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Graphic on Graphic: The Ethics of Serious Cartooning in Japan and the World

In recent years, there has been a growing niche for graphic novels (comics) and animated documentaries addressing social justice and conflict in many areas of the world. Many such works echo those of an earlier movement in postwar Japan that broke away from the lighter, more “cute” manga toward an aesthetic of serious, adult comics (“gekiga”) in order to engage socio-political--often “graphic”--realism. This panel brings earlier examples of Japanese serious cartoons concerning World War II together with newer works from artists outside Japan who employ autobiographical and journalistic modes to cover trauma and memory. The cases address questions concerning geopolitically and historically situated contexts of art, entertainment, and pedagogy: What kinds of formalistic devices and styles are used and/or experimented with, especially to depict atrocities? How are serious comics read differently across national borders? How do they evoke collective or personal responsibilities? What limitations do such artists confront?