

THE STRESS LESS PENCIL

ART & MENTAL HEALTH

ISSUE 02

How to start drawing when you have no time

How to prevent
BURNOUT

New Art Prompts
for Mental Health

WHAT IS STRESS EVEN?

MARCH 2023

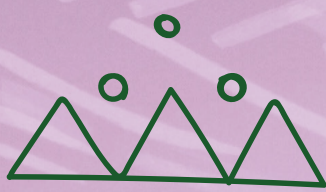




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WHAT IS STRESS EVEN?



So you're feeling stressed and you want to make it go away?

First things first, what even is stress? Simply put, it's the body's response to a challenge or a threat. It's that "oh crap" feeling you get when you're about to give a speech in front of a huge crowd or when you see a message that says "we need to talk". Basically, your body goes into fight or flight mode, releasing hormones like cortisol and adrenaline to help you prepare to deal with the situation.

Now, let's talk about stressors. These are the things that cause stress. They can be positive, like getting married or starting a new job, or negative, like traffic, financial problems, or relationship conflicts. The point is, stressors can be anything that causes stress in your life.

So, stressors are the cause and stress is the effect. The stress response is designed to last a long time, even after the stressor has gone, to prepare you to deal with future challenges or threats. And if stress becomes chronic, meaning it lasts even when there's no stressor present, it can lead to negative effects on both your physical and mental health.



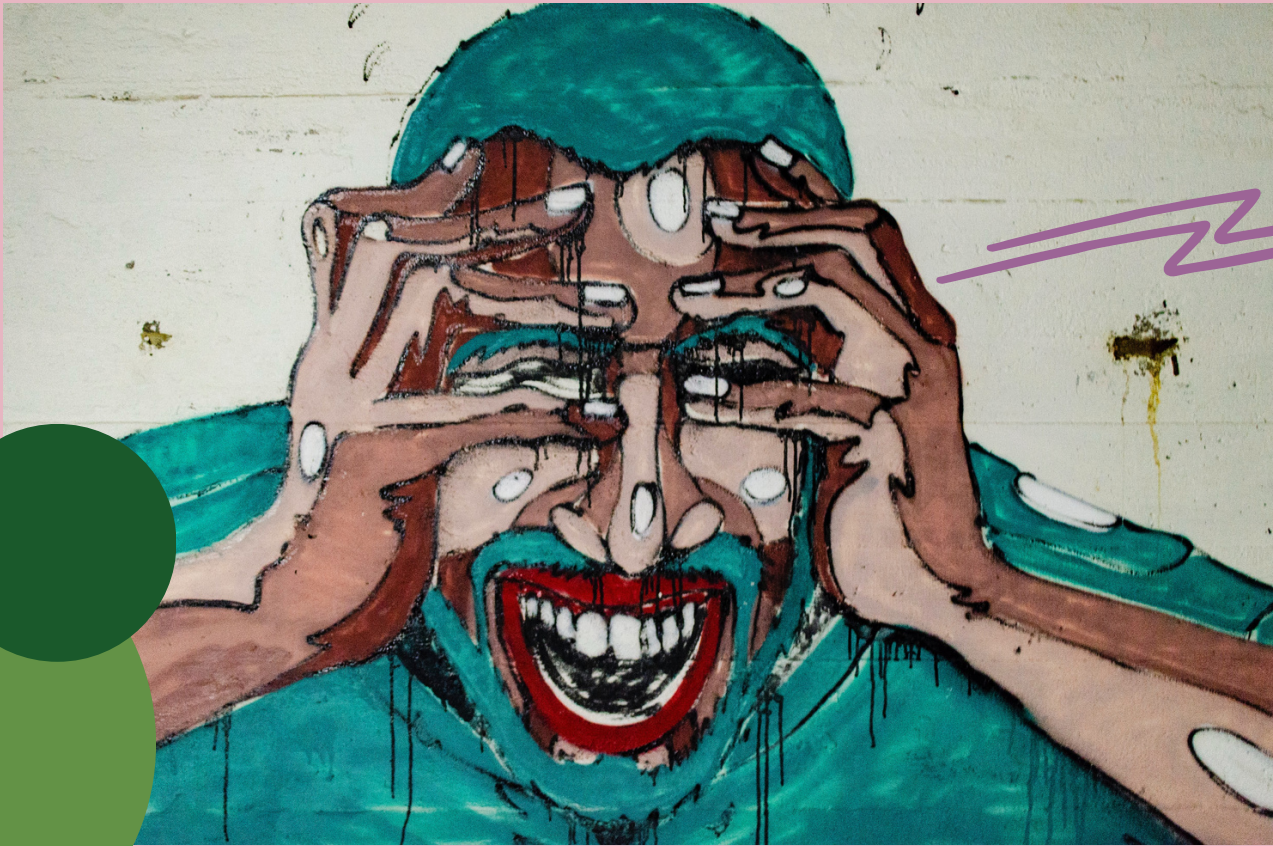


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That's why it's important to not only manage stressors, but also to find healthy ways to manage stress, like exercise, relaxation techniques, a balanced lifestyle, and of course drawing and creating art!

