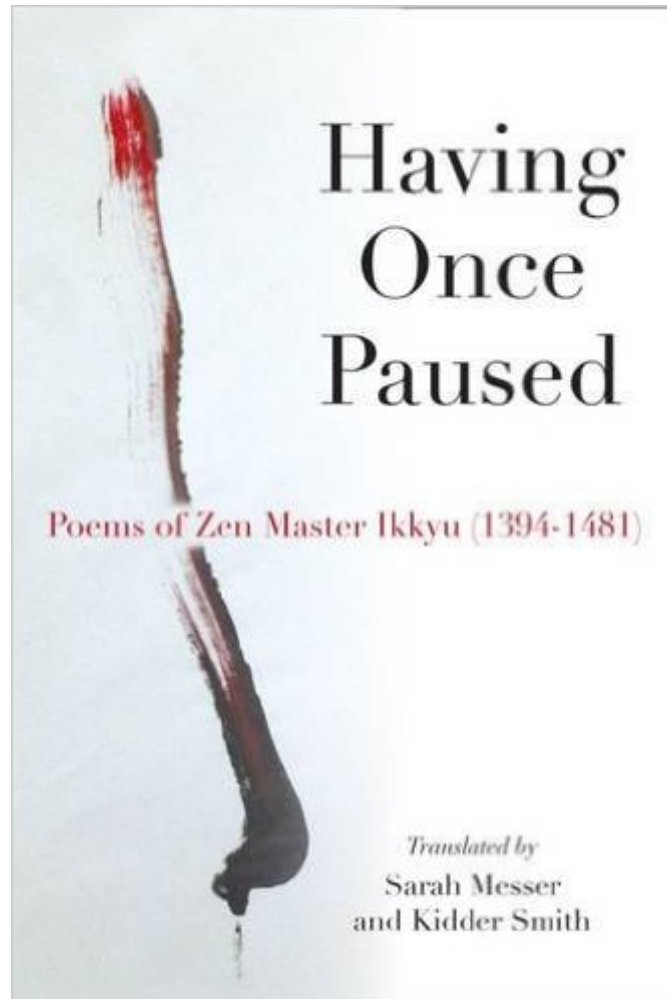


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Having Once Paused: Poems Of Zen Master Ikkyu (1394-1481)



Synopsis

The influence of Zen Master Ikkyu (1394-1481) permeates the full field of medieval Japanese aesthetics. Though best known as a poet, he was central to the shaping and reshaping of practices in calligraphy, Noh theater, tea ceremony, and rock gardening, all of which now define Japan's sense of its cultural tradition. Ikkyu is unique in Zen for letting his love of all appearance occupy him until it destroys any possibility for safety or seclusion. In his poetry, he turns the eye of enlightenment to all phenomena: politics, pine trees, hard meditation practice, sex, wine. A lifelong outsider to religious establishments, Ikkyu nonetheless accepted Imperial command to rebuild his home temple, Daitoku-ji, destroyed in the civil wars. He died before that project was complete. The poems in this collection express the unborn bliss of Ikkyu's realization and equally his devastation at the horrors of this world. They are peopled with ancient Chinese poets, cantankerous Japanese Zen Masters, contemporary warlords, and his lover Mori, a blind musician who lived with Ikkyu the last eleven years of his life. All of this is his Buddhism. His awakening outshines the small idols of reason, emotion, self, desire, doctrine, even of Buddhism itself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"If, when I die, I arrive in the Manjusri's Pure Realm, and you're not there, I'm leaving," said Ikkyu to his dying lover Mori. This is one of the most extraordinary and valuable books about the great Zen Master Ikkyu. It is an exploration of Ikkyu's vision where lineage, passion, culture and realization unfold inseparably in unending love. Moving easily between worlds of Buddhadharma and worldly

histories, Kidder Smith and Sarah Messer have made a gift to every practitioner everywhere.

Guaranteed you have not read Ikkyu's poetry like this. This beautiful new translation deserves your attention. Lovers of poetry or Ikkyu or just beauty and creative wildness, this is the book to read. Thank you to the excellent translators who themselves seem steeped in the beauty of the fluidity of words.

This is, for most intents and purposes, the second book available to the general public of translations of the 15th century Japanese coyote poet, Ikkyu, not counting one popular book of idiosyncratic transliterations. A brief description of what you get: 50 poems. This is better than nothing. The translators have made a curious decision to build the notes and annotation into the main text, like an introduction. So, in way, it's like Aitken's book on Basho, Zen Wave. Although, the introductions here are admittedly non-linear. Ikkyu's poetry is written in the Chinese style, which is founded on many allusions, so there is a method to this madness. Another curious decision is the refusal to translate the Japanese word *furyu*, which has elegant Chinese references and eremitic Japanese ones, and Ikkyu's personal reading as well. So, again, there is a method here. And precedent with such terms as the Japanese *wabi sabi* and Chinese *wu wei*. On this decision, I'm not a fan. The word stands out like sore skull, and is almost impossible to pronounce in English. Like *cue*, except an *r* instead of a *c*. Yes, poems can't be truly translated, but that's what you're doing. It will come to you if you silently wait. But that's neither here nor there. Overall, the translations appear sound, and reveal Ikkyu for the self-confident one in the world he is. At this moment, I prefer Stevens' *Wild Ways*, but that could change.

A zen classic. :)

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