Human Spaces:

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Mentors: Alyssa Kuhns, Kim Sexton

Buildings: Katsura Imperial Villa, Meiso No Mori by Toyo Ito, The Gallery of Horyuji Treasures by Yoshio Taniguchi, The Kanagawa Institute of Technology Workshop by Junya Ishigami

Institution: University of Arkansas

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Biographical Sketch

Canaan Thomas is a second-year student at the University of Arkansas in the Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design. Born in Denison, Texas, she spent her first year out of high school living in New York City studying Acting and Film at Marymount Manhattan College prior to coming to Arkansas. However, while in New York her interest in architecture, travel, and other cultures came to life. The busy landscape full of renowned works of architecture and an immensely dense and extremely diverse population instilled a desire to go learn about and experience adjacent places. In her class, she is amongst the highest-ranking students with a 4.0 GPA that is achieved through her hard work and genuine passion for her studies. Thomas participates in various student organizations, such as, the Honors College, the American Institute of Architecture Students, the National Organization of Minority Architecture Students, Non-Traditional Architecture and Design Students, Freedom by Design, and more. At the University of Arkansas, Thomas has sought immense involvement and Thomas hopes to use any future funds to continue traveling and discovering the ways in which architecture can be used to create spaces that resemble humanity and peace.

Human Spaces

Yugen, mysterious profundity, is the term used by the Japanese to describe something that is simply too deep for words. Historically, *yugen* referred to poetry, landscape painting, and *No* theater, but, having seen Japanese architecture in publications, I sensed that the concept might also describe the experience of exquisitely designed Japanese buildings. I set off on my travels to Japan with the task of discovering whether one would be able to detect the notion of yugen in classic and modern Japanese architecture. I found the most convincing instances in four sites which I present in this critical study: Katsura Imperial Villa, Meiso No Mori by Toyo Ito, The Gallery of Horyuji Treasures by Yoshio Taniguchi, and Junya Ishigami's workshop on Kanagawa Institute of Technology's campus. Katsura Imperial Villa provides a grounding in traditional Japanese design in its stunning refinement and indisputable simultaneity of the built and natural enviornment. Building upon the key achievements of Katsura, each of the remaining buildings invents and improvises new and harmonious variations on the villa's atmospheric effects, its manipulations in materials, form, and light/shadow, and its connections with nature. All four buildings gain deeper meaning from the sensitivity shown to their audiences' needs and from their unique historical, cultural, and geographical contexts. Through the in-person experience of such peerless Japanese edifices afforded to me by the Aydelott Travel Award, I have gained a keen understanding of how to create spaces which feel innately human and deeply personal.

Katsura Imperial Villa:

A Grounding in the Tradition of Peace

Katsura Imperial Villa (1616–60) is an imperial residence based on traditional Japanese architectural and cultural principles. These principles include a connection to nature, use of traditional materials and elements, stunning refinement, the activation of the five senses and Japanese aesthetics.

Because Katsura is one of the purest, most renowned examples of Japanese tradition, it is important to me that I understand its relation to the precedents set before its creation as a background for the other Japanese buildings I am studying. During prerecorded, historic times in Japan, there was a culture known as the Jomon. This was a primitive culture that lacked civility and is "considered a product of sheer vitality,"[1] as Kenzo Tange surmises in his essay on "Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture." Nevertheless, the Jomon relics (Figure 1) have unique styles that emphasize a sense of "space and volume"[2] and do not display an understanding of human proportions or scale. As empires rise and fall, the Jomon were eventually replaced by the Yayoi, the first in Japanese culture to present a level of "intellectual activity."[3] Kengo describes this time as a transition from spaces of mere volume to spaces of "peace and calm" where the "emotional qualities of a people

Figure 1: Jomon relic, (ca. 10,500–ca. 300 B.C.) Image source: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/53625

grateful for the bounties of nature”[4] emerge. The Yayoi then built the Ise Shrine which was an early display of geometric order in their built environment. The Yayoi also introduced the incorporation of decorative vegetation into the soul of the structures. The paths to approach the structures are methodically designed, yet were seemingly wondrous (Figure 2), extending the idea that the boundary between the natural and built is seamless; that it may not even exist. The connection to nature is showcased here in this developing principle and then clearly displayed in the gardens at Katsura. Moreover, the buildings containing these qualities were ones for a higher class, while the buildings in the farmland were assembled by practical means rather than aesthetic ones. Categorically, the architecture belonging to the higher classes may be perceived as stemming from the Yayoi culture, while the architecture

Figure 2: Meandering path at Katsura Imperial Villa. Photo taken by author.

belonging to the farmers, or the common man is more Jomon. Katsura is conceivably the first place where these two

Figure 3: Katsura Imperial Villa's main, meandering path shown in gold. Digital illustration by author.

cultures merge. Katsura is traditional in its "aesthetic balance and continuous sequence of patterns in space"[5] that is reminiscent of the Yayoi culture and aristocratic buildings of the time. The curation trickles down even onto the path you walk on through the grounds, which has a distinction between three styles: informal, semi-formal, and formal. Additionally, Katsura was carefully crafted to be a stroll garden, meaning the occupant is meant to always face beautifully dynamic views. Katsura maintains a formality to its design that reserves its elegance; however, Katsura's design is delicately balanced by a perception of "barbaric earthiness,"[6] according to Tange. The "barbaric earthiness" is present in its paths which meander through the garden and blind the occupant from the built surroundings until just the right moment (Figure 4). The wondrous path

Figure 4: Illustrations showing the views of the buildings on Katsura Imperial Villa's site being obstructed by nature. Photos and digital illustrations by author.

takes us back to a time where humans wandered through woods spontaneously seeking refuge. The dichotomy of impulsivity and careful calculation presents itself in Katsura. Evidently, Katsura creates a new tradition by means of bringing together the traditions of people who are separated; it is a place of hope for the common man to exist amongst the elite; a place for both to maintain a significant figure in their tradition and in their culture.

Katsura makes use of the primary elements known to Japanese architecture: wood, tatami mats, engawa, structural orientation, and an incorporation of nature[7]. Because of its strength, beauty, and symbolism of the Japanese's veneration for nature, wood is used as a natural, structural material for the villa and surrounding teahouses. Tatami, a type of mat made of rice straw, is used for the innermost

Figure 4: Illustrations showing the views of the buildings on Katsura Imperial Villa's site being obstructed by nature. Photos and digital illustrations by author.

flooring and unfinished wood plank for the *engawa, or* outer circulation corridors. Due to the natural components used to make the tatami mats, they provide a soft and pleasant scent. The texture of the mats also provides a gentler cushion to your feet than hardwood; Japanese bedding was often placed directly on it because of its comfortability. The *engawa* provides seating and a passageway to the garden outside. The wooden path acts as a discrete transition between the exterior and interior.

Furthermore, beyond the careful consideration of each material, their implementation into the design of each building is also meticulously examined. The main villa building, the Old Shoin, is oriented to face the full moon and even has a moon viewing deck where the moon can be enjoyed both in the sky and as a reflection on the

Figure 5: A window in Geppa-ro framing the nature beyond. Photo taken by author.

water. Additionally, the windows in the structures are quite large and are used to frame the nature that sits beyond. While in Geppa-ro, a small teahouse close to the Villa, I saw the strongest example I had seen of this framing (Figure 5). The window spanned almost the entirety of the wall of the teahouse and through it was the most graceful view of the garden outside. It was a moment of *yugen*; a moment that I felt I fully understood the weight of the Japanese desire to absorb the natural environment into their spaces.

A strong connection to nature is evident in each of these elements: wood, tatami, engawa, and window framing. Having experienced these spaces, I would say "simultaneity" rather than "connection" is a better term. The idea that the dwelling and its surrounding landscape exist as one thing is conceivably what makes the experience throughout so pleasant. The thoughtful and meticulous use of these elements supplies the nuanced experience felt by the inhabitants. The seamless path from the natural environment to the built environment requires no strife, just harmony. The occupant is meant to feel the simultaneity and to embrace it. This quality is furthered by activating the five senses.

French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61) posed the question, "How would the painter or poet express anything other than his encounter with the world?"[8] With this, how could an architect do otherwise? Furthermore, what can an architect do to ensure the experiences held in a space they have created reach their inhabitants on a level that is purely human. Purely human meaning that these experiences are ones that are described through the common experiences

of humans, like, the feeling of a warm bath or the smell of your grandmother's house at Christmas time. It is not necessarily the act of these things which we relate to, but the familiarity and memorability of them. We can just think of a warm bath and feel the smoothness of the water, smell the soft scent of the bubbles, hear the trickling faucet, see the steam, and taste the glass of wine we've set aside. Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) describes this phenomenon as follows:

> The taste of the apple […] lies in the contact of the fruit with the palate, not in the fruit itself; in a similar way […] poetry lies in the meeting of poem and reader, not in the lines of symbols printed on the pages of a book. What is essential is the aesthetic act, the thrill, the almost physical emotion that comes with each reading.[9]

It is the culmination of all our senses being activated that gives this experience such a fond and relatable feeling. It is what French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962) calls "the polyphony of the senses."[10] More specifically, it is how delicately the senses are approached, not just that all of them are interacting. The senses are not overstimulated and instead so deftly cared for that we may not even notice that the senses as activated. Moreover, it is precisely the way these common experiences balance and interact with our senses that make them so special. These experiences, so specific to humans, are what link us and although these experiences may not always be pleasant, it is our job as architects to curate them into the experience we intend inhabitants to have. We must become deeply aware

of the way we can employ design choices to create our desired human impact.

