

nara roesler

tomie ohtake



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.

[click to see full cv](#)

cover *Untitled*, 1962 (detail)

selected solo exhibitions

- *Tomie Ohtake Dançante*, Instituto Tomie Ohtake (ITO), São Paulo, Brazil (2022)
- *Visible Persistence*, Nara Roesler New York, USA (2021)
- *Tomie Ohtake: cor e corpo*, Caixa Cultural, Brasília, Brazil (2018)
- *Tomie Ohtake: nas pontas dos dedos*, Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil (2017)
- *Tomie Ohtake 100–101*, Instituto Tomie Ohtake (ITO), São Paulo, Brazil (2015)
- *Pinturas Cegas*, Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2013)

selected group exhibitions

- 60th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia, *Stranieri Ovunque – Foreigners Everywhere*, Italy (2024)
- *Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940–70*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2023)
- *Raio-que-o-parta: Ficções do moderno no Brasil*, Sesc 24 de Maio, São Paulo, Brazil (2022)
- *Composições para tempos insurgentes*, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2021)
- *Contemporâneo, sempre – Coleção Santander Brasil*, Farol Santander, São Paulo, Brazil (2019)
- *Surface Work*, Victoria Miro, London, United Kingdom (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 (2015)

selected collections

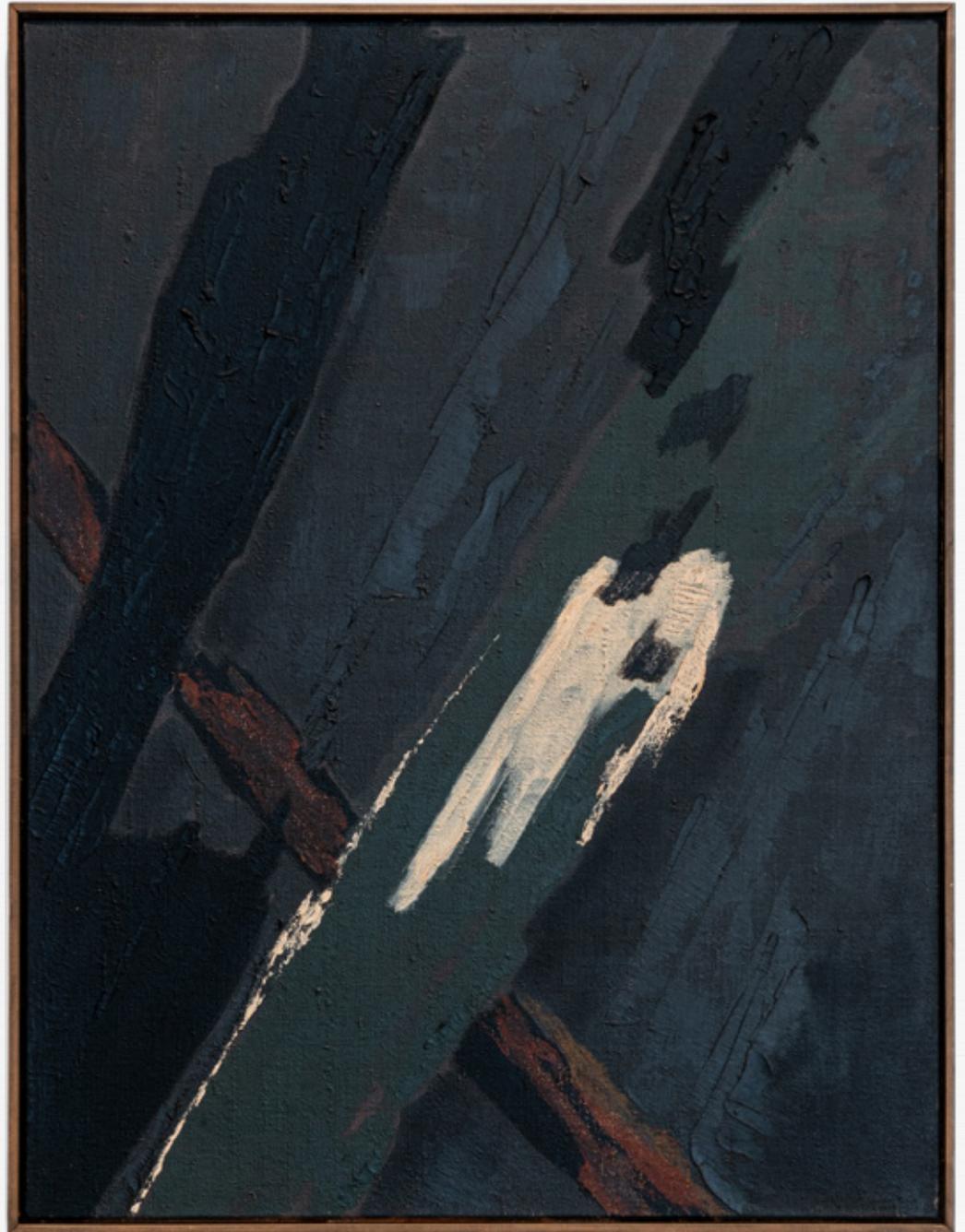
- Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas, Venezuela
- Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, USA
- M+, Hong Kong
- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMoMA), USA
- Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET), New York, USA
- Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), São Paulo, Brazil
- Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
- Tate Modern, London, UK

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early works 1952–1959

Tomie Ohtake's first paintings emerged following the artist's interactions with the Japanese painter Keisuke Sugano, who was traveling in Brazil in the 1950s. Her first pieces depict city views, urban scenes, as well as more traditional iconography such as still lifes and portraits. However, she quickly moved on to abstraction, replacing figures with simplified shapes and color fields. After having participated in a few exhibitions, Tomie Ohtake is invited to present a solo exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP). The works exhibited showed a coherent and original style, whereby she created clean compositions using juxtaposed geometric shapes.

Untitled, 1957
oil paint on canvas
65 x 50 cm | 25.6 x 19.7 in





Untitled, 1956
oil paint on canvas
73 x 59,5 cm | 28.7 x 23.4 in

Untitled, 1959
oil paint on canvas
97 x 77 cm | 38.2 x 30.3 in





Untitled, 1959
oil paint on canvas
75,5 x 95,5 cm | 29.7 x 37.6 in

Untitled, 1959
oil paint on canvas
74,5 x 48 cm | 29.3 x 18.9 in





blind paintings 1959–1961

Between 1959 and 1961, motivated by her close friend and art critic Mario Pedrosa, Tomie Ohtake started to investigate new procedures and techniques which would allow her to liberate herself from standardized ways of perceiving and producing a painting. By blindfolding herself, the artist would freely apply brushstrokes on the canvas' surface, creating abstract compositions that would become known as the blind paintings series. Even though Ohtake had a close dialogue with the main representatives of the Neo-Concrete movement in São Paulo, she always sought to produce art that did not necessarily correspond to manifestos or rules of style within a certain group. While working with abstractionism Ohtake created paintings which stemmed from an individual and extensive research, that allowed her to experiment thoroughly until achieving a form of abstraction that was intuitive and organically built.

