

A

ZEN AND ARTISTS OF THE EIGHTH STREET CLUB:  
IBRAM LASSAW AND HASEGAWA SABURŌ

by

SARAH JOHNSON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New  
York

2005

UMI Number: 3159221

Copyright 2005 by  
Johnson, Sarah

All rights reserved.

### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

**UMI**<sup>®</sup>

---

UMI Microform 3159221

Copyright 2005 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company  
300 North Zeeb Road  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

© 2005

Sarah Johnson

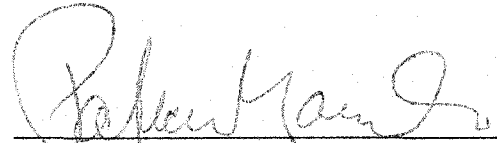
All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

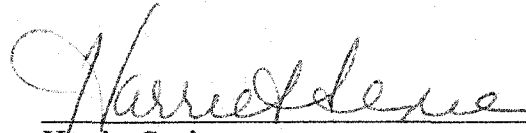
12 / 10 / 04  
Date


  
Chair of Examining Committee – Anna Chave

2/1/05  
Date

  
Executive Officer – Patricia Mainardi

  
Mona Hadler

  
Harriet Senie

  
Barbara Brooks

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

## ABSTRACT

Zen and Artists of the Eighth Street Club: Ibram Lassaw and Hasegawa Saburo

by

Sarah Johnson

Advisor: Professor Anna Chave

My dissertation centers on two postwar artists working in New York: US based sculptor Ibram Lassaw and Japanese painter Hasegawa Saburō and their involvement with Zen Buddhism.

My work binds together the correspondence, writing, and talks of Lassaw and Hasegawa with analysis of their artwork in an effort to clarify their particular interpretations of Zen within the larger milieu of interest in ‘Asian thought’ found in Abstract Expressionism. I pay special attention to their lectures on Zen Buddhism at the Eighth Street Artist’s Club, an integral site for mid 20<sup>th</sup> century artists’ discourse and practice. My overall methodology focuses on issues of identity and nationalism.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to all those who assisted me in the completion of my dissertation. I could not have finished this project without the help of my advisor, Professor Anna Chave, who was extraordinarily supportive throughout the process and provided very careful readings with invaluable suggestions. My second reader, Professor Mona Hadler, as well as Professor Barbara Brooks and Professor Harriet Senie, contributed important comments. I would also like to thank Professor Bert Winther-Tamaki, University of California at Irvine, and art writer and Zen practitioner, Kay Larson, for early encouragement on this topic.

I appreciate the generosity of Ernestine and Ibram Lassaw; it was a pleasure to be able to visit their home and studio in East Hampton. Denise Lassaw, as curator of her father's studio and archives, provided much help with images and documentation. I also thank Natalie Edgar and Philip Pavia for providing access to their archive of material on the Club and for their kind hospitality.

There were many archivists and librarians who facilitated my research. Joy Weiner at the Archives of American Art assisted me with the microfilmed copies of Ibram Lassaw's papers and other materials on the Club; Beth Posner at the CUNY Graduate Center helped me to gather articles and books from various libraries around the country; Laura Kuhn at The John Cage Trust helped me with early leads; and Jenny Tobias at the Museum of Modern Art aided my research at the MoMA library.

And to Justin Johnson- I thank you for helping me realize that the sun rises in the morning and sets at night; my feet would not have landed on the ground without you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	iv
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	v
<b>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</b>	vii
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
Background	1
Review of Literature	17
<b>I: THE CLUB</b>	
Precursors of the Club	21
Brief History of the Club	25
Zen and the Club	34
Zen and Otherness	58
Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki and Mid-century US Zen	66
<b>II: IBRAM LASSAW</b>	
Biography of Ibram Lassaw and Intellectual Premises of his Sculpture	78
Lassaw and Suzuki	114
Key Concepts: Nature and Tathata	121
Critical Reception: Zen as an Aspect	131
<b>III: HASEGAWA SABURŌ</b>	
Brief Biography	147
Hasegawa and Calligraphy	168
Hasegawa and Otherness	184
Critical Reception in the US	189
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	206
<b>ILLUSTRATIONS</b>	214
<b>APPENDIX A: List of Lectures at the Eighth Street Artist's Club Related to Zen Buddhism</b>	290
<b>APPENDIX B: Ibram Lassaw's Library of Books on Asian Culture and Philosophy – Partial List</b>	293
<b>APPENDIX C: List of Suzuki's Lectures at Columbia University Attended by Ibram Lassaw</b>	295
<b>APPENDIX D: Writings by Hasegawa Saburō</b>	302
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	305

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Akasa</i> , 1954	209
2. Ibram Lassaw, <i>The Awakened One</i> , 1957	210
3. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Dancing Figure</i> , 1929	211
4. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Torso</i> , 1931	212
5. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, <i>Light-prop</i> , 1921	213
6. Photograph: Buckminster Fuller with a model of <i>Dymaxion House</i>	214
7. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Sculpture 1933</i> , 1933	215
8. Alexander Calder, <i>Universe</i> , 1934	216
9. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Sculpture 1935</i> , 1935	217
10. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Sculpture 1936</i> , 1936	218
11. Photograph featuring Lassaw's <i>Sculpture 1935</i> , 1935	219
12. Photograph featuring Lassaw's <i>Sculpture 1936</i> , 1936	220
13. Julio González, <i>Mask of Roberta in the Sun</i> , 1927	221
14. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Sculpture in Steel</i> , 1938	222
15. Joan Miró, <i>Dog Barking at the Moon</i> , 1926	223
16. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Composition with Light</i> , 1938	224
17. Jean Arp, <i>Arranged According to the Laws of Chance</i> , 1929	225
18. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Intersecting Rectangles</i> , 1940	226
19. Alexandr Rodchenko, <i>Spatial Construction no. 12</i> , c.1920	227
20. Piet Mondrian, <i>Tableau II</i> , 1921-1925	228

21. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Arachnide</i> , 1944	229
22. Alberto Giacometti, <i>Cage</i> , 1931	230
23. Alberto Giacometti, <i>The Palace at 4 A.M.</i> , 1932-33	231
24. Isamu Noguchi, <i>Lunar Infant</i> , 1943-44	232
25. Peter Grippe, <i>Symbolic Figure #4</i> , 1946	233
26. Seymour Lipton, <i>Imprisoned Figure</i> , 1948	234
27. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Mandala</i> , 1949	235
28. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Star Cradle</i> , 1949	236
29. Jackson Pollock, <i>Galaxy</i> , 1947	237
30. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Milky Way</i> , 1950	238
31. David Smith, <i>Star Cage</i> , 1950	239
32. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Nebula in Orion</i> , 1951	240
33. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Ascension of Innana</i> , 1952	241
34. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Kwannon</i> , 1952	242
35. Alexander Calder, <i>Non-Objective</i> , 1947	243
36. Ibram Lassaw, <i>Phoenix</i> , 1955	244
37. David Smith, <i>Hudson River Landscape</i> , 1951	245
38. Photograph of Hasegawa Saburo c.1956	246
39. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Radishes</i> , c.1924	247
40. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Landscape</i> , c.1924	248
41. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Third-class Carriage: After Daumier</i> , 1930	249
42. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Grecian Head</i> , 1931	250
43. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>La Galatea: After Raphael</i> , 1931	251

44. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Saint Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata: After Giotto</i> , 1931	252
45. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Fete Champetre: After Giorgione</i> , 1931	253
46. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Still Life</i> , 1930	254
47. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Mount Fuji Against a Starry Sky</i> , 1934	255
48. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Still Life in Red</i> , 1934	256
49. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Portrait of My Father</i> , c.1933	257
50. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Drawing</i> , 1933	258
51. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Drawing</i> , 1933	259
52. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Locus of a Butterfly</i> , 1937	260
53. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Metropolis</i> , 1936	261
54. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Untitled- Inspired by a Neolithic clay figure</i> , 1948	262
55. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Fishing</i> , 1949	263
56. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Mother and Child</i> , 1950	264
57. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Self Portrait</i> , 1951	265
58. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Civilization</i> , 1951	266
59. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Symphonic Poem: A Fine Day</i> , 1951	267
60. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Katsura (Imperial Villa)</i> , 1951	268
61. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Abstract Painting</i> , 1952	269
62. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Modern Art Fair</i> , 1951	270
63. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Time</i> , 1952	271
64. Franz Kline, <i>Cover of Bokubi</i> , 1951	272
65. Franz Kline, <i>Chief</i> , 1950	273
66. Franz Kline, <i>Cardinal</i> , 1950	274

67. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Rhapsody: Fishing Village</i> , 1952	275
68. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Calligraphy</i> , 1952	276
69. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Untitled</i> , 1952	277
70. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Abstract Calligraphy</i> , 1952	278
71. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Abstract Calligraphy</i> , 1952	279
72. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Great Chorus</i> , 1952	280
73. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Environment</i> , 1953	281
74. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>The Harmonious</i> , 1953	282
75. Hakuin, <i>Ensō</i> , c.1760	283
76. Hasegawa Saburō, <i>Nature</i> , 1953	284

## INTRODUCTION

This project began after I read two momentous addresses from the early 1950s, “Lecture on Something” and “Lecture on Nothing,” by the composer John Cage.<sup>1</sup> Cage delivered these two lectures to an audience of visual artists at the Eighth Street Artists Club, and he infused the talks with associations to Zen Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> His comments had applicability to artistic creation, whether making music or visual art. He emphasized aspects of the idea of emptiness, remarking in “Lecture on Nothing” that, “[this lecture] is like an empty glass into which at any moment anything may be poured.”<sup>3</sup>

“It is not irritating to be where one is,” Cage told his audience; “it is only irritating to think one would like to be somewhere else.”<sup>4</sup> For Cage, ‘being where one is’ represented a model of experience based on Asian philosophies, an alternative to

---

<sup>1</sup> John Cage (b. Los Angeles, 1912; d. New York, 1992) was one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s most important avant-garde composers; he was influential not only as a composer but also as a thinker, profoundly influencing artists who worked in other media in addition to music. Cage’s “Lecture on Something” was delivered c. January, 1950. Cage’s, “Lecture on Nothing” took place in February 9, 1951. It is possible to conclusively date “Lecture on Nothing” due to a dated announcement card in the Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art, Emory University General Libraries, Atlanta, Georgia. The date of this lecture is commonly set in Cage scholarship as c. 1949, due to Cage’s incorrect recollection in *Silence* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 109.

<sup>2</sup> *Zen* is the Japanese pronunciation of *Ch’an*, which is the Chinese pronunciation of *dhyana*, the Sanskrit word for meditation.

<sup>3</sup> John Cage, “Lecture on Nothing,” reprinted in *Silence* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 110.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

traditional European modes of thought informed by Judeo-Christian religions.<sup>5</sup> In Christianity especially, the faithful strive to reach heaven, a place better than and beyond the earthly realm. However, Zen Buddhist practitioners train to find awareness in the everyday, mundane world by concentrating fully on whatever activity is at hand; this close attention to commonplace tasks “aids in the stripping away of illusions, centering on detachment [from ego] and self control.”<sup>6</sup>

European paradigms of artistic creation were also generally, historically premised on the structure of Judeo-Christian religions, which claim that one omnipotent being, God, created the world and all things in it during a finite period of time. Conventionally, the relationship between European artists and their art objects paralleled God’s relationship to the world, as the artist’s act of creating an art object could be seen to mirror the divine act of earthly creation. Traditionally, the European art object often embodied a concept of ideal form, moreover, which, Cage observed, “became a thing which seemed to elevate the man who made it above those who observed it... and the artist was considered a genius or given a rating.”<sup>7</sup> In this scenario, the observer, measured against the ideal object or all-powerful creator, assumes a lesser position.

---

<sup>5</sup> David Wayne Patterson, in his 1996 dissertation, “Appraising the Catchwords, c.1942-1959: John Cage’s Asian-Derived Rhetoric and the Historical Reference of Black Mountain College,” PhD dissertation, New York, Columbia University, brought methodological rigor to Cage scholarship by parsing out and defining the sources behind Cage’s references to Asian philosophies.

<sup>6</sup> Bonnie Rychlak, *Zen No Zen: Aspects of Noguchi’s Sculptural Vision*, (New York: The Isamu Noguchi Foundation, Inc., 2002), 23.

<sup>7</sup> John Cage, “Lecture on Something,” reprinted in *Silence* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 129.

In “Lecture on Something” and “Lecture on Nothing,” Cage reviewed the idea that the product of Western artistic creation --historically constituted as an elevated object representing a standard of perfection-- typically exposed a binarism between the sacred and the secular. He explained that when we see the beautiful, profound object, the masterpiece, “we feel better, and when we are away from it, we don’t feel so good. Life seems shabby and chaotic, disordered, ugly in contrast.”<sup>8</sup> Cage challenged the validity of this Western model and aligned himself with Asian philosophical models. He asserted that to accept “whatever comes regardless of the consequences is to be unafraid or to be full of that love which comes from a sense of at-one-ness with whatever.”<sup>9</sup>

Cage had learned a concept of “Ultimate Reality” from his study of Indian scholar Ananda Coomaraswamy’s writings, in which all ideas “are known at once in perfection” in “at-one-ness.”<sup>10</sup> Complete participation in the present is one purpose of Buddhist practice; at its most developed level, this awareness has been described as “the immediate expression and actualization of the perfection present in every person at every moment.”<sup>11</sup> As David Wayne Patterson observed, if all things are already known in a state of perfection, the artist cannot create something new or more perfect but can only rediscover the same essential, immutable “Reality” that serves as the basis of all things.<sup>12</sup> Cage believed that artists aligned with a more cosmic and environmental concept of

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>10</sup> Patterson, “Appraising the Catchwords,” 81-82.

<sup>11</sup> Michael S. Diener, ed., *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen* (Boston: Shambhala Publications Inc., 1991), 261.

<sup>12</sup> Patterson, “Appraising the Catchwords,” 81-82.

“Reality,” a concept linked with Asian philosophies from Hinduism to Zen, could be more expansive than artists who produced objects based on an individual perspective, or “those things that come from a profound inner feeling... full of pride and self-glory [asserting] themselves as separate from and finer than anything else on earth.”<sup>13</sup>

The Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist, Bodhidharma, who is known as Daruma in Japanese culture, traveled to China in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Out of his frustration with religious factionalism and what he considered was a loss of true faith in China, Bodhidharma transmitted what he believed to be the true teaching of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama. Shifting focus from the popular customs of building temples and reciting sutras in order to fulfill religious duties, Bodhidharma emphasized that the task of the individual was to awaken to his or her own true nature using the method of seated meditation to find inner discipline and intuitive insight. His meditative version of Mahāyāna Buddhism became known as Ch’an, or Zen, as it is termed in Japan. Bodhidharma is known as the first patriarch of Zen Buddhism.<sup>14</sup>

Ch’an developed in China in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, as the spiritual legacy of the Mahāyāna Buddhism of India met with Chinese Taoism.<sup>15</sup> Its teachings and practices were directed toward self-realization and lead, finally, to complete awakening or enlightenment as it had been experienced by Buddha. During the T’ang period (618-906)

---

<sup>13</sup> Cage, “Lecture on Something,” *Silence*, 130.

<sup>14</sup> Bodhidharma, *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*, translated by Red Pine (New York: North Point Press, 1987); Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History, Volume I: India and China* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Diener, ed., *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, 261.

especially, emphasis was placed on the primary importance of the enlightenment experience over ritual religious practices and intellectual reliance on doctrine.

Of the many schools of Ch'an that developed in China, the two most prominent traditions which reached Japan in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (and are still practiced there) were, respectively, the Lin-chi school (termed Rinzai in Japanese) and the Caodong school (which became Soto in Japan). The Rinzai school stressed methods of reaching enlightenment suddenly, while the Soto school emphasized approaching enlightenment gradually.

Among modern art historians, it has become widely known that certain Abstract Expressionist artists were interested in Asian culture, especially Zen Buddhism and the Zen arts.<sup>16</sup> However, the interest in Japanese art has largely been seen as “a peripheral and exotic foil for the movement,”<sup>17</sup> and Asian philosophies, such as Zen, have also been understood as “[providing] little more than a post-facto justification for changes that were already occurring.”<sup>18</sup> As I will discuss below, in my review of literature on this subject, recent scholarly work concerning Asian-American artists and Japanese-US cultural contact at mid-century has untangled many decades-old myths.

---

<sup>16</sup> See: David J. Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988); Jeffrey Wechsler, ed., *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions: Asian American Artists and Abstraction, 1945-1970* (New Brunswick: Harry N. Abrams, 1997); Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture*, 221.

For art historians looking at the topic of Zen and US art, the typical concerns have been with formal matters and with issues of artistic influence, while more far-reaching aspects of this interchange have been largely overlooked. In fact, the engagement with Zen at mid-century by artists in the US is part of a larger history of the partial assimilation of a worldview. The introduction of Zen to the United States is a relatively recent, and important, historical phenomenon. In the history of Buddhism, numerous cross cultural readaptations have occurred. Thus, Indian Buddhism was absorbed into Chinese culture, resulting in the formation of Ch'an, which was later imported into Japanese society as Zen.

The history of Buddhism in the US has been traced in books such as Rick Field's *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* and Stephen Batchelor's *The Awakening of the West: the Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture*.<sup>19</sup> Fields outlines some of the occurrences and relationships which caused Zen Buddhism to have a "boom" in the US during the 1950s. Where Commodore Matthew Perry's diplomacy caused Japan's opening to the Western world in 1852-1854, there followed another cultural opening. As Christopher Benfey put it:

There was a second, slower, more significant opening, which required actual understanding- of Buddhism, for example, and the traditional arts of judo and the tea ceremony... This sort of opening is as much an internal process as an external one. People talk about the Japanese influence on America; you might call this the "particle theory" of cultural exchange.

---

<sup>19</sup> Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1981, revised 1992). Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: the Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1994).

But what we see in the 150 years of Japanese-American interaction is something more complicated and harder to name.<sup>20</sup>

While my focus is specific to the influence of Zen on New York artists in the early 1950s, there were other areas in the US and abroad where East Asian calligraphy and painting experienced popularity among artists. In Seattle, Washington, the painter Mark Tobey (1890-1976) developed an interest in Zen arts and philosophy. According to Winther-Tamaki, Tobey had his first introduction to Asian brushwork from a Chinese artist named Teng Kuei, whom Tobey met while studying at the University of Washington in 1923.<sup>21</sup> Later, in 1934, on Tobey's first and only trip to East Asia, he rejoined his friend Teng, who by then had returned home to Shanghai.<sup>22</sup> After visiting China, Tobey traveled to a Zen monastery in Kyoto where he practiced meditation and studied Zen painting.<sup>23</sup>

Tobey's interest in Zen reflected a larger interest in the topic in Seattle. In 1936, Nancy Wilson Ross lectured on "Dada and Zen Buddhism" at the Cornish School, a lecture that was attended by John Cage, who was then living in Seattle. Cage, Graves, and Tobey developed an interest in each other's creative processes and philosophical interests, which included Zen, during the 1930s in Seattle.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Benfey, "Tom Cruise, Bob Dylan, Commodore Perry," *The New York Times*, December 6, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>23</sup> See Eliza E. Rathbone, *Mark Tobey: City Paintings* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art) for details on Tobey's career.

<sup>24</sup> See Wulf Herzogenrath and Andreas Kreul, eds., *Sounds of the Inner Eye: John Cage, Mark Tobey and Morris Graves* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002)

Tobey's canonical or mature abstract paintings implemented a distinctive style which came to be known as "white writing." These paintings entailed a dense, illegible, field of calligraphic markings, and the association between Asian writing traditions and his modernist technique was often brought to bear on his work by critics and viewers.<sup>25</sup> Tobey, along with painter Morris Graves (1910-2001), Kenneth Callahan (1905-1986), and Guy Anderson (b.1906), came to be known as the Northwest School of painters. The Willard Gallery in New York exhibited the paintings of Graves in 1942 and Tobey in 1944, and thus New York artists became aware of the work of these Northwest coast artists.

In California, beginning in 1953, many Bay Area artists absorbed ideas related to Buddhism and Asian thought through the radio broadcasts of Alan Watts.<sup>26</sup> As I will detail in Chapter III, in San Francisco, Watts and others had formed what has been termed a "Zen underground" which, by 1955, was extremely influential. In 1954, Watts invited Hasegawa to join the faculty of his American Academy of Asian Studies. Hasegawa taught and lectured throughout the Bay Area, and his influence extended to various artists and writers from 1954 until his death in 1957.

Many Beat-era poets were conspicuously influenced by Buddhism, and some eventually became dedicated practitioners: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen (who became a Buddhist monk and abbot), Joanne Kyger, Diane di Prima, Alan Ginsburg, and Michael

---

for a more detailed discussion of the artistic and biographical connections between these artists.

<sup>25</sup> Winther-Tamaki, "Mark Tobey: A Janus-Faced America," in *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 43-56.

<sup>26</sup> Watts' radio talks on the Berkeley, CA, station KPFA continued for 20 years until his death in 1973.

McClure. In 1954, Jack Kerouac discovered Dwight Goddard's *A Buddhist Bible* in the San Jose Library.<sup>27</sup> A San Francisco poetry reading at the Six Gallery promising "free satori," in 1955, introduced Allen Ginsberg (who read "Howl"), Snyder, McClure, Whalen, and Philip Lamantia; together, these poets marked the beginning of what would become known as the San Francisco Renaissance.<sup>28</sup> Snyder travelled to Japan in 1956 to study Zen Buddhism, and in 1958 Jack Kerouac's novel *Dharma Bums* linked the Beats and the San Francisco Renaissance to Buddhist philosophy.<sup>29</sup> In the summer of 1958, a special "Zen" issue of the *Chicago Review* featured Snyder's essay, "Spring Sessin at Sokoku-ji," Watts' "Beat Zen, Square Zen," Kerouac's "Meditation in the Woods," D.T. Suzuki's translation from the Chinese *Sayings of Rinzai*, and one of Franz Kline's black and white abstractions, thus linking the San Francisco poetry movement with a New York visual artist.<sup>30</sup>

By the '60s many major figures in the Bay Area creative community were inspired by Buddhist ideas, from visual artists Sam Francis (1923-1994) and Jay DeFeo (1929-1989) to theater artist Julian Beck of the Living Theatre and actor Peter Coyote, avant-garde composer Pauline Oliveros, and Jerry Garcia and other members of the Grateful

---

<sup>27</sup> Dwight Goddard, *A Buddhist Bible* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1938). Goddard's text focused on key Zen written works such as the Lankavarata sutra, the Diamond sutra, and the sutra of the Sixth Patriarch.

<sup>28</sup> Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 212.

<sup>29</sup> William S. Kowinski, "Buddha by the Bay: Eastern Religion Meets the West Coast Art Scene," in *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sunday, January 4, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> *Chicago Review*, Summer 1958.

Dead and the Jefferson Airplane.<sup>31</sup> Formal understanding of Zen practice followed the arrival of Zen roshi Shunryu Suzuki in 1960 and his establishment of the San Francisco Zen Center in 1962.

Interest in Zen and the Zen arts, particularly calligraphy, surfaced during the 1950s in Europe as well. In 1950, critic Michel Tapié (1909-1987) coined the term "*Art informel*" (Art Without Form) to apply to a movement, initially encompassing the work of Wols (1913-1951), Jean Fautrier (1898-1964), and Hans Hartung (1904-1989), that began in France around 1945 and flourished through the 1950s. *Art informel*, which later grew to include Georges Mathieu (b.1921), Pierre Soulages (b.1919), Alberto Burri (1915-1995), Jean-Michel Atlan (1913-1960), Alfred Manessier (1911-1993), Antoni Tàpies (b.1923) and others, ran parallel to Abstract Expressionism in that it emphasized gestural abstraction as a function of the expressive impulses of the artist.

Tapié's relationship with Jiro Yoshihara, who founded the Japanese postwar group Gutai in 1954, grew particularly during Tapié's trip to Japan during 1956-1957 and resulted in a fertile period of artistic interchange between European and Japanese artists in the late 1950s.<sup>32</sup> Munroe stated that "Gutai's involvement with the innovation of Japanese traditional arts, specifically Zen calligraphy, informed its philosophical

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, np. Works by the Bay Area artists Sam Francis, William T. Wiley, Jay DeFeo, and Arthur Monroe, calligraphy by Alan Watts and Shunryu Suzuki, and paintings by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, displayed alongside artworks by Joan Miró, Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, and Franz Kline, and prints by John Cage, as well as paintings from the contemporary Berkeley artist Kazuaki Tanahashi, were featured in "Zen and Modern Art: Echoes of Buddhism in Western Paintings and Prints," an exhibition at the University Art Gallery of California State University, Hayward, in January 2003.

<sup>32</sup> See Paul and Esther Jenkins, eds., *Observations of Michael Tapié* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1956) and *Action et Emotion: Peintures des années 50: Informel, Gutai, Cobra*, exh. cat. (Osaka: The National Museum of Art, 1985).

understanding of art as the direct reflection of the liberated self in the temporal here and now.” And in the sense of practicing the effect of artistic immediacy, Gutai evidenced similarities with *art informel* and Abstract Expressionism, namely a derivation in part from Surrealist automatism and the emphasis on painterly gesture.<sup>33</sup> However, Munroe added that where “Tapié was correct to perceive stylistic ‘affinity’ between the Gutai artists and contemporary American and European Abstract Expressionists, he was misled in believing that their similarities were historically coincidental or philosophically equivalent.”<sup>34</sup>

Cage’s presentations are an early marker of Zen as a topic of interest to mid-century artists in New York. Cage performed the “Lecture on Something” and “Lecture on Nothing” for a specific audience of artists at the Club.<sup>35</sup> The Club was the predominant meeting place and the seminal location for discourse amongst progressive artists in New York City during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Discussions begun during the Club lectures were often continued at the nearby Cedar Bar. Among the more well-known frequent attendees were Alfred Lewin Copley (who went by Alcopley),

---

<sup>33</sup> Alexandra Munroe, “With the Suddenness of Creation: Trends of Abstract Painting in Japan and China” in Jeffrey Wechsler, ed., *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions: Asian American Artists and Abstraction, 1945-1970* (New Brunswick: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 34.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>35</sup> For a useful analysis of these lectures, see James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), which remarks regarding the “Lecture on Nothing,” “[It] is the first of [his] lectures to employ a rather unusual format and performance style. This stems from his treatment of the lecture as a piece of music, thus using the same structure and methods as for a musical composition. Written and delivered in such a fashion, a lecture is no longer just a conduit for information, but is both an explanation and concrete demonstration of ideas,” 55.

Herbert Ferber, John Ferren, Robert Goodnough, Adolph Gottlieb, Philip Guston, David Hare, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Ibram Lassaw, Conrad Marca-Relli, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Robert Rauschenberg, Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, Aaron Siskind, and Jack Tworkov. The art dealers Leo Castelli, Charles Egan, Sidney Janis, Samuel Kootz, and Betty Parsons also were members, and critics such as Clement Greenberg, Thomas Hess, Harold Rosenberg, Irving Sandler, and Meyer Shapiro regularly attended, as did the curator Alfred Barr. The Club featured an organized lecture series which amplified certain topics of interest to artists, as well as to composers, poets, and other intellectuals. Irving Sandler felt that “the incessant discussions [there] forced each artist to renew his ideas constantly, to justify his painting to himself by justifying it to his colleagues.”<sup>36</sup>

The interest in Zen grew during the early 1950s and the Club sponsored lectures on the topic presented by visual artists, which I will detail in Chapter One. The artists who presented talks on Zen at the Club included Hasegawa Saburō, Harry Holtzman, John Ferren, Ibram Lassaw, Isamu Noguchi, Ad Reinhardt, and Kanemitsu Matsumi.

Few of the Club lectures have been analyzed in depth or examined in a comprehensive way. Since Club members intentionally did not allow their meetings to be recorded or photographed, scholarship has been hindered by the paucity of documentation of these presentations. Through access to the personal archive of Philip Pavia, the organizer of the Club’s lecture series for the first, and seminal, eight years of its existence, I have been able to assemble a chronology for the lectures on Zen at the

---

<sup>36</sup> Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Harper Collins, 1977), 214.

Club. In addition, Pavia's notes on the lectures provide some insight into their content and reception.<sup>37</sup>

The degree of engagement with Asian art and thought varied enormously from artist to artist. Relative to the canonical standing of such artists as de Kooning, Pollock, and Rothko, the artists with identifiable interests in Asian art have held a lower critical ranking. Among this latter group, the work of Franz Kline (1910-1962), Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), and Mark Tobey (1890-1976) have received the most scholarly treatment, since these artists had the most obvious links to Asian culture.<sup>38</sup> Winther-Tamaki has detailed how, as Kline "deflected widespread assumptions that his bold black and white abstractions were derived from East Asian calligraphy...not coincidentally, he achieved a much higher status in the canon of Abstract Expressionism."<sup>39</sup>

In the present study, I decided to isolate Hasegawa and Lassaw as case studies instead, especially since both continually affirmed their art's association with Zen, and since both are underdiscussed in the literature. Hasegawa and Lassaw each believed that Zen contained "universal" meanings which could bridge different cultural views. My work will bind together the correspondence, writing, and talks of Hasegawa and Lassaw

---

<sup>37</sup> I consulted Pavia's archive from 2003 until the spring of 2004 while it was still in his possession. This archive, now called the Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art, was acquired in 2004 by the Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Emory University General Libraries in Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>38</sup> The primary scholar in this area is Winther-Tamaki. His book, *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years*, contains a chapter entitled "The Japanese Margins of American Abstract Expressionism," with the following sections "Franz Kline: American Graphology" and "Mark Tobey: A Janus-Faced America"; Winther-Tamaki's, "Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese Culture in the Early Postwar Years," Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1992, is an excellent study of Noguchi's involvement with Zen.

<sup>39</sup> Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 19.

with analysis of their art work in an effort to clarify their particular interpretations of Zen within the larger milieu of interest in Asian thought found in Abstract Expressionism.

My first chapter will include a historical overview and contextualization of the Club as a site where mid-century New York artists exchanged ideas. Following this, in the same chapter, I briefly investigate the role of Zen scholar Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki as an influential source of knowledge about Zen and Japanese culture for many US artists, especially due to his lecturing and prolific writings; his presence in New York crystallized interest in Zen at mid-century.

In the second chapter, I will provide an overview of Lassaw's artistic career and analyze how he understood Zen and how he applied Zen concepts in his artwork. I will also include a discussion of how his interest in Zen affected his critical reception. Was association with Asian influence perceived as a liability for Lassaw in the same manner as it allegedly was for Kline and Tobey? I hope that this chapter will contribute to a larger critical reassessment of Lassaw's oeuvre, which is overdue.

Extant scholarship on Lassaw is limited. There are nine exhibition catalogs- the most recent is from the 2002 exhibition at Radford University in Virginia- and two unpublished academic studies dating back to 1977 and 1982.<sup>40</sup> While those dissertations on Lassaw contain the most substantial discussion and critical analysis of his art extant; overall, there is little published information on him.

---

<sup>40</sup> Arthur F. Jones and Denise Lassaw, eds., *Ibram Lassaw: Deep Space and Beyond* (Radford, Virginia: Radford University Art Museum, 2002); Susan Strickland, "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw: Its Relationship to Abstract Expressionism" (University of Delaware, MA thesis, 1977); Nancy Gale Heller, "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw" (Rutgers University, PhD dissertation, 1982).

I have relied heavily on primary source material in this study by consulting Lassaw's archive and studio in East Hampton, New York. His archive contains detailed daybooks from the 1920s through the 1960s, his master list of sculptures from 1929 through the 1980s, personal correspondence, and photographs. Lassaw's wife, Ernestine, kept some daybooks of her own during the 1950s which contain useful supplemental information and dates. Of significant value to Zen scholars are Lassaw's notes from Suzuki's lectures at Columbia from 1953-1957; these represent one of the very few existing sources chronicling Suzuki's topics. The Archives of American Art contains copies of Lassaw's daybooks, which are duplicated from the originals in his archive, and transcripts of interviews with Lassaw and various art critics.

Lassaw reached his best-known sculptural style around 1950. His sculptural treatment of space, created through the use of a particular welding technique and resulting in an all-over network of forms, was squarely situated within an Abstract Expressionist language of form, as epitomized in two dimensions by Pollock's poured paintings. Lassaw brought new content to the all-over mode, especially inasmuch as he explicitly identified his sculptures with a concept of totality derived from his exposure to Zen. Beginning in 1953, Lassaw began to title some of his works using Buddhist terms. I will relate his sculptures --such as *Akasa* of 1954 [Figure 1], whose title refers to the Sanskrit term describing the cosmic spirit that pervades space and serves as a reservoir for beings and non-beings, or *The Awakened One* from 1956-1957 [Figure 2], whose title is a term for the Buddha-- to the Zen idea of the non-hierarchical interconnectedness of all things, an idea that was available to him through the writings and talks of Suzuki and Alan Watts in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Abstract Expressionist, gestural painting styles were often identified with the artist's personality; the artistic gesture is typically viewed as a window into the artist's interior life and the gesture's spontaneity is valued as a marker of the authentic expression of an emotional state. I will discuss how Lassaw associated spontaneity in the artmaking process with Zen-inspired ideas about meditation and cultivating awareness, or a tendency to be absorbed in the present moment. Like Cage, Lassaw affiliated himself with a creative model that shifted away from the artistic "ego" and end product to the process of creating itself.

In the third chapter I will discuss how Zen played an important part in Japanese art historian and painter Hasegawa Saburō's interaction with the Abstract Expressionists. During 1954, Hasegawa traveled to the US, hoping to reconcile aspects of Japanese calligraphy with European modernist abstraction in a new, international form of contemporary Japanese abstract art. Among his public appearances during his year in New York, he participated in panel discussions with Ferren and Lassaw on the topic of Zen at the Club. From Hasegawa's papers in the Archives of American Art and those of his writings which are available in English, as well as some of his essays in Japanese which I was able to have translated, I will provide more information on Hasegawa's underacknowledged role as an agent of postwar Japanese-US cultural exchange. I will determine how he negotiated his role as a contemporary Japanese artist through the art communities in the US, especially by examining the differences in the critical reception of Hasegawa in New York and in San Francisco.

## Review of the Literature

Within the last fifteen years, a literature on contemporary Japanese art has developed in both Japan and the West, centering around the issues of identity and nationalism, especially as Eurocentric claims about modernism have been deflated by postmodern critiques. The increasing interest in the contemporary art of Japan has caused a reevaluation of the history of the Japanese art which developed in the decades after World War II.

Bert Winther-Tamaki, in his 2001 *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years*, reexamined artistic interchanges between Japanese and US artists during the postwar period. His account helped to explain the mechanisms of mid-century artistic nationalism, whereby a single national affiliation was usually assigned to each individual, and in which differences in identity constructions were defended as impermeable boundaries.

In his chapter, "The Japanese Margins of Abstract Expressionism," Winther-Tamaki attempted to "recover a little-acknowledged dimension of [Abstract Expressionism], namely, the subtle role that Japanese otherness played in the assertion and definition of American artistic identity."<sup>41</sup> He addressed also how "a too conspicuous expression of a fascination with East Asian tradition was a liability for European American artists working in the milieu of Abstract Expressionism."<sup>42</sup> In the case of Kline, Winther-Tamaki described how Kline's defensive diminishment of his interest in Japanese calligraphy was consistently repeated by critics well into the 1990s.

---

<sup>41</sup> Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

In a similar vein, I will discuss further instances of visual imagery created out of complex cultural interdependencies in the oeuvres of Hasegawa and Lassaw, paying special attention to the rhetoric and role of postwar Zen.

In 1997, Jeffrey Wechsler edited *Asian Traditions, Modern Expressions: Asian American Artists and Abstraction 1945-1970* in conjunction with an exhibition at the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University.<sup>43</sup> Like Winther-Tamaki, Wechsler focused on how mid-century nationalism discouraged artistic interchange between Japanese and US artists. He observed that “the nationalistic and exclusivist fervor of the most aggressively promotional of writers on Abstract Expressionism poisoned the atmosphere for reasoned discussion of the very significant subject of East/West interaction in modern American art.”<sup>44</sup> He concluded, moreover, that “the debate over the relationship of mid-century US art to East Asian art had been skewed by the obsessive scrutiny of a few famous names of Abstract Expressionism,” and that “such research misses a more relevant arena of inquiry that directly addresses the question: what happens when the Eastern and Western traditions truly met within the context of

---

<sup>43</sup> Jeffrey Wechsler, ed., *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions: Asian American Artists and Abstraction, 1945-1970* (New Brunswick: Harry N. Abrams, 1997). Artists in this exhibition consisted of: Satoru Abe, Don (Dongkuk) Ahn, Leo Amino, Bernice Bing, Louis Pal Chang, Chao Chung-hsiang, Chen Chi, Chinyee, Fay Chong, Chuang Che, Sung-Woo Chun, Isami Doi, Sabro Hasegawa, Hisako Hibi, Paul Horiuchi, Ka-Kwong Hui, Genichiro Inokuma, Ralph Iwamoto, Dale Joe, Diana Kan, Matsumi Kanemitsu, Minoru Kawabata, Byungki Kim, Po (Po-Hyun) Kim, Whanki Kim (Whanki), Sueko M. Kimura, Yien-Koo King, Masatoyo Kishi, Soojai Lee, James Leong, Seong Moy, Emiko Nakano, Win Ng, Minoru Niizuma, Isamu Noguchi, Nong, Tetsuo Ochikubo, Toshio Odate, Yutaka Ohashi, Frank Okada, Kenzo Okada, Arthur Okamura, Sumiye Okoshi, John Pai, Tadashi Sato, Sueo Serisawa, James Hiroshi Suzuki, Toshiko Takaezu, Teiji Takai, Walasse Ting, George Tsutakawa, Ansei Uchima, Toshiko Uchima, C.C. (Chi-Chien) Wang, Wang Ming, Wucius Wong, Noriko Yamamoto.

<sup>44</sup> Wechsler, *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions*, 10-11.

modern painterly abstraction?”<sup>45</sup> In my dissertation, I will attempt to address this question through case studies of the work of Hasegawa and Lassaw, two artists relatively neglected in postwar art history.

Daniel Belgrad has explored the notion of “the spontaneous creative act” in American avant-garde activity- in dance, music, painting, and poetry - as it developed from the late 1940s to the end of the 1950s.<sup>46</sup> For Belgrad, a professor of humanities and American studies, the significance of spontaneity during this period lay in the contrast it provided to the progressive rationalization of life under the sway of corporate liberalism, as he characterized the social order that emerged in the 1950s.

Belgrad mentioned the importance of Zen Buddhism to artists and intellectuals of the postwar period as it related to the topic of spontaneity, but he did not go into great depth on the subject. Most significantly, he wrote that, “the dominant ‘Western tradition’ of which American corporate-liberal culture is an extension has been Eurocentric, asserting the superiority of objective, intellectual, Western civilization,” and he situated Zen within an avant-garde interest in alternative world views. I will expand more specifically on the appeal of Zen as an alternative philosophy in the following chapters.

David J. Clarke’s groundbreaking survey of 1988, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture*, thoroughly established that Zen and other Asian philosophies were important to many North American artists, affecting

---

<sup>45</sup> Wechsler, *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions*, 11. Wechsler also discussed these topics at the 1999 College Art Association conference. Jeffrey Wechsler, “Eastward No! Critical Resistance to Asian Influence on American Art, 1945-1970,” College Art Association Conference, 1999.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 6.

their views of the creative process. Clarke interviewed many of the artists he discussed, including Ibram Lassaw, as well as Carl Andre, Sam Francis, Phillip Guston, Paul Jenkins, Richard Lippold, André Masson, Isamu Noguchi, Gordon Onslow-Ford, Ad Reinhardt, Theodore Stamos, Mark Tobey, and others. I will reexamine Clarke's study with attention to issues of national identity and cultural differences.

Helen Westgeest's 1996, *Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art between East and West*, effectively extends Clarke's study by discussing artists in France, Germany, and Japan who were influenced by Zen; however, Westgeest's account of Zen at mid-century is rudimentary and often ahistorical.<sup>47</sup> I aim to contribute a more thoroughly grounded history of Zen in the 1950s, taking into account current scholarship in the field.

David Patterson's 1996 Columbia University dissertation, *Appraising the Catchwords, c1949-1959: John Cage's Asian Derived Rhetoric*, provided an in-depth analysis of postwar Zen centered on John Cage and East Asian thought.<sup>48</sup> The importance of Patterson's approach is that he demonstrated that the impact of specific texts at specific moments can indeed be documented and assessed. My research indicates that a related approach can be successfully used with Lassaw and Hasegawa, and I will discuss the impact of their exposure to specific sources.

---

<sup>47</sup> Helen Westgeest, *Zen in the fifties: interaction in art between east and west* (Zwolle: Wanders Publishers, 1996).

<sup>48</sup> David Patterson, "Appraising the Catchwords, c.1942-1959: John Cage's Asian-Derived Rhetoric and the Historical Reference of Black Mountain College," PhD dissertation, New York, Columbia University, 1996.

## CHAPTER I: THE CLUB

In this chapter, I will provide a brief overview of the Club's evolution in order to provide a background for the dialogue on Zen which occurred there in the early 1950s.<sup>49</sup>

At the end of the chapter, I will discuss Zen in terms of its specific presentation by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki.

### **Precursors of the Club**

By the late 1940s, New York had become the capital of the international art scene.

A generation of older artists, many of whom had worked on the Works Progress

Administration (WPA) artist's programs, including Willem de Kooning and Arshile

---

<sup>49</sup> I am indebted to the following accounts for information on the formation, history, and character of the Club. Art historian Robert Goldwater briefly summed up the experience of attending the Club from his own recollections in the article, "Everyone Knew What Everyone Else Meant," in *It Is*, No. 3, Autumn 1959; Philip Pavia created the artist's journal, *It Is*, from 1958-1965 and served as its editor, in order to continue discussions formed at the Club. Irving Sandler contributed a detailed account of the Club in his article "How the artists of the New York School found their first audience-themselves," in *Artforum* IV, no. 1 (1965): 27-31. Where Sandler did not attend in the first formative years, he was active in the Club during the mid-1950s, and he personally knew the artists and intellectuals who attended. Sandler continued developing the history of the Club in his essay, "The Community of the New York School," in *The New York School: Painters and Sculptures of the Fifties* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978). Dore Ashton provided another account in *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) with one chapter, "The Eighth-street Club," dedicated to the subject. Ashton emphasized the formation of a community for artists, but she did not go into great detail regarding the participants and subjects discussed. In addition, I relied on individual artist's accounts of their attendance at the Club, namely those of Paul Brach, James Brooks, John Cage, Ibram Lassaw, Philip Pavia, and Hasegawa Saburō which I researched at the Archives of American Art. I reviewed the archive of early Club organizer Philip Pavia for details that related to the topic of Zen. Where Ashton and Sandler emphasize the most well-known artists, I include names of a larger scope of participants. As well, I contribute information and discussion of the series of talks on Zen, which cannot be found in the accounts of Goldwater, Sandler, or Ashton.

Gorky, had by then achieved some recognition and mixed with younger artists who flocked to the Greenwich Village area from cities across the country.

The vibrancy of the Village arts scene could be partially attributed to the presence of avant-garde European artists who had emigrated to the United States in the years preceding and during World War II. By 1942, André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, and Max Ernst, Matta Echaurren, as well as many other noted Surrealists, were living in New York City. Josef Albers and Hans Hoffman, both from Germany, became influential teachers when they came to the US. That European artists had a profound impact on the formation of the New York School is well documented.<sup>50</sup>

Art schools in the downtown, Village area served to foster artistic and intellectual discourse and became important sites for social gathering.<sup>51</sup> Artist Stanley Hayter (1901-1988) moved his influential printmaking workshop, Atelier 17, from Paris to New York during the years 1940 to 1950.<sup>52</sup> Atelier 17 was a fertile meeting place for European emigrés and expatriates such as Marc Chagall, Le Corbusier, Salvador Dali, Matta Echaurren, Max Ernst, André Masson, Joan Miró, Jacques Lipchitz, and Yves Tanguy

---

<sup>50</sup> Stephanie Barron, *Exiles + Emigres: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1997); Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> For an excellent overview of schools, museums, and supporters of abstract art during the 1920s to the 1940s, see Susan Larsen, "The Quest for an American Tradition, 1927-1944," in *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America: 1927-1944*, John Lane and Susan Larsen, eds. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1983), 15-44.

<sup>52</sup> From 1940-1945, Atelier 17 was located at The New School for Social Research on West 12<sup>th</sup> Street and from 1945 to 1950, it operated independently in Greenwich Village.

and New York School artists such as William Baziotés, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and David Smith.

In 1934, Hans Hofmann began a school in New York City with summer sessions in Provincetown. From 1938 to 1958 his school, attended by certain New York School artists, most notably Lee Krasner, was located at 52 West 8<sup>th</sup> Street. Nearby, The New School for Social Research on West 12<sup>th</sup> Street provided a home to modern painting, dance, and the arts in general. Renowned early teachers included Martha Graham in dance, Aaron Copland in music, José Clemente Orozco and Stuart Davis in painting, and Frank Lloyd Wright in architecture. The Whitney Museum of American Art, opened in 1931, was located within the downtown art nexus at 8 West 8<sup>th</sup> Street, and this museum focused on displaying American art.

As well, informal meeting places helped artists exchange ideas and provide mutual support. Foreign artists gathered at such places as the San Remo Café on the corner of Macdougall and Bleecker Streets and the Volpe Café, in the tradition of the café culture of Parisian artists. In 1945, the artists such as Aristodimos Kaldis and Landes Lewitin gathered at the Waldorf Cafeteria, a coffee shop located at 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The Waldorf was centrally located one block from Hans Hofmann's studio school, nearby Washington Square Park, the Whitney Museum, and many artists' lofts and studios.

Of the Waldorf group, Kaldis and Lewitin, along with artists including Lassaw, Philip Pavia, Jack Tworkov, and Esteban Vicente, formed the core of a group which met almost every night of the week to socialize and discuss art. Pavia recalled that, "It is hard to describe, but there was a real hunger to talk to each other. We all sought each other's

company, and it was practically a daily routine.”<sup>53</sup> Arshile Gorky, John Graham, and Hans Hofmann attended frequently, and other regulars included Chaim Gross, Frederick Kiesler, Franz Kline, Isamu Noguchi, and Jackson Pollock. By the fall of 1948, many of these artists began to talk of creating a more official type of meeting place; these discussions helped lead to the formation of the Club.

The Club was similar in some respects to the Subjects of the Artists group, a small cooperative school for artists founded in the fall of 1948 by William Baziotes, David Hare, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still, with later involvement by Barnett Newman, that aimed to explore “what modern artists paint about as well as how they paint.”<sup>54</sup> These artists started a public Friday night lecture series to foster understanding of contemporary art with a wider audience.

In May 1949, the Subjects of the Artists school disbanded and in the following fall some New York University School of Art Education professors privately took over the space. They renamed the school Studio 35 (after the address at 35 East Eighth Street) and continued the tradition of the Friday evening lectures until April 1950. The vitality and draw of the lecture series was later noted:

In the interests of introducing the students to as wide an experience as possible, other advanced artists, one by one, were invited to speak to the students on Friday evenings. The Friday evenings were open to the general public, and quickly became a physical place for everyone interested in advanced art in the United States to meet; the audience

---

<sup>53</sup> Philip Pavia, *New York Artist's Equity Association, 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Awards Dinner brochure*, 2003, 17.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Motherwell in *Modern Artists in America* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1950).

averaged about 150 persons, all that the loft on Eighth Street that housed the school could hold.<sup>55</sup>

The Club is sometimes confused with the Subjects of the Artists school and Studio 35 as they happened in the same general time period and location (35 and 39 East Eighth Street, respectively) and had similar organizing structures. Some overlapping of attendance at these artists' groups took place, and many of the artists who organized the Club either spoke at or attended the Friday night lectures at Studio 35.<sup>56</sup>

### **Brief History of the Club**

In his article, "Everyone Knew What Everyone Else Meant," historian and critic Robert Goldwater wrote that, "a good deal of the social history of American painting during the 'fifties belongs to 'the Club'."<sup>57</sup> Sandler asserted that "through the 1950s [the Club] remained the focal point of Abstract Expressionist activities...[it was] the core of a subculture."<sup>58</sup> The Club represented an integral site for the forming and exploration of artists' identity and practice.

The Club was founded in the fall of 1949 out of a need for a private club specifically for artists. Twelve artists, including Giorgio Cavallon, Willem de Kooning, Ibram Lassaw, Landis Lewitin, Conrad Marca-Relli, Philip Pavia, Milton Resnick, and

---

<sup>55</sup> Robert Goodnough, ed., "Artists' Sessions at Studio 35 (1950)," in *Modern Artists in America* (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, Inc., 1950), 314.

<sup>56</sup> Sandler, "The Club: How the artists of The New York School found their first audience- themselves," *Artforum*, IV: 1, 1965, 27.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Goldwater, "Everyone Knew What Everyone Else Meant," in *It Is*, No. 3, Autumn 1959.

<sup>58</sup> Irving Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 214.

Joop Sanders, decided to organize an official club, rather than continue meeting at local coffee shops. The initial organizational meeting was held at Lassaw's studio.<sup>59</sup> Although it served as a social gathering place, in a similar way as did Studio 35, the Club was exclusive to its members. Sandler wrote that these artists were "reacting against the hostile public at large, [and they] met at the Club to seek out their own kind and to create their own audience, mostly of fellow artists."<sup>60</sup>

The founding members soon rented a loft at 39 East Eighth Street, in the heart of Greenwich Village, where most of the artists lived, as their official meeting place. From its beginning in 1949, the Club was informally organized, and there is little documentation on the early events and meetings. The meetings were organized verbally as many of the artists lived near the Club on Tenth Street and saw each other every day.

The Club's membership increased in less than a year from between eighteen to twenty original members to over eighty.<sup>61</sup> Early members of the Club included Lewin Alcopely, Giorgio Cavallon, Charles Egan, Peter Grippe, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Ibram Lassaw, Landes Lewitin, Conrad Marca-Relli, Philip Pavia, Milton Resnick, Ad Reinhardt, James Rosati, Ludwig Sander, Joop Sanders, Aaron Ben-

---

<sup>59</sup> Philip Pavia recalled that the Club was formed in the fall of 1948 a few months after Arshile Gorky's death on July 21, 1948. In his notes, dated 1948, he wrote: "I returned from Paris September 1948. Gorky was given an homage at new Club." Irving Sandler dates the formation of the Club as occurring in the fall of 1949 (*Triumph of American Painting*, 214). Ibram Lassaw recalled that 1949 "was the first year of the Club" in an interview with Irving Sandler on August 26, 1969 (Archives of American Art).

<sup>60</sup> Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties*, 214

<sup>61</sup> There is some disagreement over the exact names and numbers of charter members. Pavia holds that there were 18 charter members, with 12 voting members.

Schmuel, and Jack Tworokov. The majority of the artists were in their mid-thirties and had lived and worked in New York for at least a decade.

While the Club had no official director –it was intended to be a group effort- from 1948 to 1955, the lecture series and general Club matters (such as collecting dues) were organized by sculptor Philip Pavia. Pavia's dedication to maintaining the Club provided the organizational drive which kept such a large and diverse group together. Although the Club continued through the spring of 1962, my dissertation will primarily focus on the years 1952 to 1955, when the topic of Zen was at its height among artists.

In 1950, members of the Club established a schedule such that they met on Wednesday nights to handle business matters and to plan for the more open meetings on Friday nights. Fridays were reserved for a formal lecture series, followed by dancing and festivities, for club members and invited guests. Pavia recalled that, "Wednesday nights we used to have members only, sort of a dress rehearsal for Friday... The panel discussions were held on Friday nights when the members had special guests."<sup>62</sup> John Ferren's wife, Rae, described the panels as "very structured, I recall, with the panel first, followed by partying. After the panel talk there were comments from the audience. Then the hat was passed for a contribution towards drinks, and the dancing began."<sup>63</sup> Beginning in 1950, members were informed of the meeting dates and of speakers and their topics through weekly mailed postcard announcements. I will expand on the lecture series topics later in this chapter.

---

<sup>62</sup> Pavia, NYAE brochure, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Rae Ferren, NYAE brochure, 46.

The early period of the Club, from 1949 to 1950, marked a span of initial energetic activity. The attendees were drawn together by their mutual identity as artists.

Founding member and painter, Jack Tworkov, spoke of the Club as nothing less than:

a phenomenon... There was the prospect that the Club would be regarded either as bohemian or as a self-aggrandizing clique. But now I'm consciously happy when I'm there. I enjoy the talk, the enthusiasm, the laughter, the dancing after the discussion. There is a strong sense of identification.<sup>64</sup>

Sandler wrote that:

of all The Subjects [sic] discussed, the one that recurred most often and that created the hottest controversy was the problem of community, of defining shared ideas, interests and inclinations.<sup>65</sup>

Because of the varying opinions regarding the purpose of artmaking, members refused to create any official rules or manifestos at the Club.<sup>66</sup>

While Club members did not agree on a theoretical program, they did share an interest in gaining exposure for their art. The art dealers, Leo Castelli, Charles Egan, Sidney Janis, Samuel Kootz, and Betty Parsons, were frequently present at the Club.

Egan hosted both Willem de Kooning's and Franz Kline's first solo exhibitions, in 1948

---

<sup>64</sup> Jack Tworkov in *It Is*, no. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Sandler, "The Club: How the artists of The New York School found their first audience- themselves," 30.

<sup>66</sup> As opposed to early twentieth century European avant-garde groups, this was an ideologically loose group and not an organization with fixed common political associations. Abstract Expressionist scholar, Ann Gibson, wrote that "a good deal of reticence of the New York School -the reluctance of these artists to subscribe to a definable program- stemmed from what they saw as a desperately narrowed range of options for art." In writing about artist's periodicals of this period, Gibson pointed out that the magazines were characterized by a lack of an official program, and that "the desire to have no preordained direction, like the premise of having no theory, was actually a considered position." Ann Eden Gibson, *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 7.

and 1950, respectively. Parsons presented Barnett Newman's first solo show in 1950. Those artists who were struggling for recognition were encouraged that some of their colleagues were gaining exposure for their art in gallery exhibitions. Painter James Brooks stated that:

We all liked to go to the shows and were glad when any exhibitions did occur of our work. We were anxious enough to show and we got galleries when we could. But we didn't expect sales and we didn't expect to be liked except by our fellow artists who shared our viewpoint.<sup>67</sup>

The closest that the Club came to having a group show was *The Ninth Street Show*, from May 21 through June 10, 1951, at 60 East 9<sup>th</sup> Street. Although member Ludwig Sander explained that "the Club... had a policy against manifestoes, exhibitions, and so forth," the artists felt that, at this moment, a group showing was necessary.<sup>68</sup> Many New York artists were discontented with the juried 1950 *American Painting Today* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for being, as Gottlieb stated, "hostile to modern art."<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Interview with James Brooks conducted by Dorothy Seckler, June 10 and 12, 1965, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 30.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Ludwig Sander conducted by Paul Cummings, February 4-12, 1969, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 61.

<sup>69</sup> Irving Sandler, "The Club," in *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*, David and Cecile Shapiro, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 52. In 1950, twenty-eight of the most prominent artists in the United States, including Ibram Lassaw, signed an open letter to Roland L. Redmond, president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, protesting the juried exhibition. The letter accused director Francis Henry Taylor and curator Robert Beverly of loading the jury with critics hostile to Abstract Expressionism. *Life* magazine photographer, Nina Leen brought fourteen of the signatories together for a photograph that was dubbed *The Irascibles*.

Conceived in protest against the Metropolitan's show and organized by dealer Leo Castelli, *The Ninth Street Show* represented the work of sixty-one artists, most of them affiliated with the Club, including Helen Frankenthaler, Grace Hartigan, Hofmann, Kline, de Kooning, Krasner, Joan Mitchell, Motherwell, Pollock, and Reinhardt. Sandler wrote that "the 9<sup>th</sup> Street Show generated a sense of exaltation, a feeling that something important had been achieved in American art."<sup>70</sup> The mere fact that this self-generated exhibition occurred gave the artists a great boost in exposure and confidence. In addition, the critical response to *The Ninth Street Show* helped put the Abstract Expressionists on the map. Calvin Tompkins described the organization and impact of this exhibition:

Most of the artists just came in, argued over space, and hung (or rehung) their own paintings. In the end there were sixty-one works by sixty-one artists, a brave display and the first chance anyone had to see the full extent of the Abstract Expressionist conquest- a great many of the paintings in the show reflected the new, free-swinging, gestural style. Hundreds of people came to the festive opening (a banner had been stretched across Ninth Street), and for some of these it was a revelation. Alfred Barr, whose Museum of Modern Art had paid little attention thus far to Pollock or the others, spent several hours there. When Castelli brought him back to the Club afterward, where a victory celebration was in full swing, they were greeted by a spontaneous burst of applause.<sup>71</sup>

While the artists associated with the Club generally did not have a specific shared aesthetic, some common leanings were present. These artists overall tended to reject hard-edged geometric abstraction, while also refusing social realism and the more literary aspects of surrealism, and they also tended to favor painting and sculpture over craft mediums and photography. By 1958, Museum of Modern Art curator, Alfred Barr, listed shared characteristics of Abstract Expressionist artworks as their large scale, flatness, and

---

<sup>70</sup> Sandler, "The Club: How the artists of The New York School found their first audience- themselves," 31.

<sup>71</sup> Calvin Tompkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1980), 61-62.

abstract content which he described as being “never explicit or obvious even when recognizable forms emerge.”<sup>72</sup>

The success of *The Ninth Street Show* raised awareness of the Club and its activities. The Club then increasingly attracted a diverse group of intellectuals who further enlivened the creative atmosphere.<sup>73</sup> As Sandler explained, the artists “were open to fresh ideas in a way that the milieus for literature, music and dance of the time... were not,” and because of this, “the art world... generated social and intellectual energies that made being in it exciting.”<sup>74</sup> Sandler described some of the intellectuals who were drawn to participate in the Club:

Aside from fellow artists, the most enthusiastic supporters of the New York School were among the avant-gardes in the other arts: for example Edgar Varèse, Stefan Wolpe, Virgil Thompson, John Cage, Morton Feldman, Lucia Dlugoszewski, and David Amram in music; Merce Cunningham, Merle Marsicano, Erik Haekins, and Midi Garth in dance; in literature Frank O’Hara, John Ashberry, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, Barbara Guest, and others who were so close to the artists that they became known as the New York School of poets.<sup>75</sup>

Because of the many creative types attending the Club’s lectures, the intellectual environment was multidisciplinary. Painter and Club member Jack Tworkov commented on the range of subjects:

---

<sup>72</sup> Alfred H. Barr, *The New American Painting: As Shown in Eight European Countries* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), introduction.

<sup>73</sup> Pavia indicated that the success of the exhibition drew many new artists to the Club, but he felt that “after this show [the] Club became too popular.” Philip Pavia, handwritten note, June 8, 1951, Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art, Emory University General Libraries, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>75</sup> Sandler, *The New York School*, 22.

I think that 38 East 8<sup>th</sup> [sic] is [a]... university for an artist. Here we learn not only about all the possible ideas in art, but learn what we need to know about philosophy, physics, mathematics, mythology, religion, sociology, magic.<sup>76</sup>

Photographer Fred McDarrah also described it as an educational venue, recalling the Club “was more than a graduate school.”<sup>77</sup>

As the Club membership grew in the early fifties, the artists fought to maintain its early, intimate atmosphere. In fact, Pavia refused to let *Time* magazine reporters attend Club meetings to report on and photograph the artists in order to preserve the privacy of the Club experience.<sup>78</sup> The artists felt that mainstream awareness of their activities would result in a codification of their dialogue and activities, which they resisted. Alfred Barr, who attended the Friday night Club meetings, stated that, “these artists dislike labels and shun the words ‘movement’ and ‘school’.”<sup>79</sup> Brooks said that the Club, “wasn’t given a name because it was felt that it might develop into anything, as a painting might.”<sup>80</sup> In a 1950 symposium, Willem de Kooning pronounced, “It is disastrous to name ourselves.”<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Tworkov, *It Is*, no. 4.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Fred McDarrah conducted by Paul Cummings, June 15-July 15, 1971, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

<sup>78</sup> Ernestine Lassaw recalled that it was *Life* magazine and not *Time* that wanted access to the Club (Interview with the author, November 29, 2004). Club lectures and meetings were not recorded, although some photographs exist from the later years. Fred McDarrah stated that, “Pavia didn’t want any cameras or any kind of media interference... it would have been literally impossible for somebody to show up with a recording device or with a camera”; interview with Fred McDarrah conducted by Paul Cummings, June 15-July 15, 1971, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

<sup>79</sup> Barr, “The New American Painting,” introduction.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with James Brooks conducted by Dorothy Seckler, June 10 and 12, 1965, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 28.

However, by 1954, the expanded membership, including many younger artists, prompted a Friday night talk entitled, "Has the situation changed?" Painter Paul Brach wrote that:

The scene wasn't all one of artists. Like the Magritte painting, in which cubes and spheres displace the houses in an ordinary town, the others were moving in. The dealers and the collectors who collected artists came in geometric progression. The scene expanded. Pavia's 'The Boys' from the Waldorf Cafeteria were joined by newcomers, and soon there was no center anymore.<sup>82</sup>

With such a large group, the artists' interests began increasingly to diffuse and diverge. Different groups evolved around Norman Mailer, Frank O'Hara, and John Cage, respectively, each affecting the Club's direction.<sup>83</sup>

Another factor began to challenge the initial cohesiveness of the Club, namely the success and attention brought to the careers of artists such as Kline, de Kooning, and Pollock, which caused jealousy and tension on the part of artists who were not experiencing such professional recognition. Brooks remarked that "the commercialism, or the sales rather, that came later separated a good many artists. Some artists sold and some didn't. They didn't like to embarrass each other by talking about their sales... it split up that close group and artists became more and more on their own as the whole

---

<sup>81</sup> Robert Motherwell, "Artists' Sessions at Studio 35 (1950)," in *Modern Artists in America* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1950). In fact, the term "Abstract Expressionism" came into general use only after a series of panel discussions held at the Club in 1952.

