BEING PRESENT FOR THE EMBRACE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MINDFULNESS IN AN ART MUSEUM

by

SAGE ALLEAN ROGERS KINCAID

(Under the Direction of Lynn Sanders-Bustle)

ABSTRACT

Using a phenomenological qualitative research design guided by the Reflective Lifeworld Research (RLR) approach developed by Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom (2008), this study investigated how participants experienced a mindfulness-based program at an art museum. Despite increasing numbers of programs like this and interest in museum visitor experiences, there is very little research that addresses this topic. The RLR approach determined the theoretical framework, as well as methodology for gathering, analyzing, and reporting data. RLR is guided, first and foremost, by an attitude of "sensitive openness" which requires a "purposeful leaving aside of expectations and assumptions so that the phenomenon and its meaning can show itself and, perhaps, surprise its researchers" (Dahlberg et al, 2008, p. 96).

Data for the study included 12 interviews with Morning Mindfulness (MM) participants who were invited to talk about their experience during semi-structured interviews, 38 anonymously written accounts submitted via an online form, and 16 observations which resulted in detailed fieldnotes, as well as my bridling journal. This data was then analyzed using a whole-parts-whole approach as described by Dahlberg et

al (2008) which was a process that happened in cycles moving from viewing the whole of data to viewing parts and back again. Analysis led to a rich description of the phenomenon and revealed the essential meaning structure of the phenomenon. This structure is described as “Being present *with* reveals opportunities for engagements that are illuminating, transformative, and connective” and is further elucidated by its three constituents: Finding respite in a special time and place, Embracing the experience, art, and people, and A moving discovery. Based on findings, this research study concludes that mindfulness offers a vital and profound way of being present in an art museum because it supports opportunities for participants to deeply engage with museums, art and fellow humans in profound personal and interpersonal ways that can be understood as connective, illuminating, and transformative.

INDEX WORDS: art, museum, education, mindfulness, open-heartedness, Reflective Lifeworld Research, phenomenology, experiential, visitor experience, being with, embrace, connectedness, aesthetic experience, openness, embodiment

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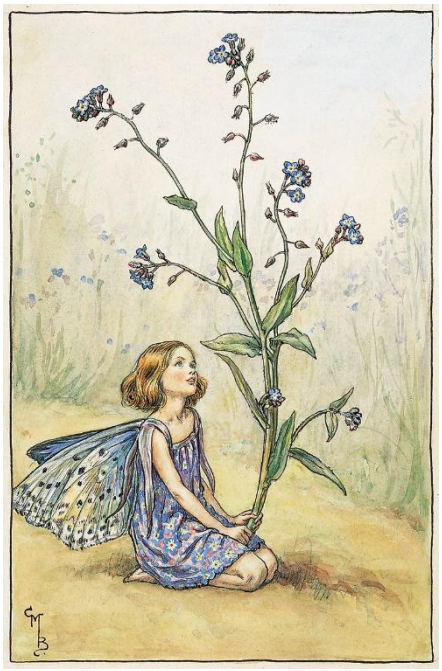
DEDICATION

To my mom and dad, Cheryl Teasley and David Rogers,

who taught me the power of unconditional love.

And, in loving memory of my aunt, Joyce Allean Castronova, and

my grandmama, Nell Mallory Rogers.



All things grow with love.

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And finally, so proud to be part of such a kind, hard-working, and creative family. I would not be who I am without you, and your love means everything to me. Elspeth, my sister and best friend, are we living the dream?!?! Yes, yes we are! And, my dearest Dave, this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart. Now, let’s go have some fun!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Wisdom does not inspect, but behold.

We must look a long time before we can see.

— Henry David Thoreau

The quote above is one that I have tacked to a corkboard above my desk. I found it years ago, when I began my search for information about mindfulness in art museums and became responsible for managing a mindfulness program in my role as an educator at the Georgia Museum of Art (GMOA). I knew that this Morning Mindfulness (MM) program was providing a very special kind of experience for participants, one that I wanted to know more about. The quote has served as a guide throughout the process of completing my dissertation, and I recently realized that the idea of "beholding" is a thread that weaves throughout my study and connects two concepts that are foundational to this dissertation: mindfulness and phenomenology.

The word "behold" means "to receive the impression of (anything) through the eyes, to see" and is based on the Old English word *bihaldan*, from *bi-* 'thoroughly' + *haldan* 'to hold' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023: online). These root words make sense to me because when I think of beholding, it does seem like a process of profoundly and deeply holding something near. Beholding seems like an effort motivated by curious wonder, different from inspecting something from afar–it entails holding something near and with attentive care in order to know it better. Thoreau's quote contrasts beholding to inspecting, which means "to look at (someone or something) closely, typically to assess

their condition or to discover any shortcomings" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023: online). When inspecting, perhaps an individual has an expectation of what they should find, or even an immutable sense of authority over the thing being examined. Perhaps wisdom does not inspect because, rather than critique, wisdom understands and provides insight, that is, "the capacity to gain an accurate and deeply intuitive understanding of a person or thing" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023: online). It is this kind of understanding that I sought throughout the process of learning about how visitors experience MM at GMOA.

Beholding describes an approach to understanding the world that is fitting for both mindfulness and phenomenology. Neither is interested in how things *should* be, but instead in how things show themselves to be through experience. For example, mindfulness is defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003), as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience" (p. 145). Mindfulness is characterized as a kind of open curiosity that allows for seeing things more as they are and less through the distorting lens of our own opinions and agendas. Patience is a key element for this unfolding of experience, as things present themselves in their own time.

Phenomenology also seeks to perceive the world as it really is through a process that prioritizes letting "something be seen as it shows itself" (van Manen, 2021, p. 487) through "goal-free perceiving." (Dahlberg et al, 2008, p.105). It is a process that Dahlberg et al (2008) write requires "a sort of attention where the researcher is mindfully and bodily present, here and now… immersed in the phenomenon" (2008, p. 105). This,

like mindfulness, takes time and an openness led by curiosity rather than by a critical expectation of what one should find.

It is with this attitude that I approached this research. Through a process of beholding the phenomenon of how participants experience Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art, I waited with attention for it to show itself "in its own pace and its own way" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 122). I embraced the world and the world embraced me back (Merleau-Ponty, 1995). I thoroughly held and was held by the phenomenon.

Background and context

In August 2016, I started working at the Georgia Museum of Art as the assistant curator of education. One of the public programs that I became responsible for was Morning Mindfulness. During this program participants are guided through mindfulness meditation in the museum's galleries by an experienced instructor. The instructor offers spoken reminders and invitations that help participants focus on the present moment by paying attention to their breathing, their body movements, or works of art. After witnessing this program in action, I was struck by how much participants had to say about their experience with mindfulness in the museum's galleries, that many participants were enthusiastically coming back time after time, and that after each practice there was a palpable afterglow that could be felt when people lingered to chat or expressed how much they appreciated the program. My interest in mindfulness programs in museums grew alongside my curiosity to learn more about participants' experiences with them. I started to wonder about how this might be different from mindfulness practices outside of art museums. I started asking questions: what was it that made participants feel like this was

a worthwhile activity? Was it the art or the museum having an impact on their experience? How were they connecting with or not connecting with the other participants? Did they enjoy engaging with works of art on their own, without extensive art historical information? Or did they feel uncomfortable spending so much time on their own, just looking? Were they actually spending as much time really engaging with the work of art as it seemed?

The setting for this program was the Georgia Museum of Art (GMOA). It was founded in 1945 and is located on the University of Georgia campus, and serves as the official art museum of the state of Georgia. Beginning with a donation of 100 American paintings by its first director, it is now a medium-sized museum with a permanent collection of over 17,000 objects and about 40 staff. The collection is still focused on American art, but also includes European and Asian art. In addition to a permanent collection, the museum also hosts special temporary exhibitions, and loans out works to other art museums. Like many museums in America, GMOA's education department and public program offerings have changed and expanded over the past 30 years. This is a result of the larger trend of museums moving from being object-centered to visitor-centered, and recognizing that visitors are not blank slates and works of art are not static objects with a singular meaning. This shift, in turn, has also led museums to embrace a more socially responsive role (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011; Falk & Dierking, 2013; Henry 2010; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Kletchka, 2018; Roberts, 1997; Weil, 2002; Wood and Latham, 2014).

A literature review in the fields of museum education and art education reveals that this shift in how art museum education departments understand their role was shaped

by John Dewey's development of experiential learning (1933), Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1972), Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), and Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1983). Museums followed these philosophical trends, as education theory shifted from a teacher-focused understanding of pedagogy as the transfer of knowledge to a passive learner to a student-centered framework that conceptualizes learners as active participants in the construction of knowledge (DiCindio, 2012; Garcia, 2012; Hein, 2008; Hubbard, 2015; Twiss et al., 2010; Xanthoudaki, 2015). The goal of transmitting a correct interpretation of a work of art, arrived at and delivered by the museum, was replaced by an effort to provide opportunities for a variety of audiences to make their own meanings from their encounters with works of art (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011; Falk & Dierking, 2013; Deeth, 2012; Mayo, 2013).

Current examples of museum programming at GMOA reflect the kind of programs offered in many museums throughout the United States. Some of these programs include public and scheduled tours that focus on a variety of topics and age groups, sustained group conversations about a particular work of art, film and lecture series, symposia, late night dance parties, art classes, yoga classes, and more recently, contemplative practices. From simply attracting new visitors to serving very specific audiences and needs, contemporary museum programming has become an important part of how museums serve their communities and remain relevant. Beyond getting visitors through the doors, museums are specifically tasked with offering opportunities to engage with the museum's collection in meaningful ways. Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson (2004) write that "museum researchers have become increasingly aware that it is not enough to attract the fleeting attention and interest of visitors, but that to be effective,

museums must provide opportunities for the kind of deep absorption that leads to learning" (p. 59).

Morning Mindfulness as a program makes sense within the scope of what contemporary museums offer their audiences as interest in mindfulness museum programming follows a trend of an exponential increase in interest in mindfulness and personal well-being in Western culture. This widespread interest in mindfulness can be attributed to a growing body of scientific evidence supporting both the physical and mental benefits of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), alongside an ever-increasing suite of contemporary issues. Mindfulness has been used in a variety of education settings to enhance student experience (Barbezat & Bush, 2017; Whitaker, 2013), by the military to improve shooting skills (The New York Times, online, 2019), for patient treatment to alleviate chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), and in mental health settings to address mental illness (Russell & Siegesmund, 2016). This is just a small snapshot of wide-range of applications mindfulness is being used for currently. Those interested in pursuing mindfulness have a wide variety of options on an individual level as well, including numerous apps, how-to books describing mindfulness practices, dedicated websites, and classes that teach various mindfulness approaches. In a society that rewards and encourages mindless speed (Honore, 2004), that runs on an attention economy in which everything is vying for a moment of our time (Davenport & Beck, 2001), and which is unsettled by politics and pandemics, perhaps mindfulness provides an anecdote to what ails us.

This trend towards mindfulness programs in U.S. museums was investigated by The Hemera Foundation in a 2016 report that identified at least 29 American art

institutions offering such programming. Many of these programs were initiated in the past several years, with only two existing before 2014 (Hemera Foundation, 2016). Currently, the number is surely much higher, as an informal review of public programs at museums across the United States revealed that at least several large art museums in each state offer mindfulness-based programming (September 2, 2023).

The mindfulness program at GMOA began in 2015 in collaboration with Dr. Jerry Gale, a professor in UGA's College of Family and Consumer Sciences, and has since grown to include more participants and additional instructors, and has also received state and national attention. In 2017, Morning Mindfulness won the Georgia Association of Museums and Galleries (GAMG) Education Program Award and received a grant from the Hemera Foundation for the 2017-2018 fiscal year. The Hemera Foundation provides funds to programs and research that focus on the intersection of contemplative practices and the arts. The museum was one of 13 institutions nationwide that received a grant from the Hemera Foundation with the aim of providing financial support for public programs that incorporate contemplative practices into their educational programming.

A review of literature about and related to mindfulness in art museums reveals that previous research has addressed the topic of sustained engagement with a work of art (Armstrong, 2000; Burnham, 1994; Perkins, 1994; Williams, 1984; Holmes, 2015; Kaplan, 2017; Krug, 2014; Lachapelle et al., 2009; Smith & Smith, 2001; Teachout, 2017). Scholars have also explored viewing practices based on mindfulness meditation (Gradle, 2011; Harrison & Clark, 2016; Yang, 2016; Zeigler, 2014). Finally, outside of an anecdotal testimony (Tobin, 2017), newspaper articles that simply report the existence of these programs (Earhart, 2011; Holmes, 2015) and the unpublished Hemera Report

from 2017, little empirical research has explored what the experience is like for visitors who attend mindfulness meditation programs at art museums. In this context, this dissertation is a valuable addition to the field of museum visitor studies.

Statement of Purpose and Research Question

Considering the significant gap in the existing literature, museums' interest in visitor experiences, and the growing popularity of mindfulness meditation programs, this study explored how participants experience Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art by asking the research question *What is Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art like for participants?* and gathering the following data: researcher field notes, interviews conducted with participants in person, participants' written narratives, researcher bridling journal**.**

Research Approach

With an aim to listen to, and with care, draw nearer to an empathic understanding of human experience, qualitative research is the best method for investigating how people experience and make meaning from their own unique position (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In order to more deeply understand the experience of MM, considering the qualities of human experience within a specific time and space was necessary. The unique position in this case is the participant experience of MM at GMOA.

Specifically, this is a phenomenological qualitative research study guided by the principles of reflective lifeworld research (RLR) as outlined by Dahlberg et al. (2008, 2013, 2017, 2019, 2020). The most important feature of this approach is that the methodology is guided first and foremost by an attitude of openness and patience supported by the act of bridling. Bridling corresponds to the common practice of

bracketing in qualitative research, but instead of trying to remove one's biases from the research process entirely, biases are restrained and responded to sensitively and with open curiosity. RLR is an appropriate approach, as I am investigating how participants experience the phenomenon of Morning Mindfulness. Adopting and practicing an "aspiration for sensitive openness" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 96) is particularly appropriate for this study. To remain open, I must pay attention and behold the phenomenon under investigation with an awareness of how easily our subjectivity is both influenced and a source of influence.

Rationale and Significance

One responsibility that I enjoy immensely as an educator is facilitating connections between people and their world. When I was an art museum educator, I enjoyed connecting people and works of art. Relevant and impactful museum work helps reveal the connections in our world to the people around us, to the museum, to the artists who made the art in the museum, to the period in which that art was made, and to humanity–our own and that of others. The growing interest in mindfulness in museums reveals that these types of programs are relevant and impactful, yet a review of literature reveals that few studies have yet explored what these programs are like for participants. Considering the need for continued and better understanding of the visitor experience in order for museums to remain relevant and socially engaged, this exploration of what MM at GMOA is like for participants is necessary. It is my hope that a better understanding of how museum visitors experience MM will assist museums, educators, curators and researchers in developing more relevant and effective engagements with their

communities, and encourage beneficial experiences that promote positive growth both for museum visitors and the museums themselves.

Key Terms

The following terms as defined here are used throughout this dissertation.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is defined in this dissertation using the oft-cited and commonly accepted description as developed by Kabat-Zinn (1984/2013), who writes that mindfulness is "the awareness that arises by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (p. XXXV). He continues, "when we speak of mindfulness, it is important to keep in mind that we equally mean *heartfulness,"* which means that mindfulness encompasses an attitude of being present in such a way that one's whole being is aware of the moment. This awareness is different from thinking, in that it is a way of knowing that incorporates all of the ways humans can be "in relationship to whatever arises in our minds and hearts, our bodies and our lives" (p. XXXV).

Museum

This definition of a museum was approved on August 24, 2022 by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Extraordinary General Assembly after a participatory process that involved representatives from museums around the world, including the then-director of GMOA, William U. Eiland:

> A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and

> with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing. (https://icom.museum/en/)

ICOM has worked to define museums over the past 226 years, and the most current definition updates the previous definition that was developed and approved in 2007.

Participant

Generally speaking, in this dissertation the term *participant* refers to someone who is engaged in an activity, rather than a passive bystander. Participants are aware of their involvement in the sense they chose to have an experience; they differ from museum visitors because they engage in a scheduled museum program. Specifically, I use the term participant to describe anyone attending MM, and consider everyone who took part in the practice to be a participant of this study, because every participant of MM contributed to the overall experience and my understanding of the phenomenon.

Practice

The word practice has two meanings that apply to this dissertation. The first meaning uses the word as a noun and means the application or use of an idea or way of doing something. For example, a teacher has a teaching practice, or a lawyer has a law practice. When someone has a mindfulness practice, their practice is how they apply their knowledge of mindfulness techniques and their experience of mindfulness. The word can also function as a verb, and is defined as performing a skill or activity habitually or regularly in order to improve or at least maintain a skill level (to practice playing an instrument, or to practice lines for a play, for example).

Both of these meanings of the term practice are used throughout this dissertation. I use the term “practice” as a noun to describe MM as opposed to the more traditional

term “program,” which is often used by museums when referring to any kind of public programming. MM is a practice of mindfulness more so than it is a program. The second meaning of the word practice, something that is done to improve a skill or maintain it, also applies often to mindfulness. Practicing mindfulness is an opportunity for practicing the skill of paying attention heartfully and non-judgmentally when needed. The analogy of a body-builder is often used to illustrate this example. When someone works out they are building their physical muscles, getting stronger, and improving their fitness skills. When someone practices mindfulness, they are improving and strengthening their ability to focus.

Organization of This Dissertation

In this chapter, I began with an overview of the background and context for the study, and discussed my statement of purpose, research question, research approach, the significance of the research, and concluded with key terms. Chapter Two provides the rationale for a literature review in a phenomenological study, my personal statement, as well as the context for the study by reviewing literature about mindfulness in the United States, the history and development of the museum, and the factors that shape museum visitor experience. I also include in this chapter my theoretical framework as shaped by the guiding philosophies of Reflective Lifeworld Research, including the important concepts of inseparability, intersubjectivity, and the lived body.

In Chapter Three, I describe my methodology, which is shaped by the qualitative phenomenological approach of Reflective Lifeworld Research. This chapter includes the guiding principles of phenomenology and RLR, along with my study design. This

includes sections that address sampling procedures, data collection and analysis methods, and also discusses the limitations of my approach.

The next two chapters focus on my findings from this study. In Chapter Four, rich descriptions of three different MM practices provide an immersive experience of the phenomenon as well as presentation of the nuanced differences that made each practice unique. These findings are explored further in Chapter Five, which presents the essential meaning structure of the phenomenon and the three constituents that make up this structure, identified as: finding respite in a special time and place; embracing the experience, people, and art; and a moving discovery.

Chapter Six concludes the dissertation with a discussion of findings, as well as the implications of these and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Art museums in the United States are consistently tasked to be relevant to their visitors. The fact that visitors, not the museum, choose what is relevant to them means that museums are interested in learning about the visitor's experience (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Simon, 2010, 2016). This study closes the gap in research on mindfulness programs in museums by asking the question: what is Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art like for participants? As mindfulness programming in museums continues to increase, this is an important area for both museum visitor studies and mindfulness research. In order to get closer to the lived experiences of participants, I conducted a phenomenological study based on the reflective lifeworld approach (Dahlberg et al., 2018). This chapter situates my study within the relevant literature related to the phenomenon. First, I present the function and purpose of a literature review in a phenomenological study, along with my subjectivities statement. Next, I explore the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology that guided this study. Finally, two primary bodies of literature are reviewed: 1) a definition and exploration of mindfulness as it relates to the museum and/or art in the United States, and 2) a definition and exploration of art museums and their visitors.

Function and Purpose of a Literature Review in a Phenomenological Study

A review of the related literature is essential to frame this study. It places it in context along with other studies with overlapping interests, and also ensures the study contributes new and original perspectives to the field (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The purpose and function of a literature review as it relates to phenomenological research and

to what extent it should review current empirical research related to the research topic has been discussed in literature (Fry, et al, 2017; Dahlberg, et al, 2008; Vagle, 2014). This section looks at what has been written about how literature reviews relate to phenomenological research, why a literature review is necessary for this research study, and how this review accommodates “specifically phenomenological concerns” (Fry et al., 2017, p. 3).

To Review or To Not Review

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) write that in phenomenological studies “the literature is reviewed primarily following data collection and data analysis so that the information in the literature does not preclude the researcher from be able to ‘bracket’ or suspend preconceptions" (p. 143). Further study of what has been written about literature reviews for phenomenological studies reveals a lack of consensus about when or to what extent the literature review should be conducted for phenomenological research (Cluett & Bluff, 2000/2006; Buckley, 1992; Dahlberg, et al, 2008; Dunne, 2011; Fry et al, 2017; Kumar, 1999/2014; Rees, 1997/2014; Vagle, 2014).

Those opposed to a literature review for a phenomenological study believe that they should be avoided so previous literature or research does not contaminate discovery (Dunne, 2011, Rees, 1997/2003), or influence or limit discovery when data is collected or analyzed (Dunne, 2011; Kumar, 1999/2014). As Vagle (2014) notes, the “concern is that existing literature would end up settling matters before the study was even conducted” (p. 72). This concern is based on a researcher’s ability to “bridle” or “bracket” their assumptions and understanding so that these preconceptions do not exert too strong of an influence and thereby prevent the researcher from being able to see the phenomenon for

what it actually is. Dahlberg et al (2008) note that to be open to the "thing itself" there must be a "purposeful leaving aside of expectations and assumptions so that the phenomenon and its meaning can show itself and, perhaps, surprise the researchers" (p. 96). This "leaving aside" is important, as in order to get to the thing itself, to be surprised by the phenomenon, the researcher has to be able to describe what they encounter based on what is actually there and not what they expected or wanted to find based on "pre-understandings," that is, anything pre-conceived about the phenomenon (p. 134).

Several factors, however, make it not only inconvenient to know as little as possible about a topic before gathering and analyzing data, but in some cases impossible (Fry et al, 2017; Wertz, 2011). The first factor is that in identifying a phenomenon to be studied, the researcher must first encounter it, which usually happens when the researcher "*finds themselves in* the experience" (Vagle, 2014, p. 21, emphasis in original). The research process and identification of the phenomenon begins with a state of "wonder" or "orientation" to the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990, p. 40), when the researcher encounters something that leads to a questioning of the meaning of life. This encounter is the starting point. The starting point, from my unique professional vantage, is already imbued with significant pre-understandings. These pre-understandings, rather than being dismissed, can be explored in a literature review, and as Dahlberg et al. (2008) note, this process makes a researcher's previous knowledge and pre-understandings more transparent and easier to bridle.

In addition to most researchers already knowing something about their chosen topic, most researchers are also expected to have already completed some pragmatic requirements before data gathering and analysis begins. The first of these is gaining

ethical approval when working with human subjects, which involves submitting a proposal that includes at least a brief literature review. In addition, doctoral students must also submit a research proposal that includes a literature review for approval by their committee before gathering and analyzing data. In light of these steps, omitting a literature review from one's dissertation before collecting and analyzing data that is at least equivalent in scope to previously conducted research would be disingenuous.

Finally, conducting a literature review before collecting and analyzing data is necessary in order to contribute responsibly to the field as an ethical researcher. Research that replicates another's previous work does not fill in an existing gap in our knowledge. Such a study would use resources and in some cases funding, as well as participant time, when in fact conducting such research would be unnecessary. A literature review helps the researcher identify a gap in the existing scholarship and avoid conducting research that is uninformed (Fry et al, 2017).

This section has detailed some of the reasons a literature review was needed for this phenomenological study. As noted above, there are some valid reasons to not conduct a literature review before data gathering and analysis begin. For this study, however, a literature review was not only required, but was in fact beneficial for me and my research. It allowed me to explore and more clearly see my own pre-understandings, which supported my efforts to adopt a "bridled" attitude as I analyzed and interpreted the data.

Pre-Understandings: Transparency and Bridling

As discussed above, it is important that pre-understandings not hinder openness to the phenomenon. I identified my research topic through a natural process, that of an

encounter with the phenomenon of mindfulness sparking wonder, what Max van Manen (2016) refers to as the "orientation" to the phenomenon. To orient towards the phenomenon means to turn towards it in an act of pursuing one's interest in it, but this interest was also directed by my subjective lived experience, and I turned towards the phenomenon because of my varied roles and specific interests. It is unrealistic, then, to expect that I would not have had previous knowledge and experience of the topic. For professional reasons, I have extensive knowledge of art museums and art museum education, as well as mindfulness programs in art museums. For personal reasons, I also have experience with mindfulness. However, this knowledge need not arrest or hasten my becoming phenomenological towards my research topic. As Dahlberg et al. (2008) note, "neither researchers nor anyone else can cut off one's pre-understanding, that little vexation that constantly has occupied philosophers as well as researchers, but it can be restrained by 'bridling' from having an uncontrolled effect on the understanding" (p. 128). The literature review is an effort to be as transparent as possible as a researcher and to disclose my pre-understandings, as well as my interests and agenda in pursuing this study.

My Subjectivities: Personal and Professional Connections

In this section, I describe my experiences and background as they relate to the research topic. This description serves as an overview of who I am in relation to what I am studying and helps to identify the subjectivities that might influence my research. It also helps "to convey this material to other scholars for their consideration of the study's credibility, authenticity, and overall quality of validity" (Preissle, 2008, p. 844). Through the process of writing this statement, I began "to try to see what frames [my] seeing - that

is, [my] connections/disconnections, assumptions of normality, bottom lines, and what shocks [me]" (Vagle, 2014, p. 133). I became what Fink (1995) calls the "phenomenological onlooker," further described by Dahlberg et al. as "both the one who looks as well as the subject who sees herself looking" (2008, p. 159). In this self-reflective and self-aware state, I investigated how I orient towards the phenomenon, which is one more move towards disrupting the natural attitude, the taken-for-granted-ness of how we understand the world and the way it is.

The first thing I remember taking for granted is that the world is full of wonder. I remember being outside. My dollhouse was made of soft green moss, small detailed acorn caps, and evenly placed twigs. I remember walking in the woods with my mom and how tenderly and carefully she pointed out the small wonders all around us: the thin, unfurling spiral of a new fern leaf, the small strange bug that appeared from a dimple in the sand when I stirred it with a stick while chanting "doodlebug, doodlebug," and the silent thrill as we waited for a heron to take flight and glide away out over the water.

My childhood also allowed me to take for granted that I had time for this wonder. When you go to school at home, the days are leisurely. Slow and long, full of time. I was homeschooled from third grade through ninth, and I think this fostered an interest in and understanding of experiential learning. In our community of homeschoolers, learning involved active engagement with the world. It took place in friends' houses, on field trips and various cultural excursions, with the cohesive theme of informal, free-choice learning, supported by adults who trusted in their children's innate curiosity and ability to learn by going into the world and doing. Things didn't always go as planned, of course, but the lesson of learning from all kinds of experiences did. These childhood experiences

led to my interest in informal learning and also my trust that people can be guided by their own sense of wonder and curiosity.

This trust in my own wonder and curiosity led me to the great adventure of moving to New York City. I was hungry for something that felt more authentic and useful than college at the time, so I followed friends who had a place waiting for me in Brooklyn. Finally, after waiting tables, I got an internship and eventually a job at a museum and exhibition design firm. I started as an unpaid graphic design intern, and was eventually hired as a project assistant, and I worked there for two years. I loved it, and I had never before considered that museums and art experiences were framed and presented by a small group of individuals. And being in New York City at the time presented an unmatched opportunity to explore art, museums, and galleries.

My experience at the design firm in Brooklyn, and my early experiences with experiential and informal learning, led to my interest in working in art museum education. This interest was finally achieved after I earned a Masters of Art in Cultural Studies at Brandeis University and moved back to Athens, where I eventually got the job of Associate Curator of Education at the Georgia Museum of Art. I worked there for seven years while conducting this research. While there, I managed family and community programs serving audiences ranging from toddlers to the elderly. As a museum educator, it was important to me to help create spaces that not only supported people making connections between the art and each other, but that also emphasized the importance of these connections. I was less interested in people leaving the museum having memorized art historical information than people having had an experience that helped them feel more comfortable in a museum. I wanted them to want to return. I still

value the archive of human expression that art museums hold in public trust, and firmly believe that everyone should feel like this archive is theirs and available to them.

In addition to my childhood relationship with education and the arts and my experience as an educator at an art museum, the final major influence on how I relate to my research topic is my personal experience with mindfulness. Since 2000, I have taken yoga classes on and off, and they usually include breathing exercises and focusing deliberate attention on the present moment. I had my first memorable experience with mindfulness during the summer of 2012 at the Penland School for Art and Crafts. Over a two-week period, I made porcelain wheel-thrown ceramics and practiced yoga every day. During the final phase of the yoga practice, *savasana* was practiced. Also called corpse pose, this closing exercise is about the art of relaxation, and it can be the hardest part of yoga for some. I had never before thought about how the practice of a physical pose and breathing exercises could purposely calm the mind and reduce stress.

My first sustained training and experience with mindfulness was about nine years ago. I was experiencing health related challenges and feeling like I finally had to figure out how to be okay with uncertainty and live in the present moment, without having to control or predict the future. After researching mindfulness online, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction seemed like an interesting option and I signed up for a class that was taught at a local hospital. It was an 8-week course that met every Monday from 6-8pm. Even though I was not the best student, and remember falling asleep when I listened to the guided mindfulness recordings, I still had a profound experience that altered how I understood mindfulness. It took the mystery out of the process for me. Before this class, mindfulness had always seemed like something that took mystical skills to practice. Like

it was an almost supernatural state that only the most disciplined gurus could access. After that class, however, the natural plainness and simplicity of connecting breath to body, and the body to this moment, was a revelation that led to moments of peace and clarity. These moments of feeling like my mind and body could finally take a break, that I could simply notice without having to judge or make decisions, were a true relief.

Currently, I do not have a regular mindfulness practice, but this encounter with the concepts that inform it certainly shaped my interest in MM. The experiences that I have shared here, and seeing people spending time in the art museum galleries coupled with mindfulness, led to my interest in finding out more about how participants experienced this program. When I heard participants talking about the connections they made with the art, artists, and each other, and observed how open they were with sharing their reflections with the group, I began to wonder about their experiences. These moments were special because people did not often share such personal observations in groups**.** This led me to begin to ask questions: How is this program able to foster feelings of trust in such a short amount of time? Why are participants connecting with the artists behind the works of art in ways that I had not seen before? What are participants experiencing that frees them from judging their own non-expert observations? How is it that participants are able to sit with works of art for extended periods when museum visitors usually only briefly pause at each work of art? I wanted to know more.

Theoretical Understandings: Concepts in Phenomenology

In this section, I present the theoretical understandings that guide this study. What follows is a theoretical framework that served to not only organize and focus the study, but also guided how the study was conducted (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The section

begins with my personal introduction and connection to phenomenology, followed by its history and foundational concepts. I will then present key phenomenological concepts foundational to reflective lifeworld research (RLR), including an attitude of openness, the lived subjective body, and inseparability. This section concludes with the methodological implications of this framework for this study.

My Introduction to and Connection with Phenomenology

When I was first introduced to qualitative research, I was surprised by its aim and ability to capture the whole of human experience. Before this exposure, I had assumed that all scientific research was conducted in sterile, lab like environments, disconnected from the myriad variables that make up the rich structure and texture of "real life." This Cartesian understanding of what science looks like and how it operates made it seem like parts of our lives, and by extension parts of the world, could be separated out into neat, easily labeled categories. The results, the conclusions of these sortings, seemed to me too detached and depersonalized to be of any interest. I was looking for a way to better understand the human experience. I was drawn to the arts, to comparative literature, to the sensual, expressive, feeling parts of our world.

This is why taking my first qualitative research class felt like coming home. Vagle (2014) writes about the first time he heard Max van Manen discuss phenomenology, and described his experience of what van Manen might call a "'phenomenological nod,' …- a time when one does not need to say 'I understand,' because one already knows one understands" (p. 11). This is not to suggest that I instantly understood the whole of qualitative research, but that it resonated with me in a way that I immediately felt drawn to. I appreciated the aims of bringing together what Descartes had rent apart with his

conception of the mind as separate from the body and from the world. I appreciated the approach of holistically attending to how people live in their natural settings, in their own place and time, and understanding experiences from others' perspectives and within their own situatedness. Making connections and understanding the interconnectedness of our world is something I have always been interested in, and being able to investigate the art of life is a place in which I like to dwell.

Enthused by the potential of qualitative research to more fully illuminate the museum visitor experience, and guided by my interest in understanding human experience from a position of empathy and care for individuals' lived perspectives, I was drawn to phenomenology. Van Manen (2001) writes:

> phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences…. [it] does not offer the possibility of effective theory with which we cannot explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world. (p. 9)

It is this increased direct contact with the world that interests me, as it is a quest guided by love and care. Van Manen (2001) summarizes why I am drawn to phenomenology:

> From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to know the world is profoundly to be in the world in a certain way, the act of researching - questioning - theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to become the world…In doing research we question the world's very secrets and

> intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which can bring the world as world into being for us and in us. Then research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being. To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love. We desire to truly know our loved one's very nature. And if our love is strong enough, we not only will learn much about life, we also will come face to face with its mystery. (pp. 5-6)

It is with this commitment to and promise of drawing closer to the world that I embraced phenomenology as an encounter, a way of living, and as a craft. As Vagle (2014) proposes, it is a process of "trying to be profoundly present" and slowing down "in order to open up" and "to dwell… amidst the harried pace we may keep" (p. 12).

