Crown Point Press
Newsletter
Fall 1992

Overview

John Cage
(1912-1992)

In 1977 I invited John Cage to Crown Point Press to make etchings. Though at the time he didn't consider himself a visual artist, he accepted because, he said, he once had been invited to walk in the Himalayas and he had refused because he was too busy. He was 65 and suffering from arthritis when he received my invitation. The possibility of walking in the Himalayas had passed him by, so he accepted what I offered: a new field of activity. I knew he had done paintings as a young man, that throughout his life he had been a close associate of visual artists and that his music scores were often graphic and were beautiful in themselves. For the next fourteen years Cage worked with us at Crown Point at least once each year. He died of a stroke a month ago as I write this in 1992.

In considering my invitation, Cage told me, he reconsidered a committment he had made to his teacher Arnold Schoenberg in 1934 to devote his life to music. Etching, he realized, would not be something to do casually. "I always go to extremes," he laughed, and added, "it's my inclination to be inclusive." His plan was to embrace visual art without diminishing his devotion to music. He was writing the Freeman Etudes at the time I met him, and at every available moment he would pull out the score and the computer-printed I Ching hexagrams he used to compose it. I once found him sitting on a curb next to the street with his briefcase open writing music while he waited for a friend.

There was not a great deal of time in the etching studio for music composition, because his approach to etching required him to be fully occupied with it. He wanted, he said, "to imitate nature not as she is but in her manner of operation," and to do this he developed images out of the materials or processes at hand. He began with *Seven Day Diary (Not Knowing)* in which he used, over seven days, every process available for use at Crown Point Press. He continued with *17 Drawings by Thoreau* in which we photographed thumbnail sketches done by Henry David Thoreau as illustrations for his *Journal*. Cage then changed their sizes, over-printed them with one another and made each image in each print of the edition a different color. After that he thought of his prints, in general, as groups of unique individuals which have family relationships rather than as editions.

Changes and Disappearances (1979- 1982), illustrated on page 5, illuminate Cage's working method. Cage always began with an idea which he wished to explore. In this case, the idea was to make a series of changes within the work as it went along. He often said he did not want to express himself but to discover something, and to do this he used what he called "chance operations." "Most people don't realize that I use chance as a discipline," he said to Robin White in Crown Point's interview series, *View*. "They think I use it—I don't know—as a way of giving up making choices. But my choices consist in choosing what questions to ask." He got answers to his questions by using the Chinese book of wisdom, the I Ching, "as a mechanism." At that time Cage consulted the I Ching through print-outs in which its hexagrams were printed by a computer in a pattern derived by simulating the throwing of three coins six times. He used to throw coins, he told us, until the computer program was developed for him.

Cage began *Changes and Disappearnces*, which was at first called simply *Changes*, by selecting an unusually-shaped printing paper of a neutral gray-blue color. He started with plates the same size as the paper (11" x 22") and cut them into a large number of chance-determined irregularly shaped small plates which he could combine and recombine to make different images. The simplest print used thirteen plates, the most complex forty-five. Sometimes the edges of the plates were inked (and show as dotted lines in the print), sometimes they were left simply to emboss the paper.

John Cage, with printer Pamela Paulson, working at Crown Point Press, San Francisco, January, 1992.

Cage decided the images on the plates would be of three types: crisp engraved lines, fuzzy drypoint lines and thick lines made photographically from Thoreau's drawings. He began each etching by asking the I Ching how many plates to use. He drew up a detailed "score" for each print. One part of it concerned the photographically derived Thoreau images. For each one, Cage asked the I Ching to choose the lens, the enlarger position, F-stop, exposure time and etching time. Then he recorded the choices in the score, which he and the printers followed meticulously. Lilah Toland, Cage's printer on this project, explains that "at times nothing resulted from a particular combination of photographic variables. This inspired Cage to add the word 'disappearances' to the title of the work."

The score also described the exact position of each of the plates in the etching. After locating the plates, Cage rotated each one around a point. He called this "fishing," as the paper often would catch only part of an image.

The engraved and drypoint lines provided the main element of change as the project progressed. As an etching was being printed, Cage—ready, as he said, "to spring into action"—consulted his score and if a plate was scheduled to be changed added a line to it. "A plate could appear several times in successive runs of a single etching, changed each time by the addition of another line," Toland explains. "The plates were altered irrevocably, not only from one print to the next, but, within each print, from one pass through the press to the next!"

