viewer may see the same sight or object again. It is the artist's silent work with chemicals, editing, and shaping that produces the powerful voice of the photograph.

Thus we find that the silent materials of paint, clay and photographic processing provide an artistic voice for the artist. The artist may choose to work his materials in silence to produce an art work that is silent but speaks through its presence and image.

Atmosphere and Silence

Some artists create "emotional landscapes" to convey their personal sense of silence. This may include many nuances of texture, shade, light, and shadow. Obviously, the art does not make "sound," but the perception of silence in this case is about aspects of the art that make one feel a sense of silence. It is through the artists' use of design and technique that they convey silent atmosphere. For instance, Bruce Cratsley's *Belgian Blocked Manhole* (Fig. 5) creates the silence of a manhole, not by showing the object itself, but through the light, shadows, and aloneness surrounding it. Cratsley found refuge in shadows, and magic in the poetry of light and the "metaphysics of photographic image-making" (Cratsley, 10). Hans Neleman, another photographer, wrote "Photography...attempts to define the sound of silence by means of the deeper voice of the image" (2000, 6). Cratsley's photographs were not about the objects but the light—and the silent voice--emitted from them. (Fig. 6)

Some painters describe silence in their painting through light, shade, shadow and color (Lundin, Rothko). They create a canvas of "emptiness" in which the atmosphere takes precedence over the topic, such as Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea*. (Fig.

7) The lone monk is nearly obscured by the mist and clouds which envelop not only the monk, but the viewer. Robert Rosenblum describes this painting as a “somber, luminous void” (1975, 10), and also argues that the hushed and quiet atmosphere of the painting demonstrates a secular expression of a supernatural and transcendental spiritual experience. The focus of the painting is not the monk, but the silence of the supernatural mysteries amidst he stands. A second example is Emil Nolde’s *Light Be*. (Fig. 8) In this painting, the earth, sky and sea seem to fold into one another. This effect is created by skillful layering of paint until the original paint color is no longer visible, but the canvas shimmers with light. Both of these paintings give forth a sense of silent aloneness. There is no narrative or story to the painting; it is more an “essence.”

Of all the “silent” paintings, perhaps the ones most identified as silent by the artists are abstract expressionist paintings. The paintings that fall into this genre are identified by descriptions such as a void, emptiness, absence, and non-intention. Although best known for his musical silence in his work **4’33,”** John Cage’s extraordinary abstract watercolors reflect his continued exploration of silence. In his book, *The Sight of Silence, John Cage’s Complete Watercolors* (Kass 2011), Cage discussed a key quality of abstract expressionism as having a surface “without a center of interest” (14). Deeply influenced by his Asian studies, he engaged in Zen and explored the absence of ego. Taking Gita Sarabhai’s thoughts on the purpose of Indian music to “sober and quiet’ the mind” (14), Cage used *I Ching* to determine how to create art, thus relieving his ego from the responsibility of choice. As he proceeded from etching to watercolor, his work became less defined and more ephemeral. His *River Rocks and Smoke* (Fig. 9) series

dissolved images in his smoked papers and subtle coloration. This visual silence surpassed the auditory silence of his music.

David Parker and Michael Evans explored the significance of silence in abstract painting through its “sense of otherness” (2010, 1). They referenced the affect that Outsider Art³³ had on abstract painting by instilling an experience of wonder and transcendence in the artist. Later, they retracted the more spiritual transcendent description and replaced it with Donald Kuspit’s “silence and alchemy:”

The means by which today’s best abstract art achieves its spiritual integrity are the same as they were when abstract art first originated, but they are now insisted upon with great urgency: silence and alchemy (Parker and Evans 2010, 3).

These words are linked further to the emptiness and void used by many other artists (e.g. Mark Rothko, 1903-1970; Barnett Newman, 1905-1970; Ad Reinhardt, 1913-1967) who produced monochromatic art to convey an atmospheric, silent, or spiritual visual experience. Reinhardt took the void concept to the extreme by removing even the traces of his brushstrokes to disclose the silence of emptiness. Allan Kaprow (1927 – 2006), who exploded the dimensions of art by including sound and movement in his performance art, described Reinhardt’s paintings as bringing the viewer “face to face with a numbing, devastating silence” (Colpitt 2005, 54). Some artists feel these paintings without forms-- seemingly blank canvases of one color—create a silent conversation between the art and the viewer.

³³ Art coming from a closed world such as a mental asylum or other marginal conditions

The medium of the artist is more than just the substance used to make art. Each medium is manipulated by the artist to create an emotional effect. Mark Rothko stated: “I am not interested in relationships of color or form or anything else...I am interested only in expressing the basic human emotions—tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on...” (Rodman 1957, 93-94). It is the skill and subtlety of the artist that transforms the silent medium into a work of art that can convey a sense of silence.

Environment and Silence

A fourth way to convey silence is through the environment representation of the painting. Two genres that particularly evoke silence are still life and landscapes. These paintings create a sense of quietness, eternity, and aloneness.

Still life seems to represent silence to both the artist and viewer.³⁴ But is it from the same perspective? Norman Lundin carefully planned the objects on his canvas, but his objective was not to represent quiet objects but to capture the void or “breathable air” in between the objects with his use of light and edges. Artists “see” their silence through how they use their medium.

Otto Modersohn (1865 – 1943) spent his life painting what he called “Landscapes of Silence” (Modersohn, 2013). Writing about his passion for landscape painting, he wrote: “Silence—silent grandeur—is my real goal. Using minimal means to say a great deal. My favorite images are those that lead to silence. For me they yield the greatest ethical benefit” (Modersohn 1892). His paintings focused on small towns and

³⁴ The viewer’s perception of silence will be discussed in the next chapter.

landscapes—particularly in the town of Worpswede—where he wanted to capture the purest form of nature. (Fig. 10) Through his artistic eye and spiritual insight, his silence of nature was not just the depiction of trees, water, meandering paths and flowers. He described that in his painting “one has to abbreviate nature, for through simplicity there is strength. The faster the gaze takes everything in, the better; one need only convey the essence, the extract” (Modersohn 1910, 13). Through his ordinary landscapes, Modersohn wanted to capture the silence of what he saw.

In contrast, the landscape photographs of Ansel Adams (1902-1984) captured the vast expanse of nature in the wilderness. As an environmental activist, Adams wanted everyone to see the wondrous natural world he wanted to protect. His photographs, however, were not just about the view, but about his emotional connection with it. He wrote “When words become unclear, I shall focus on photographs. When images become inadequate, I shall be content with silence.”³⁵ His silent photographs of awe-inspiring natural scenes emit the tremendous emotional connection Adams felt for these landscapes and his passion to preserve them. It is for this reason that his photographs have a continuing profound impact on the viewer and continue to play a role in the preservation of wilderness areas.

Both of these landscape artists clearly present forms of nature, but their goal is to evoke a spiritual connection with nature. The artist creates not a “scene” but an emotional statement connecting beauty and the profound silence of the natural world.

³⁵ Ansel Adams Quotes, [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com/anseladams/)

Still life automatically assumes a quality of silence: it is still. Whether painting, ceramics or photography, the objects represent silence to the viewer through their stationary existence. But is it the same silence the artist intends while making it? An article by Runette Kruger and Jan Van der Merwe (2011) discusses the concept of silence in still art. The authors use liminality—derived from the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold-- to describe the silence in the art installation of Jan Van der Merwe. This word is often used to describe rituals when everyday activity is put aside for a special transition. Van der Merwe's art is installations of still life with an underlying meaning that crosses past, memory, and future. For instance, *Wag* (Fig. 11) displays a rusted metal bedframe with a hanging clothes rack to indicate "absence, transience and permanence" (159) of a lost love. His installation "stories" look back, stop in the present, and look forward to the future.

Perhaps one could say this about any still life as it represents a stopped ritual, frozen in time, but heralding something that will happen again. As noted in the preceding sections, artists do not seem to paint objects, but to convey messages through the way they paint the objects. Kruger and Van der Merwe cite Heidegger's concept of time not as "the chronological sequence of moments or events but as a 'coming together' of all possible events in a single moment...that gives access to a timeless time" (160). Heidegger used the word *Dasein*—"Being There"-- (Heidegger 2006) to describe this unity of time.

Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio's *Still Life with Fruit on a Stone Ledge* (Fig. 12) masterfully presents ripe fruit with split fig, cut watermelon, and squash—certainly an

image of past (picked from the garden), present (arranged to eat) and future (decay). Did he paint a metaphor for life? No documentation has been found to discern what the artist may have wished to indicate,³⁶ but many art historians believe there is a deeper meaning behind his work. The fruit is silent, but it says a lot.

Place and Silence

A silent place also plays a role in the creation of art for some artists. Many artists retreat to private studios or remote, rural places to work on their art. Plein-air painters find their quiet in the outdoor environment, often in fields, side roads, empty streets, or near lakes and streams. Many artists find a quiet world to wrap themselves in as they work. Even if there is noise in the environment, the artist may find an inner silence from which to work. Csikszentmihalyi's "Flow Process" (1996) describes this period as intense focus where other stimuli drop away as the person becomes totally involved in an all-absorbing task. During this time, the artist may not be aware of surrounding noise or activity—only the intense exploration of what must be explored with the medium at hand. With this in mind, there is silence not only in the medium but in the creating of the medium. This ability to create a silent mental environment aids the artist in connecting the technical and emotional aspects of the medium to produce art.

Admittedly, most visual artists do not write about how they work. I have selected the few who have explained their working process for their exhibitions. The

³⁶ NationalGallery.org.uk

following brief biographical sketches of visual artists further illustrate the commonalities of silence that influenced them. These include the work of a painter, two ceramicists, a photographer, and an environmental artist.

