

# THE STRESS LESS PENCIL

ART & MENTAL HEALTH

ISSUE 03

## NEW ART PROMPTS FOR HAPPINESS

### MEET THE CREATIVE

New Interview  
Series

Mental Health  
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# Art Prompt

## When one door closes

**We've all been there. The shitty moment when a big opportunity slips through our fingers, we get turned down for a job we desperately wanted, or a relationship ends that we were sure would last through the ages.**

In those moments, the vision of our future that we've held in our minds crumbles away like a snowball in a dirty puddle. We have to let go of what we've been working towards and all the great things we've imagined ourselves having and doing.

It's often difficult to stay positive when the crap hits the fan like that, but it turns out that optimism can be learned. If we look back at some of those key moments in our lives, we often find that something good came out of it in the end. Even when we thought everything would surely be horrible from now until forever.

Keeping in mind those better-than-expected outcomes, those silver linings, those lotuses growing out of the mud, can help us keep a positive outlook on life, even while the universe is rocking our boat.

### **Step 1: Closing Door**

Take a piece of paper (or a canvas if you're painting), and draw a line down the middle, so that you have two areas to draw in.

Try to think about an event in your life that felt like a door was closing on you. A job you didn't get, your best friend moving away, the book deal you could almost grasp between your fingers.

Draw an image that represents this door, either the event itself, or the things you had already imaged in your life that never came to pass.

### **Step 2: Door opening**

Now think about what happened afterwards. After the period of sadness, anger or grief, when life resumed its course. What were some positive moments that were possible to happen, only because this first door closed?

Maybe because your best friend moved away, you got to visit new and exciting places with them that you would have never seen otherwise? Or you didn't get that book deal, but you ended up successfully self-publishing your book anyway?

Or you went through some tough times, but are now smarter and stronger because of it.

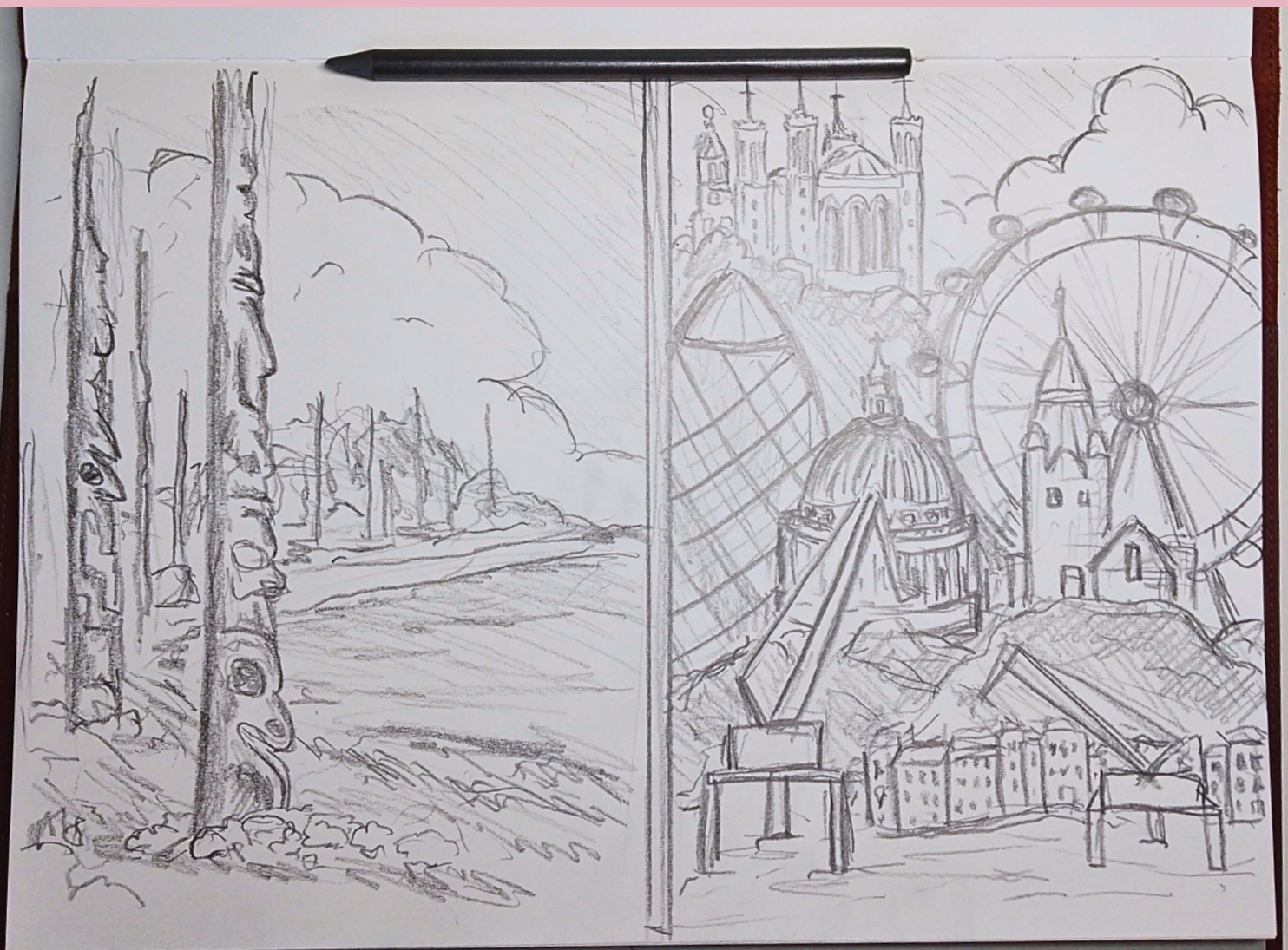
Draw an image that represents those "because A didn't happen, I was able to B" things in your life.

