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Paper magic! Origami from around the world at DAI

LOCAL By **Meredith Moss** - Staff Writer

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Peter Doebler is the Dayton Art Institute's new curator of Asian Art.

Posted: 12:00 a.m. Saturday, February 17, 2018

As you tour the exhibit that opens at the Dayton Art Institute this weekend, you'll have to keep reminding yourself that the pieces on view were all created from simple pieces of paper.

"Above the Fold: New Expressions in Origami" will be at the museum through May 13. The DAI's new Asian Art specialist, Peter Doebler, served as in-house curator for the origami show. We chatted with Doebler about this current exhibition, his new role at the museum and the DAI's prestigious Asian Art collection.

Q. What is origami?

A. Origami is the traditional Japanese art of folding paper. Its roots are at least 1,000 years old, and for hundreds of years it has been widely practiced in Japan. Since the 1950s, it has spread around the world and more and more people are using it as an artistic medium, using traditional folding but also adding new techniques, some aided by mathematical formulas or computer programs. What is also interesting is how the art has practical applications, as researchers use it to advance fields such as space exploration and heart surgery.

Our current exhibit introduces visitors to nine visionary master folders who comprise a cross-section of contemporary origami artists. They range in age from 29 to 71, and work in seven different countries. Each artist has created pieces specifically for this tour, pushing the boundaries of paper as a medium to create bold, provocative works that raise the question of what origami is and what it can be — going beyond a single, small square of paper that is only folded in a certain way. Their works exemplify not only innovative methods of working with paper, but also the power of origami to unite disciplines as diverse as sculpture and geometry, physics and religion, mathematics and the global peace movement.

Information on the history of origami, short videos of some of the artists at work, and an opportunity for visitors to make their own origami project will help visitors further appreciate this art form.

Q. What makes the work of each of these particular artists special?

A. The techniques range from the crumpling of Vincent Floderer and the curve folding of son-father duo Erik and Martin Demaine to the modular constructions of Robert J. Lang and the twisted paper of Miri Golan and Richard Sweeney. Likewise, the content varies from interaction with a Graham Greene story, folded photography, and engagement with Israeli-Palestinian relations to math theory-inspired abstract constructions and works that reference natural inspiration.

Q. What should visitors look for when they tour this exhibit?

A. Being wowed. Origami is the only art form that starts in two dimensions — a flat sheet of paper — and ends in three dimensions. In this way, it really highlights the transformative potential of art. The genius of origami artists is that they have the vision to see into another dimension, if you will, and show us something new. When people think of origami they probably imagine a tiny square of paper that is made into frog. “Above the Fold” is totally different: it includes large-scale installations and intricate sculptures that make you say, “How did they do that?”

Q. What was your role as “in-house curator?”

A. “Above the Fold” is curated by Meher McArthur and organized for tour by International Arts & Artists, Washington, D.C. As in-house curator I serve as the lead for planning how we will install the artwork in our special exhibition space — including layout, color choices and font, and labels — and helping to arrange for programs.

Q. What activities and programs will accompany this exhibit?

A. Guests can explore the amazing world of origami in a number of ways with programs ranging from our popular ARTventures series, with origami-themed workshops for families, to curatorial-led talks, book discussions, and wine tastings. Highlights include a workshop and artist talk by one of the featured artists, Dr. Robert J. Lang, whose TED Talk on origami gives a hint of the fascinating things he will discuss. A film screening of “Between the Folds,” an award-winning documentary that features several of the artists in the exhibition, will help close out things in May.

Q. What do you hope visitors will take away from this exhibit?

A. A renewed sense of delight in human creativity. The sheer variety of shapes, lines, and sizes will leave visitors with a feeling of having seen something new and memorable.

Q. At what point in your life did you become interested in art and why?

A. My earliest memories of art are being delighted by picture books, like Dr. Seuss or Beatrix Potter, and making art at school. The first project I remember was making a caterpillar out of a cardboard egg crate. Throughout high school I always took art class and it was the highlight of my schedule; an hour a day to simply experiment with all the materials, usually using old issues of National Geographic for inspiration.

It was not until college that I became interested in the history of art or going to museums, but living in various metropolitan areas quickly got me thinking about all the profound art that humans have made, which raised broader questions such as, “What is art and why do humans make it?” and “Is beauty essential for living a good life?”

Q. How did you end up focusing on Asian Art?

A. In my academic studies I focused on aesthetics and religion, focusing more on broader questions of the arts in general, what beauty is, and so on. And within that I became very interested in Japanese aesthetics and Buddhist aesthetics, as there are some ideas that seem very different from Euro-American aesthetics, such as an appreciation for imperfection and impermanence. This led to an interest in Japanese art, which is striking for its often-unique compositions, color choices, and craftsmanship, as well as Buddhist art and other Asian art traditions.

Q. Tell us a bit about the DAI's Asian Art collection and what attracted you to the Dayton museum?

A. I first came to the DAI in 2014 on a two-month fellowship to help with the interactive online program “What is a Masterpiece?”, and returned to work with the program for 14 months from 2015–2016. During this time, I became familiar with several of the highlights from the Asian collection and started to learn more about the breadth of the collection, which includes important examples from most Asian cultures. Indeed, for a city of Dayton’s size to have an encyclopedic collection of Asian art of this quality is unusual and a real treasure for the community. This is due to many donors who appreciated Asian art and wanted to make it a part of Dayton’s life, including Mrs. Virginia W. Kettering, Mrs. Julia Carnell, and The Honorable Jefferson Patterson.

Q. What is your current role at the museum and what are some of your responsibilities?

A. As the Kettering Postdoctoral Curatorial Assistant in Asian Art, most of my work focuses on the Asian collection, which includes researching objects, writing materials to help visitors engage with the art in a meaningful way, rotating objects that can only be on view for limited periods of time due to the sensitivity of their materials, arranging for necessary conservation, and planning small exhibitions. I also work with the curatorial department at large, helping with special exhibitions, reinterpretation of the galleries, and other daily tasks.

Q. What do you love about art?

A. How it engages the whole person. Of course it is visual, but art often evokes associations with other senses — colors and smells, lines and rhythmic sounds, etc. Then the mind is activated, perhaps thinking of the depicted content in relation to what you know about the world or in relation to your personal memories. And it touches the spirit, giving us a glimpse of what it means to be human. It can show us how the world is, but also visions of what the world can be.

HOW TO GO:

What: “Above the Fold: New Expressions in Origami”

Where: Dayton Art Institute, 456 Belmonte Park North, Dayton

When: Through May 13.

Admission: \$14 adults; \$11 seniors (60+), students (18+ w/ID), active military and groups (10 or more); \$6 youth (ages 7-17); and free for children (ages 6 & under) and members. Prices include admission to the special exhibition and the museum’s collection

galleries.

ALSO: Guided tours are available for individuals, groups and schools. For more information or to schedule a tour, contact Rique Hagen, at (937) 223-4278, ext. 332 or schooltours@daytonart.org.

For more about the exhibition and related programs, visit daytonartinstitute.org/origami. Photography is allowed in the exhibition, and guests are encouraged to use the hashtag #OrigamiDAI to join the conversation on social media.

A Sunday Chat

In this periodic series, arts writer Meredith Moss talks with individuals making arts news in our region. If you have someone you would like to recommend for this series, contact Meredith: MMoss@coxohio.com Please leave a daytime phone number.



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MEREDITH MOSS



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