

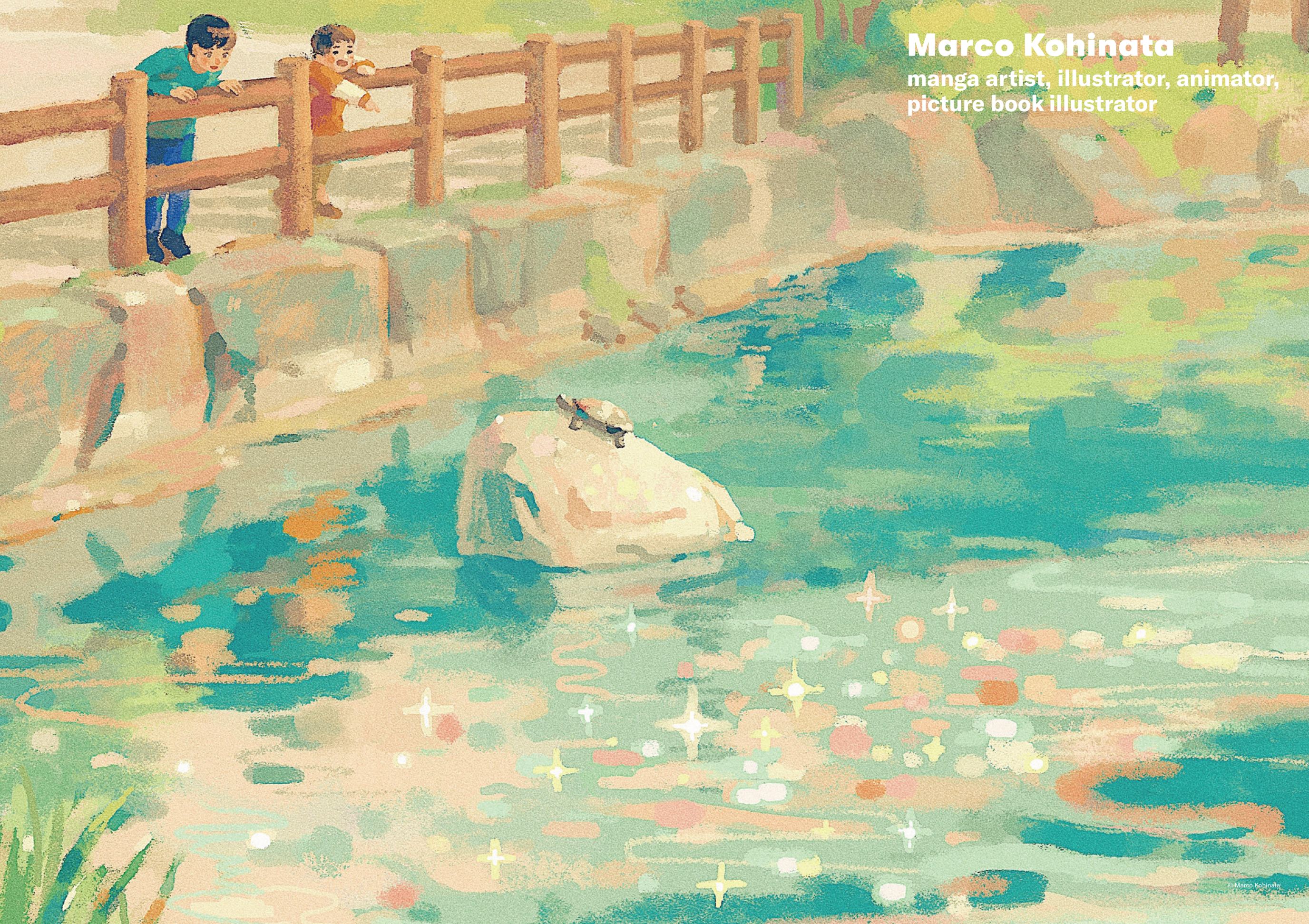


Manga International  
Network Team

# Mai Kohinata

Tales of hurt and healing woven  
in a warm and glowing light





**Marco Kohinata**

manga artist, illustrator, animator,  
picture book illustrator



## Tales of hurt and healing woven in a warm and glowing light

Daily life is a tapestry of light and shade, shifting from brilliant shimmers to deep, quiet shadows. Marco paints these scenes with such emotional depth that they mirror the sensitive hearts of her characters.

