



Influence Of Music On Art: Using Painting As Reference Point

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Abstract: The idea that music is capable of influencing the creating process of the art product is not new because this view appears to have been widely held by a lot of professional and budding artists. Whereas this view remains what it is, a considerable number of artists also believe that playing music, irrespective of the genre, distracts the artist, especially during the creative process. These two variables are the crux of the matter as the authors discuss and cite instances in which music, despite it been said to be food for the soul becomes a “Noise” that causes distraction in art making process with particular reference to painting.

Keywords: Art, Music, Artist, Inspiration, Creativity, Noise, Rhythm.

Introduction

Humans tend to speak much more about themselves because they tend to be “generally self-absorbed”. Greene made this assertion while discussing the issue of “seduction” in his book titled “The Concised Art of Seduction.” He notes that while humans mostly use words to communicate their feelings, ideas, opinions, complaints and arguments, those words can also be noise. He believes “noise” is an irritant that humans always want to tune off, especially when they go prattling about themselves. In such instances, they appear noisome and people would much want to ignore them. As early as childhood, Green (2006) submits that we learn to avoid this kind of noise. He avers, though that, some spoken words which may be liken to being “noise” could be seen to be seductively appeal to our sense of hearing if the speaker knows how to effectively bring it into play. As much as spoken words are capable of lifting our souls and emotions long after we may

have stopped paying the speaker attention, music does same if not much more. To make music instead of noise, the melodies and lyrics must be such that pleases. Accordingly, the popular cliché that “music is food for the soul” is apt.

Music plays different roles in human's life. It is a handy and creates a lot of value, especially in entertainment of the audience during ceremonies, festivities and so on. Instances abound of how music played a major role in the story of King David. In the biblical narration, we learnt that David would play the Harp anytime King Saul was being tormented by the evil spirit. The melody from the Harp became a soothing balm that relieves King Saul from the evil spirit. In modern times, music is being used by not only medical practitioners (psychiatrist) but also psychologists as alternative therapy in healing those with the diseases of the mind. In many African societies, playing music helps bereaved members of family to cope with demised of a beloved one. It's been generally argued that music has the incredible ability to stimulate and tune us into having joyous, sad, inspirational or nostalgic modes. These emotions can serve as a catalyst for creativity, helping artists tap into their innermost thoughts and ideas. Studies have shown that music can significantly impact the brain's neural circuits, triggering emotional responses that can enhance creativity and focus.

Furthermore, music can also influence the pace and rhythm of an artist's work. Just like how a beat can dictate the flow of a dance steps, music can set the tempo for an artist's creative process. Fast paced music is known to provide dancers with burst of energetic steps. This is also true of slow-paced music. These genres of music induce a sense of tranquility and mindfulness that are capable of influencing artists into a state of deep focus and concentration. In this sense, music would be seen to act as stimuli for artists in creating works of art. Irrespective of these views, music inspires or influences artists in similar ways as writers, dramatists and a host of creative persons could be inspired by books, films or artworks that they encountered. For instance, an artist (painter) may incorporate elements of jazz or classic musical notes that raises their emotions into their works. Such experiences can lead to creation of innovative art piece capable of opening new frontiers of artistic expression.

Music as a “Noise”

Despite these instances, music in many instances is considered a “noise” capable of causing distractions where quieting environment is needed. In the visual arts, playing or listening to music especially during the creative process can either be a plus or minus. The common assumption amongst professional and budding artists' is that music heightens artists' creative inclinations before as well as during production of an art piece. While this may not be completely true or false, there are persons who consider such act (irrespective of genre) as a major distraction. Whereas these variables are centre to this discourse, it is worth noting those who does believes in these opposing views. This prompts the authors to ask the question: what are the likely scenarios one encounters that possibly explain when and how music (listening) engender or hinder artists' practices?

Garba and Faida (2024) opine that an “encounter, whether brief or long, defines one’s journey through life, shaping perspectives and influencing choices. They believe that every encounter provides opportunity for learning, self-discovery, weave narrative of experiences and so on. To present us a picture of what this seems like, Afuba (2003) recalls a scenario he witnessed with Uche Okeke, who was one of Nigeria’s renowned artists portraying a bush fire he saw across the road. In order not to be noisome, Afuba claims to have stood in silence as he watches Okeke depict the seething flame with his masterly strokes of the brush on canvas. During this time, he claims Okeke only conversed with him once. The scenery described above amply states how artists could be exposed to distractions from paying full attention to what is being created. It is also important to note that the physical environment where creative process takes place at a particular time has a major role to play. In the scenario mentioned above, the sight of the burning flame already created a conflicting and probably disturbing effect on the mental essence of Okeke. In other words, he was confronted with the mental pressure the flame had created in his mind as well as the thought pattern which was required in the creative process. It is believed that had Afuba engaged him in whatever manner it may have affected the creative process and perhaps a more acceptable outcome of the process would not have been achieved.

