

The Evolving *Art* of Collaboration

Kazumasa Nagai
Graphic artist

2006 CALENDAR

My style and idiom have changed from the abstract and universe-related themes that I worked on for many years to living things and plants. What I pursue, however, has not changed.

The universe and mankind both have a uniform order that I express. I am very impressed with the results of this project, much more than I had expected. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to think that people might enjoy using this calendar throughout the year.

Persons seeing this printed work are impressed, and this is because of technique. Unless each process and technique is perfect such results will not be achieved.



Festival of angels and unicorns

The distinguished Japanese graphic artist Kazumasa Nagai created the 2006 Komori calendar, the second work in the Graphic Arts of Japan series. The calendar received the 2006 Arts Encouragement Award from the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology.

This lighthearted festival of angels and unicorns started out as copperplate etchings consisting of very fine lines drawn by Nagai. "It seems to me that angels and unicorns are watching out for our happiness," he wrote of his work on the calendar. "For a place that would be conducive to their appearance, I've depicted a landscape that goes beyond our ideas about Eastern or Western space and time."

Nagai spoke with *On Press* about his experience in creating the printed work.

Transforming a monochrome world with vivid colors

"It was a great challenge for me to see how far these basic materials could be transformed into something completely different through the use of today's printing technology and expertise," says Nagai. "The concept behind this project was a collaboration between creative



Kazumasa Nagai

and technical, and in the final analysis the challenge actually began after we joined forces in the fall of 2004."

"I was very impressed that it turned out so well, better than I had expected, in fact," explains Nagai. "Seeing my originals changed into such vivid, fresh images gives me a great sense of accomplishment. I devoted about three years to creating these etchings, and etchings are, of course, monochrome. An etching is made by cutting very fine lines on a copper plate that has been covered with an acid resistant mask. When the plate is immersed in an 'etchant,' the bare metal exposed by the lines of the drawing is eroded."

"This was an opportunity to see how these monochrome originals could be transformed into works of vivid color and what sort of creative expression would result. In addition, this project attracted me because of the chance to make completely new original works by printing on the Komori eight-color press. So, this was the beginning of my challenge."

'Gradations in colors that make people happy'

"First, for the finished image, it was my primary desire to apply gradations of rainbow hues — colors that make people happy — to the fine lines of the etchings to enliven them."

Art director Miki Murasawa of Toppan speaks of the approach from her vantage point: "When I first learned of Mr. Nagai's thoughts regarding these works, I concentrated on how to reproduce the works in keeping with the image in his mind. I finally decided that the most important point for reproduction was the gradations of color going into the linework."

Collaboration of three artisans

"Still," continues Nagai, "it was quite a surprise to me that this came out so well. These works really result from a collaboration among three parties — the originals from me, the printing, planning, know-how and art direction of Toppan Printing, and the very advanced eight-color press from Komori. Each of us brought all of our knowledge and technologies to the table."

'As much mental as technical'

"It was also a discovery for me. This was the first time for me to work with an eight-color press, and it was also

a first to see such extraordinary printing effects, the spot coating offering such enhancements and the feeling of depth in the backgrounds. I think that this work would be unimaginable without this collaboration, and it was as much mental as technical," concludes Nagai.

Fluorescents for added punch

Katsumi Kumakura, printing director at Toppan, is also exultant about the outcome of the long project. "We used fluorescent colors in proportions of up to a half with the process YMC colors, so in a sense this is like printing with specials for every color. This is what gives the colors such punch."

"We applied matte coating as a sort of frame, and the ratio of matte on the borders was kept somewhat lower because contrast with the gloss coating would otherwise be too obvious," says Kumakura.

"For me, the planning work involved in determining how to complete the project within the limits of the job is challenging and interesting. I like work that produces new ideas. In a sense, I'm using printing from the designer's viewpoint," he says.

Nagai adds, "These printed copies are our collective works. They are finished by printing, but printing can be good or bad. That's why it is so important to have a print-

ing director. Kumakura-san and Murasawa-san consider the job very carefully and come up with their own ideas. They understand my creative intent and devise ways to make it better."

"The depth of the colors and the print quality can be felt. These impressions come from the results on paper, but behind each effect is special technical expertise. The results on paper would never come about without every process and technique being just right," he stresses.

'Like performing music'

The marriage of drama and lightness in these works is a stunning display of the powers of high added value UV offset empowered by the discipline of the classical art of etching. The process itself becomes enthralling. Indeed, Nagai remarks, "In using high-level printing techniques in conjunction with a computer for applying color to my etchings, I felt at times as if I were performing music."

Kazumasa Nagai's works are found in the collections of many museums of modern art throughout the world, including the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo and MoMA in New York. He is also widely published and the recipient of many awards.



Miki Murasawa, Art Director

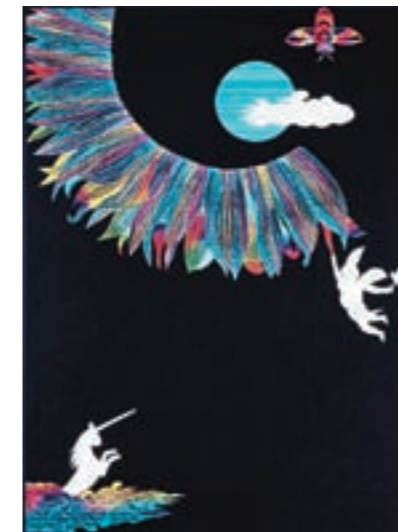


Katsumi Kumakura, Printing Director

Profile

Presently serves as Chief Adviser to the Nippon Design Center, Director of the Japan Graphic Designers Association Inc.; member of AGI; member of the Tokyo Art Directors Club; Chief Director of the Japan Design Committee.

Collections: The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; The National Museum of Art, Kyoto; The National Museum of Art, Toyama; Gunma Museum of Art, Tatebayashi; Himeji City Museum of Art; MoMA (The Museum of Modern Art); The Metropolitan Museum of Art; German National Museum of Abstract Art.



Data

Press: 8-Color Lithrone S40 with Coater
Printing Process: UV Offset
Cover: 4UV Colors
Text: 8UV Colors
Title page and Colophon: 4 Special Colors

