

Yoshitaka Amano
Origins 始源

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Creators of Japanese anime, manga, and video games have a word for the connective tissue of a fictional universe: *sekaikan*. It's often translated quite literally to "worldview," though its meaning for these creators is closer to "worldbuilding." But that too seems to miss the poetry of a word that directs you to look at something so internal that it is imperceptible. When the character 観 (*kan*) is attached to 世界 (*seka*), the word for *world* or *universe*, it simultaneously tells you to see and to feel that world. It also might tell you that the universe appears as a way of thinking, as the absolute that allows you to interpret reality and make meaning. This is why the term is used by fans to describe a feeling of complete envelopment. For them, *sekaikan* is total. It's the invisible details; it's the atmosphere beyond narrative; it's the moral system; it's a coherence surfacing only through attentive devotion. One fan dubs it "the magic." Another describes its emergence as a "feeling of fulfillment and immersion in a world that seems to grow exponentially when you realize how its thread was stitched."¹

It's difficult to describe exactly how *sekaikan* appears in Yoshitaka Amano's work. That is partly because he creates worlds, not through narrative or setting but through characters—line by line, with deliberate motion, accumulating depth in an expression, drawing figures as if they were already venerated icons. Amano's characters are living things, like the stories that anime fan describes unraveling; they rest inside of us.

This might be the result of Amano's ability to take on the posture of science fiction and fantasy and apply it to drawing. He starts with "What if?" and lets all the possibilities of that question unfurl beneath his hand. It's something he's been doing since he was fifteen, when he moved to Tokyo and began working as a character designer for Tatsunoko Production, the studio that brought one of the first anime TV shows to the United States.² There, drawing was always an act of translation. His task was to convert narrative into illustrated concepts, images that would become the thematic infrastructure for each project he worked on. Throughout his career as an independent artist and as a character designer for storied anime and video game franchises, such as *Final Fantasy* (1987–) and *Vampire Hunter D* (1983–), drawing has always been a way of describing the porousness between the real and the fantastic. "I want to depict a world I myself have never seen," Amano says of the feeling from which his work begins.³

Origins 始源 takes up Amano's interest in primordial beginnings. Consider *Cosmos* (1996), a drawing Amano made for *Guin Saga* (1979–), the series of best-selling Japanese novels by Kaoru Kurimoto. Removed from the context of its making, the nude woman lying prone in an abyss of stretched geometries could illustrate any number of creation myths. Of course she is the cosmos. In all the stories Amano is drawn to, origins are an eternal structure, a threshold where being emerges. For him, that threshold is the page; his figures seem to move and drift across its surface, entering worlds that exist beyond our lived reality. There is a certain philosophy of narrative in this approach: It is the portrait that creates the world.

At first glance, Amano's *Pandora* series seems distant from the fantasy worlds he's best known for. Drawings of the Greek myth about the first mortal woman are populated with blues, greens, pinks—colors effervescent. They make her appear both delicate and graphic. Still, the fact that there are so many Pandoras here, and yet not one is a repetition, each representing not just another scene but another mood, as if an internal life is rising into visibility, is exactly the strategy of a character designer. It's why in his depictions of her supposed fall from grace (when Pandora opens her box and evil is released upon the world) the consequences of that incident are beside the point. Instead, we see her curiosity, her beauty, even her innocence. The drawings do not animate an event; rather, they animate life.

Amano achieves something similar with *Angel's Egg* (1985), a film he created with Mamoru Oshii not long after he left Tatsunoko Production to be an independent artist. The story follows two unnamed characters—a little girl with a mysterious egg and a boy, a bit older, who carries a cross-shaped weapon—as they roam in "a deserted world where only falling rain moves." Over the course of the film, it becomes clear that a great flood has happened, or is happening, and that all the water has blighted out not only most living things but memory too. It's an inventive retelling of one of the best-known stories from Genesis, Noah's Ark. Amano's images allow

you to enter the estrangement of this distorted reality. Soldiers, somehow statue-like, run through the city hunting shadows. The little girl smirks, hair moving like tendrils, as she passes through the carcass of a whale. The sky seems made of ink. All of these moments sink into an atmosphere so overwhelming that you no longer even desire a narrative you can make sense of. In a 1985 interview, Oshii described the film as “a story made right after the future.” When you read *Angel's Egg* through that phrase, you discover that a genesis can only be seen retroactively, existence projected through a looking glass.

