

HAND PAPERMAKING

VOLUME 33, NUMBER 2 • WINTER 2018

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FRONT COVER: Mickalene Thomas, *large detail of You’re Gonna Give Me the Love I Need*, 2010, 24 x 30 inches, collaged handmade paper with silkscreened pigmented paper pulp, pochoir, digital print, and appliqué of cloth and glitter, published by Brodsky Center in an edition of 40. Collaborator: Anne Q. McKeown. Photo: Greg Leshé. Courtesy of the artist and Brodsky Center at PAFA, Philadelphia. BACK COVER: Margaret Mahan Sheppard and Drew Luan Matott, *Unmentionables from Panty Pulping project*, 2013, 14½ x 10¼ inches, pulp printing and relief printing on handmade paper (made of pulped underwear and abaca); eleven sheets in a portfolio sealed with dress hooks and black cord, published by BluSeed Studios, Saranac Lake, NY, in an edition of 8. Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee Libraries. This work was included in the exhibition “Paper/Print: American Hand Papermaking, 1960s to Today;” and the forerunner of *Underpaper* which is sampled in this issue on page 39.

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Hand Papermaking (ISSN 0887-1418) is published twice a year by Hand Papermaking, PO Box 50859, Mendota, MN 55150-0859, USA. Tel 651-447-7143.

Hand Papermaking is indexed by Art Index (since 1998). An index covering Volumes 1 through 7 (1986 through 1992) is available from the publisher for \$5. A keyword search function covering all volumes is accessible on Hand Papermaking's website at <http://www.handpapermaking.ws/search.php>.

Annual subscriptions are \$65 per year in the US; \$70 in Canada; \$95 elsewhere. Two-year subscriptions are \$115 in the US; \$125 in Canada; \$175 elsewhere. Institutional subscriptions are \$85 per year for institutions in the US, and \$100 per year for those outside the US. Payment in US dollars is required. Visa/Mastercard accepted.

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Letter from the Editor

There is no denying that we are presently in the throes of great change. There is an unprecedented, widespread awareness of the insidious effects of patriarchal systems imbedded throughout the culture. History is happening fast around us. For future readers, here's a time-capsule snapshot of events just in the past few weeks: the comedian Bill Cosby was convicted of sexual assault and is now facing ten years in prison; Leslie Moonves stepped down as CBS chairman and CEO after multiple allegations of sexual assault; and we are on the eve of mid-term elections in the US where there has been a surge of female candidates for many national and state seats. Alas, patriarchal dominator culture is still holding on, as demonstrated by the confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh despite Dr. Christine Ford's compelling testimony in which she stated she was 100-percent certain that the nominee sexually assaulted her when they were high school students.

The poet and feminist theorist bell hooks argues that our way out of patriarchal culture (what she terms as "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy") is to embrace feminism, a movement to end sexism and oppression by replacing the dominator model with a partnership model. Feminism brings forward a culture of interbeing, empathy, and interdependency as the healthy organic relationship of all living things. Given the essential elements of collaboration and partnership in hand papermaking, feminism sounds a lot like the way we describe our work and our process. And so, for this issue, we examine the history, the craft, and art made in our medium with a feminist lens.

We start at the very beginning of papermaking—Elizabeth Boyne makes an excellent case that the earliest papermakers were most likely women in their gendered roles as weavers and launderers. Erin Zona speaks with Ann Kalmbach and Tana Kellner about founding Women's Studio Workshop in 1974 as an alternative workspace for women artists. Melissa Hilliard Potter traces the history of the Los Angeles Woman's Building and its impacts with two of its papermaking instructors in the early 1980s, Sukey Hughes and Patricia Reis. Ferris Olin interviews Judith Brodsky, along with Gail Deery and Anne McKeown, about establishing the Brodsky Center in 1986 as a feminist model of democracy offering workspace and support to female artists and artists of color. Alisha Adams profiles the People's Paper Co-op's Women in Reentry program that utilizes papermaking to help formerly incarcerated women process their experiences in the criminal justice system and reclaim their own narrative as they reenter their communities. Neysa Page-Lieberman introduces us to Seeds InService, an ecofeminist, socially engaged seed-saving and papermaking project set up by artists Melissa Hilliard Potter and Maggie Puckett in Chicago. Known for her oil paintings and drawings that examine gender, sexuality, and feminism, Natalie Frank describes her powerful experience with pulp painting. Anne Osherson brings feminist context to a retrospective paper-and-print exhibition co-curated by Susan Gosin and yours truly. Jamye Jamison reviews an important exhibition of Rembrandt's etchings with a focus on paper and a watermark identification project. And two handmade paper samples round out the thematic focus of this issue: kenaf paper, made from fiber grown at the Women's Studio Workshop ArtFarm; and Underpaper, created from pulped undergarments by Margaret Mahan Sheppard and workshop participants in solidarity against sexual and domestic violence.

