



Art Around Every Corner in Greenwood

by Maddy Norell

Art is one of the most grounding things we have. Whether we're making it, watching it, or just letting it exist around us, creativity brings moments of joy, curiosity, and connection. In this article, I'm highlighting just a few of the many places right here in Greenwood where art shows up in everyday life. Places to listen, to make, to learn, to play, and to feel part of something larger. These are spaces where creativity feels accessible, welcoming, and human.

One such gem is **Seattle ReCreative**, 8408 Greenwood Ave N, a nonprofit art space built on the idea that one person's leftovers can spark someone else's imagination. They collect donated materials that might otherwise end up in landfills and turn them into possibilities by funding workshops, offering affordable supplies, and creating space for people of all ages to experiment and explore. Their work has diverted nearly 60 tons of materials from the trash, supported more than a thousand children through arts programming, and provided resources to schools, libraries, and nonprofits. Beyond the numbers, though, their impact is about community.

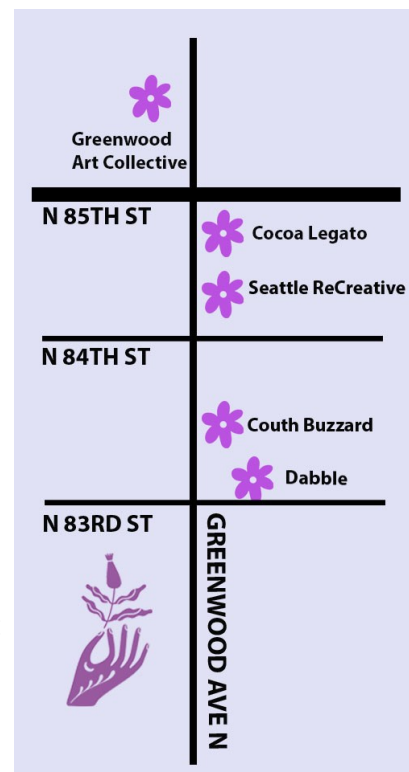
It's a place where people don't just shop for supplies, but come together to imagine, create, and connect.

Just down the street, **Dabble**, 306

N 83rd, offers a different, but equally inviting, creative experience. This drop-in art studio is all about trying things without pressure. Paints, collage materials, writing prompts, and craft supplies are ready to go, it's easy to walk in with an idea, or none at all, and walk out with something that feels good. It's perfect for solo creativity, intergenerational play, or simply giving yourself permission to explore.

In this neighborhood inspiration isn't limited to the visual arts. **Cocoa Legato**, 8420 Greenwood Ave N, blends creativity with deliciousness as a vegan café and bean-to-bar chocolate shop that also hosts

live music. Their ethically sourced Colombian cacao bars are reason enough to visit, but their commitment to building a welcoming music scene makes the



Editor's note:

I hope you enjoy and are inspired by this issue of *Connections*. Most of the articles take up the topic of art—what we mean by “art,” how art can enhance our lives and well-being, and where you can find opportunities to observe, learn, and share art processes and products. Happy reading!

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space feel special. It's the kind of place where local musicians gather, neighbors linger, and good chocolate paired with good sound creates an atmosphere that feels alive.

Then there's **Couth Buzzard Books**, 8310 Greenwood Ave N, a beloved hub for books, music, and community since 1988. What began as a cozy used bookstore has grown into a café and gathering space that hosts open mics, concerts, and our very own PNA Village Book Club that meets once a month and our Conversation & News of the Day group that meets every Thursday. For more than 35 years, Couth Buzzard has been sustained by a quirky, loyal community that has celebrated, struggled, and adapted together, even through the pandemic. Under its current owners, it continues to thrive as a place rooted in connection and a deep love for Seattle's creative spirit.