Maybe the magic of *sekaikan* is its ability to conjure beginnings again and again. Ursula K. Le Guin believed that science fiction's power rested in its ability to remake our reality anew, that certain truths could only arrive through refraction. “Children know perfectly well that unicorns aren't real,” she writes, “but they also know that books about unicorns, if they are good books, are true books.”⁴ In this sense, science fiction and the anime and video game franchises that follow it function a bit like myth. They are all stories that are themselves a kind of retelling.

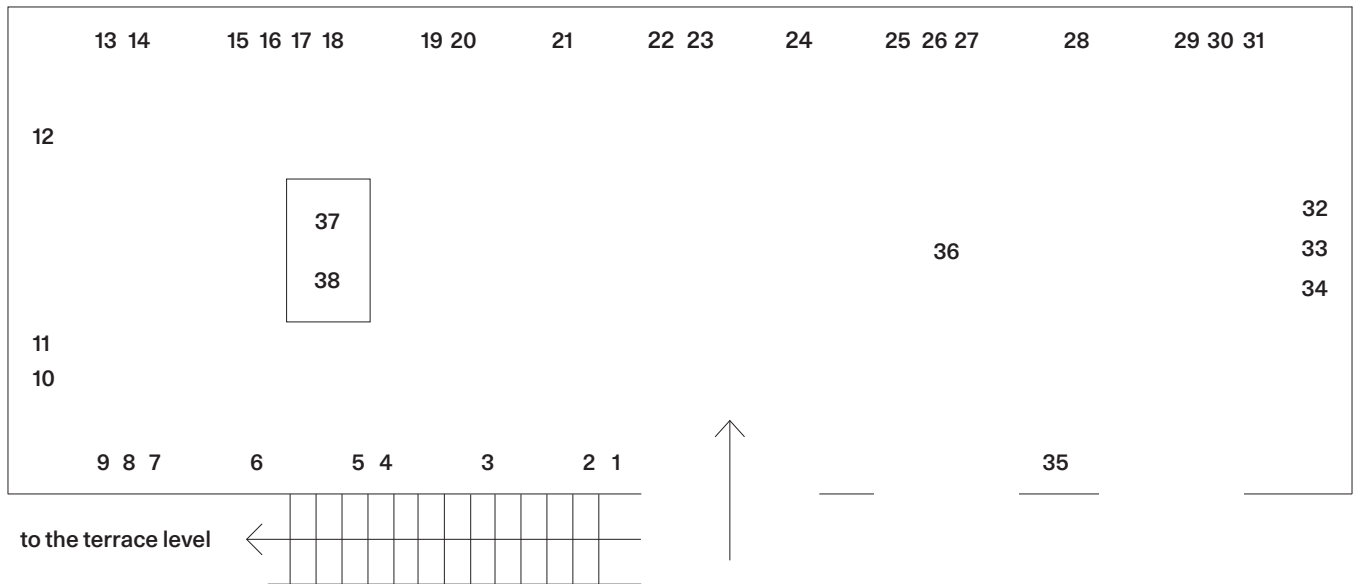
And as with anime or video games, science fiction elicits participation as part of its consumption. Fan art, fan blogs, convention lines, and a resale market for collectibles—these are the signs of a successful anime or video game franchise. They are also signs of a work with strong *sekaikan*. Right now, more likely than not, you could find Amano's drawings appearing on someone's gaming console as they play *Final Fantasy* and livestream it to Twitch; on a *Gatchaman* Uniqlo tee worn in the streets of Tokyo; or even on an iPhone as someone watches *Angel's Egg* on the subway, in bed, or really anywhere streaming is available.

Myth is often understood to be a structural thing, the backbone of all the stories that have ever been told and ever will be told. In other words, myth brings existence into view. Amano told me this is what drew him to Greek and Shinto mythology over the last few years—all the overlaps between cultures, across time, as if there could be a universal truth resting beneath the surface. Pandora is Eve. Pandora is the unnamed girl in *Angel's Egg*. She is also the Japanese deity Izanami. In that creation story, it is the betrayal of Izanami's brother and lover, Izanagi, that illuminates death and brings violence upon the world. It's curious that most origin stories contain apocalypse. Even physicists can't come up with another story about the universe. The big bang. We don't really know if that's the beginning or the end.

