

Educators' Resource Sheet for In the Studio: Takesada Matsutani

What is the book about?

'In the Studio: Takesada Matsutani' brings the artist's inner creative world directly to readers. Written by curator Mika Yoshitake, the book features Matsutani's making processes, ingenious use of materials, and his key guiding philosophies connected to introspection, the nature of time understood through repetition and meditation and the relationship between senses and self. Readers are taken through Matsutani's creative journey and understand his processes across various mediums – painting, printmaking, installation and sculpture.

Who is it for?

This book is for anyone who wants to learn more about the deep, contemplative thought processes behind Matsutani's artistic approach. Whether you were already familiar with Matsutani's practice or not, this resource is an invitation to slow down and something that you can carry with you anywhere for inspiration.

Why is it great for learners?

Readers will not only understand Matsutani's working methods and use of materials on a deeper level but also understand how his personal experiences have directly affected the way he thinks, sees the world and developed his modes of artistic expression. Audiences will gain a new understanding of Matsutani's practice as they learn about his influences from working on vinyl glue reliefs and later becoming focused on hard-edge abstraction to his work on large scale graphite drawings and installations. Readers will also have an intimate understanding of the artist's life values. Readers will also understand moments from the artist's earlier years as he submitted art for regional exhibitions, began civic art classes in Nishinomiya, Japan and made connections that laid the groundwork for his future practice.

What will you learn?

Readers will understand Matsutani's creative voice via an exhibition talk, essay excerpt and a letter emphasizing the creative and spiritual importance of physical making. The artist's influences are featured, spanning from Lucio Fontana's canvases to the concept of shinshō (inner imagery) and its profound impact on Matsutani's thinking, to Kandinsky's abstract paintings and their influence on Matsutani's own work in the 1960's. Key connections Matsutani made are also highlighted, from working with Jirō Yoshihara and the Gutai Group whilst understanding their philosophy around 'bridging art and the human spirit', to later working with Stanley William Hayter at the well-known printmaking studio in Paris, Atelier 17 (Yoshitake, 32). Here, the artist met another key creative influence, Kate Van Houten, who later became his wife. The display of the artist's inner imagery continues in photos of archived sketchbooks and drawings. By the end of the book, readers will also have a deeper understanding of Matsutani's personal life and how endurance of hardships had an impact on the foundations of his artistic practice.

Discussion Questions

Inner Imagery and Memory

- Refer to pages 25 and 109. One of Matsutani's guiding concepts throughout his early and later work is shinshō, inner imagery, which he learned through his early mentor, Shōsaku Arao. Matsutani's early work reflected his experiences balancing life with surviving tuberculosis at a young age and states 'in my works... I outwardly expressed my inner conflict and attempted to brush aside this heavy burden' (Yoshitake, 25). Shinshō for Matsutani was a 'presence', shaped by a 'heightened awareness of the senses, intertwining the body, space, experience and perception' (Yoshitake, 109). Do you have any guiding concepts that you come back to in your own practice and/or daily life? Why do you return to them? Do you have a mentor in your life? What is the significance of having someone to help guide you?
- Refer to page 145. Within his lifelong practice, the artist has dealt with ideas around 'vulnerability and endurance' (Yoshitake, 145). From perseverance in his own history to living through Japan's post-war societal recovery, Matsutani worked to transform 'individual memory into a universal mediation' (Yoshitake, 145). Do any personal memories for you intersect with the 'collective' in any way? Whether you are a practicing artist or not, do circumstances in your own life inform vulnerability or creativity within yourself? How so?

Material Transformation

- Refer to pages 35-39. In the early 60's, Matsutani became inspired by organic forms and began using polyvinyl acetate glue, becoming a key medium in his practice after working with oil pastel, pencil, ink and mineral pigments on paper. He was 'fascinated by the glue's ability to form a translucent, skin-like membrane as it dries' and was interested in its malleability, allowing him to 'pour, layer, and manipulate it in ways that emphasized gesture, chance, and material presence.' (Yoshitake, 38). Matsutani's early experiments with glue include a pivotal piece Work 63-K (1963). Have you ever come across a material that you connected with, creatively or in general? How so? Do you often find yourself shifting to new materials in your work? Has a specific material surprised you in the past, perhaps resulting in an unexpected outcome?
- Refer to pages 82-85. Matsutani reflected on how he gets 'startled or gladdened by the most ordinary things' and used everyday objects which he transformed into assemblages (Yoshitake, 82). What significance do you think physical objects have for Matsutani? As he analyzed objects often, how do you think his assemblages connect, or don't connect, to his wider practice?
- Refer to page 50. In the mid-60's, Matsutani explored kinetic forms based on one philosophy connected with Gutai focused on 'activating matter through direct, performative interaction' (Yoshitake, 50). His work, Kaiten (Rotation) (1966) reflected a 'system' in which the 'boundary between painting and sculpture dissolved into a space of continual becoming' (Yoshitake, 50). In your own life and/or creative practice, are you focused on continuity or evolution? How so?

Time, Cultural Crossover and Human Existence

- Refer to page 91. After working in printmaking, the artist returned to drawing and used graphite, a new medium. Along with the use of graphite, beginning in the 1970's Matsutani was focused on 'the notion of time, manifested through meditative repetition' and '[drawing] deeply' (Yoshitake, 91). How do you understand time within your own life and/or practice? What impact do you think repetition can have on a creative practice or your sense of time?
- Refer to page 108. Matsutani shares that his connection to Buddhism 'deepened thoughts on life and death further. A recognition of infinity' (Yoshitake, 107). He stated that if we connect art to ideas of living and passing, he believes 'our mission as people who create and look at art is to respect one another and observe the truth, as human nature is about having an individual way of living and feeling' (Yoshitake, 108). How do you understand art as it relates to human beings? Do any of these understandings emerge in your own work? How so?
- Refer to page 111. The color black became significant for Matsutani as it was a return to his 'spiritual and cultural roots, a grounding force amid the material experimentation of his Paris years' – black was not merely as a color but a 'state of being – a condensation of breath, time, and presence in which the corporeal and the metaphysical converge...' (Yoshitake, 111 – 115). Is color a prominent part of your creative practice or how you see the world? Are there any colors for you, in your creative practice or in general, that hold meaning or bring you further into yourself?
- Refer to pages 53-58. As Matsutani received a government grant to work in Paris for half a year, the artist explored European culture, art history, and eventually shifted his creative focus to printmaking as he became Stanley William Hayter's studio assistant. This time in his life also marked a period of understanding his own practice and 'postwar Japanese avant-garde artists [seeing] their own radical practices as part of a global lineage' (Yoshitake, 57). Have you wanted to explore new mediums and materials after visiting or moving to a new place? Has traveling had an impact on how you see yourself as a person and/or artist? How so? Do multiple cultures intersect in any way in your work or life?