
Re-assessing Gutai: Tanaka Atsuko and the Ishibashi Foundation Collection

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The Ishibashi Foundation Collection and 'Gutai'

The Gutai Art Association (Gutai) is widely regarded as a movement whose group of young Japanese post-war avant-garde artists based in the Hanshin region sought new visions in the eighteen years from 1954 to 1972 under the direction of Yoshihara Jiro (1905–1972), an avant-garde artist active from before the war. They engaged in a range of activities including outdoor exhibitions, stage and performance art, and kinetic art, and interacted with French and American art world people. They participated in the 1970 Japan World Exposition in Osaka. Membership was fluid, with seventeen members when the Association was formed in August 1954 and over time a total of 59 artists active under the Gutai banner.¹ From early on, their overseas activities, development of innovative physical expression, materials and techniques outside the conventional framework attracted attention in Japan and abroad. It is generally accepted that any discussion of postwar Japanese art must include the activity of these avant-garde artists.

The Ishibashi Foundation has been steadily expanding its collection of Gutai works since the 2007 acquisition of Shiraga Kazuo's (1924–2008) *White Fan* (1965) and *Kannon Fudara Jodo* (1972). Including Shiraga Fujiko's (1928–2015) *Untitled* (ca. 1955) acquired this year, there are currently 37 Gutai works (16 purchases and 21 donations) in the collection. The Artizon Museum exhibited 12 of these as "Section 9: Gutai Paintings" in the *Steps Ahead: Recent Acquisitions* exhibition focusing on new acquisitions. Though this group of paintings represents an important part of the collection's postwar Japanese art, the Museum has lagged behind other Japanese museums in acquiring works by Gutai artists. By exploring the position and potential of works by artists who participated in Gutai in the Museum collection through recent research on the work of Tanaka Atsuko (1932–2005) in particular, this paper responds to the question of whether this late starting collection simply mirrors what other museums already have or if it conveys meaning beyond an introduction to Gutai (as historical fact). We will observe the special features of Tanaka's *Untitled* (1965) and *1985 B* (1985) to offer a new perspective on the image of Gutai as a post-war avant-garde group identified by 'materials and action.'

First, a brief look at the history of the Ishibashi Foundation collection.² Ishibashi Shojiro (1889–1976), founder of the Foundation, started collecting paintings around 1927. In 1930, Sakamoto Hanjiro (1882–1969), a Western style painter

from Kurume asked Ishibashi to collect works by Aoki Shigeru (1882–1922), an artist from Kurume who died prematurely, and to establish a museum with them. Ishibashi took that as an opportunity to focus more broadly on collecting and on his idea to eventually open his collection to the public. The Bridgestone Museum of Art ("Bridgestone Gallery" in English until 1966, now Artizon Museum) opened in Tokyo in 1952, and in 1956 the Ishibashi Foundation was established to permanently maintain cultural activities. Since that time, the Foundation has built on the Shojiro's collection of Japanese-style Western paintings, Impressionist and other French painting from the 19th and early 20th century, and added Western and Japanese Modern Works. When Ishibashi Shojiro died in 1976, leadership passed to his eldest son, Ishibashi Kanichiro (1920–1997) who expanded the collection with an emphasis on modern Western and Japanese painting. His many exchanges with contemporary artists such as Pierre Soulages (1919–), Jean Fautrier (1898–1964), Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985), and Zao Wou-Ki (1921–2013), stimulated collection of works that traced the emergence and development of abstract art. One year after he passed away in 1997, Kanichiro's family donated more than 400 works from his personal collection to the Ishibashi Foundation, quickly expanding the collection's range. It gradually grew to include Art Informel and American Abstract Expressionist works and, in anticipation of the opening of the Artizon Museum, works by Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), Alexander Calder (1898–1976), and Joseph Cornell (1903–1972) marking the art world shift from Paris to the United States. Further, works by female Abstract Expressionist artists also begun to be added to the collection as feminist art historians re-evaluated them. In addition to European and American Art, Japanese post-war art to the 2000s has been targeted, including works by Imai Toshimitsu (1928–2002), Domoto Hisao (1928–2013), Sugai Kumi (1919–1996), who were based in Paris, Yamaguchi Takeo (1902–1983), Saito Yoshishige (1904–2001), Murai Masanari (1905–1999), and Shiraga and Tanaka. In recent years, the Foundation added works by Kusama Yayoi (1929 –) who had been based in New York, and Takiguchi Shuzo (1903–1979) who led Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop, 1951–57 with young artists involved in art, music, lighting, literature and other genres), and Jikken Kobo members Fukushima Hideko (1927–1997), Yamaguchi Katsuhiko (1928–2018), Kitadai Shozo (1921–2003) and others. While originally based on Ishibashi Shojiro's private collection, the Ishibashi Foundation collection continues to expand its reach, adding Australian Aboriginal Art and artist portrait photographs.

Looking at the history of the collection, the Ishibashi Foundation's connection with Gutai appears to have developed from the mid-1990s inheritance of Ishibashi Kanichiro's personal collection of abstract painting and acquisitions starting from the middle of the first decade of the 2000's. However, the connection with Gutai actually goes back to an earlier time. The October 11 – November 10, 1957 *Contemporary World ART* exhibition was held at the Bridgestone Museum of Art, and organized by the Yomiuri Newspaper and the Ishibashi Foundation. It was arranged by French art critic and collector Michel Tapié (1909–1987), an advocate of American and European post-war non-figurative and Art Informel painting. The exhibition subtitle was "An International Festival of Art Informel Featuring Tapié, Mathieu, and Sam Francis." Aside from the American and European artists, the catalog lists a special selection of exhibits by "1. Fukushima Hideko 2. Onishi