<sup>82</sup> Paul Brach postscript to Irving Sandler, "The Club: How the artists of The New York School found their first audience- themselves," 32.

<sup>83</sup> Sandler, "The Community of the New York School," *The New York School*, 29-45.

market opened up.”<sup>84</sup> By 1955, the exploratory and experimental period at the Club had indeed ended. Pavia, in his notebooks, remarked that the “Club [is] changing generations and concerns.”<sup>85</sup>

In the spring of 1955, Pavia relinquished his role as organizer, and the makeup of the Club changed with the influx of many younger artists or “inheritors.” The Club events were organized by John Ferren for a year after that, and then by a committee from 1956 to the organization’s end in the spring of 1962. Brach recalled, “By the late fifties it seemed to me that the good ideas had been talked out and that the private myths that had animated the best paintings had become public myths.”<sup>86</sup>

### **Zen and the Club**

The Friday evening lecture series, noteworthy for its variety and quality, occurred on a weekly basis during the Club’s run from 1950 to 1962. Sandler described the lecture series as “the Club’s major activity” which “attracted critics, historians, curators, dealers, collectors, and avant-garde allies in the other arts, some of whom were admitted into membership.”<sup>87</sup> Sandler wrote that:

The early lectures covered many facets of modern culture. Among the speakers were philosophers William Barrett, Hannah Arendt, and Heinrich Bluecher, composer Edgar Varèse, social critic Paul Goodman, Joseph

---

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Brooks conducted by Seckler, 30.

<sup>85</sup> Pavia, handwritten note, 1952, Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art.

<sup>86</sup> Brach quoted in Sandler, “The Club: How the artists of The New York School found their first audience- themselves,” 32.

<sup>87</sup> Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties*, 215.

Campbell, Father Flynn of Fordham University, and art critic Thomas Hess. There were also parties held in honor of artists such as Alexander Calder, Marino Marini, and Dylan Thomas.<sup>88</sup>

Many philosophical discourses were treated in Club discussions, including Existentialism, Freudianism, Jungianism, Marxism, and Zen Buddhism.

Whereas a small number of texts on Zen in English were available in the prewar period, by the late 1940s and early 1950s, another wave of books appeared including R.H. Blyth's *Zen in English Literature* (1948 English version of a 1942 Japanese text), Suzuki's *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1934, reprinted in 1949), and Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery* (1953).<sup>89</sup> These were the books on Zen which evidently enjoyed the greatest currency among artists.

The 1949 reprinting of Suzuki's *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* featured an introduction by Carl Jung which was especially recognized by artists. Much has been written on the fact that Carl Jung (1875-1961), Freud's former student, was profoundly

---

<sup>88</sup> Sandler, "The Club: How the artists of The New York School found their first audience- themselves," 30.

<sup>89</sup> Christmas Humphreys listed the entirety of works available on Zen in England in the period before Suzuki's publication of the first series of *Essays in Zen Buddhism* in 1927 in his essay, "Dr. D.T. Suzuki and Zen Buddhism in Europe," in Maseo Abe, ed., *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered* (New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1986), 82-83.; these were: Kaiten Nukariya's *The Religion of the Samurai* (1913), a chapter of E.J. Harrison's *The Fighting Spirit of Japan*, "The Zen Cult in Japan" (1913), seven pages in Ananda Coomaraswamy's *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (1916), Arthur Waley's 20 page pamphlet, *Zen Buddhism and Its Relation to Art* (1922), Suzuki's "The Zen Sect of Buddhism" in the *Journal of the Pali Text* (1906), and William Gemmill's translation of the Diamond Sutra (1912). After 1927 came Suzuki's three series of *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (1927, 1933, 1934), *The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk* (1934), *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1934), *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (1935), *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1938), Dwight Goddard's *The Buddha's Golden Path* (1930) and *A Buddhist Bible* (1932), and Alan Watt's *The Spirit of Zen* (1936).

influential on the New York School artists in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>90</sup> Jung willingly considered the phenomenon of art in his theories and encouraged the use of art in the therapeutic process. Especially appealing to artists was Jung's 1933 *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, in which he developed an idea of the "visionary" artist who draws creativity from a primordial experience that cannot be fathomed through words.<sup>91</sup> Jung had also developed a key concept that he termed the "collective unconscious," designating an area of mind that could be accessed by all human beings, and that contained a storehouse of universally held, mental predispositions which he referred to as archetypes. For Jung, artists held a privileged position inasmuch as they served as keepers of the archetypes of the collective unconscious.<sup>92</sup>

Jung's writings were notable as an entry point for many twentieth century artists and intellectuals into Asian religions and philosophies. He was one of the first to draw an explicit link between Eastern traditions of thought and the new field of psychotherapy,

---

<sup>90</sup> Deborah Johnson, "Zen, Jung, and Radical Chic at Midcentury," College Art Association Conference, 1999; Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); David Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988).

<sup>91</sup> Clarke lists the following artists, in *The Influence of Oriental Thought*, as among those interested in Jung's ideas: William Bazotes, Adolph Gottlieb, Morris Graves, Paul Jenkins, Lee Krasner, Ibram Lassaw, Richard Lippold, Stanton Macdonald-Wright, Robert Motherwell, Lee Mullican, Gordon Onslow-Ford, Alfonso Ossorio, Jackson Pollock, Ad Reinhardt, Theodore Roszak, Mark Rothko, and Mark Tobey, 58. Elizabeth Langhorne, in her 1977 University of Pennsylvania PhD dissertation, "A Jungian Interpretation of Jackson Pollock's Art Through 1946," discussed Pollock's Jungian therapy and Jungian influence on Pollock's artwork in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

<sup>92</sup> Carl Jung, "The Stages of Life," *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, W.S. Dell and Cary S. Barnes, eds. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jonavich, 1933).

and in this way he outlined Zen as a philosophy framed by psychology. As Clarke commented:

What Jung claimed to be seeking from the East [introverted and spiritual values]... was not a new metaphysical system to replace Christianity or science, but a way of finding fresh evidence and support for his own view about the centrality of the psyche, and for his belief that the psyche is a kind of inner cosmos, corresponding to the outer world, one which can be systematically explored.<sup>93</sup>

The 1949 edition of Suzuki's *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* followed a decade of exploration of mythmaking on the part of certain New York School artists, especially Gottlieb, Pollock, Newman, and Rothko.<sup>94</sup> As Michael Leja has argued, the work of many of the Abstract Expressionist artists was related to a culture-wide initiative to reimagine the self in the 1940s; these artists, in part, searched for new beginnings and spiritual regeneration. After World War II, the early twentieth century idealism surrounding technology and scientific rationalism waned, and the traditions deriving from the Western Enlightenment appeared to have lost some of their relevance for modern experience. For the Abstract Expressionist artists, appeal of earlier twentieth century movements, especially Dadaism and Surrealism, lay in the rejection of reason and emphasis on irrationality. As these artists attempted to reformulate concepts of individual identity, art became a locus for the exploration of various psychological, philosophical, and spiritual theories.

---

<sup>93</sup> John J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997), 155.

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, Anna C. Chave, "Mythmaking," in *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Jung often described Asian philosophies in psychological terms as a corrective to, what he viewed as, outdated spirituality of the “West.”<sup>95</sup> Jung believed that the spiritual malaise rife in Europe was a result of an overemphasis on the consciousness and a mastery of the physical world, as against the unconscious or inner psychological world, and he sought to find ideas in Asian texts which would emphasize the wholeness of the individual. Jung’s project of comparative study was extended by D.T. Suzuki, who distinguished the “material West” from the “spiritual East.”

In his essay, “Practical Methods of Zen Instruction,” Suzuki, in one of his more doctrinaire stances, stated that:

As I conceive it, Zen is the ultimate fact of all philosophy and religion. Every intellectual effort must culminate in it, or rather must start from it, if it is to bear any practical fruits. Every religious faith must spring from it if it has to prove at all efficiently and livingly workable in our active life. Therefore Zen is not necessarily the fountain of Buddhist thought and life alone; it is very much alive also in Christianity, Mohammedanism, in Taoism, and even in positivistic Confucianism. What makes all these

---

<sup>95</sup> There exists a substantial body of literature on the topic of Jung’s interpretation of Asian thought. J.J. Clarke in his *Oriental Enlightenment: the encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997) and especially in his *Jung and Eastern Thought: A Dialogue with the Orient* (London: Routledge, 1994) articulated that while Jung was sympathetic toward Eastern thought, as he formed his idea of collective unconscious only after exploring Eastern religions, Jung also emphasized that the East was strange and incomprehensible. Luis O. Gomez found that Jung propagated a type of colonialist orientalism; Luis Gomez, “Oriental Wisdom and the Cure of Souls: Jung and the Indian East,” in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, Donald Lopez, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). David J. Clarke, in his 1988 *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture*, 58, believed that when Jung presented Eastern concepts he “tended to ‘water-down’ and Westernize them.” Most of Jung’s writings on Eastern thought can be found in Volume II, *Psychology and Religion: West and East of The Collected Works of Carl Jung* (London: Routledge, 1969).

religions and philosophies vital and inspiring... is due to the presence in them of what I may designate as the Zen element.<sup>96</sup>

In this approach, Zen is treated as the universal experiential core of all religions of all cultures and times, yet Suzuki claimed, at the same time, that Zen was a specific product of Chinese culture that was eventually brought to fruition in the context of Japanese culture, thus emphasizing the primacy of Japanese Zen within the spirituality of “the East.”<sup>97</sup> While such ideas of timeless essences and inherent national characteristics have long since been jettisoned by contemporary scholarship, they held considerable appeal at mid-century in the U.S. I will place Suzuki’s promotion of an essential Zen experience within a discussion of universalism at the end of this dissertation.

David Clarke has traced a trajectory of development for numerous artists and intellectuals from an orientation toward Surrealism, then to Jungianism, and then to Zen. Clarke demonstrated that Surrealism was an important precursor for many artists’ openness to Eastern ideas, since it helped them develop an acceptance of “non-rational” thinking. Jung’s forward to Richard Wilhelm’s translation of the *I Ching* as well as his introduction to Suzuki’s *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, had helped draw attention to newly available texts on Asian thought.<sup>98</sup> Clarke elaborated on the transition from the ideas of Jung to those linked with Zen as follows:

---

<sup>96</sup> Suzuki, “Practical Methods of Zen Instruction,” in *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki*, William Barrett, ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 111.

<sup>97</sup> Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 64.

<sup>98</sup> Richard Wilhelm translation, rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, (New York: Bollingen Foundation, Inc., 1950); D.T. Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1949).

Jung's theories were very important for American artists, especially during the 1940s when Pollock, Rothko, Gottlieb and others created works with a symbolic dimension... However, it was not possible for Jung's theories to provide philosophical justification for an art of pure abstraction... Zen was by contrast, able to do this, since it acknowledged the possibility of 'abstract' experience, that is, experience unmediated by a language of symbols.<sup>99</sup>

A chronology establishing how Zen emerged as a topic of discussion among postwar US artists has not been previously realized or explored. Pavia's archive documents lecturers and their themes on notecards mailed to Club members; 119 cards are extant out of 205 lectures delivered at the Club [See Appendix A: List of Lectures at the Eighth Street Artist's Club related to Zen Buddhism]. From these records, it is possible to trace an arc of interest in Zen, which peaked in 1954, a peak that correlates with evidence of other Zen related events in New York City during the early 1950s.

During 1950, there were three notable lectures at the Club which included discussions of Zen: Cage presented his "Lecture on Something"; John Stephan, artist and editor of the artists' journal *Tiger's Eye*, presented "Painter as Editor," and Reinhardt gave a talk entitled "Detachment and Involvement."

As previously mentioned, Cage's January 1950 presentation, "Lecture on Something," opened an important nexus of references to Asian thought for his audience, based on ideas he had explored during the years of 1942 to 1949. In "Lecture on Something," Cage stated:

---

<sup>99</sup> Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought*, 72.

If any of you are troubled still about Orient and Occident, you can read Eckhart, or Blyth's book on Zen in English literature, or Joe Campbell's books on mythology and philosophy, or the books by Alan Watts.<sup>100</sup>

In 1942, when Cage had moved to New York City with his wife, Xenia, they stayed for several months with Joseph Campbell and his wife, dancer Jean Erdman. Campbell, a mythologist, was steeped in texts by the medieval Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart as well as South Asian texts including writings by Ananda Coomaraswamy.<sup>101</sup> Cage's interest in these sources during the 1940s parallels Campbell's intellectual interests at the time. References to these sources appeared in some of Cage's writings and talks from the 1940s including his 1946, "The East in the West," "A Composer's Confessions" of 1948, "Defense of Satie" of 1948, and "Forerunners of Modern Music" of 1949.<sup>102</sup>

Patterson pointed to the artistic and aesthetic transformation of Cage's work in the early 1950s, exemplified by "Lecture on Something," where Cage's metaphors derived

---

<sup>100</sup> John Cage, "Lecture on Something," in *It Is* (New York, 1959; reprinted in *Silence* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1961), 143 (page citation is to the reprint edition). For Cage's sources see R. H. Blyth, *Zen in English Literature* (1948); Franz Pfeiffer, *Meister Eckhart*, translated by C. De B. Evans (London: Watkins, 1924 and 1931), 2 volumes; Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (London: 1934); Rufus Jones, *The Flowering of Mysticism in the Fourteenth Century* (1939); Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949); and Alan Watts, *The Spirit of Zen* (London: John Murray, 1936). Books on Zen published in England were available in the US at bookstores including Orientalia, Inc. at 11 East 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

<sup>101</sup> David W. Patterson, "Cage and Asia: history and sources," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 44-50.

<sup>102</sup> John Cage, "The East in the West," in *Modern Music* 23:2 (Spring 1946), 111-115; "A Composer's Confessions," address given at the National Inter-Collegiate Arts Conference, Vassar College, February 28, 1948, published in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage: Writer* (New York: Limelight Publications, 1993); "Defense of Satie," address given at the first Satie festival, published in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage* (London: Allen Lane-Penguin, 1971, revised 1991); and "Forerunners of Modern Music," in *The Tiger's Eye* 7(1), March 1949.

from South Asia and medieval Europe, “were all but eclipsed... by the sudden influx of terms, concepts and metaphors drawn from distinctly East Asian sources, and in particular, from Taoism, Buddhism and, in specific instances, Zen.”<sup>103</sup> This transformation was linked to Suzuki’s arrival in New York in the late summer of 1950, hosted by the Union Theological Seminary. Awareness of Suzuki’s presence began to build among artists and intellectuals interested in Asian thought in New York. From September 1950 through February 1951, Suzuki delivered lectures at Princeton, Cornell, Yale, the University of Chicago, and Harvard.<sup>104</sup>

Pavia’s note for Stephan’s July 8<sup>th</sup> talk, “Painter as Editor,” briefly mentioned that he “brought in ideas of orientalism and Zen.” Stephan, along with his wife, Ruth (Walgreen) Stephan, published nine issues of the artist’s journal, *The Tiger’s Eye*, between 1947 and 1949. Ruth Stephan wrote in the “Sublime” issue of *The Tiger’s Eye* in 1948 that:

The sublime issue... was shaped by the idea that sublimity is the visitor of many and not the exclusive guest of the rhetorical thinker or of religiosity. There is the importance, too, of finding new symbols for medieval definitions that have long been outmoded... Of the two rooms of thought, whether sublimity is a *beyondness* signifying man as eternal, or whether it is a *here-ness* denoting a reverence or rare understanding of life, this magazine readily enters into the latter.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Patterson, “Cage and Asia: history and sources,” 50.

<sup>104</sup> Patterson, Chronological Sketch of Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, in, “Appraising the Catchwords, c.1942-1959: John Cage’s Asian-Derived Rhetoric and the Historical Reference of Black Mountain College,” PhD dissertation, New York, Columbia University, 1996.

<sup>105</sup> John Stephan and Ruth Walgreen, eds., *The Tiger’s Eye*, 6, December 1948, 57.

The term “here-ness,” with the Zen inflection of experiencing the “here and now,” indicated that Stephan identified Asian art and philosophy as a source for a new initiative to replace what she considered was overused, Christian-based, European symbolism.

Reinhardt presented a lecture on December 22 entitled “Detachment and Involvement.” Pavia’s note regarding this talk suggested that Reinhardt dealt with Asian philosophy, specifically Zen:

Reinhardt ties his spiritual plane to Zen (His good friend was Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk he would visit in a monastery). His paintings had a spiritual plane and a spiritual content for abstract art. It was a new content to substitute for Jungianism.<sup>106</sup>

Merton and Reinhardt developed a friendship at Columbia University together during the 1930s, while Reinhardt studied art history under Meyer Schapiro from 1931 to 1935. In 1941, after teaching English, Merton decided to become a monk of the Roman Catholic Trappist order, known for its embrace of ascetic discipline, silence, and solitude, although this did not prevent him from writing and achieving renown for, poetry and works of social criticism. During the early 1950s, Merton began a long-term study of Buddhism, focusing on Zen, and he corresponded regularly with Suzuki regarding the similarities and differences between Christianity and Zen.<sup>107</sup> With further research on the relationship between Reinhardt and Merton, Reinhardt’s comprehension of Zen could be better determined.

---

<sup>106</sup> Philip Pavia, handwritten note, 1954, Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1948).

Reinhardt's lecture may have shared some content with his article, "Cycles Through the Chinese Landscape," published in the December 1954 issue of *ARTnews*.<sup>108</sup> That article reviewed Sherman Lee's exhibition of Chinese landscape painting at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Lee, one of a very few specialists developing the field of Asian art history in the US during the 1950s, began his career at the Detroit Institute of Arts as Curator of Eastern Art (1941-1946) and served as the advisor of art collections for the US military (1946-1948).<sup>109</sup> Where Lee advocated understanding Asian art through studying the intentions and culture of its creators, Reinhardt largely approached Asian art using Eurocentric terms and models.

While Reinhardt would later teach a course at Brooklyn College entitled "Arts of Asia" from 1956-1968 which would imply that he had specific knowledge of dates and eras, in discussing Lee's exhibition, he replaced the dated eras of Chinese art with generalized categories such as "Early, Primitive, Archaic," "Late, Realist and Expressionist," and "High, Classic."<sup>110</sup> These categories suggested an evolution of Asian

---

<sup>108</sup> Ad Reinhardt, "Cycles Through the Chinese Landscape," *ARTnews* 58: No 8 (December 1954): 24-27.

<sup>109</sup> The East Asian scholar, Warren Cohen, studied the formation of major collections of Asian art in the US (including Lee's collection at the Cleveland Museum) as an aspect of international power relations, in the sense that that certain collectors and museums acted in the role of the "conqueror" gathering the "spoils" of war. Japanese art works, especially, came strongly onto the US art market in the postwar period as the Japanese needed to pay for reconstruction efforts. One result of newly formed collections was the development of East Asian connoisseurship and scholarship in the US. See Warren I. Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture: A Study in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

<sup>110</sup> Adolph F. Reinhardt (A.B. Columbia College, 1935) taught at Brooklyn College between the years 1948-1968. He originally began at Brooklyn College as an Assistant Professor of Design and eventually became Assistant Professor of Art. The classes he taught included: "Elements of Drawing," "Descriptive Drawing," "Color,"

art that culminated in “High” or “Classic” art in a way comparable to how Reinhardt promoted Abstract Expressionism as the climax of modernism with its painterly grandeur, purity of means, and artistic self-consciousness.

Reinhardt paired the art of Europe and the US with Asian art in a distinctly binary way. He championed the “Early” Chinese art seen in Lee’s exhibition in terms of its heroic anonymity, describing it with the terms “non-existent” and “unseen:”

The Early Chinese painters are legendary “heroes,” often anonymous, often with several names, often with no existing or even ever known works of art. Western museums are so full of stuff that exists that it is refreshing to think about paintings that do not exist. (The old Yin-Yang dualism that includes the existent and non-existent, the seen and the unseen).<sup>111</sup>

He went on to describe what he called the “Classic” Chinese paintings as:

Formless, lightless, spaceless, timeless, a “weightless nothingness” with no explanations, no meanings, nothing to point out or pin down, nothing to know or feel.<sup>112</sup>

Reinhardt’s consideration of these works was extreme in its denial of their cultural and historical contexts and its emptying out of meaning.

Reinhardt related some of this Chinese art to the interests of the New York School artists in this article and may have done so in his lecture at the Club. With attention to the Abstract Expressionist artists’ interest in gestural painting, Reinhardt emphasized the “Late” painters who:

---

“Painting Technique,” “Photography I,” “Photography II,” “Advertising Design I,” “Advertising Design II,” and “Arts of Asia” (between 1956-1968), Brooklyn College Library Archives and Special Collections.

<sup>111</sup> Reinhardt, “Cycles Through the Chinese Landscape,” 26.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 27.

[won] great fame as “brush men.” They are variously labeled Experimentalists, Traditionalists, Eclectics and Eccentrics- “flung ink” specialists, “running-brush” masters and “sudden-inspiration” virtuosos.<sup>113</sup>

In Reinhardt’s presentation, historical Chinese painting was seen as having some inspirational value for contemporary artists, especially with regard to calligraphic painting techniques.

In a later article, “Timeless in Asia” of 1960, Reinhardt continued to expand his theories regarding Asian art.<sup>114</sup> He considered art objects in museums, whether from “the East” or “the West” as existing, “separate in ‘time,’ from [their] original ‘place’ and ‘use’...rid of all [their] meanings but one.”<sup>115</sup> Reinhardt believed that when works were separated from their original context, they could only be admired as “art-for-art’s sake,” that is, as purely formal objects. “The religious object that becomes a work of art as it moves into an art museum loses all its religious meanings,” Reinhardt wrote, “no one, in Asia either, goes to an art museum to worship anything but art.”<sup>116</sup> While it is no longer possible, today, to understand any object as separate or “beyond” historical context (especially art objects removed from an original location and placed in a new situation), Reinhardt likely promoted the understanding of Asian art to the artists at the Club as something that did not require special historical knowledge; the art could be appreciated in a purely formal manner, detached from meaning.

---

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>114</sup> Ad Reinhardt, “Timeless in Asia,” *ARTnews* 58: No 9 (January 1960): 33-35.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 33.

Cage presented his “Lecture on Nothing,” a pair to his earlier “Lecture on Something,” on February 9, 1951, which caused Pavia to note, “Zen coming into the Club.”<sup>117</sup> In “Lecture on Nothing,” Cage explained to his audience that, “This is a composed talk for I am making it just as I make a piece of music.”<sup>118</sup> Cage emphasized instantaneity of form, inspired by Suzuki’s writings on Zen, by presenting seemingly unrelated anecdotes and ideas which contributed to an effect of spontaneously occurring thought. He stated, “Most speeches are full of ideas. This one doesn’t have any. But at any moment an idea may come along.”<sup>119</sup> He emphasized the present tense, self-reference, and the enunciation of structural divisions (including the repetition of statements and a silent pause) to keep his listeners aware of the moment at hand.

Soon after Cage’s “Lecture on Nothing,” Suzuki’s delivered his first three public lectures at Columbia University, on Kegon philosophy and Zen, in March 1951.<sup>120</sup> In April 1951, Suzuki returned to Japan only to revisit New York in the spring of 1952.<sup>121</sup>

On April 27, 1951, Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) presented “Myth and Creative Art” at the Club with an introduction from Leo Castelli.<sup>122</sup> While Campbell did not

---

<sup>117</sup> Philip Pavia, handwritten note, 1951, Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art; “introducing a mythic subject matter similar to Jungianism and Primitivism.”

<sup>118</sup> Cage, “Lecture on Nothing,” in *Silence*, 110.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>120</sup> Kegon is a school of Buddhism introduced in Japan during the 8<sup>th</sup> century that wielded a considerable philosophical influence on Zen.

<sup>121</sup> The only official university record that documents Suzuki’s stay at Columbia is an employment card that logs his affiliation with the school from the spring of 1952 through the spring of 1957.

lecture specifically on Zen, he was perceived as a scholar of “the Orient,” and associated with Cage’s interest in Asian ideas. Campbell had been present at Cage’s “Lecture on Nothing” in 1950.<sup>123</sup> Campbell’s topic of myth and art likely drew on his 1949 *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, a text which explicated myths of various world religions in terms of the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious. Campbell argued in this book that ritual practices, folk traditions, and religions shared certain themes, motifs, and patterns of behavior. His narrative of a hero’s path of adventure through rites of passage to final transfiguration included references to the myths of Native Americans, ancient Greeks, Hindus, Buddhists, Mayans, Norse and Arthurian legends, and the Bible.<sup>124</sup> Hare, Lipton, and Smith had created several sculptures in the 1950s that were directly inspired by Campbell’s concept of the hero.

In a 1958 essay, “The Cultural Setting of Asian Art,” Campbell described the “Orient and the Occident” in binary terms, like Jung had done, as “two worlds... [that] represent the two halves of a single spiritual tradition”; “Eastward of Iran the dominant cultural traditions are fundamentally visionary and metaphysical, whereas those westward are concrete and rational, ethical and theological.”<sup>125</sup> Campbell’s understanding was defined by a perception of lack- what “the Occident” lacked, “the Orient” could provide.

---

<sup>122</sup> Philip Pavia, handwritten note, 1951, Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art.

<sup>123</sup> Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar Painting and Sculpture*, 69-70.

<sup>124</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949).

<sup>125</sup> Joseph Campbell, “The Cultural Setting of Asian Art,” in *College Art Journal* Volume 18: 1, Fall 1958, 28.

In this article, Campbell discussed “the present interest of American artists in Zen philosophy” as “perhaps one of the most significant aspects of the modern movement,” and this conclusion must have been informed by his experience at the Club.<sup>126</sup> He associated the development of abstract art with his belief that “one of the really great contributions of Oriental thought and art to the development and maturity of our present Occidental intellect has been that of its release of our minds from the purely literal reading of our own mythology.”<sup>127</sup>

When Suzuki returned to New York in 1952, he was appointed as a visiting lecturer at Columbia through the Department of Chinese and Japanese (now known as the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures), where he taught a course on Kegon philosophy. From September 1952 through May 1953, Suzuki served as Associate Professor in the Religion department, but no information exists on his courses for the 1952-1953 school year.

On October 3, 1952, composer, ethnomusicologist, and theorist Henry Cowell presented a Club talk entitled “On Music,” with an introduction by John Cage. Cage had previously studied with Cowell at the New School for Social Research from the spring of 1933 to the fall of 1934, and he had served as an assistant and substitute teacher for Cowell at the New School in the 1940s.<sup>128</sup> Cowell is generally acknowledged for stretching and redefining Western notions of melody and rhythm through his examination

---

<sup>126</sup> Campbell, “The Cultural Setting of Asian Art,” 29. Later in the article, Campbell referenced Arthur Waley and Suzuki as providing commentary on Japanese literature and thought, 34.

<sup>127</sup> Campbell, “The Cultural Setting of Asian Art,” 29.

<sup>128</sup> Patterson, *Appraising the Catchwords*, 60.

of the musical structures of folk and non-Western cultures; his courses included the studies of the musical cultures of Africa, Appalachia, China, Japan, Java, North and South India, and Tahiti. While Pavia simply noted, regarding Cowell's lecture, the "entrance of Cage influence and Zen," it is unlikely that Cowell spoke specifically on Zen but probable that he could have discussed Asian music, since his writings focused on musical topics. Most likely, Pavia aligned Cowell with Cage as affiliated with non-Western ideas and practices.<sup>129</sup>

On October 31, 1952, the poet, potter, and Black Mountain faculty member Mary Caroline Richards, introduced by Cage, presented a talk on Artaud at the Club. During the summer of 1952 at the experimental arts school, Black Mountain College, in North Carolina, M. C. Richards spent a seminal period of time with Cage, who was then deeply steeped in Zen texts and ideas, as well as the musician David Tudor.<sup>130</sup> Richards' translation of Artaud's "The Theater and Its Double" during this summer session greatly influenced Cage's evolving concept of music as living theater, especially his multimedia performance of *Black Mountain Piece*, widely regarded as a prototype of the Happenings of the 1960s, with Merce Cunningham dancing, Tudor playing the piano, and Robert Rauschenberg playing a scratchy record against a backdrop of his all-white paintings. Again, Pavia noted merely "Zen," which could indicate that the topic of Zen was raised or that he linked Richards with Cage who he affiliated with Zen. During 1952, Pavia entered the following as a summary note for the year, "new elements invading the Club:

---

<sup>129</sup> Philip Pavia, handwritten note, 1952, Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art.

<sup>130</sup> Tudor performed many of Cage's compositions after 1950.

John Cage and Zen thinking.”<sup>131</sup> Cage, indeed, was linked through friendship with many of the speakers on the topic of Zen, including Stephens, Campbell, Cowell, and Richards, suggesting that he was central to its consideration amongst artists during the early 1950s.

The year 1954 marked the height of the examination of Zen by artists at the Club.

Painter Ludwig Sander recalled how the talks on Zen at the Club were formed:

You know a lot of people figured that if Phillip Pavia organized a panel it was because it was something he wanted to know something about himself. Like when he discovered Zen Buddhism that there was such a thing he had four panels in a row on Zen Buddhism. And there he had his adult education on the subject. So did everybody else.<sup>132</sup>

Sander thus considered that whatever was covered in these panels represented a kind of overall understanding of Zen. Painter James Brooks also recalled this period:

Zen came in pretty strong to the Club and a good many members were very receptive to it because it emphasized the pure confrontation of things rather than intellectualization. I don't think the Club was ever anti-intellectual at all but there was the deep felt need to confront things in a purer way, without bias, or as innocently as could be done.<sup>133</sup>

Hasegawa Saburō was a key figure in the Club's consideration of Zen and delivered the first of the four talks on Zen on February 26, 1954. The talk was listed on the invitations as, “Saburō Hasegawa Group from Japan. Introduction: Franz Kline.” Pavia's notes mention that there was an accompanying article and visuals; “see

---

<sup>131</sup> Philip Pavia, handwritten note, 1952, Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Ludwig Sander conducted by Paul Cummings, February 4-12, 1969, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 41.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with James Brooks conducted by Dorothy Seckler, June 10 and 12, 1965, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 30.

pamphlet from Sabrō,” “talk with slides by Franz Kline.”<sup>134</sup> As I will discuss in Chapter Three, Kline had formed a friendship with Hasegawa, through an introduction by Noguchi, and they had corresponded frequently and exchanged images during the early 1950s. Kline had facilitated an exhibition of Hasegawa’s calligraphy and prints at the New Gallery, New York, in January 1953. Other Club artists, such as Alcopley and de Kooning, had expressed interest in Hasegawa’s work, and Philip Guston remembered attending Hasegawa’s lecture.<sup>135</sup>

While no known notes are extant on Hasegawa’s February 1954 lecture, a general sense of his likely topics of discussion might be inferred from his other talks and writings from 1954, which I will elaborate on in the third chapter.<sup>136</sup> Hasegawa most likely gave visual examples of the work of traditional Zen calligraphers and tried to relate the qualities of their work to techniques associated with modernist abstraction. A fact sheet from the Willard Gallery from this period indicated:

[Hasegawa] has been particularly interested in seeing the West come to know and understand the great works of the Zen Buddhist masters...He established a fruitful new relation between the concept of the controlled accident in Zen and the automatism and action painting of modern Western art.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>134</sup> It is likely that this pamphlet was an English translation of Hasegawa’s article on Franz Kline, in the Japanese magazine *Bokubi*, 1, May 1951.

<sup>135</sup> Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture*, 77.

<sup>136</sup> Hasegawa also participated in the “Zen II” and “Zen III” panel talks on November 19 and December 17, 1954.

<sup>137</sup> “Sabrō Hasegawa,” press release from the Willard Gallery, c.1954. Pavia recalled that Hasegawa was “incredibly well-read;” Philip Pavia, handwritten note, 1954, Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art.

Suzuki's spring lectures at Columbia ran from March through May 1954. During the same period, on March 16, 1954, the Museum of Modern Art hosted a forum on behalf of the American Abstract Artists, which coincided with the AAA annual exhibition. Hasegawa and Kline were both speakers at this event (Hasegawa's work was exhibited at the AAA exhibition; he was the Japanese representative of the Japan Abstract Artists group), and the topic of Zen arose in key points during their presentations.

Dressed in a traditional kimono, Hasegawa opened his talk with by drawing attention to his attire:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I came here this evening in a costume almost perfectly formal... I wear this to show you that our costume has much older abstract elements.<sup>138</sup>

As Winther-Tamaki noted, Hasegawa poignantly referenced the late nineteenth century European interest in abstract elements of Japanese art, especially the appreciation for the flat shapes of ukiyo-e prints, which are commonly regarded as having played a crucial role in the development of European painting towards abstraction. Here, Hasegawa "managed to embody in his person the notion of 'older abstract elements' of Japan."<sup>139</sup>

Additionally, Hasegawa linked the idea of Zen as an important aspect of pre-Meiji Japanese culture. He spent a portion of his talk attempting to point to the nature of abstract art by using Zen stories and anecdotes as illustration:

---

<sup>138</sup> American Abstract Artists, "Abstract Art around the World Today," 1954. Transcript, "Tape-recording of a forum presented by the American Abstract Artists at the Museum of Modern Art, March 16, 1954," in the archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 10.

<sup>139</sup> Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 41.

I brought...two or three books from Japan with me which I like the most. There is one book on Zen. In it there are many foolish poems, stories of famous Zen priests. They sound very foolish...but I like them. One of them I [will] tell you. Once there were two young monks who were in discussion, pointing at a flag in the wind. One of them said, "It is the flag which moves." The other said, "No, it is the wind which makes the flag move." They kept on discussing this. After a while an elder monk came along. He listened to them and said to them, "You are both wrong. It is your heart, your mind which is moving."

Now there was one Japanese Zen monk who liked this story but who couldn't really get the meaning of [it]. He was wondering for seven years. As you know- perhaps you know- Zen monks are very hard laborers. They grow rice and they do everyday labor. This monk was pounding rice [with] a pounder...and at the moment he brought his hands upwards after seven years, he thought he just got the meaning, and he stayed in that pose just like on the sculpture for a long time. I tell this story again [because] perhaps abstract art is something we can really grasp...One day, one moment in our life we can grasp the real meaning. I hope so. And I have been trying to do it for about twenty years. I am very pleased to see that many people are very much interested in Zen here. And I think and I believe that Zen is one of the philosophies which has influenced the development of all Japanese abstract art.<sup>140</sup>

Hasegawa then explained to the audience his mission of fostering a relationship between Western modern art and traditional Japanese art which, as he hoped, would result in an invigorated new form of Japanese art that would take its place alongside other international art movements:

I love the old abstract art of Japan, and I am really trying to do the revival of it...I would like to make the revival of Japanese abstract art brought about in part on an international scale. And to do that I am learning from the Western modern abstract art.<sup>141</sup>

Kline, introduced as "a very good friend of Hasegawa," added his account of trying to understand the meanings of abstract art:

---

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 10-12.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 10-12.

Now coming from a country where you eat shredded wheat and you're supposed to grow up and become successful, it's rather difficult to find out just where art is... The funny papers and museums can't quite take care of it, you know. They can't take care of it. I mean abstract art is wonderful because it... [contains] the experience of the individual... coming to that situation of where one's being [is located], which Zen Buddhism speaks about.<sup>142</sup>

Following this forum and Suzuki's remarkable and well-attended semester of lectures at Columbia, three other talks on Zen at the Club, from November through December of 1954, focused the Club's attention on the subject.

The second lecture on Zen at the Club (which corresponded to "Zen I" of the three panels on Zen), entitled "Hasegawa Zen" was presented by Matsumi "Mike" Kanemitsu on November 5, 1954. Kanemitsu was a US born painter of Japanese descent who had lived in Japan until the age of 18. Jeffrey Wechsler indicated in his essay, "From Asian Traditions to Modern Expressions: Abstract Art by Asian Americans, 1945-1970," that Kanemitsu felt New York critics to be biased against Asian-influenced art, and he eventually moved to California to pursue his art career in a more receptive climate.<sup>143</sup> Pavia defensively felt that Zen had "nothing to do with Abstract Expressionism's new reality, and American pragmatism."<sup>144</sup> However he perceived that, "Zen did relate to spiritualism of Kandinsky, and therefore was attractive to Abstractionists, Ad Reinhardt, Barnett [sic] Newman."

---

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>143</sup> Jeffrey Wechsler, "From Asian Traditions to Modern Expressions: Abstract Art by Asian Americans, 1945-1970," in *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions: Asian-American Artists and Abstraction, 1945-1970* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 75.

<sup>144</sup> Philip Pavia, handwritten note, 1954, Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art.

“Zen II” took place on November 19, 1954. The card for this lecture reads, “Ibram Lassaw is forming a panel on Zen ... Harry Holtzman will moderate.” Pavia noted that Lassaw was “very well read on eastern religion and philosophy, especially on Zen.” (Lassaw, who had been actively attending Suzuki’s lectures, chose to read directly from one of Suzuki’s texts, as I will detail further in Chapter Two).

Five years later, Harry Holtzman contributed an essay to Pavia’s journal, *It Is*, entitled “The Sickness of the Cult of the Hero.”<sup>145</sup> Although written a while after the Club’s Zen panel series, the essay revealed Holtzman’s position to be one critical of the traditional Western artistic role:

Those who would be socially made-over in the heroic image of Michelangelo might reflect on whether they would be willing to strap themselves on their backs to a scaffold for several years to the Glory of God as well as Ego.<sup>146</sup>

Holtzman seemed indirectly to be offering a criticism of Joseph Campbell’s 1949 *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* as he wrote, “we cannot become preliterate; we cannot return to the rituals that imbue us.”<sup>147</sup> Again, Campbell, inspired by Jung, had attempted to uncover archetypes of world mythology, which he believed were at the “essence” of human experience, in order to apply them to modern psychology.

---

<sup>145</sup> Harry Holtzman, “The Sickness of the Cult of the Hero,” in *It Is*, No. 4, Autumn 1959, 32-33.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

Holtzman noted that, “having separated gods and heroes, we are religious-seculars and universal-individuals.”<sup>148</sup> He observed that this new role of earth-bound spirituality contributed to:

the extraordinary resurgence and spread of interest in the most complete secular culture in human evolution, the Buddhist [sic]; and in particular...Mahāyāna and Zen. Here no man can be anything but his own hero. There can be no confusion within the individual in his communion of feeling inseparable from the universe.<sup>149</sup>

Holtzman repeated the words of Bodhidharma in this article in order to emphasize the Zen idea of direct experience; “A special transmission of Enlightenment outside the Scriptures; No dependence upon word or letters; Direct pointing to the soul of man; Seeing into one’s own nature.”<sup>150</sup>

“Zen III,” held on December 17, 1954 was also moderated by Harry Holtzman, and the panelists included John Cage, John Ferren, Ibram Lassaw, and “one or two others.” Ferren, who had lived in San Francisco during the 1920s had previous knowledge of Asian philosophies. According to Susan Larsen, “through the young abstractionist Un Gee and other friends in the Chinese community, Ferren became conversant with Zen Buddhism, the *I Ching*, and Taoism.”<sup>151</sup>

The last lecture on Zen to take place during the early-mid 1950s was Dr. Martha Jaeger’s January 14, 1955 presentation, “Zen and Psychoanalysis,” which was introduced

---

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>151</sup> Susan Larsen, “John Ferren,” in *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America: 1927-1944*, John Lane and Susan Larsen, eds. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1983), 76. In a future study, I would like to examine Ferren’s association with Zen.

by Cage. Jaeger was a colleague of psychologist Eric Fromm (1900-1980). Fromm had attended Suzuki's lectures at Columbia and had become acquainted with him, developing a close interest in Zen.<sup>152</sup> In 1951, Fromm was appointed professor of psychoanalysis at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and he had participated in a one-week workshop on Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis in Mexico City during 1957.

### Zen and Otherness

Clearly, the topic of Zen was discussed with regularity at the Club from 1950 through 1955. What did these artists understand of mid-century Zen and whose concepts of Zen did they learn from?

While ideas of biculturalism or multiethnic and diasporic identity formations are common in contemporary art history, during the postwar period, the concept of unified or singular national identities was largely unquestioned. "East" and "West" were seen as an essentialistic transhistorical binary. Asian civilization was overwhelmingly understood as something distinctly "other," separated from Europe and the US by a cultural, political, and racial chasm.

Winther-Tamaki wrote that the outcome of World War II, with the US military defeat of Japan, "had the effect of riveting these cultures to each other."<sup>153</sup> Wechsler remarked that, "in the postwar years, one might [have expected] American reserve or even distaste for the promotion of Asian culture" due to the political outcome of World War II.<sup>154</sup> Japanese art and philosophy did appeal to many postwar US artists. However,

---

<sup>152</sup> Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, 156.

<sup>153</sup> Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 2.

<sup>154</sup> Wechsler, *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions*, 71.

due to the perceived parochialism, un-originality, and secondariness of US production in the visual arts during the 1930s and early 1940s, many mid-century artists, writers, and critics searched for and promoted a distinctly national “American” art. Postwar artists’ interest in Zen and the Zen arts was potentially threatening to such initiatives.

In the following chapters, I will examine the cross-cultural artistic experiences of Lassaw and Hasegawa in light of the pressures and complexities of nationalist identity constructions.

Critic Clement Greenberg flatly denied that Zen calligraphy had an influence on Abstract Expressionism, as he had developed a concept of identity for these artists rooted in nationalism. In his 1955 essay, “‘American-Type’ Painting,” he wrote that:

[Franz] Kline’s apparent allusions to Chinese or Japanese calligraphy encouraged the cant, already started by Tobey’s case, about a general Oriental influence on “abstract expressionism.” This country’s possession of a Pacific coast offered a handy received idea with which to explain the otherwise puzzling fact that Americans were at last producing a kind of art important enough to be influencing the French, not to mention the Italians, the British and the Germans. Actually, not one of the original “abstract expressionists” -least of all Kline- has felt more than a cursory interest in Oriental art. The sources of their art lie entirely in the West; what resemblances to Oriental modes may be found in it are an effect of convergence at the most, and of accident at the least.<sup>155</sup>

With his particularly New York-centric position, Greenberg considered that any admitted Asian influence would destabilize the lineage of Western art which, as he constructed it, culminated in Abstract Expressionism.

Alfred H. Barr wrote in his 1959 catalog essay for *The New American Painting*, that:

---

<sup>155</sup> Clement Greenberg, “‘American-Type’ Painting,” *Art and Culture*, 1961 (first published 1955; revised 1958), 220.

In recent years, some of the painters have been impressed by the Japanese Zen philosophy with its transcendental humor and its exploration of the self through intuition. Yet, Existentialism and Zen have afforded some encouragement and sanction to the artists, [and] their art itself has been affected only sporadically by these philosophies.<sup>156</sup>

Barr's comment downplayed Japanese Zen, as well as French and German Existentialism as minor foreign influences in order to emphasize the originality and primacy of the "New American" art.

The comments of Greenberg and Barr, dating from 1955 and 1959 respectively, contributed to a developing discursive dynamic in which Asian influence on US artists was identified, then negated, diminished, or subsumed into the construct of an "American" identity. This mechanism continued into the 1960s, as exemplified in Henry J. Seldis' 1965 *Art in America* article on Pacific Coast artists said to have "assimilated Oriental notions in a decidedly American way."<sup>157</sup> Seldis wrote that:

Only in recent generations have a number of outstanding American artists emerged whose work reflects an East-West amalgamation resulting from this age-old transatlantic contact [Guy Anderson, Kenneth Callahan, Morris Graves, Carl Morris, and Mark Tobey]... We are not concerned here with those painters and sculptors who strive to evoke the exotic Far East by trite, stylistic trickery. The artists under discussion have managed to destroy the boundaries between East and West, either by virtue of direct Oriental heredity, or by deep intellectual and intuitive involvement with Eastern philosophies.<sup>158</sup>

By 1965, the idea that a cross-cultural "amalgam" could exist had newly emerged, although Seldis asserted that it could only be approached in the "American way,"

---

<sup>156</sup> Barr, *The New American Painting*, introduction.

<sup>157</sup> Henry J. Seldis, "Exhibition Preview: Pacific Heritage," in *Art in America*, No. 1, 1965, 27.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

suggesting that he was not truly comfortable with a mutual cultural exchange.<sup>159</sup> Seldis added that neither Asian born artists working in the US nor US born, second-generation, Asian artists (“Oriental by birth or ancestry”) would “consider themselves Orientalist in their perceptions and concepts.”<sup>160</sup> He wrote that, while some of the artists “[destroyed] Western dualisms, [their motives were] not strictly based on Oriental premises,” and that “in the Far East it might be regarded as the blending of influences... but, more probably, it is looked upon as a decidedly Western phenomenon.”<sup>161</sup>

Seldis cited Mark Tobey and Carl Morris for evidence that the artists themselves “reject the ‘Orientalist’ label.”<sup>162</sup> He repeated Tobey’s often quoted comment that:

Some critics have accused me of being an Orientalist and of using Oriental models. But this is not so, for I know when in Japan and China- as I struggled with their *sumi* ink and brush in an attempt to understand their

---

<sup>159</sup> The idea of an “East-West amalgamation” in terms of national identity entered a new level of consideration particularly after UCLA historian Yuji Ichioka (1936-2002) coined the term “Asian-American” in 1969. The notion of hybridity has been raised within a substantial body of literature on the topics of orientalism and post-colonialism. Edward Said, in his *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), used the term “orientalism” to argue that the “Orient” (here, the Middle East and not South and East Asia) is a western construct and a system of ideological fictions relating to the colonial domination. Where Said’s study has been critiqued for portraying orientalism as the master narrative of Western imperialism, it marks the beginning of a discourse on the West’s relationship with Eastern thought. Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) dealt with hybridity in postcolonialist discourse, in that he considered the space of marginality in cultural production a liminal one. J.J. Clarke’s *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997) sought to reexamine the incongruities and contrarities of the West with Eastern ideas in order to recover “a richer and often more affirmative orientalism [where] the West... endeavored to integrate Eastern thought into its own intellectual concerns in a manner which, on the face of it, cannot be fully understood in terms of ‘power’ and ‘domination.’” (8)

<sup>160</sup> Seldis, “Exhibition Preview: Pacific Heritage,” 27.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

calligraphy- that I would never be any but the Occidental that I am. But it was there that I got what I call the calligraphic impulse to carry my work on into some new dimensions.<sup>163</sup>

It is telling that Tobey used the word “accused” when speaking of Asian influence; the so-called “Orientalist label” was one of stigma. The blending of philosophies and aesthetics was often cast in terms of destruction, and even when it was recognized that cultural boundaries were being intentionally and purposefully mixed, artists were expected to take sides and affirm either a US or an Asian identity.

Seldis added that “Oregon’s Carl Morris, too, rejects the idea of a formal link between the art of the Orient and his own.”<sup>164</sup> He cited Morris’ comment that the connection between his art and Asian art had to do with geographical landscape:

In the Northwest the similarity in landscape and atmosphere brings us to the same sources in nature that nourished traditional Oriental art. The landscape here is not as closely related to that of the East Coast or to Europe as it is to the coastal ranges of Japan.

Statements such as these enabled Seldis to define the “Eastern” reductively as that which is close to nature and anti-materialistic. He remarked of the Pacific coast artists in his article:

In one form or another, their poetic creations are concentrated on the essence of nature and its mystical, symbolic significance which reveals life in its ever-renewing aspect... Not engulfed by materialism, many of these artists share a pervasive mysticism... not connected with effete and esoteric investigations resulting in “pop,” Zen, or other fashionable dabblings in Eastern thought.

Worth noting here is the linkage of Zen, by this point, as an intellectual fashion.

---

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 28.

New York art critic Dore Ashton noted in her 1972 *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* that, “the perpetual conflict between the need for a refined culture and the need to reject tradition and intellectual assumptions was very marked in the late forties.”<sup>165</sup> Zen arts and philosophy seemingly represented a resolution of this conflict for postwar US artists inasmuch as Zen afforded one kind of example of cultural refinement, yet stood removed from European art. As Winther-Tamaki succinctly expressed it, Japanese art “seemed to break the European monopoly on cultural sophistication and tradition of great antiquity.”<sup>166</sup>

Yet, Ashton wrote that “if [the young artist] looked to Europe, or, as in the case of Mark Tobey, to the Orient for his inspiration, he was in danger of missing the essential sense of rootedness.”<sup>167</sup> Ashton implied that Asian culture was too alien for a US artist to be truly grounded in, and that an artist must remain attached to native sources to produce successful artwork. Her statement reflected her subscription to the critical framework of earlier New York based writers, such as Barr and Greenberg, who downplayed New York School artists’ affiliation with Asian art and thought.

The cultural manifestations of Zen were inevitably foreign to many artists and intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s, as Zen was new to most of them. Also, assimilating Zen ideas caused some insecurities to arise. In his 1949 forward to D.T. Suzuki’s influential book, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, Jung discussed Zen as of great value “for the understanding of the religious transformation process,” but he felt that “its use among

---

<sup>165</sup> Dore Ashton, *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 194.

<sup>166</sup> Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 12.

<sup>167</sup> Ashton, *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning*, 35.

Western people is very improbable.”<sup>168</sup> Jung wrote that “the spiritual conceptions necessary to Zen are missing in the West,” and that if Westerners had a transformational experience with Zen “they will keep silent, not only out of shyness but because they know that any attempt to convey their experiences to others would be hopeless.”<sup>169</sup> Jung concluded that “a direct transmission of Zen to Western conditions is neither commendable nor even possible.”<sup>170</sup> Jung thus diverged from Suzuki’s interfaith convictions which motivated Suzuki to promote Zen as something which could be experienced universally.

Jung’s perceptions of “silence” and “shyness,” relative to Zen, were generally born out in texts by artists, critics, curators, and writers of the mid-century and subsequent periods, which often diminished Zen’s influence. James Brooks admitted that Zen was widely present at the Club, but he was vague about the details of its manifestation:

Zen did take quite a hold, or rather we had a great many talks about it. A great many people were interested in it. I certainly was at the time... I think it affected us all, too, though in our general attitude, whether we thought we accepted it or not.<sup>171</sup>

Brooks, interestingly, concluded, as did Ashton, that “there was a general feeling that we couldn’t quite do it, that we were too Western.”<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> C.G. Jung, “Forward” in *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 24. Originally published: London: Rider and Company, 1949.

<sup>169</sup> Jung, “Forward,” 25.

<sup>170</sup> Jung, “Forward,” 26.

<sup>171</sup> Brooks, interview with Dorothy Seckler, 30.

<sup>172</sup> Brooks, interview with Dorothy Seckler, 30.

John Cage felt compelled, on a number of occasions, to address the issues entailed in Western borrowing of Asian ideas. In "Lecture on Something," he told his audience:

I have found that in discussing these ideas that some people say, "That is all very well, but it won't work for us, for it's Oriental." Actually there is no longer a question of Orient and Occident. All of that is rapidly disappearing.<sup>173</sup>

Addressing a similar theme, Cage wrote in 1958 that:

People are always saying that the East is East and the West is West and you have to keep from mixing them up. When I first began to study Oriental philosophy, I also worried about whether it was mine to study. I don't worry any more about that.<sup>174</sup>

A few years later, Cage commented on the fact that critics "bemoan my interest in Zen":

What I say, I do not wish blamed on Zen, though without my engagement with Zen (attendance at lectures by Alan Watts and D.T. Suzuki, reading the literature) I doubt I would have done what I have done. I am told that Alan Watts has questioned the relation between my work and Zen. I mention this in order to free Zen of any responsibility for my actions. I shall continue making them, however. I often point out that Dada nowadays has in it a space, an emptiness, that it formerly lacked. What nowadays, America mid-twentieth century, is Zen?<sup>175</sup>

Cage's last comment reflects the fact that his understanding of Zen was primarily based on the version taught by Suzuki and Watts, even though Watts evidently did not recognize his teachings in Cage's views.

---

<sup>173</sup> Cage, "Lecture on Something," *Silence*, 143.

<sup>174</sup> John Cage, "Indeterminacy" (1958-9).

<sup>175</sup> John Cage, forward to *Silence* (Hanover: Wesley University Press, 1961), June 1961, xi.

### Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki and Mid-century US Zen

Cage's question, "What nowadays, American mid-twentieth century, is Zen?" was intricately tied to Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (1870-1966) and is a topic that has undergone recent scholarly evaluation. The significance of Suzuki as an interpreter and translator of Zen Buddhism for European and US audiences in the twentieth century has been widely acknowledged, as Suzuki helped introduce and popularize Zen during this period.<sup>176</sup> As Clarke wrote, Suzuki was "the most important interpreter of Zen as far as artists were concerned."<sup>177</sup> Numerous artists seem to have embraced Suzuki's interpretations of Zen wholesale and as apart from the history of Zen or its entailment in Japanese politics. While it is generally understood that mid-century artists were influenced by a form of Zen linked with Suzuki, it is necessary to consider subsequent critical reassessments of Suzuki's role in order to more subtly characterize the philosophy that these artists were absorbing or engaging.<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>176</sup> Suzuki's academic contributions to Western Buddhist scholarship included interpretive books and articles; translations from Chinese, Japanese, Sanskrit, and Pali; and three journals: *Zendo*, *The Eastern Buddhist*, and *The Cultural East*. His entire corpus, beginning in 1896, included nearly ninety titles originally published in Japanese and nearly thirty volumes originally published in English.

<sup>177</sup> Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture*, 79.

<sup>178</sup> Notable studies addressing Suzuki's role in mid-century Zen include Rupert A. Cox, *The Zen Arts: An Anthropological Study of the Culture of Aesthetic Form in Japan* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); John J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997); Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Steven Heine, eds., *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds., *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995); Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A*

In general, many individuals interested in Zen in the US in the early to mid twentieth century viewed Suzuki as an embodiment of unadulterated Japanese Zen thought. However, the Westernization of Japan in the Meiji period (1868-1912) and onward had much to do with the formation of a modernized Zen. Suzuki's entire career, as a translator and intellectual, was shaped by his task of mediating information between Japan, Europe, and the US.

I will touch very briefly on aspects of Suzuki's biography which informed his motivation for introducing Zen thought to the US. Suzuki's family belonged to the Rinzai sect of Zen, and after the death of his father at an early age, he began to consider Zen in order to find answers to existential questioning.<sup>179</sup> Because of the presence of Christian missionaries in Kanazawa, Suzuki's hometown, his consideration of religion involved early explorations of both Christianity and Zen; his first knowledge of Zen was framed in a somewhat comparative way.

From 1892 to 1896, Suzuki was a lay student of Zen, first under *roshi* (master) Kosen Imagita (1817-1893), and then under *roshi* Soen Shaku (1859-1919), of the temple Engakuji, and although in 1896 he experienced *kensho*, the first enlightenment, he never underwent the requisite years of intense monastic study and discipline required to become a Zen *roshi*.<sup>180</sup>

---

*Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Maseo Abe, ed., *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered* (New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1986).

<sup>179</sup> D.T. Suzuki, "Early Memories," in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed. Masao Abe (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 3.

<sup>180</sup> Engakuji is the main temple of the Engakuji School of the Rinzai sect of Zen, located in Kamakura. The term *sensei* means "teacher," *shisoka* means "thinker," and the

Westernization in the post Meiji restoration period affected the traditional lay and monastic practice of Zen. Many Japanese people identified Zen Buddhism with decadent, provincial, old-fashioned culture as it had been closely related to the totalitarian and feudal shogunate. Soen's teacher, Kosen, encouraged and expanded his curriculum beyond traditional Zen studies for his students. Kosen had opened Engakuji to lay students, many of whom were also students at the new Western-style universities founded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Kosen had encouraged Soen to attend Keio University; at this time, it was considered unconventional for a Zen monk to study outside of the monastery system.<sup>181</sup> Zen increasingly became modernized in this exchange between monks and lay practitioners inasmuch as it became contextualized within or relative to the Western

---

term *roshi* designates a Zen master. Traditionally, the title of *roshi* was especially difficult to obtain and was given to a person who had realized the dharma of Buddha through his own direct experience, who was able to live this realization in everyday life, and was capable of leading others to the same experience. To become a duly developed *roshi*, many years of training under a Zen master were required. Suzuki is sometimes criticized for lacking the formal institutional sanction of Zen. While Suzuki experienced *kensho* (literally, "seeing into one's own nature"); he did not experience *satori*. While *kensho* and *satori* have similar meanings and are often used interchangeably, the term *kensho* describes a brief experience of enlightenment, where *satori* implies a deeper experience of awareness. In describing the enlightenment of the Buddha and the patriarchs, it is customary to use the word *satori*. However, the idea of an unbroken chain of awakened *roshi* who serve as enlightened links in chains of "mind-to-mind transmission" stretching back to Bodhidharma and the historical Buddha has been contested; see Christopher Ives, "Ethical Pitfalls in Imperial Zen and Nishida Philosophy," in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, (30). In the same book, Robert Sharf argued that the *roshi* certification had less to do with verification of an enlightenment experience and more to do with years of training to master the elaborate scriptural corpus and ritual procedures necessary to perform the duties of an abbot, (42). Sharf claimed that, "the difference between an authorized master speaking on the 'emptiness of form' and a mere student was not so much a difference in their 'spiritual experience,' or even in their manner of expression, but a difference in the official roles they played within the larger institutional context," (42).

<sup>181</sup> Suzuki, "Early Memories," 8.

rationalist and scientific epistemology taught in the universities. Suzuki scholar Kiyohide Kirita remarked that, “Zen was, for young thinkers at the time, an extraordinarily intellectual religion.”<sup>182</sup>

After Soen took Kosen’s place as the *roshi* of Engakuji, he was invited to attend the World Parliament of Religions, which was held in Chicago as part of the Columbian Exposition of 1893. This marked the first presence of a Zen master in the US, and it was a key event in the religious dialogue between Japan and the US. Soen employed Suzuki, who had previously taught English, as a translator of texts from English into Japanese, texts including his presentation for the World Parliament of Religions.<sup>183</sup>

While Suzuki wanted to remain at Engakuji to pursue Zen studies, his mission, under the directive of Soen, became one of promoting cross-cultural understanding. During his visit to the US, Soen had made a friend in Dr. Paul Carus (1852-1919), a German émigré, who edited *The Monist* and edited for the Open Court Press publishing house in La Salle, Illinois, near Chicago.<sup>184</sup> Carus believed that Christianity, with its emphasis on miracles and faith, was outdated and alien to the development of science. As one who believed that mind and matter are formed from, or reducible to, the same ultimate substance or principle of being, Carus perceived that Buddhism was more likely to “heal the breach that had opened between science and religion.”<sup>185</sup> Soen asked Suzuki

---

<sup>182</sup> Kiyohide Kirita, “Young D.T. Suzuki’s Views on Society, in *The Eastern Buddhist* 29:1, 1996, 113.

<sup>183</sup> Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 112-113.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

to work in the employ of Carus in order to translate Buddhist texts, which he did for the following eleven years from 1897 to 1908.

Suzuki, who soon realized “that Westerners did not understand Buddhism,” began to write texts explaining principles of Buddhism before turning to writing specifically on Zen.<sup>186</sup> He believed that “it is crucial that Japanese... undertake the task of trying to clarify Zen for the West,” and that the Japanese would benefit by “[being] able to view Zen anew, from a different angle;” he added, “we must begin to consider how to interpret Zen in the context of Western thinking and feeling.”<sup>187</sup>

Critical analyses of Suzuki’s scholarship and of twentieth century Zen arose in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which I will briefly mention.<sup>188</sup> One criticism of Suzuki’s teachings was that he presented Zen as an individual interpretation that need not be embodied in practice. Suzuki, when writing for a Western audience in 1961, had deemphasized specific practices associated with Zen, such as meditation, in order to make Zen more accessible:

It is not necessary, the masters sometimes advise, that the students should apply themselves, stiffly sitting cross-legged, to the habit of meditating on the Unattainable. The reason for this is given: the harder one strives to attain an object, the farther it recedes from one, especially when this ‘object’ is not a thing attainable in its relative sense. In fact the object so designated is not an object at all.<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>186</sup> D.T. Suzuki, “An Autobiographical Account,” in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered* ed. Masao Abe (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 21.

<sup>187</sup> Suzuki, “An Autobiographical Account,” 25-26.

<sup>188</sup> See footnote 160.

<sup>189</sup> Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, “Self and the Unattainable,” in *What is Zen?* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 40. Originally written in 1961-1963.

In 1988, Clarke commented on the issue of Suzuki's stance on practice:

In his presentation of Zen [Suzuki] concentrates on giving it a philosophical dimension, and in particular its experiential, non-conceptual approach, giving less attention to ritual and devotional aspects thus detaching it from its cultural context.<sup>190</sup>

By 1994, Richard Sharf, a scholar of Buddhism, was criticizing Suzuki as one of the twentieth century Zen popularizers --along with Nishitani Keiji, Maseo Abe, and Alan Watts-- who lacked the traditional, institutional sanction to voice Zen tenets. Sharf cautioned that one must not "uncritically [accept] their claim that Zen is some sort of nonsectarian spiritual gnosis, for such a claim is self-serving: by insisting that Zen is a way of experiencing the world, rather than a complex form of Buddhist monastic practice, these... intellectuals effectively circumvent the question of their own authority to speak on behalf of Zen."<sup>191</sup> Certainly, the majority of artists who were aware of Suzuki's teachings understood Zen not in reference to a historically specific school of Buddhism but rather to a spiritual knowledge that could be freely adapted to artistic practice or contemporary philosophies.

Suzuki had commented on the difficulties of explaining Zen to a Western audience:

I may sometimes be criticized that I extract... factors from the Zen experience as being amenable to logical or psychological treatment, and make the most of them in one way or another. But I insist that my intention has been far from it, for I have only been trying to make my lay readers, even tentatively or remotely, get acquainted with Zen, probably at

---

<sup>190</sup> Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture*, 79-80.