Each line on each plate was inked with its own individually-mixed color each time it went through the press. Cage said he wanted his colors "to look like they went to graduate school," and the formulas for this print were complex and, because of the blue cast of the paper, included some proportion of blue in each color. More and more lines accumulated as the work progressed, and the final print (#35) contains 298 colors. Printing this print went on seemingly endlessly, and when a printer wondered if it would ever be done Cage murmered, with a grin, "We must be free of such concerns!"

Probably every person who ever worked with Cage producing his music or his art shares this lesson. You simply keep going, fully attentive to what you are doing, without concern for when or how it will end. In a tape recording of the Norton Lectures which he gave at Harvard University in 1989, Cage tells of a performance in Milan in which he was singing, and some members of the audience came on stage, making noises of their own, kissing him, taking off his glasses (and putting them back on), causing disturbances. Cage has done so many unorthodox things that sometimes people, unaware of his discipline, think that with his work anything goes. In this case, Cage simply kept on singing according to his score, and eventually the disturbers went back to their seats. "When I rose up and bowed, it was like an acclamation. They were so enthusiastic. I was told later it was a very successful performance, but they certainly didn't hear what I had in mind."

Cage worked for the first time at Crown Point Press on New Year's Day, 1978, and he spent half of nearly every subsequent January with us. January was a month we all looked forward to. "Isn't this amazing?" he would say, and laugh, his attention on something he had drawn on a plate, or something he had seen or a story he had heard. He made about 160 editions or families of unique prints in the fourteen years, and added watercolors, drawings and handmade paper works to these to form a significant body of work in visual art. His death occurred in 1992 on August 12, twenty-four days

(continued on page 5)

New Editions

We are pleased to announce the release of a large color etching in two versions by **Richard Diebenkorn**. *High Green, Version I and Version II* are among the largest and most complex the artist has created in the print media. *High Green* comprises several techniques, including spit bite aquatint and hard ground, and many colors, but the overall sensation is one of sky blue, modulated and luminous, which dominates the center of the image. The green promised in the title appears in a parallelogram at the top left of the abstract composition. Other colors in geometric compartments border the blue field: a band of light blue along the left margin; a bright red wedge that appears in the upper section of the band; black and grey triangles at the lower left; and an orange to green to yellow strip at the top. The blue field itself is interrupted by some subtle lines, primarily an arc which bisects it horizontally. The two versions of *High Green* at first appear to vary only slightly. Close examination, however, reveals that there are many subtle changes in tone and hue. The most noticeable are a small blue triangle which, in *Version II*, is white, as well as the absence of horizontal lines in the orange form of the second version.

Diebenkorn also created three new black and white prints. Two, *The Barbarian* and *The Barbarian's Garden—Threatened*, derive from the same image as *Flotsam*, released in 1991. For all three, Diebenkorn began by painting with asphaltum on a copper plate. The printers put aquatint on the plate and then etched it. The artist achieved each of the related images through a series of reversals. The printers repeated the process of offseting the image onto another plate several times so that the he could rework the image—adding, subtracting, inverting or otherwise altering it. Like *Flotsam*, the two Barbarian etchings contain a variety of signs and marks (crosses, targets, arrows) scattered around a white central area, although they contain additional marks and textural effects. *The Barbarian's Garden—Threatened* also has black, brushy marks throughout.

The third black and white image, *Mask*, is an aquatint with drypoint the artist created in 1982 but only now decided to release. Diebenkorn adhered masking tape to a plate and blocked out around the remainder of the surface area. Where the tape was lifted, an aquatint was dropped. The resulting stark, ragged-edged black lines vary in width and are counterpointed with a few delicate drypoint lines. The essentially horizontal/vertical architectonic scaffold is relieved by two diagonal lines forming an "X" in the lower center of the image. The simple, open structure has a direct and assertive character.

This group of prints shows several aspects of Diebenkorn's work. *High Green* reflects the sheer lyricism and beauty we associate with his related Ocean Park paintings; the "bones" or structure of such works is the subject of *Mask*; and the two *Barbarian* prints give a glimpse of Diebenkorn's more private explorations.

