

Phases of You

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"It was our goal to see the beautiful things." Geta Bratescu

Materials Needed

Canvas cut to desired size (I started with a piece approximately 27 x 30" Try to find canvas which is primed on one side.

Gesso

Waxed linen thread, wide eyed tapestry needle, bone folder, metal ruler, scissors

PVA or Gel Medium as collage adhesive (I like Golden Regular Gloss) and a brush (I like 1" bristle brushes)

Favorite Glue Stick: Coccolina, Scotch Permanent, Tombo, Avery
(anything labeled permanent)

Rubber Stamps & inkpads (I like Staz-On)

Collage Ephemera

Pens to write with: Sakura Glaze and Souffle Pens, Pitt Pens from Faber Castell, Zig writer and vellum pens, Sharpie Poster Paint Pen (waterbased), Molotow One4All markers, .35 Rapidosketch, etc... Rub
Ons Decorative Tape (washi, paper, kawaii, deco, etc...)

Waxed paper Paper Towels/rags

Favorite acrylics (I use Blick Matte Acrylics, Holbein Acrylics, Nova color to name a few of my favorites.)

Painting the Canvas

We're going to start by painting our canvas. When I started working on my canvas, I didn't cut it first. I figured out a workable size (for me) and left it at that.

You will get a very different look if you leave the canvas ungestoed vs applying a very thin coat of gesso to the uncoated side. I apply it as thin as possible and I'll work on the already primed side while it dries. Make sure that you have several pieces of waxed paper (or plastic) underneath you as you work as this will protect it from sticking to your work surface.

Try to put the paint on thin so it dries quicker. Use a dry rag or paper towel to speed up the drying time.

Play with different tools for applying paint (brushes, fingers, waxed paper, paper towels, brayers, credit cards, toothbrushes, found tools and more.)

I'm going to give you some different ideas for laying down color. Keep in mind that there is no right (or wrong) way to start. Art making to me is about opportunity and problem solving. It's fun to see all of the different possibilities.

Mix and match these ideas as needed:

1. Start by applying bits of white randomly to your canvas.
2. Limit your color palette. Select three colors that you love and one color that you don't use a lot of the time. See what happens when you start with the color that you don't use a lot of the time first. See what happens when you use that color last. Play with how much/how little of these colors you use.
3. Nature colors. Select two basic neutral colors found in nature (think green and brown or yellow and green.) What happens if you add two pop colors? (Say, pink and blue or red and purple?)
4. Flick, drip, drop, spill paint on the canvas. Let dry.
5. Make marks on your canvas. Look to nature and simple shapes for inspiration.
6. Rotate your canvas.
7. Work back and forth between your front and the back of your canvas. This will give each side sufficient drying time.
8. Stencil, stamp and make marks on the page. Think about layering these elements and using bits and pieces of them.
9. Close your eyes, pick a paint tube/bottle and squeeze some out (don't squeeze too hard) on your canvas. Rub this color into the surface with a painting tool of your own choosing.
10. Think Rorschach paint blobs. Squeeze some paint out and fold the canvas repeatedly.
11. Using palette knives, the backs of brushes, tree branches, credit cards, scratch and make marks/words/letters into paint.
12. Cut or tear simple shapes from paper/magazine pages. Use PVA or gel medium to attach them to your canvas. Paint over them as desired. Stencil partly over them.
13. Let the above collage pieces dry and then scratch and tear them up again.
14. Use your phone. Google the work of a favorite artist. Look at the colors they use. Borrow from their palette.
15. Paint black, grey or white over a part of your canvas. Let it dry. Add color.
16. Create a color wheel (or a part of a color wheel or the shape of a wheel or whatever you want) on part of your page.
17. Use watersoluble crayons and make marks on your canvas. Rub them in with gel medium, gesso or any acrylic medium.
18. Once the canvas is dry, take pens and markers or brushes with acrylic them and WRITE BIG (or small, in cursive, printing, etc...) on parts of your canvas. Let it dry. Paint over parts of your writing. Color in the loopy bits of your writing. Cross out parts of words or phrases.
19. Smear a color you don't love on part of the canvas. Etch/write/make marks into it.
20. Have everything ready to go. Get a clean piece of waxed paper and the back of your brush. Paint a section of your canvas with more paint than in previous sections. Lay the waxed paper into the wet paint and quickly write/draw/make marks into it. Pull it up and then quickly take the wet waxed paper and "stamp/press" it onto another area of the canvas. Repeat as desired.
21. Take your paint brush and make simple shapes onto the canvas. Color these in with colors that you haven't used.
22. Write parts of brain fragments, quotes, song lyrics in long straight lines across (or up and down) the canvas.

Let everything dry (or at least to some degree.)