<sup>191</sup> Sharf, "Whose Zen?: Zen Nationalism Revisited," in *Rude Awakenings*, 43.

the sacrifice of accuracy, which may do much damage to the naked is-ness of Zen.<sup>192</sup>

This statement reveals that Suzuki was aware of the shortcomings entailed in popularizing Zen; however, he was willing to undertake the risk of misrepresentation in order to further any type of understanding of this philosophy. He acknowledged the difficulty of explaining a non-rational way of thinking in terms that were not overtly technical for an audience that was unfamiliar with the basic ideas of Buddhism. However, had Suzuki presented Zen in a language only accessible to a small group of religious scholars, it is unlikely that certain other fields of Western thought, such as psychology and psychotherapy, would have been receptive to his teachings.

In his writings, Suzuki treated Zen as the core element of Japanese culture.<sup>193</sup>

Writing for a Japanese audience during World War II, in 1942, Suzuki promoted Zen as a unique Japanese expression of a universal religious experience. He wrote that:

To the extent the Chinese, Europeans, Americans, or Japanese possess spirituality, they are similar. Following the awakening of spirituality, however, each have their respective differences in the patterns or forms in which the phenomena of...activity manifests itself.<sup>194</sup>

In Suzuki's interpretations of Zen; however, he concentrated primarily on Rinzai Zen, with its emphasis on sudden enlightenment, while barely mentioning Soto Zen, which emphasized the practice of meditation. Masao Abe stated in 1986 that:

---

<sup>192</sup> D.T. Suzuki, "Self and the Unattainable," in *What is Zen?* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 24.

<sup>193</sup> This is especially exemplified in Suzuki's, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959).

<sup>194</sup> Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Nihonteki Reisei*, 1944, translated by Norman Waddell into English as *Japanese Spirituality* (Tokyo: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, 1972), 17.

Suzuki presented only Rinzai Zen, neglecting the important stream of Soto Zen. . . Suzuki characterized Japanese culture as if it has been nourished only by Zen, overlooking other religious influences such as Shingon, Tendai Pure Land, and Shinto; Suzuki's approach was generally subjective, not based on careful historical and textual studies.<sup>195</sup>

Where Abe acknowledged Suzuki's subjective approach to Zen interpretation, Sharf more critically asserted that Suzuki's approach was part of modern Zen's "[severing of] Zen's links to traditional Buddhist soteriological, cosmological, and ethical concerns."<sup>196</sup>

Suzuki's role was complex. He was not a Zen *roshi*, and he was not simply a scholar, but a translator, religious thinker, comparative philosopher, spiritual mentor, and popularizer.<sup>197</sup> British Zen scholar Christmas Humphreys described how, "there are scholars writing of Zen who have never attained a Zen 'experience', in the sense of *satori*; there are masters of Zen who make no attempt to teach outside their monasteries."<sup>198</sup> It is undeniable that Suzuki contributed in part to a more global understanding of Asian philosophies in the twentieth century.<sup>199</sup>

David Patterson, in his 1996 dissertation, "Appraising the Catchwords, c.1942-1959: John Cage's Asian-Derived Rhetoric and the Historical Reference of Black Mountain College," concluded that Cage could not properly be considered a Zen

---

<sup>195</sup> Masao Abe, "The Influence of Suzuki in the West," in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed. Masao Abe (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 112.

<sup>196</sup> Sharf, "Whose Zen?: Zen Nationalism Revisited," 44.

<sup>197</sup> Larry A. Fader, "Contribution to the West," in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed. Masao Abe (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 96.

<sup>198</sup> Christmas Humphreys, "Dr. D.T. Suzuki and Zen Buddhism in Europe," in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed. Masao Abe (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 84.

<sup>199</sup> Sharf, "Whose Zen?: Zen Nationalism Revisited," 42-43.

Buddhist practitioner, but was rather a modernist who used aspects of East Asian philosophy to confirm and augment his Western-based modern approach.<sup>200</sup> Patterson wrote:

The most elemental facet of Cage's contact with Asian culture is the way in which he studied, absorbed, and sifted through a variety of texts during the 1940s and 1950s, extracting with single-minded discrimination only those malleable ideas that could be used metaphorically to illuminate the artistic themes that were always the focus of his writings or reshaped to reinforce the tenets of his own modernist agenda.<sup>201</sup>

Patterson's claim that the influence of Asian culture was subsumed by Cage's modernism serves to set up Cage as a kind of cultural imperialist, effectively denying any intrinsic validity to hybrid and cross-cultural forms.<sup>202</sup> While Cage was not a practicing Buddhist in any orthodox sense, he contended that his study of Zen affected his creative practice. Cage stated that, "without my engagement with Zen I doubt I would have done what I have done."<sup>203</sup> Cage's 1961 comment that, "Dada nowadays has in it a space, an emptiness, that it formerly lacked," implied that Zen did contribute a change to artmaking processes in the US in the 1950s.<sup>204</sup> Cage most likely alluded to the neo-Dada work of Robert Rauschenberg, such as his 1951 *White Paintings*, with their unmarked, imageless, and colorless surfaces.

---

<sup>200</sup> Patterson, "Appraising the Catchwords, 1996.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>202</sup> From this view, Cage's work "4'33" is read as a Duchampian gesture and not a meditation on the generative quality of "nothingness" associated with Zen.

<sup>203</sup> Cage, forward to *Silence*, xi.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, xi.

George J. Leonard, in his 1994 *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*, addressed Cage's interest in silence as an outgrowth of his interest in Zen, which Leonard found to be a subject largely avoided in art historical discourse.<sup>205</sup>

On the subject of Suzuki's role, Leonard pointed out that Suzuki never claimed to be a Zen *roshi* and "never misrepresented himself to anyone"; rather, the view of him as a "demigod" reflected the heightened expectations of European and US audiences brought to him.<sup>206</sup> Leonard painted Suzuki as a religious inventor, claiming that Suzuki created a new, ersatz or synthetic version of Zen, in part out of Western philosophy, rather than merely locating Zen relative to Western philosophical and theological tenets.

Leonard's position differed radically from those of Sharf and Patterson. Where Sharf claimed that Suzuki was removed from the practice of institutionalized, monastic Zen, Leonard pronounced that this need not matter:

Suzuki and Cage... are religious figures, not minor scholars of Asian religion restructuring some "authentic reproduction"... Suzuki's "satori Zen," the Zen of Cage's 4'33", has been far more important to American spiritual life than the purist, but still microscopic, Zen congregations.

In this sense, Leonard's interpretation can be differentiated from Patterson's view of Cage as a modernist rather than a Zen practitioner; Leonard described Cage as a "suffusive" force who transmitted Zen ideas *through* modernism. Leonard wrote:

I credit Cage with completing this new suffusive transmission because it reached America not through temples but through the universities. My evidence is firsthand. In the 1960s, well before there were any Zen temples to attend, Columbia courses in humanities, music, and even visual

---

<sup>205</sup> George J. Leonard *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 147.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

arts immersed us in John Cage. It was through the arts as they were professed in the universities, that Zen became... a 'household word.'<sup>207</sup>

In the same vein, it is still possible for contemporary art historians to discover Zen first through the study of Cage even with the now wide availability of Zen temples and texts.

In contemporary US Buddhism, both sacred texts and monastic practice are available to lay practitioners. As Buddhist scholar James William Coleman remarked in his *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*, there was no point throughout Buddhism's 2,500 year history when the practice remained static.<sup>208</sup>

Or, as Kirita eloquently phrased this:

It took centuries for Buddhism to spread from India to China and centuries more to spread from China to Japan. In the course of its history, Buddhism took on specifically Chinese and specifically Japanese forms. If Buddhism is to spread throughout the Western world, it is obvious that it will take forms quite different from those of Japanese Buddhism.<sup>209</sup>

It is often assumed that mid-century artists had a superficial understanding of Zen. While many or most of them did, inevitably, have a limited or partial awareness of Zen, they still played a part in the construction of lay Zen in the US. As I have delineated with the chronology of lectures on Zen at the Club, which were concurrent with a larger emergence of Zen in New York, the topic was one of interest to many in New York art circles. And, a subset of artists emerged for whom Zen was more than a passing interest. I believe that the willingness on the part of some postwar artists to consider Zen as a philosophy with applicability to their artistic practices played a part in the later, more

---

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>208</sup> James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>209</sup> Kiyohide, "D.T. Suzuki on Society and the State," in *Rude Awakenings*, 68.

historically informed, interest in Zen in the US as well as in the popularization of the term which occurred later in the 1950s.<sup>210</sup>

---

<sup>210</sup> The interest in Asian thought among artists in the 1940s and 1950s marked a unique link between the mythologists –Campbell and Jung- to the Beat poets and writers. As Stephen Batchelor wrote, “today it is hard to grasp that the Europeans and Americans had no coherent conception of Buddhism until 150 years ago.” He added that “not until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did a handful of Europeans [and Americans] engage with the Buddhist traditions as *forms of practice*...and only since the 1960s has that practice established itself in the west in the form of *sangha*- intentional spiritual communities.” Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: the Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1994), xi-xii. It is important to mention, therefore, that New York artists working in the 1940s and 1950s predated the widespread establishment of Buddhist centers in the US, and that their interest was based in intellectual investigation rather than through practice.

## CHAPTER II: IBRAM LASSAW

In this chapter, I will begin by briefly discussing Ibram Lassaw's biography, with emphasis on his philosophical interests from the 1920s through the 1940s, in order to demonstrate how his early interests formed the basis of his later understanding of Zen Buddhism.<sup>211</sup> I will dedicate a section to Lassaw's involvement with Zen, paying special attention to his specific interest in Zen concepts of nature and *tathata* (suchness). At the end of the chapter, I will examine how Lassaw expressed his philosophical interests in visual terms, and I will show how his affiliation with Asian philosophy played a factor in the critical reception of his work.

### **Biography of Ibram Lassaw and Intellectual Premises of his Sculpture**

Ibram Lassaw was born in Alexandria, Egypt, on May 4, 1913 and died December 30, 2003 in Easthampton, NY. He lived for short periods in Marseilles, Naples, Tunis, Malta, the Crimea, and Constantinople before emigrating with his Russian-Jewish family to the United States and settling in Brooklyn, New York in 1921.

At the age of 13, Lassaw started his lifelong sculptural practice. He began his studies at the Brooklyn Children's Museum in 1926 under sculptor Dorothea Denslow; and he attended the Clay Club, which Denslow founded, from 1927 to 1932. During this

---

<sup>211</sup> In her 1982 dissertation, "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw" (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University), Nancy Gale Heller monographically surveyed Lassaw's life and sculptural works. So as not to repeat her thorough biographical work on Lassaw, I aim to highlight aspects of Lassaw's interests and career which frame his interest in Zen Buddhism, a theme in his sculptural practice which has not been examined in depth by previous scholars. While Lassaw's interest in Zen lasted throughout his life, I am confining my study to the initial period of interest which peaked in the mid 1950s.

time as a young sculpture student, Lassaw learned traditional modeling, casting, and carving and studied such conventional subjects as the human form. His small, plaster sculptures with patina, *Dancing Figure*, 1929, and *Torso*, 1931, reflect his expressive, figurative interest in the female nude [Figures 3 and 4].

Lassaw recalled that the motivation for his intellectual investigations, beginning in the late 1920s, was an existential questioning:

I was always involved, and I am still involved to grasp in some way, in some little way, something to do with the nature of reality. What is this all about? What's happening here? What's going on?...What's the world like?<sup>212</sup>

Lassaw's very early art history education was self-propelled. He recalled his creation of a personal art encyclopedia:

I began to read many books on art, making myself familiar with aesthetic theories and art history. In two or three years I assembled a scrap book collection of the art of the world from old art magazines and reproductions of painting and sculpture. The embryo encyclopedia of art consisted of work from the ends of the Earth and from almost all periods and civilizations. The thirty-three volumes of the collection ran from Albrecht to Zuloaga.<sup>213</sup>

A 1926-1927 encounter at the Brooklyn Museum with the "International Exhibition of Modern Art," organized by Katherine Dreier's Société Anonyme, made a profound impression on Lassaw as he experienced contemporary avant-garde work first-

---

<sup>212</sup> Interview with Ibram Lassaw conducted by Dorothy Seckler, November 1-2, 1964, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 18.

<sup>213</sup> Ibram Lassaw, "Perspectives and Reflections of a Sculptor," *Leonardo*, Vol. 1, October 1968, 353. In this autobiographical statement, which is the most comprehensive of any of his artist's statements, Lassaw provided an overview of his sculptural career with a chronological summary of the types of sculptures he produced, and he outlined philosophical influences that affected his artistic development.

hand. Lassaw later recalled that, “there was an exhibition of ‘non-objective’ art at the Brooklyn Museum...with works by Villon, Taeuber-Arp, Kandinsky, etc.; it had a shocking impact upon me, upsetting all my previously held views on art and it seemed to indicate to me the future of art.”<sup>214</sup>

Lassaw’s exposure and proximity to avant-garde art in New York City was integral to his formation as an artist, as it was for many of his contemporaries. Albert Gallatin’s Museum of Living Art, housed in New York University’s library on Washington Square, opened to the public in 1927. Lassaw viewed the organic, Surrealist imagery of Joan Miró (1893-1983), the automatic drawings of André Masson (1896-1987), and Neoplastic works of Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) at the Gallatin Museum, all of which had an influence on Lassaw’s visual vocabulary.

Lassaw took evening sculpture classes at the Beaux Arts Institute of Design in New York from 1931 to 1932. In addition, during the day he attended academic courses at the City College of New York in the same period, but felt that he learned more from his own pursuits. By reading such art magazines as *Cahiers d’Art* in the early 1930s, he discovered articles on and reproductions of European modernists such as Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957), Naum Gabo (1890-1977), Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966), Julio González (1876-1942), Jacques Lipchitz (1891-1973), Miró, Antoine Pevsner (1884-1962), Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), and the Russian Constructivists.

In the late 1920s and during the 1930s, Lassaw “read books on science, astronomy, cosmological theories, the atomic structure of matter, etc., as well as a three-

---

<sup>214</sup> Lassaw, “Perspectives and Reflections,” 352.

volume edition of human anatomy,” all of which offered new models of cosmological and organic space.<sup>215</sup> Alfred North Whitehead’s *Process and Reality*, first published in 1929, added another perspective to Lassaw’s growing interest in understanding the nature of reality.<sup>216</sup> In this series of lectures, Whitehead developed a method of relating elements of the human experience through what he termed a “philosophy of organism.” In a chapter entitled, “Extensive Continuum,” Whitehead created a condensed scheme of cosmological ideas, focusing on the interconnections between time, space, perception, and causality. Lassaw later explained, in 1968, that, “Whitehead and Jung greatly affected my concepts. I began to see reality as a process.”<sup>217</sup>

Lassaw became familiar with the ideas of Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) through his 1934, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*.<sup>218</sup> Coomaraswamy was an early twentieth century exemplar of cross-cultural Asian thought. This was perhaps a result of his mixed heritage; Coomaraswamy’s father was a distinguished Ceylonese statesman and his mother came from a wealthy family, from Kent, England, active in the India trade. Coomaraswamy accepted a curatorial post in 1917 at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, where he formed an extensive collection of Indian art and was one of the first

---

<sup>215</sup> Lassaw, “Perspectives and Reflections,” 352-353. See Appendix C: Ibram Lassaw’s Library of Books on Asian Culture and Philosophy from the 1930s to 1960s – Partial List.

<sup>216</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960). Originally published in 1929.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>218</sup> Ibram Lassaw, “Conversations with Ibram Lassaw at his home,” April 4, 1958, Interviewer unknown, from the Lassaw Archive.

intellectuals to provide scholarship on Indian art history and aesthetics for a Western audience.

In *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, Coomaraswamy attempted to link Indian aesthetics with Western mysticism by emphasizing what he saw as a universal spiritual base of both traditions that existed outside of temporal or cultural differences.

Coomaraswamy explained that in traditional Indian aesthetics, artists did not simply imitate external forms nor create art merely for aesthetic pleasure; the artist created products that were transient manifestations of what he termed “Ultimate Reality.” In Coomaraswamy’s view, art was more a rediscovery of the same essential, immutable “Ultimate Reality” than a result of a specific artist or culture.

It was within *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, that Coomaraswamy referenced St. Thomas Aquinas’ quote that “art imitates nature in its method of operating.” In a 1962 interview, Lassaw repeated this quote, rediscovered through Coomaraswamy, “you know, St. Thomas Aquinas once said ‘Artes imatatur naturam in operatione.’”<sup>219</sup>

As a result of encountering the ideas of Coomaraswamy, Jung, and Whitehead, Lassaw’s understanding of scientific reason as developed in the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on rational space, was undermined. He wrote in the 1930s that:

After the Renaissance in Europe, the great successes of science served to draw the interest of large numbers of creative minds to the scientific method, and away from other types of apprehending reality. There grew the illusion, persisting to this very day, that all of reality can be

---

<sup>219</sup> Interview with Ibram Lassaw conducted by Karlis Otis, December 26, 1962, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

experienced by the way of measurement and classification of phenomena. So much emphasis was placed on ego-consciousness that large areas of experience were ignored.<sup>220</sup>

Like Jung, Lassaw viewed Asian philosophies as in contrast to or as a corrective to scientific reason:

The work of such men as Einstein, Whitehead, Eddington, J. Jeans, Freud, Jung and the influence of seminal philosophies from the East, has helped to show us the crippling inadequacy of the reliance on the scientific method as the one and only source of truth.<sup>221</sup>

During his coursework at City College in New York, from 1931 to 1933, Lassaw had his first exposure to Taoism, a Chinese religion, which emphasized the spiritual aspect of the individual being as a manifestation of a vast, cosmic force. Around this time, Lassaw read the Taoist texts *The Secret of the Golden Flower* and the *Tao Te Ching*.<sup>222</sup> The *Tao Te Ching*, an important Taoist text written by Lao Tzu in the sixth century BC, described the Tao as a nameless, formless, non-being, which represented the totality of natural processes.<sup>223</sup> Lao Tzu's text contains many spatial metaphors concerning empty or negative space, such as his examples of the bowl, whose void in the

---

<sup>220</sup> Ibram Lassaw, c.1930s, undated notes in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>221</sup> Ibram Lassaw, undated notes in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>222</sup> Interview with Ibram Lassaw conducted by Dorothy Seckler, November 1-2, 1964, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Richard Wilhelm, trans. and ed., commentary by C.G. Jung, *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*, 1931.

<sup>223</sup> Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*, Jane English, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1972).

center renders it useful, or the wheel of a cart, whose spokes converge in the hub, but the empty space in the center of the hub helps it attach to the cart.

*The Secret of the Golden Flower* is a Taoist text attributed to the late 8<sup>th</sup>-early 9<sup>th</sup> century patriarch, Lü Yen; it taught meditative techniques to strengthen, rejuvenate, and normalize spiritual energy.<sup>224</sup> This text became famous in Europe and the U.S. when it was translated by Richard Wilhelm in 1929 and published with a commentary by Jung. These two texts familiarized Lassaw with ideas of the interrelationship between spirit and matter and provided him with spatial metaphors unrelated to the Western sculptural tradition, including ideas of formlessness, empty space, and the circulation of energy in space.

Lassaw was not alone in his awareness of Taoist writings, as these texts gained some currency in the circles of Abstract Expressionism. Jackson Pollock's Jungian therapist presented him with *Secrets of the Golden Flower* around 1939-1940, and the artist and theoretician, John Graham, drew Pollock's attention to the book again in 1942.<sup>225</sup> Elizabeth Langhorne has explained that the text detailed energy as a flowing light force which a person could control, and she demonstrated how symbolism drawn from *Secrets of the Golden Flower* appeared in Pollock's paintings during the early 1940s.

Lassaw was interested in the connections between Jungian archetypes and Taoist texts. He wrote that:

---

<sup>224</sup> Wilhelm, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, 4.

<sup>225</sup> Elizabeth Langhorne, "Chinese/Am.Indian,': Learning from the East," College Art Association Conference, 1999.

Jung discovered the existence of the 'anima' as part of the unconscious. This 'anima' is of female gender. In the Chinese *Tao Te Ching*, I found this most interesting parallel:

The Valley Spirit never dies  
 It is named the Mysterious Female  
 And the Doorway of the Mysterious Female  
 Is the base from which Heaven and Earth spring.  
 It is there within us all the while.  
 Draw upon it as you will  
 It never runs dry.<sup>226</sup>

Concepts of the Jungian anima, the innate, creative spirit of Taoism, and the ancient Greek muse were conflated for Lassaw, as he explained that, "I think for me the muse stands for the intuition or instinct, that part of one's self that we do not control."<sup>227</sup>

Also in the early 1930's, Lassaw explored texts which related to methods and materials of industrial production. In 1930, the English publication of Laszlo Moholy Nagy's (1895-1946) 1928 text, *The New Vision*, had a large impact on Lassaw. Moholy-Nagy's illustrated book introduced the Bauhaus education to the general Anglophone reading public, including artists. Moholy-Nagy emphasized the exploration of new, industrial materials with "sincerity of emotion... truth of observation... fantasy and creativeness," as against the "dilettantish and superficial design" that he believed resulted from overthinking the design process.<sup>228</sup> Lassaw's 1933 statement revealed an affinity

---

<sup>226</sup> Lassaw, "Perspectives and Reflections," 351.

<sup>227</sup> Interview with Ibram Lassaw conducted by Dorothy Seckler, November 1-2, 1964, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 17.

<sup>228</sup> Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1947-forth revised edition of 1928 publication), 11.

with Moholy-Nagy's outlook; Lassaw stated that "our baggage of traditional values is a hindrance," and that "in our time most sculptors use materials entirely because of tradition... mainly because they conceive of forms for which one of these ancient materials is entirely satisfactory as a medium."<sup>229</sup>

Lassaw remembered especially being influenced by Moholy-Nagy's "ideas of balance and motion," where Moholy-Nagy advocated dynamic construction based on relationships of transparent materials and moving forms, such as in his 1921 nickel and plastic piece, *Light-prop* [Figure 5], rather than classical, static monolithic sculpture.<sup>230</sup>

Around this time Lassaw read *Shelter*, a magazine edited by architect and designer Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983). Fuller envisioned moveable, adaptable architectural spaces, and he emphasized overhauling traditional building design by applying new techniques, industrial materials, and concepts to what he called "four-dimensional" architecture.<sup>231</sup> Fuller's prototype *Dymaxion House* [Figure 6] demonstrated spatial complexity, with decks enclosed in translucent glass plates surrounding a central "utility" pole. The concept of "open space" architecture contributed to Lassaw's consideration of the effects of transparent materials and a reduction of the boundary between interior and exterior spaces in his sculptural spaces.

Fuller advised, in his 1932 *Shelter* articles on universal architecture, that the critical needs of humanity must be realized in terms of a global system of shared

---

<sup>229</sup> Ibram Lassaw, "The Unemployed Artist's Association," 1933, handwritten notes in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>230</sup> Lassaw, "Perspectives and Reflections," 352.

<sup>231</sup> Buckminster Fuller, "Universal Architecture," three-part article in *Shelter*, February, April, and May 1932.

design.<sup>232</sup> Philosophically, Fuller's goal was utopian; he believed that, with the use of new technology, all people could have an equally high standard of living on an ecologically sustainable basis. His humanitarian vision of "synergy" emphasized the awareness of natural systems, including the life cycle of human beings, encompassed within larger systems of the universe. Fuller stated that:

Everything you've learned in school as "obvious" becomes less and less obvious as you begin to study the universe. For example, there are no solids in the universe. There's not even a suggestion of a solid. There are no absolute continuums. There are no surfaces. There are no straight lines.<sup>233</sup>

Fuller's ideas of holistic interconnectedness, applied through integral and aggregate designs, would factor into Lassaw's sculptural designs, and inform his appreciation of Asian philosophy. Lassaw's understanding of Taoism intersected with his assimilation of Fuller's and Moholy-Nagy's universalizing rhetoric based on global industrialism; these philosophies related to each other in their emphasis on the connectedness of human beings within larger systems.

Lassaw's first abstract work was *Sculpture 1933* [Figure 7].<sup>234</sup> This early plaster, now destroyed, forecast the basis of his later work, including work done in the 1950s, by its implementation of an open composition with linear structural elements in balance with organic shapes. Lassaw modeled his inaugural abstract sculpture from plaster of Paris on top of a wire armature which allowed him to explore open spatial relationships.

---

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> I had the opportunity to view all of Lassaw's sculptures in his collection that remain at his studio in East Hampton. The studio remains intact from Lassaw's working years, complete with his welding area, library, and desk.

After seeing an exhibition of mobile works by Alexander Calder (1898-1976) at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in 1934, Lassaw became encouraged to further articulate space within his works, taking into account the changing viewpoints in Calder's mobile works. Particularly striking to Lassaw was Calder's 1934 motorized sculpture, *Universe* [Figure 8], which combined Calder's interest in movement with a continuing interest in cosmic imagery that was inspired, in part, by Miró's use of sun, moon, and star shapes and the widely publicized 1930 scientific discovery of a ninth planet, Pluto.<sup>235</sup> Joan Marter described that the construction of *Universe* "includes an open sphere, which corresponds to the universe, supporting small wooden balls, which represent the planets."<sup>236</sup> The motor attached to the sculpture activated the spheres which then moved, or orbited, along a curving path within the open sphere.

Although Calder's kinetic art inspired Lassaw, more poignant to him was the application of enfolding and incorporating spatial volume to define abstract forms. *Sculpture 1935* and *Sculpture 1936* [Figures 9 and 10] are both composed with attention to establishing different vantage points for the viewer, and the empty space within and around the solid forms are treated as integral to the sculptural concept. In *Sculpture 1935* and *Sculpture 1936*, Lassaw developed more fluidity in his open compositions with stronger biomorphic imagery than in *Sculpture 1933*.

*Sculpture 1935*, a work measuring three feet in height, was displayed at the American Abstract Artists exhibition in 1937 on a base of about the same height. A smoothly sculpted ovoid shape with an open center frames a ribcage-like extension that

---

<sup>235</sup> Joan Marter, *Alexander Calder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 133.

<sup>236</sup> Marter, *Alexander Calder*, 106.

stretches out from the bottom of the egg shape and curls up at its end. Strung between the ovoid frame and its extension, Lassaw bent a curving wire, which he punctuated with smooth bulbous shapes. The alternations between thinness and thickness in the plaster lend the sculpture a sense of the irregularity or randomness of natural forms, while the ovoid framing mechanism indicated that Lassaw was intent on carefully constructing certain perspectives for the viewer.

*Sculpture 1936*, another plaster and wire work, stands at four feet high apart from its base. Rather than being organized around a singular shape such as the oval in *Sculpture 1935*, this later work features the linear movement of knobby, foliate elements as they curve around a main, structural pole. This work may loosely evoke an animal, in that it rested on its base with “feet” and a head shape topped the neck-like pole. Lassaw eventually gave up plaster as too fragile a medium for open form sculpture.

During the 1930s, Lassaw was actively involved in the most advanced groups of contemporary artists active in New York City. Susan Larsen wrote that “by 1933, Lassaw was one of the pioneers in the creation of nonobjective sculpture among American artists.”<sup>237</sup> Lassaw was a founding member in 1936, and later served as president of the American Abstract Artists, a group of painters and sculptors in New York which formed in order to foster understanding of abstract art through annual

---

<sup>237</sup> Susan Larsen, “Ibram Lassaw,” in *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America: 1927-1944*, John Lane and Susan Larsen, eds. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1983), 182. Larsen details the preliminary meetings of the AAA, of which Lassaw was a primary figure, in her essay, “The Quest for An American Tradition, 1927-1944” in this book.

exhibitions, publications, and lectures [Figures 11, 12].<sup>238</sup> Through the AAA, which was open to artists working in any medium, Lassaw formed friendships with such painters as Burgoyne Diller, John Ferren, and Ad Reinhardt, and he once noted that “not until 1936, when I met David Smith, did I know personally another abstract sculptor.”<sup>239</sup> The “new” abstract art that the AAA promoted had much in common with European modernism, and represented a refusal of the social realism then being promoted as the accepted style for US artists.

In 1936, echoing Moholy-Nagy’s Bauhaus spirit of experimentation, Lassaw began to search for “new materials and new processes in industrial technology” to express concepts of space.<sup>240</sup> Having dismissed working in plaster, Lassaw attempted another accretive method of sculpting by applying rubber, a highly unconventional medium, to his wire armatures in an attempt to form shapes. However, he noted some olfactory displeasure with rubber in his notebook: “I obtained some liquid latex and with filler, applied it to wire... bad smell.”<sup>241</sup>

---

<sup>238</sup> Lassaw participated in this group’s annual exhibitions from 1937 to 1951 and served as its president from 1946 to 1949.

<sup>239</sup> Lassaw, “Perspectives and Reflections,” 352. Rosalind Krauss noted that, “during the 1930s, the one American sculptor whose work seems to have had any influence on Smith was Ibram Lassaw. *Growing Forms* [Smith, 1939] is strikingly like the sculpture Lassaw exhibited in the exhibition of American Abstract Artists of 1938, the first year that Smith himself showed with this group.” She gives a few other examples of Lassaw’s works which inspired Smith in the late 1930s. Rosalind Krauss, *The Sculpture of David Smith: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977), 21-22.

<sup>240</sup> Lassaw, “Perspectives and Reflections,” 353.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 351. Since rubber is petroleum based, melting it is akin to burning oil.

At this point, in 1936, Lassaw abandoned his experimentation with plaster and wire and with unusual materials such as rubber. Lassaw began to use metals, and later plastics, due to their newness as materials and their associations with technological advancement. Lassaw was aware of the work of Julio González, a member of the Parisian avant-garde, who pioneered direct metal work in sculpture. In his relief sculptures of the 1920s, González assembled figures and masks from cut or incised flat metal sheets [Figure 13]. In 1937, Lassaw began to follow González' lead by experimenting with steel rods and sheets, using a jig saw to cut shapes from the metal sheets, and then assembling the pieces with machine screws. Lassaw also attempted to work a small forge "in the manner of blacksmiths" and concluded that this technique was "unwieldy."<sup>242</sup>

Lassaw took cues from European Surrealist painting and sculpture and applied them to his new-found medium of direct metal sculpture. In his 1938 *Sculpture in Steel* [Figure 14], Lassaw may have translated Miró's 1926 painting, *Dog Barking at the Moon* [Figure 15], into sculptural form. Lassaw viewed this painting at Gallatin's gallery, and he remarked that of all of the works he viewed during this time, Miró's *Dog Barking at the Moon*, made the strongest impression.<sup>243</sup>

In *Sculpture in Steel*, Lassaw used a jig saw cut to cut forms out of sheets of steel, forms he proceeded to hammer into three-dimensional shapes, and then brazed onto straight steel rods suspended from a rectangular iron frame anchored onto a rectangular

---

<sup>242</sup> Lassaw, "Perspectives and Reflections," 351.

<sup>243</sup> Heller, "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw," 55.

metal plate.<sup>244</sup> The diagonally mounted steel frame paralleled the edge or frame of a painting, and his steel shapes, although hammered, retained a quality of flatness as if they were paper cut-outs. When viewed upside down, the three forms in *Sculpture in Steel* correspond loosely to those in Miró's painting, though suspended by steel rods.

Lassaw's curved half moon at the base of *Sculpture in Steel* could refer to Miró's half moon in the upper right hand of his painting. In Lassaw's possible inversion, his version of the dog, with two legs, a tail, and an irregularly shaped head, hovered above the moon. The ladder form in Miró's scene is distantly echoed in Lassaw's sculpture as two vertical, undulating lines with two horizontal cross bars.

Lassaw absorbed the Surrealist language of forms through works he saw at the Gallatin gallery, in the *Cahiers D'Art*, and at the 1936 *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. During 1938-1939, Lassaw created a series of shadow boxes which were designed to be hung on walls as three-dimensional paintings. These works consisted of shallow wooden-framed boxes holding wire, mesh, and painted wooden organic shapes that were illuminated with hidden electric bulbs. In the 1938 annual exhibition of the American Abstract Artists, he showed a number of these works, including *Composition with Light* [Figure 16], which, in outline, somewhat resembled certain of Jean Arp's painted wood reliefs from the 1920s.

Arp's 1929 *Arranged According to the Laws of Chance* [Figure 17], featured randomly placed three-dimensional, painted wood shapes set within a shallow wooden

---

<sup>244</sup> Brazing is a technique where two pieces of metal are joined together using a material with a high melting point (Lassaw used brazing rods); welding is a method of joining two like metals directly by applying heat.

box; Arp distinguished the foreground field (with shapes) from the background by painting it a lighter color and mounting it closer to the front of the box. Lassaw's box sculptures are not direct translations of Arp's wood reliefs, but they share certain qualities. Lassaw painted his foreground lighter to contrast with a dark, internally lit, back space complete with objects seemingly arranged at random. Lassaw cut irregularly shaped openings in the front panel, which resemble Arp's organic forms from the 1920s, to frame compositions made in part from found objects. In his shadow-box sculptures, Lassaw applied a Surrealist-inspired assemblage technique by juxtaposing objects and by combining painting and sculpture.

As Arp's title suggests, he employed chance as a compositional element. In 1915 Arp began to develop a method of making collages by dropping pieces of torn paper on the floor and arranging them on a piece of paper more or less in the manner they had fallen. Arp incorporated chance as a method of removing the artist's will and lessening the influence of artistic conventions on the creative act.

From 1940 to 1942, Lassaw shifted his focus from biomorphic shapes to geometric forms, from Surrealist-derived to Constructivist or de Stijl aesthetics. He began making constructions of steel frames, often containing plastic panels. He showed a 1940 steel and acrylic sculpture, entitled *Intersecting Rectangles* [Figure 18], in the 1941 American Abstract Artists exhibition. This work, approximately two and a half feet high, consists of four steel rectangles of varying sizes intersecting each other at right angles with clear acrylic rods set inside the bottom sections of the two smallest rectangles.

*Intersecting Rectangles* is reminiscent of Alexandr Rodchenko's *Spatial Constructions* from 1918-1921, in that it appears to be a flat form of repeated shapes

expanded into space. In his c.1920 *Spatial Construction no.12* [Figure 19], Rodchenko had taken a single flat geometric shape, in this case a circle (although he created a similar work using a square), cut it in concentric bands, painted it silver, and fanned the bands into a three-dimensional shape. Another influence on Lassaw at this time was the Dutch painter, Piet Mondrian, who arrived in New York in 1940 and became an active AAA member.<sup>245</sup> The effectiveness of Mondrian's grid paintings, such as his 1921-1935 *Tableau II* [Figure 20], depended on the balance of primary colors within the strict geometry of the grid. The structural framework in *Intersecting Rectangles* loosely evoked the Mondrianesque grid. In fact, Mondrian, who attended the 1941 AAA exhibition in which *Intersecting Rectangles* was shown, positively responded to the work as "a very interesting direction" for Lassaw.<sup>246</sup>

Lassaw worked for various federal arts projects between 1933 and 1942: the Public Works of Art Project, the Civil Works Administration, and the WPA Federal Art Project. From 1942 to 1943, as documented in his estate papers, Lassaw was drafted into the United States Army.<sup>247</sup> Because of his experience with metal working, Lassaw was assigned to a mechanics shop at Camp Lee, Virginia, where he advanced his knowledge of metal work and welding.<sup>248</sup>

---

<sup>245</sup> Wayne Anderson, *American Sculpture in Process: 1930/1970* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), 56.

<sup>246</sup> Heller, "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw," 100.

<sup>247</sup> Ibram Lassaw Archive, East Hampton, New York.

<sup>248</sup> Heller, "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw," 102. Lassaw eventually transferred to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and then to Brooklyn Army Base, New York.

When Lassaw ended his service with the army, he returned to his sculptural practice. From 1944 through 1950, Lassaw sought to combine soft-edge Surrealist forms with hard-edged Constructivist elements in his works. In his 1944 sculpture, *Arachnide* [Figure 21], Lassaw joined two steel frames, resembling window panes, of different sizes at intersecting angles. In various compartments within each frame, he attached painted wooden forms caught within plastic threads which resembled nerve cells, nests or, in keeping with the myth of Arachne, dear to the Surrealists, spider webs.<sup>249</sup>

The title of the work signalled a change in Lassaw's creative process: the titles of his works from the early to mid 1930s consisted of the generic epithet "sculpture" together with the year of their creation (*Sculpture 1933*, *Sculpture 1935...*), and his works from the late 1930s to early 1940s were titled so as to succinctly, factually describe the works (e.g. *Composition with Light*, 1938; *Two Biomorphical Shapes*, 1940; *Sculpture in Steel...*). Lassaw's use of a mythic title, *Arachnide*, for his 1944 sculpture reflected a shared interest among US based vanguard artists during this moment in tapping into an unconscious or primordial level of human experience, in a revisiting of ideas broached by Surrealist artists and, in theoretical terms, by Jung. Such artists as Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still shared an affinity for mythological subject matter associated with archaic and what was then called primitive art.<sup>250</sup> Stephen Polcari described how:

---

<sup>250</sup> For a discussion of the use of myth by Abstract Expressionist artists, see Anna Chave, "Mythmaking" in *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 60-104; Michael Leja, "The Mythmakers & the Primitive: Gottlieb, Newman, Rothko & Still," in *Reframing Abstract Expressionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 49-120; Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 33-50.

Though the primary writings of the anthropologists [and] through other sources such as the works of [Herbert] Read, Freud, Jung, Eliot, Pound, and Joyce, which incorporated the current ideas of anthropology on primitive and classical cultures... [Abstract Expressionist artists] saw the primitive or archaic as representing the fundamental, elemental, and ancestral nature of humanity.<sup>251</sup>

Pollock's 1943 painting, *Pasiphae*, for instance, set an example for Lassaw in terms of theme and titling. Lassaw had viewed Pollock's first solo show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century Gallery in 1943 while he was still in the army.<sup>252</sup>

Although he did not meet Pollock until later, Lassaw saw such works as *Guardians of the Secret* and the *Moon-Woman* series which reflected Pollock's intense interest in Jungian archetypes and mythology, interests which Lassaw shared.

Lassaw's work, *Arachnide*, also reflected a larger interest by New York School sculptors in the Surrealist-based form of the cage. As Rosalind Krauss put it:

The standard repertory of Surrealist sculptural forms involved cages in which objects were mysteriously trapped, hollow objects with empty cores... or skeletal structures often tremendously bloated to become themselves volumes or containers for some more interior secret presence. All of this symbolism for holding, containing, trapping, enclosing is ultimately a set of metaphors for possession.<sup>253</sup>

As the New York School artists turned towards expressing subjective experience, the cage became a metaphor for the body as a container of interior experiences. Giacometti's 1931 *Cage* [Figure 22] and 1932-33 *The Palace at 4 A.M.* [Figure 23], informed the style of New York sculptors working in the 1940s, especially with the use of metal as a sculptural medium and the use of the cage a motif. In *The Palace at 4 A.M.*, for instance,

---

<sup>251</sup> Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, 37.

<sup>252</sup> Heller, "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw," 153.

<sup>253</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Terminal Iron Works: The Sculpture of David Smith* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 125.

Giacometti developed a sense of an interior space as haunted and frightening, especially with the eerie presence of a loose spine hanging inside of a cage within the larger sculptural room.

Lassaw and his contemporaries, including Herbert Ferber (1906-1991), Peter Grippe (1912-2002), David Hare (1917-1992), Seymour Lipton (1903-1986), Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), Theodore Roszak (1907-1981), and David Smith (1906-1965) all worked directly with metal, and often with cage forms, in their sculptures of the 1940s. In his 1943-44 sculpture, *Lunar Infant* [Figure 24], Noguchi created a self-illuminating piece which consisted of a biomorphic, Surrealist-inspired figurative shape dangling inside of a simple cage frame. Grippe's 1946 bronze, *Symbolic Figure #4* [Figure 25], emphasized the movement of textured organic forms within a geometric architectural cage. Lipton's 1948 *Imprisoned Figure* [Figure 26] closely resembled Giacometti's *Cage*, with its entangled, violent, spiky forms, suggesting the torture of imprisonment.

In works of the late 1940s, such as his 1949 *Mandala* and *Star Cradle* [Figures 27, 28], Lassaw's continued his use of the framing, grid, or cage motif. Lassaw referred to *Mandala* as a "framing set" with colored interlocking plastic panes, out of which organic shapes had been cut. In this work, Lassaw arranged the rectangular pieces at right angles so that an empty column formed in the center of the piece. He referred to this piece as "an interiority" in his 1949 daybooks, and the inner core could be understood as paralleling the interior cavity of the human body.

In the mid-1940s, Lassaw increasingly applied ideas based in psychoanalysis to his artmaking in order to explore subjective experience as the content for art. Sometime in the 1940s, Lassaw had defined his subjectivity as an "interior universe":

The artist can find no order in the external universe as it is known today. He has awakened into a world he does not comprehend... more than ever the interior universe is required to lift the artist out of chaos... the mind is its own universe.<sup>254</sup>

Jung's writings from the 1930s on *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, which prefigured his 1954 commentary, referred to patterns in the mind which he believed were inherent to the unconscious. Jung described the *mandala* (Sanskrit for "circle") as "a concentric or radial order which constitutes the true centre or essence of the collective unconscious," and as one of "an indefinite number of motifs or patterns of an archaic character" common to the "collective unconscious" of all human beings.<sup>255</sup> While Lassaw's sculpture may not have been a literal representation of a *mandala*, the title would have been associated with Jung's writings by his cohort at the time, and the interlocking planes could have been understood as evoking a concentric order which amounted to a spatial template or stand-in for the collective unconscious or subjective self.

Lassaw's 1949 *Star Cradle* [Figure 28] consisted of three intersecting planes of acrylic framed by stainless steel in a highly symmetrical shape. Lassaw created an irregular, amoebic pattern which distinguished an inner and outer section of each acrylic panel; he sanded the outer sections of the acrylic panels to create a matte surface in contrast to the clear middle sections. Within the translucent acrylic panels of each plane, Lassaw used red dye to create loose skeins of interconnected paint which resembled

---

<sup>254</sup> Ibram Lassaw, "The World of the Artist," c.1940s, handwritten notes in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>255</sup> Carl Jung, "Psychological Commentaries on *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*," (1939), in W.Y. Evans-Wentz, ed. and introduction, Carl Jung commentary, *The Tibetan Book of Great Liberation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 118.

blood vessels or nerve endings. Certain critics, as I will discuss below, have drawn a connection between Pollock's signature webs of paint and Lassaw's use of color in *Star Cradle*.

Lassaw's title, *Star Cradle*, with its inference of celestial space, echoed the consideration of cosmological themes that was most apparent in Pollock's work of 1947. Pollock titled three of his works from that year with reference to outer space: *Galaxy* [Figure 29], *Reflection of the Big Dipper*, and *Comet*. Spatial metaphors were often used in descriptions of Pollock's work; a 1950 article by Parker Tyler used such phrases as "whorls of color, interlacing [skeins], labyrinthine patinas" and even described his paintings in terms of cosmic space:

Pollock's paint flies through space like the elongated bodies of comets and, striking the blind alley of the flat canvas, bursts into frozen visibilities. What are his dense and spangled works but viscera of an endless non-being of the universe?<sup>256</sup>

More frequently than Pollock, Lassaw used titles based on astronomy, including the names of constellations, individual stars, and satellites, for many of his sculptures from 1949 through 1959: (1950) *Mizur*, *Arcturus*, *Cluster in Lyra*, and *Pyocyon*; (1951) *Galaxy of Andromeda*, *Alcor*, *Sirius*, *Pleiades*, *Canopus*, *Nebula in Orion*, *Fomalhaut*, *The Hyades*, *Betelgeuse*, and *The Constellation Perseus*; (1952) *Clouds of Magellan*; (1953) *Coma Berenice*, *Alcyone*, *Epsilon Lyrae*, *Deimos*, *Monoceros*, *Kornephoros*, *Capricorn*, *Vindemiatrix*, *Tarazed*, and *Ceres*; (1954) *The Moons of Saturn*, *The Planets*, and *Morning Star*; (1955) *Evening Star*, *Phoenix*; (1956) *Tethys* and *Star Cluster in*

---

<sup>256</sup> Parker Tyler, "Jackson Pollock: The Infinite Labyrinth," *Magazine of Art*, March 1950, reprinted in David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, eds., *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 367.

*Auriga*, 1958) *Zodiac House*, *Pleone*, *Formation in Cygnus*, and *Galactic Cluster*; (1959) *Algol*.

Lassaw, who added his titles following his creation of sculptures, explained that:

Since it is necessary to have a title on one's work for purposes of identification, I preferred stars to numbers, dates or worn-out titles.<sup>257</sup>

Interestingly, in a 1949 *Life* article on Pollock, a caption for his painting *Number 17* reads:

He numbers his paintings instead of naming them, so that the public will not look at them with any preconceived notion of what they are.<sup>258</sup>

Where Lassaw had used dates in his titles during the 1930s and mythological names in the 1940s, he came to use astronomical terms in his titles beginning in 1949 with the belief that these terms were evocative for the viewer without carrying many well known associations. However, due to his regular use of astronomical titles during the 1950s, Lassaw's sculptures became associated with ideas of cosmic processes. In a 1952 review of Lassaw's work, a critic pronounced that, "The artist creates a new cosmography."<sup>259</sup>

Lassaw had previously been deeply inspired by Arthur Stanley Eddington's 1928 *The Nature of the Physical World*, which explored reality through the perspective of astronomy. Eddington asked his readers to "look both ways. For the road to a knowledge of the stars leads through the atom; and important knowledge of the atom has been

---

<sup>257</sup> Lassaw, "Perspectives and Reflections," 354.

<sup>258</sup> "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States," in *Life*, 27, 6 (August 8, 1949), 43.

<sup>259</sup> Margaret Breuning, "Lassaw on a Cosmic Level," *Art Digest*, Volume 27, October 1952, 14.

reached through the stars.<sup>260</sup> Lassaw employed this idea that the microcosm of the atom and the macrocosm of the universe were similarly structured, except for scale; he wrote in his notebooks that:

The most arresting chance [in the conception of the universe] is not the rearrangement of space and time by Einstein, but the dissolution of all that we regard as most solid into tiny specks floating in the void... the revelation by modern physics of the void within the atom is more disturbing than the revelation of astronomy of the immense void of interstellar space.<sup>261</sup>

The notion that mass contained space (including the void within human mass), resonated with Lassaw's decision to create open-form sculptures, as he attempted to apply new cosmological discoveries to his sculptural expressions. In reflecting during the 1960s on his earlier work, he wrote that, "I had long felt an analogy between the polymorphous relationships in my sculpture and the starry structures in three-dimensional outer space."<sup>262</sup>

Lassaw's consideration of cosmological space began at least by the 1930s and continued throughout his career, so his interest was not entirely due to Pollock's example. Lassaw had previously taken visual cues from various other painters and sculptors; however, as did his contemporaries, and Pollock's all-over, networks of lines, especially as connected with astronomical titles, may have prompted Lassaw to explore formlessness and dissolution of shapes within his sculptures.

---

<sup>260</sup> Sir Arthur Eddington, "Stars and Atoms" (1928), Lecture 1, *The Nature of the Physical World*.

<sup>261</sup> Ibram Lassaw, c.1930s, handwritten notes in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>262</sup> Lassaw, "Perspectives and Reflections," 354.

Wayne Anderson, in 1975, suggested that Pollock's famed painting style had been influential for Lassaw, noting that in *Star Cradle* Lassaw's incorporation of painting "overtly" referred to "the paintings of his friend Jackson Pollock. The dripped plastic represents an adaptation of Pollock's technique of producing a surface pattern of interconnected nuclei."<sup>263</sup> David Anfam claimed in his 1990 survey that Lassaw's works became "more labyrinthine and encrusted with dribbled metal after 1950 in response to Pollock's catalytic style."<sup>264</sup>

In 1971, Rosalind Krauss read Lassaw's *Star Cradle* as an example of the New York School sculptors':

actively engaging in exploring the reciprocity between pictorial and plastic art... mining painting for the inherent transparency possessed by the picture surface, hoping to open their sculpture to a more insistent feeling of immateriality.<sup>265</sup>

I would agree that Lassaw assimilated ideas from various painting modalities, especially those which addressed immateriality and space. More accurately, Lassaw attempted to fuse Constructivist-inspired examination of volumetric space and the Surrealists' psychologized sculptural cage with Pollock's boundless painted cosmological space in three-dimensional form.

Lassaw's sculptural practice had changed with the shifting focus of the avant-garde New York art scene. Lassaw was the president of the American Abstract Artists from 1946 to 1949, although the necessity for the AAA had faded by the mid 1940s as

---

<sup>263</sup> Anderson, *American Sculpture in Process*, 59.

<sup>264</sup> David Anfam, *Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1990), 191.

<sup>265</sup> Krauss, *Terminal Iron Works*, 149.

abstraction had become more accepted. In 1949, Lassaw helped found the Club; in fact, the first meeting of this group of New York School artists took place in his studio. He also participated in artist-run schools such as Subjects of the Artist and Studio 35 and was present at the 1950 symposium held by Studio 35 members.<sup>266</sup> As a result of his friendships and involvement with contemporary avant-garde artists, including those who would become known as Abstract Expressionists, Lassaw began to develop the focus of his mature style.

Lassaw's breakthrough happened in 1950, a key year for many artists. As April Kingsley described it, in her book about this year, *The Turning Point: The Abstract Expressionists and the Transformation of American Art*:

During 1950 the artists and their public became aware that something extremely important was going on in New York, something that wasn't happening anywhere else. The excitement was palpable; to be in the art world in that time and place was to be in the center of it all.<sup>267</sup>

Kingsley studied artistic activities in New York in 1950 month by month and concluded that:

During this twelve-month period almost all the artists we have come to see as crucial [in the Abstract Expressionist movement] had breakthrough exhibitions in New York of the very works that made them famous; in retrospective surveys of artist after artist, 1950 turns out to be the year they established their "signature images."<sup>268</sup>

Lassaw was no exception.

---

<sup>266</sup> Ibram Lassaw Archive, East Hampton, New York.

<sup>267</sup> April Kingsley, *The Turning Point: The Abstract Expressionists and the Transformation of American Art* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 13.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

In his 1950 sculpture entitled “Milky Way” [Figure 30], Lassaw bent and shaped a wire armature into an irregular structure that resembled an organic grid, a process which he referred to as “drawing in space.” The piece could be seen as a sculptural transposition of automatist line into three dimensional space with shifting points of focus.<sup>269</sup> He covered a shaped framework with plastic composition paste, and this allowed him to vary the thinness and thickness of the lines comprising the sculpture. Unlike his sculptures of the 1940s, *Milky Way* did not have a rigid, rectangular steel frame or a strict boundary containing internal forms. Here, the loosely geometric structure of the armature was softened by the varied organic shaping applied to it, and the forms freely expanded within and without a network of borders.

While reminiscent of the plaster-on-frame technique of *Sculpture 1936* [Figure 10], especially as both sculptures rest on feet-like forms suggesting some reference to the figure, *Milky Way* had a larger, denser, and more complexly gridded structure. If *Sculpture 1936* seemed to refer to the organic shape of one or more living organisms, the repeated forms in *Milky Way* indicated a larger system of shapes, such as a network of stars, planets, and comets.

Both *Star Cradle* and *Milky Way* were exhibited in the 1950 Fourteenth AAA annual exhibition. Relatively little was written about *Milky Way* when it was first

---

<sup>269</sup> A phrase Lassaw borrowed from sculptor Julio González, who spent much of his career as a draughtsman, and one which was also used by Lassaw’s fellow sculptor, David Smith.

exhibited, but even so, this particular sculpture was reproduced in seven major publications in France and the US between 1950 and 1952.<sup>270</sup>

In the same year that Lassaw created *Milky Way*, David Smith created a similarly sized and themed welded metal sculpture entitled *Star Cage* [Figure 31], a piece clearly connected to the contemporary interest in the cage form and astronomical setting. Smith's piece, like Lassaw's *Milky Way*, reshaped the cage into a more free-formed container of space. In comparison to *Milky Way*, Smith's treatment of outer space in *Star Cage* implemented a more angular line and more explicitly geometrical relationships.

The soft-edges of Lassaw's sculptures of the early 1950s resulted from a particular method he developed. Lassaw had used soldering during the late 1930s, and he had learned advanced oxyacetylene welding while serving in the army. In 1951, after he sold his first piece of sculpture, Lassaw invested in oxyacetylene welding equipment in order to apply new welding techniques that he had learned to his sculptural practice. In such pieces as the suspended *Nebula in Orion* of 1951 [Figure 32], *Ascension of Innana* [Figure 33] and *Kwannon* of 1952 [Figure 34], Lassaw followed the accumulative method he used in creating *Milky Way*, but rather than work with plastic paste, he began to wrap his open-form, architectonic structures with sheet copper, and then coat and encrust the surfaces with droplets of solder, thus unifying the armature with the coating. His daughter, Denise, explained that:

The wire structures are... coated with bronze to add strength, texture, and color, but are not hidden inside as an armature would be. In a few

---

<sup>270</sup> Howard Devree listed *Milky Way* as one of several "intricate towering pieces" in the AAA's fourteenth annual exhibition catalog and Marynell Sharp singled it out as one of the "good" pieces in her article on the AAA show, "All Abstract," *Art Digest* XXIV (April, 1950), 16.

sculptures, the wire structure is partially covered with copper shapes, partially exposed and bronze coated.<sup>271</sup>

Primarily, Lassaw used steel, a cheaper material, for his armatures, and coated them with more precious metals, such as bronze.

The cosmologically titled 1952 *Ascension of Innana* is a textured and organic cage on four legs with more literal representations of stars whose orbit appears delineated by the structure's roughly spherical structure. *Ascension of Innana* was unusual for Lassaw in its more explicit interpretation of the solar system. As a hanging sculpture, *Nebula in Orion* differed from Lassaw's other works which rested on bases, and the suspension of the work amplified an allusion to outer space.

With *Nebula in Orion*, Lassaw followed the precedent of floating an object in space as it appeared in the work of Rodchenko [Figure 19] and in Calder's mobiles, such as his *Non-Objective* [Figure 35]. Marter noted that interest in cosmic imagery by Bauhaus artists, such as Moholy-Nagy, and the Russian Constructivists, which served to inspire both Calder and Lassaw, "related closely to the search for universalism in the arts based on the principles of equilibrium and harmony that form the universe" and that an age in which "science proposed a general model of a dynamic, rather than a static, universe" encouraged artists to create works which referenced this dynamic model.<sup>272</sup> Lassaw repeated the hanging design in his 1954, *Akasa* [Figure 1], which I will discuss below in relation to the Zen idea of interconnectedness.

---

<sup>271</sup> Denise Lassaw, "Ibram Lassaw's Life and Art: A Personal Account," in Steve Arbury, ed., *Ibram Lassaw: Deep Space and Beyond* (Radford: Radford University Art Museum, 2002), 7.

<sup>272</sup> Marter, *Alexander Calder*, 109.

Lassaw's accumulative brazing method allowed him to work in a vein similar to some other New York artists, not just in enabling a richly textured surface, but in allowing accidental effects, such as drips and irregular shapes. This approach to creating was grounded in the Surrealist technique of automatism which enjoyed widespread currency among Abstract Expressionist artists generally during the 1940s and 1950s as they began to place emphasis on processes of creating that utilized both chance and intention.<sup>273</sup>

As opposed to earlier pieces such as his shadow boxes and *Star Cradle*, which were first conceptualized in sketches, with pencil on paper, Lassaw recalled of his welded work in the 1950s, in 1968, that "the concepts that are in many drawings and in my imagination are changed by the character of the materials that I use. One must think and dream directly with the material" and he added that "most of what happens in my sculptures is not planned by me beforehand."<sup>274</sup> The release from complete artistic control allowed Lassaw to work in a meditative, almost trance-like state, such that he

---

<sup>273</sup> The concept of automatism went through a complex evolution from the Surrealists through Abstract Expressionism, both in theorization and in practice, both literary and visual, which is too lengthy to cover here. In brief, Surrealist automatism was a visual parallel to Freud's psychoanalytic mode of free association and was seen as a method of exploring the unconscious. Chave, in 1989, stated that "in principle, making a work of art strictly through automatist practices would mean acting in a spontaneous and unguarded way throughout the creative process, acting from a welling up of unconscious internal forces, free of moral and intellectual inhibitions and without the influences of learned aesthetic criteria. But this idea of making the unconscious conscious constituted an obvious impossibility, a contradictory or self-canceling proposition. The ideal of the purely spontaneous gesture, a gesture motivated by authentic primal drives and charged with the mythic juices of the unconscious, necessarily remained just that—an ideal-mediated by the impossibility of sustaining a wholly unguarded frame of mind in an awake state for an extended period of time," Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction*, 68.

<sup>274</sup> Lassaw, "Perspectives and Reflections," 353.

could be “in” the sculpture –just so, Pollock had explained in 1947 that he was “in” his paintings:

I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor... On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting.<sup>275</sup>

Pollock stated in the winter of 1947 to 1948 regarding artistic receptivity, that:

When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, and easy give and take, and the painting comes out well.<sup>276</sup>

Lassaw, in 1950, articulated a comparable description of a spontaneous creative process:

I would consider a work finished when I sense a 'togetherness,' a participation of all parts as in an organism. This does not mean that I entirely understand what I have created. To me a work is at first, quite unknown. In time, more and more enters into consciousness. It would be better to consider a work of art as a process that is started by the artist. In that way of thinking a sculpture or painting is never finished, but only begun. If successful, the work starts to live a life of its own, a work of art begins to work.<sup>277</sup>

Lassaw's technique of using molten metals allowed him some freedom of response in creating his sculptures. Lassaw stated in 1992 that, “the process can take longer to go through [than Abstract Expressionist painting], but it's still the same process.

---

<sup>275</sup> Jackson Pollock, “My Painting” in *Possibilities I*, Winter 1947-48, reprinted in David and Cecile Shapiro, eds., *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 356.

<sup>276</sup> Pollock, “My Painting,” reprinted in David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, eds., *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*, 356.

<sup>277</sup> *Modern Artists in America*, “Artist's Sessions at Studio 35” (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, Inc., 1950), 11.

It's using your feelings and your instincts, and without making plans beforehand."<sup>278</sup>

Lassaw also stated that "when I melt metal, it's fluid...; that is what it has in common with paint."<sup>279</sup>

In 1951, Lassaw had at last found methods and materials that integrated biomorphic and geometric form while satisfying his need to work freely and intuitively, a rarity in sculptural practice generally. He wrote that while "the welding medium has its limitations... the freedom it gives makes it the most suitable for the kind of structures I plan... The discoveries, the accidents, the experiments [I make] lead to an expansion of the areas of exploration."<sup>280</sup> By using different alloys and chemical treatments, Lassaw was able to enhance his sculpture with color. By the time he produced sculptures such as his 1952 bronze sculpture, *Kwannon* [Figure 34], Lassaw had developed the textured open-space constructions for which he would become recognized; the majority of his works that were sold or reproduced in publications are of this general type.

In *Kwannon*, Lassaw bent metal wire into small cells which were gradually joined together to make a larger unit, forming the skeleton of the sculpture. This method of amassing parts allowed Lassaw to expand *Kwannon* into a piece which measured about six feet high, approximating the size of a human body. Irving Sandler referred to this procedure as "analogous to drawing in space; more arduous and not as fluent as pen or

---

<sup>278</sup> Ibram Lassaw, interview by Arthur Jones, May 8, 1992, Springs, New York.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 352.

brush, but still spontaneous enough.”<sup>281</sup> (Sandler’s comment seemingly revealed an uneasiness with according Lassaw’s process the same degree of spontaneity as was attributed to Abstract Expressionist painters; it was merely “spontaneous enough.”) After the form and composition evolved, Lassaw covered the armature with drops of metal. In comparison, the entire body of a 1955 piece, *Phoenix* [Figure 36], was built up from the accretion of metal drops without a supporting armature.

Lassaw referred to his work, in 1968, as “sculpture of relativity.” He explained that his mature sculpture expressed “the reality I see before me [as a] living organism” in which “all its parts are ultimately in ecological interdependence.”<sup>282</sup> Lassaw’s sculptures from the 1950s could be seen as evoking his view of the universe as “an immensely organic machine, constructed of an infinite number of exceedingly intricate parts, in which no shape, no movement is ever repeated.”<sup>283</sup> While indebted to Cubist and Constructivist sculptural precedents, Lassaw’s “sculpture of relativity” represented a new way of experiencing space as opposed to traditional, Western, three-dimensional, solid form sculpture; his new approach to space could be described as asymmetrical, open, polymorphous, and concerned with interrelationships. He wrote that his sculpture:

---

<sup>281</sup> Irving Sandler, “Ibram Lassaw,” in *Three American Sculptors: Ferber, Hare, Lassaw* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 52. Interestingly, in his 1967 essay, “Gesture and Non-Gesture in Recent Sculpture,” Sandler seemed to accord Lassaw, as one of the 1950s sculptors working in metal, complete fluency in gesture; “the metalworkers of the fifties... preferred to assemble intricate and active linear elements and to use the oxyacetylene torch like a brush, [thereby] producing richly detailed textures, erupting crusts that focus attention on the surface,” reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, Gregory Battcock, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 308-309.

<sup>282</sup> Lassaw, “Perspectives and Reflections,” 354.

