

*On Paper* creates a new form of artist dialogue that offers a unique perspective on the work of Sivan Eldar, Mingjun Luo, Francine Murry and Jiang Zuqing, four contemporary creative talents from different backgrounds and practices.

As a material, a field of experience and an age-old medium of transmission, paper represents the meeting point towards which the questions and approaches of the invited artists converge. Despite the radical change ushered in by the digital revolution, the medium has not outlived its usefulness by any means. Its unique materiality means that paper remains the preferred vehicle, both in life and in art, to give tangible expression to experiences.

The exhibition addresses the concepts of space between the Orient and the Occident, of relativism and the hybridisation of identity; its underlying dynamic is the resonance between different cultures and means of expression. Sweeping brush strokes, the fluency and precision of an India ink drawing, an audio composition and an in-situ installation: these elements come to life as visitors make their way through the rooms, revealing a richness of media, languages and sensibilities.

*On Paper* was born from the meeting between Francine Murry and Jiang Zuqing, two artists who share a deep interest in ink painting on paper. Their affinity is reflected in their intense art collaboration, notably their series of monotypes and their paintings on large sheets of paper made in the Chinese province of Anhui according to traditional techniques. The simultaneous interaction between their bodies and brushes with the white surface empowers both artists to move beyond not only their individual roles but also their cultural roots.

As a counterpoint to this approach is the work of Mingjun Luo, a Chinese artist living in Switzerland. The path her life has taken is both crossed and initiated by her sense of bicultural belonging. Paper and India ink are the vehicles for and eyewitnesses to the question of identity and to a particular kind of language, in which fragmentation, reconstruction and the assembly of parts are recurring themes.

The exhibition is enriched by the addition of sound. In collaboration with Ircam (Institut de recherche et coordination acoustique/musique, Paris), composer Sivan Eldar has created an installation in which paper is brought to life by sound. The nature of this work also raises the topical and important issue of the role of museums as conservators of intangible cultural heritage.

The exhibition will travel to MUSEC – Museo delle Culture Lugano, where it will run from 28 October 2021 to 20 March 2022.



Mingjun Luo, *Break the Chinese Character* or *Démonter les mots*, 1996, India ink on paper, 350×350 mm. Property of the artist © Mingjun Luo

The creative universe of Mingjun Luo, a Chinese artist who has lived in Switzerland since 1987, is inhabited by the theme of dual identity and the idea of cultural hybridism. The feeling of estrangement and rootlessness engendered by the trajectory that her life has taken led Luo to develop a unique visual idiom, in which fragmentation, reconstruction and the assembly of parts are recurring themes.

*Break up étoilé*, a constantly evolving series of 105 India ink drawings mounted on canvas and adapted to the Museum's space, fills an entire wall in Room 1 and poetically encapsulates the approach of the artist on a monumental scale. The formal research, the masterful draftsmanship and technical proficiency — thanks to her classical academic training — challenge and clash with the freedom and abstraction of the star-studded drip painting. The constant back and forth between rigour and chance sums up the oppositional forces that inform her work, and can be seen as a metaphor of the relativism of the individual in the universe.

Writing and language, at once an obstacle and an opportunity, are a central focus of Luo's research (*Break the Chinese Character*). The emphasis and concentration on characters echoes the tradition of Chinese calligraphy and its system of signs, each with their own set of phonetic and semantic values. By reinventing, diverting or isolating a character on the white expanse of the wall, the artist operates in a seemingly coded system where she integrates the language into a personal and subjective universe where nothing is fixed and everything is to be written.

"I love the softness of Chinese paper, the smell of the ink, that moment when the ink-soaked brush glides over the paper, the beauty of black and white, the paper that relaxes when moistened and becomes smooth once mounted. I love the peace that I derive from paper.

I like the concept of 'emptiness' in ancient Chinese art, as it allows the imagination to run wild. My ideal is to use techniques such as oil painting, drawing and photography to infuse my work with the spirit of Chinese ink. I don't do 'Chinese painting'. Rather, my works borrow from the qualities of ink and paper. If you are to build your own language, you have to push the technique to its limits."

Mingjun Luo



The idea for the *On Paper* exhibition was born from an encounter between Francine Mury and Jiang Zuqing, two artists who share a deep interest in the technique of India ink on paper. This affinity led them to embark on an intense collaborative partnership. Together, they created paintings on large sheets of paper produced by a factory in the Chinese province of Anhui according to traditional methods. The shared physical interaction with the vast white surface enabled the two artists to rise above their individual roles and respective cultural origins.

