

Art-Based Engagement in Exhibition Settings: Exploring Self-Efficacy in Older Adults

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Abstract

As the global population ages, fostering psychological well-being and personal agency has become increasingly important to promoting independence, resilience, and overall quality of life in older adulthood. Through the My Canvas Project this study, conducted in Busan, South Korea, investigated the potential of participatory art-making and public exhibitions in enhancing self-efficacy among older adults. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining pre- and post-programme surveys with in-depth interviews. The quantitative results showed a statistically significant increase in self-efficacy, particularly in the participants' perceived ability to overcome challenges. The qualitative findings revealed five key themes: self-reflection, social connection, confidence development, sense of achievement, and openness to new challenges. Collectively, these outcomes highlight the value of art-based participation and public recognition in enhancing older adults' sense of identity, personal agency, and emotional well-being. This study contributes to the growing body of evidence that museum- and gallery-based programmes can serve as effective, non-clinical approaches to support the quality of life of older adults.

Keywords: art-based engagement, older adults, self-efficacy, participatory art, exhibition programmes, museum experience.

Introduction

The global population of adults aged 60 years and older is growing rapidly, with a concurrent increase in average life expectancy¹. This demographic shift underscores the need for age-friendly environments and research into factors that can enhance the quality of life (QoL) for older adults (Jurek and Niewiadomska 2021). For older adults, QoL encompasses multiple dimensions including physical and psychological well-being, interpersonal relationships, personal development, and social inclusion (Jurek and Niewiadomska 2021). A growing body of research emphasises the significance of social connectivity in ageing (e.g. Greaves and Farbus 2006; Adams et al. 2011; Wood et al. 2023). Maintaining interpersonal relationships and actively participating in community life are essential for psychological health, helping to mitigate the risks of depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline (Golden et al. 2009). Within this context various studies have identified this life stage as a period of ongoing growth and agency, referring to older adults as 'third agers' - those who remain mentally and physically active while seeking opportunities for continuous learning and personal growth (Chua and de Guzman 2014; Zadworna 2020; Bužgová et al. 2024; Pickard 2024). Accordingly, participation in lifelong learning programmes has been shown to enhance life satisfaction and self-esteem while reducing symptoms of depression among these individuals (Chua and de Guzman 2014). Such programmes provide not only intellectual stimulation but also recreational, social, and psychological benefits (Prieto 2009). This highlights the importance of creating opportunities that foster mental engagement, social connection, and overall well-being during this active stage of later life.

Self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to achieve specific goals, is increasingly recognized as an essential component of older adults' well-being and resilience (Doba et al. 2016; Brink et al. 2012; Xie and Mo 2024). Enhancing self-efficacy empowers older adults to make informed choices and pursue meaningful goals more actively (Lim et al. 2024). In this context, museums and galleries have begun to be recognized as potential platforms for promoting well-being among older adults by fostering therapeutic environments that promote self-exploration, empowerment, and social inclusion (Coles and Jury 2020). A growing number of museums and galleries offer a wide spectrum of services, including programmes addressing welfare, health, and social needs (Ghadim and Daugherty 2022). In some cases museums and galleries collaborate with local communities or organizations to deliver these services to families, social groups, or individuals in vulnerable situations (Treadon 2016; Coles and Jury 2020; Ghadim and Daugherty 2022). These emerging initiatives suggest that museums - as contributors to social care with the potential to inspire hope, support healing, and enrich older adults' lives - can play a broader role beyond their traditional cultural functions (Ghadim and Daugherty 2022).

A wide range of museum-based activities, including guided tours, participatory educational programmes, volunteer opportunities, art-based workshops, and inclusive exhibitions, may serve as meaningful avenues for older adults to engage more actively in cultural settings. Such forms of engagement are increasingly recognized for their potential to support social connectedness and self-efficacy for participants generally (Rosenblatt 2014; Bennington et al. 2016). Accordingly, it is important to further explore how these approaches may relate to self-efficacy in older adults. Previous research has largely focused on art-based engagement in clinical or care contexts (e.g. la Cour et al. 2005; Fraser et al. 2014); art viewing and reminiscence-based activities in museum settings (e.g. Salom 2011; Bennington et al. 2016); or programmes targeting individuals with specific health or social conditions (e.g. Camic et al. 2015; Todd et al. 2017; Thomson et al. 2018). In response to these gaps the present study focused specifically on exploring whether participation in art-based workshops and gallery exhibitions had the potential to enhance self-efficacy in later life. Hence, the present study implemented the My Canvas Project: a participatory art programme in which older adults engaged in small-group studio workshops to create original artworks that were subsequently exhibited in a public gallery. These workshops were accompanied by pre- and post-programme surveys and in-depth interviews to explore their personal experiences of the programme. This study sought to comprehend the social function of museums and galleries and guide future directions for their role in promoting well-being in later life.

