



galerie frank elbaz.

Shiryū Morita
Machiko Ogawa
in collaboration with Shibunkaku

November 25 - December 30, 2023
galerie frank elbaz, Paris



Shiryū Morita / Machiko Ogawa, 2023
Exhibition view, galerie frank elbaz, Paris.
Photo by Claire Dorn

galerie frank elbaz.

The exhibition is organized in collaboration with Shibunkaku.

Morita Shiryū

Born in 1912 in Toyooka, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan. Died in 1998 in Kyoto, Japan.

Morita Shiryū is a preeminent figure in Japanese contemporary calligraphy. Shiryū revolutionized the conventional thinking of traditional Japanese calligraphy, fronted the development of avant-garde calligraphy, and spread it to the international audience. In 1952, Shiryū co-founded the *Bokujin-kai* group with other like-minded calligraphers including Inoue Yūichi. Moreover, Shiryū initiated and edited the *Bokubi journal*, which was considerably influential in and out of Japan and had attracted extensive attention to the Japanese avant-garde calligraphy.

Morita Shiryū's [...] works demonstrate how versatile and flexible Japanese calligraphy can be, and how easily it can integrate global visual art trends while enriching them with the traditional Japanese visualities and theories.

Dynamic brushstrokes, the scale of the work, evasive uncertainty of legibility, evocative abstractions, the format, and color choices make this work seamlessly blend into the contemporary art discussion of its time and integrate immaculately into the gallery spaces in any part of the globalized world. Yet his works also signal to the viewers familiar with East Asian art a clear legacy of calligraphic heritage and skillful implementation of traditional rules of character writing, orthography, and aesthetic compliance with East Asian visual conventions. Morita's art in its uniquely chosen trajectories thus crossed not only geographical borders and brought Japanese calligraphy to the international spotlight, but also managed to overcome multiple linguistic, cultural, and time barriers, introducing the shared philosophical and cultural heritage of East Asia to Euro-American audiences.

Not only Morita's visual language but also his choices of literary sources appealed to the international taste.

Morita Shiryū, Kanzan, and Global Postwar Zen
Text by Eugenia Bogdanova-Kummer
Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures



Shiryū Morita
Mau (dancing, soaring; true motion is poetic), c. 1969
Aluminum flake pigment and lacquer on paper
79 x 54,8 cm
31 1/8 x 21 5/8 inches
Unique
MORc. 1969-3318



«Of the various means of expression, I do not think there is one way that is greater or more outstanding than the other. Also, I do not think any color surpasses black, nor does black surpass the color itself.

Contemporary art in Japan cannot be studied internationally without discussing avant-garde calligraphy. Not only when we discuss avant-garde calligraphy as avant-garde calligraphy, but when we examine avant-garde art, the name Morita Shiryū is always brought up.

That which comes from the exterior is insignificant, rather that which comes from behind and from the interior is significant.

– Pierre Soulages

Excerpts of Soulages's discussion from «*Calligraphy and the Paris Art Scene I: An Encounter*» roundtable talk with Pierre Soulages, Zao Wou-Ki, Ijima Tsutomu, Yoshikawa Itsuji & Morita Shiryū in *Bokubi*, issue 76, May 1958, p. 7, 8, & 12



Back Row (left to right) Ijima Tsutomu, Ohashi Yasuo, Muramatsu Hiroshi, Yoshikawa Itsuji
Front Row: Mrs. Soulages, Pierre Soulages, Morita Shiryū, Zao Wou-ki
Published in *Bokubi* No. 76, May 1958

Ekō
回光

In Asian painting, *yohaku* (negative/ blank space) is understood as an integral part of the work; in calligraphy, the background left blank is taken as a matter of course. Such principal-subordinate relationship - the shape of the unwritten area is dependent upon that of the written characters- were a prime target of Morita's desire to challenge the ingrained formal logic of calligraphy. As early as in 1953, he hosted a panel discussion «Calligraphy and Abstract Painting» where he espoused the oil painter Nakamura Makoto's point of view that unpainted areas were a «form in the negative» in abstract painting similar to the idea of *yohaku* in Asian art. Morita's insistence upon the idea of «*yohaku* in calligraphy» allowed to integrate two seeming contradictions into Japanese calligraphy: traditional and modern, and Eastern and Western. Starting from there, it became one of the main objectives in Morita's art making to redefine the true meaning of space. Embracing the idea of «absolute nothingness» from the Kyoto School of philosophy was crucial to Morita. He conceived of calligraphy as a metaphysical act to manifest «the dynamic movement of life» in which the artist is no longer bound to the physical aspects of ink, brush, and paper, and instead reaches out for his ideal of freedom.

