



THE SKETCHBOOK CHALLENGE

BEGINS

And now it's time to open your sketchbook and jump in, but before you do I want you to keep these three rules in mind:

- 1 The only right way to keep a sketchbook is whatever way works for you. Keeping a sketchbook is not about creating a book of perfect pages. It's about exploring new themes and experimenting with new tools or working with your favorites.
- 2 We all have different skill sets and styles, and it doesn't matter what yours is. It's not about making your sketchbook look like the ones in this book or anyone else's.
- 3 And this is the most important rule: Have fun with it!



CIRCLES

At first glance the word circles may seem like too ordinary a word to inspire a piece of artwork, but once you start to explore it, you'll find that it's rich with possibilities. Think of all the instances during your day that you encounter the circle shape (coins, plates, fruits, the sun and moon, etc.) or consider the ethereal nature of the circle with regard to the circle of life, time, and orbiting planets. You'll find that once you start looking for the circle shape it will start popping up everywhere.



Circles sketchbook pages by Carol Sloan



Cover of Circles art book



Fanned pages of Circles art book



Spine of Circles art book by Carol Sloan (6" x 4" [15 cm x 10 cm]), inspired by her sketchbook pages (opposite page)

Artist: CAROL SLOAN

Carol is a mixed-media fiber artist who tends to include a lot of experimental techniques in all her work. In her circles sketchbook, Carol uses a mix of traditional drawing and painting materials, as well as paper and fabric scraps, then translates her sketches into an embellished art book.

Techniques Used: PEN & INK, COLLAGE, DIGITAL PRINTING

My first thought about this assignment was "Great! I draw circles all the time! This will be easy for me to do." But there was more to the theme than just drawing circles. It made me think about how circular things surround us, how events in our lives run in a circular manner, how Mother Earth is circular. The sun. The moon. The seasons. Our lives seem to be surrounded by circles. The hardest part for me was narrowing down all of my ideas!

I've been making my own books lately, so I chose to make a special one for this theme. The cover has a print of a pen and ink drawing that I did of poppy seed-head shapes, circular shapes surrounded by more circular shapes in the guise of seedpods. I used tiny circles to detail and shade areas of the drawing. I used acrylic paint washes, made marks with stamps/masks/household items, ink pads, and collage elements, and added various scraps of paper and fabric to fill the sketchbook. Then I spent some time letting the pages "talk" to me. I tried to remain open-minded about the potential on each separate page instead of trying to force my own will on the page.

I was sitting outside sketching on a hot spring day. The sun was beating down on me; everything looked rather fuzzy, like one of those old Western movies where everything is blurry. I wanted to re-create this feeling in my sketchbook. I had already done some background painting on the pages, just waiting for the right subject to come along. I flipped through the pages until I found the perfect one. It was pink and yellow with areas of white and tan to show the spots (circles) that I kept seeing while I was outside. I drew the broken outline of the sun, trying to capture the feeling of the day's sweltering heat. Looking at the finished page, I realized that it would be perfect for the cover of a book (page 35, top left). It was a simple process to use the painted page at that point. I scanned it into the computer then printed it out on a heavy Exact vellum bristol paper. I applied a layer of workable fixative after the page dried. This kept the ink from smearing when I coated it with Golden soft gel medium (this seals the surface and makes the cover more durable). I used a smaller section of the scan for the back of the book. This is a great way to utilize your artwork in more than one place.



Cover of Carol's circles sketchbook



Circles sketchbook pages by Carol Sloan



DWELLINGS

The first thing that comes to mind when you think of a dwelling is the house you live in, but stop a minute and think about some other types of dwellings: birds live in a nest, chipmunks in a hollowed-out tree, and bees in a hive. What about the dreams that dwell in your heart or the inventions that dwell in your imagination?

Artist: **JAMIE FINGAL**

Jamie Fingal is a mixed-media artist whose main medium is contemporary quilts, which have been juried into international quilt exhibitions and featured in many books. Her love of vibrant colors and whimsical, abstract style comes through loud and clear in her work.

Techniques Used: LINE DRAWING, WATERCOLOR, STENCILING, RUBBER STAMPING, COLLAGE

I already have a passion for making quilts with house designs, so drawing and painting on watercolor paper just seemed like another approach to explore this theme. I sketched out the possible construction for my Dwellings accordion book. Trying to figure out the size and how many paintings I would need was the real issue. I have found in working on projects such as these that it is best to design more than you need, because you draw deeper into your imagination with each piece.

I sketched out each house with pencil, one per panel, then painted each one with watercolor paint. After the paint dried, I outlined and drew in details

with a black Micron pen. I found it interesting that some of the designs I used were the same designs I use in free-motion machine quilting.

