

PART I

Artist of the Controlled Accident



# The Controlled Accident

Saburo Hasegawa

TO BE  
CONSCIOUSLY UNCONSCIOUS  
AND  
UNCONSCIOUSLY CONSCIOUS  
BOTH  
PHYSICALLY  
AND  
MENTALLY  
IS  
NOT IMPOSSIBLE  
WHEN THROUGH ENLIGHTENMENT ONE COULD CONCEIVE  
THAT  
SPONTANEITY IS EVANESCENT  
AND  
EVANESCENCE IS SPONTANEOUS  
IN  
MAN  
NATURE  
AND  
ART  
  
MY  
WORK  
CONSISTS OF  
CONTROLLED ACCIDENTS  
AS MUCH AS  
MY LIFE

# The Paintings of Saburo Hasegawa

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Saburo Hasegawa is perhaps the first Oriental painter known to America who has successfully fused traditions of both Eastern and Western art and has gone on to make a personal statement of aesthetic importance.

We have all come to know how Oriental art influenced the development of modern Western art—how, just over a century ago, Manet, Degas, Whistler, and Van Gogh found a key to their own development in the Japanese print. In our own day, Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, and Hasegawa's good friend, Franz Kline, all come to mind as painters who have found sustenance in the arts of Japan.

But what do we here know of Japanese painters who have advanced their own tradition in some creative way by absorbing any of the spirit of the arts of the West? I can think of great painters in this country who are Japanese by birth or ancestry and whose art, though tinted by their racial origin, is primarily Western in character—Yasuo Kuniyoshi and Kenzo Okada, among others. I can also think of painters who have attempted to draw upon both cultural sources, but here succeeded only in saying a little less about each than we already know, and nothing else. And then I can think of Saburo. It is my belief that he who would draw upon both traditions, be he Oriental or Occidental, must not only show us new insights into both but must make an integrating personal statement of sufficient strength to maintain the oneness, the uniqueness which is necessary in a living work of art. Such a painter was Saburo; we here know of few painters like him.

In their spirited and knowledgeable articles, Alan Watts and Elise Grilli talk about Hasegawa's life, his career as an artist, and the meaning of his work in the larger contexts of Eastern and Western thought. Though a certain inadequacy of words for such a purpose goes without saying, I would like in this foreword to attempt to describe his paintings.

First one must know a few of the facts about his life. Hasegawa was trained in the traditional disciplines of the painter's and calligrapher's art in his native land. He went on to advanced study there and learned about modern Occidental art.

He traveled abroad and immersed himself in the study and practice of French contemporary painting. Returning to Japan, he brought knowledge of these new developments elsewhere, wrote Japan's first book on modern art and painted abstractions in oil, which had something to do with Japan but more to do with France. His last and greatest period, which began in Japan in 1950, was marked by a return to a more Japanese point of view. The paintings of this last period, though truly Japanese at the foundation, are in no way national but international, a brilliant break through of an unfettered personality at last in easy command of the varied elements which composed his experience in art.

As one might expect of a life made up of such fragmented episodes, Hasegawa's paintings divide into a number of widely differing styles. In each style, the materials he used and the way he used them reveal a great deal about the spirit of the artist himself. In reviewing each of these styles, let us begin with the technique.

The most important style, the style that has given his work the honored place it now occupies in world art, is the "abstract calligraphy" style he developed in his last years in Japan. In this abstract calligraphy style he used a variety of techniques—ink painting, block printing, rubbing and even collage. Sometimes he used one technique alone, sometimes several in a single painting. In each technique, it seems, he sought for a fresh understanding of its ancient traditions and, at the same time, he experimented with bold and entirely new uses of contemporary materials. Always there is this contrast of the old and the new.

Ink painting is one of the major techniques he used to create his abstract calligraphy style. In the traditional, classic way, he used the old soot inks in stick form, ground patiently on a stone; he used the oriental brush; he used sheets of white rice paper. Yet, in contrast, he could leap gleefully into a painting equipped with a house-painter's brush, a cellulose sponge, a mass of wool yarn, or simply an open bottle; he loved the brilliance of blue and yellow aniline inks as much as the sooty black; he developed a passion for painting on sheets of plaster board. As contrasting as his materials were, there was nevertheless a harmony of spirit in his ink paintings, no matter what he took to hand.

The rubbing is another major technique in these abstract, calligraphy paintings. Though rubbings of brass plates in English churches once enjoyed a certain vogue, the rubbing technique is basically an oriental and not a western one. Hasegawa was well aware of its ancient lineage, but again was inventive in its use. The traditional rubbing used ink and paper to reproduce characters or other figures carved in flat stone. Hasegawa used not stone but wood—timbers from abandoned fishing boats, hollow stumps, bark covered logs. Instead of seeking to reproduce carved designs, he tried to capture a reflection of Nature as she expressed herself in the weathered surface of these woods. Sometimes the forms he created with these rubbings would be traditional characters, as in the case in the painting called "Nothingness," which, incidentally, he regarded as his greatest work. Sometimes the forms would serve as backgrounds for painted characters, as in "Time," or

again they would be used purely in compositions as in the marvelous lyric screen, "Rhapsody in a Fishing Village."

The block print is another technique that has been a major one in Japanese art. Hasegawa also used it in his abstract calligraphy style of painting, though his application of this technique was unconventional. Hasegawa would save the tiny, crude plates on which rice or fish cakes came, and upon these he would carve his forms in bas-relief. There is a whole shoebox full of these little boards amongst the things in his studio. Some of these forms were characters—one of them being an abstraction of his name—but on the whole they were simply little shapes that pleased him. He would use these blocks in various combinations, sometimes in several colors. Some block print paintings are made up of simple patterns of these shapes like "The Four Seasons;" some use innumerable impressions in several colors to create monumental characters, like "San Sui." There is a marvelous early picture of a face faintly recalling the work of Paul Klee, drawn with a chopstick, which uses only two block impressions.

Occasionally we find a painting, like "Abstraction," which combines flung ink, brushed ink, yarn trailed in ink, block printing, and rubbing, though most of his works are more ascetically orchestrated.

Of all the techniques Hasegawa used in his abstract calligraphy style of painting, collage was the most minor, and that is the last of his techniques that we will discuss. Though this technique is really European rather than oriental, Hasegawa was nevertheless able to apply it with a distinctly oriental understanding of its potentialities. He made quite a number of little screens for his rooms in paper collage. One work he especially treasured is made of pieces of the same wool yarn that has left its track in some of the paintings. These little pieces of yarn, a tender green against pale paper, compose a restrained, delicate work quite in contrast to an enormous, harsh calligraphic panel of torn black roofing paper stapled to red-wood slabs ten feet high. Not exactly collage but similar in spirit is a calligraphic work painted on a burlap bag suspended from a bamboo rod.

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To know something of Hasegawa's techniques in his abstract calligraphy paintings is a first step in understanding them. Having completed this step, let us go on to the next, which is to become acquainted with the abstract calligraphy movement and to see how Hasegawa used its discoveries in his own paintings. Hasegawa is identified with the early stages of this vital and controversial movement in modern Japanese art, two of whose leaders were Sokyū Ueda and Gakyū Ogawa—both more strictly calligraphers than he.

Where they saw Western artists making abstractions and variations of our traditional landscape, still life, and figure subjects, these Japanese decided to make abstractions from the characters of their written language. The calligraphic tradition provided the Japanese with an immense storehouse of the non-representational but

meaningful and artistically interesting forms similar to those that the West was seeking in its art. Applying Western notions of free adaption and variation, these characters became the starting points for expressive, musical improvisations that often left the nature of the original subject as much in doubt as our abstractions do. These artists found a precedent for their style in the highly individual calligraphy of Zen Buddhist monks who had lived many decades before them.