Norman Lundin (1938 -)

Norman Lundin is a very methodical painter. He places his still life objects with the care and articulation of a mathematician. The location of each object is noted with pieces of tape on his canvas. He notes, however, that he often shifts and reorganizes where his objects are located. Even after he paints the objects, he often paints over them, and repaints them until he senses the placement is just right. Bruce Guenther, the Curator of one of Lundin's exhibits describes Lundin's work as "isolated, self-absorbed interiority" (Guenther and Brody 2006, 7) that forces the observer to look more and more closely at the details. Richard West, Director Emeritus of the Frye Art Museum observes that the paintings are not really about the objects, nor a hidden meaning, but about a quiet void shaped by the light surrounding the objects in the painting. The artist, himself, describes this "breathable air" (11) formed by subtle light and edges. (Fig. 13) He notes it took him many years to discover this process: "I was probably in my early thirties before I really knew what I wanted to do. I searched around for different forms and some were satisfying, but they looked like somebody else" (11). He sees art as a problem to be solved, but tells his students not to confuse their intentions with their accomplishments. It is the finished work that reflects their inspiration. Inspiration for Lundin comes from driving alone around North America. He

observes “If one is going to be an artist one has to be able to be alone, and comfortably alone” (13). His quiet, alone time observing objects and light is the fuel that ignites his artistic vision inviting the viewer to look quietly and closely at his artwork of still life.

Lundin took a long time to select the process he needed to find his path in art. Through his carefully planned still life painting, he expresses silence of his medium through a void atmosphere around the objects. The inspiration for his work comes from his time alone and in silence.

Robert Turner (1913 – 2005)

Robert Turner received his formal art training in painting. His deep Quaker beliefs mandated applying social conscience to his artistic work. He worked in the Civilian Conservation Corps during World War II as a conscientious objector and found the manual labor deeply satisfying. His beliefs and experiences led him to leave painting and embrace a life as a potter in the conviction that art could play a vital role in the preservation of cultural values. From 1949 until the late 1960’s, his work experimented with organic and geometric forms creating simple, elegant and useful vessels, such as casseroles and tea cups, based on timeless ancient Greek and Minoan designs. (Fig. 14) At the same time, he was absorbing information from new cultures and art forms. Through his friendship with Japanese master Kitaoji Rosanjin, he became interested in Zen philosophy and Japanese pottery. He visited New York museums and began to study abstract, contemporary art work. In the mid-1960’s Turner realized he had lost his way. “I was [mistakenly] interested in the external elegance...rather than anything that

had real meaning and was [not] reaching where I wanted to go” (Miro and Hepburn 2003; 83). He named one of his usable vessels the “Dead-End Pot.” As he continued his travels, he observed pottery for cooking, and other vessels for ritual in Africa; and the importance of landscape surfaces recording time and human activity in New Mexico. Ultimately, these new ideas influenced Turner to turn from functional pottery to ceramic art. In the Introduction to a book on Robert Turner, Janet Koplos writes about his work: “Turner seems to have discovered natural sources of Zen aesthetics in the windswept emptiness of the desert and wave-etched emptiness of the shore, his preferred landscape themes...I see in his pieces such qualities as serenity, dignity, and tenderness” (Miro and Hepburn 2003, 12-13). His ceramic art evolved with new geometric designs, glazes, and organic forms. (Fig. 15) This metaphorical work reflects the deep understanding he developed of himself, as well as his ability to absorb the influences of cultures and the natural world around him. He worked quietly in an isolated studio or at his rural farm where he felt most able to capture the silent voice of his clay.

Turner’s silence comes from many sources: his selection of clay, his involvement with Zen, the empty silence of his landscapes, the ultimate abstract forms of his work, and his isolated workplace.

Claudi Casanovas (1956 -)

Claudi Casanovas is an artist whose work embodies silence in his medium, and landscape forms, and his deliberate silence about his art. He first studied theater, then

trained in ceramics. From 1978 to 2006, he produced a large and diverse collection of ceramic art. He experiments with different treatments of clay, such as firing it at a high temperature until the clay distorts, laminating different types of clay together (Japanese *neruage*), sandblasting fired pieces, and using industrial machinery to shape large pieces. The resulting forms from these processes reflect natural landscape shapes and the light and style of his Barcelona surroundings. He sees his work as an expression of nature and silence.

In the fall of 2001, he exhibited *Twenty Blocks*, ceramic objects that look like found objects such as stones and volcanic debris. (Fig 16) He wanted the pieces to look like natural phenomena, and in his exhibition statement, noted that “each piece is a silence” (Roberts 2004). He described different kinds of silence: “The silence of the pieces themselves...the ‘unfailing silences’ that surrounds him” (Roberts 2004). The author of the article on Casanovas also notes there is the silence of the artist in not explaining himself further. Casanovas was silent about his art because he believed the interpretation was up to the viewer, and that his pieces existed for themselves. In his article about Casanovas’ work, Geraint Roberts discusses the importance of context in understanding an artist’s work. He observes *Twenty Blocks* “can be placed in the context of his life and previous work, in the context of ceramics as a field of artistic endeavor and within the visual and tactile arts as a whole. They might equally be located within Catalanian and Spanish and European culture” (10). This kind of perception of an artist’s work reflects the intellectual analysis of the art and museum world. Casanovas prefers a silent, emotional connection with the viewer.

Like many other ceramicists (Jones 2004), Casanovas sees his work process as silent. The making of ceramics is technically demanding, and the clay itself seems to demand silence. Casanovas comments on the difficulty of creating his art:

There comes a moment when I have nothing left but the certainty of what I do not want...And one after another I start to break up weeks of work...I say to myself, 'You're at the beginning, this has already happened to you many times before, you can manage.' And I carry on breaking them, scared as I am (Roberts)

Breaking his pieces is Casanovas' way of "rearranging" his object until the piece emerges on its own. When he accepts a piece as completed, then the work has communicated what it has to say. He says he always finds it surprising to see a new piece in reality because he often forgets what he learned in the past and is surprised to see a form again.

The making of Cassanovas' ceramics may involve a noisy, industrial process, but the creation of his forms comes from a place of silence in the landscape as well as his medium. He designs his pieces as silent earth forms, and stays silent about them as he feel they speak in silence for themselves and create their own quiet space.

Bruce Cratsley (1944 – 1998)

Bruce Cratsley, photographer, entitled his book of 25 years of his compiled works *White Light, Silent Shadows* (1998). He had this idea in 1996, two years before he died of AIDS. He had had numerous surgeries and much suffering over the years, but never let this stop him from doing what his mentor called "art of the split second" (10). While he agreed he took advantage of photographic opportunity on the spur of the moment,

his artistry came from the magic he worked in his darkroom. Barbara Head Millstein wrote: his work is “so subtle, so memorable, cannot be underestimated because of its quiet beauty” (Cratsley 1998, 13). Cratsley took simple images and turned them into silent masterpieces through light and shadow. What people pass by without noticing, Cratsley captured in a completely different way, and in turn changed the viewer’s perception of his subjects. Sherry Suris commented “One’s immediate visual response to a Cratsley print is to its beauty and purity, graphic strength and arresting composition. The complexity lies in profound multi-layered work that resonates with influences photographic, artistic, literary, personal, spiritual and paradoxical” (Cratsley 1998, 18). His works are layered, sensitive, loving and provocative. They illustrate his deep understanding of simple images and complex people—all surrounded in the silence of shadow and light.

Cratsley found silent spaces to capture through his photography. By creating an atmosphere of silence through shadows and light around his objects, he further heightened the feeling of the visual silence of his work.

Doug Wheeler (1939-)

Doug Wheeler grew up in the high Arizona desert and as a painter was an active participant in the “Light and Space Movement” in Southern California in the 1960s and 1970s. By incorporating space, volume and light in his abstract painting, he wished to change viewers’ perception of the world. As he explored this objective, his work evolved to painting-like objects combining acrylic sheets with lacquer and neon lights.

This led to rooms encasing diffused light, to abandoning painting and objects to install totally immersive environments.

On March 24, 2017, the Guggenheim Museum of Art opened a new silent environment, *PSAD Synthetic Desert III* (1971), designed by Wheeler to create a sense of the space, light, and sound (silence) of a desert. Having spent years flying to and staying in silent, remote desert locations, Wheeler outlined a concept for this exhibition 30 years ago. The Guggenheim Museum had much of his work in its collections, and decided to install his unfulfilled work on silence. The resulting semi-anechoic chamber required the involvement of sound engineers to help create a nearly totally acoustically quiet environment (3 decibels!). Housing 600 foam pyramids in a subdued grey setting, the room is intentionally abstract. Wheeler's desire was to create an experience for the visitor that would leave a long term impression from only one viewing experience. Subtle, almost inaudible randomized sounds of wind in the desert are played, but the room has a profound sense of silence. In an abstract setting without images, Wheeler hoped the visitor would re-connect with an aesthetic experience previously encountered in silence through the awakening of cognitive and sensory memories. The museum limits visitation to 5 visitors every 10 minutes. They stand or sit on a platform and are not allowed to bring anything into the room that might disturb the silence, nor are they to talk during their visit. Visitors have noted the time in the room is very powerful and goes by very quickly. I was invited to visit the exhibit privately for 30 minutes on a special pass, and have attached my thoughts recorded as I sat in this

amazing space. Wheeler's work has resulted in many articles and conversations on the lack of silence in modern life and the astounding effect this exhibit has on the visitor. Following is a description from a review from a New York Times critic as he experienced this installation:

...the light glowing from beneath the acoustic cones on the floor intruded on my vision, their spiky pattern seeming to climb the wall.

The room was unchanged, but my senses were operating independently of my mind. I watched inky patterns scroll across the wall: a hallucination, maybe, or some neural process I usually wouldn't notice, a corporeal software update.

In such a deadened room, a body bursts with life, spilling it out through every sense. I felt enraptured and paralyzed, as if I were a disembodied mind seared in the void, listening to a recording of silence played at top volume. (McDermon 2017, C6)

Can there be a more inspiring description of the impact of silence on art and the mind?

