

gutai
splendid playground

gutai

splendid playground

FEBRUARY 15, 2013–MAY 8, 2013

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Teacher Resource Unit

A NOTE TO TEACHERS

Gutai: Splendid Playground is the first U.S. museum retrospective exhibition ever devoted to Gutai, the most influential artists' collective and artistic movement in postwar Japan and among the most important international avant-garde movements of the 1950s and 1960s. The exhibition aims to demonstrate Gutai's extraordinary range of bold and innovative creativity; to examine its aesthetic strategies in the cultural, social, and political context of postwar Japan and the West; and to further establish Gutai in an expanded history of modern art. Organized thematically and chronologically to explore Gutai's unique approach to materials, process, and performativity, this exhibition explores the group's radical experimentation across a range of mediums and styles, and demonstrates how individual artists pushed the limits of what art could be and mean in a post-atomic age. The range includes painting (gestural abstraction and post-constructivist abstraction), conceptual art, experimental performance and film, indoor and outdoor installation art, sound art, mail art, interactive or "playful" art, light art, and kinetic art. The Guggenheim show comprises some 120 objects by twenty-five artists on loan from major museum and private collections in Japan, the United States, and Europe, and features both iconic and lesser-known Gutai works to present a rich survey reflecting new scholarship, especially on so-called "second phase" works dating from 1962–72. *Gutai: Splendid Playground* is organized by Ming Tiampo, Associate Professor of Art History, Carleton University, and Alexandra Munroe, Samsung Senior Curator of Asian Art, Guggenheim Museum.

This Resource Unit focuses on various aspects of Gutai's approach to art making and provides techniques for exploring both the visual arts and other areas of the curriculum. This guide is also available on the museum's website at www.guggenheim.org/artscurriculum with images that can be downloaded or projected for classroom use. The images may be used for education purposes only and are not licensed for commercial applications of any kind. Before bringing your class to the Guggenheim, we invite you to visit the exhibition, read the guide, and decide which aspects of the exhibitions are most relevant to your students. For more information, and to schedule a visit for your class, please call 212 423 3637.

Gutai: Splendid Playground is supported in part by the Henry Luce Foundation.

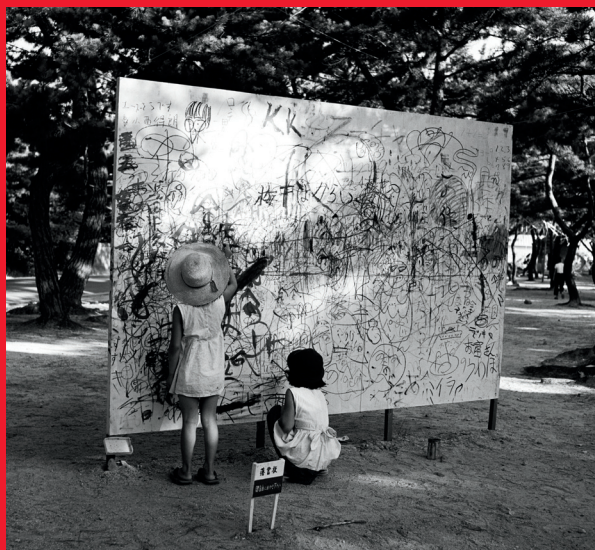
Additional funding is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, The Japan Foundation, the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Mitsubishi Corporation (Americas), the W.L.S. Spencer Foundation, Tokio Marine Holdings, the United States–Japan Foundation, and the Dedalus Foundation, Inc.

The Leadership Committee for *Gutai: Splendid Playground* is gratefully acknowledged for its support: Hauser & Wirth, Yoko Ono Lennon, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, Rachel and Jean-Pierre Lehmann, Cindy and Howard Rachofsky, Tina Kim and Jae Woong Chung, Marianne Boesky Gallery, Richard Roth, and those who wish to remain anonymous.

*As contradictory as it may sound, I believe that the most useful thing to think or do is that which is deemed useless from a conventional standpoint, because it will truly prove that we are alive.*¹

< PLAY >

During World War II, control over artistic expression in Japan was strict. Military rule permitted only paintings that glorified the war effort, and art supplies were difficult to obtain. Gutai arose from this context, and in opposition to it. In the postwar years, Gutai emphasized the importance of originality. Founded by Yoshihara Jirō (1905–1972), a wealthy industrialist and self-taught artist, Gutai embraced Yoshihara’s axiom, “Do what has never been done before!” Gutai members also advocated for the value of play, which the group considered key to creating a foundation for a strong democracy. The group believed the artist should play, and so should the artist’s audience, through participatory acts. In this way, art would encourage audiences to think and act freely.



Yoshihara Jirō, *Please Draw Freely*, 1956. Paint and marker on wood, approximately 200 x 450 x 3 cm. Installation view: *Outdoor Gutai Art Exhibition*, Ashiya Park, Ashiya, July 27–August 5, 1956.
© The former members of the Gutai Art Association. Courtesy Museum of Osaka University

Children were a primary audience for Gutai because they held the key to a future free of totalitarianism. By nurturing their creativity, children could be taught to think and act for themselves. Acting on this philosophy, members of Gutai were involved with art education at many levels—including teaching children, organizing an exhibition of children’s art, and contributing to the children’s poetry magazine *Kirin* (Giraffe). Articles in *Kirin* were often addressed to parents. In “To Mothers, 1956,” Tanaka Atsuko (1932–2005) counseled parents to raise children using a child-centered approach, “without pressure and constraint,” and without subjecting them to adult notions of art and beauty.²

Gutai members wanted both children *and* adults to play. Exhibitions staged in a park invited visitors to enter, walk around, touch, contribute to, and reflect on artworks, just as the artists had when creating them. “What I consider **avant-garde** is the involvement of ordinary people in the production of a work of art,” wrote Gutai artist Shimamoto Shōzō (b. 1928).³

In Yoshihara’s *Please Draw Freely* (1956), viewers became artists. Adults and children were presented with a board and markers and invited to add their own creative marks. According to Ming Tiampo, co-curator of this exhibition, Yoshihara’s work “embraced the possibilities of collective creativity, broke down the hierarchy between artist and audience, and harnessed the creativity of children.”⁴

VIEW + DISCUSS

Read the statements below to students. If they agree, they should stand to the right. If they disagree, they should stand to the left.

