

LOCATING PAPER ART WITHIN THE ART OF TODAY

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LOCATING PAPER ART WITHIN THE ART OF TODAY

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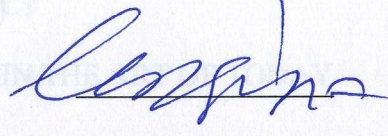
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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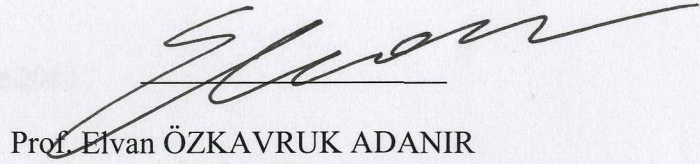
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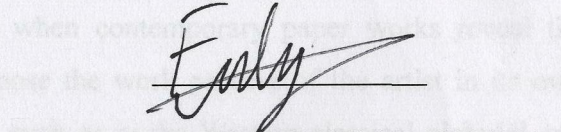
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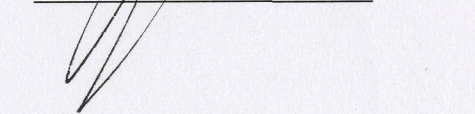
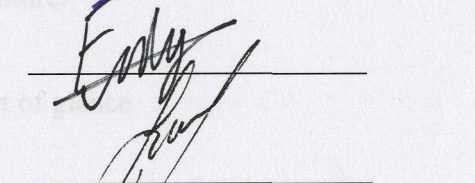
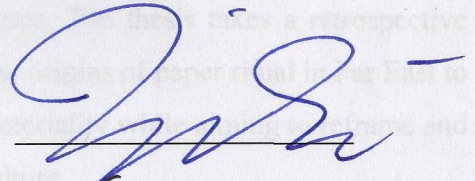
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ABSTRACT

LOCATING PAPER ART WITHIN THE ART OF TODAY

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M.Des. in Design Studies

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June 2013

There has lately been a notable increase in the use of paper as artistic medium. The manufacture of paper, a highly respected traditional practice in the Far East, seems to have regained popularity as a new medium for art. Some uses of paper in art recall the modernist stress on the authenticity of experience in terms of both the viewer and the artist. Thus following Clement Greenberg's stress on medium specificity and Norman Bryson's arguments on the artistic technique we can argue that when contemporary paper works reveal the limitations specific to their medium, they expose the work process of the artist in its own duration. As opposed to an erasive technique such as in the Western classical pictorial arts which builds the work on the effacement of the medium. On the contrary in paper works the temporality of the artist remains always legible and interpretable for the viewer and the accentuated materiality always addressing her / his senses. The thesis takes a retrospective look on the parallelism between Western paper art and the origins of paper ritual in Far East to further dwell on the interaction between visuality and materiality while aiming to reframe and locate paper's objecthood within contemporary visual culture.

Keywords: paper art, material art, medium specificity, art of glance

ÖZET

GÜNÜMÜZ SANATINDA KAĞIT SANATINI KONUMLANDIRMAK

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Son zamanlarda sanatta malzeme olarak kâğıt kullanımında kayda değer bir artış gözlenmektedir. Uzak Doğu'da oldukça saygıyla yaklaşılan bir zanaat olan kağıt yapımının yeni bir sanat vasıtası olarak yeniden cazibe kazandığını görmekteyiz. Öyle ki bazı kağıt uygulamaları gerek sanatçı gerekse izleyici açısından, modern sanata ait deneyimin özerkliği fikirlerini çağrıştırmaktadır. Buradan yola çıkarak Clement Greenberg'ün '*medium specificity*' ve Norman Bryson'un sanatsal teknikle ilgili argümanlarının ışığında kağıt işlerin, malzemenin sınırlarını ortaya koyarak sanatçının çalışma aşamasını kendi sürecinde açığa çıkardığı öne sürülebilir. Halbuki alışlagelmiş olan klasik Batı resim anlayışında örtücü bir teknik hakimdir ve eser, malzemenin örtülerek silinmesi üzerine kurulur. Buna karşın kağıt işlerde sanatçının zamansallığı, izleyici tarafından her daim okunabilir ve yorumlanabilir kalarak vurgulanan maddesellik ile de duyular hedef alınır. Tez, retrospektif bir bakışla Batı kağıt sanatı ile Uzak Doğu'daki kağıt ritüeli arasındaki paralellikleri araştırırken; görsellik ve maddesellik arasındaki etkileşime değinerek kağıdın şeyliğini çağdaş görsel kültür içinde yeniden konumlandırmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kağıt sanatı, maddesel sanat, *medium specificity*, *art of glance*

To my family for any kind of inspiration they have been to me. I am very thankful to them
for making me the person I am
and
for Nancy, I think I made it this time.

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My interest in paper originates from an early memory when in a children's magazine I have come across a "Make Your Own Paper" tutorial. I immediately tried it enthusiastically. The result was not very promising but I was fascinated by the metamorphosis of worn newspapers into something new, a curiosity I have kept ever since.

I am very indebted and grateful to my beloved advisor Asst. Prof. Dr. Fulya Ertem Bařkaya for generously and deliberately sharing her free spirit with me and everyone around her. Without her cheer motivations, academic excellence and patient wisdom this thesis would never have come to life.

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I would also like to use this humble occasion to thank my teachers; Prof. Dr. Glsm Baydar, Prof. Dr. Tevfik Balcioęlu and Prof. Dr. Hakan Ertep for creating such a prominent graduate program possible in Izmir and for making me part of it despite my different background. For me they stand as paragons of academic excellence and I am thankful to have known them and been their students.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROBLEM DEFINITION

The recent increase in the use of paper as artistic medium is an intriguing trend to investigate. In the zenith of digital production and flow of images, the triumph of concepts and ideas over artistic proficiency, the use of such a fragile and daily material seems unusual and intriguing. In that aspect the urge to turn to some materials in need for certain effects that digital media alone cannot attain, needs to be better understood, especially by focusing on the case for paper. This is partly due to the fact that the possibilities offered by digital media remain predetermined and constructive to some extent and artists thus strive for and aspire to effects which are able to remain personal and expressive.

In fact the use of paper in art is not limited to contemporary applications. It has a very large range of application, from the Dadaist collages of early 20th century to American handmade paper movement of late 70's it seems not so much of an unconventional medium. Yet not all uses of paper aspire to same effects. More recently within the last decades paper has been reintroduced and used extensively for figurative cut-outs and three dimensional installations as a way to induce a more personal, craft oriented impression in parallel with the reappearance of figuration and narration of personal experiences in visual arts.

Furthermore in talking about contemporary paper art, such works eclipse the more experimental, materialist practices of some other artists that appeal to sensuous

conduct. What the former sort of works achieves is usually a mimetic display of personal experiences, through the use of positive / negative spaces of cut paper in an analogy with presence and absence or a total escape from flatness into the third dimension. They usually underline the victory of three dimensionality over flatness; the cut-out given as popping out, escaping the picture plane and stepping into reality in an act of denial over the limitation of medium, that of flatness. Such approaches to paper fall short of touching paper at all. Paper in them is as any construction material would have been; one could replace the paper in them with just another sheet material and yet the work would look intact. It could thus be argued that they rather work to erase paper; their immersive character leads the beholder to see the perforated figures rather than the medium.

On the other hand in order to speak in the name of an art practice adhered to a material it is important to sort out and underline those more recent works which are created with a totally different influence that respects and acknowledges the materiality of paper and turns it into an artistic medium. These works are lacking the popularity and appeal of three dimensional mimetic applications because of the very reason that they are a renunciation of the desire to be seen and even looked at. Rather than that they seem to stand as merely themselves. Their own bare objecthood and the material's disclosed traits pointing to artist's presence; they distinguish themselves from the formerly discussed applications. In order to reflect on the interaction between paper's materiality and visuality the thesis focuses on artists; Jean Michel Letellier, Beili Liu and Valery Orlov since in their works they did not obscure their material with their technique. Moreover in Jean Michel Letellier's

water mark series, the paper work is created starting from pulp to sheets, involving all the production process by the inscription of the artist's efforts within the material; Letellier using water to trace on paper pulp. Beili Liu in *Yin Yan* series uses incense sticks to make burned marks on paper, although not including a throughout papermaking process, Liu nonetheless adheres to the limitations of her material. Lastly Valery Orlov in *Squares* uses paper pulp to represent contradictory shapes and textures on the same plane, in a semi-sculptural approach Orlov juxtaposes paper as mere object and paper as its objecthood suspended by his artistic intervention.

This turns out to be just another quest for medium specific art. Works made of paper, rather than with paper, seem to be in accordance with the modernist notion of unmediated experience as well as the material's embeddedness in its own history and tradition. These were ideals that critiques Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried were advocating. Although Fried did not maintain Greenberg's assumption that painting and art in general had an essence (those of the limitations of the medium), he nonetheless asserted similarly that art should at least be able to avoid theatre by creating an optical illusion thus adding a convincing element so as to suspend the objecthood of the materials.

Consequently the abandon of theatre and literality leads to a radically different aesthetics in art, an aesthetics that does not stem from the communicability of form or shape but rather from their relation to and inseparability from the material. Whereas communicability or narration necessitates a prolonged, spanned duration and the denial of any indexical essence on the surface, in the absence of those the

work is endowed with the temporality of the artist and his / her indexical references. The essence of this sort of aesthetics that discloses the artist's agency, his / her working body can best be conceived by Norman Bryson's theory on the art of glance. Bryson argues that while the Western art of painting relies on the Cartesian subject / object dichotomy and the erasure of material and artist's work traces from the surface; its Eastern counterpart, the flung ink, offers a much more thorough understanding of the depicted outer reality, respecting the subjectivities of the material, the artist and the world of objects regardless of a classification of objecthood. Bryson thus uses the metaphor of glance to describe the latter as more temporal, unfocused and disordered with contrast to the act of gazing.

This thesis hence deals with paper works that offer a similar aesthetic undertaking. Works that are respecting the material's integrity and its limitations, including within it the artist's working body, his/her working traces that take the viewer back to his/her temporality in an act of glancing.

1.2 AIM OF THE STUDY

Given the retrospective on paper art given by Dorothea Eimert and Jane Farmer this study aims mainly to locate and theorize afore mentioned contemporary practices of paper art within the discourse on visuality and artistic medium elaborated by Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried and Norman Bryson.

Greenberg was a pioneer advocate of the purity of artistic medium maintaining that art could only advance so long as it avoided literality or theatre by respecting the limitations of its medium. Thus in speaking of a medium specific art, rethinking Greenberg is necessary not for denying idea or concept oriented paper applications, but as a hint to better understand medium specific traits of paper art.

Michael Fried's ideas are supportive in terms of understanding the objecthood character of a medium specific art. Fried against the Minimalist and Conceptual art installation works asserts that in order to convince beholders, art must avoid theatre, suspending the mere objecthood character of its material through an optical illusion. Hence to what extent paper works are able to remain as mere objects or art objects is a crucial aspect of this thesis. On the other hand the way we conceive of commodity or daily life objects and art objects is marked by constructed dichotomies. Hence where necessary, WJT Mitchell's ideas on the objecthood and power of images and art will also be advised to compare more contemporary views on visuality.

Finally what Bryson argues as the art of glance is in turn an alternative aesthetical conception that respects the character and limitation of the medium and the way the medium allows inscribing an outer reality without concealing itself or its executor, the artist. Although not representational and thus offering no recognizability at all, the paper works argued seem to be best graspable in terms of the art of glance given their coherence with the material.

Although quite unintentional, when looked in general, the thesis may also suggest a different approach to materials also in terms of design studies. This handling of materials suggests a more empathetic connection to materials, respecting and giving them the most suitable position to show off its qualities instead of an inferior, merely supportive job where it gets deprived of its character.

1.3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

As a study aiming to think on the use of a specific medium, the thesis has turned its face towards art criticism but furthermore owes its theoretical background to interdisciplinary approaches to art criticism and history, in the field of visual culture which is a branch of design studies. However in order to speak of paper art in terms of its visual qualities, it was first necessary to give a record on the historical role of paper as beyond an inscription surface and the more contemporary Western applications of paper as art material.

The first section thus departs with a historical inquiry to thoroughly understand the materiality of paper and its ritualistic uses in its land of origin, the Far Eastern countries, which could play an influential role in today's artist. Then it will move on to examine the prominent examples of paper art exhibitions in the Western hemisphere where paper has been reincarnated as an art form in the last few decades. In doing this it will look for parallel influences and tendencies between the contemporary artist and the ancient papermaker.

Once the parallel aspects of paper's material essence in both its' land of origin and in contemporary uses in art will be made clear, then the second section will investigate the works of paper artists for whom paper is not an end product but an artistic creativity, an expression that opens on the working body of the artist. Such works which expose the human agency as opposed to a perfected product are best understood in terms of the Greenbergian modernist notion of unmediated experience and Norman Bryson's aesthetics of glance theories. Hence the study will conclude by an attempt to conceive the visuality of selected works in stressing on their compatibility with afore mentioned theories.

As method the study refrains to be an art historical record on paper works but rather a survey on their interaction between visuality and materiality. Therefore it will contend to rely on a visual analysis of paper works elaborated by the theories of Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried and Norman Bryson which best help us understand how material can turn into a medium.

Consequently the thesis neither purports to classify and elevate the use of paper in art to a high end nor does it satisfy itself by clinging to the more common craft related views on paper. The thesis mainly aims to rethink the visuality offered by paper art works in terms of visual culture.

Although resources are of primary importance in writing about a specific moment in art, it is kindly requested to take into account the lack of an adequate art library and archive within the closest reaches or the insufficiencies of the available ones.

Nonetheless the fact that paper art is very poorly studied even in the popular context let alone academic studies must be stated. However the lack of a consistent and thorough academic study on paper art has thus been the main motivation behind this thesis that aims to be an initiator on the issue.

2. PAPER FROM FAR EAST TO A CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCE

In instances of cultural turmoil or exhaustion the Occident world has inclined to turn its looks on the Orient for some inspiration. Such was the Renaissance in reclaiming the accumulated knowledge of the ancient era in the near East or the relatively more contemporary influence of Japanese print art on the late 19th century Art Nouveau style. Although in terms of postcolonial criticism the colonizer is supposed to have the full command of cultural dominance it is also argued that there actually takes place a reciprocal cultural exchange that the colonizer is reluctant to fully admit. Without further indulging into postcolonial critique the very use of paper in the Occident stems from a likely cultural exchange. However an exchange that remains totally functional scrapping off the ritualistic tradition of the material.

Dard Hunter, in *Papermaking, The History of an Ancient Craft* (1947), one of the most acclaimed resources on the craft of paper, underlines his veneration for the immanent hand work ability of the laborious paper maker of the Far East countries where paper first came about. However in these lands the craft of paper had more of a spiritual connotation rather than a purely utilitarian one. In China, this was in part associated to its use in funerary ceremonies. In these rituals real size replicas of money or even clothes, shoes, carts, horses and all kinds of earthly objects were recreated of paper. Even the paper money used in these ceremonies is called spirit money. It was believed that when during the ceremony these latter were burned in furnaces, their smoke would eventually assume reality in heaven and accompany the

deceased in the afterlife (Ibid: 209). Similar rituals gave paper a numinous character which enabled the craft of paper to be;

...regarded in a vastly different light in the Orient from what it is in the Occident, for in the Far East it has a spiritual significance that overshadows its practical use, while in the western world the purposes for which paper is intended are purely practical and utilitarian (Hunter, Ibid: 213).

