



Your Vitality Is Your Most Important Asset. Use Your Energy and Experience to Move Forward

Yusuke Akamatsu
Digital Finger Painter



Kazuo Nakamura
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The COVID-19 pandemic has stalled economic and human activity, making it even harder than before to engage in international exchange. Considering the difficulties in maintaining connections with people nowadays, what kind of mindset do we need and what sort of action should we take? Yusuke Akamatsu has been unhindered by these circumstances—he leverages interpersonal connections as he continues to make great strides as an artist on the global stage, creating highly original artworks and videos using just a smartphone. CEO Nakamura invited him as a guest to share his story.



Nakamura When I first met you, I was surprised to see such a unique Japanese artist in the European art scene. You travel worldwide and create artwork from what you have seen and felt. In this way, you are like a modern Matsuo Basho.*1 Whereas Basho created haiku poetry, you use modern tools to create your art. I am really interested in how your upbringing and background made you who you are today.

Akamatsu I was born and raised in Osaka. My mother is very carefree. I guess you could say she has extensive experience in romance.



Corn in the dark

When I was in kindergarten, she once left the house saying, “I’ll be back by 7 p.m.,” but she did not return for two years. (laughs)

Nakamura Two years? I would imagine that the sort of loneliness of being unable to spend your early years with your mother would have some lasting trauma. I’m amazed that you can speak about it so cheerfully.

Akamatsu After such a long time away, my mother suddenly asked me if I would like to become a child actor, so I started acting when I was 6 or 7.

Nakamura I’m sure you never saw that coming.

Akamatsu My performance fees all disappeared as lunch money for my mother though. (laughs) I was just a child, so the other actors and staff treated me kindly. I preferred being on set to being at home, because they were all so friendly to me. In junior high school I began doing *manzai* comedy with a friend, and as I was set to graduate and enter high school, I thought it might be fun to continue working in comedy. By the way, my *manzai* partner from back then is now a professor in physics at the Tokyo Institute of Technology.

Nakamura That’s amazing.

Akamatsu Despite my aspirations

for comedy, the plan was to continue studying at high school and university. But my mother left home and took my high school entrance fees with her. (laughs) I was at a loss, but someone at a talent agency in Tokyo offered me funding on the condition that I either go to a high school in Osaka or move to Tokyo and start an apprenticeship in entertainment. I did think it would be interesting just to go to high school with that offer, but I decided to move to Tokyo in 1985 as I did not want to keep relying on my grandparents who were taking care of me at the time.

Using the experience gained in his 20s to enter the world of cinema

Nakamura What kinds of dramas did you experience in Tokyo?

Akamatsu I stayed at the house of a duo called the AB Brothers that Hideyuki Nakayama was part of at the time, and got involved in various jobs related to comedy. Apart from being a comedian, I also served behind the scenes. I went on to do other work too, such writing and directing at a broadcasting station,

writing novels, and making appearances at events. I even worked with Kenji Otsuki, Unicorn, and Go-Bang’s in my early 20s when Japan was going through a band craze. Theater was also popular around then, so I worked with Kohei Tsuka, Hideki Noda, and Shoji Kokami—modern-day legends. They all have highly distinctive personalities and I learned a lot from them. I’m confident that I gained much more experience in my 20s than others of the same age. But then one day, one of my seniors in the entertainment industry recommended going abroad to accomplish something on my own. So I opted to try my hand at cinema, a field in which I was a raw beginner.

Nakamura And so that was when you first left our shores.

Akamatsu If I was going to take on a new challenge abroad, I wanted to become instantly recognizable as the Japanese guy who went overseas and made a film on his own. Someone gave me the following advice: “It won’t be any much fun if you learn their language. Your unique character will serve you well abroad.” So I marched onward with a firm belief in my own individuality.

Nakamura I’m surprised that you have such a wealth of achievement abroad despite not speaking much English. What is the key element driving communication enabling you to survive abroad?

Akamatsu You need to keep talking until the other person understands. Use hand gestures and move your body to communicate until they tell you they know what you mean. You need to work really hard to make sure the message gets through on the spot. Eventually, the barber, the supermarket checkout lady, the restaurant staff, and everyone else in the local area became familiar with my way of speaking, and they were kind to me. The power to convey

meaning starts with a desire to get the message across.

