

## **New Initiatives for Passing “The Hiroshima Panels” on to the Next Generation**

Eijiro Saiga (wyes architects)

### **Discrepancies Between Quote and Budget**

The Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels is finally approaching its renovation. As an architect who has spent 3 years designing, I would like to confidently say that everything is ready and we are about to begin construction - but unfortunately, we are far from that situation. This is because the funds for construction are still largely insufficient.

wyes architects began working on the design in August 2022 and completed the basic design in September 2023. Subsequently, we requested quotes from three construction companies, but all of them significantly exceeded our budget. Together with the Maruki Gallery, we interviewed these companies to evaluate technical capability, motivation, organisational structure and past works. Based on this assessment, we selected Sigma Construction, based in Fukaya City, Saitama, Japan, as the preferred candidate. We then continued the design process while discussing construction challenges and the factors contributing to the high costs. However, after completing the detailed design and obtaining a new quote, the costs still far exceeded the budget.

We have analysed the causes of the discrepancies between the quote and the budget as follows:

1. Extensive finishing areas
2. Numerous issues resulting from repeated past expansions and renovations
3. Long-term lack of maintenance
4. Incomplete mechanical systems, including air conditioning (resulting in the need for a large number of new systems)
5. Costs associated with updating electrical equipment
6. Wide variety of construction works required

### **Issues Resulting from Extensions and Renovations**

First of all, the finishing area (1) is related to point (2). The Maruki Gallery, built in 1967, was originally a small building of about 250 m<sup>2</sup>. Following repeated expansions and

renovations, it now totals approximately 1300 m<sup>2</sup>, nearly five times larger. However, except for the main building's second-floor expansion in 1983, all extensions are connected via corridors. Compared to a simple 1300 m<sup>2</sup> rectangular building, the wall surface area is several times greater. This has been a major factor driving up our construction costs. The expansions and renovations have also caused other problems. For example, short corridors connecting rooms with the Odaka Library - built to accommodate expansions - block drainage during heavy rain and cause flooding inside the exhibition rooms. Addressing these urgent issues requires exposing the building frame or rebuilding structural elements, as many areas cannot be fixed with superficial renovations alone.

Additionally, after Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi passed away, no further expansions and renovations were made, and even large-scale repairs were beyond the gallery's capacity (3). Consequently, exterior surfaces like the roof and walls have deteriorated significantly over time, and now require extensive restoration work. Points (4) and (5) concern the costs associated with updating the mechanical and electrical systems. At present, the gallery is equipped with only a few domestic air-conditioning units, which are insufficient for proper operation. The purchase and installation of new equipment will therefore incur additional costs. Electrical systems have been added incrementally during previous extensions, making the current configuration difficult to assess accurately. In view of fire risks and future safety, most of the electrical systems will need to be upgraded.

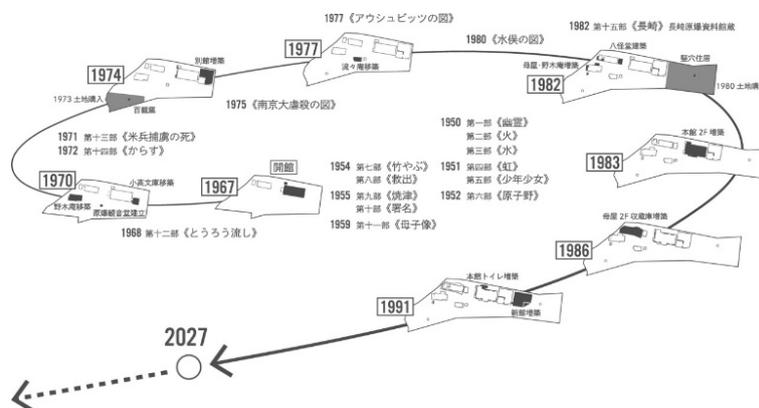
### **Revisions to the Design Policy**

This renovation involves a wide variety of types of construction works, requiring multiple specialised contractors. The more types and numbers of workers involved, the higher the material cost, and also that of labour and other costs. Construction costs, which have been rising over the past 10 years, also push overall costs higher. While a few clear factors could potentially be removed, unfortunately the causes here are numerous and intertwined. In recent months, we have been working with the budget to consider significant reductions.

