

Being creative keeps you well

A guide to
creative wellbeing



Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Foreword..... | 4 |
| Introduction | 6 |
| 1 Map of possibility – ‘map my mind’ | 8 |
| 2 Don’t break the line – pictures | 10 |
| 3 Don’t break the line – words | 11 |
| 4 Inside the rainbow..... | 12 |
| 5 Mould it | 13 |
| 6 Balance | 15 |
| 7 Hidden layers | 16 |
| 8 Map of me | 17 |
| 9 Landscapes for a Lonely Wolf | 18 |
| 10 Landescape | 19 |
| Sue Mulholland..... | 20 |

Starting points for
creative wellbeing
workshops can be
viewed at
[https://vimeo.com/
userbeingcreative](https://vimeo.com/userbeingcreative)

The need to play

The United Nations recognised the importance of play by making it one of their 54 'rights of the child'.

Article 31 (leisure, play and culture) Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.
The United Nations Rights of the Child

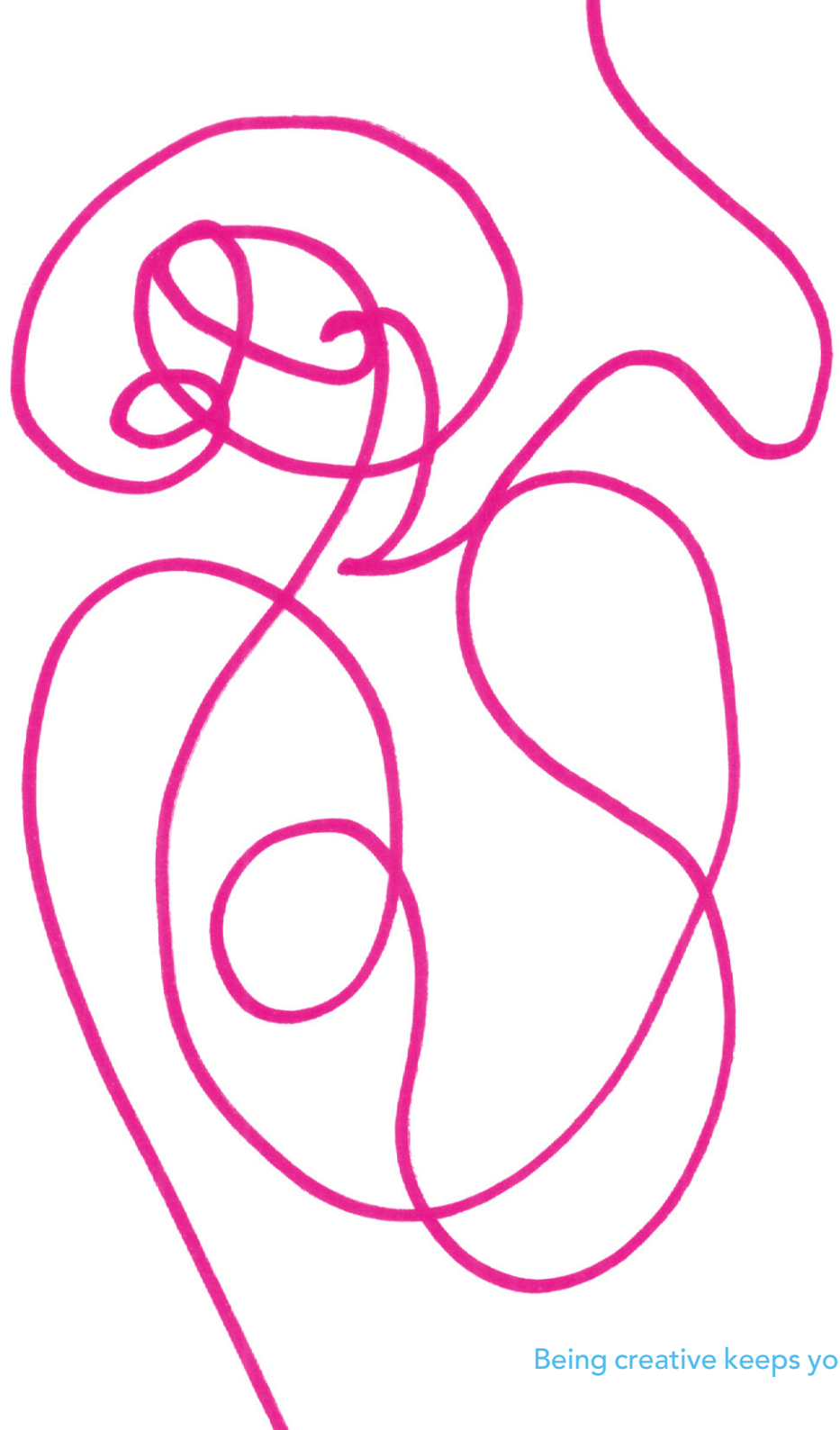
Foreword

As we grow older, we can begin to feel awkward or silly about play, our interests change. As teenagers our 'childish' things tend to disappear. However, this is often the time when we need play and creativity most: to enrich academic performance, help with focus, problem solving, being mindful and keeping well. Creative activities can help us reflect, heal, process, cope, recover and relax. In the moment we can 'simply be' and it can help us to settle when feeling stressed. It is not difficult to 'play' but it does require time and knowing where and how to start. We need not to feel self-conscious as we shake off apprehensions and challenge our misconceptions.

