



かわいい ♡

# kawaii!

japan's  
culture of cute

manami okazaki & geoff johnson

 PRESTEL

# Yayoi–Yumeji Museum

In Japan, there are kawaii items everywhere you look. Any product you can think of has a kawaii equivalent waiting coquettishly in its box at the shops, and cute-obsessed consumers buy them by the bucketload. Where does this culture come from? The Yayoi–Yumeji Museum, which is made up of two spaces, the Yayoi Museum and the Takehisa Yumeji Museum, is dedicated to girls' magazine illustrators. It hosts many exhibitions each year with the goal of promoting knowledge about kawaii's rich history.

*Keiko Nakamura, Curator, Yayoi-Yumeji Museum*



Playing cards  
by manga artist  
Katsuji Matsumoto.



Said to be the godfather of cute culture, Yumeji Takehisa blends Japanese and Western artistic sensibilities using motifs that had never previously appeared in Japanese design, such as umbrellas and mushrooms, like these prints from 1913–15.

### What does 'kawaii' mean, exactly?

It is the appeal of adolescence, when one is not yet an adult. Kawaii things are usually soft, bright, round and small. They aren't aggressive or belligerent: they give you peace of mind and a sense of security. Originally, the word was used to describe people who were beneath you. It was acceptable to use it when referring to objects, but you wouldn't use it for your superiors or fellow schoolmates. But since the mid-1980s, girls have generally preferred to be called kawaii rather than simply pretty.

### What are the historical roots of kawaii culture?

I consider 1914 the birth year of kawaii in Japan. That's when the illustrator Yumeji Takehisa opened a shop in Nihonbashi which sold numerous goods aimed at schoolgirls – what we now refer to as 'fancy goods'. Items that were desirable at the time included woodblock prints, embroidery, cards, illustrated books, umbrellas, dolls and kimono collars. Up until then, there hadn't really been any shops that were aimed at a



particular clientele based on age or gender, but the customers of this shop were mostly young women. At the time, of course, they weren't using the term 'fancy goods', but *komamono*.

Takehisa was influenced by foreign cultures, and his goods show an aesthetic meeting of East and West. He designed coloured paper with poisonous mushrooms, for example. At the time, in Japan, this wasn't done, but in the West in the early 1900s poisonous mushrooms appeared on cards and in illustrated books.

He also designed *chiyogami* paper with motifs like umbrellas and matchsticks. At the time, *chiyogami* was usually printed with traditional *yuzen* patterns, so his thinking was very innovative and a lot of people came to copy him. Takehisa placed importance on the cuteness of his designs and referred to them as kawaii. However, this is a rare example of the word being used at the time, as it wasn't a commonly used word, as it is now.

### How have Japanese notions of beauty changed over time?

If you compare the work of Takehisa and the painter Ryushi Kawabata, their notions of what constitutes beauty are very different. Takehisa's illustrations look cute in comparison to Kawabata's work because there is a roundness to them – especially the eyes. Kawabata paints eyes in the shape that is common in Japanese classical painting; having small eyes and a slender physique was considered to be the ideal. Round eyes were traditionally seen as vulgar, although the ideal changed with foreign contact. Artists began to follow Takehisa's style. One of these was Junichi Nakahara, who drew eyes very large. He introduced the notion that girls on paper didn't have to replicate reality.

The Great Kanto earthquake happened in 1923, and Tokyo was obliterated. From that time, Takehisa's popularity declined and various designers became prominent, although at the time they weren't called designers – they were called *zuanaka* and were all influenced by Takehisa.

Kaichi Kobayashi from Kyoto, who draws quite mature-looking images, was one of these designers. He made envelopes and letter paper for schoolgirls.

### What were these letter sets used for?

They were becoming increasingly important items for schoolgirls. Before the Taisho era [1912–26], girls went to elementary school and then got married or went to work, but during this period more girls continued their education. They were generally from upper-middle-class families and had a lot of spare time, which they spent writing letters. Meeting up with boys was strictly forbidden at girls' schools, so they would play games where they would write love letters to their classmates instead, or to girls that they looked up to or thought were cute – almost every day! At the time, of course, there was no Internet, so letter sets became very important and were the huge hit item of the era.

People that followed directly from Takehisa's trend were artists like Nakahara, who opened a goods shop called Himawariya [sunflower],

and Katsuji Matsumoto, who was active from the beginning of the Showa era [1926–89]. Matsumoto is thought to be the originator of *shojo* manga in Japan, and *Kurukuru Kurumi-chan* the first example of it. The protagonist, Kurumi-chan, is considered the first character icon: there were Kurumi-chan *kisekai* dolls [dress-up paper dolls] and stickers, as well as postcards that were meant to encourage troops during the war. The story itself is really quite simple: Kurumi is a five-year-old who is always merry, and hence lovable. It is uncomplicated, and audiences today might wonder what is so good about it.

In the 1950s and 1960s a lot of fancy goods came on the market as Japan's economy improved. There were improvements in raw materials and technological advances. Directly after the war there was a baby boom and, as these babies grew up to be teenagers, the market for goods aimed at this age group increased.



### Rune Naito's name comes up a lot in reference to kawaii culture. How influential is his work?

He popularized the word 'kawaii'. When you look at his drawings, the ratio of total body length to the size of the head suggests the proportions of a very little girl. The facial features are those of a newborn baby, with a large, round head. The distance from the hairline to the eyebrows is really long, giving the face a large forehead, and the nose and mouth are really small. His work was initially seen as a bit weird, but became very popular.

Prior to this era, Japanese women had to mature and become adults quickly because poverty was rampant, and people were encouraged to have a lot of children to provide a labour force and recruits for the Army. In fact, it was common for families to have between seven and ten kids. When the men went to war, the women had to work. In the mid-1950s the guys went back to work and the girls didn't have to grow up as fast.

Kiichi Tsutaya was known for his colouring books and paper dress-up dolls, like these from 1945–55.



Setsuko Tamura used food motifs on handkerchiefs like these in her early work, even as soon as 10 years after the war. These signified the rapid economic recovery and gradual affluence which later led to the economic bubble.



Handkerchiefs by  
Rune Naito.

### When did seminal shojo manga artists come into the picture?

Artists like Masako Watanabe and Macoto Takahashi, who drew gorgeous and opulent images, became the most influential people in terms of manufacturing goods. Ado Mizumori was also hugely influential. Something she did that was new was to put a touch of eroticism into the cuteness. For example, her characters

had large, round bottoms, and appeared in kissing scenes. You could say this was the beginning of *ero-kawaii* [erotic cute]. From there, the notion of *kawaii* branched off in different directions.