Bryan Hunt, although best known as a sculptor, has always been highly regarded as a draftsman. He has made drawings throughout his career, both as studies for his sculpture and as direct responses to the tangible world. Landscape is often the starting point for Hunt's sculptures (bronze waterfalls and lakes, for example) as well as for his abstract two-dimensional work. In both media Hunt is adept at combining the languages of abstraction and representation. Critic Phyllis Tuchman calls him a "reconciliator," explaining that "his sculptures and drawings embrace the seemingly incompatible." Three of Hunt's new etchings refer to nature and are therefore allied with the small color etching *Quarry at Tuy* he created at Crown Point Press in 1988. Two series, *Memnon* and *Temple Ruins*, were inspired by the Egyptian architecture and sculpture the artist saw and photographed on a recent trip.

Hunt's landscape abstractions display varied influences from Paul Cezanne to Chinese calligraphy. When asked in a 1980 interview about the relationship to calligraphy, Hunt said, "They're all about line. I *love* to draw a line. I love the idea that you can make a variation on a line that has the emotion of itself, or you can put two lines together and the juxtaposition creates another tone." Drawing for him is "...one of the richest forms, and one of the most immediate, one of the most expressive."

Wall, a large, black and white drypoint and soft ground work calls to mind Jackson Pollock in its kinetic, all-over network of black lines. Hunt's line is extraordinarily sensuous — variously dark, light, thick or thin. Hunt exploited the ability of the soft ground technique to sensitively record fingerprints, smudges, scratches and other random marks of process. A larger copper plate was used to create an intermediary five-inch border between the drawing plate and the margin of the paper.

Hunt used the line plate of *Wall* to create the visual armature of the color etching *Island*. Earth colors, primarily yellow ochre and green, define rock-like volumes set against a white background. *Sedona Precipice* is a second, more solidly colored etching in brown, blue-green and yellow. It is conceived in terms of two vertical massings of shapes and lines surrounding a light shaft, perhaps a waterfall, running down the center of the page. In these painterly works, Hunt seems to be looking back to Cezanne who gave his interpretations of nature a sense of solidity and timelessness.

Memnon is a set of three etchings based on the Colossi at Memnon in Egypt. Whereas Hunt often defies gravity in his sculpture, these etchings emphasize, even celebrate, the weightiness of a group of enormous seated pharaonic figures. The dense black aquatint shape that dominates each work is alleviated with a soft ground interior articulation. Hunt manages in these relatively small works to convey the monumentality of the ancient sculptures.

Temple Ruins, on the contrary, is made up of airy, linear compositions. There are five sepia-colored softground etchings and six photogravures in this set. Hunt's renditions of the massive colonnaded court of Amon's Temple at Karnak look like rapidly drawn on-site architectural notations. The photogravures are of the artist's photographs of the temple. The prints are available either in a boxed portfolio, a bound book or as a loose set.

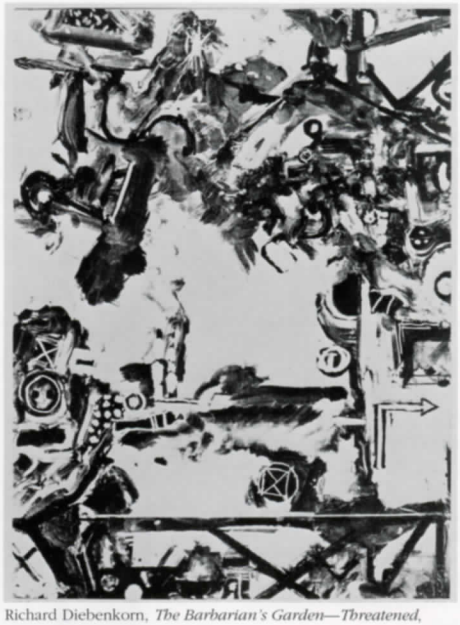
Bryan Hunt was born in Indiana, grew up in Florida, went to art school in Los Angeles and currently lives in New York. He has worked at Crown Point Press several times previously. He is represented in New York by the Blum Helman Gallery and in 1991 won the Seoul [Korea] International Art Festival grand prize for his drawings. His new etchings will be on view in our San Francisco and New York galleries from October 29 through November 28, 1992.