Literature Review

The museum's roles and older adult programmes

Traditionally museums have been regarded as institutions dedicated to the collection, preservation, and interpretation of cultural artefacts, with their primary role centred on education and public displays (Ghadim and Daugherty 2022). In recent decades, however, their focus has broadened to encompass socially responsive objectives such as engaging vulnerable populations, fostering intercultural dialogue, and providing experiential learning that deepens cultural participation (Treadon et al. 2006; Packer 2010). This shift reflects a growing emphasis on understanding and addressing visitors' diverse needs, including those of well-being and social connection (Chatterjee and Noble 2013). As such, an increasing number of museums have been exploring ways to provide inclusive cultural spaces that foster dialogue, participation, and a sense of belonging – particularly for individuals who face social or economic barriers such as those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, people with disabilities, individuals living with dementia, and older adults (Packer 2010; Chatterjee and Noble 2013; Rosenblatt 2014; Ghadim and Daugherty 2022).

In this context museums are no longer viewed solely as repositories of objects but also as environments that support participation, reflection, and well-being (Treadon et al. 2006; Treadon 2016). They foster positive social interactions, calming experiences, and opportunities for learning and personal growth (Chatterjee and Noble 2013). Museum- and art gallery-

based heritage programmes are gaining recognition as non-pharmacological approaches to enhancing health and well-being. Through initiatives that promote engagement and social interaction, museums can contribute to improved health outcomes (Fares et al. 2024). For example, the Museum of Modern Art in the US developed an art programme for individuals with dementia, while London's Dulwich Picture Gallery partnered with local physicians to offer community-centred art activities.^{2,3}

In the United Kingdom some museums have incorporated well-being-oriented programmes to support vulnerable groups such as individuals with mental health conditions, dementia, and physical disabilities, including stroke survivors (Chatterjee and Noble 2013). Erica Ander et al. (2013) reported that hospital patients who interacted with museum objects experienced enhanced well-being, highlighting the therapeutic potential of cultural engagement. Peeranut Kanhadilok and Mike Watts (2017) also highlighted how incorporating play-based learning into museum programmes enhances informal learning experiences for young adults, demonstrating the adaptability of museum programming to different audiences. These efforts underscore the potential role of museums in supporting public health and social inclusion through cultural participation, though such a role is still developing and varies widely across institutions.

Within this expanded role some museums have also introduced tailored activities to support older adults' well-being. Helen Chatterjee et al. (2009) identified the therapeutic benefits of engaging with museum objects, particularly for older adults. Activities such as artefact handling have been shown to restore dignity, foster respect, and reinforce a sense of identity - addressing essential emotional and psychological needs (Camic 2016; Coles and Jury 2020). Carolyn Todd et al. (2017) found that museum-based programmes can reduce social isolation and cultivate well-being among older adults, especially when delivered across multiple sessions. Similarly, Linda Thomson et al. (2018) reported improvements in older adults' psychological health through museum participation. Given the context of a rapidly ageing society, such approaches are gaining attention for enhancing the well-being of older adults (Rosenblatt 2014; Bennington et al. 2016).

Art-based engagement and enhancing self-efficacy

As the global older adult population continues to increase enhancing their QoL has become vital. QoL for older adults is a multidimensional construct encompassing physical and psychological well-being, interpersonal relationships, and social inclusion, which helps mitigate depression and cognitive decline (Jurek and Niewiadomska 2021). One of the key determinants of QoL for older adults is self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to perform specific tasks (Chen and Gao 2023). Self-efficacy is multidimensional and encompasses psychological capacities such as confidence, persistence, emotional regulation, problem-solving, and adaptability (Chen et al. 2001). Strengthening these dimensions is vital, as self-efficacy directly influences older adults' abilities to maintain independence, cope with life transitions, and remain socially and emotionally engaged (Luszczynska et al. 2005). Self-efficacy plays a critical role in promoting successful ageing and is strongly associated with improved physical and mental health outcomes (Kim 2024). Research has linked higher self-efficacy with increased physical activity, better chronic disease management, and lower levels of loneliness (Schwarzer and Renner 2000; Fry and Debats 2002; French et al. 2014; Chen and Gao 2023).

