Art Journaling with Marian

Week 2

Creating backgrounds

There's so many ways to create backgrounds in your art journal using all manner of materials. Creating backgrounds is one way to defeat *blank page syndrome*! If you have some pages prepared in your journal, when the urge to create strikes you're good to go! Let's have a look at some of the ways to get some colour, pattern and texture into your journal.

Things to think about when creating backgrounds:

- Do you want to cover the entire page with block colour?
- Do you just want a border?
- Do you want a pale or plain background for writing on?
- Do you want pattern on the page?

You might not want to think about any of those things but just want to dive in and play and see what happens! Either approach works, do what makes you happy! Remember - **there are no rules!**

Wet media

Paint

One of the easiest ways to get some colour on the page is, of course, paint! Use whatever you have! That might be watercolour, poster paint, acrylic, gouache, whatever you have! I have even used emulsion! You don't need to but the latest, expensive art materials! If you have no paint and do want to buy a set, I would recommend these Koh-I-Noor Anilinky Watercolours, they are beautiful vivid colours and only around £5.

Some ways of applying paint to the page for different effects:

- **Brushes**; big, small, fat, thin, flat, round, whatever you have will work. Use them to cover an entire background or add dabs, splatters, swirls, shapes, dots, lines etc
- **Foam applicators**; these come in various shapes and sizes and can be used in the same way as brushes.
- **Rubber tools**; different shaped children's rubber tools are great for moving paint about or making different marks and patterns on the page.

- **Card/cardboard**. Card from packaging can be cut into strips to scrape paint onto pages. Old credit cards are good for this too! Corrugated cardboard makes great marks too.
- **Bathroom materials!** Think make-up sponges, cotton buds, shower scrubbies, wipes, (old!) toothbrushes, toilet roll tubes. All these can be used to get paint and pattern onto to journal pages.
- **Newspaper**; scumpled newspaper can be used to apply paint for a different look.
- **Bubble wrap**; great for spotty backgrounds.
- **Kitchen supplies!** Kitchen towel, old spatulas, wire scrubbies, sponges, scourers, straws, forks etc.
- **Fruit and vegetables**; good old potato printing can add some funky unique patterns to your pages as well as apple or pear halves, lemon, celery and cabbage. Raw beetroot even comes with its own ink!
- **Fingers!** Return to your childhood with a bit of finger painting!

Once you start to look about at what you already have you'll find all sorts of things that you can use to apply paint (and other wet media) and make patterns with. With a bit of paint and just a few tools you'll be able to create lots of unique colourful backgrounds and patterns/texture in your art journals. Ink would also work with quite a few of the above applicators.

Images, L to R: brushed on, splattered, blown with a straw

Images, L to R: foam applicator, toilet roll tube

Other, less traditional, wet media could include food colouring, coffee, tea, lemon juice, turmeric mixed with water, or soy sauce (on Channel 4 recently, Grayson's Art Club included a portrait painted with soy sauce and used noodles for hair!). have a look about the kitchen with new eyes and see what you have that you use in your journals.

Images, L to R: coffee & tea, coffee grounds, food colouring

Images, L to R: lemon juice, turmeric

If you want to investigate even further, you might like to research making natural homemade dyes with plant matter.

Other media

There are many other mays to add colour, pattern and texture your pages with both traditional art materials and everyday substitutes! Here's some more ideas:

- **Pens & pencils**; there's no need to buy expensive pens and pencils, if you have them then, of course, use them, but it's not essential. Coloured pencils, graphite pencils, felt tip pens, fine liners, broad tip pens, permanent markers, ballpoint pens, gel pens, rollerball pens, fountain pens, stamper pens, chinagraph pencils, the list is endless! Use what you have and see what patterns and marks you can make with them. Doodle, scribble, outline, draw, experiment!
- **Crayons**; the children's classic humble crayon is a great thing! They come in every colour imaginable including metallic, are easily accessible and inexpensive to buy. Use them for resist work (see below), getting colour on the page, adding accents, outlining, wild scribbling and anything else you can think of!
- **Ink & ink pads**; if you have any bottles of drawing or writing ink, or even ink cartridges for fountain pens, these can be used as an alternative to paint. If you have ink pads from other crafts, these can be used to apply ink directly to the page or used with rubber stamps or home made stamps.
- **Bingo dabbers**; these come in a variety of colours and are fabulous for making lovely splat marks on the page! Give them a good shake, get the ink to the foam tip end and just thwack them onto the page!
- **Oil pastels**; soft, smushy and blendable, if you have some, use them in your journal! They can be blended with your fingers, a paper stump or with a cotton bud and baby oil. They can also be used for the resist technique (see below).
- **Soft pastels**; again, if you have some pastels then do have a play with them in your journal. They blend easily with your finger or a dry brush. If you do use them, they will need fixing to avoid smudging. If you don't have fixative, hairspray is a great, inexpensive substitute. Just spray the page and leave to dry. Chalk is a great alternative to pastels, not available in as many colours but if you have some already, it's worth having a play for some subtler backgrounds.
- **Make-up**; there are lots of art material alternatives in a make-up bag! If you fancy soft pastels or chalk but don't have any, eye shadows or powder blushers are a good substitute. Use a dry brush, sponge applicator or your fingers to apply to the page and remember to fix