- Artists should make their own artwork.
- Art should be finished before it is placed in a museum.
- New artworks should never repeat what has been made before.

After each statement, ask students to back up their position.

Show: Yoshihara Jirō, *Please Draw Freely* (1956)

- ▶ Ask students what they notice about the photograph. What is happening in it?
- ▶ To create this artwork, Yoshihara placed a signboard and markers in an outdoor exhibition and invited people to draw. Ask students to imagine what it would feel like to participate in this artwork. What would they have drawn?
- ▶ The artist was obsessed with originality, exhorting other artists to “do what has never been done before!” Ask students how this artwork is different from other artworks they have encountered.
- ▶ Yoshihara believed that playful art could lead to a solid democracy in Japan. Do students agree? Ask students to respond to this quote by Shimamoto: “I myself wonder if good kids who always do what grown-ups tell them can lose the ability to decide right and wrong on their own.”⁵
- ▶ Return to the statements above. Have students’ responses changed?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Gutai artists created collaborative artworks. As a class, experiment with simple ways to create artworks collaboratively.
 1. Give each student paper and a pencil. Tell them to draw five lines, then pass their paper to someone else. That student should add five more lines and pass it to someone else. Continue this process at least five times.
 2. Tell students to draw something in the room. Then tell them to tear it up into five pieces. Trade the torn pieces of paper with a partner. Collage a new artwork with pieces from both your drawing and your partner’s.
 3. Tell students to sit back-to-back with a partner so they cannot see each other. Tell each other what to draw in as much detail as possible.

After each experiment, ask questions such as: Is the product what you envisioned when you started? What do you like or dislike about this kind of collaborative process?

- Gutai artists highly valued audience participation. In *Gutai Card Box* (1962), for instance, audience members contributed money to charity to receive an original artwork from a “vending machine” with an artist inside. In Kanayama Akira’s (1924–2005) *Footprints* (1956), a long canvas with stenciled footprints enjoined visitors to step on and follow its path. As a class, brainstorm more methods for creating audience participation. In small groups, create interactive artworks. Then, present these artworks in a class exhibition. Reflect as a class on how it feels to be the artist and/or the audience of a participatory artwork.
- Gutai members emphasized the importance of children. Many of the artists contributed to the children’s poetry magazine *Kirin*. In 1956, Tanaka wrote an article titled “To Mothers, 1956,” in which she encouraged mothers to parent in ways that would create citizens of a strong democracy who thought and acted freely. Write an article titled “To Mothers” (or “To Parents and Guardians”) that addresses the question: What should parents do to raise children for a better world?
- In 1963, Ukita Yōzō (b. 1924) wrote an article titled “On Being Weird.” Read students this excerpt and discuss it: “In my opinion. . .we need to be ‘weirdos’ to the very core. If a person is not a weirdo, he has no value as a human being. . . . We are all blessed, born with something weird. Please start looking immediately for whatever is weird in you.”⁶ Ask students to write their own article titled “On Being Weird.”

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.⁷

< CONCEPT >

When, in 1955, a group of artists known as Zero Society (Zero-kai) merged with Gutai, they pushed Gutai to expand its definition of art. For Zero Society artists, the content of an artwork mattered less than the concept. They asked the question: Can an idea be a work of art? In addition, their art materials included not only everyday materials, but also time, chance, sound, unaltered factory-made materials, mechanical reproductions, and technical drawings.

Works by original Zero Society artists varied widely. Kanayama Akira's (1924–2006) paintings were more conceptual and systematic rather than emotional. He created a series of gridded works reminiscent of the Dutch artist Piet Mondrian (1872–1944). He also experimented with **automation** by creating a painting using an automatic toy car. Murakami Saburō's (1925–1996) works, on the other hand, were more exuberant. He turned performance into painting by throwing objects through paper or leaping through paper himself. In 1956, for *All the Landscapes*, he hung an empty picture frame from tree branches in an outdoor Gutai exhibition, making the work dependent on the viewer's position and perspective.

Tanaka Atsuko (1932–2005) experimented with the use of non-art materials. She created Gutai's first sound art piece. Her installation of electric bells wound along the gallery floor. Visitors were invited by a sign—"Please push this button"—to set off a loud bell tone sequence, which defined the architectural



Tanaka Atsuko, *Work (Yellow Cloth)*, 1955. Commercially dyed cotton, three parts, 100 x 208 cm, 100 x 202 cm, and 100 x 377 cm. Gallery HAM, Nagoya, Japan. Courtesy Gallery HAM

space through sound, creating what Tanaka thought of as a line in space like a painting's brushstroke. Shimamoto Shōzō (b. 1928) called it "perhaps the first ever invisible work in the history of art."⁸ At the same exhibition, Tanaka presented two installations made of large sheets of factory-made cloth. One of them, *Work (Yellow Cloth)* (1955), consisted of seven sheets of yellow cotton hung as paintings, with their edges occasionally scored and re-glued—her only artistic intervention. In this way, the yellow cloth mostly derived its artistic status through a change in context—from the everyday world to the gallery walls.

Gutai artists' conceptualism was partly inspired by **Dada**, an art movement that advocated breaking down the boundary between art and life. It was also inspired by children and their thinking about art. In 1956, a third-grader submitted an unusual artwork to a children's art exhibition in which Gutai members were involved: old bricks tied together with rubber bands. Tanaka praised the student's act of conceptual transformation: "Because she presented it as a work, it became different from things we see around us."⁹

VIEW + DISCUSS

- ▶ Ask students to brainstorm qualities they expect an artwork to have.

