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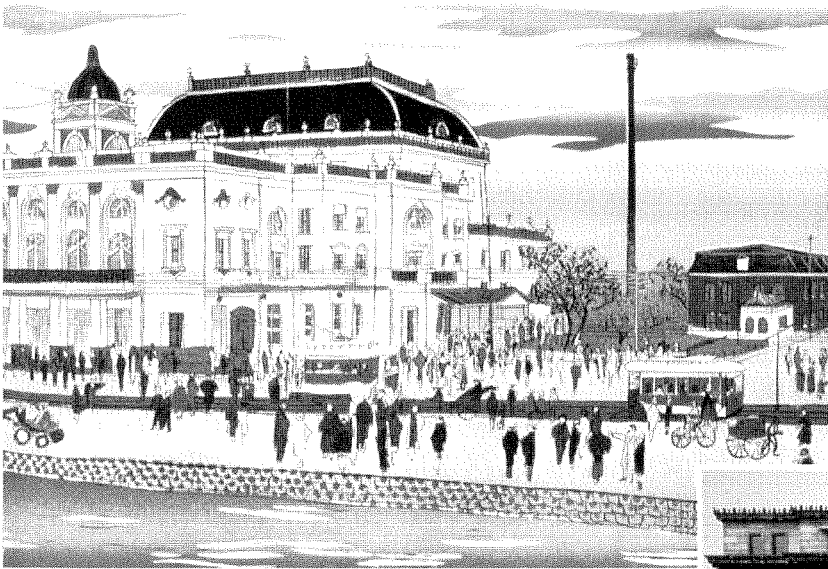
Fumihiko Maki

The Meiji restoration, which took place nearly 130 years ago, also marked the beginning of the modernization of Japanese architecture. Up until then, Japan had been a feudal society ruled by the Tokugawa Shogunate. Though civil engineering projects had been undertaken, there had been no buildings that were public in the Western sense — stadiums, universities, libraries, government buildings and the like.

The Meiji government dealt with public architecture within the context of urban development, through its own bureaucratic apparatus. Young, talented, would-be architects were recruited by the ministries of finance, home affairs, justice and railways and were sometimes sent abroad to study. As a result, many public buildings of relatively high quality (modeled, of course, on Western architecture) were constructed by the 1920s.

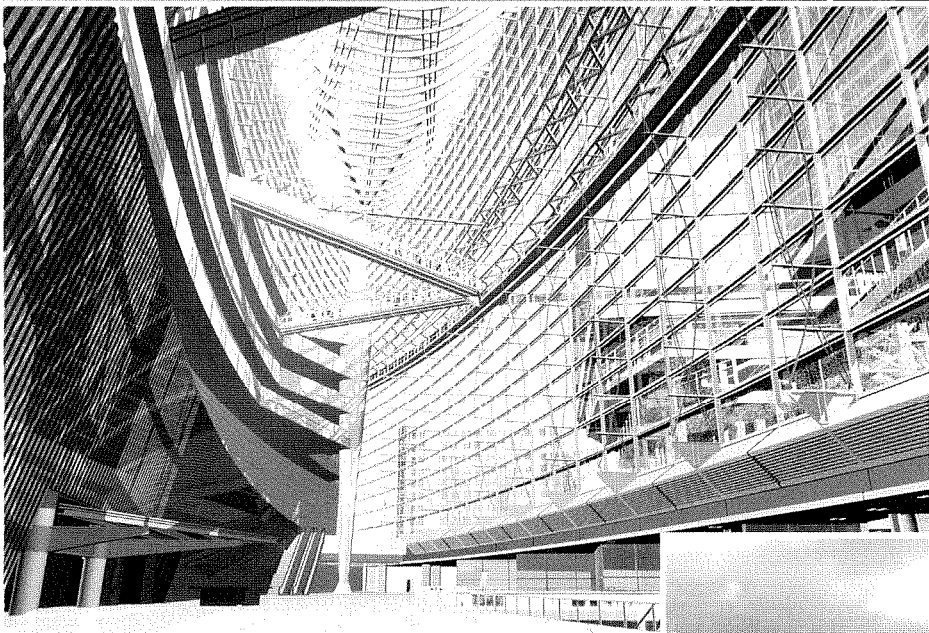
At times, professor-architects from the best known public universities (such as Tokyo and Kyoto Imperial) were commissioned to produce basic designs, which were then developed and completed by the building department of government ministries. Professional architects having no government affiliation were very rarely commissioned to design public buildings. (Their low social status is discussed at length in the diary German architect Bruno Taut kept when he was in Japan from 1935 to 1938).