them as for pastels. If you don't have oil pastels, it's worth having a play with lipstick, cream eye shadow or cream blusher. Eye or lip liners and eyebrow pencils will swap in for pencils/pens and even mascara could be applied to the page with the mascara brush to make interesting patterns. Have a play and see what old make-up you have which could be art journal treasure!

Once you start looking at everyday things in a different light, you'll be surprised how many have potential for creating backgrounds and adding colour, texture and pattern to your art journal pages!

Images, L to R: freestyle pen border, bingo dabbers, ink pad, permanent markers

Images, L to R: scrumpled newspaper, dabbed on, make-up sponge (with potato prints and crayon), mascara

Paper media

You can create backgrounds with lots of different papers, and they don't need to be expensive. Again, there is lots of art journal fodder about the house you can utilise in your journals. You may have already used some of these to create actual pages in your journal too if you made one last week.

Let's look at paper materials we can use:

- **Card making supplies**; if you already make greetings cards or do other papercrafts like scrapbooking, origami, quilling, rubber stamping etc you will probably already have coloured, patterned and textured papers and cardstock which are perfect for art journaling too.
- **Printer paper**; if you have a home printer you'll at least have plain white paper and may also have different colours too.
- **Magazines**; these are a great resource for images, colours, patterns and text you can use for art journal pages.
- **Junk mail**; again, these are good for images, colour and text.
- **Newspapers**; good for a neutral background, look out for newspapers in different languages too.
- **Napkins**; these are available in so many designs and make beautiful backgrounds. Most napkins are 3 ply and you'll need to separate the layers to use the top layer. Sometimes the second layer will have a paler image of the design you can use too. Always put glue onto the page when using napkins as they're too fragile to glue onto. If you're interested in using napkins, check out Napkinshop who sell them individually.
- **Used postage stamps**; lovely little blocks of colour and design, stamps are a great resource for collaged backgrounds. Save your own or buy inexpensively in charity shops or online.
- **Envelopes**; a lot of envelopes have great patterns on the inside, predominantly blue but other clours too and don't forget the humble brown envelope too.
- **Tracing paper;** useful for adding transparent layers to backgrounds, tracing paper can be printed on with a home printer, drawn on and coloured.
- **Tissue paper;** available in a rainbow of plain colours as well as lots of patterns. Save any that you receive as packaging or with gifts. A lot of plain coloured tissue paper will leach colour when placed onto a wet page which gives interesting results. Some crepe paper will too.
- **Wrapping paper;** again, save from presents to use, even small scraps are useful.
- **Dressmaking pattern;** good for adding layers without obscuring what's behind it and printed with lines and symbols for added interest. Old embroidery transfers can be used too.

- **Wallpaper**; if you have samples from the DIY store or leftovers from decorating, wallpaper is great for using in art journals.
- **Other paper ephemera**; shopping lists, ticket stubs, notes, letters, writing paper, paper bags, packaging, flyers, colouring pages, doodles, old book pages, old maps, photos, paint charts, postcards, diagrams, the list really is endless! Scout about your home and see what you have that could be used in an art journal rather than thrown away!

Images, L to R: word game sheet, envelopes, napkin, newspaper

Images, L to R: dressmaking pattern, magazine, old comic book page, used postage stamps

Images, L to R: leached tissue paper colour, one colour collage

Techniques

Resist painting (see video for demonstration)

This is a fun and easy way to create backgrounds. You'll need:

- ✓ paper or your journal,
- ✓ textured objects/surfaces,
- ✓ crayons (oil pastels will also work or even a candle!),
- ✓ watercolour paint (or watered down acrylic paint, ink, food colouring etc),
- ✓ brush,
- ✓ water.

