



The Modern Mandala: Create Your Own

I find great value in creating mandalas from hand with pen and paper and view it to be a soothing activity that helps calm an overwhelmed heart and mind. The process of creation can serve as a portal for focus, prayer, meditation, and self-discovery, as well as going beyond the ego level of consciousness to integrate experiences into the whole self.

The History and Meaning of the Mandala

"Mandala" comes from the loosely translated Sanskrit word for "circle" and represents the wholeness that can be born from within a circular or contained form.

Mandalas can be found in most ancient cultures and religions. Mandala patterns appear as signs of devotions and declarations of values in Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Islam, and Christianity. The Aztecs and Native Americans were known for the relationship to the mandala, as well.

This is why I tend to qualify my mandalas as "modern," because it's important to acknowledge a more current and Western adaptation of something with a long and storied history rooted in religious meaning. Yet while the modern mandala tends to be less complex and rich in religious symbolism than the mandalas rooted in Buddhism or Tibetan practices, the act of creating a mandala remains a portal to integration, organization of thought, and centering of energy through symbols of the collective unconscious, prayer, and meditation.

The cosmic nature of the mandala also serves as a portal to reconnection with the infinite, of which we are a part.

In Buddhism, the mandala represents the ideal form of the universe and a process through which to alchemize an experience of suffering into one of enlightenment. The center of the mandala, the center of the universe, represents the beginning of a journey toward wisdom.

Psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung explored the psychological effects of mandalas and is even often credited with introducing the Western world to the Eastern concept of the mandala. He referred to the mandala as "the psychological expression of the totality of the self." Jung

used mandalas to get a deeper understanding of his clients' suffering by way of the archetypal symbols present in the art. He also created many of his own mandalas, many of which were published in the Red Book.

Mandalas are equally about process than they are about product and in some cases, the product itself exists for just a short time. Tibetan monks and Navajo Indians create mandalas in sand to embrace the impermanence of life. Intricate mandalas are created in the sand and slowly or abruptly, the wind returns the sand back to a blank canvas.

How to Create Your Own

Here are some step-by-step instructions on how to create your own modern mandala by hand.

WHAT/WHY: Creative art project to support focus and integration of chaotic thoughts and feelings cohesively into body + soul.

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Paper -- I prefer mixed media paper so I can complete the mandala with watercolor or acrylic paint but any paper will do and crayon or colored pencil always make a fine mandala.
- Compass + protractor/ruler -- If you don't have a compass, you can use various sizes of bowls and cups to trace. If you don't have a ruler, use the edge of a hard book to draw your straight lines.
- Pencil + eraser
- Fine tip marker (pen works in a jam, too)
- Something to color with (colored pencils, watercolors, markers, crayons, etc.)

