

Kites for KIWA

A Collaboration of Mokuhanga Prints & Kites

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Curated by Scott Skinner

KIWA and Mokuhanga Conference Kyoto, Japan, June, 2011

It has been interesting to see which individuals and organizations find their way to the Drachen Foundation's doors, proved again when interaction at the Foundation led Ali Fujino and myself to participate in the first International Mokuhanga Conference (IMC) in Kyoto, Japan. Ali, in learning more about mokuhanga (traditional Japanese woodblock printing on damp paper) attended classes taught by Richard Steiner of KIWA (Kyoto International Woodprint Association), who suggested we take part in IMC.

Never one to miss an opportunity, Richard convinced Ali that KIWA should have a kite component and the first KIWA kite exhibit was born. With sponsorship help from McClain's Printmaking Supplies, Cullom Gallery, and Hiromi Paper International, artists were solicited to submit woodblock prints that I would make into kites for the exhibit. Over thirty works were accepted and sent to Japan, where they were tastefully and expertly displayed by Steiner and Kyoto kite maker, Nobuhiko Yoshizumi. This exhibit ended prior to the beginning of the IMC, but the kites were shown to the IMC participants during an "open portfolio" session scheduled within the conference.

As for the Mokuhanga Conference, here is a group much like our kite world; small, international, and passionate about their art. It is a group that has a variety of linkages within; teacher-student relationships, country-to-country relations, and personal friendship to name a few. But from my observation, it is a group that does not actively look outward for new participants. So here was an opportunity for the Drachen Foundation to talk about kites – not only as a possible artistic pursuit for these artists – but as a real object, made in Japan throughout the history of mokuhanga techniques. For novice printers like Ali and myself, it was an eye-opening experience where new techniques were discussed and demonstrated, but for experienced members of the group there were numerous workshops covering valuable topics including teaching mokuhanga in school art curricula, making mokuhanga accessible in remote areas, and publicizing the value of this art to the public. All of these are discussions similar to those that might take place at an American Kitefliers Association Convention.

The experience of mokuhanga kites was well taken, the tradition goes on.

Scott Skinner

Kyoto International Woodprint Association, (KIWA)

For the 6th KIWA Exhibition, (Kyoto International Woodprint Association) held in the Kyoto City Museum in April 2011, we decided to devote space to woodblock printed kites. Our qualifications were uncomplicated; they had to be real, flyable kites, and mostly, if not all, printed from woodblock. The Drachen Foundation enlisted the help of McClain's Printmaking Supplies and Hiromi Paper International and sent out a call for entries, which were sparred into kites by Scott Skinner and sent to Kyoto.

Here, with the assistance of master kitemaker Nobuhiko Yoshizumi, KIWA selected 30 for the exhibition. Two special bamboo stands were built to hold the kites in the air, where one usually sees kites. During the week-long show, the one worry we had was how many times running children would bring the stands down. It never happened, until the final hour when a girl tried to run through a stand, and brought it down. Amid tears and smiles, we re-erected it, then took pictures of all the happy faces.

Happy faces were the rule for the kite display. Everyone knows about kites, but no one had ever seen a display of them in a major exhibition like this. So many visitors had their picture taken with the kites as a background. We had over 1,200 visitors, a museum record for this kind of exhibition.

After the KIWA Exhibition, the kites were held until June, for the First International Mokuhanga Conference, where all were displayed at the portfolio sessions, and Drachen's Scott Skinner used them for his presentation on Japanese Kite Prints and Kites. KIWA is pleased and proud to have worked with Drachen on this excellent project. It was a joy for everyone and should be repeated.

Richard Steiner
President



Nobuhiko Yoshizumi, Kyoto's Kite Master

Nobuhiko Yoshizumi is the Guinness World Record Holder for the world's smallest kite, a kite made of washi and bamboo that is 4mm x 5mm. Additionally, he was a principal kite maker and is the curator of the famous, Kunst-drachen (Art Kites) exhibit, organized by the Goethe Institute in the late 1980's. He has experience in making kites from every region of Japan and is a living encyclopedia of Japanese kite knowledge. His immaculate craftsmanship is demonstrated in the miniature kites that he routinely makes and flies both indoors and out.

