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# JOHN CAGE

*Zen Ox-Herding Pictures*

Selected and Edited by Stephen Addiss & Ray Kass

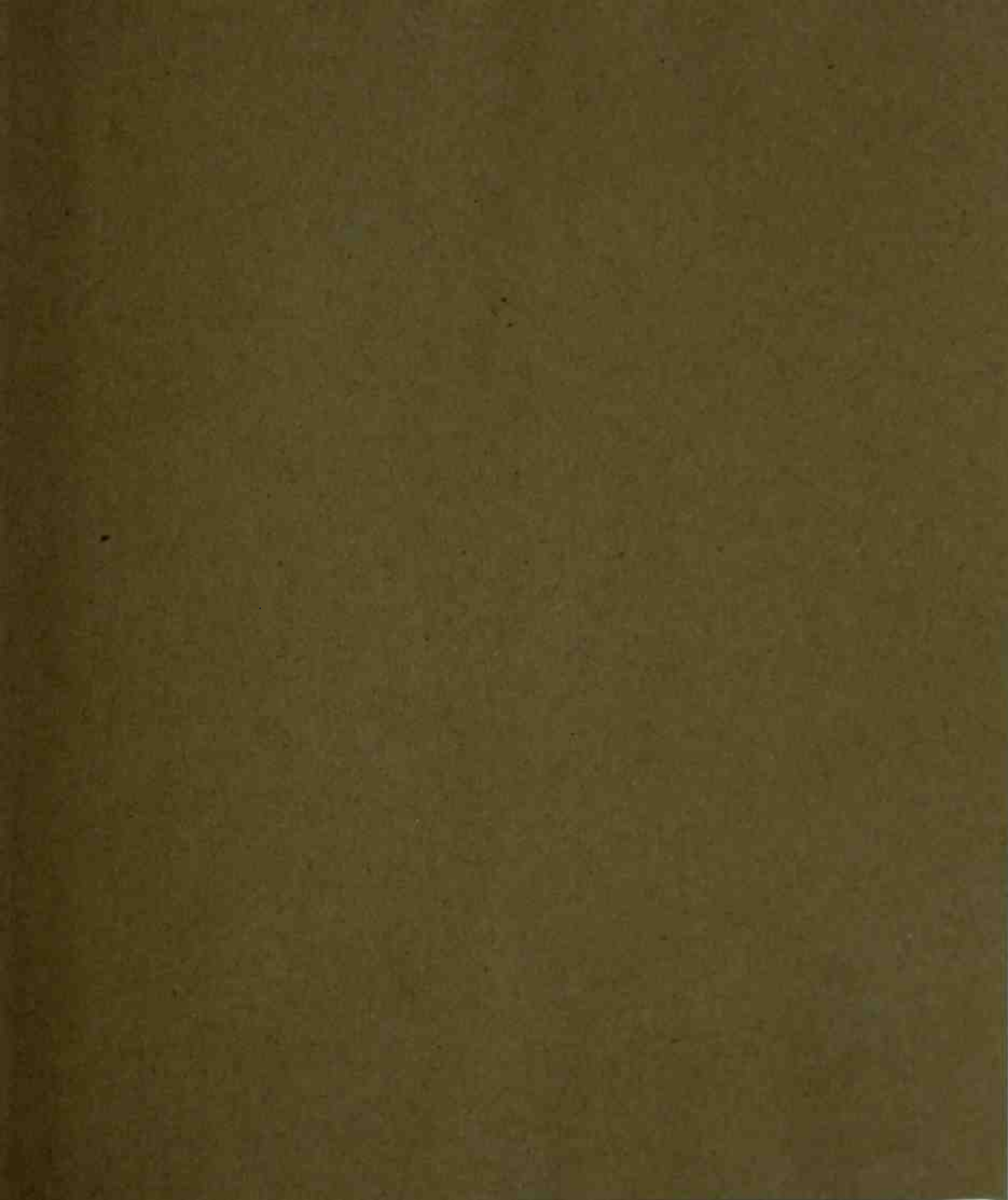
## JOHN CAGE: *Zen Ox-Herding Pictures*

This book brings together fifty never-before-seen images made in collaboration with renowned artist and composer John Cage, revealing the powerful influence of Zen in his life and work. These exquisite artifacts date from the 1988 Mountain Lake Workshop, where they were preparatory studies for greater endeavors by Cage. Now, nearly two decades later, these images have been utilized in a new collaboration as illustrations enlivening the classic "Ten Ox-Herding Pictures." The story of this collaboration draws upon resources from Cage's visual art, lectures, poetry, and the reflections of his colleagues and students.

As try-out sheets for Cage's watercolor paintings, each piece in this collection of paper towels was created serendipitously. And yet they are consistent in their visual exploration of the medium and appear as a cohesive group. Limited to a small, subtle palette and a neutral ground, they comprise a dynamic series in which no two images are alike, and where the possibilities of the medium are fully and enthusiastically revealed. Some images seem brittle, delicate, and on the verge of fading away; others are rich, dark, crossed by bold and energetic marks; and still others embrace both extremes, as though proposing a possible balance.

Mountain Lake Workshop founder and director Ray Kass (who first recognized the beauty of these artifacts) and Stephen Addiss (scholar, artist, and student of Cage) provide introductory essays, discussing their own experiences with the collaboration. Juxtaposing Cage's meditative studies with the "Ten Ox-Herding Pictures," a series of images that has been used to communicate the essence of Zen for nearly one thousand years, the authors also explore fragments of Cage's poetry and his many statements about Zen practice. These explorations provide a fascinating lens through which the reader can view the Mountain Lake Workshop images, allowing us to see them as mysterious echoes of the centuries-old "Ten Ox-Herding Paintings" themselves—images about searching for, finding, and returning from the path to enlightenment.

60 full-color illustrations





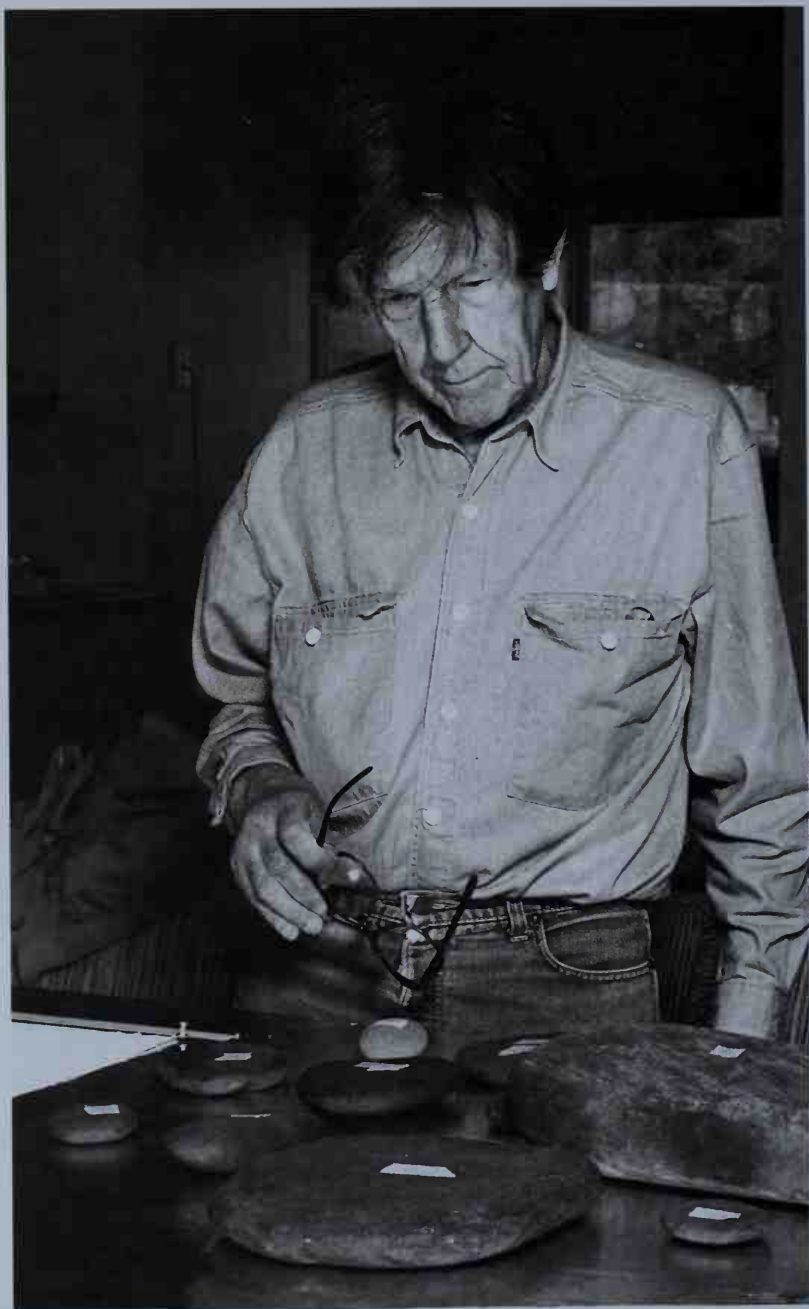
# John Cage

ZEN OX-HERDING PICTURES

*Once caught, the ox is no longer visible.*

— John Cage





# John Cage

ZEN OX-HERDING PICTURES

SELECTED AND EDITED  
BY STEPHEN ADDISS AND RAY KASS  
AT THE MOUNTAIN LAKE WORKSHOP

University of Richmond Museums  
VIRGINIA

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John Cage at the Mountain Lake Workshop, 1988.

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## P R E F A C E

In 1988, Ray Kass invited John Cage to paint at the Mountain Lake Workshop in Blacksburg, Virginia, and they began a series of experiments with watercolor pigments that resulted in fifty-five densely marked paper towels. Though these towels were merely collaborative test sheets created while Cage acquainted himself with a new medium, Kass saw that they had a beauty of their own and suggested to Cage that they should be used as material for an entirely new piece. Cage replied, “You should make a piece with them.”

