

Kazuyo Sejima: Cogs 160 Research Document

Title Page & Table of Contents

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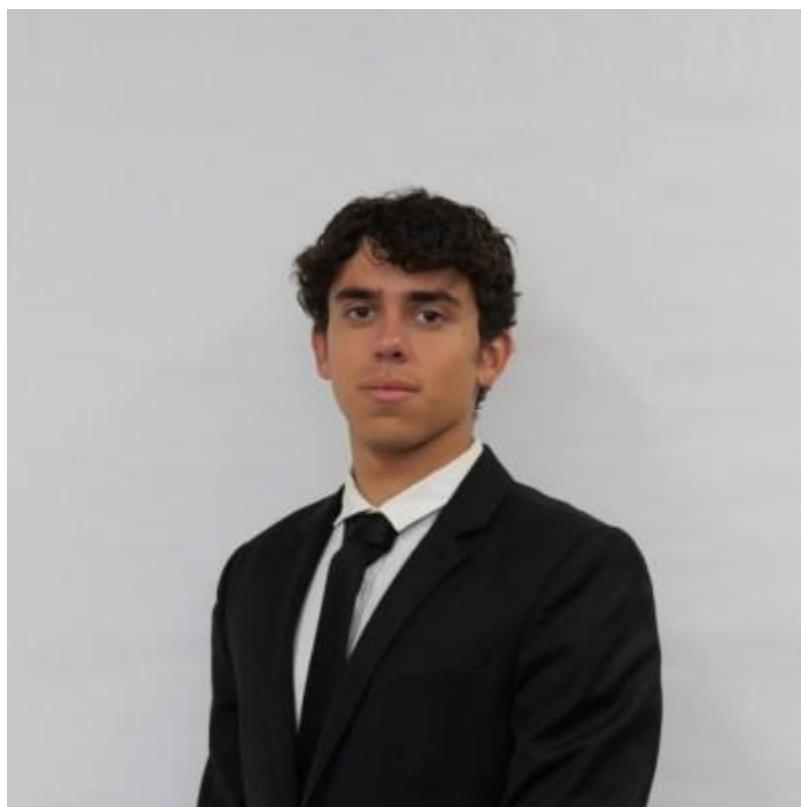
Kazuyo Sejima

1956 - Present

Ibaraki, Japan

Student: Matthew David

Matthew David is a 4th year undergraduate at UC San Diego studying Cognitive Science. He is interested in how architecture and spaces communicate emotions, and hopes to one day integrate his learnings into his field of choice.



Chapter 1: Architect Biography & Portfolio

Kazuyo Sejima: Redefining Contemporary Architecture

Kazuyo Sejima is one of the most influential architects of our time, known for her distinctive minimalist style and innovative spatial concepts. Born in 1956 in Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan, Sejima has established herself as a pioneer in architectural design, challenging conventional approaches with buildings that emphasize lightness, transparency, and human experience (Hasegawa, 2006).

Education and Early Career

Sejima studied architecture at Japan Women's University, graduating in 1981 with a master's degree. She then joined the office of renowned architect Toyo Ito, where she worked until 1987 (Hasegawa, 2006). This experience significantly influenced her approach to architecture, particularly in conceptualizing space and light. In 1987, Sejima established her own practice, Kazuyo Sejima & Associates.

Her earliest recognized works include the Platform Houses (1987-1990) and the Police Box in Chofu (1993), which already displayed her characteristic style: clean lines, minimal forms, and thoughtful consideration of the relationship between space and its occupants (Sejima, 1996). According to Pérez-Gómez (2008), these early projects revealed Sejima's unique understanding of materiality and spatial organization that would later define her revolutionary approach to architecture.

Partnership with Ryue Nishizawa and Formation of SANAA

In 1995, Sejima formed a partnership with her former employee Ryue Nishizawa, establishing SANAA (Sejima and Nishizawa and Associates). Oshima (2010) documents how this collaboration led to some of the most groundbreaking architectural projects of the past few decades, noting the "unique synergy that transcends individual authorship" (p. 18). While maintaining their individual practices, their collaborative work has garnered international recognition and numerous prestigious awards (Nishizawa & Sejima, 2015).

Architectural Style and Philosophy

Sejima's architecture is characterized by extraordinary lightness and transparency that creates fluid, open spaces. She employs clean, simple geometries and often uses materials like glass, metal, and concrete to create buildings that seem to dissolve boundaries between inside and outside (Taki, 2014). Daniell (2012) analyzes how her structures possess an ethereal quality, appearing almost weightless despite their substantial physical presence, describing her work as "architecture that approaches the condition of atmosphere" (p. 73).

Unlike many architects who focus primarily on visual impact, Sejima emphasizes the human experience of space. She designs architecture that encourages social interaction and creates comfortable environments. As she stated in an interview, "I am interested in how people live together and communicate with each other in a space" (Taki, 2005, p. 8). Cathcart (2011) argues that this human-centered approach represents a fundamental shift in architectural priorities, moving away from monumentality toward architecture as social facilitator.

Sejima's approach represents a departure from the heavy, monumental architecture of previous generations. She embraces what Worrall (2017) has termed "the deep flat" – a spatial paradigm that prioritizes horizontal relationships over vertical hierarchies (p. 475). This conceptual framework has proven highly influential in contemporary architectural discourse, with Mostafavi (2011) noting that "Sejima's flattening of space has transformed our understanding of architectural volume" (p. 92).

