THE JAPANESE HOUSE
Architecture & Life after 1945

Tradition and innovation
the interpretation of the house by over 50 Japanese architects
capable of recounting an entire culture

9 November 2016 – 26 February 2017
www.fondazionemaxxi.it

Rome 8 November 2016. In the Japan devastated by the Second World War and economically incapable of planning large-scale public settlements, the cities slowly transformed into vital, apparently disordered and continually expanding entities in which small single-family dwellings were built, demolished and reconstructed without pause.

From 9 November 2016 to 26 February 2017 with the exhibition The Japanese House. Architecture & Life after 1945 co-produced with the Japan Foundation, the Barbican Centre and the Tokyo Museum of Modern Art, MAXXI will be presenting the centrality of the theme of domestic architecture in Japanese society through the work of archistars such as Kenzo Tange, Toyo Ito, Kazuyo Sejima and Shigeru Ban, that of a number of their masters, hitherto less well known in the West, such as Seike Shirai, Kazuo Shinohara and Kazunari Sakamoto as well as a group of extraordinarily promising young designers.

The exhibition was born out of an idea by Kenjiro Hosaka and Yoshiharu Tsukamoto and is curated by Pippo Ciorra, Senior Curator at MAXXI Archittetura directed by Margherita Guccione, in collaboration with Kenjiro Hosaka (National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo) and Florence Ostende (Barbican Centre, London) with consultancy from Yoshiharu Tsukamoto (Atelier Bow-Wow / Tokyo Institute of Technology).

This is the first exhibition in Italy dedicated to a theme that has produced some of the most influential and extraordinary examples of modern and contemporary architecture. A recurrent subject within the artistic, cinematic and visual imagination, the house is also the conceptual place in which Japanese society and culture bring together two fundamental aspects of the modernization of the country: tradition, with its system of rules and customs, and the propensity for innovation and the most radical expressive research.

The Japanese House tackles a number of principal themes, presenting essential aspects of the Japanese domestic and architectural space, revealing the expressive richness of these projects and the capacity to create unexpected harmonies between man, building and the context housing it, urban or natural as it may be.

The first theme to which we are introduced is that of the coexistence of traditional aspects and extreme architectural innovation, which we see in the first wooden houses by Kenzo Tange and also in more explicitly "avant-garde" projects such as the Sky House by Kikutake or in the more recent works by SANAA and Toyo Ito.

The second is that of the continuity in Japanese culture, as evident in architecture as it is in all other fields, the continuity we find between the exterior and the interior of the house, between nature and artifice, between ancient and technologically advanced materials. The exhibition highlights the ties established through the universities, the studios and the associations between the various generations of masters and their students who have gone on to become masters in their own right. We find it in the works of Shirai, of Sakamoto, of Kengo Kuma and of many other designers.

The third aspect concerns finally the role of the domestic space, the key to the entire metropolitan culture and to the urban metabolism of the Japan of today, characterised by the silent congestion of the urban spaces, by the link between the imaginations of architects, filmmakers and manga cartoonists, through to the impenetrable recipe that permits every Japanese designer to combine with innate skill Shinto sobriety and western minimalism, primordial and high-tech materials, privacy and transparency. In this sense one can hardly fail to be impressed by the works of Shinoara, those of Ryue Nishizawa and Sou Fujimoto, as well as by those of their younger followers.
The exhibition layout designed by Atelier Bow-Wow in collaboration with MAXXI, is intended to reproduce the spatial sensation of the buildings presented, in which functionality is frequently understood more of a psychological than practical device.

Drawings, models, vintage and contemporary photos, together with videos, interviews, film clips and mangas and works by artists make up the presentation together with life size reproductions of fragments and sections of particularly significant buildings such as the House U by Toyo Ito, the emergency shelter by Shigeru Ban and other essential elements of the Japanese domestic space.

The “non-architectural” materials such as the works by artists, filmmakers, anime artists and photographers are intended to facilitate understanding of the relationship between the Japanese inhabitant and their house and at the same time to extend the visitor’s gaze to take in a broader view of an infinitely rich and attractive culture that is frequently described in a summary, exotic or excessively romantic manner.


The Japanese House. Architecture & Life after 1945 be open at the Barbican Centre in London from 23 March through to 25 June 2017 and at the Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo from 11 July through to 18 September 2017 (to be confirmed).

The press kit and images of the exhibition can be downloaded from the Reserved Area of the Fondazione MAXXI's website at http://www.fondazionemaxxi.it/area-riservata/ by typing in the password areariservatamaxxi

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Admittance free for students of art architecture from Tuesday to Friday

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La mostra è co-organizzata da / the exhibition is co-organized by The Japan Foundation e / and MAXXI ed è co-prodotta da / and it is co-produced by The Japan Foundation, MAXXI, Barbican Centre, Londra e / and The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.
The Japanese House: Architecture and Life after 1945
By Jane Alison Head of Visual Arts, Barbican Centre and Giovanna Melandri President Fondazione MAXXI

The Japanese House: Architecture and Life after 1945 marks the first collaboration and joint venture of the MAXXI in Rome and Barbican Centre in London—two European institutions known for their iconic buildings and remarkable history of staging architecture exhibitions. MAXXI in Rome—designed by Zaha Hadid and a beacon for all that is bright and progressive in the world of culture—gives architecture and architects a permanent platform. Similarly, the Barbican Centre at the heart of the Barbican Estate, an architectural landmark and utopian project, has a history of staging architecture exhibitions within an enlightened programme that celebrates the exchange between art and design, art and life. Although there are subtle nuances of difference in our respective programmes, we share the belief that architecture matters. MAXXI started its young life with landmark exhibitions on Pier Luigi Nervi, Le Corbusier, Gerrit Rietveld, and OMA. The Barbican has staged major shows on the work of Daniel Libeskind, Alvar Aalto as seen by Shigeru Ban, Le Corbusier, and OMA. But it is perhaps The Surreal House in 2010, an exhibition that was the first to look at the importance of the house within surrealism and surrealism within architecture, that feels like the closest forerunner to this new exhibition, which similarly puts the domestic space centre stage. Like The Surreal House, The Japanese House weaves architecture with film to illuminate the life within and the socio-historic context of domestic architecture in Japan.