Untitled, 1961
oil paint on canvas
75 x 85 cm | 29.5 x 33.5 in



Untitled, 1960
oil paint on canvas
83 x 61 cm | 32.7 x 24 in

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Untitled, 1962
oil paint on canvas
60 x 120 cm | 23.6 x 47.2 in



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exhibition view
Pinturas Cegas, 2013
Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR),
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

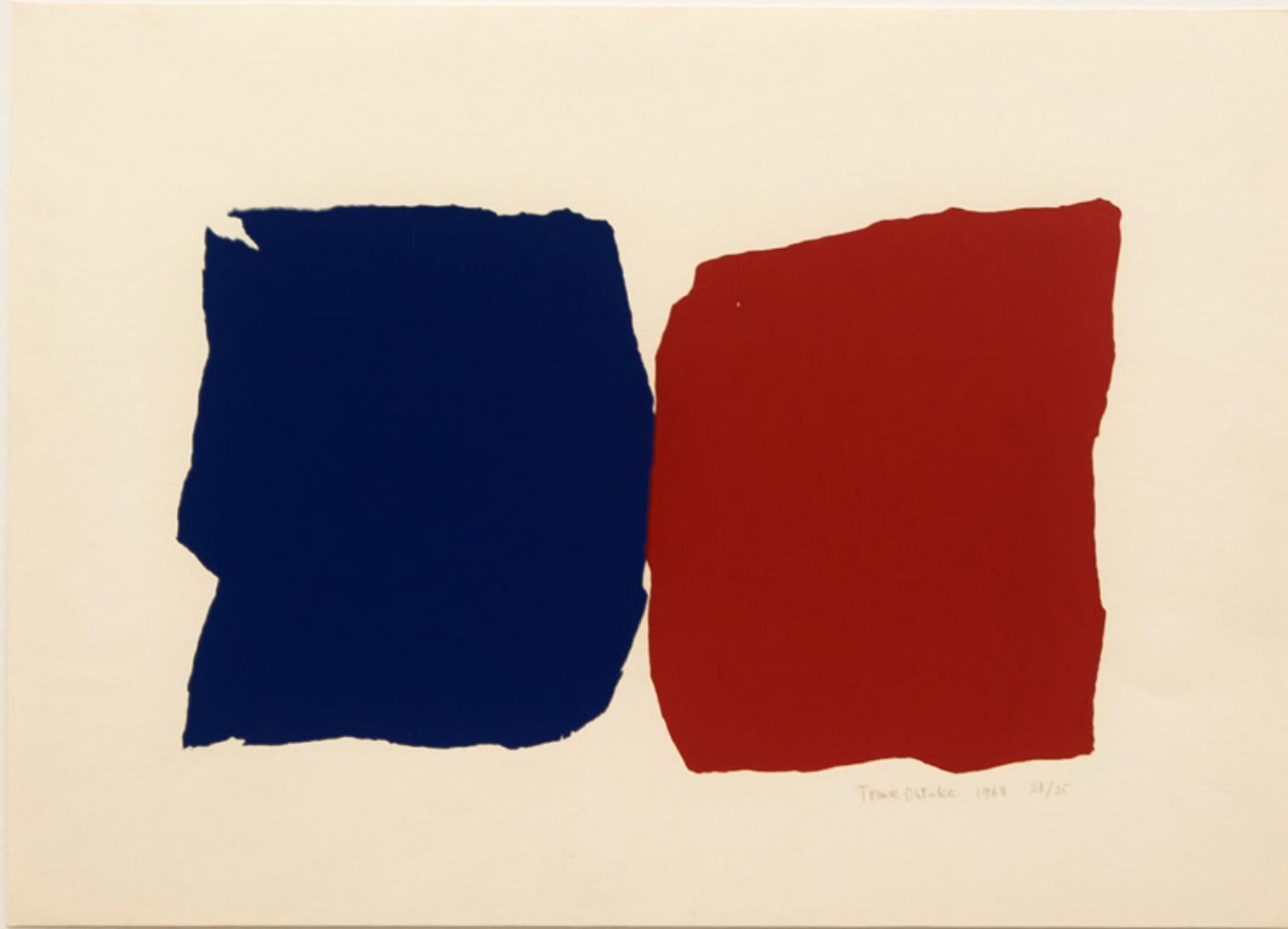
paintings with ripped paper

1962–1969

At the beginning of the 1960s, Ohtake's production changed directions again. The gestuality of her previous work was replaced by a focus on color fields. She began to create studies in small-format using paper ripped from Brazilian and Japanese magazines, producing collages through which she tested her compositions and defined color fields before painting the canvas itself. With an artistic process that began with paper-ripping, the artist infused her work with a certain imprecision as well as a richness in texture. On the canvases, the tension between equilibrium and disequilibrium took on a prominent role between the quadrangular shapes that were layered with large, uniform color backgrounds. During this period, repetition became an important strategy for the artist, as she focused on researching chromatic relationships.

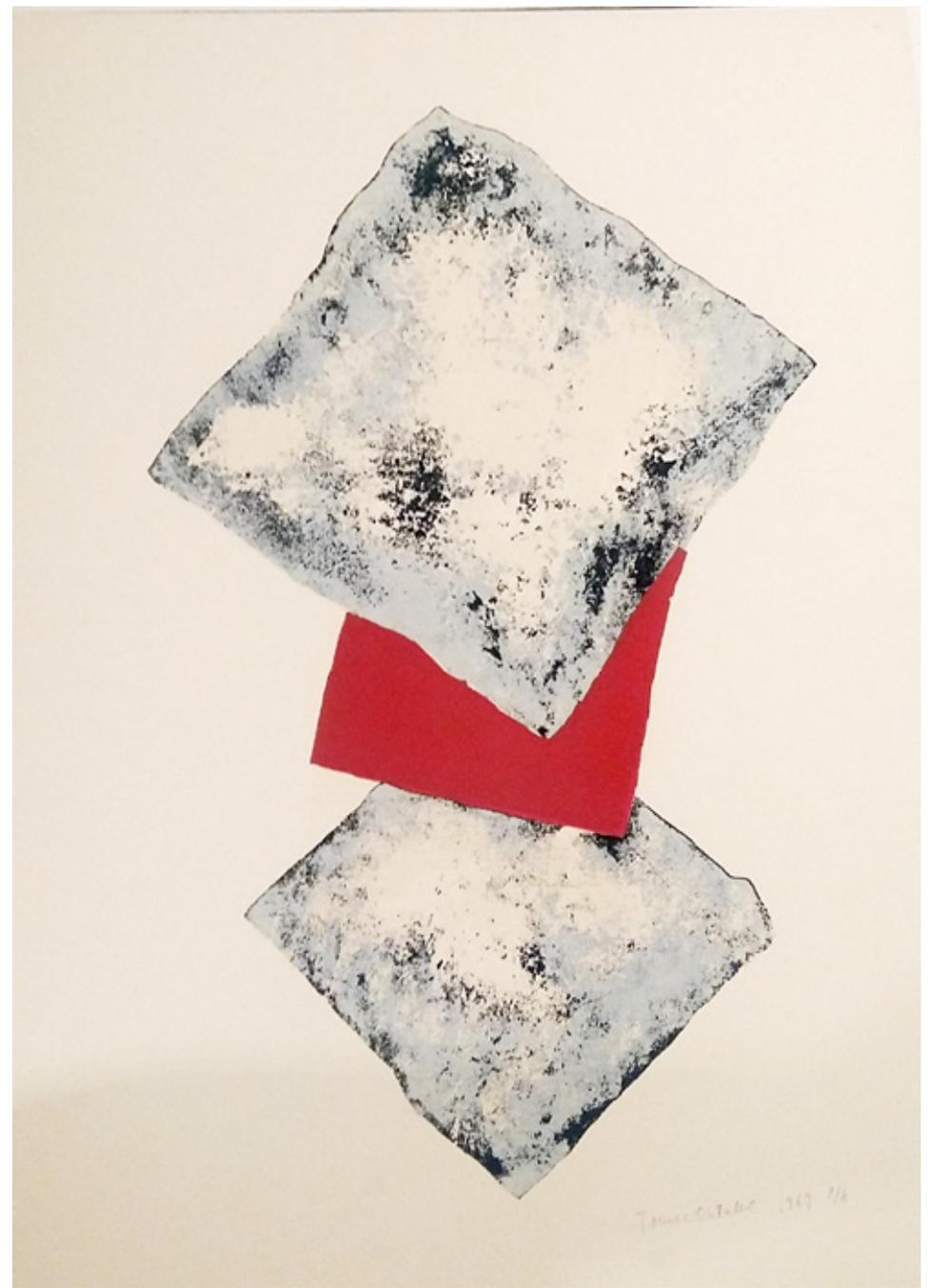
Untitled, 1962
oil paint on canvas
129 x 110 cm | 50.8 x 43.3 in





