

DEVALS

John Cage, Works on paper

25 January – 15 March 2025



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In 1983, twenty years after his visit to the Ryōan-ji, John Cage began producing *Where R = Ryoanji*, a series of “plastic experiments” on paper. Using a quill pen, paintbrushes, drypoint pens or pencils, he identified fifteen polished stones, chosen from the sixty-four he collected on the banks of the New River and numbered to correspond to the sixty-four hexagrams of the Yi-King. The fifteen stones are chosen and distributed on his papers according to parameters also obtained from the Yi-King.

First come engravings and etchings, then watercolors on Japanese paper. The titles of the works indicate the parameters supported by the Yi-King. Thus, in *Where R = Ryoanji R/7* (1988), pencil on Japanese paper, the letter “R” refers to the fifteen stones[56] of the Zen garden, and the number “7” to the number of pencils used. Of the fifteen stones in the Kyoto garden, only fourteen are visible at the same time from any given point of view[57]. In the case of *The Missing Stone*, taken from the 1989 *New River Rocks* and *Smoke* series, Cage says he also inadvertently forgot to take the fifteenth stone into account. By choosing this title, he draws attention to a lack that would otherwise have remained unnoticed, insisting on the part of the invisible inherent in what is perceived. The world is made up of an infinite number of elements that our thinking tends to simplify. The *Where R = Ryoanji* series encourages the viewer to let go of the richness and multiplicity of the world.

In 1988, these experiences led him to undertake a residency at the Mountain Lake Workshop in Virginia, where the same approach led him to produce a series of watercolors entitled *New River Watercolors*. This was followed by the *New River Rocks* and *Smoke* series in 1989-90, in which Cage brought the gaseous element into play alongside the rocky and liquid elements, smoking his canvases before painting them, using an absolutely elusive material subject to non-parameterizable hazards. Finally, 1990's *New River Rocks* and *Washes* will combine the various techniques he tested in the course of his research.

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John Cage (1912-1992)

New River, 1988

Watercolor on paper

Signed and dated "88" lower right.

66 x 188 cm.

Provenance:

Galerie Margarete Roeder, New York;

Acquired by the current owner.

Bibliography :

Dreyfus, Charles, Happenings & Fluxus, Paris, Galerie 1900-2000, Galerie de Poche, Galerie du Génie, 1988, reproduced.

John Cage and the Mountain Lake workshop : New River Watercolors, 3-8 Avril 1988, Miles C. Horton Sr. Center At Mountain Lake : <https://youtu.be/ix-8CU-5SP4>









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John Cage (1912-1992)

Variations III 25, 1992

Mixed media (Indian ink, fire dust and burnt newspaper) on gray-brown Fabriano Roma laid paper.

Signed and dated "88" lower right.

Signed and dated "1992" lower right. 49 x 66 cm.

From a series of 57 monotypes produced by Crown Point Press and printed by Pamela Paulson : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5loGWbfFAc>

Provenance :

Henning Lohner Collection, Munich, acquired directly from the artist;

Private collection, Paris, acquired directly from the artist.



D. W. W. 1992

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John Cage (1912-1992)

Variations III 26, 1992

Mixed media (Indian ink, fire dust and burnt newspaper) on gray-brown Fabriano Roma laid paper.

Signed and dated "88" lower right.

Signed and dated "1992" lower right.

47,5 x 65 cm.

From a series of 57 monotypes produced by Crown Point Press and printed by Pamela Paulson : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5loGWbfFAc>

Provenance :

Henning Lohner Collection, Munich, acquired directly from the artist;

Private collection, Paris, acquired directly from the artist.

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John Cage (1912-1992)

Variations III 41, 1992

Mixed media (Indian ink, fire dust and burnt newspaper) on gray-brown Fabriano Roma laid paper.

Signed and dated "88" lower right.

Signed and dated "1992" lower right.

47,5 x 65 cm.

