

Art Exhibition for the Institute's 50th Anniversary



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We proudly celebrated two commemorative milestones this year: the 50th anniversary of the Japan Cultural Institute in Rome, established as Japan's first cultural institute overseas in December 1962, and the 400th anniversary of the departure of the 'Keicho' Diplomatic Mission to Spain and Italy headed by Tsunenaga Hasekura, which falls on 2013.

Inaugurating the series of celebrations hosted in association with the Embassy of Japan in Italy was the special exhibition "Art in Japan 1868-1945." Retracing the history of modern Japanese paintings and crafts through the Meiji Restoration to the prewar era, with 170 masterpieces from more than 50 museums and private collections, it was the Italy's largest exhibition of its kind since Taikan Yokoyama's "Esposizione d'arte giapponese a Roma" in 1930. The exhibition drew over 38,000 visitors over ten weeks.

People could appreciate the little known history of Japanese modern art, see how traditional Japanese art was influenced by Western art, and how Japanese aesthetics were retained while the art underwent change (photo on p.16).

Press Photos Exhibition Showing Life after the Disaster



From February 26 to March 16, 2013, we presented "Press Photos of the Great East Japan Earthquake" in collaboration with Mitsubishi Corporation, Asahi Shimbun Company, and the Embassy of Japan in France.

The exhibition showed Asahi Shimbun news photos of the disaster's aftermath in four chapters. Chapter 1 was "What happened?" with images of people in shock, taken right after the earthquake and tsunami. Chapter 2 titled "Fukushima" covered the nuclear plant crisis and the mass evacuation. Chapter 3, "Grief," taken some time after the disaster, showed the survivors' grief over their loss and their gradual return to normal life. "Hope" was Chapter 4, displaying people's tireless efforts toward recovery.

The graphic images of the destruction and the people surviving there drew strong reactions in France, attracting over 10,000 visitors during the three-week show. A gallery talk also explained the current status of reconstruction efforts. This exhibition enabled us to show the French public how Japan was recovering from the disaster and think about how we can continue to report on the survivors' lives.

Discussion on Energy Offers Insight into Japan and Germany's Future



In collaboration with the University of Cologne, we held a series of symposiums to address energy issues. The first symposium began with a keynote speech on energy saving and alternative energy resources by Hiroshi Komiyama. Nobuo Tanaka, the former Executive Director of IEA, and Hiroshi Tsukamoto, General Manager of the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation, presided over the second symposium that looked at Japan's energy policies. At the third symposium, Yotaro Hatamura and Masao Fuchigami, members of the Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power-Stations, discussed lessons learned from the crisis and future energy issues.

The German keynote speakers included a parliament member, an official from the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, and an expert from the Institute of Energy Economics at the University of Cologne.

The three symposiums stimulated a lively debate on issues ranging from an energy paradigm shift to visions of energy security in the future.

New "Cool Japan" with antlered Deer Dance

Accompanying the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Cultural Olympiad was held in the U.K. showcasing cultural events from many countries. For the finale, we invited the Oshu Kanatsuryu Dance Troupe from Iwate Prefecture to perform at the Mayor's Thames Festival in September.

Fourteen dancers performed the dynamic 'Shishi-odori' (antlered deer dance) on the bank of the River Thames as tens of thousands gathered for the festival's climactic carnival. While bearing two-meter-high 'Sasara' sticks on their backs, the dancers beat taiko drums and danced amid cheering spectators who even exclaimed, "Cool!" The dance is a long cultural tradition of the Tohoku region that was devastated by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The dance showed the British that there is much more to "Cool Japan" than just manga and anime. The dancers were also well-received in Oxford and Maidstone.



Photo: Adrian Snood

Multicultural Jazz Band Unleashes Asian Power



“Unit asia” is a jazz quintet from Asia featuring guitarist Isao Miyoshi, drummer Hiroyuki Noritake, and bassist Shigeki Ippon from Japan, along with a leading Thai saxophonist Koh “Mr. Saxman” and up-and-coming jazz pianist Tay Cher Siang from Malaysia. The band had played mostly in Asia until they played two concerts for us in Madrid and Barcelona in February 2013 as part of their first European tour.

