FEBRUARY 10 – APRIL 15, 2014

Social Paper

HAND PAPERMAKING IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART

BOOK AND PAPER
CENTER FOR BOOK AND PAPER ARTS at Columbia College Chicago

Columbia COLLEGE CHICAGO
Social Paper
Hand papermaking as Socially Engaged Art

Loreto Apilado
Aliison Knowles
Cathy Mooses
Parents Circle—Families Forum
Peace Paper
Maggie Puckett
John Risseew
Kiff Stemmons
The People’s Library
Women’s Studio Workshop

Curated by
Jessica Cochran and Melissa Potter

Socially engaged art occupies the forefront of today’s contemporary art discourse, and Chicago is at the center of the discussion. Social Paper explores hand papermaking as a medium that exemplifies many of the characteristics of socially engaged art. The exhibition can be seen at Columbia College Chicago’s Center for Book and Paper Arts, which was founded in 1992 to advance the craft discourse in book and paper.

Hand papermaking is a naturally collaborative process, and within the exploratory realm of the studio it can be as experimental as it is pedagogical, as artists gather and share knowledge about specific fibers, new techniques or alternative processes. As such, many hand papermaking projects privilege community, collaboration, participation, student knowledge and empowerment over a hierarchical student/teacher dynamic or artistic product. Its legacy stems from the industrial revolution, which rendered many craft arts like hand papermaking obsolete to the communities in which it once was essential. A renewed interest in local economies and the handmade was a response to the events of the early 20th century, and led to the reformist communities of craft workers assembled as part of the Arts and Crafts movement.

The legacy of Jane Addams’ Hull House has also profoundly affected the rise of social practice. Hull House, a settlement home founded in 1889, was part of a broad progressive movement that offered social services to low-income urban dwellers through democratized access to education, health care and social interaction. Addams believed handicrafts and fine art were essential to a healthy community, and necessary aspects of Hull House’s services. This framework for engaged art practices has gained currency in the art world over the past decade, particularly in Chicago where it is embodied in groups like the Stockyard Institute, People Powered and Mess Hall.

Now, decades after Addams, the centuries-old process of hand papermaking has developed into a dynamic artistic field, energized in part by a broad public interest in craft arts, as characterized by the American Studio Craft movement and, more recently, the DIY craft movement. In the 1960’s and 1970’s, American hand papermaking underwent a revival fueled by its survival in academic art departments like our own, especially in the current global environment of continuing economic crises.

Our goal at the Center for Book and Paper Arts is to locate the multi-dimensional practices of hand papermakers within broader theoretical, practical, historical, sociological and disciplinary contexts relative to contemporary art. It has been especially exciting to situate hand papermaking in many of the key debates in social practice as established by major proponents of the movement. Social Paper demonstrates, through the lens of social engagement, how the practice of hand papermaking can engage many of social practice’s strategies of activism and community interaction.

Together, the sculptures, installations, prints, documentaries, artists’ books and ephemera articulate how the labor of papermaking is valuable and beautifully porous when generatively transformed into healing workshops, models for ars-driven micro-industry, or into discursive art objects that are the outcomes of research or activism; with this exhibition, it is our goal to reveal the “work” of this work: that deep engagements with culture, history and the natural environment are brought to into the realm of the social through participation, interaction and field research.

To us, the urgency of this project is clear. We must assert the importance of hand papermaking projects as established by major proponents of the social practice. Hull House, a settlement home founded in 1889, was part of a broad progressive movement that offered social services to low-income urban dwellers through democratized access to education, health care and social interaction. Addams believed handicrafts and fine art were essential to a healthy community, and necessary aspects of Hull House’s services. This framework for engaged art practices has gained currency in the art world over the past decade, particularly in Chicago where it is embodied in groups like the Stockyard Institute, People Powered and Mess Hall.

