



Opus 27

Kazuo Shinohara, Centennial Hall, Tokyo

With an introduction by David Stewart and photographs by Tomio Ohashi. 56 pp. with 63 ill., 280 x 300 mm, hard-cover, English
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Shinohara, arguably Japan's most original architect, was born in 1925 and comes from a mathematical background. He was trained at Tokyo Institute of Technology, the national polytechnic university (resembling ETH in Zurich); he also taught in the Department of Engineering for some thirty years. One of the substantial figures of late twentieth-century design, he possesses the sensibility of both a Voysey and a Lautréamont.

Well known for his residential work, Shinohara has more recently turned his hand to larger buildings, notably the Centennial Hall of Tokyo Institute of Technology, which serves as a club and meeting facility for the alumni and faculty. A work of imposing appearance, Centennial Hall has nonetheless mystified many Japanese observers, who see in it a giant robotic figure towering over the urban landscape. While notions of technology are certainly implied in the design – the structure could not have been calculated without a computerized matrix of 3180 simultaneous equations – nothing was farther from the architect's intention than a simple High-Tech emblem, or popular icon.

On the contrary, this book portrays Centennial Hall as the culmination of three successive architectural concepts or »styles«, the product of Shinohara's career as a teacher and hands-on designer during the course of Japan's unbelievably rapid postwar growth. Thus Centennial Hall looks toward what Shinohara speaks of as a »fourth space« – with reference to both the F 14 A Tomcat fighter plane and the Apollo 11 moon-landing craft. But just as this work was not intended to evoke comic-book style robots, neither does it seek to embody American-style technology for its own sake.

The author writes from a friendship with the architect of over twenty years. He explains how the building evolved as a quintessentially Japanese design of high seriousness and subtle aesthetic complexity, citing Friedrich Hölderlin's conviction that what is most difficult is »the **free** usage of what is **our own**.«

David Stewart was trained at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London and is now Professor of Architectural History at Tokyo Institute of Technology. Tomio Ohashi is famous for his distinguished photographs of ancient, as well as contemporary, Japanese architecture.

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