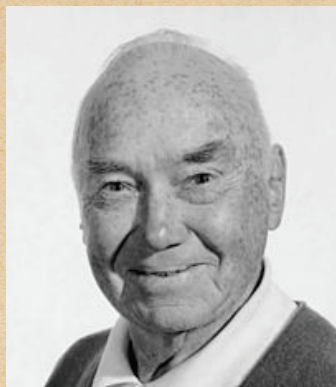


Paul Zep

poem before words



Paul Reps (1895–1990)

American artist, poet, author and artist, best known for his unorthodox haiku-inspired poetry published from 1939 onwards. He is considered one of America's first haiku poets, particularly tinged with Zen Buddhism.

Reps travelled widely and spent much time in Asia. In Japan particularly his work was appreciated, and he gave many readings and his art was broadly exhibited.

He lived the last part of his life, and died, on Maui.

Books

Zen Flesh, Zen Bones. A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings
(ISBN 0-8048-0644-6)

Zen Telegrams (ISBN 0-8048-2023-6)

Letters to a friend: Writings & Drawings, 1939 to 1980 (ISBN
0-938286-01-3)

*Gold and Fish Signatures** (handmade prints)

Gold Fish Signatures (ISBN 0-8048-0210-6)

Square Sun, Square Moon (ISBN 0-8048-0544-X)

*22 ways to nowhere** (no ISBN printed in Japan)

*poem before words** (no ISBN printed in Japan)

Sit In: What it is Like (OCLC 8387693)

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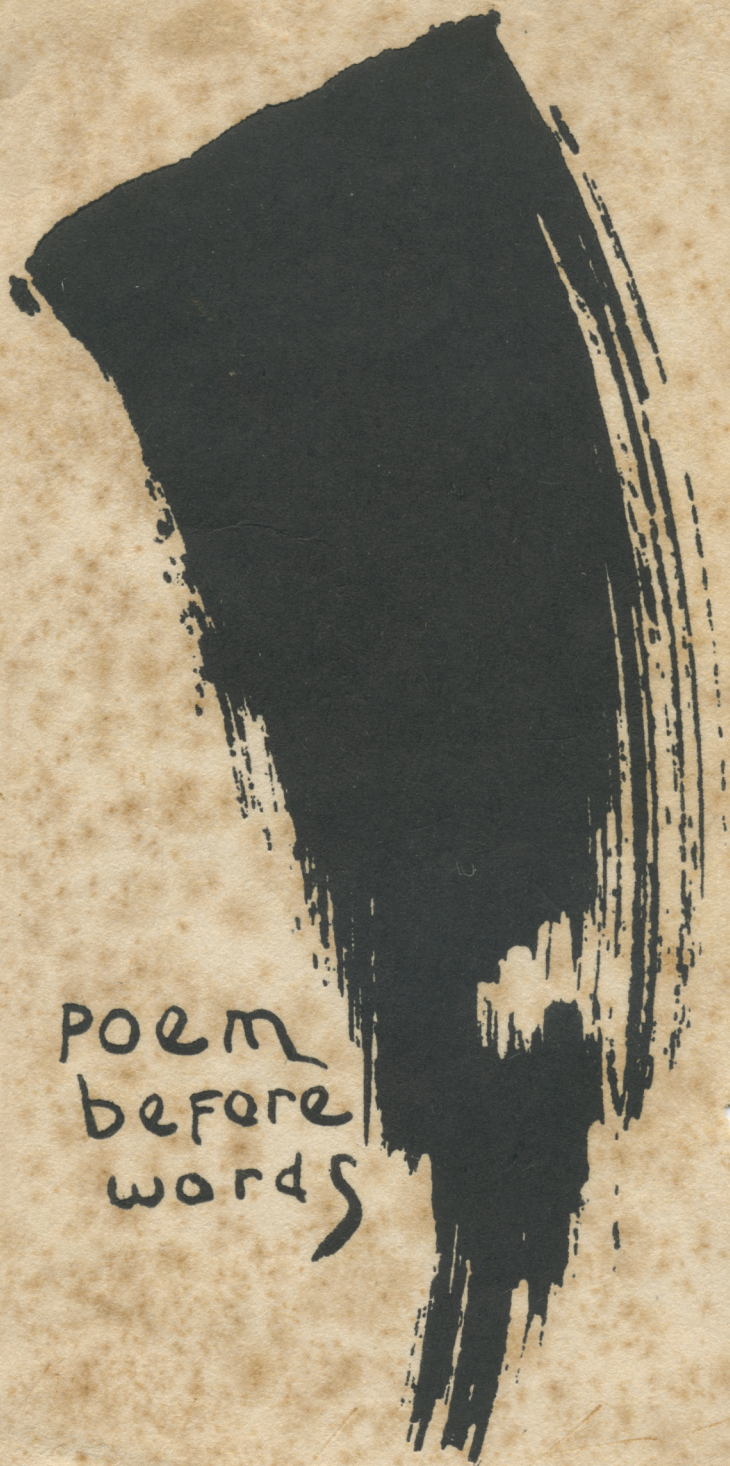
Unwrinkling Plays (ISBN 0-8048-0607-1)

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Juicing: Words and Brushwork (ISBN 0-385-13250-6)

* Bequeathed to The Haiku Foundation by the estate of Susan Marie LaVallée.



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THESE POEMS FIRST FLUTTERED

Visiting the poet Shimaoka in his small home, I unrolled the picture-poems and gave them to him as already I had given them away from Hokkaido to Miyajima. A staring four-leaf flower painted with brush in rubbed black ink looked like an electric fan, he said.