I believe this to be a principal cause for the admiration of Katsura Imperial Villa. Katsura is a space that is not overly extravagant, but one that holds a stunning refinement which physically encapsulates the sacred space between the breaths, a place of peace and pause, in the scheme of its surrounding landscape. As Finnish architect Juhani Pallasamaa states in *The Eyes of the Skin* (1996), "Architecture emancipates us from the embrace of the present and allows us to experience the slow, healing of time."[11] In Katsura's garden, we escape to an alternate landscape that allows our mind, body, and spirit to calm and restore itself. Though the garden is characterized by vegetation that is not highly groomed the

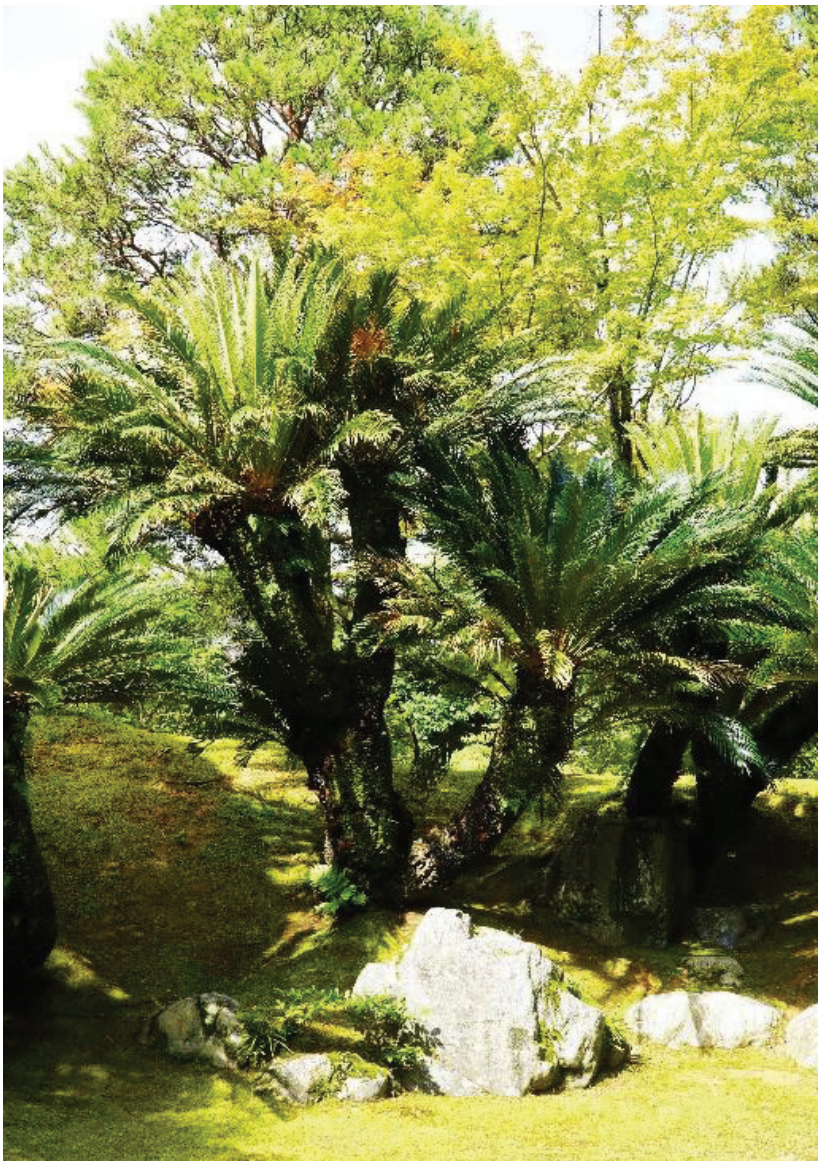

Figure 6: Non-native tree at Katsura. Photo taken by author.

flora was methodically selected to house a feeling of escapism. For example, the architect used a non-native tree (Figure 6) to create a feeling of being somewhere beyond the surrounding city of Kyoto. Of the five tea houses in the garden, I believe Geppa-ro to be the perfect example of the incorporation of our senses to create a space of peace. Because of the thatched roofs, which overhang the engawa, the doors and windows of the teahouse are rarely shut, leaving the occupant open to the landscape. The space is also designed to have openings in every direction which encapsulate the viewer in their natural surroundings. The use of wood as the primary material continues to develop the concomitantly of nature inside of the built environment. In Geppa-ro, we look out of the open structure to our surroundings and see an expansive, green garden with a calm-watered lake in the middle of it. We hear the chirps of birds and rustling leaves. When we breathe in, we smell the green tea in our hands, because the soft, pleasant scent of the tatami has activated our olfactory glands. We take a sip of our herbal green tea and can taste its earthiness. From this, we feel that we are one with the natural environment around us. We accept the

Figure 7: Unfinished, single branch support in Geppa-ro. Photo by author.

natural environment to infiltrate into the built environment and for them to interact harmoniously. Lastly, as we peer above us, we see a single tree branch acting as a support in the center of the roof enclosure (Figure 7). The branch is unfinished and unrefined, symbolizing the importance of natural environment as what the Japanese structure their dwellings and, perhaps, their lives on. This harmony, this oneness is surely responsible for the tranquility we feel in this space. It is the equilibrium that we meet that eases us and allows for meditation without wavering.

This feeling of peace is furthered by the various ceremonial or procedural acts done at Katsura. The most obvious example being the tea ceremony. Followed by the path at Katsura, which leads you through the entirety of the grounds. Because there is only one main path, the inhabitant faces no confusion about where to go, thus creating a peaceful easy interaction with the site. Lastly, the appreciation for the moon and the following of its monthly cycle. These acts foster a feeling of peace and calm because of their predictability. As the inhabitants, we know what to expect and therefore are not required to contemplate or worry.

To heighten the senses, the architects did not rely on conventional notions of elegance, but rather on a simple expression of simple, austere beauty often called *wabi*. The Japanese aesthetic of *wabi* is heavily integrated into Katsura's design. *Wabi* is best described in the *Zen Tea Record, 1828* that is cited in Stanford University's Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:*

> *Wabi* means that even in straitened circumstances no thought of hardship arises. Even amid insufficiency, one is moved by no feeling of want. Even when faced with failure, one does not brood over injustice. If you find being in straitened circumstances to be confining, if you lament insufficiency as privation, if you complain that things have been ill-disposed—this is not *wabi*.[12]

This means that with the application of the *wabi* aesthetic frivolous desires do not arise and, if they do, it is not noble. One might expect that Katsura, having been designed for the top ranks of the imperial hierarchy, would have embraced excessive ornament or extravagance, but that was not the case. *Wabi* is an idea that is thoughtfully intertwined with many recurrent tendencies in Japanese culture. In my travels to Japan, I found this to be very apparent in the way people dressed, expressed themselves, and in their thoughts. In 2023, dress tended to follow a monochromatic, neutral, and simple style, like aesthetics of the structures at Katsura. Makeup is not commonly worn and if it is it is lightly applied, reminding me of the lack of ornamentation at Katsura. I noticed that a short haircut with bangs was a very common hairstyle for women and when I asked why, my colleague, a Japanese native, said it was so that “less of their face would be seen because they are a shy group of people.” Furthermore, it seemed to me to be a very reserved society. I lived in New York City for a year and the juxtaposition of the passengers conduct on the train systems from New York City to Tokyo made this difference quite apparent. When speaking with locals I took note of the appreciation of moderation, especially regarding consumption of material items. Of

course, this changed as I went into the larger cities; however, it still seemed to be representative of a large portion of the population. These common opinions or beliefs seemed to seep into the architectural design at Katsura. Katsura maintains simple aesthetic features which lack much ornamentation and offers something that is more closely related to the aesthetic of *wabi*. This seems to be an aesthetic that has remained a steady part of Japanese contemporary

Figure 8: Layers of the Shokintei teahouse on Katsura's site. Photo taken by author.

culture. Referring to Katsura being a place that represented both the Yayoi and Jomon cultures, it becomes even more apparent just how lasting some aesthetic preferences can be. Seemingly Katsura provided an ideological statement on the value of *wabi* in an unexpected place.

