# The 25 Dimensions of Emotion Art Activates in Your Brain

3 MIN READ

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BY HEATHER HURLOCK

SUPER
AGE

# *Viewing art builds a richer emotional world, supporting resilience and longevity.*

You already know art can move you. A painting that gives you chills, a sculpture that makes you pause, or an image that feels strange yet unforgettable. But what's happening in your brain isn't just appreciation. It's emotional rewiring.

According to a groundbreaking study published in ***Scientific Reports***, viewing art activates 25 distinct dimensions of emotion, far beyond simple joy or sadness. Researchers at UC Berkeley and the University of Amsterdam found that viewing art can spark awe, mystery, desire, serenity, even cosmic expansiveness, creating a complex emotional "map" that mirrors the richness of life itself.

"Art doesn't just reflect emotion, it trains us in how to feel it more richly," says co-author Dacher Keltner, a leading researcher on awe and the science of emotion.

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## What Our Emotional Map Reveals

The findings surprised even the researchers. Yes, people reported expected reactions — admiration, serenity, amusement — but also something stranger and more expansive: a sense of the unknowable or sacred, imaginative and surreal states of

mind, deep body awareness, longing. Sometimes a disorienting but meaningful confusion. Sometimes a glimpse of the transcendent.

Our emotions flow along gradients, like awe shading into serenity, or confusion morphing into fascination. The result? **An emotional map** that mirrors the complexity of real life while offering a mirror for self-reflection.

# Why Emotional Range Supports Longevity

Building **emotional granularity**, the ability to identify and name subtle emotions, is linked to better mental health, lower stress, and even physical resilience. It's not just poetic to distinguish between melancholy, nostalgia, or wistfulness; it's protective.

This is especially valuable as we age, when identity shifts can **cloud our inner compass**. By engaging with art, we practice decoding and expanding emotions, which strengthens:

- **Resilience** ? recovering faster from setbacks
- **Longevity** ? lowering stress and inflammation, which supports long-term health
- **Empathy** ? seeing and feeling more in ourselves and others

In short: training your emotional brain is as vital as training your body.

## Try It Yourself: The 3-Minute Emotional Palette Test

You don't need to visit a gallery or buy expensive prints. Just do this:

1. 1 **Choose three works of visual art**: Any era, any medium.
   The National Gallery of Art has **a phenomenal collection online**.

The Louvre also has an **an incredible online collection.**

2. **Look slowly.** Give each piece at least 30 seconds.
3. **Ask yourself: What do I feel? What does this image seem to** *be***?** Use emotion-rich words like *awe, mystery, grief, nostalgia, serenity, craving*. Let them overlap.
4. **Journal it.** Write down what came up and what surprised you. Want to explore further? Check out the **interactive emotions map** created by the study's authors. It's a beautiful tool that lets you explore emotional responses across hundreds of artworks.

Engaging with art is a practice, a way of building emotional intelligence that supports resilience, empathy, and longevity. The next time a painting or photograph pulls you in, pause. What you feel is more than fleeting; it's emotional strength training for your future self.

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**WRITTEN BY:**



# Heather Hurlock