



## **“Shozo Shimamoto Samurai, acrobat of the look 1950-2008”**

**13<sup>rd</sup> November 2008 – 8<sup>th</sup> March 2009  
Villa Croce Contemporary Art Museum, Genoa**

curator Achille Bonito Oliva

From 13<sup>rd</sup> November 2008 to 8<sup>th</sup> March 2009, Villa Croce Contemporary Art Museum hosted a personal exhibition dedicated to the Japanese artist Shozo Shimamoto. The initiative curator is Achille Bonito Oliva, and the project was organized by Antonio Borghese together with Naples Morra Foundation and Shozo Shimamoto Association.

The project included a complete artworks selection from 1950s to most recent works, realized at the last Biennale di Venezia edition and in May 2008 during Naples and Capri Performances. Moreover, it traced the whole artistic course of the Japanese Master and witnesses his work performing and poetic dimension also through several videos.

Shozo Shimamoto was a main character in the contemporary visual research. His production begins in Japan and it was placed inside Gutai movement in the early 1950s and continues, since then, with a great and increasing international consensus.

The Movement, born in Japan in 1954, was addressed to a way of making Art connected to “action-painting” and used expressive forms typical of happenings and performances, “aimed to banish the paintbrush”, as Shimamoto himself begins his poetic Manifesto in 1957.

To “free colors from the paintbrush” Gutai artists replace it with every kind of instruments able to exalt coloring matter quality, like hands, feet, skates, toys, watering cans and cannons.

Shimamoto was the discoverer of a new way of considering painting, a spectacular and multimedia forms promoter, and the creator of a virtual bridge connecting Occidental artistic avant-garde and Japanese Zen Calligraphy tradition.

Placed in a crucial position inside the contemporary artistic environment, Shimamoto became, as Achille Bonito Oliva writes:

*“a wandering art samurai succeeding in hitting the target, assisted by the creative process sharp chance, willing to pierce the world inertia and instill strength into the human community”.*

For the opening, on Thursday 13<sup>rd</sup> November, at 2 pm, the artist will perform, in Matteotti Square, the event “Shozo Shimamoto – Samurai, glance tumbler”, with the collaboration of Phoebe Neville and the Fluxus artist Philip Corner. During this performance, organized by Abc Arte, the Master, hanged by a crane, will throw colors on a large canvas stretched on the square paving. The event will be animated also by objects, performer creating sounds, colors, movements and a vital power typical of the artist.

Shimamoto was not interested only in Art: as a matter of fact, he connected to his artistic career a strong commitment to sustain and defend peace. His production can be understood as a way to stimulate vital energies able to affirm a pacifist feeling: for this reason, in 1996, he was also candidated to win the Peace Nobel Prize.

The exhibition was under the Patronage of Premiership of the Council of Ministers, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Japanese General Council, Liguria Region and Genoa Municipality.

A catalogue published by Skira, collects the whole visual documentation on Shimamoto work, Achille Bonito Oliva, Lorenzo Mango and the Master's texts.

## Plan

*"Color without matter does not exist. The matter beauty has to survive also the paintbrush straining. Only through cracks, erosions or unexpected colors changes, it is possibile to discover coloring substances inner beauty."*

This phrase, contained in Shimamoto program text written in 1957, begins the artist's linguistic experimentation course. This research has become, after 58 years of activity, the most distinctive characteristic of his poetic. The continuous and unstoppable reflection and experimentation on artistic language, action, matter, being light, energy and color at the same time.

Born in Osaka in 1958, Shimamoto is a Gutai Movement co-founder. Gutai is the Association for Concrete Art, founded by Jiro Yoshihara in 1954 and aimed to free Art from rules and Occidental and Oriental tradition burden.

The exhibition is for Genoa and Liguria Region, an absolute novelty as it about a crucial artistic personality in the Afterwar Art story. Together with the retrospective dedicated to Lucio Fontana and hosted, at the same time, by Palazzo Ducale, Shozo Shimamoto exhibition sheds light on a specific historical, political, cultural and artistic moment in which revolutionary artistic conceptions have been generated both in Europe, United States, and Japan.

The initiative is a retrospective of the Japanese artist Shozo Shimamoto aimed to witness his artistic course from the first artworks to the last performances.

