

# Cyclical

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# Introduction



Figures 1-3: feMENine Logos Project - (top) The Home Depot, (middle) AXE, (bottom) Major League Baseball

Halfway through my studies at the University of Michigan, my busy, stressful life caught up with me. A full course load of studio art classes as well as my job in the dining hall left me very little time to take care of myself and get all my work done. I quickly became too overwhelmed to deal with my day-to-day life and experienced a mental breakdown during the fall semester of 2013. During that time, I was extremely anxious and depressed: itching layers of skin off, not being able to get out of bed, and missing class for about three weeks. I went and got help from medical professionals, but it was a rough semester with a long road to recovery.

In the midst of my personal struggles, I was enrolled in a class called Concept, Form, and Context 2: Culture. For my final project, I chose to render brands closely associated with men in quilling. (Figures 1-4) During this project, I found the process of quilling to be calming. It allows me to keep my hands busy and focus on the task at hand, rather than burdening myself with negative stimuli. Quilling allows me to focus on one small aspect of my life at a time, giving the feeling of control that has been synonymous with my recovery.

I later discovered that the process of quilling is closely tied with mindfulness, the meditative state of paying attention to the present. Mindfulness encourages creativity when the focus is on the

process and not the final product, because we're joyfully engaged in what we're doing.<sup>1</sup> In quilling, each piece must be carefully cut, rolled, and glued; a repetitive process that I find relaxing. In some respects, quilling is a physical representation of the memory of the process.

When I went abroad in May 2015 to Ballyvaughan, County Clare, Ireland, I saw the world from a different perspective. While some aspects of Irish life were familiar, everything was new and exciting, and I soaked it all in. When I first arrived, I made templates and began quilling. The more time I spent exploring the landscape, the more I was inspired to work organically. I learned to let go of plans and adapt to the current situation, allowing me the flexibility that I was craving. The last piece I created, *White and Shadows* (Figure 5), took up an entire 8' studio wall and referenced the overlaps in life that I discovered during my month-long rediscovery of myself.

When I came back home, I was inspired to push the limits of quilling. For my Integrative Project, I knew I wanted a challenge- to create a large-scale project that would force me out of my comfort zone. I wanted to push the properties of the material, cause viewers to take a closer look, and in doing so, appreciate the process. For

my integrative project, I created *Cyclical*, a large-scale paper installation using quilling, the art of curled paper, to create a space that fosters mindfulness by attracting a viewer's attention to detail. The details of this quilled paper assemblage change when viewed from different angles, influencing a viewer's sense of perception.



Figure 4: feMENine Logos Project - Gentleman's Quarterly Magazine

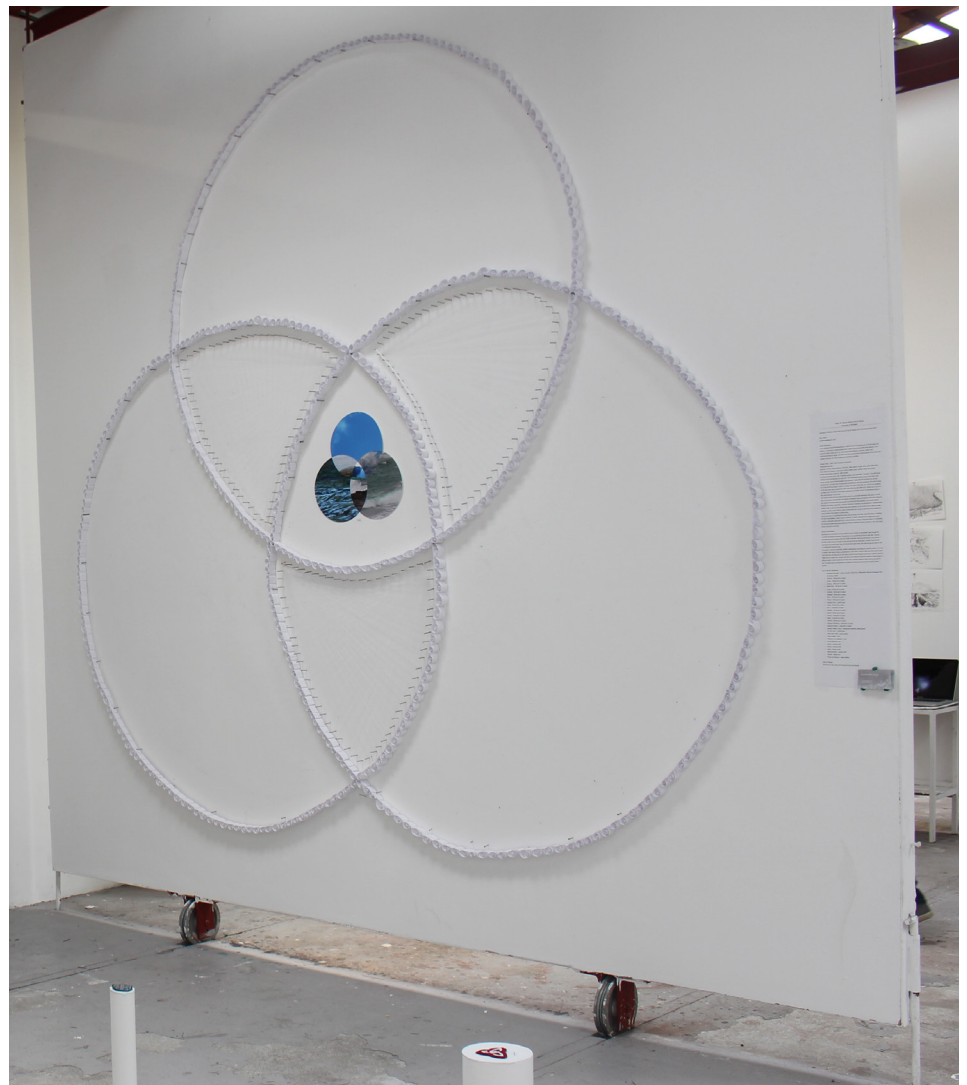


Figure 5: *White and Shadows*. In the overlapping triangles the circles make, thread is strung from nail to nail, creating a curved grid and trapping shadow. In the center, photographs of landscapes I took from my Ireland travels are arranged to show the connections between them.

<sup>1</sup> Ellen Langer, *Mindfulness* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2014).

# Contextual Discussion

Composed of millions of teardrop-shaped coils, arranged to direct the eye through a meandering path, like in a mandala, Cyclical causes the viewer to become absorbed in the quilling, and ultimately, the present moment.

Quilling is the art of rolling thin strips of colored paper into coils and pinching them into shapes to be arranged in a design. Rolling can be done with fingers, a slotted tool, or a pin/toothpick. Papers of different widths, thicknesses, and colors can be used in order to create anything from miniature versions of everyday objects, to larger-than-life text. Quilling is a versatile paper craft that has been used for hundreds of years for decorating and embellishing.

The exact origins of quilling are not known, but it is believed that the technique originated in ancient Egypt. The first clear reference to this form of delicate paper craft is in fifteenth-century England. There, poor ecclesiastical establishments made backgrounds for religious sculptures, imitating the gold and silver filigree used by the wealthier organizations. Since then, quilling has gone out of style and has been brought back into fashion multiple times throughout history. Revived in the seventeenth century by ladies of leisure, they decorated workboxes, screens, and cabinets.<sup>2</sup> Today, artists

2 Nicholas Roukes, *Sculpture in Paper* (Worcester, Massachusetts: Davis Publications, Inc, 1993)

like Yulia Brodskaya transform traditional graphic design into three-dimensional works of art.

