

D. Francine Farr Paper-Rock-Scissors and Ku-Ke-Chu:
A Buddhist View of the Japanese Paper Hanging
Scroll, Contemporary Art and the Study of Paper
from the Pacific Ocean Region

Handmade paper, works of art using paper and Buddhist paper traditions are steeped in shared cultural and scientific histories. To connect these histories to contemporary art and distinguish between secular works of art and the enshrined paper scroll as an object of worship, this presentation will be an overview of research findings. A sacred Japanese hanging scroll of a lay Hokkeko Lotus Group member of the Nichiren Shoshu sect of Buddhism, a contemporary paper relief sculpture and other artworks will be discussed. Artists' thoughts, words and works may include those of Leonardo da Vinci, Paul Gauguin, Felix Angel, Xu Bing, Chris Burden, Sue Coe, Gajin Fujita, Cai Guo-Qiang, David Hammons, William Kentridge, Nikki Lee, Mariko Mori, Senga Nengudi, Echiko Ohira, Howardena Pindell, Paula Rego, Alison Saar, William Singleton, Nancy Spero, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Rufino Tamayo and Kara Walker.

Paper's plasticity, porosity, portability, blankness, weightlessness, double-sidedness, palimpsests and properties of adsorption will be interpreted from art historical and lay Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist perspectives of cycles of life, power, karma, sentience and insentience, the Invisible World and the Three Truths of ku-ke-chu (non-substantiality, temporary existence and the middle ground). Paper and its precursors will be understood to have developed out of necessity from nature's functional morphologies into biomimicked, invented and combined forms, images, tools, materials and skeuomorphs, some memorialized into symbolic entities of reverence and sublimity.

Concluding remarks note the imperative to broaden the scope of current scholarship, scientific inquiry and public education on paper through global interdisciplinary collaboration and museum exhibitions that encompass barkcloth (tapa), the Austronesian migration, the ancient maritime Silk Route, Portuguese and Dutch East Indies trade and exploration as well as horticulture, surface science and Oceanic studies.

Keywords: Austronesian, Nichiren Shoshu, skeuomorph, tapa