As a result, paper as material and its craftsmanship have long been endowed as a numinous occupation in the area of its origin. According to Hunter this was also because it allowed the inscription of holy texts related to religious life. Hunter states;

The Chinese and Japanese people had a profound reverence for paper and for the craftsman who fabricated the thin, delicate sheets. This was only natural, as the earliest paper was used chiefly for inscribing the sayings of Kung Fu-tsu (Confucius) and for other writings deeply concerned with the religious life of the East. (Ibid: 59)

This further affiliation with religious inscriptions gave paper manufacture a mystic and meditative connotation that today still persists even detached from its land of origin.

Dorothy Field further develops the relation between the craft of paper and spirituality in *Paper and Threshold: The Paradox of Spiritual Connection in Asian Cultures* (2007). According to Field cultures use materials that reflect their own myths, their own sense of where life dwells. While in India, thread and cloth are often used as mnemonic devices to remind people to pay attention whereas in other parts of Asia, particularly Japan, Korea, Burma, and Nepal, paper takes up its paradoxical role as a

bridge enabling spirits to cross and a barrier keeping dark forces out. Field says in fact that, “in cultures where paper has been important -Japan, China, Korea, Tibet, and Nepal among others- paper is placed at the threshold, aiding communication with the world of infinite mystery, reminding people to pay attention.” (Ibid: 2)

Through the beginning of her book, Field already asserts that in her first travel to East for inquiring the spiritual connection with materials, she has understood that Asian paper was something quite different from paper in the West (Ibid: 1). Her underlining of the Japanese papermakers’ understanding the quality of paper as an indication of the quality of the papermaker’s soul is of utmost significance (Ibid: 2). Or elsewhere she also states that “sorting out then months of slides, I was surprised to see how often paper’s role was spiritual, either as an aid to speaking to the gods or as a talisman against evil spirits.” (Ibid: 2)

It is this spirituality that this chapter finds important to elaborate in order to cast light on the surplus value of paper which makes it so appealing to some artists who, as Jules Heller states in *Paper-Making* (1978); “...view the new paper revolution as a medium of artistic expression in its own right, without reference to other mediums.” (Ibid: 11)

Heller uses this definition to make a distinction between two groups of handmade paper practitioners the other of which is consisted by those who see the process in paper making an end-product for printing, drawing and calligraphy. Jane Farmer in *Paper as Medium* (1978) similarly notes that the concern of today’s artists, though not unrelated to the traditional awareness of paper as surface, is somehow different, in that it goes beyond the traditional Western use of paper (Ibid: 5).

Then as a matter of fact as this study aims to underline, paper has the potential to become an artistic medium in its own right. Therefore all the qualities invested in the practice of this ancient craft tradition can be said to have a potential to nourish a contemporary influence which in turn generates a new artistic medium.

However there is an important point to make here, paper as artistic medium within the scope of this study is inseparable from its production method, the craftsmanship and its material integrity and culture. Such inherent qualities are so closely related to this craft tradition that the use of paper as artistic medium with the exception of its production process or materiality remains insignificant when compared to works involving such. Mostly because it is likely that paper used as end-product seems deprived of its subjectivity and thus rendered as mere object. Yet when a work then exposes the materiality of paper either through the hand-making process or mere material investigation; it seems to take into consideration the material as subject. This seems to be in parallel with what Walter Benjamin describes as the embeddedness of the artwork in tradition and history. Although Benjamin stresses this as a characteristic of the art object, this study maintains it as a character of artistic activity, that of paper making.

Hence it is only when paper as material is treated as not only object matter but also part of subject matter, as an elongation of the craftsman's body of labor that it can arouse empathy towards both the artist and the material. Since paper as end-product can never be more than a support for artistic expression. This is partly due to the fact that the hand-making process of paper seems to be an important historical reference to be given on the subjectivity of this material the exclusion of which renders paper as mere object. Moreover, intriguing enough is that the craft of paper making is also

connected with many spiritual ties to its country of origin given that it originated as a material for the holy scripts and a symbol of the spiritual purity.

All in all it can be inferred that the craft of paper-making or the materiality of paper itself turns out to be a medium for art when executed for its own sake without any reference to another literal aim. This is only possible when the duration of the process is included in the final work as it is carried out with a similar empathy and reverence as in its country of origin. Here it is important to inquire what roles these historical numinous connotations in the production of paper might play with respect to Benjamin's concept of uniqueness, in turning the craft of paper into an artistic influence. Once these have been defined and the historical qualities underlined, it will also be necessary to give an account on the span of prominent paper art exhibitions. Although the institutionalization of an art movement is of less importance than the mere fact that it exists, it is important what the institutional practices opt to include and exclude in their curation strategies. Given that, while some sort of works will be in more compliance with what this thesis purports on paper art, as treating the elusive subjectivity of paper, some others may eventually not. Therefore in order to elaborate on the interaction of visuality and materiality a certain assessment will be made among so far exhibited contemporary paper artworks with respect to selected theory and their possible overlapping with this old craft.

2.1 RITUAL AND MATERIALITY

The tradition of paper manufacture is attributed to have originated in China around 105 A.D. by a court eunuch named Ts'ai Lun. According to Hunter the invention probably took place earlier with experiments spanning through a large period of time though it was in that period that Ts'ai Lun brought to perfection the production process and made an official presentation to the Emperor (Ibid: 50). Nonetheless according to Dorothy Field, recent studies indicate that paper made in north and northwest China were from some 150 years ago from Ts'ai Lun's time, in 49 BCE (2007: 9)

The invention of paper served just as another means of humanity's most longed endeavor, to document lived experience, to make them transferable to upcoming generations. Although paper was not the first writing material it surely was way too successful an invention than its archaic substitutes, papyrus, parchment and several others that antedate paper as we know it. Hunter explains in depth the use of clay bricks, copper, bronze, or even tree leaves or barks or rice paper by various civilizations. However despite serving common practical needs in similar ways, these materials and paper are quite different in technical terms. Paper as we know it and as Hunter states differentiates itself mainly by its technique of production which is the use of macerated, individualized cellulose fibers brought together in the body of a new medium, as a new entity.

In his own words Hunter defines paper as follows;

To be classed as true paper, the thin sheets must be made from fiber that has been macerated until each individual filament is a separate unit; the fibers are then intermixed with water, and, by the use of a sievelike screen, are lifted from the water in the form of a thin stratum, the water draining through the small openings of the screen leaving a sheet of matted fiber upon the screen's surface. This thin layer of intertwined fiber is paper. (Ibid: 5)

With no intention to further elaborate on the history of paper since any research related to paper is full with similar storylines, it would be more appropriate to investigate the bounds between what is today called paper as art material and paper as an old craft. It must be remembered though that the craft product is more related to a set of traditions and rituals than what the art material is today. This relation can more accurately be framed by Walter Benjamin's thoughts.

Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* argues that "the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition" (1936: 5). He then clearly underlines two distinct properties of the work of art; those of cult value and exhibition value. The unique value of the authentic work of art has its basis in ritual or cult where its original use value stems from, as in the works of once numerous paper craftspersons in the Far Eastern lands for the inscription of holy texts. Once the ritualistic traditions makes way to more secular ways of living, the cult value which has its origins in rituals crystallizes into exhibition value. This latter is a cult of beauty that also incorporates a ritualistic basis, though much more secularized.

Jane M. Farmer underlines the fact that such ritualistic components which have been vanished from the artistic endeavor in the modern world are reintroduced as contemporary influences;

Modern Western culture and even modern religion have lost their connection to the ritual and ceremony that feed the mystical and spiritual humankind. Modern culture has also lost the respect and balance for natural resources that these early beliefs maintained. The preservation of handmade papers and a revitalization of their role in ritual and ceremony can provide a reconnection to these essential activities and perspectives...reviving the spiritual role of paper in all cultures will be the bridge needed to reconnect mankind to the realm beyond the rational and materialistic dead ends. (in Field, 2007: IX)

The exhibition value that replaces the cult value, revitalizing it as Farmer says, thus adorns the art work with another power. Just as in the old times the cult value was so powerful that it turned the work into an instrument of magic, now the absolute emphasis on the exhibition value makes the work a creation with entirely new functions, namely the artistic function (Benjamin, 1936: 6). Although for Benjamin this transition is only made possible by a shift on the quantitative aspects of the work of art that creates a transformation in its qualitative nature. That is the mechanical reproducibility of film and photography which brings forth artistic function, surpassing any need for authenticity and the uniqueness of the work. Nonetheless although a paper art object remains irreproducible it still holds what Benjamin argues, not in terms of the characteristics of the art object, but of artistic activity, that of paper making. The cult value in papermaking which has its roots in ritual gets deprived of its religious context in a secularized modern society due to its increasing

mechanical reproducibility by paper machines in the modern world. Thus the craft activity becomes the crystallization between the vanishing point of cult value and the emergence of the exhibition value.

To begin with it is appropriate to investigate the origins of this cult value or the ritual roots of paper. It would be apparent to any rigorous traveler eye that in the lands of its origin, paper still maintains its' numinous position. In *Paper as Art and Craft* (1973) Thelma R. Newman says that paper since its invention has had a religious significance as in the examples of Chinese funeral garments and money symbols and as *Otomi* Indian fetish forms and papier-maché ceremonial masks used in religious processions throughout the world to this day (Ibid: 3). This is in parallel with what Farmer says;

Around the Pacific Rim, the numinous materials for making the sites of rituals have traditionally been bark fibers, pounded bark pre-papers, and ultimately papers made of those bark fibers. When paper came into being, it assumed this role of communication with the spirit world. The timing of its development aided the rapid transition from fiber to paper for spiritual ritual throughout the Pacific Rim. (in Field, 2007: X)

In accordance with Farmer's words our meticulous traveler can still enjoy today the sight of hanging *gohei* (**Fig.1**) a sort of numinous paper offering in Shinto shrines. This tradition dates back to *Shinto* religion.

Shintoism antedates Buddhism in Japan and it is far more related to the shamanic roots of Japanese people. As it is widely accepted all shamanic beliefs share a common animism in their core which suggests that all objects carry a soul regardless of a central subjective position. Given this context, paper has a much more special role in Japan than anywhere else.

The *gohei* is simply another manifestation of this. Shinto shrines are usually marked with *torii* (Fig.2) a threshold from profane to spiritual realm. Often the *torii* is accompanied with *shimenawa*, a rope made of rice stalks and adorned with *gohei*, folded paper offerings.



Figure 1, Gohei hanging from shimenawa, photo credit Dorothy Field



Figure 2, Shimenawa with gohei on a torii, photo credit Dorothy Field

Each New Year the worn out *shimenawa* of the former year is replaced with a new one and burned, its ashes meeting the skies. *Shimenawa* with *gohei* represents the cyclical embracing of life, of death and birth, moreover also of a seasonal routine since rice harvest being the spring-summer occupation and paper making left for off-season winter months (Ibid: 5). At one point Field, facing a plastic, permanent *shimenawa* and *gohei* in a shrine points to our detachment from this cycle of life, saying that we now live longer but we do so while trying to defeat death by denying it (Ibid: 74). Given Field's assertions on the importance of the ritualistic value of paper, this sight must have been a delusion. The *gohei* and overall the paper tradition in Japan is also suggestive of an abandon of a central subjective position, a notion where there is no place for permanency or exploitation.

White paper, folded into *gohei*, stands for purity of spirit and spiritual sustenance. A Japanese papermaker considers himself more midwife than fabricator. His goal is to preserve the inherent qualities of the raw fiber, its humble strength and lustrous beauty, as he transforms it into paper. Traditional papermaking has no place for ego. (Ibid: 5)

What this approach might bring to an artistic practice should lead towards a totally different understanding where aesthetics is not dictated from the standpoint of the artist but rather is expected to come about in its own right.

Furthermore Field also relates *gohei* to origami. Despite the Western attribution of a childish nature, origami descends from an ancient Shinto offering called *noshi*, white and red paper wrapped around a strip of dried abalone, and attached to ceremonial gifts (Ibid: 5). Although her assertions on the numinous uses of paper throughout the

Far East are numerous, she overall suggests that the strong focus remains on Japan since their paper culture is more intact there than anywhere else (Ibid: 2), to quote in detail; “Japanese papermakers engage in an intimate dialogue with their fiber. For them, as for Japanese people as a whole, the paper itself is numinous...Japan continues to make more varieties of handmade paper than any other nation.” (Ibid: 11)

As also previously mentioned in Hunter’s words Field also talks about the Chinese obituary rituals with paper, namely spirit money. Field however argues that the burning of paper in Chinese funerals is not necessarily a numinous approach to paper but rather a more pragmatic kind of death insurance (Ibid: 54). At one point Field moreover argues that the Chinese approach to paper is much more utilitarian; saying; “Despite the fact that paper was invented in China, Chinese uses of paper seem consistently to be strictly functional rather than spiritual.” (Ibid: 43).

That may be a fundamental reason why the Chinese have more papercut tradition than the Japanese do. The Japanese applications with paper seem to respect more the totality of the material whereas cutting is more disintegrating. Origami also is known to preserve the totality of the single paper sheet. This certainly relates to Shinto beliefs where plain natural paper is seen as an image of pure spirit. According to Field, this stems from the Shinto belief that even before the use of paper, hemp was regarded as a numinous fiber whose numinous connotations have been transferred to *washi*, the Japanese word for handmade paper (Ibid: 13).

Yet another Japanese word for paper is *kami* which is also the homonym for the word meaning gods, though spelled with different characters. Field is unable to supply a hermeneutical connection though she contends to assert that in the Japanese minds

the connection is clear in the image of a person standing in front of a cedar tree tied with a *shimenawa* (Ibid: 11).

In the light of Field's inferences, this study is able to purport what Benjamin would have called a ritualistic essence in a contemporary everyday material that today is applied in artistic practices. Nevertheless it will be evident after all the outcomes asserted that any use of paper in artistic endeavors is not necessarily suggestive of a numinous influence, rooted in the material's embeddedness in its own history. What such an approach involves is a certain decentralization from the central subjective point, in Field's words;

In Shinto, shamanism, and animism, there is no canon of teachings. The paper's power grows out of its deep connection to life force. Whether it is folded into Shinto gohei or pointed hats on a shaman's altar, the paper itself carries strong associations of spiritual purity, which scholars trace to hemp's original numinous paper. (Ibid: 15)

This in turn supplies a deep reverence for the wholeness of the material even though the artist does not literally maintain the animist belief that the object material has its own spirit. Nonetheless when treated in a similar way, paper evidently proves to be so in disclosing its most honest characteristics if not a spiritual core.

