

HAND PAPERMAKING

VOLUME 33, NUMBER 1 • SUMMER 2018

<i>Letter from the Editor</i>	2
<i>The Universal Solvent</i> SIMON BARCHAM GREEN, WITH ASSISTANCE FROM DR. ROBERT KEIRLE	3
<i>Breathing Through Paper</i> AMY RICHARD	8
<i>Feasting on Bark: An Incantation</i> MICHELE OKA DONER	12
<i>Saul Melman and Images of the Anthropocene: Ice, Water, Carbon, Trace, and Absence</i> DONNA GUSTAFSON	14
<i>Cold and Unyielding Ocean: Custom Paper for Arion Press's Moby-Dick</i> SIMON BARCHAM GREEN	19
<i>Paper Sample: Moby-Dick Paper</i> TEXT BY SIMON GREEN	23
<i>Kozo Art in a Time of Oceanic Change</i> JILL POWERS	24
<i>Ebb and Flow: A Conversation</i> MAY BABCOCK & MEGAN SINGLETON	30
<i>Beauty and Peril: Joan Hall, "Sea of Heartbreak"</i> FRANCINE WEISS	34
<i>Paper Sample: Part of the Tide</i> JOAN HALL	37
<i>Recycle Time and Space</i> SALLY WOOD JOHNSON	38
<i>Paper Sample: Fantasy Moiré Pattern on Tom Balbo Engraver's Paper</i> STEVE PITTELKOW	40
<i>Review</i> JENNIE HIRSH: <i>Collaborative Histories: Dieu Donné</i>	41
<i>Richard Tuttle: Can Paper Be the Thing / Recorded and Stored?</i> INTRODUCTION BY KATHLEEN FLYNN	44
<i>Authors</i>	47
<i>Advertisers and Contributors</i>	48

COVER: Joan Hall, large detail of *The New Normal: In with the Tide*, 2018, 70 x 100 x 15 inches, handmade paper of kozo and gampi, mixed media (collagraph printing, glass pins, acrylic, Mylar). Photo by Dan McManus. Courtesy of the artist.



Ebb and Flow: A Conversation

MAY BABCOCK & MEGAN SINGLETON

May Babcock and Megan Singleton, Ebb and Flow, 2016, 12 x 25 feet, handmade paper pulp from Mississippi River mud, abaca, cotton, American lotus. Courtesy of Megan Singleton.

MAY BABCOCK (BABCOCK): How *did* we start collaborating?

MEGAN SINGLETON (SINGLETON): Well, we first started making artwork together in 2010 during graduate school at Louisiana State University (LSU).

BABCOCK: Back then I was making large-scale woodcuts based on my sketches of sites in south Louisiana. I was drawn to defunct remnants of industrial sites, rusting bridges, locks, and the levee that surrounded the landscape next to the Mississippi River. I remember the sculptural paper work you were making at the same time, which focused on local plants, bayous, and ecological issues.

SINGLETON: That work began to take shape literally on my way to start graduate school in 2009. I drove down from St. Louis south along the Mississippi River to Baton Rouge, and by the time I arrived I was truly enamored by the subtropical and riparian Louisiana landscape. Even though my focus and teaching fellowship was through sculpture, I spent much of my time crisscrossing the departments of sculpture and printmaking, and taking advantage of LSU's amazing papermaking facility to experiment with fiber.

I started noticing piles and piles of banana trees stacked by the curb in front of homes. I put an ad on Craigslist and ended up driving all around the area collecting banana trees to process into paper. It was the beginning of a new practice for me to examine the viability and conceptual implications of using locally sourced fiber. This, coupled with my interest in botany and canoeing ultimately led to my research and artworks that interpreted the impacts of non-native aquatic flora in this majestic landscape. I think we were both exceedingly interested in getting out into the landscape and making work based on our observations and reflections of this unique place.

BABCOCK: Totally agree! Exploring our immediate locale and intriguing landscapes is definitely a commonality in our artistic practice. South Louisiana is a very different place from Connecticut [where I moved from before graduate school]. I think spending time outside is a way to begin trying to understand the complexities of place through land use; and papermaking



Megan Singleton, Viridescence through Desiccation, 2010, handmade paper from banana fiber (cut, collected, boiled, and processed by the artist). This temporary structure of 4 x 8-foot sheets of banana paper, wrapped around a lashed bamboo armature, suggests vernacular architecture and proposes the use of banana fiber as a viable material for adequate temporary shelter. Courtesy of the artist.



