

Buddhist Death Poems were written moments before death to express the poet or monk's understanding in life. The following renderings of these poems were done by Allan Graham in 1999 for the installation piece "Time is Memory" shown at Site Santa Fe in 2000 - in the show "As Real as Thinking".

Koho Kennichi - died 1316 age 76

*leaving  
standing or sitting  
a pile  
of bones -  
rising soaring falling  
I am thunder  
in the sea*

Kozan Ichiko - died 1360 age 77

*empty I entered  
empty I leave  
going and coming  
simple things entangled*

Mumon Gensen - died 1390 age 68

*life is clouds and mist  
emerging from a cave  
death - a reflecting moon  
on a cosmic course  
think to much about it  
you'll be tethered like  
an ass to a stake  
forever*

Ikkyu Sojun – died 1481 age 88

*south of center  
who understands my understanding?  
call over the master  
he is not worth a plugged nickel*

Tosui – died 1683 age 70

*seventy years  
tasting life's flavors  
my bones stench of urine  
what matters?  
look! where do I return? moon light above the peak  
wind blows clear*

Basho – died 1694 age 51

*ill – traveling  
my dreams breaking  
upon ancient fields*

Hokushi – died 1718 age ?

*I write and the poppy blooms  
erase  
and it blooms again*

Gozan – died 1733 age 38

*flowers hold the air  
while truth spins free  
song of a bird*

Kyo'on – died 1749 age 63

*passing wind  
is this my last dream leaving  
a failing vanity?*

Buson – died 1783 age 68

*turning to day  
the night  
white plums blossom*

Yayuu – died 1783 age 82

*waking shortly  
a dream  
that appeared as long*

Nandai – died 1817 age 31

*before the beginning  
alone – the dead know peace  
life is a snowball  
turning in the sun*

Kiko – died 1823 age 52

*blossoms fall  
flesh in the world  
of flowers*

Issa – died 1827 age 65

*born bathed  
dead bathed again*

*senseless mystery*

Ryokan – died 1831 age 74

*now this – now the other  
as it falls  
turning the wind*

Sengai Gibon – died 1837 age 88

*that which comes knows only its coming  
that which goes – only its going  
to keep from falling  
why hold on to the edge?*

*clouds float freely  
never knowing where the winds blow*