



ARTUR RAMON ESPAI D'ART

**Mako Artigas**

**The invisible line**

19.09.25 - 31.10.25



*No title.* Ink on japanese paper. 86 x 57 cm.

## Mako Artigas. The invisible line

Ricard Bru

Mako Artigas arrived in Barcelona in 1960, having completed her studies at the Tokyo University of the Arts and determined to make a living from art and from what she had trained in: textile print design. A contemporary of Yayoi Kusama, Yoko Ono, and Shigeo Kubota, she was born in 1937 in interwar Japan and, after World War II, emigrated to Europe with the aim of immersing herself in the avant-garde and modernist environments of the West. Mako primarily did so from Paris, where she lived and worked as a textile designer, captivating leading *prêt-à-porter* haute couture brands and internationally prestigious industries with her prolific production of drawings.

Since 1989, Mako Artigas has resided in Gallifa with her husband, sculptor and ceramist Joan Gardy Artigas. With this exhibition at Artur Ramon Art, she presents a representative selection of her textile designs and their applications, along with a few ceramic pieces —testimonies of creativity and a rich life shared with some of the great artists of the 20th century.

Mako Artigas was born in Tokyo in 1937 and today, at the age of 88, she continues to draw, create, and expand on paper a repertoire of countless images, motifs, and forms that, over more than sixty years, have been celebrated, desired, shared, or acquired by leading international fashion houses, major textile industries, and artists and friends such as Joan Miró, Sam Szafran, or Frederic Amat.

Daughter of Ishikawa Masamichi and Nishimura Tane, Mako Artigas's childhood unfolded within two prominent families from the textile industry in Tokyo and Kyoto. Her father worked at Kashikichi, an old family-owned cotton textile company in Tokyo, while her maternal grandmother's family had inherited a significant Kyoto-based silk company, Chikichi, founded in the 16th century. Her childhood memories are thus those of a well-off family with a strong social standing, living in a magnificent home in central Tokyo —right beside where the National Diet Building now stands. However, World War II changed everything: the family took refuge in their summer house in Kamakura, and the 1945 bombings completely destroyed their Tokyo residence and all the treasures it held. The widespread poverty and hunger of the war years are among her most painful memories; her mother used to crush sardine heads to make *furikake* so that meals weren't just plain white rice.

After the war, the family decided to remain in Kamakura, and young Mako enrolled in a Catholic school, Seisen Joshi Gakuin, in Yokosuka. It was there that her interest in Western, American, and European culture began to awaken. The literature of John Steinbeck and Erskine Caldwell, the poems of Lautréamont, films by Marcel Carné and Ingmar Bergman,





*No title.* Stoneware. 40 x 50 cm.



*No title.* Stoneware. 20 x 20 x 20 cm.

and the first exhibitions at the Kamakura Museum of Modern Art —founded in 1951 with Hijikata Teichi as its director— became her personal window into an artistic and cultural reality that was fresh, new, and radically different from Japanese traditions. Driven by a thirst for knowledge and experience, in 1956 she enrolled at Tokyo University of the Arts, graduating four years later with a specialization in textile and print design.

After finishing university, her longing to discover the world, to live in Paris and travel through Europe, led her to board a ship heading West. In the summer of 1960, it wasn't easy to leave Japan, but she managed by claiming she had been invited by a convent school in Madrid —run by the same religious order as her school in Yokosuka. Her real goal was Paris, but that would have to wait a few more years.

After a brief stay in Madrid, she moved to Barcelona in late 1960 and, without knowing anyone, enrolled in the Escola Massana. She quickly made friends, met Eudald Serra and Josep Llorens Artigas, both professors there, and soon became part of the city's artistic circles, attending gatherings at Ca la Mariona, alongside Albert Guinovart, Francesc Català-Roca, Paco Rebés, and among others, Joan Gardy Artigas —her future husband. With the support and trust of these peers and her early connections with patrons and cultural promoters like Alberto Puig Palau, she began to forge her path.

In June 1961, she presented her first designs at the Escola Massana's year-end exhibition. That October, she wrote to Gardy Artigas with an eye toward a shared future, telling him of new plans: "Everyone asks me for typical Japanese drawings, but the ones they want aren't truly typical —just the kind sold as souvenirs in Japan. But I'm going to make prints the way I want, even if they don't like them. From now on, I have to work."