Shigeru 3. Yoshihara Jiro 4. Shiraga Kazuo 5. Shimamoto Shozo 6. Ono Tadaihiro." It is understood that Tapié met with and reviewed works by the artists in September, prior to the exhibition. Many Japanese artists were so excited to see real Western artworks, artists and art critics including Tapié that there appeared tons of Art Informel style paintings in what was called the Japanese post-war art history 'Art Informel whirlwind' of 1956–57.³ Many Art Informel works had been in Ishibashi Kanichiro's collection which, after being studied and added to since 1998, were displayed in the 2011 *Postwar Abstract Painting in France and Art Informel* exhibition at the Bridgestone Museum of Art. In addition to Domoto Hisao who introduced Tapié to the journal *Gutai*, Japanese artists such as Imai Toshimitsu, a participant in the Art Informel movement, were mentioned in the *Postwar Abstract Painting* exhibition but Gutai works were not included there. Considering the connections with Art

Table 1 Works by artists who participated in Gutai held by the Ishibashi Foundation (By acquisition year)

| Artist | Title | Date | Acquisition year | Materials |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---------|------------------|---|
| 1 SHIRAGA Kazuo | <i>White Fan</i> | 1965 | 2007 | Oil on canvas |
| 2 SHIRAGA Kazuo | <i>Kannon Fudara Jodo</i> | 1972 | 2007 | Oil on canvas |
| 3 TANAKA Atsuko | <i>Untitled</i> | 1965 | 2008 | Vinyl paint on canvas |
| 4 SHIRAGA Kazuo | <i>Konto</i> | 1990 | 2013 | Oil on canvas |
| 5 YOSHIHARA Jiro | <i>Work</i> | 1969 | 2013 | Acrylic on canvas |
| 6 MURAKAMI Saburo | <i>Work</i> | 1961 | 2016 | Synthetic-resin paint on cotton cloth |
| 7 MURAKAMI Saburo | <i>Work</i> | c. 1962 | 2016 | Synthetic-resin paint, plaster, adhesive on canvas |
| 8 UEMAE Chiyu | <i>Work</i> | 1965 | 2016 | Oil on canvas |
| 9 UEMAE Chiyu | <i>Work</i> | 1966 | 2016 | Oil on canvas |
| 10 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Work</i> | 1964 | 2016 | Enamel on cotton cloth and panel |
| 11 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Work</i> | 1967 | 2016 | Enamel on cotton cloth and panel |
| 12 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Work</i> | 1965–67 | 2016 | Enamel on canvas |
| 13 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Work (Stream)</i> | 1975 | 2016 | Enamel on cotton cloth and panel |
| 14 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work July-Aug. 1954</i> | 1954 | 2016 (Donation) | Oil on canvas |
| 15 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work 1954–58</i> | 1954–58 | 2016 (Donation) | Oil on canvas |
| 16 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work Dec. 1958</i> | 1958 | 2016 (Donation) | Oil on canvas |
| 17 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work Jan. 4, 1959</i> | 1959 | 2016 (Donation) | Oil on canvas |
| 18 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work Mar. 22, 1959</i> | 1959 | 2016 (Donation) | Oil on canvas |
| 19 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work 1959–62</i> | 1959–62 | 2016 (Donation) | Oil on canvas |
| 20 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work Jan. 1961</i> | 1961 | 2016 (Donation) | Enamel on canvas |
| 21 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work Jan.–Mar. 1962</i> | 1962 | 2016 (Donation) | Oil on canvas |
| 22 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work Mar. 1962</i> | 1962 | 2016 (Donation) | Oil on canvas |
| 23 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work Mar. 1964</i> | 1964 | 2016 (Donation) | Enamel on canvas |
| 24 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work Nov. 1965</i> | 1965 | 2016 (Donation) | Enamel on canvas |
| 25 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work 1966</i> | 1966 | 2016 (Donation) | Enamel on canvas |
| 26 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work Dec. 1969</i> | 1969 | 2016 (Donation) | Oil on canvas |
| 27 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work Sept. 1971</i> | 1971 | 2016 (Donation) | Enamel on canvas |
| 28 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work May 6, 1972</i> | 1972 | 2016 (Donation) | Enamel on canvas |
| 29 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work May–June 1972</i> | 1972 | 2016 (Donation) | Enamel on canvas |
| 30 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work May 13, 1973</i> | 1973 | 2016 (Donation) | Enamel on canvas |
| 31 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work May 1973</i> | 1973 | 2016 (Donation) | Enamel on canvas |
| 32 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work Jan. 1977</i> | 1977 | 2016 (Donation) | Oil on canvas |
| 33 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work 1978–79</i> | 1978–79 | 2016 (Donation) | Oil on canvas |
| 34 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Small Work May 1986</i> | 1986 | 2016 (Donation) | Enamel on canvas |
| 35 TANAKA Atsuko | <i>1985 B</i> | 1985 | 2017 | Acrylic lacquer on canvas |
| 36 MOTONAGA Sadamasa | <i>Untitled</i> | 1965 | 2020 | Oil paint and Synthetic resin paint on canvas, mounted on board |
| 37 SHIRAGA Fujiko | <i>Untitled</i> | c. 1955 | 2021 | Japanese paper |

Informel, the important position of Gutai in Japanese postwar art history, and the fact that the Bridgestone Museum held the *World Contemporary ART* exhibition, it was natural that Gutai works be added to the ever-expanding Ishibashi Foundation collection and, moreover, that they be exhibited as Japanese post-war non-figurative painting by Japanese artists with international networks. Their significance is uncontested. However, there is still the question of whether the Gutai works in the Ishibashi Foundation collection basically duplicate other museum collections and present merely an introduction to Gutai as historical fact. In this paper, I will explore this question by delineating the distinctive characteristics of the collection's current Gutai art holdings.

