

SHIRO KURAMATA
1934-1991

Born in Tokyo in 1934, Kuramata grew up during World War II and the American Occupation of Japan. In 1953 he graduated from Tokyo polytechnic high school, where he studied woodcraft, and went to work for a furniture company. Soon afterwards he enrolled at the Kuwasawa Design School in Tokyo, an institute that taught more Western concepts of interior design. This included the study of chairs, at a time in Japan when even designers maintained traditional Japanese homes where they sat on the floor on tatami mats.

In 1957 Kuramata was hired by the small department store San-Ai as a designer of showcases as well as floor and window displays. Then, after a brief stint as a freelance designer for the retail giant Matsuy he opened his own office in Tokyo in 1965.

Kuramata's revolutionary approach to the design of furniture and interiors reflects the tremendous dynamism and flowering of creativity in postwar Japan. He combined the Japanese concept of the unity of the arts with fascination with contemporary Western culture, both high and low. He delighted in the mischievous dislocations of Marcel Duchamp's readymades; in the Minimalist sculptures of Dan Flavin and Donald Judd, with their geometrical repetitions and incorporation of light; and in furniture designer Ettore Sottsass's playful spirit and love of bright color.

He was inspired by Ettore Sottsass's playful spirit and love of bright color and joined Sottsass's collective, the design group 'Memphis', based in Milan, at its founding in 1981 and considered the Italian designer to be his "maestro." Kuramata reassessed the relationship between form and function, imposing his own vision of surreal and minimalist ideals on everyday objects.

During the 1970s and 80s, Kuramata, alert to the numerous possibilities of new technologies and industrial materials, turned to acrylic, glass, aluminum, and steel mesh to create objects that appear to break free of gravity into airy realms of transparency and lightness. His furniture and interiors have been influential both in his native country and abroad.

Select Museum and Public Collections

Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
Corning Museum of Glass, New York, NY
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX
Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO
Fonds national d'art contemporain, France
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel
Kunstgewerbemuseum Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Germany
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Musée des Arts Décoratifs de Montréal, Quebec, Canada
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France
Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany
Museum of Fine Art, Boston, MA
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto
The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA
Toyama Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, Toyama City, Japan
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK
Vitra Design Museum, Basel, Switzerland

Select Exhibitions

- 2014 – 2013 *Shiro Kuramata: Revolutionary Japanese Designer*. Design Museum
Gent, Belgium
- 2013-2012 *Shiro Kuramata*. Design Museum Gent, Gent, Belgium
- 2012 – 2010 *The Essence of Things, Traveling exhibition*: Grassi Museum,
Leipzig, Germany; Design Museum, Gent, Belgium; Museum August
Kestner, Hannover, Germany; Vitra Design Museums, Weil am Rhein
- 2011 *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970-1990*. Victoria and Albert
Museum, London, England
Shiro Kuramata and Ettore Sottsass. 21_21 Design Sight, Tokyo, Japan
Modern by Design. High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
- 2010 *Revisited*. The Gallery Mourmans, Knokke-Heist, Belgium
- 2003 *Moins et Plus*. Musée d'art Moderne de Saint-Etienne Métropole, France

- 1999—1996 *Shiro Kuramata 1934-1991, Traveling exhibition:* Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan, June-September
- 1999 Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, France, October-December
Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna, Austria
January-March
National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan, June – August
- 1998 *Grey Art Gallery*, New York University, New York, NY, June-September
Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Montreal, Canada, October-December
- 1997 Centro Cultural, Mexico City, Mexico, April-June
Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, August-December
Designed for Delight. Alternative aspects of twentieth-century decorative arts. Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec, Canada; Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, OH; Montreal Museum of Decorative Arts, Montreal, Quebec, Canada; Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, France
Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, Krakow, Poland; Die Neue Sammlung, Munich, Germany; J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA
- 1995 *Japan Today*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark
- 1994 *Collection: Chairs of the 20th Century*, Museum of Modern Art, Toyama, Japan
Japanese Design—A Survey Since 1950, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
Images du Futur—'94 Japon, Old Port of Montreal, Montreal, Canada
- 1993 *Electronic Surface—Liquid Structure*, O Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- 1991 *Il Dolce Stilnovo della Casa*, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, Italy
Design Connection—Shiro Kuramata Memorial, Porte de Versailles, Paris, France
TAPIS, Galerie Yves Gastou, Paris, France
Sealing of Dreams, Gallery MA, Tokyo, Japan
- 1990 Salone del Mobile, Milan, Italy
Il Palazzo and Six Designers, Gallery MA, Tokyo, Japan
I Spiritelli, Museo Alchimia, Milan, Italy
- 1989 *Memphis & Transavanguardia*, Touko Museum of Contemporary Art, Aoyama, Tokyo; Fukuyama Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan
Uny Group. Bi ! Kujira, Yatai at World Design Exposition '89, Nagoya, Japan
Europalia 1989 Japan, Brussels, Belgium

