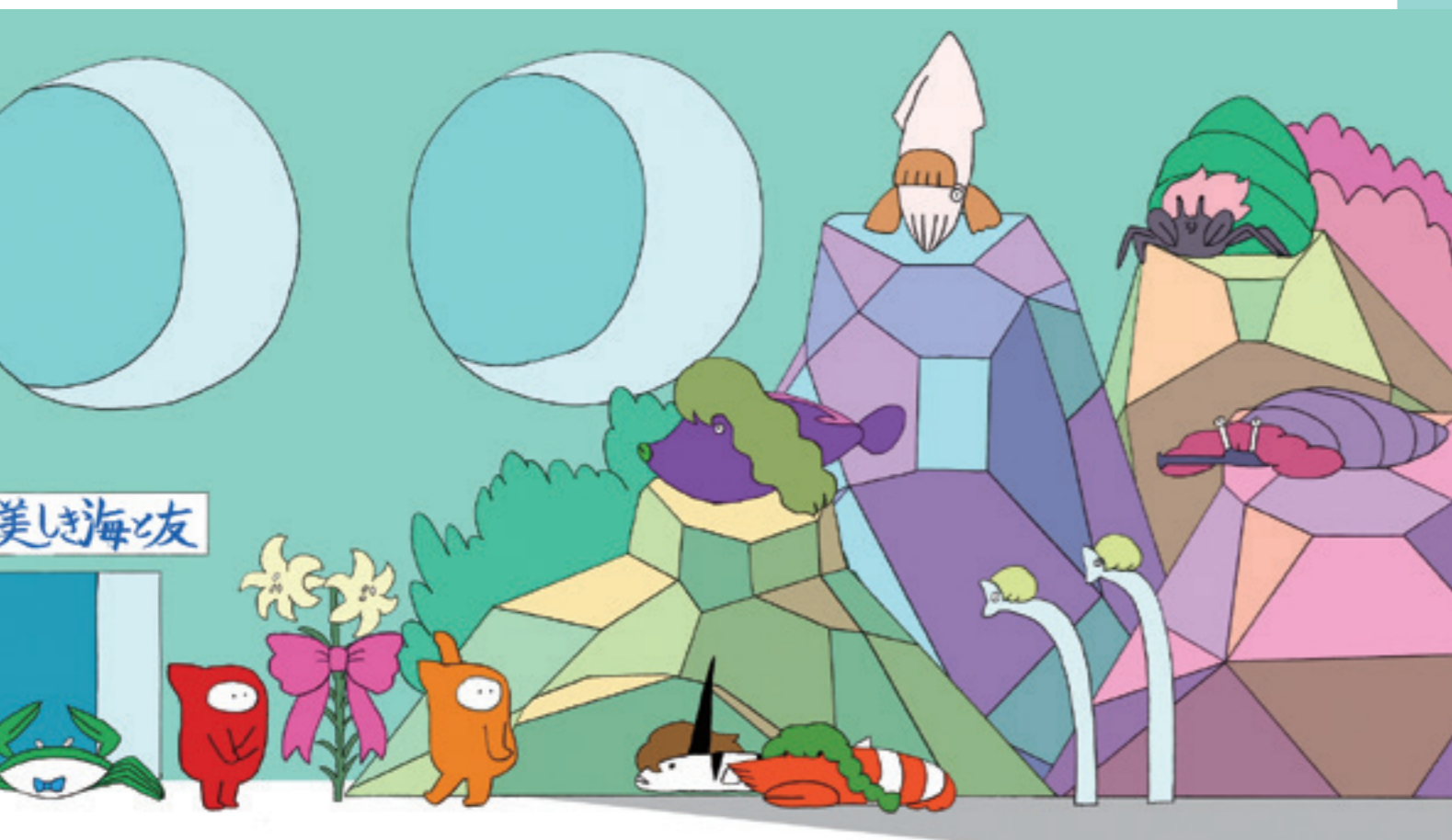


# Art, Identity, and Embracing Diversity

Artist Inoue Ryo opens up on his unique perspective  
on art and LGBTQ+ acceptance in Tokyo.

by John Ontko



*Ninja and Prefectural Seafood Girls' High School* is an image from one of Inoue's exhibitions in 2017.

In the buzzing and incredibly diverse art scene of Tokyo, artist Inoue Ryo holds a wonderfully unique perspective. The artist was first rocketed into fame through his TV program, *Art Tunes!*, a show that introduces famous works of art through original animated music videos. It is televised on part of Japan's public broadcasting network NHK Educational TV (E-Tele).

