Stop Motion

In This Issue:

Stop Motion In JAPAN
Japan is steeped with tradition and wonder that goes back in time for hundreds of years. Its culture is rich with art and beauty. There is something to be said as well about the craftsmanship of their work, a level that is very rarely seen in other places around the globe. Though stop motion is roughly 100 years old, the Japanese have been mastering the art of puppet animation for a good chunk of that time and it was heavily influenced by the Czech Masters. Rank & Bass ventured to Japan to work on their Christmas Specials and their Feature Film “Mad Monster Party”. In fact many of their puppets still reside in Tokyo. Kawamoto breathed life into master works of animation that have influenced the world of animation. The art is growing rapidly in Japan and influencing others around the world.

What’s truly amazing is the openness to explore new techniques and the respect that professional animators in Japan give each other. If you are a stop motion animator in Japan, chances are you will meet others like yourself pretty fast. I wasn’t sure initially what I’d find there, but after a few emails I was amazed at how many studios and productions were operating at the time of my visit. I do regret not being able to go to every studio and see everyone on my list. But the good news is I will be back in Japan in the future to explore those places that I left behind.

I would definitely like to thank everyone involved with this issue starting with Keita Funamoto who was my main connection in Japan and has become my newest Best Friend. Keita pretty much acted as my eyes, ears, and mouth the whole time during my visit. So I owe him a lot of gratitude. Also, Atsuko Miyake was a major help as well with serving as point person for arranging interviews with Magari. Both her and Keita really made this issue possible and were amazing tour guides. To add to the list I’d like to thank Tomoko Kitazaki who arranged the interview with Goda and Minegishi at dwarf Inc. And finally I would like to thank Ryo Yoshida who’s beautiful artwork graces the cover of this issue. Truly everyone involved with making this issue possible has the highest level of my praise and I thank you all.

That being said I would like to dedicate this issue to Kihachiro Kawamoto who I was scheduled to meet, but fell ill so our meeting was canceled and he passed away a month later. His influence on the world we work in is massive and knowing that we will always have his films to inspire us is truly one of the greatest gifts someone can leave behind for all to share. I hope you all enjoy this issue.

Keep Animating
-John Ikuma
Executive Editor
Stop Motion Magazine
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The “How to make Figure 2 / For Expert” book by Kotobukiya (ISBN 978-4-7753-0739-7) is one in a series of books that teaches the method of professional anime statue making using polyester putty. The author known as “Eight Heads High” covers many things in this book that are very useful to those interested in small scale sculpting. Special techniques for planning your sculpture, to designing the face, sculpting for molding and special tools are all covered in this book. It is filled to the brim with images, but is only available in the Japanese language. So for those of you brave enough to want a figure making guide and don’t care what language it’s in, this book’s for you. You can find the book at this web address (http://www.kotobukiya.co.jp/item/page/book_figuremaster_2/index.shtml)
Fumiko Magari is one of the most recognized stop motion animators in Japan. She is both a legend and a master within the field of Stop Mo. Her fame is more within the confines of Japanese animation circles, but her career stretches around the globe. She has worked as an animator on the Rankin Bass productions *New Adventures of Pinocchio* and *Mad Monster Party* along with other television productions like *Pingu*, and eventually started her own studio where she creates beautiful and amazing stop motion commercials for the world market.

Magari’s expertise in the field of stop motion is vast. Within ten minutes of my interview with her, I discovered techniques of animation I would have never dreamed possible. She showed me an animation of an ocean scene with a boat that was done completely in stop motion. No clay or gels were used. The waves were entirely made from wood and foam on rollers, and this made my jaw drop. It was filmed on a massive scale and involved a number of animators working together to pull it off within the confines of a small warehouse.

She also showed me an animation of a completely see-through puppet. The puppet looked as if it were made out of glass and had no skeleton. I thought it must have been replacement animation, but I was wrong. The “secret” she revealed was that the puppet was made of translucent silicone and that the armature was made from thin silver wire. I made her play her whole reel a couple of times since I had never seen any of these animation techniques pulled off so fluidly in stop motion before. She graciously rewound it and played it over again with a smile.
Magari’s studio is very similar to small commercial studios here in the U.S. except for one thing: there are no frame grabbers or gauges! She animates purely from heart and soul, with no fear. The wealth of knowledge that she has gathered over the years is not only for her benefit, however; she teaches stop motion locally to others as well. She stresses the need to animate with one’s own being, and teaches her students to not rely on machines to translate the movement, but instead to be one with the character they are moving and breathing life into.

