

TEA BAGS TRANSFORMED:

Tiny Stories Told

BY CAROL ANN WEBSTER

There's nothing more soothing than starting my morning with a hot cup of tea. For years, I tossed my used tea bags into the compost bin without a second thought. You did too, didn't you? Then one day, the marks and colors on a used tea bag caught my eye. Suddenly, I saw it as a potential background for my small art projects — offering endless possibilities for texture, color, and stitching.

I've been a fan of Ruby Silvius' tea-bag art for many years, and her work inspired me to see tea bags as tiny canvases. I've also drawn inspiration from Cas Holmes and her innovative ways of working with fiber and stitch.

Every brewed tea bag is unique, with fascinating patterns, marks, and colors created by the brewing process. After enjoying my morning tea, I clean, flatten, and dry the bags, and then store them in my art room until I'm ready to transform them. Each one holds the potential to become a tiny mixed-media canvas for the stories I want to tell. ►







For a long time, I worked with the earthy tan, brown, and black palette of brewed tea bags. But when friends suggested I explore brighter colors, I discovered the potential of using non-brewed tea bags, which are white. Adding wet media to a white tea bag was a revelation — I was hooked. The Golden Fluid Acrylics flowed beautifully across the delicate paper, creating vibrant and often unexpected effects that felt magical.

This discovery opened up a whole new world for my mixed-media cravings. I now happily embellish brewed and non-brewed tea bags with patterned and textured fabrics, paper torn into shapes, beads, buttons, and intricate embroidery stitches.

As my tea-bag art evolved, I found the joy of telling big stories on canvases no larger than the palm of my hand. These days, I can't drink a cup of tea without imagining what that tiny tea bag will become.



SUPPLIES

- * Acrylic paint: (Golden - Fluid)
- * Acrylic/Glass sheet: 8" x 8"
- * Cheesecloth
- * Cloth: clean, damp
- * Embellishments
- * Embroidery floss
- * Fabric
- * Fabric scraps
- * Glue stick: (UHU)
- * Interfacing: 931TD (Pellon)
- * Iron & ironing pad
- * Needle
- * Paper scraps
- * Pencil
- * Ribbon
- * Rotary cutter & mat
- * Ruler
- * Scissors
- * Spray bottle w/clean water
- * Tea bags

TECHNIQUE

Begin by choosing a clean tea bag from your collection. You can select a brewed tea bag with natural marks and a neutral color palette or a non-brewed tea bag if you prefer something more colorful. To add color to non-brewed tea bags, lay them out on a sheet of glass or acrylic and spray clean water across the center. Add small drops of acrylic paint to the damp areas, allowing the colors to flow and blend beautifully. You can use multiple colors for added vibrancy. Let the tea bags dry until they are almost completely dry, and then remove them from the glass and allow them to air-dry completely.

Once the tea bags are ready, select one — brewed or non-brewed — to work on. Cut a piece of interfacing slightly larger than the tea bag and iron it onto the back to provide support. Lay the tea bag vertically, and use a pencil to sketch a horizon line with a gentle “hill” across the center. Tear a small piece of printed text paper into the shape of a structure, such as a house or barn, and glue it onto the hill. Next, use embroidery floss and a needle to stitch trees along the horizon line, positioning them near the structure or scattered across the hill. ►



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For the foreground, spread the glue stick across the lower portion of the tea bag and, press fabric scraps onto it. Layer different fabrics to add depth and interest, and then secure them with hand or machine stitching. In the sky, add small details, like birds stitched with embroidery floss and clouds made from bits of cheesecloth. For additional texture, attach a tiny fence using jute ribbon or incorporate beads and yarn to enhance color and dimension.

Finally, trim the interfacing to match the size of the tea bag using a rotary cutter and mat. Stitch the finished tea bag to your background fabric by hand or with a sewing machine. Your artwork is now ready to frame or add to your tea bag art journal!

