



White Rainbow, 47 Mortimer St, Fitzrovia, London W1W 8HJ

**Minimalist Anyway | Kazuko Miyamoto and Lydia Okumura**



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Review by Rafael Barber Cortell

String theory is a branch of physics that has been applied to a variety of problems from black hole physics to early universe cosmology and nuclear physics. The essential idea behind string theory is this: all the fundamental particles of the Standard Model (our current knowledge of the subatomic composition of the universe) are just different manifestations of one basic object: a string. In other words, if, for instance, we observed an electron under a powerful microscope, we would realise that the electron is not really a dot but a tiny loop of string. Aside from moving, a string can oscillate in different ways. If it oscillates a certain way, then, from a distance, unable to tell it is really a string, we see an electron.

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'Minimalist Anyway' held at White Rainbow presents a dialogue between the works of two artists with Japanese origins: Lydia Okumura and Kazuko Miyamoto. These two artists were based in New York during the 1970s and 1980s, when the blooming minimalists remodeled the principles of sculpture. With Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt and Dan Flavin, this movement reconfigured the concept of sculpture, understanding it as a site rather than an object through which the bodies of the audience must interact.

This group of artists had a dramatic influence on all subsequent artistic manifestations but, in the case of Okumura and Miyamoto, that relation was somehow more circumstantial. Although Miyamoto shared a studio building with LeWitt and was his assistant for years, and although Okumura was living in the same area at the time, the minimalist touch that one can grasp from their works denotes divergences from the official understanding of the movement. That is wisely manifested in the show by two works that, for Edward Ball - curator of the show - are key to explain the particularities of the artists. In 'Stunt' (1981) by Miyamoto, we can see the naked body of the artist posing ironically in front of LeWitt's work. In 'Eu o sol e MAC' (Myself the sun and the museum) (1971) Okumura draws on the floor the silhouette of the shadow of her own body in contrast with the environment. These artworks indicate a radical drift towards a revolutionary approach that doesn't hint at a minimalism for the body but at minimalism with a body.

Looking at their following work, we do not contemplate a lack of emotion or modular displays; for example in 'Untitled' (1976) by Okumura we see a drawing hanging on the wall that investigates the poetry of geometry in a two-dimensional canvas, similarly to 'Untitled' (1971) by Miyamoto where a series of rubber cords nailed to a wooden structure invite an outline of an innovative method of experimentation with new materials and provide an intimacy that transcends the characteristic rawness of minimalism.

This intimacy and this unique presence of the body reaches its highest level with the string works by both artists: in 'Male I' (1974) by Miyamoto and 'Untitled I' (1980) by Okumura, the artists generate an oscillation in the audience's perception, insinuating movement, investigating the malleability of space along with an absence of representation. In these works, as Frank Stella - minimalism's flagbearer - once said: 'you see what you see'. Nevertheless, if you look at them with more attention, using a powerful microscope, you will appreciate that there is not only an electron that lies in there, not simply a pure and homogenous configuration, is not a dot. If you observe them with care you will notice the strings and their narrative, a narrative that talks about labour, about time, about care, about the body; a female body that - by its practice - makes visible and tangible the connections of the world, pulling out the yarn from the ball of threads and knots that, according to Donna Haraway, shapes the world.

However, having Japanese origins and living in New York during the 1970s, they were framed as minimalist anyway, something Miyamoto once said and from where the title comes. This visionary understanding of the art practice was eclipsed by its masculine and white surroundings and was never considered as such. It is now when, with a feminist microscope, we can appreciate what lies beneath the unambiguous narration of art we notice that the oscillations in the dots and the movement of the strings may allow us to reconsider the art cosmology moving away from the 'anyway'.