Amid the cancellation of numerous works, design policies have also had to be adjusted. The long-anticipated installation of an elevator has been postponed. To reduce costs drastically, we have cut construction items and target areas, reducing expenses by over 40%. Consequently, the appearance of the building after construction will inevitably differ from our original vision. But what does this reduced-scale renovation aim for? What will the gallery look like once the work is complete?

## The Vessel Transforming “The Hiroshima Panels”

The Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels was built in 1967 to showcase “the Hiroshima Panels”, painted by Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi. Since the first panel, *Ghost*, was painted in 1950, the panels toured Japan and the world, viewed by tens of millions of people. After many years touring, the paintings seemed to have settled in this location with the artists. However, although their whereabouts was known, the paintings cannot be said to have ‘settled down’. Over 58 years, the works have been remounted from hanging scrolls to folding screens, displayed in double layers or L-shaped arrangements, and translations have gradually been added. After all, from the twelve panel, *Lantern Floating*, onward, the works were painted after the gallery had opened. Thus, the Maruki Gallery was built to exhibit “The Hiroshima Panels”, but it also became a vessel that transformed them. The building itself, along with the artists and works, has grown and changed over time. Even in details such as decorations shaped like snakes and insects made from river stones embedded in the ground, handwritten notes inside the building, and barrels that have been placed here over time - it is clear that both the building and the people interacting with it have participated in these changes. Through historical research conducted alongside our design work, we observed these changes and the traces they have left behind. From our perspective, despite its patchwork and incoherencies, the gallery building has not yet finished serving as a vessel. This is because, through our investigation, we have recognised great potential for new ways to show “The Hiroshima Panels”, for contemporary artists to engage with them, and for visitors to have new experiences. This vessel must take on the important role of passing “The Hiroshima Panels” down to the next generation.



Transition Diagram of the Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels

## What the New Gallery Needs

To achieve its new role, we summarised (and pared down to) essential tasks:

1. Update display and viewing environments
2. Construct a new storage facility
3. Leak prevention measures
4. Reinforce the 1983 expansion
5. Update equipment
6. Restore the collapsed southern slope

After Maruki Toshi's death, the display and placement of "the Hiroshima Panels" remained unchanged. With the new storage facility, this renovation allows changes to the floor plan, updating both the display and viewing environment. Specifically, this involves renovating walls for flat displays, changing lighting, managing light from skylights, and updating display stands (1). The storage facility was previously in the artists' former house next to the gallery, requiring outdoor transport for artworks. With detailed reproductions being made alongside the perspective of preserving the artworks, it is planned that after the renovations originals and reproductions will be displayed alternately. The number of times the artworks are moved will increase more than ever before. Installing storage within the gallery (2) will improve preservation conditions. Leak prevention measures (3) are also important. In the past, heavy rain that was said to occur once in a hundred years happens almost every year across the country now, and Higashimatsuyama is frequently affected by such downpours. Each time, leaks have been observed in various parts of the gallery, seriously impacting both the display and preservation of the artworks, making leak prevention measures essential. The second-floor expansion in 1983 revealed structural issues relating to earthquake resistance; reinforcement will ensure safety in spaces where artworks are exhibited and visitors spend time (4). As mentioned, the current equipment is inadequate, ageing, and reliant on complicated wiring routes; full updates are required (5). Alongside measures to provide a comfortable viewing experience for visitors regardless of the weather outside, mitigating temperature and humidity fluctuations also helps to protect the artworks. Finally, this includes the restoration of the southern slope leading down to the Tokigawa, which collapsed during heavy rain in July 2022 (6). Temporary measures and ground surveys have been conducted by the Saitama Prefecture Department of Civil Engineering. As a result, no significant soil slippage was observed; however, since the collapsed area is private property,

the final restoration work will have to be carried out by the gallery. Each task is essential to pass down the artworks and the gallery building to the next generation.

### **Reopening in Spring 2027**

The building, funded by the two artists and shaped over decades through interactions with people and also artworks, presents numerous defects. Like scraping barnacles from a ship's hull, we would like to relieve burdens, repair damaged structures, and create a space where people can encounter “the Hiroshima Panels” anew, alongside all stakeholders. Although sufficient funds are not yet secured, there is no reason for pessimism. In past expansions, the Maruki Gallery has succeeded in raising the additional funds needed after construction had begun, and works have been completed successfully. This time as well, we aim to achieve reopening in spring 2027 through dedicated effort.



Fundraising appeal for the building extension in 1974

© SHIMA ART & DESIGN STUDIO

(Maruki Gallery News, No.163, October 10, 2025)