

My Polish Origami Convention Experience –Meenakshi Mukerji, May 2011.

It was at PCOC 2009, San Francisco, that Krystyna and Wojtek Burczyk approached me to be a special guest at their 2011 conference. It was also the first time I was meeting them. Receiving such an honorable invitation for the first time from Europe, I was obviously taken by surprise. Time flew and before I knew I was on my way to the Xth Outdoor Origami Conference at Krakow, Poland! The convention was held at the Electric Technical High School from April 29 to May 2, 2011 organized by the Burczyks. Coincidentally, the convention was time lined by not one but three world events – the British royal wedding, the beatification of Pope John Paul II, and Osama Bin Laden's capture and killing!

I will narrate my awesome convention experience pretty much in the order in which things happened. I was received at the airport by Wojtek and spent the first night at the Burczyks' beautiful home. All decors everywhere were origami and polyhedra related! Even the gate to the house was a custom made wrought iron gate featuring Krystyna's swirl designs and so was the fence! The Burczyks were extremely gracious hosts throughout my stay at Krakow.

I had allowed some time before and after the conference for sightseeing. Next morning I was picked up by my long time e-friend Halina Rosciszewska Narloch of Gliwice and her little son. We drove through some picturesque villages and visited the medieval limestone castles of Pieskowa Skala and Ogrodzieniec. That evening I was invited by Halina's parents to a delicious home made Polish dinner. Most of her family was there to greet me and they made me feel at home. I also had the fortune of seeing Halina's lovely tessellation exhibition at the local library. The next day, on the way back to Krakow, we visited some landmarks of the historic Gliwice town and the infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau camps. Little did I imagine that origami would one day take me there. The experience was somber, but like many, I thought it was important from the point of view of history, especially after having come within miles.

The convention began the next day and it was a wonderful experience despite some language gap. Most people knew enough English to get by. Some knew but had inhibitions about actually speaking it, but hey, who needs a spoken language at an origami meet? People were extremely friendly and accommodating and made sure I was comfortable. There was an opening ceremony in the exhibition hall where everybody gathered and Wojtek gave an inaugural speech. People wore hats by Joan Sallas designed specifically for the conference and innovatively decorated them as they wished with origami. The exhibits were top class and since pictures are worth a thousand words, I have included a full page of exhibit photos. There were tea/coffee breaks a couple of times a day. One notable observation I made, specially coming from the USA, was that, hardly any disposable wares were being used. People washed their own cups at the breaks. Disposables were also not used at the institute cafeteria where we had our meals. I really liked this friendliness towards the environment. The meals had many courses and were of different variety everyday.

Here is a list of some of the classes taught: Pyramid Tessellation Box by Endre Somos, Roman Diaz Fractal, Pinwheel and Vortex Dodecahedra and Star Flower by me, Chessboards

by Tomasz Siwak, Geastrum Tessellation, Four Petal Flower by Grzegorz Bubniak, Wojtek Bogacz Tessellations, Hayashi Hirumi flowers, Twirl Flowers and Kusudamas by Krystyna Burczyk, Paolo Bascetta modular, Floderer Mushroom, Melina Yureiko Hermesen Rose Tessellation, Hideo Kumayama Heptagonal Mandala and Ron Resh designs. I noted that people were generally folding at a very high level having no trouble with high intermediate or complex classes. Also, a large number of the attendees were mathematics teachers.

The only other foreign attendees were from Hungary and it was a privilege to meet Endre Somos. People call him Somos. Somos is known for applying tessellation techniques to masu boxes and coming up with boxes featuring beautiful lids often incorporating color change. Other Hungarians Maria Jilling and Eniko Orient were also a pleasure to meet. I obviously made many Polish friends including Marta Misiak, Grzegorz Bubniak, Teresa Cetera, Barbara Pfutzner, Szczepan Kaleciak, Teresa Kowal, Piotr Krychowski, Tomasz Siwak and many more. Grzegorz taught me a couple of models outside of class. On the first night of the convention when some of us were about to leave for the dorm, Piotr said something in Polish and extended his hand. I in turn reciprocated to shake hands but everybody started laughing. It turned out that Piotr just wanted to help carry my bag to the dorm, so nice of him. Now that was a communication gaffe, thankfully a harmless one! The dorm and some convention related matters were looked after by Jadwiga Jurczyk-Motył who was working hard quietly over and above attending the convention.

