



Discourse
from the end of the line

August 2009

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ON THE COVER: Martin Lester's spirit kite flies over San Vito, Sicily at the first Festival Internazionale degli Aquiloni San Vito Lo Capo. Story on page 38.

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FROM THE EDITOR

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In this issue of *Discourse*, we find another essay on the giant kites of Guatemala. Graduate student Daniel Bassili writes his observations of the cultural, historical, and political significance of these creations.

David Kahn, director of the San Diego Historical Society, writes about his notable collection of Japanese kite paintings, *tako-e*. David has spent years amassing a wonderful survey of 20th Century Japanese kites.

Striking photographs from Tom Jeckel and Chris Bell illustrate the power of kites in Afghanistan.

Finally, Ali Fujino gives insight into the current and future status of the Drachen Foundation. Having been actively involved in the kite scene for 15 years, we will be no less involved in the future, but we will move toward a more user-friendly online presence, as well as a sustainable, long-term bricks-and-mortar one.

It's been an issue or two since I solicited input from you, our readers. We welcome articles about your kite passions, photo-essays of significant events, breaking news in kite technologies, or simply, reflections upon kite personalities or kite venues.

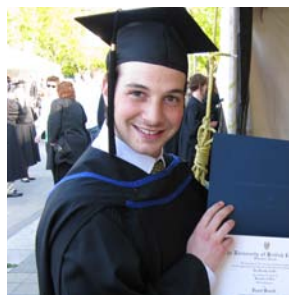
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Discourse is published on the Drachen Foundation website several times a year and can be downloaded for free at www.drachen.org (under "Publications").

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An international traveler with a visionary eye, Tom Jeckel captures the world as a photographer, kite maker, and journalist. Jeckel and friend Chris Bell take us to Afghanistan in 2003, when the kites came back.



Tom Jeckel

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From work at the Smithsonian to her present status as administrator for the Drachen Foundation, Fujino is an expert in archival practices. She works daily with the Foundation collection, organizing and storing its thousands of items.



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Kahn frequently visits Japan and owns a large collection of Japanese kites and kite paintings. He also collects other *mingei*, or Japanese folk art, including sake flasks and clay dolls. Kahn is Executive Director of the San Diego Historical Society.



Chris Travers

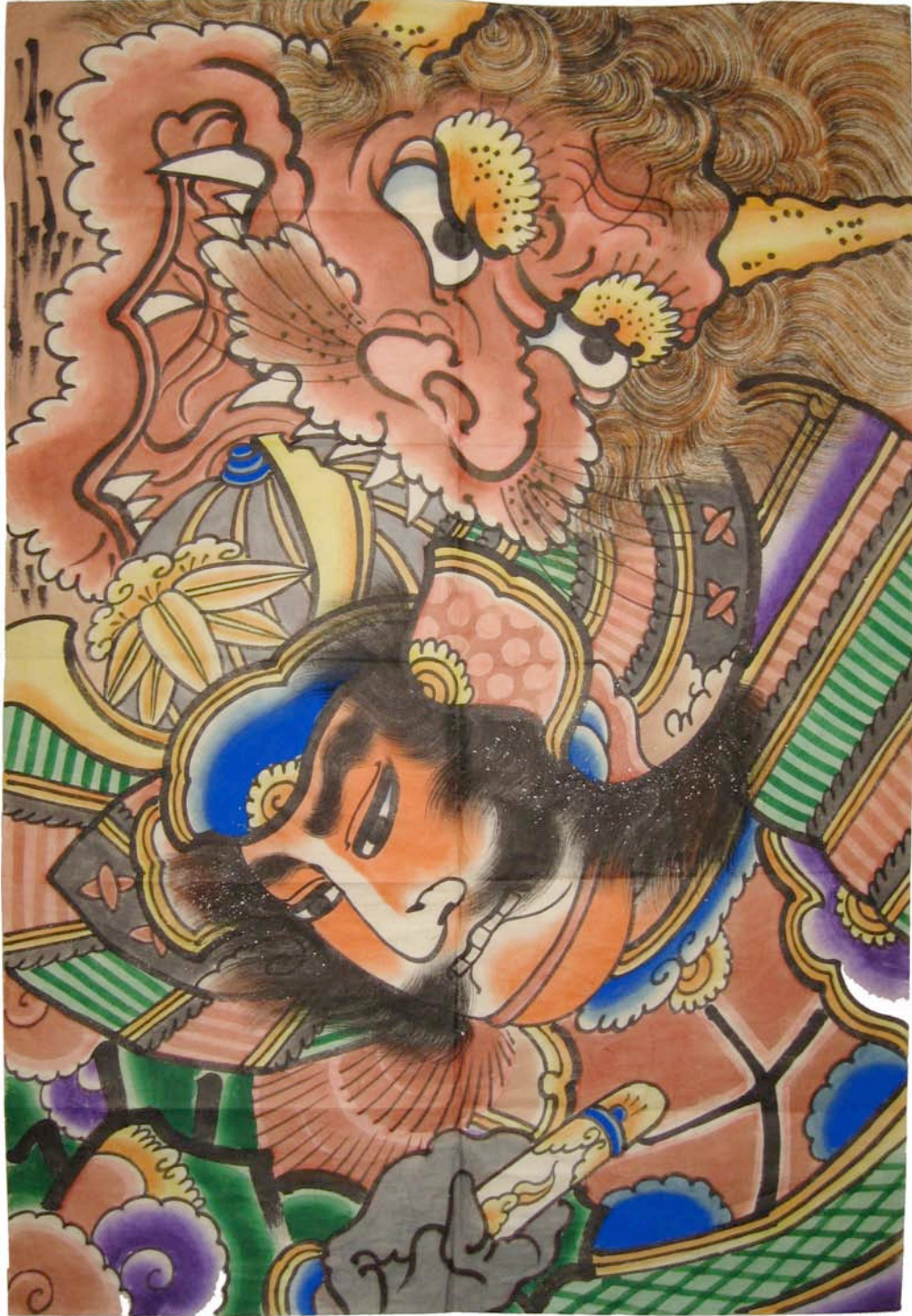
SCOTT SKINNER
Monument, Colorado

A former Air Force instructor pilot, Drachen's board president has flown and designed kites for three decades. Skinner's military training created the structure for him to express himself as a visionary kite artist.



Jose Sainz

A NEWLY UNCOVERED
COLLECTION OF 1960S
JAPANESE KITE PAINTINGS
David M. Kahn



All photos David M. Kahn



PRECEDING PAGE: Fig. 1, Tsugaru Kite Painting, origin likely Hirosaki. Kite maker unknown, *Raiko*, 38 x 26 1/4".

THIS PAGE: Fig. 2, origin unknown. Fujimoto Hiromu or Hirotake, *Soga Brothers*, 29 3/4 x 31 3/4".

Long ago in 1962, David Kung published a charming, limited edition book, *Japanese Kites: A Vanishing Art*, which drew attention to the exquisite work of elderly Japanese kite makers, some of whom had embarked upon their kite-making careers at the turn of the 19th into the 20th centuries. Scott Skinner first introduced me to this book. Kung expressed concern that the traditional craft of the Japanese kite maker might eventually die out with its then-aging practitioners.

The Japanese market for hand-painted, traditional kites made by professional kite makers has unquestionably been shrinking over the years. Relatively few professionals seem to still be in business and the prices for their work has soared. The contrast between the huge number of hand-painted kites readily available in Japanese stores selling folk arts, or *mingei*, as recently as the 1980s versus today is striking. These days

the stock of hand-painted kites looks distressingly thin even at once-reliable outlets such as the wonderful gift shop of the Japan Rural Toy Museum in Kurashiki near Okayama.