Drawing can be relaxing in and of itself. It allows you to focus on the task at hand and forget about other worries. It's a way to be present in the moment and increase mindfulness, thereby reducing stress. It's also a creative outlet to express yourself and release pent-up emotions. And, bonus, using your hands to draw can increase blood flow, making you feel more relaxed and energized.

Now, keep in mind that the stress-reducing benefits of drawing may vary from person to person. But, it never hurts to try new activities and techniques to see what works best for you.

So, grab a pencil and start doodling! Trust me, it's a great way to tackle stress and live a happier life.

calm the busy mind

Art Prompt

Mindfulness Bubbles

The practice of mindfulness has been gaining popularity in the West over the last decade. So what's it all about?

Mindfulness means keeping your awareness in the present moment, and simply noticing what's going on in your mind and in your body without trying to change it or act on it. While it sounds easier than it is, practicing mindfulness has huge benefits for our mental health.

Science is catching up to prove what Buddhists have known for millennia - mindfulness practices have been shown to reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression.

There are many ways to practice mindfulness, e.g. through meditation, by focusing on your breath, taking a walk in nature, etc.

Of course, our version will be a bit more colourful.

Step 1: Bubbles

Before you start, close your eyes and take a deep breath. Then start filling your page with circles of different sizes (and colours). You can start in one corner and work your way across, or start with the big bubbles and then fill in the gaps with smaller and smaller circles. Or just go with how you feel. What's important is to fill the entire page with bubbles.

Step 2: Be mindful

That's it.

No, I'm just kidding. While you're drawing, try and notice what your mind is doing. What are you thinking about? Which emotions are coming up? Notice the thoughts like you're an outsider listening to a podcast.

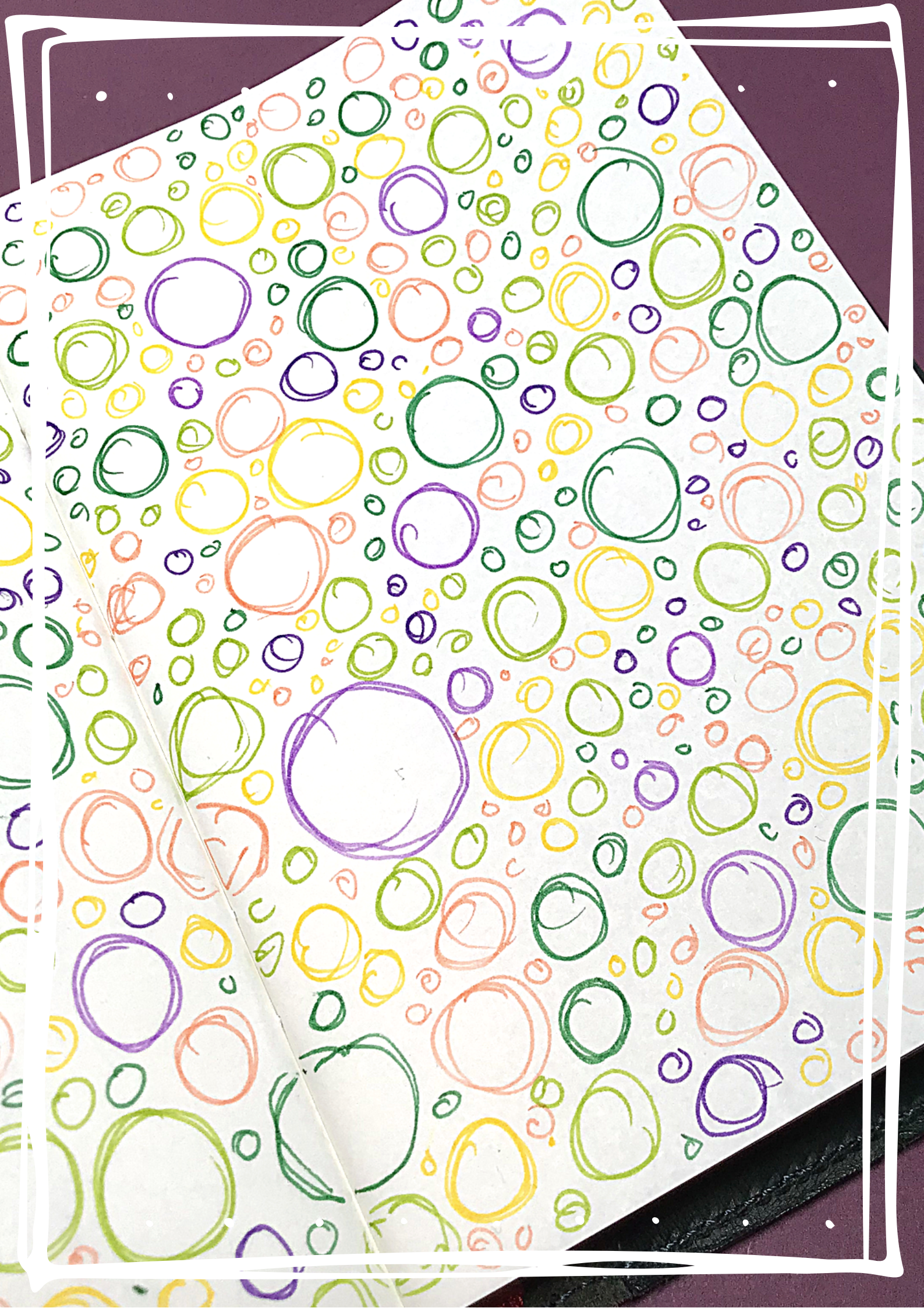
Also check in on your body. How is it feeling? Is your stomach rumbling? Are your shoulders tight? Are you feeling any discomfort anywhere?

