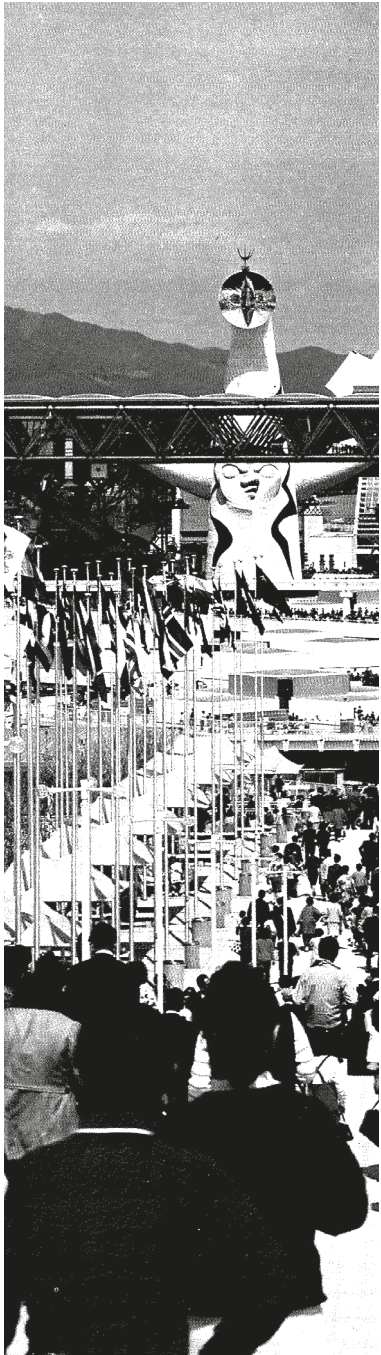


Small stories about video games + the world



Issue #3

FREE

For seven months in 1970, Osaka Prefecture, Japan hosted the Expo '70 world's fair. Architects Kenzo Tange and Uzo Nishiyama oversaw the master plan for a 330 hectare site outside the city, setting out to design a social, international space that offered an auspicious vision of the future.

These ambitions culminated in the Symbol Zone, a colossal 'space frame' roof that brought together a selection of themed pavilions devised by Japanese architects, artists and designers. At its centre stood the *Tower of the Sun* (pictured cover), created by artist Tarō Okamoto; the 70 metre tall sculpture, adorned with three abstract faces, has become something of an icon of a bygone, hopeful moment in time.

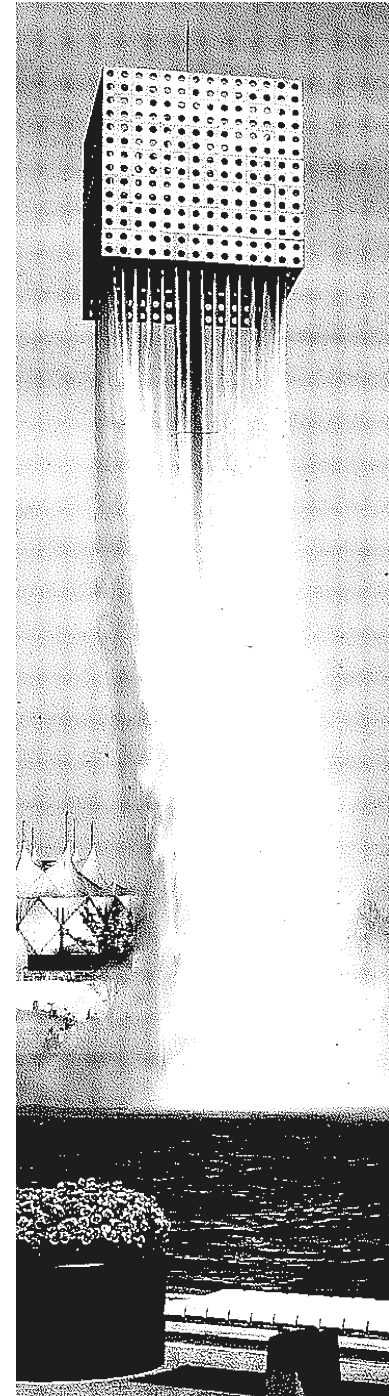
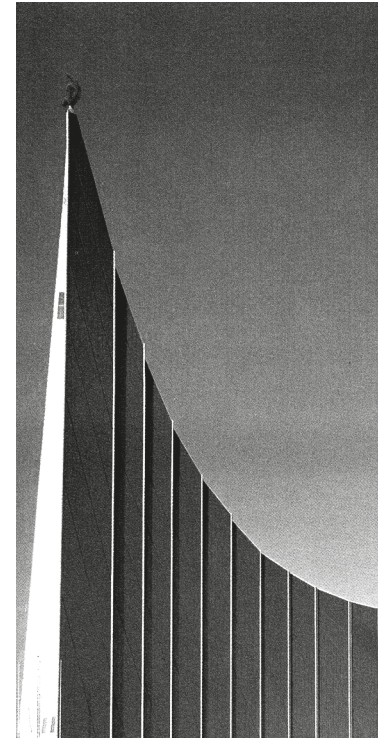
PHOTOGRAPHS:  
Henry Petermann and Kouji Oota

A collection of striking pavilions financed by nations and businesses from around the world formed an eclectic contest of architectural one-upmanship, manifested through elaborate forms and facades with shades of early post-modernism in their iconography. Technological displays embodying the emergence of today's communications society were front and centre. Moving walkways transported over 64 million visitors and performing robots entertained them. The US pavilion, which featured a piece of moon rock fresh from the Apollo 11 mission a year prior, supposedly attracted visitors at a rate of 8,000 an hour on the Expo's first day.