It should be clear that this study does not maintain that the animist belief alone turns paper into an artistic influence. Yet however much we rely on the secularity of our modern images, be modern or traditional, animism or a veil of mystery has always lingered upon images as also discussed by W.J.T. Mitchell in arguing the desire of images. Mitchell in discussing about the subjectivizing of images, their mystification

as possessing a soul and personhood, criticizes our premodern attitude towards them. Namely, the double logic of both knowing about their objecthood and yet attributing them a capacity to possess desire as their personae. Mitchell further says that the idea of the personhood of pictures, traditional attitudes towards images, still holds true in our modern world and urges to demystify such attitudes by exposing them. It is for this particular reason that this account on paper's numinous character has been given, to cast light on where today's paper art may be deriving its force.

It will be clear now that for the ancient papermaker, paper stood for the spiritual purity. The Japanese papermaker abandoning his central subject position, left his desire aside to create a quasi image of the purity of spirit by exposing the poetry locked in fiber. The papermaker refrains to reflect his/her subjectivity on the plane paper because he/she wants the paper to be the image of the spiritual purity. This is somehow in parallel with the will of modern art as Michael Fried says, that it is based on the negation of direct signs of desire (in Mitchell, 2005a: 42). Then it holds true for the contemporary paper artists too that they also aim to strip of the excessive loadedness of postmodern imagery by disclosing paper's inherited quality as pure.

Hence it is only within the framework of medium specific art, appealing only to senses and doing so only with the material's own limbs that can there be an art called "paper art". This is due to the simple logic that paper referring to anything literal other than itself will cease to be art of paper and become a mere background, a bearer of signs. In the same way that Clement Greenberg argued for modern art becoming more completely nothing but what they do, looking like what they do instead of doing what they look at (as in mimesis) while trying to "... expand the expressive resources of the medium, not in order to express ideas and notions, but to express

with greater immediacy sensations, the irreducible elements of experience.”
(‘Towards a New Laocoon’, in O’Brian (ed.), 1986: 30)

Apart from simply relating the contemporary use of paper to the ritualistic practices in Far East, we can also see paper as a ramification of a material investigation, an expansion of available resources for the exchange of ideas or sensations in a more Greenbergian way. The urge for the communication of ideas that found its material support first in hemp then in bark fibers then in pounded bark fibers and finally in paper as bearer of signs and today to its reversal, paper as a medium of artistic expression.

However it is important to notice that not all works made of paper have these characteristics. As some lend themselves more to an emphatic connection, others remain as mere objectified material. Given this respect the following chapter is dedicated to document prominent paper art exhibitions and investigate the parallelisms between their curatorial policies and the above mentioned inherited characteristics of paper.

2.2 THE REDISCOVERY OF PAPER IN CONTEMPORARY ARTWORKS

Following Benjamin’s stress on artistic value, the artistic traits of paper seem to have established themselves. Then it might be helpful to trace the accordance of the transition of ritual value to artistic expression with respect to so far exhibited paper art works.

As to popular taste even before the 80s machine-made paper producers were striving to mimic handmade paper effects. As Newman points on the deckles left around the edge of handmade paper, caused by seepage of a small amount of pulp under the frame, which once used to be trimmed away, but which lately with the advent of mechanized paper making, acquired a status symbol (1973: 12). Hunter also notes on a similar tendency that “The rough edges were regarded as blemishes in the making of paper and therefore were discarded. It was not until the beginning of the machine age that deckle edges on paper began to be considered artistic and desirable” (1947: 456)

Although Hunter sees this as an inevitable sign of machinery’s limitations in the creation of what is considered artistic value and acknowledgement that imperfections of hand craft are indeed a desirable effect, he nonetheless warns that machinery should avoid the imitation of elusive qualities of handmade papers (Ibid: 458).

Since the 70s on what Hunter describes as the elusive characters of handmade paper seems to have become an emulation for artists that were weary of the digitally perfected surfaces. Be it for the former everyday use paper or for artistic expression, such elusive traits of handmade paper have become more appealing than ever. From then on, artists especially in United States have striven to use paper pulp within their processes. As Eimert also notes in *The History of Paper Art* (1994); paper art spread at first from United States where since 1970 pulp and handmade paper have been a popular material (1994: 85). With the popularization of handmade paper among American artists the first pioneer exhibitions on paper took place in United States. Smithsonian Institute’s *Paper as Medium* (1978) was one of them. In *Paper as Medium*’s catalogue Farmer asserts the particular qualities of handmade papers made

in the Western tradition which appeal to artists as follows; the deckle edge, the soft opaque surface and the plasticity of the medium as well as its ability to take color into each fiber (1980: 9) as well as the torn edge, the integrity of the paper surface and the ability of paper to accept color both on the surface and within itself (1980: 5).

Such traits still remain influential in our day where there is a huge variety of works pertaining to the use of paper. From cut out illustrations to three dimensional paper sculptures or found-object modifications, not to mention the whole origami tradition that has originated in Japan to evolve into a global fascination. In fact paper has been introduced in different ways to art realm ever since the Dada collage applications. German paper art researcher, Dr. Dorothea Eimert, describes the popularity of modern paper art as follows; “Paper can be as liquid as paint, as graphic as a drawing, as light as air, mobile and yet stable and take on any shape or form.” (1994: 8)

Indeed given the malleability of this medium, its wide range of applicability, its inherited historical background, all seem to imply an influential relation to art that it is suggestive of a leap from crafts towards art.

With no attempt to trigger an art versus craft discussion it is important here to once again remember the nature of crafts. Crafts have always been attributed a passive, domestic and enclosed-upon-itself status unlike institutionalized art where constant exploration of medium is necessitated. This fact is mostly due to craft’s nature of following pre-existing patterns or customary, conventionally attested routes. For instance there hardly is any need for creativity in the folding of *gohei*; it has been done pretty much in the same way for hundreds of years. Hence craft follows a safer

path where the outcome is more or less predetermined and involves the appreciation of the craftsperson's patience making its way out of the routine process of its medium.

Yet the dichotomy between the two poles seems to dissolve in the postmodern scene where communication of ideas seems of primary importance and thus craft being an indispensable medium to bring forth an empathetic essence into art works. Hence since the early 80s craft objects have been introduced in the contemporary art scene; laces, tapestry, embroidery, knitting, sewing and paper or paper pulp, make part of the works of many distinguished artists.

The introduction of craft into the art scene is also suggestive of a will to break the increasing take-over of computer based digital medium which led to a unitary global taste. *By Hand: The Use of Craft in Contemporary Art* (2010) argues that while the language of computer design helped construct a globally available language and celebrate cultural homogeneity it nevertheless threatened a certain loss of individuality, of the characteristics that distinguish people, ethnic groups and even nations (2010: 11). This is best explained in notable Austrian writer, Stefan Zweig's words, as the monotonization of the world, accompanied by a lack of exposure to and cultivation of unique and highly personal creative work (Ibid: 11). Hence the intention in the use of craft in art is to restore a lost sense of belonging or physical attachment to the works and anticipate empathetic connection. Farmer also talks about this "recent interest in a return to a more intimate and personal form of expression" (1980: 12).

Interestingly then many ritual related craft practices that were not institutionalized before have been taken over by artists to add new ways of expression to their exhibition values, hence what Benjamin so far argues.

Paper in this context, all the more shows the capacity to go beyond adding an empathetic component to art with its adaptability to assume a multitude of situations further more than any other craft material has been able to do so. It can be folded, ripped, drawn on, burned, crumpled, cut, manipulated as pulp, moreover can be made from scratch to involve its own process and duration. As an everyday material its organic origin is suggestive of an empathetic connection, as a mirror we hold against nature, where we see our position with respect to it as in the Japanese uses of paper reminding the cyclical turns of life or rather our detachment from it. Farmer also notes that another influence of the paper artists was a desire to evolve a medium which can respond individually to the natural and environmental concerns (1980: 12) All this seem to have contributed as pioneering drives of the American revival of handmade paper that embraced this understanding towards paper in the 70s. Farmer stresses especially on the contribution of American papermakers on the emergence of paper as a contemporary influence;

Coming from a constantly evolving and mixed culture, emphasizing cross-fertilization, and having a 'short' historical past, Americans possess an avid interest in the folk and spiritual content of other cultures... This interest, when sincere, can often validate aspects of foreign cultures that have been rejected as outdated by indigenous young people, who ironically believe to be more Western or 'modern'. In this way, the interest of American artists in hand

papermaking and the uses of paper in Asia have reinforced and preserved the complex variety of those papers, as well as inspired artists worldwide to incorporate their own cultural and spiritual paper traditions into their creations. (in Field, 2007: IX)

For Farmer, the American papermakers or paper artists constitute the cultural link that take over an abandoned ritual for the sake of modernity to carry it over to a contemporary movement, way of life or expression. Should we rephrase in Benjamin's words, it is thanks to many Western and as Farmer quotes, mostly American contemporary artists that this cultural exchange, the transition from cult value to exhibition value is brought to life.

However, it remains important to identify the ways in which paper is treated, in other words how the material investigation lends itself to a more qualitative artistic expression conduct than mere quantitative, standard craft output. In order to do that it is necessary to examine what institutional practices have hitherto been devoted to paper art and with which tendencies.

The pioneer exhibition held by the Smithsonian Institution, *Paper as Medium* (1978) is a direct manifestation of the increasing affinity of paper art among American artists in early 80s. Although its' seemingly early date it may be said to mark the beginning of the institutionalization of handmade paper. In the exhibition catalogue Farmer already asserts that the Oriental sensibility and orientation to paper has played an extremely important factor in the use of paper as medium and further relates the Far Eastern paper tradition to influence today's artists;

The Oriental reverence for paper as an intrinsically beautiful object permeates the work of many contemporary American artists. Qualities found in Oriental papers are timely for the interests of many contemporary artists. (1980: 7)

Only a year after Smithsonian's *Paper as Medium* exhibition follows Crocker Art Museum's exhibition titled *Paper / Art* dated 1981, which also suggests the culmination of the American handmade paper revolution. Composed of fifteen American paper artists, the exhibition as Joanna C. Ownby states in the catalogue regards making paper by hand as "in and of itself an art form, a creative technique which has been basically unchanged since A.D.105" and concludes that the selection of artists "...testify to the manner in which this legacy has been embellished and illustrate the extent to which the use of handmade paper has become a major contemporary art movement" (1981: 5). Ownby further adds that the primary focus of the exhibition is "on new concepts of paper as the medium rather than simply as a support material" (1981: 5). Furthermore one of the participating artists, Bob Nugent underlines the breakdown of the classic medium definitions and notes;

Paper has proven to be an attractive substance for many artists because it is, in an uncanny way, both surface and content, rich in tradition and splendid for traditional uses, but flexible as well indeed it embraces most of the manipulative techniques artists have applied to it. (1981: 6)

Most important in Nugent's words is the realization of the connection of paper as artistically influential and historically numinous which this study aims to purport; "...many artists have either knowingly or unconsciously partaken of the mythopoetic evocations which the fiber so mysteriously commutes" (1981: 6). In these

terms the Crocker Art Museum's approach to paper art seems to play a major role in the transition of paper making craft to paper as art medium in its own sake.

On the other hand in the European continent, where the handmaking of paper has had a longer history only after the Far East, one of the most notorious leaps that took the craft of paper towards the art of paper occurred with the establishment of the Leopold-Hoesch-Museum's Papermuseum in Düren, Germany in 1984 that owes much to the efforts of Friends Society of the Paper History of Düren-Jülich-Euskirchen. Various museums already existed on the craft of paper, among them Hunter's own creation, Dard Hunter Paper Museum founded in 1939 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a pioneer. Hunter's life span collection of documents and artifacts related to the art and craft of papermaking from all around the world were brought together here "...with the hope of stimulating interest in the ancient craft of papermaking and promoting understanding of present-day paper and its relation to the graphic arts." (Online, http://www.ipst.gatech.edu/amp/collection/museum_dhunter.htm).

In 1945 the collection has been transferred to the Institute of Paper Chemistry of Appleton (Wisconsin) where Hunter himself worked as honorary curator until the end of his life in 1966. Afterwards the collection was transferred to Robert C. Williams Paper Museum at Georgia Institute of Technology, its present location.

Besides Hunter's indisputable contribution to the craft of papermaking, the Papermuseum in Düren distinguishes itself mainly by approaching paper as an art in itself. From 1986 until 2005 the museum organized nine biennials called *Internationale Biennale der Papierkunst*. The biennials' contribution to the Western

recognition of papermaking as a medium for artistic expression has been indispensable.

Among them, of most notoriety is the fourth biennial organized in 1992 titled, *4. Internationale Biennale der Papierkunst / 4. International Biennial of Paper Art, 1992*, which is encircled around the theme “Paper and Nature”. In the catalogue Dorothea Eimert briefly explains the motives of working with paper as another incentive towards participatory art;

A phenomenon that has been increasingly in vogue since the late Fifties is the participation of natural forces and processes in the work of art...Also paper, a universally flexible material, is experimented in different ways and integrated into processes and actions. (1992: 8)

This means that paper is seen as a transformable material that does not deny the natural process of life, which includes the duration of life within the work. Departing from this philosophy Eimert adds;

A new understanding of how to make reality artistically intelligible inspired a number of artists to use paper and paper fiber as a medium. Paper itself is a product of nature, produced from wood or plant fiber and mixed with water...For art made out of and with paper – for paper art – nature and natural elements are basic areas of exploration. (Ibid: 8)

Thus the process of papermaking which plays a detrimental role in paper art works turns out to be one that inscribes the duration of life within itself as an interplay of different elements. In the same way that the ancient papermaker regarded his activity

as a deep connection to life force. Such as in the works of Norbert Stockheim in the fourth biennial where he uses various minerals and soils grounded finely to a powder and then mixed in the paper pulp which Eimert says; “give paper a specific look, a materiality that cannot be attained with traditional easel paintings” (Ibid: 14). Up to day the museum organizes exhibitions on paper art and remains as a center of attraction.

In the catalogue, interestingly Jane Farmer further describes the popularity of the art of paper as yet another form of revitalized ancient art. Similar to Benjamin’s assessment, Farmer quotes from Lucy Lippard where she explains how ancient art ripped of its cult value can be influential in the contemporary context in her book *Overlay. Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (1983);

Our lack of shared beliefs and values contributes to our fascination with ancient images and monuments. They are often attractive precisely because their meaning cannot be deciphered. This leaves a free field, a , Tabula Rasa in itself, where an artist can be formally influenced by these images as though they had no meaning, and at the same time can capitalize on meanings sensed, if not seen..Ancient art, wiped clean of its class and religious content by the ages seems almost natural in its distance – a distance that allows it to become paradoxically, more intimate than the art of our times. (1983: 10)

For Farmer the transformative power of the paper material, from solid fibers to a liquid pulp then to an aesthetical form seems like a modern alchemy that carries within itself meditative powers which are in parallel to the historic attraction as described by Lippard. Therefore Farmer suggests that paper as material offers artists interested in the connection of ancient and contemporary art, a communicable

medium to linger between the borders of both. Farmer goes on to give some practical reasons on the use of paper as art medium;

Papermaking's appeal is manifold, it uses readily available materials from the natural world; is flexible and recyclable; and it has a great deal of appeal today when many artists feel the need to use an art material that is not risky; either for the artist or for the environment. (Ibid: 19)

On a further note Farmer states that paper as art medium allows easier logistics, is more democratic given its use for mass communication, offers a more intellectual or conceptual expression because of its use for the transfer of knowledge and a more humorous approach to art. These are qualities more related to the use of paper in art as end material. However apart from these most apparent advantages, the use of paper has more profound empathetic effects which as Lippard says and the former chapter purports, are driven from its historic, ritual roots. For the author the remark of Farmer on the latter seems more in parallel with the outcome of the biennial which as Farmer says has established itself as an international forum for contemporary paper art in a relatively short time (Ibid: 20).

