

— Jen Sincero

“Nobody who ever accomplished anything big or new, or worth raising a celebratory fist in the air, did it from their comfort zone.”<sup>28</sup>

28. SINCERO, JEN. “CHAPTER 7: I KNOW YOU ARE BUT WHAT AM I?” YOU ARE A BAD ASS: HOW TO STOP DOUBTING YOUR GREATNESS AND START LIVING AN AWESOME LIFE. N.P.: RUNNING, 2013. N. PAG. PRINT.

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PACKET No. 4  
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VERMONT COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

# Summary

Packet no. 4 July/August 2016

On my drive home yesterday I stumbled upon an *OnBeing* segment by Krista Tippett with Brazilian author Paulo Coelho. His well-known book, *The Alchemist*, is hands down one of my favorite books of all time. It affected me deeply when I read it many years ago, and I believe has framed some of my most important ideas and means for understanding the world today.

During the OnBeing interview, Coelho mentions a few thoughts that really stuck with me and that are now an important part of my thinking. First, he says that he believes all of us are a constant contradiction of ourselves and that we need to learn to accept and live with these contradictions. This resonated with me for a couple of reasons. One, **I feel lost**. Truly. I am completely lost in the woods of my ‘making’, which is very difficult and honestly, a bit annoying. Since I transferred into VCFA and embarked on a different academic journey than I’d ever known before, I feel as though I’ve split into two distinct and contradictory people, neither finding their bearings. The first, a designer by trade, carries all of my knowledge and experience from the past, including my history of becoming a designer, its merits and successes, as well as countless but surpassable failures. The second split, an aspiring artist, longs for what seems to be an unattainable understanding of things and for an ability to see and create beyond the norm, yet lacks knowledge, experience, insight and a fundamental sense of patience and confidence. My basic ability to make often contradicts my grand visions in both physical and conceptual terms. My desire to find peace in my work contradicts my actual unrest and frustration. My uncertainty contradicts my desire for clarity. My exploration and making with new materials contradicts my history and habit of designing as an act of mere choosing and organizing. And well, these contradictions are hard to live with. This journey has been really painful. It’s been hard. I long to see at least a flicker of light at the end of the tunnel I’ve dug myself in.

Yet as tough as it’s been, I believe this journey has been a truly important part of understanding ‘me’. This year I have taken more risks than I had in a decade. Risks that if looked at from the outside may not seem of much importance or consequence. But from the inside, seem to stem from a place of curiosity and a genuine eagerness to grow. In realizing and acknowledging my contradictions I feel like I’m in a box. A very small, dimly lit box, that I had no idea was there before. My challenge is to get out of it, although as of right now, I just don’t know how.

Another idea Coelho brings to light during the OnBeing interview is that “being a gardener, in the metaphoric sense, is more important than being a builder”. This begs the question, am I a gardener or a builder? As I see it, a gardener works with the land, with nature, with the elements that surround the garden, and with the fluid unpredictability of life. A gardener tends with patience and rejoices in the fruit of its labor, whatever the harvest may be. In contrast, and as I understand it, a builder works to control the materials within a specific context, with precision and under predetermined parameters. A builder plans, labors and perseveres as the structure is complete, and then moves on to build elsewhere. Maybe all this time I’ve been a builder but now I want to be a gardener. But maybe they are so fundamentally different, both in practice and mindset, that it’s a hard and painful transition. But maybe just that mere desire to change is enough of a catalyst for a fundamental shift, which although not easy or pleasant, can in fact pivot perspective, action and result.

So this month, I made. I committed mentally to creating an alphabet out of paper which I spent countless hours on and have built to the letter ‘m’. Yes, built. I also learned to color handmade paper and tried my hand at casting, molding, illustrating and thinking in 3-dimensional ways. I revived my watercolor interest and practiced my line drawing. I shredded paper, rolled it, cut it, glued it and pieced it together with hundreds of others shreds. I found solace, as I have many times before, in endless repetition. I found comfort within the confines of basic, simple shapes creating letter forms, none which I personally designed. I made trip after trip to the hardware store, looking for something, or not. And then I rolled and rolled paper some more. My husband took our boys back to South Carolina to say hi to old friends and to spend a week at the beach. I stayed home. It was exactly where I needed to be and am endlessly thankful for my parents who came out to visit and for my husband who granted me that much-needed space.



# Research

## Research: Inspiration

Almost obsessively I continued to browse & search through Pinterest and Instagram this month. I love finding mind-blowing work which serves as both a point of inspiration and self-motivation. I find that the type and style of work that I gravitate towards is similar in its fluid motion and natural essence. Time and time again I assert my love of paper, natural forms and muted color palettes, and have a growing interest in exploring 3-dimensional space.

