

# **CHANCE**

A E S T H E T I C S

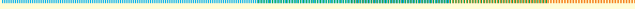
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essays by

**Susan Laxton**  
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catalog entries by

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# MILDRED LANE KEMPER ART MUSEUM

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FRONT COVER:  
Niki de Saint Phalle  
*Grand tir-séance Galerie J* (detail),  
30 June–12 July 1961  
Plaster, paint, wire mesh, string,  
and plastic, 56 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 30 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub>"

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*La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires même*  
(*La Boîte verte*) (*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her*  
*Bachelors, Even [The Green Box]*), 1934  
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FRONTISPIECE:  
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One work from the *Lyric Suite*, 1965  
Ink on rice paper, 11 x 9"  
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END PAPER (BACK):  
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## INTRODUCTION

MEREDITH MALONE

**Chance has been understood** as both a liberating source of unforeseen possibilities and a threatening force capable of undermining human self-sufficiency and moral self-determination. As an indication of the world's instability and our uncertain position within it, chance has been a perennial concern in the visual arts as subject matter and theme.<sup>1</sup> In the early decades of the twentieth century, however, avant-garde artists began to enthusiastically adopt it as a decisive factor in the actual composition of an artwork. *Chance Aesthetics* explores chance as a key compositional principle of modernism from the beginning of the twentieth century through the early 1970s, a time of transition after high modernism and just before the advent of the first fully postmodern generation.<sup>2</sup> Defined as operating outside of the purview of the artist, chance and its many manifestations (accident, luck, randomness, and contingency), when incorporated into the creative process, speak directly to questions of aesthetic philosophy and sensibility. While artists have called on chance to fulfill a variety of aims—aggressive anti-art agendas, revolutionary attempts to bypass the conscious mind and transform the way reality is perceived, statements of free will, and radical programs meant to open the artwork to the random flow of everyday life, to name a few—its strategic appeal is similar throughout much avant-garde production. Undertaken as a stimulus to new forms of artistic invention, the deliberate implementation of accident and the openness to vagaries of interpretation advanced a challenge to longstanding assumptions concerning what might constitute a work of art as well as the role of the artist as autonomous creator. The artistic recourse to chance bypasses the idea of personal responsibility and individual investment in a work of art by redefining the notion of creativity as a form of production whose development is contingent rather than deliberate. What is ultimately at stake is artistic subjectivity, as questions of intentionality, rationality, and decision making are suspended but never completely negated.

In the context of this project, chance is understood as a relative concept defined by an intentional curbing of artistic agency, not as an absolute absence of cause. *Chance Aesthetics* takes the productive tension between chance and determinism as its point of departure, placing critical emphasis on artistic processes that cede an element of

authorial intent to circumstance, whether through internal or external forces, mechanical procedures, or the intervention of other agents. Such processes include dropping cut paper onto a surface and gluing them down where they lay, dripping or flinging paint across a canvas, letting the progressive decay of organic materials determine a composition, or tossing coins to arrive at formal selections, among others. The over sixty works presented in the *Chance Aesthetics* exhibition focus on the visual arts but also highlight certain expressions of poetry, performance, and sound art. Spanning numerous disciplines and mediums, the objects represent an equally diverse group of avant-garde artists, including such pioneering figures of chance-based composition as Marcel Duchamp, Jean Arp, André Breton, Jackson Pollock, and John Cage.

Previous exhibitions exploring the relationship between chance and art range in approach from ambitious historical overviews that reach, in some cases, as far back as the fifteenth century, to sweeping studies that move swiftly through the entire twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> *Chance Aesthetics* lays no claims to presenting a comprehensive survey of chance in modern art. Rather, this exhibition and its catalog offers a focused examination of the dynamic tension between chance and control, between the repudiation of accepted notions of autonomy and originality and the reassertion of authorship that lies at the heart of all artistic creation that employs chance. Through this unique approach, *Chance Aesthetics* attempts to advance fresh perspectives on an important and extensive subject in which critical discourse and artistic process are fascinatingly intertwined.

The exhibition is conceived in a thematic manner. Its three sections—“Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object,” “Automatism,” and “Games and Systems of Random Ordering”—address central avant-garde strategies employed to subvert traditional genres and forms of expression such as painting and sculpture, as well as the bourgeois values and rationalist ideals they were understood to represent. While remaining necessarily fluid (several works can be understood as crossing multiple categories at once), these sections provide a framework through which individual movements—Dada, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Nouveau Réalisme, Fluxus, and others—can be traversed in an effort to critically compare and contrast a variety of chance-based strategies and objectives as they were deployed, received, revised, and redeployed across diverse historical and cultural contexts.

A recurring pattern of abandoning and reclaiming agency becomes evident in all of the works discussed here, as artists exploit the possibilities of chance by tapping into its creative potential while inevitably intervening in its operations. “Proclaim as we might our liberation from causality and our dedication to anti-art,” stated Dada artist Hans Richter retrospectively, “we could not help involving our whole selves, including our conscious sense of order, in the creative process.... Chance could never be liberated from the presence of the conscious artist. This was the reality in which we worked ... a situation of conflict.”<sup>4</sup> As Richter’s statement makes clear, it is hard to make chance an artistic program. Self-contradiction pervades its adherents’ pronouncements. A balance must be struck between the ideal of pure, unmediated

spontaneity and the need for a degree of critical self-awareness to avoid devolving into total arbitrariness and nihilism. To that effect, artists have established bounds so that some control, however loosely, can be maintained. This volume begins to unpack the fraught relationship between artistic intent and contingency as it reappears in different historical contexts at points throughout the twentieth century. It treats the category of chance critically and differentially by addressing three main factors: the process (or processes) chosen, the nature of the work produced, and the rhetoric employed to describe and theorize chance in both Western Europe and the United States.

Recognizing that the move to employ chance as a compositional factor did not occur in a vacuum, *Chance Aesthetics* also places significant emphasis on the relationship between artistic production and the sociocultural matrix in which it was made. Every age has its particular fascination with chance as origin, terminus, and possibility. In the early twentieth century, psychologists, philosophers, scientists, and artists alike were enthralled by the notion of chance as a possible key to a nondeterministic, acausal scheme for interpreting the universe. The pervasive preoccupation with randomness and contingency may be seen, argues artist and critic Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, as a product of overdetermination—as the logical consequence of attempts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through reason and mechanization, to diminish the role chance might play in everyday life.<sup>5</sup> In physics, it culminated in quantum theory and Werner Heisenberg’s indeterminacy principle, which together toppled deterministic constructs of the physical universe.<sup>6</sup> In the realm of psychology, Carl Jung’s theory of synchronicity (the experience of two or more causally unrelated events occurring together in a supposedly meaningful manner) and Sigmund Freud’s notion of parapraxes (that slips of the tongue and other “accidental” gestures are actually involuntary clues to the sublimated life of the unconscious) became for many artists a source of inspiration. Accident began to appear as a serendipitous means of discovery. Modernist thinkers were also becoming increasingly aware of Eastern interpretations of experience as manifested in the Chinese *I Ching (Book of Changes)* and the Zen Buddhist nondeterministic understanding of the natural world.

With the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s, chance, accident, and play acquired a sharper political edge, as exemplified in Dutch historian Johan Huizinga’s paean to play, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1938). In the immediate post-World War II period, many artists embraced an aesthetic of unmediated spontaneity as a means of grappling with a civilization traumatized by the Holocaust and nuclear devastation. The spontaneous gesture, considered a symbol of subjective experience, proved exceptionally appealing in a world understood by some existentialists as absurd. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a confluence of unprecedented technological advancements, economic prosperity, and technocratic excesses resulting from the rise of corporate cultures of control. With the emergence of market research, risk management, game theory, and other forms of knowledge based on statistical surveys and probability, the random occurrence became the unpredictable exception that proved the predictable rule.<sup>7</sup> While statistical thinking

may have theoretically robbed chance of its power, artists on both sides of the Atlantic mobilized randomness and indeterminacy as a counterpoint to the rapid standardization of experience attributable to increases in consumerism and functionalism. The emergence of a boundary-less postmodern culture in the late 1960s and 1970s inaugurated another major shift in assumptions about chance. As artists began to embrace all manner of representations and styles while querying notions of origin and authorship—a point of view crystallized by French theorist Roland Barthes in his landmark essay, “The Death of the Author” (1967)—chance was no longer readily conceived as a radical anti-convention capable of circumventing the status quo, but rather as one of many in a long line of modernist conventions.

