

ANASTASI

BRADSHAW

CAGE

MARIONI

RAUSCHENBERG

TOBEY

1990/2014

Imitating Nature in Her Manner of Operation:  
Works from John Cage's Collection

Curator: Dove Bradshaw  
December 8, 1990 – January 19, 1991

Sandra Gering Gallery  
14 WEST 11TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY, 10011

. . . imitating nature in her manner of operation . . .

Ananda Coomaraswamy

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Richard Kostelanitz: *What word would you use to characterize the artists in this show?*

John Cage: Well, the word I would use, or the word I have used, is “non-intention”. That’s specifically what I would say. Bill Anastasi likes the word “dumb”. I don’t know what Dove Bradshaw says about her work, but of late she’s involved with things where the material itself is involved in physical change over which she has no control.

*Which is another kind of “dumbness” or “blindness”?*

It’s acceptance of the material, and the material is in flux. Tom Marioni makes actions, accepting the results of actions that are not in themselves produced with graphic intent. You might call it contingency, where he does the action and the drawing results from the action, but something else as well could result.

*Doesn’t that resemble Surrealism automatism?*

No, not quite that. It’s not psychological; it’s physical. Mark Tobey was also involved in activities in which the mind was short-circuited, gotten out of the way. One of his ways of teaching was to put paper on the wall, have the students look at a still-life that he had made. When they were satisfied they could draw it from memory, he had them go and put their noses and their toes both in touch with the wall, and in that position, never losing touch, to draw what they had seen. And of course they couldn’t do it. So they suddenly became modern artists; the mind was no longer in a position to control. And he worked with all kinds of materials, and many things, in order to arrive at results that weren’t in his mind.

John Cage has been conversing with Richard Kostelanetz, in person and as well as in print, for a quarter-century at this point; for this preface Kostelanetz interviewed John Cage (Nisma Zaman, an undergraduate at Ithaca College transcribed).

*Is there more to say about non-intentionality in Tobey?*

Not that I know. He was very aware of the work as something to look at.

*In Conversing with Cage, your marvelous anecdote about walking with him is reprinted.*

Walking along, yes, so that everything that we see he would be able to see in detail— all the changes, particularly the visual ones, whether they're in the distance or whether they're close by.

*How is your own visual art reflective of non-intention?*

Well, my introduction of my Harvard University book, (I-IV, Harvard University Press, 1990) is all about that.

*But we have to get reprint permission to use that.*

Well you can make it up.

*Anastasi?*

We play chess everyday. We're going to play today, and he'll either drive down or he'll take the subway, he'll bring headphones without music, and papers and a board to draw on, and pencils and so forth; and he'll make a drawing with his eyes closed, and his arms responding to the movement of the subway car.

*How big are they?*

They're convenient for drawing on his lap.

*Has he done other work reflective of non-intention?*

Oh, yes. Some of it is close to Tobey in that his face is close to the wall, or the surface on which he's drawing, so that he can't really see what he's doing.

*Doesn't this relate to what Jackson Pollock did? Doesn't the physical aspect of what he's*

*doing echo painting in general?*

Pollock is a curious case, because he doesn't have an interest in what he sees in the way that Tobey has an interest in what he sees. I think of Pollock as being involved in gesture.

*And Anastasi is not making gestures as much as extending, or representing, the subway's gestures.*

Yes.

*His arm responding to extrinsic forces, which Pollock would never allow.*

No. And Pollock controlled the color in a way that Tobey would never dream of controlling the color, simply by putting it in a pitcher and pouring it out, you see, so that the white never changes, whereas with Tobey every brushstroke would be with a different white.

*Is that controlling color, or not controlling color?*

It's giving great complexity to the surface, the kind of complexity we see when we look at anything. We see that it's not all flat.

*Or uniform.*

Whereas with Pollock it's uniform. And with Tobey and with Anastasi it's not uniform.

*Is there more to say about Tom Marioni?*

Well, he draws until the pencil, or whatnot he's using wears out. And so, that kind of steady movement makes a sound.

*Is this a performance?*

Yes, he is a performance artist, so that his performances have graphic work and acoustic work as side products. Klaus Schönig of Westdeutscher Rundfunk is going to give a Horspiel (ear-play) that will be made up of the sounds that result from Marioni's performances.

*Dove Bradshaw?*

Well, I mentioned before her involvement with materials that are in flux. Some of the more recent ones are birds, and birds of course fly and have eggs, doing various things, and she thinks of the life of the birds and their activities as her work.

*How does she incorporate them into her work?*

By using birds as her materials.

*As her subject?*

Not as her subject, but her materials. She would get two birds and put them in the gallery, and give them a place.

*Are those live birds?*

Yes. To sit on a bicycle wheel. For instance, there will be two birds. The question is are they going to end up making love and are they going to have eggs? What's going to happen?

*Is there more to know about Dove's work on this theme?*

I have one in which it is not birds but metal with an oxidizing agent that is in a state of flux, so that what is light or dark changes.

