

Paper Works

Saturday 16 January – Sunday 28 February, 2010

Paper Works is curated by Yvonna Demczynska, Director of the Flow Gallery, London. She remembers beautiful, colourful paper cut-outs from her childhood in Poland and has wanted to curate an exhibition showing contemporary paper art for a long time. 'Paper as a medium in crafts has gained importance and popularity in the last few years and even the New York Museum of Art & Design has a current paper show.' Yvonna selected the contributing artists for the quality of their work, the range of techniques used and for variations in the scale of the pieces. *Paper Works*, at the Devon Guild of Craftsmen, shows fourteen international artists who work with this versatile and intriguing material, showing us how much this everyday product has reached a place where anything can happen...



Polish paper cut

Of course paper has always been used in art either as a vehicle for ideas (sketches) or the base for applying other material such as paint or text. It has not, until quite recently, had recognition in its own right as an artist's material yet it can be printed, torn, shredded and burned. It can be folded, cut, glued and creased. Put lots of paper together and it can be bound, stitched, drilled and sculpted. It is a material with enormous possibilities. No wonder artists and designers find purpose and meaning in this light, strong material. Architect Frank Gehry is quoted as saying, 'Paper is structure. If I can make it out of paper I know I can build it.' Paper pulp can be cast like sculpture and manipulated by hand like clay. It can be burnished, gilded, vacuum-formed, sprayed, spattered, spun, woven, sawn and carved. Paper is having its day and could it be that 'resource awareness' is also feeding paper's image as something rather special and somehow lovelier now that we know that even this abundant and cheap material needs to be used carefully? And does our electronic age change the status of paper too? A handwritten letter already has an air of history but paper lighting can look as futuristic as space travel. In other words paper can be anything at all and, in the hands of our exhibitors, it becomes fairytale, nature, tools, garments, architectural silhouettes, kitchen utensils, entymology, archeology, biology, myth and metaphor. The truth is that any material, regardless of inherent value, is limitless in its potential when transformed by an imaginative eye and skillful hand.

Ferry Staverman's pieces, curvaceous, softly coloured fountain-like forms are made from cut cardboard, a material he describes as 'willing and relatively cheap'. The pieces have architectural qualities, more Eastern than Western, their graceful outlines simple but extraordinarily pleasing.

Helen Musselwhite's intricate paper tableaus show miniature pastoral worlds, delicate

forays into fairytale, with reference to folk art and illustration. She folds, scores and cuts by hand, building the pieces with layers of different papers and card.

Claire Brewster's pieces reflect the fragility and lightness of her subjects – birds, insects and flowers – and their freedom to cross artificial borders. Her use of light and shadow further enhance the pieces. The flock of different-feathered birds, mounted on the gallery wall, flies the world on paper wings which show traces of the oceans and continents on the recycled atlas pages and maps from which they are made.

Anna King uses what she describes as 'a simple lock-fold technique' to create sinuous, flowing works. She also uses origami techniques, remembering the excitement of childhood 'fortune-tellers' with their fates and promises hidden in the paper folds. For her, the material is full of possibilities and outcomes and she likes to experiment with it.

Berdien Nieuwenhuizen's paper garments and hangings are cut freehand with a flexible scalpel, a technique she describes as similar to using a pencil. The light airiness of these pieces makes them a pleasure to look at and the cutting is clearly executed by a very skillful hand.

Tracey Bush also pays homage to flora and fauna in her 'museum' collections and her plants made from branded packaging. She gives us the rather astonishing information that the average Western adult can identify over one thousand brand names and logos but only nine local plants. With this in mind, Tracey set about making the most recognized plants from recycled, branded packaging.

All our exhibitors have manipulated paper in their own unique way. Some have commented on the fragility of the material, some on the versatility. Some have chosen to use recycled paper for the traces of its previous life and some through environmental concerns. All have chosen to work in paper for their own unique reasons but, in common with each other, all would probably agree that paper is an exciting material with a long history of meaning and purpose.

The Devon Guild is very pleased to host this exhibition and we hope that visitors will regard paper in a new light after seeing the variety of subtle and sometimes exquisite incarnations of this widely used, *extraordinary* material.