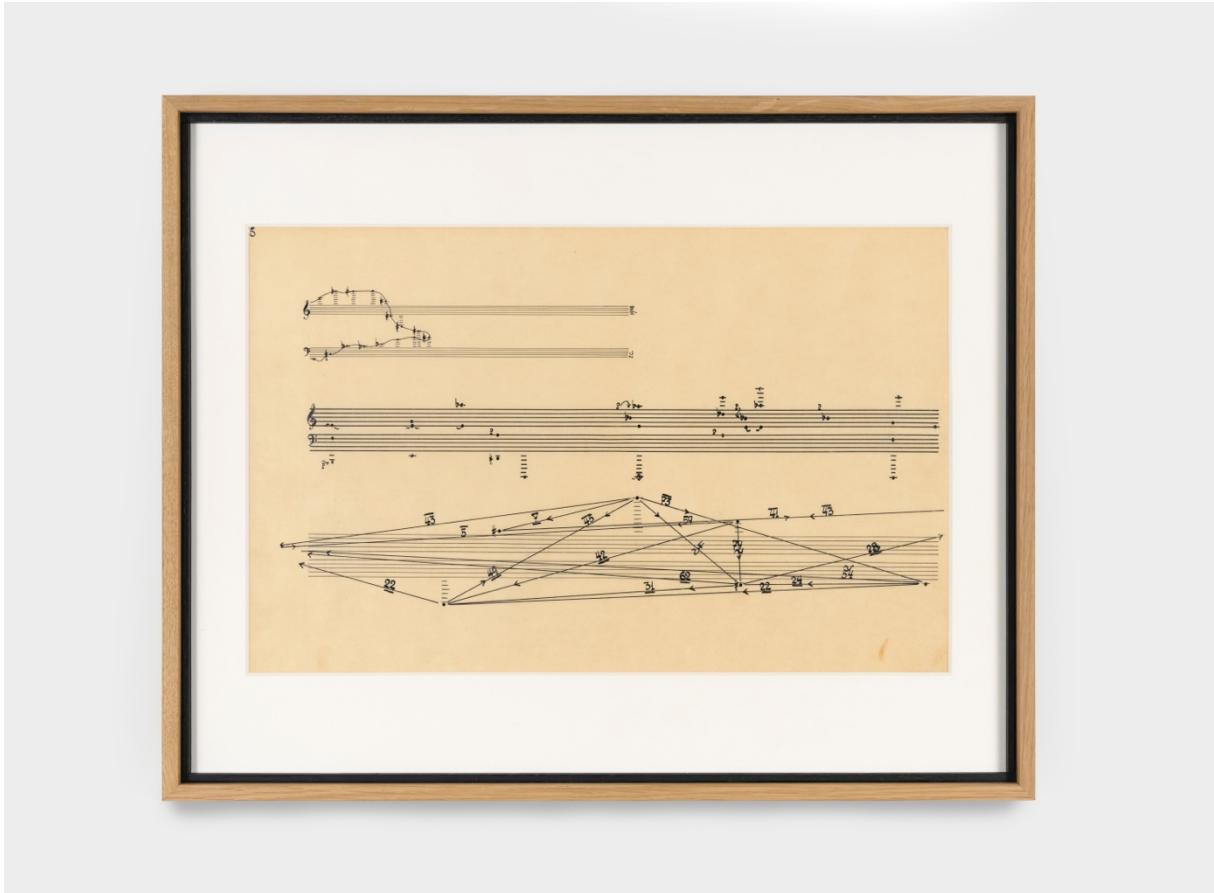
From a series of 57 monotypes produced by Crown Point Press and printed by Pamela Paulson : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5loGWbfFAc>

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John Cage

Concert for Piano and Orchestra, 1958

Ink on paper

Monogrammed "JC" and dated "1958" top left.

26 x 42 cm.

This concert was commissioned from John Cage by his friend, the artist Elaine de Kooning, to whom the work is dedicated.