Major Works and Their Significance

Sejima's portfolio includes an impressive array of buildings that have redefined architectural possibilities. The 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan (1999-2004) exemplifies her approach to public space, featuring a circular design with glass walls that democratizes the museum experience (Idenburg, 2010). Fernández-Galiano (2016) describes this project as "a paradigm shift in museum architecture, replacing hierarchy with accessibility" (p. 45).

The New Museum in New York City (2007) represents another milestone. Its distinctive stacked-box design creates a dynamic vertical presence while maintaining the characteristic lightness of her work. According to Allen (2008), the building has been praised for its innovative approach to urban museum design, offering "a new template for cultural institutions in dense urban contexts" (p. 112).

The Rolex Learning Center at École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (2010) features an undulating floor plate and roof. This project exemplifies Sejima's interest in creating fluid, non-hierarchical spaces that encourage spontaneous interaction (Nishizawa & Sejima, 2015). Cortés (2008) analyzes how this building represents "a radical rethinking of institutional architecture and learning environments" (p. 40).

Recognition and Influence

Sejima's contributions to architecture have been recognized with numerous awards, most notably the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2010, which she shared with Ryue Nishizawa. In her Pritzker citation, the jury praised Sejima for "inventing new hierarchies" in architectural space (Blau, 2010). The same year, Sejima became the first woman to direct the Venice Architecture Biennale, selecting "People Meet in Architecture" as the theme, further emphasizing her focus on architecture as a framework for human experience (Sejima & Nishizawa, 2010).

Sejima's influence extends beyond her built works. Through teaching positions at institutions including Princeton University and the Polytechnique de Lausanne, she has shaped a new generation of architects who share her interest in creating more humane buildings. As Reynolds (2015) observes, "Sejima's pedagogical approach emphasizes experimental thinking that challenges the very foundations of architectural practice" (p. 203).

In contemporary architecture, Kazuyo Sejima stands as a transformative figure whose work challenges conventional thinking about space, materiality, and the social role of buildings. Her delicate yet powerful architecture continues to inspire designers worldwide, suggesting new possibilities for our built environment in the 21st century.

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Portfolio of Landmark Buildings:

1. 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art

- a. Location: Kanazawa, Ishikawa, Japan

Significance

This museum, designed by Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa of SANAA, is a landmark in contemporary architecture. Its circular design and transparent glass walls blur the boundaries between interior and exterior spaces, embodying openness and accessibility. The building's innovative use of transparency and spatial layering has been celebrated as a new cultural institution model that integrates art with daily life.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:21st_Century_Museum_of_Contemporary_Art,_Kanazawa011.jpg



<https://www.ishikawatravel.jp/en/spots/21st-century-museum-of-contemporary-art-kanazawa/>



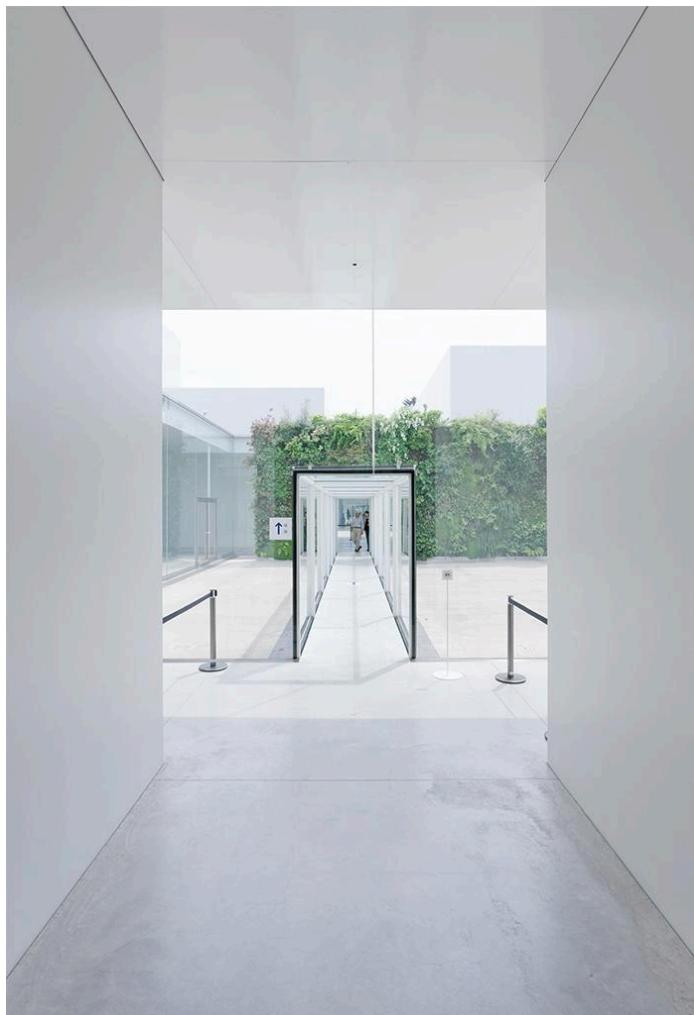
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<https://www.artforum.com/features/into-the-light-238382/>