Untitled, 1968
silk-screen on paper
42,2 x 60 cm | 16.6 x 23.6 in

Untitled, 1969
silk-screen on paper
66 x 48 cm | 26 x 18.9 in





Untitled, 1965
oil paint on canvas
120 x 100 cm | 47.2 x 39.4 in

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tomie ohtake in her atelier house, 1980s
Campo Belo, São Paulo, Brazil





organic abstraction 1970s

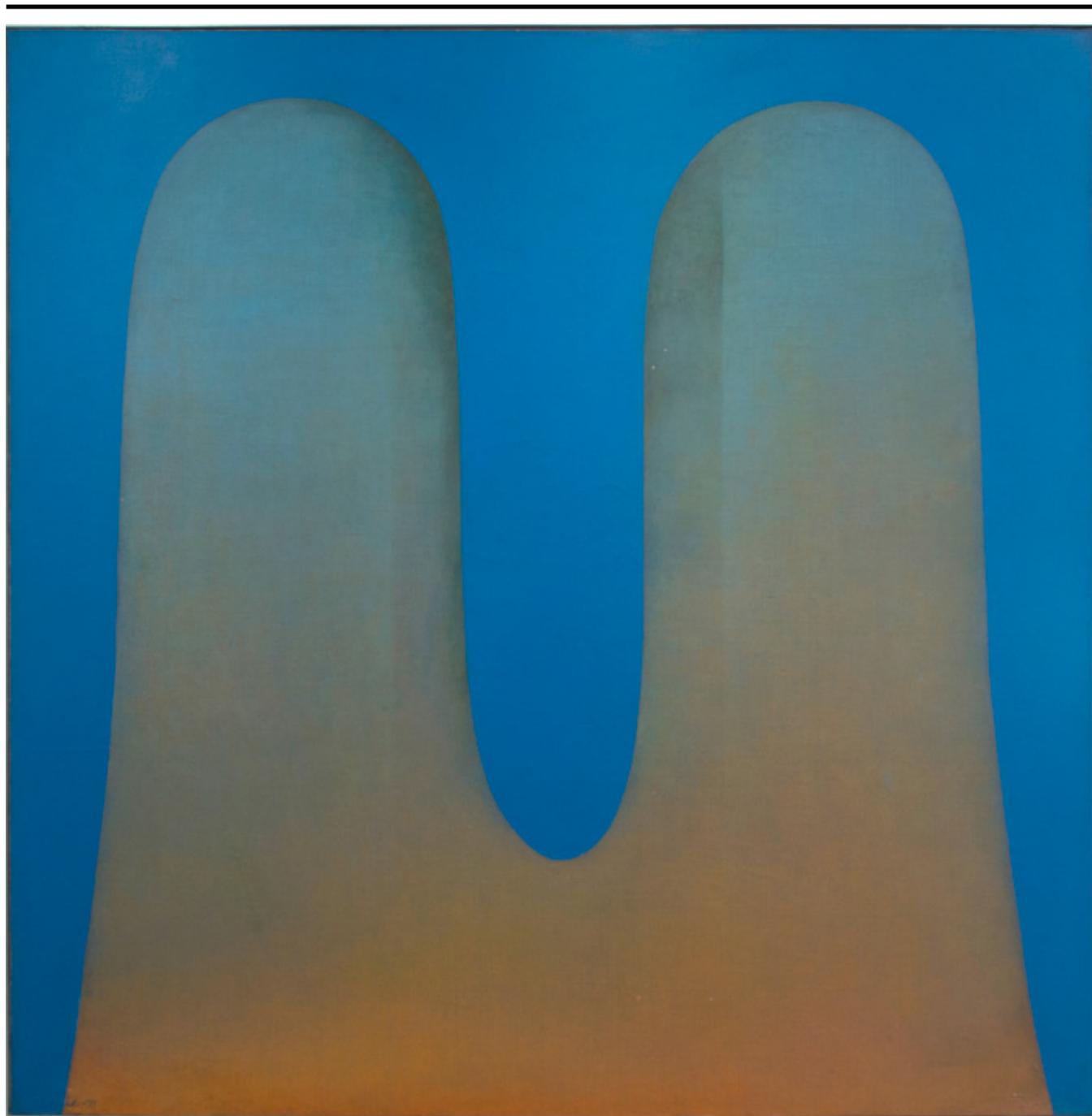
In 1970, Tomie Ohtake continued making collages but changed from using ripped paper to cutting it with scissors. This move allowed for her to create compositions with sharper contours as she gained greater control over the process.

According to 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.' She also began to expand her color palette, turning to richer and more vibrant tones, while also working on establishing a more direct relationship between the texture of the final painting and that of the initial collage. Her work resulted in a form of abstraction that did not conform to the definitions of informal abstraction or of tachisme, where gesture and the trace of the artist's process of making became a stylistic trait. Instead, this body of work inserted itself into a form of organic abstraction, with a strong presence of ovals, arches, tubes, curves etc. that arguably evoke landscapes.

