

# UNLEASHING CREATIVITY: The Impact of Collage on Graphic Design Practices

What is collage? A lazy patchwork of random materials and loose ideas thrown onto one canvas? No, collage is a fantastic art form described as an "experiment with the combination of different media and materials through a pieced-together process" (Santos). Collage is always more than what people see, and even though it is still debatable to some whether it is a legit art form it has been around since the early nineteen hundreds. The year is 1912. You are George Braque and you have just discovered the art of pasting rectangle papers to your charcoal drawings. The way the "drawings and the paper intersect and interact in a way that will bring a totally new direction to art". Collage is an important aspect of art history; it is when the artist has felt free to make a more chaotic and interesting piece of art. Collage has changed and evolved multiple times since 1912. There have been Dadaism, Surrealism, California Collage, and Collage in Pop Art which are all different from each other. Over time through the changes to collage artists have found aspects to be helpful in the creative process. Having the freedom to do whatever you want as an artist is so helpful in getting the creative juices flowing. One artist, Melody, has said that collage "was a real trigger. I spent my days just doing that and I realized that it had a huge therapeutic effect on me. Later on, I went back to work and continued with collage at night, on weekends, and whenever I had even a little time. It became cathartic for me. The practice became essential for me to get rid of accumulated frustrations, inner questions, or dreams. It became a new language for expressing myself" (Santos). Artists have been using it as a way to bring back the spark for making and creating art. With collage, you can use everyday scraps and junk to create a beautiful image which is unlike the way of graphic design at this time. Graphic design, often involves strict rules about composition, type, color, and so on, while collage allows for a more relaxed approach. While there are still design principles at play, the structure is far more flexible in collage, but in graphic design, at times you can break these rules

but most of the time they are there to stay. In collage, those rules are sort of thrown out the window, and I say sort of because there are rules in design for a reason and that is to maintain good design. That's why collage is so freeing because while the design rules exist for a reason here they can take a step back. Collage not only encourages but allows an artist to play and experiment with materials and all things to let the creative juices flow. Collage is the unique artistic medium that encourages creative freedom by allowing artists to experiment with composition, color, and design elements, making it an invaluable step or tool in the creative process.

## *A Short History*

Collage started in the early 1900s with Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. Braque walked past a wallpaper store and decided to go back and get some. He later decided in the studio to paste rectangles on his charcoal drawings. What he created was the first collage and he felt "The tension of the combined tactility and visuality creates a rupture, a jolt" (Wolfe). After he looked at what he created he showed Picasso and he later recalled "I felt a great shock, and it was an even greater shock for Picasso when I showed it to him" (Wolfe). This great discovery led to more artists using collage in their work. A Spanish artist Juan Gris started to use collage and they "have been described as some of the most pictorially complex of his time." Collage continued to grow as more and more artists saw the works of Braque and Picasso which led to an influence in Constructivism. Collage allowed artists and writers to work together to combine their work "to shift the coordinates of the image" (Wolfe). Then after world war one there was Dada where they used collage as their main style. Henry Matisse used a collage style to cut out pieces of paper and paste them together to create a larger image. It then still continued to evolve and influence the next art movements. Collage design has been and will always be incredibly important in art history and it still continues to be an important aspect of the art world and the creative process.

## *Collage and why does it matter*

Throughout history, collage has influenced various art movements and has served as a powerful medium for self-expression. Collage enables artists to take "fragments of work, family life, and life as an artist" and "suck them up into a vortex of uncertainty, only to deposit them in a new arrangement" (Golden, 2021). In this way, collage becomes a tool for transforming the complexities of life into something more manageable. Life often presents challenges and large problems that can be difficult to navigate, and it offers artists a way to visualize and reframe these issues. It allows them to see problems from a fresh perspective because it "is a constantly changing composition" that offers a new viewpoint (Golden, 2021). The process of creating a collage—cutting, pasting, and reassembling elements—becomes a metaphor for processing personal and societal challenges. The fluidity and dynamism of collage provide an ongoing, evolving perspective on these issues. This reimagining of life's challenges through collage can offer both the artist and the viewer a deeper understanding and a different lens through which to approach these complex problems. "Collage arises when there is both limited materials and excessive information," allowing artists to paint their understandings.

Artists not only use collage as a way to engage with the world and its issues, but also as a means of starting new projects and filling the blank space. One artist said "Collage is the perfect metaphor for the creative practice, the visual manifestation of the design process" (Fuller, 2016). Collage is an excellent tool for initiating a project because it allows artists to throw down ideas freely. "Collage can also help you be creative in working with design and placement, which is a mental exercise that many people find pleasure in" because of how freeing and noncommittal it is (Miller). Collage is constantly evolving and can be a living piece that is never truly finished. "When creating a collage, your mind starts connecting ideas and coming up with meanings that are personal to you," which is why collage can be a great way to open one's mind before embarking on a large

project. One artist noted, "Though I personally use collage as exploration or to create a reference image for a future painting, and not as a finalized piece in and of itself, it is an invaluable part of my creative process. It has a lot of advantages that I have yet to find in other techniques" (Lancaster, 2018). The creative process begins with collage and collage is a great tool to help artist to express what they cant draw or put into words. One artist made a statement that "Collage is synecdochic of the creative process. It's our process made visual. The design process always begins with collage. We may have moved from the traditional cut-out and pinned-up moodboards to digital Pinterest boards – but the action is the same: we pull from our influences and inspirations, using the fragments of what came before in search of something new. Design is both a noun and a verb, the action and the artifact and so is collage. It is a noun – a complete object – but also a verb – the action of collaging, of connecting disparate parts into a coherent whole." (Fuller, 2016). A collage is integral to the creative process as a tool to get to the finished project and it has shown to be helpful to multiple artists. The act of collaging is just being creative and getting ideas down and it does not have to be the final project but it also can become a project itself. Collage is a way of expression and in the creative process there needs to be a step where the artist can express without multiple rules which is why collage is the best option.

