ALISON KNOWLES

BY

A Retrospective
(1960–2022)

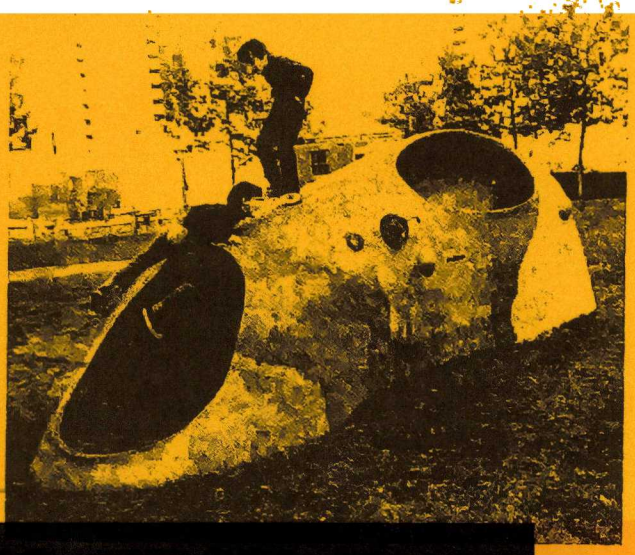
Sculpture Is Burned On Penn South Lawn

The Big Book travels to Chicago

The Big Book travels to Chicago for the Museum of Contemporary Art's inaugural exhibition, *Pictures to be Read / Poetry to be Seen*. During the exhibition, Knowles, Dick Higgins, and John Cage perform *Make a Salad*, *String Piece*, *Newspaper Music*, and other works in an evening program called *What did you bring?*

A large sculptural work by fire had been started de-
Chelsea artist Alison Knowles liberately.
was almost destroyed by fire last Mrs. Knowles, who lives on
Thursday evening as it stood on a Penn South terrace, said there was
Penn Station-bound platform for 28th no question in her mind that
Street near Eighth Avenue. the fire had been set by a Penn

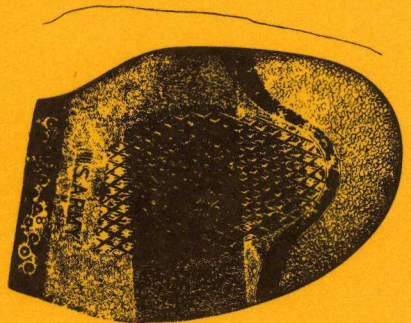
A guard from the adjacent South resident who was angry
tive who witnessed the fire said that the sculptural work had been
that dense black smoke billowed placed on that lawn.
out of the burning fiberglas work
and flames shot up as high as Charging that residents had
the two-story power house been 'absolutely vicious to me'
building behind which the sculp- ever since the piece was first put
ture had been placed. there two weeks prior to the fire,
the artist said that even before
Firemen found evidence—ker- the eventual burning of the work
osene-drenched [illegible] that the



ROLF NELSON GALLERY
530 N. LA CIENEGA BOULEVARD - LOS ANGELES 48
TUESDAY THROUGH SATURDAY - 11:00 A.M. TO 6:00 P.M.
OPENING OCT. 7, 1963, 8-10 P.M. THROUGH NOV. 2

(CX5) CHICAGO, Oct. 20--SHE'S CLOSE IN SOMETHING THAT'S FAR OUT--Contemporary art such as "The Big Book" here has creator, Alison Knowles, very much a part of it today at museum given over to display of controversial exhibits. This, among other things, went on display at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. (AP Wirephoto) 1967
(fww61500cs 1stf)(See story by Charles-Gene McDaniel)

PHOTO BY PETER MOORE



FACING Peter Moore: Lette Eisenhauer modeling apparel at *BLINK* photo shoot, New York, 1963, color photograph. © Northwestern University **ABOVE** Sissor Bros. Warehouse: Rolf Nelson with *The Big Book*, Nelson Gallery of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1967, Graph

by
Alison
Knowles

1965
A Great Bear Pamphlet
New York

by Alison Knowles

#1 —

Shuffle (1961)

The performer or performers shuffle into the performance area and away from it, above, behind, around, or through the audience. They perform as a group or solo: but quietly.

Premiered August 1963 at National Association of Chemists and Perfumers in New York at the Advertisers' Club.

#2 —

Proposition (October, 1962)

Make a salad.

Premiered October 21st, 1962 at Institute for Contemporary Arts in London.

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with Lucia Fabio

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Lucia Fabio
Lauren Fulton
Hannah B Higgins
Maud Jacquin and Sébastien Pluot
Alison Knowles and George Quasha
Karen Moss
Julia Robinson
Kristine Stiles
Nicole L. Woods

University of California, Berkeley
Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

BY ALISON KNOWLES

A Retrospective (1960–2022)

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Director's Foreword

by Alison Knowles: A Retrospective (1960–2022) is the first comprehensive exhibition of the American artist Alison Knowles (b. 1933, Scarsdale, NY), who has produced a significant but underexamined body of work since the early 1960s. While Knowles is best known as a core member of Fluxus, the avant-garde movement founded in 1962, her groundbreaking experimentation—from painting and printmaking to sculpture and installation, sound works, poetry, performance events, and artist's books—has continued for more than sixty years, influencing contemporary art and artists. Her interdisciplinary approach to being an artist may seem commonplace today, but it was decidedly radical in the 1960s.

Among her career highlights, Knowles became one of the first artists to utilize food as a medium. *The Identical Lunch* (1967), in which she consumed the same meal daily for two years, is a very early example of durational performance art. *The Big Book* (1966) expanded the small format of artist-made publications into a monumental-scale installation. Her multifaceted *The House of Dust* generated possibly the first computerized poem in the United States in 1967, followed by a public sculpture and numerous related performances. Knowles's quotidian, poetic works emanate from her extended engagement with ordinary materials, found objects, and everyday life.

In recent years, Knowles has presented her early works at major public events both at home and abroad, including at Tate Modern, London (2008); the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2011); the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2014); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2016); the Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2018); and Art Basel, Switzerland (2021). *by Alison Knowles: A Retrospective (1960–2022)* brings greater attention to all facets of Knowles's oeuvre, presenting more than 200 objects and spanning the entire breadth of her still-active career. The presentation of this retrospective at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive offers unprecedented opportunity for new audiences to discover and experience the incredible range and full impact of Knowles's art.

Given BAMPFA's decades-long commitment to conceptual art and intermedia practices, we are specially poised to organize this exhibition. BAMPFA's conceptual art collection of over 1,000 works includes several significant archives and substantial holdings of Fluxus materials, among them rare works by Knowles. A concurrent exhibition culled from these holdings—*Fluxus Reverb: Events, Scores, Boxes & More*, curated by Constance Lewallen—provides greater context for Knowles's work.

Art historian and independent curator Karen Moss has worked with Knowles for almost thirty years, first on *In the Spirit of Fluxus* at the Walker Art Center (1993) and later on Knowles's solo exhibition and residency at the San Francisco Art Institute (2003). Karen is a close friend of BAMPFA: she worked at the museum while attending graduate school at UC Berkeley and co-curated *State of Mind: New California Art Circa 1970*, on view at BAMPFA in 2012 as part of the Getty Foundation's Pacific Standard Time initiative. The Knowles project started in 2018, and I am so grateful for Karen's tireless efforts and perseverance during the pandemic to bring the exhibition and catalog to their fruition in 2022.

I would also like to thank the dedicated BAMPFA staff members who have worked on this project: John Alexander, Director of Collections and Exhibitions; Stephanie Cannizzo, Associate Curator; Sean Carson, Program Manager; Maria Cisneros, Interim Head of Administration

PREVIOUS SPREAD Dick Higgins and Knowles performing *John Cage, Solo for Voice 2*, at *Parallel Performances of New Music*, Galerie Monet, Amsterdam, October 5, 1962

Department, Security and Operations Administrator; Alex Confer, Chief Preparator; AJ Fox, Media Relations Manager; Steve Fujimura, Business Services Associate; Eric Gillet, Business Services Director; Justin Glasson, Director of Development; Aimée Goggins, Director of Marketing and Communications; Sherry Goodman, Director of Education and Academic Relations; Laura Hansen, Collection Specialist; Albert Liu, Director's Executive Assistant; Stephanie Reeves, Associate Registrar for Exhibitions; Holly Roach, Grants Officer; Nada Shalaby, Senior Grants Officer; Jim Sugarman, Sales and Admissions Manager; and Christina Yang, Chief Curator.

On behalf of BAMPFA, I offer immense thanks to the Terra Foundation for American Art for their support of the exhibition and its tour, and to the University of Southern California (USC) for the Faculty Innovation and Research Grant that allowed Karen to bring on additional support.

We are also so grateful for the generosity of the following archives and museums in lending works to the exhibition: Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; De Appel, Amsterdam; Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; Heine Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Ostwall, Dortmund, Germany; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Additionally, we thank the following private collectors and foundations for their generous loans: Fondazione Bonotto, Colceresa, Italy; Meghan DellaCrosse, Berkeley, California; Rebecca and Marty Eisenberg, New York; Emily Harvey Foundation, New York; Lucia Fabio and R. Andrew Mueller, Los Angeles; Hannah B Higgins and Joseph Reinstein, Highland Park, Illinois; Jessica Higgins and Joshua Selman, New York; Adam and Beth Lustbader, Bannockburn, Illinois; and Karen Moss, Santa Monica, California. Finally, we greatly appreciate the loans and support provided by the Alison Knowles Studio and James Fuentes.

And, of course, I would like to express our deepest appreciation to Alison Knowles, who for six decades has pushed us all to move beyond binary thinking and the perceived limits of knowledge, toward a higher consciousness of meaning—through art, community, and collaboration in the performance of everyday life.

— Julie Rodrigues Widholm, Director,
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum
and Pacific Film Archive

Curator's Acknowledgments

The exhibition and publication *by Alison Knowles: A Retrospective (1960–2022)* evolved from decades of academic and curatorial work on intermedia and Fluxus as well as the thirty-plus years over which I have had the pleasure of knowing Alison. First I must acknowledge the key role that the Getty Research Institute (GRI) in Los Angeles played in my initial research into Fluxus. When the GRI acquired the Jean Brown papers, a repository of twentieth-century avant-garde objects, artist's books, and Fluxus works, Marcia Reed, Curator of Special Collections, invited me to view the collection in storage while it was still being processed. I'd like to acknowledge Marcia's pivotal role in my decision to focus my doctoral dissertation on Fluxus, Happenings, and intermedia. Shortly thereafter, I met Dick Higgins, who had recently been a keynote speaker at the GRI's *Art of the Book* conference (1989). Dick graciously invited me to come to his studio in Barrytown, New York, where Alison also kept a studio—my first real encounter with both artists and their intriguing work. Subsequently, they introduced me to their daughter Hannah B Higgins, whom I met while she was doing her own Fluxus dissertation research at the GRI. Hannah and I have been close colleagues ever since.

I would also like to acknowledge my long-time colleagues Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss, who curated *In the Spirit of Fluxus* at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (1993), which was the first comprehensive Fluxus exhibition in the United States. After touring widely in this country, *In the Spirit* traveled to Europe. Liz and Joan invited me to join a small group of Fluxus scholars in advising on a planning grant and then hired me as a consultant on public programs in conjunction with the exhibition's opening at the Walker, which featured events by Alison. Two years later, after I had accepted a position at that museum, I organized the exhibition *Experiencing the Everyday: Performance of the 1970s* (1998), which featured some of Alison's works from the Walker's significant holdings of Fluxus art and archival materials.

I am also very grateful to those who supported this project during its nascent stages. More than five years ago, the conceptual and historical framework for this retrospective started to take shape during a series of conversations I shared with a small group of Fluxus researchers and scholars—Lucia Fabio, Lauren Fulton, Hannah B Higgins, and Nicole L. Woods—all of whom are contributing authors to this publication. Hannah, Lauren, and Nicole answered countless questions on their respective areas of expertise. Lucia has worked tirelessly as the curatorial consultant and lead researcher on every facet of this project, especially on the extensive "Art/Life/Events" chronology in both this book and the exhibition. I wish to acknowledge the University of Southern California (USC) for granting me a Zumberge Faculty Innovation and Research Individual Fellowship to support my research and travel, and also the staff at the USC Office of Research Initiatives and Facilities.

In addition to Hannah, Lauren, Lucia, and Nicole, I would like to thank the essayists Sébastien Pluot and Maud Jacquin, who work as the curatorial team Art by Translation and have organized new iterations of Knowles's *The House of Dust* in both Europe and the United States. I am also grateful to the authors and art historians Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Julia Robinson, and Kristine Stiles, who kindly granted permission to reprint their exceptional articles on Knowles's work. Finally, thanks are due to the poet George Quasha, for his article and dialogue with Alison on her large-scale books and the concept of "transvironments." We are

FOLLOWING SPREAD Nam June Paik, Knowles, Emmett Williams, George Maciunas, and Benjamin Patterson performing Maciunas's *In Memoriam to Adriano Olivetti, No. 5*, Städtisches Museum Wiesbaden, September 8, 1962

so very pleased to be able to include these articles to this publication, providing critical content that can now be read by additional audiences.

Many thanks are due to Kimberly Varella of Content Object design studio for inspirational work on this publication, which resulted from her deep research into the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of Knowles's work. I also acknowledge Deirdre O'Dwyer, whose astute reading of the texts and deft editorial skills contributed greatly to the book. I thank Eve Arballo, for her hours of research on images and archival work with the Alison Knowles Studio, and Nadia Estrada, for helping with the arduous rights and reproductions permissions process.

