



PRESS RELEASE

AZZEDINE ALAÏA COLLECTOR
ALAÏA / KURAMATA
lightness in creation

Curated by Carla Sozzani and Olivier Saillard

Exhibition from Monday, June 24th, 2024 to Sunday, January 12th, 2024

Open every day from 11 am to 7 pm

Full Price: 10€ - Reduced price: 3€

Métro : Hôtel de Ville

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"I don't do sketches. I draw everything in my head. The images always come to me first. When you draw, you tend to focus on peripheral aspects. (...) And before you know it, that can end up replacing more essential questions that need to be considered".

Shiro Kuramata

How High Is The Moon is a steel mesh armchair designed by Shiro Kuramata in 1986. It is one of 25 pieces that Azzedine Alaïa collected from the 2000s onwards. "To get away from rags", quipped Alaïa, who appreciated Kuramata's light-hearted humour and their shared relationship with sculpture.

"The biggest problem," Kuramata explained, "is gravity. We must think about how to erase it." His pared-back creations aimed at achieving perfection are well-honed responses to the problem of balance in objects. *Glass Chair* (1976), *Broken Glass Table* (1986) and *Twilight Time* (1985) combine the notions of erasure and the memory of a chair or table to multiply their subtracted forms, which are nonetheless exposed to the light that passes through them. Whether it be armchairs, lamps or stools, Kuramata's acrylic furniture removes any suggestion of structure and does away with the visual impurity he shunned.

Azzedine Alaïa was a great admirer of Shiro Kuramata, who died in 1991, and organised an exhibition of his work here in 2005. He was also a close friend of Kuramata's wife Mieko, who played an essential role in building Alaïa's collection of essential pieces including *Pyramid* (1968), *Luminous Chair* (1969), *OBA-Q* (1972), *Glass Chair* (1976), *How High Is The Moon* (1986) and *Twilight Time* (1985). Only *Miss Blanche*, the mythical armchair made of acrylic and roses, was missing from the collection, but Alaïa never lost hope of acquiring it one day at auction.

Twenty years later, and for the first time ever, the Fondation Azzedine Alaïa has decided to celebrate one of the great designers of his time by associating Kuramata's work with a careful selection of pieces by Alaïa chosen for the materials, forms or approaches they share. The lurex knit of a simple gown responds to the knitted metal mesh of a chair, while the transparent acrylic of a shelf unit echoes the feather-light muslin of an *haute couture* creation.

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The way Kuramata made lines disappear and Alaïa's constant quest for masterfully invisible stitching brings their creations together. They have in common formal subtraction and, paradoxically, diversity of composition. Kuramata's Pyramid shelving unit (1970) echoes Alaïa's bandage dress, while the frozen folds of the *Oba-Q lamp* (1972) echo those of an evanescent white gown.

Some twenty pieces of furniture and exceptional objects designed by Shiro Kuramata (1934-91) are presented in the exhibition. In parallel, almost twenty haute couture creations by Azzedine Alaïa demonstrate his poetry of form, his radical tailoring, his subtle choice of colour and his refined use of transparency. Imbued with a great sense of lightness, the pieces on display reflect an eagerness for abstraction shared by both artists.

All the pieces on display by Shiro Kuramata and Azzedine Alaïa are from the collections of the Fondation Azzedine Alaïa.

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Shiro Kuramata biography

Shiro Kuramata was born in Tokyo in 1934.

He grew up in accommodation provided by the Physics Research Institute where his father worked.

Under the influence of a master carpenter named Mr. Seta and his workshop, which was located near where he lived, Shiro Kuramata wanted to become an architect.

After studying at a technical college, in 1956 he graduated from the Kuwasa Design School, where he studied interior design in particular.

Shiro Kuramata began his career designing interiors on a freelance basis and under contract to the Matsuya department store in Ginza, Tokyo.

In 1965, he created the Kuramata Design Office.

“Pyramid furniture” (1968) was a variable form that Shiro Kuramata designed based on a series of stacked mobile drawers. Key to his work, it foreshadowed 1980s design.

In 1969, when Shiro Kuramata installed floor-to-ceiling light pillars in the showroom of the Edward company, light became a fundamental element in his work.

In his early work it is possible to observe key concepts that would crop up over and over again in his later pieces, for example “transparency”, “lightness”, “drawer”, and “humour”.

Fascinated by the revolutionary possibilities offered by new technologies and industrial materials in the 1970s and 1980s, Shiro Kuramata concentrated his creation and production on objects made of acrylic, glass, aluminium and steel mesh which defy the laws of gravity and apply innovative assembly techniques to create extremely lightweight forms.

In 1972 he received the Mainichi Design Award. In the same year, he designed “Oba- Φ ”, a draped luminous form.

In 1976 he designed his most emblematic piece: “Glass Chair”, made up of assembled glass plates.

Shiro Kuramata received the Japan Cultural Design Award in 1981.

He drew his inspiration from Japanese culture and the creativity of the Memphis group with which he was associated from 1981 to 1983, following an invitation by Ettore Sottsass, who became a great friend.



In 1986 he designed “How High Is The Moon”, a steel mesh armchair that became a 20th-century design icon. Designed in 1988, his chair titled Miss Blanche was named after the main character in A Streetcar Named Desire. Roses are encased in acrylic, symbolising the passage of time frozen for an instant. Shiro Kuramata said: “One of the earliest inspirations for producing this chair was my desire to present it in Paris. I think there was a kind of anticipation or a part of me that felt it would be better understood in France, especially in Paris”. Inspired by the same creative principles as those of his furniture, he worked as an interior designer for Issey Miyake’s stores in New York, Paris and Tokyo.

In 1990, the French government awarded him the medal of the Ordre des Arts et Lettres.

He died in Tokyo in 1991.

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AZZEDINE ALAÏA FOUNDATION

Azzedine Alaïa lived a life filled with fashion, art, design, architecture, music and theatre.

Mr. Alaïa had been an avid collector in the creative and cultural disciplines for the past fifty years. In 2007, he set about to preserve his own work and his large holdings by founding the Association Azzedine Alaïa, later becoming the Azzedine Alaïa Foundation, with his lifetime partner, and his close friend of forty years, the publisher Carla Sozzani.

The Azzedine Alaïa Foundation has been recognized as a public utility on February 28th, 2020. The Foundation's missions are the conservation and enhancement of the work of Azzedine Alaïa, the pieces he collected throughout his life in the fields of art, fashion and design, the organization of exhibitions, and the support for cultural and educational activities.

The foundation houses its collections in Paris and exhibits Alaïa's own work as well as his collections. It is located at 18 rue de la Verrerie where he lived and work and in Sidi Bou Saïd, the town he loved so dearly.

A bookshop and café, featuring books on fashion and cultural history, are also situated at the heart of the Foundation in Paris.

The Foundation also gives awards to promising visionaries in fashion.

The signature logo of the Azzedine Alaïa Foundation was designed by Julian Schnabel.

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