



pretty paper

Contemporary flower makers
add their own touches to the
long tradition of three-dimensional
paper botanicals

By **COURTNEY BARNES**



“VIVID, AMUSING PAPER FLOWERS ARE PREFERABLE to careful, plastic copies,” proclaimed *Vogue’s* editors in 1969, describing the charms of unpretentious blooms set out in a shallow bowl to enliven the dinner table. Young girls could also perk up their bedroom desks with fluffy roses, big Oriental poppies, and zinnias handcrafted from tissue or crepe paper, thanks to a profusion of flower-making kits soon marketed to children and teens throughout the crafty 1970s.

But long before it became trendy in the States and UK, paper flora had been used around the world for centuries, notably in East Asia and Mexico. Believed to have originated in China, colored tissue paper likely made its way in the 17th century from Manila, in

the Philippines, to Mexico, where it was ultimately transformed by amateurs and skilled artisans alike into the iconic Latin blossoms used for decorating weddings and other fiestas.

Today, paper blossoms are once again on the radar of designers with tastemaking shops, such as John Derian Company in New York City and Hollyhock in Los Angeles, that sell magical interpretations. Major art museums, too, are reexamining the power of the paper flower.

Welcome additions to this growing conversation and flower-making craze come in the form of two lavishly illustrated books by contemporary paper artists whose work on the meditative art of flower making instructs and inspires.

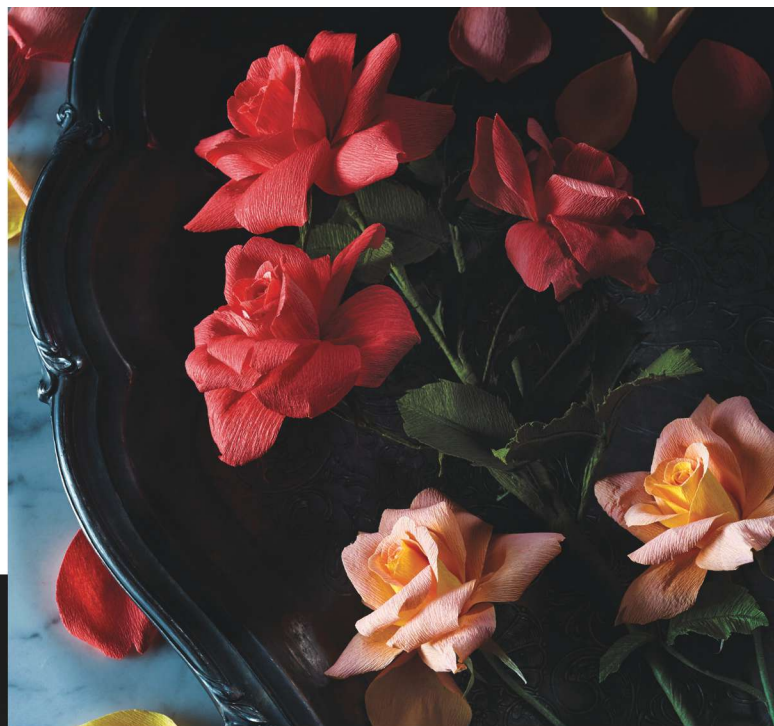
IS IT A FRESH-CUT, BLUSH-TONED David Austin rose or lush layers of meticulously sculpted paper? This is what many people wonder as they view the work of botanical artist and author of *The Fine Art of Paper Flowers*, Tiffanie Turner. While realism is vital to her work (she spends her days studying the forms of natural specimens), Turner never wants to create perfect copies. A little poetic license is important, whether it's a rose handcrafted with pale, ethereal blue crepe paper, an ultra-feathery dandelion, or a peony enlarged to 40 inches in diameter.

"If you strive for a mechanical reproduction of nature, you can drift into territory sometimes known as the uncanny valley, where the work actually becomes off-putting to the viewer," explains Turner.

Although she has been passionate about botany since she was a child growing up in the New Hampshire countryside, Turner didn't plan on a career involving flowers, nor did she imagine that one day her botanical art would be installed at the de Young Museum in San Francisco. A licensed California architect, mother and wife who enjoys fashion as well as flamenco and burlesque performing, Turner first delved into paper flowers simply because she wanted to create something to wear. Paper turned out to be a wonderful medium for self-expression, and during the past three years, she has found herself creating blooming headdresses for brides and overscale works for art galleries, as well as teaching.

