

## Press Release

### Atsuko Tanaka

#### *The Art of Connecting*

27 July – 11 September 2011

Ikon and the Japan Foundation presents the first UK retrospective of the pioneering Japanese artist Atsuko Tanaka (1932-2005), consisting of very early paper and fabric collages, diverse works from her years as a member of the avant-garde Gutai group (1955-65) including the famous *Electric Dress*, and a selection of later paintings.

The first works in this exhibition, two paper collages entitled *Calendar* (1954), refer to a period Tanaka spent in hospital and her habit whilst there of writing out dates as a countdown towards the day she would be discharged. Quite complex in their composition, they preceded more minimal works on fabric including *Work* (1955), consisting of large rectangles of yellow cotton cloth. These pieces constitute a fascinating instance of modernism in Japan, very radical in the straightforward insistence on an actual place in the world.

Tanaka subscribed to a “concrete aesthetic”, preferring realism to illusion and narrative - very different to many Japanese artists working immediately after World War 2, often in exaggerated surrealist styles. In October 1955 she exhibited *Work (Bell)* at the 1<sup>st</sup> Gutai Art Exhibition, a sound installation consisting of 20 electric bells wired together at 2m intervals, ringing occasionally and in sequence. It anticipated the *Electric Dress*, Tanaka’s most famous work, shown in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gutai Art Exhibition in 1956. This piece, actually worn by Tanaka but now supported by life-sized steel armature, is a mass of electric lamps of various shapes, sizes and colours. It is an extraordinary conflation of humanity and technology: at once attractive and dangerous-looking, it is an edgy celebration of urban post-war popular culture. The exhibition includes both of these seminal works alongside associated drawings.

Tanaka’s paintings, acrylic on canvas, consist of vivid lines and circles, analogous to the lamps and wiring of the *Electric Dress*. Made horizontally on the floor of her studio, the paintings are traces of the artist’s movement around a canvas, easily interpreted as the pacing of an individual within a confined space. Up until the early 1960s, red and black were the predominant colours, then the palette opened up to embrace blues, greens, yellows and so on. The overall effect became less severe and a variation in the sizes of the circles widened the range of emotional expression. As much about the mind as about physical gestures, they comprise a remarkable body of work.

*Cont.*

# IKON

Ikon Gallery, 1 Oozells Square, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS  
TEL. +44 (0) 121 248 0708 / FAX. +44 (0) 121 248 0709  
WEBSITE. [www.ikon-gallery.co.uk](http://www.ikon-gallery.co.uk)  
Ikon Gallery is a registered charity no. 528892

The exhibition is organised in collaboration with the Japan Foundation, Espai D'Art Contemporani de Catelló, Spain and the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Japan. Exhibition supported by The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation and the Ishibashi Foundation.

**Ends.**

**Note to Editors:**

1. Press Preview, Tuesday 26 July 2011, 12-8pm
2. A selection of images is shown below
3. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 6pm. Free entry.
4. Ikon Gallery is a registered charity and receives core funding from Birmingham City Council and Arts Council England. Ikon Gallery Limited trading as Ikon. Registered address: 1 Oozells Square, Birmingham B1 2HS.
5. For more information and images please contact Helen Stallard, Press and PR Consultant, on 0774 033 9604 or [h.stallard@ikon-gallery.co.uk](mailto:h.stallard@ikon-gallery.co.uk)

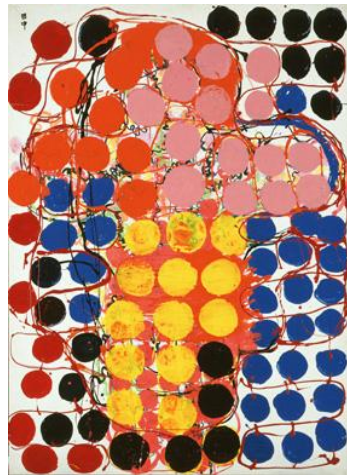
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Atsuko Tanaka  
*Electric Dress* (1956)  
Vinyl paint on light bulbs, electric  
cords and control console  
Courtesy Takamatsu City Museum of  
Art  
(C) Ryoji Ito



Atsuko Tanaka  
*Work* (1957)  
Permanent marker, oil and vinyl  
paint on paper  
Courtesy Ashiya City Museum of Art  
& History  
(C) Ryoji Ito



Atsuko Tanaka  
*Thanks Sam* (1963)  
Vinyl paint on canvas  
Courtesy Chiba City Museum of Art  
(C) Ryoji Ito