

SKETCHBOOK ADVENTURES

Chapter 5: Stamping and Image Transfer Techniques

A few years ago I headed out for a weekend trip to Palm Springs with some friends. Don't get me wrong, I love sitting by the pool and talking, but after a few hours of that I get restless and can't sit still so I always bring my travel art supplies and my sketchbook on trips. On the drive out to the desert I starting wishing I had brought a crafty project for the group to do but there wasn't an arts and craft supply store in sight. On top of that, most of the people who were going aren't artists so I had to bring an activity that wasn't intimidating and wouldn't requite a lot of explanation or technical skills. Since I wasn't even sure if anyone was going to join in, I also didn't want to spend a lot of money on supplies in case I was the only one doing the project.

Then I thought about collage. I picked up a few pairs of scissors, some magazines, glue sticks and some poster board at the grocery store and for under \$20 I had a crafty project that was simple and fun. I was surprised when upon seeing all my craft supplies, several people wanted to get in on the action. We made vision boards, and the people who weren't into the whole vision board thing just made collages of stuff they liked. It was so cool to see people who didn't consider themselves to be creative really getting into the process of making something. One of the things I love about collage is that it is an easy, no-pressure creativity activity that anyone can do.

A collage combines different elements together to create a piece of art. Collages can be created on a variety of surfaces like wood or canvas and can be comprised of all kinds of objects like paper, fabric or even three-dimensional things like dried flowers or bottle caps. Since we're planning on making collages in our sketchbooks we'll focus on using fairly flat mixed media materials. You'll likely hear the words "mixed media" when people are talking about collages. Mixed media simply means that the artist used more than one type of technique or supply to create the piece. For example, a piece created with ink, watercolors and paper glued to it would be referred to as a mixed media collage.

Like watercolors, collage is an awesome technique to create a background for your page. If you're not confident about your drawing techniques, using collage is an awesome way to get images onto your piece. It's also great for adding color, shape or interest to fill in an area that needs a little something, and creating patterns. I use collage on almost every page in my sketchbook. You can create a whole piece with just collage or use it as an element with other techniques. I love juxtaposing the images, colors, patterns and shapes of my mixed media collage materials with other techniques like watercolors, hand lettering and drawing.

Even though collage is one of the least intimidating techniques we're covering, to create a cohesive page in your sketchbook using collage you'll need to do a bit of planning, gathering and practicing.



HOW TO SOURCE AND ORGANIZE YOUR COLLAGE SUPPLIES

There are tons of collage materials available at craft supply stores but chances are that you probably already have everything you need at home. Some of my favorite collage materials are magazines, junk mail, things I find in the trash or the bottom of my purse like receipts and ticket stubs, old books and office supply papers like graph paper and index cards. Start looking at your trash differently and before you know it you'll have an arsenal of collage materials. At the end of this chapter you can download a full list of collage materials, but if you have a magazine, scissors and some glue you're well on your way.

If you plan on using collage often in your sketchbook I suggest getting a container like a shoebox or something similar to store your materials. If you're just starting out, gather some of the materials from the list at the end of this chapter and start going through your magazines and pulling out images that speak to you. At this point don't worry about how you're going to use them – just tear or cut out anything that strikes you. When you source your materials you want to trust your instincts and not spend time asking yourself if you'll end up using the image. Just pull out ANYTHING that appeals to you. If you're thinking about saving a postcard you got from a friend, save it! Think of gathering your collage materials like writing whatever comes to your mind in a journal. JUST WRITE and don't worry about what someone would think if they read it or if the writing is good.

Some people (like me), who are Type-A personalities, like everything to be super organized and take it a step further by dividing their materials into categories inside their container. I keep my materials organized in envelopes by theme and color. For example one envelope may have images that have to do with nature or one might be images of people. I also have envelopes that have clippings of patterns and solid color images that are organized by color. This is helpful if I'm working on a piece and need to quickly find a blue polka dotted image to add to my page. Organize yours in any way that will help you remember where things are.

If you find an image that you can't bear to use just once, you can always scan it into your computer and print multiples of it. Always be aware of copyrights on images. Most images are okay to use for personal use (meaning that you won't be making money from it).



HOW TO CHOOSE WHICH COLLAGE MATERIALS TO USE

Now that you have all of your materials and they're organized, it's time to start thinking about how to use them. If you just start gluing random images onto your page without giving thought to how they interact with each other, your piece will not end up being balanced. Balance (as we learned in the chapter Elements of Design) is essential for your page to be successful and cohesive.

When you go through your collage container to pull out images for a piece, this is the time to start putting thought into what you're choosing. Think about the theme and color palette of the piece you're working on and pull out images that match the overall aesthetic you're working towards. Once I've chosen my collage materials I like to lay them out on the table and begin placing them onto my page. I rearrange them and trim images down but I don't pull out my glue stick until I'm satisfied with the layout. Go back to the tutorial in the Elements of Design chapter about composition and ask yourself those questions as you're looking at your layout.