Later his friend offered to display them in his Sankakudo gallery, Kyoto, for five June days as a benefit for the poet's wife, seriously ill in a hospital. Walking at daybreak in the mountains at Yase, I came upon some ground dedicated for building with ropes strung around it from bamboo poles. This gave me the idea.

A worker brought many bamboo for 100 yen, 28¢, and we hung them horizontally intermeshed about the gallery. To these the poems on fine rice paper were pinned, only at top. They fluttered in the slightest breeze, often danced. It was perhaps the first exhibit where the pictures all moved together.

Someone hung white silk poemed in the window and it fluttered. A bamboo wedged from floor to ceiling held papers in its branches. So many came to see them that the doors were kept open until Ten each night. Such exhibits do well to dispose of a fifth of their offerings but each poem-before-words picture-before-art went to someone, the turtle many times over. The prices:

1,000 yen	each to automobile owners
500	to well dressed persons
200	to students
100	to anyone poor
10	to lovers of Buddha.

Such pricing was revolutionary. No one elected to pay 10 yen, each loving himself perhaps more than Buddha.

In the hospital Shimaoka's wife whispered to a reporter, "If I die let the exhibit succeed, and thank Reps." Wondering who Reps was, the reporter came to see and wrote gracious accounts for the English Mainichi. Other articles appeared in Japanese language dailies, also with picture reproductions.

A television crew asked for talk and broadcast it over Japan for two successive days. After the room of waving objects, they flashed to the bedside of the wife : an international un-national cooperation to save a life.

A guest book had 300 names signed so there may have been ten times this number of visitors, unusual for old Kyoto. Someone strung a little bell at the entrance on an obtruding bamboo.

The Zen Roshi of Tofukuji, Ekkyo Hayashi, hung his big hat on a post and left it there as a talisman. It shone, browned by snow and rain of years of severe training. Someone placed straw sandals beneath it to suggest the presence of the giver. Two upright daisies blossomed in the sandals.

A huge gift photo of Reps appeared beside many reviews in one section. A lettered paper kite began to fly from above. None of this was planned. It just happened. Two firms offered the loan of picture frames, repeatedly advising that here pictures must be under glass. You can't put me under glass, I insisted.

Ohashi, producer of obi, wished to have the picture-poems on obi so they might be seen-read as lovely women walked about. I wondered what others would think, reading "Now now" or "Well silently overflowing" or "Cobwebs hesitating us", inferring indulgences where I had intended unviolent disciplines.

The rooms of white suggested the white angular papers of Shinto Shrines. The owner came early mornings just to sit there. A young man bought fighting-wrens to send to his father in Tokyo whose geisha, homed there with him, did not accord with his Kyoto wife.

Students contemplated the English. A professor wished to use it in place of older literature. "I like the one because it is so simple," a scholar of philosophy stated :

Under my clothes

I am naked too

A surgeon acquired the fingernails: Sometimes in May rain

I can hear my fingernails growing

"We need these," he declared, "as an antidote to the disease we always are talking."

The representative of American Cultural Center remarked, "You are doing what we are trying to do." Their Japanese adviser acquired several. A black-eyed Egyptian woman looked carefully into each poem, said, "I like the simplicity of fish, pine, ricefield, cobwebs," and left. An old book informs us the Japanese wandered over from Egypt.

Happy groups gathered for green tea, sakt, soft drinks, cakes. The Roshi of Shokokuji, Daizo Otsu, left his calligraphy: "Everything innocent-this is poetry." Masuro Ijiri commented, "Arts of the 21 century will point so directly to the mind."

A beggar once a millionaire said, "I live from room to room. If I took this one with me it soon would be crumpled. I buy it and give it back to you. But in heart, wherever I go, no matter how cluttered the place, I always will have your bowl of tea before me:

Drinking a bowl of green tea
I stopped the war

"What a night for me, seeing your memos of experience," a youth wrote. "I went out singing into the noisy street. Looking up, I saw one star blinking. I was in another land, with Reps. It penetrated my brain, music was in me. I am a country man. I avoid even Kyoto. But among these works I feel an unspeakable something, as a breeze. They surely cool my hot heart. I am glad to keep in contact with their maker in this way, standing among stars. Let me pay student rate for the-smile-in-your-eyes. Sickness during the war kept me in bed ten years. Recently recovering, I discover these writings, my life encouraged by them."

Many returned several times to look and read. A man left a note: I was excited. Your art has a great simpleness that is the center of human culture. Noriaki Siro. Late the last night three shakuhachi players, their heads hidden under basket hats, came to play flutes to

celebrate the pictures. "This is the essence of our music," one said:

Sound of flute
has returned to
bamboo forest

As the rice papers were climbing off the bamboo the next morning, a young girl appeared, having left her bank work in a neighboring city on some pretext. "I must see once more and have one," she said, innerly troubled. "What does this mean?"

It was a vertical line with the words Below (at top), ever, above. Shimaoka interpreted: Revolving with, earth, we sometimes are below or above, so these terms are relative-yet ever continues presently. She was satisfied.

Such brush painting is appreciated by Chinese and Japanese, as is calligraphy, since it gives them something of the writer. Through it they treasure a relationship. They do not call it art. It is something in heart.

If handed a charred stick, a young child will start to draw, later using pencil or crayon with innate confidence until miseducated. Anyone may do so at once from our inexhaustible fount of hearts. A child values cobwebs, pebbles, raindrops.

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