

Kazuo Shiraga after the third execution of his performance painting *Challenging Mud* at the First Gutai Art Exhibition, in Ohara Kaikan, Tokyo, in 1955. The bottom image is a postcard for Gutai showing the finished "painting."

*Please Come In*, 1955, was a performance and an installation consisting of ten poles painted red and arranged in a conical shape, which Shiraga swung at with an axe. At the "Experimental Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Midsummer Sun," in Ashiya Park (above), and the First Gutai Exhibition in Tokyo (below), the poles were left standing for viewers to circumnavigate.



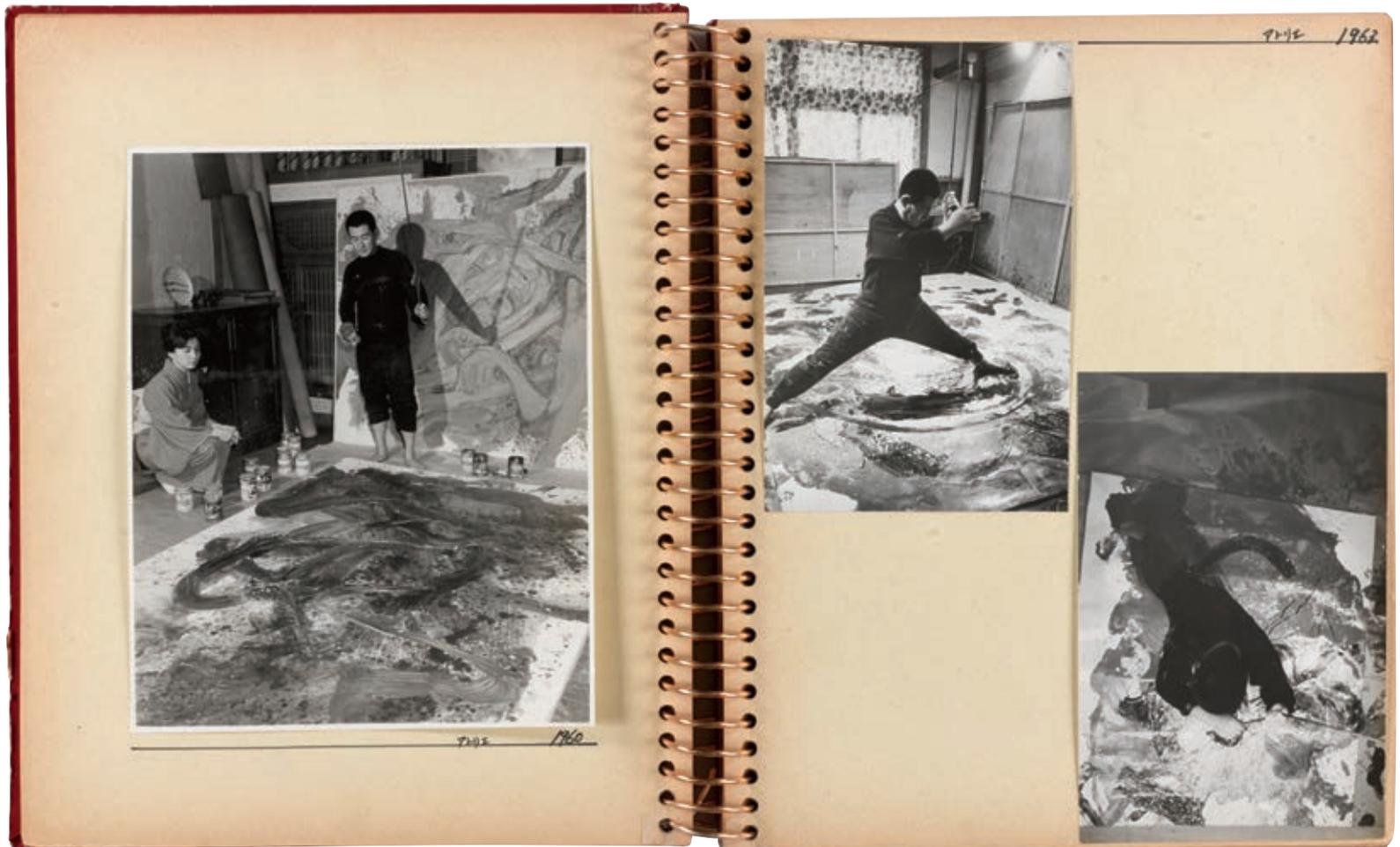
# UNSEEN EYE ON GUTAI

**KAZUO SHIRAGA, ONE OF THE MOVEMENT'S LEADING LIGHTS, KEPT A SCRAPBOOK DOCUMENTING THE GROUP'S FAMOUSLY EPHEMERAL ARTWORKS**

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY AMAGASAKI CULTURAL CENTER, JAPAN

Shiraga and his wife, Fujiko, in his studio in Amagasaki, 1960.

