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Kazuko Miyamoto: To perform a line

Japan Society Presents First Institutional Survey of Kazuko Miyamoto with Exhibition of Rare Works by the Artist

April 29 – July 10, 2022



Kazuko Miyamoto with an assistant creating string constructions in her studio at 181 Chrystie Street, 1970s.
Courtesy of the artist and Zürcher Gallery, New York/Paris

April 7, 2022 (New York, NY)—*Kazuko Miyamoto: To perform a line* is the first institutional exhibition to survey the significant artist Kazuko Miyamoto (b. 1942). The exhibition brings together key bodies of the artist's work, beginning with her contributions to (and subversion of) the Minimalism movement through early paintings and drawings from the late 1960s and moving to her increasingly spatial string constructions of the 1970s, culminating with her kimono series

from 1987 through the 2000s. A number of the works that will be on view have never been shown together nor been exhibited since they were first created, offering a crucial opportunity for the public to encounter Miyamoto's rich oeuvre for the first time and providing an overdue re-examination of this singular artist.

Born in Tokyo, Miyamoto has lived and worked in the Lower East Side of Manhattan since 1964, when she was in her early twenties. In 1968 she met Sol LeWitt — who was her neighbor on Hester Street — and began overseeing the production of his open cube sculptures and executing his early wall drawings, including those that were exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum in 1971. In parallel to her contributions to LeWitt, Miyamoto began exploring the vocabulary of Minimalism while finding ways to make it her own. Some of the earliest pieces included in the exhibition are works on canvas and paper from the late 1960s and early 1970s, made with materials such as spray paint that introduced an element of organic imprecision into the work.

Throughout Miyamoto's career, the presence of the artist's hand has remained a constant aesthetic sensibility as has the use of modest, often found materials such as nails, string, umbrellas, tree branches, brown paper bags, and newspaper. A through-line of the exhibition aims to express that gestural abstraction and personal references are present in the artist's work from the beginning to today, complicating her engagement with the vocabulary of minimalism—repetition, geometry, and the grid.

In the early 1970s, Miyamoto began creating string constructions, at first with just a few threads stretched and anchored around nails in her studio walls and then becoming increasingly more complex and spatial in nature. The constructions were made through an intuitive process, emerging out of the artist's relationship with a given space. Contrary to Minimalism's systematic, rigid approach to geometry, Miyamoto embraced uncertainty, chance, and ephemerality, distinguished by the presence of the artist's hand. The exhibition includes pivotal works, including an early two-dimensional wall string construction, *Untitled* (1973), and Miyamoto's first three-dimensional string construction, *Male* (1974). By recreating these historic works—which have not been on view in public since they were originally created—a major focus of the exhibition is to recover Miyamoto's contributions to Minimalism and post-Minimalism while complicating the male-dominated history of the movement. Though influenced by LeWitt (who was not only an employer but a long-time friend, supporter, and avid collector of her work), the exhibition makes clear that Miyamoto's idiosyncratic expression was always her own. "Hers was not a simple action of imitation...on the contrary she pursued, with relentless subtlety, a three-dimensional potential implicit in the drawings but not realized by LeWitt," wrote the prominent art critic Lawrence Alloway in 1977 on Miyamoto's work.

The exhibition design by New York-based Ransmeier, Inc. honors and alludes to the avant-garde milieu and the industrial studio spaces in which Miyamoto worked by incorporating hardwood platforms into which the string constructions will be directly anchored, illustrating the physical connections that Miyamoto had between her body and the architecture she was engaging with. Community has been central to Miyamoto's practice and grew increasingly important over the course of her career as she more frequently worked in performance and through collaborations with the many artists in her orbit, including Louise Bourgeois, Ana Mendieta, David Hammons, and Adrian Piper, among numerous others.

Miyamoto's career can be seen as a varied exploration of what it means to be a woman and an immigrant making art in New York City. Central to this and complementary to her studio practice were her roles as a connector, curator, gallerist, and champion for underrepresented artists. She participated in the "13 Women Artists" show in Soho in 1972, which was a precursor to A.I.R. Gallery — the first all-women artist collective in the United States—opening later that year at 97 Wooster Street, New York. As an early member of A.I.R., she presented five solo shows and co-curated two group exhibitions with the gallery.

Over the years she became a pivotal figure in the downtown avant-garde scene and she opened her own gallery, Onetwentyeight, at 128 Rivington Street on the Lower East Side in 1986. In this space, she focused on community-building and highlighting the work of immigrant and young emerging artists who had few opportunities to exhibit elsewhere. Miyamoto was the first to show the work of several prominent as well as now-recognized artists, including Jean-Michel Basquiat, David Hammons, Kiki Smith, Nancy Spero, and Piotr Uklanski. Onetwentyeight remains the longest-running gallery on the Lower East Side today.

A program of public events will accompany the exhibition throughout its duration. An exhibition catalogue will be published, including newly commissioned texts and documentation of the exhibition as well as photographs and other ephemera never before published.

