

## John Cage: works on paper, 1982-90.

Cage, John; Snyder, Ellsworth

Madison, Wisconsin: Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991

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J O H N  
C A G E

WORKS ON PAPER, 1982-90

Elvehjem Museum of Art  
University of Wisconsin–Madison  
April 6–May 19, 1991

Ellsworth Snyder, *catalogue author*  
Patricia Powell, *catalogue editor*  
Earl J. Madden, *catalogue designer*



## foreword

John Cage represents a unique force in American art of the twentieth century, influencing, as he has, the course of music, theater, dance, and the visual arts. The present exhibition is intended as an introduction to Cage's watercolors, drawings, and prints.

Cage's first venture into visual works on paper dates to 1969, when he produced two lithographs, together with an accompanying Plexiglas sculpture, on the occasion of his friend Marcel Duchamp's death, and was followed by printmaking experiments at Crown Point Press in 1978. The present exhibition, however, concerns itself only with the works produced since 1982. The two prints in the exhibition from the Dereau series of that year represents the early period of experimentation. On the other hand, the R = Ryoanji drawings of the following year mark the beginning of a clearly discernible personal style which characterizes Cage's work through the present day.

On behalf of myself and the Elvehjem Museum of Art I wish to thank Ellsworth Snyder, music director of the First Unitarian Society of Madison, for suggesting the present exhibition and for his invaluable assistance in selecting the works. Mr. Snyder, who wrote the first doctoral dissertation on John Cage, also graciously provided the informative essay and didactic captions for the illustrations which appear in this catalog. Mr. Snyder's premier recital at the First Unitarian Meeting House of a work written for and dedicated to him by Mr. Cage entitled *One*<sup>5</sup> is part of this project.

On behalf of the Elvehjem I also wish to acknowledge the generosity of Crown Point Press, Ray Kass of Mountain Lake Workshop, Margarete Roeder of the Margarete Roeder Gallery of New York, Bernie Toale of Rugg Road Paper and Prints of Somerville, Massachusetts, the Roanoke Museum of Fine Arts, and Ellsworth Snyder, who generously lent works from their collec-

tions and holdings to the Elvehjem exhibition.

As no exhibition can be organized and mounted without the support of a dedicated museum staff, I also wish to acknowledge the efforts of the entire staff and particularly to thank assistant curator Andrew Stevens, preparator Dale Malner, registrar Lindy Waite, and editor Patricia Powell for their assistance with this project.

Funding for this exhibition was provided by the Humanistic Foundation Committee and the Elvehjem discretionary fund. We offer a heartfelt thank-you to the members of the Humanistic Foundation Committee and to the many individuals who through their contributions to the Elvehjem discretionary fund made it possible to bring John Cage and this selection of his works on paper to Madison.

Russell Panczenko, *Director*

## about john cage

In her book *Picasso*, Gertrude Stein wrote:

Complications are always easy but another vision than that of all the world is very rare. That is why geniuses are rare, to complicate things in a new way that is easy, but to see the things in a new way that is really difficult, everything prevents one, habits, schools, daily life, reason, necessities of daily life, indolence, everything prevents one, in fact there are very few geniuses in the world.

(Boston: Beacon Press, 1959, pp. 29–30)

In terms of the arts, it now seems arguable that John Cage was the creator who forced an international recognition of the “entire change in everything” following the Second World War.

As early as 1938, Cage entered the arena of new sound materials with his invention, a piano altered by placing various objects between the strings. His first piece for the prepared piano, *Bacchanale*, was written for a dance by Syvilla Fort, given in Seattle, Washington. Shortly thereafter he was writing for percussion orchestra using such instruments as brake drums and water gong

(*First Construction*, 1939), while with *Imaginary Landscape No. 1* (1939) he was composing directly on to a record. By the end of the Second World War Cage began recording on magnetic tape. In 1951 he adopted the concept of chance operations—of imitating the process of nature in her manner of operation—as a compositional technique. It is 1952, however, that may be remembered as the most important year of Cage’s creative activities. In that year he wrote *Imaginary Landscape No. 5*, the first American piece for tape in which Cage provides “... a score for making a recording on tape, using as material any 42 phonograph records”; *Williams Mix*, which provides a 192-page score for making music on magnetic tape; *4’33”*, a piece in three movements for any instrument or combination of instruments, in which no sounds are *intentionally* produced, and the first Happening, presented at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. An

especially important work in Cage’s output, *4’33”* is a definitive statement of his idea that silence does not exist as the absence of sound. It also admitted environmental sounds into music and was Cage’s most revolutionary contribution to the new sound materials of the twentieth century. The Happening, on the other hand, was a crippling blow to the idea that the various arts belong in separate categories. It grew out of Cage’s idea that theater is everything going on at the same time, including music: “Theatre takes place all the time wherever one is, and art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case.”