If you find your mind wandering, simply notice where it has gone and bring your attention back to the bubbles.

Keep going until you've filled the entire piece of paper.

The more often you practice mindfulness, the easier it will become to keep your awareness in the moment. So feel free to repeat this exercise as often as you want.





HOW TO START DRAWING WHEN YOU HAVE EXACTLY ZERO TIME



Ok, so you've heard my pitch: drawing and creating art of any kind is good for your mental health. But how do you get started when you're already torn in five different directions? Job, kids, never-ending laundry, fun with friends?

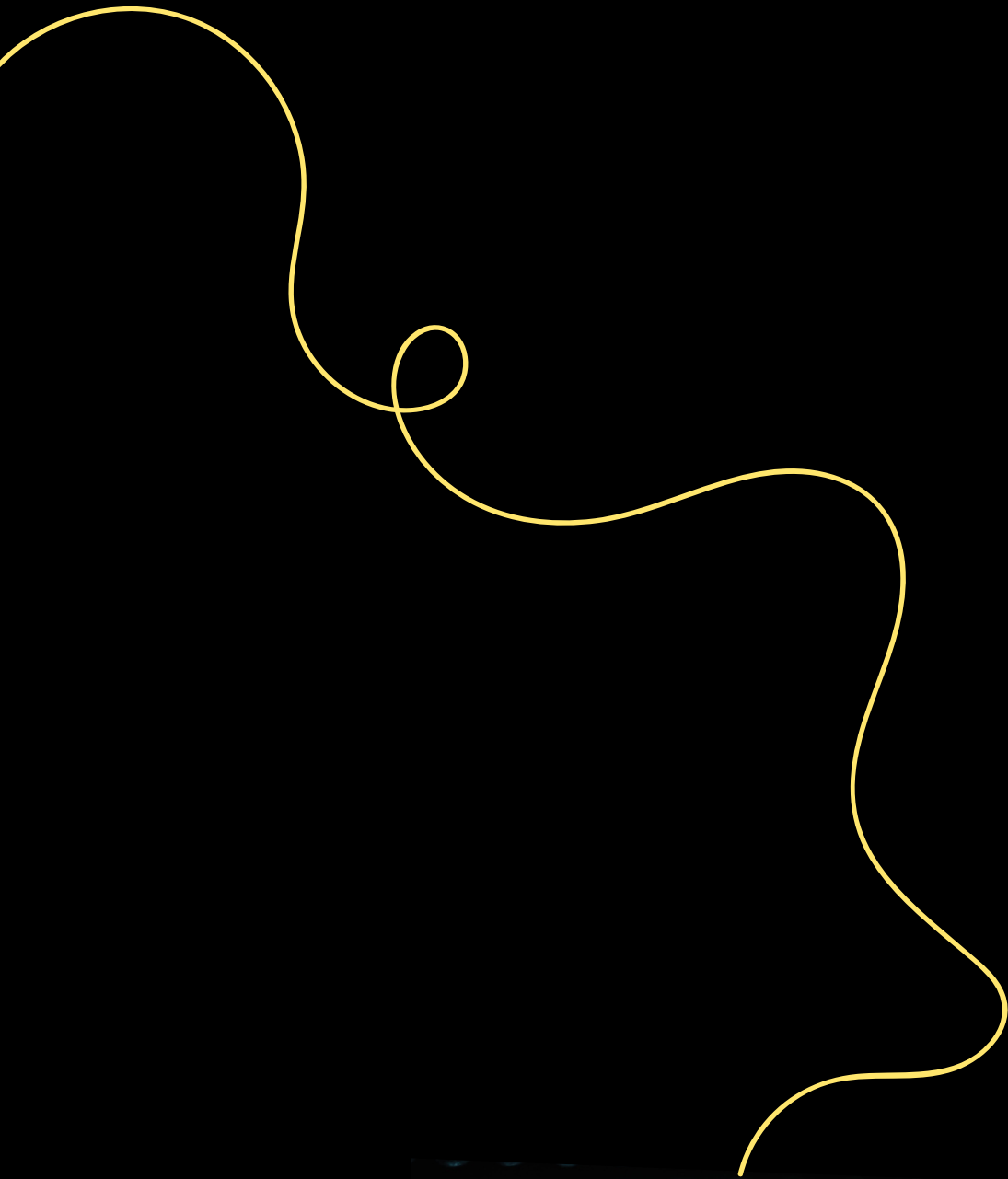
How do you start drawing regularly when you have exactly zero time to do so?

