and gender, much as they simultaneously depicted and classified flora and fauna. Included as well was Tambat’s drawing (with dimensions) of a rhinoceros in the Peshwa’s menagerie, suggesting that a taste for collecting and the exotic was not restricted to the British. The display was intellectually engaging and each exhibit was thoughtfully labeled. Adapting the Eye makes a significant contribution to the historiography of architectural sites in western India and raises important questions about the role of Indian artists in laying the foundations for the colonial production of the history of South Asian architecture.

Madhuri Desai
The Pennsylvania State University

Related Publication
Adapting the Eye: An Archive of the British in India, 1770–1830 (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2011), 38 pp., 22 color illus., 1 map. No charge

Notes
2. Henry Salt, Twenty-Four Views in St. Helena, the Cape, India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia and Egypt (London, 1809), pl. 14; and James Ferguson, Illustrations of the Rock-Cut Temples of India (London: John Weale, 1845) pl. 10.

Metabolism: The City of the Future
Mori Art Museum, Tokyo
17 September 2011–15 January 2012

Today we often regard Japan’s Metabolists as young dreamers proffering technologically advanced, audaciously overscaled schemes. A show at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo—the first retrospective dedicated to the group—underscored instead Metabolism’s ideological origins and, more importantly, unearthed a treasure trove of artifacts.

The exhibition opened with a single image: a 1953 photograph of Kenzo Tange’s celebrated central structure at Hiroshima’s Peace Park. The Metabolists’ debut was still seven years away, via a booklet distributed at the 1960 World Design Congress in Tokyo that featured four architects—Masato Otaka, Kiyonori Kikutake, Fumihiko Maki, and Kisho Kurokawa—and others from related disciplines: author and editor Noboru Kawazo, industrial designer Genji Ekuwan, and graphic designer Kyoshi Awazu.1 Adjacent Japanese and English wall text used to isolate this image argued that Tange, though not a member of the movement, was its progenitor; the point was then followed by additional photographs of Peace Park interspersed with rarely seen construction and presentation documents from the Tange office, many now held by Harvard’s Frances Loeb Library. A public housing complex designed by Masato Otaka, built on an adjacent plot, was served up subsequently on the same wall. The Mori exhibition thus presented its first Metabolist with a subtlety that was atypical of the movement itself, via a grouping of residential towers overshadowed by Tange’s masterwork—an unappreciated complex not completed until the 1970s, designed by the only Metabolist architect who was more interested in Japan’s proletariat and never established an international reputation.

The opposite wall of this opening gallery offered a historical preamble to the exhibition: on a panel some 45 feet long, a timeline tracked Japan’s population and economic growth from 1905 through 1960. Set against the data were computer animations, reproductions of photographs, and recently built models related to a period long ignored in polite circles: proposals for new towns in the nation’s colonial effort to expand, recast by Kenzo Tange and his circle.

This exhibition strongly reflected co-curator Hajime Yatsuka’s influence. Now an architecture professor at Tokyo’s Shibaura University, he was for much of his career a practicing architect with a sideline as an intellectually dense and unconventional scholar. Author of two books in Japanese on Metabolism (the second written concurrently with preparations for this exhibition), he was Kenzo Tange’s last graduate student and worked closely with Arata Isozaki for many years. As if in homage, the opening gallery was bisected by a 3-meter-long model of Tange’s Peace Park and, printed the same length and hanging above the model, a replica of Isozaki’s 1968 Electronic Labyrinth, which illustrated Hiroshima in ruins, with insect-like structures struggling to rise from the ashes.

Behind, and with the same subtle hand seen in the introduction of Otaka’s apartment blocks, artifacts from the World Design Conference were tightly bunched along one wall: posters, newspaper clippings, photographs, conference reports, Japanese magazines—and two hardcover copies of the Metabolist manifesto, signed by all the authors, from the private collections of Fumihiko Maki and Kiyonori Kikutake. With little fanfare the exhibition moved on, and quickly served up graphic material by Takashi Asada, Tange’s research assistant who mentored the Metabolists. Other projects nearby were loosely linked to the 1960 booklet: Kurokawa’s “Agricultural City,” “Towards Group Form” by Maki and Otaka, Kikutake’s “Ocean City” and his iconic “Sky House.” The drawings and sketches were enlivened by a monitor displaying an interview with Kikutake and incorporating archival film and a cluster of four models, one wonderful piece in wood and brass, four square meters in size, of “Agricultural City,” part of a collection

Harumi Apartments and a turquoise-and-canary-colored plan from 1959, of a googie-esque community floating on Tokyo Bay, also by Otaka—introduced the postwar period’s emerging confidence. These materials underscore a major point made by the show: the movement resulted not merely from youthful exuberance or postwar optimism, but as the outcome of Japan’s prewar colonial effort to expand, recast by Kenzo Tange and his circle.

The timeline continued on a grimmer note: Tokyo’s destruction in an air raid, rationalist planning for postwar reconstruction, Sei’ichi Shirai’s Atomic Bomb Museum, shaped like a mushroom cloud. Two final pieces—Kunio Maekawa’s 1958
recently transferred from Kurokawa’s estate to the Mori Art Museum.

