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A-LIST PICKS

A LIST RECOMMENDED EVENT

Masami Toku: Manga



"Shojo Manga! Girl Power!," a touring exhibition of girls' comics from Japan opening this weekend at MCAD Gallery, chronicles the changing role of women in Japanese culture. The show's curator, Masami Toku of California State University, Chico, recently elaborated on her work with shojo manga and explained why, for many female readers, real love can only occur between two men.

City Pages: *What does shojo manga say about girls? Does it exploit their fantasies? Or does it create them?*

Masami Toku: I think it's both. Unlike American comics, Japanese manga is published every month, and depending on the audience reaction, they change the story. It's not just from the view of the comic artist. And the artists are often the same age as the reader. They create fantasy, but they collaborate with each other.

CP: *So what does it say about gender issues?*

MT: Japanese comics are based on gender differences. Boys read manga, girls read girls' manga, and they develop differently. Most of the boys' interests are themes like fighting each other, how to win, compete, how to protect. Girls' manga is about—guess what?—love. Consciously and unconsciously. Every story, if you read carefully, is a love story, always. This is a core theme for girls.

CP: *With women's roles changing in Japan, where is shojo manga headed next?*

MT: It's really curious because Japanese girls have more freedom, compared to what it used to be. After WWII, women were moms and wives. Now Japanese women have their own career. Happily ever after isn't going to be a reality anymore. Love stories have changed because of that. But women are always subordinate in Japanese culture, so the stories now are about love between a man and a man, because their love is more equal. Women put their own dreams, desires, and fantasies about sophisticated love into man-and-man. It is not about gay love. It is women looking for equal relationships.

Masami Toku discusses "Shojo Manga! Girl Power!" tonight at MCAD Gallery. Free. 7:00 p.m. The public reception for the show is Friday, May 25, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. "Shojo Manga! Girl Power!" runs through June 29. —Molly Priesmeyer

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