This began to change after World War II. Much of the energy expended in reconstructing Japan, particularly up to the 1970s, was focused on building public housing, primary and secondary schools, and social welfare facilities. The main objective was to provide a sufficient number of such buildings at a low cost. During this time, works of public architecture



A "Ukiyoe" print illustrating a typical Western-style building after the Meiji Restoration of the 1870s in Tokyo. Courtesy Fumihiko Maki.

The Meiji Insurance Company, designed by Shinichiro Okada in 1934 in Tokyo, is designed in the neoclassical style that was typical for public buildings of the period. Courtesy Fumihiko Maki.



Tokyo International Forum. Designed by Rafael Viñoly Architects PC. Courtesy Fumihiko Maki.

Kumamoto Grasslands Agricultural Institute. Designed by Tom Henegan and Inga Dagflinnisdottir. © Shigeo Ogawa, Shinkenchiu.





Hotakubo housing. Designed by Riken Yamamoto & Field Shop. Top © Shigeo Ogawa, Shinkenchiku. Right courtesy Fumihiko Maki.



Location map of the projects in Art Polis, Kumamoto. Courtesy Fumihiko Maki.

by architects like Kenzo Tange and Kunio Maekawa began to receive international attention. Moreover, government agencies underwent a major reorganization and more commissions for public buildings began to be awarded to professional architects.

The 1980s brought unprecedented economic prosperity. Both public institutions and the general public expressed greater concern for the quality of public architecture, which began to be seen as a means of expression especially emblematic of an information and consumption oriented society. Public institutions were able to award commissions for public buildings with a much higher unit cost than those before the war, particularly cultural facilities such as art museums and concert halls. And throughout Japan, public architecture began to depart from a simple functionalism whose aim was to be neutral and easy to use.

In recent years two local governments in Japan have taken equally noteworthy but very different approaches to public architecture. One is Art Polis, a program of the Kumamoto Prefectural Government, and the other is the committee established by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government to select architects. In Kumamoto, a small group of persons select young, energetic architects who previously have had few opportunities to design public buildings; Tokyo's system reflects the opinions of many individuals, involving selection by a committee.

Art Polis

Kumamoto City is a city of 600,000 residents; the population of Kumamoto Prefecture as a whole is only 1.6 million, compared to Tokyo's 12 million. The sudden appearance of forty buildings that look unlike anything people had ever seen before not only made a significant contribution to the creation of a regional identity, but also had a much greater impact on the public than would have been possible in a mammoth city like Tokyo.

Art Polis was initiated in 1988 by former governor Morihio Hosokawa, who later became Japan's prime minister. After visiting the IBA projects in Berlin in 1987, he conceived the idea of creating a series of public buildings by selected innovative architects and invented the name Art Polis to characterize his ambitious concept. He then invited Arata Isozaki, an old friend and advisor, to act as commissioner for the project with Hajime Yatsuka as secretary general. After only four years, more than 25 Art Polis projects have been realized and twenty more are under construction.