Carol Ann Webster is a mixed-media artist and workshop instructor living in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. She is passionate about making small art, trying new techniques, and encouraging others to make stuff because it's fun. Her "Snippets Tea Bag Art" course is one of several she offers. To learn more about her courses, art, and workshops, please visit carolannwebster.com or find her on Instagram (@carolwebsterart). She welcomes email at carol@carolannwebster.com.

Freedom

THROUGH ART JOURNALING

BY PEGGY TUNNELL



My journey into art journaling began a while back when I was struggling with my emotions and how to process them. I was going through a very difficult time when words were hard to find. During this period it seemed easier to paint, draw, or glue — any way I could find to express myself through art. Sometimes I was inspired by a verse from the Bible or a quote I had heard that seemed to apply at the time. It was always different, which I think is why art journaling is so appealing: It can be whatever I want it to be for that moment, nice and neat or grungy and messy.

Messy, GRUNGY,
STAINED, TORN,
AND EVEN ugly —
THAT IS HOW I FELT,
SO WHY NOT give
in TO IT?

WORDS ARE FEW

When dealing with loss and grief, many say, “Time heals all wounds.” I discovered this to be true only when I chose to take the time, allowing myself to feel those reoccurring memories of pain from my losses. In a relaxed moment with a valued friend, she asked, “May I have permission to point something out about your struggle?” “Of course!” I responded.



She continued, “It appears to me that you seem to resist times of crying because you may think you will never stop if you give into the grief process.” With her encouragement, it was here I chose to take the time needed to begin my process of healing, and within that journey I created my “Words” journal. I chose this title because although I did not have many words, I felt freedom when I could express myself through my art journals. Messy, grungy, stained, torn, and even ugly — that is how I felt, so why not give in to it?

The process of creating this journal was very freeing for me. Taking my art supplies to the page began to release me emotionally. Locked-up thoughts flowed and so did the tears. Working a little at a time took time — time I had decided was important to me. I did not create every day, yet it was available when needed. »

Creative Discoveries

Vintage photos — it really pulls me in to think about who and what was going on in these photos from the past. Jane Chipp's classes have played a large role in inspiring me to use vintage photos.



GETTING GRUNGY

I had been creating journals as gifts and for sale for years, but this one was for me: my special place, my mess. The quote on my messiest page in this journal is, “Moving forward through emotional pain is like swimming in mud.” This quote came to mind because it was exactly how I felt: depressed, angry, and muddled.

Using my sewing machine, I added torn and shredded cheesecloth to the pages, as well as a torn vintage hankie, rusted and coffee-stained fabrics, vintage lace bits, and lots of fabric and paper scraps. I love to add all the grunge I can find: coffee and tea-stained papers, used tea bags, dyed cheesecloth, and bits of cardboard are all favorites. Other art methods I used and use regularly are applying gesso over words along with collaged bits of papers, torn tea bags, and paints.



UNDER THE LAYERS

Pouring out my heart, crying my eyes out, and painting or scribbling over it helps me to process my emotions. And only I really know what is under all those layers. One of the best forms of emotional expression I have learned is to write over my writing. Processing my jumbled thoughts into words on the pages has become so valuable to me. As I wrote and scribbled down my feelings, more words would come, breaking down my resistance, which was something I did not expect. Nothing had to make sense; they were unorganized emotions. Nothing had to be spelled correctly. As the process helped me to let go, crying seasons became less frequent, as my friend had predicted. Art journaling has become one of my most valued art forms. »

DETAIL





EMBOSSED FABRIC JOURNAL

Creating handmade journals has become one of my favorite ways to explore art. Many different art methods get my attention, and I find it so fun to make something out of basically nothing: unwanted old books, book covers pieced together with fabrics, cardboard, recycled trash, bits of papers and fabric, ribbons, coffee-stained papers, and much more. In this embossed fabric journal, I used a cardboard restaurant coaster, lightweight muslin fabric, gel medium, paints, and sandpaper.

