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KATŌ, Mizuho. Kanayama Akira's painting using machines, and its significance to Gutai

From the formation of their group until at least the mid 1960s, the artists of the Gutai Art Association (“Gutai,” 1954–1972), one of the leading avant-garde groups of postwar Japan, are generally thought to have created art characterized by forms of artistic expression incorporating raw materiality and violent physicality. An exception is Kanayama Akira (1924–2006), whose art did not conform to that style. From 1957 until he left the group in 1965, Kanayama painted by operating electrically-powered machines, rather than through vigorous movements of his own body. This paper studies Kanayama's painting, including its development beginning with works that preceded the period when he started employing this method, such as *Footprints*, and his “balloon art.” In order to consider the significance of his approach, I compare it with that of leading Gutai artist, Shiraga Kazuo (1924–2008), renowned for painting with his feet.

Two comparisons of works by Kanayama and Shiraga, respectively, all exhibited in 1956 suggests the likelihood that Kanayama's work was produced in the context of, and in deliberate contrast to, Shiraga's work. The works include on the one hand *Footprints*, which Kanayama exhibited at the Outdoor Gutai Art Exhibition in 1956, and *Feet*, which Shiraga exhibited at the Shinko Independent Exhibition about three months earlier, and on the other hand Kanayama's “balloon art” exhibited at the second Gutai Art Exhibition in 1956 and a work by Shiraga exhibited at the Outdoor Gutai Art Exhibition about two and a half months earlier. In light of this finding, it is obvious that Kanayama responded to Shiraga's large work created by painting with his feet for the second Gutai Art Exhibition by way of contrasting forms and methods of creating art, resulting in his paintings created by use of electric machines.

The viewer of Shiraga's paintings senses the unique presence of the artist through lines and compositions that only he could produce. In contrast, Kanayama's paintings stand out by way of the regularity of the lines, not their uniqueness. The viewer is therefore aware of the regularity of the underlying physics, such as the speed with which the lines are drawn and the passage of time required for them to accumulate. Although Kanayama's painting is intentionally based on what is referred to as action painting, it relativizes the very premise of action painting—the notion of the absolute role of the artist as creator. It can also be inferred that Kanayama tried using painting machines as a means of representing a source of fascination to him—the cosmos, or, rather, the passage of time and expansion of space that are based upon the physical laws of the universe.

Until now, the Gutai movement has been regarded as the first artists' group in postwar art history to assert that art should make the fullest use of the characteristics of matter itself and that matter is not dominated by spirit. The artists put this thinking into practice, and assigned a major role to the body in the process. Shiraga, more than anyone, has been seen as the central figure embodying this very notion. However, in regard to establishing a new relationship between spirit and matter, Kanayama's approach of painting through the mediation of electric devices rather than painting directly onto the canvas demonstrated that there is an alternative to the approach of direct participation taken by Shiraga. Focusing on the elements of space and time that inform matter, in addition to the visible matter, Kanayama provides a form of art that does more than merely assert materiality. In other words, he offers a perspective focused not on the concrete existence of something, but on the relationship between one thing and another, as well as on the methodical regularity of that relationship. The author concludes that this is what constitutes Kanayama's *raison d'être* in the context of Gutai.

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