The following is a quote from Hajime Yatsuka describing the concept of Art Polis:

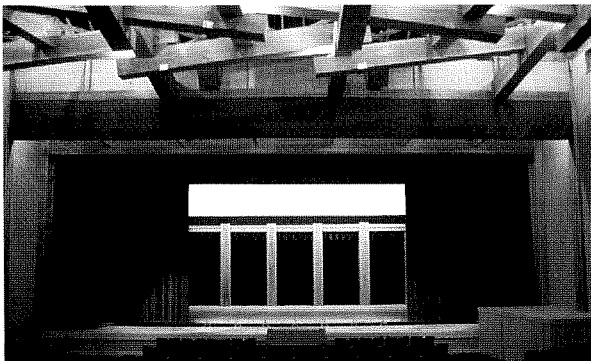
The principal significance of Art Polis resides in the fact that it is the first time that so many avant garde architects ... are of the younger generation whose age do not go beyond the forties at the time of commission. Those younger generation had, until then, seldom had chances to get

involved in public buildings. Many internationally well-known buildings by them were either small residential works or commercial ones.

Unlike European precedents, Art Polis is a rather modest program. It is a series of independent projects. Except for two joint housing projects, they are dots and not planes. And it is not intended to change the whole urban structure by not establishing any effective guidelines, because Japanese society, and hence the city's morphological structure, were too pluralistic for the projects to be guided by a single major principle. ...

The choice of architect for each program was very crucial. That they are excellent architects is not enough — they should be the best choices for their specific programs. They could be well illustrated in two different kinds of approaches in housing complexes — one, more like the product of European housing of the heroic period, the other by new programs of its own, where the exploration of such a new program was vital for its formal consequences. The other issue pursued in Art Polis is internationality and locality. Not only were the architects invited from Tokyo or Osaka, architects from abroad — Renzo Piano, Lapena and Torres, and Tom Henegan, were commissioned.

Most of the projects, except the Bunraku Theater by Kazuhiro Ishii, are anything but literally traditional. Even the theater may look traditional, but on closer inspection ... the iconoclastic use of wooden beams in the theater and the rotunda exhibition hall annexes, have no historic precedent in Japan. These projects significantly indicate the very modernity of Japan, where no genuine internationality nor regionality exist.¹



Seiwa Bunraku Puppet Theater. Designed by Kazuhiro Ishii Architect and Associates. Photos © Shigeo Ogawa, Shinken-chiku.



Tokyo's Architectural Selection Committee

Tokyo's new direction commenced in early 1980, when the Tokyo Metropolitan Government established an architect selection committee. The intention was to have impartial architects select appropriate designers for buildings that were expected to become the nucleus for the future urban development and, therefore, required a symbolic quality.

The committee was empowered to select architects through nomination, simple proposals and interviews, or limited or open competitions. The most noteworthy example was the open international competition for the Tokyo International Forum, which was awarded to Rafael Vinoly and is now under construction.

Historically in Tokyo, as in other large cities, influential architectural firms, particularly those with established connections to the city's building-related agencies, would be commissioned for a large share of such work. The introduction of these new selection methods represented a drastic change.

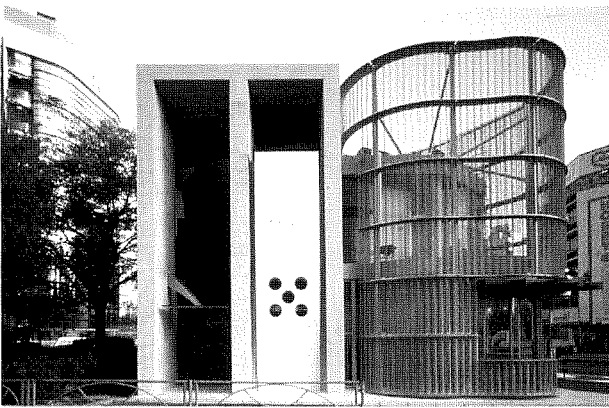
From 1982 to 1986, architects for twenty-five projects were selected by these methods. These projects varied in scale and type, ranging from a concert hall, gymnasium, aquarium, park and welfare facilities, to ward offices and police boxes. Young architects were being actively engaged.