Show: Tanaka Atsuko, *Work (Yellow Cloth)* (1955)

- ▶ Ask students what they notice about the work. Tell students this work consists of seven sheets of virtually unaltered yellow cotton hung as paintings. How would students have to change their definition of art and/or painting for it to include this work?
- ▶ Some people say the change of a material's context alone—moving the cloth from everyday life to a gallery—is enough to qualify it as art. Tanaka was well known for making art with everyday materials, including a dress made of lightbulbs. She said of a third-grader's artwork made of bricks tied together by rubber bands: “[She] did not try to tie bricks beautifully. . . . Because she presented it as a work, it became different from things we see around us.”¹⁰ What do students think about this idea?
- ▶ Tell students that this kind of work is considered “conceptual,” meaning its idea is more important than its content. Which ideas does this work seem to be exploring?
- ▶ Gutai, like art movements before it, perceived an artificial separation between art and life and wanted to break down that boundary. Ask students to imagine a world with no boundary between art and life and describe how their lives would change.
- ▶ The premise of the art group, Zero Society, that influenced Gutai's conceptualism was: “Every work of art begins from nothing.”¹¹ Ask students what they think of this statement. What does it mean in the context of *Work (Yellow Cloth)*? Do they think it is—or should be—true?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Artworks like Tanaka's have been the source of many debates about the definition of art. Stage a debate as a class. Address the question: Can a virtually unaltered piece of cloth be a work of art? Divide the class into two groups. One group should argue that Tanaka's artwork is art. The other group should argue that it is not. Talk to students about the kinds of evidence they can present to back up their arguments. They may have to research the history of art, especially primary documents such as artist quotes, legal documents, or court trials. At the end of the debate, ask the class which side they think presented the most compelling argument and why. Has anyone changed his or her opinion?
- Gutai artists believed an idea could be a work of art. Often, these ideas were about the definition of art. Ask students to work with a partner to list traditional ideas about what makes something art. Some traditional ideas include: art is created by an artist, made with traditional art materials, hangs on a wall or stands on a pedestal, requires “skill” or “hard work,” and is “complete” before the viewer encounters it. Ask partners to work together to think of ways artists could break these “rules” of art. For instance, what unusual materials could be used as art materials? (For Gutai artists, those materials included everyday materials, time, chance, and sound.) Ask students to sketch or write an idea with their partner for a work of art that breaks a traditional “rule” of art.
- Throughout the 20th century, artists' movements have expressed their principles through manifestos. In 1956, Yoshihara Jirō (1905–1972) wrote a **manifesto** stating his vision for postwar Japanese art. Discuss the idea of a manifesto with your students. Read this excerpt from Yoshihara's manifesto. What do students notice about the ideas and the language?

Gutai Art does not alter matter. Gutai Art imparts life to matter. Gutai Art does not distort matter.

In Gutai Art, the human spirit and matter shake hands with each other, while keeping their distance. Matter never compromises itself with the spirit; the spirit never dominates matter. When matter remains intact and exposes its characteristics, it starts telling a story and even cries out.¹²

Research other manifestos in art history—including the Futurist manifesto (1909), the Surrealist manifesto (1924 and 1929), and the de Stijl manifesto (1918). Challenge students to write their own manifestos capturing their visions for what art should be. They should ask themselves questions such as: Where should art be displayed? What should art *not* be? Should art influence politics?

*In Gutai Art, the human spirit and matter shake hands with each other, while keeping their distance. Matter never compromises itself with the spirit; the spirit never dominates matter. When matter remains intact and exposes its characteristics, it starts telling a story and even cries out.*¹³

< MATERIALS >

The word *gutai* means “concreteness” in Japanese. The meaning captures the group’s interest in direct engagement with raw materials through physical action. After the moral and physical devastation of war and the Cold War specter of atomic annihilation, Yoshihara Jirō (1905–1972) wanted to embrace **concrete**, everyday existence. Inspired in part by “the scream of matter itself”¹⁴ in Jackson Pollock’s (1912–1956) drip paintings, he rejected art that sought to represent nature. Instead he sought to create art that recorded the interaction of the human spirit with matter while allowing matter to maintain its own characteristics. Yoshihara wrote, “When matter remains intact and exposes its characteristics, it starts telling a story and even cries out.”¹⁵

In response to a lack of available art materials in the postwar era, Gutai artists selected materials that were easily available and more democratic: glue, mud, candles, newspapers, even the sky. In Murakami Saburō’s (1925–1996) *Work (Sky)* (1956), visitors entered an outdoor cylindrical tent to view the sky above. Some works embraced the materials of the postwar landscape, such as Tanaka Atsuko’s (1932–2005) *Electric Dress* (1956), inspired by neon signs, and Yamazaki Tsuruko’s (b. 1925) *Tin Cans* (1955), which was made up of detritus from the American occupation. Other works explored traditional Japanese materials— such as candles that referenced Japanese lanterns. Later, in the 1960s, Gutai artists explored more technological and cutting-edge industrial materials.

Gutai artists investigated materials through physical action, often as performances in front of audiences. In Shiraga Kazuo’s (1924–2008) iconic *Challenging Mud* (1955), the artist crawled half-naked into a pile of mud, wrestling and struggling against the earth. Finally, he emerged bruised and cut, leaving a “sculptural elegy of conflict,”¹⁶ a symbol of struggles in the totalitarian regime that ruled Japan during the war.

The Gutai artist often ceded some control of the process to the material. In Motonaga Sadamasa’s (b. 1922) *Work (Water)* (1956), long, transparent plastic tubes filled with colored water were suspended from pine tree branches. The strands of color were activated by the natural elements—sunlight shining through them and wind blowing to create waves. In the Guggenheim’s exhibition, this work is suspended across the rotunda designed by Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959).

