



**Ink Splashes on Camera: Calligraphy, Action Painting, and  
Mass Media in Postwar Japan**

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## **Ink Splashes on Camera: Calligraphy, Action Painting, and Mass Media in Postwar Japan**

The rapid postwar modernization and internationalization of Japanese calligraphy coincided with the global spread of action painting. But scholarly discussions of action painting, even those that employ transcultural and comparative approaches, have for the most part failed to see the connection.<sup>1</sup> Calligraphy is mentioned as a source of inspiration for postwar abstract painters, and the works of Pollock and Mathieu have occasionally been compared to East Asian calligraphy.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, on his trip to Japan in 1957, Georges Mathieu publicly acknowledged that he had been inspired by the wild cursive calligraphy of ancient China, and Pollock's method of laying his canvases on the floor has been thought to resemble calligraphic practice.<sup>3</sup> But, tangled as it is, the nexus between Japanese calligraphy and action painting demands attention. In particular, the role that the calligraphers themselves, who were engaged in the strategic internationalization of their practices, played in this exchange has yet to be explored.

Calligraphy was perhaps the last of Japan's art forms to undergo modernization. By the early twentieth century, the calligraphers, who had ardently resisted the new artistic and cultural system imposed by the Meiji reforms of the preceding century, found themselves excluded from the official, state-sponsored art institutions and organizations. In contrast to the privileged position that their traditional art form had held in the premodern period, its practitioners now were cut off from state-sponsored opportunities for dialogue and collaboration with other artists. In the 1930s the calligraphers had made a few feeble attempts to modernize their art for viewers, but it was only during the post-war period—with its near-total transformation of Japanese political, social, and cultural life—that calligraphy achieved new status as a highly visible form of modern art.

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3 Paradoxically, the calligraphers' new visibility after the war was triggered by yet another act of  
4 exclusion. In 1946, the Allied occupation forces—in particular the U.S. Education Mission to  
5 Japan, which questioned the usefulness of calligraphy for the age of print media, radio, and  
6 television—had ousted calligraphy from the educational curriculum, which had been the  
7 calligraphers' only refuge in an official Meiji cultural system that had otherwise excluded them.  
8 The shock of this final institutional uprooting pushed the calligraphers to take a proactive stance  
9 and start a dialogue with a wide range of cultural players in a struggle for the survival of their  
10 art.<sup>4</sup> At this watershed moment, a group of young Japanese calligraphers broke with tradition in  
11 an effort to prove the relevance of their art to new audiences. In its epistolary manifesto, the  
12 Bokujinkai group, which formed in Kyoto in 1952, declared:

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27 Now, a great future is opening in front of calligraphy. European and  
28 American avant-garde artists, and Japanese progressive artists and art  
29 critics, keep knocking on calligraphy's doors. . . . The world of calligraphy,  
30 which has long been hibernating in the shell of authoritarianism, is finally  
31 being shaken from outside. Calligraphic art, which has preserved a long  
32 tradition in a remote corner of the Orient, has finally come into sight of the  
33 world. But will it be able to resurrect itself as a truly modern art, or will it  
34 be abandoned and self-destruct after progressive artists have absorbed its  
35 essence? We acutely feel that we are standing at this crossroads right now.

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47 When we think about it, we feel like we cannot lose even one day.<sup>5</sup>

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50 With these words, the postwar generation of Japanese calligraphers launched the ambitious and  
51 perilous venture of reshaping calligraphy's public image as a modern art form, and the new  
52 calligraphy—known as both avant-garde *zen'ei* and modernist *kindai*—was born.

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6 For the Japanese calligraphers who were pursuing this agenda of radical modernization during  
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8 the late '40s and early '50s, international abstract art was a central point of reference for the  
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10 "modern," and the calligraphic sections of European Informel and American Abstract  
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12 Expressionism offered access to broader international visibility. But it was the perceived analogy  
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14 between calligraphy and the new action painting—facilitated in large part by the media—that  
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16 would catapult the calligraphers into the public eye. In turn, the calligraphers, engaged in the  
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18 strategic internationalization of their practices, would persistently share their new performative  
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20 theories and practices with action painters worldwide.  
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### 28 **The View from TV Journalism: Bundō Shunkai and Calligraphy as Spectacle**

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30 On January 5, 1952 visitors of the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum witnessed a large-scale  
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32 calligraphy performance by one of the most influential but also most traditional calligraphers of  
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34 the modern era, a Tendai Buddhist monk Bundō Shunkai (1878–1970).  
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38 Head of both the Zuiun (Auspicious Cloud) calligraphy group and the selection committee for  
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40 the calligraphy section of the yearly government-run Nitten art salon, Bundō acknowledged the  
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42 Tokyo Metropolitan Museum for their support of calligraphy by staging a calligraphy  
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44 demonstration at the annual commemoration of the museum's founding. An impressive strip of  
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46 paper about 36 meters long and 6 meters wide was spread on the floor of the exhibition hall.  
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48 Surrounded by the crowd of the viewers, Bundō performed his art, stepping on the paper as if  
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50 dancing, with the audience breathlessly following each of his movements.  
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54 Entering the vast white space amidst the surging crowd, the calligrapher stood for a moment in  
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3 the center of his future artwork (plate 1). An old man of seventy five, with a long white beard  
4 and a monk's black attire, Bundō's slight figure appeared solemn and solitary, as if dwarfed by  
5 the sea of paper. After a moment of contemplation, the action starts. Taking up a brush so big that  
6 it resembled a broom for sweeping streets, the calligrapher dipped it into a large bucket of liquid  
7 ink. At this point his body becomes tense, the inked brush being very heavy. He moves with  
8 extreme focus, since there will be no chance for correction under the gaze of hundreds of eyes—  
9 as well as extremely fast, since this is the only way to keep the writing integrated and maintain  
10 the natural flow of the brushstrokes. As Bundō Shunkai writes, he steps backwards.

11  
12 Occasionally, assistants enter the paper arena to supply new ink for the master's brush or  
13 straighten folds of paper. Several photo journalists run along the margins of the paper sheet,  
14 attempting to follow Bundo's rapid movements as his painting evolves and trying to capture  
15 every aspect of his unusual action, from various angles and at different stages. As the  
16 calligrapher approaches the end of the white sheet, four huge characters are left behind, as if to  
17 mark his passage (plate 2). Now the audience can read an ancient Chinese proverb: 龍翔鳳舞  
18 *ryūshō hōbu* ("Rise into the skies like a dragon and dance like a phoenix").

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Inscribed in early January, this was Bundō's *kakizome*—his first programmatic calligraphy of the  
year—announcing his wishes for the new year 1952. This auspicious and energetic motto  
introduced a year in which Japan would gain its independence from the Allied government, and  
expressed Bundō's hopes for a bright future, for his country as well as for calligraphy. To draw  
these characters Bundō had used the fast *gyōsho* (running) script, which corresponded both to the  
dynamism of the proverb's content and to the fast mode of his calligraphy performance. But  
given the scale of the artwork, it was neither the content of the *kakizome*, nor the style of the  
calligraphy, but the spectacle itself that attracted the most attention. The enormous size of the

