NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

FRAGILE ART

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INTRODUCTION

Fragile is not a word often used to describe sculpture of any age; the word sculpture for most people conjures up ideas of marble, metal or concrete structures or monuments. Dictionary definitions refer to sculpture as an act of art making in relief or solid form; fragile definitely does not appear to fit this description. It is for this reason that I have found myself fascinated with any form of fragile sculpture; at first it was the contradiction in terms of material and resiliance that attracted my attention but, upon further inspection of delicate pieces of work, I have been amazed at the artist's ability to take a chosen medium and push it to its limits and still create a standing piece as an end result. This has become a driving force behind my own work, creating sculpture that gives a feeling of contradiction in the material, taking the medium out of its preconceived context allowing it to achieve something that under normal circumstances should not be possible.

Although the artist may appear to achieve this balance of tension easily, it is in fact very difficult to achieve; the difference between the piece being stable and not falling apart is not as straight forward as it looks. Therefore I find that construction and structure techniques are also of interest to me. The topic of this research will combine the areas of contradiction that arise when using a fragile medium such as

i contradictions in appearance, i.e. appearing to be weak but in fact being resiliant

ii. contradictions in public response, i.e. despite its fragile appearance the public can still interact with the piece

iii. contradictions in production techniques, how individual artists achieve resilience in their work by using various additives such as armatures, strengthening resins and glues

v. appearing to contradict the law of balance, achieving shapes and forms that seem to be impossible

My research will also cover various construction techniques used by a number of working artists involved in the production of fragile sculpture. In order to explore these areas further I have decided to concentrate on paper pulped sculpture from the 1960's to the modern day as a channel for exploring fragile art.

Most people seem to generally think of paper as being a flat rectangular with four sides and only two dimensions and not a strong robust and durable medium that can be used in a three dimensional sculptural form. My aim is to examine paper pulp in its third dimension in terms of its durability in the world of contemporary art, how its construction techniques contribute or detract from the overall durability of a piece and how the public reacts to such sculpture. As sculpture is an area the public usually perceives as being solid and strong, I am interested to know when confronted with paper pulped sculpture do they see through the contradictions put forward by the piece, such as its apparent weakness. Another reason for using paper pulp in my research is that, having used handmade paper in my own work, I am interested to find out more about construction techniques involved, from paper's origins to its use as a three dimensional form, in the hope of learning information I could use and adopt in my own work.

In my research I have spoken to working artists such as Theresa Mc Kenna and Pauline Flynn, who are both Irish artists working in Dublin, and Vanessa Godfrey, Cas Holmes Carol Farrow and Miriam Troth, who are all English artists. I hope to have a greater understanding of their feelings about the preconceived ideas of delicacy towards their work, and how this does or does not affect them. I use the contradictions of fragility as an inspiration in my own work and tend to translate and explore these in a delicate way, resulting in an apparently fragile form. I am interested to

know if artists who work with a considered fragile medium such as pulp, choose to do so because they are inspired by delicate forms such as shells or do they naturally respond to all stimuli in a fragile way either by their choice of medium or their techniques of working, even if the stimulus has nothing to do with delicacy.

Handmade Japanese
Paper 'Paperchase'

CHAPTER ONE

The paper that we are familiar with today is a man-made material which must be constructed from natural fibres that have been ground or crushed in order to give each fibre an individual or separate identity. It is paper pulp made from this process that determines handmade papers from all other papers such as rice or papyrus. The construction of paper and its techniques have not changed to any great extent from its original invention. It is difficult to pinpoint an exact date of invention, with many ancient myths and story tales suggesting different times and places, but since ancient times the Chinese have recycled old linen and hemp rags. Having observed plants decomposing around ponds, they borrowed this recycling technique form nature for their own purposes, like making clothes, e.g. reusing cocoons to make silk. During this process, as in nature, the cocoons are dissolved in water to break down the fibres, by being placed in baskets and dipped into a stream; the cocoon should then, having been loosened in the water, unravel into a continuous strand, although there are a certain amount of fragments left in the basket. Eventually when the left-over fragments have matted together, creating pulp, it could be peeled from the basket as one sheet; this was called Chin, taken from the name for silk making. It wasn't long before people began intentionally creating Chin, mainly for wrapping purposes at first and later as a surface on which to write. With only the wealthy enjoying the pleasures of paper at this stage and the poor making it, they could dictate its purpose. The Empress T'eng of the Han Dynasty realized the importance of this material and in 105 A.D. sanctioned her court official, T'sai Lun, who himself made paper, to officially announce the invention of paper on her behalf, which was still at this stage in flat sheet form (Saddington, 1991, p.12).

Such ease of communication brought information to a wider section of the population, but this became potentially hazardous to those in positions of power. The spread of knowledge, information and rumour often led to discontent and political unrest; therefore those in control felt it necessary to curtail the accessibility of the populus to paper. This resulted in the techniques of paper production being restricted to a chosen number of people; those who controlled paper production controlled the power. By the time knowledge of paper-making spread to Japan, through word of mouth, the art was treated with a great respect. The Japanese made sure they had a constant supply of the ingredients used in the paper-making process. They learned to farm the trees and plants needed years in advance, to accommodate their own needs, time-tabling farming to the winter months and paper-making to the summer months. The influences of paper began to affect many of the traditions in Japanese life, with the various rhythms, sounds and motions of paper-making giving rise to the beginnings of many songs and poems involved in the process. Influences stretched even further, giving an almost sacred or symbolic feeling to Gohei strips, pieces of white paper, used to mark sacred religious areas. This interest and respect for paper meant that it was more than just a means of communication, and was used in many more creative forms.

Up to this point, I have been describing the art of paper making as a flat form, but with the wider acceptance of pulp as a resilient medium it was not long before the development of more three dimensional artistic forms, such as lanterns, doors, rope, bedding and toys. The western world, in comparison, tended to use heavier materials for such items, like wood, metal or glass. The versatility of pulp meant that it could be used for a wide range of creative practices such as origami, decorative folded forms, papier machē, pulp constructed into toys and sturdy furniture, even to the origination of paper clothing, better known as Shifu. Each of

the numerous applications of pulp went with their own traditional production techniques, the emphasis and priority being focused on quality rather than quantity.

