

**Speaking With Materials:
The Expressive Potential of Pulp**

Karen Hardy
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Thesis Committee

Eve Ingalls

Hedi Kyle

Winifred Lutz

Susan Viguers

Thesis Faculty

Peter Kruty

Martha McDonald

Susan Viguers, MFA Book Arts/Printmaking Program Director

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ABSTRACT

My studio thesis is an exploration of the properties and expressive potential of handmade paper in a variety of two- and three-dimensional forms. The formal and conceptual motivations behind my investigation of this material are focused on its translucency and tension, and the organic and corporeal associations that it carries. This paper discusses the experimentation, discovery, and research that have served to clarify and refine my artistic practice as one based on the primacy of materials. It traces how the content in my work, and my own reading of the work, have evolved from a literal to an intuitive approach. I also consider how this body of work connects with Post-Minimalist practices of artists working during the past and today, and how my approach represents a subversion of the traditional status of papermaking in the craft milieu. My artist statement, curriculum vitae, and supplemental images of my work are included.

INTRODUCTION

I am motivated by the investigation of materials. My MFA thesis exhibition developed as an exploration of the properties of handmade paper, focused on generating content through direct experimentation with the expressive potential of the material. Evidence of the hand, the action of natural forces, and my affinity for organic forms and processes are essential elements in this body of work.

In this thesis I consider the experiences in graduate school that helped me cultivate a sensitivity to materials and their connotations, and detail my reasons for focusing on one material in particular: translucent paper made from high-shrinkage pulp. My interest in papermaking is multifaceted, relating to technical, formal, and conceptual aspects of the medium, and my implementation of this traditional craft differs from standard techniques in significant and innovative ways. Throughout my analysis of process, material, and content, I highlight my connections with other artists to contextualize my work in the lineage of Post-Minimalist art and its present-day descendants.

I. Process: Investigation of Materials

My work begins with curiosity rather than a concept. I am driven to test and manipulate materials by a desire to find out what will happen, and a hope that something interesting will happen. My inner dialogue as I work consists of endless versions of questions beginning “What if...”, yielding a sketchbook of to-do lists that include cutting, melting, joining, dyeing, pressing, molding, rusting, and the like. Not knowing what will happen keeps the creative process exciting – the experimentation could easily be an end in itself – but I am also searching, probing the material to reveal its essential, intriguing qualities.

This creative practice is new for me. It represents a shift in my way of working that occurred during my time in graduate school, discovered through key studio and

course experiences, and influenced by research on other artists' practices. My own awareness of my preferred process evolved gradually; it was only in my final semester, for my thesis work, that it was consciously, deliberately employed. In this section I describe the development of my working process and consider its relationship to those of contemporary artists working in similar ways.

Discovery of the Primacy of Materials

As an MFA student I came to appreciate the investigation of materials as an end in itself, and found this pursuit to be more rewarding than my former creative process. Prior to enrolling in an introductory fibers course in my second year of graduate school, I was virtually unaware of a materials-based approach as a valid, considered method used by contemporary artists. In fact, this practice was neither acknowledged nor supported in most of my previous studio experiences, where the primary focus was conceptual development and mastery of specific skills. By contrast, in the fibers class we were given materials to simply experiment with, for hours at a time, with no agenda other than to find out what they could do. In some sessions we were taught a basic fiber technique, such as knotting or coiling, which we were then encouraged to apply to any material of our choosing, fiber-based or not.

The first major project in which I employed this new way of working was *Colony*, a three by three foot sculptural piece composed of used bicycle inner tubes [Figure 1]. I chose this material spontaneously: I had many at my disposal (from getting flats), and suspected that something interesting could be done with them. I spent several days cutting, gluing, piercing, stretching, and melting the tubes before I got any exciting results. Eventually I discovered that I could manipulate cross sections of the tubes into different shapes that could be held en masse by pinching them into spaces cut into hardware cloth.



Figure 1 Karen Hardy, *Colony*, 2012; used bicycle inner tubes, hardware cloth; 3' x 3' x 4"; detail

The overall effect of combining tubes of varying diameters and lengths in this manner suggested the growth pattern of a sessile aquatic life form or a fungal colony spreading across a surface. It was satisfying to recognize these qualities after investing many hours in an experimental process; I enjoyed not knowing what the piece would be until it was done, that it developed organically as a direct response to the material.

Validation and Inspiration from Contemporary Artists

Based on recommendations from instructors and visiting critics, I began researching artists who focus on the primacy of materials. Discovering the work of Tara Donovan and Ranjani Shettar served to contextualize my own work and inspired me to move forward in this new direction.

Tara Donovan is a contemporary American artist who works with mass-produced items and manufactured materials in what she calls “site responsive”

installations. Her process is a conversation with a material, in which she essentially asks it what it wants to be (Brewer). In her 2003 work, *Haze*, nearly two million stacked clear plastic drinking straws become a mysteriously undulating surface reaching to thirteen feet high on a gallery wall. In another untitled work, a suspended mass of Styrofoam cups, lit from behind by a skylight, form a bulbous, luminescent honeycomb [Figure 2].

