これを読まずにガンダムを語るな！

2001年11月1日発行 第2巻第8号

ガンダムエース
GUNDAM A

Aber ich werde sie mehr als wettmachen. Meine jetzigen Fehler sind leider nicht zu leugnen.

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THE ERA OF GUNDAM

#2 The Birth of Yoshikazu Yasuhiko's Characters

Text and Composition

Ryusuke Hikawa

In our first installment, we embarked on a comprehensive odyssey through Yoshikazu Yasuhiko's masterful contributions to the legendary Mobile Suit Gundam. As we venture forth, we'll delve deep into the intricate details, illuminating various facets of this historical masterpiece and unraveling its profound significance.

For this chapter of our journey, we'll immerse ourselves in the alchemical process of character design, with a particular focus on the prelim sketches that breathed life into the original Gundam series. Together, we'll uncover the character creation process.

Tracing the Evolution of Initial Character Designs: Uncovering the Essence of Characters

It's widely known that animation uses character sheets as reference materials. Their primary purpose is to maintain consistency in collaborative work involving many people, serving as a kind of blueprint. However, in animation, as exemplified by Disney, characters themselves often have commercial value. This paradigm shift has inspired a new generation of artists to pursue the noble calling of character design as their primary vocation, a concept that might seem like science fiction to those familiar with earlier works where characters emerged from the collective imagination of multiple animation directors (consider the case of ***Space Battleship Yamato***).

While there's deep interest and abundant material published about character design, there may not have been much process-oriented research done specifically for Gundam.

On the following pages, we present what are believed to be the earliest surviving rough character design sketches. While the images themselves aren't new and have been published in ***Gundam Archive*** (published by Media Works), this is likely the first time they've been presented along with surrounding notes from planning meetings. Let's engage in a bit of archaeological investigation to explore the atmosphere during the planning stages and uncover the moment of character creation.

The nine sketches you see on the following page are all drawn on animation paper, with alphabetical marks from A to H in circles. We've compiled the surrounding notes (in Yoshikazu Yasuhiko's handwriting) below. The parentheses contain the later character names, followed by "age," "placeholder name," "ethnicity," and "role/personality" in that order. Note that we've preserved the original text as-is due to its draft nature.