Many early examples of ancient pulp articles such as The Empress Shotoku's Million Charms, a small scroll about one and a half inches high, which dates from 770 A.D. and is now housed in China, are still in existence today mainly due to the "careful choice of fibres, their controlled gentle cooking, rinsing and beating as well as skillful sheet forming", as Bernard Toale has stated in his book The Art Of Paper Making (Toale, 1983, p.1). Fibres were never chemically broken down or bleached, but were strictly hand produced with only natural barks, shrubs and leaves being used. These all have natural preservatives and insect-repelling qualities, discouraging the growth of bacteria in the paper, which contributed to its strength and long life. It has even been found that in certain countries such as Nepal, the ingredients used in paper production are so pure that the paper is used for medical purposes in the form of paper plasters, as the strong antiseptic presence stops the infection of wounds. As a result of such stringent construction processes, the quality of pulp could be determined during the washing and cooking process, with traditional paper makers believing fibre preparation to be the secret to good pulp.

During the thirteenth century the Japanese were striving to perfect their art, whereas Europeans were just discovering paper as a material, tending to use it as a means of illustration. They failed to realize its greater potential, dictating the shape of paper into a flat object, whereas the Eastern world had moved on to using pulp as a three dimensional form for armour, furniture and rope. Europeans were using cotton and linen rags to construct their paper, as the plants used in Japan, such as gampi and mistumata, were not available in Europe due to differing climates; this resulted

in the production of a rougher type of paper, more suited to the quills and oxgill inks used at the time in Europe.

By the fourteenth century the use of paper was widespread in Europe; up until this point paper was mainly used in the production of religious books and manuscripts and was very much the perrogative of the wealthy. As the political power and influence of the church began to diminish, paper was used in a more commercial and informative way. Engraving, etching and printing were now popular methods for marking paper for use in prints and books. Johann Gutenburg invented the printing press with a moveable type face. With these newly developing printing techniques quickening the process of marking paper, it wasn't long before paper-mills began to spring up throughout Europe to meet the growing demand for paper.

By the seventeenth century Holland had become the leader in European paper production with fibres now being mechanically crushed and broken down with the use of the 'Hollander Beater'. By 1798 Nicholas Louis Robert had invented a machine that could produce one long continuous length of paper which would then be cut to the desired size.

This almost dehumanized the whole beauty of making paper, so it was no longer a treasured commodity in European countries, but a disposable one. The speed at which paper was being produced from the eighteenth century onwards meant that paper had become readily available and was popular in the manufacture of throw away items such as cards, newspapers, receipts and wallpapers; this led to the growth of a profitable business. The people who used technology to make the mass production of paper possible did not realize that they were threatening the handmade paper trade. The chemicals used in the new processes such as bleaching and acid-sizing resulted in paper being less stable.

Through time, the chemicals cause the fibres to break down and the paper degenerates, thus removing the former permanency that it held in Asia.

By the twentieth century paper pulp priorities had changed from quality, which was of the utmost importance to the Japanese, to quantity as with most profitable industries. Artists had begun to become more aware of the qualities of paper such as the texture, colour and weight, and in their search for a better alternative to the chemically mass produced examples, they began to experiment at making their own paper to accommodate their own needs.

During the 1920's Dard Hunter, an American artist who made his own paper, decided to travel the world collecting information on handmade paper and the techniques involved in its production process, Hunter put this information together and produced a book, Papermaking, The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft (New York 1947). It was this book which encouraged a revival of interest in Oriental methods of making paper in America. By 1940 Douglas Howell, an American art historian, who had also researched the Oriental beliefs and methods of paper-making through his own explorations into this art, combined with Hunter's work, came up with the idea of using paper pulp to produce paper sculpture. An American contemporary artist, Laurence Barker, was encouraged by the use of this new idea. He too had been looking at the strength of Oriental pulp in the form of papier maché furniture and armour etc. and realized the potential of pulp as a modelling medium. He began experimenting with a combination of textured layers, using various fibres to create a variety of contrasting textures. Although the use of paper pulp as a valid medium began in the U.S.A., during the 1960's many artists throughout the world had begun to realize the manipulative potential of this

medium and were interested in using the material as a form for contemporary art and sculpture.

Laurence Barker was at the forefront of this American interest, creating the first hand paper making course in Michigan in 1964. He established a pulp making mills in Barcelona, Spain in the 1970's; other locations included Australia, West Germany and Israel. Being involved with pulp on an international basis meant Barker had contact with many of the early pulp hand-builders such as the artists Miro and Lichtenstein, which led to collaborations with them on special one-off projects. On one such project Ken Tyler, one of Barker's pupils, worked with David Hockney on his Paper Pools series of work in New York 1978 (Arts Council of Great Britian, 1983, p.13), producing work on a scale never seen in pulp before. Taking ancient techniques, revitalizing them and pushing them to an extreme was a real challenge for many artists, as there was no right or wrong way to manipulate the pulp. The lack of tradition within paper making in America meant that here was a new aspect to paper: America proved to be the best place for this medium to develop, as there had been no previous styles originating from there.

The fact that there is very little expense involved with this craft was an added bonus, with so little specialist equipment is needed; unlike other areas, such as ceramics, glass or metals, artists were not restricted by the need for expensive machinery. Artists were able to determine the shape and form of the pulp, not letting the medium dictate size etc. to them. With such low production costs, there was a lot of room for experimentation.

By 1971 'Twinrocker' had opened, a professional studio in Brookston, Indiana. Its aims were to revive the original traditional Oriental methods of making paper pulp and to

promote the development of paper pulp as a valid artistic medium. It produced a range of custom-made papers, working with individual artists to meet their specific needs in pulp. In 1975 the first paper-making conference of hand paper makers took place in America at the Institute for Paper Chemistry in Appelton Wisconsin, with people from many different disciplines participating, including painters, sculptors, printers, weavers, paper merchants and even scientists. This created a network of friends throughout the world, encouraging more paper conferences which would promote pulp as a medium. For those who thought pulp was a passing trend, these conferences were to send out a strong message of validity.

Although paper pulp of the Sixties and Seventies was considered fashionable and many big names such as David Hockney and Jackson Pollock did experiment, not all these ventures were successful; this gave the impression to the public that paper pulp was a passing trend. But now, nearly thirty years later, pulped sculpture is still around and has proven itself to be a worthy artistic medium. Problems associated with its viability include the fragility and short life of the sculptures. In their excitement with their new medium, many artists gave too much time and thought to the aesthetics of producing and making objects and did not stop to think what would happen to the pieces. Papers produced with acid and other chemicals became weak and started to rot and decay with time. Many paper sculptors, who had not realized this, started to look at past techniques and make new investigations concerned with strength and permanency of fibres, using only natural ingredients and discouraging the use of chemical and acid-decaying agents. By using these techniques, artists could ensure the use of a strong robust medium which was a lot tougher than it appeared to be. By the mid 70's, artists began to make an effort to ensure their creations stood the test of time, as ancient oriental papers

could be shown to have done, thus proving paper is not just a disposable item.

