

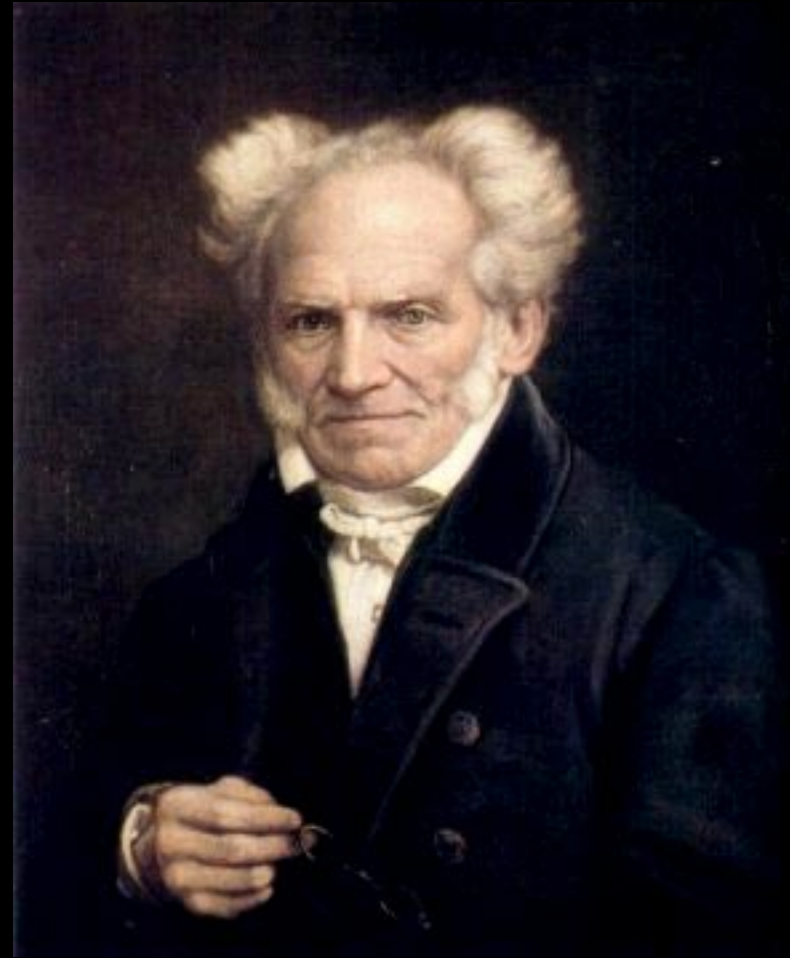
Buddhist influences in Western Art

Buddhism in the West

We have already seen how Buddhism has spread throughout Asia and Southeast Asia.

The term 'Buddhism' only appeared in the English language after 1800.

While several Europeans tried to translate Buddhist sutras or concepts in the West, it wasn't until the German Philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer when the ideas took hold.



Buddhism in the West

Schopenhauer found a similar concept of will as the desire for existence as the cause of suffering.

However, Schopenhauer, unlike the Buddha, did not believe happiness is attainable in this world but he did believe that contemplation of great works of art can provide a way to transcend the will and achieve an experience beyond desire.

His ideas were popular with 19th century intellectuals, including Vincent van Gogh.

