

The Legacy of Akira Yoshizawa

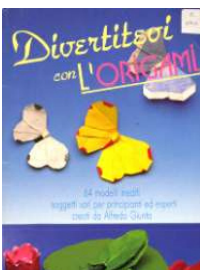
Yoshizawa's influence has spread far and wide, certainly well beyond the shores of Japan. Many leading creative folders in the West have been touched by his genius and openly admit that their work has been inspired by his ideas, his artistic sensitivity, and his respect for the paper. I'd like to introduce three leading origami artists whose work owes a great debt to



the Japanese master. They are all good friends of mine and so it was a great pleasure to talk to them on the telephone to ask each of them the stock questions which I'd prepared.

Alfredo Giunta

Alfredo Giunta born in Sicily, and now lives in Vicenza in the north of Italy. He has been an active origami designer since the mid 1970's, and he was the first prizewinner of a competition organised in 1983 by the Centro Diffusione Origami to design an origami figure of Pinocchio. He has published several origami books of his works: these two are from the Italian publisher, il Castello.



“Divertitevi con l'origami” (Enjoy yourself with Origami) and “Origami: I Piccoli Animali” (Origami Little Animals).

Here are a few photographs of his models which display a keen sense of form and artistry and colour.



DB: Tell me about your introduction to the origami work of Akira Yoshizawa

AG: The first time that I saw models

folded by Yoshizawa was in his books that I bought from the C.D.O. I remained fascinated by his folds, the liveliness of the animals, and the roundness of their forms was something incredible to me. His entire work reflected his philosophy in creating a model, that is to learn from nature, just by observing.

He used to say, “When you fold, the ritual and the act of creation is more important than the final result. When your hands are busy your heart is serene”.

DB: When did you first meet him, and what were your impressions then?

AG: I met him the first time in Florence in 1983, for me this encounter was like a dream come true! It was incredible for me to hear directly from his voice his thoughts on origami and most of all, his hands dancing in the air while folding a butterfly. He really opened for me a window to the beautiful world of creativity.



Alfredo Giunta

My second meeting with Yoshizawa was at the “Origami e Grafica” exhibition in Milan in September 1987, organised by Candida Zanelli.

DB: Can you tell me about any important lessons you learned from him?

AG: I learned from him the fine and artistic technique of “wet folding”, that allows you to give life and shape to any

model. I use this often in my models, and this led me towards easier, more direct designs.

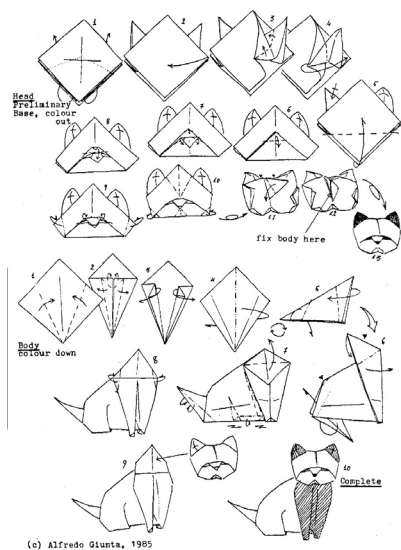
DB: Which are your favourite designs of his?

AG: I don't have a favourite designs of his, I love them all!

DB: Which of his techniques do you admire? Have you used any of these yourself?



Kitten by Alfredo Giunta



AG: I saw his way of giving his animals a rounded, three-dimensional shape, and this I tried to do with my work.

DB: Which of your designs show his influence?

AG: I think that the model of mine that mostly reflect his influence is the "Kitten", two pieces, head and body well shaped, very Yoshizawa!

DB: Do you have any other comments to make about Akira Yoshizawa?

AG: I think his style is disappearing today, with many super-complex, realistic designs being favoured by young creators: in their models they seem to be looking for more folds, rather than fewer! Yoshizawa relied on suggestion rather than realism and it is this quality that I admire, and seek to adopt in my work.

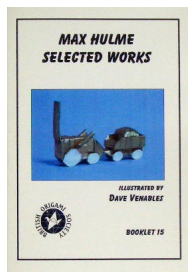
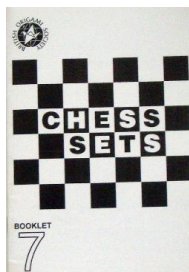
Max Hulme

Max Hulme lives in the small town of Broseley in the English Midlands, where he works as a School Technician. He has been a BOS member since 1972.

Max was a leading light in the British origami renaissance of late 1970s. Having absorbed Yoshizawa's influence for animal folds, he went on to tackle more complex engineering style subjects, and he's well known for his origami versions of railway engines and rolling stock. He also pioneered a technique for highly detailed insects using a rectangles and multi-sunken waterbomb bases.