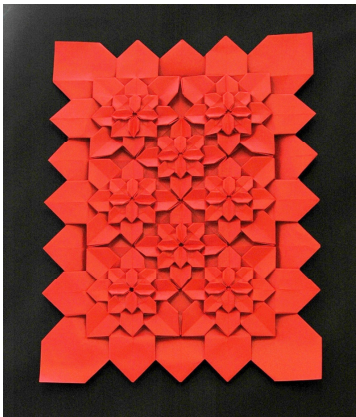
The Roman Diaz Fractal class taught by Somos was a hit. People were folding more of them from larger paper after-hours. But Tomasz was folding a 5-layer one from 5" paper! It was perfectly accurate too. Halina, Szczepan and Marta were working on amazingly miniature tessellations. Krystyna and Wojtek had a staggeringly large number of new twirl designs since I had last checked in 2009. On the second evening there was an anniversary cake baked in the shape of a Roman 10 (X) by Katarzyna Jaskowiec. There was another delicious cake baked by Teresa Kowal with peach filling. On the closing day I appeared in *sari* for a couple of hours to bring out the global nature of origami - a woman of Indian origin, coming from the USA, attending a Polish convention of a Japanese art! Time flew and soon people were heading back to their destinations. A memorable convention had just ended.

The next two nights the Burczyks graciously let me stay at their amazing origami studio apartment in the heart of Krakow. So conveniently located, I was able to visit a lot of the tourist spots just by walking. Some notable landmarks were the Market Square, Cloth Hall, St. Mary's Cathedral, The Barbican, Jan Matejko Square, Jagellonian University where Copernicus studied and Wawel Castle. Everything was medieval and beautiful and bursting with culture and heritage. Wojtek took me to Wieliczka Salt Mine which was really unique in that not only was it a mine but it also had beautiful rock salt sculptures, pure salt crystal chandeliers and massive cathedrals all hundreds of feet underground.

I could not have asked for a better convention experience and would like to thank each and every one who worked hard to make the convention a success. And of course, my special and sincere thanks go out to my kind hosts Krystyna, Wojtek and Halina.



Tessellation and Box exhibits by Endre Somos.



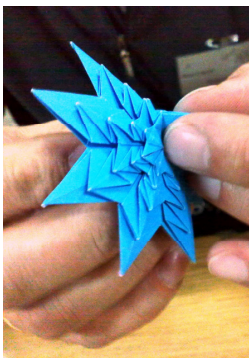
Shuzo Fujimoto Hydrangea by Halina Narloch and Twirl designs by Krystyna Burczyk.



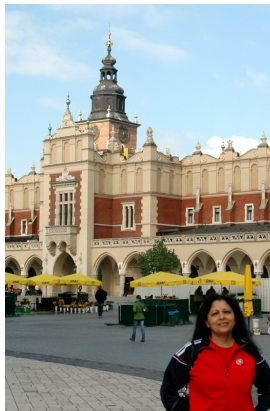
My models folded by Polish friends.



Katarzyna Jaskowiec and Jadwiga Jurczyk-Motyl at the opening ceremony. Endre Somos teaching Roman Diaz Fractal and Szczepan Kaleciak and Marta Misiak folding away intensely.



Tomasz Siwak folding a miniature Roman Diaz fractal from 5" paper. Magdalena Soltysik and Grzegorz Bubniak attending Halina Narloch's complex class. Halina tirelessly helping with the origami shop.



In Indian attire with the Burczyks. Twirl Gate at their home. Historic Market Square, Old Town Krakow.

(Photos by Krystyna, Wojtek, Halina, Somos, Grzegorz and myself.)