

mental frolic. Those with a character like Cézanne or Van Gogh can play freely here. When we play without regard to such human attributes as reason and emotion, we can discover countless differing individual qualities.

As I gave direction to my own quality and expressed myself by painting with my hands, painting with my feet, and painting with my body, my character has improved, moving along a particular path that was seen in my works. In its evolution, my creative act has stripped me naked and pushed me toward a terminal point. The moment I saw Kanayama's advertising balloon in our Tokyo exhibition,³ I had a revelation. With that work, he symbolically put the balloon's sphere in the room's rectangle; in doing so, he made the final conceptual manipulation (although I don't know if that was really final or not; it appears to me final in the usual sense of "composition"). I also had a panoramic view, connecting it with another work by him that consists of a sunlike, strongly illuminated red sphere. Which is to say, these two separate works had unconsciously affected each other and produced a unity out of multiplicity. I saw a glimmer of light in this recognition. It can be so meaningful to undertake many acts all at once. My intellect, which found it purer in terms of quality to present a single act in one work, may now be able to appreciate the greater purity in a synthesized act. To put it concretely, I am now confident that whether I use my hands or my feet, so long as I am the one undertaking an act, the work will have my quality. I have thus begun to think that undertaking an act with many people may be meaningful. By unconsciously enumerating qualities of different individuals, each of us can understand our own quality more clearly. By undertaking an act together, much can be revealed to each of us. If so, the appearance of an exhibition will be very different. Around the time I reached this conclusion, the leader of the Gutai Art Association, Yoshihara Jirō, proposed that we present an onstage exhibition. It will be a very difficult task. But what a rewarding endeavor. No matter how challenging, I am determined to bring it to fruition. When sounds, lights, materials, and human acts, as well as all aspects of stagecraft, produce one single whole, individuals' mental fattening will become very great, while the revelations the audience will have will be far greater than with the previous exhibitions. I am eager to give this idea a concrete form and have our first exhibition or, rather, our first presentation, at the earliest possible date.

Originally published as "Kotai no kakuritsu," *Gutai* 4 (July 1956), pp. 6–7.

*****TEACHER SEMINAR START HERE*****

Can a Piece of Cloth Be a Work of Art?

SHIMAMOTO Shōzō

Tanaka Atsuko caused a sensation at the 1st *Gutai Art Exhibition*: she exhibited pieces of fabric that were simply cut into rectangles and created a spatial composition consisting of a series of bell ringings triggered by a button, which was perhaps the first ever invisible work in the history of art. Among her works in the exhibition was a square piece of pink rayon more than 3.6 meters long on each side hung near the exit. Every time the air breezed in from

outside, the fabric fluttered. The only visible sign of manipulation by the artist was the green⁴ band that hemmed the edges. Other cloth rectangles were hung with no alteration whatsoever. Could things like these mean anything artistic? Ordinary people might well have thought that her works were simplistic, frivolous, and lacking rigor. Indeed, I understand why.

The color pink, dominating more than 90 percent of her fabric work, looked utterly vulgar. If the artist were to keep this flimsy rayon cloth after the exhibition and put it up for fire sale, no sane Japanese person would buy it. I wonder where on earth she found fabric in such a nauseating color. The same can be said of the color of the thin green band with which she hemmed this work. Besides, she merely hung it, hardly working with it at all. The cheapness of the rayon, which could at best be used in handicrafts, contrasted sharply with the gravity that traditional tableau painting assumes. How insignificant it looked! It is true, however, that this work can be easily folded into a small bundle, making it far easier to transport to an exhibition. The transportation of gigantic canvases is a persistent headache for ambitious painters and art-supply vendors who want to preserve the gravity of their works painted on huge canvases. Tanaka solved this insoluble problem by creating a mammoth work that can be carried in a suitcase.

An American newspaper reported that when there is no breeze, an artificial air movement—like air currents produced by waving arms—created wrinkles. That is to say, this piece of fabric changes its state constantly according to the airflow. Tanaka did not and could not predetermine its form; she left it to chance. "It is difficult to imagine that she had any definite conception about its form."

Needless to say, a contemporary artist is expected to present experiments at an exhibition. Granted, Tanaka's hanging fabric pieces constituted a new idea. And yet they invoked no immediate sensation of beauty in the viewer's mind. If avant-garde painting can be divided into two categories—the one that shows superficially novel forms and the other that at once has novel forms and instantaneously touches the viewer's mind—Tanaka's works belong in the former. . . .

We feel secure and respectful with regard to old things. This feeling inexplicably effects a misconception that determines the value we place on art. Indeed, a similar effect can also be observed outside the art world, like a walk down an old familiar street, or other aspects of history that make us feel nostalgic, which we readily accept with little reservation. Similarly, people make aesthetic judgments and speak comfortably about things that give them a sense of security. In other words, when speaking of something whose beauty they expect other people to readily acknowledge, they tend to exaggerate and mix a bit of sentimentality into their words.

Tanaka's work, in contrast, is nothing like that. It is unlikely that people would say that such a nauseating color, a flimsy piece of cloth, or an uncomposed form is beautiful. Even if they *did* think her work was beautiful, they would hesitate to say so—they would likely try to avoid thinking that way. Perhaps these people feel inferior when they find beauty in that which is despised by everyone else. Yet those who claim that colors of, say, low saturation are

universally beautiful have never explained why, and it is obvious that beauty is not as limited as those people claim. Nevertheless, we misguidedly ignore such an obvious fact and accept a color scheme that supposedly creates a sense of balanced beauty.

