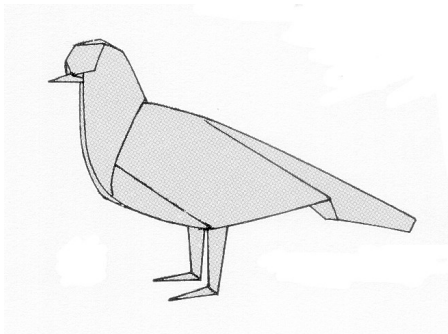


Akira Yoshizawa

an encounter with the Master

Akira Yoshizawa sensei was one of the most influential people I have ever met. His effect on the world of creative origami, and indeed on my own work was immense. As a fledgling enthusiast in the 70's, I first learned about him and his work from a few books in my small library; *Origami 1* and *Secrets of Origami* by Robert Harbin; and *The Best of Origami* by Samuel Randlett. I enjoyed folding the Pigeon from the Harbin paperback, and photographs of Yoshizawa's work which I'd seen astounded me. I wrote to Yoshizawa and



obtained a copy of *Dokuhon 1* in 1973, even before I joined the BOS, and thus started a 30 year association with him.

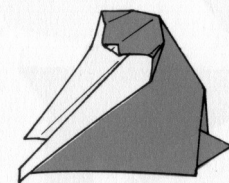
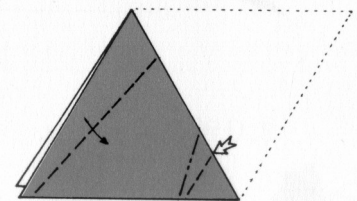
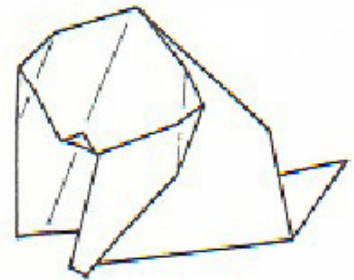
I had the good fortune to meet Akira Yoshizawa on at least 10 separate occasions. As my tribute to the master, I thought you may like to read of my emotions and experiences while I was at Yoshizawa's house, during a pilgrimage I made to Japan in 1980. Here are some extracts from a detailed diary which I kept at the time. An interpreter, Miss Furuhashi, one of Mr Yoshizawa's students, accompanied me.

Monday 15 September 1980 (National Holiday for the Aged)

10.15 am: We arrive at Akira Yoshizawa's house and we're ushered into his little room: neat and tidy, with all drawers within arm's length of his chair.

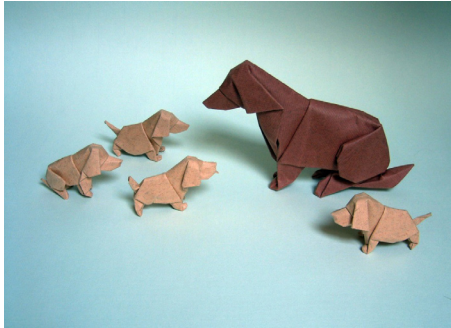
I give him a box of my origami work (horse, giraffe, rhino, dog, nut and bolt, box and lid, cigarette and match boxes). He likes the matchbox, I think. Says I should pay attention to bones of the animals and I will get a better result.

He talks about his rules, i.e. regular sheet, no star shapes, no cuts or slits.



Talks about multi-piece, 2 or 3 piece. He says that shape is more important than one piece- if you use one piece there may be a compromise in the figure. Therefore better to make firstly with two or three sheets and then work out a method for one.

He says make one subject using different paper shapes with the same folding method. New attitudes (e.g. stretching dog) result.



Once, he studied Bonkei (miniature landscapes made with natural materials), and was critical of another student's work, which depicted motionless waves. Therefore he guessed that the model for this bonkei was a photograph, and therefore the waves had no movement. He talks about drawing the chosen moving subject: e.g. lightning sketches of birds. What is not recorded is as important as what you draw.

He now began to show me his amazing work. All examples of one animal e.g. dog, elephant or crane, are kept in one box measuring 24 x 12 x 6 inches. First we look at chickens, 20 or 30 different variations of male and female figure giving different mood by slight changes of folds. The refined versions are exquisite, with a suggestion of depth rather than full three-dimensionality. Highly detailed: an eye, a tongue, and a foot in precise reproduction although stiffness, which could accompany this, is avoided.

Shows other boxes: cranes, birds, dogs, elephants, gorillas etc, etc, etc. In this small house are shelves crammed with boxes, neatly labelled with different examples and variations. Sometimes he



plays a trick: folds a monkey to look like a two-piece figure, which is in reality one piece. He proves this to me by quickly unfolding saying "one piece a paper - not cut!" My eyes are beginning to hurt with these sublime creations.

After lunch, more work to look at. Some abstract ideas influenced by figurative work. Now the best work. All packed in beautifully made wooden boxes. He only shows a few models and these very quickly. A mammoth, a crucifixion, an owl, and others, then the famous cicada and a flea, which are exquisite. His choice of paper is perfect although the cicada is thick. He flashes the drawings of the cicada and it's a 2 x 1, variation of the crab crease pattern, I think.

I sit back, stunned into silence. I feel a need to be alone, to be quiet to assimilate these wonderful things. I would like to go for a walk but don't want to miss anything! I say I'm lost for words: it's true.

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It's now about 6.30 and some of his students arrive. He begins to cut a triangle shape from white paper, and I guess it's for the swan (Origami Dokuhon 1). He prays briefly and folds quickly and decisively. He uses a mallet for the

beak reverse folds, signing and stamping the paper during the folding process. Tweezers and other tools are used for shaping. He gets up to replace the tools in their respective drawers, interrupting the sequence. He gives a curve to the paper on either side for the gentle reverse folds of the neck and body.

We all watch in reverential silence - indeed it's not possible to do otherwise. Here is a master at work and I'm privileged to witness it. He unfolds and refolds body, wings, adjusting, twisting. Again the hammer is used to flatten the head. At last it's finished; he seems satisfied. Of course the design I know, but it's a beautiful thing.

We have dinner and a rather stunted conversation. Words seem trivial and I still can't think clearly.

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A further conversation and gifts are given. We take a taxi and leave them after usual thanks and exhortations to come to the UK. I am exhausted. Miss Furuhashi seems to think I've made an impression... She says visitors are not normally shown so much work. I fold a couple of things for her to thank her, and I arrive at my Shinjuku hotel at about 12.00 midnight.