Phenomenology: History and Foundational Concepts

Edmund Husserl is recognized as the founder of phenomenology (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Dahlberg et al., 2008; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 2000; Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 1990). The first part of his *Logical Investigations* (1970a), originally published in 1900-1901, introduced a challenge to the reigning Cartesian perspective that privileges the self as the center of the world (Solowski, 2000). Such a view entails that the researched world is built inside the researcher's head rather than being constructed by all things in relation to each other (Vagle, 2014). Husserl's concern with the resulting approach of positivism, the belief that natural sciences can provide and are indeed the only way of attaining truth, is that it severs "science from the everyday world; ultimately resulting in the dehumanization of society" (Dahlberg et al, 2008, p. 30). Then, rather than answering our most important questions, "questions of the meaning or meaningless

of the whole of this human existence" (Husserl, 1970b, p. 6), positivism can only address inquiries based on a disconnected process, and this results in mistaken beliefs.

Solowski (2000) writes, "the move made by phenomenology, then, is to show that the exact sciences are derivative upon the lived world and the things in it" (p. 148). This return of science to the everyday human world reasserts the subjectivity of the researcher and rejects the belief that an objective truth residing in the external world can be found via a research methodology based on mathematical science. Instead of approaching the research with a belief in realism (things existing within themselves) or idealism (things existing within a subject's conceptual world), phenomenology links these two approaches together and focuses on the relationship between the thing and the subject (Dahlberg et al, 2008). Phenomenology does not assume that a subject's experience of the phenomenon belongs to the individual in an idealized way, nor does the phenomenologist believe that the phenomenon exists outside of the lived experience. Vagle (2014) explains:

> the philosophical assumption is that the individual is being, becoming, and moving through the lifeworld in intersubjective relationships with others and with intentional relationships with other things. The phenomenologist, then, is not studying the individual but is studying how a particular phenomenon manifests and appears in the lifeworld. (p. 23)

It is with this understanding that phenomenology is interested in the immediacy and subjectivity of lived experience. The "whatness" of an experience is more meaningful than how abstracted numbers are related, as life is revealed and realized through

experience. Through the discovery of patterns of meaning, a "whatness," or the essential meanings of the phenomenon, can be revealed.

In order to attend to this "whatness," the nature of the phenomenon must be investigated qualitatively. Vagle (2014) notes, however, that "phenomenologists are not interested in trying to represent the qualitative properties of the tree (i.e. its shape, texture, colors). Rather, phenomenologists are interested in how one finds him- or herself in relation to the tree" (p. 21). To go "to the things themselves," a popular motto in phenomenological philosophy (Husserl 1970a), the researcher takes a certain position, informed by understandings about the world, in relation to the phenomenon. Two important concepts for phenomenology are explored further: the natural attitude and the lifeworld perspective.

Natural Attitude.

The natural attitude is the way that the world is experienced and understood. And the world is around us every day. In navigating the world through time and space, from waking up in the morning, relating to each person we meet throughout the day, to wrapping up our evening with dinner and a cup of Sleepytime tea, daily activities are usually approached with an unreflective attitude, a taken-for-grantedness that is naive to what is around us. This immersion in what surrounds us and what we do is a "good-enough approach in everyday life, but it is all too imprecise, weak and vague for scientific purpose" (Dahlberg et al, 2008, p. 34).

In allowing our living to go unnoticed or unexamined, through this "natural attitude" humans are capable of going about their everyday lives. If every decision, step, or action was cause for a critical and measured analysis, humans would never get

anything done in a practical sense. So, this approach allows us to move through our days more "naturally," without questioning or critically thinking about the things that are in fact closest to us. These things are only made visible when glitches occur in the taken-for-granted process. For example, on my way to work, when the road I usually take is closed off, I have to think about finding another way. I am literally halted in my mindless commute to the next thing in my day, in this case work, and made to consider what this path means to me on a regular drive, and what it now means to me as I figure out an alternative route. Dahlberg et al. (2008) give the example of a musician who plays through a score without noticing the activity, until they hit a wrong note and are wrenched from their reverie, forced to think critically about what they are playing and then analyze the process.

The Lifeworld Perspective.

The natural attitude results in an unexamined lived experience. When the lived experience becomes visible, when the "scrutiny of what is tacit" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 34) occurs, the lifeworld in which we are immersed becomes visible. It is this lifeworld that phenomenologists are concerned with, as the lifeworld is the world of experience, experience that is always primordial, pre-scientific, and pre-reflective. It is the lived world in which all are embedded and in which all science and research has its origins. The lifeworld is worthy of study, because as Gadamer notes, the lifeworld is "the whole in which we live as historical creatures (1995, p. 247). The lifeworld itself is tacit and thus often hidden. To become aware of this lived experience is to access that which is pre-scientific and pre-reflective, before it becomes knowledge. Merleau-Ponty (1995)

explains, “to return to the things themselves is to return to *that* world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge *always* speaks” (ixm, emphasis in original).

Reality then is there for us whether we are concerned with it or not, and it is always present, and our understanding of the lifeworld can be enriched by reflecting upon it. An examined life is fuller and richer for the attention. The process of reflection can for a time define the concrete world, but as Dahlberg et al. (2008) write, this defining “must always be open for critique and ready to be made anew” (p. 38).

One reason a definition will always need to be revised, and new understandings developed, is because the lifeworld is ever changing. It is not a static world that we live in. The ebb and flow of life is ever present, and change is the nature of life. Merleau-Ponty’s poetic understanding of the lifeworld as flesh speaks to this idea of the world as ever changing. Just as flesh is alive and growing, so too is this world in which we, as living parts of the lifeworld, are “enfleshed”. He writes that all thought is “caught up in the fabric of one sole being” (1968, p. 110). Dahlberg et al. beautifully capture his meaning when they write “that we are in one way or another connected with everything and everyone” (2008, p. 39). The result of this belonging to the same world is that we are always making the world, just as the world is making us, and this process is never static or complete.

Reflective Lifeworld Research: A Phenomenological Approach

Since Husserl (1907) introduced phenomenology, subsequent discussions by other phenomenologists have added to researchers’ overall understanding of phenomenology, resulting in a variety of approaches and a belief by some that “phenomenology is plural” (Vagle, 2014, p. 14). Dahlberg et al.’s (2008) RLR is the approach that most resonates

with me due to its insistence on openness, in which the researcher is tasked to sensitively dwell with the phenomenon being studied, and its turn from bracketing to bridling in order to support an open approach. The four phenomenological theories that follow are central to the philosophy of RLR and are included here because they were the most influential in guiding how I practiced my commitment to openness and dwelling with my phenomenon, as well as bridling. These four theories are: intentionality, the foundational nature of inseparability, knowing as embodied knowing, and finally, intersubjectivity.

Intentionality.

Often people intend to do something, meaning they plan to do it: "My intention is"….. to do a thing. Intentionality is not what is normally thought of when considering the word "intention." Intentionality instead refers to the connections–the relationship–between a subject and objects and the events around them. An intentional relationship is always present between us and the everyday world that we experience. This directed awareness towards any of the things in one's sphere of being is what makes up our experience, and experience is always of something and it is always meaningful. As Merleau-Ponty (1995) states, "consciousness is always consciousness of something" (p. 137), and to be conscious of something is to direct oneself towards it. This means that our lived experience of the everyday world is an experience of something that is encountered. For example, Dahlberg et al. (2008) explain, "the perception has its 'perceived,' the wish its 'wished for,' the perception has its 'perceived'" (p. 47). Intentionality is the basis for what we understand as the human experience, and these meaningful connections between people and the world are what phenomenologists are interested in studying, in beholding, in dwelling with in order to make these invisible threads visible.

However, it is important to note that these connections do not only include those things that are immediately visible or present. Things that are not immediately visible are nonetheless contributing to and influencing one's experiences and are called "appresentations" (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Appresentations can include people, things, and time. For example, the past and the future are part of present experience, but are not literally there in the present moment. The mental and emotional life of someone else is not visible, but it can still offer an opportunity to practice empathy and form an intentional relationship. Another example would be driving past a road with a neighborhood sign on the corner, and behind that sign is the neighborhood and the houses where people live, and even though these things are not immediately visible, they contribute to the meaning of the road with its sign on the corner. Thus, intentionality is central to phenomenology and how human experience can be understood.

Inseparability.

Inseparability is the idea that something cannot be taken apart and divided into unrelated parts. For RLR, inseparability is understood in relation to human experience. Human experience cannot be separated from the world as it is, Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020) write: "born from the world, directed to the world, and only understood with the world as the background" (p. 460). Experience is the result of a subject taking an intentional stance and encountering other subjects and objects that are already meaningful. One's experience is not created solely by these entities in an idealistic sense, nor is it the result of an objective reality in a realistic sense. The two, objects and subjects, co-constitute each other and as a result are not the same, but nor are they separate. They share a common ground where they are all part of this world, and one

cannot exist without the other. This means that we can never truly distance ourselves from the world, it is "already part of an experience" and we are "already part of the world" (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020, p. 460). The Buddhist concept of "emptiness" might help explain inseparability, as Nhat Hanh (1999) explains: the concept of emptiness means that all phenomena are empty of a separate, contained, independent meaning, and that their nature only arises in relation to the lifeworld.

Embodied Knowing.

Humans belong to the world and have access to this world through their bodies. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1922) understood experience as being embodied, meaning it is with a body that humans are in the world at all. People do not have a body, they *are* their body, and this body is not an object that helps form experience because one can never separate from their body and turn away from it. As Dahlberg et al. (2008) explain, "we can never free ourselves from this embodiment….it is the body that connects us to the world" (p.41). It is this subjective body that connects with the world, because the body relates to the world: an individual's body is in relationship with the room they are in, the door they are in front of, or the chair they are sitting on. This applies to space and time as well, as Merleau-Ponty (1995) writes, "I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them" (p. 140). As a consequence, as Dahlberg et al. (2008) write, "we stand in a living relationship with the world, …with time" (p. 43). This living relationship means that all knowing, understanding, perceiving, feeling, etc. is embodied. For example, one does not think themselves to sleep–it is not a cognitive process as much as it is a physical one. To prepare for sleep, one lies down, covers up, makes themselves comfortable; thus "we

invite sleep" with our bodily actions (Moran, 2000, p. 423). Another example would be feeling sick before knowing why after an uncomfortable encounter; our stomachs often hurt before we have cognitive knowledge of what is bothering us. In Dahlberg et al. (2008)'s poetic words, "when you embrace the world, the world embraces you back. Through the embrace, and the touch, there is a sense of connection, with the world, with everything that is" (p. 42). Our bodies insert us into the world, and humans are both mind and body. People are not, and can never be, detached observers.

Intersubjectivity.

It is through the body that others are reached, others with whom the world is shared. Intersubjectivity is about relationships with other human beings and this is important because the lifeworld, which phenomenology aims to know more about, is the lived experience of humans. This world, that Dahlberg et al. (2008) describe as "a world of and with others" (p. 56), is a human world. As Heidegger (1998) writes, "...the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a with-world. Being-in the world is being-with others" (p. 155). Even the absence of others is something experienced when lonely or when alone-time is needed.

Understanding other human beings is possible because we are part of the same world. This is not to say that the same lifeworld is shared, as each person's lifeworld is distinct and unique, but this shared world perhaps helps in imagining the lifeworlds of others. Merleau-Ponty (1991) provides an example of this when he writes:

> In a fire, only the subject who is burned can feel the sensible sharpness of pain. But everything that the burn represents: the menace of the fire, the danger for the well-being of the body, the significance of the pain, can be communicated to other

> people and felt by other people…the intuition of the feeling (that which constitutes its essentials) is the same for the two consciousnesses. (p. 47)

This is not to say, however, that another person can be known completely and finally, as there will always be something unknown and ever-evolving. It is always possible to be surprised by another person and necessary to remain curious about their experience, which is a wonderful facet of human existence.

Review of Literature: Mindfulness and Museums

In order to conduct this review, I used multiple sources to identify the available relevant literature. These sources included the University of Georgia library's multi-search tool, which accesses EBSCO Information Sources, reference lists in published books, peer-reviewed articles, and dissertations. I also conducted online searches using Google's search engine. My search included combinations of the terms *mindfulness*, *art*, *museum*, *education*, and *visitor experience*.

Mindfulness: A Definition, Brief History, and Intersection with Art

I will begin by reviewing the body of literature on mindfulness. However, this should not imply that this area is more important than the body of literature on museums. Both topics, mindfulness and museums, inform the phenomenon under study equally, as the MM program is a mindfulness program that happens in a museum. I discuss mindfulness first because I think it is important to understand the unique parameters of this program, followed by the discussion of museums, so MM can be placed in the context of museum practice.

What follows is a brief history of the development of mindfulness in the United States, followed by a description of mindfulness as understood by current Western

culture, and finally, research on the intersection of mindfulness, museums, and art. This final section on mindfulness is comprised of two bodies of research, and they include studies of the effects of mindfulness when engaging with art and mindfulness in museum programming. This section situates my research within the larger field of mindfulness, art, and museums in the United States.

A Brief History of Mindfulness in the United States

The rise in popularity of mindfulness as a concept and practice is evident in the amount of interest the topic has garnered in recent decades. In an analysis of the trends and developments in mindfulness research, Baminiwatta and Solangaarachchi (2021) identified over 16,500 articles and reviews published between 1966 and 2021 that refer to mindfulness in the title, abstract, or keywords. The first reference to mindfulness that they found was an article published in 1966 by W. Pe in *Psychologia*, a Japanese journal, the second in 1978, was "Empathy and Mindfulness" by R. Schuster, and the third appeared in 1982. This was Jon Kabat-Zinn's first published article on mindfulness. Over the decades, the body of literature on mindfulness has grown, and it has expanded exponentially since 2006.

Jon Kabat-Zinn is the biggest influencer of the rise of popularity of mindfulness in the United States, and his definition is the most cited definition across research papers (Hanley, Abell, Osborn et al., 2014; Hocevar, 2016; Hyde & LaPrad, 2015). Many credit him with shaping the modern movement of wide-spread interest in mindfulness in the West (Hocevar, 2016). One reason for this is that Kabat-Zinn founded the pioneering Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Clinic in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, where he was a professor of medicine. Based on research

that he conducted at the UMass Medical Center and first published in 1984, he found that a mindfulness practice reduced the suffering of people living with chronic pain. The mindfulness course he developed was in response to the increased amount of suffering present in hospitals, especially among people in treatment for cancer. Informed by the Buddhist perspective, he developed a 10-week stress and education program based on the practice of mindfulness, where mindfulness is both a process and a state of being.

The mindfulness workshop developed by Kabat-Zinn is still popular today and is taught by people trained to lead what is now an eight-week program called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Over the course of the eight weeks, participants are "experientially introduced to mindful eating, mindful breathing, and the body-scan method, with a special emphasis on what it means to be fully engaged in the present moment" (ummhealth.org, n.d). Activities include yoga, formal walking and sitting mindfulness practice, group discussions, and learning about theories and evidence informing the program. Kabat-Zinn has also written 10 books on mindfulness, with two best-sellers: *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness* (1990, 2013), and *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* (1994, 2004), and is credited as a writer or contributor of over 146 publications.

Another important figure in the development of mindfulness in the United States is Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-2022). Hanh was an exiled Buddhist monk from Vietnam. He was an outspoken critic of the Vietnam War, and after the war ended he shifted his focus to sharing the teachings of mindfulness in hopes of encouraging peaceful activism and sharing Buddhist thought. His first book *The Miracle of Mindfulness* was a bestseller in

1975, and he published over 100 books on the topic. Hanh's introduction to American popular culture was an appearance in 2009 on Oprah Winfrey's popular talk show. He also frequently toured the United States, and led mindfulness training for Buddhist monks and nuns who continue to carry on his teachings all over the United States.

A Description of Mindfulness

Our current understanding of mindfulness is based on ancient principles of Buddhism as shared by its founder, Siddhartha Gautama, who was born around 500 BC in what is now Nepal. Buddhism is often described as a religion, but it does not require the compulsory worship of a god. It is more often described as an ethical philosophy that centers around meditation as a practice that relies on and reveals one's own knowing (Healy, 2001). This knowledge is necessary in order to address the fundamental truth about the human condition: that there is suffering in the world (Hanh, 1998). This is the first truth of the Four Noble Truths, which are 1) suffering exists, 2) the cause of suffering can be known, 3) suffering can end, and 4) the end of suffering is the eightfold path. The eightfold path includes 1) right understanding, 2) right thought, 3) right speech, 4) right action, 5) right livelihood, 6) right effort, 7) right mindfulness, and 8) right concentration (Hanh, 1998).

The early practices of Buddhism and especially, the last three elements of the eightfold path, remain relevant to meditation and mindfulness today. Currently, the most widespread and commonly used definition of mindfulness is that developed by Kabat-Zinn (2003), who describes mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience" (p. 145). Mindfulness as a state of mind suspends ruminations of the past and

projections about the future, and maintains an attitude of kindness, curiosity, openness and comfort with ambiguity. “The goal of mindfulness is to focus awareness, not empty one’s mind” (Hyde & LaPrad, 2015, p. 4), and through this awareness be able to more fully notice one’s own experience and the present moment. Mindfulness is not primarily an intellectual activity; it is centered in the body.

Kabat-Zinn (2013) describes the seven factors that form “the attitudinal foundation of mindfulness practice” (p. 21). They are 1) non-judging, 2) patience, 3) beginner’s mind, 4) trust, 5) non-striving, 6) acceptance, and 7) letting go. Each factor is dependent upon the others. Understanding this approach to mindfulness is important, as these tenets of mindfulness permeate contemporary understandings of the concept. I will briefly describe each here, as paraphrased from Kabat-Zinn’s more in-depth descriptions from his 2013 book *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness*. This list is followed by some of the specific practices that can help cultivate these attitudes.

- Non-judging is a process of not getting caught up in one’s opinions or attempts to label, categorize and judge things, people, or events. As an impartial witness of one’s own experience, one can begin to understand experience beyond the common assessments of it being good, bad, or unimportant.
- Patience is understanding that things unfold in their own time, and accepting each moment as it unfolds. Applying this concept to ourselves allows us room to have whatever experience is presented to us, instead of trying to rush to the next “better” one.

- Beginner's mind is an attitude that remains open and curious, as if we were encountering a thing for the very first time. With this approach of awe and wonder, each experience can be recognized as a unique and new encounter that one need not navigate using preconceived beliefs.
- Trust means that we each possess our own wisdom and goodness, even when mistakes are made. Trust also means that you can listen to your own intuition and authority.
- Non-striving is similar to patience in that one stays with whatever is happening in the present moment, instead of wanting whatever "should be." It means not having to do anything, except notice.
- "Acceptance means seeing things as they really are" (p. 27), and letting the truth be the truth instead of something that needs to be changed. It is a healing process to no longer resist or deny what actually is. Acceptance does not mean that one has to like the truth, but instead that they are no longer striving to deny it.
- Letting go means not being bound by something you are holding onto too tightly. This grip can be one that entraps. Paying attention to one's experience means finding where we can let go and be more free.

Other attitudes that Kabat-Zinn (2013) associates with mindfulness include "non-harming, generosity, gratitude, forbearance, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity," but these are not as foundational as the seven qualities described above (p. 31).

These attitudes can be cultivated with formal and informal practices that are associated with mindfulness. Formal practices are those that take place intentionally and usually for a predetermined amount of time. For example, a formal practice would be someone deciding that they are going to sit for a 20-minute mindfulness practice. An informal practice would be noticing the process of washing dishes or eating with a focused attention on that experience.

Mindfulness practices include breathing, sitting, walking, body-scans, yoga, and noticing with intention what you are doing. Focusing on one's breath is one of the easiest ways to practice mindfulness. It is through breathing that participants in mindfulness are able to connect with their body, which is impossible to fling into the future, or pull back into the past. Bodies are present in this time and this space. Our minds are also of course living in the present moment, but minds are prone to imagine the future and ruminate on the past. Breath pulses through us without effort, and is a process of inhaling and exhaling. Paying attention to this process, feeling the air entering the nose, the temperature of the air, and the expanding belly are all ways that attention can be placed on breath. Controlled breathing can calm one's nervous system, and act as an anchor for our attention (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Sitting and slow walking can be bodily positions that allow for this focus on breathing.

In all of these practices, one must engage in a process of training the mind to be able to focus more on the present moment. I have heard it described as teaching a puppy to stay still by leading him gently back to the same spot, or slowly building a muscle that gets stronger over time and with consistent practice. Minds naturally wander and while this process is accessible to everyone, sitting still or focusing solely on the experience at

hand can be a difficult process, as our minds are easily distracted. Our breath then is the ideal starting point for practicing mindfulness.

Another way to slow down our distracted or racing minds is the body-scan. This is a practice of patience, where one intentionally notices in a systematic order the parts of their body, starting either at their feet or their head. This noticing of each part is an opportunity to practice any of the foundational attitudes of mindfulness, like noticing without judgment how your toes feel, or noticing that your knee hurts but accepting the discomfort and not trying to fix it at that exact moment.

Moving our bodies to experience balance or a stretch is yoga, and this helps us connect to the present moment intentionally as well. Yoga is an opportunity to notice what movements feel comfortable and honor the boundaries of what our bodies are capable of in this present moment. *Yoga* is a Sanskrit word that means "yoke." Yoga can be understood as a practice of linking together mind and body through movement and breath.

Mindfulness can also be practiced informally during the tasks and events of a typical day. Albrecht et al., (2012) write that mindfulness can be understood as "a natural human capacity, which involves observing, participating and accepting each of life's moments from a state of equilibrium or loving kindness" (p. 2). One can then practice mindfulness during any task, if it is approached with a certain attitude.

Research at the Intersection of Mindfulness, Visual Art, and Museums

Little has yet been written on the topic of how visitors experience mindfulness in museums. My literature review is delimited to two areas of mindfulness research that investigate the effects of mindfulness when engaging art and mindfulness in museum

programming. The whole body of mindfulness literature is vast and beyond the scope of this review, and, moreover, does not directly relate to the topics of mindfulness and visual art engagement or mindfulness and museums.

Mindfulness and Visual Art Engagement. Practicing mindfulness while engaging with art is an area of growing scholarly interest, but it is still relatively new. The few studies that I could find revealed that by pairing the two, the potential for developing a deeper, more sustained engagement with works of art emerges (Echarri & Urpi, 2018; Graham, 2020). This is interesting because, while many visitors are engaged with their experience at the museum and leave having had a meaningful encounter with the visual arts as a whole, research has found that people do not actually spend that much time looking at specific works of art (Roberts, 2013; Smith & Smith, 2001).

An example of mindfulness being used to extend the amount of time looking at art in a museum setting was developed by Joanna Ziegler, professor of Art and Architectural History at the College of the Holy Cross until her passing in 2010. Ziegler was one of the first Contemplative Practice Fellows at the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. She incorporated mindfulness into her curriculum by having her students look at one painting every week for an entire semester. She called this act of long-term looking *beholding*, and wrote that "beholders eventually assume some identity with the art and ultimately the artist" (2014, p. 44). She also noted this practice is a habit and daily routine that eventually becomes encoded in the body, at which time artistry in whatever is being performed can be achieved. Her mindfulness practice was guided by a spiritual idea that paying attention when looking is an act of love and prayer (2014). Zeigler's goal was "to teach students that art offers the unique opportunity for experiencing the great paradox of

creativity; it is simultaneously a function of extreme rigor and practice and the manifestation of true freedom" (p. 55).

Sally Armstrong Gradle investigated the effects of mindfulness on university art education students at both the undergraduate and graduate level, as well as their appreciation of unfamiliar art. Her research points to the "necessity of developing a viewing practice built upon mindfulness as a creative act in order to explore art deeply" (Gradle, 2011, p. 137). Gradle suggests that mindfulness offers a way to viewers to "develop the capacity for insight by staying with the art and giving it their full attention for as long as possible" (p. 141) and allows for "an entrance into viewing art" (p. 149). She also claims that students found that they were able to "relax in the presence of unfamiliar art" (p. 141), and ultimately this capacity to look led to a participatory engagement with another's world-view.

Yang (2016) used qualitative data gathered from a business course on mindful leadership comprised of 25 undergraduates to investigate how meaning is made from their experience with mindfulness and art. The course aimed to develop the student's capabilities for "attention, presence, and empathy" (p. 1) by integrating art appreciation and mindfulness into the curriculum. To conduct this study, Yang required students to visit an art museum, and keep a meditation journal. The research found that the process of meaning-making through mindfulness and art appreciation follows a similar two-part process, with the first part defined by "an immediate and non-conceptual perceptual experience, followed by a series of reflections on the felt experience" (p. 5), during which the first part is narrated. The study's goal of understanding the development of "soft

skills" for business students is ultimately not useful for this study however, and still did not address how the participants experienced mindfulness in an art museum.

Finally, Harrison and Clark (2016) researched how mindfulness can affect the frequency of aesthetic experiences evoked by the arts, with aesthetic experiences defined based on measurable bodily responses, such as chills, emotional qualities such as feeling moved or touched, and absorption in the work of art. They suggest a link between mindfulness and aesthetic processing, and through data gathered from online questionnaires, found positive correlation between reports of facets of mindfulness and the frequency of aesthetic experience. While I am curious to know if mindfulness can increase or enhance participants' aesthetic experiences, this research still leaves me wanting to know more about how participants experienced mindfulness in an art setting. Measuring bodily responses is very different from asking what the experience was like or looking specifically for an aesthetic response.

Mindfulness in Museum Programming. Nina Simon (2016) writes that relevance for museums is "an exercise in empathy - understanding what matters to your intended audience, not what matters to you" (p.43). Museums want to be relevant to the communities they serve and, with the growing interest in mindfulness in America, the number of public programs that include mindfulness has been growing rapidly (Banzin, 2022; Earhart, 2011; Hemera Foundation, 2016; Holmes, 2015; Kai-Kee et al., 2020; Krug, 2014; Pollak, 2016; Thompson & Tobin, 2018; Tobin, 2017; Zabelina et al., 2020). This section of the literature review shares the findings of five articles published online by well-known websites, a field study conducted by the Hemera Foundation, two peer reviewed articles, and two books.

The Hemera Foundation study on mindfulness programming in an art museum context found that in 2016, at least 29 such programs were being implemented at art museums across the country. The foundation, which focuses on the promotion of contemplative studies, conducted the study because they believe that mindfulness programs in an art museum context "lower the perceived barrier of entry to both mindfulness and museums, and [they give] museum attendees tools by which they can more deeply engage with works of art" (p.1). The study identified a wide variety of factors that shape a program, including museum location (inside or outside, galleries or auditoriums), instruction type, and audience. The study also found that very few programs collaborated or shared notes with other museums, that programs usually operated with little financial support from within the institution and had few associated costs, and that these programs were relatively new in 2016, with only two of the 29 existing before 2014. The study's recommendations included encouraging connections between the museum professionals who manage these programs so they could learn from each other and collaboratively develop a toolkit of best practices, including evaluation measurements. The study did not include any findings related to how museum visitors experience mindfulness programs in art museums.

Online articles about mindfulness and art museums proliferate after about 2017, but none of them report any empirical research about the visitor experience of these programs. The first one I found, from 2011, reports on the fact that more and more museums are offering mindfulness programs in their galleries. The article describes the program at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York, one of the first such offerings in the country (Hemera, 2016). The article also mentions the mindfulness programs at the

Baltimore Museum of Art, the Tampa Art Museum, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, and the Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art. It includes anecdotal information from museum staff, who speculate about who the programs are attracting to the museum and note that the programs provide participants with an enhanced focus that supports their engagement with art. Like the Hemera Report, this article includes the perspectives of museum staff but not those of program participants. Other articles also included perspectives from staff about how they facilitated the program (Tobin, 2017), and described the techniques that can be used during a museum visit to bring mindfulness into a gallery experience (Migdol, 2022).

Krug (2014) reported for *The Washington Post* about a mindfulness program implemented by the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. as a one-time live event. The program aimed for visitors to connect "with the restorative power of art" and feel more relaxed throughout the day (p. 1). The program invited participants to connect with paintings through guided suggestions and breathing. In this article, the author also reflected on her own experience, but her observations were limited to how she felt calm while being guided by the instructor's voice and more at ease afterwards.

Participant perspectives of mindfulness programs in museums are included in two short articles published in 2015 (Holmes) and 2016 (Pollak). Holmes' article, published by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, describes a program that takes place at the Michener Museum in Doylestown, PA, where the aim of the program is "to foster a personal experience with the object, forming a link between observer and work that lasts more than a minute and results in a deeper understanding of the art" (Holmes, 2015, para. 6). Her article reports that participants return for subsequent sessions, and a program

manager reports that people connect with the program "in a way that other public tours do not." Holmes observes that participants share what they see, with one participant remarking that, "You see things that you've never seen before." This limited reporting of participant experience, with no accompanying analysis, was shared by Pollak's article, which describes a program she developed at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston called Mindfulness in the Galleries. The program invites participants to engage with a work or works of art using mindfulness techniques, including focused drawing, and the sharing of participant experiences after 30 minutes. Pollak reported that participants expressed that they felt relaxed and saw the works of art with fresh eyes, connected works of art across the gallery and felt that everything was interconnected, and realized they could enter a painting's scene in a way that connected them to it.

Two articles I found focused on mindfulness in art museum programming for K-12 audiences visiting a museum for a field trip experience. The first article is from 2018 (Thompson & Tobin) and includes techniques and activities developed for MASS MoCA's "ArtInSight," a three-pronged program model that brings together conversational tours, mindfulness-based insight activities (where insight is a type of mindfulness), and art-making exercises. The program is based on a constructivist education model and John Dewey's (1934) aesthetic philosophy, specifically the belief that "to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience" (p. 54). Thompson and Tobin describe compelling activities, such as guided visualization, which invited students to close their eyes and imagine the metamorphosis of a seed, mindful eating, wherein students were invited to eat a tangerine "like a sloth" (in order to prepare for viewing art slowly), and slow walking, during which students were led on a silent walking tour of a

large gallery. Museum staff reported that these mindfulness practices helped ease the transition from the rowdy school bus, so students could focus on the museum experience, and that slowing down helped students "grapple with unfamiliar or uncomfortable content" (p. 338). They did encounter challenges, such as being able to engage with fewer works of art due to the slow nature of the program, and also feeling like they were "contending with matters of cultural appropriation in the application of insight [mindfulness] activities," (p 342) as the practice is based on Buddhist teachings. These findings are compelling and important, but they apply to a K-12 audience and do not add to our understanding of how adult participants experience a public mindfulness program that they are voluntarily attending. They are also based on anecdotal evidence from staff. The article recommends that future research include more formal evaluations of the program.

Such a formal evaluation was indeed published in 2020, and it investigated the effects of mindfulness on art-viewing and art-making. This quantitative study compared students' excitement levels and art-making results on a school field trip to a museum. One group of 59 elementary students, and a second group of 193 college students, experienced mindfulness "induction" while the control group within each group did not. The "mindfulness manipulation" for the college students was a pre-recorded slow eating exercise, and their art-viewing experience was a slideshow of 200 artworks that they were later asked to recall details about. The authors concluded that the results suggest that mindfulness-based practices may result in a deeper art viewing experience. While it adds to the understanding of how mindfulness might impact art-viewing and art-making, this study does not investigate adults experiencing a mindfulness program with other adults,

guided by a live mindfulness instructor, where participants choose which works of art to look at and who to talk to during the viewing experience. These are important qualities to include when asking about the visitor experience of mindfulness programming in an art museum, as most museum programs include more elements of participant choice and opportunities to respond organically over the course of the experience.

Finally, the two published chapters reporting on mindfulness programming in an art museum setting are chapters in the books *Activity-Based Teaching in the Art Museum: Movement, Embodiment, Emotion,* published in 2020 by the J. Paul Getty Museum, and *The Brain-Friendly Museum: Using Psychology and Neuroscience to Improve the Visitor Experience*, published in 2022 by Routledge. In the former, authors Kai-Kee, Latina, and Sadoyan detail activity-based examples of teaching in the art museum. After addressing museum history in Part I and museum theory and a theory of play in Part II, Part II goes on to focus on different museum activities the authors call "Aspects of Play." Examples of these aspects are movement, the senses, drawing in the museum, and emotion. The final chapter of Part II of the book is called "Mindful Looking." This chapter focuses on mindfulness in an art museum. The eight-page chapter discusses how mindfulness is a growing industry in the United States, and notes that people are applying mindfulness to their lives in "seemingly limitless" ways (p. 159). The authors also address how mindfulness programs in museums take a variety of forms, and that their titles do little to reveal their content. These various forms entail different locations (auditoriums, galleries, and the outdoors), different structures (meditating and then looking at art, or looking at art while meditating), and different times and frequencies (morning, afternoon, or evening; once a month or weekly). They include the titles of different programs

happening around the U.S.: Art Break: Mindfulness Meditation; Mindfulness and Meditation Walk; Slow Art and Mindfulness. Others titles I have personally encountered include Mindful Looking; Masterpieces and Mindfulness, and the simply named Oasis.

