

Press Release

Atsuko Tanaka. The Art of Connecting

2012. Feb. 4 (sat) – May. 6 (sun)



Atsuko Tanaka, *Electric Dress (Reconstructed in 1986)*, 1956,
Courtesy and the Collection of Takamatsu City Museum of Art ©Ryoji Ito

Exhibition Outline

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, is holding the 'TANAKA Atsuko—Art of Connecting' exhibition as a joint project with the Japan Foundation, the U.K.'s IKON Gallery and Spain's Espai d'Art Contemporani de Castelló.

TANAKA Atsuko (1932-2005) began to pursue abstract expressions on the advice of KANAYAMA Akira and starting with the collage work, 'Calendar', she expressed a unique sensitivity combining delicacy and power. Later, with KANAYAMA she participated in the avant-garde 'Gutai Art Association' that was formed under the leadership of YOSHIIHARA Jiro. She received attention for her 'Work (Bell)' (1955) in which twenty electric bells were rigged to ring consecutively, 'Electric Dress' (1957), which consisted of approximately one hundred fluorescent tubes and approximately eighty light bulbs, painted in nine colors of enamel paint and worn like a garment, etc., her installations and performance works standing out for their originality, even among the Gutai. Her work during this period utilized non-physical materials, such as sound, blinking lights or time, abstracting them in a way that highlighted their existence without adhering to traditional artistic expressions. She also ventured to express her experiments through painting, substituting the light bulbs and wires of her 'Electric Dress' with circles and lines, producing a huge number of variations on this theme over the course of her life. It appears that sometimes the path she took led to extremely radical developments and at others, simple repetitions, but in actual fact, all her works were connected and all were new experiments.

There is a growing movement to reevaluate Japanese postwar contemporary art, beginning with the Gutai, and TANAKA Atsuko gained particular recognition after being spotlighted in Documenta12 (2007) that was held after her death. The current exhibition will contain approximately one hundred works, including recreations of her representative works, 'Work (Bell)' and 'Electric Dress', that were reproduced under the artist's guidance, allowing the viewer to retrace her footsteps as she continually sought to explore the innovative.

The 'Connecting to Atsuko Tanaka' program will consist of a talk show, the screening of a documentary on Atsuko Tanaka, entitled 'Atsuko Tanaka Another GUTAI', and various other attractions. The highlight of this program will be the presentation of various new works by contemporary artists: a large-scale balloon sculpture by Shiro Matsui named, 'between here and there is better than either here or there', performance and a video installation by Masayuki Kawai, who connects video equipment together to create music and images from the sounds it produces, and also a performance and a video work by Yui Uechi, who covers her entire body in luminous paint. 'The possibilities that were pioneered by Atsuko Tanaka have yet to be exhausted. They continue to the present day.' (Akio Seki)

Highlights of the Exhibition

■ 'Gutai', 'Fluxus', 'Experimental Workshop'

This winter MOT will be holding simultaneous exhibitions on these three keywords of Japanese contemporary art.

■ TANAKA Atsuko Won World Renown

This is a celebratory exhibition that has already been shown in the UK and Spain. A special talk will be presented at opening of the exhibition to which directors of all the main institutes will be invited.

■ From her 'Bell' and 'Electric Dress' to Tableau

During her exhibitions TANAKA Atsuko presented stimulating works that could not be grasped through sight alone, then transformed these into paintings.

This exhibition will include over 100 of her major works, allowing the viewer to experience TANAKA Atsuko's worldview.

■ Connecting 2011 and TANAKA Atsuko

We will be showing new works by MATSUI Shiro, KAWAI Masayuki and UECHI Yui.

We will present a program, named 'Connecting to Atsuko Tanaka', which will include live performances, the screening of a documentary work entitled 'Tanaka Atsuko - Another Gutai' and numerous other associated attractions.

Words of Tanaka Atsuko

During her hospitalisation in 1953, Tanaka used crayons to outline calendar numbers as she counted down the number of days until her discharge. At that moment, she had a sudden realisation that this was what painting was about. The all-too-common numbers are abstract symbols that also represented, to Tanaka, her entry into the abstract realm. (Text taken from the Exhibition Catalogue: 'Atsuko Tanaka. The Art of connecting', p.11, Yuko Hasegawa)

"What I find most interesting during the creative process is the fact that when the motor rotates to activate the blinking device, the light bulbs that I've arranged reveal an abnormal beauty that can't be humanly created"¹

"There's been so much progress in medicine and science, with people even talking about flying to Mars, and I just want to create art that can coexist with these times"²

¹ Atsuko Tanaka, 'Sakuhiin 11: Butai-fuku' ['Work 11: Stage clothes'], *Gutai*, no.4, 1 July 1956, p.24

² 'Atsuko Tanaka: Jisaku o kataru' ['Atsuko Tanaka: Talking About Her Own Works'], Miyuki Minami, ed., *Tanaka Atsuko ten fukyu puroguramu kirokushu* [Atsuko Tanaka Exhibition Outreach Program Documents], Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, 2003, p.15.

Image : Tanaka at the 3rd Genbi Exhibition in Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art (Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, November 1955) ©Ryoji Ito



Concerning the Exhibition—Why TANAKA Atsuko Now?

The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, will be holding an exhibition entitled, *'Atsuko Tanaka—The Art of Connecting'*, in collaboration with The Japan Foundation, the IKON gallery, UK, and Espai D'Art Contemporani de Castelló, Spain.