In order to explore the tactile qualities of material, Gutai artists often destroyed materials. Interested in the intersection between creation and destruction, Shimamoto Shōzō’s (b. 1928) *Work* (1954) exposed the fragility of the painting surface. After World War II, too poor to afford canvas, Shimamoto invented a new support, which he called “paper-vas,” by gluing together layers of newspaper and covering them with **gesso**, a white paint used as a base coat to prime canvas. He discovered that the brittle paper-vas collapsed in the places where he drew with pencil and created a work of art through the unintended destruction.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Shimamoto Shōzō, *Work* (1954)

- ▶ Ask students what they notice about the work. Prompt them to describe the marks and the surface. What areas are difficult to decipher?
- ▶ Ask students to compare *Work* to other paintings they know.
- ▶ After the war, Shimamoto was too poor to afford canvas, so to make this artwork he glued layers of newspaper together and then drew over them with a pencil. He discovered that the pencil pierced the brittle surface. Have students ever discovered something about a material that surprised them?
- ▶ The title of this artwork is *Work*. Many Gutai artists named their artworks *Work*. As a title, it emphasized the physical qualities while denying any literary, figurative, or symbolic meaning. Do students think this is a good title? Why or why not? If you could give it another title, what would it be?
- ▶ In Yoshihara's manifesto, he writes, "When matter remains intact and exposes its characteristics, it starts telling a story and even cries out."¹⁷ Do students think this quote applies to *Work*? Why or why not?
- ▶ Shimamoto was also known for his practice of painting with explosions. In *Breaking Open the Object* (1956), he smashed paint-filled glass bottles, exploding paint onto his canvases to show how the act of destruction could lead to creation. Ask students what they think about this idea.
- ▶ Yoshihara praised Pollock's drip paintings as capturing the "scream of matter itself." Watch the video "Jackson Pollock 51" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7blCqvmKL5s>. Have students compare Shimamoto's process and product to Pollock's.

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Gutai artists were interested in the direct engagement of physical actions with raw materials—especially natural and everyday materials. First, collect everyday and natural materials—such as leaves, straw, and orange peels. Have students divide a piece of paper into three columns. In one column, make a list of physical actions—such as scratching and stomping. In another, make a list of natural and/or everyday materials. In the third, make a list of alternative tools for manipulating materials—such as cotton swabs, fingers, and twigs. Then ask students to choose one element from each column to experiment with. Encourage them to find their own way to express themselves using the materials, tools, and actions. If time permits, repeat this last step. Discuss their discoveries. Which types of materials, tools, and actions do they prefer, and why?
- In Gutai artworks the "spirit never dominates matter." Often, Gutai artists cede control over the process to the material, to chance, or to nature. Brainstorm methods for making a painting or drawing without full control. Methods can be as simple as closing your eyes or dripping paint. Explore these brainstormed methods. Ask students what they discover. Do they prefer to be in control, to let the material take over, or a combination of the two polarities? Why?
- Shimamoto was interested in how destroying materials could help him create something new. He smashed glass bottles filled with paint on a canvas and soaked found filmstrips in vinegar to degrade the sound and image (before painting and projecting them). Give every student a selection of materials: paper, clay, old film or slides, and foam. Ask them to explore the materials through destruction. What kind of physical actions can destroy the materials? What does the act of destruction teach them about the materials? Can creation come out of destruction?



Shimamoto Shōzō, *Work*, 1954.
Paint on newspaper,
162 x 127 x 4 cm.
Ashiya City Museum of Art &
History, Japan. Courtesy Ashiya
City Museum of Art & History

*So if you want to do something, that means you are alive. If you do it, then that proves that you are alive. . . . Speaking of doing what you want to do, there is one method you can always count on that uses only what you have in front of you. Think hard.*¹⁸

< TIME AND SPACE >

Gutai artists viewed all forms of artistic expression as interrelated. For them, paintings could be created through performance, and performances could be a form of painting. As Murakami Saburō (1925–1996) wrote in 1957, Gutai artists aspired to “create a new painting.” He recommended “discarding the frame, getting off the walls, shifting from immobile time to lived time.”¹⁹

Reacting directly to the legacy of Abstract Expressionism and Jackson Pollock’s (1912–1956) drip technique, Gutai artists created radical and early responses in the mid-1950s that eschewed the paintbrush. As Shimamoto Shōzō (b. 1928) wrote in “Killing the Paintbrush” (1956), “It is only once the paintbrush has been discarded that the paint can be revived.”²⁰ Shimamoto substituted the brush with glass bottles of paint he smashed onto the canvas and paint he shot out of a homemade cannon. Sumi Yasuo (b. 1925) painted with an **abacus**, a vibrating device, and a paper umbrella; other artists used tools such as a watering can, a bicycle, an automatic toy car, and their own feet. Murakami used his body to alter the picture plane by literally bursting through paper in his *Paper-Breaking* series (1956), thus defying the traditional painting boundaries of both time and space.

Shiraga Kazuo (1924–2008) and Kanayama Akira (1924–2006) represent two poles of Gutai’s experiments with process. Shiraga painted with his feet, thus creating a direct encounter between his body and materials. Kanayama, on the other hand, painted with an automatic toy car. By mediating

his process through a mechanical device, he removed personal or psychological expression from his work—a clear critique of Pollock. Still, as curator Ming Tiampo writes, both artists “viewed their innovations in process as acts of individual liberty that freed them from artistic convention.”²¹

Even when works did not involve paint at all, they still harkened back to formal ideas of painting. Gutai artists made moving “pictures” in time and space. In Shiraga’s *Ultramodern Sanbasō* (1957), the artist performed in a red costume with long sleeves, a mask, and a cone-shaped hat to create a “picture” that resembled an undulating red line. In Tanaka Atsuko’s (1932–2005) performance, *Electric Dress* (1956), performers wore costumes made of incandescent lightbulbs painted in bright yellow, green, red, and blue that were set to flash. Their movements set the formal painting elements of light and color into motion.



