

The Washington Post

In the galleries: Tales that unfold from the folding of paper

By Mark Jenkins, November 12, 2016

Matthew Shlian

Although origami purists use folds only, some paper artists cut — “kiri” in Japanese. The kirigami in Matthew Shlian’s “Chirality” is intricate and elegant. And as befits art shown at the National Academy of Sciences, it also has practical applications. Shlian trained in ceramics and print media, but has collaborated with scientists on prototypes of technology such as solar cells that track the sun.

“Chirality” refers to the quality of being similar but asymmetrical, like human hands, so that mirror images don’t superimpose exactly. In Shlian’s artwork, chirality produces patterns that seem to emanate from a disruption, yet are basically orderly. A series of progressively smaller craters surrounds a large central one in “Enneagan”; it suggests the lunar surface, as well as the Islamic tile designs the Michigan artist cites as inspiration.

Some of Shlian’s creations are raised or impressed slightly, while others are fully sculptural. “Cursive” consists of dozens of forms, reminiscent of rhino horns or scimitar blades, precisely rendered in black and tightly grouped together. The tines are paper, but they look as if they could pierce the viewer the way the artist slices his chosen material.

Matthew Shlian: Chirality On view through Jan. 16 at the National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Ave. NW. 202-334-2415. cpnas.org/exhibitions.