Magari has a rock star energy. She overflows with passion and bubbles with enthusiasm. It’s obvious that she’s highly creative, and she’s a little wild as well. We talked about animating at Rankin Bass outside of our interview and she told me of her first day there. She got in trouble by playing rock music full blast while animating. She said she “scared the other animators” because of this. It seems clear that she is bound to be somewhat of a legend over time. Her life’s work is amazing and she’s still going strong. I was fortunate enough have an amazing dinner with her and her staff and pick her brain a little over the course of the night. The interview that follows are excerpts from that recorded conversation.
SMM: How did you start in this career?

Magari: I was a college student and worked part time at Tadahito Mochinaga’s studio. He was shooting a stop motion in a studio with tiny sets and lights. I was in shock when I saw it.

SMM: How long did you work on the Rankin Bass Pinocchio series?

Magari: Two or three years. I worked with lots of people.

SMM: What was the next job after that?

Magari: I wanted to do more work like Rankin so I waited for more. I did Andersen, Mad Monster, Smoking Bear. I don’t remember what year, but there was one commercial in between. That was a GE commercial based on The Emperor’s New Clothes. There were 2 liars selling appliances. I thought “you make them sell appliances?” It was too funny. That kind of commercial was unusual in Japan.

SMM: What’s it like being a stop motion animator/director?

Magari: In an animation job, you move everything. You have to have a director sense in you. You have to understand the world. If you lack director element, it would be a boring job. I think it’s crucial.
SMM: Why did you start your production studio?

Magari: I wanted to make my own project. It has been the best collaboration. Planning and sharing the dreams and goals-- it makes me want to live longer.

SMM: What makes an artist?

Magari: You need to know what you like and don’t like. Art comes from feelings, such as anger. I’m still looking. I want to make change. It’s a very serious question because no one has asked me so directly before.

SMM: Do you dream in animation?

Magari: When I see anyone moving in an interesting way, I wonder in my head “how many frames does it take to move like that?” How much emotion does the movement take? What does a 20 frame movement look like over 10 frames. Can you transmit emotions so much that you can kill a person? I think it is interesting to think how much emotion you can dispatch from movements. The effect of 10 frames when it’s supposed to take 20 frames. Moving objects in a way that stabs someone with a knife. It is interesting. I don’t think I dream in animation though. When I’m standing on the platform of a train station, I might be watching people and things in a stop motion camera through my eyes.
SMM: What is your dream for the future?

Magari: I’ve done so much already. It’s constant. I can only live in the stop motion world. I want to create more lives. It’s continuous on the same rail. Doing the same thing and making more projects.

SMM: Who makes the armatures?

Magari: Me, Nonaka or Komae. I’ve been working with Komae for over 40 years. I do not like to think of him as an armature maker. He is a team member. The “doll” is not an armature. It is my companion who expresses my feelings and images. It is someone who would move with me. It is not about metals, it’s teamwork. The armature is only one tool. I send love, anger and information through the armature. I want to create together with it and pass it on.

SMM: Do you have any heroes in your life?

Magari: Harryhausen, Bradbury the writer..Moppa. I’m always reading different things. Basically who I want to be comes first. Many inspired me, not just one person, such as Disney, Tyrnka, Mochinaga, all the pioneers inspired me. Everything inspires me, maybe because I haven’t studied much. Writers, artists, musicians…everyone is my teacher.

SMM: How long have you been working with Nonaka, your assistant?
Magari: 20 something years. He came when he was 20 years old. He grew up watching me. He is a good model as a person. He grew up the right way. His curiosity is amazing. If you have curiosity, you are good. He loves films. His curiosity spread from there to studying anime and learning computers and such. If you have one thing that drives you, kids will grow. My three kids grew fine, but my fourth child Nonaka is the best one, I say.

SMM: Do you use surface gauges?

