

HAND PAPERMAKING

VOLUME 40, NUMBER 1 • SUMMER 2025

<i>Note from the Editor & Letter from the Guest Editor</i>	2
<i>Falling Into Milk</i> MARIE BANNEROT MCINERNEY	3
<i>Behind the Scenes: An International Paper Biennial</i> AMY RICHARD	8
<i>Inroads to Abstraction</i> BARBARA LANDES & PAUL SULLIVAN	14
<i>During a Hard Shift to the Right</i> MELISSA JAY CRAIG	19
<i>Paper Sample: Modified Rain Paper</i> MELISSA JAY CRAIG	21
<i>Across Continents: Paper, Culture, and Curation</i> ANNE VILSBOELL	22
<i>Paperwork: Institutional Classifications of Handmade Paper Artworks</i> ELIANA BLECHMAN	26
<i>Hanji Edition: Contemporary Diasporic Approaches to Traditional Korean Paper</i> LARS KIM & STEPH RUE	30
<i>The Art of Anxiety in the Age of Digital Documentation</i> KERRY DOWNEY	34
<i>Reviews</i> MAY BABCOCK: <i>Radical Paper: Art and Invention with Colored Pulp</i> ALTA L. PRICE: <i>The Dictionary of the Book</i>	38 40
<i>Seeds into Paper: Cultivating Flax in a Campus Garden for Hand Papermaking</i> MARIA ZYTARUK	41
<i>Paper Sample: Calgary Flax Paper</i> MARIA ZYTARUK & BRIAN QUEEN TEXT BY MARIA ZYTARUK	44
<i>In Memoriam: Helmut Becker</i> HELEN O'CONNOR	45
<i>Authors</i>	47
<i>Sponsors and Contributors</i>	48

FRONT COVER: Yoo Jounghye, *The Path Where Moonlight Flows*, 2021, 1200 x 400 x 350 centimeters (472 x 157 x 138 inches), installation of dyed hanji (Korean paper). The artist is seen here with the work at Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, Taipei, Taiwan. Photo: Tae-Kyu Jeong. Courtesy of the artist. **BACK COVER:** Hanji Edition 2021 features hanji works by Carrie Ann Plank, Oriol Miro, Tatiana Ginsberg, Velma Bolyard, and Radha Pandey. Published in an edition of 20; custom enclosure measures 11.5 x 10.13 x 3.38 inches. Photo by and courtesy of Steph Rue.

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Hand Papermaking, Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing traditional and contemporary ideas in the art of hand papermaking through its print and online publications and other educational formats. Please visit the website for more information: <https://www.handpapermaking.org>.

Hand Papermaking (ISSN 0887-1418) is published twice a year by Hand Papermaking, PO Box 50336, Baltimore, MD 21211-9998, USA. Tel 651-447-7143.

Hand Papermaking is indexed by Art Index (since 1998). A keyword search function covering all volumes is accessible on Hand Papermaking's website at <https://www.handpapermaking.org/search>.

Annual subscriptions are \$70 per year in the US; \$80 in Canada and Mexico; \$105 elsewhere. Two-year subscriptions are \$130 in the US; \$150 in Canada and Mexico; \$200 elsewhere. Institutional subscriptions are \$95 per year for institutions in the US, and \$125 per year for those outside the US. Payment in US dollars is required. Visa/Mastercard/Paypal accepted.

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Note from the Editor

It has been such a delight to work with guest editors of the magazine—they bring fresh perspectives and broaden the network of artists, writers, and practitioners reflected in these pages. At the same time, we are indebted to our long-time colleagues, including Amanda Degener, co-founder of *Hand Papermaking* magazine, who joins our masthead as on-press advisor; she and our stellar designer Karen Kopacz keep an eagle eye on press to ensure the highest fidelity and quality of our print publications. Now, I am honored to turn the magazine over to Radha Pandey who has put together a marvelous issue, which she describes below. Thank you Radha for all of your contributions to the field and your efforts as guest editor of the Summer 2025 issue.

