

**Kazuo Shiraga (1924-2008)**

Born in Amagasaki, Japan, Kazuo Shiraga was a formative member of the Zero Group of avant-garde artists, and later the Gutai Art Association, through whose activities his works received widespread critical acclaim. Though he had trained as a classical Nihonga painter, he co-founded the Zero Group in 1952, with a commitment to reexamining and challenging the conventions of art. Shiraga's interest in provocation, gesturality and experimentation was particularly strong, and he took great interest in Abstract Expressionism and other contemporaneous, postmodern conceptual movements. In 1955, with several other members of the Zero Group, he joined the Gutai Art Association formed by fellow artist Jiro Yoshihara.

Shiraga became known for his performances, in which he painted oversized canvases with his feet, or plunged into and wrestled with mud in order to create sculptural forms, energetically engaging with matter. For Shiraga, Gutai's philosophy intersected with his interest in the idea of spirit directly transforming the material world. With its call for originality, spontaneity and challenging tradition, Shiraga became a representative artist of the movement. He also developed a friendship with Art Informel critic, Michel Tapié, who encouraged his exploration of painting. Toward the end of Gutai, which was disbanded with the death of Jiro Yoshihara in 1971, Shiraga deepened his spiritual practice by becoming a monk of the Tendai Buddhist sect. This inspired him to diversify his style of gestural painting, which began to include more esoteric and spiritual references. He passed away in Amagasaki in 2008.

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**Biography**

- 1924 Born in Amagasaki
- 1942 Enrolls in the Department of Japanese Painting at Kyoto City Art School
- 1952 Co-founds the Zero Group
- 1954 Produces his first work painted using his feet
- 1955 Joins the Gutai Art Association
- 1971 Becomes a Buddhist priest at Enryakuji Temple on Mt.Hiei
- 2008 Dies in Amagasaki at the age of 83

**Selected Solo Exhibitions**

- 1962 Galerie Stadler, Paris
- 1993 Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Toulouse, Toulouse
- 2001 Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Kobe
- 2009 *Kazuo Shiraga: Painting Born Out of Fighting*, Azumino Municipal Museum of Modern Art, Toyoshina; also traveled to: Amagasaki Cultural Center, Amagasaki; Yokosuka Museum of Art, Yokosuka; Hekinan Museum of Contemporary Art, Hekinan
- 2012 Axel Vervoordt Gallery, Antwerp
- 2015 Mnuchin Gallery, New York, NY
- 2017 Dominique Lévy Gallery, London

### **Selected Group Exhibitions**

- 1966 *The New Japanese Painting and Sculpture*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY  
1998 *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA  
2012 *Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY  
*Gutai: The Spirit of an Era*, National Art Center, Tokyo  
2013 *Gutai: Splendid Playground*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY  
2015 *Gutai*, de Sarthe Gallery, Hong Kong  
*Between Action and the Unknown: The Art of Kazuo Shiraga and Sadamasa Motonaga*, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX  
2018 *Gutai: 1953-1959*, Fergus McCaffrey, New York, NY

### **Awards**

- 1999 Distinguished Service Medal for Culture  
1987 Hyogo Prefectural Cultural Prize  
1965 Amagasaki Citizen's Cultural Prize  
2002 Osaka Art Prize

### **Major Public Collections**

Centre Pompidou, Paris  
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX  
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN  
The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo  
The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo