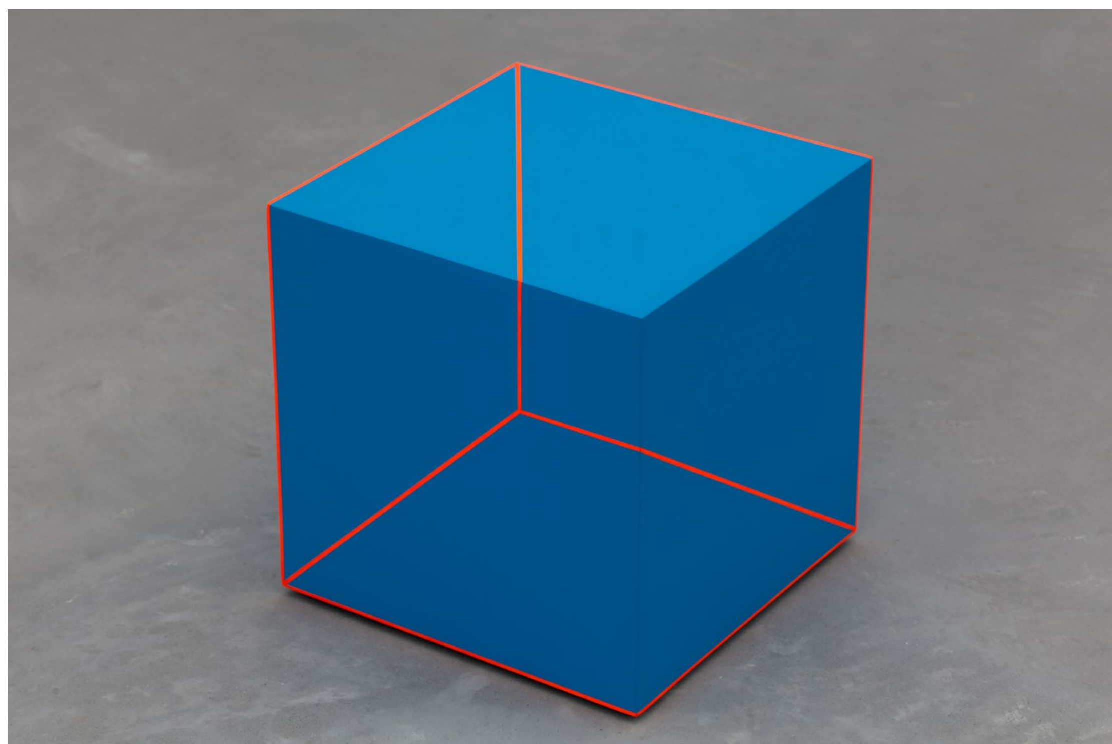
The Compendium for The Rachofsky Collection Graduate Symposium as presented at The Warehouse on November 8, 2019 in Dallas, Texas.



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Cover:
Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998).
Cube 6 + 3, 1968. Lacquer on wood.
13 x 13 x 13 inches (33 x 33 x 33 cm).
The Rachofsky Collection and the Dallas Museum of Art through the TWO x TWO for AIDS and Art Fund. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery.
Photograph by Kevin Todora

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Maki Iisaka

Keynote Speaker:
Douglas Fogle

The Graduate Symposium is a natural out-growth of the goals of The Rachofsky Collection and The Warehouse. This symposium aims to highlight emerging scholars presenting new perspectives on postwar and contemporary art, and to make the collection available to a wider national and international academic audience. Graduate students and recent graduates are invited to present their research on artists and works from the collection. As part of the program, students are given the opportunity to visit The Warehouse before the symposium to utilize the library and view works from the collection in person. For the second annual Graduate Symposium, The Rachofsky Collection invited three graduate students or recent graduates to present their research on postwar Japanese artist, Jiro Takamatsu

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Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Point No. 15*, 1961–1962. Strings and lacquer on wood. 10¾ x 8¾ inches (27.4 x 22 cm). © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery

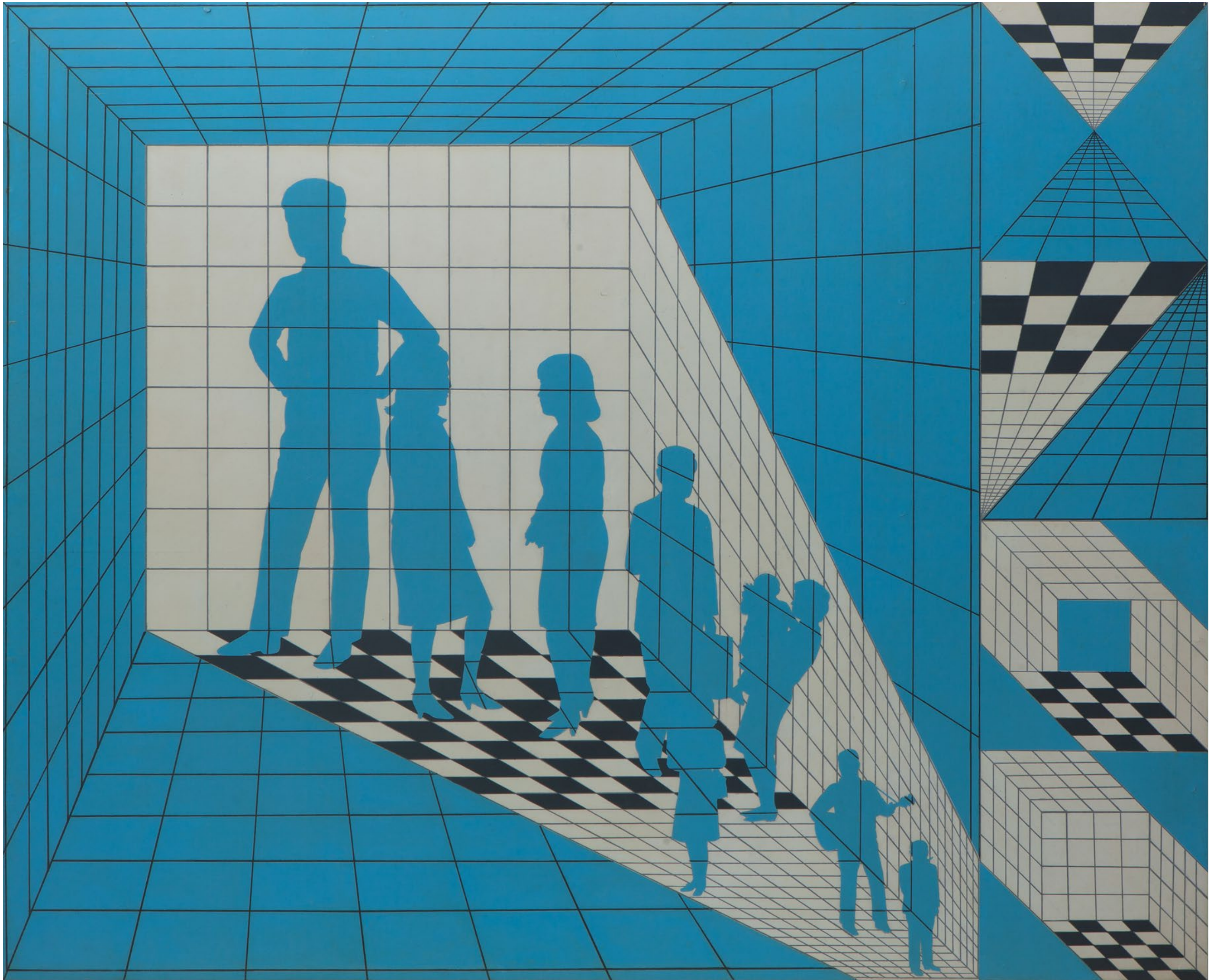

Plate 2

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Perspective Painting*, 1967. Acrylic on board. 31½ x 39⅜ inches (80 x 100 cm). The Rachofsky Collection. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery. Photograph by Kevin Todora

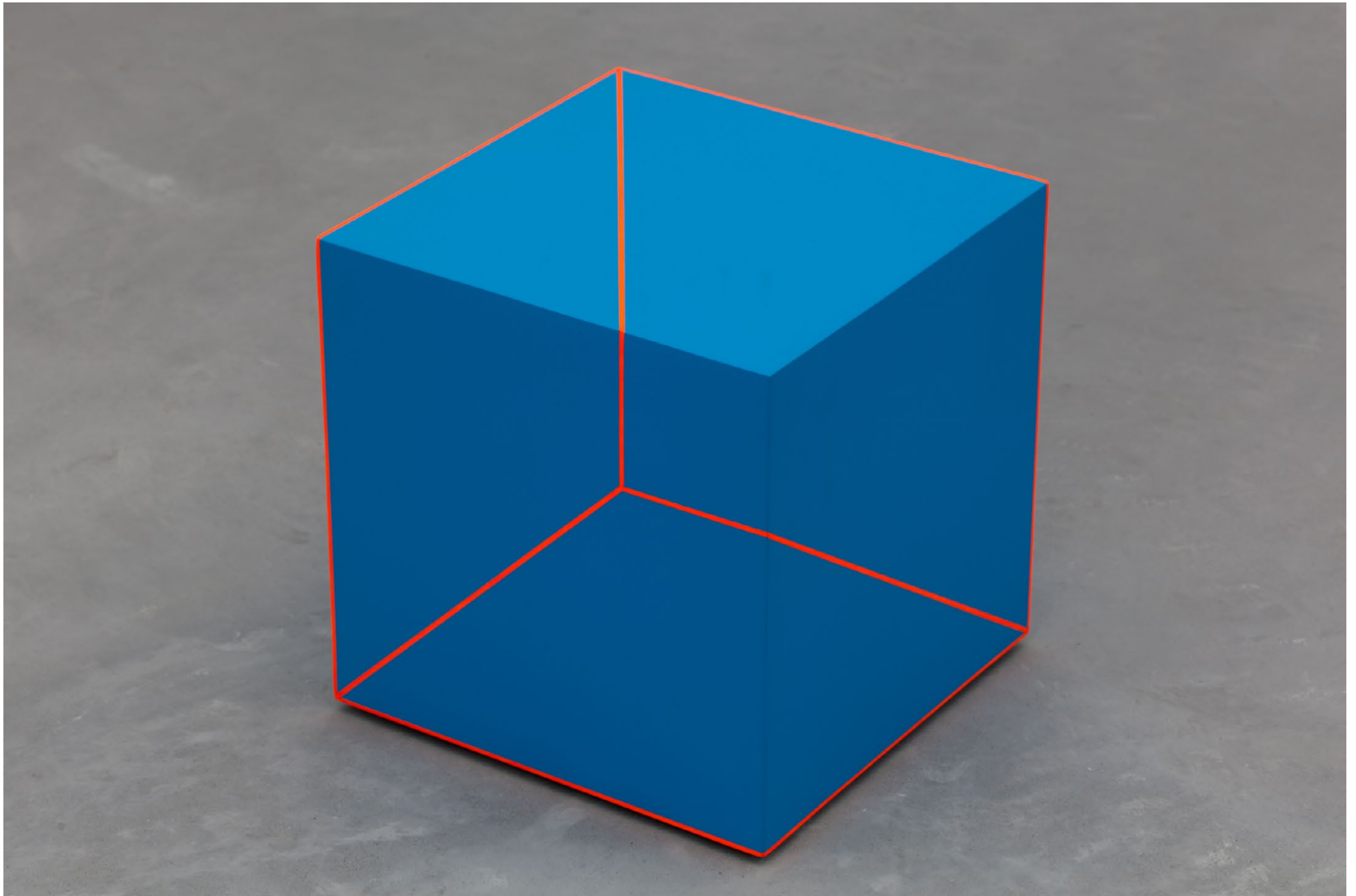

Plate 3

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998).
Cube 6 + 3, 1968. Lacquer on wood.
13 x 13 x 13 inches (33 x 33 x 33 cm).
The Rachofsky Collection and the
Dallas Museum of Art through the
TWO x TWO for AIDS and Art Fund.
© The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu,
Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates /
Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman
Gallery. Photograph by Kevin Todora

Plate 4

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Slack of Vinyl*, 1970. Stitched vinyl. 141¾ x 141¾ inches (360 x 360 cm). The Rachofsky Collection and the Dallas Museum of Art through the TWO x TWO for AIDS and Art Fund. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery. Photograph by Kevin Todora

Plate 5

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Oneness of Concrete*, 1971. Concrete. 10⅝ x 19¾ x 19¾ inches (27 x 50.2 x 50.2 cm). The Rachofsky Collection. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery. Photograph by Kevin Todora

Fig. 1

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Photograph of Photograph*, 1973. Unique vintage gelatin silver photograph. 10 x 8⅛ inches (25.4 x 20.6 cm). The Rachofsky Collection. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery. Photograph by Kevin Todora

Photography as Sculpture: Jiro Takamatsu's *Photograph of Photograph*

Asako Katsura

> When I look at the floor of my studio, I see colorful patches of paint. [...] I often find them more beautiful than Pollock's [works]. The loneliness of contemporary artists stems from the fact that our sensibility in everydayness is not shared by others. [1]

Jiro Takamatsu compared two different "patches of paint" here — one that remained as stains on his studio floor and the other by Jackson Pollock as a painting on canvas. Although both are indexical markers, the former could be viewed as mere stains, whereas the latter was intended to be seen, interpreted, and valued as "Pollock's painting." For Takamatsu, the former is "more beautiful" because it holds enormous potentialities for us to explore, whereas the latter is bound by eyes that have become blurred by knowledge and preconceptions. His only photographic work, *Photograph of Photograph* (*Shashin no shashin*), 1972–1973, echoes his interest in unlinking objects from existing concepts, meanings, customs, imagination, values, perceptions, and feelings, as well as from fixed relationships with other objects, spaces, and viewers. Takamatsu pursues the endless possibility of how we experience and explore the aesthetic relationship in our everyday world. [2]

Takamatsu's series tackles this endeavor by highlighting photography as "sculpture" that underlines the materiality of an object, exists as an extension of reality, and transforms and duplicates itself in conversation with the surrounding space. Like a sculpture, Takamatsu makes the photograph reveal itself as an object, material, installation, statue, and monument. In a comment from 1972, he pointed out photography's similarity to sculpture:

> I feel photography is closer to sculpture than to painting. [...] In photography, countless images and worlds are created in one situation. I believe that in the case of sculpture, not only the artists but also the viewers create original work because sculpture can be seen from various perspectives,

1 Jiro Takamatsu and Lee Ufan, "Conversation #6: Brancusi, Pollock, and Minimalist Art," in *Bijutsutecho*, no. 371, September, 1973, 220. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Japanese to English are my own.

2 Takamatsu, "The World Expansion Project: An Essay About Absence (1964)," in *The World Expansion Project*, eds. Naoyuki Takashima and Makiko Mabu (Tokyo: Suiheisha, 2003), 15–25.

> each of which has its own meaning. [...] Sculpture multiplies endlessly, depending on the viewers. I feel something very similar about photography. [3]

This paper examines how *Photograph of Photograph* highlights the artist's view of photography as sculpture in relation to his artistic endeavor to unravel symbolic meanings and relationships among objects and to open the everyday environment to artistic practice. Although the two art forms tend to be discussed separately today, by representing photography as sculpture, Takamatsu's series illustrates a significant historical juncture in Japanese art. It demonstrates the convergence of photography and art as they uncovered the bare face of the world in the image-saturated environment of Japan's period of high economic growth in the early 1970s.

Sculpture and Immediacy

Photograph of Photograph is comprised of more than 70 monochrome photographs of photographs. One example from the series is a photograph of a photograph placed on a wooden floor (fig. 1). The internal photograph depicts a park; a tree stands in the center of the image, surrounded by gravel, casting a shadow on the ground, while another tree is situated diagonally toward the back. More trees and bushes are seen further in the background, and two men are captured at the right edge of the image as they walk beside a pond that contains a little white boat. For *Photograph of Photograph*, Takamatsu chose the photographs to be rephotographed (hereafter referred to as photograph A) from his family album and other photographic sources, such as another photographer's work, and the sample photographs displayed in a photographic studio. [4] Takamatsu placed photograph A in carefully curated interior spaces of his house and studio and hired a professional photographer to rephotograph it, resulting in a photograph of a photograph (hereafter referred to as photograph B). [5]

3
Jiro Takamatsu, Shuji Terayama, and Tadanori Yokoo, "Conversation on Works in the Age of Reproduction," in *Kikan Firumu*, vol. 12, July, 1972, 95–96.

4
Takamatsu, *Photograph of Photograph*, drawing, Tate, ref. no. T13798, London.

5
Most of the photographs were taken by a photographer Hiromi Watanabe and the rest were by an unknown photographer. Interview with Takamatsu conducted in the early 1990s by Yumiko Chiba, e-mail correspondence with the Takamatsu Estate in August, 2019. Opinions are divided whether the first few pictures were taken by the artist.

The image captured in photograph A is always partially or totally invisible — its informational aspects are denied in favor of its materiality as a photographic paper. In the example, because photograph A is slightly creased, the shimmery reflection of the light renders almost a third of the image invisible, emphasizing its three-dimensionality and tactility and giving the impression that the viewer could almost pick it up from the floor. The camera focuses on the floor, evoking the materiality of the wood, rather than on the interrupted image of a tree captured in photograph A. The floor looks like the rough surface of the moon, its texture exaggerated by the contrast of light and shadow. A strong light emphasizes the fine-grained floorboards in the upper half, whereas manifestations of stains, flaws, and dust stand out in the darkness of the lower half.

Considering Takamatsu's idea of photography as sculpture, it is intriguing that his sculptural works from the early 1970s have a similar structure to his photographs in that they represent different phases of the same material. For example, in his *Oneness* series, 1969–1972, the self-referential structure of the sculpture's material operation is activated by reframing, just as the materiality of photograph A is activated by being rephotographed and reframed within photograph B. In *Oneness of Wood*, 1971, Takamatsu chiseled the core of a square piece of wood into pieces (sculpture A) to create the structure of a matrix (sculpture B) within which sculpture A manifests itself as a tactile presence. In *Photograph of Photograph,* photograph A is similarly distorted and fragmented inside photograph B. [6]

As Takamatsu explains, his interest in photography originated from the materiality of the photographic paper:

> I like [a photographic print] very much when I deliberately wrinkle it, when it has a three dimensionality that is highlighted by those wrinkles, or when the paper has curled up because of the chemicals attached to it, and when those elements go well with the image stuck onto it. I consider it a sculpture. [7]

6
See Ryo Sawayama, "Repetition without Copula: Works and sentences of Jiro Takamatsu," in *Jiro Takamatsu Critical Archive* (Tokyo: Yumiko Chiba Associates, 2012).

7
Takamatsu, Kiyoji Otsuji, Tatsuyuki Nakamura, and Tsutomu Watanabe, "Roundtable: On Photographs Becoming a Topic of Conversation," in *Asahi Kamera*, no. 510, December 1974, 164.

His accentuation of the photographic paper's tactility and its correlation with the objects around it clearly speaks to the artistic milieu of Mono-ha (School of Things), [8] in which artists explored the interaction between materials, people, and sites through natural or industrial materials in the form of sculpture or site-specific installations. Previous scholarship has correctly contextualized Takamatsu's photography within this artistic tendency. [9]

However, through sculpture and photography, Takamatsu also examines the connection between language and human cognition. Yuri Mitsuda points out that *Oneness* "questions the way we recognize things" by visualizing the systems through which we name and recognize objects. [10] She claims that in each work of *Oneness*, the unity of fragments and a matrix is preserved by its name (such as concrete or paper), as well as by a matrix containing the fragmented pieces (Takamatsu plate 5, page 12). [11] Considering that *Photograph of Photograph*'s original title was *Photograph* (*Shashin*) before the artist renamed it in the early 1990s, [12] the original title points to the ambiguity of the correlation between language, perception, and a signified object. In notes, partially appended in 1972, Takamatsu writes of his interest in "making everything that exists in our daily life into an objet" by opening it up to a new relationship and "freeing it from existing relationships." [13] One such existing relationship is the language through which we recognize and describe photography, which is destabilized by the material presence of a photograph that surpasses its informational function.