Magari: I don’t use gauges or a lunch box. When I have a passion, using my own fingers, it is impossible to think, “Did I do it right or not?” In the continuous time, pouring and passing through my five fingers and my own hands is important. Sending my emotions cannot be done by machine. Even if it comes out rough, it is still the right emotion. You can measure by gauge, 1mm, 2mm movement, but I don’t want to depend on the gauge. How can I place my passion exactly in the gauge? Impossible! Where do the feelings, such as having a grudge or feeling softness, go if I just stare at the gauge? If there was a girl you want to kiss, would you think when to do it? When, what time, where the sun is rising? When do you hold hands?

When you are drawing, it is ok to think 10 cm movement or 15 cm, but not when it’s in motion. You need to look at it objectively, but it may be moved differently because I was mad or something. However, that is ok because that is how I felt at the moment. Passion is what I want to share. Otherwise, stop motion cannot be done. Human emotions cannot be measured.
SMM: What are your feelings towards the change in animation? Stop motion to CG?

Magari: CG is calculated. Humans always wander around—that is not possible in CG. Stop motion makes the animator think. You cannot move in the assumptions. Humans respond and sympathize to other puzzled humans because we are not robots. I can sympathize as long as I am a human being, living and questioning things. The same humans respond to stop motion. CG is a different category. It is great. I enjoyed Avatar and such. But is perfect beauty great? If you are a human, the answer is no. Being human cannot be expressed by CG. People like new things. To me it does not have air, humidity, temperature or smell of sweat. Toy Story is great, but I could not feel the stink of the attic. On the other hand, stop motion can express that.

SMM: How many people do you work with at your studio?

Magari: Three to four people. We get more people depending on a project—10, 20, 25 etc.

SMM: How do you feel about your influence in the world as an animator?

Magari: I’ve never liked thinking about that. I just love animating and drinking with everyone! I don’t care about what other people think. I don’t belong to any association, either. I enjoy my life making mistakes. I am me.
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The studio dwarf inc. has received world wide celebrity as of late for their creation of a little brown monster named “Domo”. Though the animated shorts made for the network NHK Japan are mostly under 3 minutes, they have garnered a sizable cult following across the globe. This is evident in the amount of Domo Back Packs, Wallets, underwear, and stuffed animals you see lining the shelves of the local shopping malls here in the U.S.

This small studio run by Goda (Character Designer / Director) and Minegishi (Lead Animator / Director of Animation) along with a top notch crew of designers and animators have also made commercials, and a legendary animated film titled “Komaneko” which is about a small cat that loves to animate stop motion puppets.

We were very lucky to be able to talk to both Goda and Minegishi about their studio and their films along with the process of how it all began. The following interview is broken into two parts since they both play different roles in the production workflow.
SMM: How long have you been making Domo?

Goda: I started making Domo 11 years ago. At the time, I was working on commercials. I started gaining interest in stop motion animation as I animated Domo. Even though I was at the commercial making company, I started to make less commercials and more of Domo, such as picture books. Someone advised me that I should specialize in this, and that is how Domo began.

SMM: How did Domo get started?

Goda: NHK was looking for a character 11 years ago. I had only done storyboards. The producer suggested that I join the presentation with the domo drawing. Domo debuted in December, 1998. In order to express into a shape from the drawing, we decided to use stop motion instead of other ideas, such as full-body suits or Cell animation.

SMM: What is Domo?

Goda: In the dinosaur age, there were lots of creatures like Domo. He kept sleeping as an egg, and he was born now.

Minegishi: There’s a 2D animation that shows that story in 5 minutes.
SMM: Is it true that Domo is also being made now in CGI?

Goda: NHK is changing to a digital house, so Domo is campaigning for digital until July 2011.

Minegishi: A CGI specialist makes them. We don’t make CGI animation here.

SMM: How did dwarf Inc. get started?

Goda: I was the only creator and did not have any employees. After Komaneko, we got together with a team: Minegishi, another producer and their team. When we started to make the TV series of Domo twenty six 2 minute stories, we needed space to film, and this is where we started. The Domo TV series was the most challenging.

Then we did the Domo TV series, there are 4 working teams. 3 in Japan and 1 in Korea. When the job gets tough, we increase the team up to 6- one team in Japan and one in Korea. Then we did the Domo TV series, there are 4 working teams.

SMM: How did Komaneko get created?