Mina Takahashi

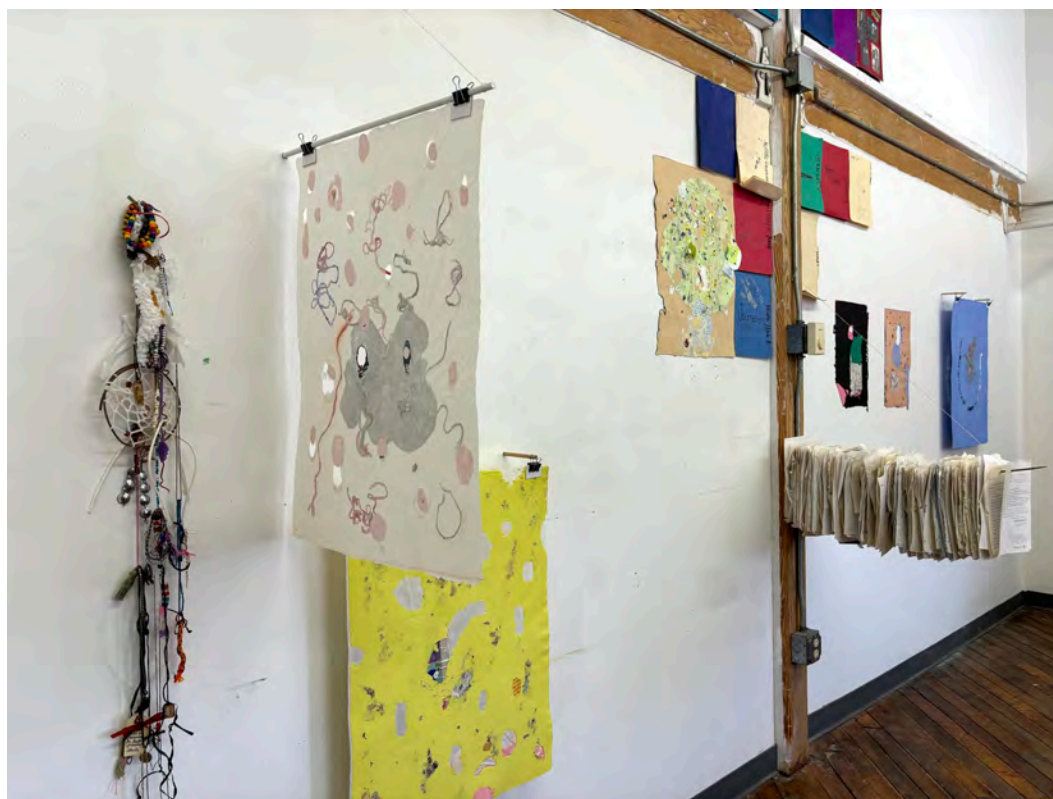
Letter from the Guest Editor

When exhibited, handmade-paper works, particularly sculpture, morph and shift with the perception of an audience both expert and novice, evolving their meaning and changing perhaps their physical shape over time. The past few years have seen a resurgence in exhibitions of works in and of paper as their focus. How are curators and artists making decisions and approaching their work? The theme of paper as concept and how it is realized through exhibitions, curation, and creation of work is what this issue of *Hand Papermaking* explores.

We begin with Marie McInerney—who created a paper-sculpture installation that she constantly adapted to its physical space over the period of nine months—and connect her work with artists such as Melissa Jay Craig who provides a paper sample from her installation, recontextualizing and bringing it to the readers of this publication. Artist-curators such as Anne Vilsboell and Amy Richard share their experiences curating and orchestrating exhibitions that toured continents. Lars Kim and Steph Rue speak about curating hanji “exhibitions” in the space of a clamshell box. Barbara Landes and Paul Sullivan present three artists whose paper sculptures delve in abstraction in different ways. Kerry Downey takes us on a sublime journey of their work and the challenges of documenting paper in time and space, while Eliana Blechman tackles the arduous subject of cataloging works on and of paper through the lens of process. The issue closes with two book reviews, and a sample of flax paper with the story behind its making by Maria Zytaruk and Brian Queen who used Helmut Becker’s flax seeds and guidance. We end with a salute to Becker’s life and work with an obituary by Helen O’Connor.

