



Project three  
Japanese influences

# INSPIRED BY JAPAN

Illustration Guy McKinley

Four creatives tell **Anne Wollenberg** how they've drawn inspiration from Japanese style, from chubby girls to ninjas blowing bubbles

**The Japanese aesthetic has found its way across so much of the world that you could say it's the ultimate pop art.** From the enduring popularity of anime maestros like Hayao Miyazaki to Shohei Otomo's ballpoint pen art, the inspiring design coming out of Japan is vibrant, striking and utterly stylish. It's also unique. When we asked artists from Italy, Russia, Korea and the Philippines to explain just why they find

Japanese art so inspiring, they raved about Japan's culture of politeness and appreciation of aesthetics, unique outlook on life and, as illustrator Jason Raish puts it, the emphasis on making "everything you see as beautiful as possible." And he should know – Japan held such strong appeal, he decided to move there. Turn the page to find out how our artists' experiences with Japanese art ultimately informed their own styles.





## Anjo Bolarda

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Japanese art is like entering a dream portal, says this Manila-based illustrator, who loves classic cartoons and pin-up girls

- 1 All about design**  
I illustrate for adverts, posters, T-shirts, editorials, CD covers, murals: anything pertaining to design. I am currently a full-time designer for an apparel brand in the Philippines called Folded and Hung ([www.foldedandhung.com](http://www.foldedandhung.com)) and do freelance work for friends and some overseas clients. I always research a project then finish it inside my head.
- 2 The right tunes**  
When I start a project like this illustration, I first play some good music to set the mood – songs that really match the project I'm working on. I usually draw first using a 5 pen on smooth paper, and then I transfer it with a scanner to my computer. I use Corel Draw for the tracing, and then Photoshop for the colouring and additional effects.
- 3 Stories in images**  
Ever since I first started to draw, I've been a big fan of the Japanese art you see in manga comics and some anime TV shows such as *Hare Tokidoki Buta*, aka Tokyo Pig, even though I can barely understand Nihongo (a type of Japanese language). But that language barrier doesn't matter because the artwork tells the story instead.
- 4 A dream world**  
Several of the Japanese artists that inspire me and influence my work are Shohei Otomo, the manga artist Shintaro Kago, Junko Mizuno, the awesome Yoshitaka Amano and also the Japanese street art scene. For me, working with Japanese art is like entering a dream portal. It seems unreal, but at the same time you can really feel it.
- 5 The extremes**  
I really love how far that Japanese artists can go with their art style. Many of their artworks are bound to themes of extreme sex, violence, pain, but then there is also happiness. Japan's love for irony and randomness is also something that I've tried to adapt into my own work from their style, along with using colours as a medium to express emotion.
- 6 Clashing colours**  
Most of my works involve funky and colourful, low-brow graphics and shapes, typography, old classic cartoons and pin-up girls too. I love using a complex palette, and pairing up unexpected colours. I'd actually say I'm most inspired when I'm feeling emotionally low, because I always manage to turn this negative energy into something epic.



## Irina Vinnik

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For this Russian illustrator, the essence of Japanese style lies in achieving the maximum expression with minimum means

- 1 Alien traditions**  
Many of my art works are related to Japanese aesthetics. I really like their detailed and laconic graphics. When I illustrated the book *The World of Dolls, Story and Legend*, I had to learn many different materials associated with different countries. I got the impression that the Japanese are a little bit alien: their traditions are so different from those of Europeans.
- 2 The connection**  
When I create my illustrations for children's books, my designs are often inspired by the great masters of Japanese prints. Each of these incredible artists were able to achieve the maximum expression with the minimum of means, and I think this is a philosophy that almost every artist should strive to achieve in their work.
- 3 Unusual solutions**  
I have several books filled with pictures of traditional ornaments, kimono patterns and old prints that I refer to when I'm working. I often stare at them, because you can see an unusual solution within the pages. Complex things can be done easily and vice versa, and that's what I admire about the Japanese style in these designs.
- 4 Everyday beauty**  
Japanese art is closely connected with this particular Japanese ratio of the beauty of everyday things. Children are taught to see a beautiful childhood. This is one of the few cultures where ornaments are, in most cases, non-symmetrical – just as in nature. I've tried to reconcile a variety of forms just as beautifully as the Japanese masters.
- 5 A tourist's view**  
I've not travelled to Japan before, but I would be very interested to do so at some point in the future. Of course, I'm sure that visiting the country for a short amount of time as a tourist can make only a very superficial impression on you of the culture that's on offer. That's especially true of a country like Japan, which is full of complex traditions.
- 6 Japanese dolls**  
I draw a lot of my inspiration from traditional Japanese dolls, and also flowers. All of the black-and-white drawings in my portfolio are pages from my sketchbook, drawn with ink and gel pen and inspired by traditional kimono designs. When drawing, we should not be afraid to carry out an unexpected line – sometimes it turns out in an interesting way.



Case study #4