

Yokote Masuda Manga Museum: First Museum in Japan Devoted to Original Manga Illustrations

The Yokote Masuda Manga Museum in Akita Prefecture has a collection of manga *genga* (original illustrations) drawn by nearly 100 manga artists on permanent display where visitors can view them up close. This article introduces this special museum, the first in Japan to feature a manga *genga* theme. (Text: MOROHASHI Kumiko)



Photo: SHIZAWA Yoji

The Yokote Masuda Manga Museum today. The museum renovated and reopened in 2019 following renovation.



Photo: SHIZAWA Yoji

Example of an exhibit. The exhibit is arranged with a series of *genga* in separate cabinet drawers so that visitors can pull them out one by one, starting at the top, to view one episode from the manga.



Photo: SHIZAWA Yoji

Interior of the Yokote Masuda Manga Museum. Admission to permanent exhibitions is free, visitors can relaxingly enjoy the exhibition.

Akita Prefecture is situated along the Sea of Japan in Japan's Tohoku region. Yokote, a city famous for *kamakura*¹ snow domes in winter, is located in the southeast of the prefecture. In 2005, seven surrounding towns and villages, including the town of Masudamachi, were merged into Yokote City. The Yokote Masuda Manga Museum, located in Yokote City, opened in 1995 as part of a project commemorating the 100th anniversary of Masudamachi's establishment, before the merger. OOHINATA Reina, who oversees public relations at the museum, looks back at how the museum came to be established.

“At the beginning, there was a plan to establish a YAGUCHI Takao Memorial Hall to recognize the achievements of YAGUCHI Takao,² a manga artist from Masudamachi. YAGUCHI's reaction was, ‘The manga that influenced me are works of pure art. I would love to convey that with exhibits of original *genga* artwork created by first-rate manga artists. His suggestion led to the establishment of this current museum featuring a theme of manga *genga* – the original illustrations.”

After its establishment, the museum attracted notice for its efforts to collect, preserve, and exhibit manga *genga* and was recognized as a pioneer on the national level. Later, after completing renovations to further enhance storage and exhibition functions for its *genga* collection, the museum reopened in 2019.

“Manga *genga* are the original drafts that have been drawn as *hanshita*³ artwork layout pages to be used in printing the manga in magazines, book form, and so on. Originally, not much value was placed on the *genga* themselves, actually. Individual manga artists would carefully store their own as pieces of art they had put their heart and soul into creating. In recent years, manga has come to be highly regarded throughout the world, yet here in Japan, there still has not been a particular value assigned to original *genga* illustrations. The situation surrounding them has many risks: they may get discarded or scattered to various locations,

even overseas, and some will ultimately be lost.”

OOHINATA warns of the crisis, saying that the loss of the original drawings, which are the foundation of Japanese manga culture, would essentially lead to the loss of Japanese culture itself.

“The museum has put a lot of effort into collecting and preserving *genga* since it first opened in 1995. We currently have a collection of over 480,000 *genga*, and we still receive many requests for *genga* to be added to our collections. That led us to establish the Manga Genga Archive Center under a commission from the Agency for Cultural Affairs, providing the only consultation service regarding the collection and storage of manga *genga* in Japan. Besides offering consultation about storing *genga*, we also engage in projects concerning temporary *genga* storage in cooperation with other similar facilities and institutions.”

OOHINATA says, “While visitors to the museum from overseas are still relatively limited in number, sometimes fans of certain artists or works of manga will make the trip here, and we can see how impressed they are by the magnificence of the *genga*.”

“*Genga* have such impact and beauty in ways that just cannot be matched by the printed forms one ordinarily sees in books and other publications, not

limited to the color and monochrome versions. I think visitors from overseas will experience the unique ways *genga* convey the creativity and passion the artists put into the work. When lovers of manga visit Japan, I hope they will make the trip here to the museum for the opportunity to view *genga* up close. They will appreciate the distinctive frame layouts, as well as the delicate and beauty of the artwork with the way it expresses emotions and the feel of the scenes so realistically.”



Visitors can also observe archival work in progress, including the documentation of detailed information contained only in *genga* and digitization of the artwork.



The museum's library contains about 25,000 volumes of manga that visitors are free to browse. Exhibits are also displayed here, featuring *genga* from works of current interest, works by manga artists from outside Japan, and more.



Exhibits in the Manga Culture Exhibition Room feature arrangements inspired by manga frame layouts. A smartphone-based multilingual audio guide (in Japanese, English, and Chinese) is partially available in places.

1. Snow domes about 3 m in height called *kamakura* are created for an event held every February in Yokote City to honor Suijin, the god of water. About 60 *kamakura* are made in the city, offered as prayers for family safety, business success, abundant crops, and so on.
2. Japanese manga artist and essayist. His work featured themes depicting life in nature, with his representative works *Fisherman Sanpei (Tsurikichi Sanpei)* and *The Mysterious Wonder Snake Bachihibi (Maboroshi no Kaija Bachihibi)* sparking interest in fishing and the *tsuchinoko*, a mythical, snake-like creature.
3. Completed Draft artwork for use in platemaking, a pre-press stage in the printing process.