The National Art Center, Tokyo
Kokuritsu-Shin-Bijutsukan | Roppongi, Tokyo

GUTAI
The Spirit of an Era
具体

July 4 – September 10, 2012
Exhibition Overview

The Gutai Art Association (or Gutai) was an avant-garde group formed in 1954 by a collection of young artists living in the Hanshin region that was led by the pioneering Kansai abstract painter Yoshihara Jiro. (The group disbanded in 1972.) The name “Gutai” was meant to “present concrete proof that our spirit is free.” (The literal meaning of the word “gutai” is “concrete.”)

“Spirit” was considered to be specific to each individual but also an abstract entity. Gutai’s leader Yoshihara Jiro relentlessly demanded that the group’s members make art unlike any that had ever existed in the past, and further, that these expressions be abstract in nature. He also organized exhibitions to show their work in parks, on stage, and in the sky. The members responded by producing a succession of creative and innovative works rooted in fantastic concepts. Although the artists’ activities were largely ignored in Japan at the time, the group was highly acclaimed abroad and the name “GUTAI” came to be widely recognized in the Western art world in the late ’50s.

After the group’s dissolution, a number of Gutai retrospectives were held in European museums. In Japan, however, despite a movement to reappraise the group that began gaining momentum in the ’80s and a few retrospectives at museums in the Kansai area, there has unfortunately never been an event held in Tokyo that focused on the entirety of Gutai’s 18-year career held in Tokyo. This will be the first. The 50s and 60s, the period during which Gutai emerged, were notable for Japan’s miraculous recovery, which was achieved through soaring economic growth in the wake of the country’s defeat in World War II.

In this exhibition, we present a collection of approximately 150 works which, through an abundance of challenging spirit and creative energy, function as a symbol of that era.

In this exhibition, we take a chronological look back at Gutai’s 18-year career.

Part 1 | Prologue | 1954 (Fig.01)

Part 2 | The Creation of the “Unknown Beauty” | 1955–1957
While on the one hand Yoshihara, the founder of Gutai, sternly directed the group’s members to “make something that has never been made before,” he also devised a series of unique plans, such as showing their works in parks and on the stage, as a way of urging the artists to evolve innovative concepts unlike anything that had ever existed before in “art.” In this section, we introduce some of the countless works that emerged as a result through a combination of reproductions that were made in subsequent years and documentary photographs.
(Fig.02, 03)

Part 3 | Mr. Gutai: Yoshihara Jiro
Underlying Gutai’s activities was the artistic perspective of the group’s absolute leader Yoshihara Jiro. Yoshihara’s views were cultivated as a young man growing up in the Hanshin area (a residential district located between Osaka and Kobe) in the 1920s and ’30s. In this section, while looking back at Yoshihara’s pre-Gutai works, we trace the group’s close links to the cultural and spiritual climate that thrived in the area prior to the war.

Part 4 | Gutai Goes International | 1957–1965
In 1957, Gutai had a fateful meeting with the French art critic Michel Tapié, the champion of Art Informel. Marveling at the group’s approach, Tapié introduced Gutai’s works (in particular the more easily transportable pieces such as paintings) in exhibitions and publications in Europe and the U.S., and in the process, thrust the artists on to the international stage. In this section, we focus on Gutai works that were shown abroad during the period. (Fig.04, 05)
Part 5 | New Developments 1965–1971

Although encountering Tapié provided Gutai with a host of opportunities to participate in exhibitions in Japan and abroad, the group's work, which had originally placed a strong emphasis on actions and materiality, gradually began to lose its freshness in the mid-'60s. Seeing this as a dangerous development for a group that had made its name on discovering unknown beauty, Yoshihara began actively recruiting new members and working to reinvigorate Gutai. In this section, we look at the works of these later members of the group.

Part 6 | Epilogue 1972

This exhibition sets out to answer a wide range of questions regarding the true nature of Gutai. As the majority of Gutai's works could not be sold in Japan at the time they were created, many were acquired by foreign collectors. Some of these works were bought back in the '80s, and are now housed in Japanese museum collections, but a large number are still owned by Western museums and collectors. In this retrospective, we are pleased to present the first homecoming of some of these works in approximately half a century. In addition, we will be screening some long-sought-after but only recently discovered newsreel footage of the historic 1st Gutai Art Exhibition, held at Ohara Hall in Tokyo in 1955.
**Symposium**

Reappraising Gutai in the Past and Present

Sat., July 14 from 13:00 to 17:00 | Doors open at 12:30

Speakers: KAWASAKI Koichi (independent curator), YURUGI Yasuhiro (art critic), Mattijs VISSER (director, Zero Foundation), Ming TIAMPO (associate professor, Carleton University; guest cocurator of Guggenheim Museum's Gutai exhibition), and HIRAI Shoichi (curator in charge of this exhibition, the National Art Center, Tokyo)

In this discussion, with presentations by those who have been involved in organizing Gutai exhibitions, we will examine how attempts to reappraise the group in the wake of its dissolution in 1972 developed in Japan and abroad, and how Gutai's work is currently viewed.

