



Souun Takeda

Living according to your own values and connected to your emotions



Souun Takeda is one of the most renowned calligraphers (kanji artists) in Japan. "I wish to create works that people can enjoy together, like pop music," says Takeda. His works are highly original yet easy to read, and exude positive warmth.

If you change, people around you will also change

After graduating from college, Takeda joined Nippon Telegraph and Telephone East Corporation. Everything seemed to be going smoothly, but a turning point came in his second year as a company employee.

"Work was starting to feel routine," Takeda recalls, "and I suddenly became afraid that I might end up living a monotonous life if I didn't do something. Until then, I was just living aimlessly from day to day, but for the first time ever, I started thinking seriously about how I wanted to live my life. One thing I knew for certain was that I wanted to do something that I could feel excited about. So I decided to actively seek enjoyment, instead of blaming the company for the lack of excitement in my life."

The first thing that came to mind was calligraphy, which Takeda had been learning from the age of three. He ground ink at his desk and tried writing memos with a brush.

"That irritated my boss but my colleagues praised my writing," Takeda says. "I was not very good at my job and never stood out in the workplace until then. I felt that I was getting attention for the first time. There was even a person who was moved to tears when I wrote their name. I thought, 'This is it. I'm going to write people's names with my brush!' As soon as I had this epiphany, I wrote my letter of resignation without a second thought."

On the day he decided to strike out on his own, Takeda met a street musician – a saxophonist – on his way home. The next day, he spread a straw mat next to the musician and started street calligraphy. This was around 2000, when no one was doing anything like it.

"At first, I was so embarrassed I couldn't even look up," Takeda says, "but I went out every day and sat on the street in many places. I would offer to write any character or word people wanted me to write. I didn't

make a lot of money from doing it, but I learned an important lesson. That is, if I change, the people who come to me will change, too. If I'm bored, nothing interesting will happen, and if I like what I'm doing, I will get positive feedback. It's almost like a mirror reflecting my mind. So I thought I should first keep my emotions under control and live life happily. That kind of thinking grew inside me."

"Enjoyment" is the absolute standard

Once Takeda started putting up information about his street activities on his website, people from various fields – magazines, radio, events, television, and so on – started approaching him. In particular, the TV programs he appeared in got high ratings, and many people started to identify with the works and way of life of calligrapher Souun Takeda. Naturally, big jobs like title lettering and logos started coming in.

"My work can sometimes be very personal like tomb inscriptions and doorplates," Takeda says, "but there are also jobs like a new product logo where the future of the company is at stake. Whether it's a person or a company, all my clients are looking to change their lives. So I approach every work, no matter what kind it is, with the same

attitude. I don't judge things or try to interpret things. I simply write, taking in what's in front of me and being moved, feeling happy, and enjoying myself. I also try not to get too focused on what I think is good or what I want to do. I make sure the other person is also enjoying the process. Like a good pop song, I want to share a 'groove' with people who have different values. Also, the world is very relative and fuzzy, so you cannot keep everyone happy. That means you should stay away from value standards like competition and people's opinions, and simply and deeply enjoy whatever you are doing. Once you have this absolute standard of 'enjoyment' in yourself, you can live every day happily with nothing to be afraid of. You can't beat that."

Perhaps because of Takeda's positive personality and the way he seems so free and unfettered, he attracts many people in areas other than calligraphy as well. He has written over 50 books, and this year he opened an organic food café called "Earth." The café is supervised by Takeda himself.

"I have a friend who is an expert in organic food, and the food he makes is absolutely delicious," Takeda says. "So we said, 'Why don't we do a café?' This friend and I go to the west coast of the US together every year, and we are thinking about moving there some day. We will think about what to do there after we move. It's always more interesting if you don't know what will happen next. It feels kind of like going back to the street to start a new life again, or starting a new stage from scratch."



Souun Takeda

Born 1975 in Kumamoto Prefecture. Started learning calligraphy from his mother Souyou, who is a calligrapher, at the age of three. After working at NTT East Corporation, started activities as a calligrapher in January 2001. Created title lettering and logos for numerous works, products and projects, such as popular TV dramas and the K computer. Appeared in many TV programs, lectures, events and seminars. Has written over 50 books. In 2017, opened an organic food café called "Earth" that he himself supervises. Runs a calligraphy class called "Futaba no Mori" and teaches about 300 students.

Souun Takeda official website
<https://www.souun.net/>