One promising avenue for enhancing self-efficacy is participation in art-based activities, particularly those involving art-making and public exhibitions. Engagement in artistic activities has been identified as a key factor in adaptive ageing; it contributes to psychological well-being and fosters social interaction in later life (Greaves and Farbus 2006). In addition, art participation enables older adults to articulate meaningful subjective experiences, supporting the continuity of their self and identity (Fraser et al. 2014). Participatory art practices are often associated with feelings of pride, accomplishment, and personal growth, particularly when older adults learn new skills and recognise their artistic potential (Bradfield 2021). Beyond the expressive benefits, such activities offer emotional and social support and reinforce a sense of connection, purpose, and belonging. Personalised mentor-supported programmes have

been shown to re-engage participants with their communities and support their psychological and physical well-being in later life (Bradfield 2021). Participatory art engagement also allows individuals to set and achieve artistic goals, navigate challenges, and receive social recognition, thus creating sustained opportunities to reinforce personal agency, emotional resilience, and task-oriented competence in a supportive context (Bandura 1997; Camic 2008; Fraser and al Sayah 2011). Within museum settings these activities go beyond aesthetic enrichment and function as strategic approaches that reinforce the psychological foundations of self-efficacy in ageing populations (Greaves and Farbus 2006; Camic and Chatterjee 2013).

Resulting from these participatory art-based interventions with older adults, many studies have employed the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSE), developed by Gilad Chen et al. (2001), to assess changes in self-efficacy. The NGSE is an eight-item, unidimensional instrument grounded in Albert Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory and is designed to measure a stable and generalised sense of personal competence across contexts. It was developed to address the psychometric limitations of earlier general scales and offers strong reliability and broad applicability across domains (Chen et al. 2001). Although the NGSE yields a single overall score, its items conceptually reflect multiple self-efficacy dimensions, including confidence, resilience, and goal-directed behaviour, which are particularly relevant in later life (Chen et al. 2001; Luszczynska et al. 2005). These traits are essential for navigating complex social, emotional, and physical transitions in older adults (Roberson 2011; Bennington et al 2016). Given its reliability and theoretical foundation, the NGSE was deemed appropriate for evaluating perceived competence and adaptability among older adults participating in art-making and exhibitions in the context of the My Canvas Project.

Method

Study design

This study is based around the My Canvas Project, which consisted of three main phases: an art workshop, a gallery exhibition showcasing the artwork resulting from the workshop, and follow-up surveys and interviews (Figure 1). The central activity of the workshop involved creating a self-portrait that participants were encouraged to interpret either literally or abstractly. Self-portraiture was selected for its unique capacity to facilitate open self-exploration, which is an essential component of therapeutic development (Muri 2007). As a medium it not only promotes self-reflection and self-acceptance but also reinforces personal identity by helping individuals gain distance from, and insight into, their experiences (Carr 2014). Moreover, self-portraits provide a platform for deep introspection and emotional expression, especially when supported by a trained art therapist who can guide participants in their journey toward self-awareness and healing (Muri 2007).

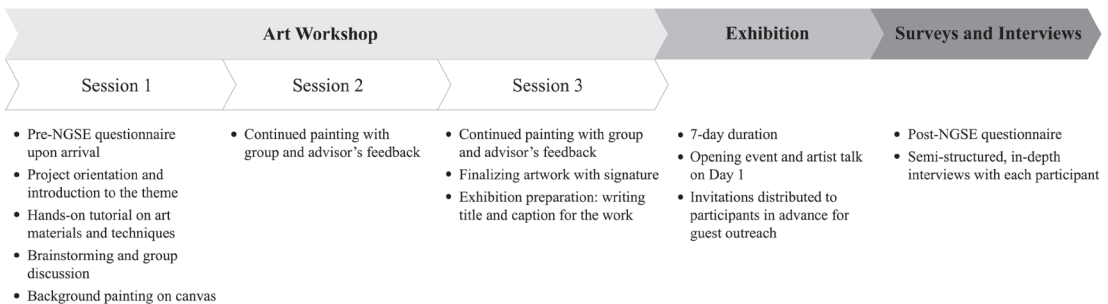


Figure 1: Procedure of experiment

Participants

Participants were recruited through posters distributed at senior community centres, inviting individuals interested in creating and exhibiting artwork in a gallery setting. In accordance with prior studies researching older adults, the study targeted retirees aged 60 and above - a group generally considered to be active in pursuing mental and physical well-being after retirement (Chua and Guzman 2014; Zadworna 2022; Bužgová et al. 2023). A total of 21 older adults participated in the project. They were organized into seven groups: five groups of three participants each, one group of two participants, and one group of four. Participants ranged in age from 61 to 77 years ($M = 66.8$), and included 4 males and 17 females. Table 1 summarizes the demographic and occupational details of the participants.

