

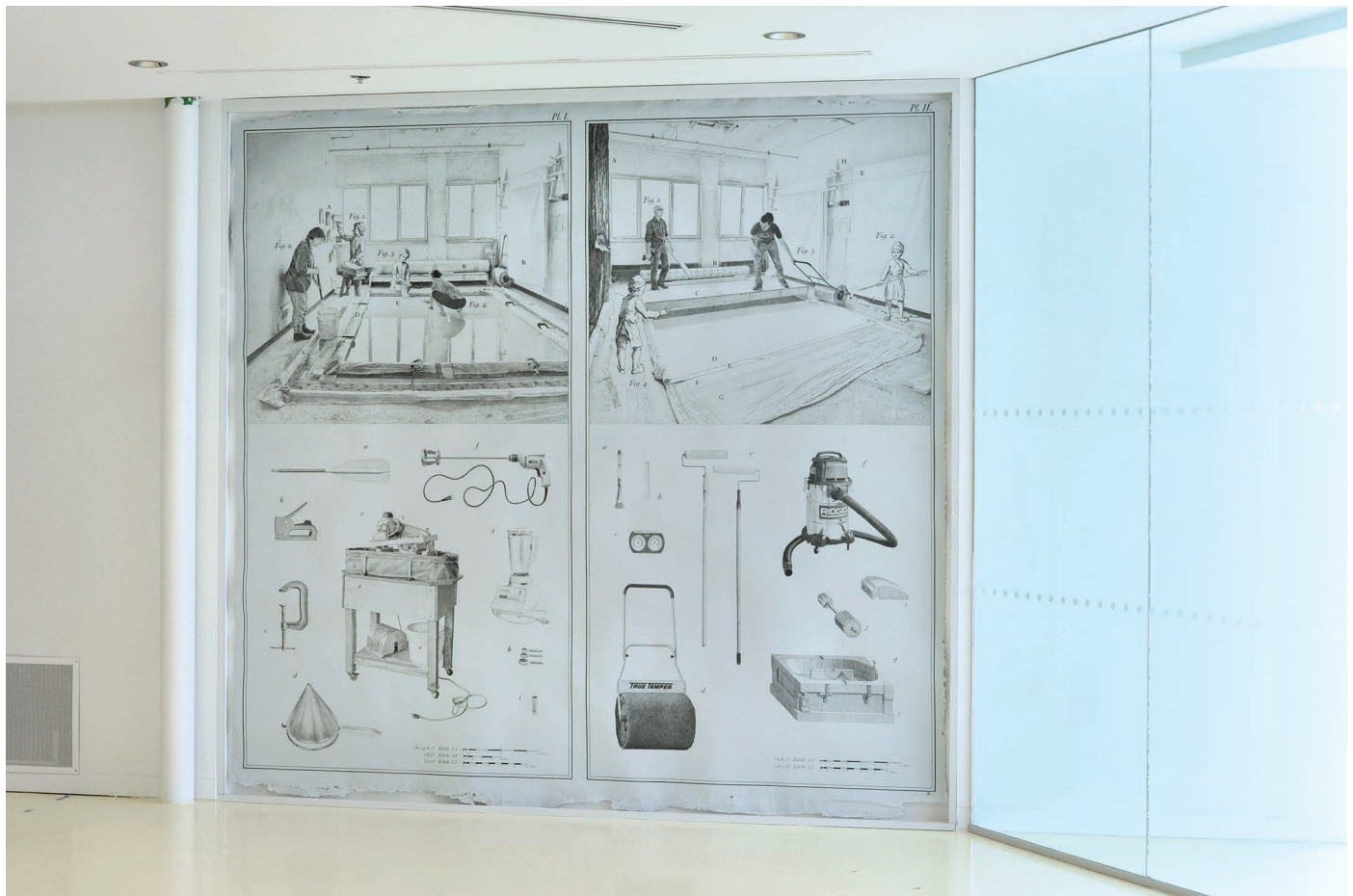


# HAND PAPERMAKING

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FRONT COVER: Karen Kandel (performer/writer) and Shonosuke Okura (Noh Drummer) in *Sen no Rikyu of Recycling: washi tales*, New York Theatre Workshop, 2011. Kyoko Ibe (set/costume design), Elise Thoron (director/writer), Jane Cox (lighting design). Photo: Isaac Bloom. BACK COVER: Lesley Dill, making adjustments to *Poem Dress* for a *Hermaphrodite*, 1995, 66 x 30 x 20 inches, tissue paper, thread, ribbon, ink. Performed by Sur Rodney Sur, in "Pulp Fashion" event, on December 2, 1995, at Dieu Donné Papermill, New York. Photo: Lesley Dill Studio.



## Sarah Bertrand-Hamel: *L'épaisseur du papier* (*The Thickness of Paper*)

AN EXHIBITION REVIEW  
BY KAREN TRASK

Sarah Bertrand-Hamel, *The Encyclopedia and The Fabrication of Paper*, 2019, 112 x 104 inches, charcoal on handmade paper (abaca and flax). Installation view of permanent installation at Pierrefonds Public Library, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Courtesy of the artist.

