



The second gallery, formerly used as a liquor storehouse now showcases a permanent display of over 200 items from its collection, Tezen Museum, Izumo ©Sophie Richard

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture

Sophie Richard, France / Great Britain

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture



Izumo Taisha, believed by many to be Japan's oldest Shinto shrine ©Izumo Taisha



Izumo Kagura, Shinto theatrical dance of the region ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation



Takatsu River, Masuda ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation

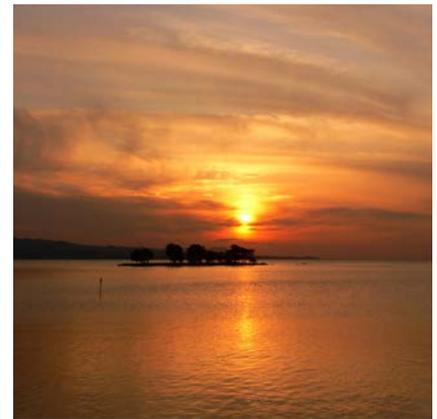
- Motivation** Shimane Prefecture in Western Honshu is rich in history, art, crafts, and natural beauty. However, not directly accessible by the shinkansen bullet train, it can be overlooked by visitors, in particular those from overseas. Inspired by the region's heritage as well as by its somewhat remote location, this writer decided to explore its museums, a subject she has been researching for some years.
- Objective** This research considers what the prefecture offers in terms of museums, including their relevance and accessibility for international visitors. This was done by visiting a selection of public institutions as well as some smaller, private museums, meeting with curators in each venue for interviews. The journey started in Matsue, the capital of Shimane Prefecture, and included several stops before ending in Masuda.
- Context** There is a remarkable number of museums in Japan. Disseminated all over the country, they are ideal venues to discover the culture, history, and dynamism of a specific region. Yet museums can be difficult to navigate: their sheer number can appear bewildering to visitors and the language barrier can be an issue. Therefore, an informed introduction to a selected number of venues will prove beneficial.

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture



*Matsue Castle ©Shimane Prefecture
Tourism Federation*



*Lake Shinji, Matsue ©Shimane
Prefecture Tourism Federation*

317

The prefecture of Shimane, on the shores of the Sea of Japan, is rich with cultural and historical treasures. Away from the main tourist routes, the area is also home to one of Japan's earliest Shinto shrines, one of the country's best-preserved feudal castles, and several interesting museums.

This essay introduces three of them, located in the cities of Matsue, Izumo, and Masuda respectively. Every one of these sites owns a collection of works that is worth seeing, and which is displayed in a distinctive setting characteristic of its time, namely the Edo period, the late 1970s and the early 21st century. Each of these venues affords visitors a rewarding yet entirely different museum experience.



*Patrick Lafcadio Hearn (Koizumi
Yakumo), 1850-1904
©Lafcadio Hearn Memorial Museum*

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture



417

Former home of Lafcadio Hearn,
Matsue ©Lafcadio Hearn Memorial
Museum

The pleasant city of Matsue sits on the shore of Lake Shinji and its castle was designated a National Treasure in 2015. Alongside the moat, a street lined with samurai houses harbors a handful of museums. Two of them are dedicated to the memory of the city's most famous resident, the 19th century Japanophile Lafcadio Hearn – his former home and the nearby Memorial Museum are both small yet very evocative of his fascinating life. A further museum, The Tanabe Museum of Art is a private institution whose collection is centered on ceramics used during tea ceremonies.



