

Roll Over, Picasso

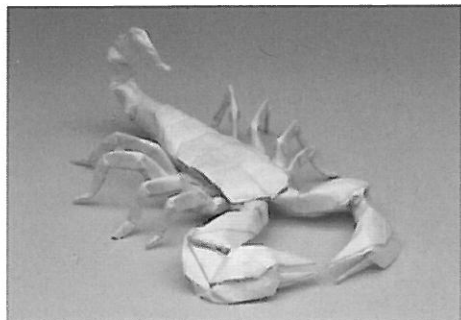
ORIGAMI TO BE FEATURED IN ART MUSEUMS ACROSS THE US

by Meher McArthur (CA)

Until 2014, six museums in the US will showcase a comprehensive exhibition of origami featuring more than 100 works by top origami creators from around the world. The traveling exhibition, curated by Asian art historian, Meher McArthur, conceives paperfolding as a true art form connected with science—and a tool for peace.

It has recently become clear to me that no single art form today has more global appeal than origami. In the last 60 years or so - all over the world - children of all ages as well as scientists, mathematicians and artists have tried their hand at folding cranes, rabbits, scorpions, dinosaurs, icosidodecahedra, tessellations and abstract sculptures out of paper. Origami transcends language (thanks to the notations of Akira Yoshizawa and others) and culture, and it is accessible to people of all socio-economic backgrounds. Though the word “origami” is Japanese, the art has now become truly universal. However, despite its great popularity and the increasingly sophisticated techniques used to fold paper, origami has been largely ignored by art historians and museums perhaps because origami art works are not widely regarded as “fine art” and most do not yet have a high market value.

On April 6, 2010, a friend brought over a DVD to watch with my family. It was Vanessa Gould's then newly-released documentary, *Between the Folds*, which spotlights the work of several major contemporary origami artists and demonstrates very clearly that origami has become an exciting new and international fine art form. I immediately knew that I wanted to

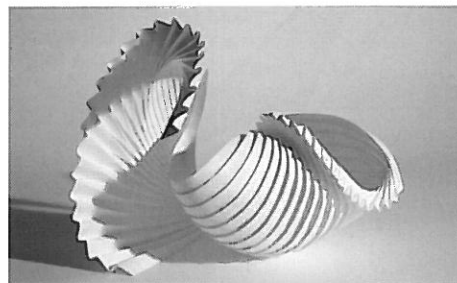


Scorpion by Robert Lang.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

curate an exhibition of this art. That same night, I sent out an email to Robert Lang asking him what he thought of such an exhibition. He immediately responded with tremendous enthusiasm and gave me very helpful advice on how to proceed. Among other things, he explained to me that in the last decade or so, there have been a few museum exhibitions of origami that have helped to change the general perception of origami, most notably the Carrousel du Louvre in Paris (1998), the Mingei International Museum in San Diego (2003), Hangar 7 Gallery in Salzburg, Austria (2005) and the Peabody-Essex Museum in Salem, MA (2008). These ground-breaking exhibitions presented the works of contemporary origami masters and drew huge crowds demonstrating that international audiences are beginning to accept origami as a true art form and not just a child's hobby.

The three-fold core themes

I decided that I would like to expand on the content of the previous exhibitions by not only showcasing the works of the world's foremost contemporary artists, but also by exploring the history of paperfolding in order to place their works in an art historical context. I also wanted to examine the relationship between art, science and mathematics in origami and to demonstrate the tremendous impact origami is having in areas as diverse as space exploration, medical research, and fashion design. Finally, since the origami crane has now become a symbol of hope and peace, I wanted to explore the role of origami in the contemporary world peace movement. These three aspects of origami – a new global fine art form, a mathematical and scientific inspiration and a tool for peace – became the core themes of the exhibition. To convey



Partial Shell, by Richard Sweeney
Photo courtesy of the artist

the seemingly boundless scope of origami today I chose the exhibition title, *Folding Paper: The Infinite Possibilities of Origami*.

Within days of contacting Robert (who has since been an invaluable advisor for this exhibition), I called a colleague at the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) here in Los Angeles and asked her

EXHIBITION TOUR SCHEDULE

Web link:

www.artsandartists.org/exhibitions/origami.html

Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA

March 10, 2012 - August 26, 2012

Thorne-Sagendorph Art Gallery, Keene, NH

October 14, 2012 - mid-December 2012

Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, Wausau, WI

January 26, 2013 - April 7, 2013

Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA

June 22, 2013 - September 29, 2013

Oregon Historical Society, Portland, OR

October 19, 2013 - January 11, 2014

Peoria Riverfront Museum, Peoria, IL

January 31, 2014 - April 27, 2014

if they would be interested in an exhibition of contemporary origami. She said that it was something they'd been hoping to do, so this would indeed be worth exploring. I also imagined that this exhibition might be of interest to more than one venue and began discussing the idea with traveling exhibitions companies who specialize in touring exhibitions. I eventually chose International Arts & Artists (IA&A), based in Washington, D.C. since they have developed similar complex international exhibitions and toured them both nationally and internationally. Over the following months I developed the exhibition in conjunction with both IA&A and JANM, which agreed to be the opening venue.

