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Drawing National Specters: Makoto Aida’s *DOG* and *The Giant Member of Fuji versus King Gidorâ*

“I suddenly felt the necessity of expressing [an] original Japanese eroticism (the mental image I had was of a Yasunari Kawabata-like world in which a hunchbacked elderly person kept a small bird). … I had almost never before worked with such an attitude of considering the psychological effect on the viewer … Around the time I finished this painting (*DOG*, 1989), the ‘Tsutomu Miyazaki Incident’ was brought to light. That was when I realized for the first time that if you create things following your instinct in a straightforward way, they may synchronize with the times.

Makoto Aida on his *DOG* painted series
How does one approach the graphic work of an artist who is known to butcher young girls on paper? With considerable daring and technical agility, the contemporary Japanese artist Makoto Aida evokes such questions with his depictions of physically brutalized Japanese girls. At first glance, Aida’s imagery seems to align with the often violent and misogynistic themes that saturate certain genres of Japanese pop culture. Yet on closer inspection, Aida sheds light on a long, often ignored postwar history that connects sexuality, modes of consumption, and the young female body in contemporary Japan.

Aida not only addresses contemporary ways of looking that commodify the bodies of young girls, but also comments on the ways their bodies are consumed by men. These hypervisual figures become highly malleable narrative vessels that transcend the cultivation of desire and sexual arousal. In Japanese popular culture, where female protagonists abound, the body of the schoolgirl has assumed an unexpected eminence. Younger generations of Japan’s citizenry no longer adhere closely to traditional social roles, and the distinctions between adult and child, male and female have become blurred. In Aida’s work, the artist seems to project his ambivalent feelings about contemporary Japanese society as they reflect the nation’s conflicted past, into the figure of the shojo, or young girl.

In the works to be discussed here, Aida presents two different, distinctly troubled portraits of Japan as embodied in the figure of the young girl. The first is The Giant Member Fuji versus King Gidorâ.
Member Fuji versus King Gidorâ from 1993 [see Figure 1]. Aida’s large-scale homage to Hokusai’s famously illicit woodcut, or ukiyo-e, The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife,1 recast in the postwar dress of Godzilla. The second set of images, from the DOG series (1989–2003), depicts a number of serene, essentialized Japanese landscapes of snow and cherry blossoms in which grisly amputations and metal chains dominate the body of the girl, leashed and on her hands and knees [see Figures. 3,4,7,8]. This imagery grotesquely confronts the contradictions of Japan’s wartime experience as both predator and victim and its postwar status as the economic rival and political subordinate of the United States. Framed by these shifting cultural realities, Japan’s present-day manifestations of postwar anxiety find revitalized, albeit sexually violent expression in the mutilated bodies of these girls and the unstable constructions of female sexuality and identity that they evoke.

While Aida’s work can be understood primarily as critical satire, his aesthetic is ultimately shaped by a multitude of visual languages that rely heavily on misogynistic depictions of the female body. The artist, who has expressed a certain pleasure in creating and beholding the bodies of beautiful Japanese girls,3 does not claim that he is free of the contradictions implicit in the source material he so skillfully lampoons. This sets up an irresolvable tension in his work between exploitation and commentary.

Part One: Radiated Bodies—The Giant Member Fuji versus King Gidorâ

The Giant Member Fuji versus King Gidorâ (1993), a large-scale (310 by 410 centimeter), full-color graphic rendering on acetate, depicts the final moments of the “Giant Member Fuji,” whose orange “Science Patrol” uniform with star insignia identifies her as “Member Fuji,” or Akiko Fuji, the sole female member of the Science Patrol in the 1960s Japanese television series Ultraman [Figure 1]. Despite her colossal growth, presumably the result of exposure to radiation, she lies prone and helpless against the violent advances of the radiated King Gidorâ (or Ghidora), the giant three-headed dragon considered Godzilla’s greatest foe. As Godzilla’s surrogate in battle, Member Fuji fails tragically.

