

How Far Would You Go to See a Work of Art?

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October 27, 2022

10/27/2022 | By Fiona Tapp

In search of an elusive modern work of art situated in a remote part of Japan, I traveled for over 22 hours by air, landing in Tokyo and continuing on to Fukuoka airport. There I took a subway ride to Hakata Station where I jumped on the sonic express train to Usa in Ōita Prefecture. Finally, we took a short drive to a lakeside park and began our hike.

In Search of Sculpture

On our ascent up and around Yayama mountain, we pass Choan-ji, an ancient temple built in 1356 which is home to a well-kept flower garden. Further up, built into the side of a cliff is Tennen-ji temple. Now abandoned, the local people still maintain its thatched roof.

After passing under a *torii* shrine gate we come to Kyu-Sento-ji. Not much is left of the temple now, but this was once one of Kunisaki peninsula's greatest. We looked around to find stone Buddha statues and hundreds of monks' gravestones nestled in soft green moss. This site had to be rebuilt after a fire in 1968 which decimated many trees and most of the original buildings—but you can still see the remnants of what was here before.

We continued climbing to Itsutsuji Fudo and were finally rewarded with a glimpse of what we had hoped to find: one lone traveler upon a mountaintop. British artist Antony Gormley's "Another Time" sculpture is a life-size figure that stands frozen in time, forever surveying the Seto Inland Sea, and is well worth the trip.

Here since 2013, this guardian of the Kunisaki peninsula was cast in iron from the British artist's own body. He is part of a series of 100 figures standing watch in different locations around the world, all facing the sea. We stood next to him, in front of and behind him trying to capture his unique perspective overlooking Kunisaki. On clear days visitors can make out Honshu and Shikoku in the far distance.

After the exertions of the long journey and the hike it was refreshing to be still, just like the sculpture, and this, it seems, was the artist's intention.

"The history of western sculpture has been concerned with movement. I wish to celebrate the still and silent nature of sculpture. The work is designed to be placed within the flow of lived time."

– Antony Gormley



Sculptures from Antony Gormley’s “Another Time” series can be seen around the world, including this one in Birmingham, UK.

Of course, this modern watchman isn’t the first to protect this area. In fact, when making the ascent, I wandered around the former temple buildings of Kyu-Sento-ji and gazed at those ancient monks’ gravestones. In doing so my tour guide brought my attention to the marking for Ninmon, reputed to have been the first to introduce Buddhism to Kunisaki over 1,200 years ago. His final resting place here is said to be just one of the 28 temples he founded across the Kunisaki peninsula.

Although the trek was worth the reward, you don’t need to go quite so far into rural Japan to find astonishing works of art in and around Kyushu. Check out these museums, art galleries and installations to enjoy both modern and classic artwork in the region.

Art in and Around Kyushu

Mifuneyama Rakuen — A Forest Where Gods Live

4100 Takeo, Takeo-cho, Takeo-shi,

Saga, 843-0022

Find an ancient 3,500-year-old tree in the forests of Takeo before exploring the Mifuneyama Rakuen exhibition—which features 22 sensory art installations that use light and sound in the natural environment. There are both indoor and outdoor artworks displayed including giant light megaliths inside the ruins of an old bath house.

Created by international artistic collective teamLab, this woodland fantasy world is titled “A Forest Where Gods Live” and takes inspiration from the legend of Empress Jingu.

Kitsuki Castle Town

Kitsuki, Kitsuki-shi,

Oita, 873-0001

Why visit just one art gallery or museum when you can tour an entire town dedicated to Japanese culture?

Kitsuki Castle is Japan’s smallest castle and the city that surrounds it is a living museum. Without distracting modern eyesores like power lines and street signs, it maintains an authentic atmosphere which is further enhanced by visitors wearing kimonos, as some local businesses offer discounts to visitors in the traditional garment. Tour the many restored samurai family residences and learn about the Edo period. Visit the castle and at the small museum inside you can even try on samurai armor.

Beppu City Traditional Bamboo Crafts Center

8-3 Higashisoen Beppu-shi,

Oita, 874-0836

Bamboo has been crafted into works of art and artisan products for more than 2,000 years. Beppu City Traditional Bamboo Crafts Center celebrates this traditional artwork through both ancient and contemporary examples. With advance registration, you can also try your hand at creating your own bamboo crafts, including the option to try weaving a small basket called *shikainami*.

Shimada Museum of Art

4-5-28, Shimasaki, Nishi-ku, Kumamoto-shi

Kumamoto, 860-0073

This museum was opened in 1977 and helps to preserve Kumamoto's warrior culture. It features the personal collection of Shimada Matomi, an art researcher who has meticulously sourced and procured historical artifacts.

The arts and crafts on display here are from the Momoyama (1573–1603)-Edo (1603–1868) period. The museum also hosts special events and visiting collections throughout the year.



Fukuoka Art Museum

1-6 Ohori Koen, Chuo-ku, Fukuoka-shi

Fukuoka, 810-0051

Visit the city's popular art museum to see diverse collections from as early as 5000 B.C right up to modern works of art from around the world. Expect to admire a range of mediums including print, film, sculpture and paintings.

Keep an eye out for famous works from the likes of Andy Warhol, Salvador Dali, Yinka Shonibare and Kusama Yayoi, to name just a few.

A little further afield, you could choose to take the ferry to Amami and visit a museum of art dedicated to a popular Japanese artist, Tanaka Isson, who lived a frugal life immersed in nature and whose work was compared to that of Paul Gauguin.

Tanaka Isson Memorial Museum of Art

1834 Setta, Kasaricho, Amami-shi,

Kagoshima 894-0504

This museum celebrates the region's most famous artist, Tanaka Isson. Opened in 2001, the museum stands as a conservation of all his works, from his earliest sketches to his final masterpieces. Although he was hailed as an artistic prodigy at the age of 7 after winning a painting competition, his work didn't reach the masses during his lifetime, and he endured great poverty. After moving from Tokyo to Amami Oshima he was inspired by the region's beautiful nature and wildlife. Take a trip in his footsteps and perhaps you'll create your own artwork.

Whether you climb a mountain to see the view from Gormley's perspective, appreciate art through the ages at a city museum in Fukuoka, visit a living work of art at Kitsuki Castle, or search out local handicrafts, Japan is an art lover's treasure trove.