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3 characters and the energetic gestures of Bundō as he danced with his huge brush lived on in the  
4 collective memory, fixed by the flashes of numerous cameras.  
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8 In their coverage of this show, the photographers focused on close-ups of the artist's movements.  
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10 They also sought to capture the general atmosphere in the exhibition room by spotlighting the  
11 relationship between calligrapher, artwork, and audience through shots of Bundō's figure taken  
12 over the viewers' heads, or images of him spreading ink on paper at the viewers' feet or moving  
13 in the white paper field surrounded by a dense ring of onlookers. Remarkably, not a single shot  
14 of the finished calligraphy was taken. The next day, a photograph of this performance appeared  
15 in Japan's leading newspaper, *Yomiuri*—a rare honor for calligraphy-related events (plate 3). The  
16 photograph was accompanied by a detailed description of the scale of the calligraphy and the  
17 observation that the artist had “received a great ovation from the viewers.”<sup>6</sup>  
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29 Such close attention to Bundō Shunkai's calligraphy from the *Yomiuri* was not accidental. The  
30 year before, in 1951, *Yomiuri* had organized the Third Yomiuri Independent Exhibition at the  
31 same venue, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, which showed works of the new generation of  
32 abstract painters, including Jackson Pollock, for the first time in Japan.<sup>7</sup> Photographs of  
33 Pollock's works, as well as Hans Namuth's famous photographs of Pollock at work, which  
34 transformed the perception of modern art in the United States,<sup>8</sup> circulated among Japanese art  
35 professionals too, discussed in various art groups and reviewed by the most prominent Japanese  
36 art critics.<sup>9</sup> The film of Pollock's performance also screened in Japan in early 1952. Namuth's  
37 photographs and film of Pollock painting encouraged Japanese art correspondents and critics to  
38 look for such performativity in Japanese art, and calligraphy turned out to be a fertile ground for  
39 this pursuit, as *Yomiuri's* art reporters pointed out. By focusing on Bundō's close relationship  
40 with the paper, his skill at wielding the dripping ink, and the excited gaze of the viewers  
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3 following his movements, the reporters offered a new perspective on Japanese calligraphy that  
4 compared it to the latest international art trends. Since Bundō was on the conservative side of the  
5 calligraphic scene, it is inconceivable that he himself would have drawn such an analogy  
6 between himself and Pollock, or that he would even have tolerated such comparisons; yet his  
7 performance reminded audiences that large-scale calligraphic performances had for a long time  
8 been a constituent part of the Japanese art practice, and inspired them to think about calligraphy  
9 in terms of speed, expressivity, spectacle, and spontaneity—features it shared with action  
10 painting.

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12 As Japanese audiences (unlike European and American audiences) were well aware, exalted self-  
13 expression in calligraphy had long been celebrated in the Chinese tradition of *kuangcao* ("wild  
14 cursive") script, which emphasized movement through time and space as well as extreme  
15 individual expressivity. Legend has it that Zhang Shu, one of the most prominent calligraphers of  
16 the Tang Dynasty, created calligraphy when drunk and, following his creative impulse, wrote  
17 calligraphy on the blank walls using his hair—soaked in ink—as a brush.<sup>10</sup> Although none of the  
18 Japanese calligraphers could actually see these legendary but non-extant works of the ancient  
19 Chinese masters, anecdotes about them circulated widely among both calligraphers and the  
20 general public, and its artists' eccentricities came to be regarded as a distinct mode of calligraphic  
21 practice. Dynamic calligraphic performances such as those of Bundō Shunkai and Nantenbō Tōjū  
22 before him were inevitably associated with the tradition of *kuangcao* and perceived as such by  
23 viewers.<sup>11</sup>

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25 Yet perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of Bundō's performance, in terms of its public  
26 resonance, was the fact that Japanese television covered it in one of its first broadcasts, in 1952.  
27 This was the era before regular television programming, when broadcasting was still irregular

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3 and offered only a few hours per day, and Bundō's large-scale performance was one of the first  
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5 events shown. The spectacular scale of the performance, the prominent venue, the distinguished  
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7 attendees, the numerous interested viewers, and the auspicious nature of *kakizome*—all of this  
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9 brought Bundō's calligraphy to the vanguard of Japanese visual culture, creating a close  
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11 association between Japanese traditional art and the rapidly developing new technology—a  
12  
13 connection much desired in the postwar era. Curiously, the news program broadcast photographs  
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15 of Bundō's performance rather than a moving image of him writing, no doubt due to technical  
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17 limitations.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it was the performative aspect of his calligraphy that had an impact  
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19 on viewers.  
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24 In the dynamic setting of postwar Tokyo, the performance by Bundō Shunkai exposed a deep-  
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26 seated tension between past, present, and future—in this case, the complex relationship between  
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28 traditional art forms, contemporary art, and rapidly developing technology—that was not only  
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30 central to calligraphy as an art form, but critical for the postwar era in Japan in general.  
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### 37 **The View from the International Artist as Filmmaker: Calligraphy as Dynamic Flow**

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39 A new way of integrating Japanese calligraphy into international performative endeavors was  
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41 soon offered by a Belgian abstract painter associated with the COBRA group, Pierre Alechinsky  
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43 (b. 1927). In 1955 Alechinsky came to Japan on a fellowship from the Belgian government to  
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45 explore the creative potential of Japanese calligraphy from the viewpoint of a European abstract  
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47 artist. His research resulted in several articles in French, English, and Japanese; a 16-minute art  
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49 documentary, *Calligraphie Japonaise*; and a lifelong exchange with Japanese calligraphers.<sup>13</sup>  
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54 The idea of making a film to document current developments in contemporary Japanese  
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3 calligraphy occurred to Alechinsky when he was first exposed to the creative calligraphic scene  
4 of Kyoto. Originally interested in the surrealist approach to script and semiotics, Alechinsky  
5 found himself in an environment where visually appealing yet (for him) illegible script created  
6 an artistic and cognitive overstimulation that was both aesthetically overwhelming and  
7 irresistibly alluring. Indiscriminately showing street signs, shop curtains with inscriptions,  
8 newspapers, handwritten letters, advertisements, and stone engravings, Alechinsky observes in  
9 his film that “The streets are filled with images. On signs, flags, objects from daily life, language  
10 decorates the city.”<sup>14</sup> Walking through the streets of Kyoto, which were covered with script—  
11 ancient yet contemporary, real yet inaccessible, pictographic yet abstract—feels to Alechinsky  
12 like sleepwalking in the surrealist dream of an abstract language. The rhythmic poetic narration  
13 and surrealist music of the film enhance this impression and create a uniquely artistic rather than  
14 documentary space for *Calligraphie Japonaise*.

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31 In the film, after overloading viewers with a critical mass of written script, Alechinsky attempts  
32 to help them find a way through it. He selects as his path the cognitive and physical experience  
33 of writing, rather than the script itself. Showing a small boy scribbling with a stick in the sand,  
34 Alechinsky theorizes that “the joy of drawing characters was born in the sand, even before  
35 school and paper existed. It’s older than art and history.”<sup>15</sup> From there he moves on to show  
36 older children, first playing in a school yard, then learning characters and practicing calligraphy  
37 in a classroom (plate 4). The children repeat with their hands the movements of their teacher,  
38 who demonstrates character strokes in the air—a standard practice for learning characters that,  
39 seen through Alechinsky’s eyes, looks almost like a devotional ritual—as if imparting a  
40 transcendental quality to the script. He comments that “children can learn determination and  
41 ability in their gestures. . . . The child restrains itself, with controlled breaths, and conquers the  
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3 characters that will fill its mind.”<sup>16</sup> For Alechinsky, this suggests that Japanese culture values  
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5 script not only as a visual, but also as a physical and metaphysical experience.  
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8 Alechinsky suggests a link between this transcendent style of learning and the Zen practice of  
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10 using calligraphy in meditation in the next scene, which shows a Zen monk practicing  
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12 calligraphy in a temple, “forgetting himself and the outside world in the process.”<sup>17</sup> As  
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14 Alechinsky points out, in Zen, the physicality of the act of writing gains a meaning independent  
15  
16 of the semantics of the written language. The very process of writing—its technique, speed,  
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18 setting, and flow—acquires a creative potential of its own, emancipated from its semantic  
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20 content or even cultural context. Alechinsky's only reservation regarding the Zen view of  
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22 calligraphy is its rootedness in rigid training and its compliance with the strict hierarchies of the  
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24 community of calligraphers, which make it inaccessible to someone like himself. In response, he  
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26 enthusiastically presents young avant-garde calligraphers who aim to transcend the limitations  
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28 not only of the conventional calligraphic societies but of traditional methods. As he points out,  
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30 for the avant-gardists “it took courage to cast off education and to revolt against the seemingly  
31  
32 rigid order.”<sup>18</sup>  
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38 Alechinsky focuses on the unique ways four avant-garde calligraphers—Eguchi Sōgen, Morita  
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40 Shiryū, Shinoda Tōkō, and Ōsawa Gakyū—searched for new forms of calligraphic practice.

