

PAULA COOPER GALLERY

ATSUKO TANAKA

Paintings and Drawings, 1963 – 2003

243A Worth Ave, Palm Beach

November 20 – December 15, 2021

Paula Cooper Gallery is delighted to announce a one-person exhibition of work by Atsuko Tanaka that will open in Palm Beach in November 2021. This is the first exhibition devoted to Tanaka's work in the United States since 2004, when a historical exhibition at the Grey Art Gallery, New York, coincided with a show at Paula Cooper Gallery. Tanaka has received worldwide acclaim in recent years, with an exhibition held at Moderna Museet (2019-2020), and an important travelling show organized and hosted by Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; Espai D'Art Contemporani de Castelló, Spain; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; and The Japan Foundation (2011–2012).

Atsuko Tanaka (1932–2005) was a prominent figure in the mid-century international avant-garde and one of Japan's best-known artists. Trained as a painter, in 1955 Tanaka joined the *Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai* (Gutai Art Association), an avant-garde art group founded in 1954 with the aim to create "an art which has never existed before." Responding to Japan's rapidly-changing post-war urban landscape, the Gutai artists embraced unconventional materials and staged performances in pursuit of experimental embodied painting. Their energetic art-making and radical break with tradition foreshadowed many developments in performance art, conceptual art, and minimalism in Europe and North America.

A child of Japan's industrial age and a thrill-seeker enamored with trains and fast cars, in 1956 Tanaka was inspired by a neon billboard in the Osaka station to create *Electric Dress*, a tangle of incandescent hand-painted bulbs and wires worn, treacherously, on the artist's body. Exhibited at the Gutai group's Tokyo debut, the work embodied the ambivalence towards technology that was characteristic of post-war Japan. The *Electric Dress* (briefly dismantled, strung up on canvas, and transformed into an illuminated painting) initiated a vocabulary of circles and lines which Tanaka elaborated in painting and drawing from 1956 onwards.

Reconceptualizing the dress in two dimensions, these works are the result of Tanaka's reflective and recursive process to record fleeting impressions of its flickering form. Vivid circles of various sizes are held in tension by a radiating network of lines, illustrating the circuits, connections, and incessant buzz of mechanized life. In the paintings, executed in synthetic resin to emphasize the smooth surface and flow of line, the compositions are chaotic but clear, while the forms in the watercolor, gouache, and crayon drawings begin to blur, the circles and lines bleeding into each other. Despite Tanaka's almost fifty-year devotion to the circle and line motif, each composition is a unique exploration of technology diffused through the self.

The current exhibition presents significant works spanning almost the artist's entire career. A work from 1963 was included in Tanaka's first one-person exhibition at the Gutai Pinotheca in February 1963, and her first commercial presentation at Minami Gallery later that year. These exhibitions were pivotal both for their presentation of Tanaka's work outside of the context of Gutai, and the attention they attracted from international critics and curators. In the early 1980s interest in Tanaka's painting was renewed, and her remarkable paintings were imbued with increased vibrancy and clarity.

The exhibition will also include a 10-minute documentary film. In *Round on Sand*, Tanaka draws concentric circles in the sand while the waves wash in. The film was produced by Hiroshi Fukuzawa and shot in the autumn of 1968 on Awaji Island in the Hyogo Prefecture.

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This is Tanaka's third exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery, following the one-person presentation in 2004 and a two-person exhibition with Atsuko Tanaka and Akira Kanayama in 2008.