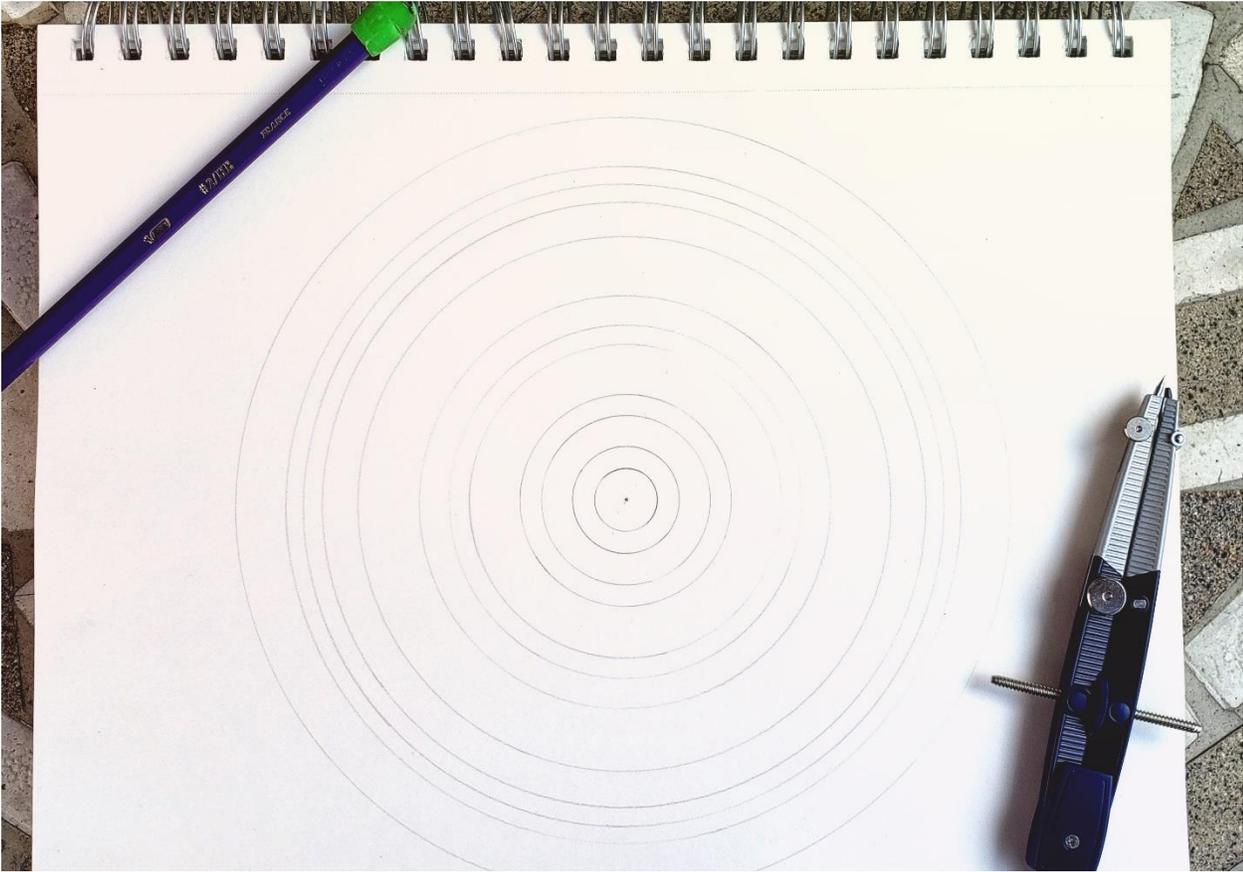
Recommended supplies: flat + comfy surface, uninterrupted space, peaceful ambiance, music to guide the journey, soothing light bright enough to draw by

TIPS/THINGS TO NOTE:

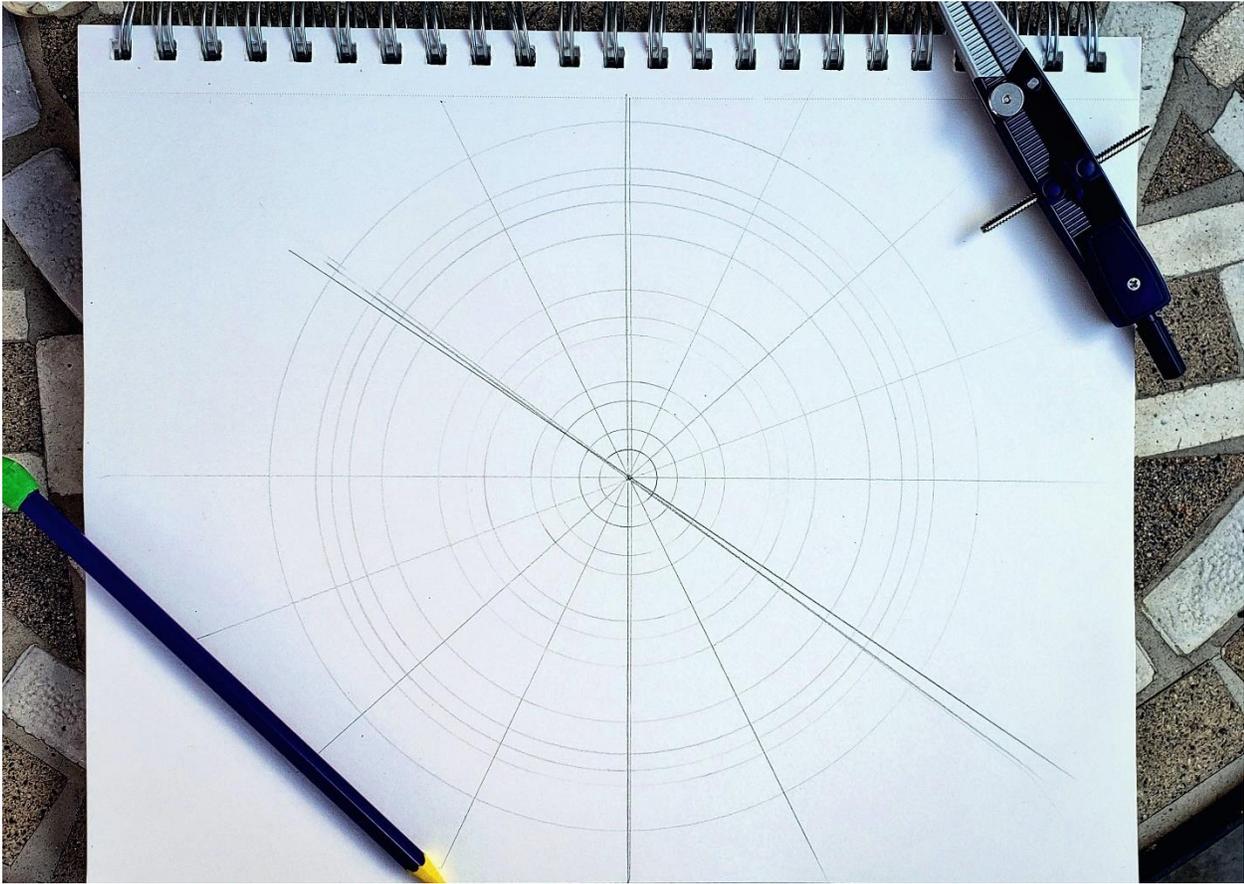
- This exercise is more about the process than the product. Don't fuss too much.
- I skip the measuring piece with the protractor because I prefer less perfect mandalas. This helps me address my inner calls for perfectionism and keeps the art project more spontaneous and art-like and rigid and less math-like.
- You don't have to have great artistic skill to create these. In fact drawing lines that create shapes that create patterns within the circular blueprint is actually quite easy and not something you need to overthink.
- If you realize your initial lines are off, keep going. You can fix it as you go, or not at all.
- Meditate into your creation. Breathe, lean in, go slow, take one step, line, shape at a time.

HOW I DO IT:

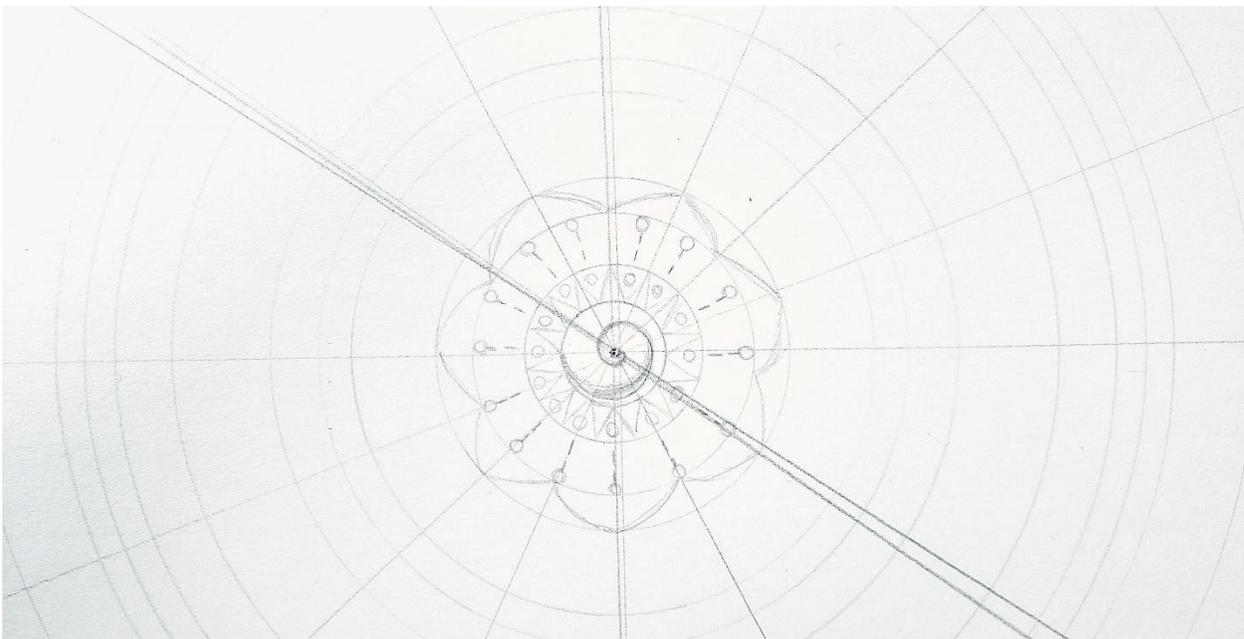
- I use my protractor/ruler to find the center of the page
- Then I use my compass to draw a series of circles within each other as I wish.