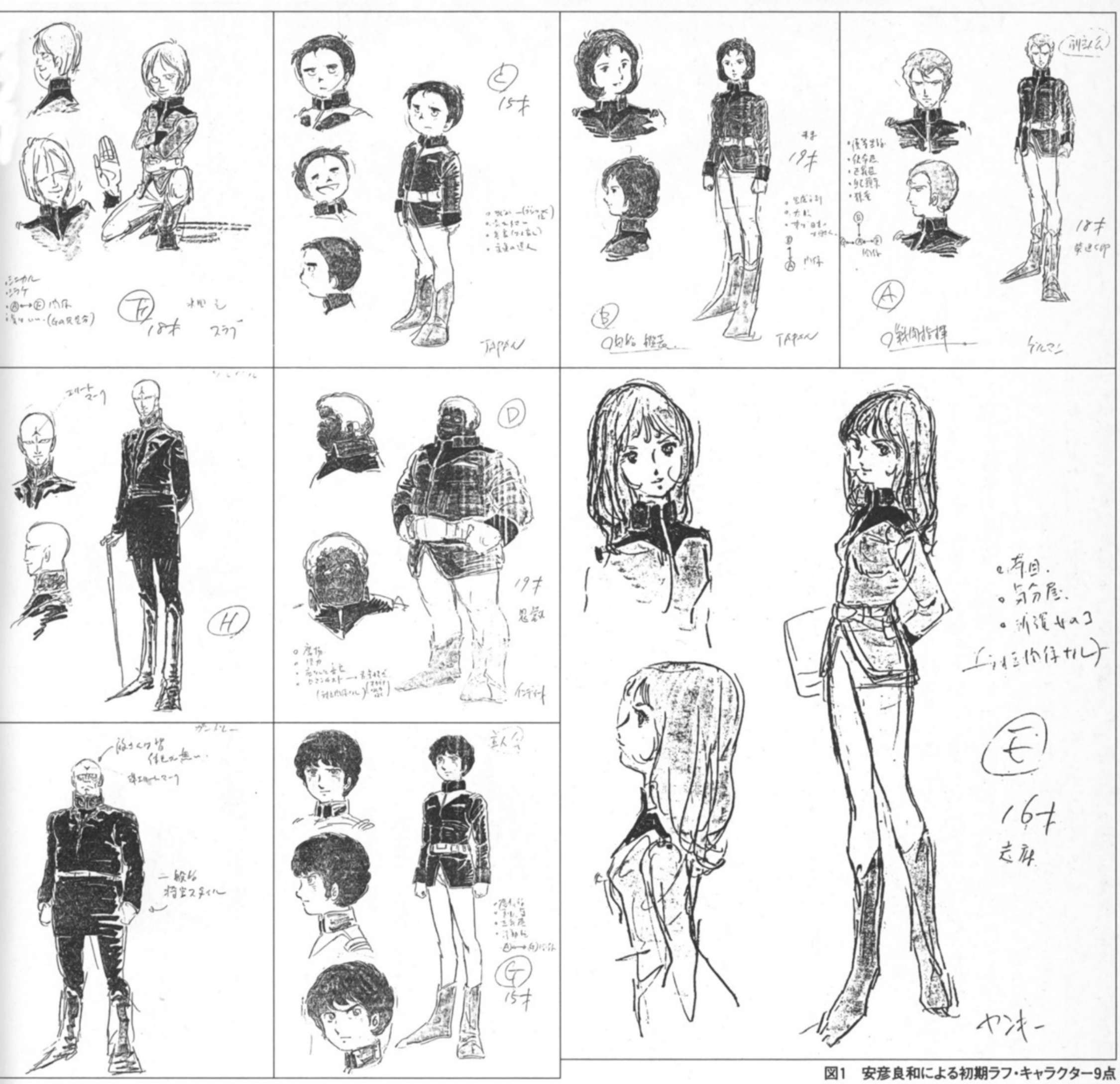

F
18才
水田
スラブ
C
15才
JAPAN
B
19才
未来
JAPAN
A
18才
ゲルマン
花房
エリートマーク
H
D
19才
鬼丸
インディオ
ガンドレー
一般的
将官スタイル
主人公
G
15才
E
16才
志麻
ヤンキー

図1　安彦良和による初期ラフ・キャラクター9点

A (Bright Noa): 18 years old: *Shintaro Hanabusa*: German: Combat Commander: Honor student type: Sense of duty: Sense of justice: Self-assertive: Narrow-minded

B (Mirai Yashima): 19 years old: *Mirai*: Japanese: Mothership captain: Thoughtful: Big-hearted: Eventually "Japanese mother"

C (Hayato Kobayashi): 15 years old: (No entry): Japanese: Serious (to a fault): Timid: Good-natured (pushover): Judo expert

D (Ryu Jose): 19 years old: *Kidomaru*: Indigenous: Easygoing: Super strength: Infinitely good-natured: Romantic → Music lover (plays instruments like ocarina)

E (No specific character): 16 years old: *Shima*: Yankee: Mischievous: Moody: So-called girly girl

F (Kai Shiden): 18 years old: *Ryu Mizuta*: Slavic: Cynical: Aloof: Good-natured (Big brother figure to G)

G (Amuro Ray): 15 years old: (No entry): (No entry): Emotional: Competitive: Sense of justice: Active

H (Gihren Zabi): *Gerber* (No other entries)

NO LETTER (No specific character): *Gundry* (No other entries)

Even as rough sketches, the characters are rendered with elegant lines and exude atmosphere. G (Amuro) in particular clearly stands apart from the then-prevalent hot-blooded robot anime protagonists, with a delicate and naive touch that's striking even by today's standards.

This material is dated August 1978. Some character names overlap with those in the ***Space Combat Team Gunboy*** proposal included in the Gundam Archive, indicating it was drawn around that time. Here are some additional details from the proposal:

The protagonist G's name (本郷東) is "Azuma Hongou"
英進太郎 is read as "Shintaro Hanabusa"
B's full name (木樽未来) is "Mirai Kitaru"
C (芙和雷三) is "Raizo Fuwa"
D (鬼堂丸 明) is "Akira Kidomaru"
E (八丈志麻) is "Shima Hachijo"

At this point, the setting was the Parallel Nebula's 3rd planet Electra (New Earth), with the protagonists aboard the battleship Freedom Fortress carrying the Gunboy. The enemy was the "Zeon Empire" from the Syrinx star in the Vuelan Nebula. The overall commander was Gerber, and Gundry was the leader directly confronting the protagonists. The enemy sketches bore the mark of elitism – an "elite mark" emblazoned on their foreheads – and notably lacked any body hair, hinting at their alien nature. An enemy character without a sketch is mentioned: a female combat pilot called the "Red Comet," named Rauzan Kerry.

