

Joining, The Traditional Japanese Building Technology, 2016



Inspired by a Japanese woodworking manual,¹ *Joining* investigates a traditional building technique that, over the centuries, has shaped Japanese architecture.

Of Chinese origins, the joinery technique reached Japan through Korea around the seventh century AD. However, the country's particular circumstances of geopolitical isolation led to the adaptation of this technology to indigenous architectural styles and its application to dwellings and religious constructions up until the second half of the nineteenth century.

Joinery is a set of skills developed and handed down from one generation to the next: the lines, the shapes, and the selection of the proper timber result from a deep knowledge that has reached high-quality standards. It is possible to count several hundred distinctly different joints, with some reserved for only one type of construction. Time plays a decisive role in this technique: on the one hand, joinery has very antique roots, but on the other, it has an unpredictable future since the method is slowly vanishing. The new Japanese generations are not interested in keeping the tradition alive, and new, faster, and less expensive Western building techniques have become popular. Today, there are about a hundred *Mia-Daiku* left, master carpenters who are experts in the ancient joinery technique and the only ones able to renovate the most important shrines and temples. It is a debated topic in Japan, and the government is trying to adopt solutions to avoid the risk of a future in which such a unique cultural heritage could be lost. The project started when the artist commissioned eight different types of joints from Toshiro Kobayashi's workshop, a carpenter

