

Orchids on Air

About the Exhibit

There are a number of common themes in the kite world: birds, insects, human forms, fish, and aircraft, but plants and flowers are another common theme that reaches deep into kite lore. The first kites on earth may well have been dried leaves flown to help island peoples catch elusive fish. Today, the kites of Malaysia are opulently decorated with vines, leaves, and flowers, all meticulously executed with cut paper and foil. Chinese kites often depict vegetables, flowers, fruit, or tree leaves. Contemporary kite enthusiasts from the Netherlands proudly fly tulip-shaped or decorated kites at festivals worldwide.

Chris Yuengling-Niles has continued the tradition with her Orchid Series, which I have faithfully framed into kites. The kites are delicate, colorful, and fully intended to be flown. As airborne art, they display the grace of real orchids, as they unexpectedly appear in airborne environments. Chris's ambitious and beautiful prints come alive in a new environment, far above gallery walls, where wind and light and kite all interact.

Scott Skinner

Board President

Drachen Foundation

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

About the Artist

Chris Yuengling-Niles, a graphic designer, is the Print Studio Manager at TBWA\Chiat\Day, partner in Positive Image Film and Video, and a fine artist. She earned a BFA degree from Rhode Island School of Design and an MAT degree from Rhode Island College. Post graduate studies have covered all aspects of the book arts; bookmaking, calligraphy, typography, and print making.

An affinity for drawing has impelled her to compile 35 years of sketches from the natural world that are being translated into a variety of media. An edition of *The Song of Songs* was published in 2000 with her floral illustrations. Most recently an association with Drachen Foundation has challenged her perceptions and involved her in the world of kites, or art aloft, and Mokuhanga.

Her work has been shown in Los Angeles (Hiromi Paper International), in Seattle, Washington (Cullom Gallery), Japan (Kyoto International Woodprint Association) and Washington, D.C. (The U.S. Botanic Garden).

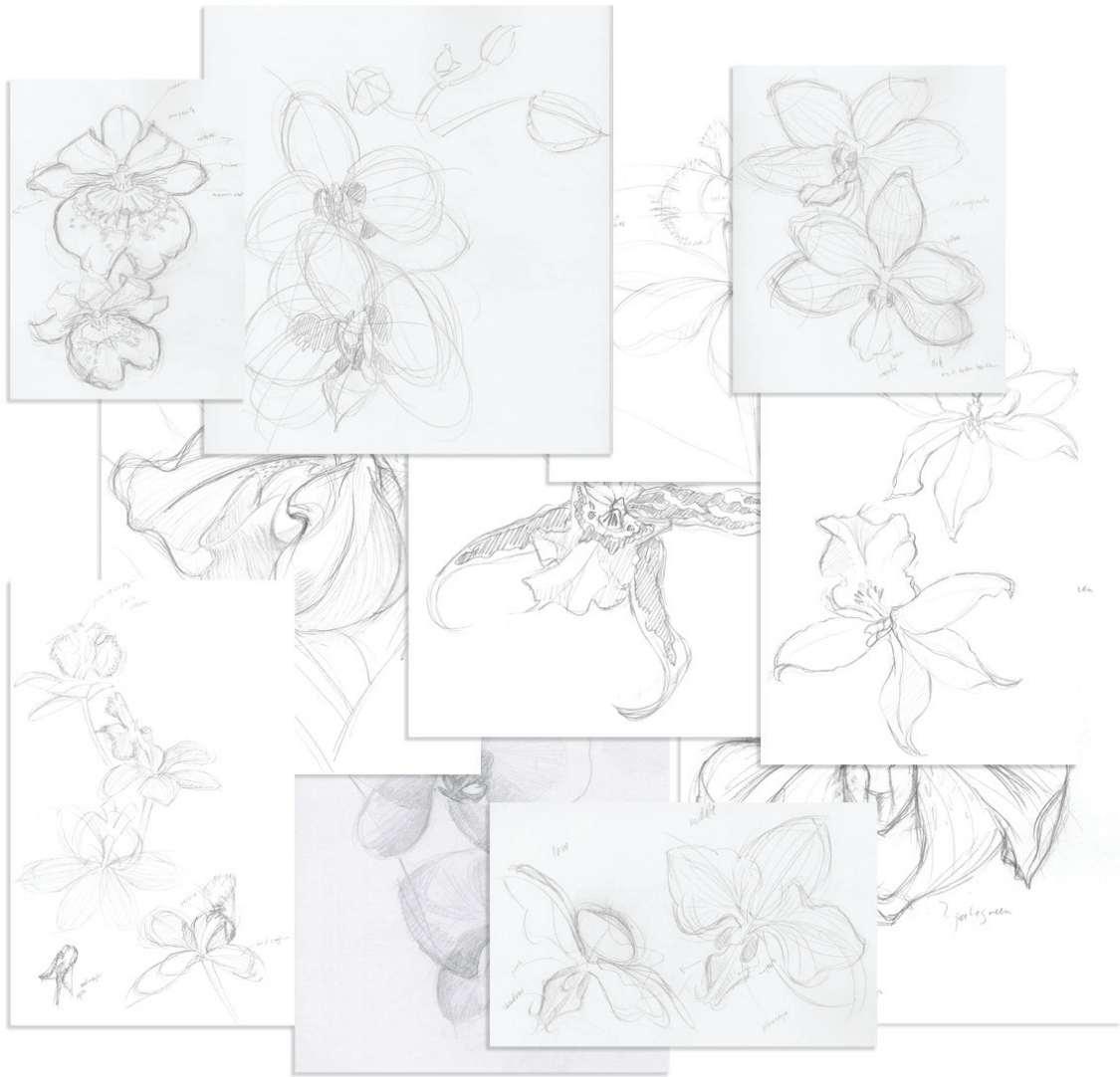
Inspiration



Cool. Moist. Light. Arrays of fans, curls, horns, stars, plates, and ruffles. Upright, arching and draped. As tiny as the tip of your finger. As large as the palm of your hand. Delicate sprays and muscular individuals. Patterns both bold and subtle. Palette: magenta, periwinkle, scarlet, mauve, maroon, pink, rose, peach, lemon, gold, sienna, cream, forest, grass.

