

11. Write an Event Instruction Zen Poem

I used this prompt in 2012 and used several Yoko Ono poems as examples (along with event instruction poems of other Zen poets). I am copying the same Yoko Ono poems below as examples and then adding new ones by the American poet Shin Yu Pai. A child of Taiwanese immigrants, she was raised in the U.S. in a spiritual blending of Taoist, Buddhist, and Confucian thought along with Taiwanese folk stories and beliefs. Shin Yu is a photographer, poet, and a translator of classical Chinese verse.

The prompt is in the title above, and examples of Event Instruction Zen Poems are below. They are quirky and fun to write.

Painting To Be Constructed in Your Head

Go on transforming a square canvas
in your head until it becomes a
circle. Pick out any shape in the
process and pin up or place on the
canvas an object, a smell, a sound,
or a colour that comes to your mind
in association with the shape.

Yoko Ono 1962 spring

Painting to Hammer A Nail

Hammer a nail into a mirror, a piece of
glass, a canvas, wood or metal every
morning. Also, pick up a hair that came
off when you combed in the morning and
tie it around the hammered nail. The
painting ends when the surface is
covered with nails.

Yoko Ono 1961 winter

YES YOKO ONO

("Little Pieces" by Shin Yu Pai)

STONES

Remove a stone from an unmarked pile.
Choose one pile to add it to—
a mound of joy
or a mound of sorrow.
Or take a stone from a mound of sorrow
and move it to a mound of joy.

PAINTING TO LET THE EVENING LIGHT COME THROUGH

Lift the blind of the bedroom window.
Place a clear glass bottle
on the window sill.
The painting exists when
the stars have risen.

PAINTING FOR THE WIND

Write down your favorite words
on separate scraps of paper.
Leave the paper where there is wind.
The scraps of paper can be lottery receipts,
business cards, of paper napkins.

PAINTING TO HAMMER A NAIL

Hammer a nail into a mirror.
Place the pieces
in an abandoned lot
with an unobstructed view of
the sky.

SHEEP PIECE

Borrow a herd of sheep,
one hundred in number or more
spray paint their fleece
with your favorite words.
Watch from a distance as the sheep
arrange themselves into poems.

Event Instruction Zen Poems (Jan's attempts)

Lie on the kitchen floor
in T position.
Imagine the tide
coming in.
Float out to sea,
singing at the top
of your heart.

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Take all your dishes
out of the cupboards.
Pile them on the kitchen floor,
architecturally.
Anything that doesn't break
when the earthquake
you make
topples the buildings
must be given
an individual name,
like Mopsy or Twinkler,
and can then be put back
into the cupboards
before you sweep up.

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