Timeline of Shiro KURAMATA

The Work of Shiro Kuramata:

A Microcosmos of Memory

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KURAMATA

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Born 29 Nov 1934 in Hongo, Tokyo City (now Honkomagome, Bunkyo Ward) to father Yoshiji Kuramata and mother Sei, the youngest of three brothers and three sisters. The Western-style architecture of RIKEN (Institute of Physical and Chemical Research) where Kuramata is born and raised becomes his earliest source of inspiration.

1941, age 7 Enters Showa City Elementary School in Tokyo. In this period he frequently plays in the master carpenter's workshop at RIKEN, where he sees architectural blueprints and first aspires to become an architect.

1942, age 8 For his birthday, his father gives him a set of children's carpentry tools, and his elder brother gives him a triangular rule and compass.

1943, age 9 Evacuated, by himself, to the Kousaka family, relatives in Ashitakamura (present-day Numazu City), Shizuoka Prefecture.

"From a flush lavatory to a vault toilet, toilet paper to newspaper, leather shoes to straw sandals, this was a change to harsh living conditions. After two months I was fluent in the Shizuoka dialect, played in the mud and helped out with farm work." ('The Kousaka family,' *Migenzo no Fukei* (Scenes from Undeveloped Images), 1991).

1945, age 11 Moves to Kuroganecho, Yokohama, and transfers to Kurogane Elementary School. Lives with his mother, two older sisters and a niece, but both the family house in Tokyo and his house in Kuroganecho are damaged in air raids. Kuramata is in Kuroganecho when Japan concedes defeat and the war ends.

"I was relieved that we would now be free from the nightly air raid sirens. More than anything, I was simply happy that I would get a good night's sleep from that night onwards" ('Defeat,' *Migenzo no Fukei* (Scenes from Undeveloped Images), 1991).

1947, age 13 Graduates from Kurogane Elementary School and returns to Tokyo with his family to enter a newly established junior high school, living in a rented house in Komagome Hayashicho (now Sendagi, Bunkyo Ward). Enters Bunkyo Ward Ninth Junior High School.

1950, age 16 Begins the woodwork course at Tokyo Metropolitan Kogei High School. Joins the school baseball club.

"I think it's because I still have memories of the war, but I really hate having to conform to a particular dress code. I used to go to high school in a turtleneck sweater, and didn't wear the school uniform." (Takashi Hasegawa, 'The Sorrow of the Showcase - or the Silent Property of KURAMATA,' *Shoten Kenchiku*, Vol. 18, No. 6, June 1973)

1953, age 19 Graduates from Tokyo Metropolitan Kogei High School. Takes the entrance examination for Tokyo College of Photography (today's Tokyo Polytechnic University) but is not accepted. The following year joins the design department of Teikoku Kizai Furniture Factory and about a year later gets a job with a furniture trading company.

1955, age 21 Enters the Living Design Department of the Kuwasawa Design School, established the previous year. Staff include the designers Riki Watanabe and Isamu Kenmochi. As part of his course, Kuramata visits the first Gutai Exhibition held at Ohara Kaikan, Tokyo, and is deeply impressed. He also sees the second exhibition the following year.

1956, age 22 Kuramata graduates from the Living Design Department of Kuwasawa Design School. He is shocked when he comes across the Italian architecture and design magazine *Domus*, and decides to create a design that could be published there.

1957, age 23 Learning that San-ai Co. Ltd. is to construct a building on the corner of Ginza 4-chome intersection in Tokyo, Kuramata asks to work on the interior and joins San-ai's publicity department.

"When you are in the publicity department, you do a lot of different jobs. Graphics, display, typography, photography, sales floor organisation, advertising techniques, etc. ..... I tend to be unrefined, not a people pleaser. But I learnt a lot." ('Newcomer — Shiro Kuramata,' *Shitsunai* [Interiors], No. 109, Jan 1964)

1963, age 29 Construction of the San-ai Dream Center, designed by architect Shoji Hayashi, is completed. Kuramata is in charge of the interior. He meets Takao Ishimaru, who later founds Ishimaru Co. Ltd. and is involved in the construction of Kuramata's interiors and acrylic works.

1964, age 30 Kuramata leaves San-ai and works on commission for the design division of Matsuya department store. Around this time he meets Tomohiko Mihoya of Mihoya Glass Co. Ltd. who undertake much of his glass work, and Kenji Aoshima of Aoshima Shoten Co. Ltd. who work with him on the production of wooden furniture.