It's rare that I'm able to use all the images I pull out. I like having extras to choose from so I'm not digging back in to my container and frantically searching for a blue piece of paper so I can cut out a circle. Sometimes you may pull out an image that you think you can use but can't. You may have an image of a typewriter you love and are dying to use but the piece you're working on is about a trip you took to the beach. Since the typewriter doesn't fit in with your theme, you can save it for a future piece or build a new piece based around the typewriter.

Once you choose your materials you'll need to think about how you want to cut them. Sometimes a straight-edged cut with scissors is the best choice but there are so many other ways to edge your pieces uniquely. I keep some pinking shears (that create a zig-zag edge) as well as some craft scissors (with a variety of edges like scallops or waves) on hand. You can also rip your pages or burn them (do this outside and be sure to keep a bowl of water handy just in case). Think about the aesthetic you're going for on that page and choose a cutting tool or multiple ones that echo the feeling you're trying to achieve.



HOW TO ADHERE YOUR COLLAGE MATERIALS TO YOUR PAGE

Glue sticks are my first choice for adhering collage materials in my sketchbook. I love using glue sticks because they're not messy, they dry clear and they're compact enough to carry when I travel. If I'm creating a piece that has lots of layers I usually use a medium or Mod Podge to adhere my images and then lacquer over it to make sure all the corners and edges are fully glued down. Glue rollers also work well for crafting on the go. If I'm working with very small pieces of paper I'll opt for a glue pen, which distributes glue through small roller tip. Washi tape is another one of my favorite ways to adhere paper to my sketchbook page. Washi tape allows me to reposition my paper if needed and adds a bit of color and pattern to my piece. Sometimes your collage material will dictate a specific type of adhesive. For example, tissue paper and glue sticks are NOT a good combination. If I'm using tissue paper on a piece I have to use a medium or Mod Podge to glue it down because the paper is so delicate and thin that running a glue stick across it would rip it. At the end of this chapter you can download a list of adhesive supplies you can experiment with so that you can find your go-to ways to adhere images to your pages.

USING COLLAGE FOR BACKGROUNDS

As I mentioned, collage is a great technique for creating a background or pattern on your page. You can use the collage as a base and add more to it or it can stand alone as a graphic page.

Here are a few ways to create a background or pattern on your page:

1. Use random images in the same organic shape tiled together.
2. Use a hole punch to create circles and make a "confetti" background.
3. Create a patchwork page with similar shapes (usually squares and rectangles) in various patterns in the same color palette that overlap each other.
4. Use tissue paper to create a graphic background by cutting shapes and piecing them together next to each other.
5. Pull out a large image that covers your whole page and use it as a background.
6. Cut several images in the same shape out of different colored papers.



USING COLLAGE TO ADD TEXT

It's rare that I have a sketchbook page that doesn't have some kind of words on it. When I first started working in my sketchbook I wasn't comfortable with my hand lettering so I relied on collage to add lettering to my pages. Even though I'm more adept at lettering now I often use collage to add words to my pieces.

Here are some ways you can add words to your page with collage:

1. Cut individual letters out and create a word or phrase in the ransom note style.
2. Cut out full words or piece them together to create your own phrase.
3. Cut block letters from plain or patterned paper to create words or phrases.
4. Use letter stamps to create text on paper.
5. Print text from your computer or type it on a typewriter.
6. Use letter stickers.



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USING COLLAGE TO CREATE LAYERS

Collage is an awesome way to create layers and texture on your page. I love using collage materials that are semi-transparent like tissue paper, napkins, lace and shipping tape image transfers because they create depth on my page. You can partially overlap your materials or cover entire sections with them.

Here are some ways to create layers with collage on your page:

1. Cover part of your page or an image with tissue paper.
2. Overlap images partially.
3. Use shipping tape image transfer to cover part or all of the image underneath.
4. Think outside the box and use materials that have cuts in them like lace or doilies.



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USING COLLAGE TO FILL IN AREAS AND CREATE BALANCE

As you're working on your layout and you do the composition exercise where you look at your piece and ask questions about balance, you may notice areas that aren't as interesting. Filling in these open spots with collage is a perfect way to balance your page and achieve great composition.

Here are some ways to use collage to create balance on your page:

1. Keep an envelope with tiny images in it that you can pull from.
2. Cut small geometric shapes like lines, circles or triangles (review the Inspirational Shapes download from the Elements of Design chapter) from colored paper that fits your color palette.
3. Use a hole punch (they have them in a variety of shapes other than circles at the craft supply store) to create tiny shapes to glue in a pattern in an open area.

*You'll see tons of examples of how to use collage to create balance in the prompts in this workshop.

At the end of this chapter you can download a few exercises to get you started building your collage materials as well as experimenting, building your confidence and getting comfortable mixing images, colors, patterns and papers together to create a well-composed page.

