



THE ART OF  
PAPER CUTTING

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# Introduction

I ARRIVED AT THE ART OF PAPER CUTTING quite by chance, after having drawn, sketched, and painted for several years. After completing a few paper cuts, I became enchanted with the medium, as I realized that the skills I had been honing with pencils and paint could be expressed through paper cutting.

From that moment onward, I have been channeling my artistic efforts into paper cutting. With this book, I hope to convey that enthusiasm to you, and inspire you to find the same delight in this precise, ancient, and beautiful art.

The *Art of Paper Cutting* features a selection of paper cuts that I made over the course of several years, reflecting diverse influences in my life. In addition to calling upon styles and symbols traditionally used in paper cutting, I have also integrated artistic techniques usually associated with drawing to create works with depth and movement.

Some of the paper cuts communicate specific messages; others are simply aesthetic, designed for the purpose of expressing beauty. All of them have been done out of inspiration, love of the craft, and a belief that any imagined image can be created through paper cutting.

OPPOSITE, PARROT STAINED GLASS,  
BLACK PAPER WITH WHITE  
BACKING, 24" X 10" (61 X 25 CM)







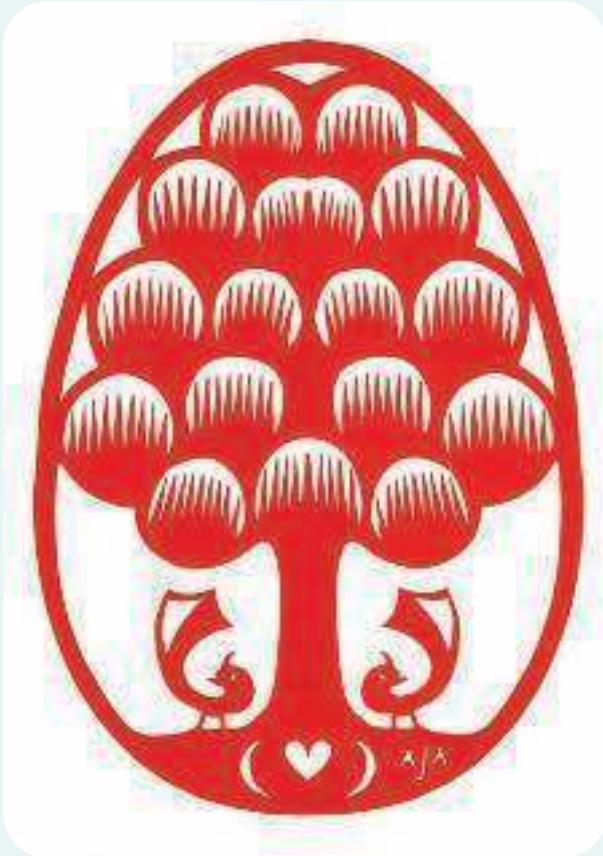
popular style, known as marques, involved cutting very delicate bookmarks. Paper cuts here are usually made with a blade, and the paper is not folded. Common motifs include mountain images, vases with flowers, rural scenes, and portraits.

In England, paper cutting became a pastime for people in the upper classes during the nineteenth century, alongside embroidery and other handicrafts. Silhouettes were a popular form of paper cutting all over Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They are an excellent method for reproducing the likeness of a person or place without using a camera.

In Holland, paper cutting is known as *papiersnyden*. It is traditionally done on white paper, without any addition of color. Dutch paper cuts are almost always cut with scissors, and though they may be either symmetrical or asymmetrical, the paper is almost always unfolded. One distinct Dutch style of paper cutting involves cutting small serrated scales.

In Poland, paper cutting is known as *wycinanki*, and dates to the nineteenth century. Polish paper cuts generally involve various colors of paper, often affixed in layers. These papers are cut, clipped, or torn, then assembled into a composite image. Peacocks, flowers, roosters, and star-shaped medallions are common motifs.

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1 TRADITIONAL DUTCH PAPER CUT,

2 TRADITIONAL POLISH PAPER CUT,



# Types of Paper Cuts

## BOOKMARKS

Paper cuts can be used to fill a variety of functions, both practical and aesthetic. In the following pages, you will see examples of my favorite types of paper cuts, and get ideas on how you can put your own paper cuts to use.

If you are just starting out in paper cutting, bookmarks are excellent first projects. They are relatively small, which means you can likely complete one in just a few hours. Bookmarks aren't only for beginners, though, and you can integrate any type of design you like, be it simple, intricate, or something in between. Insert a piece of colored paper into a folded paper cut to add a colorful background to your design. Both functional and aesthetic, bookmarks make lovely gifts.

