



Manga International
Network Team

Keita Katsushika

The essence of East Tokyo
and real life reflected in manga





Keita Katsushika
manga artist and illustrator

The essence of East Tokyo and real life reflected in manga

Tokyo's East side is a place where history meets diversity—a traditional working-class district that has evolved into a vibrant home for many international residents today.

In his work, up-and-coming manga artist Keita Katsushika captures the raw reality of these streets. By looking at the city and its people through an unbiased lens, he brings to light the true lives of Tokyo's diverse population—showing us a world that goes far beyond the pages of a travel guide.



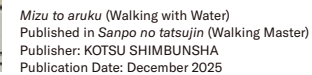
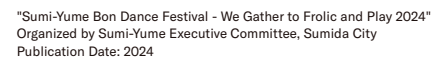
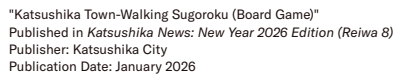
Higashi Tokyo machimachi (Diverse East Tokyo)
Publisher: Two Virgins (Print), LEED PUBLISHING Co., Ltd. (Digital)
Publication Date: July 12, 2023

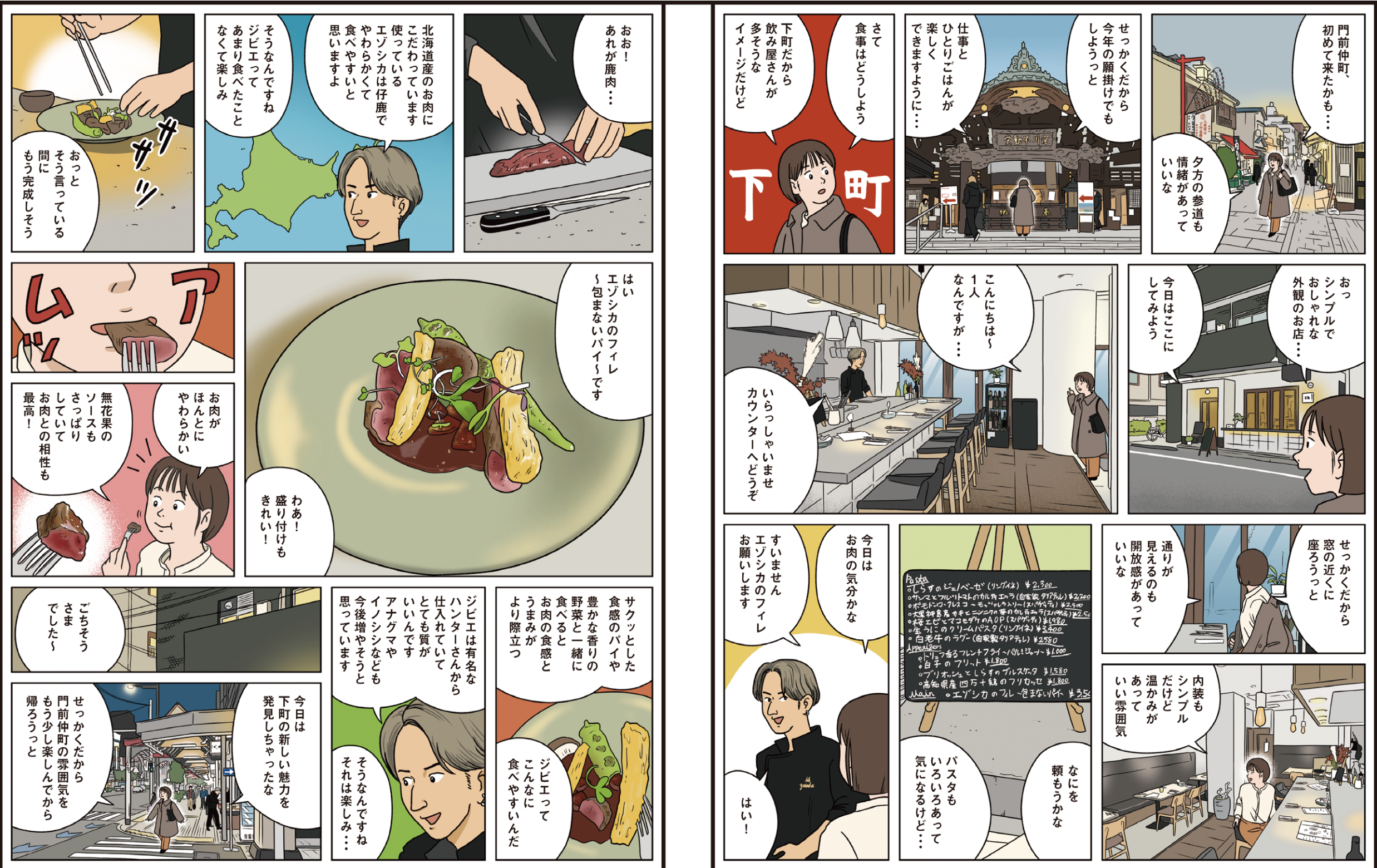


Sunderu (Living Here)
 Publisher: Urban Renaissance Agency (UR)
 Planned and edited by NOOK (General Incorporated Association)
 Publication Date: January 23, 2026



Tateishi Stories, Volume 1
 Publisher: Tateishi Stories Project
 Publication Date: 2023







Katsushika no mado (Katsushika Window), Vol. 401 Fukuju (New Year's Celebration)
Publisher: Katsushika Hojinkai
Publication Date: January 2026



Banjo no paradaisu (Paradise on the Board)
By Tadashi Wakashima
© KAWADE SHOBO SHINSHA
Publication Date: April 2023



Chiri gakusha, hakken to deai o motomete sekai o iku! (Geographers, Travel the World in Search of Discoveries and Encounters!)
