

## ¿Cuánto pesa su revista?

Esta sería la pregunta "fulleriana" del número 7 de PALIMPSESTO que en continuidad con el precedente pone el acento en una idea de ligereza, evanescente en lo material y adogmática en lo conceptual. Muchas de las aseveraciones de Kengo Kuma, de las ambiciones de RCR en el proyecto de la Carpa de Olot, de los materiales que con oficio e innovación maneja Toni Cumella, de las reflexiones de Domingo y Castellanos, Linares o Vidal o incluso la visión que nos presenta Xavier Monteyts sobre la investigación en la arquitectura, a la que podríamos adscribir la reciente publicación de Josep Parcerisa, comparten territorio y enfoque en estas páginas.

En la entrevista Kuma nos habla de su formación, de sus intereses y de su obra a través de casas concebidas como jardines, de la materia transformada en partículas, del movimiento y de la tradición japonesa y de los Ukiyo-e que tanto influyeron en arquitectos occidentales como Taut o Wright construyendo una idea de lo ligero que persigue calidez y habitabilidad. En el corazón de la Garrotxa con una relación con lo natural cuanto menos comparable, RCR nos sugiere un mundo de evocaciones materiales y sensoriales mediante una carpa de cables de acero y efte que se funde con el paisaje y recrea el rito de la comida y la tradición de los *envelats*.

La insistencia en las cualidades materiales de las cosas nos traslada al cuidadoso oficio que nos describe Cumella en la conversación que mantiene con Carlos Ferrater y Cecilia Obiol en ocasión de su exposición en la AA. En este recorrido por la tradición y la innovación en el mundo de la cerámica reconocemos no solo "un artista que mejora las ideas" sino también un material que las provoca. Material ligero por excelencia, la cerámica se somete también a la inevitable gravedad y a su manipulación antagónica más universal, la luz. La reflexión que propone Oscar Linares versa precisamente sobre esta dualidad desde un punto de vista poco habitual, el análisis científico de sendos fenómenos. Para ello pone sobre la mesa la cara B de los tratados de Vitruvio, la obra de Christopher Wren y el pensamiento filosófico de Schopenhauer.

El artículo presentado por Débora Domingo y Raúl Castellanos amplía el campo de reflexión de lo fenomenológico a lo conceptual planteando una profunda reflexión sobre la obra abierta recuperando pertinentemente un período de la historia de arquitectura, los años 60. Los casos de estudio de Le Corbusier, Candilis, Josic & Woods y los Smithson ilustran el carácter sistematizado del proyecto, donde la indeterminación de la forma ampliaba el estudio de sus posibilidades.

También desde el ámbito universitario el profesor Jorge Vidal subraya la importancia del cultivo de la mirada, en el sentido que le otorga John Berger, para la concepción del proyecto como realización personal. La atmósfera que construye la estudiante Diana Piera en su propuesta junto al mar, en plataformas que flotan sobre la naturaleza, ilustra esta ambición.

Ni exclusivamente científica, ni encorsetada, también intuitiva y libre; apuntes del catedrático Monteyts para definir la investigación en arquitectura. Una visión dual que encontramos en el espíritu flaneur y en la investigación metódica de Parcerisa en el recorrido por las "Cinco ciudades bajo sospecha" de tamaño medio que propone en su libro *Forma Urbis* recogido con rigor por el profesor Carlos Crosas. Por último, la atención por la memoria y el patrimonio urbano en peligro de desaparición queda reseñado por Ibai Rigby en su nota sobre la exposición del programa del fondo histórico Aga Khan.

En el equilibrio (que no simetría) que persigue esta publicación de apenas 50 gramos y dos años, abrimos una nueva etapa con la ampliación de los comités científicos y editoriales de la revista, con la publicación de los abstracts en inglés y con la apertura de una convocatoria para recepción de artículos... Bevilacqua y Chamorro se visten de Richard Gere.