<https://www.artforum.com/features/into-the-light-238382/>

2. Museum of Contemporary Art

- Location: New York City, USA

Significance

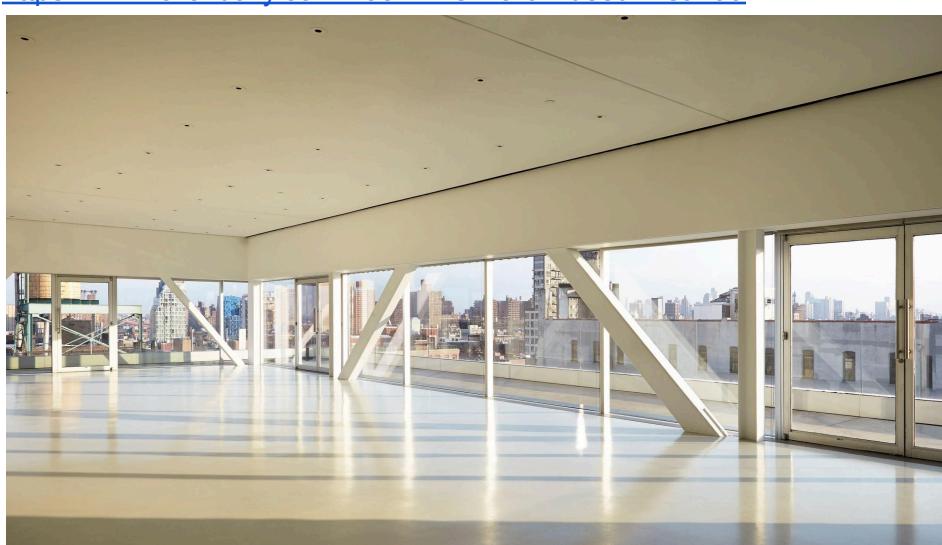
Designed by SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa), the New Museum is an iconic example of contemporary architecture. Its stacked-box design wrapped in aluminum mesh creates a striking silhouette in Manhattan's Lower East Side. The building reflects SANAA's minimalist approach while addressing urban context, transparency, and light. It has been praised for its innovative vertical layout and its ability to integrate into the evolving Bowery neighborhood.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Museum



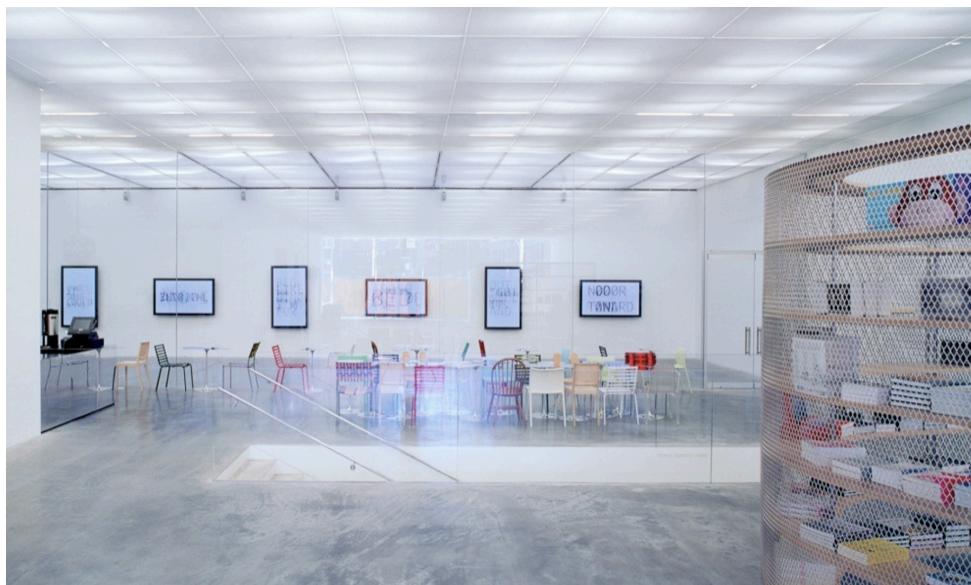
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https://www.archdaily.com/70822/new-art-museum-sanaa/5012504828ba0d0a48000389-new-art-museum-sanaa-photo?next_project=no

