ON THE COVER:
Enthusiasts fly kites at the first Great Boston Kite Festival in 1969. See page 37 for more on the Kite Festival's history.

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CLARA WAINWRIGHT
I’m constantly reminded in my other artistic pursuit – ballroom dancing – that life is a journey. In any artistic pursuit, it’s part of the mentality that helps to keep you fresh, inspired, and willing to attempt new things, all the while knowing that you’ll never know everything, do everything, or be everything that you might have once hoped. In this issue of Discourse, I steal an opportunity to talk a little about my own artistic journey in the making of a single kite that has taken most of this winter. I could not have embarked upon the journey without focused inspiration, help from a number of mentors, and several years of gathered knowledge that gave me the confidence to finish this project. I hope you’ll be inspired by the result (as it is, right now, unfinished but with the finish line in sight) and pushed toward your own new, inspired projects.

But there are other journeys to be found in this Discourse as well: our friend Dr. Jeff Cain’s recovery from a horrific airplane accident to his inspiring work on behalf of amputees throughout the US and his living-life-to-the-fullest exploits on the ski slopes, in the cockpit, and at the end of a kite line. I think it’s timely for us to bump up against the less is more blog (limblogger.wordpress.com) as so many US military veterans have returned with seemingly tragic losses. Dr. Jeff’s work has no doubt been of great benefit to these and other amputees, and as a living, working, successful example, his life is even more inspiring.

For those of us who have been around kites and the kite scene for more years than we care...
to admit, it’s always a breath of fresh air to listen to the experiences of someone “new” to the kite scene. So it is with artist Beth Gouldin and her discovery of kites as a vehicle for her artistic voice. How interesting to read about her journey from the discovery of Anna Rubin’s kites, the Tokyo Kite Museum and Masaaki Modegi, to the creation of her own wonderful kites capturing the birds of San Francisco. And at the opposite end of the same kite spectrum, we see the artistic and ecological work done by Maria Elena García Autino. In the Argentine barrios, Maria Elena coordinates work with found materials to make unexpected kites and surprising flying art. It was fun to hear that Marten Bondestam of Finland was one of the influences upon Maria Elena’s journey.

Finally, Clara Wainwright takes us back in time to the late 1960s and early 1970s where we are introduced to the Committee for the Better Use of Air and the Great Boston Kite Festival. The images from Gill Fishman tell much of the story. Here was a visionary “public celebration artist” who saw the vast potential of kites and brought them to inner-city Boston. Unbelievably, she attracted noted artist Otto Piene, who was at Harvard at the time, to fly one of his massive inflatable creations. (It didn’t happen because of high winds, but what a spectacle it might have been!) In your journey for inspirational reading material, find Otto Piene’s More Sky: you’ll be amazed at the wonderful ideas that we’ve all “invented” since he wrote about them in 1970. Thank you, Clara, for mentioning Mr. Piene’s name in telling of your exploits.

Enjoy!

Scott Skinner
Board President
Drachen Foundation
Correspondence

Congratulations to everyone!

Discourse has once again provided an enthralling read and even more insight into the fabulous world of kites and some of the driving force kiters who are increasing our knowledge of tethered flight around the world.

Keep up the outstanding work for another twenty years. Happy anniversary!

Bob White
Canada

Dear Scott, Dear Ali,

What a lovely issue!

I read from the beginning to the end over the weekend, and it was simply lovely. And seeing pics of the Taj and the Umaid Bhawan brought back memories. Aaah, it's been too long!

It was also great to read Ben [Ruhe] again after a pretty long time. ... Do give him my best.

Great work Scotto.

Looking ahead to the next 20 years!

Cheers,

Ajay Prakash
India

Dear Ali, Dear Scott,

I wanted to warmly thank you for the article you wrote in Discourse 20th on KAP. I feel honoured to be mentioned!

I often look back at the old times, when we met and you put me on some so interesting endeavours, and those years were very special for me.

Thanks a lot for your trust and support.

With lots of love,

Keep it high!

Nicolas Chorier
France
CONTRIBUTORS

MARIA ELENA GARCÍA AUTINO  
Buenos Aires, Argentina

A Barriletes a Toda Costa (BaToCo) member, Autino is a retired professor who taught for many years at the University of Buenos Aires. She has won national and international awards for her work in education.

BETH GOULDIN  
San Francisco, California

Artist Gouldin holds a BA in chemistry and MFA in watercolor from the University of North Texas. Her work explores many avenues: giant painted kites, large-scale paintings, and minuscule folded and painted paper forms.

SCOTT SKINNER  
Monument, Colorado

A former Air Force instructor pilot, Drachen’s board president has flown and designed kites for three decades. Today, Skinner is known as a world class, visionary kite artist.

CLARA WAINWRIGHT  
Boston, Massachusetts

Quilt maker and public celebration artist Wainwright organized the first Great Boston Kite Festival in 1969. She has had two retrospectives of her work at Massachusetts’ DeCordova and Cape Ann Museums.
“...If your Snark be a Boojum! For then
You will softly and suddenly vanish away,
And never be met with again!”
- Lewis Carroll, *The Hunting of the Snark*

For children of Ruca Choroi¹ Neuquen, Argentina, kites are not something new.

Back in 2005, Gustavo Sonzogni, a great kiteflier, and I started a kite building and flying experience that continued over several years throughout the region. We made more than 500 kites with schools and kids belonging mostly to the Mapuche² community.

At that time, kites didn’t have a name in the Mapuche language. Children decided to call them *cahuel mancuy*, meaning “unruly horse.” The name refers to the difficulties of flying kites in the Patagonian winds. Now, even the wind sound on the kite sail has its own *tahil* (a sound or song that belongs to each animal or tree, according to the Mapuche people), the Cahuel Mancuy Tahil.

We returned in February 2014 and met with very sad news. The forest, the world’s largest reserve of *pehuenes*, or monkey tail trees, was on fire because of human carelessness. Chilling images show the destruction.

The forest, a magical and mysterious realm with species of ancient trees from the dinosaur times, shows today the terrible ravages of the hand of man over nature.

