

Gabriel Orozco



APR 17–AUG 11, 2019

Rotating Objects

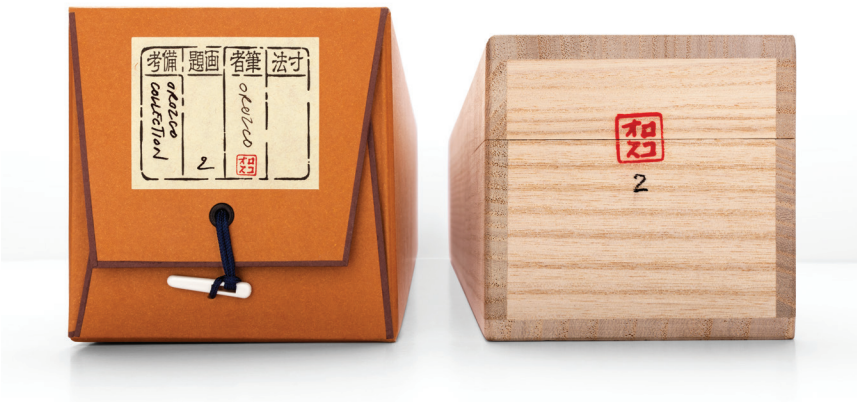
GABRIEL OROZCO: ROTATING OBJECTS

Gabriel Orozco: Rotating Objects is a selection from two bodies of work the artist made after establishing a residence in Tokyo in 2015, and first showed at Marian Goodman Gallery London that year. The *Obi Scrolls* (hanging paintings made from kimono sashes) and *Roto Shaku* (lengths of lumber wrapped in colored tapes) upend large tracts of the material culture of Japan. They blend and rework old and new craft traditions in simple, devastating ways that confuse hierarchy and chronology, and generate cultural hybridities that suggest for example that a cut-and-paste world might find meaning in weaving, even in the digital age. “I do not think of the old Japan of the past,” Isamu Noguchi told an interviewer in 1988, “I think it’s something we have to aim for.”* Orozco’s respectful intermingling of fine arts traditions and contemporary craft customs is not unlike the transgressive adoration Noguchi brought to what he called the true development of the old Japanese traditions he contemporized and semi-westernized in the 1950s.

In both the *Roto Shaku* and the *Obi Scrolls* the core content, wrapping, is essentially the same: the act of wrapping (with all its attendant connotations) and the fact of being wrapped (and unwrapped) as cultural signifiers, in both Eastern social and Western aesthetic terms. The significance of these works for most viewers however will likely lie as much in the feeling of connection that craft, as an intimate form of transhistorical human activity, can generate in the dehumanizing maelstrom of the information age. Orozco uses process—the repetition of assured technique—to make something sacred from something mundane, forgotten, broken, unseen, marginal, or otherwise undervalued. Together, these wrappers and containers upcycle specific decorative cultures into decoration, elevating pattern and repetition into something approaching a timeless, if ambiguous, communion with tradition—and signal new paths to the Japans that we need, up there ahead in the future.

Gabriel Orozco: Rotating Objects has been organized as a complement to *Changing and Unchanging Things: Noguchi and Hasegawa in Postwar Japan* (May 1–July 14, 2019), a traveling exhibition exploring Isamu Noguchi’s and Saburo Hasegawa’s ideas about making modern art in Japan in the atomic age.

DAKIN HART, SENIOR CURATOR, THE NOGUCHI MUSEUM



*Noguchi, Isamu and Rhony Alhalel. “Conversations with Isamu Noguchi.” *Kyoto Journal* 10 (Spring 1989): 36.

