

{PROFILE}

Makoto Koji



✧ ADELAIDE ✧

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I think Makoto's website description of her work perfectly sums up her illustrations.... "My work draws from my unique upbringing of both Eastern and Western sensibilities and am inspired by fairy tales, animals and all things sweet." Born in Japan and raised in rural Queensland, this talented artist is building a great animation career.

Outline: We'd love to hear about your background, from Japan to rural Queensland and your university studies.

Makoto: I was born in Hiroshima and at the age of three I moved with my family to Goomeri, a small town in rural Queensland. I grew up there while my father managed a local pig farm. After dinner every night my family would watch Japanese cartoons on VHS, taped by our grandparents in Japan. Our parents didn't want us to lose our first language and used the cartoons to reinforce it. This family ritual connected me to my roots and made animation an important part in my upbringing.

The idea of becoming an animator solidified when in Year 8 I was told about the Bachelor of Animation course at Griffith University. I was so excited when I heard I'd been accepted after graduating high school. The course exposed to me to new animation and artists and I was really fortunate to be surrounded by a close knit group of passionate animators of many different ages and nationalities.

Outline: Could you tell us about your current art/working practise in Adelaide?

Makoto: I'm currently working as a freelance Animator and Illustrator, working on commercial projects while

cramming my personal projects into whatever spare time I have left.

While I was in my final year of University I had the opportunity to travel down to Adelaide for work experience at The People's Republic of Animation. After graduating, they invited me to work for them, which I ended up doing for several years. Over the next five years I worked with several other animation studios. For most of the projects, I found I was the sole female creative and many of the jobs had masculine subject matter and themes. The experience made me realise that I really wanted to make animation and tell stories from a female perspective. Eventually I decided to go freelance and developed my brand Paper Rabbits. My goal is to contribute girly animation and illustration to the current Australian scene!

Outline: What attracts you to animation work?

Makoto: While animation is much more time consuming than illustration, seeing a character come to life is incredibly rewarding. Animation often allows for much more in depth explorations; thinking of ways to convey character, stories and worlds in motion is really appealing. It adds an extra dimension that is difficult to display with one single image.





Perhaps the greatest difference to illustration is that animation is often done collaboratively. Where illustration can be quite solitary, even a personal animation involves lots of interaction with sound designers, composers and on larger projects, other animators.

Outline: Could you tell us about the process of working with a team on an animation project? What are some of the distinct roles for the artists/technicians involved?

Makoto: Woah! That's a huge question.

Working closely with experienced animation and art directors was a brilliant way to learn quickly. Under these people I worked on television commercials, animated series and game cut scenes. Often the turnarounds are very short so you get to see the whole animation pipeline condensed into as little as a few weeks.

Whether the studio specialises in 2D or 3D work dramatically effects the type of staff they employ. 3D animation is highly technical and generally involves a lot more people to produce. Different to 2D the roles can be incredibly specific, from modelers to riggers, shader and texture artists and animators.

In my experiences in Adelaide the teams have been quite small, which has been great as it's allowed me to be involved in many areas of a production. As well as working traditionally, I've trained in 3D so my roles have varied from designing characters, illustrating storyboards in pre-production to painting backgrounds and texturing characters, all alongside my specific animation duties.

Outline: We'd love to hear about your process for building your colourful illustration work. What are your favourite mediums/software etc?

Makoto: I generally start conceptual stage with scribbles in my sketchbook then work in Photoshop for both my illustration and animation. I'm planning more traditional work using gouache and watercolour soon.

Outline: Your work seems it has a strongly Japanese influence - could you tell us about some of your favourite animators and artists from Japan? What do you think describes a "Japanese aesthetic" in illustration?

Makoto: It's so interesting, my work is seen as very Japanese in Australia and in Japan I am told the opposite. Every Japanese person says my work looks heavily influenced by western cartoons! I guess my work must sit somewhere between the two cultures that I grew up exposed to.

Being Japanese growing up in Australia, it's impossible to avoid Ghibli and Disney. But, *Anpanman* by Takashi Yanase is probably one of the first animated things I've watched and I still love his work to date. It's a wonderful series about red bean filled bun superhero in world of crazy characters. What's not to love? In more recent years I really appreciate the works of animation auteur Satoshi Kon and Mamoru Hosoda.

I really love Manga artists such as classic Osamu Tezuka, Shigeru Mizuki, to more modern Takehiko Inoue, Naoki Urasawa, Yazawa Ai and Eiichiro Oda! Their work exudes



their different personalities. Not only are they unique and amazing artists but amazing storytellers with such memorable and lively characters. The list could go on.

Further afield, I spend a lot of time admiring European Animators and Illustrators. Some of my favorites are Jiri Trnka, Tove Jansson and Amélie Fléchais.

I think the defining characteristic of Japanese aesthetic is the focus on line where in the West the art is much more about form. Japanese Ukiyo-e from the Edo period is defined by the use of line and flat colours in contrast to the paintings of the Renaissance. I've actually heard the reasons for this are something to do with the light in different countries. So in Europe the softer sunlight emphasised form and in Asia the sharper light created graphic silhouettes and harsh edges.

Outline: Could you share with us some of your local shops/galleries/artists in Adelaide that you turn to for inspiration?

Makoto: As a Queensland girl I had never thought of finding myself this far south and couldn't even picture what it would be like to live in Adelaide. But I've grown really fond of the city! It's quiet, quaint and cute; so you can get a lot of work done. I find the lovely old architecture, the striking changing seasons and the rose gardens a huge contrast to Brisbane.

After tight deadlines I like to treat myself to trips to Adelaide Central Markets and catching up for coffee with my artist/ animator friends, who I've met through working at the animation studios. My favourite stores and cafes are in Ebenezer Place in the city and Elizabeth Street in Croydon. At the moment I'm really into Swedish Tarts on Henley Beach Square, a cute cafe with tasty Scandinavian baked goods that exhibits funky artwork by local artists.

Outline: Are there any

upcoming projects this year that you are excited about?

Makoto: Oh! So many! I was just involved in a collaborative project called *Moon Animate Make-up*, where animators from all around the world re-animated shots from a whole episode of Sailor Moon. It's so entertaining to see so many different interpretations of Sailor Moon realised. The whole episode will be available to watch via the internet soon.

I have a personal short film which I received funding for that I am working on alongside my commercial work. It's really nice to be animating a character that I'm really attached to. It will be ready later this year so stay tuned!



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