

3 February 1981

Being asked to write something about papermaking as it relates to "Fine Printing" would be a simple question for most, but for me is confusing and difficult. Having made some paper over these years since exposure at the Cranbrook Academy of Art back in 1964, I still feel very humble and ignorant before the subject. My long-in-the-works book on the subject is entitled "Papermaking by Hand, A Book Of Suspicions" hopefully this title reflects the fact that I am very much still a student.

Next to someone totally ignorant of papermaking anyone who knows anything (right or wrong) can be the expert, the authority and the last word. Since Ignorance has been ineffective as a deterrent to getting the truth out, I don't see why it need apply to me either.

People ask why do you make your own paper, or why make paper by hand, etc. etc. Well, why make spaghetti sauce from scratch & cook your pasta al dente instead of grabbing it out of a can ready to go? Why grind your own grains and bake your own bread when there are fine bakeries everywhere?

If I might be so bold and arrogant to answer, simply, because IT IS BETTER! (Assuming a few things, e.g. that you are a damn good cook, that you are thoroughly experienced in tasting every kind of bread made on the planet; that you LOVE to consume the most simple/complex paradoxes of the world; that you have a gift, that is, "the knack" and finally that you have the ability to SEE clearly with body & mind well enough to provide/perform the necessary aesthetic craftsmanship.)

Given these conditions (& probably more) making one's own paper from scratch, by hand CAN be the BEST. How do we judge quality? What do we want this stuff to do? What the hell is handmade paper anyway?

Most people in wasteful America, that's us folks, go through six to eight hundred pounds of the stuff per year--blowing their noses in it,

wrapping their garbage & other gifts in it, transferring their inflated funds on it, and so forth. Paper is indeed a substance taken for granted, totally misunderstood in general ("Oh, yeah, you grind up trees & pollute the atmosphere, rivers & lakes etc..." Some educated folks have commented to us suggesting that the 40,000 trees we have planted here are for the purpose of papermaking!) but a substance that continues to be, in a word, fascinating.

Paper comes from pulp. Pulp is made of cellulose fiber. Trees have cellulose fiber. Linen & cotton have cellulose fiber. There are categories of fiber & many different kinds. However, we do not wear trees nor do we twist or weave them. Here begins the interest in a sheet of handmade paper, the Rags! Colorful, strong, individualistic, unpredictable too. Rags!--Oh, I love to go on about rags! My poor incredulous students... "My God, he went on & on about rags for an hour!" What fun to buy clothes & luxurious bath towels & lovely bedsheets with a future sheet of paper in mind! Which is exactly what I have been doing for the past fifteen years or so.

And when worn & washed simply, we tear them up into small pieces relative to the inherent "muscle" of the fabric (blue jeans are tougher than bedsheets, bath towels stringier than broadcloth etc) then with water only we "beat" them in our machine by the generic name of "beater" which, with various manipulation, produces pulp.

Pulpmaking is the key to proper papermaking, it is the negative for the photographic print. The fibers in this kind of pulp are varied in length & color, they are suspended in random orientation in a vat of water and are lifted out on a screen with an enclosing frame: the mould & the deckle. The resulting sheets are controlled by eyes & arms to desired thickness and have no grain direction, thus can be folded any which way. Because the fibers are in all directions, the sheet is strong in all directions. So there: Strength is one thing we judge.

Texture is another, (texture of pulp, texture of surface)

Color (color of rags=color of paper) a handmade sheet formed of pulp made from varied rags gives a very subtle configuration that is impossible to achieve by dyeing the pulp or coloring the pulp with pigment.

Tactility, the way a sheet of handmade feels! It has a wonderful sensual touch, like the oriental rug people say, "It has a lot of hand" and it does, like the Bijar or the Daghestan, different & subtle.

Irregularity, unevenness, uniqueness. Qualities the machine

is not interested in at all. A dented deckle. A folded-over corner. The out-of-square sides. That fortuitious red thread underlining a random word, that lacewing insect preserved forever in the corner of the title page, that "crater" the "vatman's drops" the "vatman's tears" a circle between title & text. The irregularity ~~signifies~~^{signifies}: here, H U M A N I T Y, here is a sign that a human being did this! The eye & hand were here! The aesthetic "Killroy" if you will.

Soundness, durability, cleanliness are qualities to judge. If the water is free of iron and contains lime, then the resulting paper will last hundreds of years without any elaborate preparations in manufacture. Finally, Appropriateness, an obvious quality judged in everything judge-able. The combination of all the above is considered with/against function and use, this involves taste and taste involves argument, which involves intuition, knowledge and persuasion, so let us go right on to papermaking as it relates to books.

