



PIECES OF PAPER:

Three Artists Explore the Medium

BY GENEVIEVE NORDMARK



SU BLACKWELL
BACKGROUND: The Baron in the Trees: 2011; reconstructed book in glass-fronted wooden box with light; secondhand book, wire, LEDs; 320 x 280 x 240 mm.
ABOVE: The Wild Swans: 2008; reconstructed book in glass-fronted wooden box with light; secondhand book, wire, LEDs; 320 x 280 x 240 mm.
LEFT: Alice: A Mad Tea Party: 2007; reconstructed book in glass-fronted wooden box with light; secondhand book, wire, LEDs; 320 x 280 x 240 mm.

Throughout its history as a material, paper has played an important role in the spreading of news and ideas. Stories and events are printed in books and newspapers, lands are charted on maps, and memories are recorded as photographs. Some paper artifacts are lovingly preserved while others end up recycled or simply lost to time. There is, however, another potential fate awaiting paper once its intended use is fulfilled—it could unexpectedly be transformed into a work of art.

Instead of recycling, which is reusing material to make more of the same material; up-cycling is the process of transforming materials into a new material or product, often with greater use or value. With imagination and ingenuity, the following English artists are rescuing ephemeral paper objects from the trash or recycling bin, and using the found fiber to create new work. In the hands of Su Blackwell a book gets read one last time before the pages are shaped into sculpture. Jennifer Collier invites viewers to reimagine ordinary objects, which she refashions from paper scraps from the past. The newspaper survives to see a day past its print date in the 3-D work of Pippa Andrews.

Su Blackwell spends twelve-hour days raising paper sculptures from the pages of books in her West London studio. Her studio may be England-based but her finished pieces are animated objects belonging to the world of fairy tales and folklore. "I was an avid reader as a child and totally lost myself in books as an escape. As an adult I'm trying to recapture that." At first glance, her literary landscapes immediately transport the observer to the realm of stories where Alice stands tentatively at the Mad Hatter's table and flower fields spring up with a smellable sweetness.

Working primarily with books printed between the turn of the century and the 1970s, Su starts her sculptural process with reading, then sometimes rereading a story in search of imagery. Favoring this range of publication is less about any affinity for modernist or postmodernist authors than an attraction to the material itself. "In new, more modern books, the paper is very thin. Some of the older books have very thick paper. It's nice to cut, but not so easy to fold or tear. Some paper is so fragile that it crumbles. You have to work in different ways with the quality of the paper."

The process of extracting a scene from a book is slow and intimate. Guided by inspiration from the reading, Su proceeds by cutting, coaxing, building, positioning, gluing, and wiring her forms. Text is chosen intentionally and original illustrations are often incorporated. The resulting dioramas are glimpses back into the vulnerable world of childhood wonder, where curiosity invites and anxiety excites. The philosophy of impermanence is a recurrent theme, simply by virtue of the medium. "I'm always asked how long they will last, and because of the materials I use, I don't know." Often saved from charity shop recycling bins, the books Su manipulates present one last staging of their story, through the imagination and talented hands of their caretaker. To see more of Su's work visit her website at www.sublackwell.co.uk.



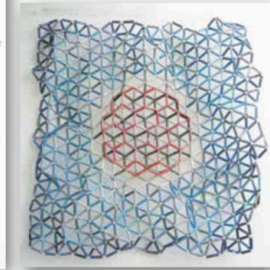
JENNIFER COLLIER
 BACKGROUND: **Typewriter** (detail)
 CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: **Map SLR Camera**: 2012; vintage maps, grey board and machine stitch; 14 x 12 x 8 cm. approx.
Typewriter: 2012; vintage typewriter manuals, grey board and machine stitch; 35 x 30 x 10 cm. approx.
Singer Sewing Machine: 2012; vintage sewing patterns and their instructions, grey board and machine stitch; 44 x 20 x 32 cm. approx.

Living and working a short train ride northwest in Stafford is Jennifer Collier, another English paper artist fond of rummaging through charity shop shelves and flea markets for papery inspiration. Lucky is the vintage map, book, or sewing pattern that gets tucked under arm and taken back to Unit Twelve, the gallery and shared studio space that Jennifer owns and operates. "The papers themselves serve as both the inspiration and the media for my work. I investigate a way in which they can be reused and transformed, giving new life to things that would otherwise go unloved or be thrown away."

