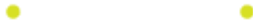




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# A traveling exhibit brings origami's best to St. Petersburg's Museum of Fine Arts

*You gotta know when to fold 'em.*

BY JENNIFER RING — JUN 25, 2019 12 PM



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**Above the Fold: New Expression in Origami at the MFA.**

JENNIFER RING

When I think of origami, I don't normally think of fine art. I imagine palm-sized paper frogs and cranes made by small children. One of the things I love about being an art writer in the Tampa Bay area is how our local cultural institutions continue to surprise me. Nothing could have prepared me for what I saw when I strolled into the MFA to view *Above the Fold: New Expressions in Origami*.

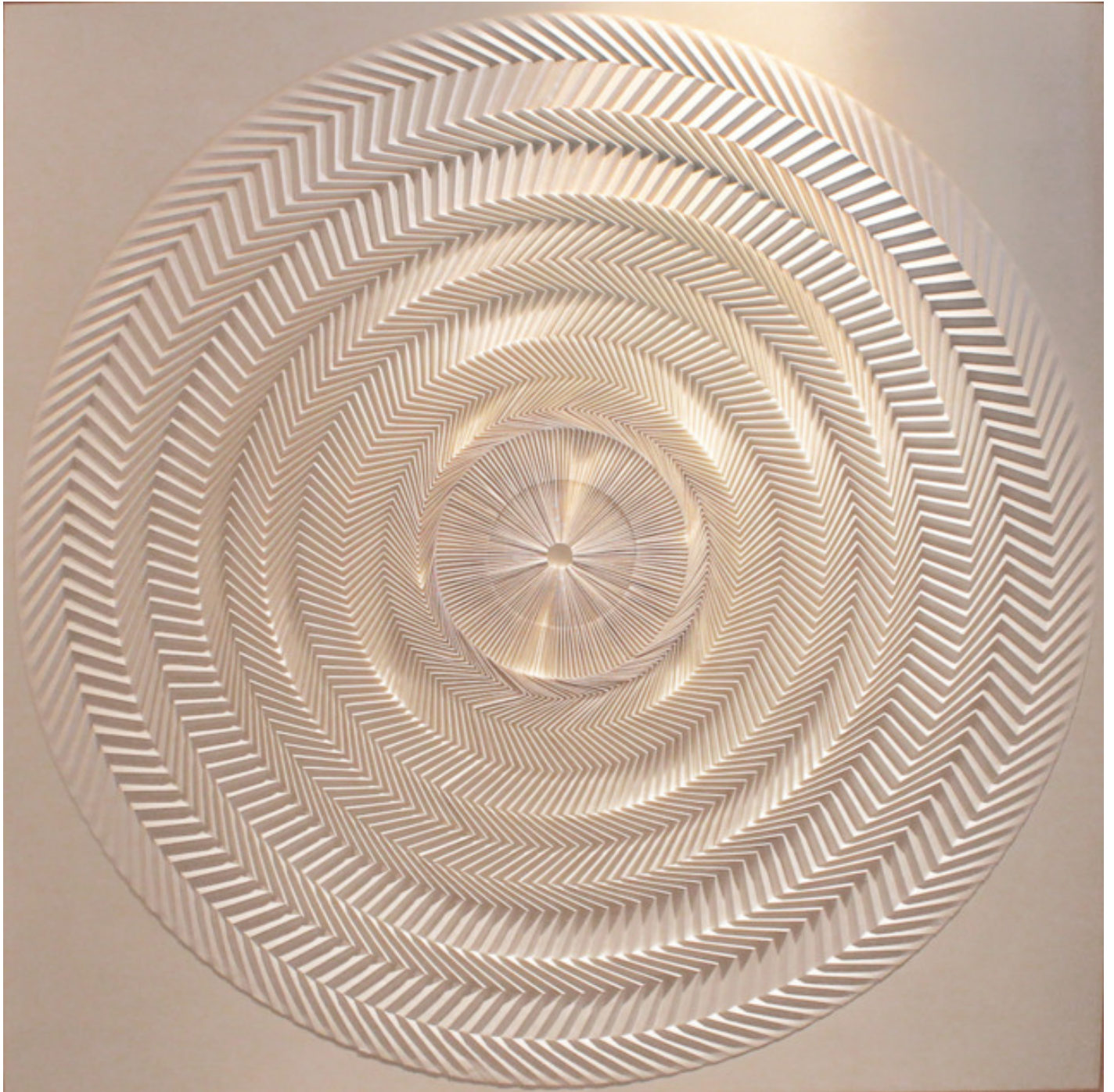
This origami is larger than life. Take Jiangmei Wu's "Ruga Swan," for example. It took the MFA four hours and ten staff members to install this one work of art. The 8.5 foot tall by 20 foot long folded cardboard installation arrives flat, to be assembled by museum staff on-site. Because of this, the cardboard sculpture is a little different every time it is shown in a different gallery — it is site-specific. At the MFA it sprawls across the Hazel Hough wing, an abstract vision of a bird in flight.

