Exploring New Possibilities in Spatial Design through Regional Revitalization × Metaverse

GARDE Celebrates 40th Anniversary with "Regional Revitalization Metaverse Award" Ceremony

– Six Award-Winning Projects Showcasing Regional Culture and Heritage in the Virtual Space –

To commemorate its 40th anniversary, GARDE Co., Ltd. (Head Office: Minato-ku, Tokyo; President & CEO: Kenji Muro), a global provider of total services in interior design, consulting, and coordination, held the "Regional Revitalization Metaverse Award" ceremony on Monday, June 16, 2025. At the event, six outstanding projects were announced, each representing a forward-thinking approach to next-generation metaverse spatial design.

The "Regional Revitalization Metaverse Award" was established to promote new regional value creation through the intersection of design, architecture, and art via metaverse technology. In this inaugural year, the award received approximately 300 entries. Based on GARDE's six judging criteria—originality and uniqueness of the idea; creativity in the use of digital technology; specific strategies for revitalization, efficiency, and convenience in regional communities; required resources and partnerships; responsiveness

to local residents' and users' needs.

Through this award, GARDE aims to promote a new wave of metaverse spatial design suited to an era where the physical and virtual seamlessly merge, while actively supporting the creative challenges of designers and innovators.

About the Regional Revitalization Metaverse Award

GARDE is leveraging its expertise in spatial design to create metaverse environments that connect rural regions with urban centers — and the world.

The Regional Revitalization Metaverse Award is an initiative aimed at addressing the challenges faced by local governments, such as population decline, aging demographics, and stagnant regional economies. By combining cutting-edge metaverse technologies with creative ideas, this award seeks to develop innovative new models for regional revitalization.

Through the use of digital spaces, the initiative enables the realistic expression of local appeal and makes it possible to communicate these qualities widely both domestically and internationally — transcending geographical and time-based limitations.

The award supports collaboration between creators with a perspective on regional branding and design, and local governments, in order to drive the development of groundbreaking content that addresses regional issues. The ultimate goal is to pass on regional culture, traditions, and natural resources to future generations while creating new opportunities for tourism and exchange and revitalizing local economies. For more details, please visit the official website: https://garde-metaverse-award.com/

Comment from Kenji Muro, President & CEO of GARDE

GARDE is a design consulting firm operating across four core business areas:

1. Design and construction for luxury brands
2. Large-scale commercial design for department stores and shopping centers
3. Office design
4. Real estate development

In recent years, we have also launched three new ventures focused on regional revitalization, the metaverse, and art. The "Regional Revitalization Metaverse Award" was established as part of our 40th anniversary celebration, combining these new initiatives to explore how virtual platforms can help address regional challenges.

Through this award, we aim to generate ideas that utilize the metaverse to tackle pressing issues such as depopulation and aging populations in rural areas, while also promoting local tourism and natural assets.

By leveraging the expertise of our in-house creators, we hope to bring these ideas to life and contribute to real-world projects led by local governments.

Shinichiro Misawa, Producer of the Regional Revitalization Metaverse Award — Comment

What stood out among the 300 submissions we received was a recurring theme of the "support economy." Just like in sports—where cheering creates energy and economic movement—many of the ideas showcased how mutual support could drive value within regional communities.

GARDE will continue to grow its initiatives around this spirit of mutual encouragement, creating platforms where communities and creators can thrive together.

Award-Winning Projects of the "Regional Revitalization Metaverse Award"

■ Grand Prize Winner

Recipient Name	Masahide Hino
Represented Municipality	Kunigami Village, Okinawa Prefecture
Title of Work	Stargazing with Locals: A Virtual Tour of Kunigami, Okinawa
Project Overview	This project offers an interactive virtual tour through the star-filled skies of Kunigami, Okinawa — an area known for its pristine night views — guided by local residents. By integrating regional cultural elements such as the sounds of the *Yambaru* subtropical forest, the Kunigami dialect, and the music of the traditional *sanshin* instrument, the tour provides an immersive experience that deepens understanding of local heritage. In addition to showcasing Kunigami's natural beauty, the initiative addresses broader regional challenges such as overtourism, depopulation, and cultural preservation. By repurposing local assets in a digital format, the project aims to serve as a model for regional revitalization. A free version will be released on YouTube to attract younger audiences and expand engagement with potential visitors and digital community members.

■ Award of Excellence

Recipient Name	Koki Okumura
Represented Municipality	Hachijojima (Hachijo Town, Tokyo) and various local governments throughout Japan
Title of Work	Co-Cat — Sensing Hachijojima Through Imagination Reimagining Tourism Through "Meaning" and "Connection" as Told by a Shape-Shifting Cat
Project Overview	This project draws inspiration from the traditional Hachijojima folktale *"The Cat Who Fooled People"*, offering an immersive experience in which visitors are guided by a cat through AR devices. Blending local scenery with storytelling, the experience unfolds across various island locations such as Mt. Hachijo-Fuji and the ruins of former schools, where layers of history and daily life emerge. Tourists engage as "narrators of the tale," introducing a new, participatory form of tourism. The project responds to pressing issues faced by remote islands and mountainous regions — including the limits of consumption-based tourism, threats to cultural preservation, and population decline. *Co-Cat* aims to address these challenges by functioning as a cultural, editorial-style metaverse archive. With integrated educational partnerships and regional DMC (Destination Management/Marketing Company) functions, the initiative also envisions a sustainable tourism cycle model.