Table 1 shows Gutai works held by the Ishibashi Foundation (as of September 2021). By year of acquisition, 2 by Shiraga Kazuo were acquired in 2007, 1 by Tanaka Atsuko in 2008, and an additional Shiraga Kazuo work and a Yoshihara Jiro work in 2013. One year after the Bridgestone Museum closing in 2015, two Uemae Chiyu (1920–2018) works were acquired, two by Murakami Saburo (1925–1996), and twenty-five by Masanobu Masatoshi (1911–1995). In 2017, an additional Tanaka Atsuko work was added and in 2020, after the Artizon Museum opened, one by Motonaga Sadamasa (1922–2011). The addition of one work by Shiraga Fujiko in 2021 brings the total to thirty-seven works by eight Gutai artists. It is a respectable collection but begun later than other Museums. For example, The Yamamura Collection (Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art)⁴ is the personal collection of Yamamura Tokutaro (1926–1986) who had direct contact with Yoshihara and Motonaga as active Gutai artists and commissioned recreations of lost works from the outdoor exhibitions, even after the Gutai group disbanded. The Miyagi Museum of Art acquired a group of Gutai works in advance of the museum opening in 1980. Ashiya City Museum of Art and History has been expanding its Gutai collection and archives since opening in 1991, with a special interest because Ashiya was the birthplace of Yoshihara and had been the Gutai base. Given that Gutai artworks and materials are indispensable to presenting Japanese post-war avant-garde art, they have been collected from the 1970s to the 1990's in

museums all across Japan, most notably The National Museum of Art, Osaka, Nakanoshima Museum of Art, Osaka, Takamatsu Art Museum, Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, Fukuoka Art Museum, Toyama Prefectural Museum of Art and Design, Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, and The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. Obviously, a collection begun in 2007 is a latecomer. Though the disadvantages of a 'latecomer' trying to acquire recognized art historically important works include escalated prices and the difficulty of establishing purchase routes. There are also advantages, as we will discuss below.

Re-evaluation of Gutai

One characteristic of the Ishibashi Foundation Gutai collection is that all of the works are by artists who were involved in the movement from the beginning. Uemae and Masanobu were with Yoshihara from the time of the formation of the Gutai Art Association in 1954. The following year, asked by Shimamoto Shozo (1928–2013), Kanayama Akira (1924–2006) left "Zero-Kai (a collective formed by young cutting edge artists around the fall of 1954) to join Gutai, along with Tanaka Atsuko, Murakami, Shiraga Kazuo. Shiraga Fujiko and Motonaga who all had participated in the *Experimental Outdoor Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Midsummer Burning Sun* held in Ashiya Park in July 1955. In other words, all the artists represented in the Ishibashi Foundation collection became Gutai members in 1954 or 1955. Though Shiraga Fujiko withdrew in 1961, Tanaka in 1965 and Motonaga in 1971, one year before Gutai's breakup in 1972, they remain Gutai's emblematic artists. Aside from being original Gutai members, the production years of their works in the collection is also of interest. Of the sixteen works, one was produced in the 1950s, eleven in the 1960s, two in the 1970s, and two after 1980. In other words, nearly 70% are from the 1960s (table 2). Generally, from December 1954, when the Gutai Art Association was founded, until the September 1957 encounter with Michel Tapié is considered Gutai's Early Period. The Middle Period is marked by a move from outdoor exhibitions and stage performances to a focus,

Table 2 Works by artists who participated in Gutai held by the Ishibashi Foundation (By production year)

| Artist | Title | Date | Acquisition year | Materials |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------|------------------|--|
| 1 SHIRAGA Fujiko | <i>Untitled</i> | c. 1955 | 2021 | Japanese paper |
| 2 MURAKAMI Saburo | <i>Work</i> | 1961 | 2016 | Synthetic-resin paint on cotton cloth |
| 3 MURAKAMI Saburo | <i>Work</i> | c. 1962 | 2016 | Synthetic-resin paint, plaster, adhesive on canvas |
| 4 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Work</i> | 1964 | 2016 | Enamel on cotton cloth and panel |
| 5 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Work</i> | 1965–67 | 2016 | Enamel on canvas |
| 6 SHIRAGA Kazuo | <i>White Fan</i> | 1965 | 2007 | Oil on canvas |
| 7 TANAKA Atsuko | <i>Untitled</i> | 1965 | 2008 | Vinyl paint on canvas |
| 8 UEMAE Chiyu | <i>Work</i> | 1965 | 2016 | Oil on canvas |
| 9 MOTONAGA Sadamasa | <i>Untitled</i> | 1965 | 2020 | Oil-based Synthetic-resin paint on canvas |
| 10 UEMAE Chiyu | <i>Work</i> | 1966 | 2016 | Oil on canvas |
| 11 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Work</i> | 1967 | 2016 | Enamel on cotton cloth and panel |
| 12 YOSHIHARA Jiro | <i>Work</i> | 1969 | 2013 | Acrylic on canvas |
| 13 SHIRAGA Kazuo | <i>Kannon Fudara Jodo</i> | 1972 | 2007 | Oil on canvas |
| 14 MASANOBU Masatoshi | <i>Work (Stream)</i> | 1975 | 2016 | Enamel on cotton cloth and panel |
| 15 TANAKA Atsuko | <i>1985 B</i> | 1985 | 2017 | Acrylic lacquer on canvas |
| 16 SHIRAGA Kazuo | <i>Konto</i> | 1990 | 2013 | Oil on canvas |

