



## CHAPTER 6

# TO CHALLENGE THE MID- SUMMER SUN: THE GUTAI GROUP

ALEXANDRA  
MUNROE

6.1. SHIRAGA Kazuo. Please Come In (view from inside). 1955. Shown at the "Experimental Outdoor Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Mid-Summer Sun," Ashiya, July 1955

All photographs of the Gutai Group in this chapter and elsewhere in this book, unless otherwise noted, are courtesy of Osaka Contemporary Art Center, Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, and the former members of Gutai Art Association.

In the summer of 1955, a group of **L**ardent young Japanese artists staged an event that was unprecedented in form, scale, or concept. Taking over a pine grove park along the industrialized beach front of the suburban town of Ashiya, near Osaka, they presented a thirteen-day, twenty-four hour exhibition in the open air. There was a painting some fifty feet long suspended from the trees, gigantic sculptures in the sand made of abandoned machinery, a bubblegum-pink vinyl sheet pinned just above the ground so that it rippled in the wind, and a store-bought ball set all alone on the pavement path, entitled *Work B*. "The experiment," the group announced, "is to take art out from closed rooms into the open air . . . exposing the works to the natural forces of sun, wind, and rain."<sup>1</sup>

The "Experimental Outdoor Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Mid-Summer Sun" was the legendary first exhibition of the Gutai Art Association (*Gutai Bijutsu Kyōkai*). Founded in December 1954 by Yoshihara Jirō (1905–1972), an influential oil painter and heir to a private company,<sup>2</sup> the group included some twenty artists who gathered under his progressive tutelage. Yoshihara promoted a bold and spirited anti-academicism by encouraging Gutai members to "Create what has never existed before!" He thought of art-making as an act of freedom, a gesture of individual spirit, a willful rite of destruction to create something new. Unbridled invention led the Gutai artists to experiment with unheard-of methods and materials—paint was applied by watering cans, remote-control toys, explosives, and bare feet, and objects were made of tin cans, water, smoke, and electric bulbs.

The Gutai artists produced a legacy of aesthetic experiments greater than any other Japanese group of their generation. Yet throughout most of Gutai's eighteen-year history, the Japanese art establishment was reluctant to recognize its significant originality despite the barrage of general media attention which the group received. In part, their neglect was the result of an age-old cultural rivalry

between Tokyo—where the prominent critics, influential artists organizations, and leading art journals were based—and the western Kansai region. Before the Shinkansen bullet train connected Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka in 1964, the distance of 300 miles took some nine hours by rail. As the New York art world regarded the West Coast during the same period, so most Tokyo critics dismissed the Kansai as provincial and remote. Gutai, based in the Osaka area and comprised of local artists, earned little critical support.

Furthermore, the intellectual mood in the capital after the war was increasingly Marxist and preoccupied with themes of apocalypse and existential alienation. By the late 1940s, a Surrealist-based Social Realism focusing on social and political allegories dominated contemporary culture. Because Gutai art seemed to ignore such issues and denied figurative, realist, or symbolic content, Tokyo's influential *Reportage* artists saw Gutai as mere bourgeois spectacle, no more serious or responsible than child's play. Finally, Japanese critics faulted Gutai as a movement having scant theory—when in fact, refuting the intellectualization of art was precisely its premise. Some questioned whether Gutai's adventures, promoted as so "original," were not actually derivative of European Dada and therefore less extraordinary as an independent Japanese avant-garde movement. Others said that Gutai's impulsive work was all-too ignorant of the intellectual lineage of modern art history, and that its artistic influence or significance, if any, was peripheral.

New scholarship on Gutai finally began to appear in the 1970s, when an increase of modern Japanese art exhibitions at home and abroad prompted a fresh approach. A new generation of scholars, many of whom became interested in Gutai while working in museums in the Osaka-Kobe region, engaged in

research that has led to significant documentation on Gutai, including a framework for the group's chronology: Early (from its founding in 1954 until 1958, when it became affiliated with *Art Informel*); Middle (from 1959 until 1965, when the *Gutai* journal ceased publication); and Late (from 1966 until 1972, when the group formally dissolved after Yoshihara's death). While debates about the nature of Gutai art are far from resolved, Gutai's radical achievements in the context of Japanese modernism are now recognized historical fact. Not coincidentally, Gutai's overdue recognition as Japan's primary "original avant-garde movement" has occurred as part of a national revisionist effort to establish a history of Japanese modernism independent from the Euro-American narrative.<sup>3</sup>

The noun *gutai*, which literally means "concreteness," is composed of two characters: *gu*, signifying tool or means, and *tai*, signifying body or substance. Using this name, Gutai signified concrete enactments of individual character, emotion, and thought in opposition to cerebral and abstract aesthetics. In locating art in the interaction of body, matter, and spirit, process and content became aspects of the same phenomenon. Art thus lay in the chance collaboration between physical action (throwing, thrashing, kicking) and material (paint, a pile of mud, the sound of electric bells). Opposed to thought, which is passive and indirect, Gutai encouraged "all daring steps which lead to an undiscovered world."<sup>4</sup>

Gutai's thesis is found in its manifesto, penned by Yoshihara in October 1956 and published in a leading art magazine, *Geijutsu Shinchō*. Declaring conventional art forms meaningless in today's world, Yoshihara proposed that new life be found in the raw interaction between the human spirit and matter. For Gutai, material is defined as "matter" (*bushitsu*) whose essential property is "spirit" (*seishin*). This spirit also con-

notes a universal human consciousness as defined in Buddhist and Jungian terms, a childlike mind that is free and pure.

Gutai art aims to unite the human and material spirits in a cathartic act that simultaneously releases the energy of both; this moment of artistic creation is what Gutai reveres. Yoshihara's involvement with the innovation of Japanese traditional arts, specifically Zen calligraphy, also informed his philosophical understanding of art as the direct reflection of the liberated self in the temporal here and now. Cultural respect for the innate quality of being that all things in the inanimate world embody is reflected in Gutai's attitude towards the nature of material:

*Gutai Art does not alter the material. Gutai Art imparts life to the material. Gutai Art does not distort the material. In Gutai Art, the human spirit and the material shake hands with each other, but keep their distance. The material never compromises itself with the spirit; the spirit never dominates the material. When the material remains intact and exposes its characteristics, it starts telling a story, and even cries out. To make the fullest use of the material is to make use of the spirit. By enhancing the spirit, the material is brought to the height of the spirit.*<sup>5</sup>

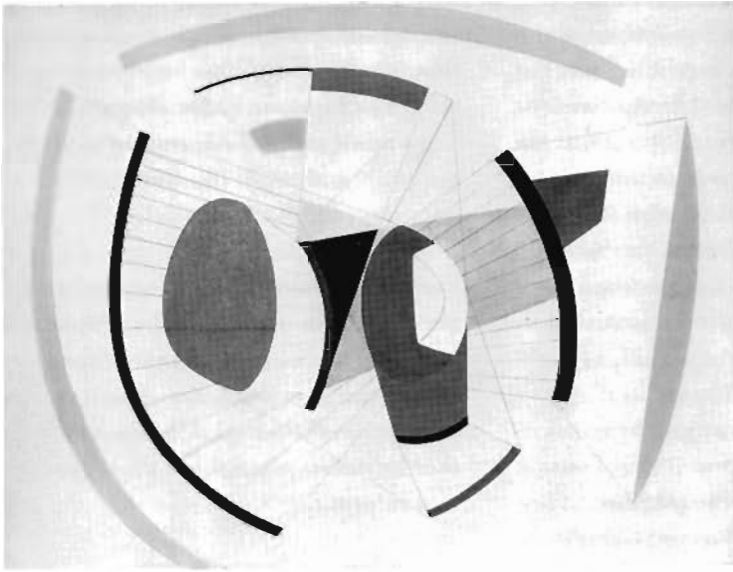
In its approach, Gutai had certain affinities with European and American postwar painting movements, such as *Art Informel*, COBRA, and Abstract Expressionism. Each was derived in part from Surrealist automatism but rejected aestheticism for more concrete qualities. Deeply affected by the atrocities and betrayals of the war, artists around the world found existential solace in the denial of symbolism, the freedom of gestural abstraction, and the materiality of paint itself. As COBRA artist Asger Jorn wrote: "One cannot express oneself in a purely psychic manner. Expression is a physical tool which materializes thought. Thus psychic automatism is related organically to physical automatism."<sup>6</sup>

Gutai's approach included non-art materials and three-dimensional or event-related works. Yet unlike Fluxus and Happenings, which also used the body in interaction with non-art matter, Gutai intentionally avoided overt mythological or political content. Joseph Beuys's repeated use of specific materials, such as honey to symbolize life or fat to signify energy, made a personal language full of symbolic meaning, and was thus charged with mystic commentary that was absent in Gutai art.<sup>7</sup> Drawing on their natural and urban environments, the Gutai artists appropriated a variety of natural and manufactured materials to reenact the aggressive freedom of birth itself. Whereas artists in the West perceived terror and chaos in the postwar condition, the Gutai artists experienced relief and liberation from decades of oppressive totalitarian bureaucracy.

Gutai's historic activities lasted from its first outdoor exhibition in 1955 until Yoshihara's death in 1972, when the group disbanded. The vast surviving and documented corpus of Gutai art includes painting, sculpture, indoor and outdoor site-specific installations, action events, stage performances, experimental film and *musique concrète*, the *Gutai* journal, and related graphic arts. Intentionally disinterested in the formalist arguments of modern Euro-American abstract art and averse to the use of art as political activism, Gutai engaged in its own form of "action event" and "action painting" as an explosive rite to stomp out the dark orthodoxies of prewar Imperial Japanese culture and usher in the liberal American-style "democracy" which history had unexpectedly granted.

## YOSHIHARA AND POSTWAR JAPANESE ART

Yoshihara Jirō was born in Osaka in 1905, the second son of a prosperous merchant family. Groomed to manage his father's business, Yoshihara nevertheless pursued art from an early age. He received no formal art training but was



6.2. YOSHIHARA Jirō. Work. c. 1936. Oil on canvas, 44" × 57" (112.1 × 145.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura. Photo courtesy the Museum

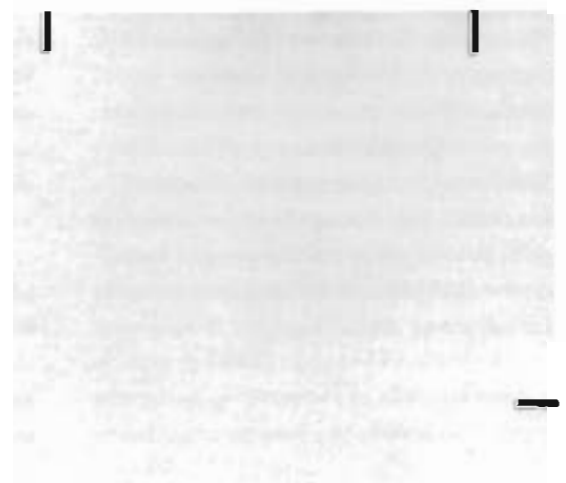
6.1. NANTENRŌ Tōjū. En-ō (Circle). Ink on paper. Andrea and Robert Nachtigall Collection. Photo courtesy Steven Addiss

Inscription reads: Eat this and drink a cup of tea, at age 82.



6.5. KAWAYAMA Akira. Work. 1954. Oil on plywood, 26" × 24" (61.8 × 61.8 cm). Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. Photo courtesy the Museum

6.3. YOSHIHARA Jirō. Untitled. 1962. Oil on canvas, 71" × 107" (182 × 272 cm). Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. Photo courtesy the Museum



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guided in his early twenties by two well-known painters. The first was Kamiyama Jirō (1895–1945), who had lived in Paris and was well-versed in contemporary European art and thought.<sup>8</sup> The second was Fujita Tsuguharu (1886–1968), perhaps the most famous Japanese painter in Paris at the time. At Fujita's recommendation, Yoshihara was accepted to *Nika-kai* (Second Section Association)—a prominent group of Fauvist-style painters who had broken away from the academic salon sponsored by the Ministry of Education; this established Yoshihara at the forefront of Japanese vanguard painting. But it was Fujita's dictum, "Do not imitate others," that particularly impressed young Yoshihara. In his essay, "Genius," Fujita expresses the ideas that would later become central to Gutai:

*It is often said, for better or worse, that we Japanese are gifted for imitating things, which we can improve upon, but that we are lacking in the innate power to create without a model from which to work. In the realm of art, we must create works of new value, one of our own devising.*<sup>9</sup>

Yoshihara first showed at *Nika-kai*'s annual show in 1934. His work of this period is typical of the Surrealist style that was popular among Japanese vanguard painters in the 1930s,<sup>10</sup> but he gradually became more interested in geometric abstraction (*figure 6.2*). In 1938, he became a founding member of the Ninth Room Association (*Kyūshitsu-kai*), a group of Surrealist and abstract painters that formed in reaction against the more Fauvist-dominated *Nika-kai*. Yoshihara's association with *Kyūshitsu-kai*, which was among the three most progressive arts groups in the prewar years, established him as a leading spokesman for advanced art in Japan.<sup>11</sup>

In 1944, as Japan's defeat was imminent, its totalitarian government banned art exhibitions except those of propaganda art organized by the Great Japan Patriotic Art Association (*Dai-Nippon Bijutsu Hōkoku-kai*), and continued to enforce its prohibition of abstract painting. Yoshihara may well have agreed with his colleague, the Expressionist painter Asō Saburō, who wrote: "It had become impossible to paint as one liked . . . The air was thin. We were being strangled by a black hand."<sup>12</sup>

Several events in the postwar Japanese art world influenced Gutai's formation and eventual direction. First, the academic hierarchy of the prewar art world was under attack, as younger artists strove to establish themselves independent of the juried salon institutions. The Democratic Artists Association (*Demokurāto Bijutsuka Kyōkai*), founded in Osaka in 1951 by the artist Ei-Kyū (1911–1960), had a deliberately anti-establishment premise: "The spirit of creation is born out of freedom and independence. Our group follows no form or organization and is thus avant-garde in the true sense. We challenge the arts organizations and their ability to create freely."<sup>13</sup> In 1949, the *Yomiuri* newspaper launched the first annual, unjuried "Yomiuri Indépendant Exhibition" in Tokyo, designed to give younger artists with no official affiliation the chance to show. The conservative styles associated with the dominant salons were passed over in favor of more Dadaist and Expressionist works. As artist Akasegawa Genpei recalls, "Everywhere at the Yomiuri Indépendant the idea of a fixed format for a picture was being destroyed—a tendency which intensified as time went on."<sup>14</sup>

The early 1950s also saw the beginning of a boom in international loan exhibitions in Japan. Between 1950 and 1954, the *Salon de mai* survey of contemporary French painting and one-person shows of works by Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Georges Rouault, and Ossip Zadkine all traveled to Japan. Rapid, successive exposure to contempo-

rary art was also facilitated by a deluge of international and domestic art magazines that were available after years of censorship. The Japanese suddenly realized "how much we had been starved of modern art"<sup>15</sup> and critics like Takiguchi Shūzō were moved to comment that:

*Perhaps we haven't completely digested the movements and principles of Western art. Japanese contemporary art must exist in our guts and bones. This is where everything begins. Is it possible that we do not yet understand our very own substance?*<sup>16</sup>

As if in response to a challenge from abroad, important annual or semi-annual exhibitions of contemporary Japanese art were inaugurated in the early 1950s, including the "International Art Exhibition, Japan/*Nihon kokusai bijutsu-ten*," known as the Tokyo Biennale, and the "Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan/*Gendai Nihon bijutsu-ten*," both held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. These surveys, which included works by Yoshihara in their opening shows, were significant because they marked the official resurgence of contemporary fine arts. But they also proved that the art community's identity and direction were mired. As Takiguchi wrote, "There was the feeling that we were waiting for something to change that was not changing drastically enough."<sup>17</sup>

For Yoshihara, Jackson Pollock provided the catalyst to overcome the postwar impasse.<sup>18</sup> Yoshihara intuited the fresh ebulliance of Pollock's automatist works and aspired to the same raw energy when he praised "the scream of the material itself, cries of the paint and enamel" in the drip paintings—a brute materialism that also lay at the heart of Gutai.<sup>19</sup> In relinquishing the easel in favor of the floor and adopting brushes, sticks, and trowels as tools, Pollock symbolized freedom from both the procedure and imagery of traditional oil painting. Further, as Harold Rosenberg implied in his seminal 1952 essay, "American Action Painters," the new American

art repudiated the political motives of Social Realism, the moral import of the Regionalists, and the aesthetic concerns of abstract painting in favor of the artist's "gesture of liberation, from Value."<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Yoshihara rejected Tokyo's Social Realist and *reportage* trends for their overt ideology and regionalism, and was also determined to progress beyond formal abstract painting. In focusing on the individual artist and the process of creation, action painting as embodied by Pollock gave impetus to Yoshihara's pursuit of a radically new art.

#### THE FORMATIVE PHASE: YOSHIHARA'S ATELIER AND THE ZERO SOCIETY

During the immediate postwar years, Yoshihara emerged as an impresario in the reconstruction of the Kansai art world. In addition to the international avant-garde's stimulus, artists were finding inspiration in a variety of indigenous cultural sources and philosophical traditions. Interest in liberating the traditional arts—especially calligraphy—from their obsolete orthodoxies lead Yoshihara and others to establish the Contemporary Art Discussion Group (*Gendai Bijutsu Kondan-kai*), known as *Genbi*. Founded in 1951 in Osaka, *Genbi* functioned as an intellectual forum and collaborative workshop for artists of diverse genres who aimed to foster the creation of new art forms based on integrating modernism and tradition, East and West, individualism and universality. In short, *Genbi*'s purpose was to rethink and reform the definition and practice of Japanese culture in a global age. The contemporary discourse on how to achieve world relevance (*sekai-sei*) through the innovation of Japanese tradition, which *Genbi* explored, was to remain a serious concern for Yoshihara throughout his career.

