



What kind of art is origami?

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What kind of art is origami?

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The (elite globalised) art world and origami
The art of/in origami
Fellow travellers: Math/Art and Art & Design
Values and categories of art—and beyond

Outline



The elite globalised art world: John Berger

The National Gallery sells more reproductions of **Leonardo's cartoon** of 'The Virgin and Child with St Anne and St John the Baptist' than any other picture...**It became famous because an American wanted to buy it for two and a half million pounds.**

Now it hangs in a room by itself. The room is like a chapel. The drawing is behind bullet-proof perspex. It has acquired a new kind of impressiveness. Not because of what it shows—not because of the meaning of its image. **It has become impressive, mysterious, because of its market value.**

John Berger (1972). Ways of Seeing, Pelican / BBC



The elite globalised art world: John Berger

The **bogus religiosity** which now surrounds original works of art, and which is ultimately dependent upon their market value, has become the substitute for what paintings lost when the camera made them reproducible. Its function is nostalgic. It is the final empty claim for the continuing values of an oligarchic, undemocratic culture. **If the image is no longer unique and exclusive, the art object, the thing, must be made mysteriously so.**

...museums are full of **holy relics** which refer to a mystery which excludes...[the majority]: the mystery **of unaccountable wealth**. Or, to put this another way, they believe that **original masterpieces belong to the preserve (both materially and spiritually) of the rich.**

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The elite globalised art world

Origami not welcome

Origami not welcome: Lee Armstrong

THE ART
ESTABLISHMENT BE
LIKE....



Origami not welcome: Paul Jackson

I went to **art school**, at a very good school, and got an M.A. I was doing all kinds of things, performance art, music, whatever, but not paper. **I showed my origami to my teacher, and he dismissed it.** I was deeply hurt. I thought, you so-and-so, I'm going to show you. To be fair, it was a simple sort of origami, like flapping birds.

I've had exhibitions of abstract forms, and they've gone quite well. **But what I do is not really saleable. I'm quite jealous of people who can sell their work**, but this also fits with my attitude that **paper is ephemeral**, so in a sense, I've shot myself in the foot. I have to do it for the moment, just make a model that you keep on the shelf.

Jan Polish (1996). An Interview With Paul Jackson, The Paper, 54, Spring 1996, p. 1, 22-23



HATORI Koshiro on artistic origami

The works of artistic origami are folded paper. So, the creativity is attributed to both the designers and folders, and the appreciation to the viewers. **The sequences or the crease patterns themselves are not the object of appreciation.** In addition, there is **no reproducibility in artistic origami**, because the same sequence produce the different works with different types of paper or different folders.

HATORI Koshiro (n.d.). History of Origami,
<https://origami.ousaan.com/library/historye.html>



Kenneway on ‘Art-with-a-capital-A’

In the sense of ‘**skilled activity**’ origami is unquestionably an art, but is it art in the sense of ‘**Art-with-a-capital-A**’?

From time to time this possibility is considered, generally by paperfolders who **hope to sell their models for large sums of money**.

Eric Kenneway (1987). Complete Origami, Ebury, p. 18



Perceiving the formal arrangement of matter

All art produces works which consist of **two elements: matter and form**.

In **music**, **notes** (matter) are arranged together and in **sequence** (given form) to create a work of art.

In **painting**, **colours** (matter) are **mixed and arranged** (given form) to create an art work.

In these and other instances it is **by perceiving the formal arrangement of matter that the listener, or viewer, has his or her aesthetic experience**.



The matter and the form of an origami model

...an origami model...has **matter (a square of paper)**; it also has **form (folding)**. ...

People...will probably ask: ‘**Is it folded from a square?... Is it folded from one piece?**’ They are asking **what constitutes the matter** of the work, although they may not think of it in those terms.

Next they may ask: ‘**Is it cut?**’ They are now questioning the **nature of the form**.

...an object in which neither the matter nor the form can be perceived cannot be described as an art work.



Kenneway on the art in origami

Of course, a model can look charming, as can many objects which are not art works, but it is the **rhythm of fold lines and balance of shapes apparent on the surface which are admired in such a case.**

If there is an art in origami then it exists within **the sequence of folds [transforming] a sheet of paper** into a model.