guided by Tapié, on painting and international exhibitions in Paris, New York, and Turin. Starting with the *15th Gutai Art Exhibition* in July 1965,⁵ new artists joined and new directions included op-art and media art, and participation in Osaka Expo 1970, but when Yoshihara suddenly died in February 1972 and the members on March 31st unanimously decided to disband, marking the close of the Gutai's Late Period.⁶ The originals of Shiraga Kazuo's *Challenging Mud* (1955), Murakami Saburo's *Passage* (1956), and Tanaka Atsuko's *Electric Dress* (1956) from the unconventional Early Period that abandoned the tableau, now exist only in photographs that generated the legendary image of Gutai as "material and action." The *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979* exhibition at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 1998–1999 positioned the action art of the Gutai artists at this time as the starting point for action in Japanese post-war art. Chiba Shigeo in his *History of Deviation in Modern Art* takes this perspective when he describes the move to the painting format as a loss of early period innovation⁷ also in the *Japon des avant-gardes, 1910–1970* exhibition at the Pompidou Center in 1986.⁸ This view of degeneration in Gutai's middle period and subsequent years has been disputed by Tatehata Akira and Osaki Shinichiro. Tatehata, for example, argues that analysis of texts by Yoshihara, Shimamoto, and Shiraga shows that the early Gutai artists were without doubt a group of painters trying through 'action' to find a way to present materiality in their paintings, and concludes that painting has always been at the center of the Gutai movement.⁹ Osaki claims, with Shiraga and Murakami as prime examples, there was not a transition to pictorial expression under Tapié's influence, and that rather than a 'transition,' it was a manifestation of what previously existed.¹⁰ Looking again at the works in the Ishibashi Foundation collection from the point of view finding consistency between the early and middle period, they can obviously be positioned with non-figurative 'painting' that emerged in post-war Japanese art. The fact that its collection is mainly composed of the works in the middle period rather than the early in which outdoor and stage works were likely produced shows it emphasizes 'Gutai painting' over 'Gutai action art.' Considering the connection with the Ishibashi Shojiro and Ishibashi Kanichiro personal collections, it is natural that the Ishibashi Foundation would place stress on painting. In addition, it should be noted that more than half — 9 out of 16 — of the Gutai paintings in the collection date from the early to mid 1960s and were done by a group of artists whose late period Gutai art was produced after much experimentation. The collection paintings by Masanobu, Tanaka, Shiraga Kazuo, Uemae and Motonaga were all produced in 1965, the same year as the *15th Gutai Art Exhibition* that ushered in the Gutai late period and stands as a turning point for Gutai with new members rescuing it from a mannerist descent. In this sense, the Ishibashi Foundation collection of Gutai works, rather than focusing on Gutai's sensational presentations and experiments with action and various techniques, sheds light on the Gutai paintings of this later period.

It is important to note that discussions up until the beginning of the 21st century were overly concerned with affirming Gutai's evaluation and finding consistency in the early and middle Gutai periods. The Gutai image was created based on Yoshihara's precepts of not copying others and producing

something that had never been done before,¹¹ of aiming to merge human qualities and material properties to concretely comprehend abstract space,¹² and of having the human spirit and matter shake hands with each other while keeping their distance.¹³ Moreover, that image was imprinted through photographs showing the dynamic destructive 'material and action' production process. The discussion of Hirai Shoichi, curator of the 2012 The National Art Center, Tokyo's *GUTAI: The Spirit of an Era*, published in his essay for the exhibition catalog, is thought provoking:

"It is indisputable that extremely original and innovative expressions emerged during the early period based on Yoshihara's stern exhortations to avoid copying others and create things that had never made before, but it would be wrong to imply that there was absolutely no precedent for contemporary expressive formats such as installations and performance art prior to the existence of Gutai. There is also a tendency to overestimate Gutai based on the form of the works and documentary photographs as in the case of single images that capture a momentary action in Shiraga Kazuo's *Challenging Mud* and Murakami Saburo's *Entrance*. This has given rise to the misconception that the artists' actions were in themselves works and led to the group's reputation as pioneers in performance art without explaining that the pictures were actually taken at displays of the artists' production processes that were staged for the media instead of being performed for a crowd of spectators.

It is vital that we distance ourselves from stereotypes of this kind — particularly prevalent abroad — that place an overwhelming emphasis on innovative expression and attempt to put forward a revised view of Gutai that lacks a grounding in modern Japanese art history and fact. Or to put it another way, there is at present a need to reexamine the true nature of Gutai based on the essential components of the group, including the late period, and reassess the historical significance of the group's activities."¹⁴

In other words, Hirai clarified the need from the 2010s to review ideas on what kind of movement Gutai was in its essential aspects, including in the later stages, in order to reconfirm the historical significance of its activities. The Gutai image formed through exhibitions and writing up to the 21st century succeeded in positioning Gutai within international art history as uniform. This image, however, masked the complexity of Gutai. Hirai raises the issue of reassessing the view of Gutai as a 'group' or 'movement,' while from 2000 the tendency has been to focus on each artist rather than on Gutai as a group. The fact that Yoshihara himself used the somewhat ambiguous term 'object' in an attempt to find common ground with the works of the early period shows that it is not possible to speak of Gutai as a coherent movement even if a general direction can be discerned in what was created and presented by more than fifteen people at any given time and considering that they were under the direction of a strong leader twenty years their senior.¹⁵ Even Tatehata, who in his above mentioned analysis of Shiraga and Shimamoto theorized that action was an aspect of painting, concluded that Gutai as an avant-garde movement was characterized by a somewhat incongruous

collective of artists. He immediately points to Tanaka Atsuko as demonstrating a distinctly different direction and not fitting in the category of 'material and action': '...despite their brilliant color, Tanaka's remote tableaux, lacking in their painterly approach, may be considered particularly inconsistent with the painting of Gutai which brings materiality and action to the fore.'¹⁶ In the early 1990s, while appreciating the theories of the 1980s, the question became 'How many of the Gutai artists and works are left out of those theories?' Kuroda Raiji, curator at the Fukuoka Art Museum at the time, also expressed the need to shed light on the individual artists, rather than the group, and also singled out Tanaka Atsuko: 'There are numerous artists and works that cannot be explained by such an assessment. [...] Tanaka's existence is the most difficult to categorize in any attempt to assume a kind of coherent identity in Gutai.'¹⁷ Both Tatehata and Kuroda cite Tanaka Atsuko as breaking the allure of Gutai consistency and study of Tanaka since the early 2000s is allowing that monolithic image of Gutai to be reassessed.