Sculpture Disempowers the Image

The similarity between Takamatsu's photographs and *Oneness*, which underlines the "thing itself," highlights another aspect of Takamatsu's concept of photography as sculpture. That is, photography is a direct extension of reality that, like sculpture, exists outside the virtual space of a picture plane. Indeed, Takamatsu recognized photography as "a trace of things that exist in reality." [14] In contrast to a painting, which transforms an

8
See Mika Yoshitake, *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha* (Los Angeles: Blum & Poe, 2012), 97–119.

9
Christian Berger, "Photography, Materiality, and Meaning: Takamatsu Jiro's *Photograph of Photograph* in a Transnational Context," in *Photo/objet/concept*, eds. Larisa Dryansky and Guillaume LeGall (Bern: Peter Lang, in print 2019). Yuri Mitsuda, "The Individuality of the Photograph: Takamatsu Jiro's *PHOTOGRAPH*," in *PROVOKE: Between PROTEST and PERFORMANCE, Photography in Japan 1960/1975*, eds. Diane Dufour, Matthew S. Witkovsky, Duncan Forbes, and Walter Moser (Göttingen: Steidl, 2016), 639–643. Mitsuda, "Jiro Takamatsu and the Photographic: Toward the Integration of Imagery into the Real," in *For a New World to Come: Experiments in Japanese Art and Photography*, 1968–1979, ed. Yasufumi Nakamori (Houston: Museum Fine Arts Houston, 2015), 114–119.

10
Mitsuda, *Words and Things: Jiro Takamatsu's issue* (Tokyo: Suiseisha, 2011), 231.

11
Ibid.

12
E-mail correspondence with the Takamatsu estate.

13
Takamatsu, "Fragmented Notes," in *The World*, 116–117.

14
Takamatsu, "Roundtable," 164.

object into an image, the photograph directly captures part of an object inside a camera as a spot of light. The disempowerment of the image's repressive nature occupied Takamatsu's interest throughout the 1960s and 1970s. He emphasized that an image of a rose painted on canvas is a rose "detached from the realm of reality" [15] that "lacks unbounded richness, expanse, and the weight of reality." By confining the rose to a canvas, the painter necessarily restricts its beauty to the limitations of the human imagination. Takamatsu had already experimented with various forms of artistic intervention into the image from the early 1960s. In his *Shadow* series, begun in 1964, he blurred the boundaries between two and three dimensions, as well as between the natural and artificial, through his use of an indexical marker, as in his photographs. This series comprises paintings of shadows on white canvases, traced and painted from the actual shadows of the artist's acquaintances and everyday objects. Mitsuda claims that the early *Shadow* series is not meant to be a series of paintings but rather "a device that stirs reality." [16] For instance, *Shadow of Brush No. 178,* 1967, is created as a partial replica of a wall on which two pillars and a hook are attached (fig. 2). The shadows of a brush, the pillars, and a hook are projected on the wall; the shadow of the brush is painted by the artist, whereas the other shadows are a mixture of the artificial and the natural, reflected in the lighting of the exhibition room, which also reflects the viewer's shadow on the canvas.

In his discussion of the Surrealists' incorporation of shadows into the picture plane, Denis Hollier calls painted shadows "iconic shadows," [17] which are "dis-indexed" [18] by being detached from their origins. However, when the viewer stands in front of the painting, casting a real shadow on the picture plane, the shadow "opens the internal space of the work to the context of its reception." [19] The shadow makes a painting "lose all virtuality" and "forever disturbs the calm of the image." [20] Takamatsu's painted shadow aligns with Hollier's argument since, like a sculpture, its self-contained space is destabilized when it is placed in another space.

15
Takamatsu, "World Expansion Project: An Essay on Absence (Outline) (1967)," in *The World*, 66–68.

16
Mitsuda, *Words and Things*, 84.

17
Denis Hollier, "Surrealist Precipitates: Shadows Don't Cast Shadows," *October*, vol. 69, Summer 1994, 119.

18
Ibid., 121.

19
Ibid., 124.

20
Ibid.

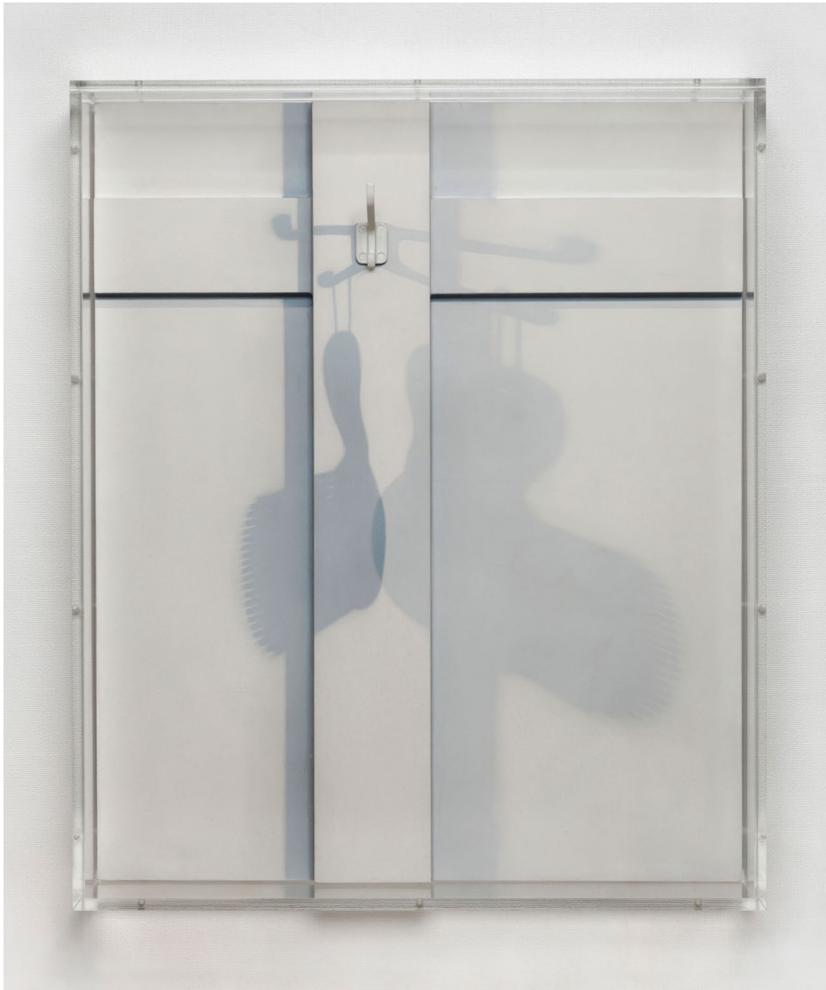

Fig. 2

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Shadow of Brush No. 178*, 1967. Oil on board. 25⅝ x 21⅛ x 4⅛ inches (65 x 53.7 x 10.5 cm). The Rachofsky Collection. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery. Photograph by Kevin Todora

Fig. 3

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Photograph of Photograph*, 1973. Unique vintage gelatin silver photograph. 10 x 8⅛ inches (25.4 x 20.6 cm). The Rachofsky Collection. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery. Photograph by Kevin Todora

Shadows are also captured in Takamatsu's photographs. In an example from the series, the photograph being photographed (photograph A) is attached to a wall with four translucent drawing pins and photographed diagonally (fig. 3). A bright light is cast on the wall, which is highlighted by a triangular shadow at the left top corner of photograph B, and the shadows of photograph A and the pins are cast on the wall. The shadows in the photograph have a different ontological status from painted shadows; while maintaining their autonomy inside the two-dimensional surface, the photographed shadows keep an indexical status, underlining the fact that "the thing has been there." [21] Art critic Yusuke Nakahara described photography and sculpture as the artist's expression of the "repulsion against an abandonment of direct relationship with things," [22] like their "works using stones, woods, and sands." [23] Likewise, Takamatsu intervenes into the iconic space of an image through sculpture, photographs, and painted shadows to recover the connection to and interaction with the viewer's space.

21
Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981; paperback edition, 2010), 76.

22
Yusuke Nakahara and Taro Nomura, "Between 'Theme' and 'Work'," in *Bijutsutecho*, no. 344, July 1971, (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha), 98.

23
Ibid., 99.

Photograph as Sculpture in Space

In his conversation with Takamatsu, the avant-garde poet Shuji Terayama stated that the images printed on mass-produced posters comprise only a half of what the poster is; the other half consists of the "relationships" between "the place where [each poster] is attached, the act of attaching it, and the viewers [of each poster]" — relationships that "cannot be reproduced." [24] *Photograph of Photograph* similarly shows that even if a photograph can be endlessly duplicated from its original negative, each copy is activated differently in conversation with its surrounding space and the viewer.

24
Takamatsu, "Conversation On," 74.

As observed in previous studies of Takamatsu's photography, his early 1970s lithographic series utilized a Xerox machine, underscoring his photography as one of many ways that he engaged artistically in discussions about the relationship between art and various forms of mechanical reproduction. [25] Takamatsu stressed that his 1,000 copies of Xerox

25
Mitsuda, "The Individuality," 642–643. Berger, 6–7. Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* was published in Japanese in 1965.

Fig. 4

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Photograph of Photograph*, 1972. Unique vintage gelatin silver photograph. 8 x 11¾ inches (20.3 x 29.8 cm). The Rachofsky Collection. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery. Photograph by Kevin Todora

Fig. 5

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Photograph of Photograph*, 1973. Gelatin silver print. 10 x 12 inches (25.4 x 30.4 cm). Instituto Inhotim. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery

lithographs confirmed the uniqueness of each copy. [26] Such recognition reflects Takamatsu's sculptural understanding of photography: "[The sculpture] endlessly duplicates itself, depending on the viewers" who walk around it and see it from different perspectives in different venues, as does the photograph. [27]

The uniqueness of reproduced images is clearly highlighted in Takamatsu's photographs. [28] For instance, the same photograph A is photographed in at least 12 photographs; it depicts two women wearing swimsuits and walking on the beach (figs. 4–5). Placed on a floor, pinned to a wall, left at the edge of the verandah, or attached to a bookshelf, each placement of photograph A offers us a different impression. Takamatsu's photographs speak to the fluidity of photographs manifesting themselves as unique entities — under different light, with different surrounding objects, and with a slight change of the camera's focus and angle. He exhibited the series in his studio in 1972, where he pinned unframed photographs to a wall so that visitors could experience the materiality of the photographic paper installed in the same space captured in the photographs (fig. 6). [29] Considering that the photographic series was also exhibited in the larger venues of international art exhibitions, [30] Takamatsu must have expected it to inspire different interactions with the viewer's space depending on the occasion.

Like Takamatsu's sculptural works, his photographs are not meant to have a static form or meaning. In the middle ground between contemporary art and photography, they challenge predetermined meanings, expectations, and relationships that prevent us from fully experiencing everyday objects and landscapes. Mitsuda states that during Japan's political turmoil in 1968, photography was gaining global attention as a tool for artists "to present alternatives and critically analyze the conventions of vision and perception." [31] The photography of Takuma Nakahira, a founding member of the photography magazine *Provoke*, 1968–1970, provides one such example.

26
Takamatsu, "Conversation On," 73. Mitsuda, ibid., 643.

27
Takamatsu, ibid., 96.

28
Mitsuda, ibid.

29
"Bijutsu Nenkan 73," in *Bijutsutecho*, no. 363, January 1973, unpaginated. Mitsuda, ibid., 639.

30
The 1st Contemporary Japanese Graphics Exhibition at ICA in London (1972); the Bienal de São Paulo 12 (1973); the 11th Tokyo Biennial (1974).

31
Mitsuda, ibid., 640.

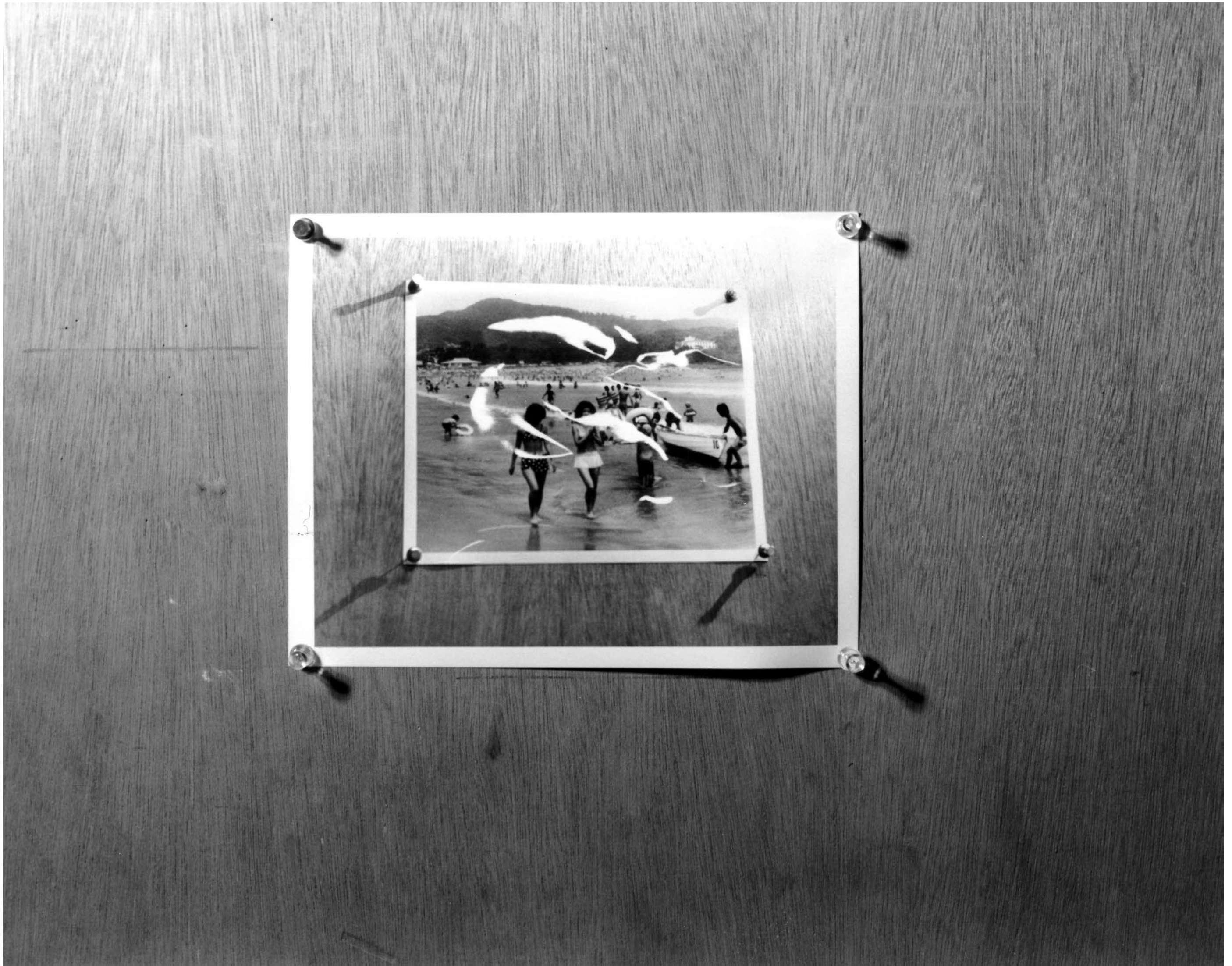

Fig. 6

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Photograph*, 1972. Photograph by Toshitaka Yamamoto. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery

Provoke is known for its signature style of *are-bure-boke* (rough, blurred, and out of focus), which embodies the emotional and dramatic moment of the photographer's encounter with a landscape. In Nakahira's series of streetscapes, published in *For a Language to Come*, 1970, the details of the urban landscape are almost unrecognizable because of the blurriness. The ways that the tactility of the photographic paper blurs and interrupts the image by being rephotographed in Takamatsu's photographs echo Nakahira's interruption through the medium specificity of photography. [32]

32

See Berger, 8–9.

Franz Prichard characterizes Nakahira's approach as his rebellion against a seamless landscape reimagined as state power, which prompts his "desire to somehow deform its smooth lustrous surface" [33] during the political turmoil of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Similarly, Takamatsu attempts to reimagine photography as sculpture by activating the materiality of the photograph, destabilizing the ties between objects and the systems of human cognition, and exploring the individuality of reproduced objects, as well as the fluidity of their relationship with the surrounding space. This can be seen as his disruption of the standardization and homogenization of the human experience with the violence of rapid urbanization and industrialization that escalated during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

33

Prichard, *Residual Futures: The Urban Ecologies of Literary and Visual Media of 1960s and 1970s Japan*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 101.

The calm and intimacy of Takamatsu's photographs are aesthetically distant from Nakahira's style of the *Provoke* period. Instead, they are reminiscent of the *konpora* photography of Kazuo Sekiguchi and Shigeo Gocho or the *kinen shashin* (commemorative photograph) explored by Nobuyoshi Araki. Takamatsu's photographs do not convey a similar sense of urgency or violence as do Nakahira's. Instead, Takamatsu makes a subtle interruption by highlighting the beauty of everyday objects and expanding the limited ways we relate aesthetically to the world.

Fig. 1

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *The String in the Bottle No. 1125*. 1963-1985. Coke bottle and white cotton rope. 12¾ x 4 x 4 inches (32.5 x 10 x 10 cm). © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery. Photograph by Masaru Yanagiba

Jiro Takamatsu's Presence in Absence: Engaging with the Known

Adrian Ogas

Jiro Takamatsu, throughout his career, was constantly thinking and working through his understanding of the dichotomy between materiality and immateriality, presence and absence. This exploration began in postwar Tokyo, Japan, during the emergence of anti-art happenings that Takamatsu took part in with the art group Hi Red Center*,* as well as participating in the Yomiuri Independent exhibitions. At this time, Takamatsu created artworks that involved the expansion of points into volumetric space through the use of string and other materials. I will argue that Takamatsu was not only an influential artist, he was also well-regarded as a writer and thinker — his collected texts represent his thought process for the creation of his many series and also place him in direct dialogue with thinkers and philosophers of the time such as Edmund Husserl, Nishida Kitaro, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre, to name a few.

It is widely recognized by Takamatsu scholars that he frequently referenced ideas from mathematics and physics — such as topology, set theory, and quantum mechanics — but the scientific models Takamatsu engages with are rarely paired specifically to particular artworks. We can trace Takamatsu's investigations through the writing that he produced during his lifetime. In his writing, he worked out complicated ideas and organized his works thematically into different running series such as: *Point*, 1961–1964; *String*, 1962–1998; *Shadow*, 1964–1998; *Perspective,* 1966–1971*; Wave*, 1968–1975; and *Slack*, 1970–1972. [1] The parallels that one could draw between Takamatsu's writing and that of prominent philosophers are vast and seemingly unending. These similarities cannot be thoroughly explored in a single essay; however, such an investigation could ultimately prove fruitful. Many scholars are only able to engage with Takamatsu's writing through translations by others from Japanese to English, as is the case with this analysis. These two variables have tightened the scope of this discussion to a focus on select parallels supported by reference materials accessible in English.

1
The dates provided for each series are from a timeline that Takamatsu made according to when he was thinking about a particular series throughout his career. Jiro Takamatsu, *Jiro Takamatsu: All Drawings/Asakura, Yuichiro* (Hiroshima, Japan: Daiwa Press; Tokyo, Japan: Distributed by Yumiko Chiba Associates, 2009), 12.

