

Paper into Sculpture Teaching Resource

Paper into Sculpture / October 14, 2017 – February 4, 2018

Paper

Paper as it is known today emerged in China nearly 2,000 years ago. Over time its use and composition spread and developed across the globe, with paper eventually becoming the primary type of marking surface due to its availability and ease of use. As an art material, paper has been used for drawing, painting, printmaking, collage, papier mâché and other techniques. The artists featured in *Paper into Sculpture* – Noriko Ambe, Margo Maggi, Joshua Neustein, Nancy Rubins, and Franz West – play on tensions between commonly held understandings of what paper can and cannot do, pushed to its physical limits. Treating paper as a material with palpable three-dimensional presence rather than as a mere support for mark-making, they have used processes ranging from tearing, crumpling, and cutting to scattering, binding, and adhering to produce sculptural works that take a variety of forms with a diverse range of expressive and conceptual implications.

Before Your Visit: Think about Paper

- Examine a blank piece of 8 ½" x 11" (or similar) plain white paper.
 - List all of its characteristics, starting with simple words and leading to more complex ideas.
 - List all the ways paper can be manipulated (folding, tearing, etc.).
- How is paper an ideal material for making sculpture?
- How is paper a challenging material for making sculpture? In what ways can you alter paper to address these challenges? (Example: Paper is flimsy. How could you make it stronger?)

Noriko Ambe (*pronounced AHM-bay*)

b. 1967 Japan, lives and works in New York and Japan

"Time is essential to my work. I add more paper to a sculpture over time, and as a result the work itself ends up embodying the time taken to create it. The process is as important as the finished product." –Noriko Ambe

Noriko Ambe originally trained as a painter, but stopped painting once she realized that the medium could never adequately fulfill her desire to express "infinite space." Several years later, the beautiful sight of white clouds in a blue sky from an airplane window made Ambe want to "melt into the natural world." She worked towards this concept by drawing one line after another on paper. Upon seeing a thick sketchbook in an art supply store, Ambe started cutting the organic, curving lines she had been drawing on the sketchbook's blank pages. Ambe committed herself to exploring this process for a decade, and has now made these works for 18 years. She makes all cuts by hand with a utility blade, beginning with a tiny incision on the first page that is used as a guide for the next page, with the cut on each following page growing slightly bigger. She made *Wave 1* and *Wave 4* after spending time on Long Island beach and in Rikuzentakata, a town affected by the 2011 Japanese earthquake, tsunami, and subsequent Fukushima nuclear disaster. Cardboard tubes inserted underneath stacks of cut paper suggest a never-ending wave cycle or the shift of earth and water due to natural phenomena.



LEFT: Noriko Ambe, *Inner Water* 2012, 2012. cut paper Installation detail with cut paper sculptures. *Wave 2*, *Wave 3*, and *Wave 4*. The Warehouse Gallery, Syracuse University, New York. © Noriko Ambe. RIGHT: Noriko Ambe. Photo: Mitchell Kearney

- Do you have any interests or hobbies in which the process you follow and amount of time you spend is as, if not more, important than the final product? What are some examples?

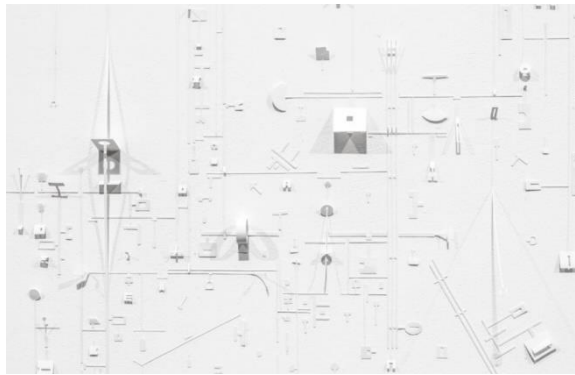
Marco Maggi

(pronounced MAH-zhee)

b. 1957 Montevideo, Uruguay,
lives and works in New York
and Montevideo

*"All my work is on the
threshold between two and
three dimensions; between
printmaking and drawing,
between the plane and the
installation, including the line
that cuts the paper and
folded micro sculpture."*

–Marco Maggi



LEFT: Marco Maggi, *GLOBAL MYOPIA* (paper & pencil), 2015 detail. Self-adhesive archival paper and ERCO LED lighting. Uruguayan Pavilion, Giardini della Biennale, Venice, Italy. © Marco Maggi. Image courtesy of the artist and Ugo Carmeni. RIGHT: Marco Maggi.