## PALIMPSESTO

### ¿CUÁNTO PESA SU REVISTA?

# 07 Año 03. Marzo 2013 (16 páginas) ISSN 2014-1505

Revista trimestral de temática arquitectónica

#### Dirección

Carlos Ferrater y Alberto Peñín

#### Redacción y diseño gráfico

Cecilia Obiol

#### Divulgación

Luis Amorós

#### Textos en inglés

Miguel Orellana

#### Colaboradores en este número

Rafael Aranda, Carlos Crosas, Toni Cumella, Débora Domingo Calabuig, Raúl Gómez Castellanos, Ferran Grau, Kengo Kuma, Oscar Linares de la Torre, Xavier Monteyts, Carme Pigem, Ibai Rigby, Ramon Vilalta, Jorge Vidal Tomás

#### Edición

Cátedra Blanca - E.T.S.A.Barcelona - UPC

Barcelona

palimpsesto@cbbbarcelona.com

#### Impresión

Arts Gràfiques Orient

Depósito legal B-5689-2011

ISSN 2014-1505

e-ISSN 2014-9751

V.O. PALIMPSESTO respeta el idioma original de los autores.

© De los textos: sus autores. Las imágenes han sido cedidas por los autores de los artículos. No ha sido posible encontrar todos los propietarios de sus derechos. Las partes interesadas pueden ponerse en contacto con el editor.

Reservados todos los derechos. Ninguna forma de reproducción, distribución, comunicación pública o transformación de esta obra se puede hacer sin autorización expresa de los titulares.



▲ Glass Wood House (Photograph credit: Kengo Kuma & Associates)

# Kengo Kuma

Entrevista realizada por el equipo de redacción (AP, LA)

*Kuma san, thank you very much for attending this conversation. From the admiration we have for your work, your thoughts and your career, please feel free, as a chess knight, to answer, jump, move, complete or modify our proposals.*

## P Beginnings

**W**hat made you decide to become an architect?

I grew up in an old wooden house in the suburbs of Tokyo which was built during the pre-war period, unlike my friends' houses, all of them built after the war with new materials such as aluminum and plastic. I was ashamed of the dark and dirty aspect of my house.

**Who was the first architect or which was the first building that called your attention?**

In 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympics, I was 10 and my father took me to Yoyogi Gymnasium. That made a huge impact on me. Light was falling down from a huge skylight as if licking the ceiling. I was so used to horizontal spaces in Japan, that such heavenly lighting from the above shocked me. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen until then.

**Would you consider any architect as your master?**

Bruno Taut and Frank Lloyd Wright. Both of them loved traditional architecture in Japan and their work became a bridge between modernism and traditional Japanese architecture.

**Do you align yourself with a particular way of doing things in Japan? I dare say that one of your first projects, the Kiro-san observatory, shows some influence from Tadao Ando: the use of concrete, the geometry. More recently, your work seems to embrace a certain lightness, which is also characteristic of other Japanese architects such as Toyo Ito. Would you agree with this?**

For Kiro-san, concrete is used only to support the earth and not the theme itself, which is completely different from the way Ando treats it. The lightness of my architecture aims at the warmth and gentleness that comes from natural materials, which differs from the works by

Toyo Ito. I do not see any architects in Japan adopting a style similar to mine.

**Could we also guess a certain continuity with the idea of the end of the building as an object that Japanese architects from Metabolism, an international movement in the 60's, announced through breaking the volume?**

I feel close to the architects from Metabolism in the way they tried to disassemble large volumes into small elements. However, they also assumed the existence of a shaft which small capsules could parasite. I would like to remove such industrial relic from the 20th century as much as possible. In this sense I am totally opposite to metabolists.

**Could your strategy of breaking the matter down to particles be understood as a continuation of this goal but oriented to the human scale?**

I began to seek ways to disassemble things as I observed how concrete, a scale-less and inhuman material, destroyed the world in the 20th century.

## P Nature

**We heard from you that the specific duty of architects in the 21st century is to provide the union between nature and man, while in the 20th century the task was actually different. How can architecture face this challenge?**

Imitating, no matter how well, shapes from nature with concrete or steel does not mean connecting the human being with nature. First of all, you must consider how you put natural materials such as water, earth or stone back in the hands of architects.

**Besides the industrial challenges of the 20th century, what do have architects to say about social needs, like social housing, that we still have?**

Many people mistakenly believe that architecture is leading the industrialized society, but the true mission of architecture is to solve the various problems and contradictions generated by the industrialized society. Social housing and other welfare-related architecture problems will become even more impor-

tant in the future. We are today trying to get actively involved in such projects.

