



Up: *The City Bathers*, 2025, 132 x 61 cm, Linen, fabric, paper, and linen yarn
Down: *Bathroom series*, 2025, Linen, mulberry paper, Japanese paper, linen yarn, Tyvek paper, indigo ink, and fabric, 61 x 91 cm each

Page 64: *Bathroom cabinet and towel*, 2025, Restored cabinet, linen, paper yarn, 41 x 51 cm
Page 65: *The Golden Boy*, 2025, Hand-made paper with abaca, joss paper, Chinese calendar paper, linen, metallic yarn, 25 x 43 cm







Lin Qiying

On Paper yarn, Weaving and the Diaspora Experience

Lin Qiying photographed by Terumi Saito

Hi Qiying, it's a pleasure to have you. To start with, let's do a little time travel. Looking back at your childhood, what are your earliest memories of being creative?

I grew up in a small town in southern China, where art wasn't very present. People worked hard, ran small businesses, and had a practical view of the world. "Art" was seen as something far away and not relevant. I was the first generation in my family to go to college, and I didn't visit an art museum until then.

But I always loved drawing and making things with my hands as a kid. My mother encouraged me to draw. When we were little, my sister and I had a lot of freedom to run around without much adult supervision. We could just be creative and use whatever materials we found at home to invent games. For example, we collected large bags of empty Yakult bottles and built snaking paths across the room. The game was to tiptoe through it without knocking anything over.

Later on, what was your path to art and when did you discover weaving? I read that you have a BA in journalism, a profession you also practiced before pursuing art professionally...

My path to art took many years. I studied journalism in my undergraduate because I was curious about the world and had many unanswered questions. I worked as a journalist in China for five years. The job was exciting and eye-opening, but toward the end I was exhausted by censorship and frustrated that the change journalism could bring was very limited under those circumstances. I felt it was time to move away.

Around the same time, I discovered weaving. In 2019, I travelled to New York City for work and stayed for almost two months. I was new to the city and looked up things to do on weekends. I came across a Japanese weaving studio called *Loop of the Loom* that offered beginner classes. I was immediately captivated by the mechanism of the looms and the tactility and colors of the yarns. The first weaving book I read was Anni Albers's *On Weaving*, which also made me deeply appreciate the art form. After that, I spent a year taking fibre art workshops, both online and in person. Gradually I realized it was something I wanted to pursue seriously, and it seemed that I had a natural sensitivity for it. In 2021, I got into the MFA Textiles program at Parsons. The program welcomed students from non-art backgrounds and helped me build the foundation for many textile techniques. It was liberating to simply make art.

"I felt like a dry tea leaf soaking in warm water, after years of restriction, finally relaxing back to the original shape, finding my medium and my voice."

In your practice, you tell stories about migration, memory, and identity. Can you please tell us more about your work and why these themes are important to you?

Much of my life has been on the move. Whether writing as a reporter or weaving as an artist, my work is rooted in my lived experience. As a Chinese immigrant living in the United States for the past four years, I have experienced



*Prospect Park, 2025,
Linen, cotton, paper yarn, abaca, 41 × 30 cm*

and heard from many around me, what it's like to deal with visas and shifting political climate. These stories constantly make me think about migration, identity, borders, class, and family, as they are all connected.

I try to respond to these issues in my work. For example, my ongoing project *Weaving with Paper* translates diaspora experience into textiles. I used dictionaries and books collected by a Chinese family who moved to New York in the 1980s. I stumbled across their story when they were giving away the collection of the family's grandfather, whose former career teaching English had become useless when he moved to this country. Here he worked in hotel service but never lost his love for languages. I picked books that symbolized his life journey, cut up the pages and spun them into yarn. The process of deconstruction and reconstruction echoes the family's immigration path and symbolizes transition and resilience.

You just mentioned cutting up pages and spinning them into yarn, which I find fascinating. When did you start doing that and what do you value about paper yarn (and paper in general) as a material?

I experimented with many different materials when I was in the textile program, aiming to turn a usually flat weaving into a three-dimensional form. Paper yarn turned out to be a good option, giving a subtle stiffness and malleable structure, without being as solid as metal or wood. For one project, I made a large weaving with hand-spun paper yarn and folded it into a mountain-and-valley

structure. It held surprisingly well. But living in New York City means limited storage, so I stopped making large paper sculptures. I mostly make tapestries now, which I can roll up easily. Since then, paper has become a central material in my work. In the past four years, I have been making hand-woven figurative tapestries that incorporate natural fibers and paper. This material carries the significance of languages, writing, and documentation. To embed these connotations in my work, I've recycled books and calligraphy paper, and also made my own paper from pulp. Papermaking and spinning with paper have long histories in Asia, and I seek to bring these craft techniques into a contemporary context.

I read that you also extract colors from plants...

Yes, I usually dye my own colors with natural dyes. Dyeing with plants is like cooking, you simmer fibre and plants together and wait patiently for the reveal. Sourcing ingredients is important too. One trick to buy dye stuff is from herbal medicine shops in Chinatown. Many herbs were traditionally used for dyeing, and they're much cheaper than specialized dye suppliers.

Natural dye colors have their own characters. A yellow isn't just any yellow, it could be warm yellow from marigold, or bright yellow from gardenia, or a greener yellow from weld. If I know where a color comes from, I feel closer to it and care about it more.

