

Kofi Bazzell-Smith

Artist| Educator| US-Japan Scholar

Rochester Institute of Technology

www.kofimanga.com

Education

University of Illinois – Master of Fine Arts, New Media (2021-2024)

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

Press

[NHK Direct Talk, International TV Broadcast & Streaming in 160+ Countries 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 Japanese National TV interview 2023](#)

[Auburn University Residency Interview 2023](#)

[HYFIN Interview Anime, Art, Beats & Sake: The Intersection of Black and Japanese Culture 2023](#)

[WCIA Channel 3 Artist Interview 2022](#)

[Fuji Television Japanese National TV interview 2022](#)

International Exchange & Leadership

Founded & Leads Study Abroad Program – RIT → Japan: Students develop manga under **industry mentorship** while studying Japanese language and culture.

Established Exchange Agreement Between RIT & Kansai Gaidai University

Collaborated with Legendary Mangaka Tetsuya Chiba – on **international manga exhibition**

Created U.S. Artist Residency for Mangaka Kazuo Maekawa

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-)

Manga Production (Studio) – University of Illinois (2022-2024)

Illustration: Composition & Storytelling – University of Illinois, 2023

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

Selected Visiting Lectures

Manga as a Global Form- Princeton University (forthcoming March 2025)

Graduation Commencement Speech – Kansai Gaidai University, 2024

Speech at the International House of Japan – U.S.-Japan Bridging Foundation, Tokyo, 2024

Frederick Luis Aldama Award Talk – Comics Studies Society, 2024

Developing a Global Practice – Musashi University (Japan), 2023

Networking Between the US and Japan – Aoyama Gakuin University (Japan), 2023

Visual Communication – UCLA, 2023

Historical Context & Idiosyncrasies of Japanese Manga – Auburn University, 2023

Intersections Between Art Practice and Engagement – Auburn University, 2023

Art Composition (In Japanese) – Middlebury College, 2022

Selected Workshops

[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

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 – *Drawing Bridges: An International Manga Showcase* (Mellon Foundation-funded), 2023

Solo Animation Exhibition – Design Festa Gallery, Tokyo, 2023

[Solo Exhibition – *Uncanny Juxtapositions*, McKinley Foundation, Illinois, 2023](#)

[Solo Exhibition – *Azuki the Rock Paper Scissors Champion*, University of Illinois, 2022](#)

Awards & Grants

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

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

Fulbright Semi-Finalist/alternate, 2024, 2023, 2022

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)

Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship, 2020 (\$5,000)

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

Freeman Asia Scholarship, 2019 (\$2500)