“Social Paper,” our exhibition at the Center for Book and Paper Arts in Chicago, seeks to document what we see as a fundamental relationship between hand papermaking and social engagement through the work of 16 artists. These sculptures, installations, prints, books and ephemera, have been produced through a variety of paper-based strategies that link the act of making to social change.

Crafts such as papermaking have been embedded in the history of progressive social programs since the early 20th century, when the Arts and Crafts movement led to the establishment of craft communities as alternatives to the “alienation” of industrial labor. Jane Addams, who won a Nobel Prize for her work with low-income urban dwellers at Hull House in Chicago, believed that handicraft could restore the psychological well-being eroded by the hardships of overwork. Lucy Morgan’s Penland School of Craft in North Carolina was founded as what we would now call a micro-industry initiative to enable local women to sell their weavings to a national audience. Subsequently, Penland has trained generations of papermakers to consider hand papermaking as a medium of both community involvement and artistic production. Across the world and over many decades, papermakers worked in locations from the Venezuelan rainforest to the rice terraces of the Philippines.

In the 1960s and 70s, papermaking was further promoted as a medium of artistic expression through certain academic art departments, such as Cranbrook in Michigan, the founding of workshops such as Dieu Donné Papermill and the Women’s Studio Workshop in New York, and initiatives at Columbia College Chicago, Pyramid Atlantic in Maryland, and elsewhere. Further energized by the postwar American Studio Craft movement and the more recent DIY movement, papermaking is now pursued by a broad range of artists.

The collaborative nature of the paper-making process, however, makes it a particularly effective medium for group engagement: Nick DuBois’ Fabric of War, for example, brought together 20 Palestinian and Israeli women bereaved by conflict to make paper, working through one another’s narratives in a sometimes difficult space of understanding and difference. Meanwhile, the physical materials out of which paper can be made allow for visceral representations of time, place and experience, as when the Combat Paper Collective in the United States works with veterans to make paper from pulped combat fatigues. Kiff Slemmons has spent two decades working with the papermakers of Arte Papel in Oaxaca, establishing an art-based micro-industry.

Projects such as these raise critical questions about the role of specific media in the realm of socially engaged art. It is our hope that “Social Paper” will spark further discussion of this movement, which has never been properly researched and documented, and of the ways in which work, art and works of art interact.

Melissa Potter is a multi-media artist and writer exhibiting and publishing internationally. She is currently an Associate Professor and Director of the Book & Paper Program in the Interdisciplinary Arts Department of Columbia College Chicago.

Jessica Cochran is curator of exhibitions and programs and acting assistant director at the Columbia College Chicago Center for Book and Paper Arts. She is also an independent curator and writer.
March – April 2014
Volume 3, Number 6

Editor-in-Chief
Susan Tallman

Associate Publisher
Julie Bernatz

Managing Editor
Dana Johnson

News Editor
Isabella Kendrick

Manuscript Editor
Prudence Crowther

Online Columnist
Sarah Kirk Hanley

Design Director
Skip Langer

Editorial Associate
Michael Ferut


This Page: Nomi Silverman, detail from Living Rough (2013), a portfolio of five lithographs and a title page in a handmade paper portfolio. Printed by James Reed/Milestone Graphics, Bridgeport, CT. Co-published by Milestone Graphics and the artist, Glenville, CT.

Art in Print
3500 N. Lake Shore Drive
Suite 10A
Chicago, IL 60657-1927
www.artinprint.org
info@artinprint.org

No part of this periodical may be published without the written consent of the publisher.

In This Issue

Susan Tallman
On Fierce Barbarians

Miguel de Baca
The Geldzahler Portfolio as AIDS Activism

John Murphy
Blacklisted: William Gropper’s Capriccios

Makeda Best
Twenty-Five Artists Against Racism and the War, 1968

Shaurya Kumar
Zarina: Paper and Partition

Jessica Cochran & Melissa Potter
Papermaking and Social Action

Prix de Print, No. 4

Richard H. Axsom
Annu Vertanen: Breathing Touch

Treasures from the Vault
Rowan Bain
Ester Hernandez, Sun Mad

Reviews

Britany Salsbury
Programs for the Théâtre de l’Oeuvre

Kate McCrickard
Hieronymus Cock Aux Quatre Vents

Alexandra Onuf
Hieronymus Cock: The Renaissance Reconceived

Jill Bugajski
The Art of Influence: Asian Propaganda

Sarah Andress
Nicola López: Big Eye

Susan Tallman
Jane Hammond: Snapshot Odyssey

Maru Rojas
Peter Blake: Found Art: Eggs

News of the Print World

International Directory 2014

Contributors

Guide to Back Issues

The series “Treasures from the Vault” was made possible with the generous support of the IFPDA Foundation.