| CORDULA KAGEMANN



| ANTOINE PARTFLALIAZ



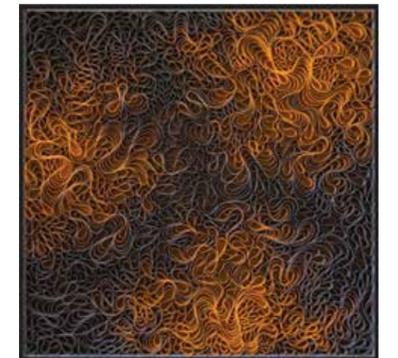
| MAGGIE CASEY

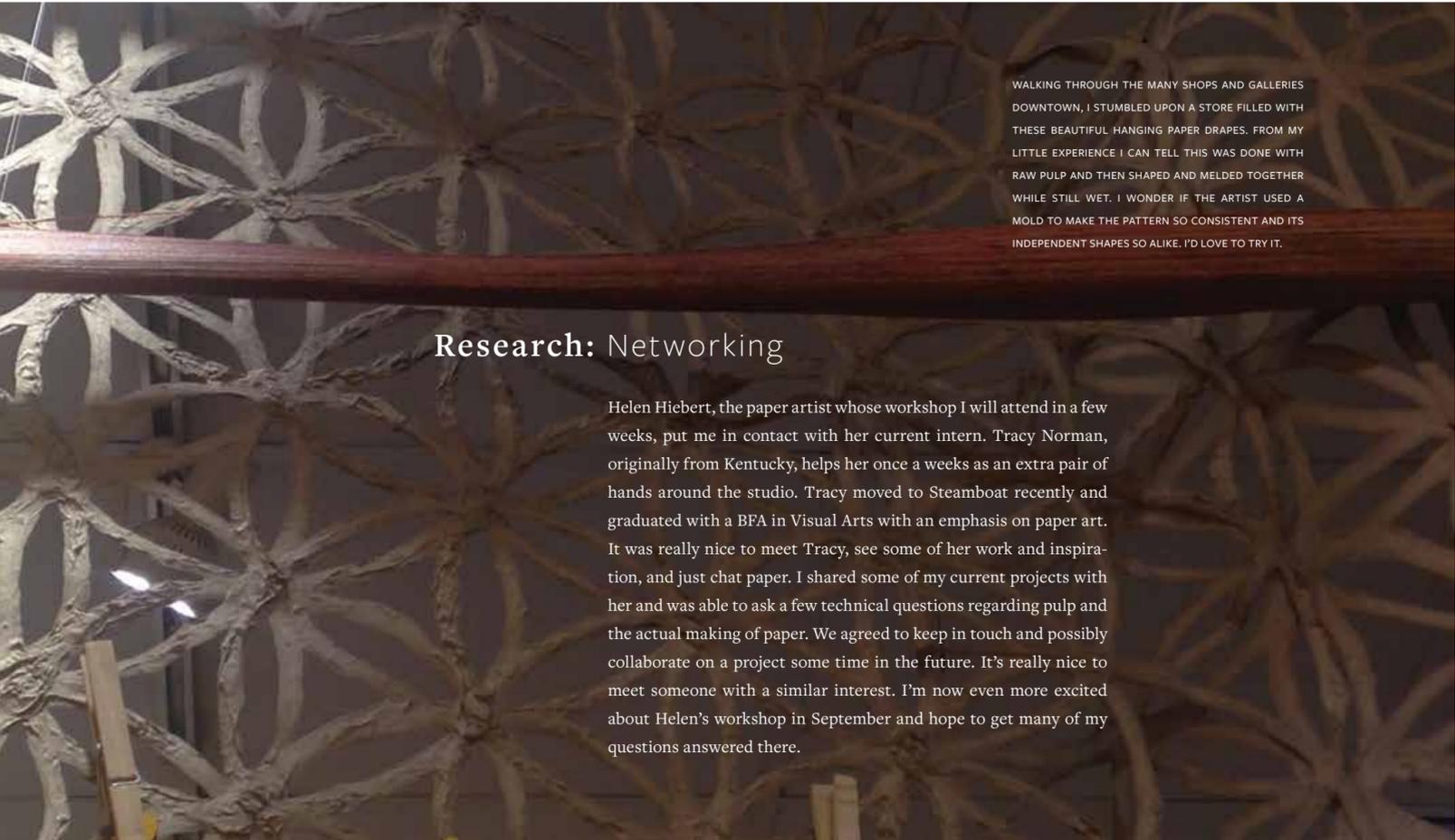


| DOROTHY CALDWELL



| STEPHEN STUM & JASON HALLMAN





WALKING THROUGH THE MANY SHOPS AND GALLERIES DOWNTOWN, I STUMBLED UPON A STORE FILLED WITH THESE BEAUTIFUL HANGING PAPER DRAPES. FROM MY LITTLE EXPERIENCE I CAN TELL THIS WAS DONE WITH RAW PULP AND THEN SHAPED AND MELDED TOGETHER WHILE STILL WET. I WONDER IF THE ARTIST USED A MOLD TO MAKE THE PATTERN SO CONSISTENT AND ITS INDEPENDENT SHAPES SO ALIKE. I'D LOVE TO TRY IT.

## Research: Networking

Helen Hiebert, the paper artist whose workshop I will attend in a few weeks, put me in contact with her current intern. Tracy Norman, originally from Kentucky, helps her once a weeks as an extra pair of hands around the studio. Tracy moved to Steamboat recently and graduated with a BFA in Visual Arts with an emphasis on paper art. It was really nice to meet Tracy, see some of her work and inspiration, and just chat paper. I shared some of my current projects with her and was able to ask a few technical questions regarding pulp and the actual making of paper. We agreed to keep in touch and possibly collaborate on a project some time in the future. It's really nice to meet someone with a similar interest. I'm now even more excited about Helen's workshop in September and hope to get many of my questions answered there.

## Research: Organizing & Curating

During our last check-in meeting I was asked if I had ever considered organizing and curating an art show. I thought to myself “no!”. I have little to no experience exhibiting my own work, much less exhibiting others'. That night however, the more I thought about it, the more excited I got. It sounds kind of fun! Taking the concept of *Living Concerts* as a point of departure, I think it might be interesting to create a sort of moving arts & crafts exhibit/show which would take place in people's living rooms around town. The event would provide an avenue for artists to show & sell their work, and for visitors and buyers to meet the artists and gain exposure to local art. All work exhibited would be 'local', although this may end up having to be a loose regional definition to include other towns in Routt County and adjacent small towns throughout Colorado. Aside from art as a 2- and 3-dimensional experience, I'm envisioning these shows to include live local music, craft beer and garden-to-table catering. It'd be awesome if it turned into a social event celebrating local arts in its many forms. I believe having it in people's homes or in the many furnished and beautiful rental properties around town, the event could have a personal and intimate feel. I also believe that by showcasing local talent, this could benefit all involved including artists, vendors, and property management companies alike.