The phrase *eko* derives from the Zen term *eko hensho*, meaning «introspection» in Morita's interpretation. Through the act of constant introspection, the practitioner is able to reach the state of enlightenment, the ultimate goal in Zen Buddhism that is equated with the concept of *mu* (nothingness). For Morita, art was the vehicle to practice that introspection throughout his life.

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Mixing an adhesive medium or *nikawa* glue with pigments on black Kent paper, finally sealing the surface with lacquer, was a technique that Morita started to use regularly from around 1964. On the one hand, from his experience abroad in the previous year he had learned that the delicacy of his papers and its susceptibility to stains had often proved a weak point of his works. Hence he devised a new technique, known as *shikkin* (lacquer and gold), as a means to cope with these drawbacks. At the same time, it would also become a new variation of calligraphy that he exploited for its expressive potential. Pigments mixed with glue easily preserved the movements of the brush. Morita tried gold and silver washes but eventually favored aluminum flake pigment which provided a certain luster to the surface in synthetic glue as well as in *nikawa*. From the interaction of the lacquer with the pigment, the latter appears as if of golden color. The artist had to exert particular care with his composition and the character's meaning to not be overpowered by the sumptuous appearance. Yet over time, *shikkin* would become one of Morita's signature techniques.

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Shiryū Morita
Ekō (Illumination; a light shining on a wall shines back on me, or seeing is to be seen) 回光, 1966
Aluminium flake pigment and lacquer on paper
96,5 x 117,2 cm
38 x 46 1/8 inches
Unique
MOR1966-3316





Shiryū Morita
Sojō ni zasu (sitting on the chopping board) 坐組上, c. 1969
Ink on paper, four-panel folding screen
139 x 280 cm
54 3/4 x 110 1/4 inches
Unique
MORc. 1969-3319

Constructing Modern Art: Sitting on the Chopping Board

Within our inner world, both in terms of mind and body, there exist various movements, waxing and waning, one after another. These internal activities are transmuted into our words, actions, or other forms, and are shown to our external world. Among these, the movements generated from the deepest of our inner selves are crystalized in the form generally termed as «art». Sometimes it appears as literature, other times as paintings. When it takes the form of characters, with the substance it is called sho (calligraphy) in my opinion.

I, being involved in a diverse body of work, threw myself upon criticisms from every corner of society. I cannot contest every comment face-to-face. Instead, I stand firm on my own beliefs, which arose from my inner sphere. It is the crystallization of all my internal protests that became the springs of this work*. To represent these inner movements, I have strived for a suitable external form. In the case of sho that deals with characters, it is the phrase that appropriately describes my internal state that is called for. *Sojō ni zasu (Sitting on the chopping board)* is the phrase I had chosen, whose three characters duly encapsulate my internal conditions. I transformed the structure of the characters, so as to reach a precise external representation of my internal state.
**Sojō ni zasu (Sitting on the chopping board)*, 1953, Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Art, Hyōgo, Japan.

Upon working on this piece, although sometimes the strength of my belief burst [onto paper] through black ink, my effort of seeking [the balance between the inner and outer spheres] has somehow purified the strength.

The phrase «sitting on the chopping board» also describes the current situation in Japan, and it is this «purification of strength» that holds the key to peace. In my point of view, all of us living in today's Japan should consider the true meaning of this work.

— Morita Shiryū

Published in *The Mainichi Newspapers* on March 21, 1953, From Soki: Morita Shiryū noto (Remembering: Morita Shiryū note)
Edited by Inada Sousai, published in 2012 by Bokujinkai-Soryūsha



Shiryū Morita / Machiko Ogawa, 2023
Exhibition view, galerie frank elbaz, Paris.
Photo by Claire Dorn

galerie frank elbaz.