Handmade Japanese Paper 'Paperchase

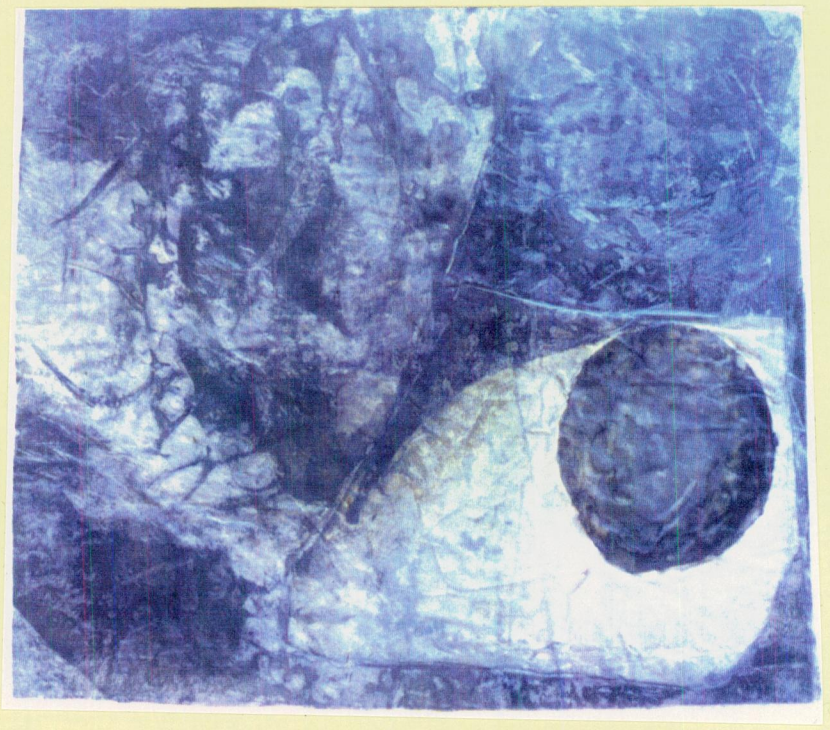
CHAPTER TWO

Paper pulp is such a versatile medium that it can be used in many ways such as laminating, casting and even hand building, which is all very well as far as techniques are involved. However, I am more concerned with how these will translate into sculptural pieces of art that are structurally sound and will not need protecting from the public gaze and touch behind a sheet of glass or in a box. This aspect seems to have been at the forefront of many paper pulp artists' minds within the last few years as they strive for purer ways of strengthening their work without having to add chemical additives that with time manage to decay the piece. This is one contradiction in terms that paper pulp artists have found definitely does not work. Instead, they are reaffirming the old traditions of natural fibres along with new possibilities of using alternative media such as bamboo canes, fabric and even wax as forms for strength and support.

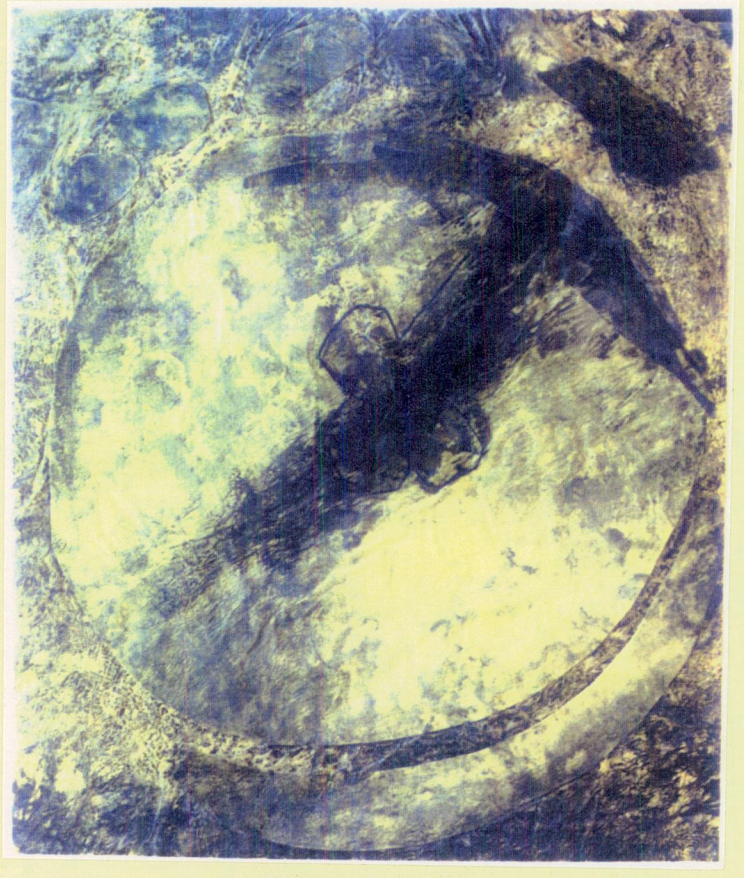
It is the uniquely changeable ability of paper to assume any form that seems to attract artists to this medium; the many different approaches to pulp that I have found in contempory work may be a result of the variance in each particular artist's background. Of those I spoke to or encountered during my research, very few seem to have come from a purely paper pulp background. All seem to have crossed over from other mediums, which shows how powerful the draw of pulp can be. Carol Farrow, a working artist in England in a interview in Crafts magazine (vol 93, Jul/Aug'88, pp.38-41) said she experiences a feeling of great control when she starts making paper pulp from scratch, the almost therapeutic method of hand beating plants etc. into fibres, soaking these in water and draining many times to produce the pulp whose scale, shape and weight she can then dictate. Once the pulp has been made, there are numerous ways of manipulating it which adds to the attraction. There are at

least nine I have come across up to date, from burnishing like metal to spinning into thread to casting. Time does not allow me to go through them all but as I introduce each artist who has assisted in my research I shall describe their methods of working separately, as each process seems to be individual to each artist and cannot be generalised.

