

Hiroko Komatsu

Interview by Mark Buckton
Pictures by Hiroko Komatsu

SFM's interviewee, Hiroko Komatsu, will feature on the early BS television coverage (1300-1430) on day 11 (Wednesday) of the 2007 Aki Bashi from the Ryogoku Kokugikan.

One of very few women to ever be granted this honor, she is perhaps the most promising of a very select group of Japanese artists covering the modern game.

Known by SFM's Editor-in-Chief from her teens, Hiroko recently spent a few hours with Mark chewing the sumo fat and talking about art, window cleaning and her future plans.

Picture Bonanza

MB: Hiroko, please tell our readers a little about yourself - the what, the when, the where etc.

HK: I'm a born and bred Adachi-ku resident, 24 years young. I attended elementary school in the ward before joining my older sister, Sakiko, at a special high school in central Tokyo that focused heavily on art, craft, design and the like.

For me, study was about 'doing', not only books and reading. Today I work as a window cleaner full time and work on my art in my

free time.

MB: Any other artists in the family?

HK: Sakiko is an artist (the sisters had their work exhibited in Tokyo's fashionable Ginza district earlier in the year) and one of my great-great-grandfathers liked drawing as a hobby but that is about it.

MB: How did your interest in art develop?

HK: When we were younger, my sister wasn't blessed with the strongest of bodies so we couldn't





really play sports together. We spent more of our time indoors than outside and art was a kind of natural step in that process – easy to do and enjoy, and not taking up too much energy at that age.

MB: What is your first memory of sumo?

HK: I remember about 1991 or 92 sitting with my grandmother and watching the TV. I think we were watching Waka and Taka in their early days.

MB: Did your grandmother have a favorite that you recall?

HK: Definitely Wakanohana III (Masaru as he is now known on the Japanese TV networks).

MB: Who was the first rikishi you put on paper?

HK: Early on, most were just 'rikishi' in the sense that they represented sumo and no particular identifiable sekitori. I drew my first rikishi at age 19 but the first individual I opted to identify was Homasho, earlier this year.

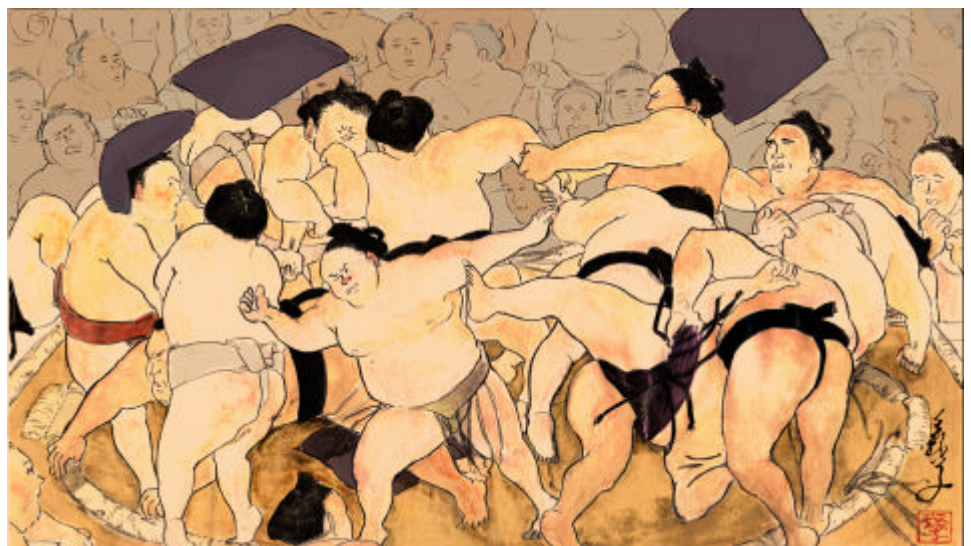
MB: How did a 24-year-old woman in one of the world's most vibrant cities develop an interest in depicting such an ancient form

of cultural entertainment and not more 'up-to-date' forms of art?

HK: I think the quintessentially Japanese concept that is sumo, with its amazing combination of skin and muscle, just drew me in. I gave it a go and really enjoyed putting together my first exhibition in Kitasenju (Adachiku) in 2003, following that up with Ginza this year.

MB: What do your family think about your doing this?

HK: They think I'm a little strange, but I clean windows – a definitely male-dominated world – as a living, and they thought that was strange too.



MB: Are you close to any of the rikishi?

HK: No.

MB: If you could be.....?

HK: Yoshikaze.

MB: Why the little terrier from Oguruma?

HK: (smiling and a tad redder) I want to sketch his calves. They are so muscular – so perfect. And, of course, he is so energetic.

MB: Do you have a favorite rikishi today – in terms of your artwork?

HK: For the body line they possess, Asashoryu, Kakuryu and Yoshikaze.

MB: Do you have any favorite sumo artist yourself?

HK: I really like and respect [Lynn Matsuoka's](#) work. Her colors are so beautiful and every piece is so refined and sophisticated.

MB: Your exhibition in Ginza earlier this year displayed many of the images we will carry with this interview but given that it was your first in a major location in Tokyo, how did it go down?

HK: It was very good. I was very happy. Many people came,

including NHK's sumo commentator - Iwasa-san - and yourself with your son, and I even sold some of my pieces.

MB: As an attendee myself, I particularly enjoyed the light-hearted look you take at rikishi and their lifestyles. Is that an area you enjoy bringing out in your art?

HK: I considered myself a beginner in appreciating the sport so when these (accompanying) pieces were finished, I didn't really know the sport that well. I have learnt a great deal in a short time and my options and ideas are increasing all the time. Now I am working on some action shots.

MB: Any plans for another exhibition?

HK: I think I will hold another exhibition next year. Maybe in Ginza but I am not sure now.

MB: Away from sumo art and on to sumo the sport, who will win the upcoming basho?*

HK: (thinking for a moment and staring off into space) Hopefully Kotomitsuki but probably Hakuho.

MB: Asashoryu is of course missing from the action this time out. What is your take on all the hoo-hah surrounding his recent (two) trip(s) to Mongolia?

HK: I think the (Nihon Sumo) Kyokai want him to resign and like his absence.



MB: Will he return to Japan and compete in the Hatsu Basho?

HK: No, I think he is finished now.

MB: Speaking as a Japanese fan of sumo and indeed as a sumo artist, do you think the issues surrounding Asashoryu's supposed mental illness and behavior problems will have any long-term negative effects on sumo?

HK: I don't think so. I think people will forget it quite soon but I do think Asashoryu will be remembered as a bad yokozuna – not in the statistical sense but in what it takes to be a yokozuna.

MB: Finally then, on a more positive note, do you have any favorite local rikishi - Japanese

lads for the future?

HK: I hope Kotomitsuki can make it to yokozuna but... I think Kisenosato might one day... (voice trails off)

Limited edition prints of any of Hiroko Komatsu's pieces accompanying this interview or in the bonanza can be purchased: signed, framed and delivered for just 9800 yen.

Only ten prints of any of the images seen will be made available to overseas buyers. Contact Hiroko via ed_in_chief@sumofanmag.com.

** interview conducted pre-basho on September 4th.*

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