

*ACCEPTED FINAL ARTICLE ON ARATA ISOZAKI**10 May 2017 5,700 words*

## **Overlooked but not forgotten: Reappraising the visionary work of Arata Isozaki**

by Steffen Lehmann

### **Summary**

This article analyses the work and presents a portrait of Japanese architect Arata Isozaki. His designs and buildings span over six decades and it is suggested that these can be categorised into four distinctively different phases. As a former collaborator of Isozaki during the 1990s, the author is able to draw from first-hand observations and knowledge to explain relevant projects. As the discussion points out, in its absorption of a multitude of influences and interdisciplinary approach, Isozaki's work is highly unusual, original, complex and personal, so that one could say he has created ideas and concepts for spaces that defy characterisation as any single school of thought.

### **Key words**

Japanese architecture; Arata Isozaki; museums and libraries; Post-war Tokyo; Post-modernism; Kenzo Tange; Metabolism; Hans Hollein; James Stirling; composition in urban design; artistic influences.

### **Introduction**

With a very productive career that spanned over six decades, with over 100 built works, and a heterogeneous oeuvre that is unusually diverse and original, writing about the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki (born 1931 in Oita, South Japan) can be a real challenge. However, now 86 years old and globally admired, Isozaki's work is due a timely reappraisal, as it has recently been overlooked, for instance, by the Pritzker Prize jury.

In 1990 that I left the office of Jim Stirling, where I worked in London, to move to Japan and work as a young architect for Arata Isozaki in Tokyo. I planned to stay in Tokyo to experience working there for a maximum of 12 months, and had not anticipated how much this change of workplace and culture would affect my future life and thinking about architecture. In the end, I stayed with Arata Isozaki for three years before moving to Berlin to open my own practice in 1993. The time in Japan gave me a good opportunity to study the master's oeuvre in close observation.

Coming in 1990 from Stirling's office, which was a relatively small firm, with only ten staff and a limited number of projects, the difference could not have been bigger: *Isozaki Atelier*, as the office was called, was a buzzing hub with a large number of interesting projects and activities. The atelier was organised with Isozaki as the single master heading up a group of around 30 devoted architects. While at Stirling's office, nobody used computers at this time. *Isozaki Atelier* represented the future of architecture: the digital revolution was happening.

I had encountered Isozaki's work a few years earlier as a young architecture student when visiting an exhibition in Frankfurt displaying the 1984 competition proposals for the new Museum of Applied Arts, which was won by Richard Meier. Isozaki's design proposal was so different from anything else: he placed a giant cube in the middle of the parkland, thus minimising the building's footprint and preserving most of the beautiful park and trees. I also admired his Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles, which opened in 1986, and I had seen photos of the Museum of Modern Art in Gunma (1974), a much-published earlier masterpiece. It was obvious to me that Isozaki was a refined master Architect, working in his own universe.

I came to Tokyo when Isozaki turned sixty and reached the peak of his career (with branch offices in New York and Barcelona), receiving a growing number of invitations to participate in design competitions, including in Germany and Austria. We collaborated on large-scale design competitions for prominent sites in Berlin (one resulted in the two buildings at Potsdamer Platz, for which we later formed a partnership), in Munich, Stuttgart and Vienna (where we won the first prize for the design of unbuilt twin towers) and in London: the prestigious Tate Modern design competition.

From around the mid-1980s onwards, Isozaki seemed to be building worldwide and was the first Japanese architect to be working globally, whilst at the same time being intensely busy at home: Japan's post-war economy had been continuously booming since 1960 (a period of rapid economic growth, which came to an abrupt end with the 'bursting of the Japanese economic bubble' in 1991), and Isozaki was well equipped to take advantage of this boom, getting his most extraordinary and ambitious designs built. His projects were rarely in Tokyo, however. Instead of the capital city, most of his buildings are to be found in Japan's smaller cities, such as in Mito, Kyoto, Nara and Kitakyushu, or dotted around Tokyo's outskirts. The architecture critic Herbert Muschamp noted in 1993 in regard to this era: 'Arata Isozaki came of age in a country that was not only physically and economically in tatters but had also been torn from its cultural moorings.'

