

Passion for paper unfolds for an Amgen engineer

By Nicole D'Amore

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By day, BiJian Fan works as a biotech engineer at Amgen, designing drug delivery devices like insulin pumps and inhalers, but at night he works magic with paper, designing origami animals.

"I feel I have a noble mission to serve the patient," Fan said, "but I like to balance my life. Origami is like meditation; I feel very calm and relaxed, forget about other things I don't want to bring home."

An exhibit of Fan's art is at the Camarillo Library through the end of June.

It's not just straight origami. He incorporates paper cutting and, along with traditional paper, uses holographic film, fabric and other adaptable materials.

"I have a lot of ideas," Fan I said. "I want to create a novelty form of art that origami and paper cutting only can't achieve, Origami is three-dimensional, but it has limits," he said. "You can't fold a curve."

He started using holographic film because he wanted something sparkly and eye catching.

"Paper is so plain; I wanted to find something more dramatic," he said. He used it for dragonfly wings and for the eyes of some of the animals.

Born in Beijing, China, Fan learned the art of paper folding from his grandmother when he was only 5 or 6 years old.

"All kids (in China) learn origami, because we don't have toys," he said. "We entertain ourselves and compete to see who makes the best," he said.

Fan came to the United States for graduate school just before the Tiananmen Square revolt in 1989 and earned his doctorate in mechanical engineering.

He lived and worked in New Jersey before moving to Camarillo a year ago, always concentrating on his career.

His love for origami was rekindled when he visited the Museum of Natural History in New York City in December 2001.

"I never considered it serious art until I saw a Christmas tree decorated with origami ornaments in the museum," he said. "I was mesmerized. I could do all those," he said.



Courtesy Photo

He went home and started to fold some paper. He went to the library and checked out books and did an Internet search to see to what level origami had developed.

"For Christmas 2002, I made my own tree with 40 or 50 different origami ornaments," he said. He had a party and gave them to his guests.

"People said you should sell it," he said. "I thought I might have a shot."

He started making cards incorporating origami designs and humorous messages. One shows the word "stressed" spelled backward is "desserts" with an origami bird looking backward over its shoulder. He uses some of his engineering techniques to make the cards.

"Each one is original and it's an original design," he said. "I have to reduce it to two dimensions to fit in the card."

Cards were the beginning; then he enclosed figures in cubes then in shadow box frames.

"From there my art started to take off," he said.

In 2003 he had his first show in Maplewood, N.J.

"People had never seen this kind of thing, and they loved it," he said.

He set two goals: to have his art exhibited at a museum and to create customized art on commission.

"I have achieved both. I said that is too easy. Now I want a museum to collect my art, and I want to strike a commercial deal to commission my work."

Fan's work can be seen at the Camarillo Library, 3100 Ponderosa Drive, from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Wednesday; from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Thursday; from 1 to 5 p.m. Friday; from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and from 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday.

His Web site is <http://www.bijian.com>