

Books return to a 200-year-old school hall: a quiet tectonic shift in the book culture of Iga, Japan

At the site of Mie Prefecture's oldest public library — the historic former domain school Sukodo — "Waza Waza — Iga Art Book Fair 2026" proposes a different kind of journey: not consuming the past, but visiting culture as it is happening.

In Iga, a castle town in Mie Prefecture, a remarkable renewal of spaces for books is underway: from BOOKMARK STORAGE, a complex beside a rural train station where art books sit alongside contemporary art, to SAKAKURA BASE, the new Iga Central Library housed in a beautifully restored modernist former city hall by Junzo Sakakura, a disciple of Le Corbusier. At the origin of this lineage stands Sukodo — a nationally designated historic site built in 1821 as a school of the domain, which later served the region for decades as Mie's oldest public library. On September 26 and 27, 2026, inheriting this lineage, an international art book fair will ask what books can be as a medium passed directly from the maker's hand. Admission is free. This is not an event that copies metropolitan culture into the countryside. It is an attempt to raise, in this town, the kind of deep thought and dialogue that only a place like this makes possible.

1. A quiet tectonic shift in Iga's book culture

In recent years, Iga's spaces for books have been rebuilt one after another, changing how people in the town live with art and books.

BOOKMARK STORAGE (opened 2023)

A complex directly connected to JR Shindo Station, developed with the involvement of DMG MORI. Contemporary art is installed throughout the building, art books fill its shelves, and it stays open until 9 p.m., becoming a new third place for the town.

SAKAKURA BASE — Iga Central Library (opened April 2026)

The former Ueno City Hall, a modernist building by Junzo Sakakura, restored and reborn as the city's central library, also open until 9 p.m. Since the move, visitor numbers have multiplied several times over compared with the former library.

Art and books in Iga are shifting from something formal, visited on occasion, into the fabric of everyday life. This fair connects that present-day energy back to the origin of the town's knowledge: Sukodo, the building that became Mie's oldest public library.

2. Haven't we seen enough of the big cities? — connecting a region directly with the world

Japan's major cities may already be enough. Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka — what you find there is certainly culture. But in a city that has internationalized, culture comes to carry a different meaning: it is selected, translated, and presented with the world's gaze already in mind. What you encounter is real, and yet it often arrives as an answer prepared in advance.

This fair makes the opposite wager. Rather than passing through the metropolis as a filter, it connects a provincial town directly with the world — the way regional towns once built their own grassroots international ties, before such exchanges faded from view. Through an open call and selection, **38 makers from six**

countries and regions — Japan, the United States, China, Singapore, Iran, and Tunisia — will gather in Iga and lay out books they made themselves on the tatami mats of the former lecture hall. Away from the noise of the city, we aim to raise a new kind of international exchange — and a new epicenter of culture — from this town.

Waza Waza Archive — Alongside the booths, there is a display of books that made the journey here on their own: comics by the Latvian publisher **kuš!**, and books by the Norwegian photographer **K Linnea Backe**, the artist collective **Zone À Publier** in Besançon, France, the Paris-based independent magazine **Schema Magazine**, and more.

3. What is a book? — the power of passing from hand to hand

Zines, artist's books, self-published editions, and books that exist in a single copy. Some are conventional books — collections of works, books of poems — while others treat the very form and concept of the book as the work itself. Such books are not only delivered through publishing distribution; at book fairs, they have been handed over directly, from the maker's hand. Rather than consuming them as a passing trend at a vast metropolitan fair, we choose to show, sell, and talk about them slowly, in Iga. Beyond buying and selling, this is an attempt to ask, from the ground up: what is a book, and what should the infrastructure of expression look like today?

4. A different kind of travel: visiting culture as it happens

From tourism that consumes the past — ninja, the poet Basho, the castle — to a journey along the line of culture rising in the town right now: touring architecture, walking through history, and meeting expression in the present tense.

In Yukoryo, the former boarding house within the venue where students from afar once lived, **Thomas Vauthier** — an artist, researcher (PhD), and curator from France — hosts the tea gathering **"Reading Tea"** (September 26, 11:00–19:00 / September 27, 11:00–17:00 (JST); each seating 30–60 minutes for 1–5 guests; reservations via the website, walk-ins welcome). With coffee brewed by fika coffee stand from the local town of Tsuge, it offers an intimate time to share tea and the books encountered at the fair.

On both days, from 13:00 to 15:00 (JST), the bookmobile of the Iga Central Library (Iga City Board of Education) will visit the venue loaded with books. The library that was born in this very hall in 1905, and left the building in 1984, comes home again.

Overview

- Name: Waza Waza — Iga Art Book Fair 2026
- Dates: Saturday, September 26 and Sunday, September 27, 2026, 11:00–19:00 (JST)
- Venue: Sukodo (nationally designated historic site, 78-1 Ueno-Marunouchi, Iga, Mie, Japan)
- Admission: Free
- Exhibitors: 38, from six countries and regions (Japan, United States, China, Singapore, Iran, Tunisia)
- Website: <https://wazawaza-artbookfair.com>
- Organiser: Waza Waza Committee
- Co-organiser: Iga Cultural City Association
- Supported by: Iga City / Iga City Board of Education / Japan Library Association / Mie International Exchange Foundation

- In cooperation with: REMARE Inc. / General Store Hakutai / fika coffee stand / Thomas Vauthier
- Waza Waza Archive: kuš! (Latvia) / K Linnea Backe (Norway) / Zone À Publier (France) / Schema Magazine (France) and more

Exhibitors (38)

&gato. (Japan) / 0x8x0_no (Japan) / 51 Personae (China) / Angelica Ong 王歆惠 (Singapore) / Anna Darab (Iran) / AprilBooks (Japan) / DARF (Tunisia) / I.CEBERG (Japan) / Jaron Menzimer (United States) / NESSIE (Japan) / Naomi Murakami (Japan) / PPP site (Japan) / Polly Fossey (United States) / STAIRS PRESS (Japan) / Sohei Terui (Japan) / Written by Daniel (United States) / between in between (Japan) / kitai (Japan) / nekoba (China) / twelvebooks (Japan) / うちだ みちこ (Japan) / たまゆら湯 (Japan) / のんぶる (Japan) / アリカ (Japan) / オッコ (Japan) / ティックの日本 (Japan) / ネコゼ商店 (Japan) / ビジテリアン大祭 (Japan) / ヤギユウ ショウ (Japan) / 増本 綾 (Japan) / 奥出理人 / OKUDE MASATO (Japan) / 庭の拝見 (Japan) / 森永侑樹(せんせいの句会) (Japan) / 楠尚子 / Naoko Kusunoki (Japan) / 烽火書房 (Japan) / 猫屋芳樹堂 (Japan) / 蒼草書院 (Japan) / 道音舎 / Michioto Publishing (Japan)

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