

# ArtsJP

VOL. 9

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2025



The Japan Cultural Expo 2.0 serves as an information hub for foreign visitors who are interested in experiencing "The Beauty and the Spirit of Japan."



MIMOCA offers works by Genichiro Inokuma and other contemporary artists in a sleek, yet whimsical, setting

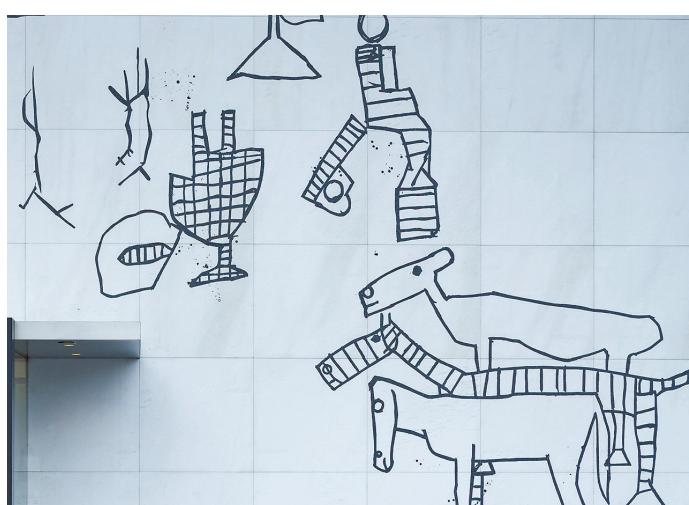
# A modern art museum that combines a novel take on architecture with childlike imagination

Creating a thriving hub for community and curiosity in the heart of the city



Visitors can see the facade of MIMOCA as soon as they step out of Marugame Station. YOSHIRO MASUDA

A massive mural designed by Genichiro Inokuma adorns the museum facade. TAKAO OHTA



MIMOCA's design incorporates natural light into its exhibition spaces. TAKAO OHTA

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**M**IMOCA, the Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art, was established in 1991 through the collaboration of Marugame and painter Genichiro Inokuma. The large, white canvas-like facade immediately catches one's eye upon exiting Marugame Station. Each of the three floors is accessible via exterior or interior staircases, and the layout is spacious. It also features wide spaces that are available for free use, including a library and indoor and outdoor public areas. This openness makes contemporary art feel accessible to anyone.

The construction of the museum was part of a project commemorating the 90th anniversary of the city of Marugame. In the 1980s, Kagawa Prefecture was advancing several major infrastructure and urban development projects prior to the opening of the Seto Ohashi Bridge connecting Okayama and Kagawa prefectures. Marugame was also moving forward with redevelopment plans around Marugame Station and other initiatives.

Marugame Castle, with over 400 years of history and the highest stone walls in Japan, has long been the city's symbol and pride. However, city officials thought that having a new cultural facility, in addition to the historic site, would make Marugame more comfortable and attractive to young people who would shape the city's future.

As discussions about constructing a museum gained traction, so did the idea of giving the museum a distinctive identity by showcasing the

works of Genichiro Inokuma, an internationally renowned contemporary artist who was originally from the region.

**A work of art**  
Inokuma insisted that the entire museum space should present itself as a work of art. To achieve this, Inokuma appointed architect Yoshio Taniguchi. As highlighted in Expo Inokuma, a MIMOCA exhibition (held from Apr. 12 to July 6, as part of the Japan Cultural Expo 2.0 initiative by the Agency for Cultural Affairs to promote Japanese culture and arts), Inokuma actively engaged in collaborations with various prominent artists and architects, including Taniguchi.

Taniguchi is a world-renowned architect known for designing the expansion of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Koichi Nakata, the artistic director and chief curator of MIMOCA, noted that the MIMOCA building showcases Taniguchi's commitment to detail. For example, many areas of the museum are paved with large, square stone tiles with vertical and horizontal joints that are all perfectly aligned with no irregularities, appearing as if a grid pattern were drawn three-dimensionally on

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all surfaces. Highlighting this astonishing precision, Nakata said, "This embodies Taniguchi's philosophy of eliminating visual noise so viewers can focus solely on artworks."

The stone used is a dark, natural slate. "Thirty years ago, when the building was completed, it was almost pitch black. But over time, the minerals have oxidized, causing some parts to turn grayish, with natural patterns emerging," Nakata said.