3. Rolex Learning Center

- Location: Lausanne, Switzerland

Significance

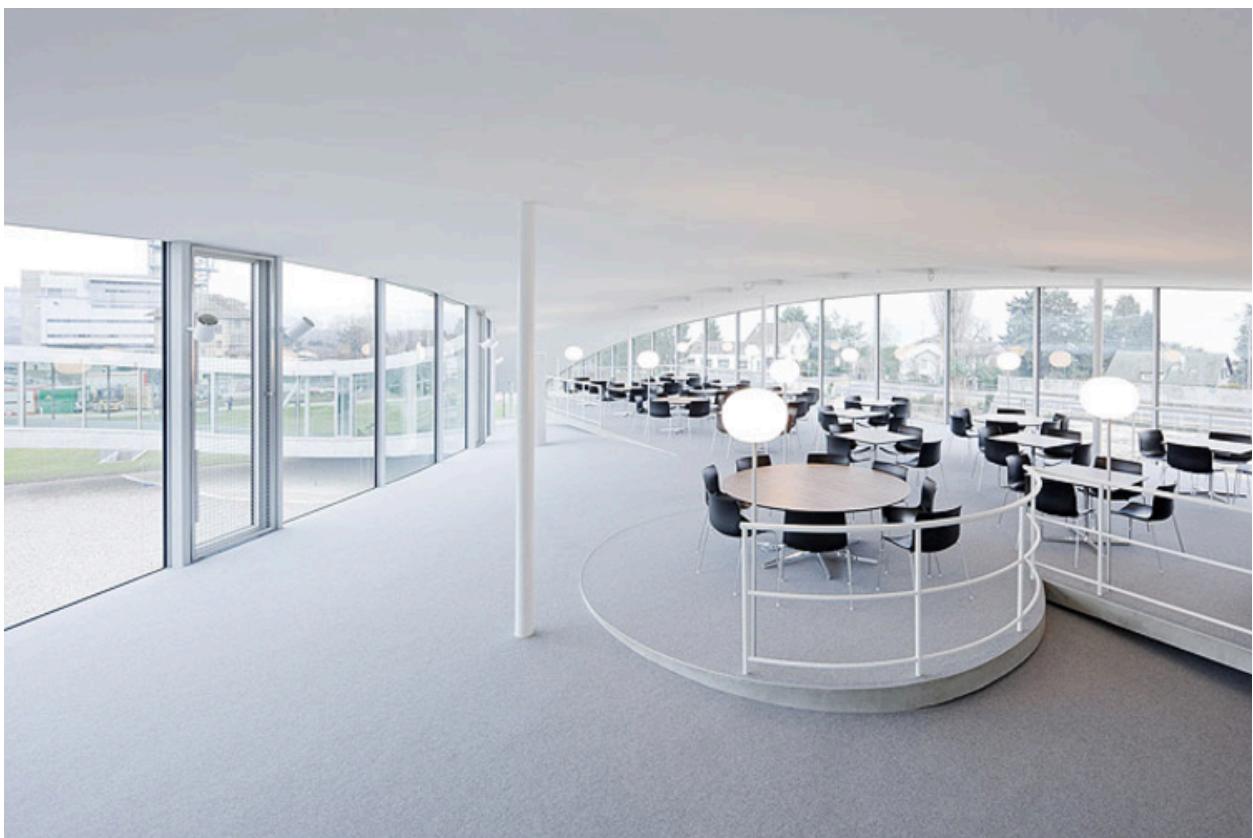
Designed by SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa), the Rolex Learning Center is a groundbreaking architectural achievement that redefines the concept of educational spaces. Its fluid, undulating design eliminates traditional spatial hierarchies, encouraging collaboration and interaction among students and faculty. The building's innovative engineering and seamless integration with its environment have made it a global icon of modern architecture.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rolex_Learning_center.jpg



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<https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/8237-rolex-learning-center-by-sanaa>

4. Glass Pavilion at the Toledo Museum of Art

- Location: Toledo, Ohio, USA

Significance

The Glass Pavilion, completed in 2006, was designed by the acclaimed Tokyo-based architectural firm SANAA, marking their first project in the United States. This innovative building is celebrated for its use of curved laminated glass walls, which create a seamless and transparent architectural experience. The pavilion houses one of the world's finest glass collections alongside working glass studios, symbolizing Toledo's historical connection to glassmaking and advancing contemporary glass art and architecture



<https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/pabellon-de-vidrio-museo-de-arte-de-toledo-ohio--4>
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<https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/pabellon-de-vidrio-museo-de-arte-de-toledo-ohio---4>



<https://www.archdaily.com/54199/glass-pavilion-at-the-toledo-museum-of-art-sanaa-pritzker-prize-2010>