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1 BIRD IN TREE BOOKMARK,

2 BUTTERFLIES BOOKMARK

3 BIRDS AND TREES  
BOOKMARK,

## DECORATIVE WALL HANGINGS

Paper cuts of any size can be mounted, framed, and hung on the wall. The subject of your paper cut may be anything under the sun, and use a range of colors. Paper cuts can be used to make blessings for the home, recreate a scene from a story, or convey meaning through the use of symbols and text.



1 GOD BLESS OUR HOME,

2 A ROYAL WOMAN,

## FRAMES

Paper cuts can be excellent frames for mirrors, photographs, drawings, or paintings. Frames are often symmetrical and made with a vertical fold down the middle. Measure carefully before you begin cutting to make sure that the open area

in the middle of the frame suits the object you are framing. In planning this type of paper cut, keep in mind that you want the paper cut to add beauty to the central object, but you don't want it to steal the show.



1 ROSE GARDEN FRAME,

## GREETING CARDS

There are so many reasons to send greeting cards; making them yourself with paper cuts means you never have to rely on something from the store. You can make Christmas cards, New Year cards, Valentine's Day cards, birthday cards, or anniversary cards.

Paper cut designs are also excellent for making invitations—just bring your finished paper cut to a print shop and make high quality photocopies. Paper cuts made for this purpose can be mounted on metallic paper first, then onto card stock, for added festiveness.

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1 SWAN GREETING CARD,

2 LOVEBIRD CARD,

3 CHRISTMAS CARD,

4 PEACOCK WITH FLOWERS,

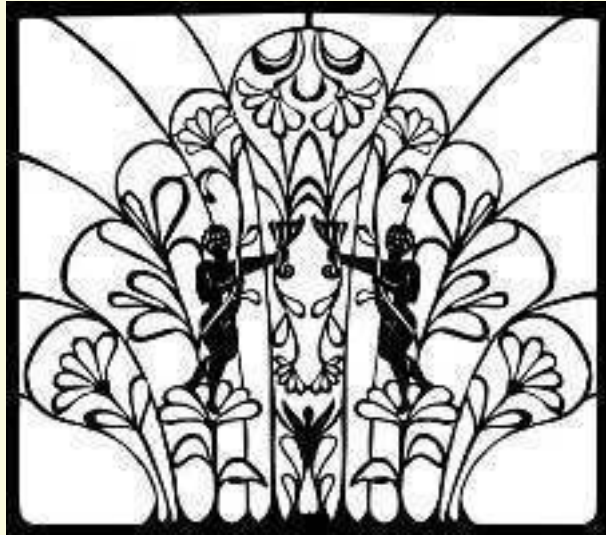


# Techniques

## SYMMETRICAL

In symmetrical paper cuts, two sides of the paper cut are mirror images of each other. Paper cuts may be vertically or horizontally symmetrical, or both, depending on how they are folded. In these paper cuts, the paper is folded, and the design is drawn onto one side. The paper should stay folded until the entire paper cut is cut, since unfolding and refolding the paper can weaken the folded seam, and cause it to rip.

1



2



**1** ANGELS WITH FLOWERS,  
BLACK PAPER ON WHITE  
BACKGROUND,  
10" X 12" (25 X 31 cm)

**2** DANCERS,  
BLACK PAPER ON WHITE  
BACKGROUND,  
10" X 20" (25 X 51 cm)

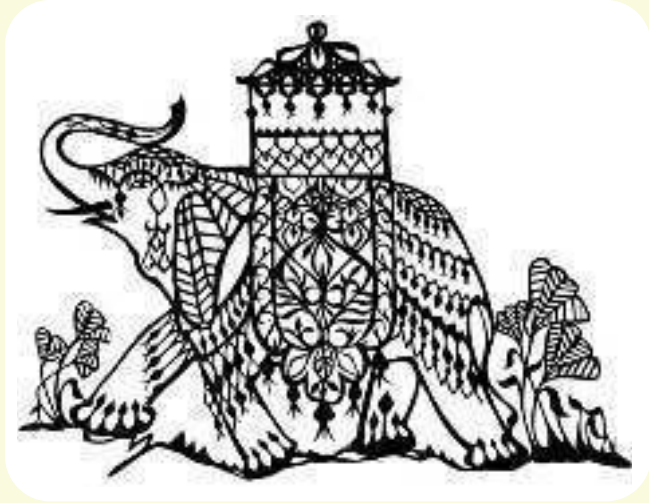
**3** HEART FILLED WITH LOVE,  
BLACK PAPER WITH RED PAPER  
ON WHITE BACKGROUND,  
12" X 10" (31 X 25 cm)



