

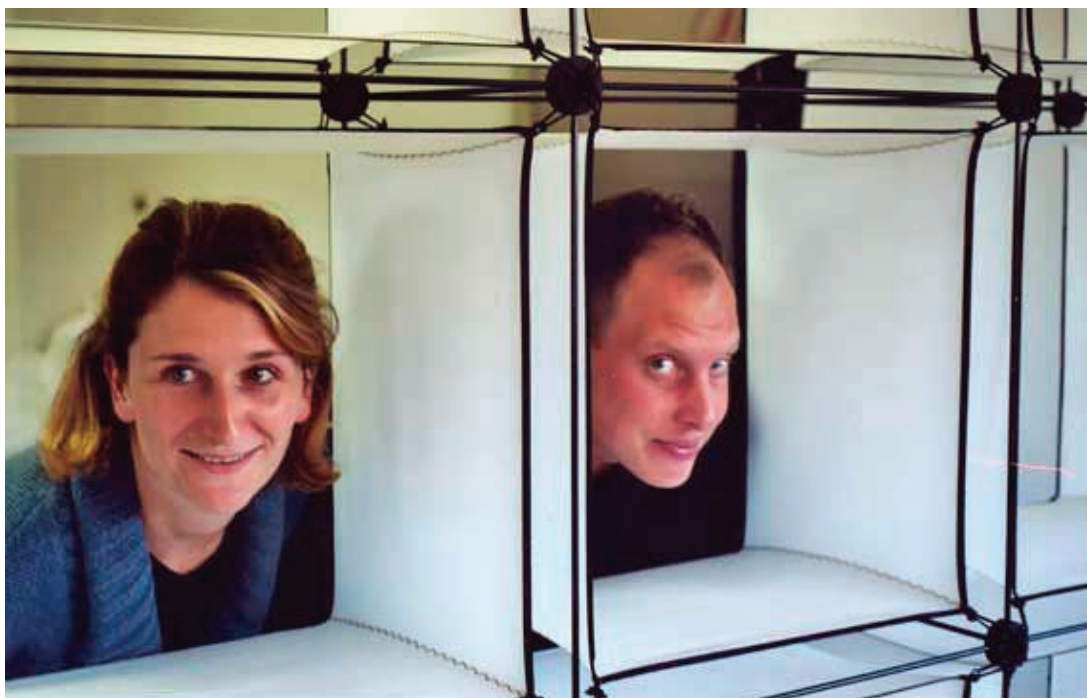
# Challenges Gladly Accepted

## A Well Tuned Creative Partnership

An art school graduate, Frank Schwiemann, of Kaarst, Germany, from the beginning made innovative kites. They were nice follow-ons to what other people had done. With his particular talent and eye, they were one step better than what had gone on before.

Schwiemann kites evolved into sleek kite-sculptures. Using Tyvek for sail and carbon fiber for framing, his pieces were light and ephemeral, distinctly refined. He used just a single color, say yellow, to put emphasis on shape and function. His work was often exhibited at night and used in conjunction with fireworks, sometimes to dance or movement performances. The way he used them, kites took on a bigger role than is normal with kites.

Accorded equal creative status is his partner of more than a decade, Christine Swarting, whom he met at school. Also an arts diplomate, she at first helped Frank out with his flying, and stayed away from kites because she didn't