Lying prostrate, Member Fuji has demolished a number of city blocks in what appears to be a nondescript residential neighborhood on the outskirts of Tokyo. In this menacing cityscape, Aida invokes both a vision of inter-species lust as painted by the celebrated nineteenth-century Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai, and the emblematic Godzilla narrative, a symbol of Japan’s historic martial enmity toward the United States. The strange presence of these two monstrous bodies, sprawled over a naturally rendered and peaceful residential enclave, raises troubling questions about Japan’s identity. Any Japanese spectator of this encounter, which is played out in the guise of super-hero versus monster, must recognize in Member Fuji and Gidorâ a twisted, physically entangled representation of both personal and collective national history.

As Godzilla’s proxy, Fuji portrays the nation in the ubiquitous and ever-coveted body of a defenseless girl, the defeated embodiment of a once-proud Japan. Her antagonist, Gidorâ, assumes the role of the United States—colored by the anti-American sentiment of the controversial Godzilla film “Gojira vs. Kingu Gidorâ” (1991), from which Aida drew his inspiration. With the graphic and metaphorical removal of distance, Fuji’s fallen body ensures an imbricated relation of subject and space, creating what the contemporary scholar Mark Selitzer describes as the utter collapse of “the feeling of distinction between subject and surroundings … [that most fundamentally] dissolves identities into place, leaving, ultimately, only the spectral efflorescence that once had been a body.”4 This confluence of identities conveys a sense of the invasion of American influence upon the culture of Japan, as Gidorâ, a troubling and eviscerating presence, overwhelms and enters Fuji, internally and externally entangled with this female body. Here, the conception of a pure and cohesive Japanese nationalism succumbs to more powerful external forces; a ghostly vessel is all that remains. Fuji is the relic of a wounded nationalism, a mere shell of what was once a proud credo.

Transgressing Social Conventions through Sex

Aida calls into play a multitude of references in this bizarre cityscape, evoking ukiyo-e images of the past. With its formal similarities of calligraphic line, foreshortened space, and dynamic composition, Fuji versus Gidorâ is Aida’s homage to Hokusai’s famous shunga (erotic) woodblock print, Kinoe no Komatsu, ca. 1814, which depicts a female abalone diver receiving cunnilingus from a large octopus while she kisses a smaller one [Figure 2].5 In referencing Hokusai’s dream of surreal inter-species love, Aida emphasizes the often scandalous subject matter that links historical ukiyo-e and modern manga. He underlined this resemblance in an interview from 1999, noting that while the “indecent tastes of the people” are often represented in popular forms such as manga, they are inevitably disregarded as art, even though “they are the most honest and original forms of visual expression for Japanese people.”6

The penetrative tentacle as positioned by Hokusai nearly two centuries earlier is reprised in Fuji versus Gidorâ, reflecting a subgenre within contemporary erotic anime and manga that was originally created to depict sexual intercourse while circumventing laws forbidding the representation of pubic hair and genitalia. This longstanding prohibition ended in 1993, but not before manga artists such as Toshio Maeda pioneered the “tentacle rape” genre in the early 1980s in his series...
Urotsukidoji, which featured beautiful young women being probed and violated by the tentacles, elongated tongues, and other miscellaneous extensions of men and non-human creatures alike. In an interview in 2006, Maeda explains how he wanted to draw unorthodox sex scenes to get around the legal proscription of the decency laws: “So I just created a creature. [His tentacle] is not a [penis] as a pretext. I could say, as an excuse, this is not a [penis], this is just a part of the creature. You know, the creatures, they don’t have a gender. A creature is a creature. So it is not obscene—not illegal.” The sexual malice in Maeda’s work and in Fuji versus Gidorâ, moreover, is an integral part of the larger visual trope of pornographic schoolgirl anime, very common in Japan.