### **A large and diverse oeuvre of buildings, from playful and inventive to monumental**

Arata Isozaki graduated from the University of Tokyo in 1954 and went straight to work under Kenzo Tange—the father of post-war Japanese architecture—before establishing his own firm, Isozaki Atelier, in 1963. His early Japanese projects, like *City in the Air* (1960–1961) and the Oita Prefectural Library (1962–1966), bear the strong influence of Le Corbusier, Louis I. Kahn and Kenzo Tange, Isozaki's early mentor. In Japanese architecture, Isozaki belongs to the same generation as Fumihiko Maki, Kisho Kurokawa, Kiyonori Kikutake and the *Metabolist* movement. However, while he was sympathetic to their ideas and theories of new forms of city, he never joined the Metabolist group but rather preferred to follow his own avant-garde path.

The widespread devastation of Japanese post-war cities brought an urgent need for new housing and a boom that also allowed for architectural experimentation and the realisation of innovative ideas. As a result, Japanese architecture since 1960 has consistently produced some of the most influential and ground-breaking examples of modern design. Over the course of his long career, Isozaki was always interested in visionary forms of cities. In 1960, he created an ironic photomontage with the title 'Future City', where he placed a Metabolist

mega-structure within a field of classical ruins. In regard to this montage, Schalk notes that 'the image pictures the city as the place where many life-cycles of various cultures rise, overlap, and decline. In this juxtaposition of the already declined (Western classical architecture) with the visionary (Japanese Metabolist architecture) and its future (parts of the new scheme already collapsed), historical time appears compressed' (Schalk, 2014; 281). In the end, very little of these visionary theories made it into reality and, ironically, one of the few Metabolist projects ever built was Isozaki's Prefectural Library in Oita (1966).

Isozaki has a deep understanding of architectural history, which allows him to easily create direct links between his designs and the past. His particular interest and expertise in Renaissance and Classical architects, such as Borromini or Schinkel, and his vast knowledge of architectural theory allowed him to use a variety of historical references in an unrestrained way. Isozaki draws on a dazzling range of influences (Taylor, 1976). His thoughts and approach to architecture were profoundly influenced by different key experiences and he extensively commented on these influences: firstly, there was the Emperor's Katsura Villa, the architectural masterpiece in Kyoto: an idealised example for circulation around a system of garden spaces as described by Junichiro Tanizaki and Bruno Taut (Tanizaki, 1933; Isozaki, 2005). But there were also the images of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, which Isozaki saw as a young man. In regard to major artistic influences, there was the Japanese space/time concept of 'Ma', a concept Isozaki repeatedly attempted to express in exhibitions. There are also influences from Surrealism, Constantin Brancusi's idea of the *Infinite Column* and the sculptural work of Isamu Noguchi, as well as the architectural work of Louis I. Kahn, especially his use of the barrel vault at the Kimbell Art Museum and the unbuilt City Tower project for Philadelphia. Similar to the work of Kahn, Isozaki shared a preoccupation with monumental and heavy buildings that did not hide their weight, their materials and rough surfaces. Isozaki frequently referred to the Salk Institute in La Jolla (1959–1965), one of Kahn's masterpieces where he composed a campus and courtyard overlooking the ocean and enclosing a heroic water garden: a space we can find again and again in Isozaki's work (Stewart, 1991). He wrote extensively about all of these influences and what they meant for him, and the intriguing capacity of Modernism to translate all kinds of artistic and urban qualities into a new language.

Isozaki's interdisciplinary approach sticks out: the ease with which he moved between fashion design, graphics, furniture and stage design, influencing his ideas far beyond the field of architecture (Isozaki, 1998 and 2006).

I was always stunned by the unprecedented degree of powerful but geometrically simple forms and the formal repertoire in his work. He displayed a unique capacity for strong figure-ground compositions that declared architecture as a compositional art, a celebration of formal expression and a reminder of the urban possibilities large buildings could offer. He frequently spoke about "buildings composed like paintings" and the collages of Juan Gris. Proof that architecture is something to be composed and elaborated on, and celebrated with unique ideas of space, turned into a special atmosphere generated by elegant theatrical spaces and extraordinary stage-like settings. With close attention to proportion, his conceptual originality for powerful designs would join together asymmetrically the strong geometric forms, such as juxtaposing a cylinder with a precise cube and a half-cylinder, combined with an exquisite refinement and complexity of detail. In this aspect, his work is not dissimilar to the late work of Aldo Rossi.