*Is it an object?*

It's like a drawing or painting.

*This metal was oxidized so that it would be in flux?*

Yes, though she sometimes makes works with fixed materials too.

*Have others been doing that?*

I think Robert Rauschenberg is an example of someone who works with flux.

*When he used materials that were meant to disintegrate, such as works that no longer exist?*

Yes. I think Jasper Johns is less open to change. He would be inclined, I think, if things changed, to correct them, to bring them back to the point where he had put them.

*Have you seen the James Turrell installation at PS1?*

No.

*Do you know about it?*

No.

*It's in the tradition of your 4'33" except that he's framing the sky, which you watch change for one hour before and then an hour after sunset.*

That sounds more like Alvin Lucier. I mean to say, it sounds more like a scientific experiment with a result that's fascinating, but it's alarmingly close to an object. In other words, what you're describing is something that separates it from the rest of the room, so that your way of looking is changed, and you could look anywhere.

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ has published *Conversing with Cage* (Limelight) and *John Cage*, a documentary monograph that will be reissued in paperback next year. His essays, *On Innovative Art(ist)s* will appear next year.

William Anastasi: *Sink*, 1963, cold rolled steel, water, 1 x 18 x 18 inches, collection of John Cage; *Without Title [Blind Drawing]*, 1990, graphite on paper, 50 x 40 inches, purchased by Edward Albee from the exhibition; two *Without Title [Subway Drawings]*, 1990, pencil on paper, 11 ¼ x 11 ½ inches, collection of the artist.

Dove Bradshaw: *Without Title [Carbon Removal]*, 1981, carbon paper, 4 ⅞ x 5 ¾ inches, collection of John Cage; *Without Title [Carbon Removal]*, 1990, carbon paper, 4 ⅞ x 5 ¾ inches, collection of John Cage; *Riverstone*, 1990, graphite on paper, 10 x 19 inches, collection of John Cage; *Contingency*, 1984, silver, liver of sulfur, varnish, crayon, gesso on paper, 32 x 22 inches, collection of the artist.

John Cage: *Signals*, 1978, copper plate etching, unique impression, 7 ¼ x 11 ¾ inches, collection of the artist; six works from *Where R = Ryoanji*, 1987-1990, drypoint, 9 x 19 inches, collection of William Anastasi and Dove Bradshaw.

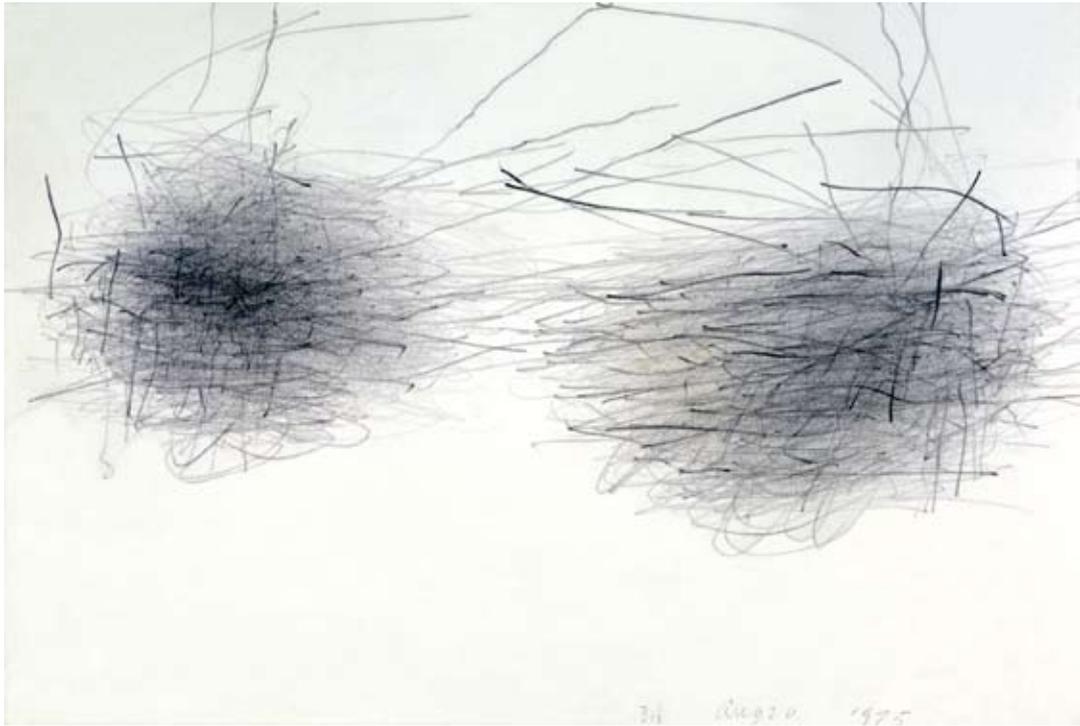
Tom Marioni: *Drawing a line as far as I can reach [finger]*, 1972-1990, pencil on paper, 3 ¼ x 2 ¼ inches, collection of the artist; *Drawing a line as far as I can reach [hand]*, 1972-1990, pencil on paper, 11 x 8 inches, collection of the artist; *Tree: drawing a line as far as I can reach [arm]*, 1972-1990, pencil on paper, 94 x 30 inches, collection of the artist; *Drumbrush Drawing*, 1972-1990, steel on sandpaper, 28 x 36 inches, collection of John Cage.

