



SADAMASA MOTONAGA ((1922-2011))

Untitled

Signed lower left, "S. Motonaga"

oil on canvas

16 x 12 1/2 in. (23 7/8 x 20 1/8 x 2 in.)

1966

27986

PROVENANCE:

Sadamasa Motonaga Estate

Private Collection

Fergus McCaffrey

Private Collection, Houston

As a member of the legendary Gutai Art Association that flourished between 1954 and 1972, Sadamasa Motonaga emerged when post-atomic surrealist existentialism was at the forefront of artistic development in Japan. Yet he chose a different path. He turned his back on the destruction wrought by the war and created work that was fresh, jubilant, and playful. "Untitled" of 1966 is in his classic style, which developed concurrently with Morris Louis' so-called 'Veil' paintings. It might suggest the brightly lit comb, eye and mottled plumage of a gallinaceous bird, but any such associations are probably arbitrary and unintended. Instead, it is a brilliantly successful display of Motonaga's avant-garde take on traditional Japanese Tarashikomi — the technique that involves tilting the canvas at different angles to allow mixtures of resin and enamel to flow upon one another before the paint is fully dry.

Sadamasa Motonaga (1922-2011) worked as a manga artist and newspaper illustrator before joining Gutai, the Japanese collective renowned for its experiments with material, space and performance. In 1966 Motonaga moved to New York and returned to the world of two dimensions. The works assembled by Fergus McCaffrey from the second half of the artist's life are brightly colored surreal landscapes, totally flat save for the gradients that modulate the anonymous biomorphs that populate them. Work (Water)—a set of plastic tubes filled with dyed water—is the only throwback to Motonaga's Gutai period, but it's more subdued than the version installed at "Gutai: Splendid Playground," the 2013 survey at the Guggenheim. There, transparent cradles traversed the museum's atrium at dramatic diagonals, and the vivid water seemed kinetic, about to spill. At Fergus McCaffrey the evenly sized stripes of water cling to the front windows, where they measure out the width of panes of glass. Dye sparkles in natural light and colored shadows dance on the floor, highlighting the slender, strange and playful forms of Motonaga's paintings.

(Art in America)

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