

ART + DESIGN

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DISPLAY UNTIL JUNE 5, 2017



CITY of GOIL

by JANE MOLINAR / photography courtesy of OLESYA IANOVITCH

NEW ORLEANS ARTIST OLESYA IANOVITCH FINDS
HER DREAM CANVAS IN KAYAZAWA, JAPAN.

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a white shirt, a grey vest, a pink patterned scarf, black pants, and black shoes, is sitting on a wooden rocking chair. She is positioned in front of a large, vibrant mural featuring various floral and geometric patterns in shades of red, blue, yellow, and green. The mural covers the wall and extends onto the floor. The text "ART AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE REALLY SPEAKS TO ME." is overlaid on the right side of the image in a white, serif font.

“ART AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE REALLY SPEAKS TO ME.”

More than two-and-a-half centuries ago in Kyoto, Japan, Toraku Sanjin tossed and turned. A butterfly that kept landing on his pillow made him unable to sleep. Having his folding fan close by, he threw it toward the insect in an attempt to shoo it away. Needless to say, he missed, but, not for naught. He was intrigued by the various positions the fan fell in; they reminded him of an old pastime called pitch-pot in which two opponents tried to throw arrows into a pot, similar to darts on a bull's-eye. Like pitch-pot, he thought, there was a tool, a goal, and a motive, all the makings of a game that would eventually become known as Tosenkyo.

On November 5, 2016, in the heart of the prefecture's most bustling location, something extraordinary would happen in Kanazawa, Japan. In honor of Tosenkyo's vibrant heritage, the people of Tatemachi Street—along with a team from a local university and a New Orleans-based Russian artist named Olesya Ianoivitch—would sprinkle “Miracle-Gro” on Tosenkyo in an attempt to pull off a life-size game of monster darts.

To play, all you need are three things: a fan, a pedestal, and a target. But to conduct a monster match of Tosenkyo on a street laden with tourists, you need much more. Visionaries at the Kaname Group, owners of the Kaname Hostel, Bar, and soon-to-be Hotel, came up with the concept to make the culture of Kanazawa known to visitors from around the world.

Turning the concept into a reality sparked one question early on: How do you preserve the function of three seemingly rudimentary objects when they're 100 times their original size? That task was assigned to Kanazawa Institute of Technology Professor Masato Okamoto, who, along with his students, created prototypes and selected materials to produce two flyable, life-size fans in the university's laboratory. They tested wing dimensions, pieced together skeletons made of metal rods, and experimented with different kinds of lightweight plastic in order to discover how the science behind air in motion could encourage even a monster dart to fly.

Though less fettered by the properties of aerodynamics, Ianoivitch's role was twofold. The giant fan she was commissioned to design would serve as the staple painting in the future Kaname Hotel and be unveiled during the opening ceremony of the Tatemachi Tosenkyo game. It wasn't until she moved to New Orleans two years ago that Ianoivitch fully developed the signature painting style that led to her participation in the Tatemachi Tosenkyo Project. “I moved for love, just like I always have—love for something, for travel, love for people—that always has driven me,” she says. “The changes I've made in life are because of that.”

A month before her trip to Kanazawa, someone from an advertising agency in Tokyo happened upon Ianoivitch's paintings on her website, noticing that her use of 24K gold, floral motifs, and bright colors lined up perfectly with the story of Kanazawa, a city known for producing 99 percent of Japan's gold leaf and whose name directly translates to gold stream. Ianoivitch's most identifiable images, from her burgeoning bouquets to her iconic red lips, brought to mind various cultural motifs of Kanazawa, the red lips of a geisha, for instance, or the color palette of a cherry blossom.

Originally from a little town called Maikain in the former USSR known for its gold mining, Ianoivitch had a similar affection toward the flaxen element. “Sparkles are everywhere in the city,” she says. “I think my bio was what

TO PLAY, ALL YOU NEED ARE THREE THINGS: A FAN, A PEDESTAL, AND A TARGET.



really struck them—the city known for gold found their golden artist.” And, just like that, the traveling visual storyteller began witnessing, absorbing, and translating her experience in Kanazawa onto a giant fan-shaped canvas that would be permanently installed at the Kaname Hotel, set to open in April 2017.

Ianovitch arrived in Kanazawa on October 24, 2016, unpacked, set up her studio, gathered art supplies, visited landmarks, played geisha, held her own in late-night karaoke, spun pottery with a master craftsman, ate bean pastry with her hands, cradled 400-year-old artifacts, filmed a documentary, and created a work of art. All in roughly 17 days.

By day three, Ianovitch was alone in the studio, staring at a blank canvas nearly seven feet tall. The fan was made out of wood and covered in high-grade metallic gold carton paper, giving Ianovitch a background color she was more than familiar with. “What was remarkable,” she says, in reference to that initial session, “was that I did not stop until 6 in the morning the next day.”

It is difficult to describe what could drive someone into a daylong stretch of creation, but it seems likely that Ianovitch’s muse had something to do with the characteristics that Kanazawa shared with her hometown of Maikain and her experience as a traveling artist. “The background,

the foundation, is sort of unconsciously embedded in you and it’s what you come to portray,” she explains. “Art as an international language really speaks to me. The visual language is so powerful that it connects people.”

On November 5, 2016, along a red carpet lining Tatemachi Street, crowds of people gathered to see the Golden Geisha Ceremony in preparation for the life-size game of Tosenkyo. Donned in a golden kimono, Ianovitch unveiled her finished painting next to geishas dancing to the beat of traditional Japanese drums. “The whole point was to learn everything I could, to be immersed in the culture, and to visually remix that on the canvas,” Ianovitch shares, looking back at her journey.

Whether through the use of high-gloss resins, thick and brightly colored acrylics, or her most emblematic ingredient—24K gold—Ianovitch’s visual narrative takes full advantage of reflective surfaces. Under the right light, the fan almost appears to be winking at us, encouraging us to bear witness to new and glorious versions of ourselves. The urge to indulge in a world not yet traversed is reflected in the flash and flicker of hammered gold, until we are shown what is so often forgotten—who we could be, or, better yet, who we are already. “That’s how these projects happen,” Ianovitch says. “You can call it magic, but I would translate magic into the visual power of art.” ●