

The Gutai Manifesto

With our present awareness, the arts we have known up to now appear to us in general to be fakes fitted out with a tremendous affectation. Let us take leave of these piles of counterfeit objects on the altars, in the palaces, in the salons and the antique shops. These objects are in disguise and their materials such as paint, pieces of cloth, metals, clay or marble are loaded with false significance by human hand and by way of fraud, so that, instead of just presenting their own material, they take on the appearance of something else. Under the cloak of an intellectual aim, the materials have been completely murdered and can no longer speak to us.

Lock these corpses into their tombs. Gutai art does not change the material but brings it to life. Gutai art does not falsify the material. In Gutai art the human spirit and the material reach out their hands to each other, even though they are otherwise opposed to each other. The material is not absorbed by the spirit. The spirit does not force the material into submission. If one leaves the material as it is, presenting it just as material, then it starts to tell us something and speaks with a mighty voice. Keeping the life of the material alive also means bringing the spirit alive, and lifting up the spirit means leading the material up to the height of the spirit.

Art is the home of the creative spirit, but never until now has the spirit created the material. The spirit has only ever created the spiritual. Certainly the spirit has always filled art with life, but this life will finally die as the times change. For all the magnificent life which existed in the art of the Renaissance, little more than its archaeological existence can be seen today.

What still keeps that vitality, even if passive, may be primitive art or the art created after Impressionism. These are things in which either, due to skillful application of the paint, the deception of the material had not quite succeeded, or else, like Pointillist or Fauvist, those pictures in which the materials, although used to reproduce nature, could not be murdered after all. Today, however, they are no longer able to call up deep emotion in us. They already belong to a world of the past.

Yet what is interesting in this respect is the novel beauty to be found in works of art and architecture of the past which have changed their appearance due to the damage of time or destruction by disasters in the course of the centuries. This is described as the beauty of decay, but is it not perhaps that beauty which material assumes when it is freed from artificial make-up and reveals its original characteristics? The fact that the ruins receive us warmly and kindly after all, and that they attract us with their cracks and flaking surfaces, could this not really be a sign of the material taking revenge, having recaptured its original life? In this sense I pay respect to Pollock's and Mathieu's works in contemporary art. These works emit the loud outcry of the material, of the very oil or enamel paints themselves. These two artists grapple with the material in a way which is completely appropriate to it and which they have discovered due to their talent. This even gives the impression that they serve the material. Differentiation and integration create mysterious effects.

Recently, Tominaga Soichi and Domoto Hisao presented the activities of Mathieu and Tapi? in Informel art, which I found most interesting. I do not know all the details, but in the content presented, there were many points I could agree with. To my surprise, I also discovered that they demanded the immediate revelation of anything arising spontaneously and that they are not bound by the previously predominant forms. Despite the differences in expression compared to our own, we still find a peculiar agreement with our claim to produce something living. I am not sure, though, about the relationship between the conceptually defined pictorial elements like colours, lines, shapes, in abstract art and the true properties of the material in Informel art. As far as the denial of abstraction is concerned, the essence of their declaration was not clear to me. In any case, it is obvious to us that purely formalistic abstract art has lost its charm, so that the Gutai Art Society founded three years ago was accompanied by the slogan that they would go beyond the borders of abstract art and that the name Gutaiism (concretism) was chosen. Above all, we had to search for a centrifugal approach, instead of the centripetal one seen in abstract art.

In those days we thought, and indeed still do think today, that the most important merits of abstract art lie in the fact that it has opened up the possibility to create a new, subjective shape of space, one which really deserves the name creation.

We have decided to pursue the possibilities of pure and creative activity with great energy. We tried to combine human creative ability with the characteristics of the material in order to concretize the abstract space.

When the abilities of the individual were united with the chosen material in the melting-pot of psychic automatism, we were overwhelmed by the shape of space still unknown to us, never before seen or experienced. Automatism naturally made the image which did not occur to us. Instead of relying on our own image, we have struggled to find an original method of creating that space.

The works of our members will serve as examples. Toshiko Kinoshita is actually a teacher of chemistry at a girls' school. She created a peculiar space by allowing chemicals to react on filter paper. Although it is possible to imagine the results beforehand to a certain extent, the final results of handling the chemicals can not be established until the following day. The particular results and the shape of the material are in any case her own work. After Pollock many Pollock-imitators appeared, but Pollock's splendour will never be extinguished. The talent of invention deserves respect.

Kazuo Shiraga placed a lump of paint on a huge piece of paper, and started to spread it around violently with his feet. For about the last two years art journalists have called this unprecedented method "the Art of committing the whole self with the body." Kazuo Shiraga had no intention at all of making this strange method known to the public. He had merely found the method which enabled him to confront and unite the material he had chosen with his own spiritual dynamics. In doing so he achieved an extremely convincing result.

In contrast to Shiraga, who works with an organic method, Shozo Shimamoto has been working with mechanical manipulations for the past few years. The spray pictures created by smashing a bottle full of paint, or the large surface made in a single moment by firing a small, hand-made cannon filled with paint by means of an acetylene gas explosion, etc., display a breathtaking freshness.

Other works which deserve mention are those of Yasuo Sumi produced with a vibrator or Toshio Yoshida, who uses only one single lump of paint. All their actions are full of a new intellectual energy which demands our respect and recognition.

The search for an original, undiscovered world also resulted in numerous works in the so-called object form. In my opinion, conditions at the annual open-air exhibitions in the city of Ashiya have contributed to this. That these works, created by artists who are confronted with many different materials, differ from the objects of Surrealism can be seen simply from the fact that the artists tend not to give them titles or to provide interpretations. The objects in Gutai art were, for example, a painted, bent iron plate (Atsuko Tanaka) or a work in hard red vinyl in the form of a mosquito net (Tsuruko Yamazaki), etc. With their characteristics, colours and forms, they were constant messages about the materials. Our group does not impose restrictions on the art of its members, letting them make full use of their creativity. For instance, many different experiments were carried out with extraordinary activity such as art felt with the entire body, art which could only be touched, Gutai music (in which Shozo Shimamoto has been doing interesting experiments for several years) and so on. Another work by Shozo Shimamoto is like a bridge which shakes everytime you walk over it. Then a work by Saburo Murakami which is like a telescope you can enter to look up at the heavens, and an installation made of plastic bags with organic elasticity, etc. Atsuko Tanaka started with a work of flashing light bulbs which she called "Clothing." Sadamasa Motonaga worked with water, smoke, etc. Gutai art put the greatest importance on all daring steps which lead to an undiscovered world. Sometimes, at first glance, we are compared with and mistaken for Dadaism, and we ourselves fully recognize the achievements of Dadaism. But we think differently, in contrast to Dadaism, our work is the result of investigating the possibilities of calling the material to life.

We shall hope that there is always a fresh spirit in our Gutai exhibitions and that the discovery of new life will call forth a tremendous scream in the material itself.

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