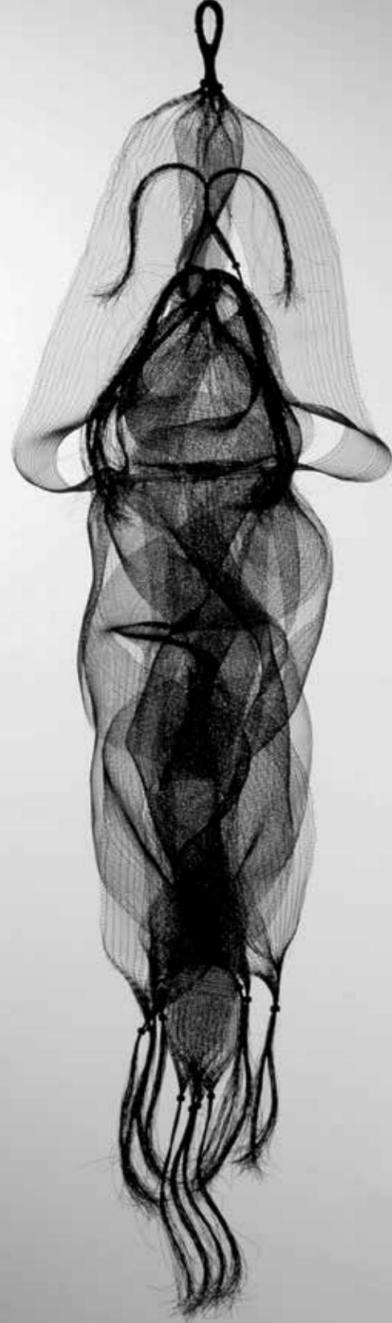


# KAY SEKIMACHI

## GEOMETRIES



Kay Sekimachi was first recognized, in the 1960s, for her woven monofilament sculptures. They demonstrated Sekimachi's facility with technique and materials, as well as her pursuit of volume, transparency, and movement. These innovative and intricate works, widely recognized at the time as unequivocally avant-garde, were included in many of the exhibitions that defined the flourishing international fiber art movement. But the gossamer, ethereal affect and intimate size of her monofilaments contrasted with the rough-textured, monumentally scaled sculptures of that era. They looked, and were, totally unique. Sekimachi, alongside her peers, transformed fiber from a material confined to industry and craft to one capable of expanding the categories of modern and contemporary art.

**Kay Sekimachi: Geometries** includes more than fifty objects that highlight the artist's formal and material innovations with a focus on the ways that her work foregrounds line, plane, and volume. After the achievement of the monofilament series, she adapted an ancient card weaving technique to create tubular suspended works in monofilament and linen that introduced surface pattern to her sculptures. She then turned her attention to the intimate scale of woven boxes and books, vessels and baskets, and origami-inflected paper constructions. She has long worked in a mode that affords exploration and variation, that is, in series that are not discretely bounded, but rather overlap in time, concept, form, technique, and material.

The development of Sekimachi's most groundbreaking work followed her studies with fellow weaver and teacher Trude Guermonprez (1910–1976), who taught a Bauhaus-based pedagogy that stressed both the rational logic of weaving and free experimentation on the loom. During summer session studies with Guermonprez in 1954 and 1955 at the California College of Arts and Crafts (now CCA) in Oakland, Sekimachi's weaving was transformed by new techniques and progressive concepts. Her work shifted from utilitarian objects to small abstract tapestries that ultimately led to her first wall hangings.

Nylon monofilament was a recent invention in the 1960s when Sekimachi recognized its potential as a pliable element with enough rigidity to hold form. It was a material that no one, as far as she knew, had used for weaving. (Synthetics were new to textiles and rarely used by handweavers. Indeed, the monofilament in her possession was a gift from a friend whose mother worked for the manufacturer.) It was unfettered by history, and Sekimachi used it to weave interlocking layers that could be shaped into volumetric, translucent forms when removed from the loom.

Sekimachi discovered that weaving with monofilament—which is slippery—was slow and painstaking: one inch required an hour of weaving. The nearly colorless “milky” hue came standard; black was attained with off-the-shelf Rit dye. The works in the monofilament series, numbering about two dozen, evolved to become increasingly layered and volumetric, with intersecting convex and concave planes, and later to include structural tubing and miniscule glass beads that amplify surface dynamics.

