ALMINE RECH

Takesada Matsutani

Jan 6 — Feb 18, 2023 | Paris, Matignon

Almine Rech Paris, Matignon, is excited to announce its presentation of a selection of mixed-media, abstract works by the pioneering Japanese modern artist Takesada Matsutani, which will run from January 6 to February 18, 2023. Featuring an overview of the artist's creations from the past two decades, the exhibition will also include several of Matsutani's emblematic works from the 1970s and 1980s; together, these works will offer a compact survey of his art's themes and technical development during the most recent phase of his long career, which has spanned some of modernism's most notable eras.

Matsutani, who has been based in Paris since the 1960s, is best known for his involvement with the Gutai Art Association, a group of young artists who, with their leader, the older painter Jirō Yoshihara (1905-1972), came together in 1954, in western Japan, with the aim of, as their manifesto declared, "locking up" the "fraudulent" art of the past like "corpses in the graveyard." Experimenting with materials and a wide range of art-making methods, the Gutai artists fueled Japan's post-World War II avant-garde with rambunctious, tradition-busting energy.

Inspired by Yoshihara's commands to work with and reveal the expressive spirit of their materials and to "create what has not been created before," Gutai's members developed what are now regarded as some of the most groundbreaking and prototypical works of installation art, performance art, and conceptual art. The group had a high-profile presence at Expo '70, the world's fair that took place in Osaka, Japan, in 1970. It disbanded two years later, following Yoshihara's death.

Matsutani was a member of Gutai's so-called second generation, since he joined the group some time after it had been established. Demonstrating a unique approach to handling his materials, he worked with vinyl glue, paint, and other media to create sculptural works on canvas with highly textured surfaces. Often they featured what appeared to be strange orifices or other unusual, organic-feeling forms. Matsutani used his own breath or an electric fan to blow air onto his liquid-glue blobs. In this way, he could control their shapes or stimulate the flow of his moist, malleable material as it dried and hardened.

The techniques Matsutani uses to produce his art, with globs of glue, splotches of paint, or objects partially dipped in paint, are as much his subjects as the sensuous forms that result from these methods. As his work evolved, evoking the aesthetics of East Asian calligraphy, he explored the expressive power of a minimalist palette of black and white in abstract works marked by an elegant, mysterious allure.

Recently, at the opening of the exhibition Into the Unknown World — Gutai: Differentiation and Integration at the Nakanoshima Museum of Art, Osaka, and the National Museum of Art, Osaka, Matsutani said, "Even today, my art-making is influenced by Yoshihara's dictum: to strive to create something new and fresh, and to honor the spirit of my materials."

Matsutani, who comes from Nishinomiya, a small town situated just to the west of Osaka, has several iconic works on display in the exhibition that is now on view in that large port city in western Japan. (The artist has long divided his time between his studio in Paris and his studio in Nishinomiya.)

Works by Matsutani at Almine Rech Paris, Matignon will include, among others, one of the artist's long, horizontal-format, pencil-on-paper drawings from his "Stream" series (1978); "Point de Contact 9-2010" (2010), one of his vinyl-glue dollops in a rare, small-format composition on plywood; "A Drop/Une Goutte" (2018–22), in which the artist experiments with a new combination of vinyl glue and black ink on canvas; and "Expanding-22" (2022), a luminous, mixed-media work in which a transparent, vinyl-glue blob hugs the surface of a white canvas, its form teasingly obscuring a single, plain-pencil line.

In recent decades, the achievements of the Gutai artists have become internationally known through such important exhibitions as Japanese Art after 1945: Scream Against the Sky (Yokohama Museum of Art, 1994), Gutai: The Spirit of an

Era (National Art Center, Tokyo, 2012), Gutai: Splendid Playground (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2013), and, now, the current, two-venue presentation in Osaka.

With the inclusion of his distinctive, mixed-media works in these exhibitions and in numerous solo presentations in galleries in Japan, the United States, and Europe, Matsutani has become one of a handful of notable Gutai artists whose contributions to the group's influential legacy of experimentation and whose individual oeuvre have attracted considerable critical praise in their own right.

With this concentrated survey of Matsutani's work, Almine Rech Paris, Matignon will showcase the ideas and innovations of an artist whose creative journey has taken him from a small town in Japan to one of modern art's historic centers in the heart of Europe, and from early experiments with the humblest of materials to the crafting of a body of enigmatic abstract works that has earned a distinctive place in modern art's canon.

— Edward M. Gómez, arts journalist, art critic and author