Robert Rauschenberg: *Untitled*, 1956, metallic paint, printed paper, linen on board, 10 x 8 ½ inches, collection of John Cage.

Mark Tobey: *Untitled [monotype]*, 1960, ink on paper, 12 ¼ x 20 ½ inches, collection of John Cage; *Brown Composition*, 1960, tempura monotype on crumbled and torn paper, 17 x 11 inches, collection of John Cage.

John Cage's work is shown in cooperation with Crown Point Press and Margarete Roeder Gallery; Mark Tobey's work is shown in cooperation with Philippe Daverio Gallery.

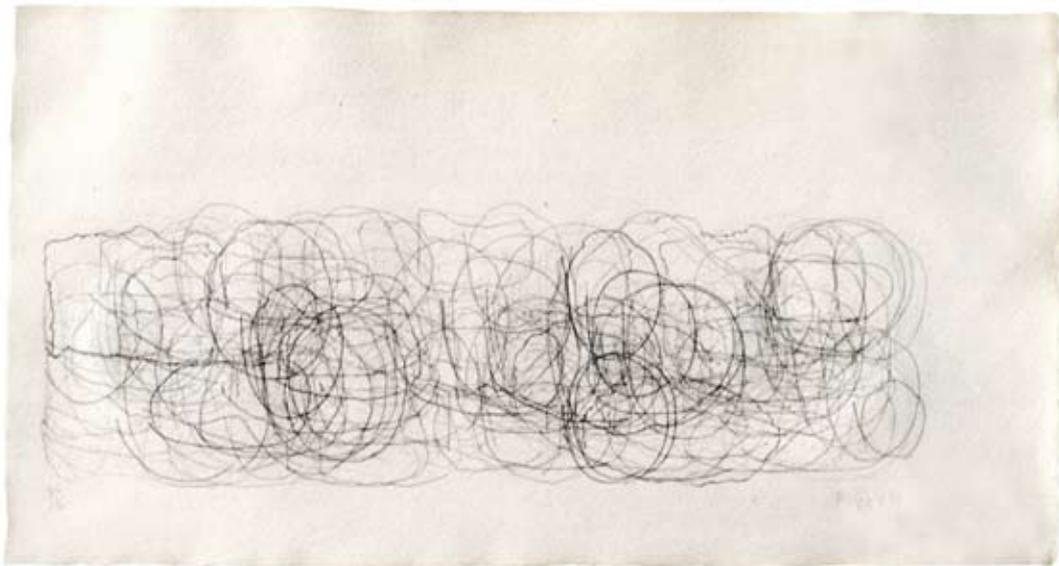
Photography: Dove Bradshaw, p.10; David Behl, p.11; Torben Thessander, p.12; Courtesy of the artist, p.13; Cosimo Di Leo Ricatto, p.14; Estate of Mark Tobey, p.15.



William Anastasi, *Without Title [Subway Drawing: 3H Aug 20]*, 1975, pencil on paper, 11 ¼ x 7 inches; collection of the artist