The **Greenwood Art Collective**, 8537 Greenwood Ave N, brings a vibrant pulse to the neighborhood. As a cooperative of artists working across media, the collective opens its doors during PNA Art Walks and special events, inviting neighbors into a world of emerging and experimental work. Their focus is on authenticity, curiosity, and shared experience through creating room for bold ideas, honest expression, and creative risk-taking. Wandering through their open studios feels like step-

ping into a living, breathing ecosystem of imagination.

Together, these spaces remind us that art isn't just something we do in our spare time. It's a way we stay connected and resilient. Every doodle, every song, every handmade card, every moment spent listening, watching, or trying something new strengthens our sense of belonging. Art helps us slow down, feel grounded, and reconnect with the parts of ourselves that are most curious and most alive. And here in Greenwood, we're lucky to have so many places that make that possible.

Next stop: Ballard!



by Barbara Doherty

I recently met two PNA Village volunteers, **Cathy Warms** and **Holly Stein**, who really are mega-volunteers! Not only do they host a



monthly jewelry group for village members at Greenwood Senior Center (GSC) but also are very much involved in other village activities.

These two most capable women have similar stories. Both moved from other places to settle in Seattle. Holly came from Chicago in 1970 for graduate work, and Cathy moved from Bremerton in 1968. Both are retired professionals. Holly was a high school teacher and Cathy a nurse; two people who had caring careers.

After retiring, they had more time to pursue very welcome help for seniors. Cathy became a companion walker and a driver for the Village; Holly spent the past year on the Business Resource Committee where she learned how to research

Hour of Climate Action
Saturday, February 28, 2026
1:30–2:30 pm
Phinney Center



(Blue Building, Room 7)

Tired of feeling paralyzed by eco-anxiety? Join our village Eco-Actors group and others who feel the same way. You'll learn practical tips for making a difference and then develop your own action plan. For more information, contact villageecoactors@gmail.com.

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businesses for village members who need reliable, reasonably priced services. And, in fact, they met through their association with GSC and PNA Village!

Holly began the jewelry group because she had lots of beads, wire, and assorted “findings” that she would never use up in her lifetime. Cathy and Holly have been hosting this group for several years and have met many interesting people while wire-wrapping or stringing beads. One woman from the Middle East learned so quickly that she now makes a complete necklace in one session. They tell me there are two musicians in the group, too. It’s as much a social group as a working group. All attendees enjoy the camaraderie as they learn and create together. Note that Cathy made the crystal earrings she’s wearing in the photo.

In their spare time (do they have any?), Holly teaches two memoir writing classes (not connected with PNA) and belongs to a book club. Cathy is a hospice volunteer.

How grateful we are for their volunteerism! It is the heart and soul of the Village.



Music memory

by Elena Louise Richmond

I direct a song circle called All Present for people with dementia. It’s a peculiar feature of this group that if I hadn’t been told these singers had some form of dementia, I wouldn’t have known. Some of them drive themselves to the song circle. Some need their caregiver to sit next to them to keep them oriented. (There are days when I could use someone like that.) Once the session starts, I don’t imagine we look different from any group of adults doing something as quaint as sitting around holding song sheets instead of cell phones and singing.

Memorable

sessions

At our very first session about 12 years ago, I didn’t know what to expect but I had plenty of experience in helping people get started singing. I’ve had voice students—**voice** students—who managed to start peeping only after weeks of coaxing. I’ve directed choirs on which I had to perform the miracle of raising the dead before I could get them to sing.

I looked at my group. The individuals had no apparent affect and seemingly no desire except to sit docilely. I wasn’t sure they knew what they were doing there. I took a deep breath. “Here goes nothing,” I thought as I strummed my guitar and started “You are My Sunshine.”

They just about took the roof off. It was as though they’d been holding it all in, not just while I fussed around meeting them and getting name tags on them but for months, for years. They knew everything by heart. When we sang “Goodnight, Irene,” someone remembered the harmony line from when he had sung Barbershop and the sweetness of the sound made me tear up. Their faces relaxed into their own nostalgia, their own associations, and their own feelings.

