

# Creating Winged Messengers

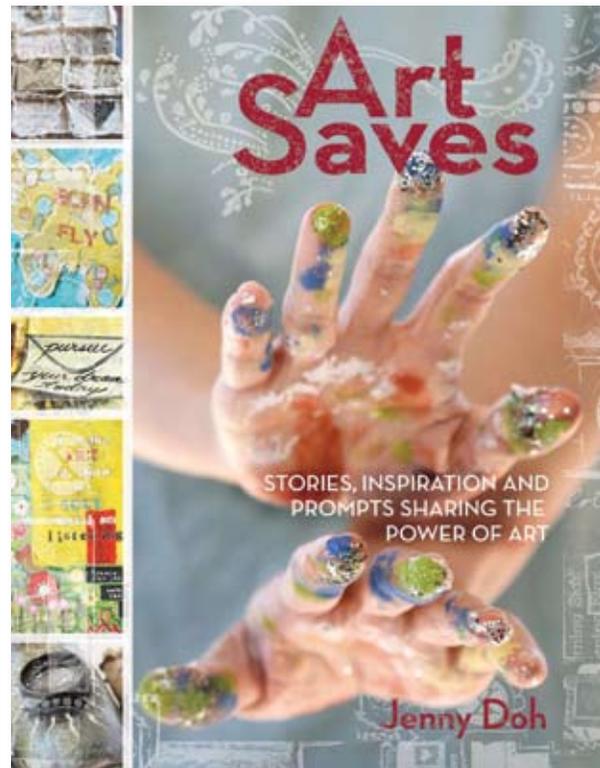
How can you use art to send a positive message to the world? Susanna Gordon shares her ideas and techniques in **Art Saves** by Jenny Doh.

*Art Saves* is a collection of stories, experiences and art projects that illustrate clearly that art does save, heal, and more. In this excerpt from the book, Susanna Gordon shares her story of creating winged messengers of positivity to send around the world, and she teaches you how you can make your own.

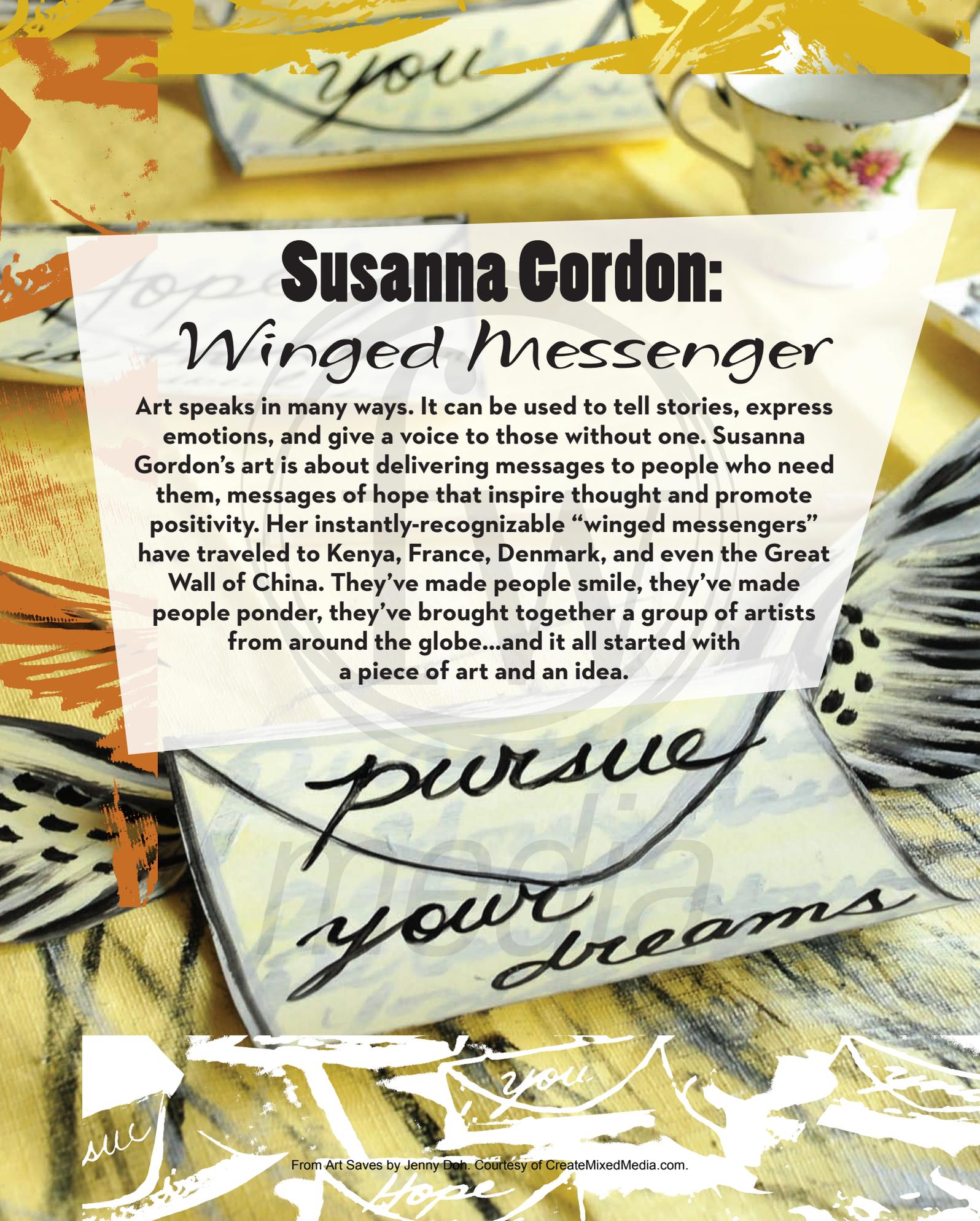
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To learn more about or purchase *Art Saves* by Jenny Doh, [click here](http://www.CreateMixedMedia.com).  
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*Art Saves* is published by North Light Books, an imprint of F+W Media, Inc.



