

Reflective Artmaking

Six art activities designed
to support your wellbeing

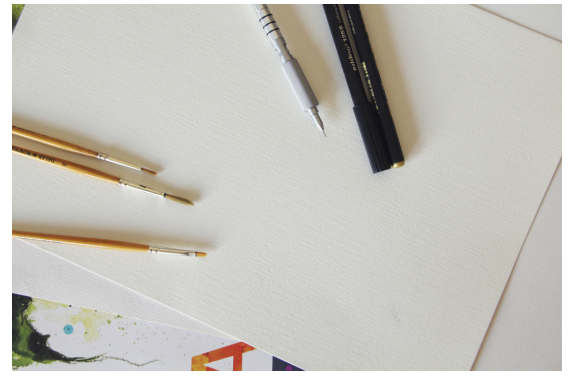


Introduction

University can be a stressful experience, as well as being fun and exciting. The Student Wellbeing Service supports students with their mental and emotional wellbeing. As part of our service we offer therapeutic art groups and activities as well as individual art psychotherapy.

Art can help boost our confidence and make us feel more engaged and resilient. It can also help alleviate anxiety, depression and stress and can support us to become more self-aware.

In this booklet you will be guided through six art activities devised to help you express your feelings and to reflect upon your personal wellbeing. These can be done by yourself at home with only minimal art materials. You do not need to be 'good' at art, enjoy the process without judging your artistic ability, the process of artmaking is what is key. **Create, express and grow.**



Resilience

Activity 1 - Kintsugi Bowl Artwork



1



2

What you'll need:

- *Paper or card, or use a page in a sketchbook or notebook. If you do not have paper available, card from recycled items such as old cereal boxes work well and reusing is kinder to the environment.*
- *Drawing materials and/or paint, whatever you have available, even a basic biro and some highlighters would work well.*

Kintsugi (golden joinery) is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. As a philosophy, it treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise. Use this as a metaphor for life and resilience by drawing your own bowl which will help you explore your past resilience.



Reflecting on our past experiences with adversity can help us appreciate the resilience skills we already possess. Recall a difficult time, or a particular challenge in your life that you struggled with. This may have been an isolated or ongoing event. Use a sheet of paper/card and the art materials you have available to draw your personal bowl, using Kintsugi as inspiration. Whilst art-making you may wish to reflect upon ...

- *What was the most difficult aspect of that situation?*
- *How did you cope at the time? Or 'how did you glue back the pieces'*
- *How did you overcome the situation and emerge successfully on the other side? Or 'what did you use to glue back the pieces' and what 'did the end result look like?'*

Exploring past resilience helps us to assess our approach to overcoming past setbacks and challenges, so that we can identify strategies and strengths to draw upon in the future. By encouraging reflection and self-awareness, it's also a useful way to recognize those qualities, approaches, and skills that you'd like to develop further. Remember that you will have shown resilience many times previously, and already have the skills to handle life's challenges when they arise.

Please see example artworks made by students and staff in images 1, 2 & 3. You'll see each person has worked differently, using different materials, colours and styles. In image 2. the picture has been made using a print-out image of a bowl, this may be helpful if you are a little nervous to draw your own picture.



Increasing Positive Emotions

Activity 2 - Positivity Portfolio



4



5

What you'll need:

- *Envelope, no smaller than A5. This could be new or re-use and old envelope*
- *Glue stick*
- *Scissors*
- *Colouring materials e.g. crayons, gel pens, pastels*
- *Collected personal items such as song lyrics, photos, gifts, letters, ephemera*

Barbara Fredrickson, a leading researcher in positive emotions, recommends creating a range of physical portfolios of objects and mementos to evoke particular positive emotions such as pride, joy and amusement.

Decorate an envelope with images and drawings to depict memories, experiences, people and objects which have positive associations for you. You could cut out images from magazines, use craft items, photographs and draw pictures and glue onto the outside of the envelope to create a colourful mini portfolio. Enjoy the process of gathering these images, spend time considering what is important to you and savour the emotions they evoke whilst you create.

Once the envelope / mini portfolio is completely dry you can gather items such as personal letters, items from nature, ephemera, little notes, photos, keepsakes etc. to store safely inside.