1965, age 31 Kuramata turns independent and establishes Kuramata Design Office, located in Shiba Nishikubo Sakuragawa-cho, Minato Ward (now Toranomon 1-chome, Minato Ward).

1967, age 33 Launches his 'Furniture with Drawers' series. The series is published in the Danish interior design magazine *Mobilia*, and is introduced overseas for the first time.

Club Cazador opens, with Jiro Takamatsu's 'Shadow' mural paintings. Kuramata meets Shintaro Tanaka, with whom he forms a lifelong friendship. Moves Kuramata Design Office to Akasaka, Minato Ward.

1968, age 34 In December, photographs of the Van and Edward's joint exhibition and of *Plastic Wardrobe* and *Plastic Drinks Trolley* are published in *Domus* No. 469.

1969, age 35 Joins the group 'Silencer' which includes younger graphic designers such as Masuteru Aoba, Katsumi Asaba and Keisuke Nagatomo. With 15 members in total, Silencer is the only professional group Kuramata joined in Japan.

Kuramata designs the headquarters building of the fashion company Edward's in Minami Aoyama, Tokyo, his first architectural design work.

The club Judd and the showroom in Edward's headquarters building lead to discussion about the connection between Kuramata's work and American minimalist art of the period.

"I became more interested in the art of Dan Flavin, Larry Bell, Christo and Judd than in the Bauhaus-oriented design movement, and my links with people like Shintaro Tanaka and Tomio Miki probably had an influence too." (Interview with Shiro Kuramata, *SD*, No. 260, May 1986)

Kuramata goes to Italy and visits *Domus* magazine. Meets with Cesare Casati and Lisa Ponti and entrusts them with some photographs of his work. The following year images of *Luminous Chair*, *Luminous Table* and the club Judd appear in *Domus* issue 487.

1970, age 36 In charge of interior design of the Mitsui Group Pavilion at the Japan World Exposition, with Katsuhiro Yamaguchi as chief producer.

Works on the interior design of the Edward's shop Market One. Shortly before opening, the FRP (fiber reinforced plastic) facade is removed due to complaints from neighbouring shops.

"... For some reason the façade was removed, and I was later told by the contractor that it was burnt on Yumenoshima Island. I was extremely shocked to think of it emitting black smoke and felt a deep sense of remorse that I had not given enough thought to its final disposal. ('Harajuku Vogue,' *Shoten Kenchiku*, Vol. 15, No. 12, December 1970)

1971, age 37 The Ginza Carioca Building, for which Kuramata is in charge of architectural planning and shop design, is completed.

Kuramata Design Office is relocated to Roppongi, Minato Ward, Tokyo.

1972, age 38 Kuramata holds a solo exhibition at Gallery Fujie (Shibuya, Tokyo). Unveils *Lamp (Oba-Q)*.

Awarded the 18th Mainichi Industrial Design Award. His furniture series and displays in retail buildings are highly acclaimed.

1973, age 39 Exhibition 'Shiro Kuramata's Creative Work' held at Matsuya Design Gallery (Ginza, Tokyo). Exhibits 'Furniture with Drawers' and other work.

1974, age 40 *Sandwich Silencer*, a series of articles by 16 members of Silencer Group, is published in *Shin Fujin* magazine, Oritsu Shuppansha.

Novelist Akiyuki Nosaka runs as an independent in the 10th House of Councilors election; Kuramata and Seitaro Kuroda help with the campaign. Kuramata does not know Nosaka personally but has read and sympathized with his writing.

1975, age 41 A dialogue between Kuramata and Koji Taki is published as *Kisa Decor Seminar Series 1: Koji Taki Dialogue Collection, Conversations with Four Designers* (Shinkenchiku-sha).

"Some things we labelled 'irony,' others 'paradox,' 'semantics' or various categories like that, and I initially got caught up in those words. It took me several years, not so much to escape from him [Koji Taki] but to escape the verbalized self. ('Interview with Shiro Kuramata,' *SD*, No. 260, May 1986).

The exhibition 'Shiro Kuramata: Prototypes for Contemplation' is held at Matsuya Design Gallery (Ginza, Tokyo). *Homage to Mondrian No. 1*, *Chair No. 1*, *Drawers No. 2* (checked furniture) and other works are displayed.

