

## Isabelle de Borchgrave's Paper Masterpieces: No Scissors, and Don't Call Them Papier Mache



by [Kristen Philipkoski](#) on [March 21, 2011](#) · [1 comment](#)

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On Friday I had the pleasure of interviewing [Isabelle de Borchgrave](#), the Belgian artist behind the amazing paper dress exhibit now at the [Legion of Honor](#). De Borchgrave, who started her paper obsession by creating paper party hats for her children, also has an exhibit at the [Serge Sorokko](#) gallery in San Francisco's Union Square, where she has installed a collection of paintings and paper objects that look incredibly realistically like pillows, vases, an enormous chandelier, giant pencils and kimonos, all created specifically for the San Francisco gallery. Everything you see in the photographs below is made of paper, except for the paintings. I met with the artist at the gallery for a quick chat, despite the fact that she was worn out from a full morning of interviews: "I hate talk. I like paint," she said. Nevertheless, we had a lovely conversation, and she complimented my [Moo](#) cards as well as my outfit after the interview. What a great start to the weekend!

Stylenik: Do you use any technology to create your pieces?

Isabelle de Borchgrave: No, never. I just paint it because you have to be very quick. Otherwise what you have in your head passes by your heart.

Sn: How do you create the pleating in your framed pieces?

IdB: When I [created the Fortuny pieces](#), I really needed to do a permanent pleat. So I took a piece of wood and I folded the paper. The first one was good; the second one: good; the third: not quite right, and after that it was completely wrong. Finally I bought a machine that came from a little atelier in the country in France. When I paint paper, it's four times bigger than (after it's pleated). I have to think about that, for example, if I would like to have a little little stripe with a lot of color.

Sn: What other techniques do you use?

IdB: I am completely an autodidact. I just use tempera, pigment, charcoal, glue, water. I mix everything. It's like a recipe. One black in ink might be more black than in acrylic. You never know because it's always one color on top of another color. I discover new techniques every day. I also manipulate the paper; crinkle it up.

Sn: Do you use scissors?

IdB: No. Pas de scissor. Terrible, the scissors.

Sn: I imagine you wouldn't call your creation papier mache?

IdB: No, never! I hate paper mache.

Sn: Does anyone ever wear your paper dresses?

IdB: Yes.

Sn: Wow, you must have to be very careful when wearing one?

IdB: Well they are usually wedding dresses or something for special occasion — you don't wear it for very long.

Sn: What are some of your most notable commissions?

IdB: I created a window for Dior, I made all the tablecloths and chair coverings for the wedding of the daughter of [Bernaut Arnaut](#) (chairman of LVMH), I made the (4-foot) wedding [veil for the Duchess of Parma](#), and I made a dress for Queen Fabiola of Belgium when she went to the son of King Juan Carlos of Spain's wedding. I also re-created Jackie Kennedy's wedding dress — the fabric was damaged so I redid it paper for special exhibitions in Chicago and Boston.

Sn: What do you have planned for the rest of your time in San Francisco?

IdB: I'd like to go to the Apple store!

Look for large exhibits from de Borchgrave coming up in Berlin and at Versailles.

All photos by me except for the paper dress image which came from the [Legion of Honor's website](#).

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Isabelle de Borchgrave at Serge Sorokko gallery



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