Goda: Originally Komaneko was exhibited as a part of an animation in the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography. It was supposed to be just drawings, but the producer came up with an idea to set up a studio as an exhibit. Walls were put up around the studio, and there was a peek hole. We animated everyday, and the visitors peeked through the hole to see how stop motion worked. I was asked to come up with a story for that project. Komaneko was born then. Neko means cat and koma means frame. We were happy to do this since we didn’t have to pay for the studio. It was a 5 min. film. It was too short for TV or DVD so we decided to make it into a movie somewhere else.
SMM: How long are the Animated Segments you have made for NHK?

Goda: Since 1998, the shortest shot was only for 4 or 5 seconds and the longest was for 30 seconds. Our average was six 30 second pieces a year, however, later it became one shot per year or every 2 years because of NHK scheduling. We plan to make 30 second spots this year.

SMM: How many people work at dwarf inc.?

Goda: 11 employees

SMM: What inspires you as a character designer and director?

Goda: Childhood experiences mostly. Stop motion takes time to make so the work should have a lasting quality. Everyone has their own childhood so it is easier for them to get into the story even though the time has changed.

SMM: What’s been your favorite character to create?

Goda: It is Domo since he brought me into the stop motion world. He is loved around the world. As I create many characters, I think of him as my first son. He holds the most memories for me.

SMM: Domo has many series. What is your favorite?

Goda: Each has its own story behind it. Regardless of how popular Domo became, I tried to keep him as he was and keep making new stories.
SMM: What are the puppets made from?

Minegishi: Materials are mostly made of cloth. Inside is wood and armatures. It has cotton and foam for the soft part. balsa material etc.

Goda: The armatures go through wood. The core is wood.

Minegishi: We use wood to make it lighter.

SMM: Would balsa wood break?

Minegishi: We insert katsura wood into balsa wood where we needed to support the metal amatures (joint) to prevent it from cracking.

SMM: What's the most challenging and rewarding part of the job?

Goda: Story board. It is the biggest job. It is fun but tough at the same time.

SMM: What inspired you as a designer?

Goda: I make many designs and take the good part from different designs, such as I like this eye and that mouth.

SMM: How fast do you get it done?

Goda: Slow.
SMM: How did you get started as an animator in Stop Motion Animation?

Minegishi: First work was with Okamoto Tadanari-called Namichibyo sokusai. When I attended Animation school, there was Kawamoto Okamoto puppet show. I realized that’s what I want to do so I moved onto that instead. I started working at Okamoto’s studio part time.

SMM: What was the name of the first art school you went attended?

Minegishi: Tokyo Designer Academy. It only taught me 2D. Okamoto was a guest speaker and taught us stop motion. I asked him for work then.

SMM: What was you favorite animation to work on?

Minegishi: I suppose it’s the Domo series.

Goda: Minegishi did many Kawamoto projects and commercials mainly. Commercials usually get forgotten.
SMM: How did you start working with Kawa-moto?

Minegishi: I asked him to let me help him with work and worked on Dojoji. He had a traditional way of teaching. You watch and learn. I was assisting with the time sheet logging numbers of frames he wanted me to move. I read as we filmed. As I watched I studied the way he moved the puppets. A few months later I was asked to move the side (not main) puppets then I applied what I’ve learned or stole from his techniques. He advised me on the time sheet with movements and timings.

SMM: The way hair moves with wind is amazing in Dojoji.

Minegishi: That is all Kawamoto. I did the foot movements and kimono. There was no computer so everything was based on instinct. Kawamoto is an amazing animator.

SMM: In the film the main character becomes a dragon in the end. I heard you did that.

Minegishi: Crossing the river towards the end is done by me. The rest was Kawamoto. The skull flying away was done by both of us since it took a long time. We used the double glass and camera was shot from above. We shaved the skull as we filmed.

SMM: How do you interpret what the director wants?

Minegishi: It is to think about what the director wants to express most in that particular frame. Depending on the puppet it is hard to manipulate. My focus is on making it possible.
SMM: What does your crew at the studio consist of?

Minegishi: There are directors and animators. We invite lighting technicians, puppet makers and etc. Very basic. Filming budget and cameras. We want a bigger studio like high ceilings and motion control.

SMM: Do you act out your animation first?

Minegishi: I act out the characters sometimes.

SMM: What kind of equipment do you use at the studio?

