

# Design in Layers

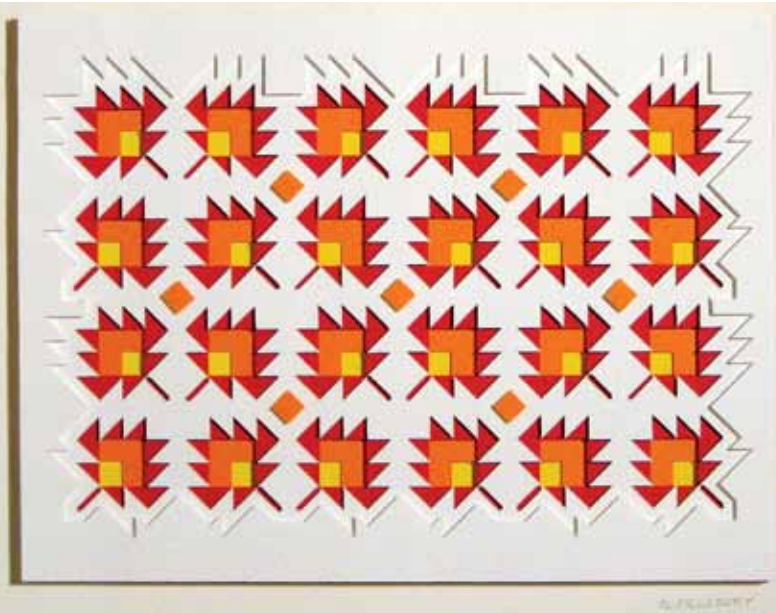
Robert Pillsbury's imaginative stacks of paper

**D**URING HIS 40-plus years as an architect, Robert Pillsbury '61, M.Arch. '65, devoted himself to the pleasures of creation and construction, often in the form of large-scale industrial water and sewer systems he helped design. Now retired, his materials of choice have shifted to the lighter medium of paper. Inspired by everything from the natural world and the elegant geometry of quilt patterns and chair caning to Italian abstract artists such as Enrico Castellani and Piero Dorazio, Pillsbury employs an architectural process and aesthetic to create cut-paper compositions that communicate a simultaneous sense of delicate intricacy and substantive dimension.

Pillsbury studied art at Harvard with painter and photographer T. Lux Feininger and dabbled in different projects over the years, at one point creating a series of life-

sized birds of prey from discarded cork sheets. It wasn't until 2009, however, that he started to devote more time to his artwork. "I always felt that you need to retire to—I couldn't just retire," says Pillsbury, who reports to his home studio in Warren, Rhode Island, at 8 A.M. every weekday, breaking for lunch and a bike ride before returning for a few more hours of work in the afternoon.

It takes him about 40 hours to craft a



Autumn

piece from start to finish. First, he drafts a design concept on paper freehand before using a software program (SketchUp) to create and manipulate a measured, hardline drawing to print out as a template. Pillsbury places that template over a sheet of

## Chapter & Verse

Correspondence on  
not-so-famous lost words

**"the commonest form of stupidity"** (January-February). Joseph Marcus responded: "I plugged the Nietzsche quotation into Google Scholar, which returns gazillions of citations. One occurs in Kenneth Hart Green's *Leo Strauss and the Rediscovery of Maimonides* (chapter 4, note 2). Green cites the Marion Faber-Stephen Lehmann translation of Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, specifically the second supplement, 'The Wanderer and His Shadow,' aphorism 206: [http://books.google.com/books?id=exAg0DL6n3IC&pg=PA186&lpg=PA186&dq=to+forget+one's+purpose+is+the+commonest+form+of+stupidity&source=bl&ots=aYif\\_r\\_ZfX&sig=5YxHQORP7Exc4-s\\_aAAxgeCq3l&hl=en&sa=X&ei=Ve7bUuj9NbOgsATRxoDACw&ved=0CEwQ6AEwBjgo#v=onepage&q=to%20forget%20one's%20purpose%20is%20the%20commonest%20](http://books.google.com/books?id=exAg0DL6n3IC&pg=PA186&lpg=PA186&dq=to+forget+one's+purpose+is+the+commonest+form+of+stupidity&source=bl&ots=aYif_r_ZfX&sig=5YxHQORP7Exc4-s_aAAxgeCq3l&hl=en&sa=X&ei=Ve7bUuj9NbOgsATRxoDACw&ved=0CEwQ6AEwBjgo#v=onepage&q=to%20forget%20one's%20purpose%20is%20the%20commonest%20)

form%20of%20stupidity&f=false.

2. Next, using Google Books, I located this translation (unfortunately there's no internal search option): [http://books.google.com/books?id=QhWSEiQFH\\_gC&dq=marion+faber+human,+all+too+human&hl=en&sa=X&ei=S\\_vbUsbtE-fjsQSHI4GgBQ&ved=0CDQQ6AEwAg](http://books.google.com/books?id=QhWSEiQFH_gC&dq=marion+faber+human,+all+too+human&hl=en&sa=X&ei=S_vbUsbtE-fjsQSHI4GgBQ&ved=0CDQQ6AEwAg).

3. You can also find this book as a 1994 Penguin Classic (again, there's no 'Look Inside ...' feature) at Amazon: [http://www.amazon.com/Human-All-Too-Paperback-Common/dp/B00FFBG1BG/ref=sr\\_l\\_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1390145718&sr=1-3&keywords=marion+faber+stephen](http://www.amazon.com/Human-All-Too-Paperback-Common/dp/B00FFBG1BG/ref=sr_l_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1390145718&sr=1-3&keywords=marion+faber+stephen). And as a 1996 Bison Books re-publication [ISBN-13: 978-0803283688]: <http://www.amazon.com/Human-All-Too-Spirits-Revised/dp/0803283687>.

