

# Diving Into Mixed-Media Abstracts

March 24, 2018 by [Jeannine Stein](#)

My fear of the blank page is trumped by my fear of the hot mess stage of artwork. In fact, not wanting to deal with that stage at all is sometimes what prevents me from trying a new technique, especially one that incorporates painting. But I decided to face that fear after reading Jodi Ohl's article "Accessible Abstracts" in the [March/April 2018 issue of Cloth Paper Scissors magazine](#), which is all about how to get started creating mixed-media abstracts. Jodi is a fantastic guide, leading you through the steps, giving you great prompts and ideas to work with, and making you feel confident when you're knee-deep in a hot mess.

I admit, I haven't done a lot of mixed-media abstracts; I never really understood how to get started and how to build an abstract composition. But I took a deep breath and dove in, knowing that I was in Jodi's good hands. I came away with pieces that I love and I learned so much about letting go and trusting the process.

# STUDIO

*Saturdays*



Jodi suggests working on heavy watercolor paper primed with black gesso; I cut a piece 9" x 11", and also worked in an art journal spread. I stayed with the same palette of acrylic paint for both, eager to see how different the pieces would be at the end.

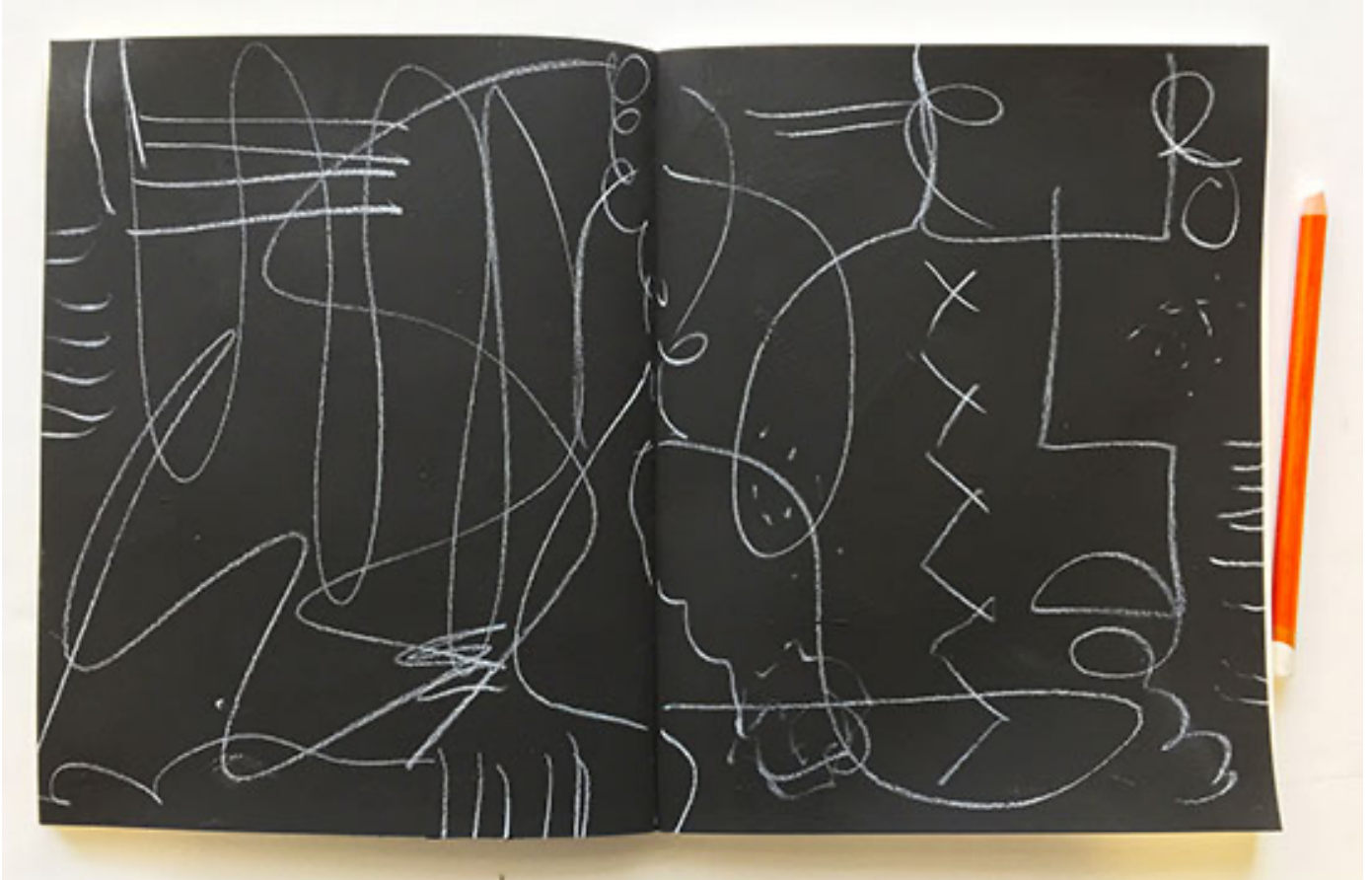
The first stage of these mixed-media abstracts is easy enough: scribbling loosely over the gesso with a white pencil. Since I knew eventually most or all of this would be covered, I drew with abandon. As Jodi writes, "You just want variety and to begin the process." Here is the vertical piece:





*Scribbling on the blank black background helps get you loosened up for creating mixed-media abstracts.*

And here's the journal spread:



*Although most of these marks will be covered up, this layer is integral to your piece.*

Next came the underpainting. Jodi uses neutral shades, and I decided to do the same, again just going with the flow and using a brush or a palette knife, then scribbling into the wet paint with the end of a paintbrush. This part really does help to keep you loose and open to trying new techniques. Here's the vertical piece, followed by the art journal spread:







*Still keeping things loose as the underpainting is created, using neutral tones.*

I chose a palette of cerulean blue, green gold, and bright yellow—a little different from my usual go-to colors, but I didn't want to rely on anything too familiar. I used the colors straight and mixed them with each other and the neutrals I started with, as Jodi suggests, to produce a variety of shades and values. I worked intuitively, doing my best to not freak out about the hot mess I was making. In the article, Jodi has great tips for how to begin to build up layers, which is an important part of the process of creating mixed-media abstracts. She also offers a great primer on design principles such as balance, rhythm, proportion and more, giving you even more guidance as you go.

Here's where I was with the vertical piece:



*Still trusting the process for creating mixed-media abstracts, I continued to add layers, marks, drips and more.*

And here's the art journal spread at the same stage. As you can see, both have a lot going on: drips, splatters, stencils, marks—and yes, both are a super-hot mess! To be honest, at this point I didn't care. I had completely let go of any worries about what these would become, and was truly enjoying the process and not beating myself up. That in itself was quite a



revelation.



*After creating all of this, I began looking for shapes and themes to expand on, working toward the finished piece.*

The article walks you through the refinement stage of the piece, where you start to see shapes to build on, areas to edit, and places that need some cohesion. My advice is to take things slowly. No need to finish this in a day. In fact, giving yourself some time between stages is a great idea, because you'll come back with a more objective eye.

I refined my pieces by adding glazing medium to various shades of paint, which helped tidy up some areas while lettering the layers below show through. I also highlighted and repeated some basic shapes with paint, pencils, and

paint pens, which gave the pieces cohesion. I think both finished pieces still have one foot (or at least a few toes) in hot mess land, but I'm getting there. I may refine them even further, after putting them away for a couple of days and looking at them again. Here's the vertical piece:



*Working on these mixed-media abstracts taught me to loosen up and trust the process.*

And here's the art journal spread.