<https://www.kendall-heaton.com/projects/toledo-museum-of-art-glass-pavilion/>



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5. Louvre-Lens Museum

- Location: Lens, France

Significance

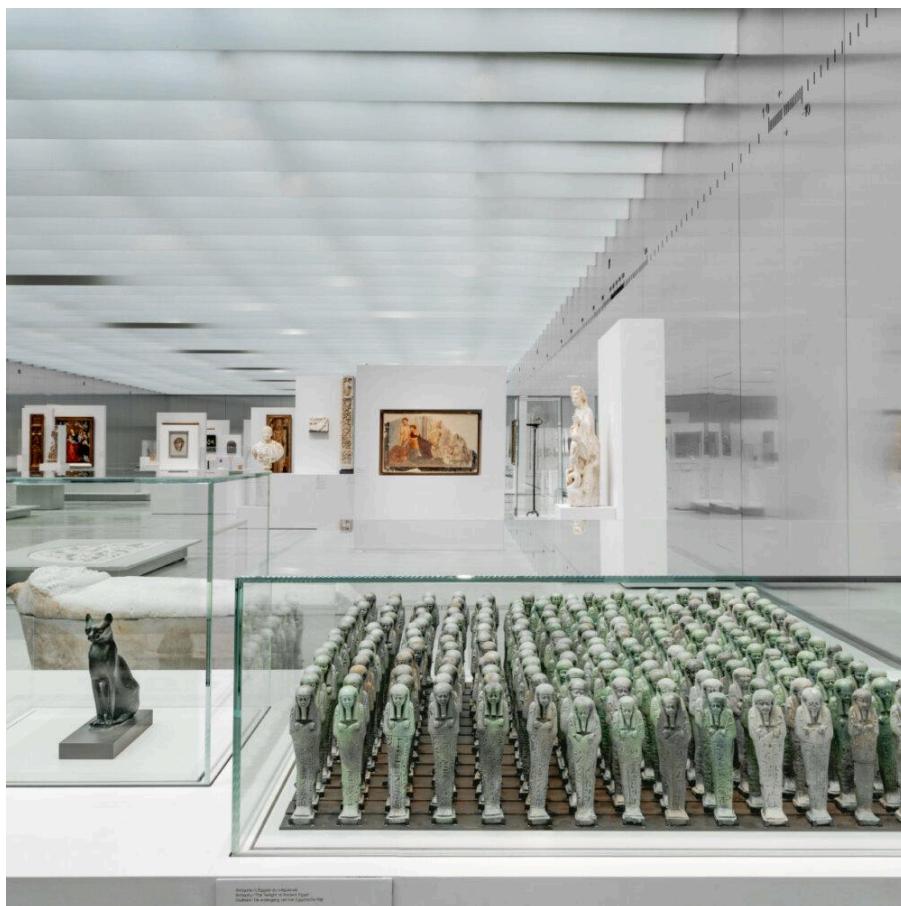
Opened in 2012, the Louvre-Lens Museum was designed by SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa) as part of the Louvre's decentralization strategy to make its collections more accessible outside Paris. The museum integrates minimalist architecture with its post-industrial landscape, featuring reflective aluminum facades and glass walls that harmonize with the surrounding environment. It has revitalized the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, transforming a former coal mining site into a cultural hub and symbolizing socio-economic regeneration through art and education.



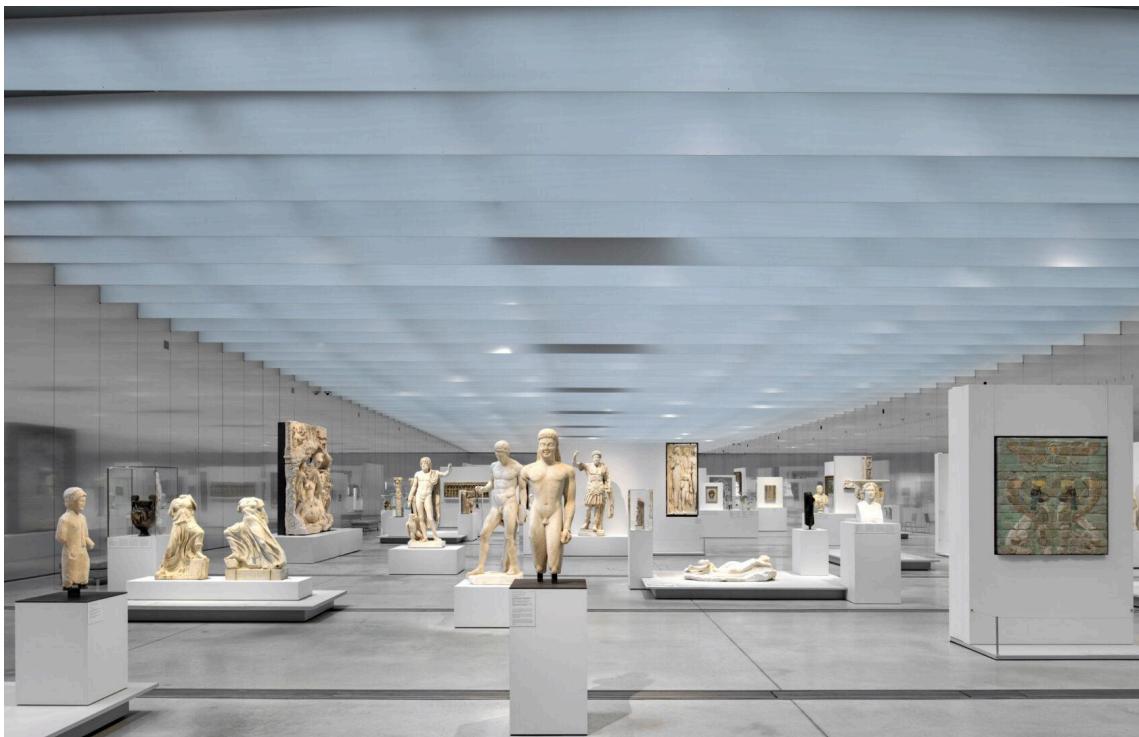
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6. Zollverein School of Management and Design

- Location: Essen, Germany

Significance

Completed in 2006, the Zollverein School of Management and Design was designed by SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa) as part of a master plan by Rem Koolhaas to revitalize the former Zollverein coal mining complex, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The building's cubic concrete form, punctuated by irregularly placed square windows, reflects the industrial heritage of the site while introducing modern architectural innovation. Its integration of sustainable features, such as active thermal insulation using water from nearby mines, demonstrates a thoughtful approach to energy efficiency and environmental design.



