

# BUDDHISM



INFLUENCE IN THE WEST



## IMPORTANT REVIEW

The last few weeks we've been looking at Hinduism as it returned in India and Buddhism as it moved through Southeast Asia.

We saw India go through many rulers including from 1858-1947, the British. We then learned that when the British left, they partitioned the country into different states. These realities have had serious consequences for India ever since.

Currently, Hinduism is the largest religion of India with about 80% of the population. Islam is next with very few other religions including Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism.





## IMPORTANT REVIEW

As for Buddhism, though it began in India, there are few Buddhist in India today.

Thailand has the largest percentage of Buddhist with 93% of people in the country. Myanmar is next with Bhutan and Sri Lanka in close second.

That having been said, it is China where we find the most Buddhist in the world.

Buddhism has become one of the largest faiths in the United States. In 2012 an estimate of 1.2 million people were Buddhist in the US.



Zen Buddhist temple in Chicago



## BUDDHISM THE TEACHING

The main teachings of the Buddha were written down in the Sutras. Recognizing that aging and death are inevitable for all, Siddhartha Gautama taught the four noble truths:

1. All life is suffering.
2. There is a cause of suffering.
3. There is an end to suffering.
4. There is a path to the end of suffering.

The four noble truths chart out the path to the end of suffering. We know through our studies that this path involves a particular way of living one's life.

The instructions for living are presented in the Eight Fold Path.

## The Eight Fold Path

Noble Eightfold Path are:

Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

In addition there are three themes into which the Path is divided: good moral conduct (Understanding, Thought, Speech); meditation and mental development (Action, Livelihood, Effort), and wisdom or insight (Mindfulness and Concentration).

*You all probably remember how Gautama sat under a tree and meditated until he had this realization.*