That afternoon, we sang standards and half of the *Rodgers and Hammerstein Songbook*. Then I moved back to the guitar because they had already forgotten



Tea & Togetherness: Village Member Meetup! 3rd Thursdays, 11 AM Greenwood Senior Center

Join Village staff for a cozy morning of tea, treats, and good company. It’s a great way to get to know fellow members, share stories, and connect within our community. Whether you’re a brand-new member or have been with the Village for years, you’re welcome! Come warm up, settle in, and spend time with neighbors who feel like friends. Your RSVP is appreciated at 206.789.1217 or [vil-
lage@phinneycenter.org](mailto:village@phinneycenter.org).

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that we'd sung "Goodnight Irene," "Daisy, Daisy," and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." We sang everything a second time. We sang and sang for an hour and half. I couldn't stop smiling, and they gave it right back to me.

Over the years, we've had some lovely moments, making music together. One week, Pete and I sang "If I Loved You" from *Carousel*. (All names have been changed.) Pete has one of those golden tenor voices with Wagnerian power behind it. I had penciled in some harmony notes for me and did my best to blend with him.



All Present with the OK Chorale

What emerged was unexpected and moving. Pete punched the air. "Yes!!" he exclaimed. He still had it. He could *sing*!

When we finish songs like "Over the Rainbow," "You'll Never Walk Alone," and especially "O Danny Boy," we take inventory of who's crying and who needs a tissue. "You're so bad to make us sing these!" Ellen said one week, tears running down her face. She was beaming.

Another time, we sang "Shall We Dance" from *The King and I*. I grabbed Henry who was sitting on the end of the circle. "Dance with me," I said. Too late I realized he needed a cane to balance but he held on to me with his other hand and we danced. Not quite like Deborah Kerr and Yul Brenner, but that dance is enshrined on film. This was now.

Now, for a concert

Every December, All Present is joined by The OK Chorale (another chorus I direct) for a concert. The audience packs the big hall. Here's what happened the first time I'd rehearsed All Present to within an inch of its life:

We got to the place where Pete and Bob, in the

front row of the stage, were to play their harmonicas for a chorus of "Jingle Bells" before we all sang the song. I asked them if they had their harmonicas ready.

"What for?"

"Jingle Bells."

"We've got C and G. Which one do you want?"

"Let's use the C," I said conversationally as though we hadn't been over this a dozen times.

"OK, what for?"

"Can you play 'Jingle Bells'?" I asked.

"We can play it in C or G."

"Let's go with C," I said.

"Right now?"

"Yep."

We got through "Jingle Bells." When we got to

"Deck the Hall," I went up to Pete and Bob again.

"Can you play "Deck the Hall" now?"

"You want us to play?"

"Yeah."

"We can play it in C or G."

"Let's go with C."

We had the same exchange for "Silent Night" and "White Christmas."

After that first concert, I didn't rehearse All Present for concerts. Every week, we just sang songs. When they were up in front of an audience, they just sang songs. That was the show.

Jane's story

Another indelible memory is of Jane. When her husband first brought her to a song circle, he looked exhausted and discouraged and told me he thought it was a waste of time bringing his wife here. She rarely spoke any more, was listless and vacant. He left her with us. I know the caregivers and spouses always have a million errands to run when they leave their loved ones with us, but I like to fantasize they are in a

bar getting a stiff drink. When he returned, his wife was singing and laughing and, more or less, behaving like a fifth grader at camp. He was astounded.

Anyway, at a concert, we sang all three verses to “Jingle Bells.” Unable to follow the song sheet, Jane dove into the third verse. “Now the ground is white, go it while you’re young,” she sang. She knew every word, this woman with memory loss who didn’t know why she was in the room until the music started. “Go it while you’re young.” She’d not forgotten the words. And there was still a child inside, still “going it.”