### How did Sanrio goods become explosively popular?

From the mid-1960s to the 1970s, manga like *Candy Candy* were very important, as were dolls such as

Licca-chan. In the 1980s, when Tokyo Disneyland opened, they sold many goods and it became common for everyone to have at least one Disney item in their house. The birth of Hello Kitty in 1974 was a landmark event too. Though Sanrio had been around previously, selling strawberry-themed goods or Ado Mizumori products, nothing came close to the Hello Kitty boom.



Ado Mizumori was one of the first artists to add a sexy touch to her kawaii illustrations, which is commonly called *ero-kawaii* today.

### Why were so many goods produced at this time?

This was connected to the oil and dollar crisis [due to the 1973 Arab oil embargo]. Up until then, the general goods industry had been aimed at exports to America, but because of the economic climate of the time they had to focus on the domestic market instead. The success of Hello Kitty led to the realization that if you made something cute, it

would sell. As a result, various companies jumped on the goods-manufacturing bandwagon.

When the economic bubble burst, Japanese people became a bit poorer and wanted to buy inexpensive things, so 100-yen shops started up. A lot of fancy goods came to be manufactured just for this market and, because of this, they came to be seen as

kitsch and cheap. Before this generation, it was upper-class girls who had bought kawaii. But now everyone could have inexpensive fancy goods. At one point the industry wanted to call them 'variety goods' instead! Unsurprisingly, that wasn't a successful idea. Since then, there has been a stream of hit characters, like Tarepanda from San-X, and similar companies have made more and more kawaii items.

The popularity of kawaii objects can be traced back to stationery and letter sets. This memo pad decorated with Masako Watanabe illustrations is an example of early kawaii goods.



Masako Watanabe's classic kawaii girls in 'Venus', 1955–65.

# Eico

Eico Hanamura is an artist who has been drawing *shojo* manga, such as the celebrated *Some Girl in the Fog*, since 1959. She is known for her colourful illustrations of doe-eyed girls with long eyelashes in gorgeous psychedelic apparel. Hanamura is one of the most influential, pioneering manga artists in the world. Her fashionable drawings look so fresh today that it is hard to believe they are decades old.

# Hanamura

## Where are you from?

Kawagoe in Saitama Prefecture: maybe that is the reason why I like old things. It is a historic Edo-era castle town, and still has that atmosphere. The house I grew up in was an old warehouse-style abode from the Genroku era [1688–1704], and had the kind of things you see in TV period dramas, like old paper lamps, ashtrays and braziers.

## When did you become an artist and how did you get your start in the industry?

I went to Osaka. The apartment building where I was staying had a library on the first floor, and the owner was a manga illustrator. I really loved to draw and I was going to Joshibi University of Art and Design and studying theatre at Keio University. There are big similarities between directing and drawing manga: like manga artists, film directors build a story with camera work using close-ups, long shots and landscapes, and decide where props should come into play.

When I showed the owner of the library my work, he told me to start drawing manga. I didn't know anything about manga, so I just drew 30 or so illustrations with a narrative and took them to a publisher – who bought them straight away. I had no desire to be a manga artist, but I was



Manga artist Eico Hanamura at her studio in Ajiro.





Paper doll, 1973.





Hanamura has created cover illustrations for many children's notebooks; these are from the 1970s.

so happy! After that I became a regular. I was doing monthlies, and then eventually a longer serial that ran for a year, which was quite popular. At the time, I had a husband, and we went to Tokyo together. The publishing house Kodansha had a magazine called *Nakayoshi* and they sent me a letter asking if I wanted to work for them.

The publisher Shogakukan ran a monthly magazine for young girls called *Jogakusei no tomo*, which had a lot of spreads with cute illustrations of girls, and I really wanted to draw like that. I had no desire to be a manga writer, but I was told by *Nakayoshi* that I was going against the tide of the times and that the future would be the era of manga. They told me that if I drew manga, I would eventually be able to do those spreads too, but I needed to do the manga first. Basically, I was talked into it by the editor!

After that, *Shojo Friend* gave me commissions for regular *shojo* manga jobs, and then Shueisha Publishing came along with an offer. Even then, I still wasn't thinking I would be a manga artist, but I really got caught up in it.

#### When did you develop your style?

I didn't have a style per se, but when I was a child I liked the illustrator Junichi Nakahara,

so I copied his work. I liked the manga-like look and the large eyes. Unlike now, most homes did not have a TV set, only books and magazines, and after the war there weren't many beautiful books like the ones you see now. Nakahara is one era before me. A friend showed me his work, and I was really astounded that such a beautiful thing even existed.

#### Did starting out during Japan's post-war era affect your work?

Yes, and not only me. If you look at the heroines of *shojo* manga of the time, they are always poor. They are good, lovely girls but poor, and the girls that tease them are usually rich.

#### When foreigners look at Japanese *shojo* manga they think the eyes are huge. Where does this look come from?

I think it's a Japanese insecurity. In the beginning, we would draw foreigners and call the work 'no-nationality manga', as it wasn't clear which country they were from, although they had huge eyes, large noses and fluffy hair. It was a kind of ideal. We had seen foreign films in which they had lace curtains and things like that, and we were fascinated by overseas things! But when foreigners look at my work they say it looks totally Japanese. I have been told that





the patterning on the clothing is similar to woodblock prints but I am not conscious of it.

**What is the most difficult aspect of drawing manga?**

The face. There are times when I can do it instantly and other times when it doesn't matter how long I take – I just can't do it. In the past, when I was working at weekly magazines and monthlies, there were many nights when I couldn't sleep. When I woke up, I had drawn the weirdest stuff that I had no recollection of even drawing, like a really cute girl with a moustache; I really was in a daze!

**The girls in your manga have great fashion sense. Did you study fashion?**

When I was drawing these girls there was no one wearing colourful things like that; they were just clothes that I imagined. I have been told that fashion designers are inspired by my illustrations, but at the time I wasn't looking at fashion magazines, although I loved to make clothes.

**Your style has changed dramatically. When did you start favouring the more mature ladies that you draw now?**

During the 1970s and 1980s, ladies' comics [manga for mature women] were really popular. Even publishing houses that don't make

manga wanted to jump on the bandwagon. They were all around 40 pages, lots of office romances and nurses.

I didn't really like them – I preferred to depict women that made things, like kimono dyers, or designers, artists or actresses. There was also a boom of erotic ladies' comics, which subsided really quickly too.

**What is popular now?**

*Otaku* [geek] style, really niche subjects like Go and *shoji* [Japanese board games], and food themes. I wanted to do a food-themed manga once, but *Oishinbo* [a cooking-themed manga] came out and I felt that niche was taken. But then there was suddenly an avalanche of food titles – I should have just done it!

Cover illustration for *Some Girl in the Fog*, 1966.



# Kyoto

The museum also hosts cosplay events.