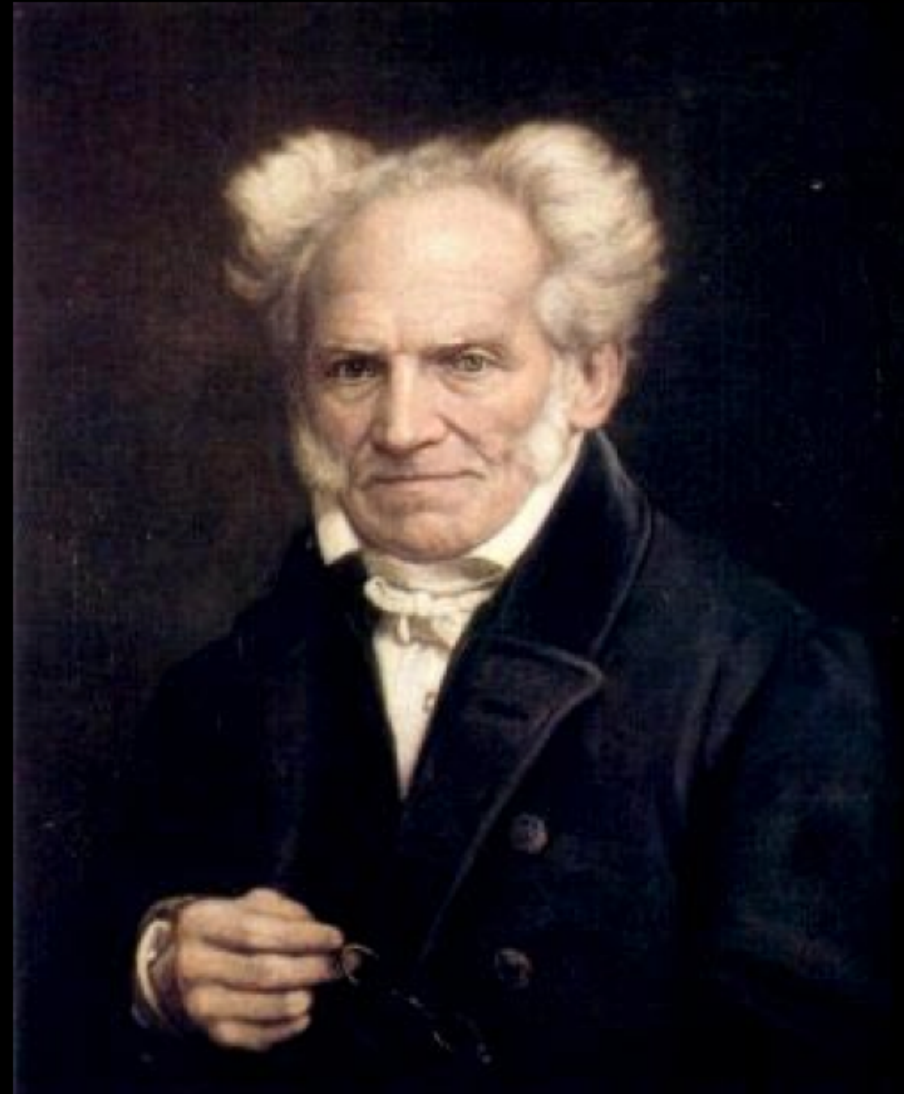
## BUDDHISM IN THE WEST

We have already seen how Buddhism has spread throughout Asia and Southeast Asia.

The term 'Buddhism' only appeared in the English language after 1800.

While several Europeans tried to translate Buddhist sutras or concepts in the West, it wasn't until the German Philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer when the ideas took hold.

At a time in history, around the Enlightenment, when people were questioning the existence of God, Buddhism, a belief with no gods emerged in the West.





## BUDDHISM IN THE WEST

Schopenhauer found a similar concept of **will** as “the desire for existence as the cause of suffering” as the Buddha did over 2000 years earlier.

However, Schopenhauer, unlike the Buddha, did not believe happiness is attainable in this world. But he did believe that contemplation of great works of art can provide a way to transcend the **will** and achieve an experience beyond desire.

His ideas were popular with 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals, including Vincent van Gogh



*Vincent van Gogh, Starry Night, 1853-1890*



## BUDDHISM IN THE WEST

Van Gogh was a failed Christian Evangelist. His interest in Buddhism is revealed in this letter to his brother regarding his self-portrait.

*"I have a portrait of myself, all ash-colored... But I also exaggerated my personality; I have in the first place aimed at the character of a simple bronze worshipping the Eternal Buddha..."*

*Van Gogh didn't really know that much about Buddhism as we've studied it. But he knew enough, through the work of Schopenhauer to make reference to the Buddha.*



*Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin, 1888*



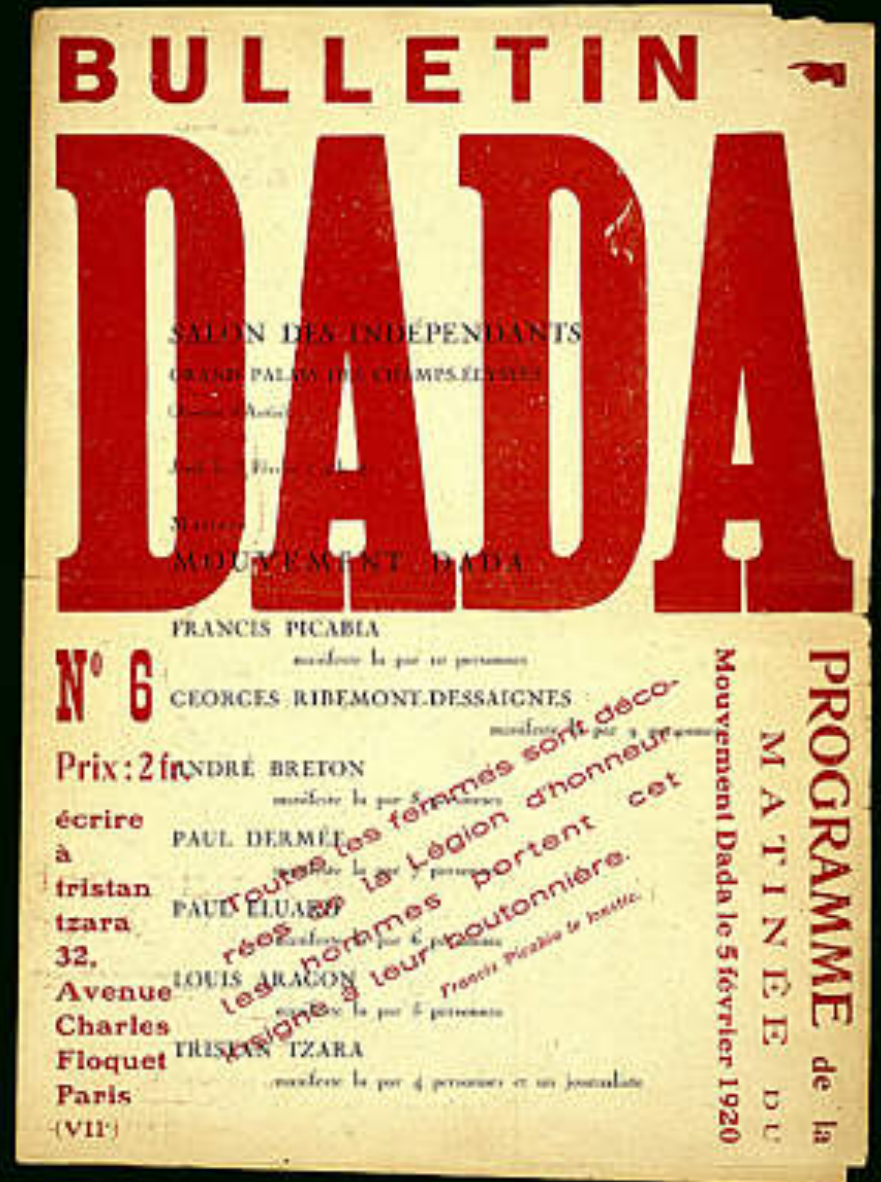
# BUDDHISM IN THE WEST

It might seem strange to shift to this movement but as far afield as Dada seems from Buddhism, there are many connections.

Due to the WWI, a number of artists, writers and intellectuals, mostly French and German, found refuge in Zurich (neutral Switzerland).

*Dada began in Zurich but then moved to Paris, Germany and New York.*

Dada ideas transformed the way artist think about and create art to this day.



Cover of the first edition of the publication  
Dada by Tristan Tzara; Zurich, 1917



## BUDDHISM IN THE WEST

For the disillusioned artists of the Dada movement, the WWI merely confirmed the degradation of social structures that led to such violence: corrupt and nationalist politics, repressive social values, and unquestioning conformity of culture and thought.

Dada was an anti-art art movement. For them, art was merely a tool of the establishment and as such, was just as corrupt as the society it comes from.

The picture of Hugo Ball shows him reciting a non-sense poem, dressed in an absurd costume. He was indicating the absurdity of art, including poetry.



Hugo Ball at the Cabaret Voltaire, 1916



## BUDDHISM IN THE WEST

### Marcel Duchamp

The most important artist of the movement, and arguably the most important artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, was Marcel Duchamp.

By World War I, he had rejected the work of many of his fellow artists as "retinal" art, intended only to please the eye.

Instead, Duchamp wanted, he said, "to put art back in the service of the mind."

It was this focus on the mind of the viewer that brought his ideas in line with Buddhist thought.

He was interested in the meaning created between the art object and the mind of the viewer.



MARCEL DUCHAMP, Fountain, (second version), 1950 (original version produced 1917). Ready-made glazed sanitary china with black paint, 12" high. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.



## BUDDHISM IN THE WEST

### Marcel Duchamp- 'readymades'

When Marcel Duchamp died in 1968 the artist Jasper Johns wrote, "The art community feels Duchamp's presence in his absence. He has changed the conditions of being here."

With the 'readymades' Duchamp shifted attention from artistic production to process. In these pieces, ordinary objects were taken from life, rearranged and placed in an art context. This changed the meaning of the objects and shifted the responsibility for interpretation to the viewer.

This changed the cultural landscape of the 20<sup>th</sup> century



Marcel Duchamp, Bicycle Wheel, 1913 & (3<sup>rd</sup> version) 1951. Metal wheel mounted on painted wood stool, 51 x 25 x 16 1/2" (129.5 x 63.5 x 41.9 cm)





East Gate at the Great Stupa at Sanchi, *Wheel of Life*.

