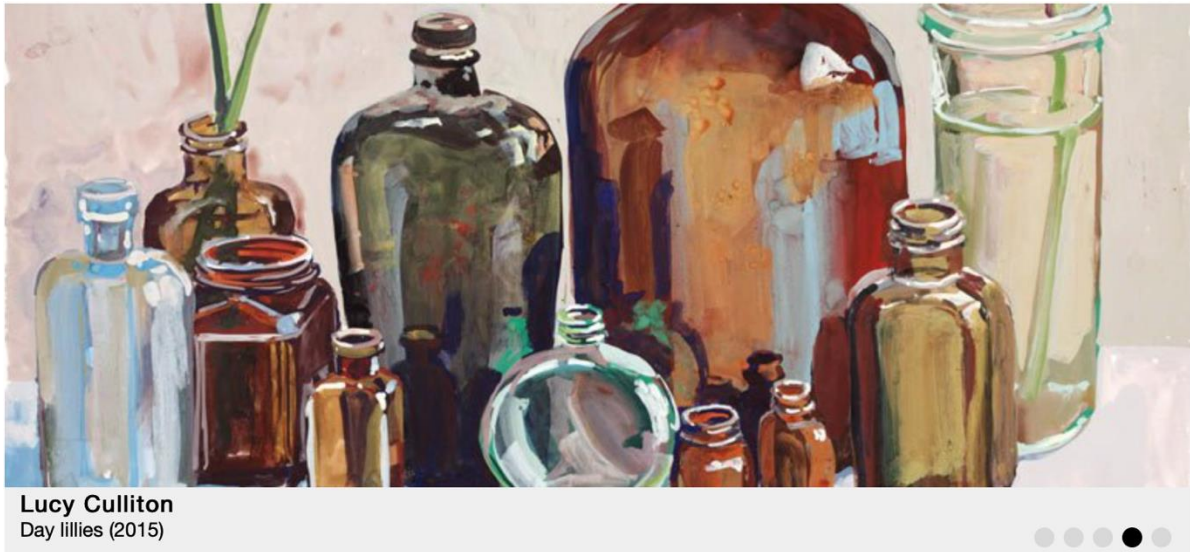


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**Culture Dose: An arts engagement program for mental health and wellbeing**

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Lucy Culliton  
Day lillies (2015)

**ABSTRACT**

Despite the prevalence of mental health issues in society, pervasive stigma and discrimination reduces opportunities for social participation and feelings of belonging and connectedness with others. Deficiencies in feelings of belonging are associated with a range of poor mental, physical and socio-economic outcomes. A lack of connectedness with others reduces feelings of self-worth and over-all wellbeing. Particularly during times of change and uncertainty, like during COVID-19, art can help us connect to our feelings, thoughts and imaginations. It can promote empathy and help us to show compassion, to others and ourselves. Creative activities have been found to improve health and wellbeing in people experiencing mental illness and lead to a reduction in social isolation. Engagement in arts-based activities has also been found to lead to a reduction in healthcare costs. While the value of arts in health has been realised in the UK, evidence-based studies in Australia are lacking. This presentation will focus on an evaluation of *Arts on Prescription* which targeted mild to moderate depression, and showed significant increases in mental health and wellbeing as well as increases in social inclusion and social connectedness. Based on these positive findings, this arts engagement program was scaled up to become *Culture Dose*, a virtual arts engagement modality geared to the broader general public. *Culture Dose* offers the opportunity to take some time out to engage deeply with artworks, find ways to respond creatively and discuss observations and insights with others.