

Into the Fold - A Creative Dialogue

Presentation by *wood+paper+box* (Katie Baldwin, Mariko Jesse, Yoonmi Nam) and an accompanying exhibition of works by Katie Baldwin, Sarah Hulsey, Fuko Ito, Mariko Jesse, Yoonmi Nam, Mia O

Background

When printmakers gather we exchange the stories of our lineage: Where did we study? Who did we study with? What did we learn? It is a game of six degrees of separation in printmaking, which takes us into the past. A global web of printmakers trace paths to shared influential educators and printmakers. Through the presentation and exhibition *Into the Fold*, we investigate the lineage between teachers and students, the links that are made, and ultimately, how we have all been welcomed 'into the fold'.

In 2004, Katie Baldwin, Mariko Jesse, and Yoonmi Nam met at Nagasawa Art Park on Awaji Island, Japan. Since the residency, we have kept in touch, maintaining connection through our work in mokuhanaga. In 2013, we began a collaborative project called *wood+paper+box*. This project came about from our desire to continue the creative dialogue that we shared during the Nagasawa Art Park residency. For a year, we made mokuhanaga prints, mailed them to one another, and held mini-residencies together at our own studios. The result of this work was a collection of mokuhanaga prints housed in a clamshell box. This work and process was presented at the 2nd International Mokuhanaga Conference in Kyoto in 2014. (For more information visit: www.woodpaperbox.com.)

After this initial project, we decided to continue the conversation and ultimately formed a collaborative of the same name: *wood+paper+box*. We produced our second project *AL>CA>KS*, continuing the format from the first project. The content was inspired by the three different states where our studios are located. As newcomers to the places that we now call home, we shared our individual works investigating the narratives, people, and landscapes where we live. This project was completed in 2016.

In 2017, we started our third and current project titled *(un)fold*. In this project, we are thinking about the structure, ideas, and acts of folding and unfolding. Through our experiments with paper and other foldable materials, we are investigating the revealing and concealing of space, dimensionality, time, and narrative.

Into the Fold

For many of us working in mokuhanaga, we are connected through Nagasawa Art Park and MI-LAB, tracing our lineage of learning to a handful of Japanese printers, carvers, and artists. Through the vision and work of the director, Keiko Kadota, we were brought into the fold of this incredible mokuhanaga community. Our aim is to expand the collaboration and dialogue amongst artists working in mokuhanaga.

This presentation and the accompanying exhibition titled *Into the Fold*, grew from our current project, *(un)fold*. Extending our collaborative structure, we invited three additional Nagasawa/MI-LAB alumnae to join us in collaboration and conversation. The three invited artists, Mia O (Nagasawa 2003), Sarah Hulsey (MI-LAB 2017), and Fuko Ito (MI-LAB 2017),

have connections to us through our teaching and learning of mokuhanga since our initial Nagasawa Art Park residency. We consider the meaning of the phrase 'into the fold' to include bringing together a group of people with common interests, as well as the idea of folding and unfolding. Each artist will share their process, interpretation and results for the theme of *Into the Fold*.

Into the Fold is a creative conversation where each artist communicates by creating an artwork and responding to the theme of folding, unfolding, community, inclusion, portability and lineage using mokuhanga as the primary medium. We work independently in our own studios, but are sharing our thoughts and discoveries through blog posts (<https://intothefoldsite.wordpress.com/>), emails, and Skype conversations. Being part of this network of international artists necessitates creative means of dialogue and communication.

Individual Artist's Project and Narrative

Katie Baldwin:

The basics of mokuhanga were introduced to me while I was a student at The Evergreen State College in 1993 by my teacher Peter Ramsey. I was an art student, primarily studying sculpture. However, I became interested in the process of mokuhanga from looking at a Ukiyo-e print hanging on the wall in the print shop. I was curious as Peter described the process and history of the print. Shortly after, I came across a technical book in Japanese woodblock printing at my local library. I spent a few weeks experimenting with cooking rice paste and making a small baren from cardboard, chord and canvas. I carved a woodblock and managed to pull a few humble prints. The idea that the process didn't require a large studio space and was non-toxic has stayed with me.

In 2004 I earned my MFA from the University of the Arts in book arts and printmaking. After graduation, I no longer had access to the presses that had been available to me as a student. My creative practice was facing serious limitations: my studio was about to become my kitchen table. Learning about the tradition of tools, materials and process of mokuhanga at the Nagasawa Art Park residency shaped my studio work. It gave me the skills in a technique that allowed me to continue my work in printmaking and book arts with limited space and equipment. I have continued honing my skills over the years, returning to Japan in the summer of 2017 for the MI-LAB Advanced Residency.