We ended the show with “Auld Lang Syne.”

All Present, a fitting name

The All Present singers are so familiar to me and their faces are so dear and so expressive. I have to remind myself that their minds or parts of their minds are in a dimension I can’t access. They can’t learn anything new. They can’t remember what they did an hour earlier. But their ability to be present in the moment is richer than mine. When we start to sing, they remember every word from every song from days gone by. From old long time. From Auld Lang Syne.

That’s their great gift to us all: It’s just for now.

Review of Exquisite Creatures, an exhibition of art and nature

by Natalie Wainwright

I’m constantly surprised by the amount and variety of art to be seen in Seattle. Irresistible shows and events pop up online, apparently magically, but I’m told these appearances are the result of some (to me, just as mysterious) Internet algorithm that “sees” what I look at and gives me more of it. An ad popped up in the middle of my research. The ad was for Exquisite Creatures, an exhibit of works by Christopher Marley. It threw me out of my research and

forced me to plan a trip to see the exhibit with an artist friend.

An astonishing display

All the works in this exhibit are shockingly beautiful. “Mosaic Alternate,” one of the pieces, is incredible. The design, the structure, and the vivid colors and shapes—strange yet familiar—strike the viewer simultaneously.

When you look closer, the information begins to sort itself out, and, lo, the piece is a marvelously arranged grouping of insects—*real* insects, three dimensional, accurate as life because, in fact, these insects were once living creatures.

Both the media—beetles, fish, crustaceans, snakes, butterflies, sea stars, and flowers, fantastically preserved and, if necessary, restored to their life colors—and the human design of each piece are amazing. The hand and the perceptive, passionate eye of the artist come together to astonish the viewer. The lighting in the rooms is faultless; the arrangement of the pieces and the distance between them is even more evidence of the perfectionism of the exhibit’s creator.

The artist says: “All of the vertebrates I use are reclaimed. This means that they...died of natural or incidental causes. As all living things eventually pass, my objective has been to honor the uniqueness and the beauty of bodies that were once animated by presenting them in a new light” (<https://christophermarley.com/>).

The bodies of some animals are from institutions such as aquariums, zoos, and museums. Others are “bycatch,” unintentionally caught and killed during ocean fishing. Over the 25 years of work that has gone into Exquisite Creatures, Mr. Marley has also found specimens in foreign seafood markets, research facilities, and quarantine facilities; some have even been



Mosaic Alternate

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roadkill. One exception is that insects are collected by indigenous people, which provides employment in a way that's not fighting nature.

Mr. Marley grew up in Oregon and then spent more than 10 years working all over the world in fashion advertising. It was this travel that enabled him to discover "enigmatic" animals, plants, and minerals and to develop a passionate desire to reveal to other people the unseen or unexpected beauty in them through his art.

It's "his life's work to broaden the world's appreciation for these little-known or misunderstood elements of nature.... [His] work is to remove much of the threat from obscure organisms by focusing his work on their physical design elements. When experienced as an element of a geometric composition, a texture study, or a color story, even the most fearsome organisms can be experienced with fresh eyes."



*Reclaimed Rose
Ringed parakeet*

A thought-provoking display

The works are fascinating, strange, and beautiful. It's an exhibit that shouldn't be missed, even though some may also find it disturbing. I did, and this made the exhibit even more thought-provoking.

It can't be forgotten that this beautiful art is made with once-living beings. Yes, Mr. Marlow uses bodies that would just "otherwise be disposed of," and, yes, he says his intention is to "invoke love" for these creatures. But does the use of them as a medium really do this, or does it somehow belittle them by turning them into things? Mr. Marley does not use mammals ("they are too close to home" is one reason), and use of humans would be out of the question.

His bird pieces evoke this concern more readily, maybe, than those with insects or starfish. The absence of the parakeet's head made me very conscious of the use of this once-living creature as medium, as an object like paint, or plastic, or metal, and I felt unsure that this was really okay to me.

