



Zentangle teacher Joan Payton and some of her students have work in the “Tangled Up in Art” show at the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany in Atlanta. “This is a way of letting go,” she says.

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Busy hands; still minds

Art form helps take focus off mundane.

Zentangle students find creating detailed drawings calming.

By **Michelle Hiskey**
For the AJC

Carrie Ott of Woodstock felt her soul burdened with helplessness. Her teenage son was battling a chronic digestive disease, and her best friend faced a deadly form of cancer.

Ott was working at home as a freelance writer and editor several months ago when screams alerted her to a neighbor who, in burning brush, had set himself on fire. She raced to help save him.

Ott, 47, couldn't put into words how out of control she felt about seemingly everything, but she could work out of it with a razor-sharp black pen.

“I didn't have even words to pray, but I can make this mark in the presence of God,” she recalled thinking in that moment as she described turning to a new art form in her crisis. “It was my own way of crying out for rescue.”

The resulting mosaic of tiny lines and dots was a Zentangle, a form of repetitive strokes that releases stress.

Zentangle formalizes what has long helped many people stuck in interminable situations: doodling. Unlike doodling, Zentangle is mindful, not mindless.

“If you're waiting and worrying about what the doctor will tell you, you just pull out your [drawing] tile and then you really don't care,” said Joan Payton of Atlanta, who has helped teach Zentangle to 300 people.

“We've had people with anxiety about flying who pull out their Zentangles.”

Her students range in their reasons for practicing Zentangle.

Art show

“Tangled Up in Art: Atlanta's First Exhibit of Zentangle Art”

Free. Through February. Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, 2089 Ponce de Leon Ave. N.E., Atlanta. www.epiphany.org.

Art retreat

“Being Present With God: A Zentangle Retreat”

9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Feb. 19. \$35. Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, 2089 Ponce de Leon Ave. N.E., Atlanta. 404-355-0522 or jeanmahood@mindspring.com.

“It calms me after having an argument with my child,” Allison Jones of Midtown said.

“Oil painting is my passion, but Zentangle has helped me a lot to improve,” Lina Arango of Kennesaw said.

“I haven't seen any change in myself,” Alice Youmans of

Zentangle continued on D5

Art form relaxes students

Zentangle

continued from D1

Atlanta said. "It's just fun and relaxing."

Payton and Ott spoke while installing the work of 25 artists, including their own, at the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany in Atlanta. The free exhibit, which opened Sunday, is Atlanta's first Zentangle art show.

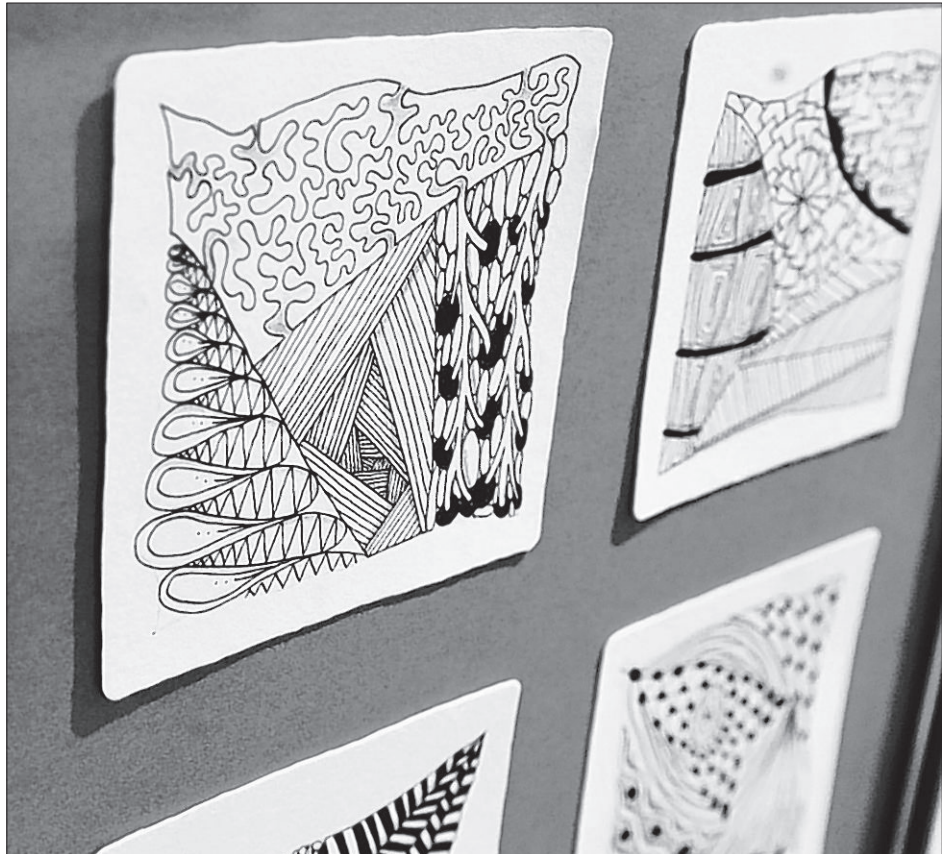
Zentangle is the creation of a Massachusetts couple, graphic designer Maria Thomas and former monk Rick Roberts.

While drawing background patterns for a manuscript, she described to him her sense of complete, unworried focus. He equated her experience to meditation, and they began creating a simple system, not based on any religious teaching, to help others achieve a similar experience.

Zentangle class begins with breathing exercises and silence. Everything is freehand. Boundary lines, called "strings," are first drawn in pencil, usually on die-cut Italian printmaking paper. The areas are then filled in with strokes and dots the size of rice grains or even smaller.

According to Thomas and Roberts' website (www.zentangle.com), the repetition opens mental doors that "swing on non-verbal hinges. ... Intuitive insights flow freely. Get inspirations, ideas and answers, unhindered by expectations or worries."

The marks that make up each design, or "tangle," can be taught within minutes. There are more than 100 basic and advanced tangles, with



Art by Michael Phillips will be on display at the "Tangled Up in Art: Featuring 25 Zentangle Artists" exhibit. Brant Sanderlin bsanderlin@ajc.com

countless variations and interpretations.

"You can tell something about a person from their Zentangle," Payton said. A beginning class "can all be doing the same tangle, but it looks so different because it's coming from inside the person. It's their personality coming out."

The main obstacle is getting started.

"Over and over, people say they are not artists, or they have to color between the lines, and I have to tell them to put that in a box somewhere before they start," Payton said. "In the kit we give our students, there are no erasers."

The element of forgiveness attracts Shea McNutt of Decatur, a chronic doodler. She learned Zentangle on a work retreat.

"Any mistake is part of the creation," she said. "Sometimes what you didn't plan on doing ends up making it more beauti-

ful than what you intended."

In February 2009, Payton's co-teacher, Jeanne Mahood, took the first Zentangle class in Atlanta from Thomas, who was in town to do all the calligraphy for Ted Turner's birthday party.

That fall, the two went to Massachusetts to become certified teachers. This year, they will teach in Nova Scotia, Maine and North Carolina, as well as a Feb. 19 retreat in conjunction with the Atlanta show.

"It's great if I want to change my mood or my thoughts," said Mahood, 48, of Sandy Springs.

"This is a way of letting go," said Payton, 70, of Atlanta. She lost her husband, a priest and calligrapher, to leukemia not long before learning this art. "He would have loved this," she said.

Zentangle compares to humming or chanting, only with a black

pen point 0.25 millimeter wide. Faced with circumstances out of their control, these Atlanta Zentangle artists believe this, too, shall pass, one pen stroke at a time.

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