In the more than 100 videos meticulously scripted,

animated, and performed by Inoue himself, classic works of art are masterfully reimagined through unbridled creativity and focus. For example, Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* is a tough career woman, and the man from Munch's *The Scream* is a ramen chef whose noodles make customers shout with delight. Stunning, amusing, and instantly memorable, these colorful art tunes have become a big hit with families, allowing

them to enjoy and share in learning about famous art.

Inoue's career as an artist began with accepting himself. In true artistic fashion, Inoue came out to the world as gay through an original video work entitled, *Gay Song 2005*. Albeit slightly embarrassed over his choice of song title, he has not had an ounce of regret over his decision. Looking back on that time in his life, Inoue remarked, "I felt like a huge negative in my life had come back to zero. I felt like I finally reached the start."

As a successful artist and outspoken member of the LGBTQ+ community, Inoue's career has been both challenging and immensely rewarding. Inoue has carved out a constructively positive niche for himself that allows him to create at his own pace and then share his works instantly with about 100,000 viewers online through his YouTube and social media accounts. When posting on social media or speaking to the press, he chooses his words with great care, both to ensure that he does not misrepresent other members of the community, and because he knows the tremendously positive effect his message can have in helping others to embrace their own identity.

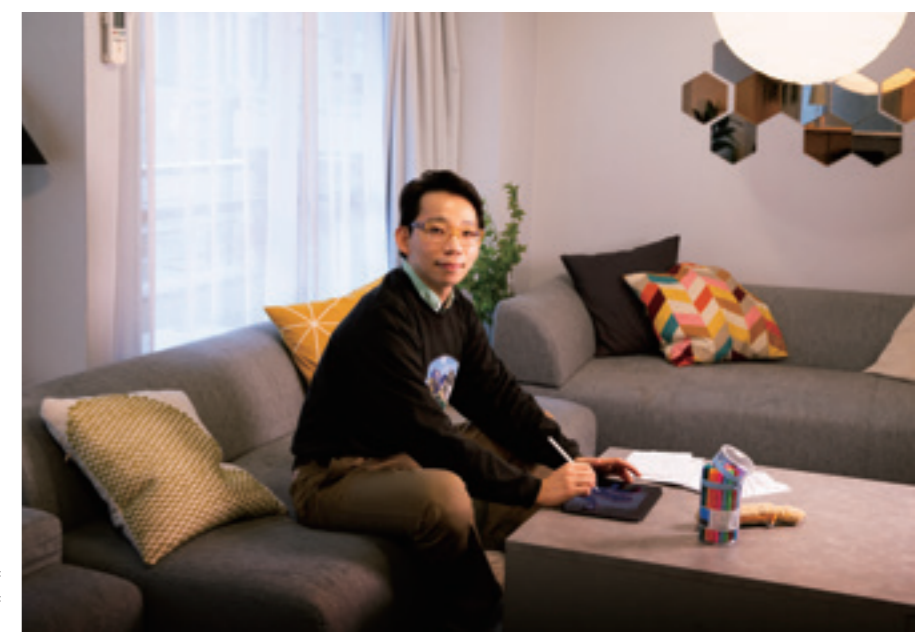
The artist's work style is remarkably well-suited to city life, and he takes great inspiration from the unending wellspring of culture that is Tokyo. "In Tokyo, if you want to see or experience something new, you can do it in less than an hour," the artist observed, and in a practical sense, being able to "people watch" has aided in his animation work tremendously. "In animation, observing how people move is important in order to capture movements naturally," he explained. "Living in Tokyo, I have constant references all around me."

In November 2022, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) introduced the Tokyo Partnership Oath System as an

important measure to deepen understanding of diverse sexuality and to create a comfortable living environment for the people concerned. Under the new system, sexual minority couples can apply and receive a Certificate of Acceptance from the TMG. Aiming for an inclusive Tokyo, where everyone can live their own way, this system will help ensure a smooth process for couples engaged in various procedures needed for daily life such as access to healthcare or social welfare and applications for public housing. The TMG is working to collaborate with municipalities and private businesses to encourage further utilization of the certificate of acceptance.

When asked for his thoughts on the system, Inoue was both pragmatic and forward-facing. "At this point in time, the partnership system is not the equivalent of marriage, but I believe we have made a leap forward in our understanding of the LGBTQ+ community compared to 10 years ago," he noted. "This is an important step toward marriage equality for all, although I strongly urge us to go further."

Powered by the vibrant energy of Tokyo, Inoue Ryo channels his fiercely unique point of view and delightfully original style into works that both entertain and uplift others. Inoue has an inspiring message for young artists everywhere: In a world full of magnificent diversity, true art and powerful creativity emerge from embracing and expressing one's own unique identity and perspective.



The future is very bright for one of Tokyo's most creative members of the LGBTQ+ community.