When the Japan Foundation in Tokyo approached both institutions to stage a major exhibition celebrating Japanese culture, we saw it as a timely and unmissable opportunity to bring the best of Japanese post-War architecture to audiences in Rome and then London who have had little exposure to it. Equally, it was an opportunity to invite Japanese scholars to take part in the project, thus ensuring the exhibition included an exemplary selection of houses from 1945 to the present day. As such, this book and the exhibition open the door to a world that, tantalizingly seductive and profoundly influential as it is, has been under-represented on the international stage. Our task has been to do justice to the material represented and to the comprehensive selection of architects or their respective families or estates who have been willing to co-operate on this internationally significant project. This project poses fundamental questions. Why the house? Why the Japanese house? Why now? We start from a position of seeing the house as a unit for dwelling. It is this human aspect that is intriguing and, in many respects, touching, for we relate to the intimacy and particularities of the house in a way that we cannot do with corporate or public buildings. Take, for instance, the utterly charming photographs of Kenzo Tange relaxing with his family in his breathtakingly beautiful home of 1953. Visionary patrons of architecture or very often architects themselves, such as Tange, live in the houses included here, houses that are especially present, in both senses of the word. Tadao Ando’s monumental Row House in Sumiyoshi (1976) and Kazuyo Sejima’s ethereal House in a Plum Grove (2003) are alive to materials and to their place within the city. Others, such as Antonin Raymond’s own house and studio (1951), speak to the world of nature or draw on the vernacular tradition. The post-War condition in Japan created a window for the languages of tradition and modernity to variously fuse and for the house to become a special unit of experiment. Seiichi Shirai’s House in Kureha (1965) and Kazuo Shinohara’s House in White (1966) are among those that exemplify this synthesis. Today, we see it again in the work of Terunobu Fujimori, Atelier Bow Wow, and Kumiko Inui as well as Chie Konno’s reinterpretation of vernacular architecture. In extreme synthesis, this is what makes the Japanese House in post-War Japan so special and so worthy of our consideration. Photography, film, and models and drawings are crucial bedfellows in a project such as this as they alone must capture the essence of space, both 8 9 interior and exterior, when the actual architecture exists elsewhere. We have sought the best examples in order to expand our understanding. Kazuo Shinohara’s conceptual houses are illuminated by Koji Taki’s stark, abstract photographs, while Terunobu Fujimori’s own roughly carved wooden model for Leek House reveals the building’s unique engagement with materials, craft, and the natural world. Hideyuki Nakayama’s childlike concept sketches illustrate his emotive, intuitive approach to creating spaces, while tracings taken of Takamitsu Azuma’s Tower House bear witness to that building’s incredible material presence.

In Rome and in London—and also in Tokyo when this project takes shape at the Museum of Modern (MOMAT)—the 1:1 model is a key component in the staging of The Japanese House. In Rome, a recreation of the interior of Toyo Ito’s White U, the section of a facade of one of Itsuko Hasegawa’s houses, and Shigeru Ban’s UNHR emergency unit form the centrepiece of the exhibition, while in London there is a complete reconstruction of Rue Nishizawa’s Moriyama House and a newly commissioned tea house and garden by...
Terunobu Fujimori. The intention is to make the architecture—as far as it is humanly possible—a real experience rather than an absence. An internationally ambitious project such as this could not have been possible without the at times seemingly superhuman efforts of individuals, more often than not working in different parts of the world in different time zones. It has been extraordinarily demanding, but in the process something essential has been achieved—a genuinely cross-cultural collaboration that brings the work of already well-known architects to a broader audience, and the work of unsung heroes of Japanese architecture (like Shinohara cult figures for those ‘in the know’) to eager cognoscenti as well as a wider public. We would like to extend our deepest thanks first of all to the Japan Foundation for embarking on this long-awaited exhibition and so painstakingly dealing with the organizational complexities in Tokyo. Special thanks go to Masanobu Ito, Managing Director, Arts and Culture Department for making all this possible, to Atsuko Sato, Director, who has facilitated this collaboration, to Keiko Tasaki, who has superintended the organizational effort and been our chief point of contact, and to Ayako Nagata and Akiko Tokuyama, who have adroitly liaised with architects, advisors, and archives to bring the exhibits together for both this book and the exhibition itself. The project was commendably developed in its formative stages by Kenjiro Hosaka, along with the chief advisor to the exhibition Yoshihara Tsukamoto of the internationally acclaimed architectural practice Atelier Bow-Wow, as well as the architectural historian, Hiroyasu Fujikawa, Professor Emeritus, Tokyo Institute of Technology. Much of the groundwork was laid due to their insights into the field. We are eternally indebted to them for sharing that knowledge.

Pippo Ciorra and Florence Ostende, curators at MAXXI and Barbican respectively, joined the curatorial team at the beginning of 2016. Each has brought extensive curatorial expertise to this project—Ciorra from an exquisitely architectural background, and Ostende from her specialization in modern and contemporary art. Both have personally met many of the architects, undertaken in-depth research, and worked in harmony and with great tenacity and commitment to ensure the success of their exhibitions at their respective institutions, as well as taken on the formidable task of editing this jointly published book. They have been aided by equally talented teams of individuals. In Rome, the realization of the exhibition has entirely been made possible by the passionate and expert dedication of the curatorial team led by Elena Motisi and involving Alessandra Spagnoli, who has spent long days on the texts. Silvia La Pergola, has collaborated with Atelier BowWWow to produce an impressive exhibition design, for which we are especially grateful to Yoshihara Tsukamoto and his main collaborator for this project Simona Ferrari, who spent never-ending nights on Skype to tune up with our team. We also acknowledge Etaoin Shrdlu Studio, responsible for the graphic image of the show. In London, Luke Naessens has been responsible for researching and writing the majority of the extended captions in this book, as well as lending his support to every aspect of the exhibition’s development. Sonoko Nakanishi joined the project in June 2016, and has greatly assisted the team’s research on Japanese art and architecture, liaised with Japanese architects and institutions, and contributed to the realization of the catalogue. The exhibition at the Barbican has been designed by the immensely talented architect Lucy Styles, who has also contributed ideas from the outset of the project. As a longstanding SANAA collaborator and employee, her knowledge of Japanese architecture has been invaluable and deeply appreciated. We would like to thank the architects Ryue Nishizawa and Terunobu Fujimori for their commitment and the inspiring re-creation of their work in the Barbican Art Gallery. We are indebted to the architect Takeshi Hayatsu for his support and to his students at Kingston University London, who have accompanied the staging of the creative world of Terunobu Fujimori in the gallery. We would like to thank Mr Moriyama for his support and filmmakers Ilê Beká and Louise Lemoine for capturing the vibrant essence of Mr Moriyama’s life in their new film. The graphic design for this book and for the exhibition in London has been handled with flair and sensitivity by Eva Kellenberger and Sebastian White of Kellenberger–White. We would like to thank Martina Mian of Marsilio publishers for her professionalism, good humour, and redoubtable commitment to this project. We would like to thank MOMAT—our partner institution in Tokyo—as well as all the lenders, estates, archives, and photographers who have allowed us to represent their work in this exhibition and book. At MAXXI, we have to thank Gagliardini srl, a loyal friend to architecture, and SAD, the school of architecture of UNICAM, for the support in the production of new models. In London, we are grateful to Simon Wright, the Director of Programming at JAPAN HOUSE, to Junko Takekawa at The Japan Foundation in London, to Ellis Woodman of the Architecture Foundation, to Tom Emerson of 6A for his immediate enthusiasm and his introductions, to Giulia Guaitoli for her research on Japanese cinema, to Coralie Malissard for her research on Japanese collections in the United Kingdom, and to Daniela Puga for her collaboration on the public programme. Finally, we would like to express our deepest thanks to the Japan centre and the Sasakawa Foundation for their generosity in supporting this project. Their help has meant we can do so much more.