The cycle of large-scale paintings by Francine Mury and Jiang Zuqing evokes signs, rhythms, outlines and ellipses, bringing together Eastern and Western motifs, tradition and modernity. It reveals a dynamic balance between the black of the ink and the white of the medium, between the full and the empty, which harks back to the precepts of Buddhist and Taoist philosophy. The identities of each artist intermingle in their collaborative works to create a universal language and a new, shared way of thinking about the artistic process.

In spring 2021, the artists had planned to produce two monumental works (approx. 2500×7300 mm) for the MahN exhibition. Unfortunately, the exceptional public health situation prevented Jiang Zuqing from leaving China. The work entitled *Souei* ('Following', in *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*, a classic of Chinese literature) was created by Francine Mury last April at the museum. The blank section symbolises the meeting between the two artists that was not to be.

"[Zuqing and I] work on the floor of the large art studio at the Academy [Tsinghua University, Beijing]. Stroke by stroke, we slip into another expanse, into a new approach. Bit by bit, we shake off our individuality. We rise above our respective processes until our distinctive rhythms merge to create a new, shared one. Our brushes cross and overlap in response to the other's strokes and shapes before they change and commingle again. Our different cultural backgrounds are manifest in our state of mind, the position of our bodies and our movements."

Francine Mury

Francine Mury and Jiang  
Zuqing in the Tsinghua  
University art studio,  
Beijing, 2018 © Teng Teng



*Papier sonore/Pigments vivants* is an interdisciplinary music installation designed around the idea of placing a sound-emitting and vibrating surface under the visitor/listener. It features acoustic and mechanical sounds based on computer-programmed audio sequences. The acoustic surface uses two frequency ranges: one within the audio spectrum, the other outside it. The visible and mobile elements of the installation are the pigments, which make it possible to invert this relationship: the inaudible vibrations cause the material on the paper to move, while the audible sounds remain hidden beneath the surface. Walking through the installation is like walking through a web of acoustic roots whose shoots are the pulsations that reveal the subtle motion of the colours. In this installation, living pigments serve as a metaphor for the link that has long connected material, vibration and movement. The processes at work in *Papier sonore/Pigments vivants* ascribe a starring and active role to paper instead of the framing, background and intermediary function it traditionally serves. At the same time, these processes raise the very topical issue of museums and the conservation of intangible heritage.



Francine Mury and Jiang Zuqing, *Sans titre*, 2018.  
India ink on mulberry  
paper, 2670×1420 mm.  
Property of the artists  
© Francine Mury

In 2018 the film director Domenico Lucchini joined Francine Mury and Jiang Zuqing on their visits to the artisanal paper mills of Changqing, in the Chinese province of Anhui. A few days later, he goes to Tsinghua University in Beijing, camera in hand, to record the two artists as they go about creating their large India ink drawings. The result is a sensitive and deeply personal documentary that tells the story of how Mury and Zuqing met and how their creative partnership took shape.

"Paper [...] is the 'pre-text' which made it possible for Francine Mury and Jiang Zuqing [...] to compare their experiences, cultures and sensibilities. This laid the foundations for their art collaborations, which are marked by elective harmonies and affinities, as well as shared expressions and representations. This is the *Stoff*, the substance, that allowed me to make a film, a creative documentary that follows the two artists on their voyage of discovery through the world of rice and bamboo paper production and an exploration of the characteristics of this material, its evolution and use in contemporary art. The film is an intimate and emotional account that adopts the structure of the creative documentary – interviews, live filming, film archives and re-enactments – to reproduce this unique artistic experience. [...] As it was a low-budget production, improvisation was often the order of the day. I had to constantly reassess what I should film and how, as not everything in China is 'filmable'. I frequently had to use a hand-held camera. In more hectic, more extreme situations, I resorted to a GoPro, or a small Osmo, and sometimes even a mobile phone. Certain images and interviews were organised and structured. Others were 'snatched' from reality, but always at a 'respectful distance'. This was the case when filming in the paper mills. Shooting in these small, slightly remote factories required a novel approach. But we managed it."