It’s not just the fire. The forest is also devastated by all kinds of trash tourists have
thrown all over: paper, plastic, garbage bags, pieces of fabric, etc. Sooner or later, a wild forest or sea animal will eat it and the consequences will be painful. The forest beauty, a peaceful refuge from difficult and stressful city days, is also menaced. The ruined woods we used to know don’t cry for retribution. The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge.

We talked with people, teachers, and students of rural schools nearby and decided to stage a small intervention. The “rebellious horses” this time will rebel against the progressive and alarming destruction of the forest.

Some years ago, Marten Bondestam, an incredible kiteflier from Finland visited Argentina and shared generously with me and many school children some of his wonderful models. Following several of his proposals, we decided to share the building of model kites using waste material found in the forest near the school. People promised to work hard on these ideas.

For us it is a first attempt to fight the limitations of the region (materials, threads, etc.). And that’s why we propose kites without a structure or with a very simple structure, trying to ignore fiberglass and similar materials.

But the main idea is: no need to create more waste. Trash can be recycled into a new and wonderful work of art or flying object that expresses the intention of preserving nature to the best of our abilities. Simplifying the structure, it is possible to achieve easy kites that incorporate elements found in the environment.

We try to make this experience an open challenge to all the experts who can create models with recycled material without adding more garbage to the world. We are not alone in this attempt. We have to thank a lot our friends from BaToCo³, and Alto Vuelo Kites⁴.

Plastic waste is a constant threat to forests and lakes. We built a threatening ghost using white bag remains frequently found in the environment.

A disposable discarded plastic tablecloth becomes a kite. This kite model was first proposed by Marten Bondestam and was built by Oscar Holgado, a BaToCo member. We consider this an interesting model since its construction uses only discarded plastic. No structure at all. It is extremely easy to build, and since tourists seem more interested in protecting their tables than the forests, materials are easy to find.

A discarded umbrella starts a new adventure as a kite. We used the umbrella structure just the way we found it, and, after some experiments, it flew nicely and high. We could not believe it!

Black garbage bags become flying bats. They can be recycled into toys; no need to add more garbage to the environment.

A flying smiling face was built by a group of deaf children out of plastic wrap, which is usually discarded in large quantities.

Large models were made out of reused big garbage bags, inspired by Marten Bondestam kites.

The Snark, Lewis Carroll’s disturbing and mysterious monster, appeared on two different versions of kites made by kids from Caminemos Juntos, a school sustained mostly by their parents who sell creative recycled objects.

Alberto Barrero, a creative member of
Various reclaimed plastics make colorful and lovely kites.
Children in Argentina build and fly kites from recycled trash found in the forest near their schools.
The Snark, Lewis Carroll’s disturbing and mysterious monster, appears on two different versions of kites.
BaToCo, was enthusiastic about the idea. He built a huge delta with discarded wrapping paper from his own brand-new air conditioner. This type of paper, which pollutes a lot, is typically used only once and quickly discarded. Alberto’s kite flies very well and defies expert kite builders.

Small kites, a simplified version of the sled, can easily be constructed from grocery bags or the type used for wrapping gifts. They are ideal for small children and they fly very well, recovering the art of building kites in families or at school at low cost, without compromising nature with new contaminants. Actually, during our trip we made many of them for children passing by.

Sailors insist on the huge amount of trash found nowadays on the open sea. Plastics of all kinds: refrigerators and car battery covers, plastic furniture, etc. Chilling lists are published, as well as pictures of dead whales with huge amounts of plastic in their stomachs.

Reusing discarded elements is not perhaps the ultimate solution, but it is an interesting option to the permanent production of new items that will soon be discarded in turn.

This situation is increasingly evident with toys. Toys today are made out of plastic and are especially fragile. The construction of kites with recycled materials offers no cost; back to the old and simple toys of the past. Kids become aware of the possibility of limiting the production of useless objects, using again what is wasted to build beautiful kites.

Reusing things may go against the consumer society, but it is good for the sea, the lakes, and forests. And for all of us too!

Let’s do it before snarked trash becomes a Bojoom! ♦

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alto Vuelo Kites
Friends from BaTaCo
Alberto Barrero
Gustavo Sonzogni
Oscar Holgado
Daniel Garcia

NOTES

CATCHING UP WITH AN OLD FRIEND OF DRACHEN
Scott Skinner

Friend of Drachen Jeff Cain with a Piper J4 Cub plane.
Whether he likes it or not, Dr. Jeff Cain and I are forever linked by our fanciful (some would say, stunning) cover photo on American Kite Magazine in winter 1990. It was probably our common home state of Colorado that put our two very different kites on that cover, but it was obvious to all who met Jeff that he would rise to great heights in our passion. In fact, shortly after this photo and after another wonderful kite replica (this one of the Langley Flying machine), Jeff began flying “real” airplanes.

Jeff’s love of flying consumed him and just two years after our appearance on American Kite, Jeff had a horrific accident that left him temporarily broken, but completely undeterred from moving on in life. I almost lost it the first time I saw him walk on one new leg and one battered one.

I’m inspired by Jeff’s story, but know him to be a kindred spirit in his love of kites and all things airborne. Through it all, Dr. Jeff might be found flying Oshkosh’s newest homebuilt, or perhaps he’ll be on a secluded beach enjoying the simple pleasure of flying a kite.

Now I’ll let Dave McGill, former Board Chair of the Amputee Coalition, pick up Jeff’s story.

TALKING WITH JEFF CAIN
BY DAVE MCGILL

For this week’s post I spoke with Jeff Cain. Jeff and I joined the Amputee Coalition of America Board of Directors at the same time (2003) and we shared (and continue to share) an interest in legislative and advocacy issues affecting amputees. So, of course, this interview contains very little discussion of either of those topics, since Jeff is asked to speak about them endlessly, thereby depriving the world of his insightful thoughts about a variety of other issues.

When I first met Jeff in 2001, he was in a wheelchair, having just undergone the elective amputation of his second leg below the knee. He had lost his other leg (also a BK amputation) 6 years earlier when the single-engine plane he was flying crashed. Despite the ample flow of painkillers flowing through his bloodstream when we first met, Jeff was polite and remarkably cogent.