*Kirin* (Giraffe), a children's art and literary magazine founded in 1947, served as another forum for many of the

Gutai artists. Just as the Surrealists admired the art of children and the mentally insane, the Gutai artists were drawn to the imaginative process of children's art to help tap into the realm of uninhibited, uncensored creativity. According to scholar Kawasaki Kōichi, the importance of children's art to the Gutai aesthetic was "not the style of art made by children but their attitude, which was capable of producing unique and surprising results from an empty white space in an unselfconscious manner."<sup>21</sup> Shiraga Kazuo found inspiration in "children's works that played with numbers, abstraction, white paper slashed with knives, canvases painted with fireworks"<sup>22</sup> and Yamasaki Tsuruko was inspired by one child's idea—of tying up the school with string—to write an essay on "The Art of Tying Up."<sup>23</sup> Valuing art made from instinct rather than intellect, Shimamoto wrote, "Not only in fine art education but all kinds of education, it's not possible for art theory to precede art itself. If it were so, then there wouldn't be any reason for art to exist."<sup>24</sup>

Such alternative models of creativity—the unschooled imaginations of children's art, the expressive play of ink in Zen calligraphy—informed Yoshihara's increasing dissatisfaction with orthodox modernism. Convinced that formal abstract painting had no future, Yoshihara was challenged "to go beyond the borders of abstract art." His rejection of Japanese modernist conventions as staid and derivative led him to establish Gutai as a vehicle for more experimental creativity.

By 1953, when the first exhibition of the Contemporary Art Discussion Group was held, Yoshihara was operating a proper atelier at his Ashiya residence.<sup>25</sup> His two constant lessons were "Never imitate!" and "Create what has never existed before!" Originality was more important than technical aptitude, talent and character were prized above intellect, and the idea of aesthetically-pleasing art was deemed invalid. Yoshihara's relationship with his young protégés was strictly student-teacher. They called him *sensei* (honorific for "master" or "profes-

sor"), greatly respected his opinion and taste, and worked hard for his approval which apparently was not easy to win. He was severe, moody, and demanding: Over the years, the number of members ebbed and flowed as several dropped out and new ones joined. He did not push one style—though gestural abstraction was already the dominant trend—but rather worked with students on a one-to-one basis, encouraging them to open up, let go, do the unthinkable. "He loved new work," Yoshida Toshio recalls, "If it wasn't new, he wasn't interested."<sup>26</sup>

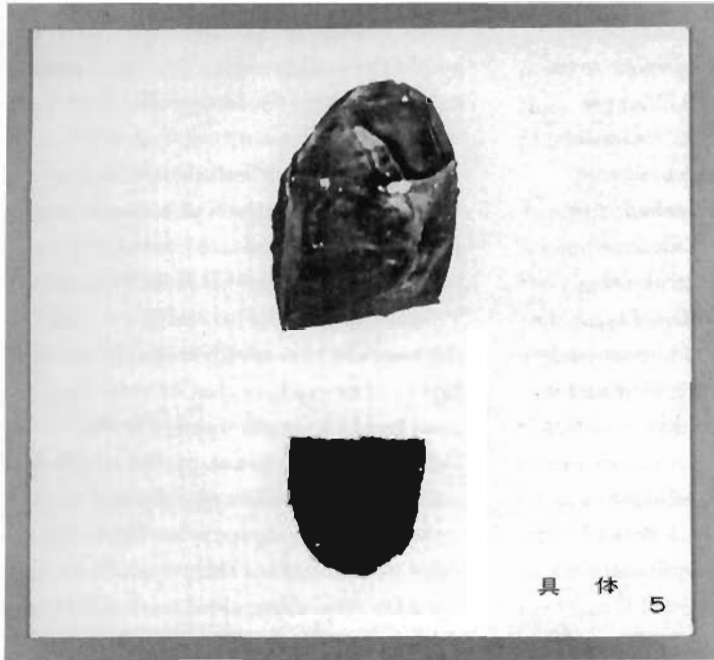
Of Yoshihara's students, Shimamoto Shōzō was among the first to realize the possibilities implied in his mentor's teachings. He began his *Hole Series* in 1950 while working on an improvised canvas that he made from gluing together layers of newspaper that he then attached to a simple wooden frame. Brushing the surface with oil-based house paint—cheaper than oil paint and better suited to cover newspaper—Shimamoto drew on the surface with a pencil, drawing a battery of lines and marks. When the newspaper ground accidentally tore open, Shimamoto responded by deliberately making breaks all over the rest of the painting. According to Shimamoto, when he showed the first hole work to Yoshihara, "we both felt that something great had been accomplished."<sup>27</sup>

At the time of his discovery, Shimamoto was unaware of his contemporary Lucio Fontana's slashed canvas works. Although both separately conceived punctured monochrome surfaces, the slash in Fontana's pristine canvas is a formal device, a late-modernist experiment with space and a proto-Minimalist exercise of the concept, "painting as object." Shimamoto's paper canvas functions instead as a record of the artist's chance physical action with material. By presenting a torn and flaking surface as an object of aesthetic value, Shimamoto at once defiantly opposed established notions of permanence in abstract modernist painting and introduced *hin*

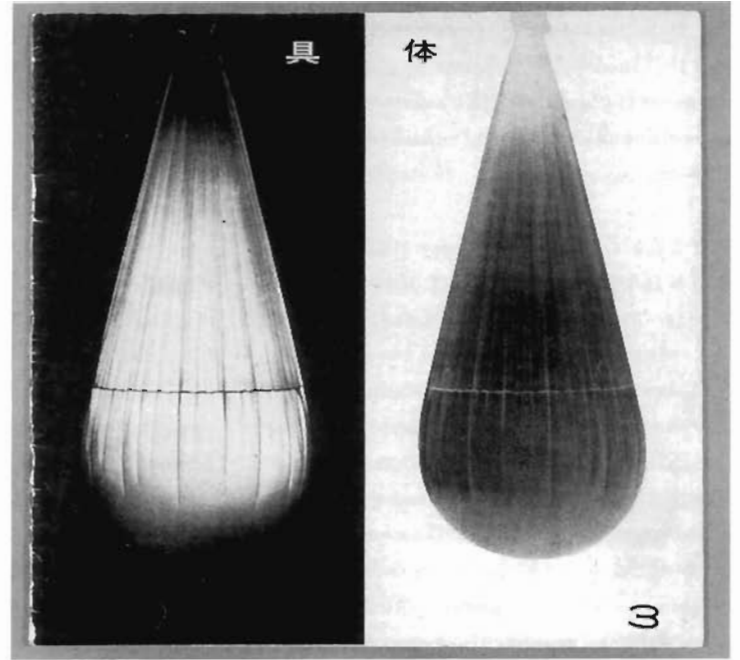


6.6. Gutai members at Yoshihara's studio, c. 1959

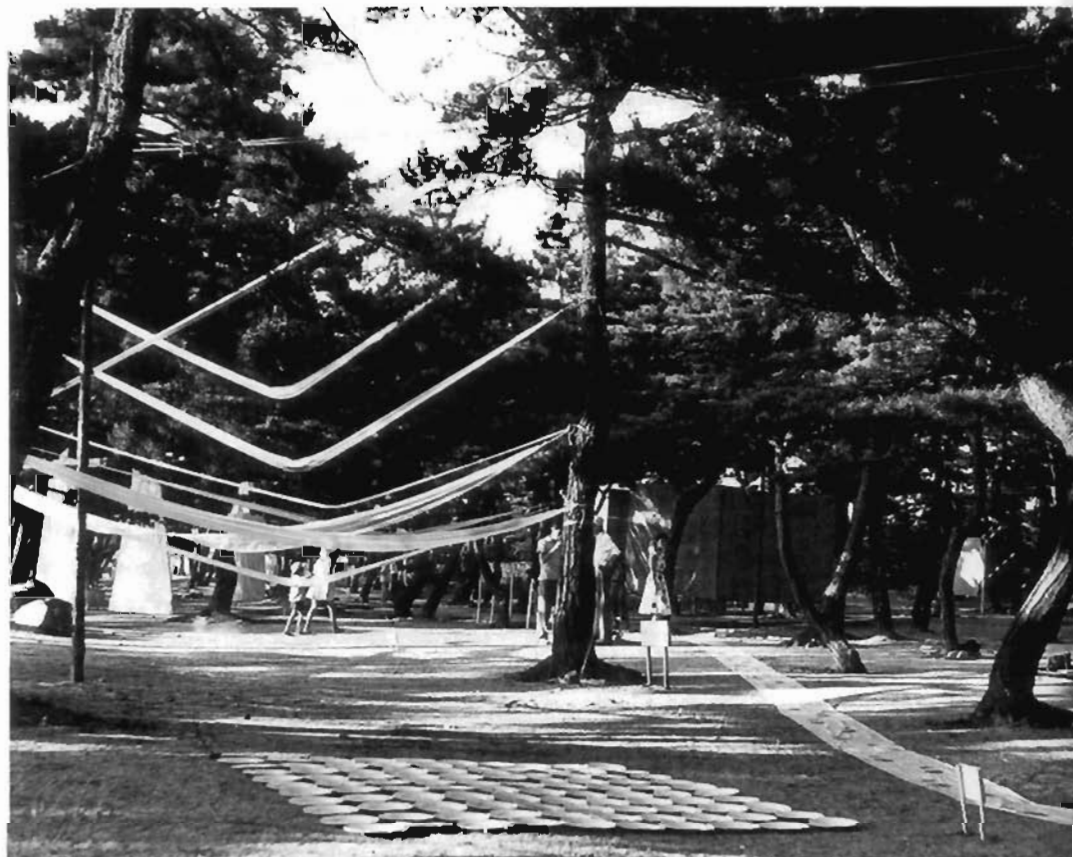
6.8. Gutai, no. 3 (20 October 1955), cover



6.7. Gutai, no. 5 (1 October 1956), cover



6.9. The "Outdoor Gutai Art Exhibition," Ashiya, July 1956



(poverty)—the appreciation of minimal and naturally weathered objects as cultivated in the arts of tea—into the context of contemporary Japanese art. In these ways, *Work: Holes* (Plate 2) represents the beginning of a Gutai style.

Yoshida Toshio, another self-taught artist who frequented the Contemporary Art Discussion Group, joined Yoshihara's circle in 1953. *Red* (Plate 3), is a painted wooden board seamed with nails with a rope tied through two holes in the surface. The Shintō elements—wood, rope, the color red—are stripped to their essentials, a rude and humble praise, in the artist's words, of "the spirit of matter."<sup>28</sup>

In 1952, as Yoshihara's atelier was becoming famous, some dozen other local artists formed the Zero Society (*Zero-kai*). Founded on the premise that "every work of art begins from nothing,"<sup>29</sup> its central figures—Shiraga Kazuo, Murakami Saburō, Kanayama Akira, and Tanaka Atsuko—later joined Gutai. Dissatisfied by the annual juried exhibition of the New Production School Association (*Shin-Seisaku-ha Kyōkai*), a nominally progressive arts association where they first met, their group began meeting at Shiraga's house in Amagasaki in the early 1950s. The object of their investigation was how "to invent a new painting."<sup>30</sup> Shiraga records the outcome:

*My childhood friend, Kanayama Akira, was working on simplifying and reducing Mondrian's abstraction. He took it to such an extreme that all that remained were the dimensions of the canvas itself. He showed this blank canvas with confidence at exhibitions. Tanaka Atsuko, another member, proclaimed that painting on canvas or paper was old-fashioned, and began making simple shapes from plain cloth. Murakami Saburō, who is famous for running through paper screens, threw rubber balls that were dipped in ink at the canvas, or let a ball bounce on the floor [and then hit the canvas]. This work had a very interesting sense—the feel of velocity. As for me, I stopped thinking about*

*form and composition, and tried to get in touch with my instincts. I began creating with my bare feet.*<sup>31</sup>

Zero Society's experiments in concept and action art profoundly influenced the course of Gutai, and deserve wider recognition abroad as examples of proto-Minimal and Conceptual Art. Kanayama's "trans-Mondrian" series (figure 6.5) aimed to transcend artistic subjectivity in order to objectify the idea of art itself, and lead him in as early as 1955 to present a blank canvas. "My work," Kanayama explained, "is intentionally opposite Shiraga's. I am interested in concept."<sup>32</sup>

Like Kanayama, Tanaka's Zero work reveals an interest in mathematical notions of infinity. *Work* (Plate 7) was conceived as Tanaka lay recovering from an illness in a hospital bed, where all there was to look at was a calendar on the wall. In her hallucinatory state, the numbers became detached from their days, their repetition lost order, and their shapes lost meaning.<sup>33</sup> Written in a deliberate scrawl on collaged fragments of cloth or newspaper, Tanaka's numbers look like codes inked on a recycled shroud. In her fascination with infinity, and the sense of passivity its contemplation instills, Tanaka's work is linked to that of other Japanese women artists of her generation, including the Gutai artists Shiraga Fujiko and Yamasaki Tsuruko, and Kusama Yayoi and Miyawaki Aiko.

Murakami's 1954 series, *Work Painted by Throwing a Ball* (Plate 4), shares the Zero proclivity for making art of an idea. "I was interested in making a painting without touching the canvas, that used distance," he explains.<sup>34</sup> The solution was found in a method that combined physical action (throwing), the inherent properties of material (ink, ball, paper), and chance circumstance (where the inked ball happens to hit the paper). In its idea of painting as performance, Murakami's mark of accidental action is an early embodiment of Gutai art.

Shiraga, one of the few Gutai artists who completed art-school training in both *Nihonga* and oil painting, discarded

his brush and palette knife by 1954 and began to paint with his feet. Just as Pollock "broke the ice" for Abstract Expressionism, in Willem de Kooning's words, when he discovered the drip technique, Shiraga's act provided the symbolic breakthrough for Gutai. Shiraga proclaimed: "Technique will change to free and wild action, and it ignites my passion. Passion turns into action, and it fills my flaming heart."<sup>35</sup>

The Zero Society showed only once, in the display windows of Osaka's Sogō Department Store, in 1954. Their experiments with conceptual and performance-based art attracted Yoshihara. Two months after Gutai was founded, he apparently won them over by saying, "You can't fight alone, so come fight in a group."<sup>36</sup>

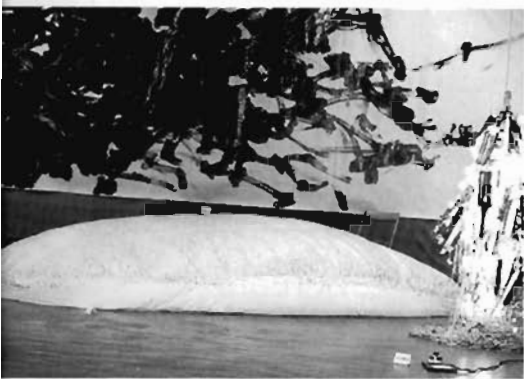
## EARLY GUTAI

The group's first activity was the publication of a journal, *Gutai*, that first appeared on January 1, 1955. Writing in English, Yoshihara introduced Gutai art as "a proposal" to the West, stating that "now is the chance to call for the sympathy of people around the world." From the start, Gutai thus aimed to build an international connection, to stimulate cross-cultural exchange, and to assert itself abroad as the preeminent Japanese avant-garde of its day.

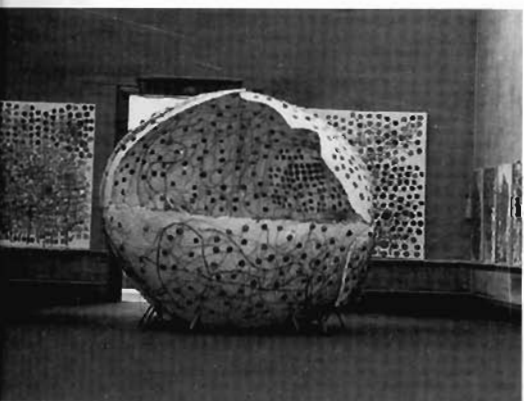
The *Gutai* journal lasted for ten years and produced twelve issues (figures 6.7 and 6.8).<sup>37</sup> Its purpose was to document Gutai's activities and publish essays by the artists. These writings took the form of statements of purpose or poetic, philosophical musings. Like so much of Gutai art, its prose is also a form of automatic gesture, uncensored self-expression, and naked and brave claims to new aesthetic territories.

In the spring of 1955, the newly-formed Gutai group made its Tokyo debut at the 7th Yomiuri Indépendant, signing all their submitted works with the single name "Gutai." But its first outdoor exhibition, held in July 1955, marked the





6.10. The "2nd Gutai Art Exhibition," the Ohara Kaikan hall, Tokyo, October 1956



6.11. The "8th Gutai Art Exhibition," Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, September 1959

real beginning of the group's historic activities. These included a second outdoor exhibition the following summer; three exhibitions with artists' demonstrations at the Tokyo headquarters of the Ohara *ikebana* school; and one exhibition at the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, all arranged by Yoshihara. In 1956, Gutai organized an outdoor spectacle of art events for *Life* magazine photographers; and from 1957 it choreographed several performances for the stage.<sup>38</sup> Gutai art developed in these many venues as the artists' creative response to the challenging conditions of each new occasion and site.