Two decades later, Cage’s pupil and friend Stephen Addiss has joined Ray Kass in realizing the potential of these singular images. From Kass’ collection of carefully archived towels, Addiss created three sets of images that echoed the narrative of the *Ox-Herding Pictures*, an illustrated parable to which Cage often referred in his discussions and writings. Kass followed suit, creating a set of his own and, finally, the two authors created a fifth set using Cage’s chance-operation methods — we leave it to readers to decide which set was created by which method! Over the months following the completion of the sets, Addiss read through Cage’s writings, selecting fragments to accompany the images in each set. The results of these explorations are united here with Addiss’ and Kass’ reflections on this unique collaboration.

It is thrilling to have the University of Richmond Museums involved in bringing these unusual, but beautiful, works to be seen by those

who peruse this publication as well as by those who see them on view in the exhibition. With this project comes a wonderful story, beginning with how the paintings came to be made and ending, or perhaps beginning again, with seeing them in the rich context of the history of Zen ox-herding poems and paintings and the writings of John Cage.

In his essay, Ray Kass unfolds the sequence of events that leads from John Cage’s visits in the 1980s to the Mountain Lake Workshop to the exhibition in the Joel and Lila Harnett Museum of Art and Print Study Center and the publication of this book in 2009. At the University of Richmond, we are fortunate to have Stephen Addiss on our faculty as the Tucker-Boatwright Chair in Humanities: Art and Professor of Art History, and we are even more fortunate that he has curated several important exhibitions for our University Museums. When Ray and Steve first came to me with this incredible group of painted paper towels and the tale of how they came to be, I was overwhelmed with the singular opportunity to have the University of Richmond be the catalyst to bring these to the public.

The successful realization of this project is due to the invaluable contributions of many people. First and foremost, our deepest thanks go to our curators, essayists, and editors for this project, Stephen Addiss and Ray Kass. They have been patient, supportive, and gracious

throughout the entire process of bringing an idea to fruition. The depth of their research and expertise is evident in the thoughtful essays that contribute so invaluable to our appreciation of these works. We are particularly grateful for Steve's history of Zen ox-herding poems and paintings, his reflections on his studies with John Cage, and his perceptive remarks and insights on the Zen influence on Cage's work. Steve is also to be commended for closely reading through the writings of Cage to select just the right poetic fragments that accompany each of the images in the five sets of ox-herding pictures. His pairing of text and image expands our aesthetic experience tremendously.

This project could only have been completed with the close collaboration of the John Cage Trust, and we are indebted to Laura Kuhn for her essential role in this endeavor. In addition, the authors would like to thank Jerrie Pike and Audrey Yoshiko Seo for their helpful ideas and support and Stanley Lombardo for his translations. Our deepest thanks go to George Braziller and Maxwell Heller of George Braziller Publishers, for their early enthusiasm and unwavering faith in bringing this publication to reality.

At the University of Richmond, our special appreciation goes to Dr. Edward L. Ayers, President; Dr. Stephen Allred, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; and Dr. Andrew F. Newcomb, Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, for their continuing guidance and support of the University Museums, comprising the Joel and Lila Harnett Museum of Art, the Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, and the Lora Robins Gallery of Design from Nature. As always, we give thanks and appreciation to the staff of the University Museums.

Support has been generously provided for this publication and exhibiton by the Louis S. Booth Arts Fund and the University of Richmond's Cultural Affairs Committee.

We believe that Cage would have been pleased with this fresh use of the pieces created during the Mountain Lake Workshop years ago. Perhaps this book is a reflection of the ox-herding parable's final image, in which the spiritual traveler "returns to the village bearing gifts."

RICHARD WALLER  
*Executive Director*  
*University of Richmond Museums*

## JOHN CAGE WIPES HIS BRUSH: THE MOUNTAIN LAKE WORKSHOP LEGACY

The five sets of Zen ox-herding pictures and poems in this volume have an unusual history, formed by a unique confluence of people, ideas, energy, and experience. This history began in 1983 when I invited John Cage to the Mountain Lake Workshop in Virginia to attend an exhibition of his etchings and drawings and to experiment with watercolors. On a return visit in 1988, he painted the contours of stones for the eight works comprising *New River Watercolors: Series IV*. During this process, Cage tested his brush, or requested that I do so, for various reasons — to lighten or darken the consistency of the color mixtures or to try out movements of the brush — on ordinary brown paper towels. He was practicing in order to master (according to his own standards) the new materials that he would subject to chance operations in determining the compositions of his *New River Watercolors*.

The paper towels were therefore a result of John Cage's engagement with watercolor painting, and were among the many and varied practice sheets that Cage generated. In this case I simply grabbed a package of the towels from a shelf in the broom closet because they were small, absorbent and disposable — although I never disposed of them in the conventional way.

A resulting group of 55 watercolor “test sheets” was particularly appealing to me, and I said so as I removed and refreshed the paper towels beside Cage. (The fact that they were

paper towels adds a certain objectively “iconic” dimension to them.) The brown/beige hue of the paper works well as a color field for the decidedly earthen watercolor mixtures that Cage was using in this series of paintings. Also, the randomly overlapping watercolor marks in these practice sheets seemed fresh and unselfconscious as they negotiate paths across the towels' folds. The paper towel wipes formed an extraordinary collection. At one point I suggested that we do something with the collection, and Cage said that I should *make a piece out of them*.

Keeping Cage's comment in mind, I saved the 55 paper towels in Cage's Mountain Lake Workshop archival collection, only periodically showing them to visitors. For many years I thought about what kind of project could bring them together as a meaningful “piece.”

The opportunity arose in 2007, two years after I had begun working with Dr. Stephen Addiss, a composer, musician, poet, painter and historian of Japanese art. In the late 1950s, Addiss studied with John Cage in his now-famous classes in experimental composition at the New School for Social Research; I knew that Cage liked Addiss and admired his published scholarship on Zen Buddhist art. One of Cage's favorite books was Addiss' *The Art of Zen: Painting and Calligraphy by Japanese Monks 1600–1925*, and we always had a copy of this book at the workshop when Cage was painting.

Before I began working with Addiss

in 2005, I had already met him several times, but I had known of his scholarly writing and artwork for more than twenty years. At first I “smoked” paper for Addiss, in the manner that I had developed for John Cage, to use for his own excellent sumi painting. Next, in 2006, we worked together to organize a Mountain Lake Workshop in paper smoking at the University of Richmond, as well as a related exhibition in the University Museums that included paintings on smoked paper by Cage, Addiss, and me.

In November 2007, I invited Addiss to give a lecture at Virginia Tech on the Development of Asian Scripts and participate in a paper-smoking workshop with students and community volunteers. During a break in the workshop, I showed him the paper towels that Cage had marked in 1988. He was very enthusiastic, so I suggested that he select ten from the group that corresponded to the *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures*. The idea probably came

to me because I knew that Cage liked the *Ox-Herding Pictures*, particularly the longer version with ten images that ends not with the eighth image of the “void,” but with the enlightened one returning from the “void” to the “origin,” and then finally to “the village bearing gifts.” This version mirrored Cage’s optimistic nature.

Addiss’ expertise in Zen Buddhist art and his understanding of the work of John Cage made him an ideal collaborator for the “piece” that Cage had proposed almost twenty years earlier. He agreed that the paper towel paintings and their abstract imagery might work as visual signifiers of the ox-herding parable.

Addiss selected the first group of ten images from the 55 paper towels, and we talked about them with the workshop participants. As the afternoon continued, we took several breaks from our paper-smoking activity, and I encouraged him to select two additional groups. I also chose a group, and we used “chance



John Cage working on one of his *New River Watercolors* in 1988 at the Mountain Lake Workshop. Photograph courtesy of Ray Kass and the Mountain Lake Workshop Archive.



operations” (Cage’s own computer-generated I-Ching pages of random numbers from his watercolor workshops) to select another group. In all, five sets of ten images each were selected. We decided not to reveal the order or origins of the selection, thus introducing an appropriate element of ambiguity.

The *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures* are traditionally presented with poems to accompany each painting, so Addiss took the next several months to select short texts from John Cage’s own writings to accompany each of the fifty images. His sensitive selection breathes new life into the project, as Cage’s writings touch on many ideas raised by the *Ox-Herding Pictures*. By adding the text fragments, Addiss has created a book of poetry grounded in John Cage’s writings that, along with these unconventional images, offers a new experience of the *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures* to the reader.

While it is important to remember that for Cage these were “try-outs” and not individual watercolor paintings, re-contextualizing these images invites the audience to experience them as a new confluence of paintings and poems. We hope that we have contributed to the ongoing collaborative spirit of “indeterminacy” that Cage’s work represents for the past, present, and future of art.

RAY KASS

*Note: John Cage’s watercolor painting experiences in 1983, 1988, 1989, and 1990 were organized as a response to the composer’s first visit to the Mountain Lake Workshop in 1983, where he participated in a mycological foray and symposium that I had organized with Orson and Hope Miller. At that time Cage made a*

*special presentation at the foray symposium and attended an opening of an exhibition of his recent prints and drawings that I curated for the Squires Student Union Gallery at nearby Virginia Tech. Included were several works from a new series of etchings and drawings entitled Where R = Ryōanji that Cage had based on the fifteen stones of the Zen-inspired Ryōanji garden in Kyoto, Japan.*

*On the final day of his 1983 visit, Cage discovered the smooth rocks of the nearby New River, and selected many examples that he asked me to bring to him in New York City. The following morning, only a few hours before his return flight, I surprised him with an array of papers, brushes, watercolors and the stones that I had arranged in my studio so that they could be easily accessed for “chance operations.” I invited him to experiment in making watercolor paintings using the stones that he had selected the previous day. He was silent for a few moments while he looked over the arrangement of the materials I had prepared. He then took out a folder containing a computer printout of random numbers based on the hexagrams of the I-Ching and immediately set to work making a program for a painting. He created several “try-out” sheets painting around stones using the brushes and colors. Then he set to work on a larger sheet of watercolor paper in which the stones, colors, brushes and their placement on the paper were all selected by “chance operations.” He then added a wide grey wash over the entire sheet as the final move in his first watercolor painting.*

*I delivered his painting along with the stones to his apartment in NYC where they remained for the next five years. Cage returned to the Mountain Lake Workshop to paint the New River Watercolors in 1988, 1989, and 1990.*



