

# Shelf Life

CHARLOTTE RICHARDSON-DEPPE & ANNE ROGERS



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*Charlotte Richardson-Deppe & Anne Rogers*



**Shelf Life** © Anne Rogers and  
Charlotte Richardson-Deppe, 2017.



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**Shelf Life** is a collaborative art installation that we (Anne Rogers and Charlotte Richardson-Deppe) first created for the course “Chemistry of Artists’ Materials” in Spring 2017. As part of this class we learned the process of hand papermaking and the chemistry behind it.



We began this project knowing that we wanted to incorporate the process of hand papermaking. We became interested in the material interaction between plastic and handmade paper. In thinking about plastic shrink wrap that many objects come packaged in, we decided to wrap plastic objects in freshly made handmade paper that was still wet— as the paper dried around the objects, it created a warping and tightening effect similar to shrink wrap.



The paper we used for Shelf Life is made from unbleached abaca fiber, which comes from a banana plant tree native to the Philippines. We learned in Chemistry of Artists' materials that the longer abaca fiber is beaten to prepare it for papermaking, the higher the shrinkage rate of the paper once it has dried.



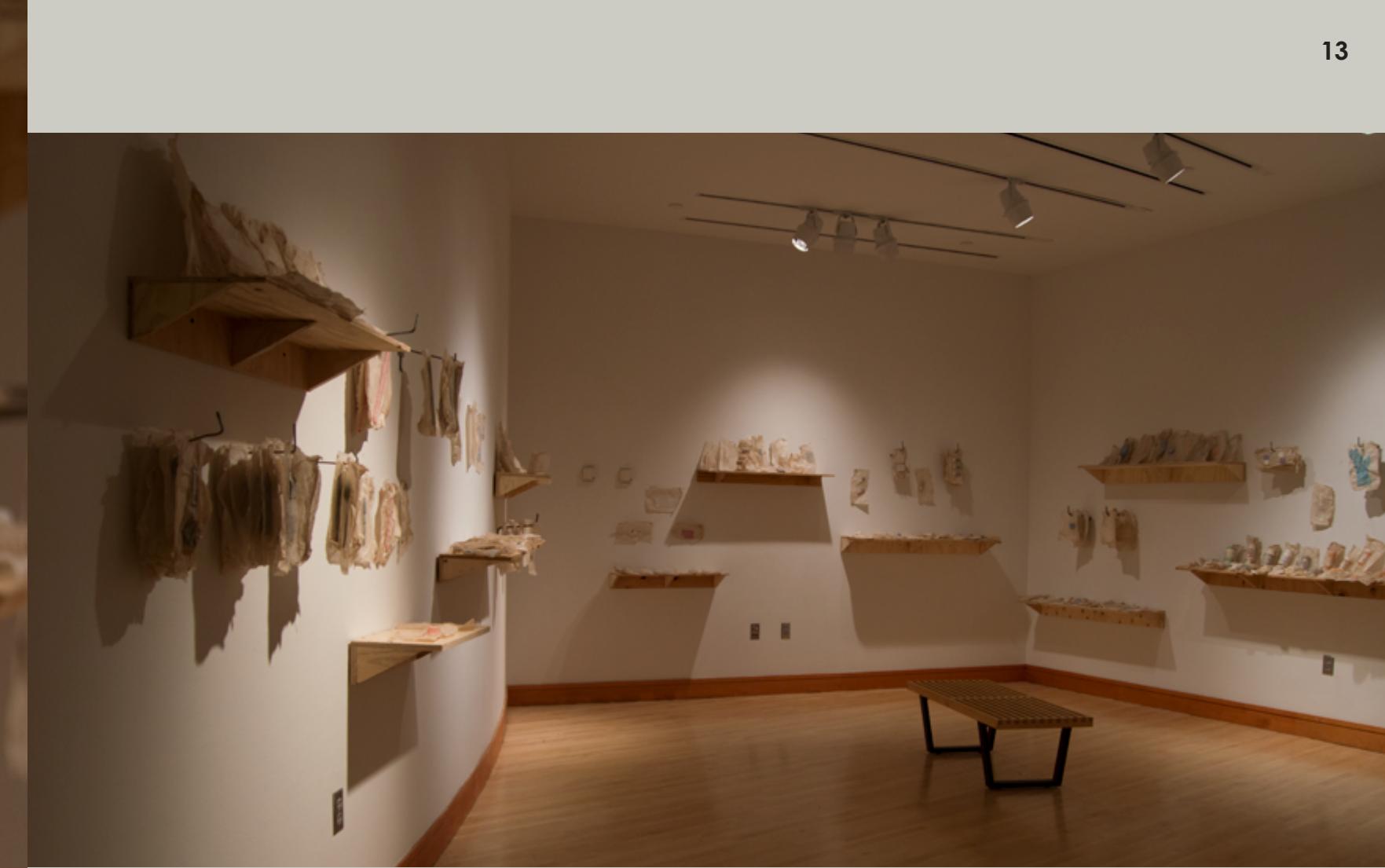
The plastic objects we wrapped in paper came from a variety of places. We wrapped plastic objects sourced from our own lives, from stores and restaurants in Grinnell, and from objects donated by other people. These included pill bottles, toiletries, lids, straws, lighters, utensils, makeup and cosmetics, plastic toys, and various plastic packaging.





