

Kazuyo Sejima, born in 1956 in the prefecture of Ibaraki, studied architecture at the Japan Women's University, graduating with a master's degree. She then joined the bureau of Toyo Ito. In 1987, she set up her own firm Kazuyo Sejima & Associates in Tokyo.

Her early buildings already attracted attention, demonstrating not only elegance in form and material composition but also and above all her completely independent design approach. The young Japanese architect works on the basis of an abstract description of the uses and purposes of each particular building, transferring these into a spatial diagram and converting this diagram into architecture. This results in equally unusual and impressive buildings, which seem to confound all conventional typology, but remain closely related to their function. In this way, Kazuyo Sejima once again takes up the threads of the Modernism, but with an unorthodox, contemporary new interpretation of its premises and claims. In contrast to her teacher Ito and most of his generation, she is not concerned with reflecting or even increasing the fleetingness of the contemporary, but far more with a contemplative deceleration, which is without any kind of nostalgia.

Earlier examples of this are the three house projects produced between 1988 and 1990, simply called PLATFORM I, PLATFORM II and PLATFORM III. With the Saishunkan Seijyoku Women's Dormitory from 1991, for the first time she demonstrated the implementation of a complex programme into an equally irritating and refined architecturally aesthetic approach. The three Pachinko Parlors, created between 1993 and 1996 and numbered like the PLATFORM houses to declare the serial and continuous nature of the principal architectural research behind them, are essentially functionally neutral structures, whose elegance betrays the signature of their author throughout.

House S in Okajama (1997) became an emblematic work (1997), bearing early witness to Sejima's cooperation with Ryue Nishizawa which started in 1995. In a neutral enclosure of translucent polycarbonate, the ground floor accommodates all the bed- and bathrooms for a six-headed three-generation extended family, with a large joint living room above. Between the outer enclosure and the inner walls of the house there is a two-storey corridor, which acts simultaneously as functional circulation element, place of communication and climatic buffer between inside and outside.

The composition elements of the S-house are collectively encountered in the apartments created by Sejima and Nishizawa in Gifu. The corresponding designs began in 1994, and the major building project was completed between 1996 and 1998; extensions are already being planned. The remarkably narrow, ten-storey, orthogonally angled slab stands on pilotis with space for cars to park in between, and accommodates 107 residential units, mostly maisonettes with covered walks as access. The rooms of the houses are designed simply in a row, connected by a sunroom along the main facade. This is formally characterised by the complex interlocking of the residential units, just as the back view is characterised by the meandering stairs. The apartment layouts and stairs become elementary symbols, essential marks in the service of peculiarly realistic poetics.

Recent buildings by Sejima and Nishizawa include the K-Head Office, the Koga Park Café and the O Museum. The most important projects completed by the two bureaux together include the City Theatre of Almere, the revitalisation of the city centre of Salerno, and the Museum for Contemporary Art in Kanazawa. Although these projects appear heterogeneous at first sight, in fact they all follow the same design approach which they in turn develop step by step.

In addition to her design work, documented in major international publications and presented at numerous exhibitions, Kazuyo Sejima has also gained teaching experience in various locations: at the Japan Women's University, at the Science University of Tokyo, at Kyoto University, at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University, and recently also in the Architecture Department at the Eidgenössischen Technischen Hochschule in Zurich. With the originality of her architectural research which uses all vital aspects of the media and information society without succumbing to the same, the young Japanese architect is becoming an established figure in contemporary architecture.

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