If any of the exterior tiles were to crack in the future and be replaced with new ones, there would be patches of darker colors, distracting visitors' eyes from the design of the architecture. "To prevent this, Taniguchi deliberately left spare slate tiles exposed on the rooftop after the construction was completed. This natural aging will ensure that if the tiles are needed for repair decades later, the finish will be seamless and natural," Nakata said.

Another key feature of this building is its effective incorporation of natural light.

"Traditional museums focus on how to protect artworks from external factors like natural light, but this building took the exact opposite approach." Some of the museum's exhibition rooms have glass walls and high ceilings with retractable louvers. It was Inokuma's intention to create openness and spaciousness by allowing abundant natural light to come in.

The massive mural adorning the facade, measuring approximately 12 meters high and 22 meters wide, was designed by Inokuma. It was created using a stone inlay technique. The white base stone tiles were carved exactly according to the design, which features horses and vehicles, and black stone was embedded into the grooves. Even details like the ink blots and intentionally distorted or misaligned lines were precisely crafted based on the design. The work of the highly skilled stonemasons is worth close examination.

"If the wall had been painted, it would have required restoration in less than 30 years," Nakata said. Thanks to this incredibly time-consuming and highly technical but extremely durable method, the mural remains as pristine as when it was first completed.

The friendly and playful design of the mural embodies Inokuma's wish for children to think, "I could draw that too," and to feel closer to and welcomed by the museum and art.

According to a booklet published in 2021 commemorating the 30th anniversary of the museum (which recounts the story of the museum's establishment and memories of Inokuma), when parts of the mural became visible during construction, the city hall received numerous calls from citizens reporting that someone had already graffitied the wall.

Inokuma received the news and burst into laughter, declaring, "It's a huge success!"

### Accessible to everyone

Inokuma also had a strong desire "to do something for the young people and children of his hometown." He deeply resonated with the vision of the then-Mayor of Marugame Shigetoshi Horie to build the museum right in front of the station, offered to donate approximately 20,000 of his own works and pledged his full cooperation in establishing the museum.

According to Nakata, the downtown location directly in front of the station was pioneering because "most museums in Japan at the time were built in suburban areas with a lot of greenery."

For Inokuma, who had lived in New York for many years, having a museum in the heart of the city was perfectly natural. He also believed that a museum should not be a formal place that requires visitors to straighten up, but rather a

place where people can casually drop by to receive fresh inspiration from art and feel their spirits lifted. For this, a location near the station, easily accessible to everyone, was essential.

To make the museum even more accessible to children, admission is free for those of high school age and younger. Supporting children's creative activities has been an integral part of the museum since its opening, and inside the building the Creative Studio offers workshops and hands-on experiences.

As part of activities collectively called Kodomo MIMOCA (children's MIMOCA), the museum started the full-scale implementation of a school program in April, following two years of pilot testing. This program invites all third-grade students from elementary schools in the city, including those on remote islands, to visit the museum.

"Only three schools are close enough for children to walk here, while students from the other 14 schools need to take a ferry or bus. We not only arrange transportation for the students, but also offer activities like exploring the entire museum in addition to viewing the artworks. It could be the first museum experience for many children, so we want to make it meaningful and enjoyable," Nakata said.

He emphasized the importance of continuing this kind of project for a long period of time to sow and grow the seeds of culture.

"If we continue this for 20 years, most of the adults who spent their childhood in Marugame will have visited the museum," he said.