Untitled, 1978
oil paint on canvas
100 x 100 cm | 39.4 x 39.4 in



Untitled, 1979
oil paint on canvas
100 x 100 cm | 39.4 x 39.4 in



Untitled, 1979
oil paint on canvas
150 x 150 cm | 59.1 x 59.1 in



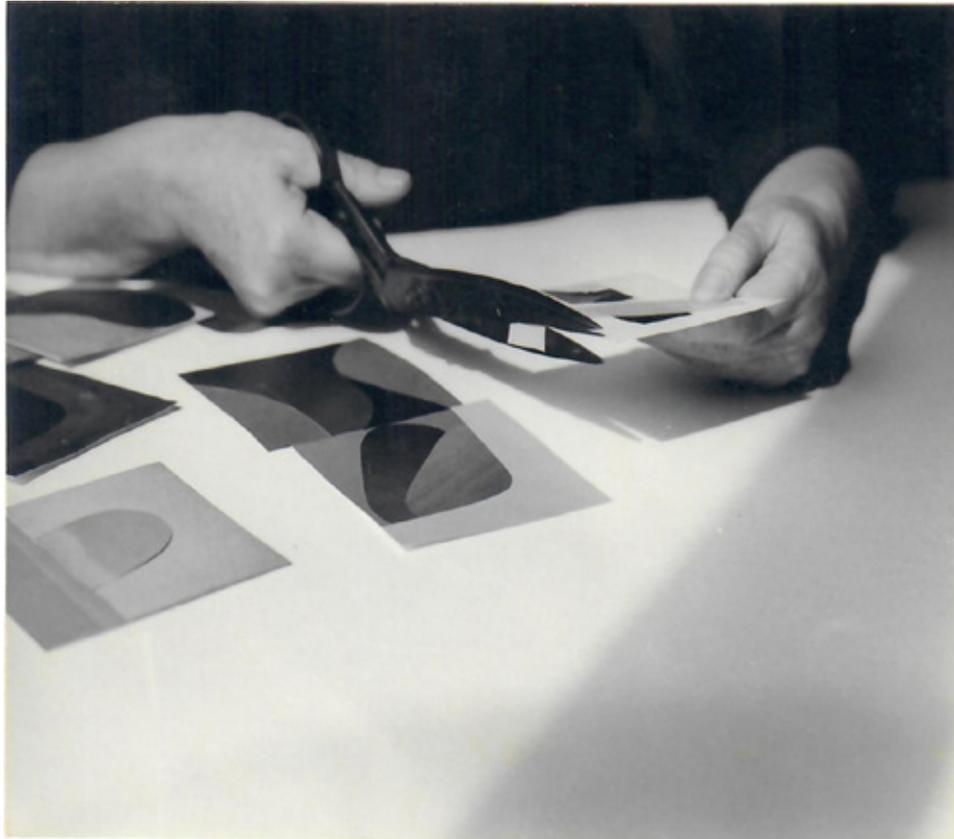
Untitled, 1976
oil paint on canvas
100 x 100 cm | 39.4 x 39.4 in



Untitled, 1976
acrylic paint on canvas
124,8 x 134,8 cm | 49.1 x 53.1 in



Untitled, 1976
acrylic paint on canvas
100 x 100 cm | 39.4 x 39.4 in



Tomie Ohtake in her atelier house,
1980s
Campo Belo, São Paulo | SP, Brazil

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exhibition view
Tomie Ohtake: *At Her Fingertips*, 2018
Galeria Nara Roesler,
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



circular shapes 1980s

In the 1980s, Tomie Ohtake began creating compositions where she painted circular shapes on square canvases. The curves embedded the works with significant dynamism and offered geometrical balance. In 1983, she introduced the use of acrylic paint, which she dissolved in water before using, allowing for a certain degree of chance, and of her relinquishing control over the process of color layering. The liquid quality of the material allowed the paint to follow its own suit, flowing into different directions and creating cloud-like shapes. After allowing the colors to spread on the surface, she intervened with a paintbrush to introduce her own composition onto the canvas. By the end of the decade, her intervention and gesture became increasingly significant; yet, she conveyed a sense of transparency and depth to her brushstrokes, always leaving the color fields uncompromised.

Untitled, 1980
oil paint on canvas
69 x 68 cm | 27.2 x 26.8 in





Untitled, 1980
oil paint on canvas
100 x 100 cm | 39.4 x 39.4 in



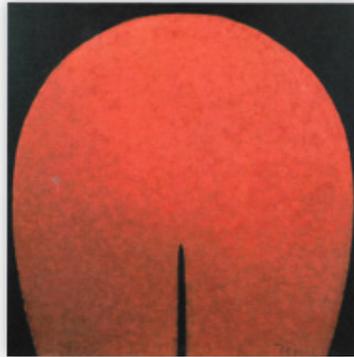
Untitled, 1987
acrylic paint on canvas
150 x 150 cm | 59.1 x 59.1 in



Untitled, 1986
oil paint on canvas
150 x 150 cm | 59.1 x 59.1 in



Untitled, 1984
acrylic paint on canvas
100 x 100 cm | 39.4 x 39.4 in



Untitled, 1982
oil paint on canvas
50 x 50 cm | 19.7 x 19.7 in

cosmic paintings 1990s

Critic and curator Frederico Morais has brilliantly captured this phase in Ohtake's career: 'In the 1990s, the metaphor is gas: clouds, vapors, nebulas, stellar masses, galaxies, celestial bodies, the Milky Way, the formation of the universe. In her current works, the curve continues to dominate: the galactic circle, rings and balls of fire, rosettes, ellipses, parabolic spirals. Yet, while in the canvases made between 1959 and 1962 the stain commands the structure, thickening the surface in areas that are almost planes and that alternate extreme shades of black and white, with graphic remains indicating the path of the thin and wide paint brushes, in the canvases from the 1990s the vibratile brushstroke, which is more touch than extension, annuls or even destroys the precision of the curved line, ending up in forms that are dispersed and enveloped by gaseous, foggy, cloudy matter. Not by chance, the artist substitutes the bodily opaqueness of oil by acrylic, which favors transparencies and glazing.'

Untitled, 1993/1994
acrylic paint on canvas
200 x 170 cm | 78.7 x 66.9 in





Untitled, 1994
acrylic paint on canvas
200 x 400 cm | 78.7 x 157.5 in





Untitled, 1996
acrylic paint on canvas
150 x 150 cm | 59.1 x 59.1 in



Untitled, 1995
acrylic paint on canvas
180 x 180 cm | 70.9 x 70.9 in



Untitled, 1993/1995
acrylic paint on canvas
200 x 200 cm | 78.7 x 78.7 in



Untitled, 1992
acrylic paint on canvas
100 x 150 cm | 39.4 x 59.1 in

monochromes 2012 – 2015

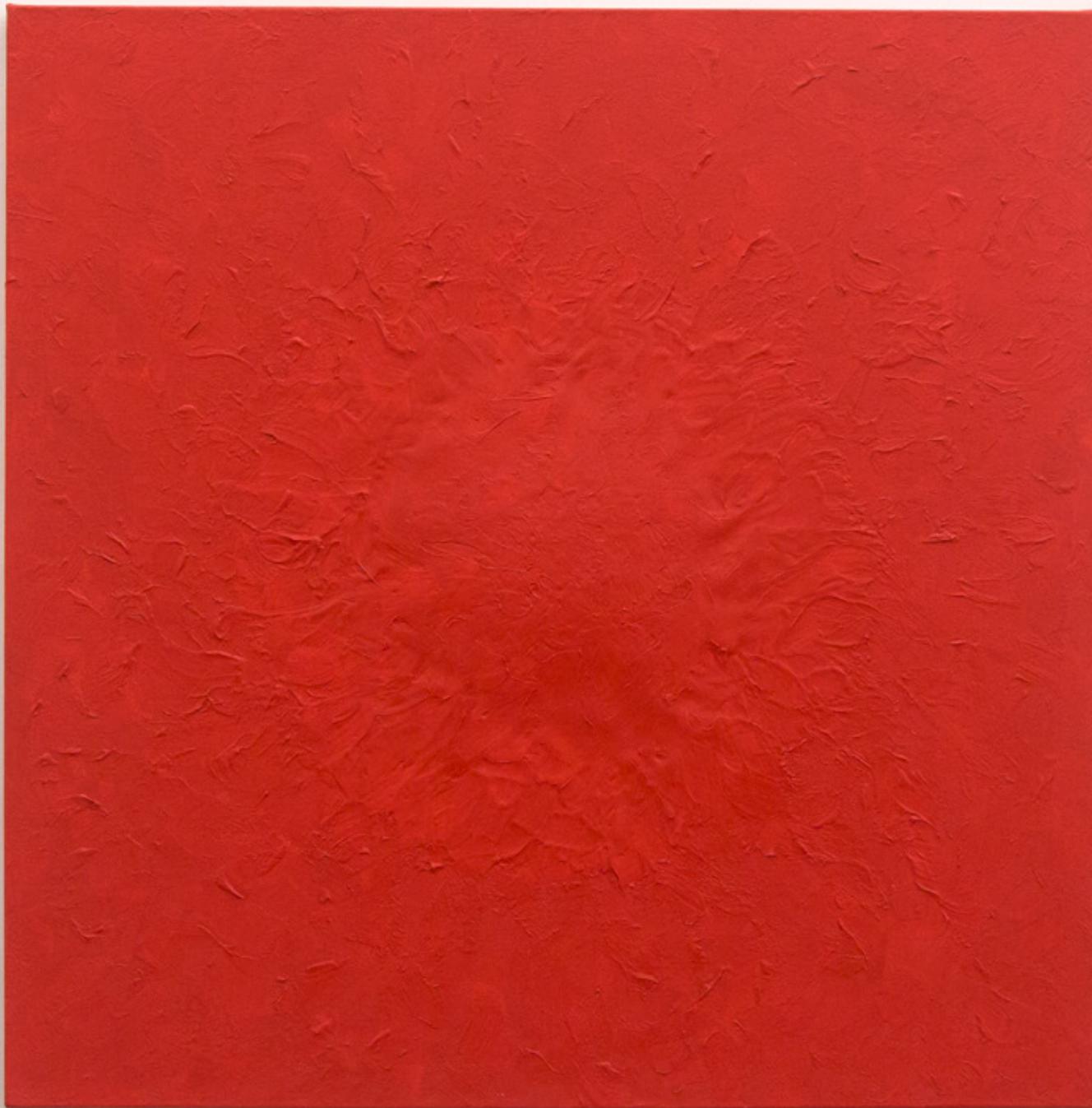
In the last few years of her career—at one-hundred years old—Tomie Ohtake began to innovate in her practices yet again, undertaking the monochrome as a genre, and engaging with new stylistic endeavors. According to curator Carolina de Angelis, ‘the paintings have a different materiality. They are made of thick layers of paint, creating relief.’ Another interesting aspect of this body of work is the fact that all of the monochrome paintings are white. The absence of color allows for the texture of the piece to emerge, making its physical irregularities a play between light and shadow.