As Sharon Kinsella writes, “Schoolgirl characters in pornographic Lolita-complex animation produced in the first half of the 1990s, such as Twin Angels, Urotsukidoji and La Blue Girl, are subject to intimidation, trickery, bondage, torture and rape by tentaculard penises, gigantic robot pistons and rape machines, and devilish old men.” The transgressive acts against the body of the shojo (literally, “young girl” in Japanese), which are central to Aida’s imagery, are precisely what the consumers seem to be buying. Unlike most of Aida’s works, Fuji versus Gidorâ fully displays a male-coded aggressor. While many of Aida’s shojo works negotiate similar themes, only in Fuji versus Gidorâ is the male figure actually shown carrying out vicious acts. With the remaining images, as in the DOG series, we are often left to imagine a male antagonist of violent intent.

The transgressive sex and aggression that resonates with Fuji versus Gidorâ and DOG, and which exists in many popular forms, is consumed within a sort of boundless, socio-psychic hinterland, or what the anthropologist Anne Allison describes as a “space where Japanese move from one place to another, temporarily disconnected and released from the contexts and relations that bind them so tightly everywhere else.” In Japanese society, one’s identity and behavior is dictated by one’s particular social group and status; comic books offer a temporary reprieve from these classifications, a space where “one is not bound by their rules and no longer identified by their frames. ‘He’ becomes no one, a social anonymity disengaged from his placements within the spheres and relationships that socially matter.” This social disengagement provides a certain fleeting liberation from the pressures of postmodern Japan, which have generated an abundance of sexually violent and explicit imagery. In light of the extreme sexual violence imagined in manga, anime, and other forms of mass media and mass entertainment, Aida’s imagery, even as it involves the sexual violation of Fuji, comes across as positively milquetoast.

The rigid spheres of work, family and school—realms that have become encoded by social domination over the individual—exert, as Allison puts it, “a dominance in which unremitting submission is demanded.” In these well-defined social spaces, both women and men are often beaten down and into submission. A temporary escape from the sense of powerlessness in daily life is found on the pages of manga and other forms of popular culture.

This separation of power relations is often expressed in gendered roles of dominance and submission. Here, women are targeted by violence, even in comics aimed at a female audience. Women become the scapegoats—the Lacanian ‘pound of flesh.’ They are the ones who get pummeled and blamed for institutional practices that typically discriminate against them,” Allison writes. Arguably, however, the brutality Aida depicts has less to do with the causal relation of victim turned phantasmagoric aggressor, as often enacted on the pages of pornographic manga. A society-beaten salary-man may feel compelled to consume violent and misogynistic depictions of women and sex, but Aida does not appear to be sublimating his rage onto these imagined bodies. His use of a graphic, two-dimensional aesthetic, with its established role in affording transgressive license, creates an inviting home for naked radiated girls, serpentine monsters, and unpredictable violence. But Aida’s narrative is not a facile, easily consumed fantasy.
On the contrary, he calls upon a multitude of pervasive visual idioms to discuss, and perhaps to inflame, matters of the past and present.

The figure of "woman" in erotic manga and by extension in Fuji versus Gidorā, becomes what Anne Allison calls a "polyvalent symbol." This stands both metonymically, for the roles women traditionally assume—those of mothers and wives who manage families in homes in which the male's role has become increasingly irrelevant—and metaphorically, for external social pressures. These pressures might include the rigorous work ethic predicated on social and financial expectations, the merciless Japanese entrance exams, and the social interrelatedness demanded from so-called real life. "What is done to this 'woman' is expressed," Allison writes, "more than by any other gesture in erotic comics, by 'sex,' constructed variously but dominantly by violence." This polyvalence resurfaces in Fuji versus Gidorā as a specter of Japan's Fujo versus Gidorā. Shortly after the film's release, an American cable news channel aired a story about the film's alleged anti-American sentiments over trade disputes led by President Ronald Reagan and the Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone.