We can begin by examining the parallels between Merleau-Ponty's and Takamatsu's phenomenological ideas of presence and absence. Merleau-Ponty was a French philosopher whose most well-known works are *The Structure of Behavior*, 1965, and *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1962. It is in the essay "Eye and Mind" from *Phenomenology of Perception* that the most noticeable parallels in their writing emerge. In "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty develops an alternative view to Martin Heidegger's notion of human reality as Being-in-the-World by exploring the paradox of human perception — which is, humans see the things that make up the world and also see themselves in the world. Merleau-Ponty says that only an artist can explore this "process of seeing," as an artist is trained to develop a "sensitivity to the elements of visual experience." [2] It is this call for artists to investigate the "process of seeing" that Takamatsu has already begun to explore.

Takamatsu explored this within his most well-known *Shadow* series, wherein the shadow served as an intermediary between the states of existence and absence. Prior to *Shadow*, Takamatsu imagined that the "points" he began exploring in the *Point*, 1961–1964, and *String*, 1962–1998, series represented a cluster of accumulated lines as cells that are creating existence, self-propagating to build a life form as yet unseen. Takamatsu was prescient in his theory of cells having the ability to self-replicate or join together to build a new life form as scientists in the current decade have begun to unravel the mystery of "protocells." [3] Protocells are nonliving cells that are essentially the building blocks of life on earth. [4]

Point for Takamatsu went beyond a mark on paper or canvas; it was the starting point for his exploration into the emptiness contained beyond the surface of this side of reality. Takamatsu, writing in *Fragmentary Text,* says, "Things divide infinitely, before the quantum mechanics quest. Imagine for a moment the elementary particle which is the ultimate of division. It is ceaseless potential, it is emptiness itself with infinitely increasing density. I have to think of a mechanism whereby

2
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie, trans. William Cobb, first edition (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

3
Jiro Takamatsu and Kenjiro Hosaka, *Takamatsu Jiro: Mysteries* (Tokyo: The National Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 37–38.

4
Irene Chen and Peter Walde, "From Self-Assembled Vesicles to Protocells," in *Cold Spring Harbor Perspectives in Biology 2, no. 7* (July 2010), https://doi.org/10.1101/cshperspect.a002170.

to more efficiently accelerate and increase pressure on that emptiness." [5] Much like the concept of *Point*, the elementary particle for Takamatsu possessed "ceaseless potential" and was a tool with which to generate "absence." Elementary particles cannot be formed into an easily digestible image for the human eye to see, which is why Takamatsu relates it with imperceivable "absence," "emptiness," and "anti-reality." String theory states that the zero dimension of elementary particles contain no mass and are represented by a single one-dimensional string, much like a point is represented by a single centripetal unit. [6] Takamatsu's writing and thinking about points as stand-ins for the elementary particle can be compared to the writing of the Austrian-born philosopher Wittgenstein in this excerpt from his 1921 publication *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*:

> 2 What is the case, the fact, is the existence of atomic facts.
>
> 2.01 An atomic fact is a combination of objects (entities, things).
>
> 2.0121 Just as we cannot think of spatial objects at all apart from space, or temporal objects from the time, so we cannot think of *any* object apart from the possibility of its "connexion" with other things.
>
> 2.013 Everything is, as it were, in a space of possible atomic facts. I can think of this space as empty, but not of the thing without a space.
>
> 2.0131 A spatial object must lie in infinite space. (A point in space is a place for an argument.) [7]

This argument that Wittgenstein assigns to the point in space is one that Takamatsu continues to work through in his *Point* and *String* series — contemplating the elementary particle as a point and the eruption forth of string into this plane of existence as "absence" in material form. The pink canvas in *Point No. 15*,

5
Yuri Mitsuda and Jiro Takamatsu, *Words and Things: Jiro Takamatsu and Japanese Art*, 1961–72 (Hiroshima, Japan: Daiwa Press Co., Ltd, 2012), 34.

6
"String Theory | Explanation & Definition," in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Accessed November 3, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/science/string-theory.

7
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, second edition, Routledge Classics (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2001).

1961–1962, (Takamatsu plate 1, page 8) displays this notion, as the black string seemingly oozes forth from the realm of absence overtaking the origin from whence it emerged. This point in space in which absence may be generated isn't limited to the canvas, either; it could just as easily emerge from the bottom of a Coca-Cola bottle, coiling and coiling up until it escapes the mouth of the bottle as Takamatsu depicts in *The String in the Bottle No. 1125*, 1963–1985, (fig. 1).

In the *Perspective*, *Wave*, and *Slack* series, Takamatsu explores a world of non-Euclidean geometry by bending the straight lines and flat planes to conform to prescribed rules by the artist. Takamatsu changed the usage of phrases like "anti-reality" and "elementary particles" to "true totality" when he began to work on the *Perspective* series. We can refer to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and his use of totality to the opening of *Tractatus:*

> 1 The world is everything that is the case.
>
> 1.1 The world is totality of facts, not of things.
>
> 1.11 The world is determined by the facts, and by these being *all* the facts.
>
> 1.12 For the totality of facts determines both what is the case, and also all that is not the case.
>
> 1.13 The facts in logical space are the world. [8]

8 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

Takamatsu's continuing attempt to question the phenomenological relationship between perception and Wittgenstein's "world" can be visualized within the sculpture *Cube 6 + 3*, 1968, (Takamatsu plate 3, page 10). In this series, Takamatsu applies the rules of perspective from painting to three-dimensional works, which allows him to create a "device to generate absence." [9] This sculpture is an application of an illusory effect explored on the surface of the cube, where it is

9 Douglas Fogle et al., *Jiro Takamatsu: Works, 1966–1978* (New York, NY: Fergus McCaffrey, 2016), 419.

no longer clear whether the cube is completely solid or whether it contains an interior space due to the vibrating red line that Takamatsu has placed strategically along select edges of the bright blue solid body — which causes the cube to oscillate between real three-dimensionality and the optical three-dimensionality of the principles of perspective. [10] The name of the artwork, *Cube 6 + 3,* relates to the fact that we know a cube is composed of six sides, yet we can only ever see three sides at any given moment. Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, says, “From the point of view of my body I never see as equal the six sides of the cube, even if it is made of glass, and yet the word ‘cube’ has a meaning: the cube itself, the cube in reality, beyond its sensible appearance, has its six equal sides.” [11] Takamatsu complicates reality even further by implicating that the cube contains a visible interiority. I posit that Takamatsu is deploying scientific devices such as those exemplified by ambiguous images such as the *Necker Cube* and the *Orbison Illusion* to achieve this effect. [12]

The *Orbison Illusion* was created by William Orbison, an American psychologist who first published the illusion in the *American Journal of Psychology* in 1939. [13] In this illusion we see what seems to be a blue rectangle with a triangular pattern in the background; the left side is shorter than the right side, and a red square in the middle seems stretched on both left and right ends. When the background pattern is removed, the red cube is revealed to be perfectly symmetrical and the rectangle no longer seems to slope. The shape of the square and the rectangle are the same in both images, but due to the human eyes’ tendency to expand acute angles, they appear as larger angles, thus distorting the appearance of the red square and outer rectangle. According to the Centre for the Study of Perceptual Experience, philosophers have been interested in what illusions like this can reveal about the nature of experience. [14] Illusions like this cause viewers to become irrational in a sense because they hold that the lines are straight, yet at the same time are not able to view the lines as such. This negates the way in which humans perceive the

10
Jiro Takamatsu, *Universe of His Thought* (Fuchu-shi: Fuchu-shi Bijutsukan, Kitakyushu-shi, Kitakyushu Shiritsu Bijutsukan, 2004), 190.

11
Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 203.

12
The University of Glasgow’s Centre for the Study of Perceptual Experience provides excellent visual models of each of these visual phenomena on their *Illusions Index* website. “Orbison Illusion,” in *Illusions Index*, accessed November 4, 2019, https://www.illusionsindex.org/ir/orbison-illusion.

13
Fiona Macpherson, “Ambiguous Figures and the Content of Experience,” in *Noûs 40*, no. 1 (2006), 82–117, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0029-4624.2006.00602.x.

14
“Orbison Illusion.”

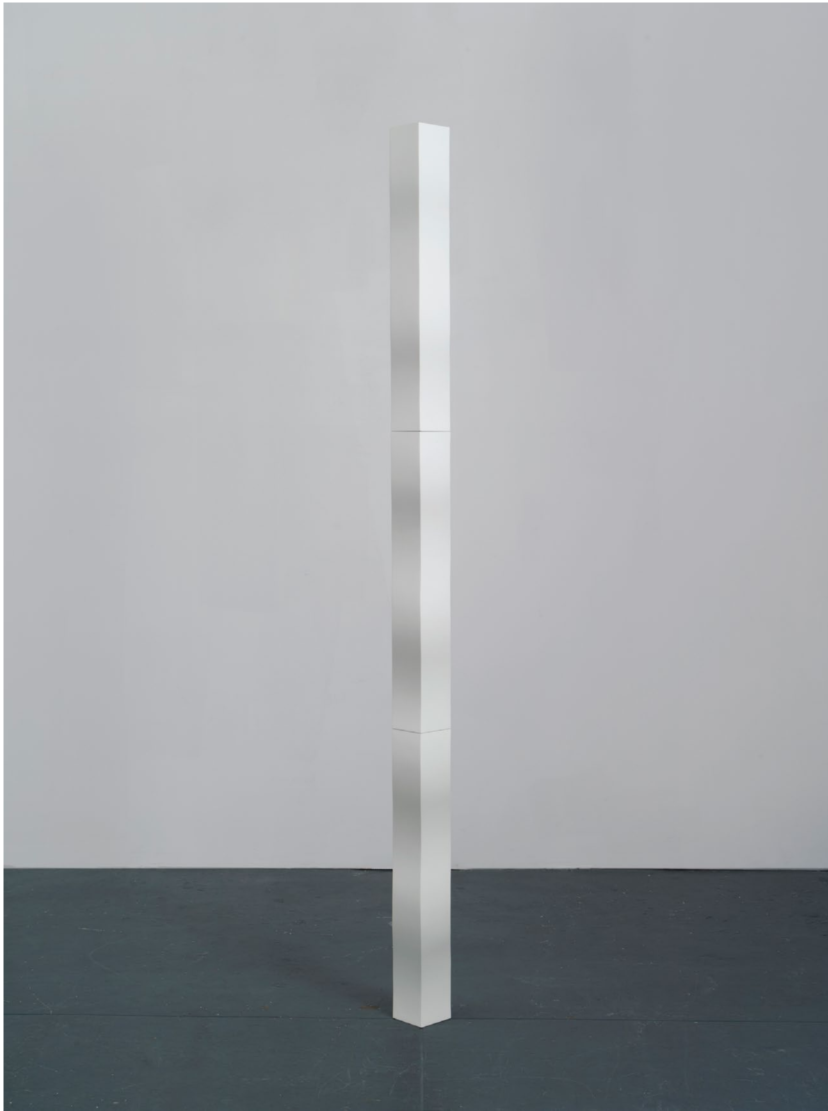

Fig. 2

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *The Pole of Wave*, 1968. Lacquer on carved wood. 75¾ x 3⅝ x 3⅝ inches (192.3 x 9 x 9 cm). Private Collection. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery

world as “reality” or as absolute truth, causing them to exist in a paradoxical state, similar to the idea of Takamatsu’s anti-reality. Anti-reality, for Takamatsu, can be connected with the phenomenological term “transcendence,” which was developed by Husserl. Transcendence, in this context, is the idea that a viewer cannot see an object from every perspective at once, so the conscious abstracts the object from the perception of the experiential world. [15]

15

“Cognitive Penetration of Colour Experience: Rethinking the Issue in Light of an Indirect Mechanism.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 84, no. 1* (2012): 24–62.

Takamatsu’s *The Pole of Wave*, 1968–1969, (fig. 2) from the *Wave* series, similarly plays with the uncertainty between what is illusion and what is reality, as this carved wooden sculpture appears from one angle to be an undulating, wavy surface, while from another view it seems to be a completely rectilinear post. [16] Both the *Wave* and *Slack* series challenges the weaknesses of human visual perception through the creation of gaps between what is visible and what is considered invisible to the human eye. *The Pole of Wave* presents as a straightforward sculpture that seemingly was made to replicate the undulations of waves on the surface of water that’s recently been disturbed, but when viewers engage the space and move around the sculpture, they began to notice that it appears as if it is perfectly straight. When situated next to the water, as Takamatsu includes in drawings such as *Wave* (TAKA-26), 1968, the image is distorted but also appears to be a straight column. In *Fragmentary Writings*, Takamatsu says, “a wave is created of an immaterial entity which is distinct from general materiality.” [17]

16

Takamatsu et al., *All Drawings*, 13.

17

Takamatsu and Hosaka, *Takamatsu Jiro*, 171.

Takamatsu finds his thinking again in conversation within another scientific topic — the hypothesis of the zero-energy universe — which states that the amount of energy in the universe is equally canceled out by negative energy. In other words, the net mass of *everything* is equally met with gravity. Physicists Lawrence Krauss and Alexander Vilenkin have referred to this as “a universe from nothingness.” [18] People exist opposite, or perhaps in relationship to, an ocean or net of energy that they are unable to perceive. Takamatsu renders

18

Alexei V. Filippenko and Jay M. Pasachoff, “A Universe from Nothing,” in *Mercury 31* (March 2002), 15.

his artworks as visual aids, or devices, for the viewer to be able to perceive that his objects are sites or a point in space for the argument that Wittgenstein calls for us to negotiate. Takamatsu interprets Sartre's theory that "the imaginative consciousness is consciousness that denies the existence of things" as the conscious acknowledging something that has matter or presence and the subconscious suppressing this vast emptiness of energy that is floating around the observer at any given moment, such as a force much like gravity in the zero-energy universe theory. The wave of energy that represents the surrounding absence has been pulled and shaped by Takamatsu into the perceivable world to foster perception of the unperceivable; these devices that generate absence also fuel awareness of the overwhelming presence of this invisible, all-encompassing force. Takamatsu states that "human beings cannot sufficiently comprehend those things that exist outside of themselves. (...) we can never hope to attain them. Therefore, we should make this process itself into art." [19]

19

Takamatsu and Hosaka, *Takamatsu Jiro*, 12.

Loose of Net #1, 1970, (fig. 3) and *Slack of Vinyl,* 1970, (Takamatsu plate 4, page 11) operate in the same capacity as *Slack of Wave*, in that Takamatsu challenges perceptions by presenting to the viewer an object that does not comply with how the subconscious constructs the world, calling into question the unreliability of human vision. *Slack of Vinyl* seems to be concealing something in the center of itself. The viewer perceives that an object should be underneath — however, Takamatsu has constructed *Slack of Vinyl* in such a way that the center of vinyl will not lay flat. This odd construction was meticulously planned so that when the vinyl tarp was placed on the floor, a pocket of air would fill into the recess, shaping the outline of some sort of object. Again, the human mind wants to place what it knows should be there, what it has learned from experience. *Loose of Net #1* behaves similarly; the net is in a neat square around the perimeter of the artwork, but the inside of the net sags and droops as if melting. The perimeter and the interior of the net exist in a paradoxical relationship; if the perimeter of the net isn't sagging, the inside of the net should

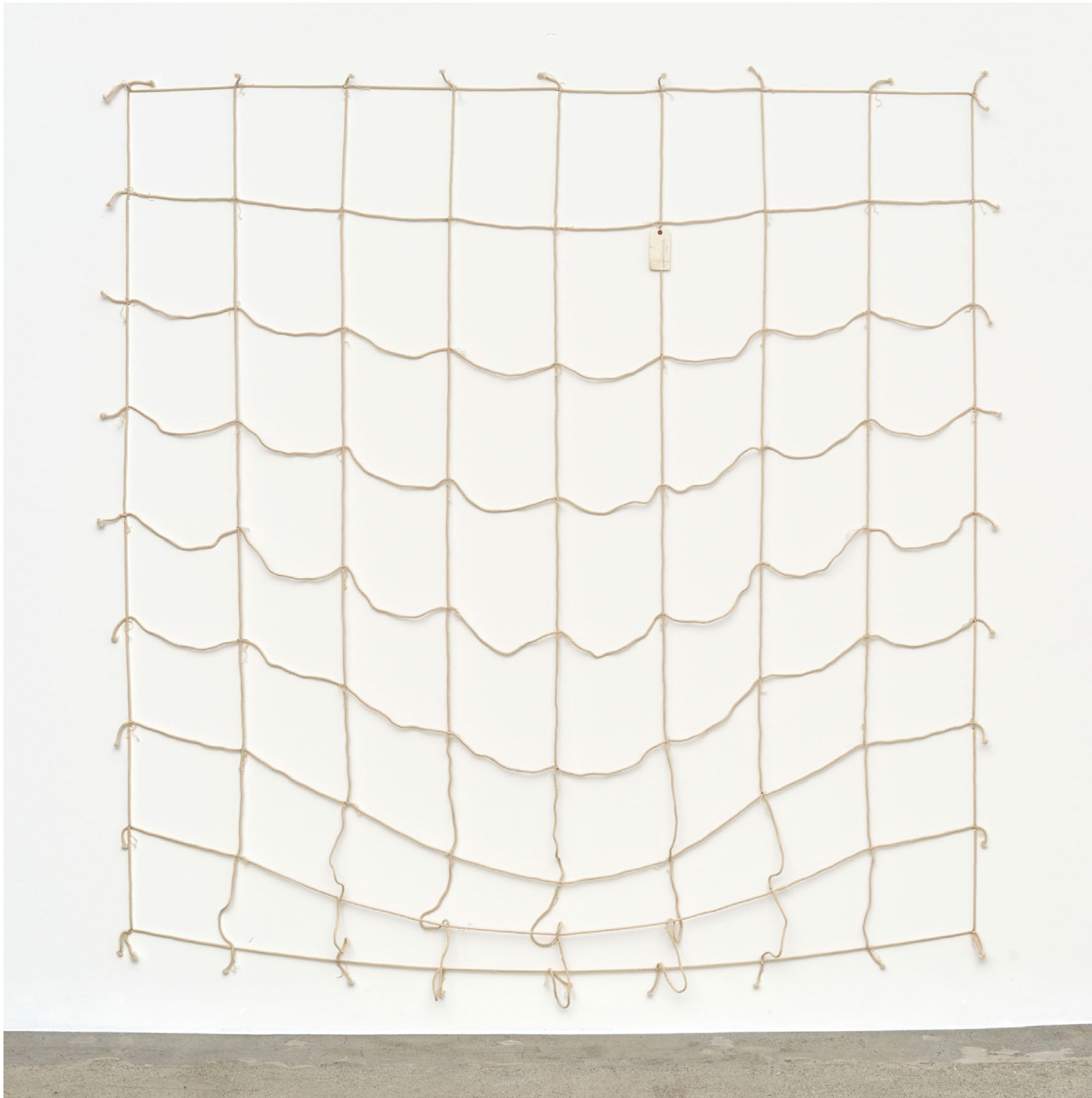

Fig. 3

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Loose of Net #1*, 1970. Cotton string. 95 x 95 inches (241.3 x 241.3 cm). © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery

also be arranged neatly into squares. Takamatsu arranged the length of the interior pieces to be longer than the perimeter of the grids, changing the perceived existence of the net's materials that are expected to be perfectly symmetrical and ordered.