Jeff led Colorado’s effort to become the first state to pass a prosthetic parity law, helping ensure that people with limb loss/difference have access to appropriate prosthetic technologies. His experiences and skills have made him one of the leading figures in the LL/D advocacy community, and with his assistance, 22 states now have passed prosthetic parity laws. In addition, he has been instrumental in introducing a Federal prosthetic parity bill that is winding its way through the corridors of our nation’s capitol.

An avid outdoorsman before his accident, Jeff maintains an unnervingly high activity level: cycling, swimming, ski-biking (a sport he introduced to the US adaptive community), snowboarding, motorcycling, and yes, piloting single-engine aircraft once again. During the recent ACA annual conference in California, Jeff glided around the parking lot on a skateboard using a staff seemingly left over from the Lord of the Rings trilogy to propel himself like a stand-up paddle surfer. Meanwhile, just in the writing of that list I put on another 2 pounds.

Jeff is a family physician and recent president of the American Academy of Family Physicians Board of Directors. During his medical residency he co-created the “Tar Wars” tobacco-free education

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Jeff Cain’s two kite replicas hang at Wings Over the Rockies Air & Space Museum in Denver, Colorado.
program for 5th grade students, now one of the AAFP’s best known programs, having reached all 50 states and 14 other countries. He is currently the Chief of Family Medicine at the Children’s Hospital in Denver, and practices Family Medicine at the AF Williams Family Medical Center, also in Denver.

He does lots of other things that, if I add them to this introduction, will rival the post below in length, so I’m going to stop after making one more comment: Jeff is one of the most thoughtful, articulate individuals in the Limb Loss/Disability world today. If you want an interesting and thought-provoking answer to almost any question, you’d be hard pressed to find someone better than Jeff to provide it. Now that I’ve built him up to almost epic proportions, let’s see if he delivers the goods in the following interview.

DAVE: In 2003, you and I had a discussion during which you said that the power of the limb loss/difference community, the power of all these individuals, is their story. Why do you think that’s the case and how did you come to that conclusion?

JEFF: I think that as human beings, as creatures in this universe, we communicate in story form. When people speak about statistics or look at graphs it doesn’t really help them relate to each other or to the larger community. At the time you and I spoke, we were talking about the power of story to be able to help change things like insurance laws or the perception of amputees in our country. We’re not going to pass legislation by just talking about the statistics of how many amputees are out there. We’re only going to make a difference when people hear the human nature of the story. Stories are what really connect us and helps us to be able to communicate with legislators to make and pass laws. Stories also help us grow both as individuals and with each other. Without having seen or touched another life that has been through an amputation, we all feel like we’re alone. Stories help us connect with others who are faced with similar challenges, understand the personal lessons from amputation, and allow us to move forward with our own lives.

DAVE: So you’re really talking about two different things. There’s a strategic element to the stories on the legislative side. And then there’s a therapeutic value on the other side. Now, you were the individual responsible for spearheading legislation in Colorado and nationally that is helping ensure that amputees would have access to prosthetics. Colorado was the first state to do that. As you were going through it, were you conscious that you might be doing it for some sort of therapeutic reason?

JEFF: Was I thinking about this as part of my own therapy? No. I was doing it because I thought I had the ability to help improve lives of amputees across the country. But the irony is that the stories I heard around the kitchen tables of our legislation team had a profound impact on me personally. Up until that point, I had not had much contact with other amputees, even minimal contact. Funny, it was the drive to be able to work through the legislative challenge that brought me to their stories, but also brought me better understanding of my own amputation and ultimately even led me to the Amputee Coalition of America.

DAVE: When did you become aware that telling the story was as much about the therapeutic value of “doing something for me” as opposed to doing something for all amputees?

JEFF: Um, I’m probably not that bright, Dave.
Jeff Cain with kite at an Oregon beach. Jeff writes: “42 degrees in December – no worries about cold feet!”
JEFF (CONT.): [Laughing].

DAVE: So in other words, about 5 minutes ago?

JEFF: [Laughing] No, no, no. I think there was a small glimmer of it as we took the prosthetic parity law nationally and began to understand that there was an additional individual internal value. That by working through my own challenge, I was helping others and at the same time doing my own work. And then I really got a bigger shot of it at the ACA meetings as you and I started working together with the ACA board on larger amputee issues, being able to see how people really grew individually when they were working on helping others.

DAVE: How did your medical training help you as you were adjusting to your life with limb loss?

JEFF: Sometimes medical training helps you. Laying on the field at my accident, I literally had to manage my own airway. Being a doctor can help save your own life. But there is another side of being a physician patient. Sometimes being a doctor can get in the way. When you’re in the ICU, it doesn’t help to try and set your own ventilator settings.

DAVE: [Laughing] And just out of curiosity, when you do that what tends to happen?

JEFF: What tends to happen is people roll their eyes big time. It really rocks your world when one week you are rounding in the ICU as the captain of the ship, chatting up the nurse at the front desk. And only days later that same nurse has to lift you up to perform personal hygiene. It rocks you to the core. Being in your own hospital and having your doctor friends taking care of you was really challenging. It takes you out of everything you know. I lost my footing, both literally and metaphorically.

DAVE: I’m interested in comparing experiences now. I can remember the exact moment when I asked my wife in the hospital, “Why did I do what I did?” Why did I put myself in a position where I could get hurt? I remember my wife staring at me and giving me a look like, “I don’t know, why did you walk into the middle of that road?” And I said to myself, “Oh my goodness, this is going to be a very bad place to go.” And I made a very conscious decision only a few days after my accident that I was going to live my life in rehabilitation increments. “What do I have to do to reclaim my life?” And I never really looked back. Was there one defining moment for you after your accident where you made a similar decision?

JEFF: Not the same as you, Dave, but there are a couple of moments that stick out.

One was getting out of the ICU, sitting with my flight instructor reviewing the accident and talking about the twists and turns of life. I believe that life is a risk sport and that if you’re living it fully, sometimes bad stuff happens because you’re really participating. What would it have been like to take another road, another path? In life what you know is only the path you took. You don’t ever know the path that you didn’t take. I was just so glad to be alive. I had to thank the people with me and tell them that I loved them, and was glad to be there to continue with them on this journey...

