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CELEBRATING DIVERSITY
IN CULTURE

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THEME FOR **SEPTEMBER:**

**CELEBRATING DIVERSITY
IN CULTURE**

The Japan Cultural Expo is being held this year through 2021 to showcase the appeal of Japanese culture and art to as wide an audience as possible, the event coinciding with the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. In this issue, we introduce a number of artists, creators and curators who draw on traditional Japanese skills and strengths to create new art forms and promote cultural exchange.

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ON THE COVER
Celebrating Diversity in Culture
Model: konoe riko
Photo: Courtesy of Ogiwara Rakutaro

TICAD 7

ON August 30, 2019, at the closing session of the Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 7), Prime Minister Shinzo Abe gave the following address:

Africa is now moving forward with dynamic progress by the rapid increase of a young population, the birth of new businesses one after another through innovation and the conclusion of the African continent-wide free trade agreement.

At this TICAD 7, we have had lively discussions on the image of a new future of Africa from the various positions, such as the African states, Japan, the International Organizations, the other partner states and the civil society.

Africa was consistently one of the main themes at the G20 Osaka Summit I hosted and the G7 Summit 2019 in Biarritz I attended just before this TICAD 7.

At this TICAD 7, we followed that flow and succeeded in giving

a clear direction for becoming a partner for Africa under dynamic growth.

With regard to the Horn of Africa where the African states themselves have been proceeding with their own actions as well as with regard to the Sahel of Africa, we succeeded in strengthening the solidarity of the international community.

TICAD has been a responsible forum consistently from its establishment in 1993. Japan will continue to steadily implement actions to promote the realization of the “African Union Agenda 2063” in collaboration with other partners.

Furthermore, I introduced dialogues with private companies for the first time at TICAD V. Afterwards, I visited Cote d’Ivoire, Mozambique and Ethiopia, and then Kenya at the time of TICAD VI, together with Japanese companies.

The private sector is also looking at Africa as the “biggest frontier” intensely, while its growth



Photograph of closing session

is actually about to be achieved. This is evidenced by the fact that companies, whose number is more than double that at the time of TICAD VI, participated in this TICAD 7.

TICAD was reborn as “New TICAD” that lifts to greater heights the double E’s of “entrepreneurship” and “enterprise,” as well as the double I’s of “investment” and “innovation.”

Japanese companies themselves are growing together with African countries and communities by fostering people and transferring technologies.

The Government of Japan is willing to render assistance to promote further activities of private companies in Africa.

I am now looking forward to seeing fruitful outcomes along with Japan and Africa’s partnership in various ways for making a leap forward in the future.”



Photograph of closing session



Celebrating Diversity in Culture

The Japan Cultural Expo, which began earlier this year and runs into 2021, showcases 10,000 years of the arts in Japan through programs focusing on everything from prehistoric Jomon period pottery to manga. Against the backdrop of this rich program of events, which will run through the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, we asked Junko Kawamura, President of the Japan Arts Council and Director of the Japan Cultural Expo Secretariat, about the characteristics of Japanese culture and the role of the arts in Japan today. We also met with artists and creators in a wide range of fields whose work draws on traditional Japanese skills and strengths to create new art forms and cultural experiences. In addition, we visited Roppongi Art Night, teamLab's digital "museum without borders," and the Sumida Hokusai Museum.

Katsushika Hokusai, *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*,
from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (details)
the Sumida Hokusai Museum

Inheriting and Creating Culture

CAPITALIZING on the opportunity of the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Japan Cultural Expo is being held to showcase the appeal of Japanese culture and art. We spoke with Junko Kawamura, President of the Japan Arts Council and Secretary-General of the Japan Cultural Expo Secretariat, about the characteristics of Japanese culture and the Japan Cultural Expo project.

What are the characteristics of Japanese culture?

One of the characteristics of Japanese culture is



Junko Kawamura at the National Noh Theatre, Tokyo
Photo: Tadashi Aizawa

the length of time it occupies. Japanese culture is highly diverse, extending from earthenware and earthen figures created during the Jomon period which is more than 10,000 years ago to the anime, manga and art based on cutting-edge technologies seen in modern Japan. In these aspects of culture there are many cases of techniques and sensibilities being carried over from ancient times into the modern world. Creators of anime and manga are sometimes inspired to devise new ideas and techniques based on picture scrolls drawn in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. Meanwhile, the acting and performances of kabuki theater have had an influence on movies and tv programs and video games. Some actors and actresses even incorporate the steps of actors in noh theater into their stage performances. In Japan, one can see both culture that has been passed down over a long time, and culture that has been newly created using those elements as an inspiration.

What kinds of changes have you seen in relation to Japanese culture in recent years?

Pop culture and media arts have gained popularity overseas. For example, for the latest iteration of the Japan Media Arts Festival that has been held by the Agency for Cultural Affairs since 1997, works were received from more than 100 countries and regions. Previously, award winners from overseas have expressed delight in being able to win awards in Japan, the home of anime and manga. Many visitors decide to study in Japan due to their interest in manga and anime, and the number of overseas tourists who visit the regions featured in those works has increased significantly.

Japanese culture in regional areas has also attracted attention. Programs that combine the rich nature of regional areas with culture and art

are being implemented in various regions. Notable examples of such endeavors are the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and Setouchi Triennale, both of which have attracted considerable attention from Japan and overseas alike.

Recent years have seen a significant change that the Japanese people come to strongly recognize various powers of culture such as the power of connecting people with one another, the power to elicit people's potential and the power to revitalize regional areas.

Tell us more about the Japan Cultural Expo that started in March this year.

The Japan Cultural Expo is being held nationwide prior to, throughout and after the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo. The overarching theme is "Humanity and Nature in Japan," the primary aim of which is to introduce Japanese styles of thinking such as a reverence towards and coexistence with nature, that have existed from the Jomon period through to the present day as embodied in art by way of projects such as art exhibitions and stage performances. The Japan Cultural Expo is expected to further cultural development and lead to the creation of social and economic value by promoting exchanges with people in Japan and overseas. The projects being implemented under the Expo number in the several hundreds. For example, at the Kyushu National Museum, an exhibition of Jomon period

earthenware will be run from October to December this year. In addition, the Okinawa-based musical theater, Kumiodori, which is celebrating the 300th anniversary of its first



A poster promoting the Japan Cultural Expo
Courtesy of the Japan Arts Council



performance this year, will go on a national tour from October to November. Next year, exhibitions covering a wide range of areas will be held, including projects to disseminate the culture of the Ainu, Japan's indigenous peoples, as well as elements of Japanese cuisine, architecture, *kogei* crafts, fashion and manga that have been cultivated through the Japanese affinity for nature. Performances and new operas that combine a wide array of the arts will also be on display.

What elements of Japanese culture do you think should be disseminated throughout Japan and overseas moving forward?

It is important that more people learn of the techniques and people that support Japanese culture. To pass on traditional culture to future generations, the related skills also need to be passed on from person to person. The skills needed to repair artistic works such as temples and Buddhist statues, and the skills to create clothing and traditional objects of traditional performing arts are examples of this. At an exhibition of national treasures that will be held in Kyoto from April 2020 as a Japan Cultural Expo project, we also plan to introduce the processes involved in repairing works of art and old documents. We also have plans to hold an exhibition of models of Japanese representative architecture from the Asuka period to modern times and to show repair work on buildings of cultural properties to the public. We believe these endeavors are necessary to ensure the continuation and development of Japanese culture. 7

Interview by OSAMU SAWAJI

ART COLORS THE ROPPONGI NIGHTSCAPE



Scenes from past Roppongi Art Nights
Photos: ©Roppongi Art Night Executive Committee

Roppongi Art Night is an annual festival held in Tokyo's Roppongi district, which is known for its art. Throughout the night, the streets of Roppongi are embellished with a variety of artworks, including installations, music, video works and more.

