

A Plethora of Paper!  
**A review of “Over the Edge: Paperworks Unbound”**  
At the WAH Center  
October 24, 2014 – January 4, 2015  
By James Baldwin Cohen, January 2, 2015

Paper! Manifold and multiform! I remember as a child being given paper to fold up and make cuts in it so when it opened it as a snowflake. And paper down through the centuries has snowed upon mankind its abundance bring us knowledge in books and decoration as art.

Today, artists try to expand the possibilities of paper. A few years ago I saw in another spectacular show at the WAH Center curated by Yuko Nii the concept of *Book Art* re-envisioned, id est, the concept of books bridging the original meaning of bound literature into art both conceptual and decorative.

The current show *Over the Edge: Paper Unbound* again shows us the expansive definition of paper art. The title suggests, “paperworks unbound,” an extension and beyond what we normally think of or know of as “paper.” Yuko Nii herein has selected from an abundance of submissions of over 350 works, which range from traditional two dimensional works such as drawings, prints, watercolors, and paintings to paper remade into three dimensional works such as statues, trees, plants, birds, bowls, boxes, dresses, book art, abstract forms, etc. etc.

Yuko says, “ I was so overwhelmed with entries of high quality from around the country and even from abroad, that I decided to have the show in two parts.” It is indeed a survey of how creative artists are using paper from traditional ways to extreme invention. Artists here redefine paper from being a cheap, disposable commodity and reinvest usage in infinite creative possibilities achieved through drawing, painting, printing, cutting, punching, carving, twisting, crushing, wrinkling, knitting, weaving, folding, sculpting, re-shaping old books and assembling art that highlights the universality of paper.

What impressed me most was not only the wide scope and variations of high quality paper works, but also how the curator Yuko Nii creatively installed these 180 works in the Part 1 show and 135 pieces in the Part 2 show such that one does not feel that the exhibits are overbooked, overcrowded and overwhelmingly congested. She installed the art with sensitivity and intelligence knowing that the total presentation of the works in the gallery is like composing a great painting. Since she is also an amazing painter, as seen in the recent documentary video about her by Petar Talijancic, she focused attention in her curatorial task here paying attention to every detail, binding all surfaces together as a total unit. Thus her special artistic talent and intuitive judgment as well as her critical “know how,” precisely, her trained and experienced eye and mental vision, have enabled her to produce in *Paperworks Unbound* one of the most engaging and interesting shows yet.

And I sensed something special about this show: As the material, paper itself, is, according to Yuko, “humble and gentle,” she did not want the show to be “pretentious

and superficial” as some shows of this scope might have become from overreach. Entering the galley, one immediately feels “welcomed” as with a warm greeting delivered with special grace. The openness of the gallery allows one to leisurely stroll through the exhibit without becoming exhausted and in the end one feels quite satisfied. The entire show is a presentation of “sincere,” “respectful,” and “well thought out” artists’ sensitivity which penetrate in each work.

While slowly moving through the gallery, stopping to see some works more closely, I examined many to find out how each artist created his or her piece. But the viewer cannot find the answer easily as the secret of the artist’s invention is hidden behind the surface. That is the pleasure of looking deeply into the works, one is delighted and finds mysteries to explore. . The viewers are really engaging in a dialogue with the art and therefore with the artists’ minds. For me it was a fascinating journey through the show.

I asked Yuko how she curated the show. While giving me her answer, she was quite intent and serious. Then she would display occasional humor or wit adding a bit of lightheartedness to her story, which made me even laugh and feel more relaxed. Listening to her story was, to my mind, like listening to good music.

Her answer as to how she curated was: “Because I myself am an artist, a painter, whose job it is to visualize what I want to convey, I envision something in my head, and my artistic judgment and critical mind helps to organize and compose the whole picture and somehow direct which way to go, and then I let myself get involved in the work rather openly and freely, and before I know it, some kind of guiding power, maybe some call it “intuition” takes over in most of the creative process. The way I create a work of art is the same way that I organize and curate the show. I organize and compose the entire gallery with many artworks the same way I work on my painting. The entire canvas has to work as a total unit. In any shows I curate, the art whether placed on walls, in windows or on the pedestals and tables or even on the floor have to work harmoniously, poetically and cohesively as a whole picture.”

I sincerely respect Yuko Nii as being one of the most outstanding curators I have come across in the recent years. Then to take the excursion through the body of works reveals intellectual judgment and vision, which powers have enabled her to create such an enormous exhibition as this. It proves that the quality of the gallery and the arrangement of the art are both as important as choosing the right works.

To educate and inspire some others including the artists in the show, Yuko included some outstanding artists’ works from the shows she curated in the past and some were in her Yuko Nii Foundation’s permanent collection She also went to a highly regarded gallery, Klein Sun Gallery in Chelsea, to loan her some excellent works. These Special Guest Artists were Beatrice Coron, Doug Beube, Li Hongbo, and Wang Lei.

Yuko also made the show more exciting for artists by giving prizes selected by an outstanding curator at a major institution, Claire Gilman of The Drawing Center in Soho. So, Yuko is an excellent educator who knows how to mix the works of professional mature artists and emerging and mid career artist to great effect. That is the very mission Yuko Nii conceived in creating the WAH Center and is recorded and archived at the WAH Center.

The Part 1 show was quite exciting and the Part 2 show that opened early December proffered more surprises and delights. I now see why Yuko Nii had to accept so many artists: they are a survey of the genre and a major statement. What Yuko Nii regrets is that she did not produce a catalog before the show, but she said she could produce the catalogue even later for the sake of an historical record of how today's artists can utilize a simple material like paper in such creative and imaginative ways to express their artistic vision. She said to me, "Yes, this show demonstrates that there is no limit to human creativity," which she said while speaking before the crowd at the opening reception. She had the same feeling about the book art show. She may correct this omission by producing both shows again in future years, possibly pared down to 100 artists in each. With that and with this high profile presentation they are "bound" to be a major statement on the current art scene.

I could not mention in this review any individual artist and examine their work as a critic. That would have been unfair to the many others whose work might be just as outstanding. That is why critics almost never review group shows. However, let me say that I salute "Over the Edge: Paperworks Unbound" and say "Well done!" to both artist and curator.

### **In part 1 the prize winners were juried by Claire Gilman:**

- 1) The 2 Best Works, "Juror's Choice Award":
  - Sylvia Schwartz - "Touch"
  - Dale Williams - "Dire"
  
- 2) The 8 Most Outstanding Works, "Special Merit" Award":
  - Tom Hooper - "Garden"
  - Kristen Letts Kovak - "Permutations"
  - Morgan O'Hara - "Tsunami 4"
  - Sara Owens - "Continuance"
  - Chris Perry - "105 Ripples: bubble"
  - Robert Saywitz - "Shipwrecks"
  - Katherine Toukhy - "What Doesn't Kill You Makes You"
  - Kumi Yamashita - "Unfolding Cosmos"

### **In part 2 prize winners were selected by Curator Yuko Nii**

- 1) 2 "Purchase Award":
  - Blake Conroy - "Sunflower, 2013"
  - Yun-Woo Choi - "0007154-BBP, 2014"
  
- 2) 8 "Curator's Choice Award":
  - Meg Bloom - "Go In and Out The Window"
  - Eloa Jane- Pereira - "Bridge to Paradise"
  - Ana Mavromatis - "Night Rhythms"
  - Nancy Raen-Mandez - "Trickle Down"
  - Kyu Seok Oh - "Reptition I & II"
  - Jon Whilfill - "USA Yesterday"
  - Marcia Widenor - "Fiesta, 2011"
  - Angie Zielinski - "Poof! 2010"