The idea of composing buildings as pure objects rather than socially engaged architecture is persuasive because it is, in fact, exactly how they appear to the visitor and user. While his compositions were shaped by simple and visually calm forms—giant prism-shaped gallery spaces and spherical or pyramid-shaped parts arranged with great order like children’s building blocks across a site (such as in Los Angeles or Mito)—Isozaki’s capacity to invent new forms is remarkable. These compositions are not anti-functional, but able to resolve the problem of the floor plan while simultaneously creating interesting solutions in section and elevation. Just like Bernini and Borromini before him, at the beginning of the Baroque era, he is always challenging the boundary between sculpture and architecture. In this regard, Joseph Giovannini (1986) wrote: “Not since the French architectural visionaries of the 18<sup>th</sup> century has an architect used solid geometric volumes with such clarity and purity, and never with his sense of playfulness.”

The interiors of Isozaki’s concert halls and cultural buildings are equally striking: here he frequently used optical illusion, with curved or mirrored glass and printed patterns on glass, to create enigmatic optical distortion, ensuring a full sensory experience in the elegant entry foyers (from Tsukuba Center Building to the Kyoto Concert Hall).

### **The Triumvirate of Post-modernism: Isozaki–Hollein–Stirling**

Besides all this monumental playfulness, symbolic messages and post-modern freedom, Isozaki is also a romantic architect rooted in history: a tendency that could generally be seen in the work of Isozaki, Hollein and Stirling around this time and which would later be coined as ‘Post-modernism’. For instance, the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, a masterpiece with a fondness for stage allusions by James Stirling (1977–1984), and Hans Hollein’s Museum Abteiberg (1972–1982) were not unlike Isozaki’s new-built ruin Tsukuba Center: a new civic centre built around the same time (1979–1983), referencing from architectural history and consisting of cubist-like compositions of memorable fragments: a collage of eclectic references ranging from Michelangelo to Borromini, Piranesi and Ledoux—all composed to one perfect synthesis in an ‘eclectic ruin of the future’. Importantly, the referencing of historical themes and fragments did not happen at the expense of the usability of these radical buildings, or was superficially attached, but was well integrated: the functional organisation of the geometrical compositions was marvellous. At this point in time, in the early 1980s, the three buildings by Isozaki–Hollein–Stirling signalled a clear and radical break with a tired and austere International Modernism and its shortcomings.

Isozaki and Stirling had begun their careers with classical modern buildings before starting afresh and subverting the compositional and theoretical ideas behind the Modern Movement. In 1978, Colin Rowe suggested in ‘Collage City’ that Modernism is not just Functionalism but may also draw on history. According to Rowe, it was not only acceptable that Modernism would quote from the rich architectural history, but Modernism could be at its best when directly referring to history. He argued that in a Post-Modern reaction to Modernism’s ‘total-design’ approach, urban design must be considered through “fragmentation, ‘bricolage’ and metamorphoses of interpretations” (Rowe and Koetter, 1978; 23). This was a completely new reading of Modernism, which had gradually manoeuvred itself into a dead-end. Today, the completion of these three radical building is considered by many historians to be a watershed moment in 20th century post-war architecture.

Japanese architecture has a long tradition of taking from foreign cultures (first from China, then from the West) and much of the Japanese design comes from a process of borrowing, transforming and refining. Isozaki understands himself as a key protagonist and player in the history of the architecture discipline—nothing less—and in this in line with the self-conscious innovator Le Corbusier and with Louis I. Kahn, also insisting on architecture as an art form. He displays a strong understanding that the design of buildings is a serious intellectual business and frequently relates his own architecture to the works of the Renaissance masters, such as Michelangelo (Drew, 1982; Futagawa, 1983). His long friendship with Hans Hollein and enormous respect for James Stirling's work allowed a shift of focus away from purely Japanese topics at the time. The team Isozaki–Hollein–Stirling was to become the “Triumvirate of Post-modernism” (Jenks, 1984), and they soon emerged as the leading architects responsible for most new museums and art galleries during the 1980s. The three became the key figures representing the most significant tendency within architecture at this time and Isozaki's global activity made him one of the first ‘star-architects’ and a true global citizen (long time before the negative connotations today associated with the term ‘star-architect’, Isozaki embodied the master that holds total control over his projects). Today, the concept of ‘star-architect’ has lost its relevance and young architects are searching for alternative working methods that effect change through the empowerment of others. However, 1980 was the beginning of trend-setting and a celebrity culture in architecture. For his internationality, Isozaki was frequently called ‘non-Japanese’ and a foreigner by more conservative Japanese colleagues (Muschamp, 1993; GA Document, 2004)

