

PRESS RELEASE

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Jiro Takamatsu: *Shadow Paintings*

McCaffrey Fine Art, New York

Exhibition Dates: May 6–July 2, 2010

Gallery Hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 10.00 AM–6.00 PM

McCaffrey Fine Art is proud to present the first solo exhibition of the work of the late Jiro Takamatsu (1936–1998) in the United States. Featuring large-scale examples of Takamatsu’s celebrated *Shadow Paintings*, this exhibition provides an opportunity to encounter one aspect of the diverse achievement of the most influential artist working in Japan during the 1960s and 1970s.

Takamatsu’s inquiries into the philosophical and material origins of painting and sculpture saw him prosper in the fertile ground between Dada, Surrealism, and Minimalism. In working in this way, he adopted an anti-illusionistic truth to materials that remained the backbone of his artistic vision over a forty-year period.

Takamatsu first achieved artistic notoriety as a member of Hi Red Center in actions carried out in Tokyo between 1962 and 1964 that sought to eliminate the boundary between art and life. In 1964, he began making *Shadow Paintings* (which he continued until the end of his life) that were a critical inquiry into the formal origins of painting—an act of anti-art that paradoxically uncovered expressive depth in abundance.

The shadow in art has a long history. Pliny the Elder identified the mythical origin of painting as a young woman tracing the profile of her lover’s illusive shadow cast on a wall. However, it was not until after the Renaissance that the shadow became liberated from its mimetic contribution to the creation of perspectival depth to realize its expressive potential. And it was not until the twentieth century that the multifaceted existential and conceptual implications of the “darkness that results from the absence of light” became a stand-alone subject in the works of Giorgio de Chirico and Marcel Duchamp.

In more than thirty years of painting gray shadows on white wooden supports and canvases, Takamatsu repainted favored subjects in the manner of de Chirico, while adding new motifs from time to time that often subtly invoked Duchamp. The enlarged shadow of a baby first received attention in 1965. A real hook was attached to the surface of a painting in 1967 so that it appeared to cast the shadow of a brush, and then in 1969, the shadow of a bunch of keys. In later years, his repertoire grew to accommodate shadows of walking figures (1989), a bicycle (1997), and a hand (1997).

Takamatsu found the depiction of the shadows of people and objects more interesting and important than the reproduction of the objects themselves, and he eliminated them entirely from the picture frame. This “absence of origin” creates a pictorial and narrative fracture between the shadow and the object that cast it, which is pregnant with potential and wide open to interpretation in conceptual, psychological, and socio-political terms.

For the most part, the objects are commonplace and the figures are those of family and friends. However, was Takamatsu’s choice of subject matter celebratory or commemorative? Were his motives nostalgic or an act of exorcism? Do these works relate to the socio-cultural aspects of Junichiro Tanizaki’s *In Praise of Shadows*, or to the shadows of vaporized atomic bomb victims in Hiroshima? Takamatsu was

silent on these matters, and the paintings remain resolutely enigmatic, gaining allure from our questioning. Along with Genpei Akasegawa and Natsuyuki Nakanishi, Takamatsu formed the legendary collective Hi Red Center in 1963. He represented Japan at the 1968 Venice Biennale, winning the Carlo Cardazzo Prize, and exhibited at the 1969 Biennale de Paris. Between 1968 and 1972, he taught at Tama Art University, Tokyo, and was a key figure in the development of the Mono-Ha movement. Takamatsu's work has been the subject of numerous retrospectives, including ones at the National Museum of Modern Art, Osaka (1999); the Chiba City Museum of Art, Chiba (2000); the Fuchu Art Museum, Tokyo; and Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, Fukuoka (2004).

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