By Kazuharu Mizuno
Publisher: Chikumashobo Ltd.
Publication Date: February 2023



Tokyo umare ja nai keredo (I Wasn't Born in Tokyo, but...)
By Ryo Fukawa
Publisher: POPLAR PUBLISHING CO., LTD.
Publication Date: October 2025



Kankoku doramauma ni hamatte mitara (Hooked on Korean Dramas)
By Mitsuyo Kakuta
Publisher: Chikumashobo Ltd.
Publication Date: May 2025

Review *by* Chris

Higashi Tokyo machimachi (Diverse East Tokyo)

Christopher Woodrow-Butcher (Canada/Taiwan)
Manga editor, writer, and podcaster

Synopsis

“There’s an ‘East’ in Tokyo.”
Sarah, a Muslim university student; Selam, a grade-schooler born to Ethiopian parents; and Haruta, a middle schooler who refuses to go to school—three individuals from diverse backgrounds and ages. Together, they explore East Tokyo, wandering the city and uncovering the hidden charms of their hometown in this local discovery adventure tale!

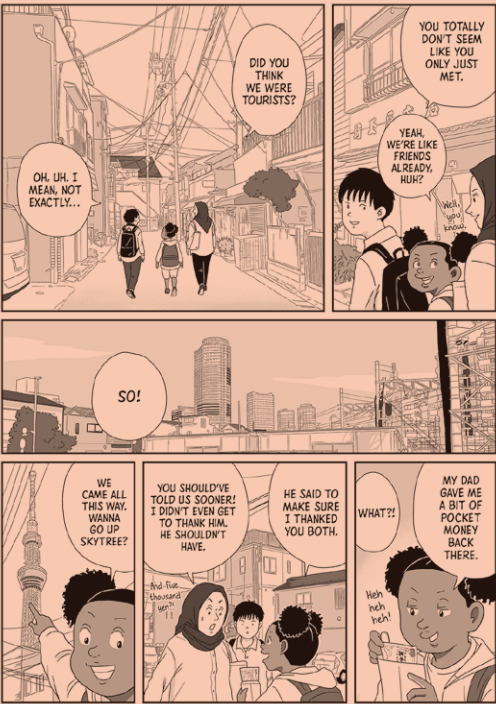


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Is it Local?: Keita Katsushika and the Little-touristed Neighborhoods of East Tokyo

You’d be forgiven, as a tourist, for not being aware of the older neighborhoods of Tokyo. If you’ve been to Tokyo, you’ve probably been to Asakusa, or perhaps a stone’s throw further to the sumo district of Ryogoku, or more likely the glamorous new “Solomachi” shopping mall that surrounds Tokyo Skytree. But these neighborhoods are just the edge, the entranceway, to the many diverse neighborhoods of East Tokyo. Writer and Illustrator Keita Katsushika is . . . well, he seems slightly obsessed with these neighborhoods. But in a good way.

