



EPISODE 102

Going Slow at The Barnes Foundation

Released April, 2018

TRANSCRIPT

Intro: Hi everyone and welcome to The Enchant Me Podcast. I'm Kim Selby and I'll be your host as we go looking for creative inspiration every day life. In each episode, we'll talk about a quick one or two hour excursion we go on that's meant to feed our creative spirit and refill our reservoir of internal inspiration. Our excursions are based on the concept of the 'artist date', one of the tools in "The Artist's Way", a book by Julia Cameron that's a great book to read if you're looking to bring more creativity into your life no matter what form you find it. So let's get started.

Hi everyone and welcome to episode 102 of The Enchant Me Podcast. I'm Kim Selby and I'll be here with you as we go looking for creative inspiration in every day life. I have a lot of different artist dates lined up to talk about on this podcast and I wasn't planning on doing something that was so museum or gallery-based for a while because I think that's an easy way out and I think that that's the obvious choice to do for an artist day and I didn't necessarily want to go in that direction so quickly. However, I happened to be looking at something online something completely different and I found something really special that I did not want to wait to share with you guys.

Now, it seems that every day is national something day. We have National Sibling Day on April 12, which just passed. We have National Margarita Day on February 22. We have National Coloring Book Day on August 2 and my favorite, which is coming up a little bit sooner on June 15, which is National Flip-Flop day. There's actually a website that lists all of these new national holidays so if you're looking to celebrate something very specific check out national day calendar.com. Anyway, I was looking for something else and I happened to stumble on something called International Slow Art Day. Now, I love art. I go to museums and galleries as much as I can and actually seek out different shows to take a look at that wind up being artist dates, but I've always enjoyed doing that so it almost doesn't count as an artist day. But I have never heard of International Slow Art Day and that kind of surprised me and I think that's why I wanted to take International Slow Art Day which just passed - it was April 14 - and see what was in my area and see if it was actually a thing. Because it seems like it is a thing.

According to the website, which is slowartday.com, slow art day is a global event with a simple mission: "to help more people discover for themselves the joy of looking at and loving art." Why go slow? Well according to them, "when people look slowly at a piece of art they make discoveries. The most important discovery they make is that they can see and experience art without an expert or without expertise. That's an exciting discovery it unlocks passion and creativity and helps to create more art lovers." Well, if there was ever a mission that I could get behind that is it. I was so excited that one of my favorite museums in Philadelphia, The Barnes Foundation, is participating in International Slow Art Day, I knew that this would have to be my artist date this week.

So the way it works is pretty simple. According to the Slow Art website, you go to the participating museum and you pick 4 or 5 works of art that you spend time with. They suggest at least 10 minutes for each piece. I did look at The Barnes Foundation website and they had a whole program set up, which I thought was great because they were taking it seriously. There was also a discussion that was scheduled to take place after the allotted time for looking at the paintings. They also noted on their website that they would actually be picking the pieces to look at slowly so that the discussion could center around those pieces which I thought was great. I really like the fact that they have an agenda and they had some structure to it so I thought I really was excited to go so when I got there on Saturday morning. The schedule was to look at the art between 11:00 and 12:30



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and then from 12:30 to 1, they had a panel that would be an interactive roundtable discussion about the pieces. Their rules - I don't wanna call them rules - their suggestions for things to consider included: to look not only what is pictured but how the pictures painted; to consider what kind of colors the artist had used, were they bright were they dull, were they somewhere in between. Could you see how the color had been applied or is the color smooth and blended; is there a sense of deep, moderate, shallow or indeterminate space; is that space consistent throughout the picture; is space clear and well-defined or would you call atmospheric; what about how the picture was painted gives it that quality. So they're really putting things out there for you to think about when you get in front of the painting.

Ten or fifteen minutes it's actually a pretty long time to stand in front of the piece and look at it. These questions really do get you to think about it and these are really good suggestions how to spend your time with each of these pieces. They also suggested taking a look at technical aspects of the paintings. Is there a directional light source; how are the edges represented; are they created by color; how are lines used. Things that you would learn in a real painting class or in a real drawing class. They were putting it out there for discussion and for observation and really just to build awareness that these are the ways or get discussed.

For those of you who aren't familiar with The Barnes Foundation, the history of the foundation itself and its founder Dr. Albert Barnes is pretty interesting in and of itself and it's worth a visit to the website or if you're local worth a visit to The Barnes Foundation itself. Just to learn about how this man collected all of these Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings by artist like Renoir, Manet and van Gogh and Rouseay before they were really well-known. So it's a very interesting story and it's worth taking a look.

