



# Flying Fish and Radishes!

## Plant & Animal Kites by Greg Kono



### A Farm in California

Kite maker Greg Kono [Koh Noh] grew up on a farm in California. His family raised fruits and vegetables. His mother loved to garden. Butterflies and ladybugs and stink bugs were all around. So were many other small animals. Greg and his brothers and his sister worked in the fields and greenhouses.



Ladybug Kite

*Photo by Greg Kono*

### Remembering Childhood

Greg says, “Sometimes my brothers and I were bored. We played catch with watermelons. We chucked fruits and vegetables that were spoiled or overgrown at each other.” Greg no longer throws watermelons into the air. Instead he flies a watermelon kite—or



Watermelon Kite

*Photo by Greg Kono*

an avocado, a lemon, a kiwi, or a radish kite. His fruit and vegetable kites remind him of his childhood.

## **Design, Test, and Test Again**

Greg must test different variables when he designs a kite. This avocado kite crashed on first flight. Greg patched the kite. It crashed again. Then he changed the pattern of the spars. Greg says, “Kite designers have to compromise between how they want the kite to look and how the kite wants to fly!”



Flying Avocado

Photo by Greg Kono



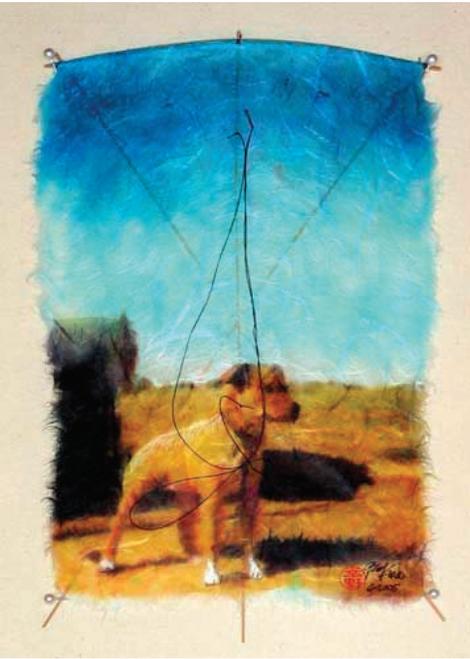
Radish Kite

Photo by Greg Kono

## **Paper is Another Variable**

Greg also tests different kinds of paper for his kite sails. Kite sails can be made from newspaper, from bond paper (the kind of paper used in a copier), or from special papers of different colors and weights. Special papers can be made by machine or by hand.

Greg uses special paper for his one-of-a-kind kites. He especially likes a kind of paper called *unryu*. In Japanese



Family Dog

Photo by Greg Kono

*unryu* means “dragon cloud paper.” The paper is light and translucent. Long strands of fiber from the mulberry plant run through the paper. The strands make the paper strong. *Unryu* works very well for the leaves and stems of plants. Look at this effect on Greg’s radish kite. The texture of this paper also suggests the wings of a butterfly.

Greg printed this image of the family dog on *washi* (Japanese paper) with a computer. He sprayed the paper with some water to blend the colors. Oops! The paper absorbed too much water. The colors ran together. He fixed the problem with colored pencils.

## **Critter Kites for Kids**

Greg’s animal kites for school children use a standard size of copier paper. He has designed a beetle, a butterfly, and a salmon. He is experimenting with a flying squirrel, a jellyfish, and an octopus. He is thinking



Butterfly Kite

Photo by Greg Kono

about other sea creatures and land animals, too. The kites are big enough to fly well. But they are small enough for children to cut out quickly. The kite sails are easy to decorate in bright colors with markers. Greg tests each design in many kinds of wind, from very light to super-strong.

### **In the Air or on the Wall?**

Sometimes how a kite looks is more important than how it flies. Greg enjoyed fishing with his brothers when he was a boy. He has made many fish kites in different sizes. They show his skill at making curved kite spars from bamboo. Here are some kites “swimming” in a stairwell for an art installation. Greg designed the kites and the way to exhibit them.



Fish Kite Installation

*Photo by Greg Kono*

The smaller fish kites are very hard to fly. They want to spin and crash. Greg explains, “I made some of these kites to hang in an art gallery. A frame protects the kite and makes a nice display.” Art lovers may want to decorate their walls instead of the sky. But Greg does point out, “I use a frame with a hinge. You can take the kite out of the frame if you want to fly it.”



Framed Fish Kite

*Photo by Greg Kono*

## Key Vocabulary for the reading

**Absorb:** to take in, or, in the case of a liquid, soak up

**Bamboo:** the woody stem of the bamboo plant (which is a grass). The stem is jointed and often hollow.

**Chuck:** colloquial for “toss” or “throw”

**Design:** to plan, create, or carry out in a systematic way, often graphically, artistically, or in a highly skilled manner.

**Exhibit:** a public display

**Fiber:** a slender thread or filament; indigestible plant matter

**Frame:** the support structure for the kite

**Gallery:** a building or room for the exhibition of art work

**Image:** a picture or reproduction

**Installation:** a kind of art exhibit more encompassing than something hanging on the wall; an exhibit that one might walk around or through

**Pattern:** a plan, diagram, or model; in an art work, form and style

**Sail:** the material that covers the frame

**Spar: (stick):** one of the parts of the frame

**Strand:** fibers twisted together to make thread or yarn

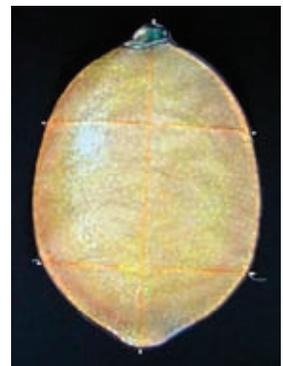
**Texture:** the appearance and feel of a surface

**Translucent:** transmitting diffused light; not see-through

**Unryu:** “dragon cloud paper” in Japanese

**Variable:** a factor that changes in a product or an experiment

**Washi:** Japanese for “paper”; often handmade, although washi can also be produced by machine



Texture—Lemon Kite

Photo by Greg Kono