

Studio Saturdays: Paper Cranes

Rollins
Museum
of Art

Untitled #25 by Masao Yamamoto



Masao Yamamoto

Untitled #25

1992

Toned gelatin silver print with ink and powdered pigment

25 x 21 in.

LIST OF MATERIALS

- 4 sheets of origami paper
- String
- Needle
- Beads

Masao Yamamoto was born in 1957 in Gamagori city, Aichi Prefecture, Japan. This photograph, titled simply “#25” as Yamamoto does not name his artworks, is part of the artist’s “Tori” series of photographs. The Japanese word “Tori” here has two meanings; with one “i” at the end, it means bird. There is a bird in every photograph of the Tori series. With two “i”s at the end, Torii is the name of a special kind of gate that marks the entrance of Shinto shrines. Shinto is a religion native to Japan; in part, it focuses on nature and the belief that all things have a spirit, or kami, inside them. Masao Yamamoto is interested in exploring Japanese traditions and beliefs in his art, so he uses this double meaning of bird and sacred gate to express that.

Another way Yamamoto expresses Japanese traditions in his photographs is by aging them on purpose. He will stain his photographs with tea, smudge them, or carry them around in his pockets until they are worn, scratched, and creased. This ageing practice is inspired by the Japanese tradition of wabi-sabi. Wabi-sabi is the belief that beauty in all things is found in their unique imperfections.

For today’s activity, we will be exploring another Japanese tradition: origami! Origami is the art of folding paper to create small sculptures of objects and animals. One of the most significant origami creations is the crane, which—in real life— is a large white bird with long legs and a long neck. In Japan, the crane is called “the bird of happiness”, and it represents good luck, a long life, and protection. Today we will be folding our own paper cranes inspired by the bird in the photograph. Don’t worry if it’s not perfect—remember Masao Yamamoto and wabi-sabi. Beauty is found in imperfections!

THINK LIKE AN ARTIST

- 1) The crane in Japan represents good luck. What is your favorite animal, and what does it represent to you?
- 2) How can you apply the thought of wabi-sabi into your art?

INSTRUCTIONS

1. If you don't have origami paper, you can take a sheet of paper and fold one corner of it diagonally to the other edge to create a triangle. Cut off the extra paper and unfold to reveal a perfect square.
2. Fold the square in half diagonally to create a triangle. Then fold the right corner to the left to make a smaller triangle. Slightly unfold the paper and press the flap down to create a diamond shape. Flip over the paper and repeat. You should now have a diamond shape, with a vertical crease running down the center—this is an origami square base.
3. Make sure the open end is at the bottom. Fold the right edge to the center crease. Repeat on the left side. Then fold the top triangle section down over the crease line. Unfold the previous three folds.
4. Pull one layer up from the bottom, along the creases you just made. Push the left and right edges inwards. This is called a squash fold
5. Flip the paper over to the other side. Repeat the same steps of the squash fold on this side.
6. Fold the lower right edge to the central crease. Fold the bottom left corner in the same way, to the crease. Flip the paper over and repeat the same steps. You should now have a thin diamond shape.
7. Fold the right corner of the diamond into the center crease, repeat on the left side. Flip paper over and repeat the same folds so that it is even on both sides.

INSTRUCTIONS

8. Slightly open one side of the diamond and fold the long end to the top, adjusting so that it sticks out at an angle. Repeat on the other side. Fold over one side of the paper to create the head of the crane.
9. Repeat these steps to create 3 more cranes.
10. Grab a bead and tie it to the end of the string. Then thread the other end of the string through the eye of the needle.
11. Insert the needle in the small opening on the bottom of the crane and push it through to create a hole in the back of it. Pull the needle and string through and place the crane on the end with the bead.
12. Determine how far apart you want the cranes to be then tie a bead on the next area. Push the needle into the bottom of the crane and pull through to thread another crane. Repeat these steps until all cranes are on the string.
13. Tie a loop using the rest of the string to hang your cranes somewhere they can fly!