

LISSON GALLERY

NEW YORK

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Press Release

Dom Sylvester Houédard

May 2 – June 16, 2018

138 10th Avenue, New York

Opening: May 1, 6 – 8pm

i see my typestracts as icons depicting sacred questions – dual space-probes of inner & outer ... they should probably be viewed like cloud-tracks & tide-ripples – bracken-patterns & gull flights – or simply as horizons & spirit levels.

– Dom Sylvester Houédard, 1972

Lisson Gallery presents the first New York show of concrete poet, visual artist, writer and Benedictine monk, Dom Sylvester Houédard (1924 – 1992) and its first solo exhibition of his work for almost 50 years. In dense visual complexity or in geometrically precise arrangements of words and symbols, Houédard's typewritten sheets and typographic constructions defied both linguistic constraints and mechanical conventions of the typewriter. These visual poems and their oration, added to his notoriety in 1960s London, where he would often stage readings or performances of his haikus and phonetic compositions. Working into the night in his monastery cloisters, he created a stream of visual poems on his portable Olivetti typewriter, combining conscious and unconscious word association with heavily condensed characters and overlapping key strokes.

These became known as 'typestracts,' a term coined by his poet friend Edwin Morgan, but were often full of evocative phrases and vocabulary relating to his studies of many mystical traditions. He gathered inspiration as much from Allen Ginsberg's Beat poetry and Eastern philosophies such as Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, as he did from Western humanism, his own training as a priest and the growing firmament of Conceptual art, which revolved around the founding of Lisson Gallery and other experimental art spaces in the late 1960s.

His time in post during World War II and experience as an administrative clerk may point to a possible origin of his interest in the subversive use of the typewriter. Finding in its functions the possibility to visualize language in a manner that relieved words of their bureaucratic function, Houédard constructed a pictorial plane and shaped their visual emergence. In doing so, words no longer performed as linguistic signifiers in a conventional sense but were instead imbued with form and a self-referential status that opened up a more fluid space for interpretation. "During 1945 I realized the typewriter's control of verticals and horizontals, balancing its mechanism for release from its own imposed grid, (and) offered possibilities that suggested the grading of Islamic calligraphy from cursive (*naskhi*) writing through *cufic* to the abstract formal arabesque, that 'wise modulation between being and not being.'"

Rather than Dadaist declarations, Houédard believed in the transformative power of his word-based arrangements to elicit linguistic, visual and spiritual connections, citing previous examples as "texts created for concrete use: amulets talismans grigris mani-walls devil traps kemioth tefillin mezuzahs medals sacred-monograms." Seen in this light, his use of

language is specific, his lexicon a cumulative barrage of marks, matter and meanings, usually without capital letters and only scant regard for grammar.

This exhibition centers on a number of these typestracts – usually using red, blue and black ink ribbons – notable for their textual content from minimal word-poems to complex, onomatopoeic scores. Another series represented here are the more spatially fluid ‘laminates’ or ‘glasspages,’ made by collaging language cut out from newspapers and colored paper which are then laminated together using transparent vinyl. The exhibition is curated by Hana Noorali and Matt O’Dell and is accompanied by a catalogue featuring contributions from Jonathan P Watts, Laura McLean-Ferris, Nicola Simpson and Charles Verey.

Kinkon biobib: life and work of dsh, 2012-2018 by Gustavo Grandal Montero will also be presented within the exhibition.

About Dom Sylvester Houédard

Widely recognized as one of the leading theorists and outstanding international practitioners of concrete poetry, Dom Sylvester Houédard (1924 – 1992) is firmly rooted in Lisson Gallery’s early history, with his first solo exhibition held at the gallery during its inaugural year in 1967. A practicing Benedictine priest and noted theologian, Houédard, also known by his initials ‘dsh’ or ‘the Dom,’ wrote extensively on new approaches to art, spirituality and philosophy, and collaborated with artists such as Gustav Metzger, Yoko Ono and John Cage. Several of his works that often incorporate language, known as ‘typestracts,’ A4 in size and typed on an Olivetti Lettera 22, were recently on view in ‘from the truer world of the other’ at the Perez Art Museum Miami.

Born Pierre-Thomas-Paul Joseph in 1924 in Guernsey and educated in Rome and Jesus College Oxford, Houédard worked as a military intelligence officer during the war, before joining the community at Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire in 1949, becoming ordained as a Benedictine monk a decade later. Houédard OSB (Order of Saint Benedict) went on to help introduce concrete poetry to Britain in 1961, exploring its links to cybernetics and Wittgenstein’s linguistic theory. He was literary editor of the Jerusalem Bible from 1961-66 and founded the Gloucestershire Ode Construction Company in 1967. As well as publishing prodigiously and lecturing at the Royal College of Art and the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) among other venues, he showed his work at Lisson Gallery, London (consistently between 1967-70); the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, (1965); the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A), London (1971); the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford and the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, UK (1972). He refocused on religion for the last ten years of his life, as an infirmarian, and died, at age 67, on January 15, 1992.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and develops 56 international artists across two exhibition spaces in London and two in New York. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie, to the public for the first time. In addition to a number of renowned artist estates, including Roy Colmer, the Leon Polk Smith Foundation and the John Latham Foundation, the gallery represents leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller and Tatsuo Miyajima. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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LISSON GALLERY

