

### **Mangaka in Luxembourg – Part 2: Kumiyonoe**

Manga is on a steady rise, all over the world. In the last few years, Japanese comics have gotten more and more popular, even more so in the pandemic. With this international rise, many mangaka start out their careers and draw their own manga, some only recently, and some have been drawing for decades.

Luxembourg is no exception, there are manga here in the country as well, drawn by talented artists. In this article series, we would like to present some of them, continuing our series with Kumiyo Mitsuoka, aka “Kumiyonoe”.

#### **Kumiyonoe**

Kumiyonoe was born and raised in Tokyo, Japan, and came to Luxembourg in 2015, where she now has her studio in the 1535° Creative Hub in Differdange.

She is a professional illustrator, and has mastered many artstyles in which she can draw in. That way, she can adapt to any client and shape her artistic expression to the stories she wants to tell. From classic shoujo, to children’s book style, to realistic artwork – but her art is always distinctly her voice.



*Kumiyo Mitsuoka aka “Kumiyonoe” in her studio.*

So, how does a professional illustrator get started in manga? Kumiyonoe describes her way as follows: As a child, she was not allowed to watch the TV freely, so she turned to drawing as her favourite pass-time activity. She is a big fan of the manga “Master Keaton” (1988-1994), an adventure/thriller manga for adult men about an archeologist who solves cases around the world. However, it doesn’t matter which target audience the work had initially, for Kumiyonoe is also a firm believer that manga and comics do not have to limit themselves, they can be for all ages – and much more is possible.

In Luxembourg, she has done already many projects with many different collaborations and clients. For the city of Differdange, she drew the work “Alice et le Jeune Pompier Skippy”, a comic about the story of the Differdange firefighters and their mascot. Alice is a young girl who has just moved to Differdange, and meets a rabbit who lives in Lasauvage, and who wants to learn firefighting. It’s a story about emotional grows and bond between different people, while it also shows the real life world of Luxembourgish history and countryside life.

One of her recent big projects had been the design of the Luxembourgish stamp depicting the Olympics 2020, and the design for the t-shirts of the Luxembourgish Olympic athletes in Tokyo. Her stamp reminds the viewer of a manga page, with three different panels in just one stamp. To depict the Tokyo stadium accurately, she used Google Maps even, to calculate the camera angles and the backgrounds.

The t-shirt design was influenced by two main factors: the Roude Leiw, the Luxembourgish national animal, the red lion and the aesthetics and tradition of Kabuki theatre. When Kumiyonoe was approached to design the t-shirt for the Luxembourgish Olympic team, she want to change the “Roude Leiw” – but how? She states that when looking at the original, she noticed two main aspects: the lion is not meant to be cute, and it has its two paws up. So instead of



*The Luxembourgish Olympic t-shirt and stamp, both designed by Kumiyonoe.*

doing a cute version of the animal in a Japanese mascot style, she accentuated the ferociousness and dramatic expression, and combined it with Kabuki theatre. In Kabuki, actors use their hands, face make-up and whole bodies to express their roles, so Kumiyonoe took inspiration from these lifted paws: The Roude Leiw was now a strong and detailed Kabuki actor, wearing the traditional costumes and clothes as well. Around the national mascot are many cheering and celebrating, on the bottom is wave in the style of Hokusai, and on top, the rising red sun of a morning dawning in Japan.



*Kumiyonoe's studio in "1535° Creative Hub Differdange", is not only her workplace, but also a meeting point for artists, learners and people who wish to know more. Her "Salon du Manga" is held here, where people can come and draw together, in a creative setting with feedback from others.*

When asking why manga is so popular these days (an increase in sales and fans worldwide during the pandemic for Japanese manga, but not for US and EU comics), she suggests that the appeal of manga is the reduction of text, and more focus on the visuals. In the bande dessinée (BD) genre prevalent in Europe, there is a lot of speech bubbles and narration to read, and in addition, the pages are in full colour, and new volumes take a long time to come out. With manga, the media is more accessible, with smaller formats, a quicker release schedule, and it's more affordable for everyone, since the pages only have to be printed in black/white/grayscale. She adds that the expressive visuals can carry the story on its own, while leaving more to the imagination, which is also an appeal for the readers – and thus, manga is easy to pick up and enjoy.

Is there anything she wants to change when it comes to manga in Luxembourg? She mentions that she would be happier about a bigger selection and diversity of genres and works in shops and libraries, and that the appreciation for the medium could be higher by the general public. The stigma that "manga is only for kids" is still prevalent, when in fact, there are many works intended for adults and general audiences, many with serious themes, historical aspects, or philosophical issues. Offering more works that show people that not only hot-blooded Shonen and flowery Shoujo is "manga" could go a long way.

Her next projects involve the revival of her “Salon du Manga”, a get-together of artists, hobbyists, and people who want to learn about drawing manga: Every Friday, the group meets, to draw together, share their art and correct each other – a creative way of learning in a comfortable social setting, open to everyone.

For the city of Differdange, she will draw a brochure for the Maison de Relais, and for different Japanese societies, she will draw advertising illustrations for print and social media. The other project is to post more works online, for example on pixiv, the biggest Japanese website for artwork and independent webmanga. Kumiyonoe wants to focus on a manga with Western and Japanese protagonists, and a work that draws from her own life experience.

We are happy that such a talented artist like Kumiyonoe is in Luxembourg, and wish her a lot of luck for the future.

<https://www.kumiyonoe.com/>

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