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| Kaprow, Allan (1927-2006) |
| Allan Kaprow was an American artist whose oeuvre included painting, assemblage, and ‘environments’. He is best known as the originator of ‘happenings,’ a term he coined in the late 1950s. A ‘happening’ refers to one-off (often scripted) performances, hosted across different locales, intended to break down the barrier between art and life by eliminating the distinction between artist and audience. Happenings played an important role in the transition from modernist painting to performance art in the mid-twentieth century. The debt that this new type of practice owes to modernist painting is made explicit in Kaprow’s seminal essay, ‘The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,’ published in *Art News*, October 1958. In the essay, Kaprow proposes an alternate legacy to the formalist one established by American art critic Clement Greenberg. Kaprow boldly claimed that Pollock destroyed painting because in his so-called ‘action paintings,’ ‘artist, spectator and the outside world are interchangeably involved.’ Kaprow believed that happenings belonged to the legacy of Pollock’s painting in that both produce works of art through commonplace actions. Pollock’s paintings achieve this through a deskilled use of gesture; Kaprow’s happenings do so in their ability to bring together non-art participants and performance through commonplace acts (such as shouting, eating lunch, brushing teeth). |
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