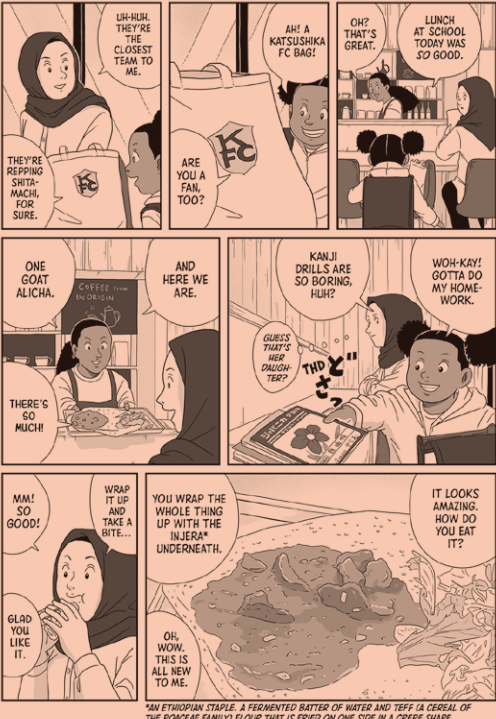
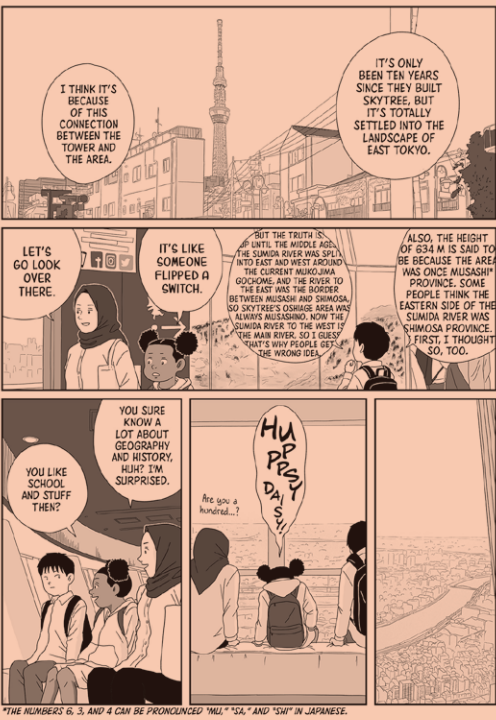
Eastern Tokyo is a little more industrial, more working-class, and a little quieter than the bustling stops along Tokyo’s circular Yamanote train line. The neighborhoods of Koto, Edogawa, and Katsushika (among others) are the mirrors to Western Tokyo’s cities-within-cities of Shibuya, Shinjuku, and Nakano—they show a different way of life in Tokyo, far off the well-worn tourist paths that have been popularized by social media and travel guides. The Western neighborhoods certainly get



the lion’s share of media attention and promotion, while the surprisingly diverse everyday life east of the Sumida River doesn’t often get the same attention despite Katsushika’s heroic efforts! Through writing local magazine articles and drawing illustrations, giving public talks, and posting on social media, Katsushika has undertaken numerous efforts to extol the virtues of East Tokyo, and now he’s added a new tool to his promotional arsenal: a travel guide, reference book, and compelling story of the lives of residents all in the form of a very cool manga: *Higashi Tokyo machimachi* (Diverse East Tokyo)!

In recent years the “Explainer Manga” (as we often call them on the Mangasplaining podcast) has become more popularly known and understood by Western manga readers. “Explainer manga” are informational or educational works created by Japanese manga creators to explain a wide variety of subjects to their Japanese readerships, usually by weaving the information into a fun or compelling story. While initially the focus on the perspective of the Japanese readership made these titles a bit difficult to bring to Western readers, smart publishers realized that certain subjects are universal, like food! The first modern forays into publishing explainer manga for English readers were the food manga, titles like *Oishinbo*, *What Did You Eat Yesterday?*, and the smash shonen hit *Food Wars!: Shokugeki no Soma*, all constructing elaborate and everyday scenarios around explaining certain ingredients, dishes, or culinary customs to their audiences. Food Explainer manga paved the way for an ever-growing list of titles on a variety of subjects, from animal biology in *Heaven’s Design Team*, to the historical luxury of a good bath in *Thermae Romae*, to anthropomorphized typefaces in the surprising *What the Font!?* Now is the time to learn about culture, art, and history through manga, and *Diverse East Tokyo* is a worthy addition to the canon.