In today's frenetically-paced and high-tech world, Marco Maggi returns to the original digital: that of the human hand and its fingers (also called digits). His artworks require viewers to slow down and look closely. Maggi makes precise, miniscule impressions and incisions in paper and paper-like surfaces, such as self-adhesive labels, aluminum foil, and the skin of Macintosh apples. In the Nasher gallery, Maggi has cut and adhered miniscule paper shapes directly to the walls. Viewers must look closely to appreciate the delicate lines and shapes that don't quite lay flat against the wall, creating lines and forms between the cut shapes and their shadows. Despite the intimate scale of Maggi's paper components, the viewer must also step back to realize the full breadth of his works as they extend along the wall onto adjoining walls and the ceiling. The tiny individual elements set within a broad expanse of space make it impossible to fully comprehend the works while standing in a single spot.

- Would you consider Maggi's works to be two-dimensional or three-dimensional? Why?
- Maggi refers to these works as "shy sculptures." What do you think he means? What personality traits would you assign to the other works in this exhibition?

Nancy Rubins (pronounced ROO-bins)

b. 1952 Texas, lives and works in California

*"I was trying to figure out what was a drawing,
what was a sculpture. I didn't really know. So I
was messing around with pushing what I
thought were the boundaries of those things."*

–Nancy Rubins

Nancy Rubins is best known for her large-scale sculptures made with industrial objects such as boats, mattresses, and appliances. While working as a waitress in grad school, she made hundreds of small drawings of a huge volcanic rock outside of the restaurant. She



LEFT: Nancy Rubins, *Drawing*, 2010. Graphite pencil on paper, 134 x 379 x 12 in. (340 x 963 x 30 cm). © Nancy Rubins. RIGHT: Nancy Rubins. Photo: Joel Searles.

decided to build sculpture that came from these drawings. The drawings themselves became experiments: Rubins completely covers large sheets of thick watercolor paper with dense, opaque layers of graphite scribbles and gestures made with flat-sided carpenter pencils sharpened to a broad, chisel-like edge. The layers of graphite produce a silvery sheen that transforms the flatness of the paper. An early example was draped over a sawhorse; another over a rope. In *Drawing* (2012), Rubins joins together drawings and mounts them on the wall, suggesting a rippling effect and the sense of simultaneous separation and coming together.

- Look at this artwork from across the room. Now move forward for a closer look. What do you notice as you move closer to the piece?
- Would you call this artwork a drawing, a sculpture or both? Why?

Joshua Neustein

(pronounced NOY-shtine)

b. 1940 Poland; lives and works in New York and Tel Aviv

"I actually find that when you cut a piece of paper...what is leftover, very often in my case is more interesting than what I'm trying to make. And so I explore the leftovers to make a better thing than what I intended to do, which was predictable; whereas the cuttings are really a surprise." –Joshua Neustein

Joshua Neustein's work encompasses photography, video, conceptual and land art. His exploration of paper is similarly diverse: folding, painting, cutting, and drawing. In 1970-71, Neustein presented Land Art installations using hay bales, tar paper, and sound recordings. In 1976, he reimagined these forms with *Paper Bales*. *Paper Bales* consists of trimmings leftover when rolls and large sheets of paper are cut into smaller pieces and bound into forms that resemble hay bales. Sourced from a local paper company, these bales pause at the Nasher for *Paper into Sculpture*. Afterward, they'll continue on to the recycling center that will pulverize, soak, and reform them into fresh sheets of paper.

- Divide into pairs. Compare *Paper Bales* with Neustein's nearby *C'est la vie*.
 - Have one partner write down all the similarities between the two artworks while the other partner writes down all the differences.
 - If you wrote down similarities, use your notes to convince your partner that the sculptures are more similar than different. If you wrote down differences, use your notes to convince your partner that the sculptures are more different than similar.



LEFT: Joshua Neustein, *Paper Bales*, 1976. Installation view, Joshua Neustein, Tel Aviv Museum. © Joshua Neustein. RIGHT: Joshua Neustein installs *Taped Map of Israel*, 2006 at the Israel Museum.