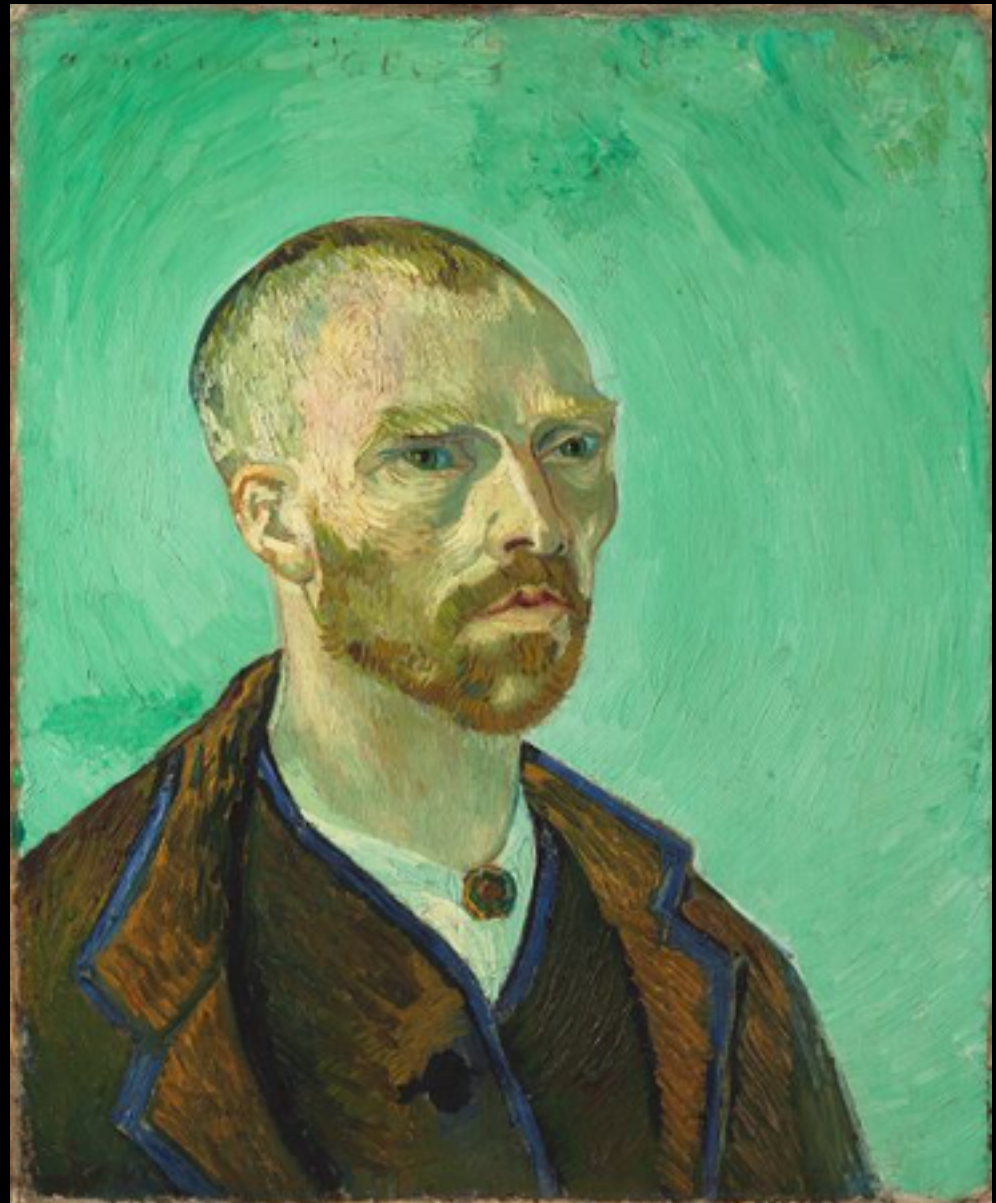


Vincent van Gogh, *Starry Night*, 1853-1890

Vincent Van Gogh

Van Gogh was a failed Christian Evangelist. His interest in Buddhism is revealed in this letter to his brother regarding his self-portrait.

“I have a portrait of myself, all ash-colored... But I also exaggerated my personality; I have in the first place aimed at the character of a simple bronze worshipping the Eternal Buddha...”



Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin, 1888

Vincent Van Gogh

A collector of Japanese prints, van Gogh, as many Impressionists and Post Impressionists were looking beyond Western art and ideas for ways to represent their ideas



Van Gogh, Japanese Tree (after Hiroshiga), 1887



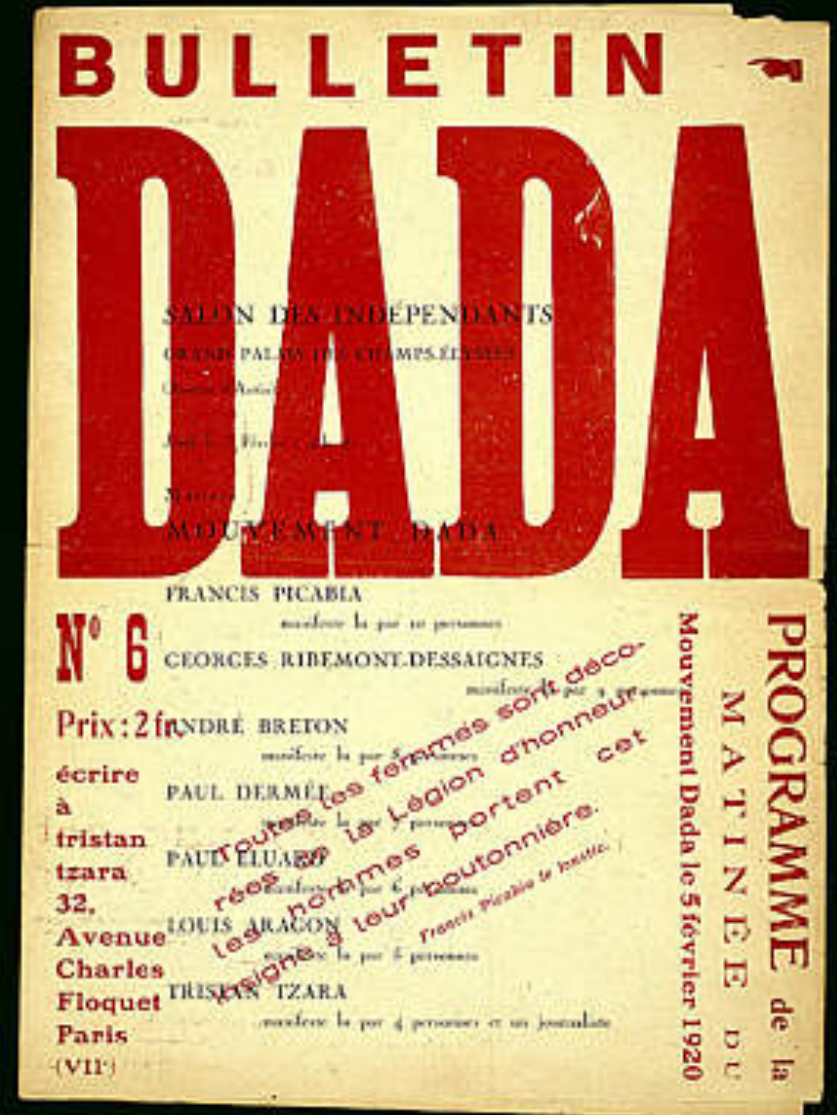
Hiroshiga, Plum Tree, 1857

DADA

Due to the WWI, a number of artists, writers and intellectuals, mostly French and German, found refuge in Zurich (neutral Switzerland).

Dada began in Zurich but then moved to Paris, Germany and New York.

Dada ideas transformed the way artist think about and create art to this day.



Cover of the first edition of the publication *Dada* by Tristan Tzara; Zurich, 1917

DADA

For the disillusioned artists of the Dada movement, the war merely confirmed the degradation of social structures that led to such violence: corrupt and nationalist politics, repressive social values, and unquestioning conformity of culture and thought.

Dada was an anti art art movement. For them, art was merely a tool of the establishment.

So, they created non-art art.



Hugo Ball at the Cabaret Voltaire,
1916

DADA

Marcel Duchamp

The most important artist of the movement, and arguably the most important artist of the 20th Century, was Marcel Duchamp.

By World War I, he had rejected the work of many of his fellow artists as "retinal" art, intended only to please the eye.

Instead, Duchamp wanted, he said, "to put art back in the service of the mind."



MARCEL DUCHAMP, Fountain, (second version), 1950 (original version produced 1917). Ready-made glazed sanitary china with black paint, 12" high. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

DADA

Marcel Duchamp

When Marcel Duchamp died in 1968 the artist Jasper Johns wrote, "The art community feels Duchamp's presence in his absence. He has changed the conditions of being here."

