

***Reflection on the issue of origami copyright  
by the MFPP (French Association of Paper Folding)***

Like most paper folders' associations around the globe, the MFPP acknowledges the difficulties arising from the lack of specific case law on the matter of origami copyright. This situation is due to :

1 - the small representation of origami on the art market and in the professional world ;

2 - the specific nature of this art, which does not target consumers but invites folders to immediate practice through diagrams (which are generally more convivial and didactic than sheet music). Hence values such as sharing, friendship, and free services that do not prepare to face indelicacy, or even plagiarism from those who make money with someone else's work.

Even if it does not offer real solutions to the issue of origami copyright – such solutions can only come from competent legal authorities – the MFPP can still make all the information it has on this matter available and state precisely its own position as a 1901 French law association.

The MFPP is a '1901 French law association'<sup>1</sup>, which 'aims at developing creation, expression and communication through paper folding'. In other words, the MFPP can support and back projects with a strictly cultural purpose, promoting social cohesion. Its goal cannot and must not be commercial. Under this condition, it can nevertheless maintain partnerships with professionals.

With these presuppositions in mind, let us add that the MFPP respects the law and in particular the measures related to copyrights as stated in the Intellectual Property Code.

It considers that origami models, as any other creative work, can and must benefit from the protection granted to the authors by these texts.

It advises the creators to make sure of the originality of their creations, using all available sources of information, including the Internet (and/or the Oritheque for the MFPP members)

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<sup>1</sup> which, in France, refers to a nonprofit organization governed by the law of July 1st, 1901

However, the MFPP cannot play the role of the SACEM<sup>2</sup>, SAIF<sup>3</sup>, or any other copyright collecting society, as such actions are not part of the association's objective it must comply with.

Hence, it can neither verify for an author, even a member, the anteriority and originality of his rights, nor deputize for this author in any legal action to make these rights respected.

The MFPP reminds that the use by an author of his diffusion right does not imply his authorization to use the model outside the family or private circle. The MFPP nevertheless advises the author to indicate all allowed and forbidden uses directly on the diagrams, crease patterns and any other means of diffusion.

The use that an author makes of this diffusion right gives him a proof of anteriority and originality against later creations (but not anterior ones). Publishing a model in *Le Pli* (or in the MFPP Convention Book) will not only bring an always welcomed contribution to our magazine (or annual Convention), but can also constitute a proof of the date of first diffusion for the author.

**At the international level**, we recall here the statement of the "First International Origami Copyright Meeting" (10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> October 2008, JOAS Hall, Tokyo) :

'We propose and agree the rights of origami artists must be protected:

- Before use of a model or design
  - Permission must be obtained
  - Payments, terms and conditions must be agreed
- On use of a model or design
  - Credit must be given unless explicitly waived

We will act against copyright infringements and unauthorized reproduction and distribution '

(from Tanteidan Magazine n°112)

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2 Society of Music Authors, Composers and Editors, a French professional association collecting payments of artists' rights and distributing the rights to the original songwriters, composers and music publishers

3 Society of Authors of visual arts and Fixed Images , a French private society managing copyright for visual arts authors (photograph, architects, illustrators, sculptors, painters, graphic designers...)

### ***Permanent dispensation request for non commercial activities:***

The large number of origami amateurs, whether they have created models or not, and who do not necessarily practice origami at its highest level, may however participate in its cultural diffusion which can later benefit the most prestigious creators.

In this respect, voluntary workers are asking for a special authorization to carry on with what is currently a reality in the field :

- exhibitions in cultural centers, libraries and other public places, without however carrying out a systematic labeling ;
- teaching models without always asking permission from the creators (but frequently reminding their names).

This being done under the condition of no more benefits than the simple refund for active participation to an event.

### ***Freedom and Ethics on the Internet***

The previous dispensation request only concerns local activities of amateurs using limited means of diffusion. When it comes to the Internet, the most powerful contemporary mean of diffusion, the same logic for tolerance proves useless and irrelevant. The growing number of online videos omitting author's permissions or failing to mention the sources, and of diagrams reproduced without authorization, is beyond any measures and defies control.

It is obviously thanks to the Internet that origami is now available as never before, in consideration of rare and expensive books. However, in addition to the lack of acknowledgment for creators and the lack of true sharing, problems also arise from the poor quality of the offer on the Internet.

Ultimately, when it is not a question of sheer dishonesty, the lack of respect regarding intellectual property certainly comes from the very image of origami which is still considered by most as a childish activity or a hobby with no artistic value. The Internet still remains an aggravating factor: the amount of information lowers the vigilance, the easiness of uploading favors the irresponsibility, while virtual relationships – often under the cover of usernames – happen with no real meeting.

### ***Commercial actions, Fine Arts supremacy***

Some commercial actions showing no scruples come from this very image of origami, such as selling identifiable origami models, with neither mention of the author nor permission, under various forms (foldings, but also pieces of

jewellery, etc.).

More surprisingly, one can find some contemporary artists who despise the specific artistic value of origami, while taking – as if belonging to an anonymous and oral tradition – well identified crease patterns to use them as raw material for their own artwork. Such an example can be found with an American artist currently sued by a group of folders gathered around Robert Lang.

### **The role of non commercial associations:**

On the one hand, the presence of associations gathering amateurs seems to confirm for an unaware public the valueless aspect of origami : available for everyone, unprofitable, etc. But on the other hand, folders meetings can be an answer, even a solution to the indifference that origami creators face and to the contempt for the artistic value of origami. Besides, developing free and disinterested performances might restore free judgment of aesthetic value as well as some fair-play.

### **Websites to go further on this reflection:**

Website of the Origami Authors and Creators group:

<http://digitalorigami.com/oac/>

Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works:

[http://www.wipo.int/treaties/fr/ip/berne/trtdocs\\_wo001.html](http://www.wipo.int/treaties/fr/ip/berne/trtdocs_wo001.html)

A reflection on copyrights, patents and intellectual property:

<http://www.freescape.eu.org/piraterie/sommaire.html>

An example of commercial actions on the French forum:

<http://www.pliagedepapier.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=3969>

Context of Robert Lang's lawsuit:

[http://www.langorigami.com/info/sarah\\_morris\\_copyright\\_infringement.php4](http://www.langorigami.com/info/sarah_morris_copyright_infringement.php4)

### **Articles from magazines of paper folders' associations (French version):**

- Summary of an article published in *Tanteidan Magazine* N°126
- Translation of an article published in *Der Falter*, May 2011