The illusion performed by the *Necker Cube*, created by Louis Albert Necker in 1882, exemplifies another way in which human perception can allow observers to behave irrationally. [20] Their mind tells them that this is a cube drawn in perspective; however, the front of the cube will appear differently to each viewer depending on where their subconscious mind decides it should be. Some will see that the bottom face of the cube is the front and the top is the back; however, others will see the reverse in that the top is the front and the back is toward the bottom — and when the mind becomes aware of this, it will oscillate back and forth. So what way is the correct way to perceive this cube? This is also complicated by another version of the *Necker Cube* that appears much more like a flat drawing but can also be seen as a three-dimensional cube, which raises further questions about whether this change in perception is affected by changes in experience itself rather than in what one believes they are experiencing. [21]

Perspective Painting, 1967, (Takamatsu plate 2, page 9) is a painting that takes concepts from the *Necker Cube* and the *Orbison Illusion* by presenting to the viewer what seems much like a straightforward, grid-based artwork dominated by a larger pictorial space on the left and four divided up areas to the right of the painting. However, upon revisiting the painting, perhaps some of the areas that were perceived as being the front face of a cube are now a part of the rectangle that didn't seem to be there the first time. The shadows of people aren't anchored to the ground, and they shrink according to the white rectangle — but it is unclear whether they are oriented correctly in space. If that wasn't disorienting enough, each of the pictorial areas on the right side of the canvas presents a perspectival lesson of sorts. The two at the top are a

20
Macpherson, "Cognitive Penetration of Colour Experience," 24–62.

21
Macpherson, "Ambiguous Figures and the Content of Experience."

straightforward exercise in linear perspective and vanishing points, while the two on the bottom display ambiguous images of cubes with faces that could be interpreted either way. The four areas are not equally divided, either; upon the first pass, the mind assumes due to experience, or what it believes to be experiencing, that they should be equal in size. Takamatsu's comment about front and back is also ambiguous. "People talk about *things* having a reverse side. (...) It all seems to be based on a dualism of front and back. I in no way believe that the simple opposite of front is back. As the phrase 'two sides of the same coin' suggests, with a bit of maneuvering, the two become the same thing." [22]

22
Takamatsu and Hosaka, *Takamatsu Jiro*, 124.

By exploring how Takamatsu was actively engaged with scientific and philosophical ideas, we can better appreciate the levels of acuity and creativity that he possessed and injected into his artwork and writing. Takamatsu's series are teeming with similar phenomenological investigations into human perception and the physical world that he explored up until his death in 1998; the models of physics and mathematics that Takamatsu made reference to in his writing and the artworks he generated were not only used to achieve an aesthetic; he also turned to them to assist in solving his lifelong pursuit of anti-reality. As seen in the select samples of Takamatsu's artistic practice and writing, which without question are interlinked, we can see that he was not only reacting to other philosophical questions but was actively participating in a globally interconnected conversation about phenomenology.

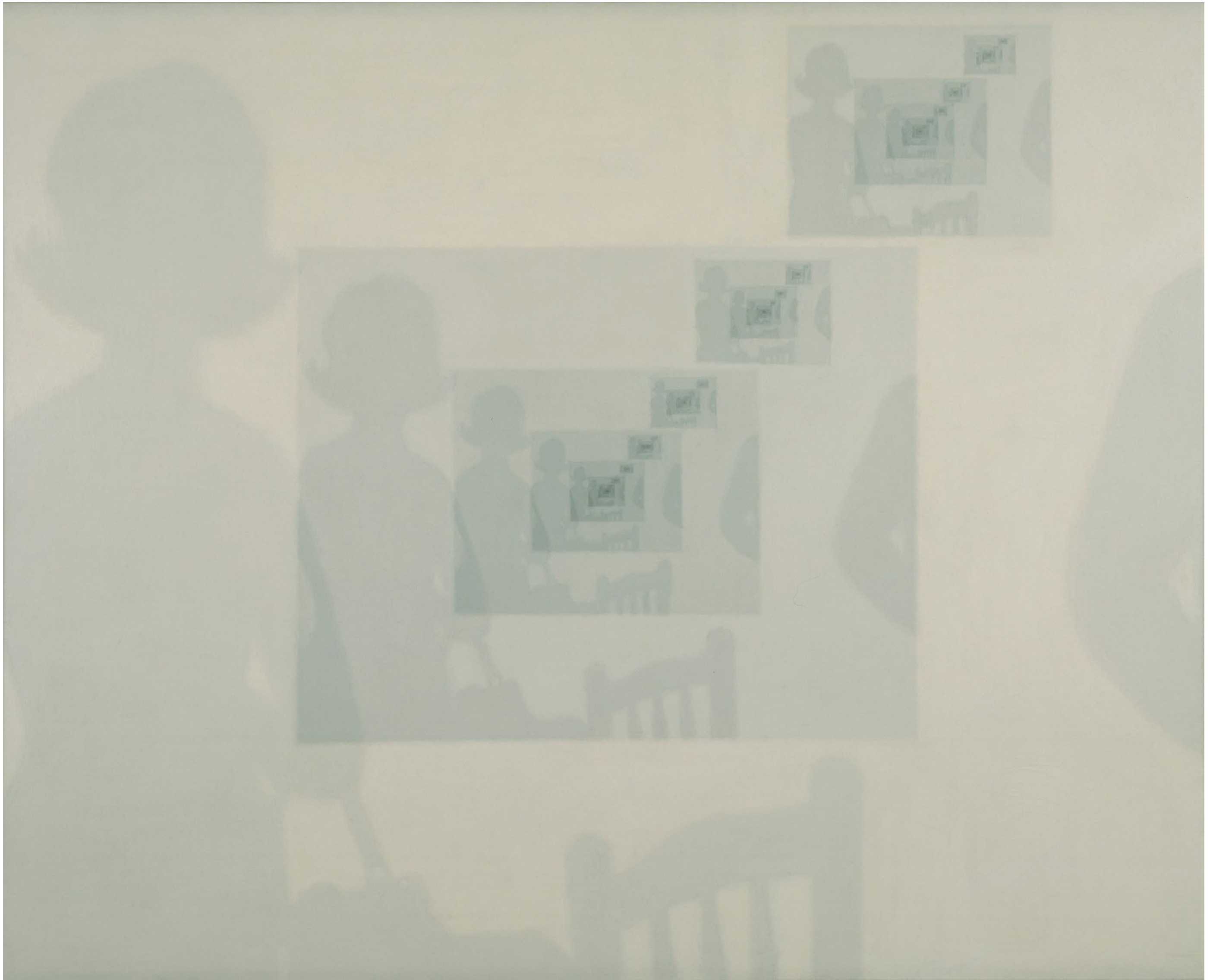

Fig. 1

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Pressed Shadows (Kage no assaku)*, 1965. Lacquer on canvas. 52⅜ x 63¾ inches (133 x 162 cm). Takamatsu City Museum of Art. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery

Indexing Absence: From Material Dimensions to Projective Realities in the Work of Jiro Takamatsu

Maki Iisaka [1]

In an open letter from 1966 entitled "Theory of Jiro Takamatsu: a Letter from a Literal-Minded Mathematics Enthusiast to an Ontological Actor," the critic Junzo Ishiko summarizes the effect that Takamatsu's artworks had on him in the following way: "The deep emotion I felt seeing your works *Kāten o aketa onna no kage* (Shadow of a woman who opened a curtain) and *Isu ni kaketa otoko no kage* (Shadow of a man sitting on a chair) was, I think, akin to that of seeing beauty in a magnificent equation, especially one in topology." [2] Ishiko analyzes Takamatsu's paintings not by "seeing" but rather by "reading" them as if they were literary works, deciphering their compositional logic using such words as "positive," "negative," and "discontinuity." These kinds of analogies and references not only reflected the overt thematic role that mathematics had come to play for Takamatsu but also signaled a more profound source of influence on his thinking that would become pervasive at both the programmatic and operative levels, from the generation of form in individual works to the conceptualization of the very nature and purpose of art.

Educated in the Oil Painting Department at Tokyo University of the Arts, Takamatsu had no formal training in science. As an adolescent, however, his learning about Albert Einstein seemed to have sparked a certain excitement, and his interests in this direction would have been naturally stimulated by his close acquaintance with Yusuke Nakahara, who had worked in Hideki Yukawa's laboratory at Kyoto University as a graduate student in theoretical physics before switching to art criticism. [3] When in early 1960s Takamatsu started promoting an artistic program that he would call his "World Expansion Project," he populated his texts with such terms as "energy" and "elementary particle," employed mathematical analogies in his theorizations, and established the ideas of absence and probability as central concerns. In a 1964 essay he writes,

> In this gigantic junkyard where everything corrodes and self-destructs, what captures, attracts, and drives us and saves us from tremendous weariness is never the thing

1
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2
Junzo Ishiko, "Takamatsu Jiro ron: sonzaironteki kōisha eno bungakuteki sūgaku aikōsha kara no tegami," in *Takamatsu Jiro o yomu*, ed. Makiko Matake et al. (Tokyo: Suiseisha, 2014), 73.

3
Jiro Takamatsu, "Ikanishite geijutsu o hakai surukani muchū," *Geijutsu shinchō 36*, no. 421 (January 1985): 40.

> in itself. It can only ever exist in the twilight, in the future, in possibility or probability, indeterminateness, lack, and every kind of absence. [4]

4 Jiro Takamatsu, "Sekai kakudai keikaku: fuzaisei ni tsuite no shiron," in *Sekai kakudai keikaku* (Tokyo: Suiseisha, 2003), 24.

Absence is the vessel for the imaginative potential that art unleashes and as such becomes the very source of satisfaction through the separation it leverages between fantasy and the dross of reality. In fact Takamatsu came to conceive of his own work as an asymptotic process that aimed towards a limiting state of pure absence. [5] This thematic prospectus was further elaborated in a 1967 essay in which set theory is invoked as a means to express the desirable largeness of absentness:

5 Jiro Takamatsu, "Fuzaisei no tameni," in *Sekai kakudai keikaku*, 28.

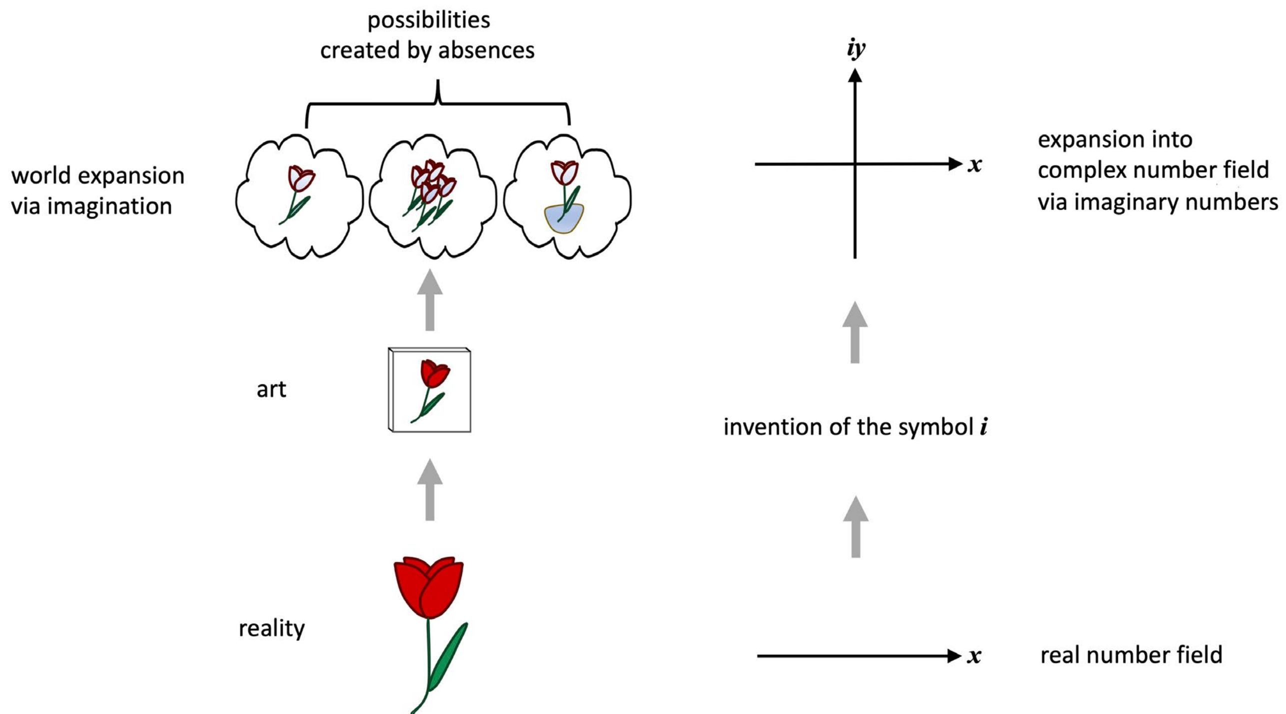
> With regard to the absentness associated with a variety of things, its character and limit is stipulated by such correspondence that cannot be severed from reality. The purity of absentness means the size of its non-presentness. Even when this possesses infiniteness, one can problematize its size just as set theory can measure large and small infinities. And for the sake of satisfiability, the absentness must be large, since satisfiability is something that always aims to increase. [6]

6 Jiro Takamatsu, "Sekai kakudai keikaku (gaisetsu)," in *Sekai kakudai keikaku*, 61.

One could thus summarize this aspect of Takamatsu's program as the production of as many "absences" as possible, never precisely determined but connected to some kind of physical reality that we can touch and feel. By creating a physical object that projects a manifold of imagery, both abstract and concrete, through its ambiguous forms, he seeks to "expand the world" and overcome the tyranny of fixity and predetermination (illus. 1).

There are some indications that this program was indeed directly modeled on mathematical ideas. In his 1970 text "World Expansion Project (2)," Takamatsu cites a popular book by Tobias Dantzig, *Number: the Language of Science*, which was written for "cultured" readers with little background in mathematics and contains many passages that echo Takamatsu's rhetoric. [7] Particularly resonant is Dantzig's discussion of how

7 Jiro Takamatsu, "Sekai kakudai keikaku (2): fuzaisei ni tsuite," in *Sekai kakudai keikaku*, 78.



Illus. 1

mathematical structures historically expanded through the formal incorporation of new symbolic content — as in the case of imaginary numbers, whose algebraic formalization was first proposed by Rafael Bombelli but only acquired full acceptance under the later geometric interpretation advanced by Carl Friedrich Gauss and others. Emphasizing the significance of having a tangible presence in the legitimation of an idea, Dantzig explains that "the discovery of this concrete interpretation gave the phantom beings of Bombelli flesh and blood. It took the *imaginary* out of the *complex*, and put an *image* in its place." This carnal investment of symbolic entities originally regarded "meaningless, sophisticated, impossible, fictitious, mystic, imaginary" embodied the moral that a "fiction is a form in search of an interpretation." [8] Dantzig's historical narrative of the evolution of mathematics through the continual enlargement of existing systems into ever more versatile and pregnant realities can be seen as a programmatic model for Takamatsu's project of "world expansion." The example of the complex numbers, moreover, resonates as an analogical paradigm for Takamatsu's conception of reality and its relation to the imaginary as a field of possibility. Augmented and cross-wired with other ideas collected from various literary, philosophical, and scientific sources, this programmatic framework serves to express the fundamental paradox of Takamatsu's quest for absence as a constructive enterprise that puts the activity of making at the center of his artistic practice.

8
Tobias Dantzig, *Number: The Language of Science (A Critical Survey Written for the Cultured Non-Mathematician)*, 3rd ed. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1946), 182, 202, 205. The Japanese translation is Tobiyasu Dantsuikku, *Kagaku no kotoba=kazu: sūgakusha denai kyōyōaru hitobito no tame no hihanteki gaikan*, trans. Isaburō Kōno (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1952).

In his aim to activate the imaginary through constructive means, Takamatsu is not interested in the properties of things themselves but rather takes a relational approach that concerns itself with perception, cognition, and bodily engagement through the artistic manipulation of the object. He writes,

> ...that the radiation energy called "elementary particle," which is a thing-like essence, barely possesses a certain kind of existentiality actually lies in its rule, and it is not that there exists an innocent pure essence from the beginning,

and for the sake of what we must pursue one must first devise a means, and what one can clearly realize is always a method, a device, or a container, with its content ⟨the probability⟩ being the self that flies around within the "inner temporal future," which is something that disappears as it becomes incorporated into the progressing reality, which is a kind of imagination… [9]

This kind of Kantian inquiry that privileges structure over content is itself paradigmatic of mathematical thinking and in particular recalls the philosophical thoughts about mathematics and physics that Dantzig's teacher Henri Poincaré formulated and popularized in several influential articles and books around the turn of the 20th century, which included extensive discussions of non-Euclidean geometry and relativity theory. According to Poincaré, "the aim of science is not things themselves, as the dogmatists in their simplicity imagine, but the relations between things; outside those relations there is no reality knowable." [10] Walking through the foundations of geometry in his book *Science and Hypothesis*, Poincaré emphasizes the structure of a geometric object as expressed dynamically in the way that its elements are put into relation by transformations such as translation, rotation, and reflection. In an echo of this philosophy, Takamatsu in the late 1960s promoted the term "relation" as a conceptual anchor of his artistic practice [11] and began to incorporate geometric transformations into his work as a device for precipitating a kind of engagement that both heightens and destabilizes the interaction between intellect and body in the process of cognition.

In Takamatsu's earlier output, the dialogue between concept and object is naively staged through an iconic representation that often becomes overtaken by an entirely different symbolic charge that the work acquires by virtue of its material and form. Representative of this tendency is the *Point* series from the early 1960s, in which Takamatsu sought inspiration from physical and metaphysical notions such as indivisibility and emptiness in order to give a sense of physicality to the titular

9
Takamatsu, "'Fuzaitai' no tameni," in *Sekai kakudai keikaku*, 12.

10
Henri Poincaré, *Science and Hypothesis* (New York: The Walter Scott, 1905), xxiv. A revised, translated edition of this work in Japanese appeared in 1959. See Poankare, *Kagaku to kasetsu*, trans. Isaburō Kōno (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1959).

11
Yusuke Nakahara has noted the introduction of the concepts of relation and non-relation as a pivotal turn in Takamatsu's work. Yusuke Nakahara, "Kaisetsu, 'sekai kakudai keikaku' o megutte," in *Sekai kakudai keikaku*, 280. Takamatsu describes the idea of non-relation as "the limit of relations" or "the absence of relation." See Takamatsu, "Sekai kakudai keikaku (2)," 85–87.

concept, writing in a 1962 memo that "A point transforms itself with space and time. It is simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal, and borrows in its entirety the energy that the space carries in itself. The point can gain its own life only within emptiness." [12] The disk shape is the one common compositional feature that binds together this series of works, which are executed in a wide variety of colors and materials, in two and three dimensions, and in solid, fragmented, and fibrous forms, ranging from an entangled hirsute mass of black wire to a cosmic swirl of pencil marks gravitating toward the center, with rich textures evincing the artist's previous training in oil painting. Animated with an intensity that invites a visceral reaction, it is the individual material realities of these pieces to which the viewer's engagement is bound, while the generative concept of point remains limited to an elementary pictorial role in its setting of the basic compositional parameters.

This disconnect between concept and execution is reiterated in the roughly contemporaneous *String* series, which explores the idea of representing the notion of length. Among the pieces from this series is a somewhat anomalous one in lacquer that sculpturally approximates the graph of a Dirac delta function as a kind of metamorphosis of the *Point* series, with a nipple-like tail growing as a smoothly curved form out of the center of a stringy mass. [13] This shape also appears in a sketch (Sketchbook 31; 1961–1962) that contains the words "inner quantum mechanics" and, in its approximation of something that, despite its name, does not actually exist as a function but only as a distribution, presages in a naive referential way the more sophisticated nonrepresentational uses to which Takamatsu will put the idea of absence in later works. [14]

In fact, the motif of the delta function reappears in the later *Compound* series from the mid- 1970s, but now with the symbolic content having given way to an exploration of the constructive logic in the balancing of different forms and materials — in this case a rope and an upright piece of wood on which it rests. [15] This shift from representation to construction

12
Jiro Takamatsu, "Sekai kakudai keikaku eno sukecchi," in *Sekai kakudai keikaku*, 90.

13
See Yuri Mitsuda, *Takamatsu Jiro kotoba to mono: Nihon no gendai bijutsu 1961–72, Words and things: Jiro Takamatsu's issue: with Japanese art 1961-72* (Tokyo: Suiseisha, 2011), 25.

14
See Lisa Le Feuvre, ed., *The Temperature of Sculpture* (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2017), 48.