Curated by Tiffany Lambert, *Kazuko Miyamoto: To perform a line* enters into a canon of historic exhibitions held at the Japan Society, which has been a thought leader in the arts since its gallery was first established in 1971. In particular, Japan Society has been focused on re-examining underrepresented artists, particularly women, including through early installations and grant and fellowship support of Shigeko Kubota, Yayoi Kusama, and Yoko Ono, among others, in the nascent stages of their careers. *Kazuko Miyamoto: To perform a line* builds upon this history and the ideas and threads that will be explored throughout Japan Society's exhibition calendar and related programming in 2022 and beyond.

ABOUT KAZUKO MIYAMOTO



Kazuko Miyamoto, *String around a cylinder of my height* (foreground), 1977.
© Kazuko Miyamoto. Courtesy of the artist; EXILE, Vienna; Take Ninagawa, Tokyo

Kazuko Miyamoto was born in Tokyo in 1942 and moved to New York City in 1964 where she attended the Art Students League until 1968. That same year, she moved into her first studio at 117 Hester Street on the Lower East Side — the neighborhood where she continues to reside— which shared occupants including Adrian Piper and Sol LeWitt. Serendipitously, a fire alarm went off one night in 1968, which led to Miyamoto and LeWitt meeting, and she soon began to collaborate with LeWitt in fabricating his early open cube sculptures and executing his important first wall drawings, including those which were exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum in 1971. In 1972 she became an early member of New York's A.I.R. Gallery, the first nonprofit all-women artist collective in the United States, where the artist held five solo exhibitions and co-curated two group exhibitions. In 1986 she founded her own gallery, Onetwentyeight, at 128 Rivington Street, which still stands today as the longest continuously running gallery on the Lower East Side. Her work is included in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), The Museum of Modern Art (New York), Princeton University Art Museum (Princeton), National Museum of Modern Art (Tokyo), National Museum of Modern Art (Kyoto), Smithsonian American Art Museum (Washington D.C), Yale University Art Gallery (New Haven), and the Daimler Art Collection (Berlin), among others.

ABOUT RANSMEIER, INC



Portrait by Thomas Slack

Leon Ransmeier is the founder of Ransmeier Inc., a New York-based design office. A graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, his work has been published internationally and is included in permanent collections at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and The Corning Museum of Glass. Clients include 2016/ Arita, HAY, Herman Miller, Japan Creative, Maharam, Mattiazzi, and SPACE10. He is a founding member of the Tokyo-based coffee products company ENTO.

Ransmeier has spoken at Aalto University in Helsinki, California College of the Arts and Pratt Institute, and has lectured and led multiple design workshops at Cranbrook Academy of Art. He is an ongoing visiting critic at the Rhode Island School of Design and the Parsons School of Design. In 2012, he received a research grant from the Graham Foundation to pursue an investigation into the evolving relationship between industrial design and robotics.

Ransmeier's designs have been exhibited at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum (New York), Friedman Benda Gallery (New York), Plusdesign Gallery (Milan, Italy), Swiss Institute (New York), and SFMOMA (California). He is an editor of the historical survey *Herman Miller: A*

Way of Living released by Phaidon Press in 2019. His writings on design, art, and architecture have been published in *Apartamento*, *Disegno*, and PIN-UP.

ABOUT JAPAN SOCIETY GALLERY

Since 1971, Japan Society Gallery has been the premier institution in the United States for the display and interpretation of Japanese art and culture in a global context. Through groundbreaking exhibitions and related programs, the Gallery cultivates a broader understanding and appreciation of Japan's contributions to global artistic heritage; explores the artistic interconnections Japan shares with Asia, the U.S., Latin America, and Europe; and celebrates the diversity of Japanese visual expression from prehistoric times to the present day.

ABOUT JAPAN SOCIETY

Japan Society is the premier organization connecting Japanese arts, culture, business, and society with audiences in New York and around the world. At Japan Society, we are inspired by the Japanese concept of *kizuna* (絆)—forging deep connections to bind people together. We are committed to telling the story of Japan while strengthening connections within New York City and building new bridges beyond. In over 100 years of work, we've inspired generations by establishing ourselves as pioneers in supporting international exchanges in arts and culture, business, and policy, as well as education between Japan and the U.S. We strive to convene important conversations on topics that bind our two countries together, champion the next generation of innovative creators, promote mutual understanding, and serve as a trusted guide for people everywhere who seek to appreciate the rich complexities and abundance of Japan more fully. From our New York headquarters, a landmark building designed by architect Junzo Yoshimura that opened to the public in 1971, we look forward to the years ahead, which will be defined by our digital and ideational impact through the *kizuna* that we build. Our future can only be enhanced by learning from our peers and engaging with our audiences, both near and afar.

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DIRECTIONS:

Japan Society is located at 333 East 47th Street between First and Second Avenues (accessible by the 4/5/6 and 7 subway lines at Grand Central or the E and M subway lines at 53rd St. and Lexington Ave.).

HOURS:

Thursday–Sunday, 12 pm to 6 pm

The hours of 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm are reserved for Members and higher-risk individuals.

ADMISSION:

\$12/\$10 students and seniors | FREE for Japan Society members and children under 16. View our visitor guidelines and safety protocols [here](#).

Kazuko Miyamoto: To perform a line is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

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