The collaborative multicultural project combining live sets and cultural exchange ignited strong interest and acclaim in both cities. They received rapturous applause after an encore. The concerts were meaningful in many ways, providing an opportunity to promote Japanese culture in Spain and creating new gains beyond bilateral cultural exchanges. It was a pleasure to work closely with the Thai and Malaysian embassies in Spain to hold the concerts. We were also fortunate to receive outstanding publicity support from Casa Asia, a Spanish public diplomacy institution that highly praised this project.

Expressing Gratitude and Vowing Recovery through Music



The Sendai Philharmonic Orchestra (SPO) toured Russia to express Japan's appreciation for Russia's support after the Great East Japan Earthquake and to show how Japan is recovering. The performances provided an opportunity to confirm the bond that developed between Japan and Russia and deepened their friendship (photo on p. 13, article on p. 20). The tour was a great success, with each performance drawing a crowd of over one thousand people.

Among the guests were Russian parliamentarians and government officials from EMERCOM (Emergency Situations Ministry) that dispatched 160 search-and-rescue team members immediately after the earthquake. Also attending were children from an orphanage and a local school who had presented paper cranes for the disaster victims. Joined by a choir group from Miyagi Prefecture, SPO's heartfelt performance drew a resounding applause from the full-house audience.

The concert hall lobby displayed photographs, news articles, and footage of disaster recovery efforts, gathering keen interest. SPO members also visited the school where the children had made paper cranes and staged a joint performance with them.

Hungarians Entertain Fellow Hungarians with Rakugo



The first Rakugo Performance & Japanese-Language Workshop in Hungary was organized as a part of the JF Japanese-language course program. The performance consisted of lectures and demonstrations by Rakugo masters Sankyo Yanagiya and Saryu Ryutei, and Japanese-language students who showed their newly acquired skills.

After being coached directly by the masters on the final day of the workshop, the eight 'Yukata'-clad students delivered a 'Kobanashi' (short story) in Japanese on stage. Their comical gestures, facial expressions, and most of all, their earnest story-telling brought laughter, awe, and loud applause from the audience.

The two Rakugo masters concluded the program with expert performances. Their monologues depicted such vivid and humorous street scenes of the Edo period that even people who did not understand Japanese were roaring with laughter. In the words of Master Sankyo, "Rakugo is Japanese culture. It becomes meaningful when it's done in Japanese." Rakugo gave us an opportunity to enjoy Japanese culture and language.

Manga, Games, and Anime Songs Inspire Hope and Courage in Youth



Despite political turmoil, Egypt is seeing a surge of interest in manga, games and other Japanese pop culture, especially among the youth. To help this growing circle of fans celebrate their passion, we held "The Grand J-POP Culture Festival" on March 8, 2013.

With the help of many volunteers, the festival offered a broad selection of participatory activities. They included the country's first cosplay show, a Japanese-song contest, an exhibition by Egyptian manga fan groups, a portrait-drawing booth, a manga café serving 'Matcha' (fine powder green tea), and a cosplay costume rental service. Hironobu Kageyama from Japan gave an anime-song concert, the Middle East's first. Even with Japanese lyrics, his dynamic singing impassioned the crowd, showing that anime songs are indeed an outstanding part of Japanese culture.

The festival inspired the youth to start their own activities such as manga exhibitions and workshops.

Japanese Contemporary Art Spanning Four Decades



“Re: Quest—Japanese Contemporary Art since the 1970s,” an exhibition of Japanese art from the 1970s to the present, was held in Seoul, Korea (photo on p. 12).

Composed of 112 works by 53 artists, including Yayoi Kusama, Yoshitomo Nara and Takashi Murakami, whose art had not been extensively shown in Korea, the retrospective examined contemporary Japanese art from diverse perspectives. Comparisons were also made with Korean art from the same period, and postwar trends of Asian art were examined. Gallery talks by Tadasu Takamine, Kenji Yanobe and Makoto Aida attracted young people.