# Manga

# International

Kyoto International Manga Museum is a veritable treasure trove of manga. Not only does it house 300,000 titles, the largest collection in the world, but it boasts numerous displays highlighting the history of manga culture and features rotating exhibitions. Established in conjunction with the Kyoto City and Kyoto Seika University, the museum restores, preserves and aids in research on manga.

*Jessica Bauwens-Sugimoto, Postdoc Research Associate, International Manga Research Center, Kyoto Seika University*  
*Noriko Inomata, Researcher, Kyoto International Manga Museum*

# Museum

### Has there always been a divide between manga for girls (*shojo* manga) and boys (*shonen* manga)?

JBS: There has been a divide in magazines for boys and girls since the first youth magazines appeared in Japan. The first magazine for girls appeared in 1903. While there wasn't a lot of manga content in them at first, eventually it increased exponentially, and it was magazine culture that was at the origin of the flourishing post-war manga culture.

### After the war, how did perceptions change on how to be the 'ideal woman' as expressed in *shojo* manga?

JBS: The ideal woman went from being innocent, sweet, obedient and childlike [as often drawn by male artists until the mid-1960s] to being fashionable, adventurous, open-minded and a lot more diverse [as often drawn by female artists since the 1970s].

### What have been some overriding trends in *shojo* manga themes and who created these trends?

NI: *Shojo* manga used to be all about a girl's happiness. This changed over time. After the war, many readers could recognize themselves in stories in which a displaced girl was reunited with her family, for example. Then Japan's economy developed rapidly and readers got older too: the main themes in the 1960s were love stories set in high school. After that, the Magnificent 49ers [a group of manga artists who were born around 1949] started introducing genres that so far had not fitted into the framework of *shojo* manga, such as sci-fi and boys' love [homoerotic manga, by artists like Keiko Takemiya and Moto Hagio], creating greater diversity in themes. Even today, the image of *shojo* manga as synonymous with romance is very strong.

As far as expressions are concerned, drawing stars in the characters' eyes was an illustrative style that Macoto Takahashi first introduced in the 1950s. Takahashi

was known for drawing characters out of the frame – as large as three vertical panels. In the 1980s, artists like Taku Tsumugi layered their panels to express a character's psychological state.

Trends were created through the strong relationships between Japanese editors and artists – that is to say, the editors took readers' reactions into account, often telling the artists what to change. So, it is the interplay between author, editor and readers that creates trends.

### When did clothing and fashion become an important aspect of *shojo* manga?

NI: After the war, stylish illustrations which depicted full-body shots became an important element of *shojo* magazines, and this trend continued in *shojo* manga. That is because at that time there were no fashion magazines aimed at teens. *Shojo* magazines shifted their content from text to more visual material like manga, and therefore took on the role of being fashion magazines. Girls focused on the fashion the manga heroines wore.



The lawn of the Kyoto International Manga Museum.

### How have the consumers of *shojo* manga changed?

NI: The audience for manga has become very diverse. Until about the 1950s, most *shojo* manga readers were elementary school students. Since the 1970s, more manga magazines aimed at older readers have been published, and the average age of the readers has gone up. Female university students started reading manga. Today, there are specialized manga magazines for working women, women with children, housewives and women who have a difficult relationship with their husbands and mothers-in-law!

### How much is the aesthetic of the female protagonists in *shojo* manga influenced by the West?

NI: In post-war Japan, admiration for Western Europe was depicted in manga more and more. Even if the setting was Japanese, the faces of the main characters would be Westernized, with large eyes. Their lifestyles – the houses they lived in, their beds, tea sets and clothes – had a Western aesthetic too: a lot of frills and lace were drawn on everything. Girls admired these settings.

Some critics say that the large eyes of manga characters meant that girls admired Western looks, but for the artists it was also a question of technique. Those who didn't draw complete backgrounds and bodies would often use close-ups of facial expressions. *Shojo* and *shonen* manga differed in the sense that psychological dilemmas like jealousy were often depicted in *shojo* manga; some say that eyes were drawn larger to make it easier to convey these emotions.

### What is the importance of girls' illustrators such as Macoto Takahashi and Yumeji Takehisa?

NI: Yumeji Takehisa took Japan by storm by drawing a specific kind of woman called 'Yumeji beauties': decadent, with big eyes, a bit sad but beautiful. What girls loved most were what we would now call his graphic design works. The stationery, envelopes and *chiyogami* paper he designed were sold in his own shop in Minatoya, which became a place where trends started. Just as girls flock to Hello Kitty today, the girls from the Taisho era were all about getting their hands on these kawaii products!

Macoto Takahashi drew many manga and illustrations that were about ballet or had a very Western European touch. The fashion details weren't always instrumental to the plot, but they made the readers of manga more interested in fashion. While *shonen* manga started to evolve into the action genre, he created works that made the reader pause to admire his stylish illustrations. He worked hard on drawing very feminine characters, and his illustrations are still used today on stationery and other fancy goods. For girls who are into the princess subculture or the gothic and Lolita fashion trend [see Gothic and Lolita Models], his illustrations are iconic.

### What is the connection between *shojo* manga and contemporary kawaii culture?

NI: Early manga artists are still influential now, both directly and in the way that their work has influenced later authors and artists. For example, Junichi Nakahara, who drew illustrations that don't just depict fashion but also overall appearance and lifestyle, still has a shop in Tokyo and his merchandise still sells.



The museum's vast manga collection.



There are specials about him on TV. In addition, he has inspired authors such as the novelist Seiko Tanabe, and has had a strong influence on fashion designers like Jun Ashida, Kenzo Takada and Keita Maruyama. As for manga artists, Riyoko Ikeda, a manga artist who has been active since the 1970s, has also said that Nakahara was a huge influence on her, and the director Momoko Ando has revealed that she is a big fan of the magazine *Shojo no tomo*, which had an exclusive contract with Nakahara. Miyoko Yodogawa, editor in chief of the fashion magazine *Olive*, which is a charismatic publication that creates a very specific vision of what it deems *kawaii*, was also enchanted with Nakahara's magazine *Junior Soleil*, and has said that it definitely had an influence on *Olive*.

It is likely that Nakahara will continue to influence contemporary creative people in many fields because he drew epoch-making total fashion suggestions featuring Westernized girls. It is safe to say that today's consumers still adhere to Nakahara's great sense of style.



Junichi Nakahara's illustrations of elegant and fashionable girls were popular from the 1920s to the 1940s.



Label Sousou's summer yukata inspired by Junichi Nakahara, 2012.

Macoto Takahashi is a pioneering *shojo* manga artist. He began working in 1957, and his images frequently adorned the covers of *shojo* manga magazines such as *Margaret*. Takahashi is known for his dreamy and coquettish starry-eyed girls and princesses, who are surrounded by lace, ribbons, flowers and small animals in fairytale settings. His characters – usually girls in pastel tones, facing front with sparkly, glittery eyes – are loved by Japanese women of all ages. He is one of the most influential artists in creating the sweet Lolita aesthetic, as well as the standard large-eyed look that is prominent in *shojo* manga to this day.

