Wilfrid Wilke
His writings and collections of calligraphies
Ulfert Wilke is a letter writer. He often sits, at seven in the morning, writing to his friends as he starts the day. Letter writing is an art which has been blighted by the typewriter. Wilke's letters are written by hand, in a fluent, abrupt, international cursive; his style only here and there shows traces of a German accent. He writes to people of people, of events, of ideas, of the art world, of practical problems, with insight, compassion, invention and humor. The letter is always fresh, lucid, informative and intensely personal.

Wilke is also a letter writer in another way, a way that has nothing to do with events, information, relevance or friends. He writes by drawing spontaneously-generated, abstract forms which may resemble music notation, petroglyphs, cattle brands, a tangle of underbrush, a topographical map, the mist closing in on a wooded hillside, or the number system of a primitive tribe. He writes, then, in illegible characters, using a language directed only at the eye and therefore meaningless in the verbal world. In their own seen world Wilke's characters become a mosaic of micro-drawings in a rich repertory of images, with which Wilke populates a blank page. Thought and hand movement mate in close alliance. This is not automatic drawing; neither is it preconceived. The mind deliberates while the hand progresses and the glyph is formed in a kind of simultaneous translation. Neither is the growth across the page fortuitous: much as corals make cells in the empty sea, then characteristic branches, then reefs, then atolls, then archipelagoes, Wilke's characters multiply and add each to each in a coherent, spreading inhabitation of the page.

Wilke also paints islands — not atolls around an empty space, but bulky, crowded overlapping archipelagoes of circles, with tiny particles of leftover space glimmering between. These are his "interstices," a reduction by crowding. A reduction by the antithesis of bulk and crowding are the constellations of innumerable dots dispersed, not aimlessly but sharply and decisively over the page. Then, in contrast with the innumerable constellations is another reduction — of the idea of number; not to signs for a number but to the quantities themselves, in lots of only one, two or three, which is as high as many primitive peoples have wanted to count. With this reduction, micro-changes to macro- and the characters become huge. A single configuration may fill a page or dominate a canvas larger than a man.

Wilke, in love with writing, loves the beautiful writing of others. Calligraphy is the lyric of writing. It is a long tradition, mostly from the East and Near East, where men wrote with the brush. The West always loses something in its technological advance and has paid for the invention of the pen, the printing press and the typewriter. Wilke knows the brush and the tradition and surrounds himself with reminders of it, then, alone among western artists, matches it with his pen.

GEORGE RICKEY
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CALLIGRAPHERS BY 20TH CENTURY ARTISTS

JULIUS BISSIER (GERMAN, 1893-1964)
4 JULY 63 G
WATERCOLOR ON PAPER, 8 x 8 1/2, 1963
H.5.8.62 PI
WASH ON PAPER, 19 x 25 1/2, 1962
29 JAN. 59 K.
WASH ON PAPER, 15 1/2 x 20 3/8, 1959
NANKOKU HIDAI (JAPANESE, BORN 1912)
UNTITLED
OIL ON CANVAS, 51 x 63 3/4, 1958
ULFERT WILKE (AMERICAN, BORN 1907 IN GERMANY)
ONE HUNDRED HOURS
INK ON PAPER, 11 x 20 1/2, 1958
UNTITLED
ETCHING, 12 x 10, 1959

CALLIGRAPHERS FROM IRAN
NINE POTTERY VESSELS OF THE NISHAPUR TYPE 9TH-10TH CENTURY, SAMANID PERIOD
TWO PAGES FROM A KORAN MANUSCRIPT 12TH CENTURY, SELJUK PERIOD

CALLIGRAPHERS FROM JAPAN
PERSONAL LETTER TO MEMBER OF THE KASUGAI FAMILY RELATING TO THE RETURN OF THE FIRST VOLUME OF SANKOKU, POETRY BY KOSANKAKU. ANONYMOUS CALLIGRAPHER, 1964 (EDO PERIOD)
SCROLL WITH PROVERBIAL CONTENT (BY ONLY A LOOK MAKE QUIET). SOSHITSU (ZEN PRIEST OF TEMPLE OF DAITOKUJI IN KYOTO), 16TH CENTURY (MOMOYAMA PERIOD)
SCROLLS WITH PHILOSOPHICAL COMMENT ON THE PLEASURES OF PEACEFUL NATURE. SOSHITSU (ZEN PRIEST OF TEMPLE OF DAITOKUJI IN KYOTO), 16TH CENTURY (MOMOYAMA PERIOD)
SCROLL WITH CONTENT RELATING TO THE VALUE OF THE STICK IN THE TRAINING OF YOUNG ZEN PRIEST. DOKUTAN, 19TH CENTURY (EDO PERIOD)
SCROLL WITH CONTENT RELATING TO THE VALUE OF THE STICK IN THE TRAINING OF YOUNG ZEN PRIEST. ANONYMOUS CALLIGRAPHER, 19TH CENTURY (MEIJI PERIOD)
SCROLL WITH SENTIMENT RELATING TO THE BEAUTIES OF FRAGRANT WOODS. ANONYMOUS CALLIGRAPHER, 19TH CENTURY (EDO PERIOD)

SEVEN PAGES FROM VARIOUS 17TH CENTURY MANUSCRIPTS (POEMS, NOVELS, HISTORIES, PENMANSHIP EXERCISE BOOKS), SAFAVID PERIOD

SCROLL WITH SENTIMENT RELATING TO THE BEAUTIES OF FRAGRANT MOUNTAINS. ANONYMOUS CALLIGRAPHER, 19TH CENTURY (EDO PERIOD)
SCROLL WITH CONTENT RELATING TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL IDEA OF ONENESS. ANONYMOUS CALLIGRAPHER, 16TH CENTURY (MUROMACHI PERIOD)
SCROLL WITH CONTENT RELATING TO THE MERIT OF FILIAL PIETY. HAKUIN (1685-1768), EDO PERIOD
SCROLL WITH CONTENT RELATING TO LONGEVITY AND WITH PICTORIAL REPRESENTATION OF A CRAWFISH, THE SYMBOL OF LONGEVITY. HAKUIN (1685-1768), EDO PERIOD
SCROLL TO HONOR JURO, THE GOD OF LONGEVITY, WITH A PICTORIAL REPRESENTATION. HAKUIN (1685-1768), EDO PERIOD
SCROLL RELATING TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL MERIT OF A PLEASANT THOUGHT. JUIN (1718-1804), EDO PERIOD.
PERSOAL LETTER WITH CONTENT RELATING TO A VISIT AND A GIFT. NOBUTADA, 17TH C., EDO PERIOD.
SCROLL WITH CONTENT RELATING TO THE BEAUTIES OF LANDSCAPE. SENGAI (1751-1837), EDO PERIOD.
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