She takes the feelings we all share—gentle warmth, fragility, and heart-wrenching nostalgia—and filters them through her own creative prism. The result is a story that glitters with a multifaceted brilliance, capturing the true essence of the human experience.



*Akari*  
Publisher: HERO'S INC.  
Publication Date: June 30, 2022  
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Before Dark © Marco Kohinata

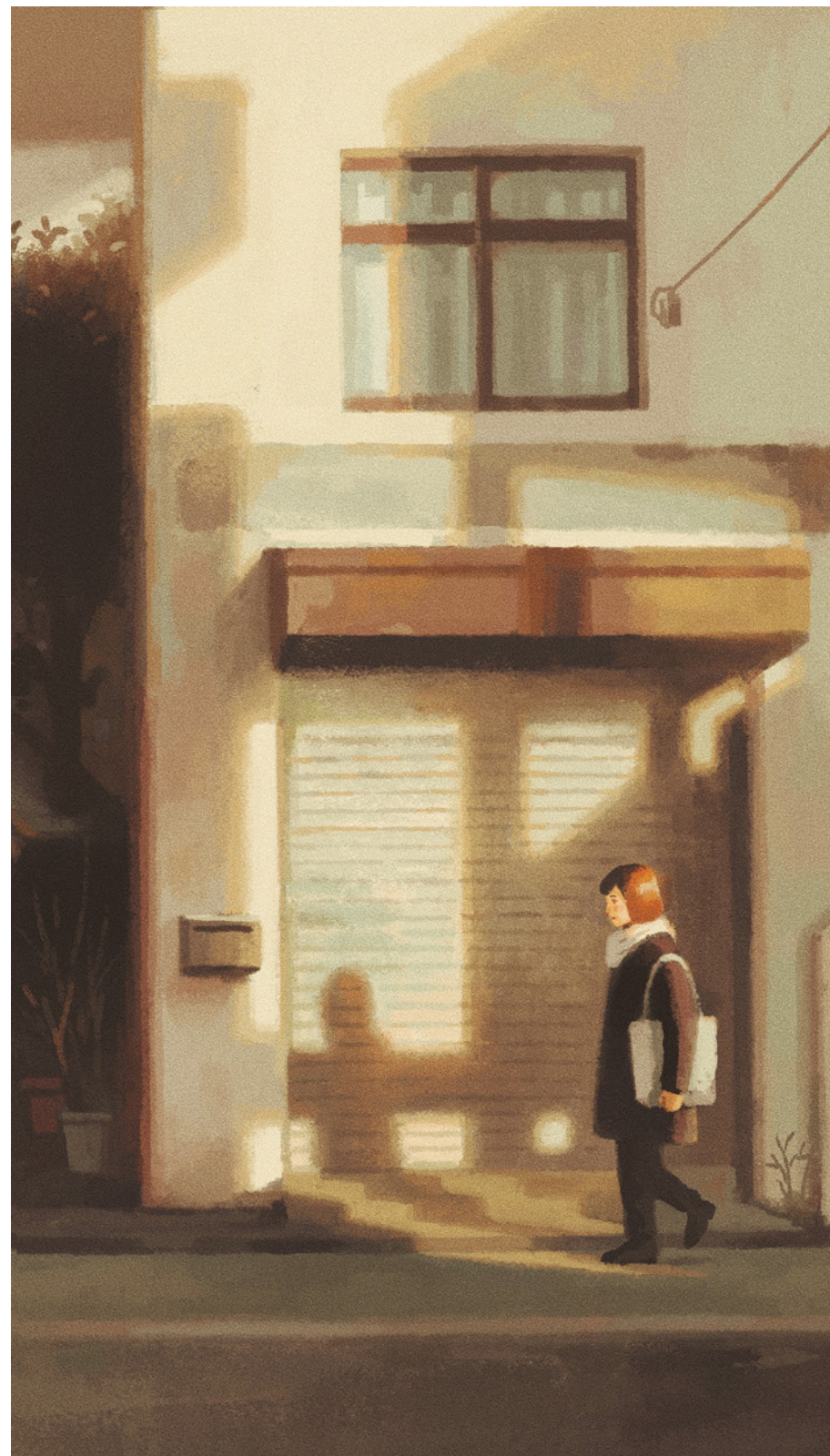