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42 Two of the calligraphers he selects, Morita Shiryū and Eguchi Sōgen, belonged to the famous  
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44 avant-garde calligraphy group Bokujinkai (“People of the Ink”), which by coincidence was  
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46 founded in Kyoto on January 1952, the day of Bundō Shunkai’s performance at Tokyo  
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48 Metropolitan Museum. Dedicated to bringing Japanese calligraphy to an international level,  
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50 these artists struggled to make the art form more accessible for international viewers, who could  
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3 not read characters. To this end they reached out to and collaborated with foreign abstract  
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5 painters in joint exhibitions, publications, and theoretical discussions. Alechinsky himself  
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7 became aware of Japanese avant-garde calligraphy through the journal *Bokubi* (Beauty of Ink),  
8  
9 edited by Morita Shiryū, which he saw at William Hayter's studio. This resulted in a yearlong  
10  
11 correspondence between Morita and Alechinsky and the regular exchange of art journals—the  
12  
13 *Bokubi*, edited by Morita, and *CoBrA*, edited by Alechinsky.<sup>19</sup>  
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17 In *Calligraphie Japonaise* Alechinsky depicts Morita primarily as an avant-garde artist rather  
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19 than as a theoretician or scholar. He shows Morita working barefoot in his atelier, dressed in  
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21 wide trousers rolled up to his ankles and a short-sleeved t-shirt. Alechinsky follows him as he  
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23 prepares ink in a deep bowl, pours it into a basin, picks up a large bundle of half-a-dozen smaller  
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25 brushes tied together, stops for a second in front of a large sheet of paper spread on the floor, lifts  
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27 the inked brush along with a piece of newspaper to catch the droplets, and finally steps on the  
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29 paper (plate 5). At this moment, the action starts. Morita attacks the paper in front of him,  
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31 jumping with his feet to make space for the brush and moving his head in rhythm with the brush,  
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33 as if the brush were taking the lead. He stops for a second in contemplation—Alechinsky  
34  
35 highlights this moment with a theatrical close-up of Morita's concentrated face—before  
36  
37 dramatically applying his final stroke. In Alechinsky's view, Morita "falls back on the  
38  
39 elementary power of ink. To create, he abandons all examples, and amidst the chaos his  
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41 movements are cast out like screams."<sup>20</sup> The expressive musical score, closely aligned with  
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43 Morita's movements, renders this action even more dynamic and forceful. In the film, it takes  
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45 Morita only sixteen seconds to complete his work, riding the momentum of his creative impulse.  
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47 Impressed by this technique, Alechinsky's two largest artistic take-aways from Japan were just  
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49 that: the technique of placing paper on the floor to enter into a different relationship with it and  
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3 the importance of speed in creating one's work.  
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6 In the final scene of the film, Alechinsky concludes that “A calligrapher is free in his movements,  
7 and animates the characters. . . . The characters leave the written pages. Transcending different  
8 educations, the universal language of art is formed.”<sup>21</sup> At this point a flock of birds flies across a  
9 clear sky—like characters that have taken off from written pages—as if to declare calligraphy  
10 free from any limitations and announce a new era of interaction between artists across the globe  
11 based on a universal language of movement, gesture, and artistic impulse.  
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20 It is noteworthy that Pierre Alechinsky, primarily an abstract painter and printmaker, was not  
21 originally a filmmaker; it was his encounter with the practices of contemporary Japanese  
22 calligraphers that made him reach out to this medium. In fact, while Alechinsky was the first to  
23 conceive of the documentary, he relied for its realization on a constellation of international,  
24 mostly European, film professionals and photographers. These included Tokyo-based Hungarian  
25 photographer Francis Haar, Belgian painter and poet Christian Dotremont, and Belgian surrealist  
26 composer André Souris, among others. Thus, while Alechinsky's paintings drew inspiration from  
27 calligraphy, he consciously selected film as the medium most suitable for capturing the  
28 movements and temporal dimension of calligraphy. The collaborators' efforts were rewarded, and  
29 the film won an international prize at the Bergamo Film Festival in 1957. Alechinsky's  
30 *Calligraphie Japonaise* affected European and American abstractionists by introducing them to  
31 the dynamic and rapidly evolving art of contemporary Japanese calligraphy. But it also made the  
32 Japanese calligraphers involved in production of the film—most importantly Morita and Eguchi,  
33 two key figures of the new avant-garde movement—see their own art with new eyes as a  
34 dynamic performative action with international reach.  
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### **The View from the *Manga* Artists: The Calligrapher Next Door**

By this point, the idea of avant-garde calligraphy and its spectacular but also puzzling performative quality had entered the larger visual field of postwar Japan, and soon reached the mass media. One of the most popular postwar newspaper *manga* series, *Sazae-san* by Hasegawa Machiko, featured an episode dedicated to avant-garde calligraphy in Japan's leading *Asahi* newspaper on January 31, 1956. Since the readership for the morning edition of this *manga* series was close to seven million, the number of people who saw the episode on avant-garde calligraphy was overwhelmingly large compared to the small size of the avant-garde calligraphy community itself. The *Sazae-san* series was itself a cultural phenomenon: a *manga* focused on the life of a young woman, Sazae Isono, who sees the post-war transformation of her country through her everyday experiences and family life.<sup>22</sup> The series conveyed the atmosphere of postwar Tokyo by addressing phenomena encountered daily by its readers—from postwar hunger to the American presence in the city, women's rights, new technology, and the clash between traditional and modern culture. The sketchy, unpretentious, ironical episodes were filled with the charm of Sazae's witty conversation with her neighbors, making the *Sazae-san* series both a commercial success and a precise social record of the postwar era.

In the spirit of the rest of the *manga* series, the avant-garde calligraphy episode had a casual and ironical tone and showed a trivial interaction between two neighbors (plate 6). As a *yonkoma* or four-panel *manga*, this episode consisted of four consecutive scenes arranged vertically. The first panel, which introduced the topic of the episode, focused on a middle-aged man with a long moustache practicing avant-garde calligraphy, presumably at home. Dressed in casual Japanese

