

K I T E THE DRACHEN FOUNDATION J O U R N A L



Kiting on Steroids

A computer composite very nicely conveys the excitement of the aerial show at an Orlando, Florida, theme park, in this case Walt Disney World's Epcot Center. Thirty-foot Disney character inflatables hold court beside the crowd as speedy watercraft tow eight looping kite trains. Hang gliders and paraplanes (a kite sail with no framework powered by a power plant strapped on the human cartoon figure's back) join the celebration. Boats in the lagoon fire rockets into the air. At center is the Disney trademark structure, the Space Ship Earth dome. The Disney show was called "Surprise in the Skies" and ran for a full year on a daily basis starting in October of 1990. Kiteman Productions organized by Bruce Flora supplied the kites, kite fliers, and boats and helped in the over-all organization of the event. For more on the innovative kite-based, often pyrotechnically minded Kiteman Productions operation, "kiting on steroids," as Flora calls it, see Page 8.

Walt Disney World

The Journal Staff



Ben Ruhe

Scott Skinner, president of the Drachen Foundation, is a former pilot instructor at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He has been a kite enthusiast for two decades—designing, making, flying, collecting, and teaching about kites.

Ali Fujino is the director of Drachen. A museum specialist since age 19 when she began work at the Smithsonian Institution, she has long been fascinated with anything that could become airborne. Fujino is a member of the prestigious Explorers Club of New York City in recognition of her 25 years of cultural work in Third World countries.



Ben Ruhe



Malcolm Goodman

Editor of the Drachen Journal, well traveled **Ben Ruhe** regularly contributes articles to special interest publications on subjects as diverse as boomerangs, tribal art and flint-knapping.

Note to readers: Articles in this issue of the Drachen Foundation Journal not bylined were written by editor Ben Ruhe.

Born and raised in Japan, **Kiyomi Okawa** came to the U.S. as a student and has stayed on to become Drachen's graphic artist. Among other duties, Kiyomi lays out this Journal. She's been flying kites since elementary school.



Mikio Ioki

How to Find This Journal

The Drachen Foundation Journal can be read online or printed out, as desired. To read it, bring up www.drachen.org, and click on Journal icon. An Adobe Acrobat Reader is needed for viewing or printing out the publication. It is available as a free download at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>

The Drachen Foundation:
Kite Archives, Science and Culture

The Drachen Foundation is devoted to the increase and diffusion of knowledge about kites worldwide. A 501(c)(3) private nonprofit corporation, Drachen views kites from the standpoint of art, culture, science and history. It uses an integrated program of exhibitions, education, research, collections management, and publications to promote learning about kites. The archive it maintains is freely open to the public for research.

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‘Won a Long Odds Survival Lottery’ World’s Oldest Kite Comes to U. S. For Conservation and Research

By Ben Ruhe

The oldest known kite in the world has been added to the Peter Lynn collection. Lynn is the noted kite inventor and aerodynamical theorist living in Ashburton, New Zealand.

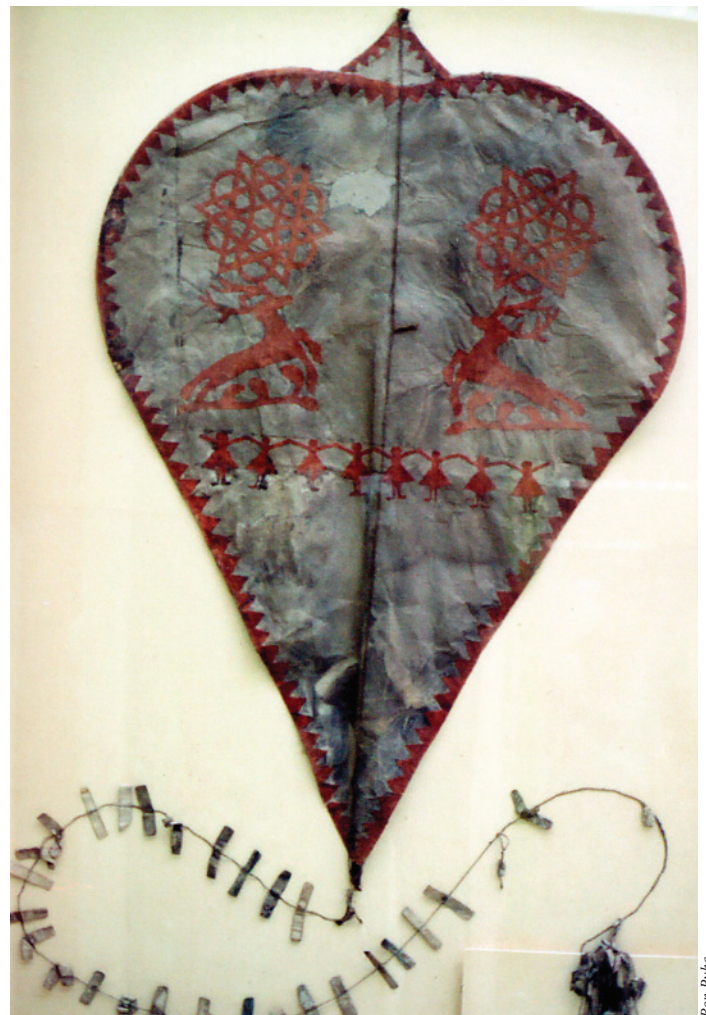
A European Peartop, the yard-long kite was purchased by him for a figure reportedly in the five figures from the Dutch firm *VliegerOp* (Go Fly a Kite) in The Hague, Holland. Said to have been discovered under the attic floor of a building being demolished in 1985, the kite was given to the late Gerard van der Loo of *VliegerOp*, a principal figure in European kiting in the 1980s-90s, and displayed at his business headquarters. After Van der Loo died before being able to document his collection, his kites, library, and kite paraphernalia were included in the business when it was sold some years back. Framed under glass, the Peartop resided until purchase on a wall outside the office of *VliegerOp*’s director.

After purchase, Peter Lynn moved the kite to Seattle for stabilization and conservation by the Drachen Foundation. Drachen collaborated with Lynn as part of its declared goal of increasing and diffusing knowledge about kites worldwide.

Exhaustive examination of the beautiful Peartop there late last year by Lynn and by Scott Skinner, president of Drachen, both kiting scholars, led them to conclude the date 1773 written on the lower lefthand front surface of the kite is almost certainly authentic. This makes the kite the only 18th century one still in existence. Numerous 19th century specimens are known, but there are no others going back to the century before that.

“The kite looks old, is fragile, but in remarkably good condition,” says Skinner. “The frame looks old too. Peter Lynn and I guess the 1773 date written on the kite, either in faded ink or in pencil, is when the kite was made. The kite itself is well worn. Wear in the tail indicates substantial use. Near its beginning the tail is fairly pristine, at the tip it is frayed as though dragged along the ground.

“We think the kite wasn’t professionally made, but rather was a labor of love by someone familiar with kites. It might have been a gift. The elaborate paperwork lends credence to the theory it was a present, maybe for Christmas. We think the kite was a loved object by a pair of children. The initials RB appear under the date, then faint initials TB under that. These could have been the children.”



The old Dutch kite



Renée Nielsen

Ali Fujino (left), director of the Drachen Foundation; kite owner Peter Lynn; and Scott Skinner, president of the Foundation, spend a day examining and discussing the old Dutch kite. There are so many unknowns and the kite is so old much of the talk is pure speculation and no more than informed guessing. The three are agreed the first priority for the kite is stabilization. After conservator Alice Bear completes her detailed analysis, she will make recommendations. Decisions on how to proceed with conservation measures will then be made jointly by Lynn and Drachen.

Continues Skinner: “Another reason we think the kite is authentically old is because of the logic in the story. There are no holes in the story. It makes complete sense---throwaway paper kite tossed in attic, forgotten, sealed in, rediscovered when house renovated.”

As the pair point out, even 19th century kites are a great rarity. Because old kites were typically made of materials such as leaves, paper or fabric over lightweight bamboo or wooden frames, and are easily damaged, they are by their nature ephemeral. The oldest kites in the United States may be several Cantonese models given by the Chinese government for display at the Philadelphia Bicentennial exhibition in 1876. These were sent on to the Smithsonian Institution at Washington, D.C., where they currently sit in storage and in need of extensive restoration.

Kites, as Lynn points out, are traditionally made for seasonal use by children, and usually discarded in fairly short order, or at best carelessly stored. “If trees and strong winds don’t get them,” says Lynn, “neglect and diverse biological action soon does. One of my earliest kites was eaten by a horse, for example.”

The old Peartop is a French version of the most popular early European kite and, amazingly, is in such good shape it appears flyable. “That this old kite has survived in such excellent condition,” says Lynn, “can be described as its having won a long odds survival lottery. That it’s not only lucky but was clearly a very special kite to begin



Renee Nielsen

Beautiful decorations grace the face of the kite. The designs are made from handcut papers glued onto the surface. At top right is a patch of some sort, age unknown.



Renee Nielsen

A portion of the tail is made up of three-by-half-inch rectangles of tightly folded decorative papers.

bottom are eight dancing maidens.

There is an irregular 50 mm hole in the top left center, which appears to have been filled in with backing paper. It has been suggested that this repair work may have been done for support and strengthening by a Dutch museum that exhibited the kite in about 1990.

The paper pieces used for the tail, at least some of them, appear to be pages from a European language book, maybe the frontispiece or flyleaf from a hymnal or prayer book. The typeface is archaic. The rectangles are 3 by ½ inches, but tightly folded, six or eight times. They are 1/8th inch thick. Drachen will investigate this text as a possible means of conclusively dating the kite.

The frame comprises curved side pieces which might have been heat-bent, with a central spine. There is no cross spar. The two-point bridle is attached to the spine ends and has little slack in it. The flying line attachment point appears to be very low----surprisingly low. The kite, a flat one, obviously required a strong wind to fly. It would have flown hard against the wind, instead of floating atop the wind as some kites do.

“The back of the kite is very interesting,” says Skinner. “Peter and I were unable to identify the wood used for the frame, consisting of bow and spine. Both are made of the same wood, which is fairly hard. In addition to being quite pretty, the kite is certainly well crafted. The bow is made of two spars married at the center. The join constitutes a hardwood piece lashed to the spars. One of the sides was broken and repaired. The sail was torn and repaired. Both repairs are crude but efficient.”

Conservationist Alice Bear is seeing to stabilizing and conserving the kite and curbing any future damage. She expects to finish her work by next summer. Plans to protect and exhibit the kite are being discussed. As

with increases these odds to absurdity.”

The kite measures 36.6 inches (930 mm) high by 24.6 inches (625 mm) wide, plus tail. It is carefully made of rugged paper, maybe commercial paper, over a wooden frame with intricate cut out edging and face designs. Applique designs are in a reddish color applied to a blue ground. The appliqué designs are in striking contrast to the body of the kite. Colors are apparently somewhat faded.

The decorations are intriguing. In the top section, six-pointed Stars of David are embedded with something like a Celtic knot. Across the center, antlered stags face inward, with undeciphered blobs beneath them. Across the



Renee Nielsen

The bottom of the tail is a bunched up tangle. The cord may be a kind of hemp. The paper rectangles attached to the tail appear to be from a book. Content and language are to be determined.

Skinner points out, this work will require expensive technology----the cost to be balanced against the rewards of exhibiting the Peartop.

The old kite joins a Peter Lynn kite collection that focuses mainly on his own inventions, some of them quite large, as well as mostly topical creations that particularly interest him, such as traction kites, or objects close to Anglo-Australian Lawrence Hargrave because of the Down Under connection.

With his usual wry humor, Lynn comments: “This acquisition is a bit embarrassing to me. Somewhere around the mid-1970s, I swore a personal oath----my wife Elwyn remembers it as loud, public, and repeated----that I would never again have any kite made of paper and sticks, committing myself from that day forward to the durability of fiberglass and fabric. Oh well, just another turn of the wheel. Who knows, next year I could move on to rainbow tie-dyeing----but don’t bet on it.”

Skinner sums up: “Every now and then we in the kite world get lucky. Something survives against long odds. It is our responsibility to take care of the kite that has come into our hands. It is an object for us and for other kitefliers and the public to enjoy and learn from. With this old Dutch kite we are just incredibly lucky.”