Early in his career, Cage had begun working with American dancers, particularly Merce Cunningham. In 1945 he became musical director for the Cunningham dancers, with whom he has traveled all over the world. When Cage started composing by tossing coins (to select the



hexagrams from the *I Ching*), Cunningham determined movements by the same method. They both felt that no relationship need exist between the music and the dance, which could simply be thought of as two activities going on simultaneously. Cunningham believed that the aim of dance was not to *express* but rather to present an event. Cage and Cunningham agreed that that event should be life.

Cage also has been very close to American painters, including Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and has written about both of them. He has acknowledged that Rauschenberg's all-white paintings came before his '33." In 1978 Cage began his own activities in the visual arts at the Crown Point Press in Oakland, California, and in 1988 he began painting with watercolors at the Miles C. Horton, Sr. Research Center at Mountain Lake, Virginia. More recently he has made edible papers at Rugg Road Prints

and Papers in Somerville, Massachusetts.

All of Cage's work since 1945 has been formed by his understanding of, and his devotion to, the underlying principles of Zen. In his attempt to remove from his creative works the ego, which is a wedge between the knower and the known, that is, the creator and his materials, he has turned to the ancient sacred book of China, the *I Ching*. The use of the *I Ching* (Cage now uses a computerized version) as a discipline has enabled him to flow easily out of inflexible mental habits into creative areas he otherwise might not have explored.

In 1975 he began investigating ways to encourage improvisation while avoiding memory and taste, and in 1977 he continued his interest in music of contingency, a music in which there is a break in connection between cause and effect. During this time Cage wrote *Child of Tree*, for amplified plants, and *Inlets*, for water in conch shells.

In 1979 Cage devised a means of translating any book into music; while in 1984, assisted by Andrew Culver and Jim Rosenberg, he began work with an IBM PC and wrote his first computer-assisted mesostic, a form of poetry Cage devised which is similar to an acrostic, but in which the word or name reads vertically down the middle of the composition.

In addition to producing various anthologies of his lectures and writings, such as the book *Silence*, Cage has lectured widely and was asked to deliver the Norton Lectures at Harvard in 1988–89. As the international arts community prepares to celebrate Cage's eightieth birthday in 1992, he continues to have "another vision than that of all the world [which] is very rare."

*By Ellsworth Snyder*



## important dates

### 1912

Born on September 5 in Los Angeles. Father was inventor John Milton Cage and mother was Lucretia Harvey.

### 1920–28

Took early piano lessons with his Aunt Phoebe and Fannie Charles Dillon.

### 1928

Was valedictorian of high school class. Studied at Pomona College. Became interested in the works of Gertrude Stein.

### 1930–31

Traveled to Europe; studied architecture and piano in Paris.

### 1931–34

Returned to the United States, studied composition with pianist Richard Buhlig in Los Angeles and with the composers Adolph Weiss and Henry Cowell in New York City.

### 1934–1935

Studied counterpoint and analysis with Arnold Schoenberg privately and at USC and UCLA.

### 1937–39

Moved to Seattle as composer-accompanist for Bonnie Bird's modern dance classes at the Cornish School. Met Merce Cunningham and painters Mark Tobey and Morris Graves.

### 1941

Invited by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy to teach experimental music at the Chicago Institute of Design.

### 1942

Moved to New York City; was introduced to Marcel Duchamp by Max Ernst and Peggy Guggenheim.

### 1945

Began studying the philosophy of the music of India with Gita Sarabhai and attended Dr. Daisetz Suzuki's classes on Zen Buddhism at Columbia University.

### 1948

Taught at Black Mountain College in the summer; presented an Erik Satie festival and met R. Buckminster Fuller.

### 1949

Won Guggenheim Fellowship, met Pierre Boulez in Europe and through later letters carried on a lively debate concerning chance and control in music.

### 1950

Met the pianist David Tudor, who became one of his most important collaborators. Also began association with the composers Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, and Christian Wolff.

### 1952

Taught again at Black Mountain College.

### 1954

Moved to a cooperative community near Stony Point, New York, and became interested in nature, especially in mushrooms.

### 1958–1960

Gave classes in experimental music at the New School for Social Research in New York City. Included among his students were George Brecht, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, Toshi Ichiyanagi, Allan Kaprow, Jackson MacLow, and Richard Maxfield; among visitors were Jim Dine, Larry Poons, and George Segal.

### 1967

Introduced to the *Journals* of Thoreau by the poet Wendell Berry.

### 1972

Moved back to New York, where he still lives.

