

Mizuki Shigeru Museum

The Mizuki Shigeru Museum commemorates the life and work of the world-famous manga artist, who died in 2015. Opened on Mizuki Shigeru Road in 2003, the compact two-story museum is one of the major attractions of the city of Sakaiminato.

The Life of the Artist

In the first section of the museum, Mizuki's life story and philosophy are depicted through letters, photographs, audio, video, and items that encapsulate important episodes from his life and travels. Visitors learn of his wartime experience and the loss of his arm, and the uprooted decade he spent after the war. His relationship with his supportive wife Nunoe is highlighted, including the plastic model battleships they built together whenever he was paid for a manga. Mizuki's ethnographic collection of masks and carvings from Africa and the Pacific Islands is displayed, along with photos of his interactions with the people he met there. His modest home work space has been recreated with his actual desk, stained with ink and cluttered with drawing implements and works in progress, backed by an enormous bookcase filled with work files. A cutout photo panel of Mizuki greets visitors with a smile, pen at the ready. The development of Mizuki's work is chronicled in this section with book covers and examples from his less familiar early attempts, and many original drawings and enlarged reproductions that illustrate his technique.

The Artist and His Inspiration

Nononba, an elderly woman who was close to Mizuki's family when he was a child, became a kind of grandmother to him. She told him ghost stories and described the creatures that inhabited the supernatural world—a place that became his ultimate inspiration. A section called “Nononba and me” features Mizuki's drawings that recount their relationship. Another section called “Sleepy period of life” has a series of detailed dioramas based on nightmares about *yokai*. They are made with incredible realism, using techniques akin to those used in special effects for film. The skin textures of the *yokai* are realistic, down to tiny whiskers and hairs. Haunted farmhouses have rotting, moss-grown floorboards and creepily forgotten junk in the attic. The lighting is dramatic. There is a long-tongued *yokai* (Akaname) that licks the scum from dirty bathtubs. A gigantic skeletal monster (Miagenyudo) arises from the grudge-filled bones of the dead people of an entire village and looms menacingly over a mountain in the nighttime sky.

A Visual Encyclopedia of Yokai

The next section is called the Yokai Cave. Forty-three realistic *yokai* figurines line the walls of this dimly lit space, some standing in rocky niches, others hovering in midair or crawling along the wall surface. Their names appear and disappear as the lighting changes, making the cave a sort of three-dimensional *yokai* encyclopedia. The open space that follows has seating and a wall covered with a huge illustrated map of Japan showing dozens of local *yokai* and other spirits. The final space is devoted to special exhibitions, while the gift shop sells collections of Mizuki's manga and collectible goods. Visitors exit past an old courtyard garden which has been enlivened by the addition of a sculpture of Mizuki's characters relaxing in Kitaro's house. The Mizuki Shigeru Museum is well-produced, with pleasant surprises at every turn.