May Babcock, Port Allen Bridge, 2010, 12 x 8 feet, woodcut on handmade paper (cotton linters, bagasse, linen rag, pigments). Courtesy of the artist.

is a way to incorporate material from sites. Eventually in my thesis work, I used bagasse fiber, which I obtained from a sugarcane processing plant.

My first encounter with papermaking was actually our first collaboration. We were working in the same space, me at the big printmaking press, and you at the Hollander beater and vacuum table. I became curious about what you were doing—I had no clue what papermaking was! That was pretty exciting when we made paper from blue abaca, and printed the sheets wet onto one of my woodcuts. After that, I was hooked.

SINGLETON: Yeah, that was a great day in the studio! I had a background in photography and sculpture, so learning more about printmaking processes, especially in this large format, was really intriguing to me. We got to talking; you were printing and I was pulling sheets; and we were like, hey, let's see what happens if we try printing these freshly made, thin high-shrinkage sheets on your giant wood block. It was a great experiment! Some stuck to the block, some popped off and shrunk in interesting ways that related to the weight of the ink. You took the papermaking class I was co-teaching in the spring of 2010 and really took off with your papermaking explorations. I genuinely love teaching papermaking and it was extraordinary to have your energy and enthusiasm in that class.

BABCOCK: There wasn't a direct conceptual link between our work at first. However, during our first group collaboration, *Passing Notes* (2011), the inspiration became the Mississippi River itself. Sarah Shearer (a fellow printmaking graduate student), you, and I needed to fill a St. Louis piano shop with an installation, and ended up pouring irregularly shaped sheets from banana and bagasse fiber. These were printed with a woodcut monoprint approach, and suspended from

the ceiling for an immersive experience. This was followed by a second group installation a year later with Sarah again, and Jessie Hornbrook who contributed projected video. *Channels* (2012) was based on the changing path of the Mississippi River on its course to the Gulf of Mexico.

SINGLETON: I think one of the best parts of these early collaborations was the sharing of skills and ideas through working together in the studio. The more I learned about printmaking the more you learned about papermaking. In terms of conceptual links, I think maybe we began having more crossover after our joint research for the performance we did at Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia along the Schuylkill River. Although this collaboration did not involve papermaking, it was the first planned project we did together; it was less about experimentation in process and more about the conceptual exploration of a historical site and the complex relationships that exist between nature, human impact, and the development of the built world.

BABCOCK: And even now, when we live in different parts of the county, we are exploring these relationships, like in our most recent collaboration, *Ebb and Flow* (2016). To create new work for our two-person exhibition in Springfield, Illinois, we approached the project with several core guidelines. We knew that we would use paper pulp to create the collaborative installation. Also, after we had a few brainstorming sessions on how to find connections between our respective locations, we decided that the inspiration would be based on research of the waterways and aquatic plants in the Midwest and Northeast.

SINGLETON: Essentially we were curating a show for a rather large gallery utilizing previous works we had made independently that we would exhibit alongside new collaborative works. It worked out so well that you were able to come to Saint Louis for almost three weeks and we had time to visit the river, collect material, and work together in the studio. It was almost like you had a mini-residency at Zymo Sculpture Studio, where my paper studio is. When you arrived we went to my studio with a printout of the gallery floor plan and mapped out where all the work we already had made

would go and said, okay we need to make works for this 30-foot wall and this other 8-foot wall and we have two and a half weeks; let's get to work!

Earlier that summer I had discovered how to access watershed maps of the country on the US Geospatial website and had been converting this imagery into vector drawing to laser cut wood blocks for printing and for hand cutting watermarks. I showed the printouts to you and we thought this imagery would be great interpreted as pulp line drawings—like I had been doing for the milfoil plant interpretations—so we went for it and it turned out fabulous! The beater was running pretty consistently for the next week.