Even today, Katsura remains an anomaly of its kind. The Japanese culture is one that favors the group over the individual. Because of this, you see a society, especially from an American perspective, that values collective cohesion over individualistic pursuits and/or desires. The quality and demand of respect for others is evident in the interactions between natives. When speaking with my colleague's teacher from her high school, a man originally from California, I asked if this was apparent in the school systems by how students treated others. He responded, "Yes, you are always included as long as you are a part of the group, but if you do not fit, then no, you are not treated well." Before coming to Japan, I was enamored by the idea of a society that was "less selfish" than the one I belonged to; however, I realized after this conversation that no one has a solution that is all-inclusive. There is no answer that is right for everyone. However, there is an opportunity to create little pockets of refuge that hopefully create spaces where everyone is welcomed, like Katsura, where different people and ideas coexist.

Katsura Imperial Villa is a quintessential example of Japanese traditional architecture where a relationship with nature, use of traditional materials and elements, stunning refinement, the activation of the five senses and Japanese aesthetics are implemented. Katsura remains historically significant in contemporary times because

of its importance architecturally, culturally, and socially. Humans spend ninety percent of their time indoors[13]. Thoughtful action must be taken to make our spaces more engaging, more peaceful, and more human to improve quality of life. By studying Katsura, I believe I've gotten remarkably closer to being able to do such an important job.

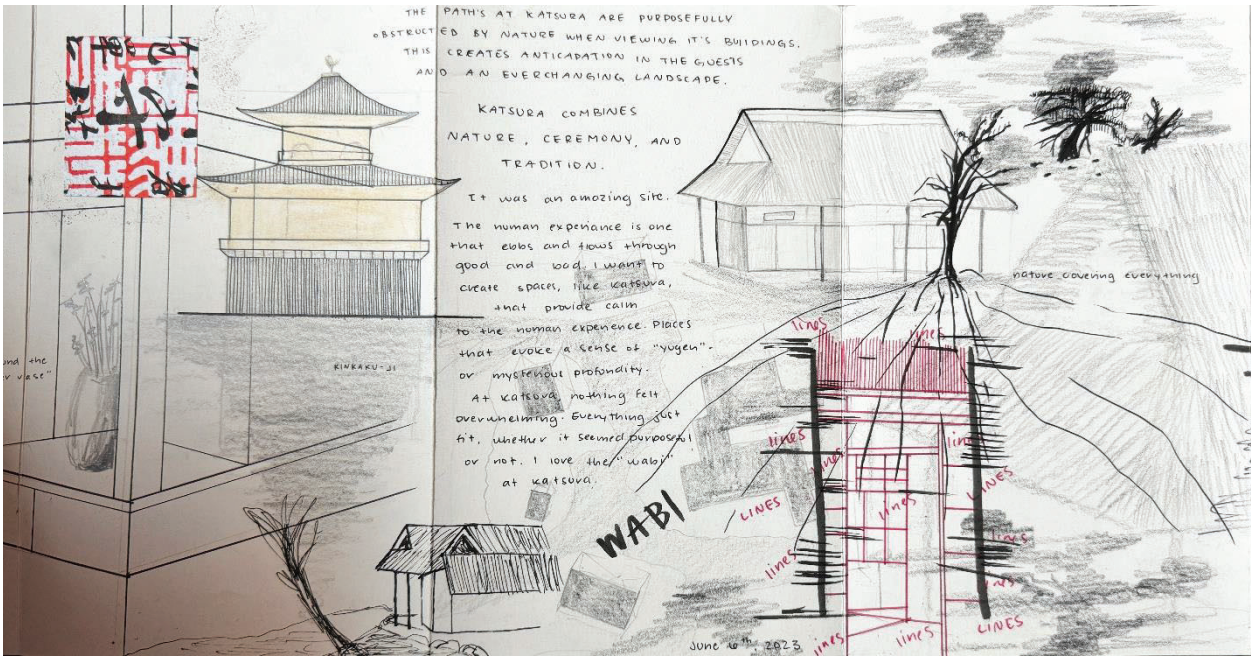

Figure 9: Sketches drawn on site and in reflection of the spaces at Katsura Imperial Villa. By author.

Essay One Endnotes:

[1] Kenzō Tange, *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture*, photographs by Yasushiro Ishimoto (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 15.
[2] Tange, *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture, 15.*
[3] Tange, *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture, 15.*
[4] Tange, *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture, 15.*
[5] Tange, *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture, 16.*
[6] Tange, *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture, 20.*
[7] "Six Elements of Japanese Architecture", J-Life International, posted on October 15, 2023, https://jlifeinternational.com/blogs/news/six-elements-of-japanese-architecture.
[8] Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin* (Chichester: Wiley, n.d.), 14.
[9] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin,* 14.
[10] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin,* 41.
[11] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin,* 52.
[12] "Japanese Aesthetics", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified December 6, 2023, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/japanese-aesthetics/
[13] "Indoor Air Quality" United States Environmental Protection Agency, last modified July 14, 2023, https://epa.gov/report-environment/indoor-air-quality#:~:text=Americans%2C%20on%20average%2C%20spend%20approximately,higher%20than%20typical%20outdoor%20concentrations.

Meiso No Mori:

A Peaceful Idiom

Meiso No Mori (2006) is a contemporary municipal funeral home designed by Toyo Ito, located on a small lake with a mountain behind it in Gifu, Japan. Despite the project's curvilinear dynamic form and use of contemporary, decidedly white, materials, it is not without kinship to Katsura in its connection to nature and the development of atmospheric quality which, arguably, aids in the grievance of loss. Ito's project holds great importance for my studies because of its strategic cultivation of a space which is specific to a very solemn human experience. His intentional design is representative of being specific to site, material, and most importantly, the profound and evocative experiences occupants can have because of the curation of peaceful atmospheric qualities.

Toyo Ito created a connection to nature both literally and metaphorically in Meiso No Mori. The literal connection lies within its garden site. Gifu, the prefecture, and city it lies in, is also one of the most popular areas in Japan in which to harvest wood. Although Ito did not use wood in the design of Meiso No Mori, he clearly incorporated the native landscape into the setting. Metaphorically, the name, meaning "Forest of Meditation," also calls our attention to the similarity of the building's form to a canopy of trees (Figure 2). Ito successfully links Meiso No Mori with the prominent local material by creating an organic and modern idiom through his design. Moreover, the funeral home echoes the surrounding

mountains and overhanging clouds through its undulating roof made of thin, white concrete. The color and material allow for the space to be distinct amidst its surroundings but not to compete with them.

Figure 1: Toyo Ito, front elevation, Meiso No Mori, Gifu, Japan, July 22, 2023. Photo taken by author.

To me, it seemed that, despite its abstract quality, an almost pictorial symbolism is inherent in the design: the white clouds allude to the sky, the sky to the heavens, making Meiso No Mori a spot of heaven on earth. This would make sense as this is a place where a body takes leave of its organic form to be born into heavenly existence. Additionally, the roof is held up by columns that taper from a small diameter upward to one that fuses harmoniously with its eccentric roof above. Due to the dynamism of a heavy canopy balancing on thinning columns, the enclosure seems to be flying. Conceivably, this could represent the liberation of the spirit from the biological body. This flying or floating effect is enhanced by the artificial light that glows just below the roof. The enclosed space, made mostly of glass,

Figure 2: Depiction of the symbolism of the enclosure of Meiso No Mori as a forest. Digital illustration and photo by author.

recedes as the amber light moves forward seeming to lift the canopy from underneath and act as an aureole surrounding the structure (Figure 3). Again, this could also represent the late individual taking on their angelic, celestial form. The effect of both form and light allows for peaceful, meditative emotions to emerge in a place of grief and rest. The subtly of these effects allows for introspection in a time of loss. Each of these effects would make sense for the program of the building and its relation to the afterlife.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the treatment of the modern materials chosen for the space not only allow for the form to cultivate these programmatic connections, but also tie it back to Japanese architectural values such as those established at Katsura Villa. The billowing reinforced concrete roof juxtaposes a seemingly heavy material with a delicate, light phenotype. The roof plane, which measures 20 cm thick, seems impossibly thin and smooth upon inspection. The form work, along with a chemical accelerator which made the concrete cure quicker, allowed for the smooth, eccentric curves which characterize the enclosure. Because of the roof's geometric irregularity, the stress levels vary across the surface. To manage this, Ito had steel meshes placed in necessary spaces to maintain the enclosures' thinness. The fluidity of the curves is in and of itself symbolic of peace and calm. Moreover, the roof encloses a transparent glass building; consequently, the building looks more like a pavilion than an actual indoor space. As a result, from perspectives both inside and outside of the building, the line between indoor and outdoor is blurred, like a traditional Japanese dwelling,

and the concrete tree canopy assumes the role historically played by the "pavilion." Likewise, Meiso No Mori responds in a similar way to the Kanagawa Institute of Technology's Workshop with its seemingly clear views in any direction. When inside of the funeral hall, the natural enviornment remains in your line of vision reinstating the idea of simultaneity between the natural and built enviornment. Furthermore, Ito's choice to color the concrete white allows for the structure to be set apart from its landscape, but the developed connections with nature allow the building to fuse quietly with its surroundings.