Mr. Marley explains on Instagram that he's not a taxidermist, that the dorsal view of extended wings and tails tells the most visually stimulating story of the morphology of parrots and that the head is on the ventral side of the bird. "Though I am loath to discard any part of the organisms I reclaim after they pass in captivity, this is one rather rare exception."

This doesn't completely convince me. However, I can be glad that this exhibit both allows me to see magnificence in nature that I may not have otherwise seen and brings up questions that perhaps need to be thought about.

How to see the exhibit

Exquisite Creatures is on the waterfront at The Maritime Building, 900 Alaskan Way. Public transportation stops are nearby. It fills 10,000 square feet and contains 500 works of art with 10,000 specimens; it generally takes one-and-a-half to two hours to see the entire exhibit.

Visitors are asked to enter on the quarter-hour so they can watch a short, engaging video that introduces the artist and his work. It serves as an alert to the fact that the works are composed of the actual bodies of animals and a relief to be told immediately that none of the animals have been killed to make art.

You can purchase tickets at <https://christophermarley.com/>. The price listed is \$34 each, but lower prices for seniors (\$30) and children (\$28) appear when you fill in the information for purchasing your tickets. Check the website for hours. The exhibit is closed on Wednesdays. It will continue, at least, to an unspecified time in summer 2026.

A different sort of holiday time

by Judith Hansen

About two years ago, I volunteered to write in this newsletter about the struggles facing "mature" folks who'd moved to Seattle, some during the Covid epidemic. I was a transplant from LA during that period and wondered how other older and no-longer-working

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folks were handling their newness. How did we integrate, find purpose, find friends and activities? I reached

out for tips.

In previous articles, I also talked about my take on the difference in communication styles between Southern California and Seattle. Did the famed Seattle Freeze still exist and, if so, why? I asked as many people as possible. Newcomers, more often than not, said “yes.” It’s hard to break into older friendships here. Folks often have lived in Seattle for many years, in fact, generations. Or their children and grandchildren are here.

What happens if you don't have family at holiday time?

I’m still thinking a lot about family and lack of it. I’m down to one grown and retired daughter who lives nearby after a second daughter moved back to California and the grandkids graduated college and moved to faraway places. Most of the friends I’ve made in Seattle spend the holidays with family or extended family. That leaves a big void.

This year, I looked ahead and felt a bit more prepared. I asked myself what I needed during this time: definitely dinners with others and making donations as big as I could afford to causes I cherish.

Be creative, reach out, build community

The weekend before Thanksgiving, I took part in my first “friendsgiving,” where one gathers with non-family who need to create a celebration. I knew only my daughter and two others slightly, but everyone appreciated being together. One couple who owns lovely China and glassware opened up their kitchen and made a great turkey. The rest of us brought all the accoutrements. It was a great feast. I hope we’ll do it again next year and it’ll become “our” tradition.

Another first for me was the PNA Thanksgiving potluck. Amazing food was brought by those who

could and was shared with those who couldn’t. A terrific crowd gathered. We enjoyed good camaraderie, sitting at long tables and talking with neighbors we’d never met before. I felt an air of generosity and ate amazing homemade pies.

For the second year in a row, I bought handmade ceramics at Goodwill, stopping in constantly to check their shelves for mugs, plates, and bowls. Goodwill offers a 20 percent reduction for seniors and veterans on Wednesdays. I do virtually no shopping anywhere else and have become friendly with the folks who work there: Holly, Laura, Cynthia. It feels like community. Last year I collected about 35 ceramics; this year about 65.

Mid-December, I held a weekend open house and asked friends and neighbors to stop in, enjoy hot apple cider, and look over the ceramic collection. I raised almost \$400, which I divided between the Seattle Library Foundation and the Seattle Times Fund.

