

Art Therapy + Happiness Project

Coaching Tools for Self-Transformation

Art can be said to be – and can be used as – the externalised map of our interior self.

Peter London, No More Second Hand Art



Art making is an essential practice that can support our positivity and sense of wellbeing, expand our awareness open ourselves to kindness and self-compassion, and deepen our connection to ourselves and others.

In February 2013 I participated in **The Art Therapy +Happiness Project** which provided a unique opportunity to learn and use strengths to flourish. The project, inspired by art therapists Cathy Malchiodi (USA) and Janet McLeod (New Zealand)

included art therapy concepts, activities and techniques for personal growth, insight and transformation.

The focus was on “**The Circle of Posttraumatic Success**” as a way to stimulate art making activities and creative self-expression. Activities were inspired by the four parts of the circle ~ **Connection, Compassion, Contribution and Courage** ~ and how these four concepts can be Creative pathways to positivity, transformation and wellbeing through a variety of art making prompts and techniques.

The course included numerous downloadable activities and instructions, video tutorials, and visuals and we were able to share artwork with others and participate in online chat forums, social networking and community activities throughout the course. The feedback was affirming as was sharing ideas and learning from others as far afield as Alaska, Germany, Japan, America, Ireland and South Africa.

Some of the creative prompts I participated in were:

- *Positivity Signposts*
- *Your Eight Auspicious Symbols*
- *Manifesting your Vision through Affirmation*
- *Creating Your Ikigai [Life’s Meaning and Purpose]*
- *Connection with Mandalas*
- *Contemplative Photography*

The art works featured in this article are a selection of projects I created throughout the course that fed my love of learning, awakened my creativity big time and led to personal growth and self-transformation. It is my hope that you too will be inspired to try some of these art making processes to boost your positivity, wellbeing and happiness.

Mandalas: A Mindfulness Process

Our emotions sometime throw us into chaos and nothing makes sense. At these times we often need to find a center amid the confusion, a way to pull together the scattered parts of life and find order.

The mandala is a centering space for the self and the soul an art therapy tool for making order out of disorder. Mandala is a Sanskrit word for “magic circle”. Nearly every culture uses mandalas or circular image in their cultural or spiritual practices.

Celebrated Swiss psychologist Carl Jung saw mandalas as representative of the unconscious self. Jung said the urge for people to make mandalas emerges during moments of intense personal growth. In his work he noted how mandala drawings changed over time as healing occurred in his patients.

Mandalas come in many styles and can be created using an unlimited array of materials. To get started try using a blank page and draw a circle either freehand or use a plate or other circular object as a guide or make a circle with a compass.

Here are a few examples of mandala’s I have created.



Acton Tool: Mandala Drawings

Using your choice of materials create an image within the circle in any way you choose. You can start in the middle make a mark and see what happens.

It may be random colours or patterns or precisely measured and balanced design such as those created by the Tibetan monks as they make their sand mandalas which can be seen in this video. <http://www.utube.com/watch?v=U12vfe1PN7c>.

During *Mindful in May 2014*, founded by Dr. Elise Bialylew, I created a mandala a day while meditating on various mindfulness themes such as loving kindness, compassion and happiness. It's a beautiful little book that inspires all manner of positivity in myself and others.

Flow: A State of Positivity

Imagine an activity that totally absorbs you. If you're a dancer you might find that you are focused on the movement of your body, graceful movements and the sound of the music. Or maybe you're in the middle playing a musical instrument strumming your guitar or playing the piano.

In both cases you're living in the moment, intensely focused on what you're doing, you lose awareness of yourself, perhaps feeling part of something larger; you lose track of time and the experience is self-rewarding. Oh what a feeling!

According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi you are experiencing what is called "flow," a state of consciousness and complete immersion in an activity. In this state you're completely absorbed in an activity, especially an activity which involves your creative ability. During this optimal experience you feel strong, alert, in effortless control, unselfconscious, and at the peak of your abilities.