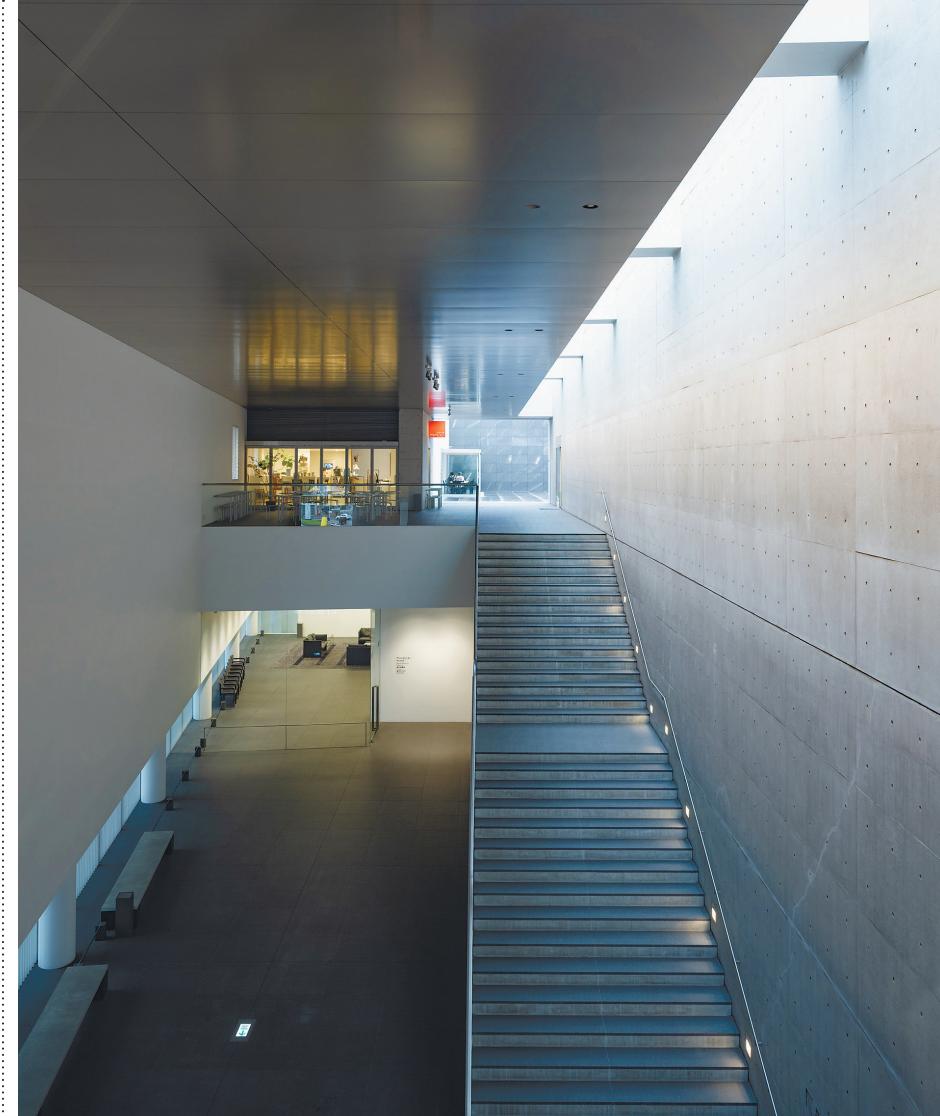
The museum's many efforts to provide children with quality art experiences are beginning to bear fruit. Nakata said that some of the children who had their first museum experience at MIMOCA started visiting the museum repeatedly when they were older. "Some went on to study art, art history or aesthetics at university. Some even became curators at this museum or other museums in Tokyo and other parts of Japan after completing internship programs here," he said.

Inokuma's commitment to fostering children's imagination is also reflected in the museum's name and exhibitions. While museums named after artists often use the term "memorial museum," Inokuma insisted it be named a "museum of contemporary art" based on his strong desire to constantly expose people, especially children, to the latest contemporary art and new forms of expression.

### Always something new

True to its name, MIMOCA continuously holds special exhibitions of diverse contemporary art from Japan and abroad alongside its permanent collection of Inokuma's works. With each new special exhibition, the museum also changes the contents of the permanent exhibition, selecting works from the Inokuma collection that relate to the special exhibition.

Nakata explained that the museum embraces a broad definition of contemporary art, encompassing artforms from design and architecture to fashion and music. MIMOCA's next special exhibition will feature Canadian artist Janet Cardiff, who creates sound installations.



MIMOCA's building showcases architect Yoshio Taniguchi's commitment to detail. TAKAO OHTA

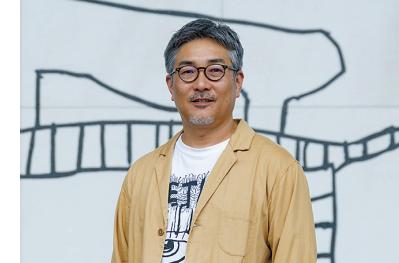


Children take part in the school program at the museum.