Here are some tips to get started

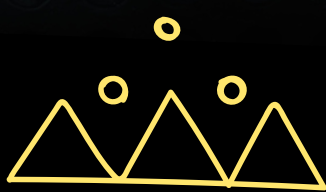
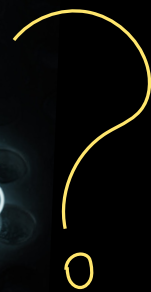
- Get yourself a notebook and a pencil. Even though art supply shopping is a big part of the fun, pen and paper are really all you need to start with.
- Draw while you're doing something else, instead of finding extra time in your day. Draw while you're watching TV. Doodle while you're on the phone with your family. Sketch while you're on public transport.
- Focus on quick and dirty, instead of perfect. Just get into the habit of putting pen to paper. You can worry about creating fine art later.

Simple exercises to start with

- Basic shapes: Draw circles, squares, triangles, and other simple shapes to practice your lines and hand-eye coordination.
- Contours: Pick an object and draw its outline without looking at your paper. This exercise helps you focus on observing and translating what you see onto paper.
- Still life: Pick or set up a simple arrangement of objects, such as fruit or flowers, and draw what you see. This exercise helps you practice proportions, shading, and composition.
- Blind drawing: Draw an object without looking at your paper. This exercise helps you focus on your observation skills and can create interesting and unique results.



THERE IS
NO TIME
FOR THIS



Art Prompt

A Sketch full of Awe

The positive emotions in our lives massively improve our mental health.

In this activity we want to dive a bit deeper into one specific emotion, awe. We might not think about it very often or seek it out on purpose, but it is just as important and powerful as other positive emotions like joy and love.

In his book "Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life", Dacher Keltner argues that it's the humbling feeling of awe, that we're in the presence of something bigger and more powerful than ourselves, that makes us appreciate ourselves, others, and the world we live in so much more. So let's go and find some awe.



Step 1: Find the Awe

What is it that inspires this emotion in you? That feeling of wonder, mixed with a bit of dread or even fear? What humbles you and at the same time makes you feel like you're part of something much bigger than yourself?