**FACING PAGE TOP LEFT:** Sarah Bertrand-Hamel, *distributing paper pulp during production of large-scale sheets for The Encyclopedia and The Fabrication of Paper*, 2019, 112 x 104 inches, handmade paper (abaca and flax). Photo: Danie Bertrand, 2017. **FACING PAGE TOP RIGHT:** Charcoal drawing in progress: Sarah Bertrand-Hamel, *The Encyclopedia and The Fabrication of Paper*, 2019, 112 x 104 inches, handmade paper (abaca and flax). Photo: Sara Lagacé, 2018. **FACING PAGE BOTTOM RIGHT:** Sarah Bertrand-Hamel, *The Scroll and its Archived Fragments*, 2019, 136 x 79 inches, 96 fragments of handmade paper (abaca), watercolor, thread. Installation view of permanent installation at Pierrefonds Public Library, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Courtesy of the artist.

*The Thickness of Paper* by Sarah Bertrand-Hamel, permanently installed in 2019 at the Pierrefonds Public Library in Montreal, is an exceptional success story. Four large-scale compositions of handmade paper are located in separate areas of the library.

Even though I witnessed different stages in the three-year production of this piece, I was still unprepared for the scale, the time, and the thought that went into its making. The largest of the compositions is 104 x 148 inches. As one wanders a light-filled labyrinth of shelves and books on the ground floor of the library, the first work encountered is a giant sheet of blue-pigmented linen and abaca paper that has been folded into 450 rectangles. Entitled *The Book in a Single Folded Sheet*, it represents the 900 pages of a standard edition of a Folio paperback. The simplicity of the act, no easy task in itself, belies the complexity of the result. Natural light plays on the folded surfaces of the paper to create many shades of blue rectangles. Even the delicate fringes randomly spilling over the edges of the paper are carefully preserved.

On the other side of the library is *The Scroll and its Archived Fragments*. It reminds us that before the contemporary book, libraries were filled with scrolls. Presented as the archive of an imaginary archaeology, its various-sized bits and shapes of abaca paper in tints of dark blue, brown, and ochre are spread evenly behind glass over the surface of this floor-to-ceiling work. It is a display of invented findings, where even the words are paper—its sentences suggested by strips of torn and sewn paper.

Hidden upstairs in a corner behind bookshelves is the magnificent charcoal drawing on linen and abaca entitled *The Encyclopedia and The Fabrication of Paper*. The style of the drawing is inspired by the fourteen illustrations of papermaking in the fifth volume of Diderot and d'Alembert's encyclopedia (1751–1772). In her drawing, Bertrand-Hamel reveals how she



made the giant sheets of paper. The top panel of the drawing is a depiction of the large sheet of paper being made, and below, the tools tenderly rendered and numbered. Included with the careful renditions of herself and her helpers, Bertrand-Hamel incorporates illustrations of four artisans from the eighteenth century copied directly from Diderot and d'Alembert's encyclopedia. They work ghost-like alongside Bertrand-Hamel. The inclusion in the drawing of these figures from the past is a beautiful nod to the long history of papermaking, a craft passed down from person to person. The making of the actual sheets of paper for the project was a feat of ingenuity, trial and error, passion, and plain stubbornness.

The fourth element in this series entitled *Emptiness and Materiality* asks us to consider two things: the endless possibilities offered by an empty page and the future of books and the library. Installed behind glass between two windows, the work aptly appears to float in space. It was a sunny, wintry morning when I first saw the work; it blended almost seamlessly with the snowy background beyond. An otherwise blank surface of white cotton paper is perforated with five separate areas of tiny squares of paper that have been cut from the same sheet of paper and sewn into strips. Held together by threads, the squares have shifted, rotating slightly on their axis of thread to make a surprising show of shadow and paper, not unlike falling snowflakes. Acting like pixels, the squares represent the percentage of the library's books that are available online.

In his writing about paper, Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us that if the poet in each of us is capable of seeing in paper the cloud and the sun that contributed to its making, we are indeed capable of seeing everything in the world present in a single sheet of paper. In *The Thickness of Paper*, Sarah Bertrand-Hamel offers worlds: past, present, and future, for those who wish to see.

*Author's Note: Accompanying the installation and soon-to-be available for consultation in the library is Bertrand-Hamel's artist book, Complément à L'épaisseur du papier. In this perfect compendium for the curious spectator, Bertrand-Hamel describes her process for making the papers. The illustrations in the book are images of the third composition—a drawing of the sheet forming, pressing, and drying processes. Inspiration for both the style of book and the drawing was the eighteenth-century French Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers by Diderot and d'Alembert. A variety of samples are stitched onto the pages of the book, inviting readers to touch. For those wanting to know more, the video L'épaisseur du papier de Sarah Bertrand-Hamel is also available in French on Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/330814561>).*