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In the first part of this volume, three essays draw connections across media and disciplines, linking the genesis and meaning of artistic production through chance to larger sociocultural, historical, and theoretical contexts. Janine Mileaf explores the link between the deterministic force of gravity and chance as manifested in practices of dripping, dropping, and scattering from Dada to Process art in the 1960s and 1970s. She interprets the enactment of falling in art and the seemingly random distribution of materials across horizontal planes as generative practices signifying the relinquishment of total control over processes of production in favor of unintended outcomes and contingent forms. Susan Laxton scrutinizes the Surrealist pursuit of automatism and its many structural paradoxes. Following the evolution from a preoccupation with supposedly unmediated practices, such as automatic drawing, decalomania, and frottage, to the production of mechanical systems developed to guarantee chance outcomes, she unpacks the Surrealists’ desire to demonstrate the inevitability of mediation in all experience, even as they insisted on “making strange” as a resistance to a society organized on the basis of a means–ends rationality. Finally, my own essay looks at the pronounced turn to chance-based procedures in art of the late 1950s and early 1960s in both Western Europe and the United States. Focusing on Nouveau Réalisme and Fluxus, I explore how the use of chance, and the stance of casual detachment it implies, is symptomatic of a broader reconfiguration of artistic practice and subjectivity in the face of both an increasingly administered culture and the stifling hegemony of high-modernist art.

The second half of the catalog loosely replicates the three-part structure of the exhibition. This section includes a series of short texts with contributions by art historians Bradley Bailey and Emily Hage that provide contextual information on the artists as well as specific interpretations of individual artworks. Whenever possible, artists’ writings and excerpts from contemporary criticism have been included to further elucidate the diverse nature of the meanings assigned to chance and the divergent discourses used to describe and theorize its aesthetic application throughout the twentieth century.

#### NOTES

1. For an examination of chance in nineteenth-century art, see Dario Gamboni’s foundational work in his essay, “Fabrication of accidents: Fatura and chance in nineteenth-century art,” *Res: Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics* 36 (Autumn 1999): 205–25, and his book *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002).
2. There is no agreement among scholars of art history about the precise historical period to which the term “postmodernism” applies. Certainly there are works discussed here that display characteristically post-modern elements. While this project focuses on chance and modern art, this is not to say that chance is without relevance in postmodernism, but when applied outside of progressive modernist paradigms, its meaning and efficacy significantly alter so as to warrant another set of analytic criteria.
3. The importance of chance in the history of art has been widely recognized by artists, theorists, and art historians alike. Prominent examples of exhibitions that have addressed chance in modern art from a variety of perspectives include *Against Order: Chance and Art* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1970); *Chance and Change: A Century of the Avant-garde* (Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1985); *Art by Chance: Fortuitous Impressions* (Kansas City: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1989); *Zufall als Prinzip: Spielwelt, Methode und System in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Ludwigshafen: Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, 1992); and *Drawing on Chance: Selections from the Collection* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1995).

4. Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965), 59.

5. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, “Not By Chance Alone,” *Chance: The Catalogue*, ed. Sarah Gavlak and Chris Kraus (Santa Monica: Smart Art Press, 1996), n.p.

6. German physicist Werner Heisenberg’s publication of his principle of indeterminacy in 1927 revealed that any prediction is possible only on a statistical basis. Statistical thinking thus tamed chance by giving up the notion of universality in favor of a probabilistic model of natural law. See Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 2.

7. See Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* (New York: Viking, 2003), 21. Ian Hacking notes that the erosion of determinism at the end of the nineteenth century did not imply decay in knowledge or the creation of disorder; rather, a seeming paradox emerged—“the more the indeterminism, the more the control”—as chance became the loyal servant of the natural, biological, and social sciences. See Hacking, *Taming of Chance*, 2. See also Gerd Gigerenzer, et al., *The Empire of Chance: How Probability Changed Science and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).



Jean (Hans) Arp (French, b. Germany [Alsace], 1886–1966)

*Objets placés selon les lois du hasard III: Configuration symétrique (Objects Arranged according to the Laws of Chance III: Symmetrical Configuration)*, 1931

Oil on wood, 10 1/8 x 11 3/8 x 2 3/8"

As a founding member of Dada, Alsatian artist Jean Arp adopted Cubist collage to Dadaist ends, transforming it from a medium of semiotic analysis into one of chance composition. His series of collages “arranged according to the laws of chance” begun around 1916, have come to be recognized as iconic works in the history of chance aesthetics. To make these works, the artist purportedly tore pieces of paper of different colors, dropped them onto a surface, and glued them down where they fell. The fact that the pieces appear to have formed a rough grid calls into question the composition as a work of pure chance, however; as argued by T. J. Demos, Arp likely “invoked the former only to attack it with the latter.”<sup>1</sup>

Rejecting the logic and rationality that Arp and his fellow Dadaists linked to the violence and corruption of World War I (later, in 1948, Arp declared: “The chaos of our era is the result of that overestimating of reason”<sup>2</sup>), Arp sought in his art what he called “a denial of human egotism,” associating individual authorship with authoritarianism. He also attempted to sublimate his own subjectivity through collaboration, primarily with Swiss artist Sophie Taeuber, seeking “an anonymous and collective art.” Linked to Arp’s suspicion of authorship were his rejection of anthropocentrism and his creation of abstract forms, which he associated with a return to a more primal state. As he asserted of the Dadaists: “We rejected all mimesis and description, giving free rein to the Elementary and the Spontaneous.”

Although there is some uncertainty about when this series of collages was titled, and even

by whom, titles were important to Arp. In 1948, he explained the title of his series as follows:

Since the arrangement of planes and their proportions and colors seemed to hinge solely on chance, I declared that these works were arranged “according to the laws of chance,” as in the order of nature, chance being for me simply a part of an inexplicable reason, of an inaccessible order.

Arp’s statement points out the significance of the organic as a model in his work. It also highlights his understanding of chance as not completely haphazard, but having a certain inherent structure. Despite the importance of the accidental in the creation of these collages, the title most likely came about years after the work was made, after the Surrealists had begun to champion the role of the unpredictable in Arp’s art. In 1930, Surrealist writer Louis Aragon allied Arp’s collage technique with the Surrealists’ attempts to resist direct, authorial composition and subjectivity.<sup>3</sup> Arp’s language in his own retrospective explanation of the series title suggests that he, too, reframed his collage technique in terms developed by the Surrealists:

“The law of chance,” which comprises all other laws and surpasses our understanding (like the primal cause from which all life arises), can be experienced only in a total surrender to the unconscious.<sup>4</sup>

In 1930, under the same core title, Arp began a new series of wooden reliefs, which he referred to as “constellations.” In *Objects Arranged according to the Laws of Chance III: Symmetrical Configuration*, the first part of the title directly links this work to his earlier collages, while the contradictory nature of the subtitle, “Symmetrical Configuration,” underscores the element of control that he exerted over the composition. Throughout this series of wooden reliefs, Arp created different configurations using an identical support and the same set of oval shapes, or “navels,” which he considered emblematic of all biological life and open to interpretation. He arranged these ovals so that the shapes seem to jostle together, as if in a state of constant movement and recombination. These reliefs, like his earlier collages and other work, reflect Arp’s lifelong interest in

a mutable order free from the strictures of an artificial logic.

EH

#### NOTES

1. T. J. Demos, “Zurich Dada: The Aesthetics of Exile,” in *The Dada Seminars*, ed. Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 22.
2. Jean (Hans) Arp, “Dadaland” (1948), in *Arp on Arp: Poems, Essays, Memories, by Jean Arp*, ed. Marcel Jean, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 232. Unless otherwise noted, the following quotations are taken from the same source and page number.
3. As cited in and discussed by Anne Umland, “Jean [Hans] Arp,” in *Dada in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, ed. Anne Umland and Adrian Sudhalter with Scott Gerson (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 47.
4. Jean (Hans) Arp, “And So the Circle Closed” (1948), in *Arp on Arp*, 246.





Jean Dubuffet (French, 1901–1985)

*Tête barbue* (Bearded Head), 1959

Driftwood with barnacles, 11 1/8 x 8 1/2 x 4"

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, as after World War I, many artists waged a critique of the protocols and decorum of Western culture. After deciding to become an artist in 1942, Jean Dubuffet set out to repudiate received notions of taste, value, and beauty, proposing instead an art free of all conventions. The models for his reinvented art were found in the works produced by untrained individuals “untouched by artistic culture,” what he termed “*art brut*.”<sup>1</sup> Equating Western culture with a dead language, Dubuffet aimed for an art “which would be in immediate connection with daily life, an art which would start from this daily life, and which would be a very direct and very sincere expression of our real life and our real moods.”<sup>2</sup> He believed that true art must spring spontaneously and obsessively from the individual, resulting in a direct and singular expression of the self. While Dubuffet, by his own definition, could not be considered a maker of *art brut*, he embraced its conventions of compulsive repetition, bricolage, automatism, and chance throughout his career.

