



BIG PAPER

BY NOELLE FOYE

Paper—such a simple, utilitarian, everyday material. It begins with mashed plant fibers soaked and beaten in water, then scooped or poured, and left to dry. The papermaking process, attributed to the Chinese in the first millennium AD, produces a material so ordinary most of us give it little thought as we use it every day. And yet, in the hands of some artists it is transformed.

In addition to the time-honored craft of making paper itself, the making of art from paper encompasses a wide and diverse range of techniques including paper cutting, folding, pulp casting, weaving with paper fibers, quilling, book making, altered books, and creating sculptures of paper.

A number of paper artists have ventured to utilize these techniques to work on a large scale. Employing cutting, folding, tearing, and casting, the five artists highlighted in this article create works that mesmerize viewers with both their size and scope and with the intricacy and detail of the work. Wendy Wahl deconstructs encyclopedias and reassembles the pages into paper works that pay homage to the source of knowledge from which they are drawn. Georgette L. Veeder uses paper pulp to cast sculptures that excite the viewer with their texture and form. Katherine Glover tears strips of handmade paper, colors them, then mounts them on edge in swirling patterns, and frames them. Mia Pearlman and Lizz Aston employ paper cutting to craft amazing artworks that command spaces while drawing viewers deep into the details of the pieces.

Paper cutting is as much about what is removed as what is kept. Negative space creates the contrast that allows images and patterns to emerge. Sometimes the negative spaces become secondary images adding a new subtext to the work. Shadows created on surfaces behind the work may add more interesting layers to the paper work. Pearlman and Aston successfully translate the tiny intricacies of cutting designs out of paper into large-scale bold artworks that belie the simple materials they spring from.

Mia Pearlman, featured in the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery's recent *40 under 40: Craft Futures* show, works out of her Brooklyn studio. Often drawing from nature and the idea of forces that we humans can't control, Pearlman's works present



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HERE: Glover, **Fire in the Lake**; 2011; torn and painted strips of khadi paper, adhered to birch panel; 40 x 60 x 3".

ABOVE: Aston, **Exploding Lace**, Installation at Harbourfront Centre; 2012; kozo paper, linen, fusible interfacing, fibre reactive dyes, starched and hand-cut; 120 x 312 x 30".

OPPOSITE PAGE

TOP: Aston, **Exploding Lace Paper Study**; 2012; kozo paper, fibre reactive dyes, hand-cut; 16.5 x 18.5 x 2".

BOTTOM RIGHT: Veeder, **Skyhook**; 2005; cast paper; 5' x 9' x 4".



HERE: Pearlman, **ONE**; 2012; paper, india ink, paperclips, tacks; two installations, each approx 16 x 11', depth variable.
 RIGHT TOP: Pearlman, **ONE**; 2012; detail.
 BELOW RIGHT: Veeder, **Arch**; 2006; cast paper; 10' x 6' x 6'.

sculptures filled with an energy and presence that evoke an immediate response in viewers. Pieces such as *Inrush* and *Subito* explode from the gallery walls in swirls, eddies, and cascades that are reminiscent of crashing waves or vortex winds and clouds. Pearlman's works, which she lights herself, are a powerful example of the dialogue an artist can create between the work, the light, and the shadows.

Lizz Aston, a Toronto-based fiber artist finds herself drawn to paper because, "This material lends itself completely to my love of process and I enjoy working with it for its transformative, resilient, and ephemeral qualities." Drawing on traditional textile objects such as lace for her *Exploding Lace* series, Aston manipulates images of the object to create altered new forms that are out of context with the original yet still familiar. The pieces produce dramatic 3D forms flowing and reaching out into the viewers' space. The work seems to spring out of the air and float along the walls, lighting here and there like butterflies. While the smaller pieces are entirely of cut paper, some of the larger forms are done in linen using the same techniques. As with Pearlman's works, the shadows created behind them become an integral component of her installations.



Still working in paper but with entirely different sources, techniques, and perspectives, Wendy Wahl's tall columns of densely stacked paper pages are immediately identifiable as the Rhode Island artist's work. Wahl scavenges for discarded Encyclopedias Britannica. Removing the book bindings, Wahl painstakingly punches and reinforces a hole in each sheet then slides the sheets onto long flexible steel rods for some of her best-known works. Installed upright in the gallery, the thickly layered pages encircle the rods from floor to ceiling. Edges of the pages are staggered and rough creating an uneven, deeply-textured surface much like bark. The pale columns branch, bend, and lean into each other, reminiscent of trees that have stood together in a forest since ancient times. The work brings the viewer full circle from the forest that served as the source of the paper to the final art made from its trees. Standing amid the uprights and arches of one of Wahl's installations the viewer can imagine themselves in that forest.



Georgette Veeder, a Pennsylvania artist, works with paper pulp made from cotton rags she beats in water in a Hollander-type beater. Pouring the pulp into handmade molds, Veeder creates work inspired by the landscape. "With forced perspective, I invite the viewer to enter my landscapes. Planes intersect to tie angles alternately geological and archeological. How do we relate to nature? How do we fit in?" Her large wall work *Skybook* draws from the Native American cliff dwellings of the Southwest. The jagged crevices and rough-hewn texture of the rock can be seen and felt in the textures of the paper as the cast surface angles and climbs the imagined cliffs. Veeder's freestanding sculpture *Arch* also reminds the viewer of the weathered rock formations of the area with its earthy red color and scoured irregular surfaces. It is difficult to conceive that these hard and solid appearing monumental sculptures are made of simple paper pulp.

Rich intense colors drench the undulating lines and curves that pack the surfaces of Cambridge, Massachusetts artist Katherine Glover's work. Beginning with handmade khadi paper, Glover tears the sheets into long strips and colors the paper with acrylic. She then sets the paper strips on edge and attaches them to a foundation backing, laying row after row tight against each other in an arduous and time-consuming process. At



HERE: Pearlman, **Inrush**; 2009; paper, india ink, paper clips, tacks; 16 x 5 x 4'.
 TOP LEFT: Pearlman, **Inrush**; 2009; detail.
 BELOW LEFT: Wahl, **EB rebound**; 2010; encyclopedia pages and stainless steel; dimensions variable.

first glance the viewer senses washes and shadows of color and texture, sometimes enhanced by a brushing of gold leaf along the paper edges. Speaking about the labor-intensive technique she uses to produce this effect, Glover says, "The best explanation for my devotion to the intense process is that I love to see the wind blowing through long grass on a hillside—and if I want to recreate that sense of motion, then I must build every blade of grass." Glover's larger works, sometimes presented as diptychs or triptychs, can dominate a wall with the intensity of their vibrating color. Looking closer, the eye follows the circuits and lines flowing across the work and the viewer is drawn into the intricate patterns.

Each of these artists works with paper yet the results are incredibly diverse. As with any medium, the individual vision of the artist and the choice of technique make the medium into a unique and personal expression of their art. When we think of paper, we think of shopping lists and copiers. These artists think paper—simple, utilitarian and everyday—and the medium is transformed.

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