Dom Sylvester Houédard

- 1924 Born in Guernsey, Channel Islands
- 1949 M.A. Modern History, Jesus College, Oxford, UK
- 1992 Died in United Kingdom

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2018 Lisson Gallery, New York, NY, USA (forthcoming)
- 2017 'Dom Sylvester Houédard: Typestracts', Richard Saltoun, London, UK
- 2012 'Dom Sylvester Houédard and the Cosmic Typewriter', One Day Creative Symposium, South London Gallery, London, UK
- 2010 'Frog-Pond-Plop: the yoga of concrete', NUCA Gallery, Norwich, UK
- 1992 Memorial exhibition, Cairn Gallery, Nailsworth, UK
- 1975 'Begin Again', LYC Museum and Gallery, Brampton, UK
- 1972 'Dom Sylvester Houédard', organised by the Ceolfrith Arts Centre and Victoria & Albert Museum, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, UK
- 1971 'Visual Poetries', Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK
- 1967 'Dom Sylvester Houédard: extinct 1', Lisson Gallery, London, UK

Selected Group Exhibitions, Projects & Publications

- 2011 'Concept as Concrete Form: Visual Poetry, Texts and Typography', University of Derby, School of Arts, Design and Technology, Derby, UK
- 2009 'Poor. Old. Tired. Horse', ICA London, UK
'Roland: The magazine of the ICA's Visual Art Programme', Issue 2
- 2000 'Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-75', Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK
'Force Fields', Hayward Gallery, London, UK
'Commentaries on Meister Eckhart Sermons', Beshara Publications, 2000
- 1987 Reading, Cambridge Poetry Festival
'The Space in the Heart of the Lotus: Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine in India' (documentary)

- 1984 Reading with Peter Middleton, King's Poetry Series, King's College London, UK
- 1983 'le petit troglodyte, yes but if..., sibyl & psalmist..., t'ai: peach' (typewriter poems, circulated as folded photocopied sheets, 1983-1986)
- 1979 'Cratylus: The English Artist and the Word', British Council, London, UK (catalogue)
'Cratylus', XV Bienal de São Paulo, Brasil
- 1977 Reading, Cambridge Poetry Festival (recording at British Council)
'Kontextsound: A Compilation of Sound-Poetry, Text-Sound Compositions, Poésie Sonore, Auditive Texts, Optophonetics, Verbosonics, Lingual Music', Kontext Publications, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (anthology)
- 1976 'key impressions', New 57 Gallery, Edinburgh, UK (with exhibition catalogue)
'For the 5 Vowels, Quintet', typestract (British Council Collection)
- 1975 Reading with Paula Claire, King's Poetry Series, King's College London, UK
'Begin Again: A Book of Reflections & Reversals', LYC Publications, Brampton, UK (pamphlet published on the occasion of the exhibition at LYC Museum and Gallery)
'Portrait of Robin Crozier (Ceolfrith 25)', Ceolfrith Arts Centre, Sunderland, UK (Artists book)
- 1974 'Typewriter Art: Half a Century of Experiment', Concourse Gallery, Polytechnic of Central London, London, UK
'GLOUP and WOUP', Arc Publications, Gillingham, UK
- 1973 'Eurovispo-73: An Exhibition of Visual Poetry by Four Europeans', Burleighfield House, Loudwater, UK
'Typewriter Art: Half a Century of Experiment', New 57 Gallery, Edinburgh, UK
- 1972 'Dom Sylvester Houédard (Ceolfrith 15)', Ceolfrith Arts Centre, Sunderland, UK (exhibition catalogue)
- 1971 'Dorothy's Umbrellas', Nottingham Festival, Polytechnic School of Art, Nottingham, UK; travelled to Bristol Arts Centre, Bristol, UK; Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, UK
'Tom Phillips, Dom Sylvester Houédard', Bear Lane Gallery, Oxford, UK
'Konkrete poëzie, klankteksten, visuele teksten', Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Germany; travelled to Institut für modern Kunst; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK
'Panache', Future's Fictions special issue
'Visual Poetries', Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK (exhibition card)
'Words as zips', Audio recording, British Library, UK
BBC Radio 4 World at One (21 February)
'gay – fab – bat', Chelsea College of Art & Design Library, UK
'O big nil – (Epitaph for) Lin Piao', The John Rylands Library

