

HAND PAPERMAKING



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FRONT COVER: Karen Kandel (performer/writer) and Shonosuke Okura (Noh Drummer) in *Sen no Rikyu of Recycling: washi tales*, New York Theatre Workshop, 2011. Kyoko Ibe (set/costume design), Elise Thoron (director/writer), Jane Cox (lighting design). Photo: Isaac Bloom. BACK COVER: Lesley Dill, making adjustments to Poem Dress for a Hermaphrodite, 1995, 66 x 30 x 20 inches, tissue paper, thread, ribbon, ink. Performed by Sur Rodney Sur, in "Pulp Fashion" event, on December 2, 1995, at Dieu Donneé Papermill, New York. Photo: Lesley Dill Studio.

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Letter from the Editor

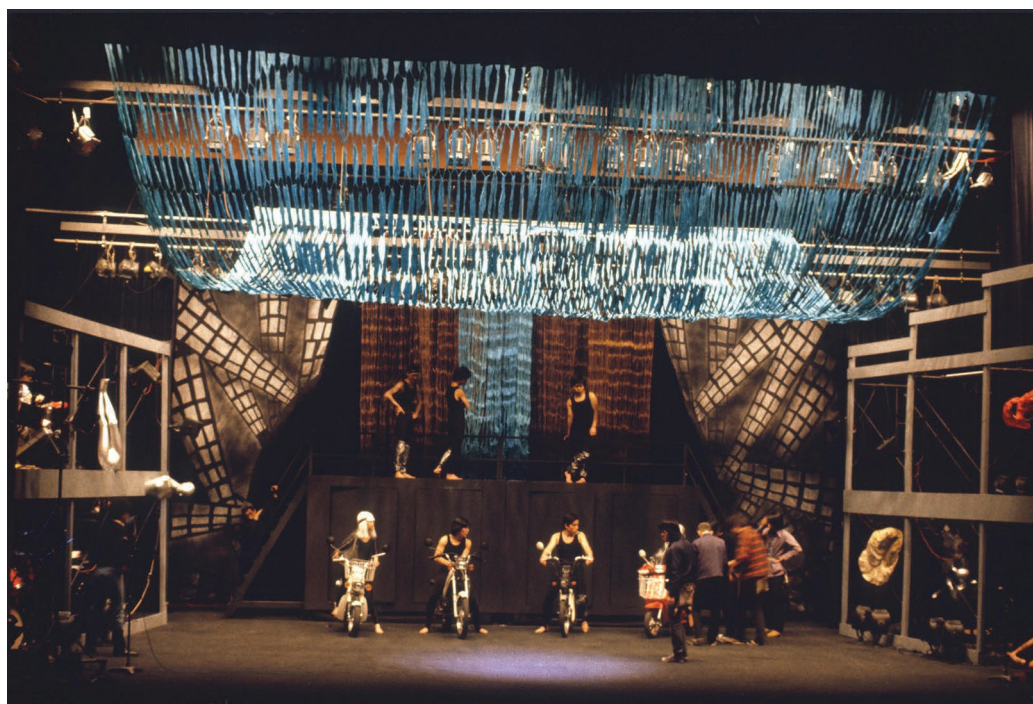
When *Hand Papermaking* was founded in 1986, one of the primary and continuing goals of the magazine has been to connect practitioners, historians, educators, and artists—to share research, document our findings, and advance the field as a whole. We often say that our community gathers in the pages of our publications. The organization itself has operated ‘virtually’—since the beginning, the board of directors and staff have been meeting via telephone and videoconferencing to bridge long distances. But every five years or so we make sure to convene in a room together, because we know that nothing takes the place of sharing the same physical space and time to assess, plan, and reaffirm our commitment to the handmade and the handheld. We are scheduled to do so again in 2021; we hope this will be possible given all the uncertainty with the coronavirus pandemic.

Sharing space and time and experiential connection are at the core of this issue of the magazine, in which we look at ways artists have mobilized paper in performance. The physical, aesthetic, and working properties of paper have been explored in costume and stage design, sound pieces, and kinetic artwork, both in live performance and as a document of private performance. We also examine the performative nature of the act of papermaking and the choreography inherent in the process.

