



THE PAINTED  
*art journal*

24 Projects for Creating  
Your Visual Narrative

*Jeanne Oliver*



NORTH LIGHT BOOKS

CINCINNATI, OHIO

[artistsnetwork.com](http://artistsnetwork.com)



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# Introduction

**The Painted Art Journal** was born from my own discovery about my authentic self and the journey I am on. I believe it is a journey we are all on: to discover who we really are and how to tell that story within our art. I had a deep desire to create art that authentically looked like me and told a story only I could tell.

It was during this time of honoring my gifts and intentional quiet that memories started to flood my mind of Illinois woods, dirt roads, floral wallpaper, my grandparents, cornfields, old farmhouses, sheets drying on the clothesline, silos, small town main street, the home I grew up in, my childhood dreams, the joys and pains from growing up, our brokenness and our joys . . . so many of the images and memories that make up who I am. As these reflections came rushing back, I asked myself why wasn't I sharing the most authentic stories about who I am, where I came from and where I wanted to go? They had been there right in front of me the whole time, and I had ignored their significance and dishonored the importance of the road I had traveled.

I finally saw that my story was good enough. I had all the stories in me to create deeply authentic art. Seeing and honoring our stories sets us free to discover the art we have longed to create. We have the freedom to walk forward and boldly watch our creativity unfold.

The storytelling and techniques in this book are active exercises in truly looking at your life and story, documenting it and what that means for you and your art. It becomes a part of your legacy and what you give to those around you and yourself. As you begin to gather your story, you will also begin to discover your color palette, imagery, mark making and patterns.

If we have our eyes over someone else's shoulders, and we are looking at what they are creating and the story they are telling, we will inevitably get lost. We go off our own path and far away from our own story and storytelling. In the process our authentic art never gets made.

When I started to see my own stories as meaningful and significant, my art began to change. When I could look back and find my own timeline and defining moments, I was able to start digging deeper as an artist and my creating became more of a time of remembering, honoring, forgiving, healing and celebrating. It made me more intentional about where I wanted to go creatively and how I wanted to share my story and my art.

**IF YOU THINK YOUR STORY ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH, YOU ARE MISTAKEN.**

**IF YOU ARE AFRAID TO TELL YOUR STORY, MAYBE IT IS TIME TO FIND FREEDOM.**

**IF YOU HAVE NEVER TOLD YOUR STORY, IT IS TIME.**

**IF YOU WANT TO CREATE AUTHENTIC ART THAT NO ONE ELSE CAN CREATE—LET'S GET STARTED.**

















# Tools and Basic Supplies

**THE MORE YOU CREATE AND GET TO KNOW** how you like to use your tools (and the different ways your tools work on different substrates and mixed with other mediums), the more freedom you will also have in your art and storytelling. Most creatives love to get new supplies and we also want to learn what other artists are using. With any art form we are drawn to the supplies and creativity of those around us whom we admire. I would only caution you to not buy any new supplies mentioned in this book until you first see if something you already have will do the job.

I do not want you to have to run out and buy art supplies that you may not use, nor do I want to confuse you into believing buying art supplies is essential to making art. With most of our projects, if I use a Daniel Smith watercolor stick in Yellow Ochre, you could substitute it with a watercolor pencil, water-soluble crayon or even acrylics in the same color. It is more important for you to use the tools in your color palette and to find the techniques that connect with your style than to worry about using the exact same supplies.

Here are some of the materials you'll encounter frequently in the projects in this book.

### **Acrylic Paints**

Acrylic paints are fast-drying paints made of pigment suspended in acrylic polymer emulsion. They are water-soluble, but become water-resistant when dry. There is a wide range of pricing and quality you have to choose from. The nicer the quality of paint, the higher the pigment. Because we are working in art journals, you can get away with a lower quality of paint.

### **Alcohol Ink, Walnut Ink, Black Calligraphy Ink**

These inks bring pigment and transparency to your work. The dropper will allow you to add mark making in a semicontrolled technique.

### **Carbon Paper**

A thin paper coated on one side with a dark waxy pigment, often containing carbon, that is transferred by the pressure of writing onto the copying surface below.

### **Caran d'Ache Neocolor II Artist Crayons**

These are water-soluble crayons with beautiful pigments. They blend easily and are a portable alternative to watercolors. These can also be made permanent by mixing with clear or white gesso.

