

Mutual
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LAYERS OF AESTHETICS AND ETHICS IN
JAPANESE POP CULTURE

MUTUAL IMAGES

VOLUME 7 – AUTUMN 2019

MUTUAL IMAGES

A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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LAYERS OF AESTHETICS AND ETHICS IN
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Barcelona: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, 31 October 2019 – 6 January 2020

Review by Antonio LORIGUILLO-LÓPEZ | Universitat Jaume I, Spain

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2019 marked a significant date for the circulation of Japanese popular culture in Spain. Manga Barcelona, the multitudinous event formerly known as “Saló del Manga”, reached its 25th edition. A quarter of a century has passed since its modest beginning as a meetup that brought together around a thousand enthusiasts of manga, anime, and video games at the Estació de França in Barcelona. At twenty-five years, the most relevant event for Japanese popular culture in the country is enjoying good health. In this last edition, more than 150,000 visitors walked the 78,000m² fairgrounds at the Feria Barcelona Montjuïc, spurred on by a programme full of activities that included a list of artists invited from Japan. This list was particularly extensive in the case of a specific group of them: the *mangaka*.

Manga Barcelona is organised by FICOMIC,¹ a non-profit organisation created in 1988 by the Catalan guilds of publishers, distributors, and booksellers for the circulation of comics as a medium. It would be difficult to understand the current state of manga publishing in Spain without also considering this initiative, which is promoted by the sector itself. After surviving the financial crisis of 2008, Spain now has a prosperous publishing landscape, something that was unthinkable even a few years earlier. In 2018, around 800 manga volumes were published in Spain, recovering the highest figures prior to the financial crisis (the peak was 740 in 2008). Since then, the health of the manga market has improved both in quality (e.g. greater variety of genres and demographic sensitivities) and in competition. More than 20 publishing houses have published manga in Spain throughout 2018 (Guía del Cómic, 2018; Bernabé, 2018). Many of them, such as Milky Way and Tomodomo, are post-crisis publishers that challenge the hegemony of the national branches of large transnational publishing groups such as Planeta, Norma, Panini, and Ivrea through cult titles for niche markets.

¹ Federació d'Institucions Professionals del Còmic. This association is also the organiser of the Saló del Còmic de Barcelona.

In this way, we can understand how the continued presence in Manga Barcelona of *mangakas* —this year's edition featured, among others, Atsushi Ohkubo, Kusanagi Mizuho (invited by Norma Editorial), Kanno Aya (Tomodomo), Kawamoto Homura and Seiki Kei (ECC Ediciones) or Yamaguchi Tsubasa (Milky Way Ediciones)— is related to the status of manga in the national publishing sector.

To make the most of the 25th anniversary, FICOMIC launched the exhibition "Osamu Tezuka, el Dios del Manga", an unprecedented exposition in Catalonia produced in collaboration with the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Tezuka Productions, and the Festival de la Bande Desinée d'Angoulême, where the expo commissioned by Stéphane Beaujean and Gaëtan Akyüz was initially exhibited in 2018. Located in a temporary exhibition hall of the monumental Palau Nacional on the hill of Montjuïc (a short walk from the Fira), the structure of the exhibition follows a chronology of Tezuka's life divided into five key periods: "the age of innocence" (1945-50), "the quest for an ideal" (1950-65), "confrontation with reality" (1966-78), "re-encounter with history" (1972-89), and only one dedicated to animation, significantly titled "the revolution of animated manga: the adventure of Mushi Production" (1962-73).