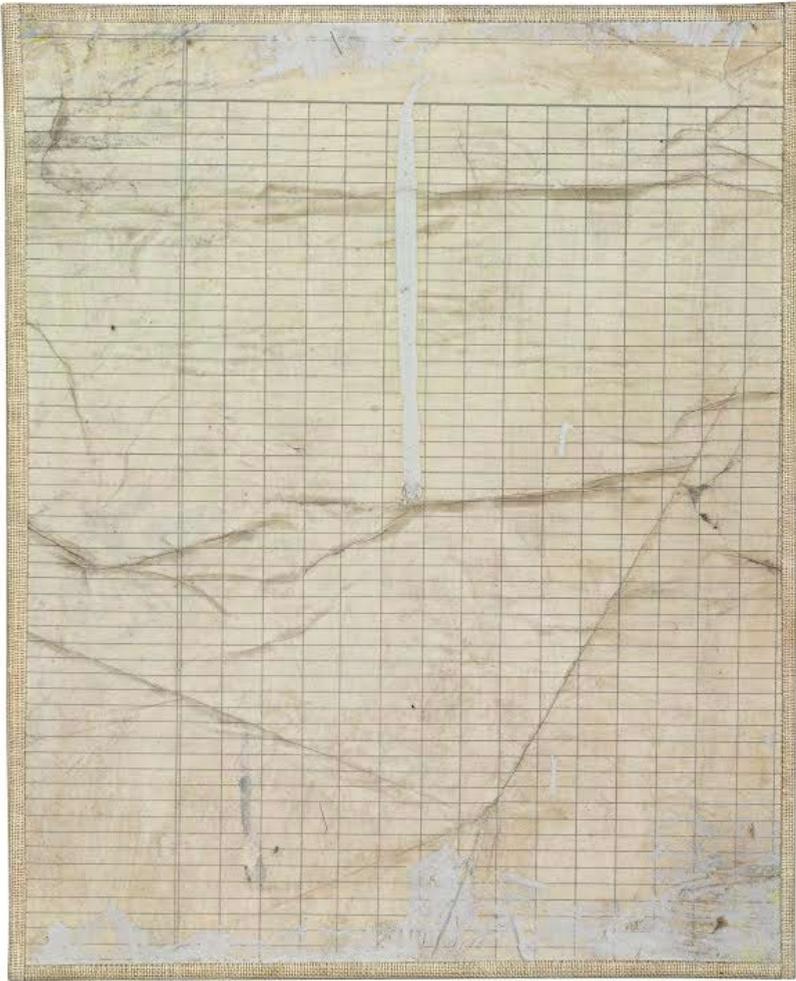
Dove Bradshaw, *Contingency*, 1984, silver, liver of sulphur, varnish, crayon, gesso on handmade paper, 32 x 22 inches; collection of the artist



John Cage, *R2/16*, 1984, pencil on paper, 10 1/8 x 19 inches; collection of William Anastasi and Dove Bradshaw



Tom Marioni, *Drumbrush Drawing*, 1972-1990, steel on sandpaper, 28 x 36 inches, collection of John Cage



Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled*, 1956, metallic paint, printed paper, linen on board,  
10 x 8 ½ inches, collection of John Cage



Mark Tobey, *Untitled [monotype]*, 1960, ink on paper, 12 ½ x 20 ½ inches;  
collection of John Cage

Strategies of Non-Intention:  
John Cage and Artists He Collected

Curator: Dove Bradshaw  
June 12, 2014 – September 5, 2014

Sandra Gering Inc  
14 EAST 63RD STREET · NEW YORK, NY 10065

ANASTASI  
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1990/2014 Strategies of Non-Intention: Cage and Artists He Collected

In September of 1990 I suggested to John Cage that he curate an exhibition of work from his collection devoted to chance. John said that he didn't want to do it. Later I learned his hands were full planning his *Rolywholyover: A Circus for Museum* that included a revolutionary score for a changing program of 20th Century painting, sculpture, objects, film, dance, music, a library of books, as well as a chess nook. He agreed enthusiastically to my project if I was the curator and to an interview for a catalogue with Richard Kostelanitz, an early biographer who had published fifty years of his interviews. When it came to the title, Cage was not warm to the idea of group exhibitions corralled under a single rubric. Instead he suggested naming each artist. My subtitle, "imitating nature in her manner of operation" came from a remark by Ananda Coomaraswamy, the Indian philosopher he often quoted.

When John had been asked by Kostelanitz what word he would use to characterize each of the artist's methods, including his own, he had replied, "...the word I have used is 'non-intention'". This time after returning to the exhibition twenty-four years later, the subtitle "Strategies of Non-Intention, Cage and Artists He Collected" seemed appropriate.

John Cage often said the he was more interested in "self alteration than self-expression" preferring to shift the artist's role from one of choosing to one of asking questions. He consulted the *I Ching, Book of Changes* to arrive at a numerical method to answer proposed questions. He said, "If you use Chance Operations the implication is that every answer is good." In the case of the watercolors in this exhibition, *New River Watercolors*,

<sup>1</sup> John Cage interviewed by Richard Kostelanitz, *Anastasi, Bradshaw, Cage, Marioni, Rauschenberg, Tobey: imitating nature in her manner of operation*, Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, 1990.

*Series I, #5, and New River Watercolors, Series II, #1*, both 1988, he used the I Ching to determine the paper size, then gridded it into 64ths determining whether to activate the whole or parts. Chance was used to determine where washes would take place and where stones that had been gathered, numbered and chance-selected would be traced with various sized chance-selected feathers or brushes. There were 26 colors and 7 washes that could be mixed together, the colors could be mixed in any two combinations in percentages, say 90/10 or 50/50, and so forth. A plan made to execute such a work could take up to three hours before a single mark was made. The only operation that could not be asked of the I Ching was the movement of the brush. "I have to accept what I do." Cage struggled with the problem of skill. He once said it didn't interest him. Yet in these works he admitted he sometimes closed his eyes in order to be "freer" and "less accountable." The "egoless spirit" of *ensō*—an attempt to recognize the nature of reality by way of sudden enlightenment— informs their performative aspects. Cage maintained in *STEPS: A Composition for a Painting to be Performed by Individuals and Groups* that, "it did not matter who [held] the brush."<sup>2</sup> In the world of music the qualified performer is customarily interchangeable, but in painting where the master's hand is considered sacrosanct, this was indeed exceptional. He stated that the activity is the art, not the result.

