

### Alternative Manga/Final Critique

After reading the first volume of George Gonzales's "... " I have to say that despite some initial reservations, I like the work. Its artistic style is original and accurately described by the introduction, which calls it a mix of inspiration from Japanese alternative manga and the artist's own artistic sensibilities. It's straddling of two cultural spheres, that of both Japanese and U.S. alternative art, makes the piece an interesting comment on the continually deepening relationship between the art worlds of these two countries. While I was at first suspicious that the artist had lacked care in making his piece, after more than one good read I was convinced of his attention to detail and devotion to depicting interesting concepts. I would recommend this work to people hoping to expand their own imaginations, especially those who find that they do not neatly fit into distinct cultural categories.

My initial impression of "... " was that it was going to be interesting, if not only to enjoy the art, to consider the train of thought that led to artist to create the piece the way he did. Besides this, however, I was wary of the apparently improvised structure and low-quality materials. Furthermore, a disclaimer in the beginning that the piece was an "experiment" constructed without planning seemed like a cover for not putting much thought into the work. It goes on, however, to explain that the drawings themselves were well-thought out but that the introduction was meant to be more of a friendly, stream-of-conscious type message. With this in mind, reading the rest of the "manga," as the artist calls it, was much more enjoyable and the artist's approach more understandable.

The seemingly haphazard method of production actually shows a calculated attempt to present the manga in a friendly, open manner. This is exemplified in the unedited opening of the comic, which emphasizes its conversational character, apparently an attempt by the artist to engage the reader as an equal or maybe even friend. The tape, pen, and paper materials show a similar lack of self-importance and preference for communicating ideas to the reader, rather than impressing her/him with style. The most complex material the artist uses seems to be a tea bag that has soaked into one manga with particular relevance. The basic style of the work makes it one to which it is easy to relate and with which one can feel comfortable.

As for the artist's other stated goal, to expose readers to ideas they have never considered before or show them that they are not alone in such ideas, I think he accomplishes this. His ideas are not what one would find in the mainstream and any person inclined to think in unordinary ways will find relief and a sense of camaraderie with the manga and its author. I do not think that the ideas are necessarily deep or provide for any foundation for enlightenment, although this depends on the reader and her/his interpretation, as is the case with any type of art. The fact that the artist was able to express in drawing these concepts so removed the mainstream is inspiring and exciting for alternative artists.

It seemed to me that the artist was attempting to create four different manga stories, each with different styles, and I think he achieved this to varying degrees. The first two, which I tentatively call "Omoi no bottoru" ("Thought bottle") and "Ame ka na~," ("I wonder if it will rain...") (The artist appends no titles to the stories) are similar in style. They both illustrate a series of events in a straightforward manner until the last

panel, in which they change perspective either with a close-up or zoom-out. The third piece seemed more cyclical, with a last panel that resembles the fourth, only more abstract. This piece is perhaps the most interesting because of its seemingly frivolous use of flashbacks and flashforwards mixed with the unorthodox approach of representing spilt tea by actual tea water on the page. The last piece departs from the style of the other three with initially minimalist, abstract drawings that seem to represent ideas of creatures rather than actual creatures themselves. Once again, the last panel is a paradigm shift that changes the focus of the piece, although this time it takes the reader outside of the “main character’s” (the only human character’s) stomach. Among these four pieces (as well as the concluding page, which has only a cartoon face resembling the consuming creature in the last story, above the Japanese word, “owari,” or “the end.”) artistic styles are relatively divergent, which I think shows the artist’s familiarity with Japanese alternative manga. Even within collectives, styles vary greatly, and I believe the artist wished to portray that in his work.

The artist accomplished the goal of representing artistic diversity, however, if his piece featured more stories I think he would have been better able to more thoroughly represent a deeper diversity of artistic styles, conceptual settings, and maybe even create stories that developed across more than 6 panels. Although he accomplished his goal with this work, he could have expanded on it, to the benefit of himself and readers, with a longer edition. Perhaps this is in the making.

Gonzales shows his love for cultural syncretism. Although his drawing style and animal characters seem to be based on work by Rokudai Tanaka of alternative manga’s UZO collective, in telling stories he utilizes both Japanese and English (although his

audience is probably more English-speaking considering the piece's introduction is in English). This is the type of art that many people who grow up outside the ethnic or cultural mainstream may gravitate to, and I wonder if the artist's interest in mixing cultures is related to his own Chicano identity.

Overall, I am glad I experienced George Gonzales' "...". Despite early reservations about lack of artistic quality or thoroughness, I came to better understand the artist's down-to-earth style that aims only to offer readers solidarity in non-conventional ideas or possibly glance into realities they never before considered. In today's society which constantly tames the innovative and sells it back to us, this type of creative curiosity is necessary to continue exploring new potentials of our own minds. It is acceptable to the greater goal of creative expression if some of these "experiments," which Gonzales calls his own work, end as many experiments do, with mixed results. Gonzales's manga shows great creative value but at the same time points to potential that he did not fully explore. Still, I recommend this artist's first release to anyone interested in alternative art, whether this means deepening their relationship with it or just becoming familiar. This is an artist that we should watch out for in the future. When he becomes more comfortable with his own style and can better pursue his full potential, he will be an artist that moves the world.