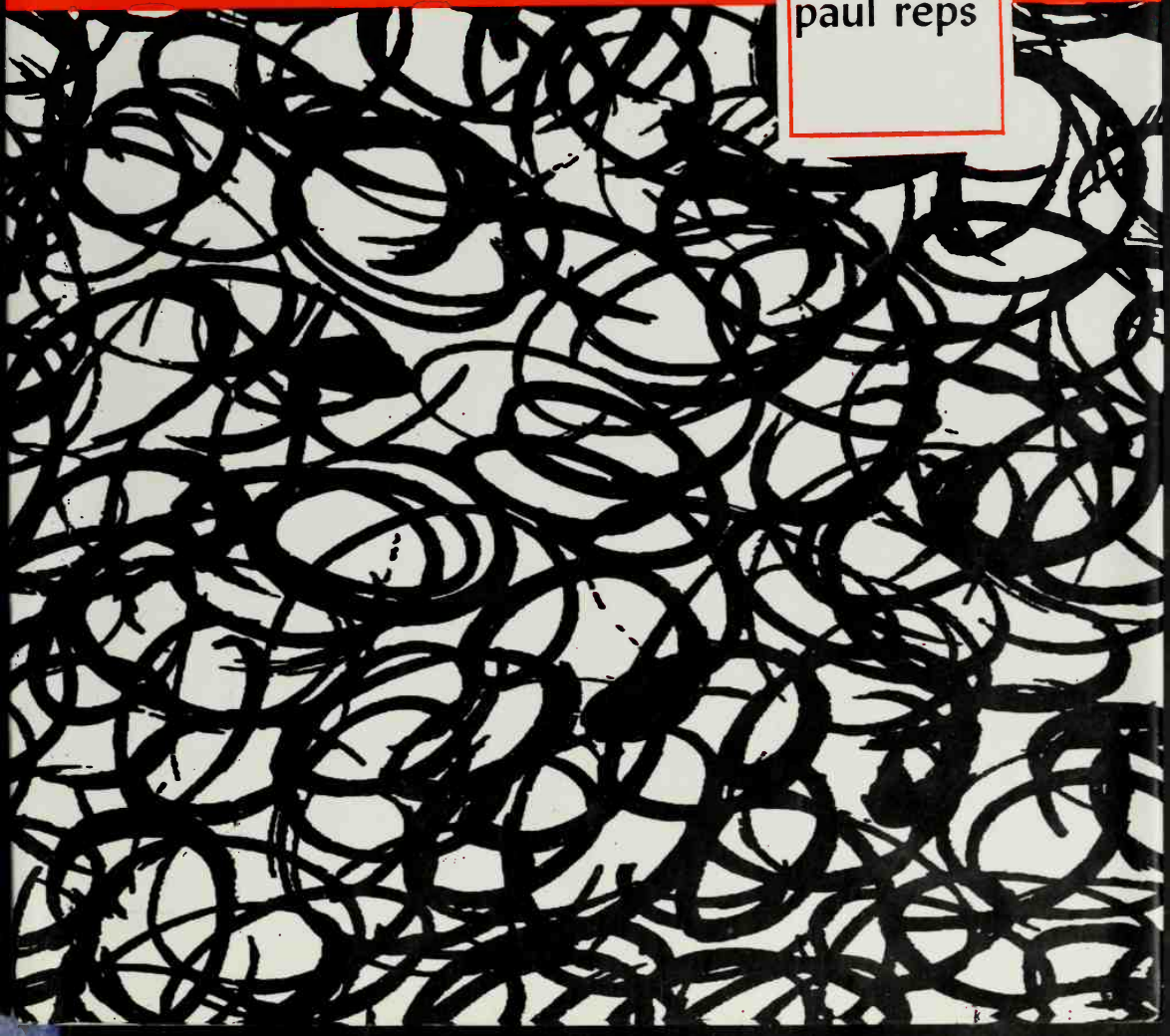


zen  
tele-  
grams

paul reps



**CALL** these 79 PICTURE-POEMS. But still they are communications that are more than pictures, more than poems. In the author's words, they are "poems before words," "pictures before art." They aim at the inner ear, the inner eye, the inner self.

Call these ZEN TELEGRAMS. And the phrase—one old word, one very-much-of-today word—points to both the immediacy and the datelessness of what's here. If Zen works as a sudden flash of insight, so do these—telegraphically, freshly.

Who can resist opening a telegram? Any of these 79 may be the one your inner self has been expecting all your life. Or again, perhaps you simply want to belly-feel the delightfully illogical logic of life, and will find here a trigger for this most satisfying of all laughter.

Any reader, be he deep thinker or quiet laughter, is almost sure to find that Reps has here sent him the most awakening and pleasuring telegram he has ever received, plus a whole "book of before art."

**PAUL REPS**, an American who has lived in many countries, now makes his home in Honolulu when he is not wandering some far corner of the world. His 1957 compilation of Zen and pre-Zen texts, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, continues to win new readers and wide acclaim, and his *Naked Essays by a Wandering Foreigner*, so far published only in Japanese, became one of Japan's most-talked-about books of 1958. Some time ago he added Chinese-ink drawing to his many accomplishments. During several invitation exhibits in Japan, his picture-poems, here collected for the first time and published as *Zen Telegrams*, have already won enthusiastic acceptance by a people who are themselves connoisseurs of calligraphic art and masters of brilliantly distilled poetry.

*Jacket design by M. Kuwata*




zen telegrams






79 picture poems

rutland vermont : tokyo japan :




# telegrams



by paul reps



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BOOK WISE (AUSTRALIA) PTY. LTD.

104-108 Sussex Street, Sydney 2000

*Published by the Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc.*

*of Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo, Japan*

*with editorial offices at*

*Suido 1-chome, 2-6, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo*

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*Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 59-8189*

*International Standard Book No. 0-8048-0645-4*

*First edition, 1959*

*First paper-bound edition, 1962*

*Twelfth printing, 1984*

*Printed in Japan*



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## editor's foreword

a book, like a life, must have a name. When Reps has to give a name to his picture-poems, he generally calls them "poems before words." But when I come to collect them into this book, I have chosen to call them "Zen telegrams."

Reps never has labeled his picture-poems as Zen. "Zen," he has commented, "is a word I now almost never use. It is for children, for those innocent." Here he is speaking, and nowise disparagingly, of Zen as a formalized religion, a way of Buddhism that seeks--through "quiet sitting," meditation--the sudden flash of self-enlightenment that sets man free of earthly limitations, free of the need of words. But the word Zen has also taken on a wider meaning in recent years and is now often applied to a certain way of thinking, of aesthetics, of living. Reps himself has said: "Zen, cryptic as 'jazz,' is now a world word for God or Buddha in us shaking us alive after we've asked for it, earned it."

So it has seemed to me that his picture-poems glow with the unmistakable light that, for lack of a better word, may be most immediately described as this wider-meaning Zen. Certainly the label serves pointedly to say these picture-poems are akin to the Zen koan, to the shining instant the Zen masters evoked with these nonsensical conundrums that often made more "sense" than a library of philosophy. When Reps remarks that "poems before words intend to let the seer invite his originative life rhythm rather than having it imposed upon him," is he not saying Zen? is he not speaking as a long-time Zen familiar?

As for "telegrams," I have occasionally heard him call his picture-poems so. To me this seems exactly the word needed--both common enough and yet sharp enough to describe these communications that in intent are more than pictures, more than poems. If Zen is old, telegrams are very much of today. The juxtaposition of the two words points, then, to both the immediacy and the datelessness of what's here. If Zen works as a flash of insight, so do these. They do so telegraphically, freshly; they are not cast in the gone past. Who can resist opening a telegram?

When I once told him how much I liked a certain one of his pictures, Reps replied: "Tell me about the words, not the ink shapes!" For, as he has explained, the "ink shapes" are not for themselves but for giving another dimension to the words. In a sense, then, he is trying, through the medium of these shapes, to give the English word some of that pictorial, flashing quality which the ideographs of China and Japan possess in their own right, the quality that breathes magical life into their calligraphy. "Black brush lines on white space, such as calligraphy," he has observed, "are treasured by the Chinese and Japanese, who feel they receive something of the writer through them. They do not call them art. It is something from the heart."

And again: "Their calligraphy is picture writing. The character for man 人 pictures a man, field 田 looks like a field, and river 川 shows as well as says river. 人 田 川 becomes a three-picture poem, with each individual supplying his own detail and interpretation. Since eighty-five percent of our

sensing comes through our seeing, picturing is primal poeming. With an alphabet language we are left straining to see, but not seeing, one step removed from the delight of a picturing way of thinking. Pictures are before words, in them, inclusive of them. Poems before words would see-say in this same care-less way and thus dip into primal vitality."

Reps first started creating his picture-poems in Japan in 1952, using them as what he calls "weightless gifts" and scattering them among his many friends, old and always new, as he moved about the world. In 1957 a Japanese poet friend to whom he had given a number of them started the first of the Reps picture-poem shows. In this Kyoto exhibit, as in all later ones, the poems, on rice paper of various sizes, were scotch-taped only at the tops to horizontal bamboo poles strung from the ceiling at different levels, and electric fans were made to blow them gently. There they fluttered like washing in the breeze, and the scene had somewhat the appearance of moving banners. There was also a sign that read:

1,000 yen each to automobile-owners  
500 yen to well-dressed persons  
200 yen to students  
100 yen to anyone poor  
10 yen to lovers of Buddha