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The example shown in images 4, 5 & 6 was made by the Student Wellbeing Service's Art Therapist. They have covered the envelope with a combination of their drawings and photocopies of personal photographs. Colour has been added on top with watercolour paint and gel pens. They have selected images to represent home, local landscape, nature, a family pet, flowers received as a gift by a child, a lighthouse with links to their family and a photo of a fox who visited their garden. Inside they have included items to represent happy times such as Christmas, things to symbolise family, jewellery, a small stone collected during a visit to the beach and cards with inspirational words.

What will you include? You can continue to gather and add items over time, or how about making different portfolios for different positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, pride or hope. You may like to take a photo of your portfolio on your phone so that you can look at it when you do not have the original with you.

Look at your portfolio when you need a boost, and enjoy the positive emotions it evokes.

Linking the conscious and unconscious

Activity 3 – Neurographic Art

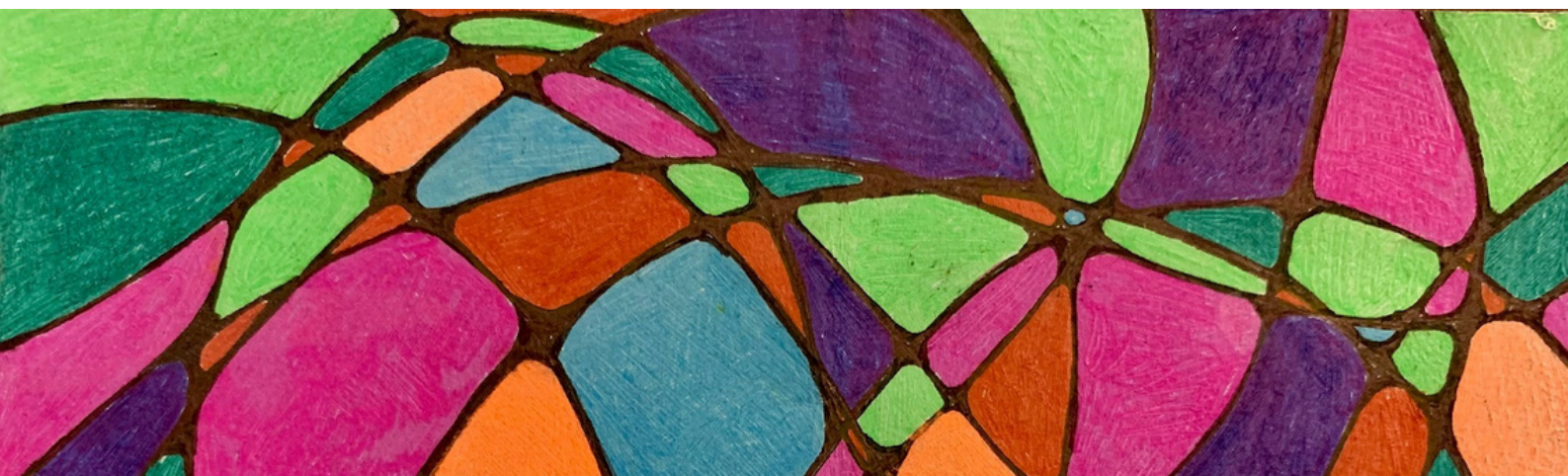
What you'll need:

- *Paper or card, again use recycled material if you like.*
- *Colouring materials such as coloured pencils, pastels, felt tips or paint.*
- *Black biro, pen or permanent marker. Make sure your pen is a permanent marker if you decide to use wet art materials to add colour to prevent smudging.*

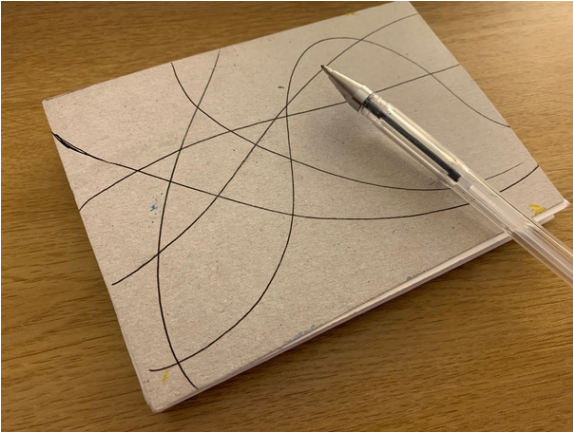
Neurographic art, also known as Neurographica, was devised by Dr. Pavel Piscev in 2014 and emulates the process of neuron connections in the brain. The technique invites us to draw freeform lines on paper, called neurolines. As the lines travel across the page, it encourages us to relax and can act as a form of meditation as the pen creates line and shape.