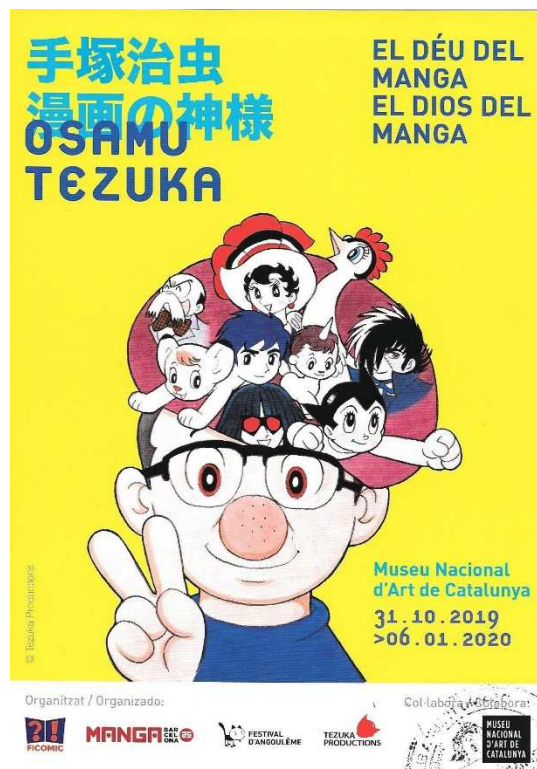


Figure 1. Flyer from the exhibit *Osamu Tezuka, el Dios del Manga* (31 October 2019 – 6 January 2020). © Courtesy of the Museo d'Art Nacional de Catalunya, Barcelona (2019)

This last period is of special interest in the Spanish context, as the first works by Tezuka to reach our territory were not his manga, but anime films that he scripted—such as *Sindbad no Bōken* (T. Yabushita & Y. Kuroda, 1962), which premiered in Spain in 1964 and the animated television series *Jungle Taitei*, adapted from a manga series of the same name (S. Hayashi, 1965-66), which was broadcasted in 1969 (Martí Escayol, 2013: 62). In addition to being considered the main architect of the consolidation of the manga industry after World War II (Onoda Power, 2009: 19), in the following years Tezuka propelled the Japanese animation industry to unknown limits. The broadcast of the first episode of *Tetsuwan Atomu* (O. Tezuka, 1963-66) on New Year's Day 1963 is generally considered the beginning of a new era for Japanese animation. Although its premiere was just a few months ahead of other influential series that contributed to consolidating the thirty-minute anime episode format, *Tetsuwan Atomu* is generally cited as the pioneer in the field of anime. And, although the routines and themes established by Mushi Productions would be polished and expanded with the passing of the decades, in *Tetsuwan Atomu* lie the foundations of the style of television anime.

Each of the periods are accompanied by reproductions and originals of Tezuka's pages and by the eloquent and informative texts by Beaujean and Xavier Guilbert² on the socio-cultural context of each period and on the particularities of the around the two hundred works, including illustrations, panels, *tobira-e*,³ and *dōga*.⁴ Access to these originals is a rare occasion. Tezuka was very jealous with his originals, so it is extraordinary that he gave in to their exhibition, albeit after a process of retouching and reframing (Beaujean and Guilbert, 2019: 4). The harmonious collaboration of the curators with the heirs of Tezuka's works is evident considering the participation of Macoto Tezka in the opening the exhibition. Director Tezka (born Makoto Tezuka) is Tezuka's son and is part of the management of Tezuka Productions, in whose headquarters the exhibited originals are kept and where offers continue to arrive for collaborations, productions, and merchandising requirements regarding his extensive production (the latter also occupy a priority place in the museum shop window display). The life-long retrospective is complemented by four murals dedicated to biographic notes, to the *COM* magazine, and to two sections set aside to illustrate the evolution of his drawing techniques and his audacious narrative

² The texts are written in Catalan and there is a contiguous QR code to access a Spanish translation.

³ Page that precedes the episodes of serialised manga that are not usually published in the later compilations.

⁴ In animation, intermediate scenes intercalated between two *genga* (key scenes).

experiments. These murals are especially pleasing because of the display of intertextualities among works of all his periods and because of the explicitation of his influence in later *mangaka* through the compilation of testimonies from authors such as veterans Leiji Matsumoto and Rintarō, and those of subsequent generations such as Naoki Urasawa and Taiyō Matsumoto.

Finally, I must point out that this exhibition is aimed more towards those already initiated in Japanese culture who want to search for the origins of the medium than those who are completely new to the codes of Japanese comics (e.g. the panel dialogues are in Japanese; there is no other format than the panels displayed). Far from this being a flaw, the maturity of the exhibition is perfectly calibrated to the growing knowledge among the Spanish manga community, which has enjoyed in recent years the publication of practically all the major works of the so-called "god of manga" since 1995.⁵ Although the devotion to Tezuka has taken time to physically consolidate — perhaps, as in other regions of the world, he seems to be more a “patron of sorts” who should be acknowledged and respected e than a worshipped god— this exhibition lays the foundations for more fervent faith within the growing manga consumer communities in Spain.

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⁵ With the edition of *Black Jack* in Spanish by Glénat.

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