Getting started is often the biggest challenge, the blank page can seem like a barrier. Each workshop has been developed, challenged and adapted over my 20 years of teaching, and they continually evolve with new encounters and feedback from the people I work with and teach. The continual line which scaffolds and weaves throughout this programme is the 10-minute lesson I taught as part of the interview for my first teaching position. I was terrified, I had 10 minutes to engage and win over the twenty five 16-year olds. They got it, they laughed and I was hired. **Inside the rainbow** was inspired by an artwork from a woman prisoner in the Koestler Trust. She had spent hours deconstructing what the inside of a rainbow looked and felt like to her; both joyful and terrifyingly sad. **Landescape** is embedded in my experiences of working in Kakuma refugee camp. The hostile harsh 'nowhere' desert that hosts almost 250,000 refugees most living there for at least 17 years. Yet, creativity thrives as hope grows on barren soil.



Sue Mulholland



'I'm no good at art
therefore this creative
stuff is not for me.'
Not true...

Confusing art practice and creative wellbeing can create a tension where one possibly undermines the other. To allow both the credibility they require to serve their purposes they need a degree of separation. There are cross overs, however, a fundamental consideration is acknowledging you don't have to be 'a creative' or be an artist to benefit from creative wellbeing. In spite of claims 'we are all artists', this is not necessarily the case: not everyone is an artist, the same way not everyone is an accountant, a professional athlete etc.

When the term 'creative' is used in relation to wellbeing it is referring to 'human' creativity. We are all creative. We mark make before we can make sentences or write. If we weren't creative, human kind would have ceased to exist; imagine not being able to problem solve, build, construct, excite, challenge or inspire. These are the very rudimentary, fundamentals of creative survival. When we are stripped back to basics it is our creative instinct that kicks in alongside survival. How to build a shelter, whittle a stick into a tool, make a trap to catch food, build devises to collect water. Once we are good on the survival front we then quite quickly move to decorating the shelter and objects, we require things around us that are aesthetically pleasing and comforting, as well as comfortable.

'Drawing is meditation, from the point of weighing of my pencils in the palm of my hand, to attending to the sharpness of their tips. I assess the dryness of the paper and the suppleness of the erasers. When that is done, I am ready to start.'

Cate Halpin – artist

Time

The activities are designed to work on a flexible time basis, though be mindful in order to benefit from any activity time is important. For these processes, a minimum of 10 minutes is suggested and the maximum amount of time is limitless (however, 45 minutes to an hour in most cases is probably a good estimate). They are also designed to leave and come back to later, however, this does require a bit of preparation and organisation.

Be prepared

The first three activities are designed to work on flexible and minimum time frames from 10 minutes to as long as you like. They also require minimum materials, a sketchbook, pen and pencil will more than suffice. The following six activities do take more time and planning and often work best when you attend a taught session first. The very first activity 'map my mind' is the foundation and scaffolding for all that follow. Once you are confident with this one you can carry on with the others; they don't have to be done in an order and some will appeal to you more than others. It's a pick and mix so dip in.

Kit check list

Basic

Pen/pencil and paper

Intermediate

Pens, pencils, rubber, sharpener, colour pencils (the ones that are watercolour are gorg), watercolour paint (the little tray with brush enclosed) tiny pot with a lid, paintbrushes, nice paper, pritt stick, newspaper, colour paper, maps, good quality plasticine

Advanced

You can play with all sorts of paint – water-based paints are recommended. As well as all of the above... canvas, paper (watercolour etc.), fancy paper, fancy glue, fancy pens (fancy whatever works for you – none of them are really necessary but definitely getting you in the mood!).

Now begin...



1 Map of possibility – ‘map my mind’

‘Sometimes words are not needed, and the simplicity of expressing yourself through an art form is one of the best ways of communication’.

Emmanuel Jal

Emmanuel Jal started his life as a child soldier in the war-torn region of Southern Sudan in the early 1980s. He was eventually rescued by a British aid worker Emma McCune and smuggled to Kenya where he overcame a huge number of struggles to become a successful and acclaimed recording artist and peace ambassador.

