

A MINI COURSE IN EXTREME VISUAL JOURNALISM

# revisionary journals



by juliana coles

Spring is a time of rebirth, and therefore a good time to reflect on where we have been and where we are going. It is the perfect time to ask ourselves some very important questions, and this is how to begin the self-reflective process of Extreme Visual Journalism. I believe we have inside of us everything we need to know, so we are not necessarily creating a new vision, but rather "revisioning." Revisioning can help us see our paths a little more clearly or help create some landmarks or road signs to assist us in mapping our journeys. I teach this workshop every year, and recently created a 40-page booklet for it that I've made available for purchase in my Etsy store ([julianacoles.etsy.com](http://julianacoles.etsy.com)).

Extreme Visual Journaling is a powerful tool for transformation: you will use it as your closest friend, confidant, guide.

Your extreme journal will be your source book—a frame of reference, an inner Hall of Records, a vast archive of stories and

images. I encourage everyone to have a book that is separate from your other books, one that is completely safe from judgment or criticism or the need to do something that will be viewed as "good" or "pretty." I want to encourage a distinction between making art to prove something to ourselves or to others, and a safe, maybe secret space to create in order to know something of our inner life. A Visual Journal is not easily shared and should be protected at all cost. Making pretty pictures is certainly allowed there, but should not be the main focus, nor your desire.





Those of you who maintain a spiritual practice of journal writing or who create spontaneous imagery in sketchbooks know the power of both of these forms of expression. The Extreme Visual Journal unites these two outpourings in a unique combination of text and imagery to simultaneously connect both hemispheres of the brain for deeper introspection. When we encourage inner dialogue in the same space, or on the same page, healing can occur. In order to facilitate this connection and instigate our revisionary process, our books must be completely "safe."

The first step is to choose a book. You may begin a new book, or you may work in a book you have already started. Anything







goes. The book is the container for this process. It will present us with problems to solve on our revisionary journey.

Don't not pick a book because it doesn't seem right or important enough; let the book choose you. Use the one that keeps calling you, no matter how wrong it may seem, and then you will do your best to solve the problems it is presenting you with. If the pages are too thin you may have to glue them together or gesso them. And don't worry; you can always begin a new one, and another, and another.

## directions

I lead visual journaling workshops. We usually begin around a big table, with all of our supplies in the middle, like women around a kitchen table or a sewing circle; I want to create a connected, intimate community of allies. So, whether you are getting a group of friends together for this revisionary journey or working solo, gather your supplies and set up your workspace. It is important not to get up and go searching for anything during the process in order to keep the flow going.

If you are by yourself, work outside what is known to you to make something that makes you uncomfortable. Those in a group will have no choice but to make something unattractive; imagine that kind of freedom—to make a horrible mess. Use items from your materials arsenal that you normally would not use in ways you never considered.

### **exercise #1:** IMAGINE THE FUTURE THROUGH A COLLABORATIVE COLLAGE

For this first exercise, you will not be working in your book, so set it aside.

1. If you are in a group, assign a time-keeper. After 5 minutes, she



# materials

**note:** I recommend at least the following items; add any personal items or favorite supplies you can't live without.

- Big glue sticks or your favorite glue (I use UHU® glue sticks.)
- Scissors
- Good-quality paintbrushes
- A rag or two
- A jar for water
- Baby wipes with alcohol
- Tape: masking, clear, and decorative
- A set of rubber-stamp letters and stamp pads (I recommend StäzOn®.)
- Acrylic paint, any brand, any color, in at least two colors, one light and one dark (I prefer inexpensive craft paints because they dry with a matte finish, which is easier to write on.)
- Brush markers, at least two: one black, one color
- Graphite pencil (A #2 is fine or use an ebony pencil, a 6B, or a graphite stick—not charcoal.)
- A writing pen
- A magazine and a poetry book (to be cut up)
- Collage elements, such as sticker letters, press-on type, transfers, rub-ons, glitter, etc.
- Markers (I like china markers and watercolor crayons.)

will call “time.” If you are alone, set a timer.

2. When you're ready to begin, take a piece of paper and grab something from your pile of collage materials to add to it. Draw, write, tape something on; glue something. Be completely experimental.
3. If you are in a group, when time is called, pass your piece to the person next to you, set the timer, and add

to your new piece. Repeat until your original piece comes back to you.

**note:** When time is called, you are done; you don't get to pass it on saying, “I was trying to sew this on, would you finish it?” No. You are done. Let go and pass it on. Try to keep with the style of each piece, yet add your personal vision of what you would like to see in your future, even though it is not your piece: husband, wife, lover, children, home, divorce, move, travel, career change, retirement, school. Get as specific as you can.

