

SIDE GALLERY

RIKI WATANABE



Armchair Model "Himo"

Manufactured by Yokoyama Kogyo
Japan, 1952
Wood, Rope cord

Measurements

54 × 72 × 73h cm
21,3 × 28,3 × 28,7h in

Provenance

Private collection, Japan

Literature

Riki Watanabe: A Life in Design, Japan Industrial Design Promotion Organization, Tokyo, 2006, pp. 34–37
Japanese Design 1945–1970, Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art, exhibition catalogue, 1990, p. 58
Pioneers of Japanese Industrial Design, Koichi Sato (ed.), Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1998, pp. 112–115
Modern Japanese Furniture, Shigeru Uchida, Shokokus-ha, 2001, p. 91

Notes

Designed in 1952, the Himo Rope Chair is one of Riki Watanabe's earliest and most emblematic works, created at a time when Japan was redefining its cultural and material identity in the postwar period. The chair is constructed around a simple wooden frame, onto which rope is tensioned and woven to form both seat and backrest, resulting in a lightweight yet resilient structure.

The design reflects Watanabe's commitment to rational construction and honest materials, merging traditional Japanese craft techniques with modernist principles. Its open, breathable form emphasizes comfort through flexibility rather than padding, anticipating later developments in ergonomic seating. The Himo Chair stands as a seminal example of early Japanese modern furniture, embodying economy of means, structural clarity, and human-centered design.

Biography

Riki Watanabe (1911–2013) was a central figure in the development of modern Japanese design. Active from the prewar period through the late 20th century, he played a pivotal role in shaping Japan's postwar design identity, balancing international modernism with indigenous materials and techniques. A founding member of the Japan Industrial Designers' Association, Watanabe was deeply involved in design education and institutional development. His achievements were recognized with numerous awards, including the Milan Triennale Gold Medal, the Mainichi Design Award, and the Japanese Medal of Honor with Purple Ribbon.