Emmanuel Jal often begins his workshops with the question ‘Who owns your mind?’ The map of possibilities might just help you start to consider a little about your own mind and if you need to, regain ownership.

Emmanuel Jal describes his trauma as leaving him with a mental genocide. At different points in our lives we all have stress, pressure and, unfortunately, some form of trauma. The scale varies drastically. However, this should mean you underestimate the need to own your problems, own your mind and deal with the problems rather than write them off as too big or too small.

In his workshops, Jal makes reference to a young boy in a school audience who put his hand up to answer this question – his brave and honest response: ‘Sugar owns my mind’...

The map of possibilities is a map of your thoughts, memories, hopes, fears, dreams at that moment in time. Based loosely on the Surrealist technique of Automatism it is about letting your mind wander, a meditative can be achieved and you can dip into your past, present and the future all at the same time.

You can spend 5 minutes on your map or 5 hours. The flexibility of the map making along with most of the workshops described is the flexibility; it is a great place to start and get over any uncomfortableness, scepticism, even that old fear of drawing.



Stage 1

Paper, pen/pencil

Place the nib on the paper and close your eyes. Take a moment, then begin. Take a line for a walk, don't lift the pen and keep the nib skating across the paper. Focus on the sound of the mark being made and try and cover the full surface of the paper. Don't lift the pen at any point. Keep focused on your breathing and what floats in and out of your mind. Go as slow as you can. Make marks that 'feel' good or necessary – that give satisfaction.

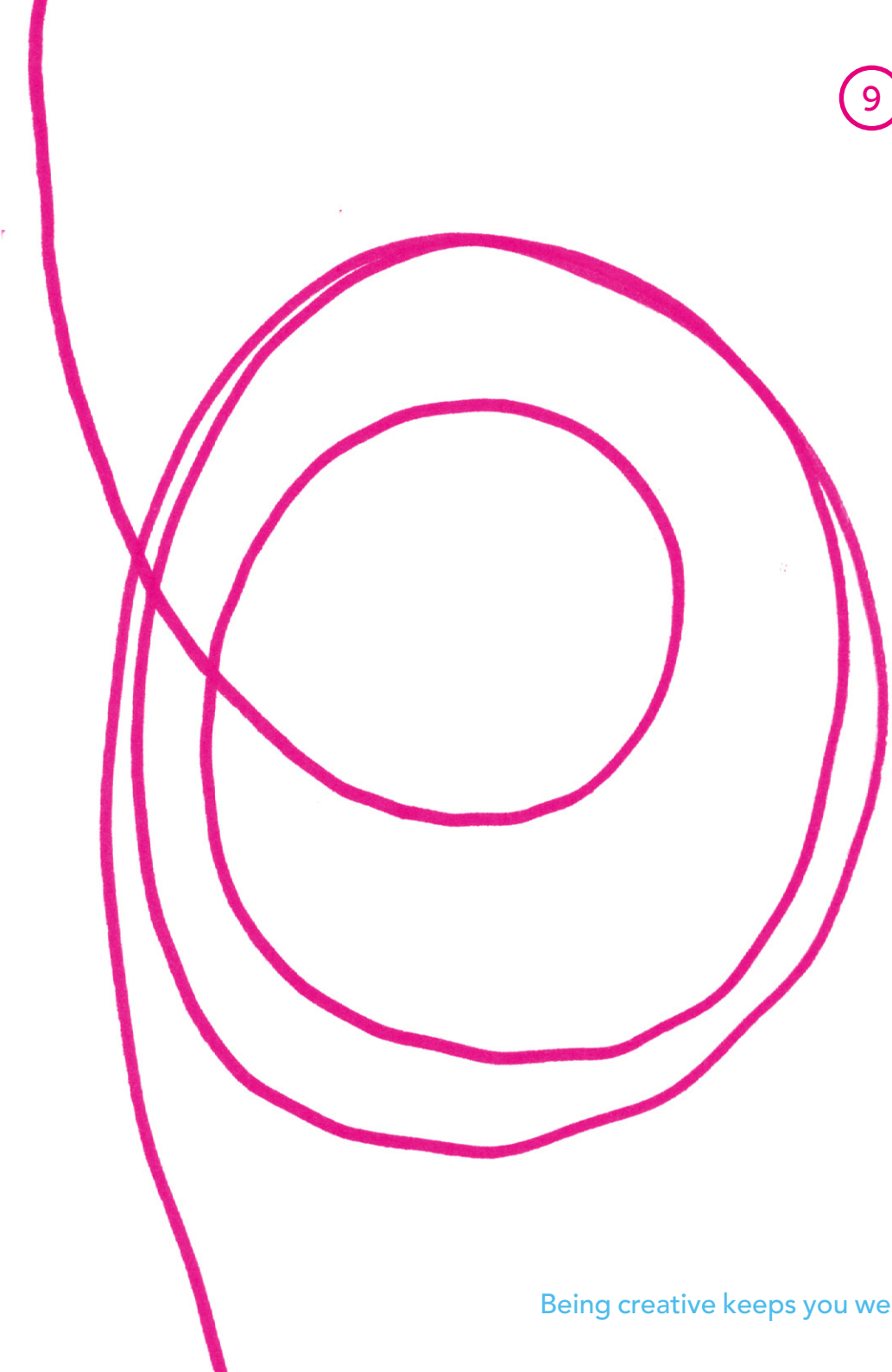
This might mean hard and jagged or smooth and curving, it is entirely up to you. You can set a timer and do the first drawing for 1 minute then increase your timings and with each drawing try and go deeper into a calm meditative space in your mind.