Minegishi: We use surface gauges. The frame device is Lunch Box. Software is Canon digital camera, Canon utility digital photo professional. We use Canon 1D Mark II. T shutter is strong. It can shoot 250,000 times. It does not break. Lens are Nikon. We can’t use auto focus so we mount an adapter. Nikon lens are 28mm, 35mm, 50mm, 85mm, 115mm. No zoom. We often use surface gauges, but there is a time when we don’t use it at all. Even when we use the surface gauge, it does not slow us down. We can shoot 90 seconds in 5 days.

We used to use laser disc before DVD came out. Analog laser disc used to record frame by frame. 8mm video stop motion. Now it’s much better for stop motion. I like analog pushing buttons rather than using a mouse.

SMM: What’s the most challenging and rewarding part of the job?

Minegishi: My favorite part is when I am animating and moving the dolls.
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Email: andy@animationsupplies.net or visit: www.animationsupplies.net
Ryo Yoshida is known worldwide for his amazing work as a master Ball Joint Doll Maker. In an art form that often gets clumped together with toy making, Yoshida’s work stands light years away from the stereotype and often results in realism on a 1:1 scale. His dolls are both magical and eerie, they stand on the edge of reality and leave the viewer to question if these nymph like goddesses will spring to life with the blink of an eye.

What is truly amazing is the influence Yoshida has on the Ball Joint Doll art scene. Yes, you heard right, there is a whole art movement that revolves around Ball Joint Dolls or BJD’s as they are known in these tight circles of artists and fans. Yoshida’s work is highly sought after and one doll can fetch tens of thousands of dollars. He has also written a few books about his style and building techniques (Yoshida Style – Ball Jointed Doll Making Guide – ISBN 978-4-89425-460-2)(Astral Doll – ISBN 9784757208650).
He currently has taken a break from making BJD’s and is focusing his time on teaching others through his school Pygmalion (http://pygmalion.mda.or.jp). He has taught hundreds of students through his school and many of them have become famous within the movement. His work is now starting to cross into stop motion by influencing a small group of people in Japan to make their own dolls and turn them into stop motion puppets.

We were very fortunate to meet and talk to Mr. Yoshida and see his studio/school up close. His kindness and very enlightened view on art and life is truly inspiring. I hope the following interview inspires you as much as it has inspired us here at SMM.

SMM: How did you become interested in Art and how would you define it?

Yoshida: I wasn’t aware of art when I was a child. I just loved creating stuff. In my adolescence, I painted in oil because of the impressionists like Van Gogh. That enhanced me to go for more art. I entered a regular college, but dropped out and started photography. My instructor recommended that I study various arts besides just taking photos. During the Surrealism era, I encountered Hans Bellmer as I searched work by Tatsuhiko Shibusawa (Tatsuhiko Shibusawa is a friend of Shimon Yotsuya). I started creating more work, however, I wanted to create my own work not under other people’s influence. In my doll making, I wanted to incorporate impact from the nature and formative art. Human being itself is from nature. If I define what is art boldly, then I say it’s within you.
SMM: I know that you have a lot of apprentices, but do you still make your own dolls?

Yoshida: I haven’t recently. After the BJD gallery and the Yoshida book, I have been on a break.

SMM: Do you plan to make more dolls?

Yoshida: I know I have to make more, but… Everyone has different energy. There are people who accumulate energy as they age and then create. The most work I created was when I was in my 30’s.

SMM: What were the challenges you faced as you developed your technique?

Yoshida: In the early stage, I focused more on the technical problems in the making of BJD. For example, doll making techniques, formative problems, line making in rough sketches and etc. I focused on the process when I was younger. However, when I figured out the problems, next came the sketch problems. I wondered if the dolls are going to come out the way I imagined. There are always visions within me. As I got older, I started to see it more calmly. When you get to this point, you can configure consciously. The doll making takes time. It takes time to come up with the shape you want. From there, when there is a vision and new idea you want to express, you have to learn new techniques.
SMM: Did you start making dolls based on Shimon Yotsuya’s book on how to make BJD?

Yoshida: In that book, the instructions were in itemized form. For example, 1) Draw a sketch, 2) Make a base form, 3) Make a mold and etc. It was not descriptive like the Yoshida book. At the time, there was no one to teach me so I read books like Yotsuya’s and studied Japanese traditional industrial techniques independently. One of the shops was giving lessons, so I took the job to teach.

SMM: What inspires your designs?