The accordion book is made with watercolor paper, fused fabrics, and a household screen. I used my sewing machine to free-motion zigzag them together. The screen between the pages acts as a flexible section that allows each panel to bend and fold, forward and backward. Then I made a three-dimensional house out of fabric with a zipper on the side (page 44, bottom) that the Design House book fits into. It can stand up by itself with the book inside. A fun little design element.



Dwellings accordion book by Jamie Fingal (each panel 6" x 9" [15cm x 23cm])

Artist: **DIANA TROUT**

Diana Trout is a painter, book artist, and teacher. Her sketchbook pages are bursting with color and imagery, and houses make a frequent appearance in her work. She loves to sit with a pile of papers—bought, found, and her own painted ones—in front of her sewing machine, stitching them together to form larger pieces to use in her work.

Techniques Used: WATERCOLOR, PEN & PENCIL, CRAYON, STITCHING

I've been working with house imagery for some years now in my NorthEast Kingdom series. I like to imagine which of my citizens would live in each little house. What do they think and feel? Is it an elderly couple, a bird family? An eccentric artist? In my mind, I populate the house as I am working on it. What are the furnishings like? I imagine many woven fabrics and tattered and beautifully patched textiles. There are deep chairs and a teapot always on the go. Sometimes, there is a sadness in the house and I'm willing to investigate that as well. I really see these little houses as vessels, vessels that hold people.

When working on a new body of artwork, my process is to work in a journal and on any paper that is handy. Sometimes, I'll want to try out different media or work on sketches in a larger format and so will choose a paper accordingly: watercolor, stitched and built paper, found papers, charcoal, fabric. My usual sketching tools are watercolor, pen, pencil, gesso, Caran d'Ache water-soluble crayons, and stitch. Mostly, I sketch at first to work out compositions and to remind myself to play with new colors. This is not a linear process for me. I start off with a

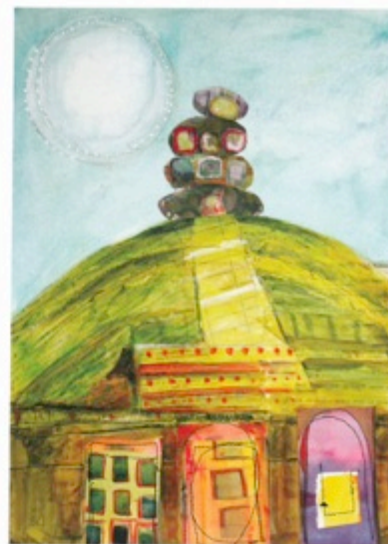
few compositional sketches and then move to preparing my paper bases. Then I may take a couple of hours to sketch again, perhaps exploring color, and then go back to the artwork. I'm moving back and forth continually while building the final artworks.

One of my goals is pushing further with "building" paper (my word for patching and layering smaller pieces of paper into a larger one). So, that was the most important technique in creating the piece *Moon in Day* (opposite, bottom left); gluing, weaving, stitching, patching, piecing, and then repeating the process. When I began experimentations with building paper foundations, there were things that just didn't work. Failed attempts get put back into the mix and are simply part of learning.

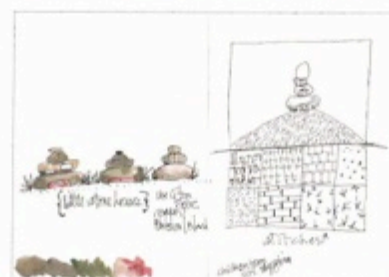
I'm constantly learning about my process. I believe that your own personal process is revealed as you work over the years and it varies hugely from person to person. So it is best to not impose a system upon yourself. It is valuable to understand and honor your process to facilitate a free flow. Working along organically and always doing the next thing that occurs to me is the keystone of my process.



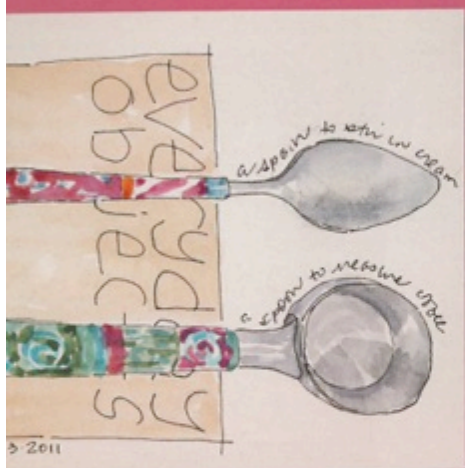
Dwellings sketchbook portfolio and pages by Diana Trout



Moon in Day by Diana Trout (11" x 15" (28cm x 38cm))



Dwellings sketchbook pages by Diana Trout (above and top)



EVERYDAY OBJECTS

Sometimes a theme as generic as Everyday Objects can be overwhelming. There are so many everyday objects, it may be hard to know where to start. If this happens to you, try breaking down the theme into smaller segments. For instance, the everyday objects in your purse, pocket, bathroom cabinet, or kitchen utensil drawer. What's in your refrigerator or freezer or even the glove compartment of your car?

