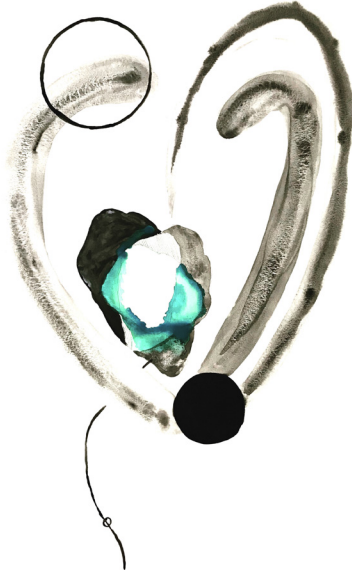


Hic et Nunc



a handbook for experiencing freedom

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melissa unger

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• introduction

In January 2019, I began making a watercolor every morning. I wish I could tell you why I chose watercolor over another medium, but I am not sure why. I think perhaps it was because water felt like the polar opposite of rigidity. I wanted to embrace fluidity. What better ally than water could I chose to embark on a daily creative journey? Later I would add grease pencils and pastels to my game, but it all began with small circles of pressed pigment and the transparent liquid that sustains all of our lives.

My *Morning Watercolors* emerge through me in moments of meditative stillness.

They are a spiritual practice in which I set aside all reasoning, striving and goals and simply surrender and allow the colors to lead the way.

I consider my output to be Intuitive Art, which is typically defined as: *a process of creating art using an inner awareness that is heart centered and does not rely on analysis or head-based questions.*

This form of art-making does not seek technique-building or improvement; it is an opportunity for wide awareness, free play and openness.

It is not a practice of transcribing the material world, but rather embracing one's *innerscape*; and of exploring energies, frequencies, vibrations.

As I began to share these watercolors, viewers drew parallels to *Georgina Houghton, Hilma Af Klimt & Agnes Pelton*. I certainly feel a kinship with this ancestral line of female mystics, but I believe that the mystery that they accessed, and that I also tap into, is available to all.

I hope this book will be a window for you. One you can always throw open to let in the cool breeze and sunshine that comes with creative freedom.

- **materials**

You will begin by gathering your materials. Choose them with intention. They matter. If you feel connected to them, you'll be eager to return to them daily.

water:

Choose your container. You will be dipping your brush into its heart. Select an object that is pleasing to your eye and that feels good to fill and carry. I began my journey with a simple empty bottle of *Martinelli's Apple Juice*. I was drawn to its small, squat roundness. I found its low center of gravity to be grounding. I liked the way it fit in my hand as I carried it from tap to table. When I placed it on my creating area, I felt protected by a feminine force. In my mind's eye, the bottle's rudimentary curves morphed into a *Venus of Willendorf*.

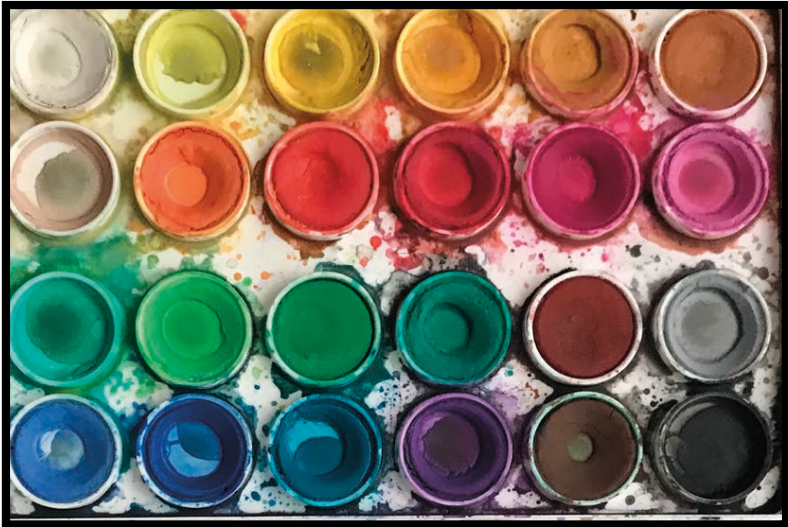
What will your water container be? Clear glass? Colored glass? Ceramic? A mug? A jar? A bowl? A vase? There is no wrong answer. Rummage around and let the container call you to it. When you've found the right one, you'll know.