No.	Gender	Age	Occupation (prior to retirement)
1	Female	63	High school principal
2	Female	61	High school principal
3	Female	66	Civil Servant
4	Female	77	Housewife
5	Female	64	Middle school teacher
6	Female	64	High school principal
7	Female	63	Elementary school teacher
8	Male	70	CEO
9	Female	65	Civil servant
10	Female	63	Civil servant
11	Male	70	Office worker
12	Female	67	Civil servant
13	Female	62	Supermarket Cashier
14	Female	67	High school teacher
15	Male	71	Plumber
16	Female	69	Property Investor
17	Male	72	CEO
18	Female	63	Housewife
19	Female	65	High school teacher
20	Female	67	High school Principal
21	Female	74	Housewife

Table 1: Details of Participants

Art-based workshop

Prior to the first session the participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, in accordance with ethical guidelines to safeguard their dignity, privacy, and well-being. The research objectives and activities were explained in detail before each workshop and interview, and verbal consent was obtained and recorded. Participation was entirely voluntary, and the participants were reminded that they could take breaks or withdraw from the programme at any time without facing negative consequences.

The workshop consisted of three structured sessions held over two weeks in an art studio. The sessions were organized in small groups of two to four participants, who stayed in the same group throughout to support continuity and interaction. Each session lasted 90 to 120 minutes, with durations adjusted according to participants' health and engagement. All sessions progressed at the participants' own pace, with breaks allowed as needed. Refreshments, including beverages and snacks, were provided to foster a relaxed and welcoming environment.

In the first session, upon arrival, participants completed the pre-intervention NGSE questionnaire using the 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating stronger general self-efficacy. Following the survey, participants were introduced to the project and artwork theme. They received hands-on tutorials on the use of art materials, including pencils, crayons, and acrylic paint. The participants then developed three conceptual ideas for their final piece through individual reflection, followed by a group discussion to verbalise the meaning behind their imagery and facilitate self-discovery (Becerra et al. 2021). The session concluded with a background painting on a canvas.

The second and third sessions focused on the continued development and completion of the self-portraits. The participants painted while receiving feedback from their advisors and peers. They were encouraged to ask questions, share their thoughts, and incorporate constructive suggestions to develop and refine their artwork. The artwork was finalised and signed at the end of the third session. Furthermore, the participants prepared for the gallery exhibition by selecting titles and composing written captions to provide personal context and insight for future viewers.

Gallery exhibition

The participants' self-portraits created during the art workshop were exhibited for seven days at the Leeasil Gallery in Busan, South Korea. Organized by the gallery's director and assistant, the exhibition featured 21 artworks, each accompanied by a title and caption. A photo wall displayed images of the participants during the workshop process. Visitors were invited to leave messages to the artists on sticky notes, posted on the wall. Promotional materials, including posters placed around the gallery and posts on the gallery's official Instagram account, were used to publicise the event. The participants also received digital invitations to share with their family and friends via social media and messaging platforms.

An opening event was held on the first day, beginning with an introduction to the My Canvas Project followed by an Artist Talk. Each participant presented their work and shared personal reflections. Afterwards a Q&A session, which facilitated dialogue between the participants and visitors, was conducted.

Post-surveys and interview

Following the exhibition, post-surveys and semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Survey data were collected when participants returned to the gallery to retrieve their artwork. Data included the NGSE questionnaire, which enabled a comparative analysis of the changes in self-efficacy before and after the programme. Within three days of the exhibition's conclusion in-depth interviews were conducted via phone to obtain qualitative insights into the participants' experiences.

Data analysis

Quantitative data from the NGSE were analysed using SPSS to assess changes in participants' self-efficacy before and after the project. A paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the differences between pre- and post-survey scores were statistically significant.

Qualitative data from the interview transcripts was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), following Jonathan Smith et al. (2009), as it suits idiographic approaches with small datasets and focuses on how individuals experience and interpret significant life events (Smith et al. 2009; Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014). The analysis followed a structured six-step process: close reading of transcripts; detailed initial notes; identification of emergent themes; mapping connections within individual transcripts; systematic examination of all cases; and identification of cross-participant patterns.

Results and Discussion

Surveys

Paired-sample t-tests were conducted to compare the participants' self-efficacy scores before and after the project across the eight questionnaire items. As shown in Table 1, all items demonstrated a statistically significant increase in mean scores from pre- to post-test ($p < .05$). The mean differences ranged from 0.33 (Items 2 and 7) to 0.81 (Item 5). The greatest improvement was observed in Item 5 ('I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges'), which indicated a mean increase of 0.81 points ($t(20) = -3.78, p = .001$). Item 8 ('Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well') also demonstrated a substantial gain ($M_{diff} = 0.71, p = .002$). The smallest, although still significant, increase was found for Item 7 ($M_{diff} = 0.33, p = .031$).

