

SIDE GALLERY

SABURO INUI



Pair of Chairs model "Ply"

Manufactured by Tendo Mokko
Japan, 1970
Wood, Steel

Measurements (each)

74 x 63 x 68h cm
29,1 x 24,8 x 26,8h in

Seat height: 35,5 cm | 14 in

Literature

Tendo Mokko Co., Ltd., historical product catalogues and company archives, Yamagata, Japan.

Mori, Y. (1996). Japanese Modern Design. Tokyo: Kodansha International

Sato, T. (2005). Tendo Mokko and the Formation of Japanese Modern Furniture. Tokyo: Tankosha

Provenance

Private collection, Japan

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.

Inui was also influenced by the political and social shifts of the 1960s and 70s in Japan, a time when design was seen not only as aesthetic production but as a cultural statement. His work resonates with the goals of the Metabolist movement—a group of architects and designers who imagined modular, flexible urban systems—although Inui's designs were more introspective and focused on domestic scale. Still, he shared their vision of a future shaped by innovation, structure, and the integration of new technologies.

Collaborating closely with Tendo Mokko, a pioneering manufacturer known for its partnerships with architects such as Sori Yanagi and Kenzo Tange, Inui helped define a new direction in postwar Japanese furniture: democratic, elegant, and technically refined. His work continues to be collected internationally and serves as a key reference in the study of 20th-century Japanese design.