Midori Yoshimoto starts off the issue by introducing us to the work of Japanese artist Shiraga Fujiko (1928–2015), an early member of Gutai, the Japanese avant-garde, performance-based collective, active in the 1950s. Elise Thoron shares her conversation with Japanese paper artist Kyoko Ibe who first incorporated paper in performance work in the early 1980s, finding that “theater is the ideal place to show the beauty and variety of washi.” Hannah Turpin writes about Fluxus performance in Alison Knowles’s handmade-paper sound sculptures, costumes, and instruments. Winifred Lutz worked with our wonderful designer Karen Kopacz to ‘re-stage’ (with coda) a photo story publication of *Light Cycle*, a performance project Lutz produced in Anchorage, Alaska in 1986. In Lucy Kay Riley’s article about Lesley Dill’s extensive use of paper costumes in performance-based pieces, Riley argues, “live performances activate the work, bringing the paper alive again.” Beatrix Mapalagama contributes a profile of Tone Fink, an Austrian artist who uses paper costumes, masks, and objects in his performance pieces and installations. Michelle Samour maintains that the process of making paper is by its very nature performative, in the ways papermakers use their bodies to transform pulp into paper, and the synchronized movements that are required when more than one are at the vat. Artist and papermaker Peter Sowiski contributes a paper sample that demonstrates the use of one of his whole-body-action, DIY, pulp-painting tools. Karen Trask reviews Sarah Bertrand-Hamel’s new permanent installation of drawings and paperworks at the Pierrefonds Public Library in Montreal, Quebec, Canada; and Lisa Cirando gives us her take on “Paper Borders,” a recent exhibition of paperworks by Emma Nishimura and Tahir Carl Karmali, presented at the International Print Center New York.

By the time you receive this in hand, I hope there is at least a timetable for when we can once again embrace family and friends, and be productive in the world beyond “sheltering in place.” On behalf of the board and staff of Hand Papermaking, Inc., I send our best wishes for your safety and health. Please send word of your papermaking doings (and performances) during this time of necessary physical distancing. In our longtime role to foster “distant gathering,” we would like to share them in the upcoming edition of *Hand Papermaking Newsletter*.

Mina Takahashi



Between Eye and Light: An Interview with Kyoko Ibe

ELISE THORON

Kyoko Ibe, set design for Izumo no Okuni at the Kyoto Prefectural Center for Arts and Culture, Japan, 1982.

BELOW: Kyoko Ibe (left) and papermaker Tadashi Tamura in a Washi Tales workshop, Asia Society, New York, 2016.

Photo: Ellen Wallop. All photos courtesy of the artist.

Japanese paper artist Kyoko Ibe¹ is a pioneer in using washi and traditional papermaking techniques to create fine art and contemporary design. For over forty years, she has been researching the dynamic qualities of washi in many forms, one of them performance.

Kyoko and I have been working together for over a decade on a performance piece called *Recycling: washi tales*. The company consists of Kyoko (artist/set-costume design) and me (writer/director), with the American performer Karen Kandel (papermaker/writer), and Japanese performers: Shisui Arai (biwa), Shonosuke Okura (Noh drum), Makiko Sakurai (Fujiwara Tamiko/shomyo chanting), Sonoko Soeda (Oshin/translator), and Tadashi Tamura (papermaker/installer). Since 2009, the company has evolved and performed *Recycling: washi tales* in museums, theaters, and universities, and taught workshops in the United States and Japan. The next performance will take place in September 2022 for the opening of the new cultural hall in Muko City, Kyoto. Images and videos are available on the website, www.washitales.com.

Today, we're sitting at a long wooden table in her kitchen at her "Yama" studio, located in an artists' village, high on a mountaintop above Kyoto. It is early November, the afternoon sunlight is turning the shoji screens persimmon in color. Behind I watch the shadow of her master papermaker, Tadashi Tamura, preparing pulp (gampi) for Kyoko's next creation. This is already performance...

ELISE THORON (ET): How did you first start working with washi in performance?

KYOKO IBE (KI): My first exhibitions took place in 1974 using washi as a material for design and also for art. I had two shows together at the same time in two different places: *Washi in Our Life Style* (functional objects) and *Washi as Form* (non-figurative abstract hanging and standing sculpture). That was my statement from the beginning: I work not in a limited corner, but both in design and art, both sides at once, because the material has that



possibility. At the time, washi was only thought of as material for traditional Japanese art or architecture, nothing new happened, nothing. But I realized the possibility to use the material in new creative ways, not only as material for art, but for lifestyle. Left side design, right side art, to move forward two ways together in order to find something new.

ET: Interesting, because performance is both left and right side...