Shiraga Kazuo demonstrating his signature painting style during the *2nd Gutai Art Exhibition*, Ohara Kaikan, Tokyo, ca. October 11–17, 1956. The completed eight-meter-long painting was then installed in the exhibition hall. Photo: Ōtsuji Seiko Collection, Musashino Art University Museum & Library, Tokyo. © Ōtsuji Seiko. Courtesy Musashino Art University Museum & Library. Photo by Ōtsuji Kiyoji

VIEW + DISCUSS

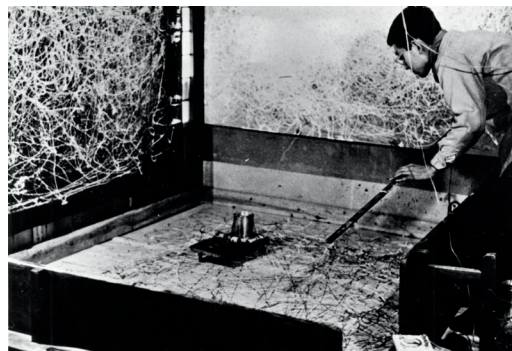
Show: Photographs of Shiraga Kazuo and Kanayama Akira making their art.

- ▶ Ask students to describe what they see the artists doing.
- ▶ Compare these painting methods to each other and to more traditional methods. Shiraga's process creates a direct encounter between his body and the material, while Kanayama's takes his body out of the process. How do these differences affect the process and the product?
- ▶ As Shimamoto wrote, "It is only once the paintbrush has been discarded that the paint can be revived."²² Why do students think he said this? Do they agree or disagree? What are some methods students can think of for getting paint on a surface without a paintbrush?
- ▶ Shiraga wrote an essay called "The Formation of the Individual" (1956) to accompany his piece *Challenging Mud* (in which he wrestled with mud). He wrote, "People need first of all to understand the personal material they were born with. This material expresses one's difference from others and comes out when a person watches and feels, talks, paints, or makes sounds. Each person should develop their own way of feeling, talking, and painting."²³ Read this quote to students and ask them to respond to it. What do they think their "personal material" is?
- ▶ Shiraga went on: "The stronger a person's will, the more the person can resist external forces." Do students think an understanding of our "personal material" can help us "resist external forces"? Why or why not? Give examples.

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Gutai artists were interested in how they could apply paint to a surface without using a paintbrush. They used tools such as a homemade cannon, an abacus, a vibrating device, a paper umbrella, a watering can, a bicycle, an automatic toy car, and their own feet. Set up an "art lab" where students can experiment with different methods. Have paint, paper, and other everyday materials available, including toys, plastic straws, and balloons. Students should come dressed for messiness and also bring potential paintbrush substitutes from home. Ask students to work with a partner to experiment with at least three methods and, on a chart, record notes about how their new methods compare to using a paintbrush. What changes about the process and product? How much can they control? How much is chance? (As an alternative, this activity can be done with water instead of paint, so that even water balloons can be thrown to make marks on a surface such as an outdoor wall.)
- Some Gutai artists created paintings or "pictures" without paint, paintbrushes, or even a surface. They performed on stage wearing costumes in dances that addressed the same formal elements as painting. Have students create a performance with just their bodies and costumes that uses the formal elements of painting, including, light, color, and line. How can their performances become pictures?
- In a poem by Shimamoto, he lists alternatives to traditional art materials. Under "Paint," he lists, among other things, time, the rainbow, heat, magic ink, blood, and spots of dirt from the neighboring painting. Under "Brush," he lists a sheath of straw, time, an electric cooker, a sponge, a cannon, and somebody's footsteps. Under "Canvas," he lists a trash can, stone, air, a mirage, a street with cement surface, a wedding dress, and myself.²⁴ Ask students what they think about the objects or ideas he lists. How do they connect to what students have seen of Shimamoto's work? Next, ask them to write their own "list poem" in which they imagine replacements for art's traditional materials.



Kanayama Akira painting with an automatic toy car, 1957.
© The former members of the Gutai Art Association.
Courtesy Museum of Osaka University

This publication has been created to introduce [our] works to the world.²⁵

< NETWORK >

Before it even held its first official exhibition, Gutai published the *Gutai* journal. Based in relatively isolated Ashiya—a small town in western Japan whose largest neighbor is Osaka—and coming out of the isolation of wartime Japan, Yoshihara Jirō (1905–1972) felt strongly that the group had to introduce themselves to the world. Not only did he want to reach the center of the Japanese art world, in Tokyo, but also the centers of the art world abroad—in New York and Paris—and the places in between.

Spanning ten years and twelve issues, the journal included photographs of Gutai works and performances, essays by Gutai artists, and even photographs of artworks by their international peers. It was partially translated into English and French.

Yoshihara had not traveled much abroad, but he had collected art journals from all over the world, and he perceived the barriers to entry into the international art world as largely geographic. He created a vast **network** of like-minded artists, critics, and curators by sending the journals far and wide to people he admired.

In the United States, Jackson Pollock's (1912–1956) biographer, B. H. Friedman (1926–2011), found the journal among Pollock's papers and subscribed. He then introduced *Gutai* to other artists. In France, the influential critic Michel Tapié (1909–1987) began a long and fruitful partnership with Gutai after reading the journal.



Gutai 11 (November 11, 1960). Special issue edited by Michel Tapié and Yoshihara Jirō that served as catalogue for The International Sky Festival and 9th Gutai Art Exhibition; introduction by Tapié. © The former members of the Gutai Art Association. Courtesy Museum of Osaka University

Gutai established methods for international connection beyond just the printed page. Members participated in exhibitions abroad, invited artists to participate in their exhibitions in Japan, hosted residencies, and even built their own museum, the Gutai **Pinacotheca** in 1962. For eight years, the Pinacotheca showed works by Gutai and international artists, acted as a physical hub for this network, and became a destination for members of the art world visiting Japan.