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3 housewear, barefoot, with short trousers, rolled-up sleeves, and a band over his head, the man is  
4 pulling a huge brush over the sheet of paper that he stands on. His legs are slightly bent, his feet  
5 placed widely apart, and his raised arms grip a large brush. The man's stiff, straight back and the  
6 sweat pouring down his face suggest that he is in a highly concentrated and exalted state of mind.  
7  
8 The ink brushstrokes that surround his feet do not resemble any character or calligraphy.  
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10 Comically drawn, the figure of the calligrapher resembles a sportsman, a martial arts practitioner,  
11 or perhaps someone doing his daily exercise routine at home. The next panel shows the  
12 calligrapher pausing, interrupted by someone calling him from outside. In the third panel another  
13 middle-aged old man, also with moustache and bald head, comes over to the calligrapher's porch  
14 with a letter in his hand. The neighbor explains that the mail carrier has mistakenly thrown a  
15 letter addressed to the calligrapher into his postbox. The neighbor is also casually dressed,  
16 although in more contemporary European attire: trousers, a vest, a fully buttoned shirt, and *geta*  
17 shoes with socks. In one hand he holds the letter and in the other he holds a large broom, as if he  
18 had been cleaning his porch or garden when the letter arrived. In the final scene, the visitor  
19 waves goodbye, apologizing to the calligrapher for having disturbed him while he was cleaning  
20 the house. It never occurs to the neighbor that the calligrapher might have been practicing the  
21 new avant-garde calligraphy with his huge brush and casual attire; he assumes he was simply  
22 sweeping the floor. The calligrapher is left standing on his porch in astonishment.  
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45 Like the Sazae-san manga series in general, this episode depicts a curious side of postwar  
46 Japanese life—the new calligraphy—with gentle irony and a cozy neighborly feeling. Hasegawa  
47 Michiko depicts avant-garde calligraphers as eccentrics who live next door and do something  
48 spectacular yet incomprehensible in their free time. The artist does not pass judgement on the  
49 quality of their calligraphy or its cultural value, but simply offers a humorous observation about  
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3 how strange their art practice looks to the outsiders. This can be interpreted as an ironic comment  
4  
5 on new postwar art movements in general or on the clash between the new calligraphy and what  
6  
7 was commonly thought of as calligraphy. Hasegawa Michiko, with her sense for the zeitgeist,  
8  
9 had already accepted avant-garde calligraphy as a part of the new Japanese reality, and her  
10  
11 manga also presents the writing process—not the final abstract works—as the hallmark feature  
12  
13 of this new art.  
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### 20 **The View from Photo Journalism: Inoue Yūichi and Calligraphy as a Battleground**

21  
22  
23 Five days later, as if to illustrate the point of view expressed in Hasegawa Machiko's manga,  
24  
25 *Asahi* published another image of avant-garde calligraphy, this time a photograph by Sugano  
26  
27 Yoshikatsu of a Bokujinkai calligrapher, Inoue Yūichi (plate 7). This image, which depicts Inoue  
28  
29 in his atelier making calligraphy for the traveling exhibition “Contemporary Japanese  
30  
31 Calligraphy” in Europe, is one of the most famous records of the performative and expressive  
32  
33 aspect of postwar avant-garde calligraphy.<sup>23</sup> At the time the photograph was taken, in 1955,  
34  
35 Inoue's works had become abstract and entirely detached from language, the characters being  
36  
37 treated as purely visual and not verbal. Furthermore, like Pollock, Inoue was using enamel  
38  
39 instead of traditional ink, thus further challenging calligraphy's conventions.<sup>24</sup>  
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44 This image, taken by *Asahi's* photographer Sugano Yoshikatsu, was prominently featured on the  
45  
46 opening page of the special issue of *Shūkan Asahi* dedicated to avant-garde calligraphy. Sugano,  
47  
48 who was not specifically an art journalist, focused on calligraphy's performative aspect as the  
49  
50 one that could potentially appeal to the widest readership. Sugano's specialization was not  
51  
52 actually art, but social and political topics. During the Pacific War, he had produced propaganda,  
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3 as had many other journalists; after the war he was most successful when covering acute political  
4 issues. His image of Tokyo's May Day demonstrations of 1952 was seen around the world and  
5  
6 was republished in *Life* magazine. Skilled at capturing social trends, he used his ability to guess  
7  
8 the mood and expectations of the public to create an innovative depiction of Japanese calligraphy  
9  
10 in a dynamic image of high complexity and intensity.  
11  
12  
13

14  
15 Sugano's photograph of Inoue depicts the calligrapher, bare-chested, bent over a large sheet of  
16  
17 paper, with elbows and feet smeared in thick black enamel. His face expresses the highest  
18  
19 tension as he drives his heavy brush across the surface in front of him. His bodily position and  
20  
21 the tense muscles on the arms express an almost painful physical and mental straining. Yūichi is  
22  
23 absorbed by his activity, by the struggle between the brush and himself, and by the act of  
24  
25 releasing his innermost emotions and ideas. He seems to become one with his work: on the one  
26  
27 hand, the calligraphy leaves marks on his skin and clothes; on the other, he shapes the ink  
28  
29 according to his will, leaving traces of his arms and feet on the paper as he touches and steps on  
30  
31 it. The scene resembles a battle between two opponents, one animate and one inanimate, or the  
32  
33 act of taming a wild spirit. The image is far from the conventional image of calligraphy as the  
34  
35 peaceful leisure activity of educated idle men, and closer to the *wild cursive* tradition of classical  
36  
37 China or to contemporary experimental art (including action painting) that explores the  
38  
39 expressive abilities of motion and the proactive dynamic energy in art making. The inner state of  
40  
41 the artist during the process of such intense creative action is memorialized in an entry from  
42  
43 Inoue Yūichi's diary at the time this photograph was taken:  
44  
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49

50 June 8: It is horrible. I made several large works and all of them are hopeless.

51  
52 Sweat flows into my eyes, and I can't see. The back of my legs is all smudged with  
53  
54 enamel. When I walk, newspaper sheets stick to them firmly. Enamel is being used  
55  
56



1  
2  
3 up very quickly, paper as well. Enamel runs on the hands. I put paper right on top  
4  
5 of this chaos, step with my dirty feet on this paper, and absent-mindedly mess it up  
6  
7 even more. [...] Sweat is in my eyes and I don't see anything. I can't control this  
8  
9 chaos. Metallic sound of jazz. Dynamism. I have to reach the inorganic in man.  
10  
11 Shit. Need to deny Hasegawa Saburō. What is calligraphy? Need to throw away  
12  
13 and ignore all philosophies. Definitely have to read Hanada Kiyoteru. There are  
14  
15 things that echo with Okamoto Tarō. Shall I write with coal tar? Zinc. Iron sheet.  
16  
17 Wood. Stone or brick. I have to devote everything to the exhibition in Europe.  
18  
19 Have to use up all enamel and paper.<sup>25</sup>  
20  
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22  
23

24 The author's inner state of confusion is mirrored in his works; the struggle with oneself turns out  
25  
26 to be a struggle with the picture plane. The fact that Inoue Yūichi was photographed in such a  
27  
28 tense, confused, and (to judge from the diary) uncomfortable state, suggests that the photograph  
29  
30 is an intrusion into the artist's intimate space that depicts him doing something highly personal  
31  
32 and emotionally exhausting. However, it was this image of the half-naked calligrapher stretched  
33  
34 in an acrobatic movement, smeared in black paint and with a strange facial expression, that  
35  
36 attracted the attention of the wider public, more than the works of abstract calligraphy  
37  
38 themselves. Photographs of Jackson Pollock making his "drippings" were also at least as famous,  
39  
40 if not more so, than his works. It is likely that Sugano had seen Namuth's images of Pollock  
41  
42 painting when he was preparing for his work with Inoue, given that Sugano's newspaper, *Asahi*,  
43  
44 had introduced Pollock to the public in 1951.  
45  
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49

50 This method of representing contemporary calligraphers soon became an established visual mode  
51  
52 of its own. The most celebrated postwar Japanese photographer, Dōmon Ken, applied the same  
53  
54 approach in 1967 when he portrayed print artist Munakata Shikō in a way similar to Sugano's  
55  
56

1  
2  
3 portrayal of Inoue (plate 8). Both images show half-naked artists secluded in their studios,  
4  
5 immersed in painful and all-absorbing artistic creation, unaware of the outside world with its  
6  
7 observers, and represented as mad, solitary geniuses bringing Japanese art—and calligraphy—to  
8  
9 the vanguard of contemporary art. The authority of Dōmon Ken amplified and reinforced this  
10  
11 way of representing avant-garde calligraphy.  
12  
13

