



Louis Kahn. The Four Freedoms Park (1974, completed 2012), New York City
Photograph by Arne Maasik 2016

Louis I. Kahn – the architect of the Four Freedoms Park memorial

Louis I. Kahn's (1901-1974) hometown was Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the US. Kahn's birthplace was Estonia. Kahn repeatedly told his children about an island with a castle. He meant the island of his childhood with its medieval castle – Saaremaa, the largest island in Estonia and the Baltic Sea.

Kahn's professional influence increased between 1947 and 1957, when he was a professor at the Yale School of Architecture in New Haven, Connecticut. While there he received the commission to design the Yale University Art Gallery (completed 1953) and later the Yale Center for British Art (completed 1977). Travels took Kahn to Europe, Africa and Asia. In 1928 and 1929, and again in 1950

and 1951, he personally experienced the ancient and medieval architecture of Italy, France, Germany, England and Scotland, the Baltic countries and Greece. On his trip to Egypt, Louis Kahn sketched the pyramids. In Jerusalem, he received a commission for the Hurva Synagogue project. He made repeated trips to India and Bangladesh in connection with his commissions in those countries.

Five buildings designed by Kahn have won the prestigious AIA Twenty-five Year Award: the Yale University Art Gallery, Salk Institute for Biological Studies, Phillips Exeter Academy Library, Kimbell Art Museum, and Yale Center for British Art.



Louis Kahn. Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban – The National Assembly Building in Dhaka, Bangladesh (1962-1982)
Photograph by Arne Maasik 2017

The castle on the island

Louis Kahn's Magnum Opus, his most challenging project, was Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban – the National Assembly Building at Dhaka, Bangladesh (1962–1982). The architect's key design philosophy was to represent Bangladeshi culture and heritage, while at the same time, optimizing the use of space. The exterior of the building is striking in its simplicity, with huge walls, deeply recessed porticoes and large openings in regular geometric shapes.

Some aspects of Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban can be seen to resemble European medieval castles. When travelling in Europe as a young architect in 1928 and 1929, Kahn paid special attention to the medieval fortifications in Italy, France, Great Britain and Scotland. Although one reason may have been that he had received a Beaux-Arts education from his French-born professor Paul Philippe Cret at the University of Pennsylvania. But there may also have been another reason.



Bishop's Castle (14th century) in Kuressaare on the island of Saaremaa, Estonia
Aerial photograph by Arne Maasik 2008

Namely, Kahn remembered a castle on the island called Ösel (now Saaremaa) from his early childhood. His father had worked near the castle. The castle may have made such a strong impression on Kahn's visual memory, that he wanted to research this type of architecture as a young architect.

The Gothic convent-style Bishop's Castle in Kuressaare dates back to the 14th century. Its design was inspired by the castles in Germany. It was the architecture of power that was completed during centuries by Swedish rulers, and more recently restored and researched by the Estonians.

Both Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban and the Bishop's Castle are structures of power with very strong central axes. Both are surrounded by water. These buildings are meant to suggest security, but also provide protection from climatic conditions. Yet Kahn avoided designing the thick walls of a medieval fortification. Instead, he opened the walls to let light in.

That's how the north and south met in the architect's vision.



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Bishop's Castle (14th century) in Kuressaare on the island of Saaremaa, Estonia
Photograph by Arne Maasik 2008
Conceptualized image-edited visual by Mart Kivisild 2016 and Martin Pedanik 2019

2016 Exhibition *Kahn. The Islander* by Arne Maasik at the Bishop's Castle in Kuressaare

2016 *Kahn. The Islander, book* by Heie Treier and Arne Maasik

2017 Exhibition *Kahn. Magnum Opus* by Arne Maasik at the Museum of Estonian Architecture

2018 Exhibition *Kahn. Bold* by Arne Maasik and Martin Pedanik at the ARS Project Space in Tallinn

Arne Maasik, b 1971, is one of the most influential architectural photographers in Estonia. He has participated in long-term projects involving large-scale research and had numerous solo exhibitions in Rome, Venice, Berlin, Moscow, Budapest, Helsinki, Tallinn and elsewhere. Arne Maasik's work is characterized by an awareness of metaphysical undercurrents and muted poetry. www.arnemaasik.org

The Tallinn-based Kahn research group that has worked since 2007 includes Arne Maasik, Heie Marie Treier, Martin Pedanik, Ott Rätsep, Juta Ristsoo, Ingrid Mald, Mikko Mutso, Toivo Tammik

Heie Marie Treier, PH.D, b 1963, is an art historian and art critic lecturing at the Baltic School of Film, Media, Arts and Communication of Tallinn University. She has studied at Tartu University and the Central European University. As the editor-in-chief of *kunst.ee* magazine in 2000-2007, she participated in the *Documenta* magazine project in Kassel, Germany in 2007. This exhibition is the outcome of a long-term research process and dialogue with several American and Estonian intellectuals.

