[title]

**Ushioni Matsuri: The Cow-Demon Festival**

[body]

Every year, from July 22–24, Uwajima (Ehime Prefecture) is taken over by the Ushioni Matsuri.

This popular festival involves up to twenty-two, eighteen-foot-high, 650—1500-pound *ushioni* (cow demon) floats, each associated with different local shrines. They are carried by fifty shrine members to the center of town, where the ushioni dance and battle with one another as they parade towards Warei Jjinja (Uwajima’s main Shinto shrine). Each festival day centers on different activities including a youth-float parade (involving smaller ushioni floats), music and dance, bamboo pole-climbing competitions, and fireworks.

The floats are highly interactive. Attached to a long neck that extends from the float’s enormous body, the ushioni head swings across crowds of people creating delight among tens of thousands of spectators. The festival’s roots are in Warei Jinja’s four hundred-year-old rituals where smaller-scale ushioni are purified by shrine priests, dispel negative spirits, and bring blessings to the community. In 1965, the city of Uwajima developed the Ushioni matsuri as a public festival to increase tourism and boost the local economy. More than that, the festival brings local communities together to compete, to collaborate, and to celebrate; it is a source of community enjoyment, identity, and pride.

[file: ushioni matsuri]

[caption]

Ushioni Matsuri

Uwajima, Ehime Prefecture

Photo courtesy of the Uwajima City Tourist Association

[file: FA.2018.76.1A-F.A]

[caption]

Ushioni head for a youth float with an amulet plaque from Warei Jinja

Utsunomiya Yoshiwo II (aka Utsunomiya Keisuke)

2018, commissioned by the Museum of International Folk Art

Uwajima, Ehime Prefecture

Washi paper, lacquer, brass, paint, oak wood, horsehair, cotton fabric, twine, white paper, ink

International Folk Art Foundation, Museum of International Folk Art (FA.2018.76.1; FA.2018.75.1)

This special float head was completed shortly before the 2018 festival was supposed to take place.

Sadly, due to record rains that caused floods and landslides in July 2018 the festival was canceled for the first time in forty years. The community’s focus was on rescue and recovery efforts and offering

support to families that lost loved ones.

[file: UTSUNOMIYA]

Utsunomiya Yoshiwo II is Uwajima’s master ushioni-head maker, who learned from his father, Utsunomiya Yoshiwo. The artist reminds us that there is a distinction between festival ushioni, which are secular, and the ushioni that are involved in the Warei Jinja rituals, which is a deity.

[title]

**Namahage Matsuri: A Festival of Monstrous Demon-Deities**

[body]

On New Year’s Eve, Namahage trample through the snow of Oga (Akita Prefecture), demanding entrance to individual homes. Once admitted, they chase family members, roar, and call out children for laziness or misbehavior. Children provide offerings of food and sake to the Namahage, who then talk with family members, explaining their role as gods descended from the mountains to bless people with good fortune.

This ritual is distinct, but related to the festival, Namahage Sedo Matsuri, created in 1963 to share Namahage with outsiders. As opposed to the private New Year’s ritual within the household, the public three-day festival occurs on the grounds of the Shinzan Jinja (a local Shinto shrine) in mid-February. It is a large event that involves dancing, roaring demons that chase audiences around icy grounds, bonfires, food, sake, and taiko drumming. Fear is at the heart of the Namahage experience, and the Namahage is at the heart of regional identity and pride. In 2018, Namahage was added to UNESCO’s Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

[file: Y200331058]

[caption]

Namahage mask and costume

Ishikawa Taiko

2012

Oga City, Akita Prefecture

Wood, paint, horsehair, Velcro, nylon, baseball catcher’s mask, fiber, straw, plastic, cotton

Museum of New Mexico Foundation, Museum of International Folk Art (A.2013.1.1-2)

Namahage knife

Artist unknown

1960s

Oga City, Akita Prefecture

Wood, paint, foil

Gift of Yamamoto Tsugio, Museum of International Folk Art (T.2019.1.1)

Background photo by Michael Dylan Foster, 2014

Oga City, Akita Prefecture