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*Grids within Grids*

by

Lingrong Wang

A thesis presented to the  
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts  
Washington University in St. Louis

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

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## Abstract

Combined with my art practice, this thesis acts as a lens for the universe within the little grids I create. Instead of using brushes and pigments, I'm searching for a different way to represent strokes to form abstract images. I'm interested in using a folding method to make one page of printed paper into multiple layers. It is fascinating to transform single sheets of paper from magazines. The magazines that I have collected show people's personal interests. These everyday items give hints and first impressions of meaning to the viewer, but I fold the magazines to make them unreadable in the attempt to dim those impressions. The little grids I make in my repetitive act of folding converge to become unique patterns. The words and images on the printed paper, which I can see clearly in the crevices, are deconstructed and fragmented. There are two different languages to encounter on the folded paper in my work: Chinese and English. Watching the pattern grow, I think about culture, language, grids, and nature. Beneath the pleats of folded paper, I look at the soul of a different organism that leads me to find a new world in the grid.

## Introduction

In my work, I'm fascinated with the abstractions made possible by folding paper. I choose various kinds of magazines as unique material to fold into little grids. In this thesis, I describe my art practice in the context of the act of folding. When I look at folded paper, I see multiple layers that expand the space from two dimensional to three dimensional.

In the first chapter, I illustrate the differences between the tradition of origami and my way of folding. I'm interested in the significance of the pleats of folded paper. The spiral shape becomes a labyrinth for me that responds to the poem of Jorge Luis Borges: *Labyrinth*.<sup>1</sup> I believe that the repetitive act of folding makes the paper infinite to some extent. I try to decipher my folding method by using the printed magazines. One sentence on a magazine's page is created by the author, but it has been broken down by the act of folding, becoming unreadable. On the other hand, it has been wrapped on its own way. The letters still come together within the folded paper, but without the rules of grammar. In this seemingly chaotic situation, I'm waiting for a new organism to emerge beneath the folds. I understand this phenomenon through the writings of Gilles Deleuze,<sup>2</sup> which have lead me to believe I'm looking for a "new universe," which is conceived by my way of folding. In the "new universe," Deleuze states in *The Fold*,

The soul sings the glory of God by running along its own folds, though without succeeding in entirely developing them, "for they reach into the infinite."<sup>3</sup>

In the second chapter, I discuss the differences of language and culture between the East and the West. When I fold Chinese and English magazines, I can see big differences between the two language structures. Unlike English letters, Chinese characters can be placed in the middle

of grids. The various strokes are clustered together to become one word. One Chinese character can refer to different meanings. It is abstract and ambiguous, but it also can be seen as a square which is placed separately. For English words, it is a continuous pattern that can be referred to as a long line on paper. The linear words imply a distinct connection in one sentence. The line is very clear and logical. Based on my own experience, this language difference makes me think about my identity. With the help of Chuang Tzu's concepts,<sup>4</sup> I find a solution to face the difference between the East and the West.

Repetition plays an important role in my art. I repeat the folding act to make paper thicker. The repetitive act generates multiple tiny grids to form a big composition for viewers. In the third chapter of my thesis, I think about the significance of repetition. It leaves my trace on the surface of printed magazines. These traces are abstract and geometric, but they imply my presence. Between presence and absence, the repetition grows stronger with the passage of time. These little grids that interlace and cluster together contain my memory and my actions. To me, they seem to be reflections of my daily life.

I'm also influenced by the natural world. The shape of folded paper reminds me of the woods. It becomes a seed that grows from the soil or a raindrop on a tree branch. Combined with my art practice, I explore the importance of nature in this thesis. In the final chapter, I discuss the poetic elements of nature and their importance to my practice. I feel that the arrangement of folded paper offers me a strong tie to plants. I want my work to arouse people to think about themselves and even establish an emotional association with memory. Nature inspires me to

build a new world to explore. As my work develops, through the accumulating gestures, I transform the folded paper from a droplet into a waterfall.

## Beneath the Pleat of Folding

Since I began to depict my perception of the world on paper or canvas, I have been thinking about paper itself. The white and clean paper gives me many possibilities to create images. I can describe what I have seen and then modify it on paper, or write down words that inspire me a great deal on paper. Paper allows me to express my feelings and understanding about the universe through my eyes. I decided that I wanted to make some changes towards the paper itself. In 2017, instead of using my pencils and pigments to respond to the world, I started to focus on the paper itself and let it take on a central role in my work. Initially, I folded white paper into a cube. In *System* (fig. 1), the lines and colors became the decoration of the white paper. But this approach seemed to be too delicate and simple for further development. I thought I should make another form of paper to create more possibilities. I noticed the tradition of origami.



Fig. 1. Lingrong Wang. *System*. 2017.

The art of *origami* (fig. 2), which means “paper folding” in Japanese, transforms flat paper into a different shape, in which it gains new dimensional space and a symbolic purpose. Folding paper in different ways offers people pleasure and surprise in its final form. “Ori” means “folding,” and “gami” means “paper.” This tradition seems to be associated mostly with Japanese culture, but there are some historical documents that show that the tradition of paper

folding appears in many other places such as Europe and China. In Europe, the earliest type of paper folding was napkin folding.<sup>5</sup> It was a form of a table sculpture for decoration, but it was slowly replaced after the introduction of porcelain decoration during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As for Chinese paper folding, an historical document shows that the usage of paper folding was ceremonial or funereal.<sup>6</sup> People folded paper as a representation of gold nuggets to represent money for the dead. Chinese people believed that burning could transform the folded paper into real money for dead people in another world. Even now, Chinese people use specific folded paper for funeral purposes. The folded paper becomes a bridge between the living and the dead, whom they miss.



Fig. 2. Brian Chan. *Grasshopper*. 2011.

In Japan, paper folding increasingly became a method of entertainment. Combined with the concept of modern design, Japanese people innovatively changed the way of paper folding in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> In the modern world, paper folding creates beautiful sculptures that represent particular objects. It can be folded into the shape of a frog, flower or bird by specific methods of folding. These forms are recognizable by the average person. This kind of transformations appeals to me a great deal. The paper becomes a representation of a real object in which people

can find beauty. Paper is reborn through folding to become an organic form that relates to the universe, and these representations of real objects establish a psychological and emotional association with people who see them. The paper is no longer a mere material or a piece of matter; it transforms into an organism which can communicate with people and be part of a real space.

I know that paper folding can transform a piece of flat paper into a particular sculpture. But, in my practice, I want to fold it into an ambiguous form that people can explore imaginatively with freedom. Transformation in my world can refer to many more things. It cannot be a napkin folded for merely decorative purposes. I want the pleat of the folded paper to become something important. A piece of white paper is too simple for me to support this kind of transformation. Therefore, I searched for a more meaningful material to fold.

Finally, I developed a method of folding inspired by childhood memories and began to collect and work with magazines. This is my method I conceived:

*Tear off one page from a magazine.*

*Divide the page vertically into sixteen strips of paper of equal size.*

*Take one strip and then fold in the middle to form a right angle.*

*Fold the lower paper strip over the top one. Next, fold the paper strip which is now the lower layer over the paper strip, which is now on top.*

*Continue this pattern until the entire length of the paper has been folded into a neat little square.*

*Glue the last little strip to whatever support is being used.*

My first memory of paper folding is with my father. He taught me to fold paper and then blow it into a balloon when I was six years old. It stimulated my curiosity about paper. Later, I started to

explore paper folding with my friends after class. When I was folding with my friends, it relaxed me from the work of studying, and I could chat with others. I preferred to fold things in my own way when I was wandering outside. In those moments, I was pleased to see the final form of my way of folding. Because of that, I would prefer that the final form be a new, different object.