In short the Düren *Paper Art* biennials were successful in proving that the layers of cellulose fibers locked in the entity of paper exposed by the artist, suggest a depth on a flat surface that three dimensional applications cannot solely maintain. This reverence for paper when blended with a more hypermediatic, deictic rather than an immersive technique suggests an all the more durational and elusive materialistic essence. In the sixth edition of *Paper Art* biennial (1996) where the notion of chance in art is the theme, Eimert argues that paper and natural processes in general are

attesting to the inherent life within the material that bring about process like occurrences which have been means of expression in the visual arts since the end of 50s (1996: 10). The last edition of *Paper Art* biennial took place in 2005 although Düren Paper Museum continues to operate.

More contemporary exhibitions on paper art took place in Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), titled, *Paper: Pressed, Stained, Slashed, Folded*, and Museum of Art and Design (MAD), titled, *SLASH: Paper Under the Knife* both held in 2009, in New York, USA. Of these MAD's selection of works consists more of contemporary works such as the cut paper trend, hence its name, with no reference to the materiality of paper. The nature of the exhibition is described as; "showcasing the work of artists who reach beyond the traditional role of paper as a neutral surface to consider its potential as a medium for provocative, expressive, and visually striking sculpture, installation, and video animation."

(Online, <http://madmuseum.org/press/releases/october-slash-paper-under-knife-showcases-work-over-50-artists-who-cut-burn-tear-and>)

Although MAD's incentive is "to examine the renaissance of traditional handcraft materials and techniques in contemporary art and design", no privilege is given to works that embody the hand making of paper, or any reference at all to a material accentuation of paper. Instead the works seem to view paper as an end product to use for artistic purposes. The manipulated maps, books, life size three dimensional paper replicas of objects, papercut patterns or illustrations surely do add richness to the notion of paper art yet not in exploring the material but its' possible ways of application. For example Andrea Mastrovito's *Non Ci Resta Che Piangere (There's*

Nothing Left To Do But Cry), (**Fig.3**) a mimetic recreation of Christopher Columbus's sinking ship, created of paper and installed on the ceiling of the exhibition area, is no doubt attractive but falls short of going further than the depiction of an immersive scenery where medium is concealed by vraisemblance.



Figure 3, Non Ci Resta Che Piangere (There's Nothing Left To Do But Cry), Andrea Mastrovito, cut paper, 2009, Museum of Art and Design, New York

Thomas Demand who photographs paper replicas of culturally or politically remarkable spaces questions the ambiguity of photographic realism. Demand's work here, titled *Shed* (**Fig.4**) is inspired by Saddam Hussein's refuge where he has been caught in the aftermath of the Iraq war. The striking view that *Shed* provides is nonetheless highly dependent on a textual reality that is to say detached from its materiality. Nonetheless the final work is not even paper but a photograph.



Figure 4, Shed, Thomas Demand, c print on Diasec, 2009, Museum of Art and Design, New York

Andrea Dezsó's *Women in Red with Black String*, (**Fig.5**) which is the mimetic representation of a personal narrative, opens up like a theater scene longing to enclose the beholder, the supposed medium; paper is invisible, wholly erased from the plane.

Most uses of paper in contemporary art follow a similar figurative and literal trend where one could replace the paper with just another sheet material and yet the work would look intact.



Figure 5, Women in Red with Back String, Andrea Dezso, hand-cut paper, 2009, Museum of Art and Design, New York

In *Paper/Art*, Nugent clarifies in depth that the artists who come to paper from other materials try to capture the similar effects of what they have achieved in other mediums and become less successful in producing the formal product and the type of statement they aim to make. He then concludes that the medium is in a way the method thus pertaining to medium specificity (1981: 9).

Similarly in *The Book of Paper* (2011) Paul Jackson, an artist who works on sound sculptures and evidently on paper music, that is the exploration of paper as an acoustic medium, states that an understanding of the physicality of paper is helpful in conceiving how it bends, the direction of the grain, how it rips etc. Although Jackson's works deal more with the acoustics of paper, he acknowledges that his performances should "hold a mirror to paper as material" (Ibid: 13)

Interestingly music has always had a profound impact on the emergence of pure optical modern pictorial arts. The modernists craved for the purity of musical form which is irreducible to communicable medium, addressing directly to senses escaping the conscious. Hence as Greenberg also notes, musical form is always abstract and thus sensuous; an effect that the modernist painters aspired to attain in neglecting vraisemblance (in O'Brian (ed.), 1986: 31). Jackson now seems to linger in the same struggle with yet two ends; pure medium and form (musical).

In the latter exhibition, MoMA's *Paper: Pressed, Stained, Slashed, Folded*, however, the selection of works also encompass a wider span of time and it is possible to locate tendencies towards a purer materiality where the emphasis on paper as both theme and subject is traceable. Hence the name implies the various techniques opted to work with paper in opposition to solely one. The exhibition aims to;

...explore and manipulate the materiality of paper itself...This quasi-sculptural approach has extended into the present, and a younger generation of artists has similarly embraced the delicacy and mutability of paper as a substance and a subject.

(Online, <http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2009/paper/depoly/>)

Immediately apparent in this context is the work of John Cage *Wild Edible Drawing* (1990) (**Fig.6**); where Cage demonstrates a sheet of handmade paper made with milkweed, cattail, saffron, pokeweed and *hijiki* (an algae specimen) as if to document how paper pulp can embrace all these natural elements. Suggestive of another Lippard's quote;

People living between earth and sky, with few human-made distractions, had to be far closer to natural forces and phenomena than people living in our crowded planet now. They were undoubtedly aware of their environment in ways lost to us. Obviously we do not relate to nature in the same way, but the reestablishment of a coherent relationship between nature and culture is a critical element in any progressive view of the future. (1983: 12)



Figure 6, Wild Edible Drawing No: 8, John Cage, handmade paper with milkweed, cattail, saffron, pokeweed and hijiki, 1990, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Cage further adds the notion of edibility to his work, as yet another dimension. As though the work could be consumed by the beholder and metaphorically reestablish Lippard's aforementioned relationship.

Sol Lewitt's *Rip Drawing* (1973) (**Fig.7**) also brings the attention back on the material accentuation of the medium. Lewitt a prominent conceptualist artist creates

a drawing on paper with mere tears. Although here the craft of paper making is excluded, the technique brings forth the medium. As Jackson had underlined Lewitt makes us aware of the materiality of paper without reference to a secondary medium. He nonetheless represents us a drawing yet with no marks other than tears and rips, marks embedded in material, marks as an extension of his musculature.



Figure 7, Rip Drawing, Sol Lewitt, torn paper, 1973, Museum of Modern Art, New York

On a similar attempt Dorothea Rockburne, in *Locus*, (1972) **(Fig.8)** presents us a series of six different relief etchings on folded paper. Again with no reference to hand making process at all, still Rockburne is able to explore the geometrical malleability of the medium with only a variety of folds. The folds although still attached to the literal surface seem to endow the surface of paper with a slight sense of dimensionality yet with recognizing the flatness of the material.



Figure 8, Locus, Dorothea Rockburne, folded paper, 1972, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Also notable among the exhibited works is Robert Rauschenberg's work titled *Page 4* (1974) from the series *Pages and Fuses* composed of two sheets of handmade paper attached with twine. In *Page 4* (**Fig.9**) the twine embedded in the body of paper appears at times as a line drawn on paper and at times as a physical object, adding the literal surface a sculptural element. Eimert also notes that the celebration of paper pulp as the new artistic way owes much to Rauschenberg's first creation of artworks made of paper as early as the 70s for the propagation of new aesthetic possibilities for the banal and the everyday (1994: 9) Rauschenberg's and Kenneth Noland's paper pulp paintings were the first experiments replacing color application on paper with pigments added directly to paper pulp. The paper paintings fulfilled

Noland's specific understanding of a direct treatment of color and texture. Eimert further notes on Noland that with intelligence, originality, skill and fantasy he raised the craft of papermaking to the dimension of art (1994: 90).



Figure 9, Page 4 (from the series 'Pages and Fuses'), Robert Rauschenberg, two sheets of handmade paper in Plexiglas frames with twine, 1974, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Consequently MoMA's curatorial selections seem in parallel with both Crocker Museum's *Paper/Art* and the Düren *Paper Art* biennial in their highlighting of the materiality of paper. The three exhibitions seem to differentiate in their acknowledgement of the potentials as well as the limitations of the medium. Notwithstanding their language nonetheless encompasses conceptual ideas however formulated within the material limitations as evident in their selection of paper works which are in a way disclosing the material and process and showcasing a

hypermediatic surface. It is in a way a rephrasing of the ancient papermaker's way, not in terms of a purer spirituality but a purer medium thus stripping of ritual values by turning the material tradition into an artistic practice which finds echoes in senses rather than the brain.

On the other hand the relation to medium of the relatively more contemporary works exhibited on MAD's *Slash: Paper under Knife*, remain ambiguous. In the aforementioned works, paper is rather objectified, occluded or even eclipsed by conceptual ideas, more dependent on an outer textual reality rather than the temporality of the artist.

This assessment depends on the acknowledgement of the notion of medium specificity, a notion best understood in terms of the art critique, Clement Greenberg's theories. However rendered obsolete by postmodern critics, in this case it is advisable to remember what the modernist lessons towards an unmediated experience were especially in speaking of an art adhered to a specific material; paper. Only then it may be clearer where paper art stands with respect to the art of recent past.

3. LOCATING PAPER ART WITHIN THE ART OF TODAY

In order to understand where paper art might stand within the art of today; it might be advisable to have a glance on the modernist purification of medium and its subsequent status. This is because of the very fact that it was for the first time the modernists who denied easily communicable ways of expression and relied on the purity of their medium, the material itself to induce sensuous stimuli rather than convey ideas.

What were the implications that entailed the artist of the early 20th century to detach from the historicist manners and mediums and moreover what were their postmodern successor's endeavors that entailed even them to separate from these modernist ideals and to arrive to art as we know it in our day which paper art makes part of. Although it must be kept in mind that since such a retrospective look would not be an art-historical narration but a small chronicle on the evolvement of modernist ideals of art into our day, scope and chronological accuracy is of least concern.

From the beginning of 20th century the modernist will of avant-garde art to achieve a socially unmediated visual experience outburst in the Western art scene. Throughout the 20th century there occurred succeeding movements that each more or less consecutively uncovered in an increasingly daring way the conventions and traditions that regulated the creation of plastic arts. These conventions which could be summed up as the desire to create a theatrical setting on the canvas, an artificial copy of what already exists in real life depicted in a more profound and sophisticated way, had long invaded the canvas from Michelangelo until the French Revolution (Berger, 1969: 173). It wouldn't be wrong to say that with Paul Cézanne, (1839-

1906) the theatricality has started to break down. What Cézanne most significantly achieved was restoring the innocence of the eye (Crary, 1992: 66) undistorted by any predetermined conventions. He is mostly noted in his struggles to give a more true to life representation in so far as D. H. Lawrence in explaining his paintings calls in the expression “the appleyness of the portrait“ (2004: 212) which suggests to see the represented not just from the front but all around, to achieve the status of an inimitable painted sensation. Important to note here, is that the sensation in Cezanne comes with the materiality of the represented instead of the conventions that dictate how it should be represented life-like and this explains the separation of Cezanne’s art from his antecedents. Eimert argues that in Cezanne’s late works, large parts of the canvas remain untouched suggesting sensitivity to the physical quality of the picture support (1994: 26).

Henceforth in modernist avant-garde art the search towards the purification of medium has always been present, supplied by the essence of materiality either material as subject or material as object, the exploration of materiality evidently remains a central notion for the sake of a an ever unmediated experience.

Moreover Cézanne’s achievements led way to the so called Cubists and to their much more radical deviation from theatricality throughout the 1910s. The Cubists aimed to experience nature as being part of it unlike the hitherto representational understanding who was content to imitate it. The Cubists led a revolution by proposing that a work of art is a new object and not simply the expression of its subject, by structuring the picture to admit the coexistence of different modes of space and time, by dislocating the forms to reveal movement or change (Berger.

1969: 185). Thus the nature of the relationship between the painted image and reality had been transformed irreversibly and a new relationship between man and reality was expressed (Berger, 1969: 76).

Contemporary with Cubism were the works of Dada in whose thought the First World War was the outcome of the order of bourgeois society, which they very much disliked, and the categorization of art within it. Indeed the Dadaist collage works or Pablo Picasso's and George Braque's paper sculptures (**Fig.10**) of this period were among first trials with paper as art medium (Eimert, 1994: 8) and attempted to break the established conventions on medium. This opponent, non-art approach is important in influencing Marcel Duchamp who is noted with his introduction of Readymades into art scene. Readymades were found objects, previously deemed unaesthetic, that were re-presented as artworks. Here Duchamp aimed at questioning the artistic notion of aesthetics, and its admiration, which he found null.



Figure 10, Still life with Guitar, Pablo Picasso, paper board, paper and string, 1913, Museum of Modern Art, New York

In the post-war period the works of Abstract Expressionist painters further unfolded the medium of their art, avoiding any presupposed clichés by seeking simplicity and spontaneity through new techniques such as dripping, pouring or throwing paint on the canvas. This aimed to achieve a childlike simplicity and deal with the concerns of “pure painting” (Gombrich, 2010: 470). Gombrich also notes that these paintings must be done rapidly like Chinese calligraphy and that should not be mediated by any convention and rather evoke the sensation of a spontaneous outburst. (Ibid: 470). Kenneth Noland and Robert Rauschenberg’s first experiments with colored paper pulp (**Fig.11**) were created with a similar spirit, a more direct way of applying pigments not merely on the surface but on the whole medium. The most notable advocate of Abstract Expressionism was Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried who stated that art could only be purified as long as it is unmediated by a secondary medium, like depth in painting. Greenberg thus urged painting to gain a poetry or music like unmediated communication which could only be attained through the accentuation of the intrinsic qualities of art material.



Figure 11, Link (from series 'Pages and Fuses'), Robert Rauschenberg, handmade paper with colored pulp, 1973/74

After Abstract Expressionism in the early 1960s, that is the onset of postmodern era, it became evident among most Western artists that the qualifications of what established the term “avant-garde” were exhausted and degraded and that the medium of painting was no longer sufficient to provide further ground for the challenge of orthodoxies, moreover it had far too long dominated the art scene. Furthermore the sense of advancement that the Greenbergian formalism insisted upon was all the more waived. Lucy Lippard notices Ad Reinhardt’s black-square identical paintings in 1960 by implication a very important ending point (1997: 6). Formalist concerns were put aside to make way to ideas displayed by performance and installation art whose very character allowed the insertion of psychological and

social dimension and the further involvement of beholder in the work. This was by implication a result of the turbulent sociopolitical agenda of the era.