**You almost do not have collective housing projects. Is this casual? Does the budget play an important role in your practice?**

Our project for Shinonome, for example, is a social housing project. Even if they are low-cost projects, we would like to become more engaged with them. However, in Japan there are design firms specialized in social housing, which makes our involvement a little difficult.

**How can buildings be designed as gardens? And how would a garden then be designed as an exercise of just landscaping?**

In Japan, architecture was traditionally considered as a belonging or part of the garden and there was no such specialized profession as architect. I would like to redefine architecture as part of the garden. Even if the garden is small, I like to design it as the place from which you can feel the universe. But we are hardly asked for designing solely a garden.

**Which would be your favorite place in nature?**

Near the water, the ocean or a river.

**In European cities like Barcelona, could the architecture as a device connecting man and nature -as you propose- be transformed into a device between man and the city, at the end between man and man?**

It makes no sense any longer to differentiate Asian cities and European cities, as every city in the world more or less faces the same problems. Architecture has potential not only for connecting cities and nature but also for mediating between lots of other things, not to mention people, as was the case in the past.

## P City

**How does your architecture relate to the public space in Japan? In Chokkura plaza, does the material take advantage of the configuration of the space?**

I would like to bring locally-produced materials back to public spaces. This is one of the reasons why I used Oya stone for Chokkura Plaza, as it was an indigenous material of the town. During the 20th century, urban spaces in Japan were invariably filled up with concrete, steel and glass and stopped being places for human beings.

**Your Asakusa Culture and Tourist Center is a magnificent example of urbanity. Did its corner position force it to fight against its condition of object? How did you try to achieve it?**

Asakusa Culture and Tourism Center is located at the corner across Kaminari-mon Gate, one of the most famous images of Tokyo. We wanted to give a certain direction to this corner. All the roofs are sloped toward the north side facing the Senso-ji Temple, in order to show our respect.

**When looking at this project, can we think of a Dutch way of combining programs and movements?**

In Dutch architecture, the theme is a stack of houses as volumes. What we did in Asakusa was a layering of thin elements, such as a floor and a roof. How to connect the inside and the outside with these elements was our primary concern.

**How would you compare two cities like Tokyo and Barcelona? Would the contrasts you evoke in Tokyo -such as silence-noise, action-sacred, public-intimacy- be wished in other cities?**

Barcelona and Tokyo are alike as both cities are sandwiched by the sea and the mountain. Various ideas of dichotomy can be applied to Barcelona, but Tokyo does not have a strong geometry such as the one that characterizes Barcelona.

**Do you think architects can design cities, or they are just able to establish relations between pieces?**

It is difficult even to make relations between pieces. We would at the very most manage to connect two pieces – road and building, station and square – but only once in a while.

---

*In Japan, architecture was traditionally considered as a belonging or part of the garden and there was no such specialized profession as architect. I would like to redefine architecture as part of the garden.*

---

## P Tradition and technology

**Is Bruno Taut the architect who opened the Western modern style to this new relationship between subject and world?**

Frank Lloyd Wright discovered something about the relationship between the subject and the world. Both the names of Taut and Wright should be cited.

**Which would be the other Western modern architects that were open to this conception? You frequently talk about Frank Lloyd Wright as someone who discarded the image as a perspective once he learnt about Ukiyo-e paintings. How do you think this conception can be applied to architecture?**

By arranging several thin walls in parallel, layers of spaces can be realized in a space without depth. This designing method is Wright's translation of Ukiyo-e learnings into architectural language.

**The L shaped house in Connecticut shows a way of improving modern architecture through life and tradition, betting for a new transparency model different from the 50's isolated one.**

The Connecticut house was an extension of a building that was typical from the 1950s, an independent glass box. We wanted to critically get over such isolated, utopian typed architecture of the 1950s as represented by Philip Johnson's Glass House. We managed to express it by using the L-shape and a composite wood structure.

**Your buildings have almost no windows, is the frame not needed anymore for interacting with nature?**

Window can be set up so cross ventilation is possible. In this house, the terrace, larger than the window, is used as an important device that connects indoor and outdoor.

**Kuma-san, we love your roofs, you rarely talk about volumes, as Le Corbusier did, or plans, or organization. Is the section and topography on the roof an actual priority into your architecture?**

We consider architecture not as a volume but as a combination of floor and roof. Floor determines human body and roof determines human mind.