Looking at the notes on the rough sketches, we notice that the regulars' physical and personality traits don't differ greatly from the finished work. In other words, there's an inseparable match between the personality descriptions and the appearances Yoshikazu Yasuhiko drew. This consistency persisted throughout the original Gundam series. Personality determines a character's appearance, and the expected personality based on appearance and resulting actions deepen the character as a whole.

We shouldn't overlook the diagram showing relationships of conflict centered on A. These conflicts generate other human relationships, becoming the starting point for drama development. Because these elements were woven into the character designs from an early stage along with the visual style, they became dominant factors even after the characters were finalized, such as the confrontation between Amuro and Bright. This demonstrates how character design can decisively influence a work long into its development.

There's a Moment When the Collective Will of the Staff Breathes Life into Fictional Anime Characters

Yoshikazu Yasuhiko didn't unilaterally decide the characters and their personality traits. During planning sessions, ideas like "We need someone like this!" or "Imagine if this guy had that kind of quirk!" were thrown around. Yasuhiko distilled this collective brainstorm into tangible form. The scribbled notes we see today are like whispers from that creative session, capturing the very instant when these fictional anime personas sparked to life.

Yasuhiko's talent for plucking these character concepts from the ether of group discussions and rendering them visible so early in the process is nothing short of extraordinary. Once characters are visualized, they inspire the staff, generating stories and drama one after another.

What catches the eye is the unfamiliar "Shima Hachijo" (E). She was something of a hidden gem among the original Gundam's beautiful female characters.

The Gundam Archive offers an intriguing explanation for her absence from the final cut: her character traits allegedly overlapped with Sayla and Mirai, and the team worried about distinguishing too many regular characters. However, this explanation seems questionable to me. As mentioned earlier, she was one of the earliest characters, with a role clearly distinct from Mirai's. Moreover, there was no Sayla-equivalent at this stage. The idea of "overlapping character traits" seems to fall flat.

In the following pages, we see these rough sketches refined into cleaner versions. Interestingly, Shima Hachijo persists here. The names evolve: A "Bright Noa," B "Mirai Eyland," C "Hayate Subayashi," D "Ryu Kyotai," F "Shiden Kai," and G "Amuro Ray" - inching closer to their final forms. Yet, E remains nameless.

Looking at "Statements from Yoshiyuki Tomino from the Gundam Behind the Scenes" (Kinema Junpo), Tomino's background setting (dated October 10) lists main characters as "Bri Toryu," "Mirai Eyland," "Ryu Shoki," etc. This timeline suggests names were added to the clean-up version later.