### 1977

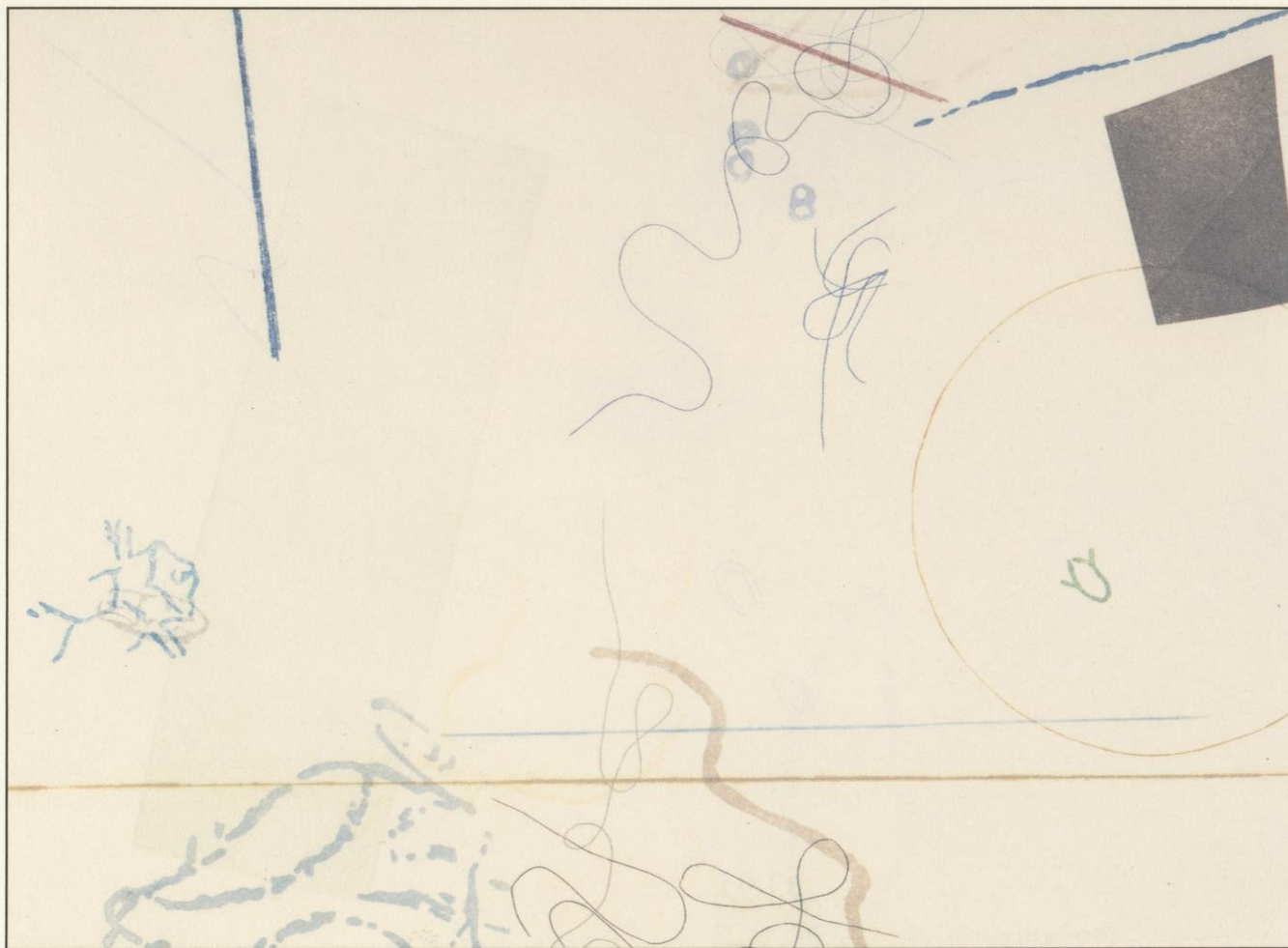
Consulted Shizuko Yamamoto, at recommendation of Yoko Ono, about a macrobiotic diet, which he then adopted.

### 1978

Became fascinated with Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, which has inspired a number of his works.

### 1989

Was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters and became a laureate of the Kyoto Prize given by the Inamori Foundation.