I spent Christmas Eve at Quest Church, across from the Ballard Food Bank, where Ballard’s unhoused enjoy community dinners each Wednesday. Long tables were decorated with tin cans, cedar boughs, and Christmas balls made by the Art Club that meets before each free Wednesday meal.

The lineup outside for Christmas dinner started long before the doors opened, each person waiting received a gift donated by seven neighborhood churches. Christmas wrapping flew everywhere. It almost felt like Christmas, even though no children were there. Later, I watched the diners take their gifts and descend into the darkness, most often to the streets.

Christmas descended, another tough one. About eight relatively new friends came over Christmas Day for brunch. Other than my daughter, no one was an old friend but, again, there was warmth and sharing and the joy that comes from celebrating a holiday together.

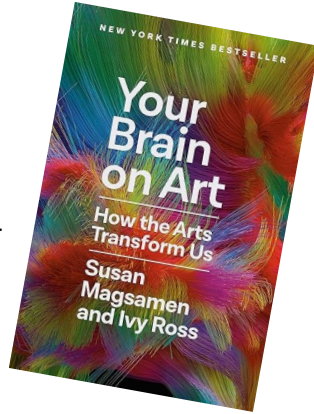
You can spend the holidays in so many ways, and you can substitute community for family if you reach out.



Book Review

by Roberta Maguire

“We’re on the verge of a cultural shift in which the arts can deliver potent, accessible, and proven solutions for everyone’s well-being. In *Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us*, Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross offer compelling research that shows how engaging in an art project for as little as 45 minutes reduces the stress hormone cortisol, no matter your skill level, and how just one art experience per month can extend your life by 10 years.” (So says the flyleaf on the cover.)



The flyleaf continues: “*Your Brain on Art* is a portal into this new understanding of how the arts can help us transform traditional medicine, build healthier communities, and mend an aching planet.”

The book features conversations with evolutionary biologist E. O. Wilson and artists such as David Byrne and Renee Fleming.

Susan Magsamen is the founder and director of the International Arts + Mind Lab, Center for Applied Neuroaesthetics, at John Hopkins University School of Medicine. Co-author Ivy Ross is the vice-president of design for hardware products at Google and was ninth on Fast Company’s list of the 100 most creative people in business in 2019.

Magsamen and Ross speak of the arts as “Our one true global language of humanity” and that advances in technology now allow us to study human psychology like never before. They also point out that being in the aesthetic mindset is being present and attuned to your environment. I remember how my four-year-old neighbor and I would make up stories and how he noticed and used everything around him to create the stories.

The authors begin by showing us the ways in which we’re wired for the arts. Knowing how our senses work is the key to understanding their transformative nature. “The olfactory cortex is located in the temporal lobe of your brain, which broadly affects emotions and memory.”

- A sniff of perfume can bring you back to a long-forgotten relationship.
- Taste is also a chemical sense that can trigger a part of the brain that is believed to process visceral and emotional experiences.
- Auditory experiences, such as music, send messages to the auditory nerve, which then sends them to the brain.
- The book also explores vision and touch. A core concept of the neuroarts is neuroplasticity. In other words, keeping your brain flexible through not just making art but also observing and experiencing it as well.

The book quotes Joseph Campbell, “I think that what we’re seeking is an experience of being alive so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.”

The cover tells us that the arts affect well-being, mental health, healing, learning, flourishing, and creating community. So, write your story or compose your music or look at or listen to other people’s music or painting or any other form of art, and cheer up!



GSC’s art program with a capital “A”

by Barbara Doherty

We’ve heard that music soothes the savage breast. But do we really know what art does? A few years ago, I read a book entitled *Craft-fulness*, which praised all arts (and crafts) as necessary to every-

Answer to village trivia question : 812 hours!