Franz West (pronounced VEST)

Austrian, 1947-2012; lived and worked in Vienna, Austria

"I have been working in papier-mâché for many years. I came to this material because it's cheap and easy to use. You can make it at home without too many complications. It doesn't bleed. It doesn't stink. And you can live with it without being afraid." –Franz West

Franz West's oeuvre includes mixed media collages, small assemblages and furniture. Some of his earliest works were painted collages using magazine images. West later used papier-mâché as a medium for larger sculptures, at times incorporating found objects. These sculptural works, referred to as "willfully unserious" by one critic, are amorphous and unwieldy, a combination of enduring and ephemeral materials. From a distance, *Sisyphos IX* resembles a nearly 7-foot-tall boulder resting precariously against tiny metal cylinders. West's use of materials—compressed and soaked balls of newsprint—is apparent in the craggy, untreated surface visible beneath splashes of paint that appear to be haphazardly applied. West has stated that he used his "gut" to determine paint color and placement, turning the sculpture as he applied paint. *Sisyphos* is named for the Greek king of Ephyra who, as punishment for his deceitful behavior, was condemned by Zeus to push a boulder up a hill over eternity, only to have it roll back down just before he reaches the top.



LEFT: Franz West, *Sisyphos IX*, 2002, 2002. Papier mâché, styrofoam, cardboard, lacquer, and acrylic. 68 ½ x 59 ¾ x 44 in. (174 x 151.8 x 111.8 cm). The Rachofsky Collection. © 2017 Estate of Franz West. © Archiv Franz West. RIGHT: Franz West in the studio.

- Make a simple shape poem: Start by lightly sketching the outline of *Sisyphos IX*.
- Write down one list of words that describe the physical form of *Sisyphos IX*: its shape, size, texture, colors and materials. Then, write another list describing what it reminds you of and how it makes you feel.
- Cover your drawing outline with the words you've written. Add or subtract words to fill in or make space.

ESOPUS

Concurrent with *Paper into Sculpture*, the Nasher presents an installation of works related to the New York-based magazine *ESOPUS*. Since 2003, *ESOPUS* has distinguished itself by its refusal of advertising and its mission to provide an unmediated experience with art, photography, literature, music, history, and broader streams of culture. The Spring 2017 issue includes a project by *Paper into Sculpture* artist Marco Maggi.



ESOPUS 24, Spring 2017. Tony Tasset artist project.

After Your Visit: Play with Paper

The artists in *Paper into Sculpture* manipulate paper using methods such as tearing, painting, folding, crumpling, cutting, soaking, bundling, molding, bending, combining, and drawing. Are there additional processes you can think of that you don't see in the works on view at the Nasher?

- Take a sheet of paper and change it using a single method.
- Now change it using a second method.
- As you work with your paper, consider where you want it to fall on the two- to three-dimensional spectrum. Do you want it to retain many of its two-dimensional properties? Do you want to make it as three-dimensional as possible? How much do you want to transform the paper?
- Take time to notice how paper behaves and what it can and cannot do. Reflect on your process. What did you learn about the nature of paper?

Additional Resources

Nasher Interview with Noriko Ambe

<http://www.nashersculpturecenter.org/learn/research/articles-publications/article?id=78>

Noriko Ambe's website

<http://www.norikoambe.com/>

Modern East Magazine: A Talk with Artist Noriko Ambe

<https://moderneastmagazine.com/2016/03/07/a-talk-with-artist-noriko-ambe/>

Nasher Interview with Marco Maggi

<http://www.nashersculpturecenter.org/learn/research/articles-publications/article?id=80>

Marco Maggi's website

<http://www.marcomaggi.org/>

Marco Maggi interviews

<http://www.marcomaggi.org/interviews/>

Nasher Interview with Joshua Neustein

<http://www.nashersculpturecenter.org/learn/research/articles-publications/article?id=81>

Nasher Interview with Nancy Rubins

<http://www.nashersculpturecenter.org/learn/research/articles-publications/article?id=66>

Nancy Rubins in the University of Texas Landmarks Collection

<https://landmarks.utexas.edu/artwork/drawing>

Frieze.com *Adaptation: Jan Verwoert on Franz West*

<https://frieze.com/article/adaptation>

Franz West Private Foundation

<http://www.franzwestprivatstiftung.at/>

ESOPUS website

<https://www.esopus.org/>

Suggested Curriculum Connections (TEKS)

Fine Arts: Historical and Cultural Relevance, Critical Evaluation and Response, Creative Expression | §117.52. Art, Level I (c) (1), (3) and (4)

APPENDIX: Interview with *Paper into Sculpture* Curator Catherine Craft

Kate Kahle, junior in the Visual Arts Conservatory at Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, gets a bit of insight into *Paper into Sculpture* from Nasher Curator, Dr. Catherine Craft.