Kai-Kee et al. (2020) also explore the questions of "how can mindfulness play a role in exploring art? and "in what way is mindfulness a skill that enables us to engage with and explore works of art?" (p. 160). The chapter then reviews a definition of mindfulness, beginning with Kabat-Zinn's definition and the concept's Buddhist roots. Based on this review, Kai-Kee et al. suggest that when mindfulness is applied to looking at art, a third term, *mindful looking*, can broaden our understanding of mindfulness in art museums. Mindful looking is defined as "a state of relaxed attentiveness in which viewers allow works of art to wash over and absorb them, rather than inserting themselves, operating, analyzing, and manipulating the works" (p. 167). Before offering this definition, however, Kai-Kee et al. cite Pollak (2016), reviewed above, and also review other instructors' techniques, which are comparable to those I describe in-depth in Chapter Four by using rich descriptions of MM at GMOA. The chapter concludes with the suggestion that mindfulness might encourage the meaning of a work of art to "come to you" instead of having to "aggressively attempt to grasp it" (p. 166) and references Dewey's (1934/1980) concern that constant doing instead of receiving keeps us from deeply exploring something. A one-page summary is also included in the chapter that describes in rich detail one of the authors leading a mindfulness program at The Getty Museum. It includes her prompts, the activities participants are invited to complete, and participants' quotes. It is a lovely report that describes the unfolding of one program, but it stops short of analyzing any data or reporting any findings.

In the last review of this section, one of Banzi's chapters in The Brain-Friendly Museum, "Museums: How They Foster Wellbeing, A Round-up of Initiatives" addresses the efforts of museums around the world to address how they foster wellbeing. The chapter reviews "Museotherapy, Art Therapy, and Museums" and "Museums, Hospitals, and Healthcare," before its final section, "Slow Looking and Mindfulness." I have not included a review of the practice of slow looking in this chapter, as I do not believe that the slow looking movement led by the founder of Slow Art Day, Phil Terry, is the same as mindfulness programming in museums. Over 1500 museums around the world participate in Slow Art Day and to participate, visitors are encouraged to look at five works of art for ten minutes each and then convene somewhere after, perhaps over lunch or coffee, to talk about their experience. While I think participants may experience moments of what could be called mindfulness, this format is not typical of mindfulness programs in museums led by an instructor who can offer a guided experience and share formal mindfulness techniques. Mindfulness programs are certainly offered on Slow Art Day, and Banzi offers details of these programs in her chapter, but I do not think that all Slow Art Day programs fit into this category, so I chose to not confuse this study's literature review by including something outside the scope of my research. The chapter does, however, also describe a variety of mindfulness programs that are offered at art museums around the world and concludes with recommendations for providing the most ideal mindfulness program at a museum. Banzi recommends that a mindfulness teacher and a museum staff member host the group (max number of participants: 10) in a large gallery away from busy foot traffic, and include distinct phases during the practice. These phases include a 15-minute introduction to mindfulness by the instructor, a 15- minute

guided practice of mindfulness that includes looking at works of art in the selected gallery, a 30-45 minute discussion inspired by the prior step, and finally, a 15 minute conclusion that includes final remarks by the "teacher and museum expert." While I appreciate Banzi's efforts to formalize a best practices approach to mindfulness programming in a museum, the source of her recommendations remains unclear. I do not think they are based on any participant feedback, as the chapter does not indicate that visitors were surveyed about their ideal mindfulness program in a museum.

This review has revealed that despite a keen interest in mindfulness programming in museums, no empirical research has yet investigated what the experience of these programs is like for participants. Many museum professionals have shared what they observed during their experiences in facilitating these programs, and the literature has also described what these programs look like and what they usually include. Some of the literature has included quotes from participants, but qualitative empirical research interviewing participants about their experience and analyzing the resulting data has not been conducted. In light of this gap in the literature, this study is needed to address this important topic.

History and Current Understandings of Museums

As this study looks at mindfulness programming in an art museum, this section reviews relevant literature related to museums. This context is equally as important as what has been written about mindfulness programming in museums, as it is what makes the mindfulness practice a unique experience, different from other mindfulness practices in other settings that do not provide art as a possible central feature of the experience.

Historical Overview

The historical overview of museums that follows does not provide an exhaustive exploration of the history of museums; rather, it includes a brief review of collection-based entities in order to better understand how our current understanding and expectations of museums came to be. Collections of objects for various purposes has been a human endeavor that stretches back over 2000 years.

Mouseions. The origins of what we understand as museums can be traced to as early as around 280 BC in ancient Greece. The first state-funded Greek "Mouseion", meaning a sacred place for the muses, was a site of ceremonies and literary competitions. Leading thinkers of the day began teaching here as well, and collecting and classifying cultural specimens (Diepeveen & Van Laar, 2001). One famous example of a mouseion was The Museum of Alexandria, which housed libraries, laboratories, and leading thinkers, as well as an encyclopedic collection used for classification and research from 280 - 48 BC.

With the accidental burning of the mouseion by Julius Caesar's troops, the next recorded example of cultural collections was the private (and looted) treasure troves controlled by ruling nobles in the Middle Ages. These amassed treasures were used as boastful examples of power and wealth, collected from conquests as well as from purchases from travelers and soldiers. Though these were examples of collecting, the research and education that were so important in ancient Greece were not a priority during this dark age (Friend, 2011).

Wunderkammens. With the Renaissance comes a renewed interest in knowledge and learning. Collecting to dazzle and assert authority remains common, but curiosity and

interest in discovery abound as ships sail around the world and bring back new, exciting, and often stolen, treasures. Those with the means purchase items, or even fund explorations, and amass their acquired objects in Wunderkammens, or cabinets of curiosity (Arnold, 2004). Access to these rooms, usually in palaces, was limited to the lucky social circles of the privileged. One well-known Wunderkamman was owned by the de' Medici family of Florence, Italy, and occupied a whole building in 1570 (Diepeveen & Van Laar, 2001). This model of amassing wonders of the world, while fueled by curiosity, also existed as a source of entertainment and pride.

(Kind of) Public Museums. It is not until the 17th century, in the climate of renewed interest in knowledge spurred by the Enlightenment, that the world's objects "were drawn together to produce an encyclopedic world-view, understood from a Western perspective" (Hooper- Greenhill, 2000, p. 151). Collections begin to be sorted and organized along taxonomic lines. Around this same time, a more egalitarian approach to collection access begins, although it is still limited only to students, the upper classes, and artists (Diepeveen & Van Laar, 2001).

Moving into the 18th and 19th centuries, shifting aims start shaping early iterations of the museum's familiar contemporary form. The Wunderkammern, designed to glorify their owners' acquisition of rare and novel objects, began to shift in form towards the "disciplinary museum" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 186). This shift in how collections were presented marked a turn from glorifying a collection's owners to civilizing a population (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Mason, 2011). This shift is illustrated by the opening of the Louvre in 1793, which saw a royal collection become a public art museum. Other museums opened to the public around this same time, with the similar

aims of civilizing citizens as well as representing power, as many of the displayed objects were stolen from other countries. Other examples of this type of institution include The National Gallery in London (est. 1824), the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (est. 1764) and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. (est. 1846) (Diepeveen & Van Laar, 2001).

Modernist Museums. Moving into the latter part of the nineteenth century, in another expression of national pride, wealthy Americans began to open museums to "civilize", "domesticate" and "spiritually awaken" the American masses (Diepeveen & Van Laar, 2001). The idea of the disciplinary museum has been addressed by many scholars, and the aim of "governability" is understood as part of this shift (Bennett, 1995; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Mason, 2011). As civic museums, such institutions were also established with the familiar aim of glorifying the nation. These public collections, no longer in private palaces, were housed in buildings that delivered the message of prestige, permanence, and power through classical and palatial architecture, and frequently acted as memorials or shrines to their benefactors. Examples of these museums include the Frick Collection in New York City (est. 1935), the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles (est. 1974), and NYC's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (est. 1937). All of these institutions were founded with the perception of museum visitors as blank slates or empty vessels that needed to be filled by expert knowledge.

Post-Museum. Hooper-Greenhill (2000, 2007) has written extensively about the post-museum. The post-museum is one in which the exhibitions and the characterization of visitors has shifted away from the modern prioritization of an expert, fixed, and unitary narrative based on one understanding of an academic discipline, such as art history.

Visitors instead are understood as developing a perspective and understanding that is based on myriad factors. Knowledge is not simply transmitted, but is constructed and changes based on the complex interactions between visitors, objects, and the museum. Museums start to embrace the postmodern and recognize, as Gude (2015) writes, "the choice-making capacity of individuals who select from the past those things that will best serve them as starting points for today," and that these choices "will be different in different places depending on the history and present issues of each …community" (p. 13).

Distributed Museum. Museums today, to varying degrees, recognize the need to adopt a holistic understanding of practices that are visitor-centered in order to remain relevant to the communities they serve. Some museums today interpret the call to relevance as the need to incorporate and apply global and critical perspectives to how they frame exhibitions, facilitate programming, and manage their collections (Kletchka, 2018). As Dewdney et al. (2013) write, this can be understood as a "more politicized engagement with our historical moment" (p. 6). This critical inquiry into museum practices and visitor-engagement is meant to serve as an intervention that many see as not only more responsive to visitors, but one that takes the call to be of service to their communities a step further to engage in social justice initiatives, or at least serve as sites where social justice-oriented conversations can take place.

A current nationally and globally recognized definition of a museum was approved on August 24, 2022 by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Extraordinary General Assembly after a participatory process that involved representatives from museums around the world, including the then director of GMOA,

William U. Eiland. The definition that was finally approved modified earlier iterations and rejected the inclusion of social justice-oriented phrases like decolonization, repatriation, and restitution as inappropriate to the defining characteristics of a museum. The approved ICOM definition of a museum is:

> A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.

This definition is seen by some as an insufficiently progressive one that fails to encompass the work that many museums now try to engage in: being active participants in righting societal problems. The discussion of relevance (Simon, 2016) and different views of how museums can stay relevant in today's society, remains at the heart of this debate.

Visitor-Centered Museums

One current understanding of museums that is not debated is that they are visitor-centered as opposed to object-centered (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011; Falk & Dierking, 2013; Henry 2010; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Roberts, 1997, Weil, 1999; Weil, 2002). They have prioritized a shift, as Weil writes (1999) from being about *something*, to being for *somebody*. As a result of this shift, the visitor experience has become a central focus of museum research, and this research is especially interested in understanding visitors "as active interpreters and performers of meaning-making practices within complex

cultural sites" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007, p. 362). In an effort to respond to and better serve visitor interests, public programming in museums has moved from focusing solely on school programs to including a variety of programs that engage adult audiences.

Asking a visitor what they think and feel should be a foundational inquiry for museum work, but in fact it represents a radical move away from the traditional exchange, in which the museum told the visitor what was meaningful about collections of cultural objects (Mayer, 2005; Roberts, 1997). Some museums still hold on to this outdated perspective, and could thus be described as repressive and authoritarian, but many are embracing the challenges and opportunities of the "present period of 'late', 'high', liquid', or, 'post' modernity" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007, p. 1). This current period is defined by a rejection of grand narratives and universal truths, and an interest in localized understandings and interpretations, as museum authority is shared with visitors and engages with their equally important perspectives (Anderson, 2012; Dewdney et al, 2013; Gude, 2015; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Kletchka, 2018).

Mayer (2005) writes about this move away from the museum as expert interpreter. She cites an important article by Bal and Bryson (1991) exploring the influence that semiotic theory has had on art history. Mayer (2005) addresses the idea that "a singular, truthful, or definitive interpretation of an art object is a myth" (p. 360). This understanding is based on Roland Barthes' profoundly influential 1967 essay "The Death of the Author," which argued that a reader's interpretation may differ from the author's, but this interpretation remains valid (1977). This semiotic theory has found its way from the art history classroom to the museum gallery, where educators seek to develop "museum literacy" (Newsome & Silver, 1978) in an effort to facilitate "a

reciprocal, interpretive dialogue between viewer, work of art, and their respective context" (Mayer, 2005, p. 365).

Through nimble and responsive programming, that is careful to resist reification, and that turns toward local narratives, museums can meaningfully participate with and stay relevant to their communities. Rather than driving people apart, multiple perspectives bring individuals together and help people become more comfortable with difference, so they can value "diverse beliefs about art and life" (Barrett, 2003, p. 8).

Visitor Experience of Museums

The ways in which museums stay relevant for their visitors and communities are related to museum professionals gaining a better understanding of visitor experience in museums. Falk and Dierking (2013) have identified three contexts that define the visitor experience, and that intersect over the course of time, beginning before the museum visit and continuing after. Their Contextual Model of Learning includes the personal context, understood as the unique perspective that visitor brings with them, based on their prior experiences and expectations; the sociocultural context, based on the visitor's cultural background (race-ethnicity, socioeconomic status, country of origin), values and belief systems, as well as the social interactions that take place within the museum; and finally, the physical context, which refers to the visitor's interactions with the building and the objects housed within, even benches or carpeting. Time is an especially important context, and one that is hard to fully comprehend, as it requires a long view of both the visitor's past and future. Context is "continuously constructed" and is "truly unique" for each visitor depending on their situation, with Falk and Dierking's contexts dynamically

interacting over the visitor's past and future, making it essentially impossible to truly separate each context or fully understand the museum experience (2013, p. 30).

This fact makes it impossible as well to fully predict or control the museum experience. Falk and Dierking caution that the museum professional should be humble in their "expectations regarding both describing and influencing the museum experience" (2013, p. 30). This sentiment is echoed by Burnham (2011), who warns that museum educators should "beware of the temptation to predetermine the content… and value" of museum encounters, and "guard against teaching toward the by-products of experience rather than experience itself" (p. 148). A remedy for this is to teach with the object as the guide, rather than whatever goal the museum educator might desire, as encounters with objects can lead to unexpected transformative experiences. As Burnham (2011) notes, "such moments of enchantment, of grace, cannot be mandated, but only acknowledged when they occur" (p. 149).

Public Programs in Art Museums

In an effort to serve the museum visitor, museums now offer public programs that encompass a variety of aims and activities. Until about 20 years ago, however, programs were almost exclusively developed for elementary schools, as the class changes that occur in middle and high school tend to make scheduling more difficult. Henry (2007) notes that this trend began decades ago with the Tax Reform Act of 1969, which motivated museums to take their philosophical stance of being educational institutions a step further by adding programs that supported this claim. In order to qualify for tax exemption, museums had to demonstrate their educational work in concrete ways, and started offering programming that could serve as a tangible example of their educational

contributions. In the past 20 years, programming in museums has expanded significantly, offering more options for wider audiences. Now, depending on their size and resources, museums provide a range of activities that serve K-12 students, college students, families, and adults.

These activities in art museums continue to play a part in sustainable community development, and understanding how best to best engage visitors has produced a growing body of research. Museums present a unique learning experience that more people can appreciate as museums broaden their mission to include educational programs. These programs focus not only on the museum's collection as a valuable archive, but also its role as a source for emotional connections made possible through object-based learning experiences. Along with valuing the connections the objects help us make with the world, museums value the unique perspective each museum visitor brings with them. This shift has resulted in a change from "a concentration on the museum's expectations of the public to a concentration on the public's expectation of the museum" (Weil, 2002, p. 213).

Education in Museums

As the types and number of museum programs has grown, so has recognition of the professional role of the museum educator, with museums designating specific staff to develop programming, and ideally to work with other museum staff including those in curatorial, development, and communications departments. Professional museum staff aim to develop programs that merge visitor interest with museum interest (Falk & Dierking, 2013). Education finally became a specialist function for museums in the 20th century, when previously it had been under the purview of directors and curators (Hein,

2006). Prior to professional educators developing specific programs, it was commonly understood that the perceived task of the museum was to interpret an artwork's meaning, and communicate this understanding to the visitor. The delivery of lectures and talks in the galleries to the museum's public formed the primary method for achieving this goal.

Emerging concerns about educating visitors saw museums hire their first paid educators, and introduce the term "docent." The question of how to define and address goals and methods remained unanswered, but in the 1920s and 30s, the development of progressive education provided some guidance. With John Dewey's work becoming more widely known, the idea that learning might be more effective if it is experiential, informal, and non-authoritarian exerted an influence on gallery teaching. The effect was that lectures became less one-sided, with visitors invited to be active and participate more. As museums tried to meet public demand, they made the effort to try new things and hoped that this practice would improve as knowledge increased. This, however, did not turn out to be the case, as Kai-Kee summarizes: the end of this period was being "experimental" and "chaotic" (p. 28), and represented an ad hoc approach that tried to meet each new demand as it emerged.

The next twenty years in museum education saw the continued demand for and growth of museum education. Despite several noted professionals in the field suggesting that there be academic training for art museum educators (Kai-Kee, 2011), the main source of knowledge for museum workers was the growing field of art history. Gallery teaching often became a "watered-down version of university art history" (Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 29). The task of teaching also usually fell to the youngest and least prepared museum staff, and, eventually, volunteers. As the number of visitors grew, so too did the

need for volunteers. The museums in Kansas City, for example, began using members of the local Junior League to teach museum visitors, and this model spread as a way to find the "best volunteer" (Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 30).

Continuing to the 1960s and 1970s, Kai-Kee (2011) notes that visitor numbers grew from 200 million in 1960 to 700 million in 1970. Volunteers were needed to keep up with visitor interest, but, predictably, the burden of managing volunteers became the responsibility of museum educators. Education departments had a hard time managing the necessary number of volunteers and were unable to enforce any kind of quality control. This is still the case in some museums, where unpaid non-professionals do the bulk of gallery teaching (Kai-Kee, 2011). This time period also saw an increased interest in social activism and change, as protesters demanded an end to the Vietnam War and awareness of social inequalities grew. One of the first exhibitions to address a social issue, *Harlem on My Mind: The Cultural Capital of Black America*, opened in 1969 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC, and controversy ensued over if the museum should be political (Hamilton, 1974; Kai-Kee, 2011). This debate is still ongoing today, and played out on a global stage when ICOM updated its definition of museum (2022).

The challenging of the rigid academic and social expectations of the 1940s and 1950s led museums to more learner-centered practices, with gallery teaching focusing less on art historical information and more on facilitating a responsive, personal discovery of artwork. This trend can be seen in public schools as well, with curricula exploring topics such as multiculturalism, women's rights, peace studies, consumer rights, and sexuality (Sadker & Zittleman, 2010). Focus on individual interests was influenced by a new understanding of education that conceived of teaching as a process

of the learner actively making meaning and knowledge, rather than an act of transmitting knowledge (Hein, 1995).

The emergence of feminist theory, and feminist works of art like Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party (1974-79),* challenged the status quo that modernist approaches had worked to maintain. The myth of a super-endowed individual, the master artist, creating art autonomously, began to be replaced by an approach that acknowledged the complex and collaborative process of creating something (Arnold, 2004). It became harder to impress upon the museum visitor the existence of a master narrative, a monolithic Truth, which the museum could kindly bestow upon the un-cultured masses. In light of these new understandings, museums began to adopt different pedagogic methods, with more emphasis on community and visitor needs. This shift in emphasis was met with hesitation by museum professionals when it began gaining momentum in the early 1970s, but once it took hold, its value and place in museum work became unavoidable.

A cognitive revolution was also underway that eventually, by the 1980s, replaced behaviorism with a more sophisticated understanding of the learning process. Howard Gardner, with his theory of multiple intelligences (1983), became a leading voice in this field. This theory is often cited as a foundation for the professional practice of many museum educators (Ebitz, 2008). Along with these shifts, we also see changes in the field of sociology as it began to reject positivist and empiricist-centered data.

For museums, this period was marked with uncertainty. The popular opinion in education held that practice should be based on a firmer intellectual foundation (Kai-Kee, 2011). Policy statements can help trace the evolution of education in museums in America during these decades. Beginning with *The Belmont Report,* the American

Association of Museums in 1969 made the case for museums to be supported federally, and justified this proposal with claims that museums offered "pleasure and delight" for visitors, as well as education (Hein, 2006, p. 342). In 1972, the Association of Art Museum Directors published conference proceedings as *Education in the Art Museum*, but many did not agree that the museum should be, primarily, an educational institution, even going so far as to defend the museum's status as an ivory tower that should be "a thing of beauty" that "preserves and protects beautiful things" (Hamilton, 1974, p. 126). In 1984, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), then known as the American Association of Museums, set forth that the primary aim of museums should be education. AAM's next major report in 1992, *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums,* "emphasized the necessity of equity in all aspects of museum operations and heralded the primary role of museums [as] educational institutions" (Anderson, 2012, p. 14).

Despite some signs of progress, a controversial study, *The Uncertain Profession*, written by Elliot Eisner and Stephen Dobbs in 1986, reported that the field remained gripped by a great deal of uncertainty. Danielle Rice (1995) notes that the report was requested by the Getty Center for Education in Art because of "a general sense that art museums were still failing in their educative work" (p. 17). The report found that museum educators continued to be regarded as having a low status, and no ability to effect change (Eisner & Dodd, 1986). Work was done in response to this report to professionalize the field of museum education with conference meetings and the assignation of titles such as Master Teacher to paid museum staff.

Even as American museums are recognized as leading the development of the educational role of museums in the 19th century (Hein, 2009; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007), their efforts lacked direction and a solid theoretical foundation to inform practice, with work being carried out somewhat haphazardly (Ebitz, 2008) and in an "often unsatisfactory manner when viewed from the perspective of subsequent educational theory" (Hein, 2006, p. 341).

The shift during this time towards visitor participation and meaning making is also due to the influence of constructivism in education theory (Hein, 2006). The museum is seen as an ideal place in which to use constructivist theory, as learners are understood to create and add to the meaning of the objects on display. Knowledge is no longer conceived as something to be discovered, but instead is something that is constructed by the context the visitor brings with them from their own time and place in the world. In this framework, asking becomes more important than telling.

Objects in Museums

Object-based learning is an effort to attend to the object and connect back to it again and again as a guide to the experience. This can serve as the basis for the visitor experience. Though some interesting examples of turning away from the object in gallery learning can be found (Gillette, 2017), as Patterson Williams (1982) writes, "the primary aim of museums must be to bring together people and objects not people and information about objects" (p. 12). Falk and Dierking (2013) help further explicate Williams' point when they write, "museums, as a general category of institution, differ in one important way from all other learning settings. Museums are collections of things, some intrinsically valuable, others not. Objects, stuff, are the essence of a museum" (p. 111).

Williams was the director of education at the Denver Art Museum from 1979 to 2002, and he coined the phrase "object-centered learning," believing that gallery learning should leave room for relevant contextual information but still focus on artwork (Kai-Kee, 2011). Over the years, many scholars have made significant contributions to thinking about how museum educators and visitors engage with objects, and offered a variety of understandings on how best to address an object's contextual information (Ebitz, 2007; Paris, 2002; Rice & Yenawine, 2002; Williams, 1982; Wood & Latham, 2014). The question of how to engage visitors with each other and objects, therefore, remains a focus of museums.

Learning Bodies in Museums

The body has long been seen as either extraneous to, or an outright problem for, the learning process, as the senses have been seen as "getting in the way of" the mind. This separation of mind and body has formed the basis of predominant value systems ever since Descartes was declared the father of modern Western philosophy, with physical and embodied ways of exploring and knowing the world dismissed as unimportant. Despite the continued tendency to privilege mind over body, Hooper-Greenhill (2013) found that when mind and body work together, that is, "when bodies are immersed in physical experiences which engage their feelings and emotions and allow their minds to open up to new ideas" museum visitors learn best (p. 165). Other museum education scholars have also written about the importance of embodied experience for learning, rejecting Descartes' claim that logical reason is the only way to gain knowledge and encouraging experiences that engage learners as "whole beings that makes sense of

the world through bodily sensations and feelings as well as rational processes" (Hubard, 2015, p. 47).

Hubard (2015) notes that embodied learning is especially relevant in the context of art education as works of art are physically present "in the same space" as learners (p. 47). She warns that although a discursive approach can help facilitate an embodied response, it also has limits, citing Eisner's (2015) assertion that "what we know through the arts is not reducible to the literal" (p. 48). Instead, non-discursive approaches "enable people to express their response through processes other than rational thought" (p. 48) and "activate the embodied ways of knowing that are so essential to aesthetic experience" (p.48). These non-discursive approaches can be varied, but the most important factor is that they unite educational goals and the character of the works of art being engaged. Hubard concludes that "embodied experiences do not only aid in the construction of knowledge, they also help make this knowledge more meaningful" (p. 51).

A more recent article also looks at how museum educators can facilitate encounters between the "learning body" and works of art. Illeris (2016) draws from Shusterman's understanding of an aesthetic experience and Judith Butler's "concepts of performativity and performance" (p. 153) to conceptualize the body as "a locus for aesthetic experience" (p. 153). She discusses three case studies of performative encounters in art museums that are "sensuous, meaningful, and transformational" (p. 153). Key to facilitating these encounters is *staging,* which suggests how a museum visitor "actively perform(s) a relationship to an artwork"; staging can direct the performance in specific ways, so that the works of art, the exhibition, or the museum educator can determine if the performance is traditional or invites new ways of learning

(p. 156). She notes, significantly, that for an experience to become a learning process, the immediate experienced moment requires a post-reflection that attends to the "possible meaning of that moment from a personal, cultural, social or other perspective" (p. 160).

Conclusion

This chapter provided a review of the various concepts that frame this study of how participants experience mindfulness in an art museum. A review of this nature is important as it places research of the lived experience of MM at GMOA in the context of related research, and ensures that this study contributes new and original perspectives that relate to the research topic. As this is a phenomenological study, this chapter is important as it supports a bridled attitude and helps ensure my pre-understandings of the phenomenon remain in check (Dahlberg et al., 2008).

My personal history led to my interest in the research topic and included important encounters both with museums and mindfulness that informed my "orientation" to the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990, p. 40) as a topic of study. These encounters included a childhood filled with slow homeschool days and an interest in experiential learning that in turn led to an interest in education and informal learning opportunities. After working at a museum and exhibition design firm, I realized that I could work in museums and support my own passion for life-long learning and help facilitate meaningful informal experiential learning experiences for museum visitors. I did this for seven years at GMOA, where I encountered MM and oriented myself towards it as a research topic. My personal encounters with mindfulness also informed my interest in the research topic.

The qualitative research approach of phenomenology provided a fitting method and theory for conducting this research study. The theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology, especially as they relate to Dahlberg et al.'s RLR, provided a theoretical framework that informed all aspects of this study. This framework includes phenomenological concepts such as the natural attitude, lifeworld perspective, intentionality, inseparability, embodied knowing, and intersubjectivity.

This chapter concluded with a review of literature that provided necessary background contexts on the topics of mindfulness and museums, two bodies of literature that are equally important to this study. The mindfulness review helped to define the concept, provided an overview of its historical development in Western culture, and explored research related to the intersection of mindfulness and art. The increased popularity of mindfulness is evident in the rapid rise of research related to the topic. Perhaps this rapid rise is due to the pressures people feel in a society that supports or even demands mindless speed (Honore, 2004), that runs on an attention economy in which everything is vying for a moment of our time (Davenport & Beck, 2001), and that is continuously unsettled by politics and pandemics.

A review of museums explored the various forms and purposes of collections that led to the current museums model. In this model, the museum is visitor-centered, endeavors to offer relevant public programs, and recognizes that visitors interpret meaning using a complex process that is based on a unique perspective. Visitor experience in museums is object-based, although museums strive to realize an ideal of prioritizing communities over collections. Visitor experience is also understood by some as an embodied encounter with these objects.

This review of the existing research related to museums and mindfulness situated this study within relevant literature. This relevant literature informed my research in important ways and confirmed that a gap remains in the research that investigates visitor experience as it relates to mindfulness in museums. This gap needs to be addressed, as this kind of museum programming responds to the growing interest in mindfulness in the United States, and realizes current museum aims of being visitor-centered and responsive to community interests. The time is right for this research, which focuses on visitor-centered mindfulness programming in art museums. The next chapter describes my methodological approach to researching this topic.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose and Research Question

The previous chapter revealed a significant gap in the research on the visitor experience of mindfulness programs in museums. Considering the growing popularity of mindfulness in general and mindfulness programs at museums specifically, and that museums have a keen interest in the visitor experience, closing this gap is important. In order to do this, this study investigated how participants experienced Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art by asking the research question, *What is Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art like for participants?* and gathering the following data: researcher field notes, interviews conducted with participants in person, participants' written narratives, researcher bridling journal**.**

To answer this question, I conducted my research using a phenomenological design informed by a reflective lifeworld research approach as described by Dahlberg, et al. (2008). As I was interested in the lived experiences of participants, I investigated the structures, meanings, subjectivities and immediacies that constituted their experience of Morning Mindfulness. This chapter includes a description and rationale for qualitative research methods, more specifically phenomenology and Reflective Lifeworld Research, and describes my methodology, including sampling procedures and participants, data collection and timeline, data analysis, protection of human subjects, trustworthiness, and limitations. I close with a brief chapter summary.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

When I first learned about qualitative research, and the aim of asking "questions of the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of this human existence" (Husserl, 1970, p. 6), I was taken by the depth it might offer. I had previously misunderstood all scientific research as something that removed the human experience in order to separate distinct pieces of data that could then be objectively analyzed, thus yielding an absolute and constant truth. This never seemed interesting to me, and one reason was because I did not see how this positivist approach could explore, in a truly meaningful and useful way, anything that could add to our understanding of what it means to be human. Because of this, I did not understand how I could research the things that intrigued me in an effort to better understand human experience.

Qualitative research is non-quantitative, which means it is not based on the scientific ideal of positivism and rejects the idea that the only definition of science is research based in mathematics (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Qualitative inquiry generally applies to a broad range of social research, but specifically for this dissertation, my aim in using qualitative research methods is to better understand the meaning of human action (Schwandt, 2015). I believe that this can provide an understanding and a kind of knowledge that a quantitative approach could not reveal, and that knowledge is related to how everything is interconnected and co-constituting. The qualities of human experience and its meaning cannot be severed from the everyday world, and this is where qualitative research rescues a dehumanized science and returns it to the art of living (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Qualitative research deepens my understanding of human experience, and helps answer compelling questions without severing them from their natural environments. As

museums strive to understand how people experience them, qualitative research offers a way to ask open-ended questions and respond to the need for research that is scientific, but that can also respond to questions and encounter humans as they are in the world.

As the world is always changing, and meaning is made from our experience in the world, an approach is needed that does not look for a world that is reified and passively waiting to be discovered, like a fossil. Qualitative research offers an approach that instead aims to behold, and with care, draw nearer to an empathic understanding of human experience. This makes qualitative research the best method for investigating how the sociocultural world is "experienced, interpreted, and understood in a particular context and at a particular point in time" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 216). The methods, aims, and assumptions of qualitative research make it the most fitting approach to answering the question of how participants experience MM at GMOA. This approach makes it possible to meet museum visitors where they are and respond to their individual perspectives. It also allows for acknowledgement of my role as a researcher as well as the role of the museum as parts of our everyday world. Qualitative research is also concerned with the qualities of phenomena, which is especially useful when examining the deeply complicated nature of an experience such as mindfulness.

Research Design: Phenomenology and Reflective Lifeworld Research

RLR is based on the philosophies of early phenomenologists Hans-George Gadamer (1900-2002), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). Husserl's writing about phenomenology in 1913 led to a new way of understanding the world and how we understand our experience of it (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Instead of understanding things existing solely as either

standalone objects or objects conceived of by a subject, Husserl focused on how the object and the subject are connected. Since then, many theorists have added to our understanding of phenomenology (Heidegger, 1927; Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Sartre, 1943; Gadamer, 1995), and no one single philosophical concept defines it.

Phenomenology does have an agreed upon aim however: it is interested in the study of how the subjective world appears to, or is perceived, by human beings. Ultimately, with the aim of "gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experience, phenomenology asks, 'what is this or that kind of experience like?'" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). This world of experience is called the "lifeworld" and is a central theme of phenomenology. Dahlberg et al. (2008) describe the lifeworld as the world of perception and human activity, and it is "the complex, qualitative and lived reality that is there for us whatever we do" (p. 38). Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) describes the lifeworld as "*that* world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge *always* speaks" (p.ix). The lifeworld exists as a concrete and subjective lived experience.

Existence in the world often and usually goes unnoticed, as humans are immersed in their experiences. This is why the world precedes knowledge, as Merleau-Ponty described, because the world is experienced with a "natural attitude"-- we do not pause and then critically respond. We act and perceive naively in the sense that we take for granted "the activity, or the being, of the moment" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 34). This natural attitude makes it possible to live our everyday lives; critically perceiving every moment and experience would bring the world to a halt, but this natural attitude is no way to conduct scientific research.

In order to conduct phenomenological research, in order to go "to the things themselves" (Husserl, 1970), the natural attitude is acknowledged so that an understanding of a phenomenon can be approached with a more sophisticated awareness. For this study, I continually examined my role in my research as a museum educator. I "bridled" my pre-understandings as a way to reign in their influence on any new understandings of the phenomenon being studied, thereby practicing a phenomenological attitude.