This text is included in the exhibition’s catalogue due to be published and a maximum of 3000 characters is permitted to be published
Sitting in the office—home of Atelier Bow-Wow, I became immediately charmed by the ingenious spatial organization of the design that fluidly links—dividing but also connecting—working and living spaces, or public and private spaces in a highly limited footprint and volume. And it is so agreeable to swing through the office, the kitchen, and the living room and be able to glance at the sleeping room. Downstairs, a crowd of assistants are intently typing away on their computers. Upstairs, one can enjoy a moment of solitude in a wide open, even empty, private room. What is even more fascinating is that, across the little terrace and the transparent walls surrounding the living room where we had our working section around the dining table accompanied with freshly brewed tea, we found ourselves in the middle of the city, with the walls of the neighbours’ houses, covered by plants and water stains, standing only a few centimetres away. One can peep into the neighbour’s kitchen through the little windows hanging on the walls like dressing mirrors. Next to us on the other side are electricity and phone lines flying over our heads like a semitransparent curtain floating between the skyline of the dynamic but peaceful city and our sights. . . It is here that discussions and debates, filled with curiosity, passion, and love, take place on the questions of density and invention of the most creative houses and urban structures ‘designed’ by the normal people living here—a topic central to the research of Atelier Bow-Wow (and many of their colleagues). This is where Japanese architects live, imagine, and design. Before them is an amazingly dense, dynamic, yet poetic environment full of stories or histories of everyday life, in which utopian visions and practical solutions have to be combined to produce ‘interesting’ dwelling structures. They are human, not only functional but also providing sensuality of living—comfortable and peaceful but always brimming with fantasy, tension, and a passion for ‘weird forms’. They always therefore tend to be playful, sensual, and even erotic, tinged with a bit of melancholy, just like the ambiance of everyday life in Japan. You are immersed in a mixture incorporating extremities of beauty: absolutely innovative and stubbornly ancient, radically speedy and profoundly serene. . .

Once the photographer Kyoichi Tsuzuki, who famously documented hundreds of Japanese houses from family interiors to love hotels in his books (including Tokyo: A Certain Style 1) told me that when you live in Tokyo your home is the entire city—you go to work in the office, eat in restaurants, and sleep at home. You don’t even need a refrigerator because there are convenient stores and vending machines on every street corner. . . How do you build a ‘single family house’ in a city like this when the whole city can be your house? For generations, Japanese architects—from pre-War modernists to today’s global stars via Metabolism—have come up with the most inventive and insightful designs that at once preserve moments of ‘sleeping at home’ and prolong the liveliness of ‘living in the city’, with resolutely avant-garde languages and technologies. Their houses are uniquely outstanding with their originally intelligent and often ‘extravagant’ forms, provoking moments of ‘insurgency’ by adding a totally novel layer of difference to the harmonious urban environment formed by patchworks of architectural styles of various periods of history. The urban textile of Japanese cities has been famously rich and complex, forming an astonishing harmony constantly negotiating between the unplanned and the ordered, the inherited and the speculated, the traditional and the ‘high tech’. Contemporary designs, especially smaller scales of constructive interventions like family houses, add pungent touches to ‘spice up’ the movement of the eternal negotiation for the coexistence between the new and the old. At the same time, with the dazzling audacity of playing around with interactions between opening and enclosure, between local materials and new technology, between built structure and unbuilt occupation, Japanese architects often manage to conceive effective strategies to produce ever-renewing friendships among neighbours, extending the longevity of urban communities. Radical cases in point are Toyo Ito’s White U House, which turns entirely in to the private, and Su Fijimoto’s House NA, which opens up to the street as a naked body. . . These are at once utopian and dystopian. They are also firmly realistic, yet delightedly aloof. They exemplify a singular but universally significant form of contemporaneity, and inspire us to understand the future of the everyday dwelling in the age of global communication and overexposure of everything—our age of urban spectacle. What is really social in the time of social media and reproduction of image that increasingly deprive us of physical human contacts? And how can privacy survive, and be revitalized in the midst of an excessive exposure to the other? To introduce Japanese House Architecture to the European public is first to share this singular contemporaneity. And with these Japanese architects—as well as those who inhabit these creatively designed houses—we are encouraged to raise fundamental questions regarding the essence of today’s home, and life in general.
The Japan Foundation is pleased to have co-organized the exhibition The Japanese House: Architecture and Life after 1945—a survey of the history of residential architecture in Japan since World War II—along with MAXXI, Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo, Rome; the Barbican Centre, London; and MOMAT, the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. Every year, Japan sees the construction of myriad new houses, a significant number of which are designed by internationally active Japanese architects. The work of these architects, however, has only fragmentarily been introduced to the broader public. There have been virtually no large-scale exhibitions overseas devoted to introducing Japanese residential architecture—this exhibition boldly attempts to fill that gap with hundreds of hitherto unseen models, plans, photographs, and films, illustrating the great variety of domestic residences designed by Japanese architects from the post-War period to the present day. Its broad approach is this exhibition’s most distinctive feature. MOMAT Curator Kenjiro Hosaka and architect Yoshiharu Tsukamoto, who provided invaluable curatorial guidance from the outset, have drawn on Michel Foucault’s concept of ‘genealogy’ and divided the residences into several distinct genealogies. Their expertise, along with that of curators Pippo Ciorra and Florence Ostende, has been brought to bear to tease out and reveal connections between residences that were built many years apart or whose connections might otherwise have remained obscure or seemed merely tenuous. This exhibition is therefore an experiment that probes more profoundly, to greater depths, and from a broader perspective than the customary exhibition whose attention is centred on superficial design and novelty. Recovery from defeat in World War II, rapid economic growth, the maturity and stagnation of a consumerist society, accelerating and ever more massive urbanization, falling birth rates and an increasingly aged society, disasters such as the Great East Japan Earthquake—through all these changes spanning the seven decades since the end of the War, architects have thought long and hard about residential architecture and have asked themselves what the role of architecture should be in shaping the most fundamental of human behaviours. We will be very pleased, indeed, if visitors to the exhibition come away with a sense of the organic connections between these architects’ experiments and the residences that resulted from them. We are profoundly grateful to MAXXI in Rome and the Barbican Centre in London, who sustained and supported our goals for this exhibition and have co-organized it with us. Fully respecting their efforts and taking into account the distinctive features and approaches of our partner institutions, we have granted our curators autonomy and allowed the exhibition at each site to take on its own life. We are confident that visitors, in referring to the exhibition concept described in this catalogue, will enjoy the world of Japanese residential architecture it presents and appreciate their contact with Japanese society and culture. In closing, I would like to thank the architects and architectural offices and collectors who provided the materials displayed in this exhibition. We are also grateful to Japan Airlines and Alitalia for their support, to the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, for providing the Tokyo venue for this exhibition, and to the many others without whose co-operation this exhibition would not have been possible. Our special thanks must also go to Jane Alison and Hou Hanru for believing in this project, to Pippo Ciorra of MAXXI and Florence Ostende of the Barbican Centre along with their institutions’ staff, to Kenjiro Hosaka, Hiroyasu Fujioka, and Yoshiharu Tsukamoto for their indefatigable efforts, and to the staff of Atelier Bow-Wow.