One might well ask where calligraphy leaves off and painting begins—especially abstract calligraphy and abstract painting. In truth, there is no clear dividing line. However, where the abstract calligraphers have generally limited themselves to variations upon characters, Hasegawa as an abstract painter seldom used characters alone; generally he incorporated other elements of one kind or another, and, as we said occasionally did not use any characters at all. Though he did not strictly regard himself as a calligrapher, Hasegawa nevertheless used the calligraphic brush with modesty, feeling, and knowledge, and taught calligraphy upon occasions, in a most time-honored fashion, leading students patiently through the traditional exercise of brushing the numerals, not disdaining to practice these himself. As I labored awkwardly to win the favor of my brush, he told me that only once, for a short time did he feel he had done the “One, two, three” well. In true Zen fashion, he taught calligraphy not as a technique that was an end in itself, but as a way to self-knowledge, to the paradoxical combination of freedom and control.

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Almost all the major, serious works of Hasegawa’s great period are based upon abstract calligraphy, presenting modified characters in interpretative backgrounds, but there are several exceptions. A few are paintings that are simply non-objective in nature, lacking both subject in our sense or characters in the Japanese. Some are calligraphic paintings in which there is very little extreme distortion of the characters.

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“Time,” “Nature,” “Enlightenment,” “Nothingness,” “Dream,”—all such titles as these I have mentioned are translations of the principal characters upon which the paintings are built, and, as one familiar with Buddhism might readily detect, these titles indicate the paintings are primarily religious in nature. Now that we have examined the techniques used in his abstract calligraphy painting and something of the nature of abstract calligraphy itself, let us look further into the kinds of moods and meanings he wished to communicate through these paintings—into the religious spirit that permeates them.

Hasegawa was never satisfied to vary the characters alone; his paintings are contemplations, explorations of the large religious concepts for which the characters stand. Although he made no attempt to play the role of a religious man, it was quite obvious to all who knew him that, to be an artist, as he saw it, was to be dedicated to the expression of what basically were religious points of view. Though

he brought a dignity to his concept of the artist as a religious man, in his eyes an artist was still inferior to a monk. He was sincerely respectful of religious leadership. I can remember clearly how he stressed that we should not refer to Hakuin and Ryoken merely as “artists,” but as “monks,” whose art was only one incidental expression of their religious enlightenment.

Tea ceremony, being as it is a cultivation of both religious and aesthetic awareness, was especially important to him, and he practiced it with sincerity and affection. So deeply imbued was he in its way that he unconsciously transmuted even the manner in which he ministered to the wants of his final illness, amidst the glass and stainless steel of the hospital, into a kind of tea ceremony. He did not simply practice the ritual of his religion, he lived its spirit and was as capable of expressing it spontaneously in some entirely new form where the occasion demanded as he was using the traditional ways he understood so well.

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In addition to these more serious paintings based on abstract calligraphy and religious concepts, there is a second important, though lighter, style. These are whimsical, colorful brush drawings of street scenes, figures, flowers, and household implements. Amongst his things we found endless little paintings of this kind. They pop up continuously from his early years on, and, were often little commentaries or mementos of family events. The amiable, relaxed and playful nature of his private family life is immediately apparent to anyone who turns through these drawings with members of his family. It is in this vein that he painted during the last few active months of his life when he was beginning to learn what was too soon to come to him. These last paintings are scenes of streets and houses, people in parks, and flower gardens here in Oakland and in San Francisco.

Although there are some changes of nuance through the years, this lighter style was from the beginning the synthesis of French and Japanese ways of painting. On the French side, it has something in common with the mood and techniques of Raul Dufy’s work. Among the Japanese paintings known to me, the distinctive style of peasant drawings—Otsu-e—and the related style of the more sophisticated artist, Sengai, come to mind. Light, personal, informal, bordering on caricature at times, this style is the second major aspect of his work.

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The third and last major style that we know includes the monumental calligraphic screens he painted in 1956 and 1957. The discovery of a panel of plasterboard in the basement of the Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco where he was teaching started all this. An interpretive rendering of the character for “Buddha” was the first painting on a plasterboard panel, then came a series of *haiku* poems rendered with accompanying forms in pale colors, one of these, on autumn leaves,

being four panels in size. For an exhibit sponsored by the Japan Trade Center in San Francisco he did the symbols of tea ceremony on an enormous set of plywood screens ten or twelve feet high. A collage on roofing paper—another abstract calligraphy—was of this period. All of these are of a scale we associate more with architecture than with easel painting, and their effectiveness depends quite a bit upon the circumstances under which they are shown. Unfortunately the plaster-board panels are as heavy and as fragile as they are large, and it is my hope that they will be preserved by being incorporated permanently into architecturally sympathetic surroundings.

Finally, there are a few other kinds of work that should be mentioned in passing. His papers include random survivals of exercise sheets, drawings of bamboo and other traditionally Japanese subjects, in which Hasegawa not infrequently rises above the ordinary. Then there are a number of finished drawings, large and small, such as the series published by the *American Mercury* and even the “Self-Portrait,” which seem to belong to modern Japanese graphic idioms. There are next a few lithographs, some done in Japan and one—of the traditional numeral exercise freely interpreted—done for the first Bay Printmakers’ Society exhibition at the Oakland Art Museum in 1955. Two oil paintings on canvas, “Metropolis” of 1936 and “Locus of a Butterfly” of 1937, are among the first abstract paintings to be done in Japan, or anywhere else outside of Europe; like a little figure drawing and some other ink drawings in his estate, they are more French than Japanese.

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The purpose of this foreword was to describe Hasegawa’s painting and that has been done. However, Hasegawa played two other roles in the art world in addition to that of a painter—the role of teacher and the role of critic, connoisseur and arranger of exhibitions—and some mention must be made of these aspects of his life as an artist.

Though I took a few classes in calligraphy with him, and heard him lecture occasionally, I cannot speak with any intimate knowledge of his teaching. Many young painters studied with him and their high regard for him—as well as the creative quality of their work—honor his memory. Perhaps one of them will choose to write about Hasegawa as a teacher. I hope so.

Hasegawa as a critic, judge and selector of exhibitions, however, was one of my closest friends. His critical writings speak for themselves, and a fairly comprehensive selection of them is included in this volume. As a writer, Hasegawa’s mastery of English was not such that an article could go from his pen to the press without assistance from someone more familiar with English grammar than he, but always he was direct, simple, and straightforward in his writing as in his conversation.

When the Women’s Board of the Oakland Association and our museum decided to present in the spring of 1956 a great festival to commemorate a century

of Japanese contribution to the culture of the West, I asked Hasegawa to assist me in arranging a series of exhibitions under the general title of "The Modern Spirit in Japanese Art." We worked closely together for months on this, and my admiration for his knowledge of Japanese art of the past, his taste, and his ability to lead us all successfully through the compounded mazes of Eastern and Western protocol grew constantly. He seemed always to belong equally to East and West, and yet, somehow, he belonged only to himself. Never during these exhausting days did he lose his calm serenity, his detached, mild sense of amusement in the face of difficulty.

The exhibitions all, in some way, related the ancient and the new, particularly through the media of paper and clay. From the fine collection of the late Hatenjirō Yamamoto came superb calligraphic paintings never before shown outside Japan. First were the bold architectural scrolls of Hakuin, including the entirely remarkable painting of Bodhidharma, patriarch of Zen Buddhism; then calligraphy by the Shinto priest, Baisen, similar in their boldness of spirit. Light, elegant and musical were the contrasting paintings and calligraphy by the beloved Zen monk Ryokan. Last of the older works on paper were the delightful, informal paintings of Sengai from the Sazo Idemitsu collection.