In 2012 the world's eye turns its eye towards Japan's avant-garde art of the fifties and sixties, such as 'Gutai' or 'Experimental Workshop'. Stimulated by Western avant-garde art in the postwar years, Japanese artists decided that they wanted to create a form of art that 'nobody had seen before', and they set about it with a straightforward, yet fresh sensitivity and overflowing energy. Among them was TANAKA Atsuko who displayed an outstanding and unique talent as a woman member of the Gutai group. Unlike other Japanese avant-garde women artists of the time, such as ONO Yoko or KUSAMA Yayoi, she did not move to New York in search of expressional freedom and achieve fame there, instead TANAKA remained in Japan where she experimented with her own forms of expression. In the 'Documenta 12' exhibition in 2007 her 'Electric Dress' attracted great attention and then a large-scale work of hers, from the collection of MOMA, was featured in an exhibition in 2010, her reputation growing like a 'late-blooming flower'.

A piece of cloth flapping in the wind provided the inspiration for her 'Bell' installation, in which sound travels through space, while the flashing of a neon tube provided the idea for the 'Electric Dress'; using immaterial sounds or light to produce metaphorical expressions, there was nothing to equal TANAKA's rich and active imagination during the fifties. Her work stood out in strong contrast to the other members of the Gutai movement who restricted themselves solely to the direct relationship of objects. Today, when the whole world is connected through a network, her 'networking painting', in which she represented flashing light bulbs as circles and patiently connecting them with lines, can be described as prophetic. The 'Art of Connecting' refers not to a single picture, but to the numerous works that fill the space and begin to synchronize with each other. TANAKA Atsuko continues to transmit her message towards the present day.

TANAKA Atsuko's (1932-2005) first abstract work was a collage entitled 'Calendar' (1953) and subsequent to this, she joined KANAYAMA Akira in the avant-garde group 'Gutai' that was founded by YOSHIHARA Jiro. With her 'Work (Bell)' (1955) in which twenty electric bells were rigged to ring consecutively, her 'Electric Dress' (1957), which consisted of one hundred fluorescent tubes and ninety light bulbs, painted in nine colors of enamel paint and worn like a garment, etc., her installations and performance works stood out for their originality, even among the Gutai. She even tried to express these experiments through painting, substituting the light bulbs and wires of her 'Electric Dress' with circles and lines, producing a huge number of variations on this theme over the course of her life. It appears that sometimes the path she took led to extremely radical developments and at others, simple repetition, but in actual fact, all were necessary steps in her search for innovation and all her works new experiments connecting with each other.

This long-awaited exhibition will present a comprehensive retrospective of her career, containing approximately one hundred works, including reconstructions of her representative works, 'Work (Bell)' and 'Electric Dress', that were reproduced under her personal guidance. It will also include a lot of reference work: contemporary film of her performances, previously unpublished sketchbooks and drawings.

(Yuko Hasegawa, Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo)

Exhibition Information

Exhibition Title :	Atsuko Tanaka. The Art of Connecting
Venue:	Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo 3F
Period :	2012. Feb. 4 (sat) —May. 6 (sun)
Closed :	Mondays, May. 1 (April. 30 is open)
Hours :	10:00 – 18:00 (Tickets available until 17:30)
Organizers :	Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo/ The Japan Foundation
Special Support :	Ishibashi Foundation
In cooperation with :	N E C Display Solutions., Ltd.
Tickets :	Adult= ¥1,000円 (¥ 800) University Students+Adults over 65yrs old= ¥800 (¥ 640) High School+Junior high School Students= ¥500 (¥ 400) Elementary School students and younger=Free ※() refers to a price for a group over 20 people ※Free entry to MOT Collection for the exhibition ticket holders
Curators :	Jonathan Watkins (Director, Ikon Gallery) Mizuho Kato (Visiting Associate Professor, Museum of Osaka University) Koichi Kawasaki (Chief Curator/ Assistant Director, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art) Yuko Hasegawa (Chief Curator , Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo) Lorenza Barboni (Director, Espai d'art contemporani de Castelló)
Exhibition Staff :	Akio Seki (Senior Curator , Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo)
Also Showing :	Ay-O: Over the Rainbow Once More Feb. 4 – May. 6 MOT Collection 1960s OFF MUSEUM Feb. 4 – May. 6 Bloomberg Pavilion Project until 2012. Oct
Exhibition Catalogue :	Atsuko Tanaka. The Art of Connecting English-Japanese Bilingual : 222 pages
General Information :	Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo 4-1-1, Miyoshi, Koto-ku, Tokyo 135-0022 Tel. 03-5245-4111 / www.mot-art-museum.jp

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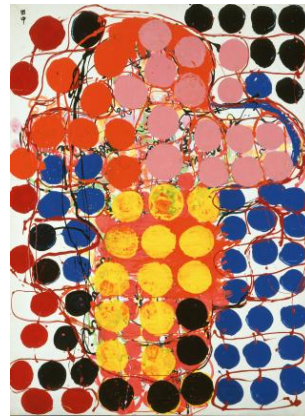
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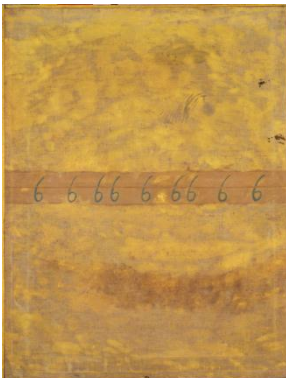
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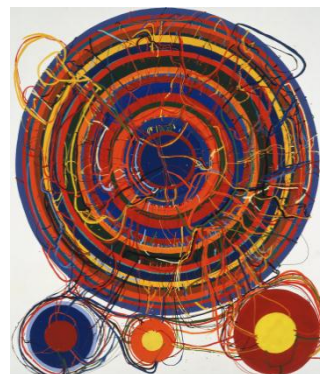
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④ Atsuko Tanaka, *Work*, 1957,
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⑤ Atsuko Tanaka, *Work (6)*, 1955,
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⑥ Atsuko Tanaka, *Thanks Sam*, 1962,
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 Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

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