So the four works that the curators at The Barnes chose for International Slow Art Day were Eduoard Manet's *Laundry*. Jules Pascin's *Cuban Hospitality*, Henri Rousseau - who happens to be one of my very, very favorite artists and I was beside myself when I read that his piece would be part of this - Henri Rousseau's *Scout Attacked by a Tiger*, and Henri Matisse, who is probably the most well-known artist, or one of them in The Barnes Foundation, his piece *Dishes and Melon*. Those are the four that were chosen for International Slow Art Day. I could go into a discussion about each and every one of these pieces but I'm going to refrain from doing that. I posted on theenchantmepodcast.com the photos of the paintings that we took a look at because if I started talking about each of these pieces. That might take a long time and I don't want to take up all of our time today talking about the art itself. I would rather spend the time talking about the takeaways and the idea of this being an artist date and what I learned from it.

Just a little background on International Slow Art Day: the day was founded in 2010, so this is the ninth year that is taking place this year. 205 locations participated this year across the world although I think about 100 of that 205 were in the United States. Since 2010, over 1200 international slow our day events have taken place on all seven continents including Antarctica and over 700 venues hosted events. I don't know how I didn't know about this and I'm still a little bit perplexed as I'm talking about it here I feel like I missed out on some secret that's not so secret. I won't be missing this day again - I will definitely have this on my calendar from now on. Like I said, the history of this event is pretty interesting and I will be posting the links to some of these references that I making. There's a really good article from 2011 from ARTnews magazine that goes into a lot of detail about the history of the day and I will post that on the website.



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At first I thought it was kind of odd to stand in front of a painting for 15 minutes I have to admit. A lot of times when I'm looking at art, especially a piece that I enjoy or really feel a connection to, I like to get as close as I possibly can and look at brushstrokes and look at color and look at how the artist has placed the paint on the canvas. Sometimes when you're standing there for 15 minutes you feel like you're in people's way or you're hogging the image, so it was nice to have that time to not only get a close but honestly to not feel like I was in anybody's way even though I have a standing there for such a long period of time. You do start to see things after certain amount of time that you might not of noticed in the past. There were some pieces that I had immediate connections with and I have to say that the Rousseau piece was so beautiful and so stunning and I love his work so much. It was a real pleasure to almost be forced to stand there for that long and look at the details and really try and figure out how certain techniques created certain looks.

The Matisse painting that we looked at - the color was amazing. If you do look at the photo that I posted on theenchantmepodcast.com, the way he uses complementary colors - and his colors are bright to begin with - I mean that's Matisse, he's a Fauve. He works in very bright, jarring color, but the watermelon in this painting couldn't stop staring at it and I don't know if I would've taken the time to really look at how the color creates depth and the color just jumps out at you and this painting was alive. I'm not sure that I would've taken that away, especially at The Barnes because there is so much to see in The Barnes. I liked the idea of picking four pieces and focusing on them because you almost had to just leave everything else behind. You had to edit yourself, you had to focus, and you had to use your time wisely. Because believe it or not and hour a half goes very quickly even though you're doing something slowly.

So at 12:30 everyone who was participating in the day was welcomed into The Barnes Auditorium, which is a really nice space. It probably seats about 150 people. There were probably about 30 participating in the discussion which was led by Bill Perthes who is the director of adult education. The discussion was interactive; it was comfortable; it was a very open exchange about each of the four paintings that we looked at. It was a non-intimidating way to talk about what we had just experienced and it was a really nice way to end this artist day sitting in a room with 30 other people talking about the art that we just looked at. Mr. Perthes led the discussion in such a way that people were excited to talk about what they saw, not afraid to talk about what they saw. I think a lot of times people are afraid to talk about art because they think they don't know what they're talking about or they don't have the education about art to talk about it. And I could not be farther from the truth to a lot of the art institutions that house the art that you're looking at.

I think people don't realize that encouraging discussion about art should be encouraged and should be good to use the word the stigmatized because I really do think that talking about art, people get intimidated by it. And there is a stigma that "Oh, I can't talk about art," or there's a stigma about "Oh, if you know art you must be," another word I hate "you might be an elitist." And you might "this" or you might "that", but this discussion was meant to encourage people to talk about what they saw. Talk about what they felt, and I loved this day and I loved this event.

I would encourage anyone in the Philadelphia area, if you have never been to The Barnes, to go check it out. It's a smaller collection than the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and it's within a specific timeframe - it covers the Impressionist and the Post-Impressionist and the Modernists. The collection is pretty focused on that era. There are some other pieces of art in the collection, but if you're looking to see paintings by the names that you



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know, definitely go check it out. Also check out their website, because they do have a lot of educational opportunities there that I would assume are very open and very welcoming the same way that International Slow Art Day and the discussion were. Definitely check it out.