"I find natural colors beautiful. They are usually more subdued than acid dyes, and I don't mind the occasional surprises that happen in the dye pot."

Is there any piece that is especially dear to you that you'd like to tell us more about?

One piece I invested deeply in was a woven painting called *To Yuliang*. It was inspired by the Chinese painter Pan Yuliang, who was active in the early 20th century. She was

incredibly talented, studied oil painting in Paris, and was the first woman in China to work in this Western style. But she was ahead of her time. Her female nude paintings were controversial when she returned to China, and she never received the same recognition as her male peers with similar career trajectories. After only a few years she left for Paris again, where she lived until the end of her life, struggling financially and as a foreigner to gain mainstream recognition. She faced systematic gender and immigrant barriers, many of which still exist today. Yet her works remain strong. No matter what happened, her art survived. She survived through her art.

I researched her life and work, and made a tapestry dedicated to her. The female body in the piece is a distillation of the women she depicted with her powerful lines. The body is made with mulberry paper collage, dyed with layers of persimmon juice, crumpled and smoothed repeatedly so it has the texture of human skin and symbolizes persistence against the roughness of life.

Next, let's speak about the creative process. Where do your ideas start from and from there, how do you proceed?

Sometimes my ideas start from material research and experiments, and sometimes they come from personal experience or visual compositions I have in mind.

"I usually begin with concepts, writing, and small sketches, and then move on to making samples."

Much of my process requires repetition, but in the idea stage I try not to repeat everything. I challenge myself to include at least one new element or process in each series, keeping it a little up in the air to see if it will work. And once everything is planned and the shuttle is in my hand, weaving is pure joy.



To Yuliang, 2024
Mulberry paper, linen, paper yarn, 152 x 89 cm

Creating your pieces is also a very hands-on and labor-intensive process...

Yes, many of my processes take time and can be hard on the body: weaving on a loom, spinning yarn on a wheel, dyeing with natural dyes. Weaving especially can take hours at a time, and I have to remind myself to stretch and drink water. But working with my hands makes me feel grounded and present. Creating something from scratch is extremely fulfilling.

Follow-up question: could you speak a bit about the importance of honoring and preserving these ancient crafts in times of AI and constant technological “progress”?

In a time of AI and technology, ancient crafts have a special charm. Techniques like weaving and hand-spinning carry the wisdom of our ancestors, who lived much closer to raw materials and made things without mass production. These practices remind us that humans created rich and beautiful cultures, and also remind us to be humble about how short our time is compared to history. If modern tools can save us time from “bullshit jobs”, that’s great! I hope we all have more time for things that truly matter and make us happy. I’ve taught many fibre art workshops to people of different backgrounds, including children, seniors, and people with intellectual disabilities, and I see how making things with our hands brings joy, calm, focus, and a sense of achievement.

Working manually is not about nostalgia or going back to the past. It’s about appreciating human physical and emotional effort, valuing people’s time and care, and paying attention to the tactile reality of everyday life.

“Manual work creates a connection between the body, the material, and the mind.”

Back to your own practice now: is there anything you’re currently working on you’d like to share with us?

Sure! I recently started a new series that combines weaving and papermaking, which I’m very excited about. This fall I did a residency at the Peter Bullough Foundation, in a small town in Virginia, where I had a big studio and could make a mess. I wove linen and paper yarn on wooden frames and then dipped the pieces into a vat of paper pulp. The fibers fused together and created very interesting textures and possibilities. I had some papermaking training at places like Penland School of Craft and Dieu Donné, but I don’t currently have access to a fully equipped papermaking studio. So I set up a small vat in my kitchen and made a series of “weaving my own papermaking moulds.” I’ve also added book pages, calendar paper, joss paper into the mixture, which created fragmented text and bits of color. It’s an exciting direction that I’ll keep exploring.

We’re coming towards the end of our conversation, so let’s wrap up with three last questions. First, are there any fellow emerging artists you’d like to recommend?

Please follow Terumi Saito (@terumi_saito_)! She’s a very talented artist working with traditional backstrap weaving and clay in a contemporary way. We met through Parsons and later did a residency together at the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft in 2023.

When you are the viewer and not the author of an artwork, what is it that you’re looking for in a piece of art?

When I’m the viewer, I look for considered thought, a distinctive style, and attentiveness to materials. I’m generally more drawn to toward craft and material based work, and also to paintings that play with color and composition. Perhaps I’m even more interested in the creators than in the artwork. I like reading artist autobiographies and understanding what happened in their lives that led them to become who they are, what moved them, what shaped them. I think the artwork and the artist are inseparable, the personality of the artist will crystallize in the work.

And last one, please complete the following sentence: When I create, I...

When I create, I wish I had all the time in the world.



Up: *Salvage Series*, 2025, Hand-made paper with abaca, linen, cotton, paper yarn, book pages, 20 x 20 cm each
Down: *The Eggs in Conversation*, 2025, Hand-made paper with abaca, dictionary pages, paper yarn, linen, cotton, 20 x 20 cm



Up: *When silence may lead to misunderstanding, I need to speak*, 2025,
Handwoven with linen, linen paper yarn, mulberry paper, book pages, and fabric, 97 × 155 cm
Down: *The Walls*, 2024, Mulberry paper, linen, pages from Shakespeare's plays and a Chinese-language chess book, 76 × 127 cm each

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- Lin Qiqing