This simple technique creates a link between conscious and unconscious. It is believed that the brain cells called neurons become activated and bring forth awareness and mindfulness. This awareness and mindfulness can turn stress into calm. Neurographic art has been used as a healing aid for everything from stress relief, anxiety, chronic pain, and grief among others.

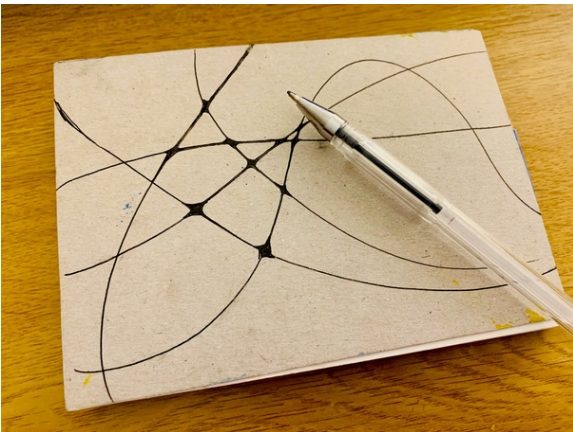
Before you start your own neurographic drawing take a moment to think of an issue of concern, a question or a challenge you are facing, focus on this whilst you draw.



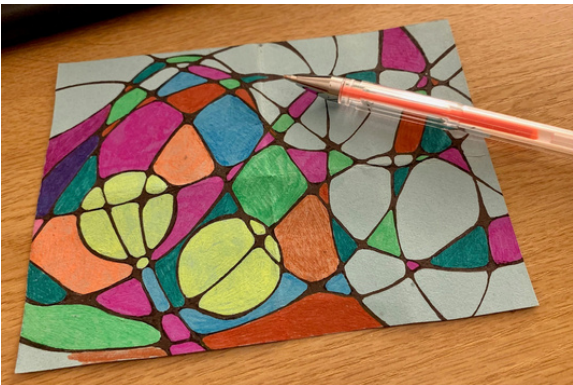
Follow the steps described on the following page to make your own neurographic artwork...



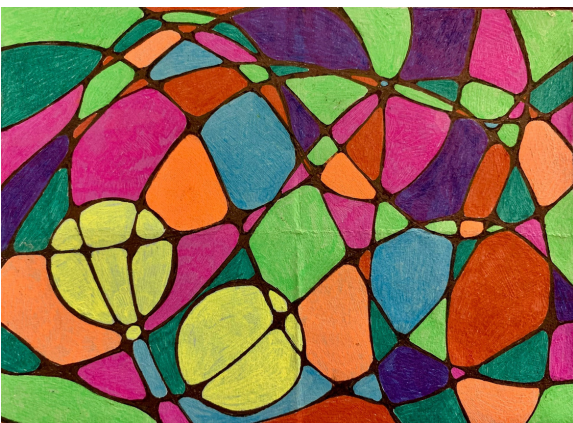
Step 1: Using a black pen draw free form lines across your paper or card. Do this quite quickly, spend no more than a minute doing this. Make sure that your lines reach the side of the paper or card.



Step 2: Continue working with your black pen. At each section where a line crosses another draw a curved area at each intersection as shown. This is to symbolise neuron connections.



Step 3: Use coloured art supplies to fill in the empty spaces in-between the lines. You can draw around a circle or other shape to add more dimension to the artwork.



Step 4: Cover the whole page with colours to complete the artwork then reflect upon the following...

- *Was there a sense of calm as you created your artwork?*
- *What emotion or feeling are you experiencing now?*
- *Did you gain clarity regarding your concern, question or challenge?*

Perseverance and Growth

Activity 4 - Paper Cut Out Images



Artist Henri Matisse started 'carving into colour' in his late sixties and created a series of spectacular cut-out images. It is believed Matisse started to create art in this way due to ill health where painting had become too difficult. A challenging period drove invention and a determination to persevere with creativity. During this activity you are invited to 'draw with scissors' and create a personal paper cut-out image.

