

C
P O
A H N
T E T
R I E
I D M A
C E P R
K O T
R
A
R
Y

Zim-Zum: The Folding World

8th July – 18th September 2022

Curated by Jyll Bradley & Paul Carey-Kent

The act of folding is spiritually and conceptually rich, making it a fertile source for artworks. Consider, for example:

* *the mystical tradition of the Kabbalah*ⁱ in which creation occurs through the divine or infinite presence folding away from the centre to make space for new worlds. Zim-Zum (or 'Tzim-Tzum') is the Hebrew word for the action of this folding. Far from being a passive 'retreat away', it is characterised as an action of strength. There is sublime strength in restraint, and the work it takes to refrain from the human impulse to fill space – rather than create it – is shared in many of the works in the show. That is consistent with the prevalence of abstraction. Many of the artists hold back from the literal or representative, maximising the room for the other, the viewer – seeking to avoid 'talking at us', filling our space.

* *David Bohm's scientific world view*ⁱⁱ, which pivots on how the explicate 'unfolded' world which we see is folded out of the broader underlying implicate order. Let him explain: 'Classical physics says that reality is actually little particles that separate the world into its independent elements. Now I'm proposing the reverse, that the fundamental reality is the enfoldment and unfoldment, and these particles are abstractions from that. We could picture the electron not as a particle that exists continuously but as something coming in and going out and then coming in again. If these various condensations are close together, they approximate a track. The electron itself can never be separated from the whole of space, which is its ground.'

* *Gilles Deleuze's related way of undermining the assumption of binaries*ⁱⁱⁱ - such as 'outside/ inside' - which we tend to project onto the world by proposing that such differences should be viewed more as either side of a fold. As Kjetil Rød^{iv} summarises it, writing on Deleuze, his use of the fold 'highlights that there is no limitation in objects or thoughts, as both permeate each other, and in the next stage are involved in processes where they cannot be separated without losing their transformative identity. A book, for instance, is not just a literary object, but is folded into a story on books and literature, as well as the library's history and thoughts on what it means to read and write.'

Those concepts feed into aesthetic concerns. For example:

* The natural expectation of *repetition* which is built into the action of folding provides a logical connection to the serial processes typical of geometric and minimalist art.

* A flat plane becomes a two by a fold – a bi-fold – and the heart of folding is *multiplicity*, the multiple, the collective. We speak of a sheep fold, a simple enclosure creating space, of bringing the like-minded 'into the fold.'

* Moreover, as that movement from a single fold to a multiplicity suggests, a simple action can lead to *intricate* results, just the sort of movement to appeal to artists.

It's no surprise that many of the works here fold several of those conceptual and aesthetic ideas together, but one might group them - loosely - according to their primary concerns.

Some of the folding is primarily *formative*. The idea of the 'folding world' - the active verb suggests an ever expanding, infinite process of creation, moment by moment, ongoing rather than 'complete' - is shared across spiritual practices as well as cutting edge physics. Consider the sacred geometry and mathematics employed by Zarah Hussain, and how Tania Kovats and Sophie Bouvier Ausländer use folding to approach landscape and geology. We forget that a landscape that looks bucolic is created through extreme stress, but Kovats reminds us of the process through her own versions, Ausländer of the result.

The *violence* in the earth's folding may also appear in the making of the work: there's repetition to the point of damage in Katherine Murphy's emphatic labour, and a severe flattening in Helena Goldwater's domestic ironing - here, the 'work' of folding creates dark, compressed recesses - of history, place, time? But she eschews the literal.

On the other hand, Simon Schubert's work generates an ordered *serenity*, literally folding a world into existence out of nothing more than that action - albeit a world characterised by absence. And Reinoud Oudshoorn returns us to landscape, but it is misty and indefinite, for what he folds is not so much material, as space.

Others use the fold to call attention to *how we see the world* rather than how it came into being. Rana Begum exposes the influence of the once-hidden as the viewer moves around her geometry and understands the source of reflected colours. Abigail Reynolds folds one time into another, in what might be seen as a temporal variation on that play with perceptions. A different sort of play is implied by Bridget Smith's curtain. That 'upward in-gathering', as she describes it, may be about to go up on a scene, yet we are drawn instead to the ruches - or is it a sea? - of cyanotype waves.