Against this background, I was thrilled when recently given the opportunity to purchase about three dozen hand-painted Japanese kite paintings, or *tako-e*, which had been acquired in Japan during the 1960s by a dealer in Japanese folk art. The 1960s were perhaps the last golden age of the Japanese kite. It is conceivable that some of the *tako-e* date to before the 1960s; all that I could ascertain is that the *tako-e* were originally *purchased* during the 1960s.

Kite makers typically begin work on a *tako-e* by sketching out a basic design in pencil. That design is then overlaid with black ink applied with a brush. Sometimes, to save labor, kite makers print the kite's basic design from a woodblock. Either way, colors are then painted in and the *tako-e* is finally mounted on a frame of bamboo or other lightweight material.

Occasionally, *tako-e* were, and are, produced specifically for collectors and never really intended to be mounted for flying. In other cases, *tako-e* were set aside as part of an individual kite maker's stock, ready to be mounted on frames to meet market demand whenever the need might arise. For example, when one of Tokyo's last traditional kite makers, the famous Hashimoto Teizo, died in 1993, he left behind a substantial quantity of unmounted *tako-e* in his shop. At one point the Kite Museum in Tokyo was selling for 1,000-1,500 Yen (then about \$8.00-\$12.00) simple, black and white *tako-e* that had been printed by Hashimoto from woodblocks. The point of selling these *tako-e* was to raise money for a Hashimoto memorial.



Fig. 3, origin unknown. Kite maker unknown,
Chinese Lion with Peonies, 13 ¼ x 18 ½".



Fig. 4, Tottori? Kite maker unknown,
Ushiwakamaru, 26 ¼ x 26 ½”.

The group of 1960s tako-e that I recently purchased includes the work of well-known makers such as Hashimoto, as well as Kinoshita Kaiichi from Takamatsu. There are also beautiful examples of work by makers I have so far been unable to identify. In some cases, the places of origin of some of the tako-e are also difficult to ascertain.

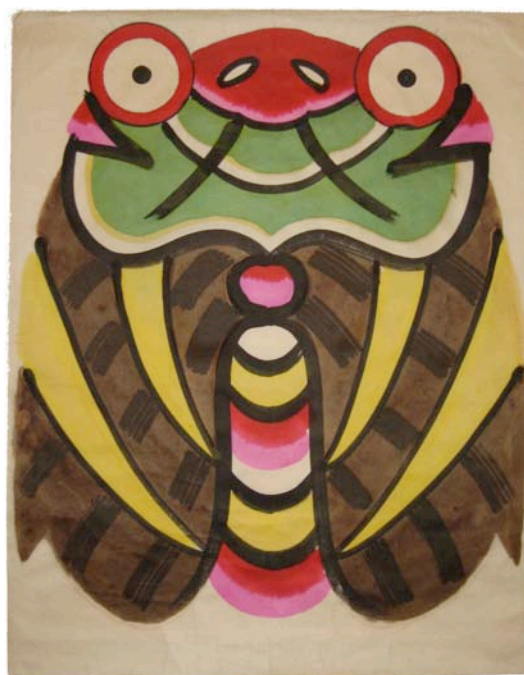
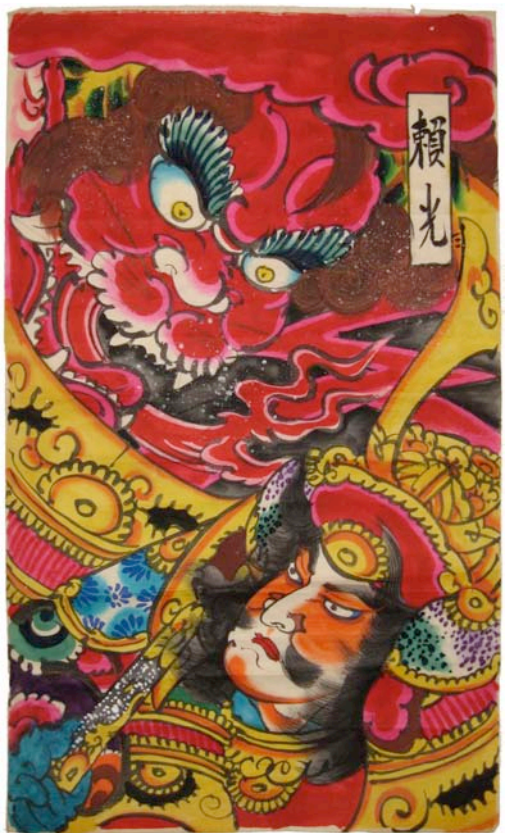
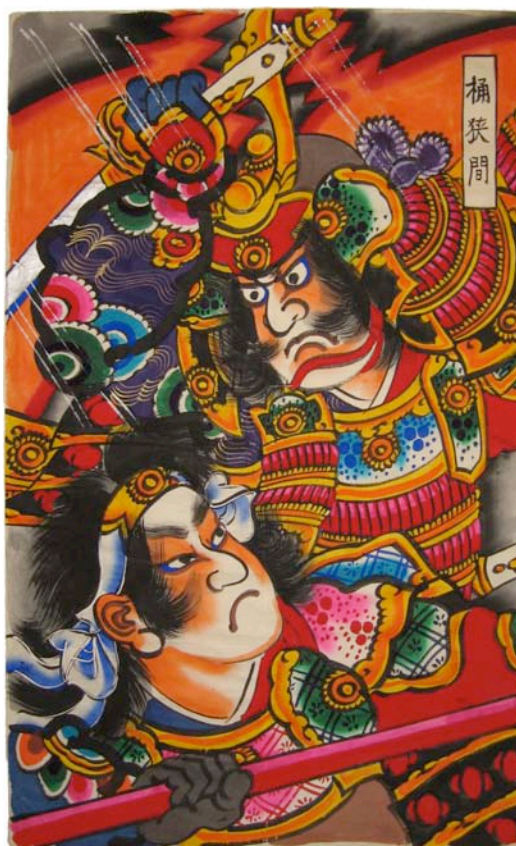
By way of background to the story of this acquisition, in the early 1990s I purchased a dozen or so 1960s tako-e from the same source. At the time I was unaware of the existence of the additional several dozen kite paintings. About three years ago I bumped into the person who sold me the initial dozen or so tako-e and asked if she happened to have any others. To my surprise she indicated that she did, but that she was about to move from New York to the West Coast and would get in touch with me after settling down. Only in early 2009 were we finally able to rendezvous in San Francisco so that I could acquire the

collection of tako-e that she had been holding onto all these years.

In my view the show stopper in the group is an amazing, fairly large Tsugaru kite painting representing Minamoto no Yorimitsu, also known as Raiko, in the middle of an altercation with the demon Shuten Doji (Fig. 1). The latter’s misdeeds included the usual: kidnapping and consuming maidens, etc. Even after having had his head hacked off, Shuten Doji remained a threat. His disembodied head is depicted sailing through the air in a final attempt to best Raiko. Luckily, Raiko was equipped with a magic helmet which Shuten Doji’s deadly fangs were unable to penetrate.

This tako-e is very elaborately drawn and carefully painted. It is probably from the City of Hirosaki. The kite maker made extensive use of subtle rust, brown, and other tints that contrast dramatically with the sometimes garish reds and greens that are the hallmark of Tsugaru kites produced in recent decades, often by amateur, versus professional, kite makers. The swirling curls of the demon’s mien are particularly impressive. It is quite possible that this tako-e was meant to end up in the hands of a collector rather than to be mounted on a frame for flying.

