



# Art Appreciation in Mountainous Yamanashi

**Yamanashi Prefecture with its magnificent mountain landscapes and bountiful nature provides the perfect backdrop to a handful of celebrated art museums.**

**KATO KYOKO**

**Y**AMANASHI Prefecture is surrounded by mountains on all sides. Mount Fuji, a World Heritage site, lies in the south; the Southern Japanese Alps to the west, the Yatsugatake Mountain Range to the north, and the Okuchichibu Mountains to the east. Thanks to the pure natural water originating in these mountains, the prefecture has long been a place for sake brewing and fruit growing. In addition, it is also known as the birth place of Japanese wine, and currently there are approximately eighty wineries operating within the prefecture. This environment offers visitors many places to enjoy delicious local foods while appreciating the beauty of nature during any season.

Yamanashi Prefecture is also home to a handful of celebrated art museums. One of these facilities is the Yamanashi Prefectural Museum of Art in Kofu City. Reflecting the character of the nature-rich prefecture, the museum, which opened in 1978, is famous for its collection of works from the Barbizon School of painters who painted the beautiful natural scenery of the French countryside, including in particular a collection of the works of Jean-François Millet. The museum was fortunate enough to acquire Millet's *The Sower* as the first piece in its collection when it

began searching for paintings of the Barbizon School for its main collection during preparations for the opening of the museum. The museum has continued to acquire Millet's landscapes and portraits ever since, and its collection of more than seventy works including several masterpieces is now considered one of the finest Millet collections in the world.

"Millet mainly depicted farmers, but as you can see from the *The Sower*, one of his masterpieces, he did not paint facial features clearly. It is said that Millet depicted a something, instead of an individual, in this case that something being the universal behavior of cultivating the soil. For this reason, I think people are fascinated by Millet's work, and view it here without any awkwardness, even though they are looking at it in Yamanashi, a foreign place, and not where or when the works were painted," remarks Kouno Kiminori, a section chief of Yamanashi Prefecture's Tourism and Culture Department.

In addition to Millet's works, the museum displays works from artists who are connected to Yamanashi or works created with a focus on Yamanashi as a main theme. For example, the *Thirty-six Fujis* by Hagiwara Hideo (1913-2007), a woodblock print artist who was born in the city of Kofu, express the natural



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As Keith Haring artwork ©The Keith Haring Foundation. Courtesy of Yamanashi Prefectural Museum of Art

beauty of Yamanashi, inspired by Katsushika Hokusai's *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*.

Added to this are three cultural facilities in the city of Hokuto which give visitors the opportunity to enjoy art alongside the beautiful natural landscape. One of these museums is the Hirayama Ikuo Silk Road Museum. In search of the sources of Japanese culture, Hirayama Ikuo (1930-2009), a painter of *Nihonga* (traditional Japanese painting) and recipient of the Order of Cultural Merit, frequently visited the Silk Road, which is known as the path that carried Buddhism to Japan. The museum displays a number of art works that he collected as well as Silk Road-related paintings of his own creation. The collection of approximately 10,000 Silk Road-related cultural items is highly praised in academic circles.

Another facility is the Nakamura Keith Haring Collection, the world's only museum that principally collects and exhibits the works of Keith Haring, an artist who played an essential role in 1980s American postmodern art. Haring provided support for children and worked on a range of projects, including HIV/AIDS-related campaigns globally, through his art until he passed away at the young age of 31. As a continuation of his legacy, the museum engages in many different social causes, including initiatives to promote HIV/AIDS awareness and related information, the international drawing contest for children's well-being, and efforts to highlight injustices and inequalities that various minorities face. Through international exhibitions, pop-up shops, nightlife events, and its social media presence, the museum has become a must place to visit for overseas travelers. Many outlets across social media also introduce the museum as one of the places that young people want to visit at least once.

Last but not least is the Kiyoharu Art Colony. This approximately 18,000 m<sup>2</sup> (195,000 square feet)

- 1 Jean-François Millet's *The Sower* on display at the Yamanashi Prefectural Museum of Art
  - 2 View over Fujimori Terunobu's *Tearoom Tetsu* at the Kiyoharu Art Colony
  - 3 Exhibits from the Nakamura Keith Haring Collection
- Photos: Courtesy of Yamanashi Prefectural Museum of Art (1); Courtesy of Kiyoharu Art Colony (2); Courtesy of Nakamura Keith Haring Collection / Keith Haring Artwork ©Keith Haring Foundation (3)

facility includes art museums, a library, a ceramics studio and an unusual tearoom. The blooming cherry blossoms in spring are a sight to behold. Here, visitors will appreciate a number of impressive buildings, including the Rouault Chapel designed by Taniguchi Yoshio, who was involved in the expansion of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, as a homage to the religious French painter Georges Rouault. Also on the grounds of the colony are the Museum of the Light designed by Ando Tadao, who has been involved in the design of many museums both in Japan and abroad; a tearoom built four meters above the ground on top of a tree trunk by Fujimori Terunobu, an architectural historian and architect; and some of the Eiffel Tower's stairs, relocated from France when the country celebrated the tower's 100th anniversary in 1989.

Taking maximum advantage of the time they can spare from art appreciation, visitors can also enjoy the wonders of Yamanashi by eating local foods such as *hoto*, a hot stew featuring thick, flat noodles, squash, carrots and other vegetables, and sometimes *nigai* (boiled abalone), or by visiting wineries in the prefecture to taste the different wines produced from the native Koshu variety of grape.

"There are many ways for people to enjoy touring Yamanashi," says Kouno. "For example, they might visit orchards, wineries, springs gushing from the mountains, and breweries making sake from that spring water, in addition to enjoying the museums and local foods. Visitors will fully enjoy touring Yamanashi, taking advantage of all the things that can only be experienced here in this prefecture."