## ZEN INFLUENCES IN THE WORK OF JOHN CAGE

*I do not want to blame Zen Buddhism with what I have done. I would not have done what I have done, except for it; and so I am very grateful for it. On the other hand, Zen Buddhism is not the only way to come to the kind of actions to which I came.*<sup>1</sup>

—John Cage

My own introduction to Zen came through John Cage, but it came indirectly. In the late 1950s, when I was one of his students in “Experimental Composition” at The New School in New York City, each class started with exploring our own new music and performances pieces. These had to be performable then and there — in addition to a piano and our own voices, we had access to a closet full of musical instruments from different cultures, many of them percussion instruments that we could all try out. However, if there were not enough of our own compositions to fill the class period, we would hold discussions, and sometimes we asked Cage about his own life and work. I remember him talking about D. T. Suzuki, with whom he had studied Zen. As he later wrote,

*I had the good fortune in the late forties to attend the classes of Daisetz Suzuki in Zen Buddhism for two years, and that had a determining influence upon my music and my thinking.<sup>2</sup> . . . He taught at Columbia and I liked his lectures very much.<sup>3</sup> . . . . Very frequently*

*you would leave the lecture without any consciousness of having learned anything . . . nothing would have been pounded into your head or even made noticeable to you.<sup>4</sup>*

This description of Suzuki could also be applied to Cage’s own teaching style, which was certainly not to indoctrinate us into his own beliefs, but rather to encourage us towards experimentation in order to develop and follow our own paths. At the time, this involved working with sounds rather than visual images, and he had a much broader view of composition than I had found in my previous studies as a music major in college. As always, Cage expressed it best himself:

*Since the forties and through study with D. T. Suzuki of the philosophy of Zen Buddhism, I’ve thought of music as a means of changing the mind. Of course, my proper concern first of all has been with changing my own mind. . . . It was through the study of Buddhism that I became, it seems to me, less confused. I saw art not as something that consisted of a communication from the artists to an audience but rather as an activity of sounds in which the artist found a way to let the sounds be themselves.<sup>5</sup>*

For me, and I suspect for many others, this was revolutionary. Give up our own (seemingly precious) musical decisions based on personal taste, and let the sounds be themselves? Even if we could open ourselves up to this idea, how could it be done?

With Cage, it involved using chance

methods “freeing the ego from its taste and memory, its concern for profit and power, of silencing the ego so that the rest of the world has a chance to enter into the ego’s own experience whether that be outside or inside.”<sup>6</sup> Of course, in the musical establishment he was greatly criticized for this use of chance, since tradition held that a composer should be held accountable for every sound in his works. But Cage’s sense of responsibility was to the entire sonic world, rather than to his own likes and dislikes.

*In our everyday life sounds are popping up, just as visual things and moving things are popping up, everywhere around us . . . Sounds should be honored rather than enslaved. I’ve come to think that because of my study of Buddhism, which teaches us that every creature, whether sentient (such as animals) or insentient (such as stones and air) is the Buddha. Each being is the center of the universe, and creation is a multiplicity of centers.*<sup>7</sup>

In class discussions, Cage often referred to Suzuki’s lectures on Zen, and described some of the ways he could reconfigure these ideas in his own work. As his life went on, he found that his new process became valid not only for music. He often took the writings (and sometimes the art) of people he admired, such as Thoreau and Joyce, and subjected them to chance operations, such as in his mesostic form of poetry, which found new uses for the words of others.

Over the course of his lifetime, Cage continued to talk and write about Zen, which remained one of the significant influences upon his music, writing, and art. Most interesting to me was how he was able to interpret Zen in such uniquely creative ways, quite unlike traditional Zen-influenced arts in China, Korea, or Japan.

It was not merely his studies with Suzuki that influenced Cage; in his later interviews and writings it is clear that he was intimately familiar



John Cage in discussion with D. T. Suzuki. Photograph courtesy of the John Cage Trust at Bard College.

with a number of major Zen texts. For example, he told in his own way the story of Hui-neng, an illiterate kitchen helper who proved his enlightenment with a poem.<sup>8</sup>

*The oldest monk in the monastery said, "The mind is like a mirror. It collects dust and the problem is to remove the dust." There was a young fellow in the kitchen, Hui-neng, who couldn't read and couldn't write but had this poem read to him and said, "That isn't very interesting." And they said, "Well, how do you know?" And he said, "Oh, I could write a much better poem, but I can't write." And so they asked him to say it, and he did, and they wrote it, and it was: "Where is the mirror and where is the dust?" He became the Sixth Patriarch.*<sup>9</sup>

Due to the jealousy of senior monastics, Hui-neng was advised to flee the monastery in the middle of the night. He was chased by monks who wanted the robe and bowl that had been given to him by the Fifth Patriarch as symbols of succession. Cage continued elements of this story in one of his mesostic poems, here using the word "Performance" running down the center.

sixth Patriarch  
so tELL us what you would say  
what miRRor what dust  
in the middle oF the night  
the fifth take this rObe this bowl  
oR whatever these are  
My  
insigniA they are yours  
escape this Night  
as fast as you Can  
thEy'll come after you

they did they caught uP with him  
dEmanded  
the Robe the bowl  
he oFFered them  
withOut hesitation  
placing them on the Rock  
between theM  
but they were unAble  
even  
to touCh  
thE robe the bowl<sup>10</sup>

In the same mesostic, Cage refers to two more Zen stories. The first is the tale of a monk who burns a statue of Buddha to keep himself warm at night. When another monk criticizes him, he says that he is creating Buddhist relics from the ashes. The monk replies that you can't make relics just by burning a wooden statue. In that case, says the first monk, let's burn another one.

Cage also alludes here to the Zen Master who, when monks argued over a cat, threatened to cut the cat's throat unless someone could immediately answer him correctly:

Practicality action is action  
thE metal ones  
won't buRn  
wooden statues oF the Buddha winter fire  
quick O quick  
a woRd of truth  
one arM  
holding the cAt  
the other the kNife  
quiCk  
or I slit thE cat's throat<sup>11</sup>

Cage was also very fond of Yun-men's statement "Every day is a good day," which he quoted in English and in Japanese (*nichi nichi kore ko nichi*):

*There is not a moment in life as far as anyone of us is concerned that is not "ideal" and in a state of utter "achievement." To think otherwise would be to be in hell rather than in league with it.*<sup>12</sup>

*In the song books one of the solos is to say the words nichi nichi kore ko nichi a chance-determined number of times and then having done it to do so again another chance-determined number of times at highest volume.*<sup>13</sup>

*[This play is] an affirmation of life, not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements on creation, but simply a waking up to the very life we're living which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of the way and lets it act of its own accord.*<sup>14</sup>

Cage's favorite Zen writings were outlined in a statement he gave when discussing the relation of Zen Buddhism to his work (although "Neti Neti" is not strictly speaking a Zen text).

*The Buddhist texts to which I often return are the Huang-Po Doctrine of Universal Mind (in Chu Ch'an's first translation, published by the London Buddhist Society in 1947), Neti Neti by L. C. Beckett of which (as I say in the introduction to my Norton Lectures at Harvard) my life could be described as an illustration, and the Ten Oxherding Pictures (in the version that ends with the return to the village bearing gifts of a smiling and somewhat heavy monk, one who had experienced nothingness).*<sup>15</sup>

Huang-Po (died 850 C.E.) was a major Chinese Zen Master in the lineage of Hui-neng, known for his teachings on the transmission of universal mind.<sup>16</sup> He emphasized that the entire universe is Buddha, and so are all sounds, and that the cessation of conceptual thought is the Way; this had a direct connection to Cage's use of everyday noises and chance methods in his work. Huang-Po also taught his followers that in order to discover their own Buddha-nature, they should not cling to anything, even to the Buddha. Replying to a monk's question, he said that people are afraid to empty their minds for fear of plunging into the void, not realizing that their own mind is the void. It was in this context that Cage, referring to Huang-Po, wrote:

*"Nothing is accomplished by writing, performing, hearing a piece of music (instantaneous-unpredictable): our ears are now in excellent condition." Couldn't have written this otherwise.*<sup>17</sup>

In an interview, Cage was asked, "What is your favorite piece of wisdom?" He replied, "*The Huang-Po Doctrine of Universal Mind*. This is a text, not a phrase." When asked why, he said "I have no idea."<sup>18</sup>

Cage also wrote:

*All  
activities fuse in one purpose which  
is (cf. Huang-Po Doctrine of Universal  
Mind) no purpose.*<sup>19</sup>

Finally, Cage refers several times to the *Ox-Herding Pictures* in his writings, making

clear that it was not only the successful search for the selfless self that was important, but also returning to the world with compassion.

*There are two versions of the ox-herding pictures. One concludes with the image of nothingness, the other with the image of a fat man, smiling, returning to the village bearing gifts. Nowadays we have only the second version. They call it neo-Dada.*<sup>20</sup>

*Searching for alternatives to world violence, we can therefore take as directives proven means used now or formerly by individuals to "pacify" their minds. What were and/or are they?*

*Self-discipline. That is to say: self-alteration, particularly with regard to ego likes and dislikes, ego memory and the resultant fixed habit ("Leave thy*

*father and mother and follow Me." Discipline. Yoga: yoking, or, rather, making nonexistent the ego. Cf. the ten ox-herding pictures of Zen Buddhism. Once caught, the ox [the ego] is no longer visible. What happens? The ox-herder, fat, smiling . . . returns to the village bearing gifts).*<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps Cage's understanding of the importance of the last stage of the *Ox-Herding Pictures* is most succinctly stated in his *Composition in Retrospect*:

THE GIVER OF GIFTS (RETURNING TO THE VILLAGE HAVING EXPERIENCED NO-MINDEDNESS).<sup>22</sup>

STEPHEN ADDISS



## THE HISTORY OF OX-HERDING POEMS AND PAINTINGS

Ox-herding poems and paintings are deeply rooted in Zen history, having been utilized by Masters for centuries as teachings that could be readily understood by people from every walk of life. While the ox has long been a symbol of fertility in China, in Zen it also represents the heart-mind unity. In Chinese and Japanese the same character 心 has both meanings, so searching for the ox can be understood as searching for one's own true self. As a metaphor for the path to enlightenment, the ox-herding poems and paintings form a spiritual narrative, making them part of a great tradition: the journey outward that leads to a journey inward. However, the basic structure of these narratives — searching, finding, and returning — informs only the first six of the ten ox-herding pictures presented here. After his return, the traveler transcends the ox, goes back to the origin, and finally re-enters the village bearing gifts. This corresponds to Zen training, in which one grapples with the question of self, reaches enlightenment, and then returns to the world with compassion for all creatures.