We looked at this earlier in the semester.



Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, 1913 & (3<sup>rd</sup> version) 1951. Metal wheel mounted on painted wood stool, 51 x 25 x 16 1/2" (129.5 x 63.5 x 41.9 cm)

Duchamp was introduced to Buddhism by his neighbor in Paris. while this piece is considered a 'readymade' it has also been connected to this earlier Buddhist symbol.



## POST WWII WESTERN ART HISTORY

### Abstract Expressionism

After the War, American Artists such as Jackson Pollock, found automatic processes a way of releasing the subconscious.

Jackson Pollock was not interested in Buddhism. He was influenced by the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

However, the other artists associated with this post war movement in the United States were.



*Jackson Pollock, Number 1 (Lavender Mist)*

*What Pollock's work did do was focus the attention of the artwork on the process he used to create it. The painting ended up being an artifact that really shows his movement across the surface as opposed to representing anything from the natural world.*



## POST WWII WESTERN ART HISTORY

### Abstract Expressionism

Many of these artists were looking at Eastern Philosophy and Buddhism (especially Zen) as a way to engaged art and life.

Mark Rothko was one of these.

Rothko's soft, luminous colors are layered in thin washes, dark over light, then light over dark to create a contemplative surface.

His work indicates a preoccupation with death. For him all art deals with intimidations or death.



*Mark Rothko, Orange and Yellow, 1956*



## POST WWII WESTERN ART HISTORY

### Abstract Expressionism

Rather than a picture of an experience (representing something from the natural world) he wanted his paintings to be an experience for the viewer.

His picture has no subject, nothing to distract the viewer from having an experience with the fields of color.

He wanted the work to create an experience for the viewer rather than representing something the artist wanted them to see. In some ways it became an object one could meditate in front of.



*Mark Rothko, Orange and Yellow, 1956*



## POST WWII WESTERN ART HISTORY

In 1971, The Rothko Chapel was constructed in Houston. Rothko created a series of paintings with thin layers of color over color until they look almost black, were begun in 1964.

The mission of the Rothko Chapel is to inspire people to action through art and contemplation, to nurture reverence for the highest aspirations of humanity, and to provide a forum for global concerns.



Mark Rothko, *Rothko Chapel*, Houston, TX





*Mark Rothko, Rothko Chapel*

The idea is for people to meditate while looking at the paintings that are so large they fill the visual field of the viewer.

I have been to the Rothko Chapel several times. It is a very quiet space to pray or meditate in quiet.



## WESTERN ART\_CONTEMPORARY

### John Cage

Cage was a musician influenced by Eastern philosophy and experimental music of Arnold Schonberg.

His ideas were based on the work of Marcel Duchamp, the I Ching (Book of Changes) and Zen Buddhism, he emphasized the element of 'chance' in art.

For him the purpose of art was “ the blurring of the distinction between art and life”

This was important for many post-WWII artists. You may think of how this worked with Pop Art.



*John Cage*



## WESTERN ART\_CONTEMPORARY

### John Cage

Cage turned to the ancient Chinese book of wisdom— the I Ching, or Book of Changes.

He said in 1992

*“ I use chance operations instead of operating according to my likes and dislikes. I use my work to change myself and I accept what the chance operations say. The I Ching says that if you don’t accept the chance operations you have no right to use them. Which is very clear, so that’s what I do.”*



John Cage, Roaratorio:An Irish Circus

This is a copy of one of Cage’s music scores.

It looks more like an abstract drawing than a musical score.

If you know anything about music, can you imagine trying to play this score?



## WESTERN ART\_CONTEMPORARY

### John Cage

One of Cage's most provocative works is 4'33".

**4'33"** (pronounced "**Four minutes, thirty-three seconds**" or just "**Four thirty-three**") is a three-movement composition. It was composed in 1952, for any instrument or combination of instruments, and the score instructs the performer(s) not to play their instrument(s) during the entire duration of the piece throughout the three movements. The piece purports to consist of the sounds of the environment that the listeners hear while it is performed.



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gN2zcLBr\\_VM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gN2zcLBr_VM)

Watch this link to see the piece performed.