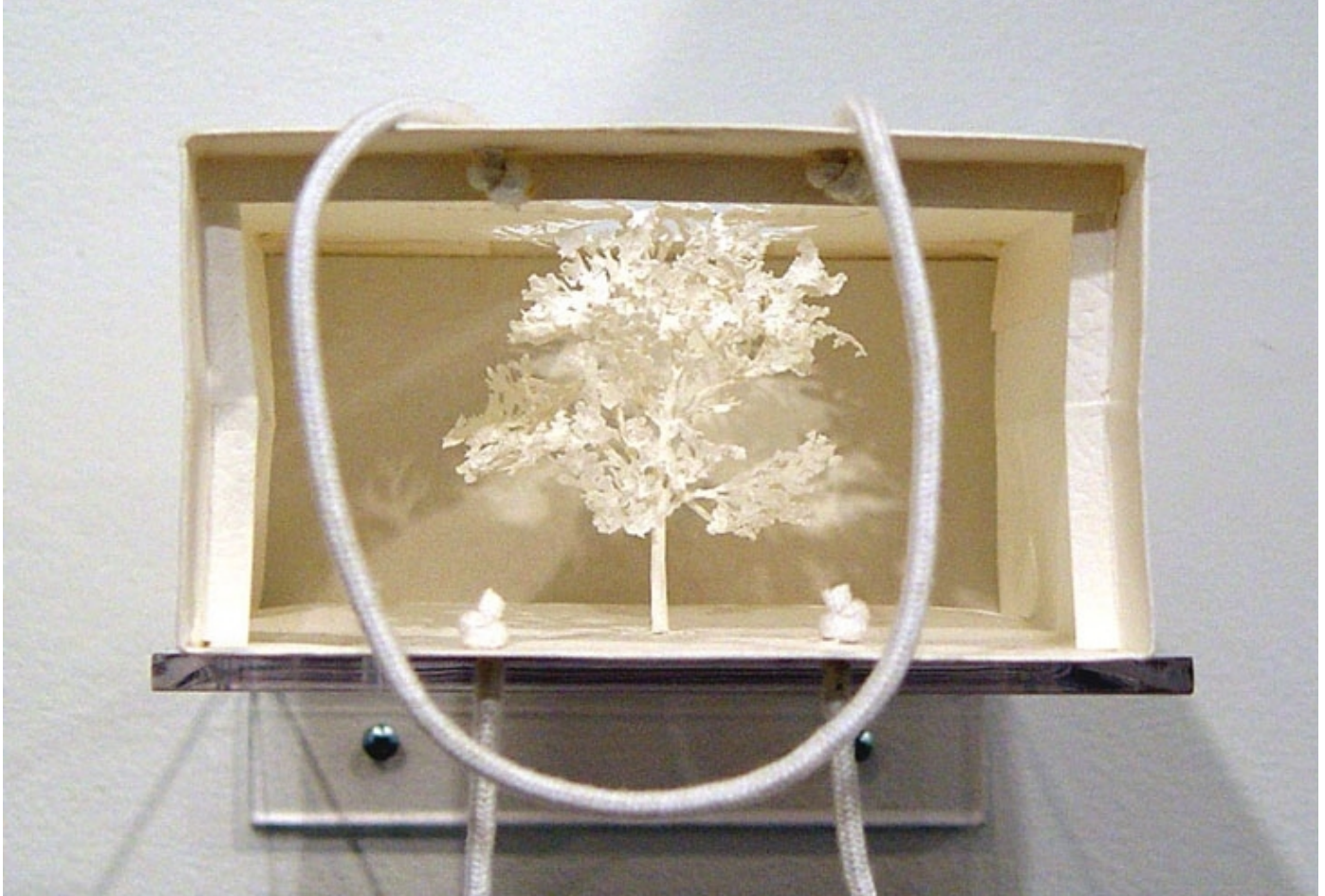


# YUKEN TERUYA: Everyday Objects

BY AMANDA STOHL



(fig. 1) *Notice - Forest Series: LVMH - Christian Dior (bag)*,  
Yuken Teruya, Japanese, (1973 - ), 2005,  
paper, glue, 8 x 15 x 19cm.