Tree at Night, **Tom Marioni**'s most recent etching, was made using several processes: mezzotint, engraving and photogravure. The rich black of the inserted small print is characteristic of mezzotint, a process by which the artist works from dark to light. The abstract image of the "tree," which, like Marioni's etching *Finger Line* of 1991, is based on the finger's reach, was drawn by rubbing a metal tool called a burnisher against the plate which had been prepared to print black. The abstract tree, made by the gesture of the finger, wrist or arm, has been a consistent motif of Marioni's. The larger engraved tree above and to the right of the symbolic night tree, is linear and more naturalistically conceived. Both are floated surrealistically against a photogravure cloudy, grey sky.

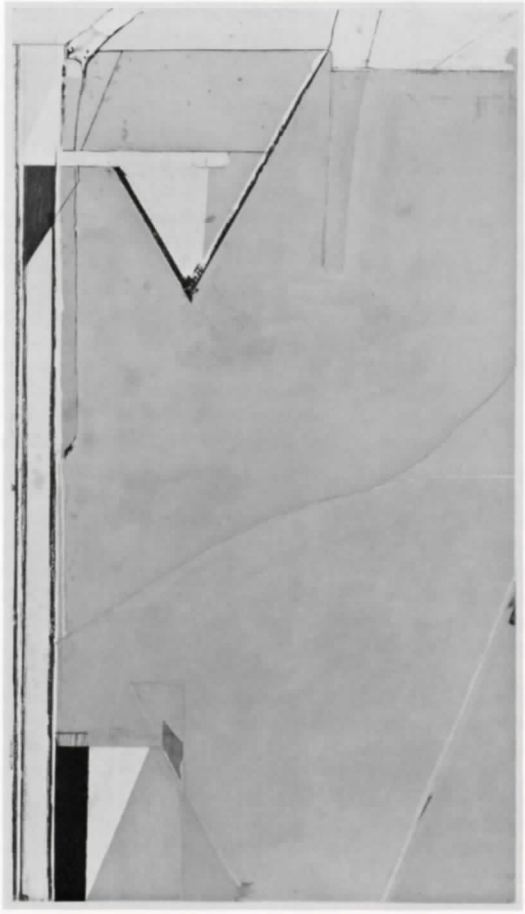
Marioni also made a series of 47 lyrical monotypes, titled *Process Landscapes*, in which he allowed the process, or chance, to determine the result. Marioni, a long-time colleague and friend of John Cage, thinks of these works as an homage to Cage who developed all of his work—in musical composition, visual art and poetry—using what he termed "chance operations." Marioni began by dripping ink along the bottom edge of a copper plate. Dampened paper was laid on the plate and then run through the press. The pressure caused the ink to spread and soak into the paper. Where the ink was thicker, the ink spread further. In most cases, Marioni used three concentrations of the same color for a single print. After the first pass through the press, Marioni would repeat the process with more extended color and a third time with the thinnest concentration of pigment. This procedure produced the effect of receding hills growing paler in the distance or rounded trees rising from a flat or rolling terrain. Sometimes Marioni used more than one color in a print, for example, green, yellow and blue. In general he restricted his palette to earth tones—sepias, greens, browns, but in all cases the color is delicate and transparent with the misty feel of a Chinese landscape. The angular hills of Kweilin, China, which Marioni visited a few years ago, are, in fact, the inspiration for the series. Often, Marioni sprayed one or more colors on the white paper above the image, which is always concentrated along the lower portion of the paper. In monotype printing, no matrix is fixed on the plate, and therefore each print is unique. Marioni, one of the founders and leading exponents of Bay Area conceptual art, has worked with Crown Point Press for 15 years, bringing to each etching project an innovative approach. These, his first monotypes, derive from a process he developed for a series of portable frescoes in cigar boxes that will be included in his exhibition at the Paule Anglim Galerie in San Francisco in February 1993.

Constance Lewallen
Associate Director

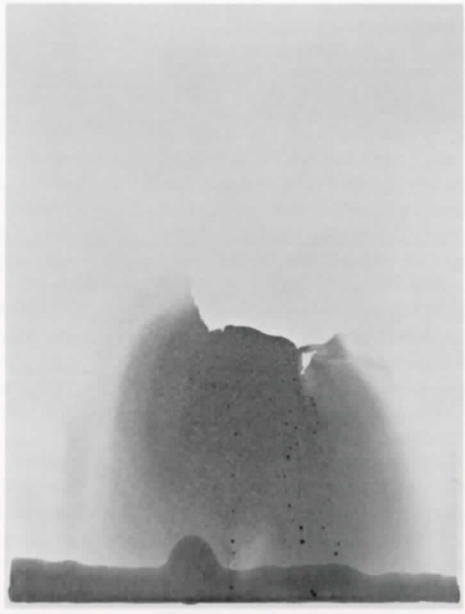
Bryan Hunt, *Memnon 1*, 1992, soft ground etching, soap ground aquatint and drypoint, paper size: 23 x 19"; image size: 11 x 9", edition 15.