**Round Table Discussion**

Gutai as Seen from the Perspective of the 3Ms

Sat., August 4 from 14:00 to 15:30 | Doors open at 13:30

MAEKAWA Tsuyoshi, MATSUTANI Takesada, and MUKAI Shuji (all former members of Gutai)

The three artists, who became members of Gutai one after another in the early '60s, came to be known as the 3Ms due to the fact that their surnames all began with the letter “m.” In this event, they will relate a variety of episodes connected to their time in the group and share their personal perspectives on Gutai.

All events will be held in the auditorium on the third floor of the National Art Center, Tokyo. Limited to 260 people (first-come, first served); admission is free but participants are required to show an exhibition ticket (or ticket stub).

Time and content of events are subject to change without notice.

For details and the latest information on related events, see the museum website.

**Tickets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tickets</th>
<th>Regular (General)</th>
<th>¥1,000</th>
<th>Advance (General)</th>
<th>¥800</th>
<th>Group (General)</th>
<th>¥800</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>¥500 (University Students)</td>
<td></td>
<td>¥300 (University Students)</td>
<td></td>
<td>¥300 (University Students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visitors who are under 18, including high school students, and disabled people with ID booklets (along with one assistant) will be admitted free.

Group tickets will only be available at the venue (discounts only applicable to groups of 20 or more).

Visitors who present a ticket or ticket stub from another exhibition currently underway at the National Art Center, Tokyo, Suntory Museum of Art or Mori Art Museum (the three facilities that make up the Roppongi Art Triangle) will be eligible for the group discount.

Tickets (both advance and regular) are available through Ticket Pia (P-Code: 765-133), and Lawson Ticket (L-Code: 32349). Service charges may apply.

Advance tickets can be purchased through the above services from Wed., April 25 to Tue., July 3, 2012, but will only be available at the National Art Center, Tokyo from Wed., May 16 to Mon., July 2, 2012.

Dates and times of the exhibition are subject to change. For details and the latest information on related events, see the museum website.

**Map**

The National Art Center, Tokyo
7-22-2 Roppongi
Minato-ku,Tokyo, 106-8558, Japan
TEL. 03-5777-8600 (toll-free)
URL http://www.nact.jp

[Access]
Direct access from Exit 6 (in the direction of Aoyama Cemetery) of Nogizaka Station (C05) on the Chiyoda Line of the Tokyo Metro
5-min. walk from Exit 4a of Roppongi Station (H04) on the Hibiya Line of the Tokyo Metro
4-min. walk from Exit 7 of Roppongi Station (H04) on the Toei Oedo Subway Line
List of Image Data for Press Use

GUTAI | The Spirit of an Era

We are pleased to offer a number of different images of the works on display to help promote the exhibition. If you would like to receive one (or more), please fill out the attached form and return it to us by fax (e-mail requests will also be honored). Please refrain from using the images included in the press release without prior permission.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Image</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1      | ![Image 1](image1.jpg) YOSHIHARA Jiro  
Red Circle on Black  
1965 
acrylic on canvas, 181.5cm × 227.0cm  
Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art |
| 2      | ![Image 2](image2.jpg) MURAKAMI Saburo  
Work  
1958 
oil on canvas, 184.1cm × 146.0cm  
Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art |
| 3      | ![Image 3](image3.jpg) MOTONAGA Sadamasa  
Work  
1962 
acrylic paint, canvas, and wood panels, 172.0cm × 229.3cm  
Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art (Yamamura Collection) |
| 4      | ![Image 4](image4.jpg) MATSUTANI Takesada  
Work ’65  
1965 
vinyl on canvas, 182.2cm × 142.6cm  
Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art |
| 5      | ![Image 5](image5.jpg) YOSHIDA Minoru  
Just Curve ’67 Cosmoplastic  
1967 
stainless steel, plexiglass, fluorescent lights, motor, etc.  
270.0cm × 150.0cm × 175.0cm  
Takamatsu City Museum of Art |
Application Form for Image Data and Ticket Giveaway for Press Use

GUTAI | The Spirit of an Era

Public Relations Division
Fax. 03-3405-2532
E-mail pr@nact.jp

I would like to receive data for the following images. (Please check the number of the images you would like to receive.)

☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☐ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5

Name of company | Name of publication | Writer’s name |
-----------------|--------------------|--------------|
Tel.             | Fax.               |              |
E-mail | Date and / or time you would like to receive image data |
Date when article is scheduled to appear / Name of section in publication |

I would like to receive exhibitions tickets to use as a giveaway in my publication (please check the box below).
☐ Ten pairs of tickets (total of 20)

Tickets will be sent out in early June. Please provide us with the mailing address at which you would like to receive them.

Address |

When making use of photographs, we kindly ask that you observe the following guidelines.
1. Photos of the art works are intended only for the promotion of the exhibition. Please do not use them after the exhibition has ended.
2. When using a photograph, please include the entire credit (either in English or Japanese) as provided. (Please refer to list of image data.)
3. Please do not trim or superimpose text on the photos.
4. Please submit your manuscript to us by fax or e-mail before it is published, so that we can ascertain the accuracy of the factual information.
5. After the article is published, please submit a copy of your article to us. In addition, we ask that the editorial office of your publication oversee the issuing of giveaway tickets after you receive them in the mail.

For inquiries or more information, please contact:
ISHIMATSU Keiko, KUBOTA Chie
Public Relations Division
The National Art Center, Tokyo
Tel. 03-6812-9925  Fax. 03-3405-2532  E-mail pr@nact.jp