PROVENANCE:

Betty Randolph Bean (1917-2002), director of Boosey and Hawkes in the 1950s. She became vice-president of this major music publisher. Betty Randolph Bean also worked for the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, where she headed the press office.



This rare autograph manuscript on page 6 of the Piano section of Concert for Piano and Orchestra was composed between 1957 and 1958 by John Cage (1912-1992). It was first performed in New York on May 15, 1958. The composition served as the argument for a ballet production by Merce Cunningham (1919-2009) entitled *Antic Meet*, with sets and costumes by Robert Rauschenberg.

Elaine de Kooning (1918-1989) and her husband Willem, Rauschenberg (1904-1997), Cage and Cunningham had met in the summer of 1948 at the Black Mountain Center, that famous utopia of academia and art. There, they performed Érik Satie's *Le Piège de Méduse*, and soon afterwards, together and in the same vein, created the first truly American happening, the *Untitled Event*, in 1952.

“John Cage's Concert for Piano and Orchestra is one of the seminal works of the second half of the twentieth century, and the centerpiece of the middle period of Cage's work. It is the culmination of Cage's work up to that point, incorporating notation techniques he had spent the last decade developing - techniques that remain radical to this day. But despite Cage's vitality in twentieth-century musical development, and the Concert's central role in his career, the work is still rarely performed and even more rarely examined in detail.” (M. Iddon and P. Thomas)

This work, one of John Cage's most notable, develops his primordial idea of progressive indeterminacy. As such, Concert for Piano and Orchestra is a pivotal moment in the history of musical manuscripts and notation systems. This 63-page score was commissioned from Cage by Elaine de Kooning. It contains 84 types of composition in 84 different notations, and could be played in any order, by extract or in its entirety, and over an indeterminate period of time.

"Each part is one system for a single pianist to be played with or without any or all parts written for orchestral instruments. The whole is to be taken as a body of material presentable at any point between minimum (nothing played) and maximum (everything

played) both horizontally and vertically. A program made within determined length of time (to be altered by a conductor when there is one) may involve any reading, i.e., any sequence of parts or parts thereof." (Introduction to the printed score).

This natural indeterminacy of Cage's composition, which left choices open, turned to chaos at the premiere on May 15, 1958. Most musicians mistook Cage's orderly disorder for the confused inspiration of their own free will, steering the work in the direction of the great n'importe quoi. But the possible was now open, and Cage's graphic revolution in musical notation was to accompany him throughout his life, right up to his Variations I-II-III, composed between 1958 and 1962.