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one's health and well-being. As a knitter, sometimes sewer and struggling watercolorist, and a real Taproot Theatre and movie buff, art fills a void for me. We can enjoy art in many ways. Borrowing from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "let me count the ways": We may renew an old interest in an art or craft, make a gift for someone, add a personal touch to our home or office, surprise ourselves in taking on a new art, or simply enjoy a presentation of someone else's art.

With PNA Village's connection to the Greenwood Senior Center (GSC), members are offered several ways to satisfy their artistic side. Let's take a look at the past year.

Senior artists made snow globes, tie-dyed t-shirts at Camp Greenwood, joined a monthly group of jewelry-making enthusiasts, and gathered to do stitchery with the weekly Needle Arts group. Village



Winnie Liu

members participated in the local Rainbow Hop in June by creating multicolored ribbon wands that were distributed along with Pride flags. In October, a group enjoyed a very interesting presentation of Chinese painting

and poetry by artist Winnie Liu. Some members made potions for Halloween or strung "planets" in a re-creation of our solar system. Some took lessons in watercolor painting and others made realistic or imagined scenes with Legos, which are not just for kids!

Are you interested in theater and music? Members joined improv sessions, learned to play the ukulele, wrote a play, or learned to line dance. Musical performances abounded, such as a sing-along, group instrumentals, a jazz band, and a holiday songfest. Between many of the group sessions, classic films were shown on special days for anyone who wanted to view them.

In addition, members attended presentations by local historians on subjects as diverse as the celebrated artist Georgia O'Keeffe, the 1950s blacklist, and the unusual life of Chief Seattle's grandson, Moses Seattle.

We're graced with an active GSC Director (MJ), a dedicated program manager (Ariel), and Village Program Manager (Rebecca) who plan and manage all the possible artistic sessions throughout the year.

If you enjoy a form of art, why not share your experience with other like-minded seniors? Or you can start a new group to explore interests or hobbies. Let's all enjoy some nourishment for the soul.

How I'm using technology in music and art

by Laurie Radin

A few years ago, I took a small step across the digital divide and signed up for a streaming audio service, Amazon Music Unlimited, which is just one of several services that offer music and podcasts ad-free with a paid subscription. Streaming music is a popular trend that's been around at least two decades but, no doubt, has been evolving. Using the streaming service has changed the way I appreciate music and changed other parts of my life as well.

It's amazing to have practically every piece of music at your fingertips. You can search for music and then "like" and add or download songs and albums to your online library. The platform makes suggestions based on your choices. This feature can be either enjoyable or annoying depending on your point of view on computers and privacy issues. I decided I liked it because it led me to listen to unfamiliar music.

After talking to a friend, I bought Bluetooth Air Pod earphones and started listening to music walking or working in the yard; it's a real motivator to get

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How I'm using technology—continued from page 9

me outside. The earphones are a significant improvement in sound quality over listening directly from my iPad or iPhone.

I started creating playlists, which are collections of songs I particularly like—another time-worn concept that's new to me. So far, I've collated 12 playlists made up of music that I've tried to loosely categorize. After listening to quite a bit of music, I even decided on one piece that could be my theme song (at least for now): *Sicilienne*, Op. 78, by Fauré. It sounded vaguely familiar, probably because it's been used in several movies.

I soon combined listening to my musical selections with my passion for art. The music I listen to strongly influences what I create now. I've been using Procreate, an inexpensive digital painting and drawing app for iPads, for about two years. It's fairly intuitive. You can learn by trying different things, but I learned quite a bit by taking a brief online class. I make abstract designs just for the pleasure of creating.



Example of Laurie's Procreate art

I combine the digital tools included in the app with scanned text and other art I've produced: scans of photos, paper collages, asemic writing (visual art that looks like writing), and gel plate prints. One thing I love about Procreate is that because you design by putting different design elements on separate layers, you can always go back and alter them. If you're interested in viewing more of my art you can visit my website www.laurieradin.com or my Instagram page [@laurieradin](https://www.instagram.com/laurieradin).