DETAIL



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"Words" Journal

FINDING MY TRIBE

As an introvert it is difficult for me to share the deepest parts of my life; accepting that has actually helped me to reach out more and more. Sharing my art journal pages also brought new freedoms. I began following like-minded creatives on Instagram, and enrolling in more than a few online art classes put me in touch with additional creatives; such freedom, to finally find my tribe. Becoming vulnerable through sharing my art has been uncomfortable yet has brought me to a new place in my life. I love my tribe and hope that sharing some of my journey may help you in yours. Creativity lies within each of us — stir it up and you might surprise yourself with what comes out. Art journaling is a great place to start. »



Embossed Fabric Journal

TIPS

- An old book is a great place to start an art journal. Gesso lightly over a page, add a few bits of scrap paper or fabric, and choose one word for the page.
- You don't need to spend money to art journal; for example, used tea bags are great once dried, emptied, and opened, as they become a somewhat transparent tissue.
- When using gel medium, glue, or other sticky substances, keep a roll of wax paper on hand to lay your project on so it won't stick to other papers, etc.
- Check thrift stores for remnant fabrics, vintage cloth, lace bits, tattered doilies, and old embroidered pieces; these make wonderful journal additions.
- If you get frustrated with an art journal page or project, keep in mind that you can cover up just about anything with a layer of something else.

Peggy Tunnell believes everyone has creativity within them, and she loves to help others in this discovery. Always learning new art methods to share with others through teaching classes and online sharing, she enjoys gift-giving and selling her journals on Etsy. Peggy and Jeff live in Big Bear Lake, California, where they raised four children who now have families of their own, resulting in 14 wonderful grandchildren. See more of her work at peachtreerecreationsco.etsy.com and on Instagram (@peachtreerecreationsco). She welcomes email at p.t.creationsco@gmail.com.

Experimentations

IN MIXED-MEDIA

BY KATE THOMPSON

*A*s a mixed-media artist working with several types of mediums, I love experimenting with how they can work together. Most of the techniques I use are unconventional, which makes everything so much more interesting to me. For these pieces, the approach I took involved using plastic on fabric, painting on top of image transfers, and mixing acrylic paints with watercolors.

My love of sharing my discoveries is why I started teaching online art classes, and from there I moved on to teaching in-person. The creative process is where the magic lies. It is all about the journey, and even when something doesn't work out quite right, it's still time well spent. The learning and doing is a lifelong process.

I fell in love with vintage fabric many years ago when I discovered it was so much more interesting to paint on than canvas or regular fabric. There is something so magical about working on something that has mystery and history. In my work, I am drawn to things that have aged or are beginning to age. There is such beauty in things decomposing, whether it be fabric, botanicals, or even old abandoned buildings. I love the muted colors and layers of decay — it is a story to be told, and my job as an artist is to find that story. ►







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SUPPLIES

- * Acrylic paints: Alizarin Crimson, Payne's Gray, Titanium White, Yellow Ochre (Golden - Open)
- * Credit card: old
- * Embroidery floss
- * Ephemera
- * Gel medium: matte
- * Joint compound
- * Needle & thread (optional)
- * Paintbrushes
- * Palette knife
- * Photographs: laser prints
- * Spray bottle w/ water
- * Vintage fabric
- * Vintage lace



TECHNIQUE

Layer fabric scraps and ephemera on top of a piece of vintage fabric. Apply a layer of gel medium to a laser print, and place it facedown onto another piece of fabric. Use an old credit card to smooth out any air bubbles, and let the transfer dry overnight. Spray the paper with water, and use your finger to rub it away.

Apply both acrylic paints and watercolors to the transfer. Apply the watercolors first to get beautiful stains, and then apply the acrylics on top for a more substantial application.

Use a palette knife to apply joint compound to vintage lace, let it dry, and then crumble it to make cracks in the plaster. You'll see a beautiful pattern emerge in the cracks. Apply gel medium to the top of the plaster to seal it. Use the ephemera and plastered lace as collage elements. Attach the lace to the piece using either gel medium or hand stitching. ►



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