During the 1990s, Isozaki Atelier was again a busy place, with commissions arriving from all over the world: about 15 projects were on the drawing boards or under construction at any given time. In addition, much of the additional work was large-scale design competitions and curatorial works, such as exhibition designs or stage designs. A creative force and an intuitive genius, Isozaki is a soft-spoken, charismatic figure, always charming and gentlemanly polite—despite the pressures of the construction business—and very talented: he is able to visualise his ideas convincingly with beautiful hand sketches that have become collectors' items. Meetings on projects usually followed a strict ritual, where Isozaki would sit on one side of the large table, without much talking, spending most of the time sketching with ink pen on yellow tracing paper. Regularity and irregularity were reoccurring themes when it came to sketching interiors. Stacks of exquisite drawings, often abstract and elegant hand sketches and diagrams, were produced in long meetings, where he would work ideas over and over, testing different solutions, and it was usually our task to ‘translate’ those freehand drawings into more concrete line drawings that could become a later basis for construction.

#### **Four distinctive phases in the work of Isozaki, spanning over six decades**

Today, Isozaki can look back on a long, diverse and productive career, spanning over six decades, during which he always re-invented himself every 10 to 12 years (not unlike Le Corbusier). With immense discipline and work ethics, Isozaki was able to build an astonishing number of projects and an almost unbelievable number of design proposals spread over five continents. An architect as much as an urban designer, with many innovative large-scale urban proposals to his name, the challenge for any interpretation of Isozaki's diverse body of work is that he refused to restrict himself to any single signature style (unlike Frank Gehry or Richard Meier, for instance, resisting a singular stylistic brand).

I suggest that one can differentiate Isozaki's oeuvre into four distinctively different phases, each of them wholly original:

### **Phase I: 1959–1973: Post-structuralism**

His early projects were in Japan, such as commissions in his home town Oita in South Japan, outside Tokyo, and heavily influenced by European experiences with a style mixed between 'New Brutalism' and 'Metabolist Architecture', such as the radical Oita Medical Hall (1959–1960), according to Reyner Banham. These buildings expressed their rough concrete structure and looked like machines: an architecture of systems and components, revealing how they were made and assembled. The elegant Gunma Art Museum (1974), Isozaki's most notable early project, gained international attention, confirmed him as an original force and set Isozaki on the global circuit. His ideas about urban mega-structures (especially 'City in the Sky') were dissimilar to the theoretical propositions of the Metabolism manifesto (published in 1960), with references to organic biological growth and biological processes. These hypothetical projects ranged from floating cities on the oceans or on reclaimed land (for instance, work in which Isozaki was involved in with Kenzo Tange, such as the Tokyo Bay Plan, 1960) to modular plug-in capsule towers that could incorporate organic growth (similar to Archigram's Walking City and Plug-in City, 1964; or Yona Friedman's Spatial City, 1963). His formal approach continued to evolve with buildings such as the Fujimi Country Club (1973–1974) and Kitakyushu Central Library (1973–1974).

Isozaki commented that this phase of technological optimism came to an end with Tokyo's 'failed' EXPO 1970 and the world energy crisis. He would always mark significant changes in the world's situation with an equally significant shift in his design approach.