The depiction of Fuji appears to allude to the collapse of Japan's imperial nationhood at the end of the war, while the ravaged cityscape behind her, seen from above, recalls the incendiary bombings of Tokyo that razed 65 percent of all residences in the city between 1941 and 1945. The fallen Member Fuji, her body naked and ravaged, conveys neither a pleasurable eroticism nor a passive victimization, but rather a final and failed resistance to death amid social disintegration. Her expression, like that of the girls in DOG, suggests a certain resignation, even in the face of horrific events, apparently implying a criticism of Aida's countrymen, whom he has described as acquiescent and oblivious.

For the most part, Aida wipes away the register of fear, pain, and humiliation in his depictions of young girls. Fuji versus Gidorā is a marginal exception, in which, even as Fuji finds herself immobilized, eviscerated, and sexually violated by Gidorā, she projects little more than a serene paralysis, as a single tear slowly rolls down her cheek. Themes of physical and sexual dominance in the pages of mainstream pornography often exploit expressions of fear to titilating effect, but Aida's repertoire of girls betray little awareness of their ravaged physical state. In the frozen veneer of Fuji's expression, a major site of sexual excitement is removed. Her face shows no sign of the violence her body must endure, and her eyes do not reveal a sense of horror. Fuji projects a sense of a history and society that has lost its moorings, not a site for misogynistic sexual arousal. On Fuji's beautiful and stony face, a feeling of loss seems locked behind her eyes.

Part Two: Graphic Synchronicity, the Wounded Nationalism of DOG

DOG began as an ongoing series in 1989. The first work of the series was Aida's first work in graduate school, simply titled DOG (Figure 3). Three additional nihonga-influenced paintings belong to the series: DOG (Moon) from 1996, DOG (snow), and DOG (flower), 2003 (see Figures 4,7,8). In all four images, the delicate rendering of subtle mineral pigment and acrylic on Japanese paper work in stark contrast to the subject of the naked female amputees, collared and leashed. The gangrenous wounds displayed against the archetypical nihonga motifs of moon, snow, and flower, with a focus on a beautiful girl as in bijin-ga (images of beautiful women), dominate Aida's provocative take on an essentialized, classical Japanese eroticism. He writes:

I suddenly felt the necessity of expressing [an] original Japanese eroticism (the mental image I had was of a Yasunari Kawabata-like world in which a hunchbacked elderly person kept a small bird). ... I had
Figure 3. Makoto Aida / DOG / 1989 / Panel, Japanese paper, acrylic, Japanese mineral pigment, 100 x 75cm / Courtesy of Mizuma Art Gallery

Figure 4. Makoto Aida / DOG (Moon) / 1996 / Panel, Japanese paper, acrylic, Japanese mineral pigment, 100 x 90cm / Courtesy of Mizuma Art Gallery
almost never before worked with such an attitude of considering the psychological effect on the viewer... by shifting the subject matter of my body of work from just ‘I’ to ‘we’ on various levels. ... Around the time I finished this painting [DOG, 1989], the Tsutomu Miyazaki incident was brought to light. That was when I realized for the first time that if you create things following your instinct in a straightforward way, they may synchronize with the times.33

The Tsutomu Miyazaki incident involved the abduction, murder, sexual abuse, and mutilation of four girls of pre-school age between August 1988 and July 1989, by a twenty-six-year-old printer’s assistant, Tsutomu Miyazaki.34 When the news media arrived at Miyazaki’s home after his arrest, his bedroom was found and adulthood devoid of personal relations... His pathological behavior was attributed to the social isolation of a childhood and youth, and girls’ culture.35 His pathological behavior was attributed to the social isolation of a childhood and adulthood devoid of personal relationships, in the constant company of otakus, a variety of soft porn manga, animation videos, a variety of soft porn manga, and a small collection of academic analyses of contemporary youth and girls’ culture.36 His pathologic behavior was attributed to the social isolation of a childhood and adulthood devoid of personal relationships, in the constant company of otakus, a variety of soft porn manga, and a small collection of academic analyses of contemporary youth and girls’ culture.37 His pathologic behavior was attributed to the social isolation of a childhood and adulthood devoid of personal relationships, in the constant company of otakus, a variety of soft porn manga, and a small collection of academic analyses of contemporary youth and girls’ culture.38 His pathologic behavior was attributed to the social isolation of a childhood and adulthood devoid of personal relationships, in the constant company of otakus, a variety of soft porn manga, and a small collection of academic analyses of contemporary youth and girls’ culture.39 His pathologic behavior was attributed to the social isolation of a childhood and adulthood devoid of personal relationships, in the constant company of otakus, a variety of soft porn manga, and a small collection of academic analyses of contemporary youth and girls’ culture.40