Three kites in the collection are from the hand of a talented craftsman whose geographic origins are difficult to pinpoint given that he created kites in so many different sizes and shapes. The three include an oval, a diamond, and a rectangle. Two kites by this kite maker (an irregularly-shaped one and a rectangle) appear in a curious little volume, *Kite, A Souvenir Postcard Book*, published in Japan in 1998 where they are identified only as having been painted by “Fujimoto.” Their place of origin is not noted. Fujimoto generally



ABOVE LEFT: Fig. 5, Edo Kite Painting, Tokyo. Probably by Fujii Hanjiro, *Kintaro and Tsuna*, 43 1/2 x 26". ABOVE RIGHT: Fig. 6, Edo Kite Painting, Tokyo. Probably by Fujii Hanjiro, *Battle of Okehazama*, 42 x 26". BELOW LEFT: Fig. 7, Edo Kite Painting, Tokyo. Hashimoto Teizo, *Yorimitsu (Raiko)*, 32 x 19". BELOW RIGHT: Fig. 8, Takamatsu. Kinoshita Kaiichi, *Semi*, 24 3/4 x 19 1/2".

signed his work with an unusual white seal that appears on all three of the newly acquired tako-e. Because Japanese *kanji* representing personal names can often be read in different ways, his first name, according to the seal, could be either Hiromu or Hirotake. Characteristic of his style is a boldly painted tako-e representing the Soga Brothers, Goro and Juro: two Japanese heroes renowned for avenging their father's murder (Fig. 2). The brother at the top is shown holding aloft a torch, indicating that we are viewing a night scene. The palette of this, and Fujimoto's other works, is dominated by very unusual pastel shades of raspberry, pink, purple, and green. The kite painting's outer edge was carefully cut with numerous notches to prepare it for mounting on a frame. The reverse side of the outer edge is crisscrossed with measured lines and numbers that enabled the kite maker to pinpoint the proper location for each notch and, eventually, each strut of the frame.

One of my favorite tako-e in the group is one of the smallest (Fig. 3). An identical example is illustrated in the January 2008 issue of the magazine *The Mingei* published by Tokyo's Mingeikan, or Folk Art Museum. There, the subject of the tako-e is identified as "Karashishi Botan," or Chinese Lion-dog with Peonies. It is from the Enshu Yokosuka region around Kanagawa and Shizuoka. Unfortunately, the kite painting is not otherwise identified in *The Mingei* as to either date or maker.

Equally intriguing is a diamond-shaped tako-e bearing the image of an historical figure about whom a huge body of myths and legends was fabricated (Fig. 4). When he was a child, as he is depicted here, he was known as Ushiwakamaru. Later his name changed to Yoshitsune once he became an adult. The open fan young Ushiwakamaru holds before him references

his challenge to a mature and powerful warrior-monk, Benkei. They did battle at the Gojo Bridge in Kyoto in a David-and-Goliath-like encounter, the outcome of which can readily be imagined. Following the fight, Benkei became Ushiwakamaru's retainer. Many different diamond-shaped kites were produced in Kyushu, Japan's southern-most island, particularly in the Nagasaki region. But I would hazard a guess that this particular diamond-shaped kite is more likely to have come from the area around the city of Tottori on the Japan Sea side of the main island of Honshu.

Four elaborately painted, large Edo kite paintings in the collection stand out. They are unsigned. However, stylistically they appear to be by the hand of Fujii Hanjiro, an Edo kite maker whose work is illustrated in Saito Tadao's small book, *Tako Zukuri*, published in 1975. An interesting example of Fujii's work is a design featuring the boy hero Kintaro clinging to a carp with the warrior Watanabe no Tsuna overlooking the scene (Fig. 5). Tsuna is known for having accompanied the hero Raiko during the fight with the demon Shuten Doji – an encounter depicted on the Tsugaru kite described earlier. Why Watanabe no Tsuna is paired here with Kintaro, however, is unclear. Flecks of gold and silver metallic paint were used to give features such as the fish's gills and the arrows' feathers an iridescent sheen that does not show up especially well in photographs.

Another of Fujii's kite paintings depicts the Battle of Okehazama (Fig. 6), which took place in 1560 between the forces of Oda Nobunaga and Imagawa Yoshimoto. The brilliant military leader Oda won and went on to rule all of Japan. The two figures in the kite painting may represent Oda and Imagawa, although they did not, in fact, directly confront one another during the encounter.



LEFT: Fig. 9, Takamatsu. Kinoshita Kaiichi, *Shojo*, 25 ¼ x 24". RIGHT: Fig. 10, origin unknown. Kite maker unknown, *Daruma*, 25 ¼ x 20 ¾".

Two examples of the work of famed Tokyo kite maker Hashimoto Teizo are in the collection. The larger and more important of the two is a brilliantly colored kite painting representing Raiko going at it with Shuten Doji (Fig. 7), the same subject depicted in the large and impressive Tsugaru tako-e already described. Here the scene is identified by the kanji for Yorimitsu, short for Minamoto no Yorimitsu, another name for Raiko. In the years leading up to his death in 1993, Hashimoto's hand became a bit unsteady and his painting could be somewhat fuzzy as evidenced by both kites and kite paintings I purchased directly from his shop around that time. (Mrs. Hashimoto handled the sales transactions in a small vestibule while Hashimoto occupied himself in the adjoining workshop, waving happily to visitors.) In contrast, the drawing here is crisp and bold, identifying the tako-e as being from Hashimoto's more vibrant, earlier period of kite painting.

Kinoshita Kaiichi, a kite maker from Takamatsu on the island of Shikoku, was profiled in David Kung's *Japanese Kites: A Vanishing Art*. Kinoshita is represented by four tako-e in the group. One of his designs represents a *semi* (Fig. 8), or cicada – interesting because Kinoshita apparently produced sufficient examples of the same design for them to have been exported for sale to the US. Over the years I have acquired a couple of these made-for-export semis. How widely they might have been distributed is difficult to say. They were folded, bagged, and came with instructions for inserting struts to prepare them for flying. Another of Kinoshita's tako-e represents a very rotund Shojo (Fig. 9), a sea spirit renowned for her fondness for alcohol. Shojo is depicted holding a liquor-filled bowl up to her lips while clasping a dipper with her other hand. There is a play in the classical Noh repertory named for Shojo.

One additional kite painting is worth mentioning: an unusually-shaped Daruma, the legendary monk in Japanese folk culture who supposedly sat motionless in meditation for so many years that his arms and legs eventually fell away (Fig. 10). Most often Daruma's image is painted on a rectangular-shaped kite. Here, however, the intention was obviously to have the kite follow the silhouette of Daruma's actual, limbless form. Daruma is represented with a fiery expression on his face and the character *inori*, which means a wish or a prayer, painted on his chest. At New Years in Japan, *papier mache* Daruma dolls are sold with their pupils left blank. Their buyers make a wish while painting in one pupil. When the wish comes true the other pupil is filled in. Evidently this procedure was to be followed with respect to this representation of Daruma. I have seen many different Daruma kites and kite paintings, but never one with its pupils left blank as is the case here. The tako-e has been prepared for mounting on a frame with notches cut for struts, etc.

The surfacing of these and other tako-e in the recently-acquired group was a highly unusual event. Occasionally I find a small number of older Japanese kites or kite paintings for sale either in the United States or Japan. But not three dozen.

These newly uncovered kite paintings, together with the other dozen or so that I initially acquired in the early 1990s, provide an interesting and colorful snapshot of the wide variety of kites that were available in the Japanese market during the 1960s. Many of these kites have long since ceased to be made.

Special thanks to Kusuno Shoko for assistance with translations.

BARRILETES GIGANTES OF HIGHLAND GUATEMALA

Daniel Bassili

INTRODUCTION BY SCOTT SKINNER

We present the first section of this article here and welcome you to read it in its entirety on the Drachen Foundation website at:

<http://www.drachen.org/pdf/UBC-Discourse.pdf>

Watch a video about the *barriletes gigantes* of Sumpango on the Drachen Foundation YouTube channel online at:

www.youtube.com/drachenfoundation

The kites of Guatemala are a continuing subject for *Discourse*. It is a testament to the fascination we have for these kites that are so close to home, yet so elusive. This contribution by Daniel Bassili gives us another perspective of the *barriletes gigantes* and shows that it is in the eye of the beholder that these kites become magical.

