

MECHADEMIA

メカデミア

VOLUME

2



*Networks
of Desire*

FRENCHY LUNNING, EDITOR

nightmare. Gotōda, the police sergeant, believes that she is a result of profound religious sin. Rei listens in bewilderment, unable to decide what he believes or feels. But Oshii himself remains silent: *he* does not speak for Saya. The old man may assert that she is a hybrid, but he does not know her at all—certainly not the way David knows her when he speaks the film's most famous line, that Saya is the "only remaining original." To be an "original" is surely incompatible with being a hybrid, and so Oshii plunges us once again into darkness, uncertainty, and opacity.

Like the nurse in the film, neither we nor Rei ever learn who Saya is. The novel ends thirty years later in 1999, with Rei an overweight middle-aged man, divorced, remarried, a writer about films, as he sits down in a Tokyo subway car. It is the opening scene of the film, recapitulated some thirty years later. A young woman sits next to him. As Rei exits the train, he remembers and recognizes her with a deep pang of loss and grief. It is Saya—beautiful, ageless, and supremely powerful—and she is still hunting down the *oni*.

In the last analysis, Oshii and Kitakubo build parallel visions of Saya. We humans do not know everything, and the ways of technology only partly illuminate the dark. Saya remains unknown, standing between this world and that, on a threshold where we encounter ourselves lurking in darkness.³

Notes

1. Kenji Iwamoto, "The Aesthetics of Japanese Cinema," *Asian Film Connections*, <http://www.asianfilms.org/japan/iwamoto5.html> (accessed December 3, 2005); Setsu Shigematsu, "Dimensions of Desire: Sex, Fantasy, and Fetish in Japanese Comics," in *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad, and Sexy*, ed. John A. Lent (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press), 93–125.

2. Timothy Perper and Carmel Schrire, "The Nimrod Connection: Myth and Science in the

Hunting Model," in *The Chemical Senses and Nutrition*, ed. Morley Kare and Owen Maller (New York: Academic, 1977), 447–59; cited by Matt Cartmill, *A View to Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 19, 26.

3. Saya's story is continued in a sharply different direction in Tamaoki Benkyō's sexually explicit manga, *Blood the Last Vampire 2002*. But Saya remains mysterious and a figure dwelling in the half-lit, violent darkness of *oni*-infested street gangs of Yokohama. Tamaoki Benkyō, *Blood the Last Vampire 2002*, trans. Carl Gustav Horn (San Francisco: Viz Communications, 2002).

トレンド

Torendo

UAAAAA! Trashkultur! An Interview with MAK's Johannes Wieninger

CHRISTOPHER BOLTON

Vienna's Museum of Applied and Contemporary Arts (Museum für Angewandte Kunst, or MAK) is known for its eclectic collection and innovative shows. (Some of its exhibits are housed in a cavernous World War II-era flak gun tower that the museum annexed in the mid-1990s.) In fall 2005, MAK sponsored the first show by a major Viennese museum dedicated to manga. We spoke with Johannes Wieninger, the museum's curator of Far Eastern and Islamic art and the creator of the show.

CHRISTOPHER BOLTON: The exhibit has the eye- or ear-catching title *UAAAAA! MANGA*, and a provocative subtitle: *On the Aesthetics of a Trash Culture*. Can you tell us how you conceive trash culture?

JOHANNES WIENINGER: Indeed, people were confused by the subtitle, and manga fan clubs

protested it. But I understand *Trashkultur* in two senses:

First, trash as it is: you use something and discard it afterward. Many things in our everyday life are made for temporary use only and become useless after a short time. But they have a certain aesthetic in their design and content. Weekly manga are trashed after reading. Nobody keeps them. Even the big editors don't keep them. Not everything in our life is made for eternity!

Second, Quentin Tarantino impresses me when he says his work is *Trashkultur*. That means that the producer, creator, or artist may know that his or her work is only of temporary use. They don't create for eternity. And they know that we cannot consume so-called high culture all day long.