Nakamura The late Dr. Yuichiro Goto*2 was a teacher I respected, and he taught me my favorite saying, “live with vigor like a weed.” I have lived my life under the principle that I will not encounter any new opportunities if I give up. One needs passion and the resolve to keep on living. I’m sure everyone could sense your passion and that’s why they opened up to you. I think the secret to building trust is more about having a strong desire for others to understand you, as opposed to linguistic ability.

Experiencing the wonder of art

Akamatsu After leaving Japan I traveled across Asia, staying in Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea. I started shooting a film with my iPhone while in Singapore. When Steve Jobs said that the iPhone was a box and that different people should be able to put different things into it, that really resonated with me. I live my life as a single individual, but I observe and absorb a lot of different things as I connect with all sorts of people, and I thought I’d put it all into this box (my iPhone). On showing the film I made on my iPhone to a movie director in Taiwan, the reply was, “This isn’t entertainment; it’s art.” I had only ever known the world of entertainment, so I was unsure of what to do. But I was advised to go to France and so headed there the following week.

Nakamura You certainly are quick on your feet. You are constantly on a journey of self-discovery, in a good way, and you always take action in pursuit of a better place. I can sense that you are filled with more vitality



Masked confession

and curiosity than the average person, and that you are living life free of doubts and excessive attachments.

Akamatsu In Paris, I visited the production company of movie director Éric Rohmer and asked him to look at my work. I was thinking of returning to Japan if he said I had no talent; instead, he told me: “You are a man of art. Paris is the place for you to be.” The situation wasn’t looking too good for me at that point. (laughs)

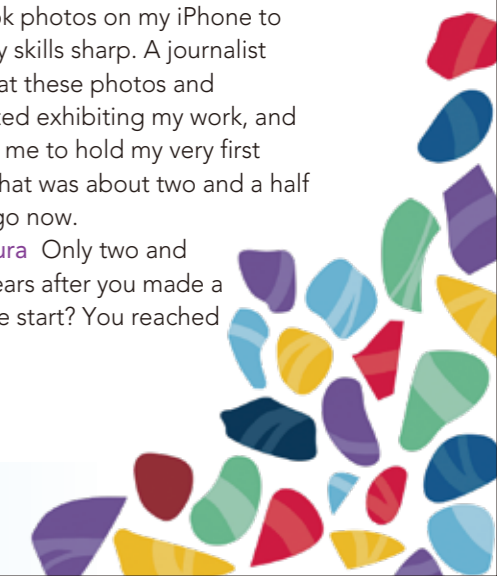
The producer at the company (she was Éric’s last assistant) told me this: “Your energy and vividness are unlike other people’s, so keep doing what you are doing now. But you should focus your output into media other than film. Keep on mixing with lots of other people and continue making things.”

I continued to produce films, but also took photos on my iPhone to keep my skills sharp. A journalist looked at these photos and suggested exhibiting my work, and that led me to hold my very first show. That was about two and a half years ago now.

Nakamura Only two and a half years after you made a full-scale start? You reached

*1 Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) was a haiku poet from the first half of the Edo Period, famed for his work *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. He developed a form of poetry called *haikai* that served as the foundation for haiku, thereby establishing this short-form poetry as a mode of art.

*2 Yuichiro Goto (1922–2003), MD. Professor Emeritus at Tokai University, and Honorary Director at The Tokai University Hospital.





TANGO



storyteller

the upper echelons of the art world in only a couple of years—though all your previous accomplishments must have helped to propel yourself upward. You show an interest in and actively seek to learn about things you didn't know before. You get the people around you involved in your work and absorb a lot from them. All these qualities serve as the foundation for your great life force.

