

## Sojourn On The Silk Road Project #1 - Sacred Art Collage - Who are you?



### Objective:

In this activity, you will create a **sacred art collage** inspired by the Buddhist monks who traveled the Silk Road to the *Caves of 1000 Buddhas*. These monks had such devotion and carried not only their teachings but also their artistic expressions to share with others so they would also be inspired by all kinds of ideas about life. Sharing deep conversation about their art work and ideas, to inspire devotion to, and reflection of, the oneness of all humanity. This was a fairly new concept that Buddhism shared on the Silk Road where many cultures were about to connect. Although it is sometimes misunderstood as a religion, Buddhism is more of a sacred way of life. A mindful way of living in gratitude and seeking to be free of suffering from learning the 4 Noble Truths & 8-Fold Path - that you will find here in these instructions. These teachings offer a way of being humble enough to learn new things, and kind enough to let go and forgive others because that is what gives us a path to our own joy. **Ask yourself, 2 questions:** What inspires you and makes you really feel alive? How do you recover from hard situations?

In our sacred art journey - it is my focus that you come to see that:

**Creativity + Inner Meaning = Lifelong Healing.**

Through this project, you will explore **what is sacredness to you, by discovering and putting symbols of, all the unique things you love - that make you - you.** We will explore how this inspires us to be creative and express our views on living a sacred life. This project is an opportunity to explore art as a spiritual practice, just as the artist monks on the Silk Road did. Approach it with curiosity, reflection, and creativity, and see what sacred meaning emerges in your work.

**There are 2 Options To Do Your Collage.**

**Option 1: Traditional (Handmade Collage done with glue and scissors.)**



Use physical materials to create your collage.

Gather:

- Magazines, newspapers, or printed images
- Scissors, glue, and a sketchbook or canvas
- Markers, paint, or mixed-media materials for layering

## Option 2: Digital (Photoshop Collage)



For students familiar with Photoshop, you can create your collage digitally by:

- Scanning or photographing images from magazines, books, or personal artwork
- Using layers, blending modes, and digital brushes to arrange and manipulate elements
- Experimenting with opacity, textures, and color adjustments to enhance the composition

Whichever method you choose, your final artwork will be uploaded to your Sojournal personal page, where all assignments will come together to prepare us for writing our personal adventure on the Silk Road. That way, this collage can continue to inspire you for this journey.

Please feel free to use your own photos or pictures of your art work if you have some that fit your collage. (I used 3 of my own photos: The background, the spiral sculpture that is the Tarot reader's hat and the Sunburst that I played with the colors and light to make it the way I wanted.) Remember, this is a piece that will continue to inspire you, a gift to your future self.

For more information about mindful and interpersonal art lessons:

[www.cocreativeconnections.com](http://www.cocreativeconnections.com)

## Step 1: Create a Sacred Space

Before you begin, take a moment to reflect on what sacredness means to you. Find a quiet space, light a candle if it helps, burn sage or incense, have water and what you need to feel comfortable (I love to do some Yoga or Qigong to help me listen inside) and then ask yourself:

- What objects, symbols, places, or ideas feel sacred to you?
- Are there certain patterns, or colors that allow you to feel connected to yourself more?
- How do different cultures use art to express spirituality?
- Are there sayings, or words that inspire you when you see them?

## Step 2: Gather Your Inspiration

(Choose if you are doing it digitally or the traditional way that is manually.)

Look for images, colors, and symbols that reflect your idea of sacredness. These can come from magazines, online searches, personal photographs, or scanned art you have made or photos you have taken or found that sit with you in a way that inspires you. And add affirmations, words, or statements that inspire you when you read them.

Consider:

- **Natural Elements** (mountains, rivers, the sun, the moon, the sky)
- **Sacred Symbols** (mandalas, spirals, ancient scripts, religious figures)
- **Emotional Colors** (shades that bring peace, strength, or joy)
- **Personal Meaning** (spiritual sacred images, personal experiences, what you love to do.)

Think about what visually represents what you care about, and that will lead to the sacredness in your life. Select images that resonate with you deeply - even if they are silly, or not knowing why it touches you deeply. For the digital version, I love using Canva that has "Magic Media" that Ai makes for you, so you don't have copyright issues from taking someone's art off the web.

## Step 3: Create Your Collage

Before you begin, take a moment to reflect again, on what sacredness means to you. Clean your space, light a candle if it helps, burn sage or incense, have water and snacks or whatever you need to feel comfortable and then ask yourself: How can these images help me to feel good each time I look at these words and images that reveal something about who I am and who I want to be. Think about how to arrange it so it feels good to me when I look at it, like all the pieces work together. Yet mostly that when you look at it, you feel inspired. Once you have your images, or an idea of which images and words you want to include, begin arranging your images in a way that feels balanced and intentional. As I said, see it as a gift to your future self.