Working with paper as if it were fabric, Jennifer both hand and machine stitches with "the narrative of the books and papers suggesting the forms, for example a sewing machine made from dress making patterns, or a camera out of vintage photographs." The stitching along with bonding, waxing, trapping, and using of traditional embroidery techniques reworks the papers into well-known utilitarian objects infused with the stuff of memory. "People tend to attach their own nostalgia to my work by recognizing a place on a map, a book they have read, or an item they have used. I believe that the audience can construct their own meanings and narratives."

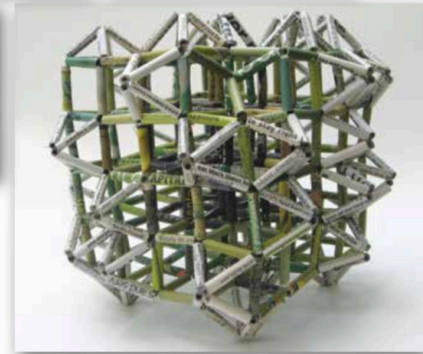
Jennifer has been investigating the re-used and recycled since 1999 when she earned her BA Honors Degree in textiles from Manchester Metropolitan University. One of the forerunners of the up-cycling craft revolution, she's a prolific one-woman show, managing her gallery and workshop schedule while developing and promoting herself and her craft. She rarely treats the papers she uses, instead relying on the paper properties she's become familiar with over years. "Through practice you get a feel for how far you can push it, when it is going to tear, and which papers work best for the job. Don't be afraid to have happy accidents or to spend time playing with materials. This is when you discover something truly unique, something no one else knows how to do." Explore more of Jennifer's paper world at www.jennifercollier.co.uk.

As more people read the news online, fewer copies are issued in print and those print editions rarely last once a reader is finished scanning the headlines. There is one artist in England who rescues old newspapers and manipulates them into 3-D sculptures and paper wall hangings. Pippa Andrews, who divides her time



PIPPA ANDREWS

BACKGROUND: **Standard Square: Black** (detail); 2011; recycled newspaper, nylon fishing line, wire; beading; 350 x 350 x 35 mm.
 CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: **Standard Red Planet**: 2012; newspaper, nylon fishing line; beading; 550 x 550 mm. **Standard Limpets: Green**: 2012; Recycled newspaper; fishing line; beading; 18 x 18 x 18 cm. **Standard Quilt: Tumbling Blocks**: 2012; recycled newspaper, nylon fishing line, wire; beading; 100 x 900 x 50 cm.



between Bath and London, has a background in traditional embroidery and textiles, including exposure to beadwork. "I made a necklace once, a long time ago, with a bead weaving technique, and I thought perhaps I could take it on to something more sculptural. I started experimenting with different-sized tubes, and a twisting technique called Dutch spiral chain that goes around in triangles."

These experiments led to another discovery, the process of making bead-like tubes from newspaper. She went on to make a series using tubes rolled from the pages of the *London Evening Standard*. "I love the colors in the newspaper, the pictures and the adverts. When you isolate them they have a nice chalky quality." Using nylon fishing line and beading techniques like Dutch spiral chain and right angle weave, Pippa connects the paper tubes into geometric shapes and dazzling arrangements that cascade in text and color. "Paper is not messy. You don't have to paint it. It's there for you and you just sort it out."

There is a lot of sorting and planning involved in Pippa's work, especially for the pieces that require complicated color schemes. These designs are planned thoroughly in advance. Rolling the tubes is slow, methodical work, which she does mostly in the evenings while listening to music or visiting with friends. Working in small scale has benefits. "Sometimes my studio is nice and clean and I work there and other times it's so messy that I pick it all up and go somewhere else in the house." Her work is dynamic due to the aging properties of newsprint, with the color changing over time. "I think there's such a diversity of different papers. It's just so varied. Of course this is not what the newspaper is meant for but I love working using it to create something else." Visit www.pippaandrews.com to see more of Pippa's sculptures.

Each of these artists has developed an intimate working knowledge of paper properties through persistent experimentation and practice. We are accustomed to seeing paper in the form of a newspaper, map, or book and we know how to interact with these objects when we encounter them. In the hands of these artists, everyday objects are transformed, engaging the viewer and allowing them to experience the familiar in a new way.