Papermaking’s Progress
To build on its legacy and articulate our vision of the future of paper as a meaningful art medium, we must consider the art and practice of making paper today in relation to trends in contemporary art; specifically, trends in socially engaged art. Social Paper features papermakers who for the past 20 years have formed community gardens, collaborated with governments and NGOs on cottage industry projects, explored participatory pedagogy through workshops, created community libraries and trans-disciplinary hubs for research, and raised awareness about the disastrous effects of war and environmental apathy. To us, the urgency of this project is clear. We must assert the importance of hand papermaking projects in the context of socially engaged art. We must also establish a new dialogue highlighting the significant and unregistered social contributions of the papermaking movement that have been omitted from recent signs of interest in the politics and social histories of craft. Because Social Paper explores hand papermaking as a socially engaged art within the significant contemporary discourse and definitions, many of the major scholarly models for identifying and evaluating socially engaged

Social Paper

Hand papermaking as Socially Engaged Art

Socially engaged art occupies the forefront of today’s contemporary art discourse, and Chicago is at the center of the discussion. Social Paper explores hand papermaking as a medium that exemplifies many of the characteristics of socially engaged art. The exhibition can be seen at Columbia College Chicago’s Center for Book and Paper Arts, which was founded in 1992 to advance the craft discourse in book and paper.

Hand papermaking is a naturally collaborative process, and within the exploratory realm of the studio it can be as experimental as it is pedagogical, as artists gather and share knowledge about specific fibers, new techniques or alternative processes. As such, many hand papermaking projects privilege community, collaboration, participation, student knowledge and empowerment over a hierarchical student/teacher dynamic or artistic product. Its legacy stems from the industrial revolution, which rendered many craft arts like hand papermaking obsolete to the communities in which it once was essential. A renewed interest in local economies and the handmade was a response to the events of the early 20th century, and led to the reformist communities of craft workers assembled as part of the Arts and Crafts movement.

The legacy of Jane Addams’ Hull House has also profoundly affected the rise of social practice. Hull House, a settlement home founded in 1889, was part of a broad progressive movement that offered social services to low-income urban dwellers through democratized access to education, health care and social interaction. Addams believed handicrafts and fine art were essential to a healthy community, and necessary aspects of Hull House’s services. This framework for engaged art practices has gained currency in the art world over the past decade, particularly in Chicago where it is embodied in groups like the Stockyard Institute, People Powered and Mess Hall.

Now, decades after Addams, the centuries-old process of hand papermaking has developed into a dynamic artistic field, energized in part by a broad public interest in craft arts, as characterized by the American Studio Craft movement and, more recently, the DIY craft movement. In the 1960’s and 1970’s, American hand papermaking underwent a revival fueled by its survival in academic art departments, such as Cranbrook’s; by the founding of arts organizations, such as Dieu Donné Papermill and the Women’s Studio Workshop in New York; and by a wave of newer hubs, such as Columbia College Chicago and Pyramid Atlantic in Baltimore.

To non-practitioners, hand papermaking is still usually associated with fine press book traditions and studio craft practices. However, papermaking experts Gail Deery and Minna Takahashi take a broader view. Writing in the Winter 1999 issue of Hand Papermaking, they declared: “An ever-growing number of projects worldwide now utilize hand papermaking as a tool for economic development.” From Aboriginal communities in Australia, to the Venezuelan rainforest, artists are using the social, economic and cultural aspects of hand papermaking to engage communities in meaningful, perhaps transformative, activities.

Papermaking’s Progress
To build on its legacy and articulate our vision of the future of paper as a meaningful art medium, we must consider the art and practice of making paper today in relation to trends in contemporary art; specifically, trends in socially engaged art. Social Paper features papermakers who for the past 20 years have formed community gardens, collaborated with governments and NGOs on cottage industry projects, explored participatory pedagogy through workshops, created community libraries and trans-disciplinary hubs for research, and raised awareness about the disastrous effects of war and environmental apathy. To us, the urgency of this project is clear. We must assert the importance of hand papermaking projects in the context of socially engaged art. We must also establish a new dialogue highlighting the significant and unregistered social contributions of the papermaking movement that have been omitted from recent signs of interest in the politics and social histories of craft. Because Social Paper explores hand papermaking as a socially engaged art within the significant contemporary discourse and definitions, many of the major scholarly models for identifying and evaluating socially engaged

Social Paper

Hand papermaking as Socially Engaged Art

Socially engaged art occupies the forefront of today’s contemporary art discourse, and Chicago is at the center of the discussion. Social Paper explores hand papermaking as a medium that exemplifies many of the characteristics of socially engaged art. The exhibition can be seen at Columbia College Chicago’s Center for Book and Paper Arts, which was founded in 1992 to advance the craft discourse in book and paper.