TAKASHI SASAKI

HELD over two days on May 25 and 26, this year's Roppongi Art Night was the 10th since the festival was first staged in March 2009. The main activities took place during the hours between sunset on day 1 and sunrise on day 2. What is the idea behind this all-night event? We asked Yoshinao Matsushima of Mori Building Co.,

Ltd., who has been involved in the planning and running of the event since its launch.

“Once, the main center for art in Tokyo has been in the Ueno district, which has a high concentration of museums and an art college. However, in the 2000s, three large art museums opened in Roppongi one after another. Roppongi Art Night seeks to enliven the area as a whole, around the nucleus of these three art museums,” says Matsushima.

The Mori Art Museum in the Roppongi Hills complex, the Suntory Museum of Art located in the Tokyo Midtown complex, and the National Art Center, Tokyo are known as the “Roppongi Art Triangle”

and have each earned popularity among art fans both in Japan and overseas. Roppongi Art Night has been held by local authorities such as the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and Minato Ward, as well as the local Roppongi Shopping District Association, and is supported by the Agency for Cultural Affairs.

Roppongi Art Night focuses on two themes: proposing a lifestyle that celebrates the enjoyment of art in our everyday lives, and creating a pioneering model for urban development in the metropolis of Tokyo.

“Japanese people were not really ones for night-life,” says Matsushima. “For example, most people attending a concert would get on the train and go home when it ended at 9 p.m. At Roppongi Art Night, I would like people to experience a different way of enjoying Roppongi, strolling around the streets and eating out while viewing various kinds of art.”

At the 10th Roppongi Art Night held this year under the theme of “Night Journey, Daydream,” Choi Jeong Hwa, an artist active on the world stage, was the event’s first artist for its Main Program to be invited from overseas. His work *Fruit Tree*, in which vegetables and fruits are represented by colorful balloons, was exhibited in Roppongi Hills Arena. In addition to works by the main artist Choi, many other installations and performances with sound were staged lending color to the streets all across the Roppongi area. The number of works on display has increased from twenty-eight in the first exhibition to more than ninety this year, with some 800,000 people now attending the event.

“Not only has the scale of the event increased each year, but I get a real sense that the participating artists and those who view their works are now enjoying Roppongi Art Night in their own way. We are seeing a steady increase not only in the number of Japanese people but also foreign visitors, with many now bringing their families during the daytime hours to participate in workshops for children. Also, developments over the past ten years such as the opening of a number of contemporary art galleries in Roppongi have changed the look of the town itself,” says Matsushima.

Roppongi Art Night transcends existing art event



1



2



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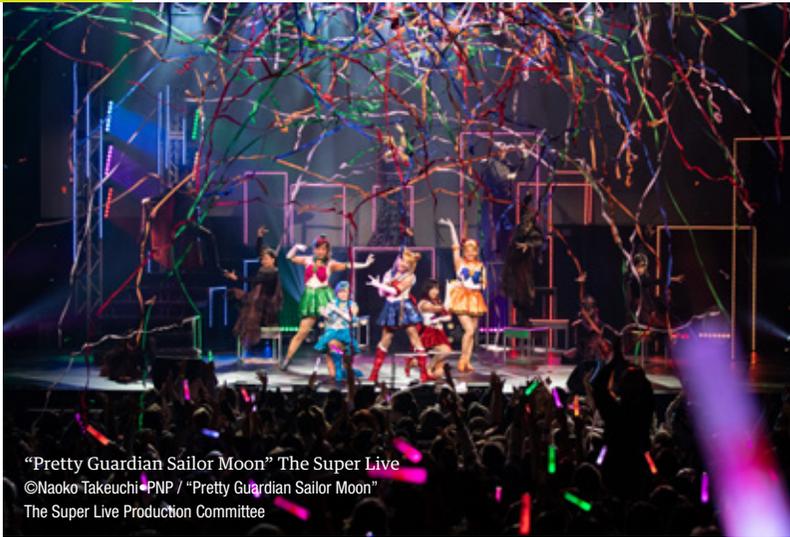
1 *Gather Together* by Choi Jeong Hwa

2 *Creased Sculpture* by Esther Stocker

3 *RedBall Project* by Kurt Perschke

Photos: ©Roppongi Art Night Executive Committee (1, 2); ©RedBall Project, by Brit Worgan (3)

formats, attracting a wider range of people and giving a boost to the community. With next year’s event scheduled to take place ahead of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, the number of visitors from overseas is expected to increase even further. “We aim to stage an art festival that is even more successful in promoting the unique characteristics of Japan and Roppongi,” Matsushima says. **7**



New Dimensions of Entertainment



Japan's world of 2D manga comics, anime and video games is being adapted for the stage in 3D. Originating in Japan, "2.5 dimensional musicals" are proving popular in Japan and abroad.

KUMIKO SATO

2.5 dimensional musicals ("2.5D musicals") are a form of stage entertainment originating in Japan that has generated popularity around the world. What makes them distinctive is that they are based on Japanese manga comics, anime or video games and seek to faithfully depict the worlds of these stories on the stage. 2.5D musicals rose to prominence with the *MUSICAL THE PRINCE OF TENNIS* which was first performed in 2003. Telling the story of a powerful junior high school tennis club on stage, the musical generated attention through word of mouth lauding the

reproduction of the characters who appear in the original manga comics and performances recreating tennis matches with the use of light and sound, charming large audiences made up primarily of young women who are also fans of the original comics. In 2014 the Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association was formed to ensure that 2.5D musicals would be established as their own genre of theatrical performance instead of ending as a passing fad. Back in 2003, 17 such musicals appeared annually and attracted audiences numbering 120,000. By 2018, the market had grown to 197 musicals attracting some 2.78 million audience members.

Ever since the term "2.5 dimensional musical" was coined in Japan, stage productions of manga, anime and video games have been performed. In 1974, the first performance of *The Rose of Versailles* was given by Takarazuka Revue, a theater group with a history spanning more than a century. In the

- 1 Live Spectacle NARUTO -Song of the Akatsuki-
Photo: ©Masashi Kishimoto, Scott/SHUEISHA/Live Spectacle "NARUTO" Production Committee 2017
- 2 "DEATH NOTE THE MUSICAL"
Photo: ©大場つぐみ・小畑健/集英社
- 3 MUSICAL THE PRINCE OF TENNIS 3rd SEASON National Tournament SEIGAKU vs RIKKAI The First Half
Photo: ©2009 TAKESHI KONOMI ©2014 NAS, THE PRINCE OF TENNIS II PROJECT ©1999 TAKESHI KONOMI/2015 MUSICAL THE PRINCE OF TENNIS PROJECT
- 4 Sengoku BASARA
Photo: ©CAPCOM CO., LTD. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
- 5 Stage [Yowamushi Pedal]
Photo: ©渡辺航(週刊少年チャンピオン)/弱虫ペダル04製作委員会©渡辺航(週刊少年チャンピオン)/マーベラス、東宝、アルテメイト

years since, many repeat performances of the musical have been put on as a perennial favorite. In 2015, the manga *One Piece* was adapted into a traditional kabuki play.

According to Naomi Toda, PR representative for the Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association, "the term 2.5 dimensional musical refers to the practice of faithfully recreating the world depicted in two-dimensional source material on a three-dimensional stage, and it's a term that sprung up naturally among fans. They are popular because the characters and worlds of the source material people love are recreated on a three-dimensional stage in a non-destructive way."