In contrast to these galleries of older art, we presented two exhibitions of modern art. One surveyed the abstract calligraphy movement in Japan and was arranged by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Contrasted against these works on paper were ceramics by the young American potter, J. B. Blunk, made in Japan during his work at the Bizen kilns. Blunk was a close friend of Hasegawa's and it was thus we were able to obtain this series of individual pots, the first of their kind to be given a museum exhibition here. Finally, this gallery contained an intricate scale model of the Jo-an teahouse, early shrine of the spirit celebrated in the exhibition.

The third exhibition paired with Hasegawa's paintings and the ceramic sculpture of his friend, Isamu Noguchi. Both are pioneers in their media, both are artists who have related contemporary Japanese art to the global mainstream of international modern art. Their works have a personal empathy for each other which added a special quality to the exhibition. In addition to such paintings as "Time," "Nothingness," "Abstract Calligraphy," and "Enlightenment," we exhibited the four-panel screen on autumn leaves, and the triptych of "Buddha" and the *haiku*.

Each day during the exhibition, Hasegawa lectured several times on the material displayed, sometimes to groups of women working on the festival, sometimes to crowds of general visitors, to art students, to students of Asian thought. Dressed always in traditional Japanese robes—in the entire time I knew him here, I saw him in Western clothes only twice—he helped us with everything, going to the airport to receive the paintings, unpacking them, checking them with customs officials, hanging them, labeling them. The exhibition was a kind of crown to his

efforts, an international celebration of what he saw as most meaningful in the art of his country and in his own work.

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Not long after the festival, the truth of his impending end was gradually unfolded to him. The last time I saw him before he went to the hospital was when I brought over the trunk in which the scrolls lent to the exhibition were to be packed and returned to Japan. As we counted and wrapped and packed together, standing there incongruously on the little porch stairs outside his San Francisco apartment, a sense of leave-taking was in the air for several reasons. We both busied ourselves with the mechanics of the task before us to avoid confronting this, but melancholy as the surfaces of our thoughts were, for me at least, there was something more; without thinking it to myself in so many words, I nevertheless knew that, though these beautiful paintings might never be seen here again, and though Hasegawa, too, might be leaving us, a spirit had been let loose amongst us which would not so easily disappear.

## Saburo Hasegawa

### *Master of the Controlled Accident*

Alan W. Watts

When it comes to putting them in words, Taoism and Zen are the most marvelously indescribable philosophies in the world. But fortunately, they can be clearly *seen*, for they find direct expression in the great tradition of Chinese and Japanese art. This expression is no mere symbolism. For one notices immediately that, in general, the subject-matter of this art does not tend to be religious or “spiritual.” It seems to be naturalistic and secular, and even when the Sung masters—like Muchi and Liang-k'ai—are painting the Buddhist sages, they appear as the most common tramps and rogues. Not only does this way of life, called the Tao, find expression in the subject-matter; it is also in the very technique, in the actual use of the brush, so much so that one must speak of such paintings as works of nature rather than works of art.

But the Chinese and Japanese idea of “nature” is not quite ours. The term which we translate as “nature” or “natural” is *tsu-jan* (*zi-ran*)—which means approximately that which is so by itself, the spontaneous. In Taoism and Zen Buddhism alike the whole world, human beings included, is felt to be a process of spontaneity. No one is ordering it around, telling it what to do; it does not follow any fixed, mechanical laws; and, having no purpose, it is not going anywhere. It is sufficient to itself at every moment, beginning and ending now—without ever stopping.

Yet although this spontaneity is following no law and pursuing no purpose, it is far from mere chaos, mere random disorder. In the whole as in the parts it is self-organizing—a marvelous system of inter-relations which “arise mutually” so that nothing is before and nothing after, nothing higher and nothing lower, since, as Lao-tsu said:

“To be” and “not to be” arise mutually  
 Difficult and easy are mutually realized;  
 Long and short are mutually contrasted;  
 High and low are mutually posited.

Each thing, each event, is what it is—or becomes what it is—in relation to the rest. This relatedness, this mutuality, expresses—like the back and forth of a coin—a kind of identity or unity that is the Tao, or the Way of Nature. As “trees show the bodily form of the mind,” man shows the conscious intelligence of mountains and waters. His apparent separateness and individuality are precisely what expresses his identity with the whole realm of nature. *Te*, or magical virtue in Taoism, and *satori*, or awakening, in Zen are the vivid realization of this truth.

In the light of this realization art is a work of nature, skill is a kind of accident, design is a form of spontaneity—and *vice versa*. For this reason, art is, in Hasegawa's own words, a “controlled accident.” What Chinese and Japanese connoisseurs admire most in art as in life is the expression that is at once masterly and uncontrived, which simply “happened” with enormous skill. As Lao-tsu said again:

The greatest perfection seems imperfect;  
 The greatest fullness seems empty;  
 The greatest straightness seems crooked;  
 The greatest dexterity seems awkward;  
 The greatest eloquence seems stammering.

It takes a keen eye, however, to distinguish an art of this kind from two diametrically opposed kinds of insincerity. On the one hand, there is the “art” of mere undisciplined chaos, occasionally achieving some sort of “effect” by pure chance. On the other, there is an immensely cunning imitation of spontaneity in which the props and pains of artifice are cleverly concealed. Far-Eastern art has always been in danger of going to this latter extreme. The master-calligrapher who first noticed the wonder of the “flying hairlines” from a brush running dry of ink, has been arduously copied by generations of technicians who have learned to control the flow of ink and the very spacing of the hairs to the most exacting standards. Only somewhat occasional is the painter in whom the “controlled accident” is perfectly genuine, expressing to the full the apparent paradox of the words of the Zen master Ma-tsu.

The Tao has nothing to do with discipline. If you say that it is attained by discipline, the completion of the discipline is the loss of the Tao. But if you say that there is no discipline, this is to be the same as ordinary people.

Almost from the first moment of meeting, I have felt that Saburo Hasegawa embodies this spirit both as an artist and as a person. For there is no feeling of clash, of inconsistency, in the fact that he is at once the entirely dignified and traditional Japanese gentleman and the easy-going Western Bohemian. In the afternoon he can preside over the meticulous ritual of the tea-ceremony, and in the evening stretch out on the floor with cigarettes and a bottle of wine—without the least change of atmosphere. And having worked with him for more than a year in rather close association, I have discovered that though he never hurries, he is never late, and that he is incredibly lazy without leaving things undone. To add to these paradoxes—he can walk about

in downtown San Francisco in kimono and *hakama* without attracting any special attention, and sit with you in prolonged silence without causing the least embarrassment. The Buddha-figure enshrined in his office was part of the turned leg of an old chair washed up on the beach, yet he has the “art-expert’s” knowledge of periods and techniques in wood-carving and lacquer. Several of his paintings have dealt with Lao-tzu’s themes of the wisdom of foolishness, and yet he can be a perfect terror to students in oral examinations for the doctorate. He has often quoted the Zen master Bankei’s saying that spontaneous emotion should be neither cultivated nor repressed, and perhaps this explains why he can bear incurable disease with the utmost serenity and yet flare into violent anger when a student oversteps the bounds of propriety.

