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