Wheeler's work is perhaps the ultimate art of silence. His environment emerges from his visits to remote desert silent places. The silence he experienced so profoundly affected him that he designed an almost perfectly silent space for urban visitors to experience as nearly as possible his wonder of silence.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the role silence in the lives of artists and the process of creating art. Silence may provide a nurturing time for the gathering, sorting and selecting of the sensory inputs that inspire the artist. It creates a space for the

sometimes chaotic internal distress of the art process. It is in itself a non-tangible medium for the artist to use in creating a work of art. For some artists, silent time assists cognitive inspiration for the artist. It allows the creative process to evolve, and reveals itself in the selection of choices of medium, atmosphere and topic to create a personal imprint on a work of art.

This study initially began with an exploration of how silence influences the viewers' ability to observe art. The next chapter uses the commonalities of the artist to explore how the viewer sees silence in art. Does the viewer see silence from the perspective of the artist, or is there a different experience coming from one who is looking at art?

CHAPTER SIX

SEEING SILENCE

How the viewer sees³⁷ silence in art is important because it completes the cycle of interaction among the artist, art, and the viewer. In his article “Echoes of Silence: A Phenomenological Study of the Creative Process” (1998), Steven Bindeman notes that the meaning of art is not a static, isolated process; that the “wider form of reference of the phenomenologically defined creative process includes not only the extended creative activity of the artist...but also the creative reception and response to the work by its audience” (69). In other words, the artist’s ideas and development of an art work result in a work of art that influences the viewer, who in turn, may influence the artist by the viewer’s response to the work. It is an ongoing cycle.

³⁷ A number of people have questioned the use of the term “seeing silence.” The musician Jennifer Roig-Francoli writes: “the sound I love more than any other is not one that I can hear so much as one that I can see...What I hear when I look is a deep, deep, echoing stillness that sounds of pure Silence.” <http://www.artoffreedom.me/can-you-see-the-sound-of-silence?>

Does the visitor, however, see silence in the art in which the artist intended to depict silence? Is it the same silence as the artist's? Why does the visitor experience a sense of silence in art? Here the debate about the capacity of the "uneducated" viewer to appreciate art emerges again. Those who believe the visitor must be "trained" to understand art maintain the viewer must know the techniques of painting such as brushstrokes, color, and shade, as well as the history of the artist and the painting in order to find meaning in the painting, and understand what the artist wished to convey. Danielle Rice observes that people are only used to looking for a purpose such as avoiding traffic or finding a friend. Therefore, she says that this "directed looking...leaves them largely unprepared for the open-ended, contemplative looking necessary..." (1989, 95) to see the art in a museum. She argues they pass by, "just looking" because they don't have the skills needed to have the familiarity with art necessary to make visual, emotional or cultural sense of it.

Further, Rice cites Malraux's concept of "art by metamorphosis"³⁸ stating that only the art of functional objects is accessible to the general visitor, while painting is not. As an example, in his review of Dominic Mciver Lopes' book *Sense and Sensibility: Evaluating Pictures*,³⁹ John Hyman (2006) describes Lopes' "seeing-in" concept as the viewer's ability to see an old pair of shoes in Van Gogh's painting because the visitor has seen old shoes "face to face." This is a very limiting concept of a viewer's perceptive abilities. However, Lopez expands this to note that "aesthetic interactionism" (205)

³⁸ Malraux, André, 1978, *The Voices of Silence*, Princeton, N.J., p. 18.

³⁹ Lopes, Dominic Mciver, 2005, Oxford Press.

goes beyond this simple recognition because of the complexity of the cognitive and aesthetic values inherent in the painting. The resulting question is: what does the visitor see in a work of art?

Another perspective maintains that the real “value” of the visitors’ art experience is not what they know about art, but their ability to connect emotionally with art by identifying a broad range of personal connections in it. Carol Maso captures this in her novel in a quote by Ed Snow “We can scarcely separate what is visible on the canvas from what happens inside us as we look at it” (1990, 58). This is an emotional and aesthetic response elicited from the viewer’s past experiences, with or without formal visual education. It is this second theory that illuminates the visitors’ insights and informs their ability to “see” silence in art; and from which I will draw descriptions of “seeing silence.”

Returning to the research by Fróis and White (2013), we know that most museum visitors respond to art through their emotions. Hence, the visitors’ recognition of silence is made through an emotional memory that links them with a sense of silence. Something in the art triggers a response that makes the viewer feel silence. Tony Kamps writes about the function of art as “not representation in any conventional sense but should be understood instead as a process by which the artwork opens onto, and thus illuminates, the time, space, and context in which it is located” (2012, 63). Silence is not the object or space being viewed, but silence emerges from the object or space. Memories of silent spaces connect with what a viewer sees in a work of art. This

memory and the feelings connected with it lead to a viewer's perception that they "see" silence in the art.

Peter Ehrenhaus describes silence as "an encounter...our attention takes an *inward* focus toward the personal meaningfulness of the encounter for those involved" (1988, 41). Using a phenomenological perspective, he explores how silence is found symbolically in objects. His example focuses on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. where visitors describe this memorial as silent, opening up new meanings for them. The silence is a wordless "discussion" between the object and the viewer. It is a silence that goes beyond the silence of the memorial itself to an interpretation of silence. He clarifies this further in explaining painting: "The painting's meaning is not within us, nor is it a feature of the object itself. Rather, meaning arises in our interplay with the painting" (44). Silence in art has to do with the viewer's looking and feeling—not thinking about technique and form. The visitor, therefore, develops a personal understanding of silence in a work of art that may or may not correspond to the artist's intention. Dale Jacquette (2006) compares this with a Rorschach test, where abstract shapes suggest one thing to one person and something quite different to another.

To analyze what the visitor "sees" as silence, I will apply the "commonalities"⁴⁰ of silence of artists to the perspective of the viewer, and see whether their concepts align or not. Since museum visitors' responses are rarely documented, I will also use accounts of curators to understand how they perceive silence in art. One dilemma I had

⁴⁰ media, atmosphere, environment, and place

during this study was that many books and articles have titles linking art work with silence, but nothing is then said in them to explain why or how the silence is connected.⁴¹ Therefore, I have only used documents that clearly explain what it is about the art that allows the viewer “see” silence in it.

The medium of the artist cannot be shared by the viewer. Obviously, the medium (paint, clay, photo processing) is silent for the viewer, but the viewer is not engaged in the silence of working with the medium, so it is only the seeing of the object made from the medium that is silent. The ceramicist feels the silence of the clay, but the viewer can only see silence in the object made of clay. This leaves atmosphere, environment, and places of silence as the connectors for the visitor experiencing silence in art.

Visitors and Silent Atmosphere

Visitors may connect to art through their emotions and making connections from their own experiences. It is possible, therefore, to connect some art to a feeling of silence based on a visitor’s memories of silence. This may be influenced by past activities, and by what the person has read or seen. Many poets create works about the silence of a painting and the emotions they attribute to it. An example is Mrs. Felicia Hemans’ third stanza of her poem she attributes to “On a Picture of Christ Bearing the Cross (painter unknown):”

⁴¹ Examples: *Daniel Lang: Trees/Water/Silence, A Selection of Paintings from 1975 through 1986*, Galleria BelloSguardo, Cagli, 1986; *Kandinsky and the Harmony of Silence; Painting with White Border*, The Phillips Collection, Yale University Press, 2011.

And upward, through transparent darkness gleaming,
Gazed, in mute reverence, woman's earnest eye,
Lit, as a vase whence inward light is streaming,
With quenchless faith, and deep love's fervency;
Gathering, like incense round some dim-veil'd shrine,
About the Form, so mournfully divine!
(Hollander 1995, 17)

In her description, we read the silence of the painting through the darkness, reverence, spirituality, and the sadness of the art. Here are words, painting, and silence brought together through the ekphrasis of a poet.

Another example comes from the combined photography, surrounding natural objects, and poetry of Gordon Parks. He is both artist and visitor as he looks with wonder at the world surrounding his home and connects them with his poetry, watercolors, and music to capture their silence:

I remain aware of imagery that lends itself to serenity and beauty, and here my camera has searched for nature's evanescent splendors. Recording them was a matter of devout observance, a sort of metamorphosis through which I call upon things dear to me—poetry, music and the magic of watercolor. Each visited by thoughts night and day—helped to extend my vision beyond plateaus I didn't know existed
(1994, Foreward)

Parks combines the two visual areas where museum visitors most often see silence in art: still life and landscapes. The viewer shares the silence of the artist, perhaps because both have experienced the inherent silence of these images. The next two sections will look at the responses to this experience in painting.

There are many examples of visual art that appear “silent” to some viewers. The art creates an atmosphere of silence through the use of light, color, and the absence of

activity. Diffused light, fog, and shadows evoke memories for the viewers that may connect them with silence, as in Cratsley's *Belgian Blocked Manhole*. Abstract art in similar colors seems to envelop some viewers in silence. One of Rothko's installations, the *Seagram Murals, Four Darks in Red* (1958-1959) (Fig.17), installed in the Four Seasons Restaurant in the Seagram Building in New York City, surrounded the diners with mostly deep reds and maroons. In his article, "Towards new understandings of silence" (2001), James Cronin describes the silence of these paintings as "a condition of consciousness" (2). Sara Maitland, who has written extensively on silence in the arts, described these Rothko paintings as "...silence made visible; I was shaken by their power and their fierce dark beauty" (Maitland 2008, 146).

Although using many colors, some Impressionist paintings create silent atmospheres through the blending of color, use of light, and blurred images. When there are no clearly defined images, the viewer focuses on the total impression of the painting rather than particular objects in the painting. For example, Georges Clémenceau (1841-1929), Prime Minister of France during WWI, and a friend of Claude Monet, described his rapture and personal transport when viewing Monet's *Les Nymphéas* (Fig. 18): ⁴² "As the *Nymphéas* sweep us up from watery surfaces into these clouds that seem to wander in infinite space, we leave earth behind and even the sky as well, to revel in harmonies far beyond our own little planet of ordinary emotional experience" (2017). Clémenceau attained a dreamy, reflective state of silence as he immersed himself in the atmosphere of Monet's shimmering works.

