

# HAND PAPERMAKING

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## Letter from the Editor

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There is a rhythm and prescribed set of movements to the practice of hand papermaking that are often likened to Zen meditation or tea ceremony. What is it about these ritualistic aspects that we appreciate? It could be that we value an activity that obliges us to slow down and pay attention to nuance, causes us to clear the mind of endless distractions, gives us a direct and copacetic connection to nature, offers grace and flow, and perhaps keeps us willing and able to kneel in front of a trough of biting cold, running spring water to pick small bits of debris out of cooked kozo all day long!

For this issue, our authors examine the role and significance of ritual in hand papermaking and by extension the cultural uses of handmade paper. Dorothy Field reflects on the mulberry plant and the ways in which cultures throughout the world have employed it for spiritual purposes. Paul Denhoed describes the Echizen Washi Deity and Paper Festival in Japan, celebrated annually since the eighth century CE. Jane Farmer ponders the connections between paper and spirit and shares her own personal paper rituals. Her essay is accompanied by a paper sample, recently named a Chinese Intangible Cultural Property, made by Tibetan papermaker Gwakgo-la. Gordon Sisler tells us about his family ritual linking bread and paper, Sukey Hughes advocates a mindful approach to the creative process, and Amanda Degener offers a moving tribute to water, her mentor at the vat. In interviews with a number of today's papermakers and paper artists, Kendra Greene discovers their reluctance to name their practice "ritual" but reports on how ritual plays a distinct role in their endeavors. Paul Wong outlines his approach to his work in which he incorporates Chinese spirit money and Tatiana Ginsberg conveys the rituals of a long-distance collaborative art project with Kate Carr and Lee Emma Running.

Also in this issue Mark Durant introduces the work of James Castle, a remarkable artist whose palette included colored paper and cardboard chewed to a pulp and applied to his drawings. In addition *Hand Papermaking* celebrates Twinrocker on their fortieth anniversary with a profile by Nicholas Basbanes, accompanied by "twin" paper samples produced by Twinrocker. And Gary Frost reviews Cathy Baker's book *From the Hand to the Machine*, and Anne McKeown gives us her take on Mary Hark's exhibition at the International Paper Museum in Brooklyn, New York.

In closing *Hand Papermaking* would like to acknowledge our Underwriter contributors whose support makes possible the inclusion of handmade paper samples in each publication. They are Susan Mackin Dolan, Michael Durgin, Peter Newland & Robyn Johnson, Gordon & Roswitha Smale, Nancy & Mark Tomasko, Beck Whitehead, and Pamela & Gary Wood. Handling the handmade paper specimens is a ritual element of "reading" *Hand Papermaking*, bringing us in direct contact with the process, materials, and practitioners we respect and admire.

*Mina Takahashi*



*The author forming sheets at Cave Paper. Photo: Aimee Cherry, 2011.*

## *Water as Mentor*

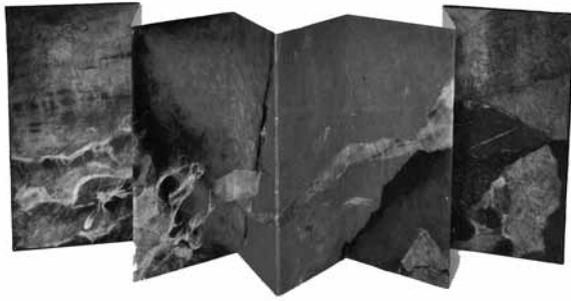
AMANDA DEGENER

I have always played with water. As a small child I fooled around with it as it traveled down the street gutter after or during a rain. I would put little structures up so the path of the water would change direction. I took every opportunity to wade into a rock-filled creek and listen to the sound of the water and the rocks. I concentrated until I could hear the repeating pattern, like a verse in a song. When I shifted a rock, a new verse would begin. I paid close attention until I learned the new verse, then shifted another rock for the next verse. I thought this game was about altering the sound, but maybe it was more about listening.

