

BEETLES, CATS, CLOUDS

THE MANGA OF TSURITA KUNIKO, YAMADA MURASAKI, AND KONDOH AKINO

SEPTEMBER 10 – JANUARY 24

In Japan, comics for women readers are often associated with the starry eyes and romantic melodramas of shōjo manga (girls' comics). As Japanese popular culture has gained global prominence, shōjo aesthetics have reshaped ideas of beauty and femininity around the world. However, not all manga by women or for women fit that mold. *Beetles, Cats, Clouds* offers a window into this alternative history of Japanese comics since the 1960s, featuring three women artists—Tsurita Kuniko (1947–85), Yamada Murasaki (1948–2009), and Kondoh Akino (b. 1980)—who defied reigning gender conventions in manga and society.

While active in a variety of venues and media, Tsurita, Yamada, and Kondoh are best known for their comics in alternative manga periodicals, particularly *Garo*, *COM*, and *Ax*. Emerging in the 1960s as part of Japan's vibrant counterculture, alternative manga positioned itself in opposition to the commercial and artistic strictures of the mainstream comics industry, providing platforms for young artists to respond to a rapidly changing world through experimental visual and narrative styles, autobiographical fiction, and anti-establishment themes.

Initially, alternative manga was hampered by the same male-dominated hierarchies that governed the broader comics industry. Over time, however, women artists and editors reformed its magazines into spaces where contributors could explore matters important to them personally—gender norms, sexual freedom, patriarchy at home and in the workplace, the trials of marriage and motherhood, or elder care, for example—in a language that was their own. Tsurita, Yamada, and Kondoh were at the forefront of this gradual revolution in their respective eras.

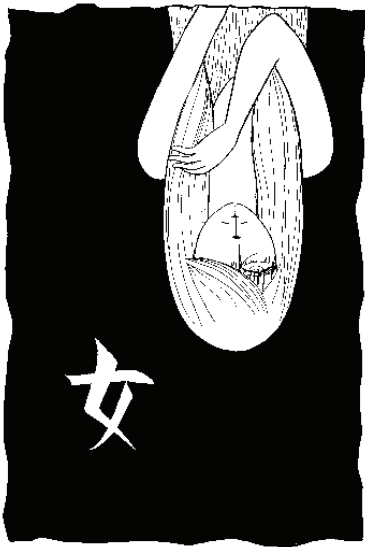
In recent years, large manga exhibitions have been hosted by major museums in the U.S. and Europe, most notably the British Museum, the Centre Pompidou, and the De Young Museum in San Francisco. Still, opportunities to view the original artwork of non-mainstream artists remain rare. This exhibition includes manga drawings (*genga*), sketchbooks, illustrations, concept art, animated shorts, and printed books and magazines—most never displayed publicly before, even in Japan.

Curated by historian, editor, and translator Ryan Holmberg in collaboration with 80WSE.
Produced by Jon Huron.

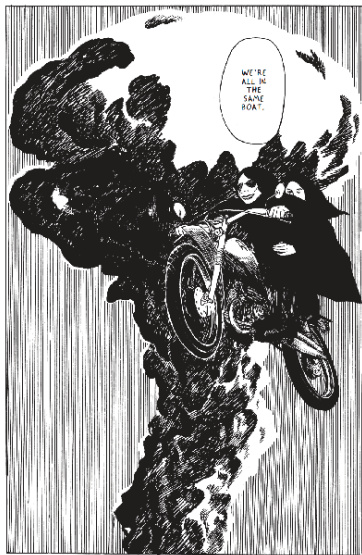
Erika Airikh and Ariel He, Curatorial Assistants.

