

## Why you should pause to appreciate beauty

Why you should pause to appreciate beauty:  
Its impact only sinks in if  
you concentrate on it

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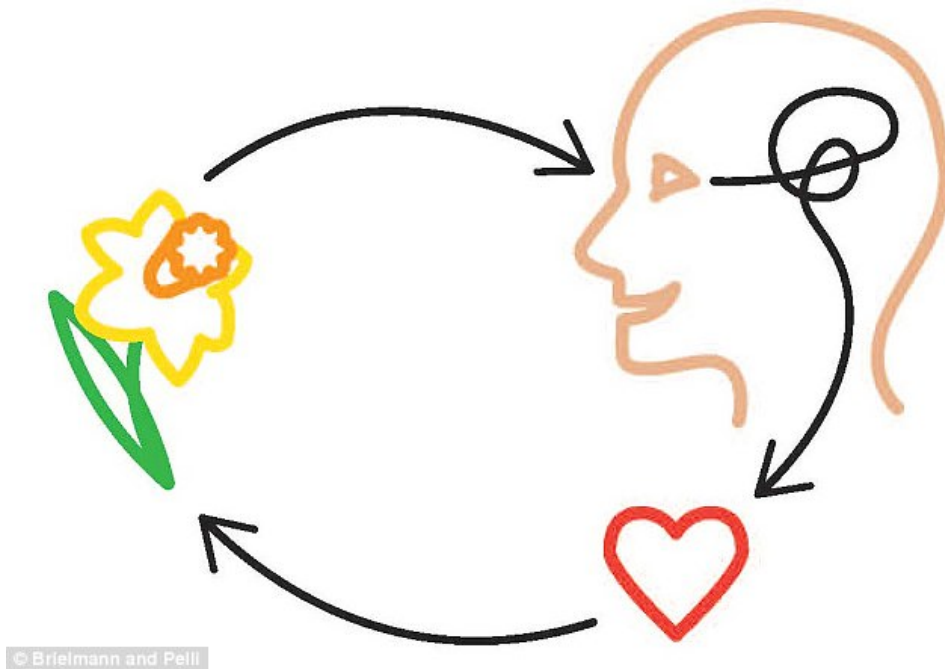


If you find it difficult to concentrate in art galleries, there's a

good chance you won't appreciate the beauty in the artwork. A new study has explored whether people need to think to experience beauty, and found that distractions can detract from appreciation



In the study, 62 participants were asked to indicate how much pleasure and beauty they felt while they saw an image, tasted a sweet, or touched a soft teddy bear.



The findings show that in order to experience beauty, you must be concentrating on it (diagram of pathway).

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## THE STUDY

In the study, 62 participants were asked to indicate how much pleasure and beauty they felt while they saw an image, tasted a sweet, or touched a soft teddy bear.

The researchers showed each person many different images, some beautiful, some nice, and others neutral, like a chair. Participants then rated their experience of each object on a four-point beauty scale.

In another round of the same experiment, participants were asked to repeat what they'd done earlier, but this time while

they were distracted with a secondary task. In that task, participants heard a series of letters and were asked to press a button any time they heard the same letter they'd heard two letters before.

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In 1742, philosopher Immanuel Kant famously claimed that beauty requires thought, while sensuous pleasure could never be beautiful. Researchers from New York University were interested in putting these philosophical notions to the test in a series of psychological experiments.

Their findings show that distractions do indeed detract from the experience of beauty. But on the other hand, their evidence shows that sensuous pleasures can also be beautiful.

Dr Denis Pelli, who led the study, said: 'We find that beauty, when it happens, is strongly pleasurable, and that strong pleasure is always beautiful. 'Strong pleasure and beauty both require thought.'

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The researchers found that the experience of non-beautiful objects wasn't changed by the distraction. But, distraction took away from the experience of beauty when a person was shown an image earlier deemed beautiful. This suggests that Kant was right - beauty does require thought.

But contrary to Kant's proposal that sensual pleasures can never be beautiful, about 30 per cent of participants said they'd definitely experienced beauty after sucking on a sweet or touching a soft teddy bear.

Surprised by that, the researchers decided to follow up. They asked some participants who had responded 'definitely yes' for beauty on sweet trials what they'd meant.

In their paper, published in *Current Biology* the researchers said: 'Most of them remarked that sucking candy had personal meaning for them, like a fond childhood memory. One participant replied, 'Of course, anything can be beautiful.'

Ms Aenne Brielmann, who also worked on the study, added: 'Our findings show that many other things besides art can be beautiful - even candy. **But for maximum pleasure, nothing beats undistracted beauty.**'

The findings highlight that while beauty is often subjective, it can still be measured and mathematically modelled, the researchers say.

Ms Brielmann added: 'These are important insights for people who want to create beauty, such as artists or museum curators. 'You should, for example, not distract people in museums if you want them to find beauty in the art.'

The researchers plan to continue this line of investigation in hopes to answer questions about the role of beauty in our lives.

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## **MOBILE PHONES ARE DISTRACTING**

If you want to get something done, you might want to put your mobile phone back in your pocket.

Researchers have found that the mere presence of a handset is distracting – even if it is not your own.

And the devices are likely to sidetrack you, even if they are not ringing or 'pinging' with text messages.

People asked to carry out electronic tests of their attention spans were found to perform worse when a mobile phone was present than other people performing in the presence of a

paper notepad.

Scientists from Hokkaido University in Japan said that their findings show that it is harder to concentrate when one of the electronic gadgets is present.

The effect was most marked on people who are not regular users of phones.

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<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-4496370/Why-stop-pause-appreciate-beauty.html>