In the 1990 interview Cage recalled that William Anastasi likes the word, "dumb."<sup>3</sup> Anastasi has also used the word "blind" or "unsighted" referring to drawings made with eyes closed in order to subvert his "aesthetic prejudice of the moment" as he likes to call it. He has described his large-scale drawings as "closer to calisthenics than to aesthetics."

Mark Tobey tried to subvert his conscious thought: "As to the Sumi paintings [shown here]—you ask how I can do them...Offhand, I don't really know how I began this period—it happened one day, a suggestion from a brown-black painting which I felt could be carried on in blacks. How long I had these Sumi paintings [begun in 1957], in cold storage or had the delayed-unrealized desire to paint them I don't know. It was a kind of fever, like the earth in spring, or a hurricane. Of course I can give many reasons, that they were a natural growth from my experience with the brush and Sumi ink in Japan and China, but why did I wait some twenty years before doing them? ...Perhaps painting that way I freed myself or thought I did. Perhaps I wanted to paint without too much thought.

<sup>2</sup> Information and Cage quotes thanks to texts by Ray Kass and Jerrie Pike, *The Sight of Silence*, Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke, Virginia in collaboration with the National Academy Museum, New York, 2011, p 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* (Cage interviewed by Kostelanitz)

I don't think I was in the Void, that rather popular place today. But then maybe I wanted to be—it's difficult to be faster than thought."<sup>4</sup>

Cage said about Mark Tobey, "He was involved in activities in which the mind was short-circuited—gotten out of the way. One of his ways of teaching was to put paper on the wall. Have the students look at a still life that he had made. When they were satisfied they could draw it from memory, he had them go and put their noses and their toes both in touch with the wall, and in that position, never losing touch, to draw what they had seen. And they of course couldn't do it. So they suddenly became modern artists; the mind was no longer in a position to control."<sup>5</sup> Tobey used a variety of methods to subvert the mind. For instance in *Untitled* [monotype], 1961, shown here and originally from Cage's collection, Tobey had poured ink onto a sheet of paper and blotted it to create a phenomenological work.

Coincidentally and without knowledge of Tobey's instruction, William Anastasi, when making his Burst Series starting in 1989<sup>6</sup>, pins paper or sometimes works directly on the wall facing it—his feet nearly touching with eyes closed or masked. Placing both hands at his midriff, each holding an oil or graphite stick, he extends his arms drawing radiating lines out from the center as far as his reach. Not seeing, he too is able to lose control paradoxically while performing a controlled action.

The same could be said about Tom Marioni's *Out of Body Free Hand Circle*, 2008: on a low box standing sideways to a 7 x 7 foot plaster-skimmed section of wall, holding a graphite stick, twenty times he swings his drawing arm 360°. Only half the time is he able to see. John Cage said, "Tom Marioni makes actions, accepting the results of actions that are not in themselves produced with graphic intent." Marioni says about both *Free Hand Circle* and *1.2. Finger Line*, 1972-1990, the other work included here, that they are "a record of my reach." In the latter, he takes a pencil in hand and extends the line as far as his finger can reach. Similar to Anastasi, he likens his practice to a physical activity, "I often say my drawings are like doing yoga while holding a pencil."<sup>7</sup>—though notably Yoga is a more comprehensive mind/body/spirit exercise.

<sup>4</sup> Seitz, William C., *Mark Tobey*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, 1962, p 22, footnote 41: p 84.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. (Cage interviewed by Kostelanitz)

<sup>6</sup> *Oil and Graphite Burst*, 2005, in the exhibition.

<sup>7</sup> In conversation with the artist.

Cage commented that Robert Rauschenberg works with flux. For Rauschenberg's *Apology*, 1968 in the exhibition: "The artist cut out... photographs... or texts which caught his eye, and soaked them... in turpentine, then later lighter fluid. [Placing] the wet paper face down on a sheet of... paper where he wanted it,... hatched its back with a dry pen nib. The pressure of this rubbing transferred the inks... The 'appropriated' image is 1:1... scale, but reversed... left to right, as... in a plate print. [A] margin of indeterminacy [is] built in. The artist does not see... the image... until the transfer is made, by which time it is too late to make changes...."<sup>8</sup> Rauschenberg said that he worked blind in order to achieve "maximum lack of control so that something I didn't think of might happen."<sup>9</sup> For *Scent*, 1974, from the *Hoarfrost* series shown here, he also used a solvent transfer to make this relief-print on silk and chiffon. "Rauschenberg spent two years (1958-60) illustrating Dante's *Inferno* in a series of transfer drawings, and he knew the text well; he likely came across the word *hoarfrost* in this passage from canto 24: 'In that part of the young year... when *hoarfrost* mimes the image of his white sister upon the ground.' The gossamer delicacy of the *Hoarfrost* works echoes the fleeting presence Dante describes."<sup>10</sup> William Anastasi and I attended the opening exhibition of this series at Castelli Gallery in 1974. We were struck by their fugitive beauty like the dusting of snow described above and by their aleatory behavior. With the slightest movement they fluttered, each fabric responding with its different weight. With *Accident*, 1963, when the lithography stone cracked in two, Rauschenberg happily found his title and continue the run. He welcomed the wide gulf and ever increasing detritus. In other works he went further using materials that would disintegrate so that the work no longer exists.