Behind the scenes

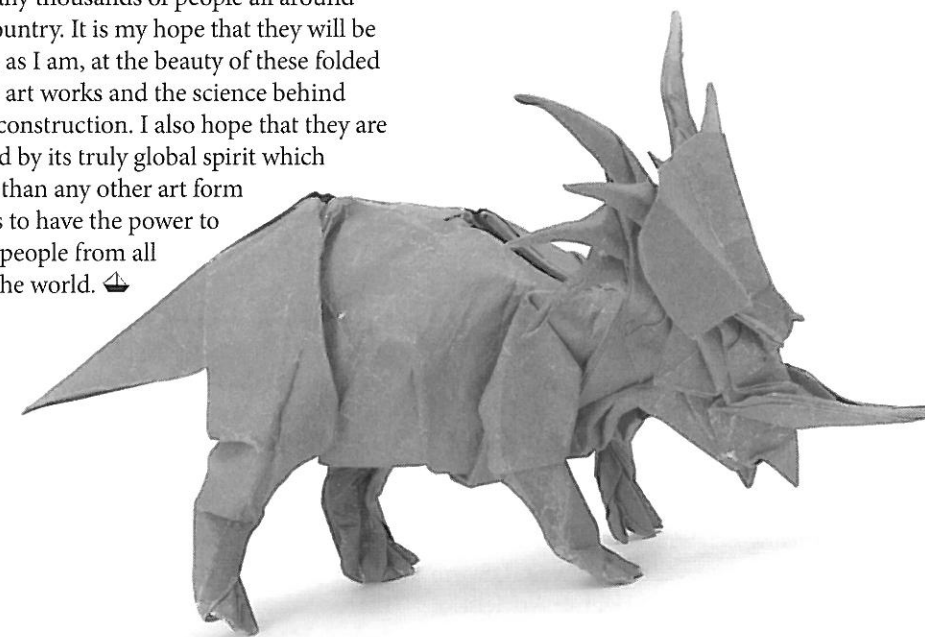
I don't think any of us realized how incredibly complicated such an exhibition would ultimately turn out to be. The exhibition features over a hundred works of art and other related items by more than 45 artists from 15 different countries. The logistics of selecting works, then assembling related information and photographs and then bringing in the works themselves have been mind-boggling at times. Not all of the artists speak or write English or are regularly reachable via email. Some artists dropped out at the last minute, and others changed their minds about what they could lend us. Tragically, Eric Joisel died just as I was

about to confirm my selection of his pieces for the exhibition. Not only did the origami world lose a beloved and inspiring artist, but we lost the pieces we had originally planned to show in the exhibition.

As I write this, the exhibition is exactly two months from its opening date in Los Angeles on March 10, 2012. As I had hoped, it has drawn interest from several museums and will travel from Los Angeles to Keene, NH; Wausau, WI; Sacramento, CA; Portland OR and Peoria IL (see the Exhibition Tour Schedule). It will be seen by many thousands of people all around the country. It is my hope that they will be awed, as I am, at the beauty of these folded paper art works and the science behind their construction. I also hope that they are moved by its truly global spirit which more than any other art form seems to have the power to unite people from all over the world. ☺



Dragon and Triceratops by Satoshi Kamiya.
Photos courtesy of Origami House Gallery, Tokyo.



BRINGING CULTURES TOGETHER

When I was 8 years old, I met two Japanese women, Kaoru and Hideko, who were studying English with my father at Edinburgh University. They gave me a delicate little doll made of colorful folded paper. These two women and this origami doll were my first introduction to Japanese culture and perhaps supplied the spark that later ignited into my passion for Japanese art – and now origami.

From early on my parents raised me to be a “citizen of the world” and stressed the importance of understanding different cultures and learning from

them. I was born in India of an Iranian mother and a Scottish father, and I grew up in Scotland, Canada (Quebec) and England. I decided to study Japanese at college because it seemed beautiful, challenging and useful. I then moved to Japan and worked in international relations for a small city in rural Kyushu. During my two years there I fell deeply in love with Japanese culture, particularly its arts, and after returning to England, I continued my studies in Japanese art history. My specialty unexpectedly brought me to the United States where I was hired as Curator of

East Asian Art for Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, California. During my 14 years in the U.S., I have curated exhibitions, written books and articles and given lectures introducing art from Japan and other Asian cultures to as many people as possible in the hope that I can help foster a deeper understanding of Asian cultures here in the United States. Art – even something as tiny as a folded paper doll – can be a valuable tool for intercultural understanding, and I sincerely believe it has the power to bring cultures closer together and contribute to global peace.