

## *Exploring Creative Self-Expression Through Mindful Collage*

### ***Exploring Creative Self-Expression Through Mindful Collage***

Join in a communal healing workshop with the purpose of introducing mindfulness practice through collage art as a method of awareness, self-expression, and connection with others through shared artmaking. We will engage together in an uplifting space to check-in with ourselves, release inner stress, and create unique artworks to express and integrate our emotions, thoughts, and senses in the present moment. We will journal and reflect on our experiences through the visual language of collage and foster acceptance, empathy, and synchronicity through sharing pieces of ourselves with others as in the art of expressionistic collage.

### ***About the Artist Instructor:***

Laura Becker is an artist, writer, and mental health advocate who integrates mindfulness into her personal journey and creative work across the disciplines of visual art and design, photography, music, writing, podcasting, and more. She has discovered and practiced mindfulness and related healing processes throughout her life and understands the positive influence that healthy awareness and authentic self-expression have within one's psyche, growth, and artwork. She is completing her BA thesis in Studio Art with a focus on Community Art and Art Education at The Peck School of the Arts, UW-Milwaukee, with this workshop the capstone project for her senior semester. Her work and philosophies can be found on her artist website [funkgod.com](http://funkgod.com)

### **Elevator Pitch:**

*Exploring Creative Self Expression Through Mindful Collage* will be a communal healing workshop with the purpose of introducing mindfulness practice through collage art as a method of awareness, self-expression, and connection with others through shared artmaking. The workshop will be an uplifting space for people to release inner stress, introduce healing practices, connect empathetically with others over shared experiences, and create unique artwork and self-reflection materials participants can take home with them to bring mindful awareness and creativity into their lives.

### **Intention and Purpose:**

My intention is to introduce mindful expression through collage art as a practice of awareness, self-expression, and communal healing, inspiring people to engage more deeply with mindfulness, art, or both as a tool for healing in their lives going forward.

This workshop will be a blend of art therapy, a support group, and a positive community gathering. The purpose is to provide a space to help people come together out of loneliness or isolation and be able to learn about mindfulness practice while exploring their inner self through expressionistic collage and mixed media artmaking alongside others.

It will be led by myself as I teach people a little about my background struggles with various emotional, psychological, and social issues, developing trust and rapport with them through my personal vulnerability so they feel more comfortable sharing their own within the group.

I will share some psychological information about the practice of mindfulness and how it can help calm, soothe, and heal us through life's issues. I will then relate it to the practice of mindful artmaking and how mindfulness and art can help us understand our experiences and create new pathways of meaning for them going forward.

The workshop is accessible, openhearted, healing, and cooperative. It eases loneliness, isolation, rumination, self-doubt, and encourages connection to and appreciation of self, others, and mindfulness healing concepts.

## **Background and Framework**

### *On Community:*

The **community setting** functions as a sacred, non-judgmental venue which may be comforting to those in distress or have limited access to psychological resources who nonetheless need support, and may benefit from an empathetic experience internally, and interpersonally.

It appeals to local community members interested in learning about mindful artmaking, or who would enjoy having a genuine, face to face connection with other people through a **shared creative experience**, something many have missed during social distancing and beyond.

Although this is a mindful and personal activity where much of the practice will be internal, I want to **encourage group members to speak about their process with others** as they engage in the collage making. This will guide in personal exploration of materials and ideas, but also promote vulnerable sharing of self, struggles, empathy, love, and inspiration with the rest of the group to foster community.

### *On Mindfulness:*

**Art is a mindful and healing practice on its own merit** as the nature of creating something from chaos has inherent meaning that can be infinitely applied in expansive ways. Mindful art acknowledges chaos, uncertainty, imperfection, and distress without placing a value judgement

on it. This is known in psychology as **radical acceptance**. Awareness and belonging in the present moment allow for a deep and moving experience of life, a counter to avoidance, distraction, anxiety, or the clutter of past pain or future anxiety. Mindfulness exists in what is happening now within the body, mind, and soul from moment to moment.

**Awareness and non-judgment** of the present state of existence allows for clarity of the mind and relaxation of the body. Mindfulness is the first step toward radical acceptance. Adding **gratitude and appreciation** for the continual absurdity and balancing forces of life can increase wellbeing and decrease distress.

**Combining** the **radical empathy** of a vulnerable communal space, the **radical acceptance of mindful awareness**, and the **expressionistic creative energy of collage**, we create a state of energy, ideas, emotions, and self to flow collectively through an artistic medium that can capture the momentary and eternal self in a beautiful and contemplative way.