In my work I have used weather and chemistry indoors. Last January I had accidentally left a chemical painting on a pure silver ground in a sleet storm for a number of hours. After a week or so inside, an alligator-rain pattern emerged and continues to develop. It will never settle down. In *Notation VII*, 2000/2008 included here, a bronze prism on top of a limestone cube was activated with multiple eyedropper-applications of ammonium chloride copper sulfate. Placed outdoors, weather will further cause the bronze to "bleed" down the face of the limestone, and after many years the stone itself will spot and darken like aging skin.

<sup>8</sup> Kachur, Lewis, *Robert Rauschenberg: Transfer Drawings from the 1960s*, Jonathan O'Hara Gallery, New York, NY, 2007, p 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Robert Rauschenberg: Inventive Genius*, American Masters [film], 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Source: <http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/2955#ixzz32N6xA71X>, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

*Passion*, 1994, the copper bar was sprayed repeatedly at the top with the same chemical.

In 1995 an untreated bar was inserted in the exterior wall of the Pier Centre in the Orkney Islands where it continues to be exposed to the North Atlantic. A copper stain has run down the wall. Anastasi's *Sink*, 1963/1991, with its daily marriage of tap water and steel too renders an ever-evolving surface.

A short film made for the exhibition includes each artist executing a work described above or a piece related to it. The various strategies of non-intention are an attempt to behave like nature that, religious dogma aside, has no intentions with mankind in 'mind'. Nature from within was employed by the artists who chose to subvert conscious thought through actions, while nature without was engaged by those who used unstable materials, unpredictable processes or weather. John Cage said he enjoyed a mark that was ego-less, that appeared not to be "fiddled with." With these various strategies the artists have tried to avoid self-conscious marks. The paradox of losing control while performing a controlled action is key. However, fear that this would lead to nonsense might, after experiencing the work, convert to understanding non-sense: "Chance is not viewed as the enemy of rational structures, but accepted as evidence of a wider orderliness of nature beyond human control or understanding."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Clark, David J., *The Sight of Silence*, Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke, Virginia in collaboration with the National Academy Museum, New York, 2011, p 59.

William Anastasi: *Vitruvian Man Drawing*, 2005, oil stick on paper, 60 x 71 inches, courtesy of the artist; *Sink*, 1963/1991, Edition of 6, cold rolled steel, water, 1 x 18 x 18 inches, courtesy of the artist.

Dove Bradshaw: *Without Title*, 1994-present, copper and ammonium chloride copper sulfate, 14 x 3 x ¾ inches, courtesy of the artist; *Notation VII*, 2000/2008, limestone, bronze, and ammonium chloride copper sulfate, 16 x 12 x 12 inches, courtesy of the artist.

John Cage: *New River Watercolors [Series I, #5]*, 1988, watercolor on paper, 18 x 36 inches, private collection; *New River Watercolors [Series II, #1]*, 1988, watercolor on paper, 26 x 72 inches, private collection.

Tom Marioni: *1.2 Finger Line*, 2006, pencil on paper, 4 ¼ x 2 ½ inches, framed: 12 ¼ x 8 ¾ inches, courtesy of the artist; *Out of Body Free hand Circle*, 2000/2014, graphite on plaster skimmed wall, 84 x 84 inches, courtesy of the artist.

Robert Rauschenberg: *Apology*, 1968, watercolor, graphite, gouache and solvent transfer on paper, 22 ½ x 30 inches, private collection; *Scent*, 1974, transfer/collage on fabric, 86 x 50 inches; *Scent* © 1974 Robert Rauschenberg and G.E.L..

Mark Tobey: *Untitled (MR27)*, 1957, Sumi ink on paper mounted on paperboard, 15 ¾ x 11 inches, courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York; *Monotype*, 1960, ink on paper, 12 ½ x 20 ½ inches, collection of Michael Straus.

Photography credit: Estate of Robert Rauschenberg, p.36, Gemini G.E.L., p.37; courtesy of Sandra Gering Inc. p.24-35, 38, 39.