Others who are due special thanks include the staff of the James Fuentes gallery, including James Fuentes, Katrin Lewinsky, Chelsea Cater, and Andrew Garcia, for all of their assistance with the exhibition; David Familian, Robert Chase Heishman, and Jason Mandella, who photographed Alison's work for the publication; Nancy Freeman and Zeno Ferrandini of VeronaLibri, where the book was printed; and Tony Manzella of Echelon Color.

A retrospective of this scope always involves the cooperation and participation of so many people at a museum, and so I want to express my appreciation for the hard work of the entire staff of the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, especially during a time of pandemic as well as institutional transition. In particular, I must thank Lawrence Rinder, former Director of the BAMPFA, for hiring me as a guest curator and for his pivotal role in the museum's successful grant proposal to the Terra Foundation for American Art, which has generously funded the exhibition and its tour. I also thank BAMPFA's new leadership team—Julie Rodrigues Widholm, Director; John Alexander, Director of Collections and Exhibitions; Justin Glasson, Director of Development; Aimée Goggins, Director of Marketing and Communications; and Christina Yang, Chief Curator—for their counsel and support just as they were assuming their new positions. I also join Julie in thanking the members of the BAMPFA team who worked closely on the exhibition: Stephanie Cannizzo, Associate Curator; Sean Carson, Program Manager; Alex Confer, Chief Preparator; Sherry Goodman, Director of Education and Academic Relations; Laura Hansen, Collection Specialist; Albert Liu, Director's Executive Assistant; Stephanie Reeves, Associate Registrar for Exhibitions; Holly Roach, Grants Officer; and Nada Shalaby, Senior Grants Officer. Finally, I wish to acknowledge my dear colleague and friend the late Constance Lewallen, BAMPFA Senior Curator Emerita, for her work on *Fluxus Reverb: Events, Scores, Boxes & More.*

I reserve my deepest gratitude for Alison Knowles, Jessica Higgins, and Joshua Selman for their relentless work on the myriad details of preparing the exhibition and this publication. I also thank family members Hannah B Higgins, Clara Joy, Joe Reinstein, Nathalie Reinstein, and Zoë Reinstein for their respective support. Ultimately, the collective processes of bringing this project to fruition afford new audiences the joy of discovering and experiencing the full range and impact of Alison's art.

—Karen Moss, Guest Curator

Preface *Karen Moss*

The first image one sees upon opening this book is the buff-colored cover of Alison Knowles's early publication *by Alison Knowles* (1965). This slim volume, published by Something Else Press as part of its Great Bear Pamphlets series, includes the earliest poetic event scores written by Knowles.[1] The collection is especially significant because it marks the first publication of the scores Knowles wrote for her initial forays into performance at Fluxus Festivals organized by George Maciunas throughout Europe between 1962–63.[2] Knowles's first event score in *by Alison Knowles* is *Shuffle* (1961), which instructs a performer or performers to meander in and around the audience while shuffling their feet, and the second is *Proposition #2: Make a Salad* (1962), first performed as part of the *Festival of Misfits* in London. One of the first food-based works of performance art, *Make a Salad* has become, for many, Knowles's signature work: she has been called to perform it at galleries, museums, and public sites internationally since the 2000s.

Yet if the present book begins by showing Knowles within the context for which she is most well-known—her participation in the Fluxus collective from 1962 through the late 1970s—the primary impetus for the exhibition *by Alison Knowles: A Retrospective (1960–2022)* and this accompanying publication—the most comprehensive published on the artist's work to date—is to document, interpret, and illustrate Knowles's extraordinary artistic production over her lifetime to date.

When curating a retrospective, it is daunting to find a title to convey the full extent of an artist's practice, especially an artist such as Knowles, whose production spans sixty-plus years. It became clear, as the curatorial project progressed, that the eponymous title *by Alison Knowles* should be incorporated into the naming of the artist's retrospective exhibition and publication, to honor Knowles's historical artist's publication and evoke the multiple meanings of the preposition *by* as applicable to her art, authorship, and achievements. Here is a sampling of those meanings:

by, preposition
– identifying the agent performing an action
– in proximity to
– indicating the means of achieving something
– in the vicinity of and beyond
– through or through the medium[3]

Knowles's open scores are minimal, poetic texts that can be performed by others, yet they are clearly written *by* Knowles, reflecting her authorship. Referred to sometimes as "propositions," the scores are invitations to perform simple actions or gestures, often in combination with found objects. Knowles's practice draws on the first definition of *by* from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: she is often "the agent performing an action," leading participants in focused, embodied engagements that often involve not only sight and sound, but also the gustatory, the haptic, and the olfactory. As the sole female co-founder of Fluxus, Knowles's work is distinct from that of her male counterparts, particularly in her interest in food, domestic materials, and quotidian activities, and in observing what she has called the "secrets of ordinary things."[4] In its difference, Knowles's practice fulfills two of the other definitions of *by*: first, she worked "in proximity to" the Fluxus collective during a particular period (representing a relatively short amount of time within the scope her long career); and second, she has long developed her own "means of achieving something."

In her association with Fluxus, Knowles worked *by* the cohort—"both in the vicinity of and beyond" them. Her experimental practices from the early 1960s to the early 1970s included screenprinted paintings, artists' books, event scores, mixed-media printmaking, sound works, visual poetry, and installation. Throughout her career, Knowles has continued to demonstrate an uncanny ability to combine diverse materials and processes, constantly iterating additional forms and developing unprecedented areas of investigation. In so doing, she has evidenced another definition of *by*, for she not only works "through the medium," but through multiple forms of media that become interdependent and coalesce into *intermedia.* Knowles's artistic production embodies what Dick Higgins referred to as the "intermedial approach, to emphasize the dialectic between the media."[5] Exemplifying this are her late 1960s trio of projects combining elements of visual art, written texts including event scores, and performance: *The Big Book* (1966), *The Identical Lunch* (1967), and *The House of Dust* (1967)—all of which she would revisit in new forms into the present century.

During the pivotal period between Knowles's screenprinted canvases (which she began making in the late 1950s, before artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol) and these three major projects, Knowles experimented with everyday objects and materials as she instantiated intermedia sensibilities and iterative tendencies in her practice. This decade became a resource for her to return to again and again, looping back to mine her previous images and ideas, then synthesizing them into freshly novel works. As of the early 1970s, Knowles's work becomes even more process-oriented and recursive—in several instances she starts a series in one decade and revisits it again years later. Rather than progressing from one strict formal style or mode of practice to another, she innovates with myriad materials and engages with a plethora of subjects. A lifelong New Yorker, Knowles has traveled frequently to participate in events, exhibitions, and artist residencies internationally. Her inclination to be itinerant, while involved in different types of projects simultaneously, has made it difficult to establish a precise chronology for her work and nearly impossible to apprehend the total gestalt of her artistic production.

The curatorial logic of *by Alison Knowles: A Retrospective (1960–2022)* has aimed to closely follow the artist's specific working methods and trajectory. The retrospective begins with "Art/Life/Events," an illustrated time line to introduce important moments in Knowles's biography alongside the highlights of her career. The first part of the exhibition's installation is organized chronologically, from 1960 to the early 1970s, to show the transition from Knowles's early paintings and prints to the advent of her event scores and participation in Fluxus Festivals, as well as her collaborations with George Brecht and Robert Watts on *BLINK* and with additional Fluxus artists on performances and publications. This section culminates with installations of *The Big Book*, *The Identical Lunch*, and *The House of Dust.* The second, nonchronological part of the exhibition presents Knowles's work from the early 1970s to today, across various media and materials as well as subjects and themes. More specifically, it focuses on a range of experimental printmaking processes; hanging mixed-media works and scrolls; flax and bean instruments and sculptures; sound works; and artist's books, multiples, and other publications. Specific sections are devoted to Knowles's collaborative exhibitions and events since 2000, which include the most recent reactivations of her intermedia works.

1. From 1963–74, Dick Higgins, Knowles's life partner for much of her life, published many of their Fluxus associates through Something Else Press, including George Brecht, Al Hansen, Nam June Paik, and Emmett Williams, as well as a broader array of artists and authors, among them John Cage, Henry Cowell, Merce Cunningham, Allan Kaprow, Marshall McLuhan, and Gertrude Stein. See *Intermedia, Fluxus and Something Else Press: Selected Writings by Dick Higgins* (New York: Siglio Press, 2018).

2. Maciunas organized *Fluxus international Festspiele Newuster Musik* (International Festival of the Newest Music) in Wiesbaden, Germany, in September 1962, which was the first concert for which he used the coinage "Fluxus." Similar festivals took place in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Düsseldorf, London, Oslo, Paris, Rotterdam, Stockholm, and Wuppertal during 1962–63.

3. These definitions are loosely drawn from the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Merriam Webster Dictionary*.

4. Knowles chose this phrase for the title of her solo exhibition *Alison Knowles: Secrets of Ordinary Things*, which I curated at the Walter and McBean Galleries, San Francisco Art Institute, April–June 2003.

5. Dick Higgins, "Statement on Intermedia," written on August 3, 1966, and published in 1967 by Something Else Press and in the ephemeral publication *Dé-coll/age, Bulletin der Fluxus und Happening Avantgarde*, no. 6, ed. Wolf Vostell. See also Higgins, *Modernism Since Postmodernism: Essays on Intermedia* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1997), where he cites Samuel Taylor Coleridge's use of the term *intermedium* in his notebooks in 1814 to describe his practice of combining writing, poetry, and drawing, often while listening to music (224).

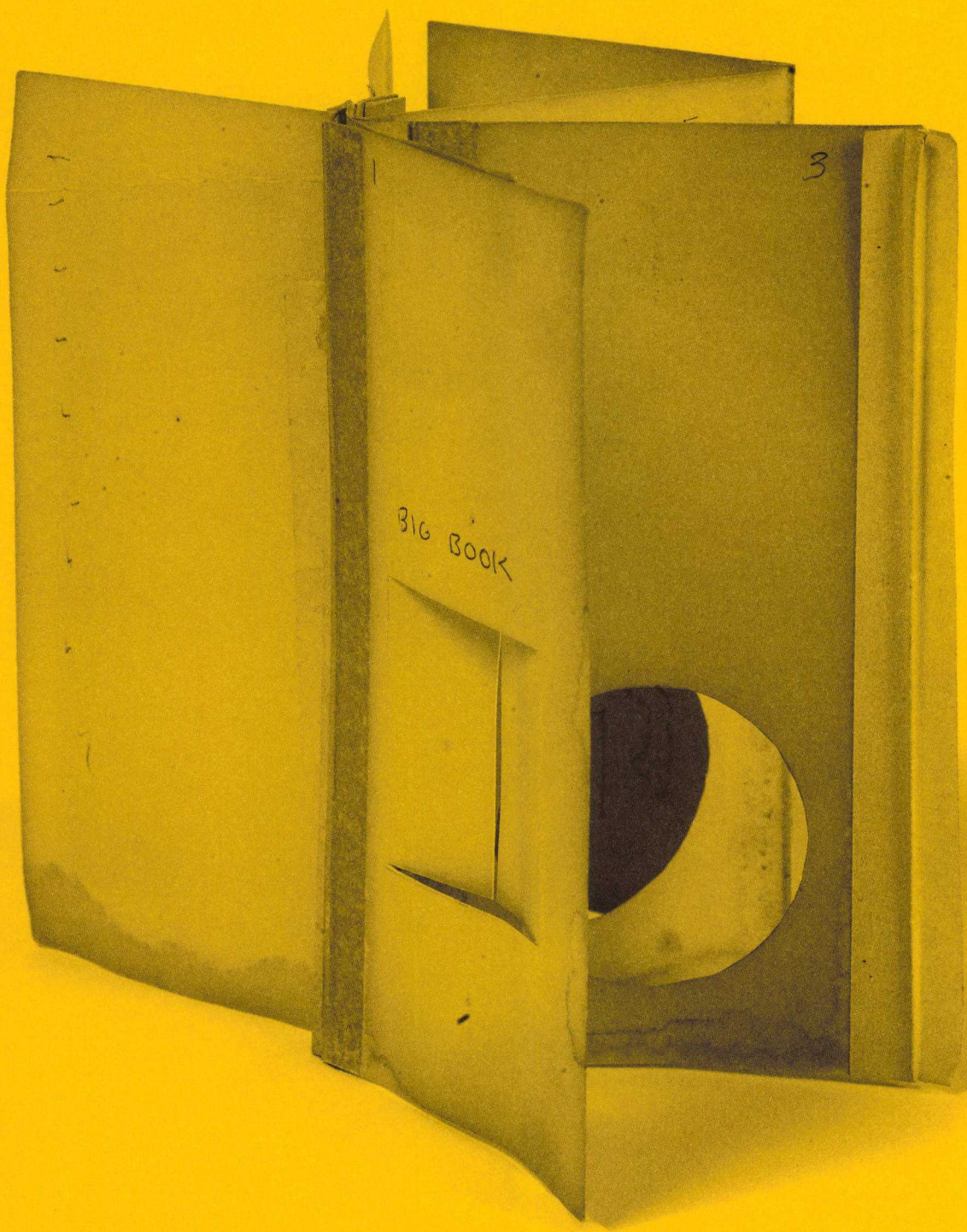
The present book accompanies the exhibition as a collection of both new scholarship and previous writings by art historians, artists, and curators keenly attuned to Fluxus and Knowles's practice. My curatorial introduction is titled "by Alison Knowles: Make a Retrospective." and provides an overarching framework that aims to reveal the depth and breadth of Knowles's art, demonstrating why it is significant and how it has influenced younger generations of artists. The other new writings presented here include Hannah B Higgins's "Twins: A Parable," a detailed reading, comparative analysis, and poetic rumination on Knowles's print *Twins* (1979). As one of the artist's fraternal twin daughters, Higgins reflects on the proliferation of nonidentical duplication in Knowles's work and how her daily routines have impacted her artistic sensibility. Nicole L. Woods's "Do You Remember? Alison Knowles in Context" considers the artist's work in relation to the historical archive, opening up new pathways to explore how we remember women artists. Lauren Fulton's "Sonic Possibilities and Meditations on Being: The Mysterious Wisdom of Alison Knowles" addresses sound works from the 1980s and 1990s, both Knowles's audio recordings and found object assemblages that exude sonic potentiality. Maud Jacquin and Sébastien Pluot's "*The House of Dust*, a Work in Translation" discusses how Knowles's project deploys a "panorama" of procedures to translate poetry, art, music, dance, and architecture and to generate situations of radical hospitality and emancipatory experiences. In "Touch, Listen, Smell, Eat, Look: Intersensory Perception in the Work of Alison Knowles," Lucia Fabio looks at the sensory implications of Knowles's "transvironments," intermedia scores and performances, and artists' books.