Whether you are working traditionally or digitally, you can:

- Layer and overlap the images to create depth
- Include words, quotes, or symbols that reflect your sacred vision
- Experiment with composition and color to enhance the emotional impact
- If traditional, you can add textures for a mixed media approach.
- If digital, you can add all kinds of effects in Photoshop for a rich, artistic look

There is no right or wrong way—let your instincts guide your artistic choices.

Focus on composition as you place images, words, colors, and symbols - that are all the things you see as part of you.

**KEY POINT:** It can help to use a background photo so it is not just a white blank space, and it can make it easier to add the other images with what works for that background image.

**Consider the five key elements of composition:**

- **Shape – your foundation**
- **Movement – how the eye travels**
- **Motif and Details – what repeats, what emerges that holds it all together**
- **Contrast – what pops out - different from the motif?**
- **Color – what emotions do each color help you feel, and how do they go together?**

This collage, of all the meaningful images, colors, and sayings - that express what you love to do, and what you would like to become, by how it inspires you. This will lead you to come to know what is sacred, to you. So you don't have to know just now what sacredness is to you. This is the journey that will allow you to discover what that is.

**And the big question...**

**“How Do I Know When My Art Is Done?”**

It's a question every artist wrestles with - at some point - or in some cases - every piece they make. And there's no single answer, but I've found a few guiding practices that help.

**Sometimes the art tells you.** It's like a quiet inner conversation you have with it. You start with an idea or feeling, and as you work, it starts taking shape. Then—there's a moment. A kind of stillness. You step back, look at it, and it just feels... complete. Not perfect. That is an illusive concept. Yet beautifully imperfect like you, like all of us, like life. In it, you see something that inspires you when you look at it. Something, that reflects, what is uniquely you.

## Listening within is the only way to know for sure.

*“Have you ever kept working on an art piece... just to see if it might get better... and then suddenly wished you had stopped a few steps earlier?”*

We've all been there.

*Other times, you pushed past that moment—and was able to take it in a new direction that becomes what you really wanted to say.*

## So how do you know when your art is really done?

Here are 4 things you can do to help you know:

- 1) I have found a few simple yet powerful tools to share with you:  
**if it is traditional, I take photos as I go - each time I think it is done.**  
**If digital, I do continual “saves” at the same points when I think it could be done.**

The good thing about being digital, is that you can change your mind more easily, yet that makes it harder at times to know what is best - when there are so many possibilities (size/color).

Doing it the more traditional way, you have to work with what you find, in magazines and photo books, and sometimes this brings us a real synchronicity that is so magical when it all just fits.

- 2) Another practice I've learned is to **give it time and look at it if from far away and close up**: When we *live with the art*. Letting it sit for a bit— and just look at it now and then, we see what keeps coming back to us, and we get a more clear idea of how to make it stronger, and **that's when we take action**.

Without doing that we can keep working on it - to see if it might get better. And sometimes it does, And if it doesn't, because we copy each time we thought it was done, we still have it and can go back to the last one we liked.

- 3) In quiet moments, keep asking yourself:  
**“Can I live with it?”**  
If the answer is no, study it until you are sure of what it needs. And *then* make changes—with intention, not impulse.

You can also ask:

- “Am I adding something meaningful or just avoiding the discomfort of being done?”
- “Does this still feel alive to me and does it have some space so that it breathes?”
- “Am I ready to let it speak for itself and live with it as it is?”

Because sometimes, **the best move is to stop**. And see if the space it has helps it to breathe. If it is all covered with images it can be overwhelming to some yet to others may like it with all the spaces filled. So it is your opinion of your art that matters. Keep trusting what you feel and know that where it is now.

4) I also remind myself of this creative mantra:

***“Done is better than perfect.”***

Perfect isn't the goal—*honesty, feeling, and a sense of presence* are.

How it makes you feel looking at it?

Often times - when you feel it might be done - it just might be enough to take a break and see it with fresh eyes when you see it again.

So when you feel that nudge to pause, to step back, to live with your work for a little bit - giving yourself time to listen to the art. Then, the art lets you know when it's time to stop and let it be.