Noa Wesley

1. All quotes come from a collection of screenshots compiled in Executor N0, “A Brief Analysis on Sekaikan and Settei,” *VS Battles Wiki* (blog), December 5, 2021, https://vsbattles.fandom.com/wiki/User_blog:Executor_N0/A_Brief_Analysis_on_Sekaikan_and_Settei.
2. When Amano arrived at Tatsunoko Production in 1967, he worked on the widely popular anime TV hit *Speed Racer*.
3. Yoshitaka Amano, interview with the author, June 2026.
4. Ursula K. Le Guin, “Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?” in *The Language of the Night*, rev. ed. (Women's Press, 1989), 40.

Hassam Gallery



1–2. *Pandora*, 2025
Oil pastel on paper

3. *Pandora*, 2025
Watercolor on paper

4–5. *Pandora*, 2024
Oil pastel on paper

6. *Pandora*, 2025
Watercolor on paper

7–9. *Pandora*, 2025
Oil pastel on paper

10–11. *Pandora*, 2025
Watercolor on paper

12. *Pandora*, 2026
Oil pastel on paper

13–14. *Pandora*, 2025
Oil pastel on paper

15–18. *Pandora*, 2024
Oil pastel on handmade paper

19–20. *Pandora*, 2025
Oil pastel on paper

21. *Pandora*, 2024
Watercolor on paper

22–23. *Pandora*, 2026
Oil pastel on paper

24. *Pandora*, 2024
Gofun (shell white), mineral pigment,
yunomoto (sulfur, calcium oxide),
and silver leaf on wood board

25–27. *Pandora*, 2024
Oil pastel on handmade paper

28. *Pandora*, 2026
Watercolor on paper

29–31. *Pandora*, 2024
Oil pastel on paper

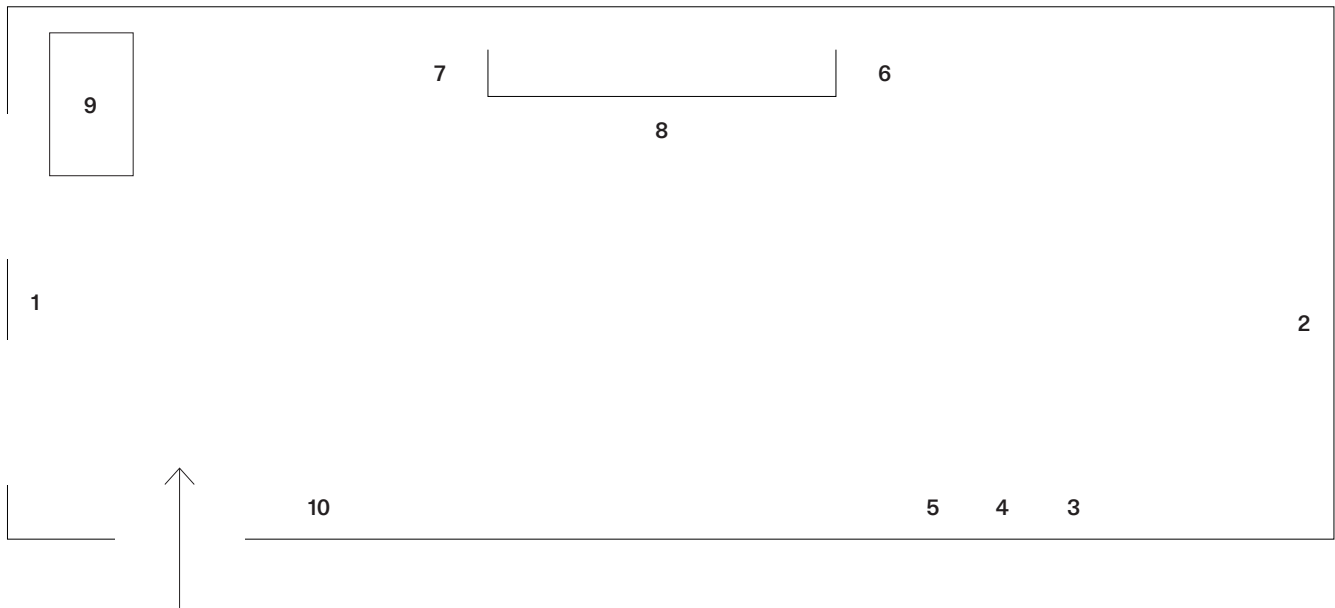
32–34. *Pandora*, 2026
Oil pastel on paper

