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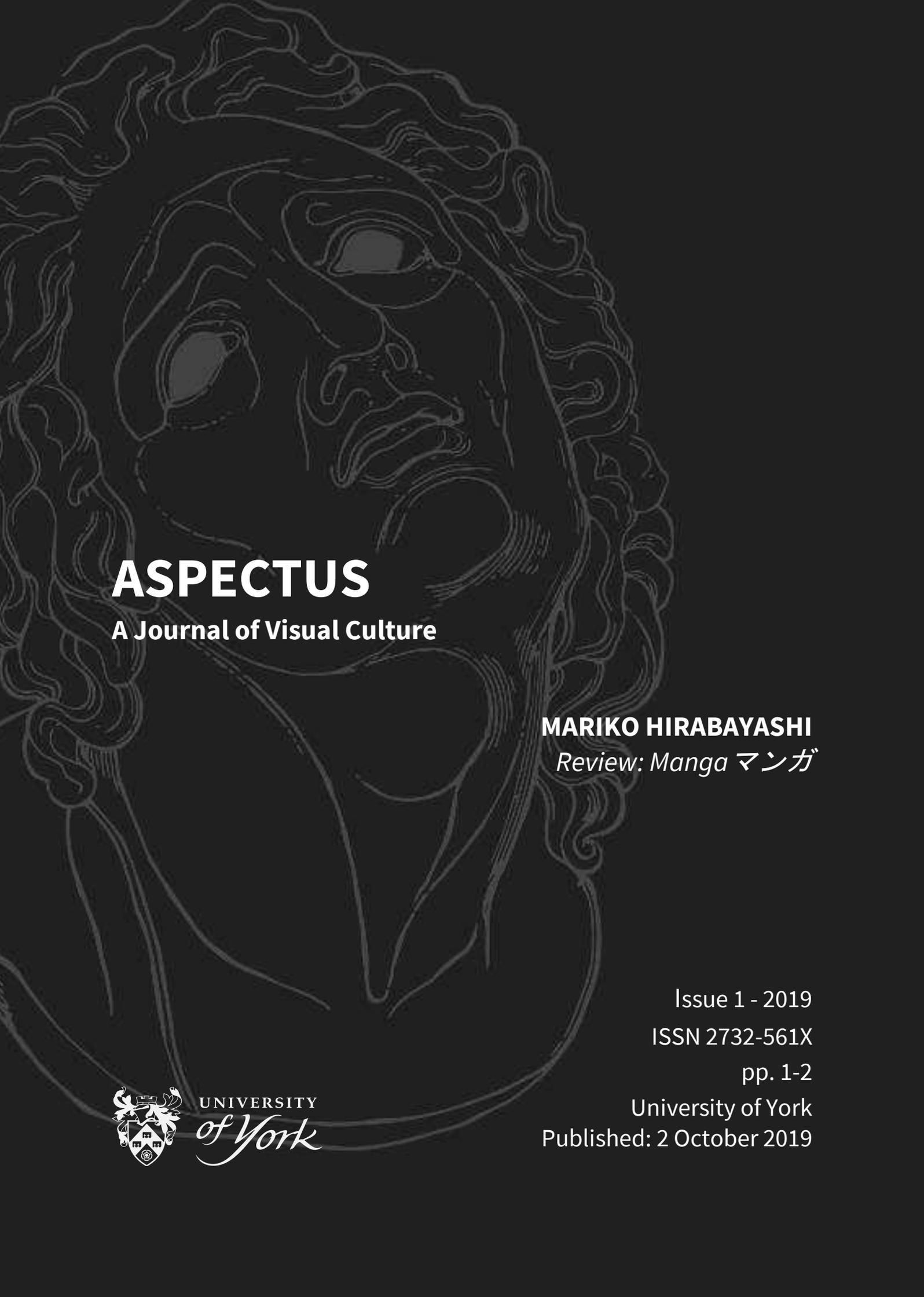
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Exhibition Review

Mangaマンガ

23 May - 26 August 2019

MARIKO HIRABAYASHI

Featuring fifty manga artists, seventy titles, and 162 works, *Mangaマンガ* is the largest exhibition of the titular style of Japanese comic books and graphic novels to have been held outside of Japan. Manga was originally developed in Japan but has become increasingly popular over the last hundred years and is now published globally. Despite its growing popularity, Japanese manga has retained its own visual grammar; for example, the reading order of manga frames is from right to left and from top to bottom. This orientation can be quite confusing for novices or those used to western-style comic books, so at the beginning of the exhibition there is a helpful guide entitled *Giga Town: A Catalogue of Manga Symbols* (2018) by Fumiyo Kōno which explains how to read manga, using a rabbit character, Mimi-chan.