⁴² A series of approximately 250 oil paintings of Water Lilies by Claude Monet

Following is an amusing story, however, told by Clémenceau, that illustrates how everyone may not share the same experience of silence when viewing a painting. Claude Monet went to a dealer to sell his art work, *Vétheuil dans le Brouillard* (Fig. 19). Their conversation went as follows:

Well, let's see here. Oh-ho! Well, that won't do at all, my dear boy. If I buy your work without haggling for it, I expect it to be *painted*. There's no paint on this one. You must have forgotten it. The canvas is blank—that's not good. Take it back and put some paint on it, and I'll think about buying it... fair enough? ... Now just between you and me, what do you suppose this canvas represents?

I don't *suppose*, I *know* that it shows the fog rising from the Seine at Vétheuil. I was out in my rowboat in the early morning waiting for that effect. The sun came up, and—sorry, but I painted what I saw. Maybe that's why you don't like it.

Oh, right, I get it now. But you have to know it's the Seine. And when the morning light hits the mist it muddles the view. We can't see much, but that's because of the fog, right?... Even so, there's not enough paint on this canvas. Dab on some more paint and I just might buy it from you (Clémenceau 2017)

A few years later, the same dealer realized the increasing value of Monet's work, asked to buy some of Monet's paintings at a reduced price. Monet refused to sell him anything. Perhaps the dealer's focus on only the monetary value of a successful painting prevented him from seeing the aesthetic value of silence in Monet's foggy landscape.

Some artists create a "void" in their paintings to indicate silence. The environmental installation exhibits could be interpreted as a void; and many artists discussed the void in their paintings and photography. However, I found no comments from visitors describing silence as a void in a work of art. On her study of the void in art, Małgorzata Cieliczko provides an analysis that may explain this absence. She wrote:

“The historical and cultural habits of the audience give them the sense that there should be ‘something’ in a certain place; artists, working against the grain of such habits, place ‘nothing’ in that particular place. Not in the sense of eliminating or erasing something that was in fact there before, but in the sense that that expected ‘something’ never existed or existed in a way not directly perceptible to the senses” (2015, 85).

If viewers connect to art and silence through their emotions and experiences, this “absence” in the art work may not be perceived as silence but as something missing in the art that they expected to be there. Cieliczko describes this as a pedestal without something on it. A void is something difficult for visitors to describe as silence; they may be more inclined to focus on what is missing than how they feel about the empty space.

Further, Noah Charne provides an example of the complexity of thinking about abstract art in his explanation about the Nobel-winning scientist Eric Kandel’s work⁴³

In abstract painting, elements are included not as visual reproductions of objects, but as references or clues to how we conceptualize objects. In describing the world they see, abstract artists not only dismantle many of the building blocks of bottom-up visual processing by eliminating perspective and holistic depiction, they also nullify some of the premises on which bottom-up processing is based. We scan an abstract painting for links between line segments, for recognizable contours and objects, but in the most fragmented works, such as those by Rothko, our efforts are thwarted.

Thus the reason abstract art poses such an enormous challenge to the beholder is that it teaches us to look at art—and, in a sense, at the world—in a new way. Abstract art dares our visual system to interpret an image that is fundamentally different from the kind of images our brain has evolved to reconstruct (Charne, 2016).

⁴³ Kandel, Eric, 2016, Reductionism in Art and Brain Science, Bridging The Two Cultures, Columbia University Press, NY.

Although the artist may intend the void in the art work to be silence, this may not be recognized by the visitor. The void in art, then, is a concept of the artist and an interpretation by the curator that may not correspond to the visitors' understanding of the work. The "void" in art presents a complex puzzle for the viewer who is contemplating what is missing in the painting rather than the empty space itself.

An interesting take on silence and atmosphere comes from the world of filmmaking. Today, we cannot imagine film without sound. Indeed, most "silent" films were accompanied by music played in the movie house. In his article "The Sounds of Silence" (2012), Steve Seid noted that only a few art films were intentionally silent without accompaniment. One of these, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) by Maya Deren, has a dreamlike sequence that focuses on images that reflect entrapment. Sied writes: "The silence that enshrouds *Meshes* is not a theorized silence, it is the silence of omission, the residue left behind when sound is ignored. Yet it serves the film well, focusing the audience's attention while adding the latent dread that only silence can provoke" (92). In his notes, Sied wrote that Theodor Adorno, a German philosopher, sociologist, and composer, observed that the audience was visibly anxious during the silence. Silence increases observation by the audience, and the frightening details became more apparent, and increased their sense of mystery and suspense. Sied interviewed Fred Camper, author of "Sound and Silence in Narrative and Nonnarrative Cinema"⁴⁴ and quoted him: "'Without sound to spatialize it directly, the image,

⁴⁴ Camper, Fred, "Sound and Silence in Narrative and Nonnarrative Cinema" in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, 1985), ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, Columbia University Press, NY.

whatever its content, hovers before the viewer in a kind of mysterious and splendid isolation, like a fragile chimera” (93). The power of silence increases the emotional impact of the art image. The audience does not “see” silence in the film, but feels the emotional impact of silence on the images.

Sometimes objects can create a silent atmosphere for visitors through their reference to silent events. Steven Winn wrote an article about the Berkeley Art Museum’s *Silence* exhibit, and described Andy Warhol’s images of electric chairs as conjuring “an ultimate mortal stillness” (Winn 2013). Some objects can signify death—the ultimate silence—to a viewer. This might include religious objects and icons, weapons, a scythe, or a stopped clock. Winn also notes a different kind of silence voiced by the curator, Lucinda Barnes, who said “working on the *Silence* show heightened her own sensory apparatus. Magritte’s paintings, she said, ‘make you feel the sound has been sucked out of the room.’” (Fig. 20)

How can Still Life can create an atmosphere of silence? Sally Duensing, who has written about object centered learning explains this occurs because of “an object’s paradoxical capacity to be both an object in itself and a symbol of something else” (2002, 351). Both the electric chair and the apple in the room are just objects, but each reveals different kind of silence to the viewer.

A different way of experiencing silence in art is through the silence of Vermeer’s paintings of women. A woman’s life in 17th century Netherlands was a quiet and sheltered existence within the confines of her home. Here, the “object” is not the woman, but her occupation and environment. Vermeer concentrated on everyday

activities in the quiet, dark interiors of both the rooms and the people inhabiting them. Brian J. Wolf uses letter writing as one example (2001). Other paintings show women sewing, cooking, and reading. While Marjorie Wiseman, in her book on Vermeer (2011), attributes this silence to 17th and 18th century life in the Netherlands, today's viewers can certainly still feel the silence of the occupations—even if they do not do this activity themselves. In another article, Mary Bittner Wiseman cites Roland Barthes' work⁴⁵ noting that not only works of art, but the viewers, themselves, have many experiences that determine what they feel about a work of art. Ordinary activities such as those depicted by Vermeer may remind the viewer of images from films, books, their own activities, or those of others—perhaps watching their grandmother sew or bake. Silence still lives in modern still life paintings such as Janet Fish's (1938-) *Cracked Eggs and Milk* (Fig 21) -- as long as her cell phone doesn't ring! Perhaps the still life of the future will be a cell phone with a dead battery...That certainly would bring forth a sound of silence!

Visitors and a Silent Environment

The two environmental exhibits noted earlier in this study, the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas, by Mark Rothko, and Doug Wheeler's *PSAD Synthetic Desert III* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, are both intended to immerse the visitor in an environment of silence. Visitors are asked not to talk, the art in the room has no identifiable "object," and the colors are dark or neutral. While the artists explicitly

⁴⁵ Barthes, Roland, 1974, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, NY.

stated they made the art for the visitor to experience silence in their works,⁴⁶ not all visitors experience what the artists intended.

The Rothko Chapel is the most conflicted. Because it is a “chapel”--although non-denominational and without reference to God--many people go to meditate. Others visit because they are familiar with Rothko’s art and wish to see it in this setting. Many attend because it is a famous site, and they want to see what it’s like. This latter group is the one that seems to have the most difficulty with the silent site, perhaps because they are not prepared for the actuality of the room. Those visitors who had an idea of what the Chapel would be like and how it addressed their interests were more comfortable staying and seeing where their experience would lead. Following are some visitors’ comments after visiting the Chapel.

People feel it’s *their* place...they come, and they have a problem and they cry in this space. If you look at the comment books, they make comments to each other as though this was their personal diary.
Suna Umari, Chapel attendant

I wasn’t prepare for that [the personal connection] when I walked In the door. I almost left with nothing and ended up spending an hour and 15 minutes there. The time just sort of stopped running. I can’t even tell you where I went at that point. I just know it was a Rothko experience unlike one I’ve had before.
Christopher Rothko, artist’s son

Here’s where I dispense with the flower set-up and get straight to the point: I don’t like this place. It is “quiet” inside. And I do mean “quiet.” Deathly quiet. And there were other people in there, too, just meditating or just sitting and looking around. But it was what I would call “oppressively quiet,” as in I literally became self-conscious

⁴⁶ “It’s something I thought would be really great for New York, because you never escape noise here... So this’ll be a place that you can go where there won’t be any noise.” Doug Wheeler, audio for the Guggenheim Museum, 2017; and Rothko wished to “connect his viewers with the sublime,” Linda DeBerry, 2014, “Silence is So Accurate: Thinking About Mark Rothko,” Crystal Brides Museum of American Art

of the rustle of my jeans on the uncomfortable wooden benches. The “art” on the walls, if it could be called “art,” were a series of large pieces of canvas done in varying shades of black. Very modern art... In short, the place was too quiet, too boring, too uninspiring for it to be relaxing for me.”

Anonymous blogger, 4/3/2016

We walked in and right out. It was so dark and gloomy in there. The fact that it was dead silent didn’t help. There’s not really anything to do, but there was still a group of about 15 people sitting on benches in there reflecting on life or whatever.

