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**tomie ohtake**

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Tomie Ohtake



**Tomie Ohtake** (1913–2015) was born in Kyoto, Japan, and moved to Brazil in 1936, where she became one of the main representatives of abstract art in the country. Her career as an artist began at the age of 37, when she became a member of the Seibi group, which brought together artists of Japanese descent in Brazil. In the late 1950s, leaving behind an initial phase of figurative studies in painting, she immersed herself into abstract explorations.

[Watch the video](#)

COVER Tomie Ohtake. *Untitled*, 1964 [detail]

THIS PAGE Tomie Ohtake in her studio, São Paulo, Brazil

Tomie Ohtake's 1964 painting *Sem Título* [*Untitled*] was created following a period of emblematic experimentations that were coined by art critic Mario Pedrosa as blind paintings, marking the artist's initial experiments in abstraction. In these works, the artist would blindfold herself and paint abstract shapes characterized by spontaneity and fluidity; *Sem título*—being subsequent to this phase—displays remnants of an impulsive process, entwined with newfound geometric and structured forms. *Sem Título* embodies Ohtake's investigative oscillation between abstraction's possibilities—it displays condensed, defined shapes, dense colors, a distinct use of a foreground and a background while the outlines remain blurred, the shapes slanted and the whole appears ripped, as if a page had been torn. Interestingly, at that point in time, the artist had begun to produce small-scale studies using colored paper from magazines which she literally tore with her hands. Ohtake would rip shapes from publications and juxtapose them into compositions, then transposing them into large-format paintings.

Tomie Ohtake  
***Untitled***, 1964  
oil paint on canvas  
41 x 31 cm  
16.1 x 12.2 in







As suggested by curator Paulo Miyada, the process became Ohtake's way of dealing with the instantaneity of gesture and infusing the entire painting process with both chance and control. He notably wrote: 'Paying close attention to the artist's studies is, currently, a way to tap into the ingenuity with which she approached planning and unpredictability in her pictorial practice—while not denying the direct character of her painting. As a result, some of the recurrent polarities in the understanding of Brazilian painting from that period, such as the dichotomous polarization between geometric calculation and expressive gesture, can be elaborated anew, when considering Ohtake as a landmark of invention and freedom.'

*Sem Título* captures the artist's lifelong strive to entwine allegedly incompatible practices, with an experimentation pulled by both extemporaneity and rationalist principles. In Ohtake's own words, 'A picture is not a thing, but a movement, it could be before, it could be after.'







'It is as if Tomie Ohtake created the forms that we need or desire. Distinct and precise forms, capable of fulfilling our need, which is profound and permanent, for order and beauty, for luminescence and freshness, for transparency; forms that function as a type of visual hygiene, a necessary counterpoint to the fragmentation and dispersion of the current world, a world that is chaotic, quick, and attached to the materiality of objects and consumption; a necessary counterpoint to the excess of contingent reality and to the flood of useless information transmitted through the mass media. Hence, her forms remain in our memory as models or archetypes of a healthy world of clean light, a world worth living in.'

—**Frederico Morais**, curator and critic, in *Tomie Ohtake's Building of Forms*

Tomie Ohtake in her studio, São Paulo, Brazil

'Tomie Ohtake's world is a colorful one. Every color is celebrated there. Every color is given a solution, is given matter, is given corporeal variety—smooth, vaporous, humid, liquid, pasty. In her world, gestures have an extraordinary role. Tomie used to say that she liked geometry, but she preferred creating her geometry with freehand gestures. And because she did not employ set squares, compasses, nor rulers, her geometry was imperfect! Imperfect, in my opinion, like an eroded pebble, like the circle of the sun when contemplated at point-blank, like an eye, like a lemon.'

—**Agnaldo Farias**, curator and critic



exhibition view of  
*Tomie Ohtake: nas pontas dos dedos*,  
Galeria Nara Roesler | Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2018  
curated by Paulo Miyada  
photo © Pat Kilgore



'Tomie Ohtake stands out in the history of Brazilian art for having formed a synthesis of geometry and informality. A careful analysis of the different moments of her artistic career reveals how she mobilizes her strengths to bring together constructive reasoning and gestural sensibility, thus arriving at a singular style founded on binary oppositions such as, for example, rectilinear and curvilinear, organic and inorganic, composure and displacement, symmetry and asymmetry. In this way, visual issues or solutions are invented under conditions that create subtle tensions on her works.'

—**Miguel Chaia**, curator, in *The Cosmic Dimension in Tomie Ohtake's Art* (2004)

exhibition view of  
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Galeria Nara Roesler | Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2018  
curated by Paulo Miyada  
photo © Pat Kilgore

exhibition view of  
*Tomie Ohtake: nas pontas dos dedos*,  
Galeria Nara Roesler | São Paulo, Brazil, 2017  
curated by Paulo Miyada  
photo © Everton Ballardin



# tomie ohtake

b. 1913, Kyoto, Japan | d. 2015, São Paulo, Brazil

One of the main representatives of abstract art in Brazil, Tomie Ohtake was born in Kyoto in 1913, and moved to Brazil in 1936. Her career as an artist began at the age of 37, when she became a member of the Seibi group, which brought together artists of Japanese descent. In the late 1950s, when she left behind an initial phase of figurative studies in painting, she immersed herself in abstract explorations. In this phase, she performed a series of paintings which became known as *blind paintings*, where she would blindfold herself in experiments that challenged the ideas which grounded the Brazilian Neo-concrete movement, also bringing sensibility and intuition to the fore of her practice.

In 1957, invited by critic Mário Pedrosa, she presented her first solo exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo, which was followed by her participation in the São Paulo Biennial in 1961. Ohtake began to experiment with various printmaking methods during the 1970s and, beginning in the late 1980s, undertook large-scale sculptural projects and public works in São Paulo and neighboring cities. Having worked until very late in life, Tomie Ohtake passed away in 2015, when she was 101 years old.

## selected solo exhibitions

- *Contemporary Art + Design*, Dallas Museum of Art (DMA), Dallas, USA (2020)
- *Cultural Encounters: Art of the Asian Diasporas in Latin America and the Caribbean 1945-Present*, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Michigan, USA (2020)
- *Tomie Ohtake: cor e corpo*, Caixa Cultural Brasília, Brasília, Brazil (2018)
- *Tomie Ohtake em Curitiba – Vultos, fissuras e clareiras*, Memorial da Cidade, Curitiba, Brazil (2018)
- *Tomie Ohtake: nas pontas dos dedos*, Galeria Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil (2017)
- *Tomie por Tizuka Yamasaki*, Museu da Imagem e do Som (MIS), São Paulo, Brazil (2015)

## selected group exhibitions

- *Ateliê de Gravura: da tradição à experimentação*, Fundação Iberê Camargo (FIC), Porto Alegre, Brazil (2019)
- *Surface Work*, Victoria Miro, London, UK (2018)
- *Arte moderna na coleção da Fundação Edson Queiroz*, Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon, Portugal (2017)
- *The World is our Home. A Poem on Abstraction*, Para Site, Hong Kong, China (2015)
- *Fusion: Tracing Asian Migration to the Americas Through AMA's Collection*, Art Museum of the Americas, Washington, USA (2013)
- *Mário Pedrosa – On the Affective Nature of Form*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), Madrid, Spain (2017)

## selected collections

- China Art Museum, Shanghai, China
- Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros (CPPC), Caracas, Venezuela
- M+ Museum for Visual Culture, Hong Kong, China
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA
- Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
- Tate Modern, London, UK
- Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, USA



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