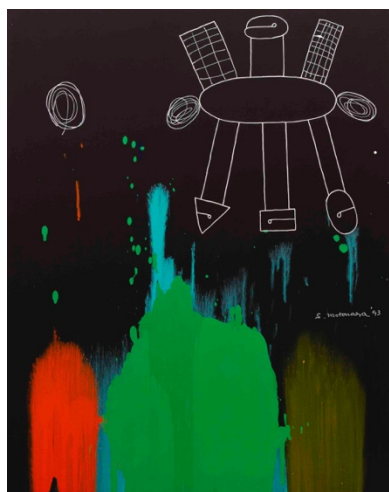


**Sadamasa Motonaga: Triangle, Circle, Square
A Centennial Celebration**

Fergus McCaffrey, Tokyo

November 26, 2022- February 18, 2023

On November 26th, 2022 in Tokyo, Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to celebrate the Centennial of the birth of Sadamasa Motonaga with the opening of the exhibition *Triangle, Circle, Square*, which features 14 paintings made between 1990 and 1999. The exhibition will continue until February 18, 2023.



Sadamasa Motonaga, *The Shape of White Line*, 1993.

Originally trained as a cartoonist, Motonaga illustrated for local magazines and newspapers in the late 1940s. Shortly thereafter he became an early member of Gutai, joining the group in 1955. Together with other first generation members, including Jiro Yoshihara, Kazuo Shiraga, and Saburo Murakami, Motonaga forged an ethos of artistic experimentation, freedom, and individuality in the wake of the Second World War. To break free from the conservatism and militarism of the past, Yoshihara urged his adherents to “do what has never been done before.” With this emphasis on originality, Motonaga responded with a wide variety of paintings, sculptures, water installations, and smoke performances that emphasized interactive play and sought to provoke joy.

In the late 1960s, Motonaga sought to break free from the somewhat hegemonic process-based abstraction that became the signature of Gutai artists, and a residency in New York City

from 1966-67 allowed him head-space to return to the fertile path of his pre and early Gutai work. He revived the anthropomorphic shapes found in his earliest painting, adopted airbrush technique, and gradually began to inject the aesthetics of street culture and *Anime* into the realm of high art. By the later 1970s, Motonaga’s large gestural strokes overlaid with scratched pictograms, and airbrush drips fit squarely into Zeitgeist of ‘bad-painting’ that was emerging with Reinhard Pods in Berlin, Albert Oehlen in Cologne, and Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring in New York.

However, Motonaga’s work remained apolitical and belongs to a special category of transgressive and liberating art which seeks to expand the reach of art to non-specialized audience, via children’s art books, interactive public sculptures, public performances, and art lessons. It is impervious to decoding and beyond words, delighting in the direct pre-verbal communication of rhythmic forms, swirling lines, and flowing shapes.



Sadamasa Motonaga, *Red Flow, Line, Shape* 1998



Sadamasa Motonaga, *White Linear Shape in Black*, 1996

Motonaga died on October 3, 2011, in Takarazuka, Japan. His work has been the subject of many retrospective exhibitions in Japan, most notably at the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Kobe, 1998; Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003; Nagano Prefectural Shinano Art Museum, 2005; and Mie Prefectural Art Museum, Tsu, 2009. Most recently his work is the subject of three solo museum exhibitions in Japan, at the Mie Prefectural Museum of Art (2022); Takarazuka Art Center (2022), Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art (2022) and Kyu-Suukoudou (old Suukou hall, Iga Ueno, 2022). The first retrospective of his work outside Japan was held at

the Dallas Museum of Art in 2014, alongside that of his Gutai colleague Kazuo Shiraga.

Retrospectives of the Gutai Art Association have been held at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Rome, 1990; Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1998; Lugano Cantonal Museum of Art, 2010; National Art Center, Tokyo, 2012; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2013; and Musée Soulages, Rodez, 2018. The largest ever Gutai survey is currently on view at both the Nakanoshima Museum of Art, Osaka; and the National Museum of Art, Osaka; through January 9th, 2023.



Sadamasa Motonaga, *Two Yellows*, 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 its commitment to Japanese art and culture, Fergus McCaffrey opened its Tokyo gallery in March 2018.

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