Typical works from this phase include:

- City in the Air (1960–1961, unbuilt), Tokyo, Japan
- Ōita Prefectural Library (1962–1966), Ōita, Ōita, Japan
- Nakayama House (1964), Oita, Japan
- Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art (1972–1974), Fukuoka, Japan
- Kitakyushu Central Library (1973–1974), Fukuoka, Japan
- Gunma Museum of Modern Art (1971–1974; refurbishment 2006–2008), Gunma, Japan
- Fujimi Country Clubhouse (1973–1974), Oita, Japan

### **Phase II: 1974–1989: High Post-modernism: the symbolic, iconic and ironic in Architecture**

During the second phase, Isozaki makes such a dramatic impact on the international architecture world that Charles Jencks wrote: "Isozaki has taken the Post-Modernism of the West one step further" (1984). His designs became more inventive with geometry at a time when architecture had to radically reinvent itself. The trust in technology had failed and the oil crisis showed the limits to growth. The new design approach emerged as a reaction against the perceived shortcomings of the 1960s and 1970s and its lack of reference to the history of architecture and ignorance of the culture of places. Isozaki also worked closely alongside his third wife, the Japanese sculptor Aiko Miyawaki. The MOCA museum in Los Angeles is entered via a sunken courtyard, an idea Isozaki had tested previously at the

Tsukuba Centre building. The Team Disney headquarters building in Orlando (Florida), for instance, is a colourful and striking assemblage influenced by Pop Art and post-modern wit: an ironic tongue-in-cheek metaphor is the main entry gate in the form of Mickey Mouse's ears. Pioneering Japanese architecture overseas, during this phase, Isozaki was able to realise a series of key projects in the USA, including MOCA in Los Angeles and Team Disney, both important buildings that introduced him to the US. MOCA is still considered as one of Isozaki's masterworks. Visitors to MOCA enter through a sunken courtyard that reminds of Tsukuba Center. Team Disney is overloaded with symbolic meaning and colourful geometries: it resembles nothing ever built before. A spectacular competition-winning design for Tokyo's New City Hall (1985) was never built (although ideas from this project kept re-emerging in later proposals, such as at the large and airy indoor/outdoor atrium sliced by bridges, just as used ten years later for the Potsdamer Platz buildings in Berlin). Isozaki's proposal for Tokyo City Hall was the only non-skyscraper project in the competition, and this gigantic 'groundscraper' typology would occupy Isozaki for his entire career.

Isozaki commented that this phase had come to an end with an entirely new world situation, following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the bursting of Japan's economic bubble.

Typical works from this phase include:

- Tsukuba Center Building (1979–1983), Tsukuba, Japan
- Museum of Contemporary Art MOCA (1981–1986), Los Angeles, United States
- Palau Sant Jordi Stadium (1983–1990), Montjuic, Barcelona, Spain; Sports Hall for the 1992 Summer Olympics; followed by the Palafolls Sports Complex Pavilion (1987–1996), Barcelona, Spain
- New Tokyo City Hall (1985–1986, unbuilt), Tokyo, Japan
- Kamioka Town Hall (1975–1978), Kamioka, Japan
- Team Disney Orlando (1987–1991), Florida, United States
- Bond University, Library and Administration Building (1987–1989), Gold Coast, Australia
- Kitakyushu International Conference Center (1987–1990), Fukuoka, Japan

### **Phase III: 1990–2000: Architecture as a Sculptural Statement and Experiment**

The third phase can best be described as a paradigm shift towards 'anything seems possible'; further heralding his career with high-profile projects and clients, firmly establishing Isozaki during this decade as the most influential figure in Japanese architecture. The conceptually powerful and often provocative design of this phase looked again more Japanese compared to the previous internationalised phase—for instance the buildings in Mito and Krakow, which showed a typical Japanese aesthetic. Edan Corkill noted (2008): "If the entire Japanese architectural fraternity was one big royal family, then Arata Isozaki would be a king approaching the end of a long and glorious reign." Indeed, during this phase, his influence gradually spread further and further afield, mirroring the growth of his stature.

In this phase, Isozaki developed a more hyper-modernistic style, with buildings such as the Art Tower of Mito and Domus—La Casa del Hombre—in Spain. Much of the work in Spain was generated from the highly successful Olympic stadium Palau Sant Jordi for the