Logistically, I realize this might all be a little crazy. Each vendor would need to be carefully selected and subsequently hired. The location of each show would need to be secured and paid for prior to

each date. Each and every participating artist would need to be vetted and chosen based on their work and the variety they may provide to the collective feel of each show. And because this would happen at private homes, all exhibiting materials, including walls, pedestals, hanging systems, etc. would need to be provided, continually moved, and safely stored while not in use. I'm unclear as to how insurance would need to be handled and who it would need to be purchased through and for. Liability, as it would pertain to the organization putting this together (me), the home-owners sharing their home, the artists showing their work, and vendors providing goods and services, is by far the most intimidating factor for me. I can see it being the sole reason I would never do this, out of fear.

In trying to understand and gage if this would even be feasible, I began to do a little research. I started by calling my great friend Kim Scholly. Kim runs the Metropolitan Arts Council (MAC) in Greenville, and puts on numerous exhibits, art walks and art receptions throughout the year. Mac's mission is to provide funding and support for local artists, including grants, competitions and exhibiting space. My conversation with Kim was really fun and I walked away from it thinking this idea may actually have some legs. She offered to help and advise along the way, which is very appealing.

Next, I decided to read about galleries and how these operate on both the artist's and the gallery's end. My work has always existed within the commercial realm, so aside from the occasional faculty show at the Governor's School in Greenville, and now my pin ups for VCFA, I've never shown my work in that context. An interesting and informative article in ArtBusiness.com entitled *Navigating the Art World, An Introduction* made it clear that my project would need to focus on new, up-and-coming artists and makers who are looking for opportunities to showcase their work. I would hope these events would feature much more variety than the current art shows in town today, and make it more fun for the audience. This article also brought to light the logistics surrounding cost and commission. I don't believe I would be able to put this event on at no cost to the audience, but I would hope to be able to keep the cost down in order to attract a younger, hipper demographic. The first event would need to be supported by something like crowd-funding or fundraising, but I'd hope subsequent events would become self-sustaining through ticket, food, drink and art sales.

In order to learn a little more about the art scene in town, I went to this month's First Friday Art Walk which is put on by the Steamboat Art Center. The event itself is an organized set of galleries and art venues open and free to the public. As visitors stop by each venue on their own schedule, they can see a variety of local photography, oil, acrylic and watercolor painting, pottery, and mixed-media art. Each venue shared light appetizers and wine, and an opportunity to meet and talk with the artists. There was some beautiful art, for sure, but what struck me the most was the fact that the demographic attending this event was largely non-diverse and affluent 60+ couples. The art itself, seemed to take a mostly conservative point of view, and was very expensive. We saw a beautiful painting listed at \$16,000! On the other side of the spectrum, I believe this opens the possibility of catering to a much younger demographic by offering more affordable and approachable art in a friendlier and 'cooler' atmosphere.

So this idea took up a significant amount of mental space this month, but I have not taken it to the next step. I think this would entail 1) writing a detailed mission statement, 2) making an extensive list of informed pros & cons to gauge true feasibility, 3) detail projected costs for the first event to assess funding, 4) begin talking to people who may have the right contacts or who may recommend potential locations and vendors in town, 5) naming and branding the event and securing a URL, 6) devising a marketing plan to include application and submission forms, 7) find an advisor to help with and explain legal implications, and 8) not freak out.

So now I ask myself, while I know I cannot do this on my own, should I start talking about this to other people? I second-guess it because this is a very small town and word, of anything, spreads very quickly. How do I make this a positive part of the existing arts community? I don't want to burn any bridges or come across as a competitor to local galleries or organizations. On the contrary, I'd love for this to present a platform for all to work and be together and celebrate the arts. How do I ensure no one steals my idea before I get to try it? Or is that even really an issue? Maybe pretentious to consider, but I have. Regardless, I have to say it's exciting to have a project like this to think about. It's definitely scary, but very exciting.



