



Above: Yuzawa Kite Painting depicting Ushiwakamaru (Young Yoshitsune) and the Tengu. Artist unknown



Above: Edo-style kite depicting Ushiwakamaru (Young Yoshitsune) and Benkei. Hashimoto Teizo, 1960's

Tako Kichi

Kite Crazy in Japan



By Sakura Tanaka
Photos by Felicia Katz-Harris

Taking flight this summer at the Museum of International Folk Art is Tako Kichi: Kite Crazy in Japan, an exhibition of more than 200 Japanese kites. The exhibition opens June 9, 2016 and runs through March 23, 2017.

Stilled though these handcrafted kites may be, hanging from the wall or the ceiling, imaginations will soar during kite-flying events and kite-making workshops at the museum's Milner Plaza location.

Traditional Japanese kites are made from a split bamboo framework and sheets of handmade washi paper (made from Mulberry tree bark). The paper is often brightly painted with colorful narrative illustrations in the ukiyo-e style representing legendary heroes and other design elements referencing Japanese folklore.

Originally kites were flown for religious purposes or to ward off evil spirits—promoting, among other things, prosperity and good fortune. An abundance of kite festivals and celebrations around Japan celebrate traditions such as the birth of a son, the New Year, or a good harvest with stalks of rice being sent aloft.

There are even huge fighting kites handled by teams of strong, experienced men. Dramatic airborne battles rage with the intent of downing the opposing kite. Kite fights may have developed from their use during wartime reconnaissance in times past.

Kites in the show range in size from a diminutive 1 inch in height to a huge 12 feet, and most date from the 1960s to the present, with the exception of a few dating to the 19th to early 20th century.

Felicia Katz-Harris, the museum's Curator of Asian and Middle Eastern Collections said, "The exhibit explores kite-flying and kite-making in Japan and presents cultural and artistic contexts of this living tradition. Tako Kichi roughly translates to 'kite crazy,' but the word kichi can also refer to joy and enthusiasm. In that sense, tako kichi is a saying that refers to people who are fantastically passionate about kites perhaps a little more than the average population!"

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Above: Edo-style kite depicting a hare jumping the waves. Hashimoto Teizo, 1991

Left: Managu (Eye Kite) painting depicting a protective demon. Artist unknown

Below: A collection of kites on display at the exhibition

