

Sadamasa Motonaga

McCaffrey Fine Art, New York

Exhibition Dates: May 5–June 30, 2012

Gallery Hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 10.00 a.m.–6.00 p.m.

McCaffrey Fine Art is happy to present an exhibition of paintings created between 1958 and 2004 by Sadamasa Motonaga (1922–2011). Remarkably, over five decades have passed since Motonaga's last solo exhibition in New York at Martha Jackson Gallery in 1961. This exhibition serves to reintroduce Motonaga's work in anticipation of several museum initiatives in the coming 18 months.

Motonaga was a member of the legendary Gutai Art Association (1954–72), which became famous for their groundbreaking performance works and innovations in painting, sculpture, and installation art.

He emerged at a time when a post-atomic surrealist existentialism was the forefront of artistic development in Japan. However, Motonaga chose a different path and turned his back on the destruction wrought by the war in order to create paintings, sculptures, and performances that were fresh, jubilant, and playful. In 1954, he began employing a vocabulary of embryonic shapes, flying objects, and cartoon-like forms modeled in heavy oil paint that revealed his interest in children's art, manga, and popular culture, and collapsed distinctions between high and low art.

By 1957, Motonaga's work had become more abstract and featured flowing lines and pools of brightly colored pigment poured and dripped onto the canvas. This "classic style" which developed concurrently with Morris Louis' "Veil" paintings, occupied him until the mid-1960s, when his anthropomorphic sensibility returned in paintings that featured extruded and knotted forms that were delicately modeled with airbrush. Thereafter in the 1970s, the artist's scratchy hand-drawn forms reappear along with the use of canned spray paint, creating a style that was fresh and raw, akin to graffiti and animation.

Motonaga occupied a unique position in the Japanese art world, creating a distinct visual continuity between the artists and imagery of the immediate postwar era and the concerns that emerged in the work of contemporary painters such as Takashi Murakami, Yoshitomo Nara, and beyond.

Motonaga's work has been the subject of many retrospective exhibitions in Japan, most notably at Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Kobe, 1998; Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003; Nagano Prefectural Museum of Art, 2005; and Mie Prefectural Museum of Art, 2009. Retrospectives of the Gutai Art Association have been held at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Rome, 1990; Guggenheim Museum SoHo, New York, 1994; and Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1998.

For further information and images, please contact

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