This level of everyday culture may have more influence on our lives, thinking, and behavior than any opera production or other art praised by critics. In that sense, we—the museums—must deal with this *Trashkultur* and not ignore it, to understand what is going on. And very often, after a certain period, subculture/trashculture changes into high culture, as we all know.

CB: MAK's collection ranges from applied arts and industrial design to contemporary installation art, with a large teaching collection of Asian art as well. Where does manga fit into this artistic universe?

JW: Although MAK has old and important collections from all the cultures of the world, we see our museum also as a kind of laboratory in which we can try new things. Sometimes we succeed, sometimes we fail. The manga exhibition was a low-budget show, but it worked. We are experimenting also in other fields like fashion, advertising, poster design, etc.

CB: Could you tell us a little bit about the process of conceiving and organizing the exhibit?

JW: During the past few years, several exhibitions on manga were offered to our museum,

but they all tried to show a historic evolution, with samples of work by well-known manga artists. But I believe if you are creating a show on something uncommon, you must use an uncommon language.

For a long time I was not sure how to manage this problem, but during a flight from Tokyo to Vienna I had the idea to work with blowups of the manga and to use only original comic books—not to translate, because the exhibition itself is a translation. Organizing it was not so difficult. After getting in contact with Kodansha and the manga artists, I knew that less would be more and decided to have only two titles featured in the show.

I chose *Derby Jockey* (1999–2005), a sports manga by Ishiki Tokihiko, and *Mars* (1996–2000), a shojo manga by Soryo Fuyumi. Soryo is a star. She is well known in Europe, and *Mars* has been translated into many Western languages. Ishiki is an up-and-coming figure on the Japanese manga scene.

I chose these works because they are contemporary, and both show very dynamic design. Soryo's style has had a big influence on Japanese graphic design; Ishiki has a fast, individual, and very realistic pencil style.

CB: The exhibition is in the "works on paper" room of the museum, a wonderful space that is the former reading room of the building's nineteenth-century library. That room displays text and graphic art in a series of glass frames suspended from tracks in the ceiling, and for this exhibit you have enlarged the manga pages ten times or more and placed them in these frames. The spectator walks down this track of images—in and around them—almost as if he or she were a character walking through a life-sized manga him- or herself. As you said earlier, an exhibit like this inevitably recontextualizes something from pop culture and Japanese culture as a part of Western museum culture, and one thing that struck me about the exhibit's design is the way that it foregrounds

that transformation. Even for those of us who read a lot of manga, it presented these works in a fresh way, as a different kind of art. But the exhibit also includes a long shelf of actual manga that ran almost the whole length of the exhibit room. I liked that juxtaposition of material objects with their artistic transformation. How did you decide on this display or arrangement?

JW: "Walking through a life-sized manga." Thanks for that wonderful interpretation! This was not my intention, but Ishiki too had that feeling. At first he was afraid blowing up the pages might not work, and he was very surprised to see this alienation of his work. The pages were 170 cm by 100 cm, and some of the characters were bigger than life size! But as I said: I wanted to deal with manga through a medium other than manga. I wanted to tell a story about manga and not just repeat a manga story. The table—it is 10 meters long with more than four hundred books and magazines—should give a broader view of the different types of Japanese comics. These were selected by Kodansha, by Ishiki himself, and also by manga fans in Japan.

CB: The exhibit is also organized as a kind of tutorial on manga's visual tropes for Western viewers. Different things like sound effects, motion effects, and so forth are explained and illustrated. Is this part of what manga has to teach Western audiences?

JW: No, it was meant to teach the Western audience the characteristics of manga. And my "tutorial" followed Siegfried Kracauer's theories about early black-and-white film, because I understand Japanese comics as a kind of black-and-white film. The relations between Western cartoons, animated films, manga, and anime are well known. Therefore I thought it would be interesting to analyze manga as a film medium.

CB: Are you planning any similar exhibits in the future?

JW: Yes. But the next show should be produced collaboratively with manga artists. We want to use video footage to show the world of the artists and the making of manga today. Our working title is *MANGA II: The Other Point of View*.