Shiro Kuramata, Galerie Yves Gastou, Paris, France

- 1988 *Petits Architectures Nomades (Little Nomad Architecture)*, Galerie Yves Gastou, Paris, France
KAGU Tokyo Designer's Week '88, Axis Gallery Annex, Tokyo, Japan
Image Up Project Exhibition for Furniture from Shizuoka. Axis Gallery, Tokyo; Shizuoka Isetan Department Store, Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan
Craft Council, Sydney, Australia
*In*Spiration Lighting Design Exhibition*, Tokyo, Japan; Paris, France; Milan, Italy
- 1987 *The 1987 Vitra International Exhibition*, Musée Rath, Geneva, Switzerland
IDÉE Shiro Kuramata Exhibition, IDÉE Shop, Tokyo, Japan
Milano Furniture Salon Exhibition, Zeus Hall, Milan, Italy
Intellectual Interior, Shibuya PARCO Part 3, Space Part 3, Tokyo, Japan
Exhibition Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Tokyo High School for the Arts, Tokyo High School for the Arts, Tokyo, Japan
Memphis Vol. 8, Milan, Italy
Shiro Kuramata Exhibition, Gallery Gallery, Kyoto, Japan
- 1986 *Kagu—Mobilier*, The Royal Monastery of Fontainebleau, France
Chairs, San Francisco Airport Gallery, San Francisco, CA
1910—1970 Japon des Avant-Gardes, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
Cappellini Presents the Furniture by Shiro Kuramata, Museum of Milan, Milan, Italy
Project K3, Axis Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Tokyo: Form and Spirit, Axis Gallery (1985), Walker Arts Center and other cities in the USA
Shiro Kuramata, Galerie Yves Gastou, Paris, France
- 1985 *Contemporary Landscape: From the Horizon of Postmodern Design*, National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto; National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan
Tokyo: Its Shape and Substance Tokyo in Tokyo, A collaboration with Tadao Ando, Axis Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Time Piece, Axis Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Time Machine, Gallery 911, New York, NY
Prints by Twenty Top International Artists, Laforet Museum Akasaka, Tokyo and Kyoto International Conference Hall, Japan
A Panorama of Contemporary Art in Japan—Design of Daily Life, Museum of Modern Art, Toyama, Japan
Japan Creative Exhibition, Seibu Department Store, Tokyo, Japan
Clock: Five Artists, Tokyo, Japan and New York, NY
Shiro Kuramata Smal, Cassina Japan Showroom, Tokyo, Japan

- 1984 *Japanese Designers— Tradition and the Present*, Central Hall of the Soviet Artists Alliance, Moscow, Russia
Phoenix / New Attitudes in Design, Queen's Quay Terminal, Toronto, Canada
- 1983 *From Spoons to Cities: One Hundred Designers at Work*, Milan, Italy
Memphis Vol. 4, Milan, Italy
Tokyo International Lighting Design Competition 1983, Livina Yamagiwa, Tokyo, Japan
Design Gallery Exhibition No. 302 Terrazzo Shiro Kuramata, Matsuya Ginza Design Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 1982 *Memphis Vol. 3*, Milan, Italy
Casa Italia—Memphis Group Exhibition, Seibu Department Store, Ikebukuro, Tokyo, Japan
- 1981 *Memphis Vol. 2*, Milan, Italy
Small Small Exhibition, Ao Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
M.T.I. 'Furniture by Architects,' Cambridge, England
Three Designers Exhibition, Ina Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Metal Sculpture Exhibition, Mikimoto Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Design Forum '81, Matsuya Ginza, Tokyo, Japan
- 1981 *Lighting Exhibition*, Mikimoto Hall, Tokyo, Japan
System Monopoll, Matsuya Ginza Design Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 1978 *Design and Art of Modern Chairs*, The National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan
MA Espace-Temps du Japon, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France
- 1977 *Isu (chair)*, Tokyo Designers Space, Tokyo, Japan
Small Small Exhibition, Ao Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Art Today '77—Structure of Visuality, Seibu Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan
- 1976 *Wonderland*, Ao Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
One Day One Show, Tokyo Designers Space, Tokyo, Japan
- 1975 *Wall Paper Design by Ten Designers*, Kawakichi, Tokyo, Japan
Negation of Form, Kirony Interior In, Tokyo, Japan
Akari (Light) Exhibition, Ao Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Experiment Work, Matsuya Ginza Design Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

