

Kanematsu Auditorium: Home to Goblins



Hidden Treasures of a National Tangible Cultural Property

For 76 years after its completion in 1927, Kanematsu Auditorium held a special place in the hearts of Hitotsubashi alumni as the place where students were greeted upon their arrival at university and sent forth into the world at graduation. It was also beloved by the citizens of Kunitachi as the symbol of the academic community in their midst. The Romanesque-style building, decorated with strange creatures from past and present, East and West, had watched over the University ever since its campus was relocated from central Tokyo to Kunitachi during the period of recovery following the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923.

But this venerable building was beginning to show its age. With no air conditioning, it was hot in summer, cold in winter, and the gradually deteriorating roof and walls were finally reaching the point of becoming dangerous. Supported by alumni contributions, renovation of Kanematsu Auditorium is now underway, scheduled for completion in March 2004, when the Auditorium will be reborn. In April 2004, Hitotsubashi University itself will be reborn as a national university corporation. The revitalized Kanematsu Auditorium will serve as witness to the progress of the new Hitotsubashi University.

On April 5, 2003, a charity concert and lecture were held in Kanematsu Auditorium on the eve of its renovation as part of the fundraising effort to support the project. The lecture was delivered by Professor Terunobu Fujimori of the University of Tokyo's Institute of Industrial Science, one of the leading specialists on the history of modern Japanese architecture, who has also made something of a name for himself as an architectural detective. Through his lecture, the audience learned aspects of the historical and cultural value of Kanematsu Auditorium that were unknown even to people closely associated with the University. In this issue of HQ, we would like to share these unknown treasures of Kanematsu Auditorium with our readers by presenting excerpts from Professor Fujimori's lecture.



University Architecture Originated in the Medieval Cloisters

In order to tell you about the character of Kanematsu Auditorium as a building and explain its significance, I am going to have to give you something like an undergraduate lecture on architecture.

Japan's modern universities were founded in the early Meiji Period (1868-1912), and the major works of architecture they built in the Taisho (1912-1926) and early Showa (1926-1989) Periods were all basically constructed in the Gothic style, from Yasuda Auditorium at the University of Tokyo and Okuma Auditorium at Waseda

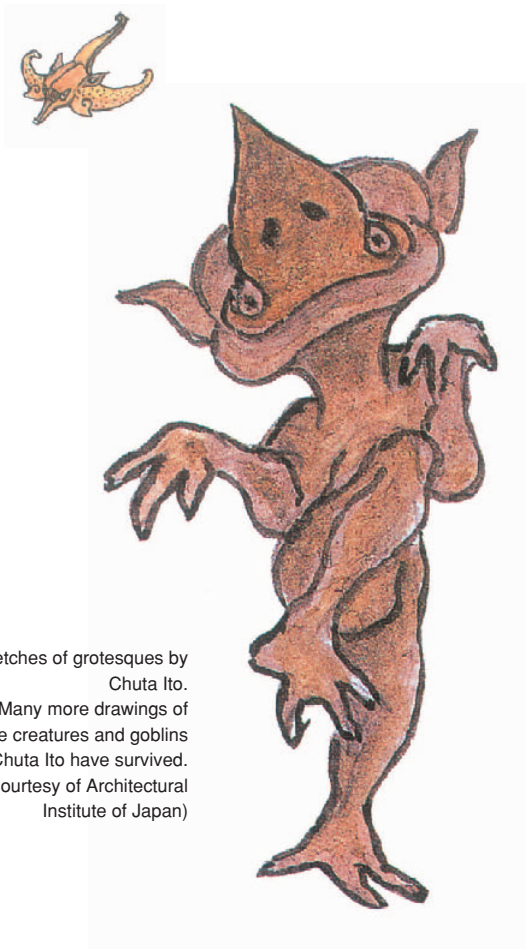
University to Keio University's Memorial Library. The exception was Hitotsubashi's Kanematsu Auditorium, which was built in the Romanesque style. Why was this? It's an interesting story.

Throughout the world, university campuses built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries almost all adopted either the Romanesque or Gothic styles. Why, out of all the possible architectural styles, did the universities settle on these two? Because universities had their institutional origins in the cloisters of medieval Europe. Universities were born out of these monastic institutions. The architects had done their historical homework, and chose to build the campuses in the style of monastery cloisters - and the style of the cloisters had been either Romanesque or Gothic.