Remarkable in this period witnessing the birth of Conceptualism, were the works of the so called *Arte Povera* group among whom Piero Manzoni or Michelangelo Pistoletto are notable. Through the use of found or configured objects, a return to Duchampian principles with the combination of juxtaposed styles, sense of irony and denial; they sought to challenge the tokenized Modernist ideals. A parallel group of French artists titled Nouveaux Realistes announced the end of the easel painting by claiming that traditional mediums were completely exhausted and thus called in new realism of pure sensitivity (Eimert, 1994: 42).

This articulation of objecthood and concept further influenced, the predominantly American, Minimalist artists. The Minimalists throughout the late 60s had a stronger emphasis on the mere objecthood of art objects. They deliberately aimed to create objects for their own sake; massive, solid and unitary structures often playing with a sense of repetition, denying traditional composition methods. The Minimalists hoped that the viewer standing in front of these “simple objects” would further be made aware of his / her subjecthood, cultural expectations and artistic values. The results were critical of further prompting to take over the viewer’s perception by incorporating him / her in an enclosed sense of temporality. Hence as Michael Fried states; Greenberg’s stress on return to material essence was taken way too far and the resulting Minimalist art only presented the materials as they are, mere objects, and aimed to obtain effects that do not generate from the work itself, but depend on the

viewer's relationship with the object, a similar theater stage now taking captive the viewer. Fried insists that this is rather “the negation of art” (1998:15).

However, Minimalism and Conceptualism slowly took over the visual experience of images for the sake of ideas and concepts. From one point of view art seemed finally to have fully democratized itself, broken all the formalist requirements, conventions and resisted the commoditization.

Yet the sociopolitical unrest of 60s and 70s which helped provide a support for such non-art tendencies was slowly leaving its place to a capitalized global economy. Soon as Lippard says both conceptualists and minimalist could not escape the faith of becoming over popular and commercialized (1997: 263). Although the aesthetic contribution of an “idea art” has been considerable, this situation led to a conflict with their opponent language, not to mention their constitution as an avant-garde movement was under critical attack. Moreover in its negation of visuals Minimalists had not gone far away from creating its own secondary imagery to rely on. Concerns on whether or not the traditions of Conceptual or Minimal art could go on to provide advancement in art were correspondent with a tendency to reintroduce images in the late 80's. This was partly due to an increasing urge to sustain a certain personal narrativity in art that required a rising emphasis on the communicability of images. This tendency of 90s carried a potential conflict, that of contradicting the principles of Modern art whose most important aim was to deny overtly accessible meaning on the one hand and on the other explicitly showing the contradiction present between

formal ambition and the cultural expectations of its supporting class at the expense of being unpopular. (Taylor, 1995: 1 68)

It becomes an important fact to notice that at the end even the most traditional Modernists like Michael Fried or Clement Greenberg regard Conceptualism as another evolution of art apart from the visual arts. Indeed both the minimalist and the conceptualist have insisted that visual art must be practiced for its own sake; at no where the use of imagery was consulted in these movements. They contended that the idea generate the shape as opposed to shape generated by form, unmediated material as in Modernist conventions. This dilemma of contemporary art becomes all the more visible;

...on the one hand, the desire to embrace images and values which speak to a wide public in a sensuously rich, formally expert way; on the other, the need to intensify the Conceptual manner still further by resort to as yet unformulated techniques of evasion, mystification, and displacement of normative expectations of culture. (Taylor, 1995:169)

The leap towards a purer medium and thus an unmediated experience seem to have remained long ago in the past. Yet what started in the 70s, experiments with paper and paper pulp is testimony to the fact that art does not proceed with progress in technical proficiency but rather with constant exploration (Gombrich, 2010: 43). Despite its abolishment by postmodern critics, medium today remains a central concern although not in the sense of establishing the hierarchy between the fields of art but rather as the acknowledgement of its generative importance. The arguments put forward by David Bolter and Richard Grusin remind us that the logic of medium operates in two directions, while in hypermediacy a raised consciousness on the

opacity of medium allows the viewer to interfere with the work whereas in immediacy the erased medium enables the viewer the full enjoyment of the transparent presentation of the real. For instance Greenberg sees the previously discussed collage applications of Braque and Picasso a direct manifestation of the tension between the modernist emphasis on the surface of the painting (hypermediacy) and the inherited tradition of realistic representation (immediacy). The collages on their canvases, created a hypermediated experience in which the viewer oscillates between seeing the pasted objects as objects and seeing them as part of the painted scene at the same time. Thus the viewer is constantly reminded of the materials, the surface, and the mediated character of this space. (in Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 41)

Hence at this point to help us conceive where the art of paper might stand, a return to more hypermediate notions on art; such as Greenberg's notion of medium specificity would be more yielding. In Greenbergian formalism the artwork is constituted by the inherent qualities of its raw material and the techniques used to manipulate the materials. Hence pure sensation can only be achieved as long as it is unmediated by another language. In other words medium-specificity means the proper materiality of the artistic medium. Greenberg contends that an artwork, in order to be successful, needs to adhere to the specific stylistic properties and limitations of its own medium. This is in parallel with the approach of ancient tradition of paper making, the way the paper maker was obliged to conform to the requirements of his raw material and felt himself more midwife than fabricator as Field had argued.

Midwife in the sense that not following a pattern mandated by the conscious but rather merely guiding the sensation of a spontaneous outburst.

On the other hand in such hypermediate works the aesthetic principles in question originate of a disparately different relation between the beholder and the work. The beholder standing in front of paper works is thus also a central concern. Here it is hoped that Norman Bryson's notion of the art of glance could establish an analogy to help us formulate the visuality offered by paper works. Bryson argues that the Western tradition of painting in its any attempt, is unable to go beyond depicting the gaze due to a fundamental characteristic in its technique; its concealment and avoidance of the temporality of the glance. On the canvas there reflects always an accumulation of look, the temporality of viewing excluded. Between the moment of founding perception, that is the artist's look that establishes a basis for the image, and the viewer's moment of looking is placed a whole set of conventions that regulate vision and create an ever extending abyss such as in immediacy. Bryson instead argues that the Zen painting practice of *Sumi-e* addresses vision in the durational temporality of the viewing subject by explicitly leaving the traces of musculature gestures of the artist on the canvas in a more hypermediatic way and thus achieves what he calls the art of glance.

It is within this framework that this chapter aims to elaborate on the interaction between visuality and materiality of paper art works.

3.1 DEMATERIALIZED ART OBJECT VERSUS THE ART OF MATERIAL

Long after the modern and postmodern dichotomy, modernism's stress on medium specificity still persists in some of today's art. This is also because what we call modernism in the Greenbergian sense is an ongoing operation, a coping with an ongoing emergency, a constant revision of standards and it can't be exhausted, done with as it was thought to be in the late 60s hence the term postmodernism ('Modern and Postmodern', 1979: 5).

The medium specific art that Greenberg defines as pure art or art for art's sake, explains itself mostly by not seeking any other intermediary medium in the search of an ever purer aesthetic value. Bolter and Grusin also argue that according to Clement Greenberg's influential formulation, it was modernism that reversed the order of things and challenged the paradigm of transparency of the medium such that the logic of hypermediacy could express itself both as a fracturing of the space of the picture and as a hyper-conscious recognition or acknowledgment of the medium (2000: 41).

In a sense for Greenberg, modernism appeared as a learned lesson from history but never falling in the pitfall of historicizing the past because modernism declared itself by insisting on a renovation of standards, and it achieved this by a more critical and less pious approach to the past in order to make it more genuinely relevant, more "modern." (Ibid: 4)

In short the materialist art of Modernism is in Greenberg's words;

The continuing effort to maintain standards and levels which has brought about the widening recognition that art, that aesthetic experience no longer needs to be justified in other terms than its own, that art is an end in itself and that the aesthetic is an autonomous value. It could now be acknowledged that art doesn't have to teach, doesn't have to celebrate or glorify anybody or anything, doesn't have to advance causes; that it has become free to distance itself from religion, politics, and even morality. (Ibid: 6)

Greenberg is well aware of the social implications of his definition. Without any social aim the scope of art would lead to a certain elitism but then again with too much social agenda art falls prey to propaganda and kitsch. Here again Greenberg is secure of himself in claiming that it is only through preventing the decline of aesthetic standards, threatened by the democratization of culture under industrialism that the aesthetic value can be maintained. That means that the aesthetic standards can only be maintained for the good of the masses when kept in isolation from them and their pseudoculture. To be able to do that art under modernism should constantly look back to the past to maintain the standards in the face of an opposition that hadn't been ever so present. (Ibid: 6)

It is with this perspective that Greenberg's critique sought to evaluate postmodern art. Although abstraction was an important contributor to the modernist notion of medium-specificity, it came also to be a threatening factor when stretched way too far where it is no longer possible to find any artistic form and thus breaks with the modernist ideals. The further consequences of this dilemma as he states in *Avant-*

Garde and Kitsch, is between art movements that can supply advancement in art, avant-garde as he calls them, and those that remain as *kitsch* (in Frascina, 2000)

His definition of an avant-garde movement explains itself by two dichotomies. On the one hand the capitalist bourgeois society whose cultural guidance is long sacrificed along the way of establishing a hegemony over the masses, on the other the masses who have in the course of time settled in cities and lost the taste for their folkloric culture to a substitution of pseudoculture called *kitsch*, an easily politicized, byproduct of industrialism. In other words the need to find new forms for the expression of a society, who has culturally become void due to increasing power hegemony over masses, was to depend only on the avant-garde artist. However the lack of social agenda does not imply that the avant-garde is at the service of elite. On the contrary avant-garde functions against the fading identity and values of the bourgeois, sacrificed along the way for establishing power over other classes. It works against the mechanisms that generate *kitsch*, a culture of instant assimilation, of abject reconciliation to the everyday, of avoidance of difficulty, pretence to indifference, equality before the image of capital (Clark, 1982: 147). Hence according to Greenberg the task of the avant-garde was;

...to perform, in opposition to bourgeois society, the function of finding new and adequate cultural forms for the expression of that same society without at the same time succumbing to its ideological divisions and its refusal to permit the arts to be their own justification. ('Towards a New Laocoon', in Clark, 1982: 144)

One setback here is that avant-garde's main task may seem to be giving a new meaning to bourgeois society and thus maintaining collaboration with it. Mitchell also warns that the contemporary outrage towards the alliance of art institutions and capital holders, has already been put forward by Greenberg in quoting him saying that the avant-garde and ruling classes were linked by a golden umbilical cord (2005a: 139). However Greenberg warns that it is only in reclaiming artistic values per se that avant-garde can avoid becoming the grantor of bourgeois values. These artistic values are those that never drain out of meaning for they inherently exist in the artistic medium, therefore they remain preserved within it, protected from the deprivation and desolation of the surrounding society.

Thus for Greenberg the unmediated purity of artistic medium is central for advancement in art. What he calls as medium-specificity is described as the distinct materiality of artistic medium; however, these categories are primarily defined by convention. The qualities that define a medium are not irreducible or inherent properties; artistic medium are historically constructed categories of tools and practices. In order for a medium to have characteristic qualities it must be grounded in a tradition that has established these as intrinsic properties such as in the papermaking tradition which Farmer suggests that it is an art permeated with traditional ritual (1980: 12)

It is with this connection that we can look at some paper works as a reversal of the use of paper as surface to paper as both art medium and form. Thanks to artist's stress on medium, paper becomes in these works not only the supplier of literal space

for artistic form but moreover becomes the form of art per se. Farmer notes that manipulation of the surface of paper can take many forms and make many statements” (1980:6). Thus this further expansion and investigation of the borders of material makes the final art work closer to the specific stylistic properties of its medium. It renders the work uncontaminated by the use of other medium. Whether all such works can maintain a standard for aesthetic value for the continuity of modernist ideals is hard to answer but they surely turn the attention back to the possibilities of materiality and allow a break in our postmodern area already flooded with conceptualist practices.

To begin with Jean Michel Letellier’s paper works are a good example. Letellier sees the process of making paper not just as a means of producing a work of art but a work of art per se. It is with that reference that he considers and calls himself a paper artist. In his works he plays with the paper fibers to give paper a new interpretation and form, he then exhibits those large paper sheets in installations playing with their translucency. The resulting works explore the borders of his material with constant research; reinvention and they turn the paper fiber into an artistic expression. Important in Letellier’s artistic influence is the recognition of the historical roots of paper making in Japan where he frequently travels from France, his hometown to learn the processes of ancestral techniques, to refine his own interpretation of paper art. This is also a crucial aspect of Greenberg’s argument that art practice should not attempt to imitate its past body of works but to improve and reinterpret it once its core essence is learned.

Notable among his works is the free watermark technique. The technique is composed of projecting water onto paper pulp during production process (**Fig.12**). Eimert on the use of pulp in paper art notes that its revolutionary aspect comes from the fact that it allows the artist to influence and determine their material during this production (1994: 85). In a similar empathy Letellier makes use of all sorts of tools from hoses, sprays to watering cans to capture the water flow on the finished paper surface. He then manipulates the paper pulp with such another fluid, ephemeral and ungraspable entity; water (**Fig.13**).



Figure 12, Letellier in his studio

Similarly Farmer also talks about the Oriental practice of splashing water on a newly formed sheet to create a random pattern in the finished sheet (1980: 8) which suggests a more flexible subjective position that recalls the ritual tradition. Hence the resulting works (**Fig.14**) look like photographs of water but photographs taken with water. As if the water flow, left unconstrained, could act like Jackson Pollock's

spontaneous arm gestures throwing paint and leaving painterly shapes on the resulting large paper sheets.