Overt in its embrace of futuristic fantasy, the Expo was decried by critics of the day as a wasteful, nationalistic farce with an utter disregard for reality; a criticism common to any world's fair, but with symptoms exasperated by the Osaka site's strong emphasis on aesthetic abstractionism, appropriated for purely commercial means.

However, in contrast to some other events of a similar scale, the vast space of the Expo park continues to be well maintained, encompassing gardens, museums and sports venues. Whilst many of the pavilions – including the ambitious Symbol Zone and its space frame were unceremoniously torn down, Tarō's *Tower of the Sun* remains, playing host to exhibitions and art installations as of 2018. Similarly, smaller public works such as fountains designed by sculptor and landscape designer Isamu Noguchi have long outlived the architectural features of other exposition parks the world over.

Expo '70 lives, too, in the memories of those who visited. So well-defined is the fair's affective legacy that the recollections of its attendees have informed studies on long-term memory. Of note is its lasting influence in cultural fields, particularly in the case of art, architecture, graphic and sound design; Expo '70 is today considered a formative moment in not only the development of modern Japan's cultural identity, but in the lives of many of the country's creative powerhouses.





PLAYSTYLE explores the way we play, examining interactions that take place between video games + the world.

Each issue features a single story about people, projects and ideas that place the medium of games into a wider cultural or societal context. We look to give space to an evolving view of video games that challenges many of the codified ideas we have about what games are, what they can be and who they are for. Our stories place games in relation to topics such as art, design, architecture, music, fashion, food, sports and more, whilst creating space for voices often unheard within the traditional discourse that surrounds the medium.

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Osamu Sato's practice is hard to encompass with a single label. His eclectic portfolio includes some of the earliest writing on computer graphic art, genre-defying music composition produced in collaboration with the likes of Ryuichi Sakamoto and Ken Ishii, neon-soaked bondage photography and video game design, amongst other pursuits in visual and sound art.

It is for his work within the medium of games that Sato has received the most acclaim in the West. The 1998 cult favourite PlayStation title *LSD: Dream Emulator* is a surrealist simulation that explores the creations of the sleeping mind and is recognised as one of the earliest examples of a commercial game intended primarily as an artwork.

Born in Kyoto about an hour away from the Expo park, Sato made a total of ten visits to the 1970 world's fair as a young boy. Just past fifty years on, he recounts his experiences of this defining moment in the culture of 70s Japan, in conversation with PLAYSTYLE.

I was ten years old back then and was a 4th year elementary school student. I liked baseball and played for the local team, practicing on Saturdays and Sundays.

The reason I visited ten times is because my father was working as a photographer for a newspaper. He'd go there frequently for his work and I accompanied him. As well as that, our place in Kyoto was fairly close to the Expo '70 site. My relatives would come to our place first as a common point before going there, so I used to tag along with them as well.

I think, in that moment, the world's fair was people's main interest. I also felt very excited every time I went there – it made the future seem expansive. That was also probably the first time I saw many different people with diverse physiques, hair colour, skin colour, eye colour, etc. I stood in line at the US pavilion for about an hour. At that time, the Apollo landing had just been broadcast on TV so like many I had a fascination with space and the moon. But now that I think about it, it was just a big rock.

I don't know if my visit had a direct effect on me creatively when I was 10 years old, but in a sense, I may have felt like I'd travelled the world. That might just be me looking retrospectively though. There was an ample budget for the fair, so I think the creators and corporations were able to experiment. That which could not have been done without cooperation back then can probably be done individually now. Andy Warhol once said "in the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes", but in the present day, you can remove the '15 minutes' from that phrase.

I remember the American, Japanese and Soviet Union's pavilions having particularly noticeable designs. After all is said and done, however, it's my opinion that the *Tower of the Sun* stood out more than anything else. That tower had the greatest impact on me and I still remember it to this day. Even now, whenever I create a character, the *Tower of the Sun* is always somewhere in the corner of my mind.

I don't know much about all of the pavilions, but the strange shapes of the buildings were certainly fun for me at as

a child. Even then, I couldn't believe they would all be destroyed afterwards. Fortunately, the *Tower of the Sun* is still there and I consider it one of Japan's landmarks.

Regarding the Expo's graphic design, I remember the cherry blossom mark used as the Expo's logo (pictured right) very clearly. I often drew it in the corner of my notebooks. The shape, created by combining circles, is mathematical and beautiful. Perhaps it in some way it has influenced my current visual style, which uses circles in a similar manner.

During and since the pandemic, many things ground to a halt. The situation with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics quickly became quite dire. I think I could see the 2025 Osaka Expo being affected as well. If I'm interested at the time I might visit the 2025 Expo, but I can't really say for sure. To be honest, I'm not that interested in visiting it at the moment!

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