

# Junya Ishigami

architect, Tokyo

## how small? how vast? how architecture grows

arc en rêve centre d'architecture bordeaux

exhibition produced in collaboration with junya.ishigami+associates

adaptation for arc en rêve centre d'architecture  
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arc en rêve centre d'architecture was founded in Bordeaux in 1981. Its mission is to stimulate cultural awareness in the fields of architecture, urban planning, landscaping and design, while also acting as an interface working to improve the quality of the spaces we live in. arc en rêve's pursuits have both a widely international and a strongly local dimension, structured around exhibitions, conferences, debates, publications, workshops for children, courses for adults, trips to visit buildings or explore towns, and experimental activities in urban design.

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From 11 December 2013 to 3 August 2014 arc en rêve centre d'architecture presents an exhibition devoted to Japanese architect Junya Ishigami.

For Junya Ishigami, architecture is a world of infinite possibilities: both a repository of knowledge and a laboratory for prospective experimentation. His approach, which combines scientific and poetic elements, forms the basis for a dreamlike creative process that transforms dreams into reality. He mainly draws inspiration from nature, methodically conceptualising his projects and always seeking to push back their limits. Though apparently simple, his work is both rich and complex. It both contains and embraces the complexity of the worlds we live in, blurring the frontiers between design, architecture, urbanism, landscape and geography.

His tireless quest for transparency and lightness goes beyond the minimalist aesthetic. It is rooted in a determination to rid architecture of appearances and futility in order to achieve perfect harmony: architecture must step aside to create a total environment celebrating nature. The exhibition presents 56 projects via experimental models, some large, some small, made of white or coloured metal, wood or cardboard. Ishigami's work explores issues such as density, transport, landscapes, structures, scale, and the urban/rural dichotomy.

These models make up a body of work that asks the underlying question: how can architecture re-enchant the world? Ishigami's acute awareness of the way humans relate to their environment and the way he calls on us to design alternative ways of living are wonderfully reflected in this show. This "presence and absence" of architecture cultivates a form of ambiguity at the boundaries between occupied and empty space, architecture and nature, the artificial and the organic, resulting in extraordinary spaces. In just a few years Junya Ishigami has opened the way for an approach that is able to go beyond technical processes and build a poetic world and inhabitable forms— from the infinitely small to the infinitely large.

**Francine Fort** general director, arc en rêve centre d'architecture

An architect who studies clouds. Who probes the mystery of the water drops in the air that coalesce to form cumulus clouds and thereby defy the laws of gravity. Clouds as buildings, or at the very least aiming for architecture that's as a light as a cloud. An architect who arranges the columns in a building like a starry sky, so that people can make places for themselves in ever-changing constellations like the signs of the zodiac. Nature is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the Japanese architect Junya Ishigami. Not only to open a window onto the living beauty of nature and natural processes, but above all to transpose the hidden primal forces of nature into architecture.

For Ishigami, architecture is, after all, one great experiment. Poet and scientist come together in his architecture, and a childlike imagination is never far off, as in 'House of the Rain' and 'House of the Wind'. Or else he makes spaces in the form of clouds: 'It's incredible fun to find inspiration for new spaces and buildings in the shapes of clouds.' There are plenty of projects like this. A small house with a view of a lake that migrating birds descend on every spring. A restaurant on a mountaintop. 'The setting of a building defines its character much more than the personality of the building itself.' A small weekend house in town, where moving between the rooms and the garden evokes the sense of a small forest. 'The project contemplates new ways of incorporating nature into the city.'

These are just a few of the many projects in which Ishigami calls on nature as an image, a metaphor or a process so as to arrive at a new form of contemporary architecture. He is constantly in search of new horizons, sometimes in the most literal sense. For example, when he wonders how architecture gives tangible shape to space, he finds his inspiration in landscapes. Especially in the way the landscape is shaped by the horizon and the contour lines that appear between the land and the sky, or the sea and the sky. 'If we want to explore new horizons,' he explains, 'we have to think about the shape of the planet itself.'