BABCOCK: It was an awesome time in your studio! I think our previous group collaborations took form organically through process and time together. You can start out with a formal visual inspiration (hydrology maps) and materials from sites (river mud and plant fibers), but from there, the first iteration of *Ebb and Flow* blossomed from working side by side with pulp, and later, making design decisions during installation. The three weeks in your paper studio was really where the magic happened! It think this made long-distance collaboration a year later with *Ebb and Flow II* (2017) a smoother process...though much more shipping of cooked plant fibers!

SINGLETON: We have a great studio dynamic together. I think over the years we have developed a real appreciation and respect for each other's practice, aesthetic, and work ethic. So when we are making decisions together in the studio to figure out color palettes while pigmenting, or while on site composing a pulp line on the wall, it's very fluid and open. We also have a lot fun working together, which to me is a very important element in a successful collaboration.

BABCOCK: Very true. It's always a great time, and we always wish we lived closer to each other! What I also love about papermaking as a creative medium is the enormous freedom of choice in the studio, in a material and physical sense. Maybe that's why getting one's hands wet with pulp has been crucial in our collaborations. Pulp gives us so many possibilities for color, context, surface, texture, form...there's a synthesis that happens in the paper studio, and especially when making decisions with a collaborator. Thus, it becomes an open process of bouncing ideas off each other to see what works. You exchange technique and approach, which is also a great learning experience at the end of the day.

SINGLETON: Yes, yes, yes. I totally agree with you. What I have found not only within our collaborations, but also within the larger hand papermaking community is an openness to share ideas and techniques amongst one another. In addition to being drawn to the myriad of ways you can physically create work with handmade paper and pulp, I find it very pertinent that we are able to physically embed a sense of place and layer conceptual meaning into the work by our material choices as papermakers.

BABCOCK: I definitely see that my own work, as it has developed over time in papermaking, has been addressing ecological issues more directly. I've always been interested in land beyond the romanticizing notion of a traditional landscape, or what we see looking out the window. It's a question of how our landscapes, altered by people, say something about us. It's looking at a specific locale's geology, plant ecology, history, and land use. *Ebb and Flow* sharpens this focus by looking at specific watersheds and evidence of human impact on nature, specifically through the presence of non-native aquatic plant species.



May Babcock and Megan Singleton, *Ebb and Flow II*, 2017, 14 x 20 feet, handmade paper pulp, laser-cut handmade paper (abaca, cotton, Japanese knotweed, Phragmites australis, Eurasian water-milfoil, variable milfoil, inflated bladderwort, Codium fragile, Heterosiphonia japonica). Moveable wall section is to the left of the artwork, and at times conceals the grid of plant silhouettes. Courtesy of May Babcock.

SINGLETON: Everyone knows what a watershed is, right? Actually, the answer is probably no, which is one of the reasons why I think this work is important. It's a chance to communicate the idea that wherever you are right now, you are in a watershed. Watersheds are areas of land defined by their drainage outlet, so if it rains or floods wherever you are right now all of that water is going to drain to a common place, and that defines your watershed.

In this way, paper is the perfect medium to address these ideas, because it is formed in a watery environment, perhaps more so than other media. Paper can be manipulated in the studio and in the gallery using light to enhance translucency or create shadows. For me, these seductive qualities in conjunction with the ability to incorporate site-specific materials make paper the ideal medium to create beautiful objects that draw viewers in, but then confronts them with a didactic element addressing an ecological concern.

We are papermakers and water is a crucial element in our creative endeavors, so I think it is also really important to be conservative with water use and know where the water comes from and where it is going.

BABCOCK: Right! It's an exciting synchronicity that is happening within *Ebb and Flow*, between papermaking as a wet process and addressing the movement of water over and under land. Incorporating river sediment into paper calls attention to the material's geological and ecological significance within a watershed. Sediment is loose matter that settles at the bottom of water, and is the result of erosion. It occurs naturally over time and from the movement of water, but also can come from land development and soil disruption. These deposits are the accumulation of an entire watershed, including any pollutants. For me, including sediment into a water-intensive process becomes a doubly reflective act.