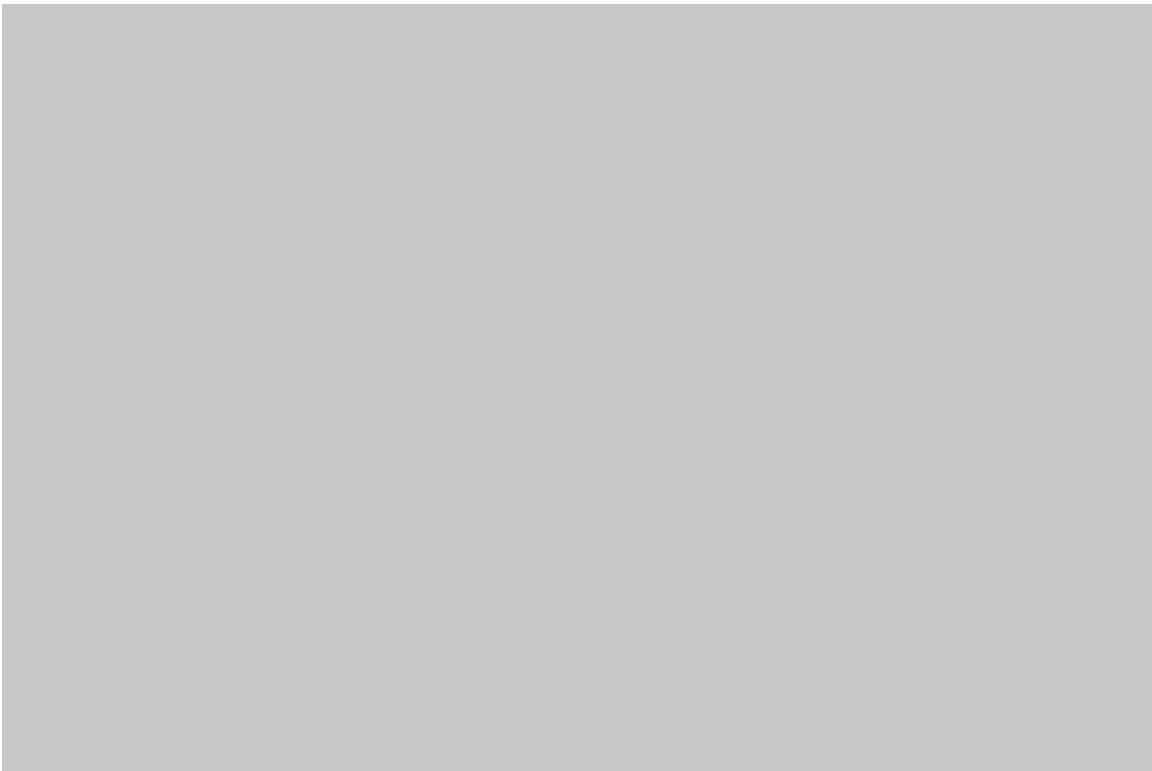


Figure 2 Tara Donovan, *Untitled*, 2003; Styrofoam cups, hot glue; dimensions variable

Reviews of Donovan's installations exalt her skill in creating natural forms with unexpected, banal materials; and her ability to conjure the suggestion of organic growth from lifeless everyday objects (Kino, Merjian, Solway). I am similarly motivated by a desire to discover the inherent properties of materials, especially those that reveal biomorphic characteristics, and I often pursue this through the use of repetition, accumulation, and scale as Donovan does. While the materials I choose are typically quite different than Donovan's, her interest in translucent materials and their

engagement with light (Hudson 204) are important preoccupations of my own.

What intrigues me about Donovan's work is not only her ability to uncover surprising qualities in mundane materials, or our shared affinity for natural forms, but the process by which she arrives at her solution. Donovan's conversation with materials takes the form of a series of experiments; she notes that her approach is "clinical, similar to a scientist who allows research and findings to build into a hypothetical proposal" (McCoy). My own process involves testing dozens of techniques for every one that is worth pursuing, a practice that I have often felt was simply indecisive or inefficient. In discovering Donovan's work, I felt a certain amount of validation for my methodical, exhaustive approach to investigating a material.

While I connect with Tara Donovan's creative methods and inspiration, my work differs from hers in significant ways. Donovan's conversation with a material usually results in a single installation, after which she moves on to investigate a new material or item. I prefer to engage in multiple conversations with a material, creating a series of works in an ongoing dialogue. Additionally, the raw materials I use are not typically pre-fabricated objects or industrial materials, but organic and craft materials. My thesis work is the result of extensive experimentation with pulp made from plant fibers, a medium associated with a long tradition in hand papermaking, one that I am drawn to because the processing and transformation of a material by hand is an essential step for me.

The evolution of ideas using a single material is exemplified in a series of work by Ranjani Shettar, a contemporary Indian artist. As with Donovan, a shared interest in referencing biological processes and a keen awareness of the interplay of light was my initial connection with Shettar's work. Shettar uses industrial materials such as silicone rubber, stainless steel, and automotive paint in some of her work, but she also frequently uses the materials of traditional Indian crafts, like tamarind paste and muslin. Her piece, *Just a Bit More* [Figure 3], is a vast suspended network of tea-dyed



Figure 3 Ranjani Shettar, *Just a Bit More*, 2005-06; hand-molded beeswax, pigments, and thread dyed in tea; 36' x 24' x 12'

thread and hand-molded beeswax pellets that calls to mind constellations, cobwebs, and molecular structure. As a student studying sculpture, she had used wax often in the creation of bronze castings, but was captivated by the qualities of the material in itself (Shettar, "on *Just a Bit More*"). Her fascination ultimately resulted in five works: *Thillana* (2004), *Vasanta* (2004), *Hoomalae* (2005), *Just a Bit More* (2005-06), and *Interplay* (2011). In an interview for *Black and White*, she describes this series as a progression in which each iteration built on the discoveries of the previous, a concept that has been important in my explorations with handmade paper.

