

Suzu Theater Museum “Ark of Light”

The memories of a town come to life at this folk museum that uses art to connect visitors with the history of Suzu and the lives of its residents. This remote city on the furthest tip of the Noto Peninsula was once a busy trading and fishing port. Train services to Suzu stopped in 2005, and while agriculture and fishing are still the main industries, over time, younger residents have moved to larger cities, and more than half of the local population is now over the age of 60.

Many elderly residents live alone in large homes with storehouses full of folk tools, furniture, and paraphernalia that have been left untouched for generations. These items would usually be discarded as the owners moved away or died. Younger people rarely want their grandparents’ old furniture and effects, and the stories around them are being lost.

The museum was established for the second Oku-Noto Triennale in 2021, to save the area’s valuable folk items and preserve the stories of Suzu’s older citizens. Volunteers interviewed the owners as they collected the unwanted items.

Eight artists were asked to repurpose these prosaic items and the stories behind them to communicate Suzu’s history to a new audience through installations and videos. Many of the items date from the seventeenth through early nineteenth centuries. The objects range from red lacquer dishes to sake barrels, fishing nets, Suzu ware ceramics, *nabe* pots, weaving looms, and even televisions from the 1960s.

The museum is housed in the gymnasium of a closed elementary school—another casualty of the area’s depopulation. The space has been divided into zones loosely themed around folklore, anthropology, and history. Visitors walk around and even through some of the artworks such as the towering shelves of red lacquerware in the installation “Drifters,” becoming immersed in Suzu’s history.

Rendezvous Forest by Okawa Yuki

Artist Okawa Yuki covered disused *kiriko* lantern festival floats with scraps of colorful fabric. Her aim is to capture the vibrant atmosphere of Suzu’s festivals, where people gather to share ideas and experiences. Long strings of knotted fabric from second-hand

clothing resemble the vines and leaves that grow over abandoned houses in the area, creating a forest of memories.

Drifters by Obi

Obi is an art collective working across the fields of art, architecture, and video. They gathered hundreds of sets of *gozen*, red lacquer dinner sets used for home banquets. The sets were used for entertaining guests, especially during festival periods when friends, relatives, and neighbors would call on each other. Visitors are surrounded by towers of shelving stacked high with red lacquerware, creating a powerful experience of local hospitality and the weight of tradition.

Standing Still Quietly by Kuno Ayako

Metalwork artist Kuno Ayako creates intricate metal sculptures to draw the viewer's attention to small details. She gathered old farm tools, from wooden ladders to rakes and hoes, slotting miniature metal houses and townscapes into the cracks and crevices between the items. She uses the discarded tools as borrowed landscapes, lit with cinematic spotlights to give the items a new role.

Peeking, Looking by Takenaka Miyuki

An installation incorporating translucent materials, light, and shadow was inspired by a journal found in one of the storehouses in Suzu. Artist Takenaka Miyuki depicted memories written in the journal with recycled items from daily life, clustered around a light-filled, translucent hut. Pages and paraphernalia suspended inside the hut hint at the journal author's thoughts, without revealing their details.

The Ocean of Afterglow by Nanjo Yoshitaka

The largest work at the museum is a sand pit strewn with the remnants of an old fishing boat, a piano and glass balls once used to keep fishing nets afloat. Artist Nanjo Yoshitaka considered the environment of Suzu in terms of its history and fishing heritage, bringing in sand dug from the ancient stratum of the area. Wave patterns and hand-written notes found in storehouses are projected on the sand. Nanjo was inspired by the idea that memories remain, even as the times and circumstances change.

Vowel / Rumbling of the Sea by Hashimoto Masaya

Working primarily in clay, artist Hashimoto Masaya draws on Suzu's history as a center for pottery and ceramic tiles. He collected tools from the site of a former tile factory to

create clay objects that express the connections between cultural history and the natural world. Clay pieces are arranged along the floor of a corridor, drawing the viewer from the darkened museum interior toward the light filtering in from outside. The pieces resemble pebbles washed ashore or fragments of whalebone, with the familiarity of elements shaped by hands or tools.

Soilstory by World Dirt Association

Working in mixed media, this art collective from Japan and Singapore researched *aenokoto*, a form of private worship that has been handed down in farming families of the Oku-Noto region for generations. Each winter, families hold a ritual to thank the deity of the rice fields and welcome them into the home to rest while the fields are fallow. In spring, there is another ritual to pray for a bountiful harvest and to send the deity back to the rice fields. Each family's practices are slightly different and rarely communicated with others, though in recent years some rituals have been opened to observers to help preserve the tradition. The artists interviewed local people about their own experiences of the ritual, creating an installation of ceremonial objects and videos.

The Missing Shade 59-1, Seascape Suzu, Untitled, by Miyake Saori

A small, dark room reveals elements of Suzu's seafaring past through the remnants of a ship, photographs, video, and projection. Artist Miyake Saori's photograms of salt crystals are projected into the room, and viewers can appreciate the sea as an element of life in Suzu, from the vast seascapes to the smallest salt crystals. The ship may have been wrecked by the power of the sea, or just neglected by history.