color:

I suggest that you begin with the most inexpensive watercolor set possible. A children's set or any rudimentary option from an art supply store will do just fine. As you move forward, you'll be able to make new choices, opting later for higher quality pan sets and even upgrade to tube paints, but for now basic is best. I found that initially, the low cost materials allowed me to be silly. Freed from fear of financial waste or mistake-making, my time became my own and I could readily tap into my childhood self and just play.



brushes :

Once again, inexpensive is a fine way to start getting over yourself. Our path is one of adventure, priggishness has no place here. You won't be burdened by the hubristic worry of whether or not you're an 'artist' if you're using the same brushes a 5 year-old uses.

Many shops offer affordable brush sets, seek out a set that appeals to you. One that contains a few different sized and shaped brushes is ideal. Later you'll perhaps explore the difference between nylon bristles versus natural bristles, and also find that you have a predilection for particular brushes. The brushes on the left are the ones I started off with. The ones on the right are the ones I use now.

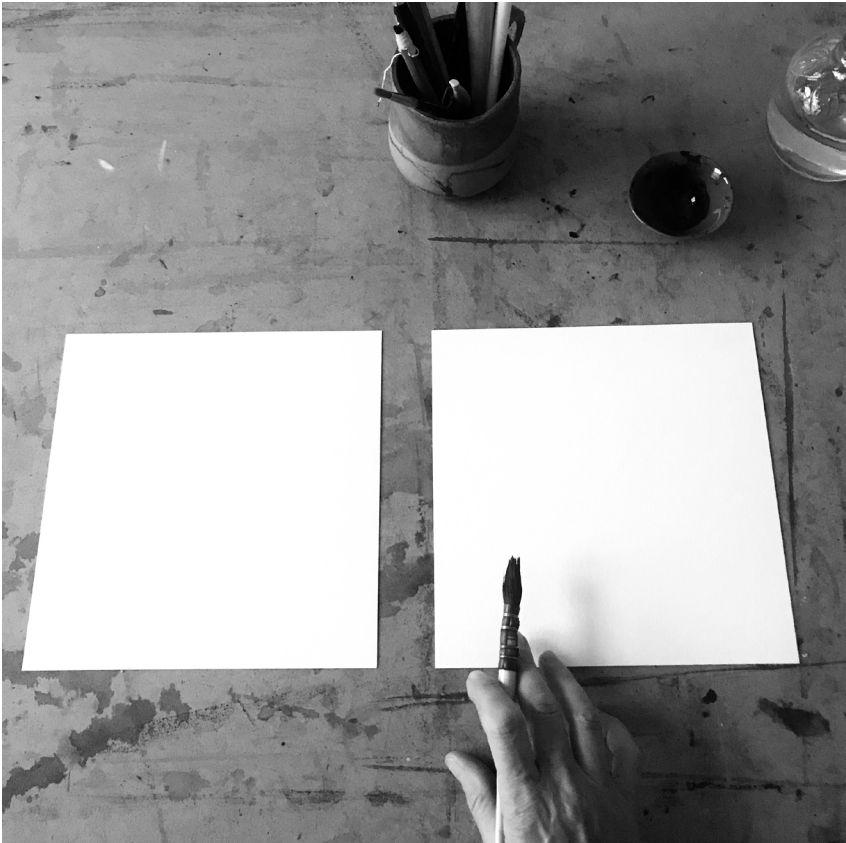


paper:

You'll need watercolor paper as opposed to standard household paper. Watercolor paper ranges wildly in price, some are surprisingly expensive. Shop around, any low cost watercolor paper will do.

As for size, it's up to you. What are you in the mood for? A smaller surface like a postcard? Something the size of 45 record album? Magazine size? Poster size? Do you tend to feel most comfortable within a framework? Or does the great wide open thrill you? Choose the size of your paper accordingly.