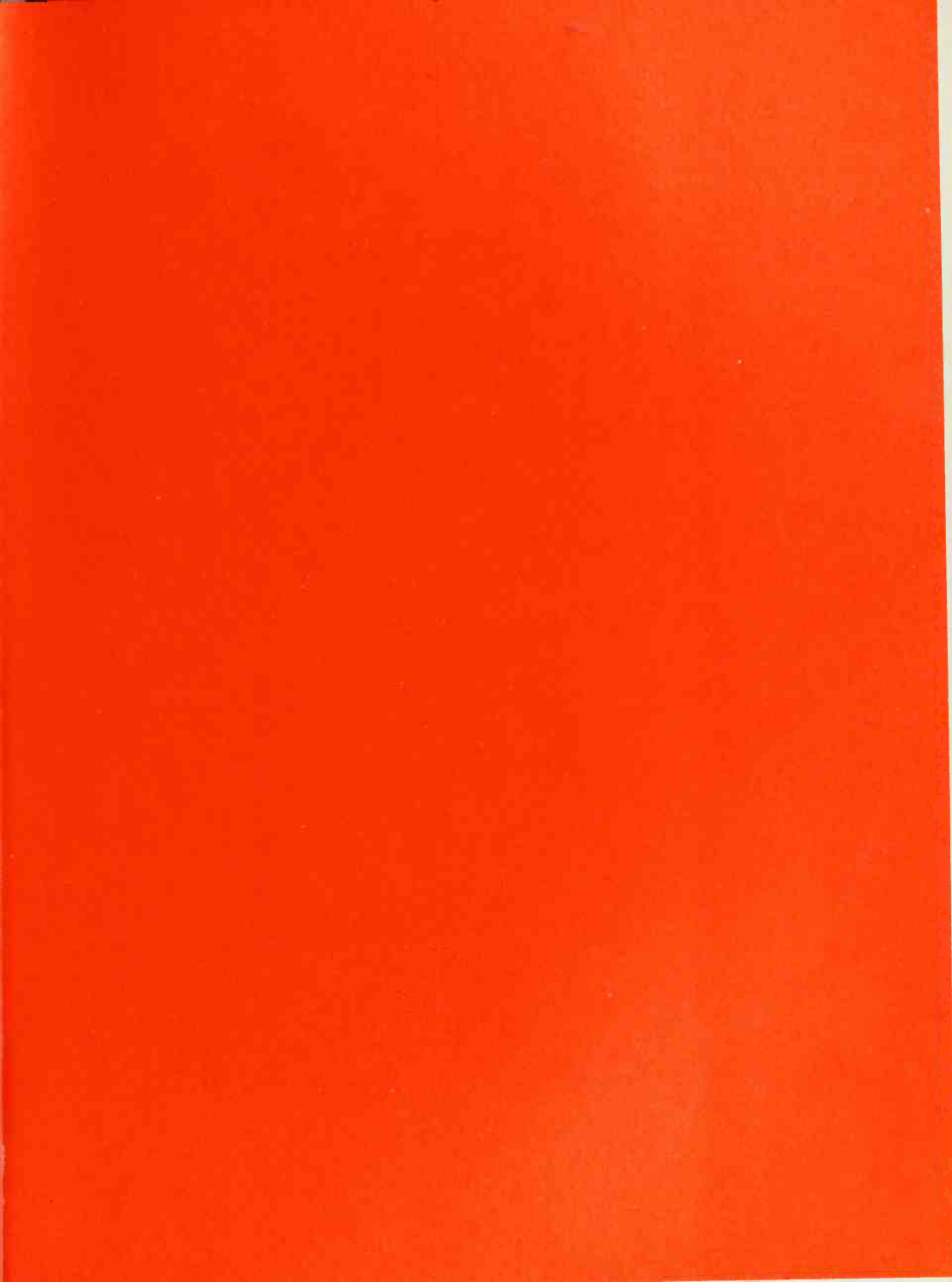
"No one elected to pay ten yen," someone has observed, "so perhaps each loved himself more than Buddha." But thousands came to "read-see" and many

stayed long. Each always seemed to find some particular one he liked for his own reasons, and Reps would give it to him or sell it at the price the buyer chose, and then draw another to hang in its place, sometimes the same one, sometimes a new one.

After that, Osaka wanted a show, then Tokyo, then Kyoto again--and now I hear talk of Washington, Honolulu, Rome. The picture-poems were televised, newsreeled, radioed, written about, and even reproduced on silken obi in microscopic stitches of silk for elegant ladies. And his creating of the poems still continues, so that I've found myself with almost two hundred to choose from. To fit the space, I've had to winnow these down to seventy-nine, arranging them in four sections of sixteen each and one section of fifteen. The titles given in the table of contents are not formal titles but only key words that I've found convenient as memory aids.

Seventy-nine poems? "No," comments Reps, speaking both to me and to future readers of this book, "actually there's only one poem, and that one too a weightless gift. Any one is for one person. Like intimate conversation, it is not meant to be seen-heard by others. All this writing and exhibiting and publishing may seem far from 'one for one'--or as near as you let it be. Perhaps then, only perhaps, one of these is for you. Should this be so, you are welcome to take it out of the book and hang it on your wall, knowing it was done for you with delight."

Meredith Weatherby







Stop

innocently  
joy is





pine drinking  
luminous tea  
as if nothing  
had happened

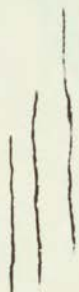




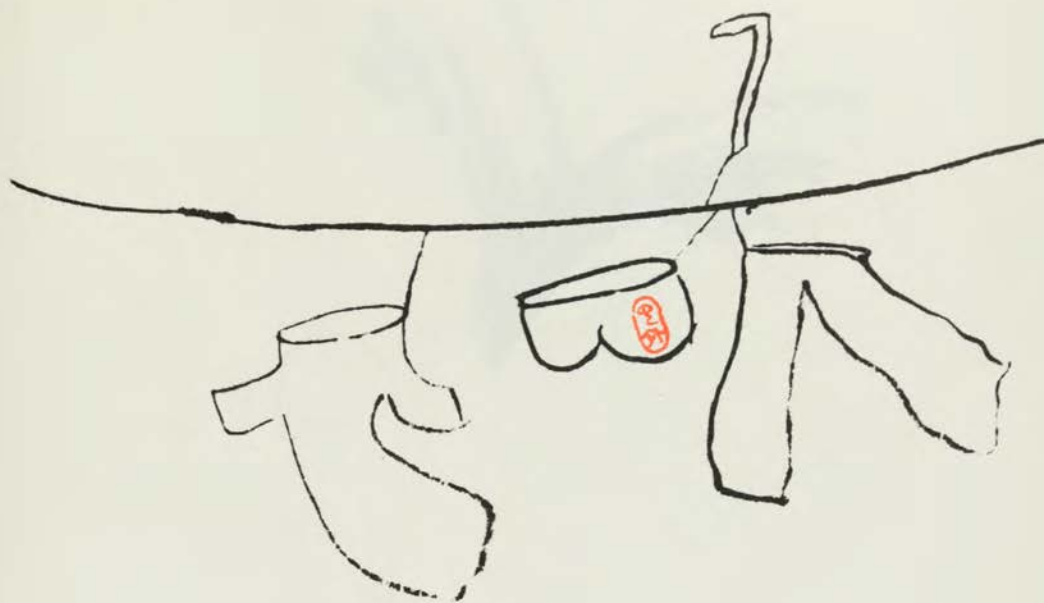
potato  
seeing  
everywhere  
below



and  
glistening  
wisps  
of  
straw



Living earth to comfort  
Living water to heal  
Living air           purify  
radiance           reveal



washing  
dancing  
hurry



though  
wide the sky  
never lost  
wild geese  
cry

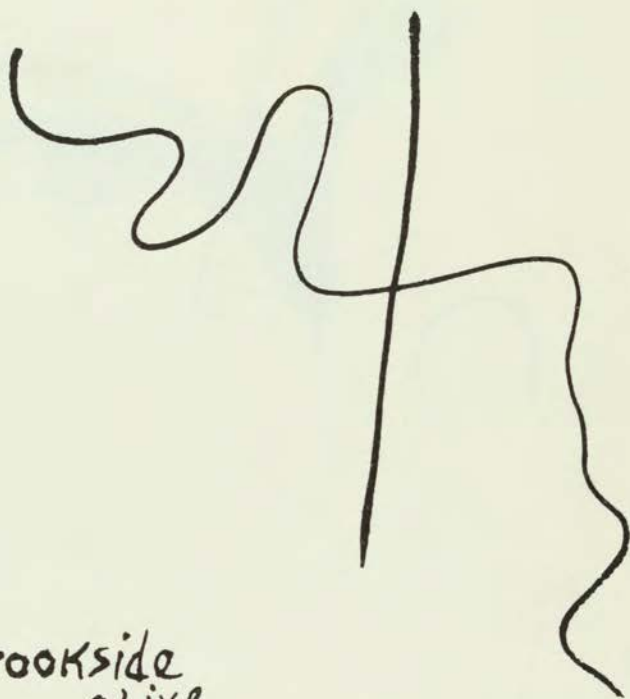




A A A



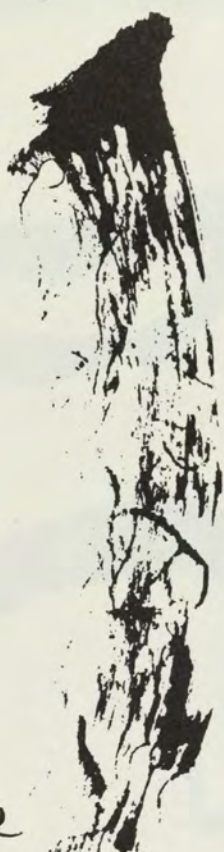
sometimes  
in may rain  
I can hear  
my Fingernails  
growing