		Mean	SD	t	df	p
Item 1	Pre (n=21)	3.5714	0.81064	-3.873	20	0.001
	Post (n=21)	4.1429	0.47809			
Item 2	Pre (n=21)	3.6667	0.85635	-2.646	20	0.016
	Post (n=21)	4.0000	0.63246			
Item 3	Pre (n=21)	3.7619	0.83095	-2.631	20	0.016
	Post (n=21)	4.1905	0.67964			
Item 4	Pre (n=21)	3.2857	0.84515	-3.009	20	0.007
	Post (n=21)	3.8571	0.79282			
Item 5	Pre (n=21)	3.3810	0.74001	-3.782	20	0.001
	Post (n=21)	4.1905	0.67964			
Item 6	Pre (n=21)	3.6667	0.73030	-4.264	20	0.000
	Post (n=21)	4.1429	0.65465			
Item 7	Pre (n=21)	3.5714	0.81064	-2.320	20	0.031
	Post (n=21)	3.9048	0.62488			
Item 8	Pre (n=21)	3.5238	0.92839	-3.627	20	0.002
	Post (n=21)	4.2381	0.62488			

Table 2: Comparison of pre- and post-survey results of NGSE Questionnaire

Pre- and post-programme scores were significantly correlated across most items ($r = .38-.74$), indicating consistent individual response patterns. However, no significant correlation was found for Item 5 ($r = .05$), suggesting more varied individual changes in that area. A line graph (Figure 2) illustrates the pre- and post-test scores with standard error bars, highlighting a consistent upward trend in self-efficacy across all domains.

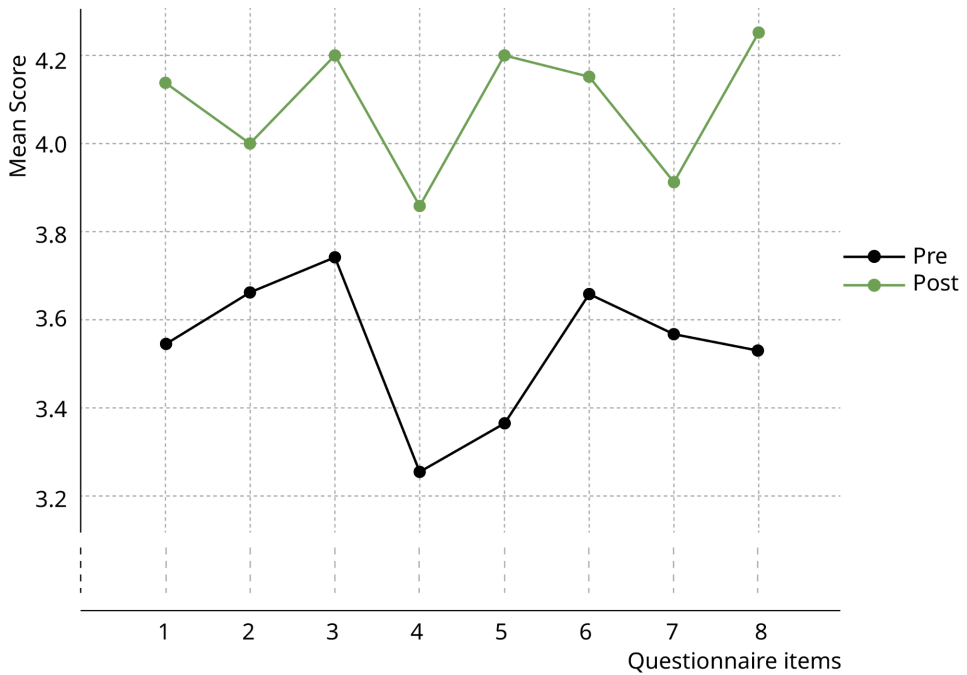


Figure 2: Comparison of pre- and post-survey results of NGSE Questionnaire

Interviews

The interviews were manually transcribed and coded, enabling close engagement with the data and allowing flexibility in interpreting emergent themes. Given the manageable size of the dataset, IPA supported a direct and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences. The analysis identified five key areas of impact: (1) self-reflection; (2) social connection; (3) confidence development; (4) sense of achievement; and (5) openness to new challenges. These themes illustrate how participatory art and exhibition experiences fostered self-efficacy in later life by enabling introspection, strengthening social ties, and increasing participants' sense of personal capability and initiative.



Figure 3: Final artworks by participants

(1) Self-reflection: 'A moment to reflect on myself and grow'

A significant outcome of the programme was the activation of self-reflection. The participants engaged in the workshop process not merely as a task but also as an opportunity for introspection, revisiting personal values, life experiences, and future aspirations. As one participant noted: 'it was a chance to reflect on myself. I thought, I need to find myself again... how I want to live from now on' (P7). Others described a renewed awareness of personal authenticity and moral intention: 'I've always wanted to live honestly, but through this painting and exhibition, I felt even more strongly that I should continue to live truthfully' (P8).