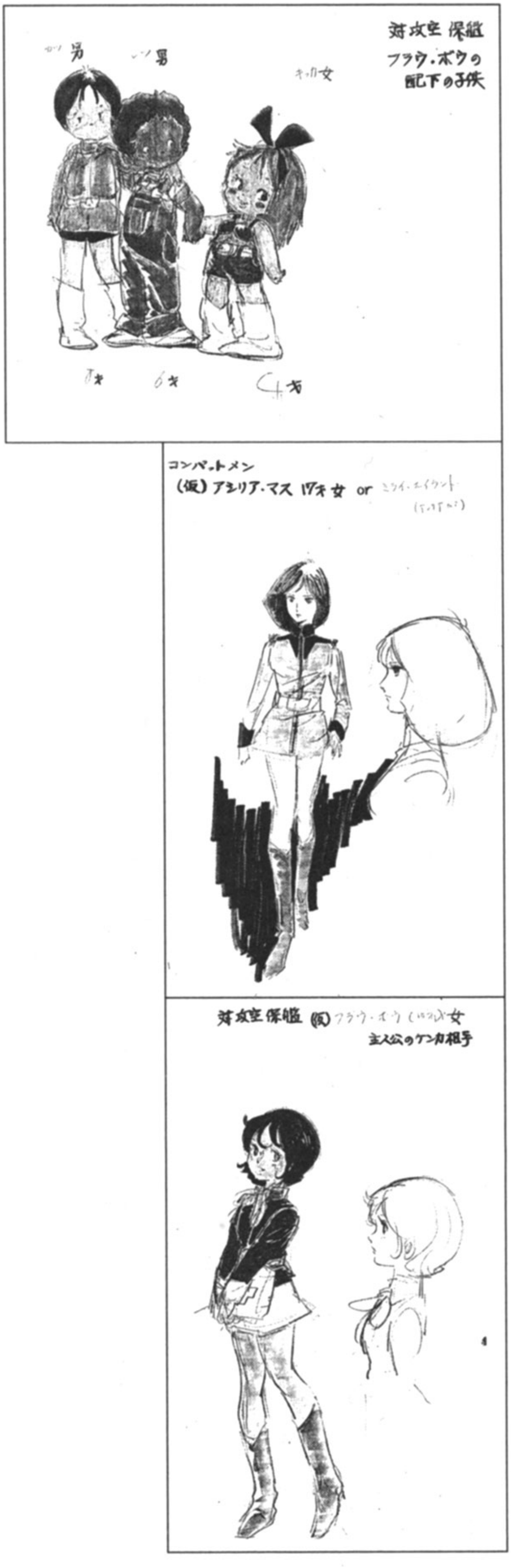

対攻空 保艦
フラウ・ボウの
配下の子供
カツ 男
レツ 男
キッカ 女
7才
6才
4才
コンパットメン
(仮) アシリア・マス 17才 女 or ミライ・エイウント
([illegible])
対攻空保艦 (仮) フラウ・ボウ (15才) 女
主人公のケンカ相手

図2　安彦良和による追加ラフ・キャラクター3点

The previous image holds more clues. Three sketches on large B4 paper (setting document size) represent Sayla, Frau Bow, and Katz, Letz, Kikka, and from the handwriting around them, we can tell they were distributed along with the clean-up version that follows. In other words, they were clearly drawn later to increase the number of characters.

The text written for the Sayla-equivalent character is key to solving this mystery. It says "Ashelia Mass, or Mirai Eyland (Ashelia?)". Now, let's reread the name "Shima Hachijo". It's clearly derived from "Hachijojima" (Hachijo Island). We can easily infer the evolution: "Hachijima" → "Eight Island" → "Eyland" → "Hashu".

From this sequence, we can understand what happened to Shima Hachijo's character design. The name and visual design were separated and reconsidered. That's why although she was cleaned up, her name wasn't filled in, left pending.