15
See the cover of the journal *Kikan geijutsu* 11, no. 4 (October 1977).

aligns with Poincaré's perspective of mathematics in another much more specific way than what Takamatsu's program might suggest from its rhetoric of absence, relation, and world expansion. Poincaré, in explaining the nature of mathematical reasoning as an inductive passage from the particular to the general, writes:

> Mathematicians therefore proceed "by constructions," they "construct" more complicated combinations. When they analyse these combinations, these aggregates, so to speak, into their primitive elements, they see the relations of the elements and deduce the relations of the aggregates themselves...
>
> Great importance has been rightly attached to this process of "construction," and some claim to see in it the necessary and sufficient condition of the progress of the exact sciences. Necessary, no doubt, but not sufficient! For a construction to be useful and not mere waste of mental effort, for it to serve as a stepping-stone to higher things, it must first of all possess a kind of unity enabling us to see something more than the juxtaposition of its elements. Or more accurately, there must be some advantage in considering the construction rather than the elements themselves...
>
> A construction only becomes interesting when it can be placed side by side with other analogous constructions for forming species of the same genus. To do this we must necessarily go back from the particular to the general, ascending one or more steps. The analytical process "by construction" does not compel us to descend, but it leaves us at the same level. We can only ascend by mathematical induction, for from it alone can we learn something new. Without the aid of this induction, which in certain respects differs from, but is as fruitful as, physical induction, construction would be powerless to create science. [16]

16
Poincaré, *Science and Hypothesis*, 15–16.

We can accordingly not only recognize in the *Compound* pieces the importance of primitive forms and materials, the physical relationships put into play between them, and the resultant idea of a unity that transcends these components, but also of a new kind of functional approach to the process of serial iteration in setting up the conditions for aesthetic novelty and judgment through variation and difference. Mathematics thus no longer enters as a formal object but rather as a conceptual heuristic that dictates a logic of artistic creation, a necessary if not sufficient set of parameters for the emergence of the kind of symbolic dimension and experiential dynamic that Takamatsu saw as vital to his program.

Takamatsu had in fact invoked the idea of inductive process in a graphically literal way much earlier, in a 1965 painting in the *Shadow* series. This piece, *Pressed Shadows (Kage no assaku)*, displays a telescoping sequence of identical images that converge to a central point and each contain a copy of the whole sequence in a mise en abyme, resulting in a layered self-similarity that teases the eye in the multivalence of its legibility and spatial depth (fig. 1). Here we see an ironic inversion of one of the basic themes in Western avant-garde artistic production: Instead of the three-dimensionality of a pictorial illusion being rendered flatter and flatter through serial repetition, it is the replication itself through a mise en abyme that serves to conjure an optical three-dimensionality out of what is in this case but a flat shadow. The technique of mise en abyme was also employed in another 1965 work, *Katen o aketa onna no kage* (*Shadow of a Woman Who Opened a Curtain*), but here the basic unit is reproduced only once and further subjected to an exchange of color, reversals of brightness, and a horizontal reflection so as to demand a cognitive self-consciousness in the reading of the work. The piece fails to fully embrace the functional paradigm in its visual cataloguing of multiple versions of the head of Venus de Milo, which, as opposed to the spatial recessions that the nested sequence of self-similar images effect, create a representational recession in which the facial features suffer a progressive loss of definition until

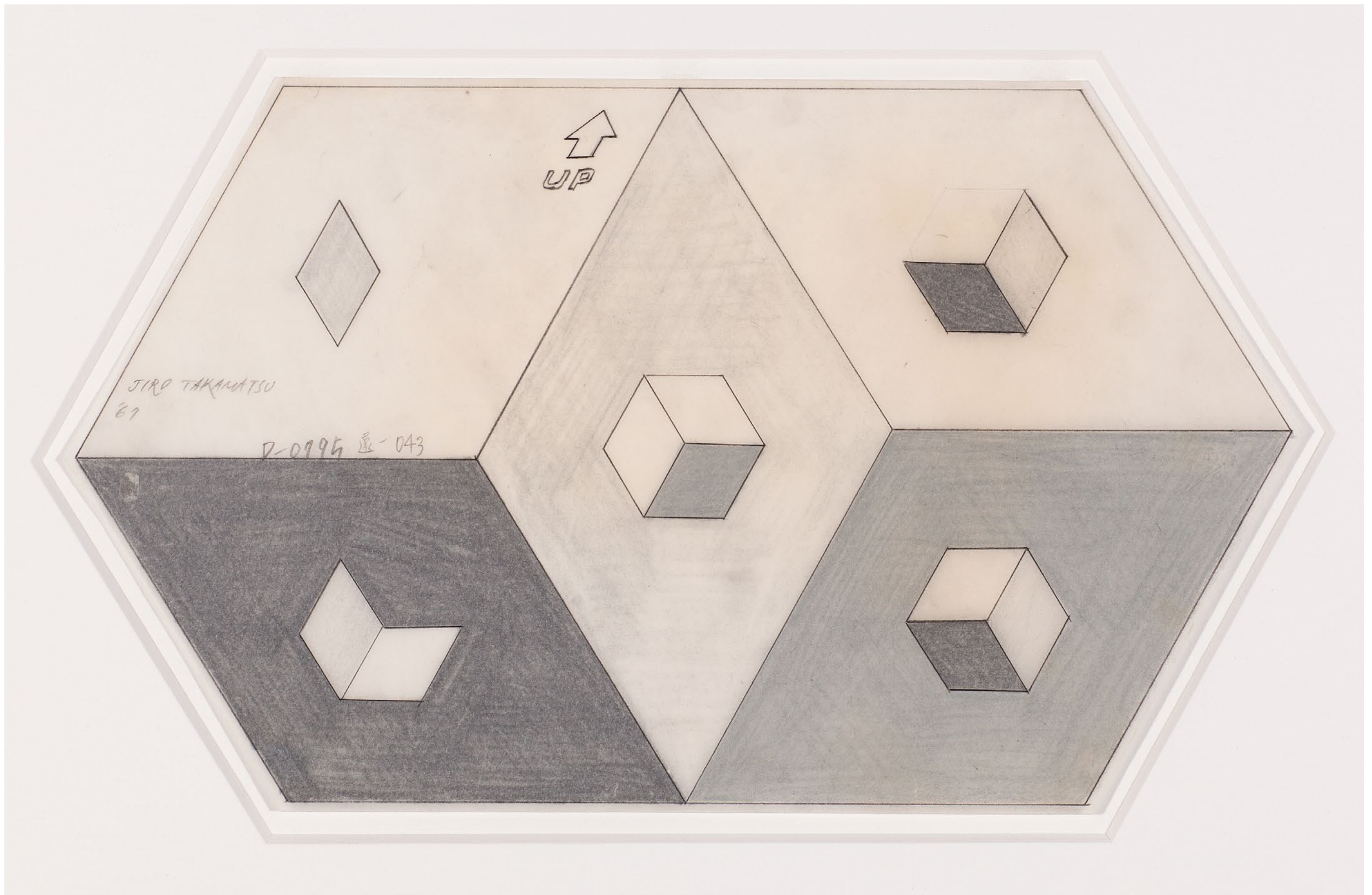


Fig. 2

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Perspective*, 1967. Pencil and pastel on tracing paper. 8⅛ x 13⅞ inches (20.7 x 35.2 cm). The Rachofsky Collection and the Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Jiro Takamatsu. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery. Photograph by Kevin Todora

the material substance of the sculpture and even of the canvas itself vanishes while the painted shadows remain intact.

The very premise of painting a shadow revolves around the idea of projective geometry, whose characteristic properties — the anonymity of projected image, the distortion of angles, and the erasure of scale — Takamatsu explored as mediators between objective and imaginary realities in the staging of absence. [17] The motivation for the *Shadow* series was laconically expressed in Takamatsu's memo to himself "to depict on a new pure-white canvas this pure-white canvas." [18] This idea of pure projection, with its evacuation of all mensurability and points of reference, could in the end only be realized through its own index, through the contingent shadows that indicate the process itself precisely by disrupting its absoluteness.

17
An extreme example that exploits distortive effects of scale is the piece *Akanbō no kage* [Shadow of a baby] from 1965, a sketch of which is accompanied by the description "baka mitai ni ōkina akanbō no kage" (an outrageously large shadow of a baby). See Mitsuda, *Takamatsu Jiro kotoba to mono*, 82.

That the idea of projection continued its grip on Takamatsu is evident from the constant reference to it in his writings as well as in its further development in the subsequent series. The *Perspective* pieces, motivated by the aim to "make a device that sees the act of seeing," pursues the projection theme in relation to the conventions of visual representation by exploiting the form of the Cartesian grid as a means of implementing and disturbing the geometries of both perspective and reverse perspective, the latter of which had been constitutive of the *Shadow* series. [19] In the *Perspective Painting* from 1967 (Takamatsu plate 2, page 9), the two perspectival systems are coded by color, the ordinary one in blue and the reverse one in both white and checkered patterns, arranged so that the latter, in its representation of shadow projections under a single light source, can be visually interpreted as being embedded in the three-dimensional space defined by the former in the main panel. The blue silhouettes of the human figures that inhabit the reverse perspectival space at the center of the main panel accordingly expose the grid lines of the surrounding ordinary perspectival space, so that their perceptual registration oscillates between the positive and the negative depending on the degree of graphic coincidence or collision between the

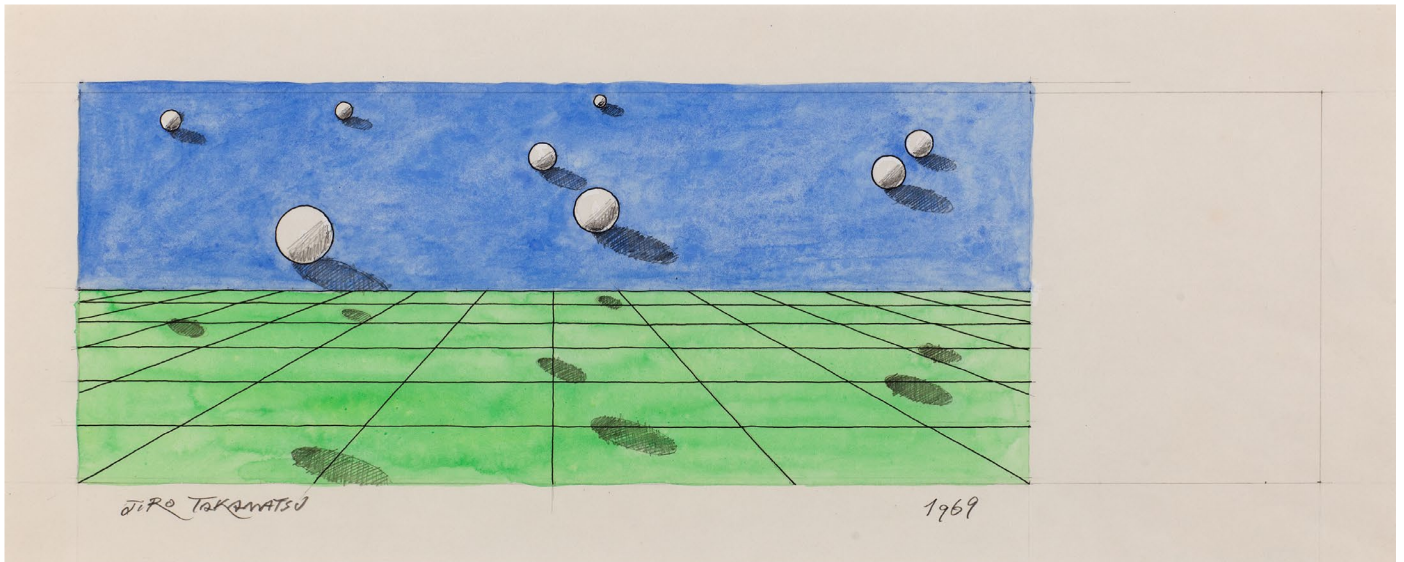
18
Jiro Takamatsu, "Danpenteki bunshō," in *Sekai kakudai keikaku*, 126.

19
Takamatsu, "Danpenteki bunshō," 149.

two systems. While the largest three figures mostly lie within the orthogonal grid that belongs to both perspectives and can accordingly be read as representations of shadows projected onto a vertical wall, the smaller figures offer up more ambiguous readings, as either cutouts or paste-ons, as a result of the discord between the two geometries. Completing the painting on the right side are four small panels of slightly varying size that catalogue some of the ways in which the two perspectival systems can be brought together for various optical purposes and at the same time serve to almost neutralize the individual spatial illusions through the overall flattening countereffect that they produce.

If this panel subdivision is reminiscent of early Renaissance painting, Takamatsu works to invert its historical narrative function. While the intent of the classical model was to introduce a temporal dimension through the juxtaposition of separate components so as to construct a coherent narrative reality, Takamatsu uses geometry against itself to willfully negate any sense of temporal or spatial unity in the composition, however pregnant each individual panel might be in these respects. Spatiality thereby becomes a negative index of flatness, much like the shadows of the *Shadow* series in relation to projection. This kind of local-to-global tension in optical effect is also explored in the graphically rather different 1967 perspective drawing of an elongated hexagon, a work that downplays the symbolic content and pushes its subject matter toward pure relationship (fig. 2). The shading and relative positioning of various rhombi at two different scales create several competing illusions involving larger and smaller cubes that can only be visually reconciled as living within a single three-dimensional reality under the interpretation of some as flat shapes or cutouts, as representations within a representation.

In the pair of drawings *Book Designs: Perspective* from 1969, such perceptual effects are furthermore controlled through symbolic references to the earthly physical environment (fig. 3). Both depict a set of balls and two sets of shadows, all three of



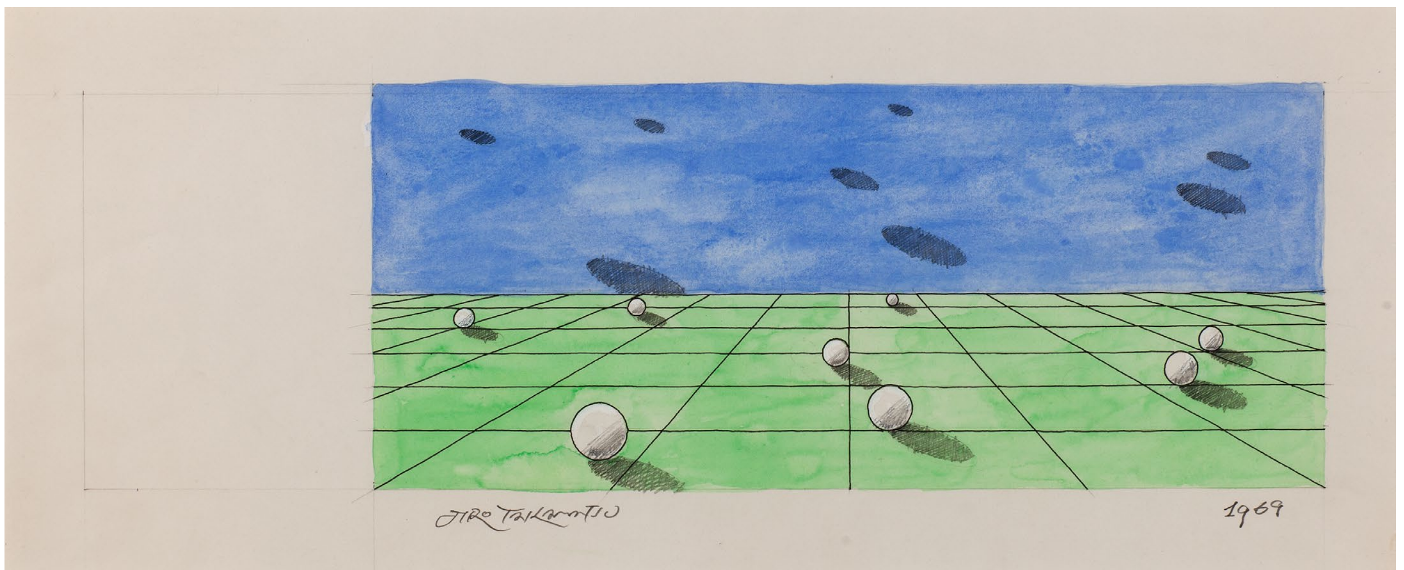


Fig. 3

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Book Designs: Perspective*, 1969. Pencil, pen, and watercolor on Kent paper. 12⅛ x 19 inches (30.8 x 48.3 cm) each. The Rachofsky Collection and the Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Jiro Takamatsu. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery. Photograph by Kevin Todora

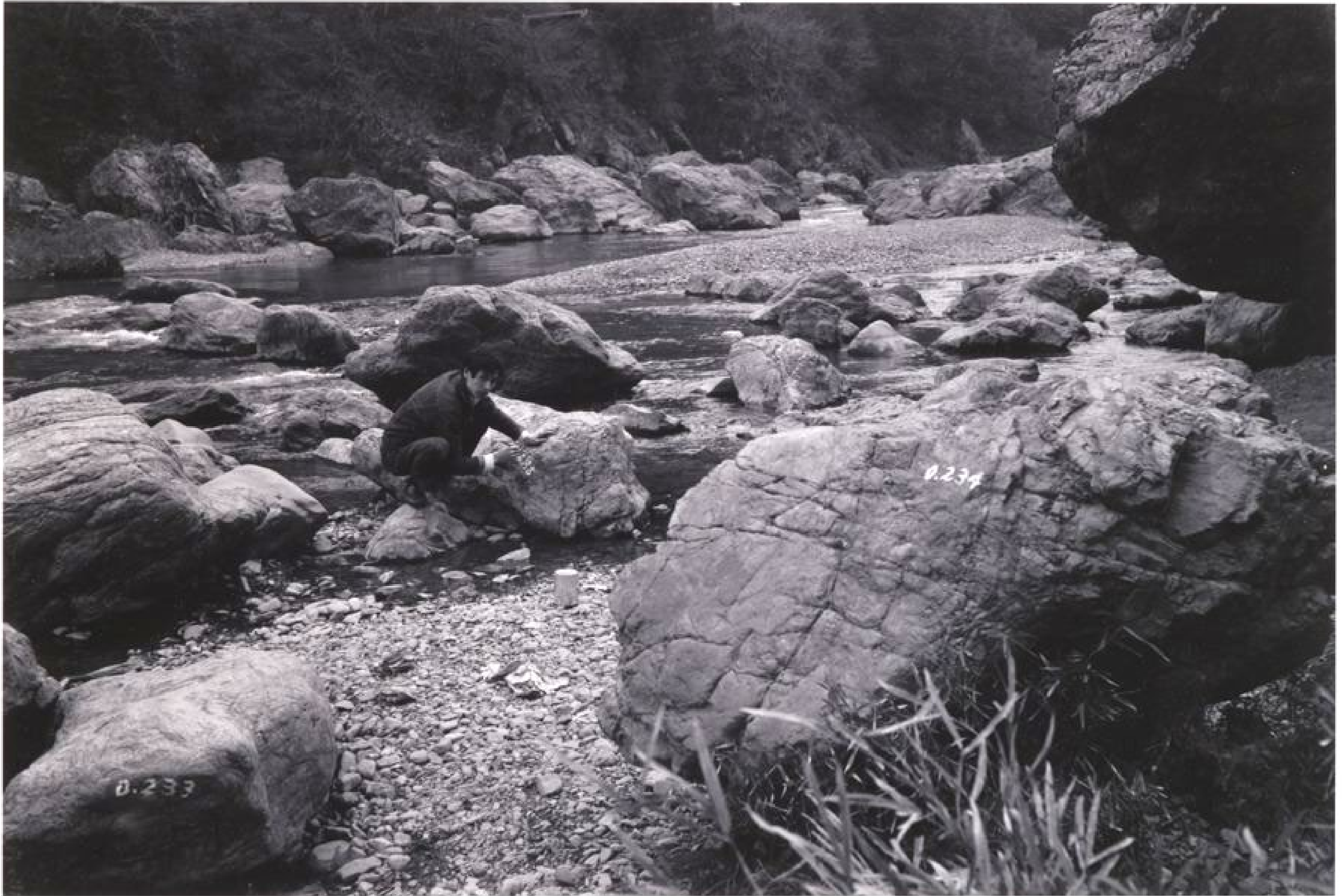


Fig. 4

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). Documentation photograph of Jiro Takamatsu making *Stone and Numeral*, 1969. Photograph taken at the Tama River. Estate of Jiro Takamatsu. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery

which are congruent to each other, and the two differ only in the position of the balls, which appear in one against the green lower background overlaid with a one-point perspective grid and in the other against the unadorned blue upper background. This simple displacement of the balls triggers a complete change of perspective, transforming a pastoral if abstract landscape with blue sky and expansive green lawn populated with balls of uniform size to what might be a downward view, from the top of a building, of balls of different sizes floating in water.