For the KIWA exhibit, Yoshizumi-san started with his specialty – miniature kites – and, after creating small woodblocks, produced a number of prints that were joined to make large rokkaku- (six-sided) and kaku-dako (four-sided kites). Yoshizumi-san also demonstrated his understanding of washi and mokuhanga when he printed images on the front and back of paper, producing mirror-images that complement his chosen kite shapes.

Yoshizumi-san's kites are always fine flyers that are a testament to his craftsmanship.



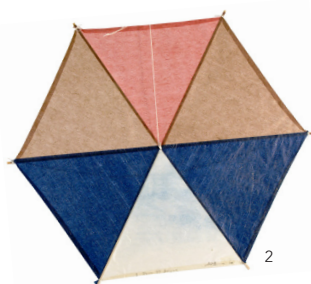
Fishes 18"w x 28"t

Dragon 26"w x 34"t

Bunnies 27.5"w x 33.5"t

Faces 27.5"w x 33.5"t

Rabbit Kite (on cover) 18.75"w x 33.5"t



Beaufort Series

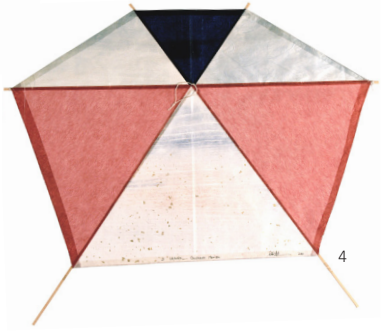
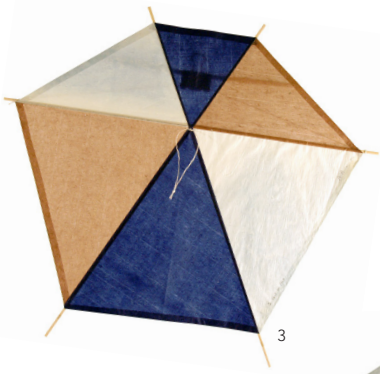
Scott Skinner Monument, CO

The kites made for the Kyoto International Woodprint Association (KIWA) exhibit, held in Kyoto, Japan, in April and May of 2011 are some of my first using mokuhanga woodblock print techniques. Having experimented with very simple and relatively small woodblock-printed kites for the last year, this series was a step forward in my woodblock printing life.

There are several parallel themes within the kites. First, the kites are a visual representation of the Beaufort wind scale, a method of accurately estimating the wind's force, developed by admiralty official Francis Beaufort in 1805. The kites provide a visual representation of the 12 Beaufort numbers (the number of white spaces take us through the Beaufort numbers). Second, I was struck by how similar wood grain looks compared to the wind lines on a weather chart. These grain lines are the basis of all the kites and are another visual representation of wind.

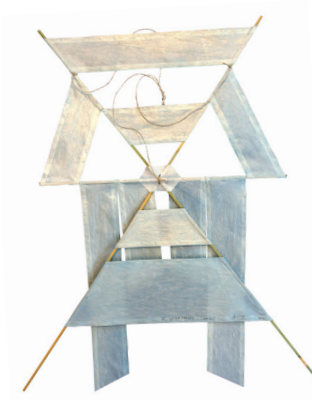
Finally, each kite is a variation on a traditional, three-stick kite. This kite form was chosen because it starts as a similar hexagonal form to the famous Japanese rokkaku (six-sided kite) It is also a typically American form that has a number of logical variations. The final visual pun is that the wood-grain embossed lines on all the kites would mimic the wood-grain of the namesake "barn door," three-stick kite.

All kites are made to fly!