### Step 3: Reflect

Think about how your positive outcome came to pass. What were the actions you took? Which people were there to make it happen for you? And most importantly, which mindset can you take with you into future "door closing" moments to keep a positive outlook in the midst of a momentary shit-nado?

I didn't get to go to Emily Carr University of Art

Instead, I got to live in London, Lyon, and Gothenburg



# WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

**Mental health and mental well-being are terms that we often used interchangeably, but they actually refer to different aspects of our overall psychological state, so let's break it down.**

## **Mental Health**

Good mental health is a state of well-being in which we can realise our own potential. We can cope with the normal stresses of life - job, family, taxes, laundry. And we can work productively and successfully, whatever that means for us. Our mental health can be affected by a variety of factors, including genetics, environment, and life experiences, which might bring about mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety. When our mental health is in bad shape, our lives are massively affected, and we need professional help to support us in order to get better.



## **Mental Well-being**

Mental well-being, on the other hand, is a broader concept that refers to our overall state of happiness and life satisfaction. It encompasses not only our psychological mental health, but also our emotional and social situation. The science of positive psychology focuses on mental well-being, and identifies what we need in our lives so that we can keep things on the shiny side - positive emotions, engagement and flow, strong relationships, meaning and a sense of a achievement in what we're doing. Of course, taking care of our well-being is not only important at home, but in all aspects of our lives.

## Well-being at Work

Well-being at work is becoming an increasingly important issue. More and more organisations are recognising the importance of taking care of their team's well-being. Of course, this not only helps the employees lead happier lives, but also helps companies to keep up productivity and reduce stress related sick days. On top of flexible work arrangements, employee assistance programs, and mindfulness training, companies are looking for new ways to promote mental well-being in a fun and approachable way.

## Using Art to Improve Mental Well-being

The creative process of making art is a great way to improve an a person's emotional, mental, and physical well-being. When treating mental health disorders, art therapy can be used to help individuals with depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. But we don't have to be in a bad place in order to reap the benefits of art to improve our mental well-being.

At The Stress Less Pencil we use art as a fun and engaging way to connect people to their emotions, and to each other, in order to strengthen relationships, create engagement and flow, invite more positive emotions into our lives, and identify the things that bring us meaning. All of the factors we need to continue to flourish.



# Art Prompt

## The 5 domains of life

**Work-Life-Balance is dead. Now here's a controversial statement to start with.**

I never really liked the concept of work somehow being separate from this thing called life. Do I not continue living while I'm at work? Do I magically leave "life" at the door to the office? And what all is "life" even? It seems too simplistic.

When it comes to our mental well-being, scientists talk about 5 different domains of life - work being one of them - that we need to balance in order to flourish.

So instead of work being separate from life, happiness and purpose at work is one of the parts that make up a happy life. The others are family, community, health, and spirituality (VanderWeele 2017).