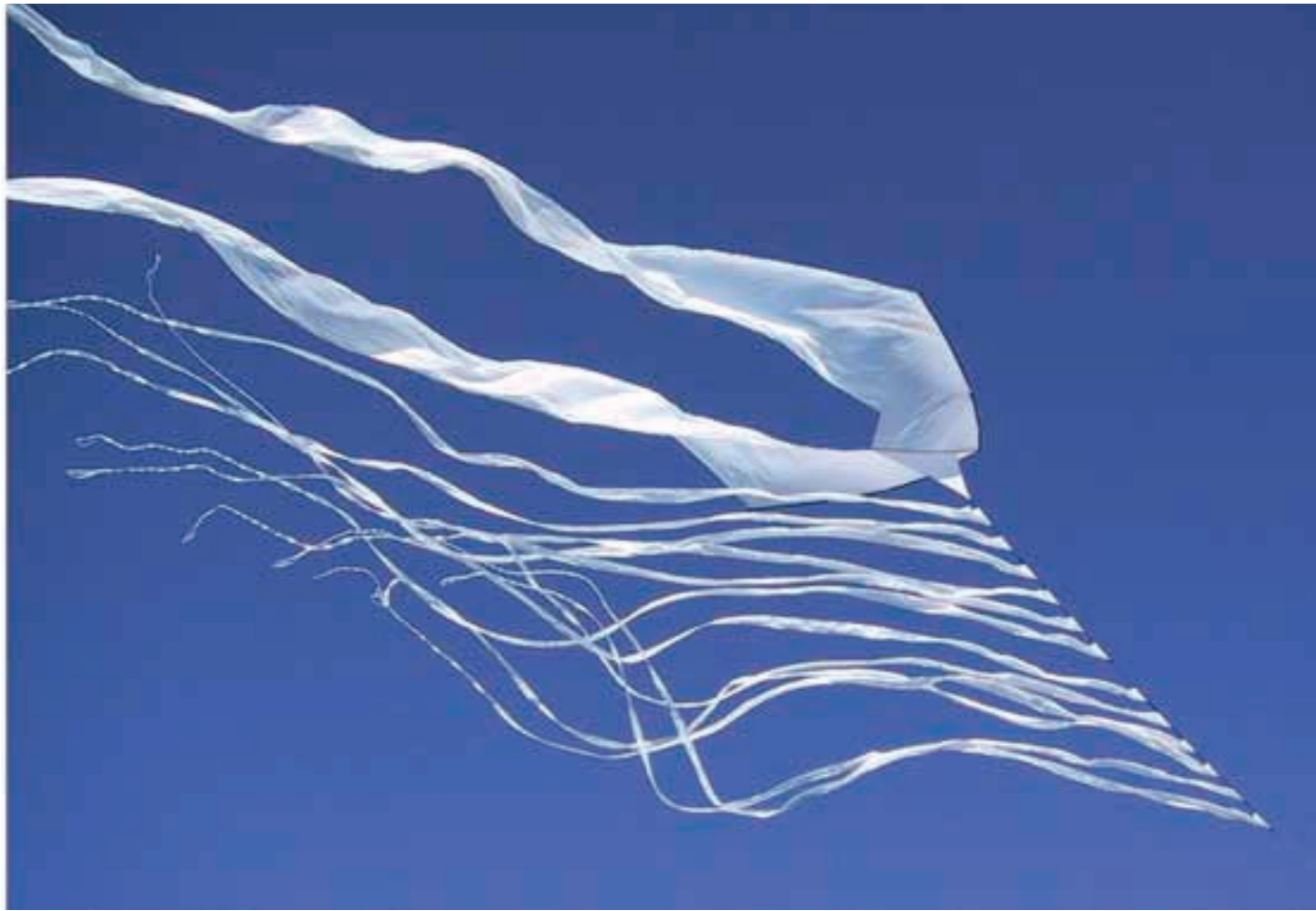
*Christine Swarting and Frank Schwiemann in their studio.*

want to infringe on Frank's work. "But I eventually decided I wanted to participate, not to be just the girlfriend," she says. "So I started making and flying kites, too."

Swarting was an instant success as well. Primarily a graphic artist, she entered paper kite and miniature kite competitions and turned out aerial dramas because of her bold, very free graphics. Bamboo and paper were her materials. She was open in her use of color, using splashes and broad sweeps of paint: "Wonderful, free brushstrokes in the sky," in the words of an observer.

In the decade since they set up their artistic partnership, Schwiemann and Swarting have traveled the world to show off their creations. They have been to festivals in India, Thailand, Japan, the U.S., and Canada as well as all over Europe.

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Both photos by Schwiemann-Schwarting

*Known for her bold graphics, Schwarting (top) puts a cow in the sky. Schwiemann’s “Delta Strings” shows an inspired freedom of expression.*



*Filled with kites, tools, and fine art, this expansive studio is shared by Schwiemann-Schwarting.*

*Schwiemann-Schwarting continued*

Their home base Kaarst, near Dusseldorf, is a former liqueur factory. They have a spacious 180 square meters of space. Neat and tidy, the studio is filled with their tools and their art.

Although everything they do is kite-related, they more and more focus these days on commissioned installations for malls, stores, and other public spaces. Both like the exploration factor in this work. “Large scale decoration is what it is,” says Frank. “We make playsails, arches, banners, big inflatables----18-meter-long tubes in one case. We make special shapes, to translate someone else’s sketches into material form. We’re flexible, we’re making a living. We have a lot of energy. We create our job day by day. Although deadlines are sometimes testing, the work is generally very rewarding.”