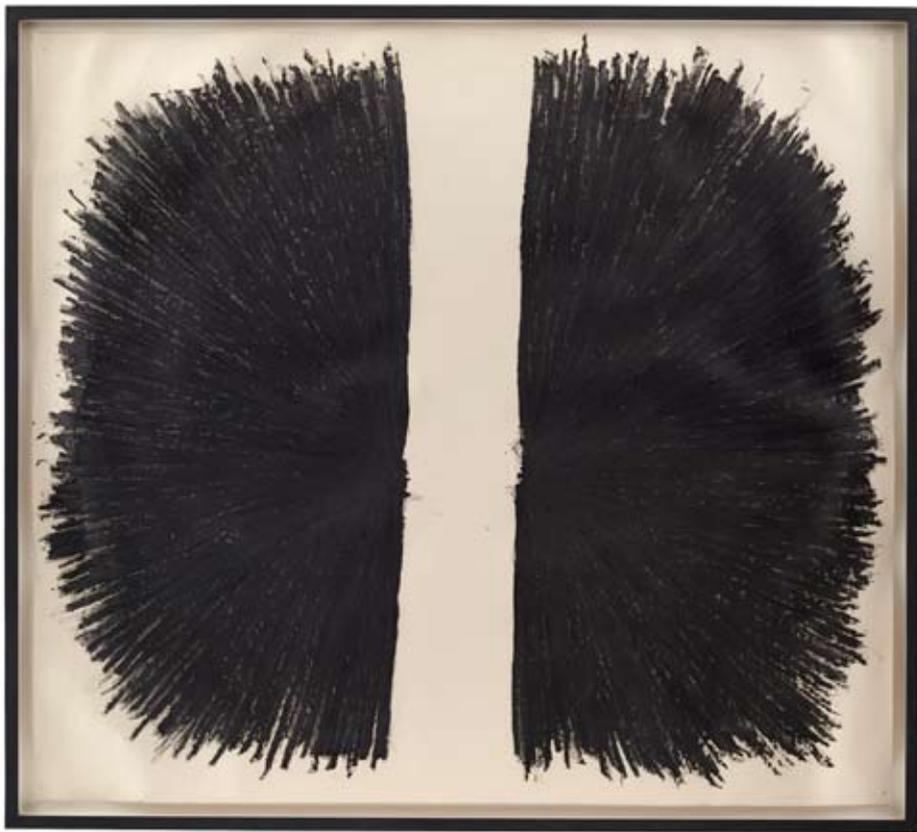
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 Compilation: Aleya Dwivedi  
 INDesign adaptation: Claudia Fellmer



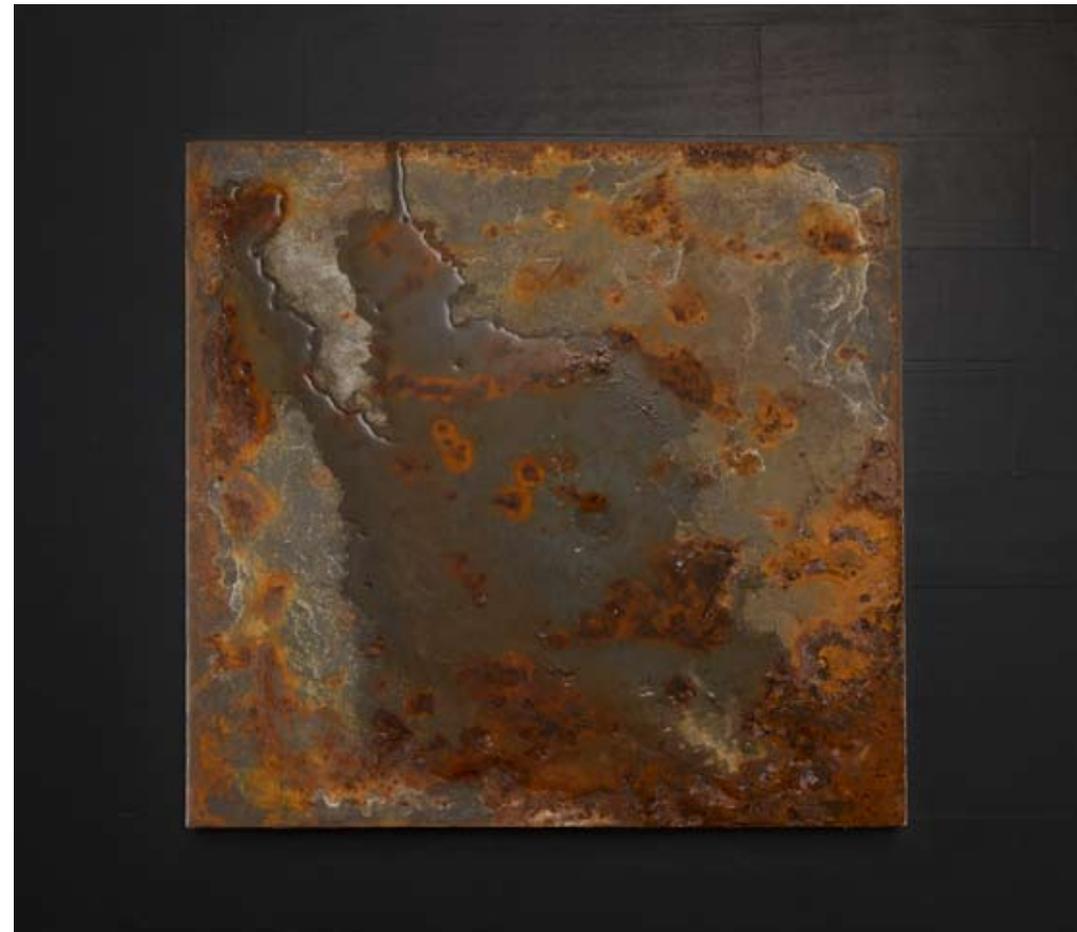
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William Anastasi, *Oil Stick and Graphite Burst*, 2005, oil stick on paper, 64 x 71 inches, courtesy of the artist