### **Charcoal**

If there is a medium that I am deeply in love with, it is charcoal. This is one of my go-to tools, and I use many varieties. Some of my favorite forms are a charcoal pencil (easy to take on-the-go and not messy), willow charcoal for sketching and warming up, and Derwent XL charcoals for the size, colors and ability to help me get out of my comfort zone and create large.

Charcoal is such a versatile medium and can be mixed with water and gesso to bring about different effects.

### **Coffee and Tea**

Listing coffee and tea in the supply section may sound odd, but I have found that both work well for painting and creating layers in my work. It is much more subtle than ink and is readily available. Try different strengths and see how you like it in your work. They are also both wonderful for instantly aging ephemera.

### **Ephemera**

In my art I like to include vintage ephemera from my travels, wallpaper, spines of old books, old tea bags and words cut from magazines and newspapers. I love how the vintage papers bring so much interest and texture into my creating.

### **Gesso**

White, clear and black gesso are all staples on my table. Each one is a primer coat that you can apply to any substrate (any surface you paint on). Gesso prevents your mediums from absorbing into your substrate and becomes the first layer you build upon. It can also be mixed with different water-soluble mediums, and once dry, it becomes permanent. This allows you to build upon your creation without the layers blending. My favorite brand is Liquitex because of the grit, or tooth, of the clear and the fluidity of the white.

### **Glue**

My glue of choice is Liquitex matte medium. It is the only adhesive I use because I have found that it doesn't bubble, and it gives me the best final product. I also use the matte medium to seal collage work and for image transfers. Always use what works for you.

### **Journal**

All of the projects shared in this book will be in an art journal or vintage ledger, but you can also create them on canvas, cardboard, wood or the substrate of your choice. If I'm using a manufactured journal, I like to choose a journal that has mixed-media paper or watercolor paper so the pages can take more medium. Some of my favorite store-bought journals are Dylusions by Ranger or Moleskines. Other choices include the handmade journal in Chapter 6, a vintage ledger or old book such as you'll see in Chapter 5 or another store-bought journal.

### **Laser and Ink-Jet Images**

Using your laser printer, print out images of your family, architecture, imagery from your story and more. We will use these images to do image transfers. If you don't have a laser printer, you can go to a local library to make copies of your images. I don't encourage you to go to a copy shop because their toner will be too high quality and your images will not transfer as well. We will also be photographing our work throughout the book and then printing those photos out on a laser or ink-jet printer and using them in other projects. This is a perfect way to use your art over and over again, and each time yields new results. It also encourages you to use sketches and mark making from previous work in your new work.

### **Linoleum Cutting Tools**

Creating your own stamps is so fun in mixed media, and you can create exactly what your mind imagines. This is a fun and relatively easy way to bring your mark making into your work in a way that can be duplicated again and again. Buy a simple beginning set and you will probably find that you will never need to buy more.



### **Mark-Making Tools**

These are tools that you can use in your art to create marks by scratching into dry or wet mediums. Some of my favorite tools are skewers, a craft knife and sculpting tools.

### **Mechanical Pencil**

I bring in a mechanical pencil for mark making, quick contour sketches and journaling. I prefer a .05mm or .07mm lead size.

### **Natural Fabrics**

I like to have different natural fiber fabrics on hand to include in my mixed media and especially my journal making. Muslin, flour sack or cheesecloth are inexpensive and also wonderful absorbers of coffee, tea and rust dyeing.

### **Paintbrushes**

I have both nice and inexpensive brushes and I am not good at taking care of any of them, so I do not spend a ton on brushes. I use a no. 4 round

long-handled brush the most out of all of my brushes for journal and smaller work. If I use different brushes on a project, I will always share the size.

### **Small Rusty Items**

It is time to go through your junk drawers and garage because those rusty items are going to make the most amazing rust-dyeing tools. After you do some rust dyeing, you will never look at rust the same. Look for nails, screws, odd-shaped items and even broken-off pieces. All of it will be useful and will yield unique results.

### **Soft Pastels**

I prefer soft pastels for easy mark making and blending. They are created with pure powdered pigment and a binder. My favorites are hand rolled and higher quality because they will have more pigment and blend beautifully. I recommend purchasing these individually and not in a set, so you get only the pigments you will use.