1976, age 42 *Glass Chair* exhibited at the Green Collections Gallery (Minami Aoyama, Tokyo).

Kuramata's first book, *Shiro Kuramata's Work* (Kuramata Shiro no Shigoto) is published by Kashima Shuppansha. Includes important furniture and interior design work dating from 1967 to 1974.

Designs the Issey Miyake shop, opened in From 1st (Minami Aoyama, Tokyo). From this point through the rest of his career undertakes numerous shop designs for Issey Miyake in Japan and overseas.

1977, age 43 Joins four other contemporary artists in the exhibition 'Art Today '77: Structure of Seeing' curated by art critic Yoshiaki Tono (Seibu Museum of Art, Ikebukuro, Tokyo). In addition to furniture, Kuramata also exhibits a non-functional three-dimensional piece *Operation table for past memories*.

1978, age 44 Designs the sushi restaurant Ume no Ki (Akasaka, Tokyo).

1981, age 47 The Axis Building, a commercial center, opens in Roppongi, Tokyo. Kuramata designs two shops in the building as well as the staircase in the inner courtyard.

Kuramata joins the design movement 'Memphis' on the invitation of Italian designer Ettore Sottsass.

He shows *Ritz* and *Imperial* at the first Memphis exhibition.

"I think I was, in a sense, partially liberated from design when I joined Memphis. I feel that there is always a kind of self-control, or self-regulation, not vis-a-vis others, but questioning whether it's OK to do things. I don't know if this is due to my education or the nature of this country, but I would like to be freer from it." ('A journey into design that began with furniture,' *Kenchiku Chishiki*, No. 329, October 1985).

Solo exhibition at Aram Design, London. Exhibits include *Furniture with Drawers*, *Furniture in Irregular Forms Side 1* and *Lamp (Oba-Q)*. This provides another opportunity, along with participation in Memphis, for Kuramata to gain recognition in Europe.

1982, age 48 Ettore Sottsass visits Japan and works with Kuramata.

"When Sottsass came to Japan he told me that I was like a Zen monk, probably meaning that I was stoic and conceptual so should ease up a bit; he said I should try making something that captures the beauty of the moment when you drop something and it cracks ('Interview with Shiro Kuramata,' *SD*, No. 260, May 1986).

1983, age 49 Designs the Issey Miyake shop on the ground floor of Matsuya (Ginza, Tokyo), using terrazzo embedded with fragments of colored glass for the entire surface of the walls, floor, pillars and tables. Terrazzo containing colored glass, named 'Star Piece,' becomes a signature feature of Kuramata's design work.

"My friends have expressed various opinions about it. The artisans named it 'Star Piece.' For me, these are all 'fragments of memory.'" ('Hell and Paradise,' *Shoten Kenchiku*, Vol. 28, No. 7, May 1983).

Travels to northern Italy, southern France, and Paris. Participates in the 'Memphis Furniture Collection' during the Milan Furniture Fair, and presents *Kyoto* and *Nara*.

1985, age 51 Holds 'Koten' (Little Solo Show) showing new work at the Cassina Japan showroom in the Axis Building (Roppongi, Tokyo). Exhibits *Sing Sing Sing* and other works. 'Sing Sing Sing' is the name of a jazz number, and from this point onwards Kuramata stops titling his works with practical descriptions, instead choosing names that are not linked to a specific image.

Exhibits *Kyoto*, *Glass Table* (Twilight Time) and other works at the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, in the exhibition 'Contemporary Landscape: From the Horizon of Postmodern Design.' The exhibition travels to the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Exhibits *Sing Sing Sing* and *Chair* (Ko-Ko) in the exhibition 'A panorama of contemporary art in Japan-design of daily life' at the Museum of Modern Art, Toyama (now the Toyama Prefectural Museum of Art and Design).

1986, age 52 Directs refurbishment of the ground floor lobby of Bridgestone's former head office building (Kyobashi, Tokyo). In addition to furniture he designed himself, Kuramata installs a sculpture by Shintaro Tanaka.

Exhibits the expand metal sofa *How High the Moon* in the display window of Issey Miyake's shop Shibuya Parco Part 1.

First solo exhibition in Paris at Galerie Yves Gastou. Exhibits *How High the Moon* and other works.

1988, age 54 Designs Comblé Bar (Gofukucho, Shizuoka). The bar is still working to this day, and retains Kuramata's original design.