Both outdoor exhibitions took place in a spacious pine grove park in Ashiya (figure 6.9). To make objects that would withstand weather, the artists experimented with industrial material such as vinyl, polyurethane, huge sheets of tin, and electricity. The work also had to conform to various conditions of its physical environment—the low-lying trees, their knotty roots, the sandy ground. The artists were inspired "to utilize and transform their surroundings,"<sup>39</sup> and their experiments led naturally to an ephemeral, site-specific, installation art. Motonaga Sadamasa, a new member, used clear polyurethane sacs—the kind used to make plastic bags—which he purchased from the factory as uncut tubing. He filled each with red, yellow, and turquoise colored water and tied the ends between the trees, where they hung like a vast criss-cross of long, see-through hammocks. When the sun shone, the bellies of colored water turned into bulbs of brightly colored light (figure 6.9). Other works included Yoshihara Michio's hole in the ground with an electric light buried at its navel, called *Discovery* (figure 6.14), and Kanayama Akira's 300-foot-long strip of white vinyl marked with black footprints that encircled the entire grounds and ended up in a tree (figure 6.9). Unlike conventional sculpture which is conceived of as static, isolated objects, Gutai's outdoor installations were developed as part of the environment, and were dependent on nature for their colorful and capricious effects.

Other objects at the outdoor exhibitions were designed to be interactive with people. Murakami Saburō's *Sky*, for example, offered viewers the chance to step inside a tall, one-man tent (figure 6.12), where one's gaze was forced upward to behold the sky framed above. Shimamoto Shōzō constructed a rocking, creaking catwalk of timber planks arranged on uneven springs, on which people were invited to walk (figure 6.13). These projects were designed to induce unexpected emotions—fear, imbalance, insecurity—and depended upon visitor participation and mental/physical interaction, to be completed as works of art. As Yoshihara wrote of Shimamoto's catwalk, it has to be "walked" rather than "watched."

Finally, the outdoor exhibitions established the Gutai notion of art as event. Theatricality was not only tolerated, it was applauded. Sound, light, play, and the spirit of festival characterized both outdoor summer shows. The artists' decision, after the first exhibition closed, simply to build a bonfire and burn all their works because they had no storage facilities, poignantly symbolizes the early Gutai belief that the making, installation, and experience of art are expressions of daily life in all its transient and imperfect flux. Process, not product, was the governing aesthetic.

The Gutai exhibitions held at the Ohara Kaikan hall in Tokyo in 1955 and 1956 offered a more formal setting for the Gutai artists (figure 6.10). Pursuing the possibilities of new materials and interactive art, Tanaka Atsuko created a series of projects based on a crude yet elaborate use of electricity. *Bell Piece* (Plates 8 and 9), which took six months to construct, was conceived as a "sound painting." Connecting twenty electric bells with some 150 feet of cord, Tanaka devised a contraption which set the bells off in a chain reaction as soon as one was kicked or in some way activated by a person. In the exhibition hall, the web of bells wound its way through several galleries, chiming at odd intervals ahead

and behind one's tour. In this work, Gutai appropriated time as well as sound into its conception of an art work.

One of Gutai's most emblematic objects is Tanaka's *Electric Dress* (Plate 10), a wearable Christmas tree cloak composed of hundreds of light bulbs painted in bright, industrial primary colors that, when turned on, flashed and blinked like a walking *pachinko* parlor. Tanaka, risking electrocution, wore the dress for various Gutai performance events (*Performance Plate 27*). Tanaka's statement on the ridiculous confines of feminine fashion is outstanding in the prehistory of feminist art.

## GUTAI PERFORMANCE

At the opening of the first Gutai Art exhibition at the Ohara Kaikan hall in Tokyo, Shiraga Kazuo dived half-naked into a pile of mud and performed an act that was at once violent, grotesque, and erotic (*Performance Plate 23*). Submerged in the ooze, he wrestled, kicked, thrashed, and squeezed the clayish mound beneath him while the audience gathered round. He emerged bruised and cut. The result was an artwork made of mud, sculpted by physical action, and recorded in photographs. Through *Challenging Mud* and other artist demonstrations held in 1955 and 1956, the Gutai action event (*kōi*) was born.

For Murakami Saburō's performance at the same opening, he built a structure of kraft paper screens, roughly six feet high and twelve feet wide. He then flung himself through the screens creating six gaping holes and several layers of torn paper (*Performance Plates 21 and 22*). As in Shiraga's mud event, Murakami's action produced a work—the torn paper screens—whose violence exposed the fundamental properties of the material itself. Because of their association with the *shōji* and *fusuma* paper-and-wood partitions that constitute interior Japanese architecture, Murakami's work represents a breaking

through of conventional cultural limits. In what Alfred Pacquement describes as "the most perfect Gutai work," what would be perceived by the Japanese as vandalism becomes an act of birth, freedom, and assertion.<sup>40</sup>

The Gutai action events—short, single, and fast matches between body and matter—signify a concrete manifestation of human imagination, chance, and time. The action, often staged in public, was intended both to present (in itself) and produce (as a result) a work of art. The work was either permanent—as in Shimamoto's paintings made by throwing glass jars of color against a canvas—or ephemeral, surviving as a concept through documentary photographs and texts. These action events, including many plans that were unrealized, were designed to invent new ways to make art using the whole body. As Gutai scholar Osaki Shin'ichirō has written, Gutai's actions were directed towards the ultimate goal of painting, and "in carrying out the Actions, it was the nature of painting which they ultimately intended to restore."<sup>41</sup> Similar to Yves Klein's "living brush" paintings of 1959, made of naked female body prints, Gutai's action events also used the body as a medium for painterly expression. But whereas Klein's erotic prints carry symbolism in the sensationalist Surrealist tradition, Gutai's actions were never literal and leave no trace of formal imagery.

The artist demonstrations were not conceived as theater but they led naturally to the stage. The group presented two performances of "Gutai Art on the Stage" in 1957 and 1958 (*Performance Plates 28 to 30*); and in 1962, Gutai collaborated with the Morita Modern Dance troupe on the spectacle, "Don't Worry! The Moon Won't Fall!" Yoshihara, writing in the *Gutai* journal, explains how Gutai experimentation came to embrace theater:

*Gutai Art is always searching for possibilities to create a new, unknown, and unexplored beauty. In this search, all conceivable perspectives are considered and all possible methods and materials are examined and used. . . . We are now*

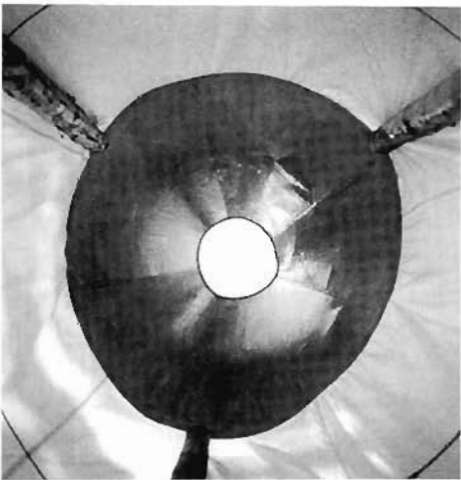
*presenting works in a form that employs the stage and incorporates the dimension of time. We are convinced that these works, and the form in which they are presented, will be revolutionary for the whole world—East and West.*<sup>42</sup>

Gutai's stage art was conceived as a series of acts, each centering around the execution of a work on stage. Mukai Shūji painted hieroglyphic graffiti marks over a blank canvas which had twelve human faces sticking through twelve holes, each of which he proceeded to cover with paint via his brush-strokes. In another piece, Sumi Yasuo hung curtains of canvas on the stage and flung buckets of paint against its surface, completing an environmental painting. Gutai performance also engaged ritual, as in Yoshida Toshio's wedding in which the bride and groom were wrapped in yards and yards of cloth until they were encased together in a single mummified cocoon, barely able to walk or breathe. Tanaka Atsuko, mocking the exhibitionist element of stage performance, appeared in layers of larger-than-life-size paper dresses which she then stripped away, one by one, until she was left standing in a tight black leotard hung with blinking lights—a work which led her to make the more elaborate *Electric Dress*. In one finale, Motonaga set up a smoke-machine on stage that produced giant smoke rings which finally sent the audience out the door, coughing. Together with Experimental Workshop, a collaborative group of musicians, composers, dancers, and artists who were active in Tokyo from 1951 to 1957, Gutai's concepts of incorporating traditional theater, light art, recorded ambient sound, and art on stage were the most advanced in the history of avant-garde performance.

Gutai's first stage performance was reported in the Sunday art section of *The New York Times* on September 8, 1957. Michael Kirby, a leading critic of performance art, suggests this report "might, therefore, have had some influence on



6.12. MURAKAMI Saburō. *Sky*, shown at the "Experimental Outdoor Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Mid-Summer Sun," Ashiya, 1955



the origins of Happenings."<sup>13</sup> A documentary of Gutai's performance events and copies of Gutai journals were shown during Gutai's exhibition at the Martha Jackson Gallery in 1958, where they were likely seen by New York artists.

Yet despite both formal and conceptual affinities, the exact nature of Gutai's experiments was not understood well enough to serve as a real source: errors abound in the American reports. Whether or not Allan Kaprow fully understood at the time Gutai's prescient exploration of strategies that would become broadly known as Anti-Art, one of his conditions for Happenings could well describe the concerns of a Gutai performance: "[T]he source of themes, materials, actions, and the relationships between them are to be derived from any place or period *except* from the arts, their derivatives, and their milieu."<sup>14</sup> As one of the first international postwar groups to make the body a primary signifying material of performance, Gutai presaged directions in the visual arts that would become mainstream a decade later.

## GUTAI PAINTING

Throughout Gutai's experiments in a variety of media, the importance of painting was never challenged. Paintings dominated the first issues of the *Gutai* journal, crowded the walls of the Gutai shows, and were featured regularly at the Gutai Pinacotheca, the company warehouse in the Nakanoshima section of Osaka which Yoshihara converted into an exhibition space for Gutai art in 1962. For Gutai, painting was defined as an art form that recorded the process of its creation. It could be made of any materials, painterly or not, and executed by any means—dance, machine or accident. By titling the majority of their paintings "work" (*sakuhin*), the Gutai artists emphasized the objecthood of painting and denied any literary, figurative or symbolic meaning. Manifesting the concrete presence of material, Gutai painting should not represent or suggest nature—it must embody, be a "work" of nature itself.

The notion of painting as action was central to Gutai. Direct, violent physical gesture, a passionate thrashing of body against matter, determined both the process and content of Gutai painting. Shiraga's entire oeuvre, for example, was painted with the artist's bare feet on unstretched canvas attached to the floor. Balancing on a hanging rope which he grasped with his fists, Shiraga dipped and swung his weight through the thick, wet oil paint. The finished painting stands as a record of his random spins, swirls, and slips (*Plates 13 and 14*). In a similar action, Shimamoto, wearing goggles and geared for combat, hurled glass bottles of paint against rocks positioned on top of unstretched linen (*Performance Plate 26*). The bottles shattered on impact, spilling bright paint like fireworks across the surface. Encrusted with glass shards, *Work (Plate 17)* survives as the record of its explosive creation.

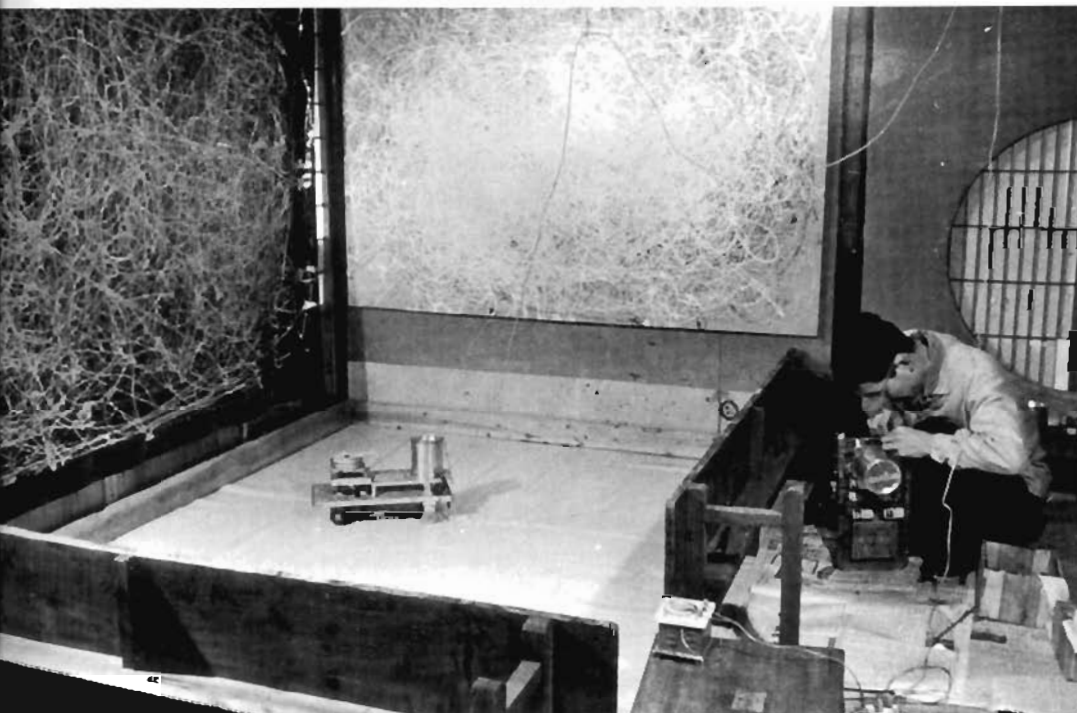
A second characteristic of Gutai painting was its attitude toward material. Yoshihara praised the materiality of paint and enamel as a means to liberate the fundamental nature of paint into the concrete world. Motonaga's series of poured paintings that date from 1958 through 1966 illustrate this approach (*Plate 15*). As pools of paint flowed gradually across the surface of a tilted canvas, the colors gathered into amorphous, organic shapes, a timeless map charting the caprice of gravity and paint's viscosity. The artist became a passive agent to his material, whose bare physical reality is more real than pictorial illusion.

Finally, Gutai painting engaged chance. Discarding the paintbrush which is a tool controlled by the artist's technical skill, Gutai artists appropriated watering cans, vibrators, burning embers, and cannons. In a rebuttal to academic painting formats, the Gutai artists courted accident, transience, and the unpredictable. Kanayama illustrated this use of chance to the point of parody in *Work (Plate 12)*, which was painted by a remote-control toy car equipped with a can of quick-drying, solvent-based paint,

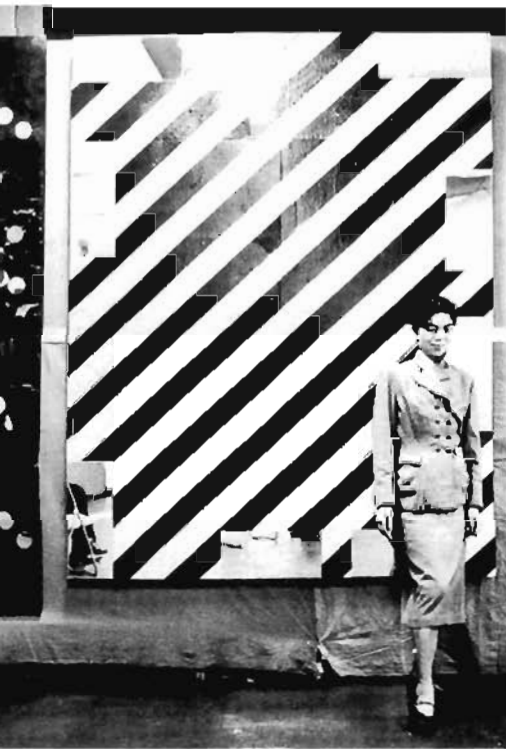


6.13. SHIMAMOTO Shōzō. *Please Walk on Here*, shown at the "Outdoor Gutai Art Exhibition," Ashiya, 1956

6.14. YOSHIHARA Michio. *Shining Water and Discovery*. "Outdoor Gutai Art Exhibition," Ashiya, 1956



6.15. Kanayama making a remote-control painting in his studio, c. 1957. Photo courtesy the artist



6.16. Yamasaki in front of *Mirror*, 1956, a collage painting of board, paper, and mirrors



6.17. Mukai in his Room of Signs shown at the "10th Gutai Art Exhibition" at the Takashimaya Department Store, Osaka, May 1961

which buzzed around and around a vinyl sheet, producing a pseudo-Pollock. Like Jean Tinguely's machine-made paintings, Kanayama's work is the wry record of art devoid of human touch.

Yoshihara, although he authored the "Gutai Art Manifesto" which so influenced Gutai painting, ultimately followed a slightly different course. As the most traditional abstract painter in the group, his concerns remained more formal and spiritual. Besides his abiding interest in modern European abstraction, he was actively involved with Morita Shiryū and the avant-garde calligraphy movement, *Bokujin-kai*.<sup>45</sup> In one of Yoshihara's frequent contributions to Morita's journal, *Bokubi* (Ink Art), he discusses the work of the Zen artist-monk Nantenbō Tōjū (1839–1926, figure 6.4).<sup>46</sup> Neither rejecting nor embracing the impact of the West, Nantenbō's ink painting and calligraphy expressed a contemporary spirit without corrupting the essence of his tradition. Yoshihara, who compared Nantenbō's flung-ink brushwork to the paintings of Kline and Pollock, was so impressed with the Zen monk's work that he frequently took the Gutai artists to see his famous *fusuma*-door paintings at the Kaisei-ji Temple in Nishinomiya.

