In 2009 I volunteered in the curatorial team for the Shen Zhen & Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism \ Architecture. One of my tasks was to help architect Sou Fujimoto prepare his speech on ‘Primitive Future’ (also the title of his book). At the time I knew little about him or architecture, but as a person who is crazy about all forms of art, I embraced this dream opportunity. I was working through some admin duties as he began to deliver his talk. He was very calm and measured, exuding the same aura of Zen that seems to emanate from all of his architecture. I found myself compelled to stop what I was doing and to listen with the rest of the enthralled audience; I found his concepts and ideals extremely interesting and inspiring.

Contrasting Landscapes
Born and raised in Hokkaido but later living and working in Tokyo exposed Fujimoto to a stark contrast between the monster metropolis and the horizontal landscapes of his birthplace, giving him the inspiration for his first concept: **Primitive Future House**.

[Image credit: Sou Fujimoto]

Here, Fujimoto aims to give this man-made construction the appearance that it was naturally formed, blurring the usually prominent line between the natural world and humanity’s architecture. At the same time, he seeks to extend the possibilities of every structure in the design, so that chairs could be used as tables, and tables as stairs. In this way, his concept draws back to the time when we inhabited caves; the body had to adapt to the space, but as it did, the space took on a ‘new subjective and temporal definition’ that was unique to each person, creating a harmonious relationship between occupant and abode, or between occupant and nature.

**Private vs. Public Spaces**
Fujimoto explores the relationship between humans and space in all of his work. In the one-room **T House** the angles of the walls were measured and calculated meticulously, providing at once privacy and openness. Depending on where you stand, the boundary between these two seemingly opposing features becomes obscured.
Nature and Man

A strong echo of this tension between intimacy and exposure can also be found in House O. Fujimoto’s one-room house offers different views and angles of the coastline giving the occupant a variety of images of the ocean, while the back of the house is completely closed off to provide intimacy and privacy. This design beautifully highlights how architecture can play the role of ‘intermediary’ as it displays to the occupants of the house the most favourable facets of the surrounding environment. (Funnily enough, as Fujimoto conceded during his speech, he forgot to assign a clear entrance to the house, so that the client was initially lead to the rocky shore to enter…)

Back to the Roots

With the opportunity to design the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2013, Fujimoto appears to have gone back to the basics and back to his first concept of Primitive Future (used as chairs, chairs as tables). At the same time the minimalistic style avoids intrusion upon the surroundings; the seemingly delicate structure appears to float like a cloud above the patch of grass in Hyde Park, true to the pavilion’s temporary nature. Delimitations between nature and architecture break away and disappear as both seem to merge into one, giving people a startling feeling of freedom.

The cloud-like installation was transformed into an ‘electric light show’ through a series of flashing LED lights, by British studio United Visual Artist, for a performance at the...
Serpentine Gallery for its 2013 Summer Party. Imitating lightening in a night sky, this simple and striking effect was by no means easy to create. Combined with thunderous audio, the installation created a very different feel, reminiscent of the changeability of nature.

Sou Fujimoto Serpentine Pavilion Intervention from United Visual Artists on Vimeo

I personally see many messages in Fujimoto’s work. ‘Less is more’, his designs seem to say, shining in their ingenious simplicity rather than through any cutting-edge technology or overwhelming size. Maximizing spaces challenges us to interact with them, encouraging us to review our preconceived notions of objects. Entering into a soothing and harmonious relationship with surrounding nature, rather than trying to keep it out and away, provides a stark contrast to the heavy and monotonous style of much of our modern architecture. Fujimoto’s architecture seems to allow us to breathe and reboot through its clarity and purity.