Today, we will take stock of those five domains in our life, and see if any of them might need a bit more attention.

### **Step 1: Circles**

Take out a piece of paper or your sketchbook, and draw 5 circles on the page. If you're not good at free-handing circles (seriously, who is?) use a glass or a cup to trace around.

Label each of the five circles as Work, Spirituality, Community, Family, and Health.



### **Step 2: Fill the circles**

Now reflect on the theme of each circle and draw something that represents how this domain shows up in your life. You can do illustrations, or just colours or patterns to represent how you feel about this area of your life.

Work - think about your job, or school, or whatever unpaid labour we spend our days with. Do you feel a sense of accomplishment? Do you get engrossed in your work? Does it light you up? Is it a constant source of stress?

Spirituality - we're not just talking about religious faith here. It's your values and core beliefs, your worldview, and that which gives you purpose and meaning.

Community - your friends, your tribe, your neighbourhood, your knitting circle, your football club. Do you feel like you're a part of a bigger group that you can fall back and rely on?

Family - blood related or chosen, which role does family play in your life?

Health - both mentally and physically, how are you feeling?

### **Step 3: Balance**

Looking at each of the areas in your life, think about which ones take up the most space in your week. Are there any that you're maybe neglecting? What are some small steps you can take to give those areas a little bit more attention next week?





SPIRITUALITY

COMMUNITY




FAMILY



HEALTH

# THE MAGIC OF HOBBIES



Hobbies have been a part of human history for as long as we can remember. People have always sought out activities that bring them joy, relaxation, and a sense of fulfilment outside of their work and daily responsibilities. From painting, to collecting stamps and coins, to playing sports and musical instruments, hobbies have evolved over time to reflect changes in technology, society, and culture.

## A Brief History of Hobbies

While people have always had creative outlets, the concept of hobbies as we know it today started to emerge in the late 19th century during the Industrial Revolution. As people began to have more leisure time and disposable income, they started to pursue activities that were not necessarily tied to their work or social obligations. Hobbies became a way for people to express themselves, learn new skills, and connect with like-minded individuals.

One of the most popular hobbies during this time was photography. With the invention of the Kodak camera in 1888, amateur photographers could capture and preserve their memories in a way that was previously impossible. Photography clubs and magazines also emerged, creating a community of enthusiasts who shared their techniques and experiences. Another popular hobby during this time was collecting. People collected everything from stamps and coins to fossils and art. Collecting allowed individuals to learn about history, geography, and other cultures while satisfying their curiosity and desire for novelty.






Photo by Vicky Hladynets on Unsplash

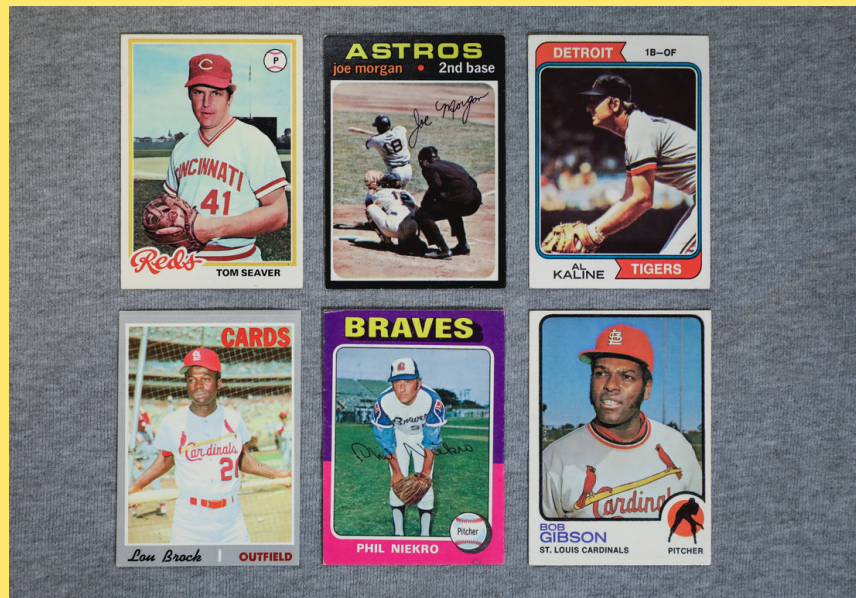


Photo by Mick Haupt on Unsplash

## Who still has a hobby these days?

Today, hobbies continue to be an important part of people's lives. In fact, with the rise of technology and the gig economy, some experts argue that hobbies are more important than ever. Although on the flip side there's also an increasing amount of pressure that time is only well spent if you can monetise it. Build an audience on Instagram, sell your products.