Stage 2

The amount of time given to your final drawing will depend on the time you have to do the activity. If you have allowed 10 minutes, then it should be roughly a third of this time – meaning you have 4–5 minutes left. You can figure out the maths. Look at the drawing carefully for a minimum of 30 seconds – longer if you can – and start to spot the patterns or/and pictures that emerge. Highlight these with outlines or, if time, colour in. Allow the colour to guide you, choose what makes sense. As you outline or colour you may start to spot other images – go with it.

Stage 3

The very last part of this activity is to write your thoughts. You may want to exorcise a past memory or celebrate it. You should write at least one statement of your current state of mind and, most important, hopes and dreams for the future. These thoughts can weave in and around your drawing. They are only for you to share.



2 Don't break the line – pictures

10

"I find the making of marks a liberating experience that enables me to connect to the world without the use of traditional forms of language".

Sui Kim – artist

Look around you and find objects to draw: the mundane and the humdrum, things that fill our everyday life. Focus on an object near you, isolate everything else and create a continual line drawing. This works best after a warm-up activity like those for 'map my mind'.

This activity is all about connecting with what fills your space and place, the objects, nature, people that surround us. You can do this on the train, bus on a lunch break or at home.

The first drawing should be stationary. Really look and focus, start in one continual line not lifting the nib off the paper. You will end up with bridging lines – they are the invisible connections we don't often see or think about. Try not looking at the page, only the object and focus your full attention; this level of concentration will help centre and slow you down. Once you gain confidence you can take this activity to new and more challenging levels including moving people and objects, architectural forms and internal spaces. I recommend sitting in parks, coffee shops and other places where you can feel calm and relaxed and not be disturbed too much whilst still connecting with the world you exist in.



Being creative keeps you well

3 Don't break the line – words

Continual line interweaves many of the creative wellbeing techniques. A particular example of an unbroken line that gave inspiration was the word 'love' repeated in joined-up writing on the side of a building. The appeal was in the rhythmic quality of the scribe and the potency of the word love combined.

Try it. Write short pieces of text or just the same word over and over again in joined up writing. The text becomes a heartbeat, a pulse, a living rhythm and the pen or pencil pressure and speed will increase or decrease depending on you and your mood. Do try to get to a place where the tone is even and you relax into a natural rhythm. Try and keep the text 'neat' on the page filling the space rather than invading it. Let the word become the picture; it is line, shape and form – no longer a word with any particular meaning.

4 Inside the rainbow

12

Repetition and colour, imagination and concentration. This activity captures the imagination and takes you to a happier place.

The rainbow appears in most children's drawings, even in places where rainbows are unlikely to occur. As a result of this, children still understand the universal image and meanings associated with the rainbow, possibly because it is used continuously in TV, film and literature.

Inside the rainbow considers this in more abstract terms. Clear your mind of what a rainbow looks like and imagine the DNA, the molecules, arteries and atoms that make up its internal structure and life force. The rainbow is the packaging for hundreds even thousands of drops, dots, spots, dashes and/or blobs all in repeating colours and shapes. Fill the entire page if you can with non-uniform repeating 'circular' forms and do not try and make it a 'rainbow' shape.

Consciously or unconsciously we continue to make certain positive associations with rainbows throughout our lives. The process of repetition with shape, colour and a loose pattern will really focus the mind and help to slow you down.



5 Mould it

13

Who does not like the feeling of moulding and forming clay? That lovely pressure and tension of application and release. Working with clay is one of the most satisfying processes: squeezing, shaping, rolling and shaping. A good quality plasticine will have a similar effect and travels easily. It is also a bit like the never-ending gobstopper in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory – it won't dry up, it's the sensation that just keeps giving.