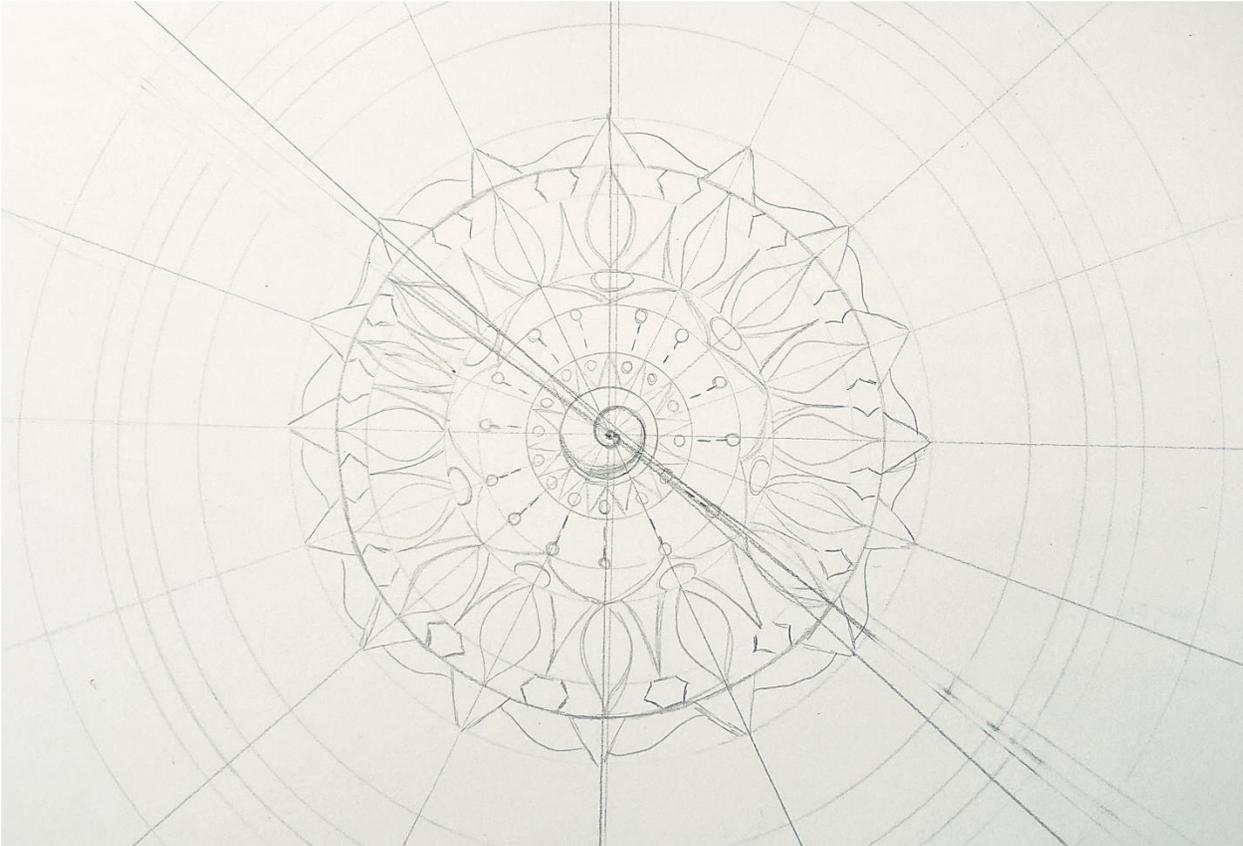


- My protractor/ruler helps me to divide the circle into quadrants. I add more lines when I want the mandala to be more details and complex. Because I don't measure these lines out, sometimes they're not entirely even. You can see below where I made some edits to the quadrant lines. It's okay not to get it perfectly. Measure if this bothers you, otherwise ride it out and make edits as you go or accept the piece as is! In this piece I even missed a line altogether which I didn't notice until I was about 1/3 done with the mandala. It's okay, I made it work.



- Then I begin creating shapes that, combined with my outline, will create new shapes and then patterns and then bigger patterns and then patterns that start to interact with each other. It's kind of cool to see how the thing starts to come to life just by drawing repetitive shapes in a circle. It is typically recommended that you start from the center and work your way outward, both for artistic and therapeutic reasons.