Hand papermaking is by its very nature a feminist practice, deeply rooted in partnerships—between fiber and fiber, fiber and water—the result being a strong matrix of connections. It is through our work and our process of hand papermaking that we add our contributions to pulp the patriarchy.

Mina Takahashi



The Los Angeles Woman's Building, 1980s: Hand Papermaking as Feminist Pedagogy

MELISSA HILLIARD POTTER, WITH SUKEY
HUGHES AND PATRICIA REIS

Staff of the Woman's Building and the Women's Graphic Center Typesetting, a Woman's Building business which grew out of the Women's Graphic Center housed at the Woman's Building, Los Angeles. Back row, left to right: Cheri Gaulke, Judith Lausten, Susan King, Linda Preuss, Anne Gauldin, Sue Maberry. Front row, left to right: Sue Ann Robinson, Jane Thurmond, Linda Nishio, Terry Wolverton, Laurel Beckman. Photo: J. Lausten, circa 1981. Courtesy of Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles.

In response to oppressively male-dominated higher education, the artist Judy Chicago, graphic designer Sheila de Brettville, and critic Arlene Raven founded the Los Angeles Woman's Building in 1973. The first art school specifically for women, more than 30 women artists and educators from across the country left their institutions to join them to develop a new feminist-centered pedagogy.¹ At the center of their mission were the graphic arts, letterpress, and artist books. These media offered self-publishing opportunities to women whose voices traditionally had been excluded, and the tools to create those narratives free of dependencies on other institutions. Over the next five decades, these same women went on to promote the book and paper arts nationally, establishing degree programs at places such as Mills College, and founding book centers such as Minneapolis Center for Book Arts.²

Though hand papermaking was offered as part of Woman's Building Extension Program, its role and impact remain unrecorded. When I was asked to contribute to this edition of Hand Papermaking, it was immediately clear my only hope to construct this history would be through personal interviews. I was fortunate enough to locate two extraordinary artists and papermakers for this interview: Sukey Hughes and Patricia Reis, both of whom taught in the Extension Program in the early 1980s. As we worked together to record this history (as well as the lives of these two remarkable practitioners), it became clear to me that this is an urgent



Susan King's letterpress workshop. King in the smock with glasses and large earrings. Mitsuye Yamada is printing. Elaine Whitman looks on. Photo by Theresa Chavez, circa 1980. Courtesy of Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles.

task. As many book and paper programs and institutions face closure, we must work quickly to record their intellectual and artistic impact that changed the art world. Though poorly historicized, the Woman's Building graphic-arts agenda sought to distribute a new history, and ultimately define a new canon with women at the center. And while hand papermaking lives at the fringes of this history, it is integral to this mission. As a process-based craft whose revival has been secured by artists like Hughes and Reis, paper represents not only the very surface on which these new narratives depend, but also a medium that challenges the macho heroics of the art world through its "tender, yet strong" nature, as described in this interview. This history is overdue, and through this interview, Sukey Hughes and Patricia Reis contribute to a thoughtful dialogue on the central role of hand papermaking in the feminist revolution.

MELISSA HILLIARD POTTER (MHP): Before I begin the interview, I wanted to let you know that this has been a challenging and exciting assignment, partly because there is literally nothing written about hand papermaking at the Woman's Building except for a brief mention online in Otis College of Art's timeline of the Woman's Building. We are constructing a narrative on a few points: your recollections and work at the Woman's Building; your influence on the book and paper programs and community centers founded by Woman's Building instructors; and also the history of hand papermaking, which remains poorly integrated into mainstream craft and fine-art discourse.

You were both in Los Angeles during the '80s. It was an exciting moment for women's empowerment, but it was also an exciting moment in the history of that city. Can you tell me more about your experiences and what you were exploring at the time? Patricia, do you want to go first?

PATRICIA REIS (PR): I started the MFA program at UCLA in 1978. Before that, I was on the central coast of California, where I met John

Babcock, an amazing papermaker still working today. He was living at the time in Santa Maria, close to where I was living. I saw what he was doing with paper, and I was intrigued. I bought a beater from him! I ordered linters from Twinrocker—they had just started, and were making papers mostly for printmakers. Papermaking as far as I understood was really to prepare a ground for printmaking. I wasn't a printmaker, but oh my god, I loved paper! I liked the fibers, and Twinrocker offered materials to make your own paper.

