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## Zentangle art and wellness: - A mutual relation

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### Abstract

Zentangle is an art form akin to doodling that is based on human behavior in which one refrains from planning and allows lines and shapes to unintentionally emerge. Apart from being a relaxation technique, Zentangle art is slowly bridging the gap between art and psychology for people.

**Keywords:** Zentangle art, owning mistakes, stress reliever

### 1. Introduction

#### What Is Zentangle?

Zentangle is known to many artists and craftivists as the way to create structured designs through drawing various patterns. Sometimes mistakenly called “Zendoodling” or “tangle doodling,” Zentangling or tangling is actually the formalized process that defines itself as something other than mere doodling because of its theory and approach.

The Zentangle Method is an easy-to-learn, relaxing, and fun way to create beautiful images by drawing structured patterns. We call these patterns, tangles. You create tangles with combinations of dots, lines, simple curves, S-curves and orbs. These simple shapes are the “Elemental Strokes” in all Zentangle art. These patterns are drawn on small pieces of paper called “tiles.” We call them tiles because you can assemble them into mosaics.

Zentangle art is non-representational and unplanned (Ref Fig 1) so you can focus on each stroke and not worry about the result. There is not any ups or downs to Zentangle art. In fact, you can most easily create Zentangle art by rotating your tile as you tangle -- always keeping your hand in a relaxed position. You don't need to know what a tangle is going to look like to draw it. You just need to know the steps. The result is a delightful surprise.

As you use the Zentangle Method to create beautiful images, you likely will enjoy increased focus, creativity, self-confidence and an increased sense of well-being.



**Fig 1:** Sample of Zentangle Art

### 2. Findings

We believe that life is an art form and that each person is an artist. The Zentangle Method is an elegant metaphor and model for inspiring a deliberate artistry in life. For this reason, we deliberately do not include an eraser in our Zentangle Kit or use it as part of a Zentangle practice. We have no eraser in life, so why in a Zentangle Kit? In Zentangle art mistakes are referred as opportunities.

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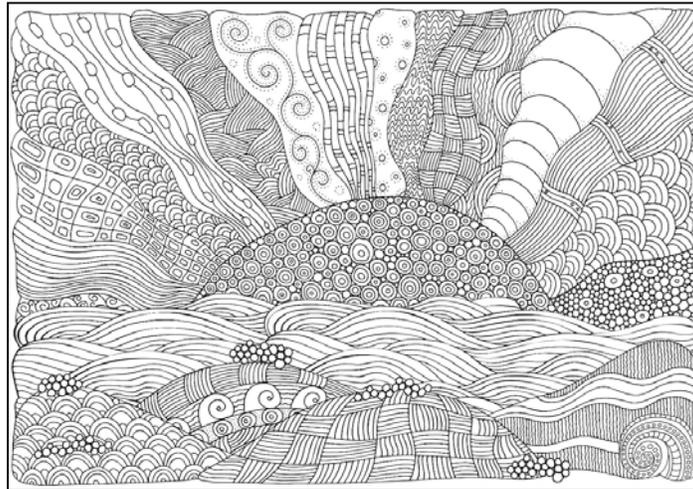


Fig 2: Methodology of Zentangle Art

### What Does Zentangle Mean?

Even though our name, Zentangle, has “Zen” in it, we do not teach Zen Buddhism or any religion. We teach how to create beautiful art with gratitude and appreciation. People who draw according to the Zentangle Method, describe their experiences as others describe the states of mindfulness and flow.

### 3. Methodology

What is the Zentangle Method?

Roberts and Thomas established eight steps of the Zentangle Method. By following them, you’re exercising your creativity as well as engaging in self-care. The eight steps are:

1. **Gratitude and appreciation.** Be in the moment and thankful for your tools and the time you have to create something.
2. **Corner dots.** Afraid of the blank page? They instruct you to place a “light pencil dot” in each corner of a 3.5” square paper that’s about a pen’s width away from the edges.
3. **Border.** Connect the dots you just made with a line to create a square (Ref Fig 2).
4. **String.** Separate the sections of your square with lines they call “strings.” The marks can be curvy, straight—whatever you like.
5. **Tangle.** A *tangle* is defined as a “sequence of simple strokes that make up a pattern.” Draw these elements inside of the strings and borders (Ref Fig 3). Be deliberate as you make your strokes and focus on the pen as you do so. “Trust that you’ll know what to do next,” they write, “when the time to do it comes.”
6. **Shade.** Add shading with a pencil to give your tile form.
7. **Initial and sign your work.** Put your initials on the front of your artwork and sign the back. You might add the date and any other comments (like how you felt) when creating it.
8. **Appreciate.** Relish in the fact you made something!



Fig 3: Basic Pattern of Zentangle Art

### 4. Applications

#### Crafting Better Mental Wellbeing: Zentangle

Zentangle is known as “yoga for the brain”. While yoga physically relaxes you, Zentangle is thought to be a great mental relaxant. It’s more structured than doodling but less so than a formal piece of artwork. It allows pure creative freedom in a world of abstract art, using repetitive patterns. Zentangle is a way for you to create an unintentional masterpiece whilst potentially calming your mind, reducing your stress levels, and helping you to develop mindfulness. There’s a huge hype around this art at the moment — but what’s it all about? Zentangle Can Be Therapeutic

It goes without saying that creating art can be therapeutic. It’s so easy to get lost in your creativity, freeing your mind of worries, responsibilities, and fears for a short while. Zentangle is often compared to meditation. It’s so simple — like yoga — yet so freeing. It doesn’t matter if you consider yourself an artist or believe you can’t draw. The difference between Zentangle and sketching or painting is that it’s supposed to rid you of the anxiety often felt about creating works of art. Instead, repetitively creating lines is quite calming.

