

Text by Jiro Yoshihara

Uemae's reddish-black dotted paintings, he once told me, are the color of the flames in the blast furnaces at the workplaces he had known since his youth. He mentioned this to me quite some time ago. I myself have never been very interested in such explanations, but in any case, while operating a crane high above the shipyard, he was forced to gaze daily at the flames of the furnaces below, and his works were born amid those intense days of labor. What is more, he produced an astonishing number of them.

One day more than a dozen years ago, he appeared at my studio wearing a large bohemian-style necktie and carrying several paintings to show me. He said one of them had been accepted into a public exhibition, but I gave them a thorough drubbing. I thought I would never see that peculiar artist again. I was wrong. From that day on, I found myself plagued by his unceasing visits. Each time he came, he brought with him a considerable number of works. I would turn away coldly, but in the end he seemed to have struck upon a vein of his own.

He painted childlike works of primary-colored dots, and before long even the airs of being an "artist" disappeared from him. Eventually, he became one of the longest-standing members of the Gutai group.

Since then, the style of his paintings has never strayed from a consistent trajectory. But this does not mean he has simply repeated himself with ease. In his own way, he has endured the pains of shedding his skin many times along the path to the present. At one point, instead of dots of paint, he embedded vast quantities of matchsticks—several kan in weight—into enormous canvases, works so heavy they required four people to move. And each time, the depth of his artistic world increased.

I recall that at the Gutai group's exhibition *International Art of a New Era*, Michel Tapié singled out Uemae's work as one of the most noteworthy pieces in the show.

Though never flamboyant, he advances along his own path step by step, without error. In recent years, there is a marked sense that his paintings have grown even denser.

*From the leaflet for Chiyu Uemae's solo exhibition at the Gutai Pinacotheca, 1966*