---

*It is difficult even to make relations between pieces. We would at the very most manage to connect two pieces – road and building, station and square – but only once in a while.*

---

**Could we say that at Momofuku Ando Center you are taking this goal to its highest level, by making the floor plan disappear and offering a roof to the landscape?**

I am not 100% satisfied with the roof for Ando Momofuku. We wanted to erase the border between indoor and outdoor with a fluid space, which is created by inserting a slope under the roof, but that was not enough.

## P Thoughts

**Do your writings precede your buildings, or does your practice cast your thoughts?**

Writing and practice influence each other, and I prioritize whichever. Both are crucial for me.

**Should an architect know about philosophy?**

No need to learn philosophy, but you can get good clues for architecture from philosophy.

**Who would be the philosopher who has influenced you the most?**

I got lots of clues from Deleuze and Guattari, including the idea of relateness in the solidity of things. If you jump from a high cliff, the water impacts you as hard as a rock. Whether something is hard or soft, big or small, heavy or light, it is all a matter of relativity – this is where I obtained lots of ideas about architecture.

**How important are movement and time in your architecture?**

Time and movement are the most important elements for my architecture. Modernist architects had pointed out the importance of them, their works were like still pictures, as best represented by Le Corbusier.

**Toyo Ito states that new technologies define a new relationship between man and nature, would you agree with that?**

I agree, but technology for Ito means a new technology in structural design, while for me its meaning is extensive.

**Would you say that your work is inspired by art -sometimes land art- philosophy and construction?**

I think that our mission is to connect art, philosophy and construction. In the past, art and philosophy functioned as connected, but their connection is somewhat weak now.

---

*We consider architecture not as a volume but as a combination of floor and roof. Floor determines human body and roof determines human mind.*

---

## P Practice

**Looking at your board of employees and collaborators it seems to be a very horizontal and democratic system with few hierarchies. How relevant is the experience for the work of an architect?**

We aim to have an unrestricted, hierarchy-free organization as much as possible. I do not deny the significance of one's ex-

▼ Yusuvara Wooden Bridge Museum (Photograph credit: Takumi Ota)



perience. I just think that an atmosphere in which you can say things to the experienced ones is very important.

**How is the design process? Do you start with a sketch, with a model, with a conversation with your staff?**

I prefer not to draw a sketch in the beginning, as I fear it might restrict ideas from the staff members. So we usually start with a conversation. Each staff member must bring a model to me. By having it in front of us we make sure that our talk won't go around in circles and will be more specific and productive. I sometimes cut some parts of the model or draw sketches from it.

**What is the role of new computational tools in the design process of your projects? Do they participate in it or do they precise a new virtuality?**

Computer tools are essential for us as we design to achieve new complexity with small elements. We used Rhinoceros a lot when we were working on Starbucks project.

**It seems that you have reached a prolific level of production. How can you control this amount of work?**

Although I keep traveling around the world, I continuously communicate with my staff members in person, making full use of the phone and the iPad. If you work in hierarchy mode, the quality of your work would deteriorate, especially when you have to implement many projects. I do not want to implement a pecking order.

**How do you manage to keep a controlled scale in your new projects in Europe: Besançon, Granada, Dundee...?**

My way of controlling does not change, wherever the project is, in Europe or in Asia. The number of times I visit the construction site is always the same. Discussion on the site is very important for me, and it is technically possible to do so at this time.

**How do craftsmen participate in your projects? Do they improve it? Do your projects change through the building process?**

I try to speak directly with craftsmen and manufacturers even during the design process, as I get lots of ideas from them. Interesting architecture cannot be realized without conversation and collaboration with such people.

**Yusuvara museum is at the same time a structure, a bridge, a residence and it is traditional, contemporary, naturalistic, artificial... what a pleasure!**

Yusuvara Museum was just a bridge in the beginning but in the course of designing we discovered other possibilities for its function. Contemporary architecture requires perhaps such varied, multiple performances.