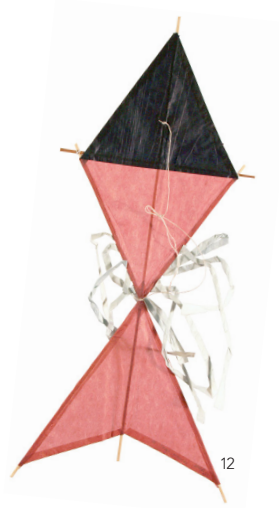




10



11



12



13

Barn Door Kite¹ 8.5"w x 9.5"t

Beaufort 1² 14"w x 12"t

Beaufort 2³ 16"w x 14.5"t

Beaufort 3⁴ 15.75"w x 13.5"t

Beaufort 4⁵ 9.5"w x 19"t

Beaufort 5⁶ 14"w x 15"t

Beaufort 6⁷ 9.75"w x 15.5"t

Beaufort 7⁸ 12.75"w x 15.5"t

Beaufort 8⁹ 12"w x 16.5"t

Beaufort 9¹⁰ 19"w x 8.5"t

Beaufort 10¹¹ 9.25"w x 20"t

Beaufort 11¹² 12.75"w x 16"t

Beaufort 12¹³ 22"w x 15.5"t

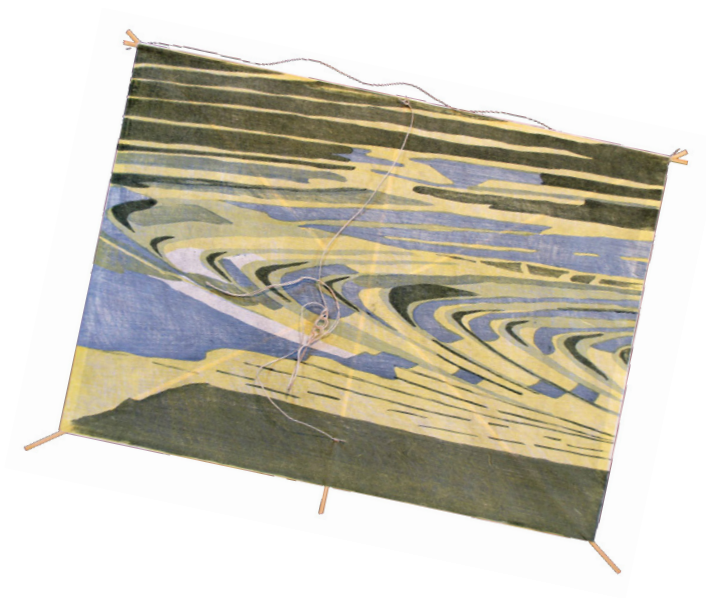


Butterfly Ode to Dali

14"w x 14.25"t, 14"w x 19.25"t

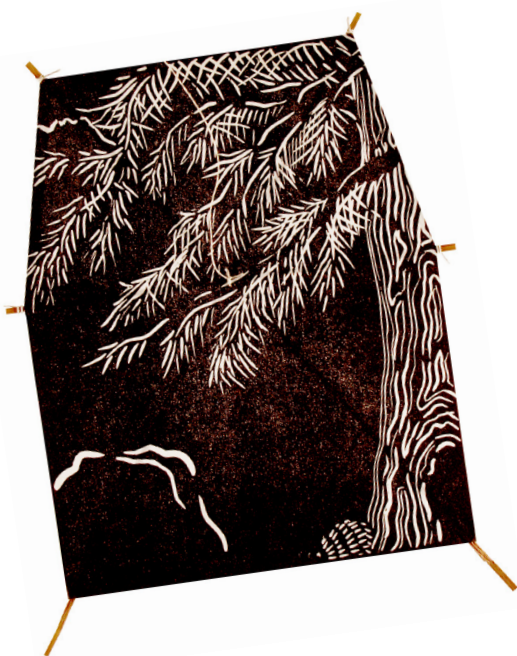
Leland Sutton, Ali Fujino Seattle, WA

These prints were transformed into kites by Drachen Foundation administrator, Ali Fujino. She has become adept at making kites as well as printing in the mokuhanga style. This kite form and structure was refined by Nobuhiko Yoshizumi as a simple workshop kite that could carry a variety of artistic techniques.



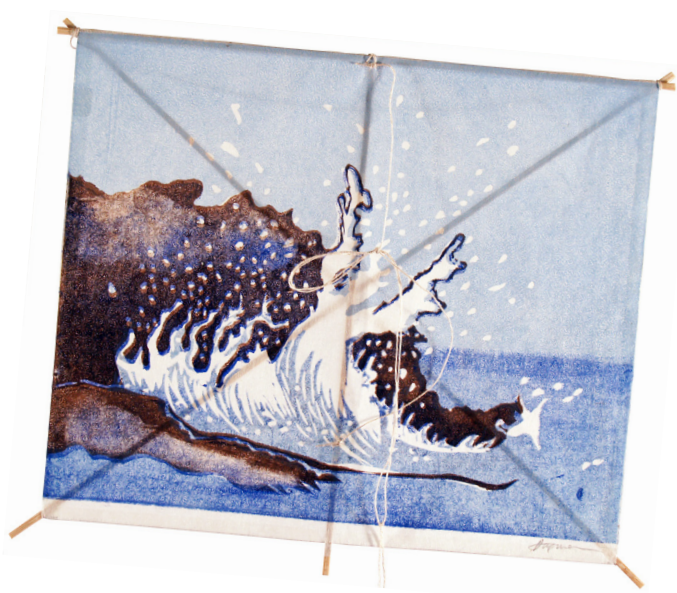
Circulation 16"w x 11.25"t
Linda J. Beeman Ovid, MI