# Susanna Gordon: *Winged Messenger*

Art speaks in many ways. It can be used to tell stories, express emotions, and give a voice to those without one. Susanna Gordon's art is about delivering messages to people who need them, messages of hope that inspire thought and promote positivity. Her instantly-recognizable "winged messengers" have traveled to Kenya, France, Denmark, and even the Great Wall of China. They've made people smile, they've made people ponder, they've brought together a group of artists from around the globe...and it all started with a piece of art and an idea.

*pursue  
your  
dreams*



## INSPIRED LESSONS

**Get distracted.** Instead of letting yourself fixate on the parts of your life that cause you stress, give your mind room to wander. Susanna's favorite way to escape is to grab her camera and head out for a walk in a local park. She allows herself to soak in her surroundings, and quickly finds herself too distracted by the beauty around her to focus on whatever had been worrying her.

**Take advice.** Being on the outside looking in can provide unique insight, so if someone you trust offers you advice, consider taking it. Susanna's decision to pursue higher education in the arts was influenced by an admired teacher, who urged her to submit a portfolio to a nearby art & design college. The recommendation was spot-on. Susanna wound up attending that school, where she discovered a passion for photography.

**Make it happen.** Everyone has something to contribute to the greater good, and it's up to you to get out there and do it. Once Susanna had developed the idea for her winged messenger project, she didn't wait to get it off the ground...she jumped right in, and began leaving her inspirational art pieces around her own neighborhood before branching out to the far corners of the world.

From Art Saves by Jenny Doh. Courtesy of CreateMixedMedia.com.



Photo by Rob Wight

## PAY IT FORWARD

Few things in the world are more powerful than a positive push. A smile. A word of optimism and hope. A "you can do it" when things are tough.

—Richard M. DeVos





## SPREADING HER WINGS

The idea of winged envelopes flying through the grass was based on an illustration Susanna drew for her husband when they were living apart, in two separate countries. She then saw a blog post by Madelyn Mulvaney and became inspired to write encouraging messages onto the envelopes. “I thought they would look beautiful moving through tall grass in a field,” says Susanna. She posted the image on her blog, and began receiving requests from fellow artists who wanted to place the thought-provoking art pieces around their own communities. Susanna poured herself into crafting a new set of one-of-a-kind envelopes, each featuring a hand-written message of positivity. In return, she asked that each participant send her a story chronicling the placement of the messengers or photographs of the pieces in their new environments. And with that, the winged messenger project was born.

Now Susanna creates her winged messengers in her art room—emblazoned with inspirational messages like “your opinion matters” and “you’re a work of art”—to send to participants spanning the globe. “If I go a period of time without creating, it feels as though I am missing something deep in my being,” she says. “I get antsy, like I’m not doing what I should be doing, what I want to be doing. There’s a sense of fulfillment when I work on my artwork, whether the piece is turning out the way I want it to or not, simply because I am creating.”



## WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

SAYS SUSANNA GORDON: "WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, THE TOUGH ALLOWS HERSELF A MOMENT OF ANGST AND SELF-PITY. THEN MAKES A PLAN AND MOVES ON."



## IN SUSANNA'S OWN WORDS: GIVE IT AWAY

I love the notion of art that's made to give away to others. It benefits the artist as well as the recipient, and it encourages creativity. My challenge for you is to make one piece of artwork today—it can be something as simple as a sketch on a piece of paper or as elaborate as a finished painting, as long as it's a work you've crafted by hand—and then give it to someone without asking for anything in return.