Dahlberg et al. (2008) developed the term "bridling" as a way to interrupt the natural attitude. This approach still acknowledged my pre-understandings, but instead of setting them aside in an attempt to bracket, I acknowledged that my awarenesses of the world, my "threads of intentionality," cannot be severed and placed to the side, but can be reined in, as a bridle guides a horse, and directed through self-reflection and self-awareness. In this way, I practiced the phenomenological attitude and tried to "see what is well-known in a new light, making it strange and different, as well as making the invisible aspects of the world visible" (p. 121).

Bridling supports an openness to the phenomenon that keeps us from "making definite that which is indefinite" (p. 121), and "is characterized by a kind of active passivity in which the phenomenon should be allowed to show itself in its own pace and its own way" (p. 122). Waiting to see the phenomenon required openness and a focal attention, which can be described as "our capacity for fully centering our attention on an object so that we perceive or understand it from many sides" (p. 103). Dahlberg et al. (2008) go on to explain "concentration or attentiveness is the researcher's capacity to be bodily and mindfully present, here and now, in the research situation" (p. 104).

This attitude of active waiting, “an activity characterized by a kind of ‘non-willing’ or ‘dwelling’ with the phenomenon” (p. 16) is similar to the attitude one practices during mindfulness. Both attitudes are interested in seeing things as they present themselves and require an openness to the present as a means to inquire into the nature of things. Dalhberg and Dalhberg (2019) assert that “instead of being run by memory or anticipation, we should be present to the here and now, paying attention to how things come to be in our awareness” (p. 3). Compare this to a description of mindfulness as defined by Kabat-Zinn (1994), which characterizes the practice as one of “paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (p. 4). Both seek to see things as they are, through a lens unclouded by expectations of what should be, in order to see what actually is.

Sampling Procedure and Participants

Participants for this study were MM attendees. MM was offered from 9:30 am to 10:30 am every other Friday, for eight Fridays during the fall and spring semesters, for a total of 16 practices each school year. This was the schedule from the fall semester of 2015 to the spring semester of 2023, and participants had the opportunity to attend whenever they chose to. As noted previously, participants included university students, faculty, and staff, as well as adults from the larger community residing in Athens and nearby counties who were not affiliated with the university. To hear from a variety of participants, I used the criterion-based approach of maximum variation sampling and, beginning in January 2018, participants were invited to interviews based on particular attributes (Roulston, 2010) (for the complete research timeline, see below). The first attribute was that they had participated in MM at least once, thereby experiencing the

phenomenon. The second attribute was that they were able to describe their experience in rich detail (van Manen, 1990). This second attribute was difficult to assess before the interview, but their written narratives, reflections during the MM practice, or comments to me after MM practice gave some indication about how we might communicate about their experiences during an interview.

In January 2018, I sent out an email informing all MM participants of my research and topic, and inviting them to interview or share a written narrative online, anonymously if preferred, describing their experience of MM at the museum (See Appendix A). Respondents to this online submission could indicate if they would be interested in being interviewed about their experience. Based on their written narratives and willingness to be interviewed, I contacted interviewees and set up a mutually convenient time to meet. As the research continued, I found that I needed to request interviews in person in order to increase variation, as I wanted to add student experiences to my data. I felt students were an important audience participating in the program whom I had not heard from yet. After the initial round of eight interviews in the spring semester of 2018, I interviewed three more participants during the fall semester of 2018. These three interviews in the fall were all with students, two male and one female. Participants did not express any interest in choosing their pseudonym, so I chose for them. Overall, they contributed 12 interviews and 38 written narratives, and I observed 16 practices.

Each MM practice consisted of 20 to 40 participants, with the average being about 24. Participants were invited to fill out a survey (see Appendix B) via email through the MM listserv after the first practice on January 12. Based on responses to this survey, I followed-up with an email (see Appendix C for sample follow-up emails) to request an

interview. In some cases, after the initial surveys were not yielding more interview participants who were younger or students, I asked specific participants if they were interested in speaking to me. Samples of these emails are included in Appendix D. Participants had the opportunity to fill out a written anonymous narrative as part of the survey. After agreeing on a mutually convenient time, we met for the interview. Before the interview began, I reviewed all the info included on the consent form with the participant and obtained informed consent (see Appendix E). Participant sampling represented a range of ages, genders, and backgrounds, but did largely present perspectives from white, female participants. See the limitations section for more details about limitations related to participant sampling.

Data Collection

Timeline of Data Collection

A preliminary collection of survey information was conducted as a result of my role as (then) assistant curator of education at GMOA. Prior to officially collecting data for this research study, as part of my job responsibilities I gathered survey information, and of the roughly 200 past participants contacted about the survey, 19 responded in fall 2016, and 20 responded in spring 2017. As a result of this response, I determined that I would be able to find participants interested in sharing their experiences, and that participants would be able to talk about a range of experiences. In addition to the online surveys, I also observed during MM that participants shared aspects of their experience during the reflection period at the end of the practice, and that they were also eager to talk to others and to me after the practice about their experience.

Data collection for this research study was conducted over the course of almost a year, from January 15, 2018 to November 30, 2018 (January 15 marked the Instructional Review Board's approval of my IRB submission). During this time, I observed 15 MM practices, conducted 12 interviews, and collected online written narratives. As I was collecting data, including interviews, participant observations, and written narratives, I was also transcribing interviews, adding details to fieldnotes, and writing bridling journal entries. Table 1 illustrates an overview of my research timeline.

Table 1

Research Timeline

Fall 2017	● Prospectus approved

Spring 2018	● IRB approved
	● Data collected
	  ● Nine Interviews
	  ● Participant Observation (Seven practices)
	  ● Written Narratives
	  ● Researcher Bridling Journal

Summer 2018	● Interview transcription ● Data collected: Researcher Bridling Journal

Fall 2018	● Data collected
	  ● Three Interviews
	  ● Participant Observation (Eight practices)
	  ● Written Narratives
	  ● Researcher Bridling Journal

	• Interview transcription
Spring 2019- Fall 2023	• Data Analysis • Writing

Data Collection Methods

As I collected data, my aim was to become closer to the phenomenon. I was guided by Dahlberg et al's (2008) guiding principle of holding an attitude of openness, "to approach the phenomena as they present themselves to us instead of imposing on them preconceived ideas or hypotheses" (p. 99). In order to be receptive to the subjects and their narratives, I practiced *open-mindedness* by engaging in "goal-free listening", *open-heartedness* by being self-revealing and self-disclosing with participants when it felt relevant to the dialogue, and *dialogical openness* by engaging in conversation with fellow researchers and colleagues about my developing perspectives, challenges and solutions (pp. 101-103). For example, during my interview with Julia, he said that there was one practice he did not connect with, because the instructor was doing things she thought were silly, and instead of feeling defensive about the program not meeting his goals, I wanted to know more about his experience and asked questions with the aim to explore with goal-free listening. Another example would be sharing information about myself when participants asked–for example, Brook asked me about my experience with a specific practice, and I honestly told her about how it had been for me.

Types of Data

Participants' Written Narratives

I invited participants to write and share their own narratives as a way to share a particular moment. One benefit to this kind of data is that it allows the participant to act in a way that is the least disturbed by the researcher (Dahlberg et al., 2008). I used Qualtrics as a collection tool for written narratives, and provided a link for participants through email so they could access the submission page. Entries were anonymous if desired, and an email inviting participants to share their experience through writing was sent to the MM listserv on the following dates: 2.2.2018 (10 responses), 2.9.2018 (6 responses), 2.23.2018 (12 responses), 4.6.2018 (13 responses), and 8.31.2018 (9 responses). I sent out the first invitation to share a written narrative when I was ready to begin scheduling interviews, and afterwards, right after an MM practice date. See Appendix A for a sample email and Appendix B for the Qualtrics survey and narrative prompt. Written narratives submitted online ranged from 20 to 352 words.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews between participants and myself as an important data source for a phenomenological study, one that has been identified as the "most appropriate method of investigating mindfulness" (Hanley et al., 2016, p. 105). The interviews were conducted for the "purposes of eliciting spoken, rather than written data" and were based on a structure of asking and answering questions (Roulston, 2010, p. 10). The semi-structured format allowed for a set of questions that acted as a starting point for each interview, but each interview did vary as follow-up and clarifying questions were different for each person based on individual responses (Roulston, 2010).

This was done to facilitate in-depth and more complete descriptions of the phenomenon. The interview questions were open-ended so as to provide more opportunities for participants to expand on their experience and share the details that they felt were relevant (Roulston, 2010). Questions were also specific in order to "stay close to an experience as it is immediately lived" (van Manen, 1990, p. 67).

Interviews were meaningful for some interviewees who expressed appreciation at the opportunity to meet and talk together as well. Interviews offered the opportunity to reflect in a way that they had not reflected before, and unfolded in such a way that "both interviewer and interviewee should understand the phenomenon better as a result of the interview" (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Dahlberg et al. write that the task of the researcher "is to facilitate interviewees in telling their stories" (p. 184). During the interview, I adopted an open attitude towards the participants in support of whatever they wanted to share that they felt was relevant, and this entailed not evaluating or challenging responses (Roulston, 2010).

I interviewed a total of 13 people, with two participants choosing to be interviewed together (because they felt more comfortable doing so as they are friends and came to the program together), for a total of 12 interviews. The interview with two people was unusable, as both the recording and the back-up recording failed to capture the full interview, due to one method lacking sufficient back-up power and the back-up method somehow turning itself off just a few minutes into the interview. Nine interviews were conducted during spring 2018, in the months of March and April. Three interviews were conducted during fall 2018, during the months of October and November. Many participants wanted to meet for the interview when they were already at the museum, so

several interviews took place after the practice on a Friday. Each interview was conducted in a room off of the main museum lobby, which provided a quiet and private place where participants could hopefully feel at ease. I provided bottled water, and the room has a sofa and chair so that each participant could choose to sit wherever they felt best.

The interview questions and sequence evolved slightly after each interview in response to what seemed to work and what seemed to stymie the flow of conversation. See Appendix F for the interview sequence and possible questions, with an example of the first and last guides I used. The number of questions dropped as I found that I did not need as many prompts, and that asking follow-up questions provided more in-depth explorations of each participant's experience.

Fieldnotes from Participant Observation

As with all methods for gathering data in RLR, I tried to observe with consistent openness and sensitivity towards the phenomenon. My fieldnotes began with writing down my initial impressions–what Emerson et al. (2011) refer to as jottings. Jottings are not complete sentences, but rather words and short phrases that will help jog the memory when fieldnotes are fleshed out later. I wrote down details that described anything that stood out to my senses, including things that I could see, hear, smell, and feel (Emerson et al., 2011). These details described the ambience of the setting, the appearances of participants, engagements, participant comments, and sensory impressions.

My field notes included both descriptive and reflective information that was jotted down during each MM practice that I observed. These notes were then expanded and reflected upon as soon as possible, to both capture as much as I could while it was still a

fresh experience and also in order to foster self-reflection, an important part of bridling and Reflective Lifeworld Research.

During each MM practice, my dual roles of both managing the program and researching the experience of participants became something that I had to thoughtfully engage with. In my role as a facilitator of the program, I welcomed participants in the lobby as they arrived and signed in. I greeted the instructor and took everyone up to the gallery. When it was time, I let participants know that we were headed upstairs and led the group to the gallery. To begin each practice, I briefly said something about the gallery or a specific work of art that might relate to what the instructor had planned for the practice. At this point, I would introduce the instructor and then sit with participants and fully engage with the practice, responding to the instructor's guidance and participating in partner activities. I was aware of how I was engaging with participants at all times, but this is something that I do naturally, as I am reflective and sensitive to how I treat people. In all of my interactions with people I want to be authentic and considerate, but I was especially aware of wanting to be open and present so as to foster a relationship of trust between participants and myself.

In addition to practicing a bridled approach to navigate being both a researcher and the program manager, the nature of the research lent itself well to the existential and experiential nature of practicing phenomenology. Practicing a mindful state during fieldwork proved to be a profound way to engage with participant observation. Examples of practices that I engaged in during MM included following guiding prompts from the instructor, such as remaining aware with "an appreciative joy" (fieldnotes, November 30, 2018), listening to the meditation bell until the ringing faded into silence, and when it did,

making a small movement with my body to note this moment (fieldnotes, February 23, 2018), or a heeding a suggestion to make "each movement a kind of prayer" (October 26, 2018). It was during these states of mind that I felt a nearness to the experience and the participants that led to thoughtful notes and grounded descriptions of what I was noticing.

Bridling Journal

Van Manen (1990) writes, "the problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon but that we know too much" (p. 46). In order to "bridle" what we think we already know – "pre-understandings, our suppositions, assumptions" (van Manen, 1990, p. 46) it is important to engage in what Vagle (2014) calls active, persistent reflexivity, where reflexivity means to notice and examine one's own assumptions and reactions. This process helps with self-awareness, or "a general sense of keeping a critical eye on oneself and one's participation in the world of meanings" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 164). In practice, in order to keep a closer critical eye on myself, I kept a bridling journal that included both digital and paper entries. This online journal was hosted on a private site called Penzu.com. The program allowed for tagging entries for later searches, attaching files to specific entries, exporting files, and syncing with a mobile app. The program also offered the flexibility and ease of use that assisted me in keeping organized and detailed notes of my self-reflexive thoughts. I realized, however, that I did not always have my cell phone or computer nearby, and started keeping a paper journal as well for those late-night moments when I woke up with a thought I wanted to record.

Data Analysis Methods

My first step of formal analysis was to transcribe all of the data into text. This included even my own hand-written notes and interview transcripts. After transcribing everything into text, I read the whole of the research a number of times without worrying about highlighting text or writing in the margins. I did however keep writing in my bridling journal to note my own reactions and thoughts. Dahlberg et al. (2008) write that the importance of this reading of the whole and being "close to and immersed in the text... should not be underestimated" (p. 238). It was from this reading that I gained a sense of the "whole material before starting the examination of the parts" (p. 238). After this sense of the whole was established, I started making notes and highlighting the parts that seemed meaningful. Finding the parts should not be forced, as they will begin to emerge as the whole is carefully considered. These parts did indeed begin to catch me and draw me in closer.

Following RLR, I call these parts that I was noticing "meaning units." I wrote down hundreds of meaning units, and after I did this, I listed them in a spreadsheet as a way to begin the sorting and grouping process of these meaning units and their corresponding chunks of text. The meaning units were often described using a single word based on the text from interviews.

Meaning units were color-coded based on the unit of data they came from as a way to effectively keep track of each source. I then began to see where these meaning units might begin to overlap and be grouped into clusters of meaning (Dahlberg et al., 2008). As these meaning units were read through and clusters of meaning began to come together, I kept notes on the emerging meanings and thoughts that came to mind. Finally,

I sorted the clusters of meaning alphabetically so I could visually observe if the emerging clusters might also correspond with a variety of sources and participants. I then would read back through whole sections of the data to see how everything remained connected.

This process of moving from the whole to the parts and back again happened over several cycles, with some clusters of meaning staying prominent while others changed or overlapped. Once the parts had been clustered and organized, everything came back together as a whole and this new whole, like every step of analysis, enabled me to see and understand the phenomenon more clearly than before. As such, the clusters of meaning were never understood out of context.

In this process, I was always in dialogue with the text. The clusters of meaning, when included in this dialogue, began to fit into a narrative that connected the different clusters of meaning. These clusters of meaning constitute the essential meaning structure of the phenomenon and as such are called constituents. A description of the constituents contributes to a more complete understanding of the phenomenon as they are, in the words of Dahlberg et al., "the means that constitute the actual essence" (2008, p. 255). This essential meaning structure and its constituents represent my findings, and are presented in Chapter Five of this dissertation.

Protection of Human Subjects

All participation with the study was elective, and in some cases, participants were anonymous to me as the researcher when they shared written narratives online through UGA's Qualtrics program. After electing to participate, participants could withdraw at any time for any reason and were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity, and all data was kept either on a password-protected computer or backed up on a password-

protected drive online. Audio recordings will be destroyed after my doctoral research is completed, but all other records such as interview transcripts, photography, and field notes, as well as my bridling journal, will be kept for up to ten years to allow for follow-up research should the opportunity or need present itself. The benefits to participants are not direct, but may include satisfaction in knowing they have contributed to a better understanding of how GMOA visitors experience public programming and how programming at other museums serves their respective communities. The University of Georgia's Human Research Protection Program approved of this research.

Trustworthiness and Quality Criteria

An important criterion in assessing the rigor of this study is if, as the parts are inseparable from the whole, it presents as a coherent unit. In order to achieve a "research result that presents an inner logic" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 337), I practiced openness in three ways. I remained responsive towards the phenomenon and made sensitive adjustments as needed to remain as close to the phenomenon as possible, stayed close to the research question as a way for it to direct and focus the inquiry, and reflected on my own experience as a way to bridle and stay a moment longer without becoming unbalanced by the encounter (Brinkmann, 2014).

As part of this practice of openness I maintained detailed and careful documentation of my process (Freeman et al., 2007) through a bridling journal, clearly labeled and organized files (both paper and digital), and a "paper-trail" of the methods I employed. I also used multiple sources of data to access a fuller and richer encounter with the phenomenon. Transcripts were shared with participants for review as a way to check accuracy. Finally, I shared emerging challenges, discoveries, hesitancies, and

experiences with peer researchers to gain valuable insights and critiques throughout the process.

Acknowledgment of Limitations

Careful thought has been given to ensure that the following limitations have been accounted for and their impact minimized. The first limitation is one inherent to all phenomenological research: that the phenomenon itself cannot be experienced except by those experiencing it. In other words, this dissertation and this text is a substitute for the experience, and essence can be "separated from existence by language" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 252). As a researcher, I am continuously aware of how my research stands and falls on my own and "others' language abilities" (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 17). This is not to say that I am always satisfied with my writing skills or in their clarity or ability to communicate exactly what I mean, but this is to say that I tried to minimize this gap between the lived experience and the limited or distorting abilities of language by being sensitive to nuances, and by providing rich, thick descriptions whenever possible.

Another limitation that I am aware of is my dual role as program manager and researcher. These roles could be seen by some as conflicting with one another, and that my role as a museum professional could create a conflict of interest with my role as a researcher. I would disagree with this assessment. I have dedicated my career as a museum professional to understanding how museums can best serve their communities. This means that my interest as a museum professional lies not with the institution but with understanding humanity at large, and how the works of art presented by museums serve their communities, both presently and in the future. In my case then my roles as a

museum professional and researcher are not in conflict with one another, but strengthen one another.

This is not to say, though, that my dual roles might not impose another limitation, that is, how my role as the program facilitator impacts the interview process and the possibility of *participant reactivity* (Maxwell, 2013). Interviewees knew me as the person who managed MM. I took their reservations, I saw them when they arrived, I showed them the gallery and art the practice will be in and near, and I introduced the instructor. Because of this, interviewees might have offered responses they thought I wanted to hear, or be guarded and less candid than they otherwise would be. To minimize this limitation in interviews, I began with a statement acknowledging I was not the expert on the interviewee's experience, and that I was eager to hear anything they wanted to say about their experience. I was also conscious throughout the interview to engage in an open and honest dialogue, and entered into each one with a reflective, bridled attitude.

Finally, the fourth chapter of this dissertation includes a description of the museum where MM takes place, a history of the development of the MM program, and rich descriptions of three different MM practices in order to establish and share a deeper understanding of the setting in which the participants' lived experiences of Morning Mindfulness unfolded.

CHAPTER 4

YOU ARE HERE: SETTING AND RICH DESCRIPTIONS

The context within which MM takes place is immensely important. Just as a research topic cannot be separated from who the researcher is, it too cannot be separated from the time and place in which the phenomenon occurs. The local and specific become essential for developing a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. This chapter will describe the various contexts within which MM takes place, as well as the practical and logistical aspects of how, when, and where MM happens. In the following sections, I describe the art museum where MM takes place, the history of the MM program, and conclude with three rich descriptions of different MM practices that occurred over the course of a year. Photographs of the museum and MM settings, as well as artworks featured in the galleries, are also included to deepen an understanding of written descriptions, as visual data can provide more detail than writing alone (Bach, 2008; Berg, 2008; Siegesmund, 2008).

The first section of this chapter takes a detailed look at the Georgia Museum of Art. Collected data from interviews and participants' written survey responses make it clear that this setting plays a prominent role in how participants experienced MM. Describing this setting is also recommended by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), who write, "...if your research takes place on a particular site…or it is tied to a ..program - you need to offer the reader a detailed description of the physical setting" (p. 251). In order to do this, I include information about the museum's history, mission, collection, exhibitions, physical spaces, and programming. This information is pulled primarily from the

museum's website, the book "One Hundred American Paintings" by Paul Manoguerra (2011), and my personal experience as an educator at GMOA.

The second section traces the beginnings of the MM program, as well as the practical and logistical aspects of how the program was managed. Finally, the chapter will include three rich, or thick, descriptions of MM that capture in as much detail as possible what someone might experience if they were to participate in MM. The descriptions are based on my field notes, bridling journal, participant narratives submitted anonymously online, and 12 individual interviews and they aim to, as Dahlberg et al. (2008) note, include enough detail as to offer the reader "the possibility of intuitive empowerment" (p. 240). That is, this data should create an opportunity for the reader to feel as immersed in the phenomenon as possible, so they might discern for themselves the thing itself, the "whatness" of the phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2009). Van Manen (1990) notes that the "nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller and deeper manner" (p. 10).

An important aspect of how this phenomenon reveals itself is that each practice was different. Different instructors guided the practice and brought with them their unique perspective and style, different galleries served as sites for the practice, and different dynamics influenced how participants experienced being with each other. A written account of a phenomenon will never replace the actual experiencing of it, but this final section will move the reader closer to encountering the essential qualities that make up the phenomenon.

The Georgia Museum of Art

Founding and Growth of the Museum

The Georgia Museum of Art was founded in 1945 with a donation by Alfred Heber Holbrook of 100 paintings by American artists. Holbrook, a retired lawyer from New York, wanted to start an academic art museum in honor of his late wife, Eva Underhill Holbrook, at a "university that had no art gallery and preferably one that had a progressive art school" (Manoguerra, 2011, p. 13). He was also, in search of a warmer climate, and was encouraged to look at the University of Georgia (UGA) by art colleagues in New York. When he and the head of the UGA's art school at the time, Lamar Dodd, met they shared a vision of enriching the visual arts environment in Georgia. At the time, the Southeastern region of the United States had very few art galleries and museums (Manoguerra, 2011). The museum's unofficial motto is "art for everyone," and legend has it that Holbrook would load up paintings in his car and take them out to rural parts of Georgia and share them with anyone who crossed his path (Manoguerra, 2011). Currently, the museum's mission, as featured on the its official website, is:

> The Georgia Museum of Art shares the mission of the University of Georgia to support and to promote teaching, research and service. Specifically, as a repository and educational instrument of the visual arts, the museum exists to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret significant works of art. (Retrieved January 9, 2022, georgiamuseum.org)

Holbrook served as director of GMOA at UGA for 25 years, during which time the museum's permanent collection grew from 100 paintings to 900 works of art. His

vision for the museum helped shape the museum's collecting philosophy and solidified the collection's focus on American art, including American scene painting, American modern art, and contemporary art. As the museum's collection grew, so too did its gallery space. Located initially in the basement of the university's main library, by 1942 the library had moved to a new building and the museum occupied the whole building. In 1958 three additional galleries were added, and 1969 saw the addition of two more galleries. In the 1990s, the museum moved into a new, larger building located within the university's Performing and Visual Arts Complex where the Performing Arts Center, the Hugh Hodgson School of Music, and the Lamar Dodd School of Art share a courtyard. In 2011, the building underwent a major expansion and renovation, increasing the gallery space for temporary exhibitions and adding an outdoor sculpture garden that is connected to the museum.

Figure 1

Georgia Museum of Art, from the Visual and Performing Arts Complex Courtyard

Permanent Collection

Currently, the museum's collection includes 20,000 works of art, of which about 2-5% are on view in the permanent collection galleries. This "permanent collection consists of American paintings, primarily 19th- and 20th-century; American, European and Asian works on paper; the Samuel H. Kress Study Collection of Italian Renaissance paintings; and growing collections of southern decorative arts and Asian art" (retrieved 1/9/22, https://georgiamuseum.org/about/). In 2016 the museum's permanent collection galleries were reinstalled to present the works of art in chronological and thematic order, with large interpretive text gallery panels, and more extended labels to share interpretive texts with museum visitors. This reinstall includes ten galleries, with each room presenting works of art that are tied together by a theme. For example, the first gallery starts with the oldest works of art in the collection, examples of Italian Renaissance and Baroque art from the Kress Collection, which leads into the next gallery, focusing on academic style paintings from the 19th century as well as portraiture, as this was a popular painting style during that time. Other galleries leading up to the contemporary art gallery at the end of the hall include impressionism, American art from the 1930s, and the work of self-taught artists.

Figure 2

Georgia Museum of Art, Permanent Collection Galleries, H. Randolph Holder Gallery

Figure 3

Georgia Museum of Art, Permanent Collection Galleries, Letitia and Rowland Radford Gallery

Figure 4

Georgia Museum of Art, Permanent Collection Galleries, Byrnece Purcell Knox Swanson Gallery

Temporary Exhibitions

The museum hosts around 20 special exhibitions each year, with each exhibition on view for about three months. These exhibitions range in size, with some including as few as 10 objects ("Ted Kincaid: Even If I Lose Everything," November 17, 2018 — January 13, 2019) in one gallery, and others featuring almost 200 objects ("Crafting History: Textiles, Metals and Ceramics at the University of Georgia," February 1, 2018 — April 29, 2018) displayed across five galleries. Temporary exhibitions are curated by any one of the four curators who work at GMOA, and the exhibition schedule is decided upon in curatorial meetings, sometimes years in advance. Temporary exhibitions can also be curated by an outside curator who works as an independent contractor with the museum, as well as by the director or other museum staff when appropriate–for example, when a specific topic aligns with an area of expertise of a staff member. The objects displayed in exhibitions are sometimes borrowed from other museums or private

collections, if the works of art align with the focus of the exhibition. Objects can also be pulled from the museum's permanent collection.

The exhibitions that were on view during the data collection period of this research, January 12, 2018 to November 30, 2018, are listed in the table below**.** This information is important because it shows the variety of exhibitions that were on view over the course of data collection, as well as the available dates. Temporary exhibitions stay up for about three months, and the topic of each of these can enrich understanding of the museum space. MM rotated through each of these exhibitions based on instructor preference or where installation work was being done. I generally avoided holding MM in any exhibition where work (label installation, painting, art hanging, etc.) would be ongoing nearby, as these areas would be noisier. I chose the gallery or exhibition based on which area would be quietest, instructor preference, or to tie the art into whatever theme the mindfulness instructor might share with me that they wanted to focus on beforehand. The three rich descriptions that are included in this chapter focus on MM practices that took place in the permanent collection, "For Home & Country: World War I Posters," and "Ted Kincaid: Even if I Lose Everything."

Table 2

Dates and Titles of Exhibitions On View During Data Collection

Dates	**Exhibition titles**
February. 1-April 29, 2018	Crafting History: Textiles, Metals, and Ceramics at the University of Georgia
January. 6-March 18, 2018	Clinton Hill

March 24-June 17, 2018	Images of Awakening: Buddhist Sculpture from Afghanistan and Pakistan
May 12-August 5, 2018	A Legacy of Giving: C. Herman and Mary Virginia Terry
May 19-July 29, 2018	Bloom Where You're Planted: The Collection of Deen Day Sanders
June 30-September 23, 2018	Central to Their Lives: Southern Women Artists in the Johnson Collection
August 25-November 18, 2018	Vernacular Modernism: The Photography of Doris Ulmann
July 21, 2018-January 6, 2019	One Heart, One Way: The Journey of a Princely Art Collection
August 18, 2018 - November 11, 2018	For Home & Country: World War I Posters
Oct. 20, 2018 - Feb. 3, 2019	Richard Hunt: Synthesis
November 17, 2018 - January 13, 2019	Ted Kincaid: Even if I Lose Everything

Physical spaces

The building is made up of three floors, with the first floor providing public access to the building and housing an auditorium, the museum shop, the sculpture garden, a versatile meeting space, a studio classroom, a café, and the front desk. The second floor

houses a total of 24 galleries: 12 galleries for the permanent collection, reinstalled during the summer of 2017 to include colorful walls that coordinate with the featured works of art, interpretive gallery panels, and extended wall labels, in chronological and thematic order with the oldest works of art in the permanent collection at the beginning and contemporary art at the end, and ten galleries for temporary exhibitions, typically for three months, with some occasionally extended to 24 months. The third floor is used for staff offices, a classroom, and a library.

Figure 5

Georgia Museum of Art, Building Map Printed in the Visitor Guide

Public Spaces at the Museum

The renovated and expanded building is an example of contemporary architecture. The museum is characterized by clean lines, minimalism, and a limited neutral palette.

Notable features of the building include large two-story windows, a large floating black stone staircase, glass barriers, polished black marble floors, steel, and blond wood fixtures. The almost 16,000 square-foot building, with its new galleries, outdoor sculpture garden, expanded lobby, and additional storage space, was designed by Gluckman Mayner Architects of New York and executed by Stanley Beaman & Sears Architects of Atlanta.

Figure 6

Georgia Museum of Art, From Carlton St., Approaching the Parking Lot

There are two main entrances to the lobby of the building. The front entrance is off of the courtyard that connects the Performing Arts Center, The Hugh Hodgson School of Music, and the Lamar Dodd School of Art. A large bronze sculpture, “Ascension” by Beverly Pepper, is installed in the courtyard. The sculpture is about 13 feet high. The surface is covered in a rusted patina, and the solid form of the shape is broken in the

middle by a vertical gap that almost looks like a slash through the metal. The gap is narrow and one can barely glimpse the other side through it. After passing this sculpture, double glass doors open into a small vestibule that leads into another set of double glass and steel doors into the lobby.

Figure 7

Pepper, B. (2008). "Ascension." Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia

The other entrance is on the side and leads into the lobby. The parking lot leads into this entrance through a small tunnel at the end of the lot. The tunnel is a short, square tunnel with a much lower ceiling than the lot and the covered area outside of the lobby doors. There is a sense of being released from the narrow space into the open space of the patio upon exiting. Like the front entrance, the side entrance is a set of double doors with a vestibule between them. Narrow dark gray bricks, as well as glass and brushed steel, line the walls of the museum outside.

The lobby is called the M. Smith Griffith Grand Hall and features light maple paneling, brushed steel, glass, and gray polished marble tile floors. Notable features include a cafe area of tables covered in a dichroic, iridescent finished acrylic that changes colors in the light. Dichroic glass tiles are also featured on the ceiling above the front desk, and they change colors as you walk past them. Two large custom-made tan leather benches sit parallel to the front desk and measure approximately 4'x8'. The stairs leading up to the second floor, where the galleries are located, are black marble. Each stair appears to float as the backs of each step are left open. The stairs are quite wide and the rails are flat steel on top of glass panels. The lobby also includes a gift shop, an auditorium, and an open classroom space. Floor to ceiling windows look out to the sculpture garden.

Figure 8

Georgia Museum of Art, Lobby

The Jane and Harry Willson Sculpture Garden is framed and the spaces are given structure by large molded concrete walls, and a stainless-steel fence of woven strips of

metal that presents an industrial, structured ambiance that is softened by low growing grasses, native reeds, and trees planted around the space. In the sculpture garden, there is also a water feature that runs the length of the back of the garden and ends in a tidy waterfall that creates the sound of running water that can be heard throughout the garden. Along the back of the water feature, native bamboo reeds tower overhead and cover the hard lines of the concrete walls that form the boundaries of the garden.

Figure 9

Georgia Museum of Art, Jane and Harry Willson Sculpture Garden

Galleries

MM participants spend the majority of their time in the permanent collection and temporary exhibition galleries. There are two wings on the second floor. The newest wing is accessed by walking straight ahead after climbing the stairs, and the other wing houses the largest temporary exhibition galleries. The two wings are connected by a long mezzanine that overlooks a portion of the lobby and the sculpture garden. The same

materials participants seen in the lobby are used in the galleries: blond wood, polished marble floors, glass, and brushed steel.

The galleries in both wings are connected by large open doorways, and every gallery has at least two doorways. Sculptures are placed on usually white pedestals and often covered with a clear acrylic case. Each gallery usually has at least one bench in it, covered in the same tan leather from the lobby benches, with a steel base and legs. These benches are a small, typical size. The flow of the galleries is not one-directional– visitors do not have to follow one certain path. The permanent collection galleries are chronologically organized, and flow from the oldest works of art to the newest. The permanent collection is exhibited in nine galleries, starting with the Italian Renaissance and Baroque art and ending with contemporary art. The theme of each gallery in chronological order:

- Italian Renaissance and Baroque
- Colonialism and Portraiture
- Impressionism
- American Landscapes
- American and European Cultural Exchange
- Modernism and Abstraction
- America in the 1930s and Social Realism
- Self-Taught Artists
- Contemporary Art

In addition to these permanent collection galleries, this wing also includes two galleries of decorative arts also from the museum's permanent collection, one that includes fine

decorative arts and silver, and the other featuring vernacular decorative arts. The other three galleries on this wing are for temporary exhibitions. Layout, lighting, wall colors, and label design are all designed and implemented by the museum's team of curators and preparators.