In addition to the long-running *MUSICAL THE PRINCE OF TENNIS* mentioned above, which is still performed today, popular 2.5D musicals include *Sengoku BASARA*, featuring theatrical sword fighting based on the original video game that fictionalizes Japan's Sengoku period; *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon: The Musical*, based on the manga for girls in which young girls transform into warriors to battle evil; and *DEATH NOTE THE MUSICAL*, based on the manga depicting a battle of minds revolving around a notebook dropped by a death spirit into the human realm. Each adaptation is faithful to the world and the distinctive characters of the source work.

Performances unique to 2.5D are another draw of the genre. For *Stage [Yowamushi Pedal]*, based on a manga about high school students taking part in bicycle races, bicycles do not appear on stage; instead, the bicycle races are realistically enacted by the cast, who move around the stage with great physical intensity holding handlebars. Meanwhile in *Live Spectacle NARUTO*, adapted from the original manga that tells the story of friendship, betrayal and

revenge between ninjas along with the bonds that tie master, pupil and family, the art of ninjutsu is recreated using costumes embedded with LED lights. In *HYPER PROJECTION ENGEKI "HAIKYU!!"*, based on a manga about a high school volleyball club, projection mapping is used to express the mental states of the characters on stage and extend a sense of presence during the match scenes. In these ways, the 2.5D musical genre has continued to evolve through a range of performances that incorporate the latest technologies.

"It can be difficult to express the high freedom of expression found in the 2D source material on a stage that has to contend with physical limitations. Only by filling in the blanks in the minds of the audience members can the work achieve completion on the stage," explains Toda.

Recently, it has become increasingly common for an original manga work being adapted into an anime, video game, novel or live-action drama and film to be adapted for the stage at the same time. And while previously almost all the audience members enjoying a 2.5D musical would be fans of the original work, recently the fan base has expanded, with audiences who have seen the stage performance later becoming fans of the original material. As many of the original works are manga, anime or video games that are popular around the world, the Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association has also been focusing on extending its messaging by setting up websites that allow ticket purchases from overseas as well as other efforts. Overseas performances have mainly taken place in China and elsewhere in Asia, but performances last year in Paris, France and in March 2019 in Washington D.C. and Broadway, New York were also met with sell-out crowds.

Toda touched upon the future goals of their efforts. "The original Japanese manga comics these musicals are based on are really respected by the overseas fans, and by having Japanese take the stage for the performances, they get a sense that the 'real thing' has come to town. By further boosting recognition of 2.5D musicals moving forward, we hope that even more overseas fans visit Japan hoping to be moved by the performances on offer." 



Forest of Resonating Lamps

Artworks without Borders

teamLab Borderless opened in Odaiba, Tokyo in 2018, offering an immersive, digitally created “world of art without boundaries.” The museum attracts large numbers of visitors, more than half of them coming from overseas.

OSAMU SAWAJI

FOUNDED in 2001, teamLab is an art collective of several hundred artists, engineers, CG animators and other specialists. teamLab has released a succession of innovative artworks that use digital technology, exhibiting them not only in Japan but throughout Asia, as well as in Europe, the United States and other parts of the world.

A permanent exhibition of teamLab’s works, *teamLab Borderless*, opened in June 2018 in Odaiba,

Tokyo. The “museum without a map” showcases some sixty artworks over a total floor space of 10,000 square meters. To date, the number of visitors has exceeded 2.3 million, more than half of whom were from overseas.

The distinguishing feature of the museum is that it is literally “without boundaries.” Many of the artworks use the walls, floor and ceiling, while others are constantly shifting, not confined to one place. Picture frames, monitors, or other framing devices, as well as boundaries separating the artworks, are almost wholly absent. Moreover, since the artworks change according to people’s movements, there is no boundary between the artwork and the viewer.

teamLab says, “We want to explore a new relationship between humans and nature, and between oneself and the world through art. Digital technology has allowed art to liberate itself from the physical

All photos: Courtesy of teamLab, Exhibition view, MORI Building DIGITAL ART MUSEUM: teamLab Borderless, 2018, Odaiba, Tokyo © teamLab

and transcend boundaries. We see no boundary between humans and nature, and between oneself and the world.”

There is no guide map or route displayed in the museum, so visitors are free to view the works in any order they like. However, visitors will encounter the artwork *Forest of Flowers and People: Lost, Immersed and Reborn* as soon as they enter the museum. In this work, colorful flowers bloom, scatter and die on the whole surface of the walls and floor of the expan-



Forest of Flowers and People: Lost, Immersed and Reborn

sive space. The flowers change as people move and touch them. The viewer proceeds through the exhibition space with the sense of having entered a maze.

One of the most popular works is *Forest of Resonating Lamps*, comprising innumerable blinking lamps suspended from the ceiling.



Graffiti Nature - High Mountains and Deep Valleys

When a visitor stops near the lamps, the lamp closest to them gleams while at the same time emitting a sound with a beautiful tonal quality. Then, the light diffuses to other nearby lamps. Viewers can enjoy the magical atmosphere of being surrounded by lamps that emit a variety of colors.

In *Graffiti Nature - High Mountains and Deep Valleys*, a work that is very popular with children, creatures of various colors move around on an uneven floor surface that mimics the undulations of mountains and valleys. The viewer draws a picture with crayons on a piece of paper on which the outlines of animals and flowers have been drawn. When they scan it, the picture they drew begins to move in the artwork. Visitors can also learn about the mechanism of the ecosystem through artworks showing how snakes are eaten by giant salamanders.

Visitors can also enjoy tea through the senses of taste and sight at the EN TEA HOUSE. When a tea bowl containing tea is placed on the table, beautiful flowers bloom on the surface of the tea. Then, when



Flowers Bloom in an Infinite Universe inside a Teacup

the tea has been drunk and the tea bowl is placed on the table once again, the flowers scatter, and no flowers bloom in the empty bowl. Visitors get a real sense of the beauty and transience of flowers.

teamLab says, “We want you to immerse your body in borderless art, wander, explore, discover, and create a new world with others.” By stepping into *teamLab Borderless*, you will be able to experience an unprecedented world of art that goes beyond the bounds of convention. 



“Wearing Mecha”



A model wears the lightweight METCALF clone robotic arms
METCALF clone
model: konoe riko
Photos: Courtesy of Ogiwara Rakutaro

Mechanical engineer Kyunkun is attracting attention in Japan and overseas with her innovative idea of wearing robots as fashion.

TAKASHI SASAKI

Beginning with the comic *Mighty Atom* which appeared in the early 1950s, the world of Japanese comics and animation has long depicted robots as heroes. This has influenced many researchers and engineers to pursue the path of research and development into robots. In fact, in addition to the industrial robots operating at plants and other locations around Japan, active R&D is underway across a wide range of fields from medicine and nursing care to help with household chores and disaster relief.

Born in 1994, Kyunkun was similarly obsessed with *Mighty Atom* in her elementary school days, but it is in the development of a robot that is completely different from the conventional robots created with economic or practical aims in mind where she has attracted attention, developing a wearable robot that gives shape to the notion of “wearing mecha” as fashion.

“Perhaps it was because my parents would take me to the National Museum of Nature and Science in Ueno from an early age, but I have always liked science and machines. It was around the fifth year of elementary school when I thought that I actually wanted to be a robot developer. There was a TV program showing the movements and development scenes of a compact robot that walks on two legs known as “Chroino” developed by robot creator Tomotaka Takahashi. When I saw this, I knew I wanted to do that kind of work in the future,” says Kyunkun.

By the time of junior high school, Kyunkun had obtained a soldering iron and started making things from an electronic kit. As a high school student, she joined the “clothing handicraft club” as an extracurricular activity where



A model wears the original METCALF robotic arms
program: Kikukawa Yuya
model: zaanya necomori
costume: chloma
Photo: Courtesy of Kyunkun

she worked on making clothing that revolved around technology, such as garments with mechanical components or electronics boards attached. Then in university while studying mechanical engineering, Kyunkun began creating items as a “robotics fashion creator,” culminating in the announcement of the “METCALF clione” wearable robot that combines clothing and

robotics in 2016. When the METCALF clione robot is put on, its robotic arms made from aluminum and acrylic appear to extend left and right from the wearer’s back like feathers. The arms can be controlled using a smartphone.

