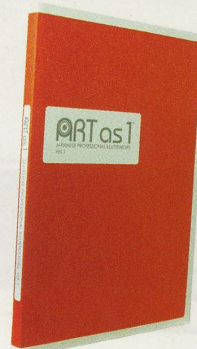




bringing culture back

ART FROM JAPAN, WITHOUT THE SUBTITLES

BY ROBERTO RAMIREZ



Usually art books come in two different formats: large and Rand McNally back-breaking size. Thankfully, *Art as 1* is doing more than eradicating neck pain and back cramps, it's breaking stereotypes while featuring 43 of Japan's talented artists — and it is no bigger than a piece of standard paper.

The book's art director, Koji Ishikawa, an award-winning Japanese illustrator, is determined to bring true Japanese art (sorry Ms. Stefani) to the States. "Rather than an art collection book, it's an art catalog," explains Ishikawa. "The primary mission being not only to introduce the artists to the U.S., but to help the U.S. in commissioning these creators." "The book started only with six artists that I knew," Ishikawa says while flipping through the colorful book, "but with the help of an agency in Japan, we collaborated together in the research process to cover the entire art spectrum." They started small, carefully choosing each artist based on different styles, backgrounds and techniques. Some use computer graphics (like superstar Hiroshii Yoshii, internationally known for his computer puppets), others are animators, while some use more unique mediums such as CD covers and poster illustration.

“We are looking for that delicate balance between mass quantity and excellent quality.”

The project not only breeds awareness of cultures outside of the American mainstream, it tells the journeys of how featured artists came to their profession, like Marie (sans last name) who left the fashion industry to become a professional illustrator. "I enjoy making my own world with my illustrations," Marie says. It also features well-known and respected artists such as Hiroshi Watanabe and Tsuyoshi Nagano on its glossy pages. Even with the favorable reputations some of the featured artists enjoy, Ishikawa still needed to offer guidance in other aspects of the project. "One of the most difficult things while bringing this book to life," he says laughing, "was telling the artists how to write a short bio on themselves and choosing the pieces of their work that will have the biggest impact to the U.S. audience."

He continues, "While selecting the sample art from Reichel Miyao, I got pieces that were not distinctive enough from art that you may find here in the U.S." So instead, he featured her work titled "The Sushi's," with animation in mind. Miyao designed every piece of classic sushi with a unique presence and personality, creating something that is fascinating and uncanny.

Besides the publication of this book, we have plans to bring the artists from Japan to hold exhibitions of their own," Ishikawa says. "First in New York and then Los Angeles."

There are also plans to commercialize some items from the book in various forms, such as paintings, toys, T-shirts and dolls. "The last thing we want to do," Ishikawa says while pointing to a doll made of fabric by one of the featured artists, "is place into the U.S. market cheap representations of the artists' work. So we are looking for that delicate balance between mass quantity and excellent quality."

Available at www.artas1.com and select book stores nationwide



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