[Supported by Arts Council Saitama] “Play” Is an Experiment in Living

People × Cultural Heritage × Tradition × Professional Expertise × Generative AI

A Song to find Our Way Back — A Short Film That Began with a Handful of People and Grew into a Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration Involving 103 Participants

Gingisells is currently producing its short film *A Song to find Our Way Back*, with support from Arts Council Saitama’s FY2026 Cultural and Artistic City Creation Grant Program.

https://artscouncil-saitama.jp/grants/adoption/gingisells-26/

The film is a cross-disciplinary cultural experiment that began with a question:

What does “play” mean for people and things to live and thrive?

What began with a handful of people has grown into a project involving 103 individuals, from children to seniors, including performers, creative professionals and people engaged in local culture.

Set in historic Japanese houses, the film brings together traditional games, nursery rhymes, dance, music, filmmaking, cultural traditions and generative AI.

The teaser will be released on November 26, 2026, followed by a special screening on January 30, 2027, at OttO, a cinema in Omiya, Saitama City, Japan.

Teaser:
https://youtu.be/VzSiDJbbvaM

Behind the Scenes on Instagram

Rehearsals, behind-the-scenes footage from the historic houses, introductions to our creative team and other moments from the creative process are being shared on our official Instagram account.

https://www.instagram.com/gingisells/



Poster 01: AYATORI — String Figures



Poster 02: PLAY

Assistant Director, Photography and Poster Design: Koma Ishibashi

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STORY | A Song to find Our Way Back

A woman goes through her days, exhausted without knowing why.

One day, she wanders into an old Japanese house and encounters mysterious figures.

One encounter leads to another.

Through encounters and farewells, a story begins to unfold almost unnoticed — a story of “play” that carries on into tomorrow.

CONCEPT | We Grow into Ourselves by Continuing to Play

Gingisells is a cross-disciplinary platform for cultural experimentation, exploring forms of “play” through which people and things can live and thrive.

The name Gingisells, a registered trademark, is inspired by the silver smoking pipes, or *gin giseru*, favored by those who helped shape the culture of Japan’s Edo period through their spirit of play.

Play creates culture. Therein lies hope.

01 | We Grow into Ourselves by Continuing to Play

Play has many dimensions: recreation, breathing room, freedom, learning, adventure and creation.

At times, it may offer refuge. It may also involve fear and sadness. Its depth cannot be described through enjoyment alone.

As we move forward and backward through life, we discover our own boundaries, venture beyond them, encounter people and things, and sometimes shed what we no longer need.

Through these experiences, we refine our sense of who we are and explore new possibilities as ourselves.

We consider this, too, a form of play.

02 | From Protecting Who We Are to Discovering Our Essence Through Change

Protecting our values and beliefs can sometimes be a necessary way of being ourselves.

Yet there may also be aspects of ourselves that we can discover only by letting go of what we have acquired to protect ourselves and engaging with others and different perspectives.

Children are often asked at school:

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

But what if the underlying question were:

“How do you want to live?”

That is a question we can continue asking throughout adulthood.

When we choose our futures from existing professions or categories and attempt to fit ourselves into them, the process of learning who we are may, for some, become reversed.

Some adults have spent their lives navigating this uncertainty.

Having accumulated so many different experiences, what dreams do we, as adults, now have for our futures?

Adults, too, can find hope in living.

We can accept ourselves as we are while remaining curious about unfamiliar worlds and undiscovered aspects of ourselves, regardless of age or professional title.

Perhaps approaching our own essence through change is another way of being ourselves — and another way of finding fascination in life itself.

03 | Would You Like to Play with Me?

Throughout this project, Gingisells founder Haruko Asaga has approached people with diverse areas of expertise, sharing this concept and inviting them to collaborate.

Precisely because each person brings their own experience, skills and deeply held values, these invitations may sometimes have been met with uncertainty or resistance.



At the heart of Asaga's invitation lies a strong desire to encounter something she could never experience alone.

To seek to understand the expertise and values of others, while respecting what we cannot fully understand.