The *Slack of Net* and *Slack of Cloth* series that succeed those of *Shadow* and *Perspective* are no longer preoccupied with vision as a scientific phenomenon, but rather with the bare symbolic potential of their minimal material support of rope and cloth through the formal evocation of landscape and other figurative elements. [20] The pieces in the first of these two series consist of networks of ropes that are laid out on the floor or hung on the wall in the form of a grid whose segments snake or sag with various calculated degrees of slackness, while those in the second are distorted squares of fabric sewn together to generate various ridges and wrinkles. Here, the idea of projection is realized self-reflexively as the material imprint of a function that maps an undulating surface onto a vertical or horizontal plane via the slackening force of gravity, more or less fully in the net pieces but only partially in the cloth pieces due to the stiffness of the material.

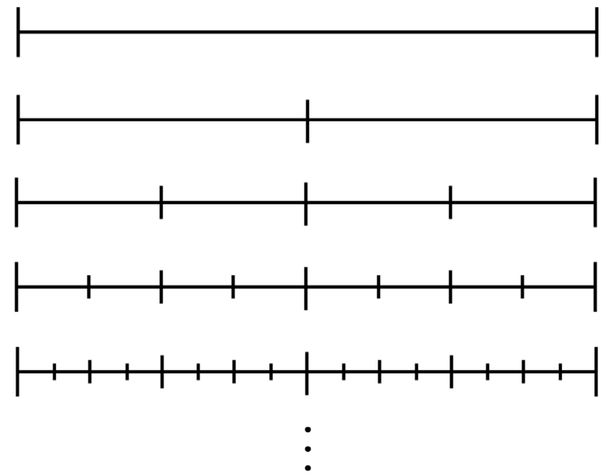
20
For examples in these series, see Le Feuvre, *The Temperature of Sculpture*, 33.

Upon seeing works from the *Slack* series in the second part of Takamatsu's 1969 solo exhibition at Tokyo Gallery, Ishiko judged them to be a sign of imminent change within the contemporary art scene in Japan, a prophecy that was soon fulfilled by the emergence of artistic practices, later grouped under the term Mono-ha (School of Things), which aimed to establish a direct connection between the artwork and the beholder through material presence, without any conceptual filter. [21] Later that year, at the Paris Biennial exhibition, the affinity between Takamatsu and Mono-ha was apparently confirmed in side-by-side comparisons, but the precise relation between the two

21
Junzo Ishiko, "'Takamatsu Jiro koten' no mondai teiki," in *Takamatsu Jiro o yomu*, ed. Matake et al., 103.

"Bad" or Type I Infinity

"Good" or Type II Infinity



Illus. 2

remained slippery and the subject of much contention and critical analysis. If the *Slack* series marked a shift from optics to “things” and registered the influence of broader artistic trends, it was the third part of the Tokyo Gallery exhibition *Stone and Numeral* that announced a new paradigm in the programmatic role of mathematics in Takamatsu’s work through its replacement of simple geometric illustrations of projection with more cerebral arithmetic ones (fig. 4). During this portion of the exhibition, the gallery remained empty while small stones were distributed on the sidewalk outside. Takamatsu had collected these stones on the bank of the Tama River and inscribed on each of them a decimal number between zero and one in a systematic way, overlaying the idea of additive infinity — to which his temporal being and the reality of his material resources point in their sequential finitude — onto the subdivisive infinity of his enumeration, of type I infinity onto type II infinity in the language of John von Neumann, or of bad infinity onto good infinity in Hegelian terms (illus. 2).

The concept of infinity fascinated Takamatsu from the very beginning of his career, with a reference to it appearing already in his 1962 memo: “From the point of view that a subset of infinity is equal to the whole, a point can be a means to grasp infinite space.” [22] Despite its obscurity, this assertion echoes the rhetorically provocative yet mathematically accurate statement “The part may have the power of the whole” that opens a section of the chapter “The Anatomy of the Infinite” in Dantzig’s book and leads into a discussion of how an infinite set may be characterized as a set that contains a proper subset of the same cardinality. [23] What is significant here is not the discrepancy between Takamatsu’s fanciful but nonsensical statement and the rigorous mise en abyme characterization of infinite sets described by Dantzig, but rather that Takamatsu was able to exploit this misunderstanding through its artistic implementation in purely material form. Once again we sense the spectral presence of Dantzig’s book, which quotes mathematician David Hilbert in refuting the idea that infinity can be derived from or applied to empirical reality:

22
Takamatsu, “Danpenteki bunshō,” 108.

23
Dantzig, *Number*, 214. Two collections are said to have the same power if they can be matched element for element.

> Be it a piece of metal or a fluid volume, we cannot escape the conviction that it is divisible into infinity, and that any of its parts, however small, will have the properties of the whole. But wherever the method of investigation into the physics of matter has been carried sufficiently far, we have invariably struck a limit of divisibility, and this was not due to a lack of experimental refinement but resided in the very nature of the phenomenon...And the verdict is that nowhere in reality does there exist a homogeneous continuum in which unlimited divisibility is possible, in which the infinitely small can be realized. The infinite divisibility of a continuum is an operation which exists in thought only, is just an idea, an idea which is refuted by our observations of nature, as well as by physical and chemical experiments. [24]

24
Dantzig, *Number*, 237–238.

In some of the works from the *Oneness* series that Takamatsu produced between 1969 and 1972, a mass of material such as concrete, paper, or wood has been hollowed out and the excavated pieces, possibly further atomized through crushing, shredding, or chiseling, deposited back into the cavity in an apparently random way (Takamatsu plate 5, page 12). Here we see a rehearsal of Hilbert's process of division relating parts to whole within the limitations of a physical reality that can at best produce only an illusion of infinity through fragmentation. These pieces continue to self-reflexively stage the idea of projection — not in the geometric sense of the *Slack* series or in the arithmetic sense of *Stone and Numeral*, but rather in a set-theoretic sense out of which the topological emerges through the suggestion of connectivity and subdivision without the stricter metric notions of distance and angle. The artistic and scientific now align through manual process and the mathematics of pure subdivisibility to produce a domesticated infinity in which the sublime's terror of scale is reduced into a material sensuality.

If the rift between subject and object is addressed by Takamatsu in the variety of apparently disparate ways that he sought to give physical presence to mathematical thinking

as a source of artistic invention — from its role as a platform for simple metaphoric elaboration in the early works to the more sophisticated and cognitively layered figuration of translation, relation, and projection in later works, and even in his overarching program of indexing absence — there appears in retrospect a continuity and even inevitability in the development of this theme across the general trajectory of his practice. The inscription of absence through the idea of projection, understood initially in its elementary geometric sense and then in the digitization of arithmetic and finally in a sublation of the two into set theory and topology, echoes a general tendency toward abstraction in mathematics while recapitulating the very historical arc of epistemic development in the discipline's understanding of itself and its objects of study, from the Cartesian coordinatization of geometry and the arithmetization of analysis to the revolution in foundations that launched the quintessentially modern study of qualitative structure and set absolute standards for rigor and precision. This culmination, which is only confirmed by the reversion to form generation through geometric construction in the late paintings and drawings, epitomizes the fundamentally analytical nature of the thinking that underlies Takamatsu's artistic inquiry — a mode of thinking that not only surfaced at the textual, iconic, and methodological levels in individual works, but also resonated uncannily if inexorably with deeper currents in mathematics.

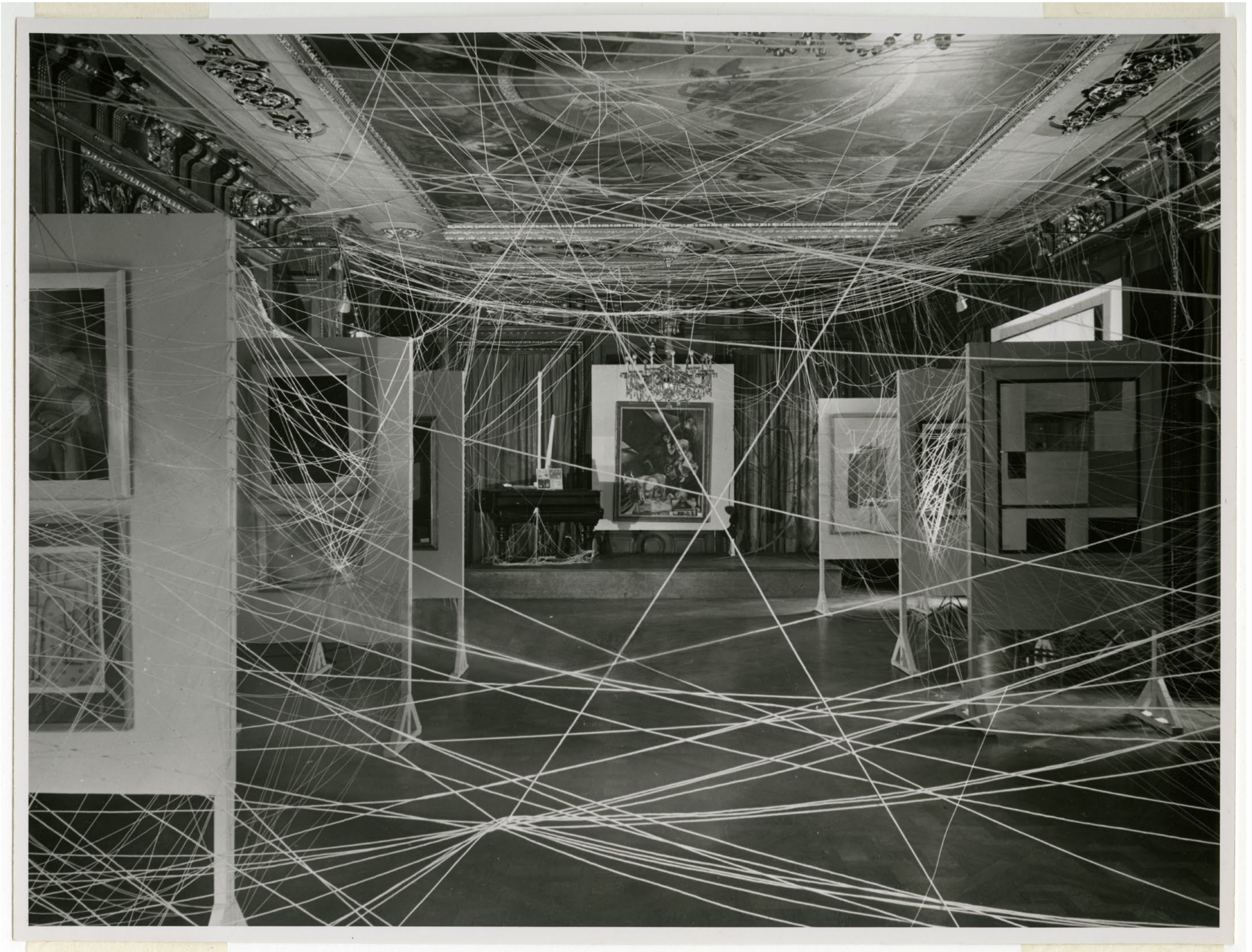


Fig. 1

John D. Schiff (American, born France. 1887–1968). Installation View of Exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism* Showing String Installation, 1942. Gelatin silver print. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library & Archives, Gift of Jacqueline, Paul, and Peter Matisse in memory of their mother, Alexina Duchamp. Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

Keynote Address

The Skin of the World

Douglas Fogle

This is such an amazing thing to be able to speak about these works, especially with people who are so enthusiastic about the artist. For me, being a longtime museum curator, it's a pleasure just to have my colleagues here talking about work — go out and have a cup of coffee and look at the work, and it's right there. But also, a big thanks to Howard and Cindy Rachofsky. It's a special place here for research, and every time I come, there's a new iteration — and you start to see new relationships between the works that are in the collection and then, in the community, which is a very interesting way to start thinking about the work of Jiro Takamatsu.

This text has been adapted from the transcript of Douglas Fogle's keynote address presented at The Warehouse on November 8, 2019 and from his catalogue essay in *Jiro Takamatsu: Works, 1966-1978*, Fergus McCaffrey, 2016.

I wanted to start with a little quote from him that I thought of a minute ago after Lisa Le Feuvre's question about Takamatsu's *Compound* series, which I have a little riff on. It's not mostly what I'm going to talk about, but Takamatsu, when asked about his work at one point for an interview, said, "If art had a raison d'être today, I believe it lies in its difficulty. It's unfair to demand simple answers from artists who are only conscious of creating artistic content that takes the form of 'questions.'"

When you look at this work — and you've already seen from the three great presentations — the diversity in the arc of his career is quite strange. There's left turn, right turn. There's two-dimensional work. There's photographic work. There are drawings. There's working with a picture plane. There's working in three-dimensional form. There's not a total unity theory of Takamatsu that I can talk about today, but there are a number of things that were spoken about tangentially in the body of the last three papers — including embodiment and what I call the "skin of the world."

Thinking about philosophers like Maurice Merleau-Ponty in particular, a phenomenologist in the 1960s, and the global set of concerns with other artists who were contemporaries of Takamatsu but working in Brazil or Italy — they were all dealing with similar kinds of questions and coming at the materiality of sculptural work in the world from an embodied kind of

perspective. I'm going to read a little bit and I'm going to riff a little bit, so let's get started.

I want to start out with a quote from Marcel Duchamp, actually, and an installation design by Duchamp from the 1940s (fig.1). "To all appearances, the artist acts like a mediumistic being" — a medium like a seance kind of a thing — "who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing."

Then, another quote from Takamatsu — "There are various things that exist before my eyes — by closely observing them or by thinking about them upon some random chance, I just tell myself to concentrate my efforts into accentuating the consciousness and mentality that underlie the act of viewing, as well as accentuating the energy inherent in objects." And that quote from Takamatsu — he reiterates this idea over and over again. There's this push and pull in the work — and we even heard it today in the other papers — between the intellectual, between the cognitive, and between the physical, the material, the concrete world that we live in. And that's what's at the basis of what I had been thinking about in Takamatsu — what I want to talk about today.

When asked by André Breton to produce the design for the 1942 exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism* at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion in New York's midtown, Duchamp responded with a deliberate provocation. Working against the opulent surroundings of the mansion's Gilded Age ballroom, the artist created a labyrinthine installation of white string that crisscrossed the room from ceiling to floor. Using more than one mile of twine, Duchamp's exhibition design produced a network of lines and visual vectors that enveloped the works on display and took on the appearance of a haphazardly executed cat's cradle or a web spun by a spider in an altered state of consciousness. The visitors to the exhibition had to navigate their bodies through the vertiginous skeins of twine in order to properly view the works on display by artistic luminaries such as Paul Klee, Marc Chagall, Max Ernst, Pablo Picasso, René

Magritte, Kay Sage, and Giorgio de Chirico, among others, many of whom had just arrived to New York after fleeing the war in Europe in the early 1940s. So if you can imagine being an artist, then having another artist do the installation design where to get to your work of art or see your work of art, you had to literally climb through a labyrinth — I think some people were a little annoyed. But it's a really interesting provocation.

The response to this installation was predictably mixed, as it was received both with annoyance by some of the artists and also as *succès de scandale* in the press. Edward Alden Jewell, the *New York Times* art critic, provided a positive and illuminating analysis of Duchamp's exhibition design when he suggested that the twine "forever gets between you and the assembled art, and in so doing creates the most paradoxically clarifying barrier imaginable."

So many of these modern painters were really approaching this exhibition from a place of Surrealism. There were artists who were left and right of Surrealism; it was kind of a very overflowing inclusive term at that time from what we think of as classic Surrealism. But many of them were challenging that in the two-dimensionality of the picture plane, and Duchamp was like, "We're going to really challenge the picture plane. We're going to physically challenge you and your body in relation to the picture plane" — which is what we're going to see happens, I think, also in Takamatsu's work.

The ironic quality of Duchamp's design was that it literally moved beyond the physical limits of the critiques of pictorial space that were on display in the exhibition in what Jewell called "this pluriverse of Surrealism." Duchamp's twine broke through the picture plane into the space of everyday life, taking this disparate body of Surrealist artworks and — in Jewell's words — "pervasively enmeshing it in a shroud of irrational logic." Of course, if you were a Surrealist, that would be the ultimate sort of goal, I suppose, in making any work at all. More important, Duchamp's subversive gesture forced the viewers'

bodies to move through the exhibition space in an unnatural manner according to the logic of an absurdist choreography that disrupted the habitual ways of seeing. I think about Bruce Nauman's *Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk).* It's a video maybe some of you guys know. Working in his studio in the 1960s making these homemade videos, he extrapolated from a story by Samuel Beckett, this character who walked with a funny walk, and went around his studio again and again in this kind of absurd walk — like something out of Monty Python's Ministry of Silly Walks where the guys walk around like this. But the physical maneuvering one had to do as a visitor, as a viewer of a work — that's what I think was so interesting and radical about this.

Although it's not often discussed as such, Duchamp's gesture was much more than a mischievous "fuck you" to the well-heeled patrons of the modern avant-garde. By exploding the ordered orthogonals and Cartesian grids of traditional perspectival space and materializing it ecstatically in three dimensions, Duchamp increased the ratio of noise to signal within the paradoxically staid Surrealist explorations of his artistic fellow travelers. Breaking the boundaries of the picture plane itself, Duchamp's mile of twine moved outside of Surrealism's concerns with irrationality and the unconscious, instead showing us that the world is a labyrinth of vectors and lines of energy that we must navigate with our bodies. It was in the wake of Duchamp's Ariadne-like installation that the postwar development of contemporary art involved an ongoing and increasingly insistent concern with both a phenomenological inquiry into defining the limits of our bodies within the expanse of the world and a concomitant questioning of the rational order of the picture plane.

These questions really lie at the heart of the work of the artist, Jiro Takamatsu, who spent his career carrying on an investigation into the mysterious interplay of presence and absence, being and nothingness, and the visual and the concrete. Having graduated from the Tokyo National University

of Fine Arts and Music in 1958, Takamatsu began his earliest aesthetic explorations with an interrogation of the practice of painting that took its start from the idea of the point. Working in both graphite and watercolor and paper and lacquer on board, Takamatsu created abstracted forms that took on the character of organic entities or one-celled organisms.

While the earliest of these works, with titles such as *Uneasy Hero* or *Birth*, had formal resonance with both the initial works on paper of Yayoi Kusama at the time in the 1950s, or Atsuko Tanaka's images resembling network circuitry, they gradually took on more rigor and became more resolved as Takamatsu moved forward in his *Point* series. What's interesting about these two early works is that he considered them within the *Point* series, but they're also like those Surrealist works that Duchamp was messing with. They're still really confined to the picture plane. You have this kind of organic entity replicating cellular division, which he was really interested in — and in this proliferation of the forms of the circles and organic swirls and gestures of the hand. If you look at an artist like Tanaka, who's one of the Gutai artists prior to Takamatsu emerging on the scene, she was very interested in this idea of circuitry. Circuitry became this kind of metaphor and another kind of replication — a dissemination into the world, again, confined within the picture plane. Then, you have her performance with the *Electric Dress*, 1956. Gutai was also very interested in the performativity, and so that became kind of another groundbreaking thing — Takamatsu would be sort of raised in terms of his intellectual upbringing. And then, the wonderful drawings that she made — which were circuitry drawings for this *Electric Dress* — these kind of model drawings. This was also a moment in his career when Gutai artists like Kazuo Shiraga were working on the picture plane with their feet. They were radically trying to do something different — a contemporary of Jackson Pollock with the drip painting, but from a very different perspective — swinging one's self across the canvas and making the gestures with the foot rather than the hand. As Takamatsu worked his way into a more mature questioning of the dictates

of the picture plane, one can see the artist grappling with the onslaught of painterly queries put forth by the likes of his older contemporaries such as the more performative somatic experimentation of the Gutai group or the spatial explorations of non-illusionistic space in the slash and gouge paintings of Lucio Fontana.