My thesis exhibition presents a variety of forms created with a single material. The thirteen pieces in this body of work are composed entirely or primarily of pulp made from the fiber of the abaca plant (*Musa textilis*, a relative of the banana plant, native to the Philippines), prepared and manipulated in different ways to create sculpture, installation, artist books, and two-dimensional work. Executing several

experiments in a variety of forms allows me to fully exploit the potential of the medium; working simultaneously on multiple projects with a single material encourages each piece to inform the others.

Regarding her process, Shettar says, “I am constantly observing materials around me and looking at possibilities...Every material has uses and associations that are particular to each one of them and so they bring in their own meaning into works” (*Black and White*). This intuitive understanding of how materials convey meaning is something I aspire to in my own work, and is discussed in depth in section III. Beyond her sensitivity to materials, Alex Baker points to her ability to encourage viewer engagement with her sculptures as another central element in Shettar’s work (4). In the arrangement and installation of her pieces, her awareness of the interplay of light and shadow, of opacity and translucency, the viewer is invited to create and influence their encounter based on their own movement around the work (Baker 7, 15). I am similarly conscious of the role of light and perspective in how I construct and display my pieces.

Respire, a Dialogue with Material, Light, and Space

Certain works in my thesis exhibition respond to the peculiarities of the gallery space I selected. For my installation, *Respire* [Figure 4], I recognized that the curvature of the gallery wall and its proximity to a large west-facing window offered significant opportunities for the interaction of light with translucent paper. In this piece, I capitalized on the source of natural light by creating three-dimensional forms from multiple single sheets of paper situated perpendicular to the surface of the wall. This position maximizes the effect of light filtering through the layers to generate a visual undulation that mimics the curvature of the overall space. The pulp was pigmented in a gradient to accentuate the importance of the light source: the forms furthest from the window are virtually white, while those close to the window have a more vivid flesh-like color. Additionally, the forms are largest and most lush in appearance at the point in



Figure 4 Karen Hardy, *Respire*, 2013; abaca handmade paper; nine units, dimensions variable

the curve corresponding to the center of the window.

My ideas for the curved gallery wall went through many permutations before the installation was conceived in its final form. I tested different colors, shapes and sizes, various methods of forming the paper and attaching it to the wall, and combinations with other sculptural elements. My primary motivation in these experiments was discovering the best way to reveal the intriguing properties of the material in this particular gallery space. During the process, I responded to the material itself rather than forcing the material to conform to a pre-determined vision. For example, accidental bubbles that occurred in some test sheets contributed to the corporeal quality of the paper, and I facilitated this further by shaking my container of pulp to introduce air

bubbles before forming a sheet. In one of my trials, the paper warped as it dried, and I thereafter encouraged this unplanned element because it served to animate the shapes I created [Figure 5].



Figure 5 Karen Hardy, *Respire*, 2013; abaca handmade paper; detail

Respire references various life forms without representing any that actually exist; the shape of the sculptures suggests marine organisms, lichen, or the gills of fungal fruiting bodies, while their color and translucency evokes living animal tissue. The forms appear to be naturally growing from the wall, integrated as part of a single living system, a direct result of allowing the material to reveal its essential properties through open-ended experimentation.

II. Material: Handmade Paper

Though I prefer to allow materials to guide the content of my work, the materials I use are not chosen at random. My selection of materials is based on my assessment of their sensory and expressive potential – often determined on an intuitive or unconscious level. An experience with a material, either in everyday life or in the studio, may pique my interest and inspire me to capture its essence in my work. In this case, I begin with an intriguing characteristic of a material and determine how best to exploit that characteristic.

My investigations with handmade paper began in this way; an initial captivation with translucency led to the discovery of additional exciting attributes: variability, unpredictability, immediacy, adaptability, interactivity, and tension, which are described in this section. Here I analyze the technical, formal, and conceptual aspects of the material that led me to designate it as the focus of my thesis work. The ways in which my implementation of papermaking differs from standard techniques are also considered to contextualize my practice. First, a brief description of the materials and methods of hand papermaking will be useful to inform what follows.

Hand Papermaking Technique

The historic development of papermaking includes regional variation in the plant fibers, tools, and techniques used. I focus here on what is generally termed “Western papermaking” and two plant fibers in particular: abaca and flax. To make paper from these fibers in their raw state requires processing to isolate the cellulose and separate it into individual filaments. This includes cleaning, cooking and maceration. Paper “pulp” is the suspension of this processed material in water; sheets are formed by dipping a sieve-like screen into a vat of pulp and allowing the water to drain. As water is removed from the fibers, through draining and then evaporation, the individual filaments interlace and bind together.

Variability, Unpredictability, and Immediacy

Although a basic description paints the process as relatively straight-forward, there is tremendous potential for variation in papermaking based on factors such as beating time, the ratio of water to fiber, the type and mixture of fibers, drying technique, and even ambient environmental conditions (Heibert 9). Alteration of these variables yields vastly different results in the color, opacity, texture, strength, and form of the paper (Heller 17, Lutz 16). This variability is an ideal characteristic given my way of working, and accounts for a large part of my investigation of the medium. For instance, I am able to vary the length of time that fiber is beaten and the degree of maceration that occurs using a Hollander beater to prepare my pulp. Experimentation and observation led me to extend the beating time well beyond the typical range in order to achieve desired results in my paper: the translucency and shrinkage that form a conceptual thread in my thesis work.