In 2007, as a small Drachen Foundation group witnessed the spectacle of the barriletes, our perceptions were molded by our backgrounds. Jose Sainz saw them as a Latino and as a part of the unique Central American culture, Ali Fujino saw them through the eyes of a former Peace Corps worker, and I looked at them as an exceptional part of world kite culture.

Now read the words of Bassili, a student of international politics who visited Guatemala in 2008, and see another side of the spectacle.

BARRILETES GIGANTES OF HIGHLAND GUATEMALA

Dedicated to commemorating deceased ancestors who are perceived as still active in daily life, the Day of the Dead or All Saints Day is celebrated across Latin America on November 1st. For centuries, rural communities throughout the highlands of Guatemala have celebrated with festivals featuring kites that carry messages to ancestors. The largest of these kite festivals occur in two communities near Guatemala City, Santiago Sacatepequez and Sumpango.



Daniel Bassili

ABOVE: Fig. 1, exhibition kites at Santiago Sacatepequez. All photos taken at Santiago Sacatepequez on November 1, 2008, unless otherwise noted. BELOW: Fig. 2, team Corazon Juvenil hard at work in preparation for the festival. Sumpango, October 30th, 2008.

While smaller kites are flown throughout the day, the largest are exhibition kites, eight to twelve meters in diameter, that do not fly (Fig. 1). These barriletes gigantes provide a focal point for the festivities, and their imagery conveys political and moral impetuses for their production each year. As I was able to document the kites at Santiago Sacatepequez in 2008 through support from the Drachen Foundation, my discussion will focus primarily on this community. Following a general introduction to the social context and overarching characteristics of these kite festivals, I will investigate all seven 2008 exhibition kites at Santiago Sacatepequez, and attempt to discern what they might signify in contemporary Maya society.

CONTEXT

The Guatemalan highlands are heavily implicated in the country's colonial history. While indigenous people always inhabited the area, today the highlands are home to an especially concentrated Maya population. It is within this social context that the barriletes gigantes are newly created each year by teams of young Maya men in local churches and community centers (Fig. 2). Women are normally responsible for making wreaths and flower arrangements for sale on the Day of the Dead, although all-women kite teams at Sumpango have been constituted sporadically. Each team is named, consists of approximately ten to fifteen members, and exhibits from year to year in their local festival. In addition, families and unestablished teams produce smaller kites, 4-6 meters in diameter, whose designs are highly heterogeneous; at Santiago Sacatepequez (hereafter referred to as Santiago) they may be purely geometric, feature a corporate logo, a figural design, or simply declare the team name. Nevertheless, community rules require that

all kite designs be made entirely of cut tissue paper. After gaining community approval for the design, a team member designated as the artist draws only the outline on a paper base, which is reinforced with tape. Designs are traced, cut into varied shapes in appropriate colors of tissue paper, and then glued to the kite using starch adhesive. Cutting tissue paper in graduated colors for naturalistic modeling becomes intricate, expensive, and time-consuming, requiring months of work.

On the day of the festival, barriletes gigantes are affixed to large bamboo frames, using rope and glue, and hoisted against wooden supports for exhibition. Kites are quickly damaged, and can be completely destroyed (Fig. 3). Bamboo supports snap and tear through the kite. Wind also rends the fragile tissue paper. These material realities reveal a conservative approach to kite construction. Design, shape, and size may change, but not technique. [Endnote 1] Were the festival purely about aesthetic or practical values, regulations might be amended. But in order to communicate effectively with ancestors, kites must be executed to specifications prescribed by tradition. Indeed, their ephemerality may be what makes them most efficacious in communicating with ancestors who have crossed into an intangible existence.

Since 1992, the barriletes gigantes have increased markedly in size, and figural motifs pertaining to current Maya experience were added to "all-over" geometric patterning. [2] This shift roughly coincided with the re-evaluation that accompanied celebrations of the Columbus quincentennial, and with the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Rigoberta Menchu Tum, a K'iche' Maya author and activist in the same year. In her Nobel lecture, Menchu Tum underscored the contemporary status of Maya activism in Guatemala:



Daniel Bassili

ABOVE: Fig. 3, wind rends the kite produced by Grupo Juvenil Corazon de Maiz. BELOW: Fig. 4, team Happy Boys at work in a community church. Sumpango, October 30, 2008.

The importance of this Nobel Prize has been demonstrated by all the congratulations received from everywhere, from heads of government – practically all the American Presidents – to the organizations of the indigenous people and of human rights, from all over the world. In fact, what they see in this Nobel Peace Prize is not only a reward and a recognition of a single person, *but a starting point for the hard struggle towards the achievement of that revindication which is yet to be fulfilled.* [3, emphasis added]

Following this award, Menchu Tum attained international celebrity status, and used it to forward Maya concerns in the public sphere. The “starting point” to which she refers seems to have been picked up by the creators of these exhibition kites, since with the addition of figural imagery, the kites became vehicles for voicing local, regional, and global concerns pertaining to Maya identity. However, while Menchu Tum voiced an academic and explicitly political view from an international vantage point, for an international audience, imagery on the barriletes gigantes evidences popular absorption of this imperative, as it is naturally reproduced by Guatemalan Maya themselves.

Nevertheless, the most pressing issues are hardly agreed upon, as different communities, and even different teams within the same community, forward different strategies for achieving their political goals. The most basic indicators of this heterogeneity in the barriletes gigantes of Sumpango and Santiago are drastic differences in visual language and composition between the two communities. Some of these differences may stem from the fact that Sumpango has emerged as locus of the larger and more prominently

advertised festival. This is evidenced by a professional website, [4] heavy corporate involvement, and aggressive advertising by Guatemala’s department of tourism (INGUAT). Furthermore, each community attempts to assert its superiority through distinctive characteristics stabilized by tradition.

Imagery in the “Sumpango style” is remarkably akin to graphic design (Fig. 2 and Fig. 4). Border and background designs are not strictly prescribed at Sumpango, and generally appear as elaborate curvilinear floral and scroll designs (Fig. 16). Conversely, while artists at Santiago occasionally use graphic novels as a basis for their figural motifs (Fig. 14), in general, the imagery is substantially less modeled. Furthermore, at Santiago, background designs usually represent local and regional weaving patterns and therefore place greater emphasis on rectilinear patterns in banded or scattered arrangements (Fig. 9).

Compositionally, Santiago’s exhibition kites are consistent and conservative when compared to those at Sumpango, whose flamboyant artists sometimes break strongly from the circular form, and have increased the proportion of figural imagery (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5). At Santiago, a main, usually figural, image is placed on the central axis, either at the center or near the top of the kite. (If at the top, the main image is normally rectangular, while at the center it may be round or square). The main image is usually accompanied by text which reinforces the message of the kite. Other figural cartouches are arranged in a geometric pattern, most commonly in a quadripartite scheme expressed by some participants as representing the four world directions. Furthermore, at Santiago a series of flags is affixed to the top of each kite. Finally, “Santiago 109” or “Santiago 1899-2008” appears on almost all of the exhibition kites



Daniel Bassili

ABOVE: Fig. 5, kites by Juventud Santiaguense, Juventud Maya, and Juventud Espiritu Maya. BELOW: Fig. 6, families arrive to decorate ancestors' graves at Santiago Cemetery.

in 2008, denoting the number of years the festival has taken place in that community.