These transformations became adventures for me in which I explored new universes. The way I fold paper in my art practice is a direct and simple way to achieve a different shape of paper, as I did in my childhood. I used to fold in this way by using two slender colored plastic tubes as a decoration. I admired the beautiful overlapping parts, and I could change the work's length by pressing or stretching. For me, the spiral shape represents infinity through my continuous act of folding. In my art practice, I repeat the pattern to fold printed pages — over 1000 of them — and then glue the folded papers together on a transparent plate (fig. 3). From this process, the object gains density and gravity. Through my way of folding, one page of paper can produce multiple folded pages. I want this propagation to transform the paper into an organism-like object which can take on its own character. The printed paper from magazines contains information about daily life. The words on the pages of magazines are enveloped by the pattern of folding. Due to my folding, words crawl across the white paper. In *The Fold*, Gilles Deleuze states a new meaning of folding and unfolding:

Folding–unfolding no longer simply means tension-release, contraction-dilation, but enveloping-developing, involution-evolution. The organism is defined by its ability to fold its own parts and to unfold them, not to infinity, but to a degree of development assigned to each species. Thus an organism is enveloped organism, one within another (interlocking of germinal matter), like Russian dolls.<sup>8</sup>

In the *Mixt* (fig. 4), I unfold grids to act as a kind of witness to my daily life. It is very interesting to find that most of them are relevant to the natural world. It is pleasant to see these abstract images — the colorful sight of my internal world. I also add my folded paper to respond to these images that unfold from my memories. These pages of magazines that I collect come from my family, my friends, my teachers, bookstores and libraries. They might be about politics, literature, or fashion. They are stacked up in a corner of a house to become a record that shows people's individual interests. The content of these magazines connects with people's daily life. People can find some interesting comments about contemporary news. For example, the author will write down a text to in response to hot social issues. People can find interesting historical stories that would take more effort to find in formal historical documents like textbooks or encyclopedia. The magazines are a place of discussion where ordinary people can find in what they are interested.



Fig. 3. Lingrong Wang. Details of *Grids*. 2018.



Fig. 4. Lingrong Wang. Details of *Mixt*. 2018.

I think magazines play the role of a mediator. When people read a magazine and want to have a record of their place, they fold a “dog-ear,” which becomes the trace of someone’s interaction with the texts and texture of the paper. To me, the magazines become organic in this way. The appearance of magazines responds to contemporary time, containing multiple voices from different critics that form a unique conversational space. It connects with daily life tightly and becomes a seed that waits for someone to water and cultivate it.

Li Qiang “waters” this “seed” in a way that inspires me.<sup>9</sup> In *Fragment* (fig. 5), Li Qiang tears off pieces of magazines and reconstructs a new image that prompts the viewer to think about contemporary information critically. The behavior of tearing is a much more violent method than I use in my own practice; it can indicate a revolution of culture and information.<sup>10</sup> In Li Qiang’s work, the material of magazines becomes a part of consumer culture. The ripped, printed paper is like pigment to depict an image. Tearing magazines is a response to the image that the artist created: many commodities are falling down like rain. These commodities are waste, to be thrown away by people.



Fig. 5. Li Qiang. *Fragment*. 2016.

In contrast to the act of tearing, the act of folding in my own practice is a corporeal vector that leads me to a labyrinth. It is fascinating for me to make the printed paper have a reflection and encounter that reflection within the folding-unfolding system. In *Grids* (fig. 6), I use light to illuminate the labyrinth of folded paper. The light comes beneath the bottom of the folded paper. It penetrates the transparent plate and then goes across the crevices of folded paper to cast a shadow on the wall. Due to the light, the folded paper becomes more mysterious. The shadow and light strengthen the spiral shape of the folded paper. They visually complicate the shape's interior world. The printed words are obscured. The light also emphasizes the gravity of the paper. It becomes a more complex structure. I want the viewer to get lost in the confusing shadow and light on its surface. Inside the folds, something springs out. I do not know what will happen as I continue to make folds. Folding is a kind of reaching that opens a new field towards me. I believe that there is a phantom waiting for me to visit, beneath every pleat of the folded paper. Inside these folds, I become an adventurer in a maze, trying to find an exit to escape the exposure of the confusing light.



Fig. 6. Lingrong Wang. *Grids*. 2018.

### *Labyrinth in Folding*

In my folded labyrinth, my feelings of disorder and anxiety are represented along the edges of folded paper. Jorge Luis Borges's words from his poem *Labyrinth* help me to express this connection:

I follow the hateful path of monotonous walls which is my destiny.  
Straight galleries which curve in secret circles as the years wear on.  
... in the pale dust I have deciphered tracks that I fear.<sup>11</sup>

Initially, I tried to close the interior, as if in an envelope, and wrap my unsettled feeling in an architectural form. However, with the passage of time, I saw some major changes in the cluster of folded paper. My psychological anxiety became energy to catalyze the production of organic items. Folding became unfolding. In *Grids* (fig. 7), the zigzag lines of individual folded paper interlace the two sides of paper in an overlapping way. During the process, both balance and rhythm are obtained. The edge relates the grid to another grid; it is continuous and angular, representing my emotional movement. I shrink the size of one page and then specify the core of paper. It becomes tiny and elastic. Beneath the pleat of folding, a new soul waits. It seems that it was conceived a long time ago.



Fig. 7. Lingrong Wang. Details of *Grids*. 2018.

When I look at the whole piece from the outside and see the folded paper in a macroscopic way, I see that each grid is next to another grid, and that *that* grid is within another grid. In this cluster, I can imagine a forest, a city, and even a story under the light. In a way, light acts as a catalyst that forms a unique environment for the work. I hope that, under the light, the shadow of grids cast on the wall shows different narrative images in people's imaginations. The multiple layers are made from a single layer of paper which shows an abstract image to me. I want to obtain more images. I fold the pages from magazines again and again. After cutting and dividing the page into strips, I start a new one: fold the lower paper strip over the top one. Next, fold the paper strip which is now the lower layer over the paper strip which is now on the top. I repeat the pattern to achieve a spiral shape of paper on which the zigzag edge connects little grids and makes them taller and longer. The elevation produced through folding represents my inner world. In *The New Yorker* (fig. 8), the long folded paper interlaces with itself to become complex and tangled. It represents my struggle and tension. Words fill the spiral shapes. In my artwork, I want to make the folded paper pieces longer to address my desire for more space. And yet, this

work is still another object, not necessarily a solution to change my interior world. Perhaps I should use a subtractive method to make a real change for myself. In *Untitled* (fig. 9), I combine the material and individual folded paper into a united whole. It is more natural and running in a settled situation.



Fig. 8. Lingrong Wang. Details of *The New Yorker*. 2017.



Fig. 9. Lingrong Wang. Details of *Untitled*. 2019.

Between the intervals of folding, I start to wonder about the words on the paper, the language itself. Their elastic power expands into a greater space. I desire to make new combinations. Magazines come from different genres, different languages and different publications. I'm aware of the origin of these materials. However, to me, folding is one thing that generates an infinity. In *Untitled*, I mix languages up by folding. They fill the white wall with tiny squares. They become dots and strokes to form an abstract archive that records my experience and feelings. I can pace around and meditate within the folded texture and words.

## Between Lines and Grids

*Wandering Boundless and Free*

故九万里，则风斯在下矣，而后乃今培风；背负青天，而莫之夭阏者，而后乃今将图南。蜩与学鸠笑之曰：“我决起而飞，抢榆枋而止，时则不至，而控于地而已矣，奚以之九万里而南为？”适莽苍者，三餐而反，腹犹果然；适百里者，宿春粮；适千里者，三月聚粮。之二虫又何知！小知不及大知，小年不及大年。奚以知其然也？朝菌不知晦朔，蟪蛄不知春秋，此小年也。楚之南有冥灵者，以五百岁为春，五百岁为秋；上古有大椿者，以八千岁为春，八千岁为秋。此大年也。而彭祖乃今以久特闻，众人匹之，不亦悲乎？

- Chuang Tzu, *Nan Hua Jing*<sup>12</sup>

So it is that P'eng needs ninety thousand miles of wind beneath it. That's when it climbs the wind until its back lifts the blue heavens. That's when it turns south and nothing can stop it. The cicada and fledgling dove laugh at it, saying: 'If we put our minds to it, we can fly across to the elm or sandalwood. But sometimes we don't make it, and we just end up fluttering around on the ground. What good's all this talk about ninety thousand miles heading south?' If you go out into the country for the day, you can carry three meals and your belly's still full when you come home. But if you're going a hundred miles, you need to hull enough grain to stay the night. And if you're going a thousand miles, you'll have to gather enough grain to last three months. So what do those two little creatures know? A little wisdom can't equal great wisdom. A short life can't equal great age. How do I know it's like this? Dawn mushrooms never know the young and old moon. Summer cicadas never know spring and autumn. This is what a short life means. South of Ch'u is a tree named DarkSpirit. For it, spring lasts five hundred years and autumn lasts another five hundred years. And for the huge ch'un tree of ancient times, spring lasts eight thousand years and autumn lasts another eight thousand years. This is what great age means. But then, these days I keep hearing about P'eng Tsu living seven hundred years. Everyone wants to be like him — and that's pretty sad too, isn't it? <sup>13</sup>