Image dictated a horizontal alignment and I felt that "the more image, the better," so I made this into a Japanese buka kite. In this small size, it would be a real challenge to make the kite behave like a real buka, that is, a maneuverable, fighting kite. However, with tails, this kite would fly stably and look spectacular.



Pine tree 9.25"w x 11.5"t
Karen Quint Tieton, WA

I love the way the three-stick shape frames the graceful curves of the pine tree. The simple print asks the viewer to complete the image and imagine even more.



Waves 11"w x 9"t

Kristina Hagman Santa Monica, CA

An image that is reminiscent of Hokusai's iconic woodblock print "Great Wave of Kanagawa" this needed to be carried on a Japanese kite.



Ocean Ave. 10" w x 9.5" t

Kristina Hagman Santa Monica, CA

Another image that easily could have originated in Japan, this one marries perfectly to the barndoor. The American three-stick form complements the shape of the tree at the top, and mirrors the lines of the bridge at the bottom.



Mood Indigo 10" w x 12.25" t
Michelle Ouellet Tokyo, Japan

Another relatively small print, this easily could have been made into a three-stick kite, but I thought straightforward treatment of the owl was more fitting on a Japanese kite.



From Above 10.5"w x 8.75"t

Don Mock Ruston, WA

This smaller print was ideal for a three-stick barndoor: three equal-length sticks, a single bridle at the sticks' intersection, and, with a tail, a great flier.



Kevinator 10.75"w x 13"t

Mark Rice Providence, RI

Here's another example of an image that perfectly complements the barn door shape. Its high contrast lends great visibility and readability in the sky and I played with the kite surface by slitting the paper under the monk's beard.



Up 12.5"w x 16.5"t
Shelly Leavens Seattle, WA

Only one way to frame this print, but without the word, "Up," I think it works just as well in a horizontal format. In flight, the image begs the viewer to search the sky for more.



California Valley Oak 12.75" w x 17" t
Jean Womack Richmond, CA

In many historical ukiyo-e depicting kites, many simple kite images are made more visually interesting by dividing the image in half and reversing the color on each side. This print reminded me of that style.



Juniper 35 15.5"w x 13.5"t

Chris Yuengling-Niles Van Nuys, CA

This was such a dynamic image that I didn't want to settle for a simple horizontal buka kite. The problem then became how to get the whole image into a three-stick kite shape. I found that I liked to purposely "run the image off the kite" as the final product shows.



Monkey Business 12.5"w x 18.5"t
Jose Sainz San Diego, CA

Printed and made by longtime kite artist, Jose Sainz, this whimsical image is like the sumi-e block print that would have been used 150 years ago to make a child's kite.



Martha 6.75" w x 9.5" t
Alfred Stark DeKalb, IL

Surprisingly, these two kites show the power of a facial image on a kite. Jose's monkey is pure whimsy, but instantly recognizable, while Stark's "Martha" is just as familiar and friendly. How different "Martha" might have been in the horizontal format!



Art and Nature 14"w x 17.5"t
Roland Kraft Krefeld, Germany

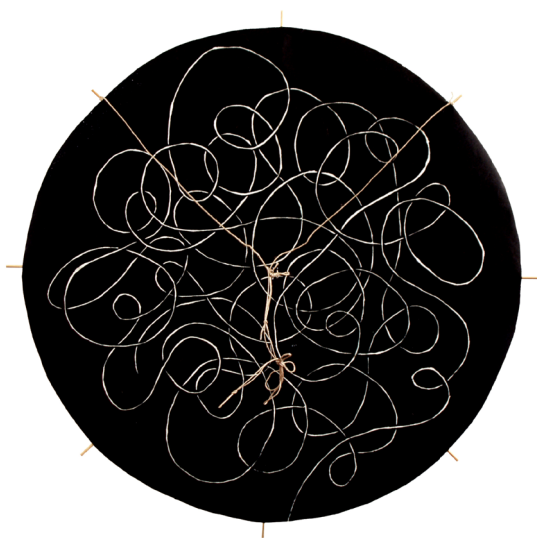
The horse and rider of this vertical image is complemented by the elongated three-stick kite form. Printed by a German kite flyer, the image is a good example of one that would show well at any flying distance.



