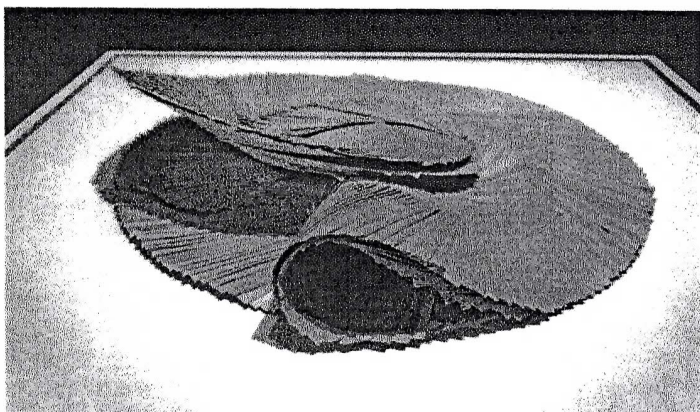


## "paperless"

### SOUTHEASTERN CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Paper manufacturing consumes 35 percent of harvested trees in America, while 40 percent of our total annual waste consists of paper and paper products. We all hoped that digital communication would alleviate these problems, yet today we churn out more paper than ever (while gobbling up other natural resources to power our smartphones, laptops, and high-definition televisions). Archaic as well as nonecological, paper is dirty, a material that some have come to regard as fragile, antique, even abject. Curated by Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art's Steven Matijcio, "paperless" contemplated our conflicted relationship to this



Oscar Santillan,  
*The Castle*, 2009–11.  
book pages, tape,  
glue, 4 x 16 x 16".  
From "paperless."

ubiquitous material, gathering art from fifteen international artists who have sought to reshape, recycle, torture, or dismember as they've mulled over paper's future or elegized its demise.

As might be expected, books figured prominently in multiple works on view. Take, for example, Natasha Bowdoin's *The Daisy Argument (Revised)*, 2011/2012, which featured ribbons of paper inscribed, by the artist with lines from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. In turn, these strips had then been applied to the gallery wall in an effulgent, flamelike arrangement. To make *The Castle*, 2009–11, Ecuadorian artist Oscar Santillan unbound the pages of Franz Kafka's eponymous unfinished novel and reassembled them to form an undulating pinwheel such that the text is obscured, thus paralleling the story's essential inscrutability.

Other works in the show concentrated on disposable media and packaging, such as bags, boxes, and newspaper, rather than the hard-bound word. For *Memorial*, 2008, Santillan gave us a pile of blank newsprint and a miniature deer. According to the artist, the deer had been made from congealed ink chemically extracted from the now-empty section of the *New York Times*—a blank information landscape across which it gazed. Maskull Lasserre, in his *Lexicon*, 2008, also employed newspaper, compressing a thick stack of daily papers, out of which he carved a spinal column and rib cage, expressing, in macabre fashion, the old saw that we are what we read.

Another human shape appeared in Peter Callesen's *Fall*, 2008. Cutting a "tree of life" silhouette from a large sheet of white paper, the Danish artist sculpted the material into a human skeleton, which he sprawled at the base of the paper sheet, below the tree's negative space. The significance of this scenario was augmented by the work's title, which alludes to the biblical fall, but also to paper itself, a commodity in decline despite its overproduction.

Elsewhere, a different kind of interiority was on display via semi-incestuous, found love letters that had been cut apart, shredded, and glued together again by Nava Lubelski to make *Kissing Cousins*, 2012. In this and in *Crush*, 2008—another ripped and reglued letter stash, this one penned by a closeted bank executive discussing his homosexuality—Lubelski transformed the paper-based notation of secretive intimacy into vaguely geological sculptural forms: the archive as melancholic ruin.

More interactively, Simryn Gill lined the base of a gallery wall with volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (beginning with the year 1968) and, via written instructions, invited viewers to tear out a single page. Calling the piece *Paper Boats*, 2009–, Gill included a note that the viewer should fold the sheet into a ship and leave it on an adjacent table—a surface that, by the time I saw the show, was burdened beyond capacity with a veritable armada of improvised vessels. What at first appeared an innocent "relational" work came to seem a disassembling of collective knowledge, the political liberation conjured by the legendary year 1968 tied up by viewers into an unregulated mess of individualized interests or, as it were, private boats.

The social critique evidenced throughout "paperless" was perhaps most delicately rendered by Japanese artist Yuken Teruya, who had cut exquisitely small trees from the surfaces of found paper items, such as dollar bills, fast-food bags, and toilet-paper rolls, while leaving the host objects otherwise intact. In so doing, he prompted an acerbic consideration of the compromises we are willing to make between our self-proclaimed concern for nature and our rapacious desire to own, eat, and, eliminate everything in sight.

—David M. Lubin