Takamatsu's *Point* series is indicative of the artist's preoccupation with these concerns. Each of these works began with a painterly movement from a central point of reference on the canvas into a circular maze of overlapping and dancing lines. The real break created by these works was Takamatsu's addition of the sculptural element of string onto the surface of the canvas itself. In works such as *Point No. 15* (Takamatsu plate 1, page 8), the artist embedded a dense circular nest of strings onto the surface of the canvas with a thick layer of black lacquer and then doused it in this very wrong Pepto-Bismol kind of pink. In this and other related works, Takamatsu extracted a line from a single point on the two-dimensional canvas and pushed it into the third dimension, giving the viewer the feeling that it was trying to escape the ennui of its planar captivity. This spatial impulse very quickly evolved into three-dimensional sculptures rendered in wire, which we'll discuss in a second, but I want to make a point about this. So, there's a hole in the canvas from which the string is pulled out. And if you think about one-point perspective as it was originated in the Renaissance by Alberti and Brunelleschi and whatnot, this idea of the vanishing point became this kind of rational order of the movement into so-called Renaissance painting from painting in the Middle Ages, where there was this illusion of depth and this rational, mathematical attempt to grasp and control the world, which later we can think of as Cartesian — much later, because Descartes wrote much later.

But what Takamatsu's doing here — he's taking that point and he's pulling the world out from behind the picture and onto the surface as if somehow — has anybody seen *Stranger Things?* It's the Upside Down. It's this barrier between two worlds,

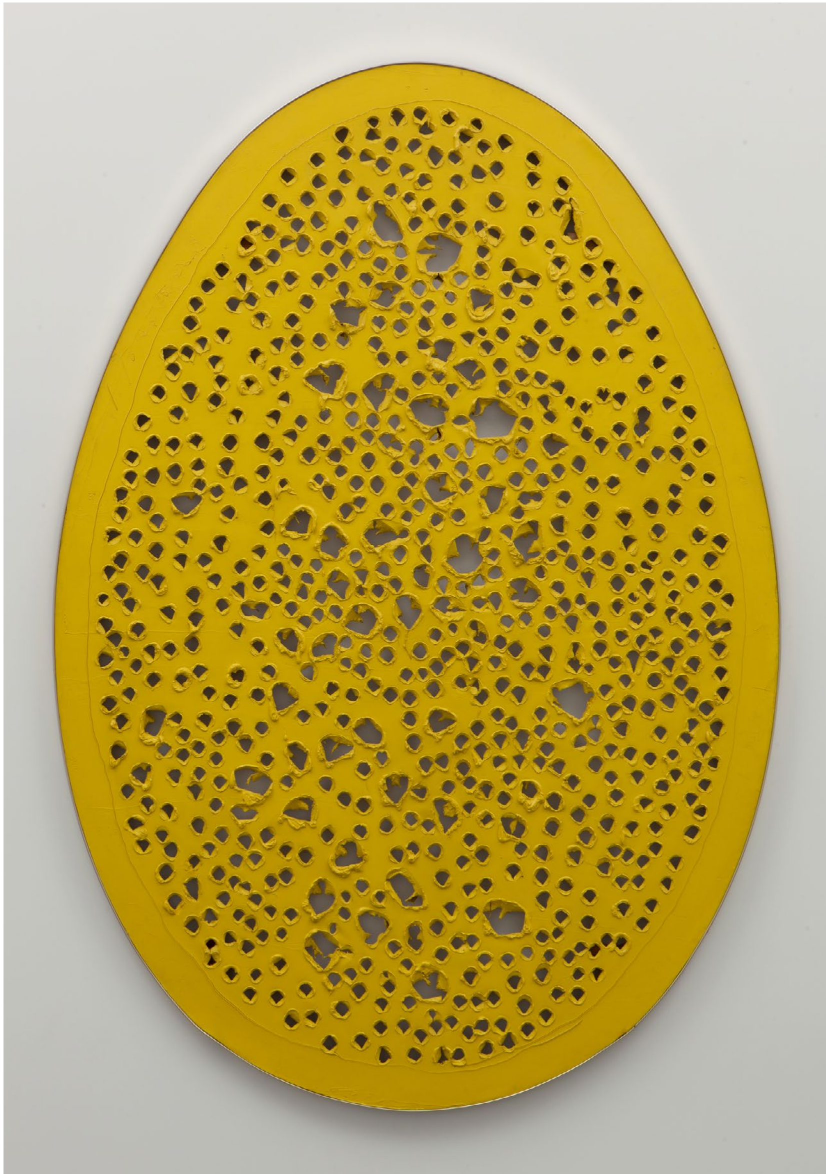


Fig. 2

Lucio Fontana (Italian, born Argentina. 1899–1968). *Concetto spaziale, la fine di Dio (Spatial Concept, The End of God)*, 1964. Oil on canvas. 70 x 48½ x 1½ inches (177.8 x 123.2 x 3.8 cm). The Rachofsky Collection. © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome. Photograph by Kevin Todora

right? The canvas is this, in fact, this membrane between you, the viewer with your optical and physical desire to grasp the world and what's happening on the canvas. There's nothing illusionistic here. Even the earlier ones that we discussed are a little more — they're not illusionistic because they're not figurative, but there's something organic. This is physical. This is moving into sculpture. It's moving into the third dimension. It's coming out. It's vomiting onto the canvas. It's literally an expectoration of something out. So, it becomes a move against the picture plane that I connect with the kind of gesture of Duchamp that we talked about earlier.

In this, and other works, he extracted this point — this spatial impulse very quickly involved in the three-dimensional sculptures running wire and lacquer — then materialized the movement of the string lines into our physical world. I want to mention that he thought, with these works, he was moving beyond Lucio Fontana. Takamatsu was very, very familiar with Fontana's work, and Fontana — Argentinian by birth but really grew up intellectually and worked in Milan, and in a context working in Italy where the gods of painting, where the Renaissance painters and this idea of perspective were already being destroyed and broken apart by the Futurists. Fontana was in school in the 1920s when the Futurists were in ascendance, but then had been tainted with collaboration with the fascist regime, so he started pulling away and gouging and showing what was behind the canvas (fig. 2). Takamatsu is moving beyond Fontana, going outside to the front of the canvas, not showing you what's behind, but extruding into the world.

So, in works such as *Point No. 15*, there's no longer even a planar surface. The string has come out into three-dimensional space and is occupying the same space that you're occupying, and it becomes a frozen, lacquered sort of physical object. And I always think of someone like Alan Saret at the same time — another American artist associated with Minimalism and Post-Minimalism — but it's a very different kind of idea, this

idea of string that Takamatsu was working with. And we heard earlier the discussion of the bottle works as well. And the idea of string — Takamatsu — I want to read a little quote by him.

> String is long, you know. Individual pieces of string can be thick or thin, of any color, but when it comes to the function of string, if you like, or rather notions thereof, there is no thickness or color, just length. Moreover, because, unlike steel wire, for instance, string is soft. It has no fixed form. Pieces can be easily joined to make any lengths. String is freedom of length itself. I sensed in it a kind of "minimal materiality" and wanted to focus exclusively on such properties.

So, this idea, mathematically — and I am in awe of Maki Iisaka's talk, because math is not my strong point and theoretical mathematics is not, but I felt that it was made very understandable to me today in that talk, so thank you. But this idea of the point being nothing but yet something — a location, a spot, but having no materiality — he gives it materiality. And I love this phrase he uses — "minimal materiality" — this idea that somehow, a string coming out of a point, a line has no mass, but he gives it this kind of physical quality. He gives it a phenomenological presence. It enters the world. It sits in the world. String, in *String in Bottles*, each time the work would be shown, of course, the string is in a slightly different arrangement because it's a pliable material. So, that kind of poetry of the ability to change the work — the work having almost an organic life because of this idea of string — I think, is really very interesting to think about with Takamatsu. This "freedom of length" and "minimal materiality" would be made manifest in other works by Takamatsu that combined coiled lines of string with everyday manufactured objects, such as in his sculpture *String in Bottles* in which coiled lengths of electrical wire fill and come pouring out of glass Coca-Cola and other soda bottles. *Strings with Stepladder* — it's related to the later concrete compound work — a stepladder covered with string from 1963 with its looping skeins of cord

draped over a common aluminum folding ladder. Takamatsu also brought these properties to bear in performances and installations using string that he created as a founding member of the group Hi Red Center. One of the performances by Hi Red Center that is often mostly attributed to Takamatsu himself is a performance called *Rope-ology* from 1963. In this performance, the three members of the group were rendered deaf and blind with earplugs and blindfolds while their hands were tied around their backs. Ropes were tied around their feet and stretched across the floor, while the players were tasked with finding their compatriots by moving around the space with one foot always on their own rope. The player who placed his foot on that of another won the game. What is amazing about this for me and the relationship to the other work is the way in which the — first of all, for those of you who have read Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, there's often a lot of discussion about sight and vision and cognitive functions and how we see the world and perception. But what I find really amazing about Takamatsu in this particular moment — and a few other artists working around the world at this time — is this kind of pushing away the idea of sight, which is so directly tied to that history of Renaissance painting and perspectival rationality, and then really thinking about embodiment through the tactile. Tactility becomes something that — you know, it's a touch — Aristotle thinks of touch as a lesser sense. It's a base sense because it's the sense of our bodies, which are filthy, and in Aristotle, vision, of course, is the ultimate intellectual sensibility. And Takamatsu's *Rope-ology* — also a fun and phenomenological game — performativity, but also, thinking about the way in which the tactile connects us as subjects to each other. Because so much of his work is about subjectivity and objectivity — about us and the world. But we ourselves are objects in the world, if we can step back a little bit from thinking about ourselves in the way that philosophy traditionally has characterized human subjectivity as being separate from the world through sight.

With its proprioceptive attempts to define the limits of our bodies — like octopi with their tentacles — this "happening" highlighted the phenomenological concerns of Takamatsu, who used string and rope as a way of signaling the importance of our tactile connectivity to the world around us. Like Duchamp before him, Takamatsu's use of string evokes a physical manifestation and subversion of the orthogonal lines of Renaissance one-point perspective by pulling these lines out beyond the surface of the canvas as strings and connecting us viscerally to the vanishing point in a truly physical manner. In these works, vision is no longer a disembodied rational order but something far more subtle, tactile, and eminently physical. In this sense, Takamatsu might be seen to be exploring a radical materialization of the rational order of Cartesian space in his unique aesthetic inquiry into our interactions with what I'm calling the "skin of the world."

Takamatsu's next body of work would make this obsession with the skin of the world that much more clear. In the *Shadow* series, which he initiated in 1964, the artist would invent what he called — in an inscription on a preparatory drawing — "a device to generate absence." In *Shadow No. 145* from 1966, for example, the artist constructed a bas-relief painting surface that appears to be a wall of a decorative wooden moldings painted in a neutral shade of off-white. On its three-dimensional surface, he painted, or rather "projected" in oil paint, a shadow of a person's hand reaching across the picture plane. Subsequent works would render the shadows on both flat and three-dimensional surfaces, as with the painting *Shadow,* 1968*,* which depicts a hand holding a teacup and saucer over a table; the seated woman shown in relief in *Coffee Break*, 1970*;* the ghost of a shirt hanger projecting its penumbra from an actual wall hook in *Shadow of a Hanger [No. 300]*; or the doubling of physical absence in *Shadow (Double Shadow of a Baby),* 1969/1997*,* which is a work that's in many of the publications over here on the shelf, with its two competing shadows seemingly generated by opposing hypothetical light sources.

The critical discourse around this formative body of Takamatsu's work has focused on the extensional play of absence and presence in terms of human subjectivity. There is another reading of these shadows that might connect them in a more material way to the artist's early string works, by stressing their playful engagement with the physical manifestation of the almost photographic indexicality of objects and bodies. And here, I'd like to make a connection to Asako Katsura's discussion of photography, because the works have this kind of photographic aspect to them — this idea of light and shadow if one thinks about the origins of photography with the camera obscura and the way in which a camera obscura lens projects the world back onto a flat surface but through an indexical relationship between light and the world. That's what I found really interesting about Katsura's talk in relation to the idea of photography because all the photographs here are very traditionally matted photographs that he did. But what she was talking about in terms of the sculpturality of them. There is this way in which Takamatsu does the mise en abyme with the *Photograph of Photograph*, talking about the way in which light hits a photograph within the photograph so you can't really see that original photograph — there is something incredibly sculptural about that, and I've always really thought about photography as a sculptural medium in terms of the physicality of its relationship to the world and not as a transparent kind of reflection of the world. But that light has to actually hit and chemically react with the substance.

In this reading, about this idea of photography and indexicality and objects and bodies, we can see these paintings as actually touching the world and in turn evoking the presence and mutual interconnectivity of things and beings that surround us. The idea of having a painting surface with an object on it and then a hanger actually coming out of it — with then a projected image of the hanger as a shadow — is kind of a push-pull between the three- and the two-dimensional. There's something at work here that other artists, of course, going back to Picasso, played with. Clement Greenberg, the great modernist critic, called the

Fig. 3

Giulio Paolini (Italian, born 1940). *Senza titolo (Untitled)*, 1964. Plywood board and used paint brushes. 75⅝ x 63 x 1 inches (192.1 x 160 x 2.5 cm). The Rose Collection and The Rachofsky Collection. © Giulio Paolini. Photograph by Kevin Todora

application of a piece of newspaper to the surface of a Picasso painting an "intruder object," because for him, it messed up the absolute modernist purity of the painting. Which, of course, I love — the idea of an intruder object that messed with that surface, and that's one of Picasso's major contributions to the history of painting. And then, you have the radical next step of that in someone like Robert Rauschenberg who would walk around New York picking up detritus from the city and attaching it to the surface of his canvases using them as a support as opposed to canvas — *Bed* being one of the most famous of the so-called combine paintings. And someone like Giulio Paolini, an artist associated with the Arte Povera so-called group out of Milan and Torino in the 1960s — a contemporary of Takamatsu's — and this is actually, I believe a work in the collection here, Giulio Paolini, *Senza titolo (Untitled)*, 1964 (fig. 3). I was like, "Of course Howard has this work." Paolini was, as a young Italian artist emerging in the 1960s, similarly obsessed with this history of perspectival space going back to the Renaissance — the tyranny of it, really, in a way for a young artist going to school in Milan or Torino. And for him, this kind of zero degree of painting became a piece of plywood — this blank, sculptural picture plane, empty — and the brushes, this idea of potential.

So, in a sense, if you think about absence as this productive possibility within Takamatsu — because he talked continually about absence, but it was always this sense of plenitude — this idea that, "Yeah, a blank piece of paper — there's an infinite number of possibilities of what can happen on it." And the same was happening with someone like Giulio Paolini in this particular work, and Takamatsu here, with the *Shadow of a Nail [No. 400]* (fig. 4), which is in the office around the corner here, does something very similar, I think. I love the minimality of this one, thinking about Lucio Fontana. It's the closest to that gesture. And then, other artists who were contemporaries of his — Günther Uecker, involved with Group Zero, was literally making paintings with nails. Yoko Ono — when she was involved with the Fluxus group — has *Painting to Hammer a Nail*

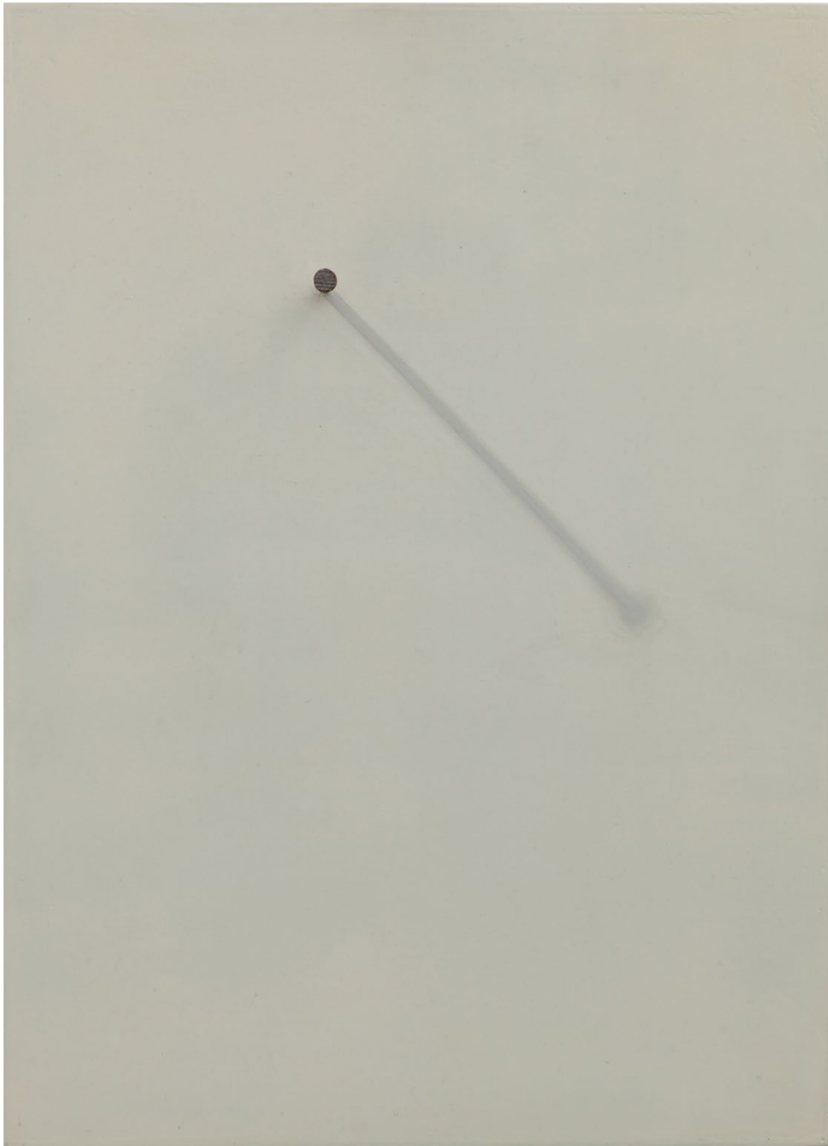


Fig. 4

Jiro Takamatsu (Japanese, 1936–1998). *Shadow of Nail No. 400*, 1975. Lacquer and iron nail on wood panel. 12⅞ x 9¼ x 2½ inches (32.7 x 23.5 x 6.4 cm). The Rachofsky Collection. © The Estate of Jiro Takamatsu, Courtesy Yumiko Chiba Associates / Fergus McCaffrey / Stephen Friedman Gallery. Photograph by Kevin Todora

in, 1961/1967, where the idea that you would go and hammer a nail into the painting and make the painting yourself. This connects in so many ways internationally to what people are kind of struggling with in this gesture of breaking up what the picture is and what a two-dimensional idea of painting is and bringing it back into the world. In this reading, we can see these paintings as actually touching the world and in turn evoking the presence and the mutual interconnectivity of things and beings that surround us. And this is really crucial to me in my reading of Takamatsu. I really feel like this is the crux of what much of this work is about throughout the different series. In this case, the shadow becomes a literal extension of the world into a realm where representation and materiality collide in an inextricable quantum matrix of presence and absence. So, in a sense, you start losing this idea that representation is somehow separate. You start to think about the idea that the physicality of the world and representations of it start to melt that separation between the two.