<https://www.archdaily.com/54212/zollverein-school-of-management-and-design-sanaa>



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7. Sumida Hokusai Museum

- Location: Tokyo, Japan

Significance

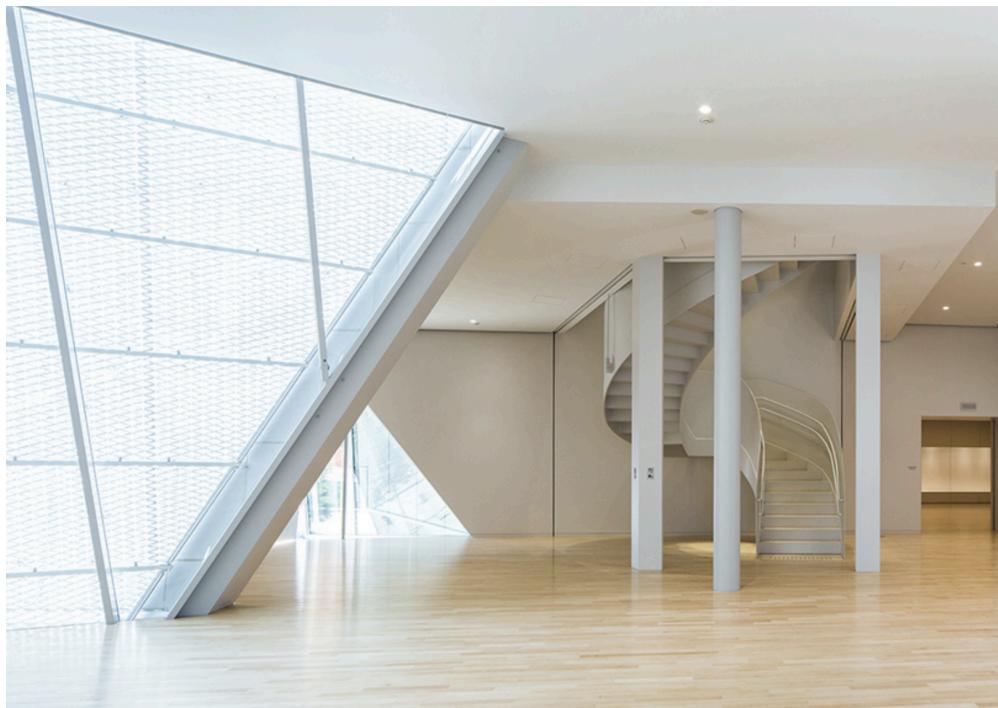
Designed by Kazuyo Sejima of SANAA and opened in 2016, this museum honors Katsushika Hokusai, the ukiyo-e master behind iconic works like *The Great Wave Off Kanagawa*. Its angular metallic facade blends into the urban environment while creating dynamic interior spaces to house over 18,000 works. The museum serves as both a cultural tribute to Hokusai and a modern architectural landmark.



https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3054_hokusai.html



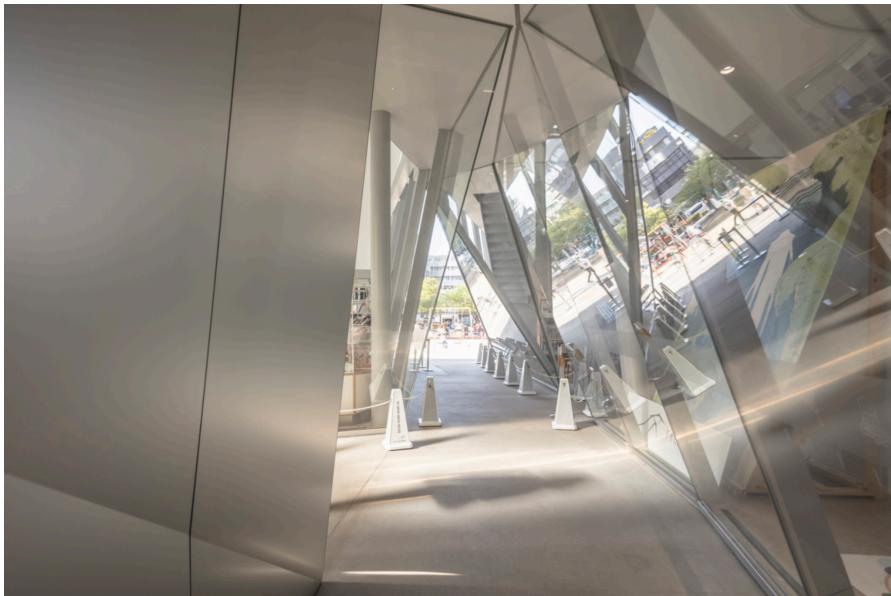
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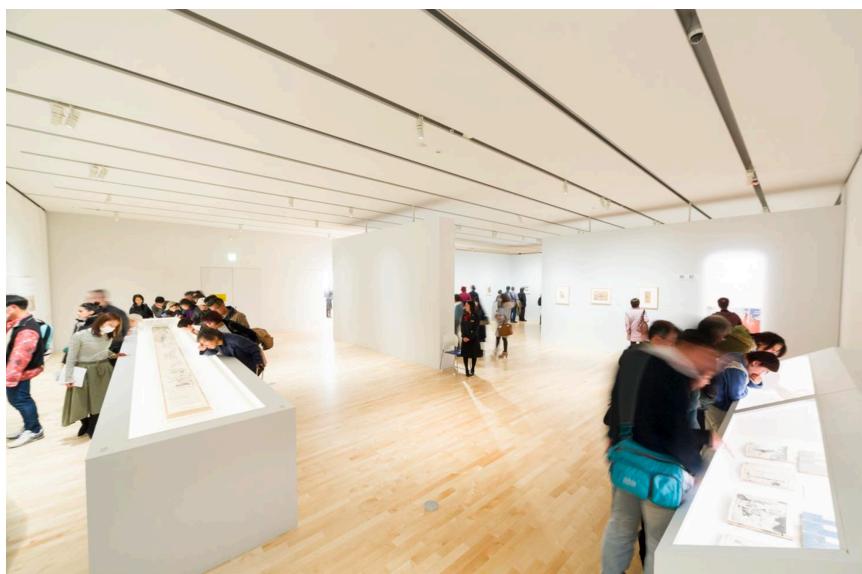
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8. Grace Farms