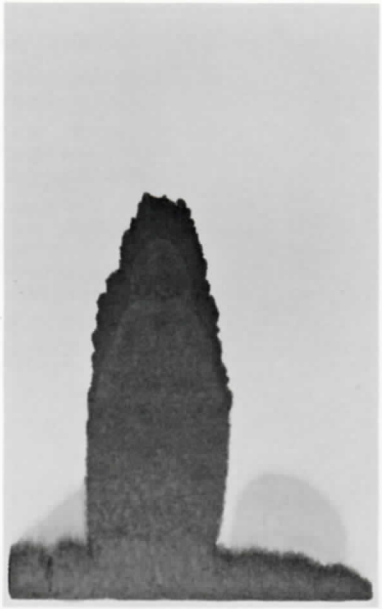
Richard Diebenkorn, *The Barbarian's Garden—Threatened*, 1992, aquatint and drypoint, paper size: 34 x 26½"; image size: 24 x 18", edition 15.



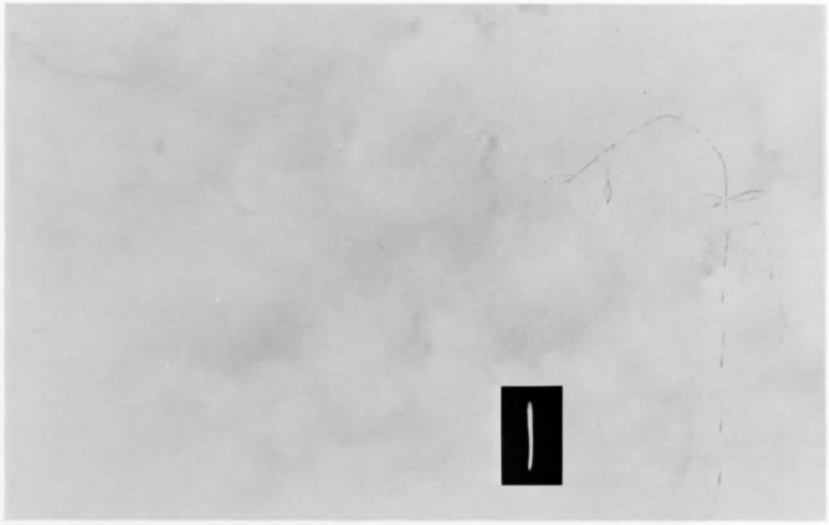
Richard Diebenkorn, *High Green, Version II*, 1992, color soft ground and hard ground etching, soap ground, sugar lift and spit bite aquatints and drypoint, paper size: 52¾ x 33⅝"; image size: 39¾ x 22⅝", edition 65



Tom Marioni, *Process Landscape # 5*, 1992, from a series of 47 monotypes, paper size: 30 x 24¼"; image size: 21 x 16".