In a changing world with a changing climate, artists are turning towards handmade paper to work sustainably and find deeper connections with the planet. As public interest in this material grows, so does its presence in art spaces.

Radha Pandey



The Art of Anxiety in the Age of Digital Documentation

KERRY DOWNEY

Kerry Downey, collection of works from the series Is it raining in your bedroom?, 2024, variable sizes, handmade-paper works (cotton, linen, abaca, pigment, embedded material). BELOW: Wannabes, 2024, 20 x 16 inches, handmade-paper work (cotton, linen, abaca, pigment, embedded material). All photos by Chris Kendall and courtesy of the artist.



Handmade paper is matter brought to its knees. Its mess is gathered into buckets of mush that is then pigmented, sifted, poured into a mould. I push the pulp around like a painting or collage, shape it into form, and press it between absorbent layers of felt and heavy boards. The paper studio is like a communal shower, with a drain in the center of the waterproofed floor. We crank down on the wet paper; water cascades, then drips, and eventually we peel the sheets off the stack. To remove the rest of the water out of the sheets, cloths, blotters, fans, and even a dehumidifier are required. Without a way to pull the moisture from the sheets, the paper would mold and rot.

In the summer of 2024 I pulped the majority of my teenage archives—nine boxes of letters, drawings, and ephemera—to make paper.¹ As a kid, I meticulously organized these materials into folders in a metal filing cabinet in my bedroom, each labeled with the corresponding name (Rachel, Alison, Melissa...). The way to manage big feelings was to store them like treasures, like secrets. I keep keeping this archive because I keep keeping it. A history of saving becomes a history to save.

What is extraordinary about making paper by hand is that the material process is so potent with kinesthetic metaphors of composting and regeneration. The process is chock-full of incredible language; in addition to beating, blending, soaking, pressing, and reconstituting the pulp, we hog the vat, make kiss offs, and couch the sheet (pronounced *cooch!*). What better way to rework an archive dripping with pathos? Agonies of my queer youth were met with sloppy wet pleasure.

All the works hold an intense materiality. For *Ghost Friendship Bracelets*, I dropped over a dozen bracelets into the wet abaca mixture during sheet formation. Once dry, the abaca sheet becomes thin and crisp but flexes around the bracelets, pulling into ripples (also known as cockles). The strings are like wriggling worms. Up close you see how hairy they are. The work is covered in pale pink spots (ladled pulp paints), and a graphite cartoon blob stares out of its hole for an eye. I have it hanging in my studio perpendicular to the wall, so it can be seen from both sides

and ambient light can pass through it, activating abaca's filmy translucency. Jutting into the room, it flies like a flag. Looking through its holes, you can see my studio walls, where other archival materials are installed.

"Memories can cohere around objects in unpredictable ways, and the task of the archivist of emotion is an unusual one," writes Ann Cvetovich in *An Archive of Feelings*. She continues, "The struggle to record and preserve is exacerbated by the invisibility that often surrounds intimate life."² The works in my archive project conjure that pre-digital era of letter writing and note passing in the halls and on the bus, exchanges of touch crucial to my early practices in queer longing. As this work evolves in my studio, it is an increasingly immersive installation, reperforming the physicality and relationality at the heart of my practice.

Documenting my works on (and now of) paper has always stressed me out. I often feel, as many queer artists do, that I am making things that defy straightforward documentation and are meant to be experienced in person. I reached out to Chris Kendall, a warm and deeply experienced photographer of art, open to working through the technical and conceptual dilemmas of shooting handmade-paper works. Chris and I photographed *Ghost Friendship Bracelets* for hours and in many different ways. What's difficult about photographing paper-pulp works, is that you're not only photographing an image, but also a low-relief object, and many of my works also have holes and variable edges. To capture the work's objecthood and luminosity, we photographed the work on a vertical Plexi-glas apparatus that Chris built. This allows the camera to read the deckle edges separate from reading the light hitting the wall, which, in Chris's setup, was a few feet behind the Plexi. Chris over-lit the white wall in order to easily select it as background in Photoshop, with the artwork as a clearly defined separate layer.