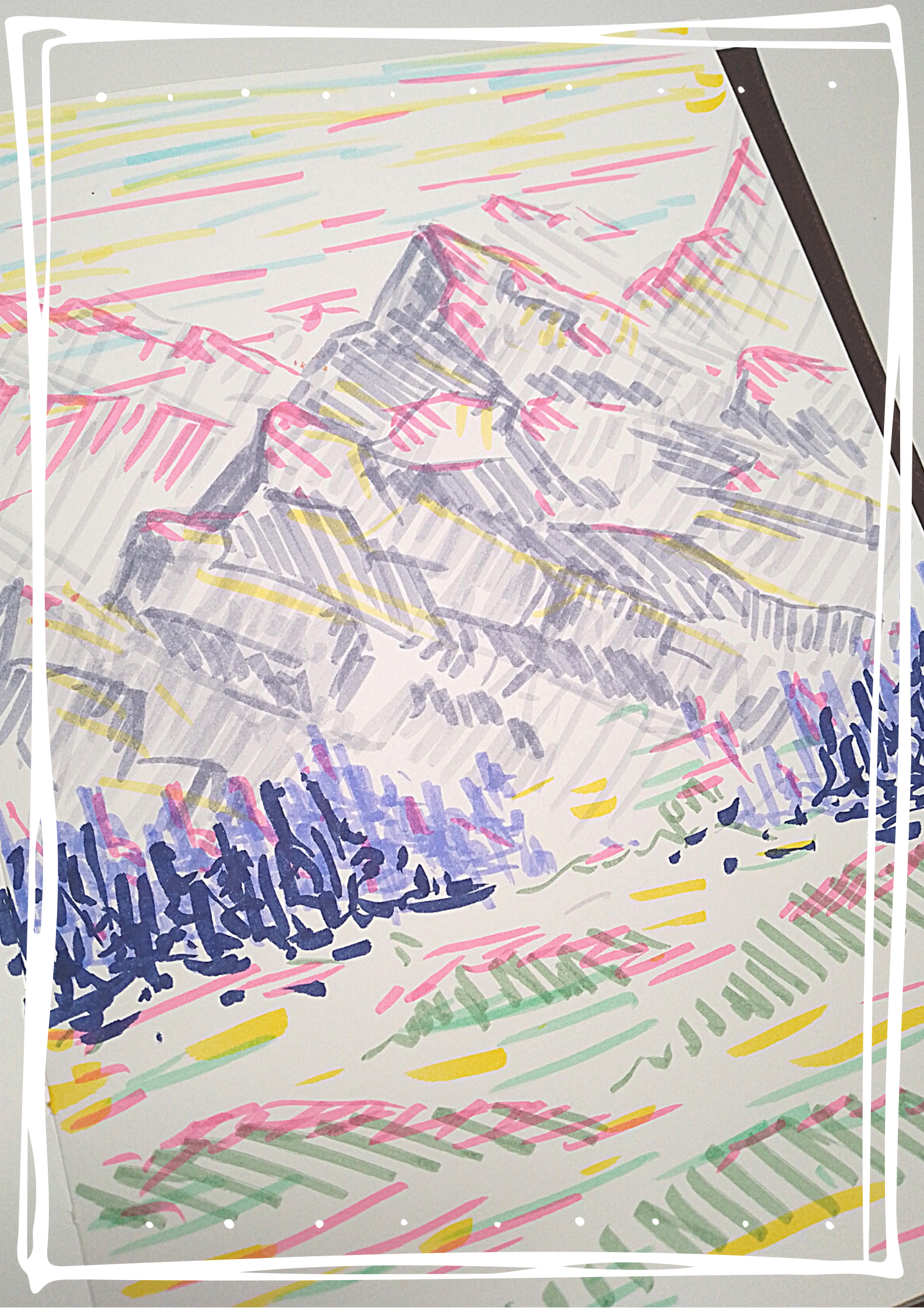
Can you find this now, in real life, somewhere close to you? Maybe it is the vastness of the sky, the ocean, an old building, or a religious image?

Step 2: Sketch it

Grab a few pens and some paper and go look at it. Go outside for a walk if you need to. Look closely, note how the feeling of awe shows up in your body. And then start sketching what you see.

Go for simple lines and shapes. Add colour only if you feel like it. The sketching helps us to stay more present, to keep our mind on the subject instead of wandering off to think about what we're making for dinner. So make a few sketches and don't worry too much about how it looks. Just enjoy the feeling.

Hang up your sketches at home, so you're reminded to seek out pure awe from time to time.



HOW TO PREVENT BURNOUT

First, a definition. What is burnout and what causes it?

The World Health Organisation defines burnout as follows:

Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
- reduced professional efficacy.

Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life.

Burnout can occur as a result of several factors including excessive workload, a lack of control or autonomy in the workplace, a lack of social support, an unclear job focus or unrealistic expectations, and a lack of recognition or rewards for one's efforts.

People who experience burnout often feel overwhelmed, have trouble sleeping, and experience physical and emotional exhaustion.



Photo by Fred Moon on Unsplash

WAIT, THAT SOUNDS A LOT LIKE DEPRESSION THOUGH? ARE BURNOUT AND DEPRESSION THE SAME THING?

No, they are not. While they share some similarities, such as feelings of exhaustion, decreased motivation, and changes in mood and sleep, they are distinct conditions with different causes and treatments.

As stated by the WHO, Burnout is specifically linked to work-related stress and is characterised by feelings of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a decreased sense of personal accomplishment.

Depression, on the other hand is characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a loss of interest in activities. Depression can be caused by a variety of factors, including biological, environmental, and psychological factors, and may not necessarily be related to work.

It is possible for an individual to experience both burnout and depression, but it is important to seek proper medical evaluation and treatment for each condition.

As I hope is clear, if you are suffering from either burnout or depression, you need to get professional help as soon as possible.