While some variables can be controlled and tested, a certain amount of the papermaking process is left to forces beyond control. There is always a degree of unpredictability as paper pulp transitions from wet to dry, when chemical reactions are occurring on a molecular level. Fibers connect through hydrogen bonding, closing molecular chains that were opened in the beating process. Though the effects of various drying methods (e.g., applying pressure, casting onto an armature, using a vacuum table) have been researched and established, there remains an inherent element of chance (McDonald 70, Robbert 18).

Much of my investigation with paper pulp involves setting up certain conditions and waiting to see what happens when the water evaporates from the fiber. Changes of form and color that occur when I am not even in the studio lend the work vitality. Such unplanned elements are often the most interesting to me; reacting to them leads me in new directions as a piece develops.

This interest in chance and the generative potential of materials themselves

links my work to that of the Process artists of the 1960s-70s. These artists emphasized process over product, and introduced process *as* product (S. Guggenheim Found.). Their work demonstrated the autonomy of non-traditional materials – much as the wrinkles, puckers, and ragged edges in my pieces announce the process by which they were formed. In my two-dimensional work, *Seep* [Figure 6], ridges radiating from the center serve to move the eye around the sheet, activating the edges and creating a dialogue with the imagery embedded in the pulp. These wrinkles were formed unintentionally in previous pieces during the drying process; I subsequently encouraged this subtle three-dimensionality in order to explore the opportunities it created.

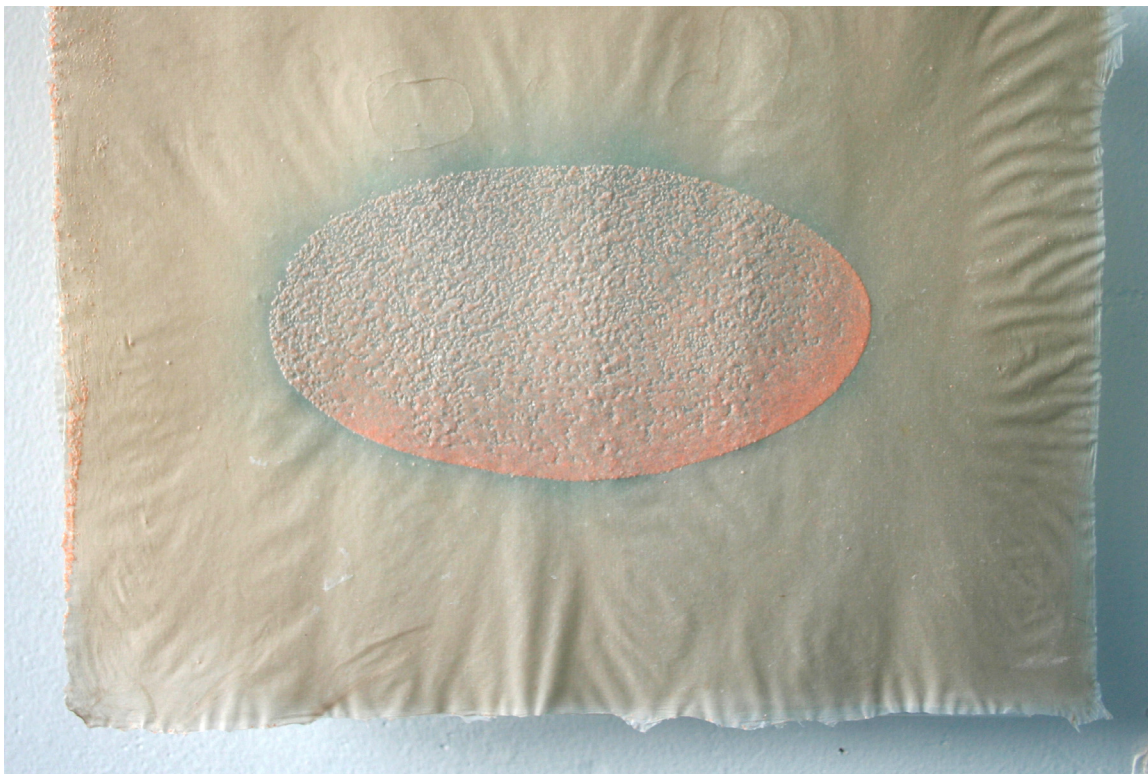


Figure 6 Karen Hardy, *Seep*, 2013; abaca handmade paper, sand, dye; 12" x 9"; detail

In allowing imperfection and unpredictability to leave their mark, my papermaking diverges from traditional practice, which instead exalts a smooth, uniform surface and crisp edges (for the purpose of writing, painting, printing, etc.). I not only

welcome such “accidents,” I facilitate their conceptual contribution to my work. The meaning inherent in these chance elements is addressed in the discussion of literal and figurative tension later in this section.

I enjoy relinquishing some creative control to forces of nature, but I also find satisfaction in the intimate involvement of my hand in the transformation of paper pulp to art work. As noted by many others who are drawn to the craft, its immediacy and physicality are essential elements (Frederick 6). Papermaking thus offers a unique combination: it is a labor-intensive, tactile experience, but it requires the acceptance of an intrinsic variability and the random action of forces of nature. This interplay of direct and indirect engagement with the medium has become vital to my process.

Adaptability and Interactivity

Papermaking has sustained my attention due to its adaptability to multiple forms, both sculptural and two-dimensional, and for the rewards of subverting its traditional role. This flexibility has allowed me to pursue different kinds of questions with a single material, and to fully explore its multi-sensory potential.