Today my creative practice includes a variety of printmaking techniques, as well as drawing and textiles. Learning mokuhanga has influenced my work beyond the development of technical skills. It has inspired the way I use color, composition, negative space, line, shape and narrative in all of my studio work.

I am creating a tableau of paper structures for *Into the Fold*. Arranged together, I explore methods of abstraction and representation of landscape. Paper is printed, cut, woven, crumpled, pieced and folded. Recognizable subjects of water, land and rafts are de-constructed utilizing color, pattern, shape and form. The work results in a manufactured stage of a real and imagined world.

Sarah Hulsey:

I was first introduced to mokuhanga during my MFA at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. One of our general courses was taught by Daniel Heyman, an accomplished printmaker who is an alumnus of the Nagasawa Art Park Program. Though it was not a course in printmaking,

Heyman did a demonstration for us of mokuhanga, which immediately caught my interest with its combination of the graphic potential of woodcut and the subtle, delicate colors produced with its water-based inks.

The following summer I enrolled in a week-long, intensive mokuhanga class with Katie Baldwin, another Nagasawa and MI-LAB alumna. The class was extremely inspiring and informative, giving me a solid foundation to explore further on my own over the next several years. After having been brought into the mokuhanga fold by two American printmakers, I am now fortunate enough to continue my training in Japan as a MI-LAB resident artist in August 2017.

In thinking about a subject for this *Into the Fold* project, I focused on the idea of folding as a reflective process. When paper is folded, the two halves of the paper are matched up point-for-point, so that the fold can act as a mirror. Two shapes that are mirror-images of each other can thus be united by the folding process.

Before I became an artist, I was trained in linguistics, where I developed a fascination with the complexities of language, both the richness of individual languages and the ways in which languages vary from one another. Japanese and English are a particularly interesting pairing because many of their phrases are mirror images of each other: the order of verbs and direct objects, auxiliary verbs and main verbs, prepositions and noun phrases, and many others.

I chose to think about word order variations in language and the idea of folding as a matching, reflective process in my work for *Into the Fold*. My imagery is based on early illustrations of crystals, shapes which have been shown by Louis Pasteur and others to exist in chiral (mirror image) forms in nature.

Fuko Ito:

Although I am Japanese, I was not exposed to the culture of mokuhanga until I moved to the U.S. for college. It was my first year in graduate school at the University of Kansas that I learned the craft through my mentor, Yoonmi Nam. In the summer of 2017, I participated in the Advanced MI-LAB residency. I realize that my relationship with mokuhanga is roundabout and tangled.

Growing up in Japan and attending international schools, I have never felt very Japanese. Having lived in the U.S. for nearly 7 years, I also know I am not American. This sense of being a foreigner anywhere I go is normal for me. Looking back, I now realize that the way I experience culture is real, but indirect. I am missing pieces of the puzzle from the respective cultures that I have lived in.

Yoonmi has shared with me not only her skill and knowledge of mokuhanga, but also her experience of bridging cultural experiences. This mentorship represents the web of artists connected through mokuhanga, and reflects the way in which this technique is no longer a practice of traditional Japanese craft--but is an expanded practice between cultures. For example, a Japanese student learns mokuhanga from a Korean professor in Lawrence, KS, USA. Then the student goes back to her home in Japan to attend a residency, sharing an experience with artists from around the globe.

For this project, *Into the Fold*, I am printing an image of fleshy, blobby creatures called *fumblys*, playing tug-of-war with bundled, knots of ribbons. The print will then be folded into an accordion book where this gesture unfolds. *fumblys* are always tangled up in sticky situations, too clumsy to problem-solve but always willing to negotiate amongst themselves. The gestures associated

with ribbons also serves as a metaphor in my work as it suggests binding, restraining, bandaging, unraveling, and undoing. Through the portrayal of *fumblys* and the objectness of the book, I am reflecting our own gestures of negotiating when in a pickle.

Mariko Jesse:

As a printmaker who specializes in intaglio processes, working with wood for the first time at the Nagasawa residency was a revelation, and I instantly fell in love with the technique. I had always admired Ukiyo-e prints, but never really thought about how they were made. Being half Japanese, learning a Japanese printmaking technique was the basis for my initial interest, and it remains an important part of my connection with it. I learned with, and continue to use, carving tools that belonged to my mother and grandmother. My grandmother's tools are especially dear to me, as I have fond memories as a child of sitting by her as she carved. I feel a like I'm carrying on a family tradition.