In 1954, Dubuffet combined his interest in assemblage and his desire to employ non-art materials to produce a series of sculptures titled *Petites statues de la vie précaire* (Little Statues of a Precarious Life).<sup>3</sup> Employing various ordinary and ephemeral materials, such as cinders, charcoal, sponges, and, in a second group of related works created in 1959–60, *papier-mâché*, aluminum foil, and driftwood, the artist developed a radical approach to sculpture in which the final work arose from the chance configuration and intrinsic nature of the given material. Made from a found piece of driftwood picked up after storms on the beaches of the Côte d’Azur, *Tête barbue* is essentially an *objet trouvé*. The artist’s hand performed a minimal amount of intervention in order to heighten the human semblance already existing in the amorphous but suggestive natural material. By burning a few lines and dotting the wood, a pair of eyes, a nose, and other subtle details emerged. Instead of attempting, like the Surrealists, to use found objects to evoke a transcendent reality, Dubuffet replaced the evocative object with banal materiality. “I’m a glutton for banality,” he

stated in 1959. “A roadway free of any unevenness or peculiarity, a dirty floor, a bare and dusty terrain, that no one would ever dream of looking at ... are reaches of intoxication and jubilation for me.”<sup>4</sup> In his drive to highlight values and materials dismissed by Western culture, what mattered to Dubuffet was unfettered spontaneity and truth to the self—and with that, a spirit of brazen opposition and impertinence.

MM

#### NOTES

1. Jean Dubuffet, “*Art Brut in Preference to the Cultural Arts*” (1949), trans. Paul Foss and Allen S. Weiss, *Art and Text* 27 (1988): 31–33. In 1945, Dubuffet began the systematic collection of more than five thousand artworks by those regarded as outside mainstream culture. The collection is now housed at the Musée de l’*Art Brut* in Lausanne, Switzerland.
2. Jean Dubuffet, “*Anticultural Positions*” (1951), reprinted in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 192.
3. The first series of statues was created in 1954 and consisted of forty-four sculptures. Dubuffet created a second group of thirty-two related sculptures between October 1959 and November 1960, including *Tête barbue*. For a complete overview of these related series, see Andreas Franzke, *Jean Dubuffet: Petites statues de la vie précaire* (Berlin: Verlag Gachnang & Springer, 1988).
4. Jean Dubuffet, “*Célébrations du sol*,” *Les Lettres Nouvelles* (April 1959), translated and reproduced in Mildred and Marc Glimcher, *Jean Dubuffet: Towards an Alternate Reality* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987), 167.





Niki de Saint Phalle (French, 1930–2002)

*Grand tir-séance Galerie J*, 30 June–12 July 1961

Plaster, paint, wire mesh, string, and plastic, 56 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 30 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub>"

**Violence and chance** were the key elements in Niki de Saint Phalle's *tirs*, or shooting paintings. To create these volatile works, she would first cover perishable and found objects—such as eggs, spaghetti, old shoes, plastic toys, and a diversity of junk items—along with several bags filled with paint, in white plaster. Then, taking up a rifle, she would fire at the assemblage, causing the paint sacks to burst, bleeding streaks of vibrant colors onto the white assemblage. The rifle, wielded by the artist or, at other times, by participants, assumed the decisive role in the creation of the work of art, thereby severing the direct connection between the artist's hand and the painterly mark. It was ultimately the skill of the shooter, the trajectory of the bullet, and the force of gravity that determined the final outcome.

*Grand tir-séance Galerie J* was created on the occasion of Saint Phalle's exhibition *Feu à volonté* (Fire at Will) at the Galerie J in Paris in the summer of 1961. Visitors to the exhibition—who notably included Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, Jean Fautrier, and many of Saint Phalle's fellow Nouveaux Réalistes—were invited to take up a rifle and shoot at the prepared assemblages, thus transforming the space of the gallery from one of quiet reverence to impromptu, explosive activity.<sup>1</sup> While prized art objects were produced during this event in the form of the assemblages, it was the fleeting, anarchistic moment when the shot was released that held the greatest importance for the artist. In a 1961 television interview with David Brinkley, she explained: "The shooting is the moment. It is the only thing that lives because everything is dead afterwards. Nothing lives. Cézanne, Rembrandt, everything will be dead in the end. The shooting is that one moment in which the miracle happens."<sup>2</sup> The relationship between beauty and brutality, creation and destruction, is thoroughly entangled in her reliefs, which exist as evocative traces of these participatory events.

Many critics from the early 1960s, as well as subsequent scholars, interpret Saint Phalle's violent acts in predominantly biographical terms: as a rejection of her bourgeois upbringing and in reaction to events suffered

during her childhood.<sup>3</sup> Although these interpretations reveal important aspects of her work, they tend to overlook the historical specificity of her shooting sessions for audiences in both Europe and America during what was a moment of intense political upheaval and violent unrest.<sup>4</sup> "My problem," she passionately stated during the Brinkley interview, "is creating, is creating now, is creating beauty, is creating something, is creating something which has to do with you, which has to do with now, which has to do with bombs and everything and the end of the world and BANG!"

MM

#### NOTES

1. Niki de Saint Phalle began her shooting performances in early 1961 and continued to stage them for three years. Her exhibition at the Galerie J was her first shooting performance inside a gallery. The gallery was required to obtain a shooting gallery license before police would allow the show to go on. See Lois Dickert, "Shooting at Malibu" (Spring 1962), unpublished manuscript in the collection of the Niki Charitable Art Foundation, Santee, California.
2. Niki de Saint Phalle, interview with David Brinkley (NBC, New York, 1961). A tape of this program is housed at the Niki Charitable Art Foundation, Santee, California.
3. Saint Phalle has reinforced such interpretations of her work. In her writings on the *tirs*, she referred to them as therapy for trauma reaching back to her relationship with her father. Additionally, Jill Carrick has recently examined Saint Phalle's work in terms of fetishism and feminine masquerade. See Jill Carrick, "Phallic Victories? Niki de Saint Phalle's *Tirs*," *Art History* 26, no. 5 (November 2003): 700–729.
4. Saint Phalle garnered an extraordinary amount of media attention for her shooting sessions, yet few critics reviewing her exhibition at the Galerie J in 1961 drew direct links between the shooting taking place in the art gallery and the violence, occurring right outside the front door, relating to the Algerian War for Independence, which began in 1954 and escalated in the summer of 1961, including a series of terrorist actions in the city of Paris.



Dieter Roth (Swiss, 1930–1998)

*Kleiner Sonnenuntergang (Small Sunset)*, 1968

Sausage on paper in plastic bag, 16 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 12 <sup>9</sup>/<sub>16</sub>"  
[right]

*Small Landscape*, 1969

Pressing, soft cheese on emery paper, in plastic sleeve, 12 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 30 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub>"

*Big Cloud*, 1971

Felt pen and mayonnaise on white paper, 29 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 39 <sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub>"  
[below]



Although initially an adherent to the stringent rules of Concrete art and poetry, by the early 1960s Dieter Roth liberated himself from formal and linguistic conventions and began to use cheap, everyday materials to create objects made from books, newspapers, and various foodstuffs such as cheese, bananas, sausage, mayonnaise, milk, and chocolate. His incorporation of organic materials was a means of displaying the effects of time, letting his works develop through the natural process of decay rather than through the direct interference of the artist's hand. Furthermore, Roth employed decomposition and the chance transformations that came with it as a means of parodying the serious tone and preservationist impulse he perceived in the postwar art world. Roth's works were not to be fully controlled, but to develop according to the environmental conditions under which they were kept—temperature, humidity, and light—continuing to alter over time.<sup>1</sup> One example of this variability is *Small Sunset*, one in a series of multiples he made by placing a slice of sausage between two sheets of paper, enclosing it in plastic, and letting the fat from the sausage slowly soak into the paper to create the composition.<sup>2</sup> Because of the varied conditions in which versions of the work were produced, each *Small Sunset* is essentially unique, arriving at a form of seriality without repetition.

For Roth, an artwork was not so much a product as a process. Rather than striving for permanence, he reveled in the transitory and relished the abject. *Small Landscape* and *Big Cloud* are two similar examples of multiples—made with cheese and mayonnaise, respectively—that parody traditionally romantic themes with decidedly unromantic materials.<sup>3</sup> The works elicit sensations of both attraction and repulsion: visually stunning yet rancid, playful yet putrefying. Created in the aftermath of the student revolts of 1968 and during a volatile period of economic downturn, these multiples reveal a more transgressive side of Roth's work. The use of food and other organic materials was a way for him to defy traditional categories while positing chance and continuous transformation in opposition to the stagnation of institutional art.

MM



#### NOTES

1. The question of the proper preservation of Dieter Roth's work is an ongoing one for museums. See Heide Skowranek, "Should We Reproduce the Beauty of Decay? A *Museumsleben* in the Work of Dieter Roth," *Tate Papers* (Autumn 2007), <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/07autumn/skowranek.htm> (accessed December 21, 2008).

2. Like his contemporaries in Fluxus, Nouveau Réalisme, and Pop art, Dieter Roth was a pioneering figure in the creation of multiples. The format offered the potential for wide-scale distribution beyond art world circles while furthering his challenge to the elite status of the art object.

3. See Tanja Maka, *Eat Art: Joseph Beuys, Dieter Roth, Sonja Alhäuser*, no. 33 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, 2001), 8.



## Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956)

### *Untitled*, 1949

Oil and enamel on canvas mounted on masonite, 18 x 23"  
[above]

### *Untitled*, c. 1950

Ink on paper, 18 7/8 x 24 3/4"  
[p. 15]

**Few artists have experienced** as profound a conflict with their own technique as Jackson Pollock, an artist whose name today is synonymous with spontaneity and the gesture. But a technique in which the artist must give over considerable control of the creative process to the medium itself was not an ideal match for one as crippled as Pollock was by anxiety, self-doubt, and paranoia that he would be revealed to the world as a “phony.”<sup>1</sup> Pollock did not discover or

invent the technique of dripping or pouring paint, and he was certainly aware that Max Ernst, Hans Hofmann, and the largely forgotten Janet Sobel had explored this territory before he made it part of the American postwar cultural landscape in the pages of *Life* magazine.<sup>2</sup> Pollock was, in a sense, the perfect storm of demographic and introverted machismo that the nation was looking for, a John Wayne to wrest the reins of the art world away from the European antagonist.

Whether it was or was not self-inflicted, the tremendous pressure under which Pollock found himself was unquestionably a major factor in his eventual wholesale rejection of the idea that anything in his work was arbitrary or a product of chance. His rhetoric in statements like “When I am *in* my painting ... I'm not aware of what I'm doing” from 1949 quickly changed to rebukes in 1950 aimed at suggestions of randomness, disorder, and unpredictability in his work, such as “I deny the accident,” and the decidedly more vehement “NO CHAOS DAMN IT.”<sup>3</sup>

While his protestations of control evoke an element of neurosis in his personality, there is little question that Pollock possessed a masterful facility with the medium, and that his control related not only to the manipulation of material but of space and density as well. A comparison of the oil painting on canvas, *Untitled* (1949), with the ink-on-paper drawing of 1950, for example, reveals his capacity to shift between densely layered compositions and open arrangements that evince a more calligraphic quality.

As with Robert Motherwell, Pollock's gestural technique was in part a response to Surrealist automatism in the work of André Masson, Roberto Matta, and other European artists in exile in the United States in the late 1930s. Additional inspirations for his groundbreaking process include the practices of Navajo sand painters that Pollock witnessed firsthand, the experimental painting techniques encouraged at the workshop of Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros that Pollock attended in New York in 1936, drawing techniques developed out of Jungian psychoanalytical sessions, Herbert Matter's experimental use of strobe lights and multiple exposures to capture motion in photography, and existentialist philosophy. Recent scholarship also points to Pollock's interest in the now-largely forgotten philosophy of vitalism, a “perhaps unlikely east / west fusion containing—among other influences—Aristotelian immanence, Zen Buddhism, Sufism, Hinduism, and [Gottfried] Leibniz” that purported to offer greater access to the forces and energies that flow through all living things.<sup>4</sup> But as successful and influential as Pollock was with his process

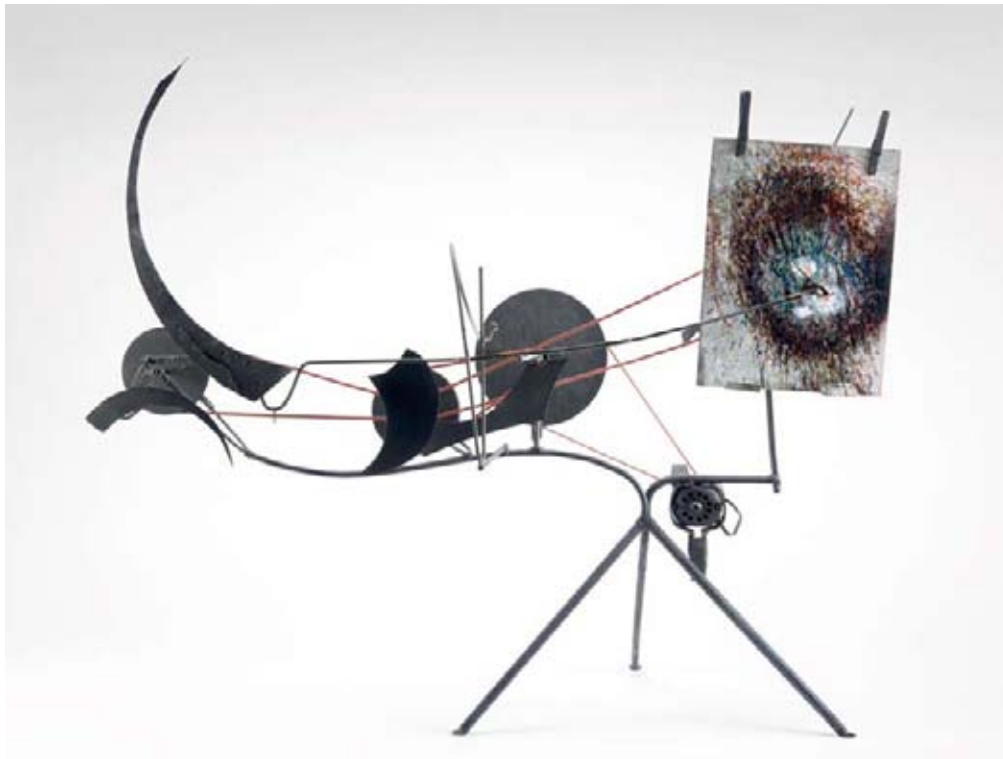
of making paintings of “energy and motion made visible,”<sup>5</sup> he was also partially paralyzed by the significance of this process; despite a few experiments with different materials, his productivity dropped off severely during the last years of his life. Independent of the artist and his flaws, Pollock's aesthetic remains fascinating in its ability to defy and yet demonstrate order so effectively.<sup>6</sup>

BB

### NOTES

1. Pollock used the word “phony” over and over during an infamously disastrous evening that followed the last day of Hans Namuth's shooting of a film about the artist at work. For details of Pollock's eruption that evening, see Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1989), 651–53.
2. See “Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?,” *Life*, August 8, 1949, 42–45.
3. Pollock's assertion of “I deny the accident” was made during a radio interview with William Wright in 1950. For a transcript of the interview, see Pepe Karmel, ed., *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 20–23. “NO CHAOS DAMN IT” was written by Pollock in a telegram to the editor of *Time* in response to the magazine's article “Chaos, Damn It!,” which quoted a healthy portion of Bruno Alfieri's essay “A Short Statement on the Painting of Jackson Pollock,” published in *L'Arte Moderna* (June 8, 1950). See *Jackson Pollock: Interviews*, 68–71. For an extended discussion of control in Pollock's work, see Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Paintings in the 1940s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 276–83.
4. Jonathan D. Katz, “Jackson Pollock's Vitalism: Herbert Matter and the Vitalist Tradition,” in *Pollock Matters*, ed. Ellen G. Landau and Claude Cernuschi (Chestnut Hill, MA: McMullen Museum of Art; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 59–71.
5. Jackson Pollock, from a handwritten statement on the back of a photograph in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, reprinted in *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works*, vol. 4, ed. Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 253.
6. Recent use of the sophisticated mathematics of fractal geometry to look for patterns and other evidence of organization in the seemingly chaotic system of Pollock's process only serves to reinforce how closely the mysteries and vast complexities of nature are reflected in his paintings. See Claude Cernuschi and Andrzej Hercynski, “Cutting Pollock Down to Size: The Boundaries of the Poured Technique,” in *Pollock Matters*, 82–84; and Claude Cernuschi, Andrzej Hercynski, and David Martin, “Abstract Expressionism and Fractal Geometry,” in *ibid.*, 91–104.





## Jean Tinguely (Swiss, 1925–1991)

### *Metamatic No. 9*, 1958

Round rubber belt, steel rods, painted sheet metal, wire wooden pulleys, two clothes pins, and electric motor, 35 1/2 x 56 5/8 x 14 1/4"  
[above]

### *Metamatic* drawings from *Metamatic No. 9*, 1959

Seven ink on paper drawings, 12 3/4 x 9 3/4" each  
[right; p. 56]

**Swiss artist Jean Tinguely**, perhaps best known for his self-destroying assemblages such as *Homage to New York*, which randomly shook, banged, and burned itself to pieces at the Museum of Modern Art's Sculpture Garden in 1960, was a member of the Paris-based group of artists known as the Nouveaux Réalistes. Many of the Nouveaux Réalistes, including Arman, Niki de Saint Phalle, and Daniel Spoerri, engaged in

works that challenged conventional definitions of art and its production by incorporating everyday objects, chance, and audience participation as key elements of their artistic practice—Tinguely chief among them.

Assembled from objects found in the junkyards of Paris and animated by secondhand electronic motors, Tinguely's *Metamatics* were typically composed of scrap metal, along with

a series of disks, rubber bands, a small board to which paper was secured, and a metal arm with a clip used to hold a marker or pen. Once a piece of paper was attached to the given board and a pen secured in its fastener, the entire machine shook violently, emitting cacophonous sounds and producing "unique" abstract drawings. Tinguely described his *Metamatics* as "anti-machine machines," noting how the abstract drawings they produced were always different because the motors were constructed in such a way that the machines were incapable of producing "that dull repetitive action so typical of ordinary machines."<sup>1</sup> By removing the direct trace of the artist's hand and replacing it with the workings of his chaotic machines, Tinguely's sculptures were widely recognized as a sarcastic critique of both the spontaneous gestures and the heroic posturing of practitioners of postwar abstraction.