Public Programs at GMOA

As was covered in this dissertation's literature review (Chapter 2), museums over the past several decades have become more visitor-focused, and this is reflected in developments in programming at GMOA as well. The museum has always supported a vision of "art for all," but as museums have learned more about what kind of programming engages visitors' interests when visiting a museum, GMOA has responded by developing programs that offer a wider variety of ways to spend time in the galleries and address the different ways that people learn and gain access to art. Moving away from the lecture-style tour, during which an expert shares information in a way that does not invite discussion, tours at the museum over the past couple of decades have shifted to a more visitor-centered approach, inviting more perspectives to be shared during K-12 tours, college student tours, and adult tours. Public tours, as well as private schedule groups tours, are offered. Visitors can also attend films that connect with the themes presented by the featured works of art and exhibitions, free yoga in the galleries, studio workshops guided by local artists that find inspiration in specific works of art, gallery conversations with curators, professors, and artists, or family-oriented programs that serve toddlers, elementary-age visitors, and teens. There is a suite of programs that serve elders in the community. Most recently, a "Drawing the Galleries" program was added to offer a safe option for spending time in the galleries during the pandemic, and the Art +

Wellness Studio, a program co-facilitated by art therapists who invite discussions about works of art and art-making inspired by themes such as transition, reflection, family, and personal histories has been implemented.

Morning Mindfulness

MM is one of many public programs that GMOA offers. In addition to admission to the museum being free for all, programs are also free, except for some studio workshops that charge up to $15 for art supplies. This section will briefly look at the range of public programs that the museum offers to place the MM program in the context of the other happenings at the museum, summarize the development of MM as a program, and finally, discuss the logistics of managing MM.

Background

MM is part of the suite of programs discussed in the previous section. These programs are offered by the education department at GMOA and were started at various times and for various reasons. Some of the programs discussed above, such as Family Day, have been ongoing in slightly modified forms since the mid-1980s. Usually, programs are initiated by education staff, but some began as a collaboration between staff and an outside party. This is how MM started in 2015, after an education staff member and a professor at UGA collaborated on a mindfulness event.

Jack (pseudonym) and the Assistant Curator of Education at the time collaborated on an event in March 2015. This special event brought nearby practitioners from Thich Nhat Hanh's monastery to the museum for a day of mindfulness practice. The monks and nuns offered a brief lecture, seated and walking meditations, and a mindful eating experience ("Campus News: Mindfulness Practice," 2015). Adding a mindfulness

program to the suite of programs offered at the museum had been discussed a few times before this collaboration, so when Jack proposed volunteering to lead a guided mindfulness program at the museum regularly, the education department was excited to collaborate with him again.

The first MM program met on September 25, 2015. It was comprised of five sessions. In the second semester it was offered, spring 2016, seven sessions were offered, and it concluded with another program led by the same monks and nuns who facilitated the first mindfulness-related event in March of 2015.The majority of practices were led by Jack, but records indicate that other instructors led some practices as well during the first few semesters the program was offered.

When I started managing the program in August of 2016, dates for the semester were already set, with the program meeting every other Friday for eight Fridays over the fall 2016 semester. Jack led all but a few of them, and when he was not available, he identified a volunteer substitute. The format for the program stayed the same until March of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began, but before that, the program was only altered to make it more sustainable.

When I started managing the program, almost every practice was led by Jack on a volunteer basis. His enthusiasm for leading the program was consistent, but leading a program every other Friday during the fall and spring semesters seemed like a lot to ask of a volunteer. I wanted to ensure the program could continue if Jack ever had obligations that could impact his ability to lead the program. I also wanted to make sure that whenever possible, instructors could be paid a small honorarium for their time, as a way to support members of the Athens community. Bringing on other instructors also seemed

like a good way to connect to the wider community in Athens, which is fortunate to have a wealth of yoga and mindfulness experts either working at UGA or managing local yoga studios and wellness centers.

The MM program received a grant from the Hemera Foundation in 2017 that was used in part to buy 25 meditation pillows and 25 yoga mats. As part of the grant, I also attended a convening in Boulder, Colorado for other museum professionals managing mindfulness programs about the United States. We met over two days in September 2017 and shared best practices, practiced meditation techniques, and brainstormed together on the challenges and opportunities mindfulness programs at art museums present.

In 2017, the MM program received another accolade when the Georgia Association of Museums and Galleries presented GMOA the award for the Education Program of the Year in recognition of MM. The program was nominated because it was an innovative program that offered a unique opportunity for a wide range of audiences. Since 2017, many more mindfulness-based programs have been developed and implemented around the country, but when MM was nominated, these programs were far less common.

Structure of the Program

During data collection, MM took place every other Friday from 9:30-10:30 am throughout UGA's fall and spring semesters, for a total of 16 dates. There were usually eight MM sessions each semester. The program was free and open to the public, although reservations were encouraged. Jack led a range of two to four dates, and the remaining dates were filled by a selection of regular instructors who had experience teaching a meditation practice.

Participants could learn about the program through a variety of formats. The program was listed on the museum's website, published in the museum's quarterly newsletter, and included in the weekly update email sent to all museum members. It was listed in two local newspapers, as well as UGA's master calendar, and as a cultural activity that met UGA freshman's First Year Odyssey cultural requirement. There was also an MM listserv that reached almost 250 past and active participants who attended at least once. Reminders were sent out about a week in advance of the sessions. Participants included university students, faculty, and staff, as well as other adult Athens residents, and they knew from published descriptions of the program that no experience was necessary, no special attire was needed, and yoga mats and meditation pillows were provided. Each meeting attracted around 20 to 40 people.

When participants arrived at the museum, they first signed in and gathered in the museum lobby. If participants had reserved a spot in advance, their name was on the sign-in sheet, but if they had not they would write their name in. People would either sit on either of the two large leather-covered benches in the lobby, or stand in clusters while they waited to go up to the galleries. People were reminded by myself or the gallery guide at the front desk that no food or drinks are allowed in the galleries, and that they could store their large bags behind the front desk.

I would announce at 9:30 that the practice was about to begin and that we could head upstairs. The group would walk together from the lobby up the stairs and, once they arrived the second floor, they would chose a meditation pillow (a small, round, and densely packed pillow called a *zafu*), or a folding gallery stool. Once everyone had settled in whichever gallery MM was to take place, I would welcome attendees, introduce

myself, and remind participants to remember to not touch the works of art or lean against the walls. I would then share a small amount of information about the works of art or exhibition around us, and then introduce the instructor.

Once the instructor began, they invited participants to focus on their breath, and they would lead a guided meditation that included moments of silence, walking meditations, breathing exercises, looking exercises, and invitations to reflect on the experience and share with the group. Some examples of MM content include a guided 20-minute look at contemporary and abstract work, a walking meditation through the sculpture garden, guided embodied responses to kinetic sculptures, careful tactile exploration of a stone while contemplating the physical nature of large abstract paintings, and a sketching exercise with impressionist and post-impressionist art. Once the practice was brought to a close with the sound of a bell, or by another indication from the instructor, participants were asked to help, if they did not mind, by placing their stools or pillows back where they were stored. Many participants would linger to talk with each other, with the instructor, or to visit other galleries in the museum.

Figure 10

MM, Fall 2017, "Martha Odum: Art Intersects Ecology" Exhibition

Rich Descriptions

Three rich descriptions are provided in this section. Each one describes a MM session that happened on a specific date and is written based on data that I collected throughout the session, including detailed field notes, photographs, participants' interviews, and participants' written narratives (if the specific practice was referenced). The primary source was my fieldnotes, which as noted in Chapter Three of this dissertation, took the form of descriptive writing and were "lushly" written (Goffman, 1989, p. 131) to capture more concrete details about what I observed. I wrote down details about what I could see, hear, smell, and feel (Emerson et al., 2011). These details captured the ambiance of the setting, the appearances of the participants, engagements, participant comments, and sensory impressions. My field notes included both descriptive and reflective information that was jotted down during each MM practice that I observed.

I include three rich descriptions because each MM practice was its own unique experience. Over the course of reading these three rich descriptions, the reader can get closer to that variety of experience, and glimpse the nuance of the emergent differences. Each instructor, each exhibition, the specific gallery, or that day's group of participants are just some of the ways in which each practice was unique. Also, by including different practices and quoting different participants, I am able to present a more well-rounded perspective as a reminder that phenomenology is not interested in individual experiences, but rather in the phenomenon itself (van Manen, 2017, p. 4). Throughout the process of writing these rich descriptions, I explored the phenomenon in a careful, reflexive, and contemplative way.

MM on January 12, 2018

The quiet museum lobby begins to slowly fill as people arrive. They are the only visitors in the museum right now. The doors are opened just for them at 9:15, 45 minutes before the museum officially opens to the public. The lobby is peaceful, as participants begin to line up to sign in. If their names are not on the list yet, I invite them to add their name, and email address if they wish to be added to the MM listserv in order to receive a reminder email the week before each practice. I let the group know we will head up to the galleries at 9:30.

As people wait, some stand alone looking at the few large works of art exhibited in the lobby, or out to the sculpture garden through huge floor-to-ceiling windows. Small groups gather, sprinkled through the lobby quietly talking. A few people sit next to each other on the two large, sturdy tan leather-covered benches in the middle of the lobby floor. At 9:30, I walk up to a few groups and quietly let them know we are heading upstairs. The word spreads easily and everyone starts moving as a group. Some people are still chatting as they ascend the stairs. Some look out to the right, out the windows at the view of the sculpture garden. If someone were to reach far enough over they could touch the window, and between us and the window in some places are impossibly long white curtains that flash silvery threads now and then.

At the top of the stairs, we head straight and as we pass a bench identical to those in the lobby full of laid out folding stools, and the cart full of round, flat, black pillows, I invite people to grab “whichever option is most comfortable” for them. The group moves down the hallway to the exhibition at the end of the corridor and looks at the works of art along the way.

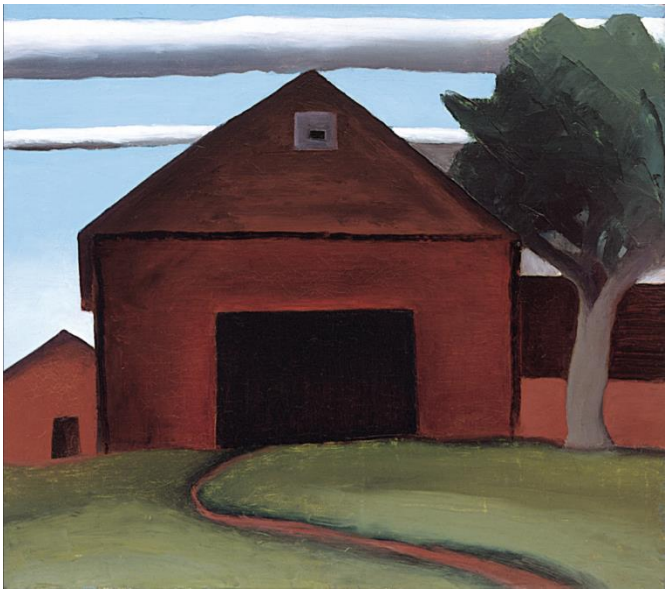
Rory, the instructor, takes a seat and I welcome people to sit wherever they will be most comfortable. One participant mentions to his neighbor he couldn't hear very well last time and wanted to move up closer to the instructor this time. The soft shuffling of the group settling in slowly comes to an end just as I begin:

> "Welcome everyone, and thank you for being here! A few reminders- this program happens every other Friday and our next MM will be January 26 and we'll be joined by Jack. Jack is a professor emeritus at UGA, has over 40 years of experience with meditation. I hope you can join us! Also, please remember - do not touch works of art or lean against the walls.
>
> The gallery that we are in today focuses on modern works of art. Looking around we can see lots of different styles. Many modern artists were grappling with traditions of the past and experimenting with new ways of making art and even seeing the world.
>
> Georgia O'Keeffe was one of these artists. O'Keeffe painted nature and landscapes in a new way (see Figure 10). She is considered by some as the mother of modernism because she was an expert at capturing so much using just simple lines, shapes, and colors. This red barn, for example, is very simple but captures something essential about what a red barn might look like on a clear, blue sky kind of day. My favorite quote by O'Keeffe stays with me over the years, she said "Nobody sees a flower really; it is so small. We haven't time, and to see takes time - like to have a friend takes time." Something to think about!
>
> Finally, I'd like to introduce our instructor for today- Rory Smith [pseudonym]. She co-founded a non-profit group for women veterans and is a

certified yoga instructor. She has also completed Trauma Sensitive Yoga certification and is a certified Holistic Nutritionist through Expert Rating ISO. Help me in welcoming and thanking Rory for being here today!"

Figure 11

O'Keeffe, G. (1921). "Red Barn, Lake George, New York." Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia; Eva Underhill Holbrook Memorial Collection of American Art, Gift of Alfred H. Holbrook



After I introduce Rory, I walk to a stool in the back of the gallery, behind everyone else. Sometimes I slip out if needed to remind security guards to turn down walk-talkies or to please talk a little softer. I also welcome any latecomers and invite them to set up their stool wherever they'd like.

Rory smiles at everyone and says she's happy to be here. She begins with a breathing activity. "Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so. Breathe as deeply as you can in through your nose. And let that breath fill your lungs. As you exhale, notice how the breath might feel warmer on your exhale than it did on your inhale. Breathe

again and see if you can fill your lungs even more this time…" She continues to guide the group through another few breaths, and as she is talking she shares that she was trained in mindfulness when she was in the military. She says one reason she likes practicing mindfulness and yoga is that your mind, like a mason jar full of muddy water, can get cloudy and stirred up, but if you take a moment the debris in the water can settle and a clarity and stillness can move in.

Figure 12

MM, January 12, 2018

Rory shares that she has brought essential oil of peppermint and that she is going to place a drop on our palms and to hold our hands out if we would like one. As Rory walks through the group with extended palms, she drops a small amount of the oil in our hands. Some people remain with their hands folded in their laps. One person explains that she is too sensitive to peppermint but thanks her. When Rory gets back to the front of the group, she instructs us to rub our hands together and then cup them, bringing the scent to our noses for a deep breath and to "draw into the point below your navel to clear out stale air." The smell of peppermint has been wafting through the room, very gently, drop by drop in people's warm palms but as I inhale my cupped hands the jolt of strong peppermint suddenly clears my mind of anything else other than the smell and tingle of menthol. Something about the gift of the drop of scented oil in my palm is warming also. I look around and see the group holding their cupped hands to their faces, breathing deeply in the silence.

Next, Rory invites us to stand to get our lymphatic system warmed up. We follow her lead as she shows us how to gently tap the opposite side of our torso with our hands. We tap up and down the sides of our torsos, along the ribs. After this, she shows us a sweeping motion with our hands that we use to brush up the side of the torso, up past the armpit, and up our arms, as they are held above our heads. This last one, she says, is Tai Chi tapping and it also activates the lymph system. Rory says to "bring your thumb and pointer finger together to make a circle, and then with this circle tap from your chest down to your wrist and then back up again." Rory invites us to then stand in mountain pose, a yoga stance that is supposed to help with feeling grounded. She directs us gently:

> Feel your feet on the ground as you stand with them about hip-width apart. Sweep your arms up over your head and look up as you sweep your arms back down to your sides. Notice how you are feeling. I like activating my lymphatic system and feeling energized by it. I hope you enjoyed that as well. (Fieldnotes, January 12, 2018)

She adds, “I have one more exercise for us before we look at the works of art around us. To get started, find a partner.” I can see people shifting a little uncomfortably in their seats. I know how they feel and I’m a little unsure and have no idea about what we are going to be asked to do. But I turn to the woman next to me, she is also starting to turn towards me. I smile and shrug, “you want to be my partner?” She shrugs too and exclaims, “sure! I’m not sure what we’re doing though.” “Me either,” I assure her. Partnering up we turn our attention back to Rory, “now that you have a partner, practice repeating after me.” She says “you are kind” and everyone says it back to her, “you are valued,” with each phrase the group echoes it back and out into the gallery. Rory continues with “you are important” and “you are loved.” “Now,” she says, “make eye contact with your partner and say those words to your partner. I’ll say them first so you can repeat after me.” My partner and I go look at each other and again we shrug. “Alright!” I say, “I’m game.” She nods and asks, “who should go first?” I ask if she has a preference and she volunteers to go first. Rory says, “You are kind.” And as my partner says it to me, I do feel a little uncomfortable, but I also try to keep an open mind and just listen to what she is saying. “You are valued.” I hear it and it actually does feel good to hear it. “You are important.” I hear this phrase too and continue practicing a willingness to be present and open to the experience. She finishes with “you are loved.” “Now,” Rory

reminds us, switch roles and I'll first say the phrase so you can repeat it to your partner. As we go through the phrases it strikes me that it is a lot easier to say them than it was to hear them. I think to myself, "Wellllllll, that's something I might have to work on being more receptive to…." Everyone has wrapped up the partner activity and we are once again looking towards Rory as she guides us into the next activity.

She says, "For this final activity, we are going to practice looking exercises." Rory invites everyone to stand up and walk around until a painting "catches your attention." Everyone begins quietly walking around the room, and the activity begins to settle as each person comes to stand in front of a painting in the gallery. Some people have gone rogue and slip into a gallery next door, but stay within hearing distance. Rory announces that we are going to practice grounding, feeling, and being with the painting. She announces, "Just take a moment to look and as you are looking, silently note and name five things you see." She gives us about 5 minutes to look and breathe and name five things we see.

I have chosen a still life painting of fruit by Marsden Hartley (Figure 12). I name the pitcher, the table, the color yellow, a basket, and apples. As I am looking and naming things I scan the canvas and notice more details, but focusing on these five things somehow lets me see them more clearly, or helps me at least linger on them in a way that lets me settle into looking at the painting more slowly. At the end of the five minutes, Rory rings the bell and introduces the next activity for looking. "For this next activity, we are going to look at the painting and note how we are feeling as we look at it. Does the painting bring up any kind of feeling response for you? If it does, name the feelings you experience." I note that at first, I feel curious. I think about how the fruit came to be

arranged like this and imagine the artist setting the scene. Was this fruit in his kitchen? Or did he buy it for his studio? And the pitcher keeps catching my attention. I wonder if it had a special meaning for him, or did it just sit in his studio as a prop?

Figure 13

Hartley, M. (c.1911 -12). "Fruit Still Life." Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia; Eva Underhill Holbrook Memorial Collection of American Art, Gift of Alfred H. Holbrook

I return to the assignment of naming my feelings and realize I'm feeling a sort of affection for, or maybe just a connection to the artist as I consider his habits as he painted this still life. I notice too that I don't really like the brown bananas and there is a dullness or a lack of vitality in the way the fruit is stacked, and the way the colors are more subdued. The painting does not make me feel energized or hopeful, I note. I am brought out of my reverie by the bell and Rory tells us the last exercise is about being with the

painting we have chosen. Instead of looking so closely at the painting this time, Rory invites us to “broaden and soften your gaze to just clear your mind and be with the work of art.” I’ve already spent more time with this painting than I usually spend with a work I immediately like. Honestly, I didn’t really feel any affinity for this work, I just chose it because it was nearby and no one was in front of it. It has grown on me in the many minutes I’ve spent looking at it, but I do feel a little antsy and distracted, ready to move on. As if Rory could read my mind, she reminds us to bring our attention back to the work of art. I try to relax back into a kind of attention towards the painting and remind myself to “broaden and soften” my gaze. I notice how elegantly the shapes of the pitcher and the basket fit together, and the blocks of color in the background. I didn’t notice that before. I have a new interest in being with the painting, and the dull colors and lifeless bananas don’t annoy me anymore. The composition is drawing me in and I feel less interested in looking with a purpose and begin to enjoy just kind of feeling the painting wash over me. I feel that initial curiosity again but it feels more gentle this time, like I don't have to understand why he painted it or how he made it. I don’t have to understand my reaction to it, I can just exist with it. Again, before I know it, Rory is sounding the bell and we all begin to move back towards our stools.

The hour has flown by and is almost up. Rory invites us to reflect on what MM was like today and if we have anything we would like to share. People are slow to start sharing, but begin to offer observations of what they noticed or felt or realized. Someone offers that they were nervous to do the partner activity, but once they started it was very nice. Someone else speaks up and echoes my feelings exactly when they say it was easier to say those words of kindness than to hear them. After a moment of silence, I speak up

and say I enjoyed the different ways of looking at the painting very much. Someone else agrees, and explains how she chose the work of art she spent time with: “moving across the room I was struck by the sky, the blues are similar but there are so many and they are different, I was noticing as the colors change and wondering how artists did that. The blues really captured my attention.” Someone else notes, “I chose a new painting that I never noticed, I was drawn to a sky too, and the rest seemed drab, but then after spending time I noticed more colors and details- beautiful after spending time noticing.” More comments are shared, people around the gallery nod and Rory thanks people for sharing their observations. Someone remarks that they were “struck over time by the interconnectivity of the scene. I noticed new things as I looked – there are actually more people in the painting than I realized at first. Made me think of all the ways that we are never alone, and can be connected by rivers, roads, and other ways.” Another person shared that he had had a revelation as well and that for him “time was allowing the painting to unfold, and that interaction that might not have taken place [outside of MM]. After looking at the painting, it reminded me that no matter our culture we have common experiences.” Someone else shares, “being able to spend moments like this I wonder what we forget to tap into, the longer I looked it became sharper and vibrant. It reminded me of a dessert I grew up eating.”

This has been a lively reflection, and we have gone past 10:30 by a few minutes. Rory thanks everyone and reminds us it is time to wrap things up. She invites us to end with the sound of ohm. She brings her hand together in a kind of prayer pose, palm to palm, against her chest and demonstrates the ohm sound. This is, she says, “the sound of the universe,” and asks us to join her in the second one. The sound of everyone “ohm”ing

together creates a beautiful harmony. She bows her head and says “namaste.” She thanks us for being there with her and around the gallery people are also nodding their heads in namaste, or murmuring thank yous.

As people stand and make their way out some linger holding their stools or zafus chatting. The instructor stands and talks to a few participants who have questions about mindfulness. Some people wander away in the direction of other exhibitions and linger for a while longer at the museum. Murmurs of thanks, or see you next time, fill the air.

Most people have grabbed their stools or pillows, but I grab mine and a few others that were left behind and carry them to the leather bench. When I return to the gallery, Rory is gathering her things and I help her carry her stools. We chat as we walk down the stairs and back into the lobby. I tell her, “Rory, thank you so much for that, it was lovely.” We talk about next time and she heads out the side door. I push the cart of pillows and sign and easel back down to the mechanical room, grab the clipboard with the list of participants on it, and head back to my desk for the rest of the workday.

MM on October 26, 2018

Alexa (pseudonym and MM participant) has decided to go to MM today. As soon as she starts driving to MM, she notices a change. This always happens, Alexa thinks, “driving to the place is part of it.” It is part of the experience, and on the way to the museum Alexa looks “at nature, and the environment, and the colors.” She pays attention to the world around her more closely than normal. The museum parking lot is just over the train tracks and she pulls under the museum into the lot. The arm to the parking lot is down and she pushes the button at the gate to buzz someone in the museum. They come through the speaker, “can I help you?” She replies, “Hi, I’m here for MM.” The gate arm

pops up and she sees there are a few spaces on the left and right of the lot. At the end of the spaces, there is a breezeway that opens up to the side door.

The weather is cold and damp, after a rain-filled night, so she is glad the walkway to the door is covered. Today is fall break for UGA, so the campus was pretty quiet, with many students out of town. She is looking forward to MM today. One of her favorite instructors is leading the program. She notices that the instructor, Demi (pseudonym), arrives after her. She checks in with me where I am standing next to the front desk and I put a check next to her name. Alexa notices me and Demi walking together up the stairs, moving quickly as we talk. She takes a seat next to a woman she recognizes sitting on the lobby bench.

I am coming back down the stairs and Alexa walks over to me. We hug and then I step back and in a louder voice lets everyone know they can put their raincoats and bags in the coatroom. There are about 35 people in the lobby waiting to go upstairs. Several are students, some are new faces, but the majority are people Alexa has seen before.

I invite everyone to go upstairs and they all begin to walk up the stairs. Alexa joins the group and walks with them down the long hall. Demi is already seated at the end of the gallery in front of some silver pieces, with a large wooden corner cabinet to the right. The gallery is bright, with white walls. The stools and pillows are already set up, Alexa heads to a stool in the back corner. Other people sit down, some remove their shoes and place bags or jackets next to their seat.

I introduce the practice with some info about the next meeting time and who will be leading it, and share some information about the two galleries the group will spend time with today. The WWI exhibition of propaganda posters is a little cramped due to a

large display table in the middle of the gallery, so the group will start with sitting in the decorative arts gallery full of fine china, silver, polished wood furniture, ceramic figurines, and dining chairs covered in satiny material. I mention that the posters in the other exhibition they will see today were made by different governments involved with WWI to support military forces and were designed to appeal to their citizens to help in various ways.

Figure 14

MM, October 26, 2018

After I introduce her, Demi starts out asking the group to find a comfortable position. She asks us to "feel the earth with our feet, the support of it, even if it is far below the floor of the museum. Remember to breathe in and out." To get us started Demi reads a poem by Mary Oliver:

At Blackwater Pond

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars

of light,
are giving off the rich
fragrance of cinnamon
and fulfillment,

the long tapers
of cattails
are bursting and floating away over
the blue shoulders

of the ponds,
and every pond,
no matter what its
name is, is

nameless now.
Every year

everything

I have ever learned

in my lifetime

leads back to this: the fires

and the black river of loss

whose other side

is salvation,

whose meaning

none of us will ever know.

To live in this world

you must be able

to do three things:

to love what is mortal;

to hold it

against your bones knowing

your own life depends on it;

and, when the time comes to let it go,

to let it go.

Demi invites the group to participate in a loving-kindness meditation and asks them to think of someone dear, someone loved, and think of that person while silently saying "may you be happy, may you be peaceful, may you be free from suffering." Demi asks if we can “open your heart a little more and add yourself to the wish as you say ‘may we be happy, may we be peaceful, may we be free from suffering.’" The group is encouraged to continue opening their hearts wider and wider to add more family and friends while repeating the phrase “may we be happy, may we be peaceful, may we be free from suffering,” with each expansion. This continues on to extended family and friends, the other people at MM, all residents of Athens, then Georgia, then the United States, then the world, then the universe. The final expansion is a request that the participants open their hearts as much as possible and extend the wish just to themselves by saying, “may I be happy, may I be peaceful, may I be free from suffering...."

Demi explains that “mindfulness would suggest that we try to remain aware of those parts that we want to close to protect something, and to bring awareness to those parts and to the closing and try to remain open as much as is comfortable for you.” She asks everyone to keep that in mind and then invites us to do a walking meditation into the poster exhibition. She explains, “Walking meditation is about noticing each movement of your body. The foot rolls heel to toe with each step, as slow as it takes.” When she invites everyone to get up and walk, she suggests that we “make each movement a prayer.” The group stands and each person begins to walk in different gaits and speeds. Some people walk faster than others as they exit the decorative arts gallery, turn left down the hall, and then again into the poster exhibition. Alexa walks slightly slower than normal but it doesn't really change her gait. Many people walk this same way as they move past the

posters, pausing at some. The small gallery begins to feel a little too cramped and Alexa, along with a few others, make their way back to their stools in the other gallery.

Figure 15

MM, October 26, 2018

As people make their way back into the gallery, the stools and pillows fill once again. When everyone is back in their seats, Demi asks people to close their eyes and as they take a few deep breaths, think about words the exhibition made them think of. We are invited to open our eyes and then share, if we would like to, the words that came to mind. People begin saying their words aloud: sadness, desperation, families, love, gratefulness, sacrifice, courage, compassion, brotherhood, hatred. Demi repeats each word as they say it. People look around the room at each person as they talk, there are nods and patience as everyone waits for their turn. Not everyone speaks, and when the group falls silent Demi asks people to share a word to describe what they thought of

when they came back into the decorative arts exhibition. The call and response of someone saying a word and Demi repeating it continues: thankful, living, calmness, comfort, quiet, peacefulness, community, beauty. Demi then reads a poem by Rumi:

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.
Be grateful for whatever comes.
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

When she finishes, she pauses for a moment and then invites participants to stand for gentle yoga stretches.

Figure 16

MM, October 26, 2018

After we have stretched, she asks if anyone wants to share. The group is silent for a while, and then someone says thanks for this, and murmurs of thanks are directed towards Demi. She brings her hands together and bows over them as they touch her chest. People begin to stand and pick up their stools and pillows. One participant, who did not share during the reflection stops with tears in her eyes, shares with me that the WWI poster exhibition was very emotional for her and expresses gratitude for offering this program.

MM on November 30, 2018

Today Jack is leading the practice. We are in one of the smaller galleries and there are just a few large paintings by the same artist. The exhibition is titled, “Ted Kincaid: Even if I Lose Everything.” After I share a bit of information about the exhibition, I introduce Jack. He invites everyone to close their eyes if they are comfortable doing so and to notice their breath as they inhale and exhale.

Figure 17

MM, November 30, 2018

As he is guiding us, Jack offers suggestions and says that as we might be:

> tempted to view things from a certain point of view, to instead consider your entire ecology of being- including from other perspectives, inviting first a perspective of considering your whole being- from the horizon view of compassion, acceptance, mindfulness, and gentleness. No matter what you notice

> or what arises as you focus on your breath, accept it with equanimity. Have compassion for your being and the movement of your thoughts. The ecology of life is interconnected and changing. Notice when you feel appreciative joy. Maybe it is when you see a sunrise, a baby smile, water moving over rocks, wind moving leaves, the vastness of the night sky glittery and sparkling. Can you extend that to all aspects of life and the world? Appreciative joy for the cycle of the seasons. (Fieldnotes, November 30, 2018)

Jack explains that he is going to remain silent for five minutes and invites us to focus on our natural breathing. At the end of the five minutes, he rings a bell and invites everyone to walk around and try extending appreciative joy for this experience. He says that after we look at the works of art, people are invited to talk to their neighbors about what they notice in the painting.

Figure 18

MM, November 30, 2018

People begin moving around the gallery and pausing in front of the large paintings. Some people have moved out of the gallery to look at works of art in the space next door, where another of Kincaid's paintings is hanging nearby. The two people standing in front of this large painting talk about how the image is an interesting depiction of a tree. One asks, "is it one tree or parts of different trees put together?" And the other says, "I keep noticing this part right here where there seems to be a seam, do you see that?" They continue sharing observations and talking quietly until Jack rings the bell and everyone returns to their seats.

Figure 19

MM, November 30, 2018

Jack invites everyone to close their eyes again and focus on their breath, moving in and out. He guides them to keep breathing and return their focus to their breath when

their mind wanders. After about 15 minutes of this guided meditation, he remains silent for another five before ringing the bell. He invites people to share if they want. Someone says they are "grateful for this time in this space." A student who came in late asks, "When does this happen again?" Someone remarks that "It's an act of real genius to put this activity in this space- never have I spent so much time with a work of art." After a short moment of silence, a woman remarks that she was "looking at that tree. It reminds me I'm still growing too, this huge tree is still strong and majestic. It makes me feel stronger." Jack wraps up the practice, thanking everyone for coming, and people begin to stand and take their stools and pillows with them. A woman stops to tell Jack "that the woman I was talking to when we were looking at the paintings said this meditation practice reminded her of the first time when she was young that she maybe had a meditative moment of quiet and interconnectedness looking at clouds and that kids now don't get that and we need moments of paying attention." While Jack is talking with people, a student comes up to me. He shared with me a couple of practices ago how he has an experience with a work of art by George Segal, titled *Woman in a Doorway*. He says that he wanted to tell me, "I see the woman in a doorway differently now. I see it now as a reminder to stay in one place maybe, compared to those clouds that represent change."

Conclusion

This chapter presented the setting for MM as well as rich descriptions of three different MM practices. More specifically, this chapter described the different physical spaces in which MM participants found themselves, the background of the museum in order to place these spaces in a historical context, the practical aspects of how MM is

managed, and how the program has developed over the years to become what participants experienced when this study took place. This scene-setting adds to the rich descriptions that make up the last half of this chapter, and the whole of this chapter leads to a better understanding of the next chapter which includes a presentation of the essence and the constituents of the phenomenon, and the final chapter which includes external sources "that give new dimensions to the understanding of the phenomenon in focus" (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020, p. 462). In the next chapter, I describe the essential meaning structure of the phenomenon and its constituents, while providing quotes from participants to help illustrate my findings.

