

DOMINIQUE LÉVY

For Immediate Release

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Tsuyoshi Maekawa

February 27 – April 12, 2014

Opening Reception: Thursday, February 27, 6-8pm

Dominique Lévy

909 Madison Avenue

New York City

Dominique Lévy Gallery is pleased to present an intimate selection of the Japanese artist Tsuyoshi Maekawa's paintings of the early 1960s. The seven paintings included in the exhibition were executed between 1962 and 1965, Maekawa's first two years as a Gutai member. Jiro Yoshihara founded the Gutai group in 1954. In the beginning there were seventeen members of the group, and these artists came to be known as the first generation of Gutai. Later in the 1960s several other influential artists, including Maekawa, joined, and they have come to be known as the second-generation Gutai artists. Maekawa was born in Osaka in 1936. He took Yoshihara as his mentor in 1959 and participated in the 8th Gutai Exhibition that same year, finally becoming a group member in 1962. From that point until the group's eventual dissolution, Maekawa exhibited his work at every Gutai event.

"Gutai" can be translated as "concrete." Yoshihara explained this choice by saying "through artistic activity the freedom of our spirits is made material, as evidence for all to see." He assembled young artists from the Osaka and Kobe area, and told them "No matter what, do not copy anyone!" and "Do something no one has ever done before!" Putting these ideas into practice, his artists created works spanning performance, painting, sculpture, installation and fashion design. Kazuo Shiraga wrestled with mud half-naked, and made action paintings using his feet. Sadamasa Motonaga created images from poured, dripped and stained pigments. Saburo Murakami burst through giant sheets of paper creating pictures both enormous and fragile. Shozo Shimamoto used cannons and bottles filled with paint to violently attack his surfaces. Atsuko Tanaka created a dress made of light bulbs, wearing which she would attend the group's opening receptions. These and other extraordinary works came to represent the unique energy of the group. They regularly published the art journal *Gutai* and held a



grand exhibition in the nearby Ashiya public park, titled *Challenge the Summer, Modern Art Outdoor Experience Exhibition*. In 1957 the Osaka Sankei Assembly Hall and Tokyo Sankei Hall both held shows focusing on Gutai members' stage-based performance art. In the Nakanoshima area of Osaka in 1962, Yoshihara renovated warehouses to become the Gutai Pinacoteca, a studio building and exhibition space for Gutai artists. Thereafter the group's activities became richer and more focused, with shows of individual members' work held in regular succession. The activities of the collective gained worldwide attention until Yoshihara's death in 1972, when they disbanded, moving on to their individual career paths.

The first generation of Gutai made works that have been described as similar to action painting or French Art Informel. Maekawa's early work is similarly reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism but his primary preoccupation is with the material nature of the work, its objectness. Rather than an investigation of action or an expression of emotion, he was focused on discovering new structural and material possibilities. In the beginning of the 1960s, Maekawa made several works using burlap, a woven cloth created from hemp fibers with a coarse large weave that was usually used for bags of grain. He would apply oil paint to this fabric, using its rough, natural character to draw attention to the work's materiality. The variegated surface texture and patterning result in a fascinatingly strange, metamorphic object.

Preceding Maekawa, there is a history of artists that used burlap, including such renowned Western figures as Joan Miró, Paul Klee, and Alberto Burri. In his famous *Sacco* series Burri created images by collaging, tearing, cutting, piercing, and sewing this naturally tactile material. Whereas Burri's exploits with burlap are considered more of a precursor to Neo-Dada and the art of such figures as Robert Rauschenberg, Maekawa's preoccupation with this same material had more to do with its textural possibilities and the way it led to surfaces that bring to mind a topographical map. Using the irregularity of the burlap's organic surface contours, he applied glue and oil paint to create works that have a raw materiality, yet maintain the feeling of a painting. The relief-like surface's gracefully meandering lines repeat organically, reminiscent of the rhythm of the natural world, geological structures of the earth, and biological phenomena. Viewing these works has been likened to the experience of observing a meandering riverbed or the veins of leafy plants.

Maekawa's burlap works of the early 1960s have been collected in large numbers by the Osaka National Museum of Art and the Japanese National Museum. They are emblematic of Maekawa's unique sensibility, and are considered to be central works in Gutai's most productive period. In the following years, Maekawa was the recipient of numerous accolades and included in prestigious museum exhibitions. In 1981 he received the *Tokyo Art Museum Award* after participating in the *15th Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibition*, and after the *4th Japan Embassy Award Exhibition* in 1982,

Maekawa received the *Osaka National Art Museum Award*. That same year he received the *Kyoto National Art Museum Award* and participated in the *14th Japanese International Art Exhibition* and the *5th Contemporary Japanese Painting Exhibition*.

This small exhibition is particularly important for the gallery for several reasons. In the past few years, we have increasingly experienced the universal importance of the avant-garde ideas of the Gutai artists and their significance in art history. During the post-war period, which the gallery program focuses on, after the destructions of the atomic bomb, artists all over the world were looking for a new beginning, a form of art that was weary of figuration and instead sought novel forms of expression: Gutai, Zero, New Realism. It is not until recent years that Gutai received a fair recognition. The exhibition *Japon des Avant-Gardes at the Paris Centre Pompidou* in 1986 and the *Venice Biennale* in 1993 marked the first steps towards this. In 1999 Maekawa's work was shown in the Gutai exhibition at *Jeu de Paume* in Paris. Last year, the renewed attention for Gutai culminated in the survey exhibition *Gutai: Splendid Playground* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum New York. Furthermore, Gutai's significance in art history and its affinity to the Western avant-gardes in the post-war era such as Yves Klein, Jackson Pollock, Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri, and Antoni Tàpies, was demonstrated in the extraordinary exhibition *Destroy the Picture: Painting the Void, 1949 – 1962*, organized by Paul Schimmel at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles in 2012, which also traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Recent exhibitions of Tsuyoshi Maekawa's work include ***Tsuyoshi Maekawa*** at Whitestone Gallery Tokyo last year, and the upcoming survey at Alex Vervoordt Gallery Antwerp, which is scheduled to open on March 13th. Maekawa lives and works in Osaka, Japan.

Tsuyoshi Maekawa will run simulatenously with the exhibition ***Germaine Richier*** at Dominique Lévy, 909 Madison Avenue. Both will be on view from February 27th through April 12th. A joint opening reception will be held 6-8pm on Thursday, February 27th.

For additional information, please contact info@andreaschwan.com