But if you're still in a good place, let's have look at what we can do to keep you there.

Positive psychology defines five factors that are important to maintain well-being in our lives – positive emotions, engagement, strong relationships, meaning, and achievement.

Many of the recommendations about preventing burnout align with those factors, so let's have a look at some good examples.



Prioritise self-care: Make time for activities that bring you positive emotions like joy and relaxation, such as exercise, hobbies, and spending time with loved ones.

Manage stress through engagement: Find healthy ways to cope with stress, such as drawing, creating art, meditation, deep breathing, or counselling. Also make sure you have uninterrupted time for deep work.

Seek support in your relationships: Build a strong support system with coworkers, friends, and family members, and make time for rest, leisure, and personal relationships outside of work.

Address workplace stressors: If possible, address any sources of stress in the workplace, such as excessive workload, lack of autonomy, unclear job expectations. See if you can spend more time on the type of work that aligns with your values and brings you a sense of meaning, and set your self achievable goals.

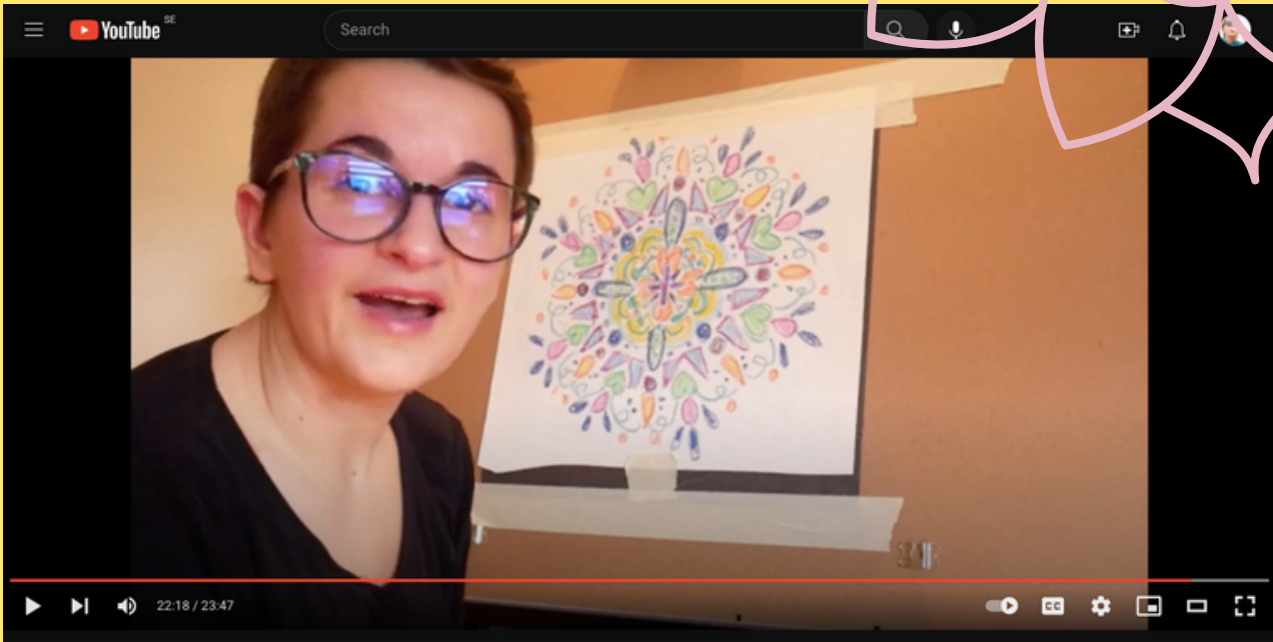
Of course, our subject here at The Stress Less Pencil is how we can strengthen our mental health through art. So in addition to the above, what role can art play to help us improve our well-being and prevent burnout?

Art can provide a fantastic creative outlet for stress and emotions. Participating in creative activities, such as painting, drawing, music, or writing, can be a form of self-expression and can help you to process and manage stress, and bring those positive emotions into your life.

It can also be a source of engagement, relaxation and enjoyment, providing a much-needed break from the demands of daily life. Engaging in art can improve mood and increase feelings of happiness and well-being, which can be protective against burnout.

Additionally, art can provide a sense of accomplishment and boost self-esteem, which can be especially beneficial for individuals who are feeling overwhelmed or dispirited. Creating art can also be a way to connect with others, and build and strengthen your relationships.