How art helps us build and maintain our mental health

by Betsy Kruse

The relationship between mental health and art is a huge topic. I'm an occupational therapist. I went into the profession because I loved art and science and because I wanted to assist individuals in having productive and rewarding lives regardless of their situation.

As a teenager, I had a close friendship with a girl whose brother had Muscular Dystrophy. Although experiencing much disability, he was fortunate to have an exceptional family support system. He was brilliant and went on to become a lawyer. His life was short but very productive. He was one of our gang and joined in many of our activities. He cruised around in his electric wheelchair. The family had a van with a plywood ramp he could use for access. This experience paved my pathway to occupational therapy.

Occupational therapy started in the late 1800s. It used purposeful activities (arts and crafts) to improve mental health. During and after WWI, the field expanded to help soldiers recover from physical and mental injuries. Soldiers relearned how to care for themselves and navigate the world. The profession transitioned over time to a bigger focus on Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), mainly because of shorter hospital stays and a care continuum shift from hospital to rehabilitation to a private residence or to a long-term care setting (<https://share.google/r3HgeGWMvNDdtKU2T>).

Understanding the profession's origins gives me and the people I work with a clearer grasp on the role of arts and crafts in the development of a well-rounded and fulfilled life. Arts and crafts (or leisure activities) add enjoyment and fun to our lives as we age. Retirement is painted as a time to do and enjoy life in a way that we didn't have time for when we were working and/or raising a family.

But as we age, we also experience changes in our health and well-being that may limit what we can and

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can't do. Further, many of us didn't cultivate hobbies in those busy times. Plus, we need the discipline and ability to create our new life routines. We wake up one day and say, "What am I going to do today?" I have confidence, though, that you can overcome these obstacles and enjoy art as I do.

Many of us think art is limited to drawing or painting. One definition of art says that it's the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination. Well then, that leaves the field wide open. Cooking, for example, could be considered an art. Really, anything can be an art—knitting, crocheting, woodworking, stained glass.

I'm intimidated by drawing or painting on a canvas. However, I do call myself an artist. I'm a textile artist. I weave on a variety of different looms; I dye fabric and yarn with lichens, mushrooms, and



Whittling at Camp Greenwood

other plants; and I make baskets out of natural materials. Many would classify these as crafts. I say crafts are arts.

And the act of making something really improves my mental health. Art takes me away from my stress. Immersing myself in art brings me to an altered state of consciousness. It is calm. I enjoy the process of making an item. I also enjoy the item.

And I engage in the arts as an observer. I greatly appreciate the artistry and discipline of dance, as well as the immersive experience of attending live theater and engaging with compelling narratives, beautiful costumes, and stunning sets. Museums are amazing places to observe what others have

made and to study how it was made and what the subject reflects. Recently, I went to Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture to see a Salish weaving exhibit. I learned some Salish weaving techniques and gained an enhanced appreciation for the art form.

Often the opportunity emerges to socialize with others while making art or going to the theater or museum. You can take classes to learn arts and crafts. You can also join groups where you can work on your own art projects. You can invite a friend to go see an exhibit or play.

It's hard to describe how we benefit from art because it's hard to describe the feelings experienced while making or observing art. I hope this article will help you think about how art enhances or can enhance your life and inspire you to express yourself in whatever form it takes.



VILLAGE VOLUNTEER VIEW: LET'S KEEP OUR FOCUS

One of the ways we keep our Village thriving is by respecting each other's time and energy.

Volunteers, please focus only on the task you've signed up for. If new needs come up, members can contact the office with additional requests. As the saying goes, "Many hands make light work." It's a great way to protect boundaries and maintain a strong and balanced community.

Thanks for your kind, clear, and neighborly service—that's what makes the Village work like, well, a Village! Happy New Year!

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Village Trivia

We'll pose a question in each issue with the answer inside.

Trivia question: In 2025, how many hours did village volunteers spend driving members around Seattle?

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

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