

# WINGSPAN

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San Francisco, USA

## Chilling with Sweet Scoops

Rausu Kombu  
**Sweet Taste of Generations**

Hanoi  
**Street Food Beyond the Pho**

罗白昆布  
美味世代传

河内  
河粉之外的街头小吃

Tsutomu Fujishima



# Liberating the Image

Interview & Photographs by Rob Gilhooly  
Illustrations by Tsutomu Fujishima

**B**orn in Kagawa Prefecture, Tsutomu Fujishima (aka Tsutomu Goda), was an advertising designer before embarking on a career in illustrating at 30. A lean decade later, he got commissions from numerous public and private entities taken by his playful, colorful depictions of humankind at work and play. Now 52, he has a healthy overseas following. In 2014 and 2016, he won the International Award for illustration at the Bologna Children's Book Fair. In 2017, he received a similar award during the Sharjah International Book Fair and won the Visual Communications Design category in the A' Design Awards. His Beautiful World gallery, Colorful Perspectives, appears on pages 28–30.



## When did you decide to become an illustrator?

I decided I wanted to become an artist when I was about 10, but it was not until I was about 20 that I first became aware that illustrating was a profession. At first, I thought that kind of work would be beyond my capabilities. It was only after I started working in the design industry that I realized I might have the requisite skills.

## Is that how you began your career?

The actual reason I got into illustration was a bitter-sweet experience when the ad company I worked for

folded following the burst of the economic bubble. I was about thirty and saw it as an opportunity to return to my original plan and make pictures. I thought if I didn't start now, I probably never would. So, I enrolled in an illustration training school to match the quality of illustrating going on at the time.

## Were you instantly successful?

I set myself a time limit of ten years during which I'd give it my best shot, and if things didn't work out, I'd look at doing something else. To be honest, those first ten years were brutal and there were times when I could barely put food on the table. I did a variety of part-time jobs just to keep me afloat.

## When did things begin to look up?

It was about that ten-year mark when I really felt I had nailed down my own style—use of miniature figures amid wide open spaces. The human form is something I could use to gain a sense of proportion and perspective. Whatever I draw, whether a town or flowers or something else in nature, by throwing my miniature human figures into the mix it became my signature. It seemed to have global potential as well. It was my wife who convinced me I could really make a go of it.

### Where do your ideas come from?

About seventy percent is inspiration. When thinking about how to best present the image I have in my mind and to make that idea convincing, a certain amount of calculation is required. That's the remaining thirty percent. Inspiration can come from anything. I'm constantly observing, looking at things, things in nature, but also things on the Internet and so on. I often come across something that viewed in a certain way resembles something I want to draw. And by seeing that object in a different way it becomes easier, and more interesting, to relay what it is I want to draw.

### Can you give an example?

Among my travel series illustrations, there's one of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow. The domes were inspired by cones of ice cream. If you look at conventional photos and images of that structure, you realize how limited the options are for visual representation. It's so big that there's only one way to photograph or draw it—from ground level, at a distance. My approach is to look outside those limitations to see if there's something that will liberate the image in question, and me as an illustrator. I thought that might be how a bird would see the cathedral domes if flying above them—variously flavored ice cream cones.

### What's your overall message?

Ultimately, that's not for me to decide, but there are hidden messages here and there—if you look hard enough you can even see an ice cream cone hidden away in the illustration of St. Basil's.

In another, I depict Greenland with the North Pole in the distance, and between the two, in the bay, an



iceberg shaped like an archway that existed and I've always loved. That was the image I had in mind when I came to do the illustration. In the foreground is a

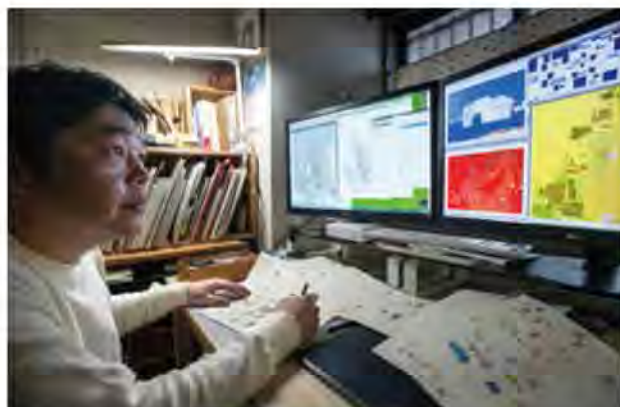
town with very colorful houses—which they did to mitigate depression among residents. It's freezing year-round and a very tough climate. The footprints in the foreground are an indication that this is as far as humans can go.

Unfortunately, the iceberg has melted due to global warming. I saw this as an example of humans literally and figuratively living on the edge. But the illustration could equally serve in a tourism promotion capacity. I'd have no problem with that.

**My style of miniature figures amid wide open spaces uses the human form to gain a sense of proportion and perspective.**

### Tourism is a major theme in your work. Are you a keen traveler?

Not exactly. Most of the time, I'm only trying to imagine what it must be like to live in different environments, though I try to treat everything impartially. Sustainable tourism is an important issue, and I am often amused by the human approach to travel, which seems to have no real purpose. But, my travel series is intended to depict safe environments. Travel is presented in a peaceful way, which is how things should be. If anything, that's my dream and my message: we should all get along together in peace.





# Colorful Perspectives

Gallery by Tsutomu Fujishima



Greenland