Creating the Book

Cut the pages down to the size desired. My pages are approximately 9 x 14" (once folded in half, the page size is 7 x 9" approximately.) You can make the pages ANY size that YOU want. I make a cut mark with a pair of scissors and then tear the canvas by hand. Others may want to make lines with pencils and rulers and cut along the line. Find what works best for you.

I began by folding my pages in half one at a time. Once I'm done folding, I nest all of the pages inside of each other so that all of the folds are touching: < When these pages are together, they are called a signature.

We are going to be sewing a five hole pamphlet stitch. Start by marking and poking five evenly spaced holes in the spine of the signature.

1. Start your sewing on the outside of the signature, go out the middle hole (#3.) Pull your thread so that you have a little tail on the inside of the book (usually a couple of inches or whatever you can comfortably hold.)
2. Sew up and into hole #2.
3. Sew up and out hole #1
4. Sew down and back into hole #2.
5. SKIP THE MIDDLE HOLE #3.
6. Sew down and into hole #4.
7. Sew down and into hole #5.
8. Sew back up and into hole #4.
9. To end your stitch, go back into the middle (#3) hole. Take care to go around the thread (or to the side) and not through the thread.
10. Pull your threads tight and tie two to three knots on top of each other. Leave one end at about an inch from the knot and the other end long and you can wrap it around the outside of your book as a closure OR cut your threads about a half an inch to an inch from the knot.

Starting

I set an intention with each journal that I start to try to do something new and different. I want to learn as I work and create new pages. My goal with this book was to explore layering and painting on canvas pages and to try to push myself into learning new techniques and ideas as I did so. I tend to be very particular about the focal images that I use and I gave myself permission to really play and not worry if I ended up painting over images and reworking them completely. Is there something new that you are eager to try with your book?

There is never a wrong way to begin. Open your book. Start on the first page. Start in the middle. Work one page at a time or work across two pages to make one giant page. Turn your book sideways. Work upside down. Paint the page first. Collage the page first. Journal on the page first. It. Is. All. Good.

I'm going to share with you how I began in this book and what I started to do on my pages. You can do the following exercises as is or you can take what you need from them. I will encourage you to get dirty, make mistakes, make a mess, laugh, cry, have fun and experiment. You absolutely cannot mess this up. Trust the process.

I tend to use a lot of people, specifically, women in my journal pages. I use these images to represent me. That said, use the images that interest you. You can use people, animals, inanimate objects, abstract images, your own cut up artwork, photographs, letterforms, quotes, etc... Use what interests YOU in your work.

I've also found that it helps to limit the amount of supplies in front of you. You don't need all of your collage materials. Pick a handful of favorite images (aim for no more than twelve) and a small pile (think no more than 25 pieces) that appeal to you right now. Carefully choose a few of your favorite color pens, markers, stencils and stamps. Work from what you have in front of you. Make it work.

Pages built in stages are better than none at all. If you can't do a full page in one setting, set your timer and try for five to fifteen minutes a day. If you can do 5-15 minutes of artwork every day in a few days, you'll have a finished page. If you want to make art, make art.

Don't be afraid to copy. The great masters encouraged copying as a learning tool when they taught. Copy. Make mistakes. Experiment. Ask questions. The more that you make, there will come a time when you will want your own voice to come through.

Date your pages. If you don't want to date your pages, date the inside cover of your journal when you start and when you add. It's nice to note your process and progress of growth. While you're there, add your contact information in case anything happens to your journal.

When I open my journal, everything around me stops. It's my time. I don't worry or think about anything else. I focus on what's in front of me at that moment. If I am limited in my time, I may set a timer to help me (remember what I wrote above about pages in stages.) I usually start by sorting through my collage material. I'll select my tools to use based on how I am feeling and what I am thinking at that moment in time. Sometimes I sit down with a specific thought or idea in mind but mostly it's about showing up, unfolding, being present and doing the work. I'll flip through my collage material, touching the papers and seeing what calls to me. I'll select one main image to use and then maybe one, two or three extra "supporting characters" (other secondary focal images to add interest and emphasis on the page. I don't always add more than one main image but when I do, this is what I think about. Is there a story I am trying to tell? Does that image fit the page? Does it help to set the scene? Do I like it? Does it interest me? Does it work?) I'll then choose a handful of background papers. Sometimes I look at my focal image and look for colors that are in my focal image and use more of those colors around the page. Other times, I

want to add colors that aren't there so I'll select three to four colors that I really like and find background papers in those colors. Some days, I cut the focal image out and glue it down after I put down the background papers. Other days, I'll tear the focal image, glue it down and build a background around it. There is never a right way or a wrong way to start the page. Think about how you are feeling, what you are thinking and just jump in.

A page can always be altered, changed and added to. Don't give up on it and don't let it get you down. You have an entire book to fill.

