

INTAGLIO AND RELIEF PRINTING ON MORGAN CONSERVATORY HANDMADE PAPERS

BY AIMEE LEE, ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

In 2010, I traveled to the Morgan Conservatory in Cleveland and met its founding director, Tom Balbo, for the first time. We had agreed to build the country's first hanji (Korean paper) studio, and spent the summer building out all of the equipment and tools to establish the Anne F. Eiben Hanji Studio. Key selling points included Tom's openness to new ideas and collaboration, and the Caraboolad garden, which provided raw material each year to make paper and teach the life cycle of Asian papermaking. The garden now includes more plants for papermaking and natural dyes, while the studio continues to grow with equipment, tools, and highly qualified personnel. The 15,000 square-foot space includes a gallery, archives, store, paper mill and beater room, bindery, letterpress studio, wood shop, multi-purpose art lab, and full office suite—not to mention its urban garden that is doubling in size, and outdoor space for large-scale papermaking. There is no place quite like the Morgan, and it continues to impress each new visitor after eight years in operation.

One of the Morgan's main goals is to produce and distribute high-quality handmade papers. Its regular papers include the Artist Curated Line of 18" x 24" papers in cotton, abaca, and flax, Eastern Paper Studio lines in kozo and gampi (tested by woodblock printing master Takuji Hamanaka), and assorted papers of varied fibers. Each year, the Morgan also produces custom papers, and in 2015, participated in two printmaking projects in both eastern and western styles that merit notice.

Egress Press and Research: Bill Mathie, master printer

Egress Press and Research (EPR) is a fine art publishing arm of the Edinboro University printmaking program in Pennsylvania. Invited artists visit campus to work with professors and students to create a proof ready to print. After the artist leaves, professors and students print the edition, split between the artist and EPR. One print each goes to the Erie Art Museum, Edinboro University's permanent art collection, and the EPR archive. Remaining prints are sold to recoup costs and fund future projects. The ongoing purpose of EPR is to expand printmaking knowledge and awareness of the creative process of living artists to students and professors. Students can experience fine art publishing before deciding to pursue such a career.

Professor Bill Mathie worked with artist Matt Rebholz to source an Asian paper flexible and strong enough to print intaglio with deeply etched lines. Matt had previously used an Asian paper no longer sold in the U.S., so Bill searched for alternatives. Not only did the Morgan hanji work best, but it was a local paper with options for customization. Bill first tested a batch of 25" x 36" hanji made from Thai kozo. However, the proofs caused a fine mist of fibers to stick to the plate after printing, and fibers pulled up from the paper. We tightened up quality control on fiber processing, namely cooking and picking, to create a new batch. Bill was able to swap out the paper and test the second batch, which was much stronger and more consistent, with no sign of fuzzing on the paper or plate. The final images were cut out and mounted onto a cotton rag paper. This process helped us at the Morgan shift to using 100% Japanese kozo for our large hanji, which has proven to be of superior quality and value.

Technical notes: EPR printed damp, wiping all plates and printing one immediately after the other. The hanji went through the intaglio press four times (with three plates) to print, and once through the litho press to attach the hanji to the cotton sheet. The line plate was very deeply etched, so the hanji went through twice to capture those lines. Chine collé was used to mount the cut-out images on hanji to a white cotton receiving paper.

Bill said, "The paper held up great." For larger-volume printing, he would recommend the process of working with a paper mill to develop paper for specific processes.



Matt Rebholz, *Creation Myth*,
etchings on Morgan Hanji mounted on Revere cotton rag paper, 11" x 30".

Wood Engravers Network: Eric Gulliver, master printer

The Wood Engravers Network (WEN), organized in 1994, is a group of printmakers especially interested in wood engraving. WEN provides a forum for communication, encouragement, and education through publications, print exchanges, and annual workshops. The 2015 workshop was held in Cleveland and hosted by the Morgan Conservatory, with lead organizer Eric Gulliver, a local wood engraver. Eric wanted to use Morgan paper for WEN's collaborative project, and talked to Tom about this possibility. The studio coordinator at the time worked with Eric to provide an assortment of papers that would suit the needs of wood engravers: very smooth, not too hard, even thickness, with very little embossing for crisp prints.

Eric tested these papers with old electrotypes, printing damp and dry, on sized and unsized samples. It was clear that the paper surface had to be smoother, so the Morgan used a pseudo-calendaring method wherein the damp paper was dried against acrylic sheets, under restraint. The results were successful and resulted in a new line of Engravers Paper, a sized cotton/abaca mix. It was originally formulated as a white paper, but can be reproduced in a variety of colors.

This group of artists relished the opportunity to print onto something new, especially now that the supply of good commercial papers has dwindled. Eric was "thrilled to go through the process and would happily repeat it," because it adds a certain ownership of the paper, and because of the ease of working with Morgan staff. Though he already knew about paper types and the means of production, the opportunity to participate in the process gave him a deeper understanding of how paper is made, what goes into the paper, and a richer sense of its nuances. He would definitely consider working with paper producers in the future; being able to go to someone with a list of needs and coming out with a solution was an amazing experience.

Technical notes: Engravers' Paper works best when printed damp. The test sheets were printed on a Vandercook proof press with two runs, one for type and one for image. Any relief process would benefit from using this paper.

For inquiries about custom orders or other paper services, contact the Morgan's studio coordinator, Radha Pandey at rpandey@morganconservatory.org or (216) 361-9255.

www.morganconservatory.org

www.egresspress.org

www.woodengravers.net



Eric Gulliver's tests of various Morgan papers (pure and mixed cotton and abaca, bleached and unbleached, sized and unsized, dry and damp).