Traditionally working on a small scale, this type of paper craft requires a lot of patience, as it is a time consuming craft. What some would call a meditative process, quilling must be done with great care and precision. Each piece is hand-crafted, transforming a strip into a coil by gently rolling it around itself, gluing it together, and then shaping it. A typical piece of quilling involves hundreds to thousands of individual pieces, requiring a high level of attention and focus in order to arrange them into a design.

For over two thousand years, paper has been a medium for creative purpose. In Nicholas Roukes's book, *Sculpture in Paper*, he states, "As an art medium, it is flexible, easy to handle, inexpensive, and non-toxic. Above all, it holds an enormous potential that awaits the artist's touch." Despite advancements in technology, paper remains indispensable as a mode for assisting and revealing human endeavor.<sup>3</sup>

Paper is a natural material made from cellulose found in plant fibers. Invented in 105 AD by a Chinese empirical guard named Ts'ai Lun, paper soon became the modern replacement for papyrus, silk, bamboo slip, parchment, and vellum. Long before the invention of paper,

3 Nicholas Roukes, *Sculpture in Paper*

Egyptians used papyrus to write on, but didn't break down the plant into separate fibers. This revolutionary technique marks a turning point in history and has changed the world.

In our modern society, paper is viewed as temporary. It's not something that holds up well over time and to the elements, becoming more and more delicate as time passes. It's fragile: breaking down over time, changing colors when exposed to sunlight, crumpling when wet, and is quick to catch on fire.

Paper, when flat, presents ideas and communicates information. When it's blank, it's an opportunity for communication or expression. If that piece of paper has writing or other markings on it, it's a carrier of information. When a piece of paper is found lying on the floor, it's considered trash. When that same piece is hung up on the wall, our perception is shifted with the context, and is now important. When it's rolled up, it becomes an object. While it's meant to communicate, I use it to confound viewers. By creating a paper sculpture, I'm changing the meaning of the material itself, turning it into something you have to look through in order to make connections.

Quilling has been around for centuries, and has experienced fluctuations in popularity throughout history. Currently, it's popular as a paper craft, popping up on cards and



Figure 6: Yulia Brodskaya: Black, White, Colour. This large-scale quilled mural piece inspired me to work on a large scale. Source: artyulia.com



Figure 9: Josef Albers: Homage to the Square: Glow (1966). This painting was the inspiration for Cyclical. Source: dwell.com

use of bright colors. "Color is stimulating, calming, expressive, disturbing, impressional, cultural, and associative. It pervades every aspect of our visual lives. Most of all, color is enriching. It embellishes the ordinary and gives beauty and drama to everyday objects."<sup>4</sup> With the influence color has on us, it's no surprise that it requires a thorough understanding of Josef Albers's color theory exercises in order to create something expressive without using words. (Figure 9)

I've always had a fascination with color and pattern. The walls in my childhood bedroom were covered in paint swatches, arranged seamlessly from floor to ceiling (Figure 8). My favorite artists use bright colors and small details in their

4 Linda Holtzschue, *Understanding Color: An Introduction for Designers* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1995), 104.



Figure 7: Yuila Brodskaya - Design Week's Top 100 Cover (2009) Source: pokidots!

in scrapbooks, in advertisements and graphic design, as well as in museums. Yulia Brodskaya is a London-based graphic designer who uses quilling as her medium of choice, and has become the most famous quiller today. My biggest inspiration since I first discovered her work, she has successfully found a way to

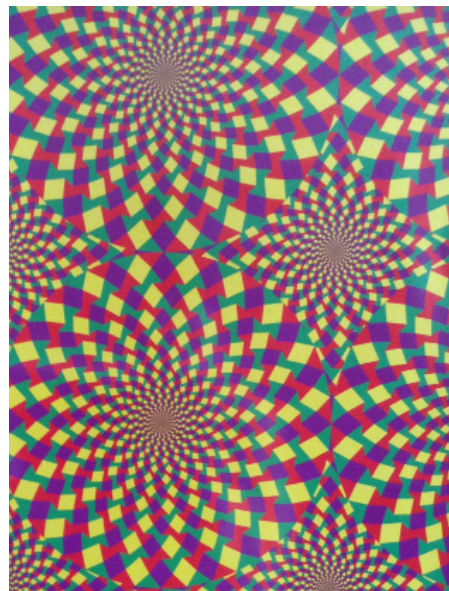


Figure 8: I had this poster in my room growing up, and I would stare at it for hours, getting lost in the apparently moving colors.

combine her love for paper craft with graphic design, something I aspire to do as well. (Figures 6-7)

One aspect of quilling that cannot be ignored is the



Figure 10: Vincent Van Gogh, The Starry Night (1889) Source: wikipedia

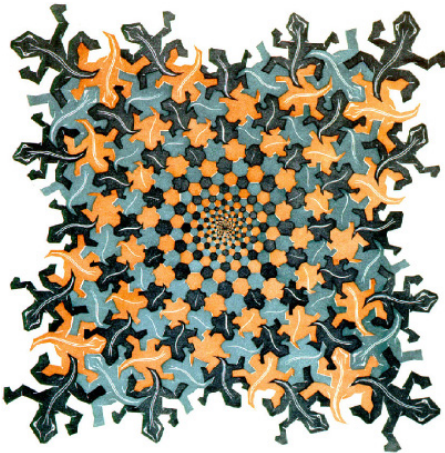


Figure 11: MC Escher, Development II (1939) Source: mc-escher.wikispaces.com

work. Van Gogh's paintings have always held a special place in my heart, but I was never sure why until embarking on my IP project. Viewed as a master, Van Gogh's paintings seem larger than life. However, after seeing many examples of his work in art museums all over the world, I realized he often painted on a small scale, making his tiny, signature brushstrokes that much more impressive. (Figure 10) Each is an individual, working together to form the whole, much like quilting does.

For Cyclical, I chose to use only one shape of quilts-

the teardrop, due to the ease of making and tessellative<sup>5</sup> quality of the shape itself. MC Escher's work introduced me to different perspectives and tessellations at a young age (Figure 11). I love how he was able to repeat the same image seamlessly, and at the same time allow for small variations that make each piece unique. I too strive to create artwork that exhibits a gradual, yet still seamless, change over a space, requiring some level of attention in order to catch.

Attention is the process of seeking out stimuli that are of interest, and also influences the way we process information. "We are aware of the things toward which we direct our attention and may be unaware of the things we ignore."<sup>6</sup> Even though you may be looking at something, you have to be interested in what you're looking at in order to see it. This is known as selective attention, and we use it in order to control visual input. According to cognitive scientists, the process of attention requires being able to "quickly identify and focus on the most important item in a complex environment" as well as "sustain attention on its focus while monitoring related information and ignoring

other stimuli."<sup>7</sup> Cyclical attempts to capture a viewer's attention long enough that they can lose themselves in it and make discoveries.

According to John H. Reynolds, Ph.D, an associate professor in the Systems Neurobiology Laboratory at the Salk Institute, and the man who led the study which has helped us understand how we pay attention:

The visual system has limited capacity and cannot process everything that falls onto the retina. Instead, the brain relies on attention to bring salient details into focus and filter out background clutter... In everyday viewing, a visual detail that is the target of our attention is generally surrounded by a lot of stimuli that are momentarily irrelevant to behavior. Attention dynamically routes relevant information to decision-making areas in the brain and suppresses the surrounding clutter.

In other words, visual attention is our brain's way of focusing so it doesn't get too overwhelmed by all the stimuli that is constantly surrounding us, a completely different concept from mindfulness. The two are similar in that they work together in order to process new

5 tess-Luh-tiv – the ability of an object to tessellate

6 E. Bruce Goldstein, Sensation & Perception, 7th edition (Belmont, California: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007.)