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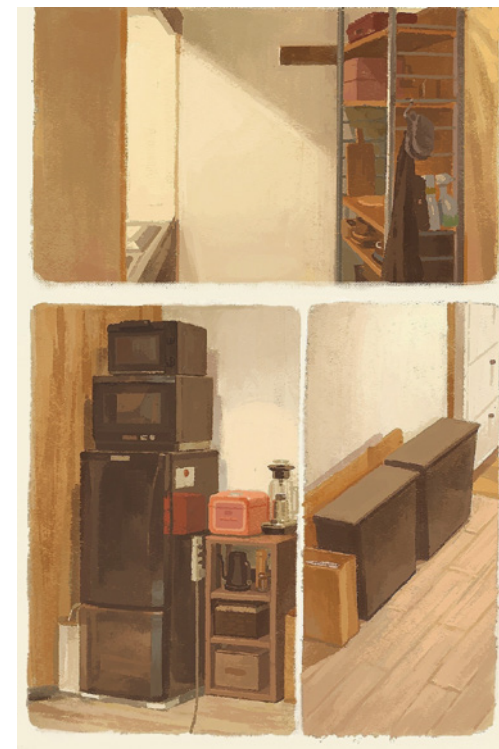


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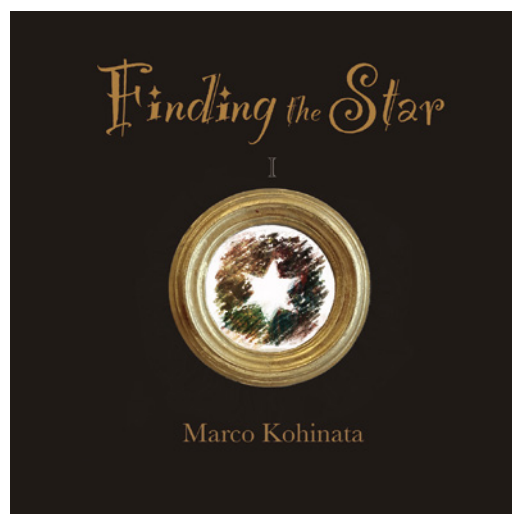
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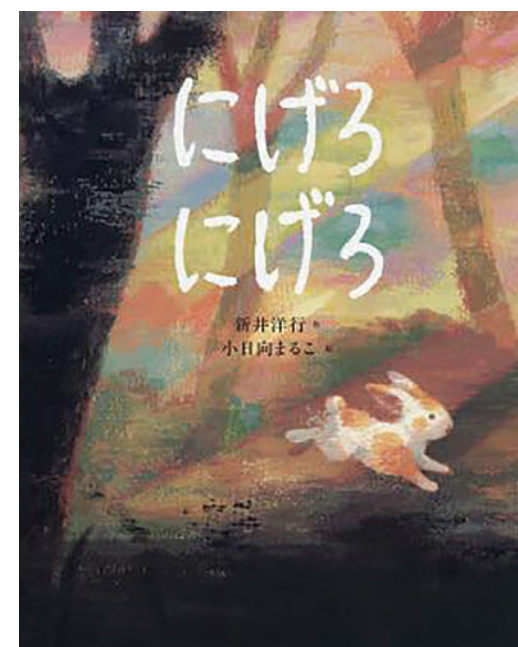
*Hei no naka no Biyoshitsu* (The Beauty Salon in Prison)  
Based on an original work by Mina Sakurai  
Publisher: Shogakukan  
Publication Date: Aug. 2022  
© Marco Kohinata, Mina Sakurai / Shogakukan