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I LOVE JAPANESE CULTURE

By Pippo Ciorra

Bruno Taut’s enthusiastic declaration, carved by Japanese friends onto a stone monument erected in memory of the architect, 1 is an excellent point from which to start elucidating the reasons for staging an exhibition on the architecture of the single-family house in contemporary Japan. In fact it is undeniable that the main reason for an exhibition of this kind in a Western museum is the fascination and undisputed interest aroused as much by the historic imagery of Japan’s art and architecture as the global success of its most recent designers. Quite apart from the legacy of a couple of centuries of Japanophilia, we should not forget that some of today’s most highly regarded architects are Japanese, that three of the last six Pritzker laureates have come from Japan, and that our exhibition includes the works of five of these Pritzker winners.

A good reason, then, but not the only one. The theme of the architecture of the single-family home in post-War Japan 3 branches out, in fact, into a series of other, connected themes which are today at the centre of the worldwide debate over the relations between architecture, society, ecology, and the city. Let us try to list these themes. The first and most obvious is the fact that the best way to approach the work of these architects and the exchange that takes place between them and the society they operate in is through their home design. The second theme we intend to explore is that of the relationship between the spaces people inhabit and the form/organization of the cities they live in, which is a pressing question in every context and at every latitude. The third theme comprises all those variables—which are so remarkably specific in Japan—that have to do with time: the relationship with memory and individual and collective traditions; the long-term effects of modernity (what Koolhaas has defined as ‘absorbed modernity’); and the preservation and transformability of older buildings. There is also one last theme that is very much present in the exhibition and also crops up obsessively in the contemporary debate over architecture, and that is the conflict between utopia and realism, between general order and local solutions, and between the desire for permanent construction and spatiality in the making (sakui versus jinen, if we want to take advantage of an established historical categorization). 4

In conclusion, our aim is to present examples that will demonstrate how, throughout the twentieth century, and especially in the period following the Second World War right up to the present day, there have been architects who have grasped the sense of ‘natural modernity’ in Japanese domestic architecture and who have deftly applied this awareness to their own way of conceiving space and tackling problems posed by modes of living and the contemporary city. An architecture of houses. In 2006, Arata Isozaki published an illuminating collection of essays on the subject of ‘Japan-ness’, 5 that is the specific identity of Japanese architecture, viewed above all in relation to the gaze of those who observe it ‘from the outside’. For Isozaki the discourse on Japan-ness has a beginning and an end. The precise beginning of Japan-ness (before, talk had been of Japonisme), in fact, is considered the second day of Bruno Taut’s stay in Japan (1933), 6 when his friend Isaburo Ueno took him on a visit to the Katsura Imperial Villa. The end of Japan-ness, though less clear-cut, is equally easy to identify as it corresponds to the early 1990s, the most frantic and expansive phase of globalization, when the world of nations and blocs as well as culture morphed into an archipelago with an infinite number of centres. Japan was now no longer a remote, faraway place located beyond the clearly defined bounds of exoticism, but simply another of these centres, conceptually equidistant and part of the worldwide artistic and political scene just like all the others. ‘That is to say,’ to quote Isozaki, ‘that the very border that once gave substance to Japan-ness has been decomposing.’ 7 This new context has made the work of architects active in Japan more accessible, and they have made the most of it by laying siege to the global market for architecture with their sophisticated simplicity, winning important, prestigious prizes and competitions. But, albeit engaged in the construction of important museums and institutions the world over, even the best-known of Japanese architects have never turned down the chance to build small single-family houses in their own country. And it is precisely with regard to the continuity of this commitment to the design of homes, from the end of the Second World War until the present day, that this exhibition takes a slightly different position from Isozaki’s and suggests the possible survival of a particular aspect of Japan-ness in the design of the individual house. The proposition in this sense is clear. Ever since the Japanese government decided to base the country’s post-War reconstruction on the owner-occupied ‘detached house’, 8 architects working in Japan have accepted the idea of the home as the primary, privileged place in which to carry out their most authentic experimentation. This is true from the viewpoint of ‘design research’, but also from that of their social role. The home is the conceptual locus where Japanese designers put to the test their ability to reconcile the immutable concepts of an extremely ‘durable’ spatial tradition with the requirements and qualities of contemporary daily life. Architects also therefore reassert their place in society, taking on the task...
of dealing in spatial terms with the conflicts inevitably generated by technological and anthropological evolution, by the hybridizing of taste and the intrusive nature of economic, management, and communicational priorities. All this finds expression in a form of collective identity (Japan-ness again) of the country’s architecture, which allows us to interpret a theme—the relationship between design and dwelling—that is once again of paramount importance in the contemporary world.