brookside  
alive  
o do not hasten  
Friend  
you may arrive



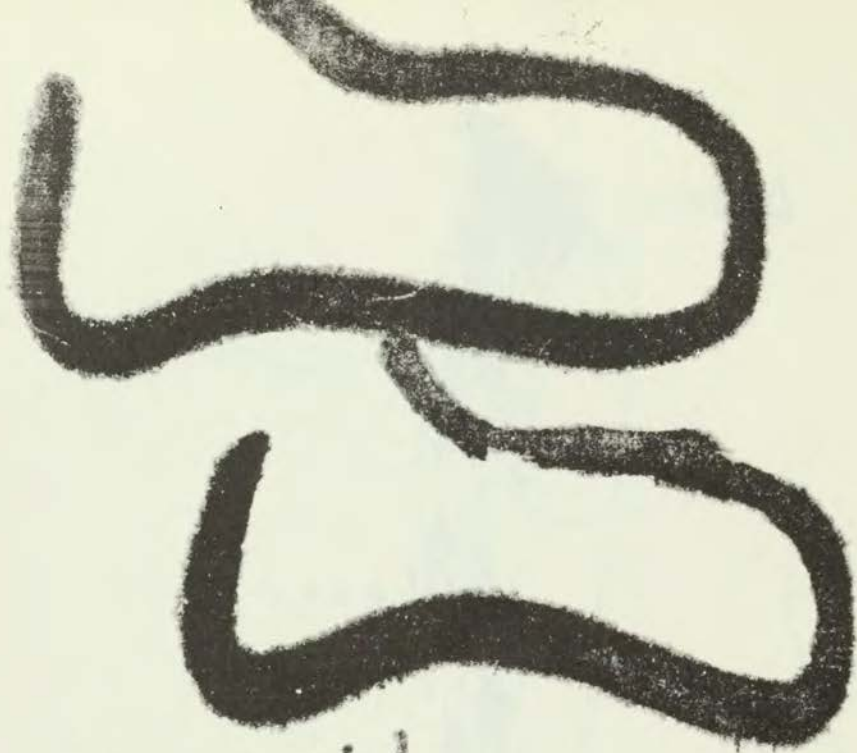
below



ever

above





now  
now



Cobwebs  
hesitating  
us

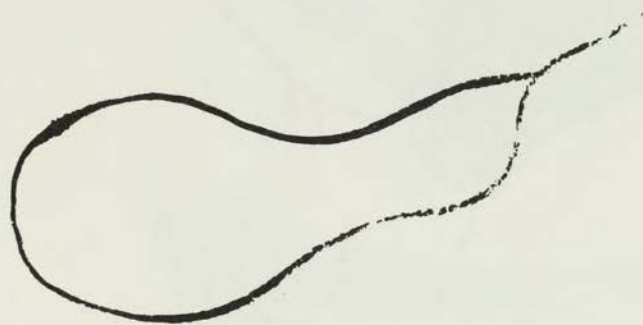


SOFTLY  
telling hand  
to open

---

Softly  
hand  
opens





cucumber  
unaccountably  
cucumbering



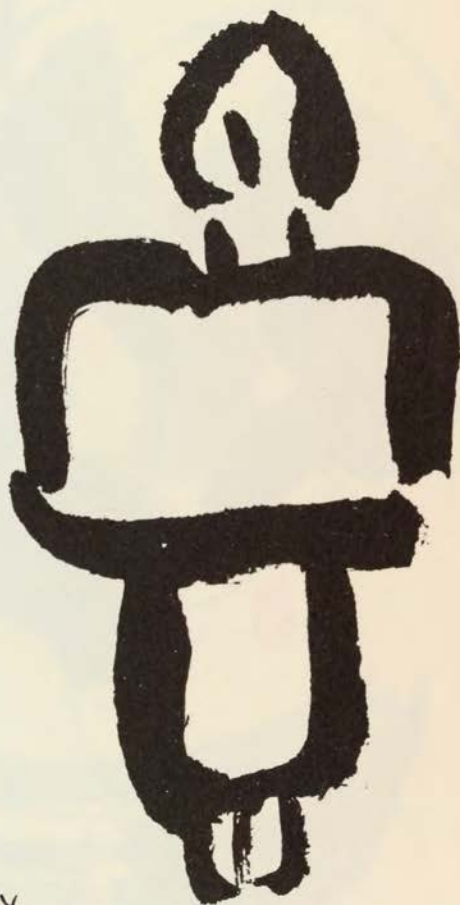




but  
seeme  
through  
your tears

words  
unsaid





under my  
clothes  
I am naked  
too

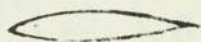








please  
telephone me  
in the  
ricefield



who  
is







shrieking  
torn from  
stem  
the  
flower





well  
silently  
overflowing

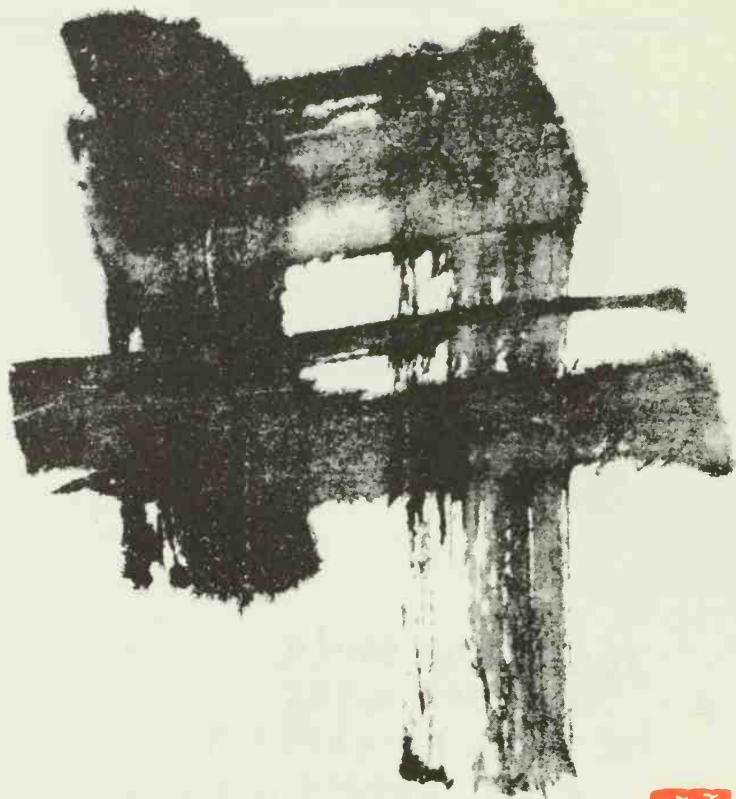


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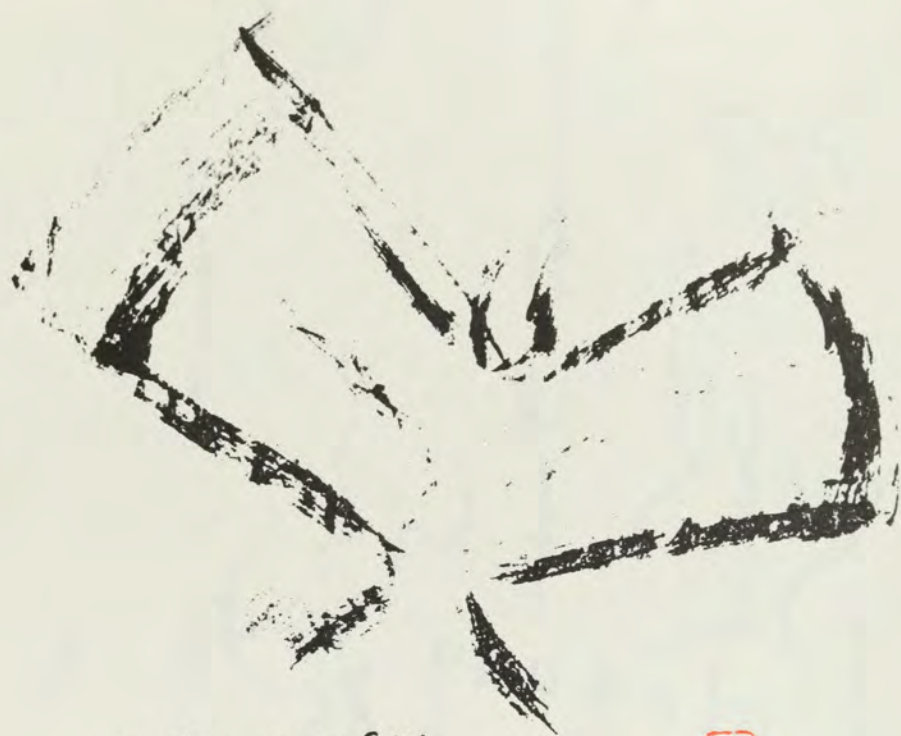
---

seeing the smile  
in your eyes  
I have forgotten  
that people die





after 50,000 years  
rapturous in sky  
I find you  
living  
in a box



Who can say  
I am Japanese  
American  
African  
when in the next day  
he may be a butterfly

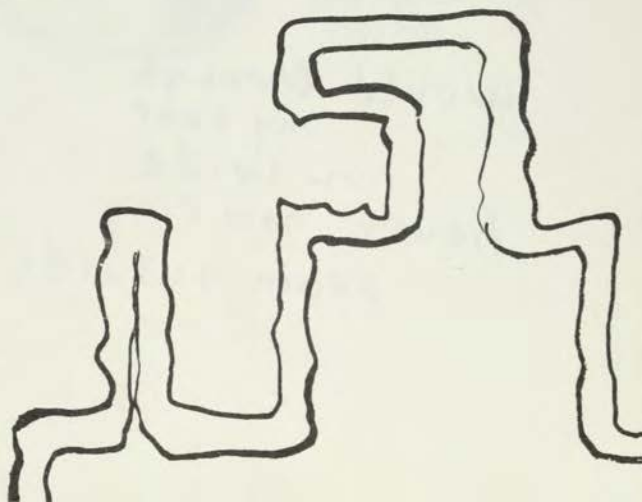


already  
weeds  
are writing  
the scriptures





earthworm  
writing letters  
to mankind





World through  
my door  
how wide  
house how tiny  
From outside










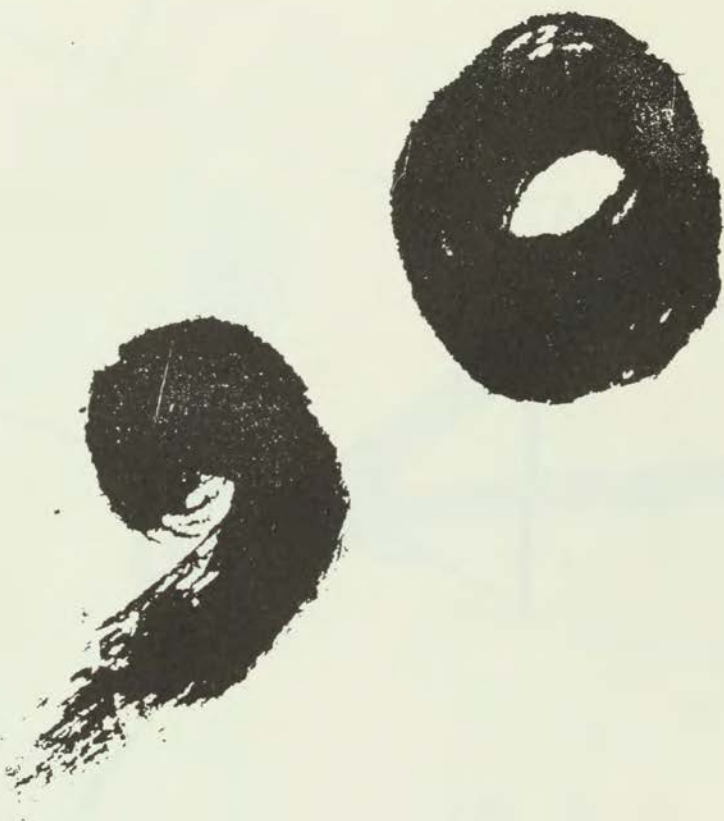
suddenly  
from tree  
peach blossom  
how can this be



An abstract line drawing consisting of several intersecting black lines on a light background. The lines form a series of irregular, angular shapes, some of which are filled with a light gray color. The lines vary in thickness and direction, creating a sense of movement and depth.