KI: Yes, exactly, you need both functional design and art for performance. It was the influence of the American Craft Movement to use traditional craft as an art form in fields of ceramics and textile, which were already developed. I tried ceramics and textile as a student, but I was so bad. Then I finally found washi as a good material for me—no one cared—there was nothing in washi—no one thought of it as good material. And because no one cared, I was perfectly free, which is why I dared to do it. My washi work was immediately accepted by press and television because it was unusual, something novel. Galleries and craft shops invited me to show my art work and sell my lamps. [*She points to the washi spiral above the table*] This is part of the prototype I designed forty years ago. And the market opened up; I was able to make a little money, enough to survive.

ET: When was the first instance you consciously worked on performance?

KI: In 1982 the Kyoto Prefectural Center for Arts and Culture was doing a new production using elements of traditional performance and the director was looking for someone to do the set. He was friends with the daughter of my gallerist and she recommended me. It was a production by a famous actress who wanted to tell the story of *Izumo no Okuni*, the lady founder of Kabuki; she was performing with a National Treasure Kyogen actor and her idea “on top” was to simulate John Lennon and Yoko Ono as the couple—they were dressed by a fancy San Francisco top fashion designer. Not my story, I just grabbed the opportunity to design the set.

ET: And how did you use washi?

KI: I made one large hanging paper panel, similar to the one we use in *Washi Tales* for shadow, one huge washi drop, hanging straight down, but then it comes up over the audience like a tent. I found that the theater is the ideal place to show the beauty and variety of washi. Because—this is my theory—washi should be placed between your eye and a light source to see it fully. Light from behind is the best position. So the audience is seated in one place, but you can shoot light from many different directions.

ET: Did you work with a lighting designer who understood these possibilities?

KI: Yes, Funakoshi-san, he was excellent. The Prefectural Theater had their own tech group including a great lighting designer who understood perfectly. He really loved washi. The idea of hanging the washi so it could change position in relationship to the audience during performance was his. He suddenly said, what do



Kyoko Ibe, *Izumo no Okuni*, 1983, video, presented at Lausanne Textile Biennale, Switzerland, 1983.



Kyoko Ibe, *Japanese Autumn, Kyo, Kaze*, installation at Alvar Aalto's North Jutland Art Museum, Denmark, 1985.

you think about moving the baton and changing the position of washi to the light? I loved it. That was the essence of the set—very simple. He was the first person to show me how to work with washi on stage—he already passed away.

Then, while I was working for the International Paper Conference '83 Kyoto, I learned about the Textile Biennale in Lausanne [Switzerland], which was a gateway to being recognized as an international artist. Their theme for their upcoming show was something like “Fiber and the Environment.” I thought, Mine is a stage art using paper—why not apply? I sent in my material and my piece was accepted—mine was the only stage art.

ET: So how did you present your piece at the biennale?

KI: I employed a video artist. I rented a stage—very expensive—and I set up my piece and asked that great lighting designer to work for me to make a good video. I showed the video at the exhibition—which was also a first—no performer [*laughter*] no Noh performer, only light and moving the paper. A fifteen-minute film—that was my international debut. A member of the jury, who was the director of a Danish art museum designed by Alvar Aalto



Kyoko Ibe, set design for Kami to Mai (Paper and Dance); Tandy Beal (performer/choreographer), Tokyo, 1987.



Kyoko Ibe, set design for Dojoji (A Forbidden Journey); Kjeitel Skoien (performer/director), Oslo Black Box Theater, 1990.



Kyoko Ibe, set design for *Paper Song*; Rebecca Nettl (choreographer), Illinois Dance Company, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 1998.

[North Jutland Art Museum] was very interested and came to Japan to interview me and invited me to Denmark to the museum as an artist in residence. I was there four times to exhibit and learned a lot from working in Aalto's design, which was a real inspiration to me. I learned how to put washi in the space, how to install—there was no word “installation” in the art field back then. In the beautifully designed space of the Aalto museum, I learned how to connect the building and people through my washi pieces. The building talked to me, and this was the best training for the stage.

ET: So you are saying installing in a gallery is performative?

KI: Yes, yes. So naturally I developed more lighting techniques for installing my exhibitions; adding mirror panels (strips of Mylar) to hang behind washi to catch the light from behind...

ET: ...which we now use in the *Washi Tales* forest with the special dimmers that your Kyoto Technology student designed.