*Mahoro koen de furimukeba* (Look Back in Mahoro Park)  
Based on an original work by Hikaru Fujishige  
Publisher: KAISEI-SHA Ltd.  
Publication Date: Jan. 2025



© Marco Kohinata



*Nigero nigero* (Run Away, Run Away)  
Based on an original work by Hiroyuki Arai  
Publisher: Kyouikugageki  
Publication Date: Feb. 2026



*Arutisuto ha hana o fumanai* (The Artist Doesn't Trample the Flowers)  
By Marco Kohinata  
Publisher: Shogakukan  
Publication Date: Mar. 2019  
© Marco Kohinata / Shogakukan



# Review *by* Chris

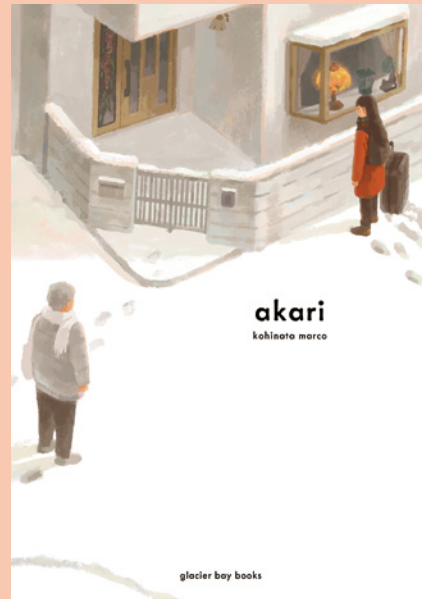
## Akari

**Christopher Woodrow-Butcher (Canada/Taiwan)**

Manga editor, writer, and podcaster

### Synopsis

After losing his wife and his will to live, Kagari, an elderly stained-glass artist, is visited by Akari, his long-estranged granddaughter. As they work together creating stained-glass pieces, the two begin to connect on a deeper level. However, their family reunion might be more complicated than what it seems to be. A heartfelt story about the bond between an older craftsman and a young girl just beginning her creative journey.



*Akari*  
Publisher: GLACIER BAY BOOKS LLC  
Publication Date: May, 2026  
© 2022 Marco Kohinata / HERO'S INC. © GLACIER BAY BOOKS LLC, 2026

## Soft and Sharp: Marco Kohinata's Soft-focus Illustrations and Cutting Contemporary Anxiety

I don't think I want to talk about Marco Kohinata's superb *Akari* without “spoiling” it a little, so this essay might not be for you.

I mean, there are ways to talk about *Akari*'s sumptuous art with its soft lines, the light seemingly radiating from the illustrations and then receding into luxurious shadows . . . The quiet moments and subtle facial expressions, the tensing and relaxing body language, the exquisite pacing—subjects that won't expose the plot of the title. It's a gorgeous book no doubt, but what makes Kohinata's manga so affecting is the way that she puts her immense artistic skill to work in service of a compelling and timely manga whose themes merit equal discussion, and that discussion cuts to the heart of the story. I'll do my best, even with what I reveal, to leave you excited to read *Akari* yourself.

