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Host: Today we're talking with Michiko Fujii, an art historian. And she's here to talk about the modern artist Kazuo Shiraga. Welcome, Ms. Fujii.

Art historian Michiko Fujii: Thank you. Thank you for the invitation.

Host: Can you tell us a little about the background of Kazuo Shiraga?

Fujii: Yes, Shiraga was a painter who belonged to the Gutai Group.

Host: Gutai?

Fujii: Yes, Gutai is a Japanese word. It means "using the body." This was a group of artists that was founded in 1954 in Japan. Gutai artists wanted to make art that was totally new and different from the Japanese art of the past.

Host: So what was new about their approach?

Fujii: Almost everything. For one thing, they used a lot of different materials to make their art. Paint, plastic, mud, wood. They even used everyday items like glass bottles and balloons. They also used film, light, and sound.

Host: Interesting.

Fujii: Yes, this was very unusual in Japan at the time. They wanted to try new techniques to express their ideas and feelings. For Gutai artists, the process of making a piece of art—I'm saying, how it was made—was very important to its meaning.

Host: I see. So tell us some more about Shiraga. What is he known for?

Fujii: Shiraga became famous as the "foot painter" because he painted using his feet.

Host: His feet?

Fujii: Yes, he wanted to show movement and action in his art. So he painted by moving his whole body. He hung a rope from the ceiling. And then he swung from the rope and applied the paint to a canvas on the floor with his feet and toes.

Host: That's amazing. I can't imagine how much energy ...

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Speaker: Now, I'd like to look at more examples. So, we have a portrait. What is a portrait exactly? A portrait is a picture of a person. A portrait can be a painting, photograph, or sculpture that shows a person's appearance—what a person looks like. Now, not all paintings with people in them are portraits. You can have a picture with a person in it, and it not

be a portrait. Instead, a portrait really focuses on the person, makes the person the center of the picture. Are there any questions? ...

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Professor Emma Gertz: E01 Hi everybody. If you remember, in our last class we looked at a painting—an abstract painting—by the Japanese artist Shiraga. Remember that? And a lot of you said, "You know, I just don't get it. I just don't get abstract art." Well, don't worry about it—that's a common feeling. Today, we're going to talk some more about abstract art, so hopefully you'll understand it better. But first, we need to define "modern art" and understand how it's different from "traditional art." Then, under modern art, we'll define "abstract art." And finally, we'll look at two different types of abstract art. OK? **E02** So, what is modern art? To many art historians, modern art means the new kinds of art that were created in the twentieth century—in the 1900s, right? **(COACHING TIP 1)** Before 1900, most artists created what we call traditional art. Traditional art is both realistic and representational. Representational means that it represents something from the real world—like a person, an object, or a scene in nature. Traditional art also looks realistic. It looks like the person or thing that it represents. Before photography became common in the late 1800s, artists were asked to create realistic paintings of people—or portraits. These were valued because they preserved a person's image. So, as you can see, it was necessary for artists to have the skills to create realistic works of art. **E03** Now a famous example of a traditional portrait is one by the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso. **(COACHING TIP 2)** He painted his mother in 1896 when he was only 15 years old. In this painting, Picasso depicts his mother using realistic details and colors, including the color of her skin, her brown hair, and the white dress she was wearing. **E04** But even at the time Picasso painted this portrait, the world was changing very quickly. By 1900, many new inventions and new ideas were emerging, and people were looking to the future. So many artists, including Picasso, wanted to create art that was new, that was different from traditional art. So, they started experimenting with new approaches to art. **E05** One of these new approaches was called abstract art. So, what exactly is abstract art? Basically, abstract art is art that's not realistic. It doesn't look like anything you see in the real world. There are two main categories of abstract art. The first is representational abstract art. This art represents a person or thing you see in the real world, OK? But we say it is "abstract" because it doesn't look realistic;

it changes the way a person or thing looks. So this is called representational abstract art. **(COACHING TIP 3) E06** In the early 1900s Picasso started to experiment with representational abstract art. He and other artists developed a kind of art called “cubism.” Now one goal of cubism was to show something from different viewpoints, all at one time. A portrait that Picasso painted of photographer Dora Maar in 1937 demonstrates this style. When you look at this painting—called *The Portrait of Dora Maar*—it looks like Dora has two noses! But in fact, Picasso is presenting two views of Dora’s face—one from the side and one from the front. **E07** Now, the second category of abstract art is “non-representational abstract art.” Unlike representational art, nonrepresentational art doesn’t represent anything you see in the real world. Instead, it expresses things you can’t see—like ideas or feelings. And another name for this kind of art is “pure abstraction.” OK? **E08** The first artist to create purely abstract art was a Russian painter named Wassily Kandinsky. Kandinsky created his first purely abstract paintings in 1913. In them he used lines, shapes, and colors to show his feelings. Kandinsky loved music and was even a musician himself. In fact, he said that when he looked at a painting, he could actually hear music. And he wanted to communicate that in his paintings. One of Kandinsky’s works is called *Contrasting Sounds*. In it, you can see different lines, shapes, and colors. To Kandinsky, these represented different feelings. For example, in this painting circles are meant to be peaceful shapes. And the contrasting colors, like black and white squares, are meant to represent different sounds, just like in a piece of music. **E09** At the time, some people reacted negatively to this art. But, after Kandinsky died in 1944, his work continued to have a major influence on other abstract artists who followed him. And we’ll talk about that influence, and other changes in art history, in our next class. **(COACHING TIP 4)**

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- 2 Representational means that it represents something from the real world—like a person, an object, or a scene in nature.
- 3 In this painting, Picasso depicts his mother using realistic details and colors, including the color of her skin, her brown hair, and the white dress she was wearing.
- 4 So many artists, including Picasso, wanted to create art that was new, that was different from traditional art.
- 5 So this is called representational abstract art.
- 6 Now one goal of cubism was to show something from different viewpoints, all at one time.
- 7 Now, the second category of abstract art is non-representational abstract art.

- 8 In them he used lines, shapes, and colors to show his feelings.
- 9 For example, in this painting circles are meant to be peaceful shapes.
- 10 But, after Kandinsky died in 1944, his work continued to have a major influence on other abstract artists who followed him.

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Michael: You want to know what I think? Of all the art that we’ve talked about today, Kandinsky’s is the best, in my opinion. I mean, his style is so much more interesting than traditional art.

Yhinny: Mm. I respect your opinion, but, I mean, his style is sort of strange. Who can tell what he’s painted? I mean, only he knows.

Qiang: I’m like you—I’m a traditionalist. I prefer that painting by Picasso, of his mother. Because in that one, you can be sure of what it is.

May: Does anyone remember—was that one ... I don’t know how to say it? Was it a cubist piece of work? Was it modern art?

Qiang: No, I have that Picasso was still in his traditional period—it was in the late 1800s. He was just 15 years old.

Michael: Well, what do you guys think? Like, OK, traditional is fine. But imagine how boring the art world would be if that’s all we had to look at.

May: Oh yeah.

Yhinny: I wouldn’t be bored. Maybe I still don’t “get” abstract art. But, I mean, do you really hear music when you look at something like Kandinsky’s *Contrasting Sounds*?

May: I kind of do.

Yhinny: Oh!

May: Really! I don’t know it does something to me. I don’t know how to say it. Is that strange?

Michael: No.

Qiang: No, makes sense.

Yhinny: Kind of. It is.