Untitled, 1980
oil paint on canvas
69 x 68 cm | 27.2 x 26.8 in





Untitled, 2014
acrylic paint on canvas
100 x 100 cm | 39.4 x 39.4 in



Untitled, 2014
acrylic paint on canvas
100 x 100 cm | 39.4 x 39.4 in



Untitled, 2014
acrylic paint on canvas
100 x 300 cm | 39.4 x 118.1 in



exhibition view
Tomie Ohtake: 100-101, 2015
Instituto Tomie Ohtake,
São Paulo, Brazil
photo © Everton Ballardin. Courtesy
of the artist and Galeria Nara Roesler

engravings 1969–2015

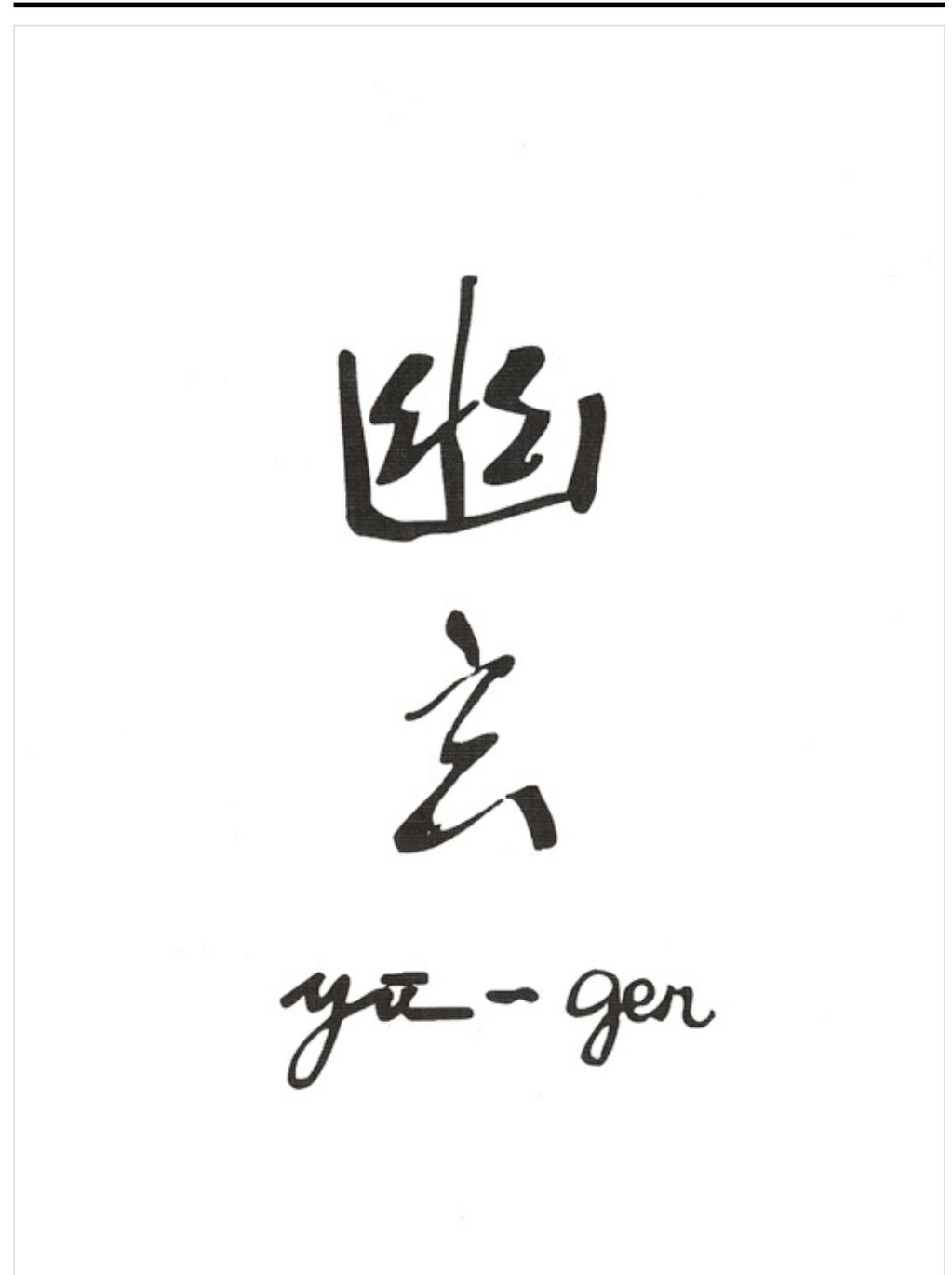
Lithography, like painting, was one of Tomie Ohtake's chosen medium for her artistic production. Her first investigations with these techniques were made with serigraphy. Those works are derived from her paintings, as the process not only allowed for image reproduction, but also for the creation of juxtaposed and intertwined color fields. In 1972, the artist produced a series of lithographs, of which some pieces were shown at the Venice Biennale of that same year. Through these works, Ohtake explored the possibilities that lay within the technique in terms of lines, planes, textures and color scales.

