



A Small Model for Future

Home-for-All by Kumamoto Artpolis
Tohoku Support Group
Photo: ©Ito Toru

A small facility designed by architect Toyo Ito for people who have been forced to live in temporary housing in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake shows the possibilities for future architecture.

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FACING the tremendous damage caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, Architect Toyo Ito was driven by the questions “What is architecture?” “What can architects do?” and “For whom does architecture exist?” Ito is an internationally acclaimed Japanese architect who in 2013 was awarded the Pritzker Architecture Prize, the “Nobel Prize” of architecture.

March 12, 2011, the day after the earthquake, was the day before the tenth anniversary of the opening of Sendai Mediatheque, a major work by Ito that stands in the center of Sendai. Because of the earthquake, of course, the celebratory ceremony was canceled and the Sendai Mediatheque also had to close for some time. Ito nevertheless visited Sendai and other places badly affected by the quake “in the hope that the areas will be restored as quickly as possible.”

Sendai Mediatheque is a cultural complex consisting of Sendai City Library, a gallery, event spaces and a theater. Because it is an innovative architectural structure with unusual internal pillar designs, the building receives many visitors from Japan and abroad. The structure has other features besides.

“I often say that the Mediatheque is like being ‘in a park,’” says Ito. It is a building that makes you feel as if you are outdoors, although you are actually inside a structure. I created a structure that emphasizes the sense of everyone coexisting beyond generational barriers and feeling free to walk around everywhere.”

The building is evocative of traditional Japanese houses in which living spaces are not permanently divided. In such houses you can, for example, open or remove *fusuma*, framed and papered sliding doors used as room partitions, and *shoji*, sliding paper doors.

Having surveyed the earthquake-affected areas, Ito said, “This is a time when we need a small Mediatheque, a home-for-all.” Ito felt that victims should not be isolated by the walls of temporary housing.

Ito created the first “Home-for-All,” which was completed in Miyagino Ward, Sendai City, in October 2011, after visiting earthquake-affected areas many



Toyo Ito
Photo: Yuichi Itabashi

times and having discussions with the local people. With the support and cooperation of other architects, Ito advertised for donations from both Japan and abroad, and has so far completed sixteen Home-for-All projects in earthquake and tsunami affected areas of northeast Japan. He built them all in consultation with the local people.

Ito's first Home-for-All was built through a process of trial and error that engaged the local community. Ito reflects, "It was only three months after the earthquake. I could never have expected that I would be able to realize my idea and that I would be able to delight the local people. When I first presented my plan, people said, 'How small it is!' [Laughs]. But I showed them a model and explained, 'Here you have a firewood stove and a porch.' They then became grateful to me, and when I had almost completed the structure, everyone looked forward to it very much." Ito adds, "Because they were still in a desperate situation, they found it extremely enjoyable to build the structure together. Home-for-All became a playground for children, a place where people discuss the restoration of agriculture and fisheries, and a center where people recover local bonds.

In seeking to realize the idea of "Home-for-All," Ito asked Ikuo Kabashima, Governor of Kumamoto Prefecture, for help. The two men had been closely involved in the realization of the Kumamoto Artropolis project.

Ito says, "Because living in temporary housing is extremely desperate, I asked for cooperation, advising that I wanted to create a place where local people could get together and enjoy talking. The governor

decided to help us at once and provided us with some rich timber and capital from Kumamoto. His help enabled us to complete the first Home-for-All."

On April 14 and 16, 2016, huge earthquakes hit Kumamoto (see HJ Oct. 2016, pp. 6-7). The Governor immediately decided to build Home-for-All projects. Needless to say, Ito went to help him. Ito says with a smile, "We helped young local architects. We also worked with local carpenters and student supporters to build more than eighty Home-for-All projects together. They literally became homes-for-all."

In both the West and the East, modern public architectural structures are created by program and function. But Ito says, "That era is over. Our society is now so complicated that it cannot be understood with the concept of functions. The boundaries of functions are becoming so blurred that people enjoy reading books and listening to music at art museums. The smallest form of this is the Home-for-All."

The Home-for-All is a creative guide that shows how public architecture should be in the future. 



Sendai Mediatheque
Photo: Provided by Miyagi Prefecture Sightseeing Section