KI: I also installed many pieces in public spaces and buildings, one in a children's museum, where the focus was on touching the washi and interacting with my installation.

In 1987, Tandy Beal, a contemporary dancer who was on a Japan-US Friendship Commission fellowship, visited a building where I had installed my artwork. It was the first day she was in Japan. There was a small piece at the top of each escalator on ev-

ery floor. She had a shock and said “this is what I had to find—the most theatrical art I ever saw.” So, I began to do stage design, first for her solo dance performance *Kami to Mai* (*Paper and Dance*, performed in Tokyo and Kyoto, 1987), then for a work for her company *Time Falling Bodies Taking To Light* (1988) for the San Francisco Performing Arts Festival, where I won the Isadora Duncan Prize for visual design. I organized a tour for the company to perform in Japan at Tonga International Festival, and also Kyoto, Sendai, and Tokushima.

ET: As we know a washi set is incredibly strong, durable, light, and easy to pack. Just collapse into a suitcase and carry on a plane. What was different about working with a dancer?

KI: Working with dancers, it was much easier for me to solve the problem of their movement on stage than working with the public or children in an installation. My first principle is I don't like to disturb dancers' movement. I observe how they move, then think how to put my paper in relation to their bodies to make a whole new world better than before. I have to see them moving first, then think about what is possible. Like for *Washi Tales*.

Working with a good lighting designer is very important; we have a similar approach: to find out how to be good for the performers, to create a good feeling for them on stage. At that time the costumes were designed by a famous textile designer and friend, Junichi Arai, though not made of paper.



Sonoko Soeda (performer) as Oshin in *Najio Gawa of Recycling: washi tales*, Asia Society, New York, 2016. Kyoko Ibe (set/costume design), Elise Thoron (director/writer), Nicole Pearce (lighting design). Photo: Ellen Wallop.

ET: When did you first use washi for costumes?

KI: In 1990, for *Dojoji* (*A Forbidden Journey*) with a Norwegian dancer and choreographer, Kjeitel Skoien, artistic director of Passage Nord. I think it was Matsui-san the Noh master's idea—no—it was the year before, 1989. I was working for the Takarazuka group, you know the all-ladies theater troupe in Osaka. They were producing a famous Bunraku text *Sonezaki Shinju* (*The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*) and I was making the stage. The kimono design was done by a very professional group who used traditional *kamiko*-kimono, paper dress, made for a National Treasure Kabuki actor and they went to borrow it to use as part of the costume. I thought—hmm, paper...

ET: So washi was a traditional material for Kabuki costumes?

KI: Yes and they still use it—charge several million yen for one kimono. I thought, I could do that—easy for me.

ET: Why do they use paper kimonos?

KI: Like Bashō [the master haiku poet]...everyone at that time used paper kimonos when they travelled, covered their body in washi to protect from the weather. In the story on stage the couple was traveling, so they used traditional *kamiko*-kimono. I didn't know how to make a kimono, but I knew the material by now and had



Karen Kandel (performer/writer) as Papermaker and Sonoko Soeda (performer/translator) as Oshin in *Najio Gawa of Recycling: washi tales*, Asia Society, New York, 2016. Kyoko Ibe (set/costume design), Elise Thoron (director/writer), Nicole Pearce (lighting design). Photo: Ellen Wallop.



Washi Tales company in *Hogoshō of Recycling: washi tales*, Asia Society, New York, 2016. Kyoko Ibe (set/costume design), Elise Thoron (director/writer), Nicole Pearce (lighting design). Photo: Ellen Wallop.

an American assistant who was very interested. So I sent him to learn from an expert in kimono making, and he mastered how to make them. He made the washi kimono Makiko [Sakurai, actor] is now using as Fujiwara Tamiko in *Washi Tales*.

The movement of my paper pieces is always related to the human body—finding the zero point between the human action and movement of paper. The reaction of the paper is different, slightly slower than cloth—the 0.1 second or so difference is of great interest to me. I learned this from using washi as a costume: cloth moves perfectly with your skin, but when you wear washi there is a distance from the skin. A washi sleeve moves slower than your arm, gives shape to the action. I control the weight of the paper, the length, the volume, to enhance the delay—this is what I want to show on stage.

ET: Yes. And the sound of Makiko's footsteps entering in darkness in the huge washi kimono and pants is breathtaking. Or I love when Oshin disappears into the washi forest to commit suicide and takes off her paper traveling kimono; we have it so the kimono remains standing slightly collapsed, but keeping her form on stage

like a ghost. At the end of the tale when the papermaker picks it up to fold it is like Karen [Kandel, actor] is touching Oshin's spirit.