A city of houses
In their introduction to Made in Tokyo, the authors accurately describe the sense of uneasiness, vaguely reminiscent of Blade Runner, that strikes even the more acculturated Japanese when they return to Tokyo from Europe: ‘Roads and trainlines run over buildings, expressways wind themselves over rivers, cars can drive up ramps to the rooftop of a six-storey building. . .’ 9 How could all this have happened? What has gone wrong in Tokyo? After a few days, however, confess the authors, the question quietly subsides, along with the sensation that anything is wrong. Gradually they start to feel at home again, as if there were something, a secret architectural device, that allows the feeling of urban disorientation to be gently absorbed and compensated in the life of individuals. It seems evident that for Atelier Bow-Wow, some of whose research is contained in Made in Tokyo, this device is the singlefamily house, whose efficacy clearly encompasses the plane of both urban and human relations. In a social space that is highly organized in a modern and productivist sense, often very remote from the ‘human scale’, and where collective modes of behaviour are meticulously regulated, the house is ultimately a place of compensation where the Japanese can more freely express their individuality. Houses often take the form of the ‘free behavior’10 of those who live in them and have an average lifespan of twenty-six-years (that is, one generation), and the city has no choice but to derive much of its own unstable form directly from the sum of these single units. Perfectly expressed in the Japanese Pavilion of the 2010 Venice Architecture Biennale,11 this seems to be the true nature of Tokyo’s urban metabolism. The Biennale in question—directed by Kazuyo Sejima, as it happens—was held when the ‘urban question’ still dominated the debate over planning. Not yet diverted by the economic crisis, the debate centred on how to put a stop to the boundless housing sprawl brought about by what Aldo Bonomi calls ‘molecular capitalism’ and extending swiftly and more or less consistently all over the world, from the suburbs of South America to the coastal areas of Asia, from the metropolitan zones of sub-Saharan Africa to the shores of the Mediterranean. The authors of Tokyo Metabolizing,12 drawing on the Japanese experience, proposed an unprecedented and provocative solution to the problem: as there was no point in restoring a lost (and Eurocentric) urbanistic order, would it not be better to try to understand the rules and rhythms of the metabolism of contemporary urban space and learn how to work within them? For this to be possible, it was necessary to realize that traditional distinctions of scale were no longer applicable and that, once a sound infrastructural network has been established, the basic unit of construction, that is the single-family house, is just as important—if not more so—than a public building, a shopping mall, or an office tower.

The space of the house and the space of time
In order to understand just how intimately the many legacies of tradition and modernity, aristocratic and rural life, and ancient and recent technologies are intertwined in the Japanese home, we must go back to those first few days that Bruno Taut spent in Japan after fleeing from Nazi Germany in 1933. His diary entry on day one is all about his encounter with the humber, poorer aspects of the Japanese home: the cold, the absence of ‘European-style’ furniture, the communal bathroom, the basic simplicity of the utensils, the low beams (which he occasionally bumped his head on), the pain of having to sit on his haunches. On day two, the Taut family left the home of his host Mamada-san and were taken to Katsura, where Taut discovered the other, far more aristocratic aspect of Japanese spatial culture, with its severe, simple spaces, its regular arrangement and right angles, and its discreet compositions that spoke to a subtle equilibrium between artifice and nature. He was profoundly impressed. ‘What would you call this architecture in modern terms?’ Taut asked his friends.13 The response was unanimous and rousing: ‘an architecture of function or [. . .] motive’. In one fell swoop Taut laid the foundations for a global perception of Japanese architecture as ‘naturally modern’, a perception that, when all is said and done, still holds. Many years later, in fact, when Katsura himself was being described by Gropius and photographed by Yasuhiro Ishimoto,14 the ‘detached villa’ was again presented as a sort of backdated archetype of neoplastic architecture,15 where the elements of Japanese life (tokonoma, engawa, tatami) were directly connected with a space defined by areas, layout, and geometries typical of northern European modernism. Like Taut’s diary, Ishimoto’s photographs gloss over pitched roofs, structural details, and decorative elements, even though there was no shortage of these at Katsura that could be used to set the complex in relation to the more vernacular aspects of the local tradition.
All this means that, during the period after the end of the Second World War when Japanese architects fell in love with single-family houses, designers approached the theme without any particular qualms or restrictions and without feeling the need to fall into line with an ‘international’ norm. The young Kenzo Tange, Seiij Shirai (who had just returned from studying philosophy in Germany), and Antonin Raymond (who came to Japan with Wright) tackled the question of Japan-ness freely and gracefully, utilizing the traditional elements of space and construction to design incontestably modern buildings. There are two basic factors that entrenched this approach, making it still relevant today: on the one hand the absence of our Western obsession with ‘origins’ and the consequent desire for a paradigm against which architects can measure themselves, its place taken by a circular and recurrent ‘space of time’, founded on generations and genealogies; on the other, the increasing importance of the client, seen as the bearer of tastes, habits, and ‘modes of behaviour’ that directly condition the form of the house and function as an ‘enzyme’ capable of harmonizing the coexistence of what derives from tradition with everything that comes to us from contemporary life. ‘Each building,’ we read in Behaviorology, ‘can be viewed as a sentient creature’,16 and like every sentient creature each building has a lifespan, which we have already identified as twenty-six years, not coincidentally the length of a generation. This is how Tokyo has operated over the last seventy years, and is thus how the city has developed a form of void metabolism17 (as opposed to the core metabolism described in Project Japan18) that has allowed Japanese city planning, contrary to all disciplinary common sense, to function well. However, there now also seems to be something new in the circular, ‘genealogical’ time of Japan, visible for example in the works on show in the Japanese Pavilion at the 2016 Architecture Biennale, which opened in May. It is a series of designs of houses assembled by the curator Yoshiyuki Yamana,19 whose common denominator is the idea of extending the concept of the household to communities beyond the limits of the traditional family and—something truly unprecedented in a country in which the most important temple is moved and reconstructed every twenty years—of recycling existing buildings to realize or improve housing projects. In short, preservation and the obsession with recycling are making headway even in metabolizing Tokyo and raising new and stimulating problems for the practice and theory of architectural behaviourism.