In 1960, Gutai invited artists from abroad to exhibit in their *International Sky Festival* in Osaka. To avoid the enormous fees of shipping full-sized works on canvas from abroad, artists were asked to send sketches that Gutai members enlarged and transferred onto banners. These banners were suspended from large, tethered helium balloons in the sky.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Cover of *Gutai* 11 (November 11, 1960)

- ▶ Ask students what they notice. Ask them to think about the covers of magazines with which they are familiar. What are the functions of these covers? Does the cover for *Gutai* 11 seem to fill these functions?
- ▶ Next, look together at journal pages from *Gutai* 11. What do students notice? How do they relate to the cover, if at all?
- ▶ Tell students that these images are from the eleventh issue of *Gutai*, a publication of artwork and essays on art that Gutai artists started even before they had their first exhibition. Ask students why they think artists might want to put together a journal of their artwork and essays.
- ▶ Look at a world map or globe together. Find western Japan and the city of Osaka. Gutai artists were centered in a small town not far from Osaka named Ashiya. Now, ask students to find France, Holland, Italy, South Africa, and the United States. Gutai artists wanted to be in touch with artists in all of these places. Ask students what they think the challenges might be in making connections with artists in these places. How could they be in touch—now and then?
- ▶ This issue of *Gutai* documented the 1960 *International Sky Festival* in Osaka for which artists from around the world were invited to send sketches of their artwork to Japan. Gutai artists then enlarged and transferred these sketches to banners and flew them in the sky from helium balloons. Ask students what they think it would be like to view art in this way and how it would differ from a traditional gallery show.

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Gutai artists communicated with artists, critics, and curators all over the world by sending their journals containing pictures of their artworks. These journals influenced other artists' artworks, and vice versa. For this activity, students will send pictures of their artworks to students in another city or country using more modern means—the Internet. Students will either create an artwork on the computer (using a program such as Photoshop), or will create artworks and digitally photograph them. They should then send their artworks to a collaborating classroom in another part of the United States or the world. Several websites can help make matches between classrooms (such as www.epals.com). Finally, they should make artworks inspired by those they have received from their partner classroom. How did their works influence them? How else do ideas spread throughout the world?
- Gutai members curated their journals the same way exhibitions are curated—by thinking carefully about which artworks and writings (poems, essays, etc.) to include and how to lay them out. Have students work in groups to “curate” two or three journal pages. They should commission artworks and writing by students in the group on a theme or related to one idea. They should then work together to lay out the journal either on the computer or as a hard copy. They should consider elements of layout such as which pieces should be juxtaposed and how to create good “flow.”
- As an extension to their production of journal pages, you can challenge groups to take their journal production even further. They can choose a title for their journal and create a cover. They may also be challenged to produce multiples of their journal—using a copy machine, a printer, or by hand—and distribute it. To whom would they like to distribute their pages and why?

Gutai 11 (November 11, 1960). Special issue edited by Michel Tapié and Yoshihara Jirō that served as catalogue for the *International Sky Festival* and *9th Gutai Art Exhibition*; introduction by Tapié. © The former members of the Gutai Art Association. Courtesy Museum of Osaka University



Before the flash of the atom bomb over Hiroshima cast an extraordinary anxiety and distrust over technology, science and technology. . . offered discoveries and methods useful for art, inspired courage in the human spirit, and itself became the dream for a new society, while at the same time recognizing, resisting, and confronting the violence brought about by its double-edged quality.²⁶

< ENVIRONMENT >

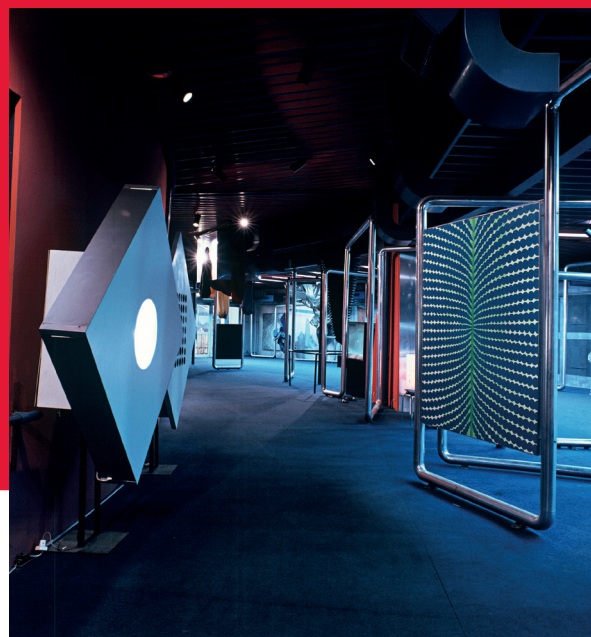
From the moment Gutai was formed, its artists were interested in moving art off of the gallery walls. Gutai members moved art to outdoor spaces, such as parks, so that the public could engage with it. They incorporated sound, motion, light, and everyday objects and spaces to create works that were not static in time or place.

By Gutai's second phase (1962–72), the interest in environment art grew even more innovative. Through participation in international exhibitions in 1965 and 1966 with artists from Germany and the Netherlands, as well as those active in **Happenings** in the United States, Gutai's members were inspired to be more radical in their experimentation and began trying kinetic, light, sound, and installation art. Gutai members also took part in international discussions about the intersections between art, science, and technology. Rapid industrialization, the rise of robotics and computers, and the **Cold War** space and nuclear arms race were of interest to artists with “dreams for a new society.”²⁷

In 1967, Gutai's second phase artists organized *Gutai Art for the Space Age* in a suburban amusement park outside of Osaka. There, artists reflected on the future of humankind in light of rapid technological progress and the **space race**. They humanized the new space-age aesthetic and technologies by animating them. Their throbbing, blinking, rotating sculptures were like alien organisms.

The materials reflected the new space age—plastics, rubbers, and reflective metals—and allowed artists to explore optical illusions, light projections, and motorization.

Japan's first World's Fair, Expo '70, was held in Osaka. Organized around the theme of “Progress and Harmony for Mankind,” it was designed as a festival to showcase advanced technology, urbanism, and internationalist trends from Japan and around the world. Perhaps the work best suited to the fair was a collaboration between Nasaka Senkichirō (b. 1923) and Yoshihara Michio (1933–1996)—an environment art piece called *Work* (1970). Its snaking aluminum pipes, piping out Yoshihara's **concrete music**, transformed the whole space into an art environment. Other works by Gutai artists were hung along its length. The Guggenheim Museum commissioned Nasaka, now in his late eighties, to recreate the work in its galleries for this exhibition.