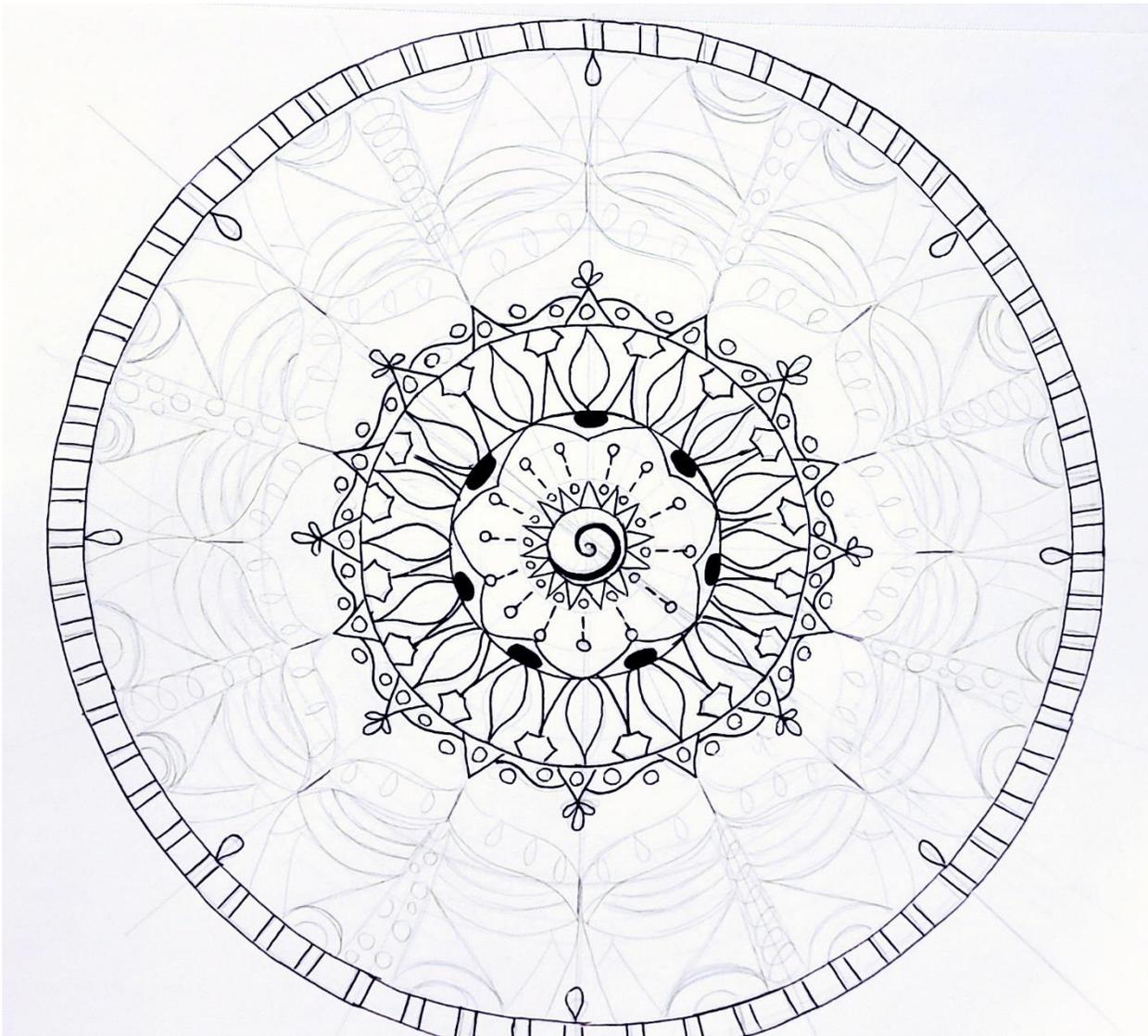


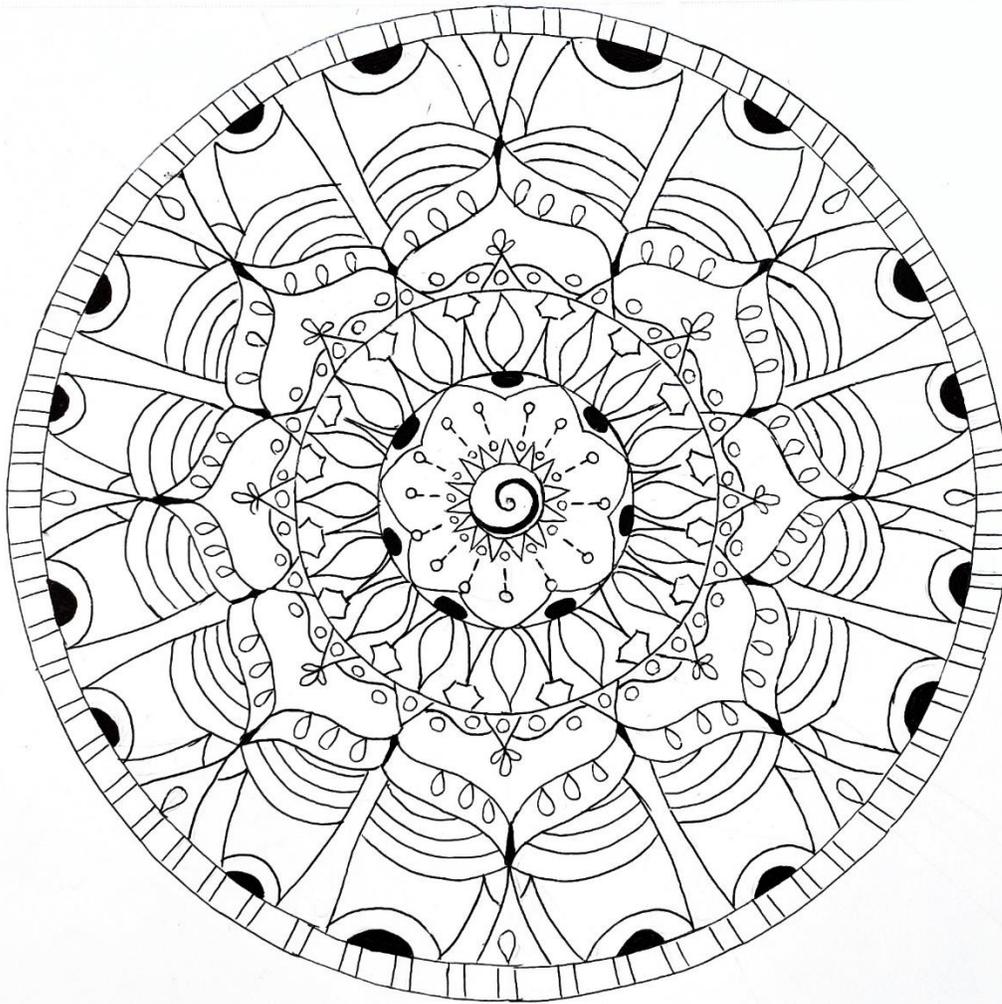


- If you need some pattern ideas, here are some you can try:



- Once I've completed my design, I trace the lines I want to keep in the finished product with my fine tip marker or pen. Then I erase the remaining pencil outline.





- Then I color as I wish with colored pencils, watercolors, or markers, depending on what the paper can hold.