Unfolding is integral to the metaphysics cited above, and unfolding has evidently occurred the work of both Murphy and Jyll Bradley. Yet while Murphy foregrounds repetitive labour, there's a more meditative air to Bradley's turning, folding, making the paper smaller, bi-folding, tri-folding, flattening, reducing space... The result of all that is 'the modernist grid', as a kind of enclosure on the page. 'What is more instinctive', Bradley has asked, 'than unwrapping a sweet or a present and then smoothing down the paper, erasing the folds with the back of your fingernail and flattening?' Only, perhaps, the child's folding of a piece of paper into a plane. That's what Samuel Zealey gives us, but with a darkly grown-up twist.

Several artists tease us with the possibility that there's a *system* to their folding. In Hussain's case, it's true: her 'metaphorically folded' forms make extensive use of the mathematics of the 'golden ratio'. The opposite applies to Beat Zoderer: he takes an almost perverse pleasure in giving permanence to happenstance. Nor would Begum want that: her focus is on the subjectivities of the eye - from hers to ours. Navid Nuur's exceptionally wide-ranging practice often applies his own peculiar systems. For example, he narrates the film 'Transfigurations', 2011-12, which he shows projected onto canvas, as telling the history of painting - purely through the actions of hands folding paper with one black and one white face into and out of darkness. Here he shows a fold-unfold work implying that our wider history emerges out of rock.

All of which could be told differently, but 'Zim-Zum' is not meant to be a single view show, more a field of possibilities to be unfolded. We hope you enjoy doing so.

ARTISTS

Rana Begum: *No, 849 Fold, 2018*

In these folded works, Begum plays with spatial geometry, folding a flat form into three-dimensional space. Their origin, she has said, was the intriguing way in which 'folded paper caught the light and created shadows; the white was no longer white, colours slowly took form as I folded the paper'. Paper is replaced with steel, suggesting a flexibility that contradicts the rigidity of the material and appears to capture a moment of spontaneous form. The varying shapes of her metal sheets are folded out towards the viewer at assorted angles, so that different combinations of their colours, both direct and indirect, come into view as the spectator moves around or the light conditions change. All of which is typical of how Begum puts colour and light into conversation with subjective experience.

Jyll Bradley: *Graft (2) Blue and green, 2022*

'Graft' is a horticultural term for combining one plant with another, and also means 'hard work'. Bradley explains that her new colour field sculptures 'graft' together her signature organic and inorganic materials – wood and live-edge Plexiglas. They then fold around the back of mirror to create a work that both mirrors her own height and reflects the viewer, collapsing 'inside' and 'outside'. Graft 2 'suggests the work it takes to bring together 'binary' aspects of self; to connect with our own and another's human nature. The work's form also draws upon the mezuzah - a Jewish ritual object which is fixed to the doorways of homes, marking the threshold between public (profane) and private (sacred) space. The blue/green colours reference earth and sky and as the light plays across the sculptures during the day, these colours fold one into another.'

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer: *Radar (SBAR20200901), 2020*

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer says that, for her, 'painting and sculpting are but two ways of exploring the boundaries of the rich space of relief'. Consistent with that, when she works with maps - implying that the planet is the sculpture par excellence – her disruptions move them back towards their contoured and layered origins in the land. Here the folding of territory acts as a modernist grid, and the gouache covering as a painterly reimagining of the world. The title of the Radar series implies that we may be able to detect the names of the places obliterated: in normal times that action could be a way of rediscovering familiar environments, names and signs.

Helena Goldwater: *Document: pile of wreckage, 1989*

From a distance, Helena Goldwater's exquisitely ironed set of white cloths look perfect enough to be made of marble, but upon closer viewing it is revealed that two sides have frayed, destructively, and can never be fully untangled. 'Restoration', she says, 'is impossible'. That makes us aware of the performance in its making – the hidden repetitive labour of washing, folding, layering many parts into a whole. Then we wonder how it came to be wrecked, as the title has it, and what we might read into a modernist totem rendered both domestic and damaged. Consistent with that implication of constructive and destructive actions, Goldwater will be performing at the gallery on 15 September.

