Pearl at Home

This art project is designed for family fun, for suggested ages of 12 and up to be completed at home with easily-accessible art materials.

TREE COLLAGE:
THE MIGHTY OAK

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MATERIALS

• Canvas panel
• Acrylic paint
• Paintbrushes
• Glue (WeldBond is a very good glue for bonding clear, quick, and firmly.)
• Collage objects and items to apply to your tree:
  This can include found objects, magazine or photocopied images, wrapping paper, text from books, stencils, etc. Most importantly, these items should express a unique quality about your individual personality.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This art lesson was inspired by the beautiful quilt called *The Mighty Oak*, created by quilter Mary Huntington. This intricate heirloom quilt contains a plethora of small artistic details that will keep the viewer engaged for hours.

This magnificent work is so full of embellishments – it actually becomes dimensional. It is as if the artist’s creativity could not be contained to the flat surface of the quilt. The artist adds silk ribbon embroidery, tatting, and appliqué – to name a few.

Mary Huntington’s manipulation of the surface inspired this lesson on collage, and her choice of themes – trees – will provide us with our subject, as well.
The word “collage” is derived from the French verb **coller**, which means “to glue.” And that is what we will be doing – in part. Collages can be about any subject. Our lesson will center on the beauty of trees, much like the assemblage of trees in Mary Huntington’s quilt *The Mighty Oak*.

My inspiration also came from a Texas Oak tree that I see every time I drive on to the property of the school where I teach art. It is so remarkable that I have pulled over, more than once, to admire it. Oaks, with their expansive canopy of limbs, are said to symbolize power and courage. Besides providing beauty, trees give us shade and protection, as well as providing a whole ecosystem to support birds, animals, and other life. It is no wonder that they are often seen as symbols of growth and resurrection.

Our objective in this lesson will be to depict this beautiful tree as the “first layer” of our collage. Then we will add to it textures, symbols, and transferred images that are meaningful to us individually. Everyone’s tree will be a collage about them as its branches reveal our individual personalities, dreams, and ideals. Just as Mary Huntington added her tiny intricate details on her quilt, we will embellish our tree with collaged images within its branches.

As an art teacher, I like to begin each school year with a project for my students that is accessible – easy for them to relate to, but also enlightening. By that I mean, something that helps me to learn more about them. I think this Tree Collage could be like that for any art teacher to use because it almost becomes a self-portrait. It could be viewed as a “Tree of Life,” if you wish. My school has the name “Providence,” so for me this lesson will be called “The Tree of Providence.”

– Evelyn Bouley
DIRECTIONS

For a full overview of this art project and directions, view the video lesson on the museum’s YouTube channel.

1 Start by sketching a live oak tree. You can go outside and draw one, or find a picture of one to draw. Since this is not strictly realistic, you are encouraged to use your imagination and make the tree image your own version.

2 Transfer your sketch to the canvas panel in pencil, then paint it with acrylic paint. Use a color scheme of your choice.

3 Add collaged elements to the branches that express your ideas. In our example, instructor Evelyn Bouley included references to her school (Providence), the students, art education, and personal interests.

Challenge yourself to come up with creative and unique collage items to add to your tree.

For educators:
When you encourage your students to express themselves, begin a discussion with them about symbolism in art. Discuss ways that an idea can be expressed visually in their artwork. A basic understanding may come with the example of simple objects that mean so much more: a dove symbolizes peace, a shamrock stands for good luck, etc.

The discussion can delve deeper into looking for symbolism in the great artworks of history. The famous image of God’s fingertip touching the finger of Adam (from the Sistine Chapel) is the visual way that Michelangelo chose to depict the moment that Adam received the spark of life.