It is interesting that Aida isolates these horrific murders as the moment when he first acknowledged the potential for shock and antipathy in his aesthetic. Yet Aida’s mindful consideration of collective Japan, as he describes his shift of perspective from “I” to “we,” also suggests a particular detachment that extends to his own unfixed position within Japanese culture,41 and indicates that he sees himself as a vessel through which historical and cultural trends are expressed.42 Aida, like Miyazaki, identifies with the popularized or platitudinal Japanese female experience. In a number of his photographic “self-portraits,” Aida affects the dress and comportment of clumsily sexualized Japanese girls [Figure 5].43 In an early work from 1989 titled Self-Portrait, A Girl of Sea Breezes, made when he was just 23 years old, and at precisely the period in which the first DOG painting was conceived and the Miyazaki murders first came to light, he stages snapshots of himself as a high-school girl awkwardly posing in various states of undress, tucking his penis behind his legs to mimic the female pubis,44 These undercurrents of self-reflexivity are also evident in other works.45 When the manga and anime interests of the child-killer Miyazaki were made public, he was immediately labeled as otaku in the most pejorative sense of the word, a socially isolated individual immersed in the fantasy realms of comic books.46 Whether self-identified or not as otaku, Aida, with his willingness to identify with schoolgirls and child-killers alike, has something in common with the pathos of the life of the otaku.

A National Homebody

DOG (1989) was intended to problematize what Aida calls “the Japanese national mentality of preserving a domestic sense of beauty or values in this era of globalization.” His use of nihonga motifs plays a significant role in this destabilizing vision. During the Meiji era, as Japan emerged from an era of sustained isolation into a...
world dominated by Europe, the call to idealize a “quintessentially” Japanese art form began to crystallize [Figure 6]. The desire for political and cultural distinction and a “pure” Japanese essentialism exemplified in the nihonga tradition arose largely in reaction to the influence of Westernized masculinity from abroad. Nihonga paintings focus almost exclusively on feminized elements: male figures are eliminated from the visual field, ceding the spotlight to beautiful women (bijin) dusted with snowflakes or delicately pink cherry blossoms. At the heart of nihonga are depictions of kacho fugetsu, literally, “flowers, birds, wind, and moon,” which characterize the “sublime and subtle view of nature for which much of traditional Japanese art is so revered.” These motifs become the settings for DOG (flower), (snow), and (moon), which serve as Aida’s visual critique of a country crippled by its nationalistic policies and practices [Figure 7].

Aida’s use of the traditional nihonga elements and rhetoric informs the narrative more than a mere backdrop. His depiction of the young girls as a dog, the homebound, domesticated animal par excellence, functions as a sort of subverted visual hyperbole, a biting critique of Japan’s frustrated, ineffectual nationhood. The piteous physical state of the female figure invokes a society crippled by its attachment to an outmoded notion of national essentialism, and perhaps what the artist sees as the elusive sense of “Japanese-ness,” which led to Japan’s defeat in World War II and which remains a national burden.

