

HIGHLIGHTING  
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**JAPAN'S IMPRESSIVE  
SNOWY LANDSCAPES**

# CONTENTS

VOL. 188, JANUARY 2024

19

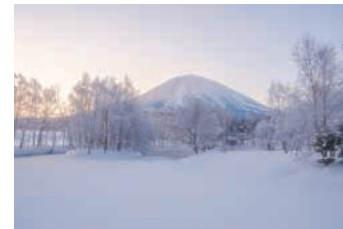


Shunsetsu ("Spring Snow," 1973), by Higashiyama Kaiti, Color painting on paper, 168 × 215 cm. Collection of Chiba Prefectural Museum of Art

23



11



6

## FEATURES

- 6** **Snow in Japan: Its Essence of Characteristics**  
Interview with Professor Emeritus Furukawa Yoshinori of Hokkaido University
- 10** **Snowscape Overlooking Drift Ice in the UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site of Shiretoko**  
Shiretoko, Hokkaido was registered as a World Natural Heritage site in 2005. Here we introduce the snowy landscape of drift ice seen in Shiretoko's coastal area.
- 12** **The Spectacle of Rime Ice-Covered Trees That Spreads Through Zao in Winter**  
Explore the Zao mountain range, is situated on the border of Miyagi and Yamagata prefectures, and its snowy landscapes of ice- and snow-covered trees (called *juhyo*)
- 14** **The Snowscape of Ginzan Onsen, Filming Location of the TV Drama *Oshin***  
Introduction to the snowy winter atmosphere in the district of *ryokan* (traditional Japanese inns) along the banks of the Ginzan River in Obanazawa City, Yamagata Prefecture
- 16** **A Masterpiece of Photography: The Tadami Line in Winter that Captivated the World**  
Introduction to the work of photographer Kameyama Takeshi, including his internationally admired snowy landscape photograph, *Tadami Line in Winter*
- 18** **Snowy Landscapes of Japan Painted by Higashiyama Kaiti**  
Introduction to three *Nihonga* style paintings depicting snowy landscapes by Higashiyama Kaiti: *Toshikuru* ("End of the Year"), *Shunsetsu* ("Snow in Spring"), and *Fuyu no Tabi* ("Winter Journey")
- 20** **The Scenery Depicted in Kawabata Yasunari's Masterpiece, *Snow Country***  
Introduction to the places where visitors can immerse themselves in the world of *Yukiguni* ("Snow Country"), the masterpiece novel by Nobel laureate author Kawabata Yasunari



## 22 The Snowy Japanese Gardens of Adachi Museum Fascinate People Worldwide

Introduction to the picturesque snowy views of the Japanese Garden at the Adachi Museum of Art, known for its beauty in all four seasons and voted the best Japanese garden in Japan for 20 consecutive years by a U.S. magazine about Japanese gardens

### ALSO

#### 24 POLICY-RELATED NEWS

The Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation and its Related Programs

#### 28 MY WAY

Shinto Priest from Ukraine Inscribes Prayers for Peace

#### 30 THE BEAUTY AND THE SPIRIT OF JAPAN: FROM THE JAPAN CULTURAL EXPO 2.0

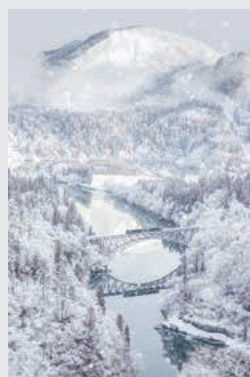
Magical Contemporary Art of Light and Shadow — Special Exhibition at One of Japan's Largest Exhibition Venues

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## THEME FOR JANUARY: Japan's Impressive Snowy Landscapes

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Japan is one of the snowiest countries in the world, with many scenic spots where visitors can view beautiful winter landscapes. This issue of *Highlighting Japan* introduces readers to the special qualities of Japanese snow from a scientific perspective and invites them to explore the country's snowy scenery in various ways, by admiring impressive snowy landscapes, art with snowy scenery themes, and literary masterpieces set in snow country.



The photo "Tadami Line in Winter" won a top prize in the International Photography Awards  
Photo: Kameyama Takeshi

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## FEATURES

# Japan's Impressive Snowy Landscapes



Above left: *Juhyo* is created as ice and snow accumulate on the branches of Aomori todomatsu trees.

Above right: There's a chance of unexpectedly encountering wildlife during a stroll, like the Yezo sika deer.

Below left: In winter, Ginzan Onsen bustles with tourists from overseas

Below right: Snow crystals with hexagonal forms

Japan is one of the snowiest countries in the world, with many scenic spots where visitors can view beautiful winter landscapes. This issue of *Highlighting Japan* introduces readers to the special qualities of Japanese snow from a scientific perspective and invites them to explore the country's snowy scenery in various ways, by admiring impressive snowy landscapes, art with snowy scenery themes, and literary masterpieces set in snow country.



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# Snow in Japan: Its Essence of Characteristics

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**J**apan is among the snowiest countries in the world and has many sightseeing locations where visitors can view snowy winter landscapes. Professor Emeritus Furukawa Yoshinori of Hokkaido University shares a range of facts associated with snow, a phenomenon so familiar, yet with so many features that remain unknown.

**Japan is among the snowiest countries in the world. To begin with, why is it that snow falls in the winter?**

While located at a relatively southern latitude, Japan receives one of the highest amounts of snowfall in the world. Its geographical features have a lot to do with that. To the west of the Japanese islands lies the Sea of Japan, and beyond it, the Asian continent extends beyond it. In winter, winds bring masses of extremely cold, dry air to Japan across the Sea of Japan from the northern reaches of the continent. As this air blows across the Sea of Japan, it takes on water vapor that rises from the warmer seawater. As it reaches the Japanese islands, cold northern winds blowing in the tall mountain ranges of Japan cause the air in the upper sky to drop to temperatures around  $-15\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $-20\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ . This cools the water vapor, causing it to cluster

together and fall as snow.

**Why does Japan have so many areas of heavy snowfall? Also, is there anything particularly unique about Japan's snow?**

Geographical features and temperatures influence amounts of snowfall. Snow is made up of water to begin with, so above  $0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ , it melts. This means that the snow that generated by clouds high in the sky will fall as snow in areas where the temperature near the ground surface is below  $0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Yet in warmer locations like Tokyo, it might melt by the time it reaches the ground and fall as rain. In areas of northern Japan like Hokkaido, Tohoku, and Hokuriku, where temperatures are lower, it falls as snow, and can really pile up.

Also, lately you may hear skiers and snowboarders from overseas referring to the snow that falls in Hokkaido as

“Japow” — Japanese powder snow. Hokkaido is located in the far north of Japan and has many tall mountains. The low temperatures here cause the snow crystals that form from the water vapor to fall as dry flakes of snow as they reach the ground, and this makes for extremely light, fluffy powder snow. If you ski down through freshly fallen snow like this on the slopes in places like Niseko, the snow is so soft and light that it can come up into the air and cover you like down feathers. One could say that the geographical conditions and specific climate of Hokkaido give it some of the most specially textured powder snow in the world.

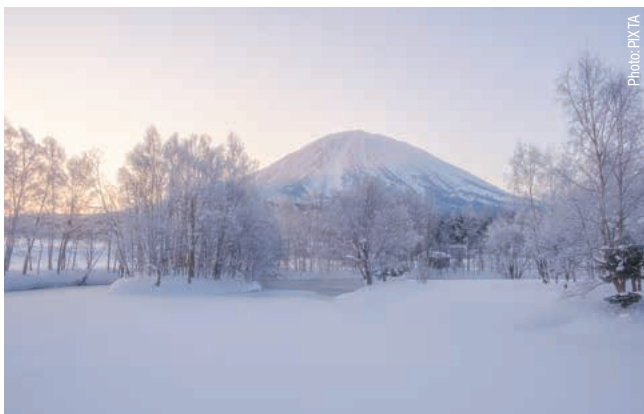
**In northern lands, they see snow crystals in the winter. What causes snowflakes to come in so many different shapes?**

With the way you can see snowflakes featured in old *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, as patterns in kimono, and so on, it seems that the Japanese have long had special



**Furukawa Yoshinori**  
Professor emeritus of Hokkaido University and director of Nakaya Ukichiro Museum of Snow and Ice

He has also held posts including director of Institute of Low Temperature Science, Hokkaido University and oversaw experiments on ice crystal growth in outer space on JAXA's “Kibo” Japanese Experiment Module.



Soft, fluffy snow on the ground in Niseko, Hokkaido



Source: National Diet Library "The Landmarks of Edo in Color Woodblock Prints" (<https://www.ndl.go.jp/landmarks/>)

feelings about snow crystals.

The shapes of snowflakes are determined by the temperature when the crystals form and the amount of water vapor the air contains. So, different conditions in the clouds in the sky where the snow forms will cause different shapes of crystals to develop.

Still, I think the snowflakes we view here near the ground surface often tend to be those pretty ones with six branches called dendrite ("tree-like") crystals. As a scientific knowledge, these form within a narrow temperature range right around  $-15\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Dendrite crystals have fine branches with tips spreading out from the center. These ones feature more rapid growth

in their sizes than crystals formed at other temperatures. In this region where we live, surface temperatures rarely fall below  $-15\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ , but this temperature range around  $-15\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$  will definitely be found in the clouds high in the sky. As the snowflakes fall to the ground, they will pass through that temperature range, and when dendrite crystals happen, they rapidly develop tree branch-like forms. That is the reason we so often observe snowflakes with these six-pointed dendrite crystals.