*Shojo* illustrator Macoto Takahashi, whose work is loved by three generations of Japanese women.

# Macoto Takahashi

You are known for your illustrations, but you were initially a manga artist. Do you still draw *shojo* manga?

Only at the beginning of my career. I drew manga for a lot of *shojo* magazines and school magazines, but just for four years. After that, I only did illustrations as opposed to comic-style works.

I contributed to most of the *shojo* manga magazines, and I took a lot of commissions from *Margaret*, although at the time I was doing stories, magazine-opener illustration spreads and covers, rather than manga. From there I started to make products such as handkerchiefs and socks – in fact, everything a girl would use, from panties, notebooks and sketchbooks to bikes.

At that time, boys' things were blue and girls' were red. When I put red backgrounds in behind my girls, I would add flowers and lace to make the background more beautiful and alive. That is why there are so many flowers around the girls in my illustrations, even now.

How do you research your material?

For a theme like fruits and flowers, I look at botanical art and life drawings. The girls are the main subject of my illustrations, so I have to use flowers that complement them. If the flowers are simply drawn from life, they don't suit the girl, so I alter them.

My method is totally self-taught; I have never been to art school. For the rose series, for example, I will plant roses in the garden. Though I don't do sketches per se, I can observe. I see the shape of the stem and how the rose looks when it blossoms, and when the petals drop. The next year, I'll look at sweet peas and watch them mature. If you observe them for a year, you can see their shapes and colours, and how they grow.

Using my observations of lilies of the valley and Icelandic poppies as a base, I can work out how to draw them in a way that suits the girl. I want the viewer to almost be able to smell the rose's scent and feel the texture of the petals.



### What other motifs appear a lot?

Instead of drawing just a field, I will put in things like small animals and Japanese white birch to make the forest come alive. There is also the joy of finding these small animals in the illustrations, especially if they are animals that are scared of humans. Surrounding the girl with these animals shows that they trust and believe in her; they see her as a friend. It's great to have that kind of atmosphere in the work.

### Are the girls you draw a kind of ideal female?

I don't base each girl on a model or one particular person, but on various people. If I am having a conversation with someone whose hair is beautiful, or I am having tea with a woman and think the way she is moving her hands and fingers is beautiful, I want to draw it. So I collect inspirational things and use them in my work. My girls also have a certain kindness.

### How old are they?

They are aged from around 12 or 13 until high school age. At that stage of life, girls have the potential to change as much as their heart's desire, and it is just before they become fully fledged females. Girls of that age have a lot of thoughts and dreams that they can become a princess, or anything they like – that is the most appealing thing about them.

### Do you ever draw Japanese backgrounds or do you mostly use European settings?

I have drawn scenes from *The Crane Wife*, *Issun-boshi* and such folkloric tales, but in my work I usually depict foreign girls.

When I was around ten years old, maybe in sixth grade or thereabouts, and Japan lost the war, there was a church with a flower garden in my

Sunny Hill, 2008.





*Princess's  
Treasure, 2010.*

neighbourhood. I had never seen anything like it, so I would go there and have a look. When I was watching one day, there was a blonde girl there who was four or five years old, and her mother was calling her.

The girl called out 'Mummy!', and I found that impressive because I had never seen a foreign girl before, and I thought, 'Wow, blonde hair is amazing!'

#### What do you want your audience to feel when they see your work?

It depends on the audience's psychological condition. If they are feeling a bit blue, they can look at the illustration and think that the girl is saying, 'Try hard to cheer up!'; when they are happy, the girl can be seen as saying, 'It's good that we are both happy!' I never depict the girls laughing or crying: they always have a really ambiguous expression. It's a small smile, kind of like a Buddhist statue, so the audience can feel different things when they look at it.

#### How has your audience changed over the years?

I have three generations of fans now, and people bring in old products or magazines to my exhibitions. I don't have a singular representative work but everyone knows the style with the starry eyes. Even grandmothers say, 'I had these when I was a child!' Even though all I do is draw girls and princesses without paying attention to trends, perhaps that is a good thing – I was following my own style all this time.



Cover drawing for  
*Deluxe Margaret*  
magazine, 1971.

# Yumiko Igarashi

## Was *Candy Candy* explosively popular from the start?

Yes. I think it is because all girls share traits that are depicted in *Candy Candy*. The current generation reading *Candy* and the next will all have things in common, such as their aspirations and their determined, never-give-up spirit. I feel that readers from 30 years ago and primary school students have common ground too. And even if you read *Candy* as an adult, it is quite deep. In the narrative, Candy and Terry break up because of the actress called Susana. I received so many fan letters begging me not to let them separate, but now when I go to signings older women come up to me and say, 'Now I understand Susana's feelings.'

## Did you always want to be a manga artist?

When I was in kindergarten, I loved to draw, and I decided I wanted to be a manga artist when I was in high school. Back then it was a fairly mysterious job. There were no how-to manuals, so it was more something that a student who had a knack for

drawing in class would try, but now there are a lot of books on how to draw manga as well as classes you can take.

When I was in junior high school, I was already sending out illustrations to publications. I sent illustrations out twice, and both were accepted.

## When you were drawing *Candy Candy*, what was your daily schedule like?

For a manga illustrator deadlines are absolute, because if we miss them, the readers won't get to see the work. Sometimes, in order to meet the deadlines, I wouldn't sleep for 72 hours. I was just chugging coffee in order to stay up; if you eat you get tired, so I was only consuming liquids. I wasn't very fat back then! I was doing that for four and a half years while I was drawing *Candy Candy*, but I think that kind of routine is standard for a manga artist. You can't have a nine-to-five schedule. If you are on a wave you can really ride it, but at times I am just staring at a blank piece of paper for a long time.

Yumiko Igarashi is one of Japan's most iconic *shojo* manga artists. She is best known for the classic coming-of-age love story *Candy Candy*, which is a staple title for young Japanese girls. *Candy Candy* first appeared as a novel, written by Kyoko Mizuki, before Igarashi rendered it into manga in the mid-1970s; it was then serialized in *Nakayoshi* magazine. The story is set in the early 20th century and depicts a cheerful orphan, Candice White Ardlay, whose optimistic sweetness makes her the epitome of an ideal female character. The narrative follows her as she overcomes hardships and falls in love. It is one of the most revered manga classics of all time.



Manga artist  
Yumiko Igarashi.

*Candy Candy* is a classic coming-of-age *shojo* manga title from the 1970s which is widely read by Japanese girls. The main protagonist, Candice, encapsulates the *kawaii* spirit of never giving up and remaining forever sweet, even when faced with adversity.