In fact, I *did* find Tanaka's works beautiful, although I do not intend to impose my view on everyone else. I particularly wanted to write about Tanaka's work, not because of my subjective opinion but for the following reasons:

I have explained that experimentation is necessary in avant-garde painting, but there are two kinds of vanguard experimentation: beauty is either received without resistance or utterly resisted. Come to think of it, it is absurd to say that something is new and at the same time acceptable as beautiful in the viewer's mind. Consider Heisenberg's uncertainty principle—the concepts “new” and “beautiful” are forever chasing each other. That is to say, since newness in art invariably awakens a new sensibility in the viewer, it is impossible for it to be accepted without resistance. If something is at once new and beautiful, that in and of itself constitutes a logical contradiction.

Should we find beauty in new art, we inevitably feel resistant and hesitate to speak up and express how we feel. For this reason, while avant-garde painting as a concept is highly regarded, we see little of it in reality.

Among these few examples of avant-garde art, Tanaka's work has taught me about an aesthetic sensitivity that I did not have, especially an alternate possibility of rigorous beauty that womanly sweetness and frailty may create. They were a great influence on me. I ask you to reconsider her works, which is why I wrote this essay.

Originally published as “Ichi-mai no nunokire demo geijutsu sakuin ka,” *Gutai* 4 (July 1956), p. 31. This version adapted and excerpted from “Can a Piece of Fabric Be a Work of Art?,” trans. Reiko Tomii, in Ming Tiampo and Katō Mizuho, *Electrifying Art: Atsuko Tanaka, 1954–1968*, exh. cat. (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, 2004; New York: Grey Art Gallery, New York University), pp. 107–09.

*****TEACHER SEMINAR END HERE*****

On Gutai Art

MURAKAMI Saburō

Painting had never incorporated time as a concrete factor. The Cubists expressed different factors of time on the same plane, and the Futurists tried to express the movement of time itself. However, such works were persistently paintings in which the full view was taken in simultaneously. There, time was simply presented as the ideological content or an image of time.

Time itself had never participated in the spatiality of a painting. The Gutai group's enthusiasm to make discoveries demands not only the aspect of space but also that of time in order to convey the entirety of the aesthetic emotion. By abandoning the frame or jumping off the wall, we are trying to experiment with a new painting that shifts from immobile time to live time. This is entirely different from the connection between time and space in conventional drama performing literary content. The change that is about

to take place here possesses a lasting time, which rouses emotion in itself. A space for such time and time for such a space—this is a painting with a new meaning.

Originally published as “Gutai bijutsu ni tsuite,” *Gutai* 7 (July 1957), unpaginated. This translation by Ogawa Kikuko, repr. from *Fukkokuhan Gutai/Gutai: Facsimile Edition*, supervised by Ashiya City Museum of Art & History (Tokyo: Geika Shoin, 2010), p. 61.

The Outlandish Group of Works: Amsterdam Art Exhibition

YOSHIHARA Jirō

The Story Behind the “Wooden Box”

A box is now on exhibit inside a room at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. This wooden box that is a cubic meter in size and made from rough wood is nailed up so that it does not open. Of course, it is exhibited as a respectable work of art, but it looks merely like a packing box. This was created by Murakami Saburō, a member of the Gutai Art Association. This work was once rejected for an exhibition at Osaka Municipal Museum of Art, but the Stedelijk Museum treated it as a legitimate artwork.

Though it is a mere box, a clock ticks time on the inside, devised to sometimes make ding-dong sounds at odd times of the day.

But I must say that this exhibition overall is extremely outlandish. There are groups of artists who call themselves Zero in Germany and the Netherlands, who are said to have begun their activities around 1960. This exhibition is Zero's 3rd international exhibition. The central member of this movement was the late Yves Klein. His posthumous works are also on exhibit. They are his typical works that were done in blue and gold monochrome. Though they are two-dimensional paintings using a single color, Klein contrived one unique idea or another in these works, such as creating an indented surface, or a surface to which pieces of sponge were applied and painted over. The retrospective exhibition of Klein's work that is also being held in Paris allowed me to perceive the strength that could be possessed by monochrome works.

The Revolving “Hemp Bag”

In this exhibition, the Zero groups have presented the work of Otto Piene (Germany), which entirely covers the walls in a room with screens upon which odd shapes from six windows are projected; Heinz Mack's (Germany) work in which countless metal plates revolve and reflect light; and Gunther Uecker's (Germany) work that shows a furiously revolving hemp bag with many large nails attached to it. Henk Peeters (Netherlands) utilizes water and exhibits works that sparkle. One work shows reflecting water ripples, while another uses plastic bags filled with water.

The other exhibited works are by invited artists, chiefly: the Gutai group from Japan; Lucia [sic] Fontana, Enrico Castellani, and Piero Dorazio from Italy; Yayoi Kusama from New York; Yves Klein (posthumous works) and Pol Bury from Belgium; and Armando and Soto (Venezuelan by nationality) from France. A group of artists from Southern Italy called “Group I” was also invited.