I lived on Venice Beach. Judy Chicago had her studio in Santa Monica, and was working on *The Dinner Party*. I never volunteered to work in her studio, because I had a lot going on in my MFA program, but there were lots of things happening during that time: women's bookstores, for instance—my friend started Sisterhood bookstore, a landmark. Institutions in general were really conservative, and male dominated, interested in product, and even though Judy Chicago graduated from UCLA, her name was never mentioned (laughs).

I was doing work at that time making body casts with handmade paper. This was before people were doing that a lot. So I was working with my body, and Judy Chicago published her book *Through the Flower* about her experience at UCLA. She was persona non grata, not someone they were proud of. She wasn't a dutiful daughter!

MHP: Did you both see that she was just named one of the most influential people in *Time* magazine's 100 List this year? Things have turned around big time.

Sukey, I want to talk about your work at the Zen Center in LA.

SUKEY HUGHES (SH): I was going back and forth to Japan over a five-year period of living there and trying to figure out how to bring papermaking back. There were all kinds of problems! I was experimenting—in my parents' home, trying to work with elm bark. I was a student at the Zen Center of Los Angeles in 1980–81. In fact, I



Susan King teaching in the Women's Graphic Center studio, 1988. Courtesy of Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles.



Susan King teaching letterpress printing in the Women's Graphic Center studio, 1981. Courtesy of Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles.

was doing an intensive study, which was extreme and fantastic. We were meditating six to eight hours a day, and on retreats, more. The Zen Center asked if I would do a workshop, and later the Woman's Building asked me to teach.

Western and Eastern papermaking are very different. Patricia took the Western path, I took the Eastern. In my early workshops, I was fumbling around. I had to devise ways to make small moulds that had foldable (or flexible) screens. Nothing was available in the States. And I came upon sushi rolling mats! Some of my students were the ones who came up with the best ideas that are still being used: one was familiar with the material Pellon, which could be put on top of the sushi roll to smooth out hills and valleys. Another student of mine early on tried to figure out a mucilage substitute. She was a cook, so she said, "Let's try okra!" It turns out it's related to hollyhock root, which is used in Japan. I taught all up and down California mostly. My students also became teachers, and it tickles me pink to see all these paper classes on Instagram!

MHP: Sukey, your work in Japan was a pioneering revival in the US workshop movement for Japanese papermaking. This is a perfect segue into the next question: I would love to hear how you were invited to the Woman's Building, and why you think they were interested in hand papermaking as a course topic?

SH: I don't remember how it came about; word was spreading about my workshops. I think I was contacted by Susan King, who is a fantastic designer. It was only a weekend workshop, and was a long time ago. I don't remember too many details, but I do remember there were some extremely dedicated young women. Some of them used paper for printmaking... paper was a ground, but they wanted a good ground.

PR: I think Susan King invited me, too! I don't know how we met exactly, but Woman's Building had a lot of events. I taught there for a whole year on and off. The reason it was so important to me is because those were the years I was at UCLA. I can't emphasize enough how different those two places were! Even though I was only 40, I was thought to be a menopausal woman working with my body. I even had a professor threaten to take away my teaching assistantship, which I was living on, because I wouldn't bend to what he wanted me to do for my work! But then the invite for the Woman's Building came, and I was paid for that, so I knew I would be okay.

MHP: From my research on the Extension Program and the Graphic Center, it looked to me like Woman's Building emphasized craft in their new feminist pedagogy. Do you have any more thoughts on "why paper?"

SH: I have a thought: papermaking is a craft. In Japan, it is almost all dominated by women. Some men make wonderful artistic things with paper, and they get a lot of credit, but the craft is non-threatening. If the Woman's Building went about it this way, it was very clever. I don't know if they did it intentionally, but everything was male-dominated, so craft was another approach to art.