This text talks about the bias that results from size differences. In the text, P'eng is the biggest bird in the world which transforms from a Kun, the biggest fish in the world, in a Chinese myth. Chuang Tzu thought that limits exist in every area, and knowledge depends on how the person perceives the world. Chuang Tzu, one of the representatives of Taoism, pursued the freedom of Wandering Boundless and Free. Though Chuang Tzu's text displays many examples that demonstrate the limits of the world in the excerpt above, he also wrote that one can acquire

freedom spiritually. As he responded to Hui Tzu when Hui Tzu worried about the future of a tree, a story I will return to later in this chapter: let it go.<sup>14</sup>

I have always been impressed by the thoughts of Chuang Tzu, especially when I left my homeland. I have recognized that there is a total difference in culture and custom between the East and the West. It generates two separate and solid systems that limit people's ability to comprehend each other. The cultural divide is a gap that restricts people spiritually, even in today's globalized world. At first, the cultural shock hit me hard, and I became anxious. I felt helpless. Everything was totally different. *The New Yorker*, one of the most famous American magazines, became a window through which I felt I could see this different world more clearly. I got to know the magazine when I was in an art history class in the U.S. I used texts from *The New Yorker* (fig. 10) to ask myself questions and to look more clearly through that window — the lens through which I saw western culture. Why did I choose *The New Yorker*? At that moment, I was thinking about the content of magazines. I repeatedly wrote down the titles of magazines to try to grab the key point, but I utilized folding and veiling to make the English texts and my texts on it unreadable. In *The New Yorker*, the layers of folded paper represent curtains in front of a window. Behind the layers, the typography of text is at random. I want this piece to suggest my struggle looking out of a window (my “frame of reference.”) and the embarrassment I felt while living in a new environment. In this piece, I express that I am on the edge of both expectation and fear — a contradictory state of mind. I create a window to look outside, but I knit a paper curtain to block the view.



Fig. 10. Lingrong Wang. *The New Yorker*. 2017.

My art practice addresses my experience of the cultural divide. Folding is another form of making shadows or hiding something behind shades: in my work, shadows hide or even deconstruct the images and words on printed paper. The action of folding makes the gap between the Eastern world and the Western world visible while simultaneously causing the English words to become invisible. Between constructing multiple layers and deconstructing words, the distance between China and the Western world seems to shrink. The shape of folded paper is also like a spring or a ladder, which functions to connect different objects. In folding the English printed paper and Chinese printed paper together, I deconstruct the words and at the same time establish a tangible connection that reaches across the space between them. Without the intervention of language, the gap becomes traversable for everyone. Unlike Tower of Babel, which divides, the folded paper might bridge space.

子独不见狸狌乎？卑身而伏，以候敖者；东西跳梁，不辟高下；中于机辟，死于罔罟。今夫鬻牛，其大若垂天之云。此能为大矣，而不能执鼠。今子有大树，患其无用，何不树之于无何有之乡，广莫之野，彷徨乎无为其侧，逍遥乎寝卧其下。不夭斤斧，物无害者，无所可用，安所困苦哉！

- Chuang Tzu, *Nan Hua Jing* <sup>15</sup>

“Haven’t you ever seen a wildcat or a weasel?” replied Chuang Tzu. “It crouches low, hiding, waiting. Suddenly it springs up and bounds east and west, uphill and

down, centering its trap, and finally it makes the kill there in its net. Then there's the yak: huge as clouds hung clear cross the sky. It's mastered immensity, but it can't even catch a mouse. Now you've got this huge tree, and you agonize over how useless it is. Why not plant it in a village where there's nothing at all, a land where emptiness stretches away forever? Then you could be no one drifting lazily beside it, roam boundless and free as you doze in its shade. It won't die young from the axe. Nothing will harm it. If you have no use, you have no grief."<sup>16</sup>

According to Chuang Tzu's thought, it is unnecessary to worry about the consequences that every individual experiences and witnesses. Physical gaps do exist in the universe and cannot be solved immediately. For Chuang Tzu, the best strategy to eliminate anxiety is paying attention to one's own individual internal world because the spiritual world is limitless for the self. It might partially respond to Rene Descartes's concept of the "cogito."<sup>17</sup> Descartes discussed the idea of the presence of people, or rather, the self. He wanted to find a solid philosophical cornerstone to support the presence of people.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the critical thought of Descartes, Chuang Tzu had a more romantic way of thinking. He started to think about reality of himself after dreaming that he was a butterfly. He could not distinguish whether he was Chuang Tzu dreaming he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming that he was Chuang Tzu.<sup>19</sup> He thought about the identity of an object versus the self. The difference suggests that the structures of languages, such as French and Chinese, bring people unique ways of thinking. These thinkers' introspections are similar, but they offer different ways of thinking about the world.

On the small grids of folded paper from both Chinese and English magazines, I fold and deconstruct the material into fragments that connect physically with each other. When they experience the multiplicity of small grids, people might reflect on their thought processes rather

than merely the limits of small typeface and foreign language. I want my work to act as a kind of visual transfer station where people can mentally walk into the space between two cultures.

### *Ambiguous Faces*

In my work, paper grids cover the transparent plates. To me, the textural surface seems to create a hallucination that there are images of mosaic, fragmented faces. Looking through the accumulation of many folded printed magazines, I can see the shadow of my body and my face (fig. 11). This perception makes me think about my identity. Before I started to work with texts and words on printed paper, I was obsessed by faces. In *Face* (fig. 12), I produced small images of faces because they reminded me of ID photos — but I wanted to change them. I was interested in distorting the face to create a bizarre atmosphere in contrast to the formal ID photos. The distorted face is vague and strange. It obscures gender. The abstract faces cannot offer specific information or identity. It is interesting to probe the definition of identity. There are so many types of IDs: driver license, student ID card, passport, etc. My passport is an important certification that proves my identity and social status. On my passport, there are several pieces of information about my identity: face photo, name, nationality, gender, date of birth, bearer's signature, and passport code (fig. 13). Apart from this fundamental information, a biometric passport can offer even more comprehensive data to ensure a person's identity.<sup>20</sup> Yet the image of a face appears in almost all IDs to identify one person. It is a visual and direct way to



punishment erased every trace of a person to reject his existence symbolically. *Severan Tondo* (fig. 14) is one such example of this punishment. Images of the face are crucial for people to recognize and remember others. Compared to text, visual images are a more straightforward way to connect to our psychic world. When I look at an image of a face, I feel like I know how the person behind that face is feeling. In *Face* (fig. 12), I want to eliminate the emotional element from the face by distorting it, but it seems to generate anyway, spontaneously. Some faces are painful, some faces are relaxed. In these twelve faces, there is little, if any, identifying information. Now, the face becomes vague and insignificant — useless as ID information. The ambiguity lets me imagine more about the subjects' stories. They could be from different races. The vague faces seem to erase their referents' identity. They are strangers about whom I cannot find more information, but the visual images lead people to try to figure out who they are. So does the image of a face specify its owner's identity? Not at all. I can get some information from these faces, but I cannot know their thoughts about the world. That can only come from direct verbal communication: a much more specific bridge between people.



Fig. 14. *Severan Tondo*. c. a. 200 AD.

*Transferrable Space*

In my art practice, I'm interested in the denotation of languages because of my identity and cross-cultural experience. The shape of folded paper could be a combination of these two different structures: the grid represents Chinese characters while English words can be seen as a line. The reason I choose to fold this way in my work is not only about my childhood memory of origami, but it is also about my effort to fit in or fill the gap between two languages. Thousands of texts are arranged in the average library. Every language has its own law of symbols. These symbols are placed on horizontal or vertical lines to form sentences, describing stories and images. Despite the meaning of these sentences, the symbols by themselves are in reality without order. I find context for these ideas in Jorge Luis Borges' *The Library of Babel*:

There are twenty-five orthographic symbols. That discovery enabled mankind, three hundred years ago, to formulate a general theory of the library and thereby satisfactorily solve the riddle that no conjecture had been able to divine — the formless and chaotic nature of virtually all books... They will acknowledge that the inventors of writing imitated the twenty-five natural symbols, but contend that that adoption was fortuitous, coincidental, and that books in the themselves have no meaning. That argument, as we shall see, is not entirely fallacious.<sup>22</sup>

How does language develop? It originates from images and actions. I become aware of order in my work. Like I place my folded paper on the plastic plate to establish a textural surface, I deconstruct the order of words on the paper with folding and replacement (Fig. 15). These fragmented words on little squares present new sentences and phrases. Chinese characters and English letters are mixed on the plates. The words are small but they become clearer as they get closer. Their fragmentation still leaves a sense of obscurity. However, in a way, I see these two different languages become one thing.