To meet one another halfway and explore unknown possibilities together.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who believed in this concept, found something intriguing within it and engaged with it sincerely.

Unexpected forms of creation can emerge through encounters with different perspectives.

Through artistic production, human encounters and experimentation, Gingisells continues to explore the diverse possibilities of play.

A Song to find Our Way Back is one cultural experiment born from that exploration.

What does play mean to you?

Gingisells

Gingisells

＊A symbol of “play” spreading like smoke.The energy of “play” radiating outward from each individual.

CREATION | Expression Is Open to Everyone

People from different generations and professional backgrounds, from children to seniors, have contributed to this project.

Actors, dancers, musicians, costume specialists, hair and makeup artists, filmmakers, company employees and people engaged in local culture have brought their individual experiences and skills into a shared creative process.

One example is the production of the film’s music.

As the possibilities for cross-disciplinary collaboration expanded, the project also faced the challenge of coordinating its many elements within a limited schedule and budget.

With little room to maneuver, Asaga asked her husband, who works for a company and is also a drummer, to use his expertise in generative AI to develop initial musical concepts.

Music professionals subsequently offered advice regarding the concerns and challenges associated with generative AI.

Around the same time, a seminar organized by the Arts Council Saitama office provided an opportunity to consult a lawyer specializing in legal matters related to arts and culture, allowing Asaga to deepen her understanding.

Through these developments, music professionals offered to help refine the music. Building upon the AI-generated musical concepts, they are now exploring new composition and performance, developing the music through human creativity, sensitivity and technical expertise.

What began as a constraint ultimately became an opportunity for unexpected encounters, learning and collaboration.

Tradition or innovation? Professional or amateur? AI or human?

The opportunity to express oneself is equally open to everyone.

We seek new forms of expression while respecting individual experiences, skills and characteristics.

At the same time, we address the challenges that arise when different fields intersect, including copyright, permissions and the treatment of cultural traditions.

We continue to ask what we can do to avoid causing harm and to invite more people to find something meaningful or intriguing in what we create.

This, too, is a form of play.

A project is both a playground and a collective of energies.

Through encounters with people, things and different perspectives, the original concept evolves in unexpected ways, giving rise to new forms of expression and relationships.

In this process, we may also find our way back to aspects of ourselves that we could never have discovered alone.

Finding fascination in what happens and continuing to explore what might emerge from it — therein lies the beauty of cross-disciplinary co-creation.

The finished work is not our only outcome. The encounters, experimentation and transformations that take place along the way are equally valuable outcomes of the project.

COSTUME | The Kimono as a Bridge Between the Everyday and the Extraordinary

The kimono, a traditional Japanese garment, is another important form of expression shaping the world of this film.

Costume supervisor and kimono dressing specialist Honami Harukawa describes its role in the film as follows:

“A means of resetting the impurities of everyday life. Not something entirely removed from the everyday, but an element that makes us feel that this world still exists somewhere, that it continues to live on.”

The kimono was once something people wore in their everyday lives.

Today, various discussions surround its dressing conventions, styling and the ways in which its traditions should be preserved.

Harukawa continues to explore the expressive possibilities of the kimono while engaging with its history and cultural background.

New forms of expression can emerge precisely because we understand tradition.

The messages conveyed through the kimono are another aspect of the film we invite audiences to discover.





Fuko,
the protagonist

CULTURAL INSPIRATION | Is Changing Form a Sign of Decline or Evolution? Exploring a Deeper Sense of Being Oneself

From the earliest stages of the project, we felt that the concept of play we were exploring might share a common energy with traditional festivals.

Koma Ishibashi, our Saitama-based assistant director, still photographer and poster designer, introduced us to *Shiroku no Tengou Matsuri*, a traditional festival in Chichibu that is currently suspended.

To explore this inspiration further, Asaga traveled to Chichibu, conducting interviews and learning about the festival's history and cultural background.

Why have people needed festivals in the first place?

And why are traditions so often at risk of disappearing?