“When they hear ‘wearable robot,’ a lot of people are reminded of a powered suit designed to help with physical tasks, or imagine some kind of body extension, but METCALF is completely different. It’s not a question of practicality, but about what people feel and what they think when the physical distance between human and robot is reduced to zero. I created METCALF out of an interest in those questions,” explains Kyunkun.

METCALF drew the attention of many people through social media and other sources, and invitations to exhibit METCALF were even received from major events overseas. In 2016, METCALF stage, a

version designed to be used on the stage, was featured as a costume in a performance by the idol group AKB48. This version was equipped with a motion sensor, with METCALF changing its movements based on the movements of the wearer, such as extending its arms when the wearer spins around.

“When I have asked people for their impressions when they have put on METCALF at exhibition events, a lot of them have said it makes them feel reassured or calm because it’s as if there is an animal close to them,” says Kyunkun.

While continuing her activities as a mechanical engineer, Kyunkun is currently working on her graduate school master’s thesis, in which she is researching people’s impressions when wearing robots. The idea of wearing robots as a fashion statement is an unprecedented experience for humans, and Kyunkun’s creations may herald the beginning of an entirely new relationship between people and robots. **7**



Robotics fashion creator and mechanical engineer Kyunkun
Photo: Courtesy of Kyunkun



Hokusai Comes Home

Prints and drawings by the world-famous artist Katsushika Hokusai have found a new home at the Sumida Hokusai Museum in the heart of the neighborhood where Hokusai was born and lived.

AKIRA UMEZAWA

KATSUSHIKA Hokusai (1760-1849) is an artist most famous for his ukiyo-e woodblock print series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, which includes *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*, known internationally as *The Great Wave*, as well as for his *bijin-ga*, paintings of elegant, beautiful women. Many of Hokusai's works had a profound influence not only on painting in Japan but also on European and other artists overseas. Hokusai was the only Japanese person to be included in "The 100 Most Important Events and People of the Past 1,000 Years" in *The Life Millennium*, published in 1998.

The Sumida Hokusai Museum is located in present-day Sumida City, Tokyo, close to the spot where Hokusai was born. The museum is located a short walk from Ryogoku Station, which is also the closest

Under the Wave off Kanagawa, from the series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji, by Katsushika Hokusai, From the Sumida Hokusai Museum collection.

station to the Ryogoku Kokugikan sumo stadium and Edo-Tokyo Museum.

Deputy Director Chiaki Mizukami says, "Hokusai was born in [present-day] Sumida and spent almost his entire life here, leaving many superb works of art. In honor of this outstanding artist whom the local citizens regard with great pride, Sumida City opened the museum in 2016 as a base to invigorate the local community and contribute to the region's industry and tourism."

As well as the works collected by Sumida City, the museum houses two bodies of work from the collections of individuals. One is that of the late Hokusai researcher and collector of Hokusai works Peter Morse. The other is the collection of valuable resources gathered by leading ukiyo-e researcher Muneshige Narasaki. These collections are incorporated into special exhibitions with diverse and unique themes.

Curator Yoko Hasegawa has the following to say



The Sumida Hokusai Museum

Photos: Courtesy of Owashi Yosuke/The Sumida Hokusai Museum (left); Courtesy of Forward Stroke/The Sumida Hokusai Museum (right)

about the appeal of Hokusai's works.

“Hokusai left many works during his seventy years of creative activity, but the style is so varied that at first glance it's hard to believe that they are the work of the same artist. I think the secret of his popularity is his multifaceted appeal. For example, people who know his *nishiki-e* [multi-colored woodblock prints] then become fascinated by his *nikuhitsuga* [hand-drawn paintings].”

From September 10th through November 4th, 2019, the special exhibition *Hokusai Masterpieces from the Mogi-Honke Museum of Art* will be held to commemorate the 170th anniversary of the death of Katsushika Hokusai. The exhibition will showcase 116 of Hokusai's works, including iconic series such as *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* and *Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces*, as well as works such as the complete *Sketches by Hokusai (Hokusai Manga)* and *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*. The Mogi-Honke Museum of Art houses a large collection of ukiyo-e masterpieces, and this is the first time that these Hokusai works will be brought together in a single exhibition.

In addition to ukiyo-e, the museum has on permanent exhibition a life-size model of Hokusai at work in his atelier, based on a sketch by one of his students. The exhibit shows Hokusai aged around 84 at work on the floor next to his daughter with whom he lived. There is also a section where visitors can appreciate *nishiki-e* on a high-definition monitor as they watch video footage explaining how the works are created.

If you visit The Sumida Hokusai Museum, be sure to pay attention to the building itself. The structure was designed by architect Kazuyo Sejima, winner of the Pritzker Prize, known as the Nobel

Prize for architects.

“The exterior walls of the structure are made from aluminum panels that have a slightly mirrored surface, allowing the building to blend into the surrounding landscape. Most visitors take photographs of the building,” says Deputy Director Mizukami.

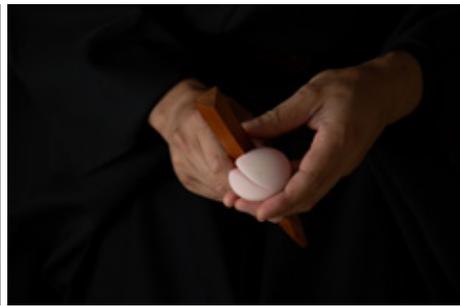
In the future, Mizukami says that he would like to increase the number of visitors from overseas and expand Hokusai's global appeal.

“Currently, we are preparing brochures in six languages, but we will further enhance the range of multilingual resources offered in the museum. We aim to use a variety of methods to strengthen communication with overseas visitors.”

Paintings featuring motifs from Hokusai's works may be found on lamp posts and public restroom walls along Hokusai-dori running east from Ryogoku Station and passing in front of the Sumida Hokusai Museum. Why not take your time and look at these paintings as you make your way to the museum through the neighborhood where Hokusai lived? **7**



A Mild Breeze on a Fine Day, from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, by Katsushika Hokusai, From the Sumida Hokusai Museum collection.



Junichi Mitsubori in action
Photos: Kumazo Kato

Wagashi as Performance Art

Junichi Mitsubori has taken the traditional Japanese sweets known as *wagashi* and elevated them into an art form.

KUMIKO SATO

JUNICHI Mitsubori, the third-generation owner of Wagashi Izumiya, a traditional Japanese sweets store in Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture established in 1954, is self-styled as Japan's only "wagashi artist." *Kado*, the "art of wagashi," goes beyond simply serving wagashi; it incorporates the physical actions both of creating the sweets and of serving them as a means of entertaining guests. To promote *kado*, Mitsubori established the *Kado Ichika-ryu* style in 2016.

"Like the beauty of shadows or the beauty of empty space, wagashi have a beauty that channels a Zen-like spirit. To allow those qualities to be experienced through all the senses, *Ichika-ryu* involves

making sweets right in front of the guest, similar to the format of a traditional Japanese tea ceremony," explains Mitsubori.

What Mitsubori presents is a type of unbaked sweets known as *neri-kiri*, made from boiling beans, filtering the bean paste, adding sugar and a thickener based on glutinous rice, kneading the mixture, and crafting the resulting dough, usually in ways that reflect the seasons. Just as any movement can be recognized as art, so the sight of beautiful and mysterious wagashi being created within Mitsubori's hands transports those watching into a different time and space.

From tea rooms to tea utensils, hanging scrolls and Japanese flower arrangements, the art of the Japanese tea ceremony is connected with a wide array of artistic culture and is often referred to as composite art for this reason.