A proper perception of origami can only be **achieved by doing it.**

Eric Kenneway (1987). Complete Origami, Ebury, p. 18



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Artistic origami

More than one kind of origami

More than one kind of origami (a simplified view)

Emphasis		
Process	Result	
Improvised / Free / Arbitrary	Correia (judgement)	Smith minimalist portraits
		artistic origami (Hatori def.): Dinh, Floderer, Joisel (judgement early or late in folding, specialist papers)
Folding		Brill animals later Engel
		Yoshizawa
Reproducible / Defined	model-making (Jackson definition) & Pureland (Smith def) (landmarks, diagrams, general purpose / everyday papers)	Maekawa modular and geometric
		technical origami early Engel, Komatsu, Lang, Montroll (landmarks, diagrams, CP, specialist papers)



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The art of/in origami

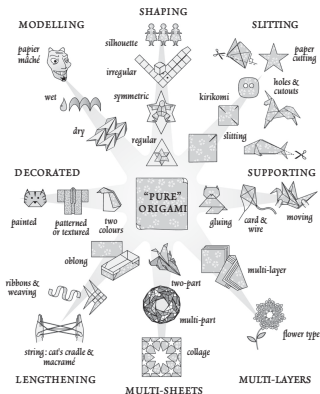
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(How) is it origami?



Above: Relaxing the "purity" of origami leads to different kinds of crafts. The "closed-system" nature of origami is characterised by its ability to create a model and yet return to the starting point. After John Smith [1924–2018].



What Can We Say About ‘Math/Art’? George Hart

I consider myself an **applied mathematician and sculptor**, employing mathematical techniques and ideas in creating **geometric art**. ...

mathematical art...[includes] computer-generated renderings of **fractals**, hand-drawn **tessellated images** inspired by M. C. Escher, or beautiful **physical models** of mathematical objects...**geometric origami**, intricately patterned **quilts**, and amazing handmade examples of **beadwork**, **crochet**, **knitting**, and **tatting**, each with an underlying mathematical story.

George Hart (2024). What Can We Say About ‘Math/Art’?, Notices of the American Mathematical Society



What Can We Say About ‘Math/Art’? George Hart

[the accepted art authorities such as museums, galleries, auction houses, and university art departments judge]....much of what is presented in our art exhibitions and publications is **not truly ‘fine art.’ The sad truth is that no experts** from these organizations are **rushing over** to our mathematical art exhibitions and being **impressed by what they find**. We must admit that in terms of their culturally accepted notions of art, **something is lacking**.

<https://www.ams.org/journals/notices/202404/noti2920/noti2920.html>



What Can We Say About 'Math/Art'? George Hart

the works...of the math/art community are largely **craft, design, models, and visualization, not fine art**. But there is nothing wrong with that. An interesting and original object might be considered **craft instead of art because it can be reproduced** by competent workers following step-by-step instructions. It might be considered **design instead of art** because it is a digitally printed graphic or is robotically fabricated...might be considered a **model** instead of art because it displays **casual craftsmanship and seems most suitable for education**. It might be considered **visualization** instead of art because it originated functionally as an aid for explaining a technical fine point. These characteristics... may distance the object from **accepted notions of fine art**.



What Can We Say About ‘Math/Art’? George Hart

To reconcile these issues, perhaps what we call an ‘Art Exhibition’ should be **rebranded as something like ‘Exhibition of Mathematical Art, Craft, Design, Models, and Visualization.’** This conveniently covers the entire collection without having to be definitionally specific about individual items. Beyond any benefits of self-honesty, this labelling might aid us in **appearing more modest to any fine art communities** that consider our math/art to be below their artistic standards. A venue that is unwilling to present our works under the rubric ‘Art’ might be happy to display it if **labelled less grandiosely.**

George Hart (2024). What Can We Say About ‘Math/Art’?,
Notices of the American Mathematical Society,
<https://www.ams.org/journals/notices/202404/noti2920/noti2920.html>



Art and design: John Maeda

The best art makes your head spin with questions. Perhaps this is the fundamental distinction between pure art and pure design. While **great art makes you wonder, great design makes things clear.**

John Maeda (2006). The Laws of Simplicity, MIT Press



Grayson Perry on being an artist

My job is to notice things that other people don't notice.