Does the disappearance of a form necessarily mean the loss of its essence — in other words, decline?

Perhaps being oneself does not mean preserving one's existing form indefinitely.

Sometimes, by letting go of what has shaped us and accepting change, we may find ourselves moving closer to our own essence.

Of course, certain skills and cultural practices, once lost, may never be recovered.

While respecting their value, we also wish to ask what remains when a form disappears, what can be carried forward and what might emerge anew.

Alongside the possibility of decline, we wish to continue exploring the possibilities of evolution and deepening.

Change may bring loss, but it may also give rise to something new. It may even bring us closer to the essence of who or what we are.

Perhaps this is why it matters to continue playing.

The project has become an opportunity not only to explore the forces that sustain human life, but also to reflect on the transmission and future of intangible folk cultural heritage and cultural traditions.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Cultural Properties Protection Division of the Chichibu City Board of Education, Mr. Asami and Mr. Takano for their assistance with our interviews and cultural research on November 5, 2026.

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM | A Cultural Experiment Involving 103 People

We introduce the principal performers and creative professionals who brought the many forms of expression within this project to life.

CAST

Principal Cast

Fuko — 新白 彩乃 Ayano Shinshiro

Tsugita — 小塙 祐介 Yusuke Kobana

Tengu Child — 小西 美月 Mitsuki Konishi

Aya (String Figures) — 中川 渚 Nagisa Nakagawa

Koma (Spinning Top) — 横田 桜正 Ousei Yokota

Mari (Traditional Ball) — 三根 由梨香 Yurika Mine

Denden 1 (Pellet Drum) — 金井 耀太郎 Yotaro Kanai

Denden 2 (Pellet Drum) — 小山 春 Haru Koyama

Energies of Play

Academy Student Dance Ensemble:

大坪 虎太郎 / 久保 日与利 / 國分 隆登 / 近藤 将正 / 高堂 充咲 / 北國 茉和 / 山本 彩羽

Senior Dance Ensemble:

新野 恭子 / 坂口 友見 / 和田 延裕 / 斎藤 敦 / 五十嵐 貴子 / 宮岡 直美 / 島村 かなめ / 菜花 広美

Approximately 70 performers applied to participate in the project’s auditions.

New inspiration emerged from the individual experiences and challenges of those who engaged with various creative tasks, including improvisation.

Recognizing these encounters and challenges as valuable parts of the creative process, we have included the names of audition participants on the film posters and in the end credits.

CREATIVE TEAM | Gingisells Backyard Team

Director, Cinematography and Editing — 小野田 奨 Tasuku Onoda

Assistant Director, Still Photography, Tengou Festival Cultural Research and Poster Design — 石橋 小真 Koma Ishibashi

Camera Assistant — 佐久間 智明 Tomoaki sakuma

Costume Supervision and Kimono Dressing — 晴川 穂浪 Honami Harukawa

Cast Coordination, Ensemble Choreography and Choreographic Advisor — Kin

Hair and Makeup — 木村 三喜 Miki Kimura

Concept, Executive Production, Original Story and Choreography — 浅賀 晴子 Haruko Asaga (Ginrock)

MUSIC

Vocals — れもねーど (Lemonade)

Performance — POLITYPE

Music Concept and Lyrics — Ginrock

Original Musical Concepts — SHIN-CHANG & THE MARKISA

Original Score — 葉桐 新 Shin Hagiri

The film includes music developed from traditional Japanese nursery rhymes.

COOPERATION & SUPPORT

Cooperation — Theatre Academy Co., Ltd.

Filming Cooperation — Urawa Museum of Traditional Houses

Costume and Props Cooperation — 晴川穂浪 / 木村三喜 / 劇安ハッピショップ【粋な祭人】/ ODORI Company

Tengou Festival Cultural Research Cooperation — Cultural Properties Protection Division, Chichibu City Board of Education / Mr. Asami / Mr. Takano

Grant Support — Arts Council Saitama, Cultural and Artistic City Creation Grant Program

Planning and Production — Gingisells

LOCATION | Historic Japanese Houses in Saitama City

The Urawa Museum of Traditional Houses is an open-air museum that preserves and displays seven historic buildings dating from the Edo to the Taisho periods, relocated and restored on its grounds.