Situating Works by Tanaka Atsuko

How has Tanaka Atsuko's work that is inconsistent with the group been described? Tanaka was born in 1932 in a family that ran a match manufacturing factory. In 1950, she entered the Department of Western Painting of Kyoto Municipal College of Art (now known as Kyoto City University of Arts). Dissatisfied with the conservative teaching, she moved back to the Art Institute of Osaka Municipal Museum of Art, where she had once prepared for art school entrance exams. In 1954, on Kanayama Akira's advice, she became a member of Zero-kai, co-founded by Kanayama with Murakami Saburo and Shiraga Kazuo. During a hospital stay in 1953, she began using a calendar as a motif and layering colors at the edges of the numbers. She said she felt as if she had 'painted for the first time.' After that, she started making cloth collages. In 1955, she joined Gutai with Kanayama, Murakami, and Shiraga and exhibited *Work*, made of a 10m² sheet of pink factory dyed rayon bordered in green cloth that she floated 30 cm above ground at an outdoor exhibition. (original is no longer extant; it was reproduced in *Outdoor Exhibition Revisited* in Ashiya Park, organized by Ashiya City Museum of Art and History in 1992). Then, inspired by the cloth swaying in the sea breeze, she decided to incorporate 'movement' into her work and came up with the idea of framing the entire exhibition space with sound. The result was *Work (Bell)* (1955) (original no longer extant, 5 reproductions). From around this time, an awareness of electricity started to appear¹⁸ in her works and in 1956 she created *Electric Dress* (1956) (original no longer extant; 2 reproductions), evidently inspired by a neon drugstore signboard at Osaka station. The fantastically flickering light bulbs/electricity retained a sense of cheapness. This was later developed into stage costumes, three-dimensional works, and drawings. Her "circle and line paintings"¹⁹ that she continued to produce until her death in 2005 are said to have evolved from her diagrams for *Electric Dress*. As a Gutai artist, Tanaka Atsuko received remarkable acclaim for pioneering the incorporation of everyday elements such as electricity, sound, and light in her works and in particular for her *Work (Bell)* and *Electric Dress* that have been introduced at many international exhibitions. Kuroda, however, notes that aside

Table 3 Selected Bibliography of Tanaka Atsuko's 'Circle and Line paintings' (By publication year)

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| Kato Mizuho, "Searching for a Boundary," in exh. cat., <i>Atsuko Tanaka: Search for an Unknown Aesthetic, 1954–2000</i> , Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art eds., 2001, pp. 6–14. |
| Ming Tiampo, "Electrifying Art," Ming Tiampo and Mizuho Kato eds., <i>Electrifying Art: Atsuko Tanaka, 1954–1968</i> , Vancouver, BC: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2004, pp. 63–77. |
| Nakajima Izumi, "Tanaka Atsuko no en to sen no kaiga [Tanaka Atsuko's Painting of Circles and Lines]," <i>GENSHA</i> [Research Bulletin of Hitotsubashi University Graduate School of Language and Society], No. 5, 11 March 2011, pp. 285–303. |
| Kato Mizuho, "Tanaka Atsuko <i>Spring 1966</i> — How Electric Dress was Transformed to the Picture Plane," <i>Philocaria</i> , No. 29, Osaka University Graduate School of Letters, Department of Arts and Art History, 2012, pp. 105–127. |
| Dehara Hitoshi, "A Study of Two Paintings by Tanaka Atsuko: Work (1958, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art Collection) and Work (1959, Hiroshima City Museum of Art Collection)," <i>Bulletin of the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art</i> , No.9 (2015), pp. 4–15. |
| Nakajima Izumi, <i>Anti-Action</i> , Brücke, 2019, pp. 217–276. |

from the paintings, a consistent affinity with 'wiring,' can be read in Tanaka's bells and electric dresses and dolls over a span of around 50 years and that an assessment of Tanaka's work cannot be done without connecting her early works with her 'circle and line paintings.'²⁰

The 'circle and line paintings,' however, had hardly been discussed until the beginning of the 21st century (table 3). Kato Mizuho, a curator at the Ashiya City Museum of Art and History at the time, led the way with her exhibition catalog essay for the *Atsuko Tanaka: Search for an Unknown Aesthetic, 1954–2000* held in 2001 at the Ashiya City Museum of Art and History and the Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art. Kato set aside discussion of Gutai in favor of considering Tanaka's position as an individual artist.²¹ The catalog with Tanaka's detailed chronology and a comprehensive list of works is a very important source of fundamental research. Following Kato, Ming Tiampo, Professor of Art History at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, sheds light on the relationship between Tanaka's electric clothing and subsequent paintings, focusing on interpreting the social situation in Japan at the time, particularly the issue of 'material.' Previously, Gutai had been about an attempt to incorporate artificial and industrial elements in painting as new 'substances.' It was not about 'traces of action = material = painting medium.'²² Building on the research and new perspectives of Kato and Tiampo in the first decade of the 2000s, Nakajima Izumi, who has a feminist perspective in viewing post-war female artists, argued in her 2011 "Tanaka Atsuko's Painting of Circles and Lines" that though Tanaka's works seem to be in completely different formats, her focus on collage in the early days of her career led to her calendar paintings, *Work(Bell)*, *Electric Dress*, and 'circle and line paintings,' all of which she regarded as paintings.²³ In 2012, Kato did a more detailed comparison of 'circle and line paintings,' analyzing the development style and visual effects of the vinyl paints and advocating for re-examination of Gutai two-dimensional works.²⁴ Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art curator Dehara Hitoshi, analyzing the works in his museum's collection, agreed with Kato's thesis

of Tanaka being consistent and distinct from the Gutai group. He pointed to the importance of looking at each painting more closely.²⁵ In 2019, expanding on her 2011 thesis, Nakajima, with a concept of 'anti-action,' took a hatchet to the word 'action' as key to understanding post-war Japanese art, claiming that it embodied gender bias, negating female artists whose activities are difficult to define with the word 'action.'²⁶ She presents the view that Tanaka's careful arrangement and composition of colors and her flat and carefully painted planes are generally the exact opposite of the physicality, violent gestures, and heavy use of materials associated with Gutai paintings. The research on 'circle and line paintings' to date, though presenting Tanaka Atsuko's work as 'Gutai painting,' admits that Tanaka's painting shows a perspective apart from 'Gutai = action' and opens the possibility of reinterpreting Gutai in light of re-examining Tanaka's work. Let's take a look at each of the two Tanaka paintings currently in the Ishibashi Foundation collection to assess their positioning.