Domenico Lucchini

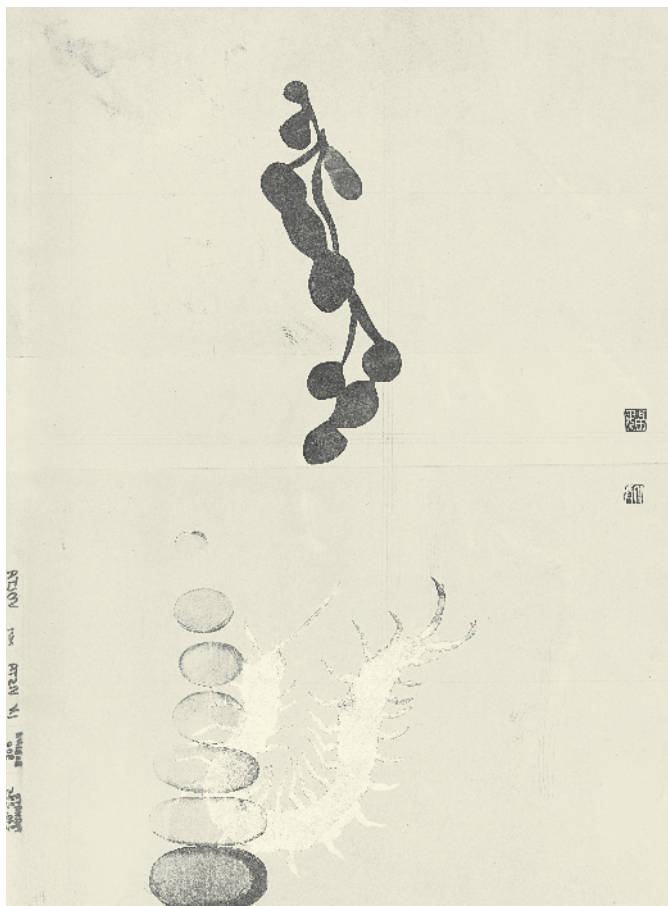


In the early 2000s, Mingjun Luo returned to figuration; it marked a turning point in her career. The intimacy of the gallery lends itself to a dialogue with everyday utilitarian objects, or *Petites choses* (little things) as the artist calls them, such as a bowl, a vase, a cup, a razor, a bracelet or a bag. This return to 'simple things' is a self-portrait of sorts, a way for the artist to define and assert herself as a woman, somewhere between the past and the future, between tradition and freedom. There is a touch of irony in her use of red and choice of texts that accompany the pieces, as they bring to mind the Maoist doctrine which was a fixture in Luo's childhood.

The *Bols* series, created by tearing and reassembling strips of papers, embodies the two opposing movements that inform the artist's work, namely the physical acts of destruction and reconstruction. The precious commonplace object is exhibited in a display case, the very symbol of the 'sanctity' of the museum space. As a result, the piece ceases to exist as a simple object per se. Instead, it ventures into new territory, both personal and universal.

Mingjun Luo, *Seul le peuple est le moteur de l'histoire*, 2006, India ink on paper, 950x790 mm. Property of the artist © Pierre Willin





Following their first collaboration in China, Francine Mury and Jiang Zuqing decided to repeat the experience, this time in the Milan studio of Giorgio Upiglio. The resulting series of monotypes\* feature archetypal shapes such as a vase, as well as plant, animal and cellular elements. A translucent ink wash imbues the surface of the paper with a poetic sensibility; here and there flashes of red appear. The shared creative process was made more complex by the choice of the artists to work on sheets that are smaller than those they used in China. Yet, it also led to a deeper exchange between the two artists and how they approach their art.

Francine Mury has a deep interest in the ancient Chinese tradition of ink painting and has been an avid student of Oriental thought and art for more than 20 years. Her collaboration with Jiang Zuqing, a Chinese artist on an eternal quest to reconcile the art traditions of her homeland with her own artistic sensibility, opens up new avenues for Mury to explore this abiding passion. The Swiss artist draws inspiration from Chinese literary classics, such as *I Ching* ('Book of Changes'). It is this text, written in the first millennium BC, to which the artist turns in order to enrich her understanding of a particular subject or situation. Her *Chung* series of drawings references the chapter 'Inner Truth – Inner Trust' of this seminal work.

Francine Mury et  
Jiang Zuqing, *Sans titre*,  
2019, monotype on Hahnemühle  
paper, 810×610 mm.  
Propriété des artistes  
© Maciej Czepiel

\*monotype: a process in which the unetched matrix – or printing plate – is inked or painted before going through the press. The result is a single, unique print.





The exhibition closes with an in-situ work by Mingjun Luo. *Conte de papier* is a further demonstration of the expressive power of paper as a medium and its limitless narrative potential.

A line defines and accentuates the contours of the black room. The sculpture is fashioned from offcuts of paper used to create *Break up étoilé*, the opening work in the exhibition. *Conte de papier* incorporates multiple facets of Mingjun Luo's artistic idiom and serves as a bridge between the 'here' and the 'elsewhere'. It also ties in with other elements present in the space: a photograph of the artist asleep under a paper blanket surrounded by beech trees; the sound of ripping paper; the vestiges of an image dimmed by time.