Stage 1:

Begin by warming the clay/plasticine up, just gently rolling it between your palms. Keep the motion even, gentle and repetitive. The word gentle is implicit here, if you smack the plasticine around or are too aggressive with it you will destroy its elasticity and defeat the purpose. If this is all you have time for that is enough! The action itself will be calming and help you concentrate and focus.

If you have more time begin to make things you can recall from memory or even your drawings from the previous two tasks. These should be familiar shapes, some literal and some more abstract. Below is a list of starting points but these are interchangeable and completely flexible.

Take shapes, line and forms from your 'Map my mind'

- Cat/mouse/dog/elephant
- Lion/sheep/cow
- Coiled snake
- Snowperson
- Pinecone
- Fat baby

Stage 2:

Once you have made the shapes you can use a pen, toothpick or another useful everyday tool to add detail, in particular patterns. Repeat patterns can be calming and help focus the mind. Alternatively, you can apply colour and texture with tissue paper and PVA glue watered down or a little wallpaper paste. Use a soft paint brush to apply the glue and gently apply each piece, build the layers up gradually.



'Clay has in its history the potential to transform, not only material but engagement with others and yourself in a reciprocal dialogue with material. I think we are craving that material relationship.'

Clare Twomey – Why I create

6 Balance

Life is all about balance.....

It can be extremely calming to focus the mind on balance. This is very much a yoga version of sculpture. An ikebana of calm and, for the very brave, engineering defying towers.

Use your plasticine to create a base starting point and the 'hinges' and 'joints' of the sculpture. With all of the activities it is up to you how much time you devote. A minimum of 15 minutes is recommended and, of course, this could keep you focused for hours.

Prep your plasticine – create a series of different sized shapes such as balls, triangles, squares – it is up to you. You can combine all three or perhaps you like the order of one shape.

Now build. You can go tall and wide at points but the real satisfying aim here is height and balance. The cocktail sticks should support like splints or scaffolding. Build with the cocktail sticks and plasticine



