

The artistic use and development of recycled paper in sustainable art

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The advancement of science and technology have been causing resources wasting and pollution that rings an alarm in the public's attention. People are therefore starting to show more interest in environmentalism, low-carbon lifestyle, sustainable art and recycled materials. Paper is the most common natural recyclable material that is easily accessible in daily life. After a piece of paper is used, it can be collected and turned into recycled paper. Compared to other limited recycled material, recycled paper shows superior versatility as an artistic material. It comes in different textures and colors for printing, painting or sketching, also can be used in different ways like cutting, folding, sculpting, crafting. Thus, recycled paper stands a great chance with bringing unique connotation and values to the future art development.

Papermaking is one of the four great inventions in ancient China and its history can be traced back to 2,000 years ago. Early in Western Han Dynasty, paper was made with fibers of hemp. Hemp paper was used for writing and painting in most developing countries throughout the thousand years from Han Dynasty to Tang Dynasty. It was during the Eastern Han period Cai Lun improved the technique of papermaking to make higher quality paper with lower production cost. The knowledge and use of paper soon widely spread from China to the Middle East and medieval Europe. Papermaking started to play an important role in the development of world civilization and society. Paper is primarily used for writing, printing, artwork, currency and a number of industrial and construction processes. As the demand for paper raised, the traditional Chinese method of shredding old rags and clothes into individual fibers to make paper was abandoned. Instead, paper was made with fiber from trees because wood is a renewable and recyclable material that is less expensive and versatile. These advantages of wood, combined with the industry's advocacy of sustainable papermaking, use of renewable biomass and advancement in papermaking technology, therefore make paper one of the most sustainable products in the world.

In the history of art, paper has been a necessity for artists in sketching and drawing though those artworks were not regarded as worthy of display because of their low price. However, the

popularity of paper art has changed with the rise of Pop Art movement in the United Kingdom and the United States. The movement aimed to blur the boundaries between "high art" and "low culture", which it presented a challenge to traditions of fine art by creating artworks that include imageries from mass culture with low-cost materials. Robert Rauschenberg, one of the most influential Pop Art artists who worked in a wide range of subjects and techniques, completed a series of works like *Combines* and *Monogram* by unconventional medium such as oil, waste paper, fabric, newspaper, wood, metal, tissue paper, stone, other materials found on the street. While his artworks first appeared to be controversial, they were gradually recognized by many art collectors, galleries, and museums. The flourish of Robert Rauschenberg and other Pop Art artists led mass audiences into a revolutionary new page in art history, which prove that paper could also be an important art medium.



Rauschenberg and Walter Hopps standing in front of *Red Interior* (1954) and *Untitled* (1954).
Photograph by Gianfranco Gorgoni



