

Mindful Makers

Learning from the work of Carmen Argote and practicing mindfulness in art and life

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can we be more mindful in what we see, hear, and do?

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

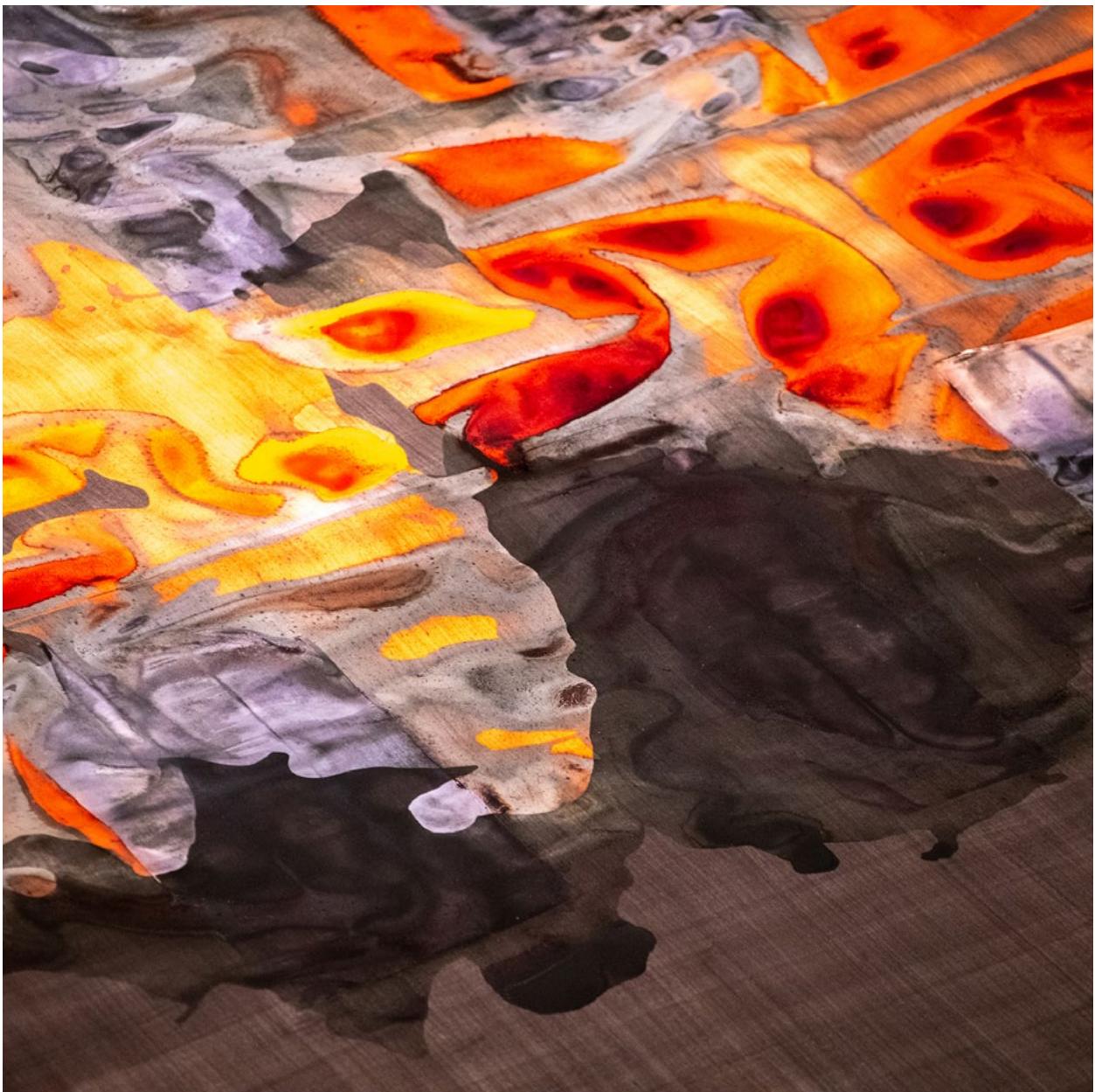
- **Identify** how mindfulness practices can impact the artistic process
- **Demonstrate** how to include mindfulness practices in their art-making
- **Create** art that responds to observations and emotions

AGES

Elementary School
Grades 3–5

DURATION

2 Hours



Before you Begin

LEARNING BENEFITS

Mindfulness is a beneficial practice for students of all ages. It helps students in their ability to focus, regulate emotions, improve their behavior, interact socially, reduce their stress levels, and more. Incorporating mindful practices in the art classroom can be helpful in centering and refocusing students both in and out of school.