Tens of Thousands of Viewers in Orlando

‘Industrial Kiting’ a Hit at Theme Parks



Ben Ruhle

Bruce Flora

Orlando, Florida, draws more tourists in a year than any city in the world, including Paris. Its visitors (49 million claimed in 2005 for a three-county area) come for the area theme parks pioneered by Disney and for associated other attractions that dot the city and surrounding counties. With are so many tourists seeking things to see and do, Orlando is a magnet for small entertainment entrepreneurs. One such is Bruce Flora, who flies kites.

Flora’s kiting is different, even unique. He had the insight to rule out the pesky wind by using mechanical tows, either vehicles or boats, for his stunt kites. Thus he and his crew fly not only against the breeze as is usual, but with it. When there is no wind at all they also fly with no problem. “Industrial kiting,” is what he calls it. When fireworks are added (and maybe strobes, onboard luminescent lighting, spotlights, and reflectors), as they are for night performances, it becomes the catchy “kiting on steroids.”

Orlando is home to not only the sprawling Walt Disney World, with 60,000 employees, but other theme parks such as Universal Studios, Sea World, and Cypress Gardens. There are numerous other attractions. Kiteman Productions----Bruce Flora is “Kiteman”----has had successful engagements at many of them.

Flora tailors his shows to the client. They can be brief but intense one-nighters featuring just speedboats and kites circling a small lagoon while fireworks erupt dramatically to year-long engagements where stunt kiting from vessels combines with other entertainments in an elaborately choreographed four-times-a-day show that includes water skiers, fast boats, high divers, dancers, frisbee-catching dogs, and trained parrots.



Five six-foot Diamond kites flying in a train spew fireworks into the night sky as Kiteman Productions stages a show biz pyrotechnical spectacular. The fireworks are triggered by radio.



Both photos by Bruce Flora

Kiteman Productions roams the globe to put on its kiteflying extravaganzas. Here a pyrotechnic display is staged on the Caribbean island of Curacao for an international conference kicked off literally by Pele, the legendary Brazilian soccer star (white shirt in foreground). Pele got things going by booting a soccer ball far out into the water.



Bruce Flora

In this triple-image stop action photograph, a Kiteman Productions team shows the launch that starts each of its shows. A rack on shore releases the train of Diamond kites in machine gun fashion as the watercraft roars off. The staccato sound and blurred sight of the launch invariably draws oohs and aahs from the crowd. The boat driver here is Brian Keating, who has performed in more than 600 shows. When asked to audition for Kiteman Productions in 1990, he dropped everything and drove from Columbus, Ohio, to Orlando in one day. His nickname is "Flyin' Brian." The kiteflier is Jonathan Palmer, stepson of Bruce Flora---known as "Kiteman." A professional kiteflier since 1983, Palmer has done hundreds of shows over the years, working twice in Japan, once flying special shows three times daily for 53 days straight. The heavy, tough Diamond kites pictured measure six by six feet and are flown daily in kite shows around the world, making them perhaps the most viewed kites in history. When loaded properly, the automatic launcher with line play-out system is considered perfectly reliable. The Diamonds are made by Flora and staff and have coated Texlon ripstop nylon sails and Glassform spars. Flying lines are 700-pound test Spectra. The inflatable tube tails are of Texlon ripstop. Since the kites---relative midgets in comparison to the 17-foot Deltas often flown in shows as well---generate enormous pull because of their high speed tow, their dual flying lines are anchored directly to the boat. The pilot controls them via a pulley system. In case of trouble, kites and lines can be released instantly.

Show biz is just one aspect of Flora's business. His firm, housed in a large warehouse complex in the town of Kissimmee, near Orlando, also makes and sells banners, balloons, flags, custom flying props, and inflatables. Many of these are available for rent. "Banners are really the bread and butter," he says. "The kite shows are the fun---the icing on the cake."

An energetic, smart self-trained engineer, Flora also consults on hang gliding, ultra light aircraft (he is a licensed pilot of conventional aircraft), even dirigibles. At the other extreme, he is always willing to conduct humble kite workshops.



Bruce Flora

Having spent his boyhood in the Panama Canal Zone where his father served as a missionary, Bruce Flora, president of Kiteman Productions, became intimate with the Kuna Indians of the adjacent San Blas Islands. He flew kites for them and a Kuna woman memorialized this in 1975 by including two kite images in a “mola,” a reverse appliqué and hand-stitched 13-by-17-inch rectangle of fabric used in making blouses. These traditional molas are world famous for their beauty, and are widely collected and exhibited.

Flora’s background is unusual. Born and mostly raised and educated (Ohio State) in the Midwest, Flora spent key years of his youth in Panama where his father served as an evangelical minister to the Kuna Indians living on islands off the Canal Zone. His father was an adopted member of the tribe. It was a highly adventurous life for a boy---jungle exploring, diving the ocean, living with Indians for weeks at a time.

Flora recalls his father introducing him to kites when he was six. “I don’t know what possessed him,” he says. “I don’t know how he knew about kites. Together we built a five-foot Rokkaku using oilcloth for a sail and it flew well. It caught my imagination. I’ve been interested in kites ever since.”

Flora introduced kites to the Indians and just by observation from a distance one of them made and flew his own kite. A woman picked up on the fad. She incorporated two kite images into a piece of appliqué fabric she made for a blouse. It took her many weeks of work. Flora bought this *mola*, as it is called, and has it framed in his office. Never conquered by the colonial Spaniards (“They hid in the hills,” says Flora), the Kuna Indians of the San Blas Islands are notably intelligent, he found. “They do things their own way,” says Flora. “When I introduced them to a Peter Powell stunt kite, they made their own and two boys flew the two-liner, one to each line. “It performed

just great for them.” Flying by two people instead of one is a distinct feat, he notes, but was a natural for the boys, since Kuna society is very communal.

After college, where he trained as a musician, Flora took a range of jobs. He served as a photocopy technician in Ohio, did weather routing for ships in Panama, served as a consultant in Latin America for Food for the Hungry International, and built log homes in Canada. Then he and partner Pete Foy set up an airtoys importing business. In order to drum up interest, they gave shows at balloon festivals, fairs, “anywhere we could.” It was then Flora had his epiphany. “While taping a kite video, we couldn’t find any wind. With a film crew hanging around waiting, I had the idea using a motorized vehicle to create our own wind. We strapped my partner on top of my VW camper and began flying. That was the beginning. Soon we gave up importing and concentrated on flying.”

A show in the Montreal Olympic stadium caught the attention of Disney in Florida and after a successful audition in Orlando before top theme show officials in 1988 Flora and team were hired. Successes there followed and Flora, wife and three sons eventually moved to Florida to live permanently.

Except for a glitch in the business following the virtual business standstill in Orlando following 9-11 when Flora barely scraped by for a year, it’s been pretty much onward and upward for him. Some highlights from the last decade and a half::



Both photos by Bruce Flora

The bliss of living in Florida’s sub-tropical climate is interrupted periodically by hurricanes and Bruce Flora and wife felt the sting of Hurricane Charley on Aug. 13, 2004, when that storm toppled a tree onto their house. The wind was roaring so loudly they barely heard the tree fall from their refuge inside the house, covered by a mattress and cuddling scared pets. Luckily, the blow spared the Flora collection of pre-Columbian artifacts amassed by the family over many years of life in Panama. At right, house restored.

Kiteman Productions produced a three-year variety water show at Sea World. Up to four performances were given daily.

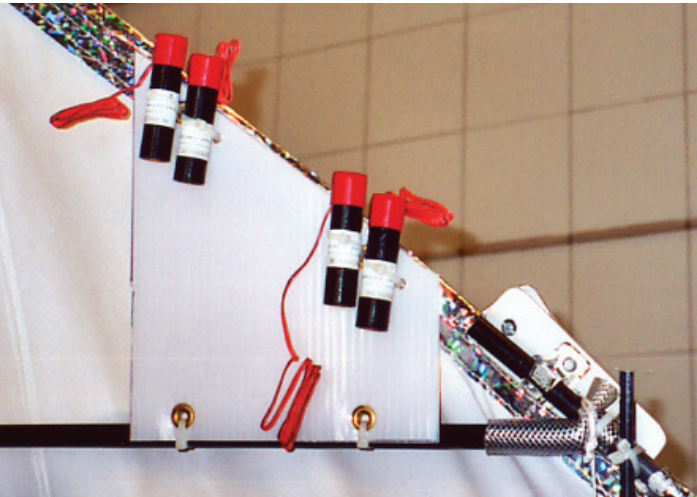
It staged a world kite festival in Disney’s Epcot Center in Orlando that ran 16 days and brought in top kite people from around the world. Peter Lynn of New Zealand set a record for world’s largest kite with his monster Megabyte. Some 2,500 kites from around the world as well as significant artifacts were placed on view. Workshops were held to teach children. Daily flying performances utilized no less than 17 speedboats used to tow stunt kites. Total attendance was 320,000.

Kiteman Productions has a continuing presence elsewhere around the U.S. and overseas. When the ocean liner Disney Magic departed from Los Angeles on a maiden cruise, Kiteman Productions flew stunt kites around the vessel using 10 watercraft in celebration. It was joined by airplanes towing banners, fireboats spraying water in

the water, massive fireworks. In Europe, Kiteman Productions trained fliers, supplied equipment, and oversees a Universal Studios theme park show near Tarragona, Spain. Performances have been running for five years. Kiteman did similar work for Universal in Osaka, Japan. The show there has been running for seven years. Another Kiteman-aided water show at Toyko Disney Sea has been going since the year 2000. The three extravaganzas attract many thousands of viewers daily.

But, as Flora points out, Kiteman Productions is still after all these years little known in the American kiting community. This is because its approach is so different. Towing permits Flora and highly skilled team to fly large, extra heavy Diamond and Delta kites made of tough modern materials such as carbon fiber, ripstop nylon, and Spectra line that normal wind would not raise into the air. It also led to Flora inventing a kite launch box (“The heart of our system,” says Flora) that permits precise, exciting launches into the air of kite trains. His tethering system too is unique: the towed kites are attached directly to the tow boat or vehicle so as to take the strain, although the pilot can almost instantly detach this harness and assume full control of the flying, if needed in an emergency.

Flora sums up about the role of Kiteman Productions: “We have exposed more people to kites than anyone. We’re a small company, but we do big things.”



Fireworks on wing of kite.



All photos by Bruce Flora

To welcome the cruise ship Disney Magic into Port Canaveral, near Orlando, Kiteman Productions turned out 10 small boats flying trains of six-foot Diamond kites. The vessels wove around the liner while the kites they towed flew graceful patterns, accentuated by their 100-foot tubular tails. Aircraft trailing welcoming banners and small craft spouting water supplemented the festive display.



Left, as its bread and butter operation, Kiteman Productions produces banners to order.

The Woman's Viewpoint

Margot Flora Speaks Up

Editor's note: Born in Montreal, French-Irish Margot Flora was educated in convent schools. She married Bruce Flora whom she met at a wedding in 1983 when she was 32. "It was love at first sight," she says. The Floras have lived in Orlando for 15 years. She is a convert to the U.S. "We're not going back to Canada to live," she says very firmly. "The quality of life is much better here." Margot became an American citizen some years ago. "I memorized the naturalization quiz," she says with pride. The Floras take particular delight in having three sons, now grown, and five grandchildren.



Margot Flora

Question: What's it like to be married to a kite enthusiast? Answer: It's interesting, a lot of fun. I particularly enjoy the reaction of kids to kites. That's my biggest kiting pleasure.

Q. Do you fly yourself? A. Yes, I'm very interested. I have my own collection of seagull kites and while lying on the beach I love to watch them flying overhead. It's very relaxing.

Q. What's your role at Kiteman Productions? A. I'm accounts manager. In addition to the bookkeeping, I do a lot of the worrying. When we're in a rush, I also help out in the sewing of appliqué banners. Banners are the mainstay of our business.