*Déreau* #18, 1982  
Color etching, 18½ × 24½ in.  
Ellsworth Snyder Collection

*Déreau* consists of thirty-eight related works printed in two impressions each, using photo-etching, engraving, drypoint, and aquatint on Japanese paper. The first syllable of the title comes from the word “décor,” and the second syllable comes from the name “Thoreau.” Cage has described the series in this way:

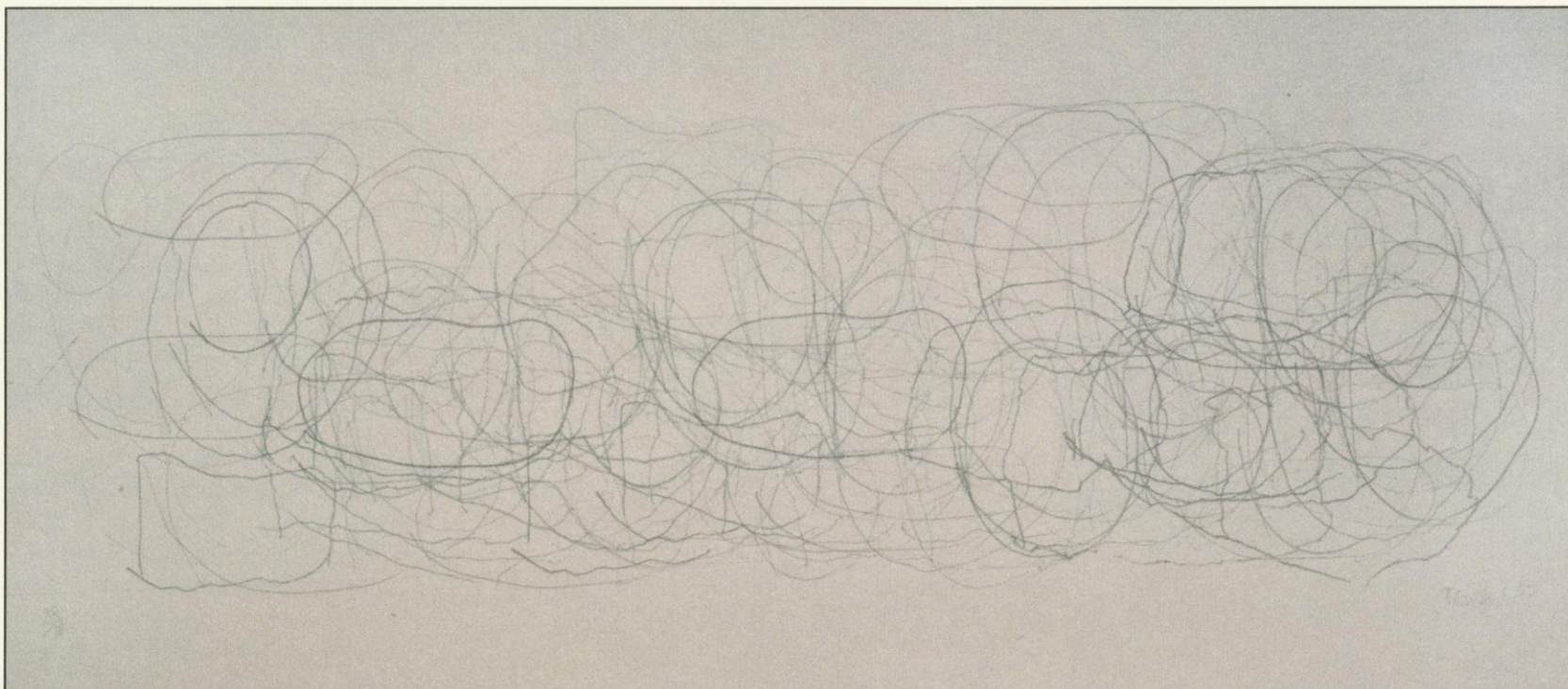
*Déreau* uses 24 Thoreau drawings, four of which are represented and 12 of which disappear. For the 12 that disappear, substitutions were made: the first of which is a circle, the second, a horizon, the third, multiple parallel lines between chance-determined quadrants, the fourth, aquatints, and the fifth, curves resulting from dropping a yard length of string on

a plate each having the size and shape of the Kodalith film of the Thoreau drawing which disappeared.

(Lilah Toland, *John Cage Etchings 1978–1982*, Oakland: Crown Point Press, Point Publications, 1982, p. 20)

The *Déreau* series contains Cage’s first use of static and changing elements in the composition of a print. The photo images maintain their positions throughout the series, but all the other images move freely about the paper. As is often the case in Cage’s works, the use of the ancient Chinese book of changes, the *I Ching*, has been involved in the compositional process.

