

Grassroots Preservation for an Industry in Decline

The Mosaic Tile Museum is located in the town of Kasahara, an area famous for tile production. During its heyday in the mid-1900s, Kasahara had over 100 tile factories and supplied the majority of the domestic market.

The history of ceramics production in Kasahara stretches back some 1,300 years, but it was only in the twentieth century that ceramicists in Kasahara began to focus on making tiles. Following World War II, the reconstruction efforts created a demand for tiles, and the town's economy boomed. This was followed by a second golden age in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when exterior tiles were used in the construction of high-rise buildings. However, as the twenty-first century approached, the industry was hit hard by a combination of changing lifestyles, the emergence of new building materials, and competition from overseas producers.

Around the turn of the century, many twentieth-century mosaic tile installations were at risk of being destroyed as the aging structures they occupied were scheduled for demolition. Under the direction of the Kasahara Chamber of Commerce, individuals in Kasahara began acquiring or salvaging the mosaic works. Discussion began about where to house and display these distinctive artifacts. Despite being competitors, several local tile, trade, and clay companies came together to support the project. The Mosaic Tile Museum is the result of this collaboration. The museum not only preserves the physical tileworks themselves but also helps to support the tile industry. Tile-making workshops are held at the museum, and its second floor has sixteen showrooms that showcase the decorative possibilities of tile.