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■ Local Government Award

Recipient Name	Runa Kuboshima
Represented Municipality	Iide Town, Yamagata Prefecture
Title of Work	Interactive Experiences Between the Physical Site and the Metaverse
Project Overview	By digitally duplicating Iide Town, Yamagata in the metaverse and synchronizing it with on-site programs, we deliver seasonal hybrid events that let people experience the town from both worlds—and, in doing so, tackle the structural issues the town faces.

■自治体賞

Recipient Name	Taishi Jinno
Represented Municipality	Kunigami Village, Okinawa Prefecture
Title of Work	Metaverse Bridge Project Connecting Japan's Northernmost Points
Project Overview	This is a virtual day-labor experience project that constructs a digital bridge in

	the metaverse, connecting Cape Hedo (the northernmost point of Okinawa Island) and Cape Soya (the northernmost point of Hokkaido).
	Players take on the role of Yanbaru Kuina (a native Okinawan bird species) and become virtual residents of Kunigami Village, participating in the bridge's construction.
	Like the long-term coal mining operations on Hashima Island (Gunkanjima), this large-scale simulated public works project — spanning several years — serves as a foundation for virtual livelihood and shared activity. By using real topographical names and features from Kunigami Village, participants deepen their understanding of the area and foster greater interest in its culture and natural environment.
	Additionally, players' activity data is provided freely for use in AI and robotics development, contributing to resolving labor shortages in regional logistics. This project holds potential as a new platform for interregional exchange, enabling meaningful connection and collaboration even between geographically distant communities.

■ **Local Government Award**

Recipient Name	Takeshi Kodama
Represented Municipality	Kunigami Village, Okinawa Prefecture
Title of Work	Expanding Exchange and Engagement in Kunigami Village through the Metaverse "Yanbaru World" (Working Title)
Project Overview	Kunigami Village is developing a metaverse space called *"Yanbaru World"* (working title), set in the rich natural environment of the Yanbaru region. In this virtual space, companies will be able to establish digital branch offices and employee retreat

facilities. Employees can work through avatars, take virtual vacations with friends and family, and engage in a variety of activities.

The village plans to offer access to *Yanbaru World* as a return gift under Japan's "Hometown Tax" (corporate version), enabling companies to contribute funds to Kunigami. These contributions will be allocated to conservation and environmental protection efforts in the Yanbaru region. Companies participating in the initiative will be able to collaborate with Kunigami Village to promote nature-positive efforts and fulfill their ESG goals.

In addition, through partnerships with local hotels and inns, employees of donating companies—and their friends and families—will receive discounts and special benefits when visiting Kunigami in person. This initiative allows companies to enjoy the effects of owning a physical employee retreat, without the associated costs.

For Kunigami Village, *Yanbaru World* acts as a catalyst to increase exchange, relationship-based, and even permanent populations—encouraging real-world visits through the metaverse experience.

■ Local Government Award

Recipient Name	Rie Takeuchi
Represented Municipality	Iide Town, Yamagata Prefecture
Title of Work	Virtual Migration Experience in the Metaverse – A Second Hometown, Starting from a House and a Field –
Project Overview	The Virtual Migration Experience Metaverse is a project set in Iide Town, Yamagata Prefecture, where users can virtually experience life as a local resident—living, working, cultivating, and contributing within the community. Participants begin by settling into a traditional Japanese home, starting a small farm,

	and taking part in local festivals and youth group activities, allowing them to enjoy the richness of everyday rural life across the changing seasons. As users accumulate experience, they eventually shift roles—from newcomers to supporters of new participants—embodying a cyclical model of growth and mutual support.
	This project emphasizes not only the virtual experience but also its connection to the real world. Mechanisms such as land acquisition through hometown tax donations and "Tamagaki NFTs" engraved with supporters' names allow users to naturally contribute to the region beyond the digital space.
	Designed as a "gateway to the future", the platform fosters positive imagination and online community building, particularly resonating with younger urban residents who are curious about rural relocation but hesitant to take the first step. In the age of AI and the metaverse, the project presents a new model that transforms virtual engagement into real-world vitality and fulfillment.
	Through the lens of Iide Town, this initiative aims to rediscover the strength and warmth of local communities, and inspire meaningful new relationships between people and place.

For more details on the award-winning project, please click here

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About the Initiatives of GARDE's Metaverse Division

At GARDE's Metaverse Division, we are actively engaged in the planning and production of virtual experiences that leverage our design expertise and technical capabilities. One such example is the virtual art museum "COCO WARP", developed in-house, where we host events such as virtual fashion shows and other immersive experiences.

For inquiries regarding metaverse-related planning and production, please contact us at:

info@garde-intl.com

＞Click here to view the COCO WARP project video.

About GARDE

GARDE is a branding and design firm specializing in luxury-focused environments across a wide range of sectors, including retail, offices, residences, hotels, dining, and large-scale mixed-use facilities. Leveraging a global network and a three-pillar approach—consulting, design, and coordination—GARDE brings

clients' visions to life by creating spaces that seamlessly merge exceptional design with functional excellence.

Headquartered in Tokyo, GARDE operates offices in Milan, Paris, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Dubai, New York, and Los Angeles, enabling truly global project execution.

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