

Visiting Oita ----- A Tale of Two Museums

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Oita(大分県) is one of the seven prefectures on the island of Kyushu (九州) which is the third largest and most southerly of Japan's four main islands and holds around 10% of the population in Japan. For people from Hong Kong, the entry point to the island is usually Fukuoka (福岡) which is only just over 3 hours' flight away. Oita prefecture is located on the eastern part of the island. On a recent visit to the area, I paid visits to two of the most interesting museums in the area.

The Comico Musuem

This museum is located in the town of Yufuin (由布院/湯布院). I last paid a visit there in 2019 and wrote about it in this column. The Comico Museum here, designed by renowned Japanese Architect Kengo Kuma (隈研吾) first opened its doors in 2017. The building is covered with dark metasequoia (dawn redwood) that has been charred in a controlled fire which makes the museum blend in perfectly with the surrounding



old Japanese houses. The clever use of water ponds and tall glass panels surrounding the reception area brings nature outside right into the museum itself. And the triangular roof of the museum corresponds almost exactly to the outline of the distant Mount Yufu (由布岳).

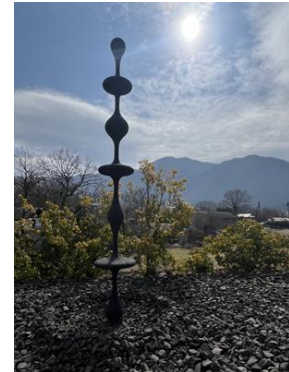
Since my last visit, the exhibits in the two galleries in the main building have been changed to those by Yayoi Kusama (草間彌生) whose pumpkin line of artwork would not be unfamiliar to people in HK. In fact, back in 2022, the M+ Museum in HK held the largest retrospective of her works in Asia outside Japan and was a very popular cultural event in Hong Kong then.



There is now also a new building (since 2022) that houses some interesting works. I am particularly impressed by the work by Tatsuo Miyajima (宮島達男) called Time Waterfall where digital numbers came down a vertical video wall like the flow of a waterfall. Standing there watching it, one gets the feeling that this work is a symbolic representation of what human life is all about ---- all our grades, wealth and achievements are all rushing by us in one relentless, unstoppable and irreversible

direction towards oblivion. The effect is further accentuated by its being juxtaposed against a quiet and cyclically changing nature outside the window in the background.

The outdoor gallery on the top floor now has a completely new look . There is this signature huge puppy by Yoshitomo Nara (奈良 美智) that everyone just loves. But the installation that is really impressive is the one called Ether by Kohei Nawa(名和 晃平) which is a 3-D stainless steel model of a big drop of liquid slowing falling to the ground . There is even a small crater- like effect at the base of the sculpture. Photographs and words simply cannot convey the full (almost monumental) effect of the piece ,especially on a good sunny day with the sculpture's black shiny surface reflecting sunlight. And one cannot help but marvel at the artist's ingenuity in using such hard material to present something so gentle and malleable like a water drop's descent from heaven. It is no wonder that Nawa's series of Ether sculptures have been installed in various part of the world ---- Paris, USA and even one in the water-front in Wuhan (武漢) in China.



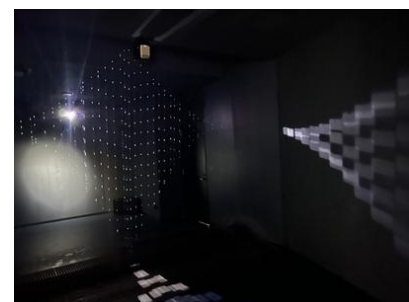
Art Museum of Nature and Human Non-Homogeneity (自然美術館と人間の非均質性)

The Art Museum of Nature and Human Non-Homogeneity is really in the middle of nowhere , being 25 minutes drive north along the coast from the town of Bungotakada(豊後高田市) on the Kunisaki Peninsula (国東半島) of Oita. However, if you are in the area , this is a museum, housed in a seaside park with wonderful nearby sea views, that must not be missed .

It is not a big museum, with only 3 small exhibition rooms offering a largely interactive experience for visitors . The first room has numerous small circular windows on the roof to let in sunlight. The windows were opened and closed in an irregular dancing fashion in syn with music. With artificial smoke being periodically introduced into the room , it creates a very surreal experience for the viewers Needless to say , this installation needs to be enjoyed when the sun is shining (or during a clear full moon night!) . Well ,this room is called the Sun and Moon Room , you see.



The second room is called the Sea room. It is a very dark room with a water curtain in the middle of the room and a light source at the back With the constantly moving water droplets reflecting the dancing light , various mesmerizing light patterns are produced. The viewer can also



participate in influencing the dancing light patterns by putting their hands into the water curtain. We all had a lot of fun playing with it .

The third room, called the Forest Room, is a generative artwork in which animations are generated and constructed using computer algorithms in a cylindrical space. The animations are generated according to an algorithm that also reflects the wind and direction information around the museum. The theme of the animation is on birth, selection of life, and evolution of life. Music is produced by two rotating super-directional speakers independently changing their movement depending on where the viewer stands.

