



Katsumi Komagata



Ospedale dei Bambini
di Kyushu

Dedicated to munari. 1,2,3... Komagata

Children are like mysterious vessels loaded with many different potentials. What do they think, what do they feel? Talking to them we are constantly amazed by their answers. As they grow up and their imagination distends its wings, their potentiality blossoms and begins to emerge little by little. At times this growth is not the destiny reserved to each child. In fact poverty and war deprive many of the world's children of attention and protection. It would be wonderful to enrich the future environment of our children so as to allow them to fully realize themselves. I think that the words which parents say to their children form the basis of their imaginative capacity and give them enormous possibilities. They are the first vital steps, of each future communication. I hope you too share this idea."

- the exhibition, the artist, the works
- taking a closer look:
 - how to transform one thing into another
 - who Bruno Munari is what they say about him.....
- suggested reading from the Art Scaffale
- internet sites

How to transform one thing into another

All the children of the world, after having played with a toy for a certain period, be it long or short, end up pulling it apart to see how it is made. And so adults say that children “break” their toys. It isn’t true. Children open them to see what’s inside. Just like an adult that “breaks” an orange to eat it. In general, it is not possible to construct anything with the broken pieces of a toy.

Only occasionally is it possible to build something else with the different parts. So- Katsumi Komagata thinks to himself one day- why not invent visual objects made up of different pieces that may combine in different ways? All it takes is for the different parts to be made up of similar dimensions or better still of modular dimensions that can be assembled together. An ancient game exists in the Orient that has the characteristic of being able to be composed in an infinite range of possibilities: it’s called the Tangram. Therefore- this is what Katsumi may have thought- let’s try to play equally well with forms and colours. It’s important to find unusual shapes: for example a triangle with a curved side. Let’s see in how many shapes it can unfold. So here we have a series of black and white and coloured games proposed by Katsumi, suitable even for the young ones. Children will be amazed by these changes even more than by certain fables that tell the story of the enamoured prince and the beautiful princess! There is a game for all ages.

Bruno Munari, October 1994

the exhibition

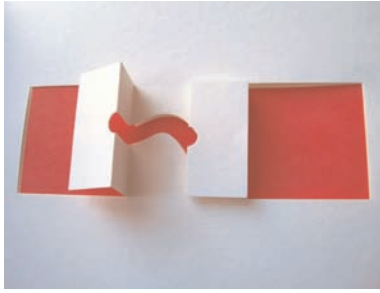
On the occasion of the centenary of Bruno Munari’s date of birth the **Scaffale** of the **Laboratorio d’arte** proposes **Dedicated to Munari. 1,2,3... Komagata** exhibition workshop of the Japanese artist Katsumi Komagata. Heir to Munari’s pedagogical thinking, Komagata is the creator of art books for children conceived of as 3-D objects with forms and colours that turn into games. In the exhibition, as in our encounter with the book, a dialogue takes place between the child and the adult. Books by the artist which beg us to open them continuously and take children seriously whilst entertaining them. Munari himself describes these books as “a small mental gymnastic”. The exhibition is curated in collaboration with the association Les trios Ourses, which has for over 20 years proposed art books to children and families through exhibitions, educational training, publications and events.

the artist

Komagata was born in 1953 in Japan. After having worked for the Nippon Design Centre he goes to the USA and works as a designer in Los Angeles and New York. His love for children’s books dates back to this period when he comes across Bruno Munari’s work and books. In 1981 he receives a silver medal from the Art Directors’ Club of New York and in 1989 he returns to Tokyo where he sets up his agency, *One stroke*. In 1990, when his daughter Ai is born, he publishes his first books for children that give rise to a series called *Little Eyes*: small books containing visual games that accompany children from their birth to stimulate their outlook and imagination. Munari’s example of the book as an object inspires him to look into new ways of binding books and reading them. This research leads to the creation of a new series of tactile books for blind children, realised in collaboration with Les Trois Ourses, Les doigts qui rêvent and the Pompidou Centre. In 2006 he wins the design award in Tokyo with the communication project for the Children’s Hospital of Kyushu. In the same year he is invited as the guest of honour to the IXX edition of the Book Salon and by the children’s publisher of Montreuil, Paris.