But if you manage to create for creating's sake, it allows you to unplug from the constant demands of work and social media, and helps to reduce stress and improve mental health.

Having a hobby also provides you with a sense of purpose and accomplishment. When we engage in activities that we enjoy and are passionate about, we feel a sense of mastery and pride in our abilities. This can boost our self-confidence and give us a sense of meaning and fulfilment outside of our professional and personal responsibilities.

Hobbies can also help us develop new skills and interests. Whether it's painting or taking up a new sport, hobbies allow us to expand our horizons and challenge ourselves in new ways, which in turn can lead to personal growth and a greater sense of satisfaction in life.

Hobbies have a rich history and continue to be an important part of our lives today. They provide a way for us to connect with others, express ourselves, and find joy outside of our work and daily responsibilities. Whether it's photography, collecting, or any other hobby, finding activities that bring us joy and fulfilment is essential for our overall well-being and happiness.

# Art Prompt

## The Triangle of Self-Compassion

**We are our own worst critics. If we spoke to other people like we speak to ourselves, nobody would want to be around us. Of course, nobody is perfect, neither are we. But we are much better at forgiving others for their shortcomings than our own.**

Constant negative self-talk slowly but surely grinds away at our self-confidence and our mental well-being. If you keep talking trash about yourself, you'll end up feeling like trash. And nobody wants that.

So today, we'll do a little exercise in self-compassion to learn to be (at least) as kind to ourselves as we are to our friends.

### **Step 0: Triangle**

Draw a triangle in the middle of your page, so that you have space to draw something on each side of it.

### **Side 1: Your inner critic**

Think about all the things you criticise yourself for on a regular basis. What do you think you fall short on? Maybe it's small things, like not getting on top of keeping your house clean. Or it's bigger things, like you're unhappy with where you are in your life on a personal or professional level.

On the first side of the triangle, draw little doodles that represent the things your inner critic can't shut up about.

### **Side 2: How does that feel?**

Now reflect on how that criticism makes you feel. When you think of all the shortcomings you doodled about before, how does that change how you see yourself?

On the second side of the triangle, draw doodles that represent how your inner critic is making you feel. These can be representative, or you can just draw colours or patterns that represent your emotions.

### **Side 3: What would a friend say**

Lastly, think about the person that loves you most in the world. Your parent, spouse, best friend. What would they say about you? Even though you might not believe these things yourself, try some roleplaying and put yourself in the shoes of that person. What are the positive qualities they would point out when asked about you? What would you say about yourself if you were your own best friend?

On the last side of the triangle, create doodles that represent those positive qualities.



#### Step 4: Center and reflection

Once you're done with the three sides, start filling the center of the triangle with colours and/or patterns. Start on the side of the inner critic, move to the side of the emotions, and lastly to the positive side. As you move along think about the effects your inner critic has on you. What are they saying, how is it making you feel, and how you feel when focusing on the positive things.

The next time your inner critic pops up, you can tell them to get lost, because all they are doing is making you feel bad. Then invite your inner best friend to the party, and have a much better time!



# Meet the Creative

An exclusive interview with...

Welcome to this new interview series that gives you the chance to meet some amazing people that have invited creativity into their lives. We'll meet makers, creators, and creatives of all different kinds. To kick this series off, I thought it would be nice to share a bit more about myself.

**Tell us a bit about your background. Who are you, where do you come from, what are you doing today and how did you get here?**

I'm Lorena. I'm originally from Karlsruhe, Germany. I moved to London in my 20s to do a master's in Social Anthropology. I then ended up staying there for 7 years, working in marketing. It's also where I met my (now) husband. In 2014, we left London to move to Lyon, France (awesome). And since 2019 we live in the Gothenburg area in Sweden (also awesome).

I still work in marketing, but now part time. The rest of the time I'm trying to build The Stress Less Pencil to help as many people as possible to discover their creativity and the power of drawing for managing their mental health.

Oh, and I also draw a webcomic called Hair Girl about a girl who can control her body hair with her mind!