With the 'readymades' Duchamp shifted attention from artistic production to process, and shifted the responsibility for interpretation to the perceiver. This changed the cultural landscape of the 20th century



Marcel Duchamp, Bicycle Wheel, 1913 & (3rd version) 1951. Metal wheel mounted on painted wood stool, 51 x 25 x 16 1/2" (129.5 x 63.5 x 41.9 cm)



East Gate at the Great Stupa at Sanchi,
Wheel of Life.

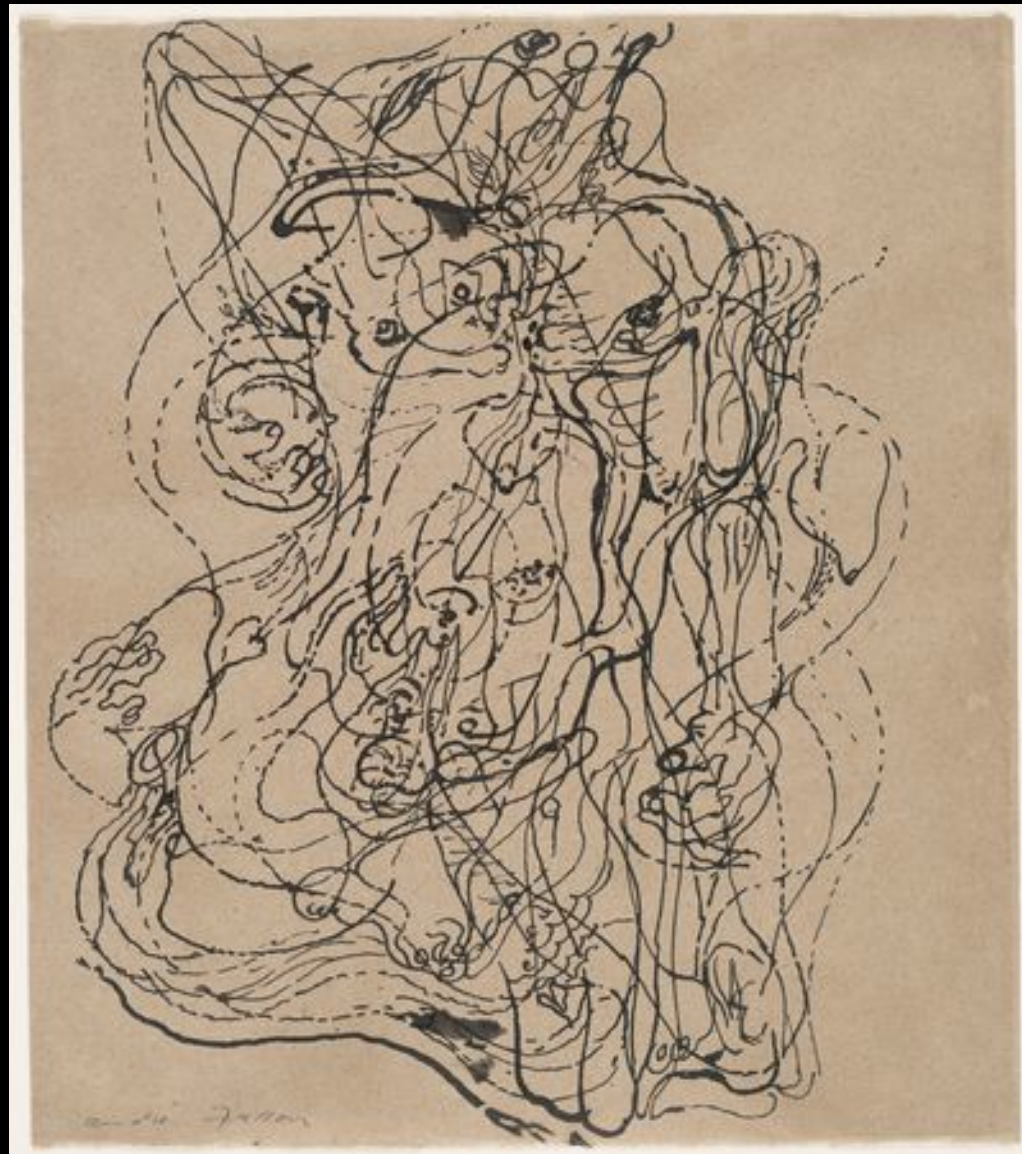


“ The Bicycle Wheel is my first Ready-Made, so much so that at first it wasn’t even called a Ready-made... it had more to do with the idea of chance. In a way, it was simply letting things go by themselves. “

Poetic Surrealism

Surrealism originated in the late 1910s and early '20s as a literary movement that experimented with a new mode of expression called automatic writing, or automatism, which sought to release the unbridled imagination of the subconscious.

Andre Breton (the leader of Surrealist Movement) believed that through dreams (from Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*) and automatic processes (Freud's free association), we could access the unconscious.



Andre Masson, Automatic Drawing, 1924.

Post WWII Abstract Expressionism

After the War, American Artists such as Jackson Pollock, found automatic processes a way of releasing the subconscious.



Jackson Pollock, Number 1 (Lavender Mist)

Abstract Expressionism

Many of these artists were looking at Eastern Philosophy and Buddhism (especially Zen) as a way to engaged art and life.

Rothko's soft, luminous colors are layered in thin washes, dark over light, then light over dark to create a contemplative surface.

His work indicates a preoccupation with death. For him all art deals with intimidations or death



Mark Rothko, Orange and Yellow, 1956

Abstract Expressionism

Rather than a picture of an experience...he wanted his paintings to be an experience.