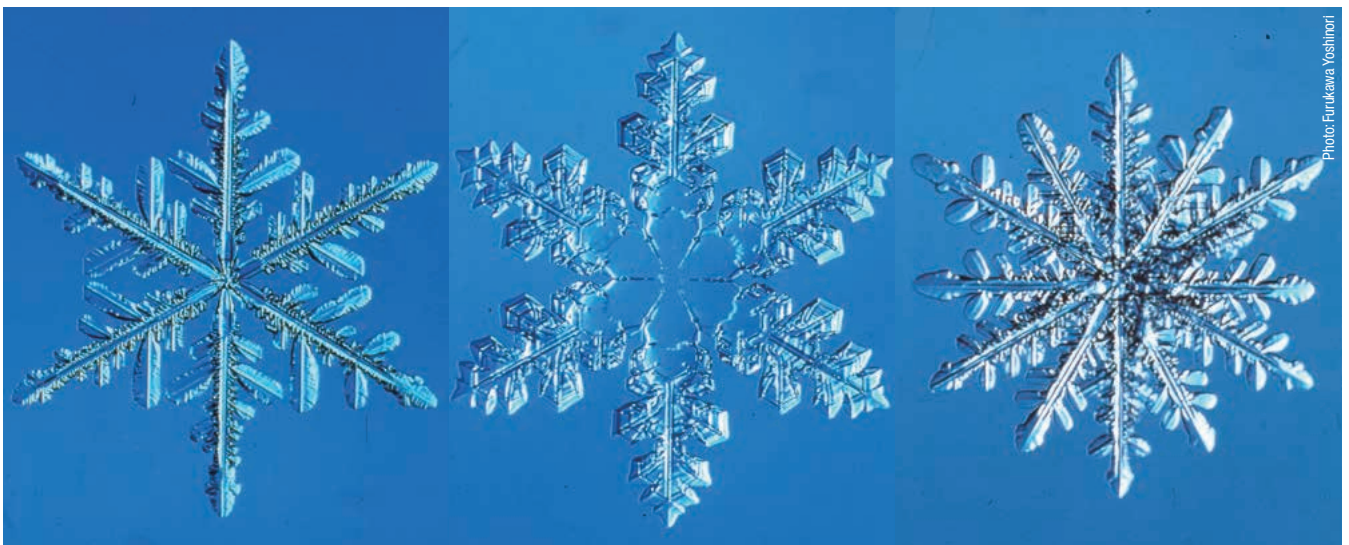


Photo: Furukawa Yoshinori

Snow crystals with hexagonal forms

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So, why then do the crystals have hexagonal (six-sided) forms? Crystals are materials in which the atoms or molecules that make them up are three-dimensionally arranged in highly ordered structures. The specific way they are arranged will be reflected in their external forms. Snow crystals are formed from water molecules, and these molecules are basically arranged in hexagonal structures. Because of this, snowflakes of the size we typically observe with our eyes have generally hexagonal forms, as those structures are reflected in their external forms.

**Can you describe ways snow is being made use of recently, or potential powers snow might have from a scientific point of view?**

Snow has long been used in Japan in a wide range of ways. Obvious examples would include winter sports and events featuring *kamakura* snow domes, as well as using snow to keep winter vegetables cold. Recently, research on snow and ice is viewed as having potential applications in a range of different fields in relation to global environmental issues and more.

My own specialty is in crystal growth: researching how crystals develop. Research on ice and snow has contributed a lot to this field, as well. As a specific example, I have been overseeing experiments with growing ice crystals on the Kibo space station since 2008.

The zero gravity in outer space makes it an ideal place to investigate the processes involved with crystal growth. Crystals are important core industrial materials in modern industries involving LEDs, semiconductors, and so on. Understandings related to crystal growth made clear through research on ice

have been helpful in creating crystals like these used as industrial materials as well. Also, there are forms of crystals called clathrate hydrates<sup>1</sup> that are attracting attention as next-generation energy sources, and they are similar in structure to ice with highly ordered arrangements of water molecules. Understanding how to make them could help provide solutions to energy-related issues.

At the same time, large quantities of snow and ice are found in cold regions like the Arctic and Antarctic, and they are considered relevant to issues related to various forms of climate change around the world, including global warming. More clearly understanding various properties of snow and ice could potentially help us find solutions to such environmental issues.

**What are some places you particularly recommend for viewing snowy landscapes in Japan?**

In Japan, with its firmly rooted tradition of venerating nature, snow has been associated with mysterious powers. For this reason, a variety of Shinto rituals are held throughout Japan during snowy seasons. If you are in Japan at the right time of year, I highly recommend traveling to experience related phenomena and events, such as *Omiwatar*<sup>2</sup> at Lake Suwa in Nagano Prefecture, where a natural phenomenon is interpreted as the crossing of the lake's ice by a local deity, and the traditional measuring of a large icicle at Taroshi Falls in Hanamaki City, Iwate Prefecture, which is done to predict how the harvests will be in the year ahead. Another is the Hirosaki Castle Snow Lantern Festival held in Hirosaki City, Aomori Prefecture, where rows of around 150 snow lanterns and other snow sculptures softly illuminate the snow-covered castle — a wonderfully magical sight for visitors to enjoy.

Hokkaido has a range of events of its own, as well, such as the Sapporo Snow Festival. You get the sense that these really reflect the hopes of local residents to find more cheer in the long, harsh winters of this northern region.

If you have a chance, I recommend you to visit the Museum of Snow and Ice, where I serve as director. It was established in memory of the achievements of Nakaya Ukichiro, who pioneered a number of new research fields and built the foundations of glaciology — the science of snow, ice, and glaciers. The museum



Photo: Furukawa Yoshinori

Experiments with crystals conducted in outer space





Snow lanterns create a magical scene in the Hirosaki Castle Snow Lantern Festival.

Photo: PATA



Photo: Ushiozu Tamotsu

Above: Nakaya Ukichiro Museum of Snow and Ice, Ishikawa Prefecture  
 Below: A permanent installation in the inner garden of the Museum of Snow and Ice, Greenland Glacial Moraine Garden: Fog Garden #47704, a fog sculpture designed by Nakaya Fujiko

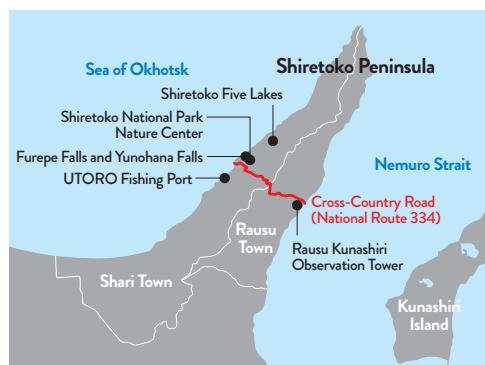
has some fascinating exhibits, including a fog sculpture made by Nakaya's second daughter, Nakaya Fujiko,<sup>3</sup> a world-renowned artist whose work is also found in collections such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. Visitors will find a range of direct experiences involving snow and ice to enjoy.

Nakaya Ukichiro famously once said, "Snowflakes are letters sent from the heaven." I feel this includes the idea that reading these "letters" and understanding them can help us find solutions to various issues here on the earth, and also that snow is truly a gift from the heaven. If you have a chance to visit Japan in winter, please enjoy the snow here. ❧

1. A crystallized material in which water molecules form cage structures trapping substances other than water inside. Many of the substances trapped in them are gases such as methane, nitrogen, and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) with hydrophobic properties — meaning that they have low affinity for water, do not dissolve easily in water, and do not mix easily with water. It is attracting attention as a technique for solidifying gases.
2. A phenomenon in which ice on frozen lakes and wetlands forms crested ridges. It is most famously associated with Nagano Prefecture's Lake Suwa, where factors such as differences between daytime and nighttime temperatures cause the lake's ice to crack and form a ridge from 30 cm to 1 m 80 cm in height. The way the ice cracks all the way across the surface of the lake has given it the name *Omiwatari*, interpreting it as a local deity's path from one side to the other.
3. A sculptural work Nakaya Fujiko first exhibited at the Japan World Exposition in Osaka (1970). It is designed to create fog artificially using special nozzles that spray water drops out at high pressure. The work envelops the surrounding area in drifting white fog that visitors can even step into themselves.

# Snowscape Overlooking Drift Ice in the UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site of Shiretoko

The Shiretoko Peninsula is in the northeastern part of Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost region. During winter, the shores of Shiretoko witness the arrival of drift ice. We spoke with Imura Daisuke from the Utoro Nature Conservation Office under the Ministry of the Environment to learn more about the snowscapes and dynamic drift ice of Shiretoko Peninsula. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)



Shiretoko Peninsula

The Shiretoko Peninsula is a slender landmass, approximately 70km in length and 25km in width at its base. It faces the Sea of Okhotsk to the west and the Nemuro Strait to the east. The coastal region marks the southernmost point in the Northern Hemisphere where drift ice makes landfall. Recognized for its rich ecosystem connecting from the ice-influenced sea to the land, the majority of the peninsula and its surrounding waters, totaling 71,000 hectares (48,700 hectares on land and 22,300 hectares at sea), earned UNESCO World Natural Heritage status in 2005 under the name "Shiretoko."