- 1970 'Concrete Poetry', Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; travelled to Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, UK (1972)
 'Peter Joseph, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Hove Dara and Others', Lisson Gallery, London, UK
 'Visual Poetry', Ceolfrith Gallery, Sunderland, UK
 'Exempla: Documenti di Poesia Concreta e Visuale Raccolti da Maurizio Nannucci', Exempla, Florence, Italy (anthology)
- 1969 'Mostra di Poesia Concreta', Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy
 'Shelter', Arnolfini, Bristol, UK
 'Concrete Poetry', Fine Arts Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada (exhibition catalogue)
 'to catch a whiteman by his manifesto' Bath Academy of Art, Corsham, UK
 '12 dancepoems from the cosmic typewriter by dsh', South Street Publications, Sherborne, UK (pamphlet)
- 1968 'Arlington-Quadro', Arlington Mill, Bilbury, UK
 'Ken Cox, Mira Schendel, Dom Sylvester Houédard', Lisson Gallery, London, UK
 'Concrete Poetry: A World View', University of Indiana Press, Bloomington, Indiana, USA (anthology)
 'Once again', New Directions, New York, NY, USA (anthology)
 'Arlington-Quadro', South Street Publications, Sherborne (group exhibition catalogue with cover and introduction by Houédard)
 'ken cox memorial: the sun-cheese wheel-ode, a double-rolling-gloster memorial for kencox', South Street Publications, Sherborne, UK
 'mini-posters', South Street Publications, Sherborne, UK (pamphlet)
 'Lisson 68', Ken Cox, Timothy Drever, Michael Ginsborg, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Peter Joseph, Li Yuan-Chia, Mira Schendel, Peter Schmidt, Lisson Gallery, London, UK
- 1967 'Antonio Sena, Dom Sylvester Houédard, David Medalla', Lisson Gallery, London, UK
 'Aktual Art International', SFMOMA, San Francisco, CA, USA and Stanford Art Gallery, Stanford, CA, USA (group exhibition catalogue)
 International Festival of Concrete Poetry, Falmouth School of Art, Falmouth, UK
 Brighton Festival, Brighton, UK
 'Je reviens dans 5 minutes' proposal for typing ballet on giant typewriter, Festival de Fort Boyard, Rochefort, France
 'Six Concrete Poems: Brighton Festival 1967', Chelsea School of Art, London, UK
 'o-zone', performance of Tristan Tzara's 'Coeur a gaz', translated by Dom Sylvester Houédard
 Collaboration with David Medalla's 'Exploding Galaxy' (later published as '12 dancepoems of the cosmic typewriter')
 'Mudras: silent gesture poems by Dom Sylvester Houédard and Jon Willcocks'
 'An Anthology of Concrete Poetry', Something Else Press, New York, NY, USA

- ‘The Chicago Review Anthology of Concretism’, Swallow Press, Chicago, IL, USA
 ‘Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology’, London Magazine, London, UK
 ‘Freewheel: An Exhibition of Graphics and Poetry’, Arts Council, London, UK (catalogue)
- 1966
- ‘Intermedia’, Subscription Rooms, Stroud, UK
 ‘The Golden Mile: An Exhibition of Kinetic + Concrete + Related Work’, Arnofini, Bristol, UK
 ‘Arlington-Une: International Exhibition of Spatial Poetry and Sound Poetry’, Arlington Mill, Bibury, UK
 ‘An Exhibition of Concrete/Spatial Poetry’, Midland Group Gallery, Nottingham, UK
 ‘Aesthetics of the death wish?, (discussion and participant)
 Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) (co-organiser and participant)
 ‘A book of chakras: 8 yantric poems’, Watford School of Art, Watford, UK
 ‘The Golden Mile: An Exhibition of Kinetic + Concrete + Related Work’, Arnofini, Bristol, UK (catalogue)
 ‘Concrete Poetry: Britain, Canada, United States’, London (group folder)
 ‘Astronauts of inner-space: an international collection of avant-garde activity’, Stolen Paper Review Editions, San Francisco, CA, USA (anthology)
 ‘Eyearun’, Writers Forum, London, UK
 ‘Beloit Poetry Journal’, v.17 (Chapbook 9)
 ‘Ikon’, n.3 (cover design)
 Member, National Liturgical Commission
 Corresponding Member, International Committee for English in the Liturgy
- 1965
- ‘Between Poetry and Painting’, ICA London, UK (accompanying pamphlet with chronology and essay by Houédard)
 ‘International Poetry Incarnation’, Royal Albert Hall, London, UK
 2nd International Exhibition of Experimental Poetry, St. Catherine’s College, Oxford, UK
 ‘Sprechgedichte’, Writers Forum, London (pamphlet introduction and chronology by Houédard)
 ‘The wider concrete’, Link
- 1964
- ‘Eyear’, Talks on concrete poetry at Royal College of Art and ICA London, UK
 ‘Wider Ecumenism’, Talk at St Anne’s Society, London, UK; published in The Aylesford Review
 ‘Beat and Afterbeat — poetry and theology’, The Ayelsford Review
 ‘Ou’, Henri Chopin
 ‘Paradada’, published in Times Literary Supplement issue dedicated to Anglo-American avant-garde
- 1963
- ‘Moire Poem 6 Typestract’, Sachner Archive
 ‘International Beat Movement’, BBC 3 Radio
 ‘Concrere poetry & Ian Hamilton Finlay’, Typographica, pp.47-62. (also in The Aylesford Review)

Collections

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK
The British Council, UK
Tate Collection, London, UK
Fondazione Bonotto, Molvena, Italy
Pérez Art Museum Miami, FL, USA
The Sackner Archive of Visual and Concrete Poetry
William Allen Word & Image Collection
The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, The State University of
New York at Buffalo