7 Robert Sylwester, & Joo-Yun Cho, What Brain Research Says About Paying Attention (1993.)

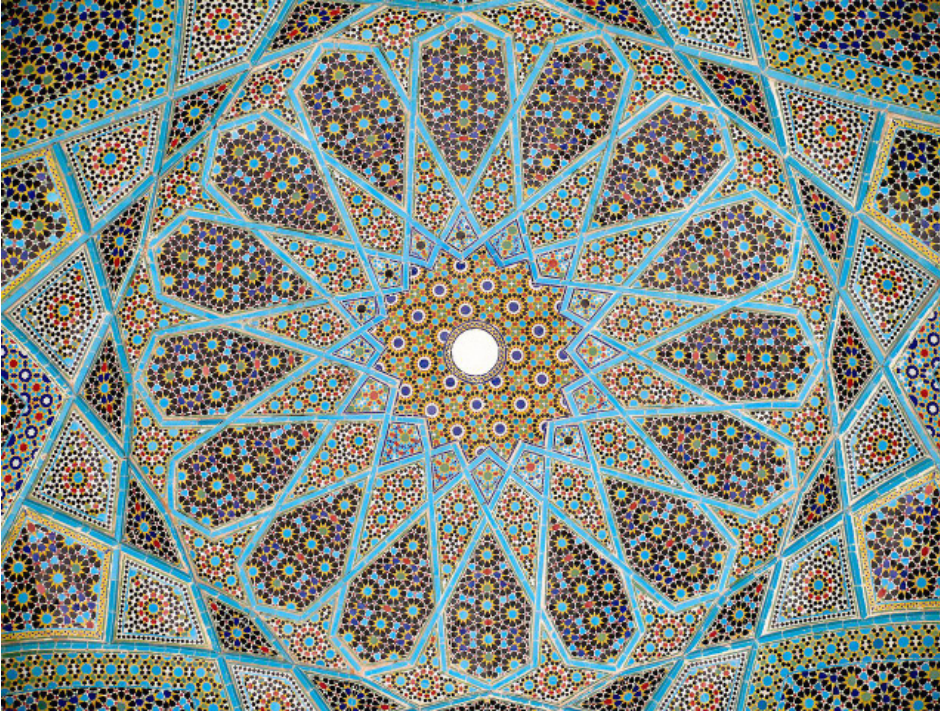


Figure 12: Iranian glazed ceramic tile work, from the ceiling of the Tomb of Havez in Shiraz, Iran. I was able to see quilling shapes in this mandala. Source: wikipedia

information. A more mindful person will focus their attention on one thing at a time, not allowing for distractions, in order to process what is happening around them. Over time, we have devised tools to help us focus and be more present in our daily lives.

Mandalas are ancient symbols that have been used across the globe for many different purposes (Figure 12). Meaning 'circle' in Sanskrit, mandalas often exhibit radial balance and are a symbol of the universe in the Hindu and Buddhist religions. The circle represents nature, as well as life-giving sources such as the sun, earth, and womb. Representing the circle of life and wholeness, they remind

us of the impermanence of life and the need to accept change. Providing a sense of calm, comfort, focus, and insight, the mandala is usually eye-catching and brightly colored.<sup>8</sup>

Psychologist Carl Jung explored mandalas and then applied them to the unconscious mind through his own art making. "I sketched every morning in a notebook a small circular drawing... which seemed to correspond to my inner situation at the time... Only gradually did I discover what the mandala really is... the self, the wholeness of the personality, which if all

8 Susan Buchalter. *Mandala Symbolism and Techniques: Innovative Approaches for Professionals*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2013.)

goes well is harmonious." It wasn't until much later, after doing studies on many of his patients, that he recognized the urge to make mandalas emerged during times of intense personal growth. Indicative of the re-balancing process that goes on in the psyche, drawing mandalas can help us figure out how we can become a more complex and better-integrated person.

Jungian analyst Marie-Louise von Franz stated, "The mandala serves a conservative purpose- namely, to restore a previously existing order. But it also serves the creative purpose of giving expression and form to something that does not yet exist, something new and unique... The process is that of the ascending spiral, which grows upward while simultaneously returning again and again to the same point."<sup>9</sup>

We owe the re-introduction of mandalas into Western thought to Jung. In modern times, mandala has become a more generic term for a repeating geometric pattern around a central point. Coloring books featuring mandala motifs are marketed toward adults to reduce stress and promote mindfulness. In the act of coloring, we are more focused on the process than the outcome.

Mindfulness centers around the idea of living life in the moment, being active and

9 Susan Buchalter. *Mandala Symbolism and Techniques: Innovative Approaches for Professionals*.

paying attention to allowing yourself to be open to new thoughts and experiences, without self-judgment getting in the way. It isn't until we learn how to be mindful that we understand how to direct our attention to the present. However, being mindful is easier said than done. One has to only be thinking about the present, not the past or future. If we can train ourselves to be more observant of our surroundings, we can slowly train ourselves to be mindful.

Mindfulness is something you must be aware of and surrender to, you can't force it to happen. Those who can free themselves of old mindsets, who can open themselves up to new information and surprise, play with perspective and context, and focus on process rather than outcome are likely to be creative, whether they are scientists, artists, or cooks.<sup>10</sup>

With mindfulness, you have to pay attention to the context of the circumstance. Contexts control behavior, and the mindsets that we form in childhood determine how we interpret each context. This context depends on who you are right now, who we were yesterday, and which viewpoint we're looking at something from. Everyone has a unique viewpoint, and it's important to take them all into consideration. Each shift in viewpoint shifts

10 Ellen Langer, *Mindfulness*, 25th Anniversary Edition. (Boston, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2014.)

the natural order of the world: everything is in a constant state of change, and there is always something new to notice. "When our minds are set on one thing or on one way of doing things, mindlessly determined in the past, we blot out intuition and miss much of the present world around us," she explained.

Ellen Langer, Ph.D, is known as the "mother of mindfulness" for her ongoing thirty-five year research on mindfulness. She points out the result of numerous studies: that people passively respond to cues in their environment instead of making decisions for themselves. She has proved that a change in mindset can change your perception of the world around you.<sup>11</sup> Being more mindful can help us feel better about ourselves and our place in the world, and constantly asking why, searching for answers, being open to new information, and thinking about multiple perspectives can help us achieve this. To be mindful, we experience life in the present, and notice all the wonders of the world that we didn't notice were right in front of us.

Langer provides multiple examples of case studies that prove no matter how much you hate an activity, the more you notice while you're participating, the more you actually enjoy it. For example, some people really dislike walking alone through busy downtown areas, so they distract themselves with their

11 Ellen Langer, *Mindfulness*.

phones. They miss out on the twenty dollar bill blowing across their path on the sidewalk. If they took the time to be focused on the environment around them, they'd notice the money, and then notice that the shop down the street is running a promotion for a free product with a twenty dollar purchase.

One of my favorite pastimes is going for walks around the city. I allow myself to let go of my thoughts and just observe what's happening around me, occasionally coming across something that captures my attention: a beautiful aspect of nature, a lost object, a hidden treasure. Discovering these relics fills me with an overwhelming urge to share. However, I rarely bring them home. Out of context, they're just everyday objects and the excitement is lost. I wanted to figure out a way to share this feeling of joy and wonder with others, and in the meantime, make people more mindful. There are so many natural delights that are overlooked by simply not observing. The goal of my project has always been to get others to notice hidden details, to realize what they're missing by not paying attention and being observant, and to share the excitement I feel when I find a hidden treasure.