Classification of Music

For the purpose of this paper, music is being classified into two with no particular consideration for genre. Composition with lyrics and instrumentation on one hand; and composition with instrumentation only on the other. Music is often composed with songs to form a composition where specific messages are being disseminated to the audience. This type could be with or without instrumentation, for example, Bolaji (2012) notes that *juju* music is one of the popular genre among the Yoruba people. Historically, they are a group of people numbering several millions, who dwell within the western geographical region of Nigeria and some neighboring countries namely Republics of Benin and Togo. Ajayi, 1998 writes,

Every Yoruba song, be it traditional or modern, carries a message for its listeners. The message addresses socio-educational issues and at times aims at correcting certain ills in the society. Songs are frequently composed (orally) in order to praise or abuse individuals, to express love or hatred, or to propagate accounts of events. Hence the Yoruba saying “*orin nii siwaju ote*” meaning songs precede an intrigue.

The other type of music is the one where only musical instruments are engaged; often referred to as classical, or just instrumental in a layman language. This is the type that basically engage orchestral musical instruments such as clarinet, piano and other strings such as violin, cello etc. for its composition where lyrics are rarely considered.

Does Music Influences Artists’ Mind

The relationship between music and art dates back to as early as the creation of man where ancient civilizations started incorporating music as part their daily living. In the 21st century’s fast-paced and ever-changing world, communication, whether spoken, literary or artistic (painting, sculpture, graphics, music, dancing) remains undeniably significant because it conveys human ideas, thoughts, emotions and so on. As with other ways, music as a means of communication also has profound impact on artist’s creativity. But what

is it really that makes music a powerful source of inspiration/companion for artists, especially in the studio? There are distinct evidences where artistic creations were inspired by music. In a critic of James McNeil Whistler's "Nocturne" and Paul Klee's "Polyphony" works, Mikulski observes that "music has played an important role in the development of art and culture for centuries, inspiring artists from various fields and influencing audiences with its extraordinary emotional power. Its universality and timelessness make classical music an enduring source of inspiration and a model for future generations of artists."



Fig. 1

Artist: Paul Klee

Title: "Polyphony"

Medium: Tempera on linen

Date: 1932

Size: 66.5 x 106cm

Source: Emmanuel Hoffmann Foundation, Switzerland (en.m.wikipedia.org)

Music is an age long source of impetus and inspiration for many visual artists. Apart from inspiring thematic thoughts of artists Like Keith Haring who listened to rap music while painting. Iyengar 2017 says "Jackson Pollock had repeatedly cited jazz music as an influence in his work...", while Milkuiski informed that "Wassily Kandinsky enjoyed playing the violin, and this musical proclivity influenced his giving his artworks musical titles" (Fig. 1 - 3). Music especially instrumental penetrates artists mind, aiding their sense of conceptual thoughts to provoke appreciable artistic expressions that appeal to their beholders' sense of vision. Milkuiski concludes "The sounds of symphonies and sonatas stimulate the imagination of artists and inspire them to create abstract compositions full of emotion and dynamism".

**Fig. 2****Artist:** Wassily Kandinsky,**Title:** "Impression III" (Concerto)**Medium:** Oil on canvas**Date:** 1911**Size:** 77.5 x 100cm**Source:** The St. Deutsche Galerie im Lenbachhaus

He further said, "the masterpieces like Ludwig van Beethoven or Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart can transport us to a completely different dimension, stimulate his imagination, and provoke thoughts". Their music serves as a source of inspiration for painters, writers, or choreographers who incorporates the emotions and atmosphere evoked by sounds into their works." Music has the ability to affect one's mood. Listening to a particular sound of music that appeals to an artist can encourage his or her level of productivity and release the vitality required to engage in creative process.