"During a tea ceremony, the tea master tells the story of the items used in the ceremony, such as the

teacups, and those who made them. Wagashi, however, are only introduced by the name of the store. Wagashi is also an aspect of Japanese culture we can be proud of. I think the artisans making them should also have some individuality,” says Mitsubori.

After taking over Wagashi Izumiya from his father at age 27, Mitsubori wanted to expand the world of wagashi as an art form as well as a food. Up to that point, the business had been striving to grow into a major manufacturer, but Mitsubori reversed course and downsized instead, choosing a path representing the pursuit of creativity.

To date, Mitsubori has delivered Kado Ichika-ryu performances in more than ten countries around the world.

The creation “Spring Breeze” mimics cherry blossom petals through a traditional, clear-cut design passed down from his father. With “Goldfish,” meanwhile, Mitsubori uses new utensils developed in conjunction with an artisan woodworker to trace dynamic lines never before seen in wagashi. Then there is “red chrysanthemum petals,” a creation that



“Red chrysanthemum petals,” by Junichi Mitsubori
Photo: Courtesy of Junichi Mitsubori

has become synonymous with Ichika-ryu, where the petals are stacked one at a time in multiple layers with dynamic movements to rise up energetically. When these fine aspects of craftsmanship rise up on the pure dough, the venues erupt in cheers. But the next moment, when the guests destroy the completed sweets in order to eat them, the cheers morph into screams.

“A common question posed to me is why I would make such a beautiful work of art out of food. But the beauty of wagashi lies precisely in the fleeting nature of something destined to lose its shape. This overlaps with ourselves as we live out our own limited existences, and I think that is moving to people,” he says.

Mitsubori’s performances attract high praise all over the world. In 2017 at Salon du Chocolat Paris, the world’s largest chocolate festival, Mitsubori was invited by Japanese pâtissier Hironobu Tsujiguchi to deliver a performance, which was met with rave reviews. This year, the third year of his participation in the event, Mitsubori decided to exhibit individually.

Even so, Mitsubori says Kado Ichika-ryu is still only half way there. Fusing tradition with innovation, Kado Ichika-ryu continues to open up new possibilities for wagashi. **■**



A selection of wagashi sweets by Junichi Mitsubori
Photo: Courtesy of Junichi Mitsubori

Japan Through the Window

Beginning in Spring 2020, a series of exhibitions will be held at Japan House locations in Brazil, the United States and the United Kingdom, themed around the beauty of Japan as seen through windows.

KUMIKO SATO

JAPAN House is a network of overseas hubs established in 2017 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan to provide people around the world with opportunities to encounter and appreciate Japan as a country that enriches the rest of the world. So far, the Japan House Touring Exhibition Project has held a variety of themed exhibitions rotating around its three existing hubs in the cities of São Paulo, Los Angeles and London. One exhibition that has been selected for the third year of the project is “Japan Through the Window” (working title) produced by the Window Research Institute. The exhibition will aim to communicate the beauty of Japan as seen through windows and architecture, while at the same time considering windows from the perspective of their universality in civilization and their diversity as cultural objects; and will travel around the three Japan House locations over a period of around one year beginning in Spring 2020.

“We regard windows not only as a part of architecture, but as being related intimately to people’s lives

and physical actions; and have taken the approach of deciphering the significance of windows from various different perspectives. This Japan House touring exhibition will provide an excellent opportunity to introduce windowology research originated in Japan,” says the Institute’s director, Kinuko Yamamoto.

The exhibition will be produced under the academic direction of architectural critic Taro Igarashi, who has overseen windowology since its establishment in 2007. “Through our activities in window research over the last decade or so we have accumulated various achievements, enabled by the participation of universities and other research institutions both in Japan and overseas, as well as various experts and artists. We have selected some of those achievements that will enable us to communicate how windows are used in Japanese architecture, and are currently working to prepare for the exhibition,” explains Igarashi.

In Japanese architecture, which makes extensive use of pillars and beams in constructing structures, it is possible to make all of the spaces between these structural parts of the framework into openings. This makes the concept of window structures in Japanese architecture fundamentally different from that of other architectural styles in which the walls of a structure are built, for example, by laying

Taro Igarashi

Photo: Courtesy of Window Research Institute

stones or bricks.

In traditional Japanese houses, the external appearance and character of the building changes dramatically when fittings such as *amado* (window shutters) and *fusuma* (sliding doors) are thrown wide open. The exhibition will aim to demonstrate concepts such as this, and the functional beauty of fittings that are used in Japan on a daily basis, with video footage using the *Kikugetsutei*—a teahouse in Ritsurin Garden, Takamatsu City, Kagawa Prefecture—as a prime example. The exhibition will also present efforts to examine how the general population of Japan have lived their lives in houses such as these, by drawing hints from the popular national animated comics *Sazae-san*.

The exhibition will also display a dimensionally accurate model teahouse built using the traditional Japanese *okoshi-ezu* technique of creating three-dimension fold-up design drawings.

“Teahouses are quite peculiar buildings in Japanese architecture. If we look at the *Yosuitei* teahouse in Kyoto, for example, it has thirteen windows, despite being such a small building. There are no similar architectural examples anywhere in the world,” says Igarashi. The teahouse—with its elaborately designed and thoughtfully positioned windows—allows us to appreciate the unique sensibilities of the Japanese with regard to nature, of bringing



the “outside” scenery “inside” with the passage of time.

In another project, titled “Window Workology,” the exhibition examines the roles of windows specialized towards various areas of manufacturing, from weaving and dyeing to pottery, and the processing of food products such as salt and tea. It also introduces the handiwork and history of Japanese craftspeople and items of local specialty produce that are deeply rooted in the climate and natural features of various regions of Japan.

“During the exhibition period, we also plan to hold talk-based events that visitors can participate in. Through the exhibition, we hope that windows—which are familiar everyday objects—will become a motivator in creating rich cultural exchanges,” says Yamamoto. 7



“Windowlogy 10th Anniversary exhibition:
The World Through the Window”
Photo: ©Sohei Oya/Nacása & Partners Inc.

The Japan Official Travel App provides a wide variety of travel and safety-related information including via push notifications
Courtesy of Japan National Tourism Organization



QR code for the Japan Official Travel App

For Safe Travel in Japan

Japan is strengthening its systems for distributing disaster information quickly and accurately to international visitors through apps, websites, hotlines and SNS.

OSAMU SAWAJI

A rapidly increasing number of international visitors are traveling to Japan in recent years. The number of international visitors was about 10 million in 2013, but it exceeded 31 million in 2018. Amid this increase in the number of international visitors visiting Japan, Japan is advancing its system for distributing multilingual natural disaster- and weather-related information (hereafter, “disaster information”) through a collaboration between the central government, local governments and companies so that international visitors can feel safe while traveling throughout the country.

As part of this initiative, the Japan Tourism Agency in 2014 began providing the free Safety Tips app to provide disaster information. The app provides

information on earthquake early warnings, tsunami warnings, eruption early warnings, other weather warnings, and heatstroke information in Japan in the form of push notifications in five different languages (Japanese, English, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese and Korean).

The Safety Tips app not only distributes disaster information but is also equipped with a wide range of functions that can be used in a disaster. For example, if you click the Advance Learning icon, you can get explanations of each type of warning, emergency treatment and corresponding flow charts. These flow charts explain what to do in the event of a disaster, for example by showing appropriate evacuation actions in response to a variety of hypothetical situations in

the event of an earthquake, such as being in an elevator or on the beach.

In addition, if you click the Communication Card icon, hypothetical questions for disasters, such as “Where is an evacuation center?” or “Where can I make an international phone call?” will be displayed in five languages. You can get information by showing the app screen to people around you.