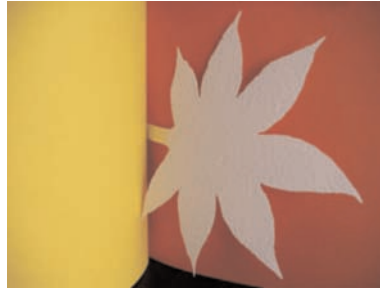
Katsumi Komagata
ritratto



Plis et plans

Les Doigts Qui Rêvent
Les Trois Ourses
One Stroke
Tokyo 2002

Zoom ●



Feuilles

Les Doigts Qui Rêvent
Les Trois Ourses
One Stroke
Centre Pompidou 2004
© Photo: Les Trois Ourses

Zoom ●

“Like a tennis player who attracts the attention of his opponents on the extreme end of the court, to quickly strike the ball into the opposite corner, Komagata plays with his readers. Surprise, which he controls with marvellous efficacy, is his favourite technique. With extreme precision, and without wasting a moment, Komagata throws us into the world of vision and the laws that govern it; indicating possible relations between form and colour, between the graphics and the spaces, insisting on their relationships and their effect on our lives. He plays with contrasts, proportions, rhythms, movements, full and empty surfaces...”

Sophie Curtil

the works

Komagata's works are a pleasure for the eyes and the hands: curious fingers lift, unfold, fold back, roll up and bind the pages in a continuous visual game. His books, mainly of a small format, can be managed with ease even by the youngest. Pleasant to touch, they oblige the reader to spend time looking at and opening the pages with both hands to reveal the continuous surprises. Our eyes follow the movements of our hands, moving from the centre to the margins, from left to right, from bottom to top, diagonally and horizontally, from image to image. The forms are built up in a dynamic way: what seems close is, in reality, on the opposite side of the page; the surface becomes volume and the book becomes a tactile object that permits us to “feel the space with our fingers”. In this way even blind people can be seduced by the tactile effect of the forms. It is no coincidence that Komagata has created a number of books in braille.

Pils and Plans - folds and planes is a tactile book where the image is both form and narration. Komagata writes only a brief introduction, in which he addresses children using a traditional poetic form, the haiku:

“Here it is,
It starts slowly slowly
There are empty and full
I move them round
They get longer, they lie down,
A small thing becomes a big thing
A single thing becomes multiple
And everything goes back to place
Slowly slowly.”

Pages without text follow, each presenting a geometric form - a circle, a square, a triangle - obtained with cuts and folds. Moving the surfaces and lifting the folds, the forms change; the movement is reversible bringing us back to the starting point. Komagata overturns the traditional form of the book, allowing the reader to experience the space of the page in a new way. Through the images he tells us that in our world our vision of things is partial, relative and often deceitful. With simplicity and immediacy - and above all with limited means - Komagata obtains results of great quality. He narrates small stories among the folds of his books that look like a game of hide-and-seek. The reader's eyes become progressively more audacious seizing on the author's idea of playing at hiding and then revealing. Between seriousness and irony, confirmation and surprise a profound complicity takes place between



Little Eyes n. 4: One for many
One Stroke
Tokyo 1991

Zoom ●



Little Eyes n. 10: Go around
One Stroke
Tokyo 1992

Zoom ●

the author and his readers. For the birth of his daughter Ai, Komagata gives life to a series *Little Eyes*, that collects 10 mini books without text. The title is a play on words of his daughter's name which rhymes with "eyes" whilst in Japanese "ai" means love. It is a collection of books where each book introduces a theme or a concept to form one big book, in which each part is necessary but remains independent. The first three books of the series were created when Ai was six months old. Komagata says to have used his daughter's interest and her responses to visual stimuli, as inspiration and confirmation of the efficacy of his works. Starting from the simplicity of the forms, Komagata is able to show the complexity of their relations. Book after book, he looks into and reveals the entire vocabulary of art: the drawing, the surfaces, the form, the colour, the rhythm, the solid and the empty, the volume. He calls to mind the universe of geometries (*little Eyes n°4: One for many*) and of arithmetic, through the rhythmic configuration of surfaces and dots (*Little Eyes n°5: 1 to 10*). *One for many* consists of 12 papers. In the first paper a circle divides into 2, composing two different figures. In the second paper the circle divides into four, giving rise to a Catherine-wheel first, and then a square. In the third, the circle divides into six figures and so on... In these pages geometry, art and play become one in a single "abstract" representation of reality. *Little Eyes n° 10: Go around* is pure play: like in a puzzle, piano accordion-shaped images hide themselves in long and narrow sleeves that reconstruct different images. In relation to the colours and forms Komagata adds the surprise effect of cut-out shapes. It's the case of *Little eyes n 1 First look*, the only book of the series in black and white, in which the author astutely plays among empty and solid forms, so much so that the reader can no longer distinguish what is black from what is simply a "hole". Cut-outs and folds not only create a surprise effect, but link up all the images: a cloud becomes a cow or a pig, or better still it is once a cloud then a cow and pig (*Little Eyes n.7: The animals*). The passage from "o" to "e" is central to the author's thinking: The images maintain a common denominator. An image does not ever substitute another, but contains it; because the artist communicates his own conception of the world based on the one principal that links everything together.