This publication also features reprints of several historically important articles that have had too limited circulation: Benjamin H. D. Buchloh's "The Book of the Future: Alison Knowles's *House of Dust*" (2012), Julia Robinson's "The Sculpture of Indeterminacy: Alison Knowles's Beans and Variations" (2004), and Kristine Stile's "Tuna and Other Fishy Thoughts on Fluxus Events" (1992). Also reprinted here is poet George Quasha and Knowles's conversation from 1982 about her artist's book installations, followed by Quasha's own "auto-dialogue" on "transvironments" and their transactional reception by reader/viewers.

These essays provide art historical, critical, and philosophical contexts for Knowles's work and bookend an illustrated chronology of the artist's education, exhibitions, performances, residencies, collaborations, and commemorations. Compiled by Lucia Fabio, it is an unprecedented attempt to construct a detailed narrative of Knowles's life and oeuvre. Commencing with her birth in Scarsdale, New York, in 1933, it ends with the most recent iteration of *The House of Dust*, a habitable house of mud produced in 2021 using digital 3D printing in collaboration with WASP (The World Advanced Saving Project) and installed in Wiesbaden, Germany, where the first Fluxus Festival took place in 1962.

Since that auspicious year, when Knowles first performed with Fluxus at twenty-nine years of age, she has had an astonishingly expansive and productive artistic career. Yet, as for many women of her generation, the extent of her practice has been too long underexamined. While no single exhibition or publication can do full justice to such a prolific eighty-nine-year-old artist, the goal of *by Alison Knowles: A Retrospective (1960–2022)* is to amplify her presence in art historical and critical discourse, and to bring into sharper relief Knowles's prescient contributions to contemporary art.

99 Red North, performed at *The House of Dust*, CalArts, Burbank, CA, 1970
FOLLOWING PAGE Maquette of *The Big Book*, c. 1966; index cards and tape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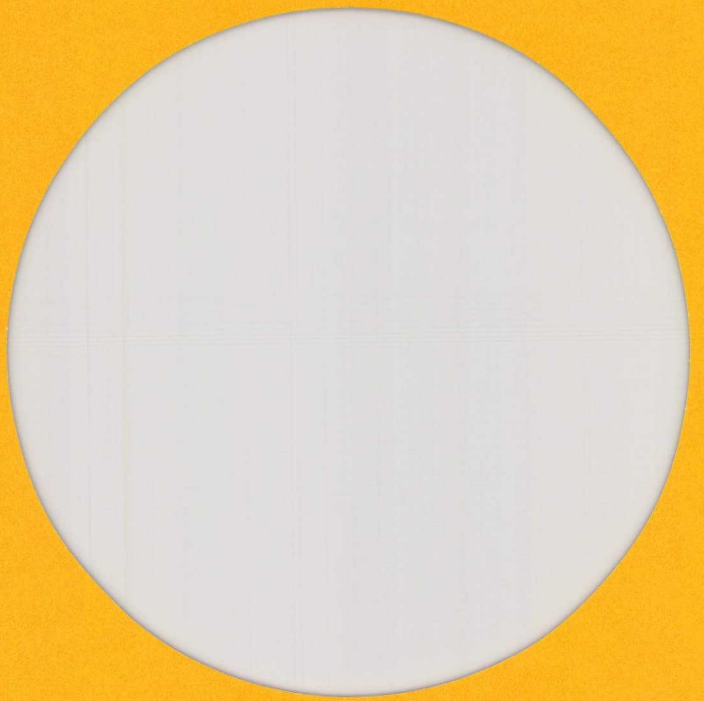
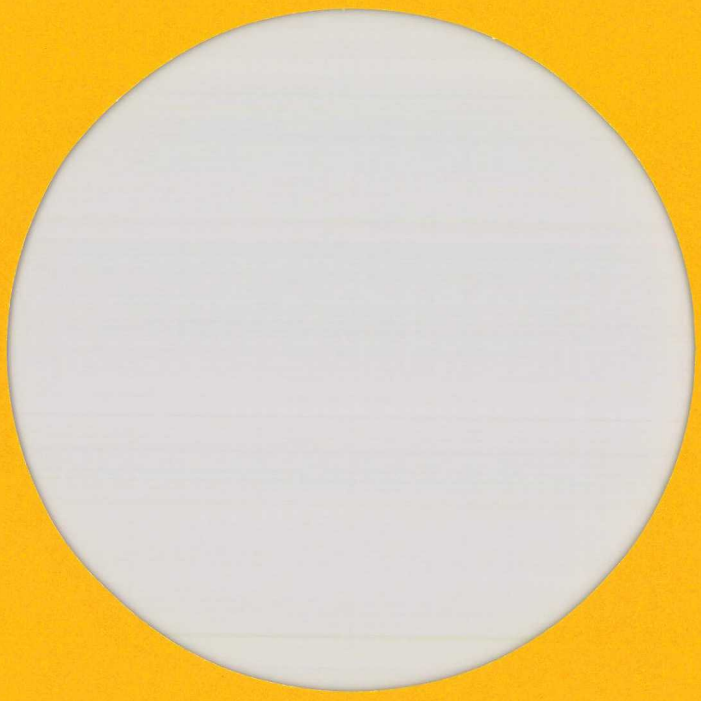
BIG BOOK

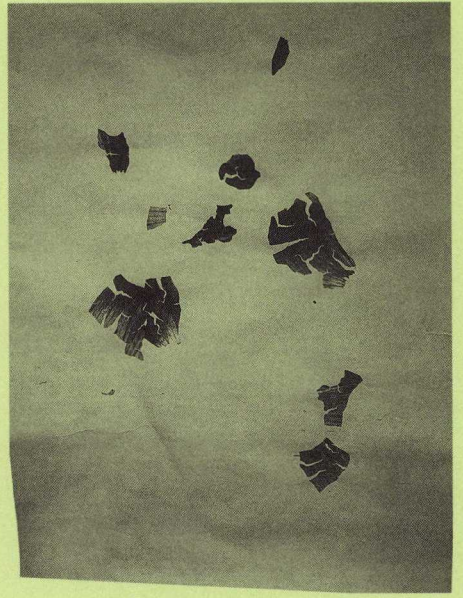
ESSAYS





by Alison Knowles: Make a Retrospective.

Karen Moss



Onion Skin Song, 1971/2021; ink on archival paper, edition of 10

1. Alison Knowles, "Back to the Real Onion—Notes on *Song No. 1* of *Three Songs*," in a broadside published by Galerie St. Petri Archive of Experimental and Marginal Art, Lund, Sweden, 1978.

When I first embarked on the project of an Alison Knowles retrospective, I considered a series of questions: What does it mean to "make a retrospective" for an artist whose production involves ephemeral, nontraditional materials and live, durational works that defy easy categorization and do not fit seamlessly into standard museum strictures? How does a curator start to research a prolific, process-oriented practice dispersed across the globe—from her New York studio (a wall-to-wall installation of art, found objects, specimens of nature, snippets of writing, and memorabilia) to international archives, foundations, and museums? Then, as one gains understanding of the artist's diffuse yet deep production, how does one codify, organize, and develop a framework for such a multifaceted body of work? Finally, and most critically, how does one communicate the overarching significance of an octogenarian who has been duly acknowledged and appreciated by her avant-garde peers and subsequent generations of artists, but underrepresented in mainstream institutions and scholarship? What follows is a kind of "open score" for Knowles's artistic practice; these "propositions," to borrow her language, suggest how we might think about Knowles's oeuvre through lenses of process, procedure, pedagogy, and impact.

Proposition 1: Process

At first glance, it is difficult to identify the floating, fragmented shapes in the 2021 print *Onion Skin Song*, a continuation of Knowles's print series *Three Songs*, begun in 1971; upon close inspection, the unmistakable striations of delicate organic matter become apparent. Knowles has explained that the prints are "made by running real onion skins through a blueprint machine":

> *This method duplicates exactly, like a shadow image, the tone and striations of the skin and reproduces them on a vellum sheet. Finding in my environment a dozen onion skins, they were placed on a plastic sheet, covered with [Saran] wrap and the prints were run. The blueprint machine turns and crushes the skins as it makes the prints. Once the dials are set, the lights and darks of the skins are interpreted and printed by the voltage. These chance elements—the turning drum changing the position of the skins as on the plastic and the crushing action, plus the differing electrical charges—I find preferable to calligraphy I might draw by hand.*[1]

Knowles's statement reveals salient qualities of her multiphased intermedia practice. First, she chooses a food item from her own domestic environment; next, she experiments with technology in order to make a machine-produced trace of it. The result is a long swath of vellum with scattered markings produced through novel, unpredictable procedures. What is also significant about *Onion Skin Song* is its recursive nature: Knowles loops back, mines specific elements, and repurposes ideas over decades.

There is yet another aspect of Knowles's process to mention with regard to *Onion Skin Song*: while the print is typically hung vertically, it is intended to be taken off the wall and read horizontally as a score for others to perform. This affirms a hallmark of Knowles's practice: the invitation to others to engage in an activity in whatever manner they choose. *Onion Skin Song* is not precise musical notation; rather, it is a collection of abstract marks intended to compel nonliteral gestures and sounds from any interpreter. Like a Cagean chance operation, the visual score elicits a nonstatic, time-based, indeterminate, and often playful event.

Knowles's specific subject—onion skins—are paper thin and translucent, inedible and disposable. Her interest is in selecting seemingly insignificant, often ephemeral objects and natural specimens, studying them intently, and transforming them into aesthetic and poetic forms. She is particularly drawn to subjects that require focused attention and an extended research process. The onion, with its seemingly endless layers, is an apt metaphor for understanding Knowles's art: one must peel away the skins to delve deep and comprehend the essence.

Proposition 2: Procedure

Initially a French major at Middlebury College, Knowles returned home to New York in 1954 to study painting and printmaking at Pratt Institute with Richard Lindner and Adolph Gottlieb. After graduating in 1956, she moved into a loft in Soho, where she became acquainted with a close-knit community of visual and performance artists, in particular Ray Johnson and Dorothy Podber, who introduced her to Dick Higgins, her future husband. At the time Higgins was taking John Cage's legendary composition class at the New School for Social Research.[2] Knowles later recalled: "I wasn't in [Cage's] class, my connection was through Dick

2. Among the artists in Cage's class who subsequently became closely associated with Fluxus were George Brecht, Al Hansen, Toshi Ichiyanagi, Allan Kaprow, and La Monte Young.

3. Aviva Rahmani, "Alison Knowles: An Interview," *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: Contemporary Art Issues*, no. 10, (Nov. 1991): 21–25.

4. Nicole L. Woods, "Performing Chance: Alison Knowles, Fluxus, and the *Enigmatic* Work of Art," PhD diss., University of California Irvine, 2010, 26. Woods's monograph based on this dissertation is forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press.

5. Rahmani, "Alison Knowles: An Interview," 24.

6. Liz Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the 'Event' Score," *October* 95 (Winter 2001): 57.

Higgins, but the mechanisms and structure discussed in that class helped me escape the ravening jaws of Abstract Expressionism."[3]

Knowles's early training is evident in the broad, gestural strokes of the paintings in her first exhibition at The Nonagon gallery in New York City in 1958. Later that year, however, the influence of Cage's aleatory procedures was emerging in her work. Enrolled in Josef Albers's summer course at Syracuse University, Knowles became disengaged from his lecturing on abstraction and color theory. She rebelled by making her first chance-based works: throwing dice onto canvas to determine the painted composition;[4] sometimes folding the canvas, putting numbers onto sections, and throwing dice to determine color.[5] *Taxis and Busses* (1959–60; p. 86) is one of the few extant paintings from this period; its layers of painted and screenprinted imagery and text derive from signage and advertising, and predate the adoption of similar iconography and techniques by Pop artists.

Proposition 3: Pedagogy

In her "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the 'Event' Score," Liz Kotz refers to event scores as "rubrics," a term educators use to refer to sets of guidelines:

> *What are these texts? They can be read (have been read) under a number of rubrics: music scores, visual art, poetic texts, performance instructions, or proposals for some kind of action or procedure. Most often, when they are read at all, these "short form" scores are seen as tools for something else, scripts for a performance or project or musical piece which is the "real" art.*[6]

These ideas relate directly to Knowles's event scores, which offer not only information to be read but instructions to enact. The participants learn through doing—intellectually, perceptually, and sensorily.