Q. Your most heart-stopping kiting moment? A. We were preparing a kite show for Disney here in Orlando years ago and in preparation kite lines were laid out on the ground. One line somehow appeared where it shouldn't have been and when an unexpected gust lifted the kite in the air the Spectra wrapped around my husband's leg and lifted him up into the air---upside down. He fell into the lake. In the moments the accident was occurring, the line sliced into his ankle. At the emergency room, the doctor saw that because of intense friction from the line, the wound had cauterized and sealed itself, and was not even bleeding. Cauterization precludes infection. He decided nothing needing doing and sent Bruce home. Because of this incident, however, we both learned to be much more concerned about developing and heeding safety systems. The accident led directly to Bruce and team member Kevin White inventing a unique, highly efficient payout system for launching kites.

Q. Funniest happening? When our dog Sadi sees a kite flying, she decides she has to get it and kill it. She'll chase till she drops. She has caught a few kites but we've managed to get to her in time to save them from complete destruction.

Q. Over the years, you've had a procession of some of the world's major kite figures come visit. Who are your favorites? A. Peter Lynn of New Zealand is one, he's so bright and he's such a charmer. Martin Lester of England is a hoot. Masaaki Modegi of Tokyo is a sweet, intelligent man embodying many generations of family kite culture that I find honorable and wonderful.

Q. It is reported you don't like to attend Kiteman Productions shows. Why? A. I get so anxious that something's not going to go right. Even a tiny error like the music not being in sync for a few moments or the tails of two kites momentarily entwining---a matter the spectators either often don't notice or think is part of the show---can deeply upset me. I really prefer to sit home and wait for a call from Bruce telling me that things went well. And they almost always do. The skill of our experienced team keeps amazing me.

Q. What's your favorite kite moment? A. When diamond kites with long tails swoop around the sky in train flying, it always evokes a strong emotional response in me. The patterns are so breathtaking.

At Work in the Hot Florida Sun

Flying as a Pro: Great Job, Great Tan

Editor's note: What's it like to fly kites for a living? A young Florida man has these comments, as excerpted by permission from <http://www.kitestop.com>.

By John Lutter

It was a dream opportunity. A stunt kite flier in the Orlando area was needed by a lagoon show at Sea World. It was a chance to get paid to do what I loved. So I contacted Kiteman Productions.

After passing an audition, which included drug testing and a visual inspection to assure I "looked the part," I was recruited by Bruce Flora who runs Kiteman Productions.

Training was conducted on a lake. Most of my fellow trainees were veteran show skiers and boat drivers; I on the other hand had done no more than fly stunt kites at the beach. Luckily, I quickly learned. I didn't have any trouble with the kiteflying, but learning to organize my equipment and props was another thing. Kiteman Productions has developed a lot of proprietary equipment for launching and attaching kites to its fleet of powerful little SeaDoo speedboats and dealing with these rigs took time to learn. I had to learn to roll up kiteline on yo-yo style winders (yeah, it seems easy but there's a technique to it so that the line comes off cleanly) and stuffing tails quickly but in such a way that they don't get tangled when we launch.



John Lutter

Flying also took getting used to, because the kiteflier rides backwards on the SeaDoo. This takes getting used to. Flying is essentially the same, but you do have to become attuned to the maneuvers of the SeaDoo and how it effects windflow. Imagine standing on the beach, flying your kite, and the wind shifts a direct 180. If you're not prepared for it, your kite crashes. Crashing in the water during a show isn't so much fun. Not only do the other crew members jeer and make fun of you ("Oh, the Kite Guy can't even keep his kite in the air.") but during a show it is very, very bad.

Anyway, they started me out with a Prism Legacy stunt kite to get accustomed to flying while riding a boat, then it was on to a five-stack of six-foot Diamonds, then a 16-foot Delta. Okay, I must admit it took me maybe 10 flights before I felt comfortable.

About That Florida Weather

Because central Florida between Tampa and Daytona, with Orlando in the middle, has the highest rate of storms with lightning in the U.S., Bruce Flora of Kiteman Productions unfailingly uses a lightning predictor before shows manufactured by a Florida electronics company. Central Florida has this lightning problem because of proximity to oceans, the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico, as well as lots of humidity. The predictor can detect lightning as far as 70 miles away. If electricity approaches a kiting event, Flora can take appropriate safety steps well in advance of its arrival. "We are super cautious; we act at least a half an hour before a storm is due," says Flora. "We cancel four or five theme park shows a week in the summer season."

After training, we went to Sea World to practice. The lagoon we'd be doing the show in was rather small, and the flight rules strict: No flying over people, boats, or objects. All of our patterns had to be approved by corporate folks at Sea World, so if we felt like a change was needed, it wasn't like we could just go and do it, we'd have to draw it out on a sheet of paper, submit it to the proper people, who'd submit it to the proper people, and so on, until it came back to us approved.

The entire cast had to memorize the sequences of the show, and their own parts in it. We had dancers, high divers, water skiers, speedboats, even birds and dogs. All were essential. If there was a goof, a whole scene was impacted. First people practiced their individual parts, then sequences were practiced until the whole show came into being.

Now, doing a regularly scheduled show isn't as much fun as just going out and tooling around the lake. Granted, it's fun, but after the first 50 or so shows it becomes a job. A fun-job, but a job none the less.

First of all, our call time and the number of shows that day was determined by Sea World, based on the estimated attendance for that day. Usually, we did three or four shows.

First thing each day upon arrival at the lagoon, we changed into our "work uniform" of swim trunks and T-shirt, and positioned our costumes and props for the show. These were our personal flotation device and different shirts and hats. Then there was an all-hands meeting to discuss safety matters, show performance, and so forth. As a group, we did stretch exercises (the dancers were much more limber than we kitefliers). Then we set up the kites for launch. At last it was show time.

The show was a quick 20 minutes. Everyone in the cast was on the move for the whole time. White kiteflying sequence might be only three minutes, we did double duty as spotters for other performers.

When the show ended, we reset the kites and got ready for the next one. We had time to cool down and eat and drink. The last was important since we were out in the Florida sun with temperatures near 100 much of the time.

But no reason to be sorry for the performers. It was a great job, and I got a great tan.

Kite Show: 'Riveting and Creative

Editor's note: Following are comments by executives attending a hotel conference in Orlando after they viewed a night-time kite and fireworks water show staged by Kiteman Productions:

"It was intimate, nice and private, staged just for us. Short and sweet." Bill, New York City.

"A little scary, actually. Very entertaining." Rob, Dallas.

"Rockin' and awesome. Those are technical terms of course." Barbara, Detroit.

"We're doing an 'incentive' in Phoenix for our top salesmen and I'm going to duplicate this show when we do the reward meeting for them." Cindi, Dallas.

"Riveting and creative." Ronnie, Sarasota.

"A wonderful transition for our conference. Before the show we held a discussion on clients, afterward we planned to move our site and take up the issue of brands." Leon, New Orleans.

"First bigtime show lasting just five minutes I've ever seen. It was intense!" Ben, Boston.

Innovative Kitemaking in Budapest

Istvan Bodoczky: Master of Asymmetry

Istvan Bodoczky chose one of the worst years in the 20th century to be born---1943. Budapest was occupied by the Nazis and his family had lost home and fortune. Two years later things took a turn for the worse: the Russians arrived. His father, a judge, was forced to become a Communist to keep his job, and Istvan at one point was quizzed by police as to his father's loyalty. Already carefully briefed by family, the boy said nothing.

Istvan received the only corporal punishment ever from his father in 1956. The 14-year-old Istvan and a friend were standing side by side and watching Hungarian revolution street violence when a stray bullet killed the friend. A clout on the head was received by Istvan as a warning against foolish behavior.

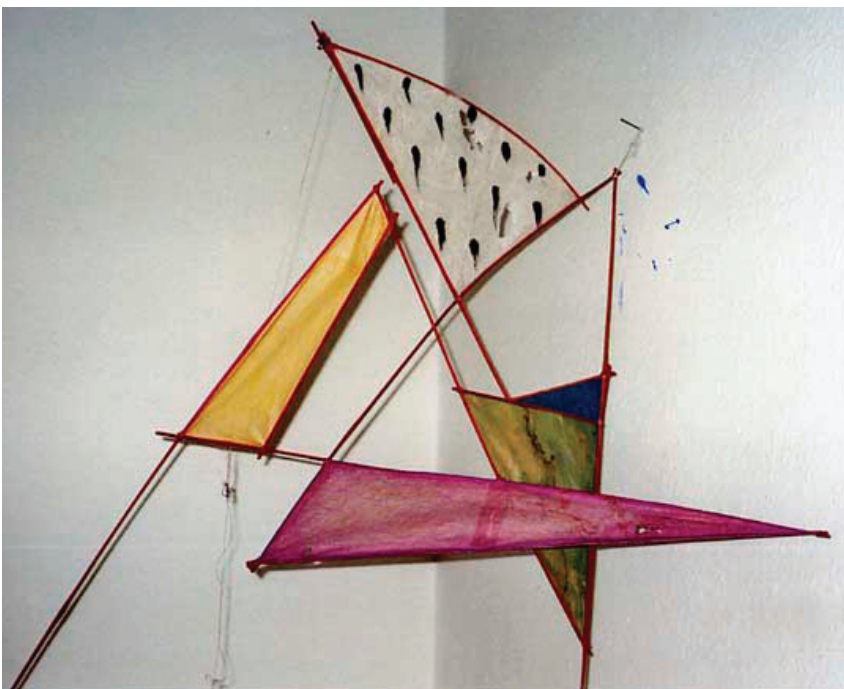
Going against family legal tradition (both brother and sister followed their father's lead and became sitting judges), Istvan opted for an art career instead and he has pursued it ever since with dedication and flare.



Istvan Bodoczky

Taking up kites to amuse his three sons, he was able to put his paintings and kites together when a television crew challenged him to fly one of his oddly shaped pictures on exhibition at an art gallery. He took up the challenge, framed and bridled it, and the kite flew nicely. This led him to experiment with and perfect asymmetrical kites. The result was a lovely fusion of kites with high art. It was an important innovation, widely admired.

Having made art and taught the subject for close to a half century now, Bodoczky is recognized as not only one of his country's outstanding artists but also one of its important teachers. His friends and admirers are legion.



Bodoczky was signally honored last year by the Hungarian University of Craft and Design in Budapest where he teaches when he was promoted to full professor, given a pay raise, bestowed a doctoral degree, and awarded tenure. "Now they can't retire me until I'm 70," he says.

Soft-spoken, charming, knowledgeable, intelligent, Istvan's dedication to art in general and kite creativity in particular is notable. He is a key figure in the global art kite community today.

A rare three-dimensional asymmetrical kite by Bodoczky, hung as a sculpture. "It flies well," he says.

An Ingenious Teaching Tool

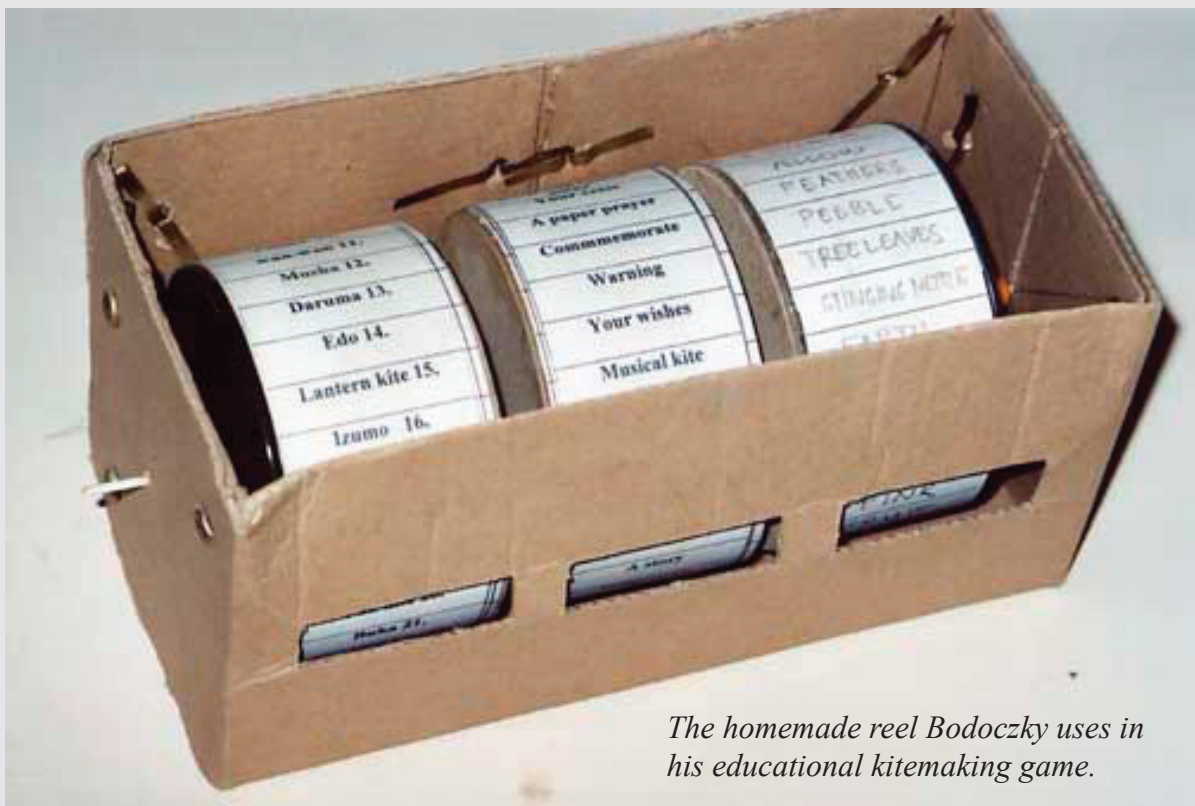
Istvan Bodoczky has come up with a brilliant teaching tool for use at kite workshops he conducts. It would appear to have widespread educational applications.