For those of you working solo, first add things that are your future visions. Then randomly add things that have nothing to do with you—things you just like, for whatever reason. Or you can approach it from different perspectives: first round, how would my artist self envision her future? Second round, how would my adventuresome or romantic self envision her future? (What about a daredevil, a world traveler, an erotic self...and so on.) Purposefully try to see yourself from different perspectives and vantage points to give yourself a new point of view. It doesn't have to be real or right. This is just an experiment.

Challenge yourself to use many different materials. Use magazines, words, sentences, definitions. Don't worry about making a pretty picture or collage. This is just research and we need to be as free and as messy as possible. Do not be attached to what it looks like. I may tell you in the next exercise to paint over the whole thing, so let go of your need to impress people. It just doesn't matter. Stay with each step and with each collage. Don't worry about the outcome.

4. Look very closely at your collage when it comes back to you. Your group (or your “group of selves”) made this for you. They are very wise women who know exactly what you need to know to revision your future. There are things they put here that you forgot to think about, things

you didn't know you would need, and changes that are about to come. I want you to understand on a very deep level—this collage was made for you. What is true about it? It is up to you to decipher. Read between the words and look at the spaces between the images. Ah, you do see it now, don't you? It is important to make connections and relationships in the world around us and to start to see where life is meaningful in areas we may not have been paying attention to. Consider your collage.

## exercise #2: BRAINSTORM FOR A FUTURE GOAL

1. Imagine a future goal. There are many areas of our lives where we can affect a change, but for simplicity's sake, I want you to focus on one goal. Take a few minutes to remind yourself of your thoughts when you were creating the “future” collage. As you chose collage items and words, was there a goal that really popped out at you, a change you would like to make, a new step to take, or a part of yourself you would like to reconnect with?
2. In your journal, or on a separate sheet of paper, write down just one goal for yourself. As you write, be very concrete and specific and say it as if it has already occurred. Whatever your goal is, I want you to step it up outlandishly—the crazier the better. Not just: I became a general. But, I became a five-star general in a battle to save the planet; I risked my life to share my vision with others and won. Not just, I wrote a magazine article, but: I was syndicated in every art magazine and newspaper in the galaxy and started my own magazine on creativity! We want to push the goal to see what the other side of it is. We can do a reality-check later. Who knows?





from this distant perspective, see if you can come up with the theme that weaves a connected meaning—not what you were thinking when you made the collage, but what you can ascertain about the whole of this collage.

What does it all mean? It may

These tales of excess may just be little truths we were afraid to speak.

3. Whether you are in a group or alone, read your “goal” out loud, even though it is ridiculous and silly. Go ahead. Maybe there is real potential here. Maybe it’s revisionary!

### exercise #3: CONSULT THE ORACLE

Now that you have named your goal and said it, how do you accomplish it? How do you get started? Are there things you have to let go of or blocks to get rid of?

Try “consulting the oracle” for advice on your future. If you have any cool tarot cards or goddess decks, power animals decks, runes, etc., take them out and pick a card randomly. (If you don’t have a deck of these kinds of cards, you can use any kind of face card; it’s just a tool.) Based on what your card is, this entity will tell you how to complete your goal, or how to attain it, move forward, transition, transform...revision—but from her perspective or the perspective of the theme of your deck. Notice the signs and symbols of your cards. Pay attention to any descriptions of the card: she has advice for you—take it. In your journal,

create alchemical stationery—a missive requesting answers or change—complete with a secret envelope. Now you will have this entity write you a letter explaining everything you need to know about your goal, in as many detailed steps as possible. It is all outlined in your card, which you use as a prop to prompt your imagination. Discover the ancient wisdom of your own oracle.

### exercise #4: INTERPRET THE COLLAGE

With these new insights, it’s time to return to your collaborative revisionist collage. To attempt to better understand your collage, have a dialogue with it through journal writing.

In your journal, write down in detail everything you see in your collage. This is just note taking, so don’t worry about how it looks on the page; you can always cover it up or embellish it later. List all the objects, symbols, words, images, colors, and techniques that appear. See if you can create or notice any relationships between all these random things. Don’t relate it to yourself, yet. Just look, as if you didn’t know the people/person who made this, and record observations. Then,

be very obvious. It may be cryptic. You may not want to see what it is about. For now, don’t worry about that. Just come up with the theme. Experiment with letter forms and write the “theme” somewhere on your collage. You will have to figure out where it will fit. Try rubber-stamp letters, sticker letters, handwriting, or press-on type, but get it on there.

### a remarkable journey

As you reflect on these exercises, you may be pleasantly surprised by what you discovered. You may realize that you’ve known these things all along. Or you may be perplexed, even dumbfounded. This is a great start for our spring rebirth! Life, and contemplating the future, as well as the past, becomes a remarkable and beautiful journey. It’s amazing how multifaceted we are: so many voices live inside of us. Listen to what they have to say year after year, book after book. We can revision it all. There’s nothing to it! ●

For more from Juliana, visit the online extras on our website: [clothpaperscissors.com](http://clothpaperscissors.com).