You can read the full interview at: http://limblogger.wordpress.com/2010/10/18/talking-with-jeff-cain

Or you can listen to the story on CNN’s Soundwaves: http://cnnradio.cnn.com/2013/04/26/cnn-profiles-after-boston-you-will-dance-again
Art has been in my life for as long as I can remember. It existed in basic forms of imagery and objects viewed by people, admired in museums, and bought and sold in galleries. As a child, I was always drawing but would never have called myself an artist. Artists were almost mythical creatures in my eyes: men and women of museum and gallery legend. I, on the other hand, was always exploring nature and science. For me, representing the physical world through art was a way of better understanding its functions and processes. That childhood drive to experiment and explore has continued to be important in my work.

I was first exposed to using watercolor as a medium in a community college class. I needed electives to fill out my hours while working on an associate of science in chemistry. Watercolor painting had a rich history in life illustration, so it was a natural tool for someone interested in representing the physical world. I reveled in its range and nuance, its tendency for watermarking and blooming. It had a dual nature, seeming to be remarkably simple – pigment plus water – yet retaining a complexity that intrigued me. Its reputation as the most challenging of painting mediums only made it all the more appealing due to its similarity to the problem-solving demanded in my study of chemistry. I was determined to learn watercolor painting's languages of control and automatism. Later, I learned of wabi-sabi, the Japanese concept of embracing beauty in imperfection. It is a perfect description of the aesthetic of watercolor painting.
Japanese aesthetics was the other major influence on my creative mind. My mother had a close Japanese friend with whom she bonded through homeschooling, motherhood, and as lonely wives with busy working partners. Their relationship deepened as my mother supported her friend through the birth and death of a severely handicapped child. For several years, our families’ lives were intertwined through life and death, pain and beauty. From early in the relationship, there was a constant dialogue about our separate cultures. My mother’s friend wanted her children to grow up experiencing all things American, and my family was curious to appreciate Japanese tradition. My mother became interested in Asian art and artifacts, often purchasing unmarked pieces from estate sales, craft shows, and antique stores. The two women would muse over these little treasures, her friend often scornfully stating, “This is not Japanese.” Those opinions never changed my appreciation for the objects of foreign origins that occupied a shelf in my mother’s home. Our West Texas, country-styled house became host to exotic traces of Japanese and other Asian cultures. They held a beauty that my American Midwest heritage seemed to lack.

Throughout the completion of my bachelor of arts degree in chemistry, the realization that I wanted to do art grew stronger and harder to ignore. As I moved deeper into the art realm and out of focusing on chemistry, I found myself incorporating many elements of Japanese aesthetic in my work. They presented the possibility of balance and tranquility, both of which I was desperately searching for in my personal life as well. Instead of committing to a single style or artistic mode, I discovered the answer was balance and the act of embracing contrary natures, imperfections, beauty, and form.

When I decided to pursue art as a career, I entered the master of fine arts program in watercolor under Millie Giles at the University of North Texas. After two years, I began my final creative project, culminating in an exhibition of my master’s thesis work. It was also accompanied by an extended artist’s statement paper. The watercolor program had historically teetered on the proverbial knife-edge from the rest of the university and was under immense pressure for “avant garde” work. My show needed to be bigger, more spectacular, and unforgettable – unlike anything the university had ever seen. Together, Millie and I began contemplating the possibility of merging kites and fine art into my master’s thesis exhibition.

Kites, like sculpture, could be art objects in and of themselves. Kites also fit well into my never-ending search for balance in art and life. I was surprised to discover balance to be more important than overall symmetry in the function of a kite. Form, surface area, materials, wind strength: all had to be in equilibrium for a successful flight.

Traditionally, the kite has functioned as a mode of communication, an expression of personal liberty, recreation, competition, and self-expansion. Scientifically, they have been connected with the understanding of electricity, the study of wind currents, and the invention of the airplane. Throughout the ages, kitefliers have figuratively transcended their land-locked beings and soared into the air, ever reaching for heights yet unexplored. This is not unlike the desired function of art and its creative process.

During some early research on kites as art, I came across Anna Rubin and a quote from Gilbert Lescault. He wrote in Ecrites timides sur le visible, “Light and frail as it is, the kite hovers at the opposite end of the spectrum from our traditional museums. It hangs on
the empty air, not on a picture rail…to build a kite is to put art beyond the reach of stuffiness and heavy discourse…for the kite is the negation of the academic attitudes of a complacent culture. A kite offers no criticism. It just escapes. It is somewhere else entirely.” (Translated from French, 1979) THAT was exactly what I was looking to express with my MFA exhibition. I wanted something more than a painting on a rail, and God knows how I longed to rise beyond the “stuffy discourse” of academia in art. It was my ticket to freedom.

Art kites allowed me to explore form, function, and the hybridization of traditional watercolor painting on a non-traditional, three-dimensional surface, displayed off the walls and in flight. Rubin’s delicate art kites presented a powerful reminder to pursue simplicity, balance, and natural materials. I decided to use Japanese kite forms as the “carriers” for my paintings. It was an artistically relevant choice considering the history of Japanese kite-decorating included techniques that were forerunners to traditional watercolor painting. As I began my research and practice of kitemaking, I didn’t understand how deep the rabbit hole went. I tumbled in headlong.

It became necessary for me to formally address the role that Japanese culture and philosophy had played in my development for the extended artist’s statement paper. It was not as crude as mimicry or as easy as appropriation; rather, it was evidence of my respect and admiration for a culture and the oblique and inadvertent role it played in my early life. But I really needed contemporary experiences to serve as evidence for my paper. A trip to Japan in the summer of 2009 enabled me to create a sustainable dialogue between this Western artist and the Eastern principles, ideas, and imagery. I joined a cultural exchange program for two weeks, traveling to over 13 different cities.

Not only was it an opportunity to travel and do art abroad, but I could also get academic credit by using it as research for my final year of the MFA program. I planned to visit multiple museums and cultural centers that were involved in the many Japanese kite festivals throughout the year.

