

# Aerial Art- Kites by Greg Kono

## Biography



Greg Kono is a third generation Japanese American (*Sansei*), who grew up on a farm in Sacramento, California. He made his first kites from greenhouse plastic, bamboo or wood dowels, and newspaper; at times he would invest a dollar for a commercial delta kite to fly over the family's twenty-five acres of farmland.

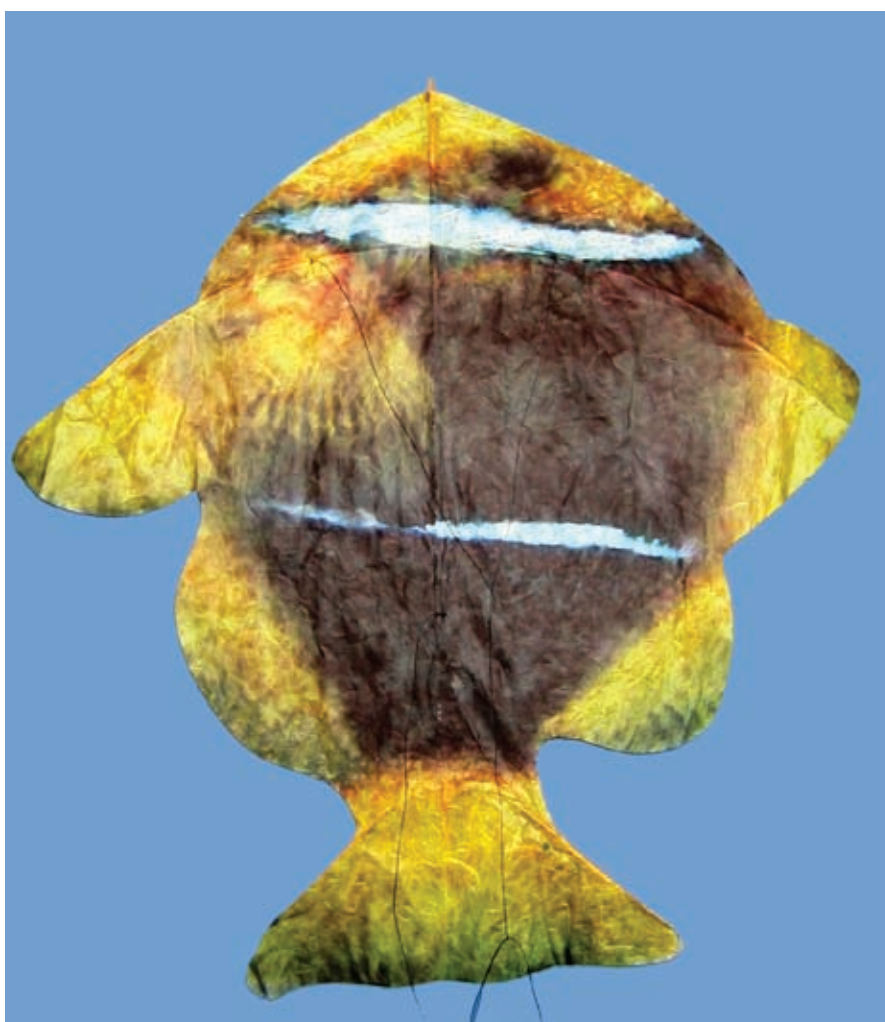
In 1986 he graduated from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Design. After graduation he designed museum exhibits for Herb Rosenthal and Associates in Los Angeles and West Office Design Associates in San Francisco.

In 1990 he relocated to Seattle, where he attended the University of Washington and Pratt Fine Arts Center to study sculpture and metal design. He fabricated and maintained exhibits for The Children's Museum, Seattle until he formed his own design studio, Kono Design, in 1991. He then collaborated with Annex Design on several youth museum exhibits before joining the company in 1997. He stayed with Annex Design as a Senior Associate until the end of 2001.

In 2001 Greg rediscovered his love of kite making. The Kono clan held a family reunion in San Francisco, for which he created a commemorative poster and several kites from the poster design.

As he began to experiment with kites of paper and bamboo, he was fortunate to come across a Japanese kite building workshop in 2002, taught by master kite builders, Nobuhiko Yoshizumi and Scott Skinner, at the Drachen Foundation in Seattle. Six months later he began working with the foundation, where he develops traveling exhibits, updates the website, and teaches kite building workshops, while continuing to develop his own kites and artwork.