CHAPTER 5

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE OF MORNING MINDFULNESS AT THE GEORGIA MUSEUM OF ART

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the essential meaning of the lived experience of the phenomenon: Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art. Museums want to and are tasked to remain relevant to the communities they serve (Anderson, 2010; Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2007; Dewdney et al., 2013; Falk & Dierking, 2013; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Kletchka, 2018; Simon, 2010, 2016; Weil, 1999) and in response to the growing interest in mindfulness in all areas of American life across the United States have added mindfulness-based programs to their offerings. The number of public mindfulness-based programs has grown steadily since 2014 (Banzin, 2022; Earhart, 2011; Hemera Foundation, 2016; Holmes, 2015; Kai-Kee et al., 2020; Krug, 2014; Pollak, 2016; Thompson & Tobin, 2018; Tobin, 2017; Zabelina et al., 2020). These public mindfulness-based programs at museums are popular and museums are interested in visitor experiences of museum programming. However, little is known about the participants' experience of these programs. A better understanding of this particular phenomenon provides valuable insight into how mindfulness programs at art museums serve visitors and can offer new understanding for the field.

In search of a more holistic understanding, I engaged in a process of looking at both the whole of the data and the parts (Dahlberg et al., 2008). To do this I simultaneously reread whole interviews while also clustering meaning units into patterns until four constituents emerged that were consistent with the data as a whole. This cycle was one that persisted organically throughout the process, and as I considered the whole I

would be led to a part, and parts would lead back out to the whole. Through this iterative process of zooming out and then zooming back in again important connections emerged. This chapter explores and describes these connections.

In order to describe these connections as clearly as possible, they are arranged in a format that is used for RLR as described by Dahlberg et al. (2008) where a summary of the phenomenon is presented as its essential meaning structure (defined in Chapter Three). This is followed by the three constituents that comprise this structure and further illuminate the meaning of the phenomenon. Together, the essential meaning structure and constituents form a phenomenological description, which is "an example composed of examples [that] permit us to 'see' the deeper significance, or meaning structures, of the lived experience" (van Manen, 1990, p.122). Each constituent is described using my own words, with participant expressions included when their words more clearly capture the essentials of the phenomenon and more precisely "explicate in particular the actual phenomenon" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 255). When theory or other outside sources are included, it is because they contribute significantly to a fuller and more complete understanding of the phenomenon.

Grasping and Verbalizing the Essence

Understanding phenomena and their essence is the focus of phenomenological research. Dahlberg (2006) writes that the "essence could be understood as a structure of essential meanings that explicate a phenomenon of interest" (p. 11). Grasping the essence of a phenomenon is not an extraordinary event, because we are always grasping the essence of something. For example, when we know that a guided gallery tour for fifth graders at the museum is different from Morning Mindfulness, a bird from a turtle, or a

pen from a pencil, we know the essence of those things. The essence is understood when we understand one thing as different from another thing.

It is important to note however that essence is not something that is mysterious or buried within. Essence is often associated with something magical, perhaps supernatural (Dahlberg, 2006; Natanson, 1973). The example that comes to mind is the image of a witch extracting the essence of newt or toad for a potion. This is not the kind of essence phenomenology seeks to describe.

The challenge of this laying out of the essential meaning structure and the constituents that make up this structure can be easily clouded by the strong influences of memory or anticipation. Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020) write, “we should be present to the here and now, paying attention to how things come to be in our awareness” (p. 460). Guided by a process of openness and bridling, I did not try to find a kind of eternal or fixed essence, but an essence based on an understanding of *this* phenomenon situated in its time and place. The essential meaning structure and its constituents that follow are inseparable from their time and place. Phenomena are always being and becoming as human relationships with the world and each other are always changing; making the world and being made by it is an ever-expanding process, as meaning is never complete or ending.

This does not mean however that this research is not generalizable, and Dahlberg et al. (2008) remind us that “all scientific research must include claims of generality” (p. 342). It is true that this study researched a specific phenomenon, that of Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art, but this is still within a certain context that is general, that of American art museums and mindfulness, and takes place in the same

world that we all share. Though the meaning is particular, the connections to the world in general can be made from the essence of the phenomenon. Relationships between this phenomenon and other related contexts are graspable (Dahlberg et al., 2008). These relationships with other related contexts and the application of the findings from this study will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation, along with recommendations for further research.

A Lived Experience of Morning Mindfulness:

An Unfolding of Three Key Constituents

The whole of the experience of Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art is understood in its essential meaning structure, which is a combination of three key constituents. These constituents are not part of a linear sequence in that one must occur before the next, but can better be understood as key aspects of the experience that lead into and away from each other over time and that can happen simultaneously. The essential meaning structure of the studied phenomenon is described as "Being present *with* reveals opportunities for engagements that are **illuminating, transformative, and connective."** In this research, the structure of the phenomenon is further elucidated by its three constituents: Finding respite in a special time and place, Embracing the experience, art, and people, and A moving discovery (Figure 20).

Figure 20

Essential Meaning Structure and Constituents of the Phenomenon

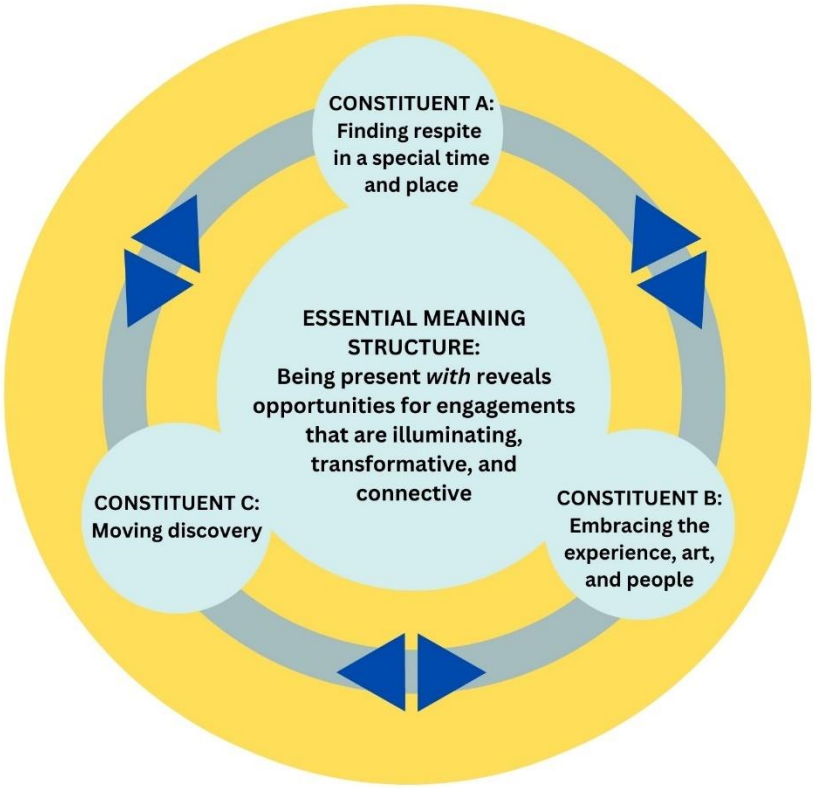


Figure 20 is inspired by other figures developed by scholars in order to visualize the lived experience of museum visitors (Falk and Dierking, 2013; Petri & Berthelsen, 2015; Steinmann, 2017; Wood & Latham, 2014). It includes and names the important parts that make up the whole of the experience, which happens over the passage of time and by an embodied subject. The concept of temporality is indicated by the arrows that

acknowledge the body and passage of time as participants experience the cyclical nature of the phenomenon and the overlapping of each constituent.

Essential Meaning Structure

The essential meaning structure of the phenomenon, participants' experience of Morning Mindfulness, is characterized as being present for and attending to a special time and place that participants find in search of something. This search is often motivated by the need for a respite from the stresses of everyday life and/or a curiosity about what mindfulness or the program offers. The embodied experience of the presence of others and the presence of art, guided by a trusted instructor, enables participants to be present in a way that reveals new knowledge and an altered state of being, for example becoming calm, relaxed, focused, and/or receptive. Discovery is made possible when an attitude of openness towards something new is practiced. The special time and place of this hour-long program that takes place in an art museum provides a sense of respite.

Without openness and the decision to be present, the experience will be less impactful. Being present was essential during Morning Mindfulness, and my findings suggest that deciding to be present and open to an unfolding of an unknown outcome can lead to the experience of discovery. The essential meaning structure of "Being present *with* reveals opportunities for engagements that are illuminating, transformative, and connective" is further illuminated by its three constituents: Finding Respite in a special time and place; Embracing the experience, people and art; and A moving discovery. This outline provides an overview of how these constituents are organized with subsections.
Constituent A. Finding Respite in a Special Time and Place

- Finding Respite
- A Special Place

- A Special Time

Constituent B. Embracing the Experience, Art, and People

- Embracing the Experience
- Embracing Works of Art
    - Sharing Space with Art
    - Feeling Emotional with Art
    - Spending Time with Art
    - Knowing the Maker of Art
- Embracing Fellow Participants
    - The group
    - The instructors
    - The individuals

Constituent C. Moving Discovery

- Discoveries
- Being Moved
- A New Way

Constituent A: Finding Respite in a Special Time and Place

Participants experience Morning Mindfulness as a special time and in a special place that feels like a respite from their normal routine. Participants seek out and find in the experience a respite from common stresses, distractions and worries. Their experience is influenced by the museum which is a “special” “pleasant” place where participants feel “safe.” It is also a special time, a special hour, that passes by in a way that is different from normal time.

The participant experience of Morning Mindfulness is described as a special place and time that is experienced differently from their everyday experience. With the backdrop of other settings, other experiences of the passage of time, or other mental

states, the experience of Morning Mindfulness at the museum would not have the same meaning. For example, if a participant did not have an eight to five job at a desk somewhere else on campus, or a house they sat in, or children to care for during this scheduled program, the experience would not have the same meaning of respite. This is all to say that while experiencing the museum as a special place, for example, this special place is not entirely separate from the other places participants move into and through. Dahlberg et al. (2008) call these unseen but experienced aspects of the phenomenon appresentations. A special time and place are also then defined by what they are *different from*, inseparable from the world even if and actually because the time or place might feel removed from it.

The way participants experience time and space is important because humans are not "in space, or in time" as Merleau-Ponty (1995) says, our bodies "inhabit space" (p. 139). Which is to say that humans are never in spaces that exist in and of themselves, nor are these spaces only subjective creations that humans understand only cognitively. Humans are in relationship with space and time. The ways that people relate to space and time are constantly moving as bodies move through time and space (Dahlberg et al., 2008).

Acknowledging that this is a special time and place does not mean though that this time and place is anything other than the present. For example, Heidegger (1998) describes time as "a succession, as a 'flowing stream' of 'nows', as 'the course of time'" (p. 474). It is significant that human beings are always here and now. For participants of MM, finding respite in the special time and place was something they experienced because they were in relationship with the museum and the practice.

Finding Respite

Many participants express their experience of Morning Mindfulness as a respite from their usual tasks and worries by saying that by participating in the practice they are "taking a break" and that "it's like a special time to just re-center." Grace captures this idea when she explains "it's tuning out things that are around me and the distractions that are normally there and taking that time, that hour to think about me. When you set your intention and I kept trying to bring myself back to that like, okay, just focus on that and that's all you need to worry about for this hour" (Grace, Interview, April 20, 2018).

For many participants the experience of Morning Mindfulness did not just begin at 9:30 when the practice began. For example, Alexa considers driving to the museum part of the experience, saying, "driving to the place is part of that. I drive around . . .it's the bypass, so I look at the, it's really now that you are asking it. I'm trying not to exaggerate it but I look at nature and the environment, and the colors, it's strange" (Alexa, March 10, 2008). Emma echoes this idea that the experience is not just limited to when the program officially starts and ends, but includes the ease that she has parking. She explains, "it's easy to park, in that little lot" (Emma, Interview, March 29, 2008), suggesting that worry-free access to the program is important for the experience.

When participants talk about MM they note that "It was a nice break" and that they were able to "turn [their] brain off for a little bit" and "be at rest". Julia mentioned that she decided to participate in MM because she wanted to:

> …just be able to take a break from stuff because it is getting very busy around this time of year and to just be able to take that time out and remove myself from

> everything that's happening around me and that's going to happen that I need to do and everything to just take a moment. (Julia, Interview, November 15, 2008)

Similarly, Kent chose to participate in MM when his classes were starting to add stress to his life, explaining that:

> when I came here and I actually started like breathing and stuff, I felt this sense of almost relief, that I was calm and at peace with myself, and I was super calm. I wasn't really worried about anything else. It was the first time that I was actually just breathing and there in the moment without running a bunch of thoughts through my head. (Kent, Interview, November 16, 2008)

Claire describes how participating in MM makes the worry and stress of everyday life "go away." She said that the guided practice of MM:

> makes all of that go away out there and just kind of puts me right in the moment. I think that's probably why I also will sometimes walk around the museum just a little bit - see some things, get my brain back up... because I do find myself getting to that nice quiet place at the end of these. I'm not ready to jump out in the big world again, right away. (Claire, Interview, March 21, 2008)

She adds that this respite feels like something she wants to hold on to, as she is not ready to "jump" back into the world again. Perhaps this respite, "this nice quiet place" she finds at the end is a state of mind that is savored and not something easily exited, as it takes some time to return to a normal state of mind.

A Special Place

This sense of being separated from "the big world" was reinforced by the physical setting of the museum, which played an important role in how participants experienced

the program. For some just going to a specific place for the practice gave it “a sense of purpose” and “specialness.” Many participants noted that the museum environment was different from where they normally would be on a Friday morning. Participants came from their offices, classes, their homes, and some even compared the experience to other settings where they might even practice mindfulness with other groups or yoga, saying that being “in the museum was different.” Grace noted that “It was, I don't know, for me, it's so peaceful being in a gallery and I go to a great yoga studio, but it's a different– a whole different atmosphere” (Grace, Interview, April 20, 2008). Earlier in the interview she brought up the setting for the first time when she said, “I think what's unique for me is that it's in a gallery.” Claire profoundly feels this different atmosphere, and explains, “There's that, there's the transformation, you know, I feel transformed when I walk in the door. I know that I'm in a different setting and it kind of frees my, my emotions and brain up a little bit” (Claire, March 21, 2008). She describes the effects of the transformation she feels as a freeing of her emotions and brain.

This unique setting is not only different from the other places participants experienced outside of MM, the setting of the museum also came with special *associations* that set it apart from other spaces. Claire captured this beautifully when she explains:

> I grew up going to church, but to me it was and is that same sort of sense of anticipation, you know going, going to this place that I knew I would feel comfortable in sitting, singing, hearing whatever, but always feeling a connection with family, connection with community and I feel that when I come to these workshops in the sense that it's... there's the community, there's the beautiful

> building, there's the ambience. I mean from the time you walk in the door, because the museum in and of itself has a calming effect, at least it does for me and a kind of quiet cathedral-like feeling. I always feel it in any museum that I go to but especially here. I think there's something about the way the light in the early morning and then the excitement of going up the stairs. (Claire, March 21, 2008)

The way that Claire and others experienced the museum as a calm place is important to how they experience MM as a whole. Feeling calm and comfortable is crucial as feeling "relaxed, safe and free from pressure" all help with being able to focus on being present and focusing one's attention (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 104), which is part of Constituent B.

A Special Time

During MM, time passes by differently than expected–it is a moment in time that is different from the usual flow of time. For example, while participants often expected that sitting with a work of art for ten minutes would drag by, the ten minutes actually felt like it passed much quicker. Another example is when participants noted that they were surprised that the end of the practice was already nearing. Claire thought "wait, what time did this class start? It's already over?" (Claire, March 21, 2008). Also surprised by how time passed, Grace noted that because she "was really involved in it, the time just went so fast" (Grace, Interview, April 20, 2018).

Not only did the passage of time feel different, Claire also noticed that she could remember those moments more vividly than even something she was doing yesterday. She says "I am present in those experiences now, like when you mention different people

or different events, my brain goes right back to that time." She goes on to note "there is an attention to time that I don't always give myself and I feel like I give myself this time when I come here" (Claire, March 21, 2008).

Constituent B: Embracing the Experience, Art, and People

Dahlberg et al. (2008) write that the concept of "the embrace" is a concrete example of the relationship between people and the world (p. 41). The embrace is important to understanding this constituent, because participants embraced different aspects of MM throughout the experience. Participants' subjective bodies made it possible to perform the embracing, as it is the body that connects us to the world and makes the embrace possible. Yet, the embrace is not only a physical act. It is true that embraces convey a caring connection towards that which is embraced, and when thinking about an embrace one can imagine warm hugs, supportive arms, and tight grasps, but the embrace can be realized in the "flesh of the world" (Merleau- Ponty, 1995) as well.

Merleau-Ponty's flesh of the world is more than the concrete stuff that makes up the world, it is also the invisible threads of intentionality that create relationships between humans and everything else in the world (1995). This means that the embrace can be more than the physical wrapping of arms, it can be an attitude of open-mindedness and open-heartedness. The embrace can be a purposeful turning towards, a directed awareness (Dahlberg et al., 2008), an orientation (van Manen, 1990) that welcomes nearness between a subject and that which they are embracing. In this way, participants directed their focal attention, drew nearer, and experienced an embrace of the practice of MM, works of art, and other participants.

When one practices mindfulness and pays attention on purpose to the present moment, one might experience being present as a state of existing in the here and now which can also be understood as part of the embrace. Being present is an awareness of what is happening around us in the current moment without our mind wandering to plan for the next grocery store trip, or feeling embarrassed about what was said last night, or worrying about the future of the planet. Paying attention to the present moment is understood as a dynamic relationship that is informed by participants' embodied subjectivity (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Participants are continuously orienting themselves to the practice in the present moment. They turn towards the experience through a process that is informed by where they are in space and time, both physically and mentally. They reinforce the decision to be present throughout the practice, and a relational meeting of subjects and/or objects guides their encounters with others, including people and works of art. This constituent is defined by examples of participants embracing the experience of MM, embracing works of art, and embracing the people involved in the experience with them.

Embracing the Practice

Part of being present for any experience, of embracing that experience, and something that enables being present for MM, is the level of trust that participants have in the experience being beneficial for them. Participants talk about being open and trusting that whatever the experience is, they will learn from it, remain accepting of what is going on, feel mentally ready to participate, and believe that the experience will be beneficial. Even without knowing exactly what is going to happen, Claire expresses this idea of being open to the experience when she says:

> I don't really go in knowing [what exactly the experience will be]. I mean, like I said, I know you tell us who's coming then a month passes by and I forget so then I don't look up on the website to read it. But I just come open. So regardless I know that between what I see in the galleries and what I'm going to get [from MM] I'm going to get an experience that I'm going to learn from. (Claire, Interview, March 23, 2018)

Claire trusts that she will get something out of the experience that will be beneficial to her, and she trusts that she will learn from the experience, so she comes to MM open to possibilities. This openness from the beginning means that she is present for the experience.

For Claire, trusting that she will learn something is based on her appreciation of the museum galleries and her prior experiences with MM. Other participants trusted that MM would be beneficial based on recommendations made to them by someone whose opinion they trusted. Heidi said:

> I was apprehensive in that I had no idea what I was getting myself into. My friend brought me here, right? I'm like, 'I don't know. Whatever. I love Stephanie [pseudonym] so I'll just go do whatever.' But some people you trust that much in your life, you're like, 'Okay, this has got to be beneficial for me.' (Heidi, Interview, April 20, 2018)

This faith that the experience will be beneficial for them is part of being able to orient to the practice and allows them to be present for the experience. Kent wisely pointed out that:

> if someone comes to Morning Mindfulness, they're going to have to accept what's going to go on, they can't fight it. If you came to Morning Mindfulness not wanting to meditate, the experience is not going to be fun for you. You might as well had never come. (Kent, Interview, November 16, 2018)

Feeling open to the experience as being beneficial involves orienting oneself towards the experience. Orienting towards the experience is part of being present during MM. This orientation begins before MM starts. For example, several participants talked about being aware of the pleasant setting on campus, or walking to get to the museum when describing their experience. This is reflected in my conversation with Alexa:

> Alexa: You know this sounds maybe even funny, but I think driving to the place is part of it. I drive around the, it's the bypass, so I look at the…I'm trying not to exaggerate but I look at nature and the environment, and the colors, it's strange, now that we are talking about it..... eh. Yeah..
>
> Interviewer:Yeah, so that happens before coming?
>
> Alexa: Yes, yes. That being very aware of what I'm going to do.
>
> (Interview, March 10, 2018)

Here, she notes that she begins to experience something in connection to MM as she drives towards the museum, and here not only is she describing an awareness of going to MM, of being oriented towards that outcome, but she is also already more present as she notices what is around her. Alexa sees and notices the natural features that she passes on her drive to the museum.

Embracing Works of Art

Seeing art is certainly part of being in the special space of a museum, which defined part of the first constituent, but for participants it was clear that experiencing the space of the museum was different than directly engaging with and relating to a work of art as an object. Throughout the interviews and their written narratives, participants talked often of their engagements with works of art. MM participants engaged with works of art in a variety of ways. They engaged with works of art on a physical level, as they stood or sat as a subject in relation to the art as an object they were attending to. MM participants also engaged with works of art for personal reasons and as something to be experienced rather than analyzed. Another aspect of being present with works of art was that they engaged with art for longer periods of time than they usually do, being present with the works of art for an unfolding of experience instead of walking quickly past them. Finally, MM participants also engaged with works of art as a way of being present with the artist who made the art, and to recognize the human behind the work of art, seeing it as a sort of expression of another individual's humanity. The opportunity to be present with works of art in various ways was a significant element of the overall experience of MM and makes it unique among other forms of mindfulness practice. The ways that participants were being present with art is essential to how they experienced MM.

Sharing Space with Objects: "Art as the Center of My Attention."

During the practice of MM, instructors would invite participants to choose works of art to focus on, and sometimes offer guided looking instructions that gave participants a more formal way of engaging with works of art. Other times, the instructions could simply be to choose a work of art, remember to breath, and use the work of art as a focal

point. Physically sharing a space with art helped participants connect with it. Claire spoke about one of these times that the instructor and the group sat in silence. Sitting like this can be challenging, which Claire acknowledges. She says, “It goes back to that silence thing and that really has always been the hardest thing. And so I knew that with meditation on a work of art I could be quiet” (Claire, Interview, March 23, 2018).

Claire can be “quiet” as the group sits in silence due to being able to focus on the work of art. For Alexa, it was also “easier to concentrate” on a work of art. She notes:

> I like the aspect to tie it to the art. That's very, for me it's easier to, um, look at eh, a piece of art and get into that instead of closing my eyes, and imagining something that is not really in front of me, to concentrate on something like the breath or you know your mind, it's easier to concentrate, to be mindful about something that you have right in front of you. (Alexa, Interview, March 10, 2018)

The way she phrases “something that you have right in front of you” wonderfully captures how MM participants are sharing space with the art objects. Subject and object are in front of each other, which speaks to how each are engaging on a relational level (Dahlberg et al., 2008). This aspect of the experience, of being physically engaged with it, is important and shows up throughout each constituent, but not as explicitly as it does here. This “concrete” nature of the works of art being present alongside MM participants is something Julia talks about when she says “[Art] was just something more concrete to focus on. I really liked having a work of art as the center of my attention in that exercise, especially being able to choose the piece of art because I could choose one that felt calming and serene” (Julia, Interview, November 15, 208). Julia adds that she would choose a work of art to be the “center” of her attention, further illuminating how subjects

are being present with art. During the practice of MM, participants were situated within galleries and invited to choose works of art, which involved the physical act of walking and looking, and then positioning oneself in front of the work of art.

Julia's reasoning for choosing this particular work of art was sensual, based on something that she felt, rather than an intellectual choice. She is drawn to the work of art because it "felt calming and serene." This quality of being present with works of art in a felt sense is explored in the next section.

Feeling Emotional with Objects: "I feel the impression that it gives."

MM participants often talked about the different ways they know or do not know about art. If they did not have any formal art training, they used phrases like "not cultured" or "no art background." During the interviews participants who did have backgrounds in art would often name artists or styles they liked. I bring this up because people often feel like there is a dichotomy between "art people" and "non-art people," and that this division is based on formal art training. It relates to how often people feel like there is a specific way of being in museums that prioritizes intellectual ways of knowing over sensual ways of knowing. Experts give tours that share art historical information, and labels and placards for the art works do the same. However, during MM, participants experience engagements with works of art that prioritized sensual responses over intellectual ones. In reference to a simple metal rooster sculpture (see Figure 20), Claire describes this process in detail:

> This idea that, um, I feel like when, when we're asked to engage, to choose a work of art, or engage in it after the relaxation technique- I do find myself kind of just more open and not filtering information - like, I approach a work of art with, you

> know, a teaching and in art history background and my brain constantly goes what do you know about that? You, dadada..... you know, if I had to give this presentation, you know, and after the morning mindfulness, none of that information pops into my head. I just kind of -- like the rooster in that room. I don't know why. The rooster is next to the Georgia O'Keefe and maybe it's because you know, ohhh, it's Georgia O'Keeffe. I have to look at Georgia O'Keeffe. I want to be in front of Georgia O'Keeffe .... walk past the rooster. Well that particular morning. It was just like they said select something and I just wanted to go sit in front of that rooster. For no other reason than I just felt really drawn to it. My - you know, my academic side says maybe, "oh, Georgia O'Keefe has something to teach you, Claire, you better go look and see what she did... what was that color? How did she do that line? Come on, you can learn from her" versus just "look at that shape," you know, and so I think that's where that idea of being present with the work of art. I don't have that filter of [choosing based on] knowledge. It's just, I feel like all of that other stuff goes to the back of my brain after we get into that relaxation state when they just said "choose something". (Claire, Interview, March 23, 2018)

Here Claire has described how she normally would choose a work of art because it was created by a more well-known artist, in this case Georgia O'Keeffe (Figure 10). The rooster (Figure 20) she describes is a metal weathervane that would have been used in a rural setting atop a home, and the artist is unknown. Claire chooses a work of art based on "feeling drawn to it" and not because she cognitively thinks she should choose it.

Figure 21

Unidentified maker (American), Cock weathervane, c. 1880-1920. Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia.

For Julia there is a similar recognition that engaging with works of art is an information gathering task, where reading the label and knowing more "about the artist and work" is different from responding to works of art because they appeal to one's senses. Julia says:

> When I just go to a museum, I like to read the whole plaque things and know about the artist and the work. I usually try to analyze them more and really try to figure out what's going on or what it's trying to say. Rather than Morning Mindfulness, where I sit there and let myself experience it and not think about it, really. I don't really think about it. I feel the impression that it gives. Experiencing it, it's not fun the way analyzing is, but it's just quietly enjoyable. (Julia, Interview, November 15, 2018)

Here, Julia describes a "quietly enjoyable" process that is based on feeling rather than analyzing in an effort to figure out something about the work of art, further illuminating

how participants experienced MM. In a similar statement, Ivan describes how the focus for his visit to the museum is different and connects to the work of art in a way that is more embodied. He says:

> The focus of it [MM] is different. When I'm visiting a museum, I want to learn. When I visit this museum for morning mindfulness, I want to relax. The focus itself is different. When I leave museums, I'm usually excited, but also really tired because I've just tried to cram in as much information as I can. When I go here for morning mindfulness, I come out usually pretty relaxed and have firmer objective for my goals in life. It's like if I were to, say, go to any museum, it's me trying to learn things. It's like reading about Leonardo da Vinci then looking at some paintings. I want to be able to connect the work with what I've learned. When I go for morning mindfulness, it's more about connecting the painting to my life. (Ivan, Interview, October 24, 2018)

Spending Time with Objects: "Staying and Looking."

An aspect of the experience that influenced how participants were present with works of art was how much time they spent with these objects. Many commented about how they usually move through museums quickly and try to see as much art as possible. When they had the opportunity and were guided through a looking process, however, staying with objects allowed them to access works of art in ways that surprised them. Through this act of staying with a work of art, meaning unfolded, and this took time. During a reflection at the end of MM on March 20, 2018, several participants commented on this aspect of the experience, saying things like "after looking I see more than I saw at first," "I noticed new things as I looked," and "after spending more time I noticed more

colors and details that were beautiful" (Fieldnotes). For example, Alexa commented how she was "so astonished how deep you could go into it, with this different technique of staying and looking" (Interview, March 10, 2018).

This suggests that "staying and looking" at art in a museum is different from how most people experience a visit to the museum. Studies reveal that museum visitors spend at the most about 27.2 seconds looking at a given work of art (Smith & Smith, 2001). This contrast between how much time participants spent looking at art during MM compared to other museum experiences is highlighted by both Heidi and Diana. They explain:

> Heidi: When I go to a museum, I just walk and look at art. When I walk, I don't sit with it, like today it took me almost to the very end of the practice of engaging with the art for me to get a deeper meaning from the picture. It was interesting because it took a while for me to shut-up inside. What I learned from that is the importance of staying with something in quietness longer to get more meaning from it. And moving past the superficial to something more deep… More than observation, it moved me to a deeper level. (Interview, April 20, 2018)
>
> Diana: I think the one woman who said how what was unfolding, the longer you look at it, you can connect, maybe not to all art but you can develop a connection because, like I said, normally, I would walk and walk around and probably spend five or ten minutes [in a gallery] and then go on to the next room because I had to hurry up and do something else, I had to do something but today you didn't have to go anywhere. When you're in a particular area, you want to take the time to I guess, take it all in. It's nice just to stand and to really absorb a piece of work and

> to absorb what is there. Because normally, if I came to the museum, I would walk probably through each room and look at it and observe and see what I liked and probably, at the hour that we spent in one room, I probably would have spent an hour in the whole museum. [MM] really does make you sit back and focus. (Interview, March 27, 2018)

For Heidi, the experience of just walking and looking while in a museum contrasts with the experience of "staying with something in quietness longer," which then leads to a deeper engagement with the work of art as opposed to a "superficial" engagement. This deeper engagement did not instantly happen for Heidi, she notes her struggle with a bit of frustration when she says "it took a while" for her to "shut up inside." Diana also talked about spending more time with art when she notes how normally during museum visits she would "walk and walk" around instead of how MM makes her "sit back and focus." For both women there was a process of being present with a work of for an "unfolding" of a "deeper" meaning to emerge,

Seeing the Artist: "A Window of Somebody's Consciousness."

Another important aspect of being present with the works of art was connecting with the maker behind the object. Participants talked about realizing that they were looking at the work of another human being and wondering how long it took for them to make it, or what the artist was trying to express when they made it. For example, after a practice a participant reflected that "a painting can seem random, but after looking I realized that artists make deliberate choices. I could see that and I also thought about the artist's process" (Fieldnotes, August 31, 2018). Even though the artist was not present physically, they were still part of the experience, and this is understood as an indirect

appresentation (Dahlberg et al., 2008). It is possible to understand others even when they are not there, because everyone shares the same world and some of the same experiences as subjective bodies. This gives human beings the opportunity to have empathy for others. This feeling of empathy towards the artist and interest in the human connection between viewer and maker was talked about often at MM during group reflections and in interviews.

Heidi explains how engaging with works of art is different because she is aware of the person who made the work:

> I've stopped and smelled the roses, but this was different. This was because I was engaging with art. This was different because you had to interact with this work of another human. There's a lot to go through for me in what were they experiencing and why did they choose this? (Heidi, Interview, April 20, 2018)

Heidi is not only looking at the work of art, she is also feeling curious about what the experience of making this work of art was like for the artist, and the choices they made along the way. A participant commented during MM that she "was noticing how the colors changed (across the sky in a painting) and wondered how the artists did that" (Fieldnotes). Diana also wonders about the artist and she experiences the work of art as a way to access a connection with them. She says that when she is "in a mindful state" and focused on one painting, she "feels like you're looking into a window of somebody's consciousness, into a window of somebody's thoughts" (Interview, March 27, 2018).

This experience of recognizing the humanity behind the art was a meaningful element of MM for participants. Claire commented about how being able to see "the artist's hand" in the work was a significant part of connecting with the work of art. She is

excited to finally be able to see the shadow of the artist in a photograph and goes on to say:

> that - that made it for me...that human contact. I think that's what it is about photographs [that I don't like]. They don't feel as humanly connected to me as works of art. And when I look at a work of art I can see the paint brush. I could see the artist's hand. (Interview, March 21, 2018)

Embracing Fellow Participants

Part of Constituent B, this section is also related to an aspect of the embrace and how it relates to fellow participants. The way in which participants experience MM as being with others is not surprising. Dahlberg et al. (2008) write that intersubjectivity "is a primordial quality of the human world" (p. 57), and Heidegger (1998) asserts that "... the world is always the one that I share with Others" (p. 155). The ways in which participants experienced being with other people during MM fall into three distinct categories that include the group as a whole, the instructor of MM, and the individual participant.

The Group. Participants talked a great deal about the group as a whole. The group is different from the individual or the instructor. This aspect of Constituent B is characterized by a connection that is felt as being part of a larger community. Connecting with the group is something that participants described as a feeling like being "part of something," a sense of "camaraderie". The "energy of the group" had a profound effect on how participants experienced MM. Dahlberg et al (2008) talk about how a "body can sense the emotional climate" of whatever space that person is in (p.46). This was certainly true for participants of MM. In a written narrative a participant commented on being with the group:

> Although I love meditating on my own, there is something very special about sharing space and silence with others. It's nice to meet without having an agenda or feeling the need to impress other people. As someone who experiences social anxiety, I find it freeing to settle into my body around others. (December 30, 2018).