ET: What other performances have you designed that stand out for you?

KI: I especially enjoyed working with Pat Knowles, choreographer, and the Illinois Dance Company on *Through the Darkness* (1998), and Rebecca Netti's *Paper Song* (1998). I followed Pat's direction, and she helped me to be "best of best." She was excellent at listening and helping to realize my ideas in theater, especially when I need to communicate with theater people.

ET: Is the language theater people talk different?

KI: They have Union stage technicians; they have no sense of handling artwork. I also worked with the Utah Dance company, by this time I had much more knowledge and experience, so I felt confident in what I could do on stage and it was easier. By the time we began working together on *Recycling: washi tales* (2009) I could

start from nothing and wait until the last minute for the idea to come from the text and what you were creating with the performers.

ET: Yes, we created the first version of the piece in only a week in the studio at the New York Theatre Workshop. My text existed before we started, but we really did not know what form it would take; it was a real collaboration with you and the performers.

KI: I recall at that point we didn't actually make paper on stage—

ET: That's right—hard to imagine now. We wanted to represent papermaking as an action, but we thought to do it more abstractly, through repeated gesture, use of tools, and recorded sound. Remember all those recordings I made of papermaking sounds in your studio with that recorder my sound designer gave me? The beating, songs, and stirring of the vat...

KI: Then in the discussion after our first workshop presentation, some audience member made what I thought was a stupid comment about needing to see real papermaking and I thought, never to be that literal—but from that point we started thinking about it.

ET: Yes, our decision to make paper on stage had a profound impact on the show, really made it an entirely acoustic experience with sound being just as important an element as light. The first word of the text is "Listen...." Our traditional musicians and sound of papermaking live in the room. In my interviews with washi makers this was such a strong common theme: listening to sound of the pulp and water in the vat. So not only did your earliest work with light and washi guide us, but the sound of water and performative ritual of making paper set the rhythm of the piece, until the final sutra is orchestrated to go from brightest white light and full instrumentation to end in darkness with just the sound of Karen alone at the vat making paper.

KI: Of course, there are logistical challenges: I had to design a portable vat in proportion to the various performance spaces.

ET: Tamura-san has to prepare the fiber for every show... bringing water into museums and theaters.

KI: The position of the vat along with the washi shadow panel become the key choices for each installation. It all is designed from there. The shadow panel we also did not have in the first workshop....

ET: It was always in my mind to do so, but I had to learn from a puppeteer first how to execute it. The shadows in the paper seemed like the most natural way of conveying the spirits of the nineteenth-century village you have in your *Hogoshō* panels coming to life, when the shadow



Makiko Sakurai (performer) as Fujiwara Tamiko in *Recycling: washi tales*, Asia Society, New York, 2016. Kyoko Ibe (set/costume design), Elise Thoron (director/writer), Nicole Pearce (lighting design). Photo: Ellen Wallop.

forms on stage seem to move inside the paper. You also recommended to me at the very beginning as your bible Tanazaki's essay *In Praise of Shadow* (1933), so I knew that shadows would have to play an important role in *Washi Tales*. It also is such a beautiful way to appreciate washi as you mentioned with a light source coming from behind and the fiber inside glowing. Both shadows and papermaking pose the most technical challenges for creating on stage, but they end up being the most special defining elements.

KI: Again, the dance between practical life needs and the pure art form.

ET: Our biggest technical challenge was when we staged the performance in a gallery space—where performance and art intersect completely.

KI: Installing the exhibition with the performance in mind, I put less in the space and knew already how Karen would move from the decisions we made when we first saw the two-floor gallery space together.

ET: With lighting designer, Nicole, we could control light on washi rather than have the bright museum lighting. The ability to lead an audience upstairs into a gallery with very dim mysterious lighting and Noh drum and your *byōbu* (folding screen) work *Morning Glory* was sublime—art and theater felt one. Then to return down to the vat and the shadow panel alive with whispers of the old nineteenth-century village next to your large *byōbu* work *Once Upon a Time*...

KI: So what's next?

It is already dark and Tamura-san has come in from the studio. We light the washi lamp and start preparing supper.

NOTES

1. Editor's Note: In this article, Japanese names are given in Western name order, given names preceding family names.