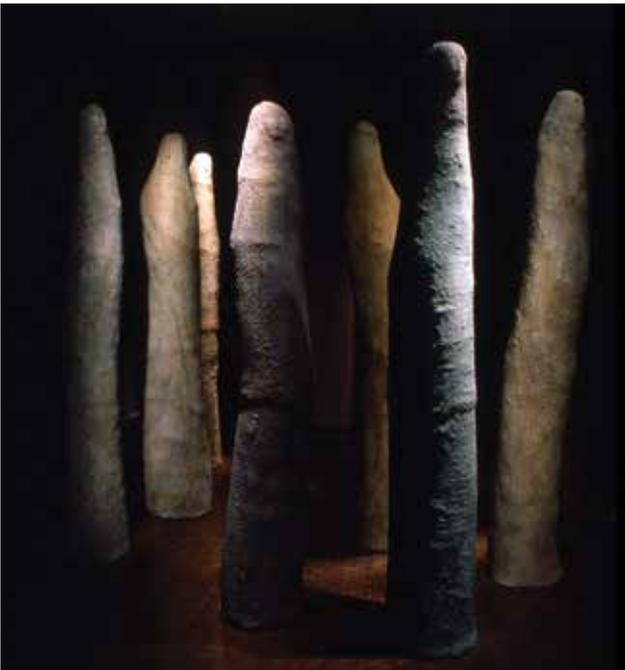
PR: I agree with Sukey. There was also a great renaissance of craft media at that time, in California and in general. Women's traditional craft was big—I'm thinking of Neda Al-Hilali, who made macramé sculpture, and Magdalena Abakanowicz—they were both fiber artists. Paper falls into these technologies as a fiber, which was elevated into an art form, into sculpture. That was a big movement in that direction fueled and energized by women.



Patricia Reis, *Demeter and Persephone*, 1981, four figures, each 20 x 14 x 7 inches, molded handmade paper. Courtesy of the artist.



Patricia Reis, *Grids*, 1980, 18 x 26 inches, handmade paper and dye. Courtesy of the artist.



Patricia Reis, *The Ancient Ones*, 1982, nine free-standing sculptures, each 9 feet tall, wire armature, chicken wire, burlap, and skin of handmade paper and CelluClay. Courtesy of the artist.

SH: Men were less threatened by that. When Patricia mentioned the revival of craft, they were blossoming in Japan! My teacher who was in his seventies knew craftsmen who were National Treasures who revived the folk-art movement from the 1920s in Japan. I think of Martha Longenecker, founder of the Mingei Museum (Mingei means folk art in Japanese), who promoted a lot of the history of crafts in Japan.

PR: I think also there was tension. Is this craft, art? Can it be shown in museums, or is it a feminized art, and lesser than?

MHP: I am fascinated with this idea that there was a parallel internationally between the crafts revival in the US and in Japan with women propelling both movements.

SH: There were famous National Treasure printmakers who would go directly to the papermaker to make paper to their specifications. Paper was essential to the art.

PR: Twinrocker originally started making paper for printmaking, but then they realized there were people whose art was papermaking, so they then supplied us with fiber, to put in the beater along with rose petals and twigs! I ended up making plaster casts of my body, then rubber moulds from which I cast paper. I could get dimensionality.

MHP: Do you think there is a relationship between papermaking and women, or papermaking and women's empowerment? As an artist I have always wondered if there is something about the process that is inherently anti-hierarchical, and attracts women.

PR: When I was making paper at UCLA I also worked in the ceramics studio, which was alongside glass. The atmosphere was very macho. Paper is in some sense fragile. I like that it is light, not like raku clay in my body casts, which was cumbersome! Paper is beautiful, tender, and lends itself to more subtle work. It also has a certain strength—by the time you beat the fibers and they meld together into pulp and dries, it's hard, but still fragile.

SH: I love what Patricia said: paper is tender. When I first saw papermaking, it was on TV in Japan. I was really struck as it combined muscular, hard labor—wading into the river to walk on the fiber, hand beating—that is what I always did—and then the end result was delicate. It was much more artful. The woman's touch, and sense of delicacy could come into shape then. We were talking about fibers being the domain of women historically. Patricia, it sounds like the men you went to school with were deeply threatened. There is a wonderful book called *Knowing Woman: a Feminine Psychology* by the author Irene Claremont, and I never forget she wrote in there, to this effect: Men want women to be creative, because that makes them interesting. But they don't want them to create, because that would be competition.

PR: There definitely was that back in the day! I'm not sure how it is today with the renewed interest in Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, the intense embroideries and those ceramics for plates.

SH: Again, a woman's domain.

MHP: I can say for sure the prejudices in academia against craft and female labor are still very real, and particularly as they relate to collaboration. I love



Sukey Hughes, stripping elm bark in her first attempt at making bast paper in America, circa 1976.



Student making paper at Sukey Hughes' first papermaking workshop in 1980, via Zen Center of Los Angeles, in Idyllwild, California, 1980.



Sukey Hughes (second from right), with husband David Hughes, and Mrs. and Mr. Seikichiro Gotoh, in Fujinomiya, Japan, circa 1970.

what you both said: the combination of the fragile medium of paper that requires intense physical labor. I often joke with my print colleagues that they should spend a day with me in the paper studio to see what hard labor is really like!