Fig. 15. Lingrong Wang. Details of *Untitled*. 2019.

The Tower of Babel is a story from the Hebrew Bible in *Genesis* that attempts to provide a reason for why people speak different languages in the world. All people spoke one language in the beginning. However, the Judeo-Christian god perceived a threat to his power because the people wanted to build a tower to the sky. Therefore, he placed a barrier to thwart the humans' plan. This was the barrier of different languages. The origin of the word "Babel" is from "Babylonian," which translates to "the gate of god." The word "babble" also represents the confusing sound of many who speak different languages at the same time.<sup>23</sup> The story illustrates a shift from one single language into multiple languages and, although it is mythological, it shows that people in ancient time were aware of the gap between different cultures and various languages. In my work, I am trying to, in a sense, build my own Tower of Babel, or, rather, an "archive" of Babel.

Language is a tool that people use to communicate their thoughts and feelings, but it can also play other roles. For example, classical Chinese painting (fig. 16) is always accompanied with calligraphy from the artist or the artist's friend. The calligraphic poem helps the audience to

comprehend the painting. I seldom see words on traditional western paintings. Therefore, it is imperative to know the difference between Chinese and English. I prefer to understand it according to my experience.



Fig. 16. Ni Zan. *Six Gentlemen*. 1345.

Chinese is a tonal language in which different tones can change the meaning of words. For example, “Yi Shu”( pronounced one way as “Yee Sue”) would change its meaning if it is pronounced all in a falling tone (like “Yì Shù(艺术),” meaning “art”) However, when the first part is pronounced in the high-and-level tone, like “Yī Shù(医术)”, it means “medical skill.” In Chinese poetry, to achieve perfect tonal effect and proper diction, poets not only focus on the aesthetic value of the words, but also on the tones. Chinese words are very flexible and able to generate new meanings for which people cannot find the reference in reality, like *yin* and *yang*. Ancient Chinese people believed that these two elements were the foundation of the Cosmos. In a sense, *yin* and *yang* were a proto-language that represented and interpreted everything in the natural world.<sup>24</sup> But for English, there is another system. David Hinton said that English is “a stable and changeless medium by which a transcendental soul represents objective reality.”<sup>25</sup>

Chinese expression is like fluid water — it can embody multiple entities; however, meaning expressed by the English language is more solid, corporeal. English words are established by a linear arrangement. Chinese words are much more about construction in various directions. Folding English magazines deconstructs the traditional linear arrangement and omits some parts of words. The sentence lines are interrupted by my repetitive action of folding. Unlike this, Chinese words separate from each other: their meaning is not linear, but is rather composed of various strokes. It is evident when you type the two different languages on a computer screen. Typing English words is both a continuous visual action and pattern, in contrast to typing Chinese, which is an intermittent process. The shape of a letter is fixed and easy to obtain without concern about tone. The Chinese word, due to the influence of multiple calligraphic forms and various tones, is hard to summarize.

English letters are more like a code that forms words. Chinese characters are more like architecture that people use to focus on shape and meaning. Both languages have their own grammar and structure. When learning a foreign language, the first part is to accumulate words — the “bricks” of the language — and then one, must learn the grammar and usage of the words. Grammar is often seen as the most important part of a new language to master. But do I think about grammar when I speak or write in Chinese? The answer is no. In Chinese ancient texts, there is one specific way to distinguish the oral Chinese and written Chinese. Writers were expected to use some words to maintain the harmony of the text. This harmony could be vocal. For example, Li Bai wrote that he admired,<sup>26</sup> the Land of Shu, which is a difficult terrain to

access: “噫吁嚱，危乎高哉！”<sup>27</sup> Here, he exclaimed his surprise at the height of mountains in the Land of Shu. There are only two words, “危” and “高,” that express the extreme height of mountains. “噫吁嚱” can be translated to “ah” or “yikes,” and for “乎”(pronounced as “who”) and “哉”(pronounced as “zen”), there is no meaning. These words function to gain both vocal and visual balance in the phrase. The meaning of the words in English is essentially: “Ah, yikes, how dangerously high!”

What happens when the syntax is broken? Xu Bing’s sculpture *A Book From the Sky* involves the revolution and mixing of Chinese characters, which shocked me the first time I saw it. It deconstructs and creates new words I have never seen (fig. 17).<sup>28</sup> It imitates the arrangement of books, but viewers cannot understand any words. We become illiterate. Because I recognize the pictographs, I feel familiar with these new words, but I can neither name them nor know their meaning. The book is meaningless, but still intriguing. Along the edge of the piece, however, the typography design of the characters is in perfect balance. Xu Bing says, “because Chinese character is monosyllabic, which makes the language very regular and tidy, Chinese people are obsessed orderliness instinctively.”<sup>29</sup>



Fig. 17. Xu Bing. *A Book From the Sky*. 1987-1991.

My art has a strong tie with the aesthetics of orderliness. I myself prefer to divide some of my works into squares in order. Therefore, English magazines, too, I put into squares by folding and tearing. I would argue that the shape of folded paper in my piece is evidence of this preference. I agree with David Hinton's statement that, "The structure of our language represents the structure of our thought."<sup>30</sup> Looking at the shape of folded paper, the grid is within a grid due to the connection between the edges of grids. The zigzag lines make the grids three dimensional on flat paper. A cluster of folded paper that is placed on a transparent plate gains a fluctuating surface. Under the pressure of the transparent plate, the folded paper is laminated, but it obtains a little space between the two plates. With this structure, I try to describe my current state of being: I am trying to reach a balance in obtaining and understanding the information transitions among different cultures.

In *Untitled* (fig. 18), my repetitive act of folding transforms one flat sheet of paper into the thick strokes of an abstract image. The textual surface is mosaic and ambiguous, but it also offers figurative information. The folded paper already has its own color and pattern. The fragmented phrases form a scene in my head. I do not need to add more color or line to modify them. The process happens automatically. The transformation between languages and images helps me to gain my own manner of figuration. For me, it is similar to sentence-making (fig. 19). I hope that viewers might relate these folded papers to their own private experiences. For example, I can see "willing to" and "market" and "living" on the folded paper. They make me think of a scene of a morning market: on a sunny morning, women are selecting the fresh food

materials for their families. The sellers are taking care of their business. It is vivid. Its contents become more and more detailed as I contemplate them. This contemplation also stimulates me to fold the paper thicker and thicker in my studio. The thickness of folded paper intangibly pushes me away to stand at a distance and let the folded paper breathe in a real space. When I stand back from the finished work, I'm overwhelmed by the texture of the surface. Everything becomes vague and abstract as if my memory has sunk to the bottom. I fold my daily life into the pleat.



Fig. 18. Lingrong Wang. *Untitled*. 2019.



Fig. 19. Lingrong Wang. Details of *Untitled*. 2019.

## Repetitive Grids

As Agnes Martin mentions in her writings: “All the people were like those rectangles.”<sup>31</sup> I want the grids in my work to encourage viewers to make new sentences and meanings from the scramble of text they are presented with. Most abstractions do not reference concrete objects or entities in real life. However, due to my action of repetition, I believe the little grids become real deconstructors of words on their surfaces. When I look at my works with folded paper, I find that some words relate to the pattern on the edges of the grids. It always stimulates me to look more closely and to free-associate. The words “again” and “was” on my folded paper imply possible future development of thought, which makes me think about my repetitive act of folding.

The act of folding is crucial part of my routine. I repeat yesterday, every day. If I repeat what I did yesterday, I eventually see the result of repetition: that it produces many pieces of folded paper. If I change something during the process, the repetition ceases, and the shape of folded paper transforms. In my practice, repetition has variables. These variables may include time, quantity, and weight. During the process of repetition, my body is involved — but that disappears when I install the folded paper on the wall. The trace of my body movement is hidden behind the multiple layers of folded paper.

One repetitive act leads me to meditation. Repetition cannot avoid the influence of time. As Tehching Hsieh says: “I’m the same and also different.”<sup>32</sup> In *Time Clock Piece* (fig. 20), Hsieh punches a time clock once per hour for one year. He documents every time stamp with a photograph. In these photos, viewers can witness his changes during this year. The time clock piece is a performance of repetition. The photographs Tehching Hsieh registers show his

condition. There are some slight changes. Time flies away and leaves something. His unemotional face makes me think of a prisoner. In a limited space, a lonely man repeats one specific action to prove his presence. In his piece, the photographs are products of repetition: they show the same place, and the same person, but at different times. It is interesting to consider that repetition can repeat anything except time. I admire his courage and persistence in his artwork. I have trained to paint still lifes and portraits in a limited studio setting every day. I got used to utilizing brushes and colors to record my feelings on paper. However, because I am inspired by his work, in my current practice, my body becomes a medium to explore the meaning of repetition and presence. Repetition does not merely mean doing the same thing over and over. I'm trying to map something out, as Hsieh has done.<sup>33</sup> Time is linear, although the shape of a clock is a round circle. People design the shape of a clock to make it easier to record time, but the design seems to be a self-deceptive fiction for humans. I can repeat anything but time. In *Untitled* (fig. 21), I witness the growth of the folded paper and my internal world. It is an experience or a performance of folding and opening my mind.