### Artistic Meditation

Creating a Zentangle is a form of “artistic meditation” as one becomes completely engrossed in the process, deliberately focusing on each stroke. The first important step in the ceremony of Zentangle is to relax and breathe deeply, bringing one’s attention to the process. Rulers, straight edges, or other mechanical aids are not used in Zentangle. It’s just you and your pen. While the process may look intricate, it is a deceptively simple pathway to relaxation and inner focus. The mindful drawing of individual strokes makes possible the shift in focus that is meditation. The creation process increases focus and creativity, whilst providing you with much artistic satisfaction along with an increased sense of personal well-being.

Recent research indicates that the Zentangle process has proven to be most beneficial within the fields of therapy and meditation, with applications in stress reduction, education, therapy and even motivational training. In fact, proponents of the practice note that it has multiple benefits including calming an anxious mind, increasing self-confidence, and cultivating moment-to-moment awareness as in mindfulness meditation. This is particularly true if you accept this process as one with no expected outcome other than the enjoyment of putting the pen to paper and staying open to whatever emerges.

### 5. Benefits

People who draw according to the Zentangle Method, describe their experiences as others describe the states of mindfulness and flow. This can occur as soon as with the first tile. No longer is a lengthy practice needed to access these inspiring and high performances states of awareness. We expected a Zentangle practice to have a positive influence on creativity (Ref Fig 4), self-image, focus and problem solving. We don't yet have completed scientific studies to explain why this works. But we have thousands of anecdotes showing that it does work. We did not anticipate these benefits when we developed the Zentangle Method. General areas that a Zentangle practice benefits include:

- Phobias
- Addictions
- Pain management
- Conflict resolution
- Workplace burnout

It’s self-soothing. Repetitive creative work, in and of itself, can be calming and self-soothing. In fact, some of the preliminary research on the Zentangle process indicates that engagement in the process has measurable relaxation benefits

- **It teaches how to own mistakes.** Using a pen on paper requires that you risk making mistakes; in fact, most tangle art has at least some misplaced lines that cannot be erased. Tangling teaches you how to incorporate what seem like “mistakes” into the overall pattern of the design. It’s a great metaphor for everyday life—nothing is ever perfect, but how you adjust to imperfections (mistakes or the unexpected) in life is what really matters.
- **It reinforces “aimlessness.”** Many Zentangle enthusiasts highlight the tangle doodle process as a form of mindfulness. I like to think of tangling as a form of “creative aimlessness.” Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh observes that we need to cultivate aimlessness in life rather than continually striving to be “number one.” For example, when we practice walking meditation, we are

not trying to arrive anywhere in particular; in fact, if we stay focused on the future, we lose the joy of our steps in the here and now. The same is true of the process of tangling. If we get caught up in judgment and deliberation, we are not in the here and now. But if we simply enjoy the creative process, we can enjoy every single moment of it and that is ultimately what any creative expression offers us. Zentangle teaches us not to rush and to take good care of ourselves in the present moment—after all, the present moment is all there is.

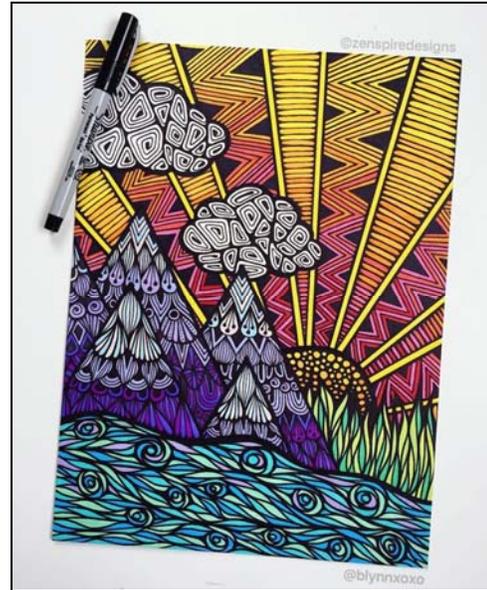


Fig 4: Complete Zentangle Art

### 6. Conclusion

1. Zentangle are not only exquisitely beautiful, they are also fun and relaxing to create (Ref Fig 5).
2. The different pattern combinations are endless, but best of all, anyone can do it!
3. Zentangle are miniature pieces of unplanned, abstract (a collection of patterns, not a drawing of something), black and white art, created on a piece of paper, 90mm x 90mm square, called a tile.
4. It is without an up or down, top or bottom, so can be viewed from any angle
5. Unplanned, its results surprise you
6. Creating a Zentangle is known as tangling
7. Can be done in 15 mins
8. Can be done anywhere at any time
9. No specialist tools needed
10. They look fantastic
11. Inspire Creativity
12. Help You Relax
13. Increase Focus
14. Build Confidence
15. Inexpensive



Fig 5: Advantage of Zentangle Art

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