## LORENA

.....





## What role have creative hobbies played in your life as you grew up?

Some of my earliest memories are drawing with my dad. He's a graphic designer and also worked in advertising. When he had to work, he used to give me the "client brief" and have me come up with my own ideas for campaigns and a logos. Drawing and crafting have always been my happy place - writing little story books, making dolls with my grandmother, wood working with my grandfather, decorating planners in school, painting, making elaborate books with stickers and stories for my friends.

I was really engaged with the arts until I was a teenager. Then slowly but surely, "Partying" took up the space and time I previously dedicated to creating. It was more of a slow fade out of one, while the volume went up on the other.



## So how did you rediscover your creativity and what has changed in your life since?

When I started working in marketing, I spent a good 10 years "working hard and playing hard"

I had always been prone to worrying, but over the years this lifestyle just turned into a spiral of increasing anxiety and subsequent self-medication. Don't get me wrong, I had a lot of fun, I loved hanging out, dancing and partying with my friends. But somewhere in my early-mid-thirties the balance tipped, and the negative consequences far outshone the positive sides. My anxiety had gotten so bad that I was starting to feel the urge to self-harm. That was a massive wake up call.

I decided to quit drinking, and shortly after I also gave up smoking. But I needed to do something to keep my crazy monkey mind and nervous hands busy, so I started crocheting like a maniac and I've never looked back.





**How did you get into what you're doing now? What is different about it than the other creative hobbies you've tried before?**

It was fascinating to witness first hand what happened to my mind when I quit the booze. My productivity shot through the roof. Which makes sense if you don't spend half your weekend sleeping off the night before I guess. I crocheted multiple ours a day. Eventually, I started creating my own patterns, and started a blog to publish them. Another fascinating steep learning curve. I eventually started to create designs that I wanted to turn into crochet patterns.

Then I thought that they would also look fantastic on a t-shirt, so I created a website for print-on-demand shirts and bags with a whole range of designs. I'll be honest, creating the designs and the webshop were more interesting than hustling to sell the products. All I wanted to do was create art and make people happy with it.



So I moved on from the designs and started creating colouring pages for people to download. Colouring pages led me to bullet journaling, to creating journaling templates, to designing a full one-year undated planner that I financed through a kickstarter. But again, the creation was more fun than selling the product, so I took a step back and tried to figure out how I can actually structure my goal of "helping people through art".

Since being creative had such a massive impact on my mental health, I started educating myself more on that aspect. I took courses in Healing through the Arts, Positive Psychology, and Art and Health. I learned as much as I could about what influences our mental health in a positive way, and I started translating what I was learning into weekly art prompts.

I've been publishing those for a while through a newsletter, and I'm now starting to expand into running in-person workshops.

Finally, I feel like I'm actually creating art in a way that allows me to a positive impact on people.

## **What advice would you give someone who is just starting to explore their creativity?**

My biggest advice is twofold: 1) Follow your curiosity and 2) it doesn't have to look good. Start playing around with different mediums, techniques, subjects. Follow online tutorials. See where your sense of adventure leads you to. If you liked something, do more of it, if not, leave it be. Have a play and don't worry what it looks like. It's something you're doing for yourself, not for Instagram, not for monetising. So go make ugly art! And have fun doing it!

## **So what's next for you, where do you want to go from here?**

I have so many ideas at any given time, I'm learning how to better choose which rabbit holes I want to go down. I'm continuing with the weekly art prompts and the monthly magazine. For the latter, I want to start sharing the stories of people who've discovered their creativity and have dared to give it space in their lives. So this interview here is the first of hopefully many more to come.

I'm also working on a four-week course to discover your creativity. People always feel like they need to be \*able\* to draw to be \*allowed\* to draw. That's bullshit. So I want to create this course to get people over that initial hurdle and get them confident in playing with colours.

