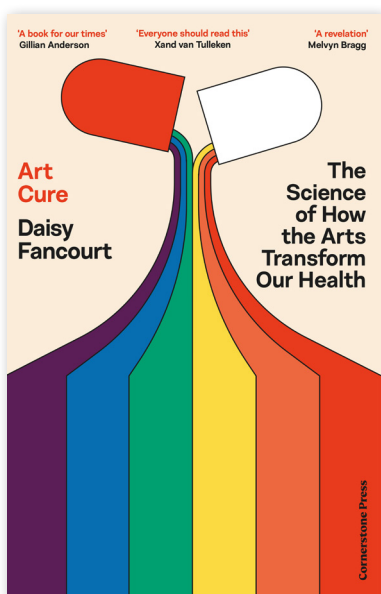


# Art Cure

## *The Science of How the Arts Transform Our Health*

by Daisy Fancourt



### PLOT SUMMARY

DIET. SLEEP. EXERCISE. NATURE. ARTS?

Many of us consider making and consuming art to be a hobby, or even a luxury. But what if arts engagement – from classical music to salsa, poetry to pop concerts, galleries to graffiti – was in fact one of our most powerful tools for unlocking health and happiness? What if art could help you live longer – and even save your life?

In *Art Cure*, world-leading expert and award-winning scientist Professor Daisy Fancourt reveals the life-changing power of the arts. Songs support the architectural development of children’s brains. Creative hobbies help our brains to stay resilient against dementia. Visual art and music act just like drugs to reduce depression, stress, and pain. Dance builds new neural pathways for people with brain injuries. Going to live music events, museums, exhibitions, and the theatre decreases our risk of future loneliness and frailty. Engaging in the arts improves the functioning of every major organ system in the body. And, perhaps most importantly, how art helps us not only to survive, but to thrive and flourish.

Fancourt draws on ground-breaking research in neuroscience, psychology, immunology, physiology, behavioural science and epidemiology, as well as inspiring true stories of people who have experienced radical changes in their health, to empower readers to improve their own health through the arts. Informed by the results of decades of scientific studies, *Art Cure* is the must-read, inspiring guide to improving your health, giving you the tools to write your own ‘arts prescription’.

### WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

A remarkable book about the power of the arts *Art Cure* references an impressive amount of research, but presents its conclusions to the reader in an accessible and friendly tone.



Shortlist  
2026

“Whether you are a sceptic, a policy-maker, or just want to know more about how art of all forms affects us – this book is brilliant!”

THANGAM DEBBOAIRE  
2026 CHAIR OF JUDGES



Shortlist  
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In *Art Cure*, Fancourt – Professor of Psychobiology and Epidemiology at University College London – references a wealth of relationships between the arts and neuroscience, but also psychology, sociology and art theory. It’s a wide span of research, meaning that many of her case studies and examples present a variety of uses for art as intervention, often stressing the benefits of community as well as the immersion in the art form itself.

However, it’s not just research. At the end of *Art Cure*, Fancourt takes the reader through a checklist of practical tips to engage with art in daily life, and envisages what a utopian creative society would look like. This posits her book as a creative tool as well as a resource of information – perfectly fitting for a book about making positive change with art, on a collective and individual level.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

At the beginning of her book, Fancourt discusses the different kinds of arts and creative activities that people might participate in to improve their wellbeing. This ranges from the ‘classic’ artforms such as dance, music and painting, but could also include cooking and crafts. She also discusses reading and libraries within the scope of her book, as well as television, with the example of the East Los High experiment in which progressive messaging around sexuality and sexual health were embedded into the plot of a teen soap opera.

Do you think there is a difference between engaging with traditionally ‘high art’ forms such as ballet, opera, art galleries and classical music for wellbeing, and consuming ‘low’ art forms such as television, cooking and crafts? Do you think Fancourt has an opinion on these distinctions? If cooking, crafts and television, listening to audiobooks, reading and listening to music count as arts engagement, is it true that, as Fancourt states, 95% of people are not engaging with the arts every day, or regularly? How does your experience reflect this? Have you found artforms to be curative? Which ones?

### QUESTIONS

Looking at Fancourt’s chapter on arts funding, do you think there is an ethical, moral or ideological difference in funding services like public libraries, and funding more ‘elite’ arts organisations?

In Fancourt’s vision for a creative utopian future, is it realistic to envision universal arts on prescription, wide-ranging investment in training creative practitioners and using the arts to remove people from waiting lists, when the NHS is cutting basic services and GP surgeries?

Fancourt suggests that to gain the same quota of wellbeing that a pay rise would bring, you could head to your local arts venue instead. Do you agree?

If you enjoyed this book try some of our recommended reads on the next page.

What are the differences between art being used to educate, as in the case of theatre-in-education programmes – for example, raising awareness of sexual health – versus art programmes with specific aims presenting a direct health benefit, as per the babies in the NICU listening to lullabies?

Fancourt doesn't really touch on the influence of class on access to the arts. How do you think class impacts people's ability to engage with art forms and thus enhance their wellbeing, or not enhance it?

### NEXT STEPS

Choose a new art form you'd like to try, and look into giving it a go with a class, a group, perhaps visiting a place like a library or a gallery for free or watching some instructional videos free online. Observe whether, over a period of weeks, your new hobby impacts your mood, physical or mental health, or improves your social life and connections.

Alternatively, if there's been a time in your life that art helped you through a difficult time with your health, or helped you cope with something else difficult – a bereavement, a stressful time, a move to a new place, loneliness – see if you can write about what you did and how it helped. How did the art make you feel? Did you create things, or did you learn something? What happened as a result? Would you recommend what you did? Why? ■

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Daisy Fancourt** is Professor of Psychobiology and Epidemiology at University College London where she heads the Social Biobehavioural Research Group, and Director of the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre on Arts and Health. She has published 300 scientific papers, won over two dozen academic prizes and is listed as one of the most highly cited scientists in the world. She is also a multi-award-winning science communicator and has been named a World Economic Forum Global Shaper and BBC New Generation Thinker.



# If you enjoyed this book...

## RECOMMENDED READS

In *Understanding Well-being Data: Improving Social and Cultural Policy, Practice and Research*, Susan Oman examines what data there is regarding the measurement of well-being, how robust it is and asks how assumptions about the arts inform cultural policy, politics and funding decisions. *Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us* by Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross is an authoritative guide to how neuroaesthetics can help us transform traditional healing, build healthier communities and mend an aching planet.

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by Jane Rogoyska



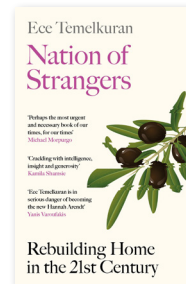
**Art Cure: The Science of How the Arts Transform Our Health**  
by Daisy Fancourt



**Mother Mary Comes to Me**  
by Arundhati Roy



**Artists, Siblings, Visionaries: The Lives and Loves of Gwen and Augustus John**  
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discusses the impact they have had on her life and career.

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