While all of my pieces represent investigations of the visual aspects of translucent handmade paper, some of my installations add the element of motion or sound to the experience, and my books allow an interaction with the tactile and aural qualities of the material as well. The activation of all the senses is a key feature that contributes to the allure of the medium, and is especially engaging in the form of artists books (Bruggeman 6).

It is useful here to draw some distinctions between my practice and the tradition of hand papermaking. I have little interest in the making of paper as a substrate upon which ideas are translated and communicated. Instead, I am drawn to the expressive potential of the material in itself. Making work that is *of paper*, rather than *on paper* – this is a critical difference, and in some ways a re-invention of the material. It is akin

to giving the stage hands the limelight. In doing so, our subconscious knowledge of the traditional role of paper as background, necessary yet extraneous, is used as a foil against which the value of innovative practices is defined. As Glenn Adamson asserts in *Thinking Through Craft*, when our expectations of what is supplemental (craft) versus autonomous (art) are consciously put to use, the marginalization of craft is in fact a productive condition (13).

This effect is especially dramatic in two-dimensional work and book structures, where paper almost always serves a silent, supporting role. For my books, *Passage* [Figure 7] and *Homeostasis* [Figure 8], I created imagery through layering and transformation of the paper pulp itself or by embedding materials in the pulp, such as sand, horsehair, and thread. In this way images are formed as the paper is made, not added to it later, and is thus intimately connected to the fiber, creating a unified whole that is in a sense a two-dimensional sculpture. In these artist books, the imagery is

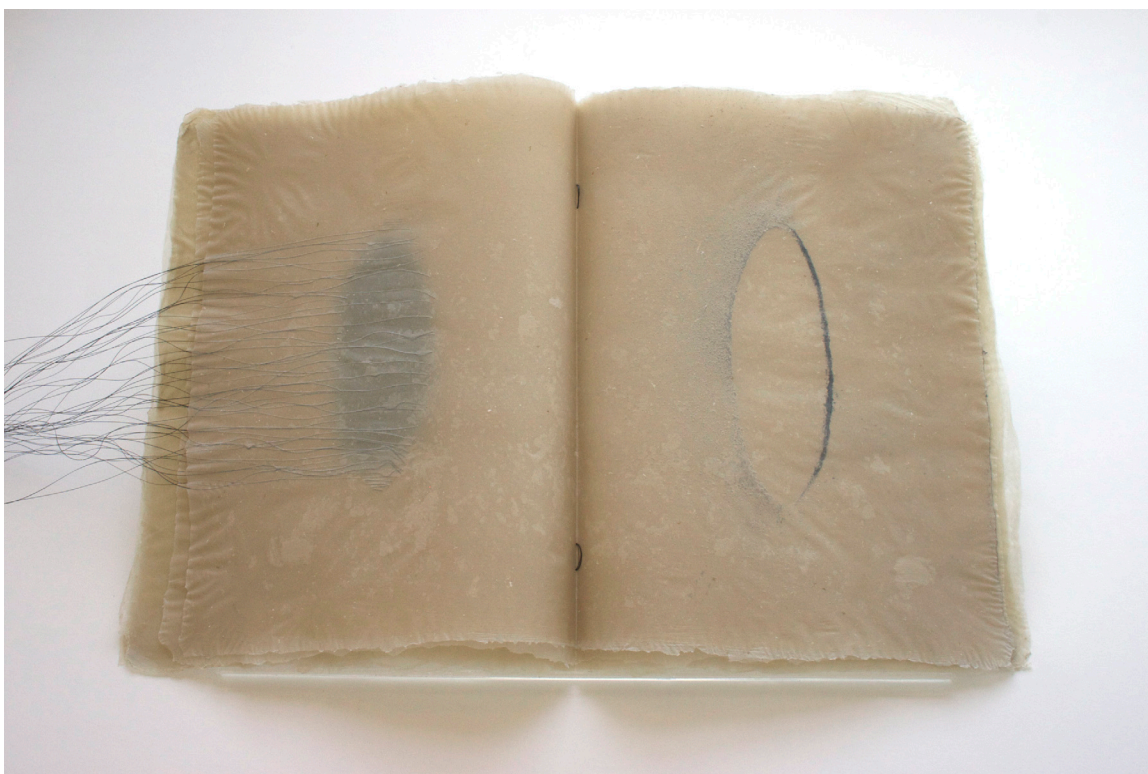


Figure 7 Karen Hardy, *Passage*, 2013; abaca handmade paper, horsehair, sand, dye; 9" x 12"



Figure 8 Karen Hardy, *Homeostasis*, 2013; abaca handmade paper, sand; 9" x 12"

felt, heard, and altered as pages are turned. The translucency of the paper allows the viewer's hands themselves to interact as visual elements.

I am certainly not the first to recognize the perceptual rewards of this change of perspective on a familiar medium. Since the 1970s, papermaking has had somewhat of a renaissance, with Douglass Morse Howell's earlier work cited as some of the first to focus on the aesthetics and creative possibilities of paper itself (Soteriou). Currently informing my pursuits with the book structure is a small group of contemporary book artists working in this way – Claire Van Vliet, John Risseuw, and Robbin Ami Silverberg, to name a few. Jae Jennifer Rossman, curator and special collections librarian at Yale University, notes that book artists who create their own paper by hand are able to infuse their work with their ideas "starting on the chemical and structural level"(8). I hasten to point out that for most of these artists, handmade paper works in concert with a pre-conceived conceptual plan, whereas in my work the content is largely revealed by

the physical properties of the paper itself. Instead of using the pulp to infuse the work with my ideas, I allow the pulp to infuse the work with its ideas.