Kohada Koheiji from *One Hundred Ghost Tales*. Colour woodblock, 1833. Purchase funded by the Theresia Gerda Buch bequest in memory of her parents Rudolph and Julie Buch. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The exhibition predominantly features *genga* (原画), the original drawings used for the mass production of manga, which opens the door to both manga beginners and long-time fans. These works are typically privately owned by the *mangaka*, the person responsible for authoring and illustrating the work, and are generally not available to the public. By collecting them into one exhibition, the artistic process is unveiled for the public. Although manga appears to be a domestic visual form in Japan, this exhibition demonstrates that it is an international and eclectic form of art. For example, the exhibition introduces the interaction between manga and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) by Lewis Carroll. *Miyukichan in the Wonderland* (1993-1995) by the artist group CLAMP and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1980) by Katsuhiro Ōtomo depict mysterious worlds inspired by Carroll's novels. Manga has often adopted British culture and there are also manga works set in Britain. The story of *The Poe Clan* (1972-1976) by Moto Hagio, for instance, begins in eighteenth-century Britain and from the eighteenth to the twentieth century its characters wander throughout Europe. The *genga* of *The Poe Clan* on display at the exhibition depict the main character, Allan, visiting Liverpool. In recent years, manga influenced by British culture have also been published. *SHERLOCK* (2013-) by Jay., which is a manga adaptation of

the similarly titled BBC drama series, and *Emma* (2002-2006) by Kaoru Mori, which is a love story about a British maid in the 1890s wherein the Crystal Palace appears as a key location, are good examples.

The variety on display makes clear that manga transcends not only borders but also time. One of manga's favourite subjects, dramatic horror stories featuring monsters and ghosts, has not changed since the Edo era. A rare loan from Tokyo, the *Shintomiza Kabuki Theatre Curtain* (1880) by Kyōsai Kawanabe depicts a nocturnal procession of demons across a stage curtain that is 17 metres long and 4 metres high. Kawanabe completed the enormous curtain in only four hours, describing monsters vividly and comically with his strong brushwork. His depiction of monsters is one of the roots of modern manga combining atmospheric illustration with the storytelling of kabuki theatre in one coherent visual medium. His dramatic and comical monsters have continuously inspired modern *mangaka*, from Shigeru Mizuki's *Kitarō's Stories of the Night* (1960-1961) to Noriyuki Konishi's *Yō-kai Watch* (2014-), both present in the exhibition.

Despite manga's long history, including Kawanabe's work, it is usually regarded simply as entertainment or Japanese pop culture. What, then, is the purpose of exhibiting manga works at the British Museum? I believe that the answer lies in the difference between this exhibition and those in Japan where many exhibitions related to manga are held every year, most of which are *genga* exhibitions that focus on an individual *mangaka* or an individual manga. In contrast, the British Museum's exhibition allows viewers to examine and compare original manga illustrations by various artists across different decades and get an overview of the genre. Furthermore, manga exhibitions in Japan tend to be commercial endeavours designed to appeal to fans of specific manga. Visitors will stand in long queues to buy products relating to the specific comic of which they are a fan. In this way, it is difficult for manga beginners to understand the contents of some Japanese manga exhibitions, which have a tendency to promote a specific manga work and to express the gratitude of manga artists or publishers to earnest fans.

On the other hand, the British Museum's manga exhibition emphasises artistic and educational aspects of manga rather than just a commercial aspect. For example, the museum introduced the *Genga' (Dash) Project*. This project reproduces manga masterpieces with high accuracy, and it was developed for the purpose of balancing both the display and the conservation of *genga*. At present, the preservation of *genga* is a matter of urgency as it is predominantly privately owned by *mangaka* or fans and may not be preserved for future generations. The British Museum recently acquired *genga* by Hikaru Nakamura and Yukinobu Hoshino for its archives. It is necessary to continue preserving manga manuscripts so that they can continue to be studied as a legitimate and beautiful form of art.

Manga at the British Museum reveals manga's variety, internationalism, and artistic significance. The British Museum already exhibits traditional Japanese art, such as woodblock prints and samurai armour, in their Japanese Galleries and the museum's acquisition history of Japanese artefacts dates back 250 years, so the acquisition and display of this illustrative form only enriches the existing collection. With this ground-breaking exhibition, the museum has offered up a new interpretation of manga as also being a significant Japanese art form, one with a long history and many tropes and traditions that deserve more serious, sustained academic attention than has been given in the past.

**MANGA マンガ was on display at the British Museum from 23 May to 26 August 2019.
Curated by Nicole Coolidge Rousmaniere, Hiromi Uchida, and Ryoko Matsuba.**