

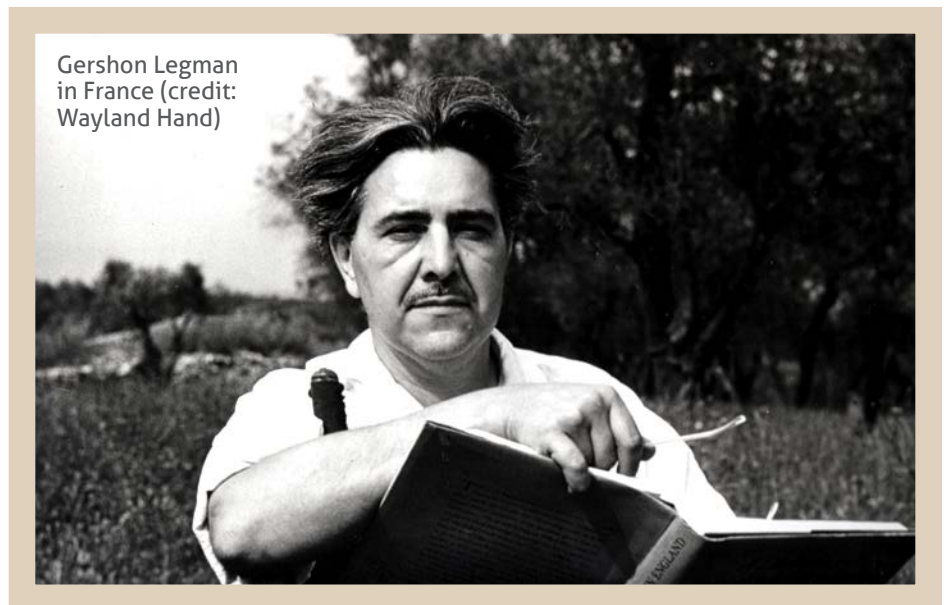
# *Legman, Tikotin & Yoshizawa:* ***A trio that transformed the art of paperfolding***

*In the previous installment<sup>1</sup>, we uncovered the story of the first letters between Akira Yoshizawa and Gershon Legman, starting in the early months of 1953. The following account provides a detailed examination of later developments that enabled Yoshizawa to move beyond borders and, in a little less than two years, taste success with his first exhibition in the Western Hemisphere.*

By *Laura Rozenberg\**

Many origami enthusiasts today still have little awareness of the role played by Gershon Legman in this art form. Standing in contrast are the contributions of Akira Yoshizawa, widely acknowledged to be the “father of modern origami”.

This research, which started in previous issues of *The Paper* and *The Fold*, continues to dive into the character and accomplishments of Gershon Legman and his unquestionable knack for sniffing talents and bring them to light (Akira Yoshizawa being his best trophy for the Western World)<sup>2</sup>.



Review of the correspondence between these two pioneers of modern origami uncovered previously unknown details concerning the prolonged preliminary efforts leading to Yoshizawa’s first exhibition in Europe.

A surprising discovery was to learn that Legman’s original motivation was not the mounting of an exhibition per se but rather a Legman’s interest, which would grow into a virtual obsession, for finding a publisher interested in a book about the Japanese artist’s origami foldings.

Unknown in the West, Yoshizawa had developed a distinctive style of manipulating and folding paper, and his model figures gave the appearance of coming to life.

Legman had seen pictures and had some originals that Yoshizawa mailed to him. He had also seen the diagrams, drawn to perfection, that Yoshizawa had been publishing in humble Japanese magazines.

With his experience as a writer, editor and bibliographer, Legman believed that an English book of diagrams would represent a qualitative leap compared to the existing literature on simple paper foldings as pastimes, which targeted a child-oriented readership. Subsidiarily, he felt strongly that an exhibition of Yoshizawa’s original artwork could become a supporting way to kick off and help the sale of that book in Europe, the United States and elsewhere.



Deer and Elephant, two pictures taken by Legman in the courtyard of his home, Valbonne, France (1955)



Gershon Legman's children workshop at the Stedelijk Museum (1955)

However, things did not progress as he hoped since the book which was to be associated with the show never materialized, while the exhibition itself, which ultimately took place in the Netherlands in 1955, proved to be a major success.

Another finding from the review of the correspondence was the existence of an earlier project to stage the exhibition in Paris at a small gallery specialized in Japanese art, directed by the art dealer Janette Ostier. In the end, the effort was abandoned and the search for alternative sites led to the exhibit at the Stedelijk Museum of Modern Art in Amsterdam.

The examination of the documents revealed the story that led to the exhibition. Of course, that brought to light many fascinating details, unknown to us until now, of the relationship between Legman and Felix Tikotin, an affluent Dutch art dealer who used his influence and contacts to ensure the staging of the exhibition in Amsterdam.

It was not possible to confirm whether, prior to the works being shipped to Amsterdam, an earlier showing had taken place in the south of France, where Legman was living at the time.

While oral references to the possible existence of this show were made in later years,

no supporting documentation was found. If it happened, the event may have been merely an 'at-home' outdoor showing in the courtyard of Legman's house, but this is pure speculation.

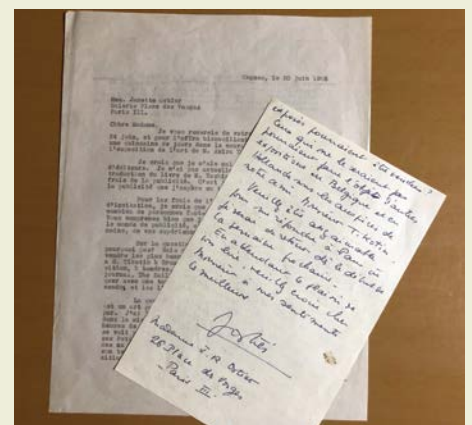
Another surprising element was the discovery that Yoshizawa did not supply Legman with his best works for exhibit in the Netherlands, sending instead a quantity that represented less than half the number of artworks he had once contemplated sending while retaining many others out of fear that they might be damaged. This may have irritated Legman to the point of provoking a resentment that could explain his later reluctance to return some foldings when the Japanese master visited him at his house in Valbonne in the south of France.

The details of this remarkable story, <sup>🚢</sup> which represents the core at the foundation of the creation of modern origami, can be read, due to its length, in *The Fold*, the on-line magazine of OrigamiUSA: <https://origamiusa.org/thefold/article/legman-tikotin-yoshizawa>

*\*This research was based in the correspondence, documents and photographs preserved at the Museo del Origami in Colonia, Uruguay. Laura Rozenberg wrote this story in Spanish. The English translation by James Buschman was made possible by OrigamiUSA.*



Diagrams by Akira Yoshizawa published in Fuji Koron (1952)



Letters between Legman and Janette Ostier (1955)

1. Laura Rozenberg. *Unwrapping the Riddle of Yoshizawa-Legman*. *The Paper*, issue 137, 2021

2. It is even more surprising to learn that Legman, who became a kind of poor patron of Yoshizawa by helping him to popularize his origami artworks in the western world, had also been involved with the emerging nucleus of the Beat Generation through his work as editor of the underground magazine *Neurotica*. Relocating to Europe following his forced exile from New York to Paris due to the perceived obscurity of his publications, Legman soon found himself in the ideal place to shape his academic and artistic projects.