To exhibit Cardiff's work in Japan, four contemporary art museums across the country, including MIMOCA, collaborated to transport her work. "It's an effort to share the burden of soaring transportation costs to keep the 'window to the world' open," Nakata said.

He also stated that this approach will offer a new way of enjoying her sound installation, by comparing how the sound resonates in each of the distinct architectural spaces of the four museums.

Marugame is a city rich in history and culture, featuring Marugame Castle and traditional crafts like the Marugame *uchiwa* fan, as well as contemporary art that connects the region and the world. "We hope many people, both domestic and international, will visit MIMOCA and our city," Nakata said.



**Koichi Nakata, MIMOCA artistic director and chief curator**

Nakata was born in Tokushima in 1972. After working as a curator at MIMOCA for 15 years, he joined the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa. He returned to MIMOCA in 2022 to take his current position.

TAKAO OHTA

## Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art

Opened in 1991, the Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art was designed by Yoshio Taniguchi. The museum houses around 20,000 works by Genichiro Inokuma, donated by the artist himself, and hosts special contemporary art exhibitions, workshops and other events, with a particular commitment to children's free admission and creative education.

**Hours:** 10 a.m.-6 p.m. [No admittance after 5:30 p.m., closed on Mondays]\*

**Address:** 80-1 Hama-machi, Marugame, Kagawa Prefecture

**Admission:** ¥300 for general admission, ¥200 for college students.

Children under 18, Marugame residents age 65 and over and all visitors with a physical disability certificate are admitted free.\*\*



**Special exhibition:** Janet Cardiff: The Forty Part Motet

**Dates:** Through Feb. 15, 2026

**Admission:** ¥1,500 for general admission, ¥1,000 for college students

<https://www.mimoca.jp/en/exhibitions/janetcardiff1213/>

\*The museum may also close during the New Year holidays or between exhibitions. When a regular closing day falls on a national holiday, the museum may open on that day and close on a nearby weekday instead.

\*\*The admission fees listed here are for permanent exhibitions. Special exhibitions require a separate fee, which varies by exhibition. Please check the MIMOCA's official website for the most accurate and up-to-date information.

## INFORMATION

## ART, ARCHITECTURE SHAPED BY REGION

All across Japan are museums and art galleries that showcase works by renowned international and regional artists, while incorporating elements of the area's history and culture.

The Japan Cultural Expo 2.0 website features an Art Hotspots page where visitors can search for art facilities across the country that are participating in the cultural expo. The Japan Cultural Passport grants admission to about 30 participating facilities for seven, 14 or 21 consecutive days until Feb. 8, 2026.

Here, we introduce four art museums from different regions that are vital parts of their communities.



## Aomori Museum of Art

The Aomori Museum of Art in the city of Aomori features a striking modern building inspired by the excavation of the adjacent Sannai-Maruyama Site, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of Japan's largest archeological discoveries from approximately 5,500 to 4,000 years ago. The museum, designed by architect Jun Aoki, is composed of white cubic buildings and narrow channels that look like excavation tunnels.



At the heart of the museum is a large atrium called Aleko Hall, where backdrop paintings by Marc Chagall for the ballet "Aleko" are exhibited. This expansive space is also used for music, dance, theater and other performing arts, as well as museum events in the evenings.

The Munakata Shiko room inside the museum holds rotating exhibitions of works by Munakata four times a year. Munakata is an artist from Aomori known for his dynamic woodblock prints. Visitors can also view sculptures by contemporary artist Yoshitomo Nara.

**Address:** 185 Chikano, Yasuta, Aomori, Aomori Prefecture

**Hours:** 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m.

**Admission:** ¥700 for adults, ¥400 for college students, free for high school students and younger

**URL:** <https://www.aomori-museum.jp/en/>



## Iwami Art Museum

The Iwami Art Museum stands adjacent to the Iwami Arts Theatre, separated by a courtyard. This art complex, named Grand Toit, is a hub for arts and culture and a gathering place for citizens and art lovers. The building itself is a work of art. Designed by architect Hiroshi Naito, its walls and roofs are lined with beautiful, glossy Sekishu tiles in a distinctive red-brown hue unique to the Iwami region of western Shimane.