Translucency and Tension

Translucency is a key characteristic of overbeaten abaca and flax fiber that initiated my ongoing conversation with handmade paper. It fascinates me on a purely aesthetic level for its interaction with light, and on a conceptual level for the sense of mystery it creates.

Osmosis [Figures 9 – 11] was conceived solely based on the interplay of light and shadow. It is an open, honeycomb-like structure of coiled and glued strips of handmade paper, in front of which a thin, translucent abaca sheet is suspended. Its structure and installation allow for a dynamic experience, one that changes according to the angle at which it is viewed as well as air currents that cause the abaca membrane to shift,



Figure 9 Karen Hardy, *Osmosis*, 2013; abaca handmade paper; 3' x 3'; photo by Elena Bouvier

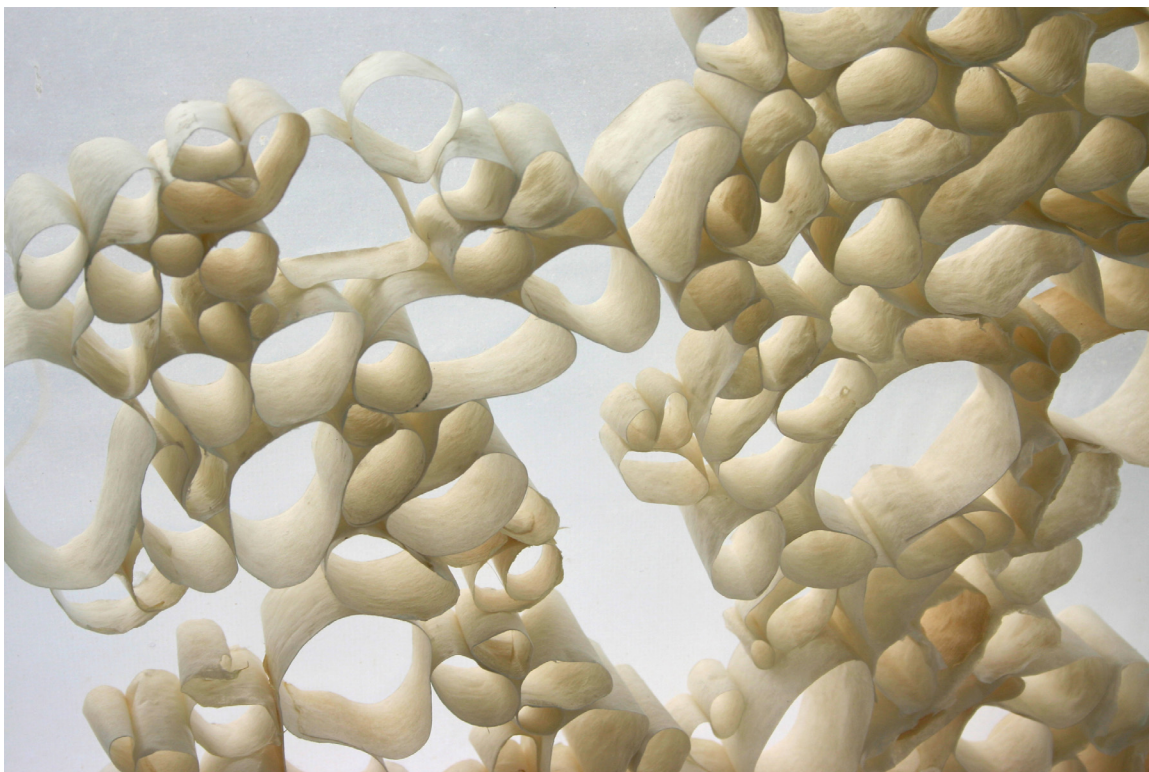


Figure 10 Karen Hardy, *Osmosis*, 2013; abaca handmade paper; 3' x 3'; detail of back



Figure 11 Karen Hardy, *Osmosis*, 2013; abaca handmade paper; 3' x 3'; detail of front

playing tricks on our perception of depth and color. Displayed in a large window for my thesis exhibition, the time of day and weather conditions also contribute to this effect, and contrasting qualities of natural and artificial light are revealed.

Many of my pieces capitalize on the aura of mystery created by translucency, through layering to create partially obscured imagery in real or implied spaces. In my series of sculptural works, *Betray*, *Expose*, and *Perceive* [Figure 12] overbeaten pulp dried onto steel armatures creates a translucent skin through which an interior space is perceptible but vague. The forms within are nebulous, their identity and relationship unknown. The resulting ambiguity is an invitation to enter an uncomfortable yet intriguing realm of uncertainty. To me, it references a blurring of private and public – a condition of containment, concealment, or protection that is hinted at and possibly breached in some way – and the anxiety and curiosity implied therein.



Figure 12 Karen Hardy, *Betray* (top), *Expose* (middle), *Perceive* (bottom), all 2013; abaca and flax handmade paper, steel rod, mixed media; each 4" x 4" x 2"; photo by Elena Bouvier

Shrinkage is another property unique to overbeaten abaca and flax fiber. The process of hydrogen bonding described earlier is most dramatic when pulp has been beaten so long and intensely that the fibers have reached their maximum potential for bonding sites. The strength of the connections created is such that there are significant changes in structure when fibers unite. When the physical trace of this force is evident in the material – as wrinkling, stretching, or tearing – it carries a suggestion of motion and a sense of the material as a living organism.