Executing these well-laid plans proved more challenging than I anticipated. The timing for the trip managed to exclude every major kite festival held that year. Additionally, younger generations of Japanese showed little interest in preserving this particular cultural element, and there were very few individuals making kites in a contemporary context. Kite flying and making seemed limited to festivals or specific kite-holiday type events. My Japanese peers were bewildered at my interest in going to said events and dismissed it for more “interesting” things to show me. Traditional kitemaking in Japan was indeed losing ground. However, when I did find someone willing to talk kites, they were incredibly enthusiastic and excited at the prospect of this Westerner showing interest! I learned not only about the construction and decorating styles, but also about the significance of the imagery itself.

I talked a friend into hunting down the TAKO-NO-HAKUBUTSUKAN, or Tokyo Kite Museum in Nihonbashi, Tokyo, Japan. It is one of the most intense, sensory-overloading museums I have ever visited! It is a tiny museum that boasts over 3,000 kites and is the head office of the Japanese Kite Association. Founded by Shingo Modegi, the former owner of the restaurant above which the museum is located, it is primarily his private collection of kites. I felt as though I had won the lottery! Even though I was the only Western visitor – actually, I was the ONLY visitor at that time – they had some English in the description tags and translated books. I picked up an
amazing book in English titled *The Making of Japanese Kites* by Masaaki Modegi (Shingo Modegi’s son and now the owner of the Tokyo Kite Museum). The Drachen Foundation has since made this book available in the US.

I returned to the States and started cranking out rough versions of the kites that I had seen. My process would prove to be quite crude compared to the incredible craftsmanship of the Japanese kites that I saw at the museum. Many of my kites refused to fly or met untimely ends in dramatic crashes, thanks to my inexperience as a flier. I became obsessed with the Edo Dako for their extreme stability, large surface areas and simple form. I learned of the Shirone Kite Battles in Niigata Prefecture where they fly giant Edo kites, measuring over 130 square feet, across the river Nakanokuchi and have “battles.” I was determined to see one and began planning for a return to Japan in the summer of 2010.

Before that could happen, I had to finish my master of fine arts exhibition and creative project. I designed nine kites – four traditional Japanese forms and five original forms – using traditional materials of bamboo, paper, and starch paste. I painted them with watercolor and gouache and installed them in a beautiful atrium of the art building on campus. I derived the imagery from my 2009 visit to Japan and included strongly recognizable silhouettes of traditional Japanese buildings, trees, and other objects. Those images served as starting points for a narrative related to the experience. This continued the East/West dialogue I had started in 2009. The kites were installed vertically in the three-story atrium, complete with tails and flying lines. The exhibition was a great success, and I graduated with a sigh of relief.

I returned to Japan in the summer of 2010 to continue feeding my growing obsession with Japanese kites. I went with Millie Giles, my professor and mentor, that time. Again, we missed the giant kite festivals due to poor timing, but were able to visit one of the other well-known kite museums, Shirone Odako to Rekishinoyakata, in Niigata, Japan, which has many of the Shirone giant kites, such as those that participate in the battles. I had a much more intimate experience at the museum. It was a fair trade.

The museum had extensive exhibits of kites from Japan and around the world. (Years later, I would meet the makers of those kites in the States.) It also had a wind tunnel and a 3D English-dubbed movie of the Shirone kite battles. I was fortunate to see many examples of the large-scale Edo Dako that measured some 40 feet on one side and required more than 20 men to fly. Those large kites were made specifically for the museum rather than the battlefield, as the ones flown in the festival are often completely destroyed in the process. The festival is quite the community event, in fact.

Traditionally, each community on both sides of the river works all year to hand-make the rope used to fly the kite and slowly puts together a selection of kites for the battle. During the festival, the kites are flown from opposite banks and are intentionally tangled up in the air. They are then downed into the river where a giant game of tug-o-war commences with the flying ropes. Eventually, one of the ropes breaks, and the side with the longest bit left wins! They get to take home the loser’s broken portion of the kite rope. It is incorporated into the length of the flying rope, which they begin again on for the next year.

Community building through kitemaking

*continued on page 26*
TOP: Kites hang from every available surface at the Tokyo Kite Museum. BOTTOM: Tiny kite with flying reel; viewed through a hand lens at the Tokyo Kite Museum.
Artist Beth Gouldin’s “Somewhere Else Entirely” MFA exhibition. Viewed up through the kites from the ground level, top, and from the third level, bottom, at the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas.
TOP: *Manu tukutuku* kite kits to be assembled at the Matariki Kite Festival in Auckland, New Zealand. Finished kite inset. BOTTOM: *Manu aute* “Bird Man kite” at the Auckland War Memorial Museum.
exists in many cultures that have a strong kite history. It was an unexpected discovery for me that this community-building element is still alive and well; one just has to know where to look. My first personal experience of this was during my research for my MFA project in 2010 when I attended a kitemaking conference in Washington state. (I was living in Texas at the time.) One might expect that the sudden involvement of a novice outsider would have been resisted or resented, but that is the opposite of what I experienced. The group of lovely folks that participate yearly in the Fort Worden Kitemaker’s Conference in Port Townsend, WA are from all around the world and all walks of life. They opened their arms to me and shared their knowledge with enthusiasm. I was hooked. It was enriching, encouraging, and challenging to delve into other materials and techniques for kitemaking.

I also witnessed community-oriented kite building in New Zealand in 2013. I attended the Matariki Kite Festival in Auckland. They had an entire building devoted to teaching traditional Maori manu tukutuku kitemaking! The materials used were very different than those used for Japanese kitemaking. Native flax, reed, and hemp were the basis for those particular kites, which have a triangular shape. They are often decorated with feathers or tufts from grasses. I didn’t get a chance to fly my kite, as the wind was utterly uncooperative that day, but I met many fine folks from Australia, New Zealand, and England, and even other Americans! Another impressive kite I had a chance to view at the Auckland War Museum was the historical “Bird Man kite,” which has a wingspan of over six feet.