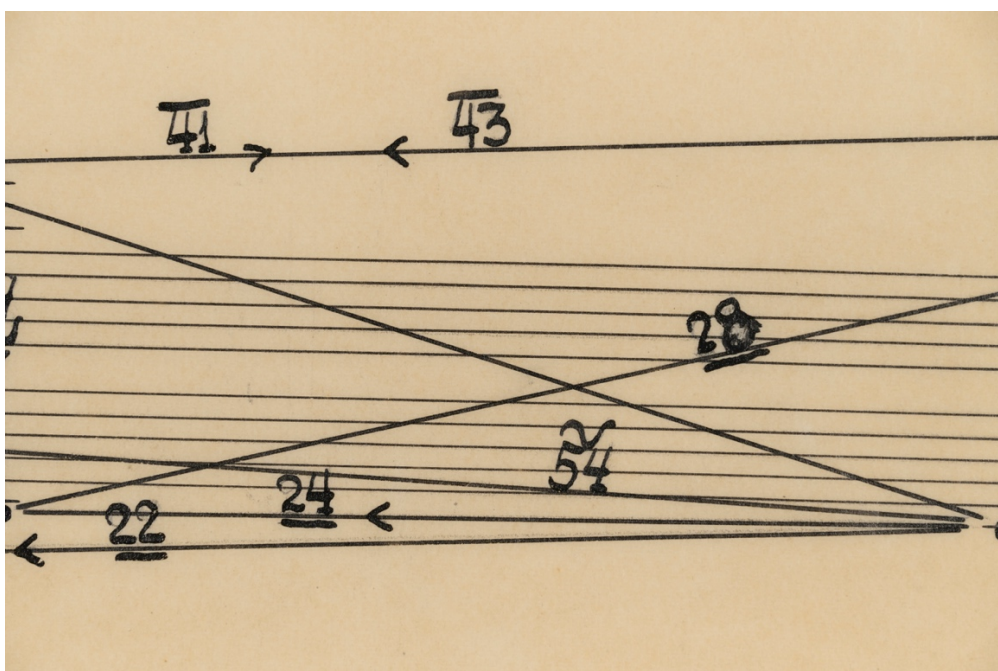
John Cage's legacy is almost entirely preserved in two American institutions: the New York Public Library and Northwestern University, which owns two autograph manuscripts of Concert for Piano and Orchestra. John Cage's manuscripts are therefore very rare on the market. In 2012, MoMA received from Henry Kravis the gift of Cage's autograph manuscript for his 4'33" (In Proportional Notation). This famous musical silence was the subject of a remarkable MoMA exhibition the following year. Entitled There Will Never Be Silence: Scoring John Cage's 4'33", it synthesized John Cage's intimate and profoundly artistic links with the artists of American Abstract Expressionism..

For another page from the manuscript of the Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (p. 18) at MOMA, once owned by Jasper Johns, see :

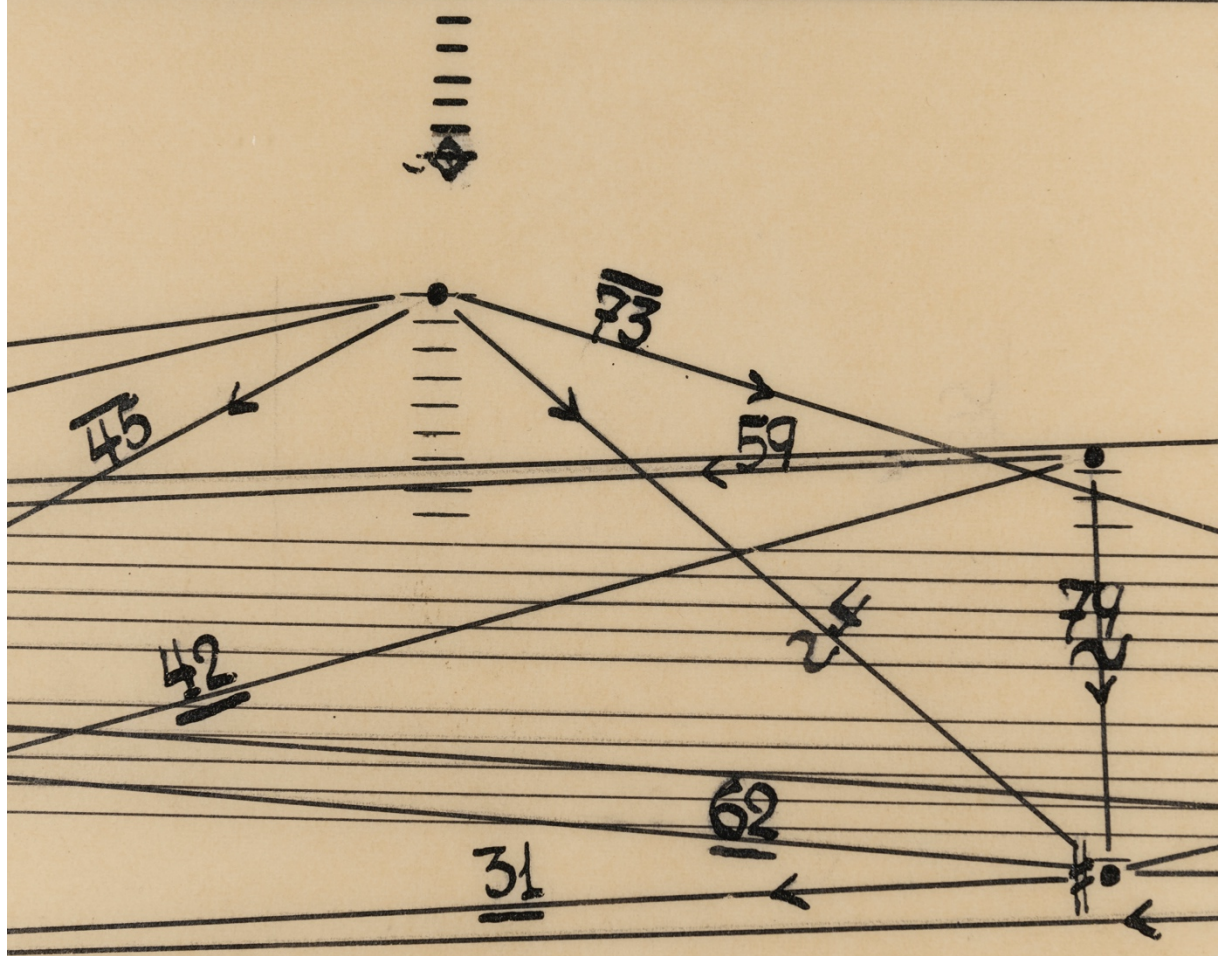
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/33472>.