Sekimachi first used card weaving to finish the tails of the monofilament sculptures. (Card weaving is an ancient Egyptian method that replaces the loom with punched cards.) She adapted the technique to make long tubular objects that continued her interest in spatial forms. She titled them with the Japanese word for river, *gawa*, since that is how she saw them, with their eddies and flows. The works in the series (*Kurogawa*, 1973–75) were initially composed of monochromatic monofilament; Sekimachi then used both black and clear monofilament, moved on to mixing black linen with monofilament, and finished the series with wholly linen works, the latter of which were titled *Marugawa*

< *Amiyose III*



(1970–76). These ingenious but understated hanging forms bridge the virtuosity of the monofilaments and the restraint of the smaller-scaled works that followed.

An invitation to participate in the 1974 *1st International Exhibition of Miniature Textiles* in London (an artist-initiated response to the preponderance of huge sculptures then dominating international fiber art) motivated Sekimachi to begin a series of small-scale woven nesting boxes. Their formal simplicity contradicts their complex construction. Using the technique she had mastered with the monofilament works, Sekimachi devised a way to transform a two-dimensional weaving into a seamless, rectilinear box. Again, her material choice is paramount: the object's ability to hold its shape is in part due to coarse linen. A limited color palette—typically black and natural—concentrates attention on the form.

Sekimachi used a fine gauge linen to weave the layers of her peaked *Ikat Box* series (c. 1986–96). She achieved the ikat patterning with paint applied to warp threads to emphasize the origami-influenced planes. Stitching is added like a drawn line. Unlike their coarse linen predecessors, the ikat boxes require the addition of an interior armature to transform them from flat weaving to volumetric sculpture. The *Takarabako* series (1998–99) is characterized by its softly folding top. The artist exploits the play of contradictory ideas—flexible and stiff, rectilinear and curvilinear—to great effect by mixing plain and twill weave, pattern and solid, and black or natural thread and painted warp.

Sekimachi recognized the vitality and potential of paper while making preliminary maquettes for her complex boxes and books. In the 1980s she was gifted a trove of antique and vintage Japanese paper and began a series of small-scale sculptures using folding and stitching construction. Paper allowed Sekimachi to work quickly and to experiment in ways that diverged from the time-demanding labor of the loom. In other words, she could explore many more ideas in a short period while still exploring layering and transparency. The reverence for paper so vital to Japanese craft and culture is particularly relevant in Sekimachi's vessels. Like traditional origami, the *Washi Vessel* works (c. 1980s–90s) are folded from a single square piece of paper; machine stitching adds surface detail. Other artists, especially those expanding the definitions of fiber-based art during the 1970s and 1980s, championed the continued relevance of the vessel form.

The works in Sekimachi's *Kiriwood* series (1990–93) are made of kiri wood paper, a one- or two-sided paper-backed veneer that is manufactured from the paulownia tree, called kiri in Japan. Kiri is a fast-growing hardwood with light, fine-grained wood typically used for chests, boxes, and *geta* (clogs). The visual exchange between that which appears stiff (the wood) and that which reads soft (the fold) is entrancing. The elegant geometries, stitching designs, and closed and open forms show Sekimachi's relentless experimentation.

^ *Takarabako VI*    *Takarabako VII*. Photo: Lee Fatheree.



Sekimachi began to make woven linen books in 1980 and continued for two decades. Each is “printed” with an image: a painting on paper is heat-transferred onto the warp threads. The finished, accordion-fold object can be displayed multiple ways but is ideally held in the hand to be experienced—“read”—like a book. Indeed, Sekimachi explained that her woven books were inspired by an object she treasured while confined to a Japanese internment camp during World War II: a miniature book of woodblock prints by ukiyo-e master Utagawa Hiroshige. *Wave* and *100 Views of Mt. Fuji* pay homage to, and borrow their titles from, works by another prominent ukiyo-e artist, Hokusai. Sekimachi's books picture landscapes, from Mt. Fuji to Mauna Kea to Point Reyes, a nod to the landscapes of these Japanese masters.

In 2006 Sekimachi returned to the loom. She began to make long weavings reminiscent of and inspired by vintage Japanese silk obis as well as scrolls. These are either dyed—with colorful gradations and saturations that evoke color field painting—or painted to generate pattern. Still others use landscape motifs, much like the woven books. The two on view here, with their black, white, and red graphic patterning, evoke the palette of early twentieth-century European modernism. In about 2010, Sekimachi began to make modest square weavings in muted hues. A return to the fundamentals of weaving, they were conceived as homages to the two abstract painters whose work has been a major influence throughout her artistic career; the initials of the titles refer to Paul Klee or Agnes Martin. Sekimachi uses warp painting here to explore the grid and the quality of line. These quietest of works, scaled to the hand, reveal an artist and weaver of remarkably potent and elegant works.

