

Shizuko Yoshikawa

Possible Progressions

5 April – 18 May 2024

Private View:

4 April 2024 | 6:00–8:00 pm

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Marlborough London is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in the United Kingdom dedicated to Shizuko Yoshikawa (1934, Ōmuta, Japan – 2019, Zurich, Switzerland), featuring relief sculptures, paintings, drawings and conceptual colour studies that span four decades of the artist's career.

Having emigrated from her native Japan to Switzerland in her late 20s, Yoshikawa was one of the few women to gain centre recognition in the Constructivist and Concrete Art movements in the 20th century.

While co-organizing the 1960 World Design Conference (WoDeCo) in Tokyo, the young Yoshikawa met leading protagonists of the "International Style" and progressive design movement. Among them was Tomás Maldonado, then rector at the prestigious Ulm School of Design which had been founded in 1953 to continue the legacy of the Bauhaus. Yoshikawa left Japan in 1961 to become the only female Japanese student at the Ulm School where she studied at the visual communication department. In 1962, she moved to Zurich, working in the studio of her future husband, renowned Swiss graphic designer Josef Müller-Brockmann.

Alongside her career as an award-winning poster designer and graphic artist, Yoshikawa also gradually developed her fine art practice. She became acquainted with the Zurich Concretist group which had formed in the 1930s, centrally by Max Bill, Camille Graeser, Richard Paul Lohse, and Verena Loewensberg, who was to become a role model for the young Japanese artist.



Shizuko Yoshikawa in front of the Tsuda library,
(Architect: Kenzō Tange), Tokyo, 1956

Shizuko's first artistic commission was a large-scale outdoor relief, *vier mögliche progressionen* (*four possible progressions*, 1972) for the façade of a Brutalist municipal building in Zurich. The tectonic stepped structure which factored in the play of light and shadow became a blueprint for the artist's signature reliefs and sculptures of the 1970s – 80s.



farbschatten (colour shadows) 87 / 3 x 4, 1979 – 1980,
lacquer and acrylic on polyester

Yoshikawa began to develop her signature restrained abstract style combining mathematical precision with multi-dimensional optical effects that ranged from powerful palettes of primary purple, blue, orange and green, to ultra-subtle scales of pastels.

In the early 1970s, she created her first abstract reliefs in acrylic on wood, a prominent example of which is the triptych *3 sequenzen (3 sequences, 1974)* with its optically animated colour graduations combined with dynamic centrifugal relief permutations.

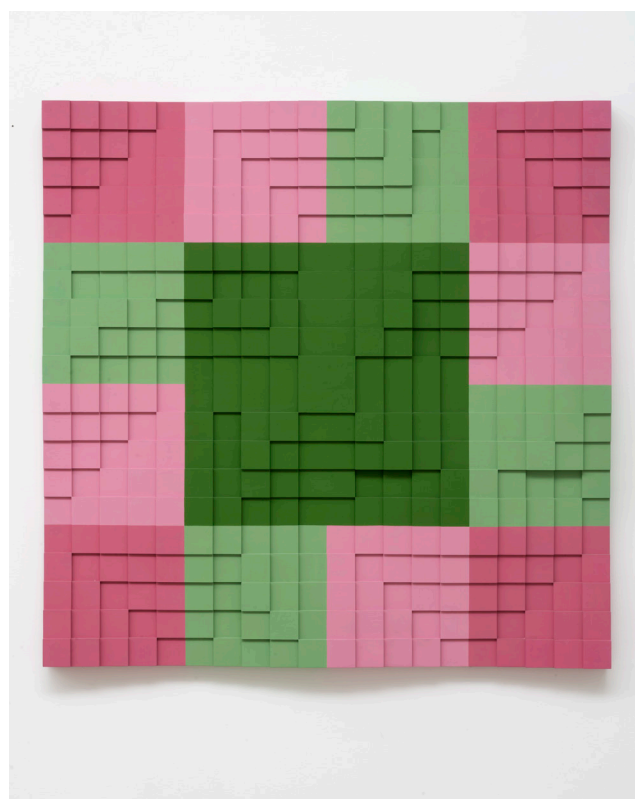
A key body of work is the ultra-minimalist *farbschatten reliefs (colour shadow reliefs)*. Between 1976 and 1984 she crafted different variations of these works in white polyester and epoxy resin, applying delicate hues of pastel colour solely to the edges of their stepped permutations to create subtle visual effects which the viewer can only fully perceive when passing along the work.

From the early 1980s, Yoshikawa developed several series of abstract paintings using modular units, multi-sectional, and deconstructed grids such as *weisse mitte (white centre)* in which a geometric composition is built around a white square in the centre, forming a negative space that transforms the grid pattern into a dynamic, evenly spaced matrix.

While committed to the strict rationalist principles of Modern geometric abstraction, Yoshikawa embraced undogmatic forms of experimentation throughout her practice. In later years, her compositions became increasingly dynamic and playful, diverging from the genre's signature rationalism. She created abstract compositions with a certain Pop-appeal, such as *drehen z. ZWEIT (turning w. TWO, 2016)*.

Yoshikawa's work has been the subject of international institutional exhibitions including at The Contemporary Sculpture Center, Tokyo (1996), Kunsthaus Zurich (1980), *Science and Art - Color Pavilion* at the XLII Venice Biennial (1986), and a recent retrospective exhibition at MAMCO Geneva (2023-24).

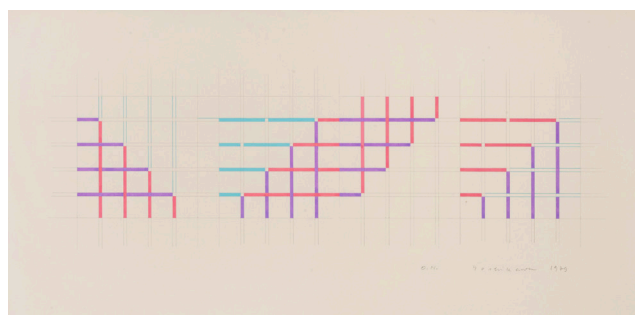
Her work is included in institutional collections, including Musée d'art moderne et contemporain



Zentrum Grün (Green Center), 1976, acrylic on wood

(MAMCO), Geneva; Kunstmuseum Bern; Kunstmuseum Luzern; Kunsthaus Zürich; Haus Konstruktiv Zürich; Zürcher Kantonalbank; Landeszentralbank Düsseldorf-Neuss; Museum für Konkrete Kunst Ingolstadt; Wilhelm-Hack Museum, Ludwigshafen; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart; Museum Ritter, Waldenbuch; The National Museum of Modern Art, Osaka; The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Possible Progressions is curated by Anke Kempkes in collaboration with Gabrielle Schaad. Our special thanks go to the Shizuko Yoshikawa and Josef Müller-Brockmann foundation Zurich.



O.N., 1979, pencil and gouache on paper

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