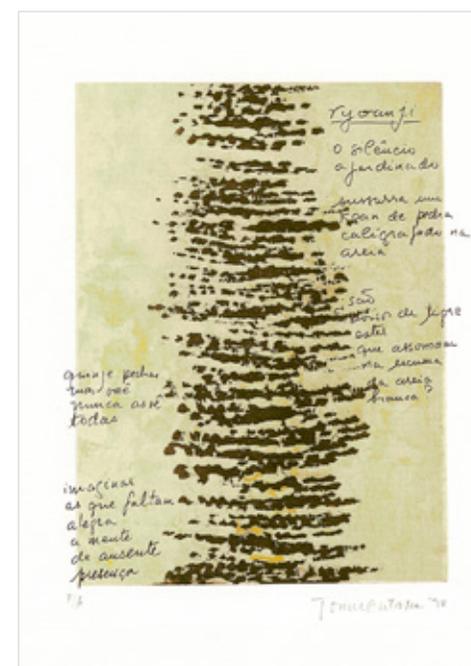
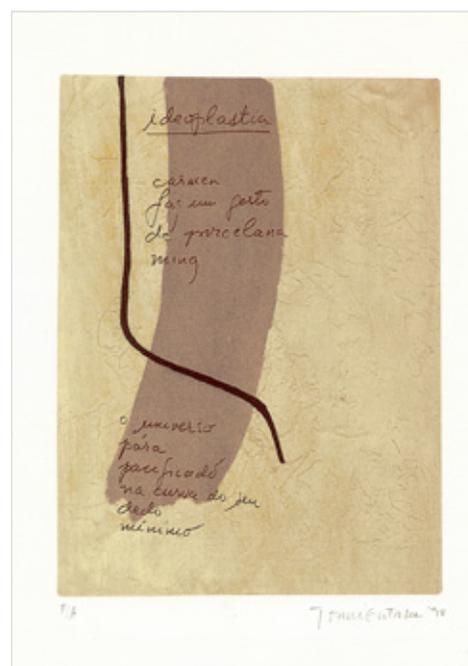
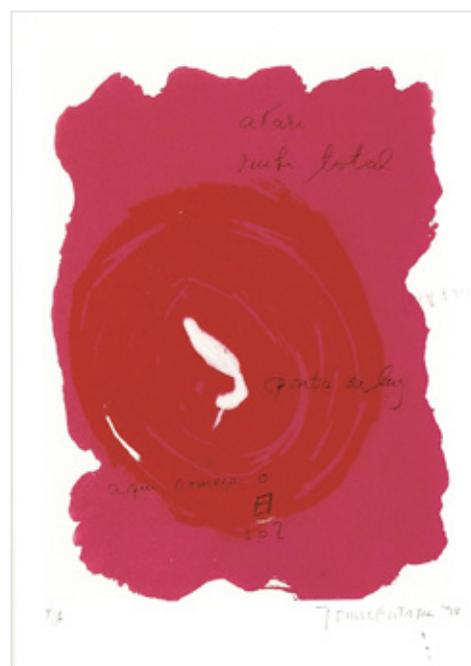
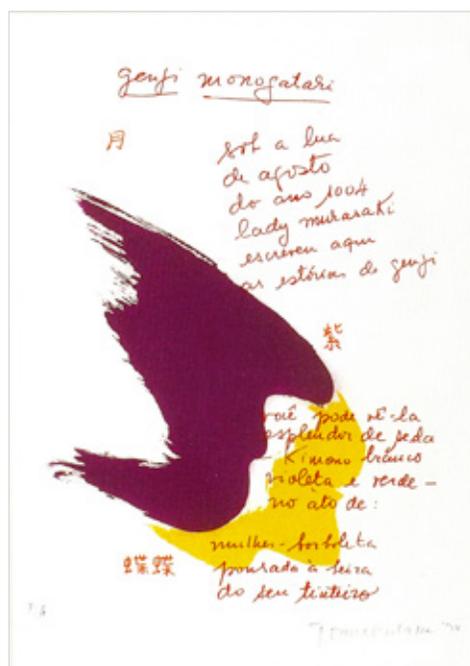


Recorte da forma # 06, 1999
metal engraving
70 x 100 cm | 27.6 x 39.4 in

Fifteen years later, in 1987, Tomie Ohtake turned to lithography. In collaboration with printmaker Claudio Vasquez, she began to explore the question of multiplicity. That same year, the artist created a series of works that were subsequently exhibited in ten different Brazilian capital cities at once. In the following decade, she continued to experiment with the process. Notably, in 1998 the artist worked along with poet Haroldo de Campos, producing an album of lithographies titled *Yu-Gen*, which coupled Ohtake's visual compositions and minute lithographic technique, with de Campos' writing. Later, in 1999, she produced a series of prints where she cut out the surrounding paper, leaving only the printed shape. Each form was framed between two acrylic plates, and hung slightly separate from the wall, casting a shadow of the shape onto the wall.

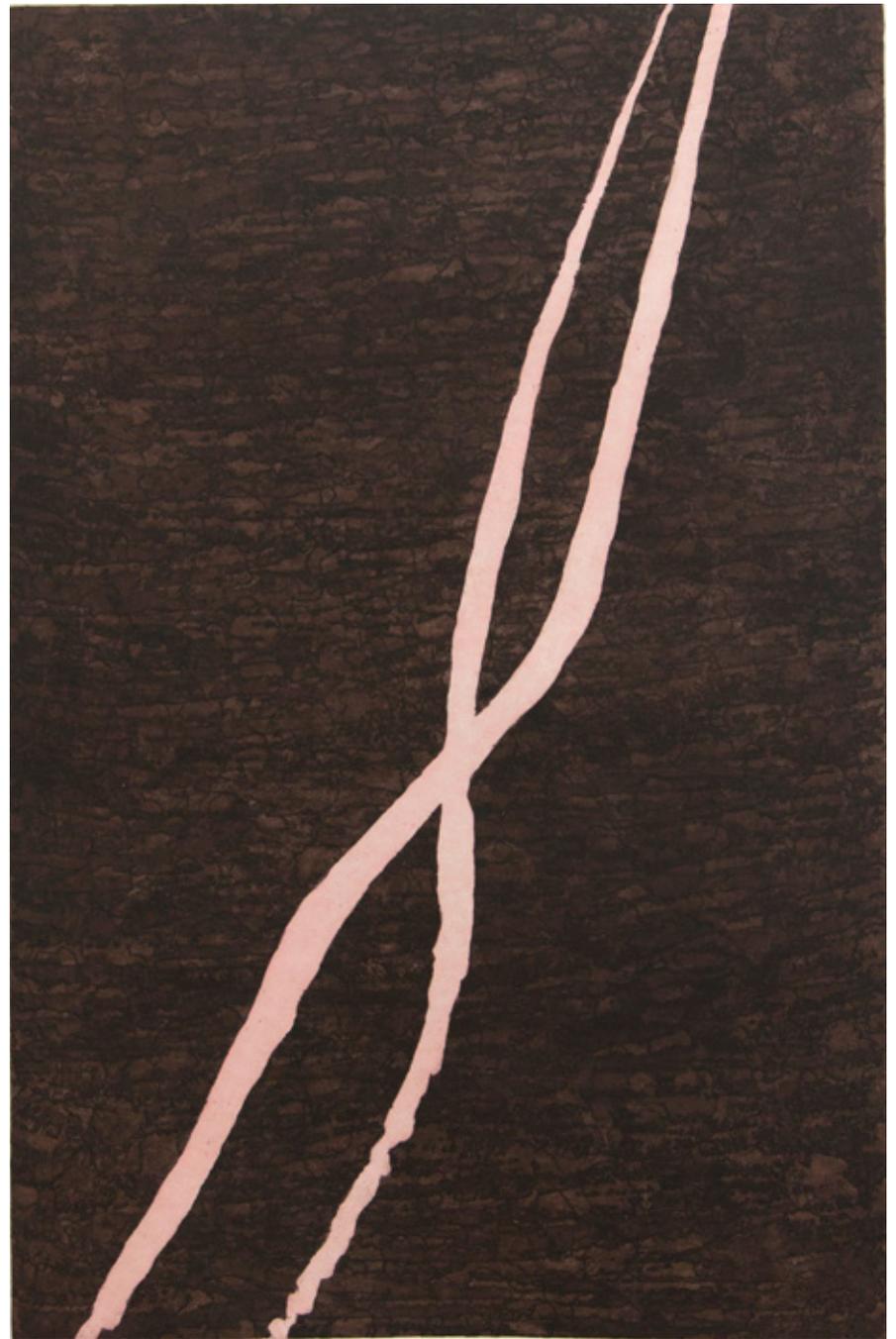
Yu-Gen (album), 1998
metal engraving
53 x 38 cm | 20.8 x 14.9 in each
produced in collaboration with
Haroldo de Campos