Theresa Mc Kenna was introduced to paper pulp through textiles and has spent time experimenting with the medium to achieve tactile surfaces. Her approach is to laminate togther sheets of hand-made paper, putting layers on top of each other. Each layer is marked individually, giving a depth of colour through the work. Through the use of translucent wax she achieves an almost ghosted image in her pieces, which suits her work as it is based on the ancient monuments and graves in Ireland. She also tends to use land and landscapes as an inspiration, allowing the materials she uses in the pulp such as wax and unbroken fibres to play a strong part in her work (figs 1&2). Mc Kenna hopes that by putting the emphasis on the surface through textures that her work will introduce itself to the onlooker through its tactile qualities. Her choice of technique, laminating, may sound a simple process but there can be many problems involved. For example you must be careful to use sheets made from the same fibres; otherwise, because of their different properties, they may be incompatible, and one layer may dry quicker than the other, causing one sheet to pull against the other,resulting in tension and shrinkage, thus weakening the piece. This is why Mc Kenna insists on "Keeping the pulp as pure as possible" (Interview 1, 1994) to avoid an unstable piece.



Theresa Mc Kenna
Fig.1 Untitled
DateUnknown



Theresa Mc Kenna
Fig. 2 Untitled
DateUnknown

Another method of working with pulp, casting, can involve either hand building or casting, as with clay. The latter involves putting pulp into or over a mould and allowing it to dry, then the cast or mould is removed to reveal either a positive or negative shape of the original cast, depending on where the pulp was placed. Miriam Troth from Dorset, (England) works in a similar way although she likes to incorporate details such as fragments of shells or silk and even gold leaf. As Troth also comes from a textiles background and was originally attracted to paper pulp because of its tactile versatility, she likes to encourage this quality by adding found objects she considers to be precious and thus making the piece more aesthetically pleasing.

The element of touch is an important aspect Troth wants to encourage in her work. Through building up layers of pulp, she explaines that she can incorporate precious objects, fragments and pigments such as small personal possessions, shells, fabrics and unbeaten plant fibre, to achieve a richly textured surface which is intended to encourage interaction between the onlooker and the piece (Interview 2, 1994). Speaking about her inspiration, Troth describes an interest in eroded surfaces such as those found for example on a neglected fresco, with the old plaster crumbling, creating layers of texture or even something that appears to have come from an old forgotten shipwreck. These are the feelings she tries to recreate in her piece 'Signature' (Fig. 3), where the surface is buzzing with interest, dappled with subtle colour and scattered with crumbling fragments, acting as stimuli for interaction. Soon realizing like Hockney,

Miriam Troth , Signature, 1993
Fig. 3

Miriam Troth,
Collection of vessels, 1993
Fig.4

Miriam Troth
Untitled work
Fig.5

that an over-active or busy piece may confuse the observer – as Hockney commented when working on his Paper Pools project at Tyler Graphics, New York in 1978

> "It is a crude medium, crude I mean, like charcoal, you simply have to work bold with it, fussiness and finickyness look awful" (Arts Council of Great Britain,1983, p.15).

Troth has worked in a similar way, simply placing a pulped cast of her own fingers in the centre of her piece, representing the fact that her own surface (i.e. her body) will eventually erode and decay but her work will remain, her everlasting signature being the cast of her fingers. By keeping her pulp as pure as possible, using only natural fibres and avoiding chemicals, Troth knows her work will remain durable and survive time. To me it seems contradictory to invite a stranger to touch something so precious and fragile that one has created. Although the public don't often touch sculptures in a gallery situation some may not be able to resist the temptation, Troth explained (Interview 2, 1994) that this is why she strives to make durable pieces, producing a body of work that survives the public gaze and goes even further by playing with the public, putting forward an image of fragmented and eroding surfaces. By carrying such representations on paper pulp, it may seem that the image complements the material, i.e. both being fragile, but in fact they contradict each other in an almost harmonious way. Troth admits that her pieces may appear to be vulnerable but this is the reason she carries her fragile images into a durable medium as opposed to a weak one, so they do survive the invitation she has given the public to explore her tactile creations. They are made to be strong and robust pieces of sculpture by adding different materials such as copper pigment, raw plant fibre and even shells, which again give the impression of being breakable but are really quite robust objects. These added elements in Troth's work, unlike chemical additives, will not rot and decay her sculptures

Cas Holmes, Turn
1988, 45 x 51 cm
Fig 6

through time, but will not rot and reinforce their structures as well as adding to the aesthetic aspect.

This combination of old traditional methods combined with modern techniques works well for Cas Holmes, who originally trained as a painter at Maidstone College of Art. After finishing college in the early Eighties she went to Japan on a foundation fellowship in order to study paper making. Having already built a reputation for combining sculptural concepts with textiles, she decided to intertwine this technique with her new found knowledge of paper-making. By using the laminating process, like that used by Theresa Mc Kenna, to treat her pulp, Holmes then strengthens her pieces by both hand and machine stitchery. She uses her stitching techniques to suggest images and to hold found objects she has placed in the pulp (Fig.6). Since leaving college, Holmes has diversified into teaching, using her wide knowledge of paper making and textile skills to organize workshops in schools and community organisations in Kent. Recently she has linked her workshops with council-organized festivals which culminated in Maidstone, Kent, in banner making, linking visual and performing arts workshops. Holmes is more involved in widening understanding and knowledge of pulp as a medium than exhibiting her work, in the hope of helping people of all ages and abilities to realize that the production of pulp is very cheap and accessible and should be more widely used.

Each of the above mentioned artists has developed her own method of naturally strengthening the potentially frail material of pulp. Over the last fifteen to twenty years, paper pulp artists have left the detrimental additives behind, preferring the tried and tested techniques of the ancient Orientals that will enable their work to survive the world of contemporary sculpture. Artists such as Troth, Holmes and Mc Kenna have gone beyond the idea of pulp being fragile,

realizing the contradictions and problems in design and technique that arise when using a fragile medium. They understand the significance of adding strengtheners for their work to survive, but not ones that work against their pieces, such as chemical additives; instead they include natural objects such as bamboo, shells or hand stitching and binding to create secure pieces of sculpture.