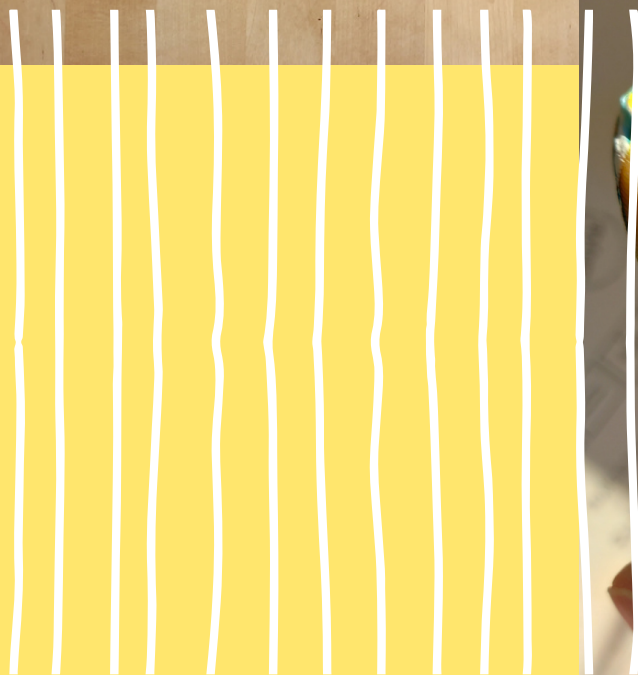
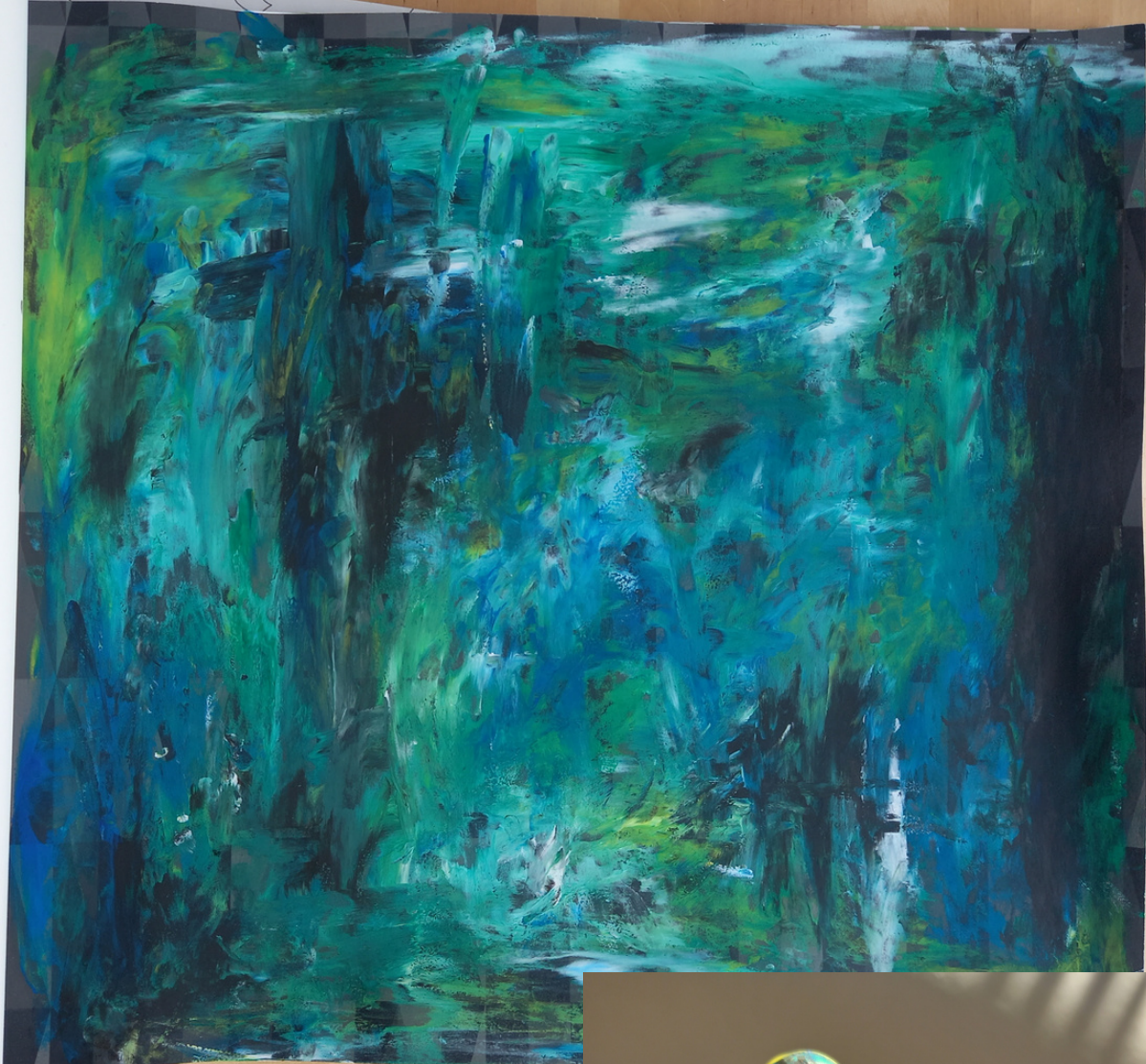
Then there's a whole calendar of workshops with different themes, both online and in-person that are kicking off. We try out things like bullet journaling (a love never forgotten), painting for stress relief, mindful drawing, finger painting for overcoming perfectionism, and much more.