Takamatsu's *Shadow* paintings lie in this liminal space between representation on one hand and the material world on the other; between the shadows of Plato's Cave, with their inability to purely represent the highest form of truth within Plato's *Republic*, and the concrete factuality that we bump into every morning when we get out of bed. It's an old problem that sets up a binary form of opposition that artists struggled to complicate throughout the 20th century. One might think of the hybrid nature of Rauschenberg's combine paintings, in which his objects came to populate the picture plane in the creation of a third way outside the confines of the painting/sculpture dichotomy. Other artists, such as Michelangelo Pistoletto, came at this problem from another angle — another artist involved with the Arte Povera group in Italy in the 1960s. And you can see this in *Three Girls on a Balcony*, 1962–1964 (fig. 5), one of his series of *Mirror* paintings, which he began in 1961, in which an almost photographic painting of people and things is attached to a perfectly mirror-polished steel surface. The resulting "paintings" both depict the world and reflect the

viewer's own dynamic (and moving) image on the surface of the work itself, creating an inversion of the rational visual order of Renaissance perspective in a manner similar to that generated by Takamatsu's *Shadows.* Thinking about Pistoletto and these works — and so many of these images are drawn from the Walker Art Center's collection because I was there for 11 years, so I know how to access them really easily. But what you see in the actual painting is these three women on a balcony. What you're also seeing in this photograph of *Three Girls on a Balcony* is the other work in the gallery that is reflected in the mirror — Ellsworth Kelly's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue?* and Andy Warhol's *16 Jackies.* I think it's fascinating how someone, at the same time, in a very different place, probably knowing nothing about the other artist, they're working on similar questions. And these questions are disseminated throughout the world philosophically and otherwise. For me, this Pistoletto, the resulting painting depicts the world and reflects our moving image of ourselves. When you walk in front of them yourselves, your body moves physically. You're interacting in this very different way. When you walk in front of a Renaissance painting, they are painted with the ideal spectator standing in one particular spot. That's how perspectival paintings were constructed mathematically and physically. But in this case, it's about moving. In fact, this starts to bring in this question of the radicality of Baroque sculpture at the end of the Renaissance, which I'm very curious if Takamatsu ever really wrote about it or thought about it, because the idea of Baroque sculpture has, I think, everything to do with Minimalist sculpture in terms of the physicality of one's relationship physically to the work. It only is taken in, in its totality when you move around it. The physical — it induces you to move to see the work, and then your body is in relationship with it in this very strict kind of way.

Takamatsu's next works emerged from the same set of concerns manifested by his *Shadows* and directly addressed the question of the construction of illusionistic space by the system of perspective. In works such as *Perspective Painting*, 1967 (Takamatsu plate 2, page 7), the artist laid bare the

Fig. 5

Michelangelo Pistoletto (Italian, born 1933). *Tre ragazze alla balconata (Three Girls on a Balcony)*, 1962–1964. Oil, graphite on tissue paper mounted to mirror-polished stainless steel. 78¾ x 78¾ x ⅞ inches (200 x 200 x 2.2 cm) overall. Collection Walker Art Center, Gift of Mrs. Julius E. Davis, 1999. © Michelangelo Pistoletto, Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York

accepted logic of this visual system with a strange reversal of the principle of the vanishing point: a series of shadow figures get larger as they recede into the background of the gridded illusionistic space — that's a reverse of what you would think. Looking more closely at this rather vertiginous perspective "study," we start to notice that something is wrong. It turns out that we are looking at the image from the backside of the painting, as the vanishing point projects out into the world in front of us. We are in fact inside the virtual world of the painting. We are behind the movie screen. You're at a theater, you walk behind the movie screen — you're seeing the reversed image. You're on the other side of that plane. Pistoletto in his series called *The Minus Objects* — and I would like to do more research on this related to Takamatsu — where Pistoletto referred to a bunch of different objects he made, which were all very different — they were sculptural, some two-dimensional — but he called them Minus Objects because he said we were taking a chunk out of the world and it was like a record skipping, an LP skipping, in a sense, and losing some of that information. One of the Minus Objects is a giant photograph of Jasper John's face where he's cut the center out of it. So he just hangs the left side of the face, and the right and the middle are gone. Another one is a kind of free-floating banister — very minimalist — where you can put your foot up and your elbow and stand to have a conversation in the gallery. Another, *Lunch Painting,* is a painting in which one could sit and have one's lunch. Three-dimensionally, one could — one's not allowed to anymore — sit there on the surface and have on your little table your lunch and have a conversation with somebody. I think what Takamatsu is starting to get at is something similar to what Pistoletto is starting to get at — messing with this idea of what sculpture and two-dimensional perspectival painting is.

And we start to see that more here in the work around the corner, *Cube 6 + 3*, 1968 (Takamatsu plate 3, page 10), which, I have to say when I came in this morning, I'm always so shocked at how small it is. Because every time I see a photograph, it's so big like this, but I walked in; I was, "Oh, it's very sweet and

very small, but it radiates from the corner. It's like this incredible black hole, blue hole, kind of thing. And, particularly, that's what the other speakers were talking about earlier with the idea of this recession back and forth — the oscillation between the six and the three in *Cube 6 + 3*, which is the title. It's a bright blue wooden cube, painted with vibrating red lines — and I think the opticality of it is accentuated by the colors he chooses — these almost fluorescent colors. It oscillates between real three-dimensionality and the optical three-dimensionality of the principles of perspective. In other works, like *The Pole of Wave*, it similarly plays with this uncertainty between optical illusion and reality — again, in three dimensions, though, as this carved wood sculpture appears, at one angle, to be undulating with a wavy surface, while if you put yourself in a particular position, it just looks like a straight Minimalist sculpture — something like an Anne Truitt, like a very white kind of column. So how it appears has to do with your position — your physical, bodily position in relationship to the work.

This movement from the virtual world of illusionistic space into the physical world around constitutes the primary through line in Takamatsu's work, in my mind. With *Slack of Net* — and there are a number of *Slack* works — the artist embarks upon another exploration of this in-between space, consciously loosening the uptight rigor of the Cartesian grid — and binary thinking, in general — by subversively morphing it into a slackened and surprisingly liberated net of rope. Lying on the floor or hung from the wall, the works in this series seem to literally melt the geometric order while celebrating the irregular and the irrational, or at least the openness of nonsystemic thinking. You think, at the same time, Sol LeWitt, other artists, are working with the grid in all sorts of different ways. I think, actually, it was interesting that someone mentioned Mel Bochner earlier, because at this time, Bochner is using those formulas — but he's also messing with them, and there are these sculptural photographs where he takes a photograph of a gridded work and then crumples the photograph, rephotographs it, and then cuts out the photograph, mounting it to Masonite. As much as Bochner is interested in

this kind of rigor or math, there's always this humor with it, too, and this messing with the system of mathematics as well. He's kind of playing with it. But I think that's also what Takamatsu was doing here. As one of Takamatsu's purest and most minimal gestures, the *Slack of Net* works give the impression of having been peeled off the surface of a painterly illusion and set adrift as malleable pieces of flotsam on the waves of the world itself. Due to the irregular lengths of the string composing their structures — that makes up their "slackness," so this is longer, that's shorter — they can neither define space properly in terms of geometric definitions nor hold their shape, but are flexible enough to adapt to the mutability of the world. This extra bit of material imbues these works with a poetic simplicity and brings to mind a work by another Arte Povera artist, Alighiero Boetti, whose work *Contest of Harmony Invention*, 1969, is composed of sheets of freely hand-drawn graph paper. Basically, Boetti made a pad of graph paper by freehand drawing the grid. And so, it's a little bit irregular, it's all a little bit wavy, and it's this beautiful piece. And then, each sheet is a little bit shorter than the one before it, so it's like this kind of *[Makes sound of flipping through pages]* — you know, you can't touch anymore. But this idea of the grid being such a structural and crucially important thing within the history of mathematics, but then, also within art, and all of these people playing with it — pushing it, smooshing it, really messing with the rationality and putting it into a poetic context rather than an orderly geometric context. Another work by Boetti — which I find interesting to compare to the *Slack of Net* work — is this work called *Nothing to See and Nothing to Hide*, 1969. Again, it's the grid. It's a minimalist kind of structure. It's plexiglass on top of a steel structure. When Renaissance painters made their paintings, they drew the grid. They drew the perspectival point. There was an underlying actual gridded structure that they worked on mathematically. And Boetti plays with this. The idea of *Nothing to See and Nothing to Hide* — I just love the kind of nature of that as a phrase, as a philosophy, as a playful kind of relationship to the world. Because you see behind the work. You see the wall behind the work. You see what's holding the work up.

I think that this idea of oneness in the *Oneness* series — these materials in Takamatsu's work — has the most direct relationship with Arte Povera and a few other artists working around the world at this point in time. In Takamatsu's *Oneness* series, we can see some of the similar kind of concerns from the Arte Povera group. The artist described coming up with the idea for this series while standing at a bus stop one day and looking at the trunk of a tree. Meditating on the tree, Takamatsu imagined that this organic entity hid within itself a square wooden beam like the ones used to construct his house. In works such as *Oneness of Cedar*, the artist demonstrates the infinite possibilities offered by the oneness of materials, partially carving a wooden pillar out of two tree trunks in a demonstration of the emergence of one particular concrete presence under the myriad potential possibilities that the wood offered.

Those of you who might know the work of Giuseppe Penone — who was another artist working at the same time as Takamatsu in Italy — he did sort of the reverse of the *Oneness of Cedar.* For his series of *Trees — Alberi* — he took an industrial block of wood, basically, and found the sapling inside the tree by following the veins and the knots and he carved out what he imagined the sapling might have looked like. Carl Andre used railroad timbers to make sculpture as this kind of minimal poetic form, actually, working in a very different way than someone like Penone or Takamatsu — thinking about the organic in a very different way.

Takamatsu would apply this methodology to a wide range of materials in works such as *Oneness of Concrete*, 1971 (Takamatsu plate 3, page 12); *Oneness of Wood* [No. 1051], 1971; *Oneness of Brick*, 1971; *Oneness of Black Granite*, 1971; and *Oneness of Paper*, 1972 — which, there are two wonderful ones on view in the other room. In each case, a unit of these materials was broken down into its constituent elements and then presented within the structure of its original source: shards of concrete resting on the block of concrete from which they were mined — chips of wood, pieces of brick, fragments

of granite, strips of ripped paper — all arranged on the surface of their parent objects.

I want to mention Alighiero Boetti's *Cube.* Italy and, of course, Japan, were both rebuilding after the war, and all of the artists, in one way or the other, were reacting to the postwar situation economically, socially, intellectually, philosophically, existentially. Much of what the Arte Povera artists were dealing with was this kind of influx of building materials, which they tried to find the poetry of the everyday world in. The term "Arte Povera" — it's poor art, poor materials — the idea of using materials that were not bronze or gold — traditional historical materials within the history of Italian art. Boetti, in this case, was playing with Minimalism, playing with this idea of the *Cube*, but then, just using it, filling it with all these elements that he found on construction sites. Like Rauschenberg with *Bed* or his combine paintings, in this case, he takes the world around him and makes a minimal form out of it with this kind of poetry of everyday found materials. There's something similar going on when I start to think about Takamatsu's *Smashing of Everything*, 1972, in which he takes a number of different materials and breaks them all down, then separates them into these two boxes. The idea, for me, of blowing it all apart and mixing everything up — is moving beyond the oneness in this work and the limits of that by bringing together the diversity of the materials that make up the world. He brings them up into a joyous kind of ecstatic fraternization in this particular case. Another Arte Povera artist — going back again Michelangelo Pistoletto — had a different take on this world of materials, and in his piece called *Mappamondo*, 1966–1968, he used newspaper to make this giant globe, which was performatively rolled through the streets of Milan. There's a film of him doing this. And then, eventually, he caged it in this wire globe. It looks like the Mercator kind of projection of the globe.

Takamatsu's movement back into the space of the world continued in his *Compound* series in which discrete materials (some found and some shaped by the artist himself) were put

into a relationship that provoked an act of friction between them. In *Compound*, 1971, for example, he placed a brick under a leg of an aluminum stepladder, creating an altogether alternative sense of off-kilter equilibrium. In its simplicity, this work holds the principle of the universe in its hands: objects bumping up against one another, forming “compound” entities through the tactile friction caused by their proximity. Takamatsu created a simple and fraught relationship between a brick — a literal building block of civilization — and a ladder — a prosthetic instrument used to augment the individual capabilities of humans. This simple destabilizing gesture of sliding a brick beneath one leg of a ladder makes for a delirious and completely upending disruption of the world as we know it. *Compound* is a piece of concrete poetry of the first order, rendered with objects instead of words, which rivals the unsettling effects of Duchamp’s matrix of strings in opening the viewer up to an expanding and infinite realm of possibilities. It’s no coincidence that Takamatsu wrote extensively about his work under the rubric of this idea of “expansiveness” in an ongoing collection of writings he called *The Expanding World Project.* Discussing our relationship with the objects that surround us, the artist suggested:

> Once we have eliminated the specific ways in which the relationships are fixed from the start, and once we have eliminated the fixed ideas in consciousness we possess towards objects… fascinating characteristics that we were not able to perceive from various objects can be fully manifested.
>
> This can be realized in the formation of [the artist’s] many multilateral and pluralistic relationships with an object as possible, as well as by becoming involved with that existence as totally as possible, even if one were to create a relationship with a single object.

For me, that quote and his *Compound* objects relate to a wonderful phrase by Viktor Shklovsky, a Russian Formalist

critic during the Russian Revolution and Soviet Union — the idea called "making strange." He was particularly talking about poetry and literature and putting together disparate elements that would take an everyday object you're very aware of, you think you know, and by putting it into proximity or in a different kind of angle, different relationship, all of a sudden, your mind is disturbed. Everything is disrupted. He was really writing about that, but I've often used that as looking at the poetic language. And you think about concrete poetry and the history of concrete poetry, going back through the avant-garde to Stéphane Mallarmé but then, certainly in the 1960s, where concrete poetry really looks at the form, the typography, the sound of the word — the Futurists experimented with sound in terms of these nonsense sounds and clash them together. The Futurists, by the way, also were some of the first artists to explore this idea of the tactile in their work, with some artists proposing — not that I would ever participate in this — but a box of glass, a box of things that you would put your hands in and not know what you were touching. But this idea of shocking you out of your everyday existence was something that a lot of the revolutionary artists explored prior to the Stalinization and emergence of Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union. They were very interested in radically changing your perspective — how you related to the world. And this idea of "making strange" — making something strange — it's this work and these works, the *Compound* works. It's that kind of friction between different objects, between us and the world, that for me is going on at one very basic level in much of Takamatsu's work, where he's broken out of the picture plane. He's come out into the world, and you have this constant reference in his work to objects in the pluriverse and the multiple possibilities offered by engaging and rethinking our relationship physically and phenomenologically to objects in the world. The questions Takamatsu posed in his works all coalesce around the idea, as he put it, of creating "as many multilateral and pluralistic relationships" as possible, with the expanding world as well as with our ability to feel our way among these constellations of objects of the world. In a sense, the entire trajectory of his

career, from the *Point* and *Perspective* works through the *Slack of Net* and *Compound* series, points us toward the following question: How do we feel the world that envelops each of us? And by “feel,” I’m talking about the tactile. The objects and subjects that make up the multiplicities of our individual universes hover around our bodies, radiating lines of energy in every direction. As these forces wash our bodies up against the shells of the external world, reality confronts us at the level of the skin, pushing against us — gently or harshly — through the surfaces of our sensory organs, as we in turn push against the world. The friction generated by these encounters between our bodies and the world creates a site where subjectivity and communication are made manifest. It is here, where our own skin comes into contact with the skin of the world, that meaning resides. That’s how we make sense of the world. This is the Duchampian “clearing” that he talked about in that first quote, occupied by the work of Takamatsu, who himself acted as a kind of “mediumistic being” who attempted to touch the ever-expanding skin of the world.

That’s the end of my talk, but I have a little postscript. This idea of the skin of the world — this morning, when I was looking at the *Slack of Vinyl* (Takamatsu plate 3, page 11) piece outside at the gallery — there’s something about that work. It started making me think of Jorge Luis Borges and the idea of the perfect map that covers that territory. It is a one-to-one map that he wrote about in one of his short stories. And, that work [*Slack of Vinyl*], which has this little bump in it — you don’t know what’s underneath it. There is nothing underneath it, but it’s irregular like *Slack of Net.* So, it’s not a perfect, seamless connection to the world. There’s a gap. But yet, it lies on top of the world — just flat on the concrete. And I want you guys to think about that. What is that? What is that space between those two works that he left there in a way?

And there are many other artists who I’d started thinking about the more I was thinking about giving this talk — another Brazilian artist, Cildo Meireles, whose work *Glove Trotter* and

its wire mesh like the chain mail you would use in a butcher shop so you don't cut your hand — covering a sort of sea, a field of different playing balls that he collected over the years. You don't necessarily know that; I'm telling you that. So, you see this work, and it's mysterious. You can see that it's a soccer ball, for example, because the mesh is semitransparent. I started thinking about Meireles and I started thinking about *Slack of Net* — for me, these two works started coming to mind. And that work was from the 1990s. Meireles was working in a very different register — different set of concerns. But this idea of covering these objects that we all are very familiar with and making a strange landscape out of them, in a way, is something similar. Or someone like Hélio Oiticica — who is also working in the 1960s in Rio at the same time Takamatsu was working in Tokyo — and his *Nucleus* pieces, which took painting off the wall and you physically had to walk through them. They were all reading Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenologist. And, because this was during the dictatorship in Brazil, in the 1960s, phenomenology and the kind of work they were able to do — thinking about the body was their political resistance because they couldn't be overtly political because they could be disappeared. So, Lygia Clark, who's in the exhibition here also, was doing something similar with tactility and the tactile materials. They radicalized, they politicized phenomenology in a way. Oiticica's *Bólides* pieces, I think, have the most direct connection to the *Oneness* works of Takamatsu. And these were meant to be the body of painting. They were pure pigment. And the idea would be you could go in and push your hands in the pigment. They are no longer a painting. Painting is no longer on the wall. It is in the world. That even morphed into these capes called *Parangolés*, which he painted and then put on Samba dancers during the Samba performances every spring during Carnival. So, they became these living painting performances — the bodies moving with the paintings. The reason I bring all these other artists in is I wanted to put Takamatsu in a dialogue with all of them, because I think that there is much more work to be done on unearthing this idea of phenomenology and the way in which it moved throughout

these different artists around the world all at the same time. But it was really a pleasure to be able to rethink this, and it's made me want to write more about Takamatsu — but I need to find some time to move forward. Thank you, guys, for your patience. Thank you, guys, for your papers, which were fantastic. Looking forward to having a drink with you.

About The Warehouse, Dallas

Created in 2013, The Warehouse is a contemporary art space in Dallas, Texas initiated by Cindy and Howard Rachofsky and their late partner Vernon Faulconer to advance scholarship and understanding of postwar and contemporary art. It stages annual exhibitions curated by a rolling roster of international curators — this has included Gavin Delahunty, Independent Curator; Leigh Arnold, Nasher Sculpture Center; Thomas Feulmer, The Rachofsky Collection; Mika Yoshitake, Independent Curator; Rodrigo Moura, Museo del Barrio; and Allan Schwartzman, Founding Director, The Warehouse and The Rachofsky Collection. These exhibitions are developed specifically to suggest new perspectives on art and invite fresh questions that expand accepted notions of history. Devoted to education, The Warehouse offers special programs and public days; hosts visiting artists and art professionals; and publishes scholarly books.

www.thewarehousedallas.org

Special thanks must be extended to the contributors Douglas Fogle, Asako Katsura, Adrian Ogas, and Maki Iisaka for their research, writings, and patience.

Published in June 2023
ISBN: 979-8-218-11567-8
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Design: Travis LaMothe