The Ishibashi Foundation acquired *Untitled* (1965, vinyl paint on canvas, 92.5 × 74.3 cm) (fig. 1) in auction in 2008. It was not included in "List of works" in the *Atsuko Tanaka: Search for an Unknown Aesthetic* exhibition catalog edited by Kato in 2001.²⁷ In her 2012 "*Spring 1966 — How Electric Dress was Transformed to the Picture Plane*," Kato analyzes style changes before and after Tanaka's withdrawal from Gutai and points out that she produced few paintings in 1965 due to deteriorating relations with Yoshihara.²⁸ Kato's analysis shows gradual transitions in the style of the 'circle and line paintings' from the 1957 drawings to works after 1966 in terms of circles of various sizes, concentric circles, and the plethora of lines of different thicknesses. Furthermore, in the later works, viewers could even feel the energy of a motorized spinning painting. Kato analyzes the five key paintings produced in 1965 and notes that *Blue* (1965, vinyl paint on canvas, 194.8 × 129.9 cm, Shiga Museum of Art), exhibited in the July 1 to July 20 1965 *15th Gutai Exhibition* at the Gutai Pinacotheca just prior to Tanaka's withdrawal from Gutai, hardly uses the warm colors that were central until then. Instead, blue is the dominant color. Further, line density is reduced, weakening the entire representation. Kato speculates that this painting is an expression of Tanaka's mental state at the time.²⁹ The painting *Untitled* in the Artizon Museum collection is not among the works listed by Kato, and may have been produced before Tanaka left Gutai and therefore apart from the subject of Kato's study. The following information was provided on *Untitled* at the time of purchase: "Tanaka Atsuko left Gutai around 1965. After that, she seemed to be in a mild state of neurosis...During that time a friend took care of her. She recovered and her international recognition grew. She later gave this painting to the friend in appreciation. It is thought to have been produced before Tanaka Atsuko moved Asuka, Nara prefecture where she spent her later years."³⁰ "June 1965" (and a trace erasure of 'July') is inscribed on the back of the painting (figs. 2 and 3). If the inscription is correct, this work was produced at the same time as *Blue* that was exhibited in July in the *15th Gutai Exhibition*. As it employs much orange, red, yellow, and green, it raises doubt on Kato's interpretation. However, when she gave it to her friend years later Tanaka may not have accurately recalled the production date. For example, *Gate of Hell* (1965–69) in the collection of the National Museum

of Art, Osaka was presented as *Work* in 1965 at the *8th Japan International Art Exhibition*. It was later reworked and finalized in its current form in the 1969 at the *9th Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibition*. As this case shows, works may have been revised in later years. Therefore, more detailed analysis and comparison is required to accurately identify production dates. Except for one other work, dated on the back with 'November 1965,' inclusion of the month in the date is rare.³¹ Because of that, it is difficult to state definitively that *Untitled* was produced just prior to Tanaka leaving Gutai. It was, however, clearly produced at a crucial time and future research will re-examine interpretations so far. For the time being, if we assume that production of the Foundation's *Untitled* began in June 1965, we can compare the size — 92.5 × 74.3cm — with three other works, besides *Blue* and *Gate of Hell* that were produced in 1965 and in private collections: *Painting* 64.0 × 52.0cm, and two 'Works' without original titles that are 53.0 × ca. 45.5cm. Close to 30F (91.0 × 72.7) format, *Untitled* is larger than the F15 (65.3 × 55.0cm) format *Painting*. The two 'work' paintings, *Work* (1961) at 90.5 × 73.0cm and *Work* (1970) at 90.4 × 73.0cm are similar in size but overall there are few paintings this size. In terms of style, Kato emphasizes the composition of two 1965 paintings titled *Work*, each with a large central circle in the center and said to have been created after Tanaka left Gutai. According to Kato, these seem to be trial steps toward *Spring 1966* (1966, Ashiya City Museum of Art and History), a circular canvas with a motor rotation mechanism. *Untitled* in the Ishibashi collection differs from what Kato posits as characteristic of 1965 works in its numerous dense lines and surface flatness, meaning that no repainting can be detected, and vinyl paint erases the depth. With overlapping circles and visible lines beneath the circles, the painting seems multi-layered. (figs. 4 and 5) Rather than dense, most of the lines are as thick as the edges of the circle and their overlapping is like electric wires wrapped in vinyl being buried in the circle. Alternatively, they look like blood vessels inside the human body. Also, unlike *Blue* and *Gate of Hell*, there is not much space between the circles. Rather than the intricacy of the lines, it is the denseness of the circles filling the picture plane with overflowing energy that draws our attention. *Untitled*, then, is important in that it differs from the style of works produced in 1965 and also because it was produced at a turning point in Tanaka's career.

1985 B (1985, acrylic lacquer on canvas 218.0 × 333.5 cm) (fig. 6) is one of eight works in Kato's "List of Works" measuring more than F500 format (333.3 × 248.5 cm). The other seven are: *Work* (1962, 220.0 × 350.0 cm, Takamatsu City Museum of Art), *Work* (1963, 200.0 × 332.0 cm, Ashiya City Museum of Art and History), *Untitled* (1964, 333.4 × 225.4 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York), *Gate of Hell* (1965–69, 331.5 × 245.5 cm, National Museum of Art, Osaka), *1985A* (1985, 218.5 × 333.0 cm, Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art), and '86G (1986, 218.0 × 333.0 cm, Toyota Municipal Museum of Art), and *94B* (1994, 300.0 × 510.0 cm, private collection). Tanaka used the standard 500 format from 1964. *Untitled* and *Gate of Hell* are F500 ('figure' 500) format and *1985 A*, *1995B*, and '86 G are P500 ('Paysage —landscape' 500, 333.3 × 218.2 cm). When Yamamura Tokutaro asked Tanaka what meaning the large canvases had for her, what urged her to make them, she answered that she feels she is really painting something when she creates a 500 format