View of the gallery ©Lafcadio Hearn
Memorial Museum

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture



The Tanabe Museum of Art, Matsue
 ©The Tanabe Museum of Art



View of the lobby
 ©The Tanabe Museum of Art



View of the gallery
 ©The Tanabe Museum of Art

Established in 1979 by Tanabe Choemon, the museum preserves works of art that have been acquired by the Tanabe family over 23 generations, since it was part of the samurai class in the Edo period. Reminiscent of this heritage are the traditional gate and walls encircling the property, yet, past the entrance visitors discover a modern structure with a sloping steel roof and a white facade. The building is the work of the architect Kikutake Kiyonori, one of the founders of the Japanese Metabolist group, who went on to design several museums, including the Edo Tokyo Museum (1993) and the Kyushu National Museum (2005). In Matsue, he created a sober structure that remains invisible from the street. The peaceful interior, where two floors covered in blond wood are linked by a long ramp, an indoor stone garden, paper lamps, and a rotating display of ikebana all add to the elegant atmosphere. The display is pleasantly uncluttered, with glass vitrines containing tea utensils as well as paintings and calligraphy related to tea gatherings. Most of the ceramics were fired in local kilns, such as Rakuzan ware and Fujina ware. The collection comprises 679 pieces, 51 of which are connected to Matsudaira Fumai (1751-1818), a daimyo who was also a great tea connoisseur and collector. There is calligraphy by his hand, as well as tea implements he owned. The display changes eight times a year, and in the spring the museum holds an important exhibition of modern tea ceramics by artists currently active in Western Japan. Established 35 years ago, this yearly event encourages contemporary creativity and includes a competition at the end of which the museum acquires works for its collection. Conveniently located in the heart of Matsue's preservation area, The Tanabe Museum of Art is well worth a visit even though information available in English is regrettably very limited.

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture

617



Tezen Museum, Izumo
©Tezen Museum

The next museum in focus is located in Izumo, a city made famous by its great Shinto shrine Izumo Taisha, believed by many to be Japan's oldest Shinto shrine. There the Tezen family opened its eponymous museum in 1993 in order to keep its heirlooms together.

The Tezen household attained a prominent position in the late 17th century – the family ran a sake brewery and counted the shrine and the local daimyo among its customers. Its collection of about 1,800 pieces, mostly dating from the Edo era, is displayed in two beautifully preserved *kura*, or storehouses. The first and smallest of the two, previously used to keep rice, houses special exhibitions. Changing four times a year, they feature a range of themes and objects. For example, the numerous military subjects on folding screens are a reminder that the family used to entertain local and visiting daimyo and samurai. There is an ensemble of *chounin-zashi*, swords that rich merchants were allowed to carry – displaying rich and intricate decoration, they are shorter than those reserved for samurai. In addition, exhibitions may at times focus on the world of tea, or everyday tools.



The second gallery ©Tezen Museum

The second gallery is an impressive space intended to brew and store sake. Today it houses a permanent display of over 200 rotating pieces of ceramics and lacquerware that illustrate the diversity of the regional traditions as well as the lifestyle of a merchant's family in the Edo period. Particularly well represented is the work of four dynasties of local craftsmen: the Nagaoka and the Funaki, two families of potters who respectively produced Rakuzan ware and Fujina ware, and the Shikkosai and the Nurudean families who specialised in lacquerware. In addition to objects that were used during formal meals and tea ceremonies, there are cosmetic boxes and accessories from bride trousseaus that bear the family crest. Ornate birdcages are reminiscent of the old Japanese pastime of making birds sing. There is also a group of ceramics by the potter Kawai Kanjiro (1890-1966), a native of Shimane.

There is some English information available in the museum but more details can be found on its website.



Tea-caddy Akino (Autumn Plains) by
Kojima Shikkosai 1st ©Tezen Museum

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture



Manpukuji Garden ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation



Ikouji Garden ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation



Courtyard, Grand Toit. The building is entirely covered with local roof tiles, Masuda ©The Shimane Arts Center

The third and last venue in this essay is located in Masuda, a coastal city whose other notable sites are two temple gardens designed by the late 15th century Zen Buddhist monk Sesshu Toyo – Manpukuji and Ikouji. In 2005 a remarkable public cultural centre comprising an art museum was established thanks to the determination of local politicians and residents. The centre's name Grand Toit – *large roof* in French – was selected by public consultation and makes reference to the fact that the building is entirely covered in local roof tiles. An object of pride for the population, they have a distinctive reddish-brown surface that give an attractive sheen to the simple volumes designed by architect Naito Hiroshi. Within the complex the Iwami Art Museum occupies four galleries of generous proportions; one is reserved for special exhibitions and three are devoted to the permanent collection. Assembled from the year 2000 onwards, the collection covers a range of fields, from Japanese arts, including many local artists, to 20th Western painting and illustration. Among the Japanese collection, a few pieces are from the Edo period, such as paintings, folding screens, and netsuke, but the majority date from the 20th century. Artists such as Takeuchi Seiho and Hashimoto Meiji are representative for Nihonga, modern Japanese-style painting, while Yoga, Western-style painting, is exemplified by Kishida Ryusei and Kazuki Yasuo.