Zarah Hussain: *Root 5: Pink Green Diagonal, 2022*

Zarah Hussain's 2004 MA was in Islamic Art, and the pattern making skills of traditional geometry feed into animations made with code, interactive apps, painting and sculpture to make up a practise which she as 'a visual study of how spirituality, technology and art intersect'. This sculpture descends from a line of which originated in physically folding card to make shapes, and arrives in turn at a form which she sees as 'metaphorically folded'. The proportions of the rectangular shapes of which the sculptural piece is made use the golden ratio proportion, based on a double square. The gradating colours suggest a wave or a ripple effect - thus relating its geometry back to nature, which is itself is the source of the golden mean proportion - observable in many natural phenomena.

Tania Kovats: *Schist, 2001*

Artificial meets organic in Tania Kovats' two 'Schist' sculptures, exhibited at a height encouraging the eye to follow the layers of wax as they ripple and undulate, as well as the flakes of glitter which intersperse the

coloured folds. In 2001, Kovats produced Mountain, a functional machine that mimics the formation of mountains. She used that to make her Schist series by pouring molten wax into the machine, allowing it to cool and set into sedimentary layers akin to the metamorphic rock of the title. Kovats explains that, as a sculptor, she is interested in how things are made, and that made her look into geological thinking to see how landscape features are made. The waves, of course, may also remind us of the sea and the potential shifts in how sea and land relate.

Katherine Murphy: *Labour + Repetition = Decay (#39)*, 2016

In Katherine Murphy's series 'Labour + Repetition = Decay', she repeatedly folds paper along composed lines until it is close to breaking. That suggests the stresses on workers carrying out repeated work acts. The artist, of course, is drawn in to acts of labour which physically replicate the oppressive repetition of the workplace. But that serves to emphasise the psychological difference between a creative act to produce an outcome controlled by its performer and how Marx described factory work in which 'the object which labour produces – labour's product – confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer' so that 'this realization of labour appears as loss of realization for the workers...' (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, 1844)

Navid Nuur: *Untitled*, 2015

Belonging to Navid Nuur's series of 'ball' works, *Untitled*, 2015 is a work on Gampi, a delicate Japanese conservation paper, which illustrates the artist's process-oriented interrogations into concept and form. Nuur covered the surface of a football with graphite and then wrapped it in a sheet of Gampi, a transfer which preserves the physicality of the football, and initiates a dialogue between the three-dimensionality of objects and how material relationships can be recorded and thus commemorated. Transferring the graphite from ball to sheet using the pressure of his own body, Nuur himself becomes an artistic tool and the graphite a conduit between his body and the paper. Art Historian Wouter Davidts considers the resulting mark transference as "not unlike the bad fit between any map of the world and the globe it depicts, the resulting drawing reveals the ineluctable bridge between representation and reality". Displayed behind a layer of Perspex, *Untitled*, 2015 renders the thresholds of material and bodily movement; the crinkles in the delicate sheet of Gampi and the curved volume of the football documents Nuur's participatory relationship with media which traverse and translate two- and three- dimensional worlds. Nuur also takes folding seriously: channelling theoretical physicist David Bohm, he's talked of giving equal attention to the work made and its detritus in line with seeing the physical universe as simply one representation – one unfolding – of an implicate order. That means that empty space is just as important as the forms of which we happen to be aware because they have surfaces we can perceive.

Reinoud Oudshoorn: *J-19*, 2019

Dutch artist Reinoud Oudshoorn's elegant frosted glass sculptures appear to float vulnerably, suggesting misted landscapes, despite their solid construction. They might be described as folding space: they imply an internal space that lies between the visible shapes and materials, but these areas escape our direct perception, appearing to be folded away from us. Then, once we move around to see them from different angles, they open up – unfold, if you like – into endless spatial perspectives. The effect is contemplative, even mystical.