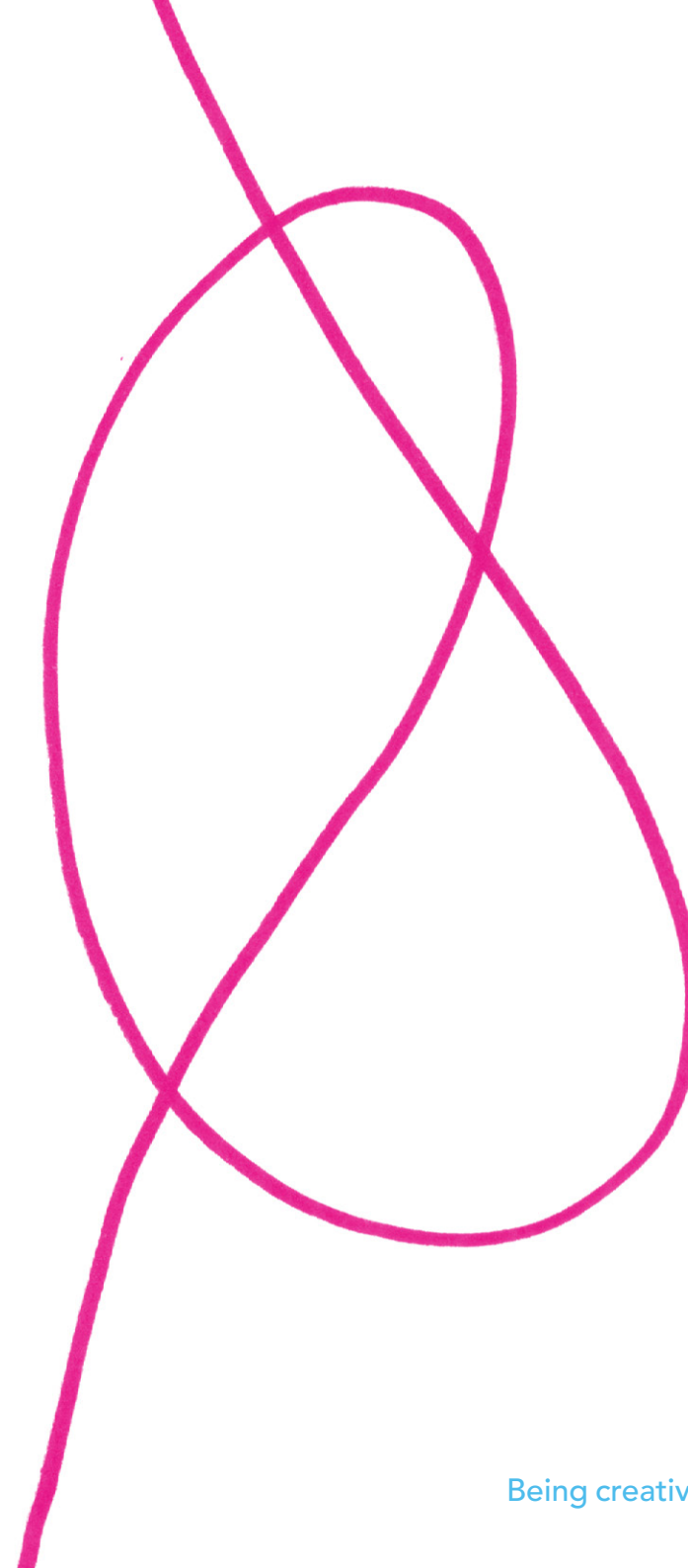
7 Hidden layers

'Through a process of removal and retrieval works become dense, wrought and sculptural. Mistakes and pentimenti hide in plain sight.'

Anthony Banks – artist

Creating collages from found and existing materials can be cathartic as well as thought and memory provoking. We consciously and sub consciously make visual connections. Shape, colour, texture, pictures and words can often be a trigger. What is important is your focus on the activity – try to avoid other distractions or conversations. Begin by not over-planning: use old magazines, newspapers, coloured/recycled paper – whatever you have that is paper based to hand.

Let your mind guide you. Focus on words that grab your attention, some of these may lead to sentences that you can build. Images that you can relate to or draw you in, the same with textures and colour. Play with the arrangement, it is important to allow a layering process and not to care too much about covering over a word or image. This can be significant – knowing you can create a message and then cover it up is important for your own process of confronting and dealing with memory, experience etc. Once you have a few layers down you can build into this by writing messages, memories, hopes, worries, dreams, fears. Then continue the layering process – cover some of these up, you can leave some partially or fully exposed or cover and even tear back into the collage to reveal. The hidden layers contain your thoughts – a map of you at this time and it may be that you come back to this at another time and re-explore it, tear back layers to reveal what is underneath.



8 Map of me

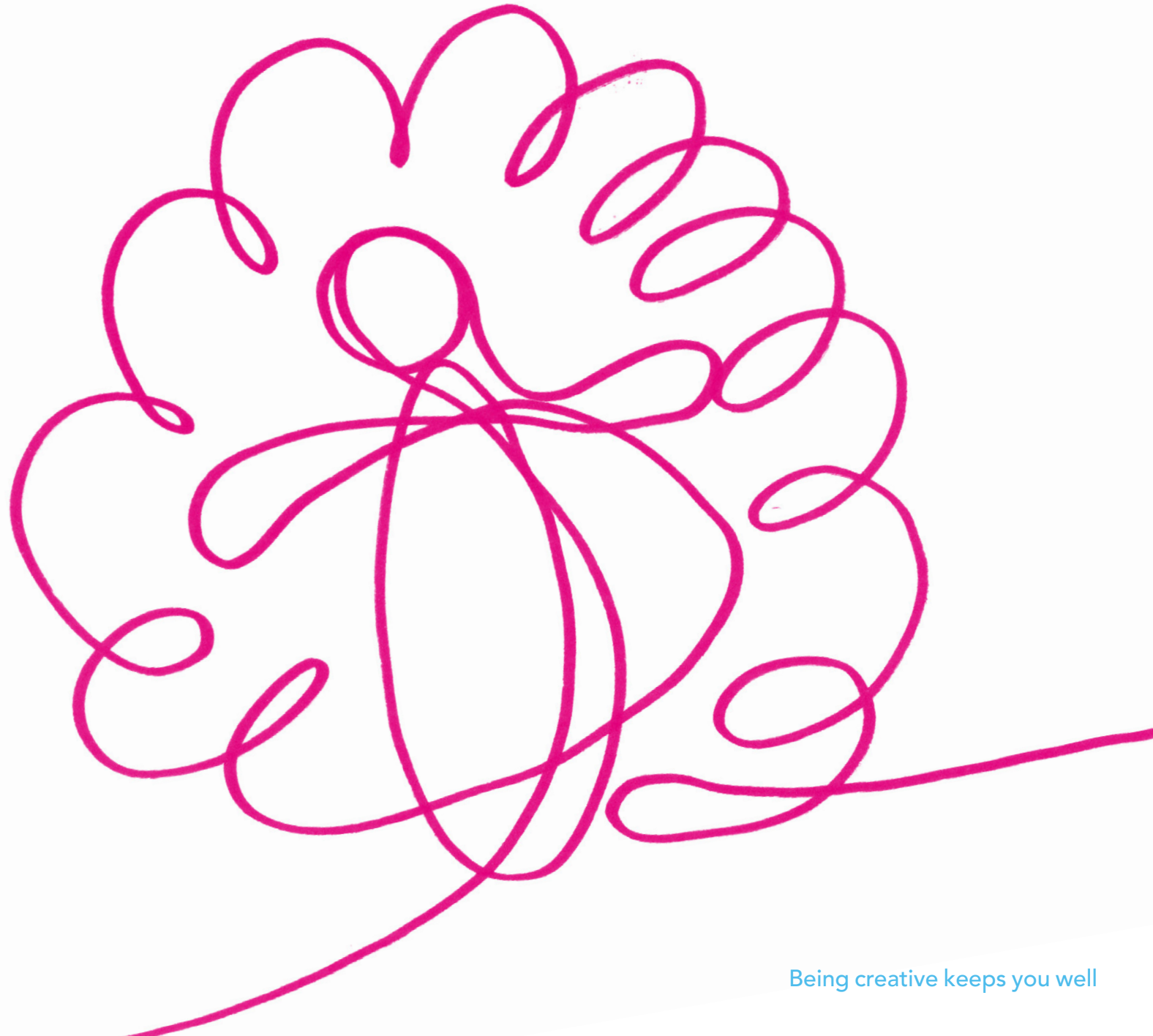
'Being challenged in life is inevitable, but being defeated is optional...'