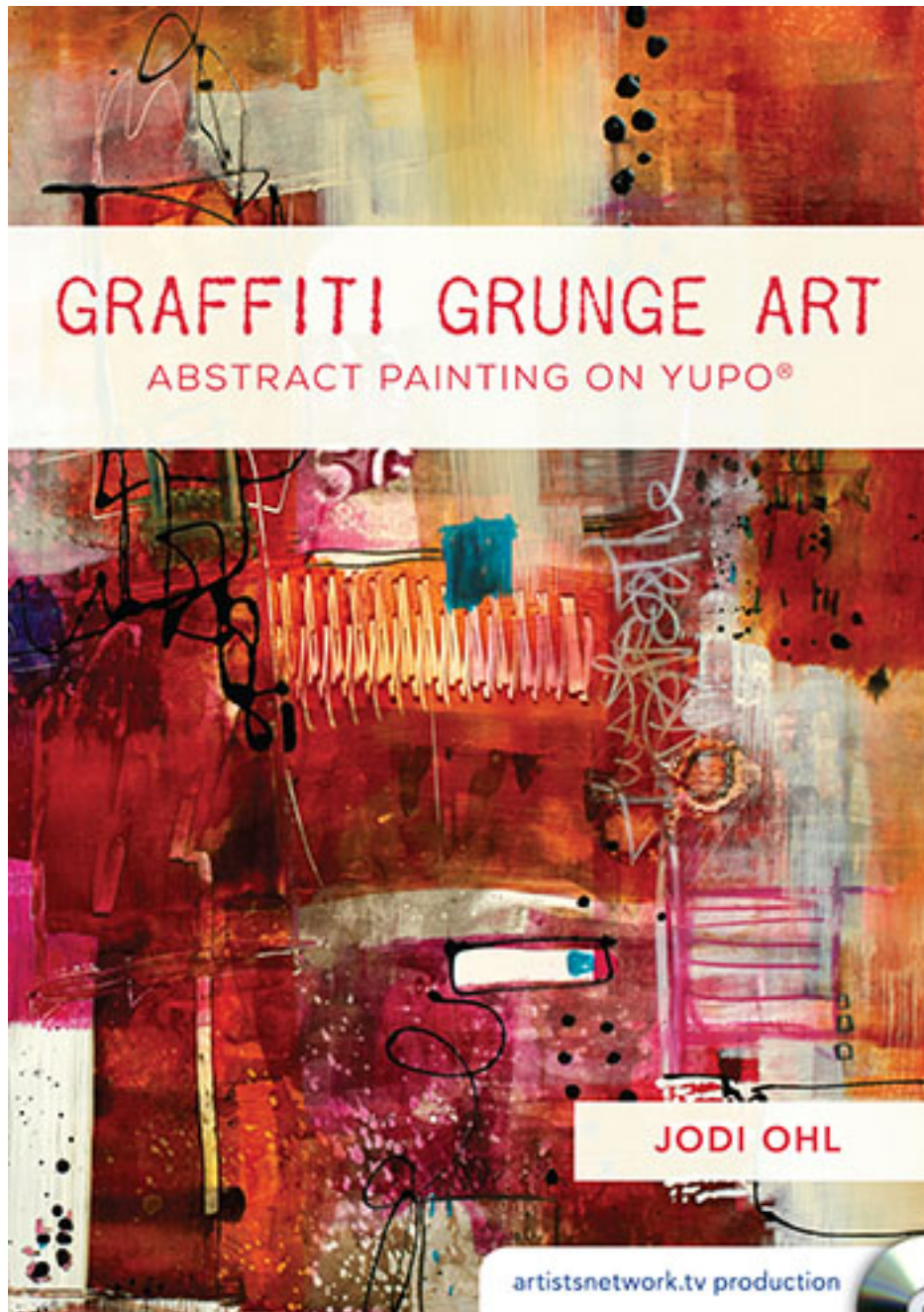
*I encourage you to give mixed-media abstracts a try, or delve more into your practice!*

I call these first significant attempts at mixed-media abstracts successful, not because I achieved perfection, but because I tried new techniques, learned an enormous amount, and am looking forward to doing more abstracts, hot mess stage and all. If abstracts are something you've been thinking of trying, or if you're looking for new ideas for mixed-media abstracts, the March/April 2018 issue of *Cloth Paper Scissors* has a variety of fantastic projects, with great options for working in paint, collage, fabric, and pastel. For a preview, [check out our lookbook, which offers a sneak peek of what you'll find inside!](#)

[Here's my attempt at Laly Mille's romantic abstract florals](#)



[from the issue](#)—this is a project you must try. The techniques offer stunning results!