While his perverse mechanization of the artistic process supplanted traditional notions of artistic genius with that of the modern *bricoleur* and the practical joker, it also revealed his critical engagement with social concerns and anxieties specific to the postwar period—namely, the effects of automation and serialized industrial production on modern daily life. The title *Metamatic*, with its play on the word "automatic" and its definition as a machine that operates autonomously, conjures up images of self-service and commercial vending machines. Indeed, when exhibited at the Iris Clert Gallery in Paris in 1959, coin slots were fitted to each of the machines and visitors had to pay to play them as if at an arcade. Instead of a signature, the works produced were stamped: "Painting executed in collaboration with Tinguely's *metamatic No. \_\_*." Although nominally unique, each painting was thus always recognized as part of a series originating from Tinguely's *Metamatics*.<sup>2</sup>

By brazenly blurring the boundaries between art and mass-produced commodities, Tinguely humorously reveled in the paradox of automatic production. While human energy is saved from carrying out excessively repetitive tasks, the individual is deprived of the possibility of contributing something truly personal to the final product.<sup>3</sup> Tinguely promoted consumption by offering participants a variety of



secondary features to "personalize" a given work, such as choice of color and duration and speed of execution, but the style of the work was ironically predetermined by the arbitrary movements of his unstable machines. Severely restricting human mediation in the actual production of a drawing to a few habitual acts and nominal selections, Tinguely's *Metamatics* wittily demonstrate how the supposedly liberatory elements of chance and choice can all too easily become tools of commodification and instrumentality.

MM

#### NOTES

1. Jean Tinguely, as quoted in John Rydon, "Mr. Tinguely Puts on a Show of Self-Propelled Art," *Daily Express* (London, October 14, 1959), n.p.
2. Only a few days before the opening of the exhibition at the Iris Clert Gallery, Jean Tinguely applied for an industrial patent for his *Metamatics*. According to the explanatory text, the machines could be applied to a variety of uses: as a toy, for the realization of abstract drawings and paintings capable of being exhibited and preserved, and for the continuous decoration of rolls of paper or cloth.
3. Jean Baudrillard's observations in *The System of Objects* (1968) regarding the modern notion of models and series of consumer products is particularly useful in analyzing the ways in which personalization through choice works in Tinguely's machines. Baudrillard notes that no serially produced industrial object appears on the market as a single type, but with a range of inessential differences that create the illusion of choice.



Kazuo Shiraga (Japanese, b. 1924)

*Dragons Emerging from the Forest*, 1961  
Oil on canvas, 51 1/2 x 51 1/4"

As a key member of the Gutai Art Association founded in Osaka, Japan, in 1954 under the leadership of Jiro Yoshihara, Kazuo Shiraga carried out innovative artistic experiments, incorporating performative events and unorthodox materials that defied traditional notions of art making. Gutai, which literally means “concreteness,” emerged at a time when the Japanese avant-garde was struggling to rediscover its voice after being silenced by state repression in the years before and during World War II.<sup>1</sup> Gutai artists emphasized the role of process over product, rejecting the creation of representational objects in favor of presentational modes of action that extended the boundaries of painting into real time and space. In the “Gutai Manifesto,” published in 1956, Yoshihara wrote:

Gutai Art does not alter the material.  
Gutai Art imparts life to the material.  
Gutai Art does not distort the material.  
In Gutai Art, the human spirit and the material shake hands with each other, but keep their distance.... To make the fullest use of the material is to make use of the spirit. By enhancing the spirit, the material is brought to the height of the spirit.<sup>2</sup>

For Yoshihara, art was the direct reflection of the liberated self in the temporal here and now, as expressed through the chance collaboration between physical action and material. The members’ use of their bodies as material and the introduction of natural elements and everyday objects such as mud, sand, lightbulbs, and smoke were aimed at reinvesting matter with spirit. In its approach, Gutai shared certain affinities with action painting and *art informel*, a mode of gestural abstraction that became prevalent in Europe during the postwar period, which were both derived in part from Surrealist automatism.<sup>3</sup> Yet members of the Gutai group were intentionally disinterested in the formalist arguments of modern Euro-American abstract art, and were averse to the use of art as political activism or nationalist propaganda.

Shiraga was among the most enterprising of the group, and his action event *Challenging the Mud* (1955), in which he jumped on top of a mud pile and kicked and wrestled with it, remains

one of Gutai’s most iconic works. Shiraga’s foot paintings, which he began shortly before joining Gutai in 1955, also earned him widespread recognition. To create a work such as *Dragons Emerging from the Forest*, the artist would swing back and forth from a rope attached to the ceiling and push wet oil paint with his feet across unstretched canvas placed on the floor. In 1955, Shiraga described the origin of his technique:

When I first discovered what seemed to be my own talent—when I decided to be “naked,” to shed all conventional ideas—forms flew out the window and techniques slipped off my painting knife and shattered. In front of me lay an austere road to originality. Run forward, I thought, run and run, it won’t matter if I fall down.... Let me do it with my hands, with my fingers. Then, as I ran, thinking that I was moving forward, it occurred to me: Why not feet? Why don’t I paint with my feet?<sup>4</sup>

Made without a brush or any of the usual tools of painting, this work evinces how Shiraga largely abandoned creative control to the caprices of chance while translating his bodily actions into painting. The finished work stands as a record of his unfettered spins, thrashes, and slips—pure bodily expression enacted, in part, as a response to the awareness of humanity’s fragility in the aftermath of the destruction of the war.

MM

#### NOTES

1. Gutai lasted until 1972, the year of Yoshihara’s death, but its most fervent period of activity was in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

2. Jiro Yoshihara, “The Gutai Manifesto” (1956), as quoted in Alexandra Munroe, ed. *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream against the Sky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 84. Originally published in Japanese as “Gutaibijutsu sengen,” in *Geijutsu shincho* 7, no. 12 (December 1956).

3. Jackson Pollock’s all-over drip compositions, with their brute materialism, were recognized as catalysts for the group as a whole. French critic Michel Tapié was introduced to Gutai during a trip to Japan in fall 1957. He commended the group for its affinities with *art informel* and became a conduit between the Japanese group and the Western art world. Allan Kaprow later characterized Gutai action events as forerunners to Happenings.

4. Kazuo Shiraga, “Only Action,” *Gutai* 3 (October 20, 1955): 22, as quoted in Munroe, *Japanese Art after 1945*, 372–73.



**William Anastasi** (American, b. 1933)

*Untitled* (V. Dwan 10.4.67), 1967

*Untitled* (Sol LeWitt 11-19-69), 1969

*Untitled* (12-4-69 Angelo Savelli), 1969

Pencil on paper drawings, 7 1/2 x 11 1/2" each

[p. 39]

*Untitled* (one gallon of industrial high-gloss enamel, poured), 1966 / 2009

Enamel paint, variable dimensions

[below]



In the 1960s, conceptual artist William Anastasi began a series of “unsighted” works—blind drawings, pocket drawings, and subway drawings—which aimed to bypass artistic control by submitting the graphic process to chance. Inspired by composer John Cage’s systematic use of chance as a compositional principle, Anastasi established situations that depend on a combination of accident and predetermined limitations. To create his series of subway drawings, which is still ongoing today, the artist takes a seat on a train (in the 1970s, this often took place on the way to a weekly chess game with Cage), places a sketchpad on his lap, takes a pencil in each hand, rests the points on the paper, holds his elbows stiffly at a 90 degree angle, is careful not to let his back touch the seat, and closes his eyes. He also wears firing-range headphones to block out all sound, transforming a cacophonous situation into an almost meditative one.<sup>1</sup> By giving up control of his hands and the use of his eyes, Anastasi lets the movement of his body, dictated by the rocking of the subway, determine the composition of each drawing. While his rejection of conscious compositional control can be compared to Surrealist automatism, the artist claims no psychological goals, favoring instead an emphasis on physicality and phenomenology. His body becomes in essence a device to absorb and record subtle movements over a given period of time. The resultant drawings are all similar in appearance—composed of two clusters of scrawls, scratches, and scribbles—yet each one reveals subtle variations: the markings appear thicker or more scattered depending on the length of the artist’s subway ride and the twists and turns of a given route. When, paradoxically, Anastasi expresses dismay over the fact that there are imitation subway drawings in circulation, we are reminded of how difficult abandoning the self really is.<sup>2</sup>

In his installations originating from the same period as his subway drawings, Anastasi follows the same basic principle of making: the production of an indeterminate result is contingent upon the establishment of specific parameters and arbitrary limits set in advance. To create *Untitled* (one gallon of industrial high-gloss enamel, poured), for instance, Anastasi

pours one gallon of paint down a wall, starting as close to the top of the wall as possible, letting gravity take over as the pigment forms a puddle on the floor. In a sister piece also first created in 1966, the parameters are similar but the paint is thrown against a wall rather than poured. Anastasi’s process of pouring and throwing paint, which he spells out in the subtitles of his artworks, wittily subverts the rhetoric of heroic individualism and authentic mark making associated with high-modernist abstraction. The literalness of Anastasi’s physical, task-based drawings, combined with his willingness to abdicate authorial responsibility for his art, resonates strongly with the tactics employed by Marcel Duchamp as well as those of numerous conceptual and process-driven projects undertaken throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

MM

NOTES

1. In a 1995 interview with Anne Barclay Morgan, Anastasi stated: “I wear these headphones that make it very quiet, and it could be a train full of people, but once I close my eyes, I am able, for a couple of minutes... not to be there, and to not be there in art, to be somewhere else, away from the artist in me.” William Anastasi, interview with Anne Barclay Morgan, *Art Papers* 19, no. 6 (November / December 1995): 25.