The museum's collection is eclectic, encompassing both Japanese and international works. The collection includes paintings, crafts, sculptures, photography and fashion.

Works by artists associated with Ogai Mori, a writer and military doctor from Shimane, are on display, along with pieces by Shimane's Hanae Mori, the first Asian designer admitted to the prestigious Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture.

The Grand Toit also includes "Muthea" (museum and theater collaboration) programs that feature performances and workshops inspired by ongoing art exhibitions.

**Address:** 5-15 Ariake-cho, Masuda, Shimane Prefecture

**Hours:** 9:30 a.m.-6 p.m. [Closed on Tuesdays]

**Admission:** ¥300 for adults, ¥200 for college students, free for high school students and younger. Foreign visitors can receive 50% off admission if they show their passports or residence cards.

**URL:** <https://www.grandtoit.jp/en/museum-en/>

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## Japan Cultural Passport Campaign

Aug. 5 (Tue.) to Feb. 8 (Sun.), 2026

7 days: ¥3,500 | 14 days: ¥6,000 | 21 days: ¥8,000

The Japan Cultural Passport is a digital pass that lets you explore about 30 cultural facilities nationwide with just a QR code on your smartphone. From cultural properties and modern art to science and technology, it eases access to a wide variety of attractions in a convenient and cost-effective way.

**Featured regions:** Kanto / Chubu / Kansai / Chugoku / Kyushu

**Highlights include:**

National treasure artworks, modern and contemporary Japanese paintings, innovative design and craftwork, samurai and ninja period drama sets, regional cultural heritage, seasonal gardens and displays of dinosaur skeletons and meteorites.

**Model Courses:**

Recommended routes are introduced on the official website at <https://www.japanculturalpassport.com/en/>

**Pass Overview**

- Only 5,000 available
- Valid for 7, 14 or 21 consecutive days
- One-time entry to each facility

## Himeji City Museum of Art

The Himeji City Museum of Art's building is a brick structure constructed in the late Meiji Era (1868 to 1912) that originally served as a military warehouse. This museum, located on the premises of the Himeji Castle World Heritage Site, is designated as a National Registered Tangible Cultural Property. The Nozato district east of the castle is known for its historical townscape and traditional *machiya* (town-houses), making the entire area appealing to both art lovers and history enthusiasts.

This museum holds approximately 5,000 works, including masterpieces of modern and contemporary art from Japan and abroad, ranging from paintings, sculptures, photographs, posters and crafts to swords.

The Keizo Kunitomi Collection, which Kunitomi, a local physician, donated to the museum, features modern French paintings by artists such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Camille Pissarro, Claude Monet, Georges Rouault, Maurice Utrillo and Henri Matisse.



**Address:** 68-25 Honmachi, Himeji, Hyogo Prefecture

**Hours:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. [Closed on Mondays]

**Admission (for permanent exhibitions):** ¥210 for adults, ¥150 for college and high school students, ¥100 for elementary and junior high school students

**URL:** <https://www.city.himeji.lg.jp/art/0000007420.html>

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## Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum

The Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum is adjacent to Nagasaki Waterfront Park, and has become an extension of the park by incorporating greenery into its buildings — including the museum rooftop, which offers a panoramic view of Nagasaki Port. The buildings, designed by Kengo Kuma and Nihon Sekkei Inc., straddle a canal.

Nagasaki is a port city with a history of active international and domestic cultural exchange, and this museum houses about 9,000 pieces, including a large collection of Spanish and Japanese art, contemporary art, photography, design and documentary materials, as well as conventional paintings and sculptures associated with Nagasaki, mainly from the Meiji Era (1868 to 1912) onward.



**Address:** 2-1, Dejima-machi, Nagasaki, Nagasaki Prefecture

**Hours:** 10 a.m.-8 p.m. [Closed on the second and fourth Mondays]

**Admission:** ¥420 for adults, ¥310 for college students and seniors, ¥210 for elementary to high school students

**URL:** <https://www.nagasaki-museum.jp/english>

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**Note:** Museums may close during the New Year's holidays or between exhibitions. When a regular closing day falls on a national holiday, the museum may open on that day and close on a nearby weekday instead. The admission fees listed here are for permanent exhibitions. Special exhibitions require a separate fee, which varies by exhibition. Please check each museum's official website for the most accurate and up-to-date information.