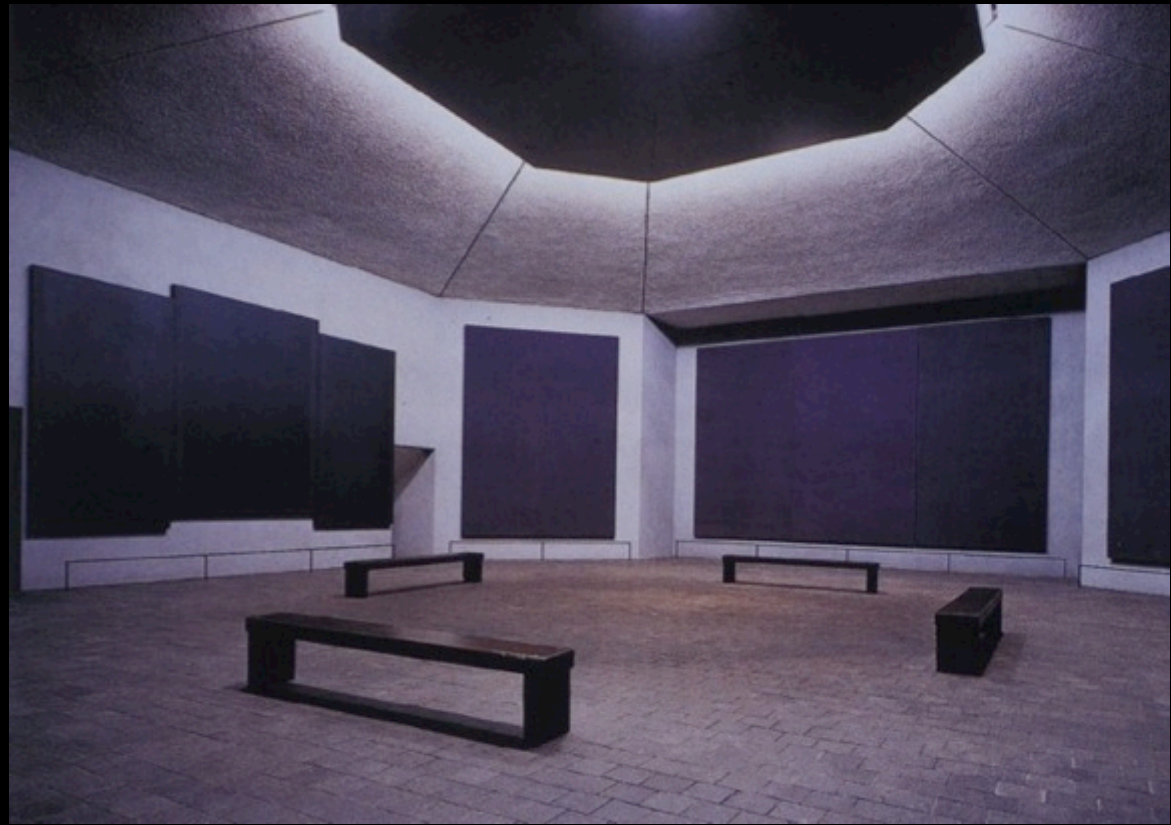


Mark Rothko, Orange and Yellow, 1956

Mark Rothko

In 1971, The Rothko Chapel was constructed in Houston. The paintings, thin layers of color over color until they look almost black, were begun in 1964.

The mission of the Rothko Chapel is to inspire people to action through art and contemplation, to nurture reverence for the highest aspirations of humanity, and to provide a forum for global concerns.



Mark Rothko, Rothko Chapel



Mark Rothko, Rothko Chapel

The idea is for people to meditate while looking at the paintings.

Neo Dada

In the work of the late 1950s an interest in the ordinary, a willingness to embrace chance (from Dada and the recognition that in life, things just happen) a new sense of the visual—each led art in two directions: towards Pop and towards Minimalism.

Robert Rauschenberg using found objects from real life together with printed media images and hand-made elements addressed a reality that everything (all signs) come together to create meaning. It all has the same importance.



ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG, *Canyon*, 1959. Oil, pencil, paper, fabric, metal, cardboard box, printed paper, printed reproductions, photograph, wood, paint tube, and mirror on canvas, with oil on bald eagle, string, and pillow, 6' 9 3/4" x 5' 10" x 2'.

John Cage

Cage was a musician influenced by Eastern philosophy and experimental music of Arnold Schonberg.

Based on the work of Marcel Duchamp, the I Ching (Book of Changes) and Zen Buddhism, he emphasized the element of 'chance' in art.

For him the purpose of art was “the blurring of the distinction between art and life”



John Cage

Cage turned to the ancient Chinese book of wisdom— the I Ching, or Book of Changes.

He said in 1992

“ I use chance operations instead of operating according to my likes and dislikes. I use my work to change myself and I accept what the chance operations say.

The I Ching says that if you don't accept the chance operations you have no right to use them. Which is very clear, so that's what I do.”



Roaratorio: An Irish Circus

John Cage

4'33" (pronounced "**Four minutes, thirty-three seconds**" or just "**Four thirty-three**"^[1]) is a three-movement composition. It was composed in 1952, for any instrument or combination of instruments, and the score instructs the performer(s) not to play their instrument(s) during the entire duration of the piece throughout the three movements. The piece purports to consist of the sounds of the environment that the listeners hear while it is performed.