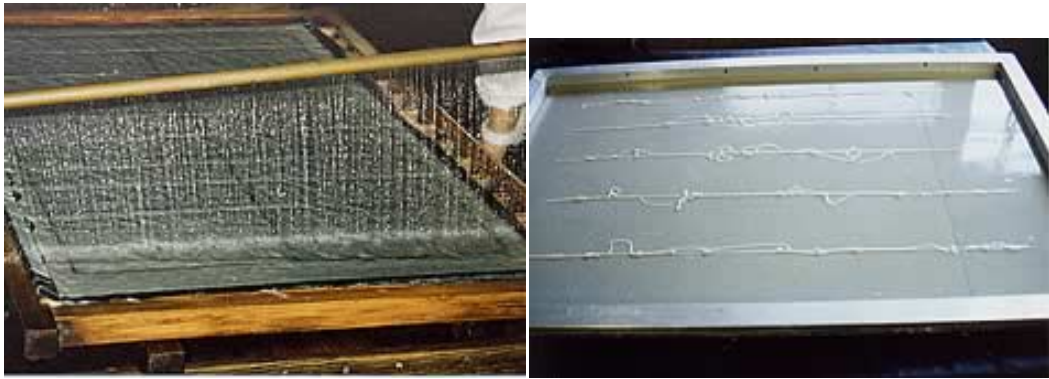


Figure 13, Letellier's production process for Watermark series

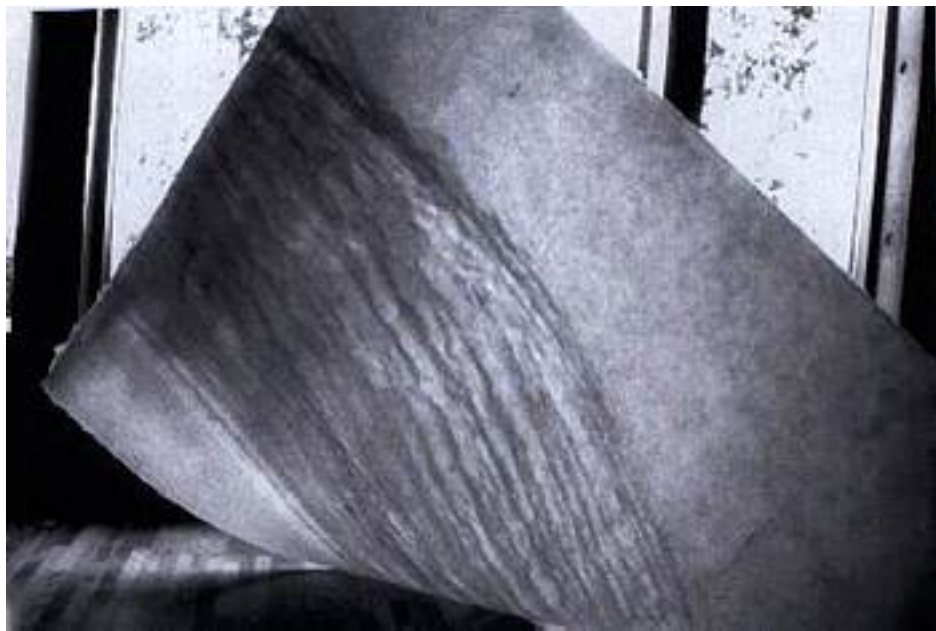


Figure 14, Watermark series, Jean Michel Letellier, handmade paper, 2009

In Farmer's analogy, Letellier acts more as a midwife than fabricator, guiding an outbursting sensation, exposing all traces evidently in a more hypermediatic manner. The sheets are later installed in luminous places. Luminosity and translucency are supporting elements that help bring forth the shapes hidden in the paper sheet (**Fig.15, 16**). In other words light articulates the expressive traces created by water

there is no theatre, no faked, readily given sensations for as Greenberg says Letellier acts like a poet; “In turning his attention away from subject matter of common experience, the poet or artist turns it in upon the medium of his own craft.” (‘Avant - Garde and Kitsch’, in Frascina, 2000: 50)



Figure 15, Watermark series, Jean Michel Letellier, 2009

Thus the craft accentuated, in front of the water mark works we are beyond all intermediary tools, the artistic medium is shed of all surplus, there remains only water to give it a form and the form is unmediated, unstrained. It is as if Letellier wants to take off all appliedness to go as far down as to the core of paper. It is as though anything that is not inherently present in paper is excluded. Greenberg notes on the similar ideal of purity characteristic of modernist works; “It follows that a modernist work of art must try, in principle, to avoid communication with any order of experience not inherent in the most literally and essentially construed nature of its medium” (1986: 56)



Figure 16, Watermark series, Jean Michel Letellier

Hence the works of Letellier can be said to constitute a medium specific quest for the expressive shape however reserved solely to his water mark technique. That is because generalizing all paper art works under the blessing of Greenbergian formalism would be impossible, inapplicable and yet unfruitful. Not all contemporary paper artists' works fall under the same category or should comply with or have the intention to do so. It is only a hint that this study aims to give.

In order to be clearer it can be helpful to look at the works of similar artists. Another artist who also creates works with the manipulation of paper fibers is the couple of Riki Moss and Robert Ostermeyer. They make sculptor like three dimensional anamorphic paper works with over beaten abaca paper whose beauty according to their statement, lies in understanding the material so thoroughly that it could be left to its own intelligence when it interacts with the forces of gravity, air, time and heat,

drying into universal forms reminiscent of those made by waves, smoke, wind and water (Online; <http://www.studio-glow.com/pages/information.html>).

Moss and Ostermeyer's paper works have built-in lighting; in fact most of their works are functioning objects as lighting appliances, that is, they are incomplete without such. Despite their claim of understanding the material thoroughly and its production process, between Letellier's works and theirs, there seems to be important contrasts reminiscent of Greenberg's distinction between the properties of avant-garde and kitsch. These supposed sculptural forms are prone to be too easily appreciated because they come mediated through artificial lightening, the cloud like anamorphic divine shapes, specific installations that establish a theatrical setting. What they may offer to beholder is rather the collective experience than expression, only an effect that, Greenberg would say, drives its life from accumulated experience in describing kitsch ('Avant - Garde and Kitsch', in Frascina, 2000: 52).

Moreover the objecthood character of these works remind us Greenberg's successor, Michael Fried's arguments. Following Greenberg's critique, Fried in *Art and Objecthood* (1998) suggests that in what came to be known as conceptualist / minimalist art -or literalist as he calls it- the art qualities in question no longer reside in the objects displayed but rather in the theatrical involvement of the viewer around the displayed objects in the exhibition space. Fried argues that this sort of presence achieved through the theatre further distances the viewing subject by strengthening his/her subjectivity and the piece in question a mere object (1998: 126). It is as though what is to be sensed from the experience offered is not located strictly within

the works but come up like a situation that only comes to life with the involvement of the beholder.

This applies to Riki Moss's work titled *Tunnel Vision* installed in Shelburne Museum, Vermont in 2011 (**Fig.17**). The work is composed of a huge paper tube, lighted from within and hanging from the ceiling of an old silo construction, connecting at one end the window looking out on the other the lonely viewer who climbs up by the aid of a ladder. First of all the work generates most of its power from the surrounding spacious empty silo and hanging from above it creates a certain dominance over this emptiness, thus achieving presence through size. Fried is critical of this presence that is conferred by size. Because it is sort of a presence that aims only to invoke interest, via theatrical (mere objects in actual space) and endless (repeating of forms) experience which is assumed to be accessible for all.



Figure 17, Tunnel Vision (detail), Riki Moss and Robert Ostermeyer, 2011

Moreover the *Tunnel Vision* seems to operate through a similar mimicry of human experience, that of birth. It can be said to invoke interest in reenacting the phenomena of human birth. The viewer, who can only be one at a time to look through the one narrow end of the lighted paper tube, is situated as if at the start of an unknown journey similar to a mother's womb (**Fig.18**). Furthermore the organic shape of abaca paper only contributes to this naturalistic experience. It is this theatricality that places Moss's and Ostermeyer's works in contrast with Letellier's works who deals to embrace the traditions of his craft nevertheless reinterpreting them to find new forms that do not refer to a certain accumulated experience to

evoke an expression. As in Greenberg's explanation what Letellier's works achieve is closer to evoking cause while Moss's and Ostermeyer's are that of effect.

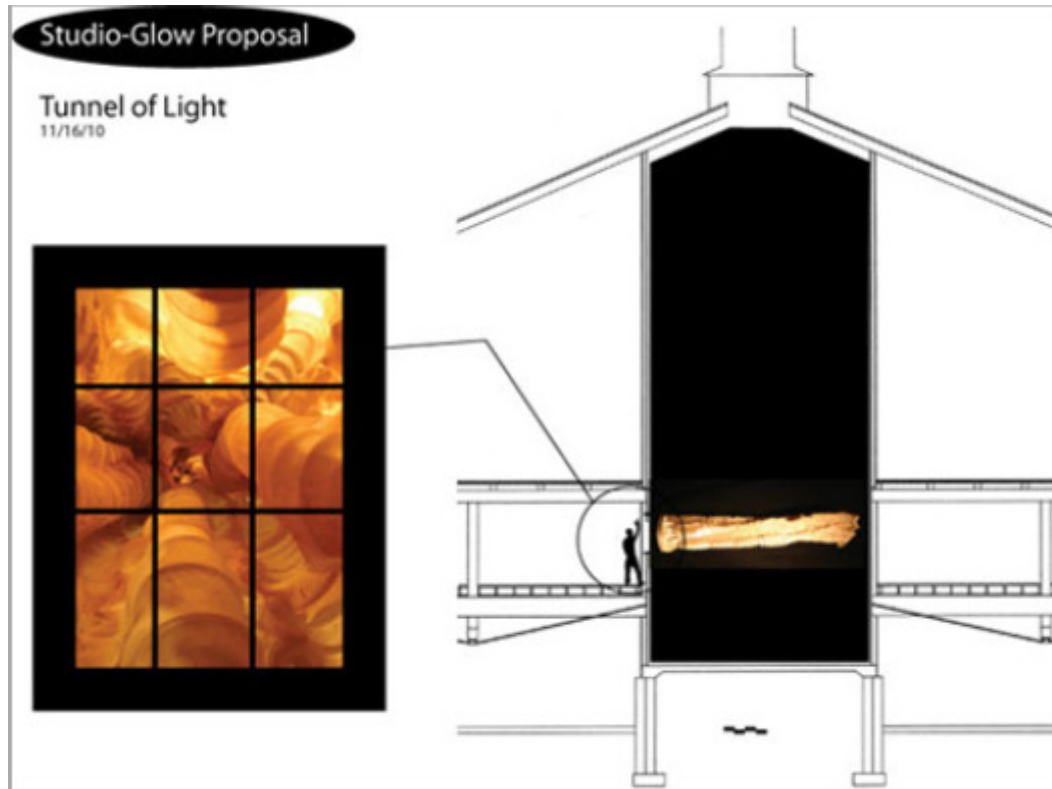


Figure 18, Tunnel Vision installation plan

This is in line with Fried's explanation that in modernist art the experience depends on the individual's own conviction that the given object is a shape and that it is in line with the past works either affirming or negating them. Conviction unlike the aim of invoking interest does not impose temporality in the form of continuing directed attention as the *Tunnel Vision* does, by further breaking the viewer's bound with temporality, on the contrary conviction provokes presentness and instantaneousness as in Letellier's works.

It is yet not only the objecthood character of Moss's works that fall short of complying with medium specificity. Letellier also has works in three dimensions that

nevertheless still are capable of avoiding theatre. His paperfolds that are a modification of the Japanese technique of *orizhomono* - dyeing resulting from folding - inquire the applicability of various voluminous forms to the flat material thereby exploring its boundaries (**Fig.19**). How these folded sculptures avoid mere objecthood and escape theatricality explains itself by the fact that they have no intention to be opaque entities for they always bare the traces of their production processes within them which is specific to paper. As Greenberg notes on realistic illusionistic art, dissembling its' medium and thus using art to conceal art, Letellier refrains to use techniques that objectify his works, culminating to a similar erasure of his medium (in Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 38)



Figure 19, Orizhomono, Jean Michel Letellier

Another prominent artist is Peter Callesen whose works step forward in talking about contemporary paper art. Callesen's works achieve a mimetic display of his conceptual ideas, through the use of positive / negative spaces of cut paper in an analogy with presence and absence or life and death. In most works Callesen consults paper cutting to travel between the negative and positive spaces of paper as if to suggest the line of demarcation between celestial and profane. That is to say the works exert meaning from a binary opposition. For instance in his reinterpretation of Escher in *Self-made Escher*, Callesen highlights the often discussed copy / real dichotomy of images in favor of the cutting technique (**Fig.20**). While the drawn hand looks flat and lacks the necessary contrast a realistic drawing would have such as Escher's own version (**Fig.21**), the cut out hand is given as popping out, escaping the picture plane and stepping into reality. For Callesen cutting opens the door into third dimension but nonetheless he avoids fleeing the two dimensional utterly because it is the very dichotomy his works drive their power from. No matter how overwhelming in artistic proficiency, Callesen's approach to paper falls short of touching paper at all. Paper in them is as any construction material would have been; one could replace the paper in them with just another sheet material and yet the work would look intact. It could thus be argued that Callesen works to erase paper, the immersive character of his works which leads the beholder to see the figures rather than the medium.

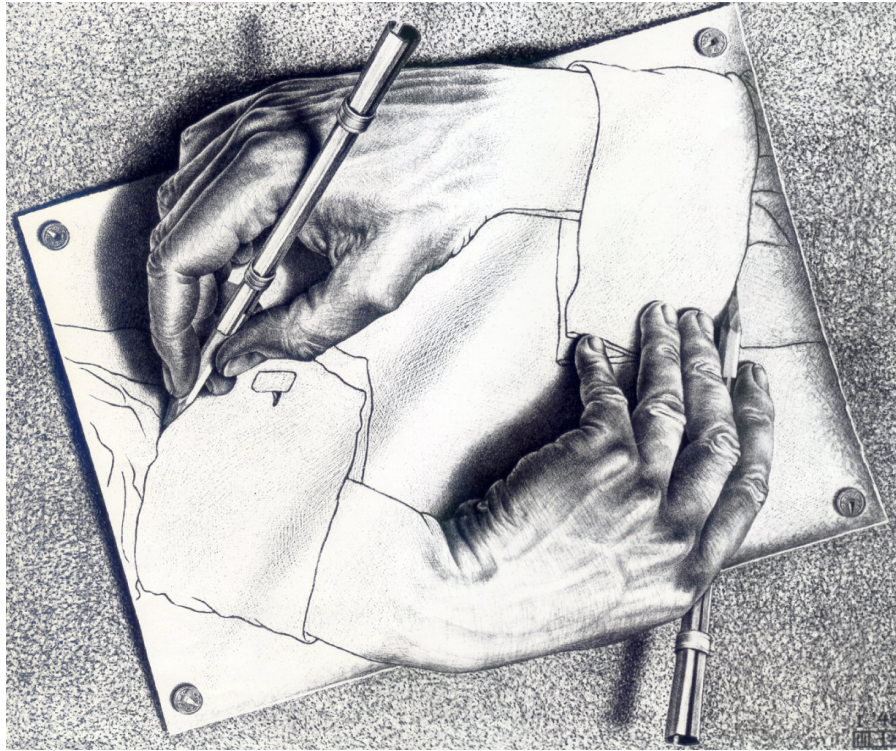


Figure 20, M. C. Escher, Drawing Hands, lithograph, 1948



Figure 21, Self-made Escher, Peter Callesen, acrylic paint on acid free paper and pencil, 2008

It should however not be understood that the adherence to medium specificity is reserved only to those works who deal with the materiality of paper. It would then be more adequate as a second quest to look for traces of medium specificity in works that do not deal solely with the craft of paper making but still are capable of turning attention upon the medium of craft as in Greenberg's words.

In Mark Fox's work titled *Hydra* (**Fig.22**), a composite of free hanging papercut with linen tape, watercolor, acrylic and gouache. Fox probably uses readymade paper to sculpt his works and therefore might not be aware of the ritual tradition of his material neither does he seem to be concerned with such investigation as Letellier is. Moreover his work is also placed in a certain theatrical setting; it floats in the air, tied to invisible strings on the string yet appears like a free floating structure that circulates around the viewer.



Figure 22, Hydra, Mark Fox, watercolor, acrylic, marker, gouache, graphite pencil, colored pencil, ballpoint pen, crayon on paper with linen tape, dimensions variable, 2005

It might be argued as in Moss and Ostermeyer's works, to derive its strength from a reservoir of already available human experience, creating dominance over the viewer by its size. Yet it still is capable of showing the delicacy of its medium, its' fragile

yet flexible, grandiose yet ephemeral nature. Given those traits *Hydra* twists and turns to create volatile forms in space, an effect only a material as lightweight as paper can give which Farmer notes as paper's lightweight plasticity that attracts artists (1980: 10).