Tako 13.5"w x 17.25"t

H. C. Kjelshus Oklahoma City, OK

A small, repeated octopus image makes up this print. Since "tako" is a double-meaning word in Japanese (kite and octopus), a natural kite would be the octopus. Rather than a true Japanese octopus-kite, I adapted the three-stick form to make an American octopus.



Kiteline 13.75"w x 13.75"t

Erin Curry Gainesville, FL

This image places normally-ground-based-kiteline into the air as a kite. The circular form left the print unchanged and hearkens to the historic Japanese wan-wan kites of Naruto. In the early 20th Century, the wan-wan kites were the largest kites in the world, up to 80 feet across and weighing almost 3 tons.



Blessings 13.5"w x 18.75"t

Annie Bisset Northampton, MA

Another image that dictates a single kite-application, this became a kaku-dako, (four-sided kite) typical in Tokyo. The simple, four-stick construction and two-point bridle would make this much like a mokuhanga printed kite made 150 years ago for "mass" production.



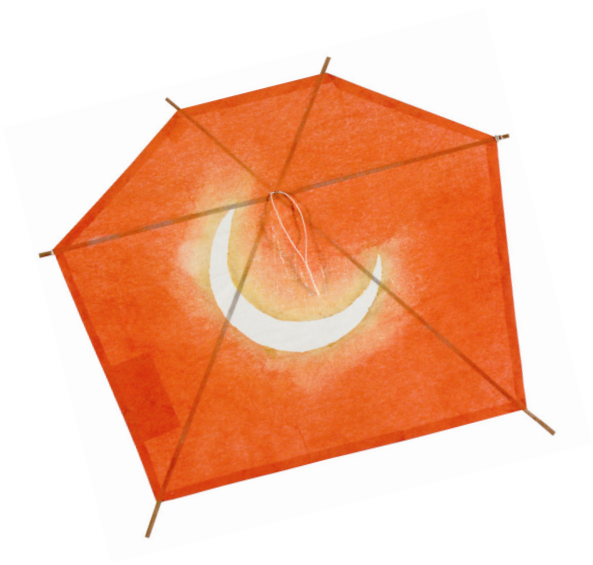
Crescent Moon Blue 12.75"w x 12"t

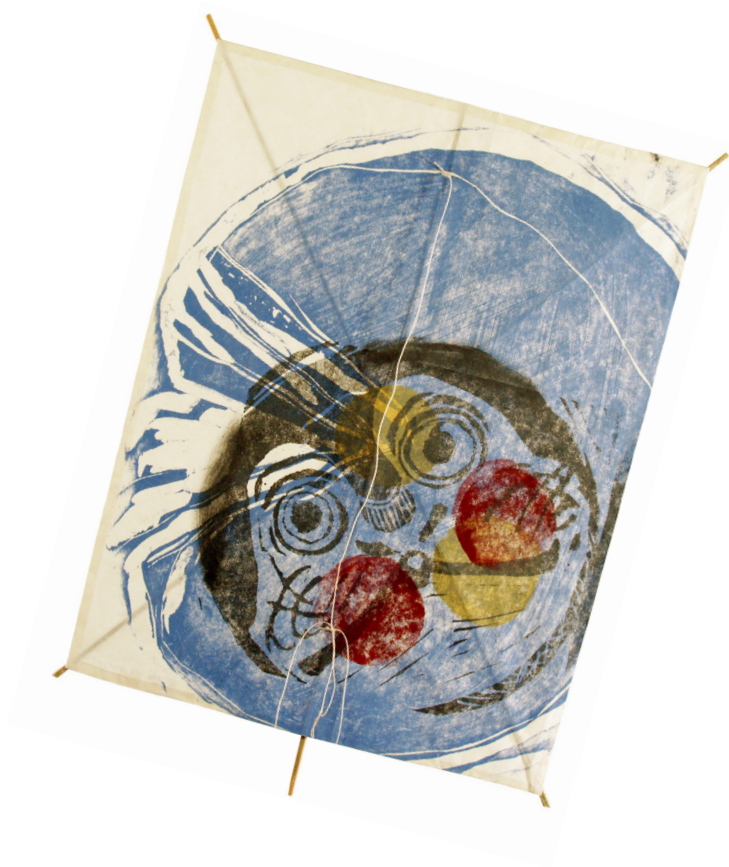
Crescent Moon Red 12.75"w x 11"t

Full Moon 12"w x 18"t

Binky Walker Seattle, WA

This three-print series became three "barn-door" variations. This simple American design, popular in the early 20th Century, offers limitless variation, as these three suggest. It is a kite that requires a long tail for flight stability, but one that flies in a wide wind range.

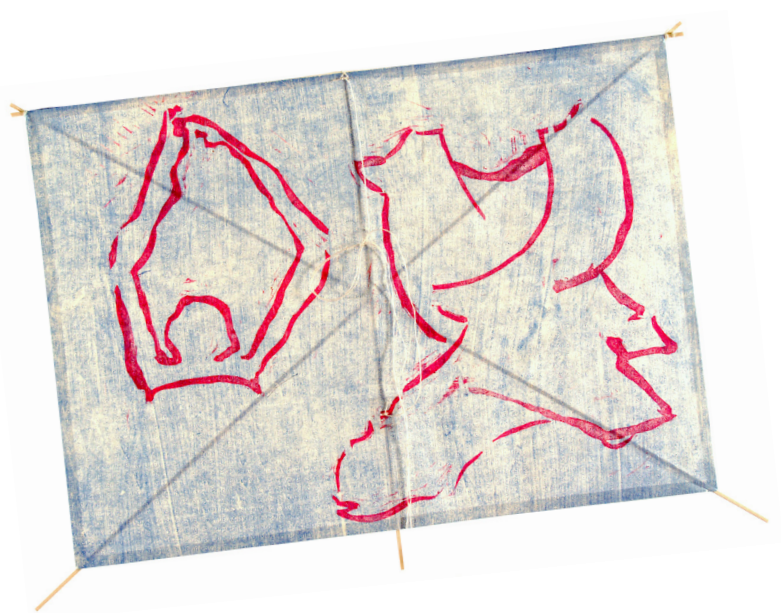




Japanese Payaso 14"w x 19.25"t

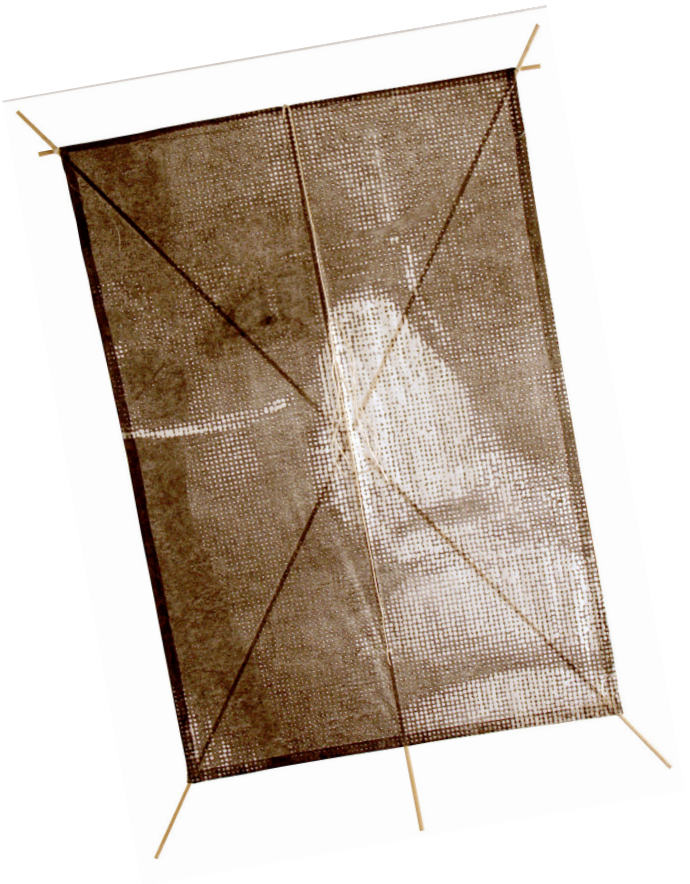
Ali Fujino Seattle, WA

A clownish and playful image much like the traditional Daruma images found throughout Japanese art, this kite needed to be of Japanese design.