The activity also prompted critical reflection on past behaviours and the present mindset: 'it made me reflect on how I had been living too passively. I've come to realise that setting goals and going through the process is what really matters' (P11). For some, the experience evoked emotional clarity: 'while drawing, I expressed that - I'm letting go emotionally and finding peace' (P4); 'I felt like ageing isn't necessarily a bad thing. I found peace and comfort' (P14). Importantly, this introspection often led to motivation and curiosity: 'it sparked a desire to try painting more seriously - not to become an artist, but as a moment to grow a little' (P2). Several participants linked this process to emotional breakthroughs: 'When I signed the painting, I got a bit emotional. I thought, what if I had missed this opportunity?' (P10); 'I've been struggling with depression, but now I feel that life is still worth living' (P18). These findings support Andrew Fraser et al.'s (2014) assertion that participating in art activities helps older adults express what matters to them and, thereby, maintain their sense of identity. This aligns with Linda Thomson et al.'s (2018) emphasis on the importance of art-based programmes in museum settings to enhance older adults' psychological well-being. The significant improvements in emotional states - such as feeling 'active', 'encouraged', and 'inspired' - resonate with the expressions of motivation and renewed confidence observed among the participants in the present study. These reflections appeared to help participants reframe their self-perceptions, embrace their capacity for change, and strengthen their sense of agency: key components

of self-efficacy. These reflective experiences are consistent with the changes observed in NGSE Item 1 ('I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself') as the participants revisited their values and aspirations, and expressed a renewed sense of direction and personal initiative through art-based activities.

(2) Social Connection: 'We learn more through others than alone'

Another important outcome was the development of meaningful social connections. The collective nature of the programme provided emotional support and social validation to many participants: 'painting with four people removed the awkwardness... because we painted together, it was really fun' (P9). Simple gestures such as exchanging compliments became powerful affirmations: 'drawing together and exchanging compliments made the experience deeply fulfilling' (P3). The exhibition further extended this sense of connection to the participants' broader social networks as the public display of their work fostered interpersonal recognition: 'it felt good to explain my work - especially in front of a group of people I didn't know. That in itself felt rewarding' (P6). Another participant recalled: 'my husband and niece came with flowers, and we celebrated together... It reminded me that even when I feel alone, people are willing to support me' (P18). Family engagement had a particularly affirming effect: 'my kids said, "Mom, you did great!" and that gave me courage' (P21); 'my children were proud that I was able to do this and that gave me courage. They said, "You've always sacrificed for us - now it's your turn"' (P13). Peer relationships nurtured shared growth and mutual engagement. As one participant noted: 'working together with fellow seniors was meaningful and enjoyable - it felt synergistic' (P6). Others emphasised the importance of learning through others: 'I was curious about how others portrayed themselves. Everyone expressed themselves in different ways, and I learned a lot from them'; 'I realised that we learn more through others than alone' (P11).

The qualitative findings align with previous research demonstrating that art-based and museum-based activities foster social connectedness, psychological well-being, and self-efficacy in older adults (Bennington et al. 2016; Wood et al. 2023). These relational dynamics, ranging from laughter in the studio to shared pride in group chats, enabled the participants to feel seen, appreciated, and socially connected. They contributed to self-efficacy by affirming the participants' social values, encouraging active participation, and reinforcing their capacity to meaningfully engage with others. Through emotional support, peer learning, and mutual affirmation, participants deepened belief in their ability to form meaningful connections and be recognised and valued by others, which is foundational to self-efficacy in later life.

(3) Confidence development: 'Painting and exhibiting my work gave me a huge boost in confidence'

Many participants began the programme with self-doubt and often expressed a lack of artistic confidence: 'I didn't have much confidence at the beginning' (P8); 'I was confident in most areas of life, but never in drawing' (P20). However, this uncertainty was gradually replaced by confidence through structured support, a non-judgmental environment, and public recognition. Exhibiting a completed painting was transformative: 'the fact that I was able to complete it gave me a sense of confidence - like, "Wow, I can actually draw"' (P1). The exhibition further amplified this shift: 'just the fact that my work was displayed in a gallery felt really good. From my perspective and at my level, I felt like I had done a good job' (P15).

External validation played a key role in this process: 'when others complimented me, I started to think, "maybe I did well." Their encouragement made me wonder if I had some talent' (P3). For some, this confidence extended beyond the artistic domain: 'this experience not only boosted my confidence in art, but also taught me not to give up, and that I can succeed even in unfamiliar areas if I approach them with belief in myself' (P20).