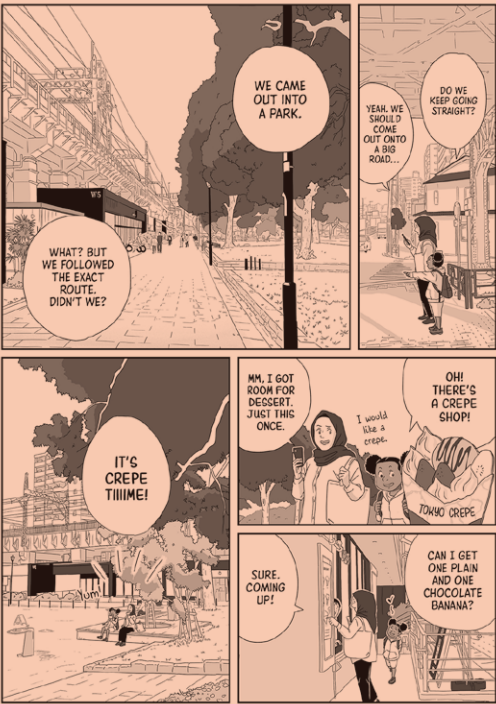
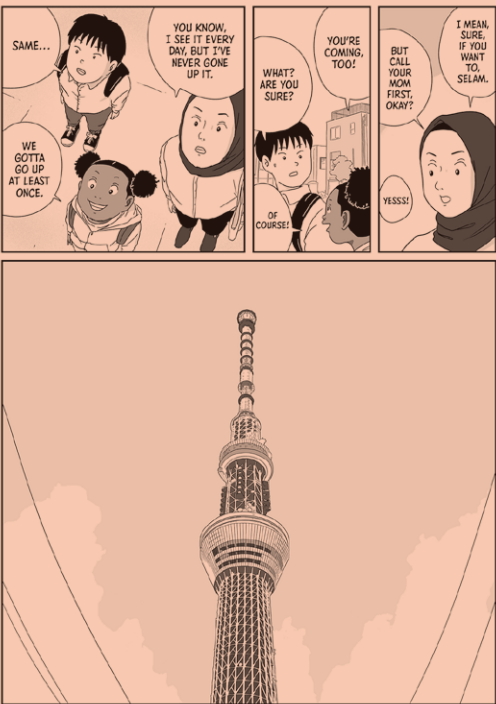
In *Diverse East Tokyo*, Katsushika tackles travel, of a sort—traveling in your own backyard. His subject is his favorite area of the city he calls home, but his manga adopts the visual vocabulary of the great comic book explorer, the boy reporter Tintin. The grandiosity of artist Herge’s depiction



of international wonders is here deployed by Katsushika to depict the narrow alleyways, warehouses, power cables, train lines, and cityscapes of the usually quite humble East Tokyo. Katsushika wants to be your guide to his little corner of the world, communicating not just the facts but also his strong feelings in an explainer manga that includes all the diversity of the best explainer manga—cultures, lifestyles, history, geography, architecture, anthropology, travel, and yes even food too! His passion is on full display in *Diverse East Tokyo*.

Katsushika begins his adventure at the city’s newest and most visible landmark—Tokyo Skytree. His three intrepid main characters Sarah, Selam, and Haruta comment on the imposing structure from its base, “You know I see it every day, but I’ve never gone up it,” something that residents of many big cities with famous “Tower” landmarks can probably relate to. Speaking of relatability, Tokyo Skytree is a great opening gambit, baiting readers with a familiar and famous landmark, but sneaking in a more complicated and textured depiction of the neighborhood around it: Delicious Ethiopian goat alicha (with injera!), history going back centuries, tasty crepes in a fancy part of town, and the revelation that Skytree is just the latest in a long line of towers in East Tokyo. You knew about Tokyo Skytree, but now you know about its predecessors, its connection to the land that surrounds it, and the people that live there . . . and that’s just the first chapter!