Artist: **JANE LAFAZIO**

A mixed-media-artist working in paper and cloth, Jane is inspired by the symbols within traditional folk arts as well as the icons of Mexico and Asia. She loves the thrill of discovering a new art technique, unusual color scheme, or fabulous piece of fabric.

Techniques Used: **WATERCOLOR, PEN & INK, DIGITAL PRINTING, THREAD SKETCHING**



Watercolor sketches by Jane LaFazio (above and opposite page)

I love the theme of Everyday Objects. I often draw in my journal at home, so I had all the subject matter on hand. I could have kept up with this series for a long time! I'm looking at everything in my house differently now, and with new appreciation of the things I use on a daily basis.

After I'd done about five pages, I started thinking about where I'd go next. I knew I wanted the piece to be sewn, so I started imagining ways to transfer the images to cloth. I decided to free-motion stitch the images on a machine using black thread to mimic the pen lines in my original drawings. I had been collecting old linens and thought they would be a good match with my household item theme.

I scanned my images and printed them onto deli wrap (butcher paper). I pinned the deli wrap on the back of the quilt (fabric and batting) and machine stitched the drawing from the back. Then I turned the quilt over and stitched again to get that hand-drawn line.



I use a method that seems to work for me, which is creating one piece at a time, without a plan for the final composition. I created pieces as I did a new drawing. I added paper to some, using a scrap of something that was meaningful to the drawing, like the bit of dress pattern for the pincushion and the calendar page for the clock.

Once I had the pieces, I began to arrange them in a pleasing composition. I then hand stitched each piece to a large piece of wool felt, adding additional hand stitching as I went. I really enjoyed working with such personal items, each of which carries special meaning for me.





MESSAGES

Every day we're bombarded with messages, from the advertisements on television and in newspapers and magazines to emails and texts from friends and family. Some are obvious, like the ones you see on the printed page, and others are subtler, such as a loved one reaching out a helping hand or a friend lending a sympathetic ear.

Artist: **KIM RAE NUGENT**

Kim Rae Nugent is a mixed-media artist who enjoys the creative challenge of working in various mediums. Nature is often portrayed in her artwork and birds are a favorite subject.

Techniques Used: **COLLAGE, COLORED PENCIL, ASSEMBLAGE**

This was a difficult theme for me as nothing visual came immediately to mind. After sitting with the theme for a while I decided the best way to approach it was to simply begin. I had some precut collage letters from magazines, so I started with them, spelling out the word messages. I hoped to develop a color theme from the letters and that they would influence a design.

On my second sketchbook page I drew a picture of my phone and colored it in with colored pencils, then let it sit for a day. The next day, the black and silver colors seemed cold and unwelcoming and I wasn't attracted to the modern look, so I painted a gold wash on the page, painting around the image of a bird. The bird is asking, "Can you tell me what my artwork should be for the theme Messages?" My third sketchbook page was inspired by the letter E in the collaged word messages. I liked the graphic boldness and colors of the letter. I also like to write down what I am thinking of my art as I create it.

After grocery shopping I stopped at the coffee shop to work on this challenge. Sometimes a new environment helps the creative process. I ripped apart the

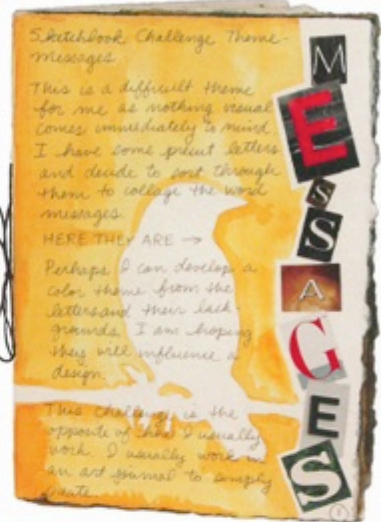
letters on the bottom of a paper bag, rearranging them until a message appeared. The remaining letters were later glued on other pages and in a pile at the bottom of the fourth sketchbook page.

I began the fifth page by tracing around an owl I had previously created. (I don't usually work my pages in the order that they appear in my journal; instead I jump around, repurposing art that I already have in my sketchbooks to save myself steps in the creative process.) I then painted a wash of phthalo blue and burnt umber around the owl. The owl was such a stark white in comparison to the background. A piece of old paper on my desk caught my eye, and I searched for more vintage collage papers in my stash. Some of them had text printed on them and if I incorporated them into the owl collage, these could form the "messages." Pleased with the owl, I wanted to explore this technique further trying different, lighter background colors and other bird species. These became my sixth and seventh pages.