My most recent experience was closer to home, here in San Francisco, as the community came together to celebrate kites and art. Working in conjunction with an exhibition of Tyrus Wong’s paintings and kites at the Disney Family Museum, and also with the Presidio Kite Festival, I held a solo exhibition of eight painted kites at the Thoreau Center of Sustainability in the Presidio. The eight kites were Japanese Tsugaru, Rokkaku, and Kerori forms. The imagery for that series was designed with the community in mind. I focused on both the efforts made in San Francisco for the preservation of local wildlife and the city’s rich, deep sense of community. It was an expression of my personal exploration of the neighborhoods and communities of San Francisco during my first two years in the city.

Moving from Texas, which is densely populated with people and vehicles, to San Francisco, which is densely populated with people and wildlife, was quite a transition for me. As I explored neighborhood by neighborhood, the abundance of birds that flourished within this raging metropolis astounded me. The kites represented both geographical locations and particular bird species. Most functioned as a mnemonic tag for the stories of those experiences – anecdotes that could be passed on in a narrative tradition with the kites. I assigned the bird species to different neighborhoods or parks within San Francisco. A visit to those places might have won you an encounter with any given species of bird, but those specific ones had become particularly iconic to me. They seemed a natural subject matter for kites: while man had certainly accomplished flight, rarely is it as elegant and effortless as that of birds. The kites celebrated a captured moment – still or in flight. (See photos of this series starting on page 28.)

The imagery of my kites varies quite a bit from my studio paintings – I simplify both the imagery and the painting style. The challenges of distance and materials require
different design principles than a studio painting that would go on a wall. I work in series — in studio and on the kites — exploring and playing with imagery and ideas until either I’ve exhausted them or grown bored and moved on. There are paintings that just blossom exactly as they were in my mind, and then there are those that take a beating to produce. I find that, especially with the stories behind the kites, I’m less likely to give up on them as I may a painting that just isn’t working out. There’s the experience to be shared of the story, the painting, and then, inevitably, the inspiration to go out and FLY.

The materials I use are all-natural and as close to traditional Japanese kitemaking materials as I can access. The sails are of masa paper, the spars of bamboo, the binding element of rice paste glue (nori paste), and cotton string. In contrast to traditional kitemaking, I construct sails specifically as the carrier for an image, rather than being strictly functional for flight. Masa paper is a tough, machine-made Japanese paper designed for printmaking, marbling, and sumi. It is lightly sized on one side, so it is ideal for careful painting. While I opt for transparent watercolor exclusively in my studio paintings, I’ll often use gouache for kites. Gouache is an opaque watercolor that tends to be heavily pigmented. I prefer it for painting the kites because it has more even coverage and it uses less water, so doesn’t cause as much warping. It can be problematic if the layers of gouache become so thick that they either crackle or block light transmittance through the kite, but with controlled layers, even back illumination causes the colors to glow brightly. I use bamboo, nori paste, and cotton string to build the framework of the kite after the painting has been completed. One of the most agonizing moments is putting holes through the painting to run the bridle lines to the frame.

The scale of the kites varies, but most are at least three feet on one side. I love both big kites and big paintings. My largest kite to date was painted for the MFA exhibition: an Edo kite that was 18 feet tall and 12 feet wide. It took over a year to paint and I used probably a thousand dollars worth of materials (though I don’t like to think about that part)! It was so large that it couldn’t be assembled before installation. It had to be brought into the space, spread out on the floor, and put together the night before. It brought the complete project up to almost 40 installation hours. Storage after the fact becomes problematic with kites of that size. Most are disassembled and rolled for safekeeping, but the recent ones decorate the walls of my home.

In the end, the kites became art-objects. None of the fully painted kites have been flown. Successful flying relies heavily on trial and error and making adjustments to each individual kite for every flight. Such experimentation would damage the kites. For the Thoreau Center exhibition, which coincided with the Presidio Kite Festival, I created three additional kites with the same designs painted in ink that I flew during the festival. They looked no worse for wear for the most part, crumpled but whole. That’s both the beauty and frustration of paper kites: they are simple, functional, and beautiful, but are very fragile and often don’t survive too many flights (especially if the landing is a little rough). For the larger kites, the scale creates difficulty. More extensive safety equipment should be used due to the extreme force they exert while in flight. Each kite, however, is designed to stay within the physical bounds of flight capability (surface area, weight, balance, and lift) and has been flight-tested on a smaller scale.

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“The Mission – Pigeons”

Typically, my view of these particular birds is far less romanticized and involves dodging and ducking as I bike through a flock of them. They can be found in every part of the city and are generally considered vermin. One day, I experienced a surreal moment while working my way through the chaos of the notorious 16th and Mission BART station. I was aggravated at having to navigate around the many homeless who sit outside of the station and dodge the pigeons simultaneously. Suddenly, the hauntingly beautiful song “Feed the Birds” from Disney’s “Mary Poppins” came into my mind. I was so struck by my own self-absorbed tendency to brush past and ignore the street people, like so many pigeons, as if they were merely obstacles to avoid in my daily life. This painting is a reminder to care about my community.

“The Castro – Anna’s Hummingbird”

This is my resident male Anna’s Hummingbird. He and several females frequent my hummingbird feeder and taunt my cat through my screen door. One day, as I was refilling the feeder, I had left the screen open on the door. I turned from the sink to see him hovering just outside of my door, eye-level, watching me fill the feeder. He zipped back and forth a few times, eyeing me all the while and impatiently chirping that I hurry up and finish with that feeder!

“The Presidio – Great Blue Heron”

The Great Blue Heron is the largest of the native herons, standing an impressive 4.5 feet tall. They are found near both fresh and salt-water sources. They seem to embody patience, their very presence evoking a Zen state despite passing tourists, bicyclists, and kids. Time expands and slows as you watch them hunting, slowly walking through the water or flying gracefully overhead.