Henry Fraser – *The Little Big Things*

This is the next step on from the map of possibilities is the map of me. You will need maps which you can tear and cut up, these can be from places you have lived/ live, have visited and aspire to visit.

Step one is to create your reconstructed map, refer to the examples, cut away landmass leaving the skeletal structure of roads. You can re-imagine your past showing both physical and metaphorical journeys you have made. You can weave your own portrait into this and collage other significant imagery and text.

A final step of your map of me is to add new paths, these can be stitched in, collaged or drawn. Its important to focus on hope as well as address challenges.



9 Landscapes for a Lonely Wolf

18

'Sometimes when I am painting, I become so engrossed in the act of making marks with a brush, afterwards I can't remember how I did it.'

Twinkle Troughton – artist

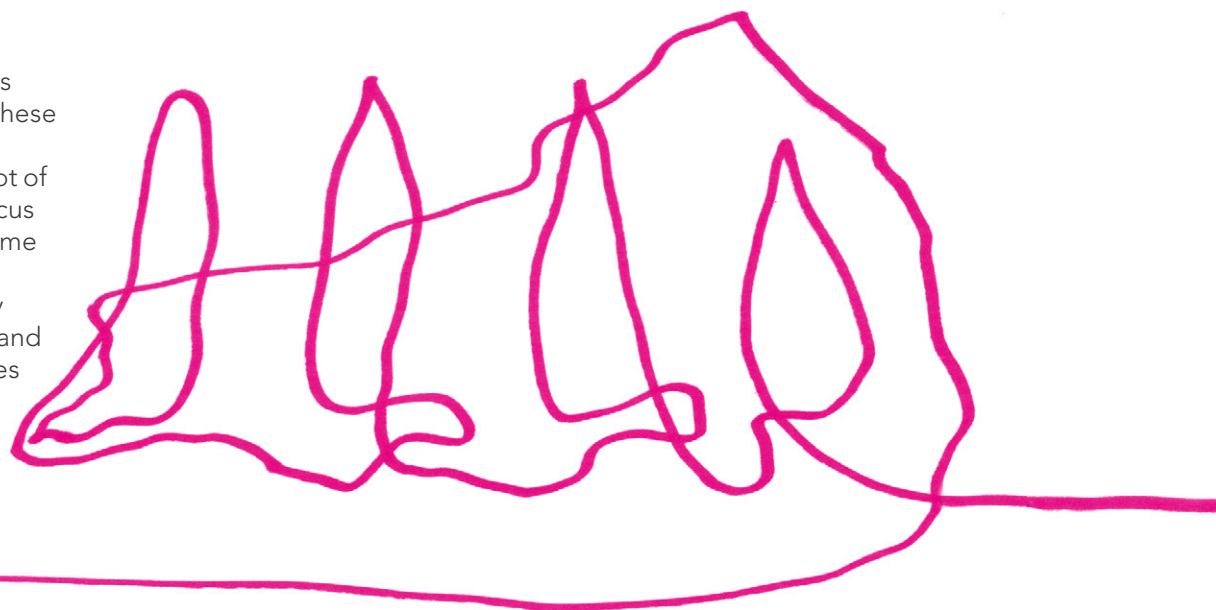
This workshop is inspired by Twinkle Troughton's The Lonely Wolf series. Her paintings are both magical and sinister responding to a poem 'Fable' by Janos Pilinszky she remembers from childhood. The unplanned stains, drips and marks are created by the alchemy of oils on paper with mediums, by their very nature, that oppose each other and create distortions. She then pulls strange fairytale landscapes out of these markings and adds minute detail which further tell a story.