It also serves as a reflection on how nationalism has come to dominate and socially conscript female bodies. Women in imperial Japan were expected primarily to bear children, incubating and replicating citizens for the nation. In contemporary Japan, while traditional social roles still remain current to some extent, women in popular representation not only stand metonymically for the roles of mothers, daughters and wives, but have come to be seen as the embodiment of a crippling social pressure that marginalizes their position in society. Japanese female subjectivity has been subjected to a continued pattern of objectification, a bound state, limited to a defined social space.

The young girls’ garishly severed limbs, putrid decay seeping through hastily bandaged joints, add to the disruptive impact of the images. Nevertheless, in each setting, the young girl is depicted “impassively enjoying traditionalized elements of the Japanese seasons—snowfall, cherry blossoms and moonlight.” DOG (flower) (2003) presents dehumanized beauty in soft, peachy tones. Seated beneath the fallen petals of a cherry tree in bloom in what is probably early April, the dog/girl begs for a treat, having lost interest in the metal dish of kibble sitting before her. In DOG (moon) from 1996, the young girl hovers in the foreground, awash in a cobalt night sky framed by the cratered surface of the moon. In a seated position, she gazes wistfully upward. With DOG (snow), 1998, the young girl moves on all fours, her stumped limbs faintly marking the soft snowfall. On
this gray and wintry day, her eyes appear unexpectedly joyful, perhaps in response to the small snowman that faces her, and upon which she has just urinated.

The most disquieting visual element within each sadistic mise en scène is the young girl’s face—ostensibly contented. This is particularly acute in *DOG* (1989). The young girl’s placid obedience, directed upward and off the page, seems contradictory given the presence of the unseen figure controlling the leash, who is cropped from the scene. The girl’s unprotesting compliance is belied by Aida’s composition, which implicates the dominant master-figure as responsible for amputating her limbs and ensuring her utter containment. And again, as in *Fuji versus Gidorâ*, this impassive gaze may signal a frozen acceptance of her condition—even as it is defined by physical horror and ruin. The contentment written onto the faces of the *DOG* girls, particularly in *DOG* (snow), implies a critique of what Aida views as a passive and unthinking Japanese citizenry, given his description of his generation and younger as blithely ignorant “pets living in small, well air-conditioned condomini-ums [Figure 8].”

In *DOG* (1989), the positioning of the young girl is nearly identical to that in *DOG* (flower), yet the environment seems even more desperate. Rendered in sallow beige, the dog/girl sits on bare soil marked by the occasional seedling, panting intently for something more after consuming a whole mackerel, its spiny backbone curved inside her metal dog dish. In every *DOG* scene, the viewer cannot help but feel the uncomfortable tension between the submissive figure pictured and the holder of the leash. “Our” viewpoint forces a direct visual confrontation with the young girl, but in each picture, the figure controlling and tightening the leash is clearly indicated, but never revealed. We do not know whether the girls in *DOG* are the same girl, or one of many.

While Aida’s intention in depicting the young girl in such an abject state is ambiguous, her ruined arms and legs serve as a reminder of the hordes of ignominious and wounded imperial Japanese soldiers returning home in defeat after the Pacific War. This scenario brings to mind the “social” of the wound, as theorized by Mark Seltzer, who characterizes “murder,” and more generally the mutilated body, as the point “where bodies and history cross.”

The wrapped, amputated limbs depicted in the *DOG* series call to mind images of all those wounded in battle, casualties of war, regardless of geographical location. While Seltzer’s exploration of wound culture focuses on nineteenth century and contemporary examples from the United States, the exhibition of atrocities, the torn body, and history find resonance in Aida’s graphic treatments.