### *On Collage*

The art of expressionistic collage allows us to **explore our complex selves** through the imagery, shapes, cuts, composition, text, and ideas that we encode both intentionally and subconsciously. It is the perfect artistic medium for expression because much like life we take bits and pieces from everything around us and create uniquely novel experiences and meaning which in turn creates meaningful experiences with others and the world around us. Existence is a **continuous process of creation and destruction**, and every day we are either creating or destroying ourselves or others. We pick everything apart to analyze it and construct new ideas, both psychologically and physically.

**The art of cutting through images to cobble and paste together a new, expanded vista of life is the perfect metaphor for the human condition.**

The characteristic messiness, and either imperfection or precision of collage, is a channel for **symbolic processing** of suffering and other concepts. I want to explore this idea as well as basic concepts of the subconscious, symbolism, and **how we perceive ourselves**, often instinctually placing negative and destructive meaning onto complex and nuanced issues, which may potentially have other meaning that we are apprehensive to explore.

### **Methods and Structure**

A unique aspect of this workshop will be the structure and flow encouraging a meditational atmosphere, similar to a support group session. I will provide **self-check in worksheets** which accompany the activities at the start and end of the gathering.

The self-check in worksheet will give members a private moment to be honest with themselves about their present moment and become more grounded within their body if they are feeling anxiety about the social interaction and activity. This should involve **a few deep breaths**,

answering questions about emotional and mental state, and a short free-writing section where **members contemplate why they are at the workshop** and what, if any, **intention they have for the experience**.

(This exercise is to provide order, focus on the present task, bring awareness to body and sensation, encourage earnest reflection, and promote a deeper engagement with the experience before the chaos of collaging begins.)

At the end, I will give members a similar self-check in sheet and end with the breathing to relax and ground once again, **repeating the free writing section for reflection** on the experience while still in the mindful flow state from the collaging.

(This exercise is to promote journaling as a practice for useful thinking and reflection, and to enrich the experience further before members leave the setting.)

Finally, I will **provide a take-home self-check sheet** in to contemplate and fill out when members have gone back to their regular routines. This is **crucial to the experience** because often we become distracted or stressed with other life things and forget to be mindful. The take home sheet will be **a reminder** that it's okay to take a break, breathe, and ground in the present.

Members will be encouraged to consider the experience by **looking at their collage** and **seeing how it speaks to them after time has passed**. This is to encourage **reengagement** with the original flow state, experiences they were processing within the collage visually and symbolically, and create new neural pathways for the habits of journaling on emotions, analyzing art (their visual language) and expressing themselves with loving-kindness and awareness.

Ideally, this will inspire members to practice mindfulness as a tool in their lives, attend another similar experience of supportive group healing, or learn something new about themselves which they were not previously aware of or able to accept.

If they do not take away the start of a mindfulness habit, they may instead takeaway other healing strategies like journaling, collaging, other creative practice, grounding, or at least a little information about radical acceptance or the importance of holistic awareness and focus on the present moment. If none of that is achieved, the members should still enjoy a meaningful social and creative activity that has a positive memory and/or work of their own art to take with them.

*\*I will likely create a different lesson plan for 0-11, 12-17, and 18+*

**Setting:**

A warm and welcoming community-based room with tables so people can sit closely to each other and work on their collages and talk. *Perhaps Arts at Large.*

**Supplies:**

- Magazines, books, other collage materials
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Markers, sharpies
- Glitter
- Other mixed media materials
- Railroad board for backing 12 x 18 or 9 x 12 \*6 ply
- Self-Check in sheet printouts

**Staff:**

- Laura to speak and run the group.
- Another 1 or 2 people to welcome members into the space and assist.
- 1 person to photograph and video tape the events.

**Members:**

TBD

**Workshop Schedule Outline (Adult):**

5 minutes for members to fill out self-check in worksheet #1

15 minutes for Laura to explain mindfulness, psychological concepts, and introduce activity

1 minute meditation

5 extra minutes for Laura to specifically discuss intentions for collage process and have members start gathering materials.

1 hour for actual collage process.

(20-25 minutes spent browsing materials, picking and cutting out imagery)

(20-25 minutes creating and gluing composition)

(10-20 minutes making final glue decisions and adding some extra jazz)

If people finish early, they can make another one

(Depending on group size) 10-15 minutes for everyone to go around and speak a little about their piece with the group.)

5 minutes to fill out Self-Check in worksheet #2

5 minutes for clean-up

5 minutes for Laura to explain the take-home worksheet

1 minute meditation

Total Running Time: About 2 Hours, cushion 1:50-2:15 hours