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GUTAI

Gutai were a Japanese avant-garde group formed in 1954 whose radical ideas and approaches to making art anticipated later performance and conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s





Shozo Shimamoto

Holes 1954

Tate

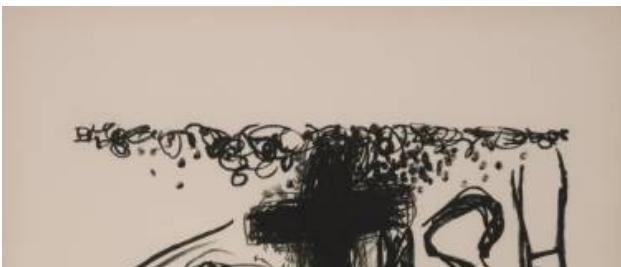
© Shozo Shimamoto

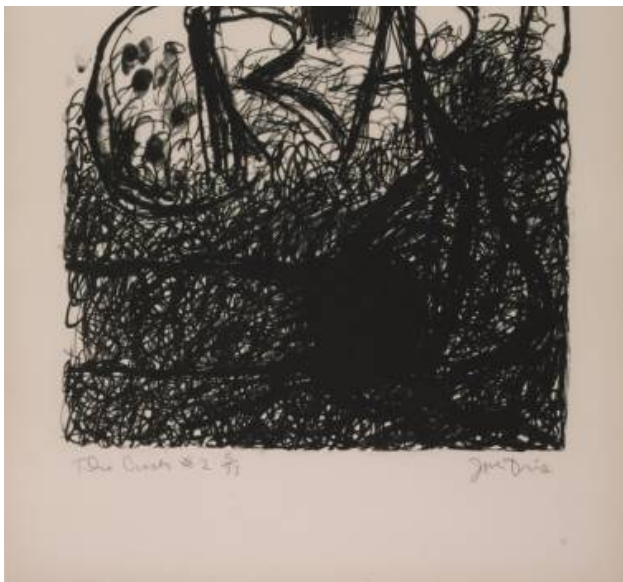
The Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai (Gutai Art Association) was formed in 1954 in Osaka by Yoshihara Jiro, Kanayama Akira, Murakami Saburo, Shiraga Kazuo and Shozo Shimamoto. The word has been translated into English as 'embodiment' or 'concrete'. Yoshihara was an older artist around whom the group coalesced and who financed it. The art historian Yve-Alain Bois has said that 'the activities of the Gutai group in the mid 1950s constitute one of the most important moments of post-war Japanese culture'.

In their early public exhibitions in 1955 and 1956 Gutai artists created a series of striking works anticipating later happenings and performance and conceptual art. Shiraga's *Challenge to the Mud* 1955, in which the artist rolled half naked in a pile of mud, remains the most celebrated event associated with the group. Also in 1955 Murakami created his reportedly stunning performance *Laceration of Paper*, in which he ran through a paper screen. At the second Gutai show in 1956, Shiraga used his feet to paint a large canvas sprawled across the floor. From about 1950 Shimamoto had been making paintings from layers of newspaper pasted together, painted and then pierced with holes, anticipating the pierced work of Lucio Fontana. In 1954 Murakami had made a series of paintings by throwing a ball soaked in ink at paper. In 1956 Shimamoto went on to make works called *Throws of Colour* by smashing glass jars filled with pigment onto canvases laid out on the floor.

Ashiya City Museum of Art and History in Japan holds a large collection of Gutai work and archives. The group dissolved in 1972 following the death of Yoshihara. There was a retrospective exhibition of their work at the Jeu de Paume in Paris in 1999.

RELATED TERMS AND CONCEPTS





Performance art

Artworks that are created through actions performed by the artist or other participants, which may be live or recorded, spontaneous ...

Happening

Happenings were theatrical events created by artists in the late 1950s and early 1960s



Conceptual art

Conceptual art is art for which the idea (or concept) behind the work is more important than the finished art ...

SELECTED ARTISTS IN THE COLLECTION





Shozo Shimamoto

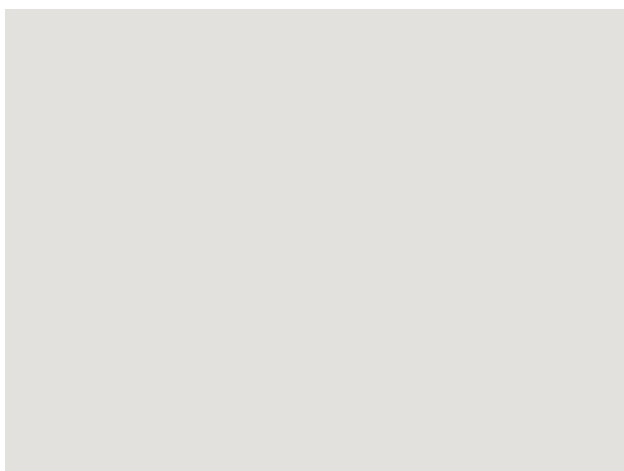
1928–2013



Tsuyoshi Maekawa

born 1936

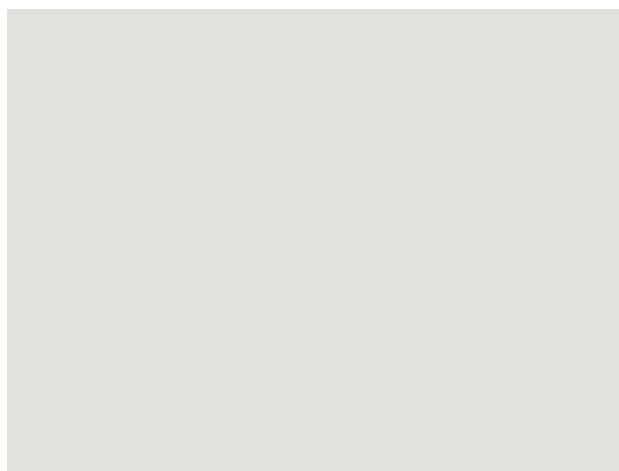
SELECTED ARTWORKS IN THE COLLECTION



Tsuyoshi Maekawa

Two Junctions

1962

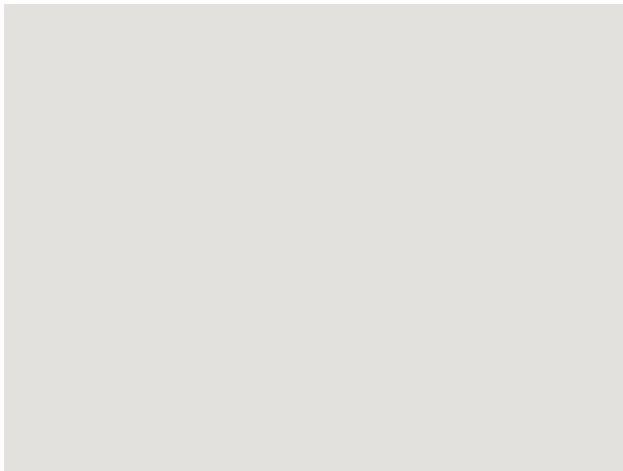


Shozo Shimamoto

Holes

1953

On display at [Tate Modern](#)
part of [In the Studio](#)



Shozo Shimamoto

Holes

1954

On display at [Tate Modern](#)
part of [In the Studio](#)

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