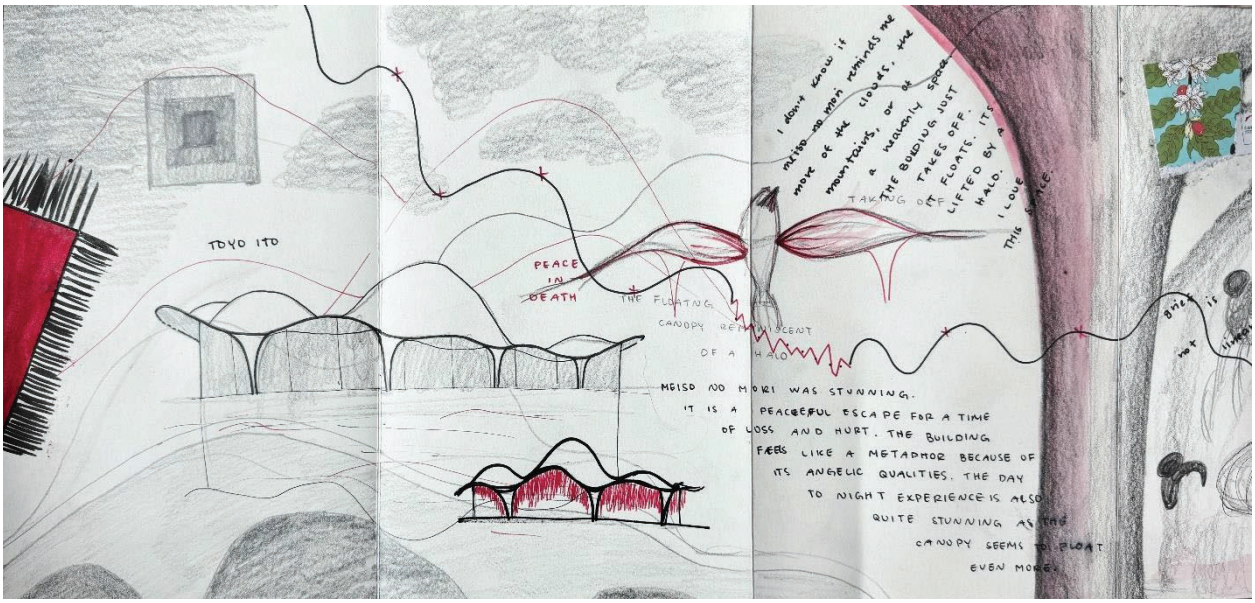

Figure 3: Sketches drawn on site and in reflection of the spaces at Meiso No Mori. By author.

To create an extensive set of formworks which allowed for the structure to be realized, Ito worked closely with engineer, Mutsuro Sasaki. In Georg Windeck's book, *Construction Matters*, the author describes this formwork as "actual architecture, and the concrete is only there to document it in order to permanently preserve its

memory."[1] I found this statement to profoundly describe just how determined and creative architects can be. I admire the idea that Ito wanted a specific effect so much that an extensive and intricate formwork didn't stand to challenge his objective. The formwork was fortified through a collaboration of specialized intelligences, a manipulation of a flexible material, and a determination to realize an idea. Furthermore, there are similar innovations in much of Ito's work, for example, the Sendai Mediatheque (2001), which is one of the high points of Ito's career. The Sendai Mediatheque, located in Sendai, Japan, was designed to house different forms of media, but for the divisions between them to be very informal. These blurred boundaries are purely the result of Ito's design which has a "simple structure, consisting of flat concrete slabs (which are honey-comb steel plates with concrete) penetrated by thirteen tubes."[2] His design allows for a lack of walls and in turn a very open floor plan, again, allowing the divisions of space to be lessened. There is a clear intention in Ito's work to be innovative with technology, material, and with the architectural ideas he conceives of. Ito is not meek in his approach, but instead he advances courageously to achieve his desired impact through space making. Meiso No Mori exists as an extension of Ito's determination and vision.

What I came to appreciate most about Toyo Ito's work is his lack of adherence to a specific architectural style or typology. For example, even in the plan of Meiso No Mori the same fluidity the enclosure possesses exists. The plan has an irregular, curvilinear shape which adheres to the symbolism of peace and calm that the rest

of the design displays. Consequently, Ito does what I think to be seldom done, he creates on a level that is much deeper than mere technological or aesthetic means, he pioneers novel forms to serve the audience targeted for a project. He crafts each new program with new, but wise eyes to create what is needed. Hence, in Meiso No Mori and the Sendai Mediatheque, we can see that, although the programs vary considerably, Ito considers the needs of humans and what the effect of the space should have on its occupants, and then realizes that idea through architectural means.

My experience at Meiso No Mori was in many ways profound and unprecedented in my lifetime. I find Meiso No Mori to be intrinsically connected with the program of the building and, consequently, the emotional states of those who occupy it. Because of these well-developed connections, moments of heavy meditation arise. Though my experience in the funeral hall was not shaped by the grief of genuine loss, I was in my fourth week of traveling alone in a foreign country. Looking back on that day, I was running very thin emotionally speaking. I was tired, lonely, and not sure that I was in the right headspace for architectural study. On the bus, I wrote in my personal journal, “I am tired. I miss home. Are these things I’m studying even powerful?” After getting off the bus, I walked forty-five minutes to the site, and, fortunately, my headphones had died by this point, leaving me more in touch with my thoughts. As I walked along, I came to a neighborhood with uninviting, expressionless houses. I saw few people, but the ones I did see were working in their yards drenched with sweat from the ninety-degree, humid weather. I carried on the

path and came to an area occupied by a considerable number of industrial buildings. The men inside worked with a mechanical quality, neither positive nor negative. Even deeper in my thoughts, I finally arrived at my destination. This was when the skepticism began to unravel into discoveries that renewed my faith in the power of architecture.

I stood at the bottom of the slight slope on which Meiso No Mori sits and felt special to have the privilege of experiencing this little pocket of peace (Figure 5). I walked through the surrounding cemetery and took in the space from every vantage point. I climbed the mountain north of the funeral hall and appreciated the expanse of the roof structure. I was enamored by the simple, yet stunning qualities that the space offered. The connections to site, to people, and to

Figure 4: Toyo Ito, partially under roof enclosure, Meiso No Mori, Gifu, Japan, July 22, 2023. Photo taken by author.

purpose were evident without inspection, they were just simply obvious. It was clear to me that the architect gave thoughtful consideration not only to the space itself, but how it had to belong to the site. I am very interested in spaces that do this, spaces that create such natural relationships with their location that it seems impossible for them to exist anywhere else. I find this to be an essential quality in setting the structure up with a basis in peace and comfort. As I approached the building, the scale of the enclosure displayed its balance of gravity and levity. The roof overhead felt bulbous and much too massive to be held by the columns which populated its perimeter. Underneath the heavy canopy, I contemplated its ability to describe how the dramatic weight of grief bears down on a person as he or she struggles to believe they can support their sorrow (Figure 4). I asked myself, "How can a space feel this personal? What is it about this space that feels like it represents me?" I recalled Maurice Merleau-

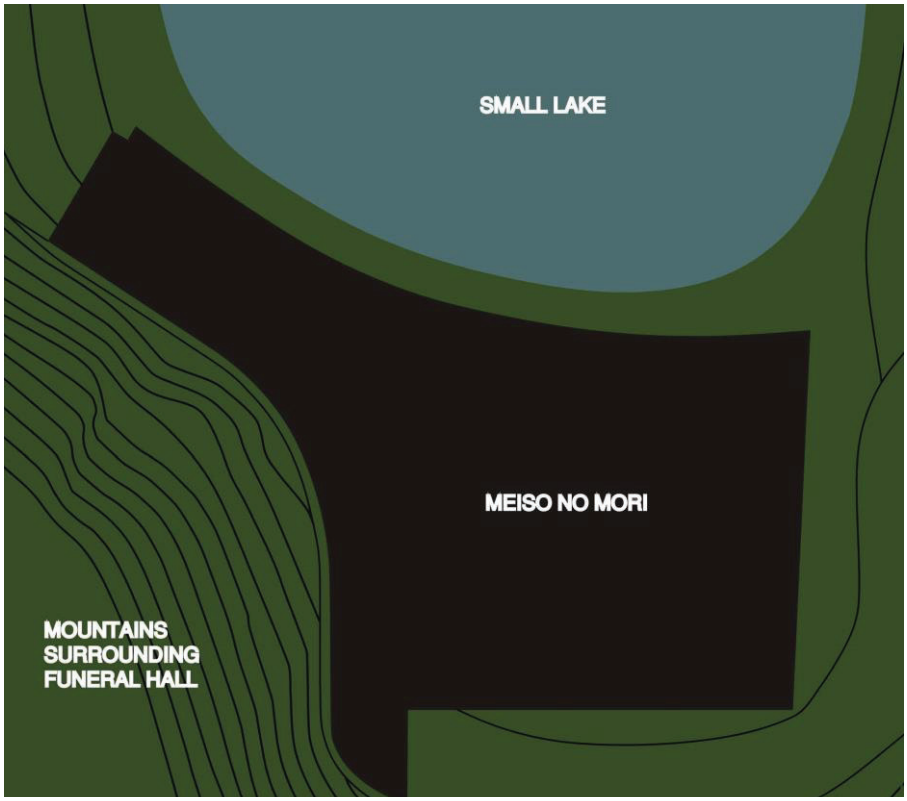

Figure 5: Plan of Meiso No Mori. Digital illustration by author.