Fujiko, an artist in her own right, was also an integral part of her husband's painting process, as she helped select the color, amount, and placement of the paint before pouring it on the canvas while he swung around on a rope from the ceiling, spreading it with his feet.



■ The recent confluence of exhibitions featuring the postwar Japanese artist Kazuo Shiraga has been hard to miss, with two concurrent gallery shows in New York, at Mnuchin and Dominique Lévy; a joint show with Sadamasa Motonaga, “Between Action and the Unknown,” on view at the Dallas Museum of Art through July 19; and a dual exhibition of his work with wife Fujiko’s, opening April 30 in New York at Fergus McCaffrey, which represents the artist’s estate. The market has spoken too, with three new auction records notched in 2014 alone. Here, *Art+Auction* offers an exclusive sneak peek at the early years of the Gutai movement, as documented by Shiraga himself between 1953 and 1965.

The excerpts here and on the following pages come from a 47-page scrapbook, published for the first time in the catalogue to the Lévy show (jointly issued with Axel Vervoordt). According to the gallery’s Valerie Werder, who in researching the show found a reference to the book in an interview and dispatched a Japanese-speaking colleague to track it down, “Gutai was primarily an assignment-based collective, with Jiro Yoshihara acting as a father/promoter/mentor to the younger group members like Shiraga. He issued a general directive—‘Do something that

has never been done before!’—and urged each member to develop an individual working process.” For Shiraga, who had already been experimenting with a palette knife and his fingers before joining the group, this meant beginning to paint with his feet, producing the canvases for which he is most famous today. But he also made a diverse array of pieces for various Gutai events and exhibitions, which were held outdoors, in department stores, and at kite festivals. All, however, dealt with concerns similar to the ones he was addressing with the foot works: painting as performance, how to inject time into a static painting, how to use the entire body to create an image, and what material might be left behind after a happening.

The scrapbook is held by the Amagasaki Cultural Center in Japan, and Koichi Kawasaki, former director of the Ashiya City Museum of Art and History (which shares the Shiraga archive with Amagasaki), hopes its publication will spur further inquiry into the Gutai movement. “Even Japanese critics are mainly studying Western art history, so Gutai is comparatively little known in the place it was born,” he says. “We need to look at Shiraga and the Gutai spirit against the whole span of Japanese tradition. It has only just begun.” ■ SARAH P. HANSON

Clippings of photographs of paintings, likely from the *Gutai* journal, which the group disseminated abroad as a way of entering into dialogue with their international peers.

A clipping featuring *Tenkosei Kaosho*, 1962, currently on view through April 4 in "Body and Matter" at Dominique Lévy Gallery.



# THE PAGES "FOLLOW THE PRACTICE IN A WAY,"

Shiraga's sculptural works included *Lens*, 1956, shown here in a *Shinko-shimbun* newspaper-sponsored exhibition in Kobe.