- Location: New Canaan, Connecticut, USA

Significance

Designed by SANAA and completed in 2015, Grace Farms is a cultural and humanitarian center set on an 80-acre landscape. Its flowing "River Building" features a ribbon-like roof that integrates seamlessly with nature, embodying SANAA's minimalist approach to blending architecture with the environment. The site supports community engagement, sustainability initiatives, and artistic programs.



<https://gracefarms.org/>



<https://gracefarms.org/event/grace-farms-tour-2024/2024-04-27>



<https://www.dezeen.com/2015/10/08/sanaa-the-river-grace-farms-pavilions-cultural-centre-connecticut-first-official-images/>



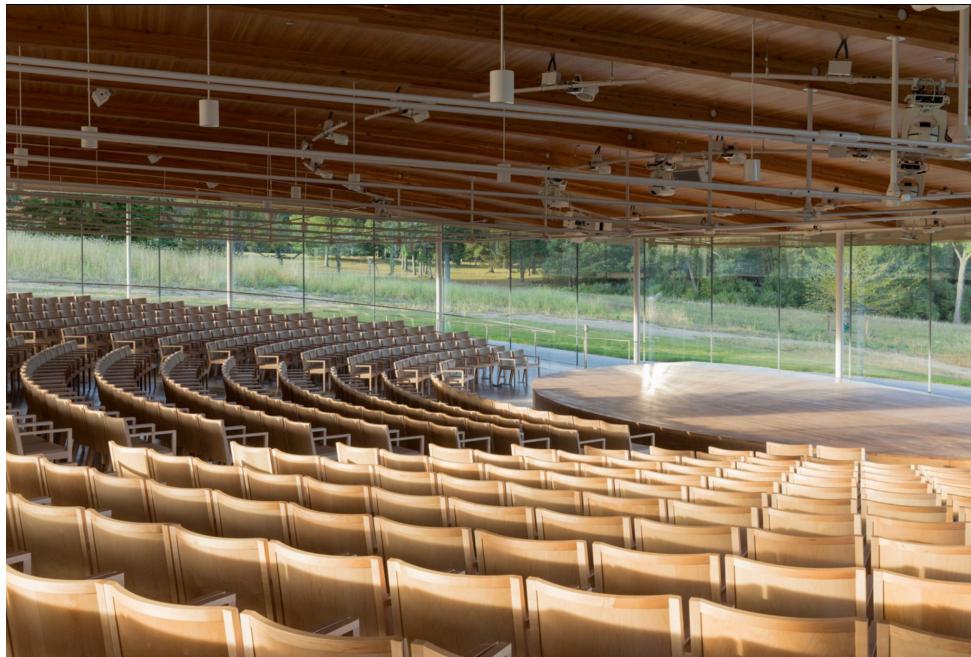
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9. Serpentine Pavilion