# Methodology

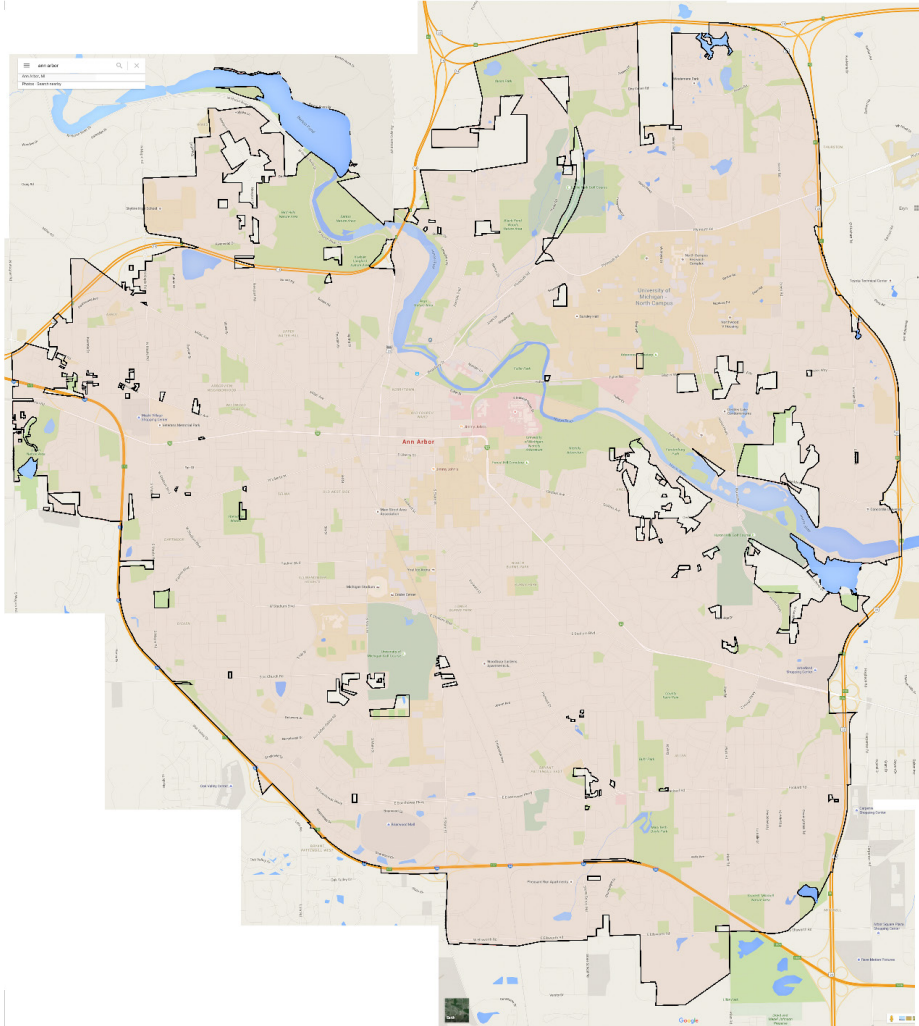


Figure 13: Ann Arbor city boundaries map. Tiled in Photoshop, this map shows the city boundaries in black. However, there are areas well within the city limits that belong to the surrounding townships, never got annexed in with the rest of the land. Source: Google maps

The first week of IP, I was set on creating a mural-sized map of Ann Arbor out of quilling (Figure 13). As the semester progressed, my project shifted from one form to the next. With the map, I had too many questions that I couldn't answer: How do I show places of interest without seeming biased? How do I depict Ann Arbor's hilly topography? What do I do about the areas within the city limits that don't actually belong to the city? As much as it interested me, I couldn't figure out why I was so attached to the idea, so it was easy to shift my focus to organic quilling experiments.

These experiments (Figures 14-16) were designed for me to play with different paper craft techniques. As a result, I inadvertently created small environments to get lost in and discovered that creating a three-dimensional landscape out of quilling is much more interesting than quilling on a flat plane. I experimented with hiding found objects in these little sculptures, but learned they got overlooked in favor of the



Figure 14: Experiment in blue. First attempts at trying other paper craft techniques.

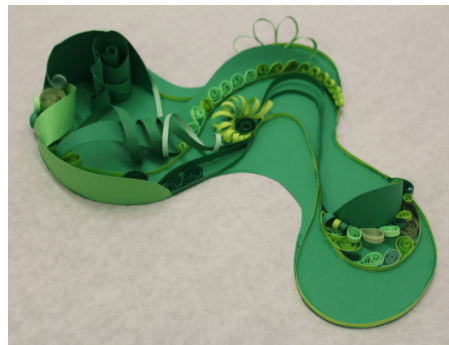


Figure 15: Experiment in green, playing with the idea of "loops."



Figure 16: Experiment in orange. Hidden deep within is a copper penny, but hidden so well you can't even see it.



Figure 17: Experiment with wall to floor paper sculpture. Viewers quickly became overwhelmed by the busyness of this sculpture.

paper itself.

Expanding my scope, I began building paper sculptures that moved from the wall to the floor in a balanced explosion of color and form (Figure 17). Using techniques like quilling, origami, and paper folding, texture was thought about for the first time. An in-class critique revealed that it was too busy- my viewers didn't know where to look and felt overwhelmed, the exact opposite of my intentions.

Taking a step back, I remembered my research on mandalas, and decided to move in that direction. I created a swirl template, filling each space in with a different color of 1/8" quills (Figure 18). In each of these spaces, I would recreate a found object in quilling, and insert it seamlessly into the piece (Figure 20). Viewers would have



Figure 18-19: (Above, top) The swirl template featured 36 segments, each to be quilled in a different color, with a hidden object recreated in each. (Above, bottom) On top of this, I planned to place a cut-paper mandala to create a "window in" effect. Looking closely, you can see an oak leaf hidden in the golden yellow segment. The swirls of color would continue off the wall and onto the floor from behind a cut-paper mandala overlay.

to be looking for the object in order to find it, complicated by the hand-cut mandala overlay I planned to place on top of the quills (Figure 19). I still loved the idea of quilling on the wall flowing down to become a sculptural floor piece as well, so I planned a gradation. Small



Figure 20: Close up of in-process quilled oak leaf. The quills in this are very small, reminiscent of the quilling work I've done previously. The quills that surround this on the swirl template are larger, allowing you to see the change in texture, and therefore, the leaf itself.



Figure 21: modular floor quills: layers of surprises hidden within 1/8" quills on the wall would grow to become large quills of upwards of eighteen inches that sat on the floor (Figure 21). Even though I had a clear direction for my project, something still didn't seem right.

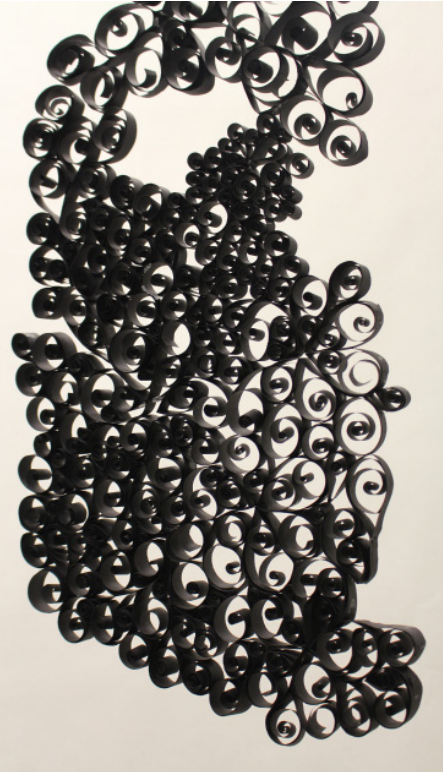


Figure 22: The chunk that started it all.