## FACTS FOR VIEWING

Born in Okinawa, Japan and now a resident of New York, Yuken Teruya approaches each of his projects with a keen sense of the environments in which he lives. His work often connects the process from nature to consumerism, as well as actively

borrowing from both traditional and contemporary sources in his works. Teruya received his Bachelor's degree from Tama Art University in Tokyo, Post Baccalaureate from Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, and received his Master's degree at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

In *Notice Forest* (fig. 1), the artist subtly draws our attention to the effects of

consumerism and globalism -- alluding to the depletion of fragile natural resources, the disappearance of cultural traditions and identities, and the distribution of wealth in the new world order. Working with discarded paper bags from takeout joints such as McDonald's and Krispy Kreme, commercial gift bags and post office packages (fig. 2), Teruya creates delicately rendered shadowboxes in which the sculptural form cut out from the container is shaped by the container itself. Using photography as the starting point, Teruya photographs trees he encounters in his daily life and then painstakingly recreates the form of the individual trees as paper cutouts that are suspended inside the bags. Light filters down through the holes to illuminate the tiny tree within each bag's miniature interior landscape in what Teruya describes as his attempt to return a spent consumer product back to the forest:

*"I cut out one side of the disposable paper bags. Then I assemble a tree from the cut-out-part; stand each tree in the same bag that it came from. When you see it under the natural light, the delicate tree shows inside a paper bag. It shows us the strength and the proof of existence of the living tree."*



(fig. 2) Yuken Teruya, *Notice – Forest Series* (7 paper bags from different stores), 2005, installation view at PSI Contemporary Arts Center.

## IDEAS WORTH PURSUING

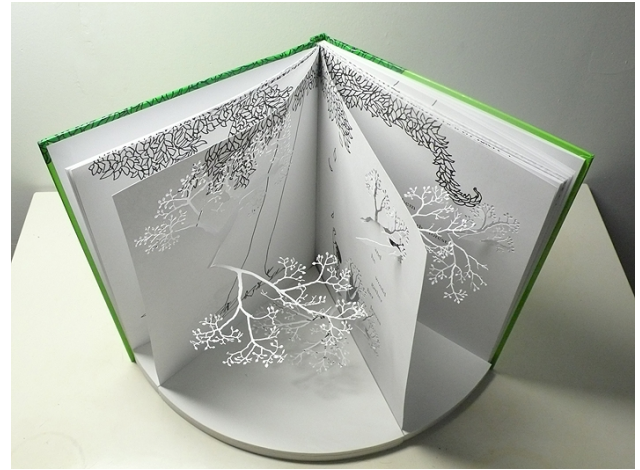
The work, *Notice – Forest*, shows the link between mass consumption and the forest. The use of paper products by fast food restaurants, which typifies the culture of consumption, is one of the biggest causes of global environmental destruction. Teruya takes the commercial Christian Dior bag and transforms it using one side of the bag to create interesting lighting effects (fig.1). The bags and packages chosen are very recognizable by our culture and others from their popularity and consumerism. Transforming their shape back into a tree creates a statement of the importance of materials and how fragile they are in our lives. Going **Green** is very fashionable right now. Recycling used consumer products

to make something new again is more appreciated now than ever. Su Blackwell, another artist that uses similar paper-craft, constructs paper sculptures out of vintage books, reusing their classic illustrations to tell the story of the book's contents (fig. 3). Teruya also has created images that come alive out of books, by instead tilting the book up so the viewer recognizes the popular title and its contents (fig. 4).



(fig. 3) Su Blackwell, *Birds of the Open Forest Dawn Series*, 2006, 27 x 22 x 23cm.