Barcelona 1992 Olympics. This was also caused by the beginning of Japan's economic recession in 1991, which forced most architects to look beyond Japan. The buildings designed and built during this phase are a string of elegant public works of cultural function, ranging from large concert halls, museums, art galleries, universities and libraries to cultural centres (mostly won through design competitions). As a consequence, Isozaki developed vast expertise in museum technology and acoustics for concert halls. During this period, he developed the concept of the *Third Generation Art Museum* (1991), which he described as a 'site-specific and art-specific museum' (Lehmann and Feireiss, 1994). The design of Art Tower Mito is influenced by Brancusi's *Infinite Column* and the idea of an infinitely extendable tower. Mito Art Tower creates a powerful civic symbol for an otherwise nondescript new town. Despite the large-scale works, he remained always interested in small projects, such as Nagi Museum, furniture design and temporary exhibitions, in line with the Japanese enormous respect for small things and a dedication to refinement—just think of the ritual of the traditional Japanese tea ceremony and its refinement (GA Architect 1991 and 2000). The designs of this phase include fiercely elegant buildings, such as the elegant Kyoto Concert Hall and Nara Centennial Hall. Around 1993 he started to incorporate organic curves in his designs and the use of curves started appearing more frequently (for instance, in his projects in China and the Florence railway station proposal).

Isozaki would claim that the phase of contextual local architecture had come to an end with the complete globalisation of architecture.

Typical works from this phase include:

- Art Tower Mito (1986–1990), Ibaragi, Japan
- Centre of Japanese Art and Technology (1990–1994), Kraków, Poland
- Donau City Twin Towers (1991–1992, 1<sup>st</sup> Prize, unbuilt), Vienna, Austria
- Kyoto Concert Hall (1991–1995), Kyoto, Japan
- Nara Centennial Hall (1992–1998), Nara, Japan
- Mino Ceramic Park and Museum (1996–2002), Gifu, Japan
- Domus—La Casa Del Hombre (1991–1995), Coruña, Galicia, Spain
- Buildings C2/C3 at Potsdamer Platz (1993–1999), Berlin, Germany (Arata Isozaki and Steffen Lehmann)
- Nagi Museum Of Contemporary Art (1991–1994), Nagi, Okayama, Japan
- Shizuoka Convention and Arts Center GRANSHIP (1998), Shizuoka, Japan
- The Bass Museum of Art, Miami (2000–2001), Florida, United States
- COSI Columbus Science Museum (1994–1999), Ohio, United States
- New entrance of the Caixa Forum Barcelona Building (1999–2002), Barcelona, Spain

#### **Phase IV: 2000 to present: The 21<sup>st</sup>-century: Digital architecture as a form of global endeavour**

In the most recent phase, Isozaki continued to push the envelope of what is possible, socially and technologically, creating new forms that often challenged gravity. The projects of this phase can mostly be found in the fast-growing mega-cities of Asia, less in Japan—a sign that architecture has become a truly globalised endeavour, catering for a global consumer society. Globalisation also leads to an architecture that could be anywhere, because it is abstract rather than locally anchored by regional materials and typologies. Many of the projects, clusters of high-rise towers as variations of the early themes, are now in China,



Vietnam and Central Asia, in the Middle East and in Qatar. The National Library in Qatar is a high-rise tower that reminds of the unbuilt project 'City in the Sky' 45 years earlier; it took a lifetime to finally get the idea built. In 2005, Isozaki founded an Italian branch of his office in Milan, where the CityLife office tower in the former trade fair area in Milan and other works have been realised. The projects highlight the contradictions and discontinuities of the contemporary city where organised and orderly planning is now rarely possible, sometimes evoking the informational city as an advanced network of ICT systems (such as the projects in China). Not unlike Le Corbusier, Isozaki's late work changed to become more organic, often with curvilinear forms derived from nature, forming cave-like spaces and bone-like structures; for instance, projects searching for such new expression are the Himalayas Art Centre and the Qatar Convention Centre, good examples of the organic late works with which Isozaki seeks deeper meaning outside ordinary criteria. At the beginning of the new millennium and in a tech-saturated age of networks, the recent works appear like 'Google Earth architecture' for the age of satellite surveillance, in an age that has radically altered the way we perceive the urban environment. This applies especially to rapidly growing cities in China, where there is increasing uncertainty about the physical presence of architecture in the world, and these works make explicit that uncertainty. The impact of globalisation on architecture and cities has yet to be seriously studied and investigated. This is the fourth phase that is currently still ongoing.