There are several early Zen texts that refer to the ox as one's own Buddha-nature. For example, a disciple asked the Master Pai-cheng (720-814) how to search for the Buddha without knowing the way. Pai-cheng answered, "It's like looking for the ox on which you're riding." The disciple then asked what to do when conscious of the truth, and Pai-cheng replied, "It's like returning home on the back of an ox."

The earliest series of Zen ox-herding poems was written in China around 1050 by C'hing-chu. These are not completely preserved. Another set composed by P'u-ming was circulated in Chinese Zen circles, but the series that became the best known was written and illustrated by K'uo-an Shih-yuan (Japanese: Kakuan Shion) in the mid-twelfth century. His pupil Tz'u-yuan (Japanese: Jion) published these paintings and poems as woodblock prints, adding an introduction that included these paradoxical comments:

*From the first "Searching for the Ox" to the final "Entering the Marketplace" I have deliberately stirred up waves and attached horns sideways on the head of the ox. Furthermore, since fundamentally there is no heart-mind to be sought after, why then should there be any need to search for an ox? And just who is the devil at the end who enters the marketplace?*<sup>23</sup>

What might Tzu-yuan have meant? That the set of ten ox-herding pictures and poems, even though it became one of the "Four Texts of Zen," should only be taken as the finger pointing at the moon, not the moon itself? Or simply that we should question the process itself: who is searching for what, and who is the enlightened being at the end?

Woodblock book versions of K'uo-an's set were printed over the next few hundred years in China and Japan, and it was his illustrations that became the paradigms for most later East Asian



painters. In Zen teaching, ox-herding pictures and poems could be appreciated at various levels of understanding. For example, when Zekkai Chushin (1336-1405) was asked in 1395 to explain Zen Buddhism to the Japanese Shogun, he used K'uo-an's book as a point of departure. More recently, when the Zen Master Shibayama Zenkei (1894-1974) came to America in 1965, he arranged for a translation of his comments on a simplified set of six ox-herding pictures to be printed and distributed.<sup>24</sup>

In 1984 the Zen scholar Yanagida Seizan (1922-2006) gave a talk on the book of ox-herding pictures at the Japan Foundation in Kyoto in which he said:

*What is Zen? Since this little book answers that question fully, its usefulness is without equal. . . . A child may read it as easily as his elders; anyone can read it. There are various translations in English, German, and French, so it seems to be the Zen text with the most international appeal. The reason for this is that pictures convey meaning more directly than words. . . . The relationship between bull and herdsman is indeed an allegory of the process of meditation, where we succeed in capturing and quieting this present arrogant heart of ours, which runs wild. . . . Zen training only begins when we become aware, in the midst of our dreaming, that the bull has run away from us. . . . [The ox-herding pictures] are an expression of that element in Zen thought which finds the profoundest miracle in the dialogue between*

*plain ordinary people, where any religious coloration of charity, salvation or satori has completely disappeared.*

The best-known paintings of the subject are attributed to the monk-painter Shūbun of the early fifteenth century; they are preserved at the temple Shōkoku-ji in Kyoto.<sup>25</sup> Following the most common format for this theme, they are painted within circles. Until the seventh picture they are quite literal: we see the herder searching, finding traces, seeing, catching, taming, and then riding home on the ox. Then the narrative takes a more spiritual dimension. The seventh picture, "Forgetting the Ox," shows the boy praying, while the eighth, "Transcending the Ox," is just an empty circle (*ensō*). This is one of the most fundamental of Zen images; it represents the universe as well as the void, and can signify enlightenment. The ninth picture, "Returning to the Source," is composed of a flowering plum tree, an emblem of the beginning of spring, along with rocks, bamboo, and water. The final image, "Entering the Marketplace," depicts the wandering monk Hotei, who became a god of good fortune in Japan, offering gifts to a figure who may be the same boy of the first seven pictures.

These images come from *Kyoto Gozan Zen no Bunka* (Zen Treasures from Kyoto Gozan Temples). Translations of K'uo-an's poems are graciously provided by Stanley Lombardo.



### 1. *Searching for the Ox*

Searching through tall, endless grass  
Rivers, mountain ranges, the path trails off.  
Weary, exhausted, no place left to hunt:  
Maples rustle, evening, the cicada's song.



### 2. *Finding its Traces*

Along the river, under trees — jumbled tracks!  
Thick fragrant woods, is this the way?  
Though the ox wanders far in the hills  
His nose touches the sky. He cannot hide.



### 3. *Seeing the Ox*

Oriole on a branch chirps and chirps,  
Sun warm, breeze through the willows.  
There is the ox, cornered, alone.  
That head, the horns! Who could paint them?



#### 4. *Catching the Ox*

Last desperate effort, got him!  
Hard to control, powerful and wild  
The ox sprints up a hill and at the top  
Disappears into the misty clouds.



#### 5. *Taming the Ox*

Don't lose the whip, hold on to the rope  
Or he'll buck away into the dirt.  
Herded well, in perfect harmony  
He'll follow along without any constraint.



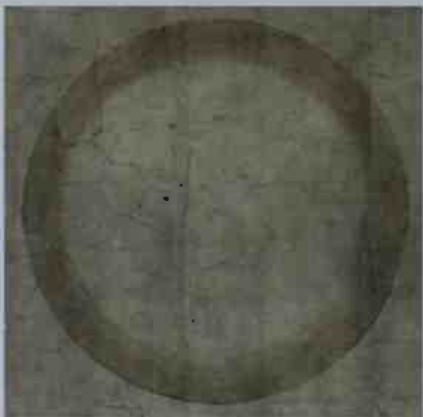
#### 6. *Riding the Ox Home*

Riding the ox home, taking it easy,  
The flute's notes vanish in the evening haze.  
Tapping time to a folksong, happy as can be —  
It's all too much for words.



### 7. *Forgetting the Ox*

Reaching home on the back of the ox,  
Rest now, the ox forgotten.  
Taking a nap under the noon sun,  
Whip and rope abandoned behind the hut.



### 8. *Transcending the Ox*

Whip, rope, self, ox — no traces left.  
Thoughts cannot penetrate the vast blue sky,  
Snowflakes cannot survive a red-hot stove.  
Arriving here, meet the ancient teachers.



### 9. *Returning to the Source*

Return to the source, no more effort,  
Just staying at home, sitting in the hut,  
Blind and deaf to the world outside.  
The river runs by itself, flowers are red.



# 10. *Entering the Marketplace*

Barefoot and shirtless, enter the market  
Smiling through all the dirt and grime.  
No immortal powers, no secret spells,  
Just teach the withered trees to bloom.

Shûbun has transposed a few of the poetic images; for example, the withered tree blooming in poem ten is the plum of painting nine, while the pine in painting ten is an evergreen. And what of the boy in the final picture? He is carrying a bag on a staff; might this hold his belongings as he sets out on his own search? This would bring us full circle to the idea of pilgrimage, but now the boy has the wisdom and generosity of Hotei to help guide him, just as young monks in training work with an established Zen Master.

While there have been many sets of the ox-herding paintings created in Japan, they

almost always conform to the K'uo-an and Shûbun prototypes, with literal images used when possible for the narrative. The five sets of John Cage's abstract watercolor marks on paper towels offer a different connection between text and image in which you, the viewer, are invited to make your own correlations and interactions. The artist's freedom from intention, often celebrated by Cage in his music, poetry, and visual art, is here extended to a major Zen theme. Ray Kass and I welcome your participation in this process.