It wasn't until my instructors, Hannah Smotrich and Stephanie Rowden came for a studio visit that everything started coming together. Hannah picked up a chunk of an old quilling project (Figure 22) and held it up in front of her. "This is interesting," she said, moving the piece around and looking at it from different angles. She was right- I needed the change of perspective to propel me forward. Bringing quilling off a flat surface and into space allows for movement and discovery. It is this dimensionality that allows the viewer to see the work from multiple perspectives, depending on the viewing angle. Straight on, you are able to see right through the quilling, allowing the surrounding environment to

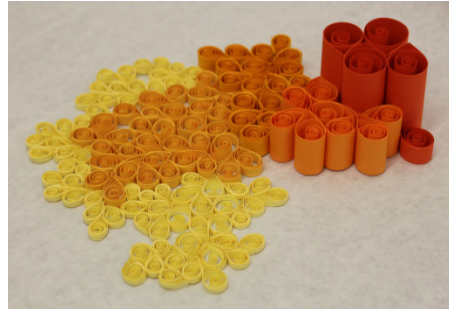
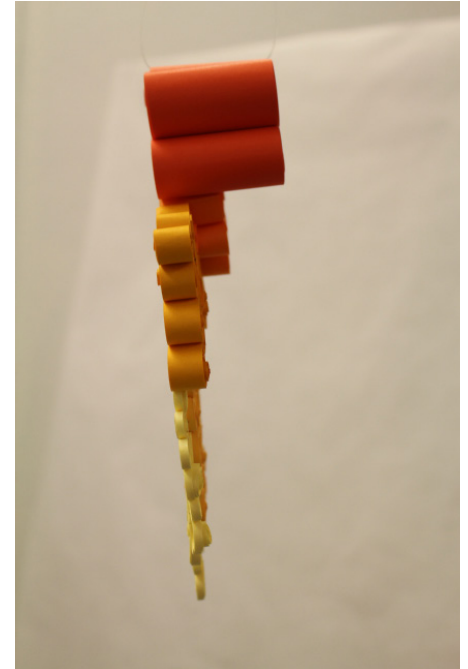


Figure 23-24 Gradient experiment. Using 5 sheets of colored copy paper, I created this gradient experiment to test strip width strength as well as color and width gradient. The yellow quills are  $1/8$ " , doubled to  $1/4$ " for the next color, then to  $1/2$ " , and finally 1" orange strips. (Above) Resting on a flat surface, the topography is evident. (Right) When floating and viewed from the side, it almost disappears.

become part of the work itself. From the side, it appears as a solid form. However, when viewed at an angle, you're suddenly observing how positive and negative space interact with light and shadow. It is in this duality that I am able to manipulate the viewer's sense of perspective.

This shift of viewing angle allows the viewer to see a facet of the piece that they would normally overlook, hopefully causing them to be interested in looking closer. It is this moment of discovery that I want to share with others. By providing an example of an everyday object we overlook, but allowing the viewer the opportunity to see it out of the busy context of today's modern world, I hope to be planting a mindfulness seed in their head.

By the end of the



semester, the ideas I had been struggling with finally came together, and, for the first time, I felt confident, excited, and sure that my IP project was going to be amazing. I abandoned work on the wall-to-floor mandala and jumped straight into what I called free-form quilling. Before embarking on creating my final installation, I created an experiment to test color gradient and strip width at the same time (figures 23-24) Using five sheets of colored paper, I cut them into different sized strips, rolled them up, and glued them together in a gradation of color and size. As a result, I discovered that the thicker the strip, the stronger the coil. Moving forward, I decided to use half-inch strips as my primary measurement, with fluctuations in the width from a quarter inch to an inch to add dimension and texture. Anything less than a quarter inch would

be too flimsy and fragile to use.

At the beginning of the winter semester, I was ready to stop experimenting and begin work on my actual thesis project. I chose to work with colored 8.5x11" copy paper, and purchased it by the ream. Colored copy paper is not only an affordable material, but a versatile and common everyday material that is often overlooked, the perfect material for a project focusing on observing what we miss in everyday life.

I began cutting strips and quilling, and soon fell into a routine. The process of coiling millions of strips of paper is very time consuming. In order to create the massive volume of coils I needed for this project, I was working on it almost constantly. Each piece was rolled by hand, and I quickly learned that I could coil without looking, allowing me to multitask. I quilled while I was sitting in lectures, while I was participating in group critiques, and while I was watching tv at the end of the day.

My instructors encouraged me to work monochromatically, but I refused. After spending years studying and working with color theory, I wanted to put that knowledge to good use. They warned me against using the entire color spectrum, so I decided to stick with warm hues, and arrange the gradient from pastels at the top to more saturated colors at the bottom. Using a chromatic scale as my color palate, my

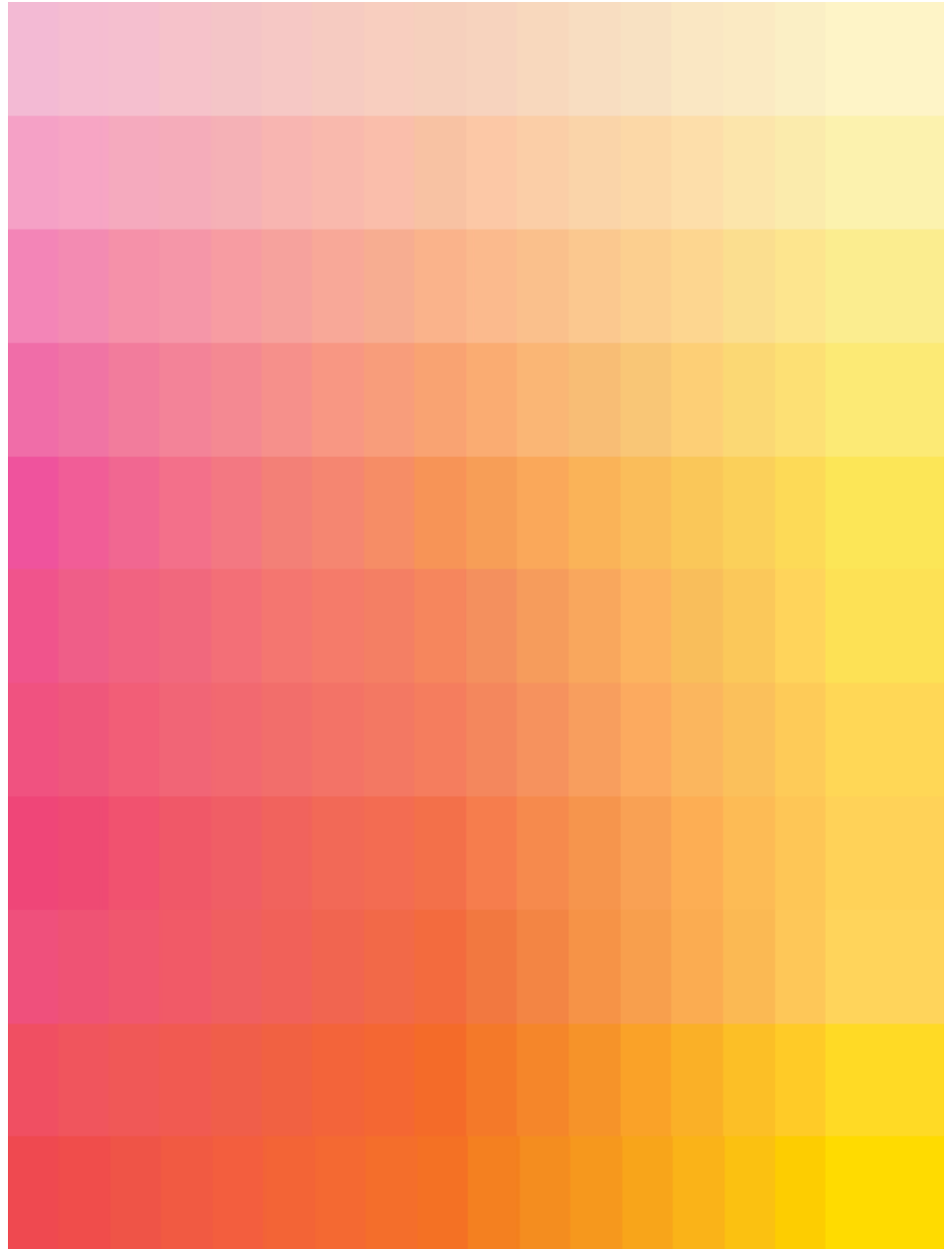


Figure 25: Digital rendering of color gradation. Moving from pink to red, peach to orange, cream to yellow, and all the shades in between, my color gradation gets more saturated as it approaches the bottom.

warm analogous color scheme draws attention to itself instead of blending into its landscape (Figure 25).

