

PRESS RELEASE

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Kazuo Shiraga: Six Decades

McCaffrey Fine Art, New York
October 8, 2009–January 23, 2010

McCaffrey Fine Art is proud to inaugurate our new gallery at 23 East 67th Street with the first ever solo exhibition of Kazuo Shiraga in the United States. *Kazuo Shiraga: Six Decades* opens on October 8 with a reception from 6:00 – 8:00 pm and continues through January 23, 2010. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday 10:00 am – 6:00 pm.

Born in Amagasaki, Japan in 1924, Shiraga co-founded the Zero Society (Zero-kai) with Saburō Murakami and Akira Kanayama in 1952. In 1955 he joined the legendary collective Gutai (Gutai Art Association) and made a series of revolutionary works that art historian Reiko Tomii calls “performance paintings,” including *Challenging Mud*, 1955 (in which he wrestled with several tons of mud) and *Red Logs*, 1955 (a structure made of wood logs that Shiraga hacked into with an axe). His distinct and inimitable style of foot painting emerged the year prior, in 1954. Aware of Jackson Pollock since 1951, Shiraga—like his contemporaries Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, and Yves Klein—sought to create work that moved beyond the vocabulary of Abstract Expressionism. He succeeded in creating paintings of great innovation with his unique style that involved sliding, spinning, and swirling his feet in mounds of oil paint on large sheets of paper laid on the floor. By the time of his 1957 “performance painting” on stage, *Sanbasō-Super Modern*, Shiraga was amongst the most avant-garde artists working anywhere and his work was drawing international attention.

Shiraga’s work was first introduced to the American public under the auspices of a Gutai exhibition held at Martha Jackson Gallery in September 1958. His work was largely dismissed as derivative and his great originality went unrecognized in New York in what amounted to an extraordinary misreading of his work. However, having realized a means so unmistakably his own, Shiraga continued to refine and rework his signature style for the remainder of his long career, creating challenging paintings of visceral energy and visual power. Shiraga’s six-decade career proved enduringly provocative and extremely successful in Europe and Japan. Yet, with the exception of his inclusion in survey exhibitions such as *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1994) and *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object* at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1998), Shiraga’s work has remained largely unknown in the United States. This exhibition seeks to rectify that, bringing together documentary films and paintings that demonstrate Shiraga’s sustained aesthetic achievement.

This exhibition is accompanied by the first in-depth publication on Shiraga’s work in English. It features essays by art historian Reiko Tomii and Fergus McCaffrey that describe and reinterpret the artist’s career, locating his development within the context of his international peers. Previously unavailable writings and interviews in English translation accompany color plates that document the span of Shiraga’s career from his earliest developments until his death in 2008.

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