The show received considerable media attention nationwide, with a special program aired by MBC, one of Korea’s major broadcasting networks. The country’s three major daily newspapers also gave extensive coverage. The Seoul National University Museum of Art, our co-sponsor and exhibition venue, saw a record number of visitors for an exhibition.

Cultural Exchange between Japan and Indonesia through Film



On the occasion of the 25th Tokyo International Film Festival (TIFF) in October 2012, the Japan Foundation invited three Indonesian film directors, Garin Nugroho, Riri Riza and Edwin, to Japan to take part in the film festival’s “Indonesia Express,” the first special program focusing on Indonesian films in two decades since the Japan Foundation’s “Indonesian Film Festival” in 1993. The TIFF screenings led to three film-related exchange events in Jakarta in March 2013.

The first one was a tribute screening of the films by the three directors invited to TIFF. The second event was a lecture meeting about TIFF with two film specialists and Tetsuaki Matsue, a young documentary film director. The third event screened Matsue’s latest film that won the 25th TIFF Audience Award, *Flashback Memories 3D*, followed by his talk.

The three events attracted many young Indonesians. Matsue’s film had a strong impact on the audience with its novel, 3D imagery. His talk sparked a lively response, affirming the value of cultural exchange through film.

China Meets Erin!—Publication of the Special Edition for Chinese Students

We published a special edition of *Erin’s Challenge! I can speak Japanese.* via the People’s Education Press operated by the Chinese Ministry of Education (photo on p. 11). This workbook of studying Japanese is a revision of the Japan Foundation’s original edition published in 2007. Now geared for today’s young Chinese students, it was published in response to the shortage of second foreign-language study materials in secondary education in China.



By incorporating Chinese place names and family names and more exercises and activities, the workbook is suited for immediate use in the classroom. Erin visiting the Great Wall is an example of localizing the content. The included DVD shows the everyday life of high school students in Japan.

As a follow-up, we plan to use *Erin’s Challenge!* as a platform to make learning Japanese appealing to Chinese students. We will launch a Japanese-language course using the workbook for middle and high school students and donate workbooks to schools.

Creating New Values through Disaster Preparedness Initiatives



The massive flooding in 2011 has heightened interest in disaster management in Thailand. Seizing this opportunity, we undertook the JISHIN ITSUMO Project (photo on p. 13, article on p. 34).

The project centered around the exhibition, “Always Prepare: Living with Changes,” co-organized with the Thailand Creative & Design Center. It introduced Japan’s JISHIN ITSUMO Project, disseminating the know-how and means of coping with disasters gleaned from survivors’ experiences of the 1995 Hanshin Earthquake.

Also on display were flood disaster-training materials developed with Thai designers. The three-month exhibition brought in over 30,000 visitors and received substantial media coverage in Thailand.

Entertaining talks and workshops on disaster preparedness were also held together with schools, NGOs, TV stations, and other entities. We hope this project will have a substantial impact on improving Thailand’s disaster preparedness.

'Koto' Workshop for Philippines-Japan Friendship Month



The Philippine government designated July 23 as "Philippines-Japan Friendship Day." Expanding the celebration to the entire month of July and dubbing it "Philippines-Japan Friendship Month," the Japan Foundation, Manila organized a variety of cultural events in cooperation with the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines. The highlight was a concert tour by AKI & KUNIKO, a rare guitarist and 'Koto' player instrumental duo. Two workshops and five performances in several venues in Manila, Baguio, and Cebu attracted a total of 1,635 people.

The University of the Philippines College of Music, one of the concert venues, offered a 'Koto' course for about ten students taught by a Filipino instructor. At the pre-performance workshop for the students, AKI & KUNIKO demonstrated their unique duet techniques and held a talk on their original music before a teaching session. Fascinated by AKI & KUNIKO's extraordinary skills, the workshop students continued to practice their original pieces so they can someday play with AKI & KUNIKO.