The app also enables you to quickly access useful links in a disaster, such as contact information for embassies and medical institutions geared to accepting foreign patients.

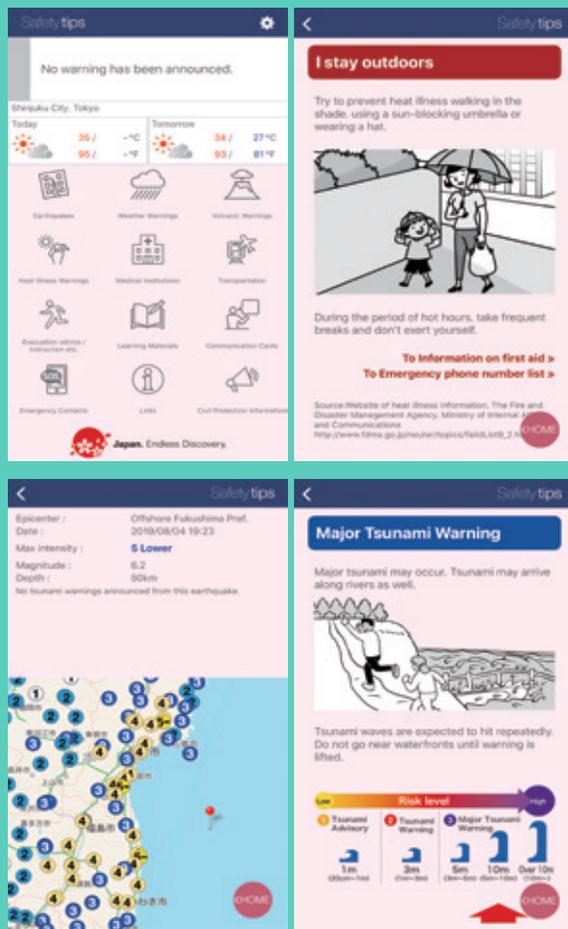
QUICK AND ACCURATE DISASTER INFORMATION

Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), a government organization committed to attracting international visitors to Japan, also has built up a system to distribute disaster information to international visitors.

Tadashi Kaneko, JNTO Executive Director, Global Strategy Headquarters, says, “There is a lot of information out there in the event of a disaster, but the JNTO distributes reliable official information quickly. If you use our website as your portal in a disaster, you can access accurate information without getting lost.”

JNTO uses multiple methods to quickly convey accurate information. JNTO issues initial reports immediately after a disaster strikes through Japan Safe Travel (JST), the official Twitter account the organization launched in October 2018 to call public attention and guide users to the JNTO Global Site. This website usually provides travel information, but it works as an information portal for a comprehensive package of detailed information in the event of a disaster. Disaster information is also distributed through the Japan Official Travel App in English, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese and Korean. Since this application added all the functions of the above-mentioned Safety Tips app, users can enjoy more substantial services, such as automatic disaster information notifications like earthquake early warnings.

In addition, JNTO provides around-the-clock



Some of the safety-related warnings and information provided by the Japan Tourism Agency's "Safety Tips" app
Courtesy of Japan Tourism Agency

services through its multilingual call center, the Japan Visitor Hotline, 050-3816-2787, in English, Chinese, Korean and Japanese, and a chat bot which automatically replies to online inquiries in English, Chinese and Korean, responding to a broad range of inquiries about travel around Japan as well as disaster inquiries.

Kaneko says, “Japan will host the Rugby World Cup this year and the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games next year. Many international visitors are expected to visit Japan. We will build up our collaborations with many information providers, including traffic organizations, local governments, and tourism facilities, and further increase the accuracy of the information we distribute.”

The newly developed ECMO with the oxygen canister unit attached
Photo: Courtesy of National Cerebral and Cardiovascular Center

The World's Smallest Cardiopulmonary Support System

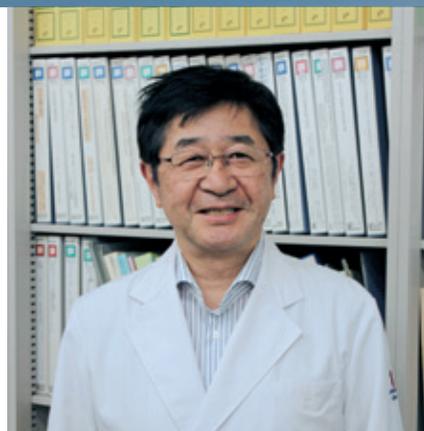
The National Cerebral and Cardiovascular Center has developed the world's smallest and lightest cardiopulmonary support system. In the near future, the advance is expected to make significant contributions in the treatment of patients with severe respiratory failure.

AKIRA UMEZAWA

IN December 2018, the National Cerebral and Cardiovascular Center succeeded in developing the world's smallest and lightest, next-generation cardiopulmonary support (ECMO) system. This research outcome was the work of a research group that included Eisuke Tatsumi, Director of the Center's Department of Artificial Organs, and project researcher Nobumasa Katagiri.

ECMO is a life support system used on patients with acute heart failure and severe respiratory failure. It works by removing venous blood from the patient using a pump to send the blood along a circuit where it is oxygenated using an artificial lung. Then, once carbon dioxide has been removed, the blood is returned to the arteries of the patient (for respiratory support

the blood may be returned to the veins). For patients with acute heart failure, since the pumping capacity of the heart is drastically reduced, it is unable to pump blood around the entire body, but ECMO equipment has the effect of sending oxygenated blood around



Eisuke Tatsumi, Director of the National Cerebral and Cardiovascular Center's Department of Artificial Organs
Photo: Akira Umezawa



The ultra-compact ECMO system (center) alongside conventional cardiopulmonary support devices
Photo: Courtesy of National Cerebral and Cardiovascular Center

the body in place of the heart. Additionally, usually patients suffering from respiratory failure have an artificial respirator attached where a tube is inserted into the airway from the nose or mouth to assist breathing, but many patients with severe conditions cannot be saved with artificial respirators due to the marked deterioration of lung function. To help these kinds of patients, ECMO sends sufficient amounts of oxygenated blood around the body through an artificial lung, allowing the patient's lungs to rest during that period, facilitating recovery.

ECMO was originally developed so that the artificial heart-lung machines used for cardiac surgery could be used for circulatory and respiratory support outside the operating theater as well, but in recent years, its applications have also expanded to critical care and intensive care. However, as the equipment generally in use today is large and complex, it is not well suited to emergency treatment and is difficult to use outside a hospital, such as when transporting a patient with a severe condition.

Moreover, as there are risks such as the formation of clots in the insides of the equipment under extended use, requirements such as Japan's Pharmaceutical Affairs Act limit usage of the equipment to six hours. This is why the development of ECMO systems that can be safely used for extended periods inside or outside a hospital and with simple installation have been long-awaited.

In 1986, the Center's Department of Artificial Organs embarked upon the development of an ECMO system with excellent antithrombotic and long-term durability properties.

"At the time, achieving this kind of system was thought of as the stuff of dreams. But thanks to the culmination of various advanced technologies that have

been practically implemented by the Department of Artificial Organs over the past three decades, we have managed to create a device that exhibits emergency responsiveness, portability, resistance to clotting and durability," says Director Tatsumi.

The newly developed device is the world's smallest and lightest (29 × 20 × 26 cm, weighting 6.6 kg), and can be carried around easily. In addition, it can be used continuously for an hour or more even where a power supply or oxygen supply is not available thanks to a built-in battery and detachable oxygen canister unit, enabling support for the transportation of patients via ambulance, for example.