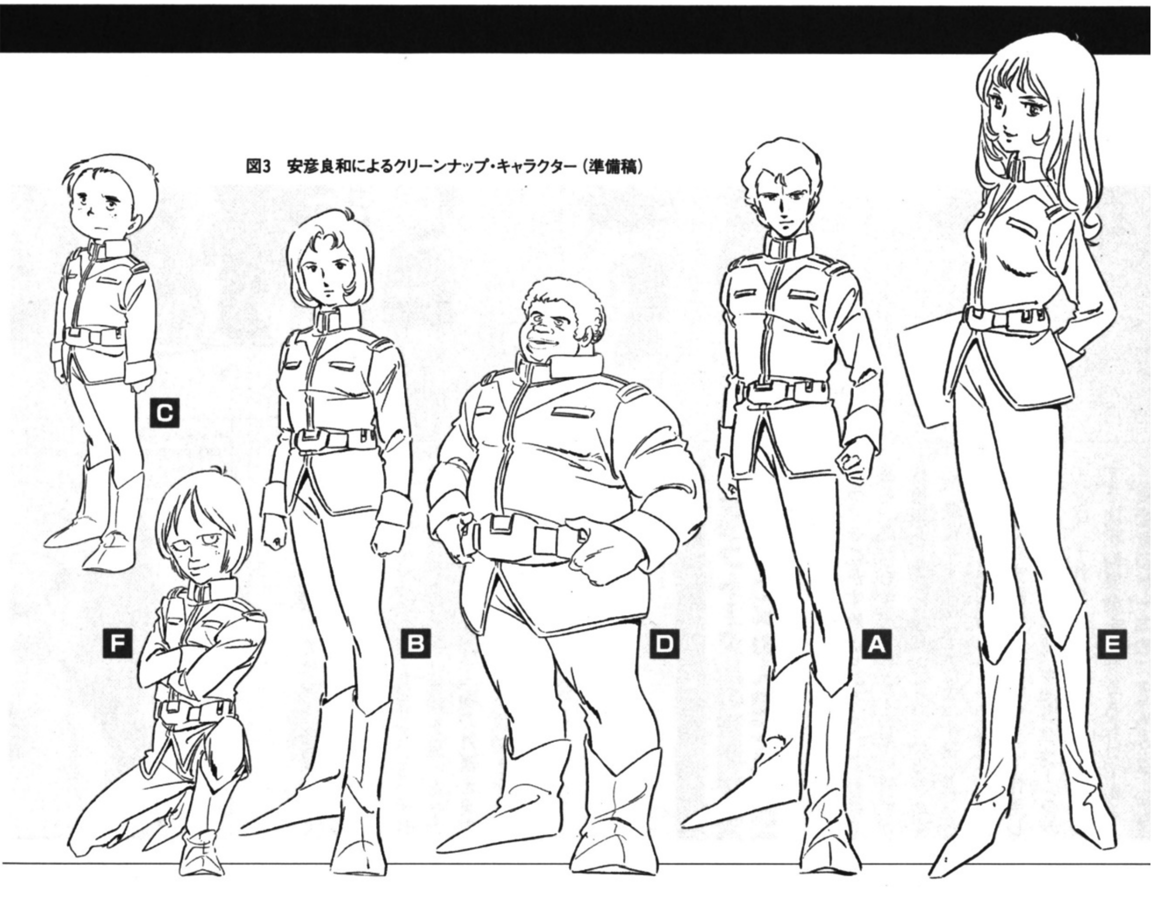


図3　安彦良和によるクリーンナップ・キャラクター（準備稿）

The Allure of a Single, Bold Line Chosen from Multiple Wavering Contours

The female character corresponding to Sayla inherited Shima's design. The name "Hachijo Shima" merged with Mirai Kitaru (the coming future?), evolving through "Mirai Eyland" to become "Mirai Yashima." The confusion at this stage likely led to the early broadcast's printed error stating "Mirai Eyland is the White Base captain."

Therefore, saying "Shima Hachijo never appeared in the main story" is only half accurate, unlike truly disappeared characters like Gundry. A more appropriate description might be "This character was revised and inherited by Sayla."

Let's move away from our archaeology game and return to Yasuhiko's designs. Compare the character prelim drafts with the rough sketches. Why is the clean-up process necessary when creating character sheets for anime?

Once character sheets are completed, they're distributed to many animators as specifications for maintaining consistency. Therefore, ambiguous lines are removed to prevent diverse interpretations. Additionally, there's the finishing process. Characters are ultimately traced onto cels and painted. For proper coloring, the main lines must form closed regions with continuous lines. Thus, from the rough draft with hesitant lines, one appropriate line must be chosen and refined.

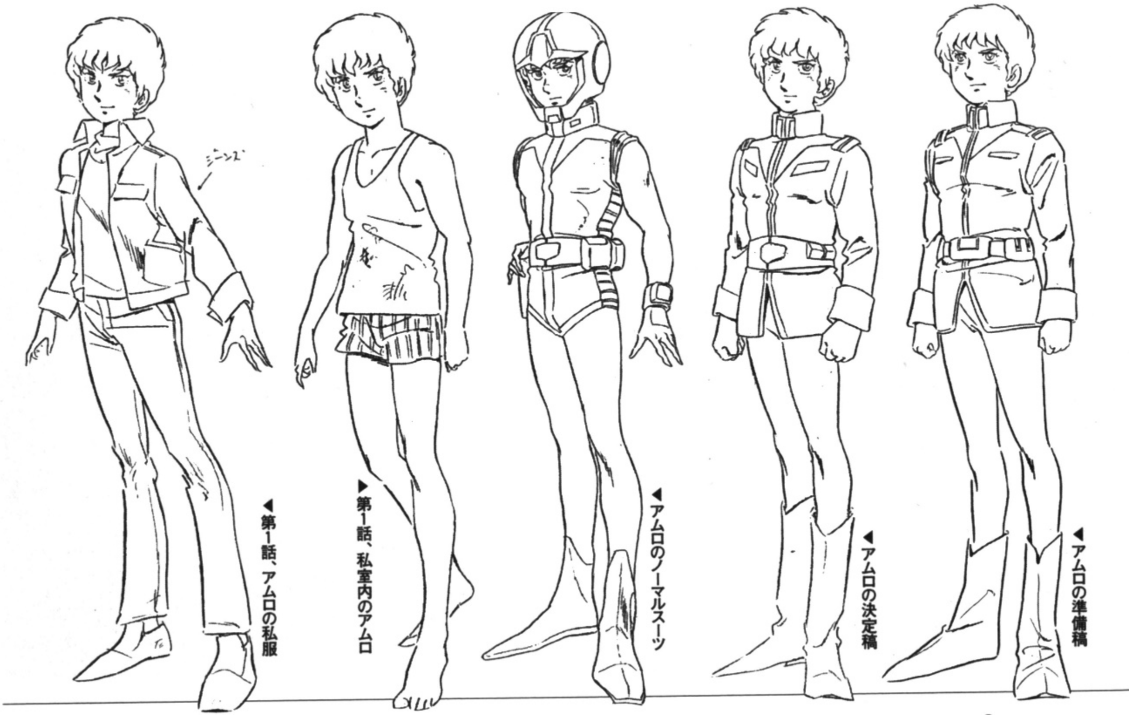
Pay attention to Yasuhiko Yoshikazu's line selection and brushwork. From multiple wavering lines with vague contours and guiding lines, he chooses just one clear line, drawing it with bold, energetic strokes. This is evident in the nuances, flow, and subtle variations in strength of the lines.