<sup>283</sup> Lassaw, “The World of the Artist,” microfilm roll N69-129.

involves the juxtaposition of many separate forms... one to another in such a way as to create a whole. It is the opposite approach from the more common solid monolithic type of composition. It also represents a different type of philosophy or outlook on the part of the artist.<sup>284</sup>

Lassaw, here, referred to the new role of the artist as aligned with process, which I will develop further below. In 1954, Ferber wrote an important article about modern sculpture which echoed Lassaw's opinion on the monolith. Ferber wrote:

Monolithic sculpture, possessed by the idea of mass, presents a continuous surface, enclosing a volume, which is motivated from the center. Sculpture of extension; centrifugal sculpture, is neither massive nor monolithic, nor does it present a continuous surface. Its elements are not oriented to a center nor are they projecting from a central mass. Where sculpture had been solid, closed, it is now an art of open, airy, discontinuous forms, suspended in space.<sup>285</sup>

Along with the large scale of many Abstract Expressionist painters' canvases and "fields" of color, associated with such artists as Newman and Rothko, the most vaunted aspect of Abstract Expressionist space was that devolving from a decentered "all-over" method of composition, especially as it appeared in the paintings of Pollock, Guston, Krasner, and Tobey. Ann Gibson observed that for the Abstract Expressionist painters, "their works share in common the shallow, indeterminate space, all-over composition, ambiguous subject matter, and apparent apoliticism of that mode."<sup>286</sup> Lassaw's works of the 1950s, with their textural, unfinished-looking, rough surfaces, share with the Abstract Expressionist painters an emphasis on gesture, and evince an "all-over" treatment of

---

<sup>284</sup> Lassaw, "Raw Material," microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>285</sup> Herbert Ferber, "On Sculpture," in *Art in America*, 42:4 (December 1954), 263.

<sup>286</sup> Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), preface, ix.

space. There appears a possibility for Lassaw's forms to continue forever; they seemed unbounded in that way.

The 1950s marked the decade of Lassaw's greatest accomplishment as an artist. Lassaw participated in the Ninth Street Show which opened on May 21, 1951. Also in 1951, the New York dealer Samuel Kootz decided to represent Lassaw, and this year marked Lassaw's first solo show at Kootz's 15 East 57<sup>th</sup> Street gallery, a prestigious location with high exposure. Kootz had opened his gallery in 1945, and he gained recognition by representing the work of the painters William Baziotis, Byron Brown, Adolph Gottlieb, Hans Hofmann, Carl Holty, and Robert Motherwell; Lassaw, along with David Hare and Herbert Ferber, were the sculptors in Kootz's stable.<sup>287</sup> During the 1950s, Lassaw often showed as a solo artist and in group exhibitions at the Kootz Gallery.<sup>288</sup>

During 1952, Lassaw participated in a twentieth century sculpture show at the Museum of Modern Art, an annual sculptural exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and he had his second solo show at Kootz Gallery. His exhibitions were reviewed often, and his 1952 exhibition at Kootz was rated among "The Year's Best: 1952," by *Artnews*.<sup>289</sup> Lassaw also achieved a number of architectural sculpture

---

<sup>287</sup> Interview with Samuel Kootz conducted by Dorothy Seckler, April 13, 1964, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

<sup>288</sup> Additional solo shows at Samuel Kootz Gallery: 1951, 1952, 1954, 1955, 1958, 1960. Kootz remained Lassaw's dealer until 1966, when he retired.

<sup>289</sup> "The Year's Best: 1952," *Artnews*, January 1953, Volume 51, Number 9, 43. Margaret Breuning, "Lassaw on a Cosmic Level," *Art Digest*, XXVII (October 15, 1952), 14. Barbara Guest, *Artnews* (October 1952), 45.

commissions, including a 28 foot high work, *Pillar of Fire*, installed as a façade on the Beth El Synagogue in Springfield, Massachusetts and, also in 1953, a nine foot sculpture, *The Clouds of Magellan*, in Phillip Johnson's house in New Canaan, Connecticut.

In 1954, Lassaw participated in group exhibitions in Brussels and Paris, in the Whitney Museum's annual sculpture exhibition, and in various other US exhibitions. The exposure helped him sell works to major museums as well as to private collectors. Lassaw was one of five US artists that were selected by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., along with Willem de Kooning, Gaston Lachaise, Ben Shahn, and David Smith, to be included in the 1954 Venice Biennale, which extended his international audience.

Lassaw's sculptures were included in other key mid-century art exhibitions which introduced and sanctioned important contemporary US artists to a national and international audience. In 1955, he participated in a Whitney Museum exhibition entitled *The New Decade: Thirty-Five American Painters and Sculptors* curated by John Baur.<sup>290</sup> Baur's exhibition focused on artists who emerged to prominence between 1945 and 1955, including Baziotes, Brooks, de Kooning, Ferber, Gottlieb, Kline, Richard Lippold, Motherwell, Pollock, Richard Pousette-Dart, Reinhardt, Theodore Stamos, and Bradley Walker-Tomlin.

In 1956 Lassaw's work was included in The Museum of Modern Art's prestigious *12 Americans*, one of a series of shows curated by Dorothy Miller, alongside the work of Larry Rivers and Grace Hartigan among others.<sup>291</sup> Miller's "Americans" series, which

---

<sup>290</sup> John I.H. Baur, *The New Decade: Thirty-Five American Painters and Sculptors* (New York: Macmillan, 1955).

<sup>291</sup> Dorothy C. Miller, *12 Americans* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1956).

highlighted the work of emerging US artists, began with *Americans 1942. Fourteen Americans*, in 1946, was notable for the inclusion of works by Arshile Gorky, Noguchi and Motherwell; and *Fifteen Americans*, in 1952, contained the work of Pollock, Rothko, and Still.

### **Lassaw and Suzuki**

While Lassaw encountered Asian philosophy in the early 1930s at City College, it is undocumented specifically when he first became aware of Zen. Certain texts in his library, including many of Suzuki's published books from the 1940s, suggest that he had read books on Zen during the 1940s; however, it cannot be conclusively proved that he read the books at the time of their publication [see Appendix C- Ibram Lassaw's Library of Books on Asian Culture and Philosophy – Partial List].

John Cage's "Lecture on Nothing" c. January, 1950 marked the first acknowledged presence of Zen as a topic in the Club's lecture series, which Lassaw attended. Within this lecture, Cage cites references to Zen, the *I Ching*, Joseph Campbell, Buckminster Fuller, and Alan Watts, all of which or whom related to a particular philosophical aesthetic that was distinctly non-Western, dealing with "universal" mythology, interconnected systems, and –for Cage- the lack of emphasis on the individual ego.

Suzuki had arrived in New York in the late summer of 1950; his first three public lectures at Columbia University, on Kegon philosophy and Zen, were delivered in March

1951; however there is no record in Lassaw's notes that he attended these lectures.<sup>292</sup>

The first dated mention of Lassaw's attendance at a Suzuki lecture at Columbia was on February 24, 1953.<sup>293</sup>

Lassaw recalled in 1965 that although he had asked questions about the nature of reality, many answers "came in 1953... Daisetz Suzuki was teaching at Columbia, a class in the history of Zen Buddhism, and I began attending once a week, every Friday... And, of course, I read all his works, all his books published."<sup>294</sup> Clarke wrote in his 1988 dissertation, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* that, "Lassaw's attendance at Suzuki's lectures over several years amounted to a systematic study of Zen philosophy. Whilst Suzuki did not provide Lassaw's introduction to Oriental philosophy, he seems to have occasioned the artists' most thorough consideration of it."<sup>295</sup>

Lassaw's notebooks mark his attendance at Suzuki's weekly courses, from the "Philosophy and Religion of Zen Buddhism" series which were offered during the springs of 1953 through 1957, at which time Suzuki declined an appointment as Adjunct

---

<sup>292</sup> Kegon is a school of Buddhism introduced in Japan during the 8<sup>th</sup> century that wielded a considerable philosophical influence on Zen, as I will explain further in this chapter.

<sup>293</sup> There are no extant enrollment rosters for Suzuki's lectures at Columbia. His lectures were open to the general public, and thus no official university registration was required.

<sup>294</sup> Ibram Lassaw, interview with Dorothy Seckler, 19.

<sup>295</sup> Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture*, 82.

Professor of Religion at Columbia [see Appendix C- List of Suzuki's Lectures at Columbia University Attended by Ibram Lassaw].

Lassaw took extensively detailed notes during Suzuki's lectures; he prized his notebooks, which he consulted and quoted in artist's statements and interviews for many years. As there are very few materials that document Suzuki's lectures themselves (Suzuki did not deposit any of his papers or class notes in the Columbia Rare Books collection, for example, as often occurs with prominent lecturers), Lassaw's notes, along with published reminiscences of former students and colleagues, provide rare bits of information on Suzuki's pedagogy in the Columbia lectures.<sup>296</sup>

Lassaw found Suzuki's Zen to be closely linked to his own earlier philosophical explorations. As he said in 1964:

When I came in contact with Zen... it was as if I was confronted with my own mind. I had already had a very similar idea and opinion, and it seemed to reinforce my internal convictions of what seemed self-evident to me by just looking and studying. The world was already something that was well known and had such a very long tradition, and that was a marvelous experience for me to find the roots of my point of view, my total orientation toward reality.<sup>297</sup>

On another occasion, in 1963, Lassaw recollected:

Before I had read any of the writings (of Zen), I had already approached close to it from the direction of Western philosophy. The whole trend in the West has been that way, I feel: it leads right up to Zen. It's as though Western thought is beginning to recognize what Zen philosophy arrives at from a different direction. It means to me that reality is here and now, and where my art jibes with my interest in Zen, is when Zen says, "Wake up! When your mind is involved with concepts and ideas of yesterday and

---

<sup>296</sup> In his notes, Lassaw often transcribed direct quotations by Suzuki. In particular, see detailed notes from Suzuki's lectures-1953: February 17, February 24; 1954: March 5, March 12, March 19, March 26, April 2.

<sup>297</sup> Ibram Lassaw, interview with Dorothy Seckler, 1964.

tomorrow, your eyes aren't opened up to the immediate moment, to the creation of the world.<sup>298</sup>

In a 1968 interview with Irving Sandler, Lassaw again emphasized the importance he placed on the idea of being fully present or awake in each moment:

Each moment goes on and we're just asleep through it all. This is where Buddhism comes in. You know Buddha means "the awakened one." And the idea is to wake up to this immediate reality, this divine reality, in the oldtime way of speaking, in the immediacy of God, in a sense.<sup>299</sup>

In his November 1954 panel on Zen at the Club, Lassaw let his audience of fellow artists at the Club know that he was "not interested in Zen just because [it's] Oriental," but because it was "the inevitable result of all [his] previous interests in philosophy, art, science."<sup>300</sup> "Zen is not mysticism," Lassaw stated, "it is not spiritualism."<sup>301</sup> Lassaw detailed Suzuki's academic qualifications as a Professor of Buddhist Philosophy at Otani University in Kyoto, and then rather than summarizing ideas from his readings on Zen, Lassaw quoted sections of a Suzuki text directly.<sup>302</sup> He told his audience:

I am going to read some paragraphs from Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki's book called *Living in Zen* [sic]. Let the master say in his own words [sic].

---

<sup>298</sup> Leslie Judd Ahlander, "Art in Washington – Sculptor Lassaw," *The Washington Post Times Herald*, August 4, 1963, 67.

<sup>299</sup> Ibram Lassaw, interview by Irving Sandler, August 26, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 60.

<sup>300</sup> Ibram Lassaw, daybook entry for November 19, 1954, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

<sup>301</sup> Lassaw, daybook entry for November 19, 1954.

<sup>302</sup> Suzuki took the chair of Professor of Buddhist Philosophy at Otani University in 1921 at the age of 51. He received the D. Litt. Degree from Otani University in 1933.

Lassaw read the following excerpts, which both concern the Zen concept of *satori* (enlightenment) from Suzuki's 1950 text:

[A] monk said, "O master, please be good enough to let me have one word of yours pointing to the essence of the matter." [The master replied] "When you know it, you have it." "Please be more direct, O master." "No use being deaf!" replied the master.<sup>303</sup>

Now, I think, we can fairly well characterize what Zen *satori* is:

It is to be with God before he cried out, "Let there be light."

It is to be with God when his spirit moved to give this order.

It is to be with God and also with the light so created.

It is even to be God himself, and also to be his firmament, his earth, his day and night.

*Satori* is God's coming to self-consciousness in man- the consciousness all the time underlining human consciousness, which may be called super-consciousness.

*Satori* is not knowledge in its commonly understood sense.

*Satori* goes beyond knowledge. It is absolute knowledge in the sense that in *satori* there is neither the knowledge of subject nor the object of knowledge.

*Satori* is not a higher unity in which two contradictory terms are synthesized. When a staff is not a staff and yet it is a staff, *satori* obtains.

When a bridge flows and the water does not, there is *satori*.

*Satori* is not an act of intuition as long as there are traces in it of a dualistic conception.

*Satori* is intuition dynamically conceived. When you move with a moving object, when you are identified with it, and yet when you are not moving at all, a certain state of consciousness -super-consciousness- prevails, which is *satori*.<sup>304</sup>

---

<sup>303</sup> Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Living By Zen* (London: Rider and Company, 1950), 78.

<sup>304</sup> Suzuki, *Living By Zen*, 87.

Suzuki's work was revelatory for Lassaw; he commented that "the more I read Suzuki, the more I think of him as one of the great men of our time."<sup>305</sup> However, Lassaw remained skeptical that this particular reading at the Club was well received and explained about his Club talk:

I don't think it was very successful, for one thing because I began reading excerpts from Suzuki. The idea was that everything had to be spontaneous, an act of some kind. I felt that the people were more interested in entertainment than in trying to get down to hard concepts and hard thinking of any kind.<sup>306</sup>

Lassaw's approach to Zen mirrored that of his friend, Alan Watts (1915-1973), a theologian who earned a reputation as a foremost interpreter of Asian philosophies in England and the United States during the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>307</sup> Watts had belonged to The Buddhist Society in London, a group founded in 1924 that was related to Madam Blavatsky's and H.S. Olcott's Theosophical Society. Watts shared with the Theosophists, who sought to create a universal religion, an emphasis on a self-styled, individualized form of spirituality and on truths that emerged through texts, rather than on ritualized religious practices.

---

<sup>305</sup> Ibram Lassaw, daybook entry in January 1955, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>307</sup> In an autobiographical article (Lassaw, "Perspectives and Reflections," 355.), Lassaw acknowledged that "the writings of Alan Watts were also of great interest to me and continue to interest me." His notebooks mark several occasions with Watts: May 27, 1958, "lecture at Community Church," "Religion in a Free Floating World;" April 21, 1960, "party for Alan Watts," New York City; April 26, 1960, "Alan Watts lecture;" April 12, 1961, "Alan Watts and Mary Jane visit the studio for lunch." Lassaw's daughter, Denise, stated in correspondence to me: "My mother says they met Alan Watts in the 50's when Alan was giving talks around NYC. I remember going to one of his talks when I was very young. He and Mary Jane visited the studio on a number of occasions. I have a picture of them in the studio. Mary Jane also visited us out in East Hampton and stayed many days."

Watts explained that his approach to Asian philosophy was “part of an individual philosophical quest”:

I am not interested in Buddhism or Taoism as particular entities or subjects to be studied and defined in such a way that one must avoid “mixing up” one’s thinking about Buddhism with interests in quantum theory, psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology, semantics, and aesthetics, or in Eckhart, Goethe, Whitehead, Jung, or Krishnamurti... It has always seemed to me that no intelligent person should restrict himself to artificially segregated fields of spiritual or intellectual adventure.... Culture is an active, present process which involves the formation of relationships between all things known to us, and the narrow specialist is its servant and informant, not its arbiter.<sup>308</sup>

Watt’s information on Zen was directly based on Suzuki’s teachings. He recalled that:

I have never had a formal teacher (guru or *roshi*) in the spiritual life- only an exemplar... That exemplar was Suzuki Daisetz... Suzuki introduced me to Zen when I first read his *Essays in Zen Buddhism* in mid-adolescence, and in the years that followed I read everything he wrote with fascination and delight. For what he said was always unexpected and open-ended. He did not travel in the well-worn ruts of philosophical and religious thought.<sup>309</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 1, the type of Zen present in mid-century US was the modern, lay version as promoted by D.T. Suzuki, and this was largely Zen as Lassaw knew it. Suzuki’s presentation of Zen within reference to Western tenets or preoccupations, including science and Christian mysticism, made it available as a paradigm which could encompass Lassaw’s intellectual explorations, including those involving space.

---

<sup>308</sup> Alan Watts, *In My Own Way: An Autobiography, 1915-1965* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 273-274.

<sup>309</sup> Alan Watts, “The ‘Mind-less’ Scholar,” in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*, Masao Abe, ed. (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 189.

Lassaw's engagement with Zen, over the course of the decade of the 1950s, seemed to be instrumental in his maturation as a sculptor, and certainly his intensity of interest in Zen distinguished him from his contemporaries. Heller concluded that, "Zen Buddhism was, and remains, the most important single influence on Lassaw's mature thinking, since it tied together the various tendencies, concepts, and interests with which Lassaw had been dealing for many years."<sup>310</sup> Lassaw's breakthrough to his mature sculptural style, however, happened in 1950 which predated his thorough consideration of Zen linked with his attendance at Suzuki's Columbia lectures beginning in 1953. More accurately, Suzuki provided Lassaw, indirectly, with a matrix of explanation for his practice that was satisfying to Lassaw, and which perhaps informed his practice, as well as (more probably), his presentation of his practice from 1953 onward.

As I will discuss at the end of this chapter, Lassaw increasingly defined his art rhetorically using a language borrowed from Zen terminology, and critics often played up this connection as a major factor in understanding and interpreting his work.

### **Key Concepts: Nature and Tathata**

Lassaw's exposure to the work of Coomaraswamy in the 1930s caused him to reconsider his previously held understanding of the material world and its phenomena, and Suzuki's descriptions and explanations also contributed to Lassaw's recharacterization of the concept of nature, which he believed was more satisfactorily explained by Asian philosophies.

---

<sup>310</sup> Heller, *The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw*, 166.

Suzuki's essay, "The Role of Nature in Zen Buddhism," published in the prewar period, discussed the Judeo-Christian binary view of human beings as separate from nature:

The Nature-Man dichotomy issues, as I think, from the Biblical account in which the Creator is said to have given mankind the power to dominate all creation. It is fundamentally due to this story that Western people talk so much about conquering Nature. . . From the human point of view, anything that is not of human origin may be said to be of Nature. But Man is, after all, part of Nature itself.<sup>311</sup>

Suzuki emphasized that:

To treat Nature as something irrational and in opposition to human "rationality" is purely a Western idea.<sup>312</sup>

Suzuki countered his description of the Western understanding of nature with an all-inclusive and interdependent concept that he located in Zen spirituality:

Zen does not try to disengage us from the world. . . Zen is right in the midst of the ocean of becoming. It shows no desire to escape from its tossing waves. It does not antagonize Nature; it does not treat Nature as if it were an enemy to be conquered, nor does it stand away from Nature. It is indeed Nature itself.<sup>313</sup>

In this essay, Suzuki created an essentialized opposition between a binary, rational, Western mind, which characterizes a culture in conflict with nature, and an Asian or Japanese mind that is part of a culture in harmony with nature.

Rick Fields, a scholar on the history of Buddhism in the US, recounted that, "Suzuki took the Hua-yen or Kegon doctrines of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (Sutra of the

---

<sup>311</sup> Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki "The Role of Nature in Zen Buddhism" in *Zen Buddhism*, ed. William Barrett (original publication between 1927-1934; reprint, Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 230-1 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

Garland of Buddhas) as the starting point of his Columbia seminars in 1953. Kegon taught the interdependence of all things, and Dr. Suzuki, along with other Buddhist scholars considered it the high point of Buddhist thought.”<sup>314</sup> The teaching of the Kegon School is known as the “teaching of totality,” in which all things are viewed as not only dependent on one another but are equal; the human mind is the universe itself and is identical with the Buddha. Indeed, the Buddha, the mind, and all sentient beings and things are one and the same. The fundamental teaching of Kegon is the notion of “universal causality” in which everything in the universe arises simultaneously out of itself.

Alan Watts framed ideas from the *Avatamsaka Sutra* more colloquially for Western readers in 1956:

The Chinese and Japanese idea of “nature” is not quite ours. In Taoism and Zen Buddhism alike the whole world, human beings included, is felt to be a process of spontaneity. No one is ordering it around, telling it what to do; it does not follow any fixed, mechanical laws; and, having no purpose, it is not going anywhere. It is sufficient to itself at every moment, beginning and ending now- without ever stopping. Yet although the spontaneity is following no law and pursuing no purpose, it is far from mere chaos, mere random disorder. In the whole as in the parts it is self-organizing- a marvelous system of inter-relations which “arise mutually” so that nothing is before and nothing after, nothing higher and nothing lower.<sup>315</sup>

Lassaw’s writings reflect his assimilation of Suzuki’s and Watts’ interpretation of nature as not based on duality or hierarchy but as a system of ongoing and interrelated

---

<sup>314</sup> Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 197.

<sup>315</sup> Alan Watts, “Sabro Hasegawa: Master of the Controlled Accident,” in *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident* (Oakland: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), 16. Watts’ first book, *The Spirit of Zen* (which was published when he was 20 years old), was a distillation of Suzuki’s writings.

elements and processes. In one 1950s essay, Lassaw wrote that, “to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Western man, nature was something opposed to man. [He] spoke of ‘conquering’ or ‘resisting’ nature. It was always outside of [himself]. To me, there is nothing in the universe, nothing that exists, but nature.”<sup>316</sup> In another essay of the same period, Lassaw emphasized again that the European tradition had become accustomed to explaining humankind and nature as separate:

The Judeo-Christian world sees nature as the enemy to be conquered, as the temptress who seduces the soul away from the divine. It is time we recognized that we humans are part of a whole ecology which I imagine to include all creation, all Becoming. I am nature. I experience both myself and the not myself. Together they constitute what I know as nature.<sup>317</sup>

Lassaw wrote in another essay from the 1950s, “The Nature of Reality,” which was reminiscent of Suzuki’s “The Role of Nature in Zen Buddhism,” that “there is no separation between man and nature. There is no question of conquering nature, but of taking one’s place in nature.” Where Suzuki wrote that, “Zen is right in the midst of the ocean of becoming... It is indeed Nature itself,” Lassaw echoed that “we humans are part of a whole ecology which I imagine to include...all Becoming. I am nature.”<sup>318</sup> In such examples, Lassaw’s absorption of Suzuki’s Zen becomes very clear.

Lassaw’s comment echoed that of Pollock, who had previously remarked “I am nature” in a notorious conversation with Hans Hoffman. Hoffman had asked Pollock

---

<sup>316</sup>Ibram Lassaw, “Statements,” undated (c. early 1950s), handwritten notes in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>317</sup>Ibram Lassaw, undated (c. early 1950s) essay in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>318</sup>Ibram Lassaw, “The Nature of Reality,” c1950s, handwritten notes in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., microfilm roll N69-129.

why he didn't work more from nature, to which Pollock shot back, "I am nature."<sup>319</sup> Pollock's statement revealed that he believed his artistic practice to be in conjunction with or indistinguishable from nature and not a matter of distilling or translating ideas from the world.

An Asian-based view of nature was, for Lassaw, connected to a shift in his concept of the ideal role of the artist as, not a genius-creator, but a participant in natural processes. Lassaw felt confident that, as an artist, he was merely exemplifying creativity in general:

There is a sense of security in the identification of the process that I am [sic] with the process taking place in the universe and the knowledge that I am always a part of an unknown but wonderful event.<sup>320</sup>

Lassaw wrote in his notebooks that "the idealistic, Aristotelian philosophy of perfection denies any growth," and he concluded that "what I deduced from my readings led to identification of process- that I am with the process taking place in the universe."<sup>321</sup> Where he saw the European artistic tradition as identified with a goal of static formal perfection, an Asian-based model offered him a more open-ended approach, where "art is one of the gateways to immediate comprehension of reality, of, let's say, digging the divine in this very moment."<sup>322</sup>

---

<sup>319</sup> Kirk Varnedoe, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 42.

<sup>320</sup> Ibram Lassaw, undated, handwritten notes in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>321</sup> Ibram Lassaw, undated notes in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>322</sup> Interview with Ibram Lassaw conducted by Irving Sandler, August 26, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 60.

By the early 1950s, Lassaw downplayed the idea of artistic intent. He began to emphasize an automatist, meditative working state, a mind-set in which the artist receives information from many different sources in a non-hierarchical fashion. Within this model, the emphasis was away from the artist's intellectualizing will, or "ego," towards other factors. He stated:

In the arena of the studio there takes place a collaboration of materials, tools, unconscious forces, ego and other factors. I respond to the felt needs of the work as it progresses.

The idea of being spontaneous and free of intellectualizing during the creative process, as emphasized by the Surrealists, closely paralleled certain of Suzuki's Zen ideas.

Suzuki presented intellectualization as an obstacle to understanding reality. In his notes on Suzuki's 1953 lectures, Lassaw noted, regarding the "direct perception of existence," that "that which is before you is it, begin to reason about it and you fall at once into error."<sup>323</sup> Lassaw noted from a Suzuki lecture that "a religious man confronts reality directly not in an abstract way" and "object and subject become one. No mind. No *atman* [the life principle or essence]... there is no meaninglessness."<sup>324</sup> He transcribed Suzuki's phrase, "he who interprets, loses life," and added in his own words, "to achieve intentionally the absence of intentions."<sup>325</sup>

---

<sup>323</sup> Ibram Lassaw, notebook entry for 1953, in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>324</sup> Ibram Lassaw, handwritten notes from Suzuki lecture at Columbia, February 17, 1953, in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>325</sup> Ibram Lassaw, notebook entry for 1953, in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll N69-129.

Lassaw's favorite Zen concept, consistently repeated throughout his writings and notebooks from 1953 through 1961, was that of *tathata*. The English translation of *tathata* is "thusness" or "suchness." In the Kegon notion of universal causality (*dharmadhātu*), all things (*dharmas*), are either in a state of "suchness" or in a state of "principle" (*sunyata*) in which the thing possesses no form of its own but can take on a form according to its circumstances. "Suchness," as Suzuki taught, represented the non-verbal level of reality, the world "just as it is" apart from any specific thoughts or valuations about it, whether positive or negative; in a state of "suchness," all seems to be self-explanatory, self-sufficient, and complete just by the fact of happening.

Lassaw's interest in *tathata* was forged during Suzuki's classes from March through May of 1954 in which Suzuki emphasized this concept as an essential part of Kegon. Lassaw's notes from four Suzuki lectures during March 1954 indicate that *tathata* was addressed in each lecture: March 5, Lassaw listed *tathata* as one of the "5 things leading to Ultimate Reality"; March 12, Lassaw wrote "suchness, *tathagata*, thusness, to purify the mind. In its absolute state- no mind"; March 19, Lassaw noted that Suzuki lectured on "Zen interpreted according to Kegon philosophy" and he also transcribed Suzuki's words, "Have no preconceived ideas or prejudices to find Suchness. Everything is just so. There is no superfluity"; March 26, "Become the wheel revolving. State of... suchness... become the becoming, out of this awareness rises and out of this comes enlightenment."<sup>326</sup> On April 9, 1954, Lassaw observed that "All things are of

---

<sup>326</sup> Ibram Lassaw, notebook entries from March 1954, in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., microfilm roll N69-129.

suchness,” and on May 4, 1954, Lassaw commented that “the Buddha is space. Space is both finite and infinite. Sunyata- Emptiness is space.”<sup>327</sup>

Lassaw reified the concept of *tathata*, derived from Suzuki’s particular discourse of Zen as an ineffable experience, as an area outside of intellectualization or verbal explanations. For Lassaw, Zen philosophy represented an unchanging system of practices that was basically a function of the universal need to cultivate the non-verbal, intuitive part of the mind. He frequently repeated the term “tathata” in interviews and in written statements. In one undated statement, most likely written in 1954 or 1955, Lassaw linked the idea of direct representation with *tathata*:

I, for one, have a great hunger for a more direct and vivid grasp of reality. I want MORE REALITY, FIRST-HAND REALITY. I want to get away from ILLUSION... The representation IS NOT the REALITY... When working on a piece of sculpture I see only the immediate reality of the particular forms and colors that confront me. The “THUSNESS” or in Sanskrit ‘TATHATA’. Concepts and associations fade away. The moment of working is to me an engagement in life. The sculpture itself is REALITY, not an interpretation of reality. Words are often dangerous stumbling blocks. In Zen literature there is this exchange: Hofoku pointing at the mountains, “Is not this Reality?” Chokei, “It is, but it’s a pity to SAY so!”<sup>328</sup>

The Zen anecdote of the exchange between Zen master, Hofoku, and his student, Chokei was one of a number of Zen stories which Lassaw frequently referred to in relation to his sculptural practice.<sup>329</sup>

---

<sup>327</sup> Ibram Lassaw, notebook entries from April 9 and May 4, 1954, in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>328</sup> Ibram Lassaw, “Statement,” undated (c.1954-1955) in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>329</sup> He repeated this anecdote, for instance, in his memoir article in *Leonardo*, 355.

Lassaw also related the idea of “thusness” or “suchness” to the idea of being fully present in the occurring moment, in everyday life, rather than living for a future goal or for heaven:

We humans ask ‘What is the meaning of our being here?’ and we are told to pay attention to reality in order to understand. Do not lose touch with concrete reality. Heaven is right here and now- we usually manage to be somewhere else. We are continually engaged in clouding over the intense, naked fresh direct experience of form, color sound- what is called thusness or *tathata* in Sanskrit- into signs, symbols, abstractions of our invention. We do not see thing [sic] as they are in themselves. We conceptualize- we translate life as it is lived- into static unlife into dreary moralistic symbols. We judge living reality on the basis of concepts. Suzuki once said- When Adam and Eve began to distinguish Good and Evil they were expelled from Paradise.<sup>330</sup>

By the early 1960s, Lassaw involved the concept of *tathata* as a regular reference point for those seeking to understand his sculptures. He stated in a 1963 interview about his sculptural work:

It isn’t verbal or conceptual: its thusness. My art is not language; it doesn’t stand for something; it isn’t even a means of communication.<sup>331</sup>

In a 1964 interview, Lassaw explained:

I’m able for moments at a time to see the world creation...the “thusness” of it. The is-ness of the universe –crazy, marvelous, boring, exciting, static, deadly- just as it is.<sup>332</sup>

In a number of his sculptures, Lassaw sought to explicitly apply Zen concepts.

His 1954 hanging work, *Akasa* [Figure 1], could be viewed as an illustration of a traditional Indian parable, which was repeated in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. In Indian lore, an enormous net is suspended above the palace of Indra, the god who symbolizes the

---

<sup>330</sup> Ibram Lassaw, “Statement,” undated note, in Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., microfilm roll N69-129.

<sup>331</sup> Ahlander, “Art in Washington – Sculptor Lassaw,” 67.

<sup>332</sup> Lassaw, interview by Dorothy Seckler, November 1-2, 1964, 7.

natural forces that protect and nurture life. A brilliant jewel is attached to each of the knots of the net. Each jewel contains and reflects the image of all the other jewels in the net, which sparkles in the magnificence of its totality. Indra's net serves as a visual metaphor for the interdependence and interpenetration of all phenomena. Similarly, *Akasa*, a highly reflective bronze lattice-like sculpture, contains a stone of rose quartz, and could be seen as evoking a section of this net. In Sanskrit, the word, *akasa*, means all pervasive, infinite space which is not limited by corporeality but is the container for material things.

Lassaw's 1952 welded bronze sculpture, *Kwannon* [Figure 34], was titled after the bodhisattva *Kannon*; she is said to have renounced enlightenment in order to guide other beings through the realms of existence. *Kwannon*, while not overtly figurative, is of a human scale, nearing six feet in height, and has protrusions resembling outstretched arms, legs, and a head.

Winther-Tamaki interpreted Lassaw's *Kwannon* through the lens of postwar nationalism:

The brazen dissimilarity of this sculpture to the eponymous Buddhist icons carved by classical masters such as Kaikei and Unkei seem to boast how the original genius of the modern artist has succeeded in digesting, internalizing, and transforming beyond superficial recognition the profound accomplishments of Japanese antiquity. During the early postwar years when Japan was subject to the hegemony of American military occupation, Japanese and Asian culture was the object of a widespread desire for *possession*: that is, subsumption to American self-identity. Rather than demonstrative Japonism, this could be described as an initiative wherein the effects of Japanese culture were banished and a supposedly universal core was assimilated.<sup>333</sup>

---

<sup>333</sup> Bert Winther, "Japanese Thematics in Postwar American Art: From *Soi-disant* Zen to the Assertion of Asian-American Identity," in *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*, Alexandra Munroe, ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 57-59.

While Lassaw's *Kwannon*, as modern abstraction, was indeed void of all reference to Buddhist iconography, perhaps it served as more of an homage to a culture he admired rather than as a gesture toward possession. Lassaw wrote that:

I always approach the business of naming a work of art with some apprehension... However, if the title or name is given with the wish to honor or give homage to certain aspects of Reality, God, Tathata (Suchness) which we experience, it then constitutes, in a way, an offering.

In the same way, in 1957, he remarked on his titling of *The Awakened One* [Figure 2]:

A Buddha! The piece of sculpture I am working on must be a Buddha.  
The Awakened One.

Lassaw's understanding of Zen as universal was common to the postwar period, partly due to Suzuki's and Watts' promotion of it as such. I will remark further upon the mid-century, universalist discourse in the conclusion below.

### **Critical reception: Zen as an aspect**

From the 1930s through the mid 1940s, Lassaw's sculptures were largely overlooked by contemporary critics for various reasons. Anderson remarked that in the 1930s, "the Constructivist-Surrealist dichotomy... implicit in the work of Alexander Calder, Isamu Noguchi, David Smith, Theodore Roszak, and Ibram Lassaw... failed to make an impact as a coherent new direction, perhaps because it hewed too closely to both European and American avant-garde painting."<sup>334</sup> Overall, painting was more popular as a medium than sculpture in the pre-war era, resulting in less exposure for sculptural work.

---

<sup>334</sup> Anderson, *American Sculpture in Process*, 3.

Larsen wrote that, “sculptors were a distinct minority during the thirties and early forties, as was frequently noted during AAA meetings.”<sup>335</sup>

Lassaw’s 1934 *Concrete Abstraction*, a three and a half foot tall, abstract sculpture modeled of concrete, now destroyed, was his first work to be represented in a major public exhibition, the Whitney Biennial of 1936. While major art magazines and newspapers covered the exhibition, Lassaw’s sculpture went undiscussed, perhaps as a result of being the only abstract sculpture in the exhibition. Lassaw regularly exhibited his sculptures in the American Abstract Artist exhibitions, and his work was briefly mentioned in reviews of the 1937 and 1938 exhibitions.<sup>336</sup>

Similarly, Lassaw’s sculptures of the early 1940s went largely unmentioned by critics. *New York Times* critic Edward Alden Jewell thought that the 1947 sculpture *Somewhere Window*, “might be more effective were the contribution (in steel and plastic) composed of solid surfaces, and were the color more positive.”<sup>337</sup> Heller wrote that

---

<sup>335</sup> Susan Larsen, “The Quest for An American Tradition, 1927-1944,” in *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America: 1927-1944*, John Lane and Susan Larsen, eds. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1983).

<sup>336</sup> A more in-depth study of reviews of Lassaw’s exhibitions during the 1930s and 1940s is included in Heller’s, “The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw.”

<sup>337</sup> Edward Alden Jewell, “Sculpture,” *New York Times*, May 18, 1947, section II, 10.

David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro wrote in their edited book of Abstract Expressionist documents that, “New York newspaper critics Edward Alden Jewell, Howard Devree, and John Canaday of the *New York Times*, Emily Genauer of the *New York World-Telegram* and *The Sun*, and Carlyle Burrows of the *New York Herald Tribune* were dubious about the new painting, often perplexed by it, and generally critical of its direction. They were writing, to be sure, for an audience rather less sophisticated about visual art.” These same critics were those who wrote on, and were generally critical, of new sculpture also. David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, “Introduction: A Brief History,” in *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 22.

“none of Lassaw’s sculptures from the 1940s has ever received much notice from reviewers. The reasons for this neglect are only partly clear. It was not because these works were inaccessible, originally, since Lassaw exhibited these sculptures in numerous important group shows throughout the decade.”<sup>338</sup> Heller cited a lack of interest in abstract work generally and the specific fact that Lassaw’s Plexiglas works did not reproduce well. From 1940 to 1948, Lassaw exhibited only in group shows, and without critical support or an art dealer, his sculptures did not sell in the marketplace.

In 1949, mention of Lassaw appeared in Clement Greenberg’s important essay entitled, “The New Sculpture.” Greenberg asserted that at that historical juncture, sculpture had reached a moment of utmost innovation, and he acknowledged that “not enough attention is paid to the novelty of new sculpture [and] not enough attention is paid to sculpture in general.”<sup>339</sup> Greenberg continued that:

Between the Renaissance and Rodin sculpture suffered as a vehicle of expression because of its adherence to the monolithic, somatic Graeco-Roman tradition of carving and modeling... sculpture was at a lesser remove than any of the other arts from that which it imitated –from its subject matter- and that it required less powers of abstraction to transpose the image, say, of an animal to stone in the round than to a flat surface, or into words- this counted against it for several centuries. Sculpture was too *literal* a medium.<sup>340</sup>

Greenberg contended that Rodin was the first sculptor to take cues from Expressionist painting and apply painterly effects to sculpture. Further influences on the medium

<sup>338</sup> Heller, “The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw,” 148.

<sup>339</sup> Greenberg, “The New Sculpture,” 642. He added that, “this new ‘genre’ is perhaps the most important manifestation of the visual arts since Cubist painting, and it is at this moment pregnant with more excitement than any other art except music.” (642)

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 639.

arrived through Cubism and African sculpture, which allowed a transition in sculpture to forms not based on mass or the monolith. In the modern period, Greenberg perceived that sculpture was “freed... from the requirements of imitative representation.”<sup>341</sup>

Greenberg’s opinion was that, as of 1949, “as many as nine or ten young sculptor-constructors... have a chance... to contribute something ambitious, serious and original.”<sup>342</sup> Lassaw was among those Greenberg singled out. He listed the sculptors who had “broken away from the monolith” as “David Smith, Theodore Roszak, David Hare, Herbert Ferber, Seymour Lipton, Peter Grippe, Burgoyne Diller, Adaline Kent, Ibram Lassaw, [and Isamu] Noguchi.”<sup>343</sup> Clearly, this article placed Lassaw within an avant-garde lineage descending from Rodin and Picasso and in an important light, since Greenberg’s audience –those who read his articles on Abstract Expressionism in the *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, *The Nation*, and other intellectual and art publications– helped to shape public opinion of the movement. However, during the late 1950s, Greenberg lost interest in many of these artists, as they did not fit within his theories of progressive formal innovation. The sole sculptor he would consistently champion was Smith.

The Abstract Expressionists artists claimed to draw upon their own subjectivity for the content of their work; these ideas were solidified in discussions at the “Subjects of the Artists” school in the late 1940s, in artist’s statements, and in publications. In 1948, *Life* magazine published a “*Life* Round Table on Modern Art,” with reproduced works by

---

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 640.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 641.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 641-642.

Baziotes, de Kooning, Gottlieb, Pollock, and Stamos, and concluded that “the meaning of modern art is, that the artist of today is engaged in a tremendous individualistic struggle to discover and to assert and to express himself.”<sup>344</sup>

Many critics in the late 1950s and early 1960s gravitated toward biographically based criticism in addressing Abstract Expressionist art, often relying on an artist’s stated goals as sufficient to explain the works’ meaning. Scholars who knew the artists personally, such as Dore Ashton and Irving Sandler, especially tended to center their writings on biographical information.<sup>345</sup> By the 1990s, a more analytical body of scholarship had developed around the idea of Abstract Expressionist subjectivity, where the idea of a “self” that was apolitical and universal was discarded, or revealed to be, not unmarked or neutral at all, but overwhelmingly white, male, and heterosexual. Michael Leja, in 1993, argued for the treatment of New York School artwork as “historically and ideologically engaged cultural artifacts.”<sup>346</sup> Also in 1993, Caroline Jones defined what she termed the “Abstract Expressionist ego” as “highly individualized... given prominence by the postwar power and prestige of America itself [and]... dominant and pervasive in the culture of the time.” She summed up this New York School subjectivity as “isolated, autochthonic, angst-ridden male genius, alternating between bouts of

---

<sup>344</sup> *Life*, October 11, 1948, 78-79.

<sup>345</sup> Dore Ashton, *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Irving Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

<sup>346</sup> Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*, 4.

melancholic depression and volcanic creativity.<sup>347</sup> Ann Gibson's 1997 book, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics*, delved into artists excluded from the canon due to their status as sculptors, photographers, or their belonging to otherwise marginalized categories, including women artists and artists of varied ethnicities.

In the notable writings on Lassaw's sculpture throughout the 1950s, as was customary, the sculptor's personality traits came to be linked with the characteristics of his sculptures. The 1951 catalog essay for Lassaw's first solo exhibition noted that he was "a sculptor of remarkably sensitive and poetic perception."<sup>348</sup> In a catalog for a solo show in 1954, James Fitzsimmons characterized Lassaw as a gentle and poetic man whose sculptures could be understood as devotional objects.<sup>349</sup> Lassaw also had a reputation as "perhaps the happiest sculptor in New York (not because his works are finally receiving the attention they deserve, but from an inner contentment and joy in his work)."<sup>350</sup>

In David Smith's 1951 *Hudson River Landscape* [Figure 37], he abstractly portrayed the northeastern landscape in welded steel; the work reads as a landscape in that it has horizontal bands which read as loosely demarcating the river and skyline. In the same year, Lassaw created a treatment of celestial space in his hanging, bronze-over-steel sculpture, *Nebula in Orion* [Figure 33]. Smith's landscape, which measured nearly

---

<sup>347</sup> Caroline A. Jones, "Finishing School: John Cage and the Abstract Expressionist Ego," *Critical Inquiry*, Summer 1993, Volume 19, Number 4, 639.

<sup>348</sup> Kootz Gallery catalogue, October 23-November 10, 1951.

<sup>349</sup> James Fitzsimmons, Kootz catalogue, October 23-November 13, 1954.

<sup>350</sup> Lawrence Campbell, "Lassaw Makes a Sculpture," *Artnews*, March 1954, Volume 53, Number 1, 26.

six feet across, was designed to be seen especially from one angle, the front, as with painting, and had little depth. Lassaw's smaller work appeared to be a textured drawn grid, expanding into three-dimensional space, and can be viewed from any angle. Both artists used welding to create these sculptures, and the linear terms in these sculptures indicate a debt to Surrealist automatic drawings.

Although their work possessed some similarities in materials and techniques, David Smith was widely considered the most important Abstract Expressionist sculptor. Smith stated, "The sculpture work is a statement of my own identity... The identity does not yield."<sup>351</sup> One of his most well-known statements was, "the subject is me."<sup>352</sup> However, Lassaw deflected the idea that his creative process was primarily centered in his subjectivity. He stated, in 1968, that "The work is a 'happening' somewhat independent of my conscious will... the work uses the artist to get itself born."<sup>353</sup> As one critic wrote, Lassaw "[sees] himself as a speck in the galaxy of creativity rather than as the focal point of a solar system revolving around his brilliant individuality."<sup>354</sup>

As Chave remarked, it was common for certain New York School artists to have a "metaphysical dimension ascribed to their art."<sup>355</sup> Jonathan Fineberg, in 1995, placed Smith's *Hudson River Landscape* within the tradition of the sublime landscape, which he

---

<sup>351</sup> Smith, *David Smith by David Smith*, 16.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>353</sup> Lassaw, "Perspectives and Reflections," 361.

<sup>354</sup> Helen A. Harrison, "Ibram Lassaw: Space Explorations: A Retrospective Survey 1929-1988" (East Hampton: Guild Hall Museum, 1988), 7.

<sup>355</sup> Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction*, 2.

delineated as beginning with the Hudson River School and culminating in the work of Gottlieb, Newman, and Rothko.<sup>356</sup> Where Lassaw's *Nebula in Orion* might also have been read as an invoking the sublime, as constructing a metaphor for the smallness of the individual in the face of the vastness of the universe, somehow his work did not seem to correspond as well to an aesthetic of grand gesture.

In a 1955 essay in *Arts* magazine, Martica Sawin included information on Lassaw's early life and work and pointed to Zen as one of his aesthetic and philosophical interests.<sup>357</sup> She wrote of Lassaw, whom she considered "immensely gentle and reflective":

Although he is an adherent of no single system of belief, he is well versed in religion and philosophy, his interests ranging from Buddhist texts to medieval thinkers such as the German mystic Meister Eckhart; and he treasures a book of notes taken from Suzuki's lectures on Zen Buddhism which he attended for several semesters at Columbia University.

In an interview with Sawin, Lassaw mentioned the idea of "no duality" which referred to the *Lankāvatāra Sutra* as taught by Suzuki in his March 1954 lectures, a sutra that stresses that inner enlightenment entails doing away with all duality and rising above all distinctions:

I am constantly absorbed by things that are going on around me, the motion of people in the streets, the movement of clouds, the patterns of branches. There is no duality, everything is nature... I believe in an ecology of the universe in which every particle is vitally related to every other, an unbroken chain of dependence in which every organism is a part.

---

<sup>356</sup> Jonathan Fineberg, *Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 121.

<sup>357</sup> Sawin, "Ibram Lassaw," *Arts*, 1955.

In his artist's statement for the 1956 *12 Americans* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Lassaw referred to the Zen idea of being present in the here-and-now without mentioning Zen by name. He wrote:

Intuition and instinct, the direct, firsthand prehension of experience, has proved to be the more fruitful way for my work. When I am in the realm of concepts, my eyes no longer see, my ears no longer hear. Reality is hidden in a fog...Preconceptions and generalizations make us blind to "now."<sup>358</sup>

This statement underlines that intellectualization is an obstacle to understanding reality, an idea that Suzuki often presented in his lectures and writings. Lassaw perhaps did not name Zen as such due to the nationalized title of the exhibition, since emphasizing a Japanese source may not have seemed "American." Here, the linkage of Asian thought to nationalism seemed marked.

Irving Sandler contributed an essay to the catalog for the exhibition, *Three American Sculptors: Ferber, Hare, Lassaw*, held at the Kootz Gallery in the winter of 1959. The biographically oriented essay traced Lassaw's early interest in sculpture and described the content of his mature work. Sandler saw Lassaw's early work as being caught between biomorphic forms influenced by Miró and geometric forms influenced by Mondrian; he pointed to 1950 as the year of Lassaw's artistic breakthrough with his adoption of the welding technique.

Sandler used the Zen rhetoric for reaching enlightenment to describe Lassaw's transformative moment in 1950:

The sudden transformation seemed to him like a Zen "awakening" whereby dualistic views are cast off. All of the plusses of his past work

---

<sup>358</sup> Ibram Lassaw, Artist's Statement, *12 Americans*, 1956.

had coalesced into a transcendent sum- a fixed but dynamic circulation of matter and energy with centers of concentration at the thickened interstices. The result achieved was greater than its components; it could not be reduced back into its parts.<sup>359</sup>

Sandler's presentation of Lassaw's affinity with Zen was sympathetic and articulate:

He shares with Zen a distaste for duality, abstraction and symbol, and a belief in direct intuitive activity unscreened by any fixed conceptions. Not only is there a similarity in ideas but some of the images of Buddhism... perfectly describe Lassaw's constructions. The ultimate analogy is one of the central images of the Avantamsaka Sutra, the major work of Mahāyāna Buddhism. According to Alan Watts, it is "a vast network of gems and crystals, like a spider's web at dawn in which each gem reflects all the others. This net of gems is the Dharmadhātu, the universe, a realm of innumerable dharmas or 'thing-events.'"<sup>360</sup>

While positioning Lassaw relative to Asian spiritual theory, Sandler did add pointedly, "not that Lassaw has embraced an Oriental way of life."<sup>361</sup>

During the 1960s almost all writings on or by Lassaw linked him with Zen. A 1963 review by Leslie Judd Ahlander, for instance, noted that Lassaw studied with Suzuki and that Zen had a great influence on him.<sup>362</sup> And in an autobiographical artist's statement in the journal, *Leonardo*, Lassaw himself emphasized the importance of Zen in his development as a sculptor.<sup>363</sup>

---

<sup>359</sup> Sandler, "Ibram Lassaw," *Three American Sculptors*, 50.

<sup>360</sup> Sandler, "Ibram Lassaw," *Three American Sculptors*, 57.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>362</sup> Ahlander, "Art in Washington – Sculptor Lassaw," 67.

<sup>363</sup> Lassaw, "Perspectives and Reflections of a Sculptor."

Critics appeared to believe that the study of Asian philosophies imbued a person with passivity or “calmness.” In a substantial exhibition catalog essay for a show at the Gertrude Kase Gallery in 1968, Sam Hunter distinguished Lassaw from his contemporaries. After mentioning that Lassaw drew on “intellectual sources as Taoist and Zen teachings, the psychology of Jung, and other esoteric wisdoms,” he stated that:

The ideal calm which Lassaw’s personal presence radiates is an achieved and mastered serenity... similarly, his art seems attuned only to harmonious forces, but without opening itself to the charge of vapid mysticism... The expressionist indulgences and wilder ego-centered gestures of [Abstract Expressionism] are apparently foreign to his controlled temper, and refined lyrical accents.

In this case Lassaw’s “calm” is contrasted with the Abstract Expressionist ego with its apparent wildness and indulgence.

In his 1975 survey of sculpture from 1930 to 1970, Wayne Anderson linked Lassaw with Asian philosophies:

The references to stars, like *Fragment from Aldebaran* (1947), *Mandala* of 1949, and *Star Cradle* of 1949, all suggest a preoccupation with the cosmos- a mystic strain no doubt resulting from Lassaw’s growing involvement with the Eastern philosophies of Taoism, Vedanta, and Zen Buddhism.<sup>364</sup>

Anderson also included mention of *Milky Way*, which he interpreted as a metaphor for Lassaw’s “view of the universe as a continuum, within which his sculptures were not meant to be microcosmic symbols of the whole, but rather, analogical fragments taking on a dual aesthetic and religious significance.”<sup>365</sup>

---

<sup>364</sup> Wayne Andersen, *American Sculpture In Process: 1930/1970* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1975), 57.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

The major scholarly works on Lassaw are Susan Strickland's 1977 M.A. thesis "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw: Its Relationship to Abstract Expressionism" and Nancy Gale Heller's 1982 Ph.D. thesis "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw," a monographic survey.<sup>366</sup> Strickland argued for the re-inclusion of Lassaw into the larger discussion of Abstract Expressionism, as she asserted that Lassaw pursued the same aesthetic aims as many of the Abstract Expressionists and maintained close friendships with de Kooning, Hare, and others. She stressed the similarities between Lassaw's sculptural techniques and those of contemporary painters: both emphasized gesture, composed intuitively, and explored nontraditional materials and techniques.

However, Strickland's argument was also tacitly gendered, framing the Abstract Expressionists' execution as masculine (brutal, forceful, and vulgar) while she read Lassaw's technique as feminine (subdued and harmonious). This was made clear in a comparison between Pollock and Lassaw:

Pollock's gesture was freer and more spontaneous, even at times brutal, and reflected his sensual, innate reaction to painting, while Lassaw's gesture, more subdued, lyrical and sustained, mirrored the harmony he intuitively felt with his natural environment.<sup>367</sup>

---

<sup>366</sup> Susan Strickland, "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw: Its Relationship to Abstract Expressionism" (University of Delaware, M.A. thesis, 1977); Nancy Gale Heller, "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw" (Rutgers University, Ph.D. dissertation, 1982).

<sup>367</sup> Strickland, "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw", 20.

Where Pollock emerged as bi-gendered, in connection to masculine brutality and female sensuality, in Strickland's reading, Lassaw was cast as intuitive and in tune with nature as women are said to be.<sup>368</sup>

From the 1949 *Life* magazine article which asked, "Is He America's Greatest Painter?" onward, the reception of Pollock's paintings was thoroughly imbued with his personal myth. Gibson recounted the emphasis on "his explosive style, his Western roots, his hard drinking, his rejection of the past, his critical success in elite circles, his incomprehensibility, and his instinctive technique."<sup>369</sup> Leja explained how Greenberg traced "the locus of unruly emotion within the individual... to the masculine core of aggressive violence- a gendering that, strangely, was able to coexist harmoniously with the feminization of the unconscious."<sup>370</sup>

Strickland observed that that where Pollock's gesture was "crisp, forceful and rhythmic," de Kooning's was "slashing and vulgar," and, among the paintings of Pollock, de Kooning, Still, and Kline, there was a "rugged, rough, tactility."<sup>371</sup> Strickland concluded that "gesture in these works is a metaphor for the artist's personality." When Lassaw's work was read as a metaphor for his personality, however, it was feminized as evincing an aspect of Asian culture. Even as late as 2002, this opposition between the

---

<sup>368</sup> For a study of the gendering of Pollock's energies, see Anna Chave, "Pollock and Krasner: Script and Postscript," reprinted in Pepe Karmel, ed., *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, Reviews* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999).

<sup>369</sup> Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism*, 2. See her chapter, *The Abstract Expressionist Hero* for a thorough discussion of the association of masculinity and the Abstract Expressionist painters.

<sup>370</sup> Leja, "Pollock in Metaphor," in *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*, 277.

<sup>371</sup> Strickland, "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw," 22.

“grand” Pollock and the “gentle” Lassaw persisted; curator Arthur Jones stated that “Lassaw’s sculptures tend to be gentler and more poetic in feeling, as well as smaller in scale, than are most of Pollock’s paintings.”<sup>372</sup>

Where Lassaw had a sensitive, poetic, and gentle persona, these personality traits in combination with his creation of works that were affiliated with Asian philosophies, would feed certain cultural biases and contribute to his being treated as a minor sculptor, much in the same way that Mark Tobey’s calligraphic painting style was generally viewed as more delicate and feminine (coded as Asian) than Pollock’s similar painting technique, which was promoted as distinctly masculine and “American.”<sup>373</sup> As Gibson put it, “in an era that preferred heroic art and in which heroism was understood as a masculine prerogative, ‘feminine’ characteristics in art works generally relegated them to minor status.”<sup>374</sup>

Generally speaking, while Abstract Expressionist painting has been critically reconsidered of late, sculpture has been neglected in recent discussions of postwar New York art. In 1994, Joan Marter stated that:

---

<sup>372</sup> Arthur Jones, “Ibram Lassaw: Deep Space and Beyond,” in *Ibram Lassaw: Deep Space and Beyond* (Radford, VA: Radford University Art Museum, 2002), 13.

<sup>373</sup> Recently, Klein and Yoshihara examined the negotiations of political, economic, military, social, cultural, and ideological hegemony in relation to gender, by studying the cultural interpretations of white womens’ relationships to Asia from the 1870s through World War II. Klein used Rodger and Hammerstein’s *The King and I*, and Yoshihara used Pucinni’s *Madame Butterfly*, to illustrate how the idea of a romantic, “feminine” Japan, also seen as a curious other-worldly place, was realized in popular culture. Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Mari Yoshihara, *White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>374</sup> Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism*, 7.

Sculpture... is frequently marginalized and, when discussed in art-historical literature, dismissed as secondary by postwar culture makers... most of the direct metal constructions of the late 1940s and early 1950s are ignored.<sup>375</sup>

Michael Leja, in his 1993, study on Abstract Expressionism, framed one explanation for the relegation of Abstract Expressionist sculpture to secondary status:

Sculpture associated with Abstract Expressionism indicates the dangers of invoking metaphor too literally. That this art, with the possible exception of David Smith's work, has proven resistant to the integration of the New York School no doubt had to do with the inhospitability of cast-metal sculpture to spontaneous facture.<sup>376</sup>

The protracted time typically involved in creating a sculpture has been raised as counter to the effect of immediacy so valued by these artists. However, Lassaw did not see that the sculptural medium, as he practiced it, was a barrier to spontaneity:

I would call myself an action sculptor in exactly the same sense as action painting. For one thing, I have no drawings, no plans. I make up my mind as I go along... spontaneity is the core of Abstract Expressionism. It's a kind of continuing exploration, without any preconceived end in view.<sup>377</sup>

Leja also asserted that:

the critical and cultural devaluation of the sculpture may be also a function of its failure to read as expressive equivalent or enactment –rather than illustration- of psychic or cosmic conflict.<sup>378</sup>

Lassaw was interestingly at once, in certain respects, connected to and, in others, thoughtfully distanced from canonical Abstract Expressionism. Where he was not

---

<sup>375</sup> Joan Marter, "Postwar Sculpture Re/viewed," *art journal* 53, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 20.

<sup>376</sup> Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*, 311.

<sup>377</sup> Ahlander, "Art in Washington – Sculptor Lassaw," 67.

<sup>378</sup> Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*, 311.

invested in the grand gesture of the egotistical, Western artistic hero or genius, Lassaw's use of metaphors of interiority and subjectivity place his thematics squarely within that of the New York School, especially that of Pollock, Rothko, and Smith.

## CHAPTER III: HASEGAWA SABURŌ

I will begin this chapter by providing a brief biography of Hasegawa Saburō. I will then discuss his interest in calligraphy and how this method of creating art became relevant for Japanese and US artists during the postwar period, especially with regard to mid-century Zen. Following this, I will examine the critical response to Hasegawa's attempt to foster intercultural exchange in the US.<sup>379</sup>

**Brief Biography**

Hasegawa Saburō was born in Yamaguchi, Japan in 1906 and grew up in Ashiya [Figure 38]; he died in Oakland, California in 1957.<sup>380</sup> He was raised in a family of considerable wealth.<sup>381</sup> Hasegawa's father, Keigoro, had spent many years in London and in an attempt to create an open intellectual environment in his home, he embraced a European style of living, complete with an English tutor for his son.<sup>382</sup>

---

<sup>379</sup> I had certain key publications translated, particularly those written in the early 1950s that related to Abstract Expressionism, for the purposes of this dissertation. However, there are many of Hasegawa's earlier writings, including essays and articles in Japanese publications, that remain to be translated into English.

<sup>380</sup> Hasegawa was known in the US as Sabro Hasegawa; however, I will refer to him using the Japanese custom of presenting the family name first. In citing sources, I kept his name the way the author listed it.

<sup>381</sup> Biographical information from Inui Yoshiaki, "Sabro Hasegawa- his Art and Thought," in *'Ron' Hasegawa Saburō* (Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977), 241, and "Brief Biography of Sabro Hasegawa," in *'Ron' Hasegawa Saburō* (Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977), unpaginated. Hasegawa's father worked for Mitsui Trading Co. for many years. Later he retired and bought and managed a ship for government use and then operated a gold mine.

<sup>382</sup> Yoshiaki, "Brief Biography of Sabro Hasegawa," unpaginated.

At the age of 13, Hasegawa took up painting. During his senior years at the Kōnan High School, he commuted to Shinanobashi Institute of Oil Painting in Osaka and studied under Koide Narashige. Koide was a prominent *yogā* painter at this time, specializing in still lifes and nudes in the Postimpressionist and Fauvist styles.<sup>383</sup> Hasegawa was interested especially in Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh; and early-twentieth century European influence can be seen in such early works as *Radishes* and *Landscape* [Figures 39 and 40].

Hasegawa went on to major in art history at the Imperial University of Tokyo, graduating in 1929. He wrote his thesis on the Japanese *sumi-e* master and Zen Buddhist priest, Sesshū Toyo (1420–1506) focusing on Sesshū's *Hui-ko and Bodhidharma* at the Sainenji Temple.<sup>384</sup> Sesshū, who had traveled to China around 1467 and visited many Zen monasteries, came to apply the Chinese Zen landscape style to his abstract interpretations of nature. Sesshū's paintings influenced later generations of Japanese *sumi-e* painters and contributed to his classification as the foremost Japanese ink painter. Alan Watts, who became Hasegawa's colleague in 1954, wrote in 1957 that "it was through his study of Sesshū that Hasegawa first came to be interested in Zen, realizing that Sesshū's art was inseparable from his life as a priest."<sup>385</sup> In addition to his art historical scholarship, Hasegawa learned to practice the traditional Japanese disciplines

---

<sup>383</sup> *Yogā* literally means "Western painting." The term refers to works created in the Western style using Western media (usually oil paint on canvas).

<sup>384</sup> This 1496 hanging scroll depicted Zen patriarch Hui-ko presenting his severed arm to Bodhidharma.

<sup>385</sup> Alan Watts, "Sabro Hasegawa: Master of the Controlled Accident," in *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident* (Oakland: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), 22.

of calligraphy and *sumi-e*. Of particular importance to Hasegawa were the traditional arts as manifestations of Zen Buddhist philosophy and not merely as techniques.<sup>386</sup>

From the very beginning of his career as an artist Hasegawa cultivated a unique comparative perspective on art created in different cultures. Hasegawa later claimed that while “the arts of calligraphy and painting are two different matters... I often find that the works of [US and European vanguard artists] have something in common with the masterworks of classic calligraphy,” “it was Cézanne who opened my eyes to Sesshū in my adolescence. But later, I learned the greatness of Cézanne through Sesshū’s art.”<sup>387</sup> He concluded in the same year that “calligraphy and painting should be one.”

Upon his graduation from the university, Hasegawa (who spoke both English and French fluently) traveled by boat to New York for two weeks and then traveled to Europe in order to study old masters as well as French contemporary painting. From 1929 to 1932, he visited England, Italy, Spain, and France on an art tour, viewing and making oil sketches of European masterpieces [Figures 41-45]. Among the artists who especially made an impression on Hasegawa were the Italian Renaissance painters Giorgione, Giotto, and Raphael and the Parisian painters Dufy, Modigliani, and Picasso.

---

<sup>386</sup> “I can remember clearly how he stressed that we should not refer to Hakuin and Ryokan merely as ‘artists,’ but as ‘monks,’ whose art was only incidental expression of their religious enlightenment.” Paul Mills, “The Paintings of Sabro Hasegawa,” *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident* (Oakland, CA: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), 10.

<sup>387</sup> Hasegawa Saburō, “Calligraphy and Vanguard Painting,” in *Ron* (Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977), c.1951. Translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Midori Yamamura.