"I wanted to introduce the accidental into the art of making kites. The idea came from slot machines. Three lemons in a row brings a prize." To realize the concept, Bodoczky built a little cardboard box with three reels mounted end to end. Each has a list of words and each can be spun.

The first reel has names for 30 Japanese kite shapes---Fugu (open mouthed fish), Daruma (monk), Yakko (servant), Sode (kimono), and so forth. Why Japanese? "Because there is such a variety of shapes. There are only seven or so for European kites." Here's the way it works. When the first wheel is rotated, the word that comes up dictates the shape of the kite to be made. The second reel determines the purpose of the kite or what it needs to express, viz. black magic, a prayer, commemoration, a poem, a small victory, gossip, the third reel mandates the material to be used in building the kite, as in stinging nettle, fire, the color pink, feathers.

Bodoczky cites three combinations that led to interesting kites: the rectangular Edo kite shape, gossip, and plant seeds; the six-sided Rokkaku shape, celebration, and fire; and the rectangular Buka shape, message, and paprika. The last combination was drawn by a teenager, who produced a kite to order and then used a gluey paprika powder to spell out a message on the sail---- "Where is Rexi?" (Rexi was a German shepherd dog who had strayed from the castle where the workshop was held, but subsequently returned.) With help from Bodoczky, all three kites flew very nicely.

What did students have to say about the project? "Experienced the fun of flying." "Learned that owning a kite does not mean you know about kites." "Flying is a sort of meditation."



The homemade reel Bodoczky uses in his educational kitemaking game.

Ben Rulke

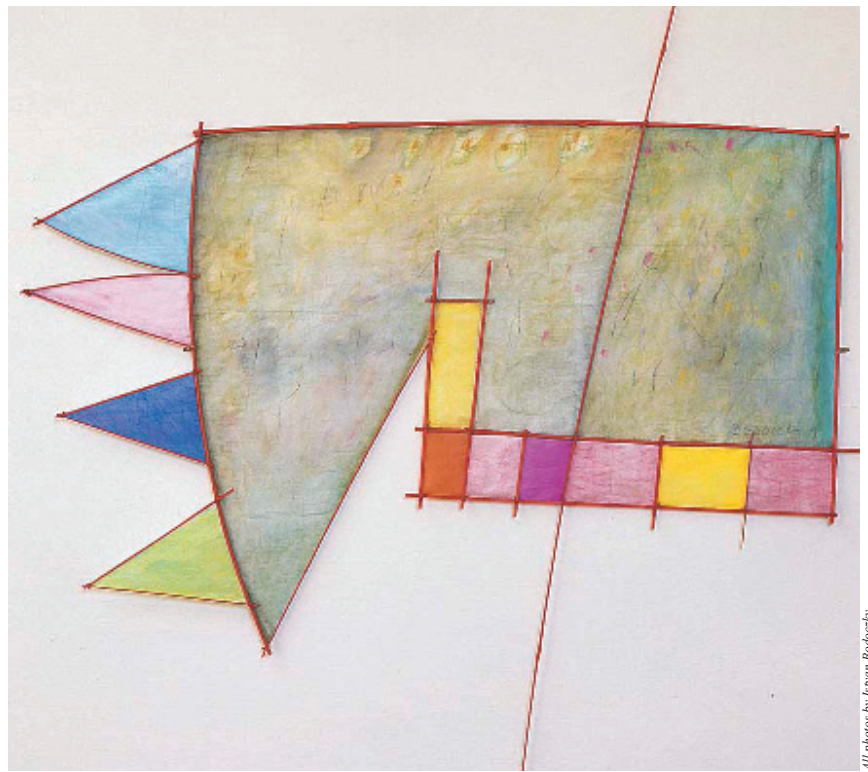
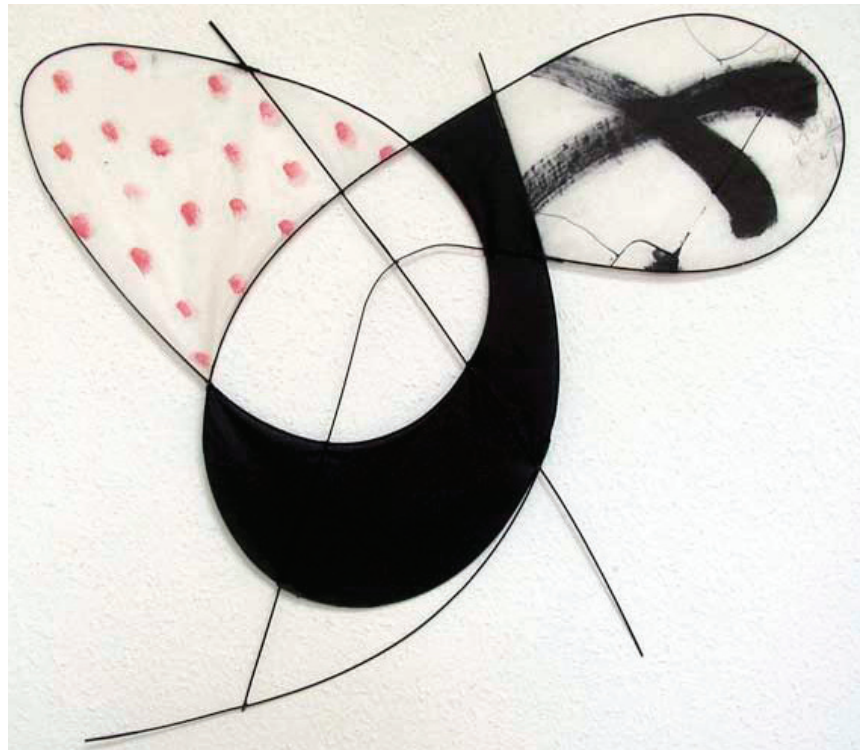
Attending a kite festival in Marseilles, France, with “woman” as theme, Istvan Bodoczky created the dramatic asymmetrical kite below titled “A Type of Woman.” He queried women about themselves, how they categorized themselves. “I didn’t ask men. I didn’t want vulgar jokes. I came up with 10 types of women. This kite represents the demon type. It’s an abstract expression of an idea.” After bridling, the kite flew nicely. At right, art students in a joint Hungarian-Austrian kite workshop were given different lengths of bamboo and told to place them where they



Both photos by Istvan Bodoczky



wanted, except that each stick had to cross two other sticks, where joins would then be made. After the wildly imaginative, asymmetrical frame was created, sails were attached as appropriate using painted papers and these were then decorated. Bodoczky bridled the resulting free form kite and to the surprise and pleasure of all concerned it flew very well.



At left: Bodoczky portrays a student of his, carrying her child, in a construction titled 'Shadow of Emese Benczur.' "While not a kite, all it needs is a bridle and line to fly," says Bodoczky. "The image is one I did of artist friends showing just their shadows or mirror images. Emese was a talented student of mine who subsequently showed at the Venice Biennale. Some of my older artist friends whose ghosts I didn't show were not pleased, thinking I had slighted them for younger artists. As is known, artists are difficult." Top right: This asymmetrical kite is titled "Scribble." Bodoczky explains: "I pick up sentences I hear or read. They stick in the ear. Then I transform them into kites. This is one of many 'scribble' kites I have made." Bottom right: "As a boy, Beni, my son, decided he wanted to be an inventor," says Bodoczky. "He invented the best-ever glue to mend children's toys; the toys he would use as a binder for cement. Instead of steel, he would put in the toys. It was a very odd idea. I call this construction 'Invention of B.' As with most of my constructions, if it is bridled and line attached, it flies as a kite."

All photos by Isvan Bodoczky

When Kites Come to Art

"There is no rule for bridling an asymmetric kite. Like children, you have to treat each one differently."

"What is the reason I paint my bamboo spars? I want the viewer to concentrate on the ideas expressed and the shapes on view, and not on the beautiful in itself bamboo."

"Working with paper is better suited to my temperament. It's easier to make changes with paper or, if you are dissatisfied, to just squash it up and throw it away."

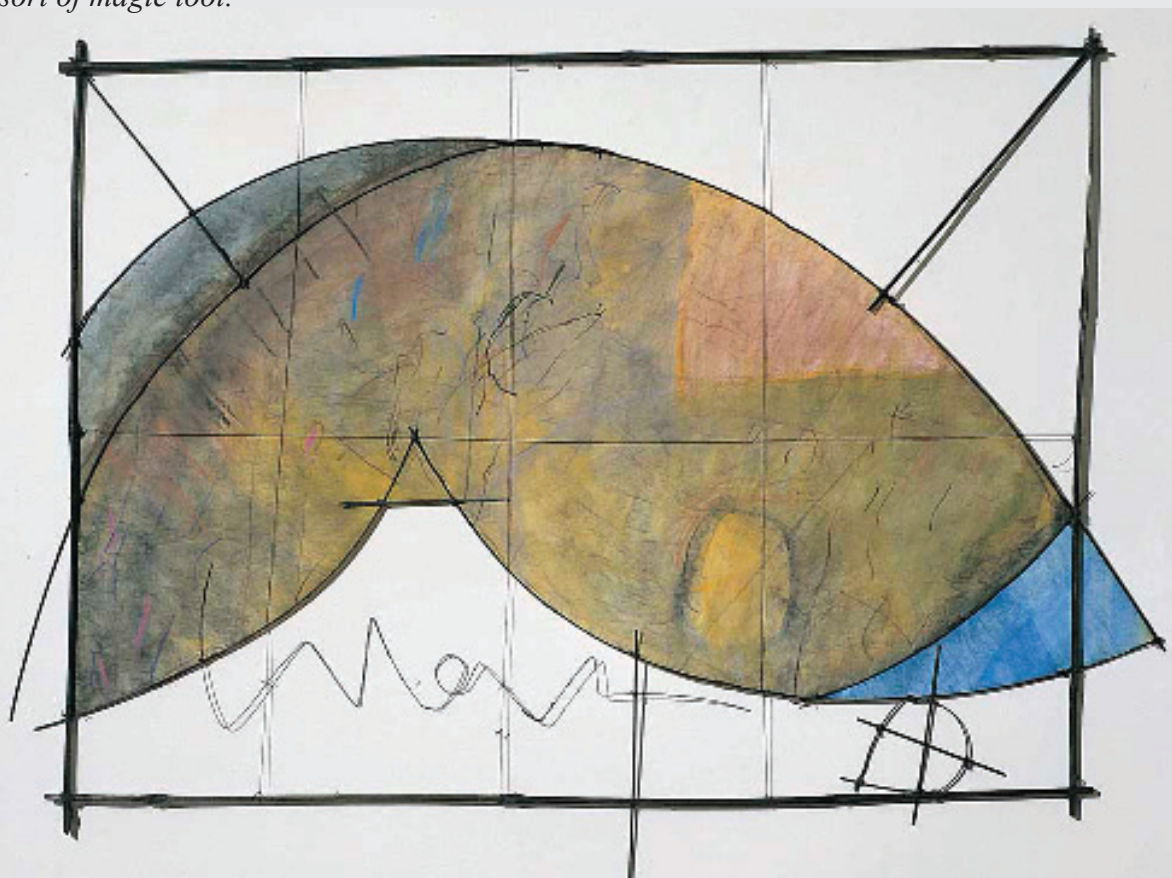
"Kites are tools enabling me to get closer to myself and to nature at the same time."