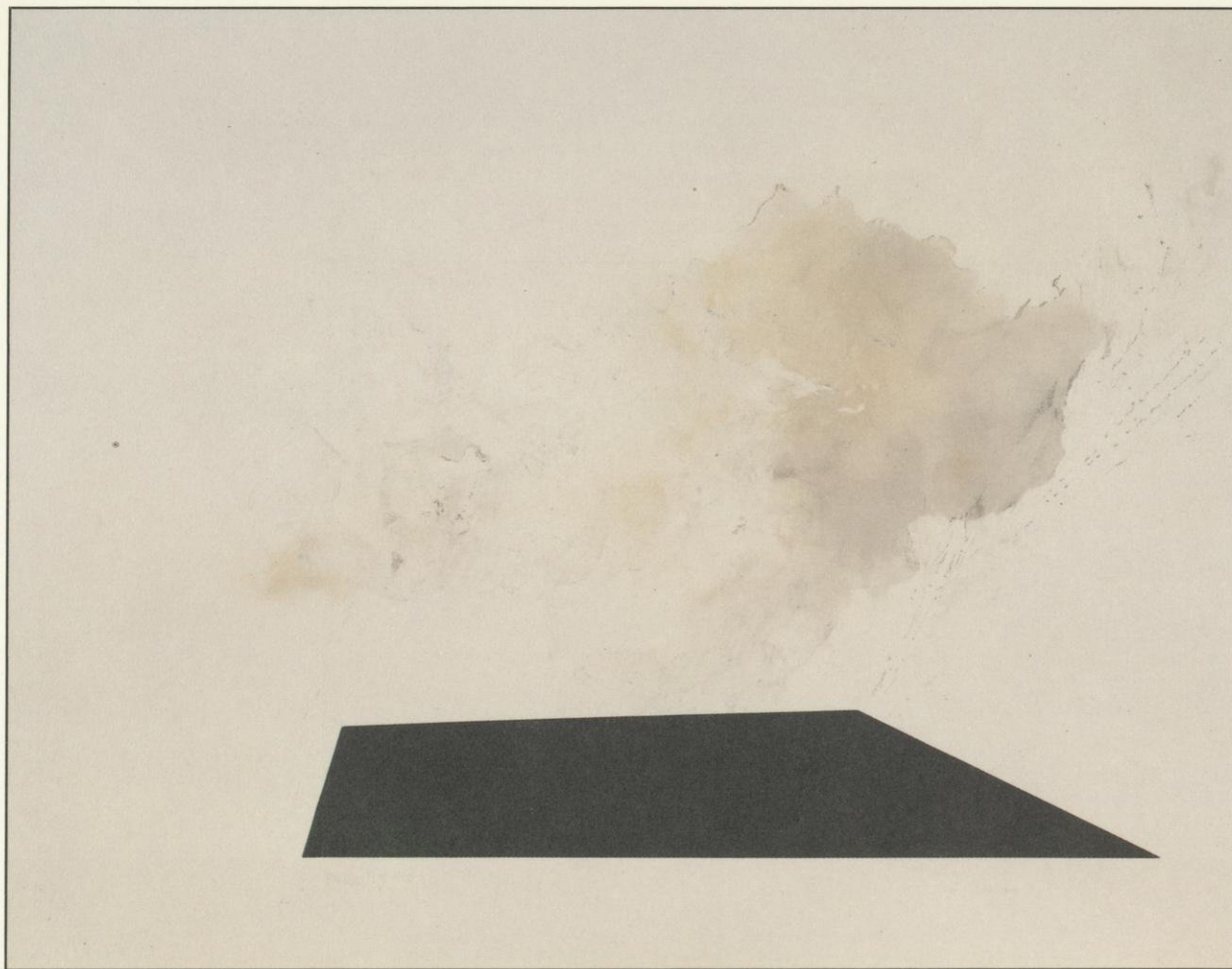




*Where R = Ryoanji*, R/8-3/90, 1983  
Pencil drawing on handmade paper, 10 × 19 in.  
Margarete Roeder Gallery