怪物

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Sketches of grotesques by Chuta Ito.
Many more drawings of strange creatures and goblins by Chuta Ito have survived.
(Courtesy of Architectural Institute of Japan)

Architect Chuta Ito: Respecter of Origins

But why, if all the other universities in Japan were going Gothic, did Hitotsubashi choose Romanesque? To understand this we must consider the unique character of Chuta Ito, the architect who designed Kanematsu Auditorium. Ito was an architectural historian who had great respect for the origins of things. At one point he developed a hypothesis that the tapering of the columns of the main hall of Horyuji Temple and its flanking roofed corridors was derived from the entasis of Greek temples and spent three years attempting to prove it - by traveling across the breadth of the Eurasian continent from China to India and finally to Greece, riding a donkey! He looked all over the place, but never found the evidence he needed, so he kept quiet after that. (Laughs) Even though it remained unproven, however, his theory has been passed down to the present day, and school field trips and tourists visiting Horyuji will be told that it is the world's oldest wooden structure exhibiting the Greek principle of entasis. (Laughs)

Romanesque was the architecture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, while Gothic was that of the thirteenth and fourteenth. Beginning in the fifteenth century we have the Renaissance styles. In other words, Romanesque developed into the Gothic. Precisely because of this, Romanesque is in some aspects a more primitive style. Gothic is showier, and a bit more refined - so most of the universities chose it. But Ito's personal interest in origins led to Hitotsubashi's choice of Romanesque, the predecessor of Gothic.

Rome as a Model for Medieval Monasteries

The word Romanesque in architecture refers to the eleventh- and twelfth-century cathedrals, churches, and monastic institutions built in a style modeled on that of Rome. Why Rome? Well, if we review our history a bit, in the early fourth century, the Roman Empire adopted Christianity, and began to build churches. But the Empire was overthrown by the great migration of Germanic



Top: Prominent arches and decorative carvings of strange creatures and plant forms are characteristics of Romanesque architecture. (Entrance pillar of Kanematsu Auditorium)
 Below left: A European example of traditional Romanesque architectural decoration.
 Below right: The monsters have been tamed in Richardson's version of the Romanesque Revival.

tribes, and from the sixth to the tenth centuries Christianity was largely confined to Italy, having disappeared in France and Germany. What the Germanic tribes brought with them was animism, an indigenous religion involving reverence for animals and plants and natural phenomena. But the Germanic tribes gradually began to be influenced by Christianity, and from the tenth century there was a resurgence of Christianity across Europe.

So Christianity was back. But now what? They didn't really know what to do, so people from France and Germany and Norway and elsewhere in Europe all set off for Rome to study, because that was where Christianity had survived all along. So it was that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries churches and monasteries were

built all over Europe on the Roman model. This is what we call Romanesque architecture.

Mr. Ito probably spun a tale like this to dazzle his university clients. (Laughs) But there was actually another reason for Ito's attachment to the Romanesque, a more personal reason. And that is what really sparks my interest.

An Architectural Style on the Cusp between Folk Beliefs and Christianity

If you look at Kanematsu Auditorium face-on, you will see that the design surrounds the entrances and windows with a succession of semi-circular arches. This is one of the defining characteristics of the Romanesque. Islamic influences



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Top: Animals are also a prominent feature in the decoration of Tsukiji Honganji Temple, Chuta Ito's representative work.

Center and bottom:Goblins created by Chuta Ito himself still live inside Kanematsu Auditorium.

Right: Even the lamps in Kanematsu Auditorium are decorated with grotesques.

such as the decorative patterns called arabesques (meaning “in the Arab manner”) came to Romanesque architecture via Spain. Step up for a closer look and you will see a host of strange creatures have also been added to the mix. With most of them it is hard to make out if they are humans or animals or plants. So these odd unidentifiable creatures are all tangled up together in masses of what look like ropes or strings extruded from their bodies. This is another feature of the Romanesque. This entanglement and repetition we see is biomorphic, based on natural forms. But it is awfully difficult to make out if this particular creature might be a lion or a cat or whatever, and what that might mean.