based in Imabari who still follows the traditional procedure. The joints were made by the master's disciple Funaki Rintaro: six faithfully reproduce the one published in the manual by Sumiyoshi and Matsui, and the other two (Kanawatsugi and Shihou sashi) are an original creation by the craftsman.

In Japan, joints are classified according to their function, and the quality of the timber traditionally depends on the relevance of the building, and it is worth noting that for *Joining*, a three-hundred-year-old Japanese Hinoki cypress was used. Del Conte then photographed the crafted joints with a medium format analog camera from a 45-degree angle. The pictures are revealed on black and white transparencies lit by two light-box tables, also made with the joinery technique. There is also a printed version of the work, composed of 24x30 cm gelatin silver prints. Each joint is matched by a grid of images that, just like a carpentry handbook, shows the step-by-step assembly of the pieces. The first slide on the top left of the grids displays the components of each joint, and those following show its operation.

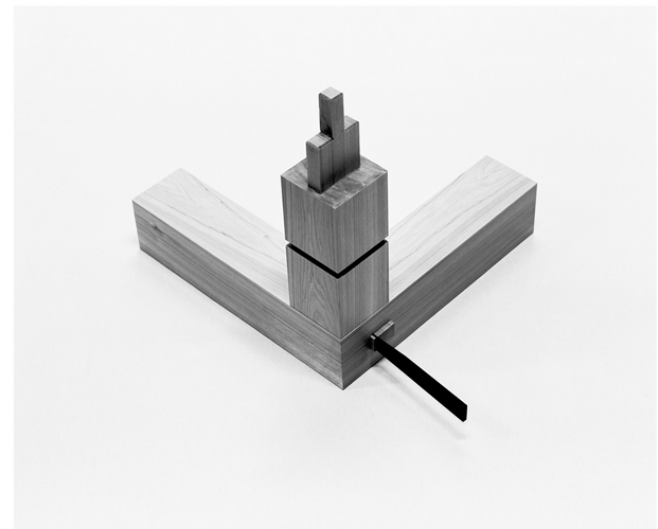
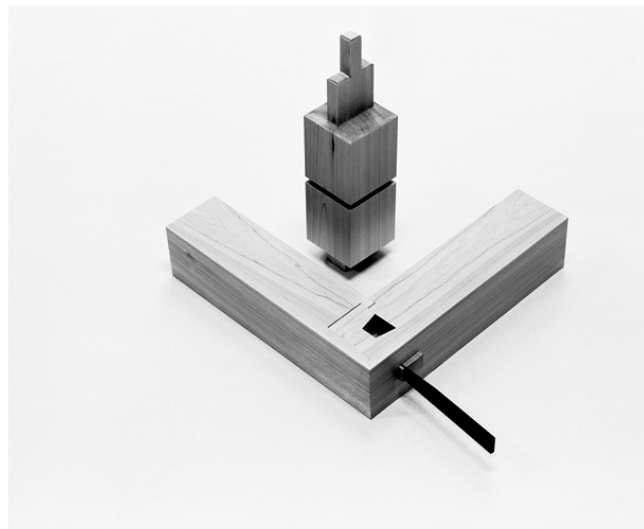
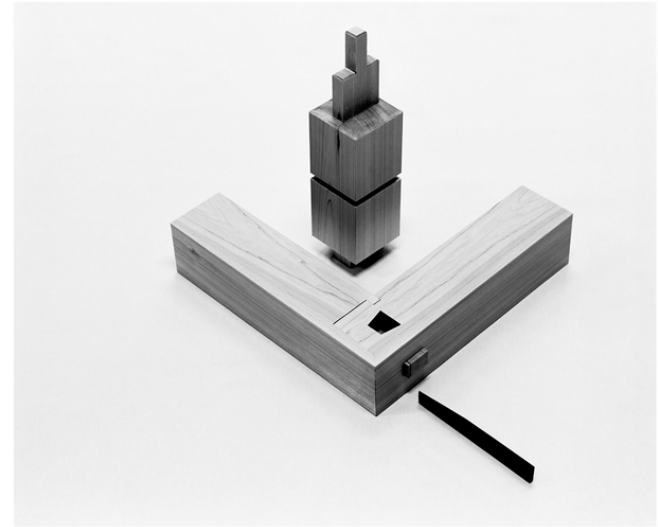
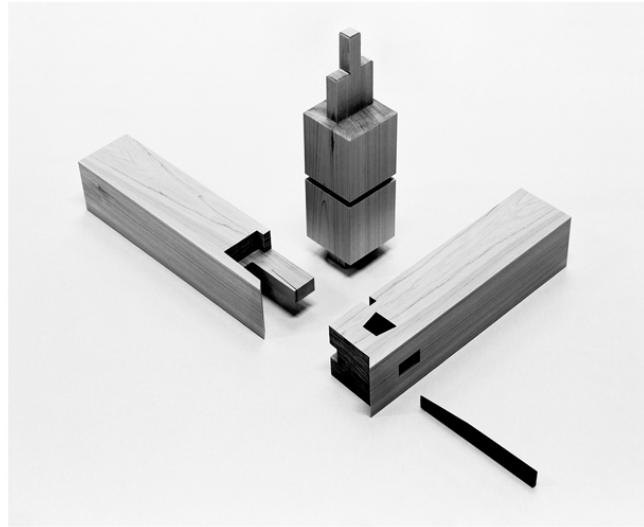
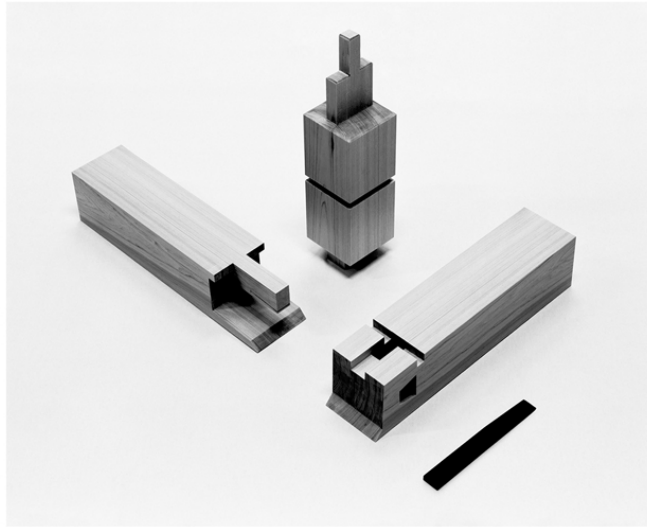
The emphasis lies on design pieces that, despite their particular and aesthetically fascinating shapes, are usually not visible because they disappear within the construction lines. Their nature is functional and choral because each piece contributes to the building's harmony. Instead, the artist aims to reveal each piece's shape and restore its uniqueness. Del Conte looks at architecture as a trace of human presence, and even if the project rules man out on purpose, it intends to propose a reflection on it. The camera's subject is not only something tangible and physical; it is, above all, an aesthetic quality and a form of knowledge; it is a fragment of history that breathes within the monochromatic wooden shapes.