## Making & Design: Paper & Papermaking

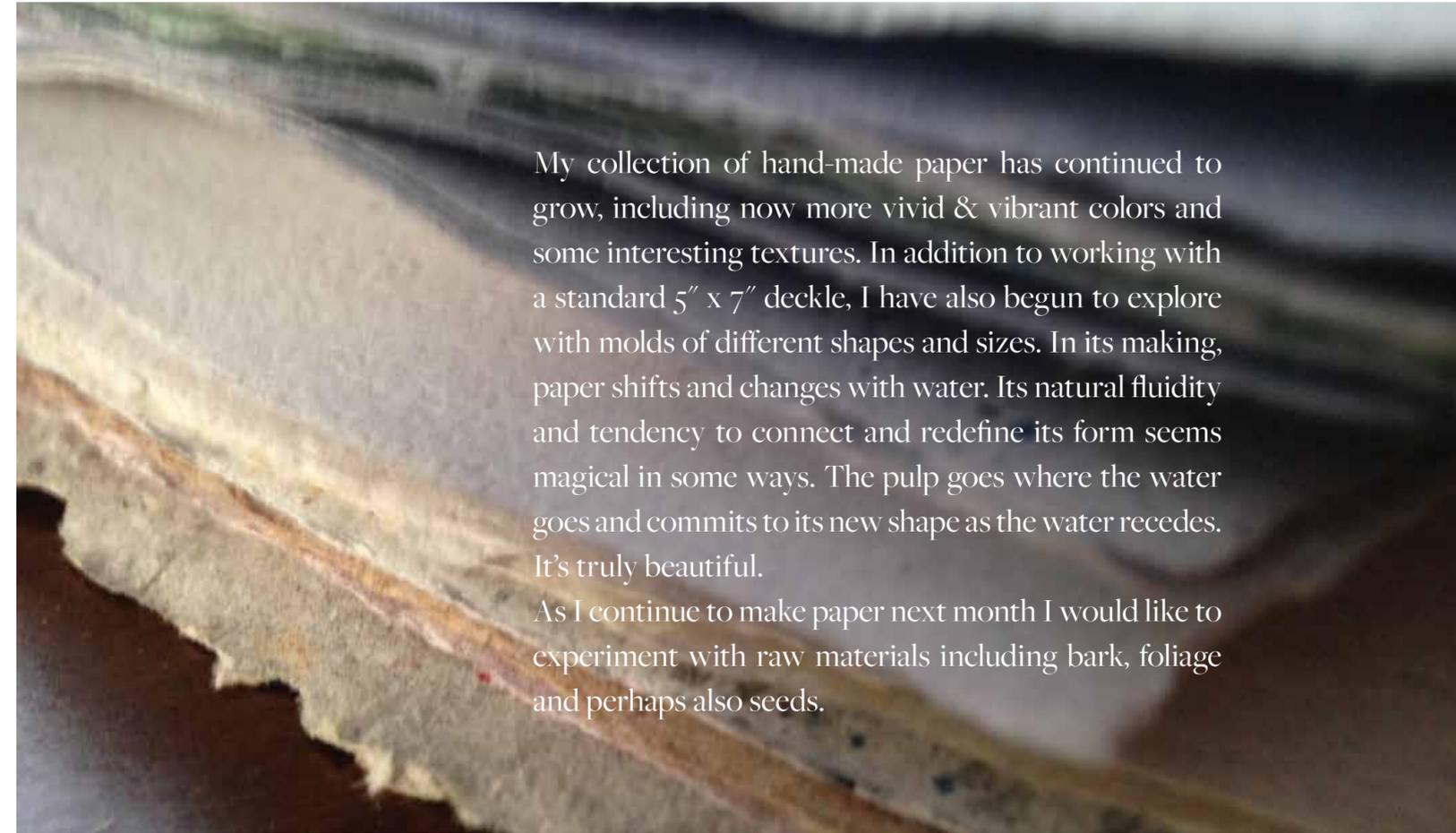
During our last conference call, we agreed this month should be dedicated wholeheartedly to ‘making’. I took this to heart and spent much less time doing research, reading or writing than in previous months. Instead, I laser-focused my attention to my exploration of paper in its making, shaping, melding and form. My progress feels incredibly slow. I realize I need to arm myself with loads of patience, but it’s difficult sometimes, life is so short.

### Paper & Papermaking » Color

In order to learn how to more closely affect the color of my handmade paper I decided to sort out all of my stacks into distinct color groups. Then, I added the shreds to the blender with color-specific tissue paper to match. As I made new sheets, I worked on fine tuning my ability to make thin, evenly weighted paper. This is definitely a skill that requires time and practice. While I haven’t been able to produce consistently weighted sheets, I feel I am beginning to understand the process a little better and can anticipate when the quantity of pulp is off.



LOOKING DOWN INTO A BLENDER FULL OF BLUE JUNK MAIL, TISSUE PAPER AND WATER.



My collection of hand-made paper has continued to grow, including now more vivid & vibrant colors and some interesting textures. In addition to working with a standard 5” x 7” deckle, I have also begun to explore with molds of different shapes and sizes. In its making, paper shifts and changes with water. Its natural fluidity and tendency to connect and redefine its form seems magical in some ways. The pulp goes where the water goes and commits to its new shape as the water recedes. It’s truly beautiful.

As I continue to make paper next month I would like to experiment with raw materials including bark, foliage and perhaps also seeds.