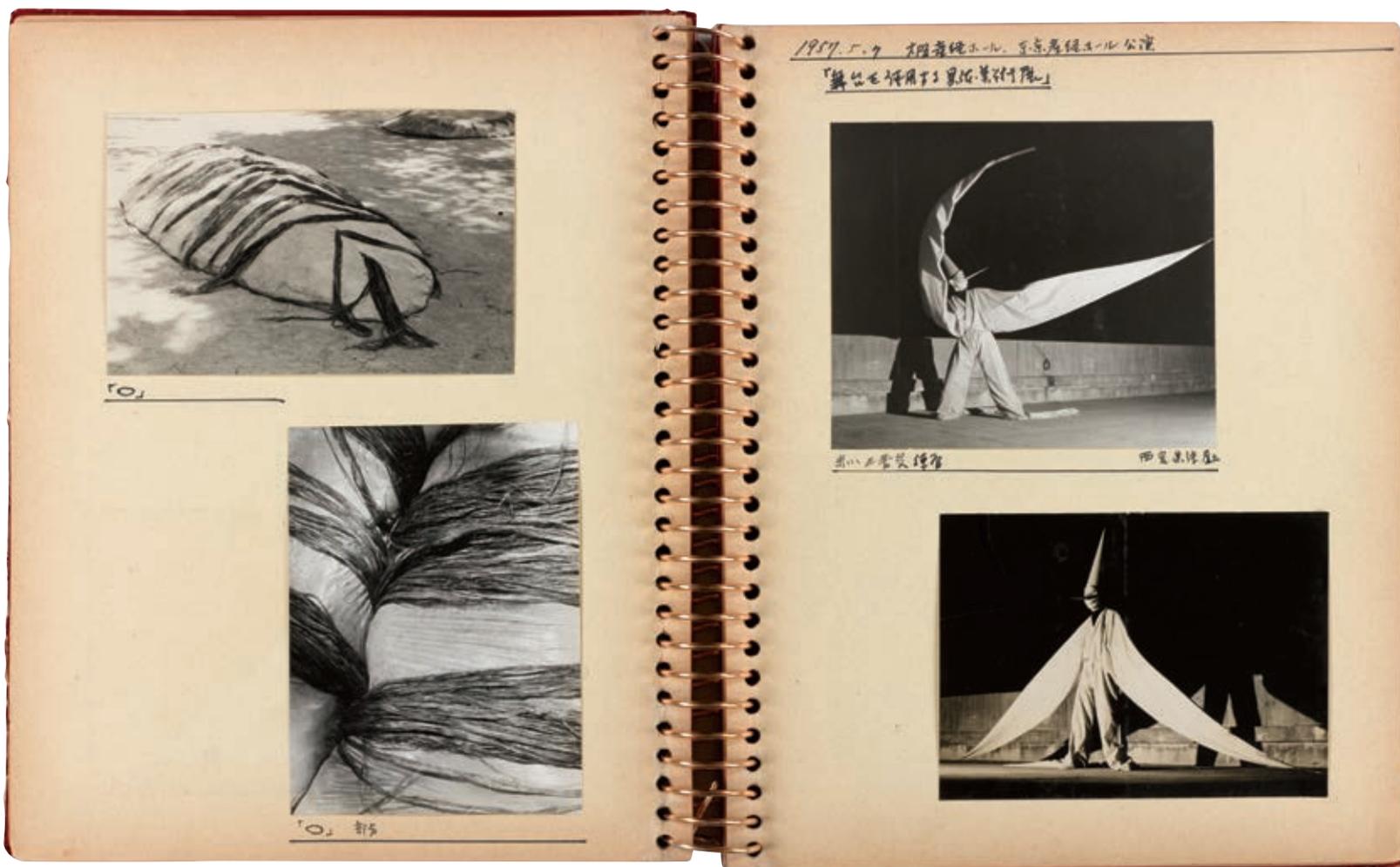
Above is *Foot*, 1956, at the same show, which Shiraga created by stepping in red paint and walking the length of a long white piece of paper. Below, the artist with *16 Forms*, made in painted plaster for the 1956 Ashiya City Art Exhibition.



# NATURE OF SHIRAGA'S OBSERVES VALERIE WERDER..

According to Valerie Werder, "I have only ever seen the title for this piece listed as an oval symbol. It was presented at the Outdoor Gutai Art Exhibition, held at Ashiya Park in July 1956, for which Shiraga exhibited two pieces, *Circle* and *Oval*. Both consist of large mounds of mud wrapped with plastic and tied with ropes."

Shiraga performing *Ultramodern Sanbaso*, the opening act of *Gutai Art on the Stage*, from May 1957, in which the artist danced in costume and fired arrows dipped in paint at a canvas.



"...WITH PHOTOGRAPHS OF HIM  
**WORKS,** THE EVENT AND THE

Shiraga's "fan painting" period began around 1965. The piece in the foreground, *The Object of Red Fan*, was made that year and shown in the 18th Gutai Art Exhibition at the Gutai Pinacoteca in Osaka.

The artist with Fujiko helping him paint, this time with the new apparatus he developed to create wide, planar strokes on the canvas. Shiraga used his feet to push this tubular apparatus across the canvas in a half-circle stroke.



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CREATING AND PERFORMING **HIS**  
OBJECT ARE GIVEN EQUAL TREATMENT."