*No title.* Ink on japanese paper. 96 x 62 cm.





*No title.* Ink on Japanese paper. 80 x 44,5 cm.



*No title.* Ink on Japanese paper. 90 x 60,5 cm.



*No title.* Ink on Japanese paper. 86 x 57 cm.

She was young, but clear-minded. Just six months later, Joan Gardy Artigas and Mako Artigas were married in Tokyo, in a ceremony attended by the ceramist Bernard Leach and witnessed by fellow ceramist Hamada Shoji and art critic Hijikata Teichi, director of Japan's first modern art museum. After returning from Japan and a short time in Gallifa, the couple settled permanently in Paris in 1963. There, surrounded daily by the constellation of artists affiliated with the Maeght Gallery, they each began rich, parallel, and successful careers.

In Paris, Mako began working around 1964, primarily producing drawings for her father's company in Tokyo, with designs that Kashikichi would manufacture for the Japanese market. It wasn't until 1967 that she began working as a designer in the Parisian studios of Paul Hargittai. However, the success and growing demand for her work — she made two drawings per day — and her ability to adapt attractively and intelligently to changing trends, led her to become independent as a textile designer four years later. From her workshop in Vitry-sur-Seine and through international fairs, she connected with clients from around the world, who started purchasing her designs for haute couture and textile manufacturing.



Christian Dior, Paco Rabanne, Nina Ricci, André Courrèges, Jack Lenor Larsen, Popy Moreni, Kenzo, Abraham, Bianchini Ferrier, Rubelli, Staron, Uchino, La Cotonerie d’Alsace, and many others discovered in Mako Artigas the creativity of a designer capable of surprise and excellence. Her invisible line soon appeared in fashion magazines like *L’Officiel*, on catwalks, and in the windows of department stores and boutiques worldwide, including local ones like El Corte Inglés and Camisería Pons on Passeig de Gràcia.

In 1986, Mako joined forces with Catherine Maeght and Florence Marganne, former colleagues from Hargittai’s studio, to form the Artigas – Maeght – Marganne textile design group. However, shortly after, following the death of her father-in-law, Josep Llorens Artigas, and the creation of the Llorens Artigas Foundation, she relocated from Paris to the family farmhouse and workshops in Gallifa (Vallès Occidental), where she continued working solo and began exploring ceramics —first stoneware, and more recently, porcelain. Although she gradually distanced herself from the demands of the textile market, she never stopped drawing.