Utopia and realism

Mentioning Japan to a Western architect inevitably evokes visions of bold technocratic structures spanning Tokyo Bay, immense tentacular towers to which building blocks are tethered like spaceships taking on fuel, and massive Fun Palaces20 transformed into huge roofs for the Osaka Expo. However, the time (a period of crisis and depression) is particularly ripe for the cultivation of utopias and thus makes the architectural public highly sensitive to the allure of any radical visionary alternative. Although it cannot in fact be said that the Japanese house is devoid of the Metabolism of the 1960s (suffice it to cite the radicalism of Kurokawa’s Capsule Tower or the trenchant force of Kikutake’s Sky House, for example), it is nonetheless true that the research underpinning this exhibition presents an essentially ‘realistic’ vision to the observer. Once again, the Japanese single-family home obliquely introduces an architectural debate that is as topical as it is broad in its scope, as the 2016 Biennale referred to above clearly evinces. The Biennale’s pavilions and the Arsenale are teeming with installations inspired by a nostalgia for ‘public’ intervention as an engine for the construction of collective housing (preferably around ten storeys high and several kilometres long) and for the architect as a demiurge graciously disseminating knowledge, cities, and democracy throughout the land. This exhibition (and the Japanese Pavilion) offers a different response: keep well away from all those cases in which the client is not the person who is actually going to live in the building, and start out instead from a promiscuous relationship between the designer and the inhabitant, between the planner and the city, between the architect and the physical and spatial materials of the house. Construct an alternative based on the multitude of ‘modes of behaviour’ and not on a revival of metanarratives. Clearly, this is a form of realism that is not immune from a certain measure of utopia, but a utopia that does not stake everything on ‘all or nothing’ but permits an endless series of partial victories or defeats, with gaps between them in which the figure of the architect can survive. Apparently chaotic, as Atelier Bow-Wow once again explains,21 the ‘city of houses’ represents a highly sustainable alternative that is able to seamlessly regenerate itself, founded on the initiative of individuals rather than the accumulation of central capital and the resources and power this implies. This is still an open question, but we would like to take this opportunity to stress the potential of research into the single-family house in Japan as a key to the current political debate on architecture and the forms of the city.

Learning from Japan

In almost all Western architectural scenarios, the theme of the single-family house for the middle classes is nonexistent or still somewhat taboo. Extraneous to the ‘collective’ nature of European modernism and generally finding expression in the regressive and exclusive theme of the detached villa, the single-family...
house is seen as an indulgence for which the masters (Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier) are forgiven in the early stages of their careers. It is considered a training ground, an inevitable initiation to the profession for young architects who have yet to earn the kind of reputation that will allow them to obtain commissions for well-subsidized public institutions or poorly subsidized public housing. For this reason the modern form of Japonisme encountered in the early decades of the twentieth century is Frank Lloyd Wright’s and Taut’s own orthodox and much-admired take on the theme. Wright is perhaps the only acclaimed architect in the West to have worked on the theme of the single-family home for the contemporary middle class, in the Prairie School houses and in his designs for ‘kit homes’. Taut, as we have seen, was for a long time the official arbitrator between modernist aesthetics and Japan. After these two architects, it was the Eameses who fastened on the most interesting typological characteristic of the Japanese house—that is, its emptiness and flexibility, with no fixed walls or rooms used for a single function. The horizontality, rationality, and multifunctionality of the spaces shaped a modernity that was foreign to Europe’s Bauhaus-inspired typological obsessions, and this allowed the Japanese architects of the second half of the twentieth century to design houses more freely and creatively than their Western counterparts. Japanese house design moves from the ground up, from family to society; in the West it almost always moves top–down, from society to the family, with different degrees of negotiation and imposition. For Dimitris Pikionis, the architect who landscaped the area around the Acropolis, Japan was the typical source of inspiration for anyone looking for an unstable—albeit convincing—equilibrium between tradition and modernity. His wooden porticos and carefully arranged stones to guide people as they climb up toward the Parthenon are reminiscent of another recurrent claim in Japanese writings: Western architecture ‘takes’ space from nature, while nature ‘bestows’ it on Japanese architecture.

Carlo Scarpa died in Japan, about a year after the magazine Space Design devoted a special issue of almost two hundred pages to him and ten years after his first visit on the occasion of an exhibition of Cassina furniture organized by his son Tobia. Officially, Scarpa’s passion for Japan was an offshoot of his devotion to Japanese works, and they are also a precious indication of a possible future for Italian architecture. Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, a decidedly ‘unaligned’ Italian architect who displays an almost ‘Scarpian’ persistence, is even closer to the Japanese vibe. Her houses in Sicily, which have received regular professional training, and both operated in opposition to modernist orthodoxy and were extraneous to the mainstream of their own country. To see how Scarpa brought about a perfect synthesis between the structural and material nature of Western architecture and the ‘spatial and dynamic’ character of Japanese architecture, you need look no further than his Brion Tomb, which Japanese architects quite fittingly often visit.