Jacki Parry, another paper artist, born in Australia and now working from Glasgow, originally trained in print, specializing in etching. In an attempt to explore some of her earlier feelings towards pulp as a medium and trying not to become too familiar or comfortable in her original medium, Parry began experimenting and trying to express the feeling of tension between opposites that has always been part of her work. In pulp she found a material that could express and carry the ideas and feelings she wants to portray in her work but it is also important to her that the public can read, understand and react to what she creates. Parry has found pulp an easy medium in which to express the feelings of tension she has been exploring, such as the stress and strain she can see between nature and culture. She represents these emotions by using pulp in both opaque and translucent forms. Through her knowledge of traditional methods of paper making, Parry has realized that by using different types of fibre, i.e. long and short from various plants, a range of effects can be produced. Shorter fibres come from widely available sources such as cotton, linen and nettles and are more suitable for casting as they have a lower shrinkage rate. This is due to the smaller particles which, when beaten into shorter fibres, become a more concentrated and compact pulp. It is because each fibre is so close together it is difficult to see through them and it appears opaque. The opposite of opaque, transparent, is obtained through the use of long fibres; these tend to separate, barely overlapping rather than compacting together. This allows light to pass through, giving a translucent appearance. To effectively represent feelings of

Jacki Parry
Visible Traces,1988
24 x 18 x 16 inches
Fig 7

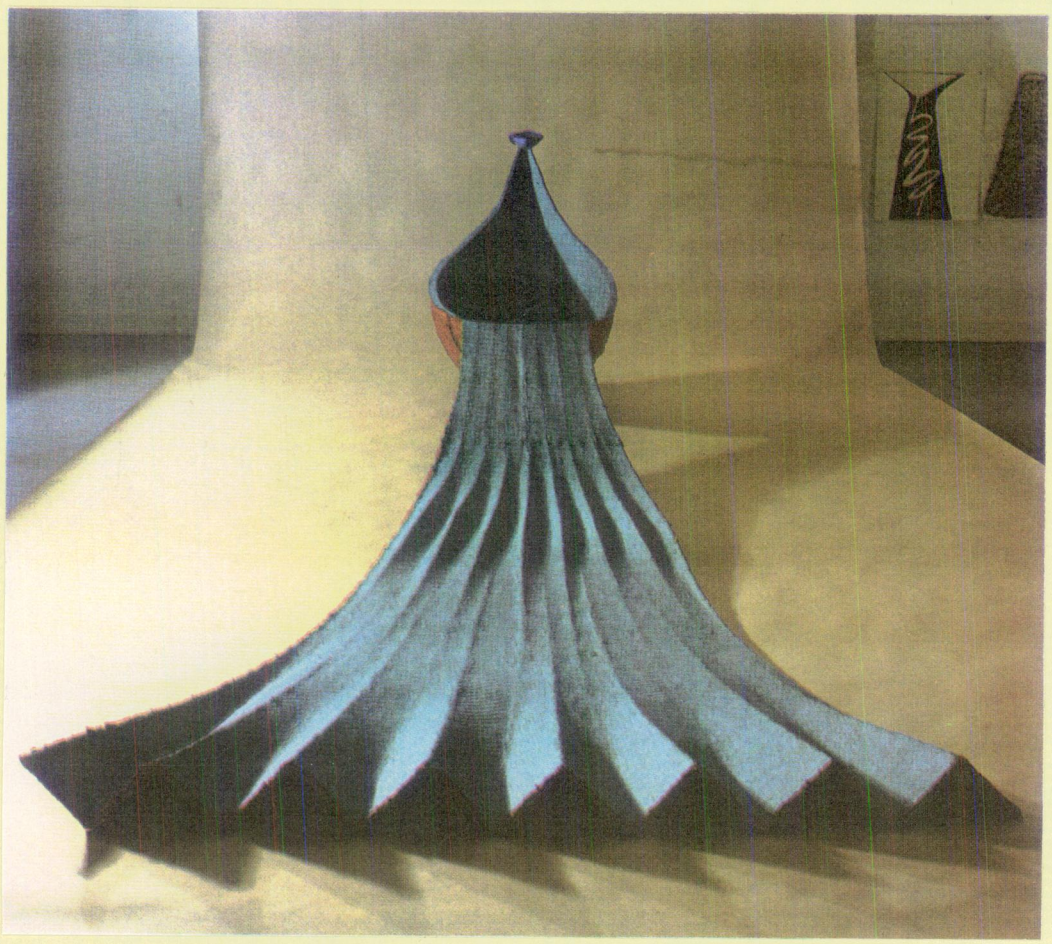
tension in opposite, Parry found it necessary to present both qualities of pulp to her audience but found it difficult to acquire the exotic plants needed to produce the longer fibres. This is when she approached the Glasgow Botanical Gardens for help in 1989. The educational officer there, Jacki Muir, was able to provide various types of stems and leaves from tropical plants such as banana and sisal, a fibre traditionally used to make rope.

Both opaque and transparent pulps were used in a body of work called "Visible Traces" (1988). Here Parry deals with the exposure and concealment of information (Fig.7). She has exploited the translucent aspect of pulp by including images concealed in the pulp that are only revealed when held to up light. This is coupled with an almost vessel-like form, which would pass as a container if it were not for the gouge along its front, exposing all that is concealed inside, contradicting and opposing the purpose of a container. Parry has used a corrigated mesh to establish a form onto which pulped paper, the short fibred casting type, is then placed. The top vessel-like form achieves its transparent image using a watermarking technique, which reveals the imprint when light travels through it, again contradicting the purpose of concealment by revealing that which it is supposed to keep hidden and secret. This watermarking process involves using pulp with long fibres, then dripping water onto the desired area, which will disperse the fibres, leaving concentrated and diluted areas.(Fig.7)

In her 1987-88 work entitled 'Rainmaker' (Fig. 8) the piece that was responsible for firing up my whole interest in pulped sculpture, Parry manages to take her material to a limit I never thought pulp could reach. It seemed to me that only mediums such as clay or metal could excel to such heights. At first I could not believe such a balanced form could be composed with pulp. My understanding of the

medium previous to seeing this piece, was one of very fragile and collapsible constructions, this could not be further from the truth. Parry's 'Rainmaker' is created from a mesh