What's more, it also incorporates technologies developed by the Department of Artificial Organs in the past to prevent the formation of blood clots, preventing thrombotic and hemorrhagic complications and successfully improving safety by a considerable degree. In terms of long-term durability, in animal testing using the equipment, as a result of seven sessions during which the equipment was used for 2 to 4 weeks continuously after attachment, in all cases the equipment completed the scheduled period of use without issue. The development process for the equipment is almost complete, and the center is now taking a leading role in preparations for physician-led clinical trials. Treatment using the new equipment is scheduled to commence from the first half of 2020.

Director Tatsumi expects the practical utilization of the system to lead to dramatic improvements to quality of life (QOL) for patients.

"For patients who find it difficult to breathe on their own, we attach an artificial respirator where a tube is inserted into the airway. Under these conditions, patients are unable to speak as they are lying on a bed. But with this new ultra-compact ECMO system, patients might be able to remove artificial respirators to walk to the bathroom on their own, and converse with family members. This is expected to make a significant contribution to QOL for patients requiring respiratory or circulatory support for extended periods, such as those with lung or heart transplants." 

Astrid Klein
Photo: Yuichi Itabashi

Architecture Breathing New Life into Japan's Cities

Astrid Klein, an Italian-born architect based in Tokyo, has won international acclaim with her business partners for their experiential and emotive building designs.

KUMIKO SATO

THE DAIKANYAMA T-SITE shopping complex, which opened in Tokyo's Shibuya City in 2011, is a beautiful building – playful and light. Its white, lacy exterior walls are made up of countless small interlocking Ts (T being the brand logo of the commissioning bookstore chain), and the building itself is shaped like a T. Inside the bookstore, which is the core of the new shopping complex, customers can enjoy the reading materials while relaxing with a coffee on the benches and sofas arranged around the windows. In 2012,

the building design won numerous awards in the World Architecture Festival, including the Best Shopping Centre Award. One of the architects involved in designing the complex is Astrid Klein of Klein Dytham architecture (KDa).

Klein, who was born in Italy, studied architecture and interior design in France and the UK. In 1988, she visited Japan with Mark Dytham, who studied alongside her at college. It was at the height of the economic bubble and creative buildings that “think outside the box” were being built one after another in

Japan. Realizing this, the business partners decided to try working in Japan and joined Toyo Ito & Associates, Architects.

Klein says, “Back then, it was the norm for architects to have their own unique style so you could tell whose design it was just by looking at the building. But Ito-san creates designs to suit the situation, bringing people together for unique experiences and so his buildings are different every time. I really, really liked this way of thinking.”

Klein and Dytham established KDa in 1991, since when they have continued to design buildings on the basis that “experience” is the most important aspect of architecture. Take, for example, Leaf Chapel in Kobuchizawa, Yamanashi Prefecture – one of KDa’s representative works. At this dome-shaped chapel, formed by two “leaves” one on top of the other, the upper leaf opens and closes in step with the ceremony, heightening the experience of those “inside.”

Klein’s activities extend beyond architecture to a wide range of fields. One example is PechaKucha Night, a presentation event for creative people devised by Klein and Dytham in 2003. “PechaKucha” “is an onomatopoeic Japanese phrase meaning “chit chat.” The events, in which presenters show 20 slides for 20 seconds each, have become a global movement, with PechaKucha Nights now running in over 1,180 cities around the world.

Klein says that “despite being able to create lots of amazing content admired by people around the world, in terms of both products and fashion, Japanese are not very good at communicating this.” For five years now, Klein has been taking part in the government’s Regional Cool Japan Promotion Council and making recommendations. Klein continues, “Tokyo needs to emphasize its appeal as a city. As far as design is concerned, Tokyo has a huge global presence. But thirty years ago it was a wilder, a more interesting city.”

Cityscape regulations have become stricter and, while Tokyo has become more aesthetically



pleasing, by the same score, its architecture has become homogenous and has lost its old vigor.

“Tokyo is the city where I have lived the longest, and it is a city that I love and will continue to work out of in the future,” says Klein. “What Tokyo needs most is a Wow! factor.”

With “experience” and “emotion” as its underlying concepts, Klein’s work will continue to breathe new life into Japan’s cities. 



Ginza Place
Photo: ©Nacása & Partners Inc.

High School Students with a Passion for Dance

The dance team in practice wearing self-made costumes



“Street” dancing has grown to become one of the most popular extracurricular activities at schools across Japan. We meet the team from Takehaya Senior High, whose members work to improve their individual dance levels while competing against one another and sweating it out to improve their performance as a team.

AKIRA UMEZAWA

IT'S a late August morning at Takehaya Senior High School in Bunkyo, Tokyo, and forty members of the school's dance club have assembled, even though they are still on their summer holidays. A mid-tempo beat echoes around the wood-walled training hall, which is also used as a practice room for the martial art of kendo. Checking their movements in the mirror that runs the length of one wall, the students silently stretch and perform warm-up exercises. The windows have been left open, but sweat soon flows from the students' foreheads. When the 30-minute warm-up period ends, the group begins practicing the dance they will perform at their school festival in early September, one in which every member will take part. The dancers move energetically up, down, left and right in time with the electronic dance music, using their entire bodies for expression. They repeat the same movements over and over until everyone is in sync. Counting in short breaks, rehearsals stretch to three hours.

After-school club activities are an important

part of Japanese school life, and Takehaya Senior High School is no exception. With a student body of around 750, the school has around thirty different clubs, including basketball and soccer teams and clubs devoted to theater, art and wind instruments. The dance club has regularly taken part in Dance Stadium, the national high school dance competition, and other events around the country.

According to the Street Dance Association which organizes Dance Stadium, more than six million people in Japan enjoy street dancing, in styles such as hip-hop and house. Since 2012, “Dance” has been a required subject at junior high schools in Japan, where students learn creative dance, folk dance as well as contemporary rhythmical dance. Partly as a result, dance has grown to rival other club activities such as baseball and soccer for popularity.

While Takehaya Senior High School's dance club performs in school-organized and regional events, their biggest goal is taking part in Dance Stadium. First held in 2008, the competitions take place in the



Video by Satoshi Tanaka

Chinatsu Fujisaki (left) with her dance team's advisor, Emi Nakagawa

spring, summer and winter. At the national competition this summer, the biggest, 100 teams will take part after advancing from regional qualifiers in which 495 schools competed.

The competition is divided into two categories: "Small Class" for performances by 2-12 team members and "Big Class" for 13-40 team members. Takehaya Senior High school usually competes in the Big Class.

Each team creates and performs an original routine of between two and two-and-a-half minutes in length, with judges rating them on factors including costume, expression, choreography, dance technique, as well as the choice and composition of backing music. Takehaya Senior High School had taken part in the national competition in the summer for eight years running up to 2018, but this year they were eliminated in the regional qualifiers. While it was a disappointing result for the club, the students have quickly bounced back and have been committing themselves to rehearsals so that they can give their best performance at the school festival.

Chinatsu Fujisaki, a second-year high school student who serves as club captain, has been dancing since she was around four years old and has learned various styles including tap dancing, cheerleading, ballet and jazz dancing. When Fujisaki was deciding which high school she wanted to attend, she says she searched for a school with a dance club.

"I chose Takehaya Senior High School because I saw videos of their performances on YouTube and thought it looked cool. It's fun to hone your individual dance



skills, but at high school I wanted to try out dancing in a team that was working towards a competition. It's also appealing because we can compete with one another to improve our own levels."

With dance, no matter how much skill you have, if you don't pay attention to details such as the alignment of your feet or the tilt of your neck, for example, things will never look good, explains Fujisaki. Practicing every day in front of the mirror, she says, she feels joy as she gets close to nailing the perfect form.

"What makes us the happiest is when we have edited our own backing music and choreographed a dance, and the people who watch it react by saying something like "that's great!" or "it looks so cool!" I want to keep improving my skills and expression so that I can get closer to giving my own perfect performance." 