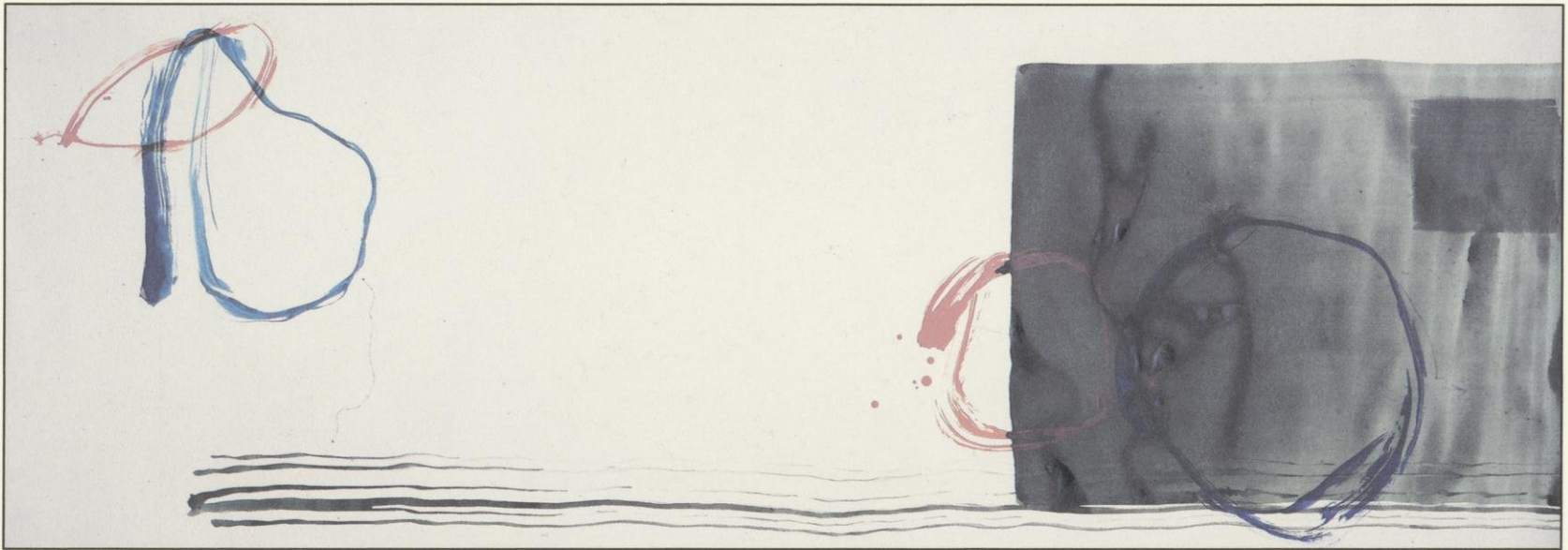
The title, *Where R = Ryoanji*, is derived from the Zen-inspired Ryoanji Garden in Kyoto, Japan. The garden is made up of patterns of rocks on raked gravel, while the drawings were made by drawing around fifteen stones with seventeen pencils of varying weights. Choices concerning which stones, pencils, paper, and placement on the paper were made by the *I Ching*.





*Dramatic Fire #4*, 1989  
Aquatint etching on smoked paper, 18 1/4 x 23 in.  
Edition 25  
Elvehjem Museum of Art  
Malcolm K. Whyte Endowment Fund purchase,  
1990.33

Cage began using smoked paper in 1985. The process consists of igniting newspaper on the press bed and then covering the flame with a damp sheet of printing paper and running it immediately through the press. This creates an atmospheric landscape on which shapes are placed. In the case of *Dramatic Fire*, a black quadrilateral form extends slightly over either side of the platemark. The placement of both the plate and the form was determined by a computer program which randomly selected one of the sixty-four hexagrams from the *I Ching*.



*New River Watercolor, 1988*

Series II

Watercolor on paper, 26 × 72 in.

Roanoke Museum of Fine Arts, Roanoke, VA

Cage made his first watercolor paintings in 1988. The paintings developed from his earlier interest in Zen-inspired chance-imagery and involved the use of stones from the New River at Mountain Lake, Virginia, watercolor, and various brushes including a feather brush. The second series of watercolors includes twelve paintings, each 26 × 72 inches. They were executed on the floor using seven or fewer stones which were painted around by feather brushes. The choices of stones, type of paper, placement of the stones on the paper, washes, paint, and brushes were determined by the *I Ching*.



*9 Stones #9*, 1989  
 Color spitbite and aquatint  
 etching on smoked  
 paper, 18 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 23 in.  
 Edition 20  
 Crown Point Press