As far as more recent history is concerned, we see how the passion for the features of Japanese architecture tends to go beyond the aesthetic sphere and expand into the realm of the theme to which this exhibition is dedicated. The single-family home, in fact, is regarded as a social mechanism capable of connecting the middle class and architecture, two entities that in Western countries, despite the fact that ‘detached’ houses are built in their millions, seem to have ignored one another almost completely up to now. In some countries the socioeconomic landscape tends to favour this process. BLAF Architecten and AND’ROL Architecture in Belgium, Bevk Perović Arhitekti and Dekleva Gregorič Arhitekti in Slovenia, and Clavien Rossier and GOA in Switzerland seem to be working on a European version of the architectural behaviourism that we are tackling in The Japanese House. Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, a decidedly ‘unaligned’ Italian architect who displays an almost ‘Scarpian’ persistence, is even closer to the Japanese vibe. Her houses in Sicily, which display rigorous devotion to space, a commitment to the involvement of clients and their modes of ‘behaviour’, and a capacity to modulate density and rarefaction, would not at all look out of place in an exhibition dedicated to Japanese works, and they are also a precious indication of a possible future for Italian architecture.

Endnotes
3 For the historical background to the questions tackled in this exhibition, readers are referred to the essay written for this catalogue by Hiroyasu Fujioka, ‘A History of Individual Houses in Postwar Japan’.
5 Ibidem.
7 Isozaki, ‘Western Structure vs Japanese Space’, 57.
8 See note 3.
10 See Atelier Bow-Wow, Behaviorology (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2010).
12 See note 11.
13 Taut, Houses and People of Japan, 293.
14 After some time spent in the United States, Yasuhiro Ishimoto returned to Japan in 1953 and the same year was commissioned by the MoMA to photograph the imperial villa of Katsura.
16 Atelier Bow-Wow, Behaviorology, 9.
17 Atelier Bow-Wow, Behaviorology, 13.
23 The love Pikionis felt for Japan, a country he never visited, was also platonic and literary. His sources were Taut’s report on the one hand and the books of his friend the writer Nikos Kazantzakis on the other, in particular Le jardin des rochers [The rock garden], a volume Kazantzakis published in French in 1936.

This text is included in the exhibition’s catalogue due to be published and a maximum of 3000 characters is permitted to be published.
THE JAPANESE HOUSE
ARCHITECTURE & LIFE AFTER 1945

The Japanese House documents the work of three generations of designers, covering a period spanning from the post-war years to the modern day. It explores one of the central themes of Japanese architecture: the design of the single-family house. The exhibition, which was born from a collaboration between international institutions and which will travel from MAXXI to the Barbican in London and to MOMAT in Tokyo, includes over eighty house designs. Drawings, models and photographs help visitors to understand not only the natural ease with which Japanese architects mix modernity, tradition and the ability to work in dialogue with their clients, but also the virtuous role that their works assume in society and in the cities of their country.

The staging of the exhibition, designed by Japanese practice Atelier Bow-Wow, organises the work of about sixty artists along a seventy-year genealogical stretch, in a path that is structured into fourteen thematic areas. The exhibition moves from the tension between modernity and Japaneseness following the war onto the metabolic utopias of the sixties and the minimalism of the nineties, before introducing us to the current renewed focus on the vernacular and the use of simple materials.

PREMISE
As an intro to the exhibition we find some fragments featuring the basic elements of the living space in Japan. Ishimoto’s images of Katsura Imperial Villa bring us back to the source of the proto-modern reading of Japanese architecture, whilst a video installation by Kogonada on the work by Japanese director Yasujirō Ozu, pictures the permanent sense of tension between tradition and modernity. The fragment by medieval poet Kamo no Chōmei speaks to us about a culture strongly tied to the idea of transiency and transformation. Finally a XVII Century painting of Morikage Kusumi displays the search for continuity in the relation between the space of the house and the landscape.

JAPANESENESS
In 1955, tradition became again the object of a discussion about which style of the past, modern Japanese architecture should refer in order to stay rooted in the identity of the country. For some it was shinden-zukuri, a style associated with Heian-period palace architecture. For others simple and functional characters of modernity should remind of the style of minka rural houses. But the discussion on Japaneseness was not only limited to the two main traditions. For example Raymond’s use of the exterior space marks a departure from the traditional Japanese engawa, into something more European. In his House with a Chestnut Tree Ikuta combines engawa and european veranda.

MASS PRODUCTION
After the Second World War, Japan was faced with a housing shortage of crisis proportions. Many architects affirmed that the solution laid in standardised design using prefabricated elements. The concepts of prefabrication, standardisation and technology were explored during the 1960s by the architects of the Metabolist group and flourished once again in the 1970s, with emblematic projects such as the Nakagin Capsule Tower Building. However, there has been considerable resistance due largely to a widespread preference for individualised homes. Alongside experiments in standardisation, therefore, even in the 60s and 70s there has been a development of houses with an emphasis on customization.

EARTHY CONCRETE
Reinforced concrete was introduced in Japan in the early 1900s. Due to its resistance to earthquakes, it was quickly adopted by the Japanese architectural profession. The transition from timber to concrete was completed by some of the postwar “masters”. For the Reinanzaka House in Tokyo, Raymond collaborated with skilled carpenters to transfer the organic quality of wood to concrete. Yoshizaka’s rough concrete houses were inspired by the makeshift barracks that Tokyo residents had erected in the wake of the wartime bombings. Azuma’s irregular interior surfaces have been polished by its residents’ long term use and ‘weathered’ over the years.
CLOSE TO OPEN
In the early 1970s Ito and Sakamoto considered their projects as a critical response to an urban context that was steadily worsening. Two of the architects’ early houses, Aluminium House and House in Minase, in fact set themselves apart from the typical houses of Japan through the use of walled-in interiors with a limited number of openings and minimal partitioning. In the 1980s, their silent dialogue goes on when their attention moves from the city to architectural language. Ito and Sakamoto’s works display then the form of a criticism of both the symbolic (postmodernist) and the mannerist (late modernist) approaches. In projects like Silver Hut or House F the architecture of the house is decomposed into its constituent elements, then re-integrated into a form free of convention and tradition.

A HOUSE IS A WORK OF ART
In 1962 Shinohara declared that ‘a house is a work of art’. Developing this statement he attempted to illustrate a ‘method of Japanese architecture’, using a wide range of buildings. To him, the opposition between the blackness of the minka (rural house) and the whiteness of the aristocratic house is reflected in the practice of those who performed their own housework and the authority of those who entrusted the work to others. In House in White he forms a turning point between what he considered his ‘first style’, characterized by a dialogue with tradition, and his ‘second style’ predominated by an attempt to express an ‘inorganic anti-space’. In 1974, the Tanikawa Villa propelled his third phase, that led him to pursue houses aiming at new relations with the city.