Ultimately, the confidence cultivated through artistic expression - whether by exploring unfamiliar tasks, successfully completing the workshop and exhibition, or receiving positive affirmation - served as a critical foundation for strengthened self-efficacy. This outcome is closely linked to the changes observed in NGSE Item 6 ('I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks') as the participants developed a stronger belief in their ability to tackle varied challenges beyond the artistic context. This shift was also reflected

in NGSE Item 8 ('even when things are tough, I can perform quite well') as the participants described overcoming initial difficulties and persisting through moments of doubt during the art-based programme. One participant reflected: 'the realization that "I can do it" gave me confidence and the courage to act independently' (P13). Beyond learning painting skills, the project appeared to empower older adults to set goals, embrace new challenges, and persevere through uncertainty - key dimensions of self-efficacy later in life. My Canvas achieved comparable outcomes within a short-term, multi-session format, to those of longer term programmes (e.g. Wood et al. 2023). This suggests that even brief, well-structured programmes can create meaningful social and psychological benefits.

(4) Sense of achievement: 'When I finished my piece, I felt a deep sense of accomplishment I hadn't expected'

A notable outcome of the programme was the strong sense of achievement that participants experienced after completing and publicly exhibiting their self-portraits. Many entered the programme with uncertainty about their abilities, yet the process of creating tangible work appeared to foster a renewed sense of competence, particularly in navigating unfamiliar territories. Participants expressed both surprise and satisfaction when they completed their work. One shared: 'I didn't think I could do it, but once I tried, I thought to myself, "I did well"... even though I'd never done it before, I still completed it somehow' (P21). Another noted: 'finishing and submitting my first self-portrait brought both relief and pride. Simply completing the piece gave me a meaningful sense of achievement' (P1). Others echoed this sentiment: 'it felt like I had achieved something new. There was a sense of accomplishment' (P4). For some, this outcome represented personal growth as much as artistic accomplishment: 'it was tremendous growth. The way I live, my normal way of thinking and approaching life - those things were embedded in that one painting... It was both a challenge and an achievement' (P8).

The public exhibition appeared to reinforce this impact. One participant remarked: 'getting feedback and realizing, "Oh, I can do it this way," gave me a great sense of achievement' (P7). Another reflected: 'my painting was exhibited, and there was an explanation next to it, and my name was there too. That made me feel proud' (P10). Several participants also described fulfilment in persisting despite difficulty: 'when I completed the piece, I felt so happy. Doing something I didn't know I could do made me truly glad. Explaining the artwork gave me a sense of fulfilment' (P9). Another added: 'by the end, I felt a sense of completion, and that felt good. Since it was something I hadn't done before, I felt like I had achieved something' (P15). For some, this sense of achievement extended to a broader reimagining of their life potential: 'more than reaching a goal, the fact that I was able to do this gave me a deep sense of accomplishment. That was more important than the goal itself' (P13). Even the act of self-expression was seen as transformative: 'creating a piece of art made me think, "wow, I did something amazing"' (P7).

By overcoming their initial hesitation and completing the programme, the participants not only acquired a new skillset but also experienced a concrete sense of achievement. This experience appears to reflect the highest positive change observed in Item 5 on the NGSE ('I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges') as the participants expressed a stronger belief in their ability to persist despite obstacles. Several participants highlighted this shift, with comments such as: 'I didn't think I could do it at first, but I kept trying and finished it' (P12) and 'completing the work made me realize I can handle new challenges' (P6). These moments of success affirmed the participants' capacity to persevere, complete meaningful tasks, and reach personal milestones: core elements of self-efficacy. The results also support Colin Greaves and Lou Farbus (2006) by demonstrating how participatory art provides a sense of achievement and purpose, with the gallery exhibition amplifying these effects through public recognition and collective reflection.

(5) Openness to new challenges: 'This experience gave me the mindset to want to learn more and try new things'

A key outcome of the programme was the participants' increased willingness to embrace new challenges. Engaging in unfamiliar activities such as painting and publicly exhibiting their work

prompted many to reconsider their perceived limitations and adopt a mindset oriented toward growth, curiosity, and exploration. Several participants expressed surprise at discovering untapped potential and the desire to further develop their artistic skills: 'I had never really thought about learning to paint, but then I started thinking "maybe if I learned more, I could get better at it"' (P14). Others set new personal goals beyond the programme's scope: 'that's why I registered for Japanese and dance classes at the cultural centre' (P7), highlighting the programme's ripple effect on lifelong learning.

