

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA PRESENTS *SHIGEKO KUBOTA: LIQUID REALITY*, THE FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION OF THE ARTIST'S WORK AT A US MUSEUM IN 25 YEARS

The Exhibition Highlights Six Video Sculptures and an Early Single-Channel Video, on View in the Kravis Studio and Gallery 414

Shigeko Kubota: Liquid Reality

August 21, 2021–February 13, 2022

The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Studio, and Gallery 414

NEW YORK, August 11, 2021—The Museum of Modern Art presents *Shigeko Kubota: Liquid Reality*, on view from August 21, 2021, through February 13, 2022. Likening video technology to a “new paintbrush,” New York-based Shigeko Kubota (Japanese, 1937–2015), whose career spanned more than five decades, was one of the first artists to commit to the video medium in the early 1970s. Formally trained as a sculptor, Kubota’s varied accomplishments as an artist, collaborator, curator, and critic helped to shape a pivotal period in the evolution of video as an art form. *Shigeko Kubota: Liquid Reality* is organized by Erica Papernik-Shimizu, Associate Curator, with the support of Veronika Molnar, Intern, Department of Media and Performance.

After making an indelible impact on the Fluxus movement in the mid-1960s, Kubota was drawn to the freedom created by newly available portable video equipment, which allowed artists to view what they were recording in real time. Kubota embarked on her signature “video diaries,” which reflected on journeys both personal and artistic, combining documentary footage with early video processing effects. The artist described video-making as an intensely physical practice, with the weight of Sony Portapak leaving traces on her body. In parallel, she translated this corporeality into a unique form of video sculpture: she extended her otherworldly portraits and landscapes into three-dimensional objects made from plywood, often incorporating mirrors and, later, sheet metal and flowing water. Among the first artists to present multiple channels of video at once and to combine “the energy of electrons” with material form, Kubota proposed a life for video beyond the constraints of the “TV box.” The first solo presentation of the artist’s work at a US museum in 25 years, this exhibition focuses on a body of work whose resonances are particularly poignant amid today’s digitally interconnected world. Associate Curator Erica Papernik-Shimizu explains, “Kubota’s ‘liquid reality’ positions video as both a total liberation from precedent and a way of life. Her visionary sculptures, through poetic contradictions and an economy of means, masterfully combine a bold interrogation of her own identity with prescient investigations of technology itself.”

MoMA’s presentation takes its name from Kubota’s observation that, “[In] video’s reality, infinite variation becomes possible...freedom to dissolve, reconstruct, mutate all forms, shape, color, location, speed, scale...liquid reality.” Featuring works from MoMA’s collection and key loans from the Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation, this exhibition highlights six intrepid video sculptures from a critical decade between 1976 and 1985, during which Kubota pivoted from her sculptural reinterpretations of works by artist Marcel Duchamp to her “autobiographical objects.”

The 25-foot-high Kravis Studio will feature three works, characterized by suspension and reflection, that draw parallels between nature, technology, and time. In *River* (1979–81), three monitors are suspended above undulating water. *Niagara Falls I* (1985) is a relief made of plywood and mirrors that is suggestive of a waterfall, with cascading movement

conveyed by 10 screens of varying sizes. By contrast, *Video Haiku* (1981) simulates a pool of water with a mirror sculpture that reflects live video images—captured through a CCTV camera—on a spherical monitor screen, which swings back and forth like a pendulum, layering and distorting reflections of the work’s environment and its viewers.

In the adjacent Gallery 414, Kubota’s *Duchampiana: Nude Descending a Staircase* (1976)—the first work combining video and sculpture to enter the Museum’s collection, in 1981—is presented alongside *Three Mountains* (1976–79), which draws on the artist’s time spent in the deserts of the American Southwest; *Berlin Diary: Thanks to My Ancestors* (1981), a “living altar” that illuminates the names of her ancestors with the electronic glow of the monitor screen; and the single-channel *Self-Portrait* (c. 1970–71), Kubota’s earliest known experimentation with video and electronic color synthesis. The works in this gallery demonstrate how Kubota created a new visual language with which to examine the video medium, the world, and her place in it.

The new acquisitions of *Berlin Diary: Thanks to My Ancestors*—acquired with support from MoMA’s Modern Women’s Fund, and *Self-Portrait*—gifted by the Shigeo Kubota Video Art Foundation on the occasion of the exhibition, underscore the Museum’s longstanding commitment to Kubota’s groundbreaking work; in addition to the works on view in *Shigeo Kubota: Liquid Reality*, the Museum’s collection also includes 10 single-channel video works as robust holdings in the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue that sheds new light on Kubota’s multilayered practice through essays by curator Erica Papernik-Shimizu and scholar Gloria Sutton.

SPONSORSHIP:



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