## Paper & Papermaking » Illustration

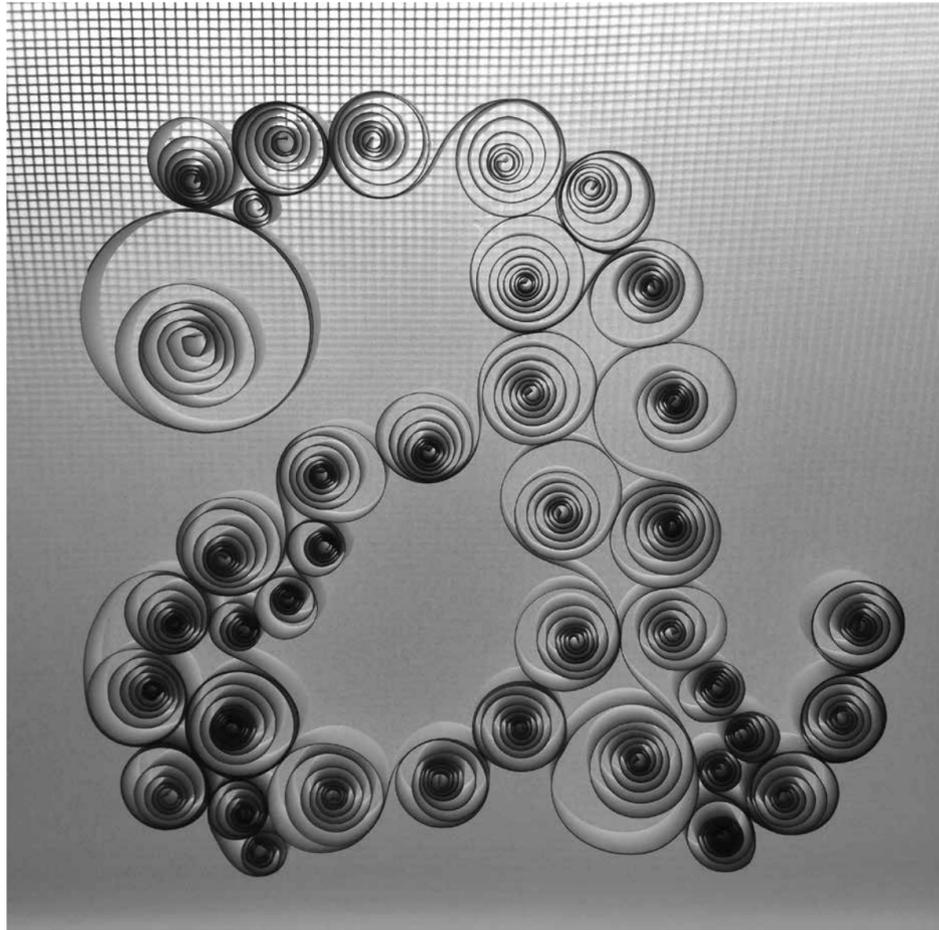
Questioning whether papermaking can be a process and end of itself, I decided to try my hand at paper illustration. During our last check in meeting I was prompted to consider 3-dimensional typography. So, in putting these two ideas together I wondered if I could create a Colorado-inspired alphabet in which each letter could represent something noteworthy and memorable within our town. These illustrations would be created with my own handmade paper. I began this project with the letter 'a' which of course could only point to the thousands of beautiful aspen trees that surround us. The project remains at 'a' however. Once again, not super impressed with the outcome of my work I decided to move on.



## Paper & Papermaking » Quilling

Since the beginning of this semester, and inspired by my last project last semester, I have been wanting to create another paper quilled project. Originally this was supposed to be done as an imitation of a half-tone image in which the interaction between the rolled up strips of black and white paper would make up a larger, more recognizable image. I had a really hard time finding or creating the right image, so out of sheer impatience I decided to revert to typography, and specifically the making of an ampersand. Last semester I set off to explore ways in which things and people are interconnected, making the ampersand ligature a perfect point of departure. I love the symbol but hate the fact that it's completely played out. Regardless, that's where I went with my paper quilling for now. The ampersand is large and almost complete. At this point, I would like to make it a form that exists as a sculptural piece, potentially blurring its recognizability as an ampersand. I haven't quite figured out how to do this however, but will continue to consider it next month.





Guided by the prompt to finish a paper quilling project and also to think of typography in the 3-dimensional realm, I then decided to make an alphabet out of quilled strips of paper. Starting in stark white and changing slowly to include gray tones of black/white typography and imagery, shifting to pitch black and then back over again, slowly, to finish in white, this alphabetical gradient, aside from being visually interesting, is meant to conceptually represent life & death, through words. We are born void of words and ideas, acquire them through life, assimilate them as knowledge and eventually begin to lose them to return back to our source. In my head this poses an interesting question about knowledge, the cycle of life, and perhaps intuition as well. Do we truly have the most knowledge when we assimilate and master the most words and ideas during mid-life? Or do we know best when we need not rely on words and are perhaps closest to the source of just 'being'? Why do so many people work on learning to meditate words and ideas out of their heads? These are questions I ponder, wondering specifically where the drive to value one or the other originate, within and out.