I'd also like to work more with companies, to make art a proper tool to improve well-being at work. I know drawing and doodling has emotionally supported me through more meetings than I can count. But there's a lot more than that.

And that's all the ideas I allow myself to indulge in. For now.

## **Where can people find you online?**

You can sign up to the weekly art prompts on [thestresslesspencil.com](http://thestresslesspencil.com) and you can follow me on all the usual social channels @thestresslesspencil



# Art Prompt

## I'm pissed off... now what?

**We talk a lot about positive emotions. About awe, and flow, and gratitude. But let's face it, we can't all be zen like a trained Buddhist monk at all times.**

Sometimes, we get angry. We get frustrated, annoyed, irritated. And that's ok. The negative emotions are just as much part of it, as the positive ones.

The trick is to learn how to notice and deal with these emotions when they come up, so they don't make you lash out and behave in a way you might regret later. Because even though I've often felt like flipping a table in a meeting, it's rarely a good idea to do so.

Today, we'll walk through a few drawing techniques you can use to channel your anger onto a page, and hopefully get through to the other side.

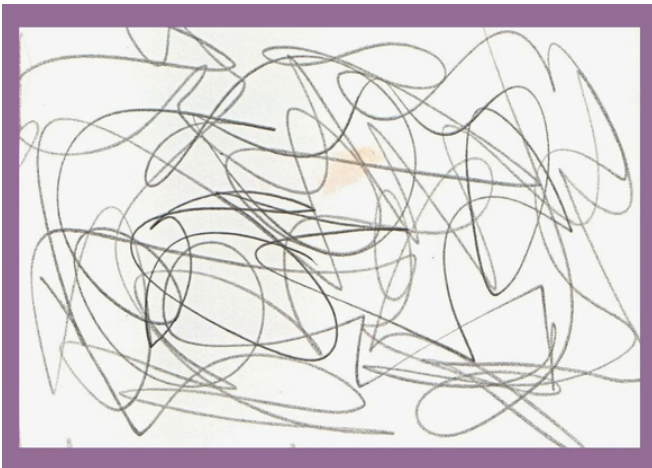
I can recommend doing these in order, as turn from letting out "the big anger" to progressively calm. But you can also pick out individual ones as you need. You want to use a pencil or ballpoint pen, something that won't break if you apply a lot of pressure ;)





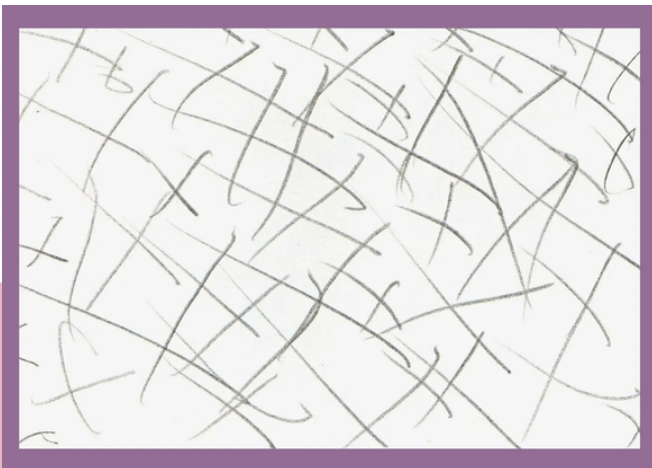
### **#1 - Turn it black**

Working from one top corner of the paper, press down hard and move fast in back and forth lines all the way to the bottom corner on the other side. Then start in the other bottom corner, and work your way across in the other direction. Keep layering until you feel some of the aggression ease up.