Anonymous blogger, 1/3/2015

I’m not much of an art lover, nor have I ever considered myself to be one, but The Rothko Chapel will provide one of the most unique, spiritual journeys that you’ll ever experience... The first thing that will strike you is, “how the hell did they get these huge paintings in this place?” The works by Rothko are huge and the front door is not very accommodating...Second, you sit there and stare into these marvelous works and I swear that you’ll be pulled into the painting and float away. I can tell you unequivocally that this happened to me. It’s both mind-boggling yet peaceful at the same time...You can actually see the paintings moving and then they place you in a meditative state. So calming. So peaceful. All my stress and worries melted away.

Anonymous blogger, 19/18/2013

Although each experience was quite different, the one experience each visitor shared was an immediate, visceral emotional response to the silent room and Rothko’s art. The silence and darkness of the room shocks the visitor when entering. Perhaps this is a state of wonder since it is a surprise that stops the visitor in silence and leads to continued observations about the art. It did not depend on the knowledge the visitor had of Rothko’s paintings—even his son who knew his father’s work was stopped short. What made a difference was the predisposition of the visitor to understand what they might experience, and the length of time the visitor stayed. The visitor who walked out did not understand the silence of the space, let initial emotions determine the decision

to leave, and lost the insights that may have come during a longer visit. For most of those who stayed, the silent aura of the space and Rothko's paintings became stronger and more personal, and for some led to a personal reflective state. Their spiritual reflection may have been influenced by their prior knowledge that the site is a Chapel. The movement in the painting experienced by the last visitor is an interesting outcome. It is also a common experience of visitors to the Wheeler exhibit.

Like Rothko, Doug Wheeler designed his space for visitors to experience silence—but his was the silence of the desert and not intended for a religious meditative activity. In addition, his room does not have obvious “art.” The artistry is in the arrangement of the acoustic materials which results in silence, and as well as a feeling of silence from the variations of grey color through the lighting and the calm stillness of the acoustic pyramids. The Guggenheim Museum is not collecting comments from its visitors to this exhibit. The staff, however, relayed some of the visitors' responses to me during my visit to the museum. There is a significant difference in the visitors who attended this exhibit from those who visited the Rothko Chapel. Tickets are required and hard to get; and substantial press coverage has prepared the visitor for a room of total silence. Visitors, therefore, are predisposed to experiencing silence, and attend purposefully to do so. The comments here include staff observations as well as journalists' comments.

I've noticed that as more time passes, visitors become more involved. Initially, visitors take a moment to adjust and scan the room to find a good viewing spot. They then become more comfortable and usually sit or lie down on the floor, relaxing or meditating.

Benjamin Hoyng, journalist

I walked up a ramp into the silence and waited for nothing to happen...I watched inky patterns scroll across the wall... In such a deadened room, a body bursts with life, spilling it out through every sense. I felt enraptured and paralyzed, as if I were a disembodied mind seared in the void, listening to a recording of silence played at top volume.

Daniel McDermott, journalist, New York Times Art and Design Section, April 7, 2015

One visitor told me that she felt changed after experiencing the work. She said that she has lived downtown [NYC] all her life, and had never encountered a place quite like this. She confessed that first she was uncomfortable and wanted to leave, but she decided she needed to stay, and it changed her. She told me she felt something spatially exciting in the room, and that she could see an infinite void expressed through the lighted far wall. This realization of space in the work moved her, and she felt very present while inside the room, in a way that she had never felt before with a work of art.

Anonymous Visitor

A visitor said how surreal it was that this room felt like home—the sound so closely imitates the sound within the Arizona landscape. He said that, as the minutes went by, he felt more comfortable and able to relax into a more spiritual experience in nature. He also noted that being still in nature dissipates time.

Anonymous Visitor

The first five minutes, they [the visitors] are most concerned about the overwhelming sounds their bodies make, and feel uncomfortable, nervous, and self-aware. Once they pass this “barrier” they begin to observe the space closely. Visitors see this as an environmental aesthetic experience, not as “art.” They also sense that the light is changing and wonder if the pyramids are moving. The longer they stay the more they have a visual sense of movement in the space. All the visitors we talked with loved the silence.

Jeffrey Weiss, Francesca Esmay, Curators

Even though these visitors expected a silent environment, they were all surprised and unnerved by the initial profound quiet. Each one became more aware of their own body sounds until they got used to it. Length of time was again a critical element so they could become comfortable and begin to observe the environment. The longer they stayed, the shorter their visiting time felt, and the more they observed in the space.

Again, as at the Rothko Chapel, visitors began to “see” movement in their surroundings. It seems visual perception may be affected by an enclosed silent experience. There is also a heightened awareness of the lack of silence in their lives, especially as they exit the space into the noisy museum galleries. I have attached my own experience in this exhibit in an Addendum. I had some similar responses to those stated by other visitors. I was initially shocked by the silent, still atmosphere; in the beginning, I had heightened awareness of my bodily sounds; as time elapsed I saw increasing details of the environment; and I experienced movement and changing light in the exhibit that was not actually occurring. It was an extraordinary personal experience—and extremely difficult to return to the museum’s noisy galleries and the streets of New York City.

Another environmental installation, Dutch artist Simon Heijdens’ *Silent Room* (2017) (Fig. 22), was set up in a container at the Netherlands Embassy in Washington, D.C. It elicited similar responses from its visitors as the previously mentioned environments. An article by Annabelle Zandbergen (2017) notes that visitors stayed for one minute to more than five minutes. This room had no place to sit and had nothing to observe; it was a plain, lighted, silent inner container without a focus point. Heijdens

stated in his explanation that there were “no visual or audible manifestations except for the visitors themselves: a rare, completely unmediated state” (2016). The visitors all noticed the noises their bodies made. The visitors who left after one minute felt they had been there longer; and the group who stayed for five minutes wanted to stay longer. “Some people came out crying, some people came out laughing, some people came out cheering,” Heijdens said (2016). Each visitor was forced to contend with their own emotional responses to this art experience. As with the other environmental exhibits, the longer the visit, the more people experienced, and the longer they wanted to stay.

Visitors often connect a silent space with nature and landscape. Sara Maitland’s *A Book of Silence* (2008) looks at the significance of silence of the landscape from the beginning of *The Book of Genesis* to today’s growing interest in—and need of—silence through meditation or vacations in remote landscapes. Landscape paintings grew increasingly popular during the Industrial Revolution. They provided a mental escape from the seemingly endless encroachment of urban life; and brought together the harmony and idealization of the purity of nature for those who could not experience it. Landscapes can bring a feeling of silence and peace through association of something remembered or imagined. After he had seen some of Hans Modersohn’s “Silent Landscapes,” Rilke wrote to him:

It moved me very much, holding in my hands these beautiful little sheets, comprehending their mystery as if they were artistic creation itself: I was like one who enters dimly lit rooms and realizes, as his eyes slowly adjust to the low light, that there before him is everything that he had ever conceived of and remembered as beautiful. (Belgin 2013, 10).

Landscapes can transport a viewer out of the noisy world into a place where the mind can imagine silence, even if it is not around us. Swinnen writes in his Introduction to Hans Neleman's *Folio Silence* that "in his photographs we hear the sound of silence. Silence is the voice of the image *and the image*" (Neleman 2000, 6).

The viewer's sense of silence, then, comes from somewhere deeper than the image itself. Some landscapes evoke a meditative or mystical silence. It can be referenced by quiet recognizable images or distant imaginings. Light and shadow add to a sense of the mystery of silence. A fine example of the many images that conjure up a sense of silence is in a description of *Autumn Moon over Lake Dongting*⁴⁷ by Soyoung Lee:

[It] shares the... mode of melancholy and contemplation.
A fishing boat moved on the shore in the foreground; a large
empty pavilion enveloped in mist in the far background;
a Buddhist temple nestled in the thin cloud-filled mountain; cold
shimmering light; and vapors rising from the water all contribute
to the mystery of a silent landscape (Lee 2009, 77)

This quote is a compilation of images that create a perception of silence in a landscape: still objects, emptiness, a hazy atmosphere of mist or fog, a religious reference, light, shadow, and even temperature. Each image offers its own association with silence, and allows for our own connections through memory. I reflected on this and thought of my own references to silence: clouds and trees captured perfectly in Paul Caponigro's photograph in San Sebastian, New Mexico. (Fig. 23)

⁴⁷ Style of An Gyeon (Korean), Period of Joseon dynasty, 1392-1919.

Landscapes do not have to have direct references from objects to evoke silence. Minimalist and abstract paintings bring to mind the silence of spare or winter landscapes. Interestingly, the example offered here of Simon Fairless' *Silent Landscape* (Fig. 28) uses the color white which Kandinsky felt expressed "a harmony of silence...pregnant with possibilities" (Smithgall 2011, 33). (Fig. 24) The color of silence may depend on the experience of the person. While Kandinsky cites black and white as his silent colors, Picasso chose blue to reflect his more silent period of painting.

Thus far, I have used country landscapes as models for silence. However, urban landscapes can also bring forth this sensation, using the same attributes described by Soyoung Lee: still objects, emptiness, lack of movement, light. As presented earlier in Bruce Cratsley's photograph of *Belgian Block Manhole*, shadow and light created silence in an urban setting in New York City. In her tribute to Edward Hopper, Gail Levin cites how a young film critic, Michel Boujut, saw a photo of Hopper's *House by the Railroad* (1925) and described how "the power of this picture was immediately mythic for him, especially its images of 'silence,' 'waiting,' and 'solitude'" (Levin 2000, 13). In this painting, a house stands alone and lonely. There is no life surrounding it, just the late afternoon diffused light. The railroad tracks in front of the house may mean the end of an era for this house sitting right beside them. Isolation, lack of movement, and emptiness are as prevalent in urban life as in remote wilderness areas.

This chapter has highlighted the complexity of the viewer's relationship with visual art and the perception of silence from the environment. Wim van der Beek

curated an exhibit of works by 15 artists addressing *Sounds of Silence*.⁴⁸ As he collected the art for this exhibit, he observed the many ways silence was portrayed in his exhibition comments:

Sounds of Silence reveals curious frictions between the sensation of sound and silence. For instance, a painting of a train thundering past, or of an explosion witnessed from a great distance can invoke an unexpected hush.

