



## Entertainment

# Are These Giant Chaotic Illustrations Predicting Natural Disasters?

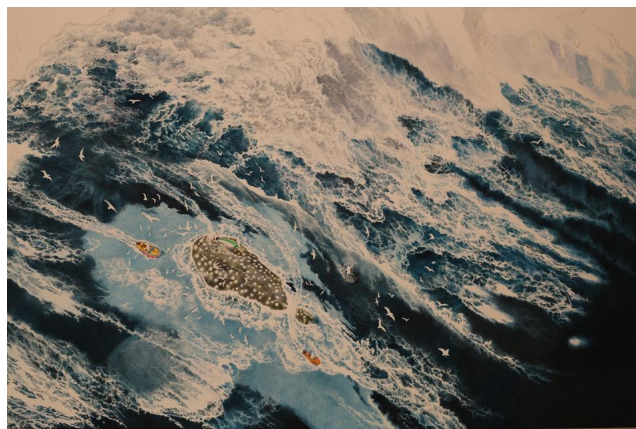
By Beckett Mufson December 26, 2016, 1:00am



Manabu Ikeda is known for weaving together fantastical, chaotic illustrations, often eclipsing an entire wall with his trademark combination of a traditional Japanese painting style and an ultra-detailed surrealism. His works are so mythic that they've been associated with prophecy more than once, he tells The Creators Project. Viewers have drawn a connection between his oceanic ink drawing *Fortoken* (2008) and the 2011 tsunami that shook his homeland of Japan to its core.

The tsunami he drew in *Foretold* is a perfect example of the underlying theme that runs through almost all of his work: mankind's relationship with nature. "Human beings are part of nature," Ikeda says. "In the scars left by human beings on nature, I feel that it is possible to glimpse the strength of both their energies." This philosophy is evident in his depiction of dense urban areas clashing with massive waves, enveloping mountains, and congregating into serpent-shaped city.

The details are especially incredible because of the intense focus and effort Ikeda puts into every inch of his illustrations, weaving together small swathes of hand-penned ink into grand landscapes over the course of years. He works for eight hours a day, improvising to create the engrossing details. "It feels just like creating a large structure, piling up the building blocks randomly," he said. This is how Ikeda grows his surreal, hyper-dense illustrations into existence: slowly nurturing the empty canvas like a bonsai tree until his vision is fully realized.



Detail of a work in progress painting in Madison, (c) IKEDA Manabu



Detail of a work in progress painting in Madison, (c)IKEDA Manabu

The artist took over three years to produce an illustration that will manifest Ikeda's feelings toward the aftermath and recovery of the same tsunami that Foretoken is so often compared to. We spoke to Ikeda about nature, prophecy, and how he creates such imaginative landscapes in a single draft.



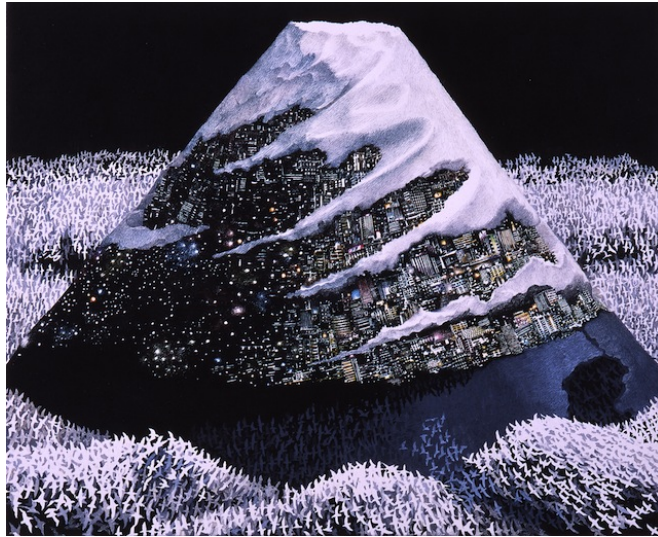
Manabu Ikeda, (b. 1973), Foretoken detail, 2008. Pen, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on boards; 72 x 132 in. Collection of Sustainable Investor Co., Ltd. © Manabu Ikeda, courtesy Mizuma Art Gallery.

**You've mentioned that you create your art based on your daily experience and memory. Can you expand on this in the context of some of your new pieces?**

Basically I can say the same things. But recently, the themes of my artworks have become more specific, like a nuclear accident or the tsunami. Actual events that occurred in reality and my thoughts about them, beyond just my own experiences and memories, have a large role to play in my making process.

**The themes of nature and man's relationship to nature are present in much of your work. Why does this relationship interest you?**

Human beings are part of nature. I have, at least, a great respect for nature. I feel a powerful attraction in the idea that, within this great nature, all of this existence called humanity—myself included—is grappling to exist within the struggle between wisdom and foolishness. Especially in the scars left by human beings on nature, I feel that it is possible to glimpse the strength of both their energies.



Manabu Ikeda, (b. 1973), *Claw Marks*, 2010. Pen, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board; 8 5/7 x 10 3/5 in. Collection of Katsura Yamaguchi. © Manabu Ikeda, courtesy Mizuma Art Gallery. Photo by Kei Miyajima.

**You've mentioned that both anime/manga styles and more traditional Japanese art techniques influence your paintings. Can you tell me a bit more about this stylistic union?**

The influence that it has is a more general nuance. My generation has grown up in anime and manga culture, whether they have become artists or schoolteachers. Some collected manga books, others got absorbed in playing at being their heroes, and I was excited to draw the characters, because I was good at drawing. In any way, whatsoever, everyone is influenced by them. Whether anime or art, I have never felt a strong influence from some specific work on my pictures themselves. In my case, I occasionally apply a scene from manga that has remained in my memory or patterns from art I have seen, into my artworks by only its visuals.

**You've spoken about the difference between painting in Japan and painting in North America. Can you tell me about how that difference affects your art?**

In Japan where everything is small and narrow, my image of "grand nature" was totally different from the truly "grand nature" which I saw in North America: the overwhelming vastness of space, and the wildness. After I moved to North America, it has become an important issue for me to capture not only the detailed, but also the grand nature of space in my artworks.

**Your works often feel like living, breathing places. Can you tell me the stories taking place in one or two of your recent works?**

I made *Foretoken* in 2008, and at the time I first imagined a "snow and ice world," and finally it became a picture of big waves. Within it I draw the Japanese islands that were dented in the Tohoku region and the scene of a big ship washed ashore. Three years after that, the earthquake happened, like something the content of the title had terribly predicted. And one more small piece, *Gate*, was created in 2010, but when during this current exhibition I visited New York's Ground Zero (memorial to 9/11) for the first time, its construction seemed to resemble that artwork—I was really surprised. It greatly resembles "memorial zero" in Ground Zero. The composition of artwork, the planes I drew, and so on, have absolutely no relation with Ground Zero. But in spite of this, they have much in common, which felt a little eerie to me.



Manabu Ikeda, (b. 1973), *Meltdown*, 2013. Acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board; 48 x 48 in. Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Colonel Rex W. & Maxine Schuster Radsch Endowment Fund purchase, 2013.24



Manabu Ikeda, (b. 1973), *Meltdown detail*, 2013. Acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board; 48 x 48 in. Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Colonel Rex W. & Maxine Schuster Radsch Endowment Fund purchase, 2013.24



Manabu Ikeda, (b. 1973), *Staircase of Waves*, 2010. Pen, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board; 8 5/7 x 10 3/5 in. Collection of David Solo. © Manabu Ikeda, courtesy Mizuma Art Gallery.

Find more of Ikeda's work on his [website, which is exclusively in Japanese, here.](#)