2. William Anastasi, conversation with author, December 18, 2008, New York City.



## Marcel Duchamp

(American, born France, 1887–1968)

### *Three Standard Stoppages*, 1964

(replica of 1913–14 original)

Thread on canvas attached to glass, wood sticks, enclosed in wood croquet case, 51 x 11 1/8 x 9" (case) [p. 10]

**Just as Marcel Duchamp** demonstrated with his introduction of the readymade that virtually any object selected by an artist could be understood as a work of art, so too did his groundbreaking inauguration of chance procedures in art establish that any force could be a creative one if specifically chosen

### *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires même (La Boîte verte)*

(*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even [The Green Box]*), 1934

Ninety-four facsimile documents in a green suede box, 13 1/16 x 11 1/8 x 1" [above]

by the artist to act in such a capacity. With the introduction of the element of chance, Duchamp could distance himself from the creative process, circumventing the insertion of his own judgment or taste. Duchamp called this process in which the parameters are defined by the artist and the outcomes are controlled

by outside forces or determinants “canned chance,” the best known and most influential example of which is arguably his *Three Standard Stoppages* from 1913–14.

During a period of intense productivity beginning in 1913 and gradually waning toward 1923, Duchamp executed what many consider his most important work, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (known as *The Large Glass*), a complex object of oil, varnish, lead foil, wire, and dust on two glass panels that he left “definitively unfinished” in 1923. His notes for *The Large Glass*, which were intended to serve as a textual analog to its visual manifestation, along with notes for numerous other projects, were collected by the artist in 1934 in *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Green Box)*, which became known simply as *The Green Box*. Carefully reproduced on scraps of paper torn to mimic the original notes, the written materials in *The Green Box* are arranged in no particular order, leaving the viewer free to leaf randomly through these unbound sheets. The notes that comprise *The Green Box* contain instructions for chance operations inspired by the proto-Surrealist language games of Duchamp’s early hero, the French poet Raymond Roussel, as well as Duchamp’s own unique understanding of advancements in contemporary mathematics. *The Green Box* also contains a facsimile of *Erratum Musical*, Duchamp’s 1913 musical score created entirely through chance procedures, including the artist and his two sisters drawing “as many notes out of a hat as there were syllables in the dictionary definition of the word ‘imprimer’ (‘empreinte’), picked up by chance.”<sup>1</sup> The seventy-five musical notes were inserted in the order chosen for three voices, but with no instructions for how the work should be performed.

Another note in *The Green Box* reads “3 Standard Stops = canned chance—1914,” a reference to a note in Duchamp’s *Box of 1914* that lays out the procedure through which he created the *Three Standard Stoppages*. Dropping three horizontal strings one meter in length from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane, to which they were immediately attached with varnish to maintain their respective shapes, Duchamp enacted

the course of action that would result in the melding of pseudo-science (“playful physics,” in Duchamp’s words), mathematics, and chance that formed the foundation of *The Large Glass*. The *Stoppages* subsequently became the model for other works derived from *The Large Glass* that incorporated chance and gravity, such as the photograph *Dust Breeding* of 1920, in which Duchamp and his frequent collaborator Man Ray photographed the lower portion of *The Large Glass* horizontally positioned and covered in months worth of dust. As a critique of the notion of standardized measurement, it is worth noting that the *Stoppages* was created shortly after Duchamp was asked to withdraw his *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912) from the Salon des Indépendents.<sup>2</sup> An embittered Duchamp could have intended the *Stoppages* as a critique of all standards, including notions of taste and quality in art. “In itself it was not an important work of art,” Duchamp told Katharine Kuh in an interview, “but for me it opened the way—the way to escape from those traditional methods of expression long associated with art... For me the *Three Stoppages* was a first gesture liberating me from the past.”<sup>3</sup>

BB

#### NOTES

1. Marcel Duchamp, as quoted in Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp: The Box in a Valise*, trans. David Britt (New York:Rizzoli,1989), 10. According to Arturo Schwarz, the notes were likely derived from a cut-up piano score. This type of procedure was anticipated by Lewis Carroll, the tala and raga systems in Indian music, and even by Mozart. See Arturo Schwarz, ed., *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, third edition, (New York: Delano Greenridge, 1997), 187.
2. On the relationship of the *Stoppages* to non-Euclidean geometry and the French standard meter, see Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in The Large Glass and Related Works* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 61–63.
3. Marcel Duchamp, in Katharine Kuh, “Marcel Duchamp,” in her *The Artist’s Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 81.



**Victor Brauner**  
(Romanian, 1903–1966)

**Jacques Hérold**  
(Romanian, b. 1910)

**Yves Tanguy**  
(French, 1900–1955)

*Exquisite Corpse*, c. 1932  
Graphite and collage on paper,  
10 1/2 x 7 7/8"

**André Breton**  
(French, 1896–1966)

**Jacqueline Lamba**  
(French, 1910–1993)

**Yves Tanguy**  
(French, 1900–1955)

*Untitled "Cadavre exquis"*  
(*"Exquisite Corpse"*), 1938  
Collage on graph paper,  
10 5/16 x 5 1/2"  
[right]

**Victor Brauner**  
(Romanian, 1903–1966)

**Jacques Hérold**  
(Romanian, 1910–1987)

**Violette Hérold**

**Yves Tanguy**  
(French, 1900–1955)

**Raoul Ubac**  
(Belgian, 1910–1985)

*Untitled "Cadavre exquis"*  
(*"Exquisite Corpse"*), 1938  
Graphite and collage on paper,  
10 3/8 x 8 1/16"  
[p. 37]

In 1925, the Surrealists began creating what they called "exquisite corpse" texts and images. Based on parlor and children's games, the technique for making these bizarre compositions involves the collective and random creation of a text or figure according to a set of rules. In the written version of the game, each collaborator adds to a composition in sequence, either by writing a series of predetermined classes of words (adjective, noun, verb, et cetera) or by responding to the last word or phrase written by the previous participant. Founding member André Breton explained that the goal of this technique was "to provide the most paradoxical confrontation possible between the elements of speech, so that human communication, diverted thus initially from its logical path, should impart the greatest possible sense of adventure to the mind recording it." The name the Surrealists gave to this playful process comes from a phrase that resulted from one of the first sentences they produced in this way: "The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine" (*"Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau"*).

The visual version of the game involves the first player drawing a head (or a head-shaped form), then folding the paper over so that what has been drawn cannot be seen by the second person, who draws the next portion of the body, folds the paper again and passes it along to another, and so on until the figure is complete. Often participants drew objects that stand in for