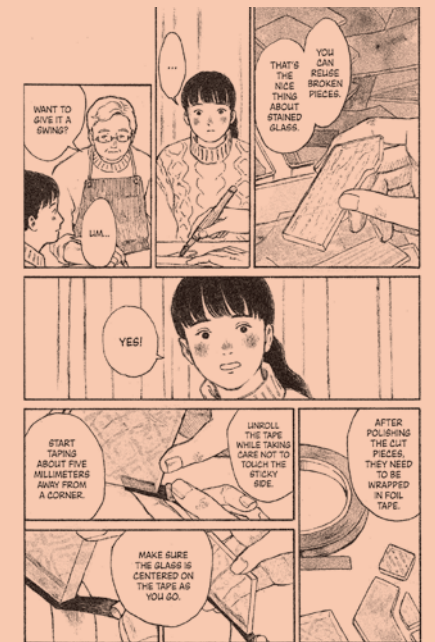
The story opens not on the titular young woman *Akari*, but on the elderly stained-glass artist Kagari. After his wife's passing, he has lost the will to live, and it is a chance encounter with



young artist Akari, his long-estranged granddaughter, that renews his spirit. Akari aspires to create art like her grandfather, and as the two of them work on stained glass projects together they begin to reconnect and the dark gloom that surrounds them both begins to dissipate, as though illuminated by the stained-glass light projects they build. But as the first chapter draws to a close, we learn that Akari is not who she seems, not Kagari's granddaughter at all but another young woman named Akari, and her mysterious motives generate a sudden, sharp anxiety in a story told entirely through soft organic artwork. It's a powerful dichotomy.

Marco Kohinata's artistic practice is rooted in illustration but explodes into the world through a variety of forms including picture books and visual collections, poetry, animation, and of course, manga. With four stand-alone manga volumes to her credit, it is her 2017 manga *Arutisuto wa hana o fumanai* (The Artist Doesn't Trample the Flowers) about children in a small French town on the border of Germany at the cusp of World War II that brought her to the attention of manga critics. Three years later, her 2020 manga adaptation of *Hei no naka no biyoshitsu* (lit. “The Beauty Salon in Prison,” but also known as “The Depth of the Sky”), about a prisoner rehabilitation program inside a women's prison, netted Kohinata the Japan Media Arts Festival Excellence Prize and brought her industry-wide acclaim. But it is the manga we're discussing here, 2022's *Akari* that marked Kohinata as a major manga talent and drew an invitation to the MINT Project. *Akari* will be Kohinata's first work published in English, coming in 2026, where English-language audiences will discover what Japanese (and French, and Italian . . . ) audiences already have.

Between these “official” manga releases, Kohinata has been busy creating illustrations and self-publishing limited edition books. She communicates frequently with her fans, updating them on her works, her creative practice and process, in surprisingly warm and thoughtful discussions. Kohinata is a creator who has built an extensive artistic career in Japan already, and you can't help but get the sense that it's still just





really beginning.

The themes of Kohinata's works are quite fascinating, and powerful. Through working with the MINT Project, I've had the honor to both professionally interview Kohinata many times and get to know her too. The difficult experiences in her own life, combined with the empathy and understanding for the people in it (and for herself), have deeply informed her works and characters. Secrets, lies, and mysteries figure heavily into Kohinata's published works, and one gets the sense that whether she is writing an original project or choosing one to adapt, these are very deliberate choices. The plight of young people also weighs heavily in her works. Her next project, unannounced as of this writing, will seek to address these themes even more directly. Perhaps though, the theme that most resonates and recurs seems to be the (poor) choices people make when they are overwhelmed, when nothing is going right, when they are desperate and feel that they are out of options. The sort of decisions that might lead to an imprisoned woman cutting your hair, or a young woman who isn't what she seems living in your guest room.

Which of course, brings us back to *Akari*. When I finished reading this manga, I couldn't help but tell everyone I knew about it! I wanted to share my love for its sumptuous artwork and really affecting story with anyone who'd listen. Their reactions were sometimes surprising, though. Some people worried about a young person and an elder living together and what that might mean . . . some were scared of what Akari might be planning through her lies. People brought a lot of their own anxiety to the book's description and setting, perhaps even you here reading this did the same. It's an anxious time, I don't really blame you, if so. I'm happy to say that *Akari* is a story where there are no "bad guys," just people in complicated situations doing their best to muddle through, sometimes failing and sometimes succeeding. It's about loneliness and family trauma healing over generations, about masters and apprentices, long-deserved apologies, and about young people suffering grievously at the hands of capitalism and finding salvation through various kinds of social safety nets. It's about art.