Hand papermaking is a naturally collaborative process, and within the exploratory realm of the studio it can be as experimental as it is pedagogical, as artists gather and share knowledge about specific fibers, new techniques or alternative processes. As such, many hand papermaking projects privilege community, collaboration, participation, student knowledge and empowerment over a hierarchical student/teacher dynamic or artistic product. Its legacy stems from the industrial revolution, which rendered many craft arts like hand papermaking obsolete to the communities in which it once was essential. A renewed interest in local economies and the handmade was a response to the events of the early 20th century, and led to the reformist communities of craft workers assembled as part of the Arts and Crafts movement.

The legacy of Jane Addams’ Hull House has also profoundly affected the rise of social practice. Hull House, a settlement home founded in 1889, was part of a broad progressive movement that offered social services to low-income urban dwellers through democratized access to education, health care and social interaction. Addams believed handicrafts and fine art were essential to a healthy community, and necessary aspects of Hull House’s services. This framework for engaged art practices has gained currency in the art world over the past decade, particularly in Chicago where it is embodied in groups like the Stockyard Institute, People Powered and Mess Hall.

Now, decades after Addams, the centuries-old process of hand papermaking has developed into a dynamic artistic field, energized in part by a broad public interest in craft arts, as characterized by the American Studio Craft movement and, more recently, the DIY craft movement. In the 1960’s and 1970’s, American hand papermaking underwent a revival fueled by its survival in academic art departments, such as Cranbrook’s; by the founding of arts organizations, such as Dieu Donné Papermill and the Women’s Studio Workshop in New York; and by a wave of newer hubs, such as Columbia College Chicago and Pyramid Atlantic in Baltimore.

To non-practitioners, hand papermaking is still usually associated with fine press book traditions and studio craft practices. However, papermaking experts Gail Deery and Minna Takahashi take a broader view. Writing in the Winter 1999 issue of Hand Papermaking, they declared: “An ever-growing number of projects worldwide now utilize hand papermaking as a tool for economic development.” From Aboriginal communities in Australia, to the Venezuelan rainforest, artists are using the social, economic and cultural aspects of hand papermaking to engage communities in meaningful, perhaps transformative, activities.

Papermaking’s Progress
To build on its legacy and articulate our vision of the future of paper as a meaningful art medium, we must consider the art and practice of making paper today in relation to trends in contemporary art; specifically, trends in socially engaged art. Social Paper features papermakers who for the past 20 years have formed community gardens, collaborated with governments and NGOs on cottage industry projects, explored participatory pedagogy through workshops, created community libraries and trans-disciplinary hubs for research, and raised awareness about the disastrous effects of war and environmental apathy. To us, the urgency of this project is clear. We must assert the importance of hand papermaking projects in the context of socially engaged art. We must also establish a new dialogue highlighting the significant and unregistered social contributions of the papermaking movement that have been omitted from recent signs of interest in the politics and social histories of craft. Because Social Paper explores hand papermaking as a socially engaged art within the significant contemporary discourse and definitions, many of the major scholarly models for identifying and evaluating socially engaged
projects proved helpful in researching and mounting the exhibition.

Major theoretical models provide a rigorous framework for considering the artworks in Paper Social. This is in part due to the collapse of the largely commodity-driven art market of the 1980’s, a period that included a rising market for high-end crafts, which were still then considered separate from the fine art world.

At the time, the absence of a flourishing object-oriented marketplace—combined with timely social issues such as the environment, the AIDS crisis, and the economic and social problems of globalization—created space for artists to reorient their artwork and object-making toward activism and radical change on a global scale. Social Paper is the first exhibition to chart hand papermaking’s relationship to socially engaged art, and the first to demonstrate how hand papermaking revived in tandem with those important, well-archived movements.

Over the past two decades, a vast outpouring of books, articles and essays about community-oriented, site-specific, participatory and public-driven art, has yielded several major positions and a critical vocabulary defining what has come to be known as social practice. These concepts, often unaligned or in opposition, are loosely anchored by Suzanne Lacy’s assertion in 1995 of the term “new genre public art,” which was followed by Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics, first published in 1998 and translated into English in 2002.

Terms of Engagement

Tom Finkelpearl points out in What We Made that writer and scholar Claire Bishop’s list of widely used descriptors for social practice includes “socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, or collaborative art.” Other popular descriptors include Pablo Helguera’s “transpedagogy,” and Stuart Keeler’s “service media.”

Finkelpearl prefers “social cooperation” over Finkelpearl’s “collaborative art.” Bishop observes that participatory projects in the social field seem to operate with a twofold gesture of opposition and amelioration. They work against dominant market imperatives by diffusing single authorship into collaborative activities. Bishop’s hesitant endorsement of such practices is grounded in a twofold critique. She argues for the urgent need to rigorously analyze such work as “art” while also warning that such practices often serve to feebly replace disappearing social services as the welfare state disappears through neo-liberal policies. Artworks should not be reduced to their ethical impact.