Ishigami is able to vigorously employ this examination of the planet, this 'cosmic' view of nature, in buildings that resonate with nature at several levels. Take for example the workspace at the Kanagawa Institute of Technology (KAIT) near Tokyo. It is a building without walls. The outer shell is in glass, and the space has a virtual boundary of trees, impressive rows of Japanese cherries. The structure of the building consists of 305 columns. Literally a forest of steel rods. Each column is a solid rectangular section rod. Each one has its own size and proportions, meticulously calculated on the basis of the load presented by the roof. Frighteningly slender too, seemingly contrary to all the rules of statics. In this building, growth, the most obvious metaphor of nature, is interpreted in an astonishing way.

Incorporating nature into architecture. Enabling architecture to breathe nature in and out, as it were. The radical way Ishigami redraws architecture by relating it to nature is not just a new

fashion or trend. It puts him fundamentally at the heart of the Japanese animist tradition in which mountains are sacred, and where in autumn the flowering cherry trees and maples form the highlight of the year. But Ishigami is also able to elevate this to an abstract level. As an engineer-architect he is able to shift the technical limits of what a building is capable of.

Junya Ishigami (1974) made his international breakthrough while relatively young, at the 2008 Venice Architecture Biennale. He set up a singular installation of glasshouses around the Japanese pavilion to subtly change its surroundings [...]. Here too it is in the first place the slenderness of the steel structure that is striking [...]. The combination of greenhouse plants and randomly assembled wooden furniture thoroughly transformed the garden around the Japanese pavilion into a place where people could rediscover nature like children.

Radically innovative, though thoroughly rooted in tradition, Junya Ishigami embodies the paradox of modern Japanese culture, where nature is culture and culture is driven forward by nature. Ishigami can in fact be seen as the heir to a 'dynasty' of architects that goes back through Kazuyo Sejima (1956) and Toyo Ito (1941) to the metabolist architect Kiyonori Kikutake (1928-2011). But what makes Ishigami exceptional is his linkage of poetry to technical innovation. It is he more than anyone who is seeking an architecture that shifts constructional boundaries and switches from statics to a new sort of dynamics.

The exhibition shows about fifty projects, from small-scale interventions the size of glass bottles with flowers in, to utopian plans with cities as landscapes, and a mountain as a theatre (or is it a theatre as a mountain?). Ishigami sometimes presents his utopias with the naivety of a children's drawing. Not only is this disarming, but at the same time it powerfully evokes his humanist attitude, his pursuit of architecture that upgrades everyday life. When, in 'Forest and City', he proposes filling a neighborhood with trees, enough to transform an urban landscape into a wood, he is simultaneously suggesting a move towards more compact habitation. At the same time, in his 'Bath Studies', he raises the question of how we can make everyday life 'more comfortable'. Not in terms of gratuitous comfort, but with the following fundamental question in mind: 'Should architecture from now on explore new ways of life?'

In concrete terms this takes the form of his view of the terraced house. By designing the terraced house more narrowly, Ishigami frees up space. He roofs over this 'slice of nature' as he calls it, this garden, with glass so that an indoor-outdoor climate arises. He withdraws the house itself, minimally, into a sort of vertical piece of furniture, so that each room is almost by definition part of the surrounding 'garden'. According to Junya Ishigami, living with the garden, with nature, creates the conditions for a more full and fulfilling lifestyle.

This focus on and care for nature, the desire to create space for nature's marvelous, complex

processes, is expressed in almost all the works in the exhibition.

By consistently taking nature as the meta-physical foundation for his architecture, and by meticulously developing this into both real and utopian projects, Junya Ishigami has in just a few years not only carried out fundamental research, but at the same time has also shown the way to a possible architecture for the future.

**Koen Van Synghel**  
architect and critic, Brussels

**Junya Ishigami** (1974, Kanagawa, Japan)  
2000 M.F.A. in Architecture, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music.  
2000-04 joined Kazuyo Sejima & associates.  
2004 established junya.ishigami+associates.  
2008 solo exhibition at the 11th International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale, Japan Pavilion.  
2010 solo exhibition "Junya Ishigami – Another scale of architecture" at Tokyo Municipal Museum of Art.  
Selected works: *table* (2005), *Balloon* (2007), the Kanagawa Institute of technology KAIT workshop (2008). Shop for Yohji Yamamoto at Gansevoort Street, New York (2008).  
Selected award : Architectural Institute of Japan Prize (2009). Golden Lion award in part of the 12th Architectural Exhibition at the Venice biennale (2010).

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