Yoshida: Fascination of a doll is the soul. When it becomes a sculpture, it’s no longer a doll. I have thoughts time to time. For example, the doll I made while I spent time with my partner has a lot of meaning to me. When I had kids, it also became my inspiration. In the earlier stages, my cloth doll was modeled after my first daughter. I have three daughters. They are in the Yoshidashiki as well. Children have innocence. They have natural instinct with some cruelty. The dolls have mischievous eyes as the children do before becoming adults.

SMM: How long have you been teaching Ball Joint Doll Making?

Yoshida: I taught about 30 years. I am 58 years old now. Probably I’ve had 100 students a year. I think it is important to exchange information and get inspiration from each other. You have to make an environment to create opportunity for your imagination to grow.
SMM: Is there work that you have never shown to the public?

Yoshida: I have some work that I gave up in the middle, work that I thought I could finish later, and some work that I broke. I have work that might not get accepted by the society, some risky and some for prototype. I had some I could not compromise. I had some projects I didn’t even take a photo of.

SMM: What is the largest doll that you have made?

Yoshida: The largest piece of art I made is 6 feet. It is not in the collection book. Regular BJD size is about 4’3” to 4’6”.

SMM: What kind of material are you using for doll making?

Yoshida: In the Yoshidashiki book, we use rador clay. In the early years, I used paper mache. Then FRP…wood carving and metal. Everyone uses different materials. Now what I do first is to make a mold of rador. I use easy slip without baking. You let it dry and it gets hard. It is hard to take it out so it is unfit for large shapes. You inject it and you don’t even spin it. The plaster sucks the moisture. When you take it off, a thin layer is left. Some people prefer bisque. The Rador company created it. Each material has its own strength and brings out its expression. You choose materials depending on your project image.
SMM: What are your feelings about the mass produced Ball Joint Dolls?

Yoshida: Toys like Super Dollfie -- I don’t know. It was already made when I noticed it. I’ve never seen the actual doll. Each doll like Bellmer, or bisque antique dolls, has different texture; it is defined by the person who makes it. The key is to create it yourself. When it becomes merchandise, such as Barbie dolls and GI Joe, it becomes something else. However, kids playing with these dolls might get inspired in the future.

SMM: Would you merchandise your dolls if you were asked?

Yoshida: I never thought about it. I wouldn’t deny it. It also depends on what it is. You can put a limit on wood block prints. When I leave it up to myself, I might compromise. It becomes a cold thing. Drawing can express backgrounds and fill in space, which gives audience the painter’s image. It is difficult when it comes to dolls, however. The ball jointed doll just sits there, but it’s supposed to show the creator’s world. I don’t know if it’s art or a toy. When making a world, you have to input some kind of meaning, otherwise, it just might become merchandise. When bisque antique dolls were made, they did get mass produced in the factory. It was done by a division of labor. Those dolls are rare and expensive now because there aren’t many left. When you have to survive, you make it, but where does the inspiration go? There is no shortcut for creation.
SMM: How do you feel about people copying your style?

Yoshida: I think it’s a good thing. Someone gets inspired and something else is born and created. I always hope for that to happen. I want to get inspiration as well. However, it is difficult to keep up with it. If you don’t create in your era and produce new ideas from a small scale to a large scale, the world is not going to see it.
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Interview with Keita Funamoto

Interview by John Ikuma / Translation by Ai Ikuma
Interpreter Jenya

Keita Funamoto’s love for stop motion is both inspiring and reassuring to all of us who seek to make our art better. In a country where the cost of materials is very high compared to other places in the world, and there is little in the way of expert advice in his native language, Keita has learned his trade by carving his way through the often mystical and magic art of stop motion and diving head first into the field with no fear. He has accomplished many great things over the past 10 years. He’s made stop motion for commercials, television productions, and feature films, along with starting a school for stop motion in Tokyo, Japan.

Keita’s family has owned and operated a recording studio in Tokyo for many years. He started a ball jointed doll school and has become widely recognized in the field. So it was only natural that Keita’s passion for stop motion would develop from his environment and he would become a recognized individual in the stop motion scene in Japan.

Keita’s stop motion school / studio is growing through word of mouth, and his knowledge of the art form is attracting many who want to learn or refine the skills of an art form that is rich with history in his native land. We sat down with Keita and picked his brain a little bit about his likes and projects, to get to know a little more about his world of Stop Motion Production.
SMM: How did you start animation?

