‘T32’
(1962) by
Kazuo
Shiraga

sought to overthrow all previous
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 “Chikai
Sensha”, a frenzy of slashing
marks around a luminous blue
void, once owned by Lucio
Fontana.

Kazuo Shiraga
Lévy Gorvy, London
Saburo Murakami punctured paper
surfaces by hurling himself through
them—once so violently that he got
concussion. Astuto Tanaka
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
ground. Dominated by blacks and
crimsons, dense dots and
apparently random splatters, drips,
sparks, these vigorous all-over
gestural paintings are disordered,
vigorous, 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 Gakai group

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