### **Stabilo**

The Stabilo All pencil is also another tool that is always with me, and there is rarely a piece that doesn't include this versatile tool. The Stabilo comes in many colors, is water-soluble and can write on almost anything (hence, the name). There are pieces that I have "painted" with only a black Stabilo plus water and have been able to create beautiful values and emotion.

### **Watercolors**

Daniel Smith watercolors are my favorite because of the pigment and quality. But I also use the Daniel Smith watercolor sticks, watercolor markers, watercolor pencils and pan sets. Use what you can afford and slowly add to your collection. I buy only the colors I will use and never buy supplies in a set.





start where you are, use what  
you have, do what you can.

—ARTHUR ASHE





# The Story

**FOR SOME, THE IDEA OF FINDING THEIR STORY** can be daunting, and for others, it is clear and exciting. It is a process, and, like anything else worth your time and energy, it may not come easily. Not everyone wants to tell all of their story and there may be parts you skip over. That is as it should be. There may be others who don't know the full extent of their story because of life experiences, and to those I say: Your story can even be imaginary and what you want it to be. Don't let not having all of the facts or having areas that are too painful keep you from telling your story. Honoring your story doesn't always mean telling it as it was. It is honoring you and your process. Be content with what that looks like.













*I make art to show my soul that I am listening.*

—UNKNOWN

There is not one way to tell your story, and as you begin I believe you will find the process that fits your creativity and personality. I love research, gathering, note taking, collecting and organizing before I begin my storytelling. I pull from many different areas and then keep only what speaks to me the most. I see clearly only when it is all out in front

of me, and then my creativity is set so free that it can be hard to rein it in.

When I first began being intentional about my story, it began with simple note taking and sketches. As I was drawn deeper into the research of my story, I began to pull out not only symbolism, imagery, stories

and photos, but also emotions and thoughts I had long ignored or forgotten. Each piece—joyful, indifferent or painful—became a treasure. Whether or not I chose to share them, I was still changed. I was remembering and honoring that part of who I am and where I came from.

## *There is no one way to tell your story*

*So, how do you begin finding your story and what you want to include in your art? These are some suggestions to get you started:*

- > Find a quiet place and set a timer for fifteen minutes and write as many things as you can remember about your life. Start chronologically if that is your personality or just write in any order.
- > Brainstorm ideas of what you wish you would have done differently in major moments of your life or what you believe were defining moments.
- > What imagery can be represented from your story? Some examples of mine are cornfields, farmhouses, dirt roads, farmers, cows and barns.
- > If your memories are painful, then come up with the places, moments, imagery, architecture that bring you joy and peace now.
- > If you do not have photos of where you grew up or where you are living now, do general Internet searches and begin collecting stories and photos.
- > Join a site like Ancestry.com to trace your genealogy.
- > If you have access to photo albums, go through them and photograph the photos, architecture and imagery you are most drawn to. You can later print these images out to use as reference.
- > Take a road trip by yourself or with a close friend and go in search of your story. Make it an adventure! Record your thoughts, take photos, interview friends and family, videotape the journey.







# Creative Rituals

**HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT HOW CRUCIAL IT IS TO PREPARE** your heart, mind and space for creating? For years I ignored this fact and would find myself disappointed with my creative time for one reason or another. Maybe I had only thirty minutes, or it had been a hard day with the kids, or my creativity was at an all-time low, or a million other reasons why our time creating is not treated as sacred and honored. We are busy, and, if you are anything like me, it can be hard to jump back and forth between the different parts of who you are. There was a time when I would skip creating altogether because I was afraid of the failure that would come out of my efforts or lack of time.

No matter what your spiritual beliefs are, I think we all can agree . . . Art is spiritual. No matter where you believe the creativity comes from, we know that when we give ourselves the time to connect and create that we are connected to something bigger than ourselves.

My time in the studio changed when I acknowledged the creative force (I believe in the Holy Spirit) and made room. I come into my space and slow down. I put on music that helps me

to slow down. I change the scent of the space to slow down. I stretch and breathe and follow a ritual that reminds my heart and mind that I have come to create. I encourage you to develop a creative ritual that lets your spirit know you have come to create. This is no different than stretching before an athletic event or warming up your fingers before a piano competition. It is being intentional with yourself and honoring the time you are about to give . . . no matter the results.

