

Commissioner's statement

While taking up the common theme offered by the general director of the 2014 International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale – Absorbing Modernity: 1914–2014 –, the Japan Pavilion will attempt to weave a continuous history of the 100 years of the country's architecture through a systematic research, which has actually rarely been done. We see this as an ideal opportunity to tell the story of unparalleled architectural development in Japan (a country that underwent drastic modernization in an effort to catch up with the West), and to feature the finest buildings and strongest concepts that arose as a result by a century's worth of Japan's absorbing or confronting with modernity.

The Japan Pavilion will be transformed into a “storehouse” filled with the testaments in various forms of the 100-year history of Japanese architecture. The building itself was designed by Takamasa Yoshizaka, who studied with Le Corbusier, and in 2014, it will be organized like an ancient Asian storehouse along the lines of the Shosoin or a takayuka-style (raised-floor) building. In the case of the latter, daily life and production was carried out on the ground below the building, and harvested crops were carried up and preserved inside the structure. In the Japan Pavilion, the elevated exhibition space will serve as the storehouse and the space below it, equipped with pilotis, will function as a venue for dispatches and discussions that will generate the “present and future.”

Visitors will be able to view a wealth of scenes taken from a variety of objects (exhibits) over this 100-year period. In addition to blueprints and models, the exhibition will include architects' sketches and notebooks, letters, drawings of structures and equipment, furniture designed as part of a building, magazines and books that exerted a strong influence on architecture, photographs, pieces of demolished buildings, photographs and paintings depicting imaginary views of buildings and cities, and documentary footage of construction work. This assemblage of varied and diverse things, together with details that tend to be omitted, will help locate architecture in a social context or in a broader perspective than before. (In order to realize this objective, we plan to use this opportunity to bring together a variety of public and private archives of modern architecture that are currently scattered all over Japan.) Further, we hope to convert some of the most important historical statements into “voices,” which can be enjoyed aurally by visitors.

A selection of buildings that stand as the most important and essential examples of architecture will be selected from each era during the 100-year period and displayed in a select group of photographs and drawings on the four walls of the exhibition room. All of the objects piled on the floor will play a narrative role in relation to the buildings that are featured above them on the walls.

The first period under examination will be the '70s. Japanese architects, who had by the 1960s largely absorbed modernism, began to take new directions over the next decade. The illusion of finding a Utopia in the future had collapsed, and by setting their sights on the society around them, the architects began to reexamine the significance of modernity and the historical perspective. The '70s can in a sense be seen as the real start of the modern era. Were these architects' questions and proposals accepted or rejected? Have any of them continued on to the present? History is a journey for "now" – this trip at the Japan Pavilion begins with this vicarious experience of the '70s.

In 2014, for the first time ever, all of the national pavilions at the biennale have been invited to adopt and explore the same theme in the exhibition. On this special occasion, I would also like to attempt for the first time to thoroughly convey the strength and historical depth of Japanese architecture.

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