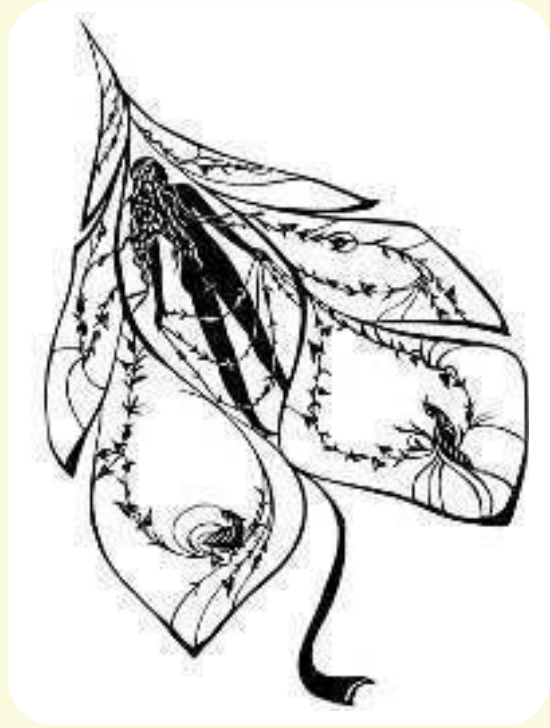
## ASYMMETRICAL

In asymmetrical paper cuts, the paper is not folded at all. The design is drawn onto the back of the paper before cutting.

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1 INDIAN ELEPHANT,

2 WOMAN IN LEAF,

3 ANGEL WITH HARP,



## COMBINED SYMMETRICAL AND ASYMMETRICAL

Many of my paper cuts feature both symmetrical and asymmetrical elements. To make this type of paper cut, I draw and cut the symmetrical elements first. I already know how the asymmetrical elements will look, and usually sketch them on a piece of tracing paper in advance. I don't draw them on the paper cut until the symmetrical elements have been cut.

After cutting the symmetrical elements, I carefully unfold the paper cut and flatten the fold. Using the asymmetrical design that I sketched on the tracing paper as a guide, I sketch these elements onto the paper cut. When it comes to cutting the asymmetrical elements, I recommend using a knife rather than scissors, since using scissors at this stage can be tricky, and can cause the paper cut to rip.

1



1 WOMAN WITH CHILD,

2



2 SCENES FROM THE CASTLE,

## POSITIVE

In positive cutting, elements of the design remain in the paper, and the background is removed. For example, if the paper cut is cut from white paper and mounted on black paper, the white paper will feature the design, and the black paper will show the background. In such paper cuts, all positive elements must be connected; otherwise, they will fall out when the background is removed.



NATURE'S LEAF,

## NEGATIVE

In negative cutting, elements of the design are cut out of the paper, and the background remains. For example, if the paper cut is cut from white paper and mounted on black paper, the white paper will show the background, and the black paper will feature the design.



A FAMILY TREE,

## COMBINED POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

When starting out, it is easier to make the whole paper cut either positive or negative. However, as you gain experience, you'll find that combining the two cutting styles in a single design introduces a world of possibilities in terms of creating shade, movement, and three-dimensional effect.

This series of photos shows the steps in making Garden Boy. First, the image is drawn onto the back of silhouette paper and positive cutting is used to remove the background of the window areas (1). After the windows are cut, I begin cutting other areas of the design (2). I continue cutting the rest of the design. Note the mirror image of letters in the bottom right corner (3). The finished paper cut is turned over and mounted on a white background (4).

1



2



3





GARDEN BOY,



# Tools and Materials

**Part of the universal appeal of paper cutting is that the supplies are inexpensive and very easy to find. All of the items below can be found in craft stores and online.**

## CELLOPHANE

This translucent, light material can be used to enhance your paper cut by adding a touch of delicate color. Cut the cellophane to size and affix behind your paper cut before mounting it on the desired background.

## CUTTING MAT

You'll need one of these if you use a blade for paper cutting. I suggest selecting a self-healing mat, comprised of layers of PVC, since this type of mat won't disintegrate with use. Using this type of mat also reduces dulling of your blade. Make sure the cutting mat you use is a little larger than your paper cut.

## CUTTING TOOLS

Paper cutting artists use either scissors or a blade to cut the paper. The choice is simply a matter of preference, so try your hand at both tools to determine which is most comfortable. Note that if you use a blade, you'll also need a cutting mat.