**Conclusion**

With *DOG* and *The Giant Member Fuji versus King Gidorâ*, Aida creates a world in which the symbolic polyvalence of the pubescent female in graphic form transcends its referent—the social role of real girls and women. Inscribed with contemporary social anxieties, these bodies represent a longing for sexual gratification subsumed into a grander desire that embraces the likelihood of male consumption and an often problematic national identity. Aida’s work lays bare the achings of postwar history and the appetites of male desire, as well as the artist’s unstable position within a world he satirizes and from which he seems unsettlingly detached. Moving easily through the cultural trends and ideas of his homeland, Aida cloaks himself in the experience of young females in order to call attention to the violence young girls’ bodies are subjected to in art, the mass media, and, occasionally, in the horrors of real life. His shojo bodies stand for the men who create, desire, and consume them. The girls have come to represent men, and to a larger extent, Japanese nationhood.

Figure 8. Makoto Aida / *DOG* (Snow) / 1996 / Panel, Japanese paper, acrylic, Japanese mineral pigment / 73 x 100cm / Courtesy of Mizuma Art Gallery
Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), painter and printmaker of the Edo period (Tokugawa period, Tokugawa-jidai, spanning from 1603 to 1868), is best known as the author of the woodblock print series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji (c. 1831), which includes the iconic image The Great Wave off Kanagawa.

Makoto Aida, Lonely Planet. (Tokyo: DAN-bo, 1999), 7-9. Ukiyo-e, “Pictures of the floating world,” is a genre of Japanese woodblock prints and paintings primarily produced during the Edo period, featuring motifs of landscapes, tales from history, the theater, the pleasure quarters, and the associated demimonde.

Makoto Aida in e-mail interview with the author, facilitated by the Mizuma Art Gallery, September 2007.


Aida, Lonely Planet.

Aida, Lonely Planet.

While both Hokusai and Maeda use tentacles to represent sex, their intentions are distinctly different. Hokusai renders a sexual fantasy without limits, in which the woman is making love to and receiving sexual gratification from two octopi, whereas in his manga, Maeda is enacting a scene of rape. The intent of much “tentacle rape” imagery, as it aims to avoid violating the decency laws of the day, is to depict violent sexual penetration.

Toshio Maeda. “Manga Interview Series: Toshio Maeda by Captain Japan,” TokyoDV, January 8, 2006, http://tokyodv.com/videolog/sake-drenched-postcards-reports-from-captain-japan/manga-artist-interview-series-toshio-maeda/ (accessed November 9, 2007); “By proscribing genital mimesis, they [Japanese obscenity laws] allow (as not legally obscene or even sexual) the ‘phantasmic’ reproduction of the body in practically any other form. … Thus, by restricting one bodily sight/site, the state permits and stimulates the mass production of a host of others. Restrictive laws are actually a boost to the big business of sexual fantasy-making in Japan, which, in the format of ‘fantasy,’ can be marketed to children as well as adults.”

Lolita Complex, elided as “Lolicon,” refers to the attraction of adult men to girls below the age of consent. In manga and anime, childlike female characters are depicted in an erotic manner. The phrase of course, is a reference to Vladimir Nabokov’s novel Lolita, in which a much older man, Humbert Humbert, becomes sexually obsessed with a twelve-year-old girl, Dolores Haze.


One exception is Mutant Hanako. Aida’s only standard manga to date, in which a number of violent rape scenes (of girls by men) unfold.

Allison, 72.

Allison, 72.

Allison, 72.

The one exception is Mutant Hanako. These absurdly violent rape scenes are evocative of erotic and pornographic manga.

Allison, 78.

Allison, 78.

Allison, 78.

Allison, 78.

Allison, 78.

Allison, 78.

Allison, 78.

These beatings are also not merely comic book fantasy. Sexual harassment is pronounced in Japan; physical violence against mothers and wives by frustrated sons and husbands is also no rarity.” Allison, 78.

Allison, 78.

Allison, 78.

Allison, 78.

Allison, 78.


Makoto Aida, taken from an interview with the artist via e-mail facilitated by the Mizuma Art Gallery, September 2007, this “acquiescence” was initially suggested by Sharon Kinsella in e-mail correspondence, February 2008.

This is particularly evident and true of the girls in Harakiri Schoolgirls, Blender, The Edible Artificial Girls, Mimi-chan, and the DOG series.