The final chapter of *Akari* hit me hard, and this is really where the "spoilers" come into play. After a series of traumatic events, the story has Akari contacting social services to help her pull her life together... and succeeding. She is given a moment to breathe, and process her actions, her feelings, and the events of the story to that point. Meanwhile Kagari has his own realizations, admitting that his once-sharp feelings about Akari, his family, and his life, when reexamined, had softened considerably, changing him and his beautiful stained-glass art. There's such a real feeling of hope in the ending, not just sentimental hope but real, practical hope, that people can pull themselves up out of difficult situations. It's an incredible and frankly rare ending in manga, or contemporary art in general. Things are rough out there, and the deck IS stacked against us, but it's not hopeless. We can heal and move forward and make amends. This is what I want to say about *Akari*, and while I might have "spoiled" some of the ending, believe me that the journey to that conclusion and the feelings that come with it will hopefully be as revelatory to you upon reading as they were for me.

-Christopher Woodrow-Butcher





# Interview Marco Kohinata



## What made you want to become a manga artist?

I've loved drawing since I was little and I also loved making up stories. I was raised by a single mother, so I spent a lot of time alone. I couldn't always tell my mom about the happy or sad things from school—like fights with friends or small daily occurrences—I just didn't really get to share those moments. But we had lots of manga, anime, and picture books at home and I found feelings in those stories that matched my own. In a way, reading those filled the space where I might have shared things with my mom. In a way, manga and anime gave me emotional support when I didn't have anyone else to talk to. That really saved me, and I naturally started wanting to create those stories myself.

# Q1

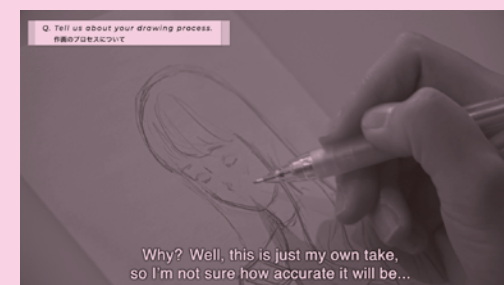
## What do you love about manga?

What I love about manga is how you can really show the subtleties of emotion, frame by frame. In other words, you can express the flow of time. A single illustration doesn't quite do that and in animation it tends to become a long story. But with manga, I can do it all on my own, whether short or long—I can show time through the combination of story and art. It's such an effective medium for that.

# Q2

## Tell us about your drawing process.

I'm quite particular about how I draw. I want to show raw textures and emotion. I love manga, but the typical manga style doesn't feel right for me. For example, in Japan, a lot of artists use G-pens or dip pens to draw with sharp black lines—but I'm not comfortable with those bold black lines. Why? Well, this is just my own take, so I'm not sure how accurate it will be, but when I think about myself and others, I see us as one part of the Earth or the larger natural world. That feeling is really reassuring to me, so when I draw characters with strong outlines, I find they feel disconnected from the world. So using rough or faded lines feels more natural to me. Another thing about typical manga style that doesn't sit well with me is how manga often uses things like screen tone or solid black fills—those clean, uniform tones feel kind of industrial, and not quite right for my work. So I intentionally add blurring, make shades uneven, or use the texture of the paper itself—that undefined quality feels like a better fit for my style.