This page was exhibited in Degree Zero: Drawing at Midcentury (Nov. 2020-June 2021). It is described in the catalog:

https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2034_300298306.pdf -- p. 20 of the manuscript was donated to Harvard University by Sarah-Ann and W. H. Kamarsky



Handwritten musical notation on a five-line staff. On the left, a note with a flat sign (B \flat) is marked with a 'P' and a downward-pointing arrow. On the right, there are two notes with flats (B \flat and E \flat) and a note with a sharp sign (F \sharp), each with a 'P' and a downward-pointing arrow. A small circle is also present on the right side of the staff.



COMPOSING WITH THE CONCEPTUAL TOOLS OF THE VISUAL ARTS

Cage came to think of the art of music with the conceptual tools of the plastic arts. Like Duchamp before him, he thought in terms of “sound sculpture”. For Duchamp, the terms “musical sculpture” appear in the Green Box, along with the following description: “Musical Sculpture / Sounds lasting and departing from different points and forming a lasting sound sculpture”[46]. For Cage, working on the sculptural dimension of music might involve distributing sounds according to a mental image of notes in relation to each other; spatializing sounds around the audience during concerts; or transferring gestures from one discipline to another.

“Every experimental musician in the twentieth century has had to relate to painters”, writes Cage. 47] With *Music for piano 1* (1952) or *Concert pour piano et orchestre* (1957-1958), he obtained scores by highlighting the crevices of the paper with pencil. 48] With *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961-1962), he wrote a piece for eighty-six instruments based on astronomical maps. To compose a musical portrait of Duchamp, *Solo 65* (dated 1965, as its title indicates), he took the contours of *Self-Portrait in Profile* (created by Duchamp in 1958) to determine the notes to which he associated, in no particular order, the various syllables of *La Mariée mise à nue par ses célibataires*, even.

For *Cartridge Music* (1960), he superimposed various transparencies featuring lines, circles, dots and a stopwatch dial, which, depending on their “combination”, produce different possible scores. The term “combination” is particularly apt, as it is reminiscent of the “Combines” of his collaborator and friend Robert Rauschenberg, who, from 1962, embarked on several series of works in transparency, superimposing X-rays, astrological grids, silk-screened Plexiglas panels, untinted glass...

Source: John Cage, *The Ingenious Genius*:

<https://mediation.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-cage/ENS-cage.html>