



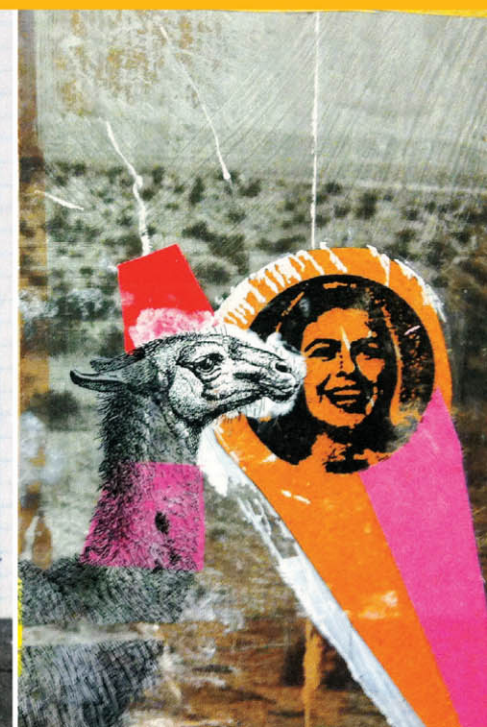
Playing with

Image Transfers

Exploring Creative Imagery for Use in Art, Mixed Media, and Design

Courtney Cerruti

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The background is a solid mustard yellow color. It features a faint, large-scale technical drawing of a dome or sphere with various lines and angles. Overlaid on this are several dark silhouettes of people in various poses. There are also some faint, vertical text elements like 'Fig. 17-10—A 150°' and '90°' scattered across the background.

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Spaces Between by Bridgette Guerzon Mills
encaustic mixed media

Dedication

For the women who started as interns and became friends; for your hard work, vision, and creativity; for making impossible days successful ones. For Shân, Veronica, Shannon, and Kelsea. I am so grateful. Thank you.





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Introduction

Image transfers live in this undefined space in art making ... they are neither photograph nor painting; they are neither print nor collage. Like an elusive nighttime creature, they are hard to explain to anyone who hasn't seen one. Their ephemeral beauty goes beyond the image alone, as they hover between mediums, inhabiting a space somewhere outside of traditional form.

I was in high school, sitting on my bedroom floor looking at an image of LK Ludwig's in the book *Making Journals by Hand* by Jason Thompson. The image was a self-portrait transferred onto a mailing tag. It wasn't a photograph or a painting, it was something else entirely ... the piece was ghostly and romantic and one of the most painterly and beautiful images I had ever seen. I read her how-to and called every store I could think of to find this substance called xylene. After discovering I couldn't get it in California, I asked my dad to bring a bottle back from his next fishing trip to Nevada. He did, and I've been playing with image transfers ever since. I've experimented, tried, and tested every method and process out there. After many failures and many discoveries, I've settled into a set of methods that work both beautifully and consistently.

I believe in processes that are accessible and successful, processes that can be done without expensive equipment and on your kitchen table in the time you DO have to make something, which can be as little as five minutes. Like any art process, so much of this is about experimentation. Give yourself the time and place to play with these methods. Delve into the projects, discover what you love and how it applies to the work you want to make, and then create your own best methods. Fly off in your own direction with a set of skills that will allow you to create the images and work you only tiptoed around before. One of the reasons I love working with image transfers is that they are versatile. They have the capability to be as layered and as complex as you need them to be or simple and immediate. I love that I can create a transfer in a few minutes and make art in a way that

fits into even the busiest moments of my life. They delight the imagination of artists new to their practice as well as seasoned artists who are looking to add dimension and depth to their current work. Image transfers continue to engage and surprise me fifteen years after that first moment when I was seduced and fell so deeply in love.

Opposite: Sunshine Followed
by Sarah Ahearn Bellmare



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CHAPTER 1





Creating successful image transfers is easy once you understand the process and have the technique down. It's always helpful to use the right materials for any project, and knowing what works best will get you on the road to making beautiful and successful transfers without frustration. Here are some basics for knowing how and why certain materials work and which will yield the best results.



Types of Images

In general, high-contrast images work best for all image transfers, both color and black and white. For this reason, clip art, copies of line drawings and sketches, and type and text make clean transfers. You'll discover you can bend this rule with packing tape transfers because they are the most forgiving transfer of all, but when making transfers with personal photos, aim for images with bold blocks of color and high contrast, whether they are in color or black and white.



**PHOTOCOPIES AND
LASER PRINTS**

Many of the projects in this book use photocopies, not inkjet prints, and it is helpful to understand why. Laser prints and photocopies are made with toner instead of ink and use a heat process to set the toner in place. Toner sits on the surface of the paper, allowing it to be released when making a transfer. Ink from an inkjet printer absorbs into the fibers of the paper and cannot be released and therefore cannot make a transfer. If you're not sure whether you have a laser or an ink-jet printer, check to see whether the paper is warm when it comes out of the printer. If it is warm, you have a laser printer; if it is not, you have an ink-jet printer. Both color and black-and-white photocopy machines use toner.