use us  
the bamboo  
whisper





period  
comma  
sunset





drinking  
a bowl of green tea  
I stopped the war



holding sun  
into forehead  
sages became  
men of Light

sun  
between  
Fingers  
reps





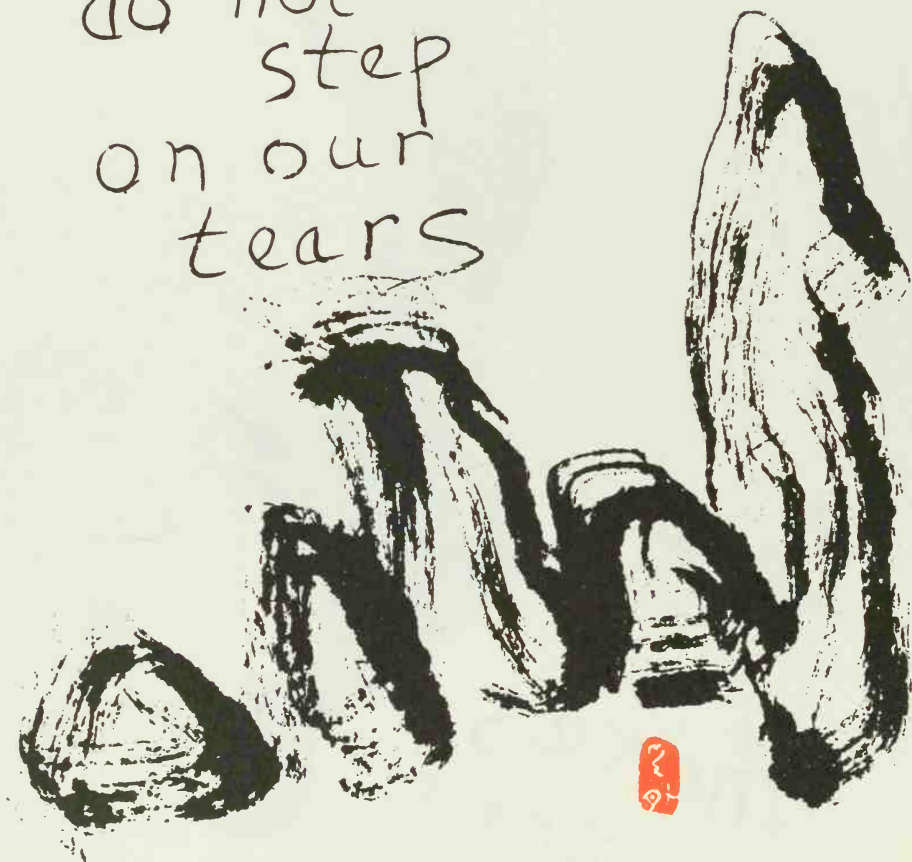




Laughing  
I  
makes  
a tree



do not  
step  
on our  
tears





Face  
in  
Face

black resting  
white transforming





consciousness  
delighting  
as crane



grain of  
sand  
spins  
round



child  
too



turtle  
explaining  
don't act  
but act





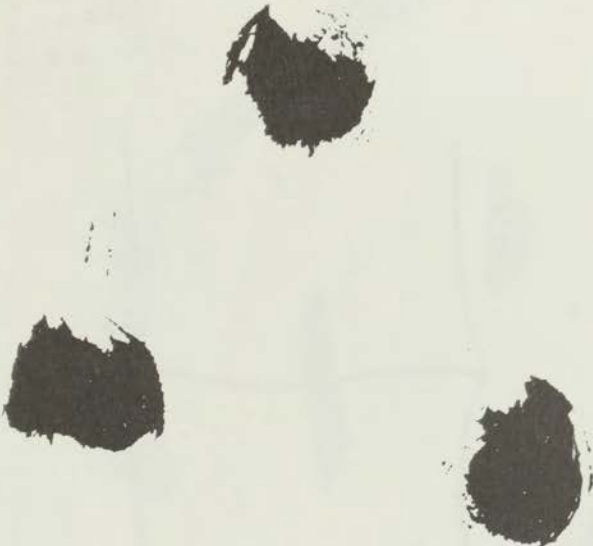
silently  
the river  
silently



Fighting wrens  
isn't there room  
enough in this world

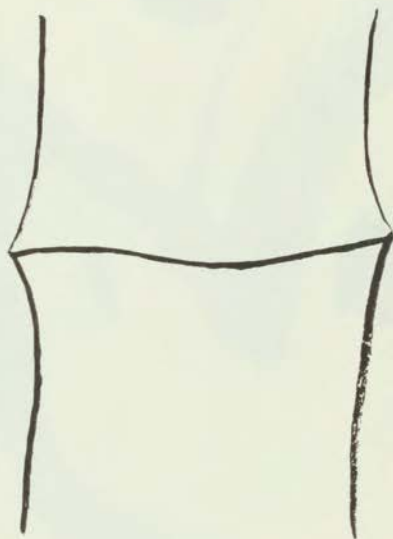






walking  
between  
the raindrops

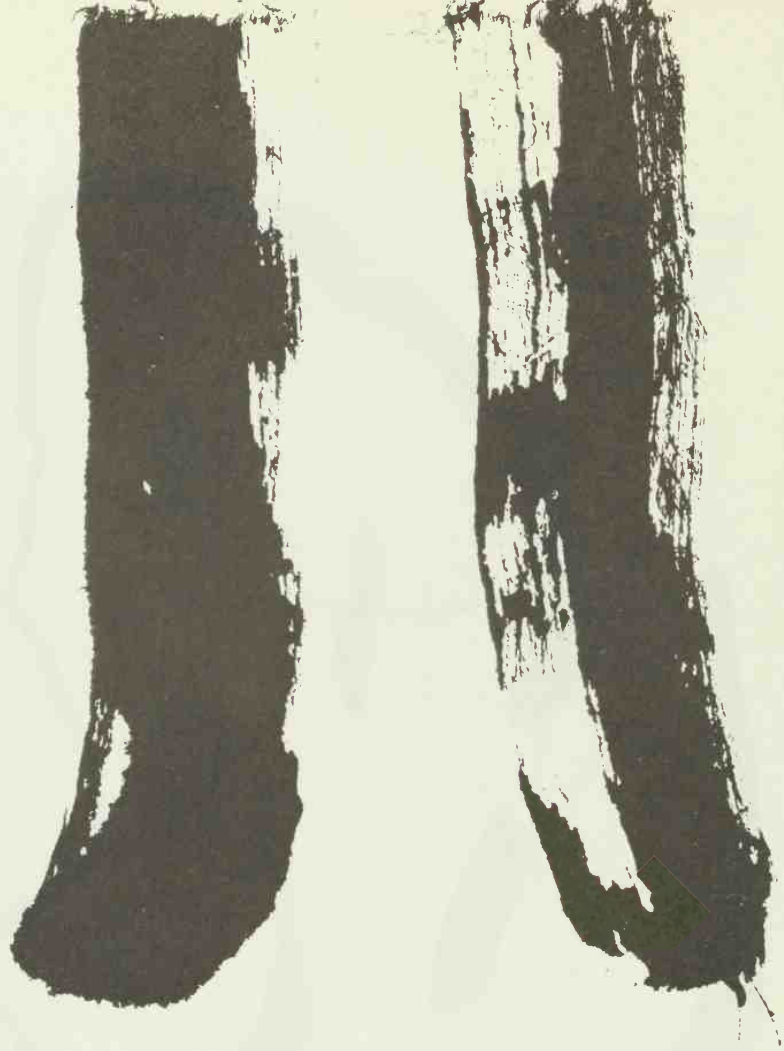




sound of flute  
has returned  
to bamboo  
forest