Kate Kahle: Is the idea of the intersection of the 2-D media and 3-D ideas only present in contemporary art?

Catherine Craft: No, not at all! Paper in the form of papier-mâché has been used for several hundred years to make sculptures, reliefs, containers, models and architectural ornament – we’re illustrating in our exhibition catalogue a beautiful 15th-century relief sculpture of the Adoration of the Magi that’s basically made of paper. Paper’s often used in place of more expensive materials, or because it’s relatively quick and easy to work with. But because paper is not as sturdy as, say, plaster, few of these objects have survived. (I can share the image of the Adoration if you’d like to see it).

KK: What are the unique qualities of paper as a material that make paper into sculpture so compelling?

CC: Paper is cheap, readily available, and has a relatively high tensile strength, so it’s really versatile – artists feel like they can take risks and experiment without fear of ruining something important or valuable. Paper is also fragile (sensitive to light and humidity, susceptible to being torn or punctured), but I think even that quality can be appealing to artists, because our bodies are fragile too. Finally, because paper has so many uses already in our culture (printing/writing, record-keeping, etc.), artists can work with those associations, creating works with many levels of meaning.

KK: Of the pieces in the exhibit, which two do you think are the most technically different from each other and why? Can you explain the processes that were used to create those pieces?

CC: Probably Nancy Rubins’s *Drawing* and Joshua Neustein’s *Paper Bales*: Rubins’s work is basically a drawing, but taken to an extent and scale that moves it really into the sculptural. At nearly 13 feet long, it’s the largest work in the show, and it’s made the way you would make any drawing: Rubins uses flat-sided carpenter pencils and thick Arches watercolor paper, which she completely coats with graphite by covering them with scribbles, then she joins them together and mounts them to the wall. They’re like gigantic reliefs, and they have this silvery deep space to them that’s very dramatic. Neustein’s work consists of two bales of paper from a local paper distributor that were headed for the recycling center until they were placed in our gallery. The bales are from trimmings of large rolls and flats of new paper, so they’re gleaming white. On the one hand, they continue the tradition of the readymade, Marcel Duchamp’s category of an everyday object that becomes art by being designated as art by the artist; once you put them in an art museum, they start acting “as” sculpture – they’re these big, shaggy rectangular modules, like mutated Minimalist sculptures. They’re really kind of beautiful, but they also provoke thoughts of waste (if you’re an artist, or writer, who’s ever destroyed work, seeing a whole bale of ripped and fragmented paper can be very sobering). The bales, by the way, will continue their voyage to the recycling center when the exhibition closes.

KK: In what ways do you feel like the material of paper is integral to the message of the work in this exhibit?

CC: The work, the exhibit, and the message wouldn’t exist without the material of paper. The very existence of paper makes possible so many things we take for granted, even the way we think and conceive ideas for projects like exhibitions. Even if much of our life is online, paper and its language still structures the way we define it: going to a home page, belonging to Facebook, editing a document, even if it’s on a computer screen. In art, paper has often been used for sketches – for artists dreaming and thinking their way through things. If you work in or on paper, you can just do it yourself, without assistance or assistants. And artists who focus on paper as a material tend to have those kinds of associations on their minds. Paper is a physical object, but it’s also slight, so it’s easy to miss it, or just take it at surface value.

KK: Do you feel like paper’s relative impermanence, as compared to other sculptural media, was chosen for a specific reason by the artists in the exhibit?

CC: Yes, but it’s different for each artist. I think Franz West liked working with papier-mâché because it’s cheap, quick and easy to use, and safe (unlike many plastics and resins, for example) – and he also had an irreverent sense of humor, so I think he also liked the unpretentiousness of paper, as opposed to a material like marble. Marco Maggi’s art concerns attention to the insignificant, to slowing down our gaze in a world that’s moving faster than we can process, and his installations with small pieces of paper adhered to walls are meant to foster slow looking; for him, paper’s relative impermanence makes for a kind of modesty about his art’s willfully small place in the world.