Genevieve Nordmark graduates this May with a master's in paper engineering from SUNY-ESF. She is a hand papermaker and runs the blog *The Fiber Wire*. www.thefiberwire.com



STRENGTH & FRAGILITY: Silvia Turbinder's Paper Sculptures

BY GENEVIEVE NORDMARK

NESTLED IN THE SUBURB OF MARTINEZ, AN HOUR AND A HALF BUS RIDE OUTSIDE OF BUENOS AIRES, is the home and studio of paper artist, Silvia Turbinder. In an earthy and intimate room with classical music playing softly on the radio, a message hangs on the wall. It reads "If you think you can, you might. If you think you can't, you're right." It is an apt philosophy to inspire a woman

who left a successful career in architecture to pursue her creative interests in fibers. "At that time I felt like Wonder Woman: raising kids, teaching, and building my professional career. Till I said, 'That's it. I've had enough of commitments. I'm going to work only in my things, teaching and creating.' It was perfect. Oh! My father! He said, 'You're crazy, how are



OPPOSITE PAGE
LEFT: *Que no nos atrape el morir (May not be caught by death)*, 2008; kozo fibers; handmade paper; 1.70 x 0.35 m. (67 x 14 in.)

TOP RIGHT AND BACKGROUND: *Deconstrucción (Deconstruction)*; 2012; kozo fibers; woven randomly; 2.50 x 1.00 m. (98 x 39 in.)

THIS PAGE
RIGHT: *Marada que un soplo desvanece (Blown with a breath)*; 2013; kozo fibers; weaving of kozo fibers; 2.30 x 0.30 m. (90 x 12 in.)


you going to live?' But it was the best thing I could have done." Almost twenty years later she has built an equally successful career as an internationally exhibited visual artist and teacher to students who come to her from multiple disciplines.

Traditional paper-making methods and materials are a starting point for her work although her process quickly diverges when the fibers inspire her. Traditionally, Eastern paper-making fibers, such as kozo, are cooked in a caustic solution to ready the fibers for sheet formation, but Turbinder's pieces rarely take the form of sheets. "I separate the fibers by hand. For my first piece I was like, 'What did I find?! Wow!' Because it was a mistake. I was cooking and it wasn't a very good [batch]...I started pulling and playing with the fiber." The results are often like *Deconstrucción*, large, three-dimensional pieces that are woven in the air, seemingly fragile, but inherently strong.

Recently *Deconstrucción* was exhibited in Palais de Glace, a museum in the Recoleta neighborhood of Buenos Aires. "I hung a white fabric behind it because the shadows from the piece are amazing." The fabric fell down onto the piece, but even though the threads are "very, very, very thin," it was not damaged. This is the recurrent theme in Turbinder's work, the contradictions involved in being human, primarily the ongoing dance between strength and fragility.

Her work is also about identity and the quality of existence, memories appearing through different layers of cracking skins, and the presence of the void. In *Que no nos atrape el morir*, a kozo paper sheet tapestry is held together with laid fibers, the light illuminating every vulnerable path. The sheets were wetted then tinted with watercolors that were drawn on after drying. "I wet the paper because it's the only way that the color flows. What I like is that you don't have any control over that.





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That's good, for once, to not have any control."

It is common for artists working in paper fibers and book structures to make editions or multiple copies of pieces, but even though the undercurrent of her thematic interest directs Turbiner's body of work, the pieces are unique in composition and approach. "I like the challenge of doing something new. But I won't repeat a work. Doing a work for the second time, exactly the same? Never."

Her recent work, *Fossil*, an altered book, is an example of this. It is reminiscent of a previous series of three altered books but stands alone as its own

composition. "There's always an idea behind the work before I start, always an idea. I have to draw and write it down. There is something inside, there's meaning and substance... If not, I don't want to do it just because it's nice... I need to express myself."

To see more of Silvia Turbiner's work visit her website at www.silviaturbiner.com.ar/

LEFT: *Fossil (Fossil)* (front); 2014; paper book and handmade paper of cotton fibers; altered book; 0.20 x 0.20 m. (8 x 8 in.)

Genevieve Norumark is a recent graduate of SUNY-ESF's MPS program in paper and bioprocessing engineering and author of the blog *The Fiber Wire* www.thefiberwire.com

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