*Conte de papier* is an exploration of the artist's personal journey, of her quest to put down roots in two lands. At the same time, the sculpture addresses the universal question of and parallels between the human condition and the impermanence of things — cyclical, in continuity with the living and organic material. From it emerges the realisation that, like paper, everything is at once fragile and tough.

Sivan Eldar  
(Tel Aviv, \*1985)  
www.sivaneldar.com

Sivan Eldar holds a PhD in composition and new media from UC Berkeley. She later moved to Paris to study computer music at Ircam (Institut de recherche et coordination acoustique/musique).

Her work frequently involves close collaboration with classical and non-classical musicians, as well as with artists from the fields of theatre, dance and the visual arts. Recent festival performances include ManiFeste at the Centre Georges-Pompidou, Rainy Days at the Philharmonie Luxembourg, Présences at the Maison de la radio in Paris, Ultraschall Berlin and Prague Spring.

Eldar is currently working on several commissions for the Accentus Choir (Donau-schingen Musiktage, Germany), the Musicatreize ensemble (Philharmonie de Paris) and the Orchestre de chambre de Paris (théâtre du Châtelet). Since autumn 2019, she has been the composer in residence at the Opéra Orchestre National de Montpellier. Together with playwright Cordelia Lynn, she is developing her first opera, Like Flesh, commissioned by the Opéra de Lille. Her music is published by Éditions Durand/Universal Music Classical.

Mingjun Luo  
(Nanchong, Sichuan Province, China, \*1963;  
originally from Taoyuan, Hunan Province)  
www.luomingjun.com

Mingjun Luo moved to Switzerland (Biel) in 1987 and currently shares her time between China and her adopted country. In 1979, she began studying fine arts at the University of Hunan. Following her graduation in 1983, she worked as an assistant at her alma mater before leaving for Switzerland. Her works have been exhibited in museums and galleries in Switzerland and abroad: *½ Alien*, Creek Art Center, Shanghai, 2007; *Poussière rouge*, Centre Pasquart, Biel, 2008; *Déchiffré*, Fondation Louis Moret, Martigny, 2009; *Ici ou Là-bas*, Kunstkeller, Bern, 2010; *Back and Forth*, LDX, Songzhuang, Beijing, 2011; *Proche de quelque part*, Fondation Louis Moret, Martigny, 2013; *Guanxi*, Aeroplastics, Brussels, 2014; *Bateau de papier*, Kunstkeller, Bern, 2015; *Ici et Maintenant*, Musée d'Art, Pully, 2016; *I Walk Beside You*, AYE Gallery, Beijing, 2019; *En scène*, Musée jurassien des arts, Moutier, 2020

Francine Mury  
(Montreux, \*1947)  
www.francinemury.ch

Francine Mury studied visual arts at Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology, Shropshire, England, between 1964 and 1966, then at the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Art and Design) in Basel and Bern. From 1971 she worked as a painter and graphic designer in the canton of Neuchâtel. In the early 1980s she moved to Paris, where she studied chalcography. From 2003 to 2007, she was based in Milan and Rome, before settling in Meride, Ticino.

She has exhibited in museums and galleries in Switzerland and abroad, including: *Lokaltermin*, Kunstmuseum, Bern, 1986; *Ragamala* with Indian painter Tilak Gitai, Musée d'ethnographie, Geneva, 1998; *Hortus Rerum I*, Museo Cantonale d'Arte, Lugano, 2002; *Francine Mury*, Spazio Officina, Chiasso, 2007; *Eden*, Casa Serodine, Musei Comunali, Ascona, 2009; *Derive di tempo e di memoria*, Pinacoteca di Arte Contemporanea, Gaeta, 2017.

Jiang Zuqing  
(Qingdao, Shandong Province, China, \*1962)

Jiang Zuqing studied visual arts at the University of Qingdao (Shandong Province), between 1980 and 1984. From 1984 to 1988, she was an assistant in the Department of Decorative Arts at the Central Academy of Art & Design, Beijing, where she obtained a master's degree in decorative arts in 1991 and subsequently worked as an associate professor. In 1999, she taught at the Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Art & Design (Tsinghua University) in Beijing. Her art is also exhibited in museums and galleries in China.



Mingjun Luo,  
*Break up étoilé*, 2020,  
India ink on paper,  
800×700 mm  
© Mingjun Luo