Texture is not merely happening *at* the surface, it *is* the work's form—image and substrate are one uniform object. A paper work has incredibly delicate materiality that absorbs, reflects, or disperses the light depending on how the



Ghost Friendship Bracelets, 2024, 29 x 21 inches, handmade-paper work (cotton, linen, abaca, pigment, embedded material).

paper was made. When light illuminates abaca, some of the light passes through the translucent material, scattering it in various directions as it travels through the sheet. This can result in a diffuse or even blurry image. In the case of this piece, in order to clearly read the pulp-paint image *and* the work's materiality, we placed white foamcore, just slightly larger than the artwork, behind the Plexi to block the light from passing



Multiple attempts by Chris Kendall to capture both materiality and image in *Ghost Friendship Bracelets*. Left to right: Image 1 shows the paper's translucency; Image 2 shows some of the translucency, color, and materiality; Image 3 shows more of the materiality, but loses the color, too much contrast; and Image 4 shows a nice balance of color and materiality, but has distracting shadows at edges.



Through and Through, 2024, 30 x 22 inches, handmade paper work (cotton, linen, pigment, embedded material, backed with abaca).



You'd be so pretty if you'd smile, 2024, 30 x 22 inches, handmade paper work (cotton, linen, abaca, pigment, embedded material).

fully through (and to prevent light from bouncing back from the lit wall behind). The gap between artwork and foamcore created a distinctive drop shadow, which accentuates the work's physicality.

After much trial and error, we landed on a repeatable strategy. We followed many of the standard rules of photographing art: shoot with uncompressed RAW files; use a tripod, manual focus, manual white balance, a gray card; keep an eye on the camera's histogram; and bracket the exposure. Another trick—Chris has many—is to only use one strobe light, set up at a 45-degree angle to the work. The typical use of two strobes will create cross shadows (shadows on both sides) that can cancel each other out. While the result creates more uneven light that needs to be corrected in post-processing (using a gradient to even the exposure across the paper), this technique privileges the work's materiality. During the shoot I also fussed with artist tape to flatten buckles at the edges. In person, these undulations are what make handmade paper so incredible. In a photograph, the wrong shape or value of a shadow can be distracting.

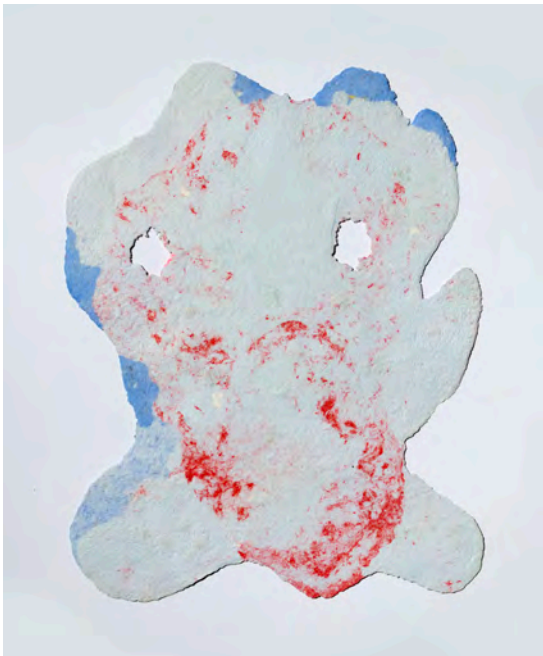
The next day, I sat nervously beside Chris while he spent patient hours color correcting, sharpening the focus, brightening the whites, saturating here, increasing the exposure there. He would zoom in, making sure a detail was in perfect focus. For me, the process felt more like resuscitation than correction. We were trying to approximate the aliveness of the real thing, which we kept referring back to, while discussing what's more important: the truthiness of the image or an image that is compelling. I thought of the theory hero Walter Benjamin, whose anxieties about reproduction were made famous, concerned that the "aura" of a work of art would be lost forever. What would Walter Benjamin think of Instagram? "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."³

After working with Chris, I found myself defending Walter Benjamin for the first time in my life. My work requires in-the-flesh, slow, and close looking, drooling over every sweet, pulpy inch. One needs to move around the paper works; experience their subtle shifts in color, texture, opacity, thickness, and surface; peek through their holes and travel along their variable edges. Feel your body, notice your breath. Wet mush is now dried skin. Handmade-paper works are not things to look at, but to look with, feel with.