14  
15 This mode of visual representation so quickly overtook the popular perception of avant-garde  
16  
17 calligraphy that less than a month after Sugano's photograph in *Asahi*, another manga series,  
18  
19 *Mappira-kun* in the *Mainichi* newspaper, also featured an episode dedicated to avant-garde  
20  
21 calligraphy (plate 9). Much like *Sazae-san* in *Asahi*, this manga also ironically depicted the  
22  
23 messiness of avant-garde calligraphy through a humorous scene in which two Japanese men, one  
24  
25 of them a calligrapher, interact, as if to make a joke about the dirty appearances of calligraphers  
26  
27 engaged in avant-garde practices. When a taxi flings mud at a middle-aged man, he demands  
28  
29 compensation from the driver for his cleaning expenditures. Later, when he sees his neighbor, the  
30  
31 calligrapher, covered in ink stains, he suspects that he has dirtied himself on purpose so that he  
32  
33 can claim money from the driver too. He comments that this is a very cunning plan indeed.  
34  
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38  
39 After the second *manga* episode, it became clear that avant-garde calligraphy had been accepted  
40  
41 as a familiar cultural phenomenon and feature of the visual and artistic experience of postwar  
42  
43 Japan. Inoue Yūichi would later comment that thanks to the two manga episodes and his own  
44  
45 photographs in *Shūkan Asahi*, the common people had started associating avant-garde  
46  
47 calligraphy with “weird naked old men, smeared in ink and messing with a broom.”<sup>26</sup> By this  
48  
49 Inoue did not mean to mock the performative aspect of his own work or the popular interest in  
50  
51 calligraphy. Rather, he was disappointed that the average viewer noticed only the most  
52  
53 superficial aspect of his art and joked about his mode of production. From this point on, Japanese  
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3 calligraphers would have to take into account this common perception of their art.  
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### 8 **Art Journals and the Staging of Calligraphy: Georges Mathieu in Japan**

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10  
11 Somewhat more than a year later, in 1957, Japanese audiences demonstrated a similar fascination  
12  
13 for the art performed by a foreign abstract painter, perceiving in it an even more staged and  
14  
15 provocative performance, without any ironical underpinnings. French abstractionist Georges  
16  
17 Mathieu (1921–2012), one of the pioneers of action painting and early performance art, came to  
18  
19 Japan in August 1957, at the invitation of the Japanese Gutai group, to introduce his art to the  
20  
21 Japanese public. Like his contemporary Pollock, Mathieu focused on the process of creation as  
22  
23 his main artistic method and highlighted the importance of speed and subconscious impulse for  
24  
25 making his large-scale canvases, some of which were completed within just minutes of a fierce  
26  
27 battle with the paint.  
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31  
32 Mathieu, “the first Western artist to stage live action paintings as a performance before a viewing  
33  
34 public and as a subject of photography,” gave a series of performances in several prominent  
35  
36 locations in Japan.<sup>27</sup> In Tokyo, he performed in the atelier garden of the Japanese postwar  
37  
38 celebrity artist Okamoto Tarō; in Osaka his painting action took place before a large group of  
39  
40 spectators on the roof of Osaka’s Daimaru department store. The press covered Mathieu’s Japan  
41  
42 trip from airstair to airstair, meeting him in Japan at Haneda Airport on August 29, and seeing  
43  
44 him off on September 19.<sup>28</sup> The *Yomiuri* newspaper, with its strong interest in contemporary art,  
45  
46 followed Mathieu’s activities particularly closely and even co-sponsored his shows in Tokyo.  
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48  
49 The same *Yomiuri* reporters who had introduced Pollock to Japanese audiences and covered  
50  
51 Bundō Shunkai’s calligraphy performance now focused on the spectacular dynamism and overall  
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3 expression of Mathieu's artistic method; and Mathieu, with his provocative claims and staged  
4 public appearances, consciously invited this media attention. In the article dedicated to Mathieu's  
5 show in Tokyo, the *Yomiuri* reporter comments that "Mathieu's artistic manner is truly avant-  
6 garde" because of his extravagant self-presentation in "white striped kimono with its sleeves  
7 rolled up in traditional way, black *obi* belt, and red *hachimaki* band on his forehead," and his  
8 unconventional way of "wastefully discarding only half-used paint tubes that each cost three to  
9 five thousand yen, and splashing paint on the windows of the brand-new house of Okamoto Tarō,  
10 built just three years ago."<sup>29</sup> The messiness, unconventionality, and sometimes asocial manner of  
11 Mathieu fascinated the *Yomiuri* readership, who ascribed it to his creative fervor and his use of  
12 "speed, intuition, and excitement" as a method.<sup>30</sup> As with Inoue and the calligraphers depicted in  
13 the manga, the vanguard atmosphere of his art production captivated the minds of the Japanese  
14 viewers. Yet unlike the calligraphers, Mathieu was received with respect and genuine  
15 astonishment, rather than irony. From this point on, action painting and performativity became an  
16 accepted and established artistic practice in Japan, rather than a curiosity.

17  
18  
19 The media trend of focusing on art production rather than product continued. Yoshida Toshio, a  
20 photographer for the *Yomiuri* who specialized on arts and culture, took pictures of Mathieu's  
21 performances that traveled beyond the *Yomiuri* and were used, for example, in *Geijutsu Shinchō*,  
22 one of Japan's leading art journals. Yoshida captured Mathieu painting, bending, contemplating,  
23 and even jumping in front of his canvases. A famous image by Yoshida showed Mathieu's tall  
24 figure from the back, caught in a high jump, putting brushstrokes to the canvases covered in  
25 black and red lines and circles, in colors that matched his kimono, belt, and headband (plate 10).  
26 Reproduced in the *Geijutsu Shinchō*, this image received a programmatic caption "Action  
27 Painting: Mathieu Paints in Japan".

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3 Mathieu's activity and public presence in Japan, dubbed the "Mathieu whirlwind" by newspaper  
4 reporters, had a direct relation to calligraphy. As Mathieu explained to the *Yomiuri* readers,  
5  
6 "André Malraux called me the first artist in Europe to make calligraphy."<sup>31</sup> Comparisons to  
7  
8 calligraphy accompanied Mathieu throughout his Japanese sojourn. In the *Geijutsu Shinchō*  
9  
10 article entitled "Confrontation with Calligraphy," Mathieu provocatively claimed that "the fact  
11  
12 that I came to Japan means a confrontation between my calligraphy and Japanese calligraphy."<sup>32</sup>  
13  
14 He also criticized modern Japanese calligraphy for not being "free enough," adding that "the task  
15  
16 of contemporary Japanese calligraphy and of my own art is the same: we both want to overcome  
17  
18 the literary component, and to fulfil the true nature of art."<sup>33</sup> Mathieu further elaborated that the  
19  
20 main message of his art was not expressed in words, but lay in the speed of his paintings,  
21  
22 because "by painting fast, I am able to capture things that cannot be captured otherwise."<sup>34</sup>  
23  
24 Mathieu thereby cemented the connection between his action painting—fast, expressive,  
25  
26 spectacular, and engaging for the public—and the art of calligraphy. Furthermore, he  
27  
28 demonstrated to the Japanese avant-garde calligraphers the possibility of staging their acts of  
29  
30 writing in front of audiences, giving it a theoretical motivation.  
31  
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33  
34 Mathieu's widespread appeal, and his criticism of contemporary calligraphic practice, was both  
35  
36 insulting and stimulating for the avant-garde calligraphers. The situation was further complicated  
37  
38 by the fact that Mathieu had come to Japan on the invitation of Yoshihara Jirō, the leader of the  
39  
40 Gutai, who had begun making the Gutai group a pioneering force of Japanese contemporary art  
41  
42 in direct competition with the calligraphers. Morita Shiryū of the Bokujinkai calligraphy group  
43  
44 later complained that they did not have a chance to spend much time with Mathieu, as "it seemed  
45  
46 that the Gutai . . . wanted to monopolize [Mathieu and art critic Michel Tapié]."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless,  
47  
48 calligraphers were able to meet Mathieu briefly and attend his lecture "Today's World Art and the  
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3 East,” organized by Yoshihara in the Asahi Newspaper Building in Osaka.<sup>36</sup>  
4  
5