“Fisherman’s Wharf – Common Gull”

“Finding Nemo” has forever embedded their characterization of seagulls into my mind. Anytime I come across these birds, my brain changes their call to “MINE! MINE!” They are particularly aggressive and fearless near Fisherman’s Wharf where tourists unknowingly, or knowingly, encourage their marauding behavior. The only time I really can enjoy their presence is during a ferry ride across the bay. It’s fascinating to watch the dynamics of flight in motion at eye-level as they coast along the wind currents created by the boat. Often, they will display stunning aerobatic feats if you toss a cracker to them in the air.
“Mission Bay – Brown Pelican”

Brown Pelicans are some of the oddest birds I’ve ever seen. They are dumpy, ugly, and awkward when grounded and astoundingly elegant and agile in the air. Their hunting technique is a blend of kamikaze diving and pinpoint accuracy. The force of their dive stuns the fish, as deep as six feet underwater, so they can scoop it up! For several decades, they were on the Federally Endangered Species List but have had a dramatic comeback. Next time you are near the bay, watch for these graceful fliers skimming above the water, their wing-tips inches away from the waves.

“Coit Tower – Red-Masked Conure”

Before my first visit to San Francisco I watched the indie film “The Parrots of Telegraph Hill.” I was then determined to find them, and we spent several hours tracking them down before discovering a small flock in the neighborhood below Coit Tower. Since moving here, I see or hear them regularly, shrilly calling to each other while they fly over our house. Since the film, they have spread into multiple areas around San Francisco. Their success is, in part, due to the protection and efforts of the California Parrot Project.

“Financial District – Peregrine Falcon”

Amazingly enough, there are nesting Peregrine falcons in the Financial District and SOMA (South of Market)! They have adopted the skyscrapers as their cliffs and made themselves quite at home. I had a unique opportunity to study this particular bird firsthand at West Coast Falconry in Marysville, CA. They are a fantastic organization for anyone interested in falconry and offer classes and hands-on experiences. During the introductory class, we had the chance to fly Harris hawks to the glove and then get up close with Peregrine Falcons and Merlins as well.

“Golden Gate Park – Raven”

Ravens are incredibly intelligent, mysterious birds. They’ve been known to use tools, teach each other skills, and interact logically with their environment. One day in Golden Gate Park, I heard the sound of dropping water, though no water was nearby. Perplexed, I struggled to locate the source of the sound and discovered a very large raven in a nearby tree. As I watched him, he opened his mouth and out came this delicate yet clearly audible “ker-plunk!” They are becoming more common in urban areas, as they are one of the few bird species that hasn’t been negatively impacted by the expansion of the human environment.
The Rokkaku kite, or Rok, is my go-to kite for an easy build and enjoyable fly. I recently taught an adult kitemaking class with that kite for the Disney Family Museum in San Francisco. During my 2010 Japan trip at the Shirone Odako to Rekishinoyakata (otherwise known as the Shirone Giant Kite Museum) in Niigata Prefecture, I was allowed to fly a huge Rok made with half-round and full-round bamboo that was almost seven feet tall. It was the first time I’d flown anything that large, and I was mesmerized during the launch as it shot effortlessly straight up into the air. Those specific Roks are designed so the spine can be removed and the kite rolled for storage. They are beautifully hand-painted and made with double-thick paper so they last for years.

When I began my journey into kitemaking, I had no idea it would develop into the kind of obsession it has. I was surprised in the beginning when my academic advisors didn’t laugh in my face at the suggestion of kites, and I’m still surprised at the positive responses I get from folks who see them. I have yet to come across someone who doesn’t seem intrigued (at the very least) at the idea of kites as art. Though, maybe those are just tolerant smiles. And I’m grateful for the tolerance from my husband as the number of kites in our home, both on the walls and off, keeps growing.

As a flier, it is a practice in humility to offer the kite to the wind, praying silently that I’ve made all the appropriate adjustments so it doesn’t crash! As a maker, I’ve progressed so far from where I started, but there’s still much to learn about the craftsmanship of making kites. In the end, I’m astounded that the humble kite, “light and frail as it is,” (Lescault) has the power to knit communities together, inspire, entertain, and ultimately lift and express the human spirit. ◆
I don’t often write about kitemaking per se for *Discourse*, but I’m going to take the opportunity in order to talk about inspiration, mentors, and kite heritage.

I might have chosen to talk about the paper-piecework fish kites that I worked on for most of last year – certainly, they were an homage to Nobuhiko Yoshizumi, mentor and friend – but I’d like to take the opportunity to go back almost 20 years to a time that I had more patchwork quilt books in my collection than kite books. Having learned by the early 90s that the great benefit of most quilt books was to find a single detail that might be used in a unique way in a kite sail, I found a book that would forever change my approach to patchwork.

*Pattern on Pattern* by Ruth B. McDowell showed me the power of overlapping and enlarging/reducing patterns upon themselves (out of print, but still available on Amazon). I happened upon a simple pattern that would allow me to make swallow – my word, could be any bird – images within a four-block section of patchwork. What I quickly discovered, thanks to Ms. McDowell, was that the image could be enlarged with a 16-piece section. That meant that I could have a large swallow made up of four less-defined small swallows. My sewing ability was the only limit to what extent I might exploit this technique. (The next multiple is an 8x8 square made up of 64 individual blocks; challenging for the best ripstop sewer.) Some of my first paper kites were pattern-on-pattern, four-block swallow

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More from Scott’s recent series of paper piecework fish kites.
LEFT: One of Scott’s first 10x10 paper swallow kites, inspired by Pattern on Pattern. RIGHT: One of Scott’s later 25x30 Edo-style swallow kites, also made with pattern-on-pattern ideas.
designs.

Very soon after, I discovered that the basic block design that I had developed could be “doubled,” that is, two diagonal corners could be made up of three pieces with a diamond-shaped center piece that would complete the square block. This block pattern (photo on page 33, right) allowed me to make the swallow in either of two directions. Incidentally, this kite is from a series of four Edo-style kites made with pattern-on-pattern ideas as well as the traditional Japanese ji-dako, or letter-kite, idea. Mentors Nobuhiko Yoshizumi and Mikio Toki helped me with finish details on all the kites. The four are different traditional Edo designs, including one which is a “creative” kaku-dako: its sparring follows the block pattern of the paper patchwork.