## FREE ART

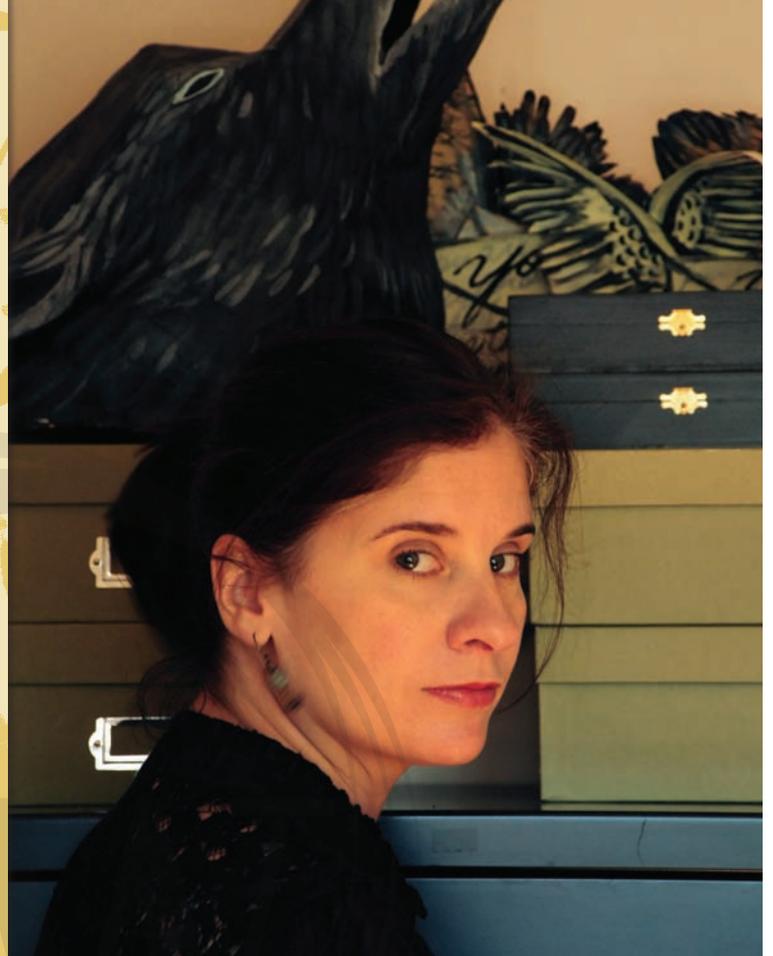
There is something liberating about creating a piece of artwork and leaving it for a stranger to find to keep for free. For me, it's a way of returning something creative back into the world that inspires me. I like to imagine that the messages on my pieces will also resonate with whoever finds it and decides to keep it, or perhaps that person will pass it on to someone in his or her life.

## COLLABORATE

Combine your efforts with the efforts of other like-minded people, and you'll be able to achieve things that are greater than what any one person could accomplish alone. The power of collaboration is what has truly allowed my winged messengers to take flight. What started as my own simple, little art project turned into something much bigger, and much better, with the help of strangers around the world.

## USE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Actively use your technical skills—even those that aren't art-related—to make a impact. At the end of the literacy program I volunteered with, a local book publisher bound each student's images and story into a hardcover book free of charge. I was so moved by this act of generosity, and I know that those children will treasure those one-of-a-kind books for many years.



It's not only the messages contained on the envelopes but also the artistry that exudes from each winged messenger that make each piece have maximum impact on those who view them.

## EXPRESSING HERSELF

The process of creating—letting your mind wander and exploring the possibilities that exist in life—allows you to tap into parts of yourself that are unreachable otherwise. Says Susanna: “Art has always been a way to express how I’m feeling and what I’m thinking about at that moment of my life. I want to visually express those ideas to others, but most often art-making has been a way for me to figure out how I feel about something.” Coping with painful emotions like grief and anger is never easy, but when you give yourself room to openly express what you’re going through in your art, you take an active approach to dealing with your feelings.

The death of Susanna’s father when she was only 21 left her devastated. She wanted to grieve the loss of the man who played such an important part in her life, but she found herself unable—until she discovered a way to commemorate him through her art. Along with a fellow blogger, Stephanie Hilvitz, she co-hosted an online, Dia de los Muertos-themed event called “Dia de Bloglandia,” which invited participants to celebrate their loved ones by posting stories and photographs of handmade altars designed to honor the deceased. Says Susanna: “The most powerful part was the stories that were told about the dead; some of them were funny; some of them were sad; all of them were full of love.”

## A THOUSAND WORDS

Visual media like photography and painting bring storytelling to its most basic form, and make sharing personal narratives accessible to everyone. Volunteering at a literacy program for children, created by two special teachers at the school, was an opportunity for Susanna to harness the power of art as a

universal language, and to use it to change young lives. The participants in her class ranged in age from six to eight years old, and all had struggled with traditional techniques for learning to read. But when art became part of the equation, the students found a new way to express themselves.

