

PAUSE AND REFLECT

A Guide to Slow Looking for
Introspection and Self-Awareness



**THE
CLARK**

Jean-Charles Cazin, *Mist on the River*, c. 1889. Oil on canvas, 1955.1026

PAUSE AND REFLECT

Can you remember the last time you *really* looked at something—for more than a passing glance? Maybe it was the view from your window or the face of someone you care about.

ART CAN ALSO INSPIRE US TO LOOK CLOSELY AND THOUGHTFULLY.

Spending an extended amount of time looking at and thinking about a single work of art is a practice called “Slow Looking.”

Slow Looking assumes that our individual experiences are a valid way of finding meaning in art and in our own lives.

Slow Looking can give us a break from the frenetic pace of our lives and can help counter the many deficit-focused messages (all the ways that we are not good enough) of the modern world.

This guide offers some questions and ideas to consider as you practice Slow Looking. Pick a few pages to guide you through fifteen minutes of focused looking, or dive deep into a work of art by using the whole guide. It’s up to you!

**PLEASE REMEMBER:
THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY
TO LOOK AT ART.**

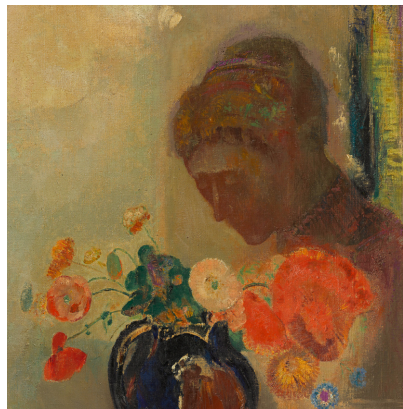
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

You can print out this guide and bring it into the galleries, or use it with any work of art, wherever you go! You can even look at a work of art online through the Clark's [digital collections](#). Zoom in on an image right in your browser, or select the “download” option to save a high-res TIFF file to your computer.

Here are a few works of art to consider for virtual exploration.



Anna Alma-Tadema, [The Garden Studio](#), 1886-87.
Pencil, watercolor and bodycolor.
Acquired by the Clark with support
from Katherine and Frank Martucci,
2020, 2020.3.



Odilon Redon, [Woman with a Vase of Flowers](#),
c. 1903. Oil on canvas.
Gift of Heinrich A. Medicus,
2014, 2014.7.



Yoshida Hiroshi, [Itoigawa Morning](#),
1929. Color woodblock print. Gift of
the Rodbell Family Collection, 2014,
2014.16.35.



George Inness, [Home at Montclair](#),
1892, Oil on canvas. Acquired by
Sterling and Francine Clark, 1955,
1955.10.



Félix Thiollier,
[Haystacks on the Plain of Forez](#),
[Sunset](#), c. 1900–1914.
Gelatin silver print. Acquired by the
Clark, 2007, 2007.15.9.



Joseph Mallord William Turner,
[Holy Island Cathedral](#), February 20,
1808, Etching and mezzotint printed
in brown inks. Acquired by the Clark
with funds provided by the Manton
Foundation, 2008, 2008.5.11.

GETTING READY

First, take a moment to acknowledge that you are about to pause your regular activities to focus on and care for yourself: something we all need from time to time.

Many people go about their days paying attention to the world around them, taking care of business, and not really thinking about their own needs at all.

The purpose of *Pause and Reflect* is to engage with art as a way to attend to ourselves.

In the Education Department at the Clark, we define “art” as:

**THE REFLECTION OR EXPRESSION OF
HUMAN IMAGINATION,
EXPERIENCE, AND VALUES.**

So, engaging with art is also engaging with humanity—the artist’s, our own, each other’s, and in general—and can remind of us the value of humanity in all of us.

Slow Looking invites us to slow down, focus on ourselves, and realize and celebrate the humanity present in our day-to-day lives.

START LOOKING

Sit down in front of the artwork you'll be spending time with.

Notice your surroundings. Try to make yourself as comfortable as possible, whether you are in the galleries or looking at the image on a computer screen.

Spend a few minutes just looking quietly at the artwork.

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You might find your mind wandering as you look. That's okay! If you feel yourself getting distracted, gently acknowledge those distracting thoughts and try to bring your focus back to the artwork in front of you.

Look from left to right, and from right to left.