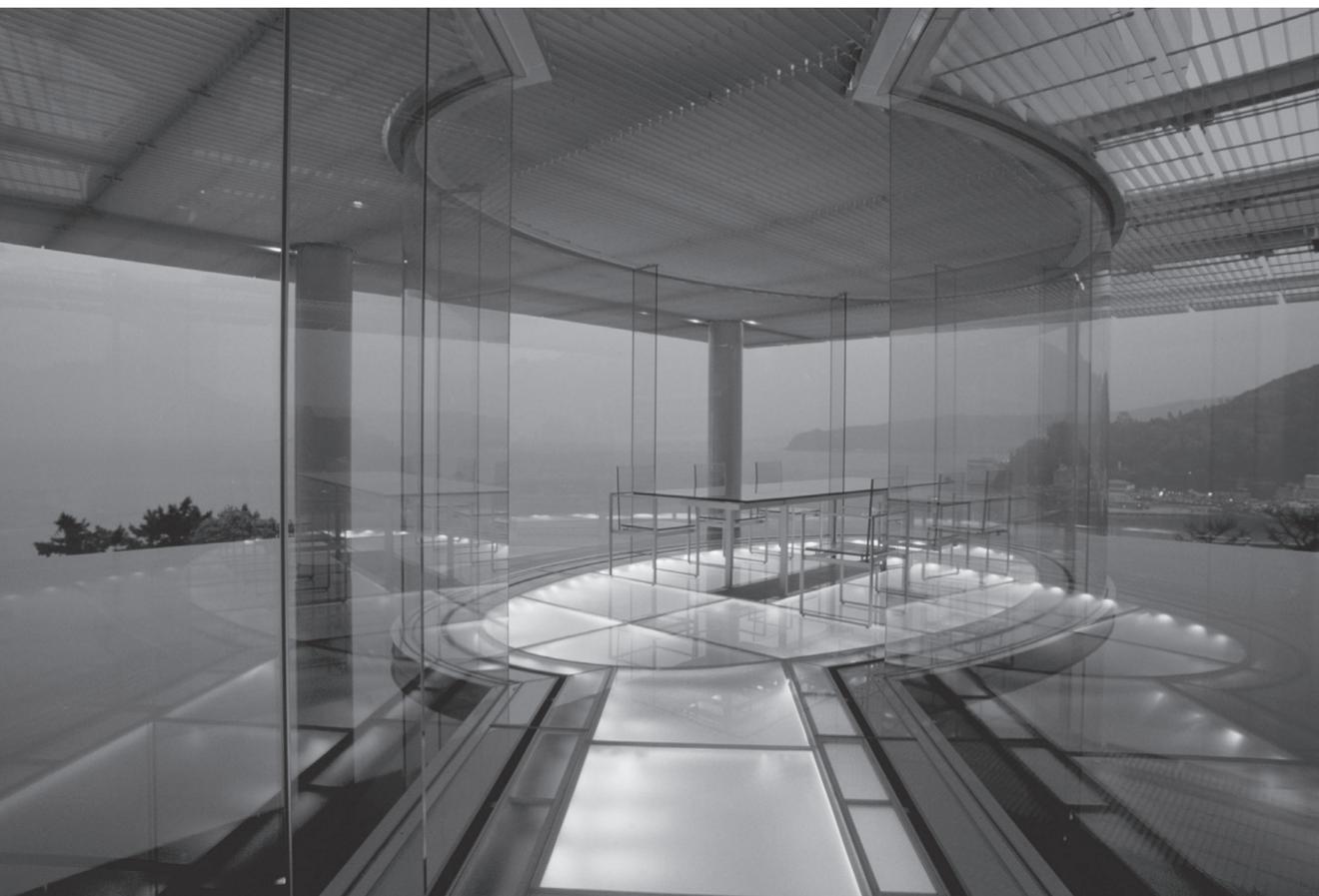
## P Matter

**How is your collaboration with engineers? Has matter more presence in your thoughts than structure -as the physical support of space? Or is it, in your opinion, just a strategy to avoid considering material as cladding or decoration?**

In the future, the 20th century will be defined as a poor age in architecture during which only steel and concrete were used for construction. Collaboration with engineers is crucial when seeking possibilities from structural materials. I would also like to get rid of the divergence between structure and cladding.

**Could high technology be thick and wet, as traditionally?**

Things will definitely go back to thick and wet.