6 Mathieu’s ideas, public presentation, direct appeal to calligraphy, and artistic method made  
7  
8 Japanese calligraphers even more aware of the effect that interaction with the press and mass  
9  
10 media could have for their art. Mathieu's success confirmed the benefits of performing  
11  
12 calligraphy in front of an audience of viewers, so that not only the calligraphic works, but the  
13  
14 calligraphy-making process and the personality of the artist himself could be captured in the  
15  
16 flash of the journalists’ cameras.  
17  
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### 20 21 22 23 **The View from Foreign Journalists: Calligraphy as a New Art** 24

25  
26 When Japanese calligraphers reached international audiences by the second half of the 1950s,  
27  
28 they were commonly represented abroad in the same way as action painters were in Japan—as  
29  
30 avant-garde artist with a strong performative focus, even more so because by this time Japanese  
31  
32 calligraphers had begun incorporating performances into their exhibition activity in recognition  
33  
34 of action painting. While in the 1950s only a few calligraphers had paid attention to  
35  
36 performativity or had publicized action-oriented photos or videos, by the 1960s performances  
37  
38 had become a standard practice of Japanese calligraphers. Foreign photo journalists, followed by  
39  
40 Japanese journalists and international artists, perpetuated the image of calligraphy as an East  
41  
42 Asian mode of action painting.  
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46  
47 Numerous photographs of calligraphic performances appeared in the press during the  
48  
49 international tours of Japanese calligraphy artists. One such image shows Morita Shiryū during  
50  
51 his performance in German Darmstadt in 1962 (plate 11). Unlike the private setting of  
52  
53 photographs of Inoue, Morita is shown making calligraphy in front of viewers, and this publicity  
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3 is obviously an important part of the event. Featured in the German local newspaper  
4  
5 *Darmstädter Tagblatt*, and later reprinted in the calligraphic journal *Bokubi*, the photograph  
6  
7 shows Morita stepping on the paper with one barefoot leg, holding the brush in both hands, and  
8  
9 concentrating on his work. The photographer appears to have been watching Morita write from  
10  
11 behind the artist's back. The article explains that "you make calligraphy by taking a large brush,  
12  
13 putting a sheet of paper on the floor, taking off your shoes, focusing, and quickly drawing the  
14  
15 brush over the paint and even faster over the paper."<sup>37</sup> Morita, who had already highlighted the  
16  
17 speed of his writing in Alechinsky's film, reconfirmed his artistic method after encountering  
18  
19 Mathieu's theories of speed in art. In his international performances the calligrapher  
20  
21 demonstrated a concentration bordering on meditation and inviting comparison with Zen  
22  
23 contemplative practices, followed by an extremely fast, fiery, and seemingly uncontrolled writing  
24  
25 act. To foreign journalists unfamiliar with calligraphy, his artistic method looked like "a pure  
26  
27 expression of vitality (power and movement, as has also become dominant in the latest paintings  
28  
29 from North America and Europe)."<sup>38</sup> By verbalizing calligraphy's relation to action painting,  
30  
31 German journalists supported the calligraphers' efforts at modernization as well as their  
32  
33 international ambitions.  
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### 43 **Calligraphy as Media Art: Nam June Paik**

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45  
46 The view of calligraphy as an expressive performance practice soon spread outside of  
47  
48 calligraphy. Some six months after Morita's demonstration in German Darmstadt, another set of  
49  
50 photographic images became formative for the new perception of a link between calligraphy and  
51  
52 action painting.  
53  
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1  
2  
3 In September 1962 the famous "Fluxus Festspiele neuster Musik" took place in Wiesbaden—a  
4 forty-minute drive from Darmstadt, where Morita had held his show in May of the same year. A  
5  
6 central event in the development of postwar performative and experimental art, the festival  
7  
8 hosted fourteen avant-garde concerts and art performances by a diverse group of artists and  
9  
10 musicians later to become the core of the international Fluxus movement.  
11  
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14  
15 One of the participants was Korean-born experimental artist Nam June Paik, who presented his  
16  
17 work *Zen for the Head* (plate 12). Photographed by Hamburg-based amateur photographer  
18  
19 Hartmut Rekort, the photograph shows Nam June Paik crawling on the floor on a long sheet of  
20  
21 paper, drawing a line with his hair. In the foreground stands a bucket with dark liquid that looks  
22  
23 like ink on a black-and-white photograph, but is in fact a mixture of ink and tomato juice; the  
24  
25 traces of Paik's hair are still shimmering wet. The performance was filmed and made a brief  
26  
27 appearance on the German television channel Hessischer Rundfunk.  
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31  
32 As a photographer of this action and a frequent collaborator with Fluxus artists, Rekort created a  
33  
34 dramatic picture by adopting a low frontal viewpoint and stepping to the very edge of the paper,  
35  
36 much as the *Yomiuri* photographers did at Bundō's performance in Tokyo. This work by Paik is  
37  
38 often interpreted as reenacting LaMonte Young's *Composition 1960 No. 10*, which consisted of an  
39  
40 instruction to "draw a straight line and follow it."<sup>39</sup> However, given Paik's connection to East  
41  
42 Asian visual culture, his knowledge of contemporary Japanese art, and the ongoing international  
43  
44 success of Japanese calligraphers, which had reached Germany the same year, it is hard to  
45  
46 overlook in this performance a reference to East Asian calligraphy, be it contemporary avant-  
47  
48 garde or legendary wild cursive. Paik's interest in the effect that new media (in particular, film  
49  
50 and television) had on viewers' perception of art, and on the interaction between artist and  
51  
52 audience, made his references to calligraphy highly innovative. Conscious of the impact of  
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3 photography and film on art production, Paik chose to recreate the legendary performances of the  
4 wild cursive calligraphers in a new, highly public experimental art context. This performance of  
5 calligraphic art—brought to its most dramatic performative angle by Paik, documented by  
6 Hartmut Rekort, and displayed in the context of Fluxus festival—finalized the public perception  
7 of calligraphy as a new avant-garde artform with an impressive tradition behind it and new  
8 potential for performativity in visual arts on the global scale.  
9