The coastline on the western side of the peninsula, primarily near Shari Town, features continuous cliffs towering over 100 meters. This formation is the result of intense erosion by drift ice on lava that once flowed

from the volcanic activity of the peninsula. There are also numerous instances of underground water flowing through the lava, forming waterfalls that cascade from the cliffs, such as the Furepe Falls, and flow into the Sea of Okhotsk. On the other hand, the eastern side of the peninsula, primarily near Rausu Town, where drift ice does not make forceful landfall, features a relatively gentle coastline.

Winter on the Shiretoko Peninsula is blanketed in snow, with drift ice arriving around February, creating a distinctive snowy landscape. Guided tours, allowing participants to walk on the drift ice floating on the sea surface, are conducted during this season. In addition, wintering animals like the Steller's sea eagle, arriving from the harsh cold regions, reveal their presence within the snowy scenery. Due to the freezing

Drift ice off the coast of Shiretoko in February





Photo: Ministry of the Environment

Drift ice comes to the shoreline for shorter periods with each passing year.

of ice and snow, one can experience the snowy landscapes from the surface of the Shiretoko Five Lakes, a sight not available in other seasons.

According to Imura, the opportunity to enjoy the dynamic snowy landscapes with drift ice is relatively brief. He says, “The cross-country road connecting the eastern and western parts of the Shiretoko Peninsula (National Route 334) closes around November 8 due to freezing at the mountain pass, making passage impossible. This marks the start of winter in Shiretoko. Snowfall occurs from December to March. Drift ice often doesn’t arrive until the latter half of January, with February being the more reliable time to see it. By mid-March, it is often pushed back towards the open sea by the wind, disappearing from view,” he says.

In winter, the Shiretoko National Park Nature Center, positioned near the midpoint of the western coastline (commonly known as the “Utoro side”), represents the furthest accessible point through public transportation. The walking trail located behind the Center is perfect for those seeking to enjoy the snowy landscapes overlooking drift ice.

“We recommend exploring some of Shiretoko’s renowned attractions like the Furepe Falls and Yunohana Falls, nicknamed ‘Men’s Tears’. These two waterfalls, resembling works of ice art, can be best experienced by walking through the primeval forest,” explains Imura. “The frozen Furepe Falls<sup>1</sup> along the cliffs at the endpoint are particularly breathtaking. Also, the view of the coastal scenery of Rausu Town on the opposite side of the peninsula to the east, where drift ice arrives, is amazing from the Rausu Kunashiri Observation Tower.”

The forests and towns are blanketed in snow, and looking out to sea, it’s a vast expanse of drift ice. The majestic, entirely white winter landscape is



Photo: Ministry of the Environment

Above: The Furepe Falls freeze into aqua-blue pillars of ice.



Photo: Ministry of the Environment

Below: There’s a chance of unexpectedly encountering wildlife during a stroll, like the Yezo sika deer.

an incredible spectacle unique to the Shiretoko Peninsula during a brief period in winter.

Recently, there has been an increasing number of tourists from overseas visiting to appreciate the beautiful snowy landscapes and drift ice.

“For visitors from countries or regions accustomed to snow, we recommend participating in eco-tours around the Shiretoko Five Lakes during winter,” says Imura. “Wearing snowshoes<sup>2</sup> allows you to stroll across the frozen lake surface, offering a unique opportunity to enjoy a different snowy landscape from the usual Shiretoko experience.”

There are also tours offering drift ice walking in the waters off Utoro, which are popular among tourists from Southeast Asia, China, and other regions less accustomed to snow.”

“Tour participants wear dry suits when walking on the ice and sometimes break through it to immerse themselves waist-deep in the sea, providing perfect photo opportunities and a lot of fun,” comments Imura.

According to Imura, “When the drift ice arrives, the waves on the sea disappear, and Shiretoko is enveloped in silence. The sight of snow gently accumulating on the drift ice is an indescribable scene.”

Due to the impact of global warming, the drift ice has been thinning each year, so the period to enjoy it has become shorter. The majestic sight is something everyone should witness at least once. **7**

1. Frozen waterfalls occur when the flowing water from the falls freezes upon exposure to the cold air.  
2. One of the tools for walking easily on the snow, similar to western-style crampons.



Photo: Shiretoko Optional Tours SOTI



Photo: SHINRA/Shiretoko Nature Guide Tour Inc.

Above: A winter eco-tour of the Shiretoko Five Lakes

Below: Drift ice walks are popular with tourists

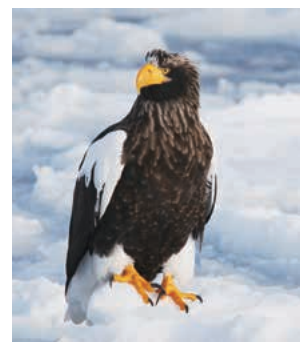


Photo: Ministry of the Environment

Steller's sea eagles fly onto the drift ice to spend the winter there.



The Zao mountain range stretches out beyond a cluster of trees with *juhyo* formations

# The Spectacle of Rime Ice-Covered Trees Spread Through Zao in Winter

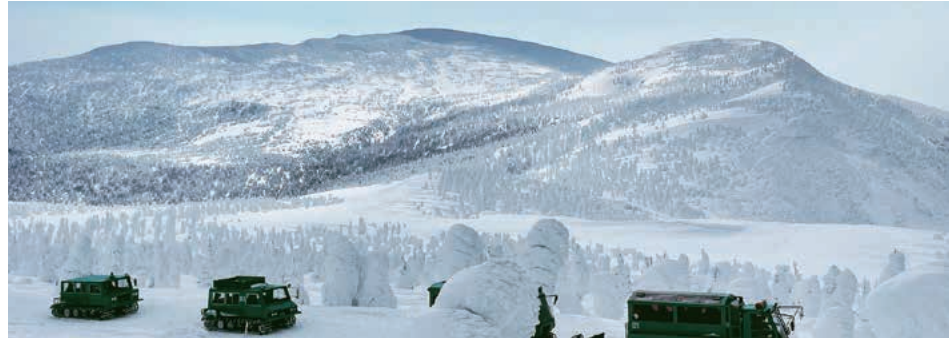
In the Zao mountain range, which extends across both Miyagi and Yamagata prefectures in Japan's Tohoku region, one can delight in the amazing sight of trees blanketed in snow and rime ice formations during the winter season, known as *juhyo*. We had the opportunity to speak with a person in charge of organizing guided tours for the captivating trees in Miyagi Prefecture.

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

**J**uhyo is a rare natural phenomenon that occurs exclusively in a few mountain ranges in Japan, and it is exceptionally rare even by international standards. The creation of *juhyo* in Zao involves three steps. First, moisture in the snow or wind hits the branches and leaves of the native coniferous Aomori todomatsu tree<sup>1</sup>, freezing upon contact. Second, a



*Juhyo* is created as ice and snow accumulate on the branches of Aomori todomatsu trees.



Left: *Juhyo*, known as “snow monsters,” feature peculiar and wild shapes.

Right: Popular tours offer views of *juhyo* from snow vehicles.

significant amount of snow, driven by blizzards or similar conditions, enters the gaps in the ice. Third, additional snow adheres, and the formation grows in the direction of the wind. *Juhyo* grows as this three-step process is repeated.

Katase Yasuyuki of Miyagi Zao Sumikawa Snow Park explains, “On the Miyagi side, it is possible to observe *juhyo* from December onwards. Initially, at the tips of the branches, baby *juhyo*, known as ‘shrimp tails,’ attach, resembling Christmas trees with visible branches and leaves. As layers of ice gradually accumulate, these formations grow larger and transform into majestic *juhyo* known as ‘snow monsters.’ These formations can be seen until around March.”

While it is also possible to observe *juhyo* in Yamagata, Katase notes that, in comparison to the soft and gentle appearance with rounded features of Yamagata’s *juhyo*, those on the Miyagi side are described as rough and rugged. He suggests that the reason for this difference lies in the topography.

“It is said that on the Yamagata side, fine powder-like snow brought by the westerly winds from the sea accumulates, forming *juhyo* as it settles. On the Miyagi side, the strong winds blowing down from the Zao mountain range create hard, hail-like particles that freeze, resulting in *juhyo* with a more rugged appear-


ance,” comments Katase. The majestic and grand *juhyo* formations are artistic masterpieces symbolizing Zao’s harsh winter nature.



*Juhyo* can form on Aomori Todomatsu trees, believed to be almost 300 years old, creating the illusion of giant living organisms.

“In recent times, the number of overseas tourists has been growing, and tours offering views from snow vehicles are particularly popular,” remarks Katase. “Since *juhyo* forms facing westward with the wind, we recommend tours during the afternoon when they sparkle in the sunlight.”