When Allan Kaprow became associate dean of the newly established California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 1970, he invited a Fluxus cohort that included Knowles to teach there. A proviso of her contract was that *The House of Dust*—her five-ton fiberglass sculptural installation built in 1969 from a score derived from a computer-generated quatrain composed in 1967—would be moved to the school's campus

Knowles with student inside *The House of Dust*, CalArts, Valencia, CA, c. 1971

7. See Karen Moss, "Performance into Pedagogy: Anna Halprin, Allan Kaprow, and Alison Knowles's Score-based Events in Experimental Arts Education," PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2016. I am indebted to Hannah B Higgins for her book *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), especially the closing chapter in which she discusses a range of teaching, learning styles, educational theories, and philosophy in the work of Cage, Kaprow, Brecht, and, of course, Knowles.

8. See John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Kappa Delta Pi, 1938).

9. See Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

10. From a typed statement about Knowles's work, 1981, Dick Higgins Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

to become the locus for workshops and classes. For her course called "House of Dust," students gathered inside the biomorphic structures, held poetry readings, screened films, and gathered for meditation events, while outside they used scores based on gift exchange and hospitality.[7]

Knowles's integration of performance and pedagogy recalls John Dewey's writing on progressive education, emphasizing active, embodied, and discovery-based inquiry into one's environment, rather than the passive, static, and rote learning of the traditional classroom.[8] Knowles provides ways for artists to amplify their individual learning styles and access what educator Howard Gardner has theorized as our "multiple intelligences."[9] Codified into bodily/kinesthetic, logical/mathematical, linguistic, spatial, naturalist, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence, these disparate but often overlapping categories parallel different ways to acquire and share knowledge through the performative event scores at the core of Knowles's informal, intuitive, and intermedial pedagogy.

Proposition 4: Impact

As Dick Higgins once poignantly observed:

> *Alison Knowles was the only woman artist who took part in the original [1962–63] Fluxus festivals; but to describe her performance works only in term of Fluxus is like describing an elephant only in terms of its trunk—an important and unique part of the beast, but it neglects the rest of the body. . . . [I]n fact, she is the link between Fluxus and Performance Art.*[10]

Knowles's participation in early Fluxus was the "trunk" that provided the impetus for her to write her first event scores, but, as Higgins noted, it is reductive to discuss her work only in terms of these collective events. From the very beginning, her larger "body" of work was distinguished by its immense diversity: painting, experimental printmaking and papermaking, artist's books and multiples, performance, intermedia projects, sound and radio works, visual poetry, and more. Knowles's link to a multitude of other artists is the real "elephant in the room."

FOLLOWING SPREAD Knowles performing *Bean Garden*, Munich, 1980

11. Woods, "Performing Chance," 3.

12. The exhibitions include *Viva Video! The Art and Life of Shigeko Kubota*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2021–22); *A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde, 1960s–1980s*, Grey Art Gallery, New York (2016); *Carolee Schneemann: Kinetic Painting*, MoMA PS1, New York (2017–18); and *Yoko Ono: One Woman Show, 1960–1971*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2015).

13. Some of the major group exhibitions in which Knowles has participated include *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (1993); *John Cage, Rolywholyover A Circus* and *Out of Actions: Between the Object and Performance, 1949–1979* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1993 and 1998, respectively); and *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2009).

14. See this book's chronology, "Art/Life/Events," for details on these events.

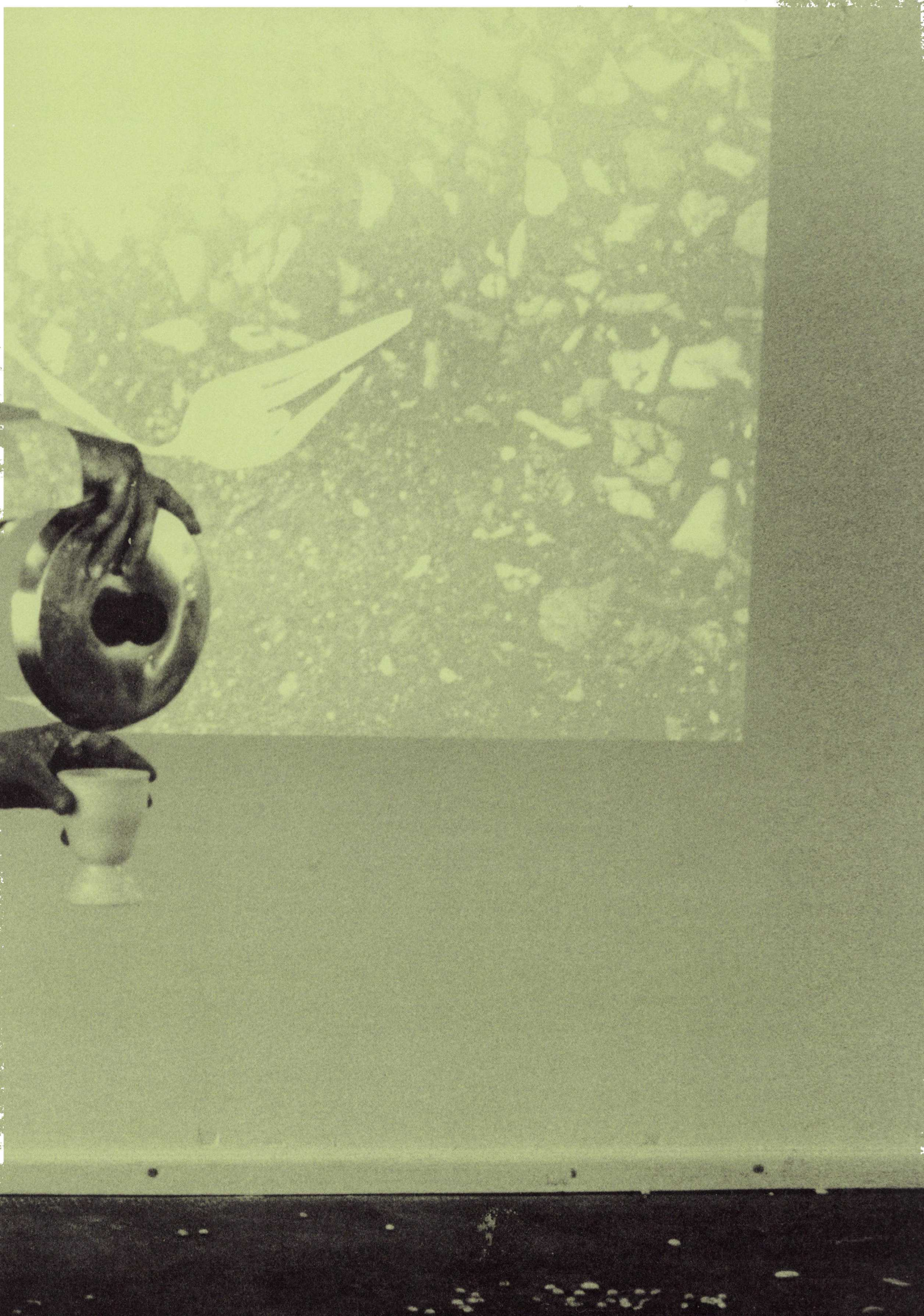
Knowles's unique experiments in intermedia and performance—both within Fluxus and apart from it—have been critically influential on contemporary artists. Her two-year *The Identical Lunch*, scored in 1967, serves as an early example of durational performance art. *The Big Book* (1966) expanded a hand-held form into a monumentally scaled, phenomenological "transvironment." Meanwhile, *The House of Dust* was a forerunner to interactive, media-based public sculpture installations; a precursor to a new kind of computational poetics; and an active, pedagogical space. Her scores proposed communal and convivial events in the very early 1960s, as she incorporated notions of hospitality and gift exchange into her work long before those artists associated with relational aesthetics in the 1990s or social practices in the 2000s. Indeed, throughout the years, Knowles's performances and workshops have influenced younger artists working across genres. Ultimately, the impact of her intermedia oeuvre emanates from her extended engagement with ordinary materials, found objects, and everyday life in performative, poetic iterations with pedagogical implications.

Even as Knowles developed her own methodologies and inspired other artists over her long and peripatetic career, as art historian Nicole L. Woods astutely notes:

> *In terms of historical reception, the clever and indeterminate nature of Knowles's production has often suffered a double exclusion: first, because of the probing, elusive, and ephemeral character of her work; and second, owing to her marginalized relation to male peers and collaborators who have received significantly greater recognition for their experimental practices.*[11]

I would add a third exclusion: other Fluxus-associated women of Knowles's generation—Shigeko Kubota, Charlotte Moorman, Carolee Schneemann, and Yoko Ono—have had major solo exhibitions or retrospectives during the past decade, yet Knowles's is only arriving now.[12] Though since the 1990s she has participated in major group exhibitions[13] and performed her events at international art fairs, galleries, and museums,[14] after six decades this comprehensive examination of her work is long overdue. It is time to *make a retrospective*.

by Alison Knowles



Knowles in her studio, New York, c. 1966

Exhibition Guide

As noted in this book's preface, *by Alison Knowles: A Retrospective (1960–2022)* starts with a chronological installation of the artist's practice from the early 1960s to the 1970s, followed by thematic sections leading up to the present. Her early works represents a microcosm of the practices, methods, subjects, and themes with which she has continued to engage to this day.

From Early Paintings to European Fluxus Festivals At the start of her career, Knowles experimented with chance-based painting, sometimes throwing dice to determine a composition, as in the screenprinted painting *Taxis and Busses*. During the European Fluxus Festivals of 1962–63, she began to write minimal, poetic event scores utilizing everyday materials to provoke maximal experiences of the mind, body, and senses. Knowles's work became increasingly multisensory, engaging new ideas about "found sounds" and framing everyday actions as live art.

Sissor Bros. Warehouse In 1963, Knowles joined George Brecht and Robert Watts under the pseudonym Sissor Bros. Warehouse, randomly selected from the phonebook. Together they produced *BLINK*, a collaborative image that they screenprinted onto objects including gloves, light bulbs, a bathing suit, jewelry, tool chests, pillows, and the walls and floors of Rolf Nelson Gallery, Los Angeles. A woman in a "BLINK" dress acted as a gallery docent as everything was auctioned off, starting at a price of 99 cents, in a critique of consumerism and the commodification of Pop art.

New York Fluxus Performances and Publications In a storefront on Canal Street, Fluxhall became a hub for events such as *Fully Guaranteed 12 Fluxus Concerts* in 1964, for which Knowles designed a poster collage overlaid with fluorescent pink text proclaiming "Fluxus Comes to New York." In the exhibition, related ephemera from the period includes photographic and film documentation of Fluxus performances: Knowles and Ben Vautier's *Street Events* (1964); Dick Higgins and Knowles enacting her *Variation #2 Make a Soup* (1964) at the Greenwich Village nightclub Café a Go-Go; and Knowles and Ay-O performing her *String Piece* (1964) at the Third Annual Avant-garde Festival in 1965, organized by Charlotte Moorman. This

section includes *by Alison Knowles*, the book that inspired the title of this exhibition, and Knowles's *Bean Rolls* (1963–64), from George Maciunas's *Fluxkit* (1965).

The Big Book and The Boat Book Knowles's *The Big Book* (1966) is a walk-in installation organized around a spine of "pages" forming small rooms and filled with objects from Knowles's domestic surroundings—a stove, a teakettle, a chair, a toilet. Extant documentation of *The Big Book* shows that the "reader" could interact with objects, texts, photographs, and prints to feel a semblance of Knowles's New York loft life and also imagine their own narratives. This phenomenological effect is what Knowles and poet George Quasha call a "transvironment," a neologism for a transformationally experienced environment. Knowles's *The Boat Book* (2014), dedicated to her brother Lawrence, who was a fisherman, has a similarly large format; it is constructed with found objects and screenprints representing navigation and nautical themes.

The Identical Lunch At Riss Restaurant in New York's Chelsea neighborhood, Knowles would often have lunch with the composer Philip Corner, who observed that she ate the same meal every day. After he suggested that this ritual might become a performance, Knowles wrote *The Identical Lunch* event score in 1967: "A tuna fish sandwich on wheat toast with lettuce and butter, no mayo and a large glass of buttermilk or a cup of soup was and is eaten many days of each week at the same place and at about the same time." She invited friends to consume the meal with her and took Polaroids of a number of artists eating *The Identical Lunch* at George Maciunas's New Years Fluxbanquet circa 1969, which she later used for several series of screenprints on canvas, also featured in this section.

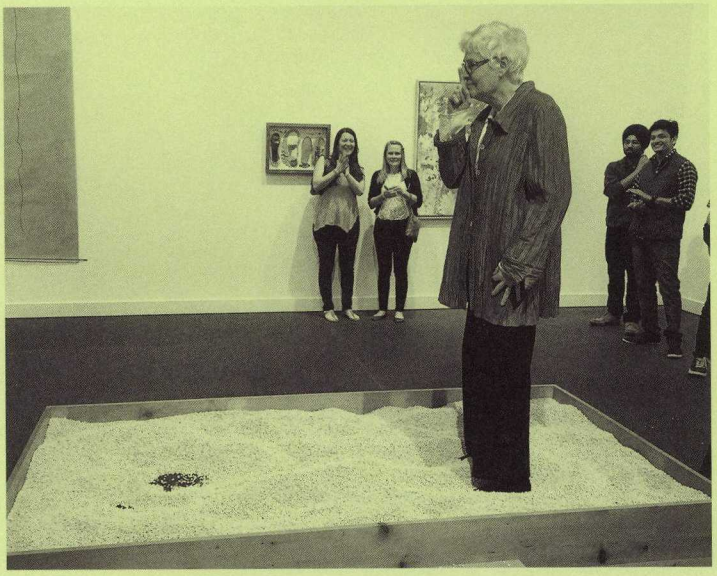
The House of Dust James Tenney, artist-in-residence at Bell Labs, led a seminar on computers and the arts at Knowles and Dick Higgins's home in 1967. Shortly after, Knowles and Tenney generated the computerized poem *The House of Dust*. The lines of the poem's quatrains are randomly drawn from a set list: a material, a location, a light source, and types of human inhabitants. The quatrain that reads "a house of dust / in an open ground / lit by natural light / inhabited by friends

and enemies" became the score for the fiberglass public sculpture *The House of Dust*, funded by a Guggenheim grant and initially installed in 1969 at a housing development in New York. After it was damaged by arson, Knowles had the sculpture restored and transported to CalArts, where it became the locus of her teaching practice, existing as an outdoor art installation and a site for events, activations, and pedagogy.

