

## Design Museum in Ghent exhibits works by revolutionary Japanese designer Shiro Kuramata



Shiro Kuramata, 1986. Ishimaru Co. Ltd. Steel mesh, nickel finish. Courtesy of Kuramata Design Office and Friedman Benda – New York.

**GHENT.**- Nothing is more highly sought after these days than Shiro Kuramata's designs. His transparent designs in acrylic, glass and steel wire are some of the most representative and creative of late 20th-century design. Kuramata is mostly known for 'Miss Blanche', a chair made of transparent Plexiglas filled with plastic roses.

Shiro Kuramata (1934 - 1991) was an influential Japanese designer who experimented in the 1970s and 1980s with the materials acrylic, glass, aluminium and wire steel mesh, with which he designed transparent furniture. He studied architecture until 1953 at Tokyo's Municipal Polytechnic High School, going on to work for furniture producer Teikokukizai for a year. He also studied interior design at the Kuwasawa institute for Design in Tokyo. From 1957 until 1963 he worked as part of the Sain-Ai design studio of the Maysuya department store in Tokyo as a window dresser and graphic artist. 1965 saw the opening of his own workshop in the Japanese capital: the Kuramata Design Office. In 1972 he received the Mainichi Design Award, and he went on to become one of its advisors in 1975. In 1981 he was awarded the Japanese Cultural Design award. He passed away in 1991 at the young age of 56 after a heart attack.

"Design Museum in Ghent exhibits works by revolutionary Japanese designer Shiro Kuramata," *Art Daily*. December 25, 2012.

A recurring theme in the work of Kuramata is the irony of function and form. His furniture mainly seems light and also apparently transparent. Kuramata was always on a quest for innovative materials which had never before been used. He thus found a way of making solid shapes appear fluid. He was able to produce truly surprising effects and his work has a strong poetic, one might even say spiritual tendency.

Companies which produce his designs include: Vitra, Cappellini, XO, Fijiko, Ishimura, Mhoya Glass Shop, Aoshima Shoten, Pastoe and Kurosaki. The timeless creations of this Japanese designer are part of the permanent collections of the world's major museums including the MoMa and the Metropolitan Museum in New York as well as the Museum of Modern Art in Toyama.

"Kuramata gave form to dreams through his keen sensibilities. He believed that living and designing are equivalent to "the pursuit of the most elemental joy". His creations shaped people's daily lives and his philosophy of continually questioning the nature of design now serve as a guideline for the next generation." Foreword Exhibition book, 21\_21 Design Sight.

21-21 Design Sight (2007) is an exhibition building in Tokyo designed by Tadao Ando. 21\_21 Design Sight focuses on design and organizes exhibitions, lectures and workshops on the subject. The building and its sister building – which houses a café – constitute a single architectural unit.

Tadao Ando wrote the following on Kuramata in 2010 at the occasion of the 21\_21 exhibition: "Kuramata passed away suddenly in 1991 at the young age of 56. It was as if he had disappeared like the wind. The designer and his work, which was to create dreams, gave form to new concepts of design during the upheavals of the 20th century."

According to Issey Miyake – an explorer of expressive worlds in the earnest pursuit of beauty and a creator who enjoys the deep friendship and respect of such world-class creators as Javacheff Christo and Irving Penn – the work of Shiro Kuramata "praises eternal beauty". For me, an architect who closely attempts expression in a domain that tends to be heavily constrained by reality and who deals with social realities, Kuramata's work seems like a fantastic world of dreams. His interiors and furniture realize abstract images through his surprising tenacity and the use of unconventional materials and forms. His lifelong work is symbolized by resolute experiments that inject the concept of perfect transparency and weightlessness liberated from functionality into the very real functional objects that are furniture pieces. (editor's note: perhaps a lesser-known fact, but in 1976 Shiro Kuramata designed Issey Miyake's first boutique in Tokyo. The two shared a virtually identical vision and were very public in their praise of one another).

Today, Miss Blanche, named after Tennessee Williams' masterpiece heroine with its plastic roses imbedded in transparent acrylic sits in my room. Gazing at its unrealistic appearance, which seems to have captured a moment in the flow of time, I realized that Kuramata was attempting to bring an imaginary world into the reality of our daily lives. Kuramata's creations are beautiful and ephemeral precisely because they provide a glimpse into the world of fiction and dreams. The appeal of Kuramata's works is on one hand precisely the conceptual nature, while on the other it's an abundant gentleness that deals with vague human feeling. Even while employing cold, inorganic materials, they sublimate into something that possesses the pulse of organic life. And that probably comes from the human gentleness of Kuramata himself. In fact, I have learned many things from the fine human character of Shiro Kuramata. (editor's note: "A streetcar Named Desire". Miss Blanche refers to the main character of Tennessee Williams' play: Blanche Dubois,

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played by Vivien Leigh in the screen adaptation).

The works that Kuramata has bequeathed to us, even if the objects themselves have deteriorated physically, possess at his essence ideas and a spirit that will continue to radiate for eternity. The immortality of this spirit is crucial for our contemporary society that tends to become swallowed up by systems and lose sight of the power of life.

The exhibition is on view at the [Design Museum](#) in Ghent through February 24, 2013.

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