

# RANI'S REPORT 2023

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

Looking back on 2023 (even though it's not over yet at the time of my writing) fills me with a strange feeling of nostalgia. Strange, because a year shouldn't be enough to be nostalgic, but I feel like so many things have happened in these last few months, that I am no longer the same person I was in January of this year, and so, nostalgic I am.

I started the year with a relatively simple and quite cute event: reading children's books at the local library. It has been a while since I've read a book out loud (I used to do this as a hobby back in Belgium) and I remembered how much fun it was when sharing the adventures of a goose discovering the colours of the rainbow one by one to little kids. I was especially impressed (and saved) by my colleague at the library who not only pulled out a highly detailed presentation on Belgium made by one of my predecessors (thank you guys), but also read the Japanese version of the story page by page as I finished with the Flemish one. I don't know how the kids managed to sit (mostly) still for as long as they did, but I will gladly give credit for this to her and her enthusiasm.

In February I held another cooking class. (It had been a while so I'm so glad I asked for a Belgian cook book last Christmas.)

I decided to make vol-au-vent, with a western-style salad and a simple dressing. After a few hours of introducing Belgian cuisine to a room full of Japanese participants, showing them how to make the dish, and supporting them as they cooked the vol-au-vent ("yes, you should wait a little longer,



no it's not thickened up enough yet, please be a little more patient"), I'm glad to report that they were all extremely impressed by the two-second dressing we poured over our salads.

There's just something about the simple things in the kitchen (and life in general, I suppose) and how they differ from what we're used to that touches people deeply, and it's wonderful to witness. This is actually the second time I've had this experience. The last time was when I taught about 20 people how to make Belgian pralines. In the interest of not having any left-over ingredients, I decided to use any additional chocolate to make hot cocoa and the reactions I got when people sat down after a few hours of struggling with tempering (and especially cleaning) chocolate, was amazing. When I told them that you just "melt chocolate in hot milk", I believe there was a moment where they thought I was lying.

Of course, most of January and February were filled with the Art Ambassador project I mentioned in my previous report. In January, Mathias organized a workshop for the citizens of Kanazawa that aimed to demystify *urushi* and make it more accessible to the average person, while also introducing a new way of looking at, and working with this traditional material. By the time February rolled around, we were preparing for the final exhibit to show his work until that moment. This exhibit was held in the Citizen's Art Center; an old warehouse that was converted in a public music and art space for everyone to use.

There aren't enough photos in the world to adequately convey this art exhibit, but I will attempt to do so anyway, by linking to our [interview with the man himself](#).

March and May were a marching band of interpretation jobs. I found myself having to become a semi-expert on the traditional Entsuke technique for gold leaf production



(officially UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage since 2020 as part of the “traditional skills, techniques and knowledge for the conservation and transmission of wooden architecture in Japan”) in a very short time. Alongside this, it was time to start preparing for some of our usual suspects; the ambassador's training program (I've been in charge of the Kutani-yaki pottery class and the *Jibuni* cooking class so far) and this year's edition of the Kanazawa Fairtrade Festa.

For that last one, we decided upon a tie-dyeing workshop in the interest of promoting upcycling and the remaking/reusing of old clothes. I will share with you my first attempt to tie-dye anything since I graduated high school (no complaints please, I did my best). Of course, after months of meetings and preparations, it turns out that our booth was right next to a professional dyeing shop, which wasn't awkward at all. (It actually wasn't; they were very nice and as we got to talking, they actually quite liked our idea, and said they'd think about organizing a similar thing for next year!)



June and July were Ghent Months. In June, I visited Ghent with three pâtissiers from Kanazawa to discover the local chocolate and delicacies. They were especially impressed by the Hotel School (which has a very unique system, even for Europe), the incredible variety and sheer number of different shops, the unique creations that the pâtissiers and chocolatiers of Ghent have to offer, and the advanced level of vegan options. It was a hard few days of work, having to translate every side of every conversation in both directions, but very satisfying in the end (and of course, the real treasure was the chocolate we ate along the way).



In July, the mayor of Ghent visited us in Kanazawa. Trying to compress the greatest things Kanazawa has to offer in a few days is incredibly difficult, but my team at the International Exchange Section did a wonderful job anyways.



From tourist locations like the Kenrokuen gardens and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum, Kanazawa, to traditional dining, local companies, and even a network reception with as many people as we could fit in the room we reserved, it was truly a short-but-sweet glimpse of the beauty of Kanazawa and its people. I hope this visit was as wonderful as it was busy for our guests (especially considering the jetlag), and I look forward to the new projects and ideas that will build on this long-awaited meeting of people (thanks to a certain pandemic).



In August came a surprise repeat project, that I would never have guessed would come back; the Kanazawa Machiya. After a few projects involving the Machiya last year, I found myself coming back to them for interpretation jobs, and was eventually invited to report on (and interpret during) a local event at the Old Mori Paper Building.

This is the symbol for the preservation and continued use of the Machiya in Kanazawa, and the only building in the center of Kanazawa that still has a stone-standing board roof (shingles held down by nothing but each other and some stones). These shingles need to be replaced every few years (the trees needed are



planted for this specific purpose, to keep the process as sustainable as possible), and this process began in August. The first day of the work was open to the public. This, to spread the message of the Machiya with a special focus on the locals, as the building is being restored with the support of the WMF and will be reused for the benefit of the local community.



In October our weekends always get busy, and this year was no exception. Our main tasks were the International Friendship Festival (a two-day event in front of city hall where we played board games and hacky sack with everyone), and the Kanazawa Marathon. For the first time in 4 years, we were able to call runners from the sister cities to participate in the marathon, and it was a wonderful meeting of new and old friends!

There is something about the marathon that sets it apart from other projects. A meeting of this many people, this many countries, the excitement as the marathon draws close, the exhausted satisfaction afterwards, ... The bonds we forge here will remain with us all for the rest of our lives, I think.

I will leave you – not with a Kanazawa photo – but with one from Hakui; a sand sculpture at the Chirihama Nagisa Driveway (the only place in Japan where you can drive on a sandy beach). It's theme is the "Ishikawa Hyakumangoku Cultural Festival 2023", a combination of the National Cultural Festival and the National Art and Cultural Festival for People with Disabilities, both of which are taking place in Ishikawa right now. This has created an atmosphere of culture and art throughout the prefecture that is unprecedented in my four years that I've been here. The way people are coming together, the celebration of art and people and our differences feels like a wonderful start to a new normal.



Kind regards and well wishes,

Rani