Ponty's question, "How would the painter or poet express anything other than his encounter with the world?"[3] I also recalled my dubious, naive freshman-year-self hearing my professor claim that architects can generate places that reflect what they see in themselves. At the time, I found this claim to be illogical and too philosophical, but I believe that I understand it now. Good architects design buildings which reflect the experiences of humans; consequently, we find ourselves embodied in such spaces. When we understand this, we find comfort and the capacity to dwell in calmness. Like the interaction of the senses at Katsura, the experience is so nuanced that it is hardly detectable. I am not claiming that we see a literal depiction of ourselves or that we even notice the embodiment, but I am now convinced that experiential qualities that were thoughtfully curated represent some experience that feels personal to us.

This was a clarifying moment and experience for me. Again, I recognize that my temporary afflictions were not of the same magnitude as the typical guest of Meiso No Mori; however, I found the weight I was carrying to be described, and simultaneously relieved by Ito's enclosure. Throughout my life, the idea of deciding where my greatest contribution to life would be has been something that has heavily burdened me. I have sometimes been terribly afraid that I would choose a path and look back at the end of my life wishing I had done something more impactful. Because of my experience at Meiso No Mori, I know that being a space maker is an avenue that provides me ample opportunities to make a difference. I am eager to bring atmospheres of peace and calm to spaces that direly need them, such as schools,

hospitals, and community centers. As architects, we have the potential to shape indoor experiences into an opportunity to elevate their quality of life. I am beyond delighted to be learning how to use such a powerful tool. Meiso No Mori is a remarkable building by the inspiring architect, Toyo Ito. The building has an intentional design that is specific to its site, material, and most importantly, the profound and evocative experiences occupants can have because of the curation of peaceful atmospheric qualities. For me, Meiso No Mori is an example of a space designed to meaningfully enhance human experience.

Essay Two Endnotes:

[1] Georg Windeck, *Construction Matters* (Powerhouse Books, New York), 2015.
[2] "Sendai Mediatheque." Architectuul. Accessed October 8, 2023. https://architectuul.com/architecture/sendai-mediatheque.
[3] Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin* (Chichester: Wiley, n.d.), 14.

Gallery of Horyuji Treasures:

A Pocket of Peace

The Museum of Horyuji Treasures is a contemporary work, located in Tokyo, by Yoshio Taniguchi which displays precious artwork formerly belonging to the early eighth century Horyuji temple near Nara, the oldest surviving wooden structure in Japan. Taniguchi's solution for housing ancient artifacts in a modern way succeeds—perhaps unexpectedly—by deploying clear geometries, a deceptively simple design, and contemporary materials such as concrete, steel, and glass. While almost Miesian in its modernity, the museum frequently nods to its basis in Japanese tradition. I see the multi-layered design of the museum as symbolic of the history of its artifacts and their safekeeping inside layers and layers of wooden boxes.

The Horyuji Temple is a significant building in Japan's history because of its coinciding with the introduction of Buddhism to Japan in the seventh century CE. In the Meiji period (1868–1912), government support for Horyuji's Hosso school of Buddhism evaporated and Horyuji's monks donated many of its treasures to the government for display and care, receiving financial compensation in return.[1] From this point forward, these treasures became government property. The Horyuji grounds were home to many irreplaceable cultural treasures—and to some degree still are—which tell the stories of the eras spanning Japan's history. The Gallery of Horyuji Treasures was established in 1964 in its first building, to preserve, protect, and display these very treasures. In 1999, the Japanese government commissioned a new, reconstructed building for the Horyuji Treasures capable of

accommodating them in a more suitable way, and Taniguchi won the competition The site selected is within Tokyo's National Museum property boundary nearby Kuro-man gate, or the black gate, another cultural and historical asset of the Edo era (late eighteenth century). From this context, it is evident how vital the creation of a space which honors and protects these artworks was. The Tokyo National Museum site is in the Ueno district of Taito City in the wider, bustling city of Tokyo. Beyond the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures building, there are several more exhibitions, museums, teahouses, and other spaces to enjoy the history of Japan within the site (Figure 5). Likewise, the grounds act as a node of peace and reflection in the wider fabric of Tokyo's busy landscape.

The Gallery of Horyuji Treasures (1999) is a layered system of rectangular volumes receding back in space. For the outermost layer, Taniguchi used proportionally small columns which lift the square canopy of concrete, creating an entrance indicative of traditional Japanese entries which blur the boundary between the natural and built environment. Additionally, the outermost layer acts as a shading device for a program that needs little to no direct light. Because the other layers are set further back from the canopy, there is a porch that wraps around the building reminding us of the engawa on a traditional Japanese dwelling. Inside the outermost layer, is the second layer: a glass rectangular volume where the foyer of the building is. Because of the transparency of the material, vertical paneling applied to the facade works in tandem with the outer canopy to help mitigate the direct light. Further into the building, a solid

concrete rectangular volume forms the third layer: the exhibition hall where the treasures are displayed in spaces without direct daylight for sake of preservation of the treasures. Taniguchi carefully took on the challenge of lighting with layering, spatial rhythm, and necessity. His use of layering breeds a gradation of light and a clear separation between the space's programs. Additionally, the employment of layering is both practically and aesthetically pleasing. The gradation of light as you move through space allows for the occupant to feel consistent anticipation for what will come next in the design. By manipulating the lighting of each space to become less and less bright, the tenebrosity of the gallery space is less jarring to the inhabitant, yet still adequate to distinguish the space from the other spaces. Lastly, the primary necessity of preservation is adhered to through a thoughtful design which considers both the experience of its occupants as well as the needs of the treasures. The design of the Gallery of Horyuji treasures respects the importance of the past in a new and contemporary representation.

The relationship of contemporary design to traditional design is apparent through comparison of the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures to Katsura Imperial Villa. The most obvious translation from traditional to contemporary Japanese architecture at the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures lies in the simple proportions and geometry of the structure. The refinement is straightforward and greatly redolent of the compositional qualities of traditional Japanese spaces formed by *tatami* mats. I am constantly reminded of the modernist adage that "less is more" when looking at many Japanese creations, even those

Figure 1: Nature being frame in The Gallery of Horyuji Treasures (top) and Katsura Imperial Villa (bottom). Photos taken by author.

that date to the seventeenth century. The designs strenuously avoid anything gaudy, preferring to generate impact through their clarity. This is a profound action and skill—to create something non-ornamental that makes people take a breath. I believe this is cultivated through a developed understanding of precisely how you would like a space to serve its occupants. If an architect can design each space with the exact qualities the program, then ornament is unnecessary, and the space can speak for itself. This mastery of specificity lies within so many spaces that are Japanese designed.

Upon approaching the museum, one glimpses the front facade through a small grove of trees. As the building comes into view, the main elevation remains slightly concealed by billowing trees which

Figure 2: Yoshio Taniguchi, approach to front elevation, The Gallery of Horyuji Treasures, Tokyo, Japan, August 4, 2023. Photo taken by author.

Figure 3: Yoshio Taniguchi, detail view of front elevation, The Gallery of Horyuji Treasures, Tokyo, Japan, August 4, 2023. Photo taken by author.

populate its outer edges (Figure 3). The screening of the museum by nature is reminiscent of the design of the grounds at Katsura. And likewise, like Katsura, anticipation arises as you approach until the structure reveals itself. Perhaps the difference at the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures is the assertive elegance with which the space pronounces itself, while the buildings at Katsura maintain a certain level of *wabi*[2]. There is an evident indulgence in grandeur in the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures; however, it remains appropriate and perhaps even respectful to its job of housing treasures. It makes clear to the occupant that this space is distinguished and holds a clear and important role.

Like the small body of water used to reflect the moon at Katsura, Taniguchi designed a reflecting pond just outside the entrance of the museum. The water is undisturbed by any use of fountains or features and instead presents a quality of calmness by its evenness. When around water, we experience the effect of blue mind, a term coined by Marine Biologist Wallace J. Nichols, to describes "the calm, peacefulness, unity, and sense of general happiness and satisfaction with life in the moment."[3] Placid water is a design feature which allows the occupants to regain a sense of peace in a space. Furthermore, there is a clear pattern of water being used in spaces that strive to convey peacefulness, like Katsura Imperial Villa and Meiso No Mori, which I've previously discussed. Moreover, similar to the sensual gratification at Katsura, water features evoke a very particular activation of our sense of touch. To me, water is one of the few things which is as pleasant to see, hear,

and taste, as it is to feel. Due to its liquidity, water can envelop us in an embrace that has no void, which, as noted earlier, is why the idea of a warm bath is so appealing. Here, at the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures, the serene water which greets and invites us in sets the tone for a space based in peace. The placid reflecting pond grounds us before we enter to observe the treasures.

