

Healing Through ART JOURNALING

BY JENNIFER TRITLE





I found myself feeling a bit fragmented in my mid-life years — happy overall, yes, but still a bit battle-worn from some of life's more unpleasant offerings and needing an avenue to tie up loose emotional ends. I could not quite find the fullness of healing and reintegration of self that I was looking for in my usual activities. Then I discovered Stampington & Company's *Art Journaling* magazine in a bookstore and found myself irresistibly attracted to this art form. For six months I mused about art journaling and started collecting supplies (a therapeutic activity in itself) as I viewed instructional blogs and video links mentioned in the magazine. Six months later, at age 52, I produced my first journal page ever and began working in both a large and small journal. Every page seemed to take on its own subject matter, mood, palette, focal point, and/or technique. Sometimes I focused on an emotion or a concept that seemed to have a grip on me. Other times, I perused all kinds of media until I found an element that grabbed my attention and then used it as my focal point for an entry. Sometimes I did a two-page layout, sometimes one, depending on whether I felt the need for freeing space or comforting coziness. I told myself to do what felt pleasant in my art process. I completed both journals in 18 months with 35 total entries. To my surprise, I found that the journal pages fit together into a story of me. »





CLEARING THE CLOUDS

I analyzed the completed journals and realized that each page represented a certain aspect of myself that had needed my attention at the time of its creation. I also noticed that my journal pages seemed to move from darker, fuzzier palettes to brighter and clearer ones over time, as the emotional clouds were literally clearing — the final page was bright, industrial, and sturdy. Finally I noted that every page expressed something very personal about me (I chose to keep these expressions encrypted to others except for the titles). One page helped me to organize my weary feelings and gave me renewed confidence in my life choices. Another reminded me to make time for myself and allow my soul to rejuvenate itself through my art. Another helped me to consider the possibility that I had more to offer than I might have realized at the time and that I needed to be more open to new life experiences — a prodding thought that proved to be quite beneficial in my healing journey.

CONSCIOUS AWARENESS

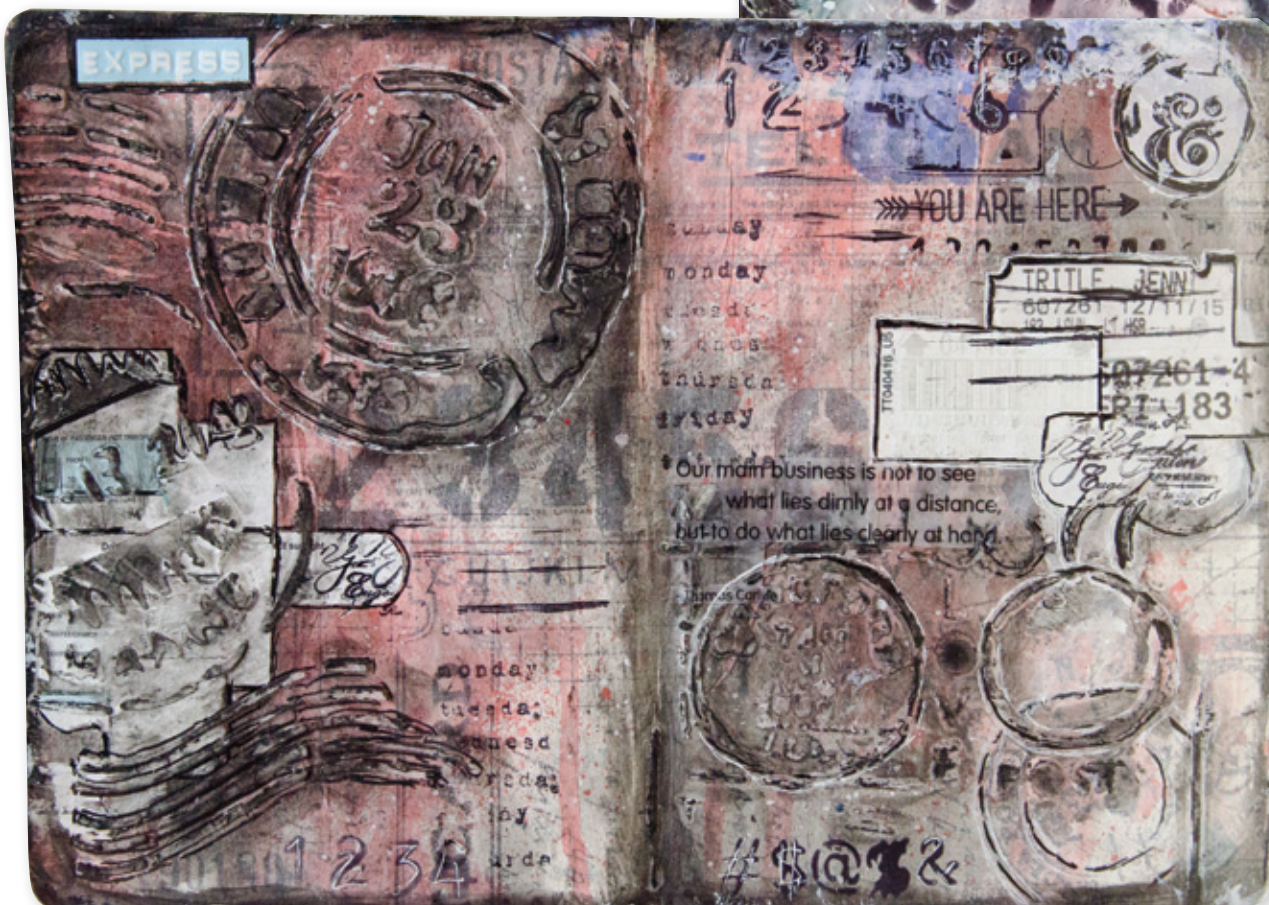
Every single page in my journal has a story like that, which is why I do it. Art journaling has the amazing power to help me integrate many hidden parts of my soul, even if that soul is feeling a bit shredded. It propels pre-conscious musings about difficult experiences into conscious awareness, enabling me to see them clearly and to integrate them into my life. It stimulates



