

## **This is Your Brain on Art**

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What are the neural dimensions of the aesthetic experience people have when looking at visual art? In this study we use fMRI to gain insight into the components of an aesthetic experience. Previous fMRI experiments using visual art stimuli have focused on preference (“how much do you like this object?”) but as our data show, the experience of art can involve emotional responses which are not strictly positive. We may be moved by one work of art because it inspires awe, another because it is comforting, another because it evokes feelings of happiness, another because it gives a thrill of fear, or another because it integrates a diversity of responses. Behaviorally, individual observers tend to be moved by very different artworks, highlighting the importance of an individual approach to the study of aesthetics. Our fMRI results show that activity in subcortical and cortical reward networks correlates with the strength of an aesthetic experience, which is also the case for preference tasks with simpler stimuli. In addition, we see evidence in the prefrontal cortex for the integration of observers' emotional experiences into their aesthetic reaction. Finally, our pattern of results indicates that the “default-mode network” may play a special role in highly positive aesthetic experience.