### **#2 - Angry Squiggles**

Put your pencil on the paper, press down hard, and mentally go AAAAAAAAAARRRRRRGGGGHHGH while you angry squiggle across the page. It helps if you can actually AAAARGH out loud a bit while you're doing it.



### **#3 - Nope nope nope nope**

The situation you find yourself in is unacceptable? Just cross it out with some Nope-Crosses and Xs.



### **#4 - Time to breath**

Breathe in, put your pencil down and draw some (still moderately pissed off) lines up and down while you breathe out slowly. Breathe in again while you move your pencil over, breathe out and move the pencil up and down again. Repeat as long as you need (or run out of paper).

### #5 - In and Out

We're starting to find our cool again a little bit in this technique. Start in the bottom corner, draw upwards for a count of 2 to breathe in, and downwards for a count of 2 to breathe out. In and up, down and out..

### #6 - Triangle Breathing

Another breathing technique to calm down the nervous system. Drawing a triangle, start in one corner. Draw up for a count of 4 while you breathe in, draw down for a count of 4 while you breathe out, draw across for a count of 4 while you hold your breath. Keep going around the triangle as long as you need..

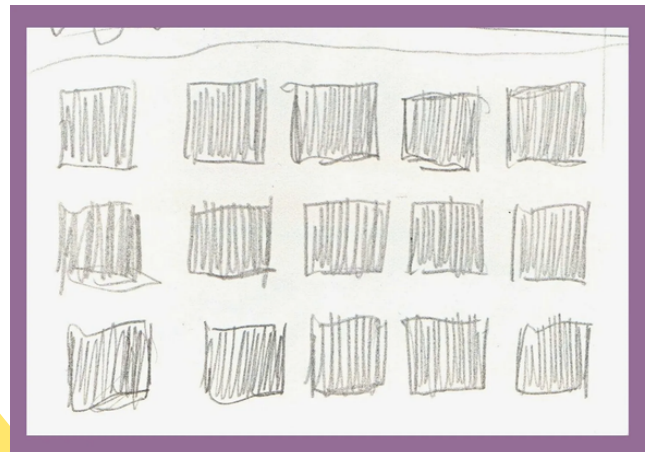
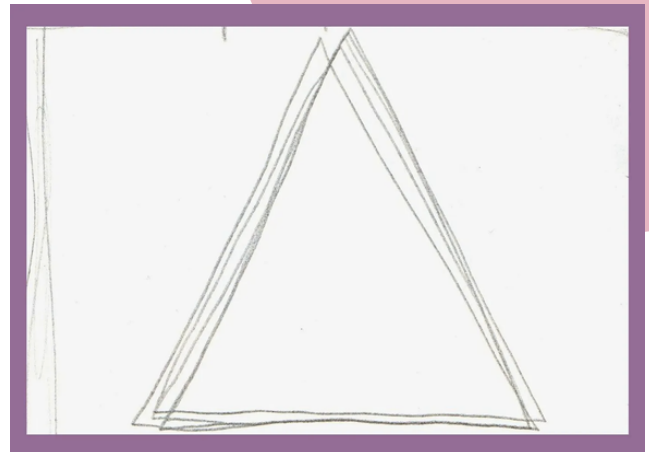
### #7 - The Squares of Control

Now that we've calmed our nervous system down a little bit, we want to try and regain a bit of control. Draw multiple lines of (more or less) equal squares, filling each one in as you go along.


### #8 - Calm like the Ocean

Draw some "ocean wave" lines, starting at the top of the page. Make them stormy! Now move down the page, drawing parallel lines to your initial waves. As you move down the page, your lines should get progressively less "stormy", and even flatten out if you keep going long enough.

This is a good metaphor for our emotional state. No matter how rough the seas get, how angry we might be, eventually our internal stormy ocean will calm down and turn back to a gentle sea..



**Try it here**



**“I FOUND I COULD SAY THINGS  
WITH COLOR AND SHAPES THAT I  
COULDN'T SAY ANY OTHER WAY—  
THINGS I HAD NO WORDS FOR.”**

Georgia O'Keeffe

At The Stress Less Pencil we give you the creative tools  
to improve your mental well-being, at work and at home.

[THESTRESSLESSPENCIL.COM](http://THESTRESSLESSPENCIL.COM)