In my adult life water continues to be my mentor. It is yielding but strong, helping me to listen and accept the flow of life. Instead of setting out to accomplish, water simply lets go and feels its way forward. Water is modest, it gives life to everything but does not strive.

Regarding my relationships with people water shows me that it is okay to have our twists and turns, sometimes surging, but ideally gentle and overlapping. Water is refreshing, nurturing, cleansing, and dangerous, cold, salty. It can be sneaky, destructive, and musical. Sometimes it is blue, white, green, and clear all on the same day. Water shows me the power of impatience. It can destroy like the tsunami in Japan bringing hunger, homelessness, and death. It creates space for itself, carving the land into something as majestic as the Grand Canyon. Water can build; in a cave it drips day after day transforming lime deposits into majestic stalactites.

My business partner Bridget O'Malley and I often get complimented for the line of Cave Paper we have invented, but it seems more about noticing than conceiving. Water has been willing to carry dye and leave it "bleeding" in the most amazing patterns. We learn how to repeat what is often an unexpected discovery.



Richard Flavin, *Untitled*, 9 x 18 inches (open), collage. Photo: Aimee Cherry.

When making sheets we spend half our time getting the water into the fiber and the second half getting the water out of the paper. What does water think? If water had a human brain how would it voice its role in hand papermaking?

*We, fiber and water, bond on a molecular level to become pulp. After the papermaker pulls the mould and deckle through the pulp, lifts it up, and shakes it, some of me drips back into the vat, and the fibers interlock and settle onto the screen. The papermaker couches the wet and fragile paper onto a dampened wool blanket. I am sloshing in the vat, as the papermaker repeatedly dips the mould, sheet after sheet, in a rhythmic flow.*

*The papermaker presses stacks of paper, taking me, water, out of the process. As the paper becomes condensed, the more I go away and the fibers pull together. Sunshine or dry blotters take out more of me. I am no longer needed so my voice fades and the papermaker's returns....*

Everything I bring to the vat on a given day is carried by the water and comes through in the work. When I am standing at the vat, am I present with the water as my music, or am I worrying about the past or the future? I am part of a watery flow. The finished sheet of handmade paper communicates this synergy.

Setsuko Gion, an intern at Cave Paper in the Summer of 2010, pulp painted with flax fiber and then did *suminagashi* over these sheets. I think this traditional Japanese technique is a glorious example of flowing with water. The technique of *suminagashi* is to alternate drops of *sumi* ink and then surfactant (namely Photo-Flo, available at photographic supply stores) on the surface of the water. The movement of air over the water spontaneously alters the linear and circular shapes in a unique pattern. When Setsuko lays an absorbent sheet of paper on the water's surface, she freezes in time what a moment ago was kinetic flowing ink. Don Guyot writes that you learn "how to arrange things so that *suminagashi* occurs."<sup>1</sup> I believe it is also about a quietness from within meeting what is made. The finished sheet shows an outer aspect of an impossible-to-articulate inner knowledge. The circular rings become a metaphor for water's cyclical progression. The solidness of snow or ice thaws into the liquid of brooks, lakes, and rivers. This same



Amanda Degener and James Kleiner, sculpture made for Art-A-Whirl, May 2011, featuring an annual art show and free hand papermaking at the Grain Belt Brewery in Northeast Minneapolis, Minnesota, 15 x 10 feet. Photo: James Kleiner.

water absorbs into the earth and eventually steams into the air to form clouds that will let go of rain, and the cycle begins again.

I encourage you to enjoy these words we use when we talk about water: waves, snow, irrigation, sweat, puddles, tears, ice, seas, lakes, rain, river, saliva, stream, flood, gush, run, fluid, wet, soak, rippling, float, and absorption. But more importantly than the words is to learn directly from this living material of life.

#### NOTES

1. Don Guyot, *Suminagashi: An Introduction to Japanese Marbling* (Seattle: Brass Gallery Press, 1988).