PLAY
Some important events of the 1960s and ’70s, undermined Japan public’s faith in the myth of progress. In architectural terms this disenchantment coalesced with two major design events. First, the housing complex Senri New Town, regarded as cutting edge, which was then beset with inadequate public facilities. Then, the Japanese World and International Exposition (Expo ’70) in Osaka, which was criticized for placing the radical propositions of 1960s architecture in the service of corporate pavilions. In response many architects strove for a renewed autonomy. Architecture, they suggested, should be a space for individual experimentation, expression and play. This is the background of iconic projects as Miyajima House, Anti-Dwelling Box and Face House.

SENSORIAL
In the exhibition, there are Japanese houses referred to as ‘sensorial’ that emphasize abstraction while attempting to create an alternative “space”. For example, House in White by Shinohara, closely affiliates the colour white with abstraction and completely separates the reality of the house from its context. During the 1950s and ’60s, when Japan — due to high-economic growth — experienced problems with pollution, the houses became also the expression of a distance from the city. In Ito’s White U the exterior wall is grey, whereas inside it is white: subconsciously Ito inverts the perception of outside and inside. Since 2000, however, a few houses like House in a Plum Grove by Sejima and G by Aoki, try to make a physical connection with the city instead of maintaining a distance from it.

MACHIYA
First developed during the mid-Edo period (1603-1868), the machiya is a wooden-urban dwelling built on deep, narrow lots that combine interior and exterior spaces. Japan’s period of economic growth saw the replacement of traditional machiya with detached houses and back yards, and the subdivision of urban land into progressively smaller plots. This process has weakened the bonds among the machiya residents, and reversed centuries of traditional architectural knowledge. Recently, a new generation of machiyas has emerged, as the Row House in Sumiyoshi, the House in Nipponbashi or the Split Machiya, that attempts to incorporate the architectural intelligence of the past within a response to the challenges of modernity.

REDEFINING THE GAP
After WW2, the reconstruction in Japan was carried out through a ‘do-it-yourself-if-you-can’ approach which generated an infinite and unplanned landscape of single family detached houses. Following the collapse of the economic bubble in the late 1990s, younger people began to return to the city centres. Their demand for small lots was fulfilled by rebuilding small houses in densely packed neighbourhoods mostly made of of wooden buildings. In order to react to such urban congestion the last generations of architects developed a number of strategies, generally managing to allow some reserve of “urban void” well inside the private area of the house, as in the cases of House NA, House in O-ta, or Moriyama House.
LIGHTNESS
One of Japan’s greatest contributions to global architecture is perhaps ‘lightness’, a quality rooted in the country’s tradition. Kuma and Shinohara’s Small Bathhouse in Izu, a house suspended on a thermal spring, is an example of the way material, aesthetic and functional lightness conflate within a single structure. Hirose’s Steel House series adopts the industrial materials and techniques of light-gauge steel structures, while in I. Hasegawa’s designs perforated aluminium panels convey ‘lightness’ in terms of illumination. Finally in Nishizawa’s Garden and House spaces are elevated on four pilotis, expressing the idea of having the horizontal structure floating in the air.

UNMARKETABLE
Of the many instances of critical architecture in postwar Japan, housing stands out. Compactness of scale and the ability of client and architect to link hands directly, helped foster a critical mentality on the question of form. In the Arimasuton Building designed and built by the architect Oka the residence’s form was directly created by the dweller. In the The Zenkai House/House Surgery, Miyamoto was critical of the structures prescribed by the local authorities that, after the 1995 earthquake, encouraged scrap-and-build housing and undermined the sense of houses as repositories of memories acting as corporate welfare.

LEARNING FROM THE VERNACULAR
There is a thin line but strong that goes from the investigation on temporary shelters carried by Kon after the devastating earthquake of 1923 to present days. In 1986 a group of architects including Fujimori established the Roadway Observation Society, perpetuating Kon’s ‘archeology of the present day’ through a sensitivity driven by makeshift structures and amusing artefacts. In the late 90s Atelier Bow-Wow developed a research on «everyday architecture» and on the stratifications created by one generation of houses after the other in Tokyo. Still today many young Japanese architects, such as Konno or Inui, insist in focusing on the vernacular and domestic aspects of architecture.

BEYOND FAMILY
The Nihon Jutaku Kodan (Japan Housing Corporation) in 1955, was able to tackle the housing shortage problem in post-war Japan through building collective housing. The housing manufacturers standardised the image of the family: one house for every family and places for living and working separated. In contrast, some houses designed by radical architects and some custom-made more recent projects performed alternatives to this standard. Ever since the 60s and 70s the family was divided into its single fellows, as in Kurosawa’s projects. More recently, many designers insisted that there should be a wider co-existence of living and working in the house, as we find in Ishiyama’s Setagaya Village or in the House & Atelier Bow-Wow.
THE JAPANESE HOUSE
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COLLATERAL ACTIVITIES OF THE EXHIBITION

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

— Visit-explorations for secondary schools
— 17 December, 4.30 p.m. and 18 December 11.30 a.m
Workshops for families: Decorate your Christmas tree with origami!
— 12 November, 4.30 p.m. and 13 November 4.30 p.m.
Workshops for adults on washi paper creation
Information and booking by phone at 06.3201954
e-mail at edumaxxi@fondazionemaxxi.it

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

One flower one leaf
Archive Center
— 3 December, from 11.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m.
The idea of this workshop, opened to a public of non-specialists, is due to the research of the artist Martina della Valle. The aim is to establish a connection between the ancient art of Ikebana and a site-specific reflection in the urban area.

MEETINGS - LECTURES
in collaboration with The Japan Foundation

Horizon Japan
Archive Center
6 p.m.
Four meetings in order to become acquainted with the history of the Japanese garden, with its style and techniques, and the ancient Eastern tradition of Ikebana.

— 18 November: Ikebana Sogetsu School with Luca Ramacciotti
— 20 January: Ikebana Ohara School with Silvana Mattei
— 10 February: Ikebana Ikenobo School with Yoko Kurata
— 27 January: History of the Japanese garden with Paco Donato