

Exhibition Press Release: *Saburo Murakami*



Saburo Murakami's creative output over the course of his half-century of activity as an artist is truly diverse in its materials and forms. At the same time, however, there is a consistent stance running through this work of his endeavoring to grasp the interconnectedness of his life in relationship to the world. Murakami produced a large number of painting works, in addition to his installation-type and conceptual pieces, and it seems that to Murakami, painting was one means for confronting "living" and coming to grips with its each and every moment.

The "Paper-Breaking" (*Kami-yaburi*) pieces, in which Murakami burst through sheets of kraft paper mounted on wooden frames, were first carried out in the mid-1950s, shortly after he began taking part in the activities of the Gutai Art Association. While often treated as a forerunner of performance art, in its presenting of this screen-breaking itself as a work, "Paper-Breaking" was also an experiment in dismantling the various existing frameworks that have shaped painting, and in seeking beyond them for manifestations of painting's essence. This exhibition features the early piece *All Landscapes (Arayuru Fukei)*, in which Murakami continued this basic questioning of the underlying structures of painting, and seven paintings produced between 1958 and the late seventies, some of which were rediscovered and repaired only recently and have not been shown publicly in almost fifty years.

The paintings from 1958 to the early sixties, with their unrestrained layerings of vigorous brushstrokes, convey raw, deep impressions of the artist's physicality. Then among the works of the mid-sixties period, are pieces containing frames that have been affixed in such a way as to suppress these strokes, as if the artist were endeavoring to reassess the relationships between himself and his paintings' surfaces. In the works from the end of the sixties, the violently surging brushstrokes are gone, replaced by semi-automatically realized images of floating lines created by tracing the edges of paper affixed to the canvas. And lastly, there is the piece *Trinity*, produced some ten years later (1978), which abounds with forcefulness and tranquility, as if the paint materials and the artist's body and concepts have reached a reasonable accord.

What Murakami was seeking – painting as a concrete "phenomenon" of harmonized thought and action and time and space; and painting as an "experience" that could convey a complete and genuine feeling of being "alive" – was something that could only be realized by way of nonactive creative acts that were not subject to the constraints of a constructing consciousness. In the series of pieces featured in this exhibition, one may observe traces of the adaptable way of life of this artist, who, in his search for such levels of expression through painting, was constantly responding to moment-to-moment changes in his own existence and in the state of the world around him, and who all the while, sometimes with a lighthearted approach and sometimes nagged by doubts, was continually conscious of choosing the optimal methods for each piece so as to develop his art.

All Landscapes, which was first displayed hanging from a tree branch at the Outdoor Gutai Art Exhibition in 1956, was a picture frame for viewing chance cutouts of landscapes. Though at first glance, this piece might be taken as the exact opposite of a work of painting, it would seem that the ideas and attitudes Murakami was pursuing through painting with regard to living and expression are evoked here via more direct gestures, with the work's mechanism of accentuating a constantly shifting frame-by-frame view in effect turning the relationship between the viewer and the world around the viewer into a place of fluid and dense interaction.

If each of our lives is something spun into being on the basis of our own existences and through all the various points of contact we have with the outside world, then to Murakami, the act of expressing was "living" itself. And it was out of this act of expressing that these works of painting and *All Landscapes* arose. In this exhibition, through these expressions of forms that stand in sharp contrast yet correlate like the negative and positive prints of a photograph, we are presenting the path forged by an artist who, without ever adhering to a single, fixed format, was unfaltering in his attempts to approach the essence of painting, that is to say, the very essence of life itself.

Exhibition period: Friday, 7 March - Saturday, 29 March, 2014

Opening hours: 11:00 - 19:00 (Saturdays 11:00 -17:00) *closed on Mon., Sun., and Holidays

▶ Talk event : 14:00-15:30 Saturday, 8 March

Etsuko Nakatsuji (Artist) x Koichi Kawasaki (Professor at Konan Women's University, independent curator)

▶ Opening reception: 15:30-17:00 (same day)

Work / 1965 / 137.9 x 431.0 cm / Synthetic-resin paint, plaster, adhesive, mixed media, cotton, board



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Saburo Murakami

Biography

Born in Kobe in 1925.

Majors in aesthetics at Kwansai Gakuin University Graduate School in 1950. Joins Zero Society (Zero kai) in 1952.

Becomes a member of the Gutai Art Association in 1955.

Submits letter of resignation to Gutai Art Association in 1971, but it is rejected. (The organization dissolves in 1972.)

Dies in 1996.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2011 Saburo Murakami: Focus on the 70s, ARTCOURT Gallery, Osaka

2003 Gallery KURANUKI, Osaka

1996 Ashiya City Museum of Art & History, Ashiya

1977 Gallery Kitano Circus, Kobe

1976 Gallery Shinanobashi, Osaka

1975 Seiwa Gallery, Osaka

1974 apron at Gallery Shinanobashi, Osaka (February and July)

1973 Shunju-kan Gallery, Osaka

Mugen-sha, Osaka

1971 Moris Form, Osaka

1963 Gutai Pinacotheca, Osaka

Selected Group Exhibitions

2013 "Parallel Views" The Warehouse, Rachofsky Collection, Dallas

"Gutai: Splendid Playground" Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

2012 "TOKYO 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde" The Museum of Modern Art, New York

"A Visual Essay on Gutai at 32 East 69 Street" Hauser & Wirth, New York

"Destroy the Picture: Painting the Void, 1949-1962"

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

"Gutai: The Spirit of an Era" The National Art Center, Tokyo

2010 "Gutai: Dipingere con il tempo e lo spazio" Museo Cantonale d' Arte, Lugano

2009 "Target Practice: Paintings Under Attack, 1949-1978" Seattle Art Museum, Seattle

"La Biennale di Venezia, 53a Esposizione Internazionale d' Arte - Fare Mondi" Venezia

2008 "The 16th Biennale of Sydney, Revolutions: Form that turns"

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

"The Collection of Hyogo" Oscar Niemmyer Museum, Curitiba

2006 "Zone Zero" Stiftung Museum Kunst Palast, Dusseldorf (Travels to Metropole)

2004 "TRACES: Body and Idea in Contemporary Art" The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

1994 "Japanese Art After 1945; Scream Against the Sky" Guggenheim Museum SoHo, New York

"Hors Limites / L' art et la vie 1952-1994" La Galerie Nord et la Galerie Sud du Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

1993 "La Biennale di Venezia, XLV Esposizione Internazionale d' Arte - Passaggio ad Oriente" Venezia

1991 "Gutai Japanische Avangarde 1954-1965" Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt

1990 "Giappone all' avanguardia; Il Gruppo Gutai negli anni Cinquanta" Galleria Nazionale d' Arte Moderna, Rome

1986 "Japon des Avant-Gardes 1910-1970" Musée National d' Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

1985 "Reconstructions: Avant-Garde Art in Japan 1945-1965" Museum of modern Art, Oxford

1970 "Japan Expo '70" Osaka

1957-68 Participates in all the Gutai Art Exhibition from 4th edition to 21st edition.

1957 "3rd Gutai Art Exhibition" Ohara Hall, Tokyo

1956 "Outdoor Gutai Art Exhibition" Ashiya Park, Hyogo

"2nd Gutai Art Exhibition" Ohara Hall, Tokyo

1955 "1st Gutai Art Exhibition" Ohara Hall, Tokyo

1954 "Zero Society Exhibition" Show window in Sogo Department Store, Osaka

1953 "Murakami-Hiko / Shiraga Kazuo" Gallery in Hankyu Department Store, Osaka