#### When did you develop your own style?

There are artists like Shotaro Ishinomoto and Tezuka Osamu that I liked ever since I was young. At first I would emulate them, but after that I began to develop my own sensibilities and individuality. I think I already had my own illustrative style when I was in high school. When I look at my old work, I feel it hasn't really progressed since then!

#### When did you start illustrating ladies' comics?

I did it for ten years. It was a while after *Candy*. There were many regulations in *shojo* manga – for example, the characters weren't allowed to kiss – and after a while I began to find that stifling. I already had kids, but I wasn't allowed to express adult feelings. I felt as though I wasn't being true to myself, and wanted to make more mature work.

#### What trends have there been in manga over the years?

After computer games became popular, manga really changed. They became more dramatic, but a fantasy element was also

introduced – and although that is interesting and exciting, I really like the warmth of social scenes, dining scenes and domestic family scenes, which are less popular now. For example, in *Candy Candy*, Candice returns to the Pony House where she was brought up because she wants to go home. Nowadays, this sense of having a place to return to isn't as common.

#### How was the industry affected by the improvement in Japan's post-war economy?

At the time a huge amount of animation was being made. When I was in Italy, someone asked me how so many different animations could be produced in a week. Overseas there might be one large Disney production each few years. Some might even take seven years. Japanese production houses busted the myth that animation is something that takes years to make – there is no other country that makes over ten animated films a week!

In terms of the subject-matter, during the economic bubble there were many female protagonists that wanted to be professionals,







Candice, an early 20th-century American orphan, was portrayed as a female ideal – outgoing, optimistic, hardworking and feminine. Her industrious nature and her (at the time) otherworldly appearance inspired the dreams of many readers.

or to have glamorous jobs like being a fashion designer, and those kinds of narratives really increased. Now it is more like, ‘What does the guy thinks of me?’, and the scale is really small. Well, it’s not small – understanding people’s souls is as hard as doing a large narrative and just as important – but I feel as though girls are only interested in guys’ opinions lately.

There are a lot of people who wanted to become a nurse because of Candy, so when I go to hospitals they really love me. In the same way, I think that many girls want to become a fashion designer after reading fashion designer manga, for example.

### Besides other manga artists, where do you get inspiration from?

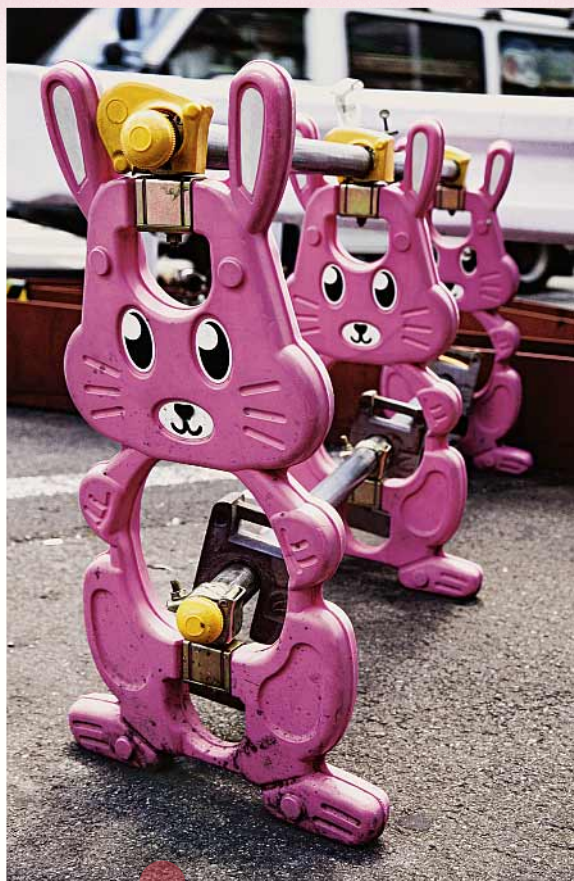
From films. I get a lot of ideas from films for things like the composition of the background, if I should have the reader looking from below or above, and how it changes the atmosphere to introduce a person into the cell. We can express a psychological state through the depiction of

the landscape and the character, even if nothing is being said. For example, from the reader’s perspective, even if we can’t see what is on the other side of a door, we might be able to sense that someone is there. The artist has exactly the same perspective as a director.

### What is the basis of good manga?

It should appeal to a wide age range, so kids and their parents can both read it, with common subjects that they can both empathize with. But drawing manga is really difficult, so I feel that all manga are worthy. The amount of energy it takes to make the manga is the same even if no one looks at it, so I respect every one.

# cute



# design



# overload

In Japan, cute design is so ubiquitous that characters grace the packaging of even the most mundane products. Japanese people love and respect inanimate objects, as is evident in their traditional rites and festivals: for example, in the blessing and burning of unwanted kokeshi dolls at Shinto shrines (see Kokeshi in Naruko Onsen) and the annual Hari-kuyo festival, which commemorates broken sewing needles.

Kawaii product design formally began in 1914, when Yumeji Takehisa opened a stationery shop in Tokyo that sold fancy goods to upper-middle-class girls. When Japan entered the economic bubble, women's spending power increased and *shojo* manga culture flourished. As the kawaii product industry eventually became based on mass-produced kitsch, it emerged unscathed from the resultant recession. Moreover, the love of kawaii started to transcend age, as older women and men began to customize their mobile phones with numerous charms.

There are three main facets of kawaii design: products based on manga or anime characters; non-commercial design (for example, kawaii construction barriers in the shape of frogs); and companies that create their own characters, such as San-X, Sanrio and PostPet. San-X has created a multitude of products featuring Rilakkuma, their floppy bear character, including stationery, electronics, umbrellas, air fresheners and kitchen appliances. It even became fashionable for girls to wear Rilakkuma costumes on the streets of Shibuya in Tokyo (see *Kigurumi*). Kawaii characters are also adopted by businesses and organizations. The police force, the Army and even Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant all have their own adorable mascots.

If there is one character that is synonymous with kawaii around the world, it is Hello Kitty, the bulbous-headed, mouthless feline with a cult following. Hello Kitty was created by Sanrio in 1974. The company's founder, Shintaro Tsuji, has emphatically stated his love of the happiness which gift-giving can bring. To that end, his company has a line-up of over 4,000 cute characters emblazoned on countless products. Hello Kitty outshines them all, and her face can be seen on over 50,000 products – everything from plasters to frying pans. She is one of the major attractions at Sanrio's theme park, Puroland, which welcomes over 1.3 million visitors annually.

Kawaii is a constantly evolving concept and has splintered in various directions. Recent permutations that include elements of horror or creepiness now rival the orthodox kawaii aesthetic in visibility. However, there is one central tenet to the kawaii philosophy that all designers agree on: a design *can* be too cute. Japanese sensibilities, imperfection and asymmetry are what makes something kawaii, while items that are self-consciously cute and flawless are solely for children and can create unease.