After creating *Ebb and Flow* for the Springfield exhibition, we responded to an open call from the Brown Arts Initiative



Megan Singleton, *Beneath the Surface of Boyden Lake*, 2015, triptych: 64 x 18 inches each, handmade paper of milfoil and abaca. The pulp drawings are of the invasive aquatic plant milfoil; plant material collected from Boyden Lake in Eastport, Maine. Courtesy of the artist.

with a proposal to expand upon the theme with a new installation. We were then awarded the mural space at the Granoff Center, a Brown University building in Providence, Rhode Island. To reflect Rhode Island ecologies, we created *Ebb and Flow II* based on research into the Narragansett Bay watershed and invasive plants. Through the spring season, I visited nine different sites around Narragansett Bay to collect plant fiber to make into pulp for the installation. The final plant list represented freshwater, riparian, and marine species. We were especially inspired by red seaweed (*Heterosiphonia japonica*), and the warm-red tones in the final installation are reflective of that.

SINGLETON: I was excited that this work would be on display for an entire school year in a prominent and actively engaged space. Since we had worked out a lot of the pulp preparation, pulp painting, and installation techniques on the first iteration of *Ebb and Flow*, it made collaborating from different cities much easier. I thought it worked really well to keep all our research on Google Drive so we could access, add, and brainstorm on an interactive platform. You would go out and collect the plant from the shore or from the water while kayaking, and upload images documenting the sites. I have to admit I was a little envious when I looked at all the images. Exploring and collecting is one of my favorite parts of the process, but I also loved getting the parcels in the mail: processed fiber ready to go in the beater! This project also gave us a new design challenge. The wall on which we installed *Ebb and Flow II* was connected to a moveable wall, so at certain times throughout the year, six feet of the mural wall was covered. In an effort to both interject more visual information relating to the plant research we had done and create a compositional break that made sense, we came up with a solution that added a new and dynamic element to the installation.

BABCOCK: That wall situation was tough to understand at first! During this research, I was struck by the direct correlation



May Babcock, *Rhode Island Macroalgae #5*, 2017, 6 x 9 inches, handmade paper from linen rag and red seaweed. Seaweed is laminated and pressed during the wet hand papermaking process. This is one of an ongoing group of both macroalgae and macrophytes started as an identification method while researching species for *Ebb and Flow II*. Courtesy of the artist.

between a larger presence of non-native plant species where there were more environmental stressors due to development. We created a taxonomy of the plants we used for fiber, and this portion of the installation was intermittently hidden or revealed depending on the wall positioning. To the left of the hand-drawn lines of pulp, one can see the plant silhouette and its common and scientific name. The silhouette shapes are laser-cut from sheets made from the plant. I love how the challenge of the moveable wall became a way to provide an educational element, with a pseudo herbarium of handmade paper cutouts mounted on Plexiglass.

SINGLETON: Since completing *Ebb and Flow II* at Brown University in the summer of 2017, we have both continued to create large wall installations depicting watershed areas in other parts of the country. As I was working on this installation, I began to think about this piece and future interpretations of watersheds I would do and you would do independently using the same research methods and papermaking techniques in the future. I was interested in the idea of developing an archive of these works we have done and will continue to do. Keeping the *Ebb and Flow* title seemed to make sense, so I called you up to talk about it, and you agreed. *Ebb and Flow III* was an interpretation of the red running Lower Cimarron River that I made using red clay soil from the riverbed in Oklahoma City, for a solo exhibition called *Fluvial Terra* at Untitled ArtSpace. *Ebb and Flow IV* is installed in the Saint Louis Lambert Airport until April 2019. This installation is a drawing of the Lower Missouri River watershed and is accompanied by large-scale, laser-cut drawings of native Missouri aquatic plants made from handmade paper of the plants they depict.

BABCOCK: And now, I am working on *Ebb and Flow V*, based on the Blackstone River watershed map and its industrial textile history. This will be installed at Machines with Magnets, a gallery in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution in the United States. Incorporated into the space is a cyanotype print series on handmade paper of non-native plants, observational sketches, and sediment gathered from dam sites along the river. It is fulfilling to see the continuation of *Ebb and Flow*. Whether independently or collaboratively produced, each new work evolves in response to different watersheds across the country, materials, and to the installation space.