

Para-Art Adds Color to the Towns

To raise awareness of the creative work of people with disabilities, an initiative called "Town Art Gallery" has been launched across Ehime. A total of 100 paintings by "para-artists", artists with disabilities, are currently on display at 32 locations, including restaurants and public facilities. The exhibition will run until February 28 of next year.

This initiative is part of the "Para-Art Ehime 2026" festival, a prefectural project celebrating the art and culture of people with disabilities. A diverse range of venues, including financial institutions, hotels, and cafes in the cities and towns of Niihama, Matsuyama, Tobe, and Ozu, are participating. A dedicated website provides information about the artists and the host venues, while also sharing the stories behind the works, such as "an expression of a moment that brings peace of mind" or "a wish for a future free from war and conflict."

Visitors can also participate in a digital stamp rally by scanning QR codes placed at each venue. Depending on the number of stamps collected, participants can enter a prize draw to win items such as merchandise featuring the work of Niihama-based artist Yoshinari Ishimura.

At the entrance to "Yururi Cafe Yumeya," located in the basement of the Ehime Prefectural Government's Annex 1, two pieces are currently on display—including "Strawberry Milk" (by an artist named Mofu), which features a charming depiction of a girl and strawberries. After finishing their meals, some customers paused to take a closer look, leaning in to examine the delicate brushwork.

Besides this prefectural project, this cafe also hosts a rotating monthly exhibition of works by para-artists. Koki Ogata, who oversees the art exhibitions, remarked, "Through this prefectural initiative, I've had the chance to discover new artists. I invite everyone to come and see these diverse works, which span a wide range of styles and age groups."

The project's website also hosts a monthly "My Favorite Art Election," where visitors can vote for an "MVP" from among 20 featured artworks every month.

(October 21, Ehime Shimbun)

A Blue-Eyed Doll Returns to its Donor's Descendant

"Francetta," one of the "friendship dolls", commonly known as "blue-eyed dolls", sent from the United States to Japan in 1927 as "messengers of peace" has returned to the U.S. state of Indiana. On October 16, the doll was reunited with a descendant of the person who originally sent it. This marks the first time Francetta has returned to the state, a homecoming nearly a century in the making.

About 12,700 dolls were donated to kindergartens and elementary schools throughout Japan. During the Pacific War many were destroyed by being stabbed with bamboo spears or burned, as they were considered "enemy dolls". Currently, only about 340 remain throughout Japan. In 1927, 58 dolls were sent to the US as a gesture of appreciation, one doll from each prefecture or region in Japan. The whereabouts of 47 of those returned dolls have been confirmed.

The friendship dolls were sent to Japan by a private organization in an effort to foster goodwill between the two nations, at a time when anti-Japanese sentiment was rising in the U.S. due to an influx

of Japanese immigrants. (The 1924 Immigration Act restricted the number of immigrants and banned immigrants from Asia.) It is rare for one of these dolls to be reunited with a descendant of the original donor. The reunion took place during the opening ceremony for an exhibition on the 100-year history of U.S.-Japan doll exchanges, held at the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Bloomington, Indiana.

Based on records kept at Akehama Elementary School in Seiyo City, Ehime, where Francetta was preserved, Associate Professor Arakawa of the Faculty of Anthropology at Indiana University identified the original donor as Frank Jordan, a resident of Indianapolis. He subsequently tracked down Leslie Newhouse, aged 77, a great-granddaughter of Jordan's younger brother.

Upon seeing Francetta displayed inside a glass case, she was visibly moved, repeatedly exclaiming, "Wonderful!" and adding, "I can't find the words to describe it." She sent a message to the children at Akehama Elementary School: "Thank you for loving Francetta." The exhibition also features five "return-gift dolls", including one named "Miss Shimane".

(October 18, Ehime Shimbun)

Matsuyama City Station Plaza Opens! Open-Air Lawn

An event celebrating the completion of the Iyo Railway Matsuyama City Station (Shieki) Plaza was held on October 3rd, drawing large crowds eager to enjoy stage performances, a market, and more. A new "community plaza"—featuring rest areas and a natural lawn—has also opened to the public. The space is expected to serve as both an improved transport hub and a catalyst for revitalizing the city center.

The ceremony began shortly after 10:00 a.m., signaled by the whistle of the "Botchan Train." Children from the Ehime Children's Choir enlivened the atmosphere with a performance of the "Matsuyama City Song." Mayor Katsuhito Noshi addressed the crowd, stating, "Thanks to all of you, this once-in-every-50-years urban development project is complete. I hope this becomes a place where people can connect." The chair of the executive committee for the plaza's development added, "While cherishing the memories created here in the past, I hope we can pass this space on to the new generation that will shape the future of Matsuyama."

A stage was set up in the community plaza, where children showcased dance performances and other acts.

Food trucks were also on-site. One man, who came to watch the children's dance performances, remarked with a smile, "The open-air atmosphere and the scent of the lawn are wonderful. It was a great experience for the children, too."

Development of the station plaza began in 2022. In 2024, bus terminals were consolidated into the eastern rotary, while the western rotary was designated for private vehicles and taxis, with restrictions placed on general traffic. The city tram stop was relocated closer to the suburban railway terminal to improve the convenience of transfers.

The area previously occupied by tram tracks and roadways has been transformed into a community plaza and pedestrian walkways. (October 3rd, Ehime Shinbun)

Saplings Planted by the Emperor and Empress at the National Tree-Planting Festival

On October 15, a memorial tree-planting event took place at "Kutani Fureai-rin"—a prefectural forest located in Kutani-cho, Matsuyama City—to plant saplings, including those personally planted by the Emperor and Empress during the 76th National Tree-Planting Festival held in Ehime this past May. Approximately 80 participants, including local elementary and junior high school students, forestry professionals, and municipal officials, planted Japanese cedar (sugi) and Japanese cypress (hinoki) saplings, embodying the hope of passing on a lush, vibrant forest to the next generation.

Six tree species were planted by the Emperor and Empress during the festival's commemorative ceremony. Ehime Prefecture Governor Tokihiro Nakamura planted a Japanese cedar and Prefectural Assembly Chairman Kazuhisa Matsuo a Japanese cypress. The planting site is located next to the Japanese cedars planted 60 years ago by Emperor Showa and Empress Kojun during the previous National Tree-Planting Festival. Four of the six species, camphor(kusunoki) sawtooth oak (kunugi) tachibana (a native citrus) and tokiwa-baikatsutsuji (an evergreen azalea), were planted at various sites in Ehime.

The trees planted during the festival 60 years ago were harvested to be used—for instance, as benches and planter covers—for this year's festival; new saplings were then planted in the spots where the original stumps remained. Additionally, 200 Japanese cypress saplings—previously used for a tree-planting experience at the Sumitomo Group's pavilion for the Osaka-Kansai Expo—were donated for the event. About 30 students from Sakamoto Elementary School and Kutani Junior High School carefully covered each sapling with soil. A student said, "I planted this with the hope that it will still be here 100 years from now. I'd be happy if it grows big and eventually gets put to use. Participating in this event made me want to cherish our forests even more."

(October 15th, Ehime Shinbun)