

# The Vienna School of Art Kites

An arts academy with two teachers passionate about kites. A kite store staff diligently spreading the word about the sport. Put them together. And what might loosely be called the Vienna School of Art Kites results----a number of enthusiasts creating and flying kites that are as much esthetic objects as machines for flight.

Teacher Anna Rubin (see Page 23) and businessmen-hobbyists Helmut Georgi and Jan Houtermans were unquestionably the catalysts.

**Daniela Zitzmann.** Daniela makes delicate and attractive kites, of one basic design. They pack up into a large, neatly compartmentalized carrying envelope. No big, untidy kite sacks for her. “I’m a government secretary,” she says. “Making and flying kites in my spare time cleans my mind. I want to make paintings that fly in the sky.” Daniela uses only natural materials and a basic planar shape. Being heavy, the kites tend to need a fairly stiff breeze. Once viewed, her kites stick in the mind as unusual and memorable.



*Daniela Zitzmann*



*Zitzmann's kites are not only beautiful but notably feminine.*

All photos by Ben Buhc

**Steffi Rauchwarter.** Steffi makes her living printing her own designs on cotton fabric for use in clothing and for interior design projects. Printing on cotton is rare, she points out. A friend inspired her to make large, dramatic kites covered with fabric and she immediately discovered the permeable cotton she uses would tolerate seriously stiff winds. Her puckish sense of humor provokes her to give all of her kites names. The first was Numero Uno. A huge red patterned kite became Pajama Man, and was joined by Pajama Madam for aerial dances. Stupid Fritz is another favorite. Steffi and partner Georg Kollmann, a computer programmer, wow visitors with their immense loft near the center of Vienna. Formerly a factory, it encompasses a whole floor and is 250 square meters in size, with high ceilings and lovely oak floors. It gives onto a courtyard and the couple awakes to bird song. Under long term lease, the showy loft has one great defect: no central heating.



*Steffi Rauchwarter*

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Ben Rube

*In her enviably large studio, Rauchwarter designs and prints patterns on cotton fabric for interior designers. Turning this skill to kites, she makes large fliers such as the one on the table.*

**Eveline Bischof.** A recently retired professor at the Vienna Academy of Art, Bischof may be the only teacher around who thought kites were an appropriate study for diploma work. She taught Anna Rubin art, then got into kiting because of Anna's influence. It's unusual for a teacher to learn from a student, as she did from Anna. Bischof's main interest is the experimental use of paper. She concentrates on the natural beauty of materials. Seeing kites as both functional and art objects, she views them as useful in an arts curriculum because they force a student to visualize an idea. "The concept of creating an object that must fly, I think that's fascinating," she says. "Kitemaking is an art process when the designer expresses himself in symbols that show an individual idea. Stability, denseness, fragility, flexibility, transparency----all these can be expressed, as well as artistic elements such as texture and dimensionality. And of course the kite must be able to fly, so it is necessary to know technical facts. Flying a kite gives one a feeling of achievement, a deeply felt sensual experience. Aesthetic and sensual aspects are an important part of understanding art."

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Scott Stimmer

*Eveline Bischof*



Eveline Bischof

*Bischof wove this unusual and lovely loose-mesh kite sail. The kite flies well.*

**Helmut Georgi.** A German by birth who once worked for an American corporation in the U.S., Georgi saw a niche and set up his Fly High kite shop in the center of Vienna. “After 19 years, I’m still around,” he says. Georgi’s shop is on the first floor of a mall and is light and bright with showy kites. He focuses on educating people on making their own kites. Toward this end, he sponsors classes, workshops, and twice a year kite festivals. He helps organize festivals elsewhere in Austria and he travels far and wide to fly his beloved Reza Ragheb kites. “Malaysia is a favorite of mine----both the Pasir Gudang festival and the northeast islands for relaxation; they are undiscovered,” he says. He is a long time judge for Sport Team and Competitive Kiting (Stack) competitions. With many kite shops going out of business in Europe after the 1980s boom, Georgi says he owes his success to a lack of competition in Vienna, reasonable prices, and devoted attention to his customers. “I do same day service with mail orders,” he says. “The shop does quite a bit of repair work. And I keep in touch with customers, I try to keep them returning.” Focused now on single line kites, Georgi worries about competition from the Chinese, but he hopes the new interest in traction kites will provoke kite skiing business. “Austria certainly does have a lot of mountains and snow,” he says.



All photos by Jan Houtermans

*Helmut Georgi*



*This is Georgi’s Fly High kite shop in central Vienna, headquarters of the unofficial Vienna School of Art Kites. It is located on the first floor of a mall and lures substantial traffic.*

**Jan Houtermans.** A longtime associate of Georgi, Houtermans, also a transplanted German, is a highly inventive kitemaker. An enthusiastic global traveler, he often travels by bicycle so his construction kit and kites must be quite portable. Houtermans is up to the challenge. His “sushi mat” kites are a case in point. “Looking for materials, I discovered sushi mats which can be taken apart for their 10-inch lengths of high quality bamboo,” he says. “The bamboo is easily split and curved, using a flame. I make any shape the process dictates. It is like doodling. I tie the bamboo ends and then sections together, bowing the kite in the process, then apply colored paper with glue, trimming with a razor blade. I use *washi* paper or whatever comes to hand. I use hemp fibers for a tail, light, easy to add or subtract, looks nice----like flowing smoke. I use a three-legged bridle, two on top, one on the bottom.

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This all takes about three hours. The kites don't come out symmetrically, but lift on the left and right-hand sides balances out and the kites generally fly."

Big and spectacular but still portable are his Astrolabe kites. "How to make a quite large but still collapsible bamboo kite is the problem," he says. "The answer is connecting the parts. I hit upon using short lengths of silicone tubing, just large enough to wedge the top and bottom of two spars together. It makes a strong joint. I buy this tubing in a shop selling chemical lab equipment. The silicone doesn't lose color or elasticity and it's cheap, but the downside is it's not natural. My first kite was two rings of bent bamboo and paper, connected by a long spar that links them. From that successful beginning, I have gone on to make quite elaborate kites consisting of many circles and many spars. The point of the connectors again is so I can take the kites apart, carry the parts on my bike."

Reverting back to the Paleolithic as he tours Asia, Houtermans teaches just how simple kites can actually be and suggests how the kite may have been invented by Early Man. He takes palm leaves, braids them into a diamond shape, adds a vertical spar, attaches string around the periphery of the kite for strength, and attaches a two-point bridle. He launches the kite into the breeze and it usually flies. "I use the kite just one day, then abandon it," he says. "The leaves are just too brittle."



All photos by Jan Houtermans

*On his bicycle travel in Southeastern Asia, Houtermans reverts back to the Paleolithic when he takes palm leaves, braids them, adds a spar, attaches a peripheral string for strength, puts on a bridle, and launches his new kite into the usually stiff tropic trade winds. The kite lasts just one day, then is abandoned.*

Proceeding forward in time from the historical sublime to contemporary ridiculousness, Houtermans once found himself on a beach in Malaysia with nothing to do, "no rave parties, no drugs. Under such circumstance, you do a lot of silly things," he says. "What I myself did was strip off my sarong, attach stunt kite lines I happened to be carrying with me, and fly it. It performed nicely."



*Left, because he routinely moves by bike, Houtermans has evolved a novel construction technique. He uses short lengths of silicone tubing to bind bamboo spars together and create quite elaborate, large kites. All materials must pack down to small size. Right, in another departure, Houtermans makes small kites by taking apart sushi mats and using the 10-inch bamboo slivers to shape lovely paper-covered creations.*