What you'll need:

- White paper or card
- Coloured papers - craft paper or recycled coloured paper from packaging etc
- *Scissors*
- *Glue stick or craft glue*

Decide upon the orientation of your paper or card, chose either landscape or portrait. Select your coloured papers and cut out random shapes with your scissors. Gather the coloured shapes together and start to map out your design on the paper. Once you are happy with your layout, glue the shapes down to complete your picture.

Whilst you are making your cut-out image give thought to times where you may have had to make changes in your life. Perhaps you are experiencing a difficult time at present and some adjustments are required to support your wellbeing. What areas of your life are ready for growth? Reflect upon these things whilst you are making your image.



Gratitude

Activity 5 - Gratitude Lantern



Gratitude is simply defined as the state of being grateful. It involves expressing thanks or appreciation for something, from a gift to life itself. Gratitude involves recognition of the positive things in your life and how they affect you, it helps us recognise what we have as opposed to what we do not. Practicing gratitude is known to have positive effects on our wellbeing, some of which include increased joy, feeling less lonely, improved sleep and increased energy levels.

This next activity involves reflecting upon the things you are grateful for and portraying them through images, symbols and colours to create a gratitude lantern.

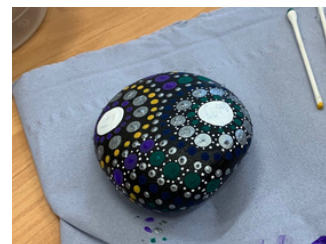
What you'll need:

- *An empty glass jar, an old jam or coffee jar would work well*
- *A black permanent pen*
- *PVA glue*
- *Some coloured tissue paper*
- *Battery operated candle or fairy lights*

Use the black permanent pen to draw outlines of things for which you are grateful on the outside of the jar. The maker of the example pictured above has included drawings to symbolise their gratitude for the warmth of the sun, starry nights, the beach, clean drinking water, flowers amongst others. When you have finished drawing your design you can use pieces of coloured tissue paper to cover the jar. Rip coloured pieces of paper and glue onto the outside of the jar and leave to dry fully. Once finished you can place a battery operated candle or fairy lights inside. Switch on the light each evening to be reminded of the things you are grateful for.

The Self

Activity 6 - Mandala Pebble



A mandala is a spiritual and ritual symbol in Asian cultures. The word mandala translates to 'circle' in Sanskrit, the classical language of India, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Usually they are circles with intricate, detailed patterns, joining together with a single, central point. They are spiritual symbols often used in prayer and meditation, and are seen to represent the different aspects of the universe. The purpose of the mandala is to help enlighten the mind, assisting with healing during meditation.

Psychoanalyst Carl Jung believed that the mandala represents the Self and that drawing a mandala gives a person a sacred space to meet that Self. Mandalas can guide you to listen to the inner voice and find yourself.

What you'll need:

- *A pebble*
- *A set of acrylic paint and a palette/ paper plate*
- *Paint brush*
- *Tools / household items to decorate the pebble with coloured dots - toothpick, cotton bud, pencil with rubber on the end, something such as a mascara tube or similar for a larger circle*
- *Damp cloth / tissue to clean your tools*

Make your own mandala by using acrylic paint to decorate a pebble to hold and keep. Collect a pebble from the beach or river bank, you will need to find a palm size, smooth, clean pebble. Paint a base coat colour on the top of the pebble. Black was used in the examples pictured here. Once dry use a dot-art method to decorate your stone, starting with a central dot with the largest round tool you have. Then create circles around the central dot using dots of various sizes and colours. Work outward until the whole stone is covered. Enjoy the meditative nature of this method and the peace it offers you.





We hope you found the art activities in this booklet helpful and supportive. Perhaps these have inspired you to make more art and to use creativity as a way to support your mental wellbeing. Please click [here](#) to access a Pinterest Board with more ideas and inspiration.

Please visit our [events](#) page for information about therapeutic art groups and activities available to students.

If any of the activities in this booklet have evoked difficult emotions for you which you would like to explore further please get in touch with us. Individual art therapy is available to students. Art therapy, a type of psychotherapy, offers emotional and psychological support during the most difficult periods of life. Working with a qualified art therapist helps people use art materials, discover the creative process and support them as they explore their thoughts and feelings through the images they create. Please [email](#) us if you would like to access support or individual art therapy.

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