He continues to be an active creator today, and his designs show an unrivalled logical approach. They are frequently challenging, although very satisfying to fold. His work deserves to be much better known throughout the origami world.

His work can be found in a variety of BOS publications, notably these booklets available from BOS supplies.



DB: Tell me about your introduction to the origami work of Akira Yoshizawa: when did you first meet him, and what were your impressions then?

MH: My introduction to Akira

Yoshizawa, the man and his work, happened at the very first origami meeting I attended, the BOS convention



Max Hulme

in Birmingham in 1972. I was in my early twenties at the time, and I had about twenty original creations under my belt. I had just passed my driving test, so attending a convention 30 miles away was to be an experience! The exact order of events is difficult to recall as the weekend was such a blur. At this convention Akira Yoshizawa was the very special guest.



To me, the name meant little, but this changed very quickly.

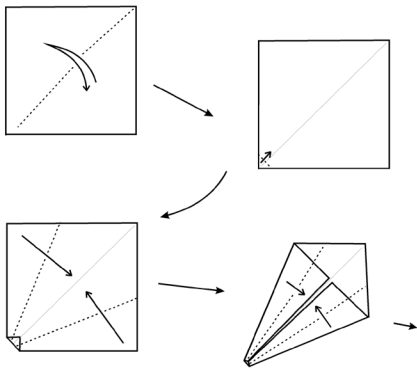
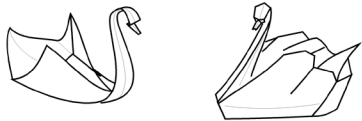
I recall that from a collection of cases, we were treated to an almost endless display of wonderful creations. Each was carefully and lovingly removed from its protective box and wrapping, to be met with gasps of admiration and applause. This appreciation in turn widened the smile on the face of Yoshizawa and he produced even more wonderful, life-like, motion-filled models. I particularly remember the greyhounds, in full racing flight, rounded, three dimensional, thin legs, and a tail of proportional length. Models such as this opened my eyes to what was achievable from a piece of

paper, models made in three dimensions, models which conveyed a sense of life.

Another instance which left a lasting impression was Yoshizawa's "party piece." Holding up a large, white, pre-creased square of paper, he effortlessly flipped it into the air where it "magically" collapsed into a base which, within a few seconds, had been adjusted and transformed into the winged horse, Pegasus. What a showman!

Swans

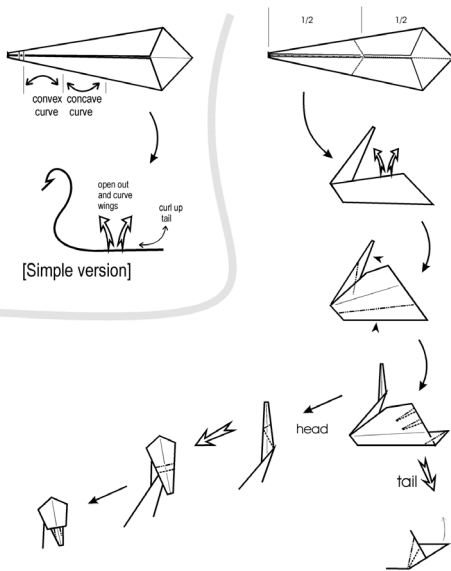
19 August 1999



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Swans [pg.2]

(ctd.)
19 August 1999



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Over the weekend, Yoshizawa took a lot of time to show and teach us his approach to folding. He was strict, but underneath there was a twinkle of schoolboy mischief and playfulness in his teaching. I still even now smile to myself as I recall the suppressed delight he took in the difficulty the translator was having as she struggled to find the correct English for his story of why the dog turned its head over its shoulder "from the tail comes this wonderful aroma"...

Such was my unforgettable two day introduction to Akira Yoshizawa and his creations.

DB: Can you tell me about any important lessons you learned from him?

MH: There are many!

- Paper has a "grain", it folds easier along this grain and is stiffer in this direction. Also because of this grain the paper expands/shrinks unevenly in different directions
- Avoid lines and edges going across models as they break up the natural line of the model
- Don't use red for a butterfly as your eye will be drawn to it.
- Animals have a "closed" back
- Don't over-moisten the paper. Use a damp cloth with the edges folded into the middle, dampen one side, turn paper over, dampen the other side, and wait for moisture to even out. Be aware that the heat from your hands will tend to dry out the model during folding.
- Keep the level of detail, whether simple or complex, the same throughout.