For me, an art journal's primary purpose is to be a place to simply create without thought of it inspiring a finished piece of art (page 72). At times what



Messages sketchbook pages by Kim Rae Nugent



I have created in my journal has led to creating a finished project, it just isn't planned. In this case, it took awhile before I was able to attach anything visual to the theme, but I got past it by just working in the sketchbook. Taking a portion of the idea I liked on one page and further developing it on another page helped me proceed.



PATTERNS AND GRIDS

Patterns and grids are everywhere and, once you start looking, you'll notice them popping up all over the place. You might see them in grocery store aisles with all those neat rows of cereal boxes and jars of sauce, or perhaps it is the pattern sunlight makes on the ground as it streams between the leaves of a tree that catches your eye. Maybe it is even the way the pavers are laid in the brick walkway in front of your door.

Artist: JANE DAVIES

Jane Davies is a full-time artist working in collage, painting, mixed media, and encaustics. She offers workshops at her studio and nationwide, focusing on helping people find a personal and playful approach to creating.

Techniques Used: COLLAGE, STENCILING, HAND-CARVED STAMPS

Patterns and grids are my elements, which is why I chose to work on this theme. Pattern, in particular, is a thread that has run through much of my work; from the time I was a potter creating patterns on ceramic pieces, through designing fabrics, scrapbook papers, and other colorful manufactured products, to using the repeated motif in my collage-paintings, pattern has been one of my go-to modes of expression.

I often use the grid as a compositional starting point. Some of my pieces are more obviously grid-based than others when they are finished, but I seem to think visually in terms of grids. I consider it a fundamental organizing principle, and I use it as the basis for teaching the elements of composition before moving on to more free-form formats.

In my sketchbook I feel free to pose visual questions, to set up a problem to solve, and to throw myself deliberately off balance. Since this theme was familiar territory, I used the sketchbook to try new combinations of materials and colors that are not on my palette. I used my usual set of techniques: acrylic paint applied with various tools



Patterns and Grids sketchbook by Jane Davies

such as my hands, found objects and brushes, and collage applied with matte medium. And I used some of my own "scribble-painted" papers, which incorporate lots of different paint application techniques, including printing with textures, scraping paint with a credit card, spritzing water and then blotting it, spattering, stamping, and many others.

I can rarely bring myself to work on a theme suggested by another person. However, since the



Patterns and Grids sketchbook pages by Jane Davies

Technique Spotlight: HAND-CARVED STAMPS

The advantage of carving your own stamps rather than using purchased ones is that it makes whatever you use them on unique and truly your own work of art. I like to carve on the Blick E-Z-Cut printing blocks from Dick Blick because their surface is soft and easy to carve. Rubber erasers are another option for carving stamps. They're small but they work well for simple designs. You can carve a whole set of coordinating stamps in no time at all.

I use the Speedball brand linoleum cutters. They feel good in my hand and are relatively inexpensive to start off with. Use care when handling these tools, though, because they are very sharp. Always be aware of where the hand that is not holding the tool is and always use a pushing motion and not a pulling motion when carving.

To create a stamp from an image in your sketchbook, trace the image onto a piece of paper using a pencil and then place the tracing with the pencil side against the carving block. Burnish it with the back of a spoon and then lift back the paper to reveal your design on the block.

Use the carving tools to cut around the design.

Leave some of the block surface beyond the edge of your design to create a more stable stamp. Just make sure that the extra block material is below the actual carved surface of the stamp so it won't be inked when it comes time to use your stamp.

Ink up your stamp using a stamp pad or use a foam brush or a brayer to apply paint to your stamp and make a test print before using it on your project. A test print allows you to check to make sure that there is no excess stamp material that needs to be cut away and that you're not adding too much or too little paint to your stamp.



Speedball cutters



Place the tracing on the carving surface and burnish it with the back of a spoon.



The design transferred to the carving surface



Carve the design.



Ink up your stamp using an ink pad, foam brush, or brayer.



The test print



Hand-carved printing blocks and erasers

Stamp-Carving Tips

It takes a bit of practice to get the feel for how hard you need to push the carving blade into the block as well as for the angle and the speed to use, so until you get comfortable with the tools, keep your stamps small and simple.

Take it slow! Don't try to carve too fast or you may find yourself carving off more of the block material than you intended.

When inking your stamp with an ink pad, place the stamp on your table image side up and then tap the pad against the stamp.

Always clean the extra paint off your stamps before it dries or it may clog up your design and make it hard to get a clean print the next time you use it. Baby wipes work great for cleaning ink and paint off stamps.

Store your hand-carved stamps flat with pieces of waxed paper between them so they don't stick to one another.