Joint Art Project Enlivens Vietnamese Contemporary Art



Architect Tsuneo Noda, curator Hiroyuki Hattori, and artist Yuichiro Tamura visited Vietnam to take part in "Skylines with Flying People," an art project to invigorate Vietnamese contemporary art through cultural exchanges and sharing know-how. Coordinated by a Vietnamese curator, the project occupied our entire center where a number of makeshift studios were built based on Noda's designs. The artists stayed for a month and exchanged ideas with the curator to stage multiple exhibitions and Open Studios.

SOIL & "PIMP" SESSIONS, a Japanese jazz group that has gained worldwide attention for its aggressive music, gave a concert to mark the start of the Japan-Vietnam Friendship Year in March 2013. Many high-ranking Vietnamese government officials, including Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai and Culture, Sports and Tourism Minister Hoang Tuan Anh attended the reception. A huge crowd attended the live outdoor performance, marking a great start for the festive year.

Learning to Connect with Society through Kyogen



Since 1982, the Malaysian government has adopted its Look East Policy to seek to emulate the work ethics of Asia's economic success stories, and has sent 15,000 Malaysians to study or train in Japan. Marking its 30th anniversary, we held a traditional Japanese Kyogen performance "Laughter of 600 Years" by Kyogen actor Mansai Nomura. The actor is well-known nationwide for connecting his art to society, challenging contemporary works and movies while maintaining the most authentic traditional art of Kyogen, which he inherited.

The on-stage workshop taught basic Kyogen movements and techniques to local college students majoring in performing arts. They also worked as volunteer staff for staging the performance. Wide press coverage included a Japanese TV station.

Amid an abundance of Japanese products and information in modern Malaysia, centuries-old Japanese Kyogen elicited a passionate response from the audience.

60th Anniversary of Japan-India Relations



To celebrate the 60th anniversary of Japan-India diplomatic relations in 2012, we held over 120 events to deepen the friendship between the two countries. Exhibitions, stage performances, film screenings, and lectures were held in 15 major and provincial cities including Delhi and Mumbai. Many opportunities for cultural exchanges were provided.

One highlight was the "Creative Platform Series," a series of exhibitions at the Japan Foundation gallery exemplifying the two-way flow of cultural exchange. They featured Indian artists who were in Japan under an artist residency, a Japanese artist who worked while living in an Indian village, and the photo exhibition "Recovery" marking the two-year passing of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

We also reached out to areas which have little opportunity to enjoy Japanese performing arts. Opera Theater "Konnyakuza", Noriyuki Sawa Figure Theater, and 'Shamisen' and 'Nagauta' (folk song) concerts toured several cities in India.

National Symposium on Japanese Language Education 2012: Creating the Future

With the Melbourne Centre for Japanese Language Education, we co-hosted the inaugural national symposium on Japanese-language education in November 2012. The symposium was a direct response to a government report recommending the establishment of a national council for Japanese-language education, and was the first nationwide conference for primary and secondary Japanese-language teachers in 36 years.



The two-day symposium included panel discussions, keynote speeches by prominent educators, and more than 40 presentations from teachers and academics. The symposium was a resounding success: more than 300 people attended, seventy percent of whom were classroom teachers. Educators were able to share their frontline expertise developed over many years, and in keeping with the theme, "Creating the Future," participants were able to share ideas about future directions of Japanese-language education in Australia, which is among the world's most advanced.

Japanese Theatrical Gestures and Dance Moves by Puppets



Together with the Asia Society, we sponsored the Yumehina Puppet Company's tour to New York City and to Houston, Texas, where the local people have little exposure to Japanese culture. 'Hyakki Yumehina' is a unique performing art developed by the late puppet master Hoichi Okamoto, founder of the Hyakki Dondoro Company. Its performance style is distinctive by the use of life-size puppets and masks together with human actors--the puppeteers themselves. There are no spoken lines, and the story is told through music, movement and dance.