MATERIALS

- Paper or sketchbook
- Pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, charcoal, or sketching media of choice
- Sketching playlist (example provided on page 17)

TEKS STANDARDS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills)

§117.117.b2 — Creative expression. The student communicates ideas through original artworks using a variety of media with appropriate skills. The student expresses thoughts and ideas creatively while challenging the imagination, fostering reflective thinking, and developing disciplined effort and progressive problem-solving skills.

§117.114.b1 — Foundations: observation and perception. The student develops and expands visual literacy skills using critical thinking, imagination, and the senses to observe and explore the world by learning about, understanding, and applying the elements of art, principles of design, and expressive qualities. The student uses what the student sees, knows, and has experienced as sources for examining, understanding, and creating artworks.

§117.114.b4B — Critical evaluation and response. The student uses methods such as written or oral response or artist statements to identify emotions found in collections of artworks created by self, peers, and major historical or contemporary artists in real or virtual portfolios, galleries, or art museums.

Before you Begin

LEARNER ADAPTATIONS

For Younger Learners

You may choose to have students move through the mindfulness/meditation exercise *after* exploration and art-making. This option allows for the exercise to act as a quiet, mindful closing to the day's activity.

For Older Learners

Have students create their own sketching playlist to make their mindful art-making experience more personal. Additionally, older artists may be encouraged to complete this activity using organic materials similar to those Argote works with. They may wish to explore textiles, try manipulating materials, and consider how their whole bodies can be woven into their art-making practice.

For At-Home Learners

Carmen Argote often integrates unconventional, natural materials into her work that can commonly be found at home! She has used citrus fruits, coffee, avocados, and other organic materials to create her vibrant and dynamic work.

- Have students gather items like oranges, avocados, sauces, coffee, or spices. Challenge them to move beyond conventional art supplies and use natural materials to make patterns and prints on the paper.

For inspiration, watch how Argote made *Me At Market!*
youtube.com/watch?v=nQXUT6yTmN4

- Incorporate STEAM learning! Consider how different materials react to one another to produce exciting and surprising results. For example, to create the floor painting in *Me At Market*, Argote poured acidic lemon juice onto pink cochineal dye, which reacted to the pH of the lemon juice to create a bright orange color. Check out this resource for activities, articles and experiments combining art and chemistry.

acs.org/content/acs/en/education/students/highschool/chemistryclubs/activities/art-and-chemistry.html

- Remember to have students set up a space inside or outside that allows for a mess as they experiment with different materials. Work with them to decide which items are appropriate to include in their artwork, and demonstrate how to use control and care when applying new materials to their surfaces.

Before you Begin

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mindfulness, meditation, and body-scan exercises for children:

Meditation 101: A Beginner's Guide
[youtube.com/watch?v=o-kMJBWk9EO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-kMJBWk9EO)

Kids Meditation: Fading Tone
[youtube.com/watch?v=hzuaKhkwskw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzuaKhkwskw)

Meditation Instructions for Kids
[youtube.com/watch?v=9CdPQ7XIMzU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CdPQ7XIMzU)

Learn about *Me At Market*, Carmen Argote's installation at the Visual Arts Center:

utvac.org/event/carmen-argote-me-market

Visit the artist's website:
carmenargote.com

Exploring Mindfulness

To begin, lead students in a conversation and exercise to learn about the concept of mindfulness. Ask students: Do you ever feel nervous or overwhelmed? What do you do to calm down?

Next, define and lead a discussion around mindfulness.

Mindfulness involves focusing on your individual senses and surroundings very closely so that you can live in the present. Practicing mindfulness can help you to focus, relax, and engage with others. For example, if you are upset, taking three slow, deep breaths can help you calm down and bring you back to the present moment.

Finally, lead students in the following meditation and body-scan exercise. The exercise gives students a chance to practice mindfulness and body awareness before continuing on to the art-making portion of the lesson. For other video-based exercises, see the Additional Resources section on page 4.

