CultureCase

Using contemporary art to facilitate remembering and enhance wellbeing

This research was conducted by **Anna Goulding** at **Newcastle University, UK.**

Summary

This article describes how a visit to a contemporary art gallery can improve the wellbeing of elderly people, specifically by creating a bonding experience that allows people to share their memories and opinions about art. The research involved 19 people who were offered guided tours of three contemporary art galleries in the northeast of England (Shipley Art Gallery, the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art and the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art). In focus-group discussions, they were asked about their experience of visiting the galleries and how it made them feel. The research found that the experience created strong social bonds between people at risk of isolation.

The research intentionally included people who tended not to visit galleries

The participants in the research were not gallery-goers, and predominantly comprised people who were disabled, from an ethnic minority, had lower socio-economic status or were living alone. The process of ageing (particularly into retirement and beyond) can be particularly damaging to the bonds that link people together through family, work and social networks. Older people who are not visitors to art galleries also have to deal with curatorial differences between how art is shown in a contemporary setting, and what they may have seen decades ago.

Participants were interviewed before and after each visit and at various intervals after the visits

For many of the participants in the research, the gallery visits provoked their memories, which in turn led to discussions between them as they shared their opinions about the art works and what they meant to them. Two years after the visits, the groups still animatedly talked about their experience.

How this type of activity can help improve the wellbeing of older people

‘Such interventions could help participants who have recently moved into care homes/sheltered accommodation to bond with both carers and other residents, allowing them to assimilate former identity and experiences into their new environment.’

Keywords

focus group **UK** **wellbeing** **visual art** **elderly** **contemporary art**

Title	How can contemporary art contribute toward the development of social and cultural capital for people aged 64 and older
Author(s)	Goulding, A.
Publication date	2013
Source	The Gerontologist, Vol 53, Iss 6, pp. 1009-1019
Link	**http://gerontologist.oxfordjournals.org/content/53/6/1009**
Open Access Link	**http://gerontologist.oxfordjournals.org/content/53/6/1009**
Author email	**anna.goulding@ncl.ac.uk**

By **Culture.Case** | 5 May 2015 | **Health and wellbeing impacts of arts and culture** |

King's Culture
© Copyright 2026
Designed, developed and maintained by **King's Digital Lab**
Originally built by **weheartdigital Ltd**
Accessibility Statement