Fig. 20. Tehching Hsieh. *Time Clock Piece*. 1980-1981.



Fig. 21. Lingrong Wang. Details of *Untitled*. 2019.

During the process of folding, I start to meditate by watching these little grids of folded paper. I think about my relationship to paper. My existence has been eroded by the years, but has my heart been enriched in these repeated folded shapes of printed paper? This unique attachment of media and material appeals to me. The textural element of my work has always attracted me. After I gather these used magazines from forgotten corners, I choose the way of folding from my memory to repeat. Without the delicate cover of the magazine, I go back and forth on a single word, just like people open a magazine and read it word by word. At this time, the repeated trace is found again.

In my studio, I'm obsessed with tiny grids. In my mind, these grids that are made by my repetitive act of folding could amplify something special in the world. These tiny grids are not big enough for me to paint something on them; at their size, they could be seen as brushstrokes or pixels that form a pattern. Unlike brushstrokes, which are more improvisational, pixels are created by elaborate calculation on digital screens. My folded paper is close in shape to pixels. However, the pattern of my tiny grids differs from a digital image of pixels, which contains

specific information. On my tiny grids, there is no completed information or intent to form a specific image. They partially conceal their information, instead giving little hints on their surface. For me, these tiny grids become “semi-pixels,” which is on the edge of information transfer — their liminal status allows me to consider their future direction.

## Wandering in Nature

*Poetic Woods in Embryo*

The natural world inspires my studio practice. Nature is poetic and reflective. As an artist, I gradually became aware of the influence of the natural world on my practice. In some of my work, I perceive nature and try to describe it faithfully on canvas. I transform the image of nature from three dimensions into two. In *The New Yorker* (fig. 22), the vine-like folded paper springs out from the vertical surface, and reminds me of plant growth. I believe I subconsciously imitated this natural form to arouse the life of my artwork. In my mind, referring to natural items can reinvigorate art work. I can see the growth, the life beneath the surface.



Fig. 22. Lingrong Wang. Details of *The New Yorker*. 2017.

For me, the natural world has a strong tie with nostalgia. When I came to St. Louis, I found that the landscape of St. Louis is very different from that of my hometown, Yichang, which is in a mountainous terrain near the Yangzi river. When I visited the Mississippi River, the landscape of the river astonished me. I found that the color of the river is brownish, which impressed me as

aggressive and masculine. Because of this, I prefer to give the following analogy to compare the two places. My hometown is like an ink wash painting, while the landscape of St. Louis is like an oil painting. Inspired by the view, I expressed my feelings in *Fragments from Memory* (fig. 23). It contains my memories of my hometown and my impression of St. Louis. In this painting, I distort the trees and architecture to try to establish an interaction between these two places, these two cultures. I use a tree as a medium to convey my mood, and hope for it to suggest my nostalgia for my hometown. As I worked on this piece, I came to believe that trees are great listeners and messengers of people's moods.

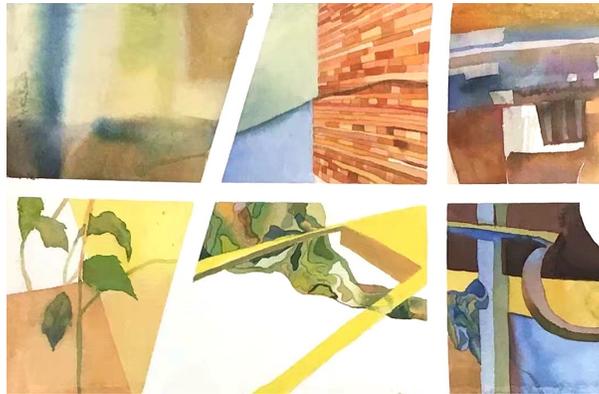


Fig. 23. Lingrong Wang. *Fragments from Memory*. 2017.

However, as for the “vines” on the surface I created later on, I discovered that they already have written words that interact with each other like separate people. These vines, made by folding, claim their own springtime and begin a new life. Many poets describe trees to imply or illustrate the advent of spring. For example, He Zhizhang wrote about a willow:

碧玉妆成一树高,万条垂下绿丝绦。  
不知细叶谁裁出? 二月春风似剪刀。<sup>34</sup>

Up to your crown, O willow, dressed in the green of jades,  
Myriads of twigs so verdant, droop like your silken braids.  
Who knows who the tailor is, who's cut your leaves so fine?  
It's the vernal winds past February, sharp as the scissors' blades. <sup>35</sup>

To me, this is a beautiful and simple poem that extols new life in springtime. In a way, my act of folding becomes the spring breeze that tailors the shape of the paper, which is like the leaves of a tree. The words on the paper become the texture of trunk while the little grids become leaves. They form woods on the surface of the canvas. When I walk far away to watch them, I strongly perceive the gravity and texture of these “woods.”

I’m pleasantly surprised to see the birth of organic forms in folded paper. For example, I use a transparent plate to let me see the piece from the bottom and top (fig. 24). Compared with the vine-like paper in the *The New Yorker* (fig. 25), I think the individual folded papers could be seen as “seeds,” which are more energetic and vivid, offering me many future possibilities. They seem to want to occupy a larger space. When I consider the potential inside these tiny “seeds,” I think about Tara Donovan’s Styrofoam cup sculptures, by which I am inspired (fig. 26).<sup>36</sup> To me, the static and clean cups create a new universe that is waiting to grow or be explored. I feel that there would be some beautiful creatures living beneath the white organic form. Looking at Donovan’s work helps me to understand the characteristics of my own more clearly. In my piece, I see that my paper “seeds” are mature and nourished, arranged in a visible accumulation, growing up from the transparent plate. Donovan’s sculpture is invisible in its support system and mysterious — it has the potential to spark viewers’ imaginations. On the other hand, if Donovan’s Styrofoam cups can be compared to single cells, I am inspired to think of my folded paper works as multicellular organisms. Single cells are simple and have no complicated organs. Multicellular organisms are more elaborate and, in my opinion, complete. Therefore, my current

goal is to accumulate many more “seeds” that will grow up to be a part of the woods — a plural being made from many multicellular organisms.



Fig. 24. Lingrong Wang. Details of *Grids*. 2018.



Fig. 25. Lingrong Wang. Details of *The New Yorker*. 2017.



Fig. 26. Tara Donovan. *Untitled*. 2004/2008.

*Meditation Under Waterfall*

Fig. 27. Lingrong Wang. *Details of Untitled*. 2019.

Everything has changed with the passage of time in *Untitled* (fig. 27). In the word “seed” is an expectation for the future. The way it transforms from a tiny thing into a beautiful natural splendor brings me into a space ripe for meditation. Seeds can be seen as individual plants that eventually emerge in a big space and converge as one large organism, but each one of them has its own character and growth pattern. When I stand in front of my work and look at the tiny grids on the transparent plates, I seem to find something new inside each “seed.” Eventually, I discover that their individual characters become vague. Each “seed” becomes like a droplet of water. It falls to the ground, splashing with others like it, and forms into a stream that seems ready to flow around people’s feet. Water is so gorgeous and tolerant — it contains and permeates nearly everything on this planet. Creatures can swim and dive in it, and wash their dirt out. Lao Tzu said in his book *Tao Te Ching*: “上善若水，水善利万物而不争，”<sup>37</sup> which means that the highest goodness is like water, it is beneficial to all things but not contentious.<sup>38</sup>

Because it is formless and has no boundaries of its own, no one can define its form: it can be a cup of water, a lake, an ocean, rain, or a waterfall. A waterfall is a process of a transformation that is very powerful. A waterfall can become a part of a lake or ocean, all from a droplet of water gathering and falling down. In this process, I discover an interaction between the waterfall and a valley. The waterfall touches rocks, making them mossy. In response to it, the high valley offers the waterfall the explosive power to roar. Unlike rain, which sheets down directly from above, a waterfall is a giant creature who I feel shares an equal standing with me. The sound of a waterfall seems to tell me of its lively experience of transformation. In my work, I gather folded paper from used magazines to imitate a waterfall, forming a new waterfall that brings its texts and images to begin a communication with viewers. These fragmented words and images are reconstructed to be a new power that supports the new waterfall. As Mary Oliver wrote in *The Waterfall*,<sup>39</sup> these natural phenomena are impressive to witness in person:

... Until I came and saw the water falling,  
 Its lace legs and its womanly arms sheeting down,  
 While something howled like thunder,  
 over the rocks,  
 all day and all night— unspooling  
 ... flying at last.  
 Gravity is a fact everybody knows about. It is always underfoot,  
 like a summons,  
 gravel-backed and mossy, in every beetled basin—and imagination—<sup>40</sup>

The power of a waterfall is fascinating for me, especially its sound of falling. It is so energetic and strong, claiming its existence. Because of the huge volume of water, it roars all day and night, attracting attention. People come and appreciate the splendor. I wander around the waterfall, and close my eyes to feel the power, the energy of it. I hear the sound which implies its

explosive power. It seems to be a response to its previous process in which it gathers droplets of water and then tries to find an outlet to pour them out. The giant creature wants to tell its story to listeners: I'm running freely. I think it is the most important thing for the waterfall to say for itself. Therefore, I start to search for a different waterfall, so I can hear about other stories.

In Pat Steir's *Waterfalls* (fig. 28),<sup>41</sup> the fluid ink goes down because of its gravity. Sixteen waterfalls are placed together to fill the whole canvas, overlapping. It is visually powerful because of its free fluidity, but different from natural waterfalls: the sound has vanished, the water has been colored, and the droplets come together without limitations on space. However, I still feel some voices behind the still representation. I believe Steir's words: "music is company, I'm sure that sound gets into my paintings."<sup>42</sup> There must be a kind of music to waterfalls. In my opinion, these sixteen waterfalls become an orchestra that plays a piece of music, conducted by Pat Steir. Penetrating through her interior world, I believe this is music about her dreams and memories.



Fig. 28. Pat Steir. *Sixteen Waterfalls of Dreams, Memories and Sentiment*. 1990.

In my work titled *Untitled*, there is a different waterfall that has other voices. By folding paper, I can reform it freely. It becomes a waterfall that pours down intermittent and fragmented

words. Instead of listening to the sound of water in nature, viewers can read these words from the waterfall, which I hope has the power to stimulate interior memories. It contains so much information that might lead people in multiple directions. I hope there is a voice that calls to people when they open their minds to gain an association with this new waterfall.

In response to the voice of my waterfall, I come beneath its shower and accept its words. Waterfalls often inspire people to introspection and meditation. In the Japanese religion “Shugendo,” “shugenja” (which means practitioners) are required to live closer to nature to obtain spiritual power through testing.<sup>43</sup> There is a type of training in “shugendo” in which believers sit under a waterfall to wash out dirt both in a physical and a spiritual way.<sup>44</sup> Beside my waterfall, I’m meditating, watching these abstract symbols on folded paper. I am my own form of “shugenja.” I observe that they are bounding and flowing everywhere. These abstract symbols flow like water into everyone’s mind; though fragmented, they can quickly merge together to be completed. It is an invisible touch to feel the gravity of these words.

Unlike the fluidity of a real waterfall that I can feel with direct touch, my waterfall is frozen, preserved. I want the act of looking at it to be like a heater: the eyes make streams seem to melt and flow into people’s hearts. Languages flow into people’s minds. Words then continuously and abundantly form a lake or even an ocean of memory — an archive. I become one with droplets of the waterfall and conserve what I’ve read. As a “shugenja,” I’m influenced by the ablution of my waterfall. I start to meditate in my world. The waterfall in my work contains everything without any bias or contention. As streams in a waterfall have different paths

and integrate into one, two different languages of folded paper come together and mix into a harmony. The sounds of two languages are echoed and communicated quietly. I cannot name the exact sounds. They depend on how people experience them. Every viewer can be a “shugenja,” each meditating to achieve his or her own goal.

## Conclusion

My act of folding deconstructs the textural information on the printed paper. This deconstruction gives me more space to digest the information. I do this with the awareness that there is a system in people's brains that automatically fills the gaps within sentences and words. The fragmented words in my artworks stimulate people to mobilize their memories and knowledge to complete the blanks. The limited, tiny grids, too, seem to form other sentences or stories in my mind. In the grids of "Babel," I establish an architecture for people to enter into imaginatively. They can bring their own memories of books and archives to this architecture. Although there are two different languages here — Chinese and English — I still hope that the texture might remind anyone of their own memories about texts they have read.

My work is about the abstract and the psychological. These abstract images and signs are a comfort to my internal world. I enjoy finding many permutations of my imagination. My practice represents a freedom to search for representations that help to depict what I have seen in my daily life.

I believe I have a strong tie with the natural world. In the woods, I can walk freely and meditate thoroughly. It is wise and old enough to inspire me. It is a trigger, or, rather, an archive that arouses my inner memories. In my art practice, I complete a cycle from nature to my internal world. The material of paper is made of wood. According to my repetitive act of folding, the folded paper somehow becomes like a living organism. It is a transformation both physical and spiritual. These "seeds" I fold come from my sense of disorder. I try to find a solution to break

down the disorder. I feel that the result is beautiful and surprising. I gradually calm down. The spiral shape of folded paper becomes a castle that conserves some words and memories. To me, it contains the natural landscape and particular people. These memories inside the little grids of folded paper grow up to become another form that supports the structure of the larger folded paper. They become a waterfall to flow to the ground. I hope for this waterfall to be powerful enough that viewers are inspired, as I am, to meditate beside it.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Jorge Luis Borges (1899 –1986) was an Argentine writer, poet and translator who played an important role in 20th century world literature. *Labyrinth* is a selection of Borges' writing.
- <sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze (1925 –1995) was a French philosopher in second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- <sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 3.
- <sup>4</sup> Chuang Tzu, an influential Chinese philosopher who lived around 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, is one of defining figures in Chinese Taoism.
- <sup>5</sup> This general introduction about history of origami comes from Wikipedia, s.v. "Origami," last modified March 16, 2019, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Origami>.
- <sup>6</sup> C. Fred Blake, "Chiasm," in *Burning Money: The Material Spirit of the Chinese Lifeworld* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 9-24.  
<http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.wustl.edu/stable/j.ctt6wqgqz.5>.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 8.
- <sup>9</sup> Li Qiang, born in 1966, is a Chinese contemporary artist who lives and works in Beijing. He has started printing art since early 90's, and then in 2000, he started to use video, installation and photography to record his personal experience. Now he is working with tearing magazines to recreate new images. His artworks can be viewed as a reflection of contemporary life and culture.
- <sup>10</sup> "Li Qiang solo show 'Apocalypse of Body' at Enjoy-Art Museum," artron.net, accessed April 18, 2019, <https://news.artron.net/20170701/n942006.html>.
- <sup>11</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "The Labyrinth," trans. David Bowles, October 2003. The Labyrinth (Jorge Luis Borges), accessed March 07, 2019. <https://davidbowles.us/poetry/the-labyrinth-jorge-luis-borges/>.
- <sup>12</sup> Zhuangzi, "逍遥游," Chinese Text Project, accessed March 04, 2019, <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/enjoyment-in-untroubled-ease/zhs>.
- <sup>13</sup> Zhuangzi, *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, trans. David Hinton (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2009), 4-5.
- <sup>14</sup> Zhuangzi, "逍遥游," Chinese Text Project, accessed March 04, 2019, <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/enjoyment-in-untroubled-ease/zhs>.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Zhuangzi, *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, trans. David Hinton (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2009), 11-12.
- <sup>17</sup> Rene Descartes (1596 –1650) was a French scientist, mathematician, and philosopher.
- <sup>18</sup> This introduction comes from Wikipedia, s.v. "Cogito, Ergo Sum," last modified March 23, 2019, accessed April 14, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cogito,\\_ergo\\_sum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cogito,_ergo_sum).
- <sup>19</sup> Wiktionary, s.v. "莊周夢蝶," last modified September 2017, accessed April 14, 2019, <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/莊周夢蝶>.
- <sup>20</sup> "In the current passport regime, individual identity is thus defined as: (1) machine-readable body measurements and (2) a set of personal data recorded in governmental and other public archives that are (3) mediated by document owned and managed by the state." See Liv Hausken,

"The Archival Promise of the Biometric Passport," in *Memory in Motion: Archives, Technology, and the Social* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Pres, 2017), 267.