"Asymmetry makes things change and move, and movement is the symbol of life."

This is Professor Istvan Bodoczky speaking, with his hallmark voice----at the same time philosophical, meditative, instructive. Common sense and an overriding feel for aesthetics blend with an acute intelligence to make him one of the most interesting of the international kitemakers. In his kites, art and science come together in a seamless whole.

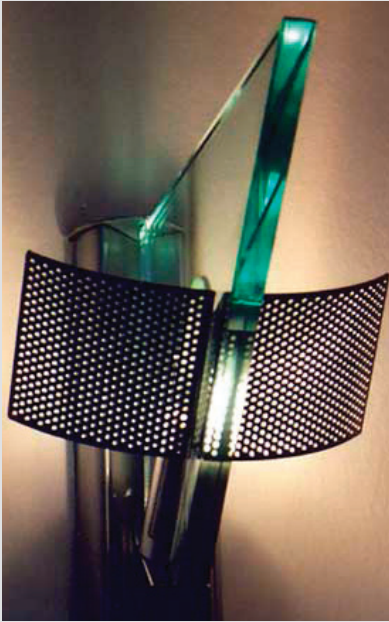
Two final quotes, culled from his everyday conversation: "Having irregular outlines for a work of art has a double effect. The area around the piece becomes an integral part of the art work, so it gains territory. At the same time, the work loses some of its autonomy."

"A mystical relationship develops between the structure flying high above and the man holding the string. The structure is the lengthening of the sense organs. It is not only the subject of meditation but the object as well, a sort of magic tool."



"This construction fixes words together that don't fit," says Istvan Bodoczky. "I call it 'Clever Body.' You can't say a body is clever, but you can say a machine is a clever body. Here I show a beautiful body, an organic form, being examined under a square microscope."

Istvan Bodoczky



All photos by Ben Rubin

Not surprisingly, Bodoczky places his guests at a hotel with an arts theme near his studio. From left, an Art Deco light sconce, another stylish fixture, and the name of the nation spelled out in style.

Bodoczky Comments on Other Kitemakers

Though I find numerous kitemakers attractive for their creativity, the ones who I feel closer to are not so many.

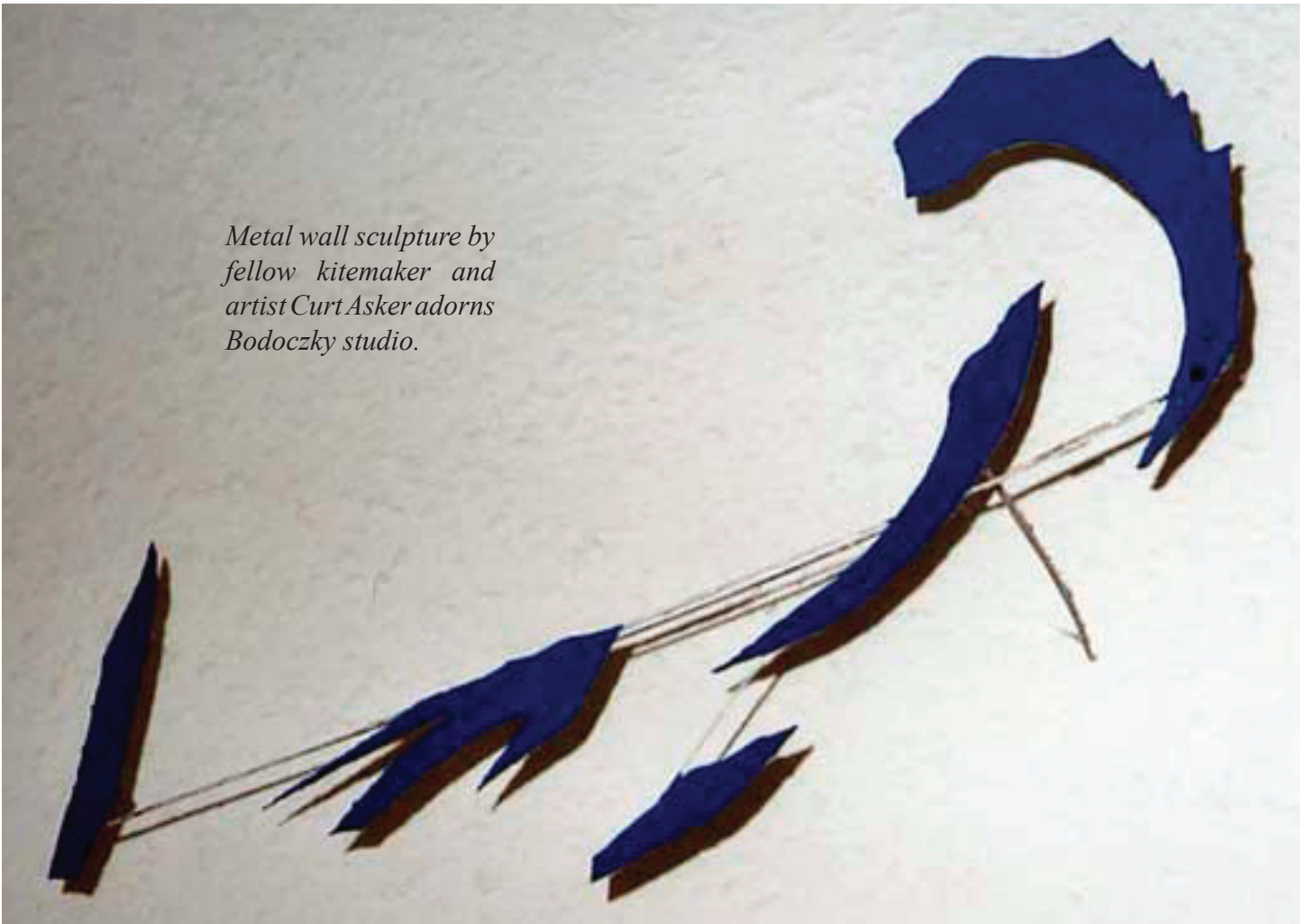
Curt Asker. A very sensitive artist. His works are on the border of what you can see and what you can feel. They are very intellectual. Some of his works have a tendency to dematerialize the art object, and his wall sculptures are quite minimalist, very metaphysical. His work perplexes you, asking whether something is real or unreal. I find his work elevating.

Robert Trepanier. A perplexing kite artist. He's an attractive and open personality. Creatively, his range of interests is wide: from bicycles to experimental music. At the same time his kite figures are repulsive, the opposite of his personality.

Anna Rubin. She is very inventive. Her works symbolize the beauty of nature and her approach appeals to many art students. It's an attractive approach. She finds a way toward people. Cheerful, dynamic, full of new ideas, she is always ready to experiment. She can carry a whole group. She's very empathetic, very kind. I never met anyone who doesn't like her. I have the feeling she doesn't think of anything other than kites. She has a very big influence on students.

Jackie Matisse. A very fine, intellectual person, her art is related to kites implicitly and sometimes more directly, but mainly as tails. Kites carry her message.

Drachen Foundation. Drachen is supporting not only kites but culture. It has a very wide angle of interest. I wish there were more organizations like it in the world, organizations that specialize in one thing, but are open to culture in general. Through kites it has assumed a cultural mission, it supports an understanding of the relationship between art, science, and engineering. With kites, it hit on a very suitable medium, a natural combination of art and science.



Metal wall sculpture by fellow kitemaker and artist Curt Asker adorns Bodoczky studio.

Three Questions

Ask difficult questions, get thoughtful replies.

Drachen Foundation: How do you define success?

Istvan Bodoczky: I think it's when what you are doing meets your own satisfaction and the satisfaction of people around you.

DF: What's your advice to young people?

IB: They should try to work on making a living at what they really like to do.

DF: How do you want to be remembered?

IB: I recently thought a lot about it. I concluded----I don't know what, actually.



Both photos by Ben Kuhn

Bodoczky is pleased to give his visitors to Budapest an architectural walking tour of the old city. It ends at Roman ruins beside the Danube River, below the famous Elizabeth Bridge.

The Dove and I

*I drifted, fluttering and free
Around the sky above.
With nothing much for company
Well, nothing save a dove.*

*The dove was quite a special bird.
I thought that, when it spoke,
“Why are you up here?” it said.
(Whilst giving me a poke!)*

*“The sky is ours----just for us birds”
I heard the dove exclaim.
“I’m sorry, but I disagree,
“You’ve no right to complain.”*

*“I really don’t know what I am.
“Much less quite why I’m here.
“But surely, no one owns the sky,
“You have no need to fear.”*

*That’s not the point,” the bird replied.
“You were not meant to fly.
“I am a bird, that’s what I do----
“You’ve no right to be so high.”*

*“Now just hold on,” I shouted back,
“At least you have a choice.
“I’d love to rest upon the ground....
“But how come you have a voice?”*

*“Why shouldn’t I?” the dove replied.
“Those rules don’t work this high.
“Birds speak all the time you know.
“But only when we fly.”*

*“We have no need to speak to man,
“We like it fine this way
“Some day men will all be gone,
“Then we will have our day.”*

*“Whilst down below you have no voice
“(It would create a fuss)
“But when you’re flying in the sky,
“You become one of us.”*

*“OK, while I’m up here,” I said,
“I speak as well as you.
“But how did I get up here,
“And what was I, before I flew?”*

*The bird flew all around me,
Then it gave a sudden shout.
“I knew I had seen you before,
“There are lots of you about!”*

*“Man makes you by the million,
“To transport things around.
“A supermarket carrier bag,
“When you’re on the ground!”*

*“But supermarket bags can’t fly,
I know that well,” I said.
“They’re only used to carry stuff,
“Like sausages and bread.”*

*The bird explained ‘bout men and bags,
And how men ‘pull things tight,’
He said that this was all it took
To turn a bag....into a kite.*

*Jim Cronin
Midland Kite Fliers, England*

Old Man’s Kite

*A feather upon the wind
Knocking on heaven’s door,
Fluttering, weightless as a leaf,
Crimson, gold-hued,
A stain on brilliant blue.
She roamed far and wide,
Curious as a child,
Seemed at times to want to reach the sun.
But all the while held firmly back
By an endless piece of twine.
And as the sun fell, so did she,
Gliding, gliding, gliding,
Coming to rest on the cool grass,
To be picked up by the maker,
Back as on every dusk to collect her
With loving eyes, that saw far more than
The bamboo and silk.*

Gisela Pineiro

Papered Beastie

*Oh sleekest soaring papered beastie,
What a black heart is in they breastie.
Couldst thou not fly from weste to eastie,
Or eastie to westie, as suits thee beastie,
And stay out of trees?
----Stormy Weathers
(with apologies to Bobby Burns)*

Wind Dancing

*A dozen kites floated in the sky, bobbing and
dipping in conversation with the kites on the
opposite hill. (Samba, Alma Gillermoprieto)*

** * **

*Kites capture the imagination as they capture the
breeze. (John Stevenson)*

A Lovely Print, Now About the Artist?

Being a major collector of kite prints from Japan has led Scott Skinner, president of the Drachen Foundation, into rewarding scholarship. His recent acquisition of a charming woodblock print titled Kite Time by the American artist Helen Hyde provoked him to wonder exactly who she was and what was her history. He decided to find out.

After a significant search, Skinner located information on the artist in a series of specialist monographs on American printmakers issued by the Smithsonian Institution. Hyde, he learned, was born in New York State and studied in New York City, San Francisco, Berlin, and Paris. When she was in her early 30s, she moved to “alluring Japan,” as she called it at one point, to study ukiyo-e (floating world) color woodblock techniques. It was at the turn of the last century and Japanese prints had by this time made a significant impact on many advanced Western artists, including Van Gogh and Whistler. In Japan, Hyde encountered the time-honored division of labor that was Japanese woodblock printmaking. Whereas in the West an artist usually did all the work of making a woodblock print, in Japan the process typically involved three people---artist, cutter, printer.