Thomas Geiger asserts that socially engaged art (SEA) is at its root “a hybrid, multi-disciplinary activity that exists somewhere between art and non-art, and its state may be permanently unresolved. SEA depends on actual—not imagined or hypothetical—social action.” Decades before the current trend of using gardens as sites for the creative intersection of growing, food education, culinary activity and artistic engagement, Dieu Donné Papermill and the Women’s Studio Workshop program both developed interdisciplinary gardens to teach the art of hand papermaking through environmental engagement.

Because their projects focused on more than the end product, they live in the space Heiwa夏日 that describes by extending artistic definitions to education, collaboration, community building, and interdisciplinary practice. Today, Fresh Press continues this legacy at the University of Illinois in Champaign Urbana by taking advantage of agricultural waste from the school’s many research crops to create paper in an interdisciplinary studio and press. In Artificial Hells, one of the most important current texts on socially engaged art, Claire Bishop observes that participatory projects in the social field seem to operate with a twofold gesture of opposition and amelioration. They work against dominant market imperatives by diffusing single authorship into collaborative activities. Bishop’s hesitant endorsement of such practices is grounded in a twofold critique. She argues for the urgent need to rigorously analyze such work as “art” while also warning that such practices often serve to feebly replace disappearing social services as the welfare state disappears through neo-liberal policies. Artworks should not be reduced to their ethical impact.

Grant Kester is perhaps Bishop’s primary antagonist in the field. He holds that “the dialogical projects...present a mode of collaborative art practice in which the tension between semantic and symbolic labor is not collapsed per se but openly thematized and made an explicit object of inquiry and creative engagement...in which the linkage between creativity and a certain form of singularized aggression and self assertion is de-naturalized.” Bishop and Kester manifest one of the primary struggles in many of the works featured in Social Paper—the line between artistic excellence and social impact.

The work of several of the projects represented in Social Paper exploit Bishop’s and Kester’s opposition. Combat Paper, for example, brings the practice of hand papermaking into the workshop format, using it as a means to provide healing and social change. Combat Paper was started by Drew Cameron and Drew Matte, a 2007 graduate of Columbia College Chicago’s Book & Paper program. The project invited military veterans to use their worn service uniforms to create works of art. The uniforms were cut up, beaten into pulp and reformulated into sheets of paper. “Participants use the transformative process of papermaking,” Combat Paper declares, “to reclaim their uniforms as art and express their experiences with the military.”

Once made, a participant’s paper becomes the foundation for expressive content; that is, for telling his or her story in the form of hand-drawn images, texts, photographs, and/or prints. Kester would approve, as he considers the craft workshop model...
The repatriation to Mexico of the mortal remains of Mexican-born performer Julia Pastrana from the basement collection of the University of Oslo, in Norway. Born in 1834 in Sinaloa, Pastrana was sold and exhibited across Europe as “The Ugliest Woman in the World.” Afflicted with generalized hypertrichosis lanuginosa and gingival hyperplasia, Pastrana’s jaw was disproportionately large and her face and body were covered with thick hair. Barbata felt it was her duty as an artist working in the social realm to see Pastrana returned to Mexico. She felt this would recover for Pastrana her dignity and her rightful place in history and the collective memory. In February 2013, after ten years of Barbata’s efforts, Julia Pastrana’s remains were repatriated and, as she had been Catholic, given a proper Catholic burial in Sinaloa.

Barbata’s role in burying Pastrana’s remains is characterized by Kester’s concepts on modernity and the intersection of art and public life through the production of alternatives that demonstrate a DIY ethos. Maggie Puckett’s installation, The Big Here: Chicago, is a set of 35 questions designed to test and increase ecological awareness based on a concept by naturalist Peter Warshall. The questions appear on handmade papers selected to emphasize each question’s content. Visitors to the installation are encouraged to write and draw answers to the questions directly on the handmade paper.