**Fig. 3****Artist:** Wassily Kandinsky,**Title:** "Impression III" (Concerto)**Medium:** Watercolour and Indian ink on paper**Date:** 1924**Size:** 32.0 x 23cm**Source:** Los Angeles County Museum of Art

It is often believed that artists require a less noisy environment to enable them concentrate and come out with creative art pieces. There is a general belief that most "creative people have special places they go to when they want to solve problem(s) because quiet time and solitude helps individual to think inside [outward] the box by focusing on the problem (task) at hand (Ochigbo and Uduak, 2017). The atmosphere in most artists or artistes' studios are expected to appear solitary. It is the common belief that art and music are universally

able to penetrate humanity and arouse their souls. Music becomes a noise to an artist who is actively engaged in a creative process when certain component of the music he or she listens to conflicts with his or her sense of concentration. For example, when a familiar lyric or song is employed in a musical composition which the artist listens to, such music will compete with the level of concentration and attention that the artist requires to meaningfully engage in the creative process. He holds the view that creativity thrives where the right environment is created. Regardless of the setting and situation, some environments are more conducive for the process to set in (Ochigbo and Uduak, 2017).

The authors of this article believe that the creative artist mind is put under pressure as it conflicts with enjoying the message in the music and focusing on the creative process. Music has the power to interrupt one's mood, the artist's mood must of a truth be ready to comprehend impulses from the brain to function during creative process. While this view is not iron cast, music has an even more dramatic effect on perception. It is commonly observed that when there is nothing to see, it is not out of place to observe a happy face listening to music that elicit in them happiness. The reverse is the case when one listens to certain music that is capable of rousing sad mood. If this is the case, in what likely scenario would playing or listening to music engenders or hinders the artists' creative practice?

Population

To find out if these opposing views holds any effect, a battery of questionnaire was randomly administered to budding and professional artists through emails and Whatsapp which is one of the most popular social media platforms in Nigeria (See Appendix). The respondents cut across the six geopolitical zones. There were no specific criteria that sets to limit or encourage where the respondents reside in the zones (cities, towns, villages) and, or whether they were students or workers (teachers, lecturers) in primary, secondary or tertiary institutions in which Fine Arts and Industrial Design are taught.

Instruments of the Study

The instrument used for this research was artists/designers (student, academia, professionals, practitioners among others) opinion questionnaire designed by the authors. It was a Likert type adopting the simple "yes or no" position either followed with additional information or none by the respondent in further explaining their initial responses.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

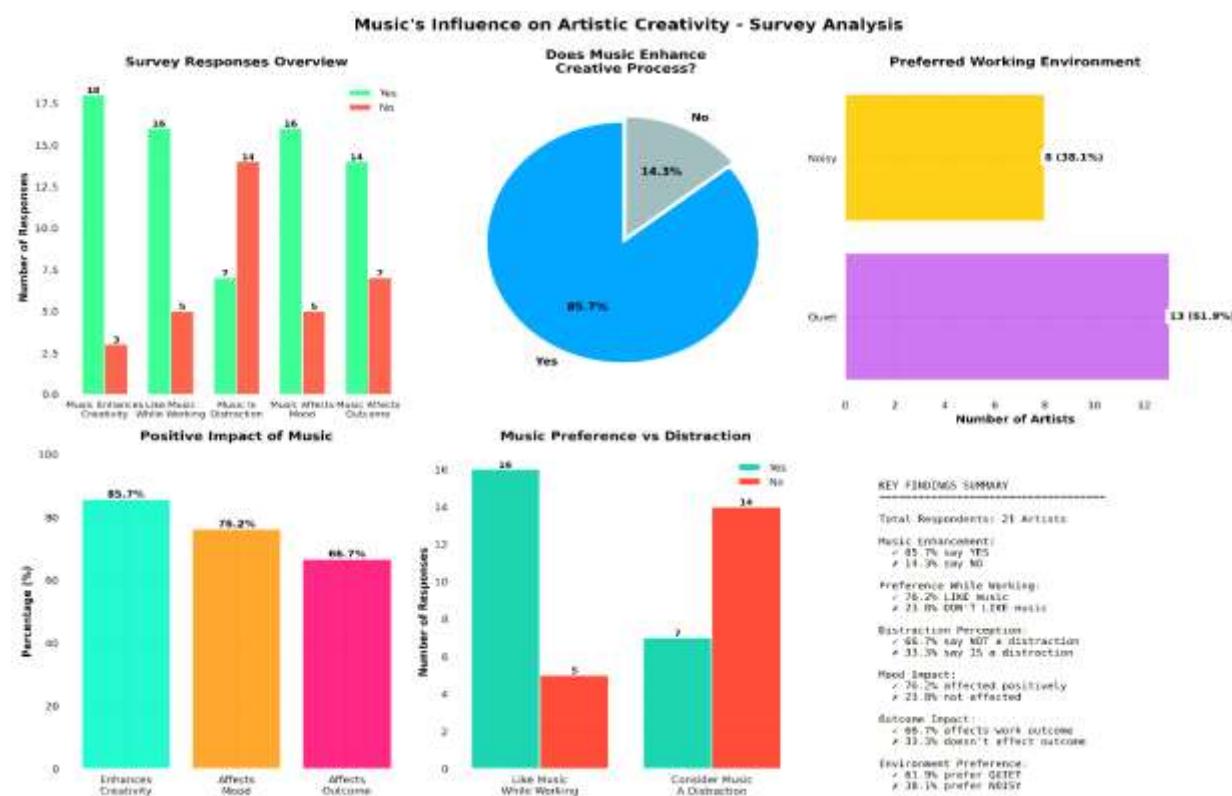
The instruments (questionnaire) were moderated by two professional colleagues (senior Professors) for content. Their observations were incorporated.