SH: When I was making paper in Japan, it was winter and we had to keep the material alive. When I would come to my teacher's house, there would often be a sheet of ice over the vat. I plunged my hands into that vat. His daughter—my age—would not do that! They would bring out a boiling basin of water I would dip my hands into to warm up.

The thought I have is this: I think I have a prejudice towards big institutions and schools. They tend to be intellectually dominated and the working conditions are often sterile. I was brought up in Japan where there was wood everywhere, and plants. And there is something about the male mentality that is unable to get into things that have heart, or are tender. Women are always in danger of being put down for bringing humanity, warmth, and tenderness to what we do, and we get marginalized for it. I think I am more of a feminist than I thought!

MHP: Sukey, I love to hear that!

PR: Paper is alive. There was so much plastic at UCLA. Paper is from a living source.

MHP: What do you think the Woman's Building accomplished?

PR: It was very empowering. The Woman's Building created a sanctuary and refuge, a safe space. You were not going to be dissed or humiliated. Your efforts were honored. And I give credit to Arlene Raven, Sheila de Brettville, and Judy Chicago. They cut the swath and made this possible. To have a space that was safe to explore and share work was invaluable.

SH: I love to hear that; I didn't know the building as well, but I kind of remember this was a time when women were very wounded. I was wounded. At the Zen Center, we were trying so hard to achieve our highest selves. I think of Ruth Bader Ginsburg who quoted nineteenth-century feminist Sarah Grimke: "—I ask no favors for my sex, all I ask of my brothers is they take their feet from off our necks!"³

PR: The Woman's Building, its place in history and what it offered in each of our lives...you never know the context for it until you get some distance. So, thinking of this in the past, as a small piece of my life, I think: how great, how really fortunate, to have had that experience.

MHP: What a beautiful way to end. I want to hear what both of you are doing now.

SH: I am doing a lot of art, all different kinds: figurative, oil painting—I'm on Instagram under @hughessukey! I am doing collage. I still have a stash of papers I've made, and

I'm making jewelry to make money. Also, I am revising a historical novel. I believe I lived the life described which takes place about 1748 in Dutch South Africa. There were as many slaves as European whites. It's about a nursemaid who falls in love with a black slave. He is involved in the abolition movement. There is some violence in the end. I find as I revise that book, I have a lot of feminist thoughts. The nursemaid was a slave, too.

PR: I finished another revision of my novel. It's a fictional story of my ancestors who ran a farm in Iowa. After the Woman's Building and UCLA, I spent my divorce settlement on my education and went to Pacifica Graduate Institute so I could make money. Then I moved to Maine, and work now as a psychotherapist. All the time I was at UCLA writing was such a huge call for me. I didn't know what I had to say, I didn't know where my voice was—that usual thing women struggle with. Writing has been my main thing now. I have made handmade-paper books, my art is not encumbered with money, never was!

SH: Your memoir *Motherlines* is stunning!

MHP: Sukey, you may have seen in an email Patricia did the illustrations for UCLA anthropologist Marija Gimbutas's book, *The Language of the Goddess*. That book has been on my shelf since age eighteen, and I used to make paper works about the goddess from that book!

SH: I have also done an artist book on the goddess using my linocut prints! It is in a box in my studio somewhere, I did show it in Durango. It's old, I have to make another one! It's interesting we've all made goddess books.

MHP: So many connections. I thank you both for being a part of this important history project, and for your dedication to feminist education through papermaking.

NOTES

1. Woman's Building, directed by Susan Mogul (Los Angeles: Otis College of Art and Design, 2010), video commissioned for the exhibition, "Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building (1973–1991)," October 1–December 3, 2011, Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jx33VQ2mWo> (accessed on July 11, 2018).
2. Kathleen Walkup, "Books in a New Language," in *Doin' it in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building: A Guide to the Exhibition*, ed. Meg Linton, Sue Maberry, and Elizabeth Pulsinelli (Los Angeles: Otis College of Art and Design, 2012), 295–6.
3. Larry Ceplair, ed., *The Public Years of Sarah and Angelina Grimké: Selected Writings, 1835–1839* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 208.



Sukey Hughes, *Goddesses, Book One*, 2013, 4¾ x 7 x 36 inches open, artist book: handmade and mouldmade papers with linocuts, published by the artist in an edition of 20.



Patricia Reis, illustration of terracotta figurine, Northwest Bulgaria, 5000–4,500 BCE. From Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (Harper and Row, 1989).