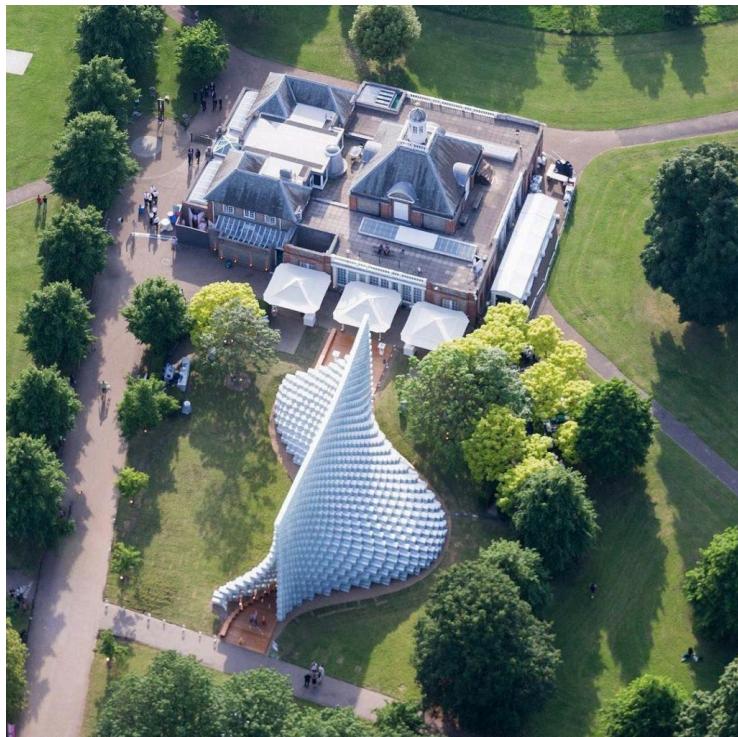
- Location: London, UK

Significance

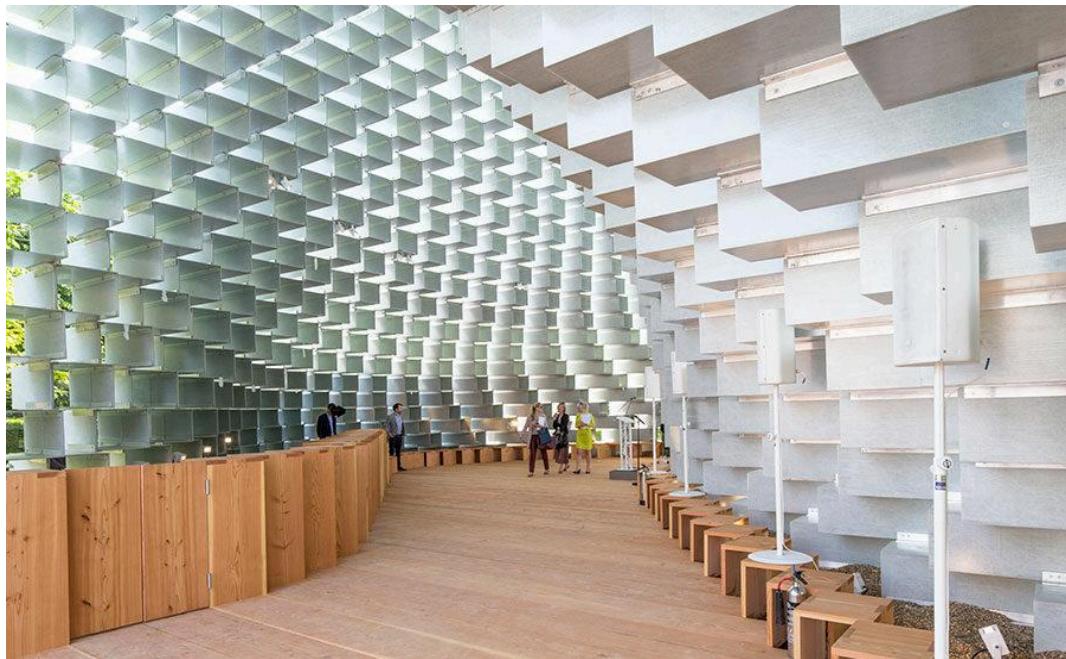
SANAA's 2009 Serpentine Pavilion in Kensington Gardens is an ephemeral structure made of undulating aluminum supported by delicate columns. Its reflective surface merges with the surrounding park, creating an ethereal canopy that exemplifies SANAA's exploration of lightness and transparency in architecture.



<https://blog.iaac.net/the-serpentine-pavilion-2016-by-big/>



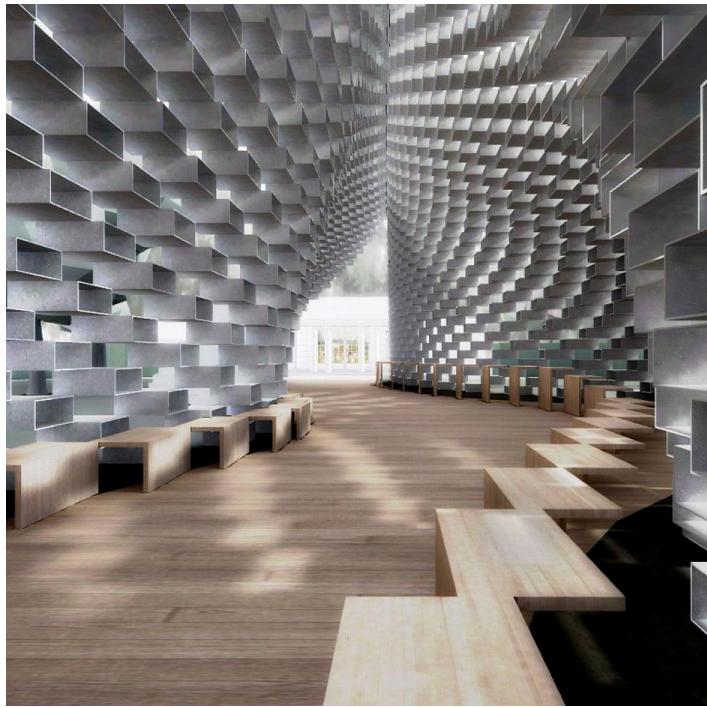
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<https://interiordesign.net/designwire/bjarke-ingels-reveals-design-for-2016-serpentine-pavilion/>

10. Platform Houses

- Location: Katsuura, Japan

Significance

Kazuyo Sejima's Platform Houses (1987–1990) marked her first independent project and showcased her minimalist design philosophy. These small residential units emphasized simplicity and openness by eliminating traditional divisions like walls and corridors, allowing inhabitants to interact freely with their surroundings. This project laid the foundation for Sejima's later architectural innovations.



<https://www.architectural-review.com/archive/platform-houses-in-japan-by-kazuyo-sejima>



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