Method of Data Collection/Analysis

A total of 100 questionnaire were sent out through online platforms especially emails and WhatsApp and processed through google form. A total of twenty-one (21) artists/designers responded after seven days (7).

This report analyzes survey responses from the 21 artists regarding the role of music and its influence in their creative processes. The findings reveal a strong positive correlation between music and artistic creativity, with 85.7% of respondents affirming that music enhances their creative work. However, individual preferences vary significantly regarding environmental conditions and perceived distractions.

Survey Analysis Chart



1. Key Findings Overview

1.1 Music Enhancement of Creativity

- Yes: 85.7% (18 out of 21 artists)
- No: 14.3% (3 out of 21 artists)

Insight: An overwhelming majority of artists find that music positively enhances their creative process, indicating music's fundamental role as a creative catalyst.

1.2 Preference for Music While Working

- Yes: 76.2% (16 artists)
- No: 23.8% (5 artists)

Insight: Three-quarters of respondents actively prefer listening to music while creating art, though this is slightly lower than those who acknowledge music's enhancement effect.

1.3 Music as a Distraction

- No (Not a distraction): 66.7% (14 artists)
- Yes (Is a distraction): 33.3% (7 artists)

Insight: Most artists do not perceive music as distracting. However, a significant minority (1 in 3) finds it can be distracting, suggesting individual differences in cognitive processing.

1.4 Music's Effect on Mood While Creating

- Yes: 76.2% (16 artists)
- No: 23.8% (5 artists)

Insight: Music significantly impacts the emotional state of artists during creation, with three-quarters reporting mood effects.

1.5 Music's Effect on Work Outcome

- Yes: 66.7% (14 artists)
- No: 33.3% (7 artists)

Insight: Two-thirds believe music directly influences the final quality or characteristics of their artwork.

1.6 Environmental Preferences

- Prefer Quiet: 61.9% (13 artists)
- Prefer Noisy: 38.1% (8 artists)

Insight: Despite valuing music, most artists prefer quieter environments, suggesting they favor controlled auditory stimulation rather than chaotic noise.

2. Thematic Analysis of Responses

2.1 Primary Influences on Artistic Creativity

Based on open-ended responses, the following themes emerged as key influences:

Influence Category	Frequency	Percentage
Music	7	33.3%
Nature/Beauty of Nature	4	19.0%
Culture/Cultural Identity	2	9.5%
Environment	2	9.5%

Influence Category	Frequency	Percentage
Emotion	2	9.5%
Experience	2	9.5%
Social/Political Issues	2	9.5%
Inner Peace/Spirituality	Multiple	-
Innovation/Passion	Multiple	-

Key Insight: Music itself is the most frequently cited influence, appearing in one-third of responses. Nature and cultural identity also play significant roles, highlighting the multifaceted sources of artistic inspiration.

3. Music Genre Preferences

3.1 Genre Distribution

Artists showed diverse musical tastes, with the following genres most frequently mentioned:

Genre Category	Frequency
Traditional/Cultural Music	6
Hip-Hop/Afrobeat	5
Classical Music	4
Jazz	2
Gospel/Spiritual Music	2
Soul	1
Reggae	1

Genre Category	Frequency
Folk	1

3.2 Genre Analysis

Traditional/Cultural Music emerged as the most popular category, suggesting artists draw heavily from their cultural heritage and indigenous musical forms. This aligns with several respondents mentioning culture and African identity as key influences, as African music has long served as a vehicle for cultural expression and the transmission of traditions (African Sahara, 2025; Folk Fiesta, 2023).