30 Nihon = Japan, ga = picture. The term was coined in the Meiji era, when Japan was emerging from its long period of isolation and finding its way in a world dominated by European aesthetics. It was used to distinguish the unique subject matter and history of Japanese painting.

31 Bijin-ga (bijin = beautiful woman, ga = pictures) is the general term for pictures of beautiful women in Japanese art, especially in woodblock printing of the ukiyo-e genre, which predates photography. The term can also be applied to modern media, provided that the images conform to a somewhat classic representation of a woman, usually depicted wearing a kimono, often surrounded by nihonga elements of nature.


33 Aida, Monument for Nothing, 206.

34 Charles Whipple, “The Silencing of Lambs,” in Tokyo Journal, July 1993; Sharon Kinsella, “Japanese Subculture in the 1990s: Otaku and the Amateur Manga Movement,” in Journal of Japanese Studies, 24, no. 2 (Summer, 1998): 289–316. Miyazaki delivered the remains of one of his victims to her family using the pseudonym Yuko Imada (a homonym for the phrase, “Now I am telling you”), reportedly the name of a favorite female comic book or anime character. When Miyazaki was finally apprehended, his apartment was found to contain nearly 6,000 videos, including “splatter” and horror films. “He was the manifestation of the manga and animation industries’ worst nightmare: a fan incapable of distinguishing between fantasy and reality,” Frederik Schodt, “Modern Manga at the End of the Millennium,” Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga, (Stone Bridge Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1996).


37 This detachment resurfaces in Aida’s description of “Pavement of Yukiko Okada,” 1992. He was inspired in part, to paint this piece after witnessing firsthand the suicide of Japanese pop idol Yukiko Okada on April 8, 1986. “This work was a result,” he writes, “of my frustration after throwing myself into Tokyo’s cool art world. If I remember correctly, it was during an hour around the noon of the hottest day of that year. I set up an easel on the crossing of Yotsuya Sanchome in Tokyo, and started to sketch the shadows of the trees reflected on the roadside where I saw Yukiko Okada’s brain scattered like tofu six years ago. I was probably a bit affected by sunstroke. This is how the work was born. Without thinking about exhibiting the work in public at all, the most hopeless work was thus made with the purest attitude. I just can’t dislike myself because I occasionally do things like that,” Aida, Lonely Planet, 22.

38 The possibility of Aida’s unfixed social positionality was initially suggested by Sharon Kinsella, from e-mail correspondence of Dr. Kinsella with the author, February 2008.

39 Kinsella, e-mail correspondence.


41 Aida also writes that these Sea Breeze images were created before the photographs of Yasumasa Morimura, famous for his re-visionist self-portraits of iconic paintings, in which he often appears in drag, Makoto Aida, Lonely Planet, 60–61.

42 Works such as the manga Mutant Hanako and the painted series, The Edible Artificial Girls, Mimi-chan. In Mutant Hanako, Aida provides the voice of the fallen kamikaze hero Junichi for a Ken Burns-esque recording and in Mimi-chan positions himself as the proprietor of a restaurant that specializes in serving up preparations of schoolgirl.
Otaku, typically young Japanese males, submerge themselves in worlds of manga, anime and video games. Uncomfortable in social interactions, otaku (singular or plural) tend to fanatically collect the various graphic mediums they relate to. Generally discriminated against by mainstream society, their social enclave of choice is the Akihabara district of Tokyo, or “Electronics Town” as it is also known, where a staggering volume of discount consumer electronics are available for purchase.

Makoto Aida, *Monument for Nothing*.
Makoto Aida, taken from an interview with the artist via e-mail facilitated by the Mizuma Art Gallery, September 2007. This “acquiescence” was initially suggested by Sharon Kinsella in e-mail correspondence with the author, February 2008.
The Tokyo-based curator Roger McDonald of Arts Initiative Tokyo, first suggested this visual association to the author on September 26, 2007.