Kids Meditation: Butterfly Body Scan
[youtube.com/watch?v=56_8aK3cLEA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56_8aK3cLEA)

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How can we focus on our individual senses and be more mindful?

What do we see when we take a minute to focus and look at our surroundings?

What other senses play a role in being mindful? Hearing? Touch? Taste? Smell?

What are some ways that you are already mindful in your everyday life?

Can you think of other ways you can practice using mindfulness?

Mindfulness and Close Looking

Mindfulness is a great tool to use when looking at a work of art, because art and mindfulness have a lot in common. Much like mindfulness, art invites viewers to be present in the moment and focus deeply on the object in front of them. Engaging mindfully with art can help students experience and appreciate it more fully.

Give students a few minutes to look closely at the images of Carmen Argote's *Me At Market* on the following pages and think quietly to themselves. You can either print copies of the images out for students to look at in small groups, or scroll through them slowly on a projector or screen for the class to look at together.

While they look, encourage students to let distractions fall away and observe their reactions to the piece. Tell students they will take turns sharing their observations after a few minutes of quiet looking.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Where does your eye go first? Focus on that area. Try to notice what you find interesting about this section of the artwork. Why do you think it interests you?

What is your first impression? Does the artwork make you feel any kind of emotion? Does it make you feel happy? Or curious? Or uninterested? Art can stir up plenty of other feelings, or you might feel no particular emotion at all; that, too, is an emotional reaction. Whatever your reaction might be, notice it without judging it. What emotions do you think the artist felt when making it?

What do you notice about the materials used? Do you have any guesses about what created the different colors and textures you see in the artwork? If you touched this artwork, what do you think it would feel like? What would it smell or taste like?



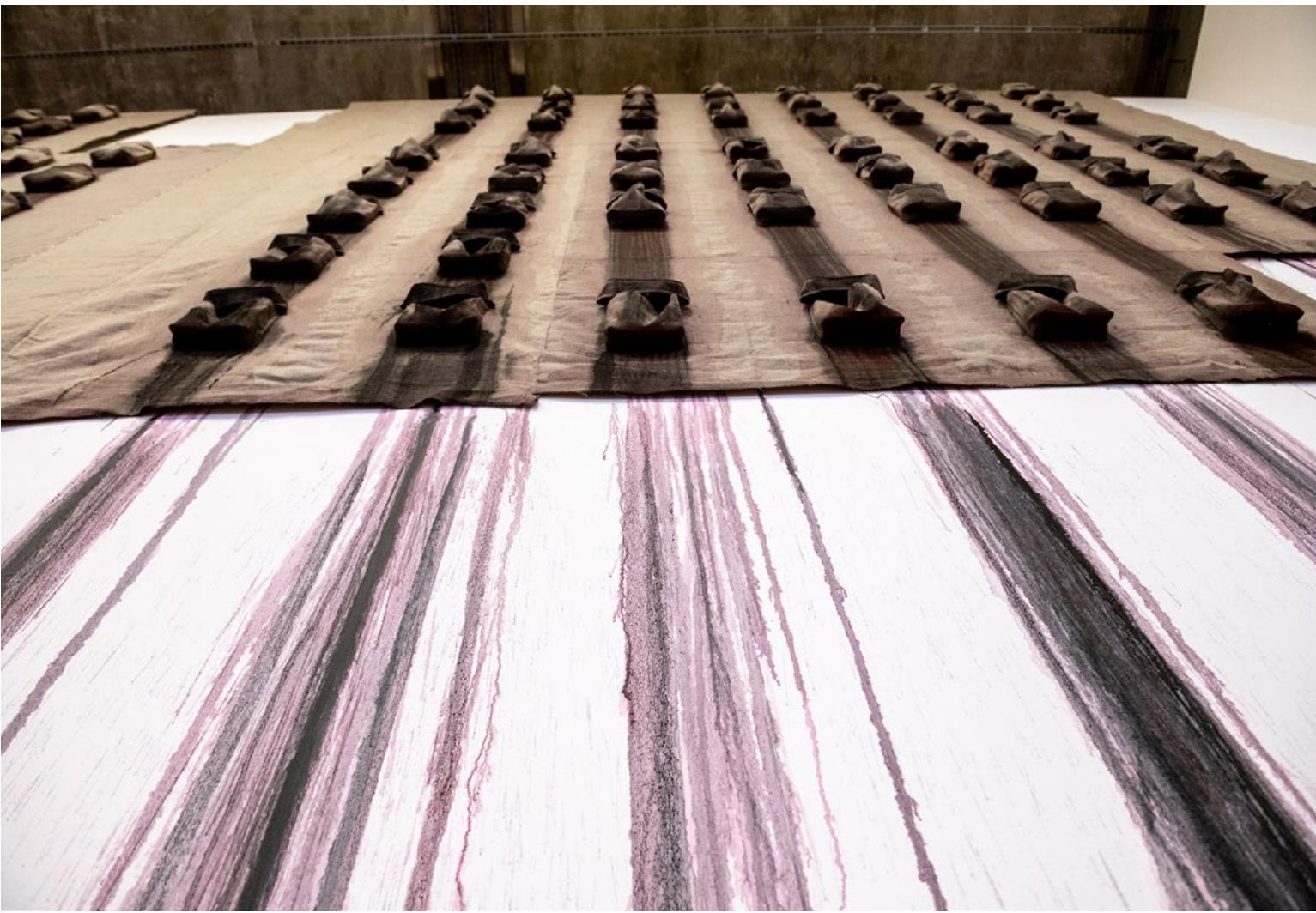
Carmen Argote: *Me At Market*, installation view, Visual Arts Center, The University of Texas at Austin, January 24 – March 6, 2020. Photo: Sandy Carson.