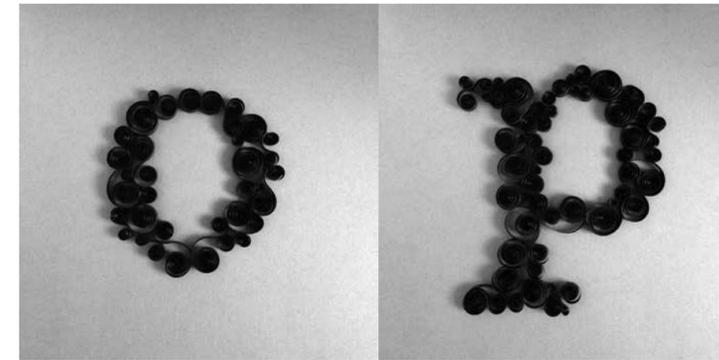
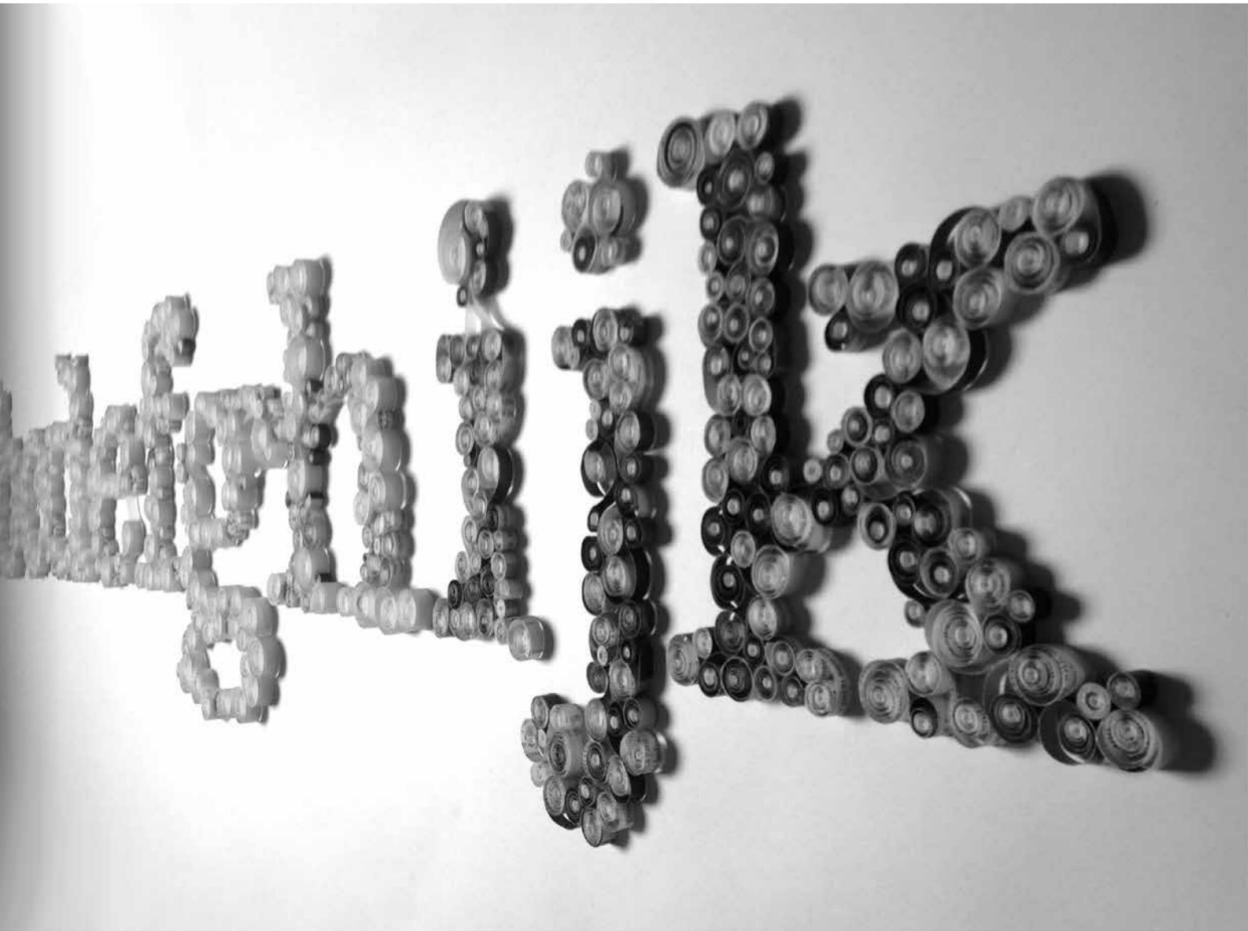
I believe this project also poses an interesting question regarding our social value of 'white' and 'black', and in my case, as it relates to paper. Paper was invented as a tool, or blank slate, to collect, document and share ideas and information. Without an agent to record this information with, as is the case with lead or ink, paper would not have served its original purpose. Today, although we continue to put ink to paper to share ideas, paper is increasingly used as a sculptural medium. Artists from around the world are carving, stacking, cutting, shredding and melding paper as a tool for expression. Paper, as it's made, is naturally

light. Not white, just light. Ink, conversely, is naturally dark. There's no good or bad, better or worse in this arrangement of things, but is this why I associate white with emptiness and black with fullness? This idea could be further explored, in so many ways.

To-date I have completed until the letter 'p'. I love the way in which the stark white strips of paper interact with the shredded black/white magazine pages. I'm not so happy however with how the gray shreds interact with the black paper. The difference is too pronounced. I'm considering just using the dark images within the magazine to create the gradient effect, which means re-making the last four letters. Which is Ok. I ran out of paper however, but have ordered a back issue of the magazine to complete the project.