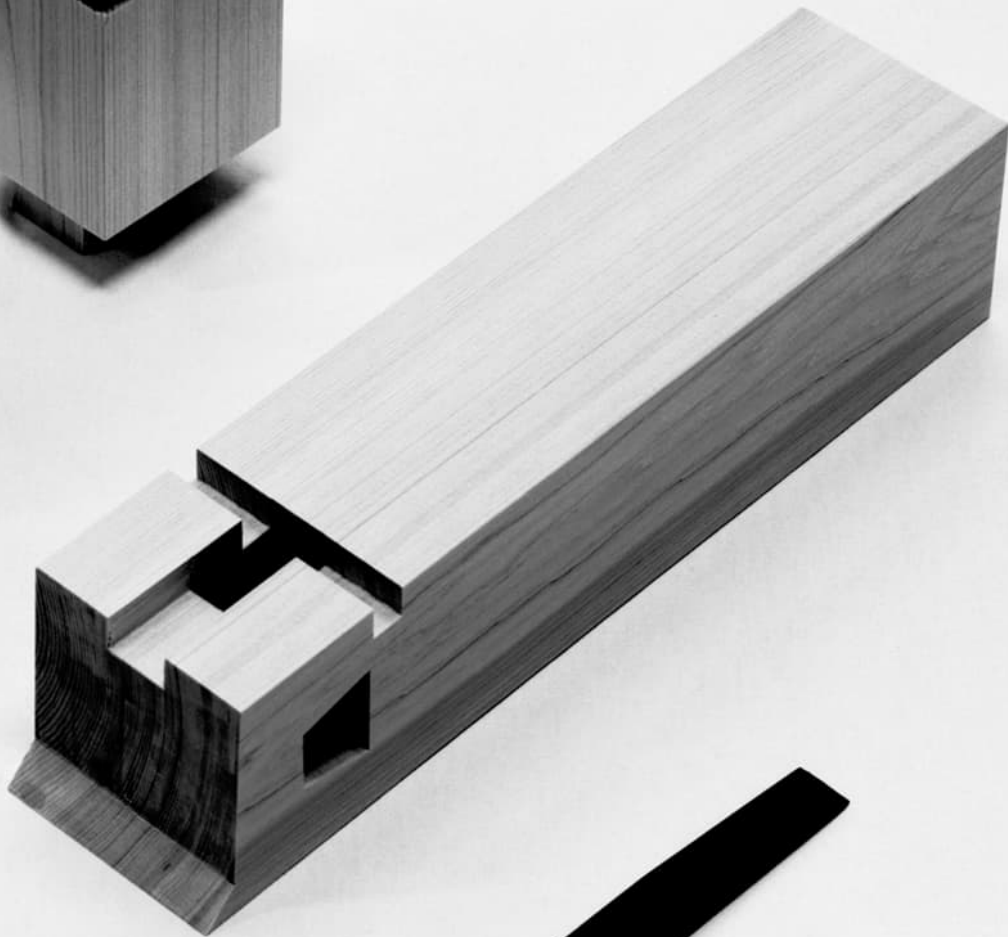
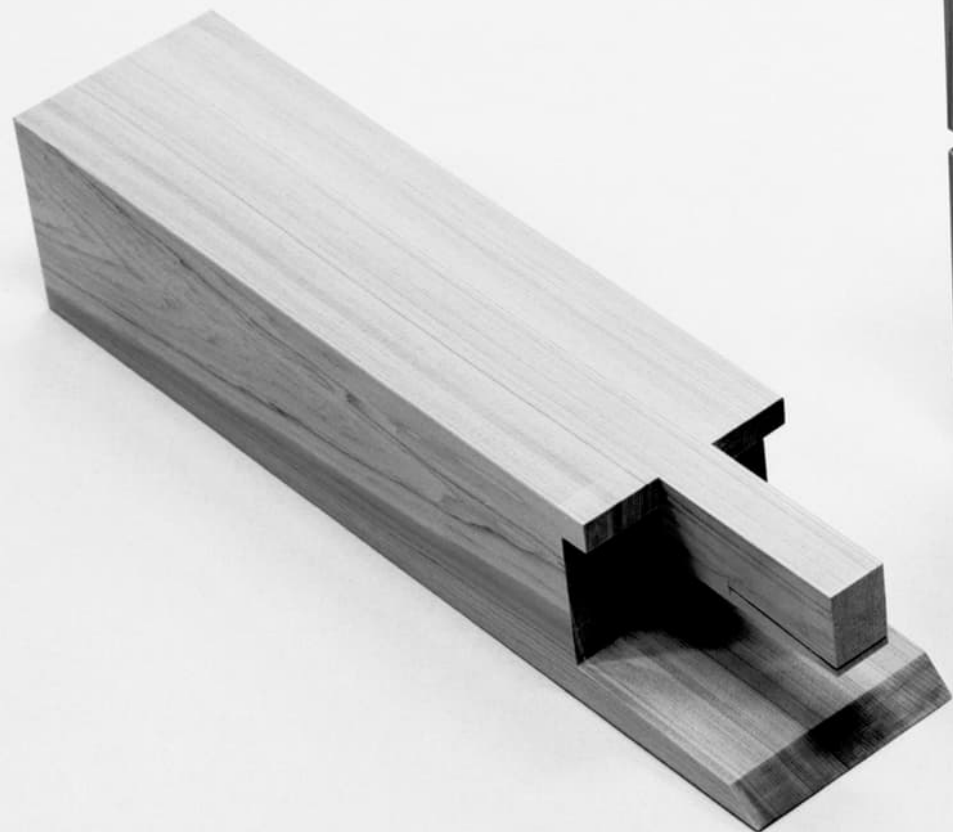
¹ Torashichi Sumiyoshi & Gengo Matsui, Wood joints in classical Japanese architecture (Kajima Institute Publishing Co., Ltd. 1989)

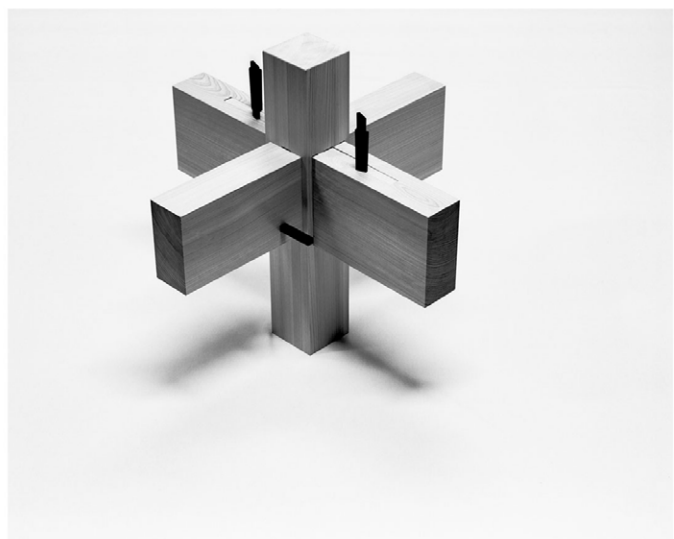