William Anastasi, *Sink*, from the 1963/1991 edition of six, steel, water, 1 x 18 ½ x 18 ½ inches, courtesy of the artist



Dove Bradshaw, *Passion*, 1994, copper and ammonium chloride copper sulfate, 14 x 3 x 3/4 inches, courtesy of the artist



Dove Bradshaw, *Notation VII*, 2000/2008, limestone, bronze, ammonium chloride copper sulfate, 16 x 12 x 12 inches, courtesy of the artist



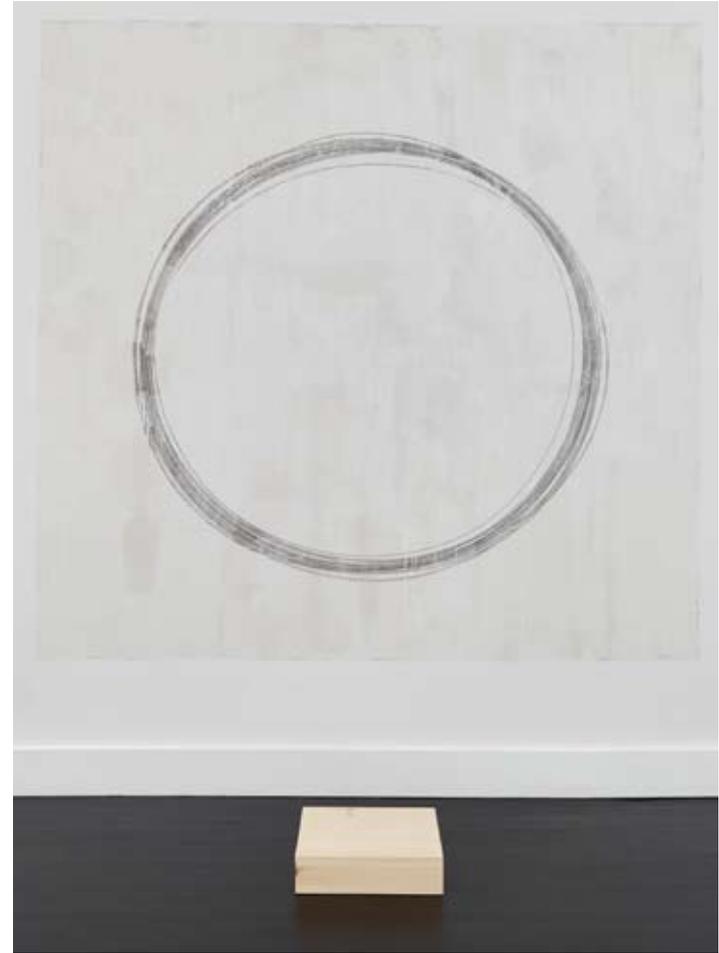
John Cage, *New River Watercolors [Series I, #5]*, 1988, watercolor on paper, 18 x 36 inches, private collection



John Cage, *New River Watercolors [Series II, #1]*, 1988, watercolor on paper, 26 x 72 inches, private collection



Tom Marioni, 1.2. *Finger Line*, 2006, pencil on paper, wood frame, Paper size: 4 ¼ x 2 ½ inches, frame size: 12 ¼ x 8 ¾ inches, courtesy of the artist



Tom Marioni, *Out of Body Free Hand Circle*, 2000/2014, graphite on prepared wall, 84 x 84 inches, wooden platform: 4 x 15 x 15 inches, courtesy of the artist



Robert Rauschenberg, *Apology*, 1968, watercolor, graphite, gouache and solvent transfer on paper, 22 ½ x 30 inches, private collection



Robert Rauschenberg, *Scent*, 1974, transfer collage on fabric, 86 x 50 inches, courtesy of Gemini G.E.L., New York



Mark Tobey, *Untitled (MR27)*, 1957, Sumi ink on paper mounted on paperboard, 15 3/4 x 11 inches, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York



Mark Tobey, *Monotype*, 1961, ink on paper, 12 1/2 x 20 1/2 inches, courtesy of Michael Straus, Birmingham, Alabama