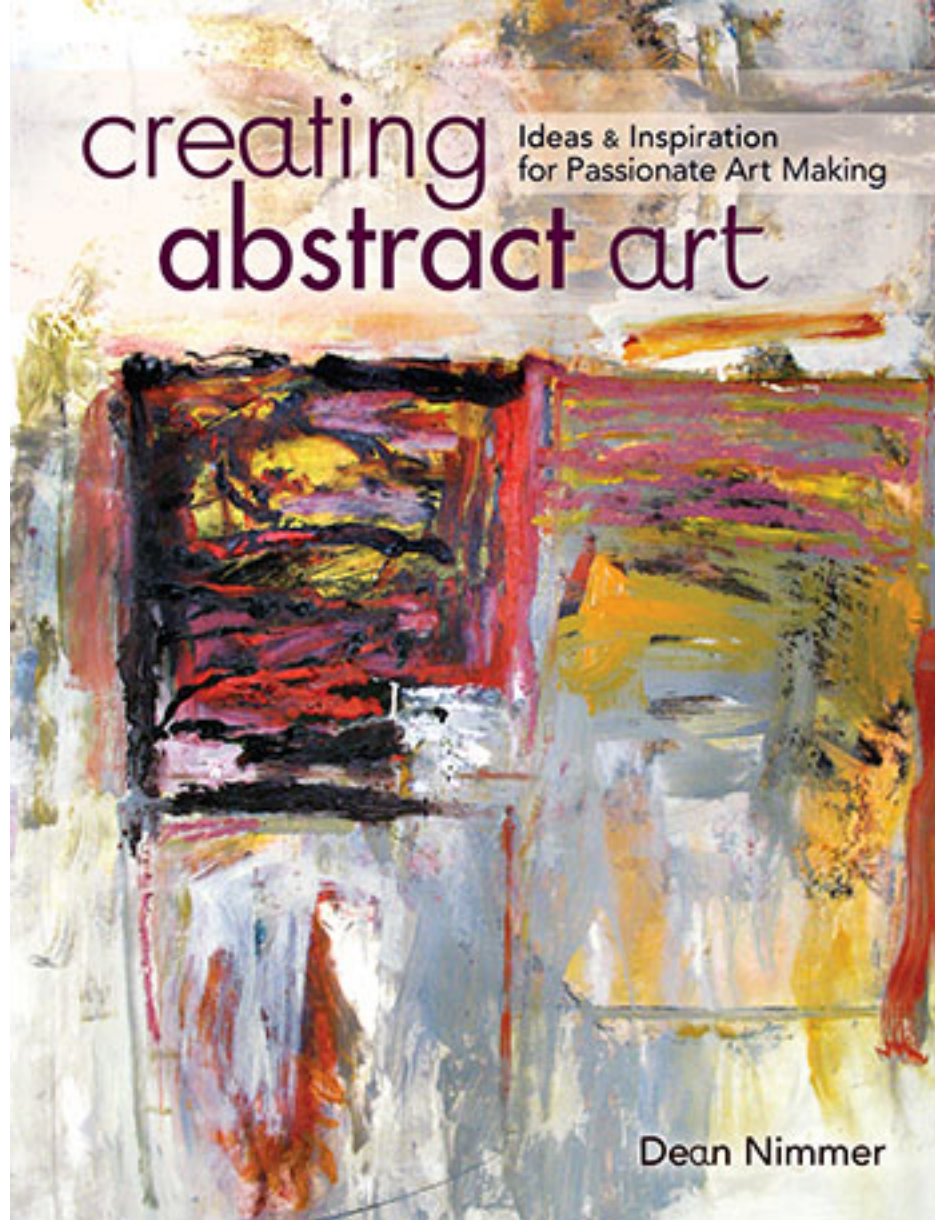


Jodi Ohl's video [Graffiti Grunge Art](#) features abstract techniques for working on Yupo paper with a variety of media.



Curious about creating mixed-media abstracts? The [March/April 2018 issue of Cloth Paper Scissors magazine](#) has fun projects and techniques to try!





[Creating Abstract Art](#) by Dean Nimmer helps you develop your own style and gain confidence in creating abstracts.