Being with others in a way that feels connected without having to talk or navigate an "agenda" for the interaction felt "freeing" for this participant, as she could be with other people but settled in her own body.

Another aspect of being with the group is that it reinforces participants' belief that they are doing something meaningful. Brooke explains, "there is a certain camaraderie and a sense of reinforcement when you are doing it with a like minded group. Having the group is a reminder that this is something that is important to do" (Interview, March 14, 2018). Here Brooke echoes what many participants noted–that knowing other people were taking time to do this made them more confident that it at least was going to be "pretty interesting."

Engagement with the group as a whole not only helps participants feel like they are doing something important, it also helps participants know better what to do. It affects their actions and mood. Emma comments on how practicing mindfulness with the group makes it easier to concentrate. She says, "when I come here, strangely enough, when I sit there and feel guided, I have a better time controlling my wandering mind than I do when I'm doing it myself, in my own home. Maybe it's the energy of the group" (Interview, March 29, 2018). Like Emma, Ivan also described how the group made it easier because he copied their actions. He explains:

> When I'm meditating with other people--it's kind of how study groups work in which by seeing other people around you do the work, you also start to be able to do it. When I was at my sessions when I saw other people basically staying in that relaxed state and focused state, at first, I was anxious, I looked around a lot, and when I saw other people doing, I just copied them. (Ivan, October 24, 2018)

For Ivan, not only does the group help him know what to do, it also changes his mood to a state that is more conducive to being able to practice mindfulness. Ivan uses words like "relaxed" and "focused" and this change in his mental state was something that others commented on as well. Kent also reacts to the group, saying about them that, "knowing that they were calm and doing it, made me calm" (Interview, November 16, 2018). Julia adds to an understanding of how the group supports her participation when she explained how the action of group helped her focus and feel soothed. She compares being with the group to being alone doing mindfulness:

> For me, there's something about a collective action that's soothing more than just doing something by yourself. Also, you don't have to talk to anybody or really interact so there's no pressure. There's no social pressure or anything, so you can feel like you're part of something but at the same time be able to focus on yourself. (Interview, November 15, 2018)

This idea that there is "no social pressure" was also talked about by Heidi, who noticed that even when she did not talk to people, she still felt like she was part of a community. She said:

> While we're not talking to each other, to me, it is still community in that we came together and then you learn from the experiences of others but in a quiet, mindful

> way. To me that's community because even though I'm not going to go up to that person, I didn't go up to them and say anything and I didn't say anything today, but it didn't mean I didn't engage and learn from the community. I think MM is a time for me to engage in community in a way that I've never done before, to learn something more about myself and something more about community in general. (Heidi, Interview, April 20, 2018)

Not talking and listening instead was a way that participants embraced being with and learning from the group, especially for people who often felt the need to fill the space, or described themselves as "talkers." One of the ways that human beings understand each other is through language, through talking and listening (Dahlberg et al, 2008). Through dialogue people's thoughts "are interwoven into a single fabric" (Merleau-Ponty, 1995, p. 354). Participants were aware of being present for this dialogue by trying to listen more, not having to control the conversation or lack of one, and letting "connections" grow organically as the group talked together about their experiences. Emma says listening instead of talking is something that she made an effort to do, "sometimes I say stuff but I'm always somebody who says stuff. I'm just a talker. I try not to say stuff sometimes, just to listen. I always like what people say" (Emma, Interview, March 29, 2018). Claire also commented on trying to be quiet and for her it was a process of being okay with the silence if no one else had something to say. She explained:

> I always have this nervous habit of wanting to fill the space and support whoever's there [by talking] that I'm really forcing myself to just be quiet and listen and sometimes be quiet - if I don't have something to say and the group

> doesn't have something to say sometimes - that's okay. (Claire, Interview, March 21, 2018)

For both Claire and Emma, there is a process of reflection and adjusting their usual habits in the interest of being present for what others had to say. Brooke reflected on this process as well, commenting more generally about how people often only think about what they want to say instead of listening to other people:

> Interviewer: How is that for you when other people are sharing reflections or talking about their experience?
>
> Brooke: Oh, I think it adds to it. Um, I think as human beings we tend to be a little impatient if we have something to say.. [laughs] And that's part of what mindfulness is about, is to become tuned into the whole person and not be thinking "what am *I* going to say" and that kind of thing. (Brooke, Interview, March 14, 2018)

Being present with what the group was saying during times of reflection during MM is something that Diane talked about. Her observation is important as she noticed what was happening when the group listened to each other, without one person filling all the space with only their one perspective. She observed:

> It was so neat because one person would chime in and then another person would piggyback off what the last person said. It felt like there's a sense of little bits of connection coming together. I could feel more and more connection growing in the group. (Interview, March 27, 2018)

Grace also noticed how a connection grows in the group, and she feels it happening when someone’s perspective matches her own. It is also interesting to see how she notices that

people are thoughtful about what they say with the group, which supports what Emma, Claire and Brooke talked about above when they said they made an effort to listen and not just fill space because they were uncomfortable with silence or only wanted to share their own perspective. Grace noticed that:

> Before people talk, they're very thoughtful about what they're going to share with the group but once they start saying things it's like, "Okay that's what I thought too." It's interesting too that sometimes you think what you're thinking no one else would be thinking that but then they really are. For example, the woman that said the painting started to unfold and I thought, she's right because you can take it all in. There was a big painting and I walked from one side to the other and to get a different perspective of it and the one side you could see. Then, when you move to the other side it was like, "I did miss all of this." If you take the time the painting does unfold.... (April 20, 2018)

Grace's comments about being able to relate to what others were saying about their experience with works of art is something many other participants commented on. Diana echoes Grace's interest in other perspectives and relating to what was said. She shared, "I always am so fascinated to hear what people think. I can't tell you how many times people have said things and I thought, "I felt that too'" (Diane, Interview, March 27, 2018). Julia also noticed that people will say things that are similar to her experience during the group reflection, but she goes on to add that sometimes different perspectives emerge as well:

> Sometimes, they say things that are similar to what I experience and that's always a nice feeling like, "Same experience." Sometimes it's just like they say

> something that's like, “I hadn't thought about that or experienced that,” and that's pretty interesting. (Interview, November 15, 2018)

Julia appreciates the different perspectives and is equally as interested in it as when the perspectives are similar to hers. Other participants talked about being present with different perspectives, and being open to and appreciating this new way of seeing things. Alexa said of hearing a new perspective, “I actually enjoyed that because it was very so different, because I was expecting this person to see the same thing, you know, and it was totally different” (Interview, March 10, 2018). Fay also gained a new perspective during group reflection. She observed, “we spoke about some of the pieces that we found interesting and hearing other people and what they saw, they gave me a new perspective on some pieces” (Interview, April 9, 2018). In a really beautiful summary of this group aspect of how participants experience MM at GMOA, Heidi expressed her appreciation of the group reflection:

> For me, I got more from the end of the mindfulness where people talked about what they experienced. Today, the same person spoke twice before people began to feel at ease, and there was more of this natural flow as people built on top of each other and began to talk. I liked personally that experience especially because we were mindfully engaging and somebody who was across the room who happened to engage in the same piece of art, he had the same experience. It makes me feel that I’m not alone, that I'm not the only one who thinks this way. Perhaps there are other people who have the same kind of thought and maybe we have to train ourselves to slow down, to be more engaged and in community with art. I think it helped me learn more, and I can know I did it by myself, because it’s

> affirming. It's affirming when someone else says something that you experience. You go, "Okay, all right. I got it. Maybe I can do this." (Heidi, Interview, April 20, 2018)

Like Diane, who earlier noticed how the group would "piggyback" off of each other, Heidi commented on the "natural flow" as people started "mindfully" sharing their perspectives with the group. For participants of MM, this state of being more engaged and "in community" both with the group and with art was an important aspect of the experience. Whether talking or simply communing with the group, participants felt connected with others and "not alone" as Heidi said.

The Instructor. As I was going through the data I noticed the important role that MM instructors played in how participants experienced the practice. Participants connect with the instructor by listening to what they say and also by watching what they do. Participants articulated this connection as seeing the instructor as a guide and an anchor who could help them navigate the sometimes uncomfortable moments of uncertainty, distraction, and silence. The support and wisdom that the instructors shared did not even have to be happening in the current moment, but could come from past instruction, as participants remembered what they had learned at previous MM practices. Relying on the instructor of MM in these ways required a certain amount of trust in them that allowed participants to feel comfortable trying out the things instructors invited them to do.

Claire talked about this trust, which she saw as an openness to being willing to try out new things, even when those new things made her nervous. She said:

> I love coming into a setting like this and just being completely open to whatever that person's going to ask me to do even though it makes me nervous. Yeah, like

> when he said we're going to do a partner activity. I'm like my brain wants to run away right now, but I'm going to stay here and do this because I know it will be a good outcome. (Claire, Interview, March 21, 2018)

Here Claire is articulating what many of the participants also expressed, that they trusted that there would be a "good outcome" if they engaged with whatever activity the instructor was inviting them to do. This trust in going along with instructor suggestions applied to partner activities, as Claire mentions, and which will be looked at more closely in the next section on how participants connected with each other individually. This trust also applies to art looking activities.

Instructors often shared techniques for looking more mindfully at works of art and Julia discussed the impact of being guided through instructor-led techniques for exploring works of art. Here, she talks about a clock-looking exercise that invited participants to imagine a clock face imposed on a work of art and to start looking at the 12 as they worked their way around the painting clockwise. Going along with this structured way of exploring a painting led Julia to experience it "more fully." She explains the impact of following the instructor's prompts:

> The clock-looking exercise allowed me to explore the work more fully in a more active way because I was looking at every section of it. That was pretty cool because you had to let it, just let yourself perceive it and let it make an impact on you. It was nice to be able to explore it in a very gentle way that really is thorough. (Julia, Interview, November 15, 2018)

Other participants also described how engaging with instructor-led techniques for looking helped them see more deeply into works of art. This experience of getting more from a

work of art by following instructor-led techniques is summarized by Alexa nicely, who said, “I like very much the guided part, for example the, um, different instructors do different things, and I go deeper into the picture” (Alexa, Interview, March 10, 2018). Kent compares his experience with instructors during MM to when he goes to art museums outside of MM. He said:

> I've gone to museums before and I'm not the biggest art person, so I always just look at it and will be like, "That's pretty cool," but what the instructor said was look at their faces and take it in deeply. I guess that being calm and trying to do what he said, I was better able to look at the little details, the things that I just normally never notice about a piece of art whenever I went to a museum. (Kent, Interview, November 16, 2018)

Kent points out that he tried to do what the instructor said, which is significant. He is willing to make an effort to do something new, without truly knowing the outcome. He is uncertain of what will happen, this process of looking is not something he usually does at a museum, but he is present for and responsive to what the instructor is guiding him to do and has an impactful and positive experience because of this.

Another example of how participants engaged with MM instructors is when they relied on them to guide them through other challenges during MM. Feeling distracted during the MM practice was something that many participants commented on, and for many the instructor helped focus their wandering mind. Fay describes this process and explains:

> The instructor was very great during the meditation, being like, “All right, your mind’s probably wandering, but just bring it back,” and was really helpful

> because the whole point of coming to the meditating is to clear up your mind. It's really easy to drift off and wander about and I found that really great. He kept anchoring me back to what we were doing because I did find my mind wandering. He would say something, I'd be like, “Yes, let's focus on my breathing again.” That was great for him to anchor me back to just sitting there. (Fay, Interview, April 9, 2018)

The challenge of paying attention and focusing was made easier by being present and connecting to what the instructor was saying. Even simple reminders to focus on breathing were effective for helping Fay. Engaging with what the instructors said helped participants experience a more satisfying mindfulness practice.

Connecting with the instructor was not just limited to listening to what they said, participants also relied on watching what instructors were doing with their bodies in order to mimic them. Kent noted the following:

> ...the way he was walking us through it while he was doing it himself. Because like a couple things, I was like, "How do I do that?" and then I looked at him and saw it and I was like, "Okay, that makes sense now." The way he was doing it and talking through it, it made it easier to do it myself and feel more comfortable then. (Kent, Interview, November 16, 2018)

Kent comments on how he “looked at him and saw” and could then make sense of what he needed to do. During MM, instructors were either sitting still with their eyes closed or demonstrating gentle stretches, for example, and participants would look to them to see what they should be doing. It happened often that when instructors invited participants to walk around the gallery to look at art, participants would wait until the instructor also

started moving across the gallery to begin their own wanderings towards works of art in a sort of echo of the instructor's movements. Dahlberg et al.'s (2008) discussion of "lived relations with others" adds to a deeper understanding of this aspect of participants' experience of MM. They explain that "when we meet with others we observe them. We see their behavior and recognize it as something that we also do" (p. 62). This "carnal intersubjectivity", as described by Merleau-Ponty (1960/1987), is based on an embodied recognition of the other, each person involved "drawing the other by invisible threads like those who hold the marionettes… making the other become what he is but would never have been by himself" (p. 137). When participants watched the movements of MM instructors, "it made it easier," as Kent noticed, for them to mimic those actions.

Kent went on to explain that this process of feeling connected to and guided by the instructor was something that he could access even after MM, when the instructor was no longer currently physically present and actively guiding him. Kent reflected that "when I look at them [photographs], I think back to MM and think of what the instructor said and almost redo what I did back there to get a better sense of the photo" (Kent, Interview, November 16, 2018). It is significant that even after the MM practice Kent can "redo" what the instructor guided him to do while looking at photographs. The impact the instructor had on how Kent looked at art after MM is important.

Claire also commented on this long-lasting instructor impact. Claire had a difficult time with silence, which is not an uncommon issue in practicing mindfulness. For many people, the distractions of checking one's phone, or being distracted and entertained by some outside stimuli is more comfortable than sitting in silence. Claire said:

> I was a little overwhelmed by the quiet today and I'm glad that that wasn't my first experience, right? But I could do it today and I could do it today because I remembered - I found myself being led by several other instructors who talked about ways of you know, you name if your neck is tight, sinking into things, and it has been what four months maybe since I've been coming to several of them, I could hear their voices kind of telling me calm down and then a song would you know, I heard on the radio over here in the car, would started playing in my head. And normally I'd be really critical, like ugh, and today it was like, okay, yeah, we know why that's there now - now turn it off and come back [to the present], you know, and it was that gentle voice of all of the other instructors kind of guiding me. (Interview, March 21, 2018)

The overwhelmed feeling that Claire experiences during a quiet part of the practice is something she tries to alleviate by a commonly used distraction techniques of a song popping into mind instead of focusing on the present moment. This process of feeling distracted is often made worse when people feel critical about not being able to focus or be present, because they feel like they are not doing mindfulness correctly. For Claire, however, even though the current instructor was not guiding her during this quiet part of MM, she was able to access "that gentle voice of" past instructors. They helped her remember that a wandering mind is normal and some techniques she could use to help connect comfortably with the present moment.

The Individual. Participants talked about all the ways they were present for different aspects of the experience, including being present with the experience itself, art, and people. This final part under Constituent B's subsection of "Embracing Fellow

Participants" addresses how participants were present with other fellow participants as individuals. This is different from how they related to the group and how they related to MM instructors. When participants connected with fellow participants as individuals, they often had very deep connections. While there was more apprehension about being open to this kind of experience, and during partner activities many people felt "panicky" about doing them, participants decided to stay with the experience. They were willing to be open to connecting with others one-on-one. When they did stay present with the experience and embrace the connection, they had a "really satisfying time," and would even cry together, or stay after MM and talk more about their personal shared experiences.

Many participants shared a hesitancy about engaging with fellow participants directly. Grace shared that the MM partner activities always make her panicky, "even though I found it to be really satisfying the times that I did it. But again, I always get really panicky" (Interview, April 20, 2018). Alexa also felt resistant and then had an enjoyable experience. In this comment she discusses the practice of saying supportive words to each other while making eye contact and deeply listening to the person who is speaking. Instructors often called these experiences "dyads." During dyads, partners would often sit directly across from each other and say things back and forth to each other. Examples of dyads that participants said to each other include "breathing in, I hear your fear and doubt. Breathing out, I embrace you in my heart… fear, doubt, embracing in heart" and "Breathing in, I see us happy. Breathing out, that is all I want… Our happiness, Is all I want" (these examples were developed and used by MM instructor

Jack, who adapted them from the work of Thich Nhat Hanh). Alexa described the practices:

> I don't like to, uhhh, how can I say this very kindly, I don't like too much this "holding hands" and the "kumbaya" part...the gazing thing I had a problem with it. I thought I was going to leave and not do it, but then it was okay because [of] the person doing it. We had a nice connection. I was reluctant and then enjoyed it twice. (Interview, March 10, 2018)

She is very clear about how she feels about it and even comments that she thought she was going to leave, but felt like the person she paired with made her comfortable enough to stay. Claire too felt panicky, and also chose to stay. Being present for the experience and orienting towards one another ended up being at least "enjoyable" and "satisfying," and for some participants it was a truly moving experience.

For example, Diana's experience of participating in a dyad with a fellow MM attendee left her feeling "very happy" and "uplifted. She recalled:

> I remember just feeling a very sweet energy from this woman and she was like, "I don't know what we're doing." We just chuckled about it a little bit and went through it, but chuckled about it. I just felt very, I felt very good, I felt very comfortable and for some reason I felt uplifted afterwards and I thought is that the dyad or just interacting with somebody. I don't know, but I felt very happy after that. (Diana, Interview, March 27, 2018)

Here she described how she and her partner were uncertain about what to do but had a sense of humor about it and "went through it." Diana was not sure if the dyad caused her to have a positive experience or if it was just the interaction with her partner. Perhaps it

was both, as the dyad gave her a structure through which she could engage with the other person who added to the experience with her "sweet energy." Emma was also affected by connecting with a fellow participant. She explained:

> I can cry easily, but I was saying some of the things with a stranger, when it was something along the lines of you're good or you are kind, or you are... I didn't know this person but I teared up and she teared up. I was like, "Why am I crying?" It was just moving. (Emma, Interview, March 29, 2018)

Claire also had an emotional experience with her partner when she shared something that had been stressing her out after feeling connected to her partner through the dyad practice. She reflected that after the dyads, she and her partner:

> stayed after and probably talked for another 10 minutes kind of because I had shared with him that you know my youngest is getting ready to go to college and he's been putting off driving and so we're really have a big push to drive and you know, the stress of all of that was making me feel very anxious. I didn't realize how much I was holding it inside and so those [dyad] affirmations [helped] and then he shared a very similar thing about his daughter - that kind of thing. And so we both kind of, we had that closure of a moment, which was really nice. (Claire, Interview, March 21, 2018)

Through this exchange with her dyad partner, they realized they had a shared experience and were able to reach some kind of "closure" through a conversation.

Constituent C: A Moving Discovery

As I was engaging with the data, I noticed how often participants said they had a profound realization or experienced a different state of mind during MM. Many

commented about how they were deeply affected during their practice of MM. Phrases like “I realized” or “I had an aha moment” stood out, as well as comments about their state of mind like “a little bit more calm” and “getting to that nice quiet place.” I began to think of this process of feeling different and realizing something new as a process of experiencing moving discoveries, and these moving discoveries were an important aspect of MM.

Choosing the phrase “moving discovery” to describe this aspect of participants' experience of MM is influenced by the phenomenological theories that guided this study. The word “moving” is fitting because each participant had an embodied experience with MM. They were physically present for the practice of MM, and literally moved their bodies through the special place of the experience. They moved the experience along with their participation and open-hearted engagement, and they moved through these discoveries to find a new way of feeling or thinking.

I chose the word “discovery” because I think it best fits what participants were experiencing during MM. Epiphany is a similar word, as is revelation, but these two words seem to highlight a more intellectual process. The dual meaning of discovery as being a new way of feeling or thinking, as well as encountering something that is revealed, captures more about the process of moving through the museum and engaging with the environment, while also seeing other perspectives. However, the word discovery does not mean that something is found that exists independently outside of the discoverer. The discovery is one that is revealed through an interaction between participant and the world, and Dahlberg et al (2008) cautions “to think that meaning arises in the human brain, or lies outside the window ready to be encountered is a grave mistake” (p.94).

Participant discovery as experienced during MM is the meaning found in relationship with the world.

When they were present for them, participants' discoveries during MM were transformative both in terms of a physical renewal as well as a new understanding of the world, or at least a new understanding of how to be in an art museum. When participants were present for the embrace, they sometimes experienced a "hearkening," which Dahlberg et al. (2008) describe as a "goal-free listening" (p. 101). This does not refer to literal listening with one's ears but a figurative listening that is meant to increase one's level of nearness to the world. It is similar to the embrace, in that it is fully engaged with the world, but the experience of hearkening results in a kind of "hearing" that deeply understands. The embrace orients one towards an object, others, or an experience and establishes a connection, while hearkening is made possible through increased reflection and awareness, and leads to new knowledge and even a paradigm shift (Dahlberg et al., 2008).

Discovery

In their interviews, participants reflected on realizations they had during MM. These realizations usually took place when participants were looking at art. This aspect of their experience, while it does include art, is different from the "Being Present with Works of Art" aspect of Constituent B. Art was certainly part of making a discovery, and the discovery was possible as a result of their presentness with a work of art, but as part of Constituent C, the "Discovery" aspect is about their experience of newly illuminated knowledge. Some of these realizations were discussed briefly during MM. One woman talked about how she was getting older and felt frail sometimes, but after looking at an

oversized photograph of a large very old tree she realized that she is aging like the tree but “this huge tree is still strong and majestic.” She added, “It makes me feel stronger” (Fieldnotes, November 30, 2018). During another practice participants looked at black and white photographs of people from Appalachia, an impoverished region in the southeastern United States. At the end of the practice, a participant wondered out loud about how do people, when they are dealing with tough times like those we saw in the photographs, keep “hopeful spirits and enjoy life?” He suggested that the answer might be that “you must create beauty when you can” (Fieldnotes, November 2, 2018). In a related turn, Grace had a realization about “life in general” that changed how she understood being in the moment. She said:

> The thing that I was thinking and not just for here but just in life in general, sometimes you just need to take the time to look at something or enjoy something or just be there in the moment and not have to worry about everything else. (Grace, Interview, April 20, 2018)

Emma described a special discovery about being happy that she experienced while looking at an antique cupboard, but goes into more depth about how the process of discovery unfolded for her:

> I had an aha moment. I'm walking around and I spent my 20s stripping antiques, stripping white paint off of antiques, and now I spend my 50s and 60s painting antiques -- so I'm in the furniture gallery and I see that blue cupboard. I love that. That's a classic old faded color. I love it and I have replicated it. When I do-- and it, it's very hard, I'm just so happy. I saw it and I felt good about it, and then I went, "This makes me so happy. I'm so glad I came to this room. I'm so glad I

> came here today." Then, I had just been talking to my sister who lives in [another state] and she gets depressed a lot. She's in her head all the time and she's like, "What is happiness and, well, I'm not happy." I realized happiness is with us all the time. It's just when we go, "I'm happy. This makes me happy." Many things make us happy throughout the day, but do we actually stop and be mindful of it? I just was standing and going, "I'm so happy. I'm so glad I came." It was like this and this and this is what happiness is. Happiness is just a series of moments. (Emma, Interview, March 29, 2018)

Emma described the process of having this "aha moment" about what happiness is to her. She began by talking about her personal history and perspective and how this connected with what she saw in the museum and made meaning from what she was looking at. This engagement and resulting new knowledge is an example of what phenomenologists mean when they talk about intentionality. Emma's discovery is not of something that exists outside of her lived experience. This discovery manifests and appears for Emma and reveals the intentional relationship (Dahlberg et al, 2008) between her and the object, the invisible threads that connect her to the lifeworld. Emma's new found wisdom is the result of this confluence of experiences.

Heidi experiences a similar series of connections during MM, leading up to an illuminating discovery about community. She explains her process of looking at a work of art and then hearing someone else talk about their experience of looking at the same painting during the reflection opportunity at the end of practice. She said:

> it took me six or seven minutes of [looking] just going, "Okay, I'm not sure, whatever," and he had the same thing. It was funny because he went through the

> same thing of-- he just looked at the boats on the canal. He noticed someone working and then he realized there's two people working. I thought that was interesting that it took him a while to realize there's two people because I took the same amount of time. It took a while of looking at it for me to go, “There are two people working.” Very common but yet, they were working together. It made me realize just the importance of community for life, working together to accomplish a greater good, even if it's in the mundane things in life, like work. (Heidi, Interview, April 20, 2018)

In this recollection, Heidi mentions other aspects of the phenomenon of MM at GMOA that constitute the whole of the essential meaning structure. This reinforces that each constituent cannot be separated out to clearly delineated parts, but that there is a movement throughout the experience through the intertwined themes that I have discussed throughout this chapter. In this one quote Heidi talks about being present with the work of art, and with the group to hear about another’s experience, which fits with Constituent B.

I included all of this quote also because it illustrates again how the constituents are all prerequisites of each other. Heidi’s discovery of the importance of community is illuminating for her and is the result of not only looking at the painting and thinking about the meaning she found in it, but also arose from Heidi’s realization that the other participants are sharing a similar experience with the same work of art. For Heidi, the painting provides an example of community as well as during MM for her as she hears the other participant share his thoughts, and being part of this confluence in her lived

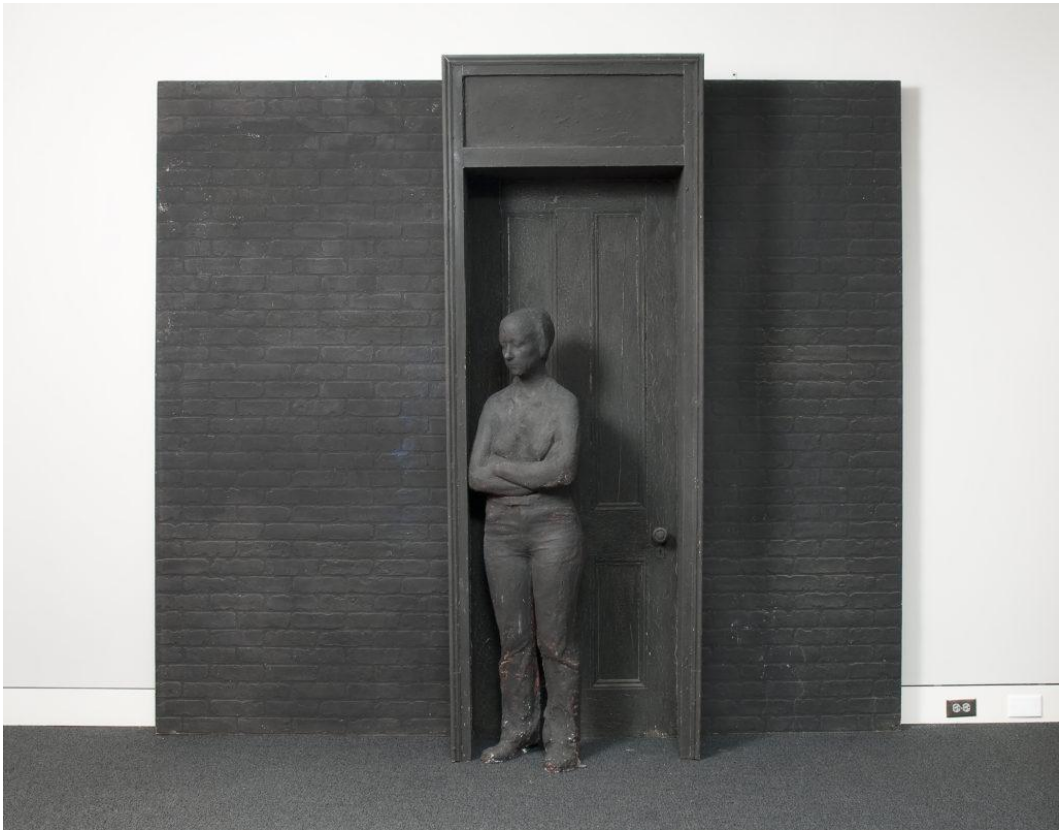
experience leads Heidi to make a transformative discovery about what community and working together means to her.

Ivan's experience also helps to illuminate this important aspect of discovery that is part of the phenomenon when he discovers a new understanding of what his parents went through when he was younger. Ivan recalls looking at a sculpture and having an epiphany about his parents:

> I remember there was this, I would say sculpture, I think it was a young woman at the doorway (Figure 21). At first glance, I just saw a woman at a doorway and stuff. Okay, that's that, but when I gave a more durable glance, it started to remind me of things that I've also experienced like my parents waiting at the door for me to come back from school and things like that. When I was looking at it, I realized the color coming through could also mean the experiences that one goes through, and it started to remind me of my parents and what they go through. (Ivan, Interview, October 24, 2018)

Figure 22

George Segal, Young Woman in Doorway, 1983. Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia; Gift of the George and Helen Segal Foundation.



Being Moved

Just like how the experience of MM started for participants before the official program began (recall how Alexa described how her experience as beginning during her drive to the museum), participants' experiences of MM also extended past the official end of the timed program at 10:30 am. MM participants felt changed both during and after the practice. They experienced an altered state that was different from how they felt when they first started MM. Many talked about lingering at the museum after MM because they enjoyed looking at art in the "receptive," "slowed down," and "quiet" state they felt as part of their experience of MM. Kent said, "afterwards I walked around the museum, I

felt that I was better able to view the art pieces themselves because I was in a more calm state, and more receptive to all the things" (Kent, Interview, November 16, 2018). One participant told me after a practice that for the first time in weeks he felt "calm and relaxed" (Fieldnotes, September 9, 2018), and another said during a reflection "I felt my body relax" (Fieldnotes, August 31, 2018) when the practice started. Brooke also noted that staying afterwards is a "good thing", and described her mood after a practice in more detail:

> And then afterwards, you're not in that rushing mindset. And, I was going to say, not every time, have I structured things so I can stay and enjoy, there is more of a feeling that that would be a good thing. In other words, you're in a, I'm in a slowed-down, notice-more-things, just-experience-what's-here-now sort of mood after it. (Brooke, Interview, March 14, 2018)

Claire also stayed to "see some things" but mainly because she was not ready to "jump out in the big world again." She explained:

> I think that's probably why I also will sometimes walk around the museum just a little bit - see some things, get my brain back up... because I do find myself getting to that nice quiet place at the end of these. I'm not ready to jump out in the big world again, right away... (Claire, Interview, March 21, 2018)

Similar to how Claire describes her state of mind, other participants talked about how they felt afterwards. They used positive words like "relaxed" and "calm." In her interview, Emma talked about how she felt when she leaves the museum and gets to her car, instead of rushing to the next planned thing, she feels more "in the moment." Emma explained:

> Usually when I leave here and I get in my car, and always it seems like I have to do something next, I'm not in the moment very often. Then this helps me be in the moment. I do feel relaxed. I feel happier. (Emma, Interview, March 29, 2018)

Others talked about similar states of mind and described how they "carried" their experience with them throughout the day in a way that made the "day so much better." For example, Fay said: I felt relaxed and just-- I could take a deep breath when I left. It made my whole day so much better" (Interview, April 9, 2018). Grace describes in more depth how her experience with MM continues throughout the day. She said:

> Afterwards, you can just carry that with you throughout the day and I find that I'm a little bit more calm and you don't let things bother you as much and you just let them roll off your back and then, I keep thinking of what I was grateful for and to keep that in my life especially for today. (Interview, April 20, 2018)

This state of being "a little bit more calm" and unbothered is something that Grace *carries* with her throughout the day. She *moves* through her day *with* this state of mind. "Being moved" acknowledges a shifting emotional state and a physical reality of navigating space and time. Participants had a moving experience during MM and this movement led to learning a new way, which is discussed in the next section.

Learning a New Way

In addition to discovering new knowledge about "life in general" and feeling moved, participants also discovered new ways of being in a museum and looking at art as part of their experience of MM. For example, a participant remarked at the end of an MM practice that she learned that "looking at a painting takes time and focus" and that when she did this, she noticed more than she normally would (Fieldnotes, August 31, 2018).

Participants also brought this aspect of their experience up in interviews. In her interview Emma reflected on how she learned a new way to look at a work of art. Emma said, “This has taught me that there is so much to see in one picture. So much to see. And to look and then to look again and to look again, and all these things are unfolding” (Emma, March 29, 2018). Diana had a similar experience of MM changing how she looks at art, and mentions someone sharing this aspect of MM during a reflection at the end of an MM practice. Diana recalled:

> One thing someone mentioned, and I shared those thoughts, he mentioned how ever since we started- ever since meditating at the museum he never looks at art the same again and I feel like that's definitely been my experience too. Just taking the time in a mindful state, not trying to get to another painting. (Diana, Interview, March 27, 2018)

For Emma, the new way of looking at art involved a process of looking “again” and noticing that by doing that she saw in a work of art, an “unfolding” of the work of art occurred. Diana described a similar discovery when she realized a new way of looking at art that involved taking more time to look and not being concerned with seeing as much of the art at the museum as possible. Her new way focused on one work of art and was not concerned about getting to the next work of art as quickly as possible.