So what are my takeaways from spending International Slow Art Day at The Barnes Foundation? There were many and I will try and go through these fairly quickly. Actually, the irony of what I just said and what my first takeaway is. I just had to chuckle to myself in my head because I just said I'm going to go through this quickly and my first takeaway is "slow down", so it's hard not to have this takeaway about going slow when you're participating in something that is called Slow Art Day, but when you really think about it, slowing down and taking your time trying to focus on what you're doing and why you're doing is something that is not so easy to do in our society anymore, but it's something that is well worth the effort. I can't tell you how many times I try to rush through something or try to rush and get 14 things done when I really only have time for 10. And of those 14 maybe three of them get done well. Taking and making a conscious effort to slow down a little bit has a lot of benefits. You notice things more; you remember the more. They make a mark on you a little bit more and I think it's a way to appreciate things more.

My second takeaway is definitely tied into the idea of slowing down. By going in front of these four pieces of art and focusing on them and them alone, you kind of had to ignore all of the other exciting things that were right next to what you were looking at. You had to edit yourself. You had to force yourself to put blinders on, because like I said, even though there was an hour and a half allotted to look at these four pieces of art, the time went really quickly. You were forced to edit yourself; you were forced to walk past or walk by some thing that caught your eye but you had to keep going. And that's not something you do all the time. I think I'm pretty good at focusing and I'm distracted constantly. I think for saying "slow down" and forcing you to focus and forcing you to edit what you're doing helps to improve the experience all around. It's hard to turn that off when we're so used to doing multiple things at once.

We're used to talking to someone while we're texting. We're used to having a meal while we're trying to take a phone call. I think it's really important not only just to give our brains a break, but to give each task or each thing or each person that we're dealing with or working with, or talking to your full attention. Because people notice that and when you're constantly distracted by shiny things it's very hard to take anything seriously. I think my second takeaway ties into my artist date at Downton Abbey Live Exhibition, which was my first artist day in Episode 101. The artists in the late 1800s and early 1900s did not have technology to fall back on. They didn't have the internet to look up what something looks like in the winter versus the summer. They didn't have Photoshop to digitally tweak things. They didn't have 25 or 30 different options for canvas or paper. A lot of times they had one or two choices and that was it. Whether to use hog's hair or sable hair for their brush, but they didn't have the choice of acrylic versus oil paint. They didn't have the choice of multiple resins or multiple matte mediums to work with. They used what they had.

Today we have so many choices and so much technology to choose from, it's really a nice thing when there's one thing for you to do or two things for you to do, or to look. And that's it. There are no choices. Here's what we have and here's what we're doing and here's what you can create with minimal decisions to make. I thought that was a really big takeaway. And going back to technology just for a moment, at the Downton Abbey exhibit they have a section in the costume area that talked about women's and men's undergarments and how the evolution of the corset and the women who were banishing the corset because they were too restrictive, that was



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all happening at this time. I thought it was funny that they actually talked about that or had some photos of men's and women's undergarments in the 1900s - and actually we're talking about the same time period here. Downton Abbey was taking place around 1916 to 1926 and a lot of the artists in The Barnes were painting at the same time. But when I connected with - connected funny that I used that word - I was connecting the fact that the women's corsets were so restrictive and holding them in you couldn't leave home without a corset on.

That's how we are today about technology. You can't go anywhere without wondering: where's my phone, where's my charger, where are my earphones? It seems to me that technology today is freeing us in one respect but restricting us and holding us back in others. You can't go anywhere without your phone. You feel naked without your phone. Is the technology of today the corset of yesterday? I couldn't help but think about that as I was packing to go to New York to go see Downton Abbey. Do I bring my iPad? I need my phone. Do I have my charger for the iPad? Do I have the charger for my phone? Do I have my earbuds? It's just overwhelming and we are restricted, constricted by technology. It felt nice to be in a location where and you had to turn it off shut it down and just *go slow*.

Thanks everybody for joining me today at The Barnes Foundation. I truly loved this artist date. It's giving me some ideas for some future artist date which I always love. Like I mentioned before, if you check out the enchantmepodcast.com I'll be posting the four photos of the paintings that we looked at and I'll also be posting the links to some of the organizations and the article that I mentioned earlier in the episode. So thanks again for listening and will see you next time on The Enchant Me Podcast.

To listen to this episode, visit www.theenchantmepodcast.com/102.