Kan
観

For *Kan*, made in 1965, Morita covered the paper first with silver leaf, then wrote the character with a mixture of glue and lamp soot, and finally sealed the surface with transparent lacquer. This particular combination of materials is rare for Morita. The best-known works are the present one, which was included in a group exhibition with Sugai Kumi and Iida Yoshikuni in Hannover; *Kame*, shown in the same year at the Bokujinkai Group Exhibition; and *Chu* from the *Sankei Famous Masters Exhibition* (now Kiyoshikojin Seichoji collection, near Kobe).

In the words of the artist, characters represent the place of one's existence. On the label of the work, he wrote «*Kwan*» (an antiquated spelling of the character) and its associated meaning «having a clear perspective, self-realization through contemplation.» Compared to the *Shikkin* works where he used aluminum flake pigment, the sheen is more mellow and brush movements are reflected more clearly, yet in its overall effect it is an equally strong work.

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Shiryū Morita
Kan (insight; seeing clearly, having clear perspective, visualizing (buddhas or pure lands) 観, c. 1965
Aluminum flake pigment and lacquer on paper
30 x 38,5 cm
11 3/4 x 15 1/8 inches
Unique
MORc. 1965-3315



Photo courtesy of Soryusha

Ki
樹

According to Inada Sousai, Morita's last disciple, this work was an improvisation by Morita while he gave lessons to his students at a calligraphy training camp in Wakayama prefecture in 1995. Unlike *Ki* of 1964 in this catalog, with its odd shape that leaves the character illegible even to the trained eye, Morita here returned to a more common style we often see in classic cursive script. One reason for this reversal may have been that it was created, as mentioned, as part of a workshop and Morita had the instruction of his students in mind. In addition, «classicism» to him meant neither just to continue traditions nor to resist or destroy them, but rather to use it as another means of self-realization.

The brushwork here looks dense and weighty as the strokes are not clearly distinguishable from one another. Ink is splattered across the paper, and a sense of movement animates the character as though Morita wrote it in a burst of strength. Near the bottom of the character, two footprints were left accidentally on the surface, bringing forth a sense of Morita's human presence. Contemplating this work created at the age of eighty-three, its raw, uninhibited energy reminds one of Morita's overwhelmingly dynamic works of the 1950s; it also tells of the unwavering spirit that the artist carried throughout his life.

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Shiryū Morita
Ki / Ju (tree, or our beings from our sho, just as the history of a tree determines its shape) 樹, 1995
Ink on paper
140 x 176 cm
55 1/8 x 69 1/4 inches
Unique
MOR1995-3314



Shiryū Morita / Machiko Ogawa, 2023
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Machiko Ogawa

Born in 1946, Sapporo, the largest city of the Hokkaido Prefecture of Japan, Ogawa studied crafts at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music where she was a student of Fujimoto Yoshimichi (1919-1992), Kato Hajime (1900-1968) and Tamura Koichi (1918-1987). Graduating in 1969, she then went on to study ceramics at l'École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Appliqués et des Métiers d'Art in Paris until 1971, and then in Burkina Faso, West Africa until 1975 where she studied local ceramic techniques.

Applying this to her understanding of Africa's geological forms, Ogawa developed her own unique style creating objects that appear to have emerged from the earth as if hewn from its very depths.

Ogawa Machiko is one Japan's most celebrated contemporary ceramicists. Renowned for her experimental and inventive approach to clay, Ogawa's work displays a lifetime fascination with geological forms, mineralogy and the different effects of extreme heat and pressure.

Machiko Ogawa
Crystals and Memory: Five Mountains (detail), 2020
Multifaceted porcelain with glass
Variable dimensions
Unique
OGA2020-3322



Machiko Ogawa
Crystals and Memory: Five Mountains, 2020
Photo by Tadayuki Minamoto



Machiko Ogawa
Crystals and Memory: Five Mountains (details), 2020
Photo by Tadayuki Minamoto



Machiko Ogawa
Crystal and Memory, 2020
Multi-faceted porcelain with glass
40,5 x 31 x 18,5 cm
16 x 12 1/4 x 7 1/4 inches
Unique
OGA2020-3072

Distant Intersection

In Ogawa Machiko's objects, one perceives two distinct voices:

One that creates and one that takes apart.