So now comes the inspiration for my current pattern-on-pattern project. Traveling to Guatemala in November of 2013 to celebrate the barriletes gigantes (giant kites) as well as the introduction of the Drachen Foundation’s Spanish-language version of Giant Kites of Guatemala, I was struck again by the close association between the butterfly mythology of the Mayan people and their cultural tradition linked to kites. Indeed, just the current word for kite, papalote, echoes the native word for butterfly. So butterfly kite it would be! Now I worked through all the inspiring butterfly kites that I’ve seen over the years: the Chinese butterflies of Ha Yiqi and Chen Zhou Ji, the wonderful geometric fliers first made by Didier Ferment and made exquisitely by many others since, the giant butterfly barrilete from Sumpango, and even the ferry from Ishigaki Island, Japan.

So with all this inspiration, what was I to do? Make a butterfly-shaped kite, a “round” barrilete, or perhaps a geometric form reminiscent of a butterfly? Alas, these ideas are for another day, as I decided to “play it safe” and make an Edo-style kite which simply happens to be my favorite. At the outset, I decided I would try to use every kitemaking technique and a wide variety of Japanese papers to, again, make a two-color kite much like many seen in ukiyo-e (Japanese woodblock prints). Additionally, I would, for the first time, make this a collapsible kaku-dako framed entirely of bamboo worked from start to finish by me. I decided against using old bamboo – it’s just too valuable to me to use so much for one project. After finishing the paper sail, adding re-enforcements, edge-treatment, and the like, I started to frame the kite. I found that a compromise was in order, so instead of framing the kite as a traditional Edo, I would eliminate the diagonal spars and make it like a Shirone kite. This would increase the number of bridles needed, but was a nice way to finish a rigid frame without having to fashion two collapsible diagonal spars.

As I write, the kite is complete except for bridling. An early spring in Colorado may allow me to do that in the next weeks, but knowing our weather, it may be June before this significant amount of work will be done. Next may be a matching butterfly ferry, or perhaps a similar kite made with ripstop and carbon fiber. Regardless, this is a kite that I couldn’t have made 10 years ago. I needed more knowledge, more skill, more inspiration, and more confidence. My thanks to the makers of inspiring kites that I’ve seen throughout my travels. Especially, thanks to Nobuhiko Yoshizumi and Mikio Toki who have been patient teachers for many years. Thanks to Robert Trepanier, whose innovative ideas trickle down to some of the smallest kite details (in this kite, it was his pulley-style tensioning technique) and to Sumpango’s Happy Boys, who broke with tradition and made a spectacular butterfly barrilete at the 2013 Day of the Dead Festival.

◆
Details of Scott’s latest kite.
Scott's butterfly-inspired, pattern-on-pattern, Edo-style kite. The backlit, framed kite shows surface details including woodblock print, dye, and waxed elements.
For two years in the 1960s I was the assistant to Benjamin Thompson, the Chairman of the Department of Architecture at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard. Each spring the students held a Beaux Arts weekend which included a Kite Flight on the banks of the Charles River. There were elaborate and beautiful kites and silly prizes. It occurred to me at the time that the Kite Flight could be expanded to both sides of the river and hundreds of people could participate.

A couple of years later the Mayor of Boston, Kevin White, appointed John Warner to be the Parks Commissioner. The story of his appointment in the *Boston Globe* suggested a man who might be up for a kite festival. I wrote him a letter including a vision for a huge event which combined a kite festival and a Venetian inspired water festival.

He responded immediately, but said the festival should take place in Franklin Park in the Roxbury/Dorchester neighborhood of Boston. He felt that Franklin Park, Boston’s largest and most underutilized park, would benefit enormously. My husband Bill, a professor at the School of Design, and I set to work – forming the Committee for the Better Use of Air – composed of architect
A t-shirt from the Great Boston Kite Festival, this purple T was part of a group that spelled K-I-T-E.
Winners with trophies at the Festival in Franklin Park, at the time Boston’s largest and most underutilized park.
The Kite Festival, which began at a time of racial unrest in Boston, brought people together in a joyful way.
Gill Fishman was designer of the Kite Festival's many colorful buttons and t-shirts.
The Committee for the Better Use of Air ran the Festival for 13 years and attracted a wide array of kite enthusiasts.
and design friends. We chose May 17th as the date of the first Festival and recruited additional friends to staff three Saturdays of workshops at the Parks Department Recreation Centers, where we taught kids to make simple kites, guaranteed to fly, such as the Scott Sled.

A couple of weeks before the Festival, Michael Sand, one of the members of the Committee for the Better Use of Air, installed a spectacular exhibition of kites, lent to us by Charles Eames, in the atrium of Boston City Hall and we held a Fly In press conference on City Hall Plaza. A week before the Festival several huge donated billboards inviting people to “GO FLY A KITE” appeared. And that Sunday the Boston Globe wrote a front page story about the exhibition and upcoming Festival: “Winds of Change Sweep Through City Hall.”

We gave a good deal of thought to the possibilities of too little or too much wind. We invited Otto Piene, a celebrated German artist from the Fluxus Movement and then at MIT’s Center for Advanced Visual Studies, to create one of his enormous inflatable sculptures. A noted Boston socialite was challenged to put together the John Finley All Girl Kazoo Band. Marching bands from several Boston neighborhoods were invited.

Saturday, May 17th, 1969, was a glorious day and hundreds of people showed up on Franklin Park’s golf course. There were Indian fighting kites, Bahamian humming kites, and for the people without kites we gave away hundreds of commercial kites. It was very windy and Otto Piene’s sculpture, which was supposed to spell out “SKY, WIND, AIR” in huge white inflated tubes, wound up in beautiful chaos. Life Magazine reporter China Altman did manage to ascend in a hot air balloon and two sky divers “judged” the highest kites.

The Committee for the Better Use of Air ran the Festival for 13 years. As it evolved, it attracted an amazing array of home cooked foods, as local churches and barbecue entrepreneurs set up along the edge of the golf course.

The City took over the Festival in 1982 and moved it into a nearby stadium and let the town’s loudest radio station blast soul and rock. The crowds disappeared and the Festival shut down a few years later.

But the good news is that I hope to find some young people to work with to revive the Festival – on Boston’s new Greenway or on a hill in Dorchester where I hear lots of kites are flying on windy days.◆
Artist Clara Wainwright hopes to work with young people to revive the Great Boston Kite Festival.
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