Jacki Parry
Rainmaker
1987-88
36 x 58 x 180 inches
Fig.8



Jacki Parry
Details of Rainmaker
1987-88
36 x 58 x 180 inches

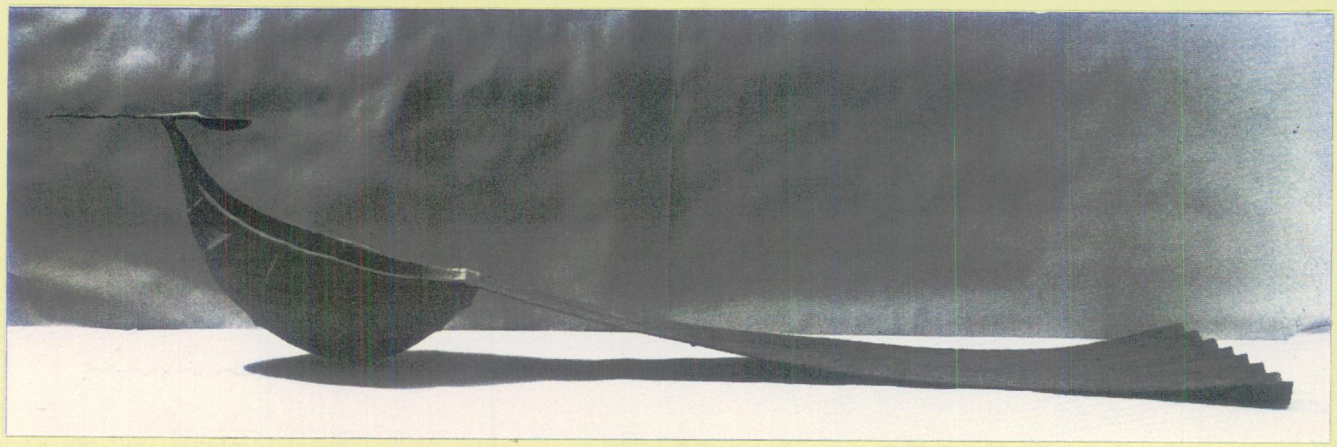


Fig.9

Fig.10

armature which holds a welded steel rod (Fig 9); this is combined with the pulp paste which acts as a skin over the form. The piece represents Parry's feelings of tension towards contradictions in nature, particularly Australian nature, where there is a vast amount of land on that continent to be provided for, but it is totally dry with a drought that makes survival difficult in a desert-like existence (Parry, 1988, p.9). 'Rainmaker' acts as a container that is designed to attract the rains, with the spoon-like form suggesting a type of weather guide. The work is an emotional response from Parry towards the unjust distribution of a limited amount of water for a vast land. Even her choice of technique, casting pulp using short fibres, creates a compact paste with little moisture. Parry goes as far as to deny the piece itself water, reinforcing her emotional opposition to a seemingly harsh nature, and describing her piece and the material in the book 'Jacki Parry Daly Night River' 1988 as a "Heavily impregnated mass where it has the ability to deny its substance"(Parry, 1988, p.10).

Carol Farrow, an English artist who works from France and London to produce her paper pulped work. Her pieces are mainly cast and are specifically made to be strong and durable as she lives by selling her work. Farrow was introduced to paper pulp through her own curiosity about paper-making techniques, she attended many workshops and visited paper-making mills and factories in England to gather the relevant knowledge before beginning to produce pulp herself. She went on to become the winner of the first Paperworks Fellowship at Oxford Polytechnic in 1988. Farrow is interested in capturing the qualities of things that have been worn, deteriorated or affected by age to create images that give a feeling of decay. For this reason she sometimes

Carol Farrow
Cast Implements
1989
Fig.11

Carol Farrow,
Detail of
Cast Implements 1989 Fig.12

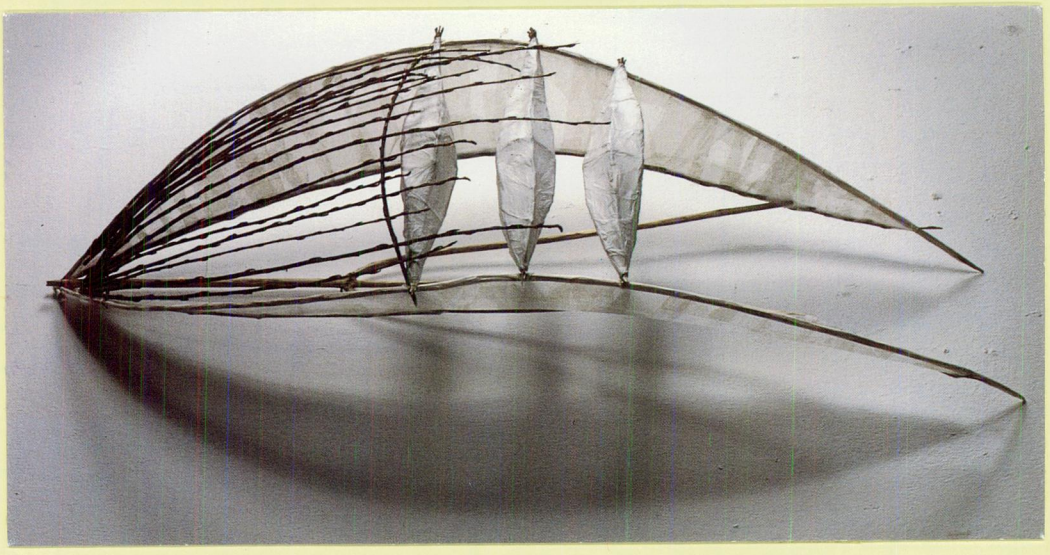
Carol Farrow,
Detail of
Cast Implements,
1989 Fig.13

adds clay to her pulp for textural and colour effects but totally avoids chemical additives because she sells her work and wants it to last. Man-made chemical additives would not allow this because their properties and make up would work against the natural fibres of the pulp, causing it to age and eventually decay. When Farrow creates her forms using the casting method, the same process as described before, she allows the pulp to dry, then sizes it with a dilute conservationist glue made form potatoes, which seals the pulp.

Her 1989 piece, entitled Cast Implements (Fig. 11, 12 &13) uses the image of farming implements, such as the pitch fork, that have become weather-beaten over the years. Farrow explaines how she does not want to complicate her image or form, but simply wants to represent the earthy rusty tones she finds so appealing in nature in their original form, using a natural material such as pulp to recreate these. It is the incredible versatility of pulp that attracts Farrow to it; she points out (interview 4) that it is cheap to work with, because of the lack of expensive machinery needed in pulp production. She does not like to hide her work behind framed glass but does admit that pulp can be 'vunerable' and people may be put off by this, but she maintains that this is the reason one should only use good papers and fibres, free of man-made chemicals.