Lately, the Aomori todomatsu trees, which naturally grow in the Zao mountain range, have aged and face issues such as damage from insect pests. Consequently, both Yamagata and Miyagi prefectures hold regular meetings to consider the preservation and regeneration of the trees. “The Aomori todomatsu is believed to have a lifespan of 300 years, with extremely slow growth. It is said to take over 50 years from germination to bearing fruit,” says Katase. “Being a high-altitude species that does not thrive

below 1,100 meters, it is considered quite challenging to grow the trees. Various initiatives are being undertaken to preserve Zao’s winter landscape. We invite you to visit the area and witness the beautiful, majestic *juhyo* formations.” 

1. An evergreen tree belonging to the fir family (Pinaceae), also known as *Abies mariesii*. It is distributed in the subalpine zone in the north of Japan’s main island.

# The Snowscape of Ginzan Onsen, Filming Location of the TV Drama *Oshin*

Ginzan Onsen hot springs is the filming location of the Japanese serialized morning television drama *Oshin*.<sup>1</sup> The traditional Japanese inns that line both banks of the Ginzan River were built from about 1910 to the 1930s. We interviewed Sasahara Kenichiro, head of the Ginzan Onsen Association, about its nostalgic snowy winter scenery. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

The serialized morning television drama *Oshin* aired from April 1983 to March 1984. In Episode 2, the main character *Oshin*, now in her 80s, visits a hot spring area deep in the snow of Yamagata Prefecture without telling her family where she was going, just as if she had run away from home, where she reflects on her life. Filming locations where the story starts at Ginzan Onsen. The many scenes shot at the snow-covered Ginzan Onsen are impressive. The scene where the young *Oshin* visits her working mother was also filmed at Ginzan Onsen.

*Oshin* was a long-running TV drama of about 300 episodes that aired in more than 60 countries around the world and became very popular. Even today, many people come from overseas to visit Ginzan Onsen and look for traces of *Oshin*.

Sasahara says, “Since *Oshin* was broadcast in many countries, the name of Ginzan Onsen, which was one of its filming locations, has become known internationally. These days, visitors are making it even more popular on social media, and all of a sudden, even more people from outside Japan have been coming.”



In winter, Ginzan Onsen bustles with tourists from overseas

Photo:PIXTA



Photo: Obanzawa City Office

This hot spring resort town still appears as it did more than 100 years ago.



Photo: PIXTA

The gas lamps appear as they did in the old days

January and February are especially bustling with overseas visitors. The warm orange glow of the gas lamps against the white snow piled up on the nostalgic streets is an attractive sight.

“Many of our visitors from overseas have never seen snow before, and they find the nighttime scenery especially beautiful. Some even say it reminds them of the food stalls in the animated film *Spirited Away*.”

*Spirited Away*, a Japanese animated feature film directed by Miyazaki Hayao and released in 2001, is acclaimed around the world and has won several international awards. Although it is said that there was no specific model for the film's setting, Sasahara says that fans visit the area because the atmosphere of the town in the film resembles their impression of Ginzan Onsen.

Ginzan Onsen is in Obanzawa City, Yamagata Prefecture, which is located on the Sea of Japan coast in

the Tohoku region, the northernmost part of Japan's main Island. Silver mining started here in the 15th century, and under the direct control of the then-Tokugawa Shogunate, the city was developed in the first half of the 17th century and called Nobesawa Ginzan (“Nobesawa Silver Mine”). Hot springs were discovered during the development of the silver mine, thus the name Ginzan Onsen (“Silver Mine Hot Springs”).

Sasahara explains. “The town of Ginzan Onsen has looked the way it is today since the 1910s. The buildings back then had been considerably damaged by flooding of the Ginzan River. Carpenters, plasterers, and joiners competed with each other to restore these buildings, and transformed them into the multi-story Western-style wooden structures that exist today.”

At that time, they also built the gas lamps, cobblestone roads, and bridges, and Ginzan Onsen took on its current appearance.


“Even during the snowy season, try taking a stroll. Since the paths are made of cobblestones, you should wear winter boots or other non-slip footwear. Take a moment to enjoy the winter sights, including the gas lamps, the streets, the night scenery, and the snowscape of the hot spring resort area.” 



Photo: PIXTA

The snowy landscape makes one feel as if lost in a storybook world.

1. A television drama broadcast by NHK from April 1983 to March 1984. It depicts the life of Oshin, a young girl born into a poor farming family, from the modern era to the postwar period and through to the present day. Average viewer ratings over a year of broadcast were high, at 52.6%, with a top viewer rating of 62.9% (November 12). The series was also aired overseas and received high viewer ratings in some countries.

# A Masterpiece of Photography: The Tadami Line in Winter that Captivated the World

Photographer Kameyama Takeshi has a strong international reputation for his photos capturing winter snowscapes. We spoke with him about the enchanting beauty of Japan's stunning snowy scenery even in the bitter cold. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)



**K**ameyama Takeshi is a non-professional photographer based in Niigata City, just around two hours north of Tokyo by Shinkansen. In 2022, his photo “Tadami Line in Winter<sup>1</sup>” featuring the snowy landscape of Fukushima Prefecture earned him the prestigious title of Nature Photographer of the Year at the world’s largest international photography competition, the International Photography Awards. This marked the first time a Japanese photographer received this honor, leading to increased international attention.

Kameyama states, “Having been born and raised in snowy Niigata, snowfall has been a natural part of my life since childhood. However, in recent years, with the increase in snowless days, I have started to worry that we may lose the opportunity to witness these magnificent landscapes. Capturing these moments in photographs serves as a record. Moreover, I hope that those who view the photos will be impressed with the scenes and feel compelled to protect them. I photograph snowscapes to foster awareness and inspire action towards environ-



Kameyama Takeshi

The photo “Tadami Line in Winter” won a top prize in the International Photography Awards  
Photo: Kameyama Takeshi





A fantastical snowy landscape in Ouchijuku<sup>2</sup>, Fukushima Prefecture, where thatched-roof traditional houses line the roadside  
Photo: Kameyama Takeshi

mental conservation.”

Motivated by these feelings, Kameyama says that he continues to capture photographs of particularly enchanting snowscapes in his local areas of Niigata and Fukushima Prefectures. “I revisit the same locations numerous times until I capture a shot I am satisfied with. Ideally, I aim for pure clean white snow as the first condition, accompanied by sunlight as the second. The third condition involves a light snowfall, and the fourth is calmness, creating a mirror-like reflection on water,” he explains. “However, it’s rare for all these conditions to align more than a few times a year. Therefore, when I decided to focus on capturing the snowy landscape with the Tadami Line train in Fukushima Prefecture, I would wake up at 2 a.m., drive for three hours on snowy roads, climb a pitch-black mountain path, and wait in sub-zero temperatures for about an hour until the train arrived. This process was repeated time and again.” This dedication resulted in the globally renowned award for “Tadami Line in Winter” at the international photography competition.

He continues, “I have always been fond of the scenery along the Tadami Line and have visited many times in the past. However, along with its beauty, I also came to recognize the harshness and severity of nature. In winter, the deep snow requires constant removal, and there are times when trains experience delays or cancellations. In 2011, heavy rainfall caused severe damage, with the bridge being washed away. As a result, there was a section that remained impassable for 11 years. Amid a decline in the number of passengers and talk of discontinuation, local efforts made by the community led to the resumption of operations on the entire line in 2023. Moved by the resilience of people living closely with nature, I chose the Tadami Line as my subject to capture through photography the harmonious coexistence of nature and people along

its route.”

Recognized on the international stage with “Tadami Line in Winter,” Kameyama has been selected as a finalist for the Lucie Awards, often referred to as the Academy Awards of the photography world. In 2023, he continues to make a mark globally, including recognition in an international photography contest in Paris.

Taking photographs of snowy landscapes is a dangerous and demanding endeavor, involving the transport of equipment weighing over 30kg in the bitter cold, and patiently waiting for the perfect moment. However, the allure of Japanese snowy landscapes surpasses these challenges.


The most beautiful snowy landscapes, as perceived by Kameyama, extend across his local Niigata, as well as the northeastern regions of Fukushima and Yamagata, encompassing the Iide Mountain Range<sup>3</sup>.

“Having grown up with my father managing and engaging in conservation activities at a mountain hut



Mount Eburisashi in the Iide Mountain Range, considered one of the world’s top snowfall areas  
Photo: Kameyama Takeshi

in the area, I climbed the mountain numerous times from childhood. In winter, the deep snow renders it an inhospitable place, yet its magnificent, gleaming white appearance holds a sense of admiration and nostalgia. For me, it is the ultimate snowy landscape.”

Kameyama expresses his desire to continue capturing photographs of captivating yet lesser-known places in the future. Through his perspective, his works undoubtedly have the potential to rediscover the beauty of snowscapes that one might overlook even while living in Japan. 

1. A railway line operated by East Japan Railway Company (JR East) connecting Aizu-Wakamatsu Station in Aizuwakamatsu City, Fukushima Prefecture, to Koide Station in Uonuma City, Niigata Prefecture. It is a regional transportation line.
2. A town in southern Aizu, Fukushima Prefecture, that flourished as a post town in the Edo period (early 17th century to mid-late 19th century). Currently, it has become a tourist destination where traditional thatched-roof houses, preserving the atmosphere of that era, line the area. In 1981, it was designated as a nationally designated Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings.
3. The Iide Mountain Range belongs to the Bandai-Asahi National Park and spans the borders of Niigata, Fukushima, and Yamagata Prefectures. It stretches approximately 20 km from north to south and includes the major peaks of Mount Iide (2,105m) and Mount Eburisashi (1,636m).