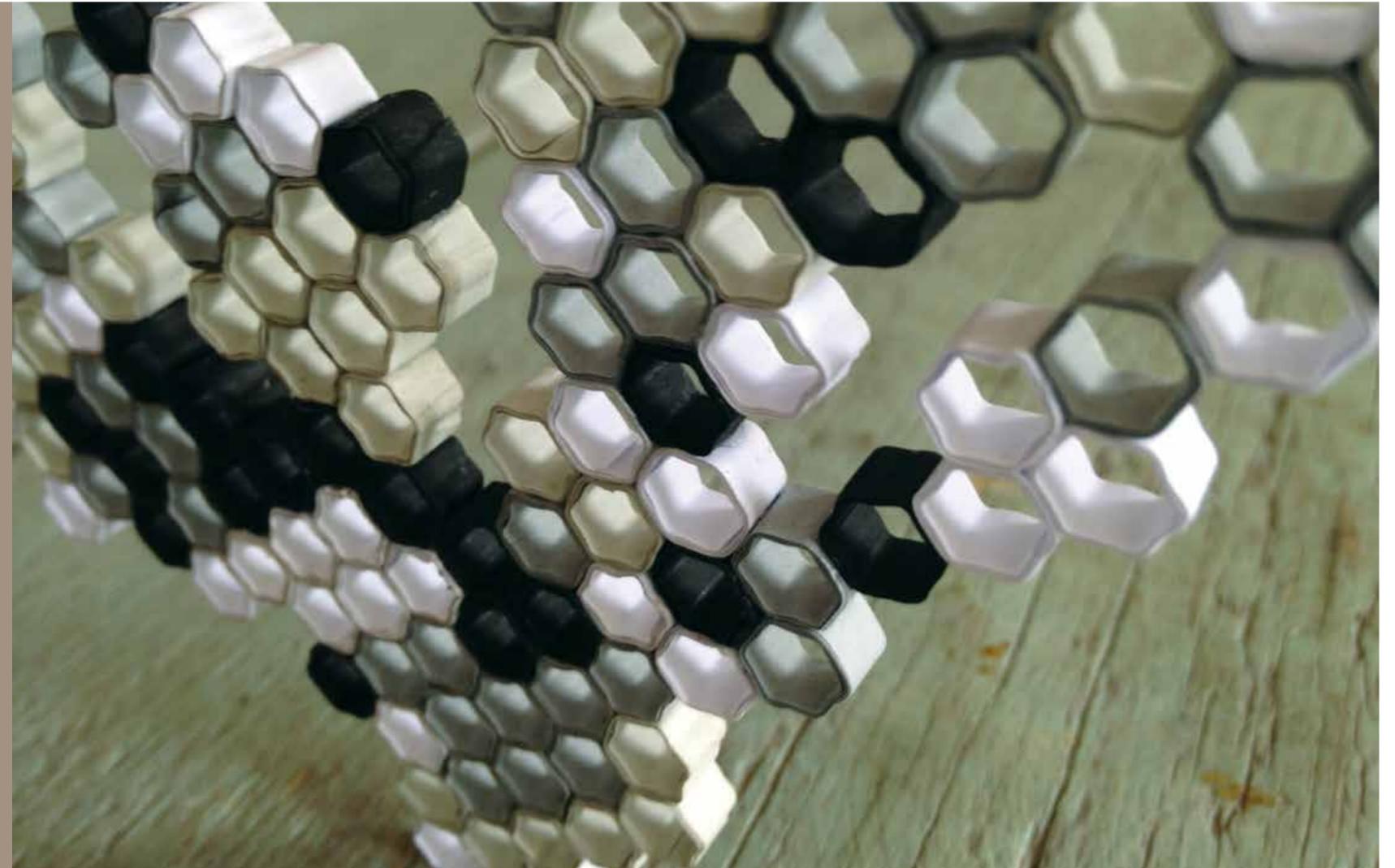
Unclear in my head is how these letters coexist and what their context should be. Initially I had planned to hang them vertically so that the life of the alphabet was linear, vertical, and much taller than the average person. Now, I feel these should live in a circular configuration, illustrating life as an evolving cycle. These letters, although structurally strong, are flimsy and unstable. With only a few exceptions, the natural forms and shapes of the letters prevent them from standing upright on their own. So after a few trial and error sessions I think what I will do is glue each letter to a 12" x 12" sheet of translucent vellum and hang them from a circular tube of some sort. I'm not super excited about gluing them to another sheet of paper, but feel it may be the only way to retain their shape. I'd love your feedback on this idea and maybe pick your brain to see if there may be a better solution than that.