10 Unlike Bundō's performance in Tokyo, Paik's *Zen for the Head* consciously targeted audiences of  
11 contemporary art rather than those interested in conventional calligraphy. Here there was an  
12 ironic reversal. While in 1952 it surprised Bundō Shunkai and his audience to hear that large  
13 calligraphic performances resembled action painting, a suggestion that was initially made by  
14 journalists, during Paik's 1962 performance it startled audiences to imagine that this newest and  
15 most avant-garde art form could be rooted in the legendary art practices of ancient China. The  
16 incorporation of media into calligraphy had changed drastically from the 1950s to '60s, with a  
17 shift from the calligrapher's passively revealing his creative activity to media coverage following  
18 the agenda set for calligraphy by journalists, to strategizing media coverage from the inception of  
19 a calligraphic performance and using it to realize a specific artistic idea. The press and mass  
20 media about calligraphy had been transformed from an advertising and promotional device into  
21 the art medium itself. Thus, quite apart from the fact that there was a direct exchange of ideas  
22 between avant-garde calligraphy and action painting, mass media played a significant role in  
23 shaping the public image of these art forms and bringing them into dialogue with each other. The  
24 postwar era had created an image of calligraphy as a type of performative media art that  
25 calligraphers were at first hesitant to accept, but later readily incorporated into their practice.  
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- 14 <sup>1</sup> Studies on action painting from a transcultural perspective include, among others, Joan Marter  
15 (ed.), *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ.  
16 Press, 2007); Kobena Mercer (ed.), *Discrepant Abstraction* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006);  
17 Paul Schimmel et al. (ed.), *Out of actions: between performance and the object, 1949-1979*  
18 (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998).  
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- 25 <sup>2</sup> Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press,  
26 2001); Alexandra Munroe, ed. *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860 -*  
27 *1989* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009).  
28  
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- 32 <sup>3</sup> Georges Mathieu and Imai Toshimitsu 今井俊満, "書道との対決 [*Shodō to no taiketsu*;  
33 Confrontation with Calligraphy]", *Geijutsu Shinchō* vol. 8, no. 10 (October 1957), 53–65;  
34 Lewis Kachur, "The view from the East: the reception of Jackson Pollock among Japanese  
35 Gutai artists", in Joan Marter (ed.), *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, 152-  
36 162.  
37  
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- 43 <sup>4</sup> For interplays between calligraphy's modernization and education system, see Kenji Kajiya,  
44 "Modernized Differently: Avant-Garde Calligraphy and Art in Postwar Japan", M+ Matters |  
45 Postwar Abstraction in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan [28 June 2014], online publication by  
46 M+ Hong Kong, [http://www.mplusmatters.hk/postwar/paper\\_topic2.php?l=en](http://www.mplusmatters.hk/postwar/paper_topic2.php?l=en) (accessed June  
47 22, 2017).  
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- <sup>5</sup> Inoue Yūichi 井上有一, Eguchi Sōgen 江口草玄, Sekiya Ōtoshi 関谷大年, Nakamura Bokushi 中村木子, and Morita Shiryū 森田子龍, “墨人会結成挨拶 [*Bokujinkai kessei aisatsu*; Greeting on the Formation of the Bokujinkai Group]”, *Bokujin* no.1 (April 1952), 2–3. (all translations are by the author, unless otherwise indicated)
- <sup>6</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, section Izumi, January 6, 1952, morning Tokyo edition, 3.
- <sup>7</sup> Lewis Kachur, “The View from the East: The Reception of Jackson Pollock among Japanese Gutai Artists,” 152–65; Shin’ichirō Osaki, “Une stratégie de l’action: Gutai, Pollock, Kaprow [A Strategy for an Action: Gutai, Pollock, Kaprow],” in *Gutai* (Paris: Editions du Jeu de paume, 1999), 50–67.
- <sup>8</sup> Study of the impact of photographs and film by Hans Namuth on the perception of Jackson Pollock became a research field of its own, spanning nearly fifty years of scholarship. Some of the studies include, chronologically, Barbara Rose, ‘Hans Namuth’s Photographs and the Jackson Pollock Myth: Media Impact and the Failure of Criticism’, *Arts*, vol. 53, no. 7 (March 1979), 116-119; Francis V. O’Connor, “Hans Namuth's Photographs of Jackson Pollock as Art Historical Documentation”, *Art Journal*, vol. 39, No. 1 (Autumn 1979): 48-49; Peter R. Kalb, “Picturing Pollock: Photography’s Challenge to the Historiography of Abstract Expressionism”, *Journal of Art Historiography*, No. 7 (December 2012): 1-17; among others.
- <sup>9</sup> For controversies of early reception of Jackson Pollock in Japan, see Reiko Tomii “Gutai’s Phase Zero: Reading Yoshihara Jirō on Pollock against Takiguchi Shūzō”, lecture manuscript presented at symposium “Tilting the World: Histories of Modern and Contemporary Asian Art”, University of Sydney, November 2013. For the relationship between Pollock’s works and early action art by the Japanese Gutai group, see Joan Kee, “Situating a Singular Kind of

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- <sup>11</sup> For performativity in Japanese calligraphy manifested in Zen manuscripts, see, for example, Charlotte Eubanks, “Performing Mind, Writing Meditation: Dōgen’s *Fukanzazengi* as Zen Calligraphy”, *Ars Orientalis*, 46 (2016): 173-198.
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- <sup>13</sup> The articles from Alechinsky’s study of Japanese calligraphy include Pierre Alechinsky, “Calligraphie Japonaise,” *Quadrum*, (May 1956): 43–53; Pierre Alechinsky, “Japanese Calligraphy and Abstraction,” *Graphis* 12 (December 1956): 542–55; and Pierre Alechinsky, “日本の書道 [*Nihon no shodō*; Japanese Calligraphy],” *Geijutsu Shinchō* vol. 6, no. 12 (December 1955): 170–173, among others. The digital version of Alechinsky’s original 1956 film is available through the CINEMATEK – Royal Belgian Film Archive, in the “Art & Cinema (Belgian Art Documentaries)” collection from 2013, edited by Steven Jacobs.
- <sup>14</sup> Minute 0:42-0:59 in the film by Pierre Alechinsky, *Calligraphie Japonaise*, 1956, in Steven Jacobs, ed., “Art & Cinema (Belgian Art Documentaries)”, 2013.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, min. 02:07-02:18.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, min. 02:30-03:20.

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- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., min. 04:05-04:09.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., min. 10:40-10:45.
- <sup>19</sup> Suda Kokuta 須田剋太, Nakamura Makoto 中村真, Yoshihara Jirō 吉原治良, Ōsawa Gakyū 大沢雅休, Morita Shiryū 森田子龍, and Arita Kōhō 有田光浦, “書と抽象絵画・座談会 [*Sho to chūshō kaiga: zadankai*; Calligraphy and Abstract Painting: A Roundtable Discussion]”, *Bokubi* no. 26 (August 1953), 11.
- <sup>20</sup> Minute 12:18-12:55 in Alechinsky, *Calligraphie Japonaise*, 1956.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., min. 15:01-15:19.
- <sup>22</sup> For complete collection of the *Sazae-san* manga series, see Hasegawa Machiko 長谷川町子, サザエさん [*Sazae-san*] (Tokyo: Asashi Shimbunsha, 1997-1998), 23 vol.; for English translation, see Hasegawa Machiko, *The Wonderful World of Sazae-San*, transl. Jules Young and Dominic Young (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2003), 12 vol.
- <sup>23</sup> Unagami Masaomi 海上雅臣, 井上有一・書は万人の芸術である [*Inoue Yūichi: Sho wa bannin no geijitsu de aru*; Inoue Yūichi: Calligraphy is Art for Ten Thousand People], 2nd ed. (Kyoto: Mineruva shobō, 2009), 132. For the information on the 1955 traveling exhibition in Europe, see special issue of the *Bokubi* journal, 現代日本の書・墨の芸術 [*Gendai Nihon no sho: Sumi no geijutsu*; Contemporary Japanese Calligraphy: Art of Ink], no. 48 (October 1955).
- <sup>24</sup> For discussion of new meaning and manifestation of ink in postwar Japanese art, see Bert Winther-Tamaki, “Remediated Ink: The Debt of Modern and Contemporary Asian Ink Aesthetics to Non-Ink Media,” *Getty Research Journal*, no. 10, January 2018.
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Plate 1. Bundō Shunkai during his calligraphy performance at Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, January 5, 1952. Photograph provided by Bundō Keishun.





Plate 2. Bundō Shunkai during his calligraphy performance at Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, January 5, 1952. Photograph provided by Bundō Keishun.

113x95mm (220 x 220 DPI)



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Plate 3. Note in Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper featuring a photograph of Bundō Shunkai’s calligraphy performance at Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. Yomiuri Shimbun, January 6, 1952, morning Tokyo edition, 3.