Step 1

Play with inks or watercolour on damp paper – the secret here is not to saturate. Use a heavy weight paper, watercolour or cartridge. You can paint with a sponge and brushes whilst also lifting the edges of the paper and allowing the paint to flow. Drop and splash and also use tissue to blot. Work with a range of colours that please you in how they mix and merge. When you are happy with your landscape let it dry. It is advisable to make a few at a time and have some in back up for step 2. Also, step 1 might be enough for you, there is no rule to say you need to go any further.

Step 2

On the dry paper start to add details using pen, pencils, colour pencils. These can be from memory or images you have. The adding detail requires a lot of focus and concentration; it helps focus the mind on the task in hand. For some this can be frustrating as they want perfection – try to move past this by adding organic detail such as trees and foliage that don't require rigid angles and straight lines.



Being creative keeps you well

10 Landscape

19

'Being creative in our workshops connects us, making art gives my mind a rest, it helps me tell my story. I am at peace for that time.'
Thok Thor Koang – Mystart student, Kakuma refugee camp

Teaching in the desert has its challenges; it is a hostile terrain where it is difficult to sustain life. Everything has a thorn. There is also incredible beauty and solace and, in ways, if you know how to look, this can be true of almost anywhere.

Kakuma is the Swahili word for Nowhere. Kakuma refugee camp sits in the Turkana desert in NW Kenya and, at time of writing, it has been there for almost 30 years and is the fourth biggest camp in the world. The average refugee stays in Kakuma for 19 years. Every day is a struggle for the people living here; it is a place where everyone has suffered deep trauma and hope is easily lost. Yet, there is still love and hope, courage, aspiration and dreams; much of this is fuelled by solidarity set within a strong community structure. People in Kakuma are very connected to each other and to the landscape they inhabit. When the community structure breaks down the terrain quickly closes in with its full weight of hostility.

Connecting or reconnecting with the world around you involves taking time to observe it, appreciate it, experience it, fear it. Then allow it to fill your senses.

Begin this task by simply observing what you can see, hear, feel, smell and touch. Connect with your environment using as many of your senses as you can. You are not attempting to create a photographic representation, rather a 'sense of place'. You can make rubbings, sketches and even write notes. Then move onto collaging a landscape – build layers using coloured paper, masking tape and paint; create a loose landscape based on the environment you are exploring, capturing the mood and atmosphere as much as simplified forms. Then build on the collage with materials you have perhaps collected or have at home. Let your landscape take on the character of the world that you are a part of. At this stage, you can inject imagination and memory. If you feel the need, add detail, however, there are no rules, it is your landscape. If you really want to go for it, apply touches of spray paint and neon tape (this gets expensive but so much fun).



Being creative keeps you well

Currently the Director of Art and Design Technology at Dulwich College, Sue Mulholland has been a teacher for 20 years across a broad spectrum of schools, maintained and independent. Primarily a teacher of Art and Art History, she is also a leader in academic and pastoral matters with a prolific track record for developing and nurturing educational partnerships.

From very early in her career she has worked with pupils from the most challenging backgrounds, including asylum seekers fleeing conflict zones. Sue recognised the role creativity and re-triggering imagination have in breaking down barriers. They can provide a platform for communication and expression and can be the much-needed scaffolding for even the most troubled person.

'Creative wellbeing' (not that she has always called it that) has been a constant thread of active research. A defining moment came in 2014. Sue made her inaugural visit to Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya with the Mystart project. Having worked with Mystart in London schools, this was the next logical step. Sue has been back to Kakuma several times since, in the capacity of teacher, mentor and teacher trainer. Sue continues to work with Mystart, she is an advisor and partner with Windle International and the Chairperson on the board of Gwa Africa, an educational foundation set up by former child soldier Emmanuel Jal.

Whilst her multi-faceted role is firmly rooted in providing care and quality education for all, regardless of situation or background, it is her work across such diverse landscapes that has convinced her of the benefits of creative wellbeing. All her workshops are carefully researched and designed in response to her years of teaching practise and field work.

"Above all, I have probably learned more from the young people and adults I teach than they will ever learn from me. Owning your mind, being calm and measured and taking back control when you feel lost is empowering; this is central to all my workshops. I do not claim creative wellbeing is a cure, but it is a tried and tested prop, a strategy to help people reflect and cope. For me, testing the theory on home ground and also extreme situations like those I encountered in Kakuma have been both humbling and convincing of their value".



'Life is much simpler and much happier when you always look at what you can do, not what you can't do. Every day is a good day'.

Henry Fraser – *The Little Big Things*

Henry Fraser OA is a British artist and motivational speaker.

Paralysed from the shoulders down following an accident.