DB: Which are your favourite designs of his?

MH: Again, a lot!

- Greyhound: Graceful lines
- Rabbit: This is the design from which I realised that a crimp could produce back legs and so a point for every limb was not necessary.
- Gorilla: For the simplicity with

which the face is produced.

- Swan: The economy of the fold, even the centre crease line is on a swan's bill.

DB: Which of his techniques do you admire? Have you used any of these yourself?

MH:

- The main technique I use is how to dampen a piece of paper evenly.
- Use of a crimp or a pleat to suggest a limb.
- Knowing that two ears could be made from a single point helped me to devise a similar result.

DB: Which of your designs show his influence?



MH: Monkey, Brown Bear, Polar Bear, Elephant, Frog, Seal, Squirrel, Deer, Horse, Goat, Cat, Mouse, Scottie, Gorilla mask, Cat mask, Chess sets, Frogman, as well many other designs of mine which lend themselves to a wet folding technique.

Michael LaFosse

Michael LaFosse is the third origami artist to whom I posed the questions about Akira Yoshizawa's influences on his own work.

Michael runs the Origamido Studio in Haverhill MA, USA. His answers to my questions provide a good introduction to him and his activities.

DB: Tell me about your introduction to the origami work of Akira Yoshizawa.

MLF: I first learned of Master Yoshizawa and his remarkable origami art from a



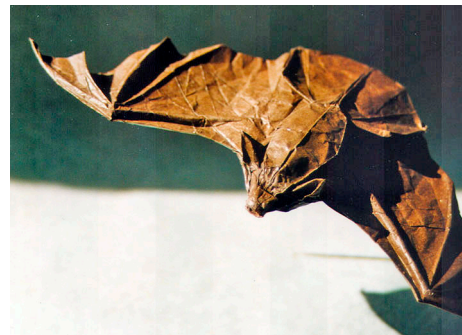
Michael LaFosse

Readers' Digest article I read when I was about 10 years old. I had been folding paper since the age of 5, and had folded the traditional crane, waterbomb, airplanes, frogs, and flowers. However, I had never seen origami like Yoshizawa's before! I was deeply moved by his origami sculptures, and the article's account of Yoshizawa's life. As I sat there, in somewhat of a state of shock, I knew the path my life would take.

For years, I had only those photos in the article to go by, so I did not know that several of his origami animals were from two pieces of paper. This was a good for me, since I strove to duplicate the works from single uncut squares, and eventually, I did. In hindsight, it was also good that I did not have access to any of Yoshizawa's origami diagrams: all I knew was that he had figured these out on his own; therefore, I supposed, I could too! I worked tirelessly on these problems, and I discovered many original origami design breakthroughs--for those days-- which I could only appreciate later, after I met Lillian Oppenheimer, and was exposed to "the state of the art of origami" from her extensive book and model collection. My work compared favourably to the creative

efforts of others of the day. (Incidentally, it was at Lillian's apartment, in the late 1970's, that I first saw photos of David Brill's origami lion family. Not until then did I see anything from anybody else that came close to capturing the art-spirit of Yoshizawa's work.) I was further motivated to continue my efforts, but influential people in the "origami community" seemed to dismiss this type of work as "paper sculpture", and not origami in their sense of the word, so I had stayed away from the origami community for about the next 10 years deliberately, so I could be free to solve origami problems on my own.

DB: When did you first meet him, and what were your impressions then?



MLF: I finally met Master Yoshizawa in 1991 at his weekend-long Master Class in Ossining, New York. I was lucky to learn about the event by chance, just a couple weeks before, and was luckier still to get a seat in the class. It happened when I saw Peter Engels' new book, which listed contacts for "The Friends of the Origami Center of America." I wondered if Lillian was still alive and how things were going. I got up the nerve and phoned them: Michael Shall answered the phone! We had a great time playing "catch-up". Michael Shall told me about the seminar and he urged me to phone the coordinator, Mrs. Emiko Kruckner, IMMEDIATELY—there were few, if any spaces left. He told me to phone Lillian

right after that because she always wondered what happened to me. I was elated that both Lillian and Master Yoshizawa were still alive, and amazed by the timing of my return to the origami community. I was so excited to finally meet the man who most profoundly changed my life!

DB: Can you tell me about any important lessons you learned from him?

MLF: I learned that one could create new origami designs. That never occurred to me before I read the article about his creative efforts in origami. I had just assumed that everything one could do had already been discovered.

Origami could be a powerful and expressive art. The subtle shaping of Yoshizawa's art left room for the viewer to fill in the gaps about the creature's character.