or 300 format painting.³² Given that, and the fact that *1985B* is among the small number of paintings of large size, it can be considered an important work of her later period. Looking at the provenance of the work, it is known to have been owned until 2007 by the Stadler Gallery and exhibited in Tanaka's solo exhibition there in 1987 and in Toulouse in 1993.³³ The work appears in a documentary film *Another GUTAI: Atsuko Tanaka* directed by Okabe Aomi, co-commissioner of the *Japon des avant-gardes, 1910–1970* exhibition at the Pompidou Center in 1986. Okabe asked Tanaka to recreate *Electric Dress* for the exhibition.³⁴ Sitting against the backdrop of *1985B* in a still from Okabe's film showing the work (fig. 10), Germain Viatte, who had been involved in the founding of the Centre National d'Art Contemporain in 1967, served as curator from 1975–85 at the Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, and was director of the National Museum of Modern Art and Industrial Creation from 1992–97, and became head of the General Inspectorate of the Musees de France, Museology Project Director of the Musee du quai Branly, talked about seeing Tanaka's work when he visited Japan to do research for *Japon des avant-gardes*.³⁵ In the 1980s Tanaka received requests to recreate *Bell* and *Electric Dress* for the Yamamura Collection and the *Japon des avant-gardes* exhibition. Her recognition was growing as more of her works were being exhibited in Japan and overseas and Gutai was being re-evaluated in Japanese contemporary art being introduced overseas. As if to meet that demand, she produced two 500 format paintings in 1985 and one in 1986. Of only two known large works with large circles as the core composition, one, the vertically oriented *Untitled* (1964), is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Kato asserts that this painting would not work compositionally if it were positioned horizontally.³⁶ The two large solid circles of *1985B* bring stability to the whole while the smaller concentric circles create a rhythm. The lines running outside the circles weaken the centripetal force, giving a feeling of energy moving horizontally and vertically across the picture plane and enveloped by the large circles. Moreover, the acrylic lacquer paint that Tanaka started to use in the early 1970s³⁷ brought a more even and uniform color surface that stands out in comparison with *Untitled* (1965, fig. 1).³⁸ Kato described the effect of the paint as 'physically creating the sense of an opaque plastic sheet stretched over the canvas, blocking the viewer's gaze toward the depth of the painting and instead pushing it forward. For *Untitled* (1965), the overlap of the lines left by vinyl paint Tanaka used at the time give a feeling of crawling opaque vinyl wrapped cables and multi-layered circles and lines. *1985B* is flatter and the feeling of blocking the line of sight toward the back and pushing in forward' is strong. The color saturation of *1985B* is more subdued than *Untitled*, so the eye is not drawn to any particular part of the painting. The overall composition is stable and the great variety of intertwining lines can be seen, one by one, from a close distance. The acrylic lacquer paint, when exposed to strong light, is glossy and has an energy that seems to be flowing from electricity.(fig. 9) Comparing the two paintings that differ in size, composition, and paint gives a glimpse of stylistic changes in Tanaka's 'circle and line paintings' and the wide range of her creative output. These two paintings, one from just before leaving the Gutai Association and the other a large-scale work from the mid-1980s, stand out perhaps

because of their distance from the early Gutai period.

As mentioned above, works by Gutai Art Association artists in the Artizon Museum collection are generally from the Gutai middle period dating from the early to mid 1960s and, in comparison with other museums, there are few works from the Gutai early period. At the same time, being a latecomer in collecting Gutai art gives the Artizon Museum an advantage in creating a Gutai collection with distinctive features. Moreover, analysis of Artizon's two works, *Untitled* (1965) and *1985B*, produced by Tanaka when she was distanced from the Gutai Association mentally or through time, may make it possible to illuminate the image of Tanaka as independent from the Gutai movement after she withdrew from it. Also, for the very reason that it is late, informed by research and analysis conducted over time, the Artizon collection of works by artists who participated in Gutai, can present new perspectives different from prevailing art history views. Aside from Gutai, many movements, concepts of art history, and works of art need to be re-examined. It is expected that the Ishibashi Foundation Artizon Museum that opened in 2020 has the potential to create such new art history interpretations for a new era.

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(Translated by Cheryl Silverman)

Notes

1. See the Gutai member list, including enrollment and withdrawal years in Ming Tiampo, "Appendix 2: Gutai Artists," *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 181–182.
2. "The Ishibashi Collection and the Artizon Museum," *Artizon Museum 200 Highlights, The Ishibashi Foundation Collection* (Tokyo: Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation, 2020), pp. 9–13. Shimbata Yasuhide, "ARTIZON MUSEUM, STEPS AHEAD," *STEPS AHEAD: Recent Acquisitions*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation, 2021), pp. 15–18.
3. On the reception of Art Informel at the time, see the roundtable discussion with Imai Toshimitsu, Hariu Ichiro, and Yamaguchi Katsuhiko, "Regarding Art Informel: Western and Eastern Traditions and the Present," *Bijutsu Techo*, No. 131, October 1957, pp. 15–26. (in Japanese)
4. On the Yamamura collection's relation with Gutai, see Suzuki Yoshiko "The Making of the Yamamura Collection: Focus on Gutai" in *The Yamamura Collection: Gutai and the Japanese Avant-garde 1950s–1980s*, exh. cat. (Hyogo: Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, 2019), pp. 16–19. (in Japanese)
5. "Birth and Challenge: Early Period 1954–1957," "Leaping and Development: Middle Period 1957–1965," "Maturing and the End: Late Period 1965–1972," Hirai Shoichi ed. and writer, *What's GUTAI?*, planned by Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Bijutsu Shuppan-Sha, 2004. (in Japanese)
6. Chiba Shigeo, *History of Deviation in Modern Art, 1945–1985* (Tokyo: Shobunsha, 1986), pp. 55–56. (in Japanese)
7. This was the first comprehensive exhibition in Europe to introduce post-war Japanese art. Okabe Aomi, the co-commissioner, had Tanaka Atsuko recreate her *Electric Dress* (1986), now in the Takamatsu Art Museum collection.
8. Hikosaka Naoyoshi, "Beyond the Closed Circle: what we see in the traces of Gutai," *Bijutsu Techo*, vol. 370 August (1973), pp. 72–92. (in Japanese)