Hasegawa represents himself and his work by the Buddhist phrase *bonno zocho*—“worldly passions multiply and increase.” In other words, his art is a kind of foolish playing around in which he indulges because he is too lazy and too stupid to do anything better. He feels that instead of learning “real technique” and becoming an important painter, he is an idle fellow who happens to discover marvelous bits of wood and tree-bark that can be used as printing-blocks and do his work for him. He is just a crazy simpleton who likes to see what happens when inked woolen thread is allowed to coil itself haphazardly on absorbent paper, or when one uses an ordinary floor-broom and a bucket of ink to write Chinese characters on huge sheets of plaster-board. At the same time, he is perfectly delighted at the prospect of a show in an important New York gallery, and downright offended when compared with some other artist whom he feels to be inferior. To the Western would-be Buddhist, anxious about his spiritual progress, he will say, “Don’t worry—you’re all right. Take it easy!”—and the next moment speak with the utmost respect of the austere severity of monastic disciplines. When asked about the Zen experience of *satori* at a party one evening, he replied, “You can get it at once, this evening; or it may take you thirty years’ practice. I really mean it”—and refused to explain any further.

What he seems to find most irritating and discouraging in the West is the insistent demand for explanation of these paradoxes, and for some sort of clear definition of such Japanese terms as *sabi* or *yugen*, which designate special moods of landscape, paintings, or poems. “What is the matter with you?” he will exclaim. “Can’t you feel!” Thus in the classroom his points are always made by implication rather than explanation, and the longish pauses between his phrases say more than the words. But this happens in just the same way that a Chinese painter makes the unpainted silk not just empty background, but an actual part of the picture. It is done by the proper placing of the painted form, and in the same way Hasegawa will define a luminous pace in thought by outlining it with suggestive anecdotes. Hence the seeming paradoxes in his attitude all make sense if one can feel, for things that are inconsistencies and conflicting opposites in words and in thought are correlatives in nature. In the words of Chuang-tsu:

Those who speak of having right without its correlative, wrong, of good rule without its correlative, misrule, do not understand the great principles of the universe, nor

the nature of the world. They might as well speak of Heaven existing without Earth, or of the negative (yin) without the positive (yang), which is obviously impossible.

Thus, Hasegawa's designation of his work as "foolishness" is neither false modesty nor a self-conscious affectation of Taoist simplicity. Nor is this attitude in actual conflict with the tremendous respect for his own artistic integrity. In the light of Chuang-tsu's words, it is the frank and simple recognition that the Tao, the natural and concrete way of his work is foolish-inspired and stupid-wise in rather the same way that a hill is up-and-down.

He is therefore making explicit in his art this up-down yang-yin, popularity which is implicit in life. But when the mind strains and analyses to understand it, there is nothing there. To see it, the mind must be a little "idiotic"—sitting quietly without any purpose, open to everything without expecting anything. And then, as the Chinese poem says:

Sitting quietly, doing nothing,  
Spring comes, and the grass grows by itself.

By his physical presence and by his attitude in both teaching and painting, Hasegawa makes this state of mind strangely infectious. He restores one's ability to feel—first of all by slowing down the tempo of things in such a way that it becomes possible to be "all here and now" without any discomfort of forced concentration. To prepare the ink before painting is not, for him, a chore to be hurried. He draws the student's attention to the quietening rhythm of the ink-stick upon the stone, and to the growing profundity and "colorfulness" of the water as it mingles with the rubbed ink. "Black," he says, "is abstract color. It has all colors within it." Although his art is visual, he is by no means a painter whose mind is all in his eyes. In his presence, I have discovered that I can enjoy the sound of a simmering kettle as much as a concert, and shall always associate him with a small bronze bell hung outside his window—ringing distantly as the wind caught the paper-strip on its tongue.

Why has Hasegawa come to the West? Representing the most ancient and authentic tradition of Japanese art, he is troubled very deeply by the cultural direction of modern Japan. Because his feeling goes back, not only to the "rough" landscapes of Sesshu and the lighting-abstract *zenge* and *haiga* drawings of the Zen monks and *haiku* poets, but to the prehistoric *haniwa* statuettes and "seal-style" Chinese characters, he finds here a genuine affinity with contemporary abstract art in the West. Many times he has said that a study of contemporary Western art is the best introduction to the arts of the Far-East. Thus he feels that at the present time Europeans and Americans rather than Japanese are coming to the point where they can appreciate the fundamental spirit of Sino-Japanese culture, and that in perhaps another two hundred years the Japanese will receive it back from them.

For Hasegawa the word "abstract" denotes the essential quality of this spirit, but obviously this is not abstract as opposed to concrete, in the sense of a coldly intellectual rarification of the actual. In his own words:

“Abstractions” is the modern occidental attitude in search of the “absolute.” Oriental way of thinking in metaphysics, philosophy, religion, general culture and art, also the way of living itself, have for centuries been tending towards the “absolute” through “abstractions.”

“Teaism” is the “abstraction” of daily life; “haiku”—short poem in seventeen syllables—is that of “literature,” and both arts are based on “zen” and “taoism” which are the “abstractions” of “religion” and “metaphysics” respectively. “Calligraphy”—art of writing—is the “abstraction” of communication.” Since human being is a being who cannot but continue creating and appreciating art, it is quite “human” to turn “communication” into “calligraphy” as well as “daily life” into “tea ceremony.” Black is “abstract” “absolute” color. Hence, the “abstract,” “calligraphic” and “absolute” paintings in black ink of the extreme Orient. Such paintings have been and are being—though far less than other days—done in monasteries and hermitage-like huts of wood, bamboo and paper—traditional simple serene “abstract” “absolute” architecture.”

Beyond this it would be absurd to try to define this type of “abstraction” when the artifacts themselves are clearly visible. But his feeling that this spirit is coming to birth in the work of “modern” artists from Cezanne and Matisse, through Braque and Mondrian to Tobey and Kline is one of the most marvelous compliments that an Asian could offer to the West.

Hasegawa first visited the West—the United States, England, Italy, France and Spain—between 1929 and 1932, settling for a while in Paris where he exhibited his work at the Salon d’Automne. Before this, he had studied painting in oils in Japan, and—in 1929—had graduated from Tokyo Imperial University, writing his thesis on the life and art of Sesshu. It was through his study of Sesshu that Hasegawa first come to be interested in Zen, realizing that Sesshu’s art was inseparable from his life as a Zen priest. But this realization dawned rather gradually. Hasegawa’s work was not at first inspired by Zen in any conscious way. He did not begin abstracting painting until about 1935, and it was only in 1940 that he began to apply himself seriously to the study of *za-zen*, or Zen-practice, and to the traditional Zen arts of *chanoyu* and *haiku* poetry.

But after 1935 he became the leader of the abstract movement in Japan, writing the first book on the subject and founding the Jiyubijutsu or “Free Artists’ Group” in 1937. In 1938 he taught at the Bijutsu Bunka Gakuin (College of Art and Culture) in Tokyo, and in 1939 made a trip to the ancient artistic centers of China—a country for whose culture he expresses an admiration and awe so deep that he has spoken of his own and other Japanese efforts as relatively childish in comparison.

On his return to Japan, Hasegawa studied *chanoyu* with Soshu Sen, master of the most unostentatious and—in the Zen sense—“philosophical” of the three schools of Tea. The deepening shadows of war inclined him to a long period of inwardness, detesting militarism and all its manifestations. In 1944 he was arrested for refusing to lend his art to war propaganda, and, though released, he

was forced to retreat to a remote country farm where he spent the remainder of the war—studying the Taoist and Zen classics, and teaching painting and *haiku* to the boys of the village.

It was in 1951 that he began to work almost exclusively with black-and-white, sumi ink on paper, exploring the use not only of the Chinese brush, but also of wood-block stamping, ink-rubbing, and other techniques which seemed to facilitate the naturalness of the “controlled accident.” Thus the period from 1951–54 was one of intense activity, during which he painted some of the marvelous screens now in the collection of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III, had his first one-man show in the United States, and exhibited his work frequently both here and in Japan. Representing the Japan Abstract Art Club, he came to this country again in 1954 to participate in a joint show with the American Abstract Artists and had his second one-man show at the Contemporaries in New York. During this trip he wrote and lectured extensively, speaking to groups at the Museum of Modern Art, the New School for Social Research, and at the California School of Fine Arts and the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco.

