

**Matthew Barney, Carolee Schneemann, Kazuo Shiraga, Min Tanaka****Fergus McCaffrey New York**

February 12 – April 2, 2022

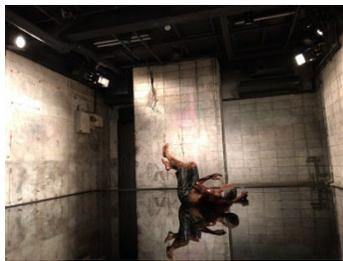
Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to present the second iteration of our landmark exhibition, *Matthew Barney, Carolee Schneemann, Kazuo Shiraga, Min Tanaka*, opening at our New York gallery on Saturday, February 12, 2022.



Originally debuted in Tokyo last year, this two-part presentation centers the exploration of the intersection of dance, performance, painting and sculpture through the theme of *gravity*; the constant force by which we are bound, against which all art is made. If, as the philosophers Deleuze and Guattari write, “Everything revolves around desiring-machines and the production of desire,”<sup>1</sup> these artists convey the intense gravitational tension—the embodied and politicized drive—that exists between potential energy and physical action; personal agency and political, desire and fulfillment.

Exhibiting together for the *second* time, this selection of four visionary artists mounts cross-cultural and cross-generational insights into the primal physicality that underscores the act of artmaking. To operate against gravity, to dance, to suspend, wrestle, take form— this radical group articulates the body as a mode for expression and documentation, developing new systems for capturing immaterial variables such as time and space.

Inspired by Jiro Yoshihara’s experimental avant-garde collective, the Gutai Art Association, Japanese artist Kazuo Shiraga, who joined the group in 1955, began exploring the weightiness and viscosity of oil paint and mud via direct applications using his hands, fingers, and feet. Fusing performance and painting, Shiraga generated theatrical panoramas that highlight the creative process as an endeavor that activates the entire body. Suspended from a rope supporting his weight, he immersed himself into the act of painting—deploying large amounts of wet material, nevertheless directing his motions and the resulting canvases through a carefully controlled choreography. The surface of his painting, *Kyoka Kenro* (1982), is testimony to the decades-long occupation of Shiraga’s mapping of a bodily trajectory—physically skidding, straining, and improvising to create his signature mark-making techniques.



Min Tanaka shares Shiraga’s explorations of sensorial adjustment, a psycho-physical investigation redefined in relation to what philosopher Pierre-Felix Guattari expressed in his 1984 homage to Tanaka—as “A dolphin of the darkness. At the feet of the miracle in Japan.”<sup>2</sup> Documented in Yamanashi during COVID-19 isolation, and debuted in our Tokyo presentation last year, Tanaka’s 15-minute, homemade film captures an emotionally charged, and physically nuanced, dance aptly reflecting the surrealism of the shared condition experienced globally during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tanaka’s gentle but rigid arrangements gesture to his local environs, the Body Weather Farm in the mountain town of Hakushu, which, since 1985, has accommodated a vibrant

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (Germany: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 415.

<sup>2</sup> Guattari, Pierre-Felix. "Homage for Min Tanaka." Min Tanaka | Rin Ishihara | Madada Official Web Site. 1984. Accessed September 28, 2020. [http://www.min-tanaka.com/wp/?page\\_id=58](http://www.min-tanaka.com/wp/?page_id=58)

community of dancers who tend to the land, the animals, and the ancient farmsteads housed within this countryside prefecture. Moving between the communal and the personal, Tanaka's precise movements unfold on an abandoned stage, erected the year prior to the farm's establishment, and offered as an homage to the late artist Noriyuki Haraguchi (1946–2020), who aided in its construction.

The exhibition furthers the creative exchange and collaboration between Tanaka and Haraguchi, with footage from the dancer's 2018 performance in Haraguchi's monumental *Oil Pool in Continuity and Practice* at Plan-B, Tokyo. Tanaka's movements gracefully strive to both defy and succumb to the natural pulling of gravity —the movement of mass or energy through continuous flow. Alongside the monitor in which the film is screened, hangs the distressed kimono worn by Tanaka in several such exacting performances. In addition, the exhibition features uncovered ephemera, costumes, and posters from Tanaka's five-plus decades-spanning history of performance, mined from his personal archive in Japan.