Public architecture has not escaped without problems. In many cases there was inadequate preparation and analysis for civic buildings before design activities commenced. Many projects have been realized in unfavorable locations because of the shortage of available properties, particularly in large cities like Tokyo and Osaka.

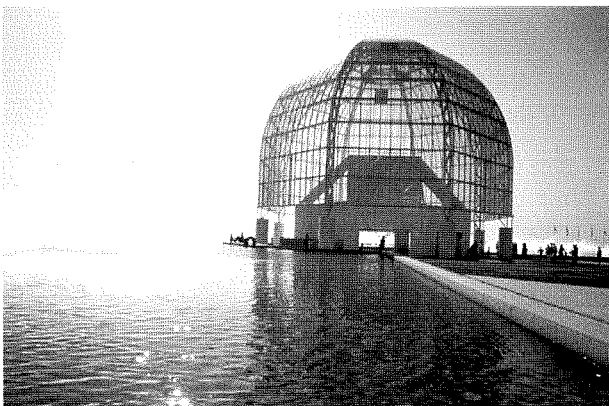
In smaller towns and cities, first-class facilities, such as large museums or acoustically superb concert halls, have been built without the art collections or programs to benefit them. They are often used for the exhibitions of local Sunday painters or karaoke contest among local residents. Much time must pass before such facilities reach cultural maturity and sophistication. The irony is, when such time arises, there may not be public funds available to capitalize on their formative efforts.

Public Architecture and Urban Structure

While public architecture has often failed to change the basic morphology of the city, it has made certain contributions to the city's cultural makings. As Tokyo demonstrates, service-related industries tend to create a multiplicity of centers scattered throughout an urban area. It is almost impossible for such cities to emulate Paris and to provide a new visual framework and



Higashi Nihonbashi police box, Tokyo.
Designed by Atsushi Kitagawara + ILCD.
Photo © Shigeo Ogawa, Shinkenchiku.



Tokyo Sealife Park.
Designed by Yoshio Taniguchi and Associates.
Photo courtesy Fumihiko Maki.

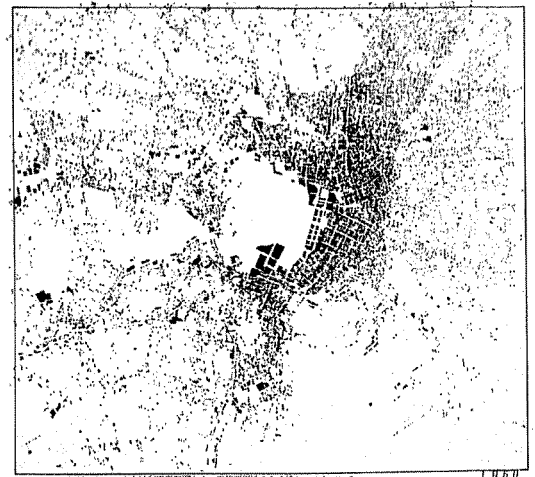
focal point with a series of grand public projects. And because Tokyo is such an enormous city, the public projects it sponsors bound to be more widely scattered and seem more isolated than those in Kumamoto City.

In cities like Tokyo and Kumamoto, each individual work of public architecture should be strategically located and possess an urbanity of its own. The sites for the projects within Art Polis were often spontaneous and not strategic in the sense of an overall master plan; they were selected in accordance with the availability of land. But the modest size of the city and the proximity of the newly built projects to one another has allowed for a certain sense of urbanity to permeate the city.

Many cities of the twenty-first century will come to have multi-centered structures, and for that reason, new urban forms and functional organizations will be needed. It is in such a context that the role of public architecture must be examined.

Note

1. Hajime Yatsuka, "Beyond Personal Architecture: Kumamoto Artpolis Phase One," *The Japan Architect* (Summer 1993): 14-23.



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Plan illustrating development of service industries in Tokyo. Black indicates location in 1960; gray indicates location in 1981. Courtesy Fumihiko Maki.



Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium.
Designed by Fumihiko Maki +
Maki and Associates.
Photo © Satoru Mishima.