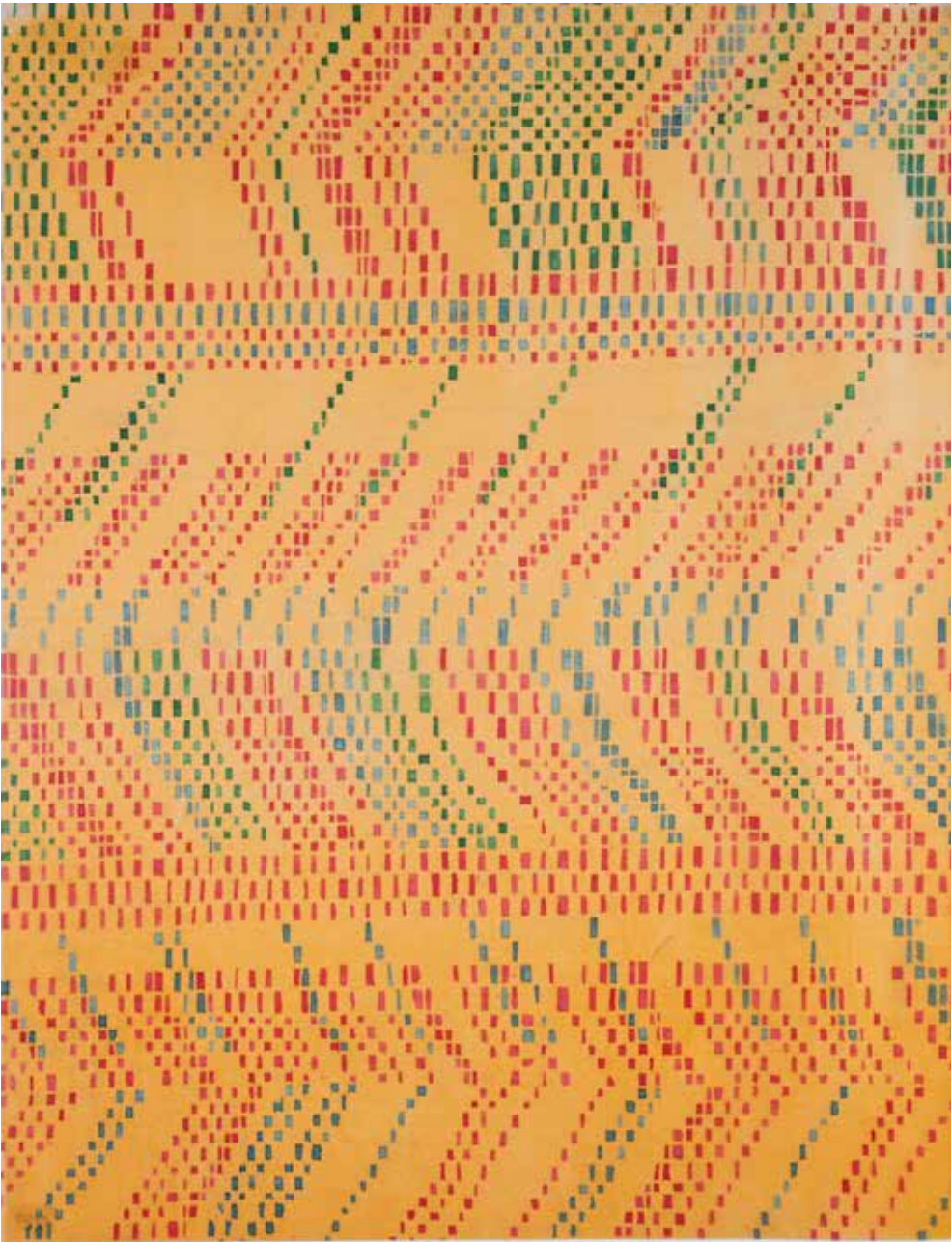
Mako Artigas’s work is broad and extraordinarily diverse. During her most active years in textile design —for haute couture, tapestries, carpets, curtains, and home décor— she had to constantly adapt to the shifting tastes of the market. She was often asked for designs inspired by the styles of Miró, Matisse, Gaudí, Serizawa, or other artists she admired. At other times, she opted for geometric, colorful, African, or childlike designs, continually expanding a



No title. Ink on japanese paper. 51 x 44 cm.



No title. Ink on japanese paper. 58 x 87,5 cm.



No title. Ink on japanese paper. 59 x 46 cm.





*No title.* Ink on japanese paper. 59 x 45 cm.

generous and surprising repertoire. It was only later that she could fully devote herself to creating freely, independent from market trends and demands.

Joan Miró, on his first trip to Japan in 1966, told the Japanese press how Mako Artigas had introduced him to Japanese culture and how, thanks to their friendship and shared life, he came to feel she was practically family. Indeed, like Miró, during her decades in Paris, Mako Artigas had the chance to meet and befriend major figures in the worlds of art and culture: Alechinsky, Calder, Chillida, Braque, the Giacometti brothers, poet Jacques Prévert, or Nina Kandinsky, to name a few. She had the great fortune of living art intensely –visiting studios, homes, and exhibitions, working tirelessly and passionately, yet always from a place of silence, modesty, and deep humility. How many artists could say the same?

An enthusiast of the work of Matisse, Nicolas de Staël, and Palazuelo, Mako Artigas's creative exuberance seems to know no bounds. After her recent participation this past spring at the Royal Tapestry Factory in Madrid, the new selection of works on display at the Galeria Artur Ramon Art features original designs—many of them previously unseen— tapestries and prints created from 1960 to the summer of 2025, serving as vivid, undeniable proof of a creative talent worth celebrating.