At the end of his tour, from November 1931 to May 1932, Hasegawa settled down in an atelier in the Montparnasse section of Paris with his new, French wife, Viola de Boer. He then focused on absorbing the lessons of French modernism. Hasegawa was enthusiastic about the work of Picasso; he studied works by Mondrian and Kandinsky, and he was familiar with the works of Arp, Brancusi, and Calder. At this time, Hasegawa entered the Salon d'Automne with his painting, *Still Life* [Figure 46], and he participated in the Abstraction-Création Association, an association of international artists that promoted abstraction in art from 1931 to 1936, although at this point he was not working abstractly himself.

Hasegawa brought his fresh knowledge of European modernism back to Japan in 1932; there he continued painting and wrote on modern Western art history and aesthetics. The style of his paintings during the early to mid 1930s, such as *Mt. Fuji against a Starry Sky* [Figure 47] and *Still Life in Red* [Figure 48], reflected the influences of European modernism; *Still Life in Red* especially echoed the aesthetic of Henri Matisse. A memorial portrait of his father, painted around 1933, resonated with Fauvist color and bold brush strokes [Figure 49].

Hasegawa's work from this period was included in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Nika Exhibitions (1932, 1933) in Tokyo, and in 1934 he founded a group, "New Age Western-style Painters," which held an exhibition every month in Tokyo. This was one of many art groups Hasegawa would form in the course of his career for the purpose of creating exhibition opportunities for Japanese artists working in new styles. At the same time as he was practicing in the styles of turn of the century European modernism; however, he contemplated the significance of the Japanese tradition and wrote essays on *Sesshū*,

Sōtatsu (c.1600-1640), and on the Chinese artist, Shih Tao (1641–c.1670).<sup>388</sup> During this time, Hasegawa also made some sketches from Buddhist sculptures [Figures 50 and 51]. Each year, from 1934 to 1936, he had at least one solo show in cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, and Kobe. He was well known for his European, modern looking paintings in Japanese art circles, although by European avant-garde standards, his work was quite regressive until the mid 1930s. A press release from a US source in the mid-1950s suggested that, “his teachings and writings and presentations of modern art were like an Armory Show for Japan, and the creative movements which sprang up were the beginning of modern art there.”<sup>389</sup> Hasegawa was indeed, if not a one-man Armory Show, a great proselytizer for European modernism in Japan, and Winther-Tamaki remarked that he “proceeded to play a leading role in shifting the attention of many in progressive Japanese art circles from surrealism to abstraction through his writings, his organizational activities, as well as his painting.”<sup>390</sup>

Around 1936, Hasegawa, who continued to follow new art movements in Europe and the US, developed an abstract way of painting which can be seen in works such as *Locus of a Butterfly* [Figure 52] and *Metropolis* [Figure 53].<sup>391</sup> The Japanese influence in

---

<sup>388</sup> Yoshiaki, “Sabro Hasegawa- his Art and Thought,” 240.

<sup>389</sup> “Sabro Hasegawa,” press release from the Willard Gallery, c.1954.

<sup>390</sup> Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 33.

<sup>391</sup> In his c.1951 essay, “New American Paintings,” reprinted in *Ron* (Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977), Hasegawa detailed the history leading up to postwar US art including the Armory Show of 1919, Gallatin’s Gallery of Living Art, the emergence of the Philadelphia Museum and the Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Modern Art’s

the paintings was reflected in Hasegawa's calligraphic draftsmanship; his treatment of line in *Metropolis*, especially, accentuated variations in slenderness, thickness, and strength of color. In 1937, Hasegawa founded the Free Arts Group (*Jiyū Bitjutsu Kyōkai*). He exhibited abstract works such as *Locus of a Butterfly* in the first exhibition of the Free Arts Group and continued to send works to exhibitions of this organization for many years. Also in 1937, Hasegawa published his book *Abstract Art (Abusutorakuto āto)*, which was the first book to be published in Japan on modern art.<sup>392</sup> His writings did a great deal to clarify contemporary European movements for his Japanese audience.

In 1938, Hasegawa taught at Tokyo's College of Art and Culture. He continued to focus on the affinities between European and Asian art and dedicated much of his writing to comparative art historical analysis. At the root of his study was a desire to find common elements that underlay different cultures' art production. From the late 1930s through the early 1950s, Hasegawa wrote many essays, which ranged from reviews and summations of individual modern European artists, to comparative treatments of Japanese and European art. His essays included writings on artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Joan Miró, Mondrian, Picasso, Henri Rousseau. Traditional Japanese artists were treated, for example, in his "Essay on Sōtatsu," "Sesshū," and "Ryōkan's Calligraphy Plaques." His essays on Japanese art themes included "Life to Paint- *Nanga* and Modern Time," and "*Ōtsue* and Folk Painting." And he also produced

---

"Cubism and Abstract Art" and "Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism" exhibitions, and the emigration of European artists to the US during the World War II era.

<sup>392</sup> Alan Watts, "Sabro Hasegawa: Master of the Controlled Accident," *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident*, Alan Watts, ed. (Oakland: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), 22. Hasegawa Saburō. *Abusutorakuto āto* (Abstract Art). (Tokyo: Atorie-sha, 1937).

essays dealing with European art movements including “Problems of Cubists.” In his essay, “Vanguard Art and Oriental Classics,” for example, Hasegawa pointed to similarities between Surrealism, functional architecture, and Japanese classic paintings.

Due to political upheaval in Asia and Europe, Japanese artists were increasingly cut off from contemporary European artists and art movements from around 1938 to 1945. Hasegawa stated that, “The Second World War interrupted the activities of the artists because none of them would agree to join the group of war-artists who painted battle-scenes. As a result they could scarcely get materials with which to paint.”<sup>393</sup> As Winther-Tamaki explained, “Modern Euro-American culture was the object of much critique and suspicion in Japan in the early 1940s,” and, thus, Japanese artists who worked with modern European art styles were subject to political scrutiny.<sup>394</sup> In 1944, Hasegawa was arrested for refusing to paint war propaganda, with an official charge of “disloyalty.” Watts wrote in 1957 that “the deepening shadows of war inclined him to a long period of inwardness, detesting militarism and all its manifestations.”<sup>395</sup>

During the isolating war years, when he “lived in seclusion...and remained silent,” Hasegawa turned his focus towards traditional Asian arts.<sup>396</sup> Hasegawa traveled to China in 1938 and became interested in Buddhist stone images in the Ta-t’ung Cave temples. In 1940, he retreated to a remote farm in Nagahama, in the Shiga Prefecture, to

---

<sup>393</sup> Sabro Hasegawa, “Abstract Art in Japan,” *The World of Abstract Art* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1956), 74.

<sup>394</sup> Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 33.

<sup>395</sup> Watts, “Sabro Hasegawa: Master of the Controlled Accident, 22.

<sup>396</sup> Yoshiaki, “Sabro Hasegawa- his Art and Thought,” 240.

study Taoist and Zen classics.<sup>397</sup> Watts wrote that, “It was only in 1940 that he began to apply himself seriously to the study of *za-zen*, or Zen practice, and to the traditional Zen arts of *cha-no-yu* [the Japanese tea ceremony] and *haiku* poetry.”<sup>398</sup> Hasegawa’s practice of Zen and the Zen arts augmented his previous interest in Sesshū and Zen calligraphers.

Hasegawa’s renewed interest in traditional Japanese culture from 1938 through the late 1940s echoed an attempt by certain Japanese intellectuals to locate and define a truly Japanese aesthetic. Important and influential philosophers such as Tanabe Hajime (1885-1962) and Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) had developed an anti-modernist hermeneutic philosophy which culminated during the war years in reaction to increasing industrialization. Nishida, especially, promoted aesthetic forms found in the Zen arts as standing in for Japanese culture as a whole, and he interiorized Japanese culture as “a narrowly focused state of being or type of ‘experience.’”<sup>399</sup>

Hasegawa’s paintings, *Untitled-Inspired by a Neolithic clay figure* of 1948 [Figure 54] and his 1949 *Fishing* [Figure 55] feature the figure and face, respectively, of a *Haniwa* funerary sculpture. *Haniwa* were unglazed, natural clay figures created in Japan during the third to sixth century, characterized by features delineated in a simple, bold, and abstracted fashion rather than in a realistically detailed style. The awkwardness between content and execution in *Untitled-Inspired by a Neolithic clay figure* and *Fishing*

---

<sup>397</sup> A classmate of Hasegawa’s at Tokyo University recalled: “Soon after the World War II began, the person who relentlessly told me to read *Shōbō Genzō*, a religious book by a medieval Zen Buddhist priest Dōgen, was Hasegawa.” Atsuo Imaizumi, “Personality and Art of Sabro Hasegawa,” in *Ron* (Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977), 244.

<sup>398</sup> Watts, “Sabro Hasegawa: Master of the Controlled Accident,” 22.

<sup>399</sup> Cox, “Culture as Aesthetic Value,” in *The Zen Arts*, 212.

was perhaps due to Hasegawa's attempt to express qualities of indigenous Japanese sculpture in oil paint through his training in European early modern painting techniques.

In 1950, the Japanese-American sculptor, Isamu Noguchi, visited Japan through a grant from the Bollingen Foundation. Noguchi later wrote, "I asked the artist Hasegawa Saburō to help me travel and re-experience the beauty of ancient temples and gardens, and to imbibe the tranquility of Zen."<sup>400</sup> Hasegawa accompanied Noguchi, as his guide, interpreter, and colleague, to the historical sites of Kyoto, Nara, and Ise. "They visited numerous historical sites including the Katsura Detached Palace; [the] Tai-an...tea house attributed to Sen no Rikyu; the stone garden at Ryoan-ji; the Nara temple of Yakushi-ji; and the Shino shrine at Ise."<sup>401</sup> The situation was one of profound interchange for both artists. Hasegawa, who was well versed in early European modernism, eagerly absorbed Noguchi's descriptions and illustrations of contemporary artistic developments in the US and gained a new vision of the traditional Japanese arts through the eyes of a contemporary US artist. Noguchi was especially engaged as he sought to learn more about his Japanese heritage from an artist expressly working to find a place for historic Japanese art within contemporary art.

Noguchi, who had visited Japan previously in 1931 and seen gardens and Zen temples, affirmed that on his second trip, he expanded his previous knowledge of Zen; "I was familiar with Zen. It wasn't that it was a new discovery; it was a kind of

---

<sup>400</sup> Isamu Noguchi, *Isamu Noguchi: A Sculptor's World* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 31.

<sup>401</sup> Bert Winther, "Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese culture in the early postwar years" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1992), 137.

continuation.”<sup>402</sup> Noguchi suggested that his own renewed attention in Zen affected Hasegawa’s interest as well:

I might say that it was because of my interest in Zen that [Hasegawa] became more interested in Zen. It wasn’t that he was not familiar with it, but he was a Western-oriented painter like all modern painters over there; he was not an old-fashioned painter; he was a modern painter in the sense that he admired people like Kandinsky and Klee. So when I became interested in looking at these temples we went around making rubbings. So he became more and more interested.<sup>403</sup>

Hasegawa was, in fact, deeply interested in Zen and the Zen arts, previous to his encounter with Noguchi; however, he had yet to find a way to reconcile in his art practice his interests in traditional Zen art with his interests in modern European painting. As Winther has detailed, Noguchi did become an artistic model for Hasegawa, since Noguchi himself was able to combine elements of Japanese art within a contemporary modernist aesthetic.<sup>404</sup> The fact that a highly regarded US artist expressed an interest in older Japanese art, materials, and techniques validated Hasegawa’s interest and served to encourage him.

Hasegawa reported in one of his numerous essays on Noguchi during the early 1950s that:

Noguchi visited the exhibit of the writings of the Zen priests with me, and he could select the best- Ryokan, Hakuin and Takuan- by himself and was excited, although he cannot read the writing. Noguchi is not an exception,

---

<sup>402</sup> Interview with Isamu Noguchi conducted by Paul Cummings, December 26, 1973, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., 126.

<sup>403</sup> Noguchi, Interview with Paul Cummings, 127.

<sup>404</sup> Winther, “Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese culture in the early postwar years” (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1992).

for all the good modern artists... who visit Japan... love and respect calligraphy.<sup>405</sup>

Hasegawa thus attempted to reassure his Japanese contemporaries that elements of traditional Japanese culture, such as Zen calligraphy, could be appreciated in an international modern art context.

Hasegawa completely changed his art practice within a year of his encounter with Noguchi; he found the recipe for what would become known as his mature style. Hasegawa abandoned oil painting on canvas and approached contemporary abstraction using traditional Japanese techniques, such as calligraphy (*sho*), ink painting (*suiboku*), engraved printmaking (*takuhon*), rubbing, and woodblock printmaking, and he embraced traditional Japanese materials such as rice paper and ink.<sup>406</sup> The visual change in Hasegawa's art was extremely dramatic as can be seen from a comparison of a colorful modern European-style work from 1950, *Mother and Child*, and a black and white 1951 calligraphic work done in ink on paper, *Self-Portrait* [Figures 56 and 57]. In *Mother and Child*, as with *Untitled-Inspired by a Neolithic clay figure* and *Fishing*, Hasegawa used the visual language of European early modernism to highlight an aspect of Japanese identity; in *Mother and Child*, the woman can be identified as Japanese by her haircut and kimono. However, in *Self Portrait*, Hasegawa managed to locate his own identity in a form which unified modern abstraction through the use of the traditional Japanese technique of ink on paper.

---

<sup>405</sup> Hasegawa, Saburō, "Days with Isamu Noguchi" ("Isamu Noguchi to no hibi"), reprinted in Hasegawa, *Ron* (Tokyo: Sanshida, 1977), 85-98.

<sup>406</sup> Mills, "The Paintings of Sabro Hasegawa," 6.

Hasegawa searched for new, vital approaches to traditional media. In 1951, he began to use a monotype technique in such pieces as *Civilization*, *Symphonic Poem: A Fine Day*, and *Katsura (Imperial Palace)* [Figures 58, 59, 60]. These “monotypes of India ink [were] taken from abstract designs which he incised in the palm-sized pieces of wood used as pallets for fish paste, a common Japanese dish.”<sup>407</sup> Hasegawa created compositions with clusters of the abstract designs, and in many of the shapes, the grain of the wood was apparent as a textural element. Winther explained that the folding screen, *Katsura (Imperial Palace)* [Figure 60], was “conceived through the memory of Hasegawa’s experience of the Katsura Detached Palace with Noguchi,” and it could be seen as an “abstract evocation of Japanese culture [where] the idea of artistic nationality is imbedded in modern abstract art.”<sup>408</sup>

Hasegawa also used the technique of rubbing, where he placed small pieces of wood from planks and other sources (“old tree stumps, driftwood, and an old boat”) under paper and rubbed India ink over the top to catch the grain of the wood.<sup>409</sup> His 1952, *Abstract Painting* [Figure 61], consisted of shapes created using ink wood rubbing which resembled the compositional style of constructivist paintings. His compositions were interpreted as embodying the idea of Zen simplicity of means; “their monochrome surfaces and the wide white space... aims at the accidental effect of the grain originating

---

<sup>407</sup> Winther, “Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese culture in the early postwar years,” 291.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid*, 292.

<sup>409</sup> Dorothy Paris, “Writings,” Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., frame 929.

in the severing of a stroke- of the point of contact of consciousness and unconsciousness...[corresponding] to the mental state of mind required for Zen.”<sup>410</sup>

Hasegawa also explored ink painting and combining calligraphy with other techniques. His 1951, *Modern Art Fair* [Figure 62], integrated monotype printing with spontaneous ink painting, and the result was a new form in the eyes of many artists. Elise Grilli, former Art Editor of the *Japan Times*, wrote of Hasegawa’s works of the early 1950s:

Noguchi, then visiting Japan, saw them as ‘abstract expressionism.’ The calligraphers called them a newly freed form of writing. The ink painters considered them to be a new form of *sumi-e* painting, perhaps a modern revival of ‘bujinga,’ the art of literati and philosopher-artists.

Hasegawa later wrote, “I do not know how to call them. Are they calligraphy or painting?”<sup>411</sup>

Hasegawa’s work came to be identified with an abstract calligraphy movement in Japan. In January 1952, five calligraphers --Inoue Yūichi, Morita Shiryū, Eguchi Sōgen, Sekiya Yoshimichi, and Nakamura Bokushi-- met at the *Ryoan-ji* temple in Kyoto to form the *Bokujin-kai* (literally, Ink Human Society), one of the most influential and innovative of the postwar avant-garde arts groups in Japan.<sup>412</sup> Morita served as the publisher of the group’s journal, *Bokubi* (The Beauty of Ink). The creation of this group

---

<sup>410</sup> Yoshiaki, “Sabro Hasegawa- his Art and Thought, 240.

<sup>411</sup> Hasegawa Saburō, “Notes on Painting,” *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident*, Alan Watts, ed. (Oakland: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), 39.

<sup>412</sup> For an excellent overview and discussion of the *Bokujin-kai* calligraphy group, see Alexandra Munroe, “Circle: Modernism and Tradition,” in *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream against the Sky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 129-132.

distinguished its members from “the conservative *yōga*, *Nihonga*, and traditional arts academies, and [positioned them] against the powerful salons that were controlled by the Ministry of Education and the Imperial Fine Arts Academy.”<sup>413</sup> Hasegawa, an early member of the *Bokujin-kai*, was responsible for introducing the art of US artists, among them Franz Kline, to the group through a regular column in *Bokubi* on experimental calligraphy and painting, as I will discuss below.

Hasegawa exhibited in the 1952 Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan, which traveled to San Francisco and Los Angeles, and in May 1953, he participated in the first Tokyo Biennale. He had his first US solo show featuring monotypes and ink paintings in January 1953 at the New Gallery in New York, an event that was arranged primarily by Kline. Hasegawa had begun corresponding with Kline in April 1951, and Kline had begun assisting Hasegawa with his US exhibition beginning in 1952 by showing images of Hasegawa’s work to New York gallerists.<sup>414</sup>

Hasegawa was eager for contact and exchange with contemporary US artists. He traveled to the US in January 1954, and during his one year stay in New York City he made a substantial presence in avant-garde art circles. By this point, Hasegawa had a well thought-out agenda based on a combined history of the Japanese cultural past with European modern art.

---

<sup>413</sup> Alexandra Munroe, “Scream Against the Sky,” in *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 22.

<sup>414</sup> April Kingsley, “Franz Kline: A critical study of the mature work, 1950-1962,” (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 2000), 61.

Hasegawa's reception among the Club members was positive and his impact at the Club was sizeable as interest in Japanese art and Zen peaked around this time.

Hasegawa reported:

In about a hundred days [in New York City] I was asked by about a hundred people about Zen and sometimes it was they who were telling me about Zen... When I went out to eat in Greenwich Village, invariably somebody young or old, painter, musician, or poet would get a hold of me and start talking intently. How dearly they desire to learn from the Orient.<sup>415</sup>

Hasegawa participated in the Club's lectures on the topic of Zen during the period between February and December 1954, events which were the more timely as many Club members were then attending D.T. Suzuki's lectures on the history of Zen Buddhism at Columbia University. In his 1954 essay, "Nationality and Universality of Japanese Art," Hasegawa particularly noted the expressions of interest in Zen by Cage, Kline, and Lassaw:

The new school of abstraction is represented by Franz Kline, whose black and white works resemble the calligraphic artists. Ibram Lassaw, who participated in the American Abstract Artists exhibition, attended every class given by Daisetsu Suzuki, and he has every book on Zen published in English... Another member [of the Club] who is known in Japan is the vanguard composer John Cage.<sup>416</sup>

---

<sup>415</sup> Hasegawa Saburō, "Nyukoku no Insho (Impressions of New York)" (1954) in Hyogo Kenrisu Kindai Bijutsukan (Hyogo Prefectural Modern Museum), *Tokubetsu Ten Hasegawa Saburō* (Special Exhibition Hasegawa Saburō) (1977), 12, 14; quoted in Bert Winther, "Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese culture in the early postwar years" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1992), 24.

<sup>416</sup> Hasegawa Saburō, "Nationality and Universality of Japanese Art," 1954, reprinted in *'Ron' Hasegawa Saburō* (Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977). Translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Midori Yamamura.

Among Hasegawa's talks that can be dated, he presented a slide lecture at the Club on pre-Meiji art on February 26, 1954 with an introduction from Franz Kline.<sup>417</sup> Matsumi Kanemitsu introduced Hasegawa's November 5, 1954 talk entitled "Hasegawa Zen." Hasegawa also participated in the "Zen II" and "Zen III" panel talks on November 19 and December 17, 1954. Hasegawa described these events:

I gave a slide lecture on Japanese classics at the Club, then narrowed it down and gave another lecture on Zen and art. These were my solo lectures. But I also did symposiums on Zen and art once every week. These were given by Lassaw, John Ferren, and myself. We became the lecturers, and we held three symposiums.<sup>418</sup>

Club lecture organizer, Philip Pavia, recalled that Hasegawa was "incredibly well-read."<sup>419</sup> The interest generated by these talks was so acute that, according to Hasegawa, "the magazine *Art Digest* asked me to write an article on the influence of Zen on contemporary art."<sup>420</sup> However, Hasegawa commented that since he "didn't want to terminate the possibilities of this new germination of interest by US artists by giving them harsh criticism, since they are not under the correct influence of Zen, [he] turned down the offer."<sup>421</sup> Since Hasegawa had studied such historical Japanese artists such as

---

<sup>417</sup> Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art, 1954, unpaginated. Pavia's notes in his archive mention that this talk was accompanied by a pamphlet. It is likely that this pamphlet is an English translation of an article on Franz Kline by Hasegawa published in the Japanese magazine *Bokubi* (Tokyo, 1951), because this archive contains a copy of this article with these notes.

<sup>418</sup> Hasegawa, "Nationality and Universality of Japanese Art," 1954.

<sup>419</sup> Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art, 1954, unpaginated.

<sup>420</sup> Hasegawa, "Nationality and Universality of Japanese Art," 1954.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.* Hasegawa felt that the US interest in knowing Zen came from "the desire for something spiritual, which is natural for people who live caught up in a civilization

Hakuin, Ryokan, and Sesshū, who were also Zen monks, he understood their calligraphy to be an expression of their religious enlightenment; the US artists did not have experience with Zen Buddhist practice, and thus, in Hasegawa's view, could not completely apply the techniques of the Zen arts.

While there are no complete notes extant on Hasegawa's February 1954 lecture on Zen at the Club, a general sense of his topics of discussion can perhaps be inferred from his other talks and writings from 1954, which I will discuss below. Hasegawa most likely cited or showed examples of the work of traditional Zen calligraphers, including Sesshū and Bashō, and tried to relate the qualities of their work to techniques of modernism. A fact sheet from the Willard Gallery indicated:

[Hasegawa] has been particularly interested in seeing the West come to know and understand the great works of the Zen Buddhist masters... He established a fruitful new relation between the concept of the controlled accident in Zen and the automatism and action painting of modern Western art.<sup>422</sup>

In a 1954 panel talk, Hasegawa placed Japanese art within the context of Zen and modernism:

I am pleased to see that many people are very much interested in Zen here. And I think and I believe that Zen is one of the philosophies which has influenced the development of all Japanese abstract art... What I really regret now- our tradition is not dead, it is not dying- but it is not living with the vigor it has before... I would like to make the revival of Japanese

---

which is excessively materialistic. In this sense, this trend also has an element of criticism and rebellion against modern American culture," c.1951 essay, "New American Paintings," reprinted in *Ron* (Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977). He remarked in "Nationality and Universality of Japanese Art" that

<sup>422</sup> "Sabro Hasegawa," press release from the Willard Gallery, c.1954.

abstract art brought about in part on an international scale. And to do that I am learning from the Western modern abstract art.<sup>423</sup>

George L.K. Morris, president of the American Abstract Artist's Club had asked Hasegawa, as a representative of the newly founded Japan Abstract Art Club, to send works for the group's 1954 exhibition.<sup>424</sup> The work of the Japan Abstract Art Club, visible at the 1954 American Abstract Artist's exhibition, generated significant attention for Hasegawa and his Japanese colleagues in the press. *ARTnews*, for one, pronounced that, "recently arrived from Japan, Sabro Hasegawa is one of his country's most dedicated abstract artists."<sup>425</sup> A panel, organized in conjunction with this exhibition by the American Abstract Artists, "Abstract Art around the World Today," was held at the Museum of Modern Art in March 1954 and featured Hasegawa as one of the key speakers.<sup>426</sup> Other members of the panel included Josef Albers, MoMA curator Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Franz Kline, George L.K. Morris, and Aline Saarinen. Hasegawa was

---

<sup>423</sup> American Abstract Artists, "Abstract Art around the World Today," 1954. Transcript, "Tape-recording of a forum presented by the American Abstract Artists at the Museum of Modern Art, March 16, 1954," in the archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 11.

<sup>424</sup> Sandra Kraskin, "American Abstract Artists," *Pioneers of Abstract Art: American Abstract Artists, 1936-1996* (New York: Baruch College, The City University of New York, 1996), 9. Morris wrote articles for individual artists, AAA publications, and the *Partisan Review*.

<sup>425</sup> Alfred Frankenfurter, "This month," *ARTnews*, April 1954, Volume 53, Number 2, unpaginated (front inside page).

<sup>426</sup> American Abstract Artists, "Abstract Art around the World Today," 1954. Transcript of a forum presented by the American Abstract Artists at the Museum of Modern Art, March 16, 1954, archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

introduced as a “distinguished guest” and linked with Kline, who was identified as expertly knowledgeable regarding Hasegawa’s work.<sup>427</sup>

The topic of Japanese abstract art was a timely one for the Museum of Modern Art, which presented an exhibition, *Japanese Calligraphy*, from June 22<sup>nd</sup> to September 19, 1954.<sup>428</sup> The exhibit featured forty works of abstract calligraphy mostly from members of the Japan Institute of Calligraphy, an official organization which was not affiliated with the avant-garde *Bokujin-kai*, although it did present one work by Inoue Yūichi.<sup>429</sup> The exhibition framed the “new Japanese calligraphy,” distinct from traditional calligraphy (“word paintings”), as emphasizing “the pictorial values of the written symbol, making legibility incidental.”<sup>430</sup> MoMA’s exhibition (which did not include Hasegawa) did raise awareness in the US of contemporary Japanese calligraphy trends. Barr promoted the exhibition by promising that “the Museum is going to open a full-scale Japanese house and garden where you can see that kind of abstract Japanese art

---

<sup>427</sup> American Abstract Artists, “Abstract Art around the World Today,” 6.

<sup>428</sup> *Japanese Calligraphy*, Museum of Modern Art exhibition #561, June 22-September 19, 1954. While the Museum of Modern Art does not have a catalogue for this exhibition, the museum archives include correspondence about the planning of the exhibition and information about traveling versions of this show. The exhibition is also referred to in MoMA press releases as *Abstract Japanese Calligraphy*.

<sup>429</sup> The impetus for organizing this exhibition arose out of MoMA philanthropist, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller’s interest in collecting postwar Japanese art, and it appears that MoMA’s curator of the Department of Architecture and Design, Arthur Drexler, developed a contact with Kyo Kagawa of the Japan Institute of Calligraphy, who presented a packaged exhibition for Drexler. Museum of Modern Art Archive, exhibition number 651, June 23-September 19, 1954.

<sup>430</sup> “First Showing of Abstract Japanese Calligraphy at Museum of Modern Art,” Museum of Modern Art press release, June 23, 1954.

and at the same time an exhibition of Japanese calligraphy.”<sup>431</sup> Barr remarked at the AAA panel that, “The calligraphic tradition of beautiful writing in Japan has been very much appreciated by some of our painters such as Mark Tobey and Mr. Kline himself.”<sup>432</sup>

Also during his year in New York City, Hasegawa had solo shows at Gallery Contemporaries in New York and at the New Jersey College for Women (now known as Douglass College).<sup>433</sup> He lectured at the New School for Social Research and the New Jersey College for Women, and he conducted several demonstrations of calligraphy and tea ceremonies, including one attended by Ernestine and Ibram Lassaw and John Cage.<sup>434</sup>

In 1955, Hasegawa returned to Japan for eight months. He then returned to New York with his family with hopes of establishing residency. At the invitation of Alan Watts, Hasegawa moved to San Francisco in order to teach at Watts’ American Academy of Asian Studies. There he taught courses in Japanese *sumi-e*, printmaking, calligraphy, and the tea ceremony. Hasegawa also taught at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland; his impact as an artist and teacher was tremendous during his brief time in the Bay area.<sup>435</sup>

---

<sup>431</sup> Barr, Jr., “Abstract Art around the World Today,” 1954, 6.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>433</sup> I have not yet been able to ascertain where Hasegawa showed his art at the New Jersey College for Women; it may have been at one of the galleries of the affiliate Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

<sup>434</sup> Ernestine Lassaw’s daybook entry for May 6, 1954 reads, “Hasegawa’s tea, bring John Cage,” Lassaw Archive, Easthampton, NY.

<sup>435</sup> Mark Johnson, Gallery Director at San Francisco State University, email of February 17, 2004.

Hasegawa conceived of “a monumental project spectacularly recognized,” the first Japanese Festival of Culture in Oakland, also called the *Bunka Sai*, of 1956.<sup>436</sup> Hasegawa served as curator of a concurrent exhibition, “The Modern Spirit in Japanese Art,” held at the Oakland Museum of Art, where, interestingly, the “modern” works were both historical and contemporary. The exhibition was comprised of a presentation of Neolithic and Bronze age Japanese ceramics from Tokyo Art College; examples of art by significant Zen monks from private collections, including work by Hakuin, Ryokan, and Sengai; a grouping of Hasegawa’s recent work, including his 1952 monoprint with calligraphy, *Time* [Figure 63]; a show on loan from the Stable Gallery in New York which combined recent sculpture of Isamu Noguchi with paintings of Haniwa figures by Hasegawa (perhaps his paintings, *Untitled: Inspired by a Neolithic clay figure* and *Fishing*) [Figures 54 and 55]; a selection of work by US ceramicist J.B. Blunk who studied at the Bizen kiln in Japan; and the *Japanese Calligraphy* exhibition on loan from the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Hasegawa died of cancer at the age of 51 in 1957. One month after his death, from April 23 to May 6, 1957, the Willard Gallery in New York held a memorial exhibition of his work. In 1958, Hasegawa’s artwork was included in the exhibition, “Contemporary Painters of Japanese Origin in America” at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

---

<sup>436</sup> Miriam Dungan Cross, “Curtain Falls on Bunka Sai Festival,” *Oakland Tribune*, May 6, 1956.

## Hasegawa and Calligraphy

Avant-garde calligraphy in Japan and Abstract Expressionism in the US became intertwined in the early 1950s, generating a short period of cross-cultural exchange. The avant-garde calligraphy movement in Japan has not received much attention in US art historical scholarship, mostly due to the fact that much of the primary source material is still untranslated.<sup>437</sup> Bert Winther-Tamaki pointed to another reason for the lack of scholarship, namely, that, “for nearly a century, the bilateral relationship between the Japanese and American art communities was strongly mediated by the perceived centrality of European art.”<sup>438</sup> Scholarship on Asian-American artists and on the exchange between US and Japanese artists at mid-century has largely developed since 1989.<sup>439</sup>

The postwar (c.1945-55) *Bokujin-kai* calligraphers applied the concept of avant-gardism (*zen'ei bijutsu*), which had been adopted during the Taisho era (1912-1926), as a

---

<sup>437</sup> The most comprehensive treatment to date can be found in *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream against the Sky*, Alexandra Munroe, ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994).

<sup>438</sup> Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 11.

<sup>439</sup> Mark Johnson, Gallery Director at San Francisco State University, wrote in an email to me of February 17, 2004 that, “In 1989, I was hired as Associate Dean of the San Francisco Art Institute. In an early meeting, we talked about organizing a symposium entitled, ‘Expanding American Art History to Reflect Multiethnic Diversity.’ We discussed and ultimately invited scholars interested in ethnically distinct art communities, and hosted a ten day event for teachers in 1992 with scholars including David Driskell, Amalia Mesa-Bains, etc. The case of Asian-American art was problematic, as there seemed to be so little scholarship in that area beyond Noguchi and Kuniyoshi specialists (this led to my own work in this field).” Johnson is currently collaborating on an NEH funded project with the Archives of American Art and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco to complete a directory of California Asian American artists, 1840-1965. Hasegawa is among the artists in the directory.

position which relied on differentiation from previous styles. Alexandra Munroe wrote of these artists working in the late 1940s and early 1950s that, “demoralized by modern history, the Japanese avant-garde found reexamining tradition an occasion for self critique and cultural regeneration.”<sup>440</sup> Hasegawa considered Westernization a means toward the reinvention of the traditional practice of calligraphy:

A word corresponding to “fine art” did not exist in Japan until about 1870. This does not mean that fine arts did not exist in Japan. On the contrary, art pervaded and permeated the life of the nation so widely and deeply that there was neither word nor concept of art as something distinct and apart.<sup>441</sup>

Hasegawa eventually came to view the US specifically as playing an integral part in the renewal of Japanese art; around 1951, he stated that “foreigners are revitalizing the great calligraphy tradition.”<sup>442</sup>

*Bokujin-kai* artists engaged in the most conscious and vigorous pursuit of calligraphic innovation in the 3,000 year history of the art form. Calligraphy had reached Japan during the seventh century A.D. as an aspect of Buddhism, since Indian Buddhist scriptures had previously been recorded in Chinese writing. Japanese artists of the Nara period (710-94 A.D.), most often monks who copied Buddhist *sūtras*, had to practice strict adherence to the original text and script style. Calligraphy associated with Zen

---

<sup>440</sup> Alexandra Munroe, “With the Suddenness of Creation: Trends of Abstract Painting in Japan and China” in Jeffrey Wechsler, ed., *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions: Asian American Artists and Abstraction, 1945-1970* (New Brunswick: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 33.

<sup>441</sup> Sabro Hasegawa, unpublished version of “Abstract Art in Japan Today,” c. 1954, in the Henry Blotkin papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

<sup>442</sup> Hasegawa, “Calligraphy and Vanguard Painting,” c.1951.

monks from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries was remarkable for its use of expressionistic brushwork.<sup>443</sup> These Zen calligrapher-monks had dispensed with the mimetic aspect of *sūtra* copying, but for them, nonetheless, calligraphy remained bound to the traditional media of brushes, ink, and paper. Munroe described the radical changes in the practice of calligraphy by the *Bokujin-kai* artists as a result of encountering contemporary Western methods of creating art:

The *Bokujin-kai* calligraphers experimented with cardboard, sticks, and broomsize brushes; tried mineral pigments, oil paint, enamel, and lacquer in place of *sumi* ink; and used canvas, wood, ceramic, and even glass for a surface other than paper... They were deeply engaged in a rigorous reevaluation of the fundamentals of ancient calligraphy from a contemporary, global point of view.<sup>444</sup>

As part of their experimentation, some *Bokujin-kai* calligraphers separated calligraphy from its association with characters altogether by emphasizing its expressionistic aspects, and in this way calligraphy became an abstract art form.

The *Bokujin-kai* artists grounded their extensive theoretical writings on calligraphy in a particular usage of Zen espoused by Nishida, founder of the prewar Kyoto School of Philosophy, who was himself a calligrapher. Nishida, particularly in his 1911 book *A study of the Good (Zen no Kenkyū)*, was largely responsible for developing the theory of the “‘pure experience’ of Zen [which] was not only the basis for all religious experience, but for specifically Japanese experience.”<sup>445</sup> In this way, many of

---

<sup>443</sup> This transformed mode of calligraphy is known in Japanese as *sho*, which differs from *shji*, the study of decorative scripts. *Sho* can represent writing, but it is also used to refer to drawing and painting, which go beyond the writing of ideograms.

<sup>444</sup> Munroe, “With the Suddenness of Creation: Trends of Abstract Painting in Japan and China,” 35.

<sup>445</sup> Cox, “Culture as Aesthetic Value,” in *The Zen Arts*, 212.

the *Bokujin-kai* artists associated calligraphy as an expression of an authentic Japanese subjectivity. Yet, as I will discuss in the conclusion below, Nishida was also a synthesist, who framed elements of Zen philosophy within concepts developed by Western thinkers including Aristotle, Kant, and Marx.

Richard Sharf is among those who have examined the relationship of twentieth century Zen and Japanese nationalism. He stated that:

The claim that Zen is the foundation of Japanese culture has the felicitous result of rendering the Japanese spiritual experience both unique and universal at the same time. And it was no coincidence that the notion of Zen as the foundation for Japanese moral, aesthetic, and spiritual superiority emerged full force in the 1930s, just as the Japanese were preparing for imperial expansion in East and Southeast Asia. This [is the] use of Zen to provide a rationale for Japanese claims of uniqueness and cultural supremacy.<sup>446</sup>

Hasegawa, who was a colleague of Nishida, imported this concept of Japanese culture as both unique and universal within his discussions of Zen and calligraphy during his year in New York.

Nishida and his students, as well as many philosophers, novelists, and critics, attended an important symposium on the theme of "Overcoming the Modern," held at the University of Kyoto in July 1942. As Munroe succinctly summed up, "the purpose [of the symposium] was to rethink Japan's course of modernization in terms of refuting Westernization and articulating an autonomous, nativist, and spiritual vision of the

---

<sup>446</sup> Robert Sharf, "Whose Zen?: Zen Nationalism Revisited," in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 46.

future.”<sup>447</sup> The critic Kobayashi Hideo, who was present, “proposed that the timeless ‘essence’ of tradition, as found in art and objects of beauty, could save Japan by offering a source of ‘renewal, creative inspiration, and identity in a world insisting on the sameness of the modern’.”<sup>448</sup> Hasegawa’s goal of bringing together unique aspects of premodern Japanese aesthetics with modern abstract art reflected what was considered a progressive position in the critical context of prewar Japan- that of incorporating traditional culture within the modernizing of Japan.

Nishida’s ideas about Zen and “logic of place” were subsumed by Emperor Hirohito’s ultranationalist campaign and, thus, Nishida’s thought came to be affiliated with the philosophy of Japanese imperialism.<sup>449</sup> Until the 1980s, Nishida and the Kyoto School were largely unmentionable topics among Japanese scholars on account of this link to the war; then the concerns of postmodern criticism served to encourage a broad reevaluation of concepts of modernization, Westernization, nationalism, and identity, and the topic was revisited.

The *Bokujin-kai* artists reflected the general influence of Nishida’s synthesisism by framing calligraphy as a common universal language. In the inaugural issue of *Bokubi*, Morita outlined the manifesto of the contemporary calligrapher, who he understood to be both modern and global:

---

<sup>447</sup> Alexandra Munroe, “Scream Against the Sky,” in *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 23.

<sup>448</sup> Munroe, “Scream Against the Sky,” 24.

<sup>449</sup> See Nishida Kitaro, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, translated with an introduction by David Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1987).

1. To research the aesthetic and philosophical expression of calligraphy;
2. To see calligraphy in the context of the whole life of a human being;
3. To establish calligraphy on the basis of modern art and theoretical ideas;
4. To see calligraphy in the larger perspective of all the arts;
5. To expand calligraphy to a global scale;
6. To reexamine and rediscover the classics;
7. To elevate the social standing of calligraphy.<sup>450</sup>

*Bokujin-kai* member Yūichi wrote that:

Calligraphy is a universal art form. Everyone is capable of being a calligrapher because they are in constant touch with letters every day. Just like clay pots have been used by primitive people since time began, letters have become just as familiar to us. So, calligraphy has become embedded in every person's life in a way in which no other art form could make such an impression.<sup>451</sup>

Yuichi's statement was utopian, and as I will discuss in the section on the critical reception of Hasegawa, modern calligraphy, or even abstract work using calligraphic techniques, was consistently inscribed during the postwar years in the US with notions of cultural difference rather than being considered universally accessible.

Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (1889-1980), a Zen scholar and member of *Bokujin-kai*, studied under Nishida and absorbed his ideas regarding Zen. In 1950, when Noguchi was visiting Japan, Hasegawa took him to visit Hisamatsu, with whom they admired a work of Nishida's calligraphy.<sup>452</sup> Hisamatsu's 1958 book, *Zen and the Fine Arts*, was known

---

<sup>450</sup> *Bokubi*, no. 1, June 1951 reprinted in Munroe, "Circle: Modernism and Tradition," 135.

<sup>451</sup> Inoue Yūichi, *Bokubi* no. 9.

<sup>452</sup> Hasegawa Saburō, "Days with Isamu Noguchi (Isamu Noguchi to no Hibi)" in *Sansai*, August 1950, reprinted in 'Ron' *Hasegawa Saburō* (Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977), 99.

to Club artists in the late 1950s, especially after Hisamatsu lectured at the Club in 1958 and published an article, "Seven Characteristics of Zen Art," which appeared in the Spring 1958 issue of *It Is*.<sup>453</sup> Sharf remarked that in *Zen and the Fine Arts* there is:

The first full synthesis of (1) the philosophy of Nishida with its rhetoric of 'pure experience' (2) the notion that Zen is the essence of all religious teachings and (3) the evolution of a fully laicized form of Zen practice.<sup>454</sup>

The exchange between the *Bokujin-kai* calligraphers and the Abstract Expressionists began when Noguchi introduced US painter Franz Kline's paintings to Hasegawa. Hasegawa recalled that "when Isamu Noguchi, American-Japanese sculptor, came back to Japan [in 1950] at the very moment of shaking hands he gave me a brown envelope. In this were the nine photographs... They were the work of Franz Kline, one of the most exciting American painters."<sup>455</sup>

Though he came to deny it, Kline had a deep affinity for Japanese art, and Hasegawa was eager to learn of contemporary artists after having been cut off from international developments during the war. The relationship between Hasegawa and Kline has been detailed in April Kingsley's 2000 dissertation on Kline, especially in her

---

<sup>453</sup> Philip Pavia published the art periodical, *It Is*, from 1958 to 1960 as a vehicle for the art and writing of the New York School; there were five issues published in total. As an artist-run magazine, Pavia intended *It Is* to reach a broad audience unmediated by the agendas of second parties, such as museums, established publications, and certain critics. It represents one of the "little magazines" along with *Possibilities I* and *Tiger's Eye*, both published in the late 1940s, which contained statements by the Abstract Expressionists and illustrations of their work.

<sup>454</sup> Robert Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," in *Curators of the Buddha*, Donald S. Lopez, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 131.

<sup>455</sup> Sabrō Hasegawa "The Beauty of Black and White," *Bokubi*, no. 1, Tokyo, Japan, 1951. Illustrations: *Chief, Hoboken, Giselle, The Drum, Leda, Cardinal, Clock Face, Nijinsky*, and *High Street*.

chapter, "Formal sources in Zen Art and Constructivism," and in Winther-Tamaki's 2001 essay, "Franz Kline: American Graphology."<sup>456</sup> But I have a bit more information to bring to the investigation of this particularly complicated cross-cultural dialogue.

Hasegawa began to correspond with Kline in 1951, since he was inspired by Noguchi's 1950 gift of images of Kline's work. Kline wrote to Hasegawa, in 1951, that while studying at Boston University from 1931-1935:

The works by Korin, Sesshū, and Hokusai at the BMFA were the strongest influences of my student years. Since then... my love for Korin, Hokusai, and the older painters of Japan and China became even stronger.<sup>457</sup>

The collection of Japanese art available to Kline at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, assembled by Ernest Fenollosa, was the most comprehensive in the US at the time.<sup>458</sup>

Kline also owned some original Japanese prints as well as books on Japanese art with reproductions.<sup>459</sup> Clarke has documented that John Cage and Elaine de Kooning were

---

<sup>456</sup> April Kingsley, "Franz Kline: A critical study of the mature work, 1950-1962," (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 2000), 58-94; Bert Winther-Tamaki, "Franz Kline: American Graphology," *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 56-62. Kingsley's dissertation includes unpublished translations of letters between Hasegawa and Kline in the early 1950s.

<sup>457</sup> Letter from Kline to Hasegawa, "Furansu to Amerika kara no tayori," reprinted in *'Ron' Hasegawa Saburō* (Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977), 131. Translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Naomi Klein.

<sup>458</sup> Fenollosa, who taught political economy and philosophy at the Imperial University at Tokyo from 1878 to 1888, helped found the Tokyo Fine Arts Academy and the Imperial Museum, acting as the museum's director in 1888. Among Fenollosa's accomplishments was the first inventory of Japan's national treasures, during which time he amassed the collection which ended up at the BMFA.

<sup>459</sup> See David J. Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 207, and Kingsley, "Franz Kline: A critical study of the mature work, 1950-1962," 60.

aware of Kline's interest in Japanese art.<sup>460</sup> Pavia's notes from the years 1948-1950 reflect that Kline's interest in Asian art was well known among artists in the New York art scene:

Kline didn't use color, he used black brush slashes as you see [in] the oriental script writing with a big difference. It had scale, that vertical and horizontal experience you get looking at the New York canyon streets. It has been a question that he was influenced by the abstract international artist, Hartung. Kline was a Hokusai, Japanese master for years before. We joked with him in the early days of the Club, his eyes were beginning to slant from staring at Hokusai's brush stroke.<sup>461</sup>

This type of racially situated joking likely helped to prompt the beginning of Kline's denial of engagement with Japanese art.<sup>462</sup>

---

<sup>460</sup> Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture*, 207.

<sup>461</sup> Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Expressionist Art, notes for years 1948-1950.

<sup>462</sup> In a 1962 interview with Katherine Kuh, Kline separated himself from a connection to calligraphy, "No, I don't think of my work as calligraphic. Critics also describe Pollock and de Kooning as calligraphic artists, but calligraphy has nothing to do with us. It's interesting that the Oriental critics never say this. The Oriental idea of space is an infinite space; it is not a painted space, and ours is. In the first place, calligraphy is writing and I'm not writing. People sometimes think I take a white canvas and paint a black sign on it, but this is not true. I paint the white as well as the black, and the white is just as important." Katherine Kuh. *The Artist's Voice*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 144.

Winther-Tamaki described the correspondence between the progressive calligraphers in the *Bokujin-kai* group and Kline in the early 1950s: "in 1951 Hasegawa had written in the Japanese art press that Kline had 'resolutely and determinedly fathomed the world of calligraphy,'" "[in 1951] Kline sent photographs which were reproduced in their art and calligraphy journals along with translation of his letters and the commentary of Japanese critics and artists [Pollock's works were likewise illustrated and discussed]," "*Bokujin-kai* member Inoue Yūichi responded to Kline's letter [in which he warmly acknowledged receipt of the magazine of Japanese avant-garde calligraphy titled *Bokubi* (Beauty of Ink)] with an essay in which he exclaimed that 'it is remarkable how the world's avant-garde art is gradually approaching ancient oriental art, calligraphy and ink painting' and supposed that the changes in Kline's work over the previous year

Whereas Noguchi introduced Kline to Hasegawa, Hasegawa, in turn, introduced Kline's work to the calligraphy avant-garde through *Bokubi*.<sup>463</sup> The first issue of *Bokubi* in 1951 featured Kline's *Hoboken* on its cover [Figure 16].

A March 18, 1952 letter that Kline wrote to Morita bears repeating here at length as it shows the intense level of involvement Kline had in connecting Japanese artists with New York artists and galleries. Kline stated:

I gave a copy of *Bokubi* to Mr. Egan [Kline's dealer] who is a friend of Mr. Wittenborn [of Wittenborn & Schultz bookstore] who is going to display these magazines in the gallery and have them for sale as Mr. Noguchi wanted him to.

I keep a copy of each *Bokubi* and study it and I really have been enjoying it. Friends of mine who are artists or musicians also enjoy looking at it.

I am extremely happy that you like my recent work and that it's going to be in the magazine again...

---

had been attributable to the influence of calligraphy published in the issues of *Bokubi* which Kline said he prized so dearly." Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 57-58. Winther-Tamaki also pointed out that "the artist's denial that his abstraction had any relationship to calligraphy was to be repeated piously by almost every writer who dealt with his work at length since the late 1950s." Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 58.

Kingsley discussed the direct influence of Hokusai on Kline's early caricature work and in his transition to abstraction. Kline spoke of Hokusai often in the late 1940s and early 1950s and owned many books on Hokusai, some of which still belong to his estate. Kingsley, "Franz Kline: A critical study of the mature work, 1950-1962," 64-66.

Harry Gaugh has asserted that Kline was "surely influenced by a specific master, Ogata Korin" from works in the Freer Gallery of Art and that "it is difficult, if not impossible to imagine that Kline's recapitulation of Korin's theme [in his 1956 painting, *Luzerne*] occurred on an unconscious level." Harry F. Gaugh, *The Vital Gesture* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1983), 131.

<sup>463</sup> Hasegawa Saburō, "The Beauty of Black and White," *Bokubi* 1 (May 1951), 18-24 (discussion and illustration of nine Kline works from his first exhibition at the Egan gallery and cover illustration); "Kline's recent works," *Bokubi* 5, no 12 (May 1952), 4 (thirteen Kline works plus one on the cover from Kline's second exhibition at Egan gallery).

I finally have good news for Mr. Hasegawa. I have already taken care of showing his work to the New Gallery. It seems that the gallery had a great interest in the work. I can find out something about a show for him within a week for sure. New Gallery is probably the biggest gallery in New York for abstract art shows. They can probably have a show of all the fascinating (wonderful) works Mr. Noguchi brought. My artist friends Alcopley and de Kooning talked to the gallery about Hasegawa's work...

I also sent some copies of *Bokubi* to the New Gallery since they have some art books on display. I'd like to take care of all the shows of yours and people from your group.

As I told you I have also enclosed *Art News* and *Art Digest*. I am also going to send other stuff...

I also sent the issue of *Bokubi* that discusses Hasegawa's folding screens to Mrs. Rockefeller...<sup>464</sup>

I'd like to let you know how much *Bokubi* is loved and how deep an impression it makes on people here. Everyone asks me to give them the one that I have. I'm sure in the future it can be sold all over New York...

I was very happy with the nice comment about my work that Mr. Hasegawa wrote last year. I think the truth of my painting was expressed most perfectly in that piece. Like you, I feel that we are collaborating. I'd like to say thank you.<sup>465</sup>

In light of Kline's later disaffiliation with Japanese calligraphers, it is important to note that he once stated that he viewed his experience with Hasegawa and other Japanese artists as a collaboration.

---

<sup>464</sup> Abby Aldrich Rockefeller subsequently purchased a work of Hasegawa's, and she was actively involved in the *Japanese Calligraphy* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

<sup>465</sup> Unpublished letter in Kingsley, "Franz Kline: A critical study of the mature work, 1950-1962," 60-61.

Hasegawa was enthusiastic about Kline's work and that of French painter Pierre Tal-Coat, with whom he was also corresponding:

Wishing for a new and more profound insight, a deep, strong self-confidence for our own tradition, I introduce Franz Kline and Pierre Tal-Coat to you- as friends who are living in anxiety, reflection and contemplation, who work to follow the examples of the pioneers of modern art... Tal-Coat is meditative and French, while Kline is frank and American. We, the most extreme Orientals, have to create a new art which is suited to ourselves.<sup>466</sup>

In this essay, Hasegawa made the connection for *Bokubi* readers that US and French artists were partners with the *Bokujin-kai* artists in creating a progressive international art based in calligraphy and gesture. However, he also insisted that the expressionist art form practiced by each nation retained qualities unique to itself: the French Tal-Coat was "meditative," the American Kline was "frank," and the "extreme Orientals" were in the process of developing a distinct style. Hasegawa promoted the idea that a contemporary Japanese style could be forged out of the connection between Abstract Expressionist gesture and historical, expressionist Zen calligraphy.

Winther-Tamaki contrasted Hasegawa's pre and postwar views with regard to his relationship to US artists. Winther-Tamaki explained how, "the shock of the war experience had created an insecurity regarding Japanese cultural identity."<sup>467</sup> Where in prewar essays, Hasegawa had "indicted the West for its neglect of non-Western culture," after the war he changed his stance to believe that the Japanese "must learn the modernist

---

<sup>466</sup> Hasegawa Saburō, "News From France and America (Furansu to Amerika no Tayori)," in *Bokubi* 1 (May 1951).

<sup>467</sup> Winther, "Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese culture in the early postwar years," 167-168.

significance of their own national past from Westerners.”<sup>468</sup> Winther commented that

Hasegawa’s:

encounter with Noguchi was instrumental in the... shift of [his] focus from the Japanese art community to that of the US in the early 1950s. This shift seems to have entailed a transition in Hasegawa’s thinking from a Japanism geared narrowly to national self-identity to an ideal of the East which transcended race and territory.<sup>469</sup>

Hasegawa received validation from Kline’s interest in calligraphy; he wrote in a 1951 essay that Kline painted “pictures far more abstract than [Matisse] in a way close to the calligraphy of the East using only black and white in oil paintings.”<sup>470</sup> He remarked that, “the attachment to calligraphy and black and white” indicated “Zen spirit in the latest art” from the US.<sup>471</sup>

Hasegawa identified “geste,” employing the French work for gesture, as “the newest and most important [problem] of modern painting. It... means that modern painting has come to touch the most fundamental factor of the art of painting.”

Hasegawa located this “fundamental factor” in the Zen calligraphy tradition, where art was not created for patrons, but to aid in meditation and lead toward enlightenment. The goal was a spontaneous and immediate translation from the mind and spirit to paper or

---

<sup>468</sup> Ibid, 167-168.

<sup>469</sup> Winther, “Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese culture in the early postwar years,” 293.

<sup>470</sup> Hasegawa Saburō, “Hansei, Atarashii Seiyo to Furui Toyo to ni Kansuru Zuiso (Reflections: Essay on the Old East and the New West),” in *Bokubi*, August 8, 1951, reprinted in *Ron’ Hasegawa Saburō* (Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977), 137-142. This essay was translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Naomi Klein.

<sup>471</sup> Hasegawa, “Reflections: Essay on the old East and the New West,” 138.

“the simple and direct expression of artist’s mentality.”<sup>472</sup> Often, the style of Zen calligraphy consisted of a few bold lines, indicating that the experience of painting in meditation was distilled in a brief, abrupt moment. Hasegawa wrote in an essay on Sesshū that, “calligraphy is a visual art which used to be almost more highly regarded than painting because of its capacity for showing the personality and the sentiment of the artist more purely and directly than in painting.”<sup>473</sup>

Hasegawa continued to advocate calligraphy as, “the biggest treasure house for the future of contemporary abstract painting”<sup>474</sup> since, as Paul Mills commented, it had “an immense storehouse of nonrepresentational but meaningful and artistically interesting forms.”<sup>475</sup> Jeffrey Wechsler compiled a list of the qualities of East Asian art which were appreciated by certain Abstract Expressionist artists:

gestural methods (for example the ‘flung ink’ manner of *sumi*); frequent restriction of color range, often to only black and white; calligraphic imagery, free linearism, and aggressive or rapid brushwork; highly asymmetrical compositions, often with large areas of empty space; atmospheric or flat fields of color; a spontaneous approach to artmaking that includes the acceptance of accidental effects; and the notion of the act of painting as a self-revelatory event, psychically and somatically charged and implicitly linked to the artist’s emotions.<sup>476</sup>

---

<sup>472</sup> Hasegawa, “Notes on Painting,” 39.

<sup>473</sup> Saburō Hasegawa, “The Paintings of Sesshu,” 1937, reprinted in *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident*, Alan Watts, ed. (Oakland: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), 57.

<sup>474</sup> Hasegawa, “Notes on Painting,” 39.

<sup>475</sup> Paul Mills, “Introduction,” *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident*, Alan Watts, ed. (Oakland: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), xxx.

<sup>476</sup> Jeffrey Wechsler, *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions: Asian American Artists and Abstraction, 1945-1970* (New Brunswick: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 11.

When Hasegawa arrived in New York in 1954 as the representative for the Japan Abstract Art Club for the American Abstract Artists exhibition, he was welcomed by Kline.<sup>477</sup> During the AAA exhibition's panel, Kline acknowledged experiential reality as an aspect of the Japanese calligraphy tradition which he linked with Hasegawa:

There is... a wonderful tradition that has to do with the experience of the abstract statement which certainly Hasegawa speaks about and which he's involved with... I mean that kind of reality. In other words, the reality that comes from the Zen Buddhist which comes from the calligrapher.<sup>478</sup>

Hasegawa accepted the language of vitality and heroism used to describe Kline's work. Hasegawa wrote in his 1951 essay, "Calligraphy and New Pictures," that "in Kline's pictures there is something hardboiled... all seems to be staked on one stroke. Especially in his recent work there is tension that never fails to impress us."<sup>479</sup> He added that in paintings such as *High Street*, "here are daring, strong, straight lines and their sorrows and solitudes."<sup>480</sup> Hasegawa's terms such as "tension," "daring," and "strong" were comparable to contemporary descriptions of Kline's paintings by New York artists

---

<sup>477</sup> Kline "had given him a spare key to his New York studio and invited him to come and go as he pleased." Winther-Tamaki, "Japanese Margins of Abstract Expressionism," *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 58.

<sup>478</sup> American Abstract Artists, "Abstract Art around the World Today," 1954. Transcript, "Tape-recording of a forum presented by the American Abstract Artists at the Museum of Modern Art, March 16, 1954," in the archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 16.

<sup>479</sup> Hasegawa Saburō, "Calligraphy and New Pictures," 1951, Holger Cahill papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Hasegawa's letter to Kline of September 10, 1952 discusses what Hasegawa considered to be a faulty translation of this essay; Morita had previously mailed this (mis)translated essay to Alcockley.

<sup>480</sup> Hasegawa, "Calligraphy and New Pictures," 1951.

and critics. Pavia had grounded Kline's inspiration in the "vertical and horizontal experience you get looking at the New York canyon streets"; he claimed that Kline's brushstrokes were related specifically to a bold New York image and experience.

Elaine de Kooning had written the forward to the 1950 catalog for Kline's first exhibition at the Egan Gallery in 1950, a text saturated with the masculinized rhetoric linking the stroke of Kline's brush to strength and violence:

One finds large ease and authority in Kline's manner of painting. The tough masculine thrust present in every scraped surface and bruising brush stroke reveals nothing of theory or dogma. The reality here has the blunt, dazing immediacy of a personal experience... Stark and instantaneous in effect, Kline's compositions are not at rest... One feels in the spreading black shapes a curious sense of threat. Forthrightness seems carried to the point of brutality as these images reach out and seize the physical space of the room in which they hang... The heavy, black flank in *Chief* [Figure 65] seems to pour a shaft of darkness over the wall on its right; the imprisoning crossbars and spikes of *Cardinal* [Figure 66] drive upward – the force everywhere is aggressive.<sup>481</sup>

The *Bokujin-kai* artists had a kind of precedent in their artistic tradition for the "hardboiled" style of the New York School in their purposefully rough, course, or crude effects, and they valued such modern variations as Kline's works represented, on traditional calligraphic techniques.<sup>482</sup> However, as Wechsler wrote, "the deliberately brusque, aggressive strokes of the New York School had no history of, or use for, [calligraphic] expertise," by which he referred to the range of expression available to

---

<sup>481</sup> Elaine de Kooning, "Franz Kline" 1950 catalog forward for Kline's first exhibition, Egan Gallery.

<sup>482</sup> Hasegawa, "The Paintings of Sesshu," 1937, reprinted in *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident*, 57.

contemporary Japanese artists, such as speed and weight of ink on the brush.<sup>483</sup> Where Hasegawa optimistically stated that, “we should strive to revive the best of our heritage in a language more contemporary and universal. I believe a meeting of Eastern and Western traditions would be beneficial to both,” certain New York critics writing about Japanese calligraphers such as Hasegawa, and their collaboration with New York School artists, betrayed a nationalistic bias in their rhetoric of aggression and heroism which effectively undermined the spirit of cross-cultural dialogue.<sup>484</sup> Kline’s defensiveness points to the strength of influence of certain critics, and to his acceptance of the fact that, to advance a career, artists who aligned themselves with important tastemakers were bound to have greater success.

### **Hasegawa and Otherness**

Paul Mills, former curator at the Oakland Art Museum, wrote in 1957, the year of Hasegawa’s death, that, “Sabro Hasegawa is perhaps the first Oriental painter known to America who has successfully fused traditions of both Eastern and Western art and has gone on to make a personal statement of aesthetic importance.”<sup>485</sup> Mills considered that besides drawing upon two cultural traditions, Hasegawa ‘[showed] us new insights into

---

<sup>483</sup> Wechsler, *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions: Asian American Artists and Abstraction, 1945-1970*, 108.

<sup>484</sup> Hasegawa Saburō, “My House,” in *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident*, Alan Watts, ed. (Oakland: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), 47.

<sup>485</sup> Paul Mills, “The Paintings of Sabro Hasegawa,” *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident*, Alan Watts, ed. (Oakland: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), 5.

both... [and made] an integrating personal statement of sufficient strength to maintain oneness, the uniqueness which is necessary in a living work of art.”<sup>486</sup>

However, while Hasegawa’s lifelong goal was to relate and fuse the art production between cultures, the task of doing so was not seamless or without difficulties, especially when viewed in the specific context of mid-century artistic discourse in the US and Japan as it related to national identity. Winther-Tamaki stated that, “shortly before his death, Hasegawa wrote that his entire career had been characterized by ‘anguish between the Orient and the Occident’... [with the] obsessive juxtaposition of Japanese and European (or American) cultural and art historical antipodes.”<sup>487</sup>

Hasegawa often retraced the history of Westernization in Japan within his talks and writings as a method of establishing the precedent for a postwar international abstract art. He alluded to the history of *Japonisme* in Europe and to the introduction of the concept of “fine art” in Japan:

After 1870, Japan began to accept Western civilization in all its aspects—the politics, economy, industry, and general mode of living, including the concept and the word ‘fine-art.’ At the very time when the impressionists and post-impressionists were busy learning the plastic elements of Japanese wood-block prints, the Japanese government was sending young artists to France and Italy to learn the realism... of nineteenth-century western ‘fine-art.’<sup>488</sup>

---

<sup>486</sup> Mills, “The Paintings of Sabro Hasegawa,” 5.

<sup>487</sup> Winter-Tamaki, 32.

<sup>488</sup> Sabro Hasegawa, “Abstract Art in Japan,” in *The World of Abstract Art* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1956), 71-72.