Keita: I was inspired by the Quay Brothers and Jan Svankmajer in my 20s and started animating when I was 30. I entered my first project in a Shockwave contest, and I was selected that year. The next year, in 2004, I started animating dolls made of Japanese ceramic and then won two festivals called Annecy and Ottawa; screened. They were aired in France and Canada. My third project was a stop motion [piece] called “Worku”.

SMM: What inspired the piece called “Worku”?  

Keita: I went to look for artists at DESIGN-FESTA (International Art Event) , and also went to art markets and galleries to find team members. Then I saw the dolls of Masahide Kobayashi and asked him to collaborate.
SMM: What is your background and training?

Keita: I learned on my own. But I can’t make dolls, so I asked Kobayashi. I also read Yukio Hiruma’s book called Fantastic Animation Making Guide.

SMM: Is stop motion a part of your life? Is it natural for you?

Keita: I love movies, and watch 100-200 films yearly ever since I was young. I wanted to make movies first. I don’t know how I ended up in stop motion. I love dolls, I think that’s why.

SMM: Who makes BJD (ball jointed dolls) for your projects? Tell us what you’ve done with BJD’s and your plans for the future.

Keita: So far I have made two stop motion pieces using BJD. You can find them on Youtube. My first BJD stop motion was done independently with a doll made by Shin. The second one was a commercial for Shiseido MAJOLICA MAJORCA (Famous Japanese Cosmetic Company). The BJD was made by Hifumi Shibakura. The director and animator is Hideki Kimura. Tetsu Kawamura developed the BJD armature, which is used in the commercial. It’s the first technology introduced in the world.

SMM: Tell us a little about your next project.

Keita: I have now some projects like stop motion film with BJD created by Mari Shimizu who gives lessons in my school. Mari Shimizu is very famous BJD artist and BJD stop motion pioneer.
SMM: You also teach stop motion. What inspired you to teach?

Keita: I felt that the stop motion education was too limited. There was no training or practice so I created the school. I first taught at Seibu Ikebukuro Community College (It is one of the three major private educational institution in Japan) as a guest teacher for 6 months. There was a student whose name was Toshikazu Ishii. He later became my school armature instructor. There were about 40 students in my class. I had them build the puppets from the Kawamura’s armature kit(ArmaBenders). On the other hand one day Ishii just brought in an armature he made from scratch by reading Tetsu Kawamura book(Eizo+ Vol.01) on how to make armatures. I learnt on the internet how to make stop motion by Shigeru Okada and also read his book(Eizo+ Vol.01). There are detailed explanations on how to create stop motion for about 40 pages. This book now sells for a premium of $80 on Ebay.

We also wrote a book about stop motion. It’s called Let’s Create Clay and Puppet Animation!! With Adobe Premiere Pro / After Effects. by Shigeru Okada, Tetsu Kawamura, Masakazu Kobayashi and Keita Funamoto. ISBN#978-4-88337-679-7 3800yen (about $40-)
SMM: In the book, I see a foam latex caterpillar. What kind of foam did you use?

Keita: The foam latex is called Regitex made in Japan by tokyu-hands.co.jp. Very different method compared to US.

SMM: You have lots of projects. How many now?

Keita: I have four projects. “Worku” and more... I have to finish “Worku” in this year.

SMM: How many episodes are you planning for “Worku”? 

Keita: We finished 5 episodes with “Worku”. Now we’re working on the sound effects. The music is done now.

SMM: Are you using replacement heads on “Worku”?

Keita: For the first two episodes for 20 min we did, but there are no replacement heads for episodes 3-5.

SMM: What kind of equipment do you use?

Keita: Canon EOS REBEL XSi(EOS 450D). Software is Dragon Stop Motion, Stop Motion Pro, Photo Shop, Premiere Pro and After Effects.

SMM: Do you have any modern day heroes?

Keita: Tetsu Kawamura. I am here now because of him.
Image from the film Alice monoka.
Directed by Ryosuke Handa.
Alice is a life sized Japanese silicone doll made by Orient Industry.
Image copyright Ryosuke Handa.
WANTED FILMS:
- Disturbing
- Gory
- Vulgar
- Rude
- Strange
- Twisted
- Violent
- etc...

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