^ Water glass (Photograph credit: Mitsumasa Fujitsuka)



^ Starbucks Omotesando (Photograph credit: Masao Nishikawa)

**Does the material have by itself a capacity of narrative? Is it responsible for the atmosphere? In that sense, do you feel close to the work of Peter Zumthor?**

People from the 20th century forgot to communicate with materials. Materials can be narrative by themselves. In Zumthor's architecture, material is certainly narrative, but the way it speaks sounds too well-behaved. I would like to do something to bring out unexpected aspects of materials.

**Does your wood smell or do you aim perfection?**

Aroma is very important for trees. It is said that Japanese people in the ancient times chose trees for construction not for their look but for the way they smelt. I do not stick to perfection. I love trees with lots of burls and uneven colors.

**Is prefabrication an option to make a more rational division of the matter into particles?**

Prefabrication can be helpful sometimes. If pre-fab industry used more wood, I would very much welcome that.

## P Research

**Do you believe that we will live a new revolution of materials in the 21st century? What should be the role of architects?**

Architects should be the leaders of the new revolution.

**Are your pavilions a laboratory for your architecture or are they independent research projects? Do they come from the same garden culture, from the tea ceremonies?**

My pavilions are kind of laboratories, but also important art spaces. Japanese teahouses used to play such role in the past, but at some point its style was fixed and became boring. We try to rediscover an original teahouse and want it to be an inspiration for our architecture.

**You usually name your buildings. You have a Plastic House -but also Steel, Bamboo, Mesh, Wood...Is not this need for communication a door to eclecticism?**

Our vision is that even small size architecture can send a powerful message, as long as it is based on a strong theme.

**Which role plays geometry in your architecture?**

Geometry is also a great mediator to link architecture and human beings. But I do not need common geometry any longer, and always seek for a new one.

*People from the 20th century forgot to communicate with materials. Materials can be narrative by themselves. I would like to do something to bring out unexpected aspects of materials.*

**We would like to see your Granada Performing Arts Center built. Starting from a natural form, is your research on a complex geometry system also a structural research? This geometrical approach, is it maybe a potential future path for your work?**

We have already gone through the stage of design development and submitted all the drawings. Our studies aimed to confirm

that the geometry of the hexagon could work structurally as well. We will continue to work hard to connect new geometries, structure and material.

**It makes sense to think that Alhambra Palace was also seeking for lightness, in this case through the contrast between the heavy fabric and the delicate lattices or even the thin and vibrant water surfaces. Is dematerialization an additional way for achieving lightness?**

The Alhambra is one my favorite architectures in the world, because it achieves an angelic lightness with its decoration, structure and light. I would like to see it happen also in our project for Granada.

*Geometry is also a great mediator to link architecture and human beings. But I do not need common geometry any longer, and always seek for a new one.*

## P University

**How important is teaching in your practice?**

In the same way that I said that writing and practice were equally important, teaching also means a lot to me. Teaching is not at all a one-sided conduct. You are greatly inspired by young people.

**Does it allow you to go further on your research as an architect?**

For pavilion projects, I often work with students. It is part of their

studies and they often build them themselves. It is a precious experience for them to do so, as they normally live attached to computers.

**In Europe, and specifically in Spain, the housing bubble recently bursted and we fear for our future, especially architects. What would you say to an architecture student in this context?**

After the burst of the so-called bubble economy in the 1980s, the 90s in Japan were called the lost decade, and I had no work at all in Tokyo. For 10 years, I visited provinces and spent a lot of time on low-cost projects with local craftsmen and professionals from whom I learned a lot in the end. I had the opportunity to learn how architecture could be harmonized with nature. Without this experience I would not have been able to achieve what I have done since then. When things go well people end up repeating their past and cannot break a new barrier. I am sure that the current condition of the Spanish economy will indicate a new direction to Spanish architecture.

**How do you see education in Japanese architecture schools?**

Very conservative and it has lots of problems. Conservative toward computational design, and not open to manufacturing as well. Architecture students in Japan can neither master computer skills nor work manually. At the University of Tokyo, where I teach, we started some new programs to deal with the situation, but there is still much room for improvement.

**And finally, thank you again for your precious time, we keep repeating the last question in all our interviews: what would you do if you were the director of the school of architecture of Tokyo or Barcelona?**

As for today I almost work like a director. If I was given the same position in Barcelona, I would at first drink with students and discuss through the night what they want to learn.

Kiro-san Observatory (Photograph credit: Mitsumasa Fujitsuka) v

