

Öyvind Fahlström was born in 1928 in São Paulo, Brazil to Swedish and Norwegian parents. In 1939, at the age of ten, he was sent to Sweden to visit his grandfather and his aunt. Shortly after arriving in Stockholm, World War II erupted. His parents felt it was too dangerous to travel and he was stranded in Stockholm for the duration of the war, living with his grandfather and aunt. Severely marked by this experience, he became extremely introspective and taciturn. He was not reunited with his parents until 1947 when they returned to Sweden. Following compulsory military service, Fahlström entered the University of Stockholm, where he studied art history and classical archaeology. He supported himself with his writing until 1968, and continued to publish regularly until his death.

Beginning in the early '50s, Fahlström experimented with different art forms, writing poetry, theater scripts, and art criticism, as well as cultural commentary for major Swedish newspapers and journals. The year 1953 marked his first one-man show at the Galleria Numero in Florence, and the publication of his Manifesto for Concrete Poetry in Stockholm. Between 1957 and 1961, Fahlström continued to experiment with and further develop his signature motifs of "character forms" and "informal" background, involving the fragmenting of black-and-white drawings and comic strips which he first developed in 1951-2.

In 1958 Fahlström exhibited for the first time in the United States, at the International Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh. In February 1959, Fahlström's one-man show at the Galerie Daniel Cordier in Paris opened and established him as an important figure in artistic and literary circles. In 1961, Fahlström won a scholarship to live and work in New York. He had already met and befriended a number of New York artists in Stockholm in the late fifties, among them Robert Rauschenberg. That year he moved into Rauschenberg's studio at 128 Front Street (Jasper Johns lived in the same building). From 1962 to 1968, Fahlström was one of the most active creators of happenings in New York, Stockholm and Paris. He created a major work, Kisses Sweeter than Wine, for the E.A.T.-sponsored Nine Evenings at the Armory in 1966.

In 1969, Fahlström was honored with a traveling retrospective organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He had subsequent exhibitions at the Guggenheim Museum and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, among others. He died of colon cancer in Stockholm on November 9, 1976 at the age of forty-seven.