The sensation of overwhelming silence in nature is sometimes coupled with (natural) noises. The idyll of a waterfall is accompanied by the experience of water splattering incessantly, while the silence in a seemingly quiet environment can suddenly be brutally disrupted by a low-passing Boeing 737 or by loud tourists not featured in a painting.

Various experiences of silence emerge on different levels. There is the silence of an empty interior in which a silent family sits at the table, like Vincent van Gogh's potato eaters did at one time...

Sounds of Silence encourages visitors to forget and let go of the commotion of everyday life for a while. This exhibition is not only interesting to lovers of modern visual art but to everyone looking for a slower pace of life and inner peace. *Sounds of Silence* makes the sensation of deafening silence visible and audible in a unique way. (van der Beek 2014)

Every person will "see" silence differently. Atmosphere, objects, landscape, light, color, and the person's own perception of silence—contemplative, peaceful, mysterious, unnerving, frightening—affect the emotional response of each viewer.

What I have not addressed in this chapter is the silent space one needs to experience "silent art." It is difficult to "see" silence in a noisy, crowded, jostling gallery. These conditions block the viewers' ability to spend time observing; the noise distracts

⁴⁸ CODA ApeldoornMuseumArchief2014Sounds of Silence Sounds of Silence (EN)

from their ability to concentrate; and the outside world interjects its pace, frenzy, and demanding attentions on the viewer. Hearing silence is a prerequisite for seeing silence in art. How can this be addressed in a museum setting responding to outside marketing forces? The next chapter will present a model experience of a silent space I have designed that could be installed as a permanent exhibition in a museum allowing visitors to have an opportunity for silent observation and to develop an understanding of their own personal complex connection to art.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ART IN A SILENT SPACE

The previous chapters describe the importance of silence for observation, reflection, emotional connection, wonder, and the creation of art. The opportunities for these experiences, however, are disappearing from museums as the desire for conversation, interaction, and social media connections continues to grow. While some curators may wish for silent opportunities, museum administrators must address the social and financial demands that make their institutions' survival feasible. Society is losing the opportunity and ability to appreciate silence. Many people feel more comfortable in a noisy environment; and museums are responding to this cultural preference.

The value of silence may not be measurable in terms required for grants and contributions. This is a topic that begs for research, but will require a silent environment available to measure the outcome. The previous chapters, however, have demonstrated that silence can play an important role in supporting the main mission of museums: to develop an appreciation and understanding of art. Love of art grows from a deep, emotional, and personal identification with art. Education and information expands the formal understanding of art, but does not allow the initial surprise and inner wonder of art that can happen prior to understanding it. How, then, can museums

provide this opportunity in a way that is cost effective and measurable for the museum, and meaningful for visitors?

To capture the experience of silence and art requires a silent museum space. Using the theories presented in the previous chapters, I developed a concept for the installation of a silent space in a museum setting that is affordable for the museum, and inviting to the visitor. Unlike the environmental exhibitions of Wheeler and Rothko, this is neither an anechoic chamber nor a chapel. It is a simple, quiet room for looking at one piece of art without distraction. The focus is on a work of art that inspires wonder by its beauty. It is a pure aesthetic experience without the trappings of information, and the distractions of a crowd of visitors. This quiet exhibit provides a singular experience focused on art and its personal connection with the viewer.

To develop this model, I have drawn from the concepts presented throughout this paper. These include:

- a. The value of a silent space for reflection and concentration
- b. The value of creating a transition for visitors to separate from outside distractions and develop a predisposition for viewing art
- c. The value of extending observation time to allow for growth of personal perspective and attention to detail
- d. The value of observing one piece of art work alone in silence to create an experience of wonder
- e. The value of developing the curiosity created during the experience of wonder by providing follow-up educational materials on the artwork

- f. The value of discussion and interaction with other viewers after a meaningful and personal art experience

These theories support for my proposal for a silent space in museums. It would provide a unique opportunity for the museum visitor to connect with art emotionally, and observe one work of art more intently, without distractions from other visitors and the outside framework provided by labels, audiotapes, and interactive options. This space allows time for the visitor to experience of wonder, reflection, and personal meaning-making connecting the visitors' own experiences to the art being observed. In the following sections, I highlight each theory and follow it with its application to the silent space design.

Theory A: A quiet space is essential for personal reflection, close observation, emotional connection and creativity (Dawson 2017).

There are different kinds of quiet spaces. People find quiet in nature; in spaces without artificial noise from radios, telephones, televisions or traffic; and while listening to contemplative music. There is the inner silence of meditation, and the outer silence in a silent environment. Research demonstrates that focused attention and deep emotional and thoughtful connections are significantly strengthened by time in silence. This theory can be applied to the observation of art, where the initial emotional connection with and wonder of art needs silence to allow this experience to take place.

A few museums have created silent rooms, but none expressly for viewing art. They have focused, instead, on the experience of silence itself. The experience of silence

has become an art form. Perhaps this fulfills Max Picard's concept of silence as a universe of its own. Silence is now packaged as an aesthetic art experience.

An example is the *Silent Room* exhibit by Marianne Heske at the Norwegian exhibit at Expo 2000 (Meyer 2015). The *Silent Room* was designed to include both sound and silence. A 15 meter waterfall at the entrance to the Silent Room created a noisy⁴⁹ portal to highlight the experience of entering a space of silence. It was meant as a startling transition from noise to quiet. The sound created the silence through its absence. Morgan Meyer describes the design concept: "silence is not only the absence of sound but also not spaceless nothingness...it is portrayed as both a natural and a cultural characteristic of Nordic countries" (Meyer 2015, 1). Many visitors felt the waterfall represented the natural landscape of Norway. In this respect, the exhibit presented two faces of nature: the thundering sounds and the peaceful silence.

The *Silent Room* was 15 x 15 x 15 meters with a video image of nature enlarged 2.25 million times to cover the whole room. This physical exhibit design embodied many of the points made earlier in this paper: namely, silence is not absence but presence; nature is often connected with the experience of silence; and a silent space allows people to individually interpret their art experience. The author of the *Silent Space* article observed: "I remember sitting down on the floor in a gigantic but totally empty room listening to strange sounds and, above all, 'listening' to silence. I felt refreshed and relaxed because there were so many things to see at Expo 2000, and this pavilion provided a welcome break" (Meyer, 2). Here, then, is another role for a quiet

⁴⁹ 80 – 90 decibels

space in a museum: it provides a break from the “action” of the rest of the museum that allows the visitor to rest, refresh, and reflect, thus renewing energy for a continued meaningful experience.

Implementation: Design of a Museum Silent Room

The silent room is small and intimate with enough space for visitors to walk around and observe the art work from different perspectives. It accommodates only a few visitors at a time. Lighting is focused on one piece of art in the room. The walls and ceiling colors are muted and allow the art to be the central focus of the room. Seating is placed at different angles to accommodate those who wish to sit. There is some acoustic treatment to reduce the noise level, but the room is not a soundproof chamber. The room is set away from museum activity centers where school groups, tour groups, or interactive settings encourage talking or interaction. There are no windows. Exterior lockers provide a secure place for visitors to put cell phones, cameras, backpacks and purses so there will not be distractions or disturbances from outside objects. No eating or drinking is allowed. There is no clock to measure passing time.

Theory B: Provide a way to create a predisposition in the visitor to separate from previous activities and enable a richer, deeper personal art experience (Knapp and Smith 2005, Meyer 2015, Ritchhart 2007).

Most visitors to a museum have little or no experience of silence. Their world is constantly filled with sound—from the environment and technology--and driven by a

fear of being disconnected or isolated. To overcome this disassociation from silence, the visitor needs information about what the silent environment will be like. Visitors to the Rothko Chapel, Guggenheim Museum, and the Norwegian *Silent Room* were more comfortable, positive, and engaged in an environment of silence if they knew what they were going to experience before they entered it. In addition, the visitor needs assurance that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to experience a silent room; only their individual experience is important. Suggestions are made to help the visitor identify ways to look at art and apply it to a personal experience. The entrance to the room is like the Norwegian waterfall portal in that it establishes a sense of preparation, transition and anticipation for the silent change about to happen. It is a mindful preparation through thoughtful consideration of silence.

Implementation: Design for the Silent Room Entrance

The disposition of the viewers plays an important role in their ability to adapt to a quiet space and understand their “role” in the room. To accomplish this, the visitor needs preparation. Before signing up for time in the Silent Room, visitors receive information about the experience of silence, and their role in preserving the silence to allow themselves and other visitors to benefit from it. They will “hear” their bodies and be aware of some sound, but as they become more focused on looking at the art, these distractions will slip away. The sound of silence may be disquieting, uncomfortable or restful. The more time they spend in the room, the deeper their experience will be.

Visitors' personal noise making items are stored in a locker. There is seating near the entrance for visitors to sit and consider their next experience. They are encouraged to take a clipboard, paper, and pencil to make notes on their observations, thoughts, and feelings as they observe the art in the silent room. Visitors will be given information to help them think of different ways to observe art to help support a mindful learning experience. This documentation process may help them focus on the art and encourage them to look more closely at the details and subtleties of the artwork. It will also provide a reference for further reflection or study about the art after they exit the room. Preparation for the room informs the visitor that this experience is only a first step in observing art at the museum, but an important way for them to find a connection with it from their own experiences. There is no right or wrong way to look at art—it is their personal thoughts about it that are important. The artwork will not be identified in advance. The “surprise” of the art will help visitors experience a sense of wonder and curiosity when they enter the room. More information about the art and the silent experience will be available after they exit the silent room.

Theories C and D: Focus attention on one piece of art for a longer time span (5 – 15 minutes) to help the visitor find more details in the art and experience a deeper, more personal connection with the art (Cuno 2004, Dawson 2003, Lachapelle, Douesnard and Keenlyside 2009, Ritchhart 2007, Roberts 2013).