The latter meeting led directly to an invitation to join the Faculty of the Academy in the Fall of 1955, after a brief return to Japan. Arrangements were made for him to teach both at the Academy and at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, and at these two schools he has painted, taught, and endeared himself to many students until the beginning of his illness in the Fall of 1956. But during this period he arranged, in conjunction with the Oakland Museum of Art, one of the most important exhibitions of Japanese art ever to be seen in this country. Taking as its theme “the modern spirit in Japanese art,” the exhibition consisted of *haniwa* clay figures and calligraphic inscriptions and drawings by the great Zen monks Hakuin, Ryokan, and Sengai, together with a number of modern works in the same spirit by both Japanese and American artists.

The exhibition showed, in a single panorama, the entire spiritual history of Hasegawa’s work—the marvel of an art that was essentially unpretentious and playful, that was never intended to be art in the serious and “fine” sense. For it is just this absence of “purpose,” of self-conscious intention, which—for Taoism and Zen—is the essential beauty and sincerity of nature, which produces order without law and intelligence without ego. In a single word, its spirit is *te*—the Taoist word for a kind of magical power or virtue, which is not the legal virtue of morality so much as something akin to the healing virtue of a plant. And of this *te* Lao-tsu spoke in a passage which gives the basic meaning of Hasegawa’s work:

Superior virtue is not virtue,  
And thus is virtue;  
Inferior virtue does not let go of virtue,  
And thus is not virtue  
Superior virtue, without striving, is aimless.  
Inferior virtue, striving, has an aim.

## Saburo Hasegawa as a Leader in Modern Art in Japan

Elise Grilli  
Art Editor, Japan Times

In his last days in America Saburo Hasegawa was clothed in the mantle of a wise man of the East, and rightly so. He brought to his young American students a direct transmission of a deeply philosophic and intuitive art. I would not change this image now, but I would expand it into another dimension, into a more active phase of his life, when he fought his way out of an impasse which cramps many modern artists in Japan. During my ten years' stay in Japan I knew Hasegawa-san for nigh onto nine years and I observed the transformation which made him into a leader of an emerging new art movement in his country.

Most Westerners who visit Japan come primarily to see the great treasures of historic art which have so miraculously been preserved in that art-impregnated country. When they become aware of the lively and dynamic modern art that exists side by side with the great past, their first reaction is usually one of dismay at the aberrations and tortured experimentation through which the young Japanese artists are passing in their efforts to achieve a meaningful art for their own time. With such great models before them as Sesshu and Korin, the sculpture of the Nara period and the architecture of Katsura Palace, why, oh why, will the young artists persist in imitating Picasso or Maillol or the skyscrapers of New York? The answer must come from the historians who follow the pattern of westernization that has enmeshed Japan for more than one hundred years. Even more significantly, the psychologists can indicate the deep-rooted impulses that press toward competitiveness and equality on an international level.

The passionate avant-garde artists ask nothing more than to reach the *nouveau* of French modernism. At the other extreme, the conservative old guard try to keep alive, a past that is timeless, yet not of our time. Only a handful of exceptionally intellectual and articulate artists are aware of the errors apparent at both extremes and are seeking for a resolution of forces that is to lead to an art which is truly

Japanese, yet cognizant of the West, just as in the life and thinking of the Japanese people of today.

After this long deviation let me return to Hasegawa, the man and his art, as a concrete example of successful synthesis of this most difficult aspect of Japanese culture.

I was active in Tokyo as an art critic who avidly examined the arts as they were being created and exhibited from day to day. Also I was a student who delved into the wonderful art history of the old Japan. Thus I enjoyed the confidence of the raucous young adventurers, as well as that of the dignified conservatives in the arts. From both sides artists came to me as an outspoken Western critic who was not hemmed in by the Japanese etiquette of restraint and politeness.

From which of these two sides did Hasegawa actually come? It took me many years to disentangle the intertwining threads that were woven into the rich texture of this complex man who literally straddled two hemispheres in his outlook.

I had met him first in Tokyo's cavernous Municipal Art Gallery, where about four thousand paintings can find room, and where huge exhibitions are rotated in monthly cycles. I used to drag my feet through miles of galleries, always searching for that proverbial needle in the haystack. There I was guided, one day in 1948, by Hasegawa's young nephew, who insisted that I must meet his uncle and that we would "have much in common." Such an introduction usually makes me bristle with skeptical opposition. This time, however, the promise came true and we felt at once "molto simpatico." As human beings only, to be sure. As artist and critic, we could not be farther apart. Three oil paintings of his were on display and I found them all painfully inept. Picture, if you can, a combination of Matisse and early Kandinsky, with a dash of Arthur Dove. Not bad in color, but obviously contrived in symbolism and entirely lacking any impetus of personal expression. I don't recall what I managed to mumble. The talk moved on to other subjects, impersonal and remote, for Hasegawa-san was far too perceptive to let me suffer after those agonies of kindly dissimulation.

And we became friends in spite of this. Better and better friends from day to day, for just as he valued my "bifocal vision" that could compare East and West, I soon found him to be my most dependable bridge across that dry river bed filled with rocks and cracks which separated our respective cultures. Hasegawa was obviously a much better theorist than practitioner in regard to French art. He was so well-informed, so clear-thinking, so articulate on the subject, that not even his long years in Paris could account for this knowledge. Gradually I found out that he had been a trained art historian long before he went to Paris. Literature and art had been his field at Tokyo's Imperial University, a school which despite its aristocratic name was severely democratic in its selection of the sharpest intelligence in the student body. There he had done a special study on Sesshu and then had gone on into other research in Japanese art history.

All this I learned later, much later, for Hasegawa-san was not one to sing his own praises. I knew that he was giving a special lecture on Matisse, Mondrian, and

others, and that he was frequently contributing articles to periodicals on modern art. To this day I find his name popping up in bibliographical lists on various subjects of historic interest, on Zen Buddhism, calligraphy, and the tea ceremony. He never alluded to his scholarship and he was content to be accepted as a struggling modern painter.

A struggle of enormous proportions were those early post-war years in Tokyo. The struggle for sheer existence in the bombed and fire-scarred city was the fate of all the Japanese, but the artists and intellectuals faced in addition the task of spanning a void of ten years during which they had been entirely cut off from world currents in thought and achievement. Hungry they might be, and more than a bit shabby in their clothing, but they were most avid for their stimulation of international contacts. That is what Hasegawa craved and that is what led to the endless impassioned talks we had up and down the ladder of history, into the present and the future of art, into the constant comparison of our contrasting cultures, which we both recognized as being interdependent and capable of great mutual enrichment.

He guided me to Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines; to the tea ceremony where it was performed as a moving ritual and not as a titillation for tourists; to museums and galleries; to the studios (if one may thus honor the minuscule hovels) where new art forms were taking shape. We talked and argued, discussed and planned and projected books we would write together. He explained to me his understanding of Zen Buddhism.

For some two years or more Hasegawa did not show me any of his paintings. Not even when I became friendly with his wife and children did I see a trace of his work. He had exhausted his defences of French art for Japanese painters and I had grown tired of reiterating my gospel of the use of traditional Japanese materials and techniques, coupled with the expressive power that the West had achieved in its arts of the past half century.