Typical works from this phase include:

- Shenzhen Cultural Center and Library (1998–2007), Shenzhen, China
- Torino Palasport Olimpico Stadium (2002–2006), Turin, Italy
- Isozaki Atea residential twin towers (1999–2009), Bilbao, Spain
- Qatar National Library (2002–2007), Doha, Qatar
- Museum of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing (2003–2008), China
- New Concert Hall Building (2003–2010), Thessaloniki, Greece, 2010
- Zendai Himalayas Art Center (2003–2010), Shanghai, China
- Diamond Island and Metropolis Thao Dien (high-rise building cluster; 2006–2012), Ho-Chi-Minh City, Vietnam
- Coliseum da Coruña (1990–1991), A Coruña, Galicia, Spain
- Qatar National Convention Centre and Ceremonial Court, Education City (2004–2010), Doha, Qatar
- CityLife 'Allianz Tower' office high-rise (2003–2012), Milan, Italy
- The University of Central Asia's three campuses in: Tekeli, Kazakhstan; Naryn, the Kyrgyz Republic; and Khorog, Tajikistan (2014–)

### **Legacy: a forgotten visionary ready for rediscovery?**

Arata Isozaki's architectural position as artist-architect was often controversial and polemical, but it is still highly relevant today. His activities are not limited to architecture, but include writing, criticism, judging architecture competitions and collaborating with artists. Overlooked for the Pritzker Prize (the only time I saw him bitter about the fact that he was a member of award juries numerous times (including for the Pritzker), promoting avant-garde architects and helping younger architects to start their career and make their ideas a reality—from Holl, to Hadid, to Sejima and Aoki, and numerous others), he was never

himself the recipient of the prestigious award. It was frequently Isozaki who created the space and freedom for other Japanese architects to use their designs to propose radical critiques of society and innovative solutions to changing lifestyles.

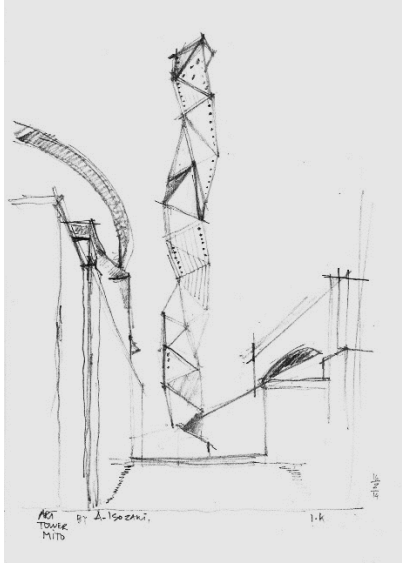
Isozaki, once called “the Emperor of Japanese Architecture” by Tadao Ando (1985), has won multiple international awards, such as the RIBA Gold Medal in 1986, but the Pritzker Prize is arguably the most important of all architecture awards and Isozaki would be a deserving recipient. Today, maybe his use of a variety of historical references in an unrestrained way (during his post-modern phase) is the part that is most misunderstood and complex, triggering scepticism by a younger generation? The Pritzker Prize jury is often looking for consistency and architects who have done one thing and did not constantly change, but kept on doing it, hence they can be easily ‘labelled’. The heterogeneous and constantly transforming oeuvre of Isozaki, its diversity and complexity would require some serious effort to grasp, and its open-ended questions (rather than delivering simplistic, singular answers) do not sit easy with such juries. Ironically, Isozaki was a member of the Pritzker Prize jury himself, from 1979 to 1984.

After a couple of years in the Tokyo office and becoming Isozaki's trusted aide, I was fortunate that we entered a project partnership in 1993 for the two large buildings at Berlin's Potsdamer Platz. In 1995, when Isozaki lost interest in this far-away project with a complicated client, the building's design and realisation were entirely taken over by my own practice. Thanks to the generosity of Arata Isozaki, as a 30-year-old young architect, I was able to team up with him and put my name to this prestigious project.