Most Museums exhibit many pieces of art work in each gallery. While this provides a valuable opportunity to learn by comparing works of art, it also creates a distraction from deep concentration on any one work. Other visitors may influence what art another person will look at and how that person responds to the art. This intrudes on the interior processing of the viewer to find personal connections and meaning with the art from past experiences. Viewing one piece of art in silence for a longer period of time creates an opportunity to experience surprise, wonder, and emotional connection. This intense focus enables Csikszentmihalyi's concept of "flow" to take place, immersing the visitor in an experience that cannot be found in a noisy or complex display. The more time the visitor spends looking at one work of art, the more the visitor will see. This requires a slowing down of activity, and an ability to get beyond restlessness or boredom to begin to see more details. While the usual time spent looking at a work of art is 30 seconds, an adequate time for fully absorbing a work of art is 10 – 15 minutes.

Implementation: Design for the Silent Room Art Experience

One piece of art is exhibited in the silent room. It should stand alone in its beauty to invoke a sense of wonder. The art is for contemplation, reflection and personal connection—not a "statement" piece to promote controversy or discussion. The silent room is not a place for art that may provoke or disturb visitors, or invite interaction. Visitors unfamiliar with art and museums should not also be challenged here by political or controversial topical issues. The selection of the art offers the viewer

a way to connect with it from some personal experience. The art is not a sculptural or technologically “moving” piece that makes noise or changes constantly. It allows for sustained, sensitive, and detailed observation. The art work is changed periodically to continue to provide a unique experience for repeat visitors.

Access to the silent room is limited to 5 visitors at a time for 10 minutes. This allows 20 visitors an hour with 5 minute intervals for people to exit and enter. Timed tickets are offered in advance. A museum staff member manages the entrance/exit and monitors the exhibit room for safety.

Theory E: The experience of silent wonder while looking at a work of art is followed by curiosity and a desire to further find information about the art work on display (Buchanan 2007, Hepburn 1980).

Wonder is an emotional response of astonishment and surprise at seeing an unexpected, beautiful object. Wonder temporarily stops the viewer because the object does not connect with anything the viewer has previously experienced. This pausing is followed by curiosity about why the object is unusual. The state of wonder diminishes as the viewer starts observing the art more closely. Questions arise and the visitor will need more information to answer the questions. The visitor will document these impressions during this time on a clipboard provided at the entrance to the room.

Implementation: Documentation of the Silent Room Experience

Writing in a journal often helps a person document personal experiences and observations and remember them for later reflection and analysis. It is a silent, personal activity that also helps retain focus on an activity. Each visitor to the Silent Room will be given a clipboard and paper to document personal observations and feelings during this art experience. These thoughts can then be used after the visit to assist discussion, prompt questions, and help the viewer find additional information on the art object.

Theory F: Meaning-making is further developed through discussion with others and access to information on the object, artist and historical relevance of the art.

(Buffington 2007, Falk & Dierking 2013, Jeffers 2003)

Current museum theory advocates the use of discussion and interaction among museum visitors and exhibit materials to help frame a more global perception about a work of art. One person's understanding can be augmented by another's viewpoint. The different experiences of each viewer will build a wider interpretation of the interpretation of the art, adding different cultural and social perceptions about the meaning of the art work.

Implementation: Post Visit Experience Design

The purpose of asking visitors to take notes during their visit to the silent room is to remind the visitor of thoughts or questions that arise during this time. As the visitors

exit, they may wish to find out what others thought, to engage in discussion, or look at additional information about the art.

The exit area invites the visitors to continue their discovery. Each visitor is asked to write or record their reactions to the silent room on a computer. This creates a log for all visitors to see what others thought about the art and silence, and an evaluation record for the museum. A seating area invites visitors to sit and share their experience with the others in their time group. A table is set up with additional reference materials, books, and a computer to research information about the art work and the artist. The museum staff reviews the comments to measure the effectiveness of the visitors' experience and to make any changes needed to improve it.

Evaluation

As I noted earlier, research on the visitors' experience in a museum is limited and sometimes contradictory. I could find no evaluation of visitors' experience in silence, probably because that has not been an area of interest for museum research. For this exhibit, each visitor will receive a short pre-visit questionnaire to measure the predisposition of the visitor before entering the quiet space. Did the visitor know about the silent space before coming to the museum? Why is the visitor interested in entering the silent space? Has the visitor previously had an interest in experiencing silence? What does the visitor expect to experience in this silent exhibit space?

As the visitor exits the silent space, the visitor will be asked to complete an additional questionnaire. Was the experience positive, difficult, negative? Did the silent

room change how the visitor looked at art? If so, what differences did the visitor notice? Does the visitor have questions about the silent experience, or about the art work on display? What recommendations would the visitor make to improve the experience? The visitor will be asked to share the observations made in the exhibit. These will then be compared with the documentation of other visitors to see what range of similarities and differences of perceptions occurred. This information can then be used to document the effect of a silent space on the visitors' perception of art. An example of a questionnaire is in Appendix C.

Summary

The design of this area is intended to incorporate the key benefits of viewing art in silence as discussed in this paper. It also addresses the concerns of those who feel the visitor must have information about art to understand it. The silent room does not inhibit this type of educational experience, but enhances it by adding an emotional and reflective learning component to the museum's array of opportunities to learn about art. The experience is optional. There is no coercion to visit the silent room.

Based on the response to the Guggenheim's Wheeler exhibit on silence, the desire to experience silence has great support from the public. There was a waiting list to get tickets; there have been considerable positive press reviews; and the exiting audiences are very positive about their experience. The room I propose here is different from the Wheeler exhibit. It focuses on art in silence, not silence as a state of being. While the Wheeler installation is an art experience, and some may consider the

acoustic forms as art, it is not perceived as a specific work of art. The extreme acoustic treatment brings the decibel level to 3—a level that cannot be reached without considerable acoustic engineering and expense. It is a semi-anechoic chamber and goes beyond the level of silence that can be experienced without this type of technological intervention. The silent room described here will have ambient sounds from outside the room, as well as from the people in the exhibit (hopefully minimal). However, it will be considerably reduced in volume from the outside; there will be no visual stimulation other than the one work of art; and the focus of the visit is on art, not silence. The silence of this room will be the silence of the mind acknowledging a reduction of noise and aided by the concentration on the art.

CONCLUSION

This study was inspired by the wonder of silence. In today's world, speed and internet connections seem to drive every activity. Silence offers a break in time to ponder slowly, observe, and reflect. Prior to the industrial revolution, silence held a significant place in human life. After the hustle and bustle of the work day concluded, and the ambient sounds of nature retreated to sleep, silence held rural villages in its grasp. As the world became more urbanized, some spaces were kept as places of silence: churches, libraries, and museums. In the past thirty years, the pressures of social, cultural, and economic change have altered how these institutions serve and fulfill their missions. These are now places for communal activities and discussions. A natural landscape is often perceived as a space of silence, but it is removed from easy access for most urban dwellers.

Silence plays a significant role in the ability of humans to successfully survive. It is the basis of aesthetics and the ability to behold beauty. Both religious and secular reflection need silence to aid looking within and looking without. A silent time offers space to feel, to connect with inner emotions, and remember experiences. It allows the brain to form connections that inspire creativity and art. Silence helps us be human beings to our fullest capacity.

For this paper, I looked to establish a place where silence could be broadly available and not tied to a formal religious or educational system. Because of its global

accessibility, history of silence, and ability to tie an experience of silence into its mission, I chose to focus this study on the need for a space of silence in a museum as a way to experience art with detailed perception and emotional connection.

Silence in museums, however, presents a problem. A silent museum is often perceived as an elitist activity and not a positive experience for the general public. This separation was initially encouraged by those who set a value on art based on the viewer's ability to intellectually analyze its composition, as well as the museums' focus on the collection and preservation of art. The emotional connection and purely aesthetic value of observing an object of beauty was not seen as measurable, and therefore not important. The financial and social pressures of the 1980s led museums to seek ways to mitigate the elitist perception of their institutions and attract larger and more diverse populations. This resulted in a change of focus from the art to the visitor's experience of the art. At the same time, advances in technology provided new ways to support and foster learning through active participation in museum galleries. To implement this educational strategy, museums introduced audiotapes, films, interactive exhibitions, tours, discussions, and the use of technological devices to engage their visitors in meaning-making. This information is managed by the museum and provides a mediated and curated interpretation of art. The current museum educational model promotes discussion and interaction among visitors, exhibits, and computers. This has positively transformed the museum experience, attracted thousands of new visitors, and engaged people from all socioeconomic backgrounds. The museum is no longer perceived as a hidden retreat for the aesthetic elite. There are interactive art spaces for children; research rooms to explore more information on any work of art; and cafes, public events, and gift shops to allow some

visitors to merely brush against the ambience of art. Museums have become places for fun, education, social mingling, and viewing art. Museums now serve as vital community connectors, as well as art preservationists and educators. With all of these positive attributes, why add a space for silence?

In the transition to meet the demands for a different kind of museum experience, thought was not given to the implications of the loss of silence. Recently, however, the increased interest and participation in reflective meditation and its benefits for learning is promoting the positive value of silence. Current research demonstrates that reflective silence supports learning and deeper understanding. The brain uses silent time to connect and organize the myriad pieces of sensory information entering the brain. The resulting impulses support the creative process. Educators are incorporating silent reflection into their curricula and find that it helps students focus more attentively, and find more meaningful connections with their areas of study. This can result in deeper engagement in a topic, resulting in what the eminent psychologist, Csikszentmihalyi, describes as a state of “Flow.” While the training required for this kind of silence would be difficult to implement in a museum where people may not visit frequently and stay for only a short period of time, the adaptation of this reflective process through silent mindful learning provides a way to return silence to the museum setting.