I began with 8in x 8in square pads and then explored both smaller and larger. These days I most often play with 18in x 24in paper.



etc:

It's nice to have a regular black lead pencil on hand. Also perhaps gather some seashells or other organic shapes. At the very start I was so frightened of the white page; of the lawlessness of it, that I began by making outlines. I'd place a shell or or a stone on the paper and trace around it with my pencil and then watercolor inside those lines. Essentially, my early forays were a sort of bespoke coloring book. Soon, I gained confidence and understood that in this realm: there are no rules or repercussions. Feeling more free, I layered increasingly intricate traced shapes, until one day my brush jumped over the line and went rogue; a streak of color danced boldly into the wild expanse of the page. I was free.





Now is the time to begin calling up memories of your early childhood play. What do you remember? Getting dirty in the mud perhaps? Or sloppily helping to bake a cake? Swimming and splashing and not caring how your wet hair looked? Coloring outside the lines? Enjoy those memories of recalling yourself in a time before you were self-aware, before rules and regulations. Return to the heart of yourself.



• **space**

You will find the space and time to play.

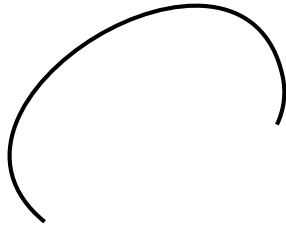
Many lead busy lives but there is always a moment.
Find the time you can spare. Start with 15 minutes.
If you can carve an hour, even better.

Will it be morning? Noon? Night?

The answer will be different for each of you.

I am an early riser: 6:30am

I love that liminal time when the world is just awakening.
Though I never set a timer, I know that my next commitment
isn't too near. That parenthesis has become the most magic
part of my day.



mood:

What energy would you currently like to explore? Do you
need more calm? Or would you prefer to feel invigorated?
This is a useful consideration. I was seeking serenity so I
made sure to create a space that was propitious to that
sensation. The light is diffused, the temperature gentle,
the smells delicious (delicate incense).

I like a quiet room with only ambient noise as a tune. What
do you like? Bright light? A dark room? Floral smells or
musky ones? Loud rhythmic music? A soft symphony? To each
his own.

movement:

Before I began painting, I had thought of it as a sedentary endeavor. But I soon realized it was the opposite. Even the smallest painting requires movement. I encourage you to choose a space to paint where you feel comfortable and unfettered; where there is room to swing your arms if you feel the urge to. Some prefer to paint seated at a table, others in an armchair with the paper resting on a clipboard or book. I, short of space, paint on my bed. As my mattress is high off the ground, and I have found that I like to paint standing, it's ideal. I keep a large, sturdy rectangular cardboard in my closet, and I place it on the bed when I paint. The board is significantly larger than any paper I might use, so there's plenty of room to make a mess.

talismans:

You may like to have a mascot nearby to cheer you on as you try this new project. What brings you comfort? A lucky charm? A cherished photo? A sentimental scarf? What gives you gumption? An award you once won? A love letter? Bring these close. As for me, felicity and solace are often found in flowers, rocks and stones.



This concludes the preparations. Next, you begin.

○ You've chosen your materials, found your time, selected your space, set your mood, gathered what's good.

Here are three ways into the mystery:

1. mirror

Take a deep breath.

Scrunch your shoulders up to your ears as you breathe in.

As you exhale drop them down as low as you can.

Do it again.

Hang your arms loose by your sides and jiggle them around.

While you're at it, dance a little jig.

Look at the blank piece of paper before you.

Imagine it's a mirror.

A mirror that allows you to see inside yourself.

Connect to your gut.

How do you feel today?

If your mood was a color, what color would it be?

No need to force it, a color will come immediately to your mind.

Intuitively select a brush, submerge the tip in water.

Look at your watercolor set and find the color that matches closest to today's mood.

Imbue your brush with that color.

Turn towards the paper again; you're going to make your mark.

Leave your rational mind out of this; let instinct take over, it's the most natural thing in the world.

It doesn't matter where on the paper you start, just touch down your brush and let it lead you.

Do it. Make a stroke.

How did it feel?

Did that line or swoop give you an adrenaline rush?

Do you feel a bit naughty?

Proud? Silly? Ridiculous? Bored?

Give into it for a while, make some abstract marks, play.

Put your mood down on paper.

Use your primary color for a bit and then ask it what other colors it might enjoy playing with. It will tell you.

Once of the most interesting aspects of this is exercise is that you will know when you've finished.

Now look at what you've made, you'll be tempted to judge it. Don't.

