

The Museum of Modern Art

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PREVIEW: THE NARA CONVENTION HALL INTERNATIONAL DESIGN COMPETITION

November 20, 1992 - March 7, 1993

The second exhibition to be held in The Museum of Modern Art's newly created **PREVIEW** series, which is devoted to small, focused investigations of important current developments in design and architecture, opens November 20, 1992. **PREVIEW: THE NARA CONVENTION HALL INTERNATIONAL DESIGN COMPETITION** features the proposals of the ten competition finalists -- including the winning design by Arata Isozaki -- for a multi-use cultural facility in the Japanese city of Nara.

Organized by Terence Riley, director, and Christopher Mount, curatorial assistant, Department of Architecture and Design, the exhibition presents ten models and approximately sixty color drawings, plans, elevations, and sections. On view through March 7, 1993, the exhibition is made possible by the City of Nara and Shinken-chiku-Sha Company, Ltd.

Last year Nara, a major center of production along Japan's silk routes nearly 1,300 years ago, announced a two-stage international competition as part of an ambitious plan to redevelop its central district. The challenge presented by the triangular site called for a sensitivity to the city's historic fabric while satisfying its goals of becoming a technologically advanced cultural center by the next century. The convention hall -- the largest public building proposed by the master plan -- required flexible facilities for theaters, a gallery, an auditorium, administrative offices,

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reception areas, and parking. The project program included the creation of a pedestrian bridge to connect the convention hall to a major railway station nearby. Dr. Kisho Kurokawa, architect of the master plan, organized the competition and was the chief juror.

The two-stage competition allowed for proposals to be submitted from prominent as well as younger, relatively unknown architects. The first stage was open, and 644 proposals were submitted by architects from forty-five countries. The five winners selected were Scott Marble and Karen Fairbanks (United States), Ryuji Nakamura (Japan), Bojan Radonic and Goran Rako (Croatia), Bahram Shirdel and Robert Livesey (United States), and Yoshito Takahashi/Takenaka Corporation (Japan).

For the second stage of the competition, these five finalists were asked to refine and resubmit their proposals. Also invited to participate were five architects of international stature: Tadao Ando (Japan), Mario Botta (Switzerland), Hans Hollein (Austria), Arata Isozaki (Japan), and Christian de Portzamparc (France).

A number of the more established architects used the competition to explore positions not previously associated with their work. Isozaki's design, for example, incorporated innovative mechanical systems with ancient architectural shapes, resulting in a structure resembling a ship. Hollein sought to create a sense of unity between the city's heritage and its new development through the use of a pedestrian park. De Portzamparc's scheme was influenced by the spacial composition of a Japanese garden.

The work of the finalists from the open competition reflected a range of issues of interest to a younger architectural generation. Shirdel's plan was based on the concept of "folding" geometrical shapes, Takahashi's design

explores his definition of the site as "interactive media" for daily activities, and Radonic and Rako combined such traditional symbols as a wooden shrine with modern elements.

In his essay for the brochure accompanying the exhibition, Mr. Riley writes, "The analysis of the results can provide a 'window' on contemporary architectural thought, both in terms of the finalist's work and the jury's deliberations....Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, the historicist elements of postmodern thought often were posed as rhetorical counterpositions to seemingly static definitions of modernism. In the Nara competition results, there is no absolute consensus but a broad recasting of the debate."

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