The physical tension in *Skin* [Figures 13 & 14] acts as a metaphor for psychological tension. In this suspended sculpture, a thin paper membrane bulges uncomfortably and inexplicably from its two-dimensional plane; it is perhaps a record of strain having been endured, or a struggle to escape entrapment. The open steel



Figure 13 (left), **Figure 14** (right) Karen Hardy, *Skin*, 2013; abaca handmade paper, steel rod, steel cable; 10" x 15" x 3"

structure and the translucency of the paper reveal that whatever caused the intrusion is no longer present, yet the illusion of a shadowy form is created in the void when lit from above. It is thus simultaneously pregnant and empty.

III. Content: Psychological Associations of Materials

As I discovered how I like to work, and a material I like to work with, I also had important revelations regarding the conceptual underpinnings of my work. How my content is generated and revealed, what it is, and why it interests me, have all been the subject of scrutiny during my graduate study. I have transitioned from communicating an overt message in my work to embodying ideas that interest me with materials. Though the development of content directly from materials is described in the discussion of process in section I, it is worth elaborating on what my content is and how it has evolved, as well as considering where this artistic practice sits in a larger contemporary and historic context.

Shift from Representation to Allusion

For the past decade, my art has generally been inspired by biological forms and processes. I had previously approached subjects from the natural world with a representational aesthetic, in paintings and prints that bore an obvious connection to my academic background in biology and landscape design. I felt something was lacking in this illustrative, descriptive work; I wanted to do more than celebrate the diversity of life. Through a combination of experiences in the studio and research on artists with similar motivations, I realized that this subject holds interest for me not only in a straightforward, visual sense, but also in its potential for metaphor, with a range of emotional connotations that could be accessed in more subtle ways.

For my sculptural piece, *Seeds* [Figure 15], part of a works in progress exhibit during my first year in graduate school, this new perspective played an important role. The project began with a concept, one that grew from a somewhat narrow reading into a more nuanced set of associations through an accidental discovery with materials.



Figure 15 Karen Hardy, *Seeds*, 2012; flax handmade paper, joint compound, dimensional paint; 9 units, each approximately 2.5" x 1.5" x 1.5"

My plan was to use the egg shape to symbolize the relationship between caregiver and dependant, paired with text that communicated some of the complex emotions associated with these roles. Initially the text was written on hardboiled chicken eggs, and during a subsequent iteration with a plaster egg, I tried using handmade paper to create a surface on which to write. When I covered an egg form with a freshly made sheet of paper and allowed it to dry, the paper formed a network of ridges on the surface due to differential shrinkage of fibers, creating a dimensional texture reminiscent of veins. Although impossible to write on, the effect was provocative enough to pursue. I painted the ridges to accentuate them and added another layer of paper made from overbeaten, translucent flax to evoke a skin-like appearance.

The result was more powerful than my original idea. A group of these eggs was exhibited with permission to be handled. They fit satisfyingly in the palm of the

hand and had a strangely animate quality, but also an unexpected weightiness and an unsettling appearance and texture. Based on observation during the exhibit and feedback during critique, people seemed to have an internal struggle between curiosity and revulsion when they encountered them. The eggs were simultaneously compelling and grotesque in a way that paralleled a conflict between the instinct to nurture and the desire to be unencumbered, a vacillation between dependence and independence. In many ways, the material itself was saying much more than the words could, and in fact the words might have limited the interpretation of the piece.

The development of *Seeds* illustrates a pivotal realization that I could trust materials to reveal content, rather than imposing pre-conceived ideas or relying on text. The experience also taught me that there can be greater potential for multiple levels of meaning in accessing my interests in less overt ways, a lesson that was solidified in subsequent work.

Expressive Materials and the Post-Minimalist Lineage

As I learned to be led by materials instead of pre-conceived ideas, I also considered how my recognition of the emotional associations of materials has developed, and studied how other artists have explored the expressive properties of materials. In the work and life of Eva Hesse, I found parallels to my own experience and a perspective on my practice in a historical context.

Much is revealed simply by an artist's selection of materials. The handmade paper I create shares many characteristics with Eva Hesse's materials. Though Hesse molded her sculptures from wire, fiberglass, latex and plastics – industrial materials, to be sure – she manipulated them by hand, in such a way that her touch is visible and essential to the work, as it is in mine. Our materials suggest corporeal substances, yet have a beautiful delicacy and luminosity. Their membrane-like quality creates a simultaneously compelling and repellant effect, referencing a blurred boundary

between interior and exterior, private and public, protected and vulnerable. I am drawn to these paradoxes for the tension they embody, as a reflection of the ongoing balance between positive and negative experience in my life. Based on Hesse's notes and diaries, internal conflict – what she referred to as the absurdity of life – was the source of her interest in the dualistic qualities of her materials as well (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 6).

Hesse's 1968 *Repetition Nineteen III* [Figure 16] exemplifies the use of Minimalist repetition with a subtly organic material and form. Slight variations and imperfections in the iterations of fiberglass and polyester resin cylinders identify her as the maker and give the work a warmth and accessibility that is intentionally absent in Minimalist precedents. It is this introduction of an authorial, evocative sensibility that many point to as the beginning of a shift to Post-Minimalism (Meyer 153, Pincus-Witten 42-62). Where Minimalist art denied the hand of the artist in favor of the mind of the artist

