



ZIP CODE MEMORY PROJECT  
[www.zcmp.org](http://www.zcmp.org)

## THE SPIRIT CARD



**THE SPIRIT CARD** is a Collaborative Project stemming from conversations with Visual Artists Kamal Badhey and Jordan Cruz, writers Carina del Valle Schorske and Noni Carter, alongside the ongoing generative conversations with the participants of the Zip Code Memory Project.

As ZCMP workshop leaders, visual artists Kamal Badhey and Jordan Cruz, alongside writers Noni Carter and Carina del Valle Schorske had circulating conversations about how to hold a creative space for the communities of Zip Codes in Upper Manhattan and the Bronx who had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Their desire was to develop pedagogy for workshops that would bring reflection and renewal during the ongoing pandemic which continued to blindside us with instability and grief. The Spirit Card stemmed from Kamal's dreams to bring the idea of spirit and its ability to

keep us alive when we as a society are skirting the fine line between life and death. The artists built on their process of collaborations with their families, storytelling, the adornment in their cultures, and ritual. In dialogue and collaboration they created the idea of the Spirit Card. The Spirit Card Project went hand and hand with the site of meeting for the group, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, where participants were observing the details of woodcarvings and the colored light that illuminated the space through stained glass.

The form of the Spirit Card is inspired by cards that people carry with them as talismans or objects of commemoration. Tarot cards, funeral cards, and prayer cards serve the purpose of giving wishes, remembering, future telling, and bringing luck. The funeral card is usually multiplied and given to friends and family as a mobile keepsake that can be carried in wallets or placed on dressers to remember those who have passed. The holder of the card can look at an image in front and read the writing on the back. Cards can be traded and given to others. In the Spirit Card workshops, cards were inspired by faith practices from across cultures, but were meant to reach beyond religious spaces.

This toolkit includes

1. A Collage Workshop that introduces techniques of using images and words
2. A Writing Workshop inspired by the idea of prayer
3. A Spirit Card Making Workshop

# 1. COLLAGE WORKSHOP

Kamal Badhey and Jordan Cruz

The Collage workshop provides the scaffolding for making spirit cards, allowing participants to practice creating stories with images and words.

Using objects, images, and words that you find around your home, create a collage that tells your *pandemic story*. This collage can be flat on a page or even 3D like a sculpture. Have fun with it!

Try using at least 3 techniques such as juxtaposition, overlapping, or layering and feel free to invent your own techniques as well! Using objects, images, and words that you find around your home, create a collage that tells your *pandemic story*. This collage can be flat on a page or even 3D like a sculpture. Have fun with it!

Feel free to incorporate your haikus or poems/prose from the writing workshop.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- A pair of scissors
- Glue, glue stick, or tape
- Pens, pencils, or markers (anything to write with)
- A sheet of paper or surface to make the collage

## PROMPTS

- What were some of the everyday objects that kept you going during the pandemic?
- What items did you reach for through this time?
- Think about how these materials gather and inhabit space. What roles do they play in your home and how do they contribute to the ways in which you move through your life?
- Do you keep these items around you for the sake of nostalgia or memory? Maybe it's about convenience?
- How do these objects mimic language and tell your story?



## POTENTIAL THEMES

- Share a message
- Express a feeling
- Gather evidence of your experience



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What messages stay with you that you see and hear in the media?
- What issue do you want to address in your collage?
- How can you use words and imagery to express a feeling?
- How do artists express issues with visuals and words?

## 2. WRITING PRAYER

Carina del Valle Schorske

The prayer workshop emerged from the Spirit Card project with teaching artists Kamal Badhey, Jordan Cruz and Noni Carter. Traditional Christian and Hindu Prayer Cards feature a sacred image on one side and a brief text on the other—small enough to fit on pocket-sized paper. These texts often take the form of familiar psalms or mantras but, in our workshop, we deconstructed the notion of prayer as a given script and thought about what else “prayer”—loosely construed—might be or do. Prayers can petition and fantasize, express gratitude, desperation, solidarity, or make a quiet space for the present moment no matter its emotional color. Prayers are portable, musical, memorable, and mysterious. They exist on the border between private and public where the Zip Code Memory Project makes its home. In circulating, the prayers we wrote—sometimes secular, sometimes spiritual—become sources of solace for others as well.

### PROMPT 1

Write down five concrete blessings that you desire for yourself (“he makes me lie down in green pastures,” “you anoint my head with oil,” “you prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies”). You don’t have to make these lists in the form of a poem yet—we’re just generating material! You can be very specific and mundane here, it doesn’t have to be “green pastures.” Think of Lucinda Williams’ wishlist from her song “Passionate Kisses”: “Is it too much to demand / I want a full house and a rock and roll band / Pens that won't run out of ink / And cool quiet and time to think / Shouldn't I have this / Shouldn't I have all of this, and / Passionate kisses from you.”

### PROMPT 2

Choose one of these: A memory/portrait of someone you love and how your perspective of them has changed over time. OR a specific memory/experience of solace that you would like to share with others. In either case, make sure to include SPECIFIC SENSORY DETAILS!

## PROMPT 3

Write a poem using “may” or “let” or “I want”

- “May” / “let” (one is more about a wish for the future, whereas the other is more about a surrender to it)
- The blessings extend to the nonhuman world: In “Blessing the Boats,” [\[poets.org/poem/blessing-boats\]](https://poets.org/poem/blessing-boats) for example, Lucille Clifton is literally blessing boats. Jane Kenyon, in “Let Evening Come” [\[poets.org/poem/let-evening-come\]](https://poets.org/poem/let-evening-come), also addresses everyday objects: “To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop in the oats, to air in the lung let evening come.” What is that effect?
- What techniques can you use here? You could make the choice to embrace the nonhuman world. You could follow Lucille Clifton’s form “may you...” and think about a particular person, place, or thing that you would like to bless and articulate your wishes for them. And/or, you could follow Jane Kenyon’s form “let...” to write about what you are willing to let go, accept, or surrender to in the world. She also offers the device of repetition.