Shiro Kuramata 1967–1987 is published by PARCO Publishing as a newly revised edition of *Shiro Kuramata, Collected Work*, with the addition of photographs of Kuramata's major work and drawings post 1982, and new text by Ettore Sottsass.

KAGU Tokyo Designers' Week '88 opens, and *Miss Blanche* is exhibited at Axis Gallery Annex 1.

"I myself don't even know why roses... But what I can now say is that the roses must be red and must be artificial, not fresh flowers." ('The floating red rose,' *Brutus*, No. 205, June 1989)

Sushi restaurant Kiyotomo (Shinbashi, Tokyo) designed by Kuramata, opens.

1989, age 55 Solo exhibition at Galerie Yves Gastou, Paris. Exhibits *Miss Blanche* and many other pieces of furniture employing acrylic. Gives a lecture at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs. In recognition of this exhibition, Kuramata is awarded the French Ministry of Culture 'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres' the following year.

The hotel Il Palazzo (Haruyoshi, Hakata, Fukuoka) designed by Italian architect Aldo Rossi, opens. Art direction is by Shigeru Uchida; Kuramata designs the interior of Oblomov, one of four bars.

1990, age 56 Kuramata undertakes the complete refurbishment of the Spiral shop in the basement of the Axis Building (Roppongi, Tokyo). Designs and installs *Acrylic Stool (with feathers)* and *Acrylic Stool*.

1991 Kuramata's four meter-long bed *Laputa* is installed at designer Andrea Branzi's project 'Il Dolce Stil Novo (della Casa)' in Strozzi Palace, Florence, Italy. Kuramata does not see the exhibition.

1 Feb, Kuramata dies of heart failure caused by myocarditis at Toho University Omori Medical Center in Ota Ward, Tokyo, at the age of 56.

A collection of essays he was working on before his death, entitled *Migenzo no Fukei* (Scenes from Undeveloped Images), is published by Sumai no Toshokan Shuppankyoku.

After Kuramata's sudden death a member of his design office, Hisae Igarashi, continues working on the Laputa restaurant on the 26th floor of Tokyo MI Building (Tennozu, Tokyo). The restaurant is completed.

On the ground floor of the same building the *kappo* restaurant Tachibana, for which the basic design and 70% of the model were ready before Kuramata's death, is completed with the cooperation of his eldest son, Ichiro Kuramata.

The exhibition 'Sealing of Dreams' is held at Gallery Ma (Nogizaka, Tokyo) in memory of Kuramata. The gallery also organizes for a collection of Kuramata's drawings, *STAR PIECE: Sketch of Image by Shiro Kuramata*, to be published by TOTO Publishing.

1993 Kuramata Design Office moves to Sakura, Setagaya Ward.

1996 The exhibition 'Shiro Kuramata 1934–1991' is held at Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, and tours to Mexico City, San Francisco, New York, Montreal, Paris and Vienna before finishing at the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, in 1999.

2011 Issey Miyake organizes the exhibition ‘Shiro Kuramata and Ettore Sottsass’ at 21_21 DESIGN SIGHT, Tokyo.

2013 Exhibition ‘Floating Design — Shiro Kuramata and his Contemporaries’ is held at the Museum of Modern Art, Saitama. The exhibition focuses on Shiro Kuramata’s work, artists and designers of the same era, and designers from Kuramata Design Office who turned independent.

The British publisher Phaidon brings out *Shiro Kuramata* by Deyan Sudjic, the first ever monograph of Kuramata’s work. It consists of two volumes, one a critical biography and the other a complete catalogue of works.

2021 The Hong Kong art museum, M+, opens. It houses the interior of the sushi restaurant Kiyotomo, which had closed in 2004 and been relocated to Hong Kong from Shinbashi, along with a large number of Kuramata’s works.

2022 A large batch of materials including work stored at Kuramata Design Office, plans of interiors and furniture, magazine cuttings, photographs and video materials are acquired by the Artizon Museum Ishibashi Foundation.

2023 The exhibition ‘The Work of Shiro KURAMATA: A Microcosmos of Memory’ is held at Setagaya Art Museum (18 Nov 2023 – 28 Jan 2024), Toyama Prefectural Museum of Art and Design (17 Feb – 7 Apr 2024) and the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto (11 Jun – 18 Aug 2024).