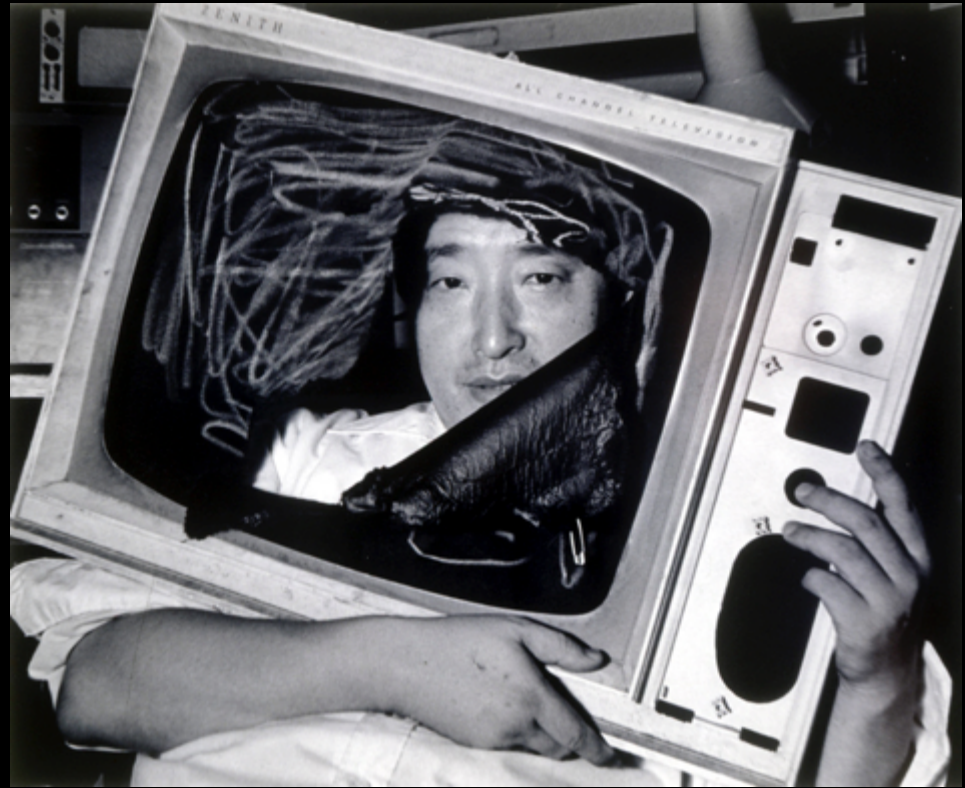
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gN2zcLBr_VM

Nam June Paik

Nam June Paik was a Korean-American artist who transformed video into an artist's medium with his media-based art that challenged and changed our understanding of visual culture.

Interested in finding ways new technologies, at this time, TV could be exploited by artists, and influenced by Fluxus he created a new form in art, Video Art.

Let's see if Buddhist ideas influenced any of this.



Nam June Paik

Zen for Head, a performance piece, is an interpretation of a 'score' by another artist, LaMonte Young, who was associated with the Fluxus movement of the 1950s and '60s.

This group was interested in putting the possibility of artmaking in the hands of ordinary people.

Young's "Composition 1960 No. 10" consisted entirely of the instruction: "draw a straight line and follow it."

A couple of years later, Paik did just that, dunking his head in a bowl of ink and dragging his hair like a giant brush along a scroll of paper.



Robert Rauschenberg

made this piece collaboratively with John Cage, entitled “Automobile Tire Print.” It’s a direct “print” made by rolling a tire covered with black house paint over sheets of typewriter paper. Both Paik and Rauschenberg were referring to the tradition of Asian ink painting, with its scroll format and emphasis on the immediacy of the encounter between ink and paper.



Asian Brush Painting

In Zen Buddhism, a *circle* that is hand drawn in one or two brushworks to express the moment when the mind is free to let the body create.

The *circle* symbolizes absolute enlightenment, strength, elegance, the universe, and *mu* (the void).

It is characterised by a minimalism born of Japanese aesthetics drawing *ensō* , a disciplined-creative practice of Japanese ink painting.



Nam June Paik

This piece, *Zen for TV*, manipulated a real TV set to only play a single moving line.

1963



Nam June Paik

Another piece entitled, *TV Buddha.*, has a live video camera focused on a antique Buddha, and live feeding through video camera into a TV.

So Buddha is watching TV – but he's also watching himself.

Maybe a sort of electronic meditation?



1974

Andy Warhol

Warhol is associated with the Pop movement in Art. He is mostly known for his silkscreen images in repetition of common consumer objects and people in the public eye.