Photo: Yamatane Museum of Art

*Toshi Kuru* ("End of the Year," 1968). Color painting on paper, 100 × 73 cm. Collection of Yamatane Museum of Art

# Snowy Landscapes of Japan Painted by Higashiyama Kaii

**Higashiyama Kaii was a Nihonga<sup>1</sup> artist who painted snowy landscapes and scenes. We spoke about the appeal of his paintings with a director and curators at three museums that have his works in their collections.**

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

**H**igashiyama Kaii (1908–1999) can be considered a representative 20th-century Nihonga painter. With experience studying abroad in Germany as well, he incorporated aspects of Western realism into Japanese painting traditions. He is known for his style, which conveys feelings of fantastical while at the same time featuring realistic representations.

His works include numerous scenes showing snowy Japanese landscapes, and they are found in the collections of museums throughout Japan. One such example is *Toshi Kuru* ("End of the Year") in the collection of the Yamatane Museum of Art (Shibuya City, Tokyo), a museum known especially for its collection of modern and contemporary Nihonga works. The painting is one in a series that arose through an exchange the artist had with Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972), a novelist awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature

"Kawabata had told him, 'Paint it now, or the unique scenery of Kyoto will no longer be there for you to paint. Paint it, please, while it still remains.' Those words inspired him to paint scenes of Kyoto throughout the four seasons, and he exhibited a series of 18



Photo: Chiba Prefectural Museum of Art

*Shunsetsu* ("Spring Snow," 1973).  
Color painting on paper, 168  
x 215 cm. Collection of Chiba  
Prefectural Museum of Art

paintings in *Keiraku Shiki* ('Kyoto's Four Seasons'), a solo exhibition held in 1968. *Toshi Kuru* is one of the works he exhibited then. The painting shows snow falling on rows of houses in Kyoto on New Year's Eve as he viewed it from the Kyoto Hotel (now the Hotel Okura Kyoto), his usual lodging place in the city," the museum's director, Yamazaki Taeko, explains.

"Kaii said about the work, 'I was spending the year's end in Kyoto and had heard the *joya no kane*<sup>2</sup> bell-ringing. At this time, there were still a lot of tiled roofs and not many square buildings. *Toshi Kuru* was born of my feelings of nostalgia and longing for good old Kyoto.' Just as he said, Kyoto on New Year's Eve is represented with a great deal of poetic sentiment in the work."

Another of his paintings, *Shunsetsu* ("Spring Snow"), which is in the collection of the Chiba Prefectural Museum of Art (Chiba City), depicts stands of Japanese cedars dusted with snow on a steep mountain slope in the northern part of Kyoto, an area also known as Rakuhoku.

"Higashiyama had long admired *Suibokuga*<sup>3</sup> (ink wash painting); he said it allowed the expression of spiritual qualities with a depth beyond what could be conveyed with the use of many different colors. He painted this work in 1973 at the age of 65 and exhibited it at Nitten.<sup>4</sup> The way a monotone world of subdued color — just blue and white — expands in it for the viewer, it also feels like an introductory chapter in his shift toward the deep spiritual expression of *Suibokuga*," explains curator Aikawa Junko.

The Nagano Prefectural Art Museum's Higashiyama Kaii Gallery (Nagano City) has a collection of over 970 works, including *Fuyu no Tabi* ("Winter Journey"), which Higashiyama painted at the age of 80. The masterpiece features a composition that directs the viewer's gaze up the slopes of a mountain in Kazuno City, Akita Prefecture covered in deep snow.

"Higashiyama made comparisons between the stages of his life and the four seasons, and I think he saw the elderly years as corresponding to snowy winter scenes like this. This work could be seen as symbolic of his life, with the series of journeys he had made himself, as he approached the final stage of it," explains curator Matsuura

Chieko.

Higashiyama Kaii continued to travel and remained quite active into his final years before passing away in 1999 at the age of 90. If you have a chance, make a point of viewing pieces of work he left behind in person — Nihonga paintings expressing the beauty of snowy Japanese landscapes as viewed through his inspired gaze. ■

*Fuyu no Tabi* ("Winter Journey," 1989). Color painting on paper, 110 x 162 cm. Collection of Higashiyama Kaii Gallery, Nagano Prefectural Art Museum



Photo: Nagano Prefectural Art Museum

1. In modern times, Nihonga generally refers to works painted on *washi* paper and silk using traditional Japanese painting materials. Traditional Nihonga materials include natural resources such as *sumi* ink and mineral pigments, and occasionally metallic materials such as gold leaf. *Nikawa* animal glue is used to attach them, as they lack adhesive qualities of mineral pigments and metallic materials.
2. Refers to the sound of bells rung at temples throughout Japan each year from midnight on New Year's Eve into New Year's Day.
3. An Eastern-style painting form. Works are primarily painted with *sumi* ink, making use of light and dark shading of its black monotone color.
4. One of the Japan's largest public art exhibitions founded in 1907. Comprises five art faculties: Japanese and Western Style Painting, Sculpture, Craft Arts, and Sho (Calligraphy). Works by designated artists who became exempted from examinations required to display as well as awarded works are exhibited every year in fall at the National Art Center, Tokyo.

# The Scenery Depicted in Kawabata Yasunari's Masterpiece, *Snow Country*



Kawabata Yasunari (far left) visited Yuzawa during the filming of the movie, *Snow Country*, in 1957. (Far right: movie director Toyoda Shiro; Second from the right: Edward G. Seidensticker, who translated *Snow Country* into English)

Photo: Yuzawa Board of Education

Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972) was the first Japanese writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1968. His masterpiece, *Yukiguni (Snow Country)*, is set in the *onsen* (hot spring) area of Echigo Yuzawa<sup>1</sup>, which is renowned for its heavy snowfall. Here we introduce locations where you can immerse yourself in the world of his literary creation. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

**K**awabata Yasunari, a representative author of modern and contemporary Japanese literature, is famous for the opening line, “The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country,”<sup>2</sup> from his famous masterpiece, *Snow Country*. The narrative revolves around the complex human relationships between Shimamura, a writer living off an inherited fortune with a family, and Komako, a geisha he encounters in the snow country. It is a lyrical tale depicting complex human relationships. The long tunnel mentioned in the novel refers to the Shimizu Tunnel<sup>3</sup>, which connects Gunma and Niigata Prefectures. Kawabata himself passed through this long tunnel on a locomotive in 1934 and visited Yuzawa Town

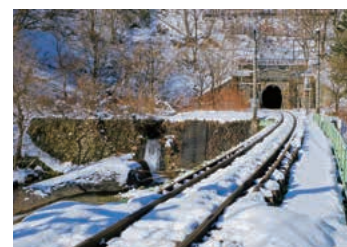


Photo: PIXTA

Above: The Shimizu Tunnel, believed to be the inspiration for the long tunnel described at the beginning of the novel, is part of the current JR Joetsu Line, measuring a total length of 9,702 meters

Below: An exhibition corner featuring the relocated room where Matsue, believed to be the model for the heroine Komako in the novel *Snow Country*, lived, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the narrative's world at the Yuzawa Museum of History and Folklore (Yukiguni-kan)



Photo: Yukiguni-kan



Above: Kawabata, known for his love of hot springs, made frequent visits to Yuzawa.

Below: Takahan Ryokan, where Kawabata stayed during his visits to Yuzawa in the mid-1950s

Photo: PIXTA



Photo: Yuzawa Board of Education



Photo: Yuzawa Board of Education



Photo: PIXTA

Above: The ski resort in Echigo Yuzawa during the 1950s

Below: The snowy landscape of Yuzawa viewed from the Yuzawa Kogen Ski Resort

in Echigo Yuzawa, a hot spring resort area.

We spoke with the staff of Yuzawa Museum of History and Folklore (Yukiguni-kan) where exhibits focus on *Snow Country* and the life and history of Yuzawa. “Impressed by the high-quality hot springs and delicious cuisine during his first visit, Kawabata developed a strong liking for Yuzawa. Approximately two months later, he revisited the town. While there are different theories, I believe that it was during this visit that Kawabata may have encountered Matsue, the geisha believed to be the inspiration for the heroine Komako. Afterwards, he visited Yuzawa three more times before completing *Snow Country*.”

The Takahan Ryokan, where Kawabata stayed when he visited Yuzawa, is still in operation today as Yukiguni no Yado Takahan. Visitors can even tour the Kasumi no Ma room, where Kawabata did his writing.

*Snow Country* has received high acclaim both domestically and internationally. It is currently translated and published worldwide, attracting many fans from abroad to visit Yuzawa.

According to the museum personnel, “While the title of the book is *Snow Country*, the entire story doesn’t exclusively take place during the snowy season. Kawabata himself didn’t visit Yuzawa during times of heavy snowfall, and there are not many depictions of scenes where life is buried under snow. Yet, the phrase ‘The earth lay white under the night sky’<sup>2</sup> that follows the opening passage conveys the subdued darkness and heaviness specific to the

snowy landscape. It suggests a cold village isolated by the deep mountains, with its inhabitants persisting with determination as snow softly blankets their surroundings. This evocative scene captivates the imagination. When reading *Snow Country*, even if you’ve never seen snow or experienced such a landscape, somehow the image of a silvery world comes to mind, and you might feel a sense of nostalgia for snowy landscapes.”