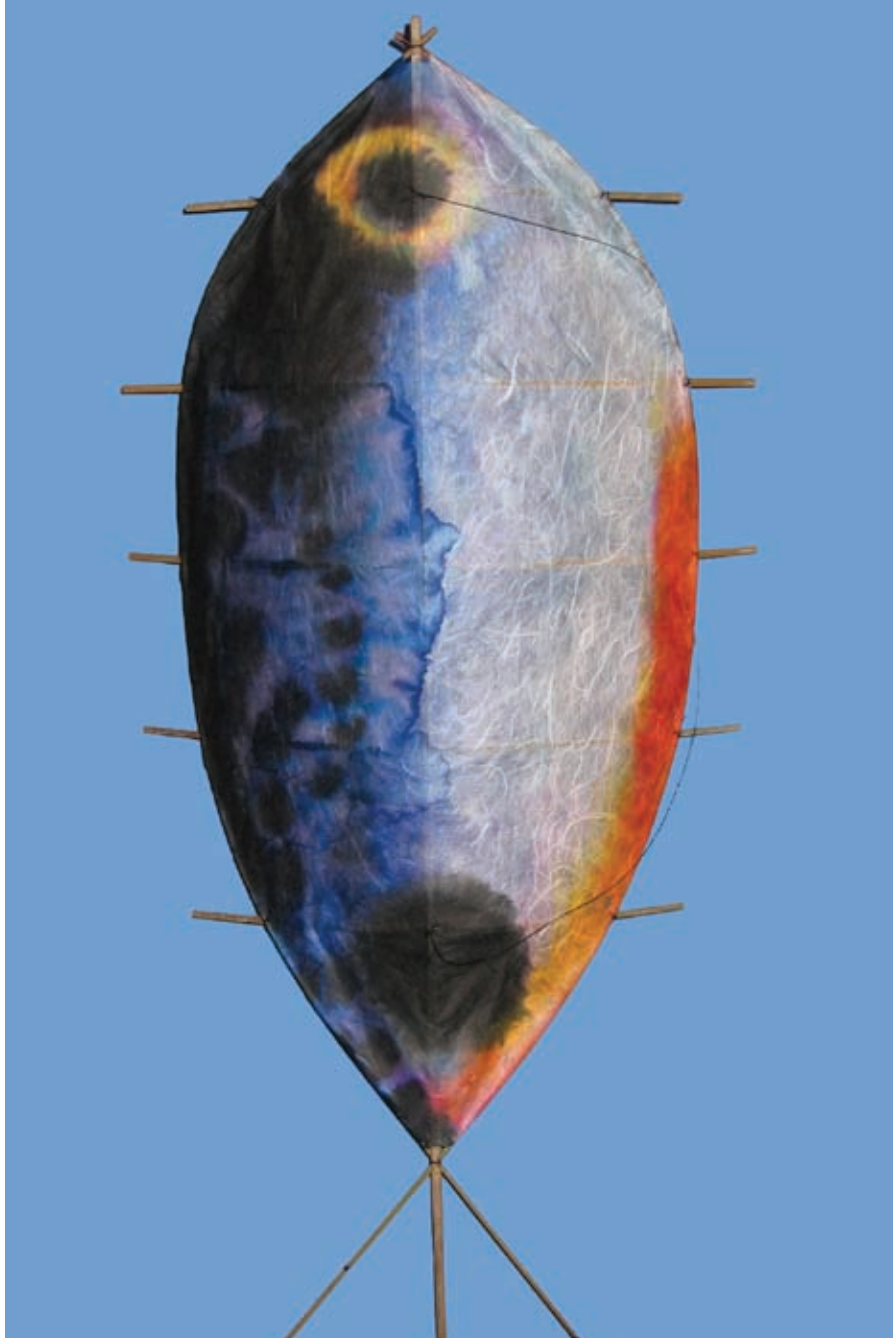
## Artist Statement

I enjoy creating functional works. Nothing gives me more satisfaction than seeing something I have built perform the way it was meant to. Flying the kite is the final process in my art. I've heard that a kite does not have a soul until it has been flown at least once.

As a Japanese American I choose to explore the culture and materials used by my ancestors. I often use bamboo and *washi* (Japanese paper), excellent materials that have been used for centuries to make kites in Japan, due to their strength and light weight.