Abigail Reynolds: *National Gallery 1974 | 2000*, 2012

Abigail Reynolds shows images of the National Gallery from 'The Universal Now', a series using photographs taken from books printed in different years that depict the same place. She splices together the book pages to make one new surface, and the publication dates of the books are part of the title of the work. Thus the past is folded into the present, evoking the way memory operates and also suggesting the other changes that went with alterations in appearance. Trafalgar Square is relatively constant in structural terms, yet 'National Gallery 1974/2000' includes an image from a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament protest on the site, so setting an anti-establishment group against the authoritative implications of the institution.

Simon Schubert: *Untitled (Schachtelung und Licht)*, 2022

Cologne-based Simon Schubert makes mysterious installations exploring themes of loneliness and

absence, but his best-known works summon a related world simply by folding a single sheet of white paper. No pencil or embossing is involved, so the image becomes visible solely through light and shadow. His love of how Magritte deals with perception and its deceptions is apparent; nor is it a surprise to learn that Hammershoi is in his pantheon, as there is a haunting stillness and precision to his unpeopled architectural interiors. The results, as in the 'Nesting and Light' series, are somewhere between homely and uncanny, and exploit the ambiguity of the intricate folds: what is light, what is substance? What is real, what is illusory?

Bridget Smith: *Blueprint for a Curtain (domestic interior)*, 2015

Bridget Smith's 'blueprint' is part of a series of site-specific installations that hang from ceiling to floor, so that the photograph is both backdrop and sculptural object – her largest iteration to date being 10 metres wide. Here, she observes, folding 'creates the ruche, that joyous, looping, upturned arc', and acts as 'a gathering up and a letting fall simultaneously, an action that creates a mesmeric, visual rhythm'. There is also a suggestion of light waves – paradoxical, given that this is a cyanotype where the white of the image represents the areas not exposed to the ultra-violet light that turns the exposed paper into that characteristic Prussian Blue.

Samuel Zealey: *Orange Republic*, 2022

Samuel Zealey's *Planes* series (2017 ongoing) starts from standard sizes of paper, in this case A3. Zealey asked people round the world to make them into paper aeroplanes, demonstrating what a variable yet iconic form that is. He then reproduces them in metal - as if origami were possible in it. Some are reproduced at 10.5 x that size, standing up to four metres high in Corten steel, so that the chemical rusting of the surface suggests that this is how aeroplanes need to end up: as monuments to what could not be sustained. The recent powder-coated example, at a more gallery-friendly scale, is shown on a custom-made stand imitating the display of ceramics in the British Museum. It has a colourfully upbeat presence likely to return us to the childhood pleasure of flying paper planes before the environmental message lands.

Beat Zoderer: *Faltungen Grün (Folds Green)*, 2003

The Swiss artist Beat Zoderer typically uses everyday materials – often office supplies – to create works which appear systematic but actually incorporate subjectivity through the introduction of 'mistakes'. Here his choice is tracing paper, some somewhat unusually coloured and some natural, some behind and some in front. Zoderer plays with its key characteristic of transparency in what you might see as an ironic reflection of the often-cited modernist demand for 'truth to materials'. Not only is the folding more haphazard than would be allowed in art of this type, but one wonders just what truth can sensibly apply to green tracing paper (actually it was sold in Switzerland for technical drawing purposes). Seen in this show, his playful tweaking of minimalist series-making may also suggest off kilter preparatory studies for Samuel Zealey's 'Orange Republic'.

Note: some artists have more than one work in the show – the additional works relate closely to the selections shown.

i Kabbalah, a set of esoteric teachings explaining the relationship between God and the universe, forms the foundation of mystical religious interpretations within Judaism

ii David Bohm (1917 –1992) was an American-Brazilian-British theoretical physicist. Quote from an interview conducted by John Briggs and F. David Peat for the January 1987 Issue of Omni Magazine

iii Gilles Deleuze: 'The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque' (1988)

iv In 'A diverse contemplation of changes', Modern Times Review, 2016