After the exhibition, the sheets will be folded into folders and bound into a codex book representing the collective awareness of the installation’s participants. With an emphasis on direct participation and the assertion of a collective knowledge, Puckett’s project places authorship in the hands of participants. The final book, though bound by Puckett herself, will be collectively authored as the result of a highly orchestrated, artist-led scenario characteristic of socially engaged art.

artists Courtney Bowles and Mark Strandquist conduct a similar process for The People’s Library’s project in Richmond, Virginia. They facilitate DIY papermaking workshops that pulp de-accessioned library books into new blank books that circulate within the library. Community residents are urged to check out the blank books, fill them with their own histories, and return them to the library for circulation. The result is that the library becomes designed, filled and authored by community members, generating a continuing exchange of local histories.

Bowles and Strandquist hope the books constitute “a thousand micro-monuments” that become “the real and symbolic meeting place for alienated publics,” while offering “sustainable, collective and critical alternatives for the form and function of public art.” The project reflects the needs and desires of local residents, and re-interprets one particular public institution as a space for production, meditation, and alternative education. Bowles and Strandquist say they are frequently asked by others for help in setting up their own People’s Libraries. As such, the project moves beyond being a symbolic, local gesture and into the territory of having real, dimensional impact beyond the usual sphere of visual art. As Nato Thompson writes, “cultural practices indicate a new social order—ways of life that emphasize participation, challenging power, and span disciplines.”

Canada-based curator Stuart Keebler provides another model that has proved very helpful in assessing paper projects as socially engaged. Keebler presents a new model that has proved very helpful in assessing paper projects as socially engaged. In Service Media, he suggests that the five main criteria for a service media work are: a non-site-specific approach, the use of a public realm or city as a studio, artists situating themselves as an “institution,” an artist working within his or her own community, and work that makes a commentary on a specific time by addressing an issue with a “service”-engaged dialogical approach.

Keebler presented his concept for building a new discourse about the interaction of socially engaged art and hand papermaking at the 2014 College Art Association in a panel titled Social Paper, From Paper in Practice: Tactics and Publics in Socially Engaged Art. Fellow panelists included socially engaged artists Laura Anderson Barbata and Claire Pentecost.

For decades, hand papermaking has been largely excluded from contemporary artistic discourse and has survived as a small, somewhat exclusive, self-sustaining community. Though the movement has not benefited from inclusion, the artists represented in Social Paper clearly articulate their significant commitment to social change through the medium of hand papermaking while navigating multiple art “worlds” with great success. Their projects are not only outstanding applications of papermaking, they enact and embody the complexity and reflexive dimensionality that characterizes contemporary art.

Today, the MFA in Book & Paper graduate students, whose studios are just steps from the galleries that house Social Paper, are extending this discussion in their work, populating the field with rigorous new approaches, and questioning the value of art in a globalized society in great need of evolved cultural discussions and interactions.

Jessica Cochran & Melissa Potter, 2014
Social Paper received generous support from the Craft Research Fund, Clinton Hill/Allen Tran Foundation, Art + Activism, and the following programming partners: The Caxton Club, Chicago Zine Fest, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and the Poetry Foundation, as well as the Columbia College Library and Department of Exhibitions and Performance Spaces at Columbia College Chicago.

CENTER FOR BOOK AND PAPER ARTS
Steve Woodall, Director
Gina Ordez, Assistant to the Director
Jessica Cochran, Curator of Exhibitions & Programs & Acting Assistant Director
April Sheridan, Studio Technician & Special Events Coordinator
Brad Freeman, Studio Coordinator & Editor, Journal of Artists’ Books

EXHIBITION SUPPORT
Melissa Potter, Co-Curator
Jessica Cochran, Co-Curator
Alexis Brocchi, Nagi Nakayama & Leonardo Selvaggio, Gallery Assistants
Brent Koehn, Installation Assistant
Aaron Ott, Exhibition Design Consultant
Jillian Bruschera, Curatorial Research Assistant
Stan Pinkwas, Editor

COVER/ABOVE: Laura Anderson Barbata, Su Vuelta Y Sus Raices, Short Animation Still (2013)

The Center for Book and Paper Arts is dedicated to the research, teaching, and promotion of the interdisciplinary practices that support the book arts and hand papermaking as contemporary art media. The Center is part of the Interdisciplinary Arts Department at Columbia College Chicago, and in addition to housing both graduate and undergraduate classes for that department, it publishes a critical journal and artists’ books, mounts exhibitions, hosts artist residencies, sponsors symposia and public programs, and provides advanced study through a workshop program.

colum.edu/bookandpaper

Gallery Hours
Monday – Friday: 10 – 6; Saturday: Noon – 4
1104 S Wabash Ave, 2nd Fl, Chicago, IL 60605
book&paper@colum.edu