

My 100-day project of inking floral illustrations

How this project made me, not only a better artist, but a better person.

Hi, my name is Agota. I am a fashion designer by profession and during the lockdown I rediscovered the joy of drawing and colouring. To combine these two I started to draw colouring pages, to find out immediately that I am so scared of inking. Maybe because the ink is something permanent on paper, you can not erase it once it is there, scary huh? Short after this experience, I found a class by Taptapkaboom (Rich Armstrong) on Skillshare about the perfect 100-day project. Usually, I analyse things too much and end up never doing them. This time I didn't analyse... I was thinking that a 100-day project would be perfect to get rid of my fear of inking by practising. Because I needed a reason, a motivation that would actually keep me practising. I tried the "I will draw every day" but always found a reason not to...

So there I was on the 1st of August, immediately after watching that class, taking the decision to ink. And keeping in mind that I would someday like to draw a colouring book, I was thinking that becoming familiar with drawing flowers would be a good idea. ...100 sounded too much, so I didn't even bother to think about it too much, just begun the task.

I started by drawing little squares of 8x8 cm, filling them with flowers... "It would be nice to have 100 squares like this at the end. :))" I was thinking. Here is a little secret, I draw my first eight squares twice, the first was only the warm-up... and trust me I needed that warm-up. A little about the process: I drew my floral illustrations first in pencil and using a light pad I inked them, using black fineliner, the paper was regular office paper. Then I moved with my project into my sketchbook (A sketchbook I bought to practice drawing once in a while, drew three flowers in it before. :))) drawing in pencil, inking, erasing the pencil. This time the paper was much proper for inking.And I didn't even realize that I somehow, little by little, grew with my project in dimension and difficulty. From 20 minutes of drawing, finding reference photo included, I ended up at about 3-4 hours of drawing per day. ... Not that my teacher didn't warn me, not to expand my project too much per day... but I never listen! :))

On my journey, I also did some background experiments trying to figure out how to create a visual difference between the background and foreground. (Because, yes, I ended up having backgrounds too, and flowers in different phases of blooming.) So I tried out playing with shading, more shading, less shading, no shading at all, pencil backgrounds, marker and watercolour backgrounds, watercolour and ink combinations for shading flowers and leaves. All good things! :)) And I feel that I evolved so much from the first flower with only outlines, no shading at all, a really graphic, doodle style, small drawing to a more complex floral illustration, a closer to reality representation, shading, differentiating between the background and foreground. ... And yes, it was HARD, to draw every day at that size and that difficulty... but if I would have stopped growing I would have never achieved all this, so I am glad that I had the time and stamina to do it.

I also made some experiments with coloured fineliners, and white ink on black paper... just to try them. I gave up on drawing in colour because I felt that it is somehow not fitting the whole picture. Black and whites were fun to do, I somehow

managed to figure out that I should use the white ink for highlights not for shading... so logical, don't understand why it took me so long to figure that out. :)) And because obviously inking with white pen was somehow easier, fewer details, I started to think of them mostly like some survival tools for my project, a once in a while break from those difficult illustrations.

And there I was, on the 8th of November, drawing my final illustration for my 100-day project. I haven't skipped a day!

Next, I want to share with you some ideas that I have learned or figured out by doing this project, more from a personal development perspective. And after I would love to share with you some tips on how to do your 100-day project so you have a better chance to actually finish it.

What personal development has to do with an art project? And how such a project can teach you something about life? Isn't this a project to practice and better your skills in a specific activity? Yes, it is, but it is even much much more than that. And never mind mentioning that you can acquire some skills on other apparently not related activities.

Here are some ideas of how this project helped me become a better version of me.

- Discover and know myself better, find out my fears and limits, find out what motivates me in general, find out ways to work and do things more efficiently, find out my weak points that I need to strengthen and my strengths that I can use as tools to achieve the things I want in any other field.

- Getting rid of perfectionism - because mostly being a perfectionist can do more damage than good and actually can be the thing that holds you back from doing and achieving. Here's why. Before, I was thinking that everything I do or create must be perfect, and I was thinking of ways to make it perfect, but I kind of never had the tools, the skills, the knowledge, so I mostly never even started to do that thing, because I knew the results would not be... perfect. If however I did something and the result was not the desired one, I was disappointed and never continued. But doing this project I realized that there is no such thing as perfect anyway, I can and I should get better, and always improve my skills and techniques, but I have to start somewhere and to achieve that almost perfect, I have to go through the doing, failing, learning steps. There is no shortcut. So allow yourself to be imperfect but always focus on becoming better. Ask yourself what is that I don't like. What can I do better next time? And that's it. Just do it and keep going! (Maybe this "always improve" concept is a perfectionism leftover.)