"One of the highlights of my life so far was an experience interacting with the public during a spring 2016 residency at the de Young," she says. Throughout the event, museum visitors were encouraged to help Turner make an enormous paper ranunculus, taking it from a state of freshness and vibrancy to lovely decay. "I see beauty in aging," she says. "With flowers especially, there's a beautiful sense of movement as they begin to wane, and I was encouraged that others saw this as well. The universal nature of flowers evoked conversation, whether it was concerns about the environment or memories of a grandmother's garden."

Kevin Chen, manager of the museum's Artist Studio Program, adds, "Over 4,000 visitors got to see Tiffanie working in process. For many, it was their first introduction to the world of paper flowers. And specifically with her work, they were left wonderstruck with the impossible intricacies of her vision and labor."



The Asian Art Museum in San Francisco was also keen to work with Turner, recently requesting five large-scale pieces, including a 52-inch mum, a wilted peony, and a dahlia, in conjunction with the *Flower Power* exhibition to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Summer of Love.

Turner hopes her debut guidebook will encourage others to relax, get their hands on some colorful, stretchy crepe, "and discover how joyful the process can be."

Photos reprinted from The Fine Art of Paper Flowers
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Tiffanie Turner created this bouquet of dahlias, coneflowers, chocolate cosmos, Japanese peonies, carnations, roses, and a magnolia branch. OPPOSITE: (clockwise from top) Turner is inspired by images of 17th-century old master paintings. • Her interpretations of hybrid tea roses and aging 'Coral Charm' peonies after they've faded to white. PREVIOUS SPREAD: (left) Turner typically re-creates full, rounded, multilayered varieties of flowers. (right) Livia Cetti arranges paper flowers just as she would fresh-cut specimens.

“I LOVE THE BEAUTIFUL PAINTED LEAVES on the quirky and cheerful geraniums,” says designer Suzanne Rheinstein, describing the potted paper flowers that sit alongside 19th-century antiques in her Los Angeles store, Hollyhock. The maker of these eye-catching geraniums is Livia Cetti, a floral stylist who achieves natural effects by gently dip-dyeing and hand-painting tissue paper. Her paper specimens, as well as her work with fresh flora, have led to commissions from retailers and fashion houses like Anthropologie, Astier de Villatte, and Dior, not to mention the White House.

However, her first pivotal assignment came from her mother. When Cetti was a child living in the mountains north of Santa Barbara, her mother gave her an opportunity to make floral arrangements for a family friend’s wedding. Cetti was also routinely taken to flea markets and estate sales, where she could hunt for silk, wax, and paper bouquets. Soon, she was occupied

with botanicals of all kinds. After graduating from art school, she became a stylist at *Martha Stewart Weddings*, but it was when she branched out with her own floral-styling venture, The Green Vase, and received a request to make a tropical cake topper that paper flowers became a real passion.

“I collect old millinery flowers and often visualize flowers on a hat as I make my paper works, but I don’t actually create pieces that are meant to be worn,” explains Cetti. She’s perhaps best known for interior installations—think blooming chandeliers replete with lilies and curtains made of marigold chains—as well as arrangements with a sense of history, like her tall, upright Victorian-inspired mantel displays. Naturally these pieces can be perfect for a party, but much of Cetti’s paper flora is coveted for everyday enjoyment. In her own home, which she shares with her husband and two young sons, floral tendrils nestle among collections of baskets, pottery, and textiles.



“Everything I do is inspired by the feeling of fresh flowers. In general, I prefer to keep the gestures natural.” For those who’d like to create their own arrangements (or maybe just a single stem), Cetti offers more advice in *The Exquisite Book of Paper Flower Transformations*. Within the pages, she shows how to manipulate different grades of crepe and tissue paper, subtly adjust petals and leaves, and give blossoms room to breathe. It is her second book, and her most personal, she says, capturing her spirit and colorful aesthetic.

“There is a feeling of freedom you get working with paper that isn’t necessarily there with more intimidating materials,” says Cetti. “The flowers don’t become too precious.”

Far right photo by Kate Mathis from The Exquisite Book of Paper Flower Transformations by Livia Cetti (Abrams, 2017), \$25; all other photos by Addie Juell from The Exquisite Book of Paper Flowers by Livia Cetti (STC Craft, 2014), \$25.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: A veritable garden of Livia Cetti’s sprightly paper stems. • The artist’s take on the “Charm peony” with her signature bleached petals set against a hand-painted background. • Cetti at home in the Bronx. LEFT: In her own home, she prefers neutral backdrops to offset her abundant installations of colorful blooms.



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