Previously shown at Fergus McCaffrey Tokyo, and traveling to the gallery's continued presentation in Chelsea, Carolee Schneemann's *Up to and Including Her Limits* (1975–2008), performed several times in public in the 1970s, and finally executed, privately, in the artist's studio in 2008, is directly in conversation with post-war American action painting. Schneemann's technique challenged the tacit requirement, even for action painters, that the artist's body be physically stable while engaged in mark-making. Suspended in a tree surgeon's harness, controlling her movements by rope, which lowers and raises the apparatus, the artist launches herself to generate a "drawing variant"—an enveloping web of pencil crayon —so that her "entire body becomes the agency of visual traces, vestige of the body's energy in motion."<sup>3</sup> Schneemann thus imbues this male-dominated arena with a keen understanding of the history that had hitherto excluded women from its participation. By utilizing a technique such that



she was acted upon *by* the forces of gravity, rather than simply reliant on them, Schneemann's work mounts a feminist critique of the field of action painting, which was previously defined by a patriarchal paradigm of the artist's individualist exertion of control over the canvas. *Up to and Including Her Limits* is accompanied by footage of Schneemann's public performances of the piece (1974–76), edited together by the artist herself.



Born a generation after Schneemann, Matthew Barney has committed himself to producing work in which the body is employed as a powerful machine that is able to act against gravitational forces. Drawing on his

background as an athlete, Barney's *DRAWING RESTRAINT* series, begun in the 1980s and continuing today, departs loosely from the notion of hypertrophy; the way in which muscles enlarge in biological response to resistance. This vast body of work, comprising of filmed actions, drawings, sculptures, and photographs, features situations in which the artist himself is met with, and must overcome, self-imposed obstacles in his drive towards artistic output. The exhibition spotlights an iconic photo suite by Barney, *ENVELOPA: Drawing Restraint 7 (Guillotine)* (1993), essentially the origin moment for Barney's gestation toward what would become his most celebrated work *The CREMASTER Cycle*. The suite of photographs captures characters wrestling in memetic contest, transformed through prosthetics and costumes, the scenes are accessed singularly through a portal of translucent nylon frames, posing a push pull challenge that feels cinematic and pictorially independent simultaneously.

These artists forge visions of art-making that dare to confront existing archetypes of both art history and scientific forces. Created in the context of revolutionary artistic milieus in both New York and Japan, they explore ways in which human embodiment might be uniquely involved in processes of innovation, whether through dance, performance, painting or sculpture. Barney, Schneemann, Shiraga and Tanaka each express, in their varied approaches, a personal philosophy of dynamic corporeality, staging the physical body as a vehicle for what Guattari calls “a thither side of the outline called Story; a body without organs.”<sup>4</sup>



### **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, Kazuo Shiraga and Jiro Takamatsu. The gallery also exhibits the work of emerging and seminal Western artists including Anna Conway, Marcia Hafif, Birgit Jürgenssen, Richard Nonas, Sigmar Polke and Carol Rama. In keeping with the gallery’s commitment to Japanese art and culture, McCaffrey opened its Tokyo outpost in March 2018. Fergus McCaffrey has locations in New York, St. Barth, and Tokyo.

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#### Images:

1. Kazuo Shiraga, *Fuma*, 1996. Oil on canvas, 76 3/8 x 102 inches (194 x 259.1 cm) © Estate of Kazuo Shiraga
2. Min Tanaka performing with Noriyuki Haraguchi's *Oil Pool*, plan-B, Tokyo, 2018 © Min Tanaka; photo by Rin Ishihara © Rin Ishihara
3. Carolee Schneemann, *Up to and Including Her Limits*, 1975–2008. Crayon on paper, rope, harness, super 8mm film projector, video (color, sound; 29 min.), and six monitors, unstretched: 108 x 192 x 96 inches (274.3 x 487.7 x 243.8 cm) © Estate of Carolee Schneemann; courtesy of the Estate of Carolee Schneemann, Galerie Lelong & Co., Hales Gallery, and P•P•O•W, New York
- 4-5. Matthew Barney, *ENVELOPA: Drawing Restraint 7 (Guillotine)*, 1993. 7 color photographs framed in nylon frames, 11 1/4 x 14 3/8 x 1 1/4 inches (28.6 x 36.5 x 3.2 cm) © Matthew Barney; courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.