



FTWeekend

# Critics' choice

Life&Arts



'T32'  
(1962) by  
Kazuo  
Shiraga

## Kazuo Shiraga

Lévy Gorvy, London

Saburo Murakami punctured paper surfaces by hurling himself through them — once so violently that he got concussion. Astuko Tanaka designed and wore dresses made of flashing lightbulbs, wired with alarm bells. And Kazuo Shiraga

ditched his brushes, swung from a rope attached to the ceiling and with his feet pushed and kicked oil paint in abstract swirls of thick impasto on to canvases lying on the floor. Dominated by blacks and crimsons, dense clots and apparently random splatters, drips, sparks, these vigorous all-over

gestural paintings are disordered, violent, evocative of wounds and destruction but also of freedom — all held together in tension with Shiraga's indomitable sense of structure. He wanted the works "to have the impact of a blow".

How to create art after the atomic bomb? Japan's postwar Gutai group

sought to overthrow all prewar forms of artmaking. Emphasising bodily interaction with materials, the movement was influential on some western contemporaries — notably Yves Klein, who lived in Japan in the early 1950s — but remained little known globally for most of the 20th century. A Guggenheim show in 2013 raised awareness and prices, and Shiraga especially struck a chord with 21st-century interest in painterly process and performance.

This small, museum-quality exhibition, inaugurating the partnership of dealers Dominique Lévy and Brett Gorvy, assembles some of Shiraga's most potent paintings: "T32" and "Kakurou", where rivers of white cascade through dense reds, fluid, brutal/lyrical compositions redolent of de Kooning; the charred black/orange tangle "Chiyosei Mochakuten", named for a character from the Chinese "Water Margin" epic, about heroic bandits rebelling against a corrupt emperor; and "Chikisei Seseisho", a frenzy of slashing marks around a luminous blue void, once owned by Lucio Fontana.

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