# Q3

## What about manga challenges you?

When it comes to typical “Japanese manga,” it's the principally black-and-white format that I struggle with. For me, color is incredibly important—almost like a language in itself. Part of why I draw is to pick out and gather up those small moments of happiness from hard days. By collecting and creating art from them, I turn them into something that gives me energy. In those moments, light often feels especially beautiful to me. Light itself is a theme and motif in my work. It might sound a bit cliché when put into words, but that light often feels like hope to me. On the other hand, black isn't technically a color. It absorbs light and for me it is an incredibly scary color, I suppose. It reminds me of darkness and shadows. Drawing only in black and white was really hard for me at times. Black, to me, symbolizes fear. It seems to strongly embody concepts like despair or even death. I recently realized that maybe I've been avoiding black because it has that character of fear and unease. But now, in trying to convey those negative emotions, I'm intentionally using black to express them. I think through my work, I can start confronting and exploring those feelings.



# Q4



Could you talk about the lies the main character tells in Akari?

I may seem completely different from Akari, the protagonist, but when I was little, I often told lies. I lied to protect the weakness in myself, and I couldn't stop myself from doing that. I think it lasted from around age five to ten. I just couldn't stop, even though I knew it was wrong. And I really struggled with the guilt. So, as an adult, I wanted to forgive my former self. I want to forgive that vulnerable version of me. Maybe that's part of the reason for the way Akari is portrayed.

Q5

Why did you choose your publisher?

Even when bringing the exact same idea, some editors will say, 'This is great!' while others won't react much at all. Of course, every publisher and manga magazine has its own style, genre, or current lineup. What matters most is whether the editor reading it says, I like this—that's the principal reason.

Q7

What do you want readers to take away from Akari?

My family didn't have much money, and I had to give up on a lot of things because of that. I really don't want others in that situation to give up on their passions just because of money or circumstance. That goes for my past self too, as well as readers and young people today. I want it to reach people in situations similar to mine back then. That hope is really strong in me.

Q6

Do you think about overseas readers?

I do hope readers outside Japan can enjoy my work, but I don't focus on it too much. Whether it's Japanese or international readers, if I draw personal and honest experiences, then I believe those feelings will reach anyone. More than where someone lives, that's the part I have in mind when drawing.

Q8



X @MARU\_CO\_415



IG @kmarco1994



HP <https://kohinatamarco.com/>



Japan Creator Support Fund Website



MINT Website



MINT vol. I Sample Catalog PDF

About Marco Kohinata

Born in 1994 in Osaka Prefecture, Marco Kohinata was influenced by her mother's love for art and fell in love with drawig as a child. Her mother often took her to art exhibitions and museums. At home, she was exposed to picture books from all around the world, manga, illustrations and anime. Kohinata studied art at correspondence courses through Musashino Art University. She eventually left academia after making her debut as a manga artist. She currently works on commerical illustration, animation projects, and picture book creation in addition to her manga work.

She has felt comforted by many works by artists she admires, and wishes to recreate that feeling in other people through her manga and illustrations.

She uses a very particular drawing style to convey raw textures and emotion. For her, the style found in typical manga doesn't feel right. Instead of sharp black lines, she draws rough or faded lines—intentionally adding blurring, making shades uneven, and even using the texture of the paper itself—which feel natural and comforting to her. She also avoids using screentone or solid black fills as those clean, uniform tones feel too industrial. This undefined, naturalistic quality is characteristic of her style.

Publications

Akari  
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Publication Date: June 30, 2022

English Ver.

Akari  
Publisher: GLACIER BAY BOOKS LLC  
Publication Date: May, 2026

| Other Language Editions |                 |       |                        |           |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-------|------------------------|-----------|
| Traditional Chinese     | Print & Digital | AKARI | SUNLIT PUBLISHING      | May 2024  |
| Korean                  | Print           | 아카리   | Somy Media, Inc.       | Jun. 2024 |
| Spanish                 | Print           | AKARI | Ponent Mon, Cyan Group | Nov. 2024 |
| French                  | Print           | AKARI | Le Lézard Noir         | Dec. 2025 |
| English                 | Print           | AKARI | Glacier Bay Books      | May 2026  |
| Arabic                  | Print & Digital | TBD   | Print & Digital        | 2026      |