Self-expression is another way artists use collage. One artist stated, "It became a new language for expressing myself" (Santos). Collage not only has been used by artists to view problems and start a project but also to just express themselves. Expressing oneself is to take their thoughts, feelings, and ideas and show them through various forms like collage. A collage is an artist's mind spilled out onto pieces of paper. "When creating a collage, your mind starts connecting ideas and coming up with meanings that are personal to you," even without you knowing it. This is why collage is a great way to express yourself

because without you knowing it you draw connections from objects and colors to personal experiences and ideas. With collage "You don't need to tell a specific story or create a narrative. You are just curating images that speak to you on some level" You are expressing yourself and creating something that speaks to you (Miller). When you are expressing and collaging what you like and are interested in it brings you joy and gives your brain gets the dopamine it needs. Expressing oneself is a way to bring back the spark to design because if you do not like what you are making that means it's probably not very good. One artist put this into words perfectly "I hope you decide that it's enough to create because of the joy it brings you without there being a defined purpose. You will notice after a while of looking at the collage art pieces posted in the group that you can actually see or feel the joy in a composition by the choices and arrangements of papers" (Miller). Collage because it is so freeing expressively it allows the artist to enjoy the act of creating again. A lot of artists sometimes lose the spark of joy when designing because of how rigid and the amount of rules that you have to follow with design. Collage can bring back that spark and let the artist enjoy just the act of play and experimenting with design which is why it is so important for artists.

MELODY A DIT: "I THINK MY FAVOURITE PART IS WHEN I GET TO MY STUDIO AND I HAVE NO IDEA OF WHAT I'M GOING TO DO. I USUALLY SIT ON THE FLOOR, IN THE MIDDLE OF A PILE OF MAGAZINES LISTENING TO MUSIC. I TURN THE PAGES UNTIL I FREEZE WITH ONE PICTURE AND JUMP INTO ANOTHER."  
"THE PRACTICE OF COLLAGE IS THE ONLY ACTIVITY THAT CALMS ME DOWN." (SANTOS)

Why would an artist like Melody find so much freedom in an art form like collage? She might find so much freedom in it, because it offers a therapeutic way for an artist to express their thoughts and emotions without all the constraints of perfection. Collage is a way that allows the artist to lay out all their ideas freely, by creating a piece that is very

raw and unrefined much like the thoughts they want to express. Collage is a beautiful art form because of its imperfections—each piece is intentionally unpolished and put together, which creates an almost freeing experience for the artist. Collage is not about climbing this mountain of perfection to achieve a perfectly clean and composed piece of art, but rather about embracing the process of design and forgetting about all the rules and restrictions to create a masterpiece. The world is imperfect and so is art so why can't that be the reason collage is perfect.

### *Freedom of collage in graphic design*

Unlike collage graphic design has many rules. In graphic design, these rules can constrict a design and make it hard to be creative or create something people have not seen. There are rules on composition, color, typography, and even different design elements. One artist, Bob Gill, advocated for breaking the rules of design for creativity; he argued "that design isn't about following trends or rigid principles; it's about solving problems with creativity, wit, and clarity" (Backhouse). Graphic design is about creating and coming up with solutions to problems, not about following rigid rules that restrict creativity and make all graphic design look the same. He also argued that "Good design isn't about a specific style or aesthetic—it's about ideas", and using those ideas to create a new and interesting approach (Backhouse). In graphic design, the one way to create without having to follow strict rules and embrace the idea of experimenting is through collage. It allows for the chaotic and spontaneous combinations of all different materials and elements, and it offers an open space for creativity. In contrast, traditional design constraints can be forgotten or let go. Collage does not directly follow design rules but it rather lets the designer use their knowledge to just create. They use their intuition and design eye to create artwork that speaks to them or expresses what they want to say. An artist when creating a collage has to "trust [their] instincts, embrace [their] individuality, and never

be afraid to challenge the status quo" because that's the way to create a new idea (Backhouse). Collage encourages new innovative design solutions and allows designers to mix and play with texture, color, and images in new ways that can be unexpected or follow an unconventional route that leads to unique and creative designs.

### *Creating your own collage*

Collage design breaks free from the structure of graphic design and busts down its expectations of it. Graphic design often relies on grids, hierarchy, and consistency, collage thrives in chaos and spontaneity. It won't follow the rules and continues to make its own. It's an art form where imperfection becomes expression and where intuition can take the lead. Rather than defining the rest of this collage I am handing it over to you. The rest of the book is yours. It's your playground to cut, rip, paste and scribble. Use anything around you, pictures, lettering, or anything that speaks to you. Let the rest of this collage be a collaboration between you and chaos. From here on out there are no mistakes, so go ahead create the rest of the collage.