my mind and heart to set out on their own healing journeys, which take on lives of their own and then surprise me in my art. And I end up telling a story that I might not have known needed telling. But in doing so, I somehow redefine myself, restructure my heart, and find soothing healing for my soul.

PLAYING ON THE PAGES

With an old credit card or 1-inch-wide paintbrush, I apply white gesso to nearly every page I journal on. This gives tooth to my pages and covers splatters/stains. This also lets me play (aka paint with something gooey, which has been therapeutic to me since childhood for whatever reason), and makes me feel like I am getting a fresh, clean start and laying a new foundation. It grounds me. Then, I dive into the color palette and color medium, selected beforehand based on my mood or on colors I saw that inspired the project. I spray Distress inks and stains, and activate them with water; or I apply acrylics with paper towels. I'm a neat-freak in my house, but in my journals I relish spritzing, pouring, spilling, smearing, and drizzling. Then, I apply stamped images, which is easier to do before you apply pastes than after. From there, I go for texture: texture paste applied in spots through selected stencils, or matte gel medium used to adhere piled paper shapes or frayed scraps, lettering, chipboard figures, etc. After that, I stamp some more. Finally, I work with the focal points or elements I have selected and often make a border using my favorite medium: Distress crayons. »





TIPS

- I often choose a small journal with lined pages. The lines become an element or layer of interest. I apply white gesso to my pages more lightly in areas where I'd like these lines to show through.
- I apply white gesso between pages to glue them together so I have a thicker, waterproof substrate on which I can work.
- I work with reusable pieces of wax or parchment paper directly beneath the pages on which I am working so paints and inks don't bleed onto other pages. It's not fun to ruin pages you have already completed!
- Any book can become an art journal if you cannot afford or find one with watercolor paper pages. Simply remove some small sections of pages throughout the book so you open up room between the book covers. (This allows it to close if that is important to you.)
- Consider working only on one side — the front side — of a journal sheet. Although it can feel wasteful not to work on both sides of a sheet, this allows you to remove only that project if you need access to it (e.g., for an art submission or for a gift for someone). You can remove the sheet but retain your journal and all of its other entries. Also, remove a few extra pages if you use any 3-D elements so your journal can close. Don't worry about a journal being too short; simply start another journal.

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Jennifer Tritle, M.S., is married to Jerry and is a mother of three grown children. She is a college psychology instructor and mixed-media artist in Springfield, Ohio. Her artwork and writing have been featured in Somerset Apprentice and Bella Grace. You can see her art projects on her Pinterest. She welcomes email at jennifer.tritle@woh.rr.com, visits on Facebook (Jennifer Spatafore Tritle), and connecting on Instagram (@jennifertitle).