<sup>21</sup> Susan Walker, *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Routledge, 2000), 21-22.

<sup>22</sup> Jorge Luis Borges et al., *The Library of Babel* (Boston: David R. Godine, 2000), 21-22.

<sup>23</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. "Tower of Babel," last modified April 13, 2019, accessed April 13, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower\\_of\\_Babel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_of_Babel).

<sup>24</sup> David Hinton, *Existence: A Story* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2016), 27.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>26</sup> Li Bai was an influential Chinese poet who is considered as a romantic figure in Tang Dynasty.

<sup>27</sup> Li Bai, "蜀道难 (李白)," Wikimedia Foundation, Inc, accessed April 14, 2019, [https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hans/蜀道難\\_\(李白\)](https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hans/蜀道難_(李白)).

<sup>28</sup> Xu Bing is a Chinese contemporary artist who currently lives in Beijing. He is known for his installations and his creative practice of language, words and texts.

<sup>29</sup> "Exclusive Interview/Xu Bing: from *A Book From the Sky* to *Dragonfly Eyes*, telling a story that never say," thepaper.cn, accessed March 06, 2019, [https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_2714296](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2714296).

<sup>30</sup> David Hinton, *Existence: A Story* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2016), 12.

<sup>31</sup> Agnes Martin (1912 – 2004) was a Canadian-born American abstract painter. She is often considered as a minimalist. Agnes Martin and Dieter Schwarz, *Writings = Schriften* (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1991), 39.

<sup>32</sup> Tehching Hsieh, born in 1950, is a performance artist. "Performance Artist Tehching Hsieh Talks Taking Risks with Marina Abramovic," Interview Magazine, November 06, 2017, accessed March 08, 2019, <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/performance-artist-tehching-hsieh-talks-taking-risks-marina-abramovic>.

<sup>33</sup> In the interview, Hsieh talks about the reason about repetitive element in his artwork: "I come from a painting background, and although my painting is completely different from my performances, there is something about the fundamentals of that training that transfers over to this idea of an exercise and being diligent about mapping something out in advance—even if it is just being aesthetically diligent." Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> He Zhizhang was a Chinese poet in Tang Dynasty. He Zhizhang, "咏柳," 到百科首页, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/咏柳/172>.

<sup>35</sup> He Zhizhang, "An Ode to the Willow," trans. Huang Hongfa, Classical Chinese Poem in English, accessed April 14, 2019, <http://chinese poems in english.blogspot.com/2008/11/he-zhizhang-ode-to-willow.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Tara Donovan, born in 1969, is a contemporary American artist. She is known for her site-specific installations which relates to biological masses.

<sup>37</sup> Lao Tzu was an ancient Chinese philosopher and writer. Along with Chuang Tzu, he is one of important representatives of philosophical Taoism. Lao Tzu, "道经 第八章 译注," 老子·道经·第八章\_古诗文网, accessed April 12, 2019, [https://so.gushiwen.org/guwen/bookv\\_3317.aspx](https://so.gushiwen.org/guwen/bookv_3317.aspx).

<sup>38</sup> "A Quote by J.C. Cooper," Goodreads, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7357494-the-highest-goodness-is-like-water-water-is-beneficial-to>.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Oliver (1935 – 2019) was an American poet.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Oliver, "The Waterfall," Poetry Foundation, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=37954>.

<sup>41</sup> Pat Steir is an American painter who is known for her *Waterfall* series. Her work is influenced by Taoist philosophy, Abstract Expressionism.

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin Clifford, Benedict Nguyen, and Osman Can Yerebakan, "PAT STEIR with Phong Bui," The Brooklyn Rail, March 04, 2011, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://brooklynrail.org/2011/03/art/pat-steir-with-phong-bui>.

<sup>43</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. "Shugendō," last modified March 16, 2019, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shugendō>.

<sup>44</sup> Wang Lu and Song Xuan, "What is the function if Siting under Waterfalls?," zhihu, last edited June 08, 2014, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://www.zhihu.com/question/24075244>.

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## Plates



*Plate 1*

Lingrong Wang

*System*

2017

Printer paper, color paper, cardboard, and marker,

27 x 28 x 35.5 in



*Plate 2*

Lingrong Wang

*Face*

2017

Watercolor on paper

22.4 x 14.7 in (each)



*Plate 3*

Lingrong Wang

*Fragments from Memory*

2017

Watercolor on paper

22.4 x 14.7 in



*Plate 4*

Lingrong Wang

*The New Yorker*

2017

*The New Yorker* magazines, marker, printer paper on canvas

72 x 48 in



*Plate 5*

Lingrong Wang

*The New Yorker*

2017

*The New Yorker* magazines, marker, printer paper on canvas

12 x 12 in (each)