Thirty-two golden paper critters hang from the ceiling. Artist Vincent Floderer calls them "Unidentified Flying Origami," which is both accurate and hilarious at the same time. Many are reminiscent of sea creatures like rays, jellyfish, horseshoe crabs and blowfish. It's like an ocean in the sky made of crumpled-up tissue paper. I can't help but look up with a childish grin.

Sixty paper koi fish swim up the wall in Robert Lang's "Vertical Pond II." Each life-sized koi fish is made from a single sheet of custom-made origami paper. Together, they canvas an entire gallery wall.

It's like I traveled to a whole new world where everything is made of paper. I'm absolutely delighted by the large-scale installations artists Jiangmei Wu, Vincent Floderer and Robert Lang created specifically for *Above the Fold*. Together these works of art make *Above The Fold* so much better than I ever could have imagined.

Interspersed throughout the space are works from six more world-renowned origami artists, each with their own unique vision of how paper can be made into art.



**Yuko Nishimura, Shine , 2008, washi (kyokushi).**

*PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.*

When you first walk into the gallery, you see Japanese artist Yuko Nishimura's artwork mounted on the wall. Nishimura's wall-mounted works are like paintings made with paper. Each of her three works in *Above the Fold* utilizes peak and valley folds. Light and shadow play along the pleated white paper to create pleasing patterns of white and gray in "Wave, Shine and Stream."