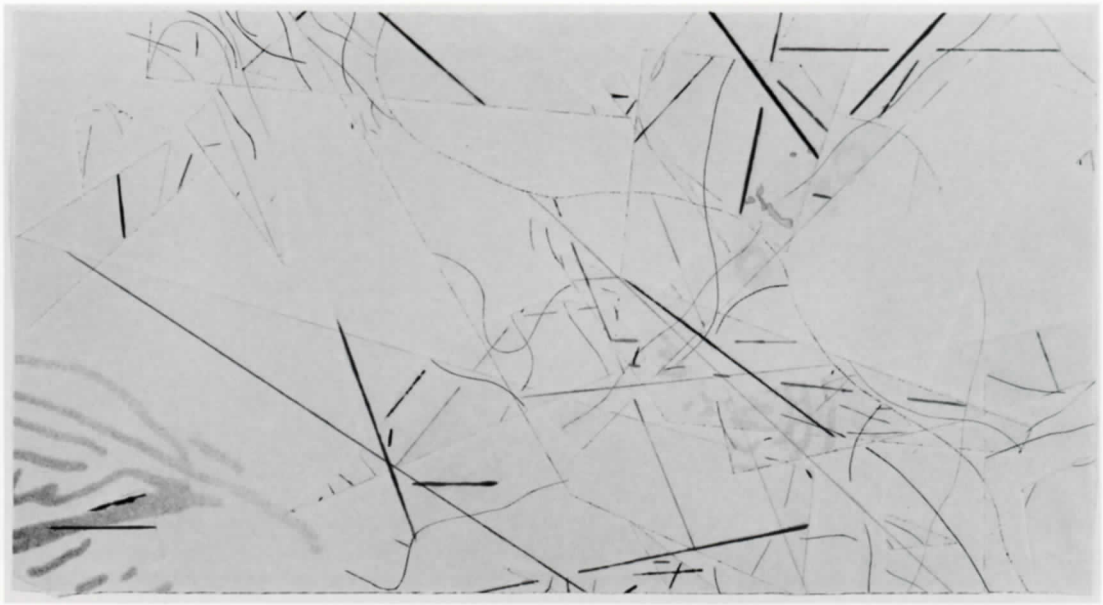
Tom Marioni, *Process Landscape # 19*, 1992, from a series of 47 monotypes, paper size: 30 x 21¼"; image size: 21 x 13".



Tom Marioni, *Tree at Night*, 1992, photogravure, engraving, and mezzotint, paper size: 34 x 34"; image size: 17¾ x 27⅜", edition 10.

Bryan Hunt, *Wall*, 1992, soft ground ething, foul biting and scratches on back of used plate, paper size: 45 x 36"; image size: 43 x 34", edition 10.

Bryan Hunt, *Sedona Precipice*, 1992, color soft ground etching, soap ground, sugar lift and spit bite aquatints with drypoint, paper size: 41¾ x 31¾"; image size: 33 x 24", edition 35.



John Cage, *Changes and Disappearances #25*, 1979-81, from a series of 35 color etchings in two impressions each, 11 x 21".

(Cage continued from front page)

before what would have been his eightieth birthday.

"I can't wait till I'm eighty!" I remember him exclaiming ten years ago to artist Louise Nevelson when she told him she had passed that milestone. Though he didn't wait, his birthday was celebrated in cities all over the world with concerts of his music and exhibitions of his art.

There were also many articles in the press. Two which were in the *New York Times* show the range of feelings with which Cage is remembered. "John Cage died on August 12, but his music keeps composing itself," wrote Bernard Holland on August 24. Holland recommends cutting his article into the shape of a frame and holding it up to whatever is in front of you and noticing that. "If listeners will but keep their empty frames handy, everything they hear for the rest of their lives becomes music by John Cage."

Edward Rothstein, writing on September 20, had an opposite view. Speaking about 4'33", Cage's famous "silent" composition, he asked if the point "was really to draw attention to the sounds around the listeners (which could easily be accomplished just by instructing them to listen), or was it primarily an aggressive dismantling of the manners of the concert hall?" My own reply is that instructing people to listen would have brought about only self-consciousness and would not have produced a work of art still discussed 42 years later. Cage favored demonstration over instruction and his approach was always non-manipulative. In *4'33"* done in 1952, a pianist dressed in tails took his place at a grand piano, opened it, placed the score on its table and timed with a stop-watch four minutes and thirty-three seconds in which he sat quietly. Cage had written the score using chance operations in three movements, each built up "by means of short silences put together." At the end of the first movement and the second the pianist closed the piano, then opened it. At the conclusion he closed the piano and bowed to the audience. Cage used the manners of the concert hall as his material, just as he used cut-out plates and engraved or drypoint lines as his material in *Changes and Disappearances*. "I'm not interested in critical or negative action," he told Robin White in *View*. "I'm interested in doing something which seems to be useful."

The difficulty of critics like Rothstein in seeing Cage's contribution as useful may be in the grandness of its scale. Bernard Holland, continuing his *New York Times* article that began with the concept of the frame, gives Cage's art an historical perspective. It "announces the failure" of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, he says and explains that the Enlightenment believed "the mind would soon make sense of most things." Cage's art, he concludes, "suggests that we shall never really know what is going on in the universe, much less control it. It asks the ear to bend to uncertainty, to negotiate with chance, not defiantly but with wit, grace and invention."