Importantly this receptiveness extended beyond artistic interests to broader transformations in self-perception and agency: 'even if I don't know what I'm doing, I've come to feel that the effort I put in becomes something meaningful. I also learned that if I just try, things do work out' (P12). Another described the programme as 'a light switching on in my life - a truly eye-opening experience' (P9), illustrating the emotional impact of discovering new possibilities. This forward momentum was social. One participant envisioned future collaboration: 'I even thought, "maybe I could do a joint exhibition with three of my fellow participants"' (P16), while another emphasised broader engagement: 'I wish older adults wouldn't just lie around at home. They should go to museums - even if it's just to have coffee and look at artwork' (P18).

The programme cultivated a sense of renewed possibility and self-direction: 'this experience gave me the mindset to want to learn more and try new things' (P3), one participant concluded. This aligns with Emily Bradfield's (2021) findings, which suggest that participatory art encourages older adults to re-evaluate their potential and approach new challenges with greater confidence. Accordingly, by broadening their sense of what was still possible, participants strengthened their self-efficacy, not only in artistic pursuits but also in their broader perspective on ageing. Thus, later life was reimagined as a period of ongoing growth, active engagement, and personal renewal.

Conclusion

As societies face rapidly ageing populations and the need to support QoL, including psychological well-being, this study aimed to examine how museum- or art gallery-based art programmes can enhance self-efficacy in older adults, a factor widely recognised as essential to their well-being. The My Canvas Project demonstrated that engagement in artistic activity could enhance self-efficacy by fostering self-reflection, social connection, confidence building, a sense of achievement, and openness to new challenges in later life. These findings provide a valuable foundation for museums and galleries committed to cultural and community development. Furthermore, it encourages the design of programmes that promote the expression, connection, and contribution of older adults. Moreover, this study offers important insights for the development of future initiatives across art, design, and community health, particularly for practitioners seeking to integrate creativity with psychological well-being in an ageing population. However, this research is limited by its small sample size, short duration, and focus on a specific cultural setting, which may constrain generalizability. Future studies should examine the applicability of such programmes across diverse populations, explore their long-term effects, and develop strategies to improve accessibility for a larger range of older adults. Additionally, because the participants were self-selected, they may have been more motivated or receptive to art-based engagement than older adults in the wider community. To address this issue, future research should employ broader recruitment strategies and consider comparative or longitudinal approaches (e.g. with control groups) to better understand the impact of such programmes on individuals with varying levels of initial motivation and confidence.

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Notes

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Appendix 1. New General Self-Efficacy Scale

1. I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself.
2. When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them.
3. In general, I think that I can obtain outcomes that are important to me.
4. I believe I can succeed at most any endeavor to which I set my mind.
5. I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges.
6. I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks.
7. Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well.
8. Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well.

Appendix 2. Interview Schedule

Researcher: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to hear, in your own words, about your experiences in the *My Canvas* programme—specifically, which aspects you found meaningful or challenging, and how it might be improved. The interview will take about 45 to 60 minutes. I will ask you a series of open-ended questions about your experiences, and I may also ask some follow-up questions to better understand what you have shared. There are no right or wrong answers, so please feel free to respond openly and comfortably. With your permission, I will record this interview using a digital audio recorder so I can ensure that I do not miss anything you say. Everything you share will be kept confidential. Taking part in this interview is completely voluntary, and you are free to skip any question, take a break, or stop the interview at any time. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Opening question: Can you tell me how you came to join the *My Canvas* programme?

Prior Experience and Initial Feelings

1. Have you ever created art or exhibited your own work before?
2. Do you often visit museums or galleries?
3. Are you someone who enjoys trying new activities or experiences (e.g. exercise, travel, cooking)?
4. How did you feel before starting this programme (e.g. nervous, excited, confident)?

Workshop Experience

1. What were your first impressions when the programme was introduced?
2. Did you have any personal goals for participating (e.g. self-expression, learning a new skill)?
3. Did you encounter any difficulties during the programme? If so, how did you manage them?
4. How did you find the experience of working together with others in the group?

5. How did you feel upon completing your self-portrait?
6. Did knowing your work would be shown affect how you approached the artwork?

Exhibition Experience

1. How did you feel when you saw your work displayed in the gallery?
2. What was it like explaining your work to visitors?
3. Did you invite family or friends to the exhibit? What were their reactions?
4. Were there any comments or feedback that stood out to you?

Overall Reflections

1. When you reflect on the experience, what thoughts or emotions stand out the most?
2. What was the most memorable moment for you?
3. Were there any particularly challenging or stressful aspects of the experience?
4. Has this programme influenced your confidence or sense of pride?
5. Would you like to take part in similar programmes again? Has it encouraged you to try new things?
6. Has this experience changed the way you view yourself or your abilities?