



Taka Ishii

Gallery

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Sofu Teshigahara

Dates: Aug 29 – Sep 27, 2025

Location: Taka Ishii Gallery Roppongi

Opening reception: Friday, Aug 29, 17:00-19:00

Taka Ishii Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of the work of Sofu Teshigahara from Friday, August 29, to Saturday, September 27. Founder of the Sogetsu School of ikebana, Teshigahara was not only a central figure in the postwar avant-garde ikebana movement, but also a rare artist who forged strong connections with contemporary art both in Japan and abroad while pioneering ikebana as a sculptural form. This third solo exhibition at Taka Ishii Gallery will feature approximately 40 works, rarely exhibited until now, of calligraphy executed with pigments on ceramic plates.

With calligraphy, like with other art forms, I just can't seem to respect people who teach by saying "you must do it this way." It would be so much better if they said, "I've taught you this far, now try thinking for yourself."

Sofu Teshigahara (*The Art of Sofu*, Shufunotomo-sha, 1978, p. 238)

While renowned for large-scale ikebana that far surpassed the dimensions of traditional standing flower arrangements in tokonoma alcoves—works so monumental they could be described as installations—and for bold, large-character calligraphy on six-panel folding screens, Teshigahara approached ceramics on a more intimate scale. These works feature one- or two-character inscriptions such as *moonlight*, *white clouds*, *illusion*, and *sky*, words he also favored in his ink calligraphy. The meanings are concise, while the works' visual symbolism is amplified by his distinctive calligraphic style.

In his early teens, Teshigahara studied Wang Xizhi-style calligraphy with his uncle, Aiseki Tamaki. However, just as he broke from his father's highly codified ikebana to establish the Sogetsu School, he departed from tradition to develop a unique calligraphic style through self-study. Unlike the wild, vigorous brushwork of his large-scale calligraphy, which conveyed energy similar to 1950s Abstract Expressionism, the works in this exhibition show a softer touch applied to both initial strokes and finishing lines, giving them a calm, understated character. While small-format ink works on rectangular paperboards of similar size also exist, the addition of varied color in these ceramics infuses them with a lively, joyful quality unlike that of the monochromatic works. The presence of pieces inscribed with the names of close family members suggests that ceramics were, for Teshigahara, an especially personal means of expression.

In recent years, interest in Teshigahara's work has been steadily growing. It was featured in the 2024 Yokohama Triennale *Wild Grass: Our Lives*, and is scheduled to appear in a major international exhibition overseas in 2026.

Sofu Teshigahara was born in 1900 as the eldest son of Ikebana artist Wafu Teshigahara. Starting to take lessons in Ikebana from childhood, he gradually began to attract attention for his outstanding talent however; in questioning the formalistic traditions of Ikebana he broke away from his father to establish the Sogetsu School of Ikebana in 1927. He eventually came to lead the postwar "avant-garde Ikebana movement" together with Houun Ohara and Yukio Nakagawa, which deviated from conventional practices of Ikebana. While actively carrying out exhibitions and demonstrations of Ikebana both in Japan and across Europe and the United States from the 1950s to the 1970s, Teshigahara had involved himself in the production of numerous sculptures, paintings, calligraphy, and collage works. Also engaging with postwar avant-garde art movements such as Jikken Kobo [Experimental Workshop], Art Informel, and the Gutai group, he had worked to introduce a wide range of avant-garde art to Japan, including the events by John Cage and David Tudor (1962) and Merce Cunningham Dance Company's Japan performance (1964) that were held at the Sogetsu Art Center under the direction of his son Hiroshi. Actively pursuing his creative practice until his late years, Teshigahara passed away in 1979.

Teshigahara's main exhibitions include, "Sofu Teshigahara in the Postwar Avant-Garde Era," the Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo (2001); "Sogetsu and Its Contemporaries," the Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, and the Chiba City Museum of Art (1998-99); "The Sculpture of Sofu Teshigahara," The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto (1967); Haus Mei, Cologne (1972); the Palais Galliera, Paris (1971); the Middelheim Museum, Antwerp (1971); the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels (1966); Lincoln Center, New York (1964); Sala Gaspar, Barcelona (1959); Stadler Gallery, Paris (1959 and 1961); Martha Jackson Gallery, New York (1959); and the Château de Bagatelle, Paris (1955). He has participated in group exhibitions such as "Art Contemporain," Grand Palais, Paris (1963); "Dalla natura all'arte," Palazzo Grassi, Venice (1960); "International Art of a New Era: Informel and Gutai," the Takashimaya Department Store, Osaka (1958); "International Contemporary Art Exhibition of the World," the Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo (1957); and "Abstract Art and Surrealism," The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (1953). In 1962 Teshigahara received The Minister of Education, Science and Culture's Art Encouragement Prize, as well as the Legion of Honor Knight's cordon and the insignia of Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French Government in 1961 and 1960 respectively.

For further information, please contact:

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Tue-Sat 12:00 – 19:00 Closed on Sun, Mon, and National Holidays



Sofu Teshigahara, glazed earthenware plates with calligraphic inscription

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