**Scissors** If you opt for scissors, choose a pair that is very sharp, and has short, straight blades. The shorter the blades on your scissors, the easier it is to make tiny and precise cuts.

**Blade** If you opt for a blade, choose one that is very sharp. I generally use a doctor's scalpel, but utility blades that can be sharpened or replaced easily are also excellent.

## GLUE

Use acid-free white craft glue to affix colored paper, metallic paper, or cellophane to your paper cut, and to affix your paper cut to its background. Apply the glue in carefully placed dots; do not try to spread the glue, as this can cause the paper cut to tear.

## LETTER AND PHRASE DECALS

Add a perfectly written personalized message to your paper cut using letter or phrase decals. Many companies sell phrases in prepared formats, and some even offer personalized phrases, allowing you to select the words, font, size, and color.

## PAPER

Virtually any type of paper can be used for paper cutting, though you should keep in mind that the quality of the paper has a direct impact on the longevity of your work. At the same time, you don't want your paper to be too thick, since this can make cutting it more difficult. Here are some tips to keep in mind when selecting paper:

**Cardboard or matboard** This is the paper upon which you'll mount your paper cut when it is finished. Choose a color that harmonizes with the color of the paper cut.

**Colored paper** Polish-style paper cuts often feature several layers of brightly colored paper. Select colors that harmonize with each other and make sure that the paper isn't too thick, so that it doesn't bulge upwards from the papercut.

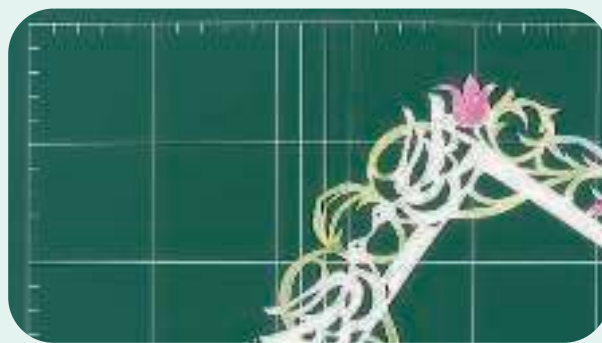
**Metallic paper** This type of paper can be used to make shimmering paper cuts, or to add a festive touch to a papercut cut from regular paper. If you are cutting the entire papercut from this paper, make sure it has a white or light-colored backing for drawing your design. Also, make sure the backing is well attached; otherwise, it can become separated from the metallic paper while you are cutting.

**Silhouette paper** This type of paper is black or dark-colored on one side, and white or light-colored on the other side. If you decide to make a dark-colored papercut, you'll need this type of paper, as the light-colored side provides the surface upon which you can draw.

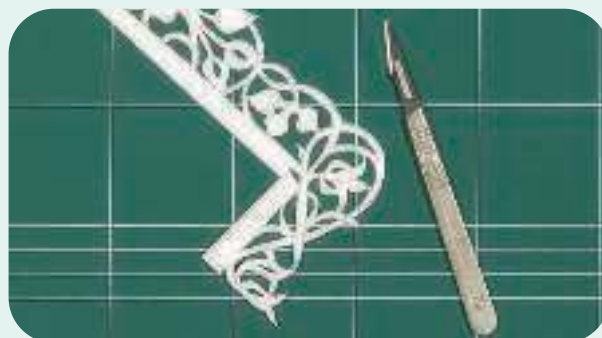
**Tracing paper or vellum** This is perfect for making a preliminary sketch of your design. When you're happy with how the design looks on tracing paper, transfer it to the paper you'll be using for your papercut.

**Variegated paper** This type of paper features at least two colors that blend gradually from one to the next. When using it as a background for your papercut, consider the orientation of the paper before mounting the papercut.

**White paper** Most people start out using ordinary white paper (the type used in most home printers) for their paper cuts. I like to use slightly glossy paper, but paper with a matte finish is fine too. An advantage of using white paper is that you can add color to the final work if you like.



CUTTING MAT



SCALPEL



CARDBOARD



SILHOUETTE PAPER

### SKETCHING MATERIALS

You'll need a sharp pencil and eraser to draw your design onto the back of the paper. If you want straight lines or perfect circles, have a ruler and compass on hand, too.

### WATERCOLORS AND FINE PAINTBRUSH

Painting your paper cut or its background adds artistic dimension. Be sure to use high quality watercolors that won't fade over time. Before applying the paint, test it on a piece of paper to make sure it isn't too wet. Overly wet paint can damage your paper cut.



WATERCOLORS AND FINE PAINTBRUSH

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1 GOD BLESS OUR HOME,

2 OPPOSITE, HEART IN  
A WINDOW,



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