From 1962 until his death in 1972, Yoshihara devoted himself to making a series of circle paintings inspired by Zen tradition (*Plates 18 and 19*). As the ultimate form in Zen painting, the *ensō* represents void and substance, emptiness and completion, and the union of painting, calligraphy, and meditation. Rejecting the stormy impasto surfaces of his mid-Gutai period, Yoshihara composed circle paintings of a single circle in water-based acrylic against a white, black or red ground. In the tradition of Zen monk-artists, Yoshihara repeatedly practiced his circle paintings as a form of spiritual discipline while pursuing the realization of a perfect form of modern abstract painting:

*I am grateful that however big the space is, I know that one circle can fill it, will complete the picture. It saves me from having to think what to draw on every*

*canvas. I am only left with dealing with what kind of circle will be made. Or, with what kind of circle I will make. . . . It is up to me as to whether I have come to an understanding with my circles and myself.*"

## THE CRITICAL LEGACY

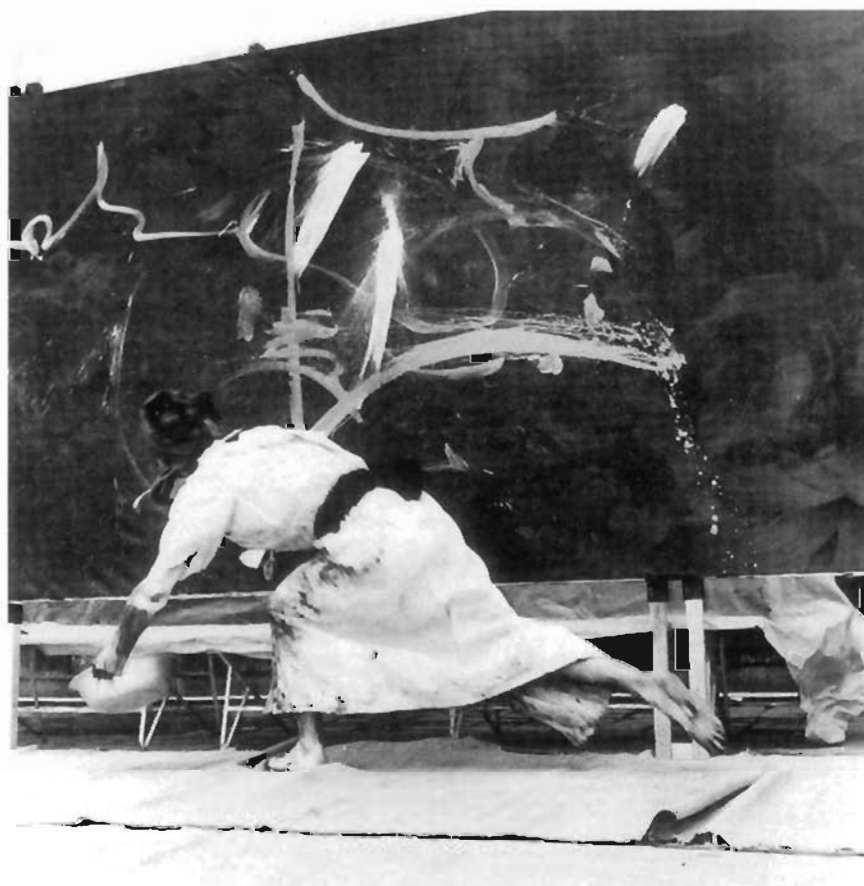
In its early years, Gutai was famous in Japan as a media spectacle yet continually lacked serious critical recognition. Initially, Yoshihara sought support from a cultural elite to which he was well-connected as both an eminent *Kyūshitsu-kai* painter and patron of the avant-garde. Among his closest supporters were the contemporary *ikebana* masters, Ohara Sōun and Teshigahara Sōfū, both of whom operated active cultural centers in Tokyo. But what finally established Gutai as an important movement in postwar Japanese history was the recognition it received abroad, especially from the French critic Michel Tapié (1909–1987). Visiting Japan in Fall 1957, Tapié praised the group for its prescient affinities with *Art Informel* and later arranged for exhibitions of Gutai in New York, Paris, and Turin.<sup>47</sup> In 1965, Gutai artists were included in the historic "Nul" exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and were briefly identified with the Zero/Nul avant-garde groups in Europe. In 1966, the American performance artist Allan Kaprow featured Gutai in his landmark anthology, *Assemblages, Environments & Happenings*, which established the notion that Gutai was a forerunner of "Happening-type performance." Such foreign acclaim helped to promote the international renown of Gutai, but did little to clarify or establish its place in the history of postwar modernism, either at home or abroad.

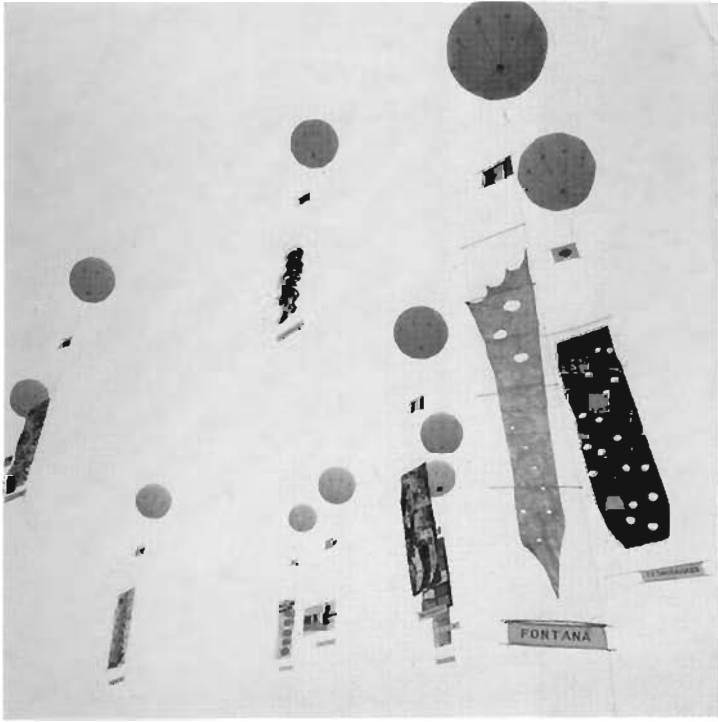
Although Gutai's reception was better in Europe and America than in Japan, ultimately the group failed to be understood within its own cultural context. Tapié's efforts to promote Gutai were motivated by his belief that Gutai



6.18. Yoshihara and Tapié at the "International Art of a New Era: Informel and Gutai" exhibition at the Takashimaya Department Store, Osaka, April 1958 in front of work by Jackson Pollock on the left and Yoshihara on the right

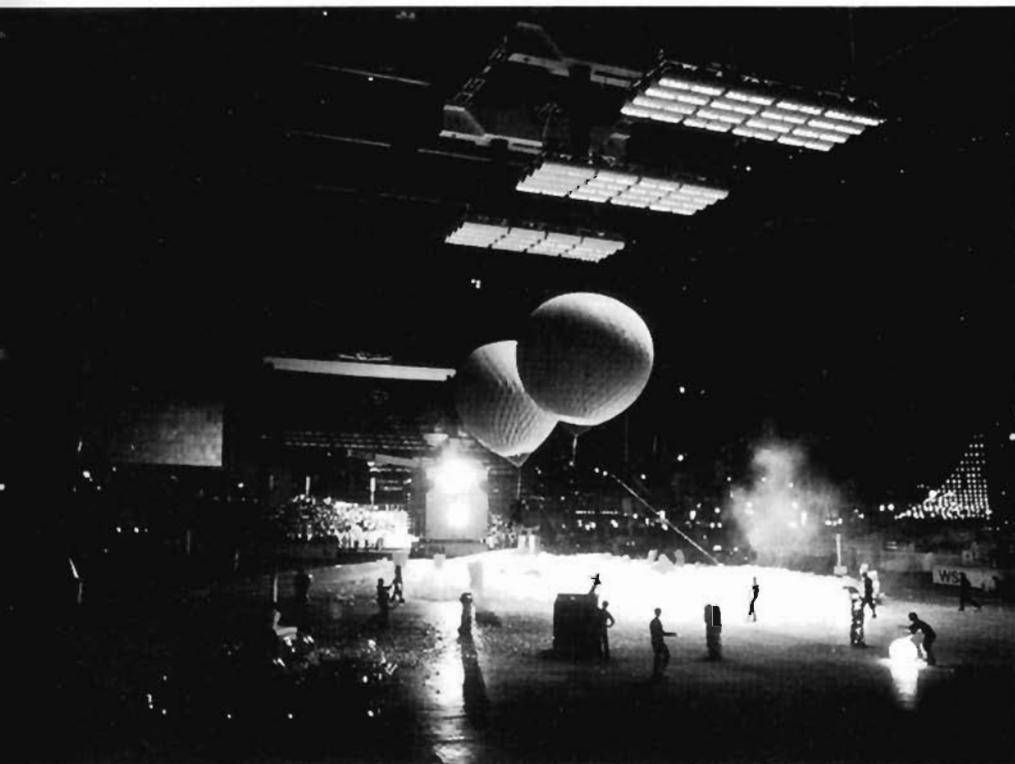
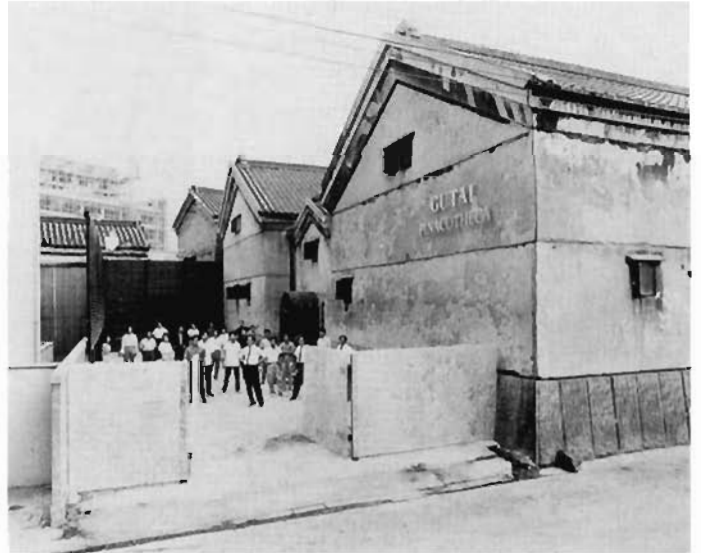
6.19. Georges Mathieu, dressed in kimono, demonstrating "action painting" at the Daimaru Department Store, Osaka, September 1957





6.20. "International Sky Festival" on the rooftop of the Takashimaya Department Store, Osaka, April 1960. Paintings by thirty artists selected by Yoshihara and Tapié were suspended in the air by advertising balloons

6.21. Yoshihara and Gutai members outside the Gutai Pinacotheca in Osaka, c. 1962



6.22. The final scene of "Drama of the Human and the Material at the Festival Plaza," presented as part of the three-night-long "Gutai Art Festival" at Expo '70, Osaka, 1970

proved the global dimensions of an aesthetic revolution predicted in his 1952 book, *Un art autre*.<sup>49</sup> Tapié declared an “extraordinary affinity” between his ideas and Gutai’s, and proposed that Gutai be understood within the framework of *Art Informel* and thereby accepted into the canon of modern art. The major exhibition he organized under Yoshihara’s auspices, “The International Art of a New Era: *Informel* and Gutai”—held at the Osaka International Festival in 1958—presented the Gutai artists alongside such Americans as Pollock, Kline, and Robert Motherwell, and the Europeans Georges Mathieu, Antoni Tapiés, and Karel Appel. In his introduction to the ninth issue of *Gutai*, which served as a catalogue for the show, Tapié wrote: “*L’art, maintenant, ne peut être pensé qu’à l’échelle mondiale.*”

However honorable Tapié’s intention, the result was that Gutai artists were seen as “Japanese *Art Informel*” painters, which was both false (because they had developed independently of *Art Informel*) and confusing (because artists like Imai Toshimitsu, who actually showed with the *Art Informel* artists in Paris, can properly be considered “Japanese *Art Informel*” but not Gutai). When Tapié arranged for Gutai artists to show at the Martha Jackson Gallery in 1958, reception was cool because the work was presented as “Japanese Abstract Expressionism.” Dore Ashton, the eminent critic and chronicler of the New York School, recalls that this exhibition “consisted largely of automatistic exercises in paint that looked all too familiar to New Yorkers, who were already turning away from action painting.”<sup>50</sup> Fluxus founder George Maciunas, who embraced several Japanese artists in the early 1960s, also mistook Gutai for a derivative movement, claiming that it originated when Georges Mathieu visited Japan with Tapié in 1957, where he gave action-painting performances.<sup>51</sup>

Contrary to Gutai painting, its action events and stage performances were mythologized by Allan Kaprow as

“a forerunner of Happenings.” It is indeed significant that Gutai originated the “action event” and “art on stage” during the years 1955–57. These events have affinities with a radical performance style that was not widely recognized until 1964, when the *Festival die neuen Kunst* in Aachen, Germany celebrated “actions, agit prop, dé-coll/age, happening, events, anti art, l’autrisme, art total, reFluxus.” The range of international performance, including Gutai, shared Dada’s zealous affronts to the traditional principles of craftsmanship and permanence in the arts. They also drew upon Surrealist automatism, the expressionist rites of action painting, assemblage, and environment art forms. In conformity with John Cage’s theories of the importance of chance in artistic creation, Happenings were described as spontaneous, plotless theatrical events.

But the sources of Gutai’s interest in the interplay of body, material, time, and space also included traditions outside the Euro-American avant-garde, such as the Japanese festival (*matsuri*), farce, and comic folk theatre. With its wild antics and freak events, Gutai performance manifested a long enthusiasm in Japan for the hybrid and fringe presented in the form of popular entertainment. Gutai’s most literal homage to traditional theater is perhaps Shiraga’s 1957 *Modern-Transcendent Sanbasō*. Dressed as the *Sanbasō* character that always appears first on the traditional stage to perform a blessing, Shiraga opened “Gutai Art on the Stage” dressed in a *Sanbasō* mask and costume of his own design. In a ritualistic act that both parodied and embodied drama’s sacred dimension, Shiraga appropriated traditional imagery in a shocking new context. Whereas the Euro-American Happenings aimed to fuse art and life as a critique on the commodification of culture, Gutai’s proto-Happenings were an affirmation of art *in* life after the near-annihilation of culture.

Tapié and Kaprow, the two powerful critics who promoted Gutai abroad, thus created a misleading legacy. First, their

claims contradict each other: Tapié hailed Gutai as an international painting movement, while Kaprow made Gutai famous for its performance events. In both cases, Gutai became a sensation because of its sudden, “fortunate” affiliation with specific art movements in Europe and America. Although Yoshihara strove for Gutai’s international recognition, it did not achieve the status abroad of an independent art movement. Rather, its identity was absorbed by the established movements with which it became associated. One of the fallacies of this legacy is that Gutai’s early experiments in more conceptual, minimalist, intermedia, and kinetic art forms were overlooked, and research into Gutai’s affinities with or connections to Fluxus, Body Art, Arte Povera, or Earthworks has yet to be fully explored.<sup>52</sup> Further, by exaggerating those aspects of Gutai experimentation that are most similar to *Art Informel* and Happenings, Western and Japanese critics alike have tended to disregard its original sources—stylistic, cultural, and historical.

The Gutai group is outstanding in the history of Japanese postwar art for its rich investigations into issues surrounding the nature of art. Drawing on a broad range of both Far Eastern and Western disciplines, intellectual sources, and cultural practices, Gutai expanded the realm of modernist visual research to include the representation of time, space, movement, process, and change. Its bold and optimistic exploration presaged 1960s and seventies expressions of anti-art, intermedia, conceptual, metaphysical, and performance art forms in the Japanese avant-garde. In its approach to making art of non-art materials using violent physical action, Gutai may have influenced Tokyo’s Neo-Dada Organizers. (Its principal artist, Ushio Shinohara, challenged Shiraga’s feet-painting with his “boxing painting” performance of 1958: half-naked with a mohawk haircut, Shinohara dipped his gloved fists



into a bucket of paint and punched his way along an extensive sheet of canvas.) Another aspect of Gutai art, namely its approach to the use of materials in their natural state, could also have influenced the development of Mono-ha in the late 1960s. Shiraga Fujiko's *Work* of 1955 (*Plates 6-1 to 6-3*), comprised of three large sheets of Japanese paper which the artist has torn and creased, suggests later work that also used large sheets of paper "as is" by Mono-ha artists Suga Kishio, Koshimizu Susumu, and Enokura Kōji.

The Gutai artists, spurred by the contemporary euphoria of political, social, and economic liberation from Japan's oppressive wartime past, reveled in what Shiraga Kazuo called "the splendid playground."<sup>53</sup> Released from the ruins of history, the postwar Gutai artists claimed to rebuild and re-imagine Japanese culture in the post-Occupation years. A generation younger than the leading Social Realists in Tokyo, many of whom experienced war first-hand, the Gutai artists were less concerned with the existential despair of defeat and holocaust than intoxicated by the limitless possibilities of the future. Because the Social Realists were affiliated with left-wing or Communist activism, they were suspicious of the American-imposed democracy with its Cold War agenda and naturally subverted the official postwar ideals. But Gutai, which sought international recognition for its ability to express a universal and transcendent art free of aesthetic, national, or cultural programming, was far less critical. In Yoshihara's efforts to position Gutai as the Japanese manifestation of "the inter-

national art of a new era," his strategy reflected the progressive idealism of American cultural diplomacy in the 1950s which promoted the virtues of "freedom of expression" in an "open and free society."<sup>54</sup> Yoshihara, writing in the first issue of the *Gutai* journal, states this vision clearly: "[T]he art of the present represents freedom for those living in this severe time. . . . Our profound wish is to concretely prove that our spirits are free." In its desire to "give concrete form to the formless,"<sup>55</sup> Gutai art found meaning in the physical act of individual creation. Emerging from a decade of wartime devastation, Gutai embraced Japan's new postwar idealism as a means to realize its own faith in the universality of the concrete here and now.