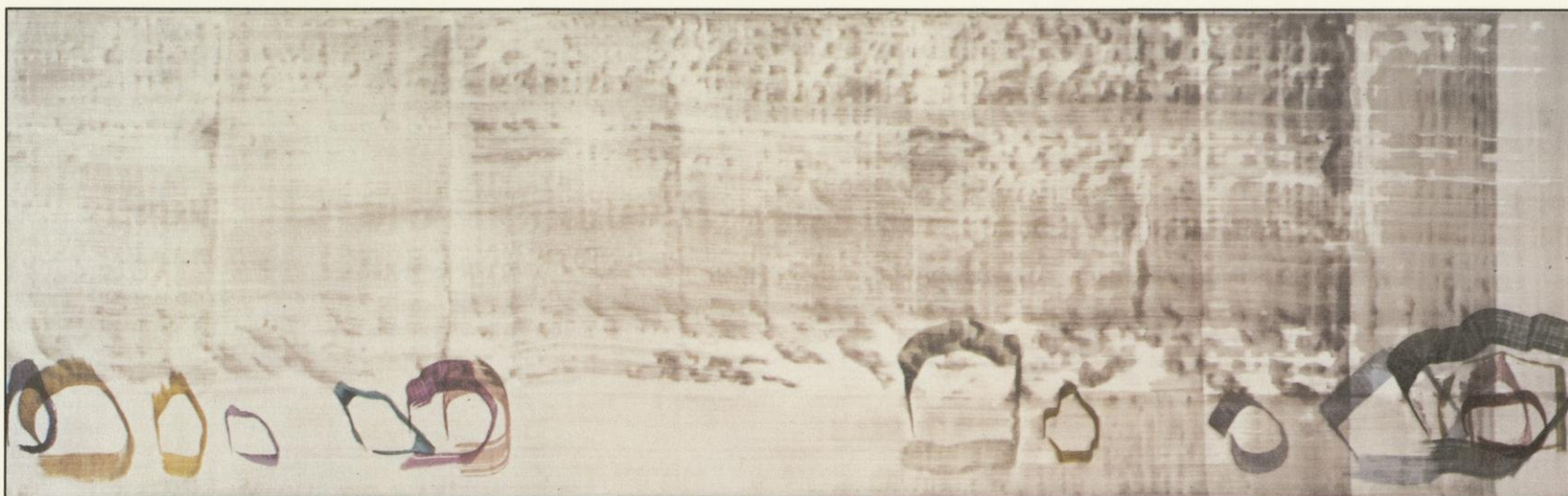
In *9 Stones*, decisions about colors, methods, and placement of stones were determined by the *I Ching* through chance operations. Smoked sheets of paper were used, which had smoke marks varying from print to print, with occasional ink from the burning newspapers transferring onto the paper. The colors used to draw around the stones are often changed by the smoke, becoming a lighter or a darker tone than usual. Cage has noted that using a

brush to trace around the stones was a different experience than he had expected it to be:

The brush became an extension of the arm. Rather than being the vehicle for an idea, the brush was a gesture made without imposing thought upon it.

(Quoted by Julia Boyd in *John Cage: New River Watercolors*.  
 Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1988, iv)





*New River, Rocks and Wash*, 1990  
Wc/rag paper, fire, watercolor, 102 × 336 in.  
Margarete Roeder Gallery  
Lent by the Mountain Lake Workshop of the  
Virginia Tech Foundation

*New River, Rocks and Wash* continues Cage's use of watercolor and stones, but in an enlarged and monumental context. The compositional process is the same as that from his first use of watercolor in 1988.



*Wild Edible Drawings*, 1990  
Suite of 12 handmade papers  
Edition of 6, in boxed portfolio  
Published by the artist, Beverly Plummer, and  
Rugg Road Papers and Prints, Boston, MA

The *Wild Edible Drawings* comprise six suites of twelve handmade papers in a boxed portfolio. During a visit to South America Cage was told that the homeless people there often collected used paper which they then boiled and ate. This gave him the idea of making edible paper which would be functional in a traditional way and recyclable as food. The *Wild Edible Drawings* were made from the edible components of twenty-seven plants collected in the mountains of North Carolina in August of 1990 and selected into "recipes" by the *I Ching*.