It wasn't until I met with paper engineer and former Stamps professor, Matthew Shlian, that I found solutions to my problems. In a studio visit, he

reminded me of the topography I had been contemplating depicting in the quilled map of Ann Arbor. Although my initial plan was to increase the strip width and coil size as the piece approached the floor, he suggested I use strips of different widths and sizes,

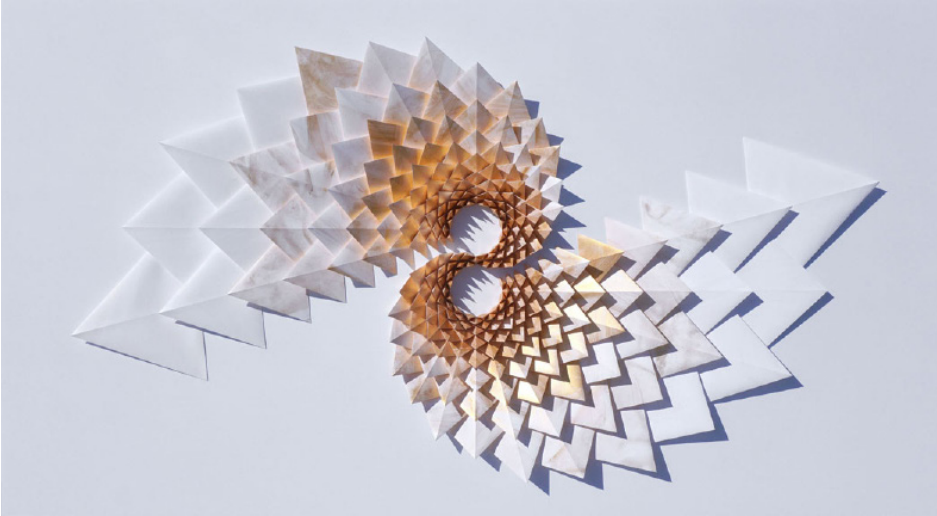


Figure 26: Matthew Shlian: Another Kind of Infinity (2015). Inspired by this recently finished piece, Matt encouraged me to create my own color instead of relying on paper manufacturers for the smooth gradation I craved.

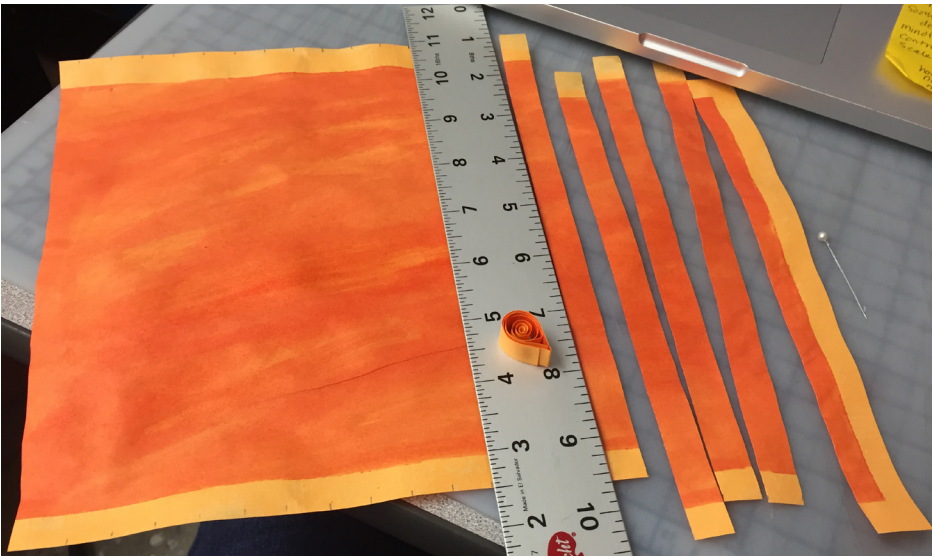


Figure 27: Figuring out how painted paper works when coiled. Conclusion: success.

and arrange them organically together to create an undulating topographic landscape. "Push it further," he advised. We went on to discuss the importance of a smooth transition from color to color. Emphasizing the need to take light and shadow into consideration, he encouraged me to try creating my own paper colors through a watercolor

wash on the inside of the quills (Figure 26).

As soon as he was gone, I went across the street and purchased some colored ink and started experimenting. Even though it worked well watered down, the small bottle wouldn't last long and would be too expensive to do my entire project with. Next, I tried watercolor,



Figure 28: Each shade of quills had its own bag. Assembly of the contents of each gallon size bag took approximately an hour and a half.

but again had the same problematic result. Wandering around the craft store, looking for alternatives, I came across the washable tempera paint from my childhood and knew it would be perfect. Back in my studio, I mixed an equal ratio of paint with water, and began applying it to one side of sheets of colored paper (Figure 27). I found that each coat of paint added gets you one step closer to the next shade of the gradient, and knew I had found my solution. I began preparing stacks of 30 sheets of paper for each interval of the gradient and got to work painting.

I soon had sheets of paper laid out all over the studio floor in varying states of wetness. As soon as I finished one batch, the previous would be done drying and I could add another coat. After switching to a 4" foam

brush, I was able to work faster, and borrowed a drying rack to organize hundreds of sheets of paper better. After obtaining the correct color through multiple coats of paint, I ironed each sheet flat, and then cut it into strips. While some sheets only received one coat of tempera wash, others received up to seven in order to create a smooth gradient. I developed an organizational system to keep each color set separate from the others (Figure 28), but still utilized the swatch sheets that I made (Figure 30).

In the process of making this piece, I was forced to let go of the structured quilling practice I had set up for myself. Previously, I was working on a micro scale, printing out scaled templates, and gluing quills directly onto a sheet of wax paper taped over the template in order to ensure perfection. For Cyclical, I gave up all sense of structure and let it grow organically. Instead of making each piece to fit a space, I made them in mass, and attached them together later.