In the footsteps of psychologist Abraham Maslow and his motivation theory, Csikszentmihalyi insists that happiness does not simply happen. It must be prepared for and cultivated by each person, by setting challenges that are neither too demanding nor too simple for one's abilities.

Happiness Project by the Sea

Last summer I was inspired to create a sand mandala in memory of my son Shaun who died on Boxing Day 1996. Seven days before Christmas I began creating a sand mandala - an art therapy tool for making order out of disorder.

Over the days that led to up to a family gathering on Boxing Day, to mark the 21st anniversary of Shaun's death, the mandala took on a life of its own. I hand painted and decorated rocks and shells. The family also added them to the collection, including my husband and 93 year old vision impaired mother. It was a joyful process that boosted my positivity ration sky high.

Since its inception an array of people stopped and admired the mandala. A photographer posted photos on Facebook, a young boy asked if he could add a painted rock, a couple who mediated by the mandala were wrapped in its beauty. And the interesting phenomenon is that the mandala was still intact after forty days and nights despite king tides and stormy seas.

This is the sand mandala I created down under.



“Mindful Moments”, sand mandala by Barbara Miller

To find out more about how this creative project was conceived read press article at: <http://cvreview.com.au/centre-amid-the-confusion/>

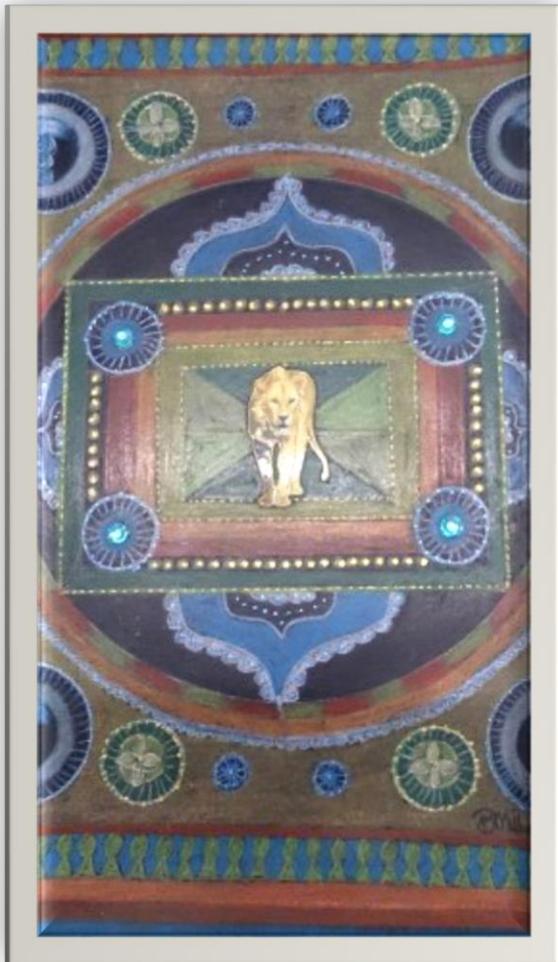
Contemplative Photography

There are mandalas in nature and manmade designs everywhere we look. Once you start to notice them you will see them everywhere. The following images, inspired by nature were taken on my smart phone during a morning walk in Hampton Victoria.



“Spring”, contemplative photography by Barbara Miller

These images were a combination of mandala drawings, screen printing and contemplate photography.



"Courage" collage by Barbara Miller



"Beauty" mixed media by Barbara Miller

Action Tool: Capturing Images

Grab your camera or smart phone and spend a day snapping images of people, places and the wonders of nature. Experiment with settings on your camera to create different affects. Feel the flow and watch your positivity grow.

It is interesting to note that people are more likely to be creative when told to be creative! So, if you want to exercise your creativity and feel the flow, then just do it!

I wish you success and happiness.

Barbara Miller

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