My approach to kite making is to unify all parts of the kite in harmony. I pay as much attention to the framework (bamboo) as I do to the skin (*washi*) when building my kites. I strive to make the back of the kite as aesthetically pleasing as the front. In flight the sun backlights the kite, highlighting the framework through the skin. The challenge for me is to not overbuild the frame, to the point where it will not perform, yet to give it enough substance to hold its shape in flight. For paper I especially like *unryu* (Japanese for "dragon cloud paper") because the long strands of mulberry fiber running throughout the sheet make the paper strong. It's also lightweight and is somewhat transparent. For color I prefer to use fabric dyes, inks and watercolors to reinforce the transparency I seek.

I like to explore themes based on simple objects from my youth. It is my hope to lure my audience from the mundane world and recapture the spirit of childhood. Fruits



and vegetables, toys, comics, animals and fishing lures are some of the images I've incorporated into my recent work. I am also inspired by the anime films of Hayao Miyazaki, especially *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *Castle in the Sky* and *Porco Rosso*. I enjoy them because of their vibrant use of color, highly detailed renditions of scenes, characters, and stories about flights of fantasy.

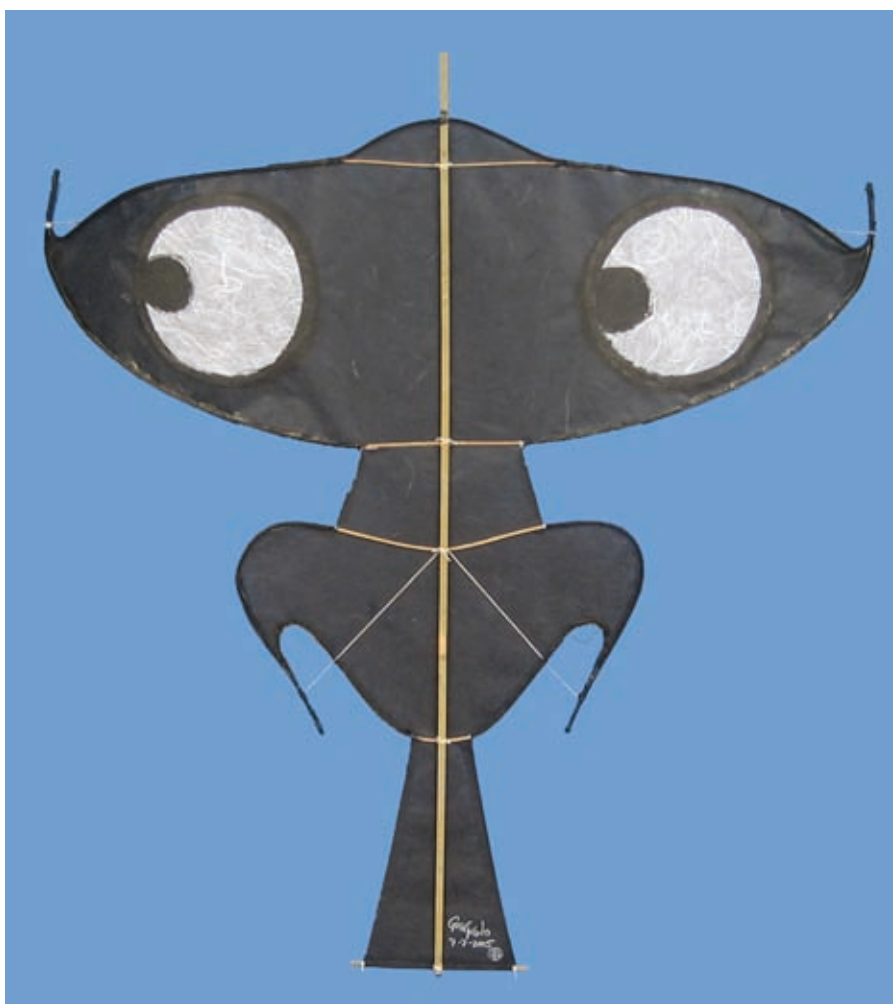
Greg Kono

August 12, 2005



## People Series

This series of kites, which was exhibited at the Art Not Terminal Gallery in Seattle, Washington in July 2005, is a light-hearted look at images from different perspectives—from bird's-eye to worm's-eye.



*portrait by Jose Sainz*

*workshop photo by Mikio Toki*

*all kite photos by Greg Kono*