## NOTES :

In preparing this chapter, I wish to acknowledge my interviews with the following artists, critics, and curators: Kanayama Akira, Barbara Bertozzi, Kawasaki Kōichi, Allan Kaprow, Kawasaki Kōichi, Alfred Lesley, Thomas Messer, Motouaga Sadamasa, Murakami Saburō, Nakajima Tokuhiko, Shimamoto Shōzō, Shiraga Fujiko, Shiraga Kazuo, Osaki Shin'ichirō, Tanaka Atsuko, Tatehata Akira, Yamawaki Kazuo, Yoshida Toshio, and Yoshihara Michio.

All translations are the author's unless otherwise noted.

1. Yoshihara Jirō, 1955; quoted and trans. in Barbara Bertozzi and Klaus Wolbert, exh. cat. *Gutai: Japanische Avantgarde/Japanese Avant-Garde 1954-1965* (Darmstadt: Mathildenhöhe, 1991), p. 20.

2. The company, Yoshihara Seiyu, manufactured cooking oil.

3. For a list of major Gutai exhibitions organized in Japan and Europe since 1972, see Bibliography. Foremost among the younger Gutai scholars are Kawasaki Kōichi, Hirai Sōichi, Osaki Shin'ichirō, Tatehata Akira, and Yamawaki Kazuo. Osaki's serialized essay on the theoretical problems of Gutai, "Seisei to jizoku: Gutai Bijutsu Kyōkai saikō" (Generation and Duration: Re-examination of the Gutai Art Association), published in *A & C* (Kyoto Junior College of Art, 1987-89) is an excellent treatment of the critical and art-historical issues basic to Gutai studies. Others who have contributed to the re-evaluation of Gutai are Chiba Shigeo, Kuroda Raiji, and Barbara Bertozzi.

4. Yoshihara, "Gutai bijutsu sengen" (Gutai Art Manifesto), *Geijutsu Shinchō* (December 1956), pp. 202-4. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the "Gutai Art Manifesto" are by Reiko Tomii. See Chapter 15 for a more complete translation.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Asger Jorn, "Discours aux Pingouins," *COBRA*, no. 1 (1949), p. 8. Quoted in Osaki Shin'ichirō, "Art in Gutai: Action into Painting" in *Gutai Shiryō-shū/Document Gutai 1954-1972*, ed. by Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, (Ashiya: City Culture Foundation, 1993), p. 22.

7. See Catherine Millet, "Lighter than Air" in *Gutai 1955-56: Nihon gendai bijutsu no risutāto chiten/Gutai: A Restarting Point for Japanese Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Penrose Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), p. 15.

8. Kamiyama Jirō was born in Tokyo and studied at the Kawabata Art School. He lived in Paris from 1921 to 1923 and again from 1924 to 1926, when he exhibited at the *Salon d'automne*.
9. Fujita Tsuguharu, "Genius," 1936; trans. by J. Thomas Rimer in Takashina Shūji and J. Thomas Rimer with Gerald D. Bolas, *Paris in Japan*, exh. cat. (St. Louis: Washington University and Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1987), p. 281.
10. See Hirai Sōichi, "Shiūrurarisumu-teki imēji no jidai" (The Period of Surrealistic Imagery) in *Yoshuhara Jirō-ten/Jirō Yoshihara*, exh. cat. (Ashiya: City Museum of Art and History, 1992), pp. 12–13.
11. The other two avant-garde groups that were influential in the prewar years were the Free Artists Association (*Jiyū Bijutsuka Kyōkai*), founded in 1937 by abstractionists Hasegawa Saburō, Hamaguchi Yōzō, Murai Masanari, Yamaguchi Kaoru and others; and Art Culture Association (*Bijutsu Bunka Kyōkai*), founded in 1939 by Surrealists Fukuzawa Ichirō, Ai-Mitsu, Terada Masaaki and others. Together with Yoshihara, *Kyūshitsu-kai*'s members Yamaguchi Takeo and Saitō Yoshishige would emerge as Japan's leading abstract painters in the postwar period (see Chapter 13).
12. Asō Saburō, "Memories of Shunsuke Matsumoto," trans. by Katsuya Keiko, quoted in *Art of the Showa Period from the Museum Collection* (Tokyo: The National Museum of Modern Art, 1989), p. 16.
13. Ei-Kyū, *Demokurāto*, no. 3 (Fall 1953).
14. Akasegawa Genpei, "The 1960s, the Art Which Destroyed Itself: An Intimate Account," trans. by Kazu Kaidō, in *Reconstructions: Avant-Garde Art in Japan 1945–1965*, exh. cat. (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1985), p. 85.
15. Haryū Ichirō, "Geudai bijutsu 1956" (Contemporary Art 1956), *Geijūtsu Shinchō* (May 1956).
16. Takiguchi Shūzō, "Sengo bijutsu no ayumi: Dai 5-kai shūsaku bijutsu ten" (Steps in Postwar Art: 5th Excellent Works Exhibition, 1954) in Takiguchi Shūzō, *Ten (Point)*, (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1983), p. 212.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
18. Pollock's drip paintings were first shown in a special section devoted to international art at the "3rd Yomiuri Indépendant Exhibition," 1951.
- Hans Namuth's famous *Life* magazine photographs of Pollock making his drip paintings were known in Japan, and served as an important model for the Gutai group in their campaign to revolutionize traditional painting techniques.
19. Yoshihara, "Gutai Art Manifesto."
20. Harold Rosenberg, "American Action Painters," *Art News* (December 1952), pp. 22–23, 48–49. See also David and Cecile Shapiro, "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting" in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. by Francis Frascua (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 137–40.
21. Kawasaki Kōichi, "Gutai: Sono shoki no jun-sui-sei / The Gutai Works: Works of Purity" in *Gutai: A Restarting Point for Japanese Contemporary Art*, p. 15. *Kirin* (Giraffe) was founded in 1948 by Inoue Yasushi, the progressive art columnist for the *Mainichi Shimbun*, and the poet Takenaka Iku. The magazine served as a forum for many of the Gutai artists, who contributed to it regularly. Essays on children's art were also included in the *Gutai* journal; a special feature on children's art appeared in *Gutai* no. 2 (October 10, 1955).
22. Shiraga Kazuo, "Bōken no kiroku I" (Record of Adventure, No. 1), *Bijutsu techō* (July 1967), pp. 136–45.
23. This anecdote is reported by Alfred Pacquement, "Gutai: L'extraordinaire intuition" in *Japon des avant-gardes 1910–1970*, exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1986), p. 286.
24. Shimamoto Shōzō, 1956; quoted in Kawasaki, "The Gutai Group: Works of Purity," p. 60.
25. Along with Yamasaki Tsuruko, Shimamoto Shōzō, and Yoshihara's son, Michio, several of Yoshihara's early students became founding members of the Gutai group, including Yoshida Toshio, Masanobu Masatoshi, Ukita Yōzo, and Uemae Chiyū.
26. Yoshida Toshio, interview with author, Nishi-Akashi, 9 August 1991.
27. Shimamoto Shōzō, interview with author, Nishinomiya, 17 August 1991.
28. Yoshida, interview with author.
29. See Shiraga, "Bōken uo kiroku I."
30. Kanayama Akira, interview with author, Asuka-mura, Nara, 24 August 1991. The exact number of Zero Society members is not confirmed.
31. Shiraga, "Bōken no kiroku I."
32. Kanayama, interview with author.
33. Tanaka Atsuko, interview with author, Asuka-mura, Nara, 24 August 1991.
34. Murakami Saburō, interview with author, Nishinomiya, 22 August 1991.
35. Shiraga Kazuo, "Action Is the True Thing," 1955; trans. in *Gutai: Japanese Avant-Garde 1954–1965*, p. 371.
36. Shiraga Kazuo, interview with author, Amagasaki, 12 January 1992.
37. The issues are numbered one to fourteen; numbers ten and thirteen were never produced.
38. Following is the history of Gutai-organized activities based on *Gutai Shiryō-shu/Document Gutai 1954–1972*:
- I. Outdoor exhibitions (*yagai-ten*): "Experimental Outdoor Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Mid-Summer Sun," Ashiya, 25 July–6 August 1955; "One-Day Only Outdoor Exhibition (The Ruins)," Amagasaki, 9 April 1956; "Outdoor Gutai Art Exhibition," Ashiya, 27 July–5 August 1956.
- II. Indoor exhibitions held in Japan, numbered consecutively (*Gutai bijutsu-ten*): 1st, Ohara Kaikan hall, Tokyo, 19–29 October 1955; 2nd, Ohara Kaikan hall, Tokyo, 11–17 October 1956; 3rd, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, 3–10 April 1957; 4th, Ohara Kaikan hall, Tokyo, 8–10 October 1957; 5th, Ohara Kaikan hall, Tokyo, 30 April–2 May 1958; 8th, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, 25–30 August and Ohara Kaikan hall, Tokyo, 11–13 September 1959; 9th, "International Sky Festival," Takashimaya Department Store, Osaka, 19–24 April 1960; 10th, Takashimaya, Osaka, 11–16 April and Takashimaya, Tokyo, 2–7 May 1961; 11th, Takashimaya, Osaka, 17–22 April 1962; 12th, Takashimaya, Tokyo, 29 January–3 February 1963; 13th, Takashimaya, Osaka, 16–21 April 1963; 14th, Takashimaya, Osaka, 31 March–5 April 1964; 15th, Gutai Pinacotheca, Osaka, 1–20 July 1965; 16th, Keiō Department Store, Tokyo, 8–13 October 1965; 17th, Takashimaya, Yokohama, 10–15 September and Gutai Pinacotheca, Osaka, 1–10 October 1966; 18th, Gutai Pinacotheca, Osaka, 1–10 June 1967; 19th, Suntory Museum, Tokyo, 1–14 October and Gutai Pinacotheca, Osaka, 1–15 November 1967;

20th, Gutai Pinacotheca, Osaka, 1–20 July, 1968; 21st, Gutai Pinacotheca, Osaka, 1–20 November 1968.

III. Indoor exhibitions held abroad (*Gutai bijutsu kokusai-ten*): “6th Gutai Art Exhibition: Gutai New York Exhibition,” Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, 25 September–25 October 1958 (thereafter toured in the U.S.); “7th Gutai Art Exhibition: Gutai Turin Exhibition,” Galleria dell’Associazione Arti Figurative, Turin, June 1–30, 1959.

IV. Theatrical events (*Butai o tsukau Gutai bijutsu*): “Gutai Art on the Stage,” Sankei Kaikan hall, Osaka 29 May and Sankei Hall, Tokyo, 17 July 1957; “Gutai Art on the Stage: 2nd Presentation,” Asahi Kaikan hall, Osaka, 4 April 1958; “Don’t Worry! The Moon Won’t Fall: Gutai Art and Morita Modern Dance,” Sankei Hall, Osaka, 6 November 1962.

V. Expo ’70 in Osaka activities: “Garden on Garden,” an outdoor sculptural environment; “Expo ’70 Midorikan Entrance Hall Gutai Art Exhibition,” 15 March–13 September, 1970; “Gutai Art Festival,” Expo ’70 Festival Plaza, 31 August–2 September 1970.

39. Shiraga Kazuo, “Bōken no kiroku 2” (Record of Adventure, No. 2), *Bijutsu techō* (August 1967), pp. 138–45.

40. Pacquement, p. 288.

41. Osaki, trans. by Moriguchi Madoka, Simon Seanes, and Shiraha Keiko, “Art in Gutai: Action into Painting” in *Gutai Shiryō-shū/Document Gutai 1954–1972*, p. 25.

42. Yoshihara Jirō, “Butai o tsukau gutai bijutsu” (Gutai Art on the Stage), *Gutai*, no. 7 (15 July 1957), unpagged.

43. Michael Kirby, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1966), p. 29.

44. See Allan Kaprow’s six conditions for “The Event” in *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966).

45. For a discussion of *Bokujin-kai*, see Chapter 7.

46. See Yoshihara Jirō in *Bokubi*, no. 14 (July 1952). Yoshihara’s interest in Nantenbō is discussed in Osaki Shin’ichirō, “Yoshihara to sho” in *Yoshihara Jirō-ten*, pp. 179–84. For a discussion of Nantenbō, see Stephen Addiss, *The Art of Zen* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), pp. 186–202.

47. Yoshihara, “Koten no tame no bunshō” (Statement for Solo Exhibition), quoted in *Yoshihara Jirō-ten*, p. 205.

48. Tapié coined the term *Art Informel* (Art Without Form) in 1950 to describe the work of Wols, but extended it to artists Jean Dubuffet, Hans Hartung, Henri Michaux, Georges Mathieu, Jean Fautrier, Alberto Burri, Antoni Tàpies and the COBRA artists in an effort to identify a new, pan-European art movement. According to Tapié, *Art Informel* gives direct expression to subconscious fantasy and irrationality in contrast to the more rigorous abstractionist tendencies deriving from Cubism, geometric abstraction, and De Stijl.

During the 1950s in Paris, Tapié was the advisor to Rodolphe Stadler, owner of the leading avant-garde gallery which showcased *Art Informel*. Stadler also exhibited the Japanese abstract painters Dōmoto Hisao and Imai Toshimitsu, who arrived in Paris in 1955 and 1952 respectively and who were later recognized as *Art Informel* artists. In 1957, Dōmoto, a Kyoto artist and friend of Yoshihara’s, showed the *Gutai* journals to Tapié and introduced him to the group’s activities. The Frenchman was delighted to discover what he perceived as a Japanese manifestation of his revolutionary aesthetic. In September of that year, Tapié travelled to Japan with Mathieu, Imai, and the American painter Sam Francis, who was also a regular at the Stadler openings, to meet the Gutai group. It was the first of several visits.

According to Osaki Shin’ichirō, Tapié’s embrace of Gutai occurred at a time when the *Art Informel* movement was at a low ebb; Tapié together with Mathieu tried to turn the tide by expanding their activities outside Europe. Gutai, which was seeking an overseas base, was the ideal collaborator. The importance of Tapié’s intervention in the history of Gutai was irrefutable, but the influence of *Art Informel*’s opaque theory on the development of Gutai art was minimal. Gutai rejoiced at the Frenchman’s support and welcomed his advice, like that to Shiraga to paint on canvas rather than paper. But Tapié’s preference for well-made paintings that could sell in Paris and New York also discouraged the more experimental tendencies of other impermanent Gutai art forms, such as performance and objects. See Osaki, “Art in Gutai: Action into Painting” in *Gutai Shiryō-shū/Document Gutai 1954–1972*, pp. 22–24.

49. Advocating direct expression through subconscious fantasy, Tapié drew on mystical tradition, contemporary scientific theory, and the Dadaist spirit of modern revolution to establish irrationality as a standard of assessment. As *Art Informel* artist Paul Jenkins has written, “*Autre art* confronts the intangible, the unknown, the unseen, with fearless equanimity and acknowledgement.

It accepts the paradoxical, the contradictory, the interference of chance, with grace as a blessing . . . so that evidence of non-empirical form may be presented.” From Paul and Esther Jenkins, eds., *Observations of Michel Tapié* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1956), p. 7. For Gutai’s relationship with the European movements, see also *Action et émotion: Peintures des années 50: Informel, Gutai, COBRA*, exh. cat. (Osaka: The National Museum of Art, 1985).

50. Dore Ashton, *Noguchi East and West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 160.

51. See Kristine Stiles, “Between Water and Stone: Fluxus Performance: A Metaphysics of Acts” in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center), p. 99, note 94.

52. For a discussion of the connection between Gutai and Arte Povera, see Barbara Bertozzi, “On the Origin of the New Avant-Garde: The Japanese Association of Artists Gutai” in *Gutai: Japanese Avant-Garde 1954–1965*, pp. 58–62. She argues convincingly that Gutai’s substantial exposure in Turin from 1959 through the mid-1960s—including exhibitions at the Galleria dell’Associazione Arti Figurative, Palazzo Granieri, and Tapié’s Centre Internationale de Recherche Esthétique and *Notizie*’s special issue on Gutai in April 1959—may have influenced the development of Arte Povera, which was also active in Turin. Some examples of clear affinities include body actions in mud (Pino Pascali), electricity with earth (Mario Merz), and smoke on stage (Michelangelo Pistoletto).

53. Shiraga Kazuo, “Kotai no kakuritsu” (The Shaping of the Individual), *Gutai*, no. 4 (1 July 1956), p. 7.

54. See Max Kozloff, “American Painting During the Cold War” and Eva Cockcroft, “Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War” in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*.