Settings also differ. Whereas at Sumpango kites are exhibited in a soccer field adjacent to the local cemetery, the festival at Santiago takes place within the cemetery proper, where local families arrive early to decorate the graves of their ancestors (Fig. 6). While the cemetery setting is appropriate to ritual communication with ancestors, it also recalls the country's civil war and its genocidal counter-insurgency campaign, which peaked in the 1980s, and laid the foundation for contemporary Maya experience in Guatemala. Although the war officially ended in 1996, escalating gang violence, neo-colonial discrimination, and degradation of the environment by external forces continue to afflict the region. These realities frame not only the means chosen by kite teams to express the theme developed by the community each year, but also their reception by viewers.

DAY OF THE DEAD:
SANTIAGO SACATEPEQUEZ, 2008

At Santiago, the theme for 2008 was "Youth for a development with identity" (Fig. 7). In this context, "development" refers to economic or industrial modernization. As such, the theme is intended to counteract discourses that dictate cultural "authenticity" must remain temporally static. This meta-narrative of modernism disenfranchises non-Western cultures, as Western culture is the only one whose "authenticity" is predicated on "progress." The theme thus takes a stance against modernist dichotomies, arguing that progress need not jeopardize indigenous identity. In fact, as will be shown, many teams express the view that indigenous Maya tradition is the key to their progress.

The theme's emphasis on youth penetrates

to the very construction of these kites, since all of the teams at Santiago in 2008 were composed of young men between the ages of 15-25. As such, youth are entrusted with perpetuating the tradition of the festival, articulating the issues most important to them in the subject matter of their kites, and subsequently implementing the ideology inculcated by their messages over the course of their lives.

While diverse visual strategies are summoned to promote these messages, some are widely shared. Utopic visions of either a hoped-for future or idyllic pre-Hispanic past are used in all seven exhibition kites, but in several these images are contrasted with dystopic views of present problems. [Editor's note: the word "dystopic" characterizes conditions of life which are miserable, the opposite of utopic.] Another shared theme is the relation of local issues not only to the global or universal, but also to the Pan-Mayanist ideology to which Menchu Tum alludes in the passage quoted above. In what follows, I thematically examine all seven exhibition kites exhibited at Santiago in 2008. As I was unable to survey community responses to the kites during my brief visit, the visual readings detailed here are my own, and are not intended to communicate an "insider" perspective. Likewise, it is important to remember that the thematic categories I employ for this analysis may not have been intended or consciously articulated by the creators of these kites.

UTOPIC/DYSTOPIC

1. Juventud Santiaguense

Caring for the environment is a theme that relates the local to the global. While environmental degradation is a global affliction, it has particular local characteristics in western highland



Daniel Bassili (top image enhanced by Marvin Cohodas)

ABOVE: Fig. 7, a banner features the theme of 2008 at the entrance of Santiago Cemetery. BELOW: Fig. 8, overview of kite by team Juventud Santiaguense.

Guatemala. The lethal pollution and appropriation of water resources perpetrated by (largely Canadian) mining companies and resisted by Guatemalan communities such as Sipakapa is a case in point.

The full geographical range of this environmental crisis is implicated in the flags affixed to the kite produced by the team that calls itself Juventud Santiaguense (Fig. 8). The flag furthest to the right has become a symbol of Pan-Mayanism: the four colors refer to the four world directions of Maya cosmography. Second to the right is a representation of the *tzute*, one of the characteristic articles of highland Guatemala's weaving tradition. The *tzute* pattern distinctive of Santiago featured on the flag also serves as a background to the figural cartouches on the kite proper. Second to the left is the flag of Guatemala. The flag furthest to the left is the symbol of Santiago, the patron saint of the *municipio* of Santiago Sacatepequez. Between the cartouches are elongated rectangular panels that represent local *huipil* designs from Santiago and several other communities in the western highlands, as far as Chichicastenango (Fig. 9). As such, non-figural imagery in the kite represents both the local and the regional scope of its message.

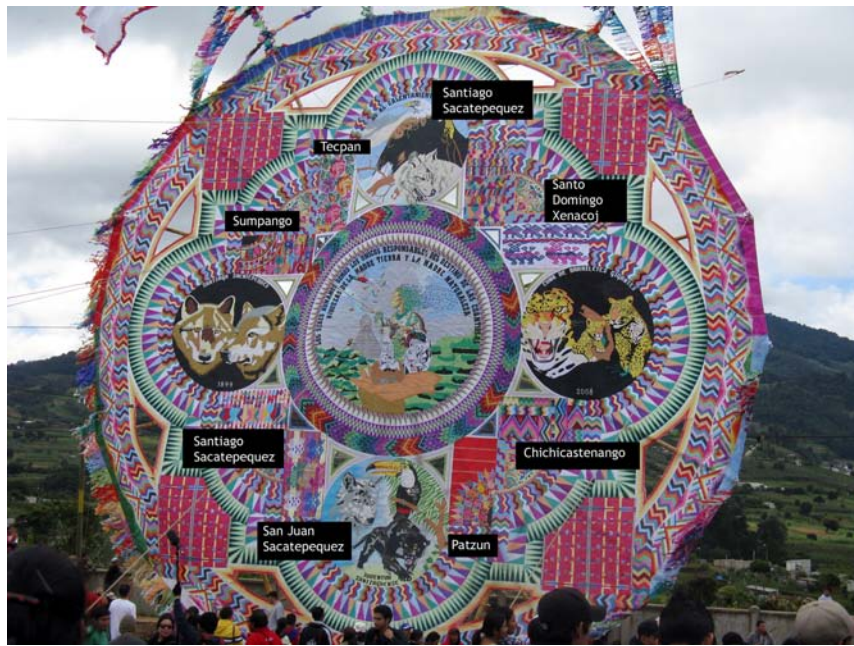
The environment is called up in the figural cartouches through portrayal of animals. I will begin with visual analysis of the radial cartouches. In the cartouche at the left, there is a pair of wolves, under which is written "1899," the year that the festival was founded in Santiago (Fig. 10). The right cartouche contains three spotted jaguars, and corresponding to the opposing left cartouche, the text reads "cradle of the giant kites, 2008" (Fig. 11). As such, tradition is engaged, linking past and present. An eagle and wolf appear in the upper cartouche, and the accompanying text declares "No to

global warming" (Fig. 12). Finally, the bottom cartouche contains a toucan, a wolf, and a black jaguar, with the team's name written at the bottom (Fig. 13). The dystopic present is herein specifically located in a geo-political context afflicted by environmental degradation. It is represented in these radial cartouches, since they each portray animals that are native to Guatemala, and risk becoming endangered if current environmental policy continues.

Set in opposition to this dystopic view, the dominant central image collapses time and space, and portrays a utopic scene of environmental symbiosis (Fig. 14). Set in the lush rain forest around Temple 1 at Tikal, at present the icon of Guatemala as a distinct nation state, a human hand holds a globe supporting a pair of Siberian tigers, which are endangered but not native to Guatemala. A generic Mother Nature icon blows a Quetzal, the national bird of Guatemala, from her hand. The accompanying text may be translated as "Humans are solely responsible for the destiny of the abundant riches of Mother Earth and Mother Nature."

The image of Mother Nature is a perennial favorite in figural iconography at Santiago and Sumpango (Fig. 15). She is distinguished by the representation of her "blown out" hair, vegetal accoutrements, and the association with giant hands (Fig. 16). Although not equated with any specific pre-Hispanic Maya deities, Mother Nature has become a symbol of Maya environmentalism. Paired with an icon of the Classic period Maya, she indicates a continuity of Maya identity in utopic harmony with the environment, as well as calling up the past as a form of instruction for the present in building a better future.

Contemporary Maya have adopted environmentalism as a strategic unifier of



Daniel Bassili (top image labelled by Marvin Cohodas)

ABOVE: Fig. 9, regional *huipil* designs as they appear on the kite by Juventud Santiaguense. BELOW: Fig. 10, left cartouche on Juventud Santiaguense kite.



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ABOVE: Fig. 11, right cartouche on Juventud Santiaguense kite. BELOW: Fig. 12, the kite's top cartouche.



