

John Cage: Every Day is a Good Day

25 September- 14 November 2010

John Cage was one of the leading avant-garde composers of the twentieth century, most famous perhaps for his silent work of 1952, 4'33". Cage was closely connected with art and artists throughout his long career. He collaborated frequently with Robert Rauschenberg and the dance choreographer Merce Cunningham, was a friend of Jasper Johns and Marcel Duchamp, and was a major influence on the Fluxus artists of the 1960s and 70s. It was not until he was in his mid-sixties that he began to practice seriously as a visual artist himself, producing over 600 prints with the Crown Point Press in San Francisco, as well as 260 drawings and watercolours. In these works he applied the same chance-determined procedures that he used in his musical compositions.

This exhibition will be the largest ever organised, presenting over 100 works on paper, including the extraordinary Ryoanji series, described by the art critic David Sylvester as 'among the most beautiful prints and drawings made anywhere in the 1980s'. In these works he drew around the outlines of stones scattered (according to chance) across the paper or printing plate, in one case drawing around 3,375 individually placed stones. He also experimented with burning or soaking the paper, and applied complex, painstaking procedures at each stage of the printmaking process.

Inspired by Cage's use of chance-determined scores, the exhibition will differ markedly from a traditional touring exhibition. The procedure that Cage often employed, using a computer-generated random number programme similar to the Chinese oracle, the 'I Ching', will be used to determine the layout of the exhibition within each venue. The programme will determine the position of each work, resulting in works being displayed at many different heights, and in groups that no curator would ordinarily choose. The exhibition will be re-hung at intervals during the show, with a number of works being added, moved or withdrawn. Such chance encounters between quite different works will give a sense of them being part of an ongoing creative process, rather than merely being the result of one creative moment. Cage, who disliked linear displays, employed this method in several exhibitions, notably Rolywholyover, in Los Angeles in 1992, which he described as a 'composition for museum'.

Alongside the exhibition will be a lively programme of talks and events exploring other aspects of Cage's practice, including his music, writing and performance, and his wide-ranging interests from mycology to chess.

The book to accompany the exhibition will be the first publication to cover all aspects of Cage's visual art, with more than sixty plates and other illustrations, and four interviews by curator Jeremy Millar with authorities on Cage's visual art work, all of whom knew him well. It will also include a substantial extract from the art critic Irving Sandler's 1966 interview with Cage, and a 'Cage Companion' of quotations and commentaries reflecting the range of his interests and concerns over sixty years, from 'Anarchy' to 'Zen'.

This will be the first major retrospective in the UK of the visual art of the American composer and artist John Cage (1912–1992). The exhibition has been conceived by Jeremy Millar and is organised by Hayward Touring and BALTIC with the close support and guidance of the John Cage Trust.

The exhibition comes to Kettle's Yard following its premiere at BALTIC this summer.

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