Sekimachi's oeuvre is integral to the story of art and fiber. For seven decades she has made experimental works with linear pliable elements that unite art and craft, economy and complexity, and Japanese and American artistic traditions. The works on view in this exhibition demonstrate Sekimachi's sustained dedication to technical experimentation, economy of means, and clarity of form. But it is perhaps her facility with the harmonizing of opposites—density and translucency, complexity and simplicity, technique and expression—that distinguishes her celebrated body of work.

Jenelle Porter, Guest Curator

^ *Ikat Box*. Photo: Lee Fatheree.    *Homage to A. M.*



<  
Left to right:  
*Wave*  
*Washi Vessel XII*  
*Kiri IV*. Photo: Lee Fatheree.

>  
Left to right:  
*Marugawa III*; *Marugawa II*; *Marugawa V*; *Marugawa I*

## Exhibition Checklist

### Amiyose III 1965

Nylon monofilament  
60 × 14 × 10 in.  
Oakland Museum of California,  
Gift of the Art Guild

### Nagare I 1967

Dyed nylon monofilament, wood  
beads, and plastic tubing  
69 × 13 × 13 in.  
Los Angeles County Museum of  
Art, Gift of the 2017 Decorative  
Arts and Design Acquisition  
Committee (DA2)

### Katsura II 1970

Dyed nylon monofilament, wood  
beads, and plastic tubing  
38 × 12 × 12 in.  
Gertrude V. Parker Collection

### Amiyose III 1971

Nylon monofilament and silver  
wrappings  
58 ¾ × 14 ¼ in.  
Arizona State University Art  
Museum

### Katsura 1971

Nylon monofilament  
43 × 15 × 13 in.  
Fine Arts Museums of San  
Francisco, Foundation purchase,  
George and Dorothy Saxe  
Endowment Fund

### River 1973

Nylon monofilament and dye  
65 ½ × 5 in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### River V 1973

Nylon monofilament, dye, glass  
beads, and plastic tubing  
80 × 3 ½ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Kurogawas 1973–74

Linen and nylon monofilament  
3 works: 52 × 5 in. diameter;  
84 ½ × 13 in. diameter; 74 × 6 in.  
diameter  
Collection of Eve Steccati-  
Tanovitz and Ron Tanowitz

### Marugawa I c. 1974

Linen  
68 ¼ × 5 in. diameter  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Marugawa II c. 1974

Linen  
70 ¾ × 4 in. diameter  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Marugawa III c. 1974

Linen  
81 × 5 in. diameter  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Marugawa V c. 1974

Linen  
75 ¾ × 5 in. diameter  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Cardwoven Tube 1974–75

Linen and dye  
82 × 4 × ½ in.  
Asian Art Museum of San  
Francisco, Acquisition in honor  
of Akiko Yamazaki made possible  
by Yogen and Peggy Dalal, Fred  
Levin, The Shenson Foundation,  
Gorretti Lo Lui, Ken and Ruth  
Wilcox, and Salle E. Yoo and  
Jeffrey P. Gray

### Kurogawa 1975

Linen  
97 × 6 in.  
Oakland Museum of California,  
Deaccession Fund Purchase

### River 1975

Nylon monofilament and dye  
82 × 3 ½ in.  
Asian Art Museum of San  
Francisco, Acquisition in honor  
of Akiko Yamazaki made possible  
by Yogen and Peggy Dalal, Fred  
Levin, The Shenson Foundation,  
Gorretti Lo Lui, Ken and Ruth  
Wilcox, and Salle E. Yoo and  
Jeffrey P. Gray

### Nesting Box 1975

Linen  
4 ½ × 4 ½ × 4 ½ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Nesting Box 1975

Linen  
6 ½ × 7 × 7 in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Marugawa (Round River) X 1976

Linen  
92 × 5 in. diameter  
Collection of Phyllis and Al Niklas

### Marugawa IV c. 1978

Linen  
80 ½ × 5 in. diameter  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Washi Vessel 1980s

Antique Japanese paper and  
cotton thread  
15 ¾ × 8 ½ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Washi Vessel 1980s

Antique Japanese paper and  
cotton thread  
10 ¾ × 9 in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Washi Vessel c. 1980

Antique Japanese paper, indigo dye,  
persimmon tannin, and thread  
9 × 9 ½ × 9 ½ in.  
Collection of Jorgen Hildebrandt

### Wave 1980

Linen, transfer dye, and buckram  
4 ¾ × 4 ¾ × 18 in.  
Fine Arts Museums of San  
Francisco, Gift of the Artist

### 100 Views of Mt. Fuji 1981

Linen, transfer dye, and buckram  
4 ½ × 4 ¼ × 30 in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Paper Box 1987

Antique Japanese paper, indigo dye,  
persimmon tannin, Japanese paper,  
and thread  
10 ¼ × 6 in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Ikata Box 1989

