

Kyoto Kaikan, Kyoto, 1960 by Kunio Mayekawa

In the historic city of Kyoto, located inside Okazaki Park across from the Heian Jingu Shinto shrines, sits a representative Modern architectural heritage, Kyoto Kaikan.

However, today, it faces an imminent threat of destructive alteration, thus calling attention for the Heritage Alert at the ICOMOS ISC20C.

Kyoto Kaikan is a multi-purpose cultural complex accommodating a concert hall, a theater and an international convention center. The complex was conceived as an edifice symbolizing the post-war reconstruction in Kyoto. It was built in 1960 and was designed by Kunio Mayekawa, a renowned vanguard architect who apprenticed under Le Corbusier in Paris from 1928 to 1930 as the first Japanese architect to do so. Without any doubt

Kyoto Kaikan has been one of the most outstanding Modern buildings in

Japan. As such it was awarded in 1960, its inaugurating year, the Architectural Institute of Japan Annual Prize, and more recently in 2003, it was registered as part of the

docomomo Japan list of significant Modern heritage buildings.

Kyoto Kaikan was designed to be harmonious with its context that provided a rich concoction of natural as well as man-made 'historic' environment. It was laid out to form a courtyard embodying the adjacent Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art Annex by asserting a strip of oversized and deep concrete eaves-in loose reference to the traditional Japanese wooden construction design-to bind it

horizontally. The exterior walls made of large size bricks and the pilotis as a sifting device moderated between the outer city and the inner spatial realm. Accordingly, Mayekawa created an architectural complex that convincingly reflected the design fundamentals of the Modern Movement while simultaneously making it fit with the historic traditional context of the Kyoto cityscape.

In June 2011, the City of Kyoto, the owner of Kyoto Kaikan, announced abruptly its plan to demolish more than a half of the complex in order to build in its place a new theater with a stage height that exceeds 30 meters. If the plan is allowed to proceed as announced, the authenticity of the complex would be categorically lost. Moreover, an emergence of massive volume done in a factory or plant like stage/theater structure would be certain to cause discord with the specific surrounding 'historic' traditional context that Mayekawa had so endearingly accorded in his design. The loss of Kyoto Kaikan would forebode the deprivation of the built environment permeating Kyoto with a rich assortment of cultural endowment.

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