On July 27, 2011 at Ikon Gallery (Birmingham, U.K.), The Japan Foundation will present *Atsuko Tanaka. The Art of Connecting*, the large-scale solo exhibition of works by Atsuko Tanaka (1932-2005) in Europe after the interval of nine years, who in recent years has received much acclaim both in Japan and abroad as one of the leading female artists associated with the Japanese postwar avant-garde art group Gutai.

With some 100 items, including paintings, collages, and documentary films, the exhibition will introduce Tanaka’s over 50-year career as a pioneering artist who combined performance with fine art in works such as *Work* (Bell, 1955), in which sound moves around the gallery, and *Electric Dress* (1956), a flashing garment with approximately 200 light bulbs originally shown in her performance piece.

The show was initially planned by Jonathan Watkins, the director of Birmingham’s Ikon Gallery, is known for his extensive knowledge of Japanese art and for his guest curation of *Facts of Life* (co-organized by The Japan Foundation), an exhibition of Japanese contemporary art that was held at Hayward Gallery in London in 2001. Watkins also served as artistic director of the Biennale of Sydney in 1998 and has overseen special exhibitions at the Venice Biennale and the Tate Gallery. As a large-scale solo show curated by Watkins and a Japanese executive committee composed of three specialists, the Atsuko Tanaka exhibition promises to invite an international reappraisal of both Gutai and the artist herself.

After premiering at the Ikon Gallery, the exhibition is scheduled to travel to the Espai d'art contemporani de Castelló in Spain, and in 2012, to the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo.

We hope that the show could bring your attention to the unique expression of the artist, who represents the world-acclaimed Gutai group.

For enquiries regarding this press release, please contact:
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Exhibition Outline

October 7-December 31, 2011: Espai d’art contemporani de Castelló (València, Spain)
February 4-May 6, 2012: Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

Organized by The Japan Foundation and participating museums
Curator: Jonathan Watkins (Director, Ikon Gallery)
Co-curators: Japanese Executive Committee
  Yuko Hasegawa (Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo)
  Mizuho Kato (Visiting Associate Professor, Museum of Osaka University)
  Koichi Kawasaki (Chief Curator / Assistant Director, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art)
Co-curator at EACC: Lorenza Barboni (Director, Espai d’art contemporani de Castelló)
With special support from Ishibashi Foundation
Support for the Ikon Gallery exhibition from the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation,
and the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation.

Profile: Atsuko Tanaka

Born in Osaka in 1932. After leaving the Kyoto Municipal College of Art in 1951, Tanaka studied at the Art Institute of the Osaka Municipal Museum of Art. On the advice of Akira Kanayama, who was also attending the school, Tanaka developed an interest in abstract painting, and began a series of works using numbers as a motif in about 1954. Around the same time, she began participating in the Zero-kai, a group of young artists attempting to create cutting-edge work that also included Kanayama, Kazuo Shiraga and Saburo Murakami, trying brainstorming sessions with them. Along with Kanayama, Shiraga, and Murakami, Tanaka joined the Jiro Yoshihara-led Gutai Art Association (or Gutai) in 1955. After creating a number of innovative works such as a ten-meter square of pink rayon that floated approximately 30 centimeters above the ground; a group of 20 bells installed in a gallery that rang in succession; Stage Clothes, which consisted of systematically flashing light tubes attached to seven huge human forms with a height of 4.4 meters and a width of 3.6 meters; Electric Dress, a blinking garment that incorporated some 200 colourful light bulbs and tubes; and a performance in which the artist changed clothes in sequence, Tanaka began making paintings that were inspired by tangled light bulbs and electric cords around 1957. The works caught the eye of the French art critic Michel Tapié, who happened to be visiting Japan at the time, and led him to champion Tanaka as one of Gutai members who "should be seen equal to the artists estimated highly in international context."

After first being introduced in the West by Tapié, Tanaka showed her work in international exhibitions, received a number of awards, and eventually came to be seen as one of the most important members of Gutai. Leaving the group in 1965, she enthusiastically continued working, staging regular solo exhibitions until 2004.

In the 1980s, with a reappraisal of Gutai well underway, Tanaka was again portrayed as one of the leading members of the group in large-scale exhibitions held both in Japan and abroad that focused on the theme of postwar art, and comprehensive overviews of Gutai. Moreover, in the late ’90s, Tanaka was recognized as an independent artist who transcended the historical context of Gutai, and renewed interest in her career was triggered by a retrospective titled Atsuko Tanaka: Search for an Unknown Aesthetic, 1954-2000 that was held at the Ashiya City Museum of Art & History and the Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art in 2001. In the midst of this reappraisal, further inspired by full-fledged solo exhibitions in Innsbruck in 2002, New York in 2004, and Vancouver in 2005, Tanaka died in December 2005 as a result of injuries she had suffered in a car accident in March of that year. Selected for inclusion in the large-scale international exhibition Documenta 12 (Kassel, Germany), which along with the Venice Biennale is seen as a prime indicator of trends in contemporary art, Tanaka was also included in the 16th Biennale of Sydney the following year, suggesting that her international standing remains secure even after her death.

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Publicity Photos

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1

Electric Dress (1956; reproduced in 1986)
Collection and photo courtesy:
Takamatsu City Museum of Art

2

‘71S (1971)
Collection and photo courtesy:
The Museum of Art, Kochi

3

Drawing after "Electric Dress" (1956)
Collection and photo courtesy:
21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa
Photo: Atsushi Nakamichi / Nacása & Partners

4

Gate of Hell (1965-69)
Collection and photo courtesy:
The National Museum of Art, Osaka

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