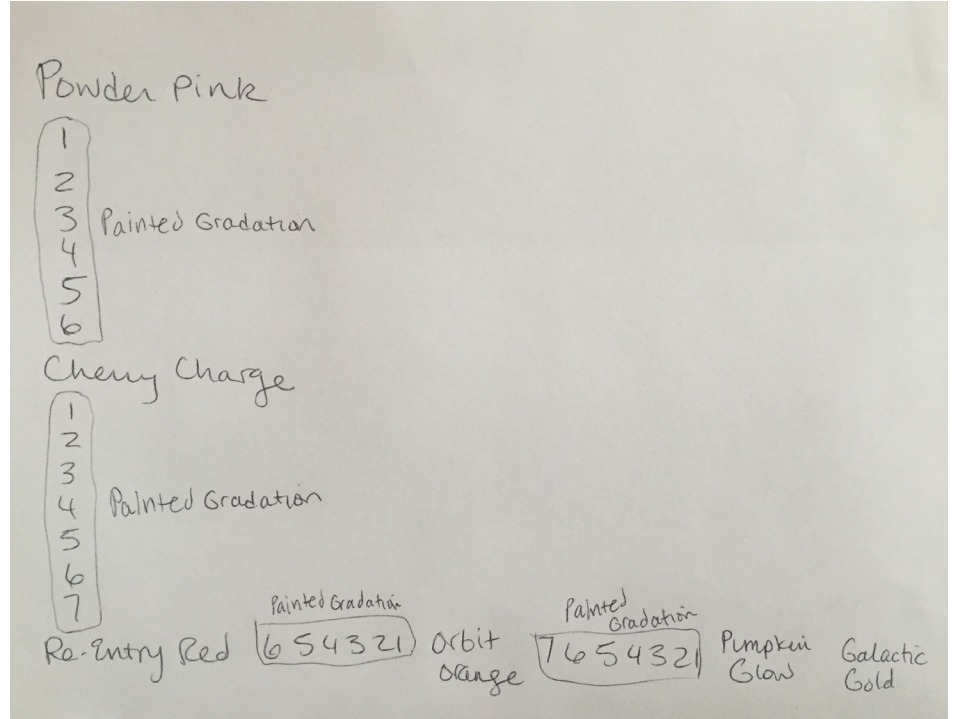


Figure 29: Modified color gradation map. Mid-March, I realized I wouldn't have enough time to create the entire red to yellow gradation, so I cut out the top right corner. I had a daymare (a scary daydream) that it would turn out to be a floppy L-shape if I followed my map. In the end, I straightened it out. (Insert) Powder Pink to Cherry Charge swatch sheet.

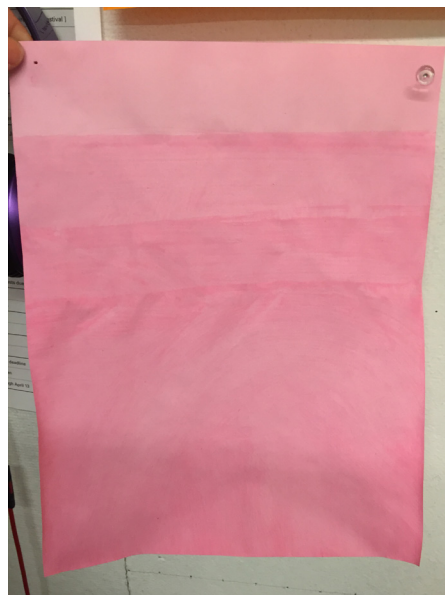


Figure 30: Powder Pink to Cherry Charge swatch sheet

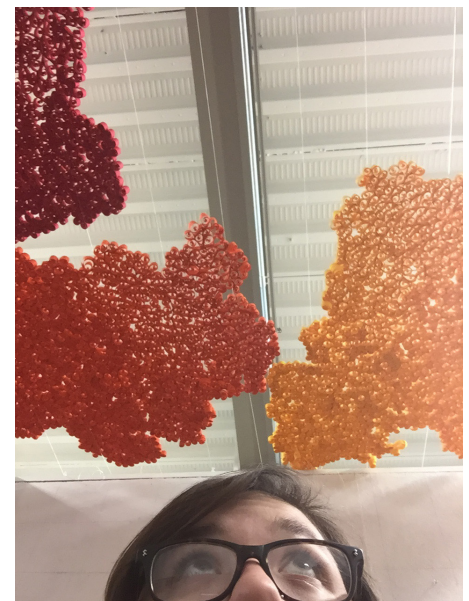


Figure 31: In order to save precious studio space, I strung 50# fishing line over the walls and created a floating shelf system to store large sheets of glued-together quills.

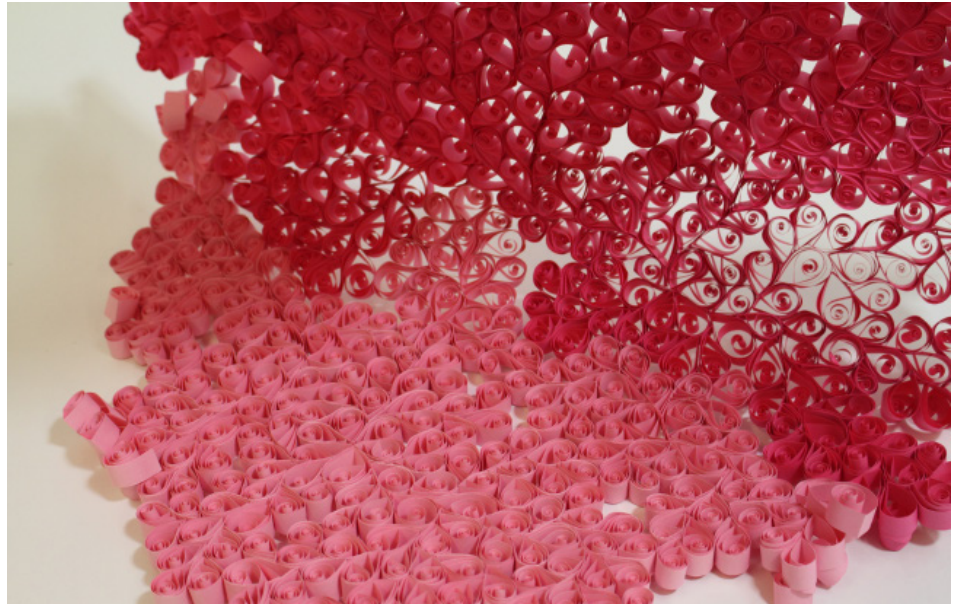


Figure 32-34: When I took photographs for my promotional materials, I had the chance to play around with the flexibility of the material and how that impacts light and shadow. (Left) Promotional postcards featuring a close-up. (Above and below) I didn't realize until after Cyclical had been installed that these shots were hinting at the final form of the piece.



# Creative Work

As a result of this intensive process, Cyclical was born. Millions of quills are attached together, a gradient of color cascading off tree branches, seemingly suspended in midair, soaking up color from the ground it rests on, creating an environment to get lost in. Cyclical references the process of making the coils, as well as the cycle of transformation from tree to paper, and the circle of life.

In its final form, Cyclical stands almost fifteen feet tall, is about seven feet wide, and extends approximately fifteen feet into the room. Attached to the top of the wall, the powder pink gently cascades down over three tree branches, gradually getting darker, until it touches the floor in a pool of red. From there, the quills spread out into shades of orange and yellow. Sitting in the middle of the floor, there is space for a viewer to walk underneath and around it, and are able to view it from multiple viewpoints. The space underneath it reminds me of the rock face behind a waterfall, hidden from normal view but a great place to hide. The overhead lights cast shadows on the wall behind it, reminding you that it's delicate, filled with holes that let the light shine through. Gentle waves ripple their way throughout, giving an illusion of movement. Light enough that it catches an ambient breeze, Cyclical is a gentle reminder to take a closer look as you walk by.



## Cyclical

### Artist Statement:

"The really magical things are the ones that happen right in front of you. A lot of the time you keep looking for beauty, but it is already there. And if you look with a bit more intention, you see it."

- Vik Muniz

I often find myself noticing aspects of my environment that many overlook, and wish others took the time to be more mindful in their daily lives.

Using quilling, the time-consuming art of curled paper, I have created an installation that requires careful attention to detail. As the viewing angle shifts, the interplay between light and shadow creates nuances of color. The juxtaposition of an organic man-made form, reminiscent of the raw material, heightens awareness of these subtle discoveries.





Figure 35: Assembling Cyclical. Since I didn't have much room to work, I rolled up the sheet of quills as it grew.

Once all the paper had been painted, cut, and coiled, it was time for assembly. In my experiments, I found that a sheet of quills is most durable when it's assembled on a flat surface. Knowing I would need a significant amount of space to comfortably work, I began searching for a large, empty space. I remembered there was a large wooden table on the second floor, at the end of the hallway, that's almost always empty. When I went to check, I found that space empty- the table was gone. Not wanting to work on the cold concrete floor for hours on end, I continued my search. At this point in the semester, all the seniors had spread out into any large open spaces in the school to work, leaving me with little room to work. Since I had been rolling with whatever got thrown at me,

I didn't let this minor setback upset me, and instead sought out a creative solution. I borrowed a few long tables from the classroom and moved them to my studio to give myself more room to work.