Then, one day in 1950, the miracle happened. Saburo Hasegawa came to my home and quietly drank the welcoming cup of tea. Just as quietly he pulled out of his pockets several crumpled balls of tissue paper, which he began to soothe and spread out on the floor. He spoke not a word, for he expected little praise from the unprepossessing, crumpled, ink-spattered sheets that covered the floor like a carpet. My eyes bulged as if they would strain out from my head and absorb the strange hieroglyphics that danced across the floor. Black ink alone and a flexible Japanese brush had conjured forth those rushing lines and spots and rough-textured areas that were veritable traces of some tornado of "élan vital." I cannot recall one word of the torrent that began to pour forth from my lips, or how I managed to convey to Hasegawa-san that this was the revelation I had dreamed of but hardly expected. I could not have been coherent, but he seemed to understand. The three paintings I had admired most were in my hands as his gifts and his blessing.

The crumpled tissue paper came back to life when the skillful hands of a *take-mono* mounter pasted them on a stiff backing and surrounded them with the

sensitive proportions and dimensions of the enframing fabric. A triptych came into being, with a large kakemono in the center and two smaller ones to flank it on my Japanese tokonoma wall. Until someone comes forth to dispute my statement and to reveal some earlier date, I shall consider October of 1950 to be the birth date of a new Japanese art.

Some of my friends were enchanted at first glance; some were puzzled; but nary a one could fail to be moved by the vitality and the rhythmic dance of those ink splashes. Exhibitions snatched up the steady stream of paintings that poured forth from Hasegawa's brush. The sculptor, Noguchi then visiting Japan, saw them as "abstract expressionism." The calligraphers called them a newly freed form of writing. The ink painters considered them to be a new form of *sumi* painting, perhaps a modern revival of *bunjinga*, the art of the literati and philosopher-artist. Very likely they were all of that and more.

Indubitably, though, these paintings opened up an entirely new path for Japanese art. The Oriental tradition was channeled into a stream which joined the turbulent current from the West. With the ancient materials of paper and ink, with the wonderful tool of the Japanese brush, with the philosophy of suggestion and emptiness, and with the decorative refinements of centuries of Japanese art, there were now fused the emotional intensity and the individuality of expression that the Japanese painter had acquired in Paris.

Hasegawa's return to his ancestral roots was soon echoed by several other young painters. If they did not give up the medium of oil painting entirely, they at least experimented with Japanese ink or casein water colors. From Matisse and Picasso they turned to their own great masters. They began to move flexibly from one medium to another, from one continent to another. They were no longer slavishly committed to imitate the latest French movement. They began to speak their own thoughts, in their own idioms.

Hasegawa became the recognized spokesman for this new movement and it was he who was designated to carry to New York, in 1954, a group of abstract paintings to be shown alongside the American Abstract Artists at the Riverside Museum. The rest has become American history. His work was reproduced in American periodicals. He had a one-man show in New York. He lectured and published articles even on his first visit, and then returned to teach and live in America. He had won a new continent and he brought his family from Japan to live with him in this bright new world. A few months later he died.

Of all my memories of Saburo Hasegawa I cherish most a strenuous journey, one hot August, when we climbed up to the great Shingon Buddhist monasteries on Mount Koya. He was to give a series of lectures there, at a sort of chatauqua organized by the Mainichi press. He allowed me to "tag along," for he had long ago fired me with enthusiasm for this holy mountain, its art treasures, and its association with Kobo Daishi, the great priest and civilizer of the ninth century. We had approached the mountain by hot and crowded trams; then we shifted to an even

more crowded cable car; and we ended by climbing on foot, engulfed in a mass of pilgrims who are always toiling up the mountain by the thousands. Hot and tired and thirsty we were, yet we talked and talked as our thoughts endlessly stimulated each other's brain. The monks at the top gave us refreshments, a bath, and a dormitory. And yet our talk rolled on. What in Japanese culture cannot be traced back to Kobo Daishi? He had transferred to this mountain peak the religion, the philosophy, the arts of T'ang China, and then he had developed new rituals, a new alphabet, and even new foods and a code of living. Hasegawa-san unrolled all this for me in a manner that could not have differed greatly from Socrates' discussions with his student along the Agora of Athens.

Later we met other visitors at the abbot's hall, where we joined in a "haiku party" of poetry compositing and of impromptu painting . . . I felt lifted above my ordinary faculties, far wiser and more artistic than I could ever have been before.

Only one moment of absolute silence can I recall, and that was when we stood at the grave of Kobo Daishi and felt his spirit all around us.

March 28, 1957

## Selected Writings by Saburo Hasegawa

**Article from the *New York Times*  
Sunday, March 21, 1954**

SABURO HASEGAWA: I will tell you one of the stories I brought from Japan from a book about the deeds of famous Zen priests. Once there were two young monks who were discussing a flag blowing in the wind. One of them said, "It is the flag that is moving." The other said, "No, it is the wind that is making the flag move." They kept on discussing it. After a while, an elder monk came. He listened to them and said, "You are both wrong. It is your heart and your mind that are moving."

Later a writer who was analyzing the story said the first two were not very clever but the third was not very clever either. But then perhaps it is true that the young monks would have bought iron and that due to the third monk they could buy gold. Gold is abstract art; that is what I believe.

Now, as perhaps you know, in Zen monasteries people are asked to learn about one of these stories until they arrive at some conclusion of their own. One Japanese Zen monk kept wondering about the story for seven years. Then one day, while pounding rice, he paused in a frozen pose as if in a sculpture, because after seven years he thought he found the meaning and he was full of joy of enlightenment. I tell this story because abstract art is something that we can't really grasp except by living with it a long time, searching for the real meaning.

This poem and the "Notes on Painting" which follow it were written during Hasegawa's final illness and are probably his last writings on art.

(Note: both the poem and the notes below need a certain amount of further editing.)'

EARTH AND AIR<sup>2</sup>

Sculpture by Picasso;  
 You would perhaps laugh at it,  
 Won't you, Haniwa—  
 But it too wants to become ——!

Say, Haniwa,  
 Among you, there are the old, the young—  
 Women and children—  
 But why, why (on your expression) could you be so naïve.

Say, Haniwa  
 Don't you, in your life  
 ever have shadow,  
 The darkness?

Say, Haniwa,  
 You are too cheerful  
 Ah, perhaps that is why you are so evanescent.

Say, Haniwa,  
 Several hundred years have gone by  
 And now I am adoring you  
 By the light of the lamp.

By me, my wife is mending some Taki  
 Radio is on the air;  
 The radio broadcasts, "The danger of the World!"  
 About the War  
 War, War and again War—

Say, Haniwa,  
 What are the human beings doing?  
 But, even today—the children are  
 Cheerful, naïve like you—  
 Ah—that's why they are so frail—  
 Just like you—

Say, Haniwa,  
 You are all a round like-cylinder  
 You are hollow—your eyes are holes—

Air—air—you inside and outside . . . it is air—  
That's all right—

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Say, Haniwa,—You are made of earth.—  
You are made of earth and you do not try to deceive it  
Say, Haniwa—but the hands, the fingers  
that have created you are the hands and fingers of the human beings  
Yet—you do not try to deceive—  
The wedge and clay

Made into coils by the fingers—  
the rounded little balls—  
just put together  
With bamboo stick or with a twig the holes are cut out  
and the lines are put in  
That is all  
That's all right—

Say, Haniwa, Human beings have made many  
forms (sculpture?) with wood, stone and metal  
Besides the earth—  
Is it real? Is it made by human beings' hands?  
We wonder about them because they are so well made  
Then, we become tired of this—  
Say, Haniwa, months and years go by but our  
hands do not change their shape  
It's foolish to try to conceal the fact that  
they are made by hands  
First of all human beings live on earth and  
eat the things that grow on earth  
Dear earth, lovable earth—  
And my hands, human being's hands, fingers  
and air, air  
Within the stomach, deep in the eyes  
Full of air  
Say, Haniwa, you are so refreshing

Say, Haniwa, among you there are also some  
armed people (soldiers)  
Say, Haniwa, trains, steam ships, airplanes were invented  
The birth of TV and atomic power—

Oh, Haniwa, how could we arm ourselves more—  
 In the stomach, deep in our eyes, we have  
 stuffed ourselves with foolishness, thinking  
 that they are superior to air (emptiness).