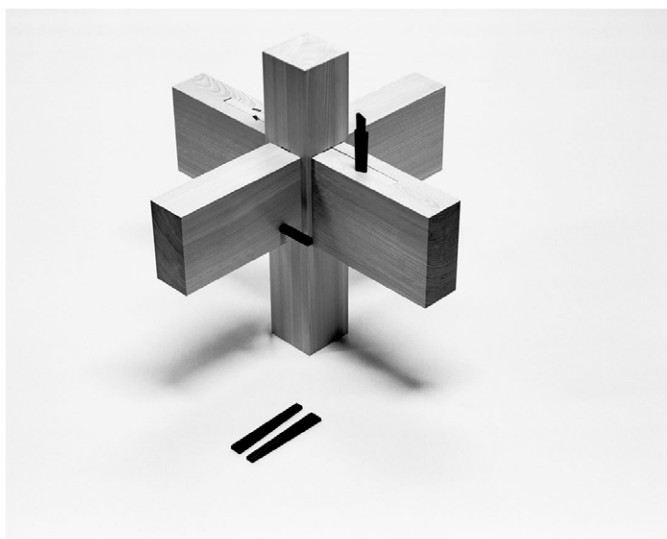
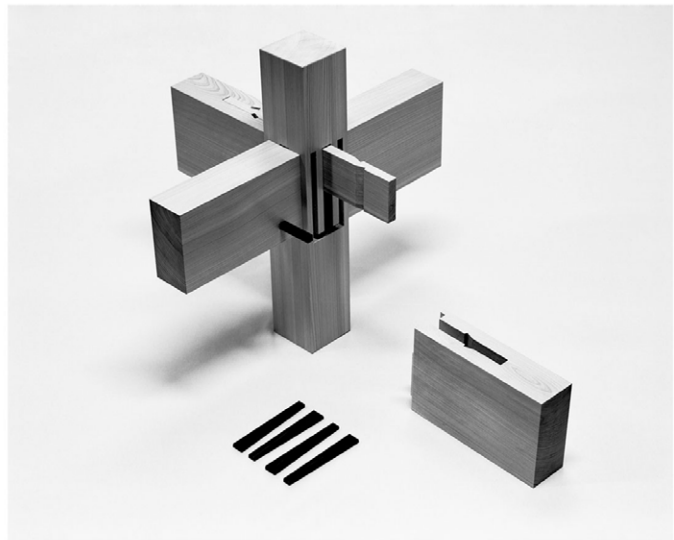
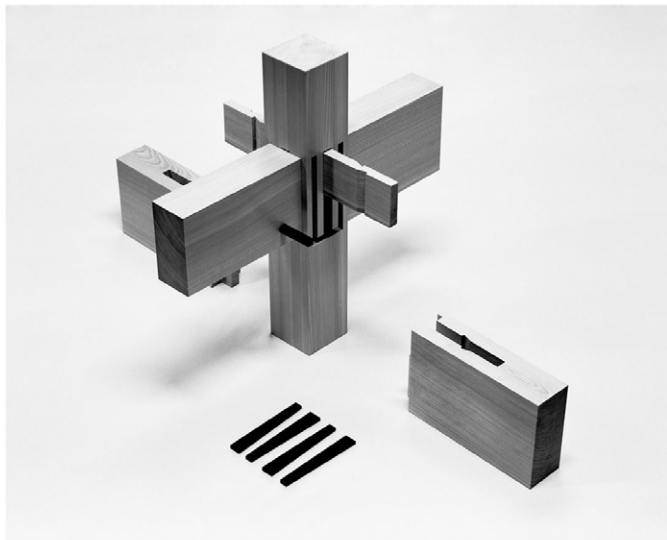
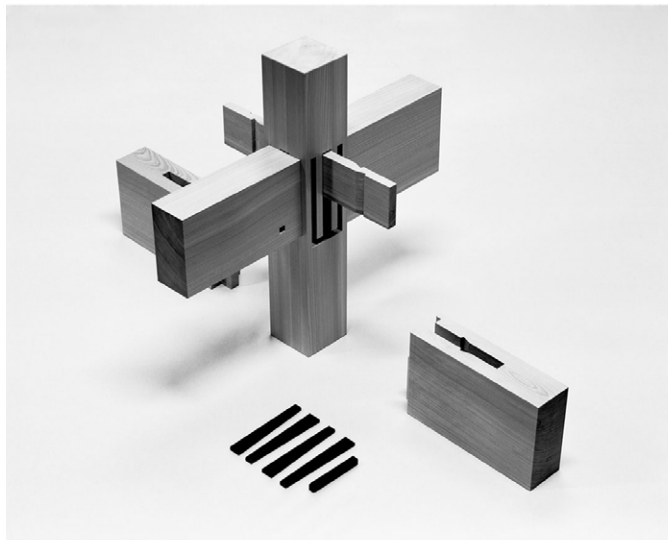
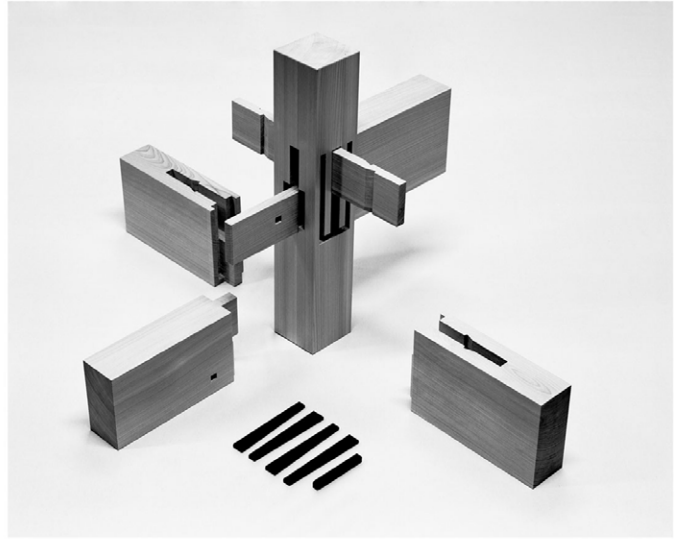
