

industrialization, and the Second World War, the sentiment of sacrifice finally bearing fruit, as made visible in Shurpin's painting, was a rhetorically effective one. Soviet society was ready for stability and a bright future after all it had suffered.

As the Cold War intensified, the symbolic struggle between East and West, Socialist Realism and Modernism also intensified. While Abstract Expressionism was positioned as apolitical "pure" art, politics continued to permeate American society, and Communism was proclaimed to be a national threat in the U.S. Each side portrayed the other as politically dangerous and saw the other's art as a form of propaganda calculated to delude its citizenry with false ideas. Soviet critics denounced Western Modernist art, like Pollock's drip paintings, as "formalism," lacking in humanity and uplifting purpose and certain to lead to its viewers' debasement and dehumanization.

In the U.S., an equally vicious attack on Socialist Realism equated the realist style with political propaganda and its viewers with being either programmed automatons or tragic victims. While there was a grain of truth in both arguments, the blunt ways in which they were deployed left no room for an understanding of historical nuances or a consideration of the agency of individual artists working in each system. Paradoxically, these attacks had repercussions in their own countries. In the West, artists working in realist styles were seen as outmoded and were all but barred from the advanced art world, while Soviet artists who wanted to paint outside of Socialist Realist conventions had to go underground, creating art in secret and exhibiting their works to small groups of friends in their apartments. Artists on both sides of the Iron Curtain finally found a wider public in the 1980s, when petrified Cold War rhetoric began to be challenged, and the harsh political divisions between East and West finally began to break down.

INTERNATIONAL STYLES

The strict binary between Soviet Socialist Realism and Western Modernism was more complicated than the Cold War ideologues would have viewers believe. This binary starts to blur even further when we look

to artists outside of the U.S. and the Soviet Union. As we shall see, artists beyond these two ideological poles adopted certain aspects from both sides, while eschewing others, and repurposed them for their own specific cultural needs.

SELECTED WORK: *UNTITLED*, KAZUO SHIRAGA, 1957

Abstract Expressionism in Japan

For Japan, which was recovering from the devastation of World War II and the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Abstract Expressionism served as a way for one group of artists to participate in a global avant-garde while engaging with native traditions to produce a new art for their own time. The **Gutai Art Association** (*Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai*) was founded in 1954 by seventeen artists living in Osaka. These artists looked to Paris and New York for the latest art and were particularly interested in Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel. Their reception of these Western movements was not straightforward; their understanding of the abstract paintings they encountered in magazines and later in traveling exhibitions was not always well informed, as the Gutai artists themselves noted in their manifesto of 1956. However, their ultimate goal was to enter into a conversation with the new art and to "advance into the unknown world."²⁸ Fittingly, their work often explored the themes of destruction, struggle, and rebirth.

Abstract Expressionist works first appeared in Japan in early 1951, when they were exhibited at the Third Yomiuri Independent exhibition in Tokyo. This show introduced the Japanese public to recent works by Jackson Pollock, Richard Pousette-Dart, Mark Rothko, and Theodoros Stamos, among others. While American critics like Clement Greenberg had emphasized the purely optical qualities of Pollock's work,