First, you'll need to find surfaces to take rubbings from. If you have any children's rubbing plates they work well, but they're not essential. Think about what you may have that has a raised texture. Ideas are textured wallpaper, plastic packaging, radiator grills, corrugated cardboard, wood grain, tree bark or a collection of things like washers, keys, leaves, flat buttons or even paper shapes.

Lay your paper over the surface(s) you choose and take a rubbing using your crayon, press firmly so you get a good image. YIf you have no textures, you can also write, draw, scribble or make marks.

Once you have your rubbing, brush paint (or whatever you're using) over the page. Make sure it's nice and wet. You'll see the crayon start to resist the wet paint. Leave to dry.

If you choose to work directly in your journal be aware that paint might bleed onto other pages.

A variety of resist painting examples.

Stencils & masks

Using stencils and masks is a good way to make backgrounds. Once you start looking, you'll find all sorts of things to use as stencils and masks!

Stencils

If you have commercial stencils of any sort, for example, mathematical, scientific, alphabets, numbers, architectural, dig them out and have a play! Children's stencils can be useful too. If you don't have any stencils, here's some easy alternatives:

- ✓ Cut simple shapes in a sheet of paper,
- ✓ If you have a craft knife, cut more complex shapes from card,
- ✓ Paper (or plastic) doilies,
- ✓ Net bags from fruit and vegetables,
- ✓ Use a hole punch to make holes in a sheet of paper,
- ✓ Netting or net curtain.

Once you have your stencil, or substitute, just place it on the page and brush, dab, or wipe paint through it or use pens/pencils to draw through your stencil and add colour afterwards.

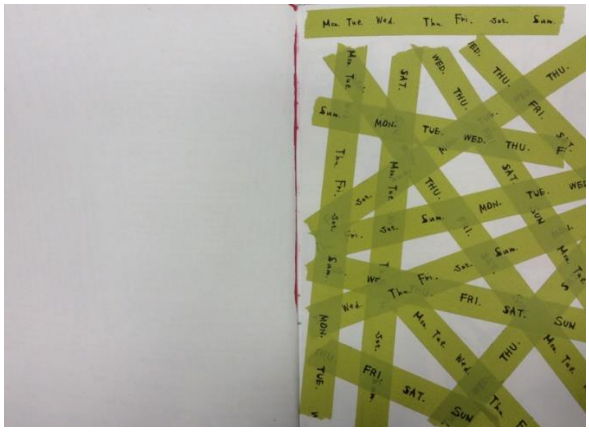
Images, L to R: Plastic doilie, cut paper, vegetable net bag, commercial stencil

Masks

Masks are the opposite to stencils. Instead of applying media through holes, with a mask you apply media over a shape. If you have a spray bottle you can repurpose for ink or paint you can spray over arrangements of chunkier objects. Some masks can also be used on a page afterwards. Masks can be made from all sorts of things:

- ✓ Use masking tape to make patterns, peel off after paint (or other media) is dry,
- ✓ Cut shapes or strips of paper and lay on the page,
- ✓ Leaves,
- ✓ Small objects like cocktail sticks, dried beans, foam shapes etc,
- ✓ Sticky notes.

Images, L to R: Sticky notes used as masks, same masks added to another page, paper strips



Images, L to R, series showing a page with tape applied ready to be painted, the result after removing the tape and the eventual result after multiple tape maskings and different colour paints

Paper weaving (see video for demonstration)

Paper weaving is a fun and easy way to create a different background. It can be a bit fiddly but it's worth having a play around with. You can work directly in your journal or on a separate page to add to your journal afterwards. You only need papers for this technique.

Cut your page into strips, vertically or horizontally, leaving an uncut margin at one side/end. Cut a separate piece of paper into strips. The strips need to be longer than the width or height of you page (depending which way you cut your page). The strips can be all one size or you could cut them of different thicknesses.

Using one strip at a time, start weaving between the strips of the page going under, over, under etc. Each strip should alternate so, for example, the second strip will start by going over the first page strip.

Once woven, slide each strip into place so there are no gaps between strips. Keep weaving until your page is complete.

Trim and glue the ends of the strips.

You can vary the width of the strips, use curved or torn strips, and alter the weaving pattern to get different results.

A variety of paper weaving examples.

Top Tips

1. Look at everyday materials with new eyes! What have you already got that you can use?
2. Find a box or bag to save materials in for your journal; magazine images that catch your eye, words cut from junk mail, envelopes, stamps, anything that appeals to you.
3. Don't be afraid to experiment! If you don't like something you can cover it up, add to it, or stick pages together.
4. **Remember, you can't do it wrong! There are no rules!**