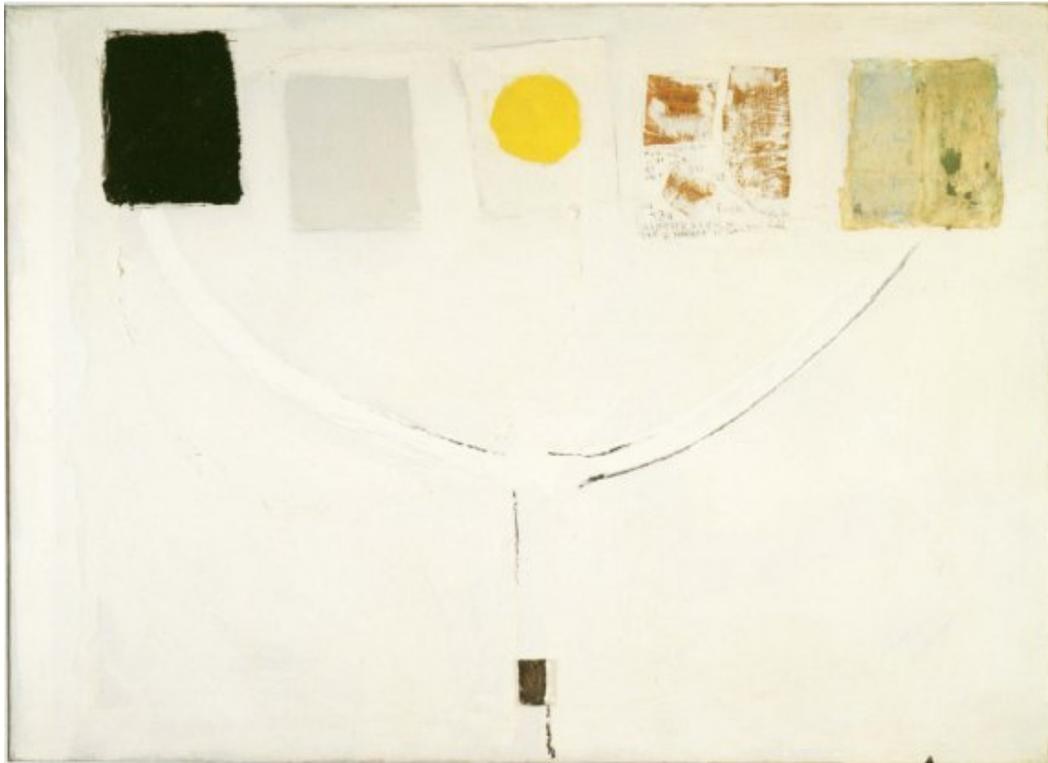
Monogram

Robert Rauschenberg

1955–59

Oil, paper, fabric, printed paper, printed reproductions, metal, wood, rubber tire, tennis ball, canvas, and Angora goat, wood platform mounted on four casters

42 x 63 1/4 x 64 1/2 inches



Untitled

Robert Rauschenberg

1951

Water-based paint, enamel, graphite, newspaper, tissue paper, and mirror on canvas

30 x 41 inches

The Pop Art movement gave paper a chance to be considered valuable in the art creative process, but the possibility in paper recycling was truly seen when sustainable art emerged after the Cold War ended in 1989. The key principles of sustainability ask individuals to consider their relationship with surrounding environments, question the global ecological and social problems, and conduct actions with the least impact to the environment. Sustainable art, under the same theory, is a range of artistic practices that repurpose wasted materials during art creation and addresses environmental issues. For example, Japanese artist Chie Hitotsuyama creates human size animals and marine life from old discarded newspapers – ones that have become unwanted and no longer have a purpose to the original owner. Canadian artist Guy Laramée collects aged

books like encyclopedias, dictionaries, second handed novels, and transforms them into mountain landscapes. “We live in books. We live in our heads.” Guy Laramée said “In the solitude of virgin landscapes, we might rediscover our intimate relationship to the world. In this intimacy we may see that we were never cut from what we call nature, even when we transform it.” As people around the world become more aware of global consciousness and the collective need to protect the Earth, more artists like Chie Hitotsutama and Guy Laramée shall embrace the concept and work in the realm of sustainable art with recycled paper.



Animal paper sculpture
Chie Hitotsuyama
Year unkown
14 x 9 x 13 inches



Seri Seru
Guy Laramée
2013-14

Beside the individual works of artists, art collectives around the world are also spreading the awareness of paper sustainability among the society by supporting artists or holding lecture talks or workshops. The International Association of Hand Papermakers and Paper Artists (IAPMA) founded in 1986 in Düren, Germany, facilitates an international exchange of artistic ideas and shares information about hand papermaking and paper art. Every year, they organize a congress meeting in different countries, providing insight into the local paper history and opportunities for members to discuss and collaborate on artistic projects and exhibitions. In 2021, IAPMA

members from around the globe exhibit their paper artworks at the University of Tasmania to celebrate the 35 years they committed to the paper art. Another paper Art exhibition *Paper Fern* was co-exhibited by Artist Wuba Yang and organization, the Suho Memorial Paper Museum, the one and only paper museum in Taiwan. Wuba's inspiration came from the diverse textures of handmade vintage paper and contemporary design paper at the museum. She chose the plants-made paper as her artistic medium, which she cut and folded these pieces of paper to create lifelike ferns to represent the unique beauty of Taiwan's ferns.

While the above artists or organizations focuses on paper artmaking, a non-profit art organization in Hong Kong has been researching and experimenting a sustainable way of recycling paper for years. Artists Co-op has developed a standing zero-carbon recycled paper making machine with a bike. The paper creation procedure involves a few steps. First, several water bottles are filled with wasted cut up paper and water, which are incorporated to the back wheel of the bike. When the bike is scooted, instead of rolling forward, the wasted paper and water at the bottles is blended into paper pulp. Once the pulp is mixed, the pulp is poured directly onto the deckle as thin and evenly as possible. The mold is then removed and the mixture is left dry. A new paper is then made. Besides paper-making, paper pulp can be applied differently in creative work such as sculpting or handcrafting. The greatest benefit of the invention is the zero consumption in electricity but only human force, which has given artists more options for their creative process.