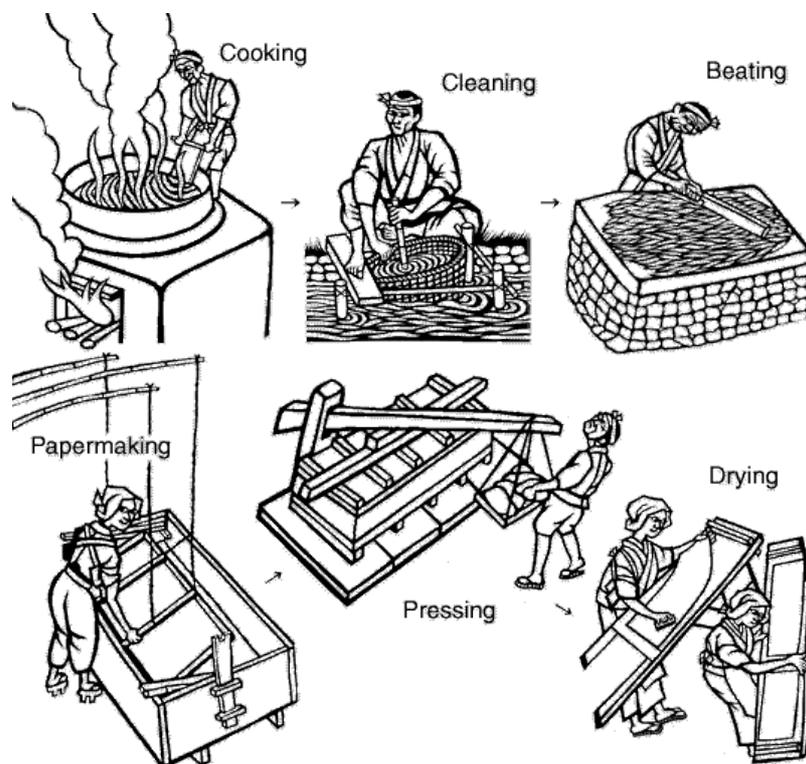
A Scrap of Paper History.

Paper was never just writing and packaging material; its development has been driven by human society's need to record ourselves. Political, economic, legal and religious information has been written on millions of miles of paper. We use it as the means of economic management in the form of laws and paper currency and it is the carrier of intellectual knowledge.

The precursors of paper, stone, metal, wood, clay, and wax tablets were rather inflexible and heavy so papyrus, an Ancient Egyptian innovation, must have appeared very portable and user-friendly. Papyrus came into use somewhere between 3,700 and 3,200 B.C. and was the chief writing material for around 4,000 years. It is not technically 'paper' in the modern sense as it is formed from beaten strips of papyrus stalk rather than pulp. Parchment, known to have been used in Assyria and Babylonia from the 6th century BC, is made from animal skin, sheep, goat and calf, although calf skin parchment is known as vellum.

Paper made from wood pulp is said to be one of the four great inventions of Ancient China¹. In 105 A.D. Ts'ai Lun presented his Emperor with a sheet of paper made from the pulped inner bark of a mulberry tree, rag and old fishing net. It might not sound like much but, as the quality improved, so did its uses. And paper was much cheaper than silk², which led to great prosperity for China as they could now sell more silk. In fact papermaking led to such prosperity for the areas of production that making methods were a closely guarded secret for 500 years.

The main ingredient of paper is cellulose fibre and all plants contain cellulose. However, these fibres are different lengths and thicknesses. Generally speaking, long fibres are best for paper making. It is produced by pressing together damp fibres, typically pulp derived from wood, rags or grasses, and drying them into flexible sheets. This is how it's done.



Any information about paper would be incomplete if origami was not mentioned. **Origami** (折り紙², from *oru* meaning "folding", and *kami* meaning "paper") is the traditional Japanese art of paper folding. The goal of this art is to create a representation of an object using geometric folds and crease patterns preferably without gluing or cutting the paper, and using only one piece of paper. In modular origami several identical units are combined to form a larger piece³.

¹ We can also thank the Chinese for printing, gunpowder and... the compass of course.

² Silk and bamboo slips were used to write on in Ancient China.

³ Wikipedia, *Origami*



Origami can be very technical and has received a considerable amount of mathematical study. Some classical construction problems of geometry — namely trisecting an arbitrary angle, or doubling the volume of an arbitrary cube — are proven to be unsolvable using compass and straightedge, but can be solved using only a few paper folds. So origami invites both complexity and literal representation. ‘Paper-folding artists are demonstrating a dexterity in manipulating their chosen material to create unique objects and sculptural works that communicate visually, in preference to clever invention⁴.

Papier-mâché (French for 'chewed-up paper' due to its appearance), sometimes called paper-mâché, is a construction material that consists of pieces of paper, sometimes reinforced with textiles, stuck together using a wet paste (e.g., glue, starch, or wallpaper adhesive). The crafted object becomes solid when the paste dries⁵.

Papier-mâché has a long history in the Middle and Far East. In Persia and Kashmir, it has been used to manufacture small painted boxes, trays, and cases. Japan and China also produce laminated paper articles using papier-mâché. In Japan and India, papier-mâché was used to add decorative elements to armor and shields. Starting around 1725, gilded papier-mâché began to appear in Europe as a low-cost alternative to similarly treated plaster or carved wood in architecture.

P. de Burlet, Jan. 2010



⁴ *On Paper, New Paper Art*. Jane Thomas and Paul Jackson, Merrell, 2001. 20.

⁵ Wikipedia,