STEPHEN ADDISS







ZEN OX-HERDING PICTURES  
WITH JOHN CAGE'S POETIC FRAGMENTS

*I — 1 Searching for the Ox*

feelings  
empty

being lost



*I — 2 Finding its Traces*

more space

to feel with my feet the faint marks





*I — 3 Seeing the Ox*

It was a juncture  
to go that way or this



I — 4 *Catching the Ox*

two members of  
each other



*I — 5 Taming the Ox*

the dance  
the magic  
in some way  
the contours





*I — 6 Riding the Ox Home*

let it dance

between mind

moving and not moving



I — 7 *Forgetting the Ox*

Multiplicity

ran

no play of power

dancing

free





*I — 8 Transcending the Ox*

actions move from zero  
began  
a center



*I — 9 Returning to the Source*

nothing's changed yet  
something immense

that adds up  
to zero



*I — 10 Entering the Marketplace*

liberation  
the flower the smile  
the return bearing gifts to the village





*II — 1 Searching for the Ox*

The question why  
riddles making  
events



II — 2 *Finding its Traces*

how  
to  
read  
it  
independently  
of  
one's thoughts



*II — 3 Seeing the Ox*

gurgling  
of awareness  
on the  
apprehension





II — 4 *Catching the Ox*

it has  
of  
its own vibration  
to be not there but here



II — 5 *Taming the Ox*

it is one  
and  
transformation



II — 6 *Riding the Ox Home*

throughout the world in this transformative process

certain

real

that it is





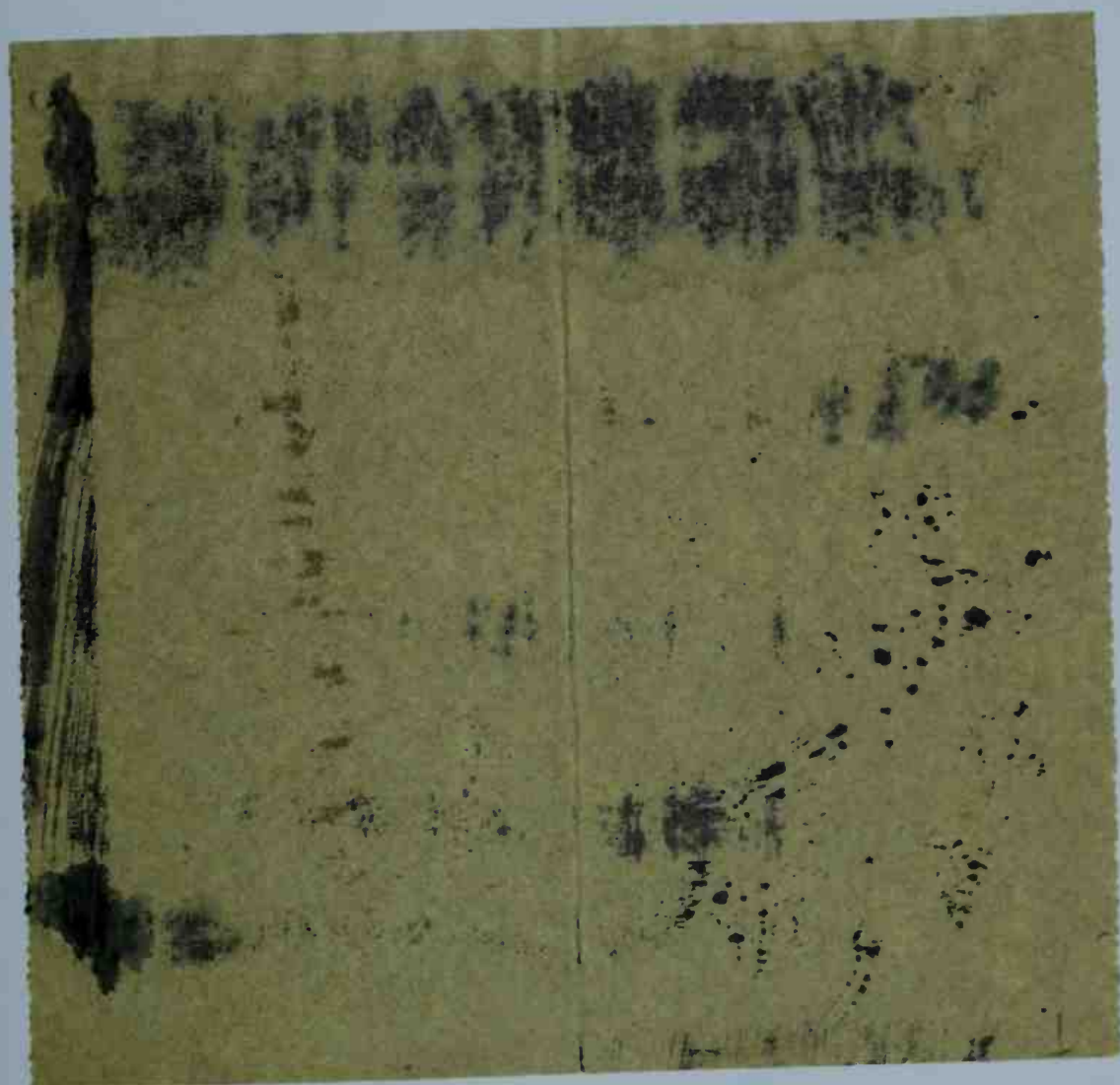
II — 7 *Forgetting the Ox*

no rules  
not  
yet  
not yet  
the world



II — 8 *Transcending the Ox*

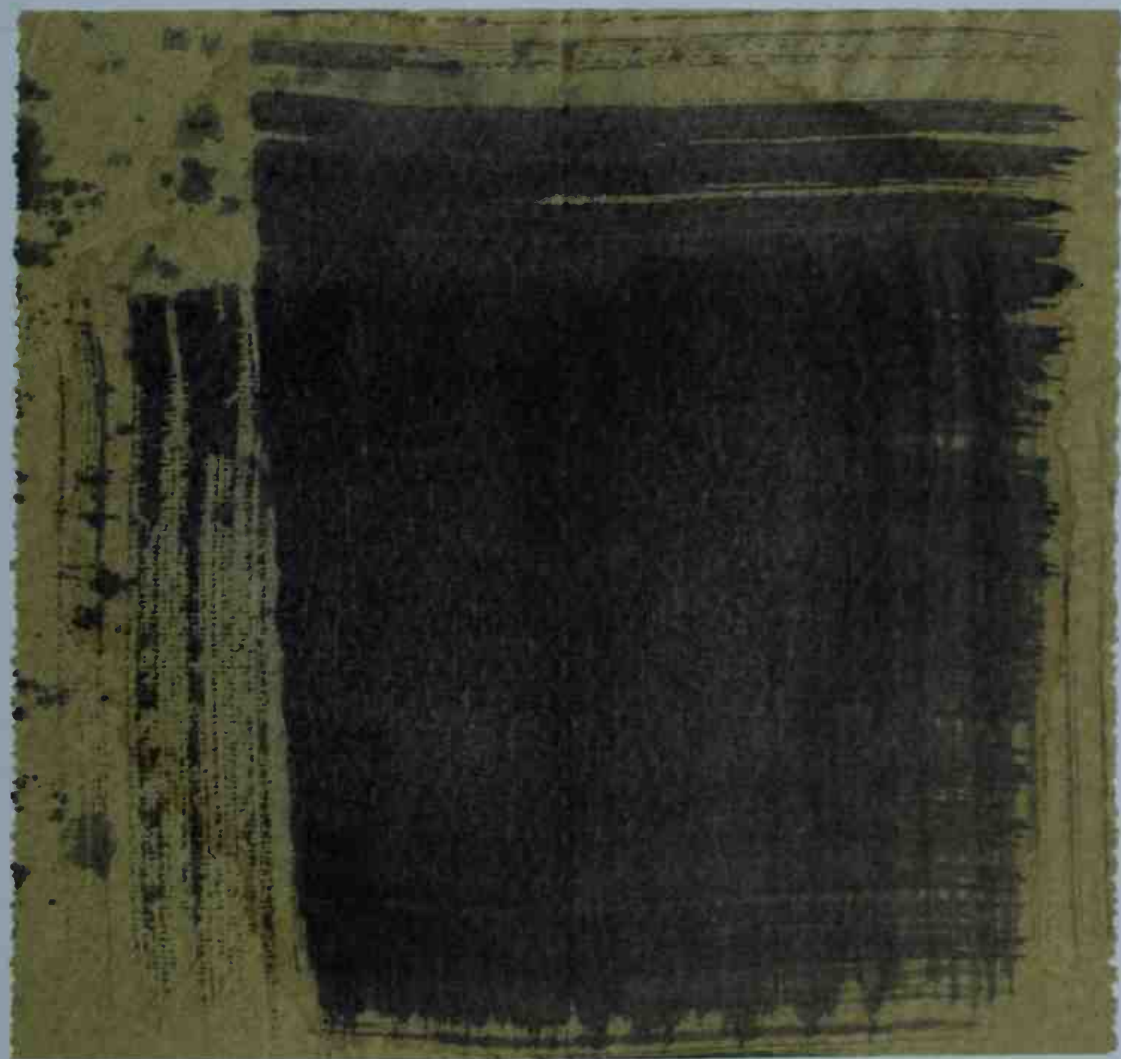
What  
we've already done conspires against  
what we have now to do



*II — 9 Returning to the Source*

Changed, mind includes  
even itself. Unchanged, nothing gets in or  
out





II — 10 *Entering the Marketplace*

Each day  
unexpected  
salvation



III — 1 *Searching for the Ox*

what exists  
is the mind

ancient overview

it can sympathize  
with absence



III — 2 *Finding its Traces*

If I can see it, do I have to hear it too?





