

Observant vs Immersive

In this exercise we look at the same artwork twice, from two different perspectives, to explore the differences in how we feel and what we experience depending on where we're standing. This offers insight into ourselves and upon life in general.

Life is full of moments where we observe and other moments to participate in, whilst our personalities might mean we prefer one over the other. Sometimes, this can be a great asset, at other times we might feel frustrated by being too caught up in one. Too much immersion can make life feel as if it is moving too fast, as if we are lacking space or unable to think clearly. Too much observation can make us feel disconnected, lacking feeling or as if we are missing out.

This exercise is useful in when looking to switch perspective and give us an indication of our current preferred stance; it can help us to know when to take a step back and when to be hands on. It is also useful for people who are curious about their preferences for viewing art and in noticing new things within that art, as well as within themselves.

- Choose an artwork of fairly good size, ideally a painting, though if you are limited in what's available this could be on a screen, in a book and can even theoretically work with the view from a window!
- Position yourself close-up, directly in front of your chosen piece (or window frame!) so that your entire vision is filled by it.
- Take a comfortable, stable stance, with a relaxed body.
- Close your eyes. Take three slow, full breaths in and out, through the nose.
- Open your eyes and look into the painting, giving the eyes time to adjust to the colours and light.

- Stand for a few minutes, running your eyes across the painting and allowing anything which comes into mind to take hold. It could be feelings, thoughts; it could be senses, the temperature, smells, conditions of what is in the painting. It could be the brush strokes themselves. Trying to work towards the feeling that you are standing in the painting, surrounded by the painting, a part of the scene or talking with the person depicted in it.
- Close your eyes. Take a breath in through the nose and out through the mouth.
- Open the eyes, taking a step back to make any mental notes of responses within yourself.

Was it strange, uncomfortable? Was it immersive, stimulating?

- Now, position yourself further away, in front of your chosen piece so that it fills the centre of your vision, but that you can also see the edges and a good amount of the surrounding space next to it.
- Close your eyes. Take three slow, full breaths in and out, through the nose.
- Open your eyes and look into the painting, giving the eyes time to adjust to the colours and light, and the distance.
- Keep your focus on the painting itself, rather than the surrounding space.

What looks different from this angle? Can you see anything you didn't before? Do you feel a different connection to the art? What other changes do you feel?

- Close your eyes. Take a breath in through the nose and out through the mouth.

Open the eyes, taking a step forward to make any mental notes of responses within yourself.

Was it distant, cold? Was it calm, easier to view? Did you feel more or less relaxed?

How did it compare previously? How do you feel after having experienced both perspectives?