



Activity Guide

TD Community Sunday:
Mandala Making with Sheniz Janmohamed

Introduction

Follow along with artist, educator, and poet [Sheniz Janmohamed](#) to learn about a mandala and its various manifestations in arts and culture. Draw upon your senses and memories to create your own mandala, imagining your heart as a city. Use shape, colour, pattern, and texture to denote landmarks, building, parks, and roads—all centred around the heart of your city/mandala.



This mandala activity draws inspiration from MOCA's exhibition *Greater Toronto Art 21*, which features works from 21 artists working in relation to Toronto today. A key question that the exhibition explores is “What does it mean to centre a community?” Through our mandala making, we can start to think about how we might personally answer this question.

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Sheniz Janmohamed (cover, p. 1, 2, 6)

Kelly Noussis (p. 3)

Susan McEwen (p. 5)

What is a Mandala?

A mandala translates as “circle” from Sanskrit. The mandala is often used as a symbolic tool for ritualistic practices in Buddhist and Vedic traditions.

Nature mandalas are often created by using found materials in nature and allowing patterns to develop through the act of making, rather than planning. As a reminder of the impermanence of all things, mandalas are destroyed or taken apart after being created.



Step 1: Prepare Your Materials

Collect some tactile materials and objects, which you will use to create your mandala. You can choose these objects intuitively or intentionally, by their colour, texture, shape or pattern.

Feel free to collect your mandala materials from a variety of places, such as:

- On a nature walk (collect natural objects such as acorns, twigs, fallen flowers, stones, etc.)
- Magazines or decorative papers (cut-out images & textures)
- At home (dried spices, lentils, broken jewellery, etc.)



Step 2: Visualize Your Heart

If possible, have someone read this aloud to you so that you can close your eyes during the exercise.

Preparation

Take a moment to adjust yourself and get comfortable. Roll your shoulders back a few times, then gently forward. Shake out any tension you might be carrying, and take a deep breath in and out. Another deep breath, in and out. Now close your eyes...

Begin the Journey

Imagine that your heart is a city that you can enter. Take a look around—what do you see, smell, taste, touch, and hear as you walk the city streets? Where are your feet taking you? Are you alone, or do you have companions in this city of your heart? Allow yourself to be completely drenched in the senses and sounds of the city.

Reaching the Centre

Now, you find yourself reaching the centre—the heart of the city. There's something precious and meaningful at the centre of the city. You don't need a map; you know exactly how to get there. Now, as you reach the centre of your heart city, how do you feel?



Step 2: Visualization (Cont'd)

Focus on the Feeling

Imagine that the heart of your city is a feeling, one that you can reach out and touch. It moves through your entire body, like a colour, or a mist. Here, you are completely safe. No matter where you go, or how many times you may get lost, you always know the way to this place. Hold onto this feeling, to this energy. Imagine it shrinking to the size of a seed, which you can place at the centre of your heart. You have access to it whenever you need it.

Find Your Way Back

Find yourself back in your room. Wiggle your toes, wiggle your fingers. When you are ready, open your eyes.



Step 3: Create Your Mandala

- Take your time coming back to your space, and look at your collection of found objects. If you don't have objects to use, you can draw your mandala using paper and markers or pencil crayons.
- Choose an object (or colour) that represents the centre of your city. This could be a representation of what you saw when you closed your eyes, or a feeling connected to that place - maybe a colour, or shape. Place it at the centre of your mandala.
- Now, build your mandala around the centre, and create patterns and shapes that represent the landmarks and roads of your city.
- If something you add doesn't feel right, just remove it and start again!



Special thanks to Sheniz Janmohamed for sharing this activity with us.