After a disastrous start in Japan, Hyde apprenticed herself to an Austrian expert who was also in Japan studying ukiyo-e and presently learned every step of the process. Now adept, she created Kite Time in 1903. The technique involved making preliminary pencil sketches, then drawing the image with brush and ink on thin, transparent paper. Her cutter, named Matsumoto, glued this paper, face down, on a block of cherrywood, then he cut away unwanted portions of the wood around the design. The resulting image became the key block. Next, the printer took over. He was Shohiro Murata, who formerly worked with the famed Hiroshige 3rd. After inking it, he placed the block on a moist sheet of paper and rubbed it to transfer the image. The resulting print went back to the artist for hand-coloring. This was given back to the printer for use as a pattern. In a long process, the cutter then made separate blocks for each color, accurate registration being of course critical. The print gained detail and hue as each color was given its own rubbing. Complicated prints using many colors required many blocks.

Hyde stayed in Japan until 1910 and during her decade there became thoroughly skilled at the expressive color woodblock art form. Her tender Kite Time is a remembrance of significant esthetic achievement by a now almost unknown American artist.



The Inspirational World of Kites

Favorite place to fly? Internationally, it's Cervia, Italy. The weather in early May is almost always beautiful and the people are inspiring. In the U.S., I really love Brenton Point in Newport, Rhode Island. Lots of bushes and trees to separate groups of people. With hundreds of kitefliers around you, you can feel like you're alone.

Best ever kiteflying companion? I love to travel with Jose Sainz. He's the perfect kite ambassador, has a wonderful sense of humor, and is always willing to share a bit of his Mexican heritage----that's spelled "t e q u i l l a." But mostly, he challenges all around him to do things better than they would have alone.



Scott R. Skinner

Most riveting kiting experience? Flying two large box kites in Long Beach, Washington, as a light fog rolled in, making both kites invisible. But their shadows could be clearly seen as the fog continued to roll by! It was magical, knowing they were flying, but only seeing the changing shadows through the fog.

If you could talk with anyone from the whole history of kiting, going back to its beginnings (and assuming language was no problem), who would it be and what questions would you ask? The easy answer is Samuel F. Cody since he was such a showman and doer. But I suspect he would have rubbed me the wrong way. A lot more my style, I suspect, would have been Lawrence Hargrave----so unselfish and open with his science. I'd ask him if he could have guessed the impact his box kite had on early aviation?

Who inspires you in the contemporary kite world? For truly cutting edge thinking and show kites, Peter Lynn. For gems that many people might never see, Anna Rubin. For general inventiveness, artistically, and in his use of materials and shapes, Robert Trepanier.

Most wonderful kite culture you have observed? Very difficult to answer, but this most recent trip to Guatemala has really had a powerful effect. The dedication of these people to making their large kites is really sobering. They have to do everything themselves, from traveling days away to cut bamboo, to finding floor space for final preparations, to final assembly on the Day of the Saints. It's really amazing.

As a collector of kites and related artifacts, what are your most exciting finds? Recently, it's a Japanese "sugoroku" ukiyo-e gameboard, with every square featuring a kite. Really rare and charming. Also, a turn-of-the-

last-century wind meter---a beautiful mechanical instrument. And an early 20th Century Aigloplan kite and ferry. The beautiful bird kite is in almost flyable condition!

What do you plan to do with your personal collection? I'll do my best to keep it intact and will find a museum interested in it. I keep my eyes open to the possible best home.

Travel Problems

How do the new security regulations affect your global travel? They force me to take fewer kites, but kites that I can readily fly in a variety of wind conditions. This is hard, because all my latest kites are light wind kites---I have almost nothing for "good wind." And then I have a few for high winds. So the regulations force you to pack smart.

With airline curbs in force, how do you deal with oversize, overweight kite gear? I try to be underweight or right on, even if both my bags are golf bags. Then clothes can go in the carry on.

You look to be 6-4 or so, how do you cope with cramped airline seating? Well I'm only 6 feet 2 but I fly enough so that I get premier seating with my carrier of choice. That five inches extra of seating room does help. I'm pretty anti-social on a long flight---headphones on, iPod jacked up, and book open. Oh, the aisle seat helps, too.

About Gear

What eyewear? Prescription Rayban wrap-around sunglasses. Can't see distances for beans without them.

Footwear? Merrell water shoes; they're great on anything but soft sand and can get completely wet. They dry quickly and stay very comfortable. In cold climates I love to carry fleece-lined Mocs; mine are by Trask in Montana. You can't be uncomfortable when your feet are warm.

Clothing for cold weather? Layers, plus I love to wear a bang-around sport coat---lots of pockets and an extra layer if you need it. It also never hurts when you're in the airline queue to get home since it might convince them that you deserve an upgrade.

Sungear? Raingear? A good waterproof coat. You can keep pretty dry if your coat is up to the task. Mine's a Patagonia rain jacket, but there are loads of great ones out there. I almost always carry some running tights by Hind---they are a light but warm underlayer for your legs.

Snacks to carry? Favorites lately are dried cherries and pistachios.

Medicines for third world travel emergencies? Cipro if you can get it prescribed---knocks out the "turistas" almost immediately. Also, Tylenol and aspirin.

What cameras do you use? Just came in to the modern digital age, Olympus E500. Comes with two lenses, great resolution, and can do anything. Feels like a real camera.

What electronic gear do you use? An iPod with extender-battery and often I take the JBL ring speaker for the iPod. It needs wall power, but has great sound and fits inside a stocking cap (thus insuring that I've brought said stocking cap).

In General

How do you define success? Doing what you want and like to do. Life is too short to be caught doing things you don't have any desire to be doing.

How do you want to be remembered? I'd hope people who have known me through kites would agree that I brought more to kites than I took.

Book Review

Was Ben Franklin's Electric Kite a Hoax?

By Scott R. Skinner

I felt a little like a Kansas school teacher when Darwin is mentioned; my faith was challenged by a new set of facts. So it was when I read Tom Tucker's *Bolt of Fate: Ben Franklin and His Electric Kite Hoax*. Could it be that the patron saint of kitefliers, Ben Franklin, never flew that famous kite? Could all the images on paper, ceramics, plaster, and bronze be inspired by myth? Could Ben have created this "experiment" out of whole cloth?

I'm suspicious of revisionist history, especially when modern norms are superimposed upon very different historical situations. Tucker wins me over though, at least as far as the actual kite experiment is concerned. In his balanced and thoughtful discussion of Ben Franklin, the printer, the politician, the celebrity, and the quick-witted hoaxer, I can believe that Franklin never actually performed the kite experiment. I think Tucker reaches when he accuses Ben of consciously planning a deadly hoax---much more likely that Franklin was not aware of the potential for danger and proposed the experiment to ensure his own fame.

By discussing the personalities involved, the rivalries, the egos, and the intellects, Tucker makes clear the high stakes of scientific fame as well as the enormous risks of failure. He identifies the people on both sides of the Atlantic who would advance the science of electricity and notes their strengths and weaknesses. Through inconsistencies in the written record as well as pragmatic problems that have been raised before, Tucker makes a strong case that Franklin never flew that famous kite. Beyond that, is the realm of conjecture, because Franklin was immensely famous in his own lifetime and learned to use fact and myth as his ally.

Bolt of Fate is a must-read for the kite enthusiast and the Drachen Foundation would be interested in additional comments on it.

Kites Thriving in Afghanistan

Five years after the fall of the Taliban, kiteflying is again flourishing in Afghanistan, particularly in the capital, Kabul. A hardline Moslem regime, the Taliban had banned flying as a distraction from religious practice.

Now many shops are selling inexpensive kites, line, and reels and the hobby has resumed its role as the national pastime. It has also become famous across the world because of the publication of a popular book, *The Kite Runner*, by Khalid Hosseini.

Kabul's top kite maker, Noor Agha, had to go underground to build and sell his kites under the Taliban, but now he sells his work openly. "During the regime, if a child was caught flying a kite, his father would be thrown into jail," he says. "Now we live like kings. We can do whatever we want. We can fly kites wherever we want."

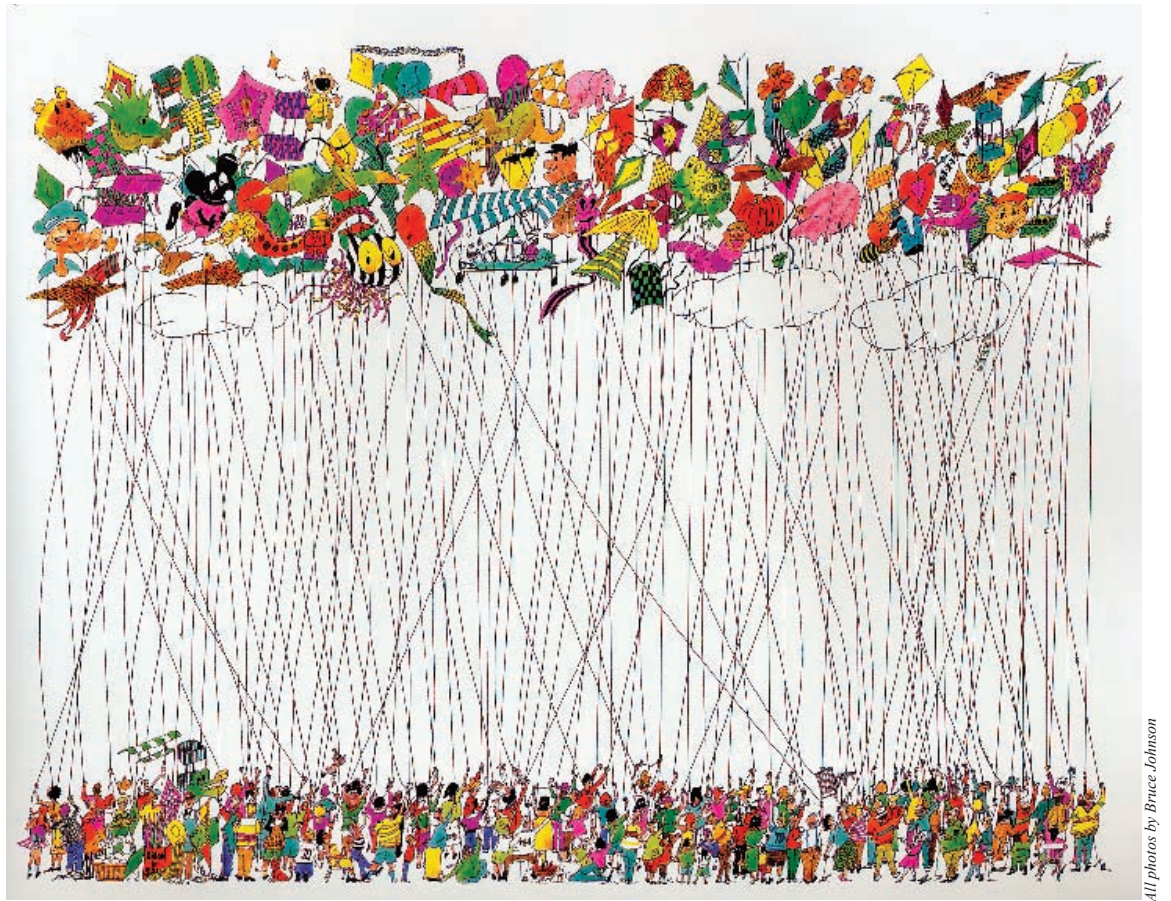
A Child Flies a Kite on a Magic Beach

Nico Chorier, of Montpellier, France, a professional kite aerial photographer, vowed his new son Noe would fly a kite before he walked. And Noe, at age six months, did just that with a small Eddy on the renowned beach and dunes on Fano Island, off the coast of Denmark, with his mother Nathalie watching. "I first attached the handle around Noe's wrist for a couple of photos," says Nico, "then gave him the handle in his little hand so he could really fly the kite. He consciously clenched his fingers around the handle and watched the kite flying at the end of the line. I hope he realized he was holding this flying alien himself." Nico adds about this tender chip off the old block scene: "If this first flight left a tiny mark in his cells, I'll be happy."