Homage, Collaboration, and Experimental Printmaking In 1967, Knowles worked with Marcel Duchamp on a reprint of his *Coeurs Volants*, first realized for the journal *Cahiers d'Art* in 1936. Their collaboration resulted in both a limited edition screenprint and the cover for Emmett Williams's book *Sweethearts*, published by the Something Else Press. Another screenprint edition, Knowles's *Leone d'Oro* (1978), produced with Francesco Conz, combines shoe parts found at the Bay of Naples with a label from an orange crate. Knowles's innovative printmaking techniques also produced *For Dick* (1976), dedicated to Dick Higgins and made using an early photocopier; a hanging scroll digitally printed in collaboration with Rirkrit Tiranvanija (2011); and the woodblock prints *Nori Hermit* (2014), a collaboration with Jessica Higgins. Among the homages featured in the exhibition are Knowles's offset lithograph *White Stripes for John Cage* (1967/68) and the print *Twins* (1979), dedicated to her daughters Hannah B and Jessica Higgins. For her *Bread and Water* series, Knowles experimented with historical methods such as Palladium printing and cyanotypes. The latter she also used in *Iliad Oddities (Greene Street)* (2010), a nine-foot-long textile hung with a net, a rope, a mask, tools, and pieces of flax—the same objects used to print on the cloth.

Assemblages and Mixed-Media Works Knowles's ongoing engagement with mixed-media assemblages takes different forms: hanging sculptures, panels, and scrolls. *Broken Line with Slippers* (1991), made of mulberry leaves, has shoes that imply the presence of an absent body. Knowles's *Event Threads* (begun 2006) are made up of wires strung with both human-made items and natural elements; they underscore her enduring practice of collecting mundane objects to shape significant forms.

Loose Pages, Flax Instruments, and Paper Works In 1983, Knowles collaborated with papermaker Coco Gordon on *Loose Pages*, a "performance



Knowles activating *Build a Bean Garden*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 2016

book" consisting of flax and cotton pages that become wearable garments: arm and leg flaps, a hat, and slippers. Knowles dresses the performer, most often Jessica Higgins, as the body becomes the "spine" of the book; meanwhile, the moving pages add a sonic element to the intermedia performance. Knowles's *Flat Paper Gong* (1998) and her large- and small-scale *Bean Turners* (begun 2000) are flax-pulp sculptures filled with legumes to function as musical instruments: they produce subtle to jarring sounds depending on the speed and angle at which they are moved. She has also embedded legumes into the large-scale flax panel *Pagina Lenticchia* (1983) and used them to create the delicate patterns in *Rice and Beans* (c. 1995).

Sound Performances and Installations Knowles's sound works since the 1960s have taken form as scrolls, installations, and intermedia performances, recordings, and radio plays. Among them are *Onion Skin Song*, as discussed above, and *Bean Garden* (1971), a sandbox-like structure filled with navy beans and amplified, or "played," by visitors' footsteps. Other sound-based performances by Knowles are well-documented in photographs and videos, such as *Mantra for Jessie* (1970), composed for her daughter, and a collaboration in 1998 between Knowles and Cage for which they recited Stephane Mallarmé's poetry while cooking.

Beans Multiples and The Book of the Bean Since her initial experiments with the *Bean Roll* multiple in the mid-1960s, Knowles has made numerous small-scale editions combining beans and found objects, among them her interactive *Bean Bags* and other multiples from the 1970s and 1980s. Her second large-scale "transvironment," *The Book of Bean* (1981), premiered at Franklin Furnace in New York; the sounds played during the performance were recorded for the 1981 tape *8112A*, which was recently remastered as the vinyl LP *Sounds from the Book of Bean* (2021).

Artist's Books Knowles's significant production of artist's books varies in design and format, from intimate, hand-held booklets to large-scale, three-dimensional sculptures. *Notations* (1967) is a book of visual scores by artists and composers that she co-edited and designed with John Cage. *A Finger Book 3* (1987/88) is a three-dimensional, mixed-media work on a circular aluminum base with texts in Braille that refer to

Knowles at her *Indigo Island* exhibition, Ujazdowski Castle Center for Contemporary Art, Warsaw, 1995

ancient languages and sites. *Tamashi* (2002), produced by Knowles in collaboration with Amanda Degener, is an accordion-folded circular construction printed on handmade and dyed paper.[15]

Recent Performance Events, Exhibitions, and Installations The exhibition's final section includes documentation of Knowles's public presentations in recent decades. Highlighted are several *Make a Salad* events in institutions and at public sites internationally as well as new versions of *The Identical Lunch*, one of which temporarily transformed a portion of the café at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, into a 1950s-style diner. This section also documents recent iterations of *The House of Dust*, including the activation of a new quatrain for a *House of Glass* at CalArts (2018) and *The House of Dust* at the Kranzplatz in Wiesbaden, Germany (2021–22).

15. *Tamashi* notably features text excerpts from George Quasha and Chie Higaswa's *Ainu Dreams* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1999) and William Romains's *Mysteries of the Hopewell* (Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 2000).

Do You Remember? Alison Knowles in Context

Nicole L. Woods

FOLLOWING SPREAD Emmett Williams: *Do You Remember*, 1966; 2 typescript sheets

In July 1969, Alison Knowles wrote to Galerie Tobiés & Silex in Cologne confirming the acquisition of her multimedia painting *Do You Remember (for Emmett Williams)* (c. 1969) by her friend the collector Wolfgang Hahn.[1] Knowles had conceptualized *Do You Remember* as a companion work to a text piece of the same title, dedicated to her in 1966 by the concrete poet and visual artist Emmett Williams. Knowles's rendition consists of a screenprinted and lightly painted canvas presented as a grid of rectangles containing various appropriated images as well as motifs echoing her previous work, including handprints and the cobalt blue ram that appears four times.[2] For his part, Williams structured the poem according to six progressions of enigmatic content, creating a furtive visual language of textures, colors, spaces, and foods:

and	*i*	*love*	*soft*	*pink*	*nights*
	you	*hated*	*hard*	*blue*	*valleys*
	kissed		*mellow*	*red*	*potatoes*
			livid	*green*	*seagulls*
				yellow	*dewdrops*
					oysters

Williams was Knowles's closest Fluxus friend and interlocutor, and in her letter to the gallery and a subsequent missive to Hahn, she specified that Williams's two typescript pages should hang near to *Do You Remember*. For the installation she also requested the "smallest, cheapest toy projector that will take film." The canvas was to serve a secondary function as a screen for black-and-white, flickering images spliced together into a film loop.[3] Providing a dynamically activated experience for the viewer, the images should, per Knowles's instructions, visually "fit as closely as possible" into the blank area near the bottom-center of the canvas's grid, with the projector running constantly when the painting is being observed." As she explained, "there are only two things that matter in this: that the image is not outside the square, and that something is noticed shifting and changing if the lights are dimmed." *Do You Remember* is an unusually technological work for Knowles, yet its economy of means and poetic associations are characteristic of her larger oeuvre. Collaborative, elusive, and textual in nature, *Do You Remember* is a call-and-response to Williams's work that speaks to the

1. Wolfgang Hahn was head of the conservation department at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum and the Museum Ludwig in Cologne.

2. In Knowles's oeuvre, the blue ram also appears in a screenprint dedicated to John Cage; a boxed cube work, *Untitled* (1967; Collection of William S. Wilson, New York); and the large scores piece *Blue Ram* (1966; six screenprints on cardboard; Collection Northwestern University Music Library).

3. Alison Knowles, letter to Galerie Tobiés & Silex, July 23, 1969, Collection Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna.

do you remember

when i loved soft pink nights
and you hated hard blue valleys
and i kissed mellow red potatoes
and you loved livid green seagulls
and I hated soft yellow dewdrops
and you kissed hard pink oysters
and i loved mellow blue nights
and you hated livid red valleys
and i kissed soft green potatoes
and you loved hard yellow seagulls
and i hated mellow pink dewdrops
and you kissed livid blue oysters
and i loved soft red nights
and you hated hard green valleys
and i kissed mellow yellow potatoes
and you loved livid pink seagulls
and i hated soft blue dewdrops
and you kissed hard red oysters
and i loved mellow green nights
and you hated livid yellow valleys
and i kissed soft pink potatoes
and you loved hard blue seagulls
and i hated mellow red dewdrops
and you kissed livid green oysters
and i loved soft yellow nights
and you hated hard pink valleys
and i kissed mellow blue potatoes
and you loved livid red seagulls
and i hated soft green dewdrops
and you kissed hard yellow oysters
and i loved mellow pink nights
and you hated livid blue valleys
and i kissed soft red potatoes

and you loved hard green seagulls
and i hated mellow yellow dewdrops
and you kissed livid pink oysters
and i loved soft blue nights
and you hated hard red valleys
and i kissed mellow green potatoes
and you loved livid yellow seagulls
and i hated soft pink dewdrops
and you kissed hard blue oysters
and i loved mellow red nights
and you hated livid green valleys
and i kissed soft yellow potatoes
and you loved hard pink seagulls
and i hated mellow blue dewdrops
and you kissed livid red oysters
and i loved soft green nights
and you hated hard yellow valleys
and i kissed mellow pink potatoes
and you loved livid blue seagulls
and i hated soft red dewdrops
and you kissed hard green oysters
and i loved mellow yellow nights
and you hated livid pink valleys
and i kissed soft blue potatoes
and you loved hard red seagulls
and i hated mellow green dewdrops
and you kissed livid yellow oysters
and i loved soft pink nights?

Emmett Williams, "do you remember" 1966. This poem, which first appeared in Underground was translated into a six-color, 24 foot long graphic work silk-screened and collaged by Alison Knowles, to whom it was dedicated. It is structured by six vertical progressions:

and	i	love	soft	pink	nights
	you	hated	hard	blue	valleys
	kissed		mellow	red	potatoes
			livid	green	seagulls
				yellow	dewdrops
					oysters

Do You Remember (for Emmett Williams), c. 1969; film projector, mixed media on canvas, and typescript on paper

affective nature of personal and professional relations, of lives lived within the context of love, friendship, ambition, and artistic labor.

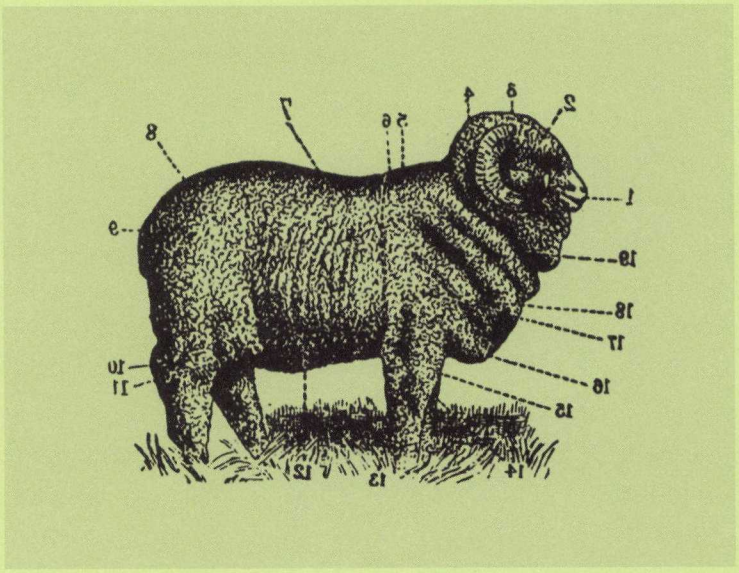
Affective proximities often go unremarked upon in the critical literature on Knowles's practice, but they are tethered to its art historical pursuit. To marshal the artworks, archive-based ephemera, and documentary photographs of Knowles's practice in a retrospective survey is to gesture toward connecting the private and public operations enmeshed in her collaborations. Knowles's work accords intimacy in the Fluxus archive *as relational* in specific ways: as the romantic union between consenting adults; as the source of friendship and professional rivalry; as the binding of parents and children; as the codification in the historical index to confer worthiness; as the communion of reader, text, and subject that carries interpretive meaning.

Knowles's unique form of cooperative work can be traced back to her early studies of chromatic intensity and expressionistic brushwork under the tutelage of Adolph Gottlieb and Josef Albers in the late 1950s and early 1960s. After studying with Gottlieb and Richard Lindner at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, where she earned a BFA honors degree in painting and illustration in 1956, Knowles pursued graduate work with Albers at Syracuse University in the summer of 1958.[4] More key mentors quickly followed, notably experimental composer John Cage and Knowles's life partner and fellow Fluxus founder Dick Higgins. Also influential on her practice and embrace of chance aesthetics were Williams, George Brecht, Philip Corner, and Ray Johnson. Knowles pursued her shared interests with these artists at various media scales, transforming her painting background into performance, installation, computational poetics, and ecologically engaged art. This is the familiar assessment of Knowles's early career: that her artistic development can be mapped onto the predominantly male forcefield of her peers and teachers.

In the project of historicizing Knowles's work, however, I am interested in considering how one can more fully piece together an artistic output that, while rich in resources intricately associated with the lives of other artists, is scantily supplied through her own archive. Equally important to this project is another question: How do we *remember* women artists?

