



News & Activities

Bridging Traditions: How an International Artist-in-Residence Exchange Ignited Cross-Cultural Craft Learning and Creative Sharing

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Introduction

The global network of UNESCO Creative Cities of Crafts and Folk-Art functions not merely as a registry of heritage, but as a living laboratory for international collaboration, knowledge transfer, and mutual artistic enrichment. A shining testament to this active partnership unfolded between February 12 and 23, 2026, when the ancient ceramic capitals of Kanazawa, Japan, and Sukhothai, Thailand, joined forces to host a dynamic cross-cultural learning and sharing initiative.

Centering on an immersive Artist-in-Residence (AIR) program and an accompanying academic short course, this bilateral exchange showcased how traditional craft practices and contemporary sustainable methodologies can expand the horizons of modern artisans.

Grounding in Heritage: The Artist-in-Residence Exchange

At the heart of the exchange was Ms. Reiko Shiraiwa, an accomplished ceramist from Kanazawa, Japan, who embedded herself in the creative and heritage legacy of Sukhothai during a residency at the renowned Mothana Ceramics Studio. Operating under the guidance and warm hospitality of local masters Mr. Chaloeangkit Bunkhong and Mrs. Anurak Bunkhong, the residency focused on the deep study of Sukhothai traditional ceramic techniques.



Figure 1a and 1b Group Photo at Mothana Ceramics Residence (Left) and Studio (Right).



Figure 2a and 2b: Mr. Chaloemkiat & Ms. Reiko preparing clay for the ceramic-making (Left) and an artwork created by Reiko featuring a pair of ancient fish motifs (Right).

During her time at the studio, Ms. Shiraiwa engaged in a fluid dialogue of technical mastery, adapting her Japanese throwing and modeling sensibilities to the local clay. The pinnacle of her practical exploration was a series of original ceramic artworks inspired directly by the "wealthy fish" motif—a historically significant symbol deeply embedded in the Sukhothai Celadon tradition. By blending Kanazawa's refined craftsmanship with Sukhothai's ancestral iconography, her creations embodied a perfect synthesis of cross-border artistic co-creation.

Institutional Dialogue and Field Exploration

The sharing activities extended well beyond the studio walls, transforming the residency into a multi-stakeholder exchange that touched local governance, academic institutions, and historical archives.

- **Civic Diplomacy:** Highlighting the institutional value of the project, Ms. Shiraiwa had the honor of meeting with Mr. Nopparit Sirikosol, the Governor of Sukhothai. During this meeting, a formal token of appreciation from the Mayor of Kanazawa was presented to the Governor, cementing the diplomatic and cultural bonds between the two creative cities.
- **Historical Immersive Studies:** To contextualize the physical properties of Thai pottery, the residency included an architectural and archaeological field study to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Si Satchanalai. Exploring the Ancient Kiln Museum (specifically inspecting historical production structures like Kilns No. 42 and 123) allowed the visiting artist to dissect the structural evolution of stupas, spires, and traditional moldings that dictate local design principles.
- **Community Engagement:** The creative dialogue also embraced community celebrations, as the exchange group visited Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat to pay respect Phra Buddha Chinnarat, the great Buddha Image, visited local craft markets, including the "One District, One Creative Space" during the Great King Naresuan Festival in Phitsanulok.



Figure 3a and 3b: Ms. Shiraiwa presented the token from Kanazawa to Mr. Nopparit Sirikosol, the Governor of Sukhothai (Left); and visited the Ancient Kiln Museum at Si Satchanalai World Heritage Site in Sukhothai (Right).

Academic Knowledge Co-Creation: The Nature-Based Solutions Workshop

A pivotal moment of academic knowledge-sharing took place on February 16, 2026, via a comprehensive hybrid seminar and workshop titled "*Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) for Building Design & Craft-Making*". Hosted by the Faculty of Architecture, Art and Design at Naresuan University, this short course bridged technical design paradigms across generations. The academic session seamlessly blended environmental resilience with handicraft ornamentation through distinct structural blocks moderated by Assoc. Prof. Witiya Pittungnapoo.