Hip-Hop/Afrobeat represents contemporary African musical expression, indicating artists engage with both traditional and modern musical forms.

Classical Music and **Jazz** were favored for their instrumental complexity and ability to provide background ambiance without lyrical distraction.

4. Qualitative Insights from Open Responses

4.1 Why Artists Like Music While Working

Respondents provided rich explanations for their preferences:

Positive Reasons (Why They Like Music):

1. Motivation and Energy

- *"It motivates and gives me energy"*
- *"It brings on the energy and entertaining"*
- *"It keeps me flowing with energy and emotional strength"*

2. Concentration Enhancement

- *"It helps me concentrate and cuts me off from distractions"*
- *"Music helps to work a bit faster"*
- *"It reduces distraction and enhances concentration"*

3. Inspiration and Creativity

- *"It's a source of inspiration for me"*
- *"It elevates the spirit and fuels my energy"*
- *"Keeps me in the perfect emotional state while working"*

4. Mood Elevation

- *"It gives vibes, energizing you to keep working"*
- *"Makes me happier and makes me concentrated"*
- *"It refreshes my mind"*

5. Preventing Boredom

- *"It gingers me to keep working for a longer period and does not bore me immediately"*
- *"Makes working more lively"*

Negative Reasons (Why They Don't Like Music):

1. Distraction and Concentration Issues

- *"It doesn't let me concentrate"*
- *"I get distracted"*
- *"I become uncoordinated in working out my artwork"*

2. Need for Silence

- *"I prefer a quiet environment"*
- *"I like where there's no any sound"*
- *"Quiet environment makes for concentration"*

3. Music as Thoughtful Art Form

- *"Music is an art form that requires thoughtfulness"*
- *"Playing music distracts my ability to concentrate while working"*

5. The Paradox: Music as Both Aid and Distraction

5.1 Understanding the Contradiction

An interesting pattern emerges when comparing responses:

- **76.2%** like music while working
- **66.7%** say music is NOT a distraction
- **33.3%** say music IS a distraction

This suggests a spectrum of musical engagement among artists:

Type A: Music-Dependent Creators (≈65%)

- Music enhances creativity
- Not considered a distraction
- Prefer controlled musical environment
- Music affects mood and outcome positively

Type B: Selective Music Users (≈20%)

- Acknowledge music's benefits
- May find it distracting at times
- Use music strategically (e.g., certain phases of work)
- Prefer quieter environments overall

Type C: Silence Seekers (≈15%)

- Prefer complete quiet
- Find music distracting
- May get inspiration from music but work in silence
- Value internal contemplation

6. Environmental Preferences: Noisy vs. Quiet

6.1 Preference Breakdown

- **61.9%** prefer quiet environments
- **38.1%** prefer noisy environments

6.2 Reconciling Music Preference with Environment Preference

The data shows an apparent paradox: **76.2%** like music while working, yet **61.9%** prefer quiet environments. This can be explained by:

1. Controlled vs. Uncontrolled Noise

Artists prefer *chosen music* (controlled) over *ambient noise* (uncontrolled)

- *"Quiet environment with low-volume coordinated music stimulates appetite to work"*

2. Volume Considerations

Many respondents emphasized *low-volume music*

- *"Music, when played on reasonable volume does not cause distraction"*

3. Phase-Dependent Preferences

Some artists use music during certain phases

- *"When I'm 70% done, I want the environment to be musically noisy"*
- *"After listening to the music, I need quiet environment to create"*

7. Impact on Creative Output

7.1 Mood Effects (76.2% Yes)

Artists described how music affects their emotional state:

- **Positive Emotional States:** Happiness, motivation, inspiration, energy
- **Focus Enhancement:** Better concentration, flow state, reduced external distractions
- **Spiritual/Transcendent Effects:** Elevation of spirit, divine inspiration

7.2 Outcome Effects (66.7% Yes)

Artists reported tangible impacts on their work:

- **Quality Improvement:** *"It gives a great outcome and shows the beauty of the work"*
- **Creative Enhancement:** *"Music enhances creativity"*
- **Productivity:** *"Music helps to work a bit faster"*
- **Visual Perception:** *"Help to visually see beyond physical"*
- **Concentration:** *"Help me to concentrate while working"*

7.3 Artists Who Report No Outcome Effect (33.3%)

Interestingly, some artists who enjoy music while working don't believe it affects the final outcome:

- *"It's just all about the process of the creation"*
- *"It only encourages me to work"*
- *"It's just a negligible part of the process"*

This suggests music serves as a *process enhancer* rather than a *direct creative input* for some artists.