III — 3 *Seeing the Ox*

to hear  
to see  
originally  
we need to  
change



III — 4 *Catching the Ox*

having  
all at once  
changes



III — 5 *Taming the Ox*

transformation  
to be done





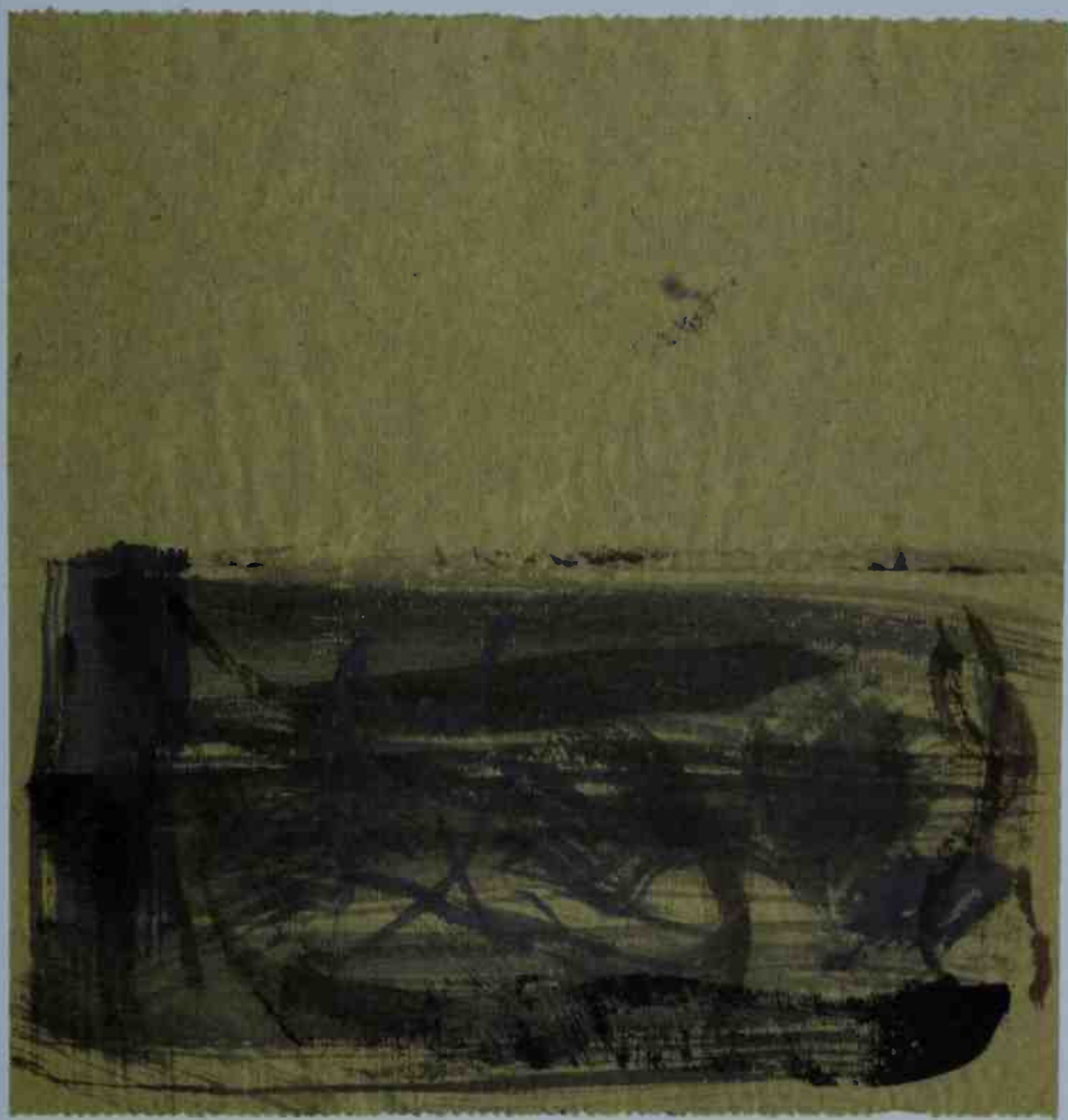
III — 6 *Riding the Ox Home*

Arriving, realizing we  
never departed



III — 7 *Forgetting the Ox*

In removing  
boundaries is the  
preservation of the world



III — 8 *Transcending the Ox*

time is provided  
is possible  
it follows  
is transcended





III — 9 *Returning to the Source*

nothing's changed yet  
something immense  
asking



III — 10 *Entering the Marketplace*

not withheld  
from any form of life



*IV — 1 Searching for the Ox*

Things were gathered together before us;  
all we have done is separate them



*IV — 2 Finding its Traces*

Does it emerge?

Or do we enter in?





