

SIDE GALLERY

SABURO INUI



Chair model "Ply"

Manufactured by Tendo Mokko
Japan, c. 1960
Rosewood plywood, enameled steel

Measurements

72 × 74 × 61h cm
28,5 × 29 × 24h in

Provenance

Private collection, Japan

Literature

Tendo Mokko, Yanagi, pp. 150–155

Details

Signed with applied metal manufacturer's label to underside.

About

The Ply Chair prototype by Saburo Inui embodies the radical experimentation of Japanese design in the postwar era. Manufactured by Tendo Mokko circa 1960, this rare early model features a sculptural rosewood shell mounted on an enameled steel frame. Its clean, biomorphic lines and generous proportions reflect Inui's interest in organic modernism, while its simplicity and transparency of construction anticipate the growing emphasis on structure and material integrity that characterized Japanese design during the 1960s.

Originally developed as a study in ergonomic plywood furniture, the Ply Chair went through several variations—including a seldom-seen acrylic version—and became a touchstone of Inui's collaboration with Tendo Mokko, a company renowned for its technical mastery and commitment to progressive design.

This prototype, with its distinctive rosewood grain and minimalist steel base, remains a highly collectible artifact of Japanese mid-century innovation, sitting at the crossroads of form, utility, and material exploration.

Biography

Saburo Inui (b. 1920 – d. 1982) was a Japanese designer and architect whose work emerged during a transformative period in postwar Japan, marked by rapid modernization and a renewed search for national identity through design. Educated at the prestigious Tokyo University of the Arts, Inui was part of a generation of creatives who redefined Japanese aesthetics by blending traditional craft sensibilities with modern industrial materials.

Inui's most iconic design is the Ply Chair, originally conceived in 1959. While best known in its molded plywood version—still in production by Tendo Mokko—Inui also experimented with highly limited editions in acrylic. The rare transparent model, manufactured only for one year in 1970, is a striking example of the Japanese avant-garde approach to materials and transparency, aligning with global modernist trends while retaining a minimalist, organic sensibility. The clear shell allowed the chair's sculptural form and construction logic to remain visible, pushing the boundaries of functional art.