The course, divided into decades, begins with early 1950s artworks: then Shimamoto is Jiro Yoshihara's disciple and Yoshihara pushes him to experiment new languages and to look for new expressive forms. And in this environment Holes works are generated, almost by chance, making coloring pigments react on different newspaper sheets overlapping layers. Matter and chance are main characters of the pictorial action, while the artist is a mere witness.

The hole piercing the screen is result of a physical contact among artist, surface and color. It is the contact track, the final result of an action but not a mental choice as in Fontana's case. This exhibition section is so fundamental also to compare and separate Shimamoto and Fontana's poetic, for a long time, wrongly, drawn close the one to the other.

In the same section, dedicated to 40s and 50s artworks, it is possibile to find also Gutai action paintings and environmental works. To represents this typology, Shimamoto "Please, walk on here" work will be reconstructed. The original one has been built for 1955 "2<sup>nd</sup> Gutai open-air exhibition" in the Ashiya City park. The path, included inside a collective creative project of intervention on a physical space, directly involved the spectator, that was invited to walk on the artwork establishing a relationship with it. The work is composed by a set of wooden boards and by a springs system and reacted when the spectator walked on it, altering his balance. With a similar purpose, 1956 "Cannon Work" witnesses the beginning in Shimamoto ac-

tion paintings inside Gutai poetics. A cannon, specifically built by the artist, shot colors and they positioned accidentally on canvas, in deliberately indefinite space and time.

This section is completed by historical pictures and videos, that witness early Gutai exhibitions and initiatives. Shimamoto audio works and works on films have to be included in this continues need to experiments. For 1957 "Gutai Stage Exhibition" he creates a movie entitled "A movie that does not exist worldwide". It is obtained drawing on a film rudimentary marks, points and lines and accompanied by a melody made of common and natural sounds reproductions.

The **second section** encompass the 1960s. The 1957 arrival of the French critic Michel Tapié in Japan, accompanied by Georges Mathieu, changes Gutai Group and Shimamoto fates: Gutai assimilation to Informal, that, carrying its language towards a pictorial style less and less characterized by objectual and processual shapes, is compensated by the international promotion by which the critic bring Gutai out of Japan. Shimamoto pictures and canvases, as the ones belonging to other Gutai members, even if reaching European and American exhibition rooms, they do not give up to action, that becomes the fulcrum of painting realization. All works are the final result of a performance, an action, a new technique kind dating back to 1956. This new technique consists in throwing violently and without any mental or intellectual choice, on canvas, coloring substances contained inside bottles (bottle crash). Also in this pictorial phase, the artistic course highlights a continuous need for experimentation characterizing Shimamoto artistic expressionism: he tries different techniques and changes supports and dimensions.

**The 1970s and 1980s section** contains several serigraphies realized for the Mail Art project, in which Shimamoto begin to be interested after Yoshihara's death and Gutai dissolution. The adhesion to Mail Art and the creation of a Network is, anyway, connected with Gutai because of its collective and active character. In this section, to witness this phase of Shimamoto career, it is possibile to find some pictures representing actions and performances with AU Group (Union Artist).

**The 1980s and 1990s** are represented by Bottle Crashes, works realized using a personally invented technique. In those years he develops an innovative and peculiar linguistic expressionism, using again bottle crashes but also adding them new meaning known trough Mail Art experience.

**The last section** documents most recent years: Shimamoto realizes his works only during performance-events in which the space (squares, monuments, museums and art galleries) the public, the performers, the tools and objects used to throw colors always create new and unexpected relationships. Works will be accompanied by a rich photographic documentation connected to performances, the real main characters to the detriment of the pictorial result. To complete the whole preparation, creating the spectacular and theatrical atmosphere typical of his happenings, music will also be used. Kyoto Saga University of Art, Trevi (colors throwing from a helicopter), Kobe Fashion Museum, Venezia, Pechino Art Challenged Project, Naples Dante Square, Punta Campanella and Capri Performances will be documented.

The exhibition will also include a didactic diachronic course, comparing i grandi eventi storico-artistici ed i maggiori protagonisti del Secondo Dopoguerra (Fontana, Cage, Pollock, Kaprow, Mathieu) al fine di ricostruire una mappatura adeguata e completa.