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  
Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture (JPIC)

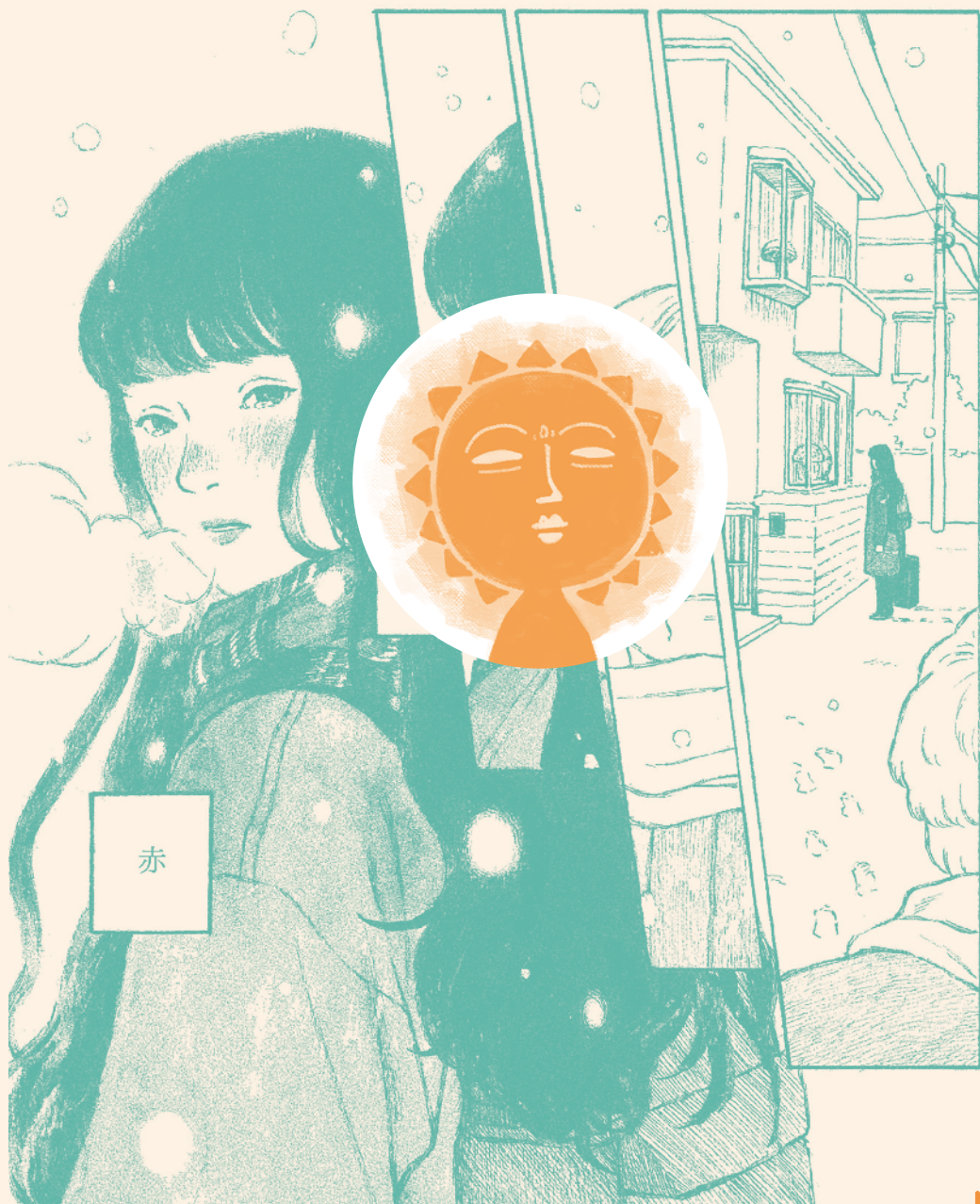
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