- 1973 *A Glimpse of Kuramata's Work*, Matsuya Ginza Design Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 1972 *The Modern Living Interior Exhibition*, Maison du Meuble, Tokyo, Japan
Tokyo International Lighting Design Competition 1972, Matsuya Ginza, Tokyo, Japan
Acrylic Lamps, Gallery Fujie, Tokyo, Japan
- 1971 The 11th São Paulo International Biennale. São Paulo, Brazil
- 1970 *Seibu New Form Interiro Show IE No. 2*, Seibu Department Store, Tokyo, Japan
Good Design Exhibition '70, Matsuya Ginza, Tokyo, Japan
Shaggy Art Exhibition, Detzi Building, Tokyo, Japan
- 1968 *DESIGN FOR LIVING*, Matsuya Ginza, Tokyo, Japan

Awards

- 1990 Ordre des Arts et des Lettres
- 1981 Japan Cultural Design Award
- 1972 Mainichi Industrial Design Award

Select Literature

Aikawa, Michikio, ed., Shiro Kuramata, exh. cat., Tokyo: Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996. Illustrated pgs. 39-49, 187, 192

Adamson, Glenn. *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990*, London: V&A Publishing, 2011. Illustrated p.152

Gaillemin, Jean Louis Gaillemin. *Design Contre Design*. Paris: Galeries nationales di Grand Palais, 2007. Illustrated pgs. 301, 353

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pp. 53-56 (example illustrated)

Uyeda, Makoto. Shiro Kuramata 1943-1991. Tokyo: Kuramata Design Office for Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, 2000. Illustrated p. 74.

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Shiro Kuramata 1943-1991. Exhibition Catalogue with essay by Andrea Branzi and Ettore Sottsass. Tokyo: Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996.

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Baverey, Michel. Ed. Moins et Plus. Le Design dans la collection du fonds national d'art contemporain. Paris: Centre national des arts plastiques, 2002.

Fiell, Charlotte and Peter. Modern Chairs. Germany: Taschen, 1993.

Armer, Karl Michael, Albrecht Bangert and Ettore Sottsass. 80s Style. New York: Abbeville Press, 1990.

Brunhammer, Yvonne and Marie-Laure Perrin. Le Mobilier Français. 1960-1998. Paris: Éditions Massin, 1998.

Eidelberg, Martin. Designed for Delight. Alternative aspects of twentieth-century decorative arts. Canada: Montreal Museum of Decorative Arts, 1997.

Press

2015

Seidman, Troy. "The Singular Designs of Shiro Kuramata," *Modern Magazine*, Spring 2015.

Lindemann, George. "The Art of Collecting." *Cultured*, February/March, 2015.

2013

Vik, Natashi. "Floating Design: Shiro Kuramata and His Contemporaries." *The Japan Times*, July 3, 2013.

Sudjic, Deyan. "How designer Shiro Kuramata helped change views of Japan." *Financial Times*, June 21, 2013.

Lasky, Julie. "'Shiro Kuramata' by Deyan Sudjic." *New York Times*, June 19, 2013.

"How Shiro Kuramata was inspired by Kubrick's 2001," *Phaidon*, December 2013.

2012

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

2009

Suzuki, Joe. "An Artist's Legacy." *Clear*, Vol. VIII, Issue 2, 2009.

2008

Mason, Brook. "Rising in the East. Shiro Kuramata Leads the Pack." *The Art Newspaper*, December, 2008.

2007

"Légères?" *La Gazette de L'Hotel Drouot*. December, 2007.

1999

Bassi, Alberto. "Shiro Kuramata: Il Design Transparente." *Casabella*, July-August, 1999.

1996

Sottsass, Ettore. "Una Mostra Dedicata a Shiro Kuramata." *Domus*, December, 1996.

"Kiyotomo Sushi Restaurant in Tokyo." *Domus*, No. 779, February, 1996.

1993

Polledri, Paolo. "Shiro Kuramata: A Design Poet Appraised." *I.D.*, March—April, 1993.

