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Touching Fictional Characters: Perspectives from Japan’s Character-Based Contemporary Art

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13 March 2026

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM EST

In-Person: H-1124, Hall Building,
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How is it (im)possible to touch fictional characters? In contemporary Japan, where character culture is deeply entrenched both as an industry and as a form of identity, this question can attract strong interest. On the one hand, there are practices such as creating an “altar” for one’s favorite character and venerating the character as something “untouchable” (almost like a deity). On the other hand, some people “marry” their favorite character and live together with a life-size doll. In this presentation, using the philosophical ontology of fictional characters as a framework, I introduce two Japanese artists who offer distinctive answers to this question in ways that differ from dolls or figurines.

Hiroshi Ohata is a postdoctoral researcher at Kobe University. He specializes in philosophy, particularly contemporary metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of science. In his doctoral dissertation, he explored the identity and irreplaceability of particular individuals using the concept of “haecceity (thisness),” a notion with tradition dating back to medieval philosophy. Through his stay at the Centre for Sensory Studies, he plans to deepen his insights into our perceptions and actions toward non-human entities (such as fictional characters).