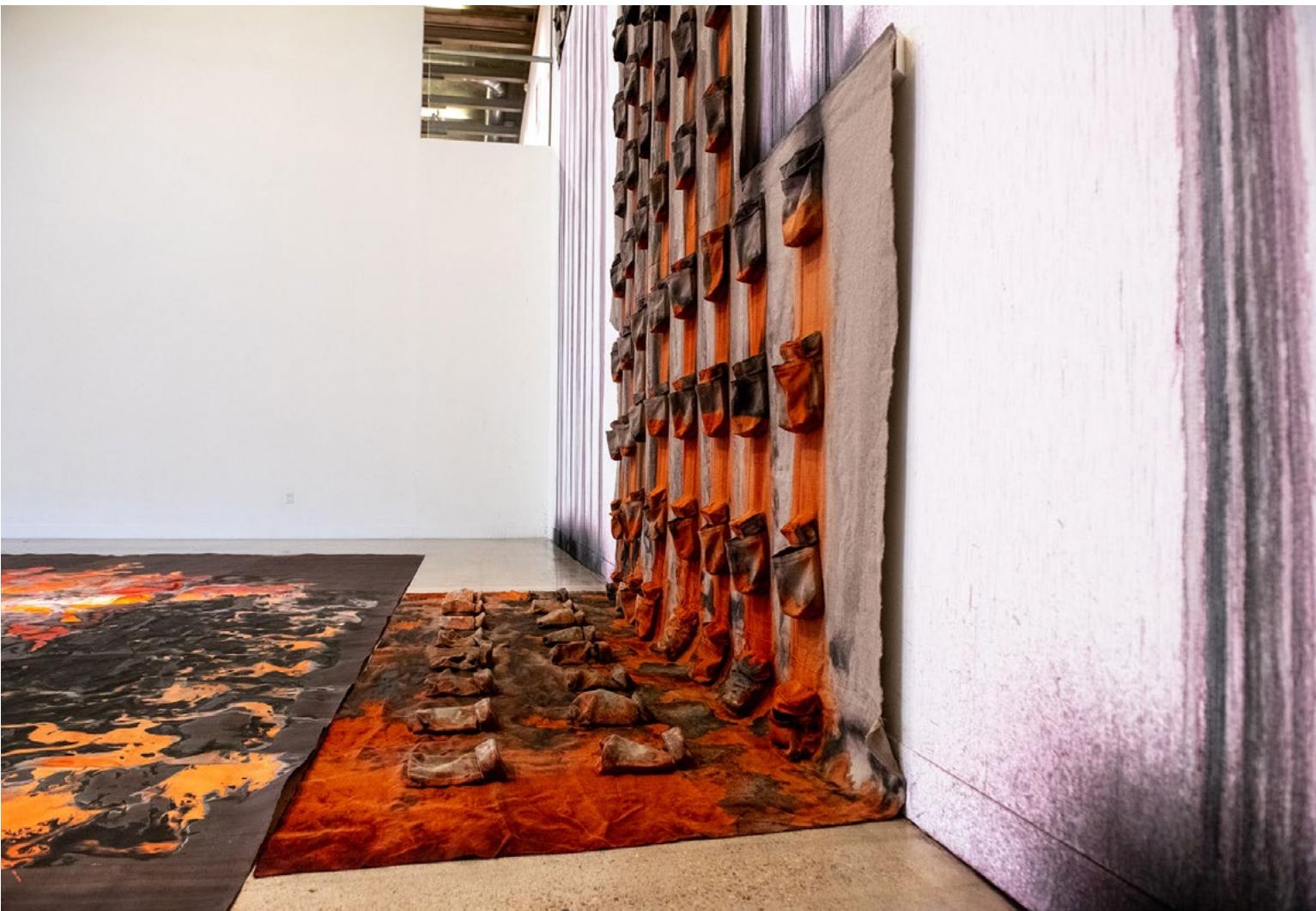
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