They put on two plays. The first one was Nekohime Kugutsu Mai (Cat Princess Dance), an entertaining performance inspired by a mythical cat monster in Japanese folklore. A cat and her kittens magically transformed themselves. The second play was Manjushaka (Equinox Flower) which likened the dismal, ephemeral life of a prostitute to the ominous equinox flower (Lycoris). She expressed her inner feelings and thoughts through stylized movement and dance.

The many questions from the audience after the performance showed their keen interest in Japanese culture.

A New Initiative: "Spotlight Japan"



Toronto's leading cultural institutions hosted "Spotlight Japan," a four-month Japanese cultural festival featuring a variety of events from January to April 2013.

As a central organizer, we prepared the program pamphlet and assisted with other promotional campaigns, screened the centerpiece *Cinema Kabuki* film, and held the "Ceramics for Daily Comfort: Design Exhibition," a "must-see" show according to a local magazine. The highly acclaimed *Cinema Kabuki* attracted a record audience at the Toronto International Film Festival's flagship theater. We also co-sponsored Oriza Hirata's robot theater, invited by a top Canadian theater company, and staged readings of Hirata's plays directed and performed by Canadians.

Many other events were initiated by Canadian organizers, such as three Japanese film retrospectives, Hiroaki Umeda dance performances, and Fujii Trio contemporary music performances with a rare percussion instrument.

Success of "Spotlight Japan" demonstrated the potential of a new, collaborative, and community-oriented approach to introducing Japanese culture.

A Tribute to Japanese Cinema's 100 Years



With legendary film studios such as Paramount and Universal celebrating centennials, 2012 was a special year for Hollywood. Japan's Nikkatsu film studio also marked its centennial this year and we celebrated by co-sponsoring "Salute to Nikkatsu, Nikkatsu at its 100th Anniversary" with the University of Southern California, famous for its film school. The three-day tribute in October screened eight films representing the studio's historical eras, including period films, gangster films, teen films, and "pink" films.

Vintage movie posters were also displayed at the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles. We also held two panel discussions with Naoki Saito (President & CEO of Nikkatsu) and Hideo Nakata (director of the horror film *Ring*), and American film experts. While reflecting on the studio's ups and downs and making comparisons with U.S. studios, the panelists discussed how Nikkatsu's liberal filmmaking spirit and environment helped overcome hurdles, fostered new talent, and led to international filmmaking.

Japan Pavilion at Mexico's Preeminent Art Festival



Feria de San Marcos is Mexico's largest and oldest annual festival held in the state of Aguascalientes from April to May. Originally a cattle fair, it has evolved from a farmers' market to a trade fair. Today, it is a vibrant cultural festival attracting eight million visitors every year.

Japan participated in 2012 as an officially invited country, and we opened the Japan Pavilion together with the Embassy of Japan in Mexico and Japanese companies in Mexico. The pavilion held diverse events including a Japanese doll display, a Tohoku region photo exhibition, tea ceremony and 'Budo' (martial arts) demonstrations, and Japanese food restaurants.

We saw 225,000 visitors during the three-week fair. Also, the Japanese music group Kizuna gave twelve outdoor performances, including one at the opening ceremony attended by the Japanese ambassador, the state governor, and an enthusiastic audience of over 10,000.

Japanese Culture Month in São Paulo



March 2013 was Japanese Culture Month in São Paulo titled, "Tradition is in Vogue: Rediscovering an Upbeat Japan." With the cooperation of the Consulate General of Japan in São Paulo, we held events appreciating Japanese traditional culture from a modern perspective.

There was a lecture, talk and exhibition by Jed Henry, a U.S.-based artist who creates video-game inspired Ukiyo-e (woodblock prints).

Another event had Sueko Oshimoto, a fashion stylist and costume designer living in the United States, giving a lecture, demonstration, and fashion show. By incorporating modern fashion elements in her kimonos, she explored new possibilities in fashion design.

We also had U.S.-based choreographer Kota Yamazaki, Mexican performer Diego Pinon, and two Brazilian dancers give a joint performance and workshop. They showed how far Butoh, Japan's original modern performing art, has come internationally.