Look from top to bottom, and from bottom to top.

**WHAT DO YOU SEE IMMEDIATELY?
WHAT TAKES A LITTLE LONGER
TO TUNE INTO?**

FIRST REACTIONS

Do you have a strong response to the artwork?

DO YOU LIKE IT OR NOT?

What are some of the formal qualities of the artwork that caught your eye?

What did you notice about the subject matter?

What about the composition (how elements are arranged in the picture)?

Is there any personal resonance for you? In other words, is there anything in this artwork that you relate to in particular?

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In general, do you tend to be aware of your reactions to situations when you experience them in the moment?

Or is it typically after the fact, with hindsight, that you understand your own response?

THE STORY

What is the artwork about?

Does it tell a clear story?

If so, what is the storyline or sequence of activity in the story?

Does the image inspire you to imagine new stories? If so, what are they?

How does it make you think of your own life—your own story?

Where does this painting bring you in your imagination or your own mind?

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Do you prefer a story or situation that has a clear message, parameters, or even instructions?

Or do you tend to be more comfortable in situations with greater subtlety, nuance, and freedom for interpretation?

Does it depend on the type of situation?

THE FORM

Think about the physical qualities of the artwork. If you are with it in the gallery, consider its size. If you're viewing an image online, look for the "Dimensions" section to get a sense of how big or small it is.

How does the size of the artwork impact how approachable it seems to you?

What colors can you see? Are there a lot of different colors or is there a dominant color?

Do you like the color choices made by the artist?

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Are there certain colors or a particular color palette that you tend to gravitate towards?

What about colors that you don't like?

Notice the shapes and lines.

Are the shapes well defined or do the different elements of the picture seem to blend into each other?

Are the lines straight or curvy? Clear or blurry? Do the lines have a vertical orientation? Horizontal? What about diagonal?

HOW DO THE LINES DIRECT THE WAY YOU LOOK AT THE PICTURE?

THE STYLE

How has the artist applied the paint?

Can you see evidence of the paintbrush or other tools the artist may have used?

Is the paint smooth or textured?

Is the picture realistic? Could you see a similar scene in real life?

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Does this scene remind you of anything you've ever experienced before?

Is the picture active or calm?

Busy or still?

Are there a lot of objects and/or figures in the picture?

How do the different parts of the picture relate to each other?

**HOW DO THE ARTIST'S CHOICES
INFLUENCE YOUR SENSE OF THE
PICTURE?**

THE FOCUS

When you look at the picture, are there any areas that stand out?

WHAT MAKES THIS AREA OR THESE AREAS CAPTURE YOUR ATTENTION?

Take some time to focus on the different details in the artwork by either zooming in or getting closer.

Then step back again and look at the entire artwork.

Once you have studied the details, do you see the whole picture differently?

Does the whole picture help you to understand the details?

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In what ways are you aware of the relationship
between parts and the whole
in your own life?

THE ESSENCE

After you've spent focused time looking at and thinking about a work of art, take a few moments to reflect on your experience.

Have your feelings or opinions changed since you first encountered it?

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE ARTWORK FOR YOU?

Do you think it is the same meaning intended by the artist?

The same meaning that another viewer would have?

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Does the meaning you find in the artwork
say anything to you about yourself?

OTHER PERSPECTIVES

If you are in the galleries with your artwork, check it out from different angles.

**LOOK WHILE STANDING IN FRONT OF IT.
LOOK FROM THE RIGHT AND LEFT.
STAND CLOSE, OR FAR AWAY. TRY SITTING ON THE
FLOOR AND LOOKING UP.**

How does your position change your sense of the image?

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Ask another person to use this *Pause and Reflect* guide with the same work of art. After each of you has explored the artwork, have a conversation and see how your perspectives may differ.

**HOW DOES SEEING THROUGH THE LENS
OF ANOTHER'S EXPERIENCE HELP YOU SEE AND
UNDERSTAND IN NEW WAYS?**

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Depending on what's going on in your own life, you may experience a work of art very differently each time you engage with it. Certainly we encourage you to use *Pause and Reflect* with a number of different artworks. But we also invite you to spend time with the same work of art over and over again. See what changes. See what stays the same.

**DO YOU SEE MORE (OR PERHAPS LESS)
THE MORE YOU LOOK?**