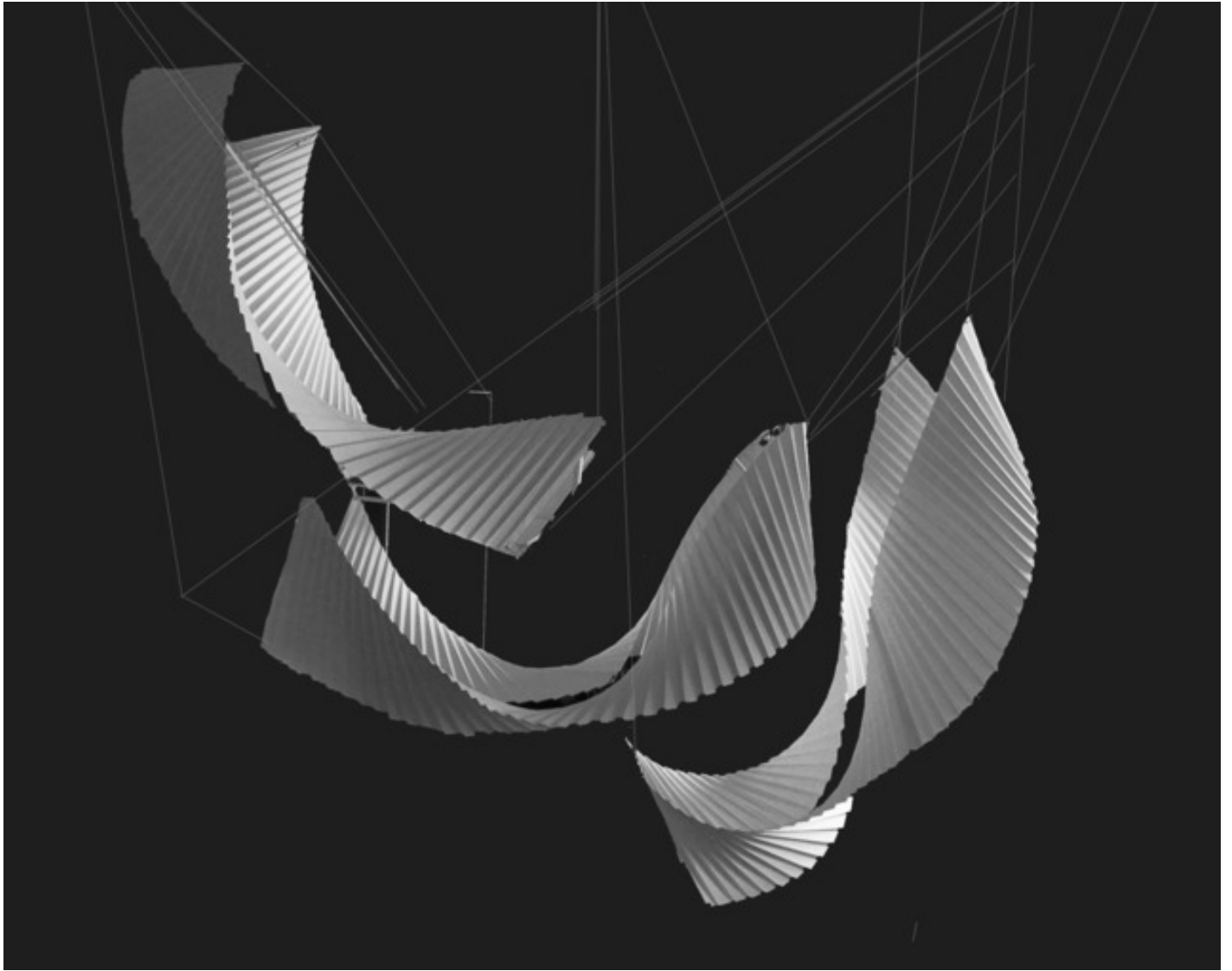




**Paul Jackson, Untitled , 2014, cut and folded digital prints.**

*PHOTO COURTESY OF INTERNATIONAL ARTS & ARTISTS.*

Paul Jackson has explored paper folding in just about every way imaginable, as you can see from any one of his 40 books on the subject. In *Above the Fold*, you can see how he cuts and folds large photographs to mimic the pixelation in digital images.



**Richard Sweeney, Air, 2014, paper, wood, metal fixings, cotton cord.**

*PHOTO COURTESY OF INTERNATIONAL ARTS & ARTISTS.*

Miri Golan is mostly known for using origami to teach geometry to school children in Israel. Her "Twisted Scroll" and Richard Sweeney's "Air" demonstrate the beauty found in simply pleated paper.



**Erik Demaine and Martin Demaine, Greene Recycling / Destructors VIII , 2013, elephant hide paper.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS.

Father-son team Martin and Erik Demaine work at the intersection of art and science. Their explorations with paper are advancing mathematics, science and the art of origami all at the same time. Erik Demaine's work relies on a scientific understanding of paper's physical properties. He is always asking the question, "How does paper *want* to fold?" Right now, the answer is in curved creases, and you can see these curved origami sculptures in *Above the Fold* this summer.

The MIT professor is now bringing this same question to the world of biochemistry and medical research in a new form, "How do *proteins* want to fold?" On a molecular level, proteins are responsible for most everything our body does. When they cease to fold properly, it often harkens disease.

Alzheimer's is an excellent example of this. In Alzheimer's disease, the amyloid-beta protein folds improperly and accumulates in the brain, where it affects memory. If we could fully understand why individual proteins fold the way they do, and correct any errors in the process, the medical applications would be endless, Erik Demaine explains in the 2008 documentary *Between the Folds* (available on iTunes, Amazon Prime video and Netflix).

We are in the midst of an origami revolution. As Robert Lang so eloquently describes it in *Between the Folds*: In the 1960s, most origami had about 20-30 steps to it, in the 80s you got up to 70-90 steps, and now there are figures that take 200-300 steps. Until now, I hadn't even noticed the step up. Lang is now applying his knowledge of folding to air bags and other real-life objects that must expand from smaller, more compact beginnings.

Normally, I focus the majority of my efforts on what our amazingly talented local artists are doing here in Tampa Bay. But every now and then, someone in our community finds an outside gem that really shouldn't be missed. *Above the Fold: New Expressions in Origami* is this summer's visiting gem.

I'm grateful to the MFA for finding and hosting this amazing Meher McArthur-curated exhibition from the International Arts & Artists group. Before we walked into the gallery, MFA Curatorial Assistant Stephanie Chill told us, "What you will see in the gallery will redefine how you think about origami," and she was right. She could have even taken it a step further and said you will never look at a square of paper the same way again.

There will always be a special place in my heart for the origami animals of my youth. Origami has a rich history as Japanese craft, but it also has a promising future as both an art form and as inspiration for scientific breakthroughs. *Above the Fold* honors both of these aspects. Now, when I look at a square of paper, I see the multitude of possibilities that the International Arts & Artists Group and the MFA showed me this summer. Now it's your turn to see it.

**Above the Fold: New Expressions in Origami | The Museum of Fine Arts, 255 Beach Dr. NE, St. Petersburg | Through Sept. 29 | 727-896-2667 | [mfastpete.org](http://mfastpete.org)**

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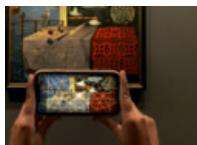


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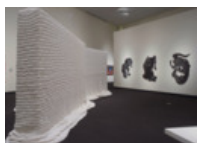
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