4. Additional publishers have issued the translation in various editions. (Be careful with the format of your citation, though; some versions only credit Faber as the translator, with Lehmann as editor, etc.)

5. Finally, it's interesting to compare other translations, which phrase the aphorism slightly differently—just one reason that it's so difficult to unearth. For instance, R.J. Hollingdale's version of *Human, All Too Hu-*

*man* (Cambridge University Press, 1996; ISBN 0-521567041) translates it on page 360 this way: '206. Forgetting our objectives. — During the journey we commonly forget its goal. Almost every profession is chosen and commenced as a means to an end but continued as an end in itself. *Forgetting our objectives is the most frequent of all acts of stupidity.*' [My emphasis.]"

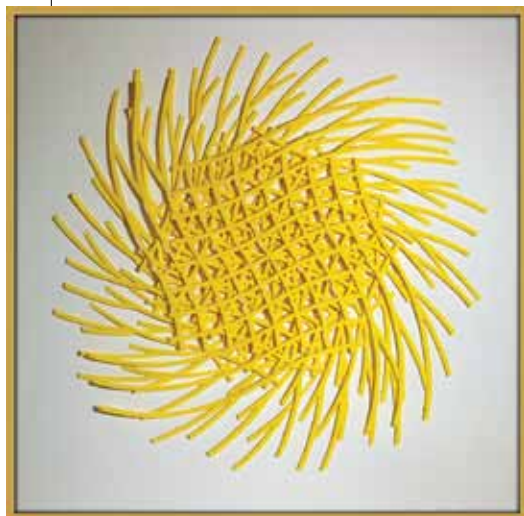
Separately, Kenneth Winston wrote: "I have in front of me the German text of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister* [Leipzig: Verlag von E.W. Fritzsche, 1886], Zweiter Band. On page 118, paragraph 206 ends with the sentence: *Das Vergessen der Absichten ist die häufigste Dummheit, die gemacht wird.* What's curious is that the English translation in my possession does not include this paragraph. Indeed it renumbers the paragraphs, so that #206 is totally different. So, perhaps the German version went through different editions and the one used by translators does not include this paragraph."

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heavy, textured paper (typically 80-pound stock) before using a pin to prick each point of the design. He then cuts from pinprick to pinprick with an X-Acto knife, producing one tier of a work that he may build up to have four or five layers. Next, he rotates each layer slightly and separates them with surgically placed, adhesive foam spacers (tweezers come into play here). When viewed head-on, the spacers are virtually invisible, creating a vortex-like, three-dimensional effect that pulls the viewer in for a closer look. Some works are monochromatic; others add a second or third color as a compositional element (see [www.rpillsburycutpaperartist.com](http://www.rpillsburycutpaperartist.com)).

"The order and craftsmanship of the forms are important to me," says Pillsbury, whose work has been featured in a number of juried shows in the past few years. "I enjoy the physical construction of the pieces—it goes back to my early years as



ROBERT PILLSBURY

### Sun Swirls

an architect. One of my first projects was building a model of the new Boston City Hall." Although his primary medium is paper, he has also experimented with thin strips of wood veneer to good effect and is intrigued by the semi-translucent potential of polypropylene.

Pillsbury is interested in moving into larger-scale commissions in mediums other than paper, although he enjoys the (relatively) immediate gratification and independence of his current work when compared to the years-long timeline for industrial projects involving numerous parties. "I should be good for a while," he says, "as long as my eyesight holds out."

~JULIA HANNA

## O P E N B O O K

# "A Fighting Faith"

**The late** Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. '38, JF '43, LL.D. '01—historian, presidential adviser, Democratic Party leader—wrote a lot (President Neil

L. Rudenstine said he covered "a cast of characters as capacious as *Aida*'s without the elephants"). It is no surprise that he was a prolific correspondent. Sons Andrew '70 and Stephen '64, LL.B. '68, have now edited *The Letters of Arthur Schlesinger Jr.* (Random House, \$35). From their introduction about this "inveterate letter writer" and his myriad correspondents:

**For the most part**, what brought him together with these individuals were his political beliefs. The abiding theme of his correspondence over a 60-year period is his preoccupation with liberalism and its prospects. He was always in some way promoting and advancing the liberal agenda; it was his mission, purpose, and justification.

What did the liberal credo mean to Schlesinger? As he wrote in his much acclaimed book, *The Vital Center*, published in 1949: "The job of liberalism [is] to devote itself to the maintenance of individual liberties and to the democratic control of economic life—and to brook no compromise, at home or abroad, on either of these two central tenets." For him, liberalism was "a fighting faith." In *The Cycles of American History* (1986) he noted that liberals do not see the unfettered marketplace as an "infinitely sensitive, frictionless, impartial, self-equilibrating mechanism." Instead, he wrote, "The liberal believes that the mitigation of [economic] problems will require a renewal of affirmative government to redress the market's distortion and compensate for its failures—but affirmative government chastened and reformed, one must hope, by stringent review of the excesses and errors of [past] centuries."

On September 14, 1960, Senator John F. Kennedy, accepting the New York Liberal

**On familiar ground: AMS Jr. at the White House, 1965**

Party's presidential nomination, proclaimed his liberalism in words Schlesinger helped craft, saying: "If, by a 'Liberal' they mean someone who looks ahead and not behind, someone who welcomes new ideas without rigid reactions, someone who cares about the welfare of the people—their health, their housing, their schools, their jobs, their civil rights, and their civil liberties—someone who believes we can break through the stalemate and suspicions that grip us in our policies abroad, if that is what they mean by a 'Liberal,' then I am proud to say I'm a 'Liberal.'"

This is what liberalism meant to Schlesinger.



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