

**Fergus McCaffrey presents a solo exhibition of paintings by Gutai artist
Toshio Yoshida**

***Toshio Yoshida: Sakuhin 1953–1963*
Fergus McCaffrey, Tokyo**

November 3 – December 22, 2018

Opening Reception: November 3, 2018, 6–8PM

Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to present a solo exhibition of paintings by Toshio Yoshida (1928–97), featuring three early bodies of work made by the innovative artist between 1953–63. Yoshida was one of the founding members of the Japanese avant-garde collective Gutai, and this exhibition provides an intimate look at Yoshida's artistic production during the height of Gutai's activity. This focused exhibition, which will be on view from November 3 – December 29, 2018, marks Fergus McCaffrey's first presentation of Yoshida's work at the gallery's Tokyo location.



Beginning in the early 1950s, Yoshida abandoned traditional oil painting methodologies to experiment with radical materials and forms, following Gutai founder Jiro Yoshihara's injunction to "do what has never been done before." Yoshida's earliest experiments reveal an imaginative, ambitious young artist: in a remarkable early painting, *Untitled* (1953), Yoshida spread a thin layer of paint atop board using a palette knife to create fan-like gestures in black and white oil. This work blends a Cubist sensibility with the artist's unique material technique, prefiguring Gerhard Richter's scraper paintings. In *Untitled (54-6)* (1954), one of the highlights of the exhibition, the artist disrupts the vibrant red painted surface with a diagonal grouping of metal hooks screwed into the wood surface, collapsing the boundary between fine art and industrial materials. Another untitled canvas from 1956 further shows the artist's capacity for material



and conceptual experimentation: Yoshida layered thick cement directly on top of board, then painted a black "frame" adding a vibrant blue "ground" outlining the dense concrete, resulting in a reverse strategy for the tradition of figure exchange in painting.

In 1954, at the same time as these early material experiments, Yoshida began work on a series of Burn Paintings. He created these by pressing a soldering iron or red-hot coals to plywood panels, leaving intricate patterns of searing and scarring marks. These works,

three of which are on view in Fergus McCaffrey's Tokyo exhibition, are remarkable for their complex but harmonious compositions, and recall ancient East Asian ink-wash paintings as well as psychoanalytic "automatic" drawings made by the French Surrealists. Yoshida's pioneering explorations of the expressive potential of fire in painting predate Alberto Burri's first *Combustione* paintings (1955) and Yves Klein's *Fire* paintings of 1957. The Burn Paintings were central to Yoshida's idea of "creative destruction"; like many Gutai members, the artist wanted to abandon traditional modes of artmaking in the wake of the Second World War, moving forward with renewed attention to forms of potential and possibility available in the aftermath of wartime violence.

During Gutai's formative first years, Yoshida extensively investigated action, simultaneity, and performance, often working in theatre to develop ideas he would go on to pursue in painting. As Michel Tapié's influence on Gutai took hold in the late 1950s, painting came more and more to the fore. In the next decade, Yoshida translated his ideas into materially challenging paintings, placing an even greater emphasis on rigorous interrogation of the form. To do so, he often turned to ideas he had first articulated onstage. For example, at the 1956 *Second Gutai Art Exhibition*, Yoshida poured India ink from a watering can onto a canvas from a distance of ten feet. Years later, he revisited this theatrical technique in works such as *Untitled* (1963), which features droplets and splashes of white paint radiating in linear patterns atop a base of heavily textured *papier-mâché*.



Similarly, Yoshida first examined ideas of layering and framing in his installation *Shadow* at the 1957 *Gutai Art on the Stage*, which consisted of objects placed onstage with electric lights illuminating them to cast shadows onto the curtain behind them. He continued to explore these ideas in the following decade, as demonstrated in *Untitled* (1962), on view in the Tokyo exhibition. Here, the artist uses a similar technique in paint as he did in physical space, illuminating and shadowing the work's surface with various layers of pigment. The resulting concentric rectangular shapes bring to mind a theatrical stage or a painting frame; in this way, the painting interrogates its own capacity for representation. Unlike many of Yoshida's works made during the 1960s, which feature somber monochromatic hues, *Untitled* (1962) vibrates with bright and intense moments of color.

About the Artist

Toshio Yoshida was born in Kobe, Japan in 1928. As a young man, he worked in an administrative job at Gutai founder Jiro Yoshihara's family company, where he was impressed with Yoshihara's Western, modernist-style oil paintings. As early as 1953, Yoshida garnered the attention of his mentor, and would go on to become an influential member of the Gutai Art Association with several other young artists of the time. Encouraged by Yoshihara to boldly explore creativity at the intersection of painting and performance, Yoshida was one of the

great original thinkers and innovators of Gutai alongside Kazuo Shiraga, Sadamasa Motonaga, Atsuko Tanaka, Shozo Shimamoto, and Saburo Murakami.

Yoshida's innovation before, during, and after Gutai is remarkable in its originality. Though his creations are lesser known today than other Gutai members' works and his international peers, there is no dispute of the artist's important and growing place in the pantheon of the post-war avant-garde. Yoshida has been included in several Gutai retrospective exhibitions, including *Gutai* at the Jeu de Paume, Paris, in 1999; *GUTAI: The Spirit of an Era* at the National Art Center, Tokyo, in 2012; and *Gutai: Splendid Playground* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 2013. Yoshida died in 1997.

About Fergus McCaffrey

Founded in 2006, Fergus McCaffrey is internationally recognized for its groundbreaking role in promoting the work of postwar Japanese artists such as Sadamasa Motonaga, Natsuyuki Nakanishi, Kazuo Shiraga, and Jiro Takamatsu. The gallery also exhibits the work of emerging and seminal Western artists such as Marcia Hafif, Birgit Jürgenssen, Richard Nonas, Sigmar Polke, and Carol Rama.

In keeping with the gallery's commitment to Japanese art and culture, Fergus McCaffrey opened its Tokyo outpost this past March with an exhibition of paintings by Robert Ryman, followed by an exhibition of works by Tetsumi Kudo and Carol Rama in June.

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Images:

1. Toshio Yoshida, *Untitled (54-6)*, 1954. Screw hooks and oil paint on wood, 24 5/8 x 16 3/4 x 1 3/4 inches (62.4 x 42.6 x 4.4 cm). © The Estate of Toshio Yoshida
2. Toshio Yoshida, *BURN by CF No. 23*, 1954. Burnt wood, 19 3/4 x 25 3/8 inches (50.2 x 64.4 cm). © The Estate of Toshio Yoshida
3. Toshio Yoshida, *Untitled*, 1963. Mixed media and cotton on board, 24 1/8 x 28 3/4 inches (61.2 x 73 cm). © The Estate of Toshio Yoshida

Map:

(Omotesando station A3 exit)

