

Buildings in Ueno Park Related to Le Corbusier

The National Museum of Western Art (NMWA), a designated World Heritage site designed by the French architect Le Corbusier (born Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris; 1887–1965), is not the only notable example of Modernist architecture in Ueno Park. In fact, as you approach the park from the direction of Ueno Station, the first building you will notice is the imposing Tokyo Bunka Kaikan, a concert hall built in 1961. It is the magnum opus of Maekawa Kunio (1905–1986), who studied under Le Corbusier and was one of the three Japanese architects to whom the Frenchman delegated the hands-on design of the NMWA. Tokyo Bunka Kaikan stands directly opposite the museum building, making for easy comparison of these two concrete icons. While their column-based structures—a feature that Le Corbusier called *pilotis* and Maekawa incorporated in several of his buildings—are similar, the Tokyo Bunka Kaikan appears both bulkier and more ornate than the somewhat modest NMWA. Maekawa's structure features a spacious lobby, the deep blue ceiling of which is dotted with lights to signify the night sky, while the floor is decorated with a leaf-like pattern intended to bring to mind city streets in autumn.

Passing between Tokyo Bunka Kaikan and the NMWA and heading further into the park, go straight and take a right at the entrance to Ueno Zoo to reach the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (TMAM). Another Maekawa design, this edifice dates back to 1975 and has a distinctive red-brown brick exterior that makes the building appear unobtrusive despite its size. Inside, distinctively Modernist features such as spiral staircases and abstract floor-tile patterns stand out, as does the placement of large sections of the galleries underground. On the whole, the TMAM feels less imposing than both the Tokyo Bunka Kaikan and the NMWA, perhaps suggesting that Maekawa, in his later years, came closer than his teacher to achieving the Modernist movement's goal of designing "human-sized" buildings.