Little Eyes n. 1: First look
One Stroke
Tokyo 1990

Zoom ●



Little Eyes n. 7: The animals
One Stroke
Tokyo 1992

Zoom ●



Bruno Munari
Prelibri
 Corraini
 Mantova 2004

Zoom ●

what they say about him...

“Katsumi Komagata’s name is to be added to the list of artists that communicate with children using clear, simple and direct concepts. He has found the essence of concepts...his gift to children”
Tana Hoban, 1994

“Katsumi Komagata has a marvellous way of looking. His books and his images represent the best graphics. They are clean, luminous, simple, direct and very new”
Ivan Chermayeff, 1994

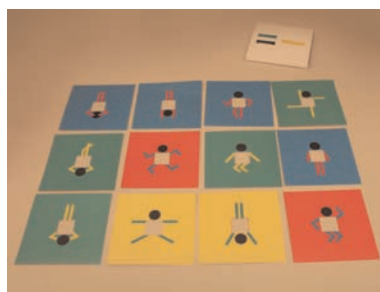
In his books what unfolds folds up, what is one becomes many, what grows shrinks, what are opposites look alike, what is divided comes together... and vice-versa. Opposites reunite and contrast in a cyclical movement where the end of one thing is always the beginning of another. So the hands and eyes of the reader go back and forth in a curious play of coming and going. (*Little Eyes n.8: Friends in nature*): the rain follows the good weather and the good weather returns after the storm. Komagata respects the natural laws : his mice are grey, like his elephants, his nights are black and his mornings light blue. They are images which are consistent with “ideal” representations, but also capable of questioning the certainty of the reader, modifying his perception and point of view.

They suggest that it is the reader who must change perspective on things. They show us that reality is full of resources if only we take time to stop and observe and think. They invite us to keep our attention focused because something unpredictable may happen at any moment to modify the course of events.

The reference points for Komagata’s work are many and diverse. First of all Bruno Munari who, as Valeria Tassinari reminds us, is a “total project man, architect-poet respectful of the codes and the language of art, lucid in his analysis and curious of the world, generous and essential”. Komagata discovers Munari’s books in Japan and understands that an art book is an instrument capable of stimulating a child’s play, his learning and perception. Munari takes the form and the structure of the book to a limit: in his books the real protagonist is the child. Apart from Munari the authors which most influence his work are Leo Lionni with *Little blue and little yellow*.

Tana Hoban with *Look again* and Ivan Chermayeff with his early forms. Komagata experiments and puts together their intuitions and dominates elements which in due course he transforms into autonomous and original creations.

In 1979 Munari creates the *Prebooks*: a real and proper encyclopaedia for pre-school children, who don’t know how to read and write, an encyclopaedia that wants to educate them to reading”, helping them to discover and build up the “desire to read”. It consists of 12 mini-books without writing that stimulate and involve all our senses. In book n.2 our sight is stimulated: a stylized white man walks, jumps, and exercises. But the image changes depending on which angle we look from. Komagata captures the idea at the heart of this book to then quote it in *Motion* where the young gymnast plays on the front and back of the page moving around the square central “hole”.



Katsumi Komagata
Motion
 One Stroke
 Tokyo 1996

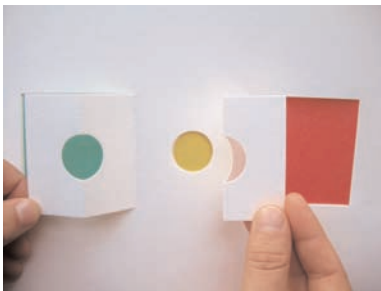
Zoom ●



Bruno Munari
Libro Letto
Produzione Interflex 1993

Zoom ●

Komagata does not remain indifferent to the fascination of *Bed Book* by Munari, which is both a book, a game and an object to use. The book is composed of large differently coloured pieces of fabric that mime the succession of sheets to touch, caress and cling to like a blanket. A book that can be opened and laid flat like a bed, that can be folded up and transformed into a tent or a hut. The pages can be separated and narrate stories which are always different. Komagata is inspired by *Bed Book* and creates his *Pata Pata*: a big soft book, without words, that can be folded up and separated into many squares that make up different geometric forms. Wonderful places in which to find oneself and become a character of an imaginary story, to hide oneself and invent infinite stories.



Plis et plans
Les Doigts Qui Rêvent
Les Trois Ourses
One Stroke
Tokyo 2002

Zoom ●



Katsumi Komagata
Pata Pata
2004

Zoom ●



Little Eyes n.5: 1 TO 10
One Stroke
Tokyo 1992

Zoom ●

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DESIGN
 mussetti rocchi pavese

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