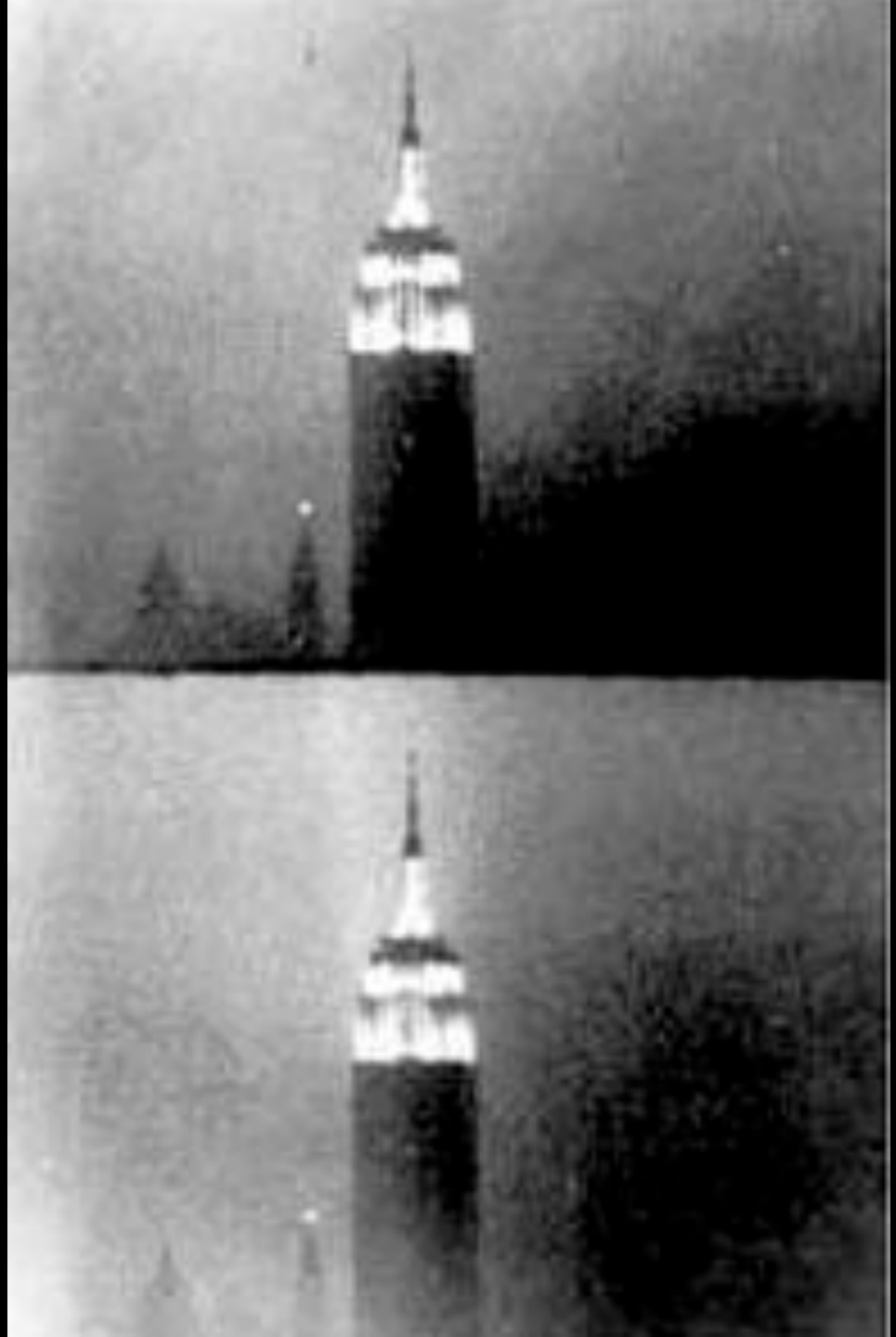


Andy Warhol

Another contribution by Warhol was to film. His interest was in non-edited documentation.

This 8 hour 5 minute film of the Empire State Building shows everything that happened while the camera was shooting the event.

Much more a meditation of seeing.





Andy Warhol, *Empire*, 1964, 16 mm black and white silent film, 8 hours 5 minutes at 16 frames per second. Shot from dusk to dawn.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMCeDBn1Zu0>

"Gives you hope for the human race."

- Sister Helen Prejean (Dead Man Walking)

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