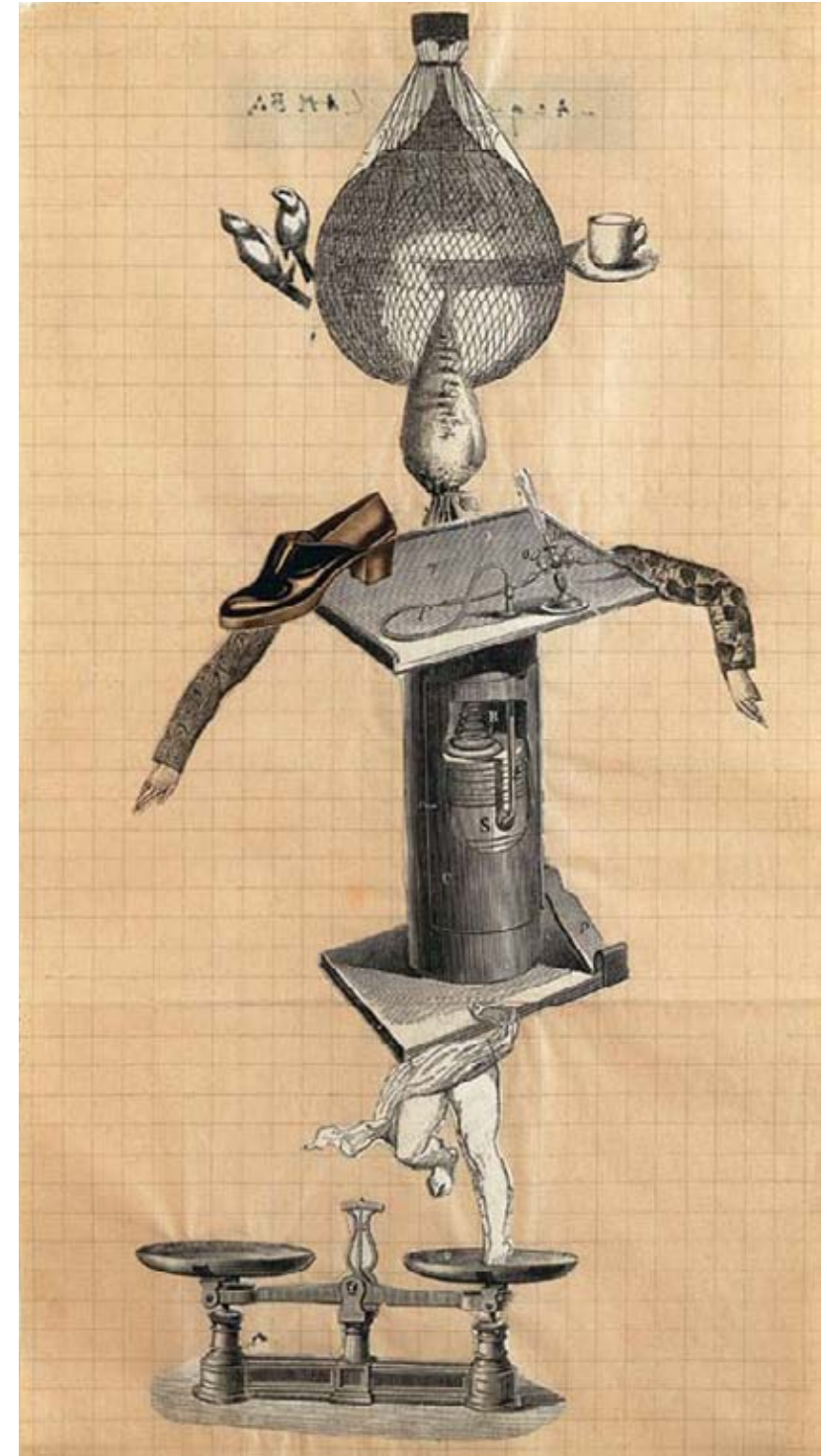
body parts, creating a hybrid figure made up of incongruous pieces that require the viewer to use his or her imagination to interpret the results. In the 1930s, the Surrealists refined this game by including collage techniques. For example, a piece by André Breton, Jacqueline Lamba, and Yves Tanguy is made up of cutouts of drawings. A hot air balloon turned upside-down serves as the head with a cup and saucer and two birds for ears, while a carrot (or some other root vegetable) functions as the neck and a shoe forms one of the figure's shoulders. However, the end product was not entirely coincidental. As with the group's automatic writings and drawings, the Surrealists often added to their exquisite corpse images.

The aleatory and communal characteristics of this method appealed to the Surrealists, who valued its de-emphasis on skill and single authorship as well as the seemingly endless number of combinations it could generate. Although the more advanced works of the 1930s indicate the degree to which the technique had been adapted over the years, they also bear witness to the Surrealists' broader interest in the continued manipulation of the creative potential of a game with rules to generate unforeseen results.

EH

#### NOTES

1. André Breton, "The Exquisite Corpse, Its Exaltation" (1948), in his *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 288.



## John Cage (American, 1912–1992)

### Score for *Music of Changes*, 1951

© Henmar Press Inc., 1961  
Sheet music, 11 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 8 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"

### Score for *Fontana Mix*, 1958

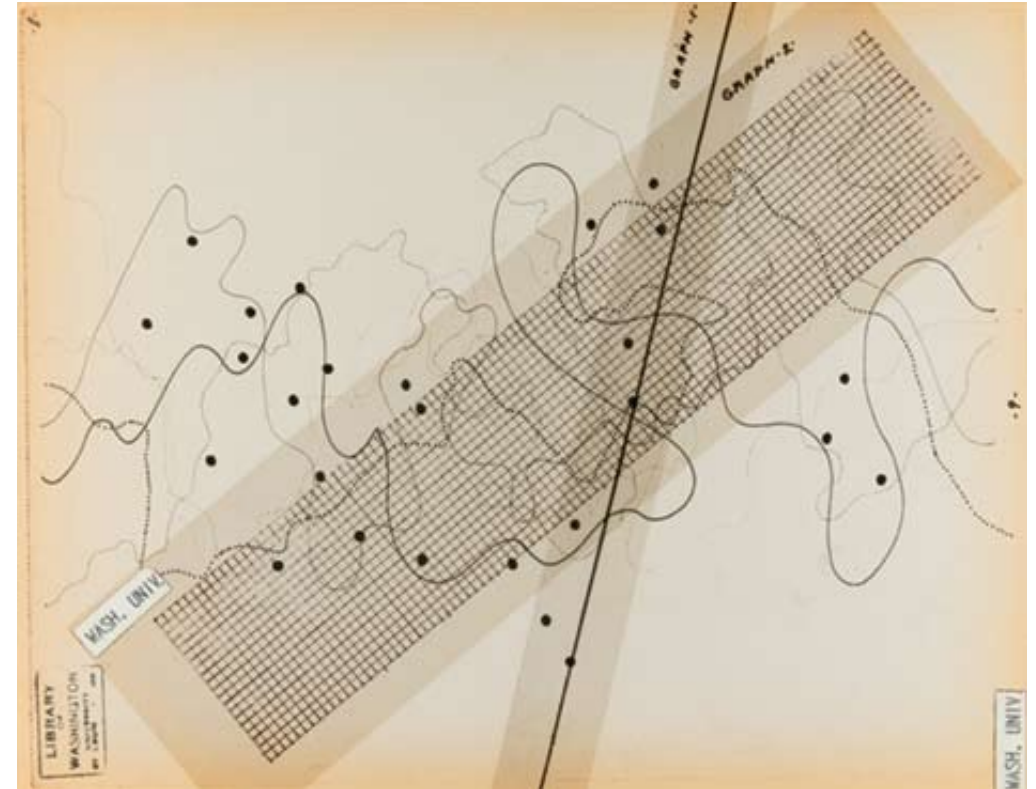
© Henmar Press Inc., 1960  
Sheet music on mylar, variable dimensions  
[right]

While Marcel Duchamp's experiments with aleatory music may have preceded John Cage's by several decades, Cage remains the composer most immediately associated with the exploration of what he called "chance operations" in the composition and performance of music. In the 1930s, Cage studied with a succession of avant-garde composers, most notably Arnold Schoenberg, one of the pioneers of atonality, or music composed without the use of a traditional tonal or key structure, often resulting in chord progressions that may sound random or dissonant. In numerous instances, however, Cage contended that the most profound influence on his work was Marcel Duchamp, whose efforts to undermine traditional ideas of aesthetic judgment in creative art, as well as his use of chance and found objects, continued to challenge and drive Cage toward work of an increasingly progressive and uncompromising nature.<sup>1</sup> Other influences included a mixture of Indian philosophies via Gita Sarabhai and Ananda Coomaraswamy, Zen Buddhism, the fourteenth-century mystic Meister Eckhardt, avant-garde composer Morton Feldman's use of graph paper to notate sounds numerically, Merce Cunningham's revolutionary incorporation of everyday movements into dance, Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* (1951), and, perhaps the most significant of all, the ancient Chinese oracular text the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*.<sup>2</sup> In turn, Cage himself became an extraordinarily influential figure through his compositions and lectures as well as his courses at Black Mountain College and the New School for Social Research, which were formative in the

development of both happenings and Fluxus.

The key to Cage's approach to writing music was discontinuity, or the elimination of any subjective or conscious arrangements of sound in a composition by employing procedures through which "sounds would be made to follow each other in a manner indeterminate of the other sounds in the sequence."<sup>3</sup> Few of Cage's compositions exemplify discontinuity better than the groundbreaking solo piano piece, inspired by processes described in the *I Ching*, titled *Music of Changes*, his first work based wholly on chance operations, wherein each decision regarding "his selection of pitches, nonpitched percussive sounds, durations, amplitude, tempo, and other variables are not dictated by conscious choice ... but rather are derived from the tossing of coins, which in turn refer to a carefully prepared list of possibilities."<sup>4</sup>

Indeterminacy, by which subjectivity is removed from both the composition and the performance of the work, often taking advantage of "non-intentional" sounds, is at the heart of Cage's *Fontana Mix* (1958), the score for which consists of ten transparencies with points, ten opaque paper sheets with six different types of lines, a graph, and a line (the latter two on transparencies), all to be used to plot out a composition.<sup>5</sup> The score for *Fontana Mix* contains no music, only the means by which a composer can arrange six different classes of sounds or actions based on the interactions of the lines, points, and the graph. While Cage used prerecorded environmental and artificial (man-made) sounds in *Fontana*



*Mix* to create an eponymous sound collage of spliced, multichannel audiotape (as well as numerous other compositions in the ensuing years), he indicated in the score that the material "may be used freely for instrumental, vocal and theatrical purposes."<sup>6</sup> Scores such as *Fontana Mix* may offer the impression that Cage used both chance operations and indeterminacy to avoid making any choices. For Cage, however, the critical choices ("composing," in the traditional sense) are already made prior to the implementation of the procedure—or, as the composer himself said: "My choices consist in choosing what questions to ask."<sup>7</sup>

BB

#### NOTES

1. See Margorie Perloff, "A Duchamp unto my self: 'Writing through' Marcel," in *John Cage: Composer in America*, ed. Marjorie Perloff and

Charles Junkerman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 100–101.

