



Shu Tanaka

b. 1908, Tokyo

Shu Tanaka was born in 1908 in Tokyo, Japan, and came of age during a period when Japanese artists were actively engaging with European modernism, many making extended stays in Paris to absorb the currents of abstraction, Impressionism, and the avant-garde reshaping Western art. After his studies at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, he made numerous trips across Europe and established a sustained presence in the French capital, maintaining a dual life between Tokyo and Paris that shaped both the range and the spirit of his work.

He participated in group exhibitions in Japan and Paris throughout his career, including the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in 1959, the major annual exhibition dedicated to abstract and constructivist tendencies in French art. His solo exhibitions were held at the Yoshii Gallery, with locations in both Tokyo and Paris, and his work also appeared at Galerie Nichido, one of the most significant galleries in Japan for Western-influenced modern painting.

Tanaka worked primarily in oil on canvas across a range of subjects that reflect his dual cultural positioning. His Japanese subjects, among them Ancien Japon, La nuit orientale, and landscapes evoking the rice harvests, mulberry groves, and mountain forms of his homeland, sit alongside French subjects including Hautes Pyrénées, Île de France, and La Garonne Frontalière, as well as lyrical compositions titled Printemps, Idylle Safran, and Fleur Idyllique. The range speaks to an artist equally at home in two visual and cultural traditions, drawing on both without being confined by either.

His practice is rooted in landscape as sensation rather than documentation. Working with spontaneous, freed brushwork unbound by academic convention, Tanaka emphasizes the effects of matter, surface, and light, arriving at a form of abstraction that grows organically from the observed world. The result is a body of work that occupies the fertile ground between landscape and abstract expressionism: recognizable in its origins, resolved in abstraction, and distinguished throughout by a lyrical sensitivity to atmosphere and place. His work is collected internationally and continues to appear at auction in France and the United States.