It's beautiful. It can't not be.

Future paintings may be different, will evolve, shift and change, you may like some more than others, but they will all be beautiful.

I suggest you do this mood mirror practice for at least a week before moving forward. Tap into your mood daily; play with colors, try different gestures, explore all the colors in your set, get used to the brushes, to the paper, to the ritual, to being a creator.



2. vessel

You'll begin by emptying yourself.

Clear it all out. Your thoughts, your mood; shovel it all aside.

When I first understood how to do this, I stumbled upon the notion of convex vs. concave consciousness.

Convex is you in your mind, you're leaning forward, present, pushing out into the world.

Concave is you leaning back, holding space, cave-like, a room, a womb.

You're making space in yourself for something else to land there.

You'll still be there watching, pressed up against the cave wall, but the waterfall will rush past you while you remain dry.

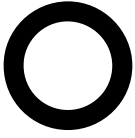
Another metaphor: Instead of the rider, you become the horse. Let go of the reins, let something other take over. Be ridden.

Grab a pencil, facing your black page: Ask it what it wants. What wants to come down onto the page? What shape? A squiggle? An arc?

Just begin, let yourself be guided. Doodle, flow.

Once you feel done, look at your watercolor set, what colors want to play today?

Select a few and let your brush glide over the squiggles and shapes and build on them. Play, give into the energy. You'll know when it's done.



3.void

Clear your mind.

Imagine yourself diaphanous, a mist.

You have no borders, you are one with everything around you.

At the subatomic level everything vibrates and nothing is rigid, nor defined.

When sitting in a chair you are also the chair.

Swimming in the ocean, you are the water.

I am just barely gracing the edge of this understanding.

Next month I will try to paint as the void.

Will you try too?



• **post script**

journeys:

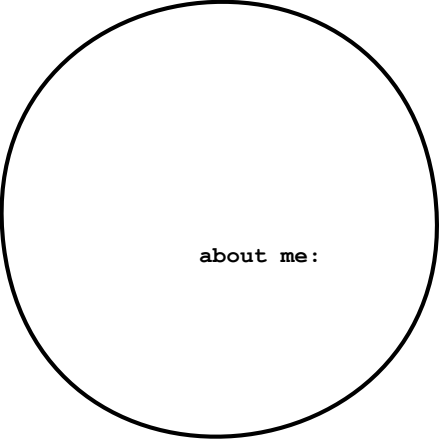
restriction to freedom
head to heart
terror to trust
patriarchy to matriarchy

prompts:

circles
bowls
wombs



+ If you're curious see all 700+ of my watercolors (2019-2021) and observe their evolution chronologically over time, I invite you to visit: **melissaunger.me**




about me:

Melissa Unger is a creative entrepreneur, advisor, writer & artist. She is also the Founder and Creative Director of Seymour Projects. Prior to founding Seymour Projects in 2011, Melissa, a Franco-American, built a prolific 20+ year career in media, arts, and public service, working with and consulting for internationally recognized organizations including *Tribeca Productions*, *Disney's Jumbo Pictures*, *The Ad Council*, *Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac*, *artnet*, and the *Creative Growth Art Center*. Melissa has also held positions on the production crew of a number of acclaimed feature films and been the personal assistant to actors *Robert De Niro* and *Daniel Day-Lewis*.

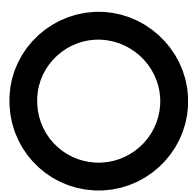
Her years of collaborating with creatives, futurists, and leading minds from a wide range of fields, coupled with a decade of her own psychosocial research have afforded Melissa unique insights that she strives to communicate in a meaningful manner. She is regularly invited to collaborate on a wide variety of projects and is often asked to share her perspective in public talks.

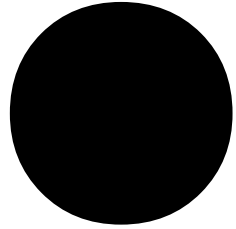
Melissa and her projects have been featured in numerous international press publications, including: *The Huffington Post*, *Die Zeit*, *ELLE Magazine*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*, *Le Monde*, *New York Magazine*.

After 14 years living & working in Paris(2004-2018) Melissa is currently based in Brooklyn.









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contact me: melissa@seymourprojects.com