Down the Well 19.75"w x 13.5"t
Chris Harmon Portland, OR

A natural pairing of horizontal-print to buka-dako, this subtle print might become ambiguous in flight, leading spectators to remain engaged through changes of light, distance, and time.



Looking Into the Sun 14"w x 20.5"t
Saskia Lehnert Overland Park, KS

Another image perfect for kites, since distance makes the image clearer. This kite was originally inspired by traditional Japanese kite prints of the Edo period (1603 - 1868): namely the 'big head' kites such as the Daruma kites and those depicting close-up, enlarged head shots of famous actors of the day or great warriors from Japanese history.



Fire on the Ocean 19" w x 13.5" t

Emma Levitt Seattle, WA

To my embarrassment, I didn't read the title of this print and considered framing this in a vertical format. It's a very effective image on this buka, and the "incomplete" image spurs viewers' imaginations.



Primordium 18"w x 18.75"
Francesca Lohmann Seattle, WA

Two prints on very delicate paper dictated a creative solution, so this is a two-skinned kite that allows light and shadow to complement the beauty of both prints.



Swampag 20" w x 13" t
Peter Russo Portland, OR

Shellfish, octopi, squids, and fish are all common subjects in Japanese art and this buka mimics similar kites made 100 years ago.



Gracie Lou Freebush's 15 Minutes of

Fame 18.75"w x 19.75"t

Erin Schiedler Seattle, WA

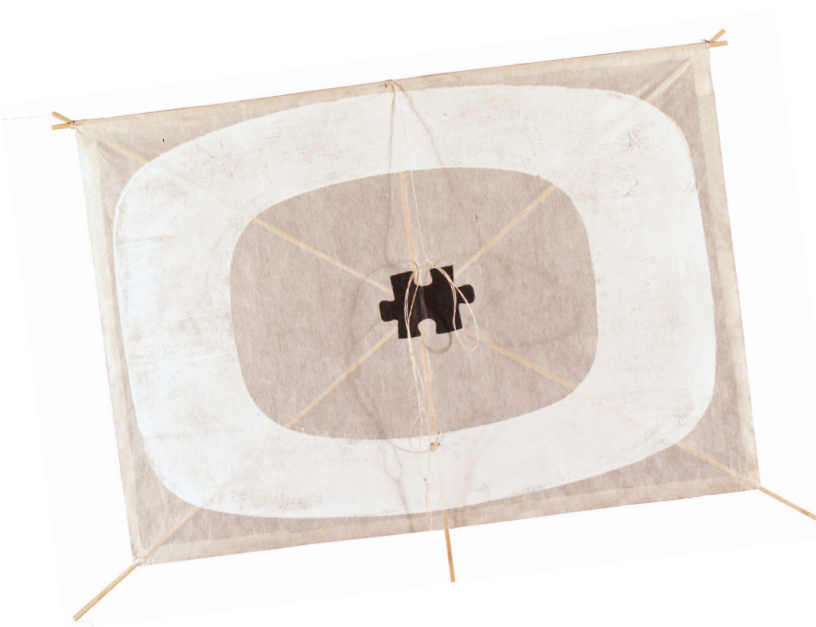
Another round kite like the traditional form in Naruto, Japan. In this size, it's very much like a "round" (usually 10-sided) fighting kite from India.



Untitled 12.25"w x 26.5"t

Erin Schiedler Seattle, WA

These three prints offered a special challenge. They are each small, so making them into stable, single kites would have been difficult. I chose to frame them as a single kite with emphasis on each individual image.



Found Object Impression Puzzle Piece

20.5"w x 13.5"t

David Thompson New Haven, CT

Here's another print that is ideal for a kite. The subtlety of different densities of white make this an image that would continually change as light and backgrounds change. In backlight, the dense white oval would even become dark grey or black.



Drachen Dragon 21.5"w x 20.5"t

Eileen Tivolacci Redding, CT

Playing on one of the many double-meaning words for "kite," drachen is the German word for kite and dragon. This kite is much like an Indian patang, which is a single-line, maneuverable kite used for aerial kite fights.

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