When I begin my work, I am focused on my thoughts and feelings. Have I heard or read something recently that stuck with me? Did I see an image that packed a powerful punch? Was it something I read or saw in a film? What about that discussion we had last night? What about that book passage I read that made me think outside of the box? Can I use these thoughts, feelings, ideas to create a page?

When I sit down to make a page, I try to think about one thing (an event, a comment, a conversation, something I was a witness to) that sticks in my mind. Can I use that thing to spark a page? Sometimes I'll write my idea in pencil on the page first (so I don't forget or so that it leads me down a path.) One friend keeps a small notebook in her purse of things that she hears, sees or experiences as journal sparks.

I look for little sparks in daily occurrences. It might be a glimmer of inspiration in something that I read in a book or saw in a film. It might be my response to something heard or read in the news. There are journal sparks everywhere and it's all about paying attention to what interests you and catches your eye/ear/heart.

When you begin your pages, select images and background paper which are of interest to you right now. Limit your choices. Touch your papers. Narrow things down and use the first things that you see that make your heart beat fast or raise your eyebrow. Look at your image and figure out (don't over think it) if you should cut out the image vs tearing it.

Look at your papers and see if you can use them in different ways. Cutting vs tearing vs cutting things out of the papers, etc...

Play with how you layer your image. Crop the images (instead of using an entire image.)

Play with size and scale (combine different or similar sized images.)

Use portions of an image instead of the entire thing.

Don't stop with sticking an image down. Layer another image (or a portion of an image) on top of it. Add paint. Draw. Doodle. Make marks. Stencil. Journal. Push your envelope.

Make marks on your pages. Small. Big.

Trace elements of your focal or background images.

When I sit down to create a page, I try to create something entirely new and fresh each time. I try to learn from each page. Sometimes it is a new way of combining images. Other times it is a new way of adding and experimenting with color. Maybe it is a new way of adding text. Sometimes I am shocked by what I journal. Each page offers and presents opportunity and growth. Date your pages. Don't be afraid to try something new on your pages. Your journal should be your safe place to experiment, explore, express and play.

Exercises

You've made your book and now it's time to go back and dive in!

1. No scissors allowed for this page. Tear your focal image into a rough shape. Use snippets of paper or tape for your background. Use PVA or gel medium to adhere your papers to the canvas.
2. Glue down background paper first. Let dry and then journal across it. Add your focal image last.
3. Cut or tear papers into organic shapes (think pods, leaves, sun, moon, or even really simple shapes like circles, rectangles, etc...) Layer these along one part of your page. Cut out your focal image and move it around the page figuring out where the best place is for it. Add stenciling or simple mark making on top of it.
4. Collage the page with background images. Let dry. Paint and stencil on top of it. Partially pull up some of what you've stuck down.
5. Glue your focal image down. Alter your focal image by painting and stenciling over it. Add background elements as desired. Play with cut vs torn images.
6. Create a line of little color swatches across the page. Play with textures and colors (tape vs torn papers.) How can you incorporate a focal image with a page like this?
7. Glue down a focal image. Paint and stencil over half of it. Tear it in half and use the other half on another page.
8. Layer several pieces of collage imagery (think 10-12 pieces.) Make sure they're well glued. Paint over parts of them. Let dry. Take your scissors or a sharp instrument (not too sharp that you cut through your canvas) and pull off bits and pieces. Add color with more paint or leave as is.
9. Glue down a piece of background paper. Partially paint and make a mark on it. Add another layer of paper and repeat. Repeat this several times until you have a built up background.
10. Glue down several pieces of background and a focal image (or two.) Let dry. Write and journal across a good portion of the page. Let dry. Paint with at least four different colors. How can you make this page work when working from where you usually start off?

Journaling

When writing on your pages, don't let the lack of white space stop you. Play with your pen colors, tip sizes, style of your writing (uppercase, printing, cursive, etc...), size (large, small, etc...), direction (down, across, circular, etc...) See how many different ways you can write on your pages. I like to experiment with my writing and see if I can vary each page. Sometimes I write a lot while other times I

write very little. It all depends on my mood and what I feel like I want or have to say on the pages. If I feel that I have a lot to say, I might write small.

Here are some prompts that might spark not only journaling ideas but entire pages.

1. The sound of...
2. A color combination I recently saw that I loved.
3. Wind.
4. Light across the bedroom ceiling.
5. A memory from elementary school.
6. Time travel.
7. A favorite taste.
8. Something that made you smile.
9. Roots.
10. If you didn't have to stick to a budget.
11. A dream adventure.
12. What didn't you tell X?
13. Ladders.
14. My bed.
15. A book you want to read.
16. Something you did as a child that you wished you could do more of now.
17. A favorite outing.
18. Touch.
19. Hands.
20. X gives the best hugs.