Tsurita Kuniko (1947–1985) is considered alternative manga's first woman star. Born in Takasago (near Himeji) to a fishing family, Tsurita was an avid reader of shōnen and shōjo manga in her youth. In the mid-1960s, she moved to Tokyo to pursue her artistic dreams as a writer and cartoonist. She succeeded in publishing a few prose stories and comics in commercial magazines and for kashihon (rental book) publishers, but found her true voice within the pages of *Garo*, where she debuted in 1965. Founded in 1964 by the manga artist Shirato Sanpei, *Garo* was celebrated for its openness to avant-garde experimentation and leftist politics. However, Tsurita was the magazine's only regular woman contributor until the late 1970s.

At first, Tsurita explored bohemian youth culture, patriarchy, and gender fluidity in her often highly conceptual work, influenced by Japanese and European literature, art cinema, and existential philosophy. In the 1970s, her work took a dark and oneiric turn, more strongly after she was diagnosed with lupus in 1973, leading her to draw many haunting comics confronting illness and mortality. Despite frequent hospitalization, Tsurita continued to draw bravely until her death in 1985, at the age of thirty-seven. Pages from her work "My Wife Is an Acrobat" were included in the acclaimed comics survey at the Centre Pompidou in 2024. The present show is the first time a range of her original comics artwork and sketchbooks have been displayed publicly. A collection of her work is available in English as *The Sky is Blue With a Single Cloud* (Drawn & Quarterly, 2020).



Tsurita Kuniko
Woman
Garo
November 1966



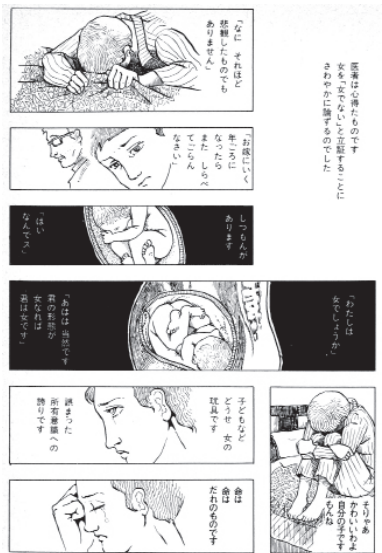
Tsurita Kuniko
Max
Garo
January 1975



Tsurita Kuniko
Yuko's Days
Garo
October 1974

Yamada Murasaki (1948–2009) was born in Setagaya, Tokyo, amidst postwar poverty and raised mainly by her grandparents. While originally aspiring to become a poet, Yamada found success as a cartoonist with the magazine *COM*, manga doyen Tezuka Osamu’s less masculine answer to *Garō*, debuting there in 1969. Her earliest comics depicted the struggles of growing up as a young woman in a conservative household with compromised family dynamics, articulated with a unique sensitivity to visual and verbal form. She paused her career in 1973 after marrying and having children, but returned a few years later when domestic troubles forced her to financially support herself and her two daughters.

In the 1980s, Yamada gained attention as the “housewife cartoonist” for her unapologetic portrayals of marriage and motherhood in both alternative and mainstream magazines, including *Garō*, *Comic Baku*, and *Morning*. In 1989, she ran for local public office in Tokyo on an environmentalist and feminist platform. She was also an essayist on topics ranging from sexism and sexuality to cooking and cats. Her best-known manga include *Sassy Cats* (1979–80), *Talk To My Back* (*Shinkirari*, 1981–84), and *A Blue Flame* (*Yurariusuiro*, 1983–84), the last adapted into the softcore film *Bed-In* (1986). These manga are available in English from Drawn & Quarterly and have appeared in other languages as well.