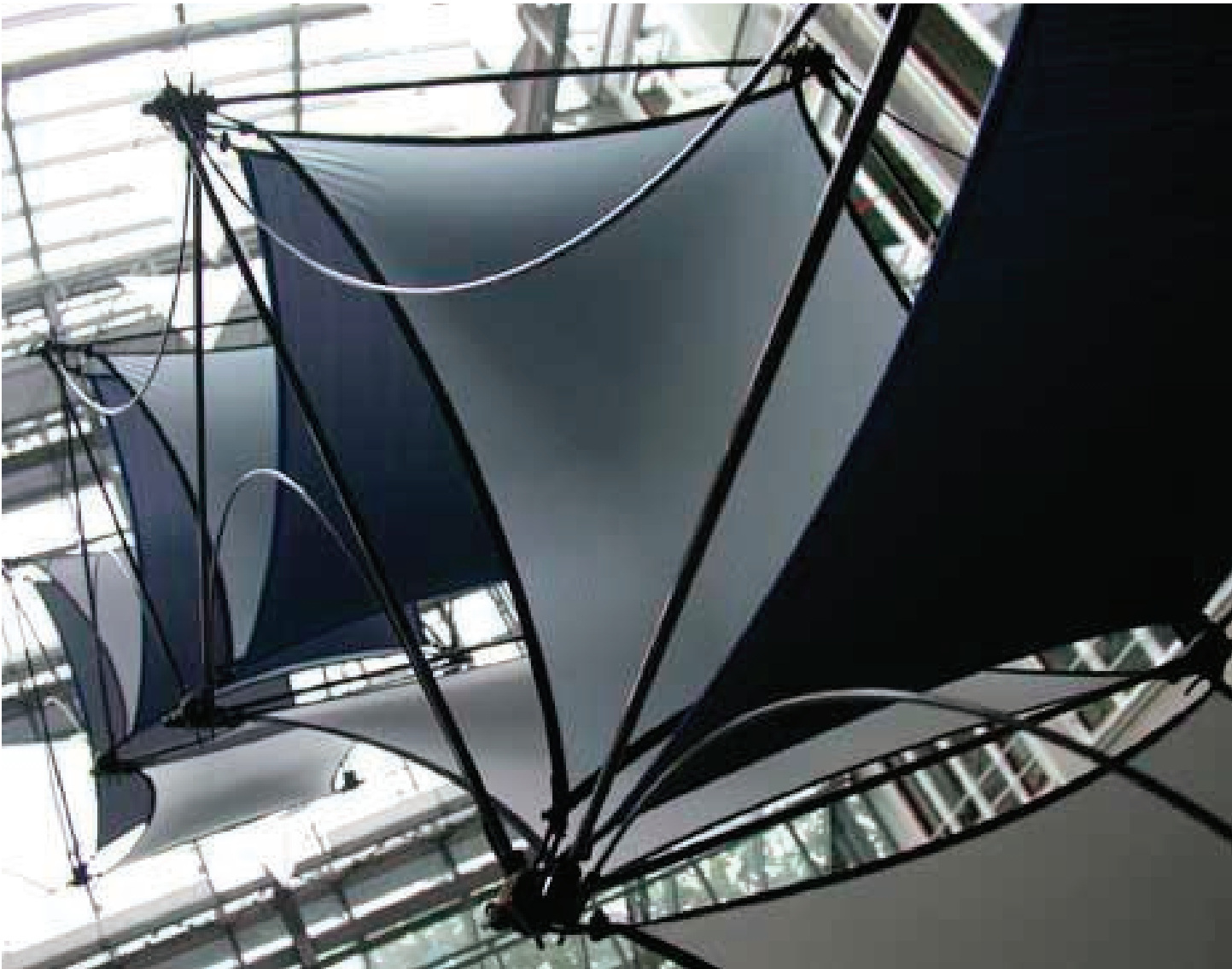
Christine adds: “We like the life of artists doing commissions. You get direct feedback. When I worked for a company, I used to get tired; art work tiredness is different.”

“For outdoor flying,” says Frank, “we have learned if the sky is dark we need to fly a white kite ‘to attract light;’ if the sky is gray, you definitely need a bright color to keep the kite from being boring. With interior installations, the size of the room and mood are important. We seek an ensemble of effects.”

“Although the sky is wonderful,” adds Christine, “indoors poses a different set of challenges. One has to make the connection between the installation, or art object, and the room. The challenge is to make the connection between the two more perfect.”

“I find it interesting,” she says, “that at first making kites that would fly well was very important to me. Now, they don’t have to fly at all----although they can fly if they want to.”

She adds: “Bamboo and paper, my favorites, are wonderful materials. They make the statement that when converted into a kite something can be fragile but strong. You can transfer this lesson to life.”



Schwiemann-Schwarting

*“Skybridge” (top) is a fine example of Frank Schwiemann’s decorative constructions for building interiors, such as malls and offices. Such commissioned, site-specific work by him and by Christine Schwarting constitutes a major source of their income. The kite “Littleman” (far right) is Christine Schwarting at her most charming. The sculpture (near right) is one of many dotting the studio of the pair.*



Ben Rühle