This is because in their encounter, creation and destruction become one.

A strong force of seduction and the blaze of rejection - resulting in a burst of flames

The wild and beautiful sensation of eros.

The attraction of dissonance. A wise man once said whatever man builds up, nature will return it all to the ground.

Ogawa Machiko makes it appear as if these two sides of the world are turned into one.

A distant intersection, where love and eternity breathe, guided by earth and fire.

It is a scenery of immense contradiction: Or rather: a vessel of compassion.

— Lee Ufan

May 2021

Ogawa Machiko, *Distant Intersection*

Works from 2019-2021

p. 2



Machiko OGAWA
Broken Vessel 1, 2017
Multi colored porcelain with glass
63 x 38 x 11 cm
24 3/4 x 15 x 4 3/8 inches
Unique
OGA2017-3068



Machiko Ogawa
Broken Vessel 3, 2017
Multi colored porcelain with glass
43,2 x 24,2 x 13 cm
17 x 9 1/2 x 5 1/8 inches
Unique
OGA2017-3070

galerie frank elbaz.



Machiko Ogawa
Work, 2013
Multi colored porcelain with glass
60 x 59 x 22 cm
23 5/8 x 23 1/4 x 8 5/8 inches
Unique
OGA2013-3071



Shiryū Morita
Machiko Ogawa

in collaboration with Shibunkaku



Shiryū Morita
Mau (dancing, soaring; true motion is poetic), c. 1969
Aluminum flake pigment and lacquer on paper
79 x 54,8 cm
31 1/8 x 21 5/8 inches
Unique
MORc. 1969-3318



Shiryū Morita
Ekō (Illumination; a light shining on a wall shines back on me, or seeing is to be seen) 回光, 1966
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Kan (insight; seeing clearly, having clear perspective, visualizing (buddhas or pure lands)) 観, c. 1965
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30 x 38,5 cm
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MORc. 1965-3315



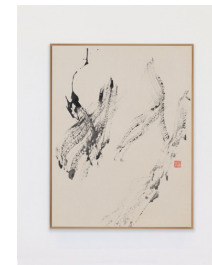
Shiryū Morita
Izumi (Spring; the origin, the source) 泉, c. 1975
Ink on paper
95 x 69 cm
37 3/8 x 27 1/8 inches
Unique
MORc. 1975-3317



Shiryū Morita
Ki / Ju (tree, or our beings from our sho, just as the history of a tree determines its shape) 樹, 1995
Ink on paper
140 x 176 cm
55 1/8 x 69 1/4 inches
Unique
MOR1995-3314



Shiryū Morita
En (circle, symbol of the perfection of being), 1976
Ink on paper
91 x 86 cm
35 7/8 x 33 7/8 inches
Unique
MOR1976-3320



Shiryū Morita
Myo (Sublimity) 妙, 1963
Ink on paper
54 x 42 cm
21 1/4 x 16 1/2 inches
Unique
MOR1963-3313



Machiko Ogawa
Crystals and Memory: Five Mountains, 2020
Multifired porcelain with glass
Variable dimensions
Unique
OGA2020-3322



Machiko Ogawa
Crystal and Memory, 2020
Multifired porcelain with glass
40,5 x 31 x 18,5 cm
16 x 12 1/4 x 7 1/4 inches
Unique
OGA2020-3072



Machiko Ogawa
Work, 2013
Multifired porcelain with glass
60 x 59 x 22 cm
23 5/8 x 23 1/4 x 8 5/8 inches
Unique
OGA2013-3071



Machiko Ogawa
Broken Vessel 1, 2017
Multifired porcelain with glass
63 x 38 x 11 cm
24 3/4 x 15 x 4 3/8 inches
Unique
OGA2017-3068



Machiko Ogawa
Broken Vessel 2, 2017
Multifired porcelain with glass
55,3 x 31,2 x 12,9 cm
21 3/4 x 12 1/4 x 5 1/8 inches
Unique
OGA2017-3069



Machiko Ogawa
Broken Vessel 3, 2017
Multifired porcelain with glass
43,2 x 24,2 x 13 cm
17 x 9 1/2 x 5 1/8 inches
Unique
OGA2017-3070