The attempt to reconstruct and understand Knowles's singular contributions to Fluxus and the experimentalist spirit that took hold in the decades following World War II entails recourse, for better or for

4. I detail and contextualize Knowles's relationships with early mentors including Josef Albers, who was frustrated by Knowles's refusal to adapt her artistic sensibilities to match his strictly geometric modernist forms, in the monograph *Performing Chance: Alison Knowles In/Out of Fluxus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).



Blue Ram, Knowles's entry in John Cage's *Notations* (Something Else Press, 1969)

worse, into other artists' vast corpuses. Indeed, one is obliged to track the labyrinthine architectures and inventories of the many artists, poets, and musicians Knowles was close to, a good number of whom she collaborated with over the course of decades even.[5] Knowles's disinclination to preserve those material goods and scraps that a historian might be most ardent to (re)discover is sharply distinct from the archiving practices of her contemporaries Carolee Schneemann and Charlotte Moorman (also friends of Knowles), who each incisively understood the structure of the archive and its correlation to how narratives are formed and upended. Schneemann and Moorman grasped how vital it is for women artists in particular to maintain a storehouse of documents, photographs, correspondence, journals, and ephemera to ensure their work's lasting inclusion in cultural histories.

The relative dearth of Knowles's personal studio archive is the consequence of at least two factors. First, having lived in New York for most of her life, Knowles has had finite space and modest means to hold such a trove. (In fact, she has been known to discard things for both practical and aesthetic reasons, including her old canvases.) Second, given that experimental women artists are, to this day, woefully underrepresented in the art press and historical literature, not to mention the lack of material support from institutions, there has been little aspiration or desire on Knowles's part to actively retain every fragment, source notebook, and bill of sale. We might have no tangible sense of Knowles's life, processes, or artworks were it not for Higgins's aversion to throwing out anything, which resulted in his saving her college journals, letters, early solo show announcements, biographical curriculum vitae, exhibition histories, and other historical threads. In fact, thanks to the preservational impulse of a number of male artists Knowles was closely affiliated with—including Williams, Maciunas, Brecht, and Nam June Paik—we have better opportunity to know her pioneering role in the development of the American postwar avant-garde.

Knowles's aversion to holding (and beholding) prompts a series of important methodological questions. How does one *find* an artist through the voices, caprices, limited authority, and tangled remembrances of others—in Knowles's case, many male others? How might such an exploration serve or challenge modernist and even feminist histories? And what does all of this tell us about Knowles—an intermedia artist who has always preferred her work to be discussed outside

5. The project of piecing together Knowles's life and work necessitates deep archival research and extensive travel. Her documentation is housed in various collections including the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (among the papers of Lawrence Alloway, Jean Brown, Dick Higgins, Allan Kaprow, George Maciunas, Carolee Schneemann, and others); the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Archives, Museum of Modern Art, New York; Northwestern University Special Collections and Music Library, Evanston, IL (John Cage, Jan Herman, Higgins, Charlotte Moorman); the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC (Nam June Paik); and the Sohm Archive, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (George Brecht, Maciunas, Higgins, and others).

Knowles and others performing *Proposition #2: Make a Salad* at the *Festival of Misfits*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1962

of what she perceives as the limiting categories of "woman artist" and "feminist artist"? This is not to suggest that Knowles does not have deeply felt convictions about the fight for gender equality in the art world, the discursive space of art history, and beyond. To the contrary, surveys of her production have demonstrated that Knowles, without appearing overtly activist, has consistently explored the domestic everyday, and often around the contested bonds of subjectivity in and around sociopolitical praxis as it relates to gender.

Indeed, several of her Fluxus scores for performance—which she termed "propositions" early on—ask us to consider processes of choice as framed in the circumstances of daily life. *Shoes of Your Choice* (1963), *Piece for Any Number of Vocalists* (1963), and *Proposition #2: Make a Salad* (1962) isolate the procedures of selecting footwear, music, or food ingredients, thereby encouraging participants to potentially experience contemplative moments in the context of everyday objects and rituals. By zeroing in on such small, daily choices, Knowles's propositions can extend into broader meditations on our global bodies. What kinds of food should we ingest? Where are the most stylish or comfortable shoes made? What are the ethical implications of our choices?

Knowles's integration of the politics of personal taste into the processes of composition is a defining feature of her oeuvre: the formal methods of art, performance, and chance (that is, using time-based events and durational media to push notions of authority and control) released Knowles from the confines of subject formation into an exploratory mode of practice that could both specify and generalize corporeal experiences (hence, her move toward demonstrations of shared biological and social rituals like eating). By freeing the *work*, both the labor and object of art, from the conventions of traditional procedures of making, Knowles disengaged from strict questions about color, shape, and form.

The artist's preferred nomenclature—"visual poet"—belies any claim to a rigid, medium-specific working method. Hailing her approach to chance and the thicket of language in the domestic procedures, poets Jerome Rothenberg and George Quasha were among the first to include or reference her experimentations, in several groundbreaking literary anthologies of the early 1970s.[6] They penned introductions to Knowles's books and offered up rich interpretations that situate her

verbal-visual constructions in the literary avant-garde. Like many artists of her generation, including Stan VanDerBeek and Mieko Shiomi, Knowles acted upon her fascination with the flexibility of linguistic daily operations and their spatialization to defamiliarize the categories of other media—celluloid, computational, sculptural.

Close study of her practice reveals fidelity to language as a nexus used among and through diverse visual tropes. A prolific poet (in various media), bookmaker (at all scales), and printmaker (using every process), Knowles developed her career in and beyond Fluxus to involve an aesthetic commitment to questions of translation in form: propositional recipes for physical action; word collages to be read aloud and out of sequence in fragmentary, staccato cadences; book objects and installations to be activated; computational poetry and paper sculptures that presage new genres.

In particular, her small-scale objects' poetics of touch, sensation, and texture—sentient knowledge in Knowles's hands—translate to a form of sociopolitical engagement wherein chance is not only a technique but an attitude, a life practice. Relatedly, her interest in intersubjectivity and perceptual systems of the body and related language projects can seem only elliptically political. In the 1960s and 1970s, as she continued to develop her aesthetic according to terms wherein chance and the temporal-durational generate a multitude of compositional choices, Knowles's artistic comportment did not directly align with the strategies of US feminist activism then being formulated.

In 2010, when Knowles participated in an oral history interview with Judith Olch Richards for the Archives of American Art's Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts Project, the two covered, over nearly six hours of recorded conversation, a range of biographical topics: childhood preoccupations; Knowles's formal training in the mid-1950s as an abstractionist and book designer; her fortuitous first encounter with John Cage and their enduring friendship; her collaboration with Marcel Duchamp near the end of his life; and her experiences as a founding member of Fluxus along with Higgins, Maciunas, Paik, Williams, and Benjamin Patterson.[7] Within the dialogic space of the interview, it becomes clear that Knowles's recounting of a nearly all-male roster of mentors and collaborators is more than a useful index of the her closest personal and professional interlocutors. It implies the paradox of accessible yet still-restricted opportunities

6. See for example, Jerome Rothenberg, ed., *Shaking the Pumpkin: Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americans* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), xxii.

7. Judith Olch Richards, oral history interview with Knowles, June 1–2, 2010, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

for women artists in postwar America: they could pursue post-secondary education, allowing for increased social mobility and the potential for autonomous employment (for the solidly middle class), but they continued to face a virulently patriarchal value system that recognized limited commercial appeal in their art. The early careers of Knowles, Schneemann, Moorman, and Simone Forti, among others (and so many before them), were materially and symbolically dependent on the support and encouragement of male friends, lovers, and teachers, predating the hard-won capacity of the American feminist art movement to organize exhibitions, publications, and associations on behalf of women artists for women artists. As Linda Nochlin vigorously argued in 1971, "if the artist in question happens to be a woman, 1,000 years of guilt, self-doubt and objecthood have been added to the undeniable difficulties of being an artist in the modern world"; further, "serious" women artists (nearly without exception) "had a close personal connection with a stronger or more dominant male artistic personality."[8]

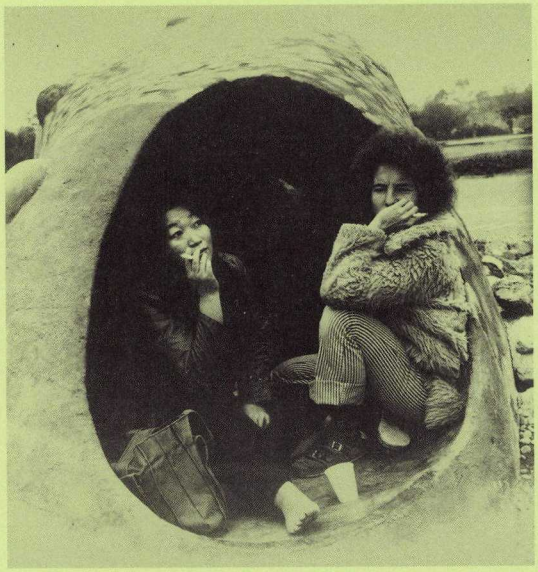
During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Knowles related her engagement with a budding feminist consciousness to Higgins in letters that reveal the extent to which he intimately understood her working methods, aesthetic preferences, and politics, not to mention whom she liked and disliked among the many artists they kept company with, and her acute sensitivity at often being the only woman present (even if she might have also delighted in the attention). In fact, in several worried moments during her stint as the director of the Graphic Prints Lab at CalArts from 1970 to 1972, Knowles wrote to Higgins about being confronted by younger, self-identified feminists. While she was supplied, in her words, with direct "access to feminism for the first time" at CalArts, Knowles has noted that some of her Feminist Art Program colleagues advanced a strident ideology, tending toward an "aggressive edge" that offended her: "I had to make a new balance in my territory of making art... [but] if one works from a personal anger as the subject matter of the art, it's rare that it becomes excellent.... No one should push us to one place or another. I'm against activism as a united front in any context."[9] Knowles would later claim that Judy Chicago and other women at CalArts refused her request to participate in the feminist installation *Womanhouse* (1972) because she "worked with men."[10]

In 1974, concerned that her minimalist orientation possessed a too different, even anachronistically masculine aesthetic compared to her

8. Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," *ARTnews* 69, no. 9 (January 1971): 32.

9. Aviva Rahmani, "Alison Knowles: An Interview," *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. Susan Bee and Mira Schor (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 364–65.

10. Knowles, interview with the author, New York, December 15, 2008.



Simone Forti and Shigeko Kubota inside *The House of Dust*, c. 1971

students and peers, she questioned her work, in a letter to Higgins, and expanded her reflection to include Fluxus artist friends: "I see Lette [Eisenhauer], I see Yoko [Ono] draped in crepe with face paint and I see I am going another way. I see my sexuality receding into my personness [*sic*]. What will happen to me as I continue to do what I consider useful work—my art?"[11] Knowles's written exchanges with Higgins reveal not only her professional frustrations and fear that she was publicly perceived as concealing an antifeminist bias, but also their familial drama. Though Knowles and Higgins's separation and divorce in the early 1970s deeply strained their relational ties, they would eventually reconcile, in 1985,[12] for companionship and financial security.

Personal difficulties notwithstanding, Knowles's rigorous approach to the domestic everyday shares key themes, notions, and strategies with the activities of feminist artists in the 1970s and since. Her praxis in the early decades—based in ephemerality, the event score, life-based performance, and found objects—expanded to include embodied sensitivities of the physical and literary use of the built environment, and of the ways in which ideas and experiences about public/private in the postwar era were tacitly gendered and critiqued. In my view, much of her work consistently resists dominant conceptions of gender, most particularly in a politics of the body often evidenced in expressionistic performance art. Knowles's refusal of spectacle and her instantiation of a visual language of and for the quotidian, in the context of the nascent feminist art movement of her early career, is one of many contributions heretofore underexamined in the Fluxus literature. From printmaking (including screenprinted paintings that predate Warhol's) to a sustained interest in performance as a medium of radical expressivity, Knowles's serious study of indeterminacy, or "nonintentional" outcomes, as a method of making has been more than a strategy of experimentation, a formal means to an unknowable end. On a more intimate level, an embrace of the provisional economies of chance has represented a nominal emancipation from her own willful choices, even her own subject position. The conceit of removing the "self" from painting, for example, was an acknowledgement of the impoverished process and limitations of the subject; of its location in Western discourse as a male access and privilege.

Though Knowles demurs at characterizations of her artistic work in the late 1960s and 1970s as explicitly political, she has admitted

11. Knowles, letter to Higgins, September 16, 1974, Dick Higgins papers, Getty Research Institute, box 18, folder 54.

12. Knowles knew and accepted from the beginning of their coupling that she and Higgins had overlapping but different libidinal appetites. Once she began keeping semiregular lovers and he experienced an unrelated nervous breakdown, their relationship took an acrimonious turn. Their bond weathered challenges including Higgins's brief institutionalization and Knowles's rising artistic status. Their correspondence from the late 1970s onwards expresses attentiveness to each other's individual projects and worries, their shared love of their twin daughters, and a poignant reckoning of friends long passed away.

13. Knowles quoted in "Alison Knowles: To See Clearly and Afresh Each Moment," in George Myers, *Alphabet's Sublime:*

Contemporary Artists on Collage and Visual Literature (Washington, DC: Paycock Press, 1986), 45.

