

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Jiro Takamatsu: Space in Two Dimensions

17 September–30 October 2021

Private View

Thursday 16 September, 6–8pm
Gallery 2



Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to present a third solo exhibition by pioneering Japanese artist Jiro Takamatsu opening on 17 September 2021. This presentation examines a rare group of paintings, drawings and sculpture from the late 1970s and early 1980s, a fertile period of Takamatsu's practice during which he developed his formal methodologies in the two-dimensional realm. These never previously seen works from the Estate of Takamatsu are on view during Frieze London.

Using the core principles devised in his earlier 'Compound' series to develop his formal methodologies in the two-dimensional realm, Takamatsu embarked on the 'Space in Two Dimensions' series in the late 1970s. Characterised by geometric patterns of interlocking lines and shapes or schematic drawings, the artist allowed the flat picture plane to dictate the form. Takamatsu described his process and motivation behind the series as follows: "I made these works with only a compass and a ruler. The lines I drew from the edge of the canvas and the curves I made with the compass at the point of contact made it seem as if the canvas was depicting the canvas." These artworks were not intended to represent a space, but rather create one, as the artist sought to manifest a world beyond our everyday reality.

One of the highlights of the exhibition is 'Space in Two Dimensions No.1057' from 1982, in which the artist challenges the existing orthodoxy of works devoid of representation. Takamatsu portrays geometric shapes and lines in contrasting colours of fuchsia pink and blue on the canvas. By eliminating one solid plane, the artist reintroduces another, conveying an object's ability to transition from two to three dimensions.

Also on view are pencil and gouache on watercolour paper drawings from the 'Space in Two Dimensions' series in which Takamatsu boldly uses complementary colours or minimal black on white to construct striking compositions. These works are distinguished by opaque paint deftly applied over sections of the paper to produce dense areas of flat colour. The artist's pencil marks are meticulously drawn and play on notions of perspective. It is tempting to see these paintings and drawings through the lens of western abstraction and minimalism, as they recall work by Mondrian and Albers. However, Takamatsu's works come out of a unique intrinsic Japanese vision and despite the apparent order of form and colour, they are born out of the artist's highly intellectual process.

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Gallery Hours

Tuesday–Saturday, 11am–5pm

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Another highlight is 'The Poles and Space No.964' from 1980, an early and important large-scale work from a series that Takamatsu began in 1979 and continued until 1998. In this geometric configuration, the rectangular parallel wooden planes and lines open up to cut into the space they inhabit, making multiple connections that challenge our idea of a singular point of perspective. The process of dissecting and dividing a three-dimensional object to the point that it infiltrates the surrounding space has a direct link to the earlier 'Compound' series and bears a close connection to the core principles of minimal art. This is crucial to understanding the working methods of an artist, who believed that 'process must always be advanced'.

Takamatsu's engaged consistently with ideas on substance, reality, language and space throughout his career. Dedicating his life's work to the progress of artistic innovation, Jiro Takamatsu became one of the most internationally acclaimed artists of the period, developing a new aesthetic that paved the way for many younger generations.

Jiro Takamatsu was born in 1936, Tokyo, Japan, and died in 1998. After finishing studies in oil painting at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music in 1958, Takamatsu worked in a range of media, including sculpture, photography, painting, drawing, and performance. His practice combined aspects of Dada and Surrealism with an idiosyncratic use of minimalism's refined visual language. Like Japan's Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai (Gutai Art Association, 1954-72), Takamatsu created public interventions or activities outside the confines of exhibition spaces. With artists Genpei Akasegawa and Natsuyuki Nakanishi, Takamatsu formed the collective Hi Red Center (1963-64), carrying out actions in Tokyo to call attention to issues faced in the post-war urban context. Takamatsu is also widely associated with Mono-Ha (School of Things, 1967-79), seeking to 'reveal the world as it is' through gesture, action, process and experimentation, rather than formal studio-based methods or finished artworks.

Having represented Japan at the Venice Biennale (1968), exhibited at the Paris Biennial (1969), the São Paulo Biennial (1973) and Documenta 6, Kassel (1977), Takamatsu was the subject of major retrospectives at The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (2014) and The National Museum of Modern Art, Osaka (2015). These two exhibitions were curated from different perspectives and offered a comprehensive overview of the artist's oeuvre. He was the subject of the major solo exhibition 'Jiro Takamatsu: The Temperature of Sculpture' at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, in 2017. Takamatsu's work also featured prominently in the exhibition 'Jiro Takamatsu, Hi Red Center, Hirata Minoru, Kim Ku Lim' at David Roberts Art Foundation, London, in 2018. The artist's work was presented in a two-person exhibition, 'Inside/Out: Jiro Takamatsu & Keiji Uematsu in Conversation' at the Royal Society of Sculptors, London in 2019.