55. Statement in *Gutai Bijutsu 18-nen* (18 Years of Gutai Art), (Osaka: Shimin Gallery, 1976), unpagged.



Plate 2

SHIMAMOTO Shōzō

Work: *Holes* (Sakuhin: Ana)

1950–52

Paint and pencil on newspaper, attached to  
wooden stretcher

76 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 51 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (194 × 130.6 cm)

Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum



Plate 3  
YOSHIDA Toshio  
*Red (Aka)*  
1954  
Paint, rope, and nails on board  
45½ × 33½" (115.5 × 85.5 cm)  
Ashiya City Museum of Art and History

Plate 4  
MURAKAMI Saburō  
*Work Painted by Throwing a Ball* (Tōkyū kaiga)  
1954  
Ink on paper  
41½ × 29½" (105.3 × 75.6 cm)  
Collection the artist

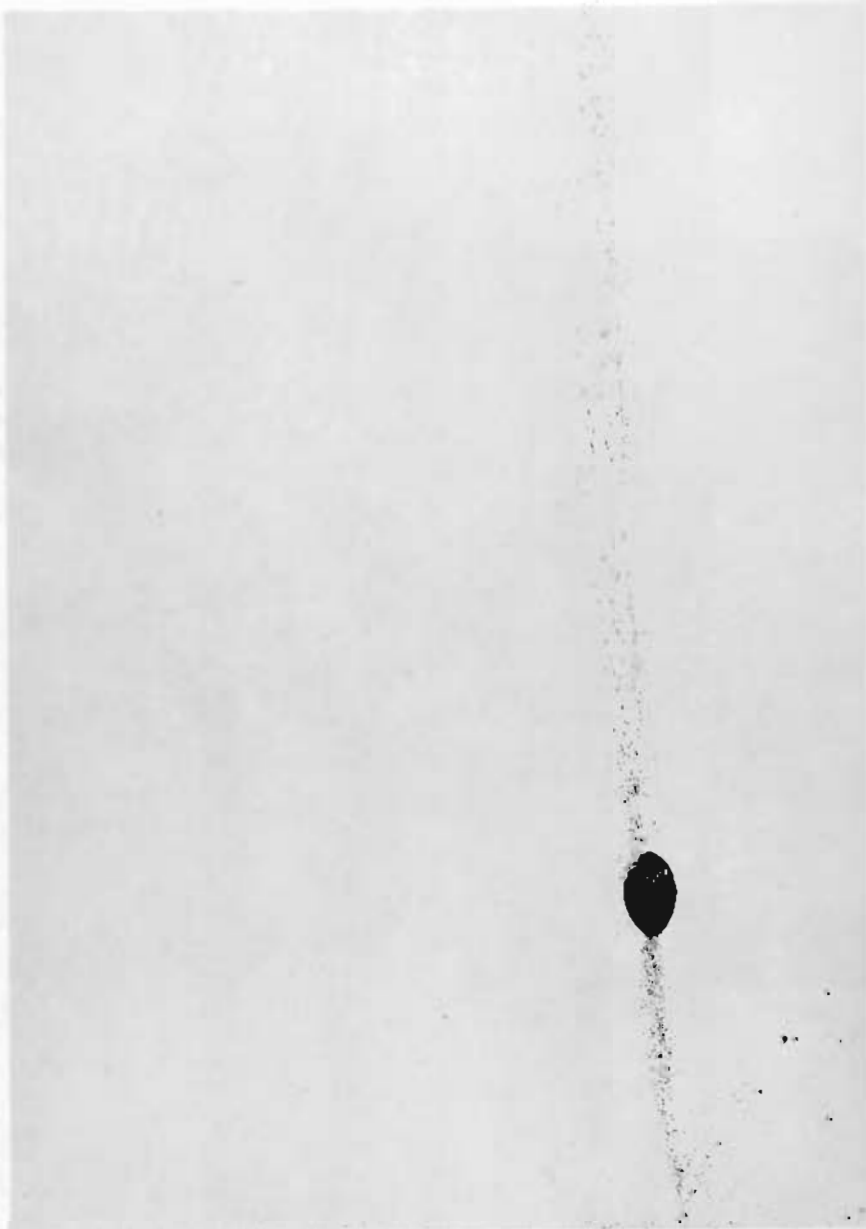


Plate 5  
MURAKAMI Saburō  
*Work: Box* (Sukabōn: Hako)  
1956-1981  
Wooden box with ticking clock inside  
31½ × 31½ × 31½" (80 × 80 × 80 cm)  
Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum





Plates 6-1 to 6-3

SHIRAGA Fujiko

*Work* (Sakuhin)

1955

Japanese paper

Two pieces, 66 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 36" (168 × 91.5 cm);

one piece, 135 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 54 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (345 × 138.5 cm)

Collection the artist

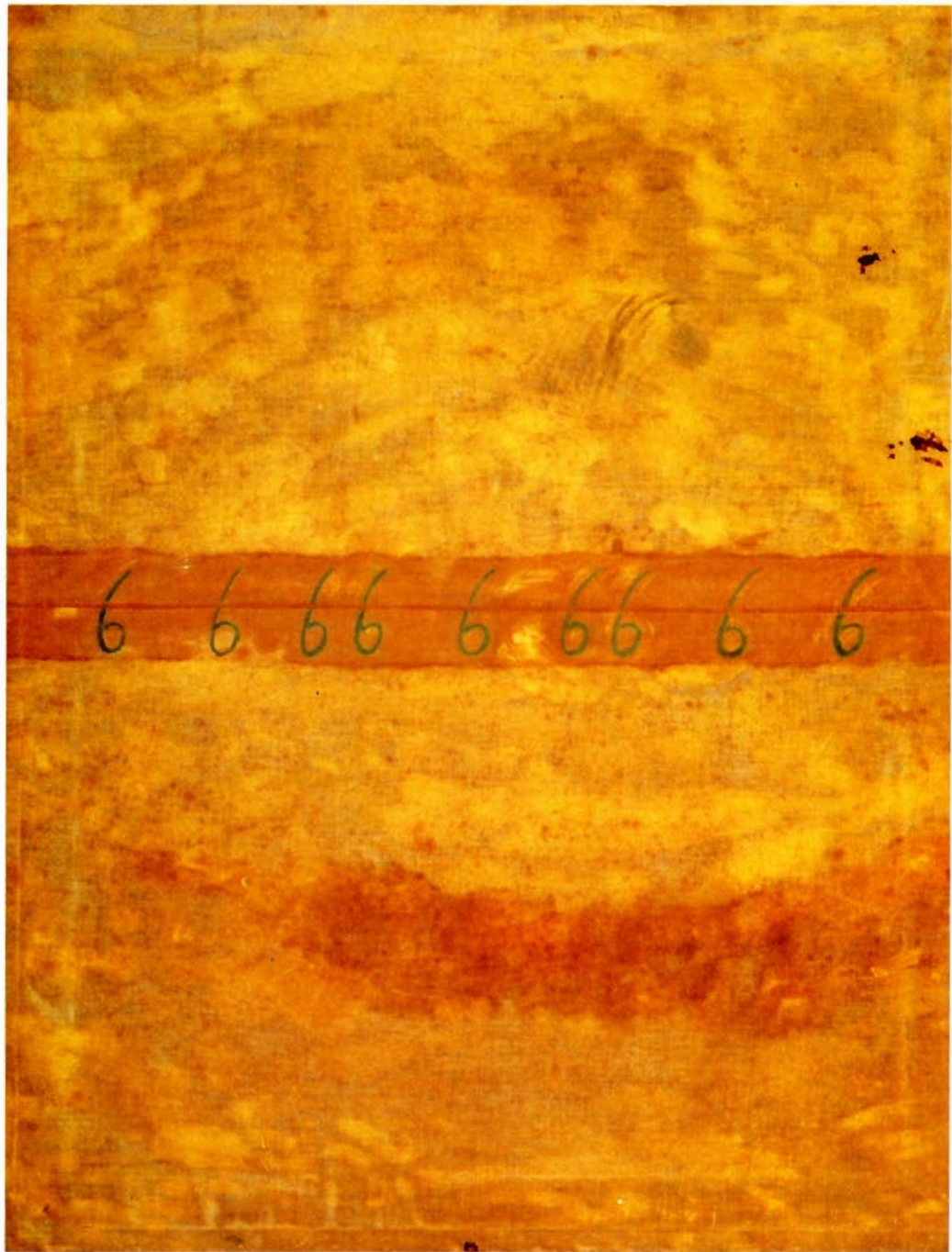


Plate 7  
TANAKA Atsuko  
*Work (Sakuhin)*  
1955  
Crayon on cloth  
32 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (81.7 × 62.3 cm)  
Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum



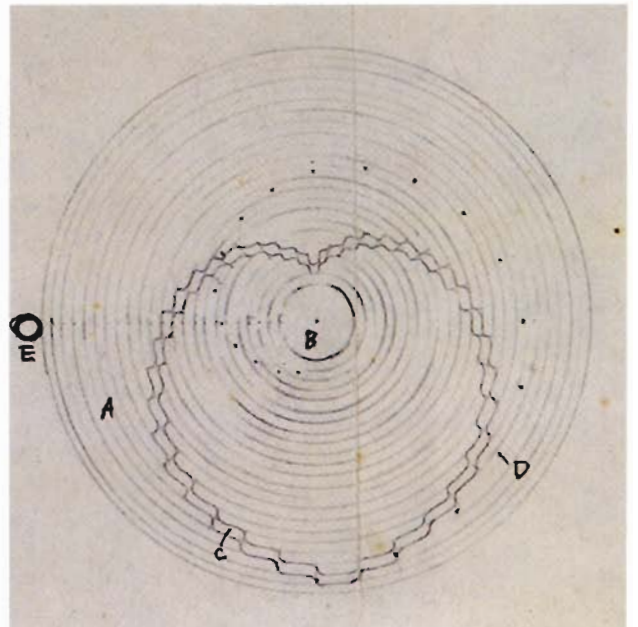
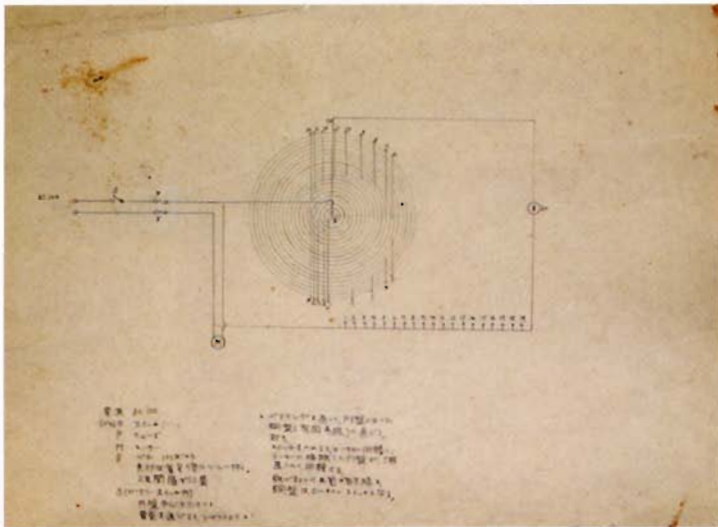
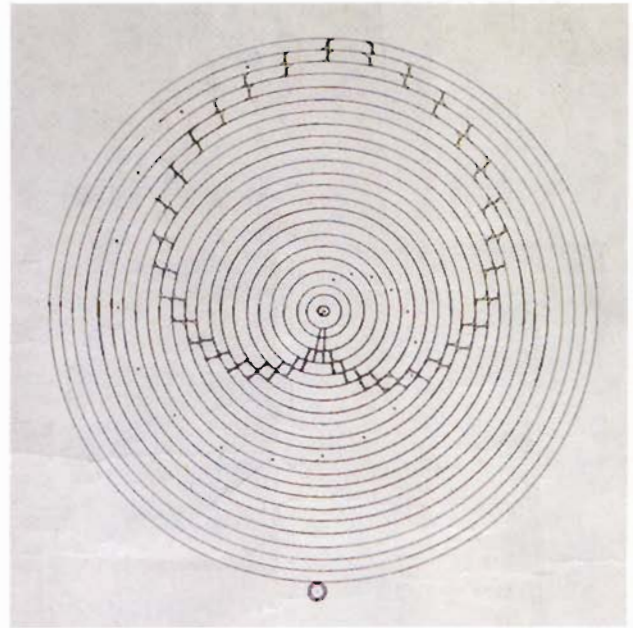


Plate 8  
TANAKA Atsuko  
*Untitled—Study for Bell Piece*  
1955

Two drawings, ink and pencil on paper  
15 1/2" (40 cm) diameter; and 15 1/2" x 10 1/2"  
(39.7 x 27.2 cm)  
Collection: the artist

Plate 9  
TANAKA Atsuko  
*Untitled—Study for Bell Piece*  
1955

Two drawings, ink and pencil on paper  
11 1/2" x 16" (29.5 x 36.2 cm) each  
Collection: the artist



Photo 40

TANAKA Arata

*Electric Dress (Denki-fuku)*

1956/1985

Painted light bulbs, electric cords, and timer

45 × 30½ × 31½" (115 × 80 × 80 cm)

Takamatsu City Museum of Art

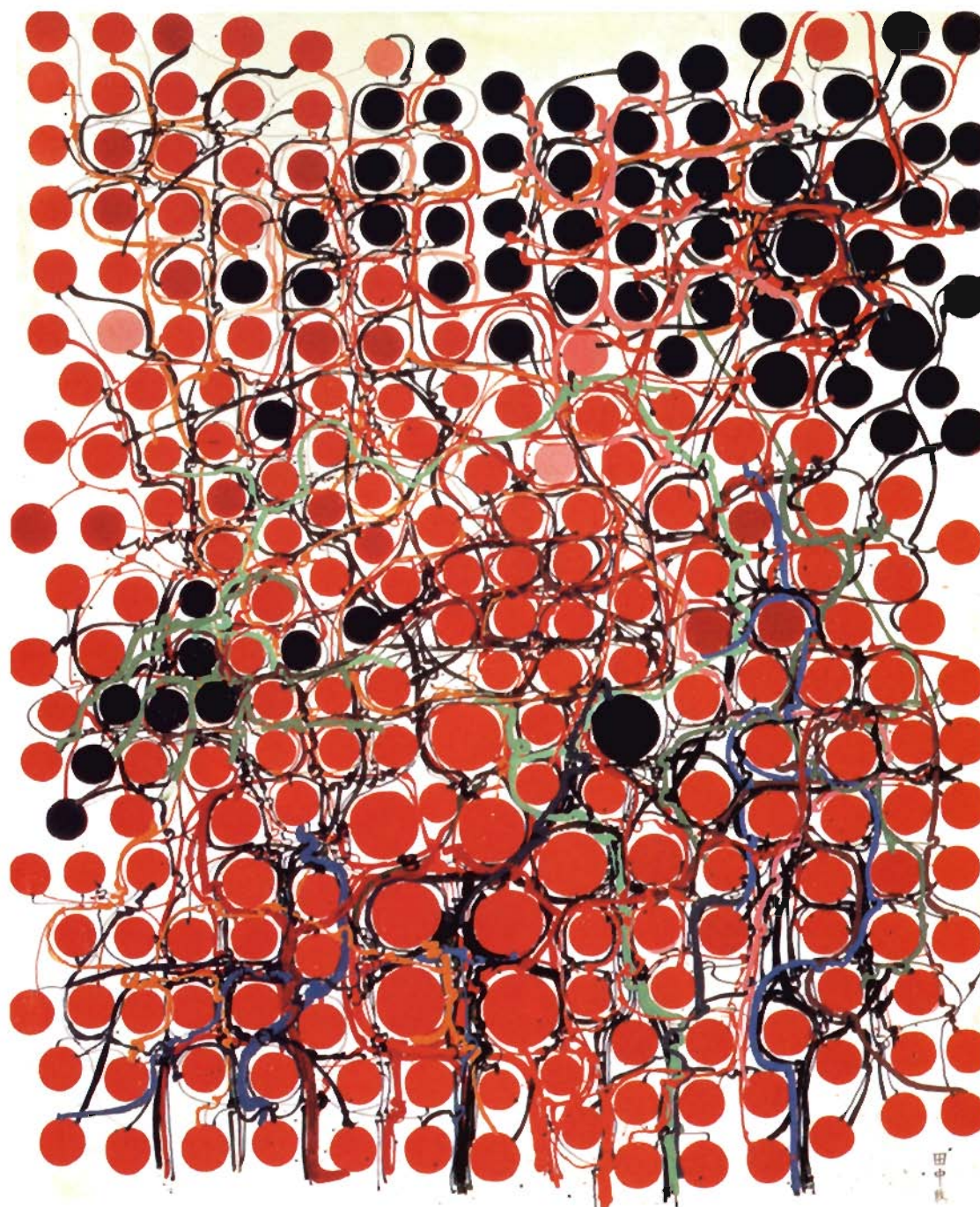


Plate 11  
TANAKA Atsuko  
*Work (Sakuhin)*  
1958  
Enamel on canvas  
88" × 72" (224.5 × 184 cm)  
The Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of  
Modern Art, Kobe