moth caressing  
my cheek  
may be you





giant redwood  
in-telligly  
compressing  
into a seed



even downtown  
surrendering  
my breath



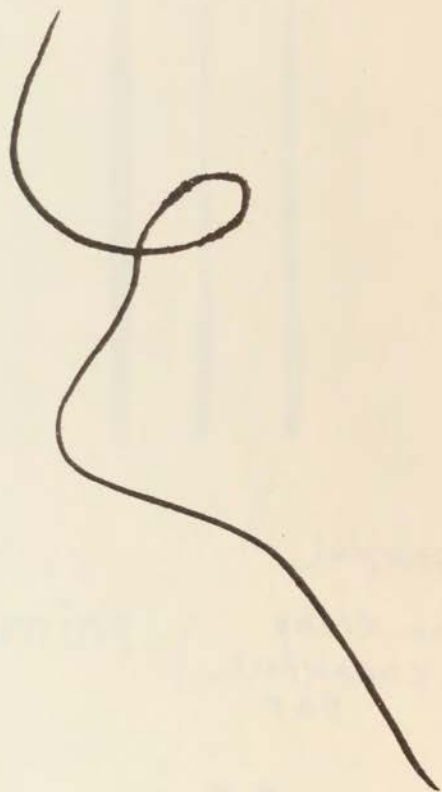


born  
yet unborningly  
reeds



ants  
how thankful  
I am  
with no thing  
to be thankful  
for

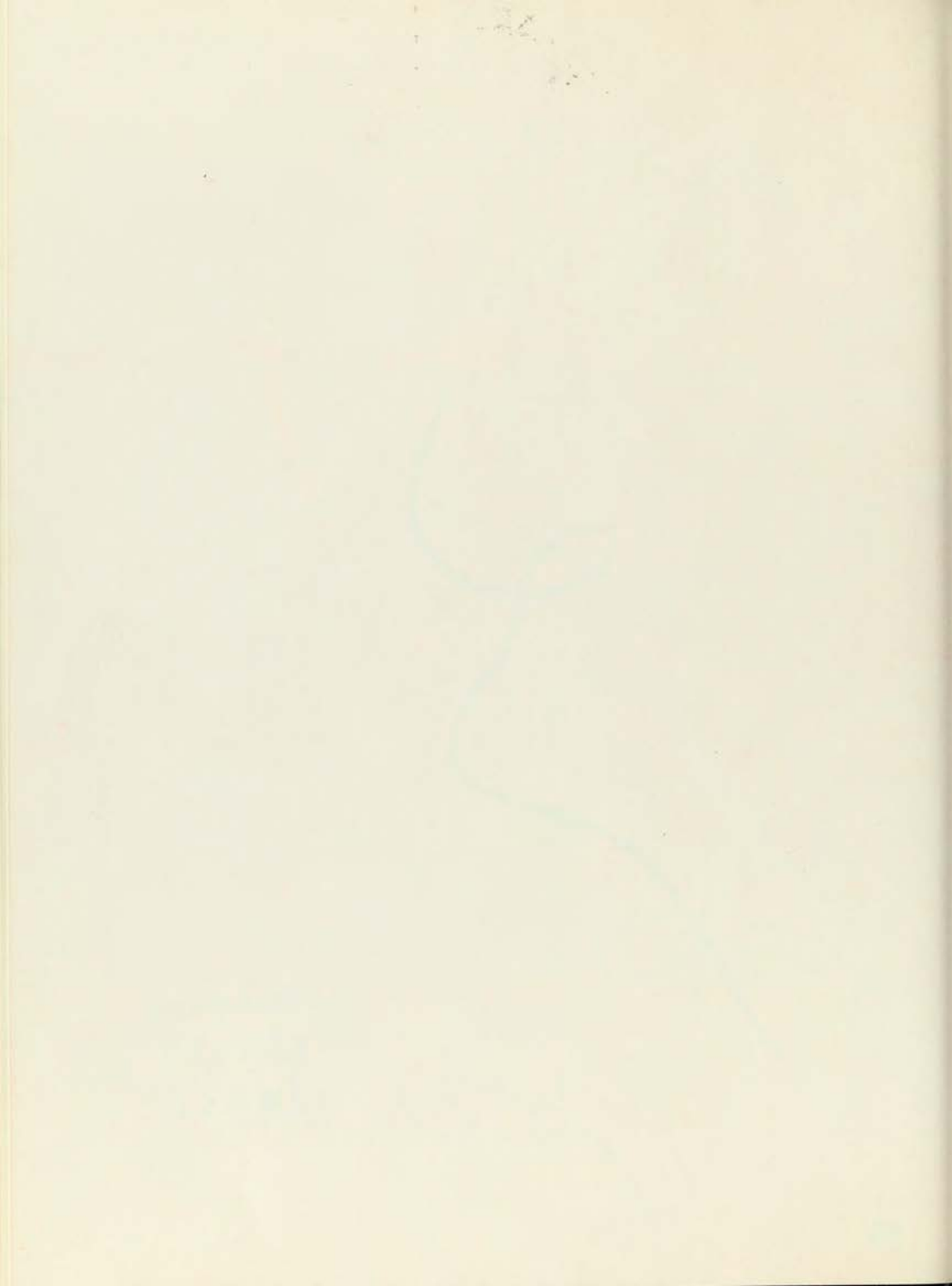




Forgotten  
string  
sings







upon  
Fallen  
Leaves

a

leaf



let

moss



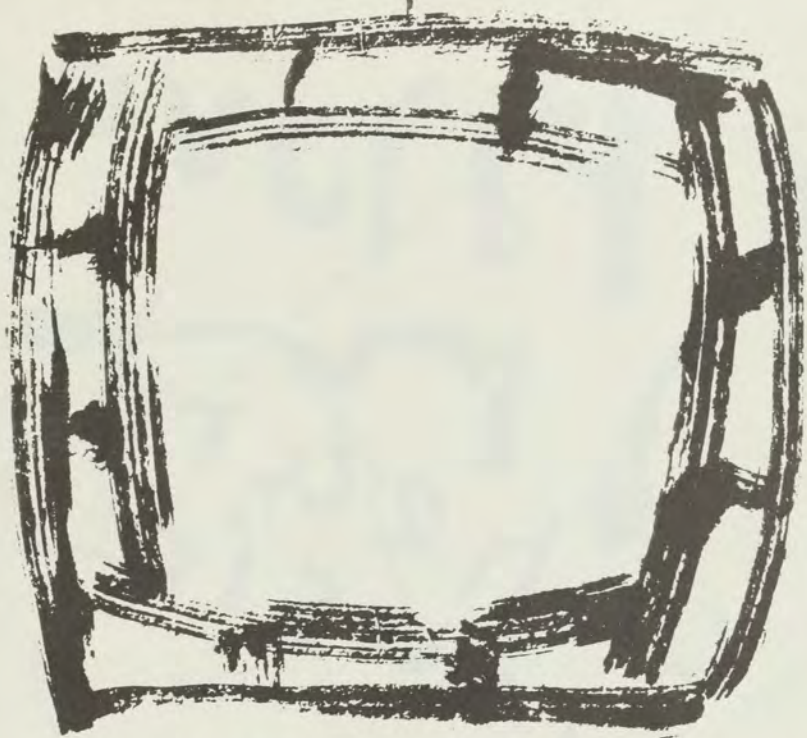
be

moss

5-stone  
garden



drop stones  
unexpectedly  
From closed hand  
see the garden you



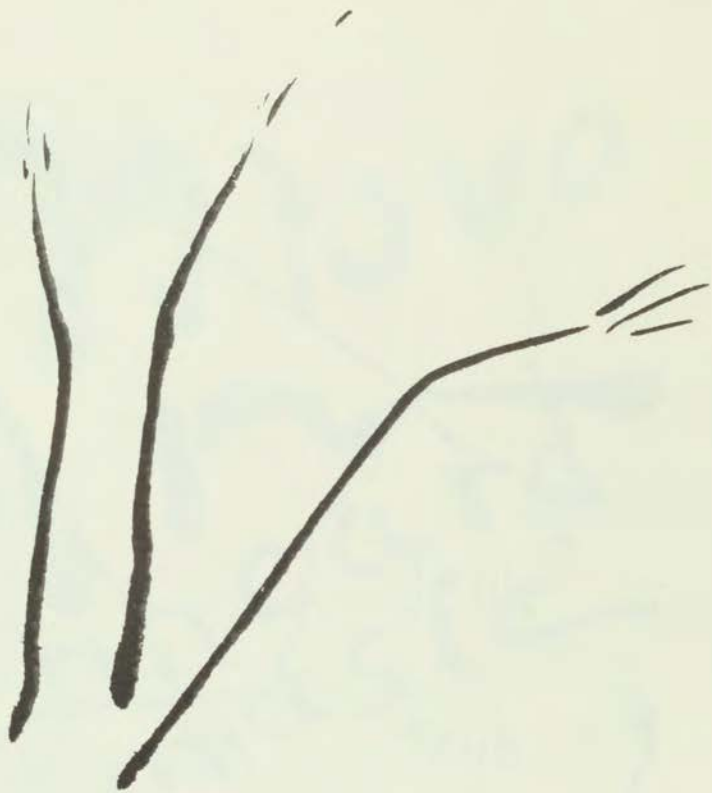
square wheel  
to go backwards



move  
heard  
music







which  
weed  
am I

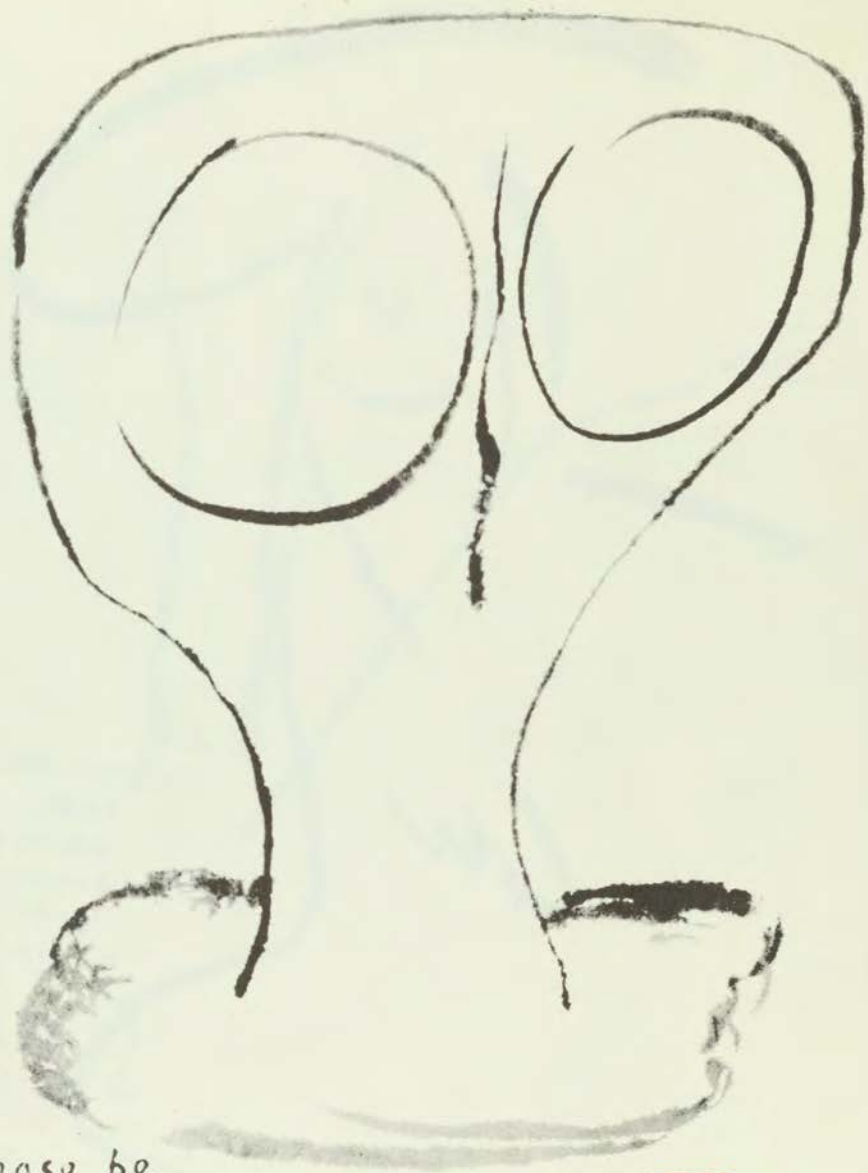






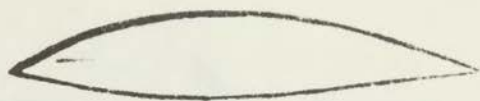
ah  
Farmer Food  
herbs  
brown rice  
greens  
sprouts  
a Farmer  
wife





