

Manga Artist Mizuki Shigeru

Mizuki Shigeru (1922–2015) was a manga artist known worldwide for his series *GeGeGe no Kitaro* and other manga and anime works. Born in Osaka as Mura Shigeru, he was raised in the city of Sakaiminato, where he showed a precocious artistic talent. He attributed his later obsession with *yokai*—Japanese ghosts, goblins, and monsters—to a grandmotherly woman he called “Nononba,” who told him chilling and amusing stories about the supernatural.

Wartime Suffering and Early Career

Mizuki was drafted into the Japanese Imperial Army in 1943, and having foolishly requested to be sent someplace warm, was assigned to New Britain Island in Papua New Guinea. There he witnessed tremendous suffering endured by the local people and his fellow soldiers, contracted malaria, and ultimately lost his left arm in an air raid on his unit at Rabaul. After the war, he made his way to Tokyo, where he did odd jobs such as selling fish and drawing picture panels for *kamishibai*, the illustrated stories told by itinerant narrators. He started drawing manga in his 30s, and was essentially self-taught. He was hampered by having only one hand, and initially had little success. In 1958 he published his first manga, a Superman-inspired comic called *Rocketman*. He followed that with manga on a variety of subjects, including *shojo manga* (sentimental romance stories for adolescent girls) like *Yuki no warutsu* (Snow Waltz), and some science fiction.

The Years of Success

Mizuki married in 1961. His wife, Nunoe, shared his struggles and acted as his manager and assistant. Success finally arrived in 1967 with the release of *GeGeGe no Kitaro*, which developed from stories with similar characters that he had worked on earlier. The manga was a massive hit that was quickly adapted to animation and live action film, and eventually translated into dozens of foreign languages. The many original characters Mizuki developed for *GeGeGe no Kitaro* became popular culture icons in Japan and abroad.

A Pacifist Moral Philosophy

Mizuki was a noted historian, with a consistent pacifist message that was shaped by his own experience. In 1971, he wrote and illustrated an unflinching manga biography of Hitler; in 1988, he published a history of wartime and postwar Japan; and in 1991 he

released a work titled *War and Japan*, aimed at Japanese middle-school students. Later in life, he began to travel the world, and he continued to draw and develop new ideas until his death from a heart attack in 2015. He was 93 years old. Mizuki left behind a massive and influential body of work, and a pacifist moral philosophy best summed up by his exhortation to young people to passively resist being controlled by the powerful forces of society: “Stop trying so hard. Become lazy like me.”