An artist's job is to make new clichés.

“Grayson, are you a loveable character or are you a serious artist?”

I said, ‘Can't I be both?’

Grayson Perry (2014). *Playing to the Gallery: Helping Contemporary Art in Its Struggle to Be Understood*, Penguin Books



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Value of objects
George's elements of sculpture
Gold's definition and categories of art
Expanding the definition of art
People who have done this (or who didn't care)

The challenge: the hierarchy of validation



Adapted from Sir Alan Bowness and Grayson Perry (2014). *Playing to the Gallery: Helping Contemporary Art in Its Struggle to Be Understood*, Penguin Books



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Pre-Columbian Gold Museum, San José, Costa Rica

Value	Description	Example
Symbolic	Function of transmitting ideas.	Gold objects had meanings related to death.
Use	Utility and purpose for which the object is produced.	Evidence in investigating the past.
Aesthetic	Design qualities.	Metal workers stylizing shapes and demonstrating skill.
Merchandise	Equivalence of one object with respect to another in a commercial exchange system.	Pieces of gold through forced or voluntary exchanges. The most valuable pieces were cast.
Patrimonial	Ability to provide access to cultural diversity history and identities.	Gold pieces provide us with valuable information about past societies.

Museo de Oro Precolombino Álvaro Vargas Echeverría, San José, Costa Rica.



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From the Physical to the Ephemeral: Herbert George

The Object

- Material
- Place

Characteristics

- Surface
- Edge
- Texture
- Colour
- Scale

Physicality

- Mass
- Centre of Gravity

Expanding the Core

- Volume
- Space

Challenging Solidity

- Movement
- Light

The Effect of Past Experience

- Memory

Herbert George (2014). The Elements of Sculpture, Phaidon Press



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Gold's definition of art

“it's stuff you are **not allowed to throw away.**”

“The inability to make art simply for its own enjoyment is one of the great losses, let me go further, is one of the great tragedies, of the Plenitude.”

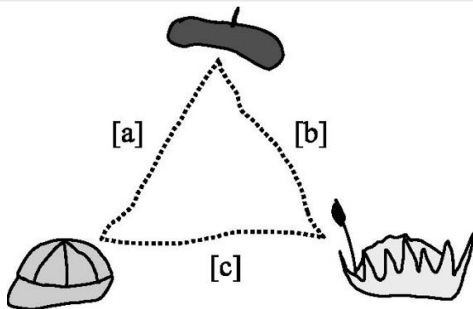
Rich Gold (2007). *Plenitude: Creativity, Innovation, and Making Stuff*. MIT Press.



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Gold's three kinds of art



- beret of **fine art**
- baseball cap of **popular art**
- straw hat of **folk art**

Rich Gold (2007) *Plenitude: Creativity, Innovation, and Making Stuff*. MIT Press.



Gold's three kinds of art

1 **Fine artists** *a priesthood*

“Western fine art [reflects]... the society that produces it. ... love of the new, ... cult of the individual, ... commodification of the aesthetic surface, ... elaborate laws of intellectual ownership ... continual revolution and change”

2 **Popular artists** *reproducible, commercial, user-tested*

“focus less on their inner vision than on the emotions of their audiences.” “The idea of producing art that confuses or repels is deeply offensive”

3 **Folk art** *amateur, immediate*

“only small sums between the maker and the consumer. It is, as the anthropologists say, a gift culture and it is to a large extent gone.”



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Maybe we should do things differently: Lee Armstrong



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Some examples

- M. C. Escher (1898-1972): a graphic artist, but not a fine artist? en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M._C._Escher
- Sol LeWitt (1928-2007): 'others help execute his wall drawings...according to his instructions and diagrams... the conception of the idea, rather than its execution, constitutes the artwork. He also rejected the traditional importance assigned to the artist's own *hand*.' publicdelivery.org/sol-lewitt-wall-drawings/
- Tim Hunkin (1950-) "those like me who do not fit in, there are all sorts of creative opportunities outside the current boundaries of 'fine art'." timhunkin.com/95/_isitart.htm