Vanessa Godfrey, an English artist, does not make durability a major concern in her work. Her influences are mainly organic, coming from the sources she collects when making pulp; these include leaves, pods, shells and cocoons. For this reason durability is not her main priority. Her influences are fragile and sensitive, therefore Godfrey feels her response should correspond with this delicate feeling. It is because organic objects do naturally decay, Godfrey feels

Vanessa Godfrey
Winged
1994
75 x 30 x 25 cm
Fig.14



that, in some cases short-lived pieces can acurately define the feelings of transient life she wants to express. Using pulp in a delicate, fragile and unsupported way may not produce a long-lasting piece but as Godfrey has made the decision to create non-permanent sculpture using pulp in this inert manner, this suits her purpose. Unlike Troth or Parry, who do desire durable pieces, Godfrey says

> "I am quite happy if a piece is emphereal, but this is a conscious decision to make a piece that is not so long lasting, other works I may want to have a longer life". (Interview 5, 1995)

'Winged' (Fig.14) one of Godfrey's 'ephemeral' pieces, explores the architectural element in organic objects, in this case the cocoon. She sees that the cocoon is the protective covering of the insect in its chrysalis state; when the insect is strong enough to face the world, it no longer needs the cocoon so it naturally decomposes when disgarded. Godfrey realizes that she can represent this bio-degradable feeling using pulp, reinforcing the natural organic feeling she wants to achieve by using a natural organic medium. She finds this quality in pulp that is untreated, clear of chemical fibres or natural strengtheners such as metal or wooden armatures. Just as the cocoon can decompose when it needs to, or when attacked by a predator, so can Godfrey's piece decay either by recycling or by being treated in an unsympathetic or wanton manner by the onlooker.

'Winged' is a delicate sculpture with its organic lines in the form of a willow frame, stressing its natural architectural form but, like the cocoon, it has a protective covering, expressed through the transparent paper. It is not an object to be poked or prodded, and this is certainly not what the sculpture invites the onlooker to do. The piece itself suggests it is vulnerable, and this is of course what Godfrey intended, unlike Parry or Troth, who create tactile pieces as in Troth's

'Signature' (Fig.3) that invite the onlooker to investigate the piece further, because of this invitation to explore the pieces that they do have to be durable and robust. Godfrey is creating for the moment, she does not expect or want her work to have a long-life. She is free to use many of the man-made chemicals sich as resins, artificial dyes and glues that may eventually cause the piece to decay because she is not concerned with the future of the piece. In contrast, artists like Troth and Farrow want to avoid their work degenerating, so they have ruled out the use of man-made chemicals in their work, preferring pure and natural ingredients. It is because of this invitation to touch textured surfaces that the pieces do have to be durable and robust whether the offer is taken up or not. Godfrey wants her work to have an organic life-span but, in apparent contradiction to her intentions, she takes away the natural life of her sculptures by using unnatural materials such as resins, dyes and glues to achieve her desired effect. Godfrey uses a very different approach in construction than the other artists I spoke to, such as Holmes or Troth. To Godfrey, the creation of the piece, using all media at hand to aid in the construction is of greater importance than searching for natural materials that will avoid decaying the piece. In contrast the other artists I spoke to described how the act of creating and the making of a piece, gathering specifically chosen fibres, the therapeutic beating of fibres etc. are of an equal importance to the final piece.

Handmade Japanese Paper, 'Paperchase'

CHAPTER THREE

It is clear to me now that the intentions behind Godfrey's work i.e. creating for the moment, are different from those of Troth, Parry, Holmes and Farrow, which are to create tactile surfaces and forms with the purpose of encouraging interaction with their work. With different intentions, the artists using pulp have found their construction methods must respond to their different requirements. Godfrey realizes that her work is vulnerable, delicate and created for the moment, and her construction of pieces reflects this; she therefore gives the message to the public that what you get is what you see. If someone responds to the piece in an unsympathetic physical manner, then it will collapse. Winged (Fig.14) for example, is stable as far as its purpose is concerned, that of representing a fragile form, i.e. the cocoon in pulped paper.

Troth, Holmes and Farrow, on the other hand, express an interest in textured work with the intention of enticing the public into responding in a tactile manner. Therefore their construction methods must complement their intention, which is to use only natural materials that will strengthen the pulp. Even though the public may not touch work, these artists can be confident, knowing that in the event of a viewer touching their work the piece is strong enough to survive the experience. Farrow, who makes a living from selling her work, mentions, (Interview 4,1995) for example, how buyers can sometimes 'be wary' of buying pieces made from pulp for various reasons ranging from transportation of the piece to the length of its life-span. Farrow comments "but I do my best to educate buyers as to pulp's durability" (Interview 4, 1995). For her to convince the buyer her work is durable and then to add chemical agents that are likely to cause her pieces to eventually decay, Farrow, as well as being dishonest to the buyer, she would soon find herself without a livelihood;

therefore she must use only pure construction methods in her pulp, taken from Oriental techniques.

In contrast, Godrey's pieces are not designed to be tactile or have a long life; she wants people to appreciate her work by simply looking at it. The rest of the artists I spoke to so desire people to interact with their work and they go as far as incorporating tactile surfaces into their sculptures to encourage this; therefore it is important for their pieces to be durable. This highlights yet another contradiction that I refered to at the beginning of this paper. Having listed four, I have covered three so far:

i. contradiction in appearance i.e. appearing to be weak but in fact being resilent, as in the work of Jacki Parry.

ii. contradicitions in production techniques i.e. using only using only natural materials, like Holmes and Farrow or using man-made resins, glues and dyes, like Godfrey

iii. appearing to contradict the law of balance, achieving shapes and forms that seem impossible, e.g. Jacki Parry's Rainmaker.

It is apparent to me that there are many different signals being sent out by artists using pulp as a medium e.g. it appears fragile but in fact is robust, varying in texture from silken to leather. I could go on but the fact is that pulp possesses all of those qualities, no matter how contradictory they may sound. One technique is not better than another e.g. that of the Orientals, using traditionally only natural pure materials or the more modern method of mixing pulp with man-made chemicals that may cause deterioration in the pulp. Nor is one quality in pulp better than another i.e. silk or leather like, opaque or transparent; there are no right or wrong ways to use or treat pulp. Although all these contradictions in pulp I have mentioned may be causing me to ask questions about pulp's nature, I have realized there are

no answers to my questions. It is now clear to me that pulp has to be viewed on a personal level that is individual to each artist and his or her method or working. Some artists are concerned with making pulp pieces that will last forever, others use pulp for temporary projects and spontaneous events.