Each of these items or a group of several smaller items was wrapped in a full sheet of handmade paper. For our initial critique in our Chemistry of Artists' Materials class, we made 153 paper wrapped objects. When we were preparing for our Smith Gallery show we made 134 more, for a total of 287 paper wrapped objects.

Throughout this project, we were interested in the material contradictions between handmade paper and plastic. Handmade paper can be made from just one material, and can easily biodegrade. It can also be destroyed, recycled, or remade into new paper. In contrast, plastic has an incredibly long "shelf life," and when thrown away, will languish in landfills indefinitely.



Handmade paper is prized and preserved due to the labor-intensive and time-consuming process needed to create it. Additionally, handmade paper has the inherent intrigue of handmade items in the contemporary world where so much of what we interact with everyday is mass produced and manufactured.



When someone buys an object packaged in plastic, the packaging is usually immediately thrown away to get to whatever is inside. Even if the contents are something that will ultimately biodegrade, such as food, the plastic wrapping will be around forever, even though it is what is most quickly discarded. We chose to reverse this value relationship, making the interior, protected object something that will never decompose yet that is constantly discarded, and the exterior wrapping a precious, yet easily recycled or repurposed material.



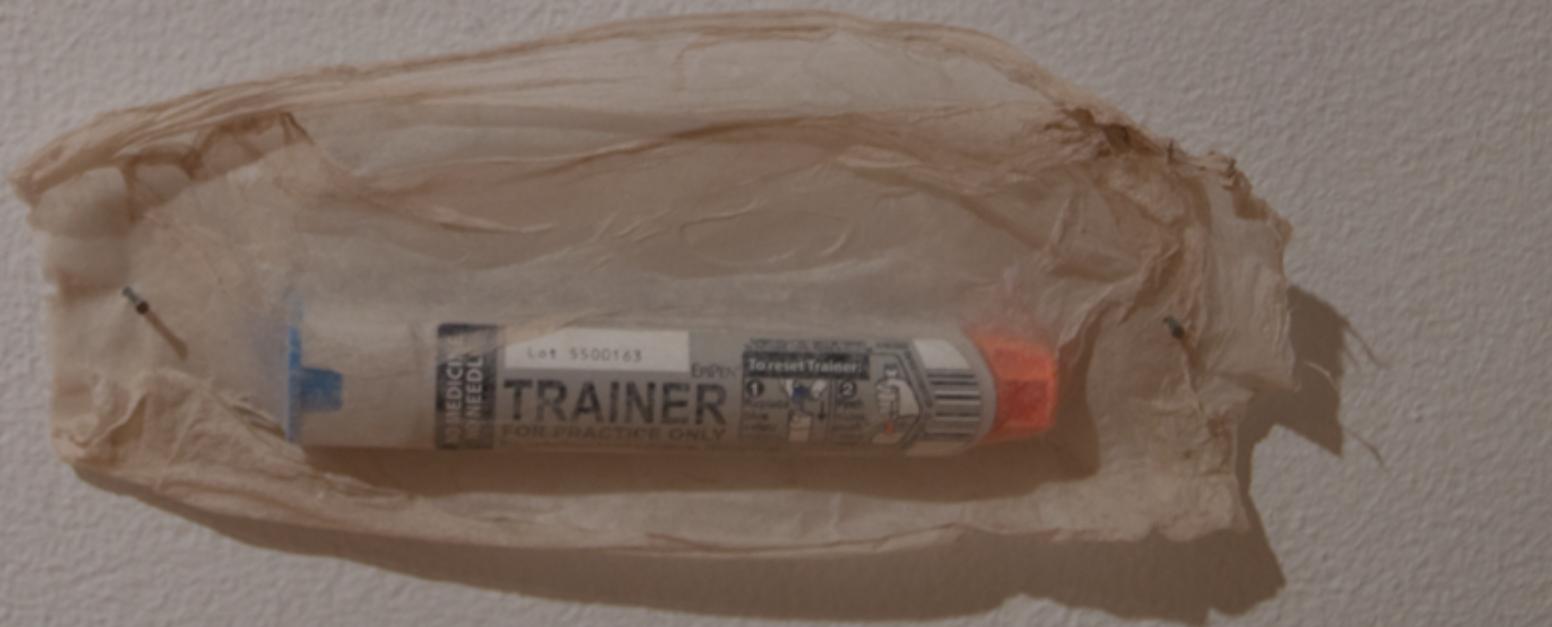




VALUE  
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STRIPS









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