Both artists show how they transformed their ordinary objects, by keeping their source intact and recognizable to the viewer. Notice how Blackwell gives clues to what the contents of her chosen book is about inside. With Teruya, he needs the viewer to see the name brands in order for the viewer to make the connection of the consumer culture. Blackwell treats her works as a childhood picture book, not needing to read to understand what is



(Fig. 4) Yuken Teruya, *Giving Tree Project: The Giving Tree Book*, 2007, 20 x 30 x 20cm.

happening. Take note on how Blackwell displays her work, compared to how Teruya displays his sculptures using different everyday objects. Teruya's bags and Blackwell's books each create their own separate environment contained within the object's limits. When Teruya uses toilet paper rolls, the environment that is portrayed is not so well contained and seems to interact with your own space (fig.5).



(fig. 5) Yuken Teruya, *Corner Forest*, toilet paper rolls, 2006, dimension variable.



## ACTIVITIES WORTH DOING

- **H**ave students take a walk around the room and discover all the objects that are made out of paper. How are they being used and are they meant to be thrown away or last a long time? Think about its life span. List these objects and other information about them. Brainstorm what comes to mind when you view this object. Is there something you wish it could do? What is your interaction with this object?
- **A**sk what the word “**TRANSFORMATION**” means to you. Depending on your response, list examples of the transformation from one object or situation to the next. Think about how this transformation could be shown using paper products.
- **T**o get students to think about how visual cultural impacts their lives, hand out a variety of popular packages that you think they may have most likely seen. Give each student a product and giving them a few minutes, have them write down their personal story with this product: how they know it, what do they do with it, a special memory, do they love it or hate it and have them explain why. After sharing, pick random products and have others share what comes to mind from the package or product using reflective questions. Who do you think the intended audience is, etc.
- **P**resent the idea of reusing different material as a “Search And Find” game. Stage some paper objects and let others be discovered. Divide students in groups and send them in different directions and have them report back with their discoveries. Have them experiment with their findings by looking at their different uses, weights, and colors. How do their differences make you feel? Experiment with the material and see what it can and maybe cant do.
- **A**sk what the word “**TRANSFORMATION**” means to you. Depending on your response, list examples of the transformation from one object or situation to the next. After you have generated a list, pick one transformation that that you feel more connected with and explain your reasoning. Go seek the object that would best represent your chosen idea, or, from a group of products, seek one that would work with one of your transformations. To help you chose, think about what the product is made of, what it is used for, think about the product's life from production to the

garbage. Also think about your personal relationship to the product.

- In a classroom setting, give a simple demonstration of Teruya's cut-out and fold method. Setup separate workstations of different objects that are thin enough to cut. At each station give a prompt of different responses to the object that doesn't require too much thought so students can start to work. For example, "Cut out how you think a person would use this product", "Cut out the image of what this product contained. Workstations will give students the feel of cutting out different materials and automatically learn to simplify their image into a recognizable symbol.

## VOCAB

**Transformation** - *a change in form, appearance, nature, or character.*

**Green** - *something that is environmentally sound or beneficial*

## PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

**Yuken Teruya** – YOU-ken Tee-ROO-ya

**Su** – Sue

**Okinawa (Japan)** – Oh-Key-NA-wa

## RESOURCES

- The Saatchi Gallery: Yuken Teruya. Accessed April 23, 2009, [www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/yukenteruya.htm](http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/yukenteruya.htm).
- Vast collection of combined information about the artist and work. There are relating links to articles found online about his series of work and a great collection of large, high quality images of the work that was displayed at the gallery: titled and dated.
- Su Blackwell, Official Website. Assessed April 23, 2009, [www.sublackwell.co.uk](http://www.sublackwell.co.uk)
- Nice, simple site that is geared to viewing her work, which even displays whether or not they have been sold. Okay medium-sized images. Brief artist statement; not ideal when there is so little accessible information.
- Yuken Teruya Studio, Official Website. Assessed April 23, 2009, [www.yukenteruyastudio.com](http://www.yukenteruyastudio.com).
- Very easy, clean site to navigate. All of his work is divided into series or separate pieces. Small brief statement with each series, explaining his main ideas. Nice, high quality images and detailed artist statement.