Since I had enough width to work, I began rolling up the sheet of quills when it grew too big to rest on the table (Figure 35). Soon, the roll became too big for me to work comfortably, so I tossed it over on the other side of the wall. When I ran out of table room, I would scoot it over the wall a little more, occasionally going around to the other side to make sure it wasn't getting crushed. With most of the assembly out of sight, it became more and more exciting the closer I got to finishing. As soon as I finished, I carefully moved it back to my

studio, where I rerolled it and prepared to transport it down to the gallery.

Before I took it inside to drop off, I unrolled it in the hallway. I was astounded at the size of it. I hadn't planned it to be this big, but yet, I hadn't really planned anything much at all. I went up to the second floor to look at it from above, noticing that it had a curve to it that I hadn't planned on being there. After taking a few pictures, I concluded that it would work itself out in the end, and rolled it back up.

I worked on this project every day for four months, so taking a much-needed break was in order. That weekend, I looked through all the pictures I'd taken and reminisced about the journey I'd been on. I'm incredibly proud of what I've accomplished with Cyclical. This is the first time I've attempted anything of this scale and scope, worked without a template or concrete plan, created a color gradient using unconventional methods, and brought my quilling off a flat plane. Instead of obsessing over issues, I let problems work themselves out naturally and didn't stress over imperfections. Instead of being stressed out and rushing to finish like many of my peers, I felt a sense of calm. Even though I was facing the same deadlines and dealing with the same problems, I knew everything would work itself out in the end, and allowed myself to relax.



Figure 36: After assembly, unrolled in the hallway. Note the organic curve it decided to take.

Monday morning, I was ready to begin installation. I got into the gallery I wanted, but unfortunately was placed in the back corner of the gallery. I had dreams of mounting Cyclical above the entrance to the gallery, forcing people to have to walk under and around it to enter the room. Instead, I was

able to mount it sort of above a doorway in the back of the gallery. Restricted by fire and building codes, I made Cyclical work for the space. Having to hang it from the metal ceiling grid placed it further into the room than I would have liked, but that allowed for walking space around the installation.



Figure 37-38: During installation, Cyclical tore in half. After spending an entire day on the twelve foot ladder rearranging the piece on the branches, I was able to reattach it using extra pieces I had made.

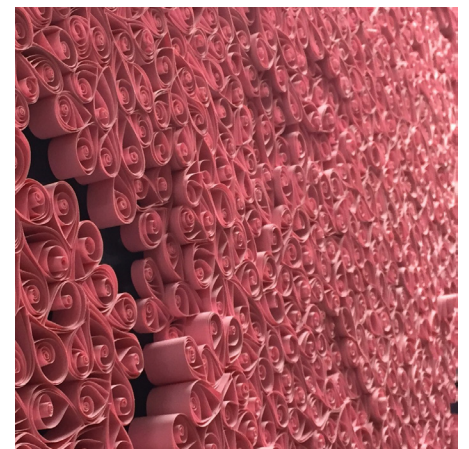


Figure 39: Close-up of quilled topography created by juxtaposing quills of different widths.

After hanging the branches, I carefully began unrolling my quills and began draping them over. As luck would have it, in the midst of installation, it ripped apart in the middle, sending reds, oranges, and yellows cascading down

to the floor. Hanging off the branches, pink and ragged, it looked natural hanging there (Figure 37). Luckily, I had anticipated repairs, and used the extra quills to fill in the gaps caused by the tears. By rotating the sheet slightly before regluing it, I was able to reshape the fabric of quills in order to fit the corner space I was given in the gallery. After it was back in one piece, I realized that I would have to make some adjustments in order to make it fit. Gently picking it up, I created waves to mask the small gaps, and in doing so, was able to shrink it to fit. Even though I was prepared for it to be crushed around the edges where people would accidentally step on it, I still tried to create an adequate walkway around it.

After two days of being up on a ladder, Cyclical was finally complete. I felt proud, confident, and strong. But I was also executing a secret plan. Throughout the process, I deliberately shared only close-ups of Cyclical on social media. Only a small handful of people knew what it actually looked like, and keeping my audience curious paid off in the end, when they were blown away by the final result. I even surprised myself. After the exhibition opening, I became one of those annoying new parents who can't stop showing you pictures of their kid, except my child was made out of paper.

During the exhibition



Figure 40: Candid shot of me installing. Photo credit: Carly Fishman

opening, I watched people take a first look, with an expression of curiosity on their face. They then would bend down, get a closer look, realize it's paper, and be completely awestruck. Friends, family, and strangers came up to me and congratulated me on my amazing accomplishment. Many were blown away by the

scale of it, and upon realizing it was paper, were even more impressed.

Figure 41: Looking at Cyclical from the doorway





Figure 42: Cyclical, the good side

Figure 43: Looking at Cyclical from the gallery



# Conclusion

Looking back on the work I've done in the past eight months in juxtaposition with the status of my life, I can conclude that I wouldn't have successfully completed IP if it weren't for this project. During this intensive and time-consuming process, I had a lot on my plate. Dealing with my physical ailments (migraines, misaligned feet featuring shooting heel pain), other time-intensive coursework, as well as my job as a Student Manager at one of the campus dining halls, was a delicate balancing act that I pulled off with apparent ease. Working on your thesis is stressful enough, but also moving house in the middle of it all is enough to push most people over the edge. Even though things kept falling off my plate, I calmly picked them up and was able to accomplish everything I set out to do.

Cyclical also taught me important life lessons. I learned that constant hard work pays off, but only if you don't stress yourself out in the process. Little imperfections don't detract from a work of art, but add to it. Perfection isn't always something to aspire to, but rather the state of efficient completion. Asking for help sooner rather than later benefits everyone involved. Getting out of your comfort zone and trying new things seems scary, but can only end positively. Never put paintbrush rinse water in a drinking glass, chances are

you'll zone out and drink it. One should always tread lightly, for you never know what may be under foot. Keep everything organized and in its place to avoid disasters later. And most important of all, you're not living life to the fullest unless you're enjoying what you're doing.

I envision a bright future for Cyclical. While I can see it rolled up in my basement for years, I can also picture myself selling it and helping install somewhere with lots of people and light. Because it's flexible, Cyclical will take on a new form every time it is displayed. It would be really fun to take it on tour, morphing itself into the lives of citizens all around the world. At the same time, I can imagine myself donating it under the conditions that it's on display somewhere where anyone and everyone can see it, and that it can benefit society as a whole rather than a specific group of people.

Moving forward, I would like to keep pushing the limits of quilling. Successfully completing Cyclical has given me the confidence to continue large-scale installation work. Perhaps a cool color scheme companion piece may be in the works next. However, I would like to continue my explorations with quilling in a more practical sense. In order for my dream of a mindful society to be achieved, I must figure out a way to incorporate it into daily

life. Smaller scale sculptures, lampshades, and room screens come to mind for household applications. I would like my quilling to redefine what artists can do with paper. By changing the way we look at one object, we can change the way we perceive the rest of the world.

Artists typically use their intuition and feelings as an inspiration to create art. Exposing people to the concept of mindfulness will not only generate more creative ideas, but more diverse, understanding people. By shifting perspectives, we are able to enact change in the world around us, and, in turn, create joy for ourselves and each other. By the time I'm gone, I would like the world to be a happier, more peaceful place full of people having intellectual, understanding conversations about aspects of life that aren't commonly brought to our attention.

# Image Credits

All images belong to the author unless indicated.

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