Figure 4: Yoshio Taniguchi, view from under enclosure looking at reflecting pond, The Gallery of Horyuji Treasures, Tokyo, Japan, August 4, 2023. Photo taken by author.

Like so many architecture students, I read *In Praise of Shadows*, by Japanese writer, Jun'chiro Tanizaki (1886-1965)[4]. I was struck by how Tanizaki recalls the moments when darkness "gathers," as it might "behind the crossbeam, around the flower vase [and] beneath the shelves."[5] Shadows can "crowd" the features in a structure to provide

depth. These are the moments when structures develop dynamism and character. As Tanizaki explains it:

> "Though we know perfectly well it is a mere shadow, we are overcome with the feeling that in this small corner of the atmosphere, there reigns complete and utter silence; that here in the darkness immutable tranquility holds sway."[6]

It is in these profoundly simple moments that our greatest peace arises. Moments of meditation arise as we watch as light diffuses into shadow, where we seem to know exactly what is happening, yet to not know at all. Conceivably, this is a rare moment of observation where potential confusion is matched with contentment. The small moments in Tanizaki's description where "immutable tranquility"[7] exist accumulate into a whole that provides this same unique quality. The effect, though simple, is cathartic to the occupant, thus creating *calmness* within the individual. And, though this manipulation may seem like a simple play of the architect, it means more: the accentuation of light/shadow is emblematic of the Japanese's appreciation for nature. The simultaneity of the Japanese built, and natural environment goes beyond physical boundaries to extend an invitation for both to exist. Structures overflowing with a sense of phenomenal transparency between the natural and the built. Places where both exist, yet never compete. These are the spaces in which the Japanese have cultivated experiential qualities unique to only them. The thoughtful and meticulous manipulation of light and shadow supplies the nuanced

experience felt by the inhabitants. Perhaps this is yet another example of *yugen*, something too deep for words; something only understandable through experience.

Inside the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures, Tanizaki's observations seem to come to life. The manipulation of light and shadow provides a nuanced experience all while safeguarding the treasures from environmental harm. Taniguchi placed a vertical paneling system that braces the glass which frames the smallest "box" of the building. The paneling diffuses the light, whereas a simple transparent façade would allow too much direct light to enter. Pragmatically speaking, the paneling works because of the importance of protecting the treasures from any harsh light as well as maintaining a comfortable temperature. The diffusion of light creates an area that is well-lit, yet very comfortable and eco-conscious, even in Japan's notably hot summer climate. Experientially, the lighting in the foyer creates a calming placidity that echoes the effects of the exterior pool in the interior. As I advanced into the exhibition halls of the museum, I quickly became aware that the main gallery receives no direct light at all; hence, Taniguchi used the diffused light of the foyer to create a transitional space between the harsh daylight outside and the lack of any daylight in the gallery. The careful manipulation of light is reminiscent of the ways in which light is manipulated at Katsura and in other traditional dwellings. Moreover, I believe this to be one of the strongest connections the Japanese make to their natural environment-- the way they utilize the contrast between light and

shadow. This careful manipulation of light and shadow is key in the design of the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures.

When thinking of the buildings I would like to create as a future architect, I think of structures like the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures. Specifically, I am interested in spaces that create peaceful experiences and yet are a novelty to their surrounding landscape and/or their program. Whether the program necessarily calls for a space of the sort, I think the emotions an audience or public would experience should be heavily considered. Likewise, the country I call home is greatly focused on progress and success, and it seems that quietude is something few people would say is their “goal”. Despite this, I think peace is one of, if not the most important, things that can improve our quality of life. Peace seems to be important to have in the design of domestic spaces and/or therapeutic ones; however, I am curious about how lives could be changed if design choices which create peace were implemented in environments which typically conjure feelings of anxiety or stress. For example, if creating spaces which are notably peaceful were a priority in academic settings, how could this change the way students learn? Of course, peacefulness may not be compatible with the requirement of engagement and focus in classrooms and studios, but if students were less stressed, they would likely have a better capacity to be attentive and active in their learning.

I notice these aspects of educational environments because I was homeschooled until the third grade. Transitioning into public schools,

I noticed a huge difference in my excitement and ability to engage with the content because of the difficulty of feeling comfortable in a space that was less familiar and bleak. The classrooms were predictably plain, white, and box-like with fluorescent lighting, whereas, at home our "school room" had pastel walls covered in maps, diagrams, and paintings we had done in art class. My siblings and I collaborated with one another and talked through the concepts we were learning. We went to the bathroom and ate a snack as we pleased. Though home was clearly comfortable because, well, it was home, I think these qualities can be recreated on a wider, more public scale starting with the architecture of schools. Japanese architecture has shown me that the manipulation of light and shadow, awareness of atmospheric qualities, and specificity in the intended audience's reaction to a space are all key considerations, and they are

Figure 5: The meandering methods of approach to The Gallery of Horyuji Treasures. Digital illustration by author.

implemented with exquisite finesse in the design of the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures. These are a few examples of tactics that architects can implement if they aim to provide a peaceful experience for inhabitants.

For my journey, the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures provides an exceptional example of the ways Japanese tradition may be retained in the modern world of new materials, new styles, and ever more congested landscapes. The museum is a pocket of peace in sprawling metropolitan Tokyo. The project achieves the goals Taniguchi desired it to:

> …to respect both the sublime works to be displayed and the natural setting, I made it my goal in designing the new Gallery of Horyuji Treasures to create on the site an environment of a kind that has become all too rare in present-day Tokyo, that is, an environment characterized by tranquility, order, and dignity.[8]

Taniguchi's design does just that. His design combines the necessities of the program with atmospheric qualities that engender peace. The building captures the essence of traditional Japanese buildings in a contemporary approach through its use of simple proportions, connection to nature, manipulation of light and shadow, and attention to materiality. The impact of Yoshio Taniguchi's impeccable museum will remain with me, as I strive to design and curate spaces which provide positive, peaceful experiences.

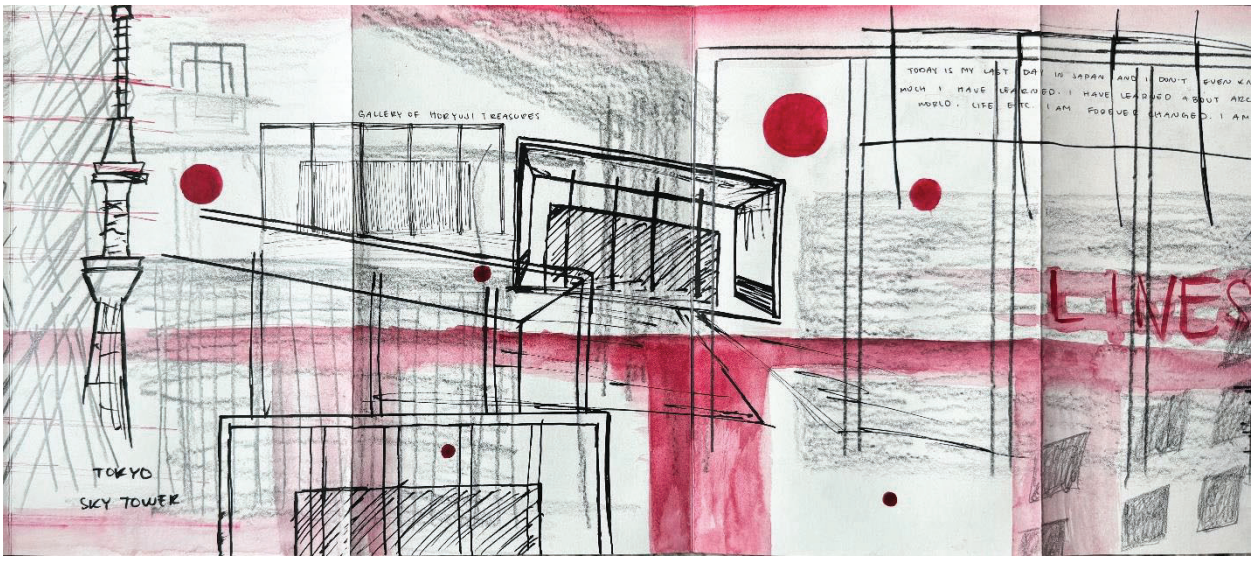

Figure 6: Sketches drawn on site and in reflection of the spaces at The Gallery of Horyuji Treasures. By author.