In Japan, the result of exposure to European arts was the creation of a new mode of art production called *yogā* (Western-influenced oil and watercolor painting) which was differentiated from *Nihonga* (traditional watercolor and ink painting). Whereas late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century *Japonisme* involved interest in compositional and decorative elements of Asian art, especially derived from woodblock prints, Hasegawa explained that with mid-century European and US artists, “interest...is now concentrated more on calligraphy and ink-drawings by Zen Buddhist monks, together with other works of a similar spirit.”<sup>489</sup>

Notwithstanding his faith in an essential Japanese art with worldwide relevance, Hasegawa encountered complex difficulties with reception of his work at every turn. In a retrospective essay, one writer pointed out a distinction:

In Japan, although his early achievement in bringing the European avant-garde art was highly estimated, his return to tradition in his later years was despised as a kind of fanatic anachronism. In America, however, in most cases, his works of the pre-war days were looked upon as an imitation of Western Modernism; it was only his later works in India ink and rubbings that were admired as works of creative new contemporary art based on Oriental spiritualism.<sup>490</sup>

In the postwar period Hasegawa’s interest in reviving traditional art forms was not especially popular with his contemporaries outside of the *Bokujin-kai* artists since nativism had become linked with nationalism. Hasegawa wrote that, “My friends always

---

<sup>489</sup> Hasegawa, “Abstract Art in Japan,” 69.

<sup>490</sup> Yoshiaki, “Sabro Hasegawa- his Art and Thought,” 239.

...laugh at me when I speak of Lao-tse, the tea ceremony, Haiku or Zen. However, I do not care since Lao-tse said, 'it would not be the Tao unless they laughed at it.'"<sup>491</sup>

He remarked that until 1950 when he began a dialogue with Kline and Noguchi:

I have always lived having two kinds of friends:

- A. Friends with whom I hold discourse about the East.
- B. Friends with whom I hold discourse about the West.

I have never lacked either of them. However, I could never discuss the West, especially the new art movements with friends A. Similarly, talk about the East was forbidden with friends B. Rarely... when the other party shows even a slight interest, I have to invest half an hour or more to explain a single word or expression.<sup>492</sup>

After his encounter with US artists, Hasegawa reframed his artistic focus toward an ideal of Japanese culture which ran parallel to Nishida and Suzuki's idea of a modern form of Zen, as an essential experience which transcended cultural boundaries.

Hasegawa believed that the interest of US artists, such as Alcopley, de Kooning, and Kline, in Japanese calligraphy, with its traditional affiliation with the philosophies of Taoism and Zen made these "Occidentals" the "true Orientals:"

It seems to me that in general old Japan was 'newer' than the new Occident, while new Japan is apparently more old-fashioned than either the new Occident or old Japan itself.<sup>493</sup>

Where Hasegawa felt that a contemporary Japanese artistic identity could only be forged through interaction with "Western modern abstract art," many US critics denied

---

<sup>491</sup> Hasegawa, "Reflections: An Essay on the New Occident and the Old Orient," 139.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>493</sup> Sabro Hasegawa, "Abstract Art in Japan," in *The World of Abstract Art* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1956), 72.

this possibility. Joseph Campbell, who was much read by the New York School, described in his 1958 essay, "The Cultural Setting of Asian Art," an ethnocentric and invidious dynamic, whereby Campbell claimed that, while Westerners could learn from Asian traditions, the reverse did not occur:

The general problem... common to the whole field of the Oriental arts is that of an archaic, exquisitely developed, relatively static constellation of inherited traditions... whereas the dominant philosophical, religious, and aesthetic traditions of the Orient have hardly changed in form and principle since the eighth century A.D., those of the modern West are outgrown and left behind almost as soon as they are conceived. And this dynamic, fluent character of the contemporary moment seems not yet to have been grasped by the Oriental mind... As a result, there is little that a Westerner can learn from the modern works of the Orient, except that the Oriental mind is having a hard time coming to terms with the modern world.<sup>494</sup>

In what amounted to a common Western bias, Campbell's approach denied a contemporary Japanese artistic voice; Asian art could only be appreciated as something located in the past.

Clement Greenberg minimized or flatly denied that any alien visual or intellectual vocabulary, including calligraphy or Zen, helped US artists to articulate a newly formed artistic identity. Greenberg affirmed, to reiterate, that the sources of Abstract Expressionist art "lie entirely in the West." In a 1955 essay, "'American-Type' Painting," Greenberg wrote concerning Pollock's ink paintings and Kline's 1951 calligraphic works:

The new emphasis on black and white has to do with something that is perhaps more crucial to Western painting than to any other kind. Value contrast, the opposition of the lightness and darkness of colors, has been Western pictorial art's chief means, far more important than perspective, to that convincing illusion of three-dimensionality which distinguishes it

---

<sup>494</sup> Campbell, "The Cultural Setting of Asian Art," 30.

from most other traditions of pictorial art... What is at stake in the new American emphasis on black and white is the preservation of something – a main pictorial resource- that is suspected of being near exhaustion; and the effort at preservation is undertaken, in this as in other cases, by isolating and exaggerating that which one wants to preserve.<sup>495</sup>

Here Greenberg ignores Asian ink painting as a likely source for an affinity for black and white, pointing instead to European chiaroscuro.

### Critical Reception in the US

Hasegawa received many mentions in articles in major art journals and newspapers between 1952 and 1959.<sup>496</sup> Also, a number of Hasegawa's writings appeared in major English publications. In 1954, *ARTnews* published his essay, "Matisse through Japanese Eyes" and the journal *New World Writing* published his essay, "Five

---

<sup>495</sup> Clement Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting", *Partisan Review* vol. XXII, no. 2, (Spring 1955), 179-196.

<sup>496</sup> In 1952, Hasegawa had a review in the *San Francisco Chronicle*; in 1953, articles appeared on his art in *ARTnews* and *Art Digest*; in 1954, the year of his strongest presence in New York, articles appeared in *ARTnews*, *Art Digest*, *The Caellian*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, and *Time*; in 1955, articles appeared in *Atlantic Monthly*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Art Digest*; in 1956, articles on Hasegawa's art appeared in the *Oakland Tribune* and in a publication by the California College of Arts and Crafts; in 1957, the *Oakland Tribune* published two articles on Hasegawa and one appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune*; in 1958, reviews of the Boston ICA exhibition, *Contemporary Painters of Japanese Origin in America*, which featured Hasegawa, appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Boston Herald*, and the *Telegram*; in 1959, reviews of the traveling ICA show appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Calligraphic Drawings.”<sup>497</sup> In 1956, Hasegawa published two more articles in English, “My House,” and “Abstract Art in Japan.”<sup>498</sup>

Writings about Hasegawa were largely positive; while reviews of other mid-century Japanese artists often contained stereotypical remarks about the “imitative” or “decorative” nature of Japanese art, Hasegawa’s work often was separated as an example of art that succeeded. Alfred Frankenstein’s 1952 review piece, “Art Shows From Exotic Places,” for instance, included a section on a contemporary Japanese art exhibition which included Hasegawa’s work. He railed against the Japanese work: “the result... is a general effect of meek obsequious decorativeness, technically admirable, but almost totally lacking in spirit.” Whereas certain of the Japanese artists “cling to their own traditions of clean, light, delicate drawing,” he found that “there is a great deal of spirit in some of the painted screens, notably those of... Saburo Hasegawa.” He found that Hasegawa’s piece *Rhapsody: Fishing Village*, [Figure 67], a four panel screen featuring an abstract geometric composition from wood rubbings, was “by far [one of the two] best things in the show.” He praised *Rhapsody*, commenting that “its grain-patterns are beautifully achieved and beautifully related, and the whole is as subtle as it is ingenious.”<sup>499</sup>

---

<sup>497</sup> Sabro Hasegawa, “Five Calligraphic Drawings,” in *New World Writing* (The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1954). I was unable to locate this publication.

<sup>498</sup> Sabro Hasegawa, “My House,” in *Art and Artist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956) and “Abstract Art in Japan,” in *The World of Abstract Art* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1956).

<sup>499</sup> Alfred Frankenstein, “Exhibition of Contemporary Japanese Art at the California Place of the Legion of Honor,” in *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 15, 1952, 22.

Hasegawa's solo exhibition of monotypes and ink paintings at the New Gallery from January 5 to 24, 1953 garnered a few reviews in major art magazines. Fairfield Porter, in his review of the show, recognized that Hasegawa's ink paintings and rubbings combined aspects of traditional Japanese art and modern idioms:

[The works are] traditionally Japanese in their close relationship to calligraphy, in their use of the wood block, in the relative unimportance of color, in the use of ink and paper and in the refined use of empty space- a respect for the untouched parts of the paper. But [Hasegawa] is modern in being often abstract; in deliberate emulation of childishness; and in an insistence on finding arrangements of space that go contrary to Japanese tradition and that might have been thought of in Japan as a display of bad taste. This could indicate Western influence, the way asymmetry of Degas may have come from Japan.<sup>500</sup>

The illustration of *Calligraphy* [Figure 68], a brush and ink work, bore the caption "respect for the untouched parts." Other abstract calligraphic works from 1952 which might have been included in this exhibition include *Untitled*, and two works titled *Abstract Calligraphy* [Figures 69, 70, 71].

Another reviewer of Hasegawa's show at the New Gallery acknowledged Hasegawa's important role in both the Japanese and US contemporary art movements, introducing him as "a leader of the advance guard movement in Japan- and instrumental in exhibiting several American non-figurative painters there."<sup>501</sup> This reviewer described Hasegawa's debut of "black and whites" as "what seems to be an attempt to integrate disciplined Oriental calligraphy and style with the more informal features of certain

---

<sup>500</sup> Fairfield Porter, "Hasegawa," *ARTnews*, January 1953, Volume 51, Number 9, 45.

<sup>501</sup> A.N., "Sabro Hasegawa," *Arts Digest*, February 1, 1953.

Occidental idioms.” One such idiom was said to be spontaneity; “Hasegawa lets line swirl and dart at random over white surfaces.”<sup>502</sup>

Hasegawa’s solo exhibition of March through April, 1954 at The Contemporaries Gallery in New York received a few reviews. While I was unable to determine which pieces Hasegawa showed in this exhibition, it is likely that the works included, or were similar to, *Great Chorus* (1952), *Environment* (1953), and *The Harmonious* (1953) [Figures 72, 73, 74]. A writer for *The New York Herald Tribune* categorized Hasegawa as an abstract artist; “Preoccupation with textures and symbols apart from any pictorial content characterizes much of the work of Sabro Hasegawa.”<sup>503</sup> However, the writer carefully delineated what he believed to be national characteristics within Hasegawa’s abstractions and even falsely asserted that the abstract patterning in his work represented Japanese symbolism:

[Within] the import of symbols revealed in a linen print of inventive “chicken-track” pattern, this artist manifests his native intuition as closely if not more so than his acquired Western viewpoint.<sup>504</sup>

The writer made it seem as if Hasegawa had no control over an “innate” manifestation of national symbols, which appeared to dominate his “acquired” Western motifs. In the end, the writer saw Hasegawa’s “clusters of form” as “thoroughly Japanese.”<sup>505</sup>

---

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> “Art Exhibition Notes,” *The New York Herald Tribune*, March 27, 1954.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

Sam Feinstein also reviewed Hasegawa's show at The Contemporaries. Feinstein enjoyed one of Hasegawa's paneled screens, possibly a screen in the style of *The Harmonious*. He wrote:

There is a three-paneled screen here, printed with blocks of wood found in a carpenter's shop, which spots varying densities of the small black rectangles upon the large areas of white paper like an undulant flow of lilting notes on a piano.<sup>506</sup>

Apart from the screen, Feinstein found Hasegawa's abstract rubbing compositions "purely decorative" and unsuccessful as abstract works. Hasegawa greatly admired simple and direct gesture, as practiced by one of the most important Zen painters, Hakuin (1685-1768). Hasegawa had described Hakuin's painting and calligraphy as "unpretentious- almost too unpretentious. It is impossible to find any trace of technical cleverness in his art."<sup>507</sup> Hakuin's way of painting "without artifice," such as in his calligraphic work *Ensō* [Figure 75], was a trait that Hasegawa tried to capture in his own work, but one that was lost on Feinstein, who favored art which dramatically transformed materials rather than drawing attention to their intrinsic qualities. Feinstein wrote:

When Hasegawa combines pieces of beautifully grained ship wood to transfer their ink-rubbed imprint to paper, the striking patterns which are created fail to lift the imagination into realms beyond purely decorative. The artist's admirable craftsmanship restricts us to an appreciation of the original subject's characteristics, instead of the created work as a transformed entity which, like his printed screen, achieves its own gesture.

In this case, estimating the artist's program suffered as a result of the invidious European distinction between "decorative" and "fine" art.

---

<sup>506</sup> Sam Feinstein, "The Unified Image," *Art Digest*, April 1, 1954.

<sup>507</sup> Saburō Hasegawa, "Exhibition Notes," in exhibition catalog for "The Modern Spirit in Japanese Art," 1956.

A review of the Japan Abstract Art Club show by Kermit I. Lansner in *ARTnews*, featured a reproduction of Hasegawa's two-paneled screen, *Nature*, 1953 [Figure 76]. The article described the "Japanese colleagues" of the American Abstract Artists as "eight painters and a sculptor," whose works were hung in a separate room of the AAA exhibition at the Riverside Museum. Even though the groups were separated, Lansner felt that the project of abstraction retained a universal appeal:

With few exceptions, the pieces might have been hung among the Americans without anyone being aware that here was art from another country done by artists whose everyday life and artistic traditions are largely different from those of the West. This seems to be the peculiar leveling affect of abstraction. Though it fosters a great variety of individual expression, it tends to suppress the national and regional traits which once set one art off from another.<sup>508</sup>

Lansner singled out Hasegawa's *Nature*, which he felt was "a sincere fusion of the traditional and the abstract" as "the most moving of these works from Japan."<sup>509</sup> Using the rubbing technique, Hasegawa had used a piece of fallen pine tree found near his studio in Japan to create an abstract composition with references to landscape. On the

---

<sup>508</sup> Kermit I. Lansner, "The Japan Abstract Art Club," in *ARTnews*, April 1954, Volume 53, Number 2, 29 and 67. In a fascinating, if not embarrassing, example of the confusion around abstract art with unidentifiable national traits, Museum of Modern Art curator, William Lieberman, included Lewin Alcopley (1910-1992), a New York based artist, as one of Japan's best "graphic artists" in a letter dated January 30, 1953 to Mrs. Nelson Rockefeller. His Alcopley entry (included on a list with Hasegawa) reads "ALCOPLEY (widely divergent styles all interesting; possibly a group?)." Hasegawa's essay, "Calligraphy and New Pictures," c.1951 contained a discussion of the work of Alcopley and Kline in relation to syllabic and ideographic characters in Japanese calligraphy (Morita sent a copy of this essay to Alcopley in 1952). In a September 10, 1952 letter that Hasegawa wrote to Kline, Hasegawa mentions that Alcopley's work had been reproduced in a number of issues of *Bokubi*. Perhaps Lieberman, who was aware of *Bokubi*, had seen one of these issues and mistaken Alcopley's works as those of a *Bokujin-kai* artist.

<sup>509</sup> Kermit I. Lansner, "The Japan Abstract Art Club," in *ARTnews*, April 1954, Volume 53, Number 2, 67.

left panel, enclosed within a circle which resembled the Zen symbol, *enso*, or circle of enlightenment, a frottage element suggests Mount Fuji, a motif Hasegawa had previously used in his painting.

Lansner also mentioned Hasegawa's 1953 screen, *Environment* [Figure 71]. There, Hasegawa had used a wood block print technique; he had carved small blocks of wood into abstract shapes and combined clusters of these shapes within four square segments of the panels. Lansner remarked that, "the still stiffness of these prints is Hasegawa's reaction against the cursive ease with which he, like so many Japanese, can use the brush."<sup>510</sup>

In another review of the Japan Abstract Art Club showing in *Art Digest* in 1954, Sam Hunter, claimed that the American Abstract Artists group represented "the least impressive of our abstract talents," and that the Abstract Expressionists outshone the merely "competent" artists affiliated with the AAA.<sup>511</sup> Whereas the AAA artists had fought to have abstract art exhibited in the late 1930s and 1940s, by 1954 abstraction was widely exhibited. Hunter identified the Japanese art component as the most interesting part of the exhibition. He called Hasegawa "one of the prime movers in the esthetic revolution" entailed in Japan's assimilation of European modern art.<sup>512</sup> What Hunter found "especially interesting" was "Hasegawa's fusion of traditional techniques and effects with modern art forms." He referred to Hasegawa's abstract screens, *Environment*

---

<sup>510</sup> Lansner, "The Japan Abstract Art Club," 67.

<sup>511</sup> Sam Hunter, "Abstracts: Western, Eastern Variety," in *Art Digest*, April 1, 1954, 15.

<sup>512</sup> Hunter, "Abstracts: Western, Eastern Variety," 31.

and *Nature*, as “frankly decorative” and “admirably” suited for use in the home; he noted that Hasegawa’s essay for the catalog included Mondrian’s statement that “art will be realized in our daily life.” Hunter identified a shuttling of influence; while he noted that 19<sup>th</sup> century European artists were influenced by Japanese prints, he identified an “artistic revolution” whereby Japanese artists were “rediscovering modernism and abstraction” through exposure to European modern art.<sup>513</sup>

Like other, previously mentioned reviewers, Hunter made a distinct point of noting Hasegawa’s synthetic technique, combining aspects of traditional Japanese art with elements of modern US and European art.<sup>514</sup> This strategy mostly impressed these reviewers as successful. However, as with Lansner, Hunter’s argument assumed a model of dominance and submission, a model privileging Western culture such that equality among cultures does not seem quite possible.

In 1956, AAA published *The World of Abstract Art* with essays on abstract art trends from various countries including England, France, Italy, Russia, Latin America, Japan, and the US. Hasegawa contributed, “Abstract Art in Japan,” and there were other essays which addressed the issue of Asian influence on the visual arts. Charmion von Wiegand submitted “The Oriental Tradition and Abstract Art,” and Grace L. McAnn Moreley’s essay, “Abstract Art on the Pacific Coast” mentioned Asian influence. Von Wiegand was extremely sympathetic to and knowledgeable about Asian art and philosophical traditions, though she perpetuated the assumption that the “East” and

---

<sup>513</sup> Sam Hunter, “Abstracts: Western, Eastern Variety,” 31.

<sup>514</sup> Out of the three pieces Hasegawa exhibited in the AAA exhibition, *Locus of the Butterfly*, *Nature*, and *Environment*, both Lansner and Hunter only chose to discuss his black and white screens, perhaps because they seemed more “typically Japanese” than his colorful abstract painting.

“West” were markedly different entities. Von Wiegand characterized the “West” as logical and the “East” as spiritually oriented, and her idea of interchange was based on a concept of equilibrium. In her binary viewpoint, she delineated two main “lines” of tradition, with the “East” having had a second line that developed parallel to the “western tradition in art...based on the solid structure of the Graeco-Roman heritage...[which] had a strong unity and relatively little outside cultural influence.”<sup>515</sup> She claimed that the “western line” had been disrupted by the industrial revolution, and that this had caused “an appreciation of great cultures of the past which are aesthetically different from western art.”<sup>516</sup>

Von Wiegand noted the primitivism and *Japonisme* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a precursor to the contemporary interest in East Asia; she cited World War II, globalism, and the prevalence of abstract art as reasons for the new interest. Overall, Von Wiegand believed that modern abstract art entailed a “universal” language free of aesthetic, national, or cultural programming. This contemporary view, shared to some extent by Hasegawa, was repeated by James Johnson Sweeney in 1951; “Abstract art has always implied a breakdown of national barriers. Its subordination of representational and anecdotal subject matter to the essentialist picture or sculpture is of its very nature a blow to regionalist, racial, or nationalist advertising in art.”<sup>517</sup>

---

<sup>515</sup> Charmion von Wiegand, “The Oriental Tradition and Abstract Art,” in *The World of Abstract Art* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1956), 55.

<sup>516</sup> von Wiegand, “The Oriental Tradition and Abstract Art,” 55.

<sup>517</sup> James Johnson Sweeney, “Address for the American Abstract Artists’ Fifteenth Annual Exhibition,” March 11, 1951, reprinted on the program for the AAA forum held at the Museum of Modern Art on March 16, 1954.

Von Wiegand, who had been a disciple of Mondrian, emphasized “Vendantism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism” as linked to postwar modern abstract art. She considered that the art movements of the early twentieth century-- “fauvism, expressionism, futurism, cubism, dadaism, and surrealism”-- had effected the “distorting, dissecting, tearing apart, exploding, and eroding [of] the natural image,” thus clearing the way for an ideational art which would extend “the boundaries of art... to include the whole universe and man’s mind.”<sup>518</sup> While Von Wiegand found East Asian influence to be integral to the fundamentals of modern, abstract art, the contribution of Japanese artists would be subsumed in her account, as “local, particular and national differences [would be] gradually absorbed into a universal expression.”<sup>519</sup>

The force of Hasegawa’s presence in New York at the end of 1954 was remarkable. Lecturing at the Club and at the Museum of Modern Art, having solo shows at New York galleries, developing friendships with prominent artists and art world personalities, publishing articles in major art journals: Hasagawa worked tirelessly to promote his program of cross-cultural interchange between Japan and the US. Mills wrote of Hasegawa’s multidimensional role in the art world, “Hasegawa played other roles in the art world in addition to that of a painter—the role of teacher and the role of critic, connoisseur and arranger of exhibitions.”<sup>520</sup>

---

<sup>518</sup> von Wiegand, “The Oriental Tradition and Abstract Art,” 57-58.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>520</sup> Paul Mills, “The Paintings of Sabro Hasegawa,” in *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident* (Oakland: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), 13.

The critical reaction to Hasegawa's promotion of an international Japanese art form varied in Japan and the US; and his reception within the regional art communities in New York and San Francisco evinced distinct differences. Japanese critic Inue Yoshiaki declared that, "the influence of Japanese paintings in India ink and calligraphy on the American paintings of the 1950s, 'Action Painting,' in particular, cannot be ignored and it was Hasegawa that played the most important role in this."<sup>521</sup> New York critic Clement Greenberg's assertion in 1955, that the Abstract Expressionists had a less than "cursory interest in oriental art," served to support his belief in a triumphant, national art free of alien influences.

Another prominent New York art writer, Dore Ashton, believed that Asian culture was too alien to be accurately assimilated in the West. She remarked on the art community's "misty references to Zen Buddhism" and on the "aimless tendency in our discussions of oriental influence" in a 1954 article.<sup>522</sup> While a number of translated texts on Zen and Japanese culture were available in mid-century New York, as was access to scholars such as Suzuki, Ashton perceived that the general attitude towards Zen among artists was casual.<sup>523</sup>

---

<sup>521</sup> Yoshiaki, "Sabro Hasegawa- his Art and Thought," 239.

<sup>522</sup> Dore Ashton, "New Japanese 'Abstract Calligraphy,'" *Art Digest*, 1954, 24.

<sup>523</sup> In her book, *Noguchi: East and West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), published thirty-eight years after the 1954 article, Ashton continued to treat Zen as a philosophy "outside" and unreachable for European and US artists and, inaccurately, as essentially nihilistic. While she chastised the art world for its racism against Noguchi during his life, Ashton herself could not fully come to terms with Noguchi's mixed heritage, his "biracial condition" (16) and ultimately claimed him as "a man of the West steeped in the Platonic tradition of unresolved dualities" (286). She insisted that Noguchi "could never become a Buddhist," and that Zen was a "limitation" to his artistic vocabulary (286). Where Ashton claimed Noguchi as a Westerner, it is more accurate to

Ashton argued that certain stylistic tendencies were racially informed. Her discussion of Japanese art traditions consisted of what she considered “injunctions the Japanese artist was to follow”; she defined tradition in Japanese art as obligatory “law.” “There were laws of proportion and design,” she insisted; “there was a law governing the strength of the brushstroke.”<sup>524</sup> In a slight to contemporary Japanese avant-garde calligraphers’ ability to use and transform traditional art techniques, Ashton stated:

It is not the Japanese artists’ memories of *laws* which make their abstract calligraphic compositions so forceful, but rather, their unconscious referral to classical precedent in both painting and calligraphy. Their abstract use of space is in the blood, a racial memory.

In a hoary trope of primitivist discourse, Ashton also asserted that Japanese artists were closer to nature.<sup>525</sup>

Ashton maintained that any commonalities between mid-century Japanese and US art were mere coincidence and, rather than representing evidence of or grounds for constructive dialogue, served to differentiate the two essentially separate cultures. “We have no calligraphic artists,” Ashton wrote, in a statement as defensive as Greenberg’s; “what is called ‘calligraphic’ in paintings by Kline, Tobey, Pollock, Guston and others is

---

state that Noguchi had a dual, and complex, cultural identity that shifted during his career. While he was attracted to symbols and metaphors used in Zen art, he did not formally study or practice Zen. Yet, Rychlak described how Noguchi cultivated a persona that “was no longer solely Western, Eastern, or Japanese-American, but quasi-spiritual, one that articulated popular notions of a Zen aesthetic;” many of Noguchi’s late works “are critically interpreted as metaphors for a kind of Zen awareness [which] seems to have enhanced and directed the reading of his work.” Rychlak, *Zen No Zen*, 23.

<sup>524</sup> Ashton, “New Japanese ‘Abstract Calligraphy,’” 24.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

usually fluent linearism.”<sup>526</sup> She concluded that “both [abstract art of Japan and the US] are directed toward the same end, but given the different circumstances of their birth, it seems likely that the two will diverge again.”<sup>527</sup> Ultimately, Ashton viewed Asian and Western cultures as racially separated and meaningful exchange as practically impossible.

Noguchi recalled in a 1973 interview that while some European and US artists and intellectuals had evinced a sustained interest in reviving and adapting aspects of traditional Japanese art, this approach was not shared by many in Japan itself during the postwar period:

[Hasegawa] was a well-to-do young man who had married a French girl and was sort of bringing back to Japan the latest European art and wrote about it and so forth. He was popular for that reason. But then when he came to America after the war and went back to Japan and started to talk to them about Zen they had no use for him at all. They said “what are you

---

<sup>526</sup> Ibid, 24. Here, Ashton established a theme consistent in her writings where she defined artists in terms of French romantic poetry and writing; she, perhaps, maintained a bias in favor of establishing a French influence over Asian sources. In “New Japanese ‘Abstract Calligraphy,’” Ashton claimed the French romantic poets of the nineteenth century as the primary source for abstract art. In this article, she wrote, “It was because Baudelaire and the symbolists who followed him spurned established relations between the material world and the artist that we have abstract art today.” (24) In a 1983 catalog on Robert Motherwell, Ashton framed his interest in “the Void,” a term associated with Asian spirituality, with Mallarmé; “Motherwell’s desire was to participate in the same sacred enterprise that led Mallarmé to compose his *Un coup de des* with blankness as a metaphor.” (46). In her 1993 book *Noguchi: East and West*, she concluded that, “I find in many of Noguchi’s statements the sensibility nurtured by the early nineteenth-century romantic poets when they spoke of the poetry of wind harps...Noguchi was also a romantic in his acute feeling of loss...He set out on the archetypal journey- not consciously by also not unaware of the great mythological tradition respected by the early moderns such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud” (296); “the mythic way of apprehending meaning was native to Noguchi” (6).

<sup>527</sup> Ashton, “New Japanese ‘Abstract Calligraphy,’” 24.

“talking about?” So he had no place in Japan and... had to come back here.<sup>528</sup>

Hasegawa wrote in 1956 that, “Japan, in fact, has become a most difficult place for the modern abstract artist to live and work in.”<sup>529</sup> Hasegawa met with disapproval of his ideas in Japan and an underlying resistance by some in New York, yet when he returned to the US in 1955, he found the most welcoming reception of all in San Francisco.

Zen scholar, Alan Watts, did not find any disparity in Hasegawa’s synthesis of cultural elements, and in fact delighted in the mixed aspects of Hasegawa’s demeanor. Watts observed that “there is no feeling of clash, of inconsistency, in the fact that he is at once the entirely dignified and traditional Japanese gentleman and the easy-going Western Bohemian.”<sup>530</sup> Watts, upon meeting Hasegawa in 1954, had invited him to teach at his school, the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco.

Watts posed the question, “why has Hasegawa come to the West?” and answered that:

Representing the most ancient and authentic tradition of Japanese art, he is troubled very deeply by the cultural direction of modern Japan... he feels that at the present time Europeans and Americans rather than Japanese are coming to the point where they can appreciate the fundamental spirit of Sino-Japanese culture, and that in perhaps another two hundred years the Japanese will receive it back from them.

---

<sup>528</sup> Noguchi, Interview with Paul Cummings, 127.

<sup>529</sup> Hasegawa, “Abstract Art in Japan,” 72.

<sup>530</sup> Alan Watts, “Sabro Hasegawa: Master of the Controlled Accident,” in *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident* (Oakland: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), 18.

Watts included Zen Buddhism in the category of the “most ancient and authentic” traditions of Japan, a philosophical tradition which he deeply revered.<sup>531</sup>

There were two important components to Hasegawa’s message— the importance of creating a modern, international Japanese avant-garde art and of reviving appreciation for traditional Japanese arts. As traditional Japanese calligraphy was a function of Zen, the philosophy and the formal aspects of the art were inseparable. New Yorkers in the early 1950s hungered to learn of Zen, but since it was a relatively new import, they often did not have background to grasp the basic concepts; as a result, they often approached the Zen arts using criteria from modern European and US art.

Noguchi recalled that, “When [Hasegawa] came to this country he came here in the sense of being a Zen teacher... He became more and more involved with Zen.”<sup>532</sup> In San Francisco, Watts and others had formed what has been termed a “Zen underground” which, by 1955, was extremely influential.<sup>533</sup> The Zen community in San Francisco embraced the Zen arts as part of a blossoming, total interest in Zen. In that context, Hasegawa’s role as an artist was as important as his role as an explainer of historic and modern Zen. Oakland Museum curator, Paul Mills noted that Hasegawa’s “paintings are contemplations” and

---

<sup>531</sup> Watts, “Sabro Hasegawa: Master of the Controlled Accident,” 18.

<sup>532</sup> Interview with Isamu Noguchi conducted by Paul Cummings, December 26, 1973, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 127.

<sup>533</sup> By the late 1960s, this movement reached a peak as, for instance, Zen priest Suzuki Shunryo Roshi sat with Alan Ginsberg and Timothy Leary on the stage of the 1967 ‘human be-in’ in Golden Gate Park.

explorations of the large religious concepts for which the characters stand. Although he made no attempt to play the role of the religious man, it was quite obvious to all who knew him that, to be an artist, as he saw it, was to be dedicated to the expression of what basically were religious points of view.<sup>534</sup>

Due to the receptivity towards Japanese culture and Zen in San Francisco during the early 1950s, there arose something of a reverence for Hasegawa there that was absent in New York City. Mills wrote in the catalog for "The Modern Spirit in Japanese Art," that "during his short period as a teacher and lecturer in the Bay Area [Hasegawa] has attracted a remarkable following among artists and students."<sup>535</sup>

Watts' recollections bear quoting at length as evidence of the appreciation of Hasegawa's contributions towards cross-cultural understanding:

During 1954 we were visited by the Japanese artist and printmaker Sabro (Saburo) Hasegawa, whom I invited immediately to join the faculty. For Sabro was an ideal mixture of Parisian bohemian and traditional Zen-Taoist Japanese, with a touch of samurai dignity and austerity. On the one hand, he might be lounging on the floor, drinking brandy and discussing outrageous new techniques for creating spontaneous abstractions (such as allowing ink-soaked woolen thread to drool over absorbent paper), while on the other, he might be conducting tea ceremony according to the superb technique of his master, So-shu of the Kankyu-an school. Often when Lois and I were unduly harassed with administrative problems he would wander into my office in the middle of the afternoon and invite us to take time out for tea. He had an adjoining room which he and William Swartley had converted into an astonishing burlap-walled cross between San Francisco Victorian and Japanese shibui, where the enshrined image of Buddha was a piece of driftwood that had originally been the lathe-turned leg of a very ordinary wooden chair. And there the three of us would sit on the floor and, with easy conversation, watch him spoon powdered green tea into a primitive Korean rice-bowl, cover it with boiling water from a bamboo ladle, and then whisk it into a potion which has been called "the froth of the liquid jade." Lois used to say that one tea with Sabro was worth fifteen visits to a psychiatrist.

---

<sup>534</sup> Mills, *Sabro Hasegawa*, 10.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

Few lecturers can keep me awake, but Sabro was one of them-- despite his slow, quiet, and pensive way of talking-- for every sentence was like an aphorism from Lao-tzu. Sometimes they were formal lectures (invariably crowded) in the main auditorium, sometimes talks over the table in the communal dining room, and sometimes observations at tea ceremony. But he taught us about Bankei's Taoist style of Zen, about the technique of haiku poetry, about calligraphy with the brush, and about the art of the "controlled accident." In Japan he had collected driftwood, especially some pieces from a wrecked boat, which he then used as modular blocks for monoprints wherein he gave a certain organized control to the wandering patterns of the grain in the wood. He explained how the grain followed those same watercourse patterns that we admire in clouds, drifting smoke, marble, jade, and flames, and how one might so flow with one's own nature as to live each moment of life with the same grace. When students pressed him to define all this more precisely he would sometimes shout out, "What's the matter with you? Can't you feel?"

Hasegawa's influence in San Francisco extended to writers, such as Gary Snyder (b.1930), as well as artists including Bernice Bing (1936-1998) and Noriko Yamamoto (b.1929) who had attended Hasegawa's classes at the California College of Arts and Crafts. Current dean of the San Francisco Art Institute, Mark Johnson stated that, "Clearly, Hasegawa helped set the stage for both contemporary art (zen and funk) and culture (Eastern mysticism) in the Bay Area."<sup>536</sup> Artist and teacher Fred Martin, who had worked at the San Francisco Art Institute since the late 1940s recalled, "There was a time in the mid-1950s when everything was Hasegawa."<sup>537</sup>

---

<sup>536</sup> Mark Johnson, Gallery Director at San Francisco State University, email of February 17, 2004.

<sup>537</sup> As cited by Johnson, email of February 17, 2004.

## CONCLUSION

Ibram Lassaw, in the US, and Hasegawa Saburō, in Japan, reached their mature styles in 1950 and 1951, respectively, both with some connection to the Abstract Expressionist movement. By 1954, when Lassaw and Hasegawa met in New York and created panels and talks on Zen at the Club together, they were confident in the relevance of Zen to postwar art. Although they promoted Zen as a universal, spiritual experience that could be manifest in art through abstract line and gesture, in retrospect their use of Zen rhetoric entailed other factors, whether conscious or not, including political ones.

To reiterate, Lassaw's understanding of Zen was derived in part from Suzuki's and Watts' totalizing narratives of Zen as a source for spiritual renewal in the face of a Western loss of faith in progress through scientific rationalism. In the US, Zen had been grounded in interfaith dialogue since its importation and, in its mid-century form, it was often treated as involving a "mystical religiosity with the promise of self discovery."<sup>538</sup>

Lassaw's views on cross-cultural borrowing varied over the course of his career. In 1936, he made a statement confirming the growing interest among progressive New York artists in producing an art not derivative of European artists and movements:

Many people are now learning that we cannot produce an art of our own by continuing to borrow styles and ways of working that came from different physical, philosophical and psychological world environments as the past shows. It is like trying to transplant a tree after tearing it out of the soil without its roots.<sup>539</sup>

---

<sup>538</sup> Cox, *The Zen Arts*, 29.

<sup>539</sup> Ibram Lassaw, "On Inventing Our Own Art," *American Abstract Artists: Three Yearbooks (1938, 1939, 1946)* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 24.

By the mid-1950s, Lassaw was no longer so leery of different worlds. When he was attending Suzuki's classes and reading the books of Suzuki and Watts, Lassaw embraced a comparative view of religions, whereby multiple, disparate cultures possessed a common universal essence:

From a number of great religious teachers and mystics I have gathered sayings that are parallel in meaning though coming from very different times and places and cultures. They all seem to say the same great truth.<sup>540</sup>

Lassaw drew up a list comparing statements by the Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart (c.1260-1328), with those of Chao-Chou (778-897), P'an Yun (740-808), Feng Kan (c.750-c.850), Buddha (c.563-c.483 BC), Christ, Moses (13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.), Hofuku (1025-1102), Hakuin (1685-1768), Suzuki (1870-1966), and writings from Vendata and Sufi literature, as follows:

Meister Eckhart says- Where there is no yesterday nor tomorrow where it is not and today- there we see God.

Chao-Chou- a Zen master of the T'ang dynasty says in answer to a question as to what is the Divine Way- The usual life is the very Tao.

Another Zen master P'ang Yun exclaims- How wondrously supernatural and how miraculous this- I draw water and I carry fuel.

In the Bible we have a most significant statement as to the nature of God- When Moses on Mount Sinai wanted to know God's name, God said "I am that I am."

In Vendata literature we are told that 'Samsara is Nirvana.' Samsara being this ordinary everyday world that we are experiencing here and now. This is it.

---

<sup>540</sup> Ibram Lassaw, undated, handwritten notes c.1954, Ibram Lassaw Archive, East Hampton, New York.

Feng Kan of the T'ang dynasty when asked what was the teaching of the Buddha simply answered Sui 'Shih" meaning 'follow the time'

A young disciple asked a Zen master what was the ultimate nature of reality- what is God's way. The master pointed to some bamboo leaves he said- see these leaves are short and these are long.

Eckhart sees the same creative moment 'Yonder in the day of eternity the soul is in the essential now. There the Father is begetting his Son in the here and now. There the soul is being reborn in God. As often as the birth takes place she is giving birth to the only Son. Christ "My Father who is in me-He doeth that I do.'

Suzuki says that which is before you is it, begin to reason about it and you fall at once into error.

The Sufi sect... has a saying- The perfection of saintship consists of seeing everything as it really is.

Hakuin- a Buddhist says- This very Earth is the Lotus land of Purity and this body- the body of Buddha.

Hofuku- pointing to the mountains said, "Is this not Reality?" Chokei answered, "Yes, but it's a pity to say so."

In the Hindu Vedas are read [sic]- Whoever thinks of God as something other than oneself- does not understand.

Then there is another Zen saying...If you understand- things are such as they are. If you do not understand- things are just as they are.<sup>541</sup>

However idealistic in intent, this approach of equalizing culturally and historically disparate statements had the effect of allowing Asian thought to be denationalized and subsumed. As Robert Sharf has remarked with a view to the postwar context, "globalization is largely coextensive with 'Westernization'."<sup>542</sup>

---

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Sharf, "Whose Zen?," 44.

Alan Watts painted Zen as one of many, ultimately interchangeable religions, an approach he developed during the 1950s and 1960s, when his popularization of Zen in the US reached its height. According to Watts, any religion could be experienced subjectively, and he counted this experience as one largely “beyond” the secular and sociopolitical world:

I am more interested in religion as feeling and experience than as conception and theory...Basic religion is beyond good and evil.<sup>543</sup>

Watts recollected his technique for presenting Zen to his students, by drawing on a multiplicity of facts and sources framed in a highly personal mode of exposition:

I would... make sure the students had access to the relevant literature, that they understood its historical background, and were familiar with its main technical terms. For the rest, I would use the original texts as a basis for rambling reflections that might take us into Tantric yoga, optical illusions, metalinguistics, biological systems-theory, and hypnosis.<sup>544</sup>

Watts did acknowledge, however, that the West’s assimilation of Zen had a political dimension:

What we were doing in San Francisco in the 1950s must, of course, be seen in context of America’s military involvements in Japan, Korea, and then Vietnam, for these exploits were bound to bring cultures of those areas back home.<sup>545</sup>

Yet, finally, Watts’ approach was casually imperialistic, insomuch as he subsumed the ideas of Zen, as practiced by its adherents, under the authority of his own position:

<sup>543</sup> Alan Watts, *In My Own Way: An Autobiography, 1915-1965* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 63.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid*, 274.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid*, 261.

My own interest in this cultural encounter was peculiar, in the sense that I was not simply a fact-seeker... I am not interested in studying, say, Buddhism in terms of what most Buddhists think about it.<sup>546</sup>

Hasegawa also modified his views on cultural exchange over the course of his career. While his early training focused on European art techniques and movements, during the 1940s, he reexamined the traditional Japanese Zen arts and struggled to integrate them into European styles. What allowed Hasegawa to unite these disparate disciplines and periods was his conviction that there existed a “true nature of visual arts.”<sup>547</sup> The idea of a pure essence of art or experience, such that the practice of Zen or the Zen arts could be independent of any individual or socio-cultural context, was in fact a central claim of the Kyoto School of philosophy.

The idea that the aesthetic forms of the Zen arts, such as calligraphy, express a Japanese cultural essence arises at particular, telling historical moments. As Rupert Cox argued, “in the modern period (post-Meiji) for example, scholarly discourses focused on aesthetics to formulate a response to the social changes taking place, and the process helped shape a growing nationalist movement.”<sup>548</sup> Hasegawa, interestingly, found what he believed was the authentic essence of art in pre-modern Japanese history, but he did not feel that modernization had created a “loss of purity;” rather, he emphasized the

---

<sup>546</sup> Ibid, 261.

<sup>547</sup> Hasegawa, “Reflections: An Essay on the New Occident and the Old Orient,” 138.

<sup>548</sup> Cox, “Culture as Aesthetic Value,” in *The Zen Arts*, 196.

convergence of traditional Zen arts and modern art in “an ideal of the East which transcended race and territory.”<sup>549</sup>

The postwar military occupation of Japan by the US from 1945 to 1952 affected Hasegawa’s artistic practice. As Winther-Tamaki explained:

The various strands of nativism characterizing early modern Japanese history had reached a crescendo with the virulent hubristic military expansionism and emperorism of the 1930s and early 1940s. This ideology was undermined by the American victory in 1945, and modern Japanese cultural identity had to be reformulated around the fact of American power.<sup>550</sup>

After Hasegawa’s encounter with Noguchi in 1950, he began to shift his focus towards locating this ideal of art within an international frame, particularly in relation to the Abstract Expressionist movement in the US. In 1950, Hasegawa proclaimed:

The art of East and West can be firmly linked. They can be linked firmly no matter how great the distance in place or time which must be overcome. Yet the possibility of their linkage is located within an awesome depth and it is the upsurge of the spirit of art which is necessarily able to realize this linkage.<sup>551</sup>

In 1951, Hasegawa stated, “I think that true Orientalism has to take an even bigger part in the modern world. However, the true Orientalist today exists more in foreign countries than in Japan.”<sup>552</sup>

---

<sup>549</sup> Winther, “Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese culture in the early postwar years,” 293.

<sup>550</sup> Bert Winther, “The Rejection of Isamu Noguchi’s Hiroshima Cenotaph: A Japanese American Artist in Occupied Japan,” in *Art Journal* 53, 4 (Winter 1994), 23.

<sup>551</sup> Hasegawa Saburō, “Noguchi Nihon” in *Bijutsu Techo* August 1950, 58-59; quoted in Winther, “Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese culture in the early postwar years,” 171.

<sup>552</sup> Hasegawa, “Reflections: An Essay on the New Occident and the Old Orient,” 138.

In 1995, Bernard Faure coined the term “reverse Orientalism” to refer to aspects of Japanese discourses on national identity, entailing the adaptation of stereotypes originating in the West to serve certain Japanese agendas. Cox argued in 2003, that whereas industrialism had caused a crisis in the West, including a loss of religious faith, in Japan “the emergence of industrial capitalism in 1968... [caused] an internal reaction which sought to construct a cultural identity in opposition to these developments and the intrusion of the foreign and modern ‘other’.”<sup>553</sup> He stated that “the irony, and the contradiction of the Zen arts, is that as aesthetic forms of Japanese culture they have been forced to bear the burden of difference from modernization.”<sup>554</sup>

The discourses of universalism in the US, Europe, and Japan are more symbiotic than is often supposed. Cox pointed out that, while “ideas about Japanese art and culture, and the Zen arts in particular, were constructed by European virtuosi within the intellectual framework of the *Japonisme* discourse” during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, he found that there were also some ways in which “Japanese scholars [especially during the 1930s and 1940s] borrowed imaginatively from European and particularly German philosophy.”<sup>555</sup> Nishida, for example, based his notion of pure experience on a variety of Western philosophical ideas including the German hermeneutical concept of *geist* as well as William James’ (1842-1910) and Henri Bergson’s (1859-1941) theories of spiritual experience.<sup>556</sup> Suzuki adopted Nishida’s concept of pure experience and used it,

---

<sup>553</sup> Cox, *The Zen Arts*, 34-35.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid*, 211.

<sup>556</sup> Cox, *The Zen Arts*, 213. Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 124-125.

ironically, to emphasize that Japanese art and culture are expressions of Zen thought, to the exclusion of other religious, social, and political influences.<sup>557</sup>

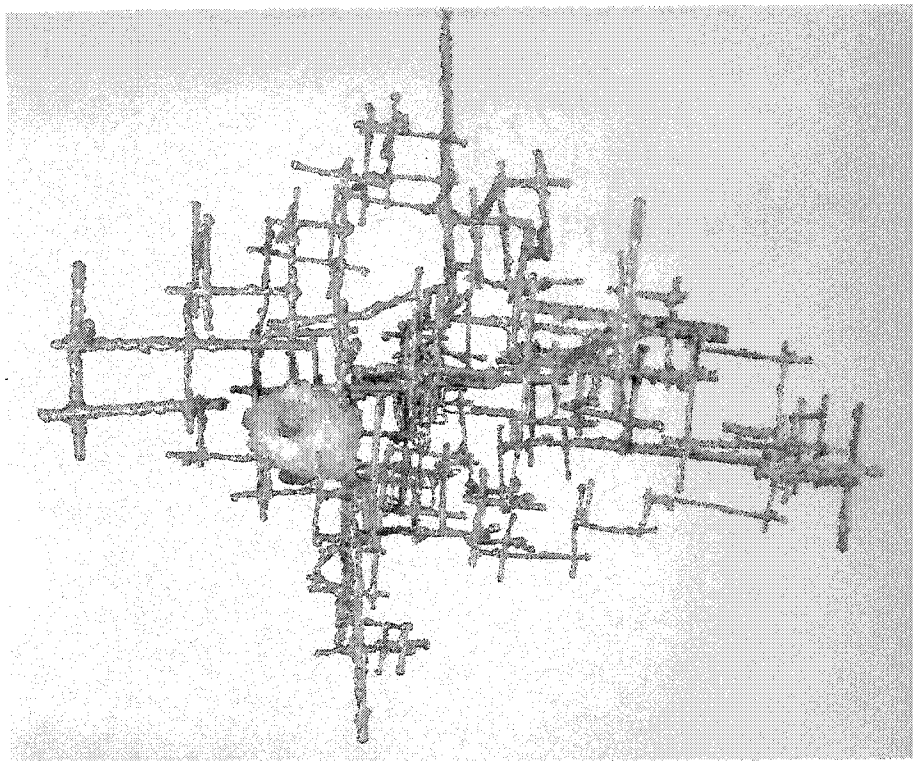
Suzuki's Zen provided Lassaw with a matrix of explanation for his sculptural practice. But Lassaw's affinity for Asian philosophies seems to have fed certain cultural biases that possibly served to undermine his critical reception. For Hasegawa, as Winther-Tamaki explained, "his attempt to realize the contemporary relevance of the pre-Meiji cultural past had a dislocative effect on his Japanese identity such that it could only be accommodated outside of Japan."<sup>558</sup> Although Hasegawa widely advocated his program to a sympathetic audience of artists in New York during the early 1950s, the then prevalent critical promotion of an endemically "American" art served to weaken the process of intercultural artistic exchange. While Lassaw and Hasegawa both saw in Zen an effectively ahistorical, universal spiritual experience which informed their art, in sum, their adaptations of Zen ideas were inevitably touched by elements of mid-century nationalism.

---

<sup>557</sup> Cox, *The Zen Arts*, 213.

<sup>558</sup> Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 43.

## ILLUSTRATIONS



1.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Akasa*, 1954  
Bronze and rose quartz  
20 x 26 x 24 inches  
Private collection



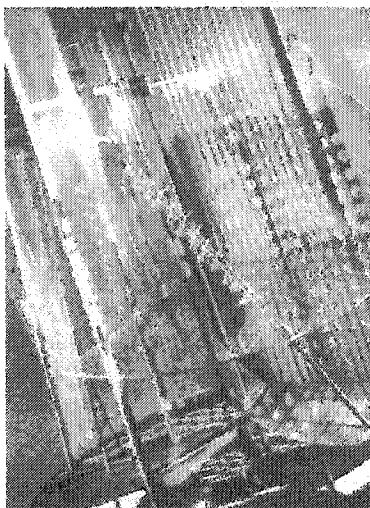
2.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*The Awakened One*, 1957  
Bronze, steel  
85 x 27 x 22 inches  
Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut



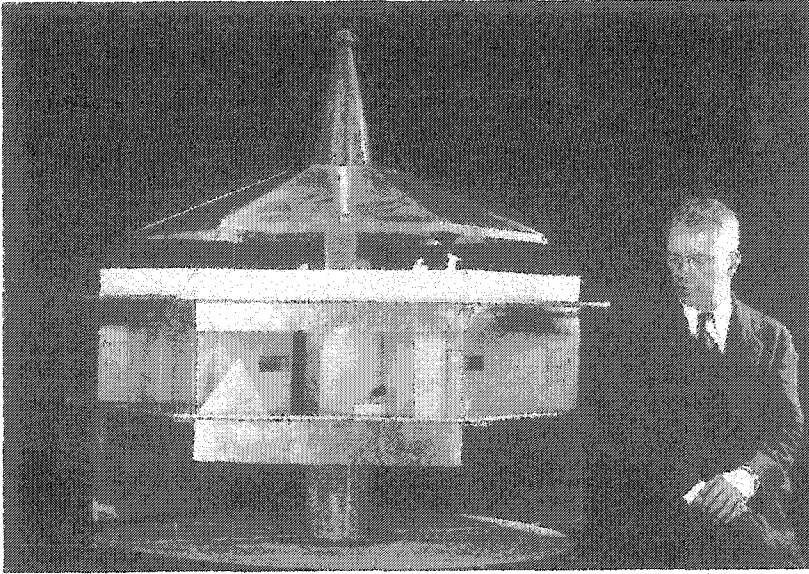
3.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Dancing Figure*, 1929  
Black graphited plaster  
9 inches high  
Collection of the artist



4.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Torso*, 1931  
Prussian blue painted plaster  
14 inches high  
Collection of the artist



**5. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy**  
*Light-prop*, 1921  
Nickel and plastic

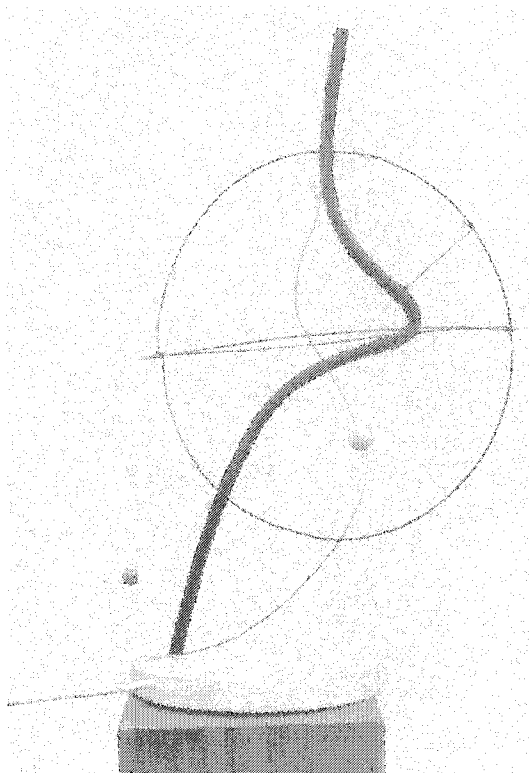


6. Photograph: Buckminster Fuller with a model of *Dymaxion House*



7.  
Photograph: Ibram Lassaw at work on *Sculpture 1933*

*Sculpture 1933*, 1933  
Plaster on wire  
Destroyed



8.

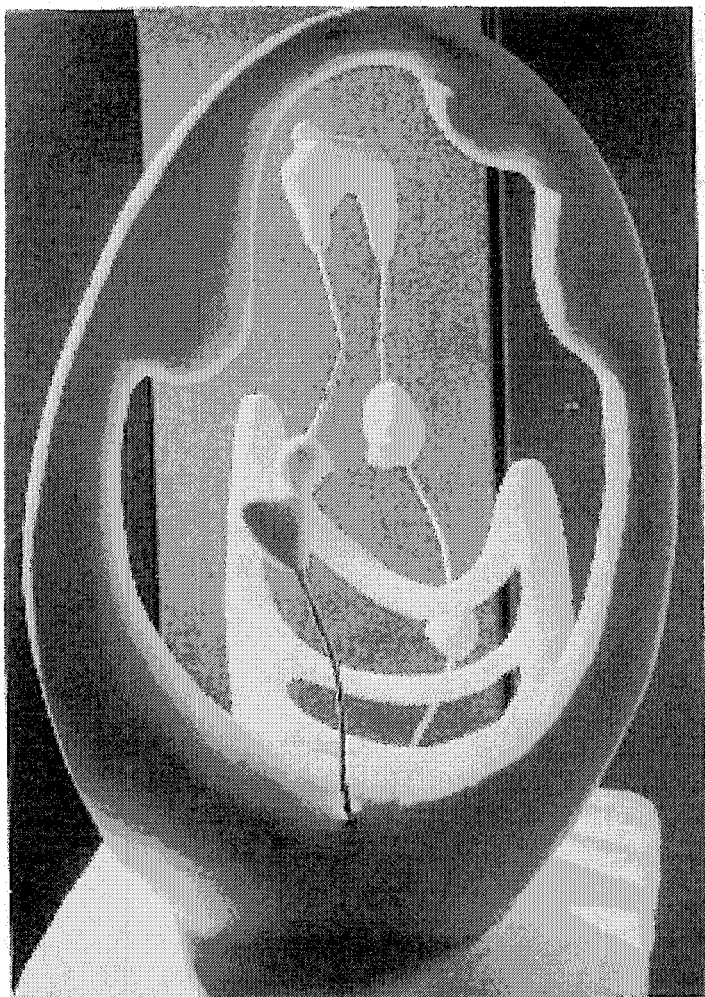
Alexander Calder

*Universe*, 1934

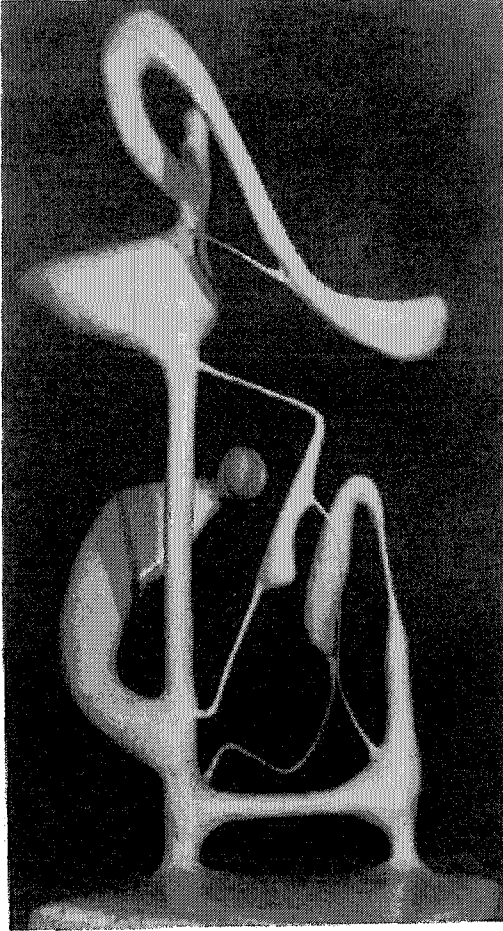
Motor driven mobile: painted iron pipe, wire, and wood with string

40 ½ inches high

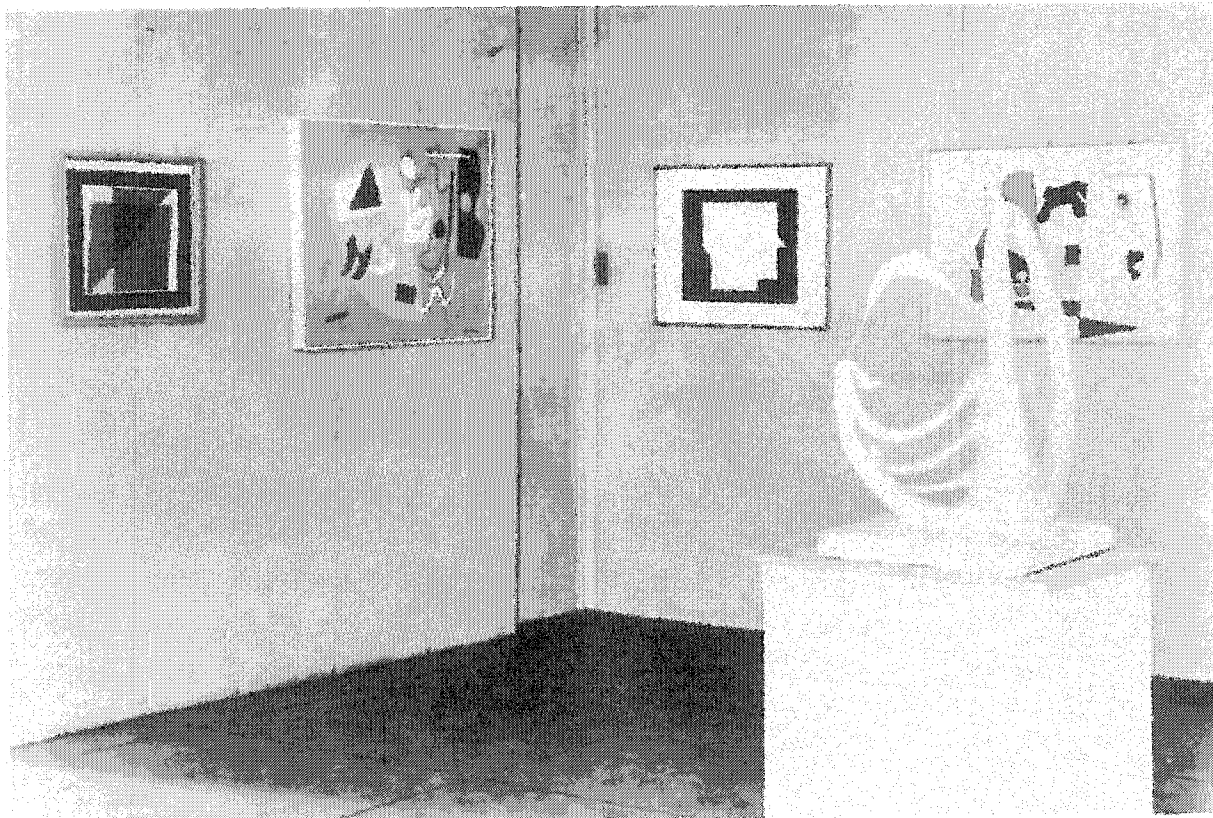
Museum of Modern Art, New York



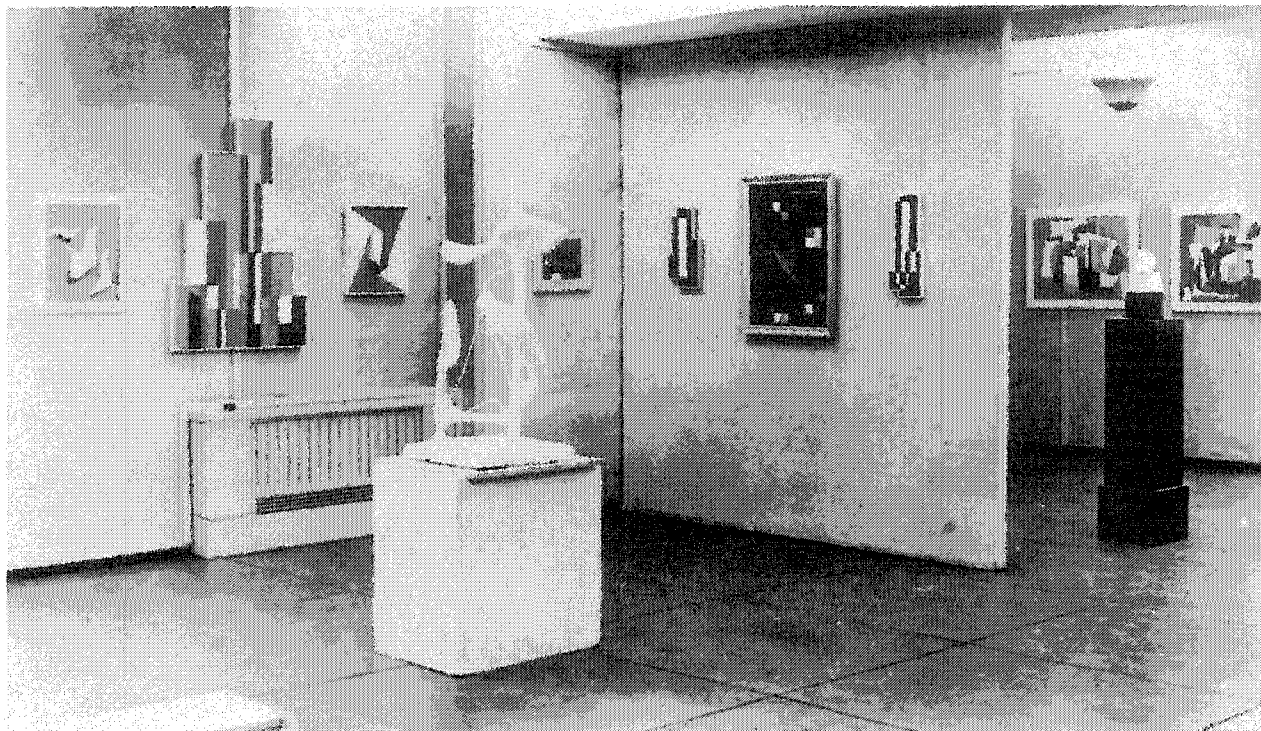
9.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Sculpture 1935, 1935*  
Plaster on wire  
36 inches high  
Destroyed 1942