Cage's wit, grace and invention was demonstrated both in his work and in his life, which was accessible to thousands of people. He answered his own telephone, refusing machines or services. "We must be able to reach each other," he said when I remarked on this. He spent a great deal of his time traveling around the world performing readings and music works, speaking, answering questions, gathering mushrooms and cooking food for others. "I remember him cooking mushrooms in your kitchen," a San Francisco friend tearfully recalled just after he died. "Some of us were on the deck, and I watched through the window. The light was falling just so, and your son was helping." A small memory, shared by many in different ways. Cage appeared that first New Year's Day at Crown Point Press with an armful of mushrooms he'd gathered on his walk through downtown Oakland from the hotel. After that year he stayed at my house, and last January he picked mushrooms in my parking strip and cooked them at the press, mentioning that he wasn't exactly sure what they were but he had tested them on himself so he was sure they wouldn't harm us (they didn't.)

The core of Cage's attitudes came from his studies of Zen Buddhism with Daisetz T. Suzuki in New York in 1945 and 1946. Cage was philosophically opposed to beginnings and endings, seeing life as made up of ever-changing circumstances each of which is specific and shows, when prodded a little, ways to move with it rather than against it, to test it and place it somewhere different, to enjoy it and see how far it can go. Things that happen, he believed, are the result of events and circumstances and are not willed. Intention is important in Cage's philosophy but not will. Willing involves manipulating and places us in an impossible position of responsibility—better to shift the responsibility from making choices to asking questions. Better to place the center not in ourselves but everywhere, in what we are doing, in the music or art itself and in each person hearing it or seeing it.

"Kathan, dear Kathan," he said to me after the earthquake when I was exhausted, worried and pessimistic, "as you keep going, which you will do, the way to proceed will become apparent." Now, we will have to keep going without him. But we have his work to use in whatever way we can.

Kathan Brown
October 20, 1992

Gallery Exhibitions

The following exhibitions will be on view in our San Francisco and New York galleries.

October 29 - November 28, 1992
San Francisco and **New York**
New Prints by **Bryan Hunt**

December 3, 1992 - January 16, 1993
New York: Landcapes—**John Cage** and **Tom Marioni**
San Francisco: A Selection of Prints by **John Cage**, New Editions by **Shoichi Ida**

January 21 - February 27, 1993
New York: Pat Steir Etchings
San Francisco: Tom Marioni

Notes

Several Crown Point Press publications, including etchings by **Günter Brus**, **Tony Cragg** and **Sol LeWitt**, and a woodblock print by **Francesco Clemente**, were included in the exhibition *De Bonnard à Baselitz* drawn from the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and presented there this summer. Crown Point Press prints are also featured at the Palo Alto Cultural Center in *Directions in Bay Area Printmaking: 3 Decades* (through January 3, 1993).

John Baldessari showed recent works at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York from September 19 through October 10, 1992. Baldessari will speak in the Department of Art: Practice, University of California, Berkeley, on November 10 as part of the Hess Collection Series of Lectures.

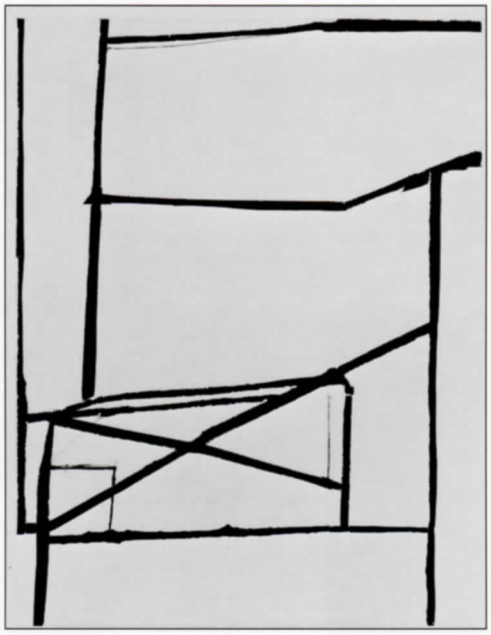
Drawings and watercolors by **John Cage** were on view at Margarete Roeder's New York and Cologne galleries in September and October 1992.

The **Richard Diebenkorn** retrospective featuring more than 50 of the artist's major paintings will be at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art from November 19, 1992, to January 24, 1993. The exhibition was organized by the Whitechapel Gallery in London.