Strive for perfection, no matter how long it takes to realize your goal. Don't give up! Just move those ideas that are not ready to the back burner, until it is time to devote more effort to the challenge.

Use the best papers— insist on the finest and correct quality of materials through every step of the process!

Study your subject and know it well. Both a person's knowledge and his ignorance of the subject show in the final work.



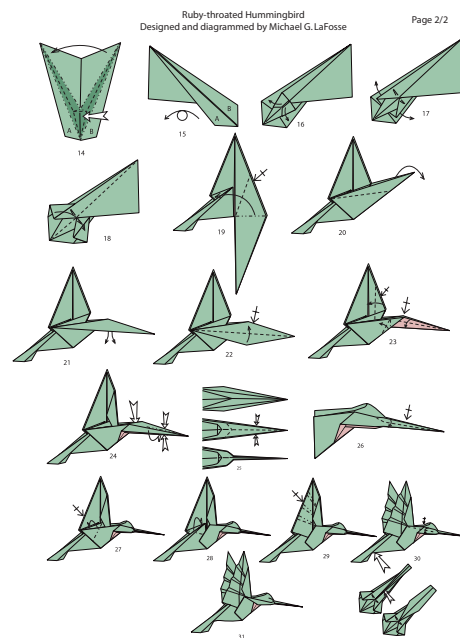
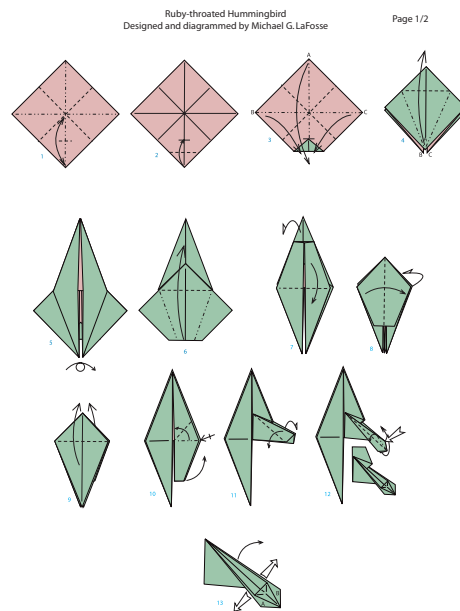
These are just a few points that I hold as tenets for my own work. I also learned

that origami art could be a professional career. I have been practicing origami for over forty years now, and professionally for twenty. In the mid 1970's I began to use the word "Origamido" (the school, path, or way of folding paper) because I wished to distinguish fulfilling art from the common craft of folding paper into simple shapes. This study of nature and the process of interpreting creatures in folded paper has indeed become my life's work, or path to artistic fulfilment.



About this word, Origamido. When I met master Yoshizawa and told him how I felt about this kind of effort in origami he told me that he, as a Japanese man, could not as easily use that word, for the "do", or the way, was so strongly connected to Bushido, the established "do"s of the samurai warrior. In the mind of many older, more traditional Japanese people, this might not sit well. He said, however, that he agreed with me about the reality of Origamido, and that in Japan it would be acceptable for a non-Japanese person to establish and use this word. He was pleased that I have begun to use Origamido as a name for what we were doing. Richard and I established the Origamido Studio in 1996, so that

there would be a place where students, could come and learn the art of paper folding, and make special paper for



serious pieces of origami art. We work as design professionals and artists dedicated to advancing the development of origami in a respected manner. Other artists, such as Robert Lang, Satoshi Kamiya, Ethan Plaut, Daniel Robinson, and Chris Palmer have collaborated on a variety of projects and activities here.

DB: Which are your favourite designs of his?

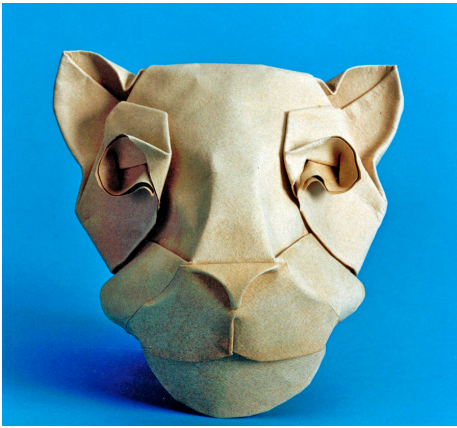
MLF: Richard Alexander and I have been fortunate to have seen thousands of master Yoshizawa's works. We have visited his home on several occasions, worked with him on four major exhibits of his works, and he has visited Richard and I at our home and studio. It is difficult to name a small number of favourites. However, I can quickly list two: the self-portrait from the Readers' Digest article, and a little, green-colored sparrow, which stood on its two feet. The self-portrait is a masterpiece I find equal to a Rembrandt portrait! That was the piece that spoke so powerfully to me and started the "art spirit" in me.

