

Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0 – Volume 7

~ At the beginning of 2023: reflecting on the many Japanese active in the arts and culture ~

6 January

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Did you have a good start to the new year?

In keeping with Tokyo's calendar, I had a six-day break over the end of the old year and the start of the new one. I visited the Hunter Valley for two days, and for the first time in my life, I experienced New Year in the middle of summer. I feel my spirit was healed by spending time in the great outdoors in touch with nature.



I hope 2023 is a wonderful year for you all.

During my break, I looked back over photos taken since I arrived in Sydney in September.

I kept being drawn to photos of the many art-related and cultural events that I was invited to attend. Sydney is a city that fosters a rich multiculturalism, and looking at these images, I was reminded of the active contribution many Japanese people make. I myself am encouraged by this. Respect for diversity and tolerance of others are the fundamental elements that make it easy for outsiders to become integrated into Australian society.

While it is not possible to write about all the Japanese who are active in the cultural arena, allow me to introduce a few to you.

Firstly, the Art Gallery of NSW.

The Art Gallery's new building opened on 3 December and was widely covered by the local media. In addition to the newly built structure, the bold vision of leaving the old oil tank in situ on the lowest level of the basement and turning it into a contemporary art gallery received much

attention (only one pillar in the tank was replaced). Just before the opening, I met with the architects responsible for the design, Ms SEJIMA Kazuyo and Mr NISHIZAWA Ryue of SANAA architects, and I was given a look inside the building. Having utilised the existing shape of the land as much as possible, the floors are not flat, and when I entered the building, I became strangely disoriented as though I had lost my sense of balance. Highlights include the impressive mural by MURAKAMI Takashi and the sculpture by KUSAMA Yayoi. This building is highly regarded locally and certain to become a new Sydney landmark. I heard that there are Japanese language tours by volunteer guides and I hope to report to you about that in future.



Next, ikebana. In November, I was invited to Ikebana International's Christmas event. On the day, Ikebana International members from the various schools of ikebana, including Ms Hiroko Prado, created wonderful flower arrangements. There was also a presentation by a specially invited lecturer. I thought that I should study the names of flowers in English ahead of the event. Perhaps it was the fact that so many local flowers were mentioned, but even when I saw the Japanese names, I couldn't understand all that well!



Turning to sculpture. I was invited to the “Sculpture by the Sea” exhibition. The exhibition consists of sculptures displayed along the coastal walk that stretches from Tamarama Beach to the southern end of Bondi Beach. I commend Mr David Handley for his dedication organising the exhibition. At this year’s event, the works by Ukrainian sculptors received particular attention. Out of the 108 sculptures on display, nine were by Japanese sculptors, and I had the pleasure of inviting one of the artists, Mr USHIO Keizo, to my official residence. He kindly gave me practical advice such as what positions would work if I were to place a sculpture somewhere.



Coming to the tea ceremony, I received an invitation to Urasenke Sydney Association’s regular “chakai” tea meeting at the Royal Botanic Garden. Both my wife and I attended wearing kimono. Cr Robert Kok of the City of Sydney also attended with his wife, and we participated in the same tea ceremony.



In the world of music, I attended a concert by Strathfield Symphony Orchestra. Together in the company of Cr Karen Pensabene, Strathfield Deputy Mayor, I was swept away by the performance which was conducted by Dr Sadaharu “Sada” Muramatsu and featured the very popular Ms Aiko Goto, violinist with the Australian Chamber Orchestra (ACO).



Here in multicultural Australia, I am greatly encouraged to see many Japanese active in the field of arts and culture. I renewed my determination that this consulate will support them as much as it can, in the hope that such support might be of some assistance, no matter how small.

Having looked back over the photos taken since my arrival, the new-year break gave me a new sense of energy.

I ask for your ongoing support during 2023.

(Ends)