

Mindfulness article for Artists and illustrators Magazine, October 2018

Mindfulness is the state of being present to and aware of what is taking place in the present moment. This presence of mind can evoke a sense of wonder, freshness and appreciation for the simple fact of being alive. When present and alive to one's actual experience, as distinct from 'ideas about it', the simplest things can take on a new life and become sources of inspiration - the touch of one's materials on the page, a particular quality of light, a sense of meaning/significance derived from a simple arrangement of objects...

Drawing itself naturally brings one into the present moment by virtue of it requiring a particular quality of attention in order to create, but it can all too easily become a routine and mechanical activity resulting in drawings that can be technically accomplished but in some way don't inspire us. Mindfulness supports presence of mind. Engaging mindfulness in the process of drawing can help us to remain connected and to become re-vivified by our subject matter and materials by virtue of our being more present and alive to their inherent qualities, which in turn gives new life to our work.

Drawing and mindfulness exercises include an investigation of drawing pace, an exploration of the unique qualities of drawing media, one's handling of materials and gestural movement (which affects the quality of mark-making), and an exploration of 'seeing'. One component of mindfulness is the cultivation of 'non-judgemental awareness'. Practical and effective methods for cultivating this quality of attention can be immensely liberating, giving us more perspective, objectivity and empathy when engaging with common creative blocks, as well as methods for releasing ourselves from the repetitive and constraining aspect of them. Mindfulness approaches can help us to restore a sense of play and wonder as well as make the transition from inner criticism/judgement to creative discernment, which is hugely supportive when engaged in developing and progressing one's skills.

Clare Barton-Harvey is a practising artist and tutor, trained to MA level. She studied drawing at the Royal Drawing School, and began incorporating mindfulness into her art practice 24 years ago. She has taught drawing/painting and mindfulness for over 14 years as a freelance mindfulness and drawing tutor. She works with groups and individuals in a variety of locations including the City Literary Institute, The National Gallery (London), The British Museum, The British Library and Hampton Court Palace. She is fascinated by the relationship between mindfulness and creativity and is an engaging communicator/workshop leader.