I spent several years travelling, directly after the residency, and having a technique that was essentially so portable, meant I could continue my printmaking practice wherever I happened to be. I'm essentially a 'line' person when I create images, but mokuhanga has challenged me to experiment with flat areas of tone and color in new ways. I've been working steadily in mokuhanga since that time, especially more recently with our *wood+paper+box* collaborative projects and the residency at MI-LAB in the summer of 2017. I've also started experimenting with mixing techniques in the last few years, introducing etching, calligraphy and drawing into my mokuhanga prints. For *Into the Fold*, I've made a print that involved hand-cutting as well as folding, to create an artist's book.

'Into the Garden' is a 3-dimensional theatre-like piece: an interpretation of a stroll through a slightly abstract verdant space. It is a one block mokuhanga print with bokashi and hand-coloured details. I used unsized paper so that pigments seep through to the back of the paper, creating a variation of color depth. The book can be folded/unfolded in several different ways and viewed from a variety of angles to create alternative narratives. It can then ultimately be folded up and put away into a printed enclosure for storage and portability.

Yoonmi Nam:

I first learned mokuhanga at Nagasawa Art Park in 2004, and this is when I met my collaborators, Katie Baldwin and Mariko Jesse. I became aware of the international community of mokuhanga artists during this residency. There was a sense of shared experience by those of us who have spent time in Awaji - learning and making prints in the local community center that we used as our studio, the Japanese teachers, the city staff members that helped us, and the local elementary school students that we visited and did workshops with. It was a similar experience at MI-LAB, located in Kawaguchi at the foot of Mt. Fuji, when I returned for my second residency in 2012. Artists from all over the world shared the incredible experience learning mokuhanga and passed on their knowledge to others. It became especially clear how varied and diverse the community is when I attended the 1st and 2nd International Mokuhanga Conferences in Kyoto and Tokyo. The network is a web of many international artists and printmakers, bringing their own unique experiences and backgrounds to this community, expanding the knowledge and possibilities of mokuhanga.

Mokuhanga for me involves a lot of traveling over land and sea. I live in Lawrence, Kansas, which is located in the center of the United States. Long distance communication and travel is a constant factor in my creative research, collaborative work and teaching. My *wood+paper+box* collaborators live and work on the opposite sides of the country from me, so we rely on Skype meetings until we are able to travel to work together in person. I often travel to Japan to do my

own research and take my students with me for summer study abroad trips. I have also traveled to different parts of the world to meet with my fellow mokuhanga artists. For my piece, I specifically considered this aspect of my relationship with the technique of mokuhanga, the people of mokuhanga, and the place of mokuhanga.

I have created a fabric piece printed with mokuhanga. One image is of an ocean and one image is land. They are cut and sewn together, the images face outward, in the form of a large pennant flag. On the flag are sewn strings, which allow the pennant flag to be folded and tied up into a bundle. This form is associated with the idea of a wrapped bundle for travel, such as a Korean wrapped *Pojagi* bundle. This flag is a visual signifier of my mokuhanga community.

Mia O:

I first encountered Ukiyo-e prints in 2000 when I went to an exhibition of Hiroshige's works at the Brooklyn Museum in the USA. The translucency of colour, fine line and composition fascinated me and I felt compelled to find out just how these prints were made. During my research, I discovered the Nagasawa Art Park artist's residency in Japan and I was selected for their program during 2003.

As a painter, I found the mokuhanga process complicated and time consuming--I did not want to continue to work this way after the residency. However, I returned to the process after the birth of my daughter, since mokuhanga is non-toxic and can be practiced at home in a small space.

Since 1997, I have felt a certain sense of displacement, because I have been moving often and between countries. I attended the International Mokuhanga Conference in 2014 and felt I fit in well within this print community. Japan instills in me a sense of calmness and simplicity. I relate strongly with its nature and culture, in particular with the Zen gardens and temples make a strong impression on me. I am also interested in the simplicity of line in Asian sumi ink painting and traditional Japanese colour painting.

Since learning the technique in 2003, I have researched the materials used in mokuhanga and attended master printer Goto's baren making master class. I have visited a master papermaker's workshop and observed a brush maker at work. It seems to me that the materials used in mokuhanga are, in themselves, a form of art. Created centuries ago, they are still in use today because of their everlasting durability. In my new landscape works I use the mokuhanga process to full advantage - the flatness of ink, layering and multiple passes - to instill a sense of depth and space between ink layers and the white paper.

I wish to express respect for nature and the process of mokuhanga. I appreciate the people who work within this ancient tradition, which has been handed down from generation to generation.