

SPENCER MUSEUM OF ART

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

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EXHIBITION: *Pop Goes Godzilla* explores global impact of Japanese pop culture

Sept. 11—Dec. 16, 2004

Asian Gallery

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Lawrence, KS— Fifty years ago this fall, movie audiences first laid eyes on one of film's most enduring icons. Godzilla, the radioactive lizard whose fiery temper tantrums trashed Tokyo in the 1954 release *Gojira*, eventually reached far beyond mere creature feature stature, becoming the first Japanese pop culture product to gain mass appeal in the United States after World War II.

The Godzilla film series is now the longest running franchise in world cinema history, and to commemorate the King of the Monsters' 50th birthday, the Spencer presents the exhibition ***Pop Goes Godzilla: Japanese Pop Culture & Globalization***, which opens Sept. 11 and will remain on view through Dec. 19 in the museum's Asian Gallery. The museum's exhibition, featuring many loaned objects from private collections, is sponsored by Sabatini Architects (<http://www.sabatiniarchitects.com/>) and organized in conjunction with a late-October, interdisciplinary conference hosted by the University of Kansas' Center for East Asian Studies, during which scholars from around the world will consider the Godzilla films and their surprising impact on global culture.

Organized by Maria Roman Navarro, curator of Asian art, and Kyungwon Choe, Carpenter Foundation summer intern in Asian art, *Pop Goes Godzilla* comprises three major categories of Japanese popular culture that have won mass appeal and made worldwide impact since the 1950s: the Godzilla film character, more recent pop-culture icons, and pop-art imagery.

- **GODZILLA** The visually arresting and culturally diverse Godzilla images of different countries and mediums—film posters, a print, and manufactured products from private collections—tell an interesting story of the Godzilla character’s evolution from the 1950s through the 1970s, and feature Godzilla as a forerunner of postwar Japanese cultural industry, which has enjoyed huge international success.
- **ICONS** As cheap and accessible forms of entertainment, Japanese comic books (*manga*) and animation films (*anime*) have grown to enormous popularity worldwide since World War II. Various characters from *manga* and *anime* have immediately become global pop culture icons, inspiring manufactured products, commodities, advertising, and fashion around the world. The *Astro Boy* and *Hello Kitty* character products on view serve as examples of Japan’s widespread pop culture exports. Such products illustrate how ubiquitous these visual conventions have become. For example, a good luck charm (*omamori*) shows the transference of *Hello Kitty*’s secular cultural icon into a traditional Buddhist realm. Further, Roger Shimomura’s painting, *Yellow Rat Bastard* (a racial epithet often used in the U.S. during World War II to describe the Japanese) demonstrates a wide incorporation of various Japanese pop icons into contemporary art works.
- **POP-ART** Unlike American pop art of the 1960s, which was influenced by the changing look of the city—new advertisements, development of media photography and mass production—contemporary Japanese pop art has developed under the influence of new technology, such as video games and computers, and reflects the taste of the people who consume those technologies, many of whom are *manga* and *anime* fans. Murakami Takashi’s toy-like plastic sculptures, from the series *Oval Sitting atop a Cosmos Ball*, unmistakably reveal Japanese pop culture as their main references. Murakami, who runs his “Hiropan Factory” studios in both Japan and New York City, is one of the pivotal artists transplanting Japanese pop culture and art in international soil.

The KU Center for East Asian Studies interdisciplinary symposium, “In Godzilla’s Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage,” will bring international scholars to campus Oct. 27—30. Conference speakers will consider the Godzilla films and how they were shaped by (and, in turn, shaped) postwar Japanese culture, as well as the globalization of Japanese popular

culture in the wake of the Godzilla phenomenon. For more information on the October conference, visit <http://www.g2004.net/godzilla/>.

Programming related to *Pop Goes Godzilla: Japanese Pop Culture & Globalization*

- Film: “Spirited Away,” September 23, 7 p.m., SMA Auditorium. (2002, dir. Hayao Miyazaki, 124 minutes). Rated PG. Free.
- Tour du Jour: Hillary Pedersen, intern, September 30, 12:15 p.m., Asian Gallery. Free.
- Film: “Princess Mononoke,” October 7, 7 p.m., SMA Auditorium. (1999, dir. Hayao Miyazaki, 133 minutes). Rated PG-13. Free.
- Children’s Art Appreciation Class: “Japan-a-mania!,” October 30, 10-30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. \$. Pre-registration required. Contact Karen Gerety at 864-0137 or kcgerety@ku.edu

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Thurs. 10a.m.–9 p.m.

Sun. Noon–5 p.m.

Closed Monday

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- Parking garage adjacent to Kansas Union is \$1 per hour weekdays, free on Saturdays and Sundays (but unavailable on home football games).