Nicolas Chorier

Artful Flying In 3-D



All photos by Bruce Johnson

Works of art using a kite motif range widely, but few have the charm of Bruce Johnson's print titled *Go Fly a Kite* in its a three-dimensional version. A Pennsylvanian, Johnson, 52, now of Dingman's Ferry, a Delaware River town, works in the popular art tradition of Andy Warhol, Keith Haring, and Kenny Scharf, Pennsylvanians themselves. *Go Fly a Kite* is sheer exuberance---many dozens of cartoonish figures flying a tangle of kites overhead. The kites are also various and colorful. Other artists have done the multiple kiteflying scene, but Johnson's work is distinguished by its literal depth. Prints of the original image are painstakingly cut up and mounted four-deep, with a glob of cement to keep them slightly apart ("Almost like caulking," says the artist). The effect, when viewed from a slight angle, is magical. Johnson came up with the idea of dimensional art from decoupage Christmas cards. At first his sister did the 3-D work, but she soon burned out from heavy demand. Next Johnson tried out a laser cutting scheme, but edges came out burned brown. He solicited a Chinese contract, but got no takers. Finally he found three ladies ("Italian and not Amish," he notes) in Reading ready and able to do the project. Using exacto knives, they cut, paste and mount. It takes in excess of two weeks of concentrated labor to do one work. Signed, numbered and framed, the dimensional kite print---his only work on that theme ever---sells very well at \$750. Showing his work in a variety of media in galleries (60 one-man shows) and advertising on the Web, the prolific Johnson, who also does meticulous Andrew Wyeth-type watercolors, once sold 100 of his works in one day. For a look at the artist's slick website, with images from tailgating at a Penn State football game to skiing the slopes, from the Hershey chocolate factory to Oktoberfest in Munich, bring up <http://www.bjohnsonltd.com>.





Jan Houtermans

Avian Attack on Thailand Beach

*While bicycling in Thailand, Jan Houtermans of Vienna, Austria, found a deserted beach on Mak Island where he could fly kites in complete peace. He put up a Nick James bird and soon decided the wind was so stable he could tie off to a tree and go fetch himself a rocking chair from his cottage. Returning, he heard loud avian screaming. “It was like in the movie *The Birds*,” he says. “There were 20 crows circling the kite, with more coming from all over. They were screaming and diving at the kite, which was flying in a lively manner because the wind was turbulent. Like a wing of fighter planes, the crows attacked one after the other, diving at but not actually touching the kite. The assault went on for 15 minutes, then the flock abruptly departed. Next day I flew the kite at the same place. The birds ignored it. They had learned it wasn’t an intruder into their environment. They figured out: It’s just a stupid kite, bound to the ground, and not dangerous.”*

News in Brief



Ben Rube

A view of the Paper Museum.

Elaine Koretsky with able support from her husband Dr. Sydney, photographer in chief until an eyesight problem intervened, the institute maintains a fascinating museum, open to researchers by appointment. Tibet, Burma (eight trips), and the remote reaches of China are among the areas they have visited. Available to study are old books on the subject, papermaking molds and tools, a wide ranging collection of handmade papers, even plants such as the mulberry which provide bark to make paper with. There are more than 3,000 items in the collection. Slides, movies, and videos created by the couple document papermaking around the world. www.papermakinghistory.org..... With little notice, **Jan Desimpelaere** of Wevelgem, Belgium, has been pursuing his studies of historic Russian kiting. Russia in pre- and post-tzarist days was quite active in developing kites for military and scientific purposes. A researcher and kitemaker, Desimpelaere is also a major collector of old kites and kite memorabilia. Funded by Drachen Foundation grants, he has made several trips to Russia over the years and obtained the cooperation of key descendents of turn-of-the last-century aeronautical pioneers. When he publishes his findings, it will fill a gap long felt in historical kite research..... Having worked on it for years, indefatigable **Bob White** has published his timeline of kite history on <http://www.best-breezes.squarespace.com/kite-timeline>. The timeline is issued in segments to allow proper display in three computer formats. White envisions the timeline leading to further discussion and conjecture on the part of the kite community. "I welcome feedback," he says: b.white@niagara.com..... **Philippe Cottenceau**, one of the great poets of kitemaking, has died of cancer after a long illness. He is buried at Forcalquier near his home in southern France. Cottenceau was noted not only for his spare, original kites but also for kite scholarship. He was a key force in the French kite association Au fil des Vents and helped produce its scholarly publications. "He was unique," says fellow kiteman Nico Chorier of Montpellier. "He was an inspired rebel, with a rare and enlightened vision, always expressed with humor, poetry, and humility."

Want to find out where the nearest kite shop in the U.S. is located? A great place to fly? A nearby kite club? WWW. Mapmuse.com is interactively mapping all three categories. They are works in progress and editorial contributions to them are invited.....**Because certain types** of kites, often Asian, are by tradition made with paper sails, interest in handmade paper has spread around the contemporary kite world. Anyone concerned to further his knowledge of this ancient craft is well advised to visit the Research Institute of Paper History and Technology, in Boston. Curated by the lively



Nicolas Chorier

Philippe Cottenceau flying.

Mayan Indians Are Heard

Big Kites of Guatemala Make a Statement

“Some of the best kites you’ll ever see,” says Scott Skinner, president of the Drachen Foundation. “It’s like Hamamatsu in Japan, a huge community kiteflying effort. Unique.”

“One of the seven wonders of the kiting world,” says Ali Fujino, director of the Foundation. “The festival, mixing Indian and Catholic cultural traditions, is both fascinating and cute.”

What’s this? The two are commenting on the Day of the Saints celebration in the Guatemalan village of Sumpango which they attended on November 1st last year. The annual event near the capital drew tens of thousands of visitors, almost all Mayan Indians, plus a Drachen Foundation team documenting the celebration on videotape and with photos. Jose Sainz, a Drachen board member, is Mexican by birth and served as Spanish-language interviewer. Matt Stubbs served as videographer. The 25-minute film he is preparing will be widely screened in the U.S. and lent to Guatemalan groups for educational use.

Day of the Saints in Sumpango village (and in a neighboring town, Santiago, the only two Guatemalan villages flying large kites), had linked parts. In the first, relatives refurbished and decorated graves of their relatives to honor them. In the second, the large kites were displayed on a playing field beside the cemetery; their construction and flight would symbolically banish evil.



Indian families groom and decorate graves as a key portion of the Day of the Saints celebration. By tradition, yellow flowers are used to symbolize the concept of rebirth.



Mark Wiener

Kitemaking in Sumpango has to be seen to be believed. The scale is so large only massive facilities can be used such as truck garages or, as this case, the municipal building of the village of Sumpango. The kitemakers, all volunteers, typically work every night after work or school and all day Saturday for weeks or months creating their intricate, showy paper kites.

This display showcased some of the largest, most beautiful kites made anywhere in the world. The big ones, of which there were dozens, measured up to 40 feet in diameter and, amazingly, were made of hand-cut, layered tissue paper. The bamboo spars measured up to six inches in diameter and were wired and roped together. It took a volunteer team weeks or months to make each one. Surprisingly not fuelled by commercial or tourism interests, the work was, rather, a labor of love by young Mayan Indians who created the kites to make a political statement---understated but clear. Repressed by the Latinos, or Spanish-speakers, even though they constitute a majority of the population, the Mayans wanted the world to know they exist, that they have their own vibrant culture, that they mean to have a voice. Many of the kites had messages on them---“Respect our lives, it’s the basis of peace.” On others, the visuals made the statement---scenes of everyday life such as people working the land, a mother braiding her daughter’s hair.

Because the kites were so huge and the crowd so dense, the big guys-----*barriletes gigantes*----did not get off the ground last year. The wind made doubly sure of this by being absent.

But a wonderful, peaceful time was had by all as the crowd milled around, chatted, ate, drank, listened to nonstop music, admired the *barriletes* up on their tall stands. The crystal clear mountain air and surrounding volcanoes, some active, gave the scene an appropriate beauty and gravity.

One and all, Drachen team members were thrilled.



Mark Wiener



Jose Sainz



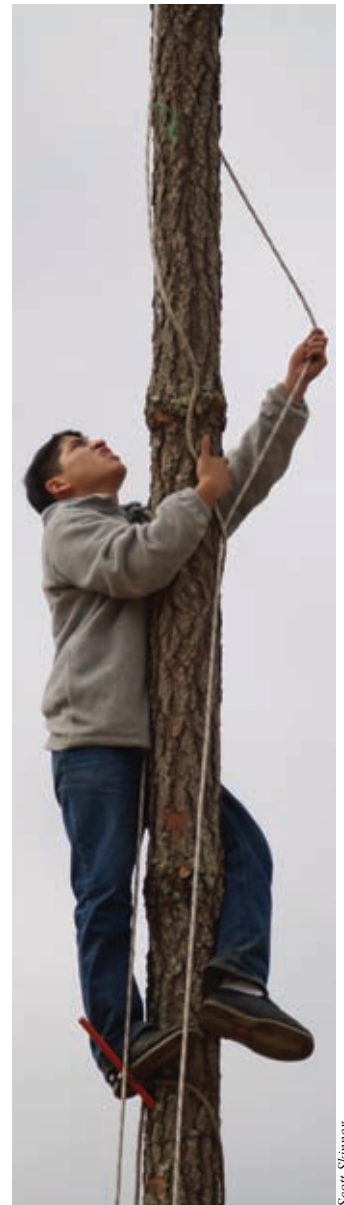
Mark Wiener

Religious, abstract, and decorative designs-----often quite beautiful and striking-----can be found on the pasteup kite sails. The kite at the top features a religious procession mixing Indians and Latinos, as shown by the clothing.

It's the day to fly! From the center top, clockwise, volunteers erect large support poles for the giant kites, a youth rigs a support line, the frame of six-inch bamboo spars is roped together, and the notched tip of a spar is roped and wired together to the tips of the other spars to complete a circle. The completed sail will now be attached to this rather crude but effective framework.



Mark Wiener



Scott Skinner



Scott Skinner



Mark Wiener



Mark Wiener



Mark Wiener



Jose Sainz

Top, brilliantly colored kites in all sizes ranging from 40 feet in diameter on down stand proudly on display at Sumpango on the Day of the Saints, November 1st. Some 50,000 people, mainly Mayan Indians, with many Latinos and a sprinkling of tourists, mill around during the course of the day to admire the kites, read political messages on some of them, eat, drink, chat, listen to music, and generally have a good time. Volcanoes brood in the background. It's a day for paying honor to their ancestors and for celebrating the unique, important Mayan culture. Although it is rarely windy enough to launch the really big kites, and in any event often too crowded for safety, smaller kites are given a go as launch teams race down the playing field one after the other. Right, with the light shining through it, a kite looks glorious in flight.



From the top, clockwise: The look of the Maya. Note colorful clothing. A beauty queen shows off fancy Indian regalia. Flora and fauna in Guatemala are different and sometimes dramatic, as with this six-inch rhinoceros beetle.

All photos by Jose Saintz



The Drachen Foundation film team plots logistics for the Day of the Saints kite fly. From left, Scott Skinner, president of the Foundation; Ali Fujino, director; Jose Sainz, a board member; and Matt Stubbs, videographer.



Both photos by Mark Wtener

Beautiful Antigua, home base for visiting the kite village of Sumpango. Antigua has been repeatedly leveled over the centuries by eruptions of the fearsome Acatenango volcano in the background. Residents rebuild each time. Life goes on.

Dramatic Kite Accident

‘Bear Makes for the Woods’

Editor’s note: The author of the following report is a noted kite designer and international exhibition flier, living in Ashburton, New Zealand.

By Peter Lynn



Ben Rubin

Peter Lynn

It might be better for me if I didn’t talk about this. It was a bad mistake, but on the other hand, maybe I can slip a bit of positive spin with this version.

Anyway, the basics are that a train of kites I was flying at Andalo in the Italian Alps made a five kilometer run for it through the forest canopy over to the next valley before being recaptured. An eight-meter Pilot, a Maxi Ray, a Maxi Trilobite, and a Maxi Penguin made up the train. No one was injured, there was not much damage to things or kites, but it definitely ranked in the top five most dramatic kite accidents I’ve been a part of in 30 years of event flying.