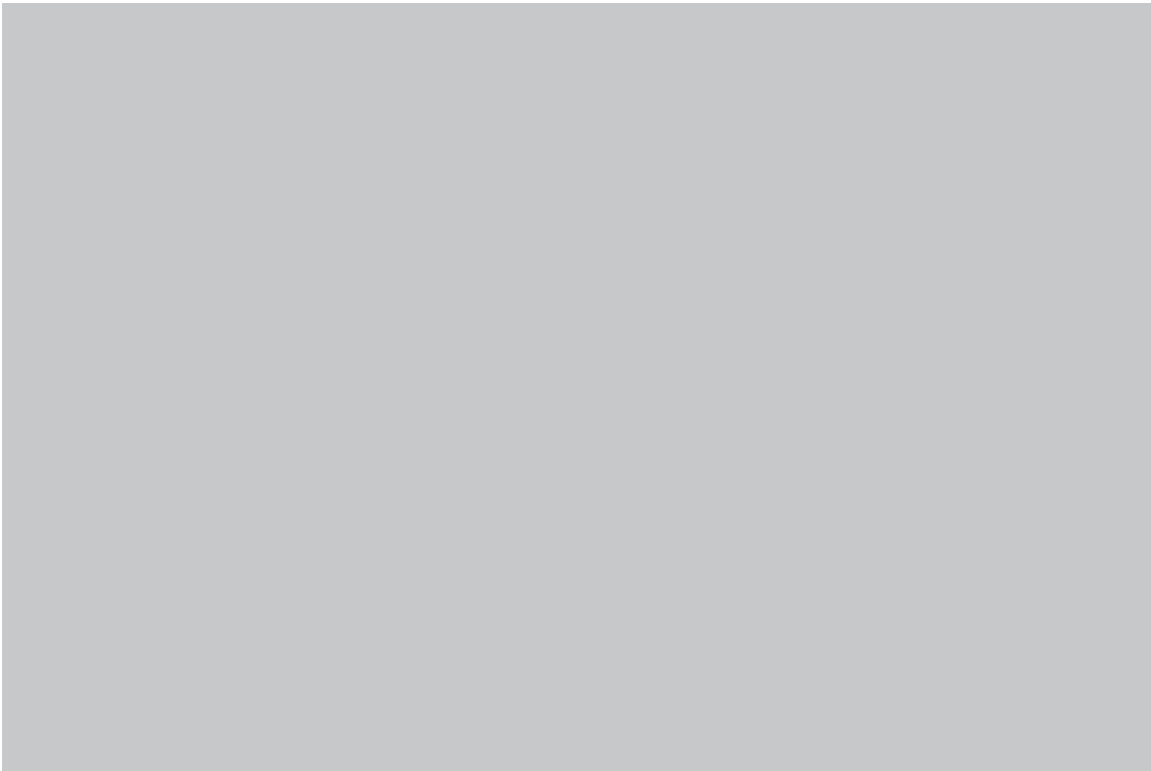


Figure 16 Eva Hesse, *Repetition Nineteen III*, 1968; fiberglass and polyester resin; nineteen units, each 19 to 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 11 to 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ " in diameter

(Anderson 9), Hesse and other Post-Minimalist and Process artists responded with a re-introduction of allusion and craft, of the primacy of the artist in transforming materials as an expressive experience.

This response was not a conscious or deliberate choice on the part of Hesse, but a necessity arising from who she was: an artist whose life and art were one. Lucy Lippard, art critic and friend of Hesse, writes that Hesse “was aware of the implications of all her actions as part of her internal history” (*Eva Hesse* 5). Just as Hesse’s significant personal struggles with health, family and relationships surely contributed to her work, my own challenges and conflicts undoubtedly find expression in my own. My primary motivation may be to allow a material to reveal itself, but in doing so I cannot avoid revealing something of myself as well. Though I am aware of the associations carried by the materials and forms of my work – such as the internal violence suggested in *Betray* [Figure 12], or the paradox of strength and delicacy in *Skin* [Figure 13 & 14] – they are accessed unconsciously or intuitively as I make decisions about a piece, and evaluated after the work is completed.

The tension embodied in high-shrinkage fiber, in combination with its translucency and organic color palette, contribute to a suggestion of bodily substances and processes. The content this material revealed to me was something I found compelling enough to pursue through many iterations, and I now recognize in it a resonance with my own issues surrounding health and privacy. Personal experience of chronic illness and social anxiety no doubt account for much of my affinity for these characteristics of handmade paper. However, it is often only after I have made something that I realize its psychological implications. Lippard reports that Hesse, too, relied on her emotional response to form to evaluate and title her pieces after their creation (*Artwork* 39).

CONCLUSION

As I assess the progression of my work and studio practice during graduate school, I can identify significant change in every major aspect: process, material, and content. These changes can be summarized as a shift away from representational, concept-driven work toward a visual language based on the physicality of materials and their psychological associations.

My desire to investigate materials developed in response to studio and course experiences, and the opportunity to work independently and experimentally in a paper studio allowed me to discover the expressive potential of a new medium. Focused time in the studio contributed to a maturation of content in my work – both the way in which it is generated and the multiple ways in which it can be understood.

As my awareness of my own art practice has changed dramatically in the past several months, I am certain it is still evolving. I look forward to working with new materials in the future, and to exploring new ideas with the medium of paper pulp.

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- Figure 3** Ranjani Shettar, *Just a Bit More*, 2005-06; hand-molded beeswax, pigments, and thread dyed in tea; 36' x 24' x 12'; The Museum of Modern Art. Photo courtesy of Ranjani Shettar and Talwar Gallery, New York/New Delhi via The New York Times, www.nytimes.com
- Figure 4** Karen Hardy, *Respire*, 2013; abaca handmade paper; nine units, 9" to 45" (l) x 5" to 25" (w) x 1" x 11" (d); photo by Karen Hardy
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