You never know what will happen tomorrow, but that's what makes life fun

Nakamura How did your network of connections grow after that?
Akamatsu Like the Japanese tale of the straw millionaire, I steadily grew bit by bit using what I had. One day, the president of a bakery said to me, "Tell me about the logic behind these photos," and I tried to describe it in my own way. I told him I was just trying to capture human emotions, history, hidden feelings and anything else that flowed out from the walls, the earth, the roads, the intermingling of people, and the

views from cafés. This led to his introducing me to a producer for the Cannes Film Festival. One thing led to another and I somehow found myself walking on the red carpet at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival along with a highly prominent individual from Greece. I'd left Japan with the aim of walking that red carpet as a movie producer, yet ended up there despite not having made a film. (laughs) That event made me truly realize that you never know what will happen tomorrow. People invite me to work on their new projects at certain locations after checking out my work, and I accept their offers. This process has led to all sorts of funny things happening, and everything just got bigger and bigger. This might sound a little dramatic, but I think that people who act with a burning passion tend to attract each other and come together. I feel that you are included in this group, too.
Nakamura With people staying home during the COVID-19 pandemic, large companies, agents, and art galleries have lost some momentum. Despite that, you have devoted your life to art, and have

developed an incredible network by doing so.

Now is the time to recharge

Akamatsu I think the most important thing is the energy, what we might call our life force, that drives us as humans. During this brief trip back to Japan, lack of life force I sense in people while observing them on the streets of Tokyo has been shocking. There seems to be no passion at all. It feels like a desert, and I can hardly bear to see it.
Nakamura The innate energy of the Japanese people has withered, hasn't it? They may be able to score high on any assignment that they are given, but there is still something missing. They have no desire to take on challenges with passion and vitality. So in that case, what do Japanese people need to do? I think your story today holds the key to breaking through this sense of helplessness in modern-day Japan. You are energetic and a



groundbreaker, and you made it big on the global stage by emitting boundless energy when a single opportunity came your way. Watching you achieve all this from the sidelines was profoundly moving.

Start walking on your own, then pursue your dreams

Nakamura I think there are many young people in Japan who do want to throw their heart into their dreams and reach the same heights as you. What would be your advice to them?
Akamatsu I think many people have

their own dreams in mind before they create any momentum in their lives. It is only once you take a few steps and become aware that you are walking all by yourself that you will truly have dreams. That is, I believe that dreams appear only once you are in motion toward something. And once you created momentum, never give up.
Nakamura So you're saying that when people find something they want to do or seek to dive into a new world without experience, they need to steel themselves with the resolve to take on challenges with everything they have at that moment. Interpersonal relationships are more important than ever in the present day, so is there anything in particular you focus on when

building your own network?
Akamatsu Creating a network and connecting with friends requires you to be trustworthy and reliable. Also, if you have something you can share with others from the heart, you will find your network practically growing of its own accord.
Nakamura You are by far one of the most interesting and high-caliber people I have met to date, and your way of life has emboldened us all. I think the fundamental challenge is the same whether our field is art, science, and business. People need to be able to exhibit originality. They also need to be steadfast in infusing their own personal twist as they put together a project using the latest information and by leveraging their personal sensibilities. Moreover, they need the charm and life force to motivate others around them to get involved and cooperate with them. I hope that you continue to see success going forward as you share your energy with younger generations. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.

PROFILE Yusuke Akamatsu

Born in Ibaraki, Osaka on October 21, 1967, Yusuke Akamatsu entered the world of entertainment in 1985 following the death of his parents. His career has encompassed many roles, including comedian, director, scriptwriter, and novelist, and he has made appearances at events as well. In 1995, he changed direction to become a video creator, and went on to produce many experimental video works that fuse moving images with photos. He began traveling the world in 1997, visiting South Korea, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Taiwan, USA, the United Kingdom, and other countries as he creates art based on the vibrations and resonance found in human barrenness. All of Akamatsu's works are captured and edited with an Apple iPhone, and his art chiefly comprises photos and short videos. He is currently a resident in Paris, France.

Website: <https://www.yusukeakamatsu.com/>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/yusukeakamatsu.digitalartist/>
You can view his works on his website and Instagram pages above



News & Activities Yusuke Akamatsu
The March 2022 edition of a magazine published with the authorization of the royal families of Monaco, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Bahrain, and Kuwait shows photos from the Royal Investment Summit held by H.E. Sheikh Abdulaziz in January 2022. This event was covered in the magazine's lead article.

Yusuke Akamatsu was appointed as a Future For Humanity ambassador in February 2022.
<https://futureforhumanity.io/pages/global-goals>

