

For Immediate Release – August 25, 2009

Contact: Kristen Heintz-Perkins
617-627-3094
kristen.heintz-perkins@tufts.edu

Tufts University Art Gallery

at the Aidekman Arts Center
40 Talbot Avenue, Medford, MA 02155
artgallery.tufts.edu

Sacred Monsters: Everyday Animism in Contemporary Japanese Art and *Anime*

September 10-November 22, 2009

Public opening reception: September 17, 2009, 5:30-8pm

Medford, MA -- The Tufts University Art Gallery presents *Sacred Monsters: Everyday Animism in Contemporary Japanese Art and Anime*, from September 10 to November 22, 2009. Co-curated by Gallery Director Amy Ingrid Schlegel and Jonathan Barracato, with advisors and Tufts professors Hosea Hirata, Charles Shiro Inouye, and Susan J. Napier, this exhibition includes twenty-one works by eight emerging and mid-career Japanese artists, as well as seven *anime* and one live-action film screened continuously in the Gallery.

Monsters and spirits are prominent elements of Japanese culture, whose representations range from the truly grotesque to the “creepy cute.” Unlike in the Judeo-Christian tradition, this Other World (*ikai*) in Japanese Shinto belief is visibly and tangibly present, rather than physically removed and conceptually distant. The Shinto belief in animism—that all things are alive and imbued with sacred spirit – allows for a visual playfulness that has inspired incredible and sometimes incredulous artistic visions. Expression of this ancient, traditional belief is re-emerging in the contemporary period and taking flight in the wildly fanciful postmodern visions of more and more artists and *anime* directors, who commingle the ordinary and the extraordinary, the mundane and the divine.

Chiho Aoshima's anime-inspired work evokes a gothic realm of spirits and monsters that are neither anthropomorphic things or animals nor distorted, grotesque humans. A visit to the ancient Buddhist temple in Nara, Japan, at night sparked painter **Nobuhiro Ishihara's** interest in investigating the legend of the deer-messenger. He reimagines the folkloric spirit as a wise but tormented *kami* (god). **Kenjiro Kitade's** earthenware sculptures of “sheep-children,” with human bodies and mismatched gas-masked, horned heads, symbolize a premature, foreboding intelligence of environmental disaster. **Mahomi Kunikata** paints scenes grounded in Japan's traditional culture of *matsuri* (Shinto festivals). Her *manga*-esque drawing style and big-eyed characters are pastiches of contemporary and traditional social references. **Tomokazu Matsuyama** re-presents the mythical protector creature known in Japan as the *kirin*. Japanese art has depicted this powerful yet peaceful beast as having the attributes of a deer, a dragon, and a unicorn. **Mr.** creates a monumental *anime*-inspired doll head with a miniature dollhouse inside. **Oscar Oiwa's** paintings compose strangely unpopulated cityscapes that seem animated by mysterious, unseen forces. Tunnels and passageways beckon us to foreboding realms we can only imagine. Finally, fashion design duo **TOKYO KAMEN** created a troupe of five life-size “monster dolls” made of brightly colored fake fur and decorative materials.

-over-

The Tufts University Art Gallery is located in **the Aidekman Arts Center, 40 Talbot Avenue**, on Tufts University's Medford campus. The Gallery is fully accessible and admission is free. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Sunday, 11:00 to 5:00 p.m., and Thursdays until 8 p.m. Free visitor parking is available in the two parking lots off Lower Campus Road. Call **617-627-3518** for more information or visit **artgallery.tufts.edu**.

Sacred Monsters: Everyday Animism in Contemporary Japanese Art and *Anime*
Calendar of Events

Continuous Anime & Film Screenings (in the Gallery)

***Akira*, 1988, Katsuhiro Otomo:** Based on a landmark 6 volume manga, *Akira* is set in “Neo Tokyo, 2019” where biker gangs, military units, rebels and telekinetic mutants contend for control of the ruined metropolis.

***Beautiful Dreamer*, 1984, Mamoru Oshii:** *Beautiful Dreamer* chronicles an endless day in which teenagers encounter entities from Japanese mythology who transform their normal world into the stuff that dreams are made of.

***Ghost in the Shell II: Innocence*, 2004, Mamoru Oshii:** A story that is partly a future noir murder mystery and partly a meditation on the relationships between humans, animals, cyborgs and dolls.

***My Neighbor Totoro*, 1988, Hayao Miyazaki:** Weaving natural enchantment together with the supernatural, Miyazaki presents a portrait of the unforced magic of childhood, encapsulated in two sisters’ friendship with the furry forest deity known as Totoro.

***Paprika*, 2006, Satoshi Kon:** Set in the near future, *Paprika* introduces a machine that allows scientist to enter peoples’ dreams for therapeutic purposes.

***Princess Mononoke*, 1997, Hayao Miyazaki:** Considered by many to be Miyazaki’s masterpiece, *Princess Mononoke* is an epic tale of warfare, sacrifice and heroism set in medieval Japan.

***Spirited Away*, 2001, Hayao Miyazaki:** In a bathhouse of the gods the everyday becomes extraordinary, as young Sen comes of age among an array of demons, gods, and ghosts who range from the sinister to the delightful.

***The Grudge (Ju-On)*, 2002, Takashi Shimizu:** The story revolves around the power of the past to shadow the present, in this case in terms of a vengeful female spirit whose face is covered by a sinister curtain of long black hair.

Events

Thursday, September 10, 11 am: Exhibitions open to the public

Thursday, September 17, 5:30-8pm: Public Opening Reception for all fall exhibitions

6pm: Artist’s Talk with Brian Knep

7pm: Tour of Sacred Monsters with a *Voice Your Vision!* guide

Saturday, October 10 [Homecoming Weekend], 2 pm: Curatorial tour of *Sacred Monsters*

Friday, October 16 [Parents’ Weekend], 11am: Exhibitions tour with a *Voice Your Vision!* guide

Saturday, October 17 [Parents’ Weekend], 3pm: Exhibitions tour with a *Voice Your Vision!* guide

Friday, October 30: *Sacred Monsters* Keynote Lecture and Reception: Anne Allison

Saturday, October 31, 7-9:30pm: Halloween Party (hosted by the Tufts Japanese Culture Club)

Saturday, November 14, 2pm: Curatorial Tour of *Sacred Monsters*

Screenings of Hayao Miyazaki’s *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea* (2009), followed by a discussion led by Professor Susan J. Napier:

Friday, November 20, 9:30pm, Barnum 008 (on the Tufts Academic Quad)

Saturday, November 21, 7pm, Barnum 008

Sunday, November 22, 8pm, Barnum 008

Sunday, November 22, 11-5pm: Last Day of *Sacred Monsters*.

2 pm: Curatorial Tour with Gallery Director Amy Schlegel

Please see the Gallery’s website for more information on events: artgallery.tufts.edu