What was once a process of alchemical healing and artistic skill building was now a full-blown existential panic about annihilation. If seen only in photographic reproduction, my work (and by extension, I too) will become submerged in the infinite sea of digital garbage. If I'm re-enacting the marginalized other, does this mean I'm making photography the oppressor!? Eek. I needed to get a grip.

"Queer archives...are composed of material practices that challenge traditional conceptions of history and understand the quest for history as a psychic need rather than a science."⁴ If this project is not about preserving history or knowledge but exploring a feeling or a need, how can the photo hold all of this affective density? I realize that a familiar mourning process is underway, one that is not unlike the archive's original and rather creative defense against loss. It is not Benjamin's *aura of the original* that I fear losing; after all this is an archive of relationships where there is no clear origin of meaning. It occurs to me that the digital reproductions speak to the losses already there, already inevitable.

Written after his mother's death, Roland Barthes' now famous *Camera Lucida* is as much a reflection on death as it is on photography. He became obsessed with a photo of his mother at age 5. The art historian Margaret Olin explains "*Camera Lucida* dwells on the 'that-has-been' of the photograph."⁵ The photo, in its aims to capture something that existed in real time and space, always speaks to something no longer existing.



Front and back views of *Just Between Us*, 2024, 18 x 14 inches, handmade paper work (cotton, linen, abaca, pigment, embedded material).

Through this lens, photography has proven wildly successful at transmitting the negative affects of my archive.

Cori Olinghouse, an artist, archivist, and curator working with performance and time-based media, reminded me that “the archivist’s work should not be about fidelity or accuracy. It’s about looking to see how an archive performs and creating new scores that potentiate other forms—making offshoots, multiplying possibilities, making something adjacent. In this way, we can play productively with failure to fully represent something. Acknowledging impossibility opens up other value systems. I’m advocating for *misrepresentation*.”⁶

I’m brought back to my longtime love of the writer Sara Ahmed, who persistently asks “What’s the use?”

When objects fail to perform within the narrow constraints of our utilitarian aims, we fail to see what’s possible. In Ahmed’s call for a *queering* of use, what are all the possible uses of an artwork’s documentation, and what other possible forms of documentation might exist? As an interdisciplinary artist who works in time-based mediums, I decided to document the paper works using video’s ability to engage the body more sensorially and durationally. In a one-minute video, I am able to present more of the phenomenology and relationality of paper. I begin with a wide-angle shot of the work as an installation, then slowly move in close to see details, like the tiny embedded hairs in the abaca. I show both sides of work, peek through its holes, and show the work as an environment, creating more context. I also juxtapose tripod shots with handheld video, which produces a sense of intimacy and immediacy.⁷

Works that trouble representation should stay close to the trouble; it is here that we potentiate new forms. My sense is that I kept everything every girl gave me because the density of those experiences overwhelmed me. By saving their unpacking for later, I also imagined a future self capable of metabolizing my teen phantasmagoria. A parallel process is slowly unfolding with the images Chris took. Time and space open up more readings of the images. With less anxiety about losing an artwork’s original “aura,” I can see what is being communicated rather than what’s absent. I wanted to write a scathing review of photography’s failing me and the art of handmade paper, great underdogs of the artworld. However, my reenactment of documentation’s failures (as existential fear of annihilation) also reignited my ongoing striving for more forms of representation. These new desires will inevitably get translated into the next body of work.

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 Julietta Singh, *No Archive Will Restore You* (2018).

NOTES

1. I made the handmade-paper works with Mina Takahashi at Round Top Paper in Delhi, NY.
2. Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 242.
3. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 3. Translated into English by Harry Zohn from the 1935 essay. <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/benjamin.pdf> (accessed October 1, 2024).
4. Ann Cvetkovich, 268.
5. Margaret Olin, “Roland Barthes’s ‘Mistaken’ Identification” in *Touching Photographs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 101.
6. Cori Olinghouse, phone conversation with the author, July 22, 2024.
7. Video forthcoming on artist’s website, kerrydowney.com.