The little bird was one of the last pieces that I saw of the master's works. It was during our visit with him in his home for his 88th birthday celebration. It was placed before us, upon the low table, and I was transfixed. Never before had I seen such a complete understanding of the subject displayed in a work of origami. He captured its intensity of being, as if it were fixated on finding a morsel of food immediately.

DB: Which of his techniques do you admire? Have you used any of these yourself?

MLF: I immediately began experimenting with wet-folding heavier papers, and at age 16, I began making my own papers. I also began experimenting with various starch pastes and discovered methyl cellulose for application while

folding – a material and set of techniques that many of my students now appreciate too.



DB: Which of your designs show his influence?

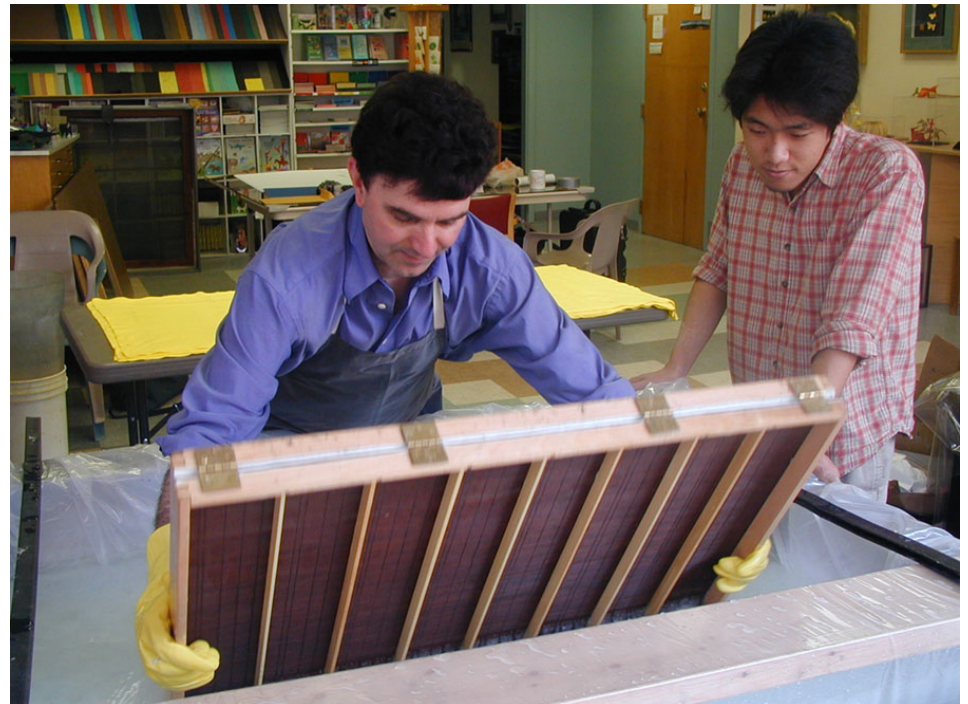
MLF: Perhaps my bat, goldfish, frog, and turtle show Yoshizawa's influence more than other pieces from my repertoire. Both of us are Biologists, and in my career I have studied these subjects for extensively. I often sculpt specific individuals of these kinds of creatures that I capture, rescue, or observe. My more detailed work, such as the bat, displays the result of more than a decade of research and development – something I would not have considered had I not learned of Yoshizawa's perseverance for perfecting an origami model.

DB: Do you have any other comments to make about Akira Yoshizawa?

MLF: Richard and I often discuss Yoshizawa's work and life. We have seen him as a grand master, preaching to the admiring worshippers. We have been with him as he thinks and watches and comments about American youth. We have shared stories about mutual acquaintances, artists, and have shared business philosophies. We have mourned our good friend, Emiko Kruckner, and since her death, I have not been able to communicate sufficiently effectively with Master Yoshizawa. We look back on the

numerous photos of him, and particularly the one from the 1970's, and imagine ourselves at a similar age, but without a pioneering mentor. As difficult as it is for us to push forward with a career in origami, we wonder what it must have been like for him. We wish that he were more of our time. He was definitely stuck in a previous age of the rigid structure and discipline of kata. What would he have been like, and what would his art be like if he were beginning his origami career today?

Yoshizawa's art has had a remarkably broad reach. Witness the numerous origami artists, worldwide, who were inspired by his work. I and many others are indeed fortunate to have know him and his art.



LaFosse and Kamiya making paper