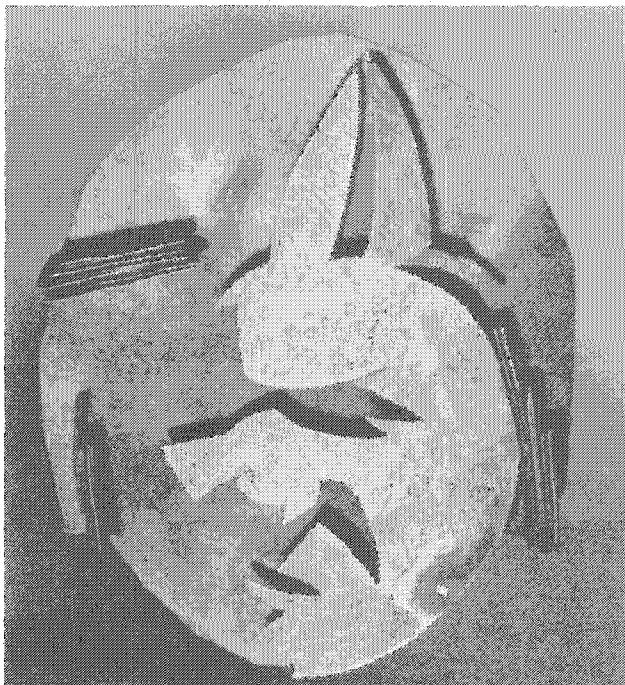
10.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Sculpture 1936, 1936*  
Plaster on wire  
4 feet high  
Destroyed 1942



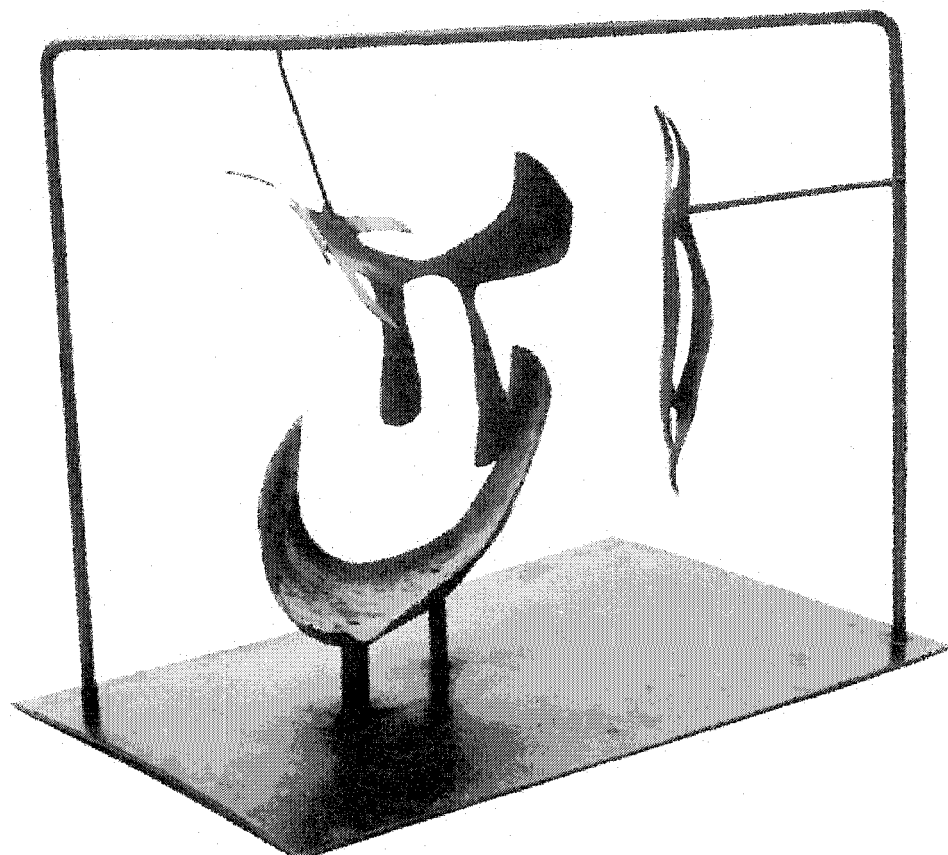
11.  
First exhibition of the American Abstract Artists  
Photograph featuring Lassaw's *Sculpture 1935, 1935*  
Squibb Gallery, New York, 1937



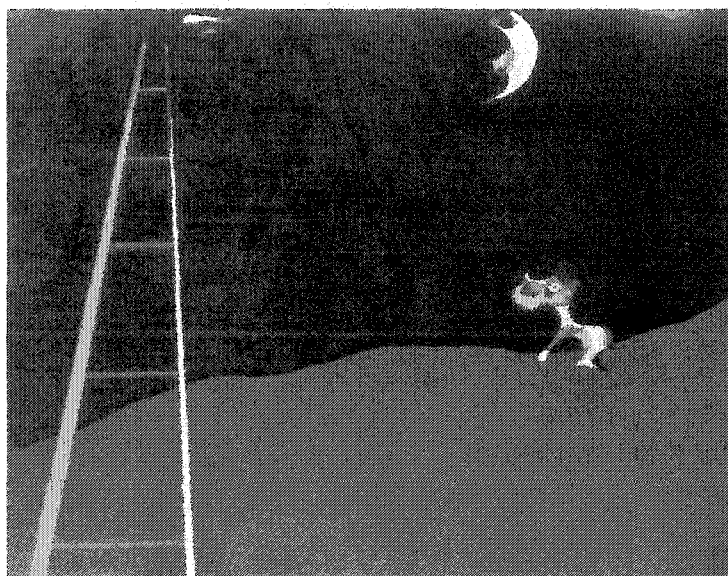
12.  
First exhibition of the American Abstract Artists  
Photograph featuring Lassaw's *Sculpture 1936, 1936*  
Squibb Gallery, New York, 1937



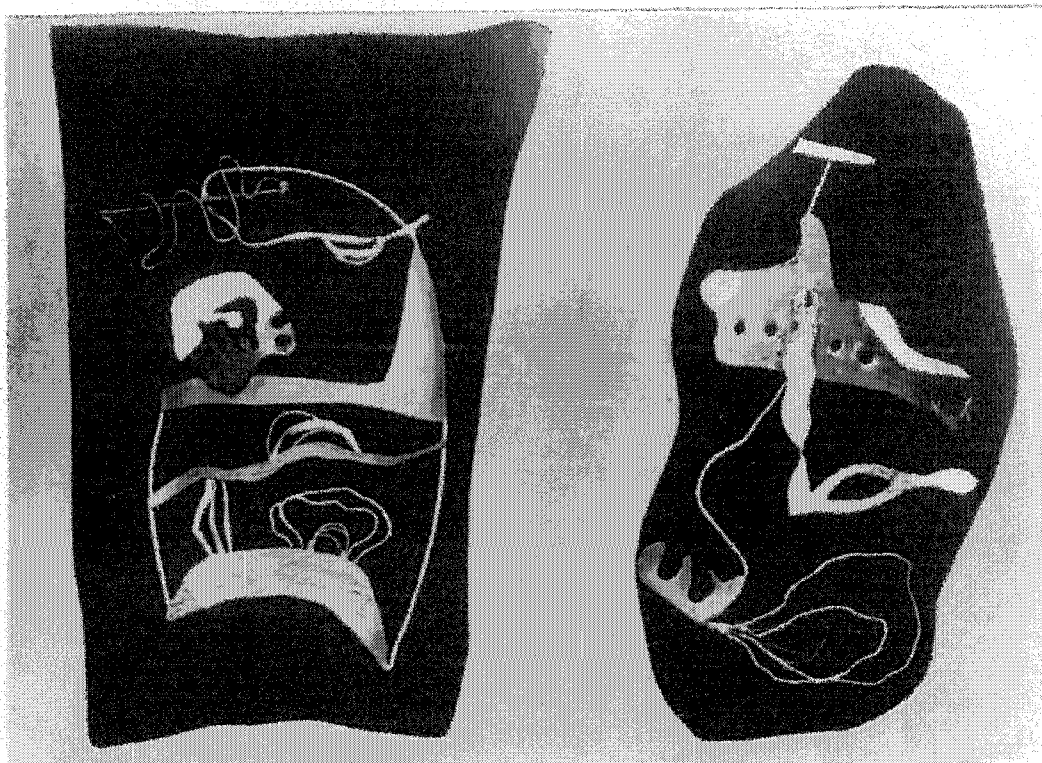
13.  
Julio González  
*Mask of Roberta in the Sun, 1927*  
Iron  
7 1/8 inches high  
Collection Roberta González, Paris



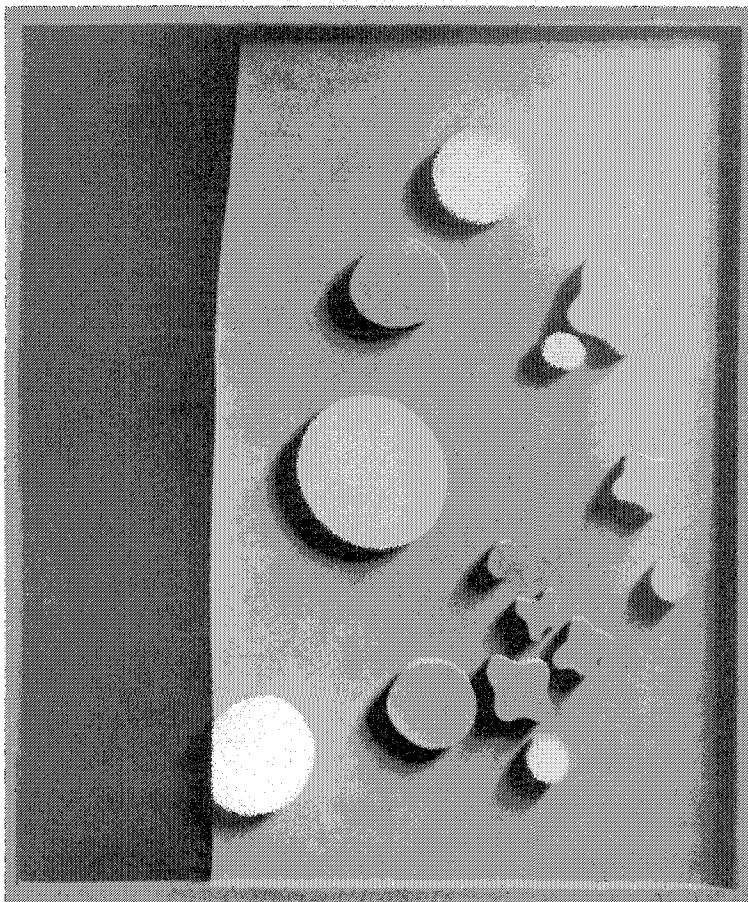
14.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Sculpture in Steel*, 1938  
Hammered steel  
18 ½ x 24 x 15 inches  
Collection of the artist



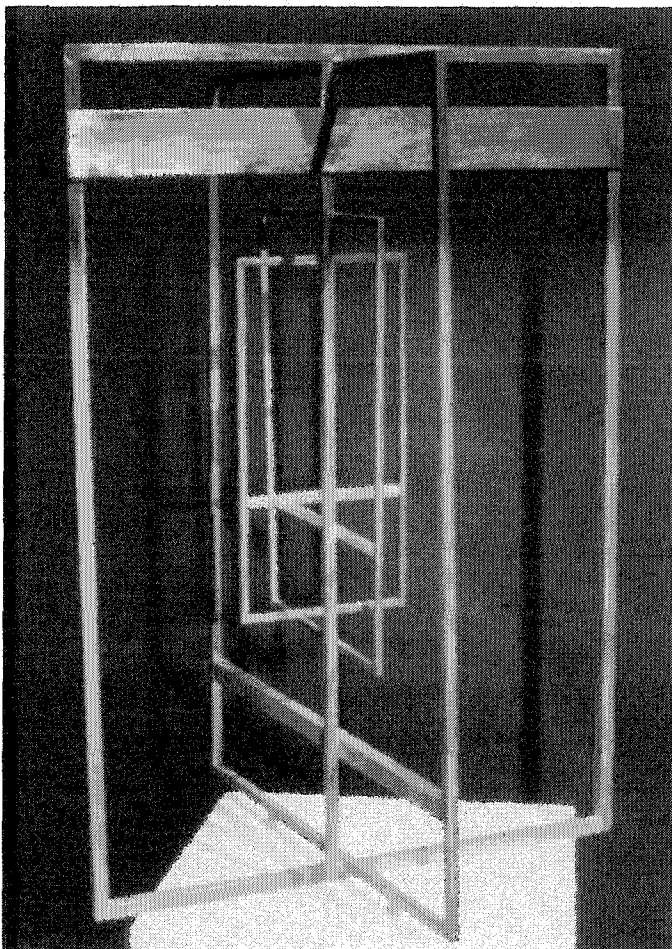
15.  
Joan Miró  
*Dog Barking at the Moon*, 1926  
Oil on canvas  
73 x 92 centimeters  
Philadelphia Museum of Art



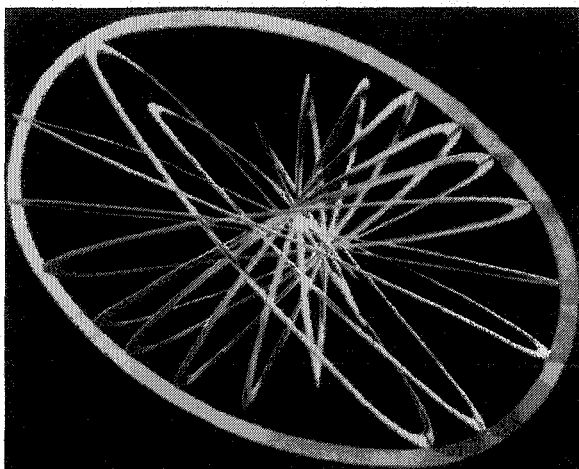
16.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Composition with Light*, 1938  
Painted wood, plaster coated wire, lightbulbs  
27 ½ x 26 x 5 inches  
Collection of the artist



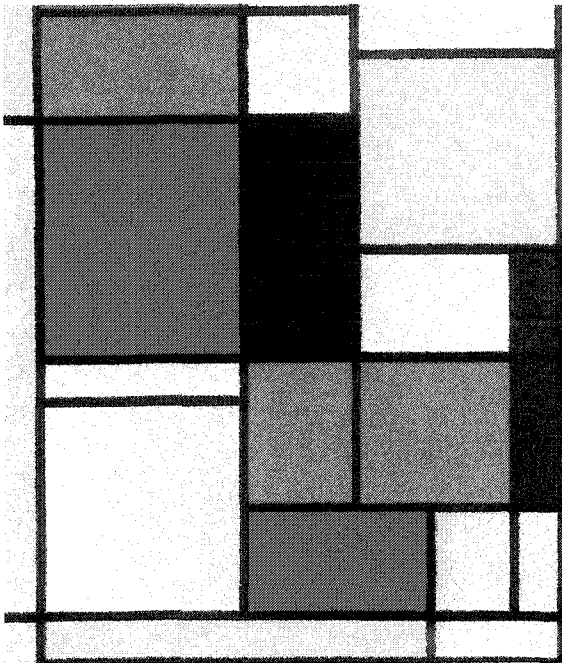
17.  
Jean Arp  
*Arranged According to the Laws of Chance*, 1929  
Painted wood relief  
55 1/8 x 42 1/8 inches  
Private Collection, Switzerland



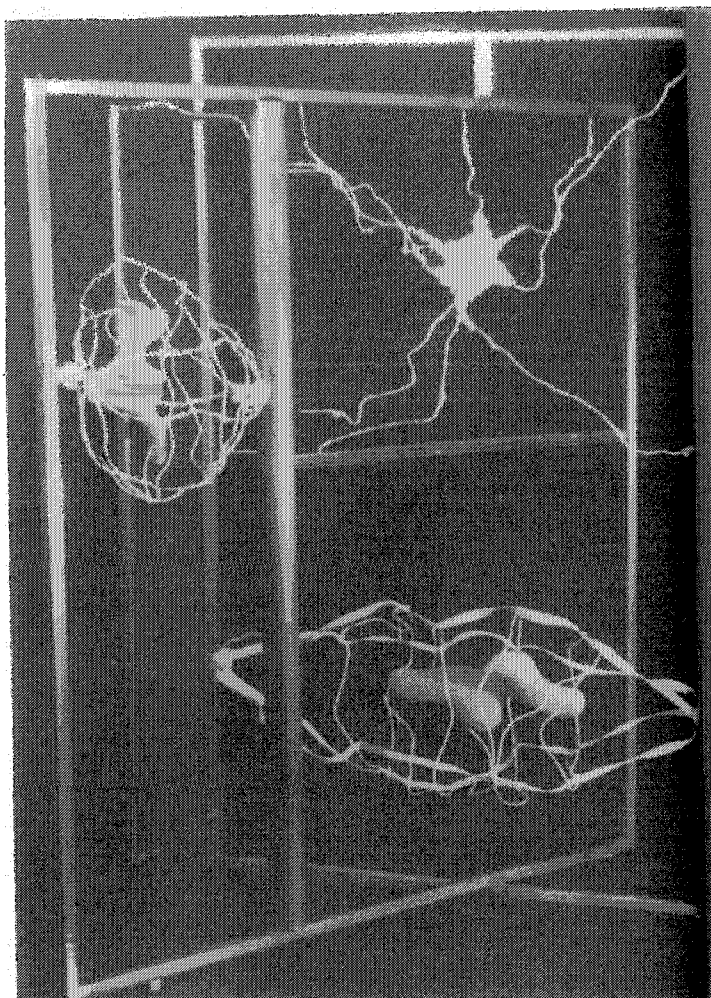
18.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Intersecting Rectangles*, 1940  
Acrylic, steel  
27 ½ x 19 x 19 inches  
Sheldon Art Gallery



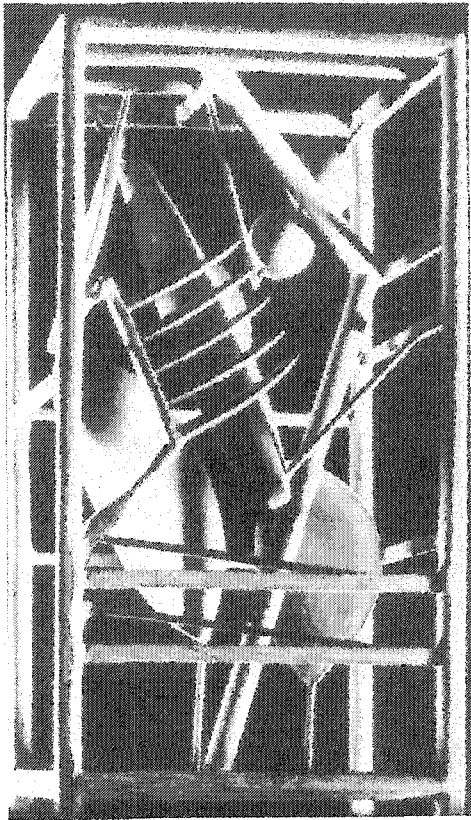
19.  
Alexandr Rodchenko  
*Spatial Construction no. 12*, c.1920  
Painted wood  
Museum of Modern Art, New York



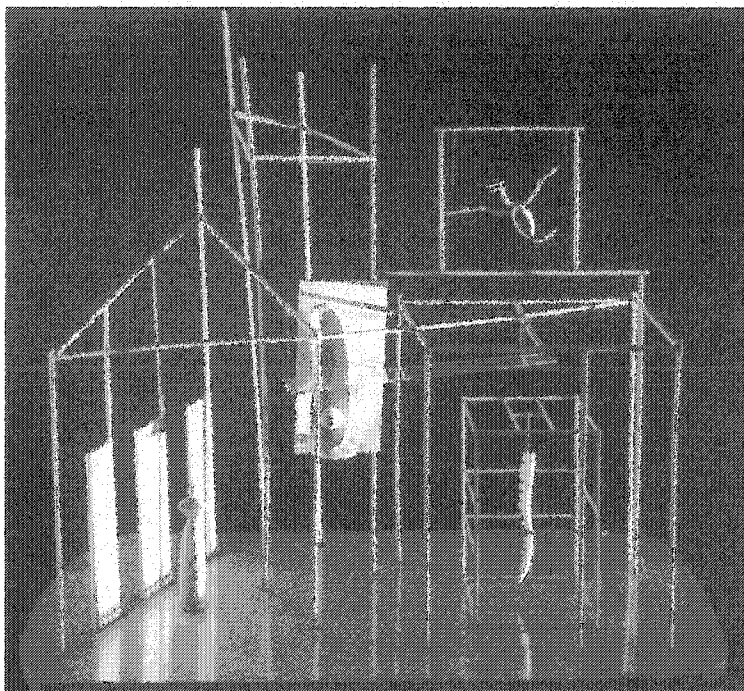
20.  
Piet Mondrian  
*Tableau II*, 1921-1925  
29 1/2 x 25 5/8 inches  
Collection Max Bill, Zurich



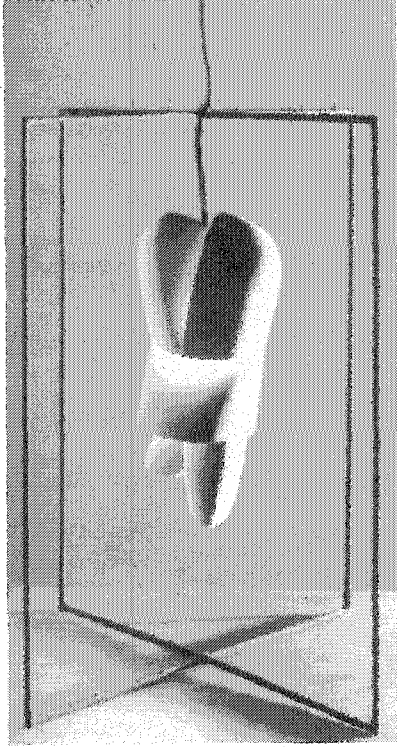
21.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Arachnide*, 1944  
Plaster on wire, steel, carved wood  
25 x 20 ½ x 16 inches  
Collection of the artist



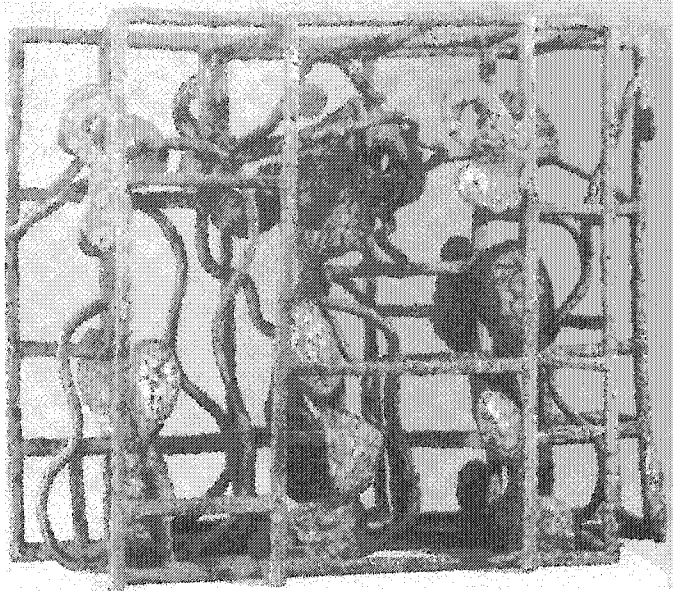
22.  
Alberto Giacometti  
*Cage*, 1931  
Wood  
30 inches high  
Moderna Museet, Stockholm



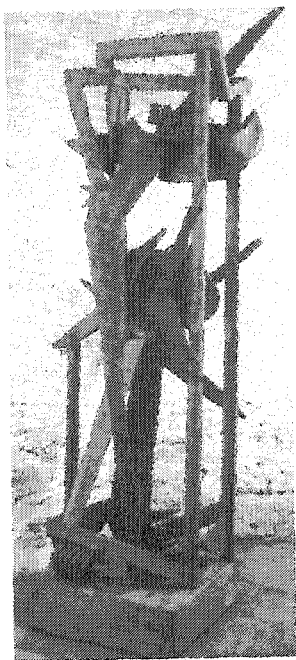
23.  
Alberto Giacometti  
*The Palace at 4 A.M.*, 1932-33  
Wood, glass, wire, string  
25 x 28 1/4 x 15 3/4 inches  
Museum of Modern Art, New York



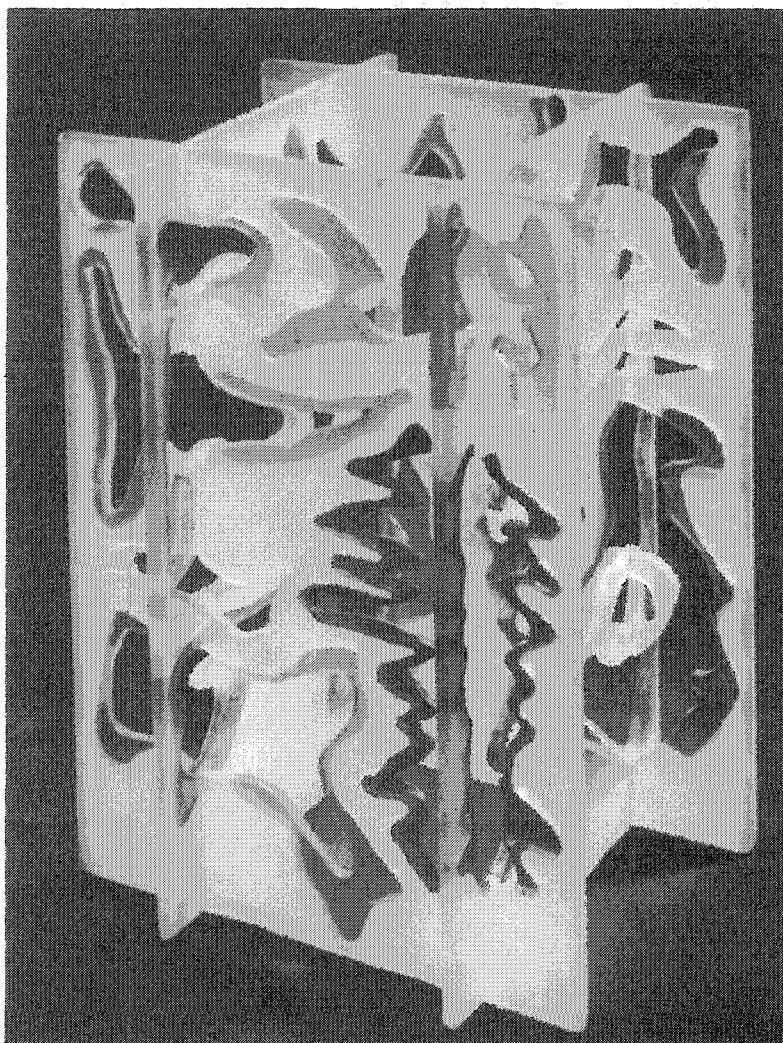
24.  
Isamu Noguchi  
*Lunar Infant*, 1943-44  
Magnesite, wood, metal, electric light  
14 inches high



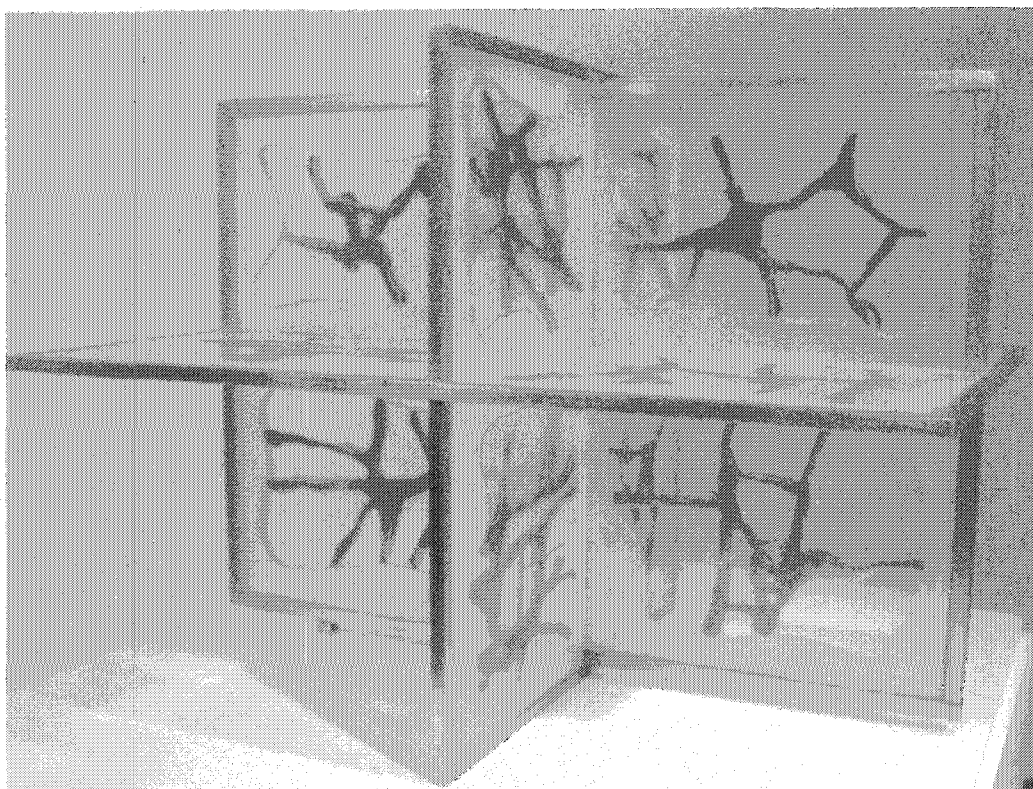
25.  
Peter Grippe  
*Symbolic Figure #4*, 1946  
Bronze  
17 inches high  
Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey



26.  
Seymour Lipton  
*Imprisoned Figure*, 1948  
Lead, wood  
80 inches high  
Museum of Modern Art, New York



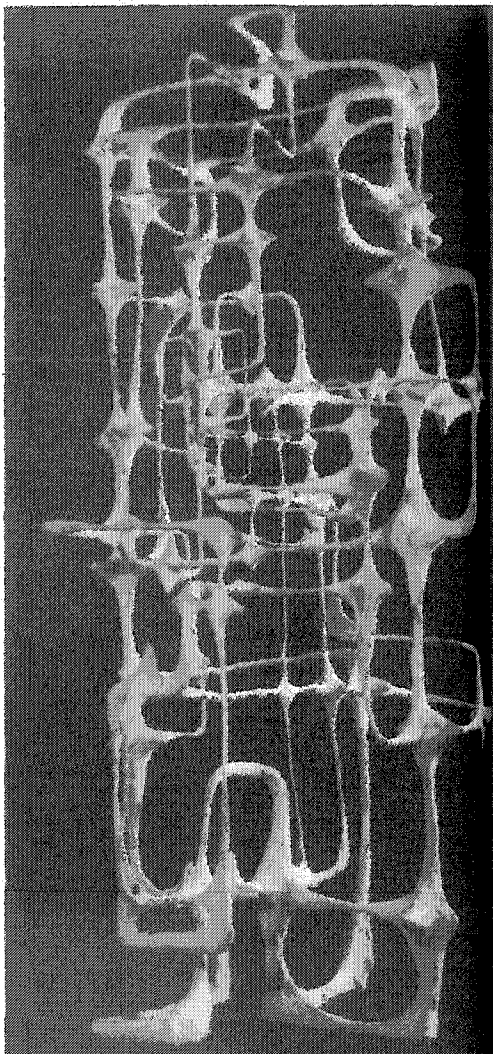
27.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Mandala*, 1949  
Polychromed plastic  
16 x 12 x 12 inches  
Collection of Denise Lassaw



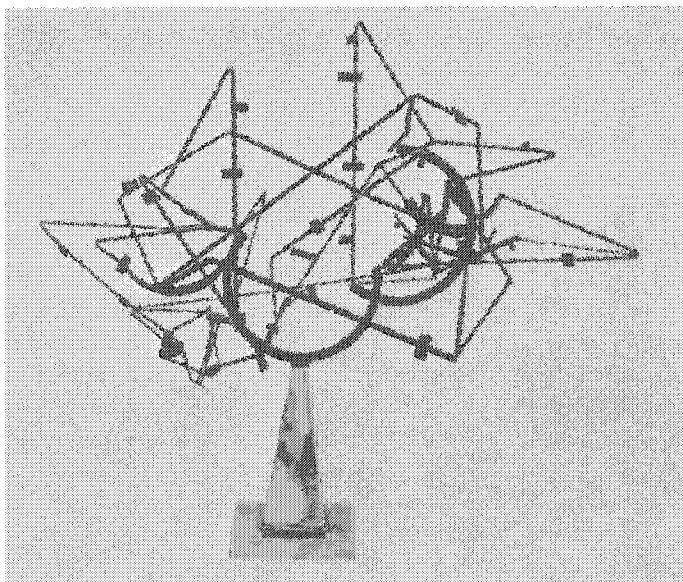
28.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Star Cradle*, 1949  
Acrylic, dye, steel  
11 ¼ x 16 x 11 inches  
Collection of Denise Lassaw



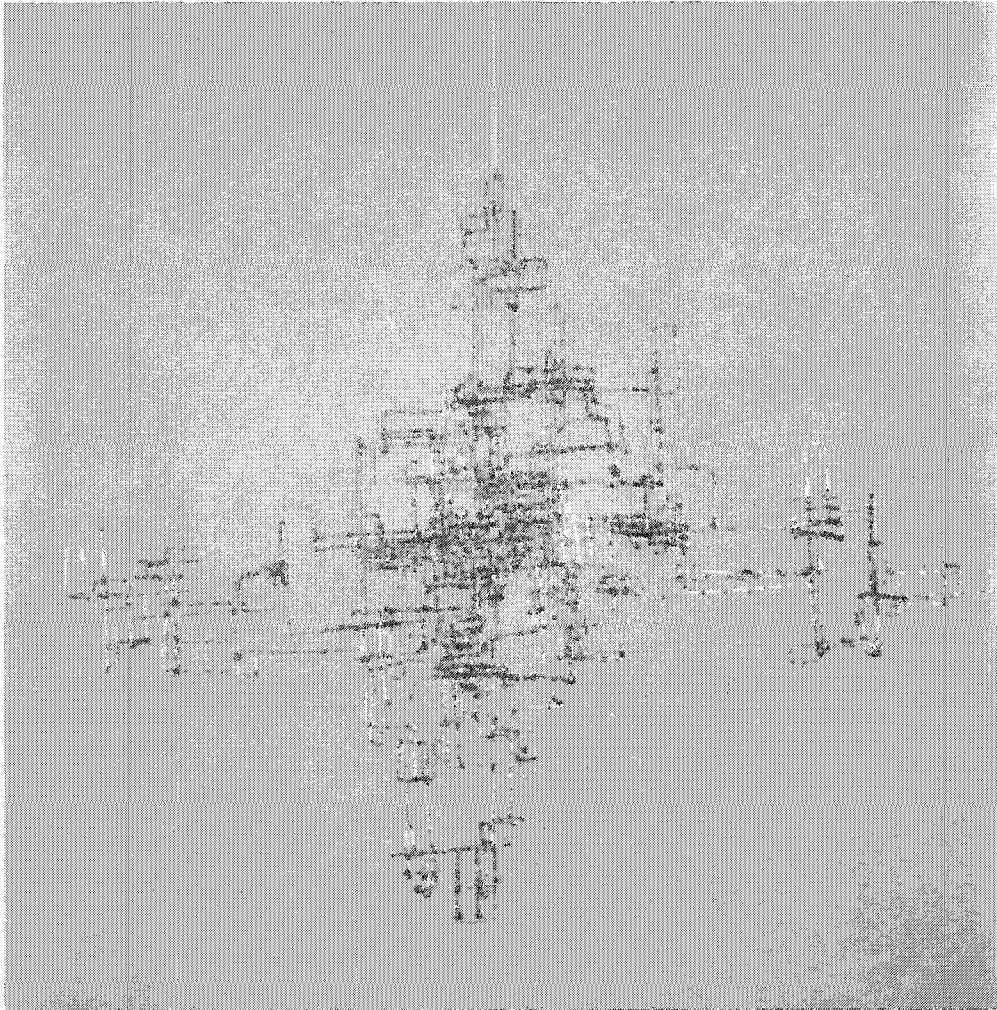
29.  
Jackson Pollock  
*Galaxy*, 1947  
Oil, aluminum paint, and small gravel on canvas  
43 ½ x 34 inches  
Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska



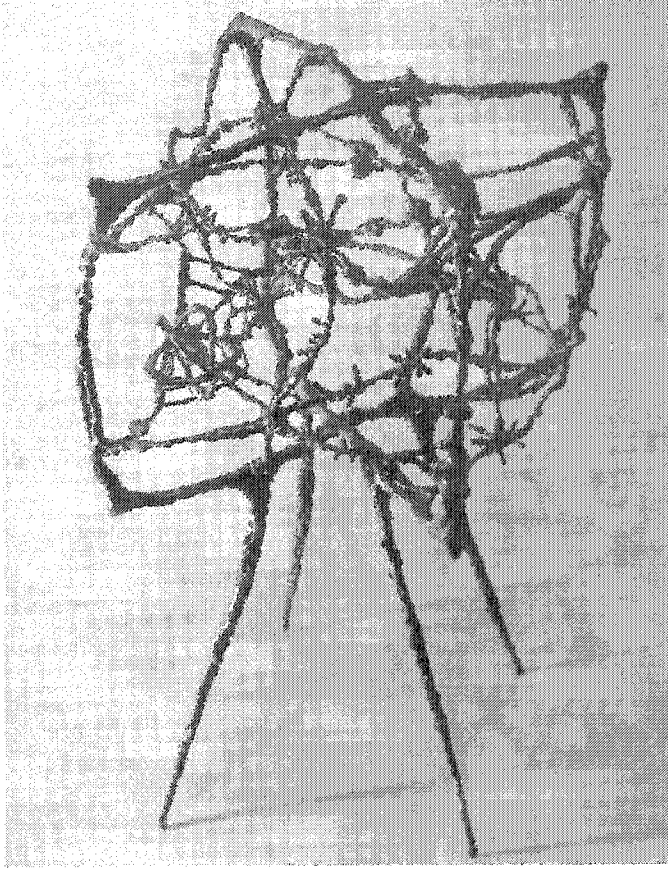
30.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Milky Way*, 1950  
Plastic composition paste, wire  
44 x 26 x 24 inches  
Collection of the artist



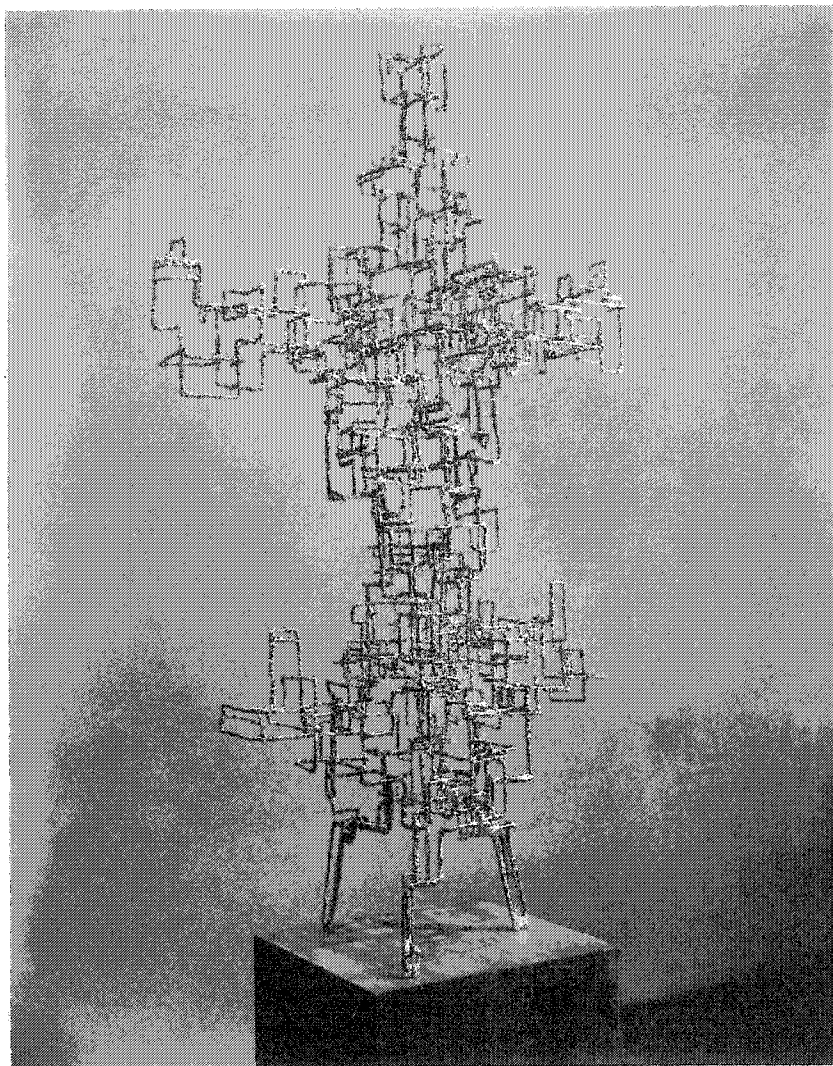
31.  
David Smith  
*Star Cage*, 1950  
Steel  
44  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches high  
John Rood Sculpture Collection, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis



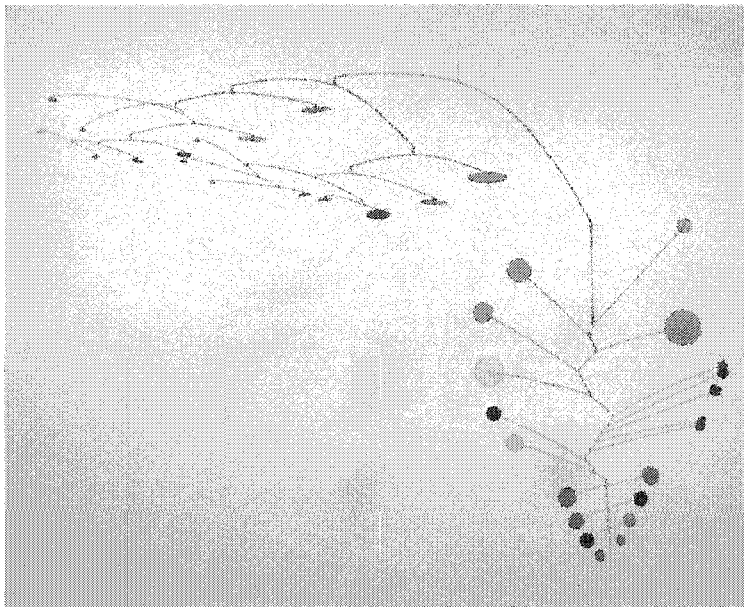
32.  
**Ibram Lassaw**  
*Nebula in Orion*, 1951  
**Bronze**  
35 x 29 x 27 inches  
Museum of Modern Art, New York



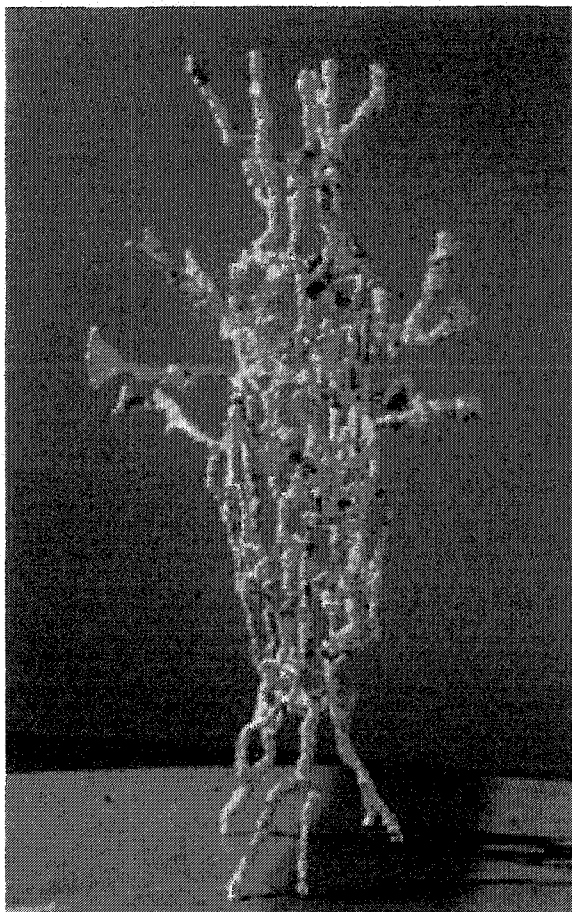
33.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Ascension of Innana*, 1952  
Bronze  
21 x 13 x 15 inches  
Private collection



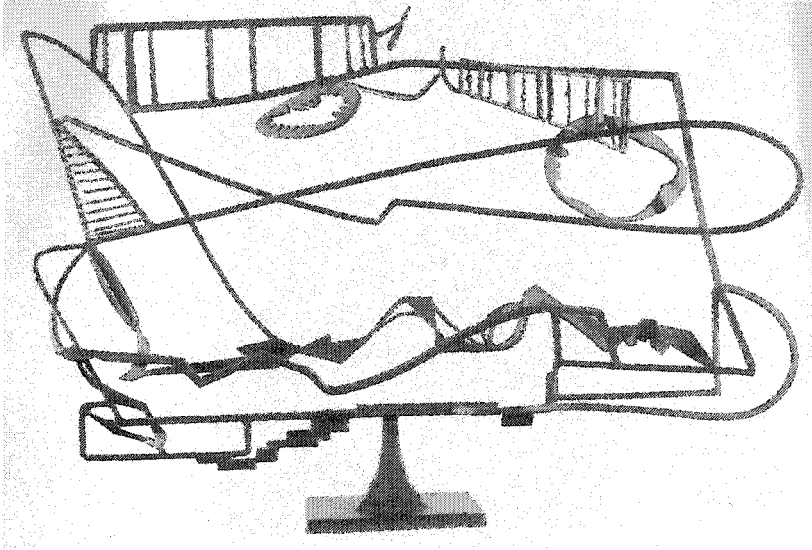
34.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Kwannon*, 1952  
Bronze  
6'2 x 45 x 27 inches  
Museum of Modern Art, New York



35.  
**Alexander Calder**  
*Non-Objective*, 1947  
Painted metal, wire  
58 x 84 x 36 inches  
Private collection



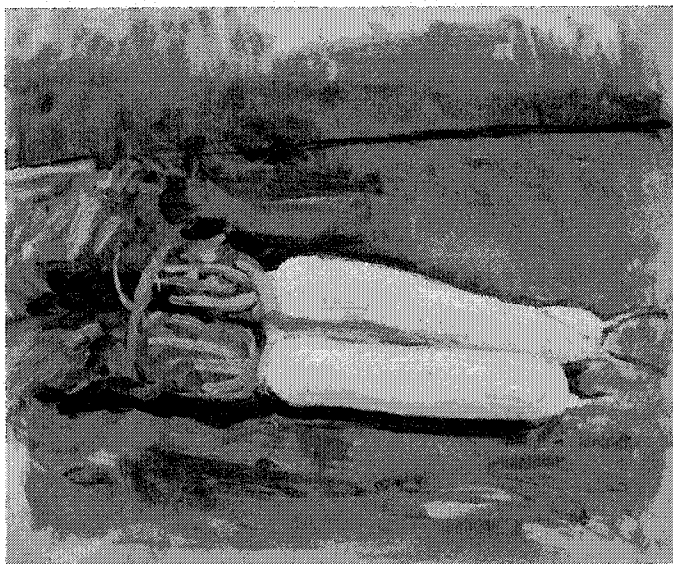
36.  
Ibram Lassaw  
*Phoenix*, 1955  
Bronze, steel  
27 x 15 x 11 inches  
Collection of Mrs. F.W. Hilles



37.  
David Smith  
*Hudson River Landscape*, 1951  
Welded steel  
49 ½ x 75 x 16 ¾ inches  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York



38.  
Photograph of Hasegawa Saburo c.1956



39.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Radishes*, c. 1924  
Oil on canvas  
59.1 x 71.3 cm



40.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Landscape*, c.1924  
Oil on canvas  
45.5 x 53 cm



41.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Third-class Carriage: After Daumier, 1930*  
Oil sketch  
40.9 x 53.1 cm



42.  
**Hasegawa Saburō**  
*Grecian Head*, 1931  
Oil on canvas  
71 x 58.5 cm



43.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*La Galatea: After Raphael*, 1931  
Oil sketch  
89.5 x 72 cm



44.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Saint Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata: After Giotto, 1931*  
Oil sketch  
112.3 x 66.1 cm



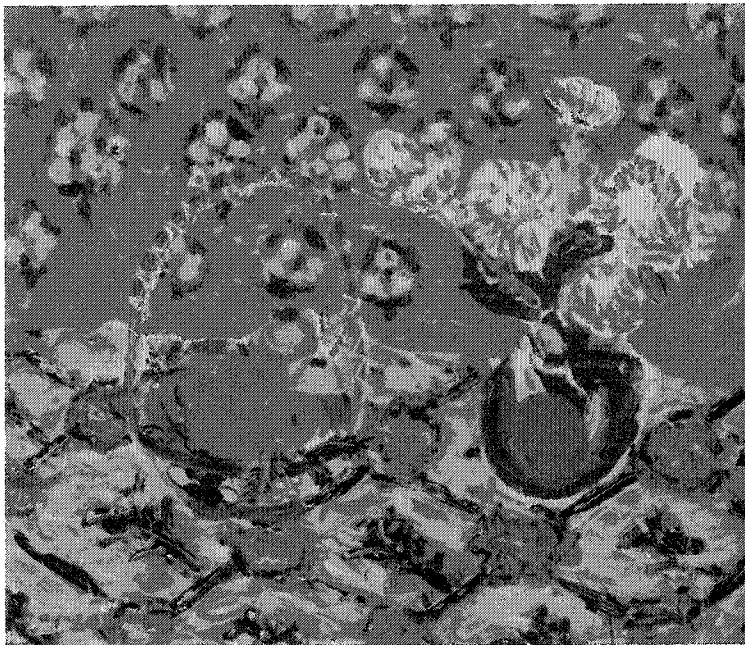
45.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Fete Champetre: After Giorgione, 1931*  
Oil sketch  
59.1 x 71.3 cm



46.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Still Life*, 1930  
Oil on canvas  
60.2 x 73 cm



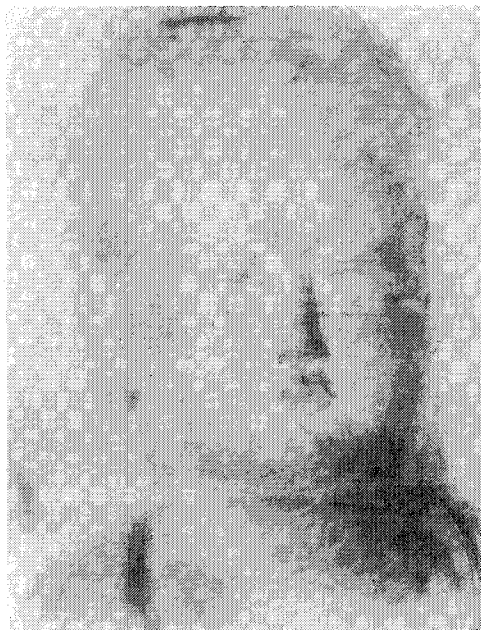
47.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Mount Fuji Against a Starry Sky*, 1934  
Oil on canvas  
130.4 x 162.2 cm



48.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Still Life in Red*, 1934  
Oil on canvas  
60.5 x 72.5 cm



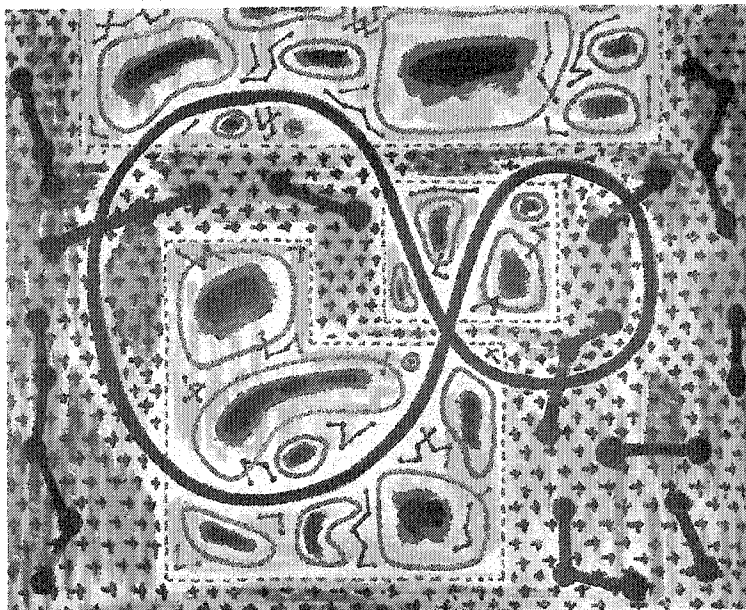
49.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Portrait of My Father*, c.1933  
Oil on canvas  
45 x 36.8 cm



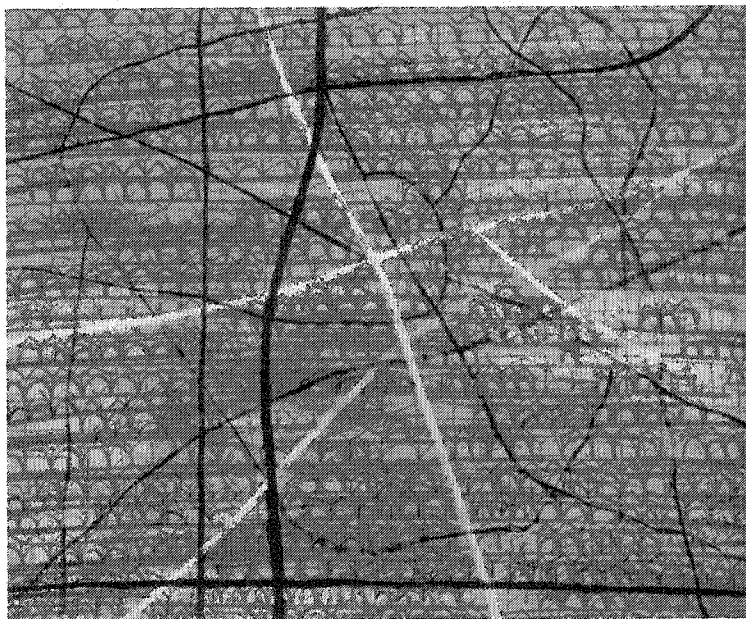
50.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Drawing*, 1933  
Pencil on paper  
62.5 x 48 cm



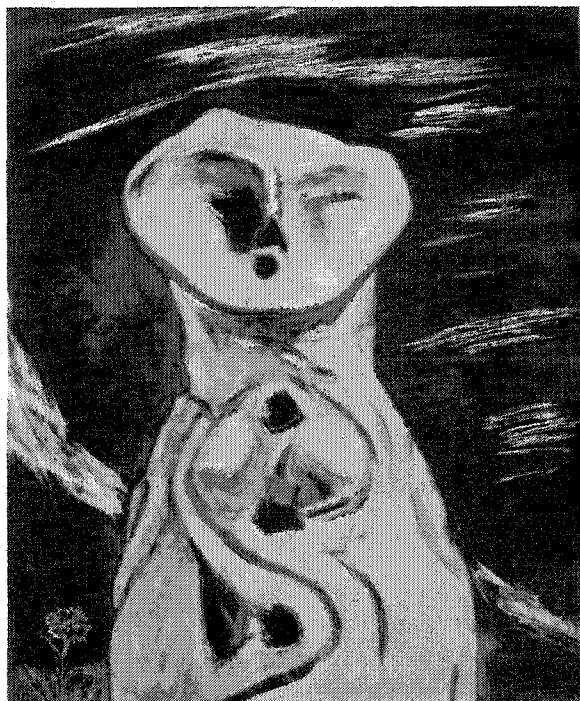
51.  
**Hasegawa Saburō**  
*Drawing*, 1933  
**Pencil on paper**  
62.6 x 47.8 cm



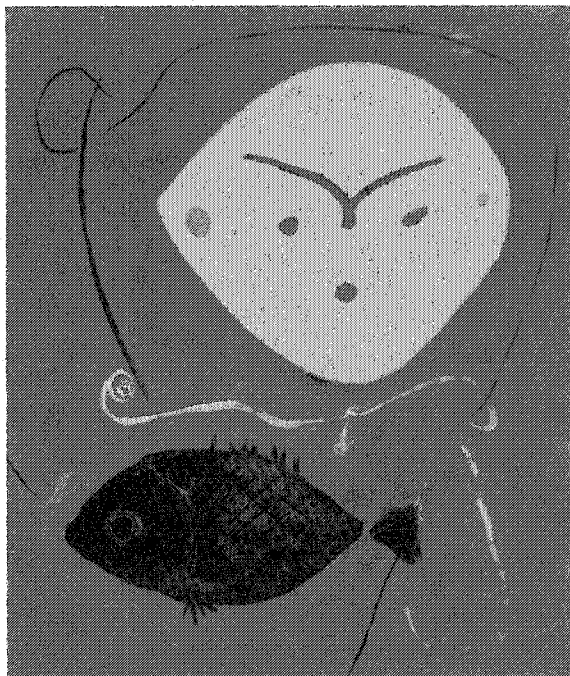
52.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Locus of a Butterfly*, 1937  
Oil on canvas  
130 x 161.5 cm



53.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Metropolis*, 1936  
Oil on canvas  
127.7 x 160.5 cm



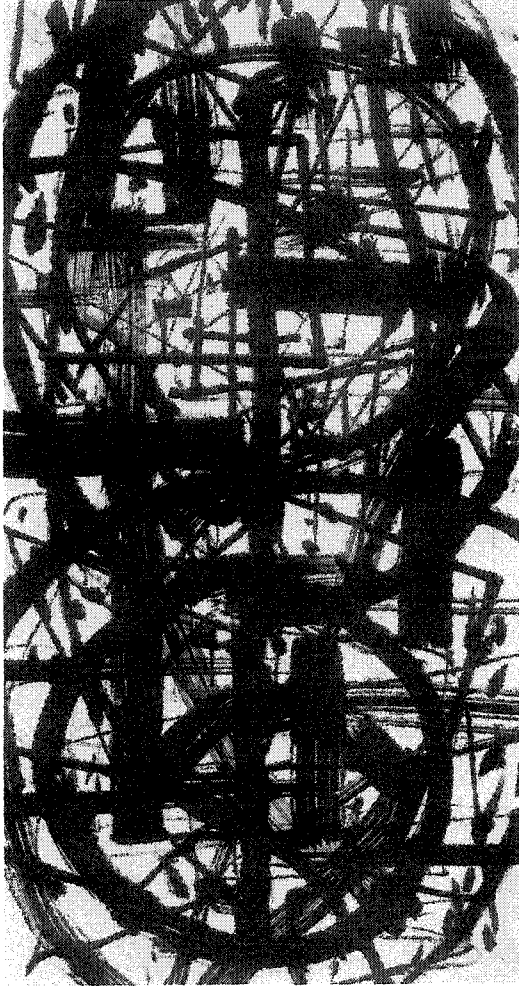
54.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Untitled- Inspired by a Neolithic clay  
figure, 1948*  
Oil on canvas  
54 x 45 cm



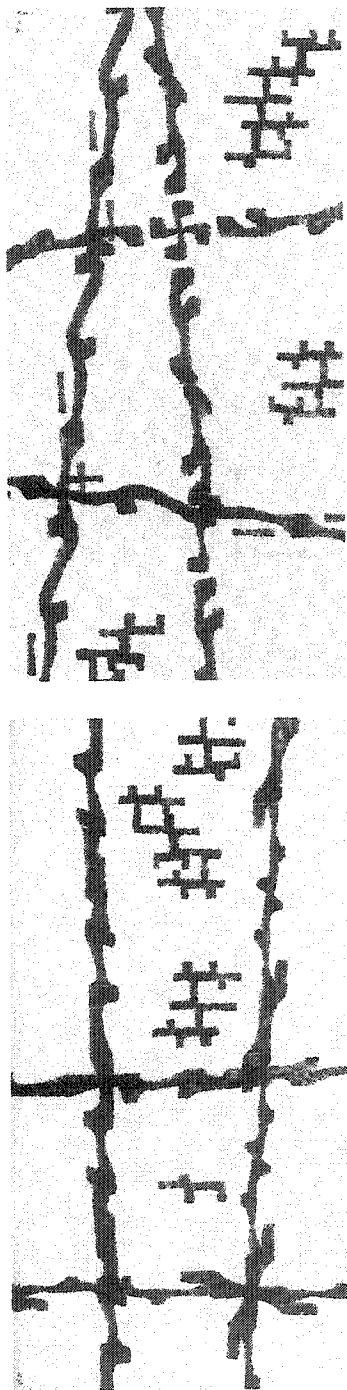
55.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Fishing*, 1949  
Oil on canvas  
52 x 44.5 cm