*Clockwise from top left:* These soft blocks feature design company San-X's most popular characters like Tarepanda and Rilakkuma.

Even construction barriers in Japan are cute! These pink bunny barriers are located outside Shinjuku station.

Nameneko features delinquent kitties dressed in Yankee motorbike clothing. Here, they are parodying the traditional *manekineko* cats that are thought to bring fortune and customers to shops.

Fake fur bag by design house Swimmer.

# Hello

Originally nameless, Hello Kitty was created in 1974 by Sanrio designer Yuko Shimizu and was initially depicted with a bottle of milk and a goldfish. A little later, she appeared with items that girls wanted at the time, such as a grand piano or a teddy bear. Eventually, she was given a background narrative: fans learned that her real name is Kitty White and she lives with her parents, George and Mary White, and her twin sister, Mimmy, in London (since, at the time she was created, British culture was seen as the epitome of cool in Japan).

Apart from this information, her background has been kept fairly vague. We know that Hello Kitty has a pet cat and hamster and eventually even got a boyfriend called Daniel in the 1990s. Hello Kitty's love for her mum's apple pie and the fact she is said to weigh the same amount as three apples has made her even more lovable, yet she has maintained her air of ambiguity. Her appeal is truly international in scope, and she even once instigated a riot at a Singapore McDonald's when fans clamoured for a promotional toy.

Hello Kitty remains fresh by constantly adopting new themes. She has collaborated with brands as wide-ranging as Stussy and Swarovski and even has her own theme park in Tokyo – Puroland. In 1982, her black outline disappeared and by 1997, computers were used to design her, but much of the process can still only be done by hand. And no matter how many characters come after Hello Kitty, she is still the ruling princess of kawaii.

*Kazuo Tomatsu, PR, Sanrio*  
*Kazuhiro Manabe, PR, Puroland*

## How did Sanrio start?

KT: In 1960, the president and CEO, Shintaro Tsuji (who still holds this position), retired from his job at the Yamanashi government office and went to Tokyo to establish an independent company. At first, he only had four employees, including himself, and was initially dealing in miscellaneous general goods. After that, he began making and marketing goods with characters that Japanese illustrators and designers from outside the company had designed. During the 1970s, a company shop was developed, and characters began to be conceived in-house.

## What was the initial reaction to Hello Kitty?

KT: The first products were sold in March 1975, since the product planning and manufacturing takes a while. We made five other varieties of small vinyl purses at the same time with the same shape as the Hello Kitty design, but Hello Kitty sold outstandingly well.

## Can you comment on Hello Kitty's lack of a mouth?

KT: It is not that Hello Kitty doesn't have a mouth, it is just that she doesn't have a mouth drawn in. Hello Kitty can talk and sing, of course! We consider this one of the reasons she is popular.

## Besides Hello Kitty, who are the most popular characters in the Sanrio line-up?

KT: To date, Sanrio has created approximately 450 characters. With the exception of Hello Kitty, their relative popularity is different in each region and country.

# Kitty



In Japan, characters like My Melody, Little Twin Stars, Cinnamoroll and Jewelpet are also popular.

#### How has the design of Hello Kitty changed over the years?

KT: We are always adding new designs. The ribbon on her ear changes to a flower or other things, or she might wear fashion glasses [with no lenses] or appear in profile. You can see each year's designs on Sanrio's website.

#### How many new characters does Sanrio release each year?

KT: Lately, around two or three.

#### When did Sanrio Puroland open, and what is the concept?

KM: Sanrio Puroland opened on 7 December 1990. The theme is communication.

#### How many people visit Puroland?

KM: Currently, 1.3 million people visit Puroland annually, mainly from within Japan. However, the number of visitors from other Asian countries increases every year.

#### Is it true that people get married there?

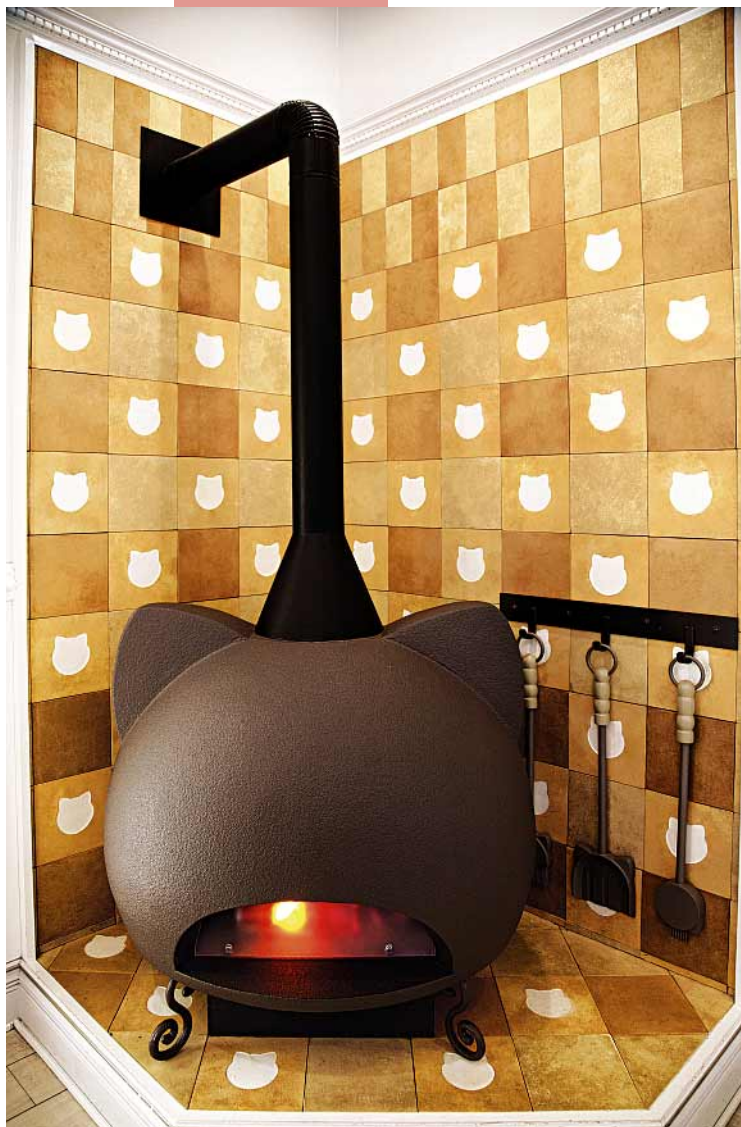
KM: Yes! Every year, between ten and 20 couples hold weddings or receptions at Puroland.

Colourful kawaii fashion label galaxxy's Hello Kitty collaboration.