Documenta 9 in Kassel, Germany, featured several Crown Point Press artists, including **Katsura Funakoshi**, **Anish Kapoor**, **Ed Ruscha** and **Pat Steir**.

Four Friends: Eric Fischl, Ralph Gibson, April Gornik, Bryan Hunt opened in October at the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut, and will be on view through January 10, 1993.

New paintings by **Al Held** will be on view at the Andre Emmerich Gallery in New York through November 7, 1992. In addition, several of Held's new monumental scale paintings are installed at the gallery's nearby storefront space at 650 Madison Avenue.



Richard Diebenkorn, *Mask*, 1982, aquatint and drypoint, paper size: 33½ x 27"; image size 22 x 17", edition 35.

Bryan Hunt's exhibition of paintings and sculpture at the Locks Gallery in Philadelphia will be on view through November 28, 1992.

Janis Provisor's exhibition at Barbara Toll, New York, will open November 19 and will be up through December 23, 1992.

Markus Raetz will have a one-person exhibition at the Brooke Alexander Gallery in New York from November 20 through December 21, 1992.

The traveling exhibition *Wayne Thiebaud Prints*, organized by the American Federation of Arts, began its tour of nine museums at the C.A. Johnson Memorial Gallery in Middlebury, Vermont, on October 5, 1992. It's final presentation will be at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery in Lincoln, Nebraska, in the fall of 1994. Thiebaud also opened the Duncan Phillips lecture series on October 20, 1993, at The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C.

Summer Etching Workshops 1993

This summer we will be offering four to six one-week-long workshops. The tentative dates are Monday through Saturday: July 5-10
July 12-17
July 19-24
August 16-21
August 23-28
August 30-September 4

Enrollment will be limited.

Please look for further details in the January issue of *Overview* or call (415) 974-6273 to request a brochure and application (ready by December 1, 1992).

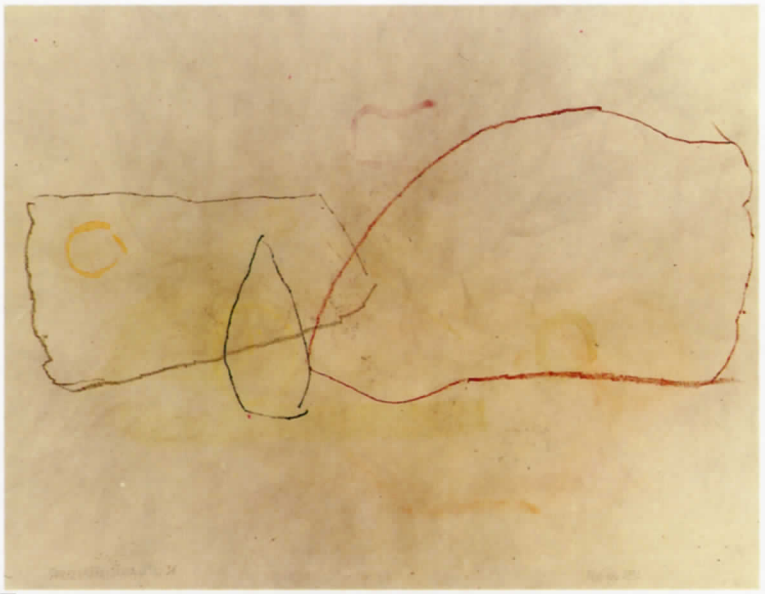
Overview Editor: Constance Lewallen
Design: Brent A. Jones

Published three times a year.

657 Howard Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
415.974.6273
FAX 415.495.4220

568 Broadway
New York, NY 10012
212.226.5476
FAX 212.966.7042

Crown Point Press



1

2

Representation:

CROWN POINT PRESS

568 Broadway
New York, NY 10012
212.226.5476
212.966.7042 FAX

657 Howatd Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
415.974.6273
415.495.4220 FAX

Contact:
Karen McCready
Valerie Wade
Exhibiting:
Publishers of etchings and color woodblock prints

John Cage

1. *Smoke Weather, Stone Weather #34*
   1991, Unique etching on smoked paper, 15" x 25"

2. *The Missing Stone*
   1989, Spitbite aquatint etching on smoked paper, 54" x 41", Edition 25