Orchid choices sit in a cool dark space. Ah! The scent of honey.

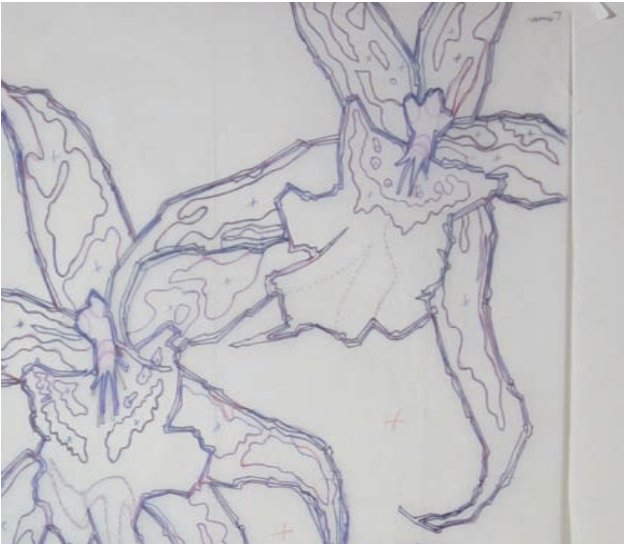
Exploration



Look closely. See how each element fits together. How the shapes create a whole. Where colors meet and shift. Render what you see before you. Eye and hand trace the curl of a leaf or the bowl of the lip. Then somewhere a picture becomes a portrait. An individual.

Or study single views of a host. From these draw together, not an individual but an icon to stand in for all.

Design



Take what is best and put it in a box. What colors work best? Where is the edge of a shape? Do you simplify? Add this. Take away that. Turn and rotate. Will it be seen close up or at a distance? What materials and methods are needed?

You frame the face. A window to another place. How can we stage an encounter and evoke a response?

Commit



With Mokuhanga, wood blocks absorb the paint which is in turn absorbed by paper.

Care needs to be taken to be sure each image is in the proper position on each block before cutting. Knives and chisels are used to cut away areas that will not be printed. Each block is usually reserved for one color or sequence of colors with different effects. These blocks are in various stages of completion.

Workspace



Here the design meets the real world. Materials are a partner in any piece of art. Paper, paint, water, and wood. Eye, hand, muscle and blood.

They all come together to make a print. But first, colors need to be mixed. Brushes and brayer need to be assembled. Rice paste prepared. Paper dampened. A workspace organized. A deep breath taken. Begin.

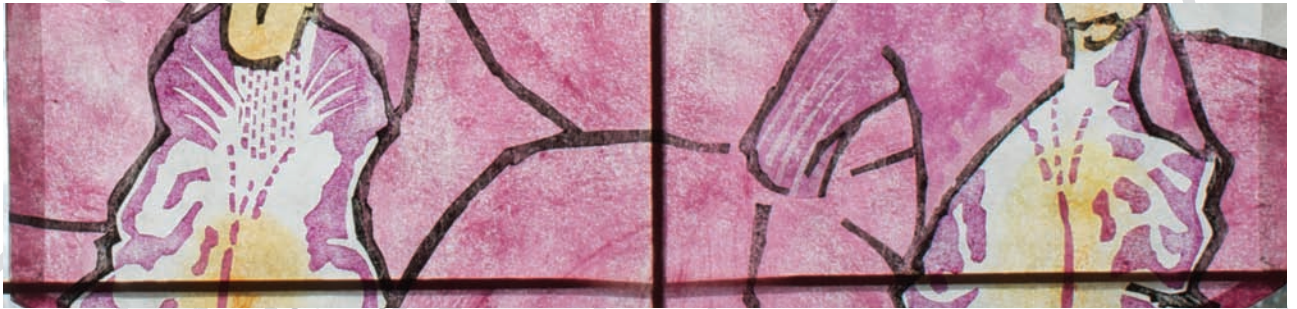
Print Stages



Mokuhanga allows the elegance of translucent paint to add richness to the print by layering color. Each block may be printed multiple times using different pigments or gradients to add complexity. Shown is a print with four blocks. The colors of each impression can change to produce different effects.



Becoming a Kite





About the U.S. Botanic Gardens

The United States Botanic Garden (USBG) is a living plant museum. It is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., free of charge. Exhibits interpret the role of plants in supporting earth's diverse and fragile ecosystems and in enriching human life. Established by Congress in 1820, the U.S. Botanic Garden is one of the oldest botanic gardens in North America. The Garden has been administered through the Architect of the Capitol since 1934. It is recognized as a museum and accredited by the American Association of Museums.



About the Drachen Foundation

The Drachen Foundation (DF) was founded in 1995 as a non-profit kite research and study center. The Foundation takes its name from the German word drachen, which can mean either kite or dragon. The Drachen Foundation houses a small library, slide collection, and kite archive, all available to those interested in increasing their knowledge of kites from historical, cultural, scientific, or artistic viewpoints.



The Foundation collaborates with non-profit educational organizations to teach kite making to the public, and to showcase kites from around the world. In addition, the Foundation works to place teachers in contact with area kitemakers to bring the experience of kitemaking to students and children of all ages. We offer several publications and kite kits for educators who are interested in using kites in their classroom.