Tange, Kurokawa and Otaka are no longer alive; Kikutake passed away as I was writing this review at the end of 2011. Yatuska relied on obsessive archival sleuthing in architects’ private collections to, in his words, “rehabilitate” our understanding of Metabolism. But the Mori show also drew attention to the incompleteness of the available archival materials. At many crucial junctures, it was necessary to include recently built models and reproductions (about a third of the show), because originals no longer exist or are held by scholarly archives which limit exhibiton—important artifacts held by the Centre Pompidou were, regretfully, also considered out of reach by the Japanese team. As a crowd-pleasing response to this problem, the exhibition incorporated numerous flat-screen monitors and wall-size projections (some nearly 30 feet wide) featuring animated flythroughs of unbuilt work, produced for the show under Yatuska’s direction and with financial support from the Mori Museum.

Japan is not a nation known for an archival approach to modern artifacts; it was impossible not to be awed by the historical material brought to light and the weighty intellectual underpinnings of this show. At the same time, the opening gallery reflected one of the key problems to emerge when viewing the exhibition as a whole: work was presented in a dense, jumbled fashion without a clear conceit to order projects; typical approaches such as chronology, shared formal traits, and authorship were underplayed or informed only sections of the show. A lack of hierarchy was exacerbated by an economic decision: in cases where original materials were no longer available, reproductions of photographs and drawings were generally printed at A1 size (about 23½ × 33 inches) and smaller archival images were grouped together in similarly sized frames. This, apparently, also allowed the curatorial team to casually reshuffle the show until quite late in the game.

Those audacious, unbuilt megastructures were featured in four smaller galleries that followed the first. Curators loosely focused each space on a specific architect or architects. Leading off was Tange’s Tokyo Bay Plan 1960 and related pieces; next a catch-all room featuring materials by Kawazoe, Otaka, and Maki; then a larger space devoted to Kikutake; and, finally, a gallery pairing Isozaki and Kurokawa. It is unlikely, though, that most visitors were aware of the authorial structure that informed this section of the show: the curatorial team made no effort to highlight the point and unrelated works turned up in each setting.

The Mori is not a small museum; its galleries cover more than 21,520 square feet. In all, the show included over 500 artifacts and 79 projects. A comprehensive catalog accompanying the show underscored the breadth represented in the exhibition: the original Metabolists numbered seven, but the catalog’s appendices listed forty-three people whose works were included in the show.

Nineteen projects crowded into a large gallery highlighting the movement’s realized buildings, which leveled differences between major works, like Kenzo Tange’s National Stadium for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, and less significant structures. The grouping of completed buildings was followed by a room dedicated to the Metabolists’ most detailed proposals, the fitted-out interiors of barnacle-like residential “capsules.” Curators corrulled models, drawings, and films of several iconic capsules by Kurokawa, Ekuan, and Isozaki in a small, dark space, as if to underscore the projects’ snug scale. One of the jewels of the show, however, a capsule once used as a showroom for Kurokawa’s Nakagin Capsule Tower—over thirteen feet long and weighing nearly 4 tons—was not there. Instead, the museum used it as a promotional teaser, placing it on a sidewalk fifty-three stories below. In the galleries, this capsule might have suggested the outside impact of these proposals—at the foot of a soaring tower, it was, regrettablly, diminished.

Following the cluster of capsules, the exhibition abruptly shifted tone, overwhelming visitors with a burst of color and sound in a space featuring artworks by Awazu, Kurokawa, Isozaki, and others. This served as an anteroom to one of the most successful assemblages in the exhibition, a large space dedicated entirely to Expo ’70 in Osaka, depicted in a dizzying array of building components, vintage film footage, and musical pieces, interspersed with architectural drawings and models. With limited exceptions—the promotional illustrations for the un consummated 1940 exposition, Otaka’s googie-esque plan, a wall of book covers and two recently built models—the first half of the show was relentlessly monotone; the large space dedicated to Expo ’70, by contrast, included an entire wall painted bright orange.

As the exhibition wound down from this crescendo, a final space entitled “Global Metabolism” featured Tange’s 1960s plans for Skopje, Yugoslavia, and Bologna; Maki’s 2007 Republic University campus in Singapore; and Kurokawa and Isozaki’s plans for Zhengdong [a.k.a. Zhengzhou], one of China’s booming but currently empty cities, with completion planned for 2025. This closing gallery was a small one, only 1400 square feet, and the works were bulky: Tange’s larger Bologna model took up more than half the width of the space. The loose layout of such a limited sampling incompletely communicated how far the Metabolists’ influence ultimately spread—but at night, when window shades were opened, a subtle gesture took up where the gallery failed: while most exterior glazing in the museum was blocked by large screens displaying the flythrough animations, here, for the first time in the show, curators exposed the Mori’s spectacular view: the city of Tokyo sparkled below, towers rising into the sky—just the way the Metabolists dreamed possible half a century ago.

DANA BUNTROCK
University of California, Berkeley

Related Publication

Note
1. All names are given in Western order, with the family name following the given name.