## **Step 4: Finalizing & Uploading**

- If your collage is handmade traditionally, **photograph or scan it** so you can upload it.
- If your collage is digital, **save it - both should be done as a high-resolution image (JPG or PNG)**.
- Upload your completed artwork to **your Sojournal page** on our class website.
- When you post your art on your Sojournal page - be sure to give it a title and sign it - in a way that makes you feel complete.
- Also post your paragraph with a small explanation or poem, that gives us a good feel of the sacredness you are feeling when looking at these images and how you feel when looking at it, with so many things in it, that inspire you are all combined into one art piece. These are the prompt questions to help you get started with that.

## **Step 5: Reflection & Sharing**

Once your collage is complete, take time to reflect on what you've created.

Write a short paragraph answering:

- Why did you choose these specific images, colors, and symbols?
- What does this collage reveal about your personal sense of what is sacred to you?
- How might your artwork inspire others to reflect on their own sacred self?

In the Friendship Circle, we will be sharing our reflections with the class as well as our art. We will talk more as we share the sacred symbols we chose, why we chose them, and what they mean to us. This is the first step in preparing for your ***Sojourn on the Silk Road***. Your **sacred art collage** will help set the tone for the creative journey ahead, as we explore the spiritual and artistic traditions of travelers who made this journey before us.

Your completed collage will be **photographed or scanned** and uploaded to your personal **Sojournal page** on our class website that will also be where you document your creative journey and reflections as you prepare to travel what few have seen and plan unique route of where you will go on your ***Sojourn on the Silk Road***.

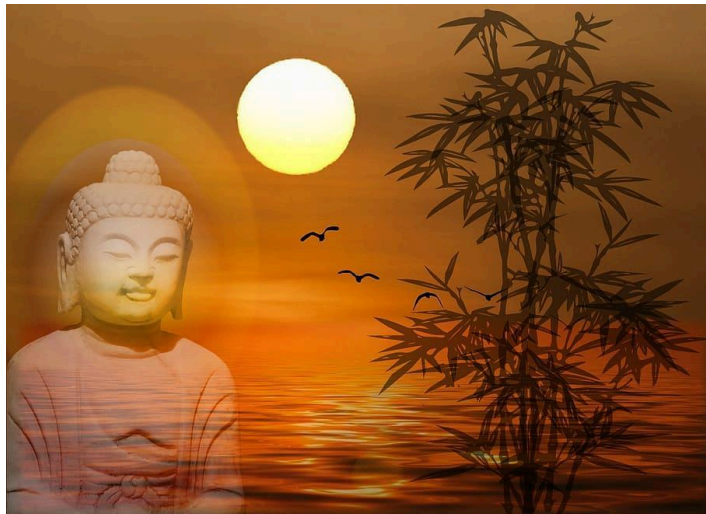
**Remember that each artistic monk traveled with a Shaolin monk to protect them, so you are in good hands and no real harm can come to you.**

**The Buddhist Way Of Life - is focused on Mindfulness.**

**What helps us to focus on this:**

**The 4 Noble Truths:**

- 1. The Truth of Suffering**
- 2. Truth of the Cause of Suffering**
- 3. The Truth of the End of Suffering**
- 4. The Truth of the Path that Leads to the End of Suffering through The Eightfold Path**







### **Right Understanding - (view)**

Live the 4 noble truths.

Understanding from your gut/heart.

Equanimity = no grasping, free of desire to hold on, push away, or change things.

Greed into generosity, contempt into kindness, cruelty into compassion - Judgments into benevolence.

### **Right Intention - (resolve)**

To live the 4 Noble Truths & Eightfold Path.

**Right Speech** - Abstaining from untruthful harsh and abusive speech that misleads idle talk and meaningless chatter to promote the ego and cover anxiety.

**Right Action - (conduct) Right Action** - restraint from harming another being under any circumstances.

Restraint from what is not feeling given. Watching your impulses.

**Right Livelihood** - No hunting, being a soldier, and no selling weapons, no "soo saying"/fraud/lies.

**Right Effort** - Developing and practicing skillful as opposed to unskillful, skillful as opposed to unskillful mental states in action.

**Right Mindfulness** - being aware of what is around us in the present time and at peace with importance. Not being fearful, angry, or anxious.

Constantly seeing what is, and bringing ourselves into a truthful and accurate relationship with what is, equanimity in every moment.

### **Right Samadhi - (concentration)**

Enlightenment - no longer in ego. Fully present and not grasping for what we want.

(meditative absorption or union; alternatively, equanimous meditative awareness). 10 Stages to become a

**Bodhisattva = meaning "awakening" or "enlightenment," and sattva, meaning "being."**

**The goal of a Bodhisattva (one who is devoted to the path of Buddhism - is to reach enlightenment to relieve others of suffering and lead them to enlightenment as well.**

**By relieving others of suffering we develop equanimity/compassion - enlightenment.**