The Hello Kitty suite at Lotte Hotel in Jeju, South Korea, shows the popularity of Japanese character goods, which is evident all over Asia.



A Kitty-themed stove in Kitty's house at Sanrio Puroland, a theme park in Tokyo that attracts fans of Sanrio characters. Hello Kitty is actually said to be British, rather than Japanese, so her house is made to look like a mansion in London.

Furniture inside  
Hello Kitty's house  
at Puroland.





The exterior of Hello Kitty's house at Puroland.







EVA Air's Hello Kitty plane, which has routes between Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Korea and Guam.



The Hello Kitty collaboration from Lolita fashion brand Baby, the Stars Shine Bright.



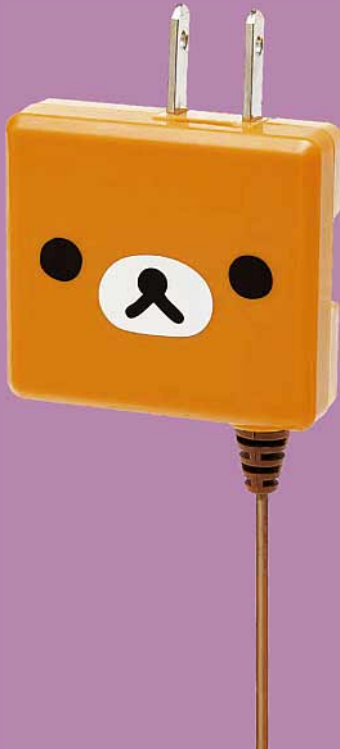


The Hello Kitty suite  
at Lotte Hotel in  
Jeju, South Korea.

# San-X



Absolutely anything can be made into character goods, as demonstrated by San-X's catalogue, featuring fans, AC adaptors, chopsticks, golf balls and even buses.



Far right: Rilakkuma the dopey, floppy bear is one of the most popular Japanese characters.

San-X is the producer of some of the most iconic kawaii characters in Japan. It has had a slew of hits ranging from Tarepanda, an unenergetic, floppy panda, to the ubiquitous Rilakkuma, a nonchalant bear with a zip on his back. The company has created over 800 characters, including Mikan Bouya, Kogepan and Afro Ken.

Tomoko Kirino, *Public Relations, San-X*



## When did San-X start?

In the early 1930s! Originally we were a stationery company that had nothing to do with characters; we made letter sets and things like that. We then imported some designs from overseas and decorated our stationery with them, and when that sold well, we gradually started to design our own characters and make them into products.

## To what do you attribute the characters' popularity?

I think it was partly luck, and also the nature of the market at the time. Also, the designs might have coincided with what customers wanted. With Tarepanda and Rilakkuma, you can get a feel for the characters when you hear their names, which are both Japanese plays on words: Tarepanda is a *tareteru* [droopy] panda; Rilakkuma is a bear that is *rilakushingu* [relaxing]. But when you see the actual image you might be a bit surprised. It is fun and mysterious. Also, Rilakkuma has a zip – although what he is concealing inside is a big secret. These little details are appealing and make certain characters very popular.

## Who are your most popular characters now?

Sentimental Circus. The characters are a little strange and have darker elements. There is a narrative to them: they are toys that have been thrown away, but they fix their bodies themselves and perform in their own circus when no one is looking. The lion removed his own tail and gave it to another animal. He can also remove his mane and jump through it, like a hoop. The ringmaster character fixed half of his body himself using different materials.

## What is the inspiration behind some of these characters?

The creator of Tarepanda was constantly exhausted. She had a job in which she had to make panda character stickers, and she was so spent she just doodled a floppy animal, but the result was quite interesting. We initially used that image on small stickers and gradually it led to a lot of products.

In terms of inspiration, generally we look at magazines and the media, but we also observe the people coming into our shops and take note of what they are wearing







Arcade games often instigate new character crazes.



and have hanging off their bags, what they are talking about and reading. Also, the staff actually really like these kinds of cute things, so they are just making items they want to own themselves.

### You create a lot of animals without mouths. Why?

If there is a mouth, then there is an emotional expression. Rilakkuma has a mouth but he is devoid of emotion, so you can interpret him how you want. It is easy to look at Rilakkuma whether you are happy or sad; if he had a beaming smile, you might reject him if you were feeling blue. These kinds of ambiguous expressions are popular in Japan.

### What do you think are the traits of cuteness?

The common answer to that is that when the head is big and the position of the eyes is low, the proportions are like that of a child, and humans are wired to think of that as cute. In terms of our products, something is cute when the concept is really strong, or when there is a story behind the characters, a narrative that allows for variations – lately, I have begun to think that that's indispensable.

Shappo is a character from Sentimental Circus, one of San-X's most popular series, about a group of abandoned toys that get together and put on performances in the middle of the night.







**Top right:** Kutsushita Nyanko is another popular character product line from San-X. Books and manga based on characters can also end up as bestsellers.



### What helps to elevate the status of a character?

It's hard to say overall, but recently it is the Internet. If a character becomes a topic online, or a famous blogger introduces it, or an amazing YouTube animation is made of it, that really helps. Celebrities are also influential, but they are certainly not everything.

### Why are cute things so popular in Japan?

I think it has been around since the Edo period, actually. Also, there are a lot of obsessive people. If a cute character comes out, a cuter character comes out that everyone wants and so on, and because of that, the customers get passionate about the products. There are also a lot of people who aren't quite on the collector level, but are one notch below that.

### How often do you produce new characters?

Once or twice a year. If you keep sending out a lot of characters, the shelf life for each one becomes shorter. We take good care to nurture them and introduce them to the world properly.



# PetWORKs

PetWORKs is a small prototype design company that makes everything from anime-inspired hang-gliders to the popular Odeco-chan dolls. Their projects enable concepts previously seen only in science fiction anime to come to life. One of their most famous characters is Momo, a pink bear featured in PostPet, a kind of email software that was invented in the late 1990s. With PostPet, Momo and friends act as postmen and virtually carry mail to your friends' inboxes.

*Namie Manabe, Manager, PetWORKs*

*Kazuhiko Hachiya, Designer, PetWORKs*

**Designer Kazuhiko Hachiya with his popular character Momo from PostPet, the email software he designed.**



### What is the PetWORKs concept?

KH: It is a prototyping company. We make three things: aeroplanes, dolls and software. We have ten people in our company. Normally small companies just do what they specialize in, but our company lets each individual do what they want. In our hearts we are amateurs and always take into account the perspective of the user, but the products are made professionally.

### How did you start making planes?

KH: The manga artist Hayao Miyazaki wrote a manga and anime called *Nausicaa: Valley of the Wind*. The protagonist, Nausicaa, flies a plane called *Mowen*. I have been making planes for eight years; *Open Sky* is a real working model of that plane.

