

Paper work? Bring it on

'Cut: Makings of Removal' at the Vincent Price Art Museum at East Los Angeles College presents striking examples of art made from cut paper.

By Scarlet Cheng

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Making art by cutting paper is a humble folk tradition in many parts of the globe, including China -- where paper was invented -- Mexico and Germany. But in "Cut: Makings of Removal" at the Vincent Price Art Museum at East Los Angeles College, museum director Karen Rapp sought to upend preconceived notions and go beyond specific cultural traditions.

"I wanted to find artists working in unexpected ways, in fine art ways, with paper," Rapp said during a recent walk through the gallery, and the works by the 17 artists she selected amply demonstrate the versatility of paper when it's subjected to the blades of the imaginative.

"It was very important that the artists hand-cut the paper -- not with laser or machines," Rapp said. She wanted the workings of the human hand to be evident, and "I wanted to keep it as simple and as pure as possible: that the work is clearly about the cut paper, and not about its being used as a steppingstone to some other form."

The selections range from the small, jewel-like geometric shapes of Teresa Redden to a wall-sized mural by Eva Struble, "Poble Nou wall, winter (vines)," and a mini-jungle installation by Chris Natrop, "Inside the Silver See-Through (Landing Nowhere Else)." There are two-dimensional pieces that hang on walls as well as three-dimensional sculptures.

Near the entrance is Pepe Mår's confrontational "Toro Cojo" (Crippled Bull), one of the artist's explosively colorful "collage monsters" made of rolled, fringed, shaped cuttings. It suggests the head of an enraged bull, its eyes and nostrils flaring, its shrieks visualized and seen all at once from multiple perspectives -- a nod to Picasso's Cubism as well as to one of Picasso's favorite subjects.

For the installation "Plastic Mountain," Dana Maiden blew up photographs of plastic lawn chairs, glued them to backing and cut them into silhouettes of lawn chairs, then stacked them willy-nilly as you might in a corner of your garage.

On the more serene side are the works of Noriko Ambe, a Tokyo artist who cuts and stacks sheets of paper or paper-like material, one on top of another, as if forming geological layers. In "Charleston Black Smith," she has taken a whole book and cut from the cover to the inside pages, revealing interrupted images and words.

"Cut" also wants us to remember both the origins of paper and where it often goes. Japanese artist Yuken Teruya accomplishes this by cleverly recycling paper shopping bags. "Notice-Forest" is a bag hung on the wall at eye level, its opening facing outward and allowing onlookers to peer inside -- onto a little forest of two miniature trees. Teruya has adeptly snipped up one side of the bag and formed two "leafy" green trees with white trunks, not only astonishing us with his sleight-of-hand but reminding us where the bag came from.

Paper can be used to express highly personal musings. The assemblages of Jane South, who was born in England and works in New York, look like three-dimensional pen and ink drawings. Their combinations of cogs, turbines and girders that recall the Industrial Age don't, however, replicate any actual machinery, and South acknowledges there's a certain hamster-wheel futility suggested by this recurring motif.

In "Church Lady's Rapturous Veiled Hat," by contrast, Leigh Salgado has made an intricate drawing of a hat and its veil gone wild, the meshwork cascading down one side and flying out the other. Openings have been cut out of the drawing and edges burned, and since the piece is hung slightly away from the wall, it achieves an added dimension. The central form is surrounded by black curlicues like those found on flocked wallpaper, for a fascinating goth combination of delicacy and decadence.

"I was originally doing painting," says the Los Angeles-based Salgado, who currently has a solo show in the project room at the Patricia Correia Gallery. "Then, to open myself up, I started drawing large drawings, doodle drawings. There were parts I didn't like, so I cut them out, and I thought, 'This is pretty interesting.'"

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