9. Tatehata Akita, "Creating Tableaux: 1950's Gutai Art Association," *Action and Emotion, Painting in the 50s, Informel, Gutai, Cobra*, exh. cat. (Osaka: National Museum of Art, 1985), p. 18. (in Japanese)
10. Osaki Shinichiro, "Creation and Continuity, Restudy of the Gutai Art Association <1>," *A&C: art & critic*, vol. 1, Research Center of Art and Culture, Kyoto Junior College of Art, July, 1987, pp. 42–48. (in Japanese)
11. Hirai Shoichi, op. cit., p. 18; Hikosaka Naoyoshi, op. cit. pp. 86–87 on the idea originating with Yoshihara showing his work to Léonard Foujita, back from Paris in 1929, and being told that his painting was too much influenced by other painters.
12. Yoshihara Jiro "Gutai Art Manifesto" in *Geijutsu Shincho*, December 1956, p. 203.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
14. Hirai Shoichi "Gutai: A Utopia of the Modern Spirit" in *GUTAI: The Spirit of an Era*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: The National Art Center, 2012), pp. 243–244.
15. Hirai Shoichi "Gutai—Toward a Reconsideration" in Hirai Shoichi, ed., *What's GUTAI?*, op. cit., pp. 168–173.
16. Tatehata, op. cit., p. 18.
17. Kuroda Raiji, "The concept behind Gutai", *Bijutsu Techo*, vol. 623, May (1990), pp. 109–122.
18. "Artist Interview 1: Tanaka Atsuko: Kaiga no denki guruvu [Electric Groove in Painting]", *Bijutsu Techo*, no. 808, July 2001, pp. 109–117.
19. Nakajima Izumi, "Tanaka Atsuko no en to sen no kaiga [Tanaka Atsuko's Painting of Circles and Lines]", *GENSHA* [Research Bulletin of Hitotsubashi University Graduate School of Language and Society], No. 5, 11 March 2011, pp. 285–303.
The 'circle and line paintings' nomenclature came about from the interview noted above where Tanaka said, 'Since I started with circles and lines, I have to make good paintings. I have always had a sense of mission to do that. I'm going to break away from it and start anew.(referring to the 2001 exhibition *Atsuko Tanaka: Search for an Unknown Aesthetic* at the Ashiya City Museum of Art and History). In this paper, we go along with Nakajima and use the term 'circle and line paintings' to refer to the series of paintings of circles and lines developed from the electric clothing drawings, since Tanaka considered those paintings to be in the same series, even if there was a change in style.
20. Kuroda, op. cit., pp. 118–119.
21. Kato Mizuho, "Searching for a Boundary," in exh. cat., *Atsuko Tanaka: Search for an Unknown Aesthetic, 1954–2000*, Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art eds. (the Executive Committee for Tanaka Atsuko exhibition, Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, 2001), pp. 15–25.
22. Ming Tiampo, "Electrifying Art," in Ming Tiampo and Mizuho Kato eds., *Electrifying Art: Atsuko Tanaka, 1954–1968*, Vancouver, BC: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2004, pp. 63–77.
23. Nakajima, op. cit.
24. Kato Mizuho, "Tanaka Atsuko, *Spring 1966* — How Electric Dress was Transformed to the Picture Plane," *Philocaria*, No. 29, Osaka University Graduate School of Letters, Department of Arts and Art History, 2012, pp. 105–127. (in Japanese)
25. Dehara Hitoshi, "A Study of Two Paintings by Tanaka Atsuko: *Work* (1958, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art Collection) and *Work* (1959, Hiroshima City Museum of Art Collection)," *Bulletin of the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art*, No.9 (2015), pp. 4–15.
26. Nakajima Izumi, "Anti-Action," *Brücke*, 2019, pp. 217–276. Developing her theory on Tanaka's 'circle and line paintings,' Nakajima also takes into account works and reviews of Yayoi Kusama and Fukushima Hideko, and sheds light throughout her essay on aspects of the works of Japanese post-war female artists that differ from 'action' and have been overlooked.
27. Kato Mizuho, ed., "List of Works," *Atsuko Tanaka*, op. cit., pp. 166–193.
28. Kato "Tanaka Atsuko *Spring 1966*" op. cit., pp. 112–113.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 112–113.
30. Artwork purchase materials, Ishibashi Foundation internal records.
31. Kato, op. cit., p. 113. (This paper's author has not been able to directly confirm the inscription.)
32. September 9, 1985 interview at Kanayama's home in Asuka, Nara Prefecture. See Yamamura Tokutaro and Osaki Shinichiro, "Interview. Kanayama Akira — Tanaka Atsuko" in *Document Gutai 1954–1972* (Ashiya: Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, Ashiya City Cultural Foundation, 1993), p. 398.
33. *ATSUKO TANAKA, Peintures* (1987, Galerie Stadler, Paris; 'GUTAI...suite? After Gutai?' 1993, Palais des Arts, Toulouse), Kato, *List of Works*, op. cit., p. 182.
34. Okabe Aomi, dir., *Another GUTAI: Tanaka Atsuko*, produced by Ufer! Art Documentary (1998), 45mins.
35. According to Kishimoto Yasushi of Ufer! Art Documentary who was involved in its production, the film was shot in 1998 and Viatte took it out of storage at the back of the gallery for the photo.
36. Kato, "Tanaka Atsuko *Spring 1966*," op.cit., p. 108.
37. At the beginning, she used the Isamn paint Company's VIBY vinyl paint but in the early 1970s when the number of its production decreased, she switched to Isamu's acrylic lacquer Atron 3000. See *Ibid.*, note 21, p. 126 for details.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

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