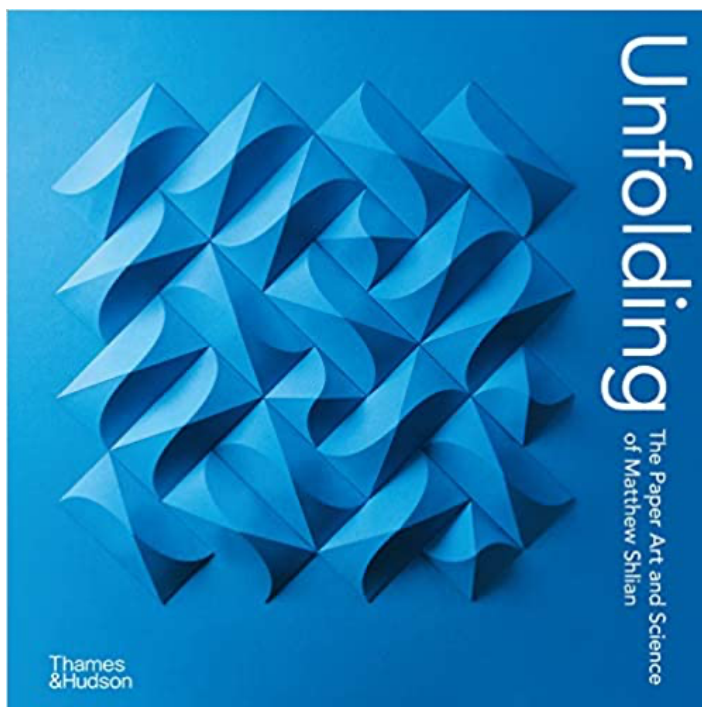


Unfolding

by Matthew Shlian. Thames & Hudson, February 2021. 256 p. ill. ISBN 9780500094280 (h/c), \$60.00

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Matthew Shlian, an artist and paper engineer, has spent the last twenty years exploring and exploiting the characteristics of one material: paper. *Unfolding* provides a retrospective of Shlian's work and process by means of his own writings and a wealth of stunning images, as well as essays and an interview by other authors. While his methods include AutoCAD, a flatbed plotter cutter, and a meticulous process of folding and gluing by hand, the title references the content of his work, which is his ardent study of the unfolding or revealing of space.

Despite the calculated appearance, and reality, of Shlian's work, he presents a thorough explanation of

his devotion to experimentation. At first glance, Shlian's work references the modular works of Minimalism and the illusionary wizardry of Op Art. Yet the text successfully establishes that Shlian's work is motivated by the incessant interrogation of one material; the investigation of space as it relates to light and form; the natural world, though not representationally; and his meditation on the beauty of geometry, especially the geometric patterns of Islamic Art.

Whether conveying the amazing properties of paper to children on an episode of *Sesame Street* or to renowned scientists at the University of Michigan, Shlian's expertise and devotion to experimentation is clearly demonstrated in the numerous compelling photographs peppered throughout the book. One strength of the images, other than their ability to maintain the rapt

attention of any viewer, is that they afford an opportunity to follow down the rabbit hole of Shlian's adventure to witness his process in detail, how he explores an idea through many iterations, and the range of scale, form, and color in his work.

There is a minimal amount of biographical repetition among the essays and Shlian's own writing. However, this monograph is ultimately a beautiful retrospective of Shlian's work to date, as well as a revelatory account of the possibilities of paper. From the text and images, a clear picture develops of Shlian's relentless pattern of making and editing, resulting in many iterations (sometimes hundreds) of one idea in a series of works with only a handful making the final cut.

Unfolding is relevant for studies in architecture, three-dimensional design, packaging design, graphic design, and even foundational art studies. It would be an excellent addition to academic or art and design school libraries. Shlian's relentless pursuit of wonder, his methodical process, and his tenacious work ethic are a model for anyone wanting to make new material discoveries or breakthroughs in the content of their work.