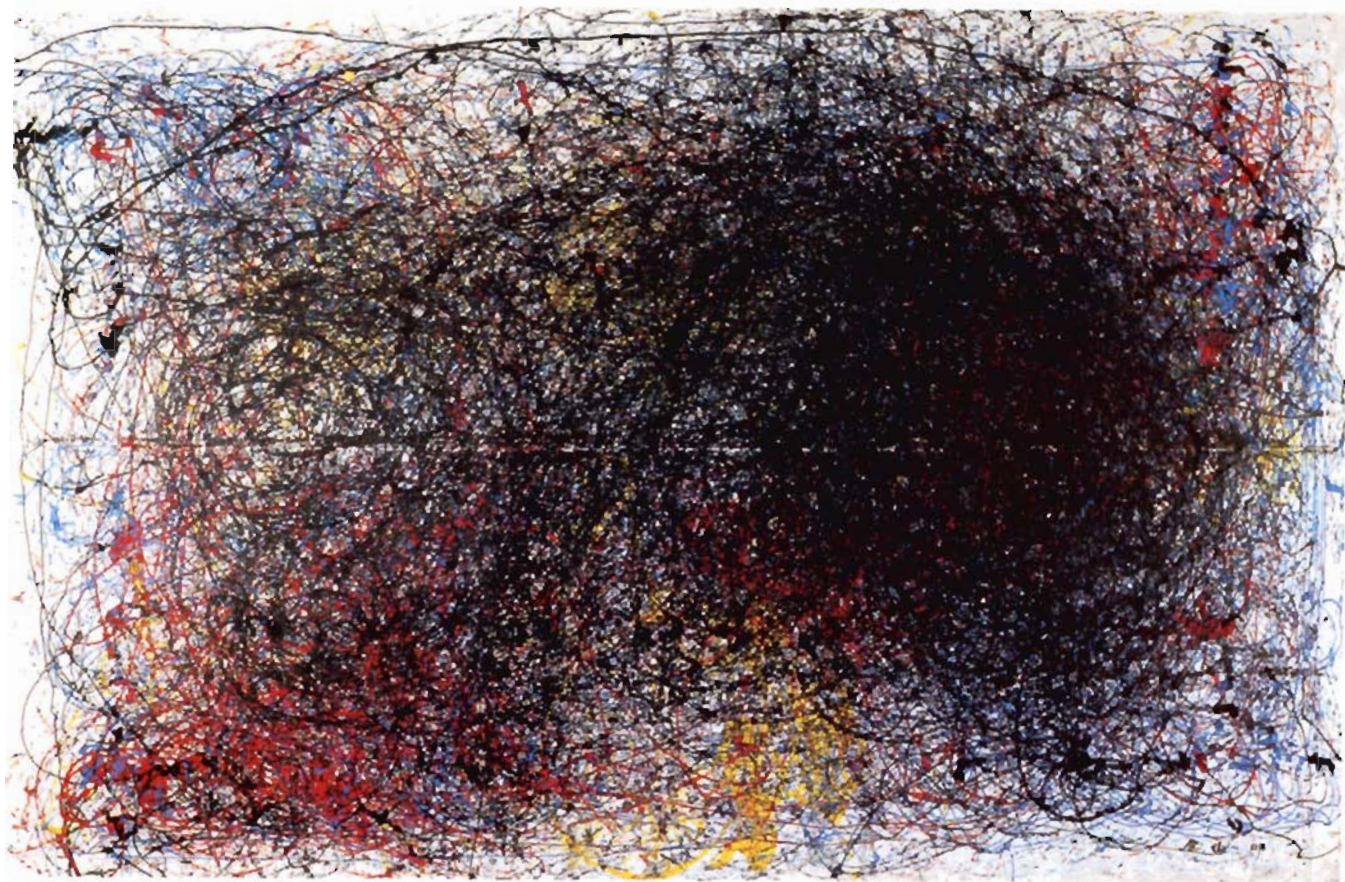


Plate 12

KANAYAMA Akira

*Work (Sakuhin)*

1957

Mixed media, drawn by an automatic  
device on vinyl

71 × 109 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (180.3 × 277.6 cm)

The Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of  
Modern Art, Kobe



PLATE 13

SHIRAGA Kazuo

*Work II (Sakuhin II)*

1958

Oil on paper mounted on canvas

72 × 95½" (183 × 243 cm)

The Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of  
Modern Art, Kobe



Plate 14  
SHIRAGA Kazuo  
*Wild Boar Hunting* (Shishōgari)  
1963  
Oil and boar hide on canvas  
73 × 80½" (183 × 204.3 cm)  
The Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of  
Modern Art, Kobe

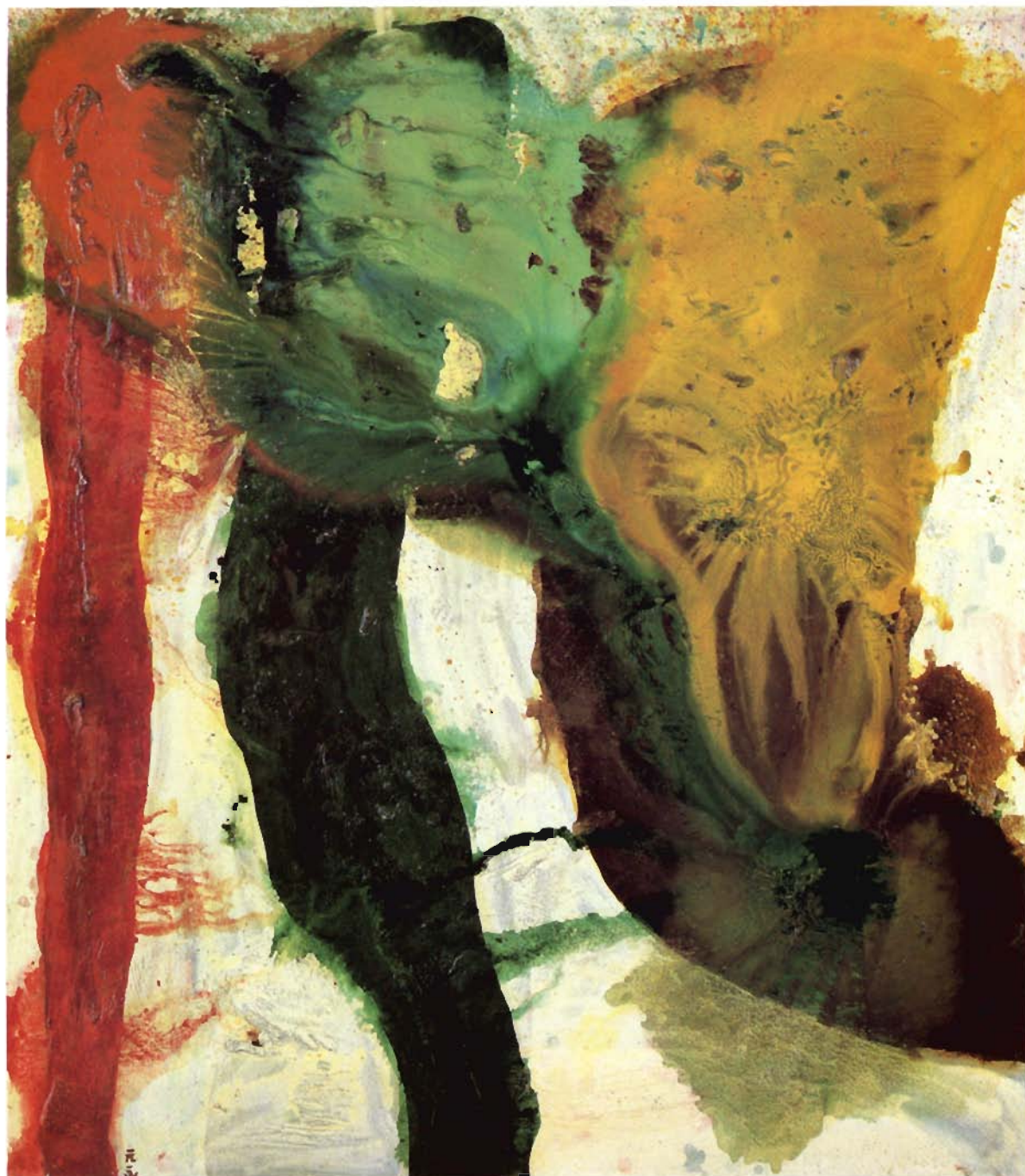


Photo 15  
MOTONAGA Sadamasu  
*Without Words*  
1959  
Acrylic on canvas  
63 × 55" (160 × 139.7 cm)  
The Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of  
Modern Art, Kobe



Plate 16  
MOTONAGA Sadamasa  
*Water (Mizu)*  
1957  
Metal frames, plastic, and water  
196¼ × 35½ × 35½" (500 × 90 × 90 cm)  
The Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of  
Modern Art, Kobe





Plate 17  
SHIMAMOTO Shūzō  
*Work (Sakuhin)*  
1961  
Oil and gesso on canvas  
101 × 76" (257.1 × 193.9 cm)  
The Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of  
Modern Art, Kobe

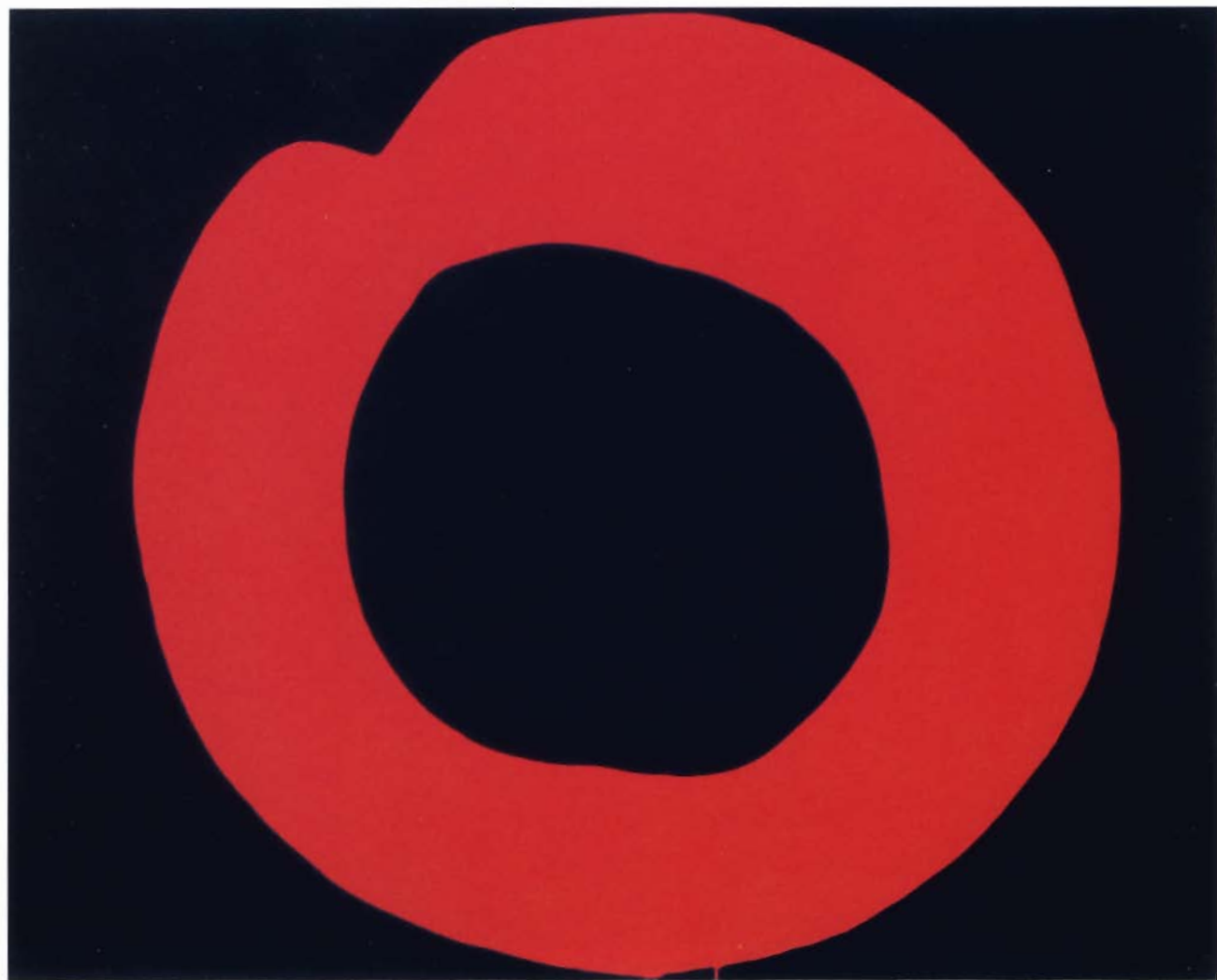


Plate 13  
YOSHIIHARA Jirō  
*Red Circle on Black* (*Kuroaji ni akai en*)  
1965  
Acrylic on canvas  
71 1/2 × 89 1/2" (182.1 × 227.9 cm)  
The Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of  
Modern Art, Kobe

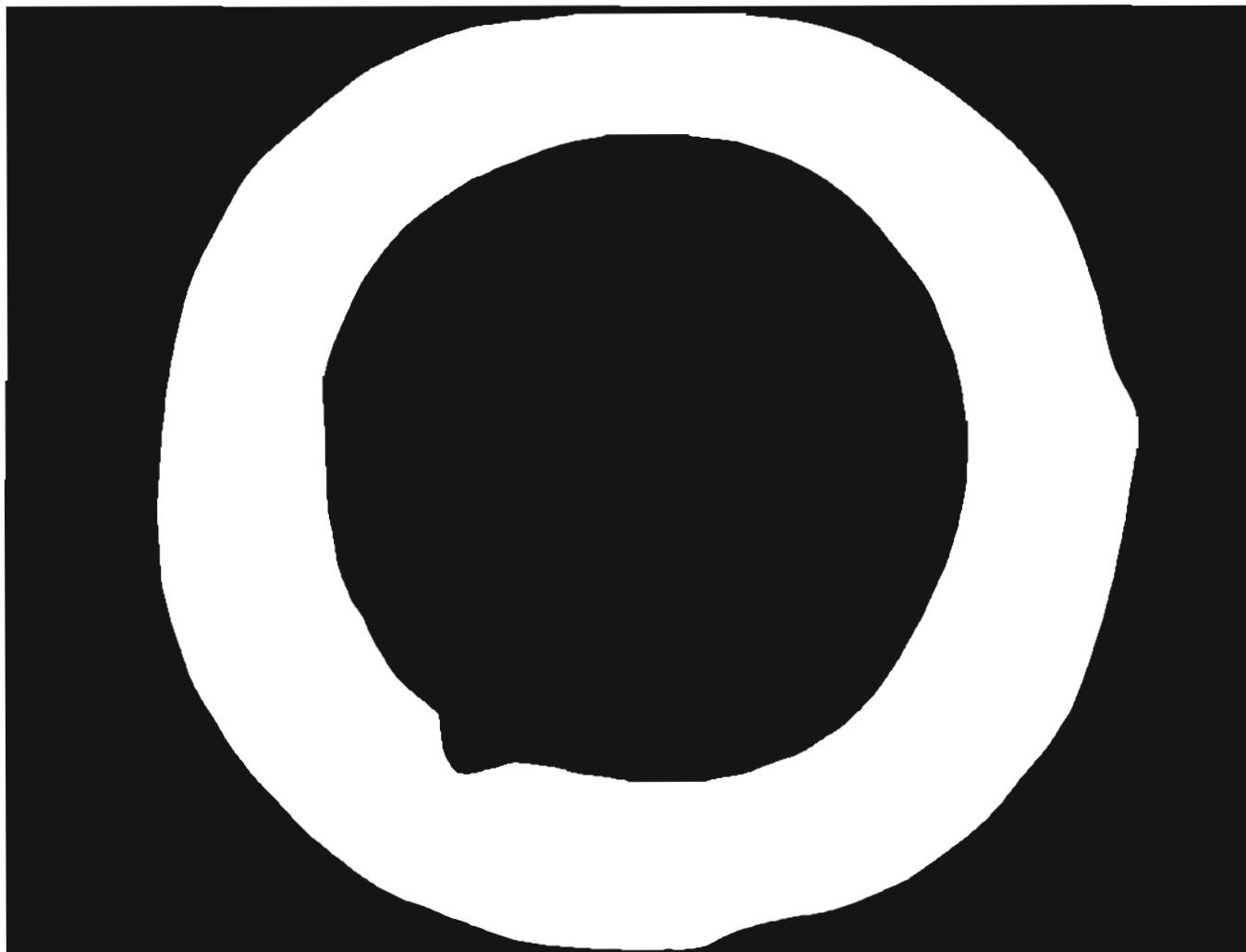


Plate 19

YOSHIHARA Jirō

*White Circle on Black* (Kuroji ni shiroi en)

1968

Acrylic on canvas

76 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 102" (194 × 259 cm)

The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto



Plate 20

YOSHIHARA Michio

*Hill of Sand* (Suna no yama)

