

STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

Jiro Takamatsu

13 October – 14 November 2015

Private view Monday 12 October 6-8pm



‘There is nothing ‘neat’ about what I am doing, like scientists who make studies out of a moon rock. I am not just talking about how high their level of studies is; the difference lies in the way they direct their consciousness. Scientists seem to think about the relationships that exist between objects, but in my case, I think about the relationships between objects and myself.’ **Jiro Takamatsu**

Opening during Frieze week in London, Stephen Friedman Gallery is proud to present an exhibition of work by Japanese artist Jiro Takamatsu, who died in 1998 at the age of 62. Never before seen outside of Japan, these important works date from the 1970s and 1980s and include drawings, paintings and sculpture. The exhibition showcases a period in the artist’s career that developed subsequent to his earlier important ‘Shadow’ and ‘Oneness’ series. This presentation of his work, the second at the gallery, seeks to draw attention to this critical yet underexposed period of intense experimentation with space, line, form and colour by one of the most important post-war Japanese artists. Complementing the main exhibition is a display of design objects by Shiro Kuramata who collaborated with Takamatsu in the 1960s and 1970s. Kuramata’s work will be displayed with one of the artist’s important ‘Shadow’ paintings.

Born in 1936 in Tokyo, Takamatsu formed part of an active circle of artists in post-war Japan aiming to rediscover both the form and the meaning of art in a rapidly changing landscape of industry and reconstruction. His earliest activities in the 1960s with the Hi Red Center are now renowned. With Genpei Akasagawa and Natsuyuki Nakanishi, the trio performed Fluxus style happenings across Tokyo which were challenging in both their politics and playfulness. One example ‘Street Cleaning Event’ saw the group and volunteers scrubbing the pavements of the city with toothbrushes, the same year of the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. Working independently from the Hi Red Center group, Takamatsu went on to represent Japan at the 1968 Venice Biennale and to exhibit at the 1969 Biennale de Paris and at Documenta 6 in Kassel, West Germany, in 1977. Takamatsu’s work is now included in major public collections including the Tate, the Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, New York and every important museum in Japan.

Throughout his career the artist sought to explore the boundaries of reality, our ties to the physical world and the relationships of objects to space. As his fellow artist Nakanishi observed, Takamatsu uncovered and probed the gap between ‘reality and non-reality’. Central to his efforts over the 1970s and 1980s was an investigation into the artifice of the pictorial space.

For over four decades of his career the artist studiously created works on paper in pencil, gouache and pastel, always conceived and catalogued as distinct series. Takamatsu’s drawings were not preparatory, nor subordinate to his paintings and three-dimensional works. Released by the Estate for this exhibition, the works on paper presented here cover the period from 1973 to 1983 and include the artist’s book designs in gouache and pencil, his colourful ‘Prism’ and ‘Spectrum’ works, ‘Compound’ drawings, through to ‘Frame’ and ‘Space in Two Dimensions’. Compelling in their simplicity, each work exemplifies a route of enquiry into colour, line, space and form. While distinct in their series, a common thread is the breaking down of imagery: waves, particles and planar elements collide and interact.

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The 'Compound' series began in the early 1970s and is here represented by a body of gouaches together with three sculptures included in Takamatsu's 1976 exhibition at Tokyo Gallery. In a development from his earlier 'Oneness', which questioned the singular totality of individual objects, the 'Compound' works highlighted the connection between items. In the sculptures, we uncover hints of Vladimir Tatlin colliding with Anthony Caro as single lines of iron are welded together in gravity defying planes. The works on paper from this series, like their three-dimensional counterparts, comprise curves and straight lines dissecting the space. By reconfiguring vertical, diagonal and horizontal lines, Takamatsu sought to expose new spatial relationships that were representative of physical laws. 'I made these works with only a compass and 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.'

Acting as a counterpart to the main exhibition, in Gallery Two the painting 'Three Shadows of a Man' by Takamatsu is juxtaposed with design objects by Shiro Kuramata. Nearly exact contemporaries, the pair collaborated on the 1967 Cazador Supper Club in Tokyo. The works for this project are now lost. All that remains are photographs of the club that showcased Kuramata's space age design paired with Takamatsu's 'Shadow' painting murals. As John Pawson writes in the exhibition catalogue, 'Kuramata made conventional distinctions between architecture, art and design seem somehow crude and irrelevant.' Takamatsu too, collapsed the boundaries between art and life, exploding preconceptions of both the form of art and the role of the artist. Refusing easy categorisation, his work continues to challenge and intrigue us to this day. The Jiro Takamatsu Estate is represented by Yumiko Chiba Associates, Stephen Friedman Gallery and Fergus McCaffrey.

The exhibition is accompanied by a significant catalogue on the aforementioned bodies of work together with essays exploring his wider career as well as his synergy with Kuramata. This is one of the most ambitious displays of his work to have taken place outside of his native Japan.

The exhibition at Stephen Friedman Gallery follows major recent retrospectives at the National Museum of Art, Osaka and the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo in 2014 and 2015 respectively. Takamatsu has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions including 'Jiro Takamatsu - Universe of His Thoughts', Fuchu Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan; touring to Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, Fukuoka, Japan (2004); 'Re-verification: Paintings of Jiro Takamatsu from his studio', Mitaka City Gallery of Art, Tokyo, Japan (2003); 'Jiro Takamatsu-1970s Three-dimensional Works and Others', Chiba City Museum of Art, Chiba, Japan (2000); and 'Jiro Takamatsu Identification', Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan (1996).

Selected group exhibitions include: 'The 70s in Japan', 1968-1982 The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama, Japan (2013); 'Mono-ha Avantguard', Nakanoshima Design Museum, Osaka, Japan (2012); 'Depicting the Uncanny: Tricks and Humor', The Yokosuka Museum of Art, Kanagawa Japan (2011); 'Shadows: Works from the National Museums of Art', The National Art Centre, Tokyo, Japan (2010); and 'Japanese Art after 1945: Scream Against the Sky', Yokohama Museum of Art, Kanagawa, Japan; touring to Guggenheim Museum SoHo, New York, USA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in association with the Center for the Arts at Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco, USA (1994-5).

Gallery hours are: Tuesday to Friday, 10am - 6pm and Saturday, 11am - 5pm

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