BLACK-AND-WHITE IMAGES

Many image transfers work best when using black-and-white photocopies. There are two reasons for this. First, the photocopy process usually enhances the contrast of the photo, making it bolder and more defined, which generally translates into a better transfer. Second, the toner on a black-and-white photocopy (as opposed to a color copy) is more saturated and can be easier to transfer. If you start with a picture of you and your best friend standing in front of a lake, in front of a mountain, under a blue sky, and you make a black-and-white photocopy, you will end up with an image that looks like a blob of gray. This in turn will create a transfer that looks like a blob of

gray. Any transfer is as good as the photocopy or original image you start with, so keep this in mind as you prepare images to transfer. When making black-and-white copies, use a regular weight copy paper such as 20 pound for best results, which is standard at most copy shops. Avoid using heavy or glossy-coated paper stock.

COLOR IMAGES

In certain processes, color images can be trickier to work with. For whatever reason, color laser printers and photocopy machines can have more variables than their black-and-white counterparts, which means you may make a batch of color copies that don't seem to work well. This may be because of the amount of toner, or the saturation of the image, or just because. Don't despair: almost any failed color copy will work with packing tape transfers. Do an experiment and try different printers and machines at your local copy shop until you find one that yields successful copies for whichever transfer method you're working with. When making color copies, use a lightweight copy paper such as 24 pound for best results. Avoid using heavy or glossy-coated paper stock.

MAGAZINE PAGES

Found images and text can be a great source of inspiration in your work, and magazines are an immediate and inexpensive way to gather found imagery. Glossy pages work best for transfers, and you'll find that matte printed pages will yield faint and ghostly

transfers. Using magazines is a great way to repurpose something that would otherwise be destined for the recycling bin. They also provide great, ready-made words and phrases, which are fun to experiment with, especially if you don't like adding your own handwriting to your work. I especially enjoy using old *National Geographic* magazines. They are easy to find at library book sales and thrift stores and have great, saturated images.

FOUND IMAGES

If you're not quite ready to use your own imagery or want to experiment with a certain theme or image, consider using clip art. A great resource for found images and text is Dover Publications. They've published innumerable volumes of graphics taken from historic, scientific, and cultural sources, all curated into tidy, themed collections. Most of the images are made from engravings, which means the images can have a ton of detail but are still just black and white. What appears as subtle gray color and shading is actually made from tiny black lines. This distinction makes them particularly suitable for transfer processes. Because Dover has been publishing these types of books for decades, these volumes are easily found in bookstores. My other favorite source of clip art is *Crap Hound* magazine. Yep, *Crap Hound*. They are categorized into themes such as Hands, Hearts and Eyes, Clowns, Devils, or Bait. These off-the-cuff compendiums are worth their weight in gold. Check the resource guide for where to find them.

Transfer Materials and Mediums

There are many different ways to make transfers. These materials are my tried-and-true go-tos for the projects in this book. They consistently create beautiful results. Feel free to experiment and explore with mediums you may already have. If you are struggling with creating transfers, check your materials and make sure you have the basics covered before you branch out to other mediums.



PACKING TAPE

You can find packing tape at the hardware store, the grocery store, or even at the dollar store. The quality of tape, whether it costs \$1 a roll or \$5 a roll, makes very little difference when creating a transfer. Some brands will be thicker (not wider), some stickier, and all will have a glossy finish. Start with whatever you have at home and then experiment with various brands. I recently found packing tape that comes wider than the standard 2-inch (5 cm) variety, and I was thrilled. It is harder to work with, but can be oh so fun!

MEDIUMS

I love gel medium. No, really, it's amazing. I use it for all kinds of mixed-media work as both a glue and a sealant. It's a miracle medium. It can be tinted, mixed with acrylic paints, and cleaned up with water. It's not expensive to use, but it's expensive to waste, which is why you should always keep it capped when you're working so it doesn't dry out. Scoop a dollop onto a piece of waxed paper when working and just fold in half to keep it wet. Gloss gel medium works too, but it tends to be thinner, which means you'll need to use more layers when making a gel skin transfer.

SOLVENTS

For most solvent transfers, I recommend using a blender pen, which you can find with the fancy fashion and design markers at most art supply stores. It's a clear "ink" pen that blends two colors together. There are several brands out there, but Chartpak works the best. The Chartpak pen is AAP nontoxic, which means it has the seal of approval from American Academy of Pediatrics for safe use, but it is smelly, so use in a well-ventilated area. The main chemical in a blender pen is xylene or xylol, which you can buy from art supply stores in a tin, like turpenoid or paint thinner. It is not nontoxic, and I rarely use it straight. If you decide your project requires using xylene from a bottle, be sure to work outside with a mask and gloves and read the manufacture's warning. Acetone is another solvent that works well for many types of transfers. You can find this at the hardware store near the paint stripper or you can buy a small quantity from the drug store as nail polish remover, but make sure it has a high percentage of acetone, 90 to 100 percent. Using a blender pen is great because it has a controlled release of solvent through the marker tip, but for larger projects or for working with color photocopies, using solvent from a bottle works better and can be applied with cotton balls.

ACRYLIC PAINT

Normally I would advocate using high-quality paints with a concentration of pigment, but for acrylic transfers, I use cheap craft paint. Craft paint comes in a variety of colors and usually has a significant amount of white base, which actually works great for transfers because it enhances the saturation of the image. You can play around with color without a lot of investment, experimenting with various bodies and brands. When selecting a paint, look for acrylic, something that is smooth to brush on, and medium to light in color (depending on your image and desired effect).