2. The *I Ching* has been used for centuries to predict trends and shifts in the universe through interpreting the results of chance procedures such as coin tosses with the sets of diagrams provided.

3. Branden W. Joseph, "Robert Morris and John Cage: Reconstructing a Dialogue," *October* 81 (Summer 1997): 63.

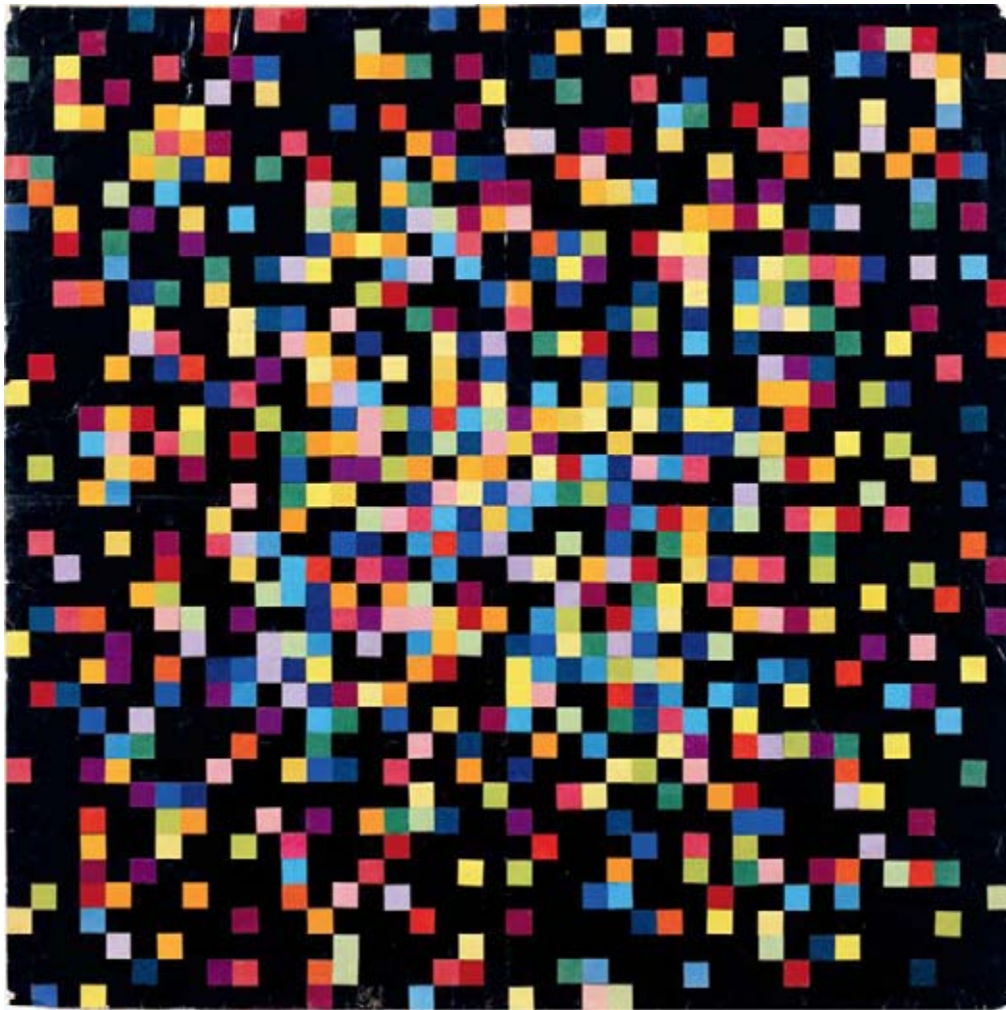
4. Elliott Schwartz and Daniel Godfrey, *Music since 1945: Issues, Materials, and Literature* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1993), 71.

5. For more on Cage's distinction between chance and indeterminacy, see John Cage, "Composition as Process: Indeterminacy," in his *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 35–40.

6. John Cage, score for *Fontana Mix* (New York: Henmar Press, 1960), n.p.

7. John Cage, as quoted in Constance Lewallen, "Cage and the Structure of Chance," in *Through John Cage's Music, Poetry, and Art*, ed. David W. Bernstein and Christopher Hatch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 235.





Ellsworth Kelly (American, b. 1923)  
*Spectrum Colors Arranged by Chance V*, 1951  
 Collage on paper, 39 x 39"  
 © Ellsworth Kelly

*Spectrum Colors Arranged by Chance V*, one of eight in a series of collages Ellsworth Kelly composed during his time in France (1948–1954), marks a turn in his work toward a more systematic approach to chance methodologies than his earlier experiments with techniques such as collage and various modes of automatism.<sup>1</sup> Throughout his experiments with chance, Kelly, much like his Dada and Surrealist predecessors, struggled to strike an acceptable balance between chance and control, artistic intuition and systems of determination. With his turn to the grid in 1951, such as in his cut-up drawings and *Spectrum* series, he began a more comprehensive examination of this fundamental opposition.

The origins of the *Spectrum* series can be traced to an earlier drawing by Kelly, *Study for Seine* (1950). In this piece, Kelly drew a grid, within which he penciled in squares systematically. He would start on either end and pencil in an increasing number of squares—from one to forty—in each column as he advanced toward the center. The vertical placement of the squares, however, was random, determined by numbers he drew from a hat. This playful compositional technique was the basis of Kelly's black and white painting, *Seine* (1951), and of his *Spectrum* series, to which the artist added another variable: color.<sup>2</sup>

For the *Spectrum* collages, Kelly cut out multiple squares of paper in many (approximately eighteen to twenty) colors, arbitrarily assigning a number to each color.<sup>3</sup> He then plotted the numbers onto a large gridded piece of paper according to various pseudo-mathematical systems he had devised.<sup>4</sup> Finally, he methodically arranged the squares according to the location determined by their numbers, placing all squares of one color at a time, so that the final composition was not apparent until the very end.<sup>5</sup> The grid became Kelly's means of balancing determination and chance, as it provided a structure upon which his random systems could be registered as such.<sup>6</sup>

The introduction of color posed a challenge to the original system Kelly devised for *Seine*, as it raised the possibility that unintended color patterns and even figures might emerge, interfering with the balanced, if

random, arrangement he sought.<sup>7</sup> Obeying the rules he established for the *Spectrum* series, Kelly accepted the results as a part of the game he had created for himself. His ultimate lack of control over the outcome, however, may explain why he chose to turn only one of these compositions into a painting.<sup>8</sup> Among Kelly's last explorations of the creative potential of chance, the *Spectrum* collages mark a critical moment in his career. Upon completion of the series, he began working with fewer colors and focusing on more controlled experimentations with form.

EH

#### NOTES

1. See the catalog entries in this volume on Ellsworth Kelly's *Children's Leftovers Arranged by Chance* and *Brushstrokes Cut into Forty-Nine Squares and Arranged by Chance* (p. 82); *Glass Roof Pattern, Charenton* (p. 80); and *Automatic Drawing* (p. 100).
2. While the first collage in the series mimics the composition and rectangular shape of *Seine*, the rest of the works are square, measuring just over three feet square (they range from 37 1/2 inches square to 44 inches square).
3. Kelly most likely chose the word "spectrum" in the title to emphasize the detached, objective nature of the piece.
4. Kelly worked out calculations and numerical progressions in his graph paper notebooks in advance, altering the systems as needed to yield a suitable result. The size of each unit of the grid (and thus each paper square) was determined by the dimensions of the overall composition. In *Spectrum Colors Arranged by Chance V*, he divided the dimensions of the piece (39 inches square) by the number of rows and columns he wished to include (forty), so that each square is a little less than one inch square. See Jack Cowart, "Method and Motif: Ellsworth Kelly's 'Chance' Grids and His Development of Color Panel Paintings," in *Ellsworth Kelly: The Years in France, 1948-1954*, ed. Yve Alain-Bois, Jack Cowart, and Alfred Pacquement (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art; Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1992), 45 n26.
5. In the first four collages, the colors are clustered toward the center, first against a white ground and then a black ground. Beginning with *Spectrum Colors Arranged by Chance V*, the squares are increasingly evenly distributed throughout the composition, until in the final two works there is no sense of a background at all.
6. See Yve-Alain Bois, *Ellsworth Kelly: The Early Drawings, 1948-1955* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museum; Winterthur, Switzerland: Kunstmuseum Winterthur, 1999), 25.
7. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Ellsworth Kelly in France: Anti-Composition in Its Many Guises," in *Ellsworth Kelly: The Years in France*, 26; and Cowart, "Method and Motif," 43.
8. The painting, *Spectrum Colors Arranged by Chance* (1951-53), is based on *Spectrum VI*.