Table 1: A seminar and workshop on Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) for Building Design & Craft-Making hosted by Faculty of Architecture, Art and Design at Naresuan University.

Sessions	Speakers	Core Focus & Activities
Theoretical Seminar (Online)	Assoc. Prof. Dowon Kim, Ph.D. Ritsumeikan University (Kyoto, Japan)	Exploring macro-level Nature-based Solutions (NBS) for structural building design and eco-resilient architectures.
Case Study Analysis (Online)	Mr. Chakgree Sriin Committee of Phukananan Resort (Nan, Thailand)	Practical application of nature-integrated designs using localized eco-resort building materials.
Hands-On DIY Workshop (Onsite)	Miss Reiko Shiraiwa Ceramist from Kanazawa (Japan)	Translating macro-environmental concepts into micro-crafts at the Naresuan Ceramic Shophouses by molding building ornaments.



Figure 4a and 4b: Ms. Shiraiwa participated in the hand-on workshop with architecture students supervised by Mr. Lakkana Wongsawat and Assoc. Prof. Nirat Soodsang (Left) and she created a lotus motif as one of Thai architectural ornaments (Right).

During the practical afternoon workshop, university students, local faculty, and international researchers worked side-by-side. Under Ms. Shiraiwa's direction, participants hand-sculpted intricate, clay-based building tiles and architectural ornaments adorned with stylized floral and lotus motifs. This tactile exercise effectively demonstrated how physical medium craftwork can double as an instrument for ecological consciousness and sustainable material use.

Looking Forward: Sustaining the Creative Collaboration

The collaborative exchange concluded with a communal farewell dinner hosted by Naresuan University and a heartfelt reflection session at Mothana Ceramics Studio. Coordinated by project leaders Assoc. Prof. Witiya Pittungnapoo (Deputy Coordinator of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network for Crafts & Folk Art) and Ms. Yoko Kawa (Focal Point of Kanazawa), this milestone program underscored how international residency initiatives build resilient social capital and long-term sustainable collaboration among artisan communities.

Through these modest beginnings, both cities hope to quietly lay the groundwork for joint research, institutional knowledge transfers, and cross-border mentorship, contributing in a small way toward long-term ecological and economic resilience. By gently fostering this continuous cycle of collaborative learning, making, and sharing, our shared goal is to help ancient craft traditions transition gracefully from static heritage into a natural, meaningful alignment with contemporary global innovation.



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- **The Host Studio:** Special thanks are extended to *Mr. Chaloeangkit Bunkhong and Mrs. Anurak Bunkhong of Mothana Ceramics Studio* for opening their doors, providing master-level technical guidance, and serving as exceptional hosts during the residency.
- **The Resident Artist:** We highly commend *Ms. Reiko Shiraiwa*, whose artistic talent, dedication to technical dialogue, and beautiful co-creation of the traditional "wealthy fish" and lotus motifs seamlessly bridged the craft traditions of Kanazawa and Sukhothai.
- **Academic & Workshop Contributors:** Heartfelt thanks go to the *Faculty of Architecture, Art and Design at Naresuan University, Thailand*, with special acknowledgment to our ceramic art lecturer *Mr. Lakkana Wongsawat* and *Assoc. Prof. Nirat Soodsang* for their excellent supervision of the architecture students during the hands-on DIY workshop.
- **Diplomatic Leadership and UCCN:** We are deeply grateful to *Mr. Nopparit Sirikosol*, the Governor of Sukhothai, and *Mr. Takashi Murayama*, the Mayor of Kanazawa for their institutional backing, which successfully reinforced the diplomatic and cultural bonds between our two UNESCO Creative Cities.
- We also express our deep gratitude to both of us: *Yoko Kawa* (Focal Point of Kanazawa) and *Assoc. Prof. Witiya Pittungnapoo* (Co-Focal Point of Sukhothai and Deputy Coordinator of UCCN for Crafts & Folk Art) for providing the institutional framework to quietly lay the groundwork for long-term sustainable craft collaboration.