



# Fix Your Gaze

*Can art really cure us from digital distraction?*

**Jonathan Malesic**

DECEMBER 2024

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. What, if anything, do you think you “get” out of visiting a museum? Does it depend on the museum’s location, content, or size? How has your experience of museums changed over the years? What would a perfect museum look like to you?

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2. Malesic writes that “looking at art is not the antidote to looking too much at our phones; art is simply an alternative to it—though often a better alternative—just as nature or prayer or sex is.” Do you agree? Are there any “antidotes” to digital distraction? If not, is there anything about art that makes it a uniquely compelling alternative to the distraction economy?

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3. As Malesic proposes, “We might take photos of artworks because we recognize that whatever attention we give them is never enough. They deserve longer looks than we can spare.” Do you take pictures of art or other beautiful things you encounter? Why or why not? Is the impulse to photograph constructive, destructive, or something else?

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4. Malesic offers a contrast between two different types of attention: the “diffuse” attention required to drive a car, and the “total, deep focus” he thinks is demanded by art. And yet, is there some art that is meant to be experienced diffusely? What type of concentration should we bring to the consumption of art—and does it change based on the content or medium?

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5. In Malesic’s words, “The narrow, blinkered perspective on the world that so many thinkers lament is necessary for self-preservation.” What do you think he means by a “narrow, blinkered perspective”? Is it truly necessary for self-preservation? Do you consider where you focus your “narrow, blinkered” attention? What would it look like to be more intentional about where we set our focus?

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6. “I didn’t see a crisis of attention at the museum or even on my way to it,” Malesic writes. “In fact, I saw the very conviviality that critics of the attention economy believe is in danger.” Does this line up with your experience, or do you see the distraction economy at play? Are museums places of “conviviality”? Where else do you experience an attentive sense of community?

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Antón Barba-Kay, “The Attention Trap,” November 10, 2024: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/attention-trap>

Cristina Campo, “Attention and Poetry,” February 2024: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/attention-and-poetry>

Jonathan Malesic, “Taming the Demon,” February 8, 2019: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/taming-demon>

Kate Lucky, “Consider the Zoo,” October 2024: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/consider-zoo>