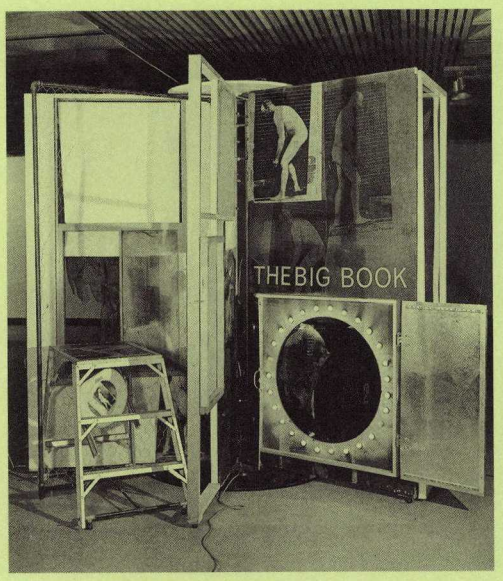
14. Carol Hanisch has noted that the editors of *Notes from the Second Year*, Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, were responsible for her essay's title. See Hanisch, "The Personal Is Political: The Women's Liberation movement classis with a new explanatory introduction," January 2006, http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html. See also Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement" (1977), reprinted in *Women's Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 2014): 271–80; and Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1984), in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 110–14.

to benefiting from liberation movements of that era: "Although I don't engage myself with politics directly, I not only feel I profit from that research but call myself a feminist."[13] Despite her reluctance to attach any such motivations to her practice, it is clear in surveying her activities that the work bears out a consistent and politically inflected consciousness, even as she has refused an overtly dogmatic, ideological, or activist approach. Knowles's aesthetic preferences pertain to the rallying cry "The Personal is Political," declared in the title of Carol Hanisch's essay for *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* (1970) and brilliantly expanded upon by African American feminist writers including the Combahee River Collective and poet Audre Lorde.[14]

Exemplary in this light is *The Identical Lunch* (first performed in 1967), a noontime performance of a notational score that entails consuming the exact same meal ("a tuna fish sandwich on wheat toast with lettuce and butter, no mayo and a large glass of buttermilk or a cup of soup") every day for two years.[15] Originally intended as a way for Knowles to gather her thoughts and revive her creative energies, performing the score instantiated a release from seemingly straightforward decision-making chores like choosing and making a meal. As a specific meditative strategy (or a parental coping mechanism, perhaps) for establishing a reliable time and space for her physical nourishment and professional sustenance, Knowles instituted a negotiation between her aesthetic labors and the demands of motherhood and self-care. Eating a (nearly) identical lunch daily at the same neighborhood diner also involved a range of gustatory complications. Sometimes the tuna was not fresh, or the service was exceptionally slow.

Ruminating on the lunch ritual as an occasion to think of the possibilities of chance as a structure for difference in sameness, Knowles devised means for her continued self-actualization as an artist while navigating her complex relationship to the tethered bonds of motherhood. Having already refused to subject herself to the patriarchal art world games of the Abstract Expressionist era that loomed over her formative years, whereby women painters were condescended to or outright ignored, Knowles's move to conceptual practices favored an alternative space of intermedia that suggest the political by highlighting domestic materials and perceptual experiences.

The embrace of nonintentional outcomes as a compositional tool for action and expression supplied a flexible structure in which to



Installation view, *The Big Book*, 1966, Art Gallery, Visual Arts Department, University of California San Diego, 1969

produce a form of intimate correspondence between the artist and her public, unconcerned with definitive outcomes and regardless of gender. In terms of spectatorship, installation works such as Knowles's *The Big Book* (1966) both liberate and obligate, in a radical reorientation of subject and object. Every performer, entrant, and viewer participates in *The Big Book* by selecting their own experience, mirroring how reading itself is a highly individuated and personal encounter with the text. The nature of this exchange, between artist-as-maker and audience-as-doer, is evident in how the walls of *The Big Book* act as windows, doors, and pages of a text to be read—each a traditionally unique experience synthesized into one intermedial space. Rather than following the precise composition or structure of a conventional story, the work is more akin to the dispersed, fragmented quality of a collection. *The Big Book* brings together an assortment of objects and experiences in a multi-mediated environment whose usefulness and signification is to be determined by each individual reader. On one level, the viewer's position shifts from passive to active through unusual access to the art object; on another, they are invited into the space to view the artist's personal affects, sip her coffee, take her cigarettes, scan her library, lay in her grass tunnel. All manner of domestic engagement can be produced by Knowles's invitation to share. Adopting chance operations is thus an apt corollary to the advent of feminism, in particular the discourse that emerged surrounding questions of the liberation of both the individual body and the body politic.

Coming of age at the cusp of feminism's fuller emergence in the 1960s and 1970s required a coterminous reckoning with what it meant to be a visual artist and a redressing of the ontological status of authorship (nearly always white and male) within the disciplinary apparatus of art history. It also meant negotiating and navigating complex relationships with male intercessors, mentors, and intimates, many of whom Knowles lived and worked closely with; she relied, too, on their enthusiasm and material support of her career. Recentering the stage lights onto Knowles's life and work serves to complicate accepted, stifling modernist ideologies that position women artists (especially those with radical experimental practices) to the periphery of historical inquiry. To consider an artist who might be less widely known, but who nevertheless had an outsized effect on participatory art in the mid-to-late twentieth century, is to reclaim a broader discourse for

15. Knowles, "The Identical Lunch," *The Outsider* 2: 4/5 (Winter 1968/69): 18; and Knowles, *Journal of the Identical Lunch* (San Francisco: Nova Broadcast Press, 1971).

Knowles in California, c. 1971

16. Important models in this regard are these texts by Jenni Sorkin: "The Pottery Happening: M. C. Richards's 'Clay Things to Touch . . . ' (1958)," *Getty Research Journal*, no. 5 (November 2013): 197–202; and *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

17. See, for example, Valerie Cassel Oliver, *Benjamin Patterson: Born in the State of FLUX/us* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum, 2012); Hanna Hölling, *Paik's Virtual Archive: Time, Change, and Materiality in Media Art* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); Julia Robinson and Alfred Fischer, eds., *George Brecht Events: A Heterospective* (Cologne: Walther König, 2005); and Robinson's forthcoming monograph on George Brecht (October Books).

18. Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," 32.

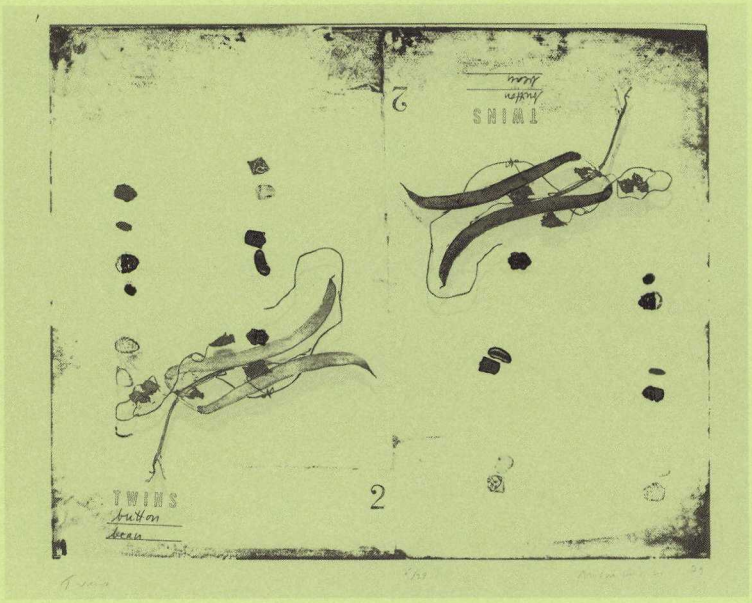
women artists of this era—one that exists both outside and alongside of art history's limited genealogies.[16] It belongs, then, to a new wave of scholarship focused on parsing the work of individual artists from the collective project of Fluxus.[17]

To think critically about Knowles's life and art together—and by extension, the art historical neglect paid to a sustained assessment of her work—is to take seriously Nochlin's observation that the "total situation of art making, both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself" occurs itself in a social situation.[18] While Knowles has subscribed (at least theoretically) to the displacement of the centrality of authorship at midcentury, her art has never been oblivious to her domestic environs.

In the shared project of disentangling modernist art history from its limited canon, we must continue to unsettle the notion that any archive is stable and monolithic, and that any life or artistic practice can really be held to thorough account by its paper trail. This may seem obvious, but it bears repeating. The challenge for the historian in tracking down one subjectivity through the remembrances, voices, records, and vagaries of others demonstrates, again and again, that knowledge acquisition is contingent, affective, speculative. The pursuit of knowledge, in fact, is always an emotional affair—tied, after all, to one's own professional desires and aspirations. We return to the question first posed: How can one piece together a life, an artistic output, with a paucity of primary materials at hand, thus requiring an investigation into other archives, seemingly without end? Can it be done? I believe it can, but it takes much longer. And time is, as ever, of the essence.

Twins: A Parable

Hannah B Higgins



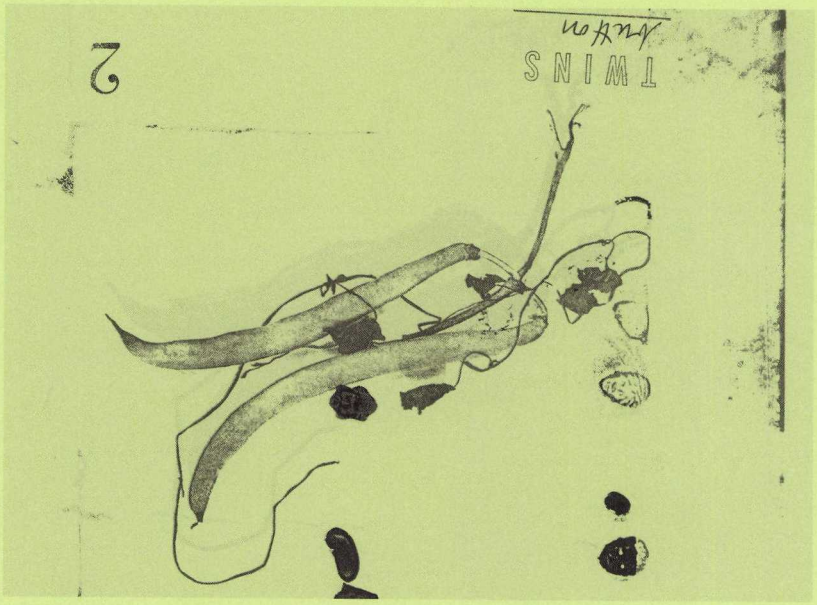
Twins, 1979; screenprint and pencil on paper

The word "TWINS" appears in hollow, sans serif, capital letters at the lower left of a 1979 print by Alison Knowles (pp. 158–59). Slightly off-kilter, it has the spontaneous feel of a stamp thumped to the inkpad and thumped again to the paper. On two stamped lines below the word, Knowles's choppy handwriting appears as zig-zagging pencil lines, like mountain peaks: the top line reads "button"; the bottom, "bean." Above these lines and "TWINS" are splotch-like pairs. Each button has its bean. Each bean has its button. One bean-and-button pair is brown, another red, another reddish-brown. There's also yellow. Blue. White. A pair of entangled green bean pods bares scant formal resemblance to a nearby green button, although the leaves on the pods' entwined stems do.

The approximately matching forms within the pairs of beans and buttons in the print *Twins* play with the idea of the nonidentical copy—long central to Knowles's work. The number "2" also appears in the image, symbolizing this process of approximate duplication; two of something presupposes that those things have a great deal in common. Similar color, shape, and size produce resemblance. But the beans and buttons are also not alike.

Reading the image a little differently, sets appear. The buttons are of a piece with each other as a manufactured set. Many of the manufactured objects in Fluxus works originated on Canal Street (near to Knowles's loft on Spring Street), among the overruns and cast-offs, the imperfect gewgaws and trinkets collected in bins. Perhaps downtown New York is where the artist bought these buttons, but really they could have been made anywhere, to be sold somewhere; they are cyphers for industrial capitalism, or globalism generally. These buttons are in fact humanoid and kitschy, vulgar even, at the level of stereotype. One was cast to look like a Buddha, another is in a head wrap, a third wears a fez, a fourth a conical hat, a fifth maybe a warrior's helmet. The peoples they portray span the world, while as buttons that share human features they form a set.

The beans meanwhile form a set as members of the flowering family of plants called *Fabaceae* or *Leguminosae*, within which each bean is singular in ovoid shape, color, and size. Unlike the buttons, the beans could only have been produced in specific locales. The cultivation of specific beans differs relative to climate, altitude, and soil type. Pole beans do well at high altitudes. Kidney beans do best between 65 to



Twins (detail), 1979

80 degrees Fahrenheit. Navy beans like full sun. Lima beans thrive when they are planted in an inch or so of deep, warm soil.

So, in *Twins*, buttons and beans almost mirror one another at the level of resemblance, but they are opposites in the sense that the former could have been made anywhere, while the latter are organically rooted to a place. The size, general shape, and dried surface of each bean makes it visually part of its bean set, while creating a visual affinity, through size and color, with its button twin, with which the bean forms a pair. In the relationships between each piece of the pair and the set within which each forms a part, the terms of resemblance differ. Some pairs—some twins—are more alike than others.

Simple contrast and comparison between bean and button, as among the elements that form the set of beans or buttons, creates a visual experience that feels like a social diagram, a visual parable of the social relationship between twins and the world. Each pair signals a human relationship between two like and unlike beings. But each piece of the pair is also like the others spread far and wide across the image, with which they form a set as culture (button) and nature (bean). Among humans, there may be local affinities, for example among pairs of siblings, or relationally within families or between friends, that are in tension with the social patterns of the larger community that is itself a set. There may be conflicting affinities depending on circumstances.