### Is there anything particularly Japanese about its design?

NM: The Japanese are quite good at making compact, personalized things. For example, so far as planes are concerned, if you want something that can travel faster and higher, leave that to America and Germany. For something

more compact, *Open Sky* is the Walkman of the plane world.

Also, Japanese people like craftsmanship rather than fine art or conceptual art. I think that in Japan the notions of art, design and entertainment are quite close to each other and I think things that have all these functions are commercially viable.

### What is the concept behind PostPet?

KH: We wanted to make PostPet a game that you don't have to play. In games like *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest*, there are some tasks that take 100 hours. Games that are meant to be for fun suddenly impose these kinds of obligations on the player. We wanted to make something that was in between a game and a tool.

With PostPet, when the character comes over, you can pat it, but you can also punch it! But if you do that, the pet reports it to its owner: 'When I went to Hachiya's, I got punched!', and then the owner goes, 'What!?' And you might get into trouble. Using text, we can transmit pain.

### Why do you think PostPet was so successful?

KH: At the time there was no mail software that was really cute. And it was good timing, with the rise of the Internet. I think we made it with a sense of hospitality and kindness. Inside one of the earlier software boxes, when software was still expensive, we would provide two packages so you could give one to a friend.

### In Japan, if you make a product cute, does it sell better?

KH: Actually, it's more important not to make it too cute. Japan has too many cute things, so it is better if you make something a bit scary rather than just adorable.

NM: I liked Dick Bruna's Miffy, who has no expressions per se – it is best to make things around that level of cuteness. It's cute but as a design it is cool-looking too.

### Where does Japanese doll culture come from?

NM: Barbie came first, and then a more compact doll called Licca-chan was developed that would sit in the palm of the Japanese hand,

Besides making character goods, software and anime-inspired glider planes, PetWORKs also have a successful doll division.



and fit in typically tiny Japanese houses. Barbie was actually made in Japan because at the time it was cheaper to produce her there.

Momoko dolls are not necessarily for children, but appeal to adult collectors as well. The clothing is miniature, but a lot of attention is focused on the detail.

### Do you design all of the clothing as well?

NM: Yes. I do most of the designs but I also work closely with the staff. I am inspired by the season's fashion collections and select the clothing that I would want to wear if I was younger. These dolls look good wearing anything. I also like kimonos.

### Are the proportions the same as those of Western dolls?

NM: We use Japanese models as a base. The lines are a bit curved, although the manufacturers really find it annoying because it's easier to make straight things. The breasts are not too big but aren't totally flat and the face is slightly Asian, so the doll is popular in Korea and China as well.

Compared to Barbie, the ideal proportions are quite slim. Our dolls are not curvaceous like Barbie, but below the knees they do not have Japanese proportions: their shins are really long!

### Where do you make the dolls?

NM: The idea of making something by hand is decreasing, so we like to work as much as possible with craftspeople in Japan. The old factories still exist in Japan, so we try to make things there, even though it is more expensive. The outfits, however – for products of this size we have to get young ladies from China or Vietnam with great sewing skills and tiny hands!





Kazuhiko Hachiya also makes glider planes inspired by the anime film *Nausicaä: Valley of the Wind* by Hayao Miyazaki.

KH: Large mass-production companies like Sony factories go bust and go overseas where it is cheaper, until we get to the point where there are no more LCD TV factories in Japan. However, we try to do things like prototyping, for which you don't have to make huge quantities, within the country – otherwise the skills to make things will disappear.

#### What is the basis of good design?

KH: Love. Cool designs and exteriors are fine, but if you buy a product and find out that it is actually mediocre, then that is no good. The best products are those which are not instantly likeable, but you gradually fall in love with them. Perfect things like Philippe Starck's designs can be difficult in that regard! We try to make products with a hospitable and kind feeling to them, products that you grow to love by using. Things with a gap or imperfection are charming, and things you want to keep close by you.

With dolls and 3D computer graphics we make sure there is some asymmetricality or easiness, as human bodies aren't exactly symmetrical. When we see things that are perfect, we perceive them as being cold.

PostPet is a software program that enables characters such as Momo to virtually carry your mail to a friend's house, turning email into a kawaii game.

愛玩

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Doll designed  
by Namie Manabe  
from the PetWORKs  
doll division.

# Gloomy

In Japan, popular kawaii characters are often a bit creepy or odd. Gloomy Bear falls into the *guro-kawaii* (grotesque cute) category. While he has all the traits of cuteness – a big, round, pink head and an adorable face – he also has homicidal and predatory urges. Often depicted splattered with blood and attacking his helpless owner, Gloomy is a huge hit with visual kei fans (who dress up in elaborate costumes and make-up), goths and the Japanese maid subculture (see Maid Cafés).

Mori Chack, *Designer*



Designer Mori Chack at his Akihabara home.

# Bear

**How did you start making goods?**

In the beginning, I was selling drawings and postcards on Shinsaibashi-suji street. It was an area where many artists like myself would sit, lined up, and try to sell our work.

**Is it difficult to survive as a freelance character designer?**

Yes, a bit. Most of the popular characters are affiliated with large companies and are designed by their in-house designers, rather than independent designers like myself.

**Was Gloomy your first hit?**

Yes, but Hanyo Usagi, the rabbit with the long ears, is as popular as Gloomy now.

**Is there a message behind Gloomy?**

I was watching the news and there was an incident where a bear emerged from the forest and attacked a human, and I thought 'Oh! Bears are actually quite terrifying animals!' Usually, bear characters are simply cute and fluffy but in reality, they are much stronger than people. If you actually met one, it would be quite frightening, and I wanted to put a sense of that terror in the cuteness. With the rabbit, everyone says rabbits are cute, but in reality they are used for experiments by humans.





### What kinds of people are Gloomy fans?

Visual kei bands and their fans. Goths, punks and rockers. The people that like my work, and the mainstream that like Hello Kitty – their perspectives are a bit different. I am trying to appeal to the minority.

### What is the girl/boy ratio of your fans?

There are probably more girls, but perhaps compared to other characters the ratio of guys is much higher.

### Do Japanese children generally have teddy bears?

Yes. Everyone has stuffed animals, and not just bears. I had pandas and a chimpanzee.

### What kind of manga did you read as a child?

*JUMP* magazine. When I was in junior high school, I just read the regular manga that everyone was reading. I also watched *Chikichiki machine* [*Wacky Races*] and *Tom and Jerry*. From our perspective, Western products seemed cool.

### What happens when you do a collaboration with Pink Panther or Hello Kitty?

Depending on the character, there are parameters within which we have to work. I did Hello Kitty three or four years ago and they had a problem with the blood,



Gloomy is a violent pink bear popular among kids involved with subcultures.



Hanyo Usagi is also very popular. She is said to be the result of artificial cross-breeding and hence has ridiculously long ears.