

## Origami's global ambassador Akira Yoshizawa dies at age 94

### The Associated Press

Akira Yoshizawa, an origami master whose expressive paper gorillas made an art out of the craft tradition, died last month of heart failure and pneumonia, his wife said Sunday. He was 94.

Moving far beyond paper cranes and hats, Yoshizawa's origami gorillas appeared ready to lumber through the jungle and his frogs looked like they were on the verge of leaping off their lily pads.

He became a tireless ambassador for the craft after his work attracted attention overseas, traveling to more than 50 countries to teach people how to create new worlds out of folded paper.

His international success, in turn, gave origami a new respectability in Japan.

"At first, people only thought of origami as entertainment for children," said Kiyoko Yoshizawa. "Gradually, it won acceptance."

Yoshizawa died on March 14 -- the same day he was born in 1911 -- after spending close to two months in the hospital, said Kiyoko, his wife of 45 years.

His first encounter with origami came at the age of 3 when a neighbor folded him a boat. But Yoshizawa only began intently studying paper folding to explain tasks to younger colleagues at the ironworks factory where he worked during World War II.

After the war, Yoshizawa poured his energy into origami while supporting himself with odd jobs.

In the 1950s, his expressive figures captured the interest of U.S. anthropologist Gershon Legman, who helped exhibit his work at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

In the decades after, Yoshizawa traveled to countries from France to Indonesia to Peru to the United States, popularizing origami.

He liked to say that origami served as a "common language" for the world.

"A few folding techniques and a little inspiration are all you need to re-create the wonders of nature from a single sheet of paper," he wrote in one of his origami guides. "The only limit is your imagination."

Keiko Suda, a curator at the Komagane Kogen Art Museum where Yoshizawa taught each summer from 2001 to 2003, said Yoshizawa told students they needed to be keen observers before they created.

Yoshizawa was active until late last year, teaching students through the International Origami Society he founded in 1954 and showing his work in exhibitions in Japan.

He is survived by Kiyoko, 76.

**The Japan Times: April 4, 2005**

(C) All rights reserved

[Go back to The Japan Times Online](#)

[Close window](#)