Among them is the former Hasumi family residence, considered the oldest surviving traditional house in Saitama City.

The museum continues to share the history, everyday life and culture of the region with contemporary visitors.

Taking Saitama City’s history and cultural landscape as its creative starting point, this project explores new forms of cinematic expression through regional research and collaboration among artists and creative professionals from diverse disciplines.

Through the special screening in January 2027, we hope to engage with local residents and create opportunities for new encounters and cultural interest.

Looking ahead to submissions to film and arts festivals in Japan and internationally, we also aim to share Saitama City’s history, culture and distinctive character beyond the region and with audiences around the world.

COOPERATION | Theatre Academy

Established in 1980, Theatre Academy is a Japanese talent development and management company working with actors, voice actors, entertainers and models across generations, from infants to seniors.

Supporting the aims of this project, Theatre Academy’s Saitama school assisted with auditions involving approximately 70 applicants, as well as rehearsals.

Beyond conventional training, the Gingisells creative environment has provided an opportunity for performers to engage in practical artistic production alongside people from different generations and disciplines.

VENUE | OttO Cinema

OttO is a cultural complex in Omiya, Saitama City, combining a cinema, café and shared living space.

Located within walking distance of the west exit of Omiya Station, OttO creates opportunities for cultural exchange through film screenings, talks and other events.

For this project, the screening is an opportunity for the questions and emotions emerging from the film to reach others, opening the way for new encounters and forms of play.

SCREENING | Special Screening in Omiya, Saitama, January 30, 2027

Event

Gingisells PROJECT #02

A Song to find Our Way Back — Special Screening

Date

Saturday, January 30, 2027

Venue

OttO

1-345 Sakuragicho, Omiya-ku, Saitama City, Saitama, Japan

Running Time

Approximately 15–20 minutes (estimated; currently in production)

Screening Schedule

Session 1

12:30 — Doors open

13:00 — Screening and talk

14:00 — Event ends

Session 2

14:30 — Doors open

15:00 — Screening and talk

16:00 — Event ends

Admission

JPY 3,000

General Reservations Open

Thursday, November 26, 2026

Online Reservations

https://shibai-engine.net/prism/webform.php?d=4rxuenwx

Seating is limited for each session.

An automated confirmation email will be sent upon completion of your reservation. Please read the information regarding your visit carefully.

If you do not receive a confirmation email, please check your spam folder before contacting us.

Teaser

https://youtu.be/VzSiDJbbvaM

Organizer and Producer

Gingisells

Grant Support

Arts Council Saitama — Cultural and Artistic City Creation Grant Program

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FROM PROJECT #01 TO PROJECT #02

Following the crowdfunding-supported short film *Spring, One Step Away – A Budding Tale of an Old House* –, presented in May 2026, *A Song to find Our Way Back* is Gingisells' second film project.

The previous film has been submitted to five film festivals in Japan and internationally, including festivals in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

Both film festival submissions and screenings are opportunities to bring our work to new places and people, share the richness of regional culture with wider audiences, and open the way for further encounters and creation.

PROJECT #01 Trailer:

https://youtu.be/1ZycATI9Ql0

ABOUT GINGISELLS & CONTACT

Organization: Gingisells (Registered Trademark)

Organization Type: Voluntary Association

Fields of Activity: Arts and Culture, Artistic Expression, Cross-Disciplinary Co-Creation and Education

Activities: Planning, production and promotion of cultural and artistic projects, artistic expression through cross-disciplinary collaboration, and the creation of experiential learning opportunities.

Contact

gingisells@gmail.com

Contact Person: Haruko Asaga

Media inquiries and interview requests are welcome.

Official Instagram

https://www.instagram.com/gingisells/

Play is an experiment in living.

What does play mean to you?