Essay Three Endnotes:

[1] Hiroko McDermott, "The Hōryūji Treasures and Early Meiji Cultural Policy," *Monumenta Nipponica* 61, no. 3 (Autumn 2006): 342 in pp. 339–74.
[2] "Japanese Aesthetics", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified December 6, 2023, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/japanese-aesthetics/
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[5] Tanazaki, *In Praise of Shadows, 20.*
[6] Tanazaki, *In Praise of Shadows, 20.*
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Kanagawa Institute of Technology Workshop:

Peace in an Unexpected Program

The Kanagawa Institute of Technology Workshop is located on the Kanagawa Institute of Technology's campus in Kanagawa, Japan just outside of Tokyo. The project, designed by Japanese architect Junya Ishigami, features many of the same qualities discussed in the previous buildings; however, accommodates an educational program in an innovative and very human approach. The program of the space is a mixed-media workshop and studio where students from various design disciplines can work simultaneously. The space features floor-to-ceiling glass panels for the exterior walls providing an unforeseen integration of the natural environment with the built environment. Additionally, this along with the open plan creates an uninterrupted, weightless feel in the enclosure. Ishigami takes a unique approach to structuring the design by employing three hundred and five white columns of varying sizes which naturally partition the spaces, however, maintain a flexible, harmonious layout which allows the different design principles to collaborate.[1] The Kanagawa Institute of Technology Workshop creates a strong connection with the natural environment, a unique integration of different design groups, a careful consideration of light qualities, and strategic use of materials all in a space meant for students. In turn, the students in the space benefit from the design choices which create a peaceful, balanced atmosphere.

The seamless boundary between the natural and built environment in Ishigami's design is achieved through four main elements: the open

layout, the transparency of the enclosure, coloring of the supporting columns, and the use of symbolism. The open layout in the workshop allows for notable relationships between students, students and their creative minds, and students and nature. Relationships between students, additionally cross-disciplinary relationships, are a product of the open layout because of the literal absence of barriers between the creatives. Students are granted access to each other's work and in turn conversations are started. These conversations allow connections and friendships between creatives to be cultivated. Additionally, students learn from one another and build a wider portfolio of knowledge in varying disciplines. Furthermore, conversations foster the relationship of students and their creative minds because they work in an environment where many ways of creative thinking exist. Because of this, these groups can learn about different design focuses, ways of creative thinking and, in turn, grow as collaborators and designers. Moreover, the space being devoted for student use only allows students to learn from one another in a more casual and explorative way than they otherwise would in a classroom. When I was on site, I noticed potters, painters, architecture students, sculptors, and more all working in the same space. Some students were focused on more digital methods of design such as 3D printing or producing music, while others were hand drafting their floor plans. The workshop had a notably energetic and cohesive ambience. As a designer, I found this to be such an inspiring space to experience. I would love to capture these qualities in more traditional spaces like

classrooms so that all learning can feel as participatory and collective as it did in Ishigami's workshop.

Additionally, as the students develop these connections they feel as though they are not necessarily in an enclosed space. Ishigami's creates a diffused border allowing the space to feel less like a building and more like a pavilion. The open floor plan allows for seemingly clear views in every direction generating a design that avoids a distinction between outside and in. The continuation of a space which

Figure 1: Junya Ishigami, view from inside of workshop showing clear views, Kanagawa Institute of Technology Workshop, Kanagawa, Japan, July 15, 2023. Photo taken by author.

Figure 2: Junya Ishigami, view from exterior showing transparency and reflectivity of enclosure, Kanagawa Institute of Technology Workshop, Kanagawa, Japan, July 15, 2023. Photo taken by author.

feels endlessly connected throughout creates an atmosphere that is equally as calm as it is exciting.

The building is wrapped in a glass enclosure which spans from the floor to the ceiling. The glass, transparent in nature, furthers the illusion of being outside while being in the workshop. As well as transparent, glass is reflective and because of this the building is meant to reflect the surrounding nature when looking at its outer façade (Figure 2). Thus, upon approach the project maintains a consistency within its context which makes it feel very naturally integrated with its site. Moreover, the columns also contribute to this simultaneity of the natural and built environment. By their

deceptive randomness, the occupant finds themself assuming there is not a clear direction through the building; however, when in the space the occupant feels intuitively led through. This is due to Ishigami's strategic placement of each column to allow main pathways to be formed and for wider spaces to be formed for certain programmatic needs. The varying shapes and sizes of the columns also subscribe to the same ambiguity the design wished to display. Furthermore, the angles at which the columns are erected create a different view as you move around them (Figure 3). A column that was two inches thick and seeming impossibly small may become six inches as you turn the corner and seem much too large compared to its counterparts. This creates an enigma of a space that is enticing for the occupant to figure out. Recalling an important aspect of program, this is also an exciting and unique feature for the students working in the space to experience. Students thrive in a space that is explorative because it gives them the opportunity to represent the same exploration in their own work. I find this to be a particular asset of the architecture building at my school: there is a clear exploration and innovation in its design which sets the basis that that is possible for me as a student to possess the same qualities in my work. Although I doubt many students

recognize its significance, I do think this is something which is highly beneficial to students.

Figure 3: Junya Ishigami, view from inside of workshop showing varying column profile sizes, Kanagawa Institute of Technology Workshop, Kanagawa, Japan, July 15, 2023. Photo taken by author.

Continuing, the use of white to color the columns is effective in its simplicity and ability to blend in with its surroundings. Perhaps ironically, the copious number of columns in the space begins to camouflage them. The columns become a part of the workshop in a way that is very cohesive because it becomes secondary. It's as though when the occupant enters, they quickly notice the columns; however, after some time they become background to the stimulating projects that populate the space. This quality is additionally evident in the way the inhabitant traverses the layout. The columns are placed in a way that makes moving through them feels

instinctual. As a result, the columns again become almost subconsciously there to the occupant. Ishigami elaborates on this idea by stating:

> [he was] was beginning to think there could be a flexibility that results when the plans or other different factors remain in effect, from simply softening and blurring their boundaries. Through this thinking my interest shifted. I became interested in finding a way to design space somehow free of geometry or any rules. I imagined this could lead to a new universality in space.[2]

It is evident that the workshop was designed with a clear intention to be explorative and available to a universal audience. I find this to be profound as the program of the workshop is clearly designated for creative thinkers; however, the design remains equally beneficial to any occupant's background. Although I find being specific to your intended audience a vital part of the design process, it is also true that the spaces should be designed with a particular universality that is welcoming and inclusive to all. To employ this idea through design, Ishigami refers to the columns when describing that he wanted to "soften" or "blur" their boundaries because it would allow flexibility within the space.

Figure 4: Junya Ishigami, view from inside of workshop showing lighting qualities, Kanagawa Institute of Technology Workshop, Kanagawa, Japan, July 15, 2023. Photo taken by author.

Lastly, I am especially fond of the sentiment that this be a

space free of “rules” because of the typical school being a place that is heavily regulated. Throughout my lifetime I’ve been in many schools, and it has been rare to see one that wasn’t dull, monochromatic, and lacking in creativity. I believe there is a tremendous opportunity to look at the design of educational spaces with more ingenuity and care for the students and teachers who use them every day. This simple decision could allow a boost in the quality of life for teachers and students and could also ignite students’ interest which has been lost due to the uninspiring classrooms they are used to. I suspect that through this effort, generations of inspired, passionate students will be manifested. Here, in Ishigami’s workshop, the start of something special is happening through intentional design.

Furthermore, the boundary between the natural and built environment is blurred using symbolism Ishigami uses in the space. The unpredictability of the columns size, orientation, and position is reminiscent of the experience of being in a forest. As you maneuver throughout the workshop the even diffusion of light is redolent of the light which peaks through a canopy of trees in a forest (Figure 4). Recalling a previous analogy of the wondrous paths at Katsura, the ambiguously guided movement in the workshop is like the idea of wandering through a forest (Figure 5). Though it may sound cliché, I believe this experience takes us back to a time of youth where our creativity

has not been hindered. While in the workshop, I recalled the moments in my youth running through the woods with my brothers' playing games of make believe. When we are young, we have the capacity to imagine anything because everything feels possible. I am encapsulated by Ishigami's project because it brought the essence of youthfulness that is so important to design back to me. The project nudges designers to move forward untraditionally and absolutely exploratively. Ishigami's design literally connects with nature, but the symbolic connections are what create the profound nuances of the space. Again, these are the pockets of *yugen* in spaces where things are mysteriously inexplicable however they resonate so well within us. These are moments where confusion is miraculously matched with contentment. The symbolism used in Ishigami's design helped to forge such a poignant relationship between interior and exterior.

The design is expressed in a manner which feels casual and potentially arbitrary; however, with a simplicity that is elegant. This quality is something I have noticed to be unique to many Japanese designs. It appears there is a major effort to find evocative simplicity. This means that something evokes thought and intricate appreciation of a space that has a veil of plainness. In each of the buildings I have studied this has been true. Each of the spaces have a design which is easily digestible, but they are still so incredibly

interesting. An example of an earlier, western architect that had this same ability is Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) and his design of the IIT College of Architecture.