## Artistic Proposal

### Drawing by Mako Artigas woven by Francesca Piñol

The work of Francesca Piñol (Puigverd, Lleida 1959) is defined by her fascination with the interweaving of textiles. The combination of threads, colours, textures, forms, and symbols shapes a discourse that expresses different worldviews, narrating the thread of life.

Her works are digital textiles, also called woven images, created with a state-of-the-art manual-digital loom, the TCII, based on Jacquard technology. This loom combines the digital design of the textile with manual creation. She begins by creating texture maps, where she combines different bindings or structures, and works with colour palettes drawn from the surrounding territory. These textures and colour palettes are the starting point for pieces inspired by nature, resulting in unique works or small series.

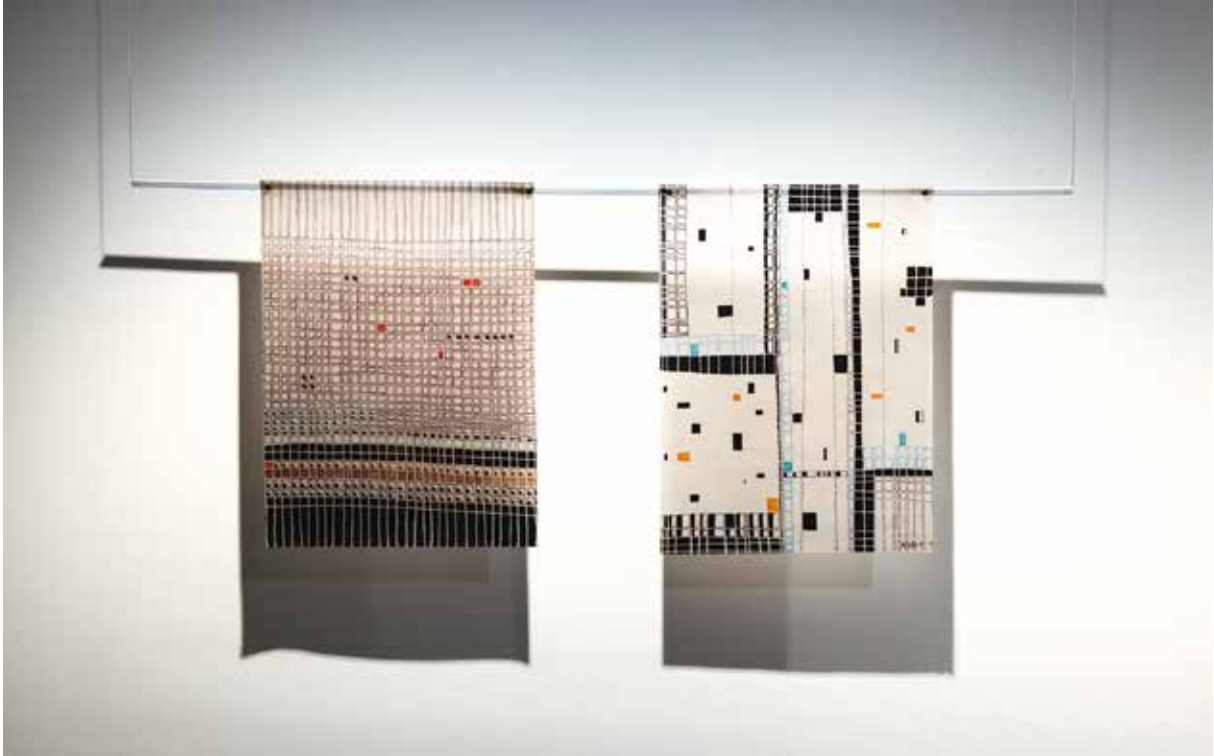
Her workshop, Textile Laboratory, is a space for research and experimentation with textures, natural colour, and digital weaving.

Nature as a reference and the repetition of motifs are a constant in the way Mako Artigas designs, and also in the work of our guest artist, Francesca Piñol.



**Published by** Artur Ramon Art.  
Bailèn 19, 08010 Barcelona  
**Graphic design:** Mariona Garcia  
**Coordination:** Mònica Ramon  
**Translation:** Artur Ramon Art











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