Nasaka Senkichirō and Yoshihara Michio, *Work*, 1970. Aluminum pipe and recorded sound, approximately 150 meters long. Installation view: *Gutai Group Exhibition*, Midori Pavilion, Expo '70, Osaka, March 15–September 13, 1970. © The former members of the Gutai Art Association. Courtesy Museum of Osaka

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Nasaka Senkichirō and Yoshihara Michio, *Work* (1970)

- ▶ Ask students what they notice about the work. This work is comprised of almost five hundred feet of aluminum piping that zigzags along the Guggenheim's ramp. From the pipe, recorded music by Yoshihara plays, while along the pipe, artwork by other Gutai artists is displayed. If you are visiting, describe these sounds and sights. If not, imagine what it would be like to walk through an exhibition like this.
- ▶ *Work* was a part of Expo '70, Japan's first World's Fair, held in Osaka in 1970. In this exhibition, Gutai artists reflected on the future of humankind in the context of rapid technological progress, the Cold War, and the space race. Ask students how they think Nasaka and Yoshihara's piece reflects, responds to, and addresses some of the issues of their time.
- ▶ In 1970, Gutai artist Imai Norio (b. 1946) wrote that it was the "task for individual artists to answer this question: 'What, then, is the role of art in a commercial or public space?'" He went on to say that "their answers can only be given in the form of their works. . .their answers must provoke direct experiences, encourage unmediated encounters. They must offer not illusory but real communication." He continued, "In a larger sense, whatever we do, it concerns the everyday. Whether making art or having a meal, it's an aspect of everyday life. They are not that different."²⁸ Ask students to think about this quote. What do they think the answer is to his question? How does Nasaka and Yoshihara's work address this question, or the everyday, if at all? What questions do they think today's artists should answer?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Nasaka's work was a part of Japan's first World's Fair, held in Osaka in 1970, called Expo '70. Its theme was "Progress and Harmony for Mankind." Ask students to submit something to a classroom expo on this same theme. They can write a poem, essay, or monologue. They can make a drawing or sculpture. They should explain how their piece fits the theme. Discuss as a class: What do the works have in common? How do they each address the theme?
- In its second phase, Gutai artists reflected on the future of humankind in the context of rapid technological progress and the space race. Specifically, they thought about what the city of the future would look like. Many artists and architects have tried to envision a "future city." Look at some examples together, such as Frank Lloyd Wright's (1867–1959) Broadacre City, or designs by the Metabolist School of Architecture, a young group of Japanese architects in the late 1950s. Ask each student to focus on an aspect of city life they would like to improve and propose one or more possible solutions. Their ideas can be documented with drawings and text. When finished, students should present their ideas to the class.
- Gutai artists were interested in experimenting with the futuristic materials of their day—such as rubbers, plastics, and reflective metals. These materials and others let them explore optical illusion, motorization, and light projections in their works. What materials would be considered new and "futuristic" today? Have each student research a new material in today's world and create a plan for a sculpture or other artwork that uses this material.

RESOURCES

BOOKS

Chong, Doryun, ed. *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant Garde*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012.

Dower, John. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. New York: Norton, 2000.

Merewether, Charles, and Rika Iezumi Hiro, eds. *Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere in Postwar Japan, 1950–1970*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007.

Munroe, Alexandra. *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream Against the Sky*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994.

Munroe, Alexandra, and Ming Tiampo. *Gutai: Splendid Playground*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2013.

Tiampo, Ming. *Gutai: Decentering Modernism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS

Rubin, Susan Goldman. *Breaking the Rules: What is Contemporary Art?* Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010.

Takabayashi, Mari. *I Live in Tokyo*. New York: Sandpiper, 2004.

VIDEOS

Murakami Saburō, “Passage,” 1956/94, YouTube video, 54 sec., posted by “mediapicnic,” May 14, 2006, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWctXXGeJMA>.

Namuth, Hans. “Jackson Pollock 51,” 1950, YouTube video, 1 min., 20 sec., posted by “OtipodasHistorias,” Feb. 28, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bICqvmKL5s>.

“Outdoor Gutai Exhibition,” part 1/5, 1956, 5 min., 43 sec., Tofu Magazine, <http://www.tofu-magazine.net/newVersion/pages/Gutai56.html>.

WEBSITES

Virtual Museum of Japanese Arts
web-japan.org/museum/menu.html

Hauser and Wirth Gallery, A Visual Essay on Gutai
hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/1429/a-visual-essay-on-gutai-at-32-east-69th-street/view/

Hundertmark Gallery, Gutai
hundertmark-gallery.com/180.0.html

Metabolism: The City of the Future, Mori Art Museum
mori.art.museum/english/contents/metabolism/about/index.html

Metabolist School of Architecture
outsiderjapan.pbworks.com/w/page/32006912/Architecture%20in%20Japan%3A%20The%20Metabolist%20Movement

NOTES

- 1 Shimamoto Shōzō, “Let’s Think More about Useless Things (Part 3),” trans. Reiko Tomii, in *Gutai: Splendid Playground*, eds. Alexandra Munroe and Ming Tiampo (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2013), p. 278. Originally published as “Motto yaku ni tatanai koto o kangaeyō (3),” *Kirin* (Apr. 1963), pp. 18–19.
- 2 Tanaka Atsuko, “From Kirin Children’s Art Exhibition: To Mothers, 1956,” trans. Reiko Tomii, in Ming Tiampo, ed., *Electrifying Art: Atsuko Tanaka 1954–1968*, exh. cat. (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia; New York: Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 2004), p. 101. Originally published as “Kirin kodomo bijutsu ten kara: Okāsama gata e,” *Kirin* 9, no. 3 (Mar. 1956).
- 3 Shimamoto Shōzō, “The Mambo and Painting,” in *Fukkokuban Gutai/Gutai: Facsimile Edition* (Tokyo: Geika Shoin, 2010), p. 19. Originally published as “Mambo to kaiga,” *Gutai* 3 (Oct. 1955), unpaginated.

