

Smith, Roberta. "Al Hansen, 67, Artist Who Created Happenings," *The New York Times*, 27 July 1995.

## The New York Times

Al Hansen, 67, Artist Who Created Happenings

By [Roberta Smith](#)  
June 27, 1995

Al Hansen, one of the first Happenings artists and a founder of the Fluxus art movement, was found dead last Tuesday in his apartment in Cologne, Germany. He was 67 and had lived in Cologne since 1987.

The cause of death has not been determined, said his dealer in Cologne, Hari Hoffman.

Alfred Earl Hansen was born in Queens in 1927 and began drawing at an early age. He once said his home became a Happening each Thanksgiving when his mother covered every available surface with slices of bread, drying them for use in the family's turkey stuffing recipe. The columnist Jimmy Breslin was a childhood friend, and with Mr. Hansen's brother, Gordon, they created a newspaper, *The Daily Flash*, for which Mr. Hansen drew cartoons.

While serving in the 82d Airborne Division from 1945 to 1948, Mr. Hansen executed what may have been the first Happening, dropping a piano off a four-story building during an Armed Forces show in Frankfurt. His event-oriented idea of art-making continued to develop at Tulane University in 1949 and in New York in 1950, where he peripatetically attended Brooklyn College, the Art Students League, the Hans Hoffman School of Art and Pratt Institute.

After spending the early 1950's in the Air Force, Mr. Hansen returned to New York City and in 1958 attended an influential class at the New School for Social Research taught by the composer John Cage. The class was attended by many future Happenings and Fluxus artists, including George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Allan Kaprow and Jackson MacLow. That year, one of Mr. Hansen's early Happenings, "Alice Denham in 48 Seconds," was performed at the New School by a cast that included Cage and several classmates.

Throughout the early 1960's Mr. Hansen was prominent on the downtown art scene, a member of a circle of artists, musicians and dancers that included Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, Yoko Ono, Wolf Vostell, Robert Rauschenberg and Nam June Paik. Their work was seen in such Greenwich Village venues as the Reuben Gallery and Judson Memorial Church. Performance sites included the subways and streets, rooftops and beaches; the Third Rail Gallery, which Mr. Hansen founded in 1962; the Merv Griffin television show, and the Cafe au Go Go. Mr. Hansen's Happenings were multi-media events that included music, light projections and films that he often made himself.

By 1962, Happenings were often seen as part of the more international Fluxus movement, which included event art but also ephemeral, found-object art. The Fluxus side of Mr. Hansen's art included collages and assemblages made of materials like Hershey Bar wrappers, burnt matches and cigarette papers. Mr. Hansen's book on Happenings, "A Primer of Happenings and Time/ Space Art," was published in 1965.

Mr. Hansen taught at Rutgers University from 1967 to 1974 but spent increasing amounts of time in Europe, where he continued to exhibit and perform regularly. His last show in New York City was at the Gracie Mansion Gallery in SoHo in 1989. A few days before his death, an exhibition of his work opened at the Poszti-Bott Gallery in Cologne. The gallery said two German museums were organizing retrospectives of Mr. Hansen's work.

Mr. Hansen's two marriages ended in divorce. He is survived by two brothers, Gordon, of Hampton, Conn., and Kenneth, of Brookhaven Hamlet, L.I.; a half-brother, Robert Duckworth of East Patchogue, L.I.; a daughter, Bibbe Anne, of Los Angeles; two grandsons, and a great-grandson.