Hence the art of paper rather than art made on paper seems to have a potential to recall the modernist quest of medium specificity although it may not totally comply with it in all its aspects. Greenberg argues that the limitations of the medium of painting, the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of pigment which were regarded as obstacles, negative factors by Old Masters; were seen as positive by the modernists to be acknowledged openly (in Bolter and Grusin, 2010: 38). Therefore the paper artist too intends to use his/her medium with a similar empathy; by disclosing the literalness (flatness, blankness) of their medium, its limitations and its embeddedness in ritual tradition yet avoiding historicism for the creation of new ways of expression. Paper surges as a historical inspiration but nevertheless can be invested in as many as new concepts and techniques that a medium of craft can be interpreted with.

When paper and paper pulp as material are approached with the acknowledgement of such the practice lends itself to a more hypermediatic surface, filled with deictic marks of the artist. Such technique like Letellier's underlines this medium specific stress which brings forth another theory on how the act of looking is structured for those kinds of works where the aesthetic principle in question does not originate from the principle of immediacy but instead of hypermediacy. Here the aesthetics

stem from the unerasable use of material and thus the principle of immediacy is of secondary importance. In doing so it relates with Bryson's theory on the aesthetics of glance which can help us understand how viewing is structured in paper works within the medium specific framework.

3.2 PAPER AND NORMAN BRYSON'S AESTHETICS OF GLANCE

Now that we saw how the artist in solitude with his craft, isolated but with the intermediacy of paper, works his / her way out of it until the opacity of the medium is left bare, it is also important to investigate the technique. Compared to a machine made piece of A4 paper sheet, the implications of paper art become all the more evident. Paper art examples that are in accordance with medium specificity shed off any surplus, already available, given traits until finally arriving to the core of paper as material. A machine made A4 paper sheet is nevertheless still paper yet its immediacy ever works to conceal and erase out its' production process and its own materiality, unlike the paper artists who gladly leave open their uncovered material in a hypermediatic way.

This is in parallel with Greenberg's stress on pre-modernist painting's obsession with illusionism, where he says that it forced pictorial arts to deny their own nature in an effort to attain the effects of the dominant art, literature being the case. The result is that the medium is concealed, and the material is annihilated in favor of illusion or immediacy in Bolter and Grusin's terms.

In these terms it is also important to investigate what the technique of paper art contributes to artistic experience. Beginning from its technique of execution as work of art to the beholder's moment of looking, in certain paper works the relation between the beholder and art object is established in disclosed manners just like in the hypermediate stress of Greenbergian account. In these terms Norman Bryson's theory on the art of glance can help us construct a model for understanding the traits in question that establish the relation between the viewer and the work as well as the paper work itself. Such relation seems to stem mainly from the technique that the medium allows most suitably without requiring its cancellation.

In *Vision and Painting* (1982) Bryson suggests an all the more radical approach to Western pictorial arts and its counterpart, the Far Eastern flung-ink painting in stressing on their interpretability. His theory rests upon the fundamental differences between what he calls analogically the art of gaze and the art of glance. He explains the dichotomy from the standpoint of language, such as while the art of gaze is inseparable from its linguistic equivalent of *aorist* the art of glance corresponds to that of *deixis*. *Aorist* refers to actions that are uttered in structures which are with no relevance to the utterer, they describe the action impersonally "without involvement or engagement on the part of the speaker recounting the action" (Bryson, *Ibid*: 88) such as "he has run" pointing only to the fact that the person is in the state of having run with no respect to speaker's position, an impersonal statement. On the other hand *deixis* is that which is indexical, it belongs to the utterer, as in the sentence "he ran" which rather includes the speaker's temporality in a certain spatial position.

What then these linguistic interpretations have in common with pictorial art or furthermore with paper art. Bryson here notes that the Western easel painting tradition is founded on the refusal of deictic reference, on the disappearance of the body as the site of the image (Bryson, Ibid: 89). That is, namely the tradition of Western representational painting which applies its medium in an erasive manner to construct the image on the effacement of the artist's traces of process, the deictic references. Here the strokes of the artist work bilaterally; first to conceal the picture plane since any unpainted area is thought to work against the coherency of the image and second to conceal its own traces as he notes "stroke conceals the canvas, as stroke conceals stroke" (Ibid: 92) and on the outcome the oil-medium does not exist except to erase its own production (Ibid: 96). What results is an opaque work that gives no clue on its production process and which has no interest or intention to do so. The immediacy in these works is so longed for that the viewer is immersed in the represented scene, unaware of the medium. Bryson further notes that;

...at no point is the durational temporality of performance preserved or respected: on the contrary each increment of durational time is referred back towards its predecessor only to efface it, and referred forward to an as yet uncreated future of the image in which the present, deictic increment will have ceased to exist. (Ibid: 92).

In the same way that Greenberg argues how illusionistic regimes overshadow the materiality and technique of the art of painting and make it a mere intermediary narrative device at the service of literalism or the dominant art (literature or

sculpture), for Bryson also the same practice of illusionism is argued to be a seductive one, eclipsing the artist's body of labor out of the picture plane to replace it with the depicted illusionistic body-image whose libidinal connotations overwhelm the viewer to leave no question as to however the work was executed, a total eradication of the medium. Hence the Gaze takes the artist's body and returns it in an altered form; it posits the body only as content, never as source of the image (Bryson, Ibid: 164). For in these pictures there is no traceability of the actual gestures of the artist, hypermediatic or deictic references.

The final work thus offers the viewer a complete, fixed, impenetrable, unfathomable surface, as if it fell from the sky and got covered with flesh; its existence and its creator are unquestionably fixed entities. Not to mention the blatant fact that the bodies of both the viewer and the painter are reduced to a single point, the macula of retinal surface and the moment of the gaze is placed outside duration (Bryson, Ibid: 96).

What results then is the depiction of a gaze, as if a glance is far more stretched and taken out of its temporality, hence frozen and numb. Because it is not in the nature of glance to leave outside sensations and replace them fully with a rational technique of representation; glance finds itself excluded in the geometric order of pictorial composition which is the realm of gaze (Ibid: 122). Bryson delineates this with Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (**Fig.23**) where the continuity of the figures is extracted from the image since the sense of animation does not originate from the duration of the body of labour. Here the image seeks a clarity so immobilized that the eye alone is incapable to attain. The image is completely based on aoristic terms, it is

not concerned about the moment of happening but the moment of the narration, that is the moment the painter sat down and determined his founding perception. This explains why consequent fragments of the story are given all at once, superimposed. As the story goes Theseus's ship leaves off the shore having left Ariadne behind, while Bacchus appears to turn Ariadne into the constellation Corona after her death. The canvas is invaded by these immobilized happenings. Bryson notes that unlike the continuity in deictic depiction here the image intends to such a discontinuity between itself and the scene it represents that it finally breaks with its origin (Ibid: 95).



Figure 23, Bacchus and Ariadne, Titian, oil on canvas, 1523, National Gallery, London

However in the case of visualizing a more deictic, hypermediate process of art Bryson suggests the Far Eastern tradition of flung-ink painting (**Fig.24**). The flung-ink technique does not build up the image on erasure; on the contrary, flung-ink

never hides brush strokes under sedimentary layers that freeze the act of looking. Here the process is always traceable on the surface, through the work of production which is constantly on display in the wake of its traces; thus the body of labor is always visible concomitantly with its duration (Ibid: 92). That is more precisely, the durational process of the painter which remains traceable by the viewer. These traits are more in accordance with the act of glance, a more temporal, disordered act of looking. The example Bryson gives here is Cleveland museum's Buddhist Monastery in Stream and Mountain Landscape, here the brushwork is so traceable that it alone gives dynamism into the picture and enables continuity. There is no frozen act of looking as in Titian's aoristic depiction.

When looked in terms of paper art, the medium specific works seem to comply with Bryson's stress on the art of glance in that they both imply a more hypermediatic technique. In Letellier's water mark series, his struggles with the material are captured within their own duration, they dwell on the surface of the works, unerased and uncovered by the sedimentary layers of material. They ever stay there as if to document the ways in which Letellier worked his way out of his medium with his own technique. These traits furthermore enable the surface finish to become the outcome of an accumulation of traces that each manifest the work in its own durational process instead of an erasive process that deny such.

Hence what utmost matters in terms of paper art, is that here not only the configuration is the subject matter of the work but also the work of the artist, the body of labor becomes part of the subject matter since the brushwork in real time and as extension of painter's own body is left intact on the surface.



Figure 24, Buddhist Monastery in Stream and Landscape, attributed to Chu-Jan, ink on silk, Five Dynasties Period (907 - 960), Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland

Important to acknowledge is that Bryson's comparison rests upon the fundamental fact that both traditions of painting are figurative and not necessarily medium specific. It then appears as a crucial fact whether if glance can be subject matter in an unrepresentative, non-figurative manner. The art of glance in its preservation of the temporality of the artist may only be graspable when the subject matter is figurative. Since be it gaze or glance both visionary activities depend on a certain degree of recognizability. Perhaps it would not be advisable then to argue that a medium specific and thus non-figurative art such as that of paper as argued here, can fully constitute an example to the art of glance.

Bryson already argues that every attempt out of representation is not necessarily that of glance. He says that not even Picasso in his struggles to emphasize improvisation and his anti-classical reactivation of deictic references on the canvas got closer to glance. Because Picasso's deconstruction of the image whose transitional phases the viewer is not able to reconstruct, remains personal and limited. Hence in doing so Picasso only repeats the classical mystification of opaque pigment handled always under erasure (Bryson, 1982: 93). Bryson even refuses to use Jackson Pollock's painterly abstractions to illustrate the art of glance for the reason that he finds his renunciation of control over form too obsessed with stylishness whereby his subject position becomes reaffirmed. (in Foster: 1988,113)

At a certain level then glance seems to be unrepresentable except for Bryson's successful delineation of flung-ink painting. Nevertheless, regardless if the act of glance is physically represented or not, we might consider that what Bryson mainly

criticizes are the aspects peculiar to art-historical techniques and materials of both schools (flung-ink vs. oil painting). On the outcome the technique of flung-ink avoids the domination of one-sided, monocular point of view whilst still allowing an omnidirectional representation of an outer reality whereby the borders of the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy tend to dissolve. It is therefore not inappropriate to humbly assume that paper art in investigation of medium specificity may bring together the temporality of both the artist and the viewer on the final work needles of any representative intention. Since flung-ink in its successful embodiment of glance has also medium specific traits in its acceptance of the primacy of the medium, the brush and the ink if not the subject matter, which remains realistic.

However there may be instances in paper art where, recognizability, although not being the aim of the work, and traits peculiar to glance come together as in flung ink. Such as in Beili Liu's work called *Yun Yan* (2009) (**Fig.25**), translated as cloud and smoke referring to things temporal and fleeting in life (Online; <http://www.beililiu.com/2d/yunyan.html>). In this work Liu uses incense sticks to make burned marks on rice paper, recalling in distant a way the Chinese way of burning spirit money after the deceased; as though the burned parts join the beyond life through smoke to reach a wholeness never present in this realm.



Figure 25, Beili Liu drawing with incense on paper

In more technical terms, without the concealment of the materiality of paper, the foreground, the burned marks function as if they have captured the flow of time in Liu's own duration. The construction of the work based on subtraction of the picture plane by burned holes are as if filled by the presence of the body of labor, Liu's body. The marks undistinguishable from a distance seem to get more and more endowed with sensation as the beholder approaches. Each mark is made with more or less tension, supposedly where the artist got more intense hence the burnt is deeper and where she felt more at ease the marks look more and more distanced and alleviated. No mark is concealed with its succeder; they follow each other to form a whole shape yet the surface remains hypermediatic, filled with deictic marks. **(Fig.26)**. Although the title suggests making a connection with objects in real world, when beholder is confronted with this whole rather he/she has the agreement of

facing the representation of cloud and smoke is of less question than the fact that the work leaves no suspicion to its madness by a physical entity with elusive senses and musculature.



Figure 26, Yun Yan (detail), Beili Liu, 2009

Moreover the technique of burning all the more suggests coherence with the material, paper. In return of this coherence the traceability of the body of labor here stems mainly from this alliance of fire and paper which allows the beholder to establish an empathetic connection with the artist. As though each mark suggests a deictic reference implying “the artist was here”. This sort of interactivity seems to establish a similarly strong reference on the durational process of the artist as in flung ink’s brush and ink (**Fig.27**).

This empathy in question would seem to fall apart, had we aimed to paint cloud and smoke in a fully representational, immersive practice. Then we would definitely end up with a much more concrete picture whose illusionistic traits would leave no suspicion at all to the fact that we are faced with cloud and smoke hence we would leave aside the artist’s body of labor. Yet what would allow this relation to be



Figure 27, Yun Yan, full panel 8, Beili Liu, incense drawing on paper, 2009

established, the fact of that realistic representation would always be produced by a given culture at a specific time. However in Liu's cloud and smoke in the same way that the artist's body is inscribed within the work, it is also not there as a central subjective position whose world view is directed upon the viewer. A certain renunciation of a central position occupied by the artist's body is evident as in the ancient paper making tradition. Liu only inscribes on paper her most immediate muscular gestures arising with the sensation of cloud and smoke rather than what conventions would tell her to do in representing cloud and smoke. Like the ancient paper maker, her role is not that of the executor but the midwife. Regardless of the title rather the beholder recognizes the shape of cloud and smoke is not important, it is important however that Liu manages to transcribe a sensuous experience. This is in parallel with what Eimert argues as the emergence point of modern art with reference to paper art, retreating from any kind of general understandability and also portraying a world that is both kaleidoscopically fragmented and accessible only to subjective interpretation and there remains thus no generally valid, all dominant central perspective (1996: 4).

The artist's abandon of this central subjective position, could be said to break the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy within a similar approach of the ancient papermaker whom as Field argued has no place for ego. Moreover the configured work is not a mere art object but an extension of the body of labor, the artist's body hence both subject and object. In return the body of labor also appears as both subject and object since the subjectivity in question is no longer that of conscious monad objectifying everything else its gaze falls upon.

A similar example is to be found in Valery Orlov's paper work series titled *Squares* (2007) (**Fig.28**). While also constituting an example for Bryson's art of glance in terms of its improvisation and exploration of material, Orlov's paper work series moreover challenge dominant issues of modernist criticism; those of literalness and illusion as also argued by Michael Fried (1998: 87).



Figure 28, Squares, Valery Orlov, handmade paper, 2007

Fried's main stress is that modernist painting never left the literal surface of the canvas. Instead having fully acknowledged it, it sought to find the most convincing illusionistic shape for the defeat of that same literalness. That's the main reason why Fried attacks Minimalism and Conceptualism for detaching literalness from the canvas, and making works that are already merely literal, objects in the real world. Similar to the technique of paper cut, creating objects out of the literal surface of

paper is also prone to the same dilemma. The shape once cut out and dissociated from the literal space acts as a separate object after which it no longer has any relation to its surrounding space which is no longer literal.

