

Column 2 GUTAI, Acts, Paintings, and Materials

The artists of early GUTAI created paintings with intense action. The GUTAI art exhibitions were held for two consecutive years at Obara Kaikan, Tokyo (the 1st exhibition in 1955 and the 2nd in 1956). During these exhibitions, they showcased open creation processes that extensively involved their bodies, including the paper-tearing artworks by MURAKAMI Saburo, the bottle-throwing paintings by SHIMAMOTO Shozo, *Challenging Mud* (Figure 6) created by SHIRAGA Kazuo, who dumped his body into mud, and so on. These were not completed as performances but were planned as artworks. For example, *Challenging Mud* was a painting that used mud as its materials.

Furthermore, many artworks in GUTAI are better described as objects rather than paintings, such as *Electric Dress* by TANAKA Atsuko and *Red Logs; Please Come In* (Figure 7) by SHIRAGA Kazuo. However, after the dissolution of GUTAI, MURAKAMI Saburo, a member of GUTAI, said that they stretched the interpretation of paintings and did not limit themselves to just tableaux. The word “painting” was originally imported from the West, so GUTAI members replaced it with “E”, a Japanese term that traditionally includes pictures, paintings, and drawings, thereby broadening its definition and infinitely expanding the possibility of expression. In fact, Shiraga said that *Red Log* is an endless painting in which viewers enter the object and can see the axe marks on the logs from inside. Tanaka considered all her artworks, including *Electric Dress*, a three-dimensional work, to be “paintings.” For GUTAI, three-dimensional artworks and the actions involved in creating them were considered pictures in a broad sense.

Additionally, YOSHIHARA Jiro, the leader of GUTAI, clearly stated that figurative, conventional artworks which clearly depict what is drawn, were fakes that only appeared to have meaning. He declared that these materials were massacred and could not convey anything. He believed that GUTAI art must not transfigure materials, but give life to them, and not deceive them. He said, “It is as if the human spirit and materials are opposed to each other yet also shaking hands.” For GUTAI art, materials are important elements as well as acts.