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ABOVE: Fig. 13, bottom cartouche on Juventud Santiaguense kite. BELOW: Fig. 14, the kite's central image.



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ABOVE: Fig. 15, Mother Nature icon on kite by Juvenil Corazon. Sumpango, October 30th, 2008. BELOW: Fig. 16, Mother Nature icon on kite by Happy Boys. Sumpango, October 30th, 2008.

cultural identity. Inclusion of Tikal Temple 1 along with Siberian tigers does more than universalize the image. It also counters archaeologists' claims that poor environmental management led to the supposed collapse of ancient Maya civilization. This hypothesis, popularized by Jared Diamond, [5] disenfranchises contemporary Maya on a number of levels. For one, by suggesting that pre-Hispanic Maya were incapable of managing their own environment, the "collapse" hypothesis implies that the invading Spaniards were indeed saviors from despotic Maya kings. Today, neo-liberal nationalist resource management, which relegates Maya health and interests behind capitalist gain, is founded on this historical falsehood. Furthermore, the environmental degradation hypothesis suggests that true "Maya culture" disappeared before the Spanish arrived in America, and their land was therefore vacant to be claimed. The imagery in this kite works against these arguments, by asserting continued Maya presence in Guatemala, and reifies this presence by defining it in opposition to current environmental policy makers.

2. Tejadores de la Cultura

The kite produced by the team that calls itself *Tejadores de la Cultura* also juxtaposes dystopic and utopic imagery, as Christianity is the proposed solution to current problems (Fig. 17). The flags affixed to this kite denote the team's affiliations: the flag of Guatemala appears on the left, while the white and yellow flag on the right represent the colors of the Roman Catholic Church.

The tzute pattern that appeared on the previous kite forms the background for this one as well, while a variation on the huipil pattern frames the central image. As they appear on almost all of the 2008 kites, thereby reinforcing the community-centered

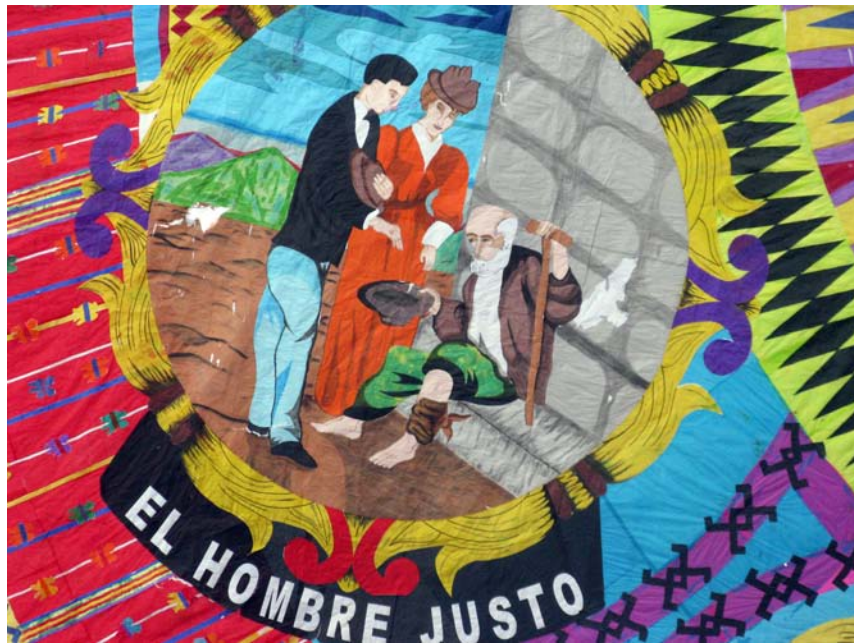
nature of the festival, such weaving patterns locate community pride specifically in Santiago. Though bilaterally symmetrical, the composition of this kite is more heterogeneous than in the other exhibition kites at the 2008 festival. At the top of the central axis is a rectangular cartouche containing the Christian holy trinity (Fig. 18). Surmounting the cartouche is the primary message of the kite, which promulgates "The Omnipresence of God." This rectangular image is itself the center of a triad, as it is flanked by two small diamond-shaped designs. On the left is a heavenly ear with the caption "God hears all," and on the right a heavenly hand writing in, one presumes, the book of life, with the caption "God knows all." Just beneath, and at the center of the kite, the circular cartouche labeled "God Sees All" depicts a heavenly eye with a hand holding the scales on which the soul's deeds are weighed (Fig. 19). Following Catholic conventions, evil deeds, symbolized by a demon, are on the left side of the eye of God (the viewer's right), while good deeds, symbolized by the angel, are on His right side. Both the demon and the angel hold scrolls on which the evil and good deeds are recorded. The hopeful image shows the soul of the deceased in the scale pan on the side of good deeds, outweighing the evil.

The right-left dichotomy of the saved and the damned, an ancient device in Catholic imagery, continues in the arc of four circular cartouches along the lower register. They provide a Catholic reading of the utopia/dystopia dyad. Reading counterclockwise from left to right, the first cartouche shows the just man giving alms to the poor (Fig. 20), and the second shows him on his death bed where angels have come to raise him to heaven (Fig. 21). The third cartouche shows a sinner in the act of murdering another man, while in the fourth he has died and is being dragged by demons into the flames of



Daniel Bassili

ABOVE: Fig. 17, overview of kite by Tejadores de la Cultura.
BELOW: Fig. 18, the kite's top central image.



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ABOVE: Fig. 19, central image on kite by Tejadores de la Cultura. BELOW: Fig. 20, the kite's "El Hombre Justo (The Just Man)" cartouche.



Daniel Bassili

ABOVE: Fig. 21, "*La Muerte del Justo* (Death of the Just)" cartouche on kite by Tejadores de la Cultura. BELOW: Fig. 22, the kite's "*La Muerte del Pecador* (Death of the Sinner)" cartouche.

hell (Fig. 22). A just man cares for others, while a sinner harms others.

As indicated at the outset of this essay, in Latin America, November 1st is variously called the Day of the Dead or All Saints Day. The distinction may depend on one's cultural identity and religious affiliation. While the Day of the Dead maintains the pre-Hispanic emphasis on ancestral veneration, All Saints Day is a Christian celebration in honor of God and all of his saints. However, All Souls Day, celebrated by Roman Catholics on November 2nd, is to aid souls trapped in purgatory through alms-giving and prayer. The imagery in this kite conflates aspects of All Saints Day and All Souls Day, insofar as its iconography encourages prayer and alms-giving by expounding the omnipresence of God. The kite provides instructions for direct entry into heaven, and the bypass of those unfortunate souls trapped in purgatory.

In this Christian vision, time is represented as a linear teleology. The future is portrayed as coming after death, at the last judgment, rather than the time when today's youth are adults, as in the other kites. While other kites stress communal solutions to problems, in this kite both the decisions and the consequences are individual rather than social. Also note that individual choice is represented as male choice. This may stem from the fact that the sources informing this kite are primarily Western religion and epistemology, known for its andro-normativity and individualism, which is set apart from the communal project of Maya revindication. Along these lines, it is interesting to note that this kite was spatially separated from the other kites when they were exhibited in the Santiago cemetery.

This article is the opening section of Daniel Bassili's thesis. We welcome you to continue reading on the Drachen Foundation website at:

<http://www.drachen.org/pdf/UBC-Discourse.pdf>

[1] Héctor Abraham Pinto, "Los Barriletes Gigantes de Santiago Sacatepequez," *Tradiciones de Guatemala* (1977), 154.

[2] Guillermo A. Vasquez Gonzalez, "Expresiones culturales de Todos Los Santos y Santos Difuntos en Guatemala," *Tradición Popular* 181 (2008), 4-5.