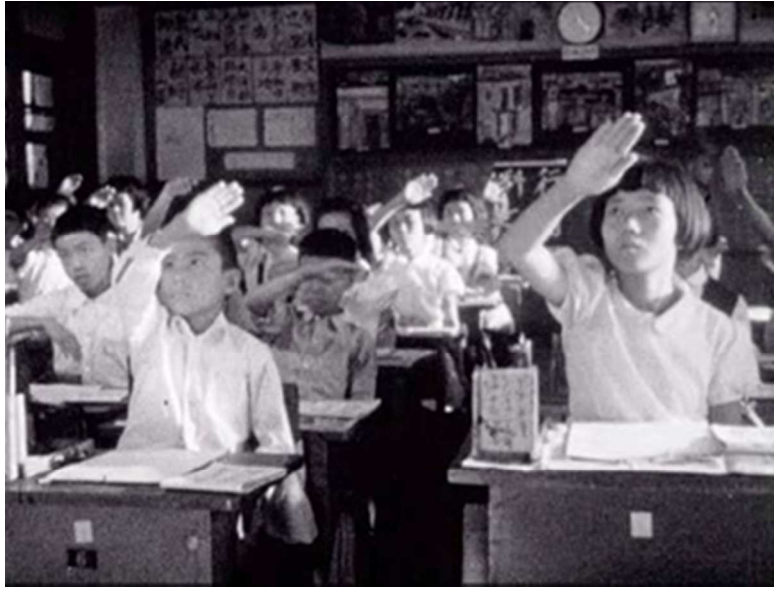


Plate 4. School children repeating teacher's movement when learning characters, minute 02:52 in film by Pierre Alechinsky *Calligraphie Japonaise*, 1956, available through CINEMATEK – Royal Belgian Film Archive, Steven Jacobs, ed., "Art & Cinema (Belgian Art Documentaries)", 2013.

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Plate 5. Morita Shiryū writing calligraphy in his atelier, minute 12:57 in Pierre Alechinsky's film *Calligraphie Japonaise*, 1956.

88x78mm (220 x 220 DPI)



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Plate 6. Episode "Avant-garde Calligraphy" of the newspaper manga series Sazae-san by Hasegawa Machiko, published in Asahi Shimbun on January 31, 1956, Tokyo edition, 9.

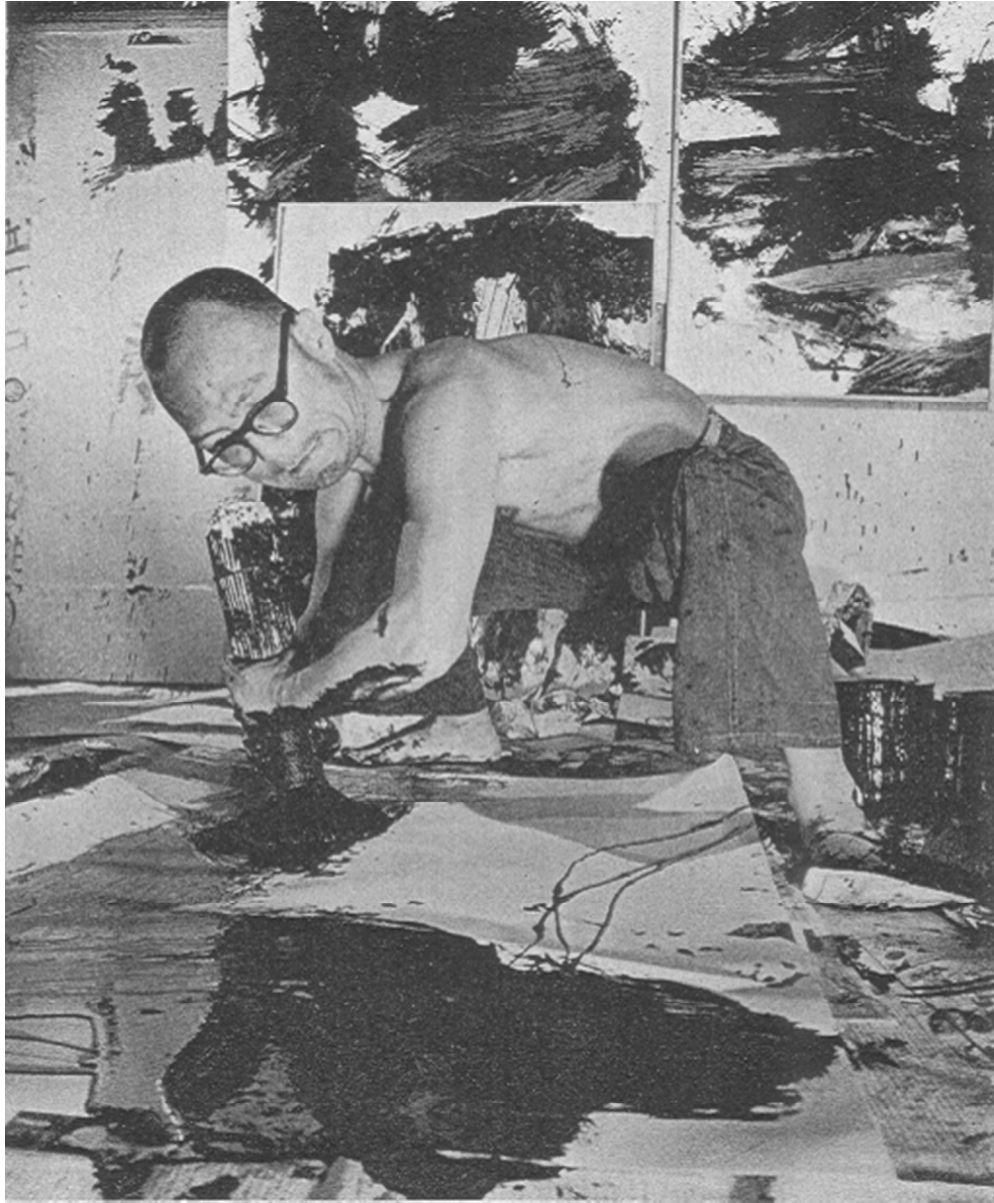


Plate 7. Inoue writing abstract calligraphy in his home atelier for the traveling exhibition in Europe, 1955. Photograph by Sugano Yoshikatsu. Photograph featured on the cover of the *Shūkan Asahi* journal dedicated to avant-garde calligraphy, from February 5, 1956, and reprinted in *Bokubi* journal no.64 (March 1957). Photograph provided by UNAC Tokyo.



Plate 8. Avant-garde print artist Munakata Shikō (1903-1975) making calligraphy in his atelier, 1967. Photograph by Domon Ken for the "Tales of Masters of Japan" series. Photograph provided by Domon Ken Memorial Museum.

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Plate 9. Episode no. 773 of the newspaper manga series Mappira-kun by Katō Yoshirō, published in Mainichi Shimibun, March 2, 1956, Tokyo evening edition, p. 7.





45 Plate 10. Georges Mathieu during his action painting demonstration in Tokyo in September 1957.  
46 Photograph by Yoshida Toshio. Caption reads: "Action Painting: Georgea Mathieu Paints in Japan".  
47 Photograph from the special issue of the art journal Geijutsu Shinchō, 8 (October 1957), 53, originally  
48 published in the Yomiuri Shimibun newspaper article "スピード、直感、興奮 [Speed, Intuition, Excitement],"  
49 from September 1, 1957, morning Tokyo edition, 5.  
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Plate 11. Photograph of Morita Shiryū's avant-garde calligraphy demonstration in German Darmstadt in 1962, published in Darmstädter Tagblatt on May 7, 1962, and reprinted in the journal Bokubi, no. 121, special issue ドイツ巡回日本書展 [Traveling Exhibition of Japanese Calligraphy in Germany], (October 1962), 23.



Plate 12. Nam June Paik performing Zen for the Head at Fluxus Festspiele neuester Musik in German Wiesbaden in September 1962. Photograph by Hartmut Rekort.

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