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture



2015 Mori Hanae exhibition at Iwami Art Museum, Masuda
©Sophie Richard

There are also more recent pieces by Kusama Yayoi and Morimura Yasumasa. An important part of the collection relates to fashion and includes significant Western artists, presenting illustrations by Georges Barbier, garments by Paul Poiret and Madeleine Vionnet, and photographs by Richard Avedon. No doubt this particular focus was inspired by the renowned fashion designer Mori Hanae, who was born in Shimane in 1926. The museum owns many of her creations that made her rise to international fame. Grand Toit provides information in English and some of the catalogues published by the Iwami Art Museum are bilingual.

Each of the three venues examined above presents different characteristics, appeal, and atmosphere. The Tanabe Museum of Art, whose collection is highly specialized, is housed in a late 1970s building with stylistic features typical of the period.

In contrast, the Tezen Museum occupies two well-preserved Edo period kura that allow visitors to immerse themselves in the lifestyle of a merchant family. The last venue, a cultural center of large dimensions, comprises a museum with a varied collection, as well as elements that signal an early 21st century facility: a theater for music and puppet performances, a library, and a restaurant, all designed to be a place of gathering for the local community.

The level of information available to foreign visitors varies. As is often the case with privately run museums of a small or medium size, it is very limited in The Tanabe Museum of Art and remains partial at the Tezen Museum. While this writer understands the difficulties encountered by the curatorial staff in this domain, it is hoped that over time the situation will improve so that the museums and their collections can be more accessible to all.

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture



Sophie Richard is a freelance art historian based in London. She was educated at the Ecole du Louvre and the Sorbonne, Paris. She has travelled to Japan many times over the past twelve years and has written articles that have been published in the UK and the USA.

www.sophierichard.co.uk

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture

Places **Grand Toit**

►Shimane Arts Center

10117

Ikouji

Founded in 1363 as a sub-temple of the Tendai Buddhist sect's Suukanji, Ikouji became the home for Sesshu Toyo who also designed its famous garden, designated a national site of historical importance and also a national beauty spot. Also on the property is the grave of Sesshu.

698-0011 Shimane, Masuda shi, Someba cho 4-29

Iwami Art Museum

►Shimane Arts Center

Izumo Taisha (Izumo Ooyashiro)

The great shrine of Izumo Taisha is one of the most important Shinto shrines in Japan, believed by many to be Japan's oldest, is dedicated to Okuninushi no Okami, the deity of good fortune and marriage.

699-0701 Shimane, Izumo shi, Taisha cho, Kizukihigashi 195

[web-site \(Japanese\)](#)

Lafcadio Hearn Memorial Museum

This small museum offers an interesting and comprehensive overview of Lafcadio Hearn's remarkable life. There is a fair amount of information available in English, including on the museum website.

690-0872 Shimane, Matsue shi, Okudani cho 322

[web-site](#)

Manpukuji

The garden of this temple was created by Sesshu Toyo, a zen priest and a prominent master of ink painting during the Muromachi Period. He was also an accomplished garden designer.

698-0004 Shimane, Masuda shi, Higashimachi 25-33

[web-site](#)

Shimane Arts Center, Grand Toit

The Shimane Arts Center is a public cultural centre comprising an art museum and theatre that was established in 2005. Within the complex the Iwami Art Museum occupies four galleries of generous proportions; one hosting special exhibitions and the others the permanent collection.

698-0022 Shimane, Masuda shi, Ariake cho 5-15

[web-site](#)

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture

Places **The Tanabe Museum of Art**

11|17

Established in 1979 by Tanabe Choemon, a local politician, businessman, and ceramicist, the museum preserves works of art that have been acquired over centuries by the Tanabe family, which held the rank of samurai in the Edo period. The museum's collection is centered on ceramics used in tea ceremonies. The entrance gate is a Designated Cultural Property of Matsue City.

690-0888 Shimane, Matsue shi, Kitahori cho 310-5

[web-site \(Japanese\)](#)

Tezen Museum

The Tezen Museum is a private institution opened in 1993 by the Tezen family in order to keep its heirlooms together. The museum presents beautiful and significant pieces dating mostly from the Edo period and illustrating local traditions.