Viewing art in silence expands the viewer’s ability to truly *see* art. A silent place removes the distractions now so prevalent in most museums: crowds, audiotapes, interactive games, computers, and cell phone photography. It allows a person to extend the time viewing art work without pressure to move on to the next piece. Silence allows us to connect more deeply with our emotions and memories and find personal

connections with a work of art. For some, this may become a spiritual and even transcendental experience. For others, it may be a revelation to survive 10 minutes of silence. It will, however, be a learning experience for all who choose to engage in it.

Looking at art is not *seeing* art. *Seeing* art requires time to observe closely. An extraordinary work of art brings wonder to the observer. It stops a person in a state of silence. Wonder is a magical experience that connects us with something larger than ourselves. It pulls us in to observe the myriad of beautiful details in a work of art. Sometimes these details are elusive. Only with a long, close look can we find them. This is *seeing* art. It is hard to do this in a noisy, moving environment. Stopping in wonder in a silent place opens a door to the soul. Looking within ourselves, we can find a deeper meaning and connection with art. We can take time to observe and ponder. We can be alone with art.

Not only is the silent environment a special way to observe art, it also allows for an emotional connection with silence conveyed through the intentions of the artist, and the memories of the viewer. Many artists work in silence, incorporate a sense of silence in their work, and learn their technique through thousands of hours spent experimenting with their silent media. Some visitors “see” the artist’s silence in the art work; other visitors “see” the silence through their memories of silence that connect with the object they are viewing. It is an ongoing process: the artist may respond to the viewers’ perceptions, and the viewers respond to the artists’ inspiration.

Sometimes the art form lends itself to spiritual silence and contemplation. Russian icons, in particular, may arouse a deep spiritual experience for the viewer. Art may represent deities of all spiritual practices, calling forth a religious fervor, as with

statues of Buddha, Shiva, Jesus or saints. These symbols provide a connection through art to spiritual beliefs.

Some museums have designed silent environments to experience silence as art, such as Wheelers' *PSAD Synthetic Desert III* at the Guggenheim Museum, the Rothko Chapel in Texas, and the *Silent Room* at Expo 2000. My proposal for a silent room, however, is a place to focus solely on one piece of art, not the experience of the environment. The silent environment allows greater detail in perception, and allows a sense of wonder to occur while observing art.

The visitors' experience in the silent room is set up to help the visitor develop a predisposition to viewing art. By preparing the visitor, a separation is created between the noisiness of the outside and the museum galleries that will help the viewer focus on art. The experience in the room includes personal documentation as a way to retain focus and remember the details. After the visit, opportunities are provided to gradually "re-enter" the visitor into the museum. There is a place for discussion with the other silent room visitors, information on the art work, and a list of other visitors' impressions. The visitor is then encouraged to return another time to observe the art again in the framework of this new information.

A visitor who experiences a silent room may find it is a life-changing experience. For many, it may be the first time they are without distractions, connections, and other people. They may experience a transition from the fast paced world to a slower time where they find something new not only about art, but about themselves. They may be moved profoundly by the wonder of art.

An important component of the exhibit is the collection of informed responses from the visitors. Unfortunately, there is little research on the impact of silence on the visitor in a museum. In addition, studies are so varied that there is no agreement on what exactly the visitor is learning during a museum visit. Is it just entertainment for a weekend afternoon, or a time of wonder and learning about art? Admittedly, the audiences are diverse and have many different reasons for visiting. The presence of art, however, must affect the visitor. Both interactive programming and silent observation can offer significant opportunities for analyzing the ways in which art results in learning and aesthetic appreciation. More study is needed to find out how this happens and what is learned.

A silent space to observe art is a gift that a museum can provide its visitors. This is not to say the entire museum should return to total silence. One silent place, however, can allow a different way of seeing and learning to take place. People have many different ways of learning; silence offers learning from introspection and deep emotional connection. I hope this study will be implemented and tested in a museum to examine the effects of silence on the observation of art. It may inspire a new perspective on the value of the aesthetic perception of art in a technological world.

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APPENDIX A
PSAD SYNTHETIC DESERT III EXPERIENCE

Stream of Thought While Attending Exhibit Alone for 30 Minutes

Lydia Kowalski

.startled at the silence and starkness of the room
.I try not to make noise, and hope my stomach doesn't growl
.no place to sit...stand, sit on floor, lay down? Try them all.
.utter calm
.light shadows become very distinct
.pyramids become dunes in the Sahara desert
.sense of vast space
.feels like evening
.there are different dimensions depending on the perspective 1–2-3 dimensions
.shadows create hollows
.grey void > space > quiet
.laying down...the sides of the room become a forest
.shapes are icicles, stalactites
.accordion
.industrial
.corrugated
.absence
.no life

.crystals/ice
.semi-transparent
.arrows
.weapons
.fear
.beauty of distance
.sharp points
.giant pencils
.the world is removed
.suddenly aware of breath
.what is beyond? Water...infinite
.memories of the ancient city of Fez
.forest at twilight...dark
.world is removed...alien
.no birds
.I hear a distant wind
.sound coursing over the sand dunes in the Sahara Desert
.magic...enchanted
.waiting or not waiting
.mind altering
.where are the rocks...Idyllwild
.pyramids appear in straight rows, angles, groups
.is the light changing?
.I am filled with thoughts, not emptiness
.curiosity
.the time went by too quickly

APPENDIX B

Fig1: (Novgorod?) Russian, (late 15th c.), *Christ in Glory*, tempera on wood, 42 1/8 x 30 7/8 in. (107X78.4 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 2: Kazimir Malevich, *Supremacist Composition: White on White* 1918, Oil on canvas, 31 1/4 x 31 1/4," Museum of Modern Art

Fig 3: Rothko Chapel, Houston, Texas. Photo by Chad Kleitsch, 2009.jpg from Rothko Chapel (Rothko Chapel)

Fig 4: Doug Wheeler, *PSAD Synthetic Desert III*, 2017, The Guggenheim Museum, NYC.

Fig. 6: Bruce Cratsley, 1990, *Belgian Blocked Manhole, West 17th Street*, Gelatin Silver Print, 150x150 cm. Courtesy of the Estate of Bruce Cratsley

Fig. 7: Bruce Cratsley, *Large Shadow, 6th Avenue, New York*, 1986, Gelatin silver print, 10x30 in. Courtesy of the Estate of Bruce Cratsley

Fig 8: Caspar David Friedrich, *Monk by the Sea*, 1810, Oil on canvas, 3/7" x 5'8", Alte Nationalgalerie, National Museums in Berlin.

Fig. 9: Emil Nolde, *Light Be*, 1901, Oil on canvas. 1024 x 782 cm., Emil Nolde Museum.

Fig. 10: John Cage, *River Rocks and Smoke, #11*, 1990, Watercolor on Waterford Cold press, 260 lb. paper prepared with fire and smoke, 26 ½ x 39 ½ in. The Menil Collection, TX.

Fig. 11: Otto Modersohn, *Sommerlicher Moorgraben*, 981x698 cm, Otto Modersohn Museum

Fig. 12: Jan van der Merwe, *Wag*, 2000, Rusted tin and found objects, Art.co.za.

Fig.13 : Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio, *Still Life with Fruit on a Stone Ledge*, 1605, Oil on canvas, 34.3 x 50.3," Villa Borghese, Rome.

Fig. 13: Norman Lundin, *Like Playing Chess*, 2012, oil on canvas, 270 cm x 225 cm. NormanLundin.com.

Fig. 14 : Robert Turner *Covered Jar*, 1964, Glazed stoneware, 12 x 10 $\frac{3}{4}$," Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Fig.15 : Robert Turner, *lfe*, 1997-1999 White stoneware glaze, 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 8," Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Fig.16 : Claudi Casanovas *Twenty Blocks*
500x308 cm. formerly Galerie Besson; current address unknown.

Fig. 17: Mark Rothko: *Four Darks in Red*,
1958, Oil on canvas, 101 13/16 x 116 3/8,"
Whitney Museum.

Fig. 18: Claude Monet, *Les Nymphéas (The Water-Lilies)*, 1919, 39 3/4 x 78 3/4," Metropolitan Museum
Of Art.

Fig. 19: Claude Monet, *Vétheuil dans le Brouillard* (*Vétheuil in the Mist*), 1894, 1226 x 1056 cm, The Musée Marmottan.

Fig.20 : René Magritte, *The Listening Room* 1952, 1'6" x 1'9," Oil on canvas, The Menil Collection

Fig. 21: Janet Fish, *Cracked Eggs and Milk* 2005, watercolor, 500x362 cm., D.C. Moore Gallery, NY.

Fig. 22: Simon Heijdens, *The Silent Room*, 2016, on line photo, 600x734 cm. Simonheijdens.com.

Fig. 23: Paul Caponigro, *Cloud and Tree*, San Sebastian 1980, Gelatin Silver Print, 480x346 cm, Birmingham Museum of Art.

Fig. 24: Simon Fairless, *Silent Landscape*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 20 x 20 in., Simons Gallery.

APPENDIX C
SILENCE ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Pre-Visit:

1. How often do you experience silence?
Daily_____ Weekly_____ Monthly_____ Seldom_____ Never_____
2. If you experience silence, for how long?
A few minutes_____ One half hour_____ One hour_____ Many hours_____
3. How do you feel when you experience silence?
4. What do you do during a silent time?

Post-Visit:

1. Describe the feelings you experienced in the silent art room.
2. Did the silent room change your experience of art from you typical Experience? If so, please describe it.
3. Did the silence make a difference in how you viewed the art work in the silent room from the other galleries? If so, how?
4. What would you change about the silent room?
5. Did you discuss your visit with other participants? If so, was this helpful and how?
6. Would you like to participate in a silent art experience again? Please explain your response.
Yes_____ No_____ Not sure_____
7. What will you do after this exhibit?

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Vol. 2, No. 2, 2013

NATIONAL MEETING PRESENTATIONS

American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta
American Association of Museums (AAM)
American Association of Zoological Parks and Gardens (AAZPG)

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

Longwood Graduate Seminars
Princeton University Graduate Student Symposium