Books begin with a text, then a typeface design that will be harmonious with the meaning of the text. Then the text set in type^{and} is printed on paper. So the paper really carries this configuration, what could be more basic? The Flour to the Dough. The rag to the pulp, the pulp to the sheet, the sheet to the page, the page to the book, the parts to the sequence, the sequence giving over the meaning(s).

l.c.
Last fall, two of my students were told by a book dealer that their books couldn't be handled by that company because "they couldn't be described for the catalogue in thirty-eight words or less." Needless to say this caused us all the greatest amazement. And in response while writing an entry in my journal one thing led to another & I wrote a long blast at that kind of lack of understanding, that self-righteous smugness, that flat out irresponsible stupidity. The gist of it is:

The book is perhaps the most personal form an artist can deal with. It encompasses a multiple & sequential picture plane, it is tactile, and to be understood must be handled by the viewer, who then becomes participant. Participant as an individual, not public by display but private via one-person-at-a-time revelation.

The Book as structure is the Trojan Horse of Art--it is not feared by average people. It is a familiar form in the world and average people will take it from you & examine it--whereas a painting, poem, sculpture or print, they will not.

The Book is NOT something that needs to be described for the catalogue in 38 words or less! It is a living dynamic possibility--a meeting place

for whole worlds of divergent elements of human expression to melt & flow, to meld into excess beyond the limits of its parts. Not merely bound pages to be sold & shelved & checked out.

To understand the structure of Book, one must understand "Seeing" that is, Know How to SEE. The book is a drawing in that it is organizing shapes in space, shapes with space, space and elements e.g. line/texture/color/harmony/balance, and so on. But the Book is sculpture too, physically it must be held and manipulated by the viewer--but the viewer remains controlled by the intent of the artist. The artist reveals to the viewer as the gourmet chef reveals courses in color/texture/flavor compliments--with elegance, that is, "free from awkwardness."

The definition of a book has evolved to be: a sequential and multiple picture plane that is connected in such a way as to be unalterable by the viewer. The latter part re: unalterable was in response to the fakers filling a box up with all sorts of stuff and calling such, a "book" and in reality it is a box full of printed stuff without sequence or order. The same mentality has it that swill slopped in a trough is a meal. Making books is very exciting (I can hear my teen-age alcoholic friends of yore howling at that crack!), making books exciting? How can this be? Making books is to take the same trip into intuition that leads, if successful, to visual/sensual/total surprise!

This journey is essentially the same for all art forms, it is akin to kidnapping in that once begun by the maker, the maker is abducted by the piece itself. The piece takes on Life, Character and demands its completion in its own terms. It kidnaps the maker, who is the instigator only, captive thereafter. That is why time vanishes so quickly when making a work of art, the maker becomes invisible, disappearing into the work itself on a very spiritual & intense level. It is exciting.

If you know ahead of time where you are going in this, then it isn't worth the trip. A book will be as exciting to read/see/experience as it was to make in the first place. Like all artifacts, they are evidence of the process(es) that made them. And, the process is as complex and as interesting as the human being(s) perceiving it. One can SEE in the world as much as there is to see in one's self. Oneself. One's Elf.

So why make your own paper? The question seems dumber and dumber. It's that old quip: If you gotta tellem who you are you ain't. If you gotta tellem what it is, it ain't. People like garlic & olive oil or they don't.

Beyond having the control of a very elemental part of the overall statement, the attraction is, that this kind of real handmade paper has character. Character achieved in only this labor-intensive way. A way unperformable by machine, unduplicatable by the money-grubbing mentality that wants to speed everything up, make it cheaper, make a profit. Were human beings put on this planet to make a goddamned profit? I believe not. On the other hand I don't believe the purpose to be toil for its own sake. Though papermaking by hand is damn hard physical work especially in the winter with temperatures below zero (both F & C). It is spiritually lifting work (no pun intended) it is satisfying and the results are unique & aesthetically beautiful. Making paper, fifty sheets a day, watching the stack grow into a pile is slow work, it is like making firewood in the woods. Sawing, splitting, loading, hauling, stacking admiring same for a year, burning it, keeping warm, smelling & seeing the lovely smoke curl into a starry night, thinking about making more. It is like making firewood because there is never such a thing as too much of it and each pile, each stack is a monument to your own skill & Industry. A friend_A refers to it as "Manuel Labor" FROM MEXICO CITY

I hope these remarks in some way throw a little light against the question "why." There is a last point to make here and I must refer to something pointed out by Roderick Cave in his book The Private Press. He said something to the effect that even alcoholics do not set up their own stills--but here bibliomaniacs set up their own printing shops and these days, even papermills! So this last point has to do with enthusiasm, love, devotion, gumption, adventure and just downright insanity, which, in these times, is blissful.