- 4 Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 29.
- 5 Shimamoto Shōzō, “Let’s Make Mischief!,” trans. Reiko Tomii, in *Gutai*, Munroe and Tiampo, eds., p. 276. Originally published as “Chikyū wa maruku nai,” *Kirin* (Dec. 1956), p. 36.
- 6 Ukita Yōzō, “On Being Weird,” trans. Reiko Tomii, in *Gutai*, Munroe and Tiampo, eds., p. 278. Originally published as “E no kyōshitsu (5): Henchikurin to iu koto,” *Kirin* (Mar. 1963), p. 27.
- 7 Shimamoto Shōzō, “Can a Piece of Cloth Be a Work of Art?,” trans. Reiko Tomii, in *Electrifying Art*, Tiampo, ed., pp. 107–09. Originally published as “Ichi-mai no nunokire demo geijutsu sakuhin ka,” *Gutai* 4 (July 1956), p. 31.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Tanaka, “From Kirin Children’s Art Exhibition,” trans. Reiko Tomii, in *Electrifying Art*, Tiampo, ed. p. 101.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Shiraga Kazuo, “Bōken no kiroku: Episōdo de tsuzuru Gutai gurūpu no jū-ninen 1,” *Bijutsu techō*, no. 285 (July 1967); repr. in *Gutai shiryōshū: Dokyumento Gutai 1954–1972/Document Gutai 1954–1972*, trans. Moriguchi Madoka, Simon Scanes, and Shiraha Keiko (Ashiya: Ashiya City Culture Foundation, 1993).
- 12 Yoshihara Jirō, “Gutai Art Manifesto,” trans. Reiko Tomii, in *Gutai*, Munroe and Tiampo, eds., p. 18. Originally published as “Gutai bijutsu sengen,” *Geijutsu Shinchō* 7, no. 12 (Dec. 1956), pp. 202–04.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism*, p. 42.
- 17 Yoshihara, “Gutai Art Manifesto,” p. 18.
- 18 Shiraga Kazuo, “The Baby and Milk, or Proof of Life,” trans. Reiko Tomii, in *Gutai*, Munroe and Tiampo, eds., p. 277. Originally published as “Akachan to miruku: Ikigai to iu koto,” *Kirin* (May 1956), p. 1.
- 19 Murakami Saburō, “Gutai bijutsu ni tsuite,” *Gutai* 7 (July 1957), unpaginated.
- 20 Shimamoto Shōzō, “Efude shoikei ron,” *Gutai* 6 (Apr. 1957), unpaginated.
- 21 Ming Tiampo, “Performance Painting: Pictures with Time and Space,” in *Gutai*, Munroe and Tiampo, eds., p. 166.
- 22 Shimamoto, “Efude shoikei ron,” unpaginated.
- 23 Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism*, p. 41.
- 24 Shimamoto Shōzō, “[Untitled],” in *Gutai: Japanische Avantgarde/Gutai: Japanese Avant-Garde 1954–1965*, Barbara Bertozzi and Klaus Wolbert, eds., exh. cat. (Darmstadt, Germany: Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt, 1991), pp. 437–38. Originally published in French in *Notizie: Arti figurative* 2, no. 8 (Apr. 1959), pp. 17–19.
- 25 Yoshihara Jirō, “Hakkan ni saishite”/“For Publishing This Pamphlet,” *Gutai* 1 (Jan. 1955), pp. 1, 33.
- 26 Kikunami Jōji, “What Technology Demands,” trans. Reiko Tomii, in *Gutai*, Munroe and Tiampo, eds., p. 283. Originally published as “Tekunoroji ga semaru mono,” in “Ningen to tekunoroji,” supplementary issue, *Bijutsu techō*, no. 313 (May 1969), p. 127.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Imai Norio, “Between Concept and Everyday,” trans. Reiko Tomii, in *Gutai*, Munroe and Tiampo, eds., p. 285. Originally published as “Kannen to nichijō no aida,” *Ōru Kansai* (June 1, 1970), pp. 138–40.

ABACUS

An instrument for performing calculations by sliding bead counters along rods or in grooves. Its first known use was in the 14th century; it is probably of Babylonian origin.

ART MOVEMENT

A group of artists who agree on general principles.

AUTOMATION

Automatically controlled operation of an apparatus, process, or system by mechanical or electronic devices that take the place of human labor.

AVANT-GARDE

A way to describe artists who operate outside of the mainstream and strive to push the boundaries of art. The term was originally used by the military in reference to the soldiers at the front of a battle formation.

COLD WAR

The ideological conflict between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics during the second half of the 20th century.

CONCEPTUAL ART

An art form in which the artist's primary intent is to work with a concept rather than to create an art object.

CONCRETE

Characterized by or belonging to immediate experience of actual things or events.

CONCRETE MUSIC OR *MUSIQUE CONCRETE*

Sound-based music that has no composition, and no beginning or end.

DADA

A movement in art and literature based on deliberate irrationality and negation of traditional artistic values.

GESSO

Plaster of paris or gypsum prepared with glue for use in painting or making bas-reliefs.

GUTAI

An artist collective and artistic movement in postwar Japan that consisted of fifty-nine members spanning eighteen years (1954–72). The Japanese word *gutai* means “concreteness.”

HAPPENING

An event that combines elements of painting, poetry, music, dance, and theater, staged as a live action. The term was coined by the American artist Allan Kaprow in the 1950s.

MANIFESTO

A written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer.

PINACOTHECA

A picture gallery; a museum founded by Gutai artists in Japan in 1962.

SPACE RACE

A competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, soon after World War II, to best each other's achievements in space exploration.

SURREALISM

A 20th-century movement in art and literature that sought to express the subconscious mind by depicting objects and events as seen in dreams.