## Spark an Idea

*I encourage you to develop a creative ritual that lets your spirit know you have come to create.*

## Start a Creative Ritual

*Here are some examples of ways you can start your own creative ritual:*

- > Music
- > Candles or essential oils
- > Notice how you breathe and take deep breaths.
- > Speak out loud the work you want to produce that day.
- > Meditate or pray.
- > Organize your space as you warm yourself up to create.
- > Review some of the printable art prompts I have included in the back of the book.
- > Begin practicing to warm up with one of the audio art prompts I have included in the links at the back of the book.
- > Your ritual can also be jumping jacks and loud music! Whatever connects you with your creative force and reminds your heart, mind and spirit that you are serious about this thing called your creativity!













# Gathering Your Story Elements

**EACH OF OUR STORIES IS SO DIFFERENT, LOVELY AND BROKEN IN ITS OWN WAY.**

Being an artist and a very visual person, I enjoy the act of gathering. I like to collect, sort and curate the beautiful things around me. I like to be intentional. It helps me see clearly. Over the years I have found that by gathering and then intentionally sifting through the bits that I have collected that I have come to understand myself better, the art I want to make, the palette that authentically calls to me and even the lines and designs that are waiting for me to reach out and create.

The act of gathering and creating a storyboard will help you narrow down what is really calling to you. As you begin this journey to discover your stories, I believe you will be surprised with all the beautiful and broken parts that make up your story that you may not regularly consider. This exercise gives you the opportunity to pull together the story that is already all around you . . . you just need to see it.

## PROJECT 1

# Collecting Your Story

Your board will not look like anyone else's, and it is a reflection of whatever you choose to focus on. Your storyboard can be general and include a little bit of everything, like mine, or you can make it as specific as you wish. As you gather for your storyboard, remember: This is just for you.



### GATHER THIS

– As you begin to gather items for your own storyboard, here are a few suggestions to get you started: colors, textures, images, art, quotes, magazine pages, objects, travel, architecture, history, family, vintage ephemera, fabrics and online searches regarding people or places.



**1** Use whatever space and tools you have on hand to display your board. This will be based upon whether you create a large storyboard or one in your art journal, on cardboard or on corkboard. There comes a time when you need to stop collecting and begin creating. Just like any form of supplies it can become a procrastinating tool if we aren't honoring of the process.

I find the gathering part of this exercise extremely relaxing and meditative, and it is fun to bring together all of these collections.

*The real voyage of discovery  
consists not in seeking new landscapes  
but in having new eyes.*

– MARCEL PROUST





## PROJECT 2

# Displaying Your Story

Find a place where you can display your storyboard whether it is a large wall or an art journal. Enjoy the process of choosing from what you have gathered and seeing your story come to life before you. This exercise can be one of the most beautiful ways to honor your research about your history, present and future. I found it became the archaeology of me, and it has been one of the most art-changing experiences of my creative life.



### WHAT YOU NEED

- Bulletin board (or wall)
- Gathered storyboard elements
- Paperclips
- Stapler
- Tape: washi, artist or masking
- Thumbtacks



**1** The first step in creating your storyboard is deciding on a location. I chose a wall in my studio because I intend to keep it up for ongoing inspiration. Artist's tape and thumbtacks work well for displaying the papers and images you're going to pull together. Decide whether you'll use an existing wall or a bulletin board. If you are limited by space, use cardboard or your journal.



**2** Sort through what you've gathered, selecting images that speak to you most, and begin arranging them as you feel inspired. There were many images and objects I eventually did not include, yet still, when I look over my storyboard, I see bits of my story throughout. Play around with your elements and the arrangement until it feels good to you and reflects your own story.



# What does your storyboard show you?

- > What is your color palette?
- > What images are you most drawn to?
- > Is there something in your past or present that you have never considered painting, sketching or incorporating into your art?
- > What mark making can be found?
- > Could there be new inspiration for your art that is right in front of you?



Here I'm able to see my love of type, vintage ephemera, travel, family, portraits, faith, mark making and the simple knowledge that sometimes I like things just because they are pretty. What do you see when you look at your board? Does anything surprise you?



When you feel stuck in your art, turn first to your storyboard and see if your creative block vanishes. You may be like me and decide to keep your storyboard up in your creative space long after the projects in this book are complete, so you can keep adding new inspiration to it and rearranging it when you feel it's necessary.



Go and make interesting mistakes, make amazing mistakes, make glorious and fantastic mistakes. Break rules. Leave the world more interesting for your being here. Make. Bad. Art.