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Martin Pedanik, b 1974, is a graphic designer and artist, author of the *KAHN. Bold* typeface (2016-2018), and member of the Tallinn-based *Kahn. The Islander* research group since 2007. Pedanik has been the co-founder and graphic designer of the avant-garde Theater NO99 in Tallinn since 2005 and the co-author of the Estonian Pavilion at the 2010 Venice Architecture Biennale. www.labor.ee



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KAHN

From Island to Island – The Creative Journey of Louis Kahn

Photos by Arne Maasik

Headquarters of the United Nations
New York City
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The photo exhibition *From Island to Island – The Creative Journey of Louis Kahn* speaks the language of architecture, the universal language of the highly respected Estonian-born American architect Louis I. Kahn (1901-1974).

It aims to bridge faraway centuries and countries and unite them. The exhibition is comprised of the works of Estonian photographer, architect and artist Arne Maasik.

Louis Kahn's works reflect and link together the ancient past and modern sustainable future, the cultural similarities of the North-South and West-East, as well as the political institutions and shrines of cultural heritage – the world in its eternity and entirety, in its simplicity and complexity.

This multidimensional and multifaceted creativity originates from the architect's life experience as

it moves through vast geography and connects with many nations. Being born in Northern Europe in Estonia, and having worked in the United States and Southeast Asia enabled Kahn to amalgamate different cultures and ideas into a singular concept. The eternal vibe of the buildings he designed alludes to architectural elements in Italy, Scotland, Egypt, etc.

However, his works are best represented in the US, as well as India and Bangladesh. Louis I. Kahn is one of the most influential American architects of the 20th century, who still serves as an inspiration, while remaining somewhat of a riddle for architects, researchers and lovers of architecture around the world. His buildings are refined to the utmost degree and strive for perfection. They create powerful images and metaphors of security, light and freedom.

Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park

Looking out of the windows of the United Nations Headquarters building across the East River to Roosevelt Island, one can easily see the park and monument dedicated to the Four Freedoms Speech given on January 6, 1941 by Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945), the 32nd President of the United States. The Four Freedoms became the pillars of the world order established after World War II. The Four Freedoms also guided and inspired the drafters of the UN Charter and the Declaration of the Human Rights. The park and monument are located at the southern end of Roosevelt Island in the East River and was designed by Louis I. Kahn between 1972 and 1974. It was one of his last works.

Louis Kahn had a deep regard for President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This respect was expressed in his mission to create a harmonious environment in Roosevelt's memory, in which politics, culture and nature would coexist in friendship. In the same way, Louis Kahn is honoring every visitor who comes to Roosevelt Island to enjoy the calming synergy of the water, ozone and greenery amid the bustling metropolis. This harmony is a guide for all peoples who have joined together around the globe for peace, stability, development and dignity, and are making an effort to keep the world sustainable. Sustainable for everyone.

The horizontal design of the monument was very innovative at a time when monuments aspired to great heights. According to the landscape architect Harriet Pattison, Kahn's idea was to make a horizontal statement the impact of which would be just as strong as the vertical Washington Monument in the US capital.

The Four Freedoms Park represents the ideal of nonviolence, and encourages physical and spiritual relaxation while experiencing the environment. Unlike the thick walls of a medieval fortress, Kahn designed openings into the thick walls of the monument so that one can look through them and see the water and the rising sun. This instills the universal human values of hope, love and freedom. President Roosevelt spoke about these same ideals in his Four Freedoms speech in 1941. Now a cubical structure helps to keep the text of that speech and the memory of Roosevelt alive.



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The Four Freedoms

In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy

peacetime life for its inhabitants everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world. That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation.

*Franklin D. Roosevelt,
January 6, 1941*



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Legacy of the Four Freedoms

The Four Freedoms — freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from fear, and freedom from want — were adopted by the Allies as their basic aims for the future world, and provides a basis for its social agreement. The United Nations Charter, signed after WW II, adheres to those principles – “reaffirmed faith in fundamental human rights, and dignity and worth of the human person” – and committed all member states to promote “universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion”. The signing

of the Charter was soon followed by drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was adopted on December 10, 1948 as Resolution 217 at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, France. Although not legally binding, the articles of the Declaration and the principles therein, have been elaborated on by subsequent international treaties, economic transfers, regional human rights instruments, national constitutions, and other laws. Day by day, year by year, decade by decade they are increasingly embedded into our everyday life around the world.