

Interview with Alfredo Giunta

By Jan Polish

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Alfredo Giunta, a prolific and creative Italian designer of origami, is most famous for his incredible insects. I met with him in Paris to discuss his inspirations.

Jan Polish: How did you get started in origami?

Alfredo Giunta: I started when I was a child in Sicily. I was not conscious of origami as something special. There were many folds I did at school, traditional folds, airplanes, fortune teller, the rabbit, but I knew nothing about "origami." When I was about 17 or 18, I saw on television a guy that was explaining origami. It was difficult to find books, but I was captivated by the many animals this guy could do from paper. I tried, but it was almost impossible to do. I studied art in high school in Sicily, then I took my certificate to teach art history and drawing in high school.

When I was 27, I went to Vincenza for work ... maybe 1978. I saw in a shop window an origami book *Introduction to Origami*, by a German. So I started doing all the figures in the book. They were so amazing.

I searched for other books and I found *Origami Made Easy* by **Kunihiko Kasahara**, and after reading it I started to create my first origami. One of the first was the dragonfly. A grasshopper from a bird base. A rooster, very similar to one by **Fred Rohm**. **Roberto Morassi** sent me photocopies of the model in the book just like mine, but I had never seen it. I continued to fold because it was better for me to create than to fold from diagrams. So year by year, I invented models.

I became a member of CIO (Centro Italiano Origami) in Turin (at that time the CDO did not exist). I folded and I folded. I participated in an International Exposition to celebrate Pinocchio, and became a member of the CDO (Centro Diffusione Origami) and BOS (British Origami Society). Before that time I published two books with the CIO ... insects and a chess set. I went to conventions and started to meet "stars" of origami like **Eric Kenneway**, **Dave Brill**, and others.

At one convention in Rimini I met the editor of *il Castillo*, and he asked me to make a book on insects, *Origami Gli Insetti*. I agreed and started the drawings. After one year the book was finished. I made two other books after that: *I Piccoli Animali* and *Divertitevi con L'Origami*. The origami book

market in Italy is not so good, and at the moment *I Piccoli Animalì* has to be reprinted, and *Divertitevi* is at the end of its first printing. I'm thinking of doing another book on insects ... I have many other models. So one day maybe I will have the material for a new book.

JP: Who were the greatest influences on you?

AG: Akira Yoshizawa, deeply. I met him in Florence in 1982. I think that I learned so much just watching him folding, and his models. He opened my mind. If I have to say which is my master, it's Kasahara, because I started with his book. I think that I learned a little from everyone that I met ... great people. We can influence each other when we meet.

JP: Who do you think is or was the greatest creator of origami?

AG: The creator of the crane ... no one knows who created it, but it was brilliant. That's a diplomatic answer, but it's also what I feel.

JP: Where do you get your ideas from?

AG: I like to fold animals. That's the challenge that I prefer, especially little animals with many appendages. I plan it in my mind. I start with an idea of how to get the appendages from the paper. Then I do a rough shape. Then I look at books and try to do the right one. Always I have in my mind what to do, and then I try to figure out how to do it. It is like Michelangelo said, "Every statue is already in the marble ... you just have to find it." In paper there are so many things you can obtain from folding. You just have to find the right way.

JP: What do you think about the controversy between the "minimalist" and "technical" creators, and the hand-drawn diagrams versus computerized diagramming?

AG: It depends on what you want to do with origami. It's a challenge for everyone to try to make something in the way they think is right. Origami is one of the most beautiful things to create, because it's for everyone. Everyone can do how many folds he wants. Everyone can decide when to stop folding. You can make a few folds and be satisfied, then it's a beautiful model. If you're not satisfied, you have to add folds. You can choose simple to complex--it's really a way of creating for everyone ... for the baby and the old.

For the diagrams ... I think that it's better to do freehand drawings so you can feel the personality of the author. The computer is maybe more clear, more orderly. It could be good, but for people that have scientific minds. People for the art and soul ... who have done art study as I did ... it's better

to draw by hand. Of course, to make diagrams by computer is more convenient for the book writer because you can organize more easily and change things. But I think a computer is without personality. It's very cold.

JP: Where do you think your work is going?

AG: I think that everyone has a desire inside him--one is to make a grasshopper that jumps; another is to make a firefly that makes light with fluorescent paper. I remain fascinated by insects: beautiful body, beautiful colors, beautiful shape. They are really a challenge for a folder.

JP: What is going to happen to origami?

AG: Very difficult to say. I admire people like **John Montroll**, **Robert Lang**, **Peter Engel**, but I admire at the same time Akira Yoshizawa, **Paul Jackson**, Dave Brill. I think that the last names are more creative because they use few folds, and I really like the final results that they obtain. I don't like many very complicated models because I think that the final result loses something of reality. I like nature and my principal aim is to give a little breath of life in my models.