



the big PICTURE

by *anahata* **k** *atkin* creative journaling on a large scale

i have been an avid art journaler for many years now. It has been a passion and an escape that has more recently taken center stage in my life. The comfort of art journaling gave me the freedom and permission I needed to put down visual ideas, inspirations, and unrefined

attempts at creating. Journals can tuck into our luggage, keep us company on couches and coffee tables. They cannot be seen all at once. Sometimes they are not even meant to be seen at all. It has been in this spirit that I have been chipping away page after page, exploring media and

preferences. But at some point the urge pulls us off the pages and onto new surfaces, bigger surfaces with the intent to share. This leap can be a way to bring art deeper into your life and to begin the process of moving into richer explorations.

I have recently been noticing that, at times, if I allow myself to work on a larger surface I can accomplish so much more than I would have in a smaller area. There is room for expansion. Room for more potential. This is true with nearly everyone.

Giving yourself the commitment of a larger surface can be an exciting change with unexpected results.

tips for journaling large

time

My general rule of thumb has typically been that I prefer to create mixed-media images within one to two sittings. I rarely work on a particular piece of artwork over a long period of time. I tend to lose interest in the project if it carries on and it seems to lose its original mood. So for me the goal is to move swiftly to capture how I am feeling at that time. Going larger doesn't need to mean that you will need tons of extra time. You can actually learn to do larger works as quickly as you might do a journal page! It's all about loosening up and acting on impulse.

materials

Whenever you sit down to create a new project the materials on hand will always be sufficient. Some of the best ways to learn new techniques are to have a limited amount of materials. That is precisely how I have created most of my mixed-media projects.

I use very simple materials and techniques to achieve a variety of different qualities. Sure, today I have a table



Above: Bold lines and color draw the eye to the vertically placed focal points in this large-scale collage.

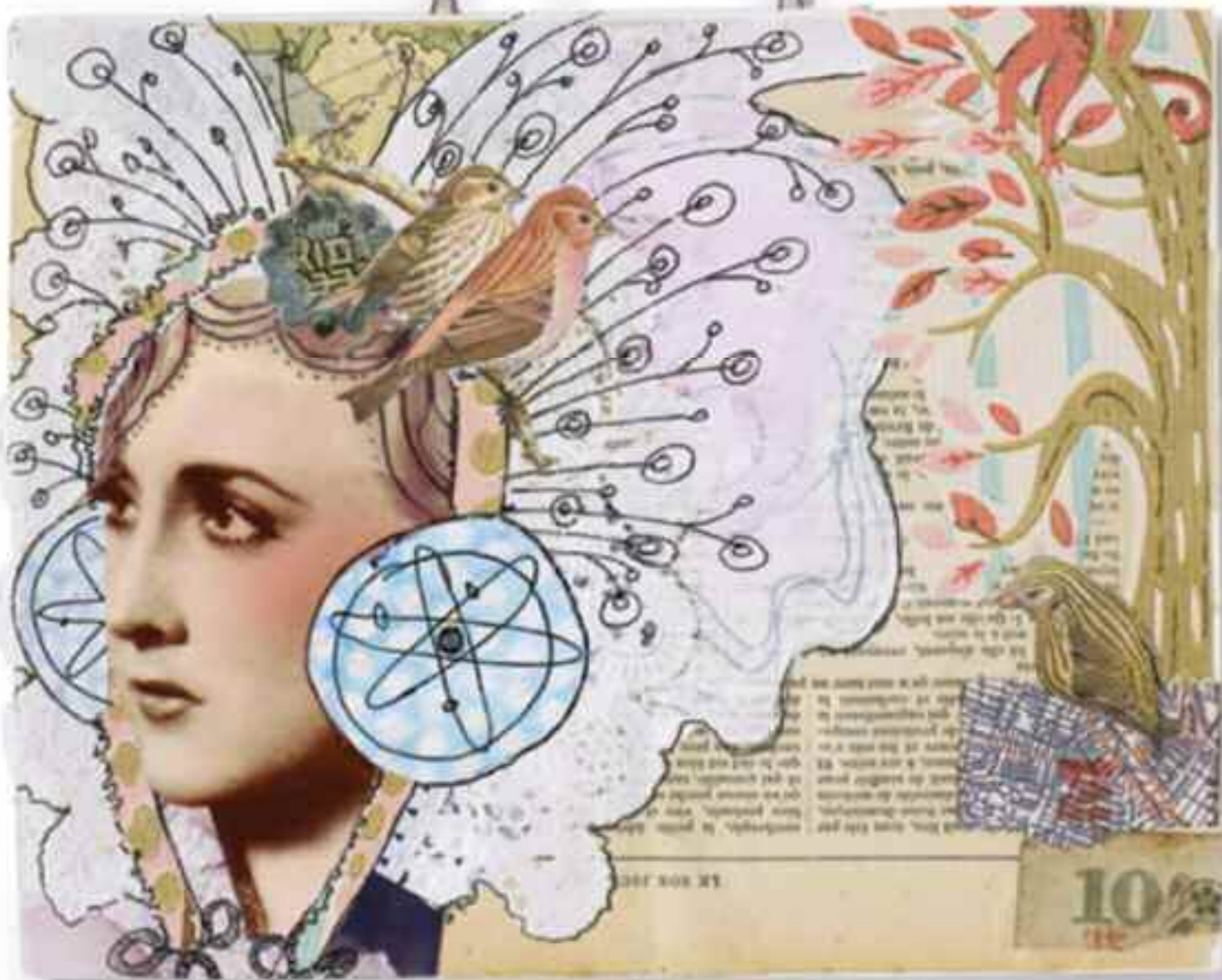
Opposite: The woman's big eyes and curly hair are echoed in the bubbly circles and wavy petals in this collage that combines Asian ephemera, ink, and paint on a wallpaper base.