Why did the Romanesque incorporate these grotesques (the architectural term for these creatures)? The Celts before the Romans and the Germans after the Romans both adopted Christianity, but that did not mean they entirely abandoned their indigenous beliefs. And it was because of this that numerous motifs originating in animism worked their way into Christian churches and monasteries. But this was a bit problematic for Christianity. (Laughs) Christianity is a quite rational religion, and in Christian iconography, weird creatures that can't clearly be identified as man or bird or beast or plant are all taken to be symbols of the devil. Because of this, from the Gothic onward, these grotesques were steadily stripped away from European religious architecture, to the point that today we no longer have a clear idea of what they are supposed to signify. In Japan, we still have some idea of what snake or fox motifs at a Shinto shrine mean, but in Europe the meaning of these odd creatures has been lost.

A Perfect Style for Setting the Monsters Loose

In Boston there is a world-famous building designed by H.H. Richardson, one of the leaders of the nineteenth century Romanesque Revival. Its series of semicircular arches is typically Romanesque, but the grotesques that were another feature of the Romanesque are nowhere to be seen. Instead, we have a few birds and lions and saints, all clearly identifiable. Richardson was of course aware of the strange and enigmatic crea-

tures crawling all over eleventh and twelfth century churches and monasteries - he simply chose to eliminate them.

But Chuta Ito used so many of these grotesques in his designs that it makes me think he might have been attracted to the Romanesque style *because* of all these wonderful monsters. The Tsukiji Honganji Temple in Tokyo is one of Ito's best-known works. It is modeled on Indian temple architecture because the first Buddhist temples were in India - which must have been a bit of a shock to his clients (laughs) - but in any case, the Temple is in an Indian style. And images of elephants, monkeys, and oxen have been used as decorative motifs all over the building. In short, Ito loved animals and grotesques and goblins.

Ito was born in what is now Yamagata Prefecture in 1867, at the very end of the Tokugawa shogunate. In those days, belief in household gods and other spirits was still alive and well. Perhaps it was because he was raised in such an environment, but Ito took a fancy to goblins and monsters from childhood onward, and even after he became a professor, he drew pictures of such grotesques almost daily. He kept on with this his entire life - to the point that it seems a bit more than just having fun. (Laughs) Given this obsession of his, when Ito was given the chance to design a university building, he must have thought to himself, "Oh boy, I think I'll put in a few monsters for them!" (Laughs) At least that's what I imagine him thinking.

Whether this proves my point or not, I don't know, but here at Kanematsu Auditorium, the exterior of the building is decorated with grotesques based on European models, but the inside is filled with goblins of Ito's own invention. The sketches he was constantly making of monsters were given concrete life here. In the Romanesque Revival of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Ito may have been the only one who did something like this.

A Building that Breathes the Ecological Mentality Rejected by Modern European Civilization

Architecture can be somewhat daunting if you start out trying to learn the rules of the Romanesque style or how to construct the cross-

section of an arch, but anyone can get into it if you start with something like grotesques. Symbolism like this has the power to connect people with architecture. Maybe goblins and monsters aren't the most appropriate way to do it (laughs), but this is an aspect of architecture. In a similar spirit, I planted dandelions all over the roof and walls of the house I designed for my family. It had the effect, if you can call it that, of making us famous throughout the neighborhood - which bothers my daughter, but all of her friends like to come and visit at our house. (Laughs)

In any case, let me conclude with an observation that I think will tie all of these themes together. The animistic spirit we saw in the Romanesque - animals, plants, and people all intertwined with one another without clear distinctions - was something that modern European civilization rejected. But I think it has genuine connections with contemporary ecological consciousness, which once again sees all these elements as indivisible. So I'll wrap up my "lecture" by leaving you with the thought that this is another way to look at and appreciate Kanematsu Auditorium.

(Applause)



Profile: Terunobu Fujimori

Born 1946 in Nagano Prefecture. Completed the doctoral program in architecture at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Engineering in 1978. Currently Professor at the Institute of Industrial Science at the University of Tokyo. In addition to his work as a specialist in the history of modern Japanese architecture, he is active as leader of the Architectural Detectives. He is also known for his research on Chuta Ito, the architect of Kanematsu Auditorium. In 1998, Fujimori won an Architectural Institute of Japan prize for his book *Nihon kindai no kenchiku · toshi no kenkyu* (A Study of Modern Japanese Architecture and Cities). Other books by Fujimori related to the topic of the lecture excerpted here include *Ito Chuta dobutsuen* (Chuta Ito's Zoo; Chikuma Shobo, 1995) and *Tampopo Haus no dekiru made* (The Building of Tampopo House; Asahi Shimbunsha, 1999).