

CASE STUDY: COLLAGE – COLLECTING PIECES

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CLIENT Digital Imaging ART 125 / Professor Deborah Krikun

PROJECT TITLE COLLAGE: Travel Diary

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TEAM Kathleen Corgan

DESCRIPTION The Collage Project was a study in combining imagery into an abstraction of the sum of its parts. Though seemingly a relatively simple project, the lack of predetermined rules and construct belied the hidden challenges of putting together a successful collage. I thought a travel collage would be a great idea and was one of the concepts I felt I would be well equipped to manage, considering I have thousands of photos from many different countries visited for both work and pleasure over the years.

RESEARCH Initially my research consisted of going through the various digital photo libraries on my hard drives to see which trips yielded the most interesting and iconic photos, but that also had a common thread among them. Because I have a great affinity for maps, I also hoped to use images of maps that I had acquired while travelling, especially ones whose visual designs were iconic enough to recognize the city by its layout or geographical features.

STRATEGY I had wanted for some time to do photo essays on several of the countries I have visited, either because they were once in a lifetime trips, like working on a movie in India that included the historically famous Kolkata and Taj Mahal as shooting locations, or because they held a common thread to places I'd been before or was otherwise immersed in, like Amsterdam and its historic connections to both New York City, India and Istanbul for trade and commerce. Barcelona became the fourth city to make the cut alongside Istanbul, Amsterdam and Kolkata due to its ancient roots and its preserved historic district, which mirrored the old but ordered streets of the other cities. My strategy was to try to provide a few links for these cities either photographically or through their cartography to depict their similarities.

CHALLENGES The overarching challenge for the collage was how to make an idea that sounded good on paper become a cohesive piece as a collection of images. I went through several different iterations of how to handle the map; it started as an ancient global map with various photographs from the different cities positioned as satellites around each of the cities geographic locales. However the original map I was using was neither geographically accurate nor balanced enough in its layout to accommodate the photos without obscuring too many parts of the background map itself.

At that point, I revised my concept to reflect an area or district map of each the cities each occupying a quadrant of the canvas, and using photos to represent iconic images of the various districts or landmarks I encountered in my travels. This solution had the potential to be more ordered from a grid standpoint, and I could experiment with masking the images with gradients of transparency-to-foreground or background-to-foreground to expose only the parts of the photos I wanted to see. However, the canvas quickly became distracting and busy, with nowhere for the viewer's eye to focus or rest.

This is where my use of type had to play a stronger hand, and again, a nod to Professor Krikun for steering me in that direction with her feedback. In each quadrant I had placed the name of the city where I had spent most of my travels, and had given a unique character to each through changing font, orientation, color and effect. It was necessary to push this even further so that the typography of the city names would take on a life of their own; become more two dimensional graphic elements than just words. The district maps needed to take on a similar role, and I began to use the identifying features of each map to help strengthen the two dimensional qualities of the collage. For example, I made a layer mask of the land areas of the Amsterdam city map, allowing only the very recognizable spiderweb appearance of the canal and dam system to be a solid shape. The masked land areas became a transparent window for the various Amsterdam photos, tickets and kept images to show through. In addition, I had applied a B&W adjustment with tint to most of the elements, only allowing the most iconic of the images to be represented in full color, like an image of tulips for Amsterdam, or a color corrected image of the Taj Mahal for Kolkata (yes technically Dehli, but Taj was a major part of my Kolkata trip, so I took some artistic license!) The only other elements that would remain colorized would be the typography of the city names. In lieu of having enough mementos to color match the entire canvas, the monochromatic wash helped to bring the disparate photographic elements together.

RESULTS Suffice it to say that this particular collage could be finished or it could still be a work in progress. Because it is typical of a scrapbook collage and given the eclectic appearance of the various elements, its evolution has tended to be more a reactive process than a proactive one,

a methodical process of trial and error. Eventually however, patterns begin to emerge, and the pieces can be pushed in new directions that fall into a rhythmic scheme.

