

Austria National Day Special

A meeting of tradition and innovation

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My start as the Austrian ambassador to Japan this summer was quite different from what I had expected, beginning with two weeks of quarantine, no 2020 Tokyo Olympic nor Paralympic Games,

distancing and special precautions for all meetings and social interactions. I know that I don't need to explain, as we are all experiencing it every day.

But I still feel extremely honored and grateful for this opportunity to make a contribution to the Austrian-Japanese relations that started a little over 150 years ago. In 2019, this anniversary of one and a half centuries of friendship, curiosity, and mutual appreciation was celebrated with a flurry of high-level political visits in Japan, including the Austrian head of state, the chancellor and the foreign minister, as well as a large number of top-quality cultural events.

What is helping me to be optimistic and focus on the positive sides of the current situation is the fascination both countries, Austria and Japan, share for the seemingly contrary concepts of tradition and innovation. Please allow me to explain.

Austria and Japan both can look back at a long history that has led to the formation of strong political, cultural, scientific and economic traditions based on exchange, cooperative learning, welfare and prosperity. These traditions have provided a

fertile ground for an innovative environment to flourish and guarantee success in the globalized, ever-changing and fast-moving 21st century. In this sense, tradition and innovation are actually a pair — they are complementary, interconnected and interdependent.

But how does this relate to our current situation? Building on what has been created by improvement and refinement over centuries — and by questioning and redefining it, if necessary — has led to healthy societies, democracies, cultures and economies in Austria and Japan. On this solid basis, both countries have managed to weather all sorts of human-made and natural disasters, eventually coming out stronger than they were before. I am convinced that this time, we are also heading in the right direction.

Innovation in scientific research, medical advances and economic entrepreneurship are needed to tackle the coronavirus pandemic's challenges. Innovative ideas and solutions are also essential to finding a way out of the climate crisis and protecting the environment and biodiversity of our world. Austria and Japan contribute to these global processes with the know-how created at schools and universities, the expertise available at their scientific institutions and the craftsmanship and skills of their companies. All of this is combined with a willingness to cooperate bilaterally and multilaterally and defend open, just and equal societies, stand up for human rights and defend gender justice.

Our countries' strong artistic and cultural scenes can also provide insight and impetus for the creativity which is now required to



Marianne Greber's "The First Breakfast"
(2015-2016) EMBASSY OF AUSTRIA

find new answers and new paths. The line of thought which connects the past, the present, and the future was the leitmotif of the project #JapanRevisited202x developed by the Austrian Cultural Forum Tokyo out of the special context of the year 2020. The vast amount and outstanding quality of submissions made it clear that the rich cultural traditions of our countries are ideal launching pads for creative and innovative processes.

Austria's National Day on Oct. 26 is always a reason for celebration — but also a moment for reflection. Where are we coming from? Where do we stand now? What will the future bring? We don't have all the answers yet but we have every reason to believe that we are on the right track. I am happy and proud that Austria and Japan follow the path of tradition and innovation together in friendship and cooperation.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.



Flora Miranda's "Ready To Die"
(2018) as seen in the exhibition, #Japan-Revisited202X: then-now-after
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Nippon Plasser

Greetings

on the Austrian National Day

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