8. Cultural and Contextual Factors

8.1 African Cultural Context

Several responses explicitly mentioned African cultural elements:

- *"My culture, my immediate environment, African at large and Music"*
- *"Cultural music dancers"*
- *Traditional music* was the most popular genre

Insight: For many artists, music is inseparable from cultural identity, suggesting that musical preferences in creative work are deeply rooted in cultural heritage and collective memory.

8.2 Spirituality and Music

Multiple respondents connected music to spiritual experiences:

- *"Sacred music"*
- *"Gospel music"*
- *"Divine inspiration"*
- *"Console the heart of artist"*

Insight: Music serves not just as auditory stimulation but as a *spiritual conduit* for some artists.

9. Practical Implications for Artists

9.1 Recommendations Based on Data

For Artists Who Benefit from Music:

1. Curate Genre-Specific Playlists

- Match music genre to creative phase
- Traditional/cultural music for cultural themes
- Classical/jazz for concentration-intensive work
- Hip-hop/Afrobeat for energy and motivation

2. Control Volume Levels

- Keep music at moderate levels to avoid distraction
- Adjust based on work phase

3. Use Music Strategically

- Initial inspiration phase: diverse, energetic music
- Deep work phase: instrumental, familiar music
- Final touches: quiet or no music

For Artists Who Find Music Distracting:

1. Separate Inspiration from Execution

- Listen to music before starting work
- Work in silence during creation

2. Experiment with Different Genres

- Instrumental music may be less distracting than lyrical
- Natural sounds or ambient music as alternatives

3. Honor Your Process

- Some artists genuinely work better in silence
- This is equally valid and should be respected

10. Statistical Correlations

10.1 Key Relationships Observed

1. Strong Positive Correlation:

- Artists who say music enhances creativity (85.7%) largely also like music while working (76.2%)

2. Inverse Relationship:

- Only 33.3% find music distracting despite 76.2% using it regularly
- Suggests successful adaptation strategies

3. Outcome Confidence:

- 66.7% believe music affects outcome, which is lower than those who like music (76.2%)
- Indicates some uncertainty about music's direct impact on final product

Conclusions

Primary Conclusions

1. Music is a Significant Creative Catalyst

- 85.7% of artists affirm music enhances their creativity
- Music ranks as the #1 self-reported influence on artistic work

2. Individual Differences Matter

- No one-size-fits-all approach to music and creativity
- Artists fall into distinct categories: music-dependent, selective users, and silence seekers

3. Controlled Auditory Environment is Preferred

- Artists prefer chosen music over ambient noise
- Volume and genre selection are critical factors

4. Music Affects Process More Than Product

- Stronger agreement on mood effects (76.2%) than outcome effects (66.7%)
- Music may be more important for the creative journey than the destination

5. Cultural Context Shapes Musical Preferences

- Traditional and cultural music dominate preferences
- Music connects artists to their heritage and identity

Final Insight

Music's role in artistic creativity is deeply personal and contextual. While the majority of artists benefit from musical accompaniment, the optimal approach varies based on:

- Individual cognitive processing styles
- Cultural background and musical heritage
- Specific phase of the creative process
- Type of artwork being created
- Personal associations with particular genres

The key takeaway: *Artists should experiment with different musical approaches and honor what works for their unique creative process.*

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Experimental Design

- Conduct controlled experiments measuring actual creative output with and without music
- Compare quality ratings by independent judges

2. Neurological Studies

- Investigate brain activity patterns of artists working with and without music
- Identify neural correlates of music-enhanced creativity

3. Longitudinal Studies

- Track artists over time to see if music preferences change
- Examine career-stage differences in music use

4. Genre-Specific Research

- Compare painters, sculptors, digital artists, etc.
- Investigate whether different art forms benefit differently from music

5. Cultural Comparative Studies

- Compare artists from different cultural backgrounds
- Examine how cultural musical traditions influence creative processes

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