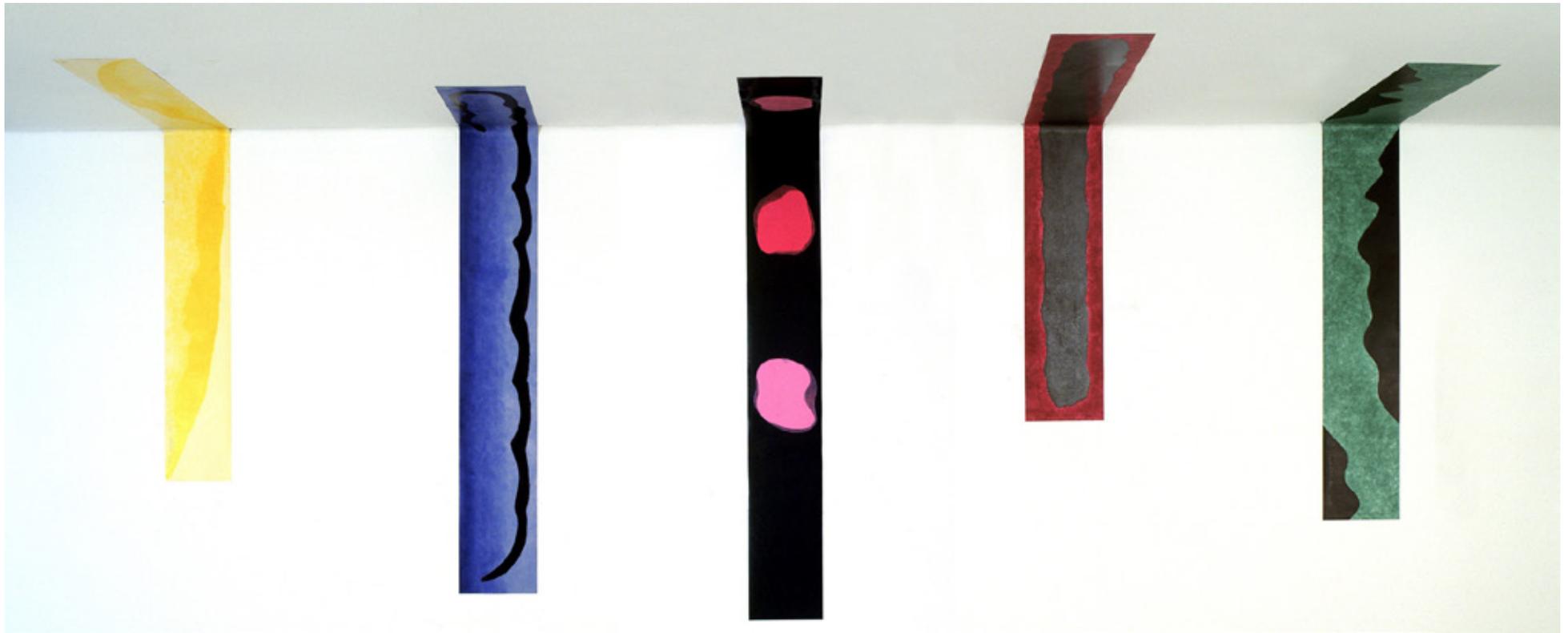




Yu-Gen (album), 1998
 metal engraving
 53 x 38 cm | 20.8 x 14.9 in each
 produced in collaboration with
 Haroldo de Campos

Instituto Tomie Ohtake Project, 2002
metal engraving
100 x 70 cm | 39.4 x 27.6 in





Untitled, 2005
color etching on paper on polystyrene
27 x 220 cm | 10.6 x 86.6 in each



exhibition view
Tomie Ohtake Graphic, 2006/2007
Instituto Tomie Ohtake,
São Paulo, Brazil,
photo © Denise Andrade. Courtesy
of the artist and Galeria Nara Roesler