Yamada Murasaki
I Have a Question
COM
August 1970



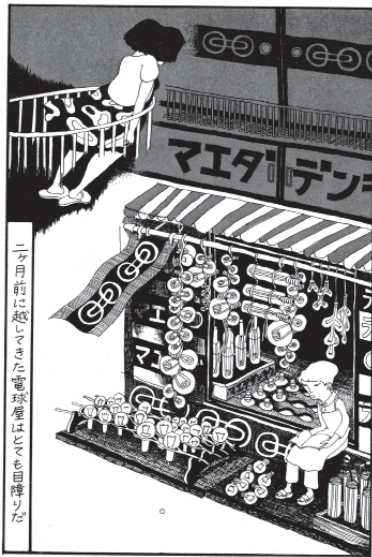
Yamada Murasaki
Talk To My Back
Garō
1981-84



Yamada Murasaki
Fairytale of Old
Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha
1997

Kondoh Akino (b. 1980) grew up in the Tokyo suburbs of Chiba Prefecture and attended Tama Art University. In 2000, she received an award for her story “Kobayashi Kayoko” in *Ax*, an alternative manga magazine founded in 1998 by former editors of *Garō*. Melding the refined minimalism of traditional Japanese art with the imaginative flights of gothic fantasy, Kondoh’s exquisitely drawn and stylistically unique comics have ranged from surreal explorations of women’s identity and sexuality to romantic comedies and diaristic meditations.

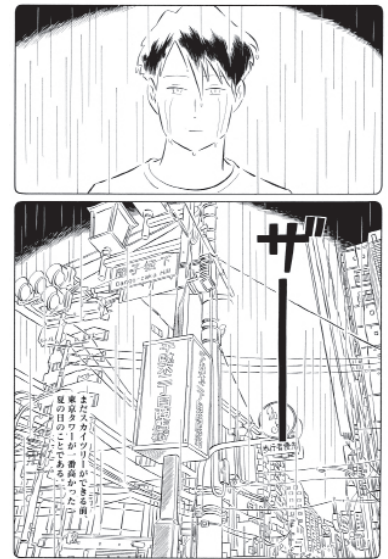
Also a fine artist, Kondoh has exhibited her drawings, paintings, and hand-drawn animated shorts at galleries and museums around the world, including in Japan, the USA, England, France, and China. Her ongoing series *Noodling in New York* (2012–present) chronicles her daily life in the city, where she has lived since 2008. It and A-ko’s *Boyfriends* (2014–20), about a love triangle split between Tokyo and New York, are her most popular works. Kondoh’s manga have been extensively translated into French. While a few of her stories have appeared in English over the years, Glacier Bay Books’ forthcoming edition of her debut collection, *Box Garden Beetle* (2004), will be her first full book in English. She is also, like Yamada Murasaki, a lover of cats.



Kondoh Akino
Kobayashi Kayoko
Ax
April 2000



Kondoh Akino
Ladybirds' Requiem
Comic H
March 2003



Kondoh Akino
A-ko's Boyfriends
Harta
2016

Ryan Holmberg is an art and comics historian, editor, and Japanese-English translator. He is the author of *The Translator Without Talent* (Bubbles, 2020) and *Garo Manga: The First Decade, 1964-1973* (Center for Book Arts, 2010). He has contributed numerous essays and reviews about art and comics to such publications as *The Comics Journal*, *Artforum International*, *Art in America*, and *The New York Review*. As an editor and translator of manga, Ryan has worked with Drawn & Quarterly, New York Review Comics, Breakdown Press, Retrofit Comics, PictureBox, Floating World, Bubbles, Glacier Bay Books, and Living the Line on over fifty books. His editions of Tezuka Osamu's *The Mysterious Underground Men* (PictureBox) and Fujiwara Maki's *My Picture Diary* (D&Q) won the Eisner Award for Best U.S. Edition of International Material: Asia in 2014 and 2024, respectively. He has advised on manga-related exhibitions at the British Museum and the Honolulu Museum of Art. He is currently Senior Lecturer at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (remote) and lives near Baltimore, MD.

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About 80WSE

Founded in 1974, 80 Washington Square East (80WSE), NYU is a not-for-profit gallery presenting contemporary and historical exhibitions. The gallery exhibits in two further locations, at Broadway Windows at Broadway and East 10th Street, and Washington Square Windows.

Curator Howie Chen and Gallery Manager Jon Huron.

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