

ARTS & CULTURE

Li Hongbo  

Pure White Paper by Li Hongbo

Chinese contemporary artist Li Hongbo is known for his unconventional figurative sculptures made from thousands of sheets of flexible paper that twist and elongate in almost any direction.

Paper is an essential partner in our daily life that we could not live without. Humans use paper to record, depict, examine and spread civilization. It embodies our culture and spirit. Paper can be as resilient as it can be fragile. A small flame, an earthquake, or the summer rain can irreversibly destroy paper. And, the same goes for life. There is a Chinese saying, "life is as fragile as paper", which has left a deep impact on me. The concise and harrowing phrase sums up the fragility of life and rockiness of fate.

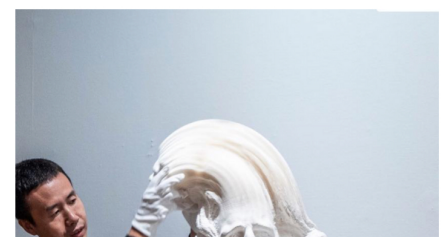
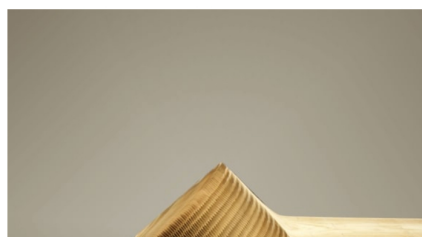
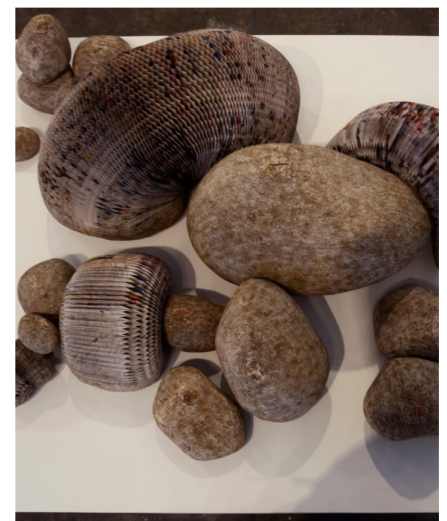
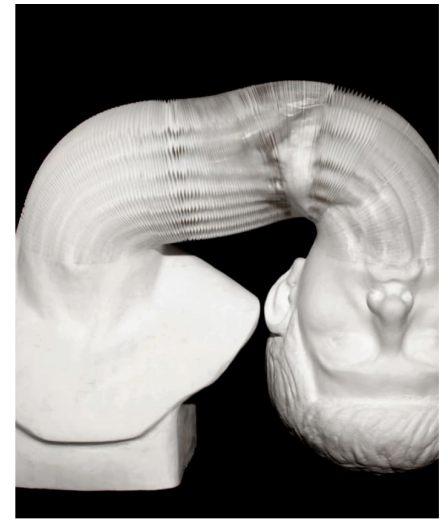
Life is as pure as a piece of white paper when it is born. Yet it is as fleeting as a galloping white horse against infinite time, as it is fragile and solitary against the volatile world. Life is vulnerable and transient; it is as fragile as paper. People tend to use familiar objects as metaphors for themselves. I have chosen paper to depict life. "Baby", "Boy", "Girl", "Yong Man", "Skull" and "Skeleton" are the major works I present to the audience in this exhibition. I attempt to use white paper sculptures to recreate these figures, and interpret birth, aging, illness and death along the trail of time.

The origin of this group of paper sculptures are plaster models that I once used to sketch, like Marseillaise, David, Roman Youth, and Agrippa... They are classic pieces of ancient sculpture that are used towards the basic training of sketching in atypical art education curriculum. These tools of study have stayed with me from the moment I first entered the world of fine art. When I was a child, I enjoyed drawing. I always sought to find as many interesting things to sketch as possible.

When I started to study painting seriously, the first thing I did was sketch plaster models. During my high school and university years, I continued sketching these models. They stood there endlessly, without a word, and I could handle them however I wished to. Sometimes I painted them beautifully, other times they would look hideous and even broken-- however, they never complained. To this day they are my most faithful friends. When the sun shines through the windows onto their faces, these memories all come back to me-- particularly, the rustling of my pencil.

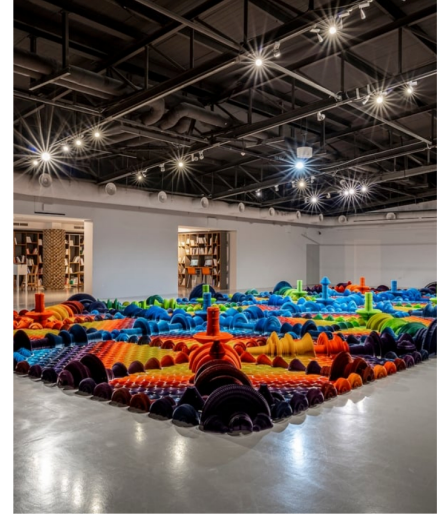
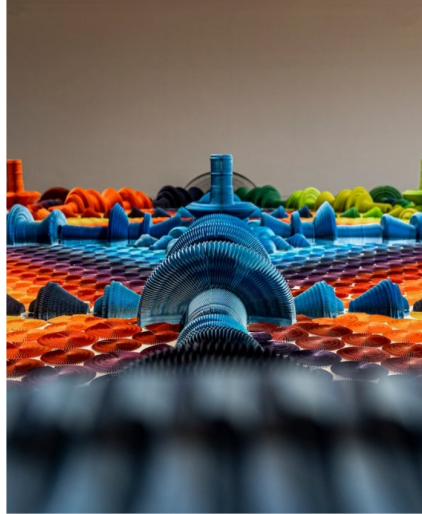
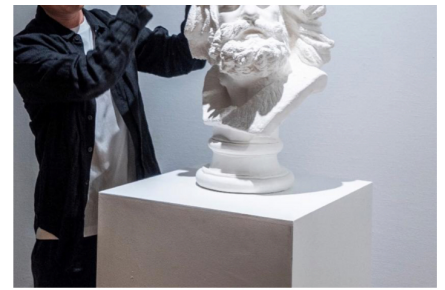
I've tried to use the most loving and warm way I know to recall this period of time. I've used paper--that most familiar material to me--to remake these tools of study so as to revitalize the memories in my heart. The static models of my past were emotionless and immutable. Yet, with bonding, cutting and polishing paper I've made sculptures which have the same appearance and profile, even the same color as my old plaster models--while they remain in a static state. However, fundamental essentials have changed and they no longer stand as mere static plaster models. These can be stretched, reversed, and transformed by the hands of individuals. Their static state and static space have changed, together with my memory.

May I be like paper: pure at birth, silent in death, and blossoming like



flowers even in my withered bones.

Final Pictures Courtesy of the artist, Eli Klein Gallery and Maraya Art Center © Li Hongbo



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