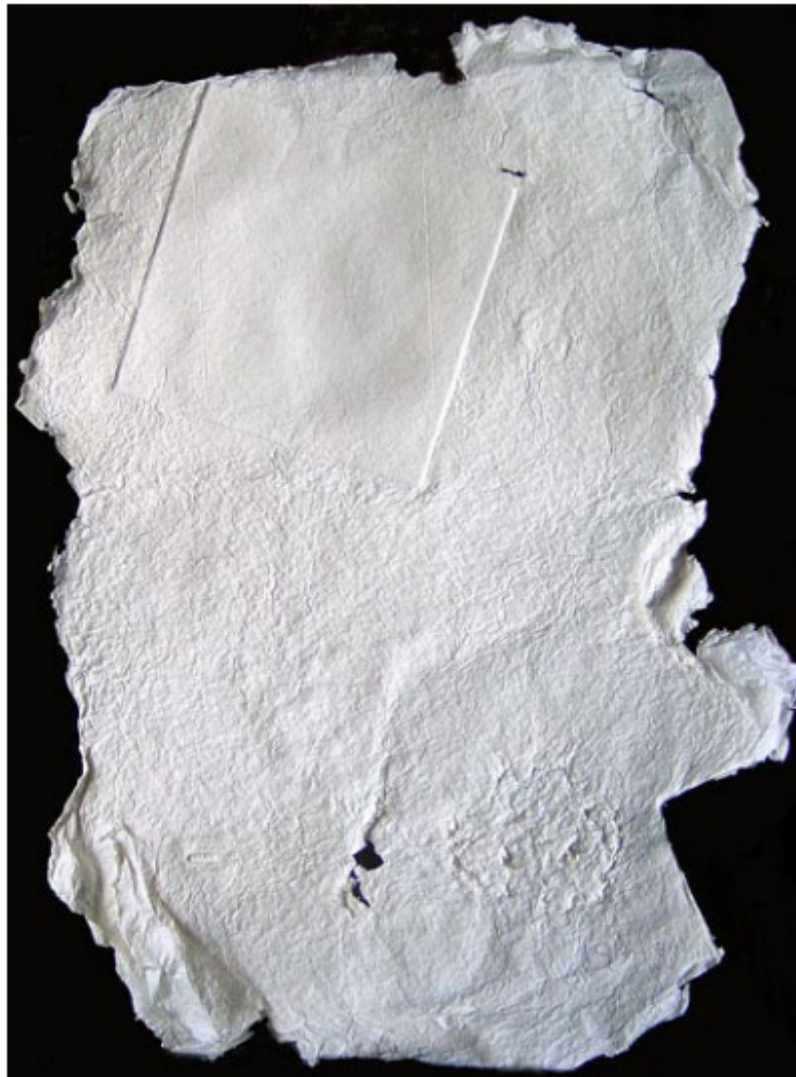


Figure 29, Square-2, Valery Orlov, handmade paper, 2007

In this respect Orlov's seven paper works seem to continue to linger around the border of literalness and objecthood. The literalness in them is neither wholly detached from the surface as in the cut outs, transforming the work in question to quasi sculpture, a mere object; yet nor can they be said to possess the pure literalness of the canvas or a blank paper sheet since they hold a degree of objecthood in

themselves, however one that is not totally detached from the surface of the work (Fig.29). Orlov preserves the literal surface and on it he builds an interplay of contradicting shapes and textures, lingering between two and three dimensionality. In *Square 2* the literal spaces left raw, unprocessed and unrestrained suggest an all the more significant importance when compared with the perfectly rendered small squares they encircle. This juxtaposition seems to underline the very difference between paper as art medium per se and paper as mere intermediary material. Moreover these works seem to stand for the very distinction Bryson so far underlines. On the one hand a hypermediatic surface filled with deictic marks, tears, wrinkles, disjunctions, irregularities suggesting the temporal duration of glance and including Orlov's working body; on the other a more immersive, subtle, firm, complete and opaque regular shape of paper. While the former is full with marks on its madeness which the eye gently glances; the other remains discreet, it wants to immerse our gaze.

What then paper contributes to contemporary art practice is its affinity with this more temporal execution technique that Bryson explains in depth. It encloses the artist's temporality within the visible material without soaking it up or locking it up amid sedimentary layers of artistic material. It avoids today's common practice of placing the beholder in a closed up circuit of mere objects, only complete with his/her inclusion, to impose a conceptual idea. Instead in these works everything already emanates to invite the viewer to contemplation, to connect with beholder in a manner as to make him/her curious about the work. Moreover the haptic quality exposed by the traces of the artist further invokes a will to interact with the material, to actually

touch the paper which actually adds to this curious sensation. As if to suggest us W.J.T. Mitchell's argument that there are actually no purely visual media but rather that all media are mixed and intertwined (2005b: 260)

Hence it is not the technical perfection of a visual medium as in immersive works but the very applicability and tactility of the technique in a hypermediate way that makes one curious in paper works. And this sense of applicability owes much to Bryson's theory. When faced with the body of labor the beholder's admiration of the technique that renders the image perfectly unfathomable in terms of its origin ceases its place to the sensation revealed by the track of the traces left by the artist.

It can be argued that many other modernist or even postmodernist art practices do so more or less however it is important to acknowledge this effect today in an era of ever changing, mechanically reproduced images and ever increasing need for conceptual works.

Conceptualism in art is definitely a need for the communication of ideas in the clash of cultures on a global level. This study has no objection to conceptual art practices or mechanically reproducible imagery. However it seeks to underline and determine why artists like Letellier, Orlov or Liu use paper to establish a more hypermediatic and purely material connection, regardless of their frequency on consulting paper. As shown in Bryson's studies while the tradition of Western oil painting was at its most fruitful moment, somewhere in the Far East, there also existed another similar way of visual depiction with so many diverse implications before even the significant cultural encounters of the colonial period took place. Therefore in today's globally

run cultural scene the selection of paper as material per se by some contemporary artists who are as well bound up with the flood of ideas and technological media, shows itself in the acknowledgement of the importance of another kind of communication, even after almost three decades since paper made its debut as art medium. This communication is not that of exchange or transmission of ideas but that of senses from one body (of labor) to another (beholder) which seems even more profound than the elaborate language of the modernists.

4. CONCLUSION

As Ernst Gombrich highlights the story of art is not of a progress in technical proficiency but of ever changing ideas and requirements (2006: 43). At times such requirements, in order to be fulfilled, make certain mediums more evident in the art scene while concurrently others emerge and start to render the former obsolete. All this, is in fact a matter of conviction as David Bolter and Peter Grusin also point, mediums emulate each other's traits once a medium is proven to convince beholders of its immediacy - its ability to erase itself to represent a copy of the reality.

However in times the struggle of the artist shift from immediacy to hypermediacy, that is to ever uncover the surface of the picture to disclose the process of their work. In that case, conviction works to prove the madeness of the work instead of an overwhelming representation of life. Hence the character of the medium and how they are embedded in the process of the artist step forward in artistic practices. Despite the disavowal of medium specificity by postmodern critics and the fact that both immediacy and hypermediacy today seem to be eclipsed by the viability of concept in art, medium nonetheless still holds a central place in art criticism. Thus throughout the thesis it was more important to recognize and understand the motives beneath medium specific claims of the artists or curators in the postmodern art scene than their capacity to achieve the purity of their medium.

Hence the first chapter was in turn a survey in understanding the intentions of both the ancient Far Eastern uses and approaches to paper and papermaking, and the more

recent artists handling of it. It carried the hope to determine the surplus value of paper as object, that which is beyond the act of seeing. In the outcome a concrete definition of an ontological inquiry is less likely to have taken place but it can be said that the use of paper as art medium does nonetheless stem from the intention to emulate certain effects that the material possesses. Then the first criterion becomes that of defining such intentions in making the artist use paper. After all it is intriguing, after going through all the bulk of exhibitions and books written on paper art, why there is not a corpus in the same strict tendency towards what might be called a wood art or stone art. Perhaps the most immediate answer is that paper is able to remain flat thus preserving the conventional vertical plane of a picture whilst adding to it a sculptural element. Yet the convenience of use of material remains superficial in explaining a medium's favorability. The art work's ability of convincing the beholder either to a mimetic scene or to a pictorial illusion as in modernist painting, put forward by Fried and Greenberg, remain as central concerns for a medium. The use of paper as medium in art definitely does not carry the intention of mimesis which other mediums such as photography or painting are far more capable of supplying. Then paper as art medium, aspires to effects which are not attainable through immersive projections. This is of course excluding paper-cut applications which are mostly mimetic and immersive but which then carry the intention to convey conceptual ideas that do not necessarily drive their power from their medium or objecthood but from the idea itself. The moment the concept comes in the creation process, the dissemination of an idea becomes more important than what the work is made of. That is the main reason why paper art dealing with conceptual claims were left out of the scope of the thesis.

In the latter modernist approach elaborated in the second chapter, an art work is convincing so long as it is able to defeat its own objecthood, its ability to “suspend its own objecthood through the medium of shape” ? as Fried puts it or its ability to refer to nothing else than its own effects as in the Greenbergian formalism. Although not merely in a literal or theatrical way but blended with artistic gestures, paper art in this sense stands forward in underlining the objecthood character of its material at times suspending it, at times disclosing it. Thus it was best to consider paper as art medium within the formalist framework of Greenberg and Fried. But then what are precisely these characteristics peculiar to paper or things in general that the artists so aspire to express?

In describing the character of objects in terms of visual culture Mitchell argues that “things” no longer wait for a sovereign subject to arrange them with respect to a concept but that they are becoming increasingly autonomous, rearing their heads with an obdurate materiality (2005a: 112). Although Mitchell argues this in terms of “found object” applications nonetheless the mentioned obdurate materiality of paper as object is a strong component of the paper works. Mitchell even argues that images and objects drive their power within a ventriloquist concept as a puppeteer makes a puppet talk while he seems mute. That is to say, images and objects drive their utterances from what beholder’s discourse of the unconscious projects onto them. In his words;

The really good ventriloquist doesn’t simply impose his voice on the mute thing, but expresses in some way the autonomy and specificity of that

thing...Their speech is not just arbitrary or forced upon them but must seem to reflect their inner nature as modern fetish objects. (2005a: 140)

As a matter of fact it was with a similar principle that the craft of paper making was carried out in the Far East, not from the stand point of fabricator as the sovereign subject that imposes his/her own projections on the raw material but rather as a contributor and witness to its coming about from cellulose fibers as an autonomous process. The fibers thus transformed into a symbol of purity in the body of paper stood then as a kind of fetish for the ancient paper maker. However if not a fetish for purity, today's artists in trying to expose such materiality, allow paper concomitantly a subjective element which is repressed in daily use machine made paper.

Mitchell argues that the modern approach towards objects or artifacts, namely Fried's distinction between art and objecthood or Greenberg's between images and pictures (as kitsch and art) stems from a colonial discourse where the encounter with the Other's objects takes place. Thus an imperial construction of the taxonomy of objecthood redeems the literal materiality of things (belonging to Self's own culture) from animist beliefs whilst attributing all the veil of mystery and corruption to the Other's objects (2006:147). Paper in this respect is not proof of the same discourse since in the Western realm it is taken over as deprived of its literal materiality in its adoption as a fully pragmatic material. However what the postmodern artists do with paper seems to stand in between the both views; in daring to respect the bare materiality of paper which the modernist critique was wary of, they are able to add to it gestural qualities in a modernist touch. Hence the second chapter tried to think of paper art works within the vocabulary of Greenberg and Fried's formalist

approaches. Yet perhaps what we need is a redefinition of objecthood that neither needs to be repressed in order to be classified as art nor fully literal, deprived of gestural. Mitchell also talks about such a redefinition;

The new objecthood is not merely a woolgathering movement toward empiricism and materialism, or a spin-off of the new historicist love of detail and anecdote, but a return to theoretical reflection on the constitution of material objects, as if our virtual heritage were compelling us to start all over with ontology of things, renewing Heidegger's obsessive questions about the Being of beings. (2006: 153)

Although far beyond the aim of this thesis one thing emerges here to underline also in terms of design studies. Mitchell's argument here suggests an approach which does not aim to arrange materials with respect to a sovereign, supposedly conscious subject, neglecting their inner nature but rather acknowledges and respects their integrity and being as such; an approach which is akin to the ancient papermaker's reverence to material. Similarly the architect Louis Kahn was renowned to ask his materials what they wanted to become for inspiration. A well known anecdote is when he describes this to his students;

"To express is to drive and when you want to give something presence you have to consult nature and there is where design comes in...If you think of brick for instance, you say to a brick, 'What do you want, brick?' And brick says to you, 'I like an arch.' And if you say to brick, 'Look, arches are

expensive and I can use a concrete lintel. What do you think of that, brick?'

Brick says: 'I like an arch.'" (in Twombly, ed. 2003: 271)

This seems to be in parallel with Field's assessment about the Japanese papermaker, considering himself more midwife than fabricator thus allowing the material to show off its structural wholeness. The artists working with paper thus approach their material similarly and redefine its objecthood in the art scene, respecting its integrity. This new objecthood is neither dismissed because of its exposed literal character yet nor is it totally in pursuit of gestural qualities. Instead the paper artist exposes the literal materiality in inscribing on it their own work traces. This exposed, accentuated materiality inscribes the agencies of both the paper and the artist and establishes the convincing element to the picture plane that the modernist critique was very fond of. Since the beholder faced with this obdurate materiality and its ability to show itself off on the picture plane, unlike in an erasive manner where the technical perfection would require its effacement, has all the awareness of standing in front of an art work which is all the more capable of supplying a convincing element, a sort of presentness. A presentness that which is driven from the bare integrity of the material.

Such effect is mostly graspable by a disparately different kind of aesthetics that does not deny the medium or the body of labor of the artist. That is the art of glance discussed at length by Norman Bryson which is the main reason why the last part of the second chapter is devoted to. Bryson in describing the art of glance stresses the example of the Far Eastern flung ink technique which is parallel in philosophy to the

way papermaking was executed; in terms of the artist not dominating a center role of the executor or master but a mere witness to the coming about of the artifact, respecting both the subjectivities of the object, the artisan and the world of objects, represented if any. Bryson later relates this to fundamental discrepancies between the Cartesian perspectivalist world view and the Buddhist Zen teachings ('The Gaze in the Expanded Field' in Foster (ed.), 1988: 87). In the latter, regardless of a central conscious subjective position and taxonomy of things, everything is seen to emerge and return to one field of emptiness, *Sunyata* (Nishitani, 1982: 110).

Hence the thesis maintains that only within such an approach to materials, a segment of art entitled paper art would be more meaningful. Perhaps seemingly contradictory to the Fried / Greenberg dichotomy of art and objecthood, yet Bryson's interpretation of such an aesthetical undertaking offers all the more a hint in better understanding the medium specific traits in respecting the totality of the medium and its irreducibility to communicable media.

In paper's case it was very challenging to find an academic canon that previously dealt with such an interaction between materials and visibility. Therefore the thesis maintains the hope to bring about or at least question a new definition of objecthood of paper art. In other words it hopes to reveal the negated objecthood of an art material that can supply new inspirations when experienced and experimented by the artist.

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