Kawabata revised *Snow Country* multiple times until his later years.

“Two months before his death, Kawabata left behind a handwritten piece titled Yukiguni-sho based on the novel. It seems he had a special attachment to this work.”

In addition to Yukiguni-kan and Takahan, there are other notable places where visitors can immerse themselves in the world of the novel, such as the communal bath, Komako no Yu, and Suwa Shrine. Today, it is extremely easy to travel to Echigo Yuzawa, taking just one hour from Tokyo by Shinkansen. Why not take the opportunity to visit and witness the snowy landscapes beyond the tunnel? **1**

1. The collective term for hot spring resorts surrounding Yuzawa Town in Minamiuonuma District, Niigata Prefecture. Initially known as Yuzawa Onsen, it underwent a name change to Echigo Yuzawa Station when the shinkansen commenced operations, aiming to differentiate it from Yuzawa City in Akita Prefecture. Consequently, the term Echigo Yuzawa Onsen gained broader usage.
2. From the English edition translated by Edward G. Seidensticker
3. Completed in 1931, this tunnel stretches across Gunma and Niigata Prefectures, allowing the JR Joetsu Line to pass through. Situated on the mountainside of Mount Tanigawa, it is an extensive single-track (uphill track) tunnel with a length of 9,702 meters. At the time of completion, it held the record as the largest in Japan and the Orient, and the 9th largest in the world.

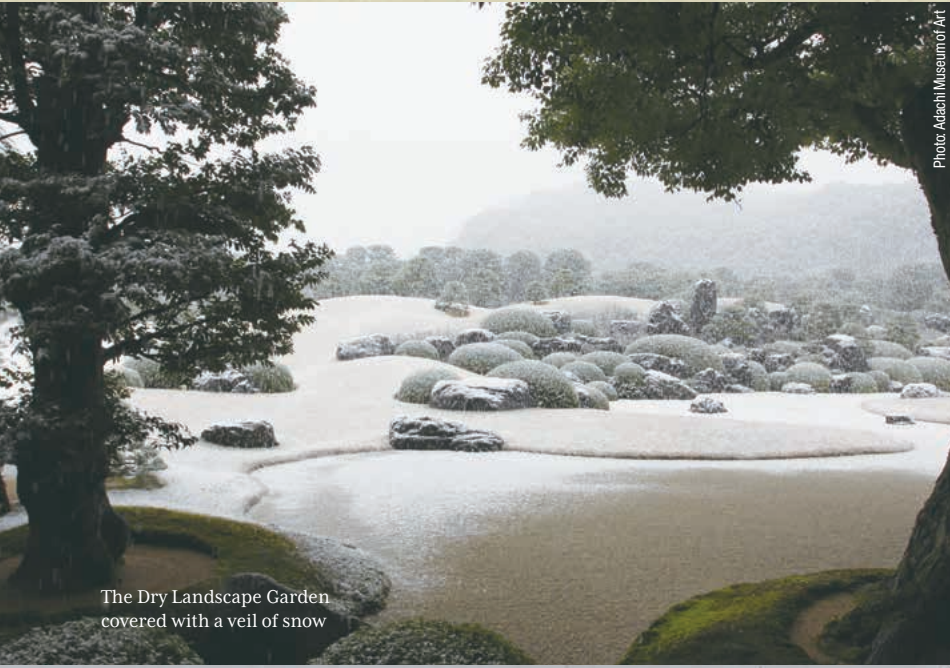


Photo: Adachi Museum of Art

The Dry Landscape Garden covered with a veil of snow

# The Snowy Japanese Gardens of Adachi Museum Fascinate People Worldwide

The beautiful Japanese gardens of the Adachi Museum of Art, voted the best in Japan out of approximately 1,000 sites in the country for 21 consecutive years by a Japanese garden specialty magazine published in the United States, continue to fascinate people around the world. The appearance of the gardens changes with the seasons. Kanno Ayaka, the person in charge of the museum's public relations, told us about the special appeal of the gardens when they are covered with snow.

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

The Adachi Museum of Art, located in Yasugi City, Shimane Prefecture, in the Sanin region on the Sea of Japan side of western Honshu, the main island of Japan, was opened in November 1970 to exhibit the works of art collected over many years by Adachi Zenko, an entre-

Photo: Adachi Museum of Art

The Dry Landscape Garden creates a spacious ambience against the backdrop of the mountains in the distance.





Photo: Adachi Museum of Art

The *Living Framed Painting* in which the museum window frames the scenery and gives it the appearance of a painting

preneur from the same city. The original collection included more than 120 works by Yokoyama Taikan, a prominent Japanese-style painter, from the early to late years of his life. Currently, these works are now featured in the museum's collection that represent the museum. Apart from these, it holds ceramics, wood carvings, lacquerware, and contemporary Japanese paintings totaling 2,000 pieces. In addition, the gardens on the museum grounds are magnificent.

"The museum's Japanese gardens cover an area of approximately 165,000 square meters surrounding the museum building. A stroll through the exhibition halls offers visitors the opportunity to enjoy a variety of garden views from different vantage points and angles, such as the Moss Garden, the Dry Landscape Garden,<sup>1</sup> the Pond Garden, and the White Gravel and Pine Garden.<sup>2</sup> In order to keep these Japanese gardens in the best condition at all times, the museum has a gardening department that is unique among art museums in Japan, with dedicated gardeners who tend to the gardens every day, 365 days a year. In addition to the gardeners, the entire museum staff cleans the gardens every morning before the museum opens. This diligent care and maintenance is one of the reasons for the museum's worldwide reputation."<sup>3</sup>

One of the great appeals of Japanese gardens is that the highlights change with the changing seasons.

"The main garden, the Dry Landscape Garden, is designed to appear majestic and more expansive than it actually is by incorporating the distant natural mountains in the background as part of the garden scene. Furthermore, the concept of representing Yokoyama Taikan's works in the design of the gardens is truly unique to the Adachi Museum of Art. For example, the White Gravel and Pine Garden was inspired by Taikan's painting *Beautiful Pine Beach*, and the design of the Kikaku Waterfall was based on Taikan's work *Waterfall in Nachi* (both in the collection of the Adachi Museum of Art). Adachi Zenko famously said, "The garden is also a picture." In keeping with his words, the museum features such elegant and ingenious highlights as the *Living Framed Painting*, in which

the frame around a large window serves as a picture frame, and the *Living Hanging Scroll*<sup>4</sup> created by cutting out a portion of an alcove wall so that the part of the garden seen through the opening can be enjoyed as a landscape painting."<sup>5</sup>

The scenery of the gardens is especially beautiful when they are covered with a blanket of snow.


"Several times during the winter season, visitors can enjoy the view of the gardens covered in snow. The light snow typical of the humid climate of the Sanin region gives the snow-dusted Japanese gardens the appearance of an ink painting.<sup>6</sup> On snowy days, time passes quietly in serenity, delighting the eye with a different atmosphere than usual. Visitors who venture to the Adachi Museum of Art in winter, when it is covered in snow, will be rewarded with unforgettable views." 



Photo: Adachi Museum of Art

A pond where only carp swim, in the garden covered with snow and immersed in serenity.

1. A type of Japanese-style garden that recreates a natural landscape of mountains and rivers using rocks, white gravel, and other materials, without water.
2. The Japanese coastal landscape of white sandy beaches and verdant pine trees is called *hakusa-seisho*, which literally means "white sand and green pines." The Adachi Museum of Art has recreated the world of Yokoyama Taikan's masterpiece *Beautiful Pine Beach* in the form of a garden.
3. The gardens of the Adachi Museum of Art were ranked number one in Japan by *Sukiya Living Magazine: The Journal of Japanese Gardening*, a US magazine dedicated to Japanese gardens.
4. Hanging scrolls are calligraphic works or paintings mounted on fabric or paper with rollers made of bamboo, wood, or other materials and hung in a *tokonoma* (alcove) or similar space. The most common type (*shakugohaba*) is 54.5 centimeters wide and 190 centimeters long.
5. One of the themes of oriental painting. In the broad definition of the term, it refers to landscape painting. Paintings of this style depict natural scenery, such as mountains and rivers.
6. An oriental painting style. It uses only black ink, without color. In ink painting, the artist applies gradations of ink and modulates the amount of moisture to create a sense of light, shade and volume.



## ASEAN-JAPAN 50th YEAR COMMEMORATIVE SUMMIT

Group photo at the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation

Photo: courtesy of Cabinet Public Affairs Office

# The Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation and its Related Programs

Japan became the first country in the world to establish dialogue relations with ASEAN back in 1973. Ever since, Japan has continued to build and strengthen its friendship and cooperation with ASEAN in a wide range of areas. The year 2023 marked the historic 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan friendship and cooperation. In celebration of this milestone, the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation (hereinafter referred to as the “Commemorative Summit”) and various related programs were held in Tokyo from December 16 to 18. Below is the outline of these programs and highlights of their outcomes.

