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UCSB Reads selects “Your Brain on Art” for its 18th season

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Creative activities such as painting, dancing, playing music or expressive writing are known to ease distress, invigorate communities, improve learning and academic achievement, and simply to bring us joy. For these reasons and more, they’re essential to our daily lives.

Such is the case made by Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross in “Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us,” a journey through the science of neuroaesthetics, a new and rapidly expanding field of research at the intersection of psychological aesthetics, biological mechanisms and human evolution. The interdisciplinary book demonstrates how our brains and bodies transform in profound ways when we participate in the arts, even for as little as 45 minutes, and how this knowledge can improve health and build stronger communities. The authors describe their work as a “call-to-arms for the radical integration of the arts with science and technology to design a more humane future.”

A New York Times bestselling book, “Your Brain on Art” is the 2024 selection for [UCSB Reads](#), an initiative of the UC Santa Barbara Library. Now in its 18th year, the

program brings together the campus and Santa Barbara communities to read a common book that explores compelling issues of our time.

“This is the first time in the program’s 18-year history that the UCSB Reads selection committee has chosen a book that examines how the arts enrich our lives,” said Alex Regan, the library’s events and exhibitions program manager. “UCSB Library is excited to explore the ways in which the visual arts, music, dance and other means of artistic expression are fundamental to human flourishing.”

Book authors Magsamen and Ross draw further insight from their careers. Magsamen is the founder/director of the International Arts + Mind Lab: Center for Applied Neuroaesthetics at Johns Hopkins University; and Ross is vice president of design for hardware products at Google.

The new season of UCSB Reads will officially kick off Thursday, Jan. 18, 2024, with a book giveaway for students at the UC Santa Barbara Library. Chancellor Henry Yang, Executive Vice Chancellor David Marshall and University Librarian Kristin Antelman will distribute copies of “Your Brain on Art” while supplies last.

From January through May, the library will sponsor talks, panel discussions, film screenings, book clubs, creative workshops and other events to explore the book’s themes. Faculty are encouraged to incorporate “Your Brain on Art” into their winter or spring courses; the library will provide free copies of the book to all students who are assigned to read it as part of coursework.

UCSB Reads will culminate at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 8, 2024, with a free public talk by authors Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross in Campbell Hall, presented in partnership with UCSB Arts & Lectures.

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