

# HEART JOURNALING



**Cynthia Gunsinger**

It's quite ridiculous, the number of people who are far more comfortable being a caregiver than they are with taking care of themselves. Those who are balancing work and life, those unsettled with their purpose and contribution, and those juggling the care taking of elderly parents and empty nests tend to neglect self care.

Care for our health and human body systems: maintaining physical activity and healthy eating are important self care components, but what about emotional, mental and creative care?

For those needing to fill up their buckets and reach into their creative range, welcome to the world of Art Journaling!

“Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time.”

Thomas Merton

Here I established background of the journal page. Pages have been washed in watercolour and some collage has started. Combining written and visual languages to reach into a full range of expression, art journaling combines mixed media art with words to create greater understanding and insight into yourself.

Your art journal is a space for expression of your visual and written thoughts. A space for questions, thoughts, emotions and it is also a play space for experimenting with art materials. A journal can be shared or kept personal, making it a safe place to try new techniques or mediums, or a place to unburden yourself from hard emotions.

According to scientist, Grant Eckert, “Art is very important in helping the brain reach its full potential ... It introduces the brain to diverse cognitive skills that help us unravel intricate problems. Art activates the creative part of our brain - the part that works without words and can only express itself non-verbally. Art, in thought and through the creative processes, activates the imaginative and creative side, the spatial and intuitive side of our brain. Art jumps over the process of linear and logical thinking. It trains the brain to shift into thinking differently, of broaching old problems in new ways.”

Many who would not consider themselves artists have taken solace in art studios for emotional and mental care via creative expression. One great example of such a community gathering and creative exploration place is New Moon Gallery in West Kelowna, British Columbia. Students come pulling a wagon full of art supplies and emotional baggage and leave with inspiring art and lighter spirits. Another great example of creative community gatherings are Squam Art Workshops, [www.squamartworkshops.com/](http://www.squamartworkshops.com/) : creative retreats from the East Coast to the West Coast and abroad that are



**Stately Journal** – established background of the journal page. Pages have been washed in watercolour and some collage has started.



**Mediterranean Journal** – completed journal page with layers of water colour, acrylic, ink, crayon, and pastels. Words have been added to complete the page.

focused on personal self-expression.

Beautiful examples of Art Journaling can be found in the book *French Milk*, by Lucy Knisley. Other beautiful journal work examples and tutorials have been produced by artist Teesha Moore and can be found at [www.teeshamoore.com](http://www.teeshamoore.com).

The emotional and creative care through this flexible mode of self expression and having a space to turn your chaotic thoughts into order is invaluable.

For someone who needs more emotional and creative care, PaperBag Press from Kelowna, British Columbia, has just releasing *Reflections*, an art journal with creative exploration exercises and inspiration. Linda Lovisa, artist and art teacher at her New Moon Art Gallery, is the author of *Reflections*. The journal provided a collection of Linda's favourite works alongside the moments that inspired them. Techniques, prompts, and thoughts for you to explore are a reflection of the teaching in Linda's art classes. Following each painting are blank pages for you to create and develop your own working journal.

Semir Zeki, a former professor of neurobiology at the University College, London and co-head of the Wellcome Department of Cognitive Neurology says that "Artistic expression is the key to comprehending ourselves ... Art and its expression is an expansion of brain function."

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## Art Journaling Basics

You don't need an art studio to do art journaling. A few supplies and workspace where you can access your work is all you need.

### Supplies

- Small blank journal - find one kicking around or make one with drawing or water colour paper. You can use gesso to reinforce the pages if they are of light weight (gesso is available in any art store and is a liquid chalk primer for canvas and paper).
- Adhesive - a glue stick, mod podge or gel medium and a brush.
- Colour - watercolour paints, crayons, pencils, markers, acrylic paint, pastels or any media you are comfortable with.
- Marker - permanent ink that will not smear when it gets wet.
- Miscellaneous - rags, paper towels, scissors, paint brushes, old magazines.

### 1. Begin with a Background

Wash the background in either watercolour paint or acrylic paint thinned with water. Start with lighter colours for a background until you see how it goes. Remember that as you build your journal page, watercolour paint will change with the added moisture.

### 2. Build

Build on the background with collage: designs and colors from magazines, book text, other artwork of your own, photos, stencils, etc.

### 3. Mix Your Media

Add layers of collage, painting, coloured pencils, drawing, stamping as you desire. Ensure that your page has border and a focal point, but be loose with your work. Work from different directions on your page until you feel the piece is complete.

### 4. Write

Most of us think of journaling as a diary, but in art journaling, the visual expression speaks as well. You may choose to diary words in the in-between spaces of your piece to complete the message, thought, or experience.

What a beautiful, presence-based honouring of your life, trip, event or moment.