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## **San Francisco Art Institute Presents Gutai Historical Survey and Contemporary Response**

**First West Coast Survey Exhibition of Avant-Garde, Postwar Japanese Art Movement  
Features Site-Specific Contemporary Responses to Classic Gutai Performative Works**

**Exhibition:** Experimental Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Mid-Winter  
Burning Sun: Gutai Historical Survey and Contemporary Response

**Curators:** John Held, Jr. and Andrew McClintock

**Venue:** Walter and McBean Galleries  
San Francisco Art Institute  
800 Chestnut Street, San Francisco, CA

**Dates:** February 8–March 30, 2013

**Media Preview:** Friday, February 8, 5:00–6:00 pm

**Cost:** Free and Open to the Public

**San Francisco, CA (January 9, 2013)** — [The San Francisco Art Institute](#) (SFAI) is proud to announce the first West Coast survey exhibition of Gutai (1954-1972)—a significant avant-garde artist collective in postwar Japan whose overriding directive was: "Do something no one's ever done before." Rejecting the figurative and abstract art of the era, and in an effort to transform the Japanese psyche from wartime regimentation to independence of thought, Gutai artists fulfilled their commitment to innovative practices by producing art through concrete, performative actions. With a diverse assembly of historical and contemporary art, including several site-specific performances commissioned exclusively for SFAI, [Experimental Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Mid-Winter Burning Sun: Gutai Historical Survey and Contemporary Response](#) creates a dialogue with classic Gutai works while demonstrating the lasting significance and radical energy of this movement. This exhibition showcases North American, neo-conceptualist artists' responses to groundbreaking Gutai performances; dozens of original paintings, video, photographs, and ephemera from private collections; and an expansive collection of Mail Art from more than 30 countries.

As one of the nation's most vital contemporary fine arts institutions—and an epicenter of experimental, interdisciplinary thinking on the West Coast for more than 140 years—SFAI is the ideal venue for an exhibition that seeks to celebrate the legacy of the Gutai artists and contextualize these important works for a new generation. Co-curator and SFAI's Interim

Director of Exhibitions Andrew McClintock explains, "We're bringing a critical, undervalued aspect of postwar modernism to our students and the general public." He continues, "Not only is this rediscovery timely—with a renewed interest nationally and internationally in Gutai and other lesser-known Japanese art—but the exhibition's focus on contemporary response and avant-garde performance is a natural extension of SFAI's boundary-pushing, renegade culture."

*Gutai Historical Survey and Contemporary Response* investigates an array of classic Gutai performative activities: smashing paint-filled bottles; full-body engagement with mud and cement; leaping through a series of paper screens; painting with feet. At the exhibition's opening reception, Bay Area artist and SFAI alumnus Guy Overfelt will break open the plane of painting atop a motorcycle in response to Saburo Murakami's *Passing Through* (1956). Jeremiah Jenkins, also a local artist and alumnus, will respond to Kazuo Shiraga's *Challenging Mud* (1955) by taking on the materials as a professional wrestler, complete with WWF-style theatrics. Through completely different actions, these artists aim to mirror the physical relics of Shiraga's and Murakami's works while demonstrating for SFAI's present-day audience the unfettered expression and excitement that the original performances brought to onlookers more than fifty years ago. Original photographs and videos of classic Gutai performances on the nearby gallery walls add additional perspective to Overfelt and Jenkins' pieces.

On loan from museums, galleries, and private collections, the exhibition's nearly two dozen paintings—several on view for the first time in the U.S.—help to complete a fully immersive Gutai experience. They range from pre-Gutai works, painted by Shiraga during the Zero-Kai period, to the "action painting" that characterized the early years of the movement, including both small and large pieces by Jiro Yoshihara (Gutai's founder), Shozo Shimamoto, Chiyu Uemae, and Takesada Matsutani. Many of these works of art are nothing more than the visual documentation of the artists' momentary interaction with their chosen medium. A group of post-Gutai paintings, especially a large Atsuko Tanaka from 2010, reveals how the artists remained rooted in their quest for freedom through novel means, even after the group disbanded in 1972.

The exhibition also presents an impressive collection of Mail Art elicited in response to the movement by over 200 contemporary artists from thirty countries. These artists learned about Gutai through Shimamoto's involvement in the Mail Art community, and their work sits adjacent to a reading room featuring historical Gutai ephemera: facsimile of the fourteen issues of *Gutai* magazine and the Gutai Pinacotheca's catalogues from the early '60s. Co-curator and art historian John Held, Jr., who performed with Shimamoto and other prominent Mail Art artists in the U.S. and Japan, explains, "Gutai artists' rethinking of venues for exhibition took the display of art outside the 'white cube' of traditional showrooms and centered it in the midst of people's lives." He continues, "It's closely aligned with the concepts of long distance, delayed aesthetic communications tested and examined by contemporary Mail Artists. Both are timeless artistic concerns still being explored today."