The wind was strong----up to 60 kilometers an hour in gusts (couldn’t hold onto the Pilot by myself at times), but surprisingly steady for an inland alpine location. I’d tied the train off to the foundation of an office servicing an adjacent climbing wall by lashing around the 80mm by 80mm foundation timbers that crossed at each corner, and, for security, had rigged a 2,000kgm Dyneema loop around a substantial fence post by the upwind corner.

How it all let go I’m not sure----an 80mm by 80mm by 4m piece of building went along for the entire trip, pulled out nails and all----but what happened to the tie to the fence post I have no clue; it vanished. Did it break? I wouldn’t think it could have, and if it did, some remains would have stayed with the (recovered) main leash it was rigged to. Did it come untied? It’s difficult to imagine that both ends would have done so simultaneously. In the days following, I tied off the same building (but with the line right around, rather than just to its foundation), with a loop back to the same posts; and even now, with heightened suspicion, could not see how it could fail.



Peter Lynn

Peter Lynn’s four-kite train of giant kites snags in the Italian Alps. It was one of his more dramatic accidents in 30 years of kite event flying.

Fortunately I’d just “encouraged” some spectators to move out of the danger area just downwind of the anchor

point; no, not a premonition, but a precaution when the wind's up---when the kites began to get smaller and smaller, while I stood there open mouthed for a second or so thinking maybe I need glasses.

The Penguin, lowest on the totem, took a liking to the first tree it met and stayed there, sans bridle. Then, after demolishing four sections of a post and rail fence beside a horse arena (complete with horses, who were very interested by this time), the other kites flew 500 meters or so across a lake before catching in the forest canopy, through which they snagged and dragged for the next few kilometers, powered by the Ray and Pilot that remained flying. Eventually they were brought to earth from the final snag courtesy of a colleague's not inconsiderable tree-climbing skills.

I'm very embarrassed to have had this accident, and apologize for the risks that other kitefliers and the public were exposed to, and especially to the event organizers, Claudio and Catarina Capelli.



The mishap draws local law enforcement.

Peter Lynn

The Pilot and Ray were untouched, the Bear had an easily repairable 1.5 meter rip below the muzzle, and were all back up in the air again the same day. The Penguin was rebridled, better than originally, and up again the following day. The Trilobite took the brunt with an ugly 2m dismemberment in the upper head area and completely shredded tails, but was near enough flyable again by festival end.

On a brighter note, the mayor was delighted with the regional news coverage Andalo derived from all this, under headlines like "Bear Makes for the Woods." At the official dinner I was presented with a commemorative plate, complete with Andalo's bear logo coat of arms, as thanks, and was apparently to have received a bronze casting of a bear instead, until Claudio dissuaded the authorities on the grounds I wouldn't have weight allowance sufficient to bring it home, which this time I did, damn!

Safety in General

Every time there's something like this, I think, Okay it was very bad, but it won't ever happen again. And generally it doesn't, but then some new thing does.

Ten years ago I was in the middle of a line-breaking crisis that at times made me consider seriously whether it was safe to continue festival flying. The problem then was the weight of the lines. Having to travel everywhere by air, there was just no possibility of carrying big, heavy, strong lines, as well as kites that pulled too hard. The solution to the line problem was the advent of reasonably priced Spectra/Dyneema, although I'm only now developing knot systems that don't weaken the line too much and hold reliably under load but can be undone easily when required. The answer to kites that pull too much has been 10 years unremitting effort designing them so they pull less. The challenge is that there is a narrow window of bridling angle for which most kites are stable, and generally this occurs at a much steeper angle than for the minimum pull condition. Soft kites that have interesting shapes are already difficult enough to design without this unwelcome restriction. They've gradually yielded though. The kites we make now pull much less than those of 10 years ago, and are generally better behaved and more stable.

Anchoring has now become the major challenge for fliers of large kites at festivals. Even organizers naturally want as many kites in the air as possible, but the limiting factor is now more usually availability of anchors and their precise placement, rather than kite or space availability. To add to the problem, increasingly we fly trains of kites, because this gets more kites into less space. But this loads the available anchor points even more.

Small vehicles are the best. They are easily moved when the wind shifts, and not even a major train like the Andalo escapees will easily move a car, whereas in 1996 just one Ray would have.

Next best is some form of heavyweight. Berck-sur-Mer in France does this very well with their supply of concrete dumbbells, backed by a friendly driver of a frontend loader for quick shifting. Anchors that rely on weight are best because when they do move, it usually happens slowly enough to give warning and allow remedial response. For beaches, sandbags are excellent, particularly construction bags. If more organizers could supply a few of these, and shovels, many more kites would grace their skies. These bags are easy for them to supply but impossible for kites who are arriving by plane to bring, and cost a very small percentage of what festival organizers spend on travel, accommodation, and field organization expenses.

Worst, and particularly unsafe, are stakes, screws, and rods. There are a few fliers putting up large kites who use them safely, and if you use arrays of them, know ground conditions well, and have your own equipment and systems, I have no doubt that they can be. But visiting fliers are forced to use what can be scrounged or borrowed locally, and are frequently reduced to using unsuitable or wrongly situated setups, or not fly----a recipe for disaster. The only injury I've ever sustained from single line flying is a broken thumb when a ground screw came out without warning, and the nearest to being offed ditto was when a 1.5m by 25mm diameter rod came out of the ground like a rocket, creasing my hair as it went past. Lumps of metal flying through the air pulled by escaping kites just don't bear thinking about. So I'm not thinking about them. I'm thinking about a great idea I have for solving the loss of steering at maximum depower that the next generation of traction kites will be plagued by instead.

What They Had to Say

"My most memorable experience? I will always remember being dragged by a train of eight stunt kites and before I knew what was happening I was lying in a ditch without breath and very severely bruised. I was lucky I didn't break anything, but I had to lie in bed for several weeks before I fully recovered and could move around without pains." Eli Shavit, Israel

"There are kites that should never be flown near trees in any wind conditions, and others that can survive so long as they are kept well above the treetops. Unfortunately, most people don't find out which they've got until it's too late. Most people understand that turbulence is created downwind of trees and buildings, but few seem to know about the downdraft that appears to be created directly above the trees. This can suck an otherwise happy single-liner down into the clutches of a dreaded kite-eating tree. The moral being----don't put any kite in a position where it can be grabbed by a tree, which may have very long arms!" Jim Cronin, Midlands Kite Fliers, England

"Keep the wind at your back/A warmth in your heart/ and your colors in the sky!" George Peters, Boulder, Colorado

"The Au fil des Vents kite association has as its main concern the poetic side of kites, linking this ancient art to the world of dreams." Au fil des Vents journal, 1998

"Those man-lifting experiments with kites Nick Morse and I did were scary, yes. we got up to 300 feet, high enough to die. The first 50 feet were the worst because if you fell you might live!" Martin Lester, England

"Imagination is the highest kite one can fly." Actress Lauren Bacall

Kite Study Evolves

Taking a Look at Modern Cambodia

After graduating from college, Pennsylvanian Sarah St. Vincent explored her newly discovered Web-browsing interest in kiteflying by traveling to Cambodia for a bare bones research trip. The trip was partially funded by the Drachen Foundation. She spent ten months in Phnom Penh, finished off with brief kite research visits to neighboring Vietnam and Laos.

A year after her return and while studying for a graduate degree at Harvard, St. Vincent completed a book manuscript on her memorable Cambodian experience. She titled it *The Year of the Singing Kite: Art and Life in Modern Cambodia*. “Singing” because many Cambodian kites have a sounding device attached which hums as the kite flies. The book was not what she had first planned. “My original plan was to focus exclusively on kitemakers, interviewing those I could find for several days. I thought I could create a portrait of life in modern Cambodia, using kitemaking as a sort of lens.” She settled instead for efficient daytrips with officials of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, who did the arranging and interpreting. Sim Sarak, a top official in the ministry, served as her host, his wife Cheang Yarin did the interpreting.

St. Vincent interviewed kitemakers in eight different provinces. As she got deeper into the project, her focus changed. From kites she move to the general question: What is life like in Cambodia 25 years after the genocide here?



Sarah St. Vincent tries out her beginning Khmer on youngsters.

The answers she received to this question, along with her kite interviews which often---even usually---got into the same sensitive area, constitute her well written, vivid 230-page book, with accompanying photographs.

St. Vincent writes she wanted not only the world of professional kiting---“a world whose members are passionate but few”---but also her friends and colleagues “to see the Cambodia I had seen. This country which had suffered devastating violence was very much alive.” In Phnom Penh and elsewhere, answers came to her in a variety of voices. She talked not only with kitemakers but with monks, princes, café waiters, street children, dancers, bodyguards, mechanics, laundresses. “All had the kindness (albeit unwittingly, in most cases) to show me some piece of the whole,” she says.

While the bulk of the manuscript thus became contemporary sociology, the scattered kite portions yield interesting insights into kites and kiting as an important, at one point almost lost, aspect of Khmer popular culture. Says a kitemaker: “If we have war, no one can fly kites but when it’s peaceful we’re free to fly them.” Another notes: “I taught my three sons to make kites. Because it’s a part of Khmer tradition, I want to pass it on to my children.”

Not all is sweetness and light on the Cambodian kite scene, however. When St. Vincent interviewed an old farmer named Mr. Song, she hears from the man’s wife of many decades. “If I had known he likes kites so much, I wouldn’t have married him,” she says. “Do you see my hair? It’s all white. How many white hairs do you see on his head?” Writes St. Vincent: “The children under the house are giggling.”



Kitefliers and neighbors pose with a khlonek, or singing kite, in Kompong Speu province. Note the hummer atop the kite which vibrates in the wind to make pleasing sounds.



All photos by Sarah St. Vincent

Cambodia has many different types of kites

Book Excerpt

(Characters: Kong Chheng, a retired low-level government official living near Angkor Wat; Lim Kruth, a frail old kiteflying friend; author; interpreter.)

“Some people say that if a kite falls down on someone’s house, that person will have bad luck,” I note, citing an ancient and widely held Cambodian belief. “Do you think that’s true?”

“No!” Kong Chheng nearly shouts. “I’m sorry, but I’ve had so much trouble with that idea.”

“Trouble?”

Lim Kruth notes. “It’s true. I fly kites with him, so I know.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“Well,” Kong Chheng huffs, “last year I had to pay 20,000 riel to that doctor over there.” He points across the dirt road. “My kite fell on his house, and he called the monks to do a blessing ceremony because he thought it was bad luck. I had to pay the monks for the ceremony. And they burned my kite! Does that make sense? If a car hits someone, do we burn the car? No,” he shakes his head emphatically, “it’s not true that kites are bad luck. There should be an announcement on TV.”

“They should tell the teachers,” Lim Kruth chimes in. “The teachers would tell the children.”

“Yes. That would work.” Kong Chheng claps his hands.

“Do you have any other stories about kites?” I ask.

“Well.” He hesitates.

“Lim Kruth smiles, an amused, toothless grin. “Tell her.”

Kong Chheng gestures toward a palm tree that stands at the edge of his yard. “One time my kite got stuck in that tree, and when I tried to climb up and get it, a snake bit me. The doctor wanted to amputate my leg, but it’s getting better.” He puts his feet together, and for the first time I notice that one of them is swollen.”

When did this happen?”

“Oh, maybe four months ago.” He lights another cigarette. “And one time I was climbing up to get the kite and I actually fell out of the tree, about eight meters. But kites are not bad luck! That’s just a rumor. There’s not truth to it, none at all.”

The translator, normally a staid, intimidating presence, begins to titter. I bite the inside of my lip.





Children clad in traditional Cambodian garb perform in Phnom Penh.



Kiteflying takes concentration, no matter the country.



Among kitemakers interviewed by Sarah St. Vincent was Tong Baty, a poet, singer, and former fashion model, who learned to make and fly kites by watching her father in action. Now a young mother, Tong concluded the interview by asking St. Vincent to name her 10-day-old child. "Samantha," St. Vincent suggested, and the name was promptly adopted. "It sounds Khmer," said Tong. "It's a good name. Now you have a goddaughter."



Shaving bamboo for kites

All photos by Sarah St. Vincent