

RANI'S REPORT 2022

- JET CIR (COORDINATOR FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS) IN KANAZAWA -

The year 2022 was the slow return to normal after a very difficult time. Looking back, it is weird to see how the year began with tentative events that were tangentially linked with our sister cities, how the rules were steadily getting more lenient with each increased vaccine, and how we ended the year with one of the biggest event I'd participated in so far.

From the start of the year, a lot of annual projects were back in full swing (albeit, with a careful combination of social distancing, online participation, and a lot of masks and disinfectant). The CIRs of Kanazawa City Hall visited about 1 school per week for four weeks straight, we were being sent to different local health centers to interpret for the young parents during their children's health checks, and back to organizing our continuing "Kanazawa International Ambassador's Training Program" courses. I personally was in charge of our Oki-agari Doll Painting event (in September), a traditional incense game experience in an old Machiya building (in November), and a Mizuhiki art workshop (in February) this year. My colleagues introduced our international students to the local soy sauce, took them grape picking, and had them try their hand at *urushi* lacquer decorating.



One of the first Belgium-related events we organized this year was still firmly within the context of “what can we do to bring the sister cities closer to the people of Kanazawa, without risking direct contact?” The idea we came up with was the “Belgian Sweets Fair”. For this event, multiple pâtisseries and cake shops – not only from Kanazawa but from the whole prefecture – made new products inspired by Belgium and of course, Belgian chocolate. It will come as no surprise that this was done in February!

However, it wasn't until the middle of the year, in May, that things were starting to feel more normal, and we were allowed to organize bigger things again. At the end of the month was our now annual Kanazawa Fairtrade Festa, where the international exchange section always has a booth. This year, we tried to make the search for fairtrade clothing less daunting by introducing good online resources for fairtrade fashion and drew a large map of places that put effort in Fairtrade around Kanazawa.



A personal highlight was the Hyakumangoku Festival in June. The Hyakumangoku Festival is Kanazawa's largest festival and celebrates the city's history and culture. It showcases a huge parade, food stalls throughout the center of the city, and of course: huge crowds. It is because of that last one, that this was my first Hyakumangoku Festival since coming to Kanazawa. I had just missed the 2019 edition by 2 months, and by June 2020 COVID was already in full swing. In 2021, the risk was still too great to hold it, but by 2022 it was finally time to try again. The festival was amazing. It wasn't since the Kanazawa Marathon of 2019 that I'd seen those kinds of crowds in the city streets and the excitement in the air was contagious.

Not only was it my first Hyakumangoku Festival, it was also the first one I participated in myself (no, not as part of the annual parade, though that would've been amazing). On Saturday I danced in the Odori-nagashi parade that takes place in the evening, and on Sunday I played Taiko in front of Kanazawa Castle!



...but back to work.

In June we were delighted to receive a visit from chocolatier Nicolas Vanaise who found his way back to Kanazawa. We took him on a tour of local Yuzu plantation, a reference to the name of his shop in Ghent.





Another sorely needed return to normal was the mid-year CIR conference in Yokohama this year. It was wonderful to be able to meet CIRs from all over the country, listen to lectures and learn from my colleagues. On the other hand, it was definitely a strange feeling to notice how I'd

become a senior CIR without even realizing it. At the office, only two of my colleagues were still the same from when I'd started, one of which was a CIR who was set to leave in April of this year. It is this aspect of the job that really makes you think about how time can fly, and the meetings and partings we experience in our lives. I wish everyone I met during my time here so far the best in the far-off places that they are (from China to America) and while I miss them dearly, I look forward to who else I may still get to meet before I'll be the one saying goodbye.

As we're nearing the end of the year, I had one short moment of relief before I found myself busier than I'd been in literal years. This came in the form of making a tiny house of clay. What happened was as follows: as part of the preparations for an upcoming event (the incense experience I mentioned earlier), I scoped out a Machiya house in the city. Machiya are traditional wooden houses that used to be residences or places of business, and Kanazawa is blessed with many of them throughout the city. However, it is a difficult task to try and preserve the remaining houses, so the city puts a lot of effort into this endeavor. To teach our international students about this pressing issue, we decided to organize an incense game in one of these Machiya.

Usually, we go visit the locations of these training programs beforehand, to have all the context we need to interpret on the day of, as well as to try and be prepared for unforeseen circumstances. However, as it turns out, the department in city hall that I got in contact with (that manages the promotion of the Machiya buildings)



was organizing an event of their own around the same time. As I needed to go see the building anyway, they asked to come on that same day.



For their event, they were working with a local ceramics artist to create tiny Machiya-houses from clay, and since they had some clay left over, so after work, I was allowed to join in. I had to go back during my time off a few months later to add the glaze to my creation, but that was no problem at all. 😊

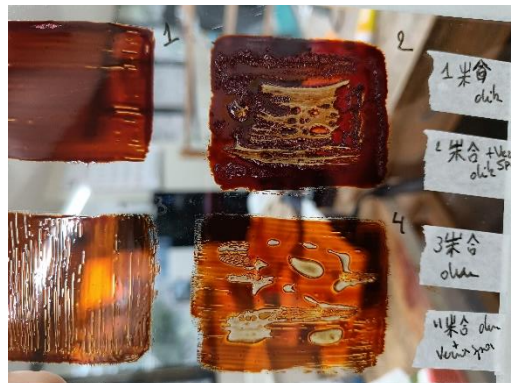
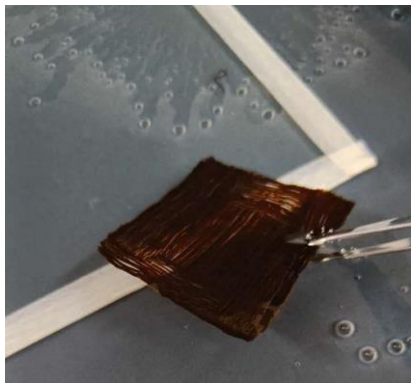
Finally, we get to the end-of-year crazies. This is when it truly felt like we were back to our regularly scheduled program, with only our masks as a sign that there was anything different from the usual. Our biggest project to date was the Art Ambassador project. This project actually began in 2021, when we called a French calligrapher who is currently residing in Tokyo to collaborate with the Utatsuyama Kogei Kobo art center to create a work of art incorporating foreign and local traditional techniques. To continue on this success, we wanted to call an artist from Ghent next.





What began as a two-week collaboration to create a single piece of art, became a three month stay as part of a larger project on the material study of *urushi* lacquer that is now spanning ten years. Mathias Prenen, our artist from Ghent arrived at the beginning of December and stayed throughout the coldest months of the year, until he returned home at the end of February. During his stay, he worked together with not only *urushi* artists, but also expanded his project to encompass silk dyeing techniques and glass making.

He is searching for the true meaning of *urushi* as a material, independent from its carrier, and continued his project (which started with his first visit to Kanazawa in 2013) even after his return home in 2023.



To finish this report of my activities as a Kanazawa Coordinator for International Relations, I leave you with this collage of the passing of time and the seasons. This connection to nature, this awareness of how time moves at its own pace, regardless of our wishes as humans, is one of my favorite things about living in a place as peaceful and surrounded by nature as Kanazawa is.



Until next time,

Rani