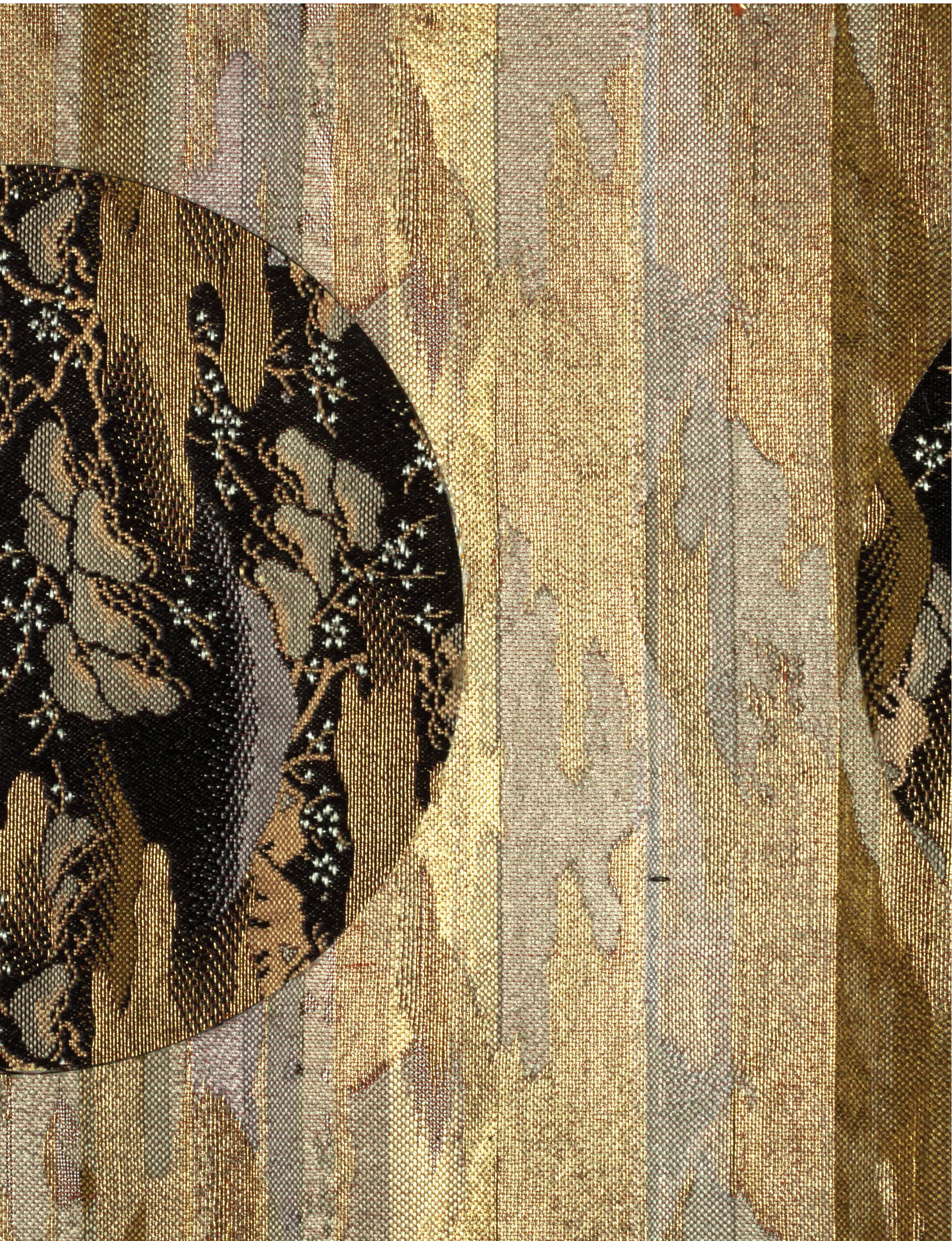
COVER Gabriel Orozco, *Roto Shaku* 31 (detail), 2015. Plastic tape, wood veneer and graphite on wood. Photograph by Cathy Carver. ABOVE Gabriel Orozco, *Obi Scroll* 2 (detail), 2015. Cotton, washi, Japanese wood. Photographs by Michel Zabé. All works courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery.

the **noguchi** museum 9-01 33rd Road, Long Island City, New York **noguchi.org**

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Gabriel Orozco, *Obi Scroll 5* (detail), 2015. Cotton, washi, rosewood. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. Photograph by Cathy Carver.



AREA 5 ROTO SHAKU

The *Roto Shaku* are made from standard lengths of lumber, tape, and unmixed paints purchased at Tokyu Hands, Japan's mind-bogglingly comprehensive "creative life" craft stores (where the leather department stocks everything from shoe laces to complete cow hides). Ciphers for the layered quality we associate with meaning in art, the *Roto Shaku* trade on the Japanese social convention that makes the act of gift wrapping more eloquently communicative of the care often only approximated through the value of the gifts we give. Attacking, among other things, the perpetual tug-of-war between painting (seeming), with its long-over-intellectualized, pseudo-philosophies of abstraction, and sculpture (being), Orozco has essentially turned his own most iconic painting style into wrapping paper and then wrapped something utterly valueless. Like parts from postmodern prayer wheels, what they suggest, or at least allude to, is the possibility of meaning in the age of the do-it-yourself, sell-it-on-Etsy decorative object. With the search for purpose they represent—call it ritual—emerging from the iterative processes of pattern making.



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AREA 6 OBI SCROLLS

Synthesizing something old and new from two of Japan's decorative arts traditions—kimono sashes and the use of textiles as backgrounds and borders in the mounting of scroll paintings—Orozco's woven silk *Obi Scrolls* appear to occupy the opposite end of the material culture spectrum from his tape and lumber *Roto Shaku*. Yet the conceptual territory they occupy is much the same. Each *obi* painting was fashioned by altering a fragment from an antique sash through incision, rotation, and inversion. These altered fragments were then mounted on scrolls as paintings, effectively supplanting the paintings they might ordinarily have served to enrich—had they not been used for sashes. They also move the absence of bodies, and what they might have signified there, to the center of attention. Of course, in this form, their original cultural significance has been cut-and-pasted, literally, into near meaninglessness—the gender and status signs they once carried reduced to pixel-level babble—or, in other words, abstracted. Working with a master scroll maker, Orozco further had each painting packaged with the exquisite meticulousness the Japanese employ to give anything the import of a national treasure, thus bringing the inversion of these disciplines and what they represent full circle.