[3] Rigoberta Menchu Tum, "Acceptance and Nobel Lecture, December 10, 1992," nobelprize.org. http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1992/tum-lecture.html.

[4] Festival Sumpango 2008, "Festival Internacional de Sumpango de Barriletes Gigantes 2008," Solucionweb.com. <http://www.festivalsumpango.com/>.

[5] Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Chose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

KITES FOR PEACE

Photographs by Chris Bell and Tom Jeckel

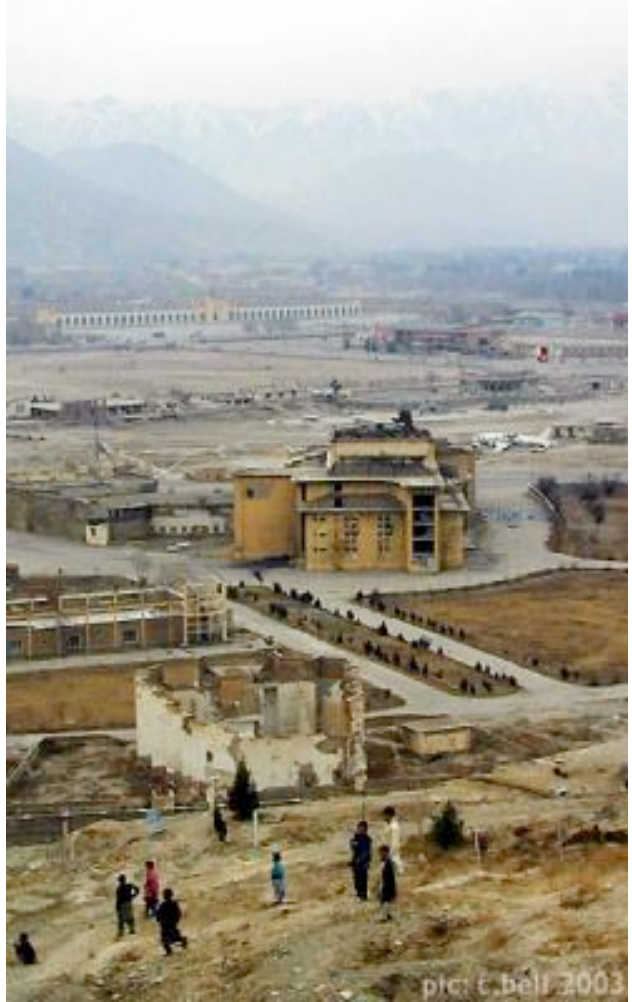


Chris Bell

From 1996 to 2001, the Taliban government in Afghanistan outlawed kite flying, calling it "un-Islamic." After the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, kites began to return.

In 2003, Tom Jeckel helped produce 10,000 sled kites from ripstop nylon for children in Kabul. United Nations peace troops distributed the kites to local schools.

For more information on this effort:
<http://subvision.net/sky/planetkite/middle-east/afghanistan/>



Chris Bell



Tom Jeckel



Chris Bell 2003



Chris Bell, except noted

THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND OUR FUTURE

Ali Fujino



All photos Jose Sainz

THE PAST

Scott Skinner and I launched the Drachen Foundation in 1994, incorporated as a private educational nonprofit. This began an incredible journey, one which neither of us had any direct experience in or idea of what would be the outcome. What did it actually mean to be a kite foundation?

Our start was an idealistic and energetic approach to doing it all. We staged programs throughout the world in almost all formats – festivals, exhibitions, research, lectures, publications, seminars – and got to know the world of kiting. Having made the conscious decision NOT to be a formal museum, we staged some of the most impressive on-site exhibits in some of the most prestigious institutions. The National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, to name

The streets of Tieton, Washington, a small arts community and now home of the Drachen Foundation warehouse.

one, displayed the largest Japanese kite we own, 45 feet long. Loving the kite in exhibition, we developed 7 touring exhibitions for rent, and found a market that covered not only the United States with kites, but also Asia and Europe.

We taught teachers, artists, and professionals how to use kites in their daily schedules. Now, even the world renowned artist Francisco Toledo, of Mexico, has started his own kite collection.

We sat in small boats in Baja California and taught a Mexican marine biologist how to fly a kite and safely use it to hoist his camera equipment to document and survey whale migrations. He now flies on his own with great skill, and this year he will

document the shark whale.

We worked with a wonderfully philanthropic duo, Wally and Suzie Marks, as we orchestrated flying 10,000 kites over the wall of separation in Palestine.

When I look back at the number of individuals we met and how many projects we created, sponsored, and executed, I have to say, we did more than our job! But our job is not done.

THE PRESENT

It is almost 15 years after that altruistic beginning, and not only have Scott and I reflected on what we've done, but a wonderful 7-person board of directors has as well. Our programming has slowed down, and in some areas has been terminated. We have not been accounted for at many venues, and rumors began to circulate: "Drachen might be closing down, or perhaps even disappearing."

On the contrary, we just took some quiet time to focus on our future. To analyze the movement of the kiting industry and our fellow organizations – American Kitefliers Association, Japan Kite Association, World Kite Museum, and the Kite Museum of Ottawa, just to name a few. We found our future was that of our original mandate: the three Ds, Discovery, Documentation, and Dissemination (of information) of the world of kiting. But how does one do that in a terrifyingly threatening economy?

With the help of our board, we created a realistically workable plan and spent the last three years testing whether or not it would work. That plan was:

1. Designate a stable and affordable location for the continually growing collection.

2. Create an affordable, accessible database for our collection and everything which belongs to the collection, no matter what media it is in.
3. Create an affordable, accessible, and manageable system to give the world access to the information in a universal manner.
4. Create an endowment or sustainable income for the continuance of the systems for generations to come that will buffer the swings of global economic change.

THE TEST

In 2006, we created a model to test the four goals above. We moved from our modern office building to our less expensive space at 3131 Western, Suite 400.

We closed down our warehouse and moved the collection out of Seattle, cutting costs by two thirds. As luck had it, we were able to find similar individuals in the arts who invested in a small town two and a half hours from Seattle, and we moved into a cooperative warehouse there which had a more than adequate storage facility.

3,000 square feet with 24 foot ceilings gave us a working area for our kite kit production (the sale of our kits have tripled in the last year, making profits from sales a stable income for us) as well as a base for shipping and receiving our traveling exhibits (which doubled in rental fee profits last year). It also gave us a home for conservation-minded and archival-qualified paper and ripstop storage.

We were able to obtain use of a nearby 1,800 square foot modern condo for serious kite enthusiasts to rent/stay as they work with the collection. An individual is able to



The board of directors tours the Drachen Foundation storage and production facilities in Tieton.

have the kites brought out for study or viewing and only pay for the time used.

Both the condo and the warehouse are located in Tieton, a town with local restaurants, stores, and a post office, not to mention 11 acres of cleared kite flying fields at our beck and call. (See MightyTieton.com for more on this small arts community in eastern Washington.) The results of the location test seem to be solid after three years!

With little programming in 2008/2009, we were able to finally insert a major part of our collection into a workable database. Having tested the archival software, Past Perfect, we were able to bring the coveted Cody collection onto our website and make international access available. The results of this are stunning, and the number of inquiries about items in the collection are still increasing. It is the basis for dialogue and exchanges of information.

The success of this database means two things: putting together the right team and prompting the board to find funding to support this team. I am happy to have one of the finest groups of museum/digital media professionals:

Kiyomi Okawa
Graphic arts
Oregon State University, Portland, OR

Jessica Murphy
Digital archives/operations
Adobe Systems, San Jose, CA

Shelly Leavens
Masters of Arts in museology
University of Washington, Seattle, WA

Simon Bond
Visual communication design
University of Washington, Seattle, WA

And myself, Ali Fujino
Archival conservation/museology
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

It is our job in the next three years to input all the collection and make it accessible through our website. It is also our job to continue to house the collection in the safest, most affordable manner. It is our job to continue to find kites and document their story. Funding research through our granting program is important.