Say, Haniwa, your foolishness no longer exists anywhere  
 Say, Haniwa, decadent human beings are we  
 envious of you

Say, Haniwa, but still now, the children are  
 able to paint the naïve feature of man  
 just like you  
 And, the decadent human beings are  
 envying the kids' paintings—

Say, Haniwa, we must start all over again  
 We must start all over again  
 We, the human beings must start all over again  
 regarding you as our model, our example—

Now then, Haniwa, a philosopher has taught me  
 That our old literature, "Kojiki" has  
 an introduction written by Roshi's words—  
 So I have assumed to myself, Haniwa  
 That before Shaku and Confucius came to our  
 country from the front entrance,  
 The intelligent Lao Tsu had already  
 quietly come in from the back gate—

Say, Haniwa, I shall not be fooled—  
 Your naiveté is not a mere naiveté  
 That usually witty Lao-Tsu of the Orient  
 and his "Kyo-mu" (emptiness?) also  
 exists in your stomach and deep behind  
 your eyes  
 Say Haniwa, you do not answer—  
 but that's all right.

Say, Haniwa, This is a secret just between you and me.  
 You know that Lao-Tsu is lately seen  
 in "Horizontal writing" (meaning Occidental writing)  
 and he is read all over the world—

Do you know who is reading his writings?  
 The people who are longing to become  
 like you—  
 Like you, Haniwa, with brightness, frail,  
 and the stomach and eyes just filled with  
 fresh (refreshing) air—  
 The American sculptor, Isamu Noguchi—  
 The French painter, ——  
 Say, Haniwa, you are so frail and fragile—(evanescent)  
 But possibly because of your frailty  
 You are so priceless, precious, noble—  
 I adore you, I love you Haniwa.  
 Taruko

#### NOTES ON PAINTING

It was during summer school, I had to say to my Painting Workshop class, “This is not the class of anatomy. You have to draw and paint our nude model as she is and as you feel. She is not made of plaster, stone or wood. Her bone structure is covered with flesh and skin. Feel that! Paint that!”

I set out to draw and paint the nude model. I wanted to draw and paint her as she lives. After a few strokes, I had to stop. If I want to keep my drawing or painting alive, I shouldn’t add one unnecessary line or dot which make the whole thing dull.

“Rhythmical sound of spirit alive and moving,” has been the first of the six canons of artists for fifteen centuries in the Far East. I lectured on those canons. I had to demonstrate the practice, too.

. . .

In my book, “Abstract Art,” published in 1937 in Tokyo, as one of the first books on contemporary Western movement of abstract art, I wrote, “Calligraphy will become the biggest treasure house for the future of contemporary abstract painting.”

In the beginning of the fifties, I wrote several articles on Calligraphy and abstract painting.

Myself as a little boy, very enthusiastic and talented student of calligraphy, have deserted it for long years, for the sake of painting. Time has come for me to go back into calligraphy and make steps forward in abstract painting. I do not know how to call them. Are they calligraphy or painting? Important fact is that I am inspired very often by some subjects . . . sometimes by Zen Buddhists’ remarks, sometimes by Haiku poetry and sometimes just by a phrase . . . for their visual image and literal meaning at the same time, one as strong as the other. I am very

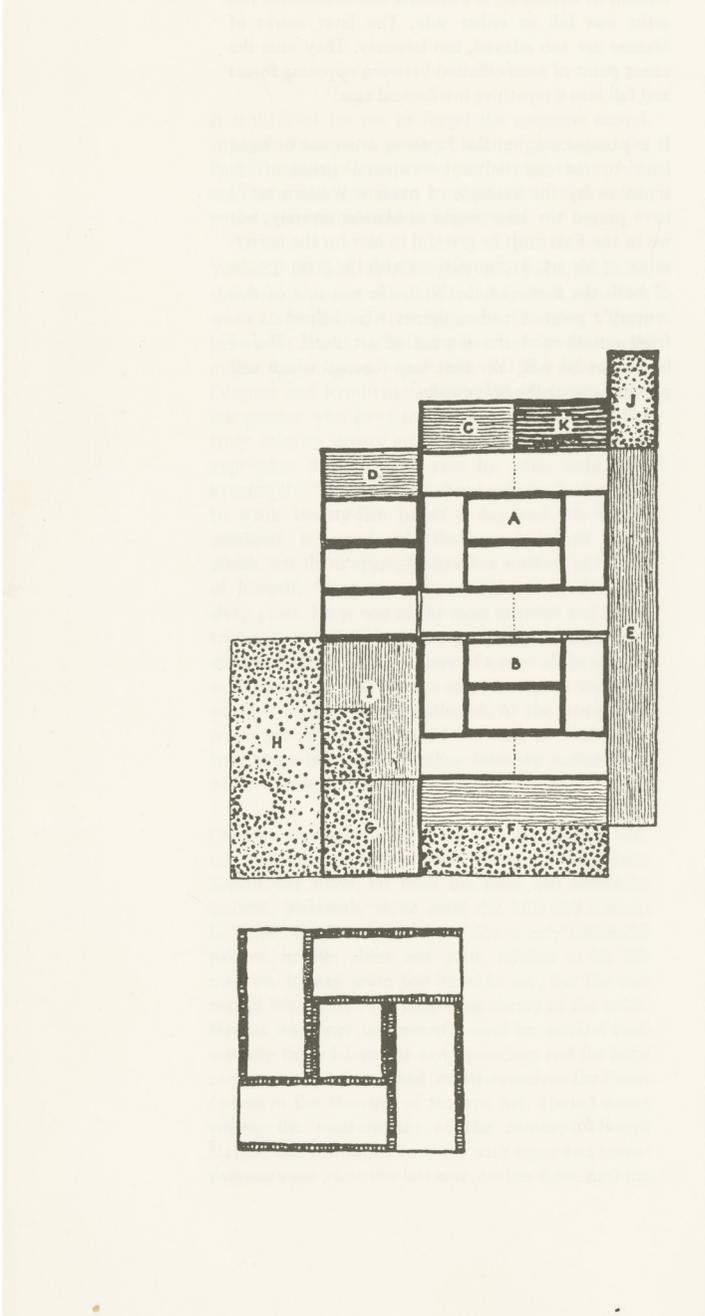


FIGURE 1. Reproduction of floor-plan drawing accompanying "My House" essay. Hasegawa Family Collection.

much concerned with the static visual aspect of calligraphy, but, at the same time rhythmical movement has been its very important aspect throughout a few thousand years of its history. Here again, the simple and direct expression of artist's mentality becomes of first importance.

Haiku is the shortest form of poetry in the world which consists of seventeen syllables. Haiga style of painting derived from Haiku and it's the style of painting which consists of fewest strokes, fewest colors possible. This is the product of various aspects of Far-East Arts.

"To express most by saying the least," this was actually attained by at least the greatest of Haiku poets, Basho. Being taught almost everyday and influenced profoundly by Basho, I can't but try to achieve the same in painting.

San Francisco cityscapes which came out of my brushes almost spontaneously everyday when I was sick last summer, told us about the ambition of myself which long years I myself was not conscious about.

. . .

An artist knows very little about what he is doing. I shouldn't talk about what I am doing. All I want is to paint better one day.