full of goops and pigments, but it hasn't always been the case. Overall I would say that the average crafter has more materials than I do. I keep it fairly simple and just keep trying. There's so much you can accomplish by playing with what's already in the house.

collage papers

I have been more excited these days about paper so I tend to start with

that. Contrary to the way many collage artists work, I will often lay a focal image down first. Doing my favorite things in the order that interests me keeps the project moving. I also might lay down a favorite map or textured paper as a base layer before laying down collage. From there, my advice is...glue it down! Don't allow yourself to have a bunch of little floating pieces lying there for debate. Glue them. And



Above: Anahata combines ink drawing with a wide variety of papers in this collage, including vintage wallpaper, bird cutouts, paper lace, old maps, a French newspaper, and other ephemera.

move on as quickly as you can. The longer you debate, the more power you give the resistant part of your brain. Move in spite of any inner dialogue and learn to expect the voice in your head as background noise in the first third of your process. Just ignore it. It's only a game.

wallpaper panels

You can use wallpaper as a wonderful and inexpensive surface for mixed-media pieces, too. Hardware super stores now carry rolls of

textured wallpapers that can be a lot of fun to use. Don't focus on the color as much as the pattern you like.

Using a print roller you can roll on acrylic paints to emphasize the texture of the wallpaper and give it a new effect. When choosing colors, try to leave a little bit of unmixed paint on your palette or use multiple shades of a single color. Nothing flattens an image like a solid single color. Warm it up by trying hints of yellow or red.

You can also use plain, white gesso for interesting effects on wallpaper. Just get out a bunch of colors and a roller and move quickly.

acrylic gel medium

I like to use acrylic gel medium as my glue. Most paint brands have a sufficient one. My favorite is Golden®'s Soft Gel Gloss. I will glue under paper and often brush over the tops and edges as well to make sure the seams are sealed. The downside to this method is that thinner papers will

wrinkle, so I have a print roller handy to roll out any air bubbles. Don't worry about making it perfect. It won't be. Just move on. Even if it's still wet, just keep working.

inks

I was stuck in a workshop one time and I had accidentally forgotten some of the key supplies for the class. All I had were crayons, gesso, and ink. Since that day, I have been using inks in most of my artwork. But if you are going to use ink you must know that you have to be willing to take risks. Using inks can be scary—but use them boldly and don't hesitate.

The beauty of inks is the translucent quality they have. Unlike paint, ink makes a wonderful top layer and it can yield all sorts of wonderful effects. For example, take a standard spray bottle and fill it with a small amount of colored ink. Then lay down pieces of paper and spray over them to achieve a stencil effect. This works best if you use basic shapes such as circles and squares. I will often lay a circle over a collage face or focal point to protect it from the ink and then just lightly spray around it.

You can of course just drip ink, splat it, scratch it around, or use the print roller to apply it. I like how much I have to let go of the control when I use ink.

Note that inks will not set on their own. Even dry ink will smear if you go back over it with something wet. So you will have to spray it with a varnish or carefully seal it with gel medium before you can go over it with something else.

composition

I tend to work very centrally. There are so many other good ways to approach composition but I seem to

do the same things. It will be very difficult in this type of artwork to create exactly what's in your mind. So I don't even try. I just take one step at a time and trust that in the end something I enjoy will emerge.

Finding a focal point is a good way to start. If I have a face I want to use it's easier. I can use a figure like a tree and work outward from that image. I start with a general visual mood that I want and then let the rest go. Don't be attached to the outcome.

Grab basic bits from your stack of papers and begin forming shapes and preferences around your figure. Remember...glue it down. Move on. That's how you'll get there.

But maybe you are more excited about a texture or bits of flowers. That's great. Play around with those things on your surface as if they were the only things there.

The piece with the woman and the pink bubbles was created this way. I was originally playing with the blossoms, inks, and wallpaper scraps. After looking at it a few weeks later, I decided to try and add something unexpected right in the middle of it all. That's when I drew in the woman to be painted. But the first things there were the circles, the blooms, and the collage bits. You can work in any direction when it comes to composition. Any direction you take can be a benefit. The thing is to just roll with it.

A magnet on my fridge says, "Everything will be OK in the end. If it's not OK it's not the end."

painting

Unfortunately, there are not a whole lot of shortcuts when it comes to painting faces or figures. Take a class if it scares you, but mostly just start

trying. It will take some time, but this is how you will develop your style. You can get started right away though, making shapes and forms, plants, etc. with paint. Just lay down three to five colors and add something with paint on each project. Little by little you will get the hang of how you will work with paint. Everyone does it differently, so just jump in.

finishing

Sometimes a piece of artwork can look unfinished and all it needs is a few basic things. I like to use pens and pencils to finish a piece. Something about fine lines and hand-drawn doodles changes the quality and makes it feel more personalized. Emphasize things with outlining. Using the edges of shapes and figures will tie it all together. You can outline them with pens and scratchy lines, or smear the edge with charcoal or pencil. Doodle on your collages to create interest and further unify the bits that need to be integrated. Use words or fonts to fill in spaces or hide funny spots. Doodle a border, or a face, or a pattern over the top of your creation. You will be surprised what a huge difference this step makes.

You can also do what is called pin lining: use fabric paints or acrylics in bottles to edge a piece. I will often use Stickles glitter gels to pin-line an element for a wonderful effect. Use glitter where you want the effect of light vs. sparkle. It will make all the difference. ●

