



wood+paper+box,
Mise-en-Scène (2023
Beach Museum of Art
Gift Print), 2020–2022,
clamsbell box, *mokubanga*
 (Japanese woodblock),
 oil-based woodblock,
 letterpress, lithograph, and
 inkjet, dimensions variable,
 Marianna Kistler Beach
 Museum of Art, photo:
 Kansas State University,
 Communications and
 Marketing

wood+paper+box in your hands

October 3, 2023–April 6, 2024

Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, Manhattan, Kansas

Reviewed by *Kimi Kitada*

AN INVITATION: PLACE BOX HERE FOR UNPACKING. Use the other pedestal to create your own arrangement.

Reaching for the clamsbell box, I felt a tinge of anticipation. What would emerge from this box, and what would the condition of its contents be? After opening the lid, a bright orange Tyvek netting revealed itself, slightly disheveled at the edges. At that moment, I contemplated the level of trust that the artists gave to their audiences. While the wall label clearly states, “handling copy,” museumgoers do not often hold and unpack artworks.

The unboxing process required time and close investigation. The artist collective, *wood+paper+box*, consists of three artists: Katie Baldwin, Mariko Jesse, and Yoonmi Nam. Each artist contributed several material elements to the box, and I was curious about which works were attributed to an individual artist. Every artwork was folded and resting precisely in its place. Some of the works on paper inhabited a small envelope, and the viewer would open it with a sense of delight and wonder. After I had unwrapped multiple artworks and placed them gingerly onto the pedestal, I was awestruck by the sheer number of pieces that fit neatly into this box. When I finally reached the last object, I composed a simple arrangement for the #woodpaperbox visual archive.

The exhibition title, *wood+paper+box in your hands*, references the tactile experience of holding the artworks using the handling copy, as well as the artists’ process of mailing each other pieces to inspire and inform the next works. Curated by Aileen June Wang, the exhibition compels viewers to consider the artist book in an expanded manner and prioritizes a collaborative spirit of making.

Kimi Kitada is a curator based in Kansas City. She is currently the Gallery & Programs Manager at Charlotte Street. Previously, she was Curatorial Assistant at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 2019–2020, where she assisted on Xu Zhen: In Just a Blink of an Eye. From 2014 to 2018, she served as Public Programs & Research Coordinator at Independent Curators International in New York. Kitada received a BA in art history and classics from Bucknell University and an MA in museum studies from NYU.



wood+paper+box, (un)fold, 2017–2023, clamshell box, mokubanga (Japanese woodblock), relief printing, pressure printing, digital print, pochoir; dimensions variable, photo: Kansas State University, Communications and Marketing

The selected works of the wood+paper+box collective function as open-ended, printed material. The works are not bound or mass-produced, but rather are hand printed in a limited edition. Instead of taking the form of traditional printed matter, these pieces push boundaries relating to graphic design, illustration, and printmaking, among other techniques. All the artists display an exceptional attention to detail, especially working on a miniature scale. The petite “Thank You” bag by Yoonmi Nam, the letterpress details on a small lid by Katie Baldwin, and the Meyer lemon seeds packet hand lettered by Mariko Jesse exemplify this careful, concise attention to detail.

The artworks of Baldwin, Jesse, and Nam visually harmonize, and each wood+paper+box project ties together in a cohesive way. The artists met in 2004 at the Nagasawa Art Park residency in Awaji, Japan. The *wood+paper+box in your hands* exhibition spans a period from 2013 to 2023, and includes four large display cases, titled *wood+paper+box; (un)fold; AL > CA > KS*; and *Mise-en-Scène*. From an exhibition design standpoint, the color of each wooden display case mirrors the color of that project’s box. This aesthetic choice creates a unified experience throughout the exhibition space and alludes to a sense of play in the work. Notably, in the project, *(un)fold* (2017–23), the artists investigate the revealing and concealing of space using a variety of paper folding ideas. Baldwin experiments with relief and pressure printing, while Jesse uses paper folding to conceal a mokuhanga (Japanese woodblock) flower print. The artists communicate this idea of play by testing different printmaking techniques and making work for each other in a joyful way.

At the onset of this collaboration, the artists marked their ten-year friendship and chose to create works on paper inspired by working, learning, and living together in Japan. The organizing principle of friendship carries through each display case, and touches on the art historical precedent of mail art—specifically, the postcard series of artist On Kawara, titled *I Got Up*, which was a continuous piece from 1968 to 1979 in which the artist sent postcards to friends, stamped with the exact time that he woke up on that day. The personal nature of Kawara’s work connects to the intimate friendships of the wood+paper+box collective. For the project, *AL > CA > KS* (2015–2016), the artists mailed works to each other in order to connect across vast distances and maintain their personal ties over the years.



wood+paper+box, AL>CA>KS, 2015–2016, clamshell box, mokubanga (Japanese woodblock), letterpress, reductive linoleum, screen print, etching and color transfer; lithograph, vintage handkerchief, dimensions variable, photo: Kansas State University, Communications and Marketing



Handling copy of
Mise-en-Scène, 2023
Beach Museum of
Art Gift Print at the
interactive station of
the exhibition, photo:
Kansas State University,
Communications and
Marketing

In the printed exhibition brochure, Wang expresses her admiration for the collective: “I find their mutual respect to be a breath of fresh air within a mainstream art world that often elevates individual artists.” The artists dispel the emphasis on an individual practice and expound on their identity as an artist collective. The spirit of collaborative art-making truly extends to the viewer, who is invited as a participant in the *Mise-en-Scène* (2023) box. The artists of the wood+paper+box collective are not concerned with artistic authorship or singular genius, but instead encourage viewers to become coauthors—to touch, hold, and choreograph a scene using the original artworks. This invitation guides the audience’s creative impulses, and at the same time, the act of touching pieces in a museum space is a rare privilege and a radical gesture. ■