

Laudation

Dear Sou Fujimoto, Excellencies, Mr. Rector, Madam Director, Colleagues and Students, Dear guests,

As an architecture critic, it is my honour to deliver the laudation for this jubilee year's Moholy-Nagy Award recipient, the Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto, whose body of work is followed with great admiration by the architectural profession, whose buildings bring joy to their users in many countries around the world, and whom we in Hungary affectionately refer to as the architect of the House of Music.

Sou Fujimoto was born in 1971 in Hokkaido, Japan. He received his degree in architecture from the University of Tokyo in 1994, and in 2000 founded his own practice, Sou Fujimoto Architects, which has also operated an office in Paris since 2016.

While writing this tribute, I recalled my 2023 meeting with Sou Fujimoto at the House of Music, and naturally I spent a long time looking at his buildings: paging through publications, browsing the professional photography of renowned architectural platforms, and studying images uploaded by visitors. I looked and looked. And was seeking connections with the vision of our namesake, László Moholy-Nagy, and with the rich activities we pursue in this institution.

Let me begin with one of the smallest interventions in his oeuvre: a bus stop. Imagine an idyllic green landscape unfolding before your eyes: in the vivid green of the Austrian mountains, a few white-painted poles stand, forming a delicate structure. A tiny sign in the landscape, a slight disruption. What am I seeing? It does not look like a bus stop. It looks more like a white scribble. A scratch marking the spot. A graphic gesture signalling that something different is happening there. Space is different there, time is different there. This small installation was built by local craftsmen; the intention was to anchor the best of international architecture in the Bregenz countryside, between a connecting road, a traditional Alpine cottage, and — in our imagination — gently nodding cows.

The gesture of creating a small-scale structure in the landscape is a well-understood dimension of architecture in the education of MOME. This scale forms a direct link: for more than twenty years, it has been the practice of our first-year BA students during the summer building camp. It is at once observation, interpretation, experimentation, freedom and vision, while also being tangible reality, function shaped into space, a concrete task that gains meaning in situ. Fujimoto's bus stop also fulfils a dual role, though the longer I look at it, the more I feel its function is primarily poetic. Within this small vertical structure, one ascends along a spiral of about twenty-five steps to reach a single-person lookout point. Not very high. What can one see from there? Perhaps the bus — is it coming? — but more importantly the surrounding landscape, which, through this displacement — to borrow a colleague's term, this "spatial diversion" — shifts the viewer into a different perspective.

In interpreting Fujimoto's buildings, this vision connected to movement often challenges the gaze that seeks form and constructs space. Let me share a few examples.

The 2013 installation for the Serpentine Gallery in London appears as though fog had descended upon Kensington Gardens — as if a cloud had settled in front of the small brick building that houses the permanent exhibition. In Iwan Baan's photograph, the brick structure shimmers faintly behind the new installation. The eye searches in vain for the contours of the new building. It tries to define the form, to imagine the enclosed space — but it does not appear. The gaze hesitates, runs across the grid, wanders. There is no wall or roof in the traditional sense. And yet the communal space in the park is clearly defined, and yet the rain does not fall inside.

The pavilion of the Setouchi International Art Festival in Kagawa also challenges the eye. Like a translucent stone, a meteorite, it appears on the waterfront: a body composed of geometric forms, draped in a white translucent veil. A polished glass washed ashore, a personal space, a contemplative cabin: a passage between architecture and art.

At the end of our journey around the world, let us think of the Japanese Pavilion at the Osaka World Expo 2025. It was a central structure, yet essentially a frame: a six-hundred-metre-wide ring encircling the Expo grounds. This ephemeral building, with its wooden structure, evoked the traditional architecture of the Edo period, but its message was not tradition. As the Japan House in London described it: *“The Grand Ring’s design reflects Fujimoto’s philosophy to create a space where people from all cultural backgrounds around the world can gather within a circle.”*

These architectural gestures are exciting, inspiring and thought-provoking. They articulate a new architectural vision, and therefore a mere glance is not enough. To understand them, we must step outside the routines of seeing. We must look at them actively; construct their appearance, shape their spatiality within ourselves. For there are no closing contours that clearly separate outside from inside, below from above. We must search for the focus, step back if the gaze runs too far, or if it becomes stuck too close.

The wonder and difficulty of architecture lie in the fact that it stands in spaces filled with meanings, histories and uses, and is subject to public judgement. The Hungarian House of Music also found its place within such a complex context. The public has been getting to know it for five years now. Since then, Fujimoto’s architecture has become close to us. Since then, Hungarians have looked at that place differently and experience architecture at a new light.

A building has taken its place in our culture that does not divide but connects. It draws attention to the transitions between exterior and interior space, Eastern and Western culture, nature and the built environment, architecture and music. The art that surrounds us and the art within us. The building’s creation has fostered a harmonious relationship between the Japanese architects and the outstanding Hungarian architects who collaborated on the project, just as it has between contemporary architecture and the Hungarian public, whose tastes tend to be more traditional. For as visitors approach the building, their curiosity is awakened: by the vision of the unusual forms and spatial arrangements in motion, and by connecting and experiencing even contradictory sensations, the House of Music re-tunes them.

Let me close my words of praise with the inspiring thoughts of Moholy-Nagy: *„Simultaneous grasp is a creative performance – seeing, feeling and thinking in relationship and not as a series of isolated phenomena. It instantaneously integrates and transmutes single elements into a coherent whole. This is valid for physical vision as well as for the abstract. Vision in motion is a synonym for simultaneity and space-time; a means to comprehend the new dimension. Vision in motion is seeing while moving.”*

With these words, I warmly congratulate the winner of the Moholy-Nagy Award, Mr. Sou Fujimoto.

Somogyi Krisztina

Budapest, 11 June 2026