Recent digitalization has led to an increase in images with thin, connected lines lacking the charm of the line itself. Yasuhiko's approach isn't like mechanically connecting lines as in a technical drawing. Following his undulating, vibrant lines is like tracing the journey of an idea as it leaps from the realm of imagination into our tangible reality. The character's very breath, known only to the artist, rides these dynamic lines like a wave, creating a resonance with the viewer. That's where the emotion is born.

This might sound occult-like. Yasuhiko himself probably considers it as simply drawing lines as he feels. But isn't that the essence of genius? What's undeniable is that only creations that seem to channel something from beyond our world in this way truly possess a soul. And it's only these soulful creations that move us deeply. The magic of anime – its power to captivate and inspire – resides precisely in these ineffable qualities.

The Beautiful Trajectory of Materializing Something from the World of Imagination into Reality with Conviction

What work remains for character design after the clean-up process? To illustrate this, the following images depict Amuro's evolution after the prelim drafts. On the far right is the cleaned-up prelim draft. Immediately to its left is the final full-body pose. While the eye might be drawn to the altered clothing details or belt changes, the true artistry lies in the subtle shift of character essence. Amuro's face carries a whisper more youth, his body echoing this gentle regression. The refined leg posture amplifies an air of introversion. Though these aren't drastic changes, they clearly reflect discussions held between these two versions, including Amuro's personality development and envisioned dramatic progression.


ジーンズ
◀第1話、アムロの私服
▶第1話、私室内のアムロ
◀アムロのノーマルスーツ
◀アムロの決定稿
◀アムロの準備稿

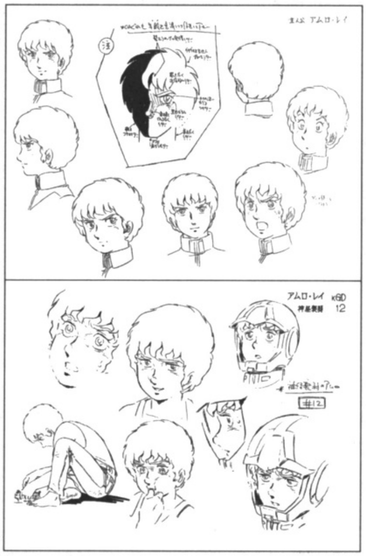
The central combat suit is for piloting the Gundam. This doesn't deviate much from typical robot anime designs. Regular characters' uniforms and battle gear are created with side and back views, pose collections, and expression sheets, distributed to staff as basic reference materials.

The next images of Amuro in underwear and jeans are from the first episode. Even for regular characters, when outfits differ by episode, settings sheets are created as if for guest characters. The jeans outfit is reused as Amuro's casual wear during his escape in Episode 17.