Using donated cameras, the children first documented their lives through photography—taking snapshots of their family, friends, and surroundings—and then crafted stories to accompany the images. It didn’t matter if the grammar was correct or if the spelling was perfect. That would come later. What mattered was that the students were reading and writing. Says Susanna: “These students had repeatedly failed their reading and writing assessments, and yet they ‘got it.’ They understood that art could be a way to visually express what someone was feeling inside or trying to say.”

Susanna has taken a simple idea of sharing beauty and with the help of the arts community, turned it into a unique phenomenon. “Each of us can use our creative voice to make a difference in this world,” she says. “It’s just a matter of doing it.”

## CONNECT YOUR COMMUNITY

Schools are cutting back on funding for arts programs, independent galleries are closing, and non-profit art centers are struggling, and it’s all happening in our own communities. Find a local cause that speaks to you, and get involved. You’ll not only help an organization that’s in need, but you’ll also fuel creative connections in your neighborhood.



# WINGED MESSENGERS

Before one of Susanna's charming winged envelopes can inspire someone else, she has to settle into her studio, roll up her sleeves, and make it. Beginning with a blank piece of paper, she layers paint, pastels, and messages of positivity to create each one-of-a-kind winged messenger before sending it off to one of her eager participants. This project will teach you how to craft your own winged messengers using Susanna's original techniques, but it's up to you to decide what words to share and who the lucky recipient of the finished piece will be.





figure 1



figure 2



figure 3



figure 4



figure 5

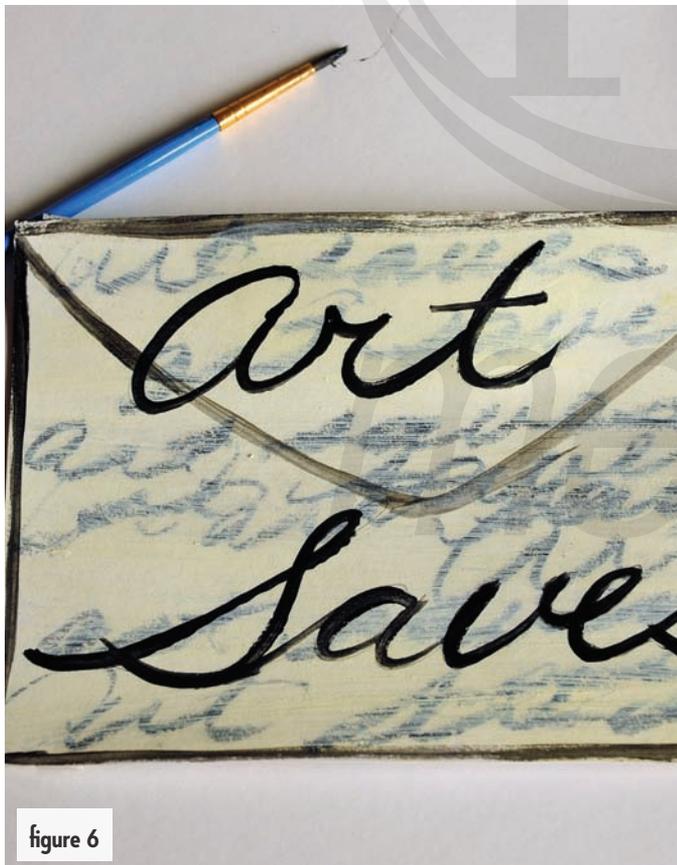


figure 6

## MATERIALS:

- thick, uncoated paper or cardstock
- felt
- black pastel
- artist's acrylic paints (black, white, and yellow)
- paintbrushes
- glue

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Create a wing template from the felt, and use it to trace a wing onto thick paper or cardstock. Flip the template over, and use it to trace a second wing. You will need two wings for each envelope—one left-facing wing and one right-facing wing (figure 1).
2. Using black pastel, write messages onto each of the wings. Mix together the yellow and white acrylic paints to achieve a pale yellow hue, and then apply a thin coat of paint over the top of each wing. Allow to dry thoroughly (figure 2).
3. Add feathers and accent lines to the wings using a thin paintbrush and black acrylic paint (figure 3).
4. Once dry, apply additional accents with white and yellow acrylic paints (figure 4).
5. Cut a rectangle out of the same paper as the wings to create the envelope. Following the same steps used to embellish the wings, add words to the face of the envelope with black pastel and apply a layer of pale yellow acrylic paint over the top (figure 5).
6. Using black acrylic paint, add a line to represent the flap on the envelope and a border around the outer edge, as well as the message (figure 6). Affix the wings onto the back side of the envelope and allow them to dry completely. When finished, the project measures approximately 15" x 8" (38cm x 20cm).