

## Paper as Idea

When initially approached by the Ohio Advisory Group, Emily Liebert and I agreed that we were looking for artists who worked WITH and ABOUT paper rather than ON paper. That strategy opened up new contexts for considering what can “qualify” as paper without abandoning the materiality at the core of the curatorial mandate. We sought artists who were intrinsically engaged in what it meant to manipulate paper and some of the common uses of paper. We arrived at a lengthy list refined down to five artists that we felt represented a wide range of approaches to this ubiquitous art material - Kristine Donnelly, Sarah Kabot, Sa’dia Rehman, Breanne Trammell, and Alice Pixley Young. Not only do these artists fit the criteria for working with paper, they are intensely thoughtful about their use of material in all facets of making art. Their objects and installations are conceptually connected to the historical implications of their materials and the means of production. The labor involved in each piece is driven by the object’s theoretical underpinnings. Even when the labor is “automated”, as in the case of Breanne Trammell’s laser-printed large-scale collages, that labor is connected to the office culture and sloganeering that Trammell is borrowing. Labor is evident in the hand-cut objects by Kristine Donnelly, Sarah Kabot, Sa’dia Rehman, and Alice Pixley Young, the artists choosing to tackle their images with little more than a sharp blade. Each of these choices reflect on the materiality of paper not just as a surface upon which to draw, but as a viable building material.

It is impossible to know what the art world will be in the new near future or how artists will respond in their studios to a global pandemic. The majority of the work in this exhibition was created prior to the COVID-19 outbreak yet it continues to remain relevant and, in some cases, feels prescient or filled with new meaning. The collective nature of this experience will still be chronicled by individual responses and we may indeed see some sort of permanent shift in the way that art is made, viewed and consumed. However, the intelligence and thoughtfulness exhibited in the way the objects in this show are created will surely play a role in shaping that landscape. Projects like Women to Watch provide a vital regional and national platform to explore ideas and materials that are important to artists navigating tricky new terrains. The spirit of labor and protest that runs through the five artists selected through the Ohio Advisory Group and the artists selected by the Riffe Gallery (Stephanie Rond? please make editorial decision here) point toward a hopeful future.

## Kristine Donnelly

Kristine Donnelly’s hand-cut objects are developed with an eye toward historical motifs and patterns. Embellishments and ornamentation normally relegated to the edges and frames of fine art take on a central role as the primary imagery in Donnelly’s work. Her process – screen printing patterns by hand onto long rolls of paper and then using a blade to meticulously cut out predetermined shapes – also calls attention to the physicality of the paper. Donnelly then layers or bends the paper into new forms, the negative space behind the object blurring foreground and background as repeated shapes create a type of visual echo chamber.

## Sarah Kabot

Sarah Kabot utilizes paper as a material and “the paper” for content. Within several bodies of work, Kabot has explored the institution of news media as a source and site for collective memories. For the past many generations important global, local, political and cultural events have “occurred” in the pages of newspapers. Of course these events happened in the real world but our perceptions and memories of them are shaped or distorted by how we consume the media around them. Kabot’s work begins with images and text about concrete events that she renders as sculptural and collaged abstractions.

## Sa’dia Rehman

Personal histories and geo-politics are comingled in Sa’dia Rehman’s work. Drawing from family photographs, public records, mass media, art history and other archives, Rehman takes apart images and reconstructs them as stencils. She refers to stencils as the “language of protest” for their use in public spaces particularly during times of political or social unrest. Rehman frequently switches between exhibiting the stenciled image and the stencil itself, simultaneously highlighting and negating the iterative power of the medium. As objects, the stencils reveal a process that will eventually lead to their breakdown as they no longer are useful for their intended purpose. They are both fragile and resilient.

## Breanne Trammell

Breanne Trammell is a multi-disciplinary, project-based artist with an occasional emphasis on printmaking. The imagery she explores is frequently language-based and always humorous and poignant. The work in this exhibition using decidedly common office equipment to great large scale “prints” constructed from standard-sized paper products. The messages waver between saccharine and pointed, calling attention to the power AND futility in slogans and advertising to create impact and effect change. By cribbing the language and visual strategies of motivational posters, youth-targeted advertising, and the like, Trammell brings new contexts worn out tropes and otherwise empty phrases.

## Alice Pixley Young

Alice Pixley Young creates objects and installations that value negative spaces and shadows as much as the objects that create them. Frequently, the focus of her work will be those interstitial moments that occur when the foreground and background is blurred, and the source of the image is obscured. In addition to employing cut paper to create these effects, Pixley Young also has developed a process involving pushing paper ash through stencils to generate patterns directly on the wall. The material and means of production are all from a common source.