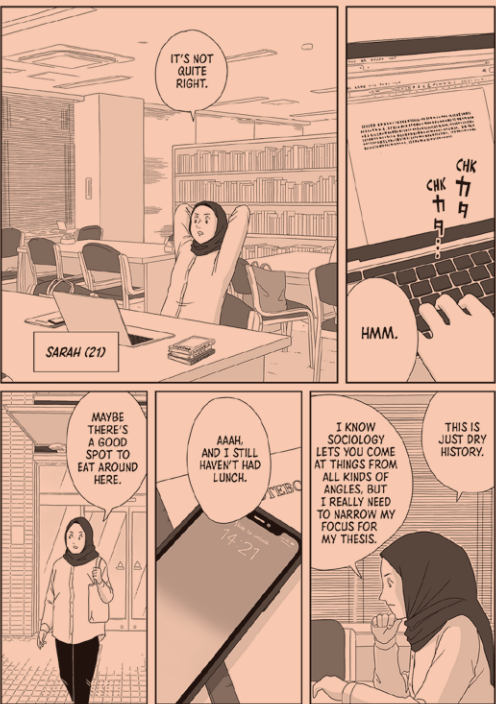
I’ll be honest, I didn’t really understand (or often visit . . .) East Tokyo. I’m a big fan of the Edo-Tokyo Museum in Ryogoku (bring the family!), and I did go up Tokyo Skytree myself on a particularly quiet New Year’s Day in Tokyo . . . but since reading *Diverse East Tokyo*, Katsushika’s work inspired me to make my own explorations. There are great craft beer bars for example, and many new breweries opening too. I met a restaurant proprietor out there who gave up his job as a manga editor(!) to open a combination bar and bookstore where he makes all his food from scratch! We met another small-business owner that teaches traditional tea ceremonies in the afternoons, runs a bar and restaurant at night,



and speaks four languages. Many of Tokyo’s oldest sento bathhouses still in operation are out that way, and some of their newest and most creative are there too. The fascinating Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, hosting rotating exhibitions and the incredible Tokyo Art Book Fair, is a centerpiece of Koto City. There’s even a manga museum out there, dedicated to the *complicated* prewar comic strip hero *Norakuro*. I was positively inspired by Katsushika’s work, and I’ve loved my time exploring East Tokyo. Apparently, I’ve become something of an evangelist for East Tokyo myself.

In the first chapter of *Diverse East Tokyo*, our POV character Sarah begins the story by despairing the “dry history” of her thesis project on East Tokyo. She ends the first chapter by realizing that its history is rich, its people fascinating, and the eastern city is best explored on foot, where you can meet its inhabitants. She commits to keep strolling through East Tokyo, and through her and this manga, Katsushika is inviting us along too. Let’s take him up on his offer!

-Christopher Woodrow-Butcher



Manga International Network Team (MINT)

Interview Keita Katsushika

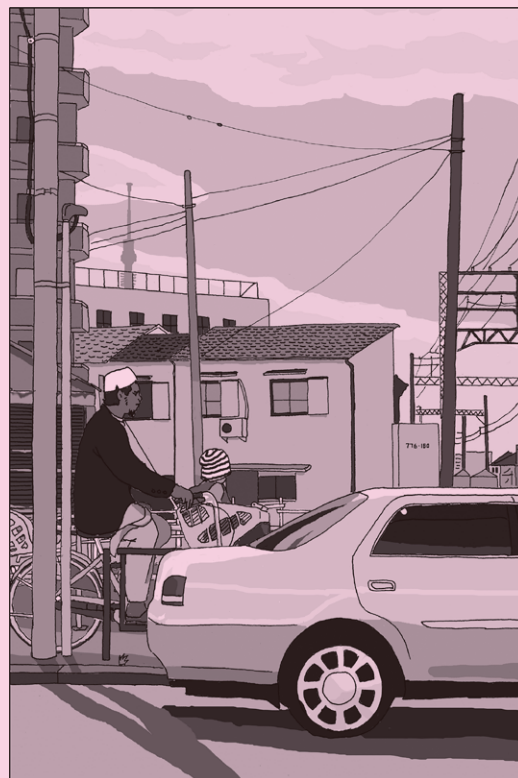


What made you want to become a manga artist?

I've liked drawing ever since I was a kid. I never formally studied art in university. I just made illustrations and manga for myself as a hobby.

Around 2010, I started posting illustrations online of Tokyo's old town areas like my neighborhood, Katsushika City. I was uploading these one-panel manga on Tumblr and gradually connected with more people through social media. That led to invites for me to contribute to independent magazines and more chances to exhibit my illustrations. From there, my creative activities gradually expanded.