35. *Venus at Night*, 2024
Mineral pigments, *yunomoto*
(sulfur, calcium oxide), and silver
leaf on wood panel
Collection of Lucius Elliott, New York

36. *Mythology*, 2023
Porcelain plates with *gosu*
(cobalt oxide)

37. *Pandora: Book 1*, 2025
Artist's book with watercolor
on handmade paper

38. *Pandora: Book 2*, 2025
Artist's book with watercolor
on handmade paper



1. *Rasen-Ō*, 1992

Acrylic and color ink on paper

This illustration shows the titular character of *Rasen-Ō* (Spiral King), a book Amano made with the fantasy writer Baku Yumemakura. It's a prime example of how text informs Amano's images, as the shell-like spiral in the background arises out of the literal meaning of the kanji character ("rotating like a spiral shell"). Amano and Yumemakura collaborated on many other projects, including *Amon Saga* (1984), a manga published in *S-F Magazine* and later turned into a film, and the fantasy novel series *Chimera* (1982–2002), for which Amano provided the cover illustrations.

2. *The Mystery*, 1988

Acrylic and color ink on paper

This is one of the sixty-five illustrations Amano created for a series of books by the influential mystery writer Edogawa Ranpo, reissued between 1987 and 1989.

3–5. *Murasaki-no-ue*, from *The Tale of Genji*, 1992

Acrylic and color ink on paper

Murasaki-no-ue, from *The Tale of Genji*, 1992

Acrylic and color ink on paper

Genji, from *The Tale of Genji*, 1992

Acrylic and color ink on paper

Amano illustrated Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* (c. 1021) for the writer and Buddhist nun Jakuchō Setouchi's 1993 adaptation of the novel for young readers. Setouchi later published her best-selling translation of *The Tale of Genji* in modern Japanese, a ten-volume work famous for its feminist interpretation. These drawings are part of a long tradition of illustrating *Genji* that dates back to the twelfth century, when a form of Japanese narrative painting known as *emaki* became popular among women in the imperial court.

6. *Cosmos*, 1996, from *Guin Saga*, 1984–97

Acrylic and color ink on paper

7. *Soyogi*, 1996

Lithograph on paper

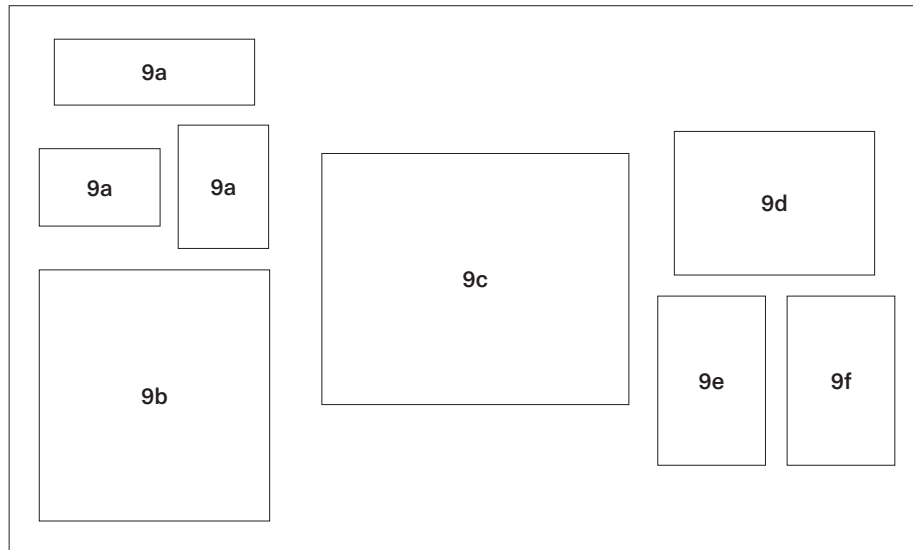
Since 1983, Amano has illustrated Hideyuki Kikuchi's horror novel series *Vampire Hunter D*, rendering the series' half-human, half-vampire protagonist as an unforgettable Art Nouveau cowboy. Here, Amano returns to that character to show all the pathos living beneath his stylized garb. This lithograph is one example of how difficult it would be to siphon off Amano's commercial projects from his personal imagery.