#### MY HOUSE

*Reprinted by permission from Art and Artist, published by the University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1956, and to be issued in a paper-bound edition by the New American Library as a Mentor book.*

This is my house. It was built by an elderly Japanese carpenter. This is the floor plan of my house, I want to tell you about the two elements in it that I appreciate most. Two things that I enjoy every day and every night and for which I am very grateful to my ancestors. First, the pattern made by the mats that cover the floors in my house.

This is a sketch of one floor mat, called *tatami*. It measures approximately three by six feet. It is made of compressed straw and is about one and a half inches thick. It has a cover woven from *I* grass, a tall slender grass. The edge is bound with linen or cotton or a combination of the two. This binding is black though occasionally brown may be used. The surface of the *tatami* is smooth and pleasant to touch.

No one wears shoes in a Japanese house so the mats are always clean. We sit directly on the *tatami*s, sometimes using a small sitting cushion, called *zabuton*. We also place our sleeping cushions *futon* directly on the *tatami*. Sitting on them brings us endless pleasure because of the texture of the surface and the patterns suggested by the bound edges.

The *tatami* is the module for the house. "A" is a room of eight *tatami*, "B" is a room of six *tatami*, and the size of the room is usually so indicated. Five of us live

in my house, my wife and I and three children. Seventeen tatamis for five persons means that each has three and a quarter tatamis. Since a tatami measures about eighteen square feet, this allows each person sixty-one square feet. This living area is about average in Japan today—a little less than it was before the war.

We have built-in storage facilities “C and D”. All sleeping equipment—cushions, quilts, pajamas—is kept there during the day. Closets are generally divided into two parts. I take advantage of this arrangement by using the upper half for sleeping equipment and the lower for my brushes, ink stone, and other materials for painting. In the eight-tatami room we also have a writing desk, a book shelf, a small side board, and sometimes we bring in a dining table. The desk and table are very low because we use them while sitting on the floor. This room is used for sleeping and working as well as for entertaining guests.

Most Japanese houses have verandas “E” usually facing south. The south room opens onto the garden; the veranda serving to unite the two. The view of the garden from the room, or when we sit on the veranda, brings a sense of participation in the changing of the four seasons of the year. The garden is designed to imitate nature by extracting her charm. When we look at the garden we relax in contemplation of nature’s gifts.

In my house the entrance hall “F” is six by nine feet; half the floor is paved with stone—this is where people leave their shoes—the other half is a wooden floor. There is also a bath “G”, an enclosed, covered court “H” which contains the well, a kitchen “I”, and a toilet “J”. Throughout the Japanese house the pattern of the floor mats is one of the basic and strong visual elements. Eight—six—and three tatami rooms are the most popular. There is a very beautiful square room of four and a half tatamis; the half tatami is in the center (this is a room I do not have).

Rooms range in size from three tatamis, through six, eight, ten twelve, and fifteen. The fifteen-tatami room is usually the largest found in a private dwelling. Large clubs or hotels with banquet halls may have rooms of twenty tatamis or more. Smaller rooms give the feeling of an asymmetrical pattern and are more intimate. The formality of larger rooms is emphasized by more symmetrical patterns; the larger the room the more symmetrical the pattern.

Doors also follow the standard measures of three by six feet, though there are deviations. A wall nine feet wide may be divided into four doors of two feet, three inches each. Ceilings are either seven and a half or nine feet high. Pierced carvings or small sliding doors often occupy the space between the top of the door and the ceiling; this is decorative and also provides ventilation. With our consistent standard of measurement, all lumber can be prepared at the mill according to the module, as also the paper needed for doors and walls. Building and repair work are thus simplified.

The main support for the roof, traditionally covered with straw or reeds, or with ceramic tiles but today often with zinc plates, are wooden posts. Most of the walls slide open or can be removed entirely; it is thus possible to turn two small rooms

into one large room. This also provides greater ventilation, a necessity during the hot, humid summer months.

The traditional Japanese way of living can be described as an example of modular measurement, from the smallest utensil to a large dwelling. As the tatami border shows, the module allows for very pleasant variations of patterns. The tatami gives a sense of stability because it adheres to a strict module but at the same time the module allows room for imagination. The linear pattern of the Japanese house bears a striking resemblance to the paintings of Piet Mondrian in his most austere period. In a sense, we live *in* and *on* Mondrian paintings. I feel this very strongly; especially when I see the numerous straight lines of the house, the rectangular patterns of the black lacquer frames of *fusama* (removable partitions; prepared on both sides with plain or decorated paper), and the natural wood frames of *shoji* (single-sheet, white paper doors.) It might be said that we do not need Mondrian paintings in Japan because we live within them. But as one who appreciates the fascinating beauty of the pure abstract patterns of traditional Japanese architecture, I think that Japan today needs the reminder of Mondrian in order to rediscover the treasures of her heritage.

Living within the Mondrian patterns means we move around in them. By moving around our changing perspectives emphasize and enrich the enjoyment of these extremely strict, straight-line compositions. Measurement of all these changes is based on the arithmetic of the ancient Chinese *Book of Changes, I-Ching*, which deals with the figures in mathematical relation to the universe. Though the rule of the module is strict it contains all possibilities for true creativity. As the fundamental theory of the *Book of Changes* emphasizes harmony between Yin and Yang, which means harmony between shade and sun, so the symmetrical structures and patterns created in accordance with this harmony produce a feeling of balance in which we can live and relax.

This harmony is reflected in the serenity apparent in the Japanese home. Simplicity and cleanliness add to it. These elements developed early in Shintoism, and later happily combined with Zen Buddhist emphasis on directness. Zen Buddhism influenced the development of an architecture of extreme simplicity, and at the same time provided a deep feeling for eternity. We feel this is the serenity of the home.

The second element in my house which I enjoy is the part of the house marked "H". In my house it is a one-tatami unit. This area is dedicated to purposes entirely beyond physical or bodily functions. We do not use this space for eating, sitting, or sleeping. It is wholly dedicated to art, religion, nature, or a combination of the three. It has a mental and spiritual function. I think this proportion of one unit to seventeen is good. It is a proportion the average Japanese house reserves for "unusefulness." The material used in building this area differs from that in the other parts of the house. Although the natural hues of the walls of the other parts are restricted to neutral tones of cream, ochre, or white, brilliant colors and textures

of the walls are applied here. The columns, floors, border, and ceiling are finished with imagination in order to display unusual kinds of wood, special finishes, and colors. This area is called the *tokonoma*. It serves as an artistic frame for a vase or a basket of flowers and leaves, a hanging scroll painting, or a scroll of calligraphy. Any treasured object may be placed here. Within this framework flower arrangements and works of art have a place of their own. Here, they are fully appreciated and respected. When the occasion arises, the *tokonoma* is converted into an altar and serves a religious purpose. If a guest is present he is given the place nearest the *tokonoma*. A good guest pays homage to the holy, beautiful, or natural objects that are found there at all times.

I wonder whether contemporary architecture, which in theory and practice places so much emphasis on the functional, gives due consideration to the true purpose of living: to art, to religion, to nature. Is due attention being given to the *tokonoma* by the architects of today who follow a style similar to that of the Japanese house?

The old traditions of the East spread over a wide expanse of India and China. They were gathered up, condensed, and made visible by the Japanese, who are historically, young people among the Orientals. The cultural position of Japan in relation to China and India is similar to that of the United States to Europe.

I do not believe Japanese architecture is an ideal one. We have problems, many of which stem from the fact that our architecture was developed within local traditions. Today, we should strive to revive the best of our heritage in a language more contemporary and universal. I believe a meeting of Eastern and Western traditions would be beneficial to both.