Q1



Katsushika-shika series, 2012



Katsushika-shika series, 2016

What influenced your creative style?

French *bandes dessinées* and American underground comics, or alternative comics as they were also called. A lot like the sorts of work published by Fantagraphics or Drawn & Quarterly in North America.

It wasn't your typical superhero fare. I was way more into black-and-white comics as a teenager. I think those definitely had a big influence on my art style. I've always loved French comics and their clean-line style known as *ligne claire*.

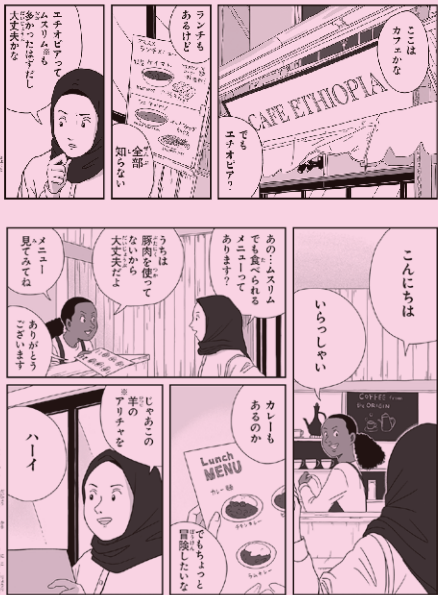
The designer for *Higashi Tokyo machimachi* also knows a lot about international comics. So in our meetings, we talked about doing something in a classic *bande dessinée* style. So we decided to go full *Tintin* with it. Like where the character's face is just tucked into the corner. That cover is basically a direct nod to *Tintin*.

Q2

Why did you choose to focus on East Tokyo?

Mainly because I grew up in Katsushika City which is in the eastern part of Tokyo. It's where I've always lived, so it's very familiar. It's what I'd call my hometown. When Tokyo gets featured in the media, the focus is often on fashion or pop culture. Whenever talking about the latest cultural trends, you hear about Shibuya, Shinjuku, maybe Ikebukuro . . .

It's mostly the western side of Tokyo's 23 cities that get the spotlight. The eastern side is usually framed as a sort of "traditional old Tokyo". Places like Asakusa or Ueno, lots of temples and that kind of thing. But living here, you realize that's not the full picture. Like in *Higashi Tokyo machimachi*, there might be mosques nearby, or a shop selling halal food, or markets for Chinese or Southeast Asian ingredients. People from all over the world live here. You can hear all kinds of languages walking down the street. But I feel that reality doesn't get shown much in the media. I wanted to draw these different sides of the city with the actual perspective of a person living here. I wanted the manga to show what it's really like here and say, "There's more to this place than you think."



Q3

How do readers respond to your work?

When I draw neighborhoods that don't often appear in media some people say, "Thank you for putting this on the map!" It really makes people happy to see their hometowns represented. Others say, "I've never been there, but now I want to go," and that kind of reaction really means a lot to me.

Q4

How do you think about social issues in your work?

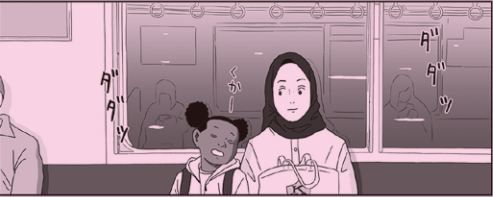
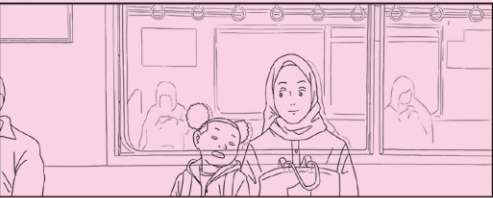
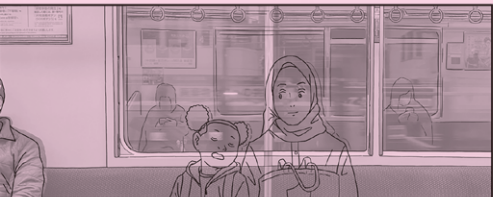
Rather than focusing on current events, I'm more interested in the history of Tokyo's eastern cities. I'm especially interested in what kinds of issues these areas have dealt with in the past. To me, learning a place's history is deeply connected to making work that feels rooted in it.