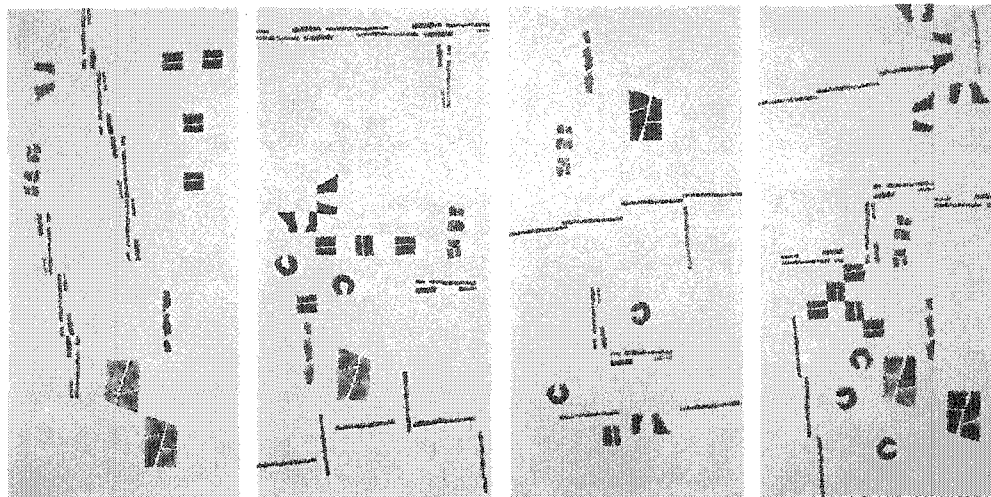
56.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Mother and Child*, 1950  
Oil on canvas  
52.3 x 40.7 cm



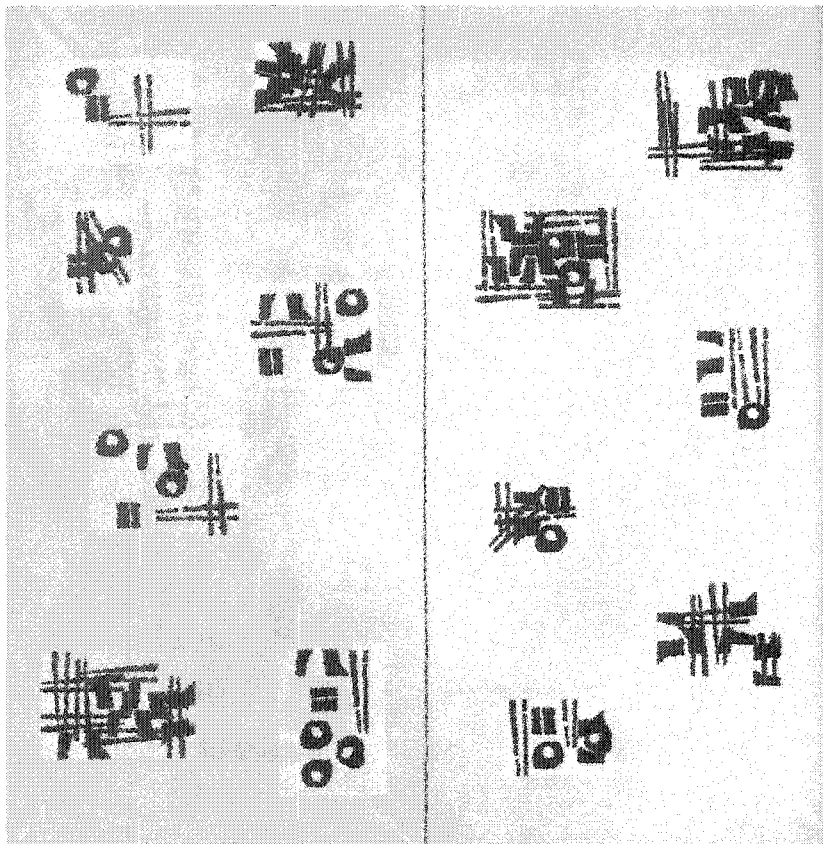
57.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Self Portrait*, 1951  
Ink on paper  
67.8 x 34.6 cm



58.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Civilization*, 1951  
Paper screen  
135.9 x 135.2 cm



59.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Symphonic Poem: A Fine Day*, 1951  
Print on paper screen  
172.8 x 335.8 cm



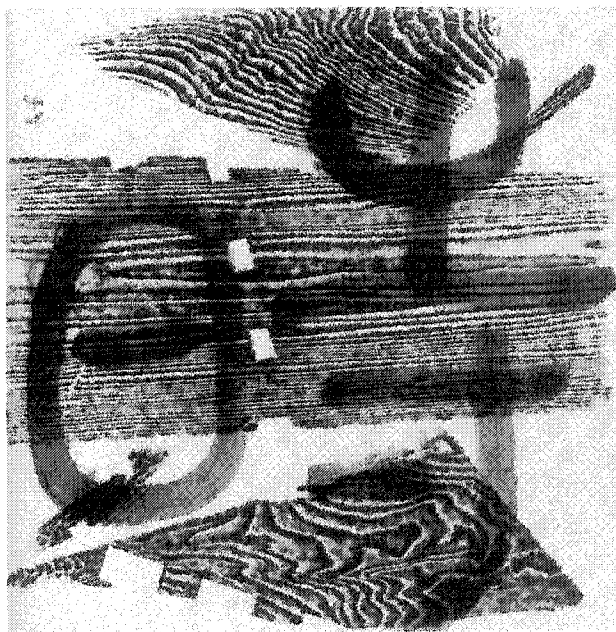
60.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Katsura (Imperial Palace)*, 1951  
Screen doors –printing on paper  
168.3 x 165.7 cm



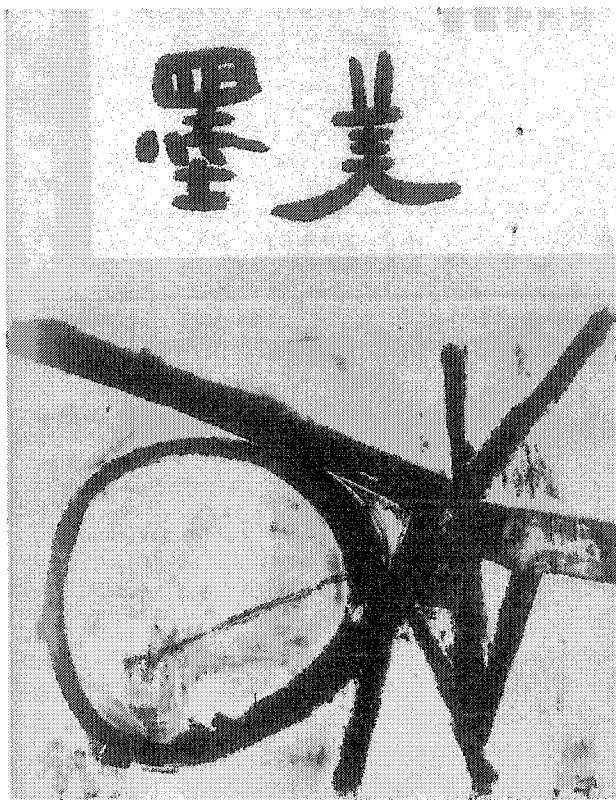
61.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Abstract Painting*, 1952  
Ink rubbing on paper  
137.1 x 65.4 cm



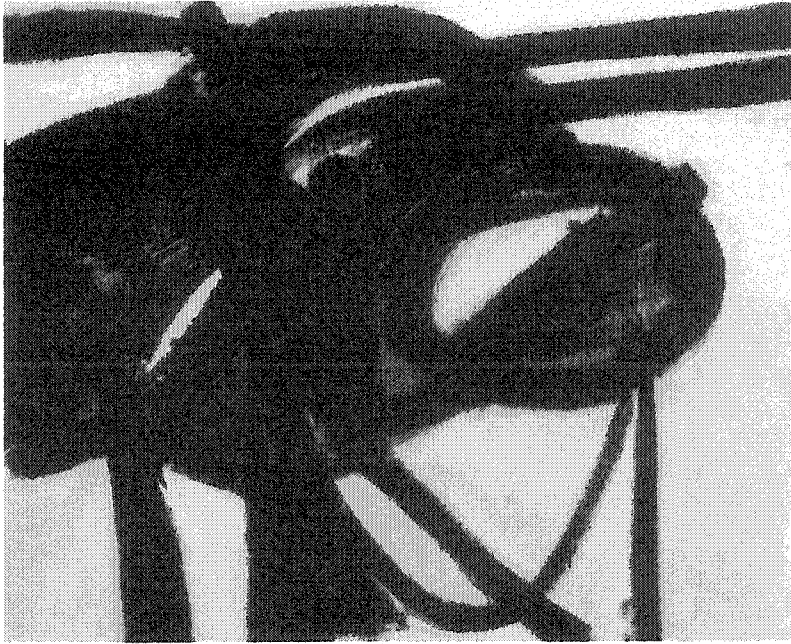
62.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Modern Art Fair*, 1951  
Ink and printing on paper  
67.1 x 67.1 cm



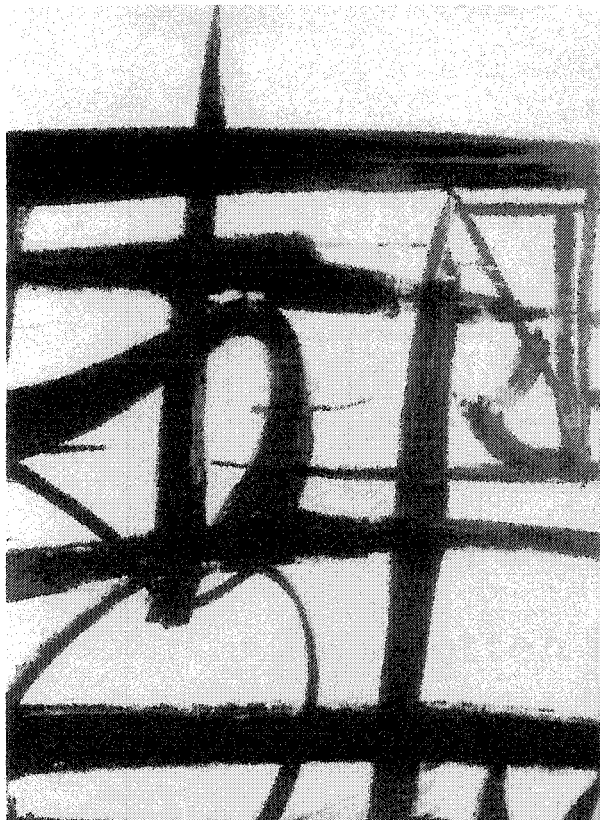
63.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Time*, 1952  
Monoprint with calligraphy  
65.4 x 67 cm



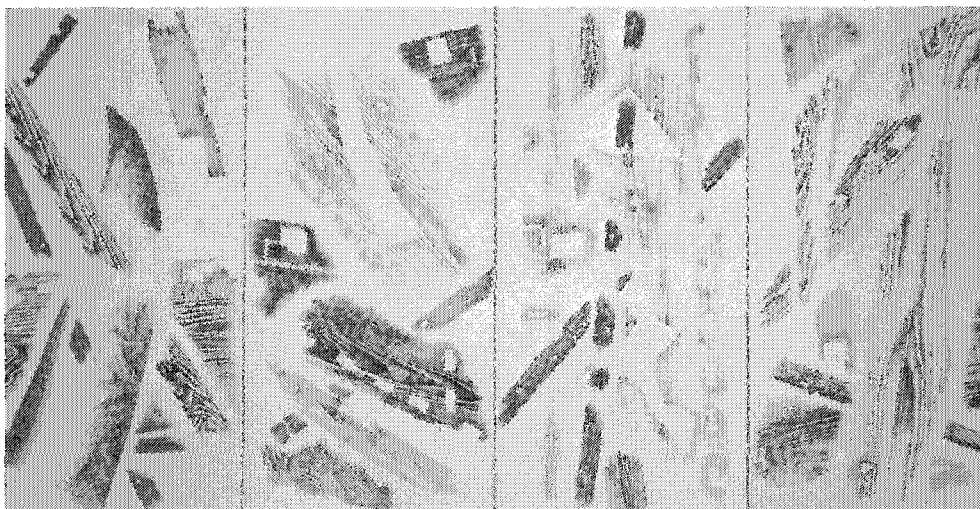
64.  
Franz Kline  
*Cover of Bokubi*, 1951  
Magazine cover



65.  
Franz Kline  
*Chief*, 1950  
Oil on canvas  
4 feet 10  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches x 6 feet 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches



66.  
Franz Kline  
*Cardinal*, 1950  
Oil on canvas  
79 ½ x 58 ½ inches



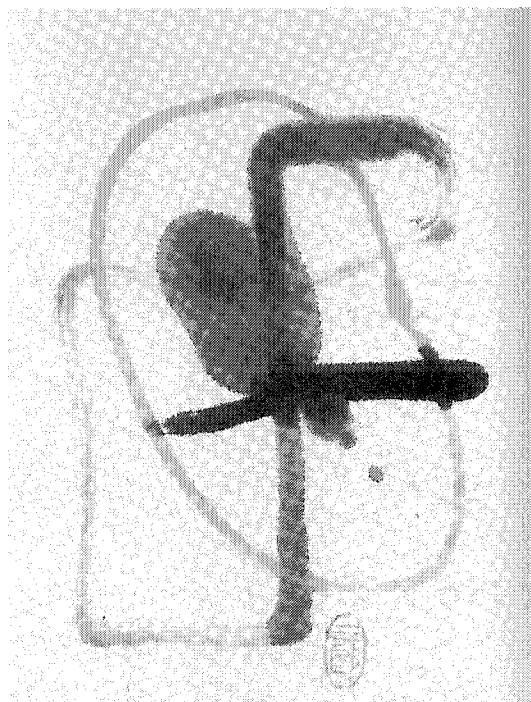
67.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Rhapsody: Fishing Village*, 1952  
Ink rubbing on paper screens  
136.6 x 266.4 cm



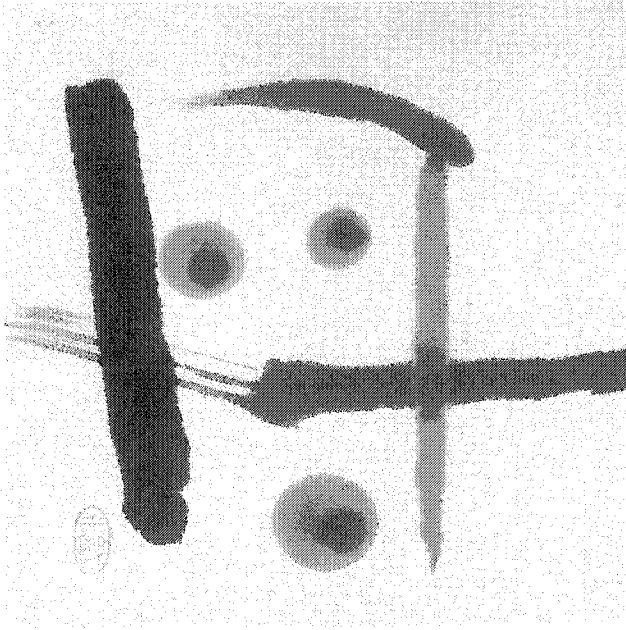
68.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Calligraphy*, 1952  
Ink on paper



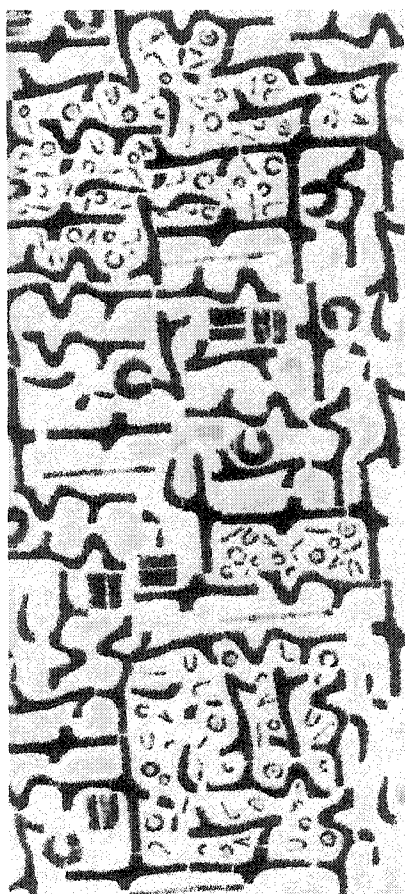
69.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Untitled*, 1952  
Ink on paper  
69.4 x 52.4 cm



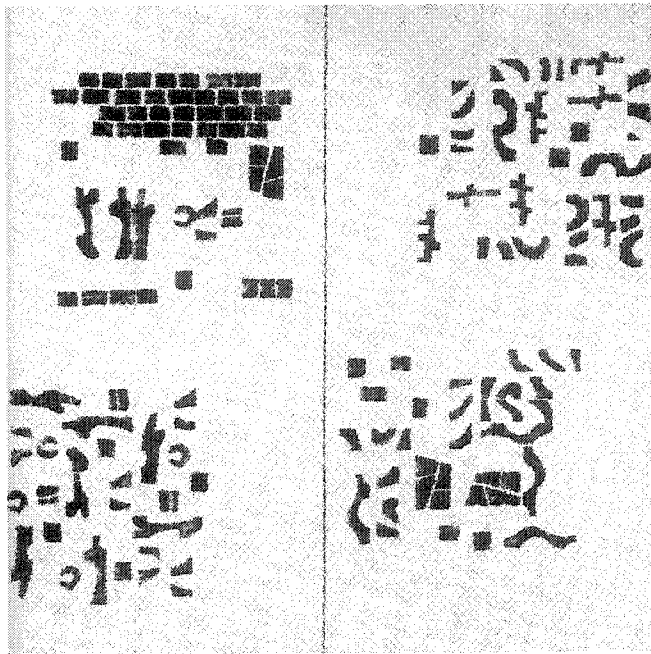
70.  
**Hasegawa Saburō**  
*Abstract Calligraphy*, 1952  
Ink on paper  
34.4 x 25.9 cm



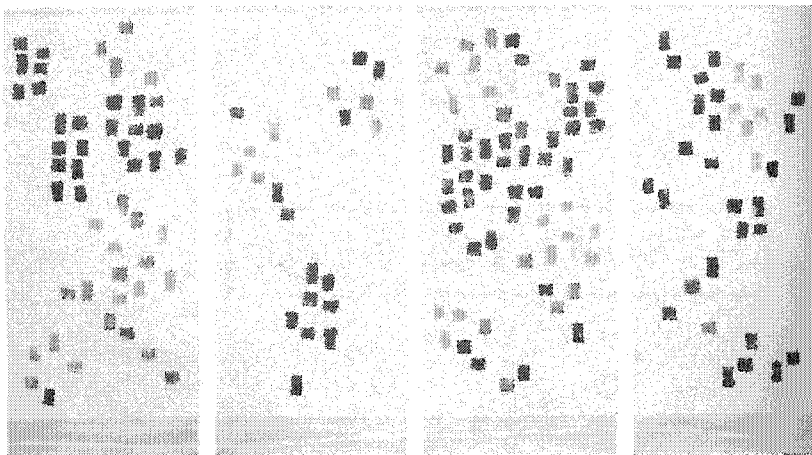
71.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Abstract Calligraphy*, 1952  
Ink on paper  
38.7 x 34.6 cm



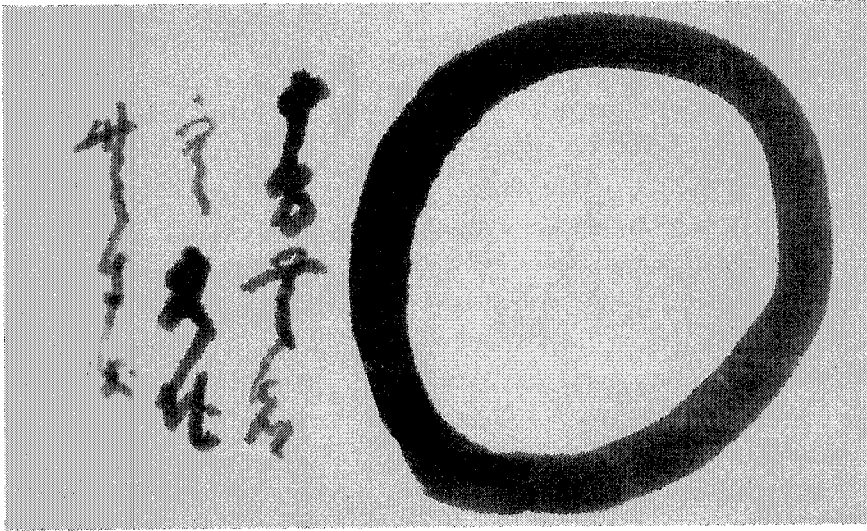
72.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Great Chorus*, 1952  
Ink print on paper  
129.5 x 62.2 cm



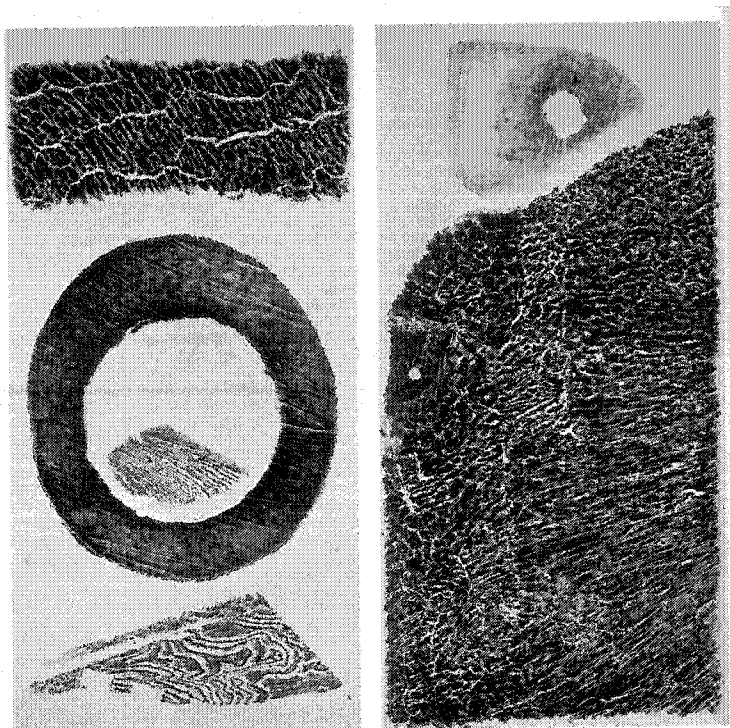
73.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Environment*, 1953  
Print on paper  
168.3 x 165.7 cm



74.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*The Harmonious*, 1953  
Print on paper screens  
149.8 x 264 cm



75.  
Hakuin  
*Ensō*, c.1760  
Ink on paper  
13 x 21 5/8 inches  
Private Collection



76.  
Hasegawa Saburō  
*Nature*, 1953  
Print on paper  
136.6 x 133 cm

Appendix A: List of Lectures at the Eighth Street Artist's Club related to Zen Buddhism<sup>559</sup>

<u>Date</u>	<u>Presenter</u>	<u>Topic</u>
c. January, 1950	John Cage	<p>"Lecture on Something"</p> <p>This lecture occurred before the printing of notecards for the Club. James Pritchett dates the lecture in early 1950, and there is a reference near the end ("Would you like to join a society called Capitalists Inc.") that appears in Cage's letter to Pierre Boulez of January 17, 1950.</p>
July 8, 1950	John Stephan	<p>"Painter as Editor"</p> <p>Notes: "editor of <i>Tiger's Eye</i>, leader of the Surrealists, brought in ideas of orientalism and Zen"<sup>560</sup></p>
December, 22, 1950	Ad Reinhardt	<p>"Detachment and Involvement"</p> <p>Notes: "Reinhardt tied his spiritual plane to Zen (His good friend was Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk he would visit in a monastery). His paintings had a spiritual plane and a spiritual content for abstract art. It was a new content to substitute for Jungianism."</p>
February 9, 1951	John Cage	<p>"Lecture on Nothing"</p> <p>Notes: "Zen coming into the Club"</p>

<sup>559</sup> I am only including lectures where there is a documented reference to Zen, i.e. in members' notes or recollections. It is likely that the topic occurred in other lectures by John Cage and in other Club discussions.

<sup>560</sup> Lecture presenters and topics are documented on notecards which were mailed to Club members; 119 cards are documented of the 205 lecture meetings at the Club in Philip Pavia's personal archive. Notes come from Philip Pavia's notebooks and supplement the cards, often providing commentary on the lectures.

- October 3, 1952      Henry Cowell      “On Music”  
 Introduction: John Cage  
 Notes: “entrance of Cage influence and Zen”
- October 31, 1952      MC Richards      “MC Richards on Artaud”  
 Introduction: John Cage  
 Notes: “Zen”
- 1952      Summary Notes  
 “57<sup>th</sup> Street joined in...parties  
 galore...young artists stormed the Club  
 doors...membership doubled. The Club was  
 divided between the Abstractionists, with  
 their spiritual plane (Kandinsky) and the  
 Expressionists centering around de Kooning  
 and Kline, the feuding was continuous.  
 New elements invading the Club: John Cage  
 and Zen thinking, Frank O’Hara and the new  
 poets”
- February 26, 1954      Sabrō Hasegawa      “Sabrō Hasegawa Group from Japan”  
 Introduction: Franz Kline  
 Notes: “see pamphlet from Sabrō”,<sup>561</sup>
- November 5, 1954      Matsumi Kanemitsu      “Hasegawa Zen” – Pavia’s note  
 Notes: “Nothing to do with Abstract  
 Expressionism’s new reality, and American  
 pragmatism. Zen did relate to spiritualism  
 of Kandinsky, and therefore was attractive  
 to Abstractionists, Ad Reinhardt, Barnett  
 (sic) Newman”  
 Handwritten card in Sandler archive

---

<sup>561</sup> It is likely that this pamphlet is an English translation of an article on Franz Kline, “The Beauty of Black and White,” by Sabrō Hasegawa published in the Japanese magazine *Bokubi* (Tokyo, Japan, 1951).

-Sabro Hasegawa will give a talk on Zen,  
introduced by Isamo Naguchi [sic]

November 19, 1954

"Zen II"

Card reads: Ibram Lassaw is forming a panel  
on Zen this Friday Nov 19 '54 Harry  
Holtzman will moderate

December 17, 1954

"Zen III"

Card reads: Panel on Zen  
Moderator: Harry Holtzman  
Panel with John Cage, John Ferren, Ibram  
Lassaw, and one or two others

January 14, 1955

Dr. Martha Jaeger

"Zen and Psychoanalysis"

Introduction: John Cage

Appendix B: Ibram Lassaw's Attendance at Suzuki Lectures – Definitive Dates

These daybook entry dates were specifically notated to indicate attendance at a Suzuki lecture; however, Lassaw likely attended more of Suzuki's lectures than listed above.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic(s)</u>
1953	
February 24	Chuang tze, "the Perfect Man"; Samurai movable and immovable mind techniques; egolessness; judo; Kundalini; koan
1954	
February 12	
February 19	
February 26	
March 5	Lankavarata sutra, "On Going to Ceylon"; Diamond sutra; Prajnaparamita sutra; Five things leading to Ultimate Reality-nama, nimitta, samya-kjnana, sanyagnajana (?), tathata; not depending on words or letters, illustrated with parable of Buddha preaching for nine years, "I have not uttered a single word"; T'ang Dynasty 390-667 A.D.; Genjo translations of Buddhist sutras; citta; Bodhidharma
March 12	tathagata; Pure Land; all dualisms transcended; "Transmission of the Lamp"; dhyana
March 19	"Zen interpreted according to Kegon philosophy"
March 26	Shingon School; za zen; nembutsu; Prajnaparamita sutra; Amitabha Buddha' "Not to hit the target but to develop such a mastery of the mind that the target comes to you to be hit"; "Become the wheel revolving... become the becoming"; Pure Land
April 2	Bodhidharma "28 <sup>th</sup> Indian Patriarch, 1 <sup>st</sup> Chinese Patriarch"; "mind is no mind"
April 30	Hui Neng; "direct personal experience"; Shen-Hsiu
May 7	Guest lecturer, Chang Chi: Tibetan Buddhism
May 14	Guest lecturer, Chang Chi; Journal, <i>Philosophy East and West</i> , July issue, "Zen and Pragmatism: a reply" by Suzuki
1955	
February 4	Cosmic Enlightenment; prajna and vijnana; "Zen tries to study that part of experience which we cannot communicate to others"
February 11	Kegon; Fa Yen School of Buddhism; Saddharmapunarika
February 18	prajna-intuition; tathagata
March 4	"net of relationships"; "all things are both yes and no"; Nama Amida Butsu; <i>Studies in Zen</i> , Suzuki, Rider & Co.;
March 11	kalpa; <i>The Golden Flower</i> ; transcending opposites

- March 18 mind light; "Buddha- to see into one's nature"  
 March 25 100 stories from Zen history
- April 1 Christian "emotive intuition"; Sufism; Karuna  
 April 15 Bodhidharma  
 April 21 An hsin; Kegon; *The Synthesis of Yoga*  
 April 29 karma; 3<sup>rd</sup> Patriarch; the Perfect Tao; 4<sup>th</sup> Patriarch; Om Mani  
 Padme Hum
- May 6 "There is no distinction between inner and outer. No distinction  
 between manyness and oneness"; dhyana; 5<sup>th</sup> Patriarch; 6<sup>th</sup>  
 Patriarch  
 May 13 Hui Neng; Nembutsu and Zen; Lin Chi School
- 1956  
 February 10 Hui Neng's Doctrine of Oneness of Prajna  
 May 25 Guest lecturer; Seppo
- 1957  
 May 17 Suzuki's last lecture at Columbia University; *Mysticism East and  
 West*, Suzuki's book

Appendix C: Ibram Lassaw's Library of Books on Asian Culture and Philosophy – Partial List

While it is not possible to compile a complete list of books which Ibram Lassaw read on the subject of Asian philosophy, nor can one accurately know when he read each of the following volumes, this list, compiled from titles currently in Lassaw's archive, is a useful indicator of his level of interest.

Denise Lassaw stated that, "there is no way to pinpoint exactly when Ibram read any of the books...books were borrowed from friends and returned, and lent to friends and lost. I also permanently 'borrowed' a few of my favorite books [from his library]...After Ibram began writing in his day books, he often recorded what he was reading."<sup>562</sup>

Asimov, Isaac. *Asimov's Guide to the Bible: The Old Testament*. New York: Avon Books, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Asimov's Guide to the Bible: The New Testament*. New York: Avon Books, 1969.

Abhedananda, Swami. *Yoga Psychology*. Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1960.

Aurobindo, Sri. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1950.

Avalon, Arthur, trans. *The Great Liberation: Mahanirvana Tantra*. Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1913.

Beckett, L.C. *Movement and Emptiness*. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Society in America, 1969.

Bergson, Henri. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1954. Originally published 1935.

Blofeld, John, trans. *The Zen Teachings of Huang-Po*. New York: Grove Press, 1958.

Blyth, R.H. *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*. Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1942.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Zen and Zen Classics: Volume 7*. Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1962.

\_\_\_\_\_. Robert Sohl and Audrey Carr, eds. *Games Zen Masters Play: The Writings of R.H. Blyth*. New York: Mentor Book, 1976.

Carus, Paul. *Nirvana: The Story of Buddhist Psychology*. La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1902.

<sup>562</sup> Denise Lassaw, letter to Sarah Johnson, June 23, 2004.

- Ch'an, Chu, trans. *Huang-Po Doctrine of Universal Mind*. London: The Buddhist Society, 1947.
- Chan, Wing-tsit, trans. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Chung-Yuan, Chang, trans. *The Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism: Selected from the Transmission of the Lamp*. New York: Pantheon Press, 1969.
- Conze, Edward, in collaboration with I.B. Horner, D.S. Snellgrove, and Arthur Waley. *Buddhist Texts: Throughout the Ages*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1954. This book contained texts translated from Apabhramsa, Chinese, Japanese, Pali, Sanskrit, and Tibetan.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Buddhist Wisdom Books: The Diamond Sutra, The Heart Sutra*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966 reprint of 1958 edition.
- Coomaraswamy, Ananda. *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*. New York: Harper and Row, 1964.
- Dubos, Rene. *So Human An Animal*. New York: Scribners, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A God Within*. New York: Scribners, 1972.
- Dumoulin, Heinrich and Ruth Fuller Sasaki. *The Development of Chinese Zen*. New York: First Zen Institute of America, 1953.
- Evans-Wentz, W. Y., ed. and introduction. *The Tibetan Book of Great Liberation*. London: Oxford University Press, 1954.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1958.
- Evola, J. *The Doctrine of Awakening*. London: Luzac & Co., 1951.
- Fujii, Reverend Ryuchi. *The True Meaning of Buddhism*. Honolulu: Hongwaji Buddhism Mission, n/d.
- Happold, F.C. *Mysticism: A Study and An Anthology*. London: Penguin, 1964.
- Herrigel, Eugene. *Zen in the Art of Archery*. New York: Pantheon Press, 1953.
- Hillman, James. *The Myth of Analysis: Essays in Archetypical Psychology*. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

- Hoffman, Yoel, trans. *The Sound of One Hand*. New York: Basic Books, 1975.
- Humphreys, Christmas and Wong Mou-Lam, trans. *The Sutra of Wei Lang*. London: The Buddhist Society, 1953. Original translation, 1930.
- Huxley, Aldous. *Heaven and Hell*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Hubert Benoit, introduction. *The Supreme Doctrine: Psychological Studies in Zen Thought*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow and other essays*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956.
- Jung, C.G. *The Undiscovered Self*. Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*. Collected Works, Vol. 8, Bollingen Series XX. Pantheon: New York, 1960.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Symbols of Transformation*. Collected Works, Vol. 5, Bollingen Series XX. Pantheon: New York, 1967.
- Kapleau, Philip, ed. *The Three Pillars of Zen*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965.
- Khanna, Madhu. *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1979.
- Otto, Rudolph. *Mysticism East and West: a comparative analysis of the nature of mysticism*. New York: Living Age Books/Meridian Books, 1957.
- Philosophy East and West: A Journal of Oriental and Comparative Thought*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1954.
- Progoff, Ira. *Jung's Psychology and Its Social Meaning*. New York: Grove Press, 1953.
- Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli and Charles Moore. *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Rahakrishnan, Sri, ed. and trans. *The Principal Upanisads*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953.
- Read, Sir Herbert. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung: Volume 5, Symbols of Transformation*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung: Volume 8*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1960.

Rutherford, Harry C. *The Religion of Logos and Sophia: From the Writings of Dimitrije Mitrinovic on Christianity*. Alan Watts, foreward. Pacific Grove: The Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, 1973.

Scholem, Gershom G., ed. *Zohar: The Book of Splendor: Basic Readings from the Kabbalah*. New York: Schocken, 1949.

Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. Carl Jung, introduction. *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. London: Rider & Co., 1949.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. Foreward by Christmas Humphreys. First Series. London: Rider and Co., 1949.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Complete Works of D.T. Suzuki: Living By Zen*. Christmas Humphreys, ed. London: Rider and Co., 1950.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. Second Series. Boston: Beacon Press, 1952.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Living in the Light of Eternity." Lecture, Pendle Hall, Wallingford, PA, Friends Conference on Religion and Psychology, May 1, 1954.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Complete Works of D.T. Suzuki: Studies in Zen*. London: Rider and Co., 1955.

\_\_\_\_\_. William Barrett, ed. *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki*. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956.

\_\_\_\_\_, trans. *The Lankavarata Sutra*. London: Routledge, 1956. Originally published in 1932.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. C.G. Jung, foreward. London: Rider and Co., 1957. First published, 1949.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. First Series. London: Rider & Co., 1958.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Zen and Japanese Culture*. Bollingen Series LXIV. New York: Pantheon Books, 1959. This book is the revised and enlarged second edition of *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*. Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society, 1938.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Manual of Zen Buddhism*. New York: Grove Press, 1960.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Chain of Compassion*. Sumiko Kudo, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge Buddhist Association, Inc., 1966.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Field of Zen*. Christmas Humphreys, ed., foreward. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.
- Suzuki, Shunryu. *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. New York: Weatherhill, 1976.
- Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: Harper & Row, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Hymn of the Universe*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *How I Believe*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.
- Tillich, Paul. *The Courage to Be*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Theology of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Vahanian, Gabriel. *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era*. New York: George Braziller, 1961.
- Vajiranavarorasa. *The Entrance to the Vinaya, Volume I*. Bangkok: King Mahamakuta's Academy, 1969.
- Watts, Alan. *The Spirit of Zen: A Way of Life- Work and Art in the Far East*. London: John Murray, Ltd., 1948. First published, 1935.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Wisdom of Insecurity*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1951.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Meaning of Happiness*. Stanford: James Ladd Delkin, 1953.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Myth and Ritual in Christianity*. New York: Evergreen Press, 1960. First edition, 1953.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Supreme Identity: An Essay on Oriental Metaphysics and the Christian Religion*. New York: Noonday Press, 1957. First published, 1950.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Way of Zen*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Nature, Man, and Woman*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Spirit of Zen: A Way of Life, Work, and Art in the Far East*. New York: Grove Press, 1958. First published, 1936.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *This is It and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1960.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Psychotherapy East and West*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1961.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Joyous Cosmology- Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness*. Timothy Leary, Introduction. New York: Pantheon Books, 1962.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Two Hands of God: The Myths of Polarity*. New York: George Braziller, 1963.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Beyond Theology: The Art of Godmanship*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1964.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1966.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Does It Matter? Essays on Man's Relation to Materiality*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Theologica Mystica of Saint Dionysius*. Pacific Grove: The Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, 1971. First published, 1944.

\_\_\_\_\_. *In My Own Way: An Autobiography- 1915-1965*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Way of Liberation in Zen Buddhism*. Pacific Grove: The Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, 1972. First published, 1955.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Cloud-Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown- A Mountain Journal*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Lectures on the Nature of Man as a Unified Organism Environment Field*. Pacific Grove: The Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Philosophical Fantasies*. Millbrae: Celestial Arts, 1975.

\_\_\_\_\_, with Al Chung-liang Hung. *Tao: The Watercourse Way*. New York: Pantheon, 1975.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Uncarved Block, Unbleached Silk: The Mystery of Life*. New York: A & W Visual Library, 1978.

Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960. Originally published in 1929.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Essays in Science and Philosophy*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1948.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*. New York: Mentor Books, 1964.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Concept of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971  
reprint of 1920 essay.

Wilhelm, Richard, trans., Carl Jung, commentary. *The Secret of the Golden Flower*.  
New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1931.

Yutang, Lin, trans., ed., and introduction. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: The  
Modern Library, 1948.

Zimmer, Heinrich. Forward by Carl Jung. *Philosophies of India*. Princeton: Bollingen  
Foundation, 1951.

Appendix D: Writings of Hasegawa Saburō

Hasegawa, Saburō. *Abusutorakuto Ato (Abstract Art)*. Tokyo: Atorie-sha, 1937.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Avant-Garde Art and Oriental Classics (Zen'ei Bijutsu to Tōyō no Koten) in *Mizue*, February 1937. Republished in '*Ron' Hasegawa Saburō*. 2 vols. Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977, pp. 32-35.

\* \_\_\_\_\_. "The Paintings of Sesshu," (1937) translated and reprinted in *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident*. Oakland: Oakland Museum, 1957.<sup>563</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_. "Days with Isamu Noguchi (Isamu Noguchi to No Hibi)," 1950, republished in '*Ron' Hasegawa Saburō*. Tokyo: Sanshida, 1977, pp. 85-98.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The East and West of Art (Bijutsu no Tōzai)," in *Sansai*, March and April 1950. Republished in '*Ron' Hasegawa Saburō*. 2 vols. Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977.

\* \_\_\_\_\_. "Calligraphy is the Treasury of Art (Sho wa Bi no Hōko desu)," Letter addressed to Morita Shiryū, September 13, 1950, *Sho no Bi*, no. 1, November 1950. Reprinted in *O Bijutsukan. Sho to Kaiga to no Nekki Jida, 1945-1969*, exh. cat. Tokyo: O Art Museum, 1992, p. 139. Partially translated in Alexandra Munroe, *Scream Against the Sky: Japanese Art After 1945*, 1995, p. 382..

\_\_\_\_\_. "Calligraphy and Vanguard Painting," c.1951, republished in '*Ron' Hasegawa Saburō*. Tokyo: Sansaisha, c. 1977. [Translated in brief for the purposes of this dissertation].

\_\_\_\_\_. "New American Paintings," c.1951, republished in '*Ron' Hasegawa Saburō*. Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977. [Translated for the purposes of this dissertation]

\* \_\_\_\_\_. "The Beauty of Black and White." *Bokubi* 1, 1951. [unpublished translation available in the Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Art. Atlanta, Georgia: Emory University General Libraries].

\_\_\_\_\_. "News from France and America (Furansu to Amerika No Tayori)." *Bokubi* June 1951. [Translated for the purposes of this dissertation]

\_\_\_\_\_. "Concerning a Work by Ryokan (Ryōkan no Gaku o Megutte)" in *Bokubi*, July 1951, pp. 21-25.

---

<sup>563</sup> \*Indicates that the text was written in English or is available in English translation.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Reflections: Essay on the Old East and the New West (Hansei, Atarashii Seiyō to Furui Tōyō to Ni Kansuru Zuiso)." *Bokubi*, August 8, 1951. [Translated for the purposes of this dissertation]
- \* \_\_\_\_\_. "Letter to Franz Kline," September 10, 1952. Holger Cahill papers, Archives of American Art.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Kline's Recent Works." *Bokubi* 5, no. 12 (1952).
- \* \_\_\_\_\_. "Abstract Art around the World Today," in *American Abstract Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*. American Abstract Artists, ed. New York, 1954.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Impressions of New York (Nyukoku No Insho)," 1954, republished in *Tokubetsu Ten Hasegawa Saburō* (Special Exhibition Hasegawa Saburō). Hyōgo: Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, 1977, pp. 12-14.
- \* \_\_\_\_\_. "Five Calligraphic Drawings," in *New World Writing*. The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1954.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Nationality and Universality of Japanese Art," (1954) in *'Ron' Hasegawa Saburō*. Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977. [Translated in brief for the purposes of this dissertation]
- \* \_\_\_\_\_. "Abstract Art in Japan," in *The World of Abstract Art*. American Abstract Artists, ed. New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1956.
- \* \_\_\_\_\_. "My House," in *Art and Artist*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956.
- \*Watts, Alan, ed. *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident*. Oakland, CA: Oakland Art Museum, 1957. Unpublished manuscript with essays by Elisa Grilli, Paul Mills, and Hasegawa Saburō. Included in this text:
- \*"Earth and Air," poem, n/d
  - \*"Ink-Splash Landscape"
  - \*"Notes on Painting," n/d
  - \*"My House," reprinted from *Art and Artist*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956
  - \*"Matisse Through Japanese Eyes," reprinted from *Artnews*, April 1954, 27-29, 65-66.
  - \*"The Paintings of Sesshu," 1937
  - \*Untitled article, *The New York Times*, Sunday, March 12, 1954
- \*Fujimoto, Shozo, ed. *'Ron' Hasegawa Saburō* (Writings of Hasegawa Saburō). 2 vols. Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977. This is a two-volume set that has reproductions of Hasegawa's work and an anthology of his writings. It includes some minimal English translation.

Additional texts on Hasegawa and *Bokujin-kai*:<sup>564</sup>

Hideo, Takumi, ed. "Hasegawa Saburō" in *Heretical Painters*. Tokyo: Kyuryudo, 1983.  
Reprint of Akane Kazuo essay, 1964.

Hyōgo Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan (Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art).  
*Tokubetsu Ten Hasegawa Saburō* (Special Exhibition Hasegawa Saburō). Hyōgo:  
Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, 1977.

Imaoka, Norio; Michiko Kamaza and Futishi Tsuji, eds. *Bokujin yonjūnen* (Forty Years  
Bokujin). Kifu City: Bokujin-kai, 1991.

Kazuo, Amano, ed. *O Bijutsukan. Sho to Kaiga no Nekki Jidai: 1945-1969/Calligraphy  
and Painting, the Passionate Age: 1945-1969*, exh.cat. Tokyo: O Art Museum,  
1992.

*Morita Shiryū to "Bokubi"* (Morita Shiryū and Bokubi), exh. Cat. Kobe: Hyōgo  
Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, 1992.

---

<sup>564</sup> I was unable to access these texts through any library in New York.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abe, Maseo, ed. *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*. New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1986.
- Ahlander, Leslie Judd. "Art in Washington - Sculptor Lassaw." *The Washington Post Times Herald*, August 4, 1963.
- American Abstract Artists. "Abstract Art around the World Today." Museum of Modern Art, New York: American Abstract Artists, 1954.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *The World of Abstract Art*. New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *AAA: Three Yearbooks (1938, 1939, 1946)*. New York: Arno Press, 1969.
- Ames, Van Meter. *Zen and American Thought*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1962.
- Andersen, Wayne. *American Sculpture in Process, 1930/1970*. Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975.
- Anfam, David. *Abstract Expressionism*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1990.
- Arbury, Steve, ed. *Ibram Lassaw: Deep Space and Beyond: A Retrospective Exhibition of Works and Photographic Documents from the Artist's Studio in Springs, East Hampton, New York*. Radford: Radford University Art Museum, 2002.
- Ashton, Dore. "New Japanese 'Abstract Calligraphy.'" *Art Digest* (1954).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Isamu Noguchi: East and West*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.
- Auping, Michael. *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments*. New York: Harry Abrams, 1987.
- Baigell, Matthew. "American Art around 1960 and the Loss of Self." *Art Criticism* 13, no. 2 (1998): 42-53.
- Barr, Jr., Alfred H. *The New American Painting: As Shown in Eight European Countries, 1958-1959*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959.
- Barron, Stephanie. *Exiles + Emigres: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1997.

- Batchelor, Stephen. *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1994.
- Baur, John I.H. *The New Decade: Thirty-Five American Painters and Sculptors*. New York: Macmillan, 1955.
- Belgrad, Daniel. *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Benfey, Christopher. "Tom Cruise, Bob Dylan, Commodore Perry." *The New York Times*, December 6 2003.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Blakely, Raymond Bernard. *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941.
- Blythe, R.H. *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*. Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1948.
- Bodhidharma. Red Pine, trans. *The Zen Teachings of Bodhidharma*. New York: North Point Press, 1987.
- Breuning, Margaret. "Lassaw on a Cosmic Level." *Art Digest* 27 (1952).
- Cage, John. "The East in the West." *Modern Music* 23, no. 2 (1946): 111-115.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Composer's Confessions." In *National Inter-Collegiate Arts Conference*. Vassar College, 1948.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Silence*. Wesleyan University Press, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Forerunners of Modern Music." *The Tiger's Eye* 7, no. 1 (1949).
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New York: Pantheon, 1949.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Cultural Setting of Asian Art." *College Art Journal* 18, no. 1 (1958).
- Campbell, Lawrence. "Lassaw Makes a Sculpture." *Art news* (1954): 24-27.
- Chave, Anna C. *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Pollock and Krasner: Script and Postscript." In *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, Reviews*, ed. Pepe Karmel. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Brancusi and Noguchi: Towards "a Larger Definition of Sculpture", " in *Isamu Noguchi: Sculptural Design*, ed. Alexander and Katarina V. Posch von Vegesack, Jocjen Eisenbrand: Vitra Design Museum, 2001.
- Chung, Moojeong. "Abstract Expressionism, Art Informel, and Modern Korean Art, 1945-1965." Dissertation, City University of New York, 2000.
- Clarke, David J. *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1988.
- Clarke, John J. *Jung and Eastern Thought: A Dialogue with the Orient*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought*. London: University of Kingston, 1997.
- Coates, Robert. "The Art Galleries: East Is West and West Is East." *The New Yorker* 32, no. 36 (1956): 131-133.
- Cohen, Warren I. *East Asian Art and American Culture: A Study in International Relations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.
- Coleman, James William. *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Cox, Rubert A. *The Zen Arts: An Anthropological Study of The Culture of Aesthetic Form in Japan*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.
- Cummings, Paul. Interview with Ludwig Sander. Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Interview with Fred Mcdarraah. Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Interview with Isamu Noguchi. Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1973.
- Diener, Michael S., ed. *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*. Boston: Shambhala Publications Inc., 1991.
- Dumoulin, Heinrich. *Zen Buddhism: A History. Volume I: India and China*. II vols., 1988.
- Dungan Cross, Miriam. "Curtain Falls on Bunka Sai Festival." *Oakland Tribune*, May 6 1956.

- Edmondson, Amy. *A Fuller Explanation: The Synergetic Geometry of R. Buckminster Fuller*. Boston: Design Science Collection, 1986.
- Faure, Bernard. *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Kyoto School and Reverse Orientalism." *In Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, eds. Charles Wei-Hsun Fu and Steven Heine, 245-281. Albany: State University of New York, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Feinstein, Sam. "The Unified Image." *Art Digest* (1954).
- Fields, Rick. *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*. Boston: Shambhala, 1981. Reprint, 1992.
- Foster, Hal. "Reviews." *Artforum* XVI (1978): 66.
- Frankenfurter, Alfred. "This Month." *ARTnews* 53, no. 2 (1954).
- Frankenstein, Alfred. "Exhibition of Contemporary Japanese Art at the California Place of the Legion of Honor." *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 15 1952.
- Frascina, Francis. *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*. New York: Harper and Row, 1985.
- Friedman, B.H, ed. *Give My Regards to 8th Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Exact Change, 2000.
- Fu, Charles Wei-hsun and Steven Heine, ed. *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- Fuller, Buckminster. "Universal Architecture." *Shelter* (1932).
- Gibson, Ann Eden. "Abstract Expressionism's Evasion of Language." *Art Journal* 47 (1988): 208-214.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

- Goldwater, Robert. "Everyone Knew What Everyone Else Meant." *It Is* 3, no. Autumn (1959).
- Gomez, Luis. "Oriental Wisdom and the Cure of Souls: Jung and the Indian East," in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*. Donald Lopez, ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Goodnough, Robert. "Artists' Sessions at Studio 35 (1950)," in *Modern Artists in America*. Robert Goodnough, ed. New York: Wittenborn Schultz, Inc., 1950.
- Goosen, E.C., ed. *Three American Sculptors: Ferber, Hare, Lassaw*. New York: Grove Press, 1959.
- Greenberg, Clement. "The New Sculpture." *Partisan Review* XVI, no. 6 (1949): 637-642.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "American-Type' Painting." *Partisan Review* XX. Spring (1955): 187.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "America Takes the Lead, 1945-1965." *Art in America* 53. August (1965): 108-109.
- Guilbaut, Serge. *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Guild Hall Museum. *Ibram Lassaw, Space Explorations: A Retrospective Survey, 1929-1988*. East Hampton, New York: Guild Hall Museum, 1988.
- Hadler, Mona. "Sculpture in Postwar Europe and America, 1945-59." *Art Journal* 53, no. 4 (1994): 17-19.
- Harrison, Helen A. *Ibram Lassaw: Space Explorations: A Retrospective Survey 1929-1988*. East Hampton: Guild Hall Museum, 1988.
- Hasegawa, Saburō. *Abusutorakuto Ato (Abstract Art)*. Tokyo: Atorie-sha, 1937.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Paintings of Sesshu," (1937) in *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident*. Oakland: Oakland Museum, (reprinted 1957).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Days with Isamu Noguchi (Isamu Noguchi to No Hibi)," in *'Ron'*. Tokyo: Sanshida, 1950 (reprinted 1977).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Beauty of Black and White." *Bokubi* 1 (1951).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "News from France and America (Furansu to Amerika No Tayori)." *Bokubi* (1951).

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Reflections: Essay on the Old East and the New West (Hansei, Atarashii Seiyō to Furui Toyo to Ni Kansuru Zuiso)." *Bokubi* (1951).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Kline's Recent Works." *Bokubi* 5, no. 12 (1952).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Abstract Art around the World Today," in *American Abstract Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*. American Abstract Artists, ed. New York, 1954.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Impressions of New York (Nyukoku No Insho)." Hyogo: Hyogo Prefectural Modern Museum, 1954.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Five Calligraphic Drawings," in *New World Writing*. The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1954.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Nationality and Universality of Japanese Art," (1954) in *'Ron'*. Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Abstract Art in Japan," in *The World of Abstract Art*. American Abstract Artists, ed. New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "My House," in *Art and Artist*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *'Ron'*. 2 vols. Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Calligraphy and Vanguard Painting," (c.1951) in *'Ron'*. Tokyo: Sansaisha, c. 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "New American Paintings," (c.1951) in *'Ron'*. Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1977.
- Heisig, James W. and John C. Maraldo, eds. *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995.
- Heller, Nancy Gale. "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw." PhD dissertation, Rutgers University, 1982.
- Herskovic, Marika, ed. *American Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s: An Illustrated Survey with Artists' Statements, Artwork and Biographies*. New York: New York School Press, 2003.
- Holtzman, Harry. "The Sickness of the Cult of the Hero." *It Is* 4 (1959): 32-33.
- Hoover, Thomas. *Zen Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- Hunter, Sam. "Abstracts: Western, Eastern Variety." *Art Digest* (1954): 15, 31.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Irons in the Fire: An Exhibition of Metal Sculpture*. Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw*. Detroit: Gertrude Kase Gallery, 1968.
- Johnson, Deborah. "Zen, Jung, and Radical Chic at Midcentury." New York: College Art Association, 1999.
- Jones, Caroline. "Finishing School: John Cage and the Abstract Expressionist Ego." *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (1993): 630-662.
- Jung, Carl. "The Secret of the Golden Flower." Richard Wilhelm, ed. 1931.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. Translated by W.S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1933.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious." Papers of the Analytic Psychology Club of New York, no. 1 (1938).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Forward," in *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. London: Rider and Company, 1949.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Volume II, Psychology and Religion: West and East. The Collected Works of Carl Jung*. London: Routledge, 1969.
- Kingsley, April. *The Turning Point: The Abstract Expressionists and the Transformation of American Art*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Franz Kline: A Critical Study of the Mature Work, 1950-1962." PhD dissertation, City University of New York, 2000.
- Kirita, Kiyohide. "Young D.T. Suzuki's Views on Society." *The Eastern Buddhist* 29, no. 1 (1996).
- Klein, Christina. *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Kootz, Samuel and Harold Rosenberg. "The Intrasubjectives." (1949).
- Kostelanetz, Richard, ed. *John Cage: Writer*. New York: Limelight Publications, 1993.
- Krauss, Rosalind. *Terminal Iron Works: The Sculpture of David Smith*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Sculpture of David Smith: A Catalogue Raisonné*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1977.

- Lane, John and Susan Larsen, eds., *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America: 1927-1944*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1983.
- Langhorne, Elizabeth. "Chinese/Am.Indian,': Learning from the East." College Art Association Conference. New York, 1999.
- Lansner, Kermit I. "The Japan Abstract Art Club." *ARTnews* 53, no. 2 (1954): 29, 67.
- Lao Tsu. *Tao Te Ching*. Jane English, trans. New York: Vintage Books, 1972.
- Larsen, Susan. "The Quest for an American Tradition, 1927-1944," in *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America: 1927-1944*. John and Susan Larsen Lane, eds. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1983.
- Larsen, Susan Carol. "The American Abstract Artists Group: A History and Evaluation of Its Impact Upon American Art." Phd dissertation, Northwestern, 1974.
- Ibram Lassaw Papers. Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
- Ibram Lassaw Archive. East Hampton, New York.
- Lassaw, Ibram.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Unemployed Artist's Association. Washington, D.C.: Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1933.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The World of the Artist (c.1940s). Washington, D.C.: Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Nature of Reality (c.1950s). Washington, D.C.: Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Untitled Statement," in *Twelve Americans*, ed. Dorothy Miller. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Remarks on the Differences between Sculpture and Painting." *It Is* 1, no. Spring 1958 (1958): 26.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Color for Sculpture." *Art in America* XLVIV. Summer (1961): 48-49.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Perspectives and Reflections of a Sculptor: A Memoir." *Leonardo* 1, no. 4 (1968): 351-361.

- Lawrence, Ellen. *Flying Tigers: Painting and Sculpture in New York: 1939-1946*. Providence: Bell Gallery, Brown University, 1985.
- Leja, Michael. *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Leonard, George J. *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Marter, Joan, Roberta Tarbell, and Jeffrey Wechsler, eds. *Vanguard American Sculpture 1913-1939*. Rutgers: Rutgers University Art Gallery, 1979.
- Marter, Joan. *Alexander Calder*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Postwar Sculpture Re/Viewed." *Art Journal* 53, no. 4 (1994): 20-22.
- Merton, Thomas. *Seven Storey Mountain*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1948.
- Messner, Thomas M. "Nipponism." *Art in America* 46, no. 3 (1958): 58-61.
- \_\_\_\_\_ and Anne L. Jenks. *Contemporary Painters of Japanese Origin in America*. Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1958.
- Miller, Dorothy, ed. *12 Americans*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1956.
- Mills, Paul, ed. *Sabro Hasegawa: Artist of the Controlled Accident*. Oakland: Oakland Art Museum, 1957 (unpublished).
- Moholy-Nagy, Laszlo. *The New Vision*. New York: George Wittenborn, 1947.
- Motherwell, Robert and Ad Reinhardt, eds. *Modern Artists in America*. New York: Wittenborn Schultz, Jr., 1950.
- Munroe, Alexandra. *Scream against the Sky: Japanese Art after 1945*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "With the Suddenness of Creation: Trends of Abstract Painting in Japan and China, 1945-1970," in *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions: Asian-American Artists and Abstraction 1945-1970*. Jeffrey Wechsler, ed.. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997.
- Noguchi, Isamu. *A Sculptor's World*. New York: Harper and Row, 1968.
- O'Brian, John, ed. *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*. Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

- Otis, Karlis. Interview with Ibram Lassaw. Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1962.
- Patterson, David Wayne. "Appraising the Catchwords, C.1942-1959: John Cage's Asian-Derived Rhetoric and the Historical Reference of Black Mountain College." PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. John Cage: Music, Philosophy, Intention. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Cage and Asia: History and Sources," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*. David Nicholls, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 41-59.
- Philip Pavia and Natalie Edgar Archive of American Abstract Art. Atlanta, Georgia: Emory University General Libraries.
- Pavia, Philip. New York Artist's Equity Association, 55th Anniversary Awards Dinner Brochure. New York: New York Artist's Equity Association, 2003.
- Polcari, Stephen. *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Pollock, Jackson. "My Painting." *Possibilities I* (1947-48).
- Porter, Fairfield. "Hasegawa." *ARTnews* 51, no. 9 (1953): 45.
- Pritchett, James. *The Music of John Cage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Reinhardt, Ad. "Cycles through the Chinese Landscape." *ARTnews* 58, no. 8 (1954): 24-27.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Timeless in Asia." *ARTnews* 58, no. 9 (1960): 33-35.
- Ritchie, Andrew Carnduff, ed. *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1951.
- Ross, Clifford, ed. *Abstract Expressionism: Creators and Critics*. New York: Harry Abrams, 1990.
- Rychlak, Bonnie. *Zen No Zen: Aspects of Noguchi's Sculptural Vision*. New York: The Isamu Noguchi Foundation, 2002.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- Sandler, Irving. "Ibram Lassaw," in *Three American Sculptors: Ferber, Hare, Lassaw*. New York: Grove Press, 1959.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Club: How the Artists of the New York School Found Their First Audience- Themselves." *Artforum* IV, no. 1 (1965): 27-31.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Interview with Ibram Lassaw. Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism*. New York: Harper Collins, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The New York School: Painters and Sculptures of the Fifties*. New York: Harper and Row, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Club," in *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*. David and Cecile Shapiro, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Sawin, Martica. "Ibram Lassaw." *Arts* 30 (1955): 22-26.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997.
- Scharf, Robert H. "Whose Zen? Zen Nationalism Revisited," in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*. James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994, 40-51.
- Seckler, Dorothy. Interview with Ibram Lassaw. Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Interview with Samuel Kootz. Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Interview with James Brooks. Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1965.
- Seldis, Henry J. "Exhibition Preview: Pacific Heritage." *Art in America* 1 (1965).
- Shapiro, David and Cecile, eds. *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*. New York: Cambridge, 1990.
- Strickland, Susan Elizabeth. "The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw: Its Relationship to Abstract Expressionism." Masters thesis, University of Delaware, 1977.
- Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. London: Rider and Company, 1949.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Living by Zen*. London: Rider and Company, 1950.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Practical Methods of Zen Instruction," in *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki*. William Barrett, ed. Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sengai: Zen and Art." *Art News*. November (1957): 115-118.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Zen and Japanese Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Self and the Unattainable," in *What Is Zen?* New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971 (originally written in 1961-1963).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Early Memories," in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*. Masao Abe, ed. New York: Weatherhill, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "An Autobiographical Account," in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*. Masao Abe, ed. New York: Weatherhill, 1986.
- Tompkins, Calvin. *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time*. New York: Penguin Books, 1980.
- Tyler, Parker. "Jackson Pollock: The Infinite Labyrinth," in *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*. David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Unknown. "Art Exhibition Notes." *New York Herald Tribune*. March 1954 (1954): 97.
- Varnedoe, Kirk. *Jackson Pollock*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998.
- von Wiegand, Charmion. "The Oriental Tradition and Abstract Art," in *The World of Abstract Art*. New York: George Wittenborn, 1956.
- Watts, Alan. *The Spirit of Zen*. London: John Murray, 1936.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *In My Own Way: An Autobiography, 1915-1965*. New York: Vintage Books, 1972.
- Wechsler, Jeffrey, ed. *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions: Asian American Artists and Abstraction: 1945-1970*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Eastward, No! Critical Resistance to Asian Influence on American Art, 1945-1970." In *College Art Association*. New York: College Art Association, 1999.
- Westgeest, Helen. *Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art between East and West*. Zwolle: Wanders Publishers, 1996.

Winther-Tamaki, Bert. "Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese Culture in the Early Post-War Years." PhD dissertation. New York University, 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Japanese Thematics in Postwar American Art: From Soi-Disant Zen to the Assertion of Asian-American Identity." In *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream against the Sky*, ed. Alexandra Munroe. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001.

Yoshihara, Mari. *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.