This process of moving on to the next work of art instead of focusing on a work of art and feeling like that was the right way of engaging with art in a museum is something Heidi talked about. She explained:

> That's the thing, I'm not cultured. Before when I went to museums I just thought like, “You go, you see, you look, you move on.” This, it’s learning a different

> way, even though I'm not sure if that was the intent of Morning Mindfulness. It does help, I don't want to say train, but it does help maybe retrain or break down these perceived rules that some of us might have picked up that this is how you're supposed to do or be [in a museum]. (Heidi, Interview, April 20, 2018)

Feeling like she was not "cultured" meant that she thought there was a certain way of how she was supposed to visit a museum that was based on perhaps what she had seen other people doing in a museum, and feeling pressure to act like everyone else instead of exploring other ways of being in that space and engaging with art. Her old way involved a process that prioritized how to move through the museum space instead of how to look at art. Just like Diana and Emma, Heidi felt a pressure to move through the museum as a priority instead of moving through a work of art, so to speak. In addition to looking more deeply at art, during MM participants experienced a new way of moving through the museum that involved sitting in a gallery, focusing on breathing, spending time stretching or listening to poetry, and talking through dyads with a partner wishing them happiness or acknowledging the other's suffering. Existing with art and being settled into spaces that might encourage a lingering embrace, especially for those who are not sure if they are cultured enough or belong in that space, can be a radical new way of being in an art museum. Discovering a new way to be in museums and with art was an important part of how MM participants experienced the phenomenon.

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

> What we are encouraging is the value of discovery, the interest in things beneath the surface, the joy of looking and thinking. It is here that meanings are made, that one's own life illuminates a work of art and a work of art in turn illuminates who we are and what we do. It is an experience that is powerful and personal, and it makes the viewer feel alive in a way that no amount of information can. But if you don't stop, you won't see anything. (Burnham, 1991, p. 524)

This inspiring quote by Rika Burnham was written over 32 years ago. These aspects of an art museum experience that educators are encouraging are still relevant today. Since Burnham wrote this, new ways of making important discoveries in art galleries are still being realized for art museum education. Central to these techniques, though, is still the simple idea that "if you don't stop, you won't see anything."

This study began with the wonder that I felt after witnessing a MM at GMOA in action. I was inspired by the level of engagement the participants seemed to experience, as well as their profound and vulnerable reflections offered to the group, who in turn provided open-hearted and deep listening. Through the process of investigating this phenomenon, I have discovered that mindfulness programs in art museums present a profound opportunity for supporting participants' connections to the world, comfort with uncertainty, and access to aesthetic experience. These opportunities, as well as their implications and ideas for future research, are included in this final chapter.

As my research and this dissertation comes to a close, I feel relief as the work of a project draws near, and excitement about all that has been illuminated, but also a pang of

wistfulness as I think about no longer dwelling with this topic of participant experience of MM at GMOA. I am reminded of something van Manen (1990) wrote. He reflects on the process of research as being a desire "to know the world in which we live as human beings" (p. 5). He goes on to say:

> In doing research we question the world's very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and to bring the world as world into being for us and in us. Then research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being. To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love. We desire to truly know our loved one's very nature. And if our love is strong enough, we not only will learn much about life, we also come face to face with its mystery. (pp. 5-6)

This passage resonates with me because I appreciate the opportunities this research study presented to me for thinking deeply about human experience and coming "face to face" with the mysteries I care deeply about.

Revisiting the Research Question and Process

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experience for participants of MM at GMOA. In order to do this, I asked the question: What is Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art like for participants? This research was guided by a phenomenological qualitative research design informed by the Reflective Lifeworld Research approach developed by Dahlberg et al. (2008). The RLR approach determined my theoretical framework, as well as my methodology for gathering, analyzing, and reporting data.

RLR is guided first and foremost by an attitude of "sensitive openness" that requires a "purposeful leaving aside of expectations and assumptions so that the phenomenon and its meaning can show itself and, perhaps, surprise its researchers" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 96). This attitude of openness was supported by examining my pre-understandings through a literature review, and paying attention to my reactions and assumptions towards the phenomenon by keeping a bridling journal. In this way I could remain aware of my evolving position towards the research and ensure that I did not jump to any conclusions before the true nature of the phenomenon could reveal itself.

Data for the study included 12 semi-structured interviews with MM participants whom I invited to discuss their experiences, 38 anonymously written accounts submitted via an online form, and 16 observations resulting in detailed fieldnotes, as well as my bridling journal. This data was then analyzed using a whole-parts-whole approach as described by Dahlberg et al. (2008) which was a process that happened in cycles as I moved from viewing the whole of data to viewing parts and back again. In this way I considered how even the smallest cluster of meaning fit in within the whole context of the phenomenon.

The results of this analysis were presented in Chapter Four as rich descriptions and in Chapter Five as the essential meaning structure made up of constituents. The essential meaning structure of the phenomenon is described as "Being present *with* reveals opportunities for engagements that are illuminating, transformative, and connective" and is further elucidated by its three constituents: Finding respite in a special time and place, Embracing the experience, art, and people, and A moving discovery. In

the next section, I reflect more fully on my research findings as a means for setting up implications and future research.

Discussion of Findings

As art museums continue to work to meet the interests and needs of their visitors, they are challenged to know more about museum visitors and their experiences (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011; Falk & Dierking, 2013; Henry 2010; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Roberts, 1997, Weil, 1999; Weil, 2002). Knowing more about what visitors are hoping to gain from their visit and how to help them realize this is a way for museums to remain relevant to their communities. Simon (2016) writes that relevance for museums is "an exercise in empathy - understanding what matters to your intended audience, not what matters to you" (p. 43). Museums want to be relevant to the communities they serve and with the growing interest in mindfulness in America, as discussed in Chapter Two, the number of public programs that include mindfulness has been increasing rapidly (Banzin, 2022; Earhart, 2011; Hemera Foundation, 2016; Holmes, 2015; Kai-Kee et al., 2020; Krug, 2014; Pollak, 2016; Thompson & Tobin, 2018; Tobin, 2017; Zabelina et al., 2020). Much of what has been written about the intersection of mindfulness, museums, and art has speculated about the benefits of this confluence, such as deepening participants' experiences with art (Banzin, 2022; Migdol, 2022; Gradle, 2011; Kai-Kee et al., 2020; Thompson & Tobin, 2018, Zebelina et al., 2020) and leading to transformative experiences (Hemera Report, 2017; Zabelina et al., 2020) but these reports either did not provide empirical research about the participant experience of mindfulness-based public programs art museums, or provided anecdotal reports from observing K-12 and college students who were involved due to class requirements. The findings of this dissertation

hopefully add to the body of research cited above and deepen scholarly understanding of not only how participants experience mindfulness in art museums, but also how this experience can be effectively implemented in the future.

Based on participants' experiences, the research study concludes that mindfulness offers a **vital and profound** way of being present in an art museum, because it supports opportunities for participants to deeply engage with the world. My findings make it clear that the growth and popularity of these kinds of mindfulness programs is not simply based on what Hannah Arendt (1968) calls "extraordinary enthusiasm for what is new" (p. 176) but is rather a result of the benefit participants gain from these programs. Enthusiasm for the new can result in a bandwagon effect, with many people supporting something just because it is novel. In the case of mindfulness in art museums, there has been a significant increase in the number of museums offering mindfulness programs, which could be seen as part of a fad-driven trend based on the current popularity of mindfulness. However, when developed and facilitated by professionals who understand art, mindfulness, and art museum education, mindfulness-based programs at art museums can offer beneficial opportunities for participants to engage with museums, art, and their fellow humans in profound personal and interpersonal ways that can be understood as connective, illuminating, and transformative.

Being Present With

Before I discuss the ways that mindfulness supports connection, illumination, and transformation, it is important to be clear about how mindfulness supports being present, as being present is necessary for deep engagement. My findings make it clear that while MM provided a respite from the stresses and worries of the modern world, this respite

was not a freeing from the world itself. It was a way to more deeply engage in it–it was the kind of experience that Dewey describes when he writes, “instead of signifying being shut up within one’s own private feelings and sensations, experience signifies active and alert commerce with the world” (1934/1980, p. 19). Many misunderstand mindfulness as a solely individual practice instead of a social one, and that the aims of it are to empty one’s mind (Hyde & LaPrad, 2015). Instead, it can be understood as Kabat-Zinn (1990) defines it: “awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience” (p. 145). When participants were present for the experience, they readied themselves for engagements that were connective, illuminating and transformative. These engagements were beneficial and meaningful for participants because they were ways for them to not only be involved with the world, but also to actively practice this involvement through their embodied orientation towards the experience.

This orientation to the present moment begins with the simple act of being present. Varela et al. (1991) explain:

> Eventually it begins to dawn on the meditators that there is an actual difference between being present and not being present… the first great discovery of mindfulness tends to be not some encompassing insight into the nature of mind but the piercing realization of just how disconnected humans normally are from their very experience. (p. 25)

Awareness of the present moment is foundational for mindfulness practice. This connection can begin with attention to the breath, as one’s breath connects them to their body, and one’s body, being physically present, cannot be in the past or in the future. One

also cannot recapture a past breath, nor breathe a future breath. There is only the current breath the body is breathing right now, and awareness of the current breath places one's body here and now. Dahlberg et al. (2008) and Merleau-Ponty (1995) would agree that our bodies connect us to the world and act as anchors. Every mindfulness instructor in their MM practice guided participants through this basic step of noticing one's breathing, whether by counting each breath, extending the exhale out to be longer than the inhale, or simply inviting participants to take a deep slow breath into their belly.

My findings also support that MM encouraged participants to remain present in other ways. For example, feeling more present was something that participants noticed on their way to attending MM, as anticipation for the experience focused their attention on what they were doing in the present moment. Recall Alexa, who started to notice her surroundings and physical and mental state even on the drive to MM. Claire reflected that she is present to her experience during MM (and even after), because she noticed the time she took for MM. Many participants also found that focusing on works of art allowed them to more easily center their attention, due to the artworks' "concrete" nature.

Being present, whether through breath, works of art, or noticing time, begins with an awareness that is rooted in the body. This understanding is foundational for how mindfulness-based programs at art museums support participants being able to connect with themselves, others, and art as well. Being present allows for an involvement with the world that supported participants in experiencing connection, illumination, and transformation.

Connection

I wrote in Chapter Two of this dissertation about my interest when I was a museum educator in creating spaces where museum visitors could make connections, and this interest is shared widely in museum education, where fostering "a greater sense of connection to the world around us" (GMOA Education Mission Statement, online, n.d) is a priority. Connection is fundamental to being human, as we evolved in groups and rely on each other constantly. Together humans share our experiences and their dreams, comfort each other in fear and pain, and feel pleasure together in play and joy. But as Wheatley (2002) writes "we are more fragmented and isolated from one another than ever before… the entire world seems hypnotized in the wrong direction - encouraging us to love things rather than people.. to choose fear instead of love" (p. 4). We live in a world where it can feel increasingly more difficult to deeply connect due to myriad external pressures like chronic distractions, the cult of "busyness," and technology-assisted communication replacing person-to-person interactions. During MM at GMOA, mindfulness encouraged participants to truly connect based on practicing the attitudes that are associated with mindfulness.

Mindfulness also helped participants develop a deeper connection to themselves. This was made possible through being reflective about their own thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations with an attitude of non-striving, patience, and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). This awareness can again begin with one's breath, simply noticing how it feels to inhale and then exhale. Often, MM participants spoke of their perspective from a place of self-awareness. Grace was aware of bringing herself back to her intention of focusing on MM, and also that she took the time to participate in MM for "that hour to think about

me" (Grace, Interview, April 20, 2018). Other MM participants also mentioned the self often, saying things like "I remove myself..to just take a moment" (Julia, Interview, November 15, 2018), "I was calm and at peace with myself" (Kent, Interview, November 16, 2008), "I find myself getting to that nice quiet place" (Claire, Interview, March 21, 2018), and "MM is a time for me… to learn something more about myself" (Heidi, Interview, April 20, 2018). Instead of being isolating acts, self-awareness and reflection increase one's ability to connect with others (Hyde &LaPrad, 2015; Kabat-Zinn, 2013) and ability to better understand others' lived experiences (Dahlberg et al., 2008).

Mindfulness helped participants be more compassionate and open-hearted towards others, and as a result they felt more connected to other participants. This is important work for museums to do in our modern times. Though written in 1995, Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson's reflections on providing opportunities for connection in museums still holds true today. They explain that in modern society, "there are fewer and fewer ways for people to experience shared events, but that museums can provide opportunities for individually meaningful experiences that also connect with the experiences of others" (p. 61). This was profoundly true for participants of MM, whether they were connecting with the group or individuals. They experienced these connections with others as feeling the energy of the group, being able to relax with others despite social anxiety, sharing space and silence, learning what to do by watching group actions, and being in a community with others. Mindfulness also assisted participants in being able to listen deeply to what others had to say. Barrett (2010) reminds us of the importance of listening to one another, suggesting that "by listening to one another, we learn about each other, and we can create communities of understanding. Through

communities of understanding we can reduce fear of others and contribute to peace in the world" (2010, p. 124).

Illumination

Another important way that mindfulness helped participants state their involvement with the world was in how it supported the kind of perception that allows for seeing. The kind of seeing that participants experienced was not that "bald sense" of seeing that Dewey (1934/1980) talks about, which allows for the object to be looked at and named (p. 54). Rather, the kind of seeing that mindfulness allows for is an "act of perception, which is performed not to judge …but to understand" (Isenberg, 1973, p. 162), and the promise is "that all sorts of vistas lie ahead if the work is authentically performed" (Greene, 1995, p. 182). It is this kind of open-hearted seeing that MM participants experienced. In their embrace of the practice of MM, of each other, and of works of art, those parts of the lifeworld that were normally looked through or seen as something else entirely due to recognition instead of perception, were at last illuminated. When something is illuminated new realizations are awakened.

MM participants talked about being present with works of art, but being present with works of art is not the only condition of illumination. Research in the field of museum education has recognized the importance of supporting embodied responses in the museum setting (Hubard, 2007; Illeris, 2016; Kai-Kee et al., 2020; Mayer, 2007; Steier et al., 2015), and as Kai-Kee et al. (2020) write, "exploring a museum should not be viewed as a mental exercise" (p. 60). Mayer (2007) explains why works of art are especially conducive for embodied responses, as they "present themselves as physical entities that exist in the same space as we do…Therefore, there is a sense of immediacy

in the way viewers begin to apprehend an artwork…" (p. 47). MM participants talked often about how being in front of a work of art made it easier to be "quiet" and concentrate on it.

However, as Greene (1995) notes, "simply being in the presence of art forms is not sufficient to occasion an aesthetic experience or to change a life" (p. 125). Mindfulness provided a framework for being able to stay with a work of art long enough and in a way that allowed the work to be "sensuously perceived" (Siegesmund, 2010, p. 82). MM participants expressed this part of their experience as being able to "feel the impression that [the work of art] gives" or engaging with works of art because they "felt really drawn to it". Instead of analyzing the work of art through a lens of art historical information or using labels to decide what the work of art should express, participants approached their involvement with works of art with the awareness that it could illuminate something in connection with their life, as Ivan noted in his interview (October 24, 2018).

This illumination happened for MM participants as an unfolding, described as a process of "staying and looking." Dewey writes how important it is to let an experience develop fully, and that this can be cut short if someone does not spend enough time attending to it "because something else is entered upon so speedily" (Dewey, 1934/1980, p.45). When MM participants practiced the attitudes that are developed during mindfulness like patience, openness, and curiosity they were, and Heidi put it, able to move "past the superficial to something more deep" as she said the experience was "more than observation, it moved me to a deeper level" (Heidi, Interview, April 20, 2018). I suggest that during mindfulness, when it takes place in an art museum and incorporates

objects of art as focal points, that involvement with art "makes visible what was never visible before" (Greene, 2007, p. 164). New meanings of the world and understandings of the self are illuminated, and these illuminations lead to transformation.

Transformation

By being involved with the world in ways that allowed for connection and illumination, mindfulness also supported transformation. When something is transformed it is changed. This change happened during MM because participants had what Dewey (1935/1980) calls "an experience" (p. 35) which is an arc and highly evolved form of common human experience.

During *an experience* there is a sense of being part of something unfolding and whole. Parts can be separated by pauses, but these pauses are not interruptions or abandonment of one's involvement. The sense of cohesiveness is what gives the normal progression of experience a distinctive arc that we can recognize as *an experience*. Each part is connected in a relationship and this relationship gives an experience meaning and leads to a satisfying conclusion. During *an experience*, one might feel a range of emotions that are not always pleasant, but throughout *an experience*, they make the choice to engage even when they experience difficulty. Engaging with works of art can also be marked with discomfort. For example, Deeth (2012) writes that many people who enjoy contemporary art talk about how they welcome the unease and imbalance, the dwelling with uncertainty, that the experience affords them. A*n experience* moves us to new conclusions that transform previous understanding. Mindfulness-based programs in art museums support this arc of experience and crucially support participants through the discomfort of "risking a venture into the unknown," as Greene (1988) would call it (p.

135), by guiding participants through practicing attitudes of trust, openness, and being present for whatever arises (Chodron, 2002).

An example of transformation during MM includes participants' understanding of *how to be present* in an art museum differently. This includes how to look at art and also how to move through or be still in art museum spaces. Typically, museum visitors move through the galleries, pausing on this or that work of art and moving on to the next (Falk & Dierking, 2013, Henry, 2010). During MM, participants often spent longer looking at one work of art, and as Emma reflected during her interview, learned to look at the art over and over again. Participants also noticed that they were looking longer at one work of art, as opposed to quickly moving on to another painting. Heidi commented during her interview that she learned a new way of being in a museum because her experience changed her understanding of how she could engage with works in the museum.

Participants were also transformed by new knowledge that was illuminated by interacting with works of art as part of practicing habits of mindfulness. Gadamer (1960/2004) writes that "…a work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience changing the person experiencing it" (p. 92). For example, they experienced new realizations like how their parents may have felt waiting for them after school, that happiness is a series of moments, or how one just needs to be in the moment, and these were all transformative realizations.

Implications

Based on my research findings about how participants experience MM at GMOA and discussion about how mindfulness-based programs support profound and vital ways of being in art museums, I offer two primary recommendations that are in many ways tied

to each other. Throughout the data it was clear that participants were choosing to participate for personal reasons, and co-constituting their experiences throughout MM by making the decision to orient or not towards the practice again and again. Their experiences would not have been as meaningful if the goal of their participation or what discoveries they should make had been pre-determined by the museum. Over the decades, museum visitor studies have revealed the personal nature of meaning making in a museum, but truly creating spaces that allow for deeply personal experiences that can be shared and reflected upon with groups in the galleries has yet to be consistently realized in museum practice. The experience of MM would have been very different if instructors told participants which works of art they should engage with, instead of letting participants choose based on which works of art called to them, or told them who they must partner with. Just as Hyde and LaPrad (2015) write that "practicing mindfulness cannot be required of people, they must choose it and practice it for themselves" (p. 3), the same is true of the museum experience. It must be chosen and practiced by the participant, and supported by museums that become "expert listeners" (Deeth, 2012, p. 1) so as to be able to openly and sensitively respond to participants' interests.

Evidence from this study also suggests that the quality of the program is important. When the practice was off, in this case the mindfulness instructor led participants in movements that were more fitness oriented for seniors and less about mindfulness, Julia thought it was "weird":

> Interviewer: Can you describe some of the things that you -- that you thought were weird about that MM?

> Julia: Just because it wasn't a-- the stuff that she [the instructor] was doing wasn't-- is not aimed at people my age, so it was just a little odd to be participating in that kind of stuff because I don't need it nor do I want it. It was silly and a little tiny bit fun but mostly it was like, “All right, why am I here?” [chuckles] I liked the more meditation session ones a lot. They're really nice. You feel very calm and centered and it’s nice to also be able to take a look around at the art that's up.

This implies that experienced mindfulness instructors and museum educators have an impact on what kind of experiences participants have. This means that mindfulness-based programs should be facilitated by qualified and experienced professional mindfulness instructors and art museum educators who understand the nature of mindfulness-based programs. Expert facilitators also help participants feel safe and invested in the experience, so they are willing to be vulnerable, otherwise they will not turn towards the practice or embrace uncertainty. When one is surprised by discovery and encounters something one did not know before, the outcome cannot be predicted, which requires an openness to the unexpected. Museum education staff need to understand how to facilitate what Dewey calls “an experience” and respond sensitively to shifting program needs. This is true for mindfulness instructors as well. They also should have some experience with mindfulness practice, or they will not be able to teach it well (Hyde & LaPrad, 2015). Without a sense of trust and access to experienced guidance, participants cannot embrace the experience and will turn away. As Dewey (1934/1980) notes, “expert educators have the skills necessary to be “attentive to and aware of the physical, material, and social conditions that are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth” (p.

40). It makes a difference when expert professionals and educators facilitate art museum education and have the resources and support that they need to do so.

Future Research

As this research project wraps up, it is exciting to think about future research related to my findings. In this section, I offer several ideas for new research questions. Given that time and memory are such interesting factors for participants of MM, my first suggestion for future research is to investigate how participants remember their experience of MM years after they first experienced it. Several discussed being able to remember special details about works of art they had viewed weeks ago, or could remember what specific instructors said and use those memories as stand-ins for in-person guidance. Participants also talked about how their experience of MM began before they even got to the museum, that time passed differently during the practice, and that they could feel the effects after the official practice time ended. Falk & Dierking's (2014) contextual model of museum visitor experience includes the element of time, and they discuss how our understandings can deepen or change over time.

I am also curious about aspects of my findings that revealed how participants experience being in the museum in a new way. I think mindfulness in museums presents an exciting opportunity for an important investigation into how expected ways of being in museums can be disrupted in peaceful and quiet ways. Ileris (2016) writes about how embodied responses to art have the potential to explore, challenge, and modify how people "normally" relate to art, because embodied response can alter how bodies are staged and learning is performed in the museum (p. 156). For example, gallery visitors act in certain ways based on what they think is expected of them, and these performances

are often based on people's understanding of the "traditional stagings of the learning body," which dictate how they engage with art. Mindfulness encourages interacting with the museum space in ways that are authentic and responsive, but also non traditional, as people do not often practice mindful walking through a gallery barefoot, or stay with a work of art longer than a few seconds. My data could be further mined for new understandings about how participants experience being in a museum in new ways, or new research might be conducted to ask questions about how being present in museum spaces can disrupt typical ways of engaging.

Another question that emerged for me is based on the degree to which art factors into participants' experiences, prompting new questions like how might engagements with specific types of art change the experience? For example, what kind of experiences can mindfulness support when works of art are all abstract vs narrative paintings? Another question that emerged was how does telling someone what to look at instead of letting them choose change the experience? And related to art, how might adding art making in the galleries as part of the mindfulness experience change the experience?

Finally, I also wonder about what the experience of mindfulness-based programming in museums is like for mindfulness instructors, and museum education staff. Related to their experience, do instructors and museum staff experience the embrace and if so in what ways? Do they embrace participants and the uncertainty of how the practice will unfold? Do they have a hearkening that allows for their own transformation, similar to what participants experience? My own experience made me curious about other facilitators' experiences of mindfulness-based museum programs, because my experience was different in some ways from participant experience. I think

understanding more about this is important to cultivating a deeper understanding of this kind of programming.

My last musing is not about a specific research topic, but more about how one might practice a mindfulness-supported methodology for conducting phenomenological research. Throughout this research I noticed connections between the practice and goals of mindfulness and phenomenology. Both are interested in seeing the world "as it shows itself or gives itself in a self-revealing or experiential manner" (van Manen, p. 487) and depend on practicing attitudes of open-mindedness, open-heartedness, goal-free listening, self-awareness, reflection, and insight. Francesconi & Tarozzi (2012) compare the two as well, writing that: "Meditation, as well as phenomenology, is a technique for opening the eye to a new possibility of rebuilding our worldview, of seeing the world in its own way of appearing to us" (p. 281). Kabat-Zinn (1990/2013) points out, "mindfulness is essentially about relationality- in other words, how we are in relationship to everything" (p.xxxvii) and phenomenology is also interested in intentionality and the inseparable relationship between human beings and the world. This is not to suggest that practicing phenomenology and practicing mindfulness are the same thing, as phenomenology is more interested in an empirical and scientific investigation of an identified phenomenon, but as perhaps the attitudes that one cultivates through mindfulness could support what Dahlberg et al (2008) call a "sensitive openness" (p. 97) that guides the research process. I noticed that practicing mindfulness during fieldwork was a profound way to engage with participant observation. I experienced an awareness of the phenomenon that led to thoughtful notes and grounded descriptions of what I was noticing. In practicing mindfulness as a methodology to support phenomenological research perhaps, "instead of

being run by memory or anticipation," as Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020) write, we could "be present to the here and now, paying attention to how things come to be in our awareness," (p. 460) so that the phenomenon can show itself.

Concluding Reflection

At the heart of this research study is my interest in understanding more about human experience, and especially how people experience connection with their world and each other. I think that it is through these connections that the best aspects of humanity can be realized and hopefully aid in the pursuit of quality of life and a better world. Museums are important because they preserve and provide access to the archives of human experience. Art museums hold the archives of human experience as expressed through art, and I believe as Dewey (1934/1980) does, that "works of art are the most intimate and energetic means of aiding individuals to share in the arts of living" (p.13). My hope is that this study contributes to a better understanding of the importance of mindfulness-based art museum programs and how they can facilitate connections between people, art and each other. In a world right now that is consumed with pursuit of what Greene (1982) calls "the technical, the measurable, and the fearful ideas of effectiveness and efficiency," perhaps finding ways to connect by being present can make true discovery possible. To do this though, one has to show up, have an experience of their own, and in doing so, reveal the world that we all make together.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings!

As some of you may know, in addition to my role as assistant curator of education at the museum, I am also a doctoral student in art education at the Lamar Dodd School of Art. I am conducting my dissertation research on meditation in art museums and would love to know more about your experience with Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art.

If you are interested in participating in this study, the following voluntary survey takes about 5 minutes to complete: [LINK to QUALTRICS]

I am interested in interviewing participants and/or and gathering written reflections about your experience with the program. If this is something you are interested in or have any questions about, please let me know!

Thank you!

Sage Kincaid

Assistant Curator of Education

Georgia Museum of Art

University of Georgia

706-542-0448

APPENDIX B

WRITTEN NARRATIVE AND INTERVIEW AVAILABILITY SURVEY FORM

Thank you for participating in this survey about Morning Mindfulness.

Q1. Name, email, age and gender

Q2. How do you describe yourself?

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White, non-Hispanic, non-Latino
- Other: _____

Q3. Are you interested in being interviewed about your experience with Morning Mindfulness?

- Yes
- No

Q4. Describe your most recent experience with Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art. No detail is too small, and no entry is too long. Some things to think about include the setting, the things around you, your fellow participants, or your experience before, during and after Morning Mindfulness. (To write about your experience anonymously, please follow this link.)

APPENDIX C

EMAIL INTERVIEW REQUEST BASED ON SURVEY RESPONSE

Dear ******,
Thank you so much for completing the survey about Morning Mindfulness.

You indicated that you might be interested in chatting with me about your experience with Morning Mindfulness but would like more info.

I would be happy to speak with you at the next Morning Mindfulness you attend and answer any questions. My research is about how participants
experience Morning Mindfulness.

The interview would last about an hour and would be an informal conversation about how you experience Morning Mindfulness. The interview is recorded and then I transcribe it, but you would get to see the transcription before I turn in my dissertation. Your name would not be used, I would use a pseudonym of your choice, or select one if you don't have a preference.

Thank you!

Sage

--
Sage Kincaid
Assistant Curator of Education
Georgia Museum of Art
90 Carlton Street
Athens, GA 30602
706.542.0448

APPENDIX D

EMAIL INTERVIEW REQUEST BASED ON RESEARCHER INTEREST

Dear ***,
It was wonderful seeing you at Morning Mindfulness.

As you may know, in addition to my work at the museum, I am a doctoral student in art education at the Lamar Dodd School of Art. I am conducting my dissertation research on meditation in art museums and would love to know more about what Morning Mindfulness is like for you at the Georgia Museum of Art. Would you be interested and available to talk about how you experience the program, maybe sometime next week?

The interview would be about an hour and would just be a chat about
whatever Morning Mindfulness is like for you. I can meet you whenever and wherever, including the museum.

Thank you!

Sage

--
Sage Kincaid
Assistant Curator of Education
Georgia Museum of Art
90 Carlton Street
Athens, GA 30602
706.542.0448

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
Visitor Experience with Morning Mindfulness at Georgia Museum of Art

Researcher's Statement
I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: *Lynn Sanders-Bustle*
Lamar Dodd School of Art (Art Education)
bustle@uga.edu
706-542-1511

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study to learn more about how participants experience Morning Mindfulness at the Georgia Museum of Art. You are being asked to participate in the study because you have attended Morning Mindfulness at least once and can provide valuable information by sharing how you experience this museum program.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …

- *Participate in at least one interview, with a possible follow-up interview if needed for clarification and if time permits. The first interview will be about 60 minutes, with the possible follow-up interview being closer to 30 minutes. The interview will follow a semi-structured interview guide that was prepared prior to the interview. The face-to-face interview will be conducted at a site that we agree upon. I will record the interview with a digital device and transcribe it word for word. You may choose a pseudonym or request that I choose a pseudonym for you in an effort to protect your anonymity.*
- *Review the transcription of our interview to check it for accuracy if desired.*

After the interview has been conducted, transcribed and analyzed, the digital file will be destroyed or securely archived depending on what is indicated below. The study is expected to conclude December 2018.

Risks and discomforts

- *I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.*

Benefits

- *There are no probable benefits of participation in the research.*
- *Findings from this study will contribute to a better understanding of how art museums might offer opportunities to engage with works of art and fellow visitors.*

Incentives for participation

No external incentives for participation will be granted (monetary or non-monetary).

Audio/Video Recording

The records of this study will be kept private and in a locked file, a pseudonym will be used rather than your real name. Interviews will be audio recorded using two digital devices (one for back-up), and the recorded audio will be transcribed in order to then be analyzed to further understanding of how participants experience Morning Mindfulness. After the recorded audio from the interview is transcribed, the audio will be archived in a secure digital file. If you wish to have the audio file destroyed after transcription, please indicate your wish below.

Please provide initials below if you wish to have this interview's audio record destroyed after transcription.

_I do want to have this interview's audio record destroyed after transcription and analysis.

Privacy/Confidentiality

The data that I collect during this interview will not identify you directly (e.g., name, e-mail address). All information will stored securely and will not be seen by anyone other than the researcher on this project. Your identity will be kept confidential and a pseudonym of your choose, or assigned by me if desired, will be used.

The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight. I will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time.

If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Sage Kincaid, a graduate student at the University of Georgia, under the supervision of Primary Investigator/Major Professor Dr. Lynn Bustle. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Lynn Bustle at bustle@uga.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

First Interview Script

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND SEQUENCE

THE OPENING-UP SEQUENCE

Can you tell me about how you first started coming to Morning Mindfulness?

Think about the first Morning Mindfulness you attended. What was it like?

What expectations do you have coming into each practice of Morning Mindfulness?

How is it for you before Morning Mindfulness?

Think about the last Morning Mindfulness you attended. What was it like?

Can you describe the things that affect your experience of Morning Mindfulness?

Can you describe how the space affects your experience of Morning Mindfulness?

Can you describe how being with other people affects your experience of Morning Mindfulness?

How do you experience the museum during MM?

What was your experience with the museum before coming to Morning Mindfulness?

How is it for you after Morning Mindfulness?

What is it like for you at Morning Mindfulness?

What is it now that you have been coming to MM?

DIRECTING QUESTIONS SEQUENCES

When you are participating in Morning Mindfulness what do you notice?

Do you make any discoveries during MM? What stays with you?

What are some of the thoughts, emotions, or sensations you have during Morning Mindfulness?

FOLLOWING-UP QUESTIONS SEQUENCES

Can you say more about that?, Can you give me an example?, What does that mean to you?

What was it like for you?

Final Interview Script

Provide intro about research and aim of research after thanking them for coming and signing everything.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND SEQUENCE

What is it like for you at Morning Mindfulness?

Are there any particular things that stand out for you or that you notice?

Can you tell me why you come to Morning Mindfulness?

What do you think stays with you about Morning Mindfulness?

Were any of the following part of your experience of Morning Mindfulness? If so, how?

- People
- Space
- Museum

How often do you visit art museums, including this one?

In as much detail as possible, how do you usually spend your time in the museum? In the galleries?

How often do you practice mindfulness?

In as much detail as possible, can you describe your mindfulness practice? How different than MM?

Can you compare - in as much detail as possible, visiting a museum outside of morning mindfulness and visiting the museum during MM?

Can you describe, in as much detail as possible – any experiences you have had with art that are memorable? You most recent experience with a work of art that stands out?

FOLLOWING-UP QUESTIONS SEQUENCES

Can you say more about that?, Can you give me an example?

What does that mean to you?, What was it like for you?