- Making mistakes is not a bad thing. Society teaches us that making mistakes means failure and it makes you less valuable. But by doing my project I understood that making mistakes is a necessary step to reach a better point because it forced me to think: How can I fix that? How can I incorporate my mistake in my work so that it will result in something even more amazing in the end? How can I do it better next time?

- Never complain about my mistakes - I used to do that - even if I make a mistake, the world will not even notice it, because they don't know what was in my mind,

what I have imagined when creating that work of art or anything else. There are mostly mistakes that only I can see.

- Never compare myself to others - we are all different and unique, all starting from different levels, having different backgrounds and experiences so comparing my results or journey to someone else's is nonsense. I should only compare today's me to yesterday's me.

- Being happy with my daily achievements no matter what - some days I didn't manage to do the best of me, it's ok. I realize that it is good to care about your results, but don't care that much. Allow yourself to be terrible sometimes, tomorrow is also a day.

- Big things are made of many small things - doing something small, and apparently insignificant, but doing it every day, consistently for a long period of time will lead to something big and valuable as an end result. A 100-day project develops the habit of doing things regularly. And acquiring a habit like this can be priceless.

- Going to the next level - this project helped me to reach levels in my drawing that I would have never reached if I would draw only from time to time. This continuous doing pushed me to grow incredibly fast. Make growing and becoming better a goal of your project.

- Facing my fears - this one was a really valuable lesson I have learned. We all have fears, facing them means courage. I have realized that the more I faced my fears the more fearless I became. I had a bunch of "scary flowers" that seemed impossible for me to draw but drew them anyway. By the end, the scary ones were not even that scary and in general, I realize that the things we fear the most are not even close to being that fearful as we think they are. And I felt that this way I have trained my mind to face any other fear I have with ease and understand that fear is only in my mind, it is not a real thing, so it can be defeated.

- Life is not about the destination. It is about the process - It is a good thing to achieve but I have learned to value the process more and feel significant and feel that I have accomplished something by only the act of doing.

- Appreciate time and organize it better - we all know that time is precious, but we still do unimportant things every day. This project made me realize that I can do so many creative things if I manage my time better. And now that I have found something that I really like, I want to spend more time doing that.

- Cultivating patience - this process of cultivating patience I started a while before this project with colouring, but drawing helped me develop this further and realizing that good things take patience. And it is worth to spend time on good things.

- You know that saying that talent is not enough you have to cultivate it? Now that I saw the progress, this makes even more sense to me than before.

- Self-discipline and focus were important factors that kept me going. - setting a daily goal, made myself do it no matter what and focus on the process.

- Finding a work system for everything - and by system I mean to develop process steps that you can follow every time you do that activity, this can save you precious time and ensure that you do it right or at least get the same result. Of course, developing a system takes time and doing, observing and bettering things. I used this for drawing and also for editing photos.

- Thinking about the things I want to do or want to accomplish as projects - The concept of project itself includes the idea of a final result, of actually finishing it at

some point, not just, “Oh, I want to do that someday.” For me, this concept created an expectation so I became much more motivated to do things to achieve that finish line, even if I was doing it mostly for the process. Adding a time limit is also an important part of a project.

- “I don’t feel like doing anything today.” sounds familiar? This project taught me that even if I was not in the mood of drawing that day, just starting it got me out of that state.

It is said that the way we do anything in life is the way we do everything. So these things I have kind of figured out or understood better (even if I already knew them somehow) affected my life in general, and indeed I am more patient, more thoughtful in my actions and more kind and understanding towards myself now than I was before doing this project. It was a complete perspective change for me. I don’t know if these things are a natural outcome of a project like this or you have to have that willingness to evolve as a person in general. This thing I haven’t figured out... but maybe if you do a 100-day project or you have already done one you can tell me.

What your 100-day project should be about.

Now that I have presented you my 100-day project experience let’s talk about your 100-day project!

Well, I think that a 100-day project can be about anything you are interested in, or you want to improve or be better in your life. It can be art, drawing, painting, singing, writing, improve or learn to play on a musical instrument. But it doesn’t have to be art. It can be your health, maybe you realize that you should eat more fresh vegetable and fruits, do a 100-day project on preparing and eating a healthy salad every day. (Develop the habit and then continue of course.) Or exercise, go for a walk every day. Or maybe you feel you need more peace in your life, then make a 100-day project on meditating every day. Or there is something that you procrastinate for a long time, divide it into small tasks and start doing something small every day in that direction. Read a book, maybe you are so busy all the time that you have no time to read, but I’m sure you can find 10 minutes per day to do that. Reading even five pages a day are 500 pages in 100 days and think about how many things you could learn in 100 days.

Taptapkaboom suggested in his class to write lists on what are you good at, what you love to do, what is that you want to do or learn more about, or maybe dreaming of doing that thing one day and the reasons to do a specific thing, all these to figure out what your 100-day project should be about. From my experience with this project, I would add two more things to that list of lists: 1. Things you fear doing like I was with inking because I think that getting rid of your fears can also be a motivation to do a project. The best treatment for fear is doing it. 2. Some issue that needs to be solved in your life and bothers you for a while and yes that probably will not be an art project.

How did I choose the subject for my project? Well, I think that in my case the fear of inking, as a problem I had, found its solution in the idea of the 100-day project so I could get comfortable with the process of inking as a result. So it could be the other way around. Maybe you have the subject, the “what to do” you just don’t know how to start or you can’t find an extra reason that would push you to do that thing and do it every day and solve your problem at the end.

A few tips on how I did my 100-day project.

These tips were mostly, as the other things I have learned, developed in my journey, they were no guidelines for me from the first day, but they can be for you, so you can have a better start and reach even further. Some of the ideas related to time and space were mentioned in Taptakboom’s class... but because I was so unsure at the beginning about me doing that project that I didn’t take them seriously, didn’t even bother... but they are important.

- See how much time you have available a day to do your project - find something or fit that thing you want to do in that time frame.
- Don’t make it too big. (I did, by the end, and it was not too wise. Grow, but grow wisely.) Choose something small. But what if you want to paint large paintings? Maybe you could break it down into more tasks and do one task each day, establish how many days you are going to spend finishing one painting, when you are done start all over. And yes you will not have 100 paintings at the end of the 100 days, but you will have some and remember that the goal is to do every day for 100 days. Or maybe you don’t even want to necessarily have a final product or products at the end, you just want to spend time doing what you love to do, then set 10 minutes per day doing that thing, enjoy it and you’re done.
- Pick a time of the day - in the morning before work, in the afternoon when things are more peaceful around. Doing your project at about the same time every day will also help to develop the habit of doing. If you do it in the morning, make sure you don’t skip breakfast. (I did that for a period of time... not healthy.)
- Make a list of ideas of what to draw or create - I had a general list where I wrote down every idea that came into my mind, every flower that I was thinking of to maybe draw or flower names I found looking for reference photos.
- Plan ahead what to draw/do for about a week - my second list was the plan of what to draw exactly each day. I suggest you not to fully complete that second list and the reasons are the followings: you will evolve in time, you will have better ideas, you will see things from a different perspective so it is useless to stress yourself with planning exactly all your 100 days. It can actually scare you and never start the project. But I found that planning ahead is necessary and relieves a huge amount of stress. In one of the weeks of my project, I ended up not having a list for the upcoming days, and I felt constant stress of “Oh my, what will I draw tomorrow...” So make sure that you never run out of your what-to-do list. (I have planned 6 or 9 days ahead because this way I also had the chance to plan my Instagram grid so it will look nice in the end.)

- While doing your project I suggest you turn off any distraction, like the internet, messages, notifications, boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife, kids, sisters/brothers... you get the picture. Be just you and your project so you can fully focus, getting the best out of your work and this way you also finish it in the established time.

- This also involves creating your own workspace, have your table/desk with all the supplies you need to accomplish your daily project, make that place look nice so you will feel good spending your time there.

- Try to develop a work system - working after the same pattern, following some organized steps, always the same steps can help you to develop faster a habit so you will be more efficient in time and also have the possibility to focus more on effectively creating rather than figuring out a method each time. Let's say a system, developed, and learned allows your creativity to flow.

