

ART | 1 DAY AGO | BY [MINAKO NORIMATSU](#)

Massimo De Carlo gallery unveils Paris outpost by Kengo Kuma

Intended for single-work exhibitions, Massimo De Carlo Pièce Unique is small, minimal, yet ambitious, proposing a new exhibition model that emphasises the connection between viewer and artwork

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Seen on the left, the new Massimo de Carlo Pièce Unique, designed by **Kengo Kuma** in collaboration with PiM.studio Architects, occupies a street-facing space on Rue de Turenne in the Marais, Paris. *Photography: Delfino Sisto Legnani and Piercarlo Quecchia, courtesy Massimo de Carlo*

Massimo De Carlo Pièce Unique may be tiny, but it's ambitious in concept. Located in the Marais, and breaking with the local tradition of hiding top galleries within enclosed courtyards, this first Parisian space of the influential Italian gallerist is scheduled to open to the public on 9 February. Unusually, it will only present a single art piece at a time.

Pièce Unique is 'small by choice, in favour of the quality of the programme', says gallerist Massimo De Carlo. 'Art is always about ideas, never about scale. My desire was to question the true nature of a gallery, challenge the art system, and give artists a possibility to enhance new conversations between their work and the viewers. Its dynamic environment will give me – and more importantly, the artists – the chance to operate in a radically different way from the usual gallery exhibitions.'

The philosophy is echoed in the space's understated design by [Kengo Kuma](#), who worked hand-in-hand with London-based studio PiM (Maria-Chiara Piccinelli and Maurizio Mucciola). The renowned Japanese architect – whose latest projects include the Japan National Stadium, which international audiences will hopefully get to discover this summer for the Tokyo Olympic Games – was also willing to strip back and switch scales. 'Our idea was to introduce as little as possible in terms of design elements, so the focus remains on the exhibited artwork,' says Kuma, showing a respect for heritage that is characteristic of Japanese culture.

'We wanted to show the true essence of the existing materials of the historic building in their original roughness.'

De Carlo was drawn to the architect's reverent approach. 'I felt the light and elegant Japanese touch of [Kengo Kuma](#) would be perfectly consistent with the nature of the project, for which the small detailing and the choice of materials are so important. The relationship we built was very meaningful,' says De Carlo from Milan, where he has two large gallery spaces.



The compact space is intended to display one artwork at a time. Kuma left the wood of the ceiling is exposed to highlight the building's heritage, while installing a richly textured clay floor. *Photography: Delfino Sisto Legnani and Piercarlo Quecchia, courtesy Massimo de Carlo*

With Kuma directing the project remotely from Tokyo, his team carefully removed the plaster covering the space's Lutetian limestone wall and wooden beams, to reveal the surfaces in their weathered beauty. As a calming counterpoint, the floor remains smooth, covered with beige clay and seamlessly connected to the wall by limestone skirting. The façade is a simple glazed vitrine, 'to recreate the transparency of the shop window and maximise the visibility of the gallery's interior from the street', explains the architect. Above the window hangs a rectangular sign with a black frame, its white surface left intentionally blank.

Although the show can be appreciated from the street, perfect for the era of social distancing, it's worth stepping inside to visit the office area, located just behind the white plywood wall which serves as a backdrop for the art piece on show. There stands a custom reception desk crafted from rough limestone, a piece that Kuma is particularly proud of. It commands the space like a huge block of nougat, sliced smoothly at the top – as if laser-cut – and then sealed with resin. On the left, a minimal and smartly functional shelf was also specially designed by the architect.



Above: Kuma's custom reception desk for the gallery, made from Parisian stone and with deliberately rough surfaces that call to mind a huge nougat. Below: the office space in the gallery. *Photography: Delfino Sisto Legnani and Piercarlo Quecchia, courtesy Massimo de Carlo*

The inaugural show of Massimo De Carlo Pièce Unique comprises a new work titled *Clay Baby (m.l.)* by Kaari Upson, whose work reveals intimate inner worlds and fits perfectly with the gallery's vision, says De Carlo. As for future shows, 'experimentation shall always remain at the core of everything that we do, as the best artists always teach us', he adds. ✨

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