THE FUTURE

The future is that of maintaining the website and new developments that come into the world of kiting. Our operation in Tieton, Washington will continue to grow, and we are certain that we won't grow out of it.

The sales of our kite kits will help to sustain our economic needs, and continue to provide educators a resource which is successfully affordable. Assembly of the kits will help to employ individuals in Tieton.

Our location in Tieton gives us the ability to host seminars, workshops, and gatherings in the future, as there is rentable community space. It also allows us to have professional contractors continue servicing those who are interested without constant cost to the Foundation, billed on an as-needed basis.

Our foundation is not based on one individual, but on a group who has had the foresight to look into a viable cash flow for support of operations. The creation of an endowment, sales of kite kits, and touring exhibition rentals will sustain operations for a long time to come.

I am proud and pleased that we have come this far, and I am happy to know after 15 years, there will be a Drachen Foundation well after me.

FAMILIAR FACES IN SAN VITO

Article and photographs by Scott Skinner



Some of kite flying's most enduring characters were invited to San Vito, Sicily for a first-time festival this May. Headlined by Peter Lynn, Ray Bethell, George Peters, Martin Lester, Robert Trepanier, Claudio Capelli, and Ramlal Tien, the invited kite fliers brought large and striking festival kites sure to attract large crowds. Additionally a

Martin Lester's spirit kite flies over Sicily at the first Festival Internazionale degli Aquiloni San Vito Lo Capo.

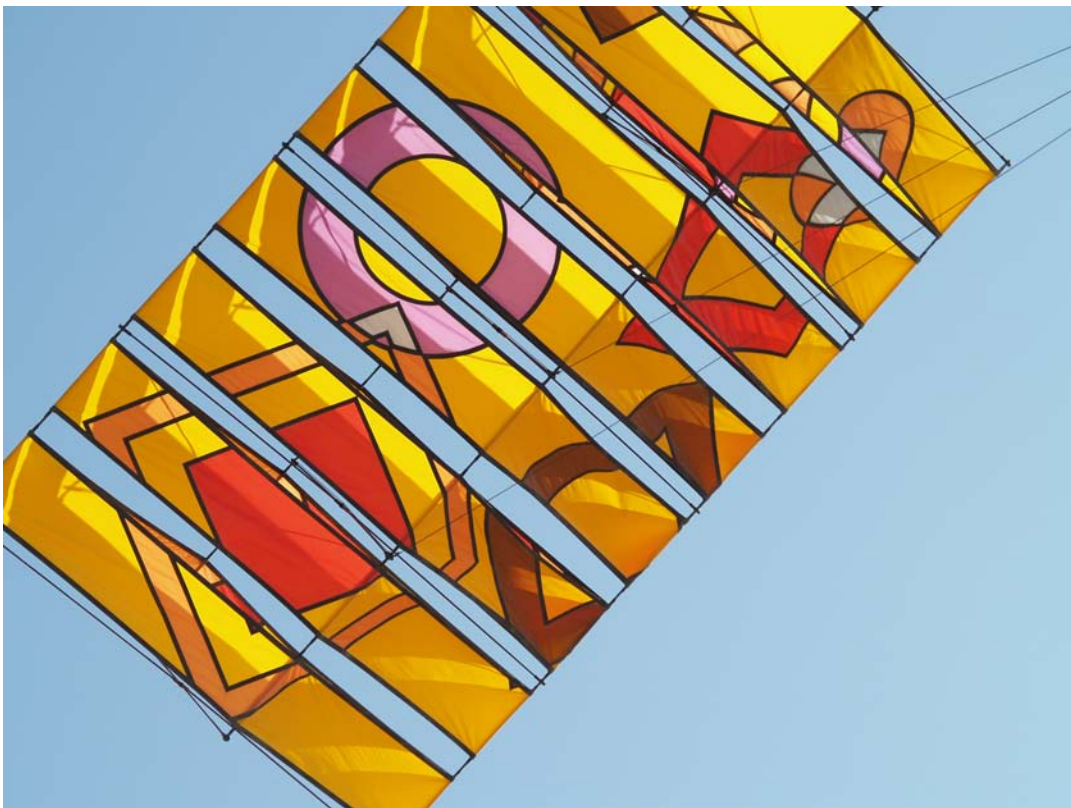
group of first-rate kite artists attended and flew their newest creations. In a small flying arena, highlighted by Capelli's informed commentary, the kites were spotlighted in a show that lasted 9 days.



At this beautifully organized first festival, fliers were taken in small groups throughout the island to fly their kites in startlingly beautiful environments. Stark hillsides, ocean-fronts, salt-flats: all were backdrops to the kites of Michael Alvarez, Pierre Fabre, Jose Sainz, and members of the Drachen Syndikat. The festival poster is a wonderful

Ramlal Tien's sentinel kites fly against the backdrop of a stark hillside.

image by noted photographer Hans Silverster and features the kites of Ruth Whiting and Tim Elverson. Here were the best kites and kite fliers doing what they do best; showing their kites to a new audience



ABOVE: George Peters' ribbon arch kite. BELOW: Michael Alvarez's trapezoid box kite.



ABOVE: Robert Trepanier's rokkaku kite. BELOW: Robert Trepanier's dog kite flies with Tim Elverson's camera kite.

in a picture-perfect setting.

The fact that struck me the most during the course of this fantastic week is that great kites really do have a lasting, positive impact. For example, Martin Lester's scuba-diver has been around for the better part of ten years, as has Peter Lynn's ray and Pierre Fabre's "Michelin man." But these are still fantastic show kites that have instant and lasting appeal. Michael Alvarez's box kites, Jose Sainz's Aztec calendar, and George Peters' flying men are still show-stoppers that kite crowds love to see.

Certainly there were wonderful new creations: Anna Rubin's flying sculpture, Alessia Morroccu's delicate and whimsical kites, and Tim Elverson and Ruth Whiting's camera, cursor, and deltas. But the stars of the week were kites that we've all seen many times. It's taken ten years for us to really appreciate the genius of Ramlal's sentinals, Robert's quad-line faces and animals, and Kisa Sauer's planets. Wonderful traditional kites flown by Mikio Toki and Makoto Ohye from Japan and Indian fighters flown by Stafford Wallace were some of the kites that showed the wide scope of kiting, and Peter Lynn, Stefan Cook, and Paul Reynolds practiced the show techniques of the Ultimate Kite Show by towing large kites in the sheltered bay by the kite beach.

As an aside, the concept of the Ultimate Kite Show is for a number of boats to tow giant kites in waters off popular destinations. This allows promoters to guarantee a show, no matter the winds. Too light? Tow the kites faster. Too heavy? Tow the kites with the wind. It also frees valuable beach real estate and is a completely safe way to manage these giants near large crowds. Several of the veteran kite fliers were treated to a morning or afternoon on the boat to see, first-hand,

how the operation works. Stefan Cook was exceptionally patient with this "small kite flier" as we dumped the pilot kite into the water and he had to dive in and swim with the giant shark back to the boat. (Oh well, it's my job to expose flaws in the best of plans.) A highlight of their ability came late in the week when they drove the boat right to the flying area and walked the kites from boat to beach anchor without a hiccup. Exceptional!

All in all, this event, beautifully organized by Trapani Eventi and Maria Gabriella de Maria, was a huge success and has set the groundwork for future events on Sicily.



Scott Skinner's geo-pointer kite.



Submit your article or photographs to *Discourse*! We thank our authors with official Drachen Foundation Sherpa Adventure Gear outdoor wear. These exclusive pullovers are not available for purchase and are reserved for authors and special friends of *Discourse*.

Send your submission or comments to:
discourse@drachen.org