SFAI's exhibition takes its title from Gutai's first exhibition, *The Experimental Outdoor Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Mid-Summer Burning Sun*, which was held in a park north of Osaka in 1955. Special thanks goes to the Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, Museum of Osaka University, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Don Soaker Gallery, Gallery Paule Anglim, Japonisque Gallery, Inc., The Falkenstein Foundation, and private collectors.

## **Exhibition Catalogue**

An exhibition catalogue will be available at the closing reception on March 27 for *Experimental Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Mid-Winter Burning Sun: Gutai Historical Survey and Contemporary Response*. It includes an essay on Gutai by the curators, installation photography, select Mail Art from the exhibition, and a complete list of contributing artists.

## **Schedule of Events**

In addition to the works featured in the Walter and McBean exhibition, *Gutai Historical Survey and Contemporary Response* includes related events—a lecture, film screening, and panel discussion—to further understanding of Gutai's historical significance and contemporary relevance, and to explore curatorial challenges that surround performance recreation.

The exhibition and all its associated events are FREE and open to the public. Space is limited for some events, and advance registration is recommended. See details below and visit our website to register: [www.sfai.edu/Gutai](http://www.sfai.edu/Gutai)

## **Opening Reception**

**Date:** Friday, February 8, 6:00–9:00 pm

**Location:** Walter and McBean Galleries

The opening reception of *Gutai Historical Survey and Contemporary Response* features live, site-specific performances by local artists and alumni Guy Overfelt and Jeremiah Jenkins.

## **Lecture ([Register online](#))**

**Dr. Shoichi Hirai**, Curator at The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

**Date:** Thursday, February 21, 7:30–9:00 pm

**Location:** Lecture Hall

A noted authority on Gutai and the curator behind Tokyo's first major retrospective of the movement, Dr. Hirai discusses the artists' activities chronologically and their significance in history, exploring how Gutai opened a new phase in art through experimental methods.

## **Film Screening ([Register online](#))**

**Play It Again: A Screening of Performance Art Documentation 1954-1972**

**Date:** Tuesday, March 5, 7:30–9:00 pm

**Location:** Lecture Hall

This evening of film documentation highlights Bay Area-based performance art from the '50s, '60s, and '70s with rare footage that chronicles the complicated history of performance documentation and the critical possibilities it raises.

## **Closing Reception, Catalogue Release, and Panel Discussion ([Register online](#))**

**Date:** Wednesday, March 27, 6:30–9:00 pm

**Locations:** Walter and McBean Galleries and Lecture Hall

To celebrate the closing of the exhibition and the release of the exhibition catalogue, SFAI hosts a reception with drinks and light refreshments. Following the reception, Tony Labat, SFAI's Faculty Director of MFA Programs, leads a discussion on the curatorial legitimacy of reenacting past performances. This panel features Rudolf Frieling, Curator of Media Arts at SFMOMA; Constance Lewallen, Adjunct Curator at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; artist and curator TOM MARIONI; and Mayumi Handa, special assistant to Shozo Shimamoto.

### **About the Curators**

John Held, Jr. is a specialist in postwar avant-garde art movements—having interviewed, written, lectured, and curated exhibitions about John Cage, Ray Johnson, Allan Kaprow, and Shozo Shimamoto, one of the founding members of the Gutai group. Held performed with Shimamoto in Japan in 1988 and 1993, and his current interest in Gutai originates from his relationship with the artist. Held's collection of Mail Art is in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and he has placed collections with The Getty Research Institute and MoMA, New York.

Andrew McClintock is the Interim Director of Exhibitions of SFAI, Editor-In-Chief & Publisher of *SFAQ* (*San Francisco Arts Quarterly*), and Director / Co-Owner of Ever Gold Gallery in San Francisco. He has organized over 30 exhibitions at Ever Gold Gallery and has served as an independent curator at several other galleries. McClintock has also exhibited his own mixed-media work internationally and holds a BFA in photography from SFAI.

### **About the Walter and McBean Galleries**

The Walter and McBean Galleries on SFAI's 800 Chestnut Street campus house exhibitions, workshops, and other alternative and experimental avenues for presenting work by international contemporary artists. All SFAI's public programs and exhibitions are FREE and open to the public. They are supported, in part, by the Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. <http://www.sfai.edu/events>

Hours:

Tuesdays 11 am–7 pm

Wednesday–Saturday 11 am–6 pm

Open until 7:30 pm on evenings with lectures

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### **About San Francisco Art Institute**

Founded in 1871, the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), a nonprofit art institution, is a vital convening place for arts communities and an international leader in fine arts education. A small school with global impact—notable faculty and alumni include Richard Diebenkorn, Ansel Adams, Annie Leibovitz, Enrique Chagoya, Kathryn Bigelow, Peter Pau, Paul Kos, George Kuchar, Catherine Opie, Lance Acord, Barry McGee, and Kehinde Wiley—SFAI enrolls approximately 650 students in undergraduate and graduate programs, and offers a wide range of continuing education courses and public programs.

[www.sfai.edu](http://www.sfai.edu)

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