### The Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation and its related programs

Prime Minister Kishida Fumio of Japan and President Joko Widodo of Indonesia, this year’s ASEAN Chair, co-chaired the Commemorative Summit. The Summit was attended by the Leaders of ASEAN Member States, as well as the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (observer) and the Secretary-General of ASEAN.

The Commemorative Summit had two sessions. In Session 1, participants reviewed ASEAN-Japan relations over the past half century and exchanged views on strengthening the relationship as “Partners for Peace and Stability” and on regional and international issues. In

Session 2, participants discussed further strengthening cooperation under the agenda of “Heart-to-Heart Partners across Generations” and “Partners for Co-creation of Economy and Society of the Future.”

During this historic Commemorative Summit, the participants adopted outcome documents: the Joint Vision Statement on ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, which sets out a new vision for the future; and its Implementation Plan, which includes a wide range of concrete cooperation initiatives based on the “heart to heart” relations of trust that have been built over the decades, seeking to further strengthen the Japan-ASEAN relations.





Prime Minister Kishida Fumio at session 1

Photo: courtesy of Cabinet Public Affairs Office



Prime Minister Kishida Fumio at session 2

Photo: courtesy of Cabinet Public Affairs Office

■ Schedule of the Commemorative Summit and Its Related Programs

December 16	Dinner hosted by Mr. Kishida Fumio, Prime Minister of Japan, and Mrs. Kishida Yuko
December 17	The Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation Co-chairs Joint Press Occasion Tokyo Tower Light-Up Ceremony Gala Dinner <sup>1</sup>
December 18	Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) Leaders Meeting Welcome Luncheon Hosted by Keidanren <sup>2</sup> and the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry <sup>3</sup>

Note: This article was created using publicly available materials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and with MOFA's consent.

1. A special dinner served on festive occasions such as Christmas, mainly in Southeast Asia and other countries.
2. An economic organization founded in 1946. The core of its membership consists mainly of large Japanese companies.
3. An economic organization founded in 1878 that consists of regional chambers of commerce and industry throughout Japan.

■ Speech by Prime Minister Kishida at the banquet held on December 16 (excerpts)

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is my great honor to welcome you here this evening ahead of the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation tomorrow... Today, building on this foundation, I would like to propose three concrete measures to take ASEAN-Japan relations to new heights for the next 50 years.

**1. Heart-to-Heart Partners across Generations**

First of all, the core of Japan-ASEAN relations is, above all, mutual trust. What underpins this trust is our precious history of consistently walking together, even in times of hardship. We would like to pass on to the next generation this “heart to heart” relationship.

To this end, we are launching a new comprehensive exchange program called the “Partnership to Co-create a Future with the Next Generation,” which will benefit more than 10 million people over the next 10 years. In addition, we will further promote interactive exchanges such as those among young business leaders.

**2. Partners for Co-creation of Economy and Society of the Future**

Then, based on our strong relationship of trust, it is our hope that Japan and ASEAN will bring together their strengths and find solutions in an era of compound crises that are difficult for any one country to solve. We also hope to create strong economies that generate further vitality through mutually channeling each other's vitality, and to grow together as partners to co-create a society and economy in which people from all walks of life can achieve and enjoy the middle-class dreams to which most of us aspire.

To this end, we will work on public-private partnerships, focusing on strengthening connectivity, addressing climate change including through the realization of the Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC), and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises as well as start-ups. We will further encourage private investment through utilizing new ODA tools, such as the Co-Creation for Common Agenda Initiative.

We will also launch the ASEAN-Japan Co-Creation Initiative for the Next Generation Automotive Industry, in which we will work together to develop and implement strategies to ensure that ASEAN remains the world's leading hub for automotive production and export.

### 3. Partners for Peace and Stability

Last but not least, what Japan and ASEAN have always pursued is “peace and prosperity.” As we co-create and build upon stronger and more vibrant economies and societies, we will be better able to secure a free and open international order based on the rule of law. Let us together create peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region where human dignity is protected.

To this end, we will promote our efforts aimed at nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation based on the “Hiroshima Action Plan,” judicial cooperation including legal technical assistance, Women, Peace and Security (WPS), cyber security, defense exchange and cooperation, and Official Security Assistance (OSA). Ladies and gentlemen, it is with these thoughts and true determination that I will approach tomorrow's meeting. As friends gathered here, let us present to the world a vision for the future that will last for generations to come.

Well, I think I have spoken enough! I hope you will enjoy the delicious dinner and make the most of each other's company. I would like to propose a toast to your health and happiness and to the further development of Japan-ASEAN friendship in the future. Cheers!



During the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation

Photo: courtesy of Cabinet Public Affairs Office

## Outline of the Joint Vision Statement on ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation

In the Joint Vision Statement on ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation adopted as an outcome document of the Commemorative Summit, Japan and ASEAN outlined a vision for a world where the values and principles they share are ensured, and where all countries can pursue peace and prosperity and uphold the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Furthermore, the document states that, building on mutual trust, ASEAN and Japan will strengthen the mutually beneficial Comprehensive Strategic Partnership under the following three concrete measures, embracing ASEAN unity and centrality.



At the Gala Dinner hosted by Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and Mrs. Kishida Yuko on December 18

Photo: courtesy of Cabinet Public Affairs Office

### 1. Heart-to-Heart Partners across Generations

Committed to further fostering the “heart-to-heart” relationship of mutual trust, mutual understanding, and mutual respect that is the foundation of the ASEAN-Japan partnership. Strengthen youth and people-to-people exchanges, human intellectual exchanges.

### 2. Partners for Co-creation of Economy and Society of the Future

Co-create a prosperous and sustainable economy and society, which is diverse, inclusive, resilient, free and fair, and jointly address various common economic and social challenges by: enhancing connectivity based on quality infrastructure; strengthening supply chain resilience and enhancing industrial competitiveness; and promoting sustainable energy security and accelerating energy transitions.

### 3. Partners for Peace and Stability

Promoting an Indo-Pacific region that is free and open; strengthening security cooperation; working towards a world without nuclear weapons by strengthening cooperation on disarmament and non-proliferation; promoting the rule of law; and advancing the WPS Agenda.

#### ■ Statement by Prime Minister Kishida Fumio at the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation Co-Chairs Joint Press Occasion held after the end of the Commemorative Summit (excerpts)

The Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation has come to a successful conclusion. First of all, I would like to thank the Co-Chair of the Summit, President Joko Widodo, as well as the leaders and delegation members of each country.

We had productive discussions worthy of this historic milestone, and adopted a Joint Vision Statement and an Implementation Plan as outcome documents.

The Joint Vision Statement sets out the future direction of ASEAN-Japan relations and a new vision for cooperation. As the subtitle “Trusted Partners” suggests, it is the trust built over half a century that forms the foundation of our relationship.

Our vision is for a world where all countries can pursue peace and prosperity, uphold the principles of democracy, the rule of law, good governance, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. (Omission)

This 50th Year Commemorative Summit was an excellent opportunity for Japan and ASEAN to reflect on the progress we have made, to examine one another’s present situation, and to discuss our common future. Today, at the culmination of these efforts, I am truly pleased that together we have taken a new step forward into the next 50 years, powerfully demonstrating to the world a vision for future cooperation. It is my sincere hope that we can pass on this bond of trust to the next generation.



# Shinto Priest from Ukraine Inscribes Prayers for Peace

Kamisato Sugawara Shrine in Kamisato-machi, Saitama Prefecture, Japan.

Ukrainian native Umebayashi Tatiana came to Japan on the occasion of marrying and has served as *Gonnegi*<sup>1</sup> priest at Kamisato Sugawara Shrine in Kamisato Town, northern Saitama Prefecture, since 2020. When the invasion of Ukraine began, she was deeply distressed by the situation in her home country, and has been distributing *goshuin*<sup>2</sup> (red seals given to shrine worshippers) to pray for peace.

Hara Erika

Tatiana is from Rakhiv, which is in western Ukraine near the border with Romania. While working as a Japanese and English teacher at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, she met Masaki, a fellow Japanese teacher and current *guuji* priest (*negi* at that time) of the Kamisato Sugawara Shrine. They came to Japan in 2009 and married. While assisting with shrine duties, such as preparations for the *Hatsumode*<sup>3</sup> (first shrine visit of the New Year) period, Tatiana became interested in Shinto.<sup>4</sup> When she learned that non-Japanese could also become priests, in 2020 she took a Shinto priest training course at Kokugakuin University and earned her certification. That same year, she was appointed *Gonnegi*, Junior priest of Kamisato Sugawara Shrine by the Association of Shinto Shrines.<sup>5</sup> Since then, Tatiana has performed

many Shinto rituals and inscribed and distributed rare *goshuin* red seals in Ukrainian and English.

“In my priesthood training, I studied a wide range of specialized knowledge, from classroom lectures on Japanese history and classics to practical skills, including the ways of *saishiki*, which are the Shinto rituals. Thanks to this training, I now understand the meaning behind each movement in a ritual. At a shrine, a priest offers prayers at the request of visitors for things like successful entrance exams, safe childbirth, recovery from illness, and prosperous business. I’m very happy that some of them call on me to pray for them. Now, since I want to be able to write *goshuin* in Japanese, I’m taking a calligraphy class to practice.”

On February 24, 2022, when the invasion of her native Ukraine began, Tatiana kept a sorrowful eye on the war-torn devastation in her birthplace

via TV news reports. Although her family had been living outside Ukraine since before the invasion (her parents and brother are in the Czech Republic and her sister is married and in Poland), she has other relatives and friends who are still in Ukraine.

“I was shocked, saddened, and



Tatiana inscribes words of hope for peace in a *goshuin* book.



Umebayashi Tatiana

angered to see the destruction in the country where I used to live, and I felt a sense of frustration that I couldn't do anything about it from so far away here in Japan.”

With the desire to convey her prayers and support for the return of peace to her homeland, immediately after the invasion she wrote the messages “Glory to Ukraine” in Ukrainian and “Stand with Ukraine” in English on Kamisato Sugawara Shrine’s Ukrainian and English language *goshuin* seals, and posted them on the shrine’s official social



*Goshuin* from Kamisato Sugawara Shrine with the inscription “Stand with Ukraine” in English (left) and “Glory to Ukraine” in Ukrainian (right).



*Senbazuru* in the colors of the Ukrainian flag, dedicated by local residents with prayers for peace.



Tatiana performs a Shinto ritual in her role as *Gonnegi*.

media sites. Those who saw the post and shared her sentiments visited the shrine one after the other in search of these *goshuin*. At one point, so many visitors from far away had come that a long line formed all the way to the shrine’s *torii* gate.<sup>6</sup>

“Everyone offered warm words, such as ‘May Ukraine be at peace,’ and ‘May life get back to normal.’ Some were even in tears as they sought to shake my hand.”

In addition to the *goshuin*, the shrine also shows it wishes for peace by having visitors tie ribbons of blue

and yellow (colors of the Ukrainian flag) to bannisters on the shrine grounds and by decorating the shrine with *senbazuru* (1,000 paper cranes)<sup>7</sup> made of blue and yellow paper dedicated by local residents. The shrine has also been holding *chohai* morning prayers for world peace once or twice a week without fail since the year of the invasion, and there is still no end to the number of visitors to the shrine.

“We can only pray, but we will keep on praying until the day of peace comes.”

1. A general term for one who serves the gods at a Japanese shrine. Also known as *Shinkan*. The position of a priest engaged in all aspects of Shinto rituals, including prayer. There is no consistent structure as there are differences among shrines, but there are several positions, with the *Guji* at the top, followed by *Gonguji*, *Negi*, and *Gonnegi*. The Kamisato Sugawara Shrine is dedicated to Sugawara Michizane (845-903), who is known as the god of academics.
2. A seal imprint received by a visitor to a shrine or temple as proof of visit.
3. The custom of visiting a shrine or temple at New Year to pray for a safe and happy year.
4. A religion or belief unique to Japan. It began as nature worship in ancient times and developed into a belief in *ujigami* (guardian deities) with the addition of beliefs in people and other things. Today, beliefs and rituals centered on shrines are generally recognized as Shinto.
5. An organization that includes the roughly 80,000 Shinto shrines in Japan (this number is from the 2020 *Shukyo Nenkan* (“Religious Yearbook”), published by Japan’s Agency for Cultural Affairs).
6. The gate built at the entrance to a shrine that separates the Shinto world from the ordinary world. What is beyond the *torii* is the domain of the gods and is considered sacred.
7. A string of numerous origami cranes strung together. Customarily offered to shrines and temples, and made during prayer.

*Gravity and Grace*

Part of the exhibition

*Shinji Ohmaki: Interface of Being*

(November 1 - December 25, 2023)

The National Art Center, Tokyo, 2023

Photo: Kioku Keizo



## Magical Contemporary Art of Light and Shadow — Special Exhibition at One of Japan’s Largest Exhibition Venues

The Japan Cultural Expo 2.0 aims to build momentum for the upcoming Expo 2025 (World Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai), to support renewed interest in inbound travel to Japan, and to encourage further demand for domestic tourism. It also features a focus on “The Beauty and The Spirit of Japan,” promoting Japanese cultural arts and spreading awareness of their diverse and universal charms within Japan and around the world. This is a large-scale project with Japanese cultural facilities, arts organizations, and many others hosting and participating in a diverse range of projects and events. In this article, from among these participants, we will focus on the activities of the National Art Center, Tokyo.

Moribe Shinji

### Center for the international promotion of contemporary Japanese art

The National Art Center, Tokyo (NACT) in Roppongi is known for its unique appearance, which is designed as a beautiful wavelike glass wall. As a hub for the promotion of new expres-

sive forms, NACT offers one of the largest exhibition spaces in Japan (14,000 square meters) to showcase outstanding works of contemporary art, fashion, design, architecture, manga, animation, and other art forms from Japan and overseas. It also provides a venue for presentation to art groups and other organizations active

on a national scale, such as the Japan Fine Arts Exhibition<sup>1</sup> and the Nika Art Exhibition<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, the NACT focuses on educational and outreach activities, such as collecting art-related information and hosting symposiums and gallery talks.



Performance by Suzuki Ryu at the exhibition space of *Liminal Air Space - Time: Vacuum Fluctuation*, an installation in the exhibition *Shinji Ohmaki: Interface of Being*

Photo: Daido Hiroyasu



Designed by Kurokawa Kisho and Nihon Sekkei, Inc., the National Art Center, Tokyo opened in 2007

Photo: The National Art Center, Tokyo



*The Spinning Crocodiles*, Tamura Satoru exhibition (June 15 - July 18, 2022)

Photo: Kaneda Koza

## Large-scale installations gain attention

As part of the Japan Cultural Expo, since fiscal 2020 NACT has held special exhibitions in a variety of genres, including exhibitions of works by young artists. One of them is *Spinning Crocodiles*, Tamura Satoru, an exhibition which opened in June 2022 and attracted attention for its three-dimensional installations<sup>3</sup> of a large number of spinning crocodiles.

In November 2023, NACT held the exhibition *Shinji Ohmaki: Interface of Being* as part of the Japan Cultural Expo 2.0, which took over the initiatives of the Japan Cultural Expo. His installation works – a large vessel incorporating with intense light and a wavy thin fabric – were dynamically staged in an expansive venue with a ceiling height of eight meters and a

floor space of 2,000 square meters. Consequently, the exhibition created a magical world of intersecting soft light and shadow. The exhibition was accompanied by a dialogue event between Ohmaki and poet Sekiguchi Ryoko (with simultaneous interpretation from Japanese to English) and a dance performance in the exhibition space. At the exhibition venue, visitors were able to access explanations of the works in Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean on their smartphones via QR codes. A bilingual (Japanese/English) catalog was also produced. The exhibition attracted approximately 140,000 visitors, including more than 20,000 people from outside Japan. It was also featured in national and international art, design, and fashion magazines, particularly in the German and Italian media.

This exhibition can be viewed on

the NACT website, which also features an introduction to the *Universal/Remote* exhibition, which will be launched in March. (A bilingual Japanese/English catalog will be produced for that exhibition as well, related events will be held with simultaneous interpretation.)

Based on the results of the Japan Cultural Expo and Japan Cultural Expo 2.0, NACT will continue to explore ways to strengthen overseas information dissemination and introduce a Japanese/English audio guide system, with the overall goal of increasing the number of visitors from overseas. NACT's facilities also include a restaurant, cafes, and a museum shop, so visitors can expect to have fun if they stop by while sightseeing in Roppongi.

**The National Art Center, Tokyo website**  
<https://www.nact.jp/english/>

1. One of the Japan's largest public art exhibitions founded in 1907. Comprises five art faculties: Japanese and Western Style Painting, Sculpture, Craft Arts, and Sho (Calligraphy). Works by designated artists who became exempted from examinations required to display as well as awarded works are exhibited every year in fall at the National Art Center, Tokyo.
2. Public art exhibition founded in 1914. Consists of four divisions: Painting, Sculpture, Design, and Photography. Selected works are exhibited each September at the National Art Center, Tokyo. Works by Japanese entertainers, celebrities, etc., often receive a lot of attention.
3. A method of expression in contemporary art that has spread since the 1970s. Objects are installed indoors or outdoors to create a three-dimensional space. Some works incorporate video and audio, allowing viewers to experience the world of art by immersing themselves in the space of the work.



All photos: PIXTA

The Steller's sea eagle is one of the largest birds in Japan. It grows from about 85 cm to 1 m in length, with a wing span that can reach from about 2 m to 2.5 m. It migrates from eastern Russia along with drift ice to Hokkaido and northern Honshu (Japan's main island) for wintering, where it feeds on fish and seabirds. Steller's sea eagles are distinguished by a strong appearance, with a blackish-brown body, with white highlights about its wings and tail feathers, and yellow beak and legs. While in flight overhead or from a perch in a tree, they swoop down and catch their prey with their sharp claws. They build their nests in mixed coniferous and broad-leaved forests near shorelines and lakes.

The Japanese government has designated the species as a national natural treasure for its high scientific value, and also designates it as an "endangered species II" (species at increasing risk of extinction) because its population has been declining due to decreases in resources and nests caused by deforestation. Steller's sea eagles can be seen up close in more than a dozen zoos in Japan, and in Shiretoko, northeastern Hokkaido, and they can be observed in their natural habitat in winter (see pages 10-11).

HIGHLIGHTING

## Japan

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