please be  
my doll

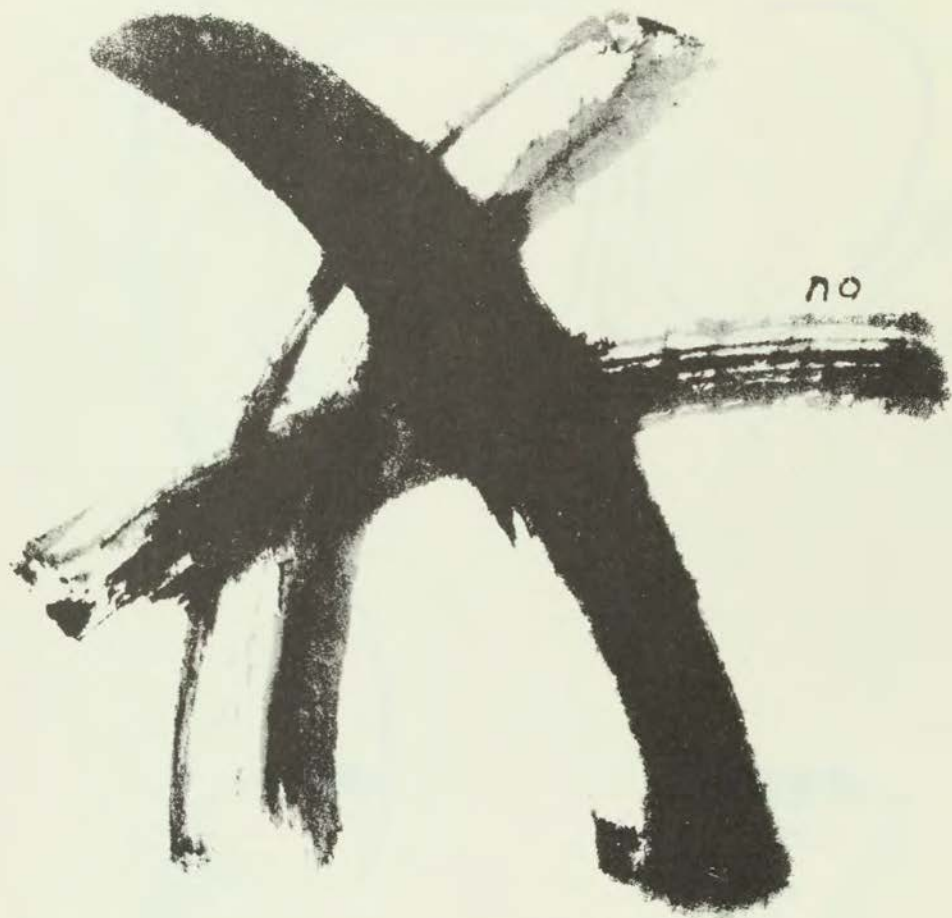


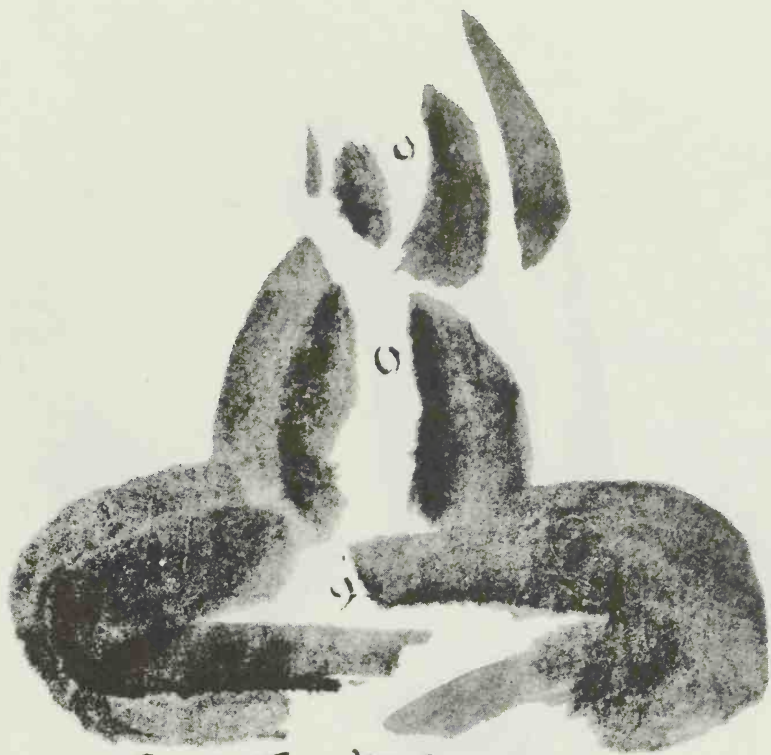


my life  
as path  
of fish



until  
you  
cry





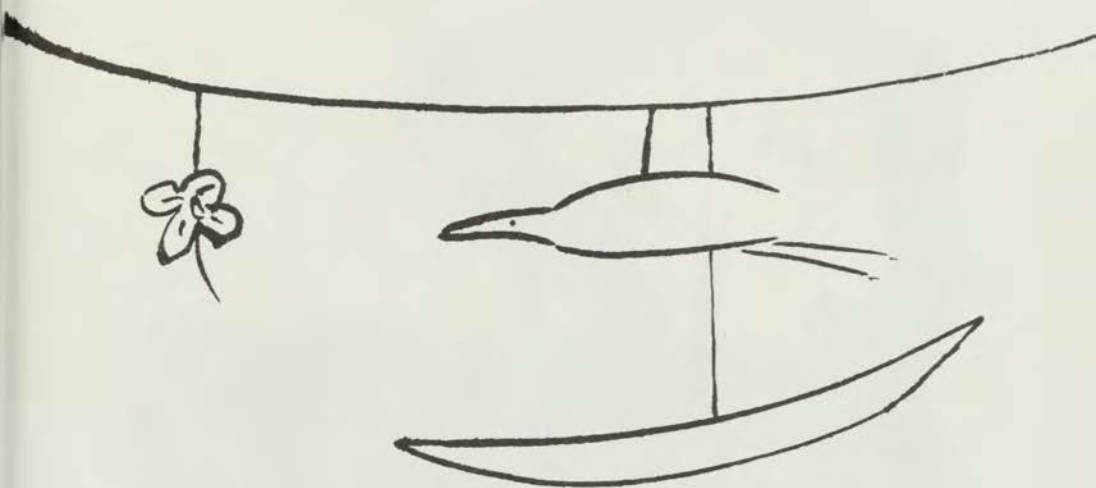
IF OF me  
a picture  
you a picture  
take





don't worry  
day  
will come

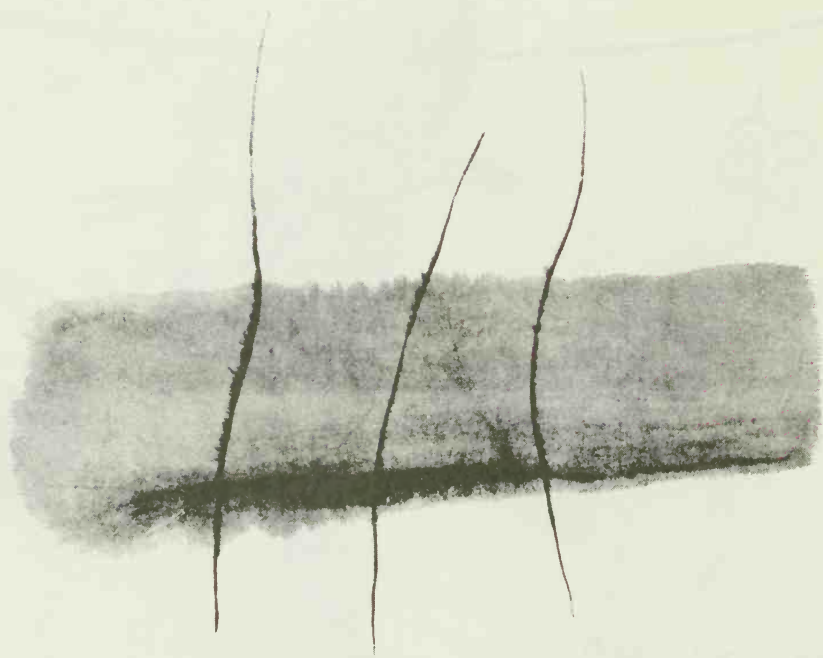




paper flower  
paper bird  
paper moon

who walks  
the wild earth  
any more?





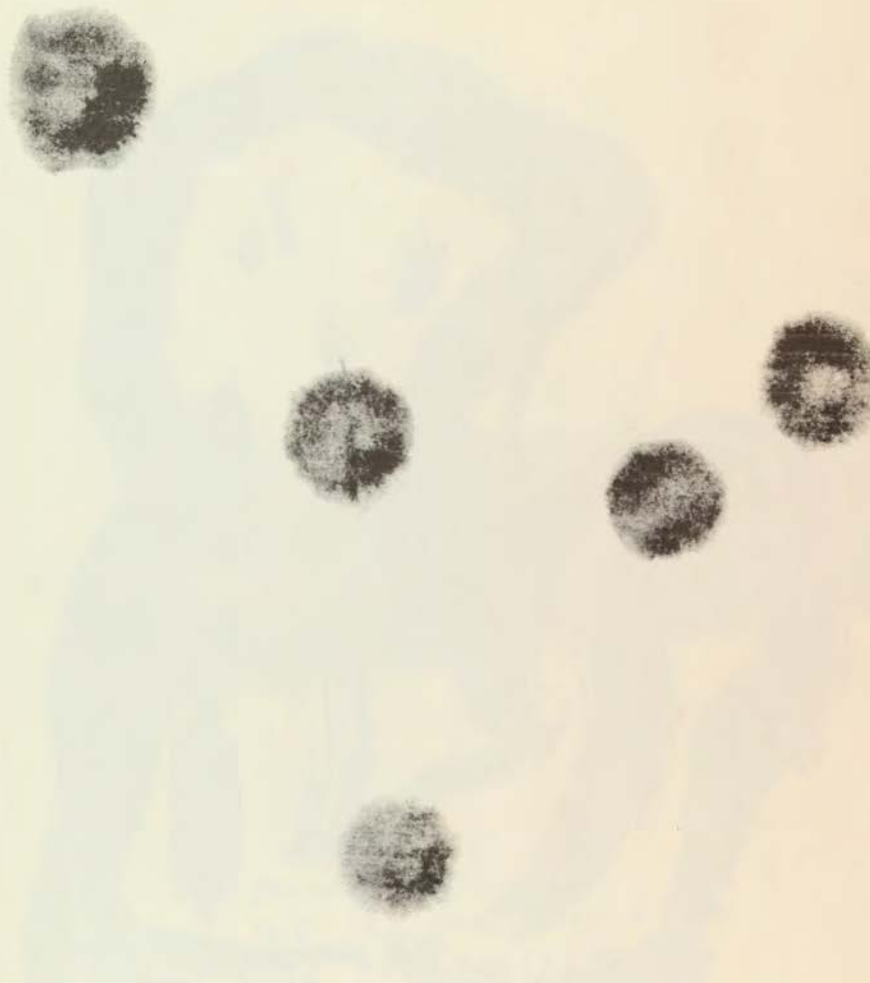
Since men  
still make war  
let me lie down and sing  
with the grasses