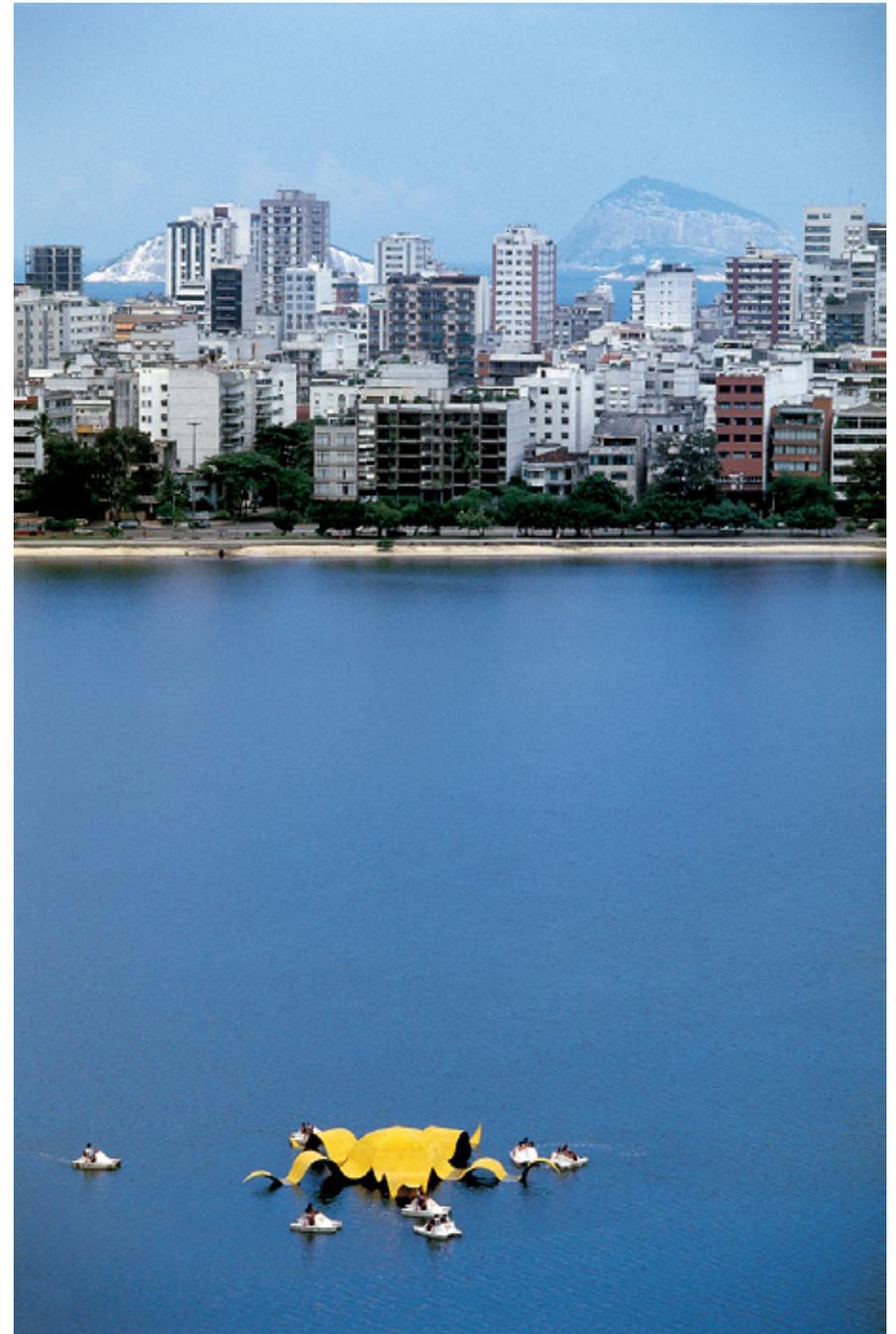
sculptures and public works

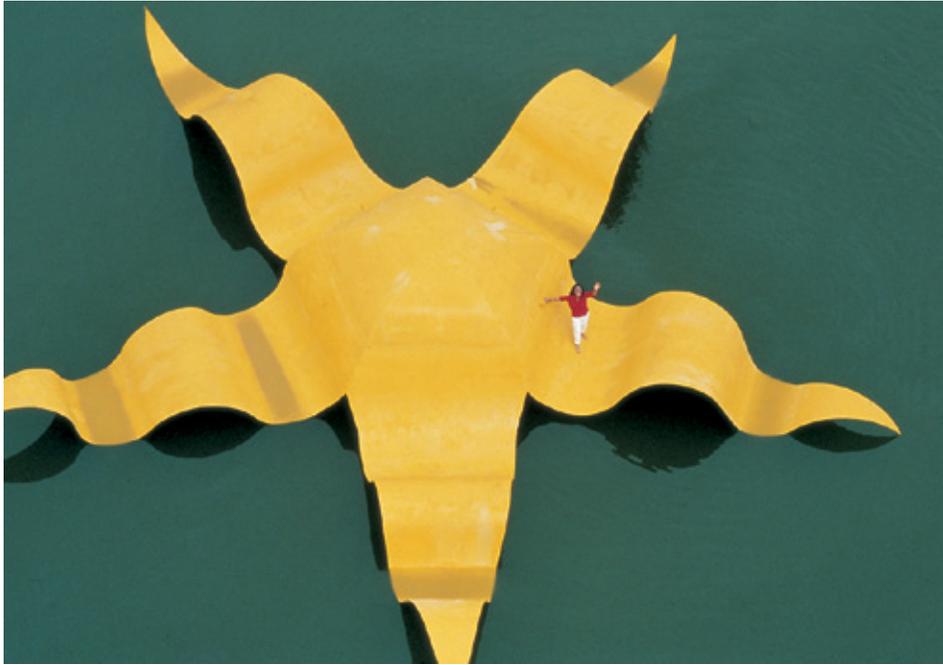
1983–2015

In 1983, Tomie Ohtake created her first project designed for a public space, marking the beginning of an enduring path in her career, which she pursued simultaneously to her painting and printmaking production. Most of her public works are tridimensional, but she also created a few murals and panels. These works have been installed in a variety of places including subways, cultural centers, auditoriums, theaters, offices, hotels and squares. The variety in the genre of spaces demonstrates Ohtake's versatility, who has been able to adapt to different places all while respecting the specificities of each one of them while maintaining her style.

Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas, 1985
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Iron sculpture, 20 meters in diameter, weighing 17 metric tons. Executed at the Ishikawajima shipyard, which donated it to the city. Inaugurated by Rio de Janeiro Vice-mayor and Secretary of Culture Darcy Ribeiro.







Ladeira da Memória, 1984
São Paulo, Brazil

Ladeira da Memória, Anhangabaú, 1984, painting on building's blind sidewall, 55 meters tall and 22 meters wide, epoxy on wall. Concept by EMURB (architect José Roberto Graciano) and sponsored by Banco Nacional. Inaugurated by Mayor Mario Covas.





Companhia Brasileira de Metalurgia e Mineração (CBMM) industrial park, 1999/2000
Araxá, Brazil

Steel sculpture, 23 meters long, weighs 20 metric tons. Inaugurated by CBMM president José Alberto Camargo, Ambassador José Aparecido, and Secretary of Culture Angelo Oswaldo. Project design by Aluísio Margarido, executed by Edmundo Canedo and his team, with the collaboration of Jorge Utsunomiya and Vera Fujisaki.





Untitled, 2004
galvanized steel profiles and
plasterboard
20 x 20 meters | 787.4 x 787.4 in

panel on the front wall and ceiling
of the main hall of the Ibirapuera
Auditorium, São Paulo, Brazil.
Architecture: Oscar Niemeyer





Parque do Emissário Submarino,
2008
Santos, Brazil

Embankment at José Menino Beach, Santos, 2008. The 15-meter tall steel sculpture was painted with automotive paint, it weighs 60 metric tons. Made possible by the city of Santos with sponsoring from Cosipa / Usiminas, Gafisa and Yune Incorporadora. Executed with collaboration of Jorge Utsunomiya e Vera Fujisaki.



Memorial da América Latina, 1990
São Paulo, Brazil

Tapestry on internal sidewall of the Auditorium, 70 meters wide. Architectural design by Oscar Niemeyer. Executed by Tabacow. Inaugurated by Governor Orestes Quércia.

Tomie Ohtake's sculptures were made of steel, which she then covered with a layer of solid paint. Her use of curves give both the work and its material a certain sense of weightlessness. Her artistic language quickly expanded to dialogue with urban landscapes. Notably, in 1996, the artist created a sculpture on the occasion of the 23rd Biennial of São Paulo, which was shown in the main pavilion—the tubular and dynamic structure of the work formally redesigned the space.



exhibition view
XXIII Bienal Internacional de São Paulo, 1996
Special Room—Sculpture
Fundação Bienal de São Paulo
Pavilhão Cícillo Matarazzo, São Paulo, Brazil

In the 2000s, she continued to create sculptures maintaining a similar formal grammar. She created smaller pieces that can be brittly balanced on one another, on the floor or hung to a wall or the ceiling. These steel pieces were painted in white, emphasizing a sense of three-dimensional drawing, reinforced by the agile and supple shape of the piece that evokes the shape of an impulsively traced pencil mark. Curator Luis Perez-Oramas notably wrote, 'The fluidity of color fields and lines are leitmotifs of her work as well as essential elements of her late production, both painterly and sculptural, as shown here. Lines that surge from the density of absolute color, dancing and shaping wavy visual fields were ultimately materialized by Ohtake in her last body of work, as free sculptural lines in space: a poetic, lasting message written in the air.'

Untitled, 2008
tubular carbon steel painted
with automotive paint
190 x 250 cm | 74.8 x 98.4 in

→ [next page]
Untitled, 2014
tubular carbon steel painted
with automotive paint
140 x 136 cm | 55.1 x 53.5 in





Untitled, 2008
tubular carbon steel painted
with automotive paint
60 x 230 x 110 cm
23.6 x 90.6 x 43.3 in



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