699-0751 Shimane, Izumo shi, Taisha cho, Kizukinishi 2450-1

[web-site](#)

Resources **The Art Lover's Guide to Japanese Museums**

Japan boasts rich collections and excellent exhibitions in world-class galleries, yet the sheer number of venues can be bewildering and not all offer information in English. *The Art Lover's Guide to Japanese Museums* acts as a personal guide, introducing readers to some of the most distinctive and inspiring art museums in the country, ranging from traditional to contemporary art, as well as crafts. Its author Sophie Richard conducted in-depth interviews with museum curators and directors, which provide a rare insight into the world of Japanese museums. The book showcases public and private museums that were selected for their individuality and the strength of their collection, as well as their remarkable architecture or location.

Sophie Richard has been recognised by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs for her book, receiving the Commissioner's Award in Tokyo in December 2015.

Richard Sophie, Japan Society, London 2014

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture

Glossary **Richard Avedon (1923-2004)**

American fashion and portrait photographer

12|17

George Barbier (1882-1932)

French illustrator covering costumes for the performing arts, books, and haute-couture

Chounin

Literally *townspeople*, forming a social class in the early Tokugawa period (1603-1867) that included chiefly merchants and craftsmen

Chouninzashi

►Wakizashi

Edo Period (1603-1867)

►Tokugawa Period

Fujina Ware (Fujina-Yaki)

A specific genre of pottery the origin of which can be traced back to Funaki Yojibe Muramasa who in 1764 set up a kiln in the Fujina district of Tamayu near Lake Shinji in Shimane Prefecture

►Izumo Ware

Hashimoto Meiji (1904-1991)

Japanese painter and designer following the traditional Nihonga style

Patrick Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904)

Arriving in Japan in 1890 as a magazine correspondent, he settled in Matsue, Shimane Prefecture taking on the Japanese name of Koizumi Yakumo. He later became known for his collections of Japanese folk tales and ghost stories.

Heian Period (794-1185)

The last division of classical Japanese history started with the movement of the capital of Japan to Heian-kyo, today's Kyoto in 794 and ended in 1185 when the Kamakura Shogunate was established in Kamakura

►Kamakura Period

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture

Glossary

Ikouji

Founded in 1363 as a sub-temple of the Tendai Buddhist sect's Suukanji, Ikouji became the home for Sesshu Toyo who also designed its famous garden, designated a national site of historical importance and also a national beauty spot. Also on the property is the grave of Sesshu.

- ▶Manpukuji
- ▶Sesshu Toyo

Izumo

City in the northern part of Shimane Prefecture, known by the Izumo Taisha. Formerly Izumo has been a province, known as the land of myths, where the gods congregate. At one time, it was the center of power on the Japanese island.

- ▶Izumo Taisha

Izumo Taisha

Although its official name is *Izumo Ooyashiro* the shrine is better known as *Izumo Taisha*. Its earliest mention goes back to around 950 where it has been described as a 48m tall building and as Japan's largest wooden structure. The shrine is dedicated to Okuninushi no Okami, the deity of good fortune and marriage. Believed by many to be Japan's oldest Shinto shrine, Izumo Taisha has been designated National Treasure of Japan in 1952.

Izumo Ware (Izumo-Yaki)

A type of vernacular pottery from Shimane Prefecture comprising two distinct local styles: Fujina ware and Rakuzan ware

- ▶Fujina Ware
- ▶Rakuzan Ware

Kamakura Period (1185-1333)

Started with the establishment of the Kamakura Shogunate by the first shogun, Minamoto no Yoritomo, it ended with the forceful re-establishment of imperial rule from Kyoto by the later Emperor Daigo

Kawai Kanjiro (1890-1966)

Japanese potter seeking accomplishment in the study and pursuit of vernacular styles

Kazuki Yasuo (1911-1974)

Japanese painter

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture

Glossary **Kikutake Kiyonori (1928-2011)**

Japanese architect, credited as one of the initiators of the Metabolist movement

►Metabolism

Kishida Ryusei (1891-1929)

Japanese painter following the western Youga style portraits

Kojima Shikkosai 1st (Kojima Seibei)

A Edo period artist, coming from a Kyoto family of lacquer painters.

Kojima has been bestowed the name *Shikkosai*, meaning *Master of lacquer containers*, for his masterpiece *Akino (Autumn Plains)*, a container for powdered green tea.

