

# The Sand Beach as Art Museum

At Kuroshio Town in Kochi Prefecture, the beautiful Irino Beach doubles as an art gallery called the Sunabi Museum.

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**T**HE one-of-a-kind Sunabi Museum (in Japanese, Sunahama Bijutsukan) is located on the Pacific coast of southwestern Kochi Prefecture in Kuroshio, a town with a population of about 10,000. Despite being an art “museum” by name, Sunabi Museum has no buildings. Irino Beach, which stretches for 4 kilometers and is a famous feature of Kuroshio Town, is itself considered to be an art museum for regularly holding art exhibitions and other creative events in the picturesque natural landscape.

The Sunabi Museum evolved out of a T-shirt Art Exhibition that was first held in 1989. This exhibition had originated in an idea of photographer Kitade Hiroki to have T-shirts printed with his photographs fluttering in the wind on the beach. Artist Umebara Makoto, a resident of Kochi and friend of Kitade, approached the young officials at the

town hall about implementing the idea on Irino Beach.

Murakami Kentaro, a representative of the non-profit Sunabi Museum, says, “Elaborate events like this were held everywhere at the time as it was the boom period of the economic bubble in Japan. But most of these events were not rooted in the community and ended after being held just once. There were fears that the T-shirt Art Exhibition would turn out the same way. The idea for the Sunabi Museum evolved from the many meetings that Umebara and the local town officials held to dispel those concerns.”

The concept the organizers arrived at was to turn the beautiful local sand beach itself into a museum. The museum regards everything on the beach as art, from the works exhibited on the beach, to the designs in the sand drawn by the waves and wind, the sight of the children playing at the water’s edge, or the whales

swimming in the open sea.

Since then, over the course of thirty years, the Sunabi Museum has hosted a variety of exhibitions and events. Among them, the T-shirt Art Exhibition that started it all is very popular and has come to gather many submissions from all over Japan. Other popular events include the annual Seaside Barefoot Marathon, the Sea Breeze Quilt Exhibition held in pine forests along the sandy beach, and the Washed Ashore Exhibition, which gathers a diverse range of items that have washed up on shore. Whale watching tours are also held to watch the dolphins and the Bryde’s whales that have been appointed as “curators” of the museum.

Murakami says that what he most wants visitors to appreciate are the permanent exhibits; in other words, everyday scenes of the beach. “When you forget about the passing of time and view the beautiful Irino Beach,” he says, “you



The T-shirt Art Exhibition



A Bryde's whale, an appointed "curator" of the Sunabi Museum, breaks the surface of the sea



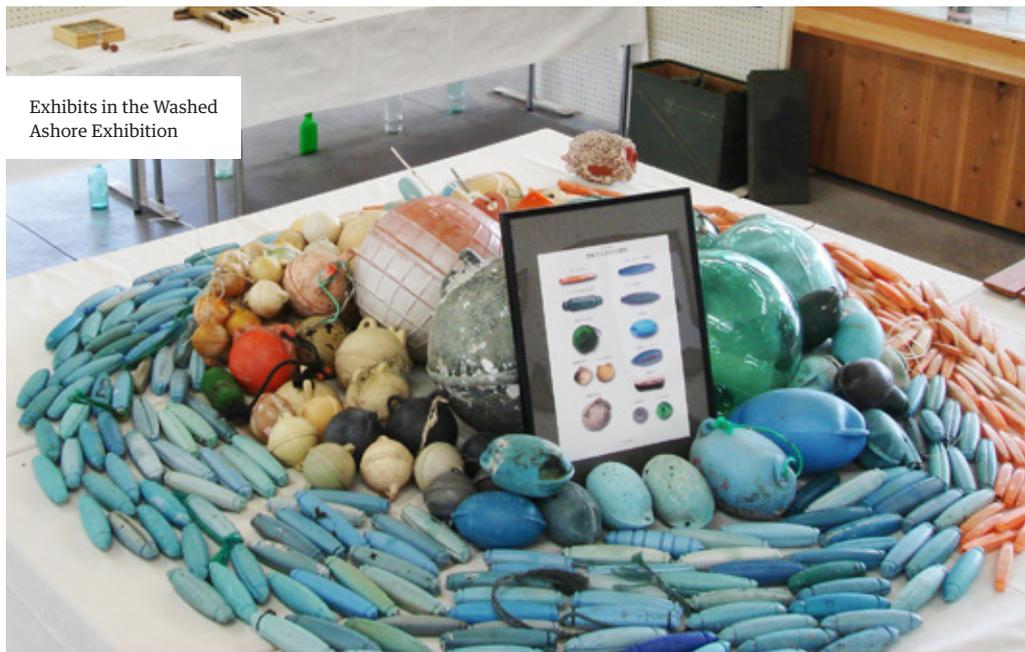
The Sea Breeze Quilt Exhibition

will surely feel as if you have encountered a work of art."

Iri-no Beach is sometimes called the "Salar de Uyuni of Kochi" in reference to the famous reflective salt flat in Bolivia. On Iri-no Beach too, if the conditions are right, the wet sand reflects the light like a mirror.

Sunabi Museum became a non-profit organization in 2003 and now also manages the neighboring park and tourist promotion, playing an important role as a base for the revitalization of Kuroshio Town. The organization attracts volunteers from all over Japan who support its initiatives, while the pioneering T-shirt Art Exhibition and other Sunabi Museum events are now held across Japan and overseas as well.

The unprecedented idea of turning a beautiful beach itself into an art museum resonates with many people, going beyond regional and national borders. 7



Exhibits in the Washed Ashore Exhibition