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

*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  
- Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, France, October-December
- Österreichisches Museum fur 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; Musee des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, France; Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, Krakow, Poland; Die Neue Sammlung, Munich, Germany; J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KN; 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
- *Images du Futur— '94 Japan,* 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 Sma!, Cassina Japan Showroom, Tokyo, Japan
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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| 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, Ikeukuro, 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 |
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>A Glimpse of Kuramata’s Work</td>
<td>Matsuya Ginza Design Gallery, Tokyo, Japan</td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>The Modern Living Interior Exhibition, Maison du Meuble</td>
<td>Tokyo, Japan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tokyo International Lighting Design Competition 1972</td>
<td>Matsuya Ginza, Tokyo, Japan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Acrylic Lamps, Gallery Fujie</td>
<td>Tokyo, Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>The 11th São Paulo International Biennale</td>
<td>São Paulo, Brazil</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Seibu New Form Interiro Show IE No. 2</td>
<td>Seibu Department Store, Tokyo, Japan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Good Design Exhibition ’70</td>
<td>Matsuya Ginza, Tokyo, Japan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shaggy Art Exhibition</td>
<td>Detzi Building, Tokyo, Japan</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>DESIGN FOR LIVING</td>
<td>Matsuya Ginza, Tokyo, Japan</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Awards**

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

**Select Literature**


Von Vegesack, Alexander, Peter Dunas, Mathias Schwartz-Clauss, (eds). 100 Masterpieces from the Vitra Design Museum, Germany: Vitra Design Museum, 1996, pgs. 204-205, cat. no. 87.


Press

2015


2013


“How Shiro Kuramata was inspired by Kubrick’s 2001,” *Phaidon*, December 2013.

2012

2009

2008

2007

1999

1996


1993

1992


1991


1990


1989


1988


1987


1986


1985


1982


1981

1979

1977

1972

1970