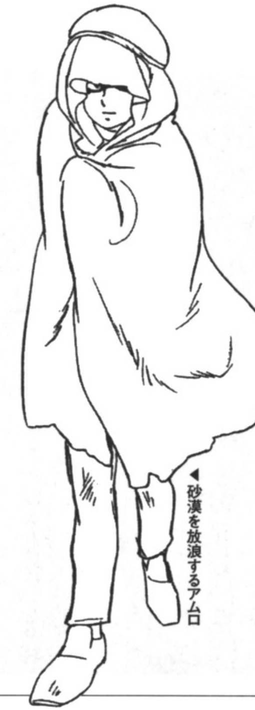
Note the subtle poses and clothing nuances. The underwear pose is relaxed and slightly hunched, while the jeans outfit has a more active pose for going out. Since the first episode's storyboard was drawn based on this image, we can tell Yasuhiko Yoshikazu designed it after reading the scenario. The drawings subtly anticipate the character's actions and performance.

The following image showcases Amuro's designs from later episodes. The child Amuro is from **Episode 13: *We Meet Again, Mother*** (US: ***Coming Home***). Character designers are sometimes required to create designs outside the original age setting for flashbacks or future scenes.

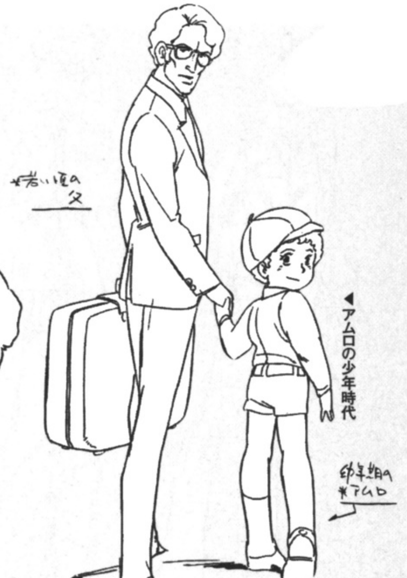
The desert wandering scene from **Episode 19: *Ramba Ral's Suicide Attack!*** (US: ***Ramba Ral's Attack***) features an unexpected costume for what started as a space-themed work. By this point, Amuro's sullen nature seems to have thoroughly permeated Yasuhiko's hand through repeated animation work. Even a single image conveys ample drama, evoking an involuntary smile.


主人公 アムロ・レイ
アムロ・レイ
12
#12

▲アムロの表情集。上はレギュラー、下は12話神経衰弱時。



◀砂漠を放浪するアムロ


※若い頃の父
幼年期の※アムロ

◀アムロの少年時代

Another Drama of Growth Gradually Revealed by Tracing the Evolution of Character Sheets

Beyond the initial sketches, Amuro's emotional landscape unfolds through a series of "guest" expressions. On the far left, we're presented with a fascinating duality: above, a collection of expressions intertwined with meticulous drawing instructions; below, the haunting visage of Amuro's psychological unraveling from **Episode 12: *The Threat of Zeon.*** The exhausted, vacant-eyed Amuro of Episode 12 is, in a sense, unique to that episode. It's interesting to note that Yasuhiko's brushwork in this drawing differs slightly from other character sheets.

The lines flow with a softer cadence, reminiscent of the fluid grace seen in corrected key frames. Perhaps this is because, unlike setting sheets that determine clothing and such, this was drawn with the mindset of creating key animation, imbuing it with performance. At this point, rather than simply defining the character as a setting, it might also embody Yasuhiko's feelings as an animation director, wanting to comprehensively coordinate how other staff should interpret the character.

As we trace this visual odyssey of character sheets, we witness Amuro's birth into this fictional realm, his gradual acclimation, his expanding horizons, and his growth through myriad experiences. While he doesn't undergo a dramatic metamorphosis, we feel the emergence of a character with an unwavering core, evolving yet consistent. This ability to evoke a sense of a living, breathing individual – albeit fictional – is the unique alchemy of anime.

Within this meticulous process, we discover a parallel narrative, one that exists alongside but distinct from the main anime storyline. It's a drama inherent to the character design process itself, infused with Yasuhiko Yoshikazu's formidable presence and artistic vision.

Yes, these settings and character sheets are invaluable historical documents. But to view them as mere artifacts would be to miss the forest for the trees. The true challenge – and the real excitement – lies in reconstructing these fragments to uncover the zeitgeist of their era, to feel the pulse of creative power that brought them to life. How do we bridge this past with our present? How can these insights illuminate our path forward in animation and storytelling?

As long as we approach these materials with such inquisitive and connective perspectives, we'll find ourselves in a bottomless well of research potential.