

Rethinking Paper: A Sensory Journey

My journey has been an exploration of paper's remarkable sensory qualities—its textures, scents, and visuals—transforming it into a multi-sensory experience. I started by asking how narratives could become more engaging and tangible through the physical manipulation of paper. Through folding, crumpling, and reshaping its form, I discovered that these transformations could inspire new perceptions of the information on its surface, adding intrigue and enhancing engagement.

I was fascinated every time I read Japanese designer Kenya Hara's book *Designing Design* (Hara, Hohle and Yukiko, 2021). Inspired by Kenya's concept of paper as a sensory medium, I dove deeper into its materiality. A memorable visit to traditional paper mills in Yunnan, China, allowed me to have a dialogue with skilled craftsmen and immerse myself fully in the fascinating paper-making process. This immersive experience has truly deepened my understanding of paper, revealing its power to engage all five senses—beyond just sight and touch. I found myself especially enchanted by the sense of smell, discovering its deep connections to memory that linger long after the initial encounter.

I believe that every loss can lead to a gain. Losing my part of sense of smell due to COVID-19 in 2023 led me to appreciate how scents evoke memories. This inspired me to create scented papers infused with natural aromas from herbs, plants, and fruits, on which I applied photographs from my travels. For instance, lemongrass-infused paper reminds me of Indonesia, while lemon-scented paper evokes Mallorca. This project allowed me to create a connection to my past and helped retrain my sense of smell in a meaningful way.

During my exploration, I discovered HaMai's work "A Piece of Bark" (2024). This six-year photographic journey examines the impermanence of memory by replacing a piece of bark with a photograph and documenting the deterioration of both over time. HaMai's acceptance of change and decay contrasts with my desire to preserve sensory experiences, emphasizing that even paper is not immune to the effects of time and transformation.

This process of triangulation has been instrumental in reshaping my perspective. By synthesizing my sensory-focused practice with HaMai's examination of impermanence, I appreciate the fleeting beauty of both materials and memories. I initially viewed the paper as a stable anchor for my ideas, but I have realized that even it is subject to change. Embracing this truth challenges traditional notions of permanence and opens up new opportunities for transformation and evolution in my artistic expression.

Insights gained from HaMai's work have reinforced the importance of sensory engagement in evoking memories while helping me untangle my attachment to permanence. I am excited to incorporate the idea of accepting change into my studio practice. Instead of solely focusing on preserving memories through sensory engagement, I will explore how the natural evolution of materials enhances the memory experience. By documenting the changes in scent and texture of my scented papers, I aim to capture a layered and evolving representation that embraces impermanence.

In conclusion, triangulating my position through studio practice and critical analysis has enhanced my understanding of sensory experience, materiality, and memory. I have learned to balance the stability and transience of paper as a medium. By embracing inevitable change, I hope to create works that evoke memories and reflect the dynamic nature of time, enriching the narrative and emotional depth of my art.

References

- Hara, K., Hohle, M.K. and Yukiko, N. (2021) *Designing design*. Zurich, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers.
- Mai, H. (2024) *A Piece of Bark, I replaced the bark with a photograph and spent six years documenting it, Little red book*. Available at: <http://xhslink.com/a/UA4FEgrgYgxY> (Accessed: 2024).