1992

Reif, Rita. "Squaring Off with Aesthetic Connections." *International Herald Tribune*, June 6—7, 1992.

Morozzi, Cristina. "Parole fortie e immagini deboli." *Modo*, March 1992.

Barberis, Maurizio. "L'oggetto Tessuto, The Woven Object." *Annual Tessuti*, 1992.

1991

"L'Objet du Mois: Le Siege de Tokyo." *Vogue*, December 1991.

"From 1960 to 1990 Interior Design in Japan: Shiro Kuramata." *Ottagono*, August 1991.

- Boisi, Antonella. "Giappone—Shiro Kuramata." *Interni*, July—August 1991.
- "Designet med faryenes lyde." *Politiken*, July 20, 1991.
- "Hommage à Shiro Kuramata." *Marie Claire Maison*, May 1991.
- Pawson, John. "Shiro Kuramata." *Blue Print*, April 1991.
- "Intermezzo." *Abitare con Arte*, March 1991.
- "I Segni Della Superficie." *Modo*, March 1991.
- Richard, Christine. "Mort d'un maitre." *Le Quotidien de Paris*, February 18, 1990.
- "Mort du designer Shiro Kuramata." *Le Figaro*, February 13, 1990.
- Benaïm, Laurence. "Mort du un designer japonais Shiro Kuramata." *Le Monde*, February 7, 1991.
- "Conversazione fra Shiro Kuramata e Andrea Branzi." *La Nazione*, January 29, 1991.
- "Den Evige Jagt på det Perfecte." *Bo Bedre*, 1991.
- Pearlman, Chee. "Shiro Kuramata 1934—1991." *Architectural Review*, 1991.
- "Shiro Kuramata." *Connaissance des Arts*, 1991.
- Fitoussi, Brigitte. "Hommage à Shiro Kuramata." *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 1991.
- 1990**
- "Shiro Kuramata, Designer Poète Allégresse et Transparence." *Le grand cahier*, July—August 1990.
- "Kuramata, Images du Monde Flottant." *Connaissance des Arts*, February 1990.
- "Shiro Kuramata, Dans un Fauteuil." *Marie-France*, February 1990.
- 1989**
- Benaïm, Laurence. "Plexi trouble." *Le Monde*, November 28, 1989.
- Branzi, Andrea. "Purple Shadows." *Terazzo*, November 3, 1989.
- Dings, Matt. "Ontwerpen Tegen de Stress Kuramata." *De Tijd*, April 7, 1989.

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1988

“Breaking the Bonds.” *Progressive Architecture*, September 1988.

Popham, Peter. “Chairs to the World.” *Sunday Times Magazine*, September 1988.

“Deux cafés Kyoto et Tokko.” *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, February 1988.

Kicherer, Sybille. “Heister eines neuen japanischen design.” *Form*, 1988.

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“Intervista a Shiro Kuramata.” *L’Uomo Vogue*, January 1988.

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Y. Shiratori. “Mon Petit Chou.” *Abitare*, 1988.

“De Wetien van de Leegte.” *De Tijd*, 1988.

1987

“Shiro Kuramata.” *I.D.*, September – October 1987.

“Popham, Peter. “The Toast of Modernism.” *Sunday Times Magazine*, October 16, 1987.

“Japan is on the Go.” *Time*, September 21, 1987.

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1986

Fitoussi, Brigitte. “Les tiroirs secrets de Kuramata.” *Maison Française*, December 1986.

“Le salon du meuble.” *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, December 1986.

“Shiro Kuramata Designer.” *Casa Vogue*, November 1986.

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“Shiro Kuramata s’installe chez Yves Gastou.” *Techniques & Architecture*, 1986.

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1985

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“Shiro Kuramata: I Mobili Trasparenti.” *Domus*, No. 664, September 1985.

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1982

Smetana, Donatella. “Il Colore del Bianco e Nero e il Colore del Suono.” *Casa Vogue*, August 1982.

“Shiro Kuramata.” An interview by Kazuko Sato, *Domus*, April 1984.

1981

“Japan Points to the Future: Shiro Kuramata Interior Angles.” *G.Q.*, August 1981.

1979

Contribution by Shiro Kuramata, *Erco*, April 1979.

1977

“Il Vetro Incollato.” *Domus*, No. 572, July 1977.

1972

“Tokyo: Closed Box.” *Domus*, No. 509, April 1972.

1970

“Shiro Kuramata: Two Stores in Tokyo.” *Domus*, No. 493, December 1970.