

Acts and Artworks in Japan After the War

After the war ended, an art movement that focused on “acts” began mainly in Europe and Japan. In particular, a Japanese art association called GUTAI, a group of artists active in the Kansai region, came into the spotlight. GUTAI was established in Ashiya, Hyogo Prefecture in 1954, and its members engaged in experimental creative activities under the strict guidance of their leader, YOSHIHARA Jiro, who often told members: “Do not imitate works made by others” and “Create something that has never been seen before.” In its early days, GUTAI created artworks through intense actions such as tearing paper with the whole body or painting by throwing bottles. They did not consider the actions themselves to be art, but rather as means to enhance the beauty of their works.

Meanwhile, in Tokyo, intense action-based art practices began to emerge around the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition in the 1960's. Artists such as SHINOHARA Ushio, who painted by punching canvases with boxing gloves dipped in paint, represented this movement. Most of these action-based works have not been preserved, as they were usually discarded after the performance.

In contrast, YOSHIHARA, the leader of GUTAI, valued “things,” such as the raw materials used in artworks. For him, the actions served to give life to these materials and were necessary steps in the process of creating a painting. In the early days, SHIRAGA Kazuo said, “Action is the most important part of creation, and the finished work only needs to last for the duration of the exhibition.” However, the idea that completed works are unnecessary was never fully accepted. This exhibition mainly features works from our museum's OHASHI Collection, along with pieces by SHIRAGA Kazuo, MOTONAGA Sadamasa, and TANAKA Atsuko. Let us now explore each artist's acts and artworks.