Linen, acrylic paint, and wood  
11 ¾ × 8 in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Ikata Box 1989

Linen, acrylic paint, and wood  
11 ¼ × 7 ¼ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Kiriwood c. 1990s

Kiri wood paper, silk tissue, and  
cotton thread  
6 ½ × 8 × 8 in.  
Collection of Jorgen Hildebrandt

### Paired Box c. 1990s

Linen  
2 works, each 5 × 5 × 5 in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Untitled 1990

Kiri wood, paper, and cotton thread  
5 ½ × 9 ½ × 9 ½ in.  
Fine Arts Museums of San  
Francisco, Gift of the Sinton-Adler  
families in memory of Carol Walter  
Sinton

### Washi Vessel, XII 1990

Antique Japanese paper,  
persimmon tannin, and thread  
9 ¾ × 10 ¾ × 10 ¾ in.  
Mingei International Museum, San  
Diego, CA

### Kiri IV 1993

Kiri wood, laminated silk tissue,  
chopstick, and acrylic  
7 × 10 in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Kiriwood 1993

Kiri wood, laminated silk tissue,  
chopstick, and acrylic  
7 ½ × 10 × 8 in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Kiriwood Vessel 1993

Kiri wood paper, Japanese paper,  
and cotton thread  
7 × 10 × 7 in.  
Mingei International Museum,  
San Diego, CA

### Kiri VII #5 1995

Kiri wood and cotton thread  
6 ½ × 8 × 8 in.  
Collection of Lisa Fleming

### Hako VII 1998

Linen, acrylic paint, and boning  
8 × 10 × 7 in.  
Collection of Lisa Fleming

### Takarabako II 1999

Linen and boning  
7 ¾ × 6 ¾ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Takarabako III 1999

Linen and boning  
9 × 8 in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Takarabako IV 1999

Linen and boning  
8 ½ × 7 in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Takarabako VI 1999

Linen, acrylic paint, and boning  
9 × 7 ½ × 7 ½ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Takarabako VII 1999

Linen, acrylic paint, and boning  
7 × 7 ¼ × 7 ¼ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Aka/Kuro II 2007

Polyester, linen, acrylic paint, wood,  
and gesso  
38 ¾ × 5 ¾ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Rouge et Noir VI 2007

Linen, dye, and lucite  
28 ¾ × 6 ¾ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Homage to P. K. 2010

Linen, and acrylic paint  
11 × 11 in.  
Fine Arts Museums of San  
Francisco, Gift of Kim Schwarzc  
and Carl Schwarzc

### Homage to A. M. 2011

Linen, acrylic paint, textile dye,  
and indelible ink  
12 ½ × 12 in.  
UC Berkeley Art Museum and  
Pacific Film Archive, Purchase  
made possible through a gift  
of Barbara N. and William G.  
Hyland, Monterey, CA 2017.36

### Homage to P. K. III 2013

Linen, acrylic paint, and indelible  
ink  
13 ½ × 12 ½ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Homage to A. M. V 2014

Linen, dye, and indelible ink  
12 ¼ × 12 in.  
Collection of the artist

### Homage to A. M. VI 2014

Linen, dye, and indelible ink  
12 ¾ × 12 in.  
Collection of the artist

### Homage to A. M.: Dots II 2015

Linen, dye, and indelible ink  
11 ¾ × 11 ¾ in.  
Collection of the artist

### Homage to A. M., Series II #3 2015

Linen, dye, and indelible ink  
10 ¾ × 10 ¾ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Homage to A. M., Series II #4 2015

Linen, dye, and indelible ink  
10 ¾ × 10 ¾ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Homage to A. M., Series II #5 2015

Linen, dye, and indelible ink  
10 ¾ × 10 ¾ in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

### Homage to A. M., Series II #6 2015

Linen, dye, and indelible ink  
10 ¾ × 10 ¾ × in.  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill

Note on titles: The artist titles her work in  
Japanese, English, or both. The following list is  
provided for words not translated in titles.

aka: red  
amiyose: multilayered screen  
gawa : river  
hako: box  
katsura: Japanese Imperial Villa, type of tree  
kawa: side or wrapping  
kuro: black  
maru: round  
nagare: flow  
orikomu: to fold or interweave  
takarabako: treasure box  
washi: paper

**Kay Sekimachi: Geometries** is organized by  
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PUBLIC PROGRAM  
Thursday, May 27, 1 p.m.

**Indira Allegra, Josh Faught, and  
Jenelle Porter on Kay Sekimachi:  
Lineage, Legacy, and Weaving**

Details at [bampfa.org](http://bampfa.org)



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