8. *Angel's Egg*, 1985

35mm transferred to 4K digital video, color, sound; 71 minutes

Created by Mamoru Oshii and Yoshitaka Amano
Directed by Mamoru Oshii
Courtesy of GKIDS

Vitrine



- 9a. *Final Fantasy III*, Square Co., Ltd.,
Tokyo, © 1990,
Family Computer™ (Famicom)
Nintendo gaming cartridge
- 9b. Yoshitaka Amano
Japan: Final Fantasy, NTT Publishing,
Tokyo, 1994
Hardcover book
- 9c. Yoshitaka Amano's *Final Fantasy*
drawing in *Illustration*, no. 195,
Genkosha, Tokyo, September 2012
Print magazine
- 9d. *Final Fantasy IV Battle Analysis*
Guide, NTT Publishing, Tokyo, 1991
Softcover book
- 9e. *Final Fantasy VI Complete Strategy*
Guide, NTT Publishing, Tokyo, 1994
Softcover book
- 9f. *Final Fantasy VI Setting Material*
Edition, NTT Publishing, Tokyo, 1994
Softcover book

10. *Selected Books, listed from top
to bottom*

Yoshitaka Amano and Baku
Yumemakura, *Rasenoh*,
Tokuma Shoten, Tokyo, 1992
Softcover book

Yoshitaka Amano, *Maten*, Kodansha,
Tokyo, 1984
Softcover book

Yoshitaka Amano's illustration in *S-F
Magazine*, no. 272, Hayakawa Shobō,
Tokyo, April 1981
Print magazine

Yoshitaka Amano and Hideyuki
Kikuchi, *Yoshitaka Amano: The
Collected Art of Vampire Hunter D*,
Dark Horse, Milwaukie, Oregon,
2008
Softcover book

Yoshitaka Amano and Mamoru Oshii,
Angel's Egg Image Boards, Tokuma
Shoten, Tokyo, 2025
Hardcover book

*Visitors are invited to ask a Gallery
Attendant to read the books.*

Yoshitaka Amano (b. 1952, Shizuoka, Japan) grew up in a coastal city in Japan famous for its views of Mount Fuji. There, he learned from his father, who was a lacquer artist, that beauty could be a craft. As a child, Amano applied this lesson to drawing, training his hand on long rolls of paper his older brother brought home from his job at a paper factory. At fifteen, he moved to Tokyo alone and began working as a character designer for Tatsunoko Production, making illustrations for projects such as the widely popular anime TV hit *Speed Racer* (1967–68). It is just one of many projects that continues to have widespread cultural impact (for instance, *Speed Racer* clips were used in the influential music video for “Daytona 500” [1996] by Wu-Tang Clan’s Ghostface Killah). Amano left Tatsunoko Production in 1982 to pursue independent projects: illustrations and animation for science fiction, fantasy, and mystery writers; character design for the video game *Final Fantasy*; and art exhibitions, the first of which was held at a shopping mall in Tokyo (*Hiten*, Yurakucho Mallion, 1989). In 1997, Amano moved to New York to absorb the creative energy he had fantasized about since the 1970s. While producing work in New York, he appeared as the genius mad scientist Hiroshi in Abel Ferrara’s sci-fi erotic thriller *New Rose Hotel* (1998). His recent projects include large, site-specific sumi ink drawings of the Shinto god Inari for a shrine in Kyoto; an original anime (*Zan*, 2026–); and artwork for The Weeknd’s newest release in Japan. Amano continues to begin each day by making a drawing.

Origins 始源 is curated by Noa Wesley, Assistant Curator.

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