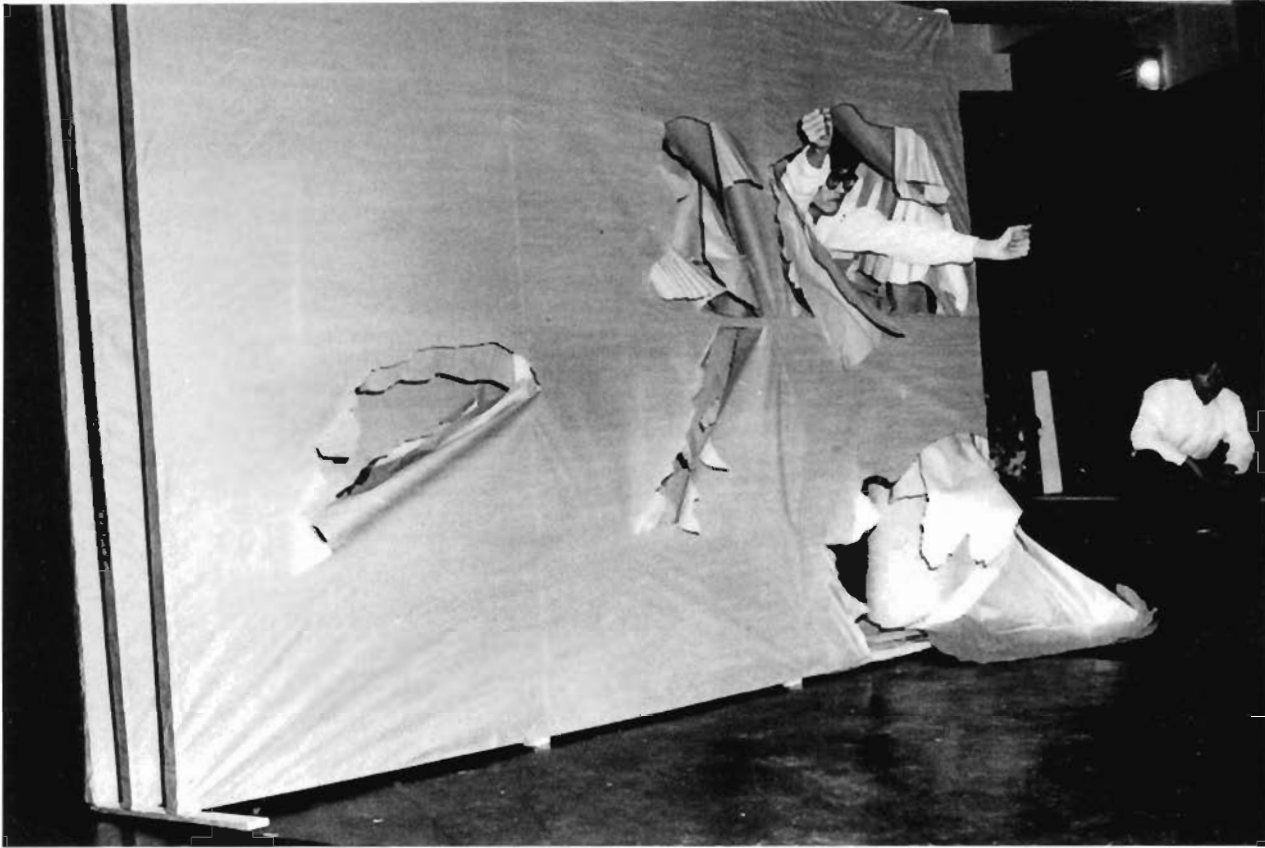
1962/1994

Sand, rope, and three electric light bulbs

27 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (70 cm) high; 59" (150 cm) diameter

(60 × 60 × 60 cm)

Collection the artist

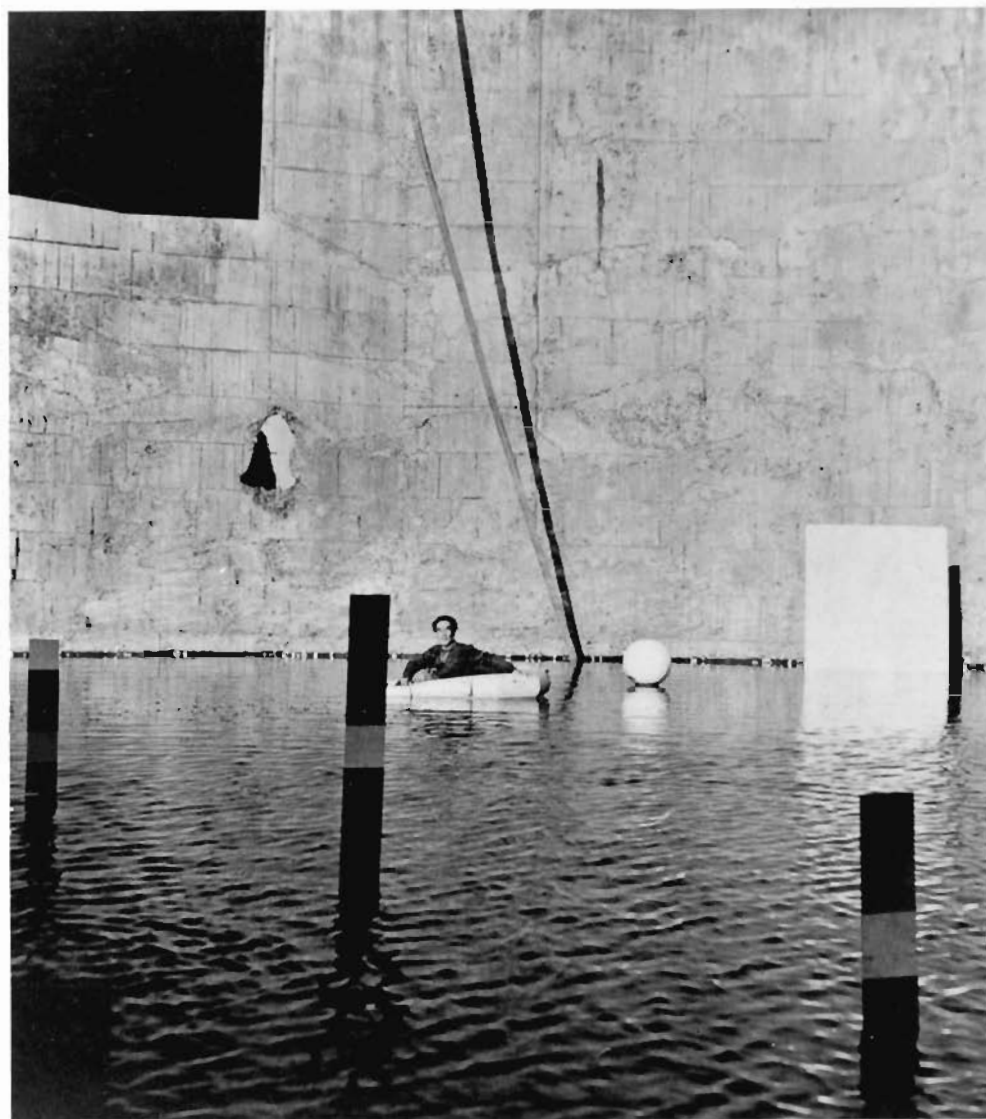


Performance Plates 21 and 22  
MURAKAMI Saburō performing *At One Moment  
Opening Six Holes* (Isshun ni shite rokko no ana o  
akeru) at the "1st Gutai Art Exhibition" held at  
the Ohara Kaikan hall, Tokyo, October 1955.

Performance Plate 23  
SHIRAGA Kazuo performing *Challenging Mud*  
(Dora ni idomu) at the "1st Gutai Art Exhibition"  
held at the Ohara Kaikan hall, Tokyo,  
October 1955.



Performance Plate 24  
YOSHIIHARA Iriō floating in a boat with objects  
emerging from the shallow waters of the ruins of  
Mukogawa River, whose embankments had been  
bombed during the war; performed for *Life*  
magazine photographers at the "One Day Only  
Outdoor Exhibition (The Ruins)" in Anagasaki,  
9 April 1956.

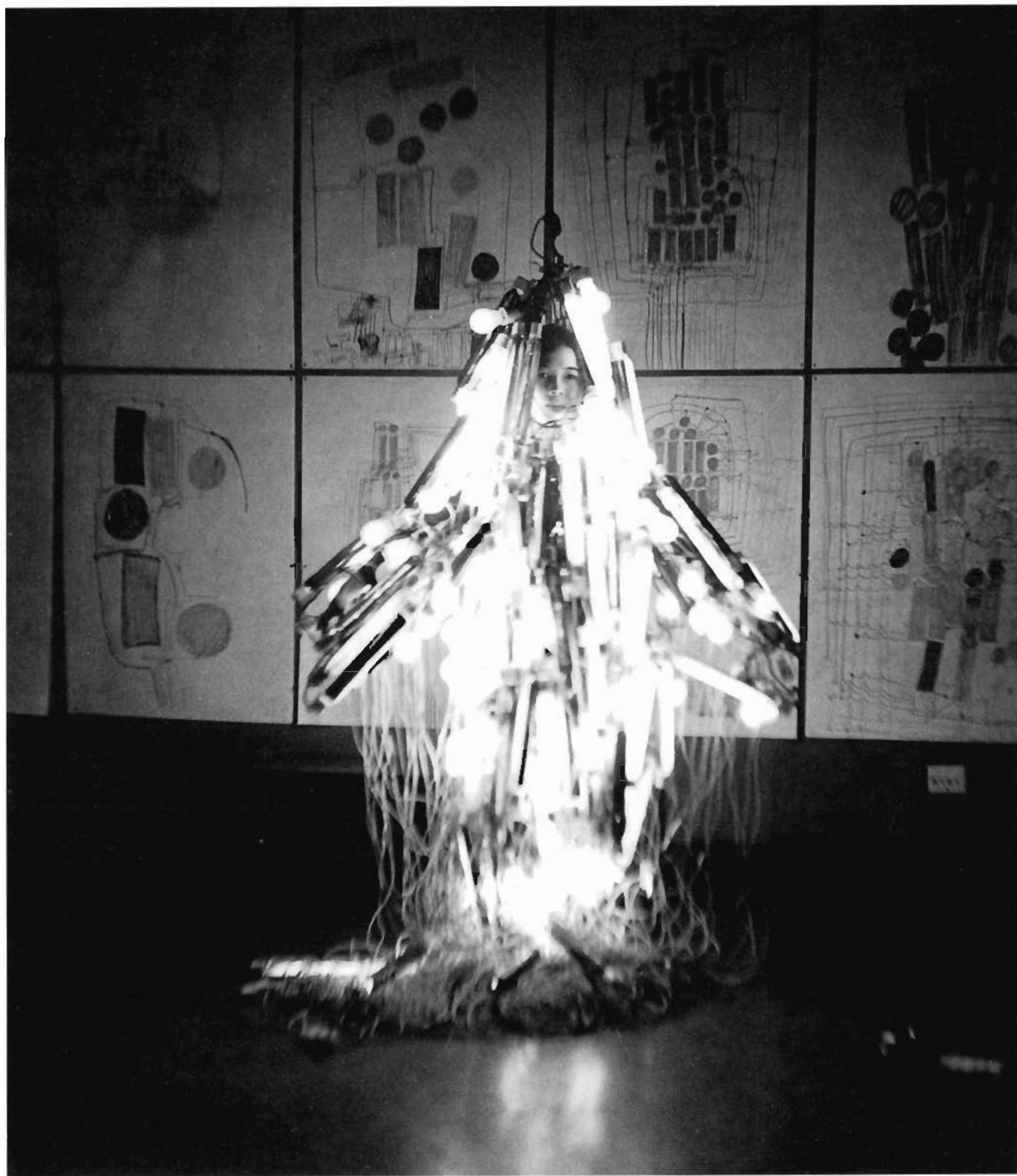




Performance Plate 25  
 SHIRAGA Kazuo painting with his feet at the "2nd Gutai Art Exhibition" held at the Ohara Kaikan hall, Tokyo, October 1956.



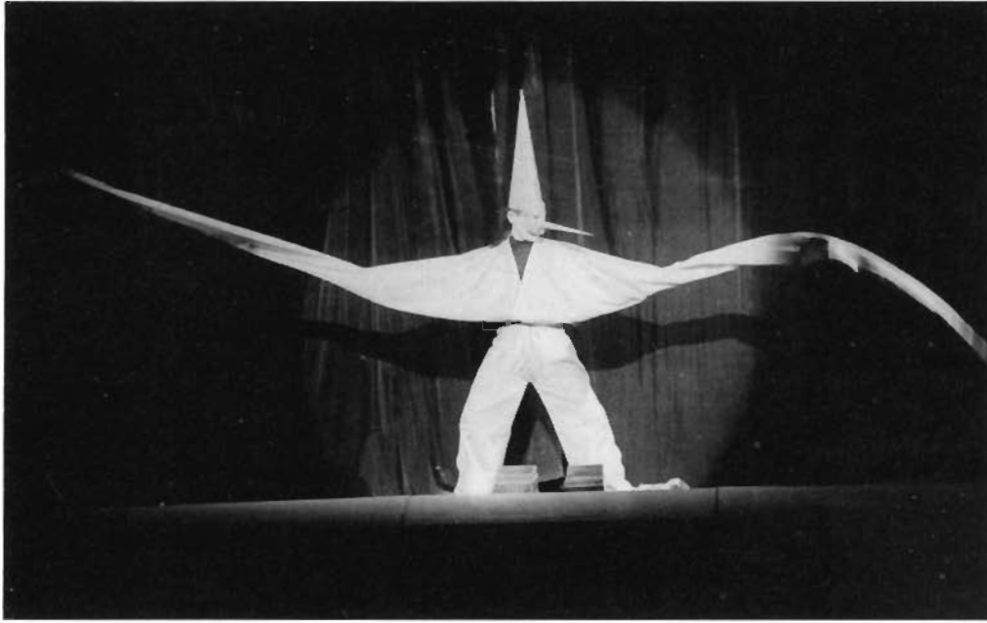
Performance Plate 26  
 SHIMAMOTO Shōzō making a printing by throwing bottles of paint at the "2nd Gutai Art Exhibition" held at the Ohara Kaikan hall, Tokyo, October 1956.



Performer Plate 27

TANAKA Atsuko wearing *Electric Dress* (*Deukifuku*) at the "2nd Gutai Art Exhibition" held at the Ohara Kaikan hall, Tokyo, October 1956.





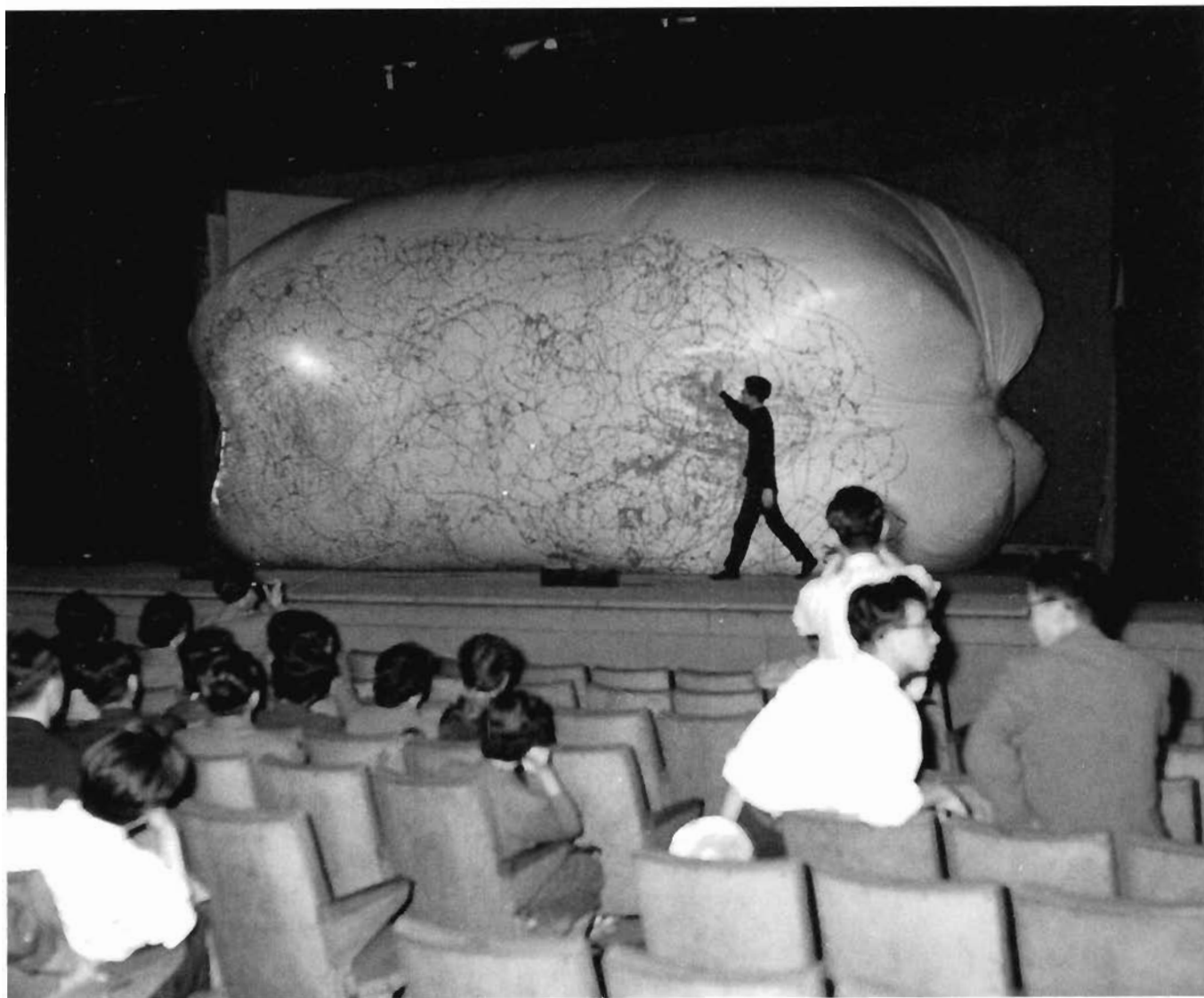
Performance Plate 28

SHIRAGA Kazuo performing *The Modern-Transcendent Sambasō* (Chōgendai Sambasō) in "Gutai Art on the Stage" presented at the Sankei Kaikan hall, Osaka in May and the Sankei Hall, Tokyo in July, 1957.



Performance Plate 29

YOSHIDA Toshio performing *Ceremony by Cloth: Wedding of Yoshida Toshio and Morita Kyōko* (Nuno ni yoru gishiki) in "Gutai Art on the Stage" presented at the Sankei Kaikan hall, Osaka in May and the Sankei Hall, Tokyo in July, 1957. The program notes state, "You don't have to think of ritual as something self-important or bombastic."



Performance Plate 30

KANAYAMA Akira performing *The Giant Balloon* (Kyodai barūn) in "Gutai Art on the Stage" presented at the Sankei Kaikan hall, Osaka in May and the Sankei Hall, Tokyo in July, 1957. The balloon lay limp on the stage, then Kanayama slowly inflated it to Shimamoto's musical accompaniment of monotonous, breath-like sounds. Once the balloon had filled the entire stage, Kanayama let the air escape as the music turned more and more shrill.