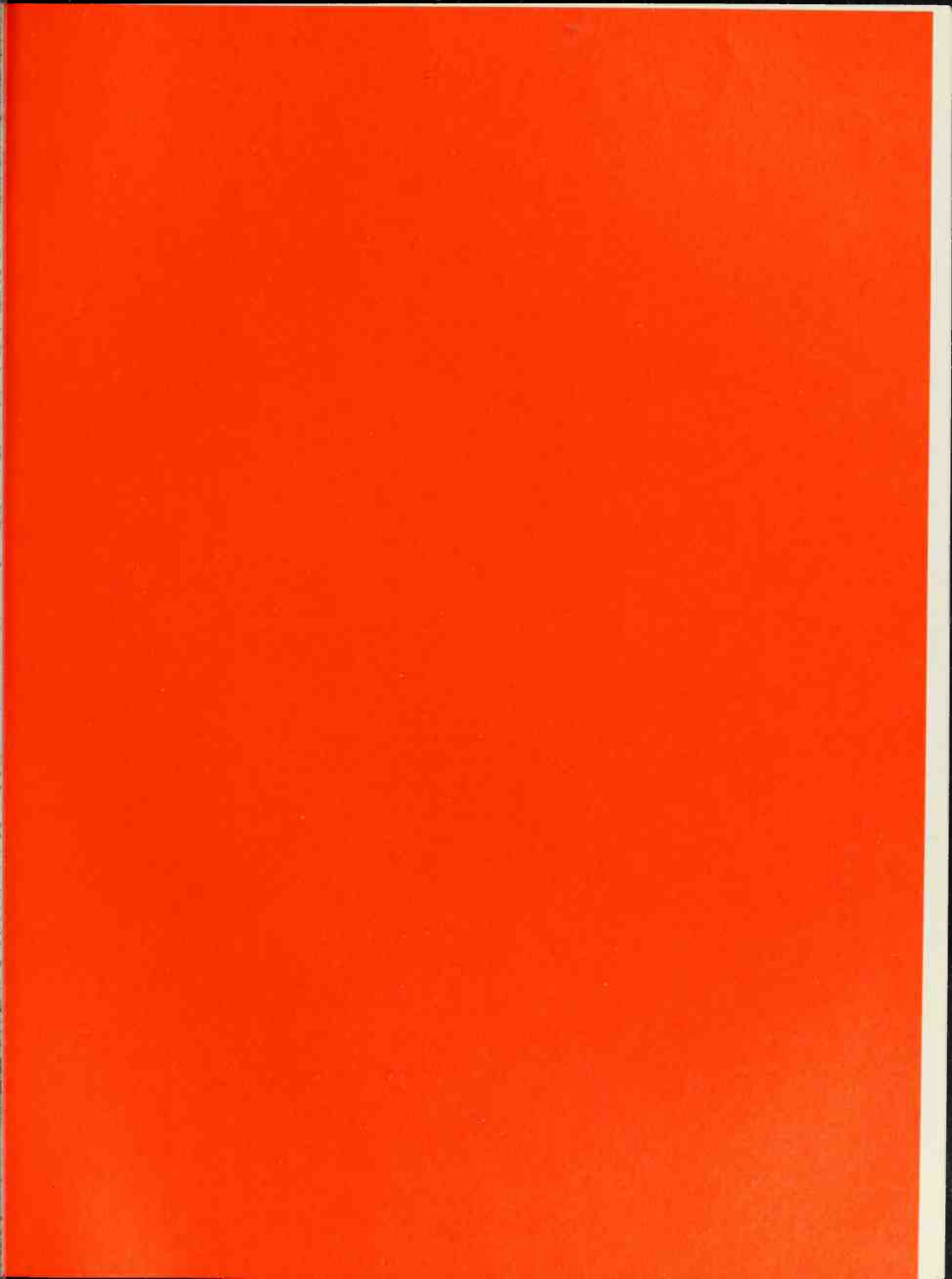
rocks preaching  
Become some  
silent  
sound





perhaps only  
perhaps  
you stand beside me  
in the gentle rain



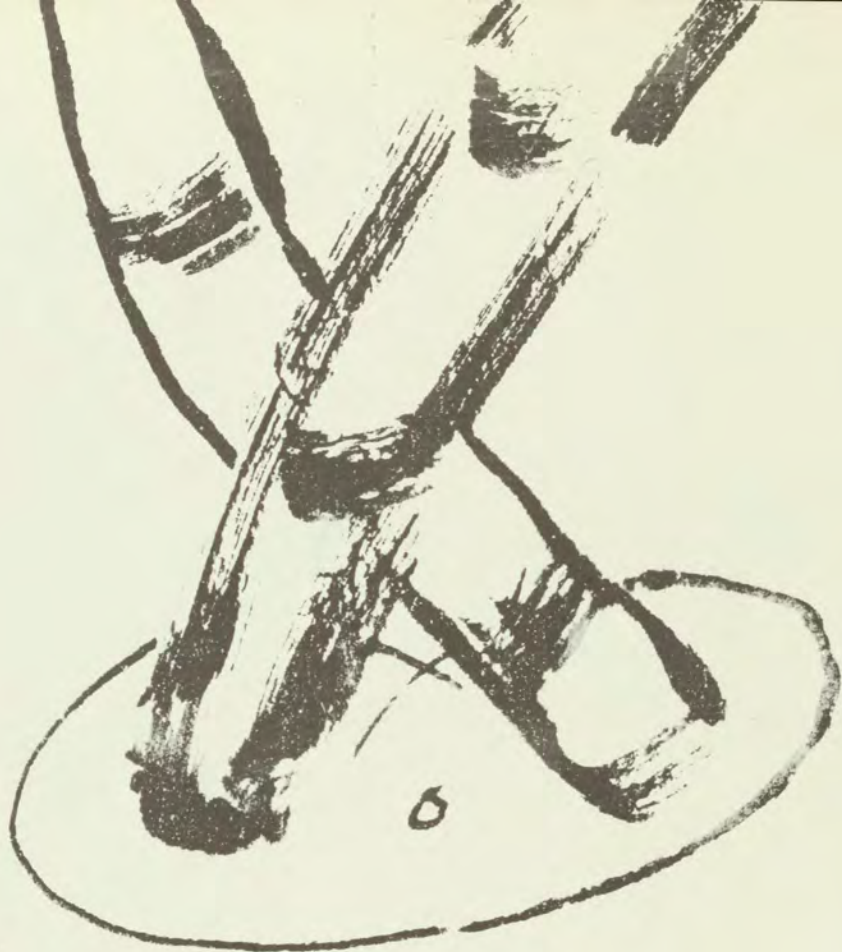




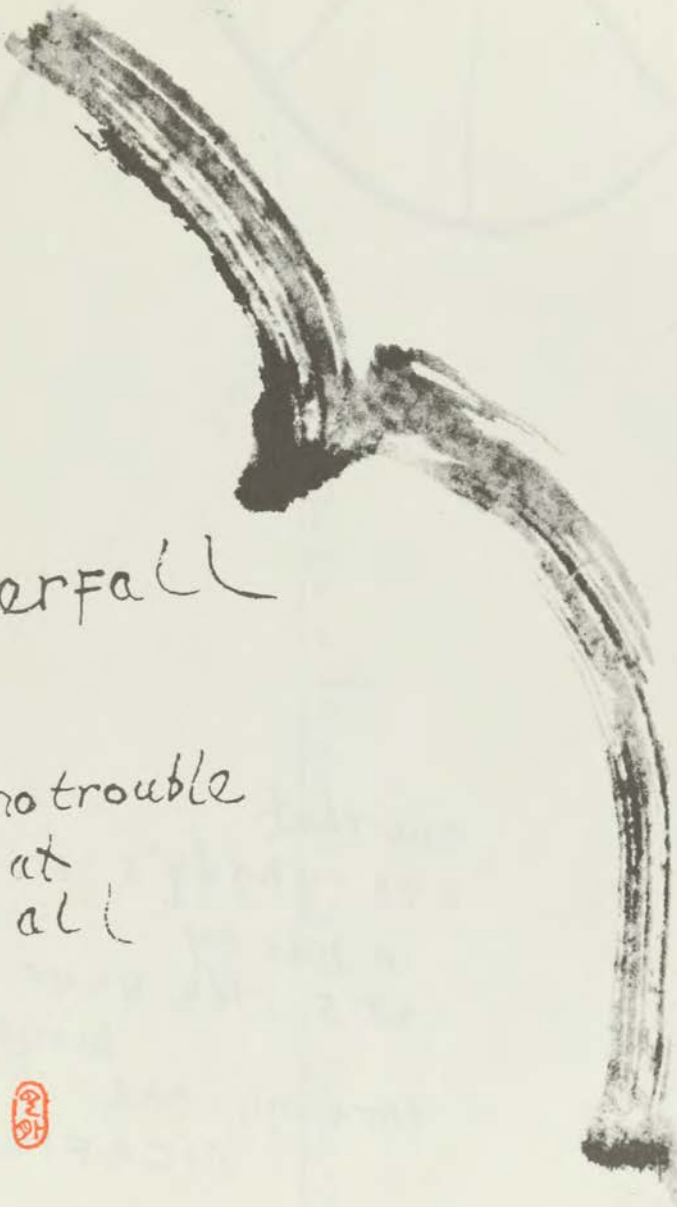
9

Little bud  
open this heart  
with your  
invisible hands






pebble  
receiving  
love




waterfall

no trouble  
at  
all





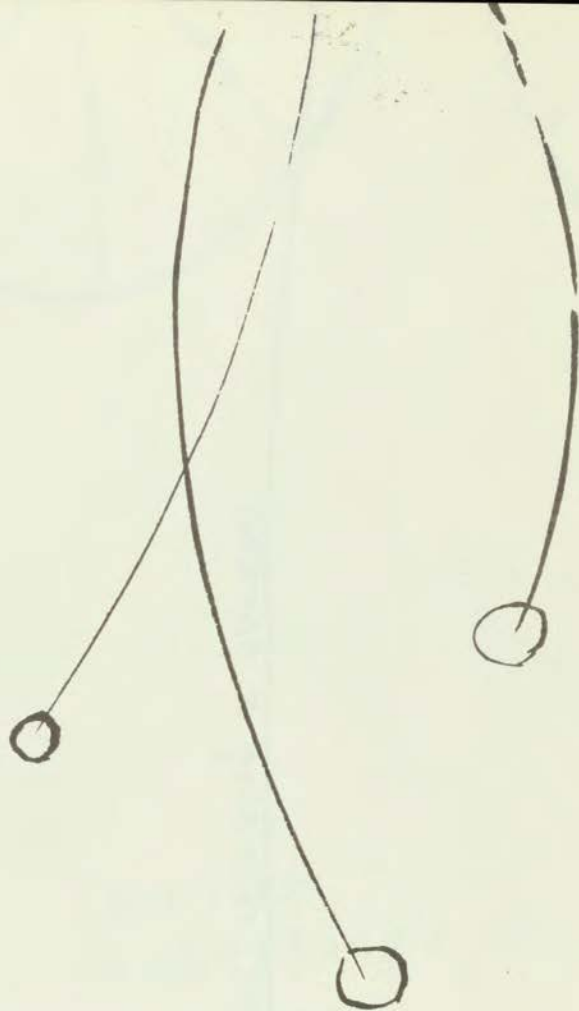
now that  
everybody's in  
a hurry  
let's ride your  
bicycle  
through the  
rice fields





2nd-hand words climbing a thread





captured  
snowflakes  
suffering



# SNOW

if only  
I could tell  
you my name  
tomorrow



Mountain  
rising lines  
to center  
sudden  
Light





asking  
seed how to open  
roots how to grow:  
"open" "grow"