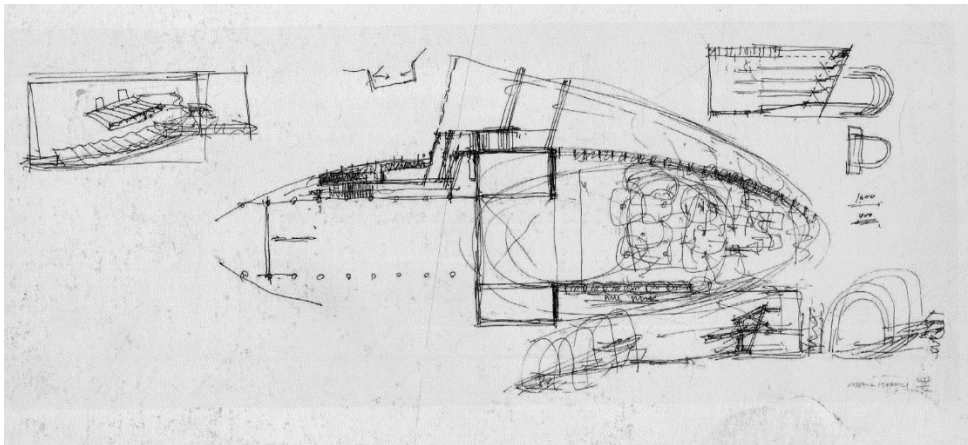
Today, architects are subjected to elaborate forms of control and project management, squeezing out all complex invention and elements of complicated geometry in the name of reducing project risks. Isozaki showed us how powerful buildings can be. The ideas and formal originality that continue to drive his architecture are still influential internationally. There is no doubt that he is one of the most important and influential architects of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His work—although not yet entirely and fully understood—is still very relevant (Oshima, 2009). I predict that Isozaki's oeuvre and legacy is such a rich resource that it will soon again become the subject of intensive study, rediscovery and reappraisal—re-appreciated by future generations.

Within 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture, Isozaki's work is highly unusual and original. One could say that he has created an architecture so personal in its ideas and concepts for spaces that it defies characterisation in any single school of thought. His great personality, sense of humour, fascinating complex character, modesty and extraordinary generosity that helped so many to launch their careers will not be forgotten. A true visionary and master architect—Isozaki turned 86 years old on 23 July 2017.

**Figs. 1-4:** The sketches of Arata Isozaki are exquisitely atmospheric (Courtesy: Arata Isozaki & Associates)



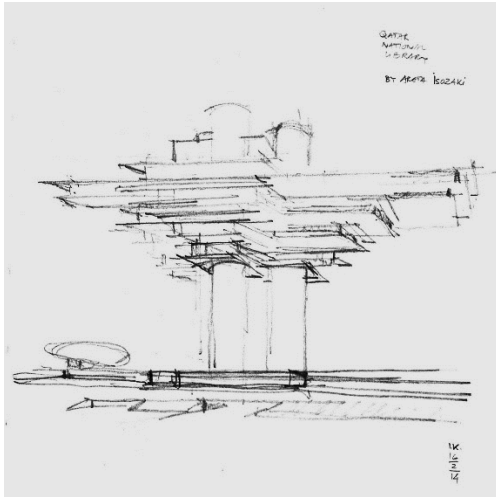
Sketch 1: Mito Art Tower, 1986



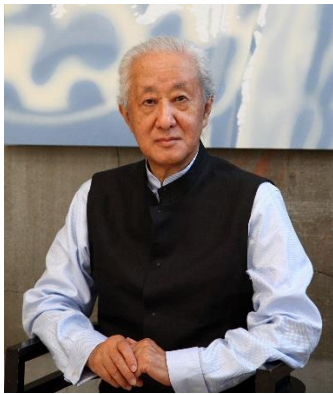
Sketch 2: Nara Centennial Convention Hall, 1992



Sketch 3: Atea Bilbao Twin Towers, 1999



Sketch 4: National Library Qatar, 2002



**Fig. 5: Portrait:** Arata Isozaki (born 1931 in Oita, Japan), photo around 2015 (Courtesy: Arata Isozaki & Associates, Tokyo)

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## Note

The author worked with Arata Isozaki & Associates in Tokyo from 1990 to 1992, before establishing his own practice in 1993 in Berlin. He collaborated as project partner of Arata Isozaki for two new buildings C2/C3 at Potsdamer Platz in Berlin (1993-2000). Before this, he also worked with James Stirling in London and taught with Hans Hollein in Austria. Today, he is Professor of Sustainable Architecture and Director of the Innovation Cluster for Sustainable Cities at the University of Portsmouth (UK), see: [www.city-futures.org.uk](http://www.city-futures.org.uk)  
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