

Japanese Saturday in Kraków

2025-01-28

The anniversary of the Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology was the occasion for a visit to Kraków by the new Ambassador of Japan to Poland, H.E. Akiro Kono. On 30 November His Excellency paid a courtesy visit to the Mayor of Kraków, Aleksander Miszański.

The meeting was held in a cordial atmosphere, as - despite the considerable distance in between Japan and Poland - our country is regarded in high esteem by the inhabitants of the Land of the Rising Sun. Ambassador Akiro Kono even took the opportunity to say that the Japanese consider Poland to be the most open and interesting European country. Sympathy and solidarity with Poland have their roots in the 1980s, when our country was undergoing political change.

Kraków does not have a formal partnership with any city in Japan, but cooperates with Kyoto within the framework of the League of Historic Cities. Above all, more than 30 years ago, the cities were united by the initiative to establish the Manggha Centre for Japanese Art and Technology, for which funds were raised by the Kyoto-Krakow Foundation. The Honorary Consul General of Japan in Kraków, Krzysztof Ingarden who was present at the meeting, outlined the colourful history of the development of the Manggha, in which he has been participating from the beginning as an architect working with the world-renowned architect Arata Izosaki.

The creation of the Museum was made possible thanks to the vision and determination of film director Andrzej Wajda, who inspired his numerous colleagues with his passion, and above all thanks to the thousands of donors from Japan who raised funds to build the Japanese centre in the distant city of Kraków. The involvement of Kyoto and his residents in the construction of the Manggha Centre, followed by 30 years of rich cooperation between artists and universities in both cities and countries, was the reason why - on the initiative of the Mayor Aleksander Miszański - the City of Kyoto was granted the title of Kraków's Honorary Twin City in September 2024. During the meeting, the Mayor presented the Ambassador with a commemorative diploma for Kyoto to commemorate the event.

An important strand of Kraków-Japanese relations is the cooperation agreement between Wawel Royal Castle and Himeji Castle - a UNESCO-listed Japanese treasure. Cooperation between the castles has already borne concrete fruits: two photo exhibitions were held in Himeji, dedicated to the city of Kraków and Wawel Castle. In addition, as part of the partnership programme, children from Ukraine living in Kraków visited Japan.

Following the meeting at the city hall, Mayor Aleksander Miszański and the Ambassador Akiro Kono attended the 30th anniversary celebrations of the Manggha Museum. The speeches by the guests of honour made for a colourful and emotional account of the establishment and development of this unique Kraków's institution, connecting generations, historical eras and two geographically distant cultures.

The representative of the Inamori Foundation, whose award - given to Andrzej Wajda in 1987 -



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provided the impetus to launch a major fundraising effort for a 'home for the collection of Japanese art in Kraków', said that honouring the eminent Polish director 'set in motion a chain of people of good will'. Princess Takamado spoke moving words to the participants of the ceremony, testifying to the importance of cooperation with the Kraków institution.

In his speech, Mayor Aleksander Miszalski emphasised that the idea of the Manggha was born in Kraków as early as 1944, or perhaps even in the 1920s, when the excentric art collector Feliks 'Manggha' Jasieński donated his collection of Japanese art (which luckily did not attract the public in Warsaw!) to the National Museum in Kraków. Thanks to fortunate coincidences, the Japanese collection - which fascinated the artists of the Young Poland - safely survived the war. It waited for 'its time' in the museum's magazines, only to finally find itself in a 'Japanese home' which, thanks to its location on the Vistula - opposite the Wawel Royal Castle - is also very Polish.

The Manggha Museum - Japanese, international, but above all, Kraków - is a place that brings people together and creates good energy. The Manggha fits perfectly into Kraków's cultural panorama, co-organising various city events. Mayor Aleksander Miszalski thanked Professor Krystyna Zachwatowicz-Wajda for her and her husband vision and consistency in creating this unique place. The 30th anniversary of the Manggha, celebrated in a cordial atmosphere, in a wide circle of friends and colleagues from Polish and international institutions, with the participation of more than 30 guests from Japan, is undoubtedly a confirmation of its uniqueness.