

Setouchi Triennale: A Celebration of Art and Community

The Setouchi Triennale is an international art festival that, as its name suggests, takes place every three years. Established in 2010, the event is held across the Seto Inland Sea region, with the island of Naoshima and the ports of Takamatsu (in Kagawa Prefecture) and Uno (Okayama Prefecture) among the major venues. The program includes exhibitions, performances, and many other events, and the line-up of participants always features a number of internationally renowned artists.

Plans for the Triennale began taking form in 2006, when the Kagawa prefectural government joined forces with the Benesse Art Site Naoshima project to promote the Inland Sea region's art, crafts, and architecture to an international audience. Five years later, the inaugural festival was held on islands that were once prosperous trading outposts but had in modern times been hit hard by depopulation and a lack of economic opportunities. The effort to revive these communities through art also included shining a light on the many historical and cultural sites on the islands, which had rarely benefited from tourism in the past.

The Triennale's focus on place and the aim of having the festival work for the benefit of local communities inspired an emphasis on site-specific art, meaning art created specifically to be viewed in a certain place. Many of the artworks exhibited during the festival are produced together with the residents of the host locations, and some of the participating artists return to the Inland Sea region regularly to work and interact with the local people. For many residents, their town, village, or island's association with the international art community has become a source of pride. The festival has also brought tangible benefits to the region, including facilities such as public restrooms a bathhouse, a Shinto shrine, and ferry terminals that are artworks in themselves.