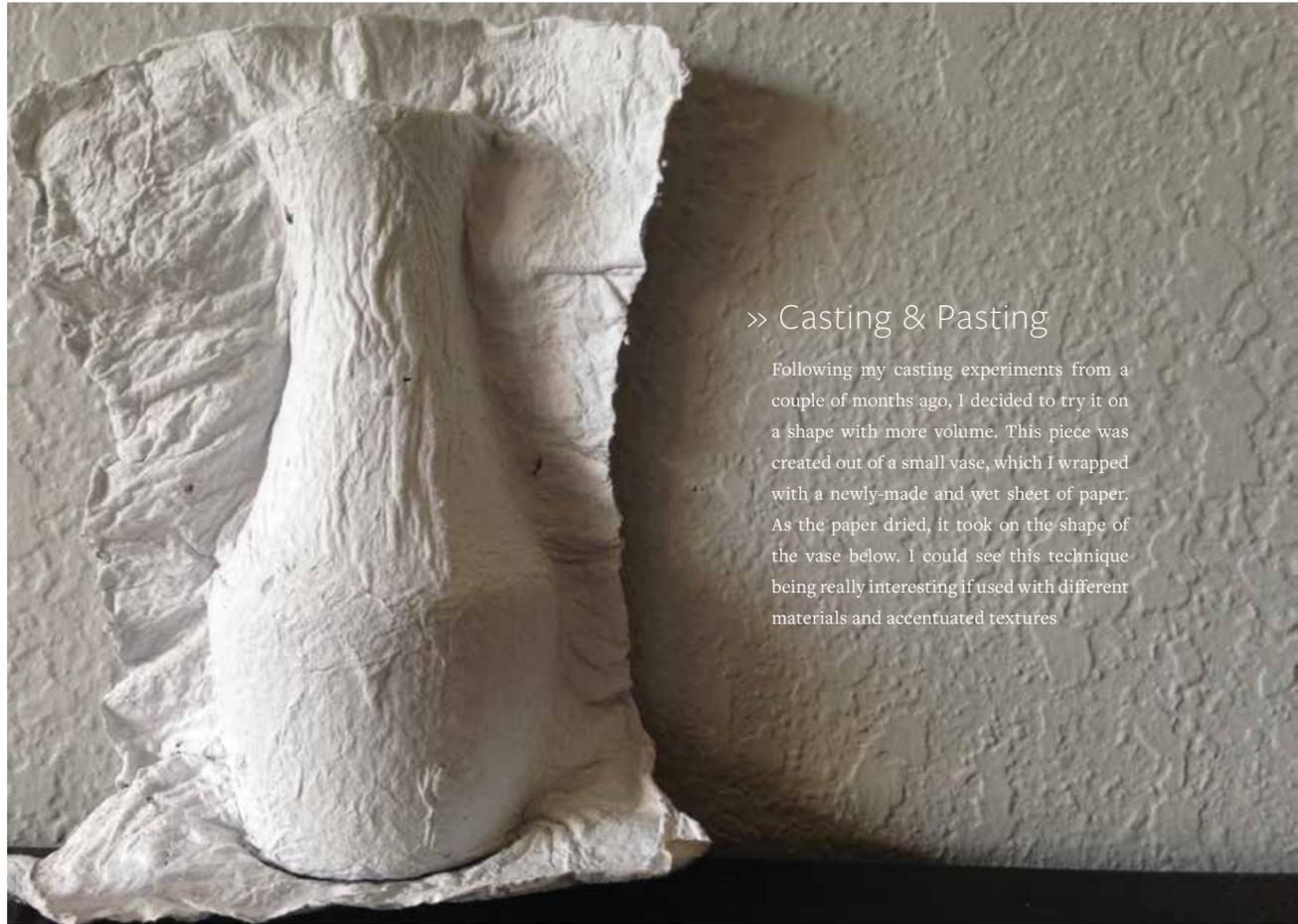




## Paper & Papermaking » Wrapping

My creative outlet from all my other endeavors this month ended up being this bee-hive-like piece. Using a drill bit from my husband's collection, I decided to wrap strips of paper which formed small, uniform hexagon shapes. Then, I glued them together which after a while began to create something reminiscent of sea coral. Many times, when I start a project without a predetermined concept or goal, I always somehow end up making something related to the ocean. I love the ocean and every sensory experience related to it. I feel a deep connection close by and from afar. I also have great sympathy for its wild live, living organisms and beautiful ecosystems. As with all my other ongoing projects however, creating this piece is very tedious and time-consuming. But I can loose myself in its making, which I really like. It's been one of the first hand-made projects to send me into a state of 'flow', where time stops moving and I can just focus on the act of wrapping, piecing, gluing and repeating.

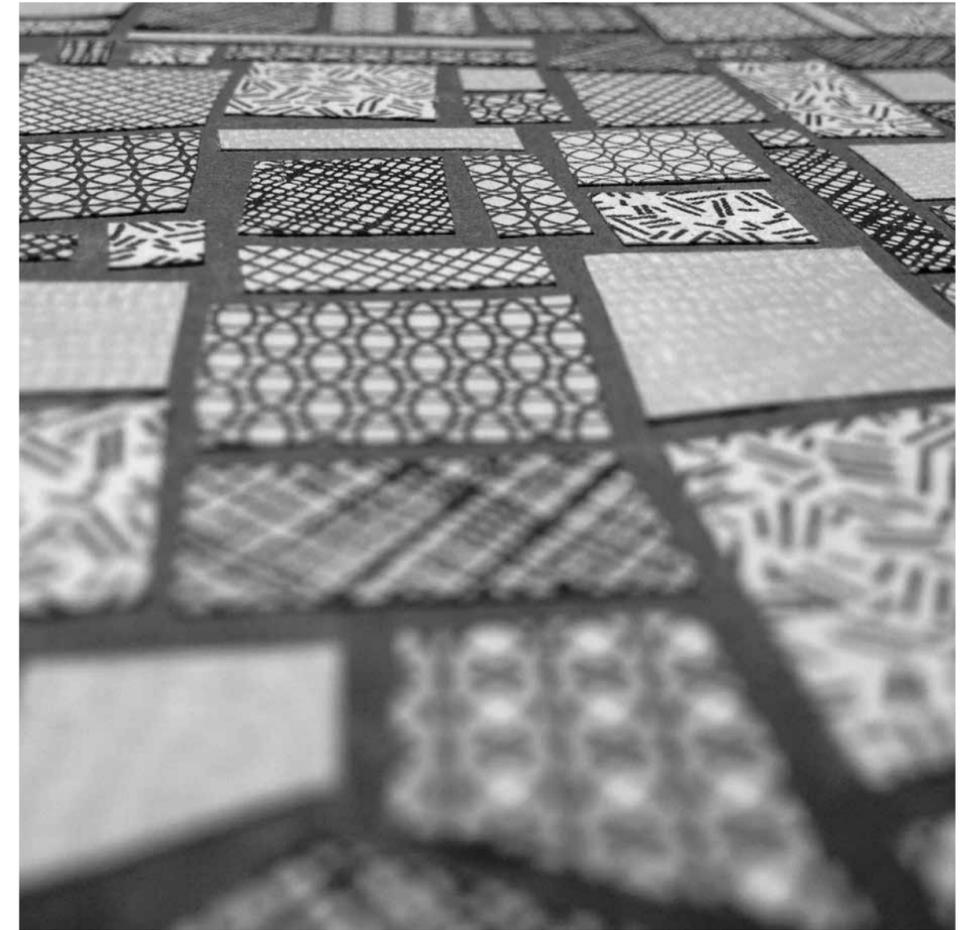




» Casting & Pasting

Following my casting experiments from a couple of months ago, I decided to try it on a shape with more volume. This piece was created out of a small vase, which I wrapped with a newly-made and wet sheet of paper. As the paper dried, it took on the shape of the vase below. I could see this technique being really interesting if used with different materials and accentuated textures

When I decided to learn how to make paper, I started collecting junk mail. My stacks include a wide variety of paper waste including mailing envelopes which I discovered are lined with fun patterns and interesting textures. Rather than destroying these I decided to cut them to make textured combinations. I'm not really sure where this experiment is going or why I'm making it. I seem to be making just to make a lot these days. I remain confident that somehow, somewhere down the line all of these little experiments may come together to as something a lot more meaningful.



PENCIL SKETCH AND WATERCOLOR PAINTING OF DOWNTOWN STEAMBOAT SPRINGS. NOT COMPLETE YET.

Painting & Drawing » Watercolor



Painting & Drawing » Kitchen-Inspired Sketches