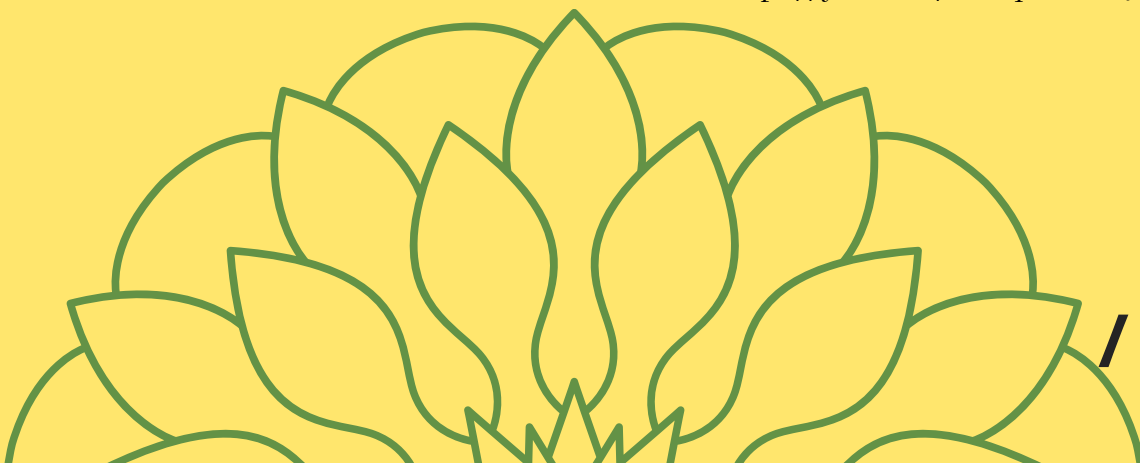
Video Session: Drawing Mandalas to Reduce Stress



Join me as I create a mandala and talk about how this mindful practice can help you relax and reduce stress. Whether you're an experienced artist or a beginner, you can follow along with me and create your own unique mandala. This art form has been used for centuries as a way to promote relaxation, mindfulness, and healing. So grab your paintbrush or crayons and join me for this session.



<https://youtu.be/Zk7tqhSSbhQ>



Art Prompt

Feed your monster

Monsters, demons, goblins, we all carry them around. Each one of us with their own unique blend. Some try to ignore them, others to befriend them. But sooner or later, we all have to face them.

There is a great meditation technique called “Feeding your demons”, in which you try and visualise your demon sitting in front of you. You ask it why it exists, and what it wants. Because deep down, they are all hungry for something, whether that's love, praise, safety, or acknowledgement. Once your demon has told you what it wants, you imagine feeding it. You feed it whatever it needs until it's full and until it can finally rest and leave you in peace.

This exercise is a visual version of this meditation, so get ready to face your monsters.

Step 1: Find your monster

Sit somewhere quiet and close your eyes (after reading this, I mean). Take a couple of deep breaths and focus on the sensations in your body. Where do you feel discomfort? Is there a knot in your stomach? Tightness in your shoulder? Hone in on that sensation for a few breaths. What does it feel like? Which texture does it have? Is it rough, or smooth, or hot, or slimy?

Once you have identified the texture, try to imagine its colour. Is it blue, green, or orange? Does it glow? Or is it dark?

Now imagine the monster, with its colour and texture, leaving your body and turning into a proper being sitting in front of you. What does it look like? Does it have arms, legs, eyes? Teeth?

Here it is, your monster.

Step 2: Draw your monster

Keep the image of your monster in mind. Take a piece of paper and draw it to the best of your ability using any medium you like.

Step 3: Feed your monster

While you are drawing it, ask yourself what your monster needs. Normally, our monsters are monsters because they aren't happy. What does yours need to make it feel better?

Add those things to your drawing. Keep adding them until your monster is satisfied.

Step 4: Reflect

Feeding our monsters is a great way to get in touch with our deepest needs, fears, and insecurities. I hope meeting your monster helps you identify things you need more of in your life, or maybe less of. Next time your monster rears its head, say hi and give it a bit of love, and hopefully it will go back to where it came from.

I'm anxious and I need
a hug and ice cream



Art Prompt

The Zine

A zine is a great format to express your ideas and opinions through a variety of mediums, such as writing, drawing, and collaging. So today we'll be creating our very own zine.

All you need is a sheet of paper, a black marker, and some scissors. On top of that, you can add anything you want - stickers, tape, colours, or paints. There even are some great examples of lino-printed zines, so feel free to get creative.

Step 1: The Theme

Decide what you want your zine to be about. Choose a topic that is important to you. Maybe a zine about your favorite band, or about plastic in the oceans, or a collection of Haikus or most inspiring quotes?

