



**UNDERSTANDING PAPER:
ASSESSMENT AND PERMANENCE
FOR
ARTISTS AND FINE PRINTERS**

Graham Williams

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This is an intriguing book, quite unlike any published before on paper and its usage. The author has no intent to persuade anyone to use or avoid any individual paper and it is definitely not a list of papers for others to follow as any list would soon be out of date. It is about how any user of paper can make their own assessments of three distinct attributes of paper based on questions of aesthetics, practicality in use and the permanence of the paper.

Aesthetic qualities are discussed first, followed by a description of the five published international standards for the permanence of paper. These are not necessarily sufficient for many users as they were formulated for a different need. There is certainly no guarantee as to the longevity of paper; however, science does suggest which qualities we should consider and test.

Thirty-four of the papers involved the author's *A Collection of Printing from Woodblocks* were assessed for this book. These included fourteen European handmade papers, a dozen mould-made papers and eight machine made papers. Half the papers were analysed by two

independent laboratories for this book, some extensively. Both the laboratory and the author's assessments were sent to all the makers of the different papers. Some responded responsibly with candour and in one case significant changes were made by a papermaker. Other producers reacted in different ways, a minority believing silence was in their best interests. A couple of papers even confounded the scientific analyses. Surprisingly a handmade and a machine-made paper both tested differently from their published descriptions. Potential scandals were revealed by scientific detection, and averted.

Much of the book is concerned with what a user of paper can assess themselves. Laboratory testing is too expensive to commission on a regular basis. Williams suggests that the way forward is with reliable tests that we could all carry out in a studio or workshop. Some tests use very little equipment and are accomplished in a matter of minutes. Others need equipment that is both readily available, affordable and take a little longer. In all there are nine assessments and tests.

Most of those who use fine papers have a loyalty to individual papermakers or brands. Subsequent makings of the same paper are not necessarily identical to the first making. When stocking paper or buying for an important project these tests can avoid potentially expensive and even embarrassing problems. Every artist and artisan should be aware of the qualities of the paper they use.

This book makes a very readable and accessible addition to any library. It's beautifully designed and written: every sentence and idea are infused with the author's years of experience in handling and using paper. The Glossary will prove very useful for anyone just starting out on their journey with paper.

Peter Bower



**FACTURE:
CONSERVATION, SCIENCE, ART
HISTORY**

Edited by Daphne Barbour
and Suzanne Quillen Lomax