

KAZUO SHIRAGA

February 10 - April 11, 2015



Mnuchin Gallery is proud to announce an exhibition of major paintings by Kazuo Shiraga (1924 – 2008). Tracing the evolution of Shiraga’s signature “foot painting” method over his entire career, it features 17 examples spanning more than four decades, from 1959 to 2001. It is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue authored by noted Gutai scholar Dr. Ming Tiampo, Associate Professor of Art History at Carleton University, with an introduction by Dr. Reiko Tomii, independent art historian and curator. The exhibition will be on view February 10 – April 11, 2015.

Shiraga first embarked upon his experiments with foot painting in 1954, on a quest to articulate a radical individualism as a rejection of Japan’s wartime militarism. Throwing away his brushes and rejecting his hands as too trained, Shiraga began painting with his feet, which enabled a fresh and direct mode of expression. Starting with paper or canvas laid out on the floor, the artist would deposit copious amounts of oil paint on the surface, and paint with the movements of his bare feet, sometimes hanging from the ceiling by a rope. Shiraga went on to employ this method of painting for the rest of his career, declaring, “I have never doubted that ‘action painting’ is my expression, never stopped it. I will single-mindedly continue to paint my painting with a sincere desire that the pleasure of making a painting will be communicated to those who see it.”¹ While the palette and mood of these works evolved over time, they are united by a vigorous energy and a facture so dramatically rich and textured as to be almost sculptural.

A leading member of the Gutai Art Association, the most influential collective of avant-garde artists in postwar Japan, Shiraga is known not only for his innovations in action painting but also for his groundbreaking performances, such as *Challenging Mud* (1955), which predated Allan Kaprow’s Happenings in the United States and Europe. Shiraga’s work featured prominently in the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles’s exhibition *Destroy the Picture, Painting the Void* (2012), the Museum of Modern Art’s *Tokyo 1955 – 1970: A New Avant-Garde* (2012 – 2013) and the Guggenheim’s *Gutai: Splendid Playground* (2013), co-curated by Dr. Tiampo.

Shiraga will be the subject of *Between Action and the Unknown: The Art of Kazuo Shiraga and Sadamasa Motonaga*, a two-person exhibition opening at the Dallas Museum of Art in February 2015.

¹ Kazuo Shiraga, “Akushon peintingu eno michi” [A path to action painting], trans. Reiko Tomii in *Kazuo Shiraga: Six Decades*, exh. cat. (New York: McCaffrey Fine Art, 2009), 68. Originally published in *Shiraga Kazuo-ten*, exh. cat. (Amagasaki: Amagasaki Cultural Center, 1989).

Image: Kazuo Shiraga, *Chikusei Shobao* [Little King incarnated from Earthly Empty Star] (1961), oil on canvas, 51 1/4 x 63 3/4 inches (130 x 162 cm).