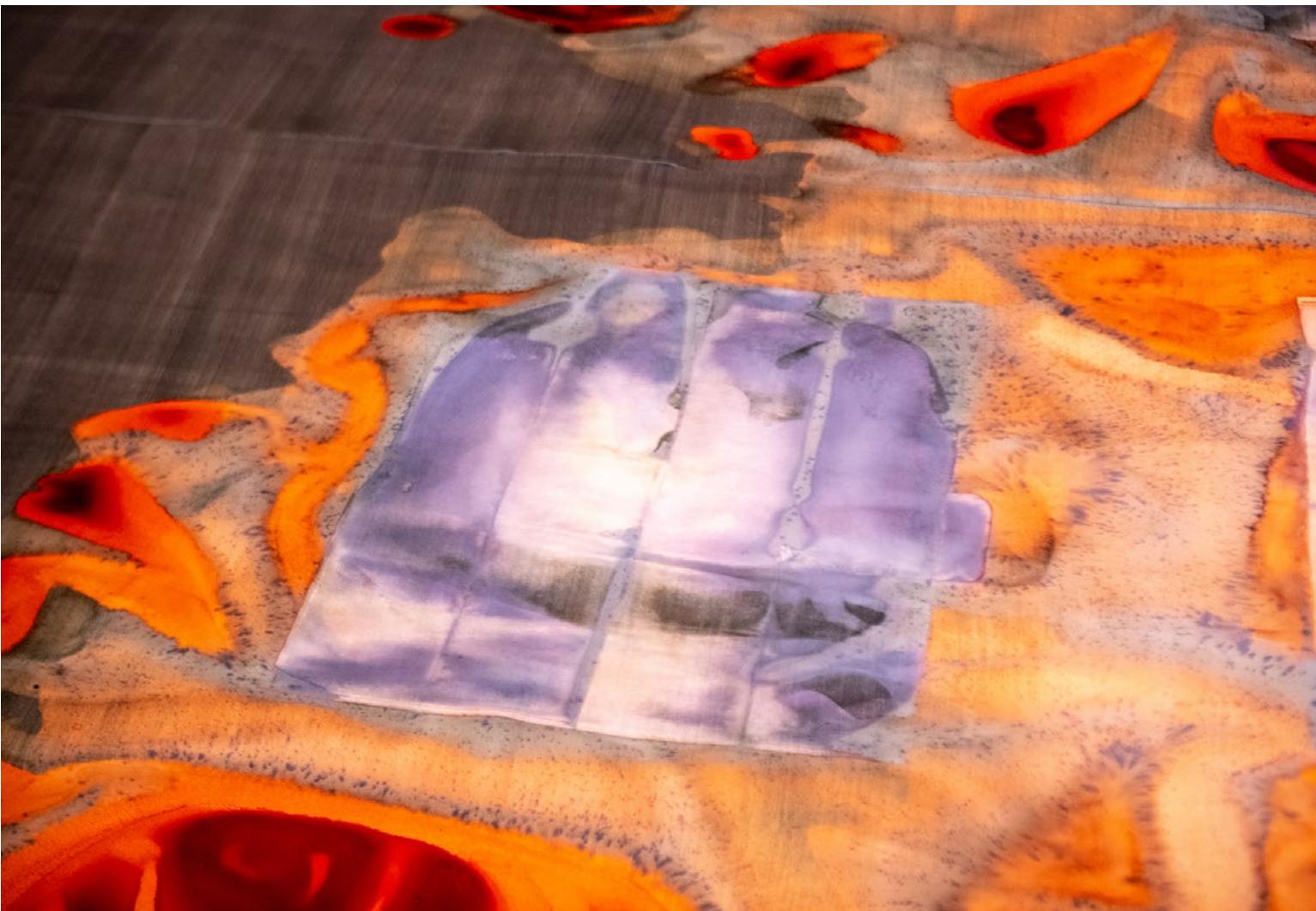
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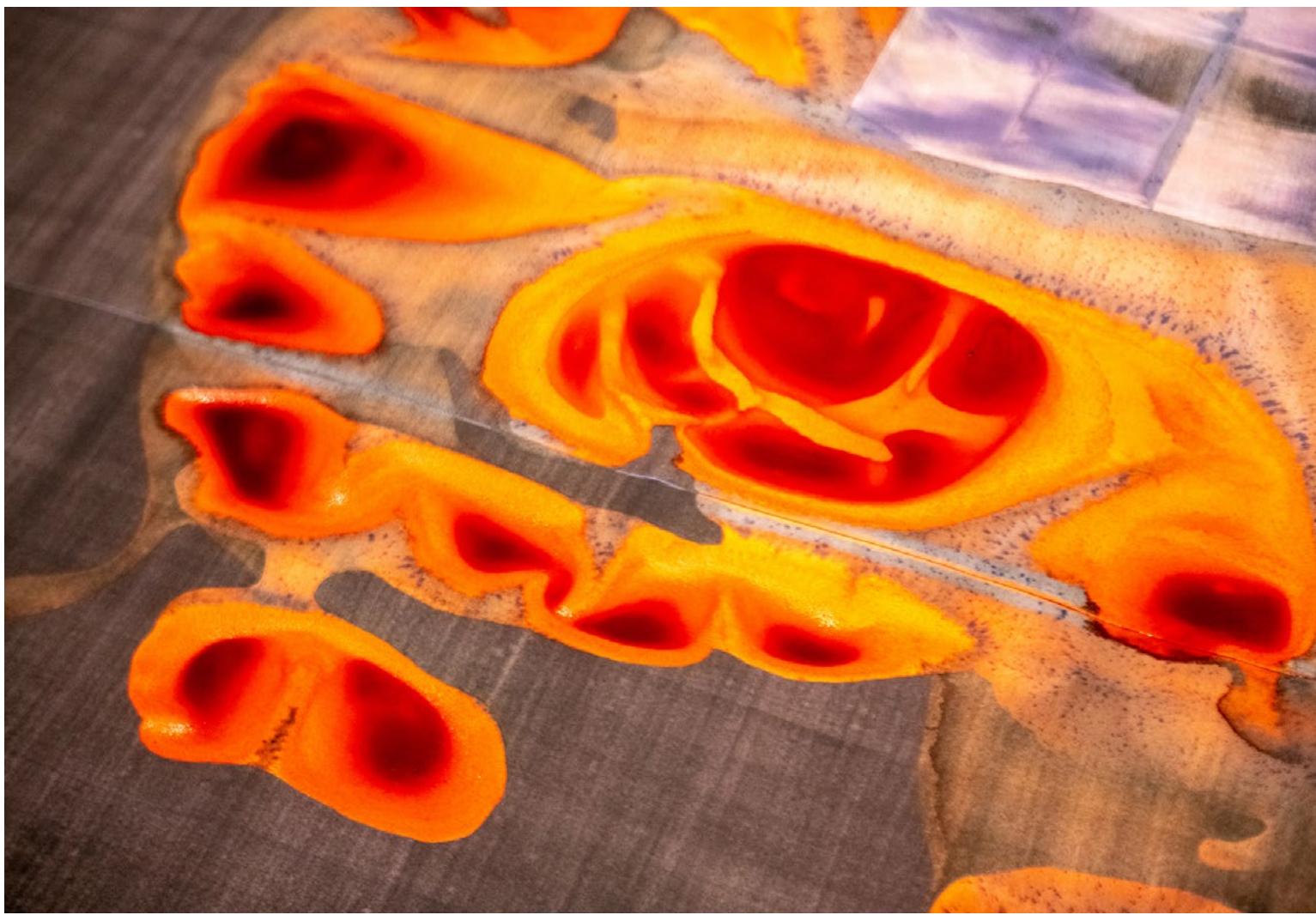
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Connecting Method, Materials, and Mindfulness

Carmen Argote created this large-scale installation specifically for the gallery space in the Visual Arts Center. When creating this artwork, Argote focused on being present in her body and making decisions based on what her body told her to do. Rather than come up with a plan in advance, she became very aware of her body, her surroundings, and her materials and allowed them to guide her through the process of making this work of art. This process of going with the flow leads to beautiful, unexpected results that change and transform as the work is made.

Argote used a natural dye made from the cochineal bug—an insect that lives on cactus plants—to create the purple stripes that we see streaking down the fabric piece and the gallery walls, and continuing onto the painting on the floor. The lemon juice had a chemical reaction to the natural dye, which created the brilliant red and orange colors in the piece! Once again, she did not make a sketch or come up with a plan for how this piece would look in the end. Instead, she carefully observed how her materials interacted with each other and allowed them to work together to create these organic, swirling patterns we see in the painting on the floor.

Allow time for some reflection after this exercise. Have students discuss or write down one thing they learned about practicing mindfulness and how it can help when looking at and making a work of art.

Mindfulness, Music, and Mark-Making

In this exercise, students will listen to music as they sketch, using mindfulness to focus on what they hear and how they might respond to it through their drawings.

Listening to music of your choosing, ask students to use their art materials to create spontaneous drawings in response to what they hear. Encourage them to practice mindfulness and understand how the sounds they hear can have an effect on their art-making.

You can find a playlist inspired by some of Argote's favorite art-making tunes here:

open.spotify.com/playlist/6WT5suDvQ7d7HyQhBtozsm

Or, you can create your own playlist of sketching tunes for your students! When selecting music for your playlist, consider choosing songs in a range of tempos and styles to elicit a variety of reactions from the students.

Before starting the playlist, ask students to consider the sounds, rhythm, and feeling of the music while sketching. Invite them to try and change their marks and colors in response to each song, and to use various colors, lines, patterns, and shapes to fill their pages.

Encourage students to focus on their senses as they work and listen, taking in what they hear and see as well as how they are feeling.

Tell students they will have roughly 20 minutes to experiment with mark-making while listening to a sketching playlist. You may adjust this time as needed.

continued

Mindfulness, Music, and Mark-Making

GUIDING INSTRUCTIONS

As you begin to use your art materials, listen closely to the music. While you listen and sketch, take full, deep breaths. Note how the song makes you feel (tense, energized, relaxed, joyful, peaceful). While breathing, notice the rhythm of your breath and how it rises and falls with the music. Allow any memories that you get from listening to this particular song to flow into your mind, and become aware of the emotions they may bring. Still sitting, refocus your attention to the sounds you hear and begin to create.

How does the song change your body (posture, movements)? How does it make you feel?

What thoughts come to your mind as you listen?

Look at your artwork closely. What is the nature of the lines or brush strokes on your page? Are they smooth or bumpy? Light or dark? What colors, forms, and shapes do you notice? What caused those changes in the way you made your marks?

Closing and Group Discussion

SHOW & SHARE

Following the activity, ask students to share their artwork with one another as a class or in small groups. Ask them to interpret the emotions they see in their peers' sketches and share their experiences with the activity.

As a reflection, ask each student to share or write down one or two takeaways about mindfulness and art-making.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How can you approach art with a mindful mentality?

What do you know now about mindfulness that you didn't know before?

How do you think mindfulness can help you in your life?

What is one way you can bring this practice into your daily life?

WRAP-UP

As you go forward this week, consider ways you can slow down, focus, and be more mindful of the world around you.