Q5

How do you research the neighborhoods you draw?

I always try to find a spot where I can take in the whole area I'm researching first. Like, if a character walks in from here, what would that opening panel look like? I often take photos while imagining the character's movements. Sometimes, when I'm drawing the storyboard I realize I need a photo from the opposite angle. So I'll come back again to collect more material. I'll visit the same spot three or four times for just one episode. I usually draw on an iPad so I often do my rough storyboard layouts at a nearby café. And while working, if I notice I'm missing a reference photo, I'll go out again and take it. Being able to move around easily is important for me.

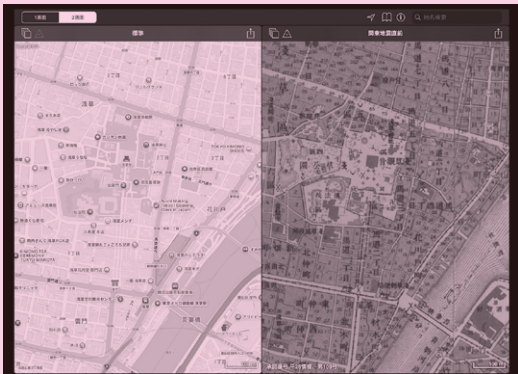
Q6



What kind of reference materials do you use?

I walk the neighborhoods and research them as part of my creative process. Along the way, I collect and read all sorts of materials. I mainly get materials from local museums and history centers, free brochures or catalogs sold at the exhibitions. I collect those as I go and draw on them. Take this one here, called *Koiwa Venice Market*. I used this booklet about a shopping arcade that used to be built over a waterway in Koiwa for research. And this one's the Arakawa Museum's official catalog from a photo exhibition about Arakawa in the Showa era. There are also collections of old photographs that have been compiled by local historians. Or booklets from the local government on the area's history. I read all of these kinds of things to try to get to know a place.

Also . . . I use iPad apps a fair bit too. This one's called "Tokyo jiso chizu" ("Tokyo Historical Layer Map"). It shows how neighborhoods looked in the past. There's an iPhone and an iPad version. You can view today's map side by side with prewar layouts, and maps from around the time of the Great Kanto Earthquake or 100 years ago. With this app, you can see where you are now and what it looked like a century ago. It's an incredibly useful tool for what I do.



What do you hope to express in your work?

With *Higashi Tokyo machimachi*, for instance, it features characters with all sorts of backgrounds which is how I express diversity. I've noticed readers really connect with that, and it makes me so glad. But that's not the only thing I want to convey. There's also the neighborhoods the characters live in: What kind of environment are they part of? What's the present state of the city they live in? I'm really interested in these kinds of things.

I want to show who's living in these cities and portray the kinds of people who call these places home. At its base, that's what I want to keep exploring through my work. And I hope to keep observing neighborhoods and continue drawing what I see.



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MINT vol. I Sample Catalog PDF

About Keita Katsushika

Keita Katsushika is a manga artist and illustrator from Katsushika Ward in East Tokyo. He debuted in 2010 with his manga appearing in independent magazines such as *USCA* and *PON-RAI*. He is also a professional illustrator, and creates artwork featured on the covers of books and magazines. *Higashi Tokyo machimachi* (Diverse East Tokyo) was first serialized on the web comic platform Michikusa but has since moved to serialization on Torch web. It has been included as a recommended title in *Kono Manga ga Sugoi!* 2024 (This Manga is Awesome!) and *Freestyle* magazine's "Kono manga o yome! 2024" (Read This Manga!) 2024.

Katsushika's artwork draws inspiration from the *ligne claire* (clear line) style found in Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée* as well as from American underground and alternative comics. He excels at describing cities and people through his fieldwork and applying what he saw and discovered to his manga. As he lives in the east side of Tokyo, he is very interested in its history and the events that took place in the area before, and shares the charm of the area through social media.

Publications

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About MINT

Manga International Network Team (MINT) aims to support early career manga artists and their editors in Japan who are working to achieve a global presence, and to increase the recognition and value of manga's diversity overseas. This project is the manga section of the Creator Support Program, a program managed by the Japan Creator Support Fund, which in turn was established by the Japan Arts Council with a subsidy from the Agency for Cultural Affairs.

Organizers
Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan
Japan Arts Council
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