

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## PROJECTS: KYOKO KUMAI

May 3 - June 18, 1991

A monumental fabric made from thousands of feet of stainless-steel fiber by Japanese fiber artist Kyoko Kumai is on view as part of The Museum of Modern Art's PROJECTS series from May 3 through June 18, 1991. Titled *Air* (1991), the installation demonstrates how the artist, by piling and manipulating industrial wire, transforms metal filament into an unexpectedly sensuous sculptural form. Organized by Matilda McQuaid, assistant curator, Department of Architecture and Design, **PROJECTS: KYOKO KUMAI** is the artist's first exhibition in the United States.

*Air* alludes to Kumai's interest in the forces of nature, specifically air movement and light, through her use of highly reflective and light-weight materials. In the brochure accompanying the exhibition, Ms. McQuaid writes, "Most indicative of the Japanese sense of beauty in Kumai's work is the importance of light, both in its presence and calculated absence. In the Japanese sensibility, beauty resides not always in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness. Shadows become calligraphic lines in *Air*, and their movement captures the spirit of turbulent wind."

Measuring approximately 6 x 4 x 32', *Air* was constructed by a technique invented by the artist. Kumai and her assistants pull stainless-steel wire from dozens of spools, curling and coiling the metallic fiber and stretching it outward from the center. Once the overall size has been established, Kumai goes back over the work with a shuttle, loosely looping the thousands of feet of curled wire. She binds it further from a hanging position, giving it more form and volume.

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One of the most distinctive textile designers practicing in Japan today, Kumai has been working exclusively with stainless-steel fiber for the past seven years to create immense fabrics that evoke the Japanese landscape. Her pieces recall the work of Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz, whose sculptural forms led fiber out of the confines of traditional weaving. In referring to her materials, Kumai has written, "There is something mysterious, erotic, even fluid about the texture of stainless steel fiber when it meets the weaver's hand. Its hard, cool, directionless character becomes flexible and warm. In the final stage it stands seeming to draw a breath--waving and blowing in the wind."

Born in 1943 in Tokyo, Kyoko Kumai received her B.F.A. degree from the Tokyo University of Arts. She is a professor of textile design at the Oita Prefectural Junior Art College. Kumai's work has been included in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including the *Eighth International Miniature Textile Biennial*, Hungary (1990); *Suntory Prize '90*, Tokyo, (1990); and the *1st Perth International Craft Triennial*, Australia (1989).

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