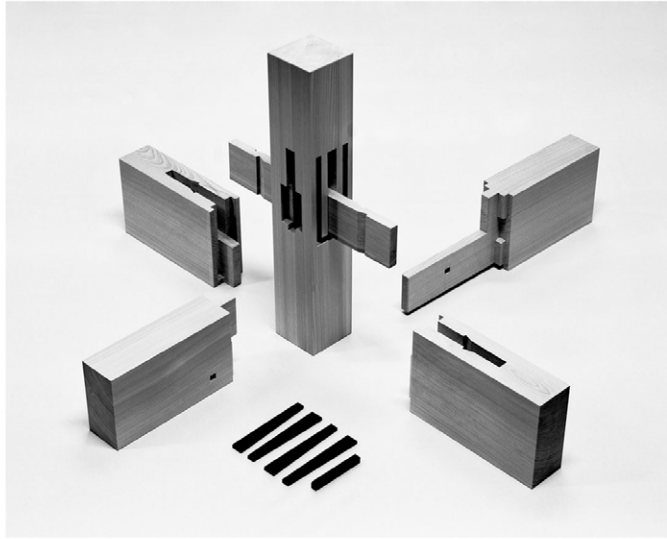
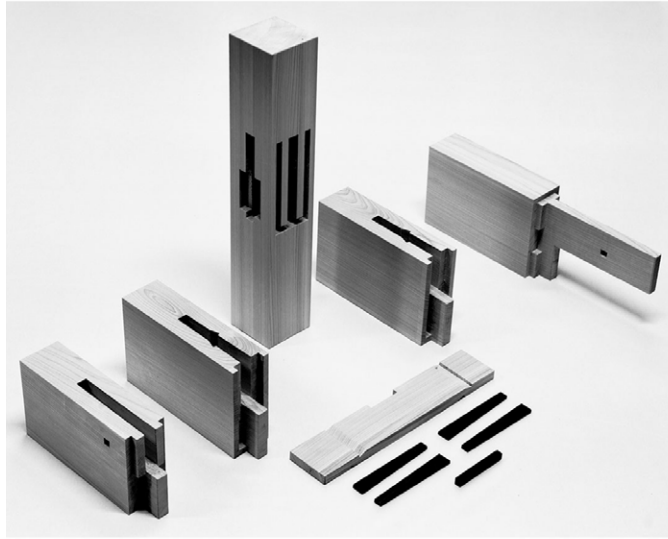
Fig. 1 Kanawatsugi, gelatin silver print, 24x30 cm, ED 5+2 AP, 2017

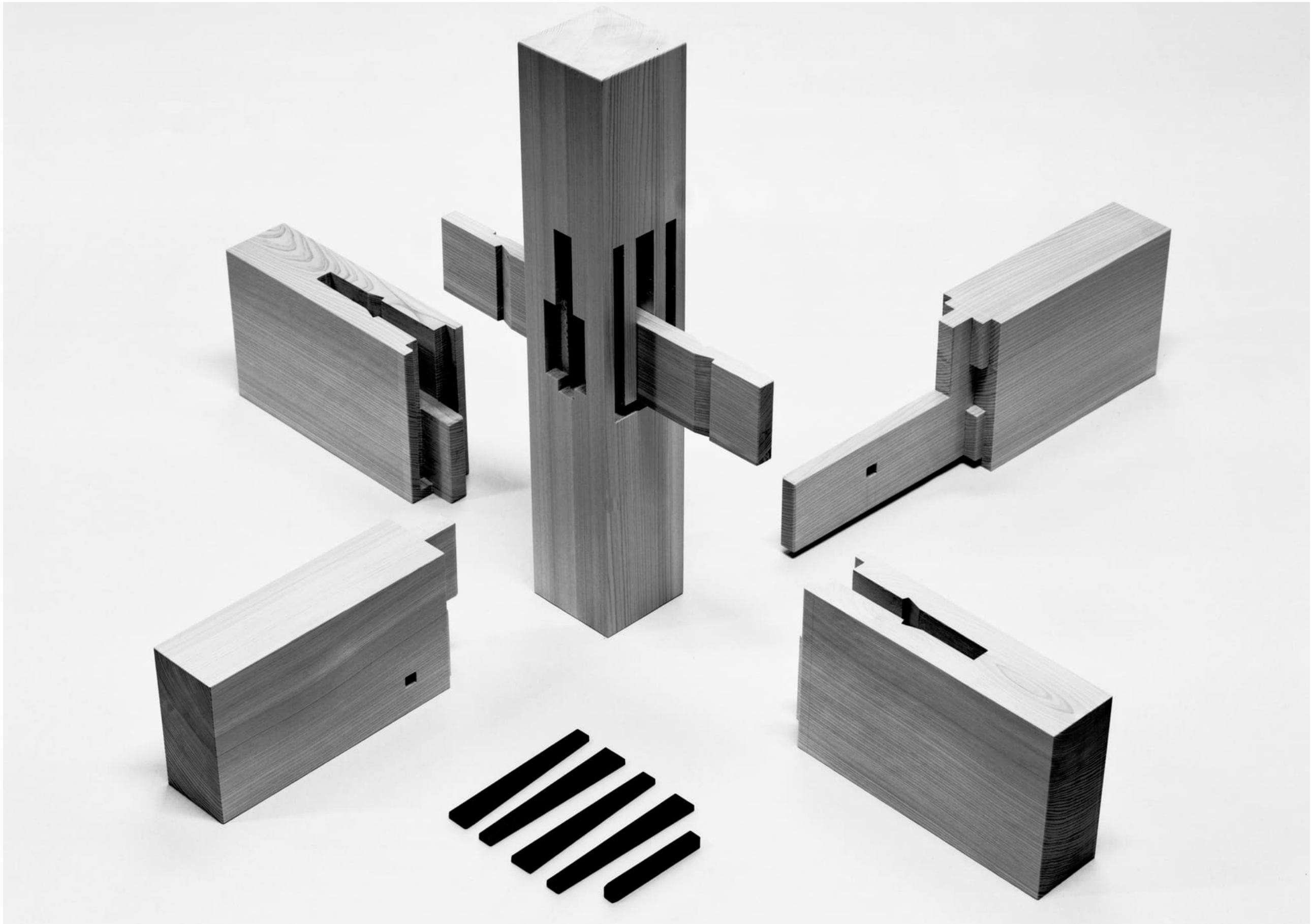
Fig. 2 Toshiro Kobayashi's Workshop, Imabari, 2016













- Fig. 3 Sumitome hozo sashi, five gelatin silver prints, 24x30 cm each, ED 5+2 AP, 2017
Fig. 4 Sumitome hozo sashi, detail
Fig. 5 Shihou sashi, eight gelatin silver prints, 24x30 cm each, ED 5+2 AP, 2017
Fig. 6 Shihou sashi, detail
Fig. 7, 8 Framed B/W slides on light-box tables, Serie Inversa # 4, Turin, 2017
Fig. 9 Making of Joining, CCA Kitakyushu, 2016
Fig. 10 Yosemite no sumi, eight gelatin silver prints, 24x30 cm each, ED 5+2 AP, 2017
Fig. 11 Yosemite no sumi, detail