*IV — 3 Seeing the Ox*

the resonance of  
space brings  
only  
interacting



*IV — 4 Catching the Ox*

gift  
of self to self



*IV — 5 Taming the Ox*

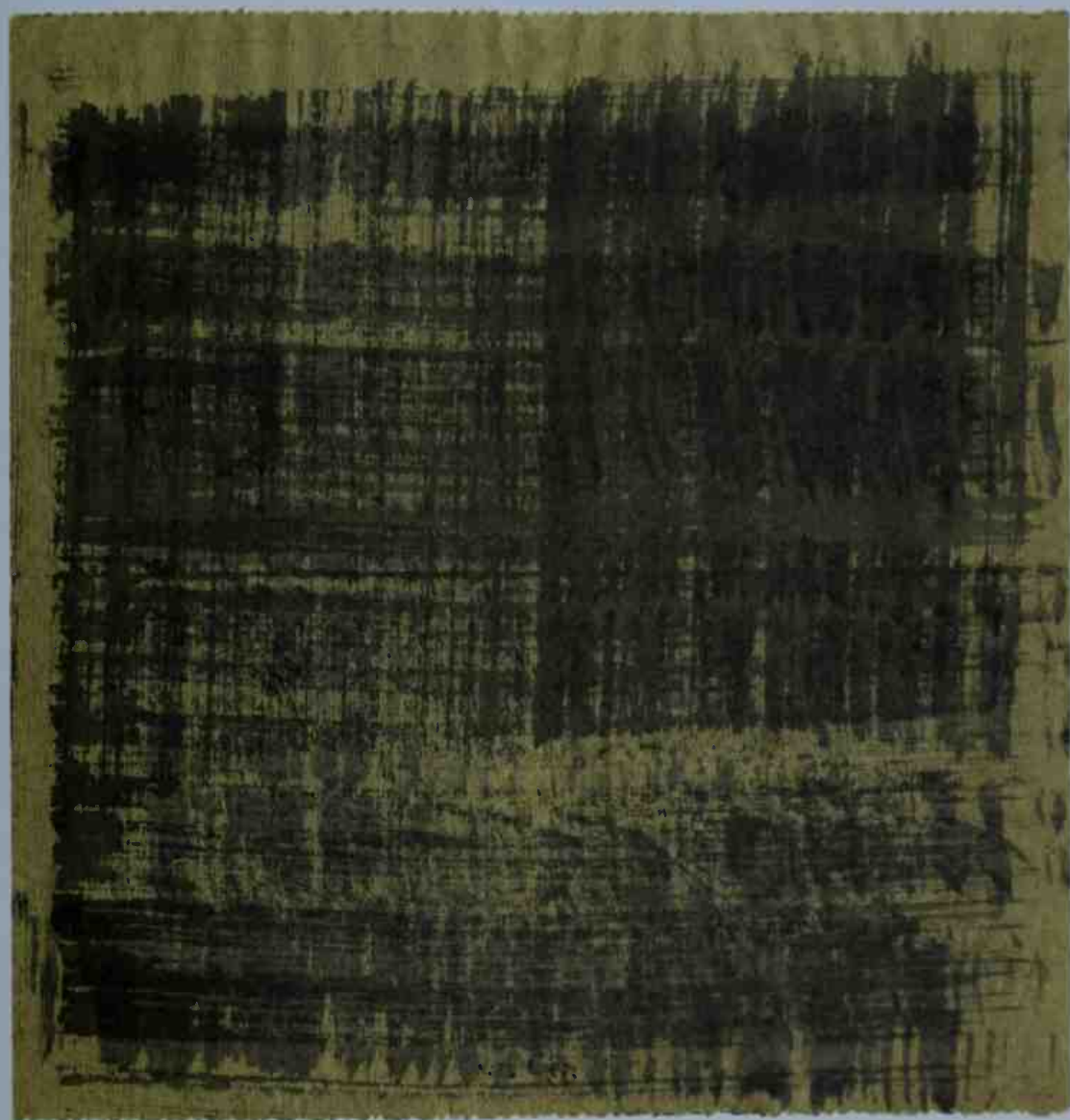
no accomplishment's  
involved





*IV — 6 Riding the Ox Home*

if not that at least there be  
ecstasy it is rather the  
circumstances



IV — 7 *Forgetting the Ox*

questions I might  
have  
learned  
to ask can  
no longer  
receive replies



*IV — 8 Transcending the Ox*

surrounded  
by mystery



*IV — 9 Returning to the Source*

origin  
is how it's now





*IV — 10 Entering the Marketplace*

living in this new

purpose no purpose vision no vision



*V — 1 Searching for the Ox*

Looking for  
something irrelevant, I found I  
couldn't find it



*V — 2 Finding its Traces*

outside it  
yes and no are lies

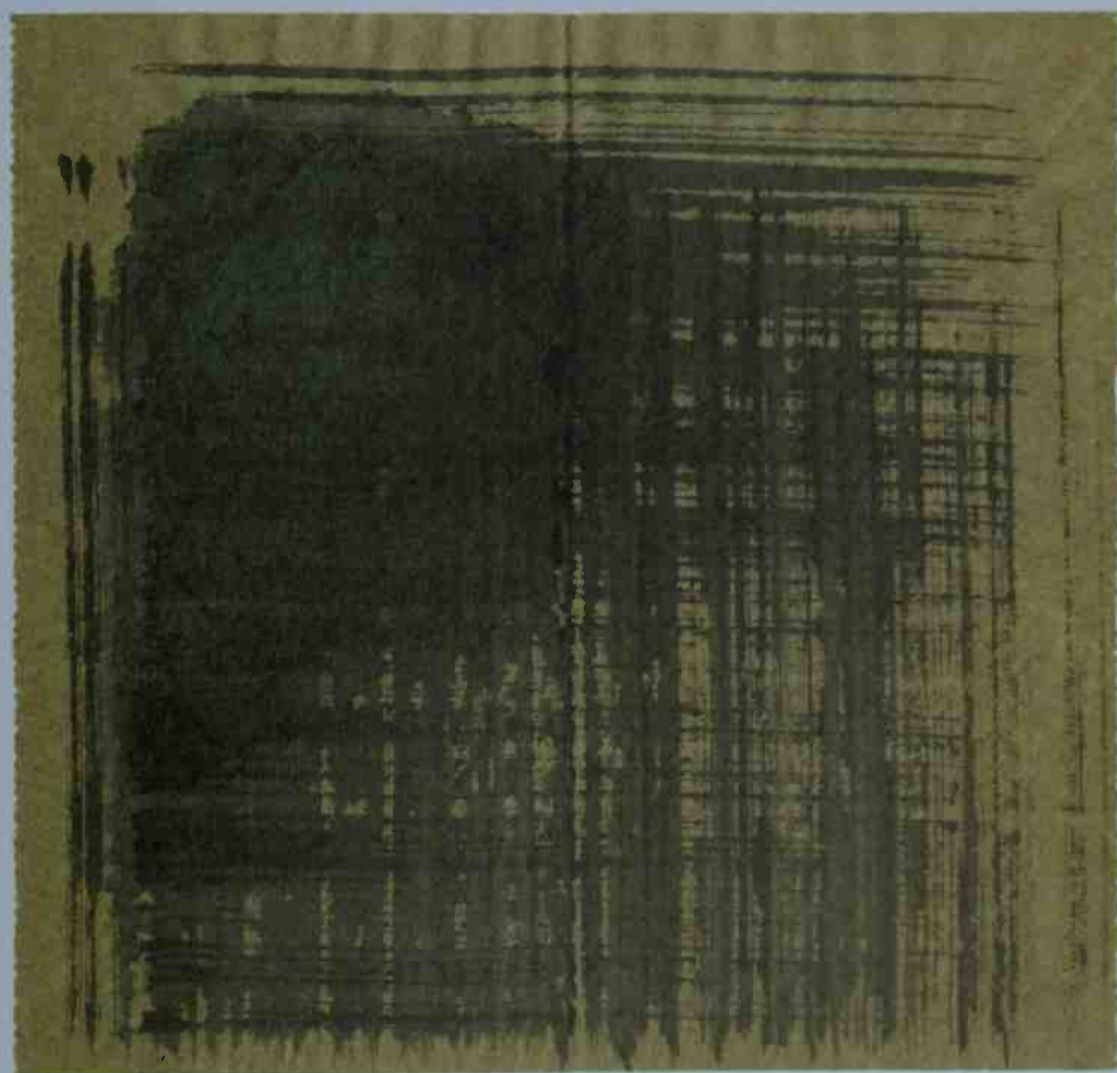






V — 3 *Seeing the Ox*

how far ahead  
easily and insensibly we fall into a particular



V — 4 *Catching the Ox*

Hunting for  
one thing, finding another



V — 5 *Taming the Ox*

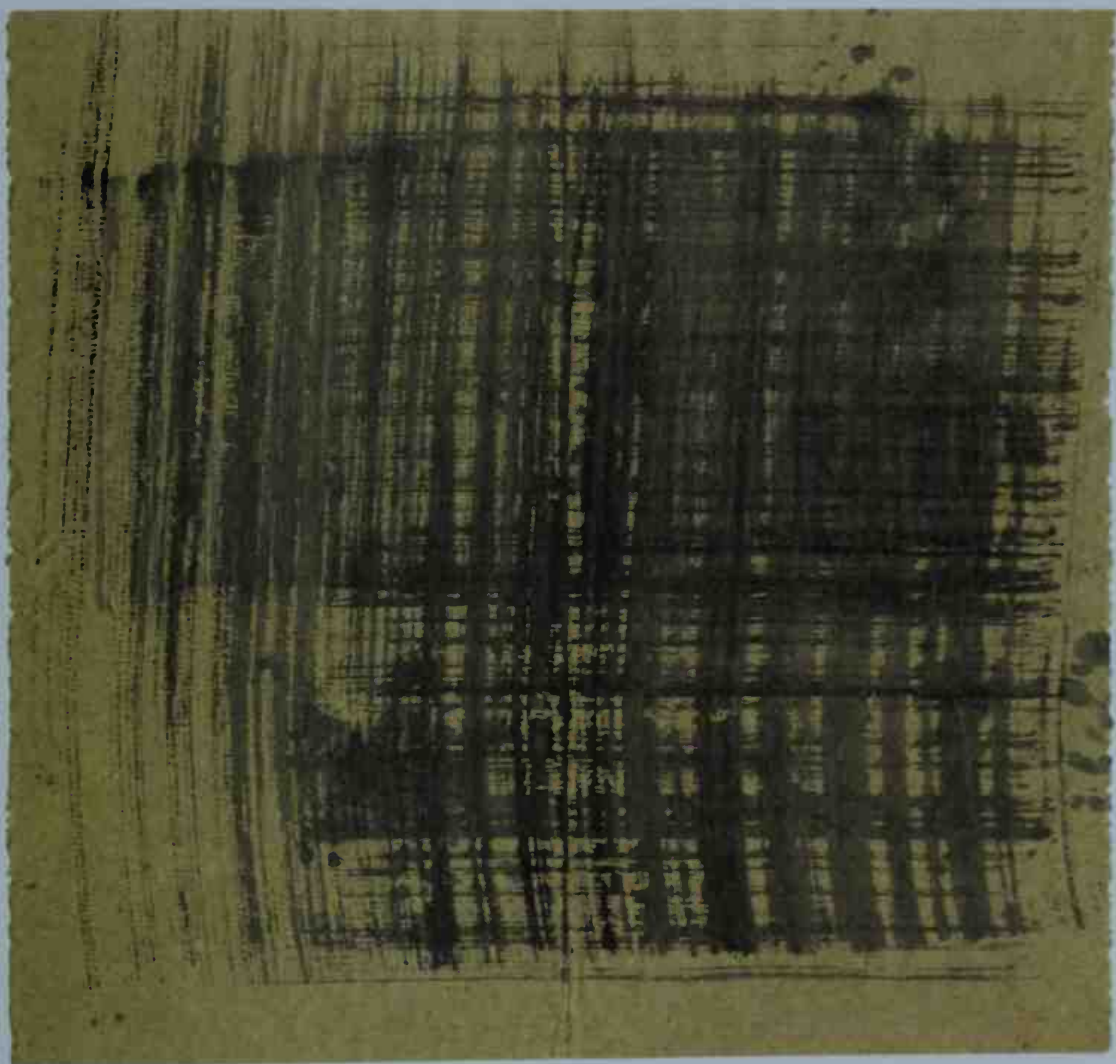
Wild and tame are one. What a delicious sound!



*V — 6 Riding the Ox Home*

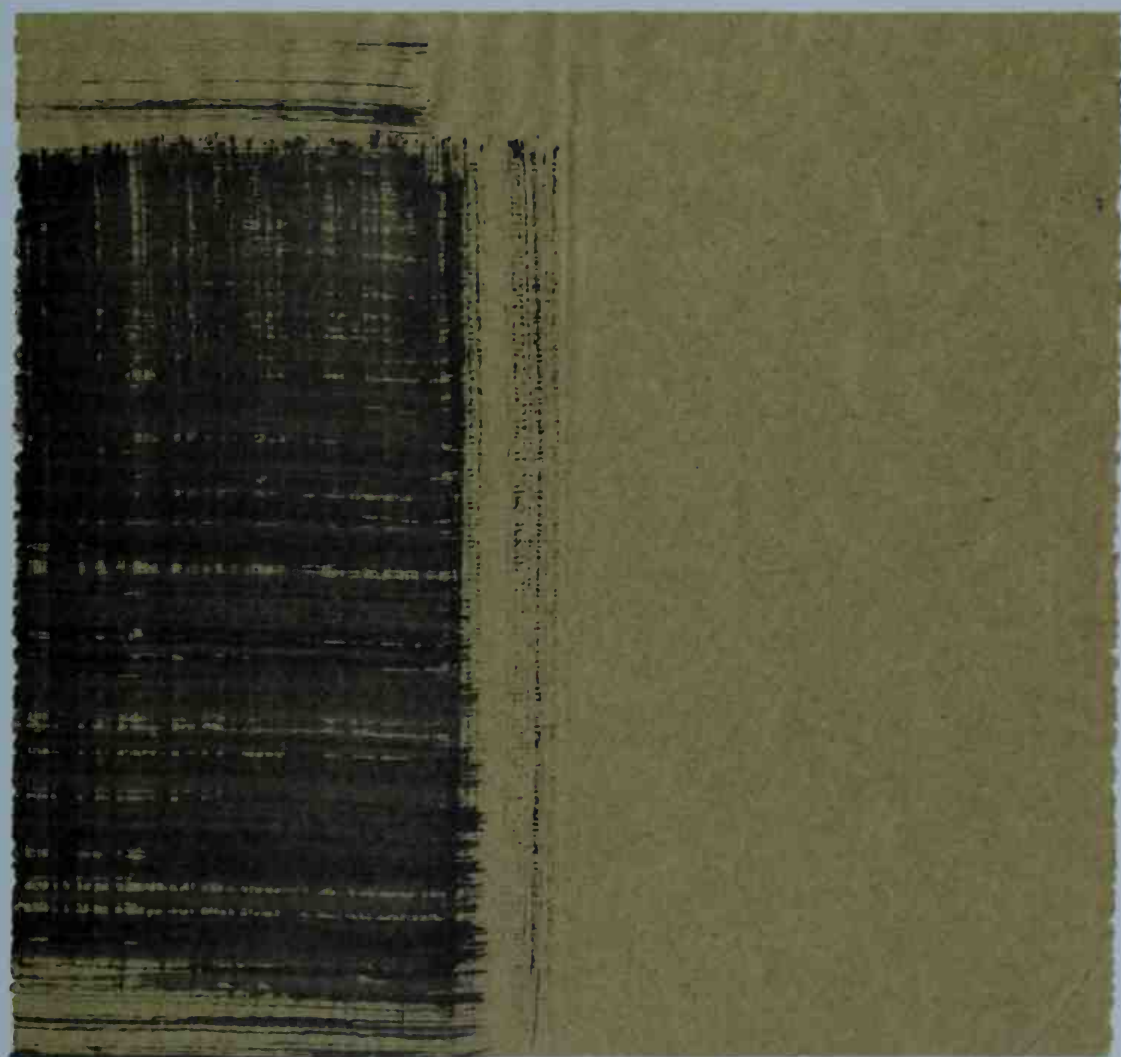
A  
possibility of  
lives  
circle another