*Plate 6*

Lingrong Wang

*Grids*

2018

Magazines, clear Nielsen styrene sheets and light

23.5 x 48.2 x 14 in



*Plate 7*

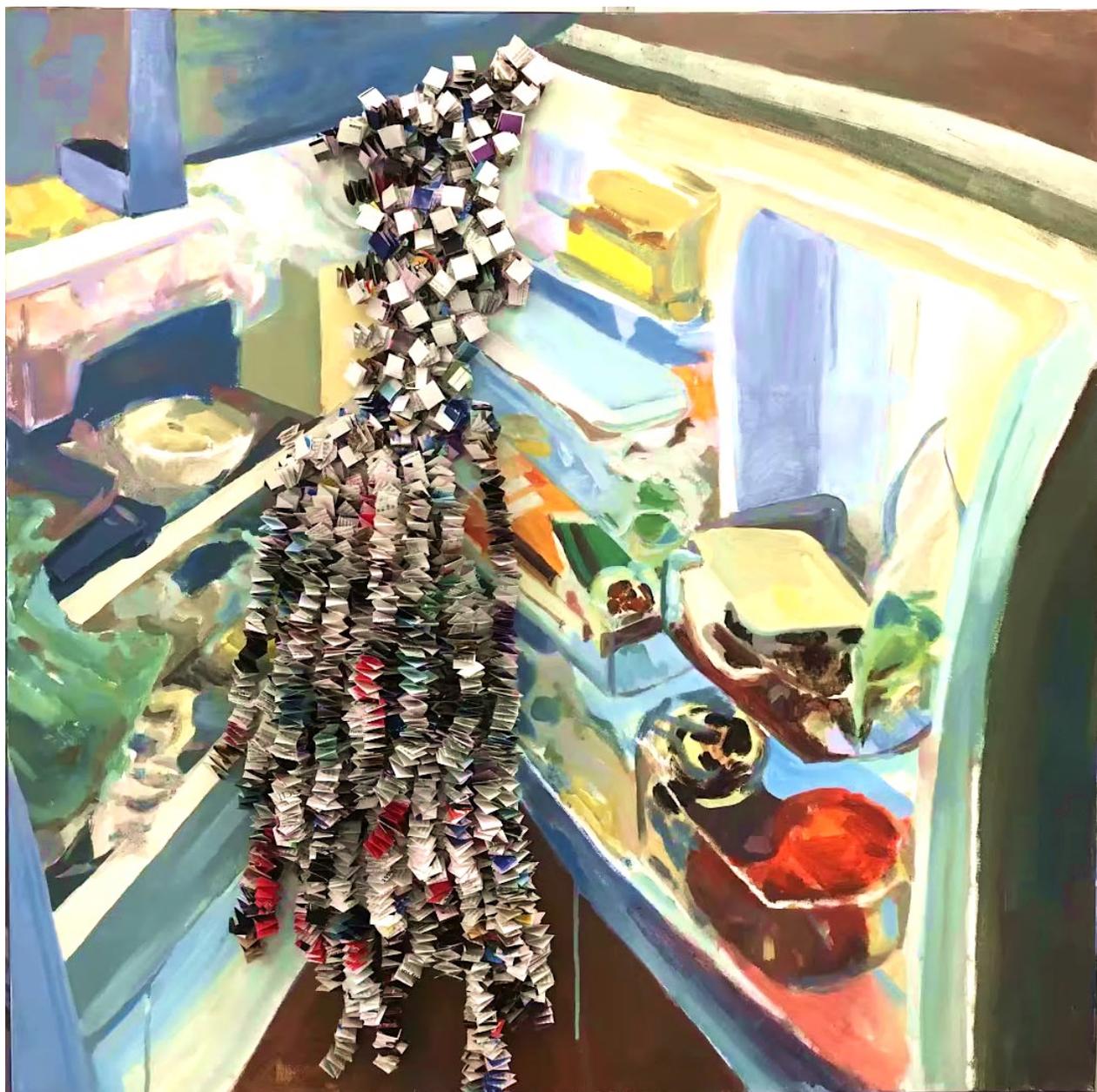
Lingrong Wang

*Mixt*

2018

Oil, acrylics, watercolor and printed paper on canvas

48 x 96 in



*Plate 8*

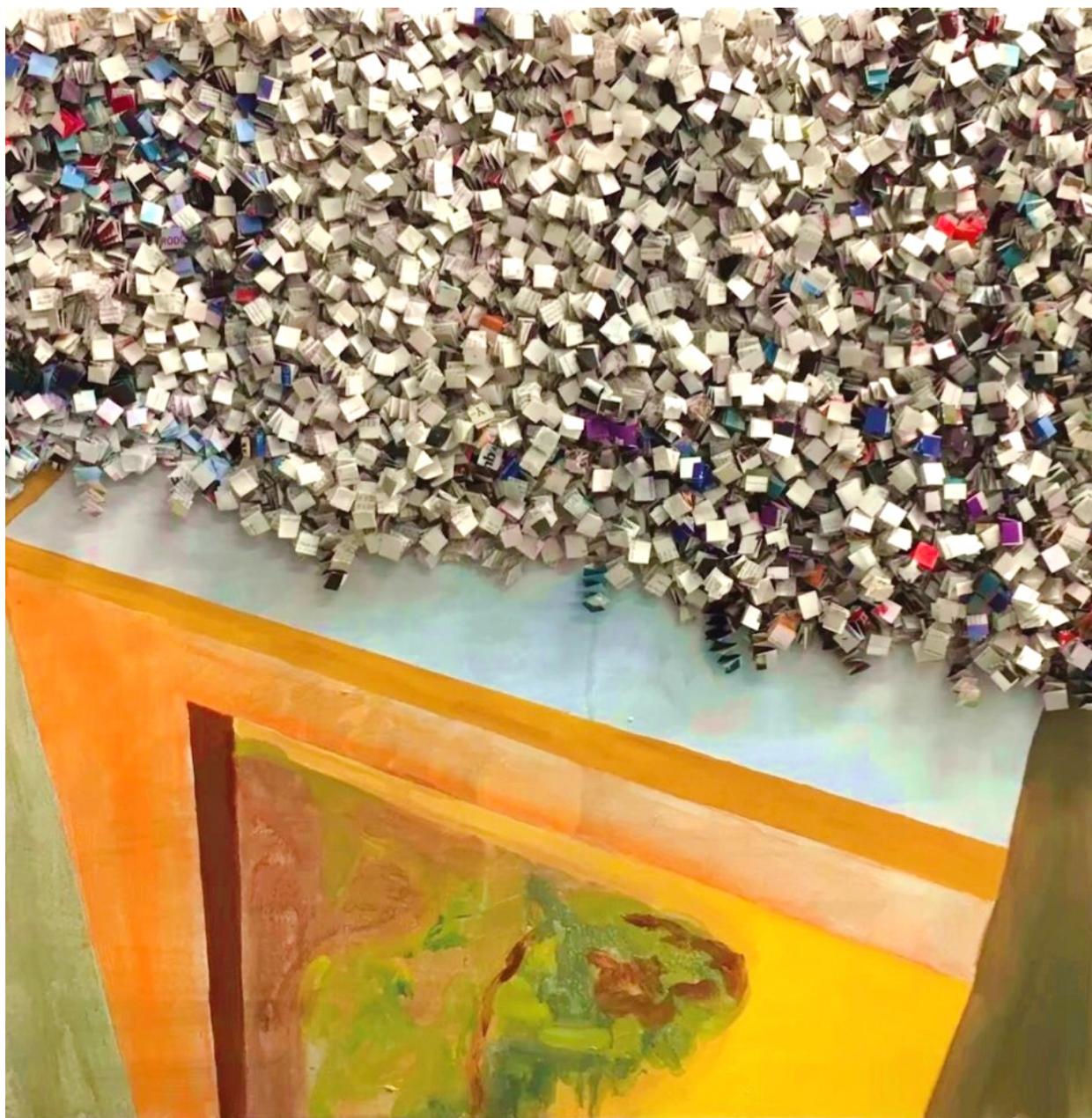
Lingrong Wang

*Daily Life*

2018

Acrylics and magazines on canvas

36 x36 in



*Plate 9*

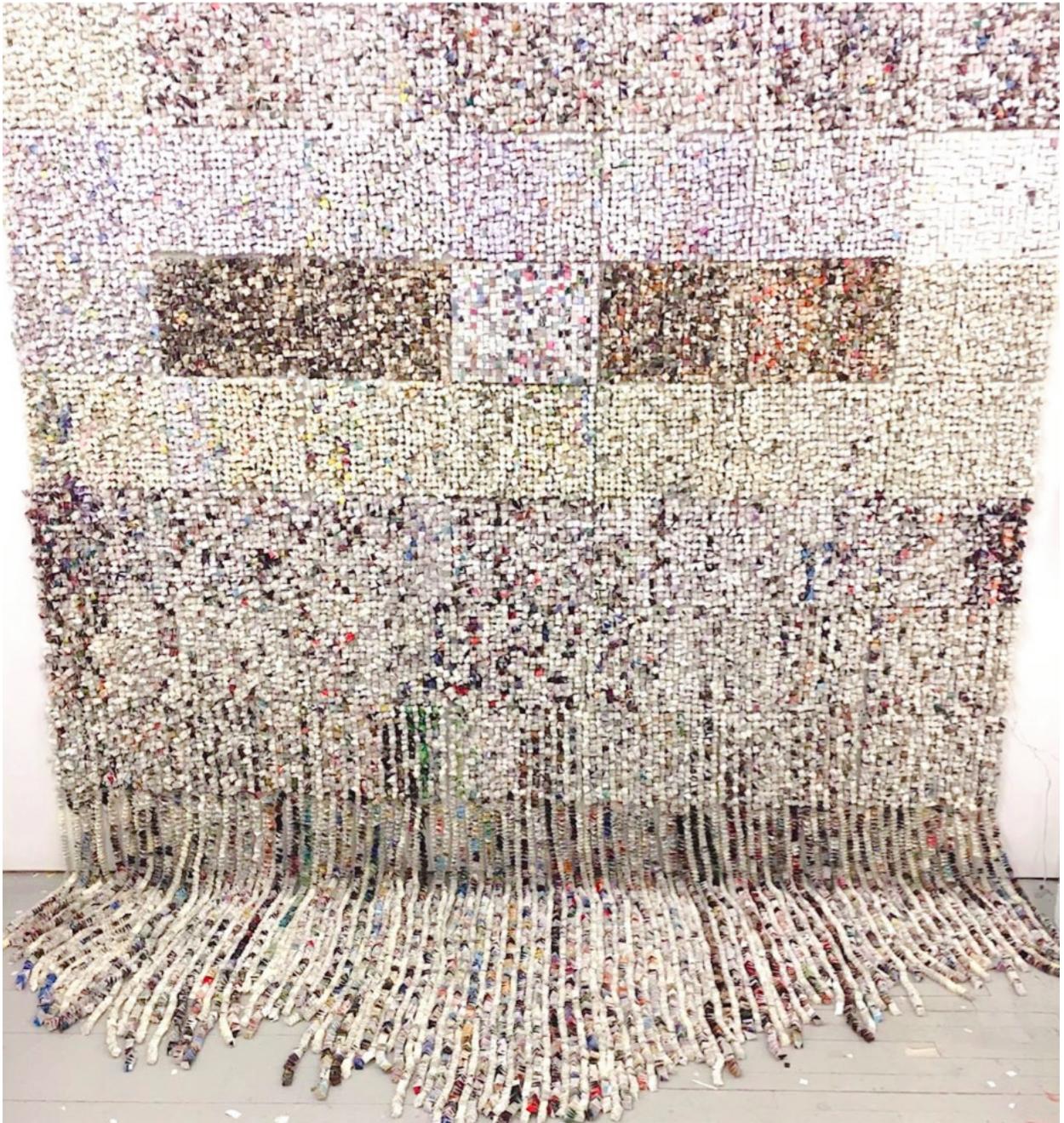
Lingrong Wang

*Eliminating*

2018

Magazines, acrylics on canvas

36 x36 in



*Plate 10*

Lingrong Wang

*Untitled*

2019

Magazines, clear Nielsen styrene sheets

98 x 129 x 1 1/2 in

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