

Culture Language samurai

Interview with Rikyu, a Japanese Calligraphy Artist & Designer (Part1)

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Shodo(書道) is the art of expressing the meaning and feeling of words using a brush. It literally means "the way of writing" in Japanese, and those who practice the art are called *shodoka*(書道家).

I get up close and personal with Rikyu(利久), a *shodoka*, as he tells us about the beauty and artistry of Japanese calligraphy. This article is split into two parts, so be sure to check out [part 2](#) as well!

Contents [hide]

- Q. Tell us how you became a calligraphy artist.
- Q. Tell us the beauty and artistry of Japanese calligraphy.
- Q. Doesn't it feel like a herculean task to send out handmade postcards?
- Profile: Rikyu (利久), a Japanese calligraphy artist & designer

Q. Tell us how you became a calligraphy artist.

I started doing calligraphy in second grade when I was eight years old.



At that time I was doing it as part of a class, so it was more like learning "how to write characters properly" than "expressing my feelings with words." I took another calligraphy class in high school, but even then I treated it just like a regular schoolwork and did not imagine that it would become my craft today. I only realized the calligraphy artist budding inside of me when I started making and sending postcards to people (they're basically picture postcards with my original calligraphy). But I did not really consider myself a real artist until about six years ago when I was 48. Until then I had been busy raising my kids and my only hobbies had been sports. I always knew that I wanted to do something in art, so I decided to rekindle my old interest in calligraphy back when I was in high school 30 years ago. But I thought that doing calligraphy like "how to write characters properly" as I was taught in class would be boring, so I figured this time I'd create art that "expresses my feelings with a brush, ink and a white paper."

My work now is divided into four themes that match the four seasons of Japan. I usually write calligraphies on Japanese paper then scan them and print them on postcards. Originally, I'd handwritten letters and postcards to people that were special to me, but since I started these printed postcards, I now send those and add personal messages on each. People seem really happy to get my season-themed postcards especially because it seems almost rare nowadays to get handwritten letters and postcards in Japan. In return, their happiness brings me joy and motivation to keep doing this.

Q. Tell us the beauty and artistry of Japanese calligraphy.

I think calligraphy is self-expression in "brush to black ink" and "back ink to white paper."



And as you're concentrating on that blank piece of paper, you escape from this hectic, noisy and confusing world and get transported into another dimension. While I mostly use my left brain in the real world, I definitely switch to my right brain when I do calligraphy. It ruffles your feathers and brings out a cacophony of emotions and imageries that you don't realize you have. This, for me, is the beauty and artistry of calligraphy.

Q. Doesn't it feel like a herculean task to send out handmade postcards?

I think that you tug at the heartstrings of people when you send them any handwritten stuff, not just calligraphies.

There's special warmth that you won't find in digitally printed texts. It's so easy now in the age of smartphones to send emails or text messages as you're rolling out of bed, walking, while you're in the toilet or in the bathtub, and even if you

make a mistake you can easily delete it or edit it. It's extremely convenient. But this very convenience is also why we lose a lot.

Every time I do calligraphy, I get in the perfect sitting position and face the paper, and think deeply about the person I'm writing to as I brush every stroke. One mistake and I redo everything. It's the most personal gift you can give to anyone because nothing says "thinking of you" better than a carefully handwritten letter or postcard. And whoever receives it can definitely feel that the other person went out of his or her way and took time to write something.



Handwritten letters also carry the writer's personality. For example, I can tell if something's written by my mom, my brother or a friend. By just looking at their distinct handwriting, I can really feel that specific person's presence.

This experience is lost when we type words on a keyboard or smartphone, and that's why I try to handwrite all my letters and postcards as much as possible.

By the way, I recommend picture postcards to people who hate making postcards by hand. Picture postcards already have a picture on the front so you

don't have to worry about that. And then on the back, you don't have to write a lot of message either because most of the space is used for writing the person's name and address. But when you do write something in that small space, you're still adding a little touch of you, making it still a wonderful gift to anyone. I really recommend this. Don't miss [part 2](#)!

Profile: Rikyu (利久), a Japanese calligraphy artist & designer



- Japanese postcard artist, Japanese calligraphy artist & designer
- Born in 1964. From Ise City in Mie Prefecture. Male.
- Known for his 4 season-themed calligraphies.
- Holds solo gallery shows and exhibits in Tokyo.

Official Website: <http://rikyu.main.jp/english/index.html>

【message from Rikyu】

Here are postcards and greeting cards created featuring Japanese calligraphy:SHODO.
I try to express the image of seasonal sceneries.
Please enjoy the beautiful four seasons in the works.
I put my heart into making each piece of post card.
I send them to my close friends and persons I came to know from time to time.
Now that we are all in the digital societies, I cherish the true value of handwritten and
handmade works and the warmth of analog.
From this year(2018),I started to hold a workshop for foreign travelers to Japan and
foreigners in Japan (including Japanese people) so that they can enjoy Japanese
calligraphy and understand Japanese culture well.

【holing a solo exhibition and joining a exhibition】

1 solo exhibition

- Jun 2015 at HOTEL CLASKA in Tokyo
- Mar to Apr 2016 at Showa Commemorative National Government Park
"Showa Kinen Park " in Tokyo
- Aug 2017 at HOTEL CLASKA in Tokyo

- 2 I joined the exhibition of Mr.Nobuo SUGINO's pressed flowers.
Mr.SUGINO is a very famous artist of pressed flowers in the world.
Some pieces of my works were exhibited as art of combination of pressed
flowers and calligraphy.

- Dec 2014 at Mitsukoshi's main store in Nihonbashi, Tokyo
- Jan to Feb 2015 at
- Dec 2016 at Mitsukoshi's main store in Nihonbashi, Tokyo
- Dec 2018 at Mitsukoshi's main store in Nihonbashi, Tokyo

Photos has taken by Kota Wada



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