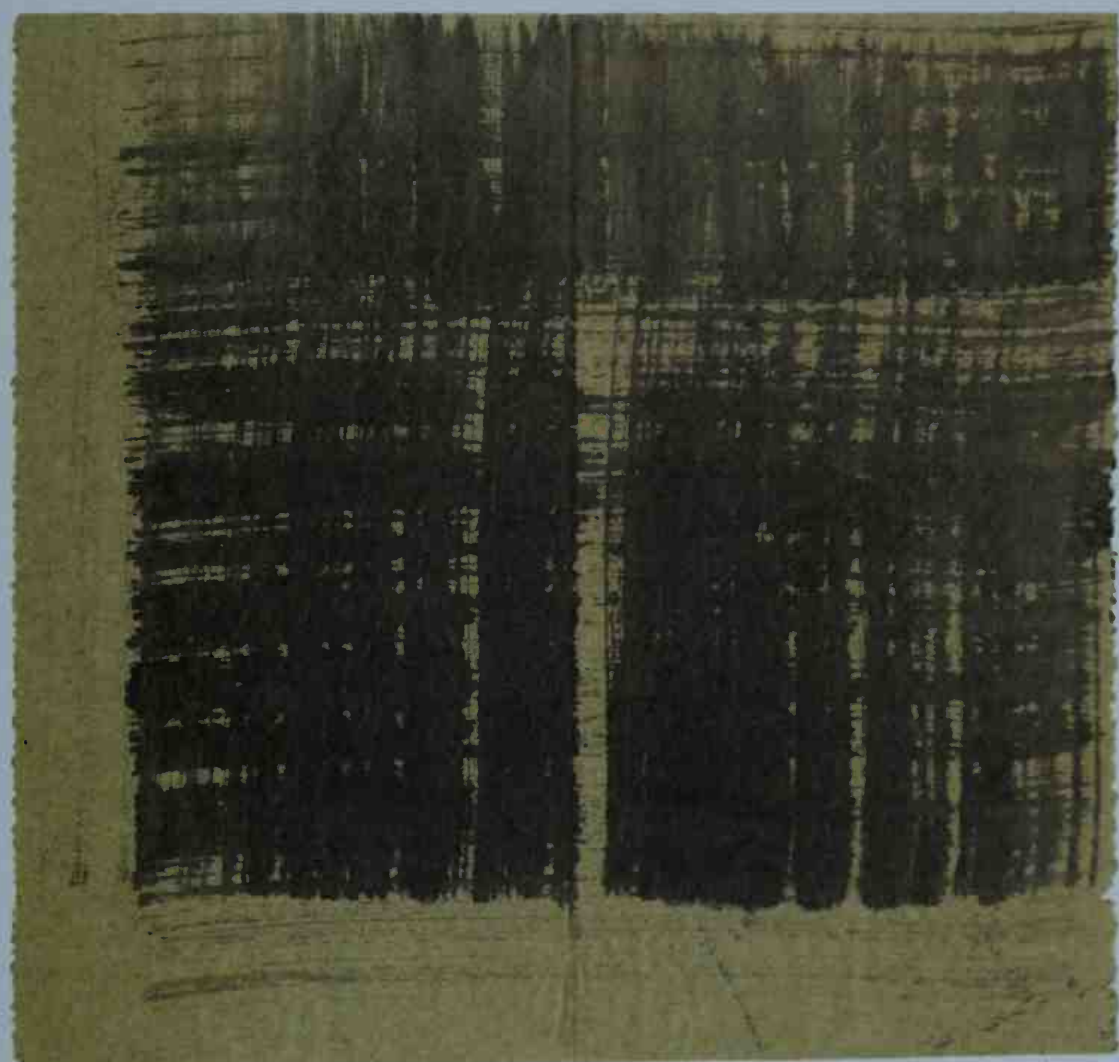
*V — 7 Forgetting the Ox*

narrow the  
terms of  
elsewhere  
in the universe ultimately a nothing between must be  
what happened



V — 8 *Transcending the Ox*

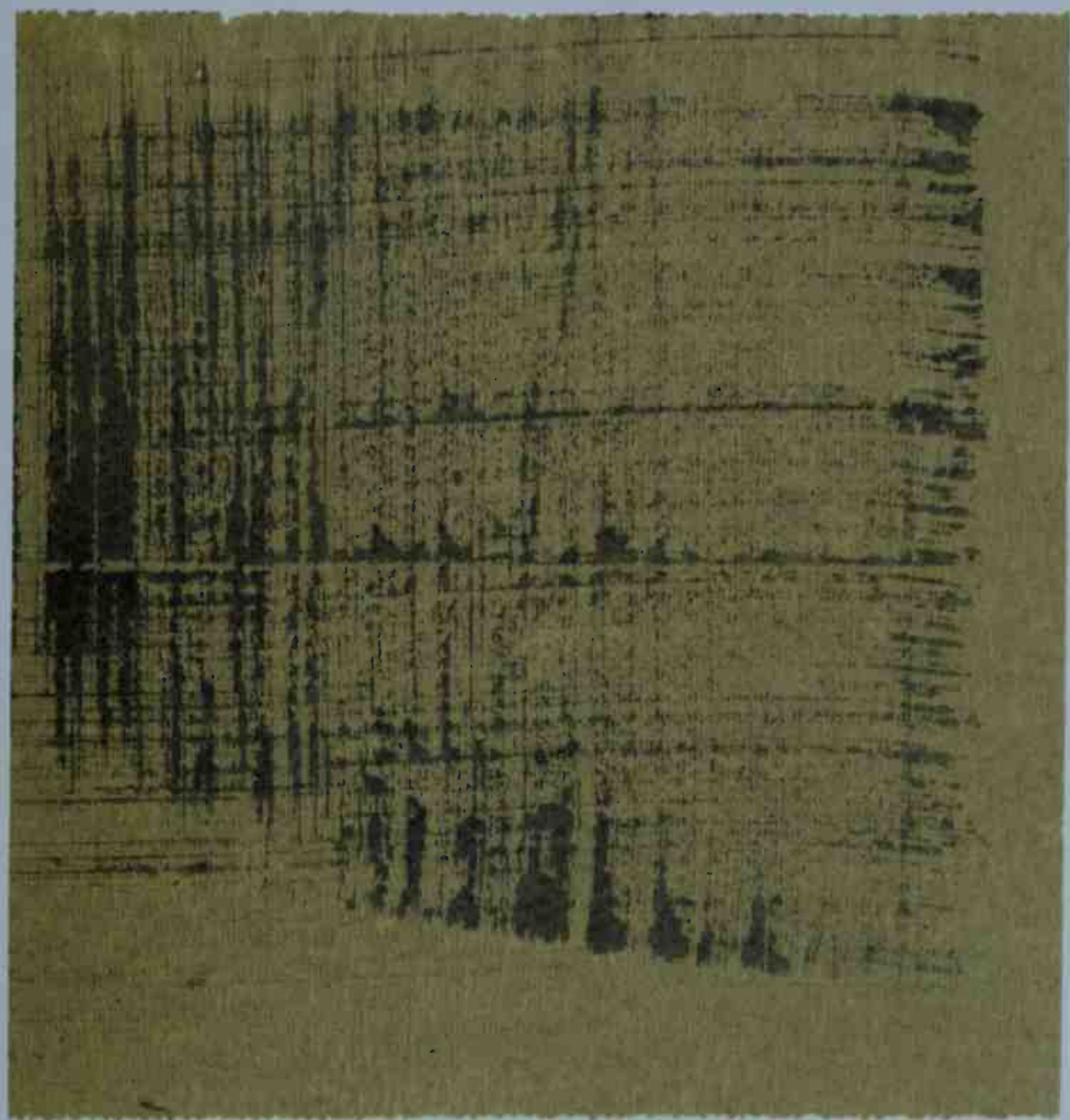
to leave no traces  
nothing in between  
no need



V — 9 *Returning to the Source*

in whatever's  
happening

flowerings





*V — 10 Entering the Marketplace*

all creation  
endless  
interpenetration



## ENDNOTES

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### THE HISTORY OF ZEN OX-HERDING POEMS AND PAINTINGS

23. Adapted from Yamada Mumon, *Lectures on the Ten Oxherding Pictures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), p. 2.
24. They were later also printed in Shibayama's book *A Flower Does Not Talk* (Rutland, VT and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1970).
25. For an earlier Japanese set dated to 1278, see Stephanie Wada, *The Oxherder: A Zen Parable Illustrated* (New York: George Braziller, 2002).

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JOHN CAGE'S POETIC FRAGMENTS

I — 1, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 161  
I — 2, *I-VI*, p. 54  
I — 3, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 73  
I — 4, *I-VI*, p. 242  
I — 5, *I-VI*, p. 220  
I — 6, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 122  
I — 7, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 82  
I — 8, *I-VI*, p. 313  
I — 9, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 78  
I — 10, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 47

II — 1, *I-VI*, p. 233  
II — 2, *X: Writings '79-'82*, p. 136  
II — 3, *I-VI*, p. 418  
II — 4, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 169  
II — 5, *I-VI*, p. 216  
II — 6, *I-VI*, p. 54  
II — 7, *I-VI*, p. 200  
II — 8, *M: Writings '67-'72*, p. 60  
II — 9, *M: Writings '67-'72*, p. 7  
II — 10, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 148

III — 1, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 165  
III — 2, *Silence*, p. 41  
III — 3, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 24  
III — 4, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 162  
III — 5, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 74  
III — 6, *A Year From Monday*, p. 12  
III — 7, *M: Writings '67-'72*, p. 153  
III — 8, *I-VI*, p. 238  
III — 9, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 133  
III — 10, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 128

IV — 1, *For the Birds*, p. 216  
IV — 2, *A Year From Monday*, p. 39  
IV — 3, *I-VI*, p. 249  
IV — 4, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 113  
IV — 5, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 106  
IV — 6, *I-VI*, p. 334  
IV — 7, *M: Writings '67-'72*, p. 34  
IV — 8, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 41  
IV — 9, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 90  
IV — 10, *I-VI*, p. 354

V — 1, *M: Writings '67-'72*, p. 61  
V — 2, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 159  
V — 3, *I-VI*, p. 56  
V — 4, *A Year From Monday*, p. 55  
V — 5, *M: Writings '67-'72*, p. 90  
V — 6, *I-VI*, p. 231  
V — 7, *I-VI*, p. 151  
V — 8, *Themes and Variations*, p. 66  
V — 9, *Composition in Retrospect*, p. 117  
V — 10, *Overpopulation and Art*, p. 7

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JOHN CAGE (1912–1992) studied with Richard Buhlig, Henry Cowell, Adolph Weiss, and Arnold Schoenberg. In 1952, at Black Mountain College, he presented a theatrical event considered by many to have been the first Happening. He was associated with Merce Cunningham from the early 1940's and was Musical Advisor for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. He received many awards and honors, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and an Award from the National Academy of Arts and Letters. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1978, and inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1989. Cage was the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard University for the 1988–1989 academic year. He is the author of *Silence, A Year from Monday, M, Empty Words, X*, and *I-VI*. A series of fifty-two watercolors, the *New River Watercolors*, executed by Cage at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University was shown at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., in 1990.

RAY KASS' paintings have been widely exhibited. He is Emeritus Professor of Art in the School of Visual Art at Virginia Tech and founder and director of the Mountain Lake Workshop. His publications include *Morris Graves: Vision of the Inner Eye*, *John Cage: New River Watercolors*, and *Sounds of The Inner Eye: John Cage, Mark Tobey and Morris Graves*.

STEPHEN ADDISS is a scholar-artist and composer who studied with John Cage in the late 1950s. His ink paintings and calligraphy have been exhibited in many countries, and his publications include *The Art of Zen, Haiga, Japanese Ghosts and Demons, Zen Sourcebook*, and *The Art of Chinese Calligraphy*. He currently serves as Tucker-Boatwright Professor in the Humanities: Art at The University of Richmond.

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