## exhibition checklist

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 1a. <i>Déreau #12, 1982</i><br>Color etching, 18½ × 24½ in.<br>38 related images in 2 impressions each<br>Crown Point Press           | 2e. <i>Where R = Ryoanji, 3R/12-6/87, 1983</i><br>Pencil drawing on handmade paper,<br>10 × 19 in.<br>Margarete Roeder Gallery                             | 5a. <i>Where There Is Where There—Urban Land-<br/>scape # 36, 1987-89</i><br>Aquatint etching and smoke resist flatbite,<br>22¾ × 30 in.<br>48 related images, each impression unique<br>Crown Point Press |
| 1b. <i>Déreau #18, 1982</i><br>Color etching, 18½ × 24½ in.<br>38 related images in 2 impressions each<br>Ellsworth Snyder Collection | 2f. <i>Where R = Ryoanji, 8R/14-5/87, 1983</i><br>Pencil drawing on handmade paper,<br>10 × 19 in.<br>Margarete Roeder Gallery                             | 5b. <i>Where There Is Where There—Urban Land-<br/>scape # 37, 1987-89</i><br>Aquatint etching and smoke resist flatbite,<br>22¾ × 30 in.<br>48 related images, each impression unique<br>Crown Point Press |
| 2a. <i>Where R = Ryoanji, R/8-3/90, 1983</i><br>Pencil drawing on handmade paper,<br>10 × 19 in.<br>Margarete Roeder Gallery          | 3. <i>Fire #1, 1985</i><br>Monotype, 24½ × 18½ in.<br>Series of 16<br>Crown Point Press  | 6. <i>New River Watercolor, 1988</i><br><i>Series II</i><br>Watercolor on paper, 26 × 72 in.<br>Roanoke Museum of Fine Arts, Roanoke,<br>VA  |
| 2b. <i>Where R = Ryoanji, 4R/2-6/87, 1983</i><br>Pencil drawing on handmade paper,<br>10 × 19 in.<br>Margarete Roeder Gallery         | 4a. <i>Eninka #2, 1986</i><br>Monotype, 24½ × 18½ in.<br>Series of 50<br>Crown Point Press   | 7a. <i>New River Watercolor, 1988</i><br><i>Series III</i><br>Watercolor on paper, 36 × 15 in.<br>Margarete Roeder Gallery   |
| 2c. <i>Where R = Ryoanji, 12R/6-6/87, 1983</i><br>Pencil drawing on handmade paper,<br>10 × 19 in.<br>Margarete Roeder Gallery        | 4b. <i>Eninka #16, 1986</i><br>Monotype, 24½ × 18½ in.<br>Series of 50<br>Elvehjem Museum of Art<br>Malcolm K. Whyte Endowment Fund pur-<br>chase, 1990.34 | 7b. <i>New River Watercolor, 1988</i><br><i>Series III</i><br>Watercolor on paper, 36 × 15 in.<br>Margarete Roeder Gallery   |
| 2d. <i>Where R = Ryoanji, R/2-3/90, 1983</i><br>Pencil drawing on handmade paper,<br>10 × 19 in.<br>Margarete Roeder Gallery          | 4c. <i>Eninka #5, 1986</i><br>Monotype, 24½ × 18½ in.<br>Series of 50<br>Crown Point Press   |  |



8. *The Missing Stone #1*, 1989  
Color spitbite aquatint etching on smoked paper, 54 × 41 in.  
Edition 25  
Crown Point Press
9. *75 Stones #17*, 1989  
Color spitbite aquatint etching on smoked paper, 54 × 41 in.  
Edition 25  
Crown Point Press
- 10a. *Dramatic Fire #4*, 1989  
Aquatint etching on smoked paper, 18<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 23 in.  
Edition 25  
Elvehjem Museum of Art  
Malcolm K. Whyte Endowment Fund purchase, 1990.33
- 10b. *Dramatic Fire #10*, 1989  
Aquatint etching on smoked paper, 18<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 23 in.  
Edition 25  
Crown Point Press
- 10c. *Dramatic Fire #25*, 1989  
Aquatint etching on smoked paper, 18<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 23 in.  
Edition 25  
Crown Point Press
11. *9 Stones #9*, 1989  
Color spitbite and aquatint etching on smoked paper, 18<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 23 in.  
Edition 20  
Crown Point Press
12. *9 Stones 2, A.P. 2*, 1989  
Color spitbite and aquatint etching on smoked paper, 23 × 18<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.  
Edition 20  
Ellsworth Snyder Collection
- 13a. *Global Village 1-36 #9*, 1989  
Aquatint etching, diptych on brown smoked paper, 38<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 53 in.  
Edition 15  
Crown Point Press
- 13b. *Global Village 37-48*, 1989  
Aquatint etching, diptych on gray smoked paper, 35<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 52<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.  
Edition 15  
Crown Point Press
14. *Fire and Stone, 4/10/90 #11*  
Fire and watercolor on paper, 73<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 46<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.  
Margarete Roeder Gallery
- 15a. *Fire and Stone, 4/11/90 #1*  
Fire and watercolor on paper, 27<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 42<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.  
Margarete Roeder Gallery
- 15b. *Fire and Stone 4/11/90 #6*  
Fire and watercolor on paper, 27<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 42<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.  
Margarete Roeder Gallery
16. *New River, Rocks and Wash*, 1990  
W/c rag paper, fire, watercolor, 102 × 336 in.  
Margarete Roeder Gallery  
Lent by the Mountain Lake Workshop of the Virginia Tech Foundation
- 17a-l. *Wild Edible Drawings*, 1990  
Suite of 12 handmade papers  
Edition of 6, in boxed portfolio  
Published by the artist, Beverly Plummer, and Rugg Road Papers and Prints, Boston, MA

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On the cover:

*Eninka* #16, 1986

Monotype, 24½ × 18½ in.

Series of 50

Elvehjem Museum of Art

Malcolm K. Whyte Endowment Fund purchase,

1990.34