Step 2: Prep the empty Zine

Fold your piece of paper multiple times, so that it's divided into 8 pieces. This is much easier to show than to describe, so please have a look at the picture on the next page. Fold along the yellow dots, and make a cut along the green line. Fold the page in half along the long middle line, and thanks to the cuts you can now fold out the middle pages on each side so the whole thing turns into a little booklet. You can also check the web for this, there are tons of tutorials.

Step 3 - Fill your Zine

You can now start filling your zine page by page. Draw, scribble, write. We're looking for that handmade, imperfect feel, that still communicates your values and what it is you want to share with the world. Like a punk rock song on paper.

Step 4 (optional) - Publish

Once you're happy with your zine, you can either just keep it for yourself, or you can make a bunch of copies and give them to your friends, or leave them in your local café. You have things to say? Then the world has a right to hear them.

fold



pop out



Inspired?

Draw something here.

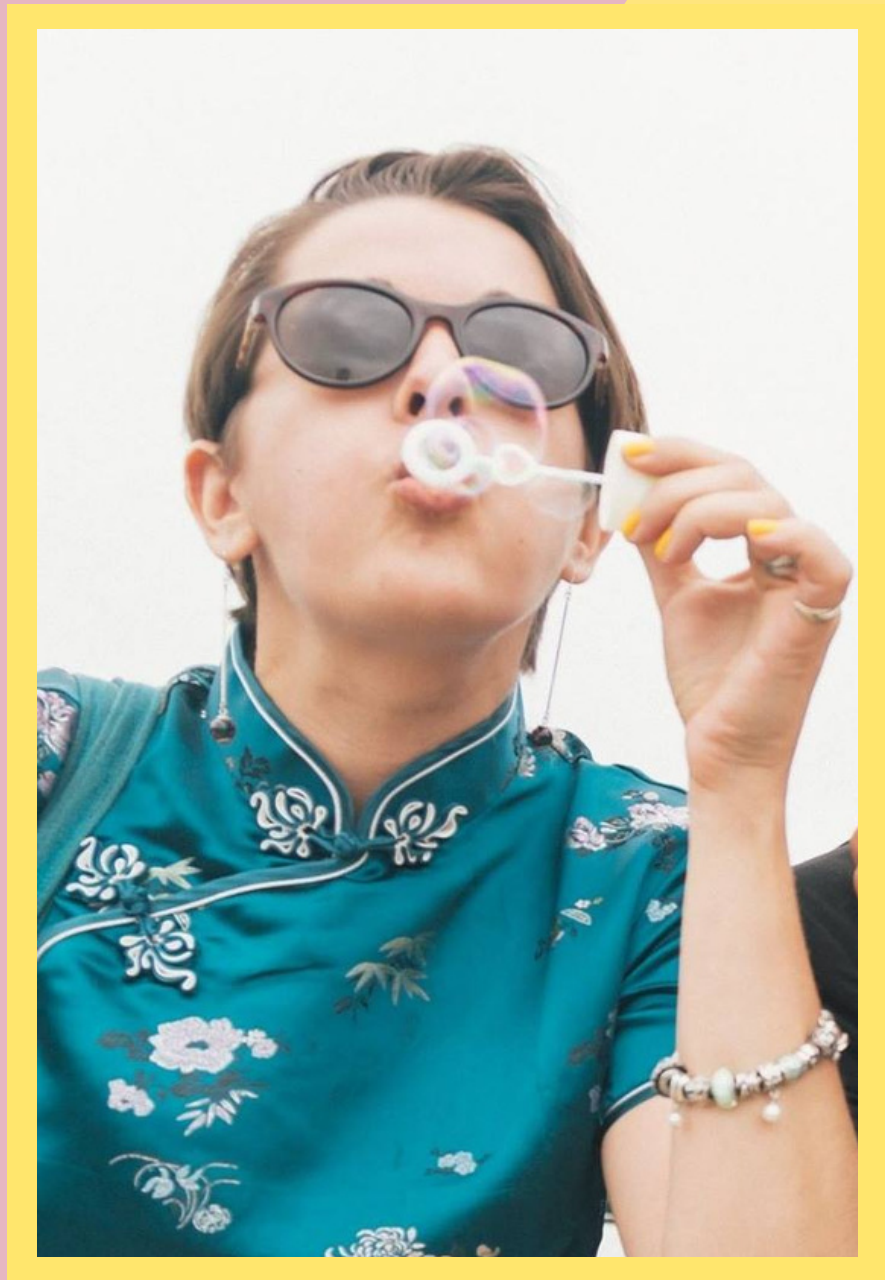


DIRTY HANDS

Happy Hands



ABOUT ●



Hi, I'm Lorena and I help people improve their mental health through art.

On thestresslesspencil.com you can sign up to receive this monthly magazine by email, you can also find out more about our workshops, get weekly art prompts, and more.

