

**KIKUO SAITO
COLOR PLAYS
October 26–December 7, 2024****Opening reception:
Saturday, October 26, 6-8pm**

James Fuentes is pleased to present *Color Plays*, introducing works by Japanese-American painter and performer Kikuo Saito (1939-2016) spanning the first decade of the 2000s. The exhibition marks the first major solo presentation of Saito's work in Los Angeles, following the gallery's exhibitions in New York, including *Color Codes* curated by Christopher Y. Lew earlier this year.

The metaphor of dual existence can be applied along almost any interval of Saito's oeuvre. Born in Japan, Saito spent his earliest years as an artist in Tokyo establishing his relationship with painting, seeking to have his works publicly exhibited, and earning money working on stage sets for modern dance and as a lighting engineer at a popular cabaret in Shinjuku. In 1966, at the age of 26, he would destroy all of his paintings made up to this point and move to New York City. There, Saito maintained the bridge between painting in the solitude of his studio and collaborating on stage settings and costume design—for La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club and alongside Robert Wilson, Peter Brook, Jerome Robbins, and Eva Maier. While Saito's first, pre-New York explorations in paint and performance remain unknowable to us, this early interplay between theatre and painting would establish the backbone to his life's work.

Leading up to the moment in time that this exhibition encapsulates, Saito had established what are now called his Theatre Paintings. With their titles often evocative of (if not directly echoing) those of his theatre pieces, a wash of monochromatic color forms the ground—or indeed a backdrop—for Saito's expressions of movement in oil paint, impressions of light turned into color, and choreographic notations in pencil lead cutting through or dancing behind the paint. *Color Plays* assembles a number of Theatre Paintings alongside works that immediately evolved from this nucleus; with their lyrical movement expanding across the entire field of vision, and stenciled roman numerals beginning to appear beneath, overtaken by dripping tangles of color. Honoring Saito's formative development as an artist as defined by his experimentation in both theatre and painting, *Color Plays* forms a vignette around a decade of painting during which the sustained influence of this earliest overlap remains perhaps most pronounced.

Kikuo Saito (b. 1939, Tokyo; d. 2016, New York) was an interdisciplinary artist whose work is represented in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Nasher Museum of Art, Durham; The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield; and Edmonton Art Gallery, Canada. Saito has been the subject of solo exhibitions at KinoSaito, Verplanck; Fort Lauderdale Museum, Fort Lauderdale; Nasher Museum of Art, Durham; Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich; Altman Siegel, San Francisco; and Loretta Howard, New York, among others. Saito's theatre work has been staged at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, New York; Nasher Museum of Art, Durham; the Byrd Hoffman Foundation, New York; Opera Comique, Paris; and Iino Hall, Tokyo. Saito served as a painting instructor at the Art Students League of New York, an artist-in-residence at Duke University, and visiting professor at Musashino Art University in Tokyo.

The artist's legacy is sustained at **KinoSaito**, a non-profit art center in Verplanck, New York, dedicated to nurturing abstract and cross-disciplinary art practices through offering residencies, performance space, workshops, art studios, and classrooms.

James Fuentes Press Vol. 2: Kikuo Saito was released in 2021, with essays by Joshua Cohen, Franklin Einspruch, Hal Foster, Sarah Strauss, Reiko Tomii, Rachel Wetzler, and Karen Wilkin. Now out of print, it can be accessed in full at jamesfuentes.com/publications.

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