

Kofi Bazzell-Smith

Artist | Educator | US-Japan Leader

Representation: Writers House Literary Agency

Agent: Dan Lazar

Rochester Institute of Technology

www.kofimanga.com

Education

University of Illinois – Master of Fine Arts, New Media (2024)

Eastern Illinois University – BA in Studio Art, Minor in Asian Studies (2021)

International Exchange & Leadership

Fellow- United States-Japan Foundation Leadership Program (class of 2025-26)

Board of Directors- U.S.-Japan Bridging Foundation (2025–Present)

U.S.-Japan Council member, 2025

Senior Jury, Giant Hunt Anime Contest

Faculty Leader – RIT: Manga in Japan program

Created Artist Residency for Japanese Mangaka Kazuo Maekawa, 2023

Award Judging Panel Comic Studies Society

Press

Unpacking Japan Podcast Interview 2026

Featured on Abema News (TV Asahi) 2025

NHK World Direct Talk 2025

Exchange Program at Kansai Gaidai 2025

Illinois Global Institute Newsletter Spotlight 2024

Illinois Public Media Interview 2024

University of Illinois News Bureau 2024

Black Experience Japan Interview 2023

Fuji Television Japan TV interview 2023

Auburn University Residency Interview 2023

HYFINated Black and Japanese Culture 2023

WCIA Channel 3 Artist Interview 2022

Publications

"Karasu" in Interseminars: Speculation and Imagining Otherwise, Mellon Foundation, 2023

4 Pages / 16 Bars: A Visual Mixtape (Black Comics Anthology), 2021

University Courses Taught

Manga Production (Studio) - Rochester Institute of Technology (2024-), Temple University Kyoto campus (2025) University of Illinois (2022-2024)

Illustration: Composition & Storytelling – University of Illinois, 2023

Art for Non-Majors (Studio) – University of Illinois, 2022

Selected Visiting Lectures

Keynote Speech EIU Comics Art Festival 2026

Manga as a Tool for Global Exchange-
Asia Society 2025

Manga as a Global Form-
Princeton University 2025

Graduation Commencement Speech-

Kansai Gaidai University, 2024

U.S.-Japan Bridging Foundation, Tokyo, 2024

Comics Studies Society, 2024

UCLA 2023

Musashi University (Japan), 2023

Aoyama Gakuin University (Japan), 2023

Auburn University, 2023

Middlebury College, 2022

Selected Workshops

Manga Workshop – University of Hawai'i, 2025

Manga Workshop – Temple University Kyoto and Tokyo Campuses 2025

Manga Workshop – University of Illinois Center for Global Studies, 2024

Manga Drawing & Storytelling Workshop – UCLA, 2023

Manga Drawing & Storytelling Workshop – High Museum of Art Atlanta, 2023

Manga & Boxing Workshops (in Japanese) – Middlebury College, 2023

Comic Paneling & Composition Workshops – Auburn University, 2023

Public Manga Workshop – University of Texas at Austin, 2023

Manga Drawing & Storytelling Workshop – Museum of Design Atlanta, 2022

Selected Panel Discussions

Trends in the Global Manga Industry – Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, 2024

Melanated and Animated-

Japanese Arts Foundation 2023

Discussion on Manga Industry w/ Kazuo Maekawa – C2E2, 2023

Global Forms & Ancestral Identities – BIPOC POP Symposium, UT Austin, 2022

Anime & Manga: Black & Japanese Culture U.S.-Japan Bridging Foundation, 2020

Residencies

McGuire Artist in Residence – The Blake School, Minneapolis, 2024

Visiting Faculty Residency – Middlebury College Intensive Japanese Program, 2023

Artist in Residence – Auburn University, 2023

Artist in Residence – Middlebury College, 2022

Exhibitions

Atlantic Gallery, NYC, 2026

US-Japan Foundation D.C. HQ Exhibition 2025

Alumni Exhibition, Eastern Illinois University 2025

Solo Exhibition – Cary Graphic Arts Collection, RIT Library. 2025

Solo Exhibition – *Illinois Center for Advanced Studies of the Universe 2024*

Group Show – The Blake School, Minneapolis, 2024

Curator & Participant – *An International Manga Showcase* (Mellon Foundation-funded), 2023

Solo Exhibition – *Uncanny Juxtapositions*, McKinley Foundation, Illinois, 2023

Solo Exhibition – *Azuki the Rock Paper Scissors Champion*, University of Illinois, 2022

Awards & Grants

RIT Faculty Beacon Award, 2026

Best Emerging Creator Award, Bipoc Pop 2026

USJF Social Impact Stipend, 2025 (\$10,000)

United States Japan Foundation Leadership Program Delegate 2025-26

Coyne Family Foundation Illustration Award, AIGA, 2023 (\$3,000)

Frederick Luis Aldama Leadership Award, Comics Studies Society, 2023 (\$500)

Fulbright Semi-Finalist/alternate, 2021-24

Kate Neal Kinley Memorial Fellowship, University of Illinois, 2023 (\$10,000)

Future Faculty Career Exploration Fellowship, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2023

Mellon Foundation Interseminars Initiative Fellowship, 2022-23 (\$35,000)

George A. Miller Visiting Artist Grant, University of Illinois, 2023 (\$15,000)

Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship US Department of Education 2021 (\$15,000)

U.S.-Japan Bridging Scholarship, 2019 (\$2,500)