To a better understanding here are some of the work systems I have developed:

> system on drawing my flowers: find the reference photo (mostly more than one, so I could make my own composition); draw a little doodle style thing on a paper just to see how I will organize my flowers on the page, establishing the composition (This saved me time, because figuring that out on my sketchbook ended up in drawing, erasing, drawing, erasing... until I found the composition to my liking.); sketching in pencil, with all the details in place; inking; erasing the pencil... Lately, in my project I included watercolour, but having already a work system was easier to figure out how to place that in the process as well.

> system on editing photos: using the same steps will ensure that you save time and your photos will always look the same in editing style. (This was a hard one for me because I had to find a photo editor - found Snapseed and I find it amazing - and figure out what tools that editor has and how to use them. Initially, I wrote down the steps as I figured them out and found them useful for my editing. But by the end, editing became automatic for me, I knew exactly the steps, so no mistakes could be made.)

> system to post on Instagram: yes, that needs a system too I think. Make a list of hashtags in a file that you use all the time, so you don't spend time on each post rewriting hashtags, and maybe an intro for your text. Also, plan your grid. I have found apps that can help you plan your grid, never tried them, I went with something less fancy: drawing squares, 3 in one row. :)

- Put your project out in the world - Post your result every day on social media, maybe write a blog or make a small video. This commitment to post every day can be a motivation too. But remember that you are doing this project for you, because you want to do it for yourself, not to prove anything to anyone. Another benefit of posting is that you can get valuable feedback from people interested in the same subject and even find ideas to solve some issues that could come up in your way.

- Track your project - create some sort of grid with 100 spaces to fill, so you can check your project for each day or do this in a notebook as I did, make sure you count your days. I wrote down every day what I drew for my project, and also the ideas, things I have learned or figured out. You can write a journal if you will. Keep that grid or notebook at hand.

- Integrate into your project easier days - mostly if you do things that have a higher level of difficulty. Make those easy days still fit in the whole picture. (... like I did with my black and whites.)

- Can you skip a day or a week from time to time? Well, my opinion is that if you want to do a 100-day project make it 100 not 10 + 15 +... You know what I mean. But if this is the only way you can do this project, do it that way, it is still better than not doing it at all. And also remember that your 100-day project is YOUR project, you make it for you, so you set your own rules. There are no wrong ways to do your project.

- ...but, still, life is life and sometimes things happen and you cannot do your project that day, it is impossible. ...Do your project the next day, or as I did (it happened three times) do it in advance, and of course the project for that before or next day too. Yes... that means that you do two in a day. Maybe you will disagree with me about this, and it is fine. It doesn't matter how you choose to do it. I suggest that you should not make a habit out of skipping days and skip them only if there is no other way, if you want or not to catch up with your days is up to you. But I think that this is a part of the challenge, and it is an important one, to do your little thing every day no matter what or at least have them done. This doesn't mean that you draw all your drawings in one day for a week :) ... that is definitely not the idea.

Ok now... but what if 100 days scare you? It scared me too. So then try my method. Do 10 days... I'm sure you can. If you still think you can't do ten do five. ... And then do another 5... and you already have 10. If you could do 10 once you can do it again, and again... I did this till about 50. And then did another 50. Go only as far as you can see and then go further! This is my rule to start a 100-day project if you are scared of that number. And maybe you will want to do only a 30-day project or 50. Perfect, do it! Don't forget, your project, your rules.

How to end your 100-day project? Day 100 should definitely not be the last day of your project. I think that after you worked so hard for 100 days, those 100 days deserve a conclusion. Write down your thoughts, write down the thing you have learned, write about your experience. (...and now your journal or notebook with your every day thought will be helpful.) This way you have the chance to really learn your lessons and be able to review them any time.

What about after the project? Keep doing. You may not do that thing every day... you are now allowed to skip days... but keep doing it, because I think that the main reason of a project like this is to develop a habit to do something and grow. And I think if we are not growing we are going backwards. There is no such thing as staying at a level forever once you have achieved it. So keep going!

If my project inspires you to do yours, I will be happy to hear about it, so let me know. Find me on Instagram on my illustrator page @agotapopillustration and @agotapop (for colour lovers).

If you have any questions, feel free to ask. I will be happy to answer if I can. You can find me on Instagram or send me an e-mail to agotapop@yahoo.com.

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