

UNFOLDING STORIES

Noted: Reflections & Process

BY BRIDGET MARZO

Les Trois Ourses in Paris have been putting artists, children and books together in new ways for nearly 30 years. Close to the Bastille, their gallery, book resource and workshop centre are a discrete motor of innovation behind mainstream as well as small publishing in France. They also distribute and publish exceptional books created by artists and designers with children in mind.

I took my Parsons Paris students there each year to excite them into the idea of creating their own books. We'd spend an afternoon looking at Katsumi Komagata's valise of 30 extraordinary books in his **LITTLE EYE** series, which he developed as he watched his daughter Ai's development from baby to child. We'd start with the first black and white wordless 'book', sliding out from its box cover a series of beautifully folded cards upon which were concentric die-cut black circles. We'd open the fold and reveal another larger circle. "A nipple getting closer to the baby?" a student suggested. Another fold, another circle then? No – a surprise black rectangle filling the card. Each fold opened to a change of scene – and we would carry on unfolding book after book, totally absorbed. Beginning to middle to end, reduced to its visual essence, and the endings nearly always unexpected.

ALLER-RETOUR is a book that is in every sense, a return journey between two great designers Katsumi Komagata and Jean Widner, who share a concern for clarity and a social conscience.

LES TROIS OURSES had the genius to put them together first by asking Widner to design an original catalogue, **LES LIVRES DE KOMAGATA**. As with Komagata's **LITTLE EYE** books, **ALLER-RETOUR** is a slide-out book of folded cards, this time with pictograms by Jean Widner. In a to-and-fro between Toyko and Paris, Komagata selected these pictograms out of the 550 signs that Widner and his team created for 2500 km of French motorways, to indicate nearby local attractions.

On the motorway such signage is designed to be read at speed. On each card, different folds change the pace of reading, creating a different scene each time. A bird takes flight across an accordian fold.

A small historical building opens out across its middle, to reveal a whole town. No words, except on one unusual card showing a medieval matron whom you can behead by lifting up the top flap – or reveal a nude statue below – "Oops!" it says. It's a playful exchange between two innovators whose work provides the grounds for new ways to look and play, as my 3-year-old friend Ash demonstrated. He happily spotted the rabbit running after a carrot, the duck and the boat on the water, the owl and castle, then turned all the cards upright into a forest.



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ALLER-RETOUR, © Katsumi Komagata, published by Les Trois Ourses, 2015

KATSUMI KOMAGATA

Illustrator and designer

IDEA/MATERIALS: These are pictograms which were designed by Jean Widner. They are not used anymore though, but they turned out to have a heritage, so I made them as cards with fun and surprises for the especially young generation.

RESEARCH/PROCESS: I found Widner's works when I had my own first exhibition in France in 1994. I have respected and admired his works since then, especially the logos and these pictograms.

RESISTANCES: These pictograms were used for the traffic sign system and the colours were already determined as they were reversed out white from a brown background, but I tried to use vivid and various colours, because I wanted to refresh them.

INSIGHT: There were more than 100 pictograms designed, and I tried to come up with some stories to put behind them. The look of the pictograms are consistent, so it was no problem to put them together, and even different themes could be executed for each pictogram.

DISTRACTIONS: All the colours for the printing were special inks, so they were difficult to match to the colours what I wanted.

NUMBERS: It was a great fun to work with Jean Widner, and I learned a lot from his attitude as a graphic designer. I was working on another project of my own at the same time and tried to develop some illustrations too, but he reminded me that I am also a graphic designer and it turned out that simple graphics developed a solution for my own project. !

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