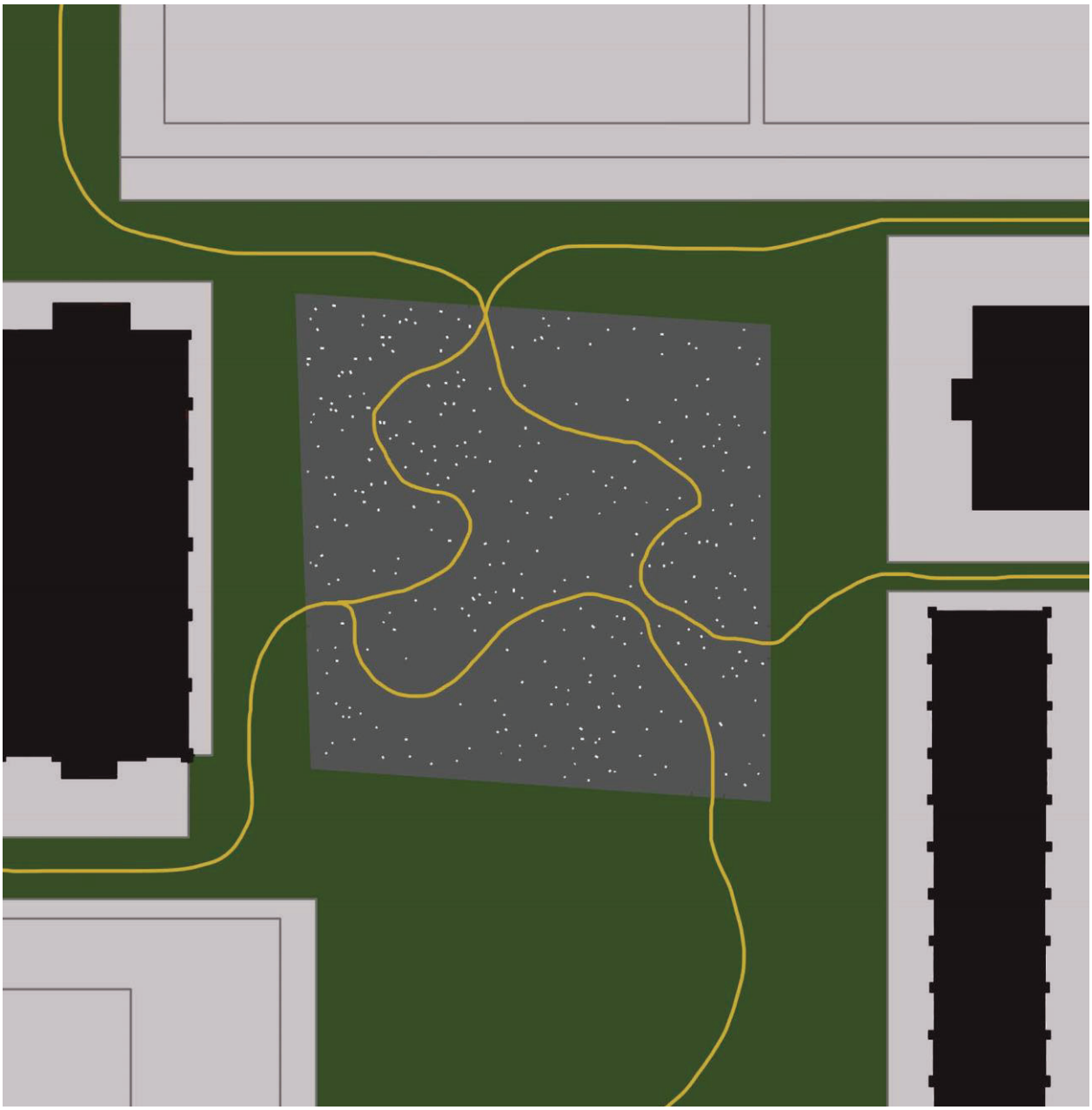

Figure 5: Meandering paths of the workshop. Compare to Figure 3 (above) in "Katsura Imperial Villa: A Grounding in the Tradition of Peace". Digital illustration by author.

There are many similarities between the Kanagawa Institute of Technology and the IIT College of Architecture's designs. For example,

both spaces are scholastic settings for students based in design majors. As well as each of the designs have a simple, refined aesthetic quality to them. Although the obvious difference is that Mies van der Rohe used no columns in his design and Ishigami heavily employs columns, they each choose these methods for the same purpose. Both Mies and Ishigami wanted to create a space that allowed creative interaction and collaboration between students without disruption. Additionally, both architects sought out innovative ways in which they could structure their design to allow their ideas to be realized. The IIT College building has an open floor plan that is one hundred and twenty by two hundred and twenty feet large (26,400 square feet) with eighteen-foot ceilings[3]. To achieve this an open floor plan in a space of this size, Mies suspended the roof off four steel plate girders. The girders are then supported by eight exterior columns. Mies van der Rohe's approach allows the space to be free of any columns or physical partitions. Contrastingly, the Ishigami project is slightly smaller with a square footage of roughly 21,400. Ishigami structures his design without the use of any earthquake resisting walls or bracing and relies entirely on the collection of three hundred and five modest columns that have varying proportions. Throughout all the columns, there is not a single identical cross-section or angle. Though the approach to structure each of these spaces is quite different, both the profile of the building and the idea behind the space it creates were very similar. To me, this is indicative that the same atmospheric

qualities can be created across designers, across countries, and in educational programs.

Moreover, this comparison seems to lend a very favorable lesson to aspiring creatives. Although your stylistic opinions, available funds, local materials, etc. may vary, there is always a way to realize the ideas you wish to. While design may feel heavily constrained by common limitations, it is our job as designers to be flexible and clever in how we can pivot to reach our goals. This is something that is lost throughout an architect's education. When starting architecture school, you are unaware of the limitations set by designing for a client, by budgets, or availability of materials; however, these factors become obvious and can feel suffocating. To prevent this from happening I believe designers must become extremely confident in their ability to adapt and advocate for why their designs deserve realization.

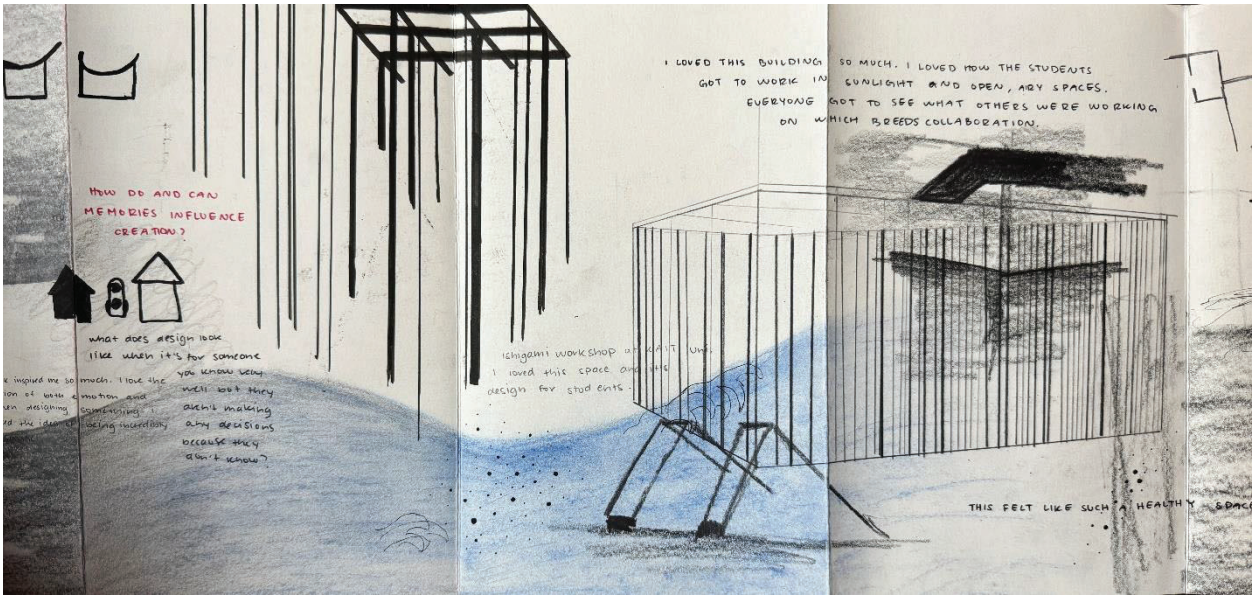

Figure 6: Sketches drawn on site and in reflection of the spaces at Kanagawa Institute of Technology Workshop. By author.

Throughout my travels, studying, and reflection on the experiences this opportunity has granted me, the most obvious takeaway has been that architecture has always and will always be a medium which improves the quality of human lives. The essence of who we are, who we want to be, and what we believe is reflected in the spaces we create. We preserve and restore the buildings that were fortified before our time because they symbolize not only our past, but our present and future. If I can make any contribution as an architect, I hope it to be that future generations look back and recognize how much I and other architects of my time cared about how our designs positively affected the human experience. Additionally, I hope our designs signify a level of diversification and exploration which encourages others to continue similarly. It is my desire that my work will raise the requirements for architecture to house intentional, meaningful designs that breed profound connections between humans and the spaces they inhabit. Specifically, I hope to garner the formula which makes spaces have peaceful atmospheres where being is intuitive and pleasant. Katsura Imperial Villa, Meiso No Mori, The Gallery of Horyuji Treasures, and The Kanagawa Institute of Technology’s Workshop are each examples of what I hope my designs to be. Visiting and learning about these spaces has granted me the gift of knowing how I can impact the world and why it is so important that I use architectural design as my vehicle to do so.

Essay Four Endnotes:

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