I suppose a word about what is going on in the world with regards to papermaking would be in order here. To distill recent history into a few paragraphs is impossible, of course, even if I knew what I was talking about. To say there has been a revival of concern, a renaissance in papermaking would be an understatement. copy?

This movement began in the sixties at the Cranbrook Academy of Art sparked by Laurence Barker. The details we will save for another time but the revival began there with those of us, unknowingly, carrying away the flame of awareness. Not to say this was all there is/was to it--the timing was right. The boom in printmaking was on, prints are printed on paper, the paper was/is part of the expression, a larger vocabulary was

needed and American Ingenuity filled the need. Nobody dreamed it would mushroom into such a big thing--but the most important thing is, it did. And by causing such commotion in the Art world the results are that more people than ever in this century are paying attention to and are aware of paper--as substance, as voice, as structure, as carrier of image. And too, these days if you don't know anything about paper you are considered to be archaic, ancient, out-of-step, square and all the rest of unawareness. I mean, who ever thought paper would be hip? What a treat to see such an arcane enterprise whumping disco!

Another article could be the genealogy of American Papermills--a subject beyond me at this point--I lost track with the third generation of Cranbrook-spawned operations and never did comprehend the other epicenters.

Apparently, there are numerous handmade paper "mills" burgeoning across the land like fast food chains. I would think though that Twinrocker (Katherine & Howard Clark), HMP (John Kohler) and Dieu Donne^A would be featured prominently. (SUSAN GOSIN)

In Europe there are essentially three main mills in operation making paper by hand. ^{BARHAM GREEN AT} Hayle Mill, Maidstone, England is the largest and most energetic with the largest range of papers--they will make anything you want as a "bespoke" paper, a term much nicer than "custom". Next going south is Richard du Bas, near Ambert in the Auvergne of France. A lovely picturesque location, the mill is unchanged since the thirteenth century and makes sheets ~~and it is made from rags & with some~~ character not achieved with linters & pigment. Richard du Bas is a very popular museum & tourist attraction which likely has kept it in operation so successfully in recent times. Last is C.M. Miliani in Fabriano, Italy. The handmade operation is a very very small part of a super-huge, ultra-modern operation. The number of papers of this writing is down to two. This may be due to that old profit margin again or perhaps the mill foreman of over forty years finally quit.

There are several, if not many, old papermills that are preserved as museums in England, Holland, Switzerland and Spain. Consult: A Survey of Hand-Made Papers compiled by G.A. Beale, Cadenza Press, London 1977.

Where can handmade papers be seen and purchased? How do they cost?

For European and American handmades the best selection at fair prices is New York Central Supply, 62 Third Ave, NYC 10003. They have everything including "antique" papers from long defunct English mills such as Wookey

Hole and Whatman. Sample books and price lists are available at small cost. Other companies in New York are Andrews/Nelson/Whitehead (they have the franchise for the Green papers) and Crestwood Papers. In Seattle, Daniel Smith Inks, Co stocks a wide range of handmades as well as other printmaking supplies, they have a catalog and a toll free number. For Japanese handmades the very best selection is from Aiko's^{*} in Chicago-- there is a very substantial sample book, prices reasonable.

As mentioned before, making paper by hand is labor intensive. If your plumber, dentist or psychiatrist were making it and charging their going rate for services, the price would be much higher than it is. The prices for European & English handmade can run from two to five dollars per sheet depending on size, weight and quantity. The more sheets bought, the lower the unit price, just like screws and soap. The price breaks are usually 25 sheets (a quire), 100 sheets, 500 sheets (a ream) and 1,000 or more (M). If it can be afforded, I always suggest buying in round figures of reams. Handmade paper is a good investment, it only improves with age, unlike old papermakers & printers, and the price likely will never go down just like the interest rate on your mortgage.

P For me, making paper by hand remains a challenge, a hobby, a sport, a diversion, a craft even exercise--the cost of the finished product is not really calculatable in monetary terms. Rather, for me it is an ongoing exchange of my most valuable asset and that is the unused time/ time left in life/ my life, an exchange that so far has given little regret.

(how about that? ending on a widow!)

* should addresses be supplied separately @ the end? style in consistent and pre-janury.

Walter Hamady 3 February 1981