

"Distortion" running Nov. 11-30 at the SuperDeluxe event space in Roppongi, Tokyo.

The multi-media exhibition -- which incorporates paintings, sculptures and segments from various artists' comic books as well as live music events -- features both the works of cutting-edge Japanese comics artists like Shintaro Kago and Akino Kondoh and artwork by manga-inspired artists from the States like Kenji and Toby Barnes.

Another highlight will be the numerous video installations produced by popular visual artist Keiji Ito, which will be screened throughout the mostly admission-free 20-day exhibition. Ito, who recently created the poster art for "Expo 2005 Aichi, Japan," will also lend his talents as a guest DJ for the opening party (which is open to all) on Nov. 10, and participate in a panel discussion with fellow artists the following evening (for both of which a small admission fee will be charged).

"Manga has served as a catalyst for self-expression and a powerful springboard in dynamic nihilism in the 21st century, in much the same way that jazz, blues and hip-hop grew out of very specific historical situations and consequently took on vibrant new forms in various parts of the world," says Evans. "Psionic Distortion" aims to demonstrate how Japanese popular culture has been dispersed and transformed throughout the West (particularly in America), and is currently influencing a younger generation of artists.

If "Pikachu" -- from the anime megahit "Pokemon" -- is the new millennium's answer to "Astro Boy," then the eclectic circus of strange and subversive artifacts on display in "Psionic Distortion" is likewise Garo-esque in its aims.

Manga artist Shintaro Kago, who will contribute several illustrations from his manga book covers, certainly knows how to test the limits of what is art (and good taste) with his oftentimes sexually and politically charged manga comics. In one strikingly colorful image, uniformed Japanese schoolgirls wave the Hinomaru flag as Zero fighter planes circle the bright blue sky. One girl has an eyeball falling out of its socket from a gunshot blast to her head. Another hairless girl stands beside a wild-eyed and bloodied schoolmate in a state of purplish radioactive decomposition.

Although perhaps not as bleak as his Japanese counterpart, comic-book sequences taken from Detroit-based Afro-American manga artist Kenji are no less political in their vision. Kenji has created his own self-styled brand of *kuroi-manga* (black comics), and is particularly known for his groundbreaking concoction "Witch Doctor: Protector of the People." Kenji's protagonist, Jovan, is a sharp-suited black superhero with D'Angelo-style cornrowed hair, who not only fights Zombies and racist stereotypes, but is on a spiritual mission to unearth the hidden riches of Voodoo culture and ancient African history.

"[Japanese] manga culture has shown to my audience that comics, cartoons and illustrative art can deal with a broad range of issues, not just typical superheroes," says Kenji, whose own initiation to Japanese comics was Katsuhiro Otomo's post-apocalyptic thriller "Akira" in the early '90s. "In America we still struggle to bring out different material from the mainstream, but typically the trite material is always more popular," he says. Works by American painter Toby Barnes project a heavier influence from late '80s and '90s Japanese robot animation classics like "Gundam" and "Evangelion."

## The marriage partner hunt

The term *kon-katsu* has been coined to refer to a strategic approach to finding the right partner for marriage. What's your take on this?

- ☐ No thanks. It's got to happen naturally.
- ☐ Maybe not so bad if it boosts Japan's falling birth rate.
- ☐ Matchmaking among friends or relatives is fine, but this is too extreme.
- ☐ It's better than the traditional arranged-marriage route.
- ☐ Desperate times require desperate measures.

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