The Chinese and Japanese cultures have always combined their understanding of natural materials with practical and functional uses so that they can produce pulp products such those I have mentioned in chapter one, in an economical way. This can be seen in the production of pulp today where the cost is still low due to the fact that little machinery is needed. The making of pulp for paper is as much a community ritual today in Japan as it was hundreds of years ago, one that involves everyone from the young to the old. The West, on the other hand has very different attitudes and uses for pulp, using it mainly as a material to write or print on or to wrap with. Pauline Flynn, a Dublin-based artist who spent four years working and living in Japan who now works with hand made paper in a two-dimensional way, spoke to me about the attitudes of Europeans towards paper (Interview 6, 1995). She describes how we in the Western world only seem to treat paper with respect and understanding if we are artists or printmakers. If a piece of paper-pulped sculpture were to be recreated in bronze, wood or stone it would be recieved very differently by the onlooker than if it were to remain in pulp form.

This brings me to the fourth point of contradiction that I mentioned earlier as regards pulp: public response to paper-pulped sculpture i.e. do people interact with the work or are they put off by its, in some cases, fragile appearance? Again I have to say there is no ready answer. Differing signals are being sent out by artists, such as here is an exciting medium that produces a strong body of work that can be touched and

interacted with if desired, as in Troth's and Farrow's work or the reverse in Godfrey's case where her work is created for the moment and is not expected to have a long life. I originally thought these contradictory attitudes would confuse the onlooker about pulp, so much so that they would not know if it was acceptable to touch a piece of work or not and if they did, would the piece be durable enough to survive. Having spoken to artists and some galleries, such as the Arts Council's and the Ulster Museum in Belfast and retail outlets such as the DesignYard in Dublin, about public reaction to fragile pieces of sculpture in general, all have given me the same answer. Obviously certain work will have to be put in enclosed cases to protect it either from the environment or from robbery, but sculpture on open display is always going to be touched by some element of the public whether they are permitted to touch or not.

> "It really depends on the individual person, some touch sculpture regardless if they are invited to or not, others seem to treat the work as if it's almost something that is above them, never daring to touch it" (Interview 7, 1995)

the Ulster Museum told me.

No artist can dictate or force the onlooker to accept, look at or touch their work in a particular way. The debate about how and why the public reacts to sculpture can be left to the psychologist; it is not my job to disentangle how the viewer should percieve sculpture. It is such a wide issue that a separate paper could be written on this subject alone. Therefore it is an area I only want to refer to briefly. In my opinion it is indeed an inconclusive, individual issue between the viewer and the piece. It is true that in the West not all who view pulp will understand or respect the medium as much as the artist or the Japanese do but, then again, why should the Western population interact with pulp in a similar way to the Far Eastern population. This may be why there

are differences in the appearance, production and use of paper in the two continents such as the West using pulp to make newspapers, wallpapers and wrapping papers, whereas the East tend to use pulp to make screens, dolls, armour and even clothes. We are cultures with different beliefs and customs, so it is understandable that each will react to pulp in differing ways.

Handmade
Japanese paper
origin Unknown
(PAPER CHASE)

CONCLUSION

It was because of my own curiosity about a "fragile' medium that I decided to research this area of sculpture, partly because my own work is delicate and fragile. I wanted this research to produce a solution to the negative aspects of working with a delicate medium that I could then apply to my own work. I suppose I wanted to be reassured that when I exhibit my own work, the viewer will understand the production process and techniques; that they will have respect for the work and will know how to interact with the work in a way that is sympathetic to the medium. What I have actually learnt from my research is that there are no predictable answers. Certainly pulp artists have respect for their medium but how the viewer treats pulp is up to them just as how fragile or strong, transparent or opaque the artist makes their work is entirely up to them. I have come to realize, though speaking to artists working with pulp, that I have become protective of my work because it is fragile and delicate, but I am coming to terms with this fact and now have to turn these protective qualities into respect for my chosen material.

In a strange way without realizing it, the underlying reasons for my research were for me to challenge artists working in a similar way to myself so as to find out what their reasons for working with a sometimes fragile medium were, how they accept public reaction to their work, how they cope with the medium itself, do they feel the need to make the pulp stronger, do they like its delicate qualities. Having asked five different artists these questions, I have come to the conclusion that I could ask five hundred artists the same questions and still not come to a conclusion. Working in a delicate style myself I have learnt, through this research, that I have to view each artist, their choice of medium and use of technique in an individual, separate manner. It is fine to

create fragile work that is ephemeral, just as it is acceptable to create strong work or even work that appears to be fragile but is, in fact, robust.

Through my need to question sensitivity and understanding towards pulp, I have managed to learn a valuable lesson; that art is an individual experience, both to artist and viewer, and each cannot impose thoughts and opinions about the work upon the other. Art is a subject that has to be viewed on a subjective level. This is a lesson that I can now confidently apply to my own work for the better. As to the qualities of pulp, I can confirm that they are indeed contradictory; as Sophie Dawson states in her book, The Art And Craft of Papermaking (Dawson, 1993, p.129):

> "The contradictory combinations found in nature are echoed in the fragility and strength, the smoothness and roughness, the translucency and opacity, the flexibility and structure of pulp".

Handmade Japanese Paper, Maker Unknown
Paperchase

APPENDIX:

Interview text sent out ot artists November 1994

How did you get involved in paper pulped sculpture, and how long have you been using it as a medium?

Do you work with paper alone or do you find you combine it with other materials?

If yes, do you combine paper in order to add to the aesthetic value because its structurally needed or to make it a more durable piece?

How has your process of working changed and developed from you began working?

When working in paper do you try to make durable pieces or is this not a consideration?

Do you add any chemical additives to your pulp or do you only use natural products?

When trying to bring your work to an audience do you find museums, galleries, media and commercial outlets helpful?

Have you always found these attitudes to be true over the years?

Is organizing exhibition space more of a problem now than in the past?

When trying to sell or exhibit your work does transportation of the piece become a problem?

Do you find there is a market in Ireland for selling three-dimensional hand made paper?

When costing work do you find hand made paper sculptures will sell in the same price bracket as other craft materials such as ceramics, glass or metals?

How positive do you find the feedback to paper pulped sculpture?

What do you as a paper artist think of attitudes towards paper, compared to other mediums?

Was this always the attitude?

Would you say this attitude would be any different in other parts of Europe or even Japan and China?

Why?

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Interview 8, with DesignYard 1995