Dance team members work on moving in sync

The sightseeing train Tenku cuts through the countryside on the outskirts of Osaka

Photo: Courtesy of Nankai Electric Railway Corporation



A Journey Connecting the Bustling City of Osaka to World Heritage Sites

The Nankai Electric Railway's Koya Line runs between the prefectures of Osaka and Wakayama. By taking a ride on the line, passengers can enjoy and appreciate Japan's diverse culture and history from the ancient to the modern; from neon-lit downtown shopping districts to uniquely shaped ancient burial mounds, and sacred places in Japanese Buddhism, surrounded by greenery.

OSAMU SAWAJI

THE Nankai Electric Railway Co., Ltd. (Nankai Electric Railway) was established in 1885, primarily through the efforts of leading Osaka businessmen. It has the longest history of any extant private railway company, and operates lines branching out from its base of operations at Namba Station in Chuo Ward, Osaka to destinations such as Kansai International Airport, Wakayama City and the town of Koya (also in Wakayama Prefecture). The Koya Line runs a distance of 64.4 km, connecting Namba Station to Koyasan Station in the town of Koya.

“The appeal of the Koya Line is that passengers can enjoy the changing scenery as they travel from Namba Station, in the center of Osaka, to Koyasan deep in the mountains. There are also many sights to see, including two World Heritage Sites along the route,” explains Kaoru Fujimoto of Nankai Electric Railway's Transportation Department.

Namba Station is situated in an area of Osaka called Minami. Minami is one of Osaka's representative downtown districts, packed with restaurants where visitors can enjoy Osaka food culture by eating dishes

such as *takoyaki* (octopus balls) and *okonomiyaki* (savory pancake); and theaters where they can watch performance arts such as *manzai* (stand-up comedy) and kabuki. The Namba Station terminal building—the Nankai Building—was completed in 1932, and is one of a handful of buildings that symbolizes the Minami district. With its large Corinthian pillars and its terracotta-covered exterior, the building exudes an air of dignified elegance, and has been registered as a national registered tangible cultural property.

After boarding a train at Namba Station and traveling for around 15 minutes, passing by office buildings and residential areas, passengers arrive at Mikunigaoka Station in the city of Sakai, Osaka Prefecture. To the west side of the station lies the Nintoku-tenno-ryo Kofun, one of Japan's largest *kofun* (burial mounds) and one of the heritage sites that makes up the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group (Mounded Tombs of Ancient Japan), which was added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in July 2019.

The Nintoku-tenno-ryo Kofun (Tomb of Emperor Nintoku) is shaped like a keyhole, consisting of



Video by Satoshi Tanaka

adjoined square and circular segments. The mound is covered by trees and encircled by three moats. Aside from the Tomb of Emperor Nintoku in Sakai, numerous other kofun—built between the latter half of the fourth century and the latter half of the fifth century—also remain in the neighboring cities of Habikino and Fujiidera. These mounds are all part of the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group, which consists of forty-nine distinct kofun in all.

After traveling for approximately 50 minutes from Namba Station, the train reaches Hashimoto Station in the city of Hashimoto, Wakayama. From here, the 19.8-km stretch to Gokuraubashi Station—in the foothills of Mount Koya—follows a steep gradient, passing through a total of twenty-four tunnels. The sightseeing train Tenku makes the return trip along this section two or three times a day, with four cars (two with reserved seating, and two with non-reserved seating). Tenku’s livery is designed with the image of the forest in mind, with a base color of dark green; and vermilion lines representing Mount Koya’s distinctively colored Konpon Daito pagoda. The seats, floor and other interior parts of the train cars are made from wood, and the designs of the window blinds and seat upholstery use a motif that features the *moriaogaeru* (forest green tree frog), which lives in the forests of Mount Koya.

“Tenku’s windows are intentionally larger than on regular trains, and many of the seats are positioned facing towards the windows, to enable passengers to fully enjoy the the greenery of the Mount Koya foothills during their journey. We have also provided observation decks, where we hope that passengers will appreciate the fresh mountain air,” says Fujimoto.

After a leisurely 40-minute ride through the mountains from Hashimoto Station, the train arrives at Gokurakubashi Station, at an altitude of 535 m. From here, passengers disembark from the train and transfer to a cable car. The new cable car was introduced in March 2019. After around five minutes climbing a steep, almost wall-like slope, the car reaches Koyasan Station—the final stop on the Koya Line—at a height of 867 m. The Koyasan Station building is a two-story wooden structure, built in 1928, and has been designated as a national registered tangible cultural



- 1 Many of the seats in Tenku face the train’s large windows
Photo: Satoshi Tanaka
- 2 The Nintoku-tenno-ryo Kofun burial mound is of the “keyhole” type
Photo: Courtesy of Sakai City

property. On the second floor of the building there is a corner presenting historical and sightseeing information on the Koya Line, and an observation room from which visitors can survey the whole of Hashimoto City.

By taking a 15-minute bus ride from Koyasan Station, visitors can enter Mount Koya, which was registered as a World Heritage site in 2004 as part of the Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range. Mount Koya (or “Koyasan” in Japanese) is a significant sacred place in Japanese Buddhism, opened up around 1,200 years ago by the Buddhist monk Kukai (also known as Kobo Daishi, “The Grand Master Who Propagated the Buddhist Teaching”). Mount Koya has many Buddhist temples, including Kongobuji, and is visited by many worshippers and tourists throughout the year.

Riding the Koya Line enables passengers to savor both the hustle and bustle of the big city and the peaceful serenity of sacred places, and to learn about the culture and history of Japan, from the ancient all the way up to modern times. 

Courtesy of Sabae City

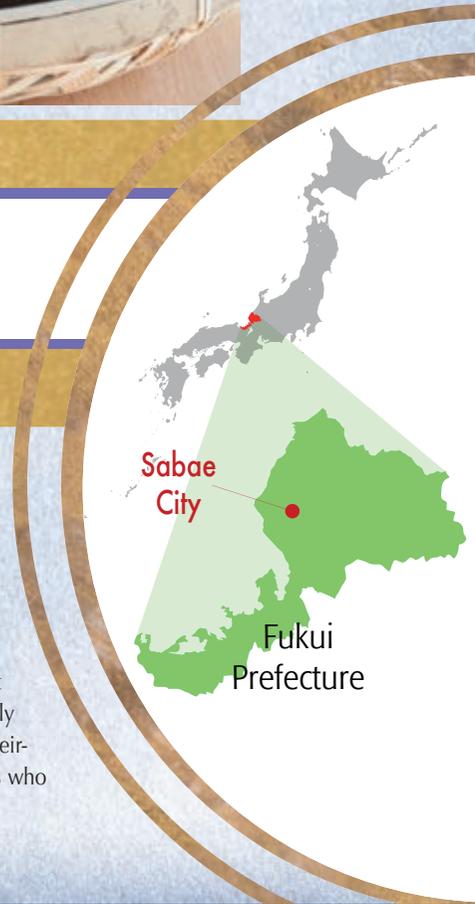


GI JAPAN PRODUCTS

EGGPLANT

Yoshikawa Nasu

Yoshikawa Nasu is a variety of eggplant (*nasu*) grown in the former Yoshikawa village, now a part of Sabae in Fukui Prefecture. Whereas most Japanese eggplant varieties are long and slender, the Yoshikawa Nasu is round. The eggplant trees are cultivated in greenhouses to protect the vegetables' thin, easily scratched skin, and pruned to allow only three or four branches to grow, so that each branch is strong enough to support the weighty produce. The annual harvest yield of about forty eggplants from each tree is less than half that of varieties commonly grown in Japan. Farmers in Sabae nevertheless continue to propagate the heirloom vegetable, shipping about 10,000 eggplants every year, many to chefs who prize the strong taste and firm texture of the Yoshikawa Nasu.



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