Buddha compassion  
Jesus Love  
and touch of a hand

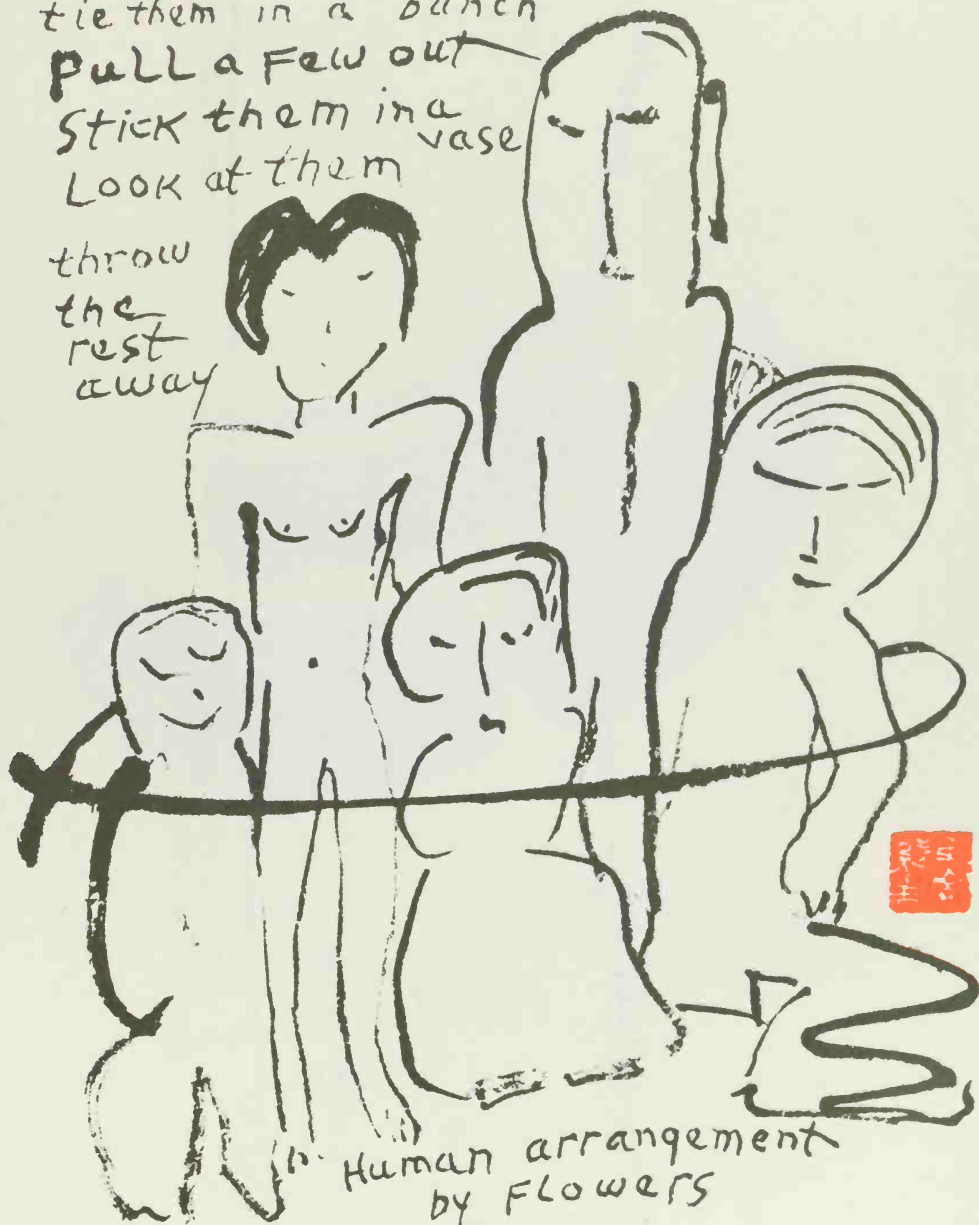
cut some humans from their stems  
tie them in a bunch

pull a few out

stick them in a vase

look at them

throw  
the  
rest  
away



Human arrangement  
by Flowers

something

something

nothing

nothing







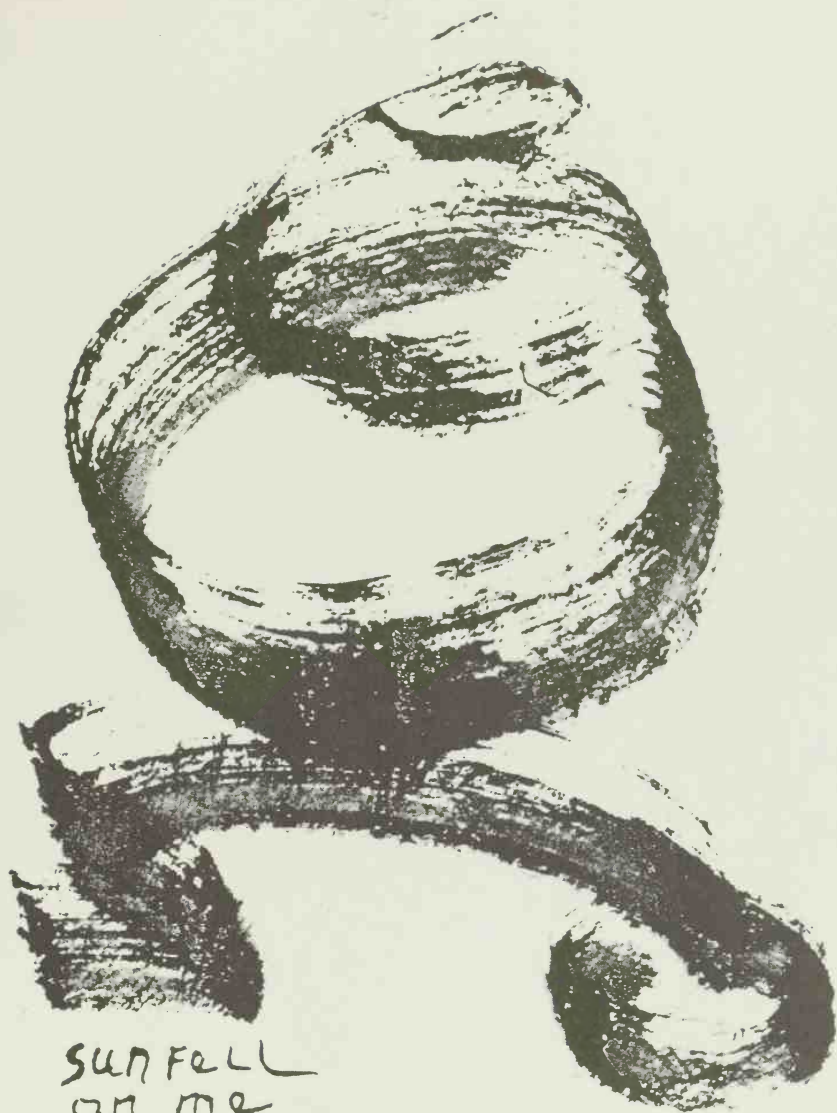
in her  
tender  
unfathomable  
being





how to  
be  
a  
samurai

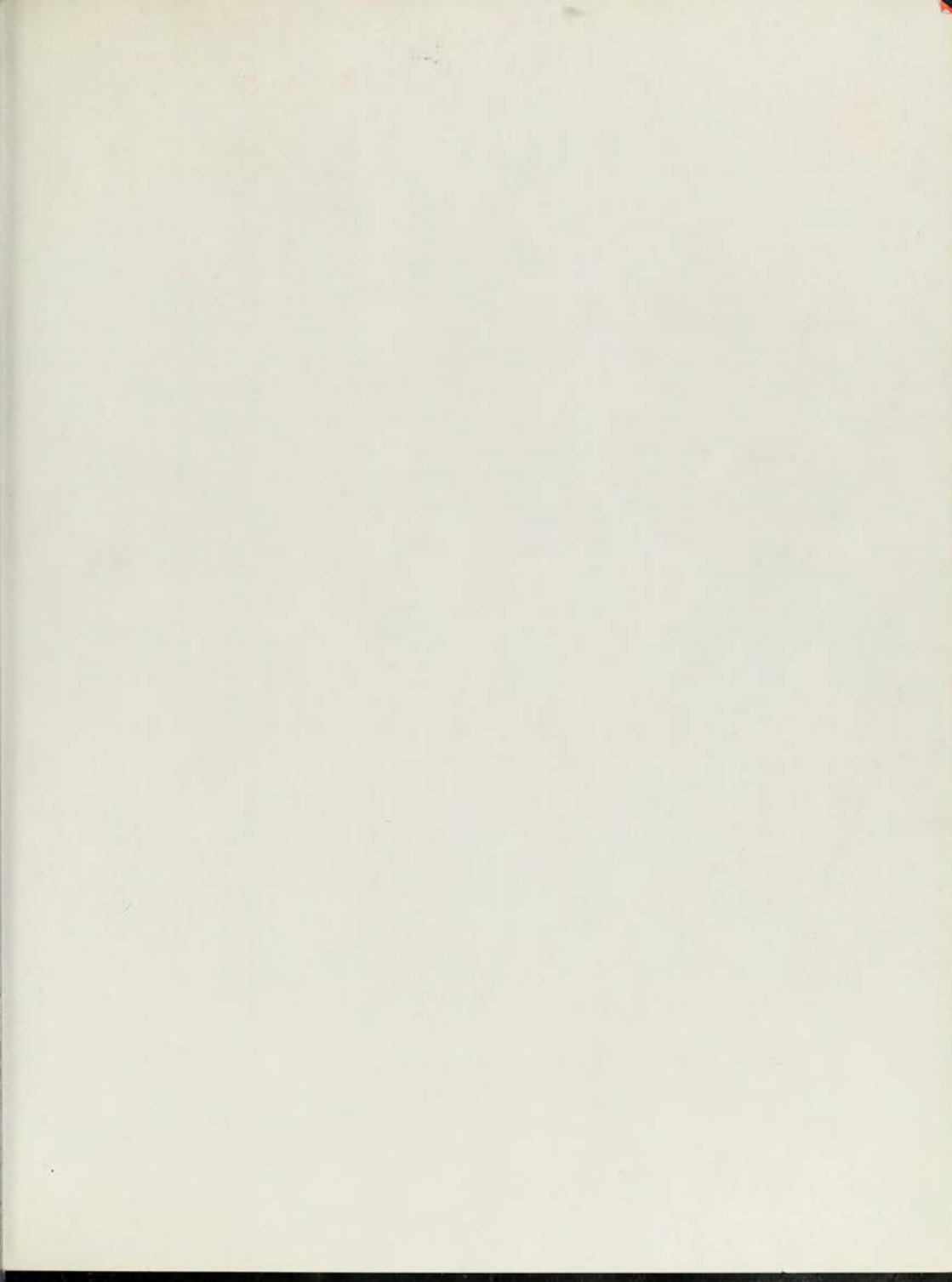




SUN FELL  
ON ME









Other books by Paul Reps

GOLD and/FISH SIGNATURES

SQUARE SUN, SQUARE MOON:

A Collection of Sweet and Sour Essays

UNWRINKLING PLAYS

ZEN FLESH, ZEN BONES:

A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings

charles e. tuttle company: publishers

ISBN 0-8048-0645-4

"He is one of those individuals who can make us feel, despite everything, the sheer delight of existence in an unbalanced world, the humour of humanity that, for all its nastiness, we cannot hate."

JAMES KIRKUP