Kusama Yayoi (1929-)

One of the Pop-Art Avant-Garde, her work has inspired many Japanese and international contemporary artists

Manpukuji

One of the oldest temples in Masuda, it was established during the Heian period in Nakanoshima and relocated to Masuda in 1374 after a Tsunami. The garden of this temple, designated an Important Cultural Property, was created by Sesshu Toyo, a zen priest and a prominent master of ink painting during the Muromachi Period. He was also an accomplished garden designer.

►Ikouji

►Sesshu Toyo

Masuda

City in the southern part of Shimane Prefecture

►Manpukuji

Matsudaira Fumai (1751-1818)

The seventh daimyo of the Matsudaira clan in Matsue and a famous tea master known for his extensive collection of tea ceremony implements

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture

Glossary

Matsue

The capital city of Shimane Prefecture, situated in the north between Lake Shinji and the Nakaumi lagoon near Izumo Taisha

▶ Izumo Taisha

Metabolism

A post-war Japanese architectural movement. The movement took that name, arguing that buildings and cities should be conceived as living beings and should grow organically, according to the needs of their inhabitants.

▶ Kikutake Kiyonori

Mori Hanae (1926-)

Japanese fashion designer

Morimura Yasumasa (1951-)

Japanese artist

Muromachi Period (1336-1573)

Also referred to as the Ashikaga Period, established in 1338 by the shogun Ashikaga Takauji and coming to a close with the expulsion of Ashikaga Yoshiaki, the 15th shogun of the Ashikaga clan, from Kyoto by Oda Nobunaga

Naito Hiroshi (1950-)

Japanese architect, working with Kikutake Kiyonori from 1979 before establishing his own practice as Naito Architect & Associates in 1981

▶ Kikutake Kiyonori

Paul Poiret (1879-1944)

French fashion designer

Rakuzan Ware (Rakuzan-Yaki)

One of the Izumo ware styles, pioneered by Kurasaki Gombei who has been invited by a member of the Matsudaira clan in 1677 from Choshu in today's Yamaguchi Prefecture to set-up a kiln in Rakuzan, a town in eastern Matsue

▶ Izumo Ware

▶ Matsudaira Fumai

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture

Glossary **Sesshu Toyo (1420-1506)**

Respected as the foremost artist of the Muromachi Period, he was trained as a Zen priest. Also known as Unkoku, he had a large following of painters that formed the Unkoku-rin or Sesshu School.

- ▶Ikouji
- ▶Manpukuji
- ▶Muromachi Period

Shimane

Japanese prefecture in the southwest of the Honshu main island, located along the Sea of Japan

Takeuchi Seiho (1864-1942)

Recognized as one of the fathers of the Nihonga style of traditional Japanese painting. Less known under his real name Takeuchi Tsunekichi.

Tanabe Choemon (1906-1979)

Former Governor of Shimane Prefecture (1959-1971) and founder of The Tanabe Museum of Art in 1979 as a space to present many of his vast family treasures

- ▶Shimane

Tokugawa Period (1603-1867)

Also referred to as the Edo Period, identifies the time when Japan was under the rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate

Madeleine Vionnet (1876-1975)

French fashion designer

Wakizashi

Literally *sidewise-inserted*, wakizashi are intricately decorated traditional Japanese swords carried by the samurai class of feudal Japan. The shorter variant, chouninzashi, was allowed for the chounin class of townspeople.

- ▶Chounin
- ▶Chouninzashi

Portraits of Museums

Exploring Art Museums in Shimane Prefecture

Imprint

Publisher Japan-Insights, *Exploring Expert Experiences*, is one of the many activities pursued by the Toshiba International Foundation, TIFO. **17117**
Japan-Insights promotes a deeper understanding of the country – its people, places, and culture.

Leading experts, scholars, and professors in Japanese studies present a broad range of historical and contemporary topics, encouraging visitors to engage with the real Japan through immersive experiences. Essays that share their excitement and depth of insight are complemented by relevant information for travelers on the site.

Looking towards the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics and beyond, we hope to contribute to a Japan that offers people from around the world many opportunities for discoveries and memorable encounters.

Japan-Insights
Toshiba International Foundation
©2018

info@japan-insights.jp
japan-insights.jp

Unless stated otherwise, copyrights for content of this document – text, images, etc – belong to Toshiba International Foundation (TIFO). Content of this document may not be reproduced for purposes other than personal use.

*Japanese names are given in the order of surname/given name while all other names follow the given name/surname pattern