## Examples

For My Daughter by [Grace Paley](#)

I wanted to bring her a chalice  
or maybe a cup of love  
or cool water I wanted to sit  
beside her as she rested  
after the long day I wanted to adjure  
commend admonish saying don't  
do that of course wonderful try  
I wanted to help her grow old I wanted  
to say last words the words famous  
for final enlightenment I wanted  
to say them now in case I am in  
calm sleep when the last sleep strikes  
or aged into disorder I wanted to  
bring her a cup of cool water

I wanted to explain tiredness is  
expected it is even appropriate  
at the end of the day

Grace Paley "For My Daughter" from *Begin Again: Collected Poems*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.  
Reprinted with permission from Nora Paley.

**“Let Evening Come” (excerpt) by Jane Kenyon**

Let the light of late afternoon  
shine through chinks in the barn, moving  
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing  
as a woman takes up her needles  
and her yarn. Let evening come.

...

Let it come, as it will, and don't  
be afraid. God does not leave us  
comfortless, so let evening come.

Jane Kenyon, excerpt “Let Evening Come”, *Collected Poems*, St. Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2005.  
<https://poets.org/poem/let-evening-come>

**"oh antic God" (excerpt) by Lucille Clifton**

oh antic God  
return to me  
my mother in her thirties  
leaned across the front porch  
the huge pillow of her breasts  
pressing against the rail  
summoning me in for bed.

...

Lucille Clifton, excerpt “ ‘oh antic God’ ” from *Mercy*, 2004, BOA Editions Ltd.  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46670/oh-antic-god>

### 3. MAKING SPIRIT CARDS

Kamal Badhey and Jordan Cruz

Materials needed:

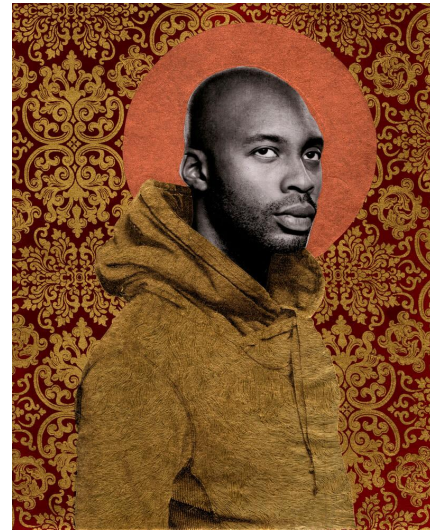
- Scissors
- Photo paper (8.5x11 Luster)
- Color - Card stock
- Black – Card Stock
- Clear Glue sticks
- Acrylic Paint
- Paint brushes
- Rhinestones
- Beads
- Sharpies
- Decorative paper
- Modge Podge
- Gold Leaf
- Oil Pastel
- Charcoal
- Tissue paper
- Tracing paper
- Printer/scanner
- Transparent paper
- Sewing Kit

What images help manifest a feeling of grounding and spirit? What do participants want to grieve, commemorate, and contemplate?

#### ACTIVITY

For images, we offer examples from across cultures that include gods and goddesses, but we can also think of people we look to for daily advice like Dr. Fauci. The artworks [\*Jasmines Blooms at Night\*](#) by Jaishri Abichandani and [\*Queer Icons\*](#) by Gabriel García Román show how artists have named and elevated people using adornment to make visible their existence and unacknowledged contributions to society.





[Gabriel Garcis Roman](http://www.gabrielgarciaroman.com), *Queer Icons*, QTPoC (queer trans people of color), activists and community organizers stand hallowed in photographs, their radiant halos like the saints Gabriel grew up with. [www.gabrielgarciaroman.com](http://www.gabrielgarciaroman.com)

These works inspire us to ask ourselves how we are to keep on going knowing that there are so many unacknowledged deaths surrounding our lives? Participants are asked to discuss physical spaces that had become sacred to them, such as parks by their home where they walk to ease their nerves during unpredictable times. Others can dedicate their cards to people they want to acknowledge, some alive and some who passed – whether coworkers, mothers, or brothers. Some cards have symbols or recall moments of cultural acknowledgement and justice during the protests of 2020.



[Jaishri Abichandani](http://jaishriabichandani.net) *Jasmines Bloom at Night*, 40 sculptural and painted portraits that makes visible the work of South Asian American feminists who are generating incredible social change on a local and international level. [jaishriabichandani.net](http://jaishriabichandani.net)



After these conversations, participants work alone or in groups to incorporate the photos, objects and writing they have brought into the front and back of the spirit card. Teaching artists provide materials with which to decorate the spirit cards, photograph the resulting collages. Have a printer on hand to print the photos of the front and back of the cards. Files can be sent to a service that creates memorial cards in pocket size form. After being embellished and printed, those memorialized can protect us as we walk through the trials of the everyday. The project seeks to create a personal object that offers the groundedness of hope and a future, while acknowledging that our composition as humans comes from our individual and communal experiences of the past, inclusive of all things that stem from the era of the pandemic. Through our personal reinventions, we acknowledge our survival to propel us and our spirit forward.

— Kamal Badhey

## **SPIRIT CARD** examples from our workshop