As if to demonstrate that such social mapping forms a pattern, Knowles duplicates. Or seems to. The constellation of screenprinted buttons and beans, stamped labels, and handwriting that appears on the left side of the page is repeated on the opposite side, on the other side of a fine, blue, central line that suggests perhaps the crevice of a book or the edge of a piece of paper. On the right side, it's more of the same, upside down. The source image for the screenprints on either side may have been a copy made on a Xerox machine, a technology the artist long used to reproduce her source materials. If the image *is* turned upside down, the sheet appears slightly different left and right, top and bottom—both the same and not, like actual twins rotating in utero. The right side is *almost* an inverted version of the left. Both have all the same elements, but the image on the left is a little crisper and brighter, and adjustments can be observed in the placement of elements (particularly of the blue and burgundy bean-and-button pairs).

1. Beginning in the 1980s, my mother would suspend her *Loose Pages* book (1983) on my sister, as a dancer, which suggests to me that the vines in *Twins* are like small spines.

Like DNA from two common sources, self-selecting and then replicating itself uniquely in gestation, the sequence and placement of the pairs of buttons and beans on the two sides is fraternal in nature, a unique doubling of the logic within each side of the print, subject to the laws of chance. If there is a social dimension to the relationship Knowles calls "twins" here, it would be that things that appear alike may not be, and also that exact duplication is not only impossible, but also undesirable—as the artist opted for difference.

The long, green, living bean pods on both sides of the sheet are not separate from each other, but, rather, joined at the top. In each case, one stem is the source vine for two beans that curve in opposite directions and are very different, both as a joined pair and compared across the two sides of the sheet. Perhaps the artist was thinking of the vines as umbilical—dispensing nutrients to the beans like the blood vessels of a mother to her twins. Perhaps the vines are the conceptual origin of *Twins*, the artwork. The long beans are a pair in and of themselves, unlike the surrounding single beans with single buttons. The pods would, if opened, spill out many beans. Would these be twins? Or quadruplets?

Twins demonstrates Alison Knowles's commitment to exploring—in both her city surroundings and the natural world—duplication, sameness, and difference across graphic technologies, as mechanisms that are qualitatively human, dehumanizing, culturally binding, and in tension person to person. But *Twins* also speaks to her giving birth to fraternal twin girls—my sister Jessica and me—on August 21, 1964. We twins were fourteen and going through peak adolescence when our mother made *Twins*, in 1979. Jessica, firstborn and a dancer, inspired my parents and her teachers to write words, music, and movement for her as she shaped herself into an artist of haunting installations as well as *drawritings*, arabesque line drawings that are also short poems or single words.[1] Born second, I was a teenager prone to writing lovesick ballads and hardcore songs of rage—riding out a different wave on our twin-ship. I remember the day our mother showed us *Twins* in her Vermont studio. I didn't get it. At the time both sides looked the same to me. (This is an issue for both twins and adolescents, who are by definition people trying to sort out who they might be in comparison to their families or context). Jessica immediately understood that the issue was difference. She saw the rotation right away. For both

2. John Dewey, "The Organization of Energies," in *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 1934), 164. First published in 1934.

Jessica and Alison, the page is a performance field: text and image are three-dimensional and turn in space.

From a distance of four decades, I now see our different perspectives on *Twins* as a matter of how perception works more generally: human beings tend to be pattern seekers and variety makers. The cycles of day/night, month/year, birth/growth/decay, peace/war, feast/famine give shape to an inhabited world organized through pattern. Today, I am a scholar, a pattern seeker who frames complexity and variation so that people can make sense of time that is deeper than their immediate proximity. Variety, however, keeps the world interesting. "The greater the variation," according to the philosopher John Dewey, "the more interesting the effect, provided order is maintained."[2] Order is, of course, in the eye of the beholder.

The visual rhythms between pattern and variation, between cultural cues and biological experience, make *Twins* a vexing work of art. Who is it for? We twins, or the general public? How do the pairs of things work with and against each other? What do the two sides, the buttons and beans, communicate about what it means to compare things? Do the two sides make a book, with one side upside down? What does the slowing down caused by rotation tell the viewer about processes of visual comparison in general? What does the work tell us about Alison Knowles's work, or her art self, or her attitude toward us twins? Or does it even matter, in thinking about the work, that Knowles is the mother of twins? Perhaps the forms of duplication embedded in the work have everything to do with her being a Fluxus artist and a publisher and a maker of multiples? Relatedly, there is clearly something wrong, suspect even, in placing motherhood at the center of an artwork by a significant woman artist now—finally—being appreciated for her extensive body of work since the 1960s: artist's books, sculptures, performances, musical scores, screenprinted paintings, food art, computational poetry and poetics, and combinatory architectures. Last but not least, there is her contribution to Fluxus, a movement of artistic multiples and *Fluxkits*—and these are nonidentical, too.

I have come to see *Twins* as complicating precisely this dilemma. It is a concatenation of elements "by Alison Knowles" made after 1964. Each element in *Twins*, it turns out, represents a pivot linking her work as an artist in and around Fluxus to her circle of friends as well as her

3. My mother named the Something Else Press. When my father mentioned wanting to call it "Shirtsleeves Press," she scoffed and told him to call it "something else."

4. Alison Knowles, *by Alison Knowles*, in the Great Bear Pamphlet series (New York: Something Else Press, 1965), 3.

5. The *Bean Turners* resulted from Alison's daily sourcing. One *Bean Turner* (that we know of) actually came to life when bean worms hatched and flew out of the seams of the instrument. Alison restored it, but it has become emblematic of the porous but necessary art-life boundary in her work.

family. The point is not that the print blurs art and life. In fact, as a flat thing on the wall, it is on the more conventional end of the spectrum of her work. But its flatness makes *Twins* a parable of sorts. The placements and twists among the elements give it something of the quality of a key to her life and work, while also functioning as a visual sign of the problematics of pair and set, individual and world. *Twins* is of a piece with performances by, books by, sounds by, graphics by, and collaborations by Alison Knowles—artist, publisher, composer, mother, and life partner.

The use of "by" for works Alison made in collaboration with others is about the sense of "being with," and it is especially important to understanding *Twins*. I cannot think of a single close friend with whom Alison has not, at a fundamental level, collaborated. The signed copy of *Twins* in my personal collection reads "For Dick": it was a Christmas present to our father, Dick Higgins. He was Alison's husband; then ex-husband; then life partner; then husband again, in an open arrangement. They collaborated on raising Jessica and me, just as they collaborated on running the Something Else Press and later the cooperative publishing venture Unpublished Editions, which became Printed Editions.[3] They commented on each other's solo works in progress. They collaborated on Fluxus concerts, too, from 1962 to 1998, when Dick died suddenly of a heart attack. The relationship was deep and rich and unconventional. He was gay. His partners were also part of the family. We called them uncles and brothers.

The beans in *Twins* tether the work to Alison's long-standing interest in beans as wholesome, nutritious, and affordable food, and as art material. In October 1964, Alison wrote *Variation #1 (Make a Soup)*, a follow-up to her more famous work *Make a Salad*, from 1962.[4] Fluxus co-founder and erstwhile director George Maciunas called her bean soup (lovingly) "shit porridge" when she served it to friends at Fluxus New Year's. Beans show up in Alison's book works, including *The Bean Rolls* (1963–64), *The Book of Bean* (1981), and *A Bean Concordance* (1983). In the 1990s, she made *Bean Turner* instruments: paper pages full of beans.[5] Whether printed on a page or embedded in its surface—that is, enveloped within an empty fold, to swoosh and move within the handmade paper—beans bring pleasure in Alison's work through their scattering. They roll unevenly, each type situating itself differently

along a variegated line defined by its oblong, round, trapezoidal, rough, smooth, or wavy exterior. No doubt the arrangements on the two sides of *Twins* reflect Alison's interest in what beans are with regard to how they move, land, throw down shoots, and sprint for the sky.

In 1975, Alison used the occasion of the Annual Avant-Garde Festival of New York, organized by Charlotte Moorman, to "build a *Bean Garden*."[6] Alison's friend and collaborator Bill Fontana is credited with the "sound concept": filling a wooden tray fitted with contact microphones with 500 pounds of navy beans.[7] The shuffling of people through the beans filled the airplane hangar at Floyd Bennett Field with thunderous but gentle whooshing sounds that bore a curious resemblance to waves. After the festival, the wooden box was surely reused by someone else, but the hundreds of pounds of navy beans ended up stored in enormous burlap sacks in the elevator shaft of Alison's loft at 122 Spring Street. She proceeded to cook them regularly, usually with onions, carrots, maybe a few tomatoes or leftover vegetables, some garlic, and Provençale seasonings or a hit of soy. Eating them several times a week, we finally finished them in about 1995. To be fair, we did not eat those beans every night. However, for much of our life, they were dinner at least three times a week.

My mother's New York loft is both her studio and the place she lives, with the time of day and task classifying the space as serving one or the other function. The tone of the space shifts absolutely based on what is happening in it. Here, things for living are (like beans and buttons) organized the same way as for art-ing. Open shelves rule the day. Tools sit in open containers. Drips of this or that ink or glue or coffee or soup, a burn mark from a pot, a clothes iron (used mostly for art), or a cauterizing tip, coexist table by table, shelf by shelf, and countertop to countertop. Yet although she studied with Adolph Gottlieb and Josef Albers, Alison is not primarily a painter, so her studio and living space never looks painterly (in the sense of drip-covered floor). Neither is her cloth-work or page-making haphazardly spread about at the end of the workday (no scatter aesthetic either). Far from it. The things of the project at hand are carefully organized, sorted, placed on a table, or hung (usually on a single wall). Things with similar shapes, or sizes, or colors, might be piled, or placed alongside, or collected in a tin or box, for the time being.

6. Alison Knowles, score for *Proposition X*, in *MORE by Alison Knowles* (New York: Unpublished Editions, 1976)

7. In *Twins*, the blue-rimmed white bean to the middle left on the left side and the lower right on the right side is a navy bean.

Knowles's New York loft, 2022

8. In 1987, Arlene Schloss and Edmund Chibeau filmed Alison and John cooking together. The video, "Cooking with Cage," was performed and broadcast as part of my sister Jessica's benchmark *SWITCH TV* program on ECAT in Massachusetts in 2013.

Colors are, like the buttons and beans of *Twins*, matters of affinity or generalizable likeness. The colors seem to have come, simply, from off my mother's shelf or out in the world. The basis for their being selected is never mentioned. In the early 1970s, when Dick and Alison were divorced and she lived with Jessica in New York, Alison listened at the door while a seven-year-old Jessica put herself to sleep. Taking notes while Jessica knit from a multicolored yarn, Alison wrote this:

brown, brown, brown, brown
red, green, green, green, green
green, green, white, white
white, green, red, red, red
white, green, red, red, red
white, green, brown, brown, brown
white, white, brown, brown, brown . . . (and finally)
red, red, red, red, red

Jessica had devised a meditation of sorts, and significantly it did not involve repetition (unlike most mantras). Rather, the spoken list results from simply saying what is there, in the present moment, as the child knits each color. When Alison recites the list—as in her performance *Mantra for Jessie* (1970)—she is in some crucial sense melding their voices. The vocalized thread, as sound and yarn, gives, in her words, "some help in sleeping." It is a list that is superficially random, but for its being in that actual dyed yarn that was in the world, passing through the fingers of her firstborn twin.

The color scheme of brown, red, green, and white is ubiquitous in Alison's work and seems particularly emphatic in *Twins*, where the white bean and button are articulated by a thin, blue line, inside of which only the paper's surface appears. Since almost the entire surface is printed over in white, the decision to let the paper color show through as the color of the white navy bean seems particularly intentional. The blue-rimmed white navy bean was a particular favorite between my mother and John Cage, probably her best-known collaborator-friend. They loved to cook together, and beans were central to the macrobiotic diet that cured his arthritis.[8]

Knowles's bean collection in a stoneware bowl at her New York loft, 2013

Alison first housed her unlabeled bean collection in a mortar bowl in her studio decades ago, placing it on a low table beneath a fichus tree she found on the street in about 1975. The most special beans (gifted from friends) and the humblest (from the grocery store) coexist in the bowl. In ones, twos, threes, and a few fours, the collection is a constellation of possibilities and a meditation on things held in common. Above the bowl, on the white brick wall, is a bean "gong" by Alison. A handful of beans might be tossed against its hard flax paper, which she made in collaboration with the highly skilled paper maker Coco Gordon. In performance, Alison spins the gong and drops in a few beans, which rattle and crack along the form's high sides. The percussive sound reaches a higher pitch when the gong spins faster, then dips low as it slows.

Near the bean collection is a much smaller bowl holding a selection of buttons. Some of these were my great-grandmother's, others were gifted, found, or taken off shirts to be turned into rags. When Jessica and I were children, Alison set up her mother's ancient Singer sewing machine in a corner of the loft, and for a time the button bowl was next to it. On the machine, she made us muumuus for PJs (we picked out fabrics from remnant piles on Broadway) and enormous cloth panels that she covered in mass-produced pockets and filled with nonidentical found objects and beans. She hand-dyed the panels in a near-natural palette of red, mustard, or light brown and hung these free-floating book pages around the loft. Or they appeared at art openings, when Jess and I might notice a familiar white blouse now sewn onto a hovering page. Alison's aesthetic is clearly one of reuse and repair—in today's language, upcycling. This aesthetic has a deeply felt ethics, of course. It traces to being a child of the Great Depression and the rationing of World War II. Today, we are returning to the careful habits of Alison's childhood era for political, economic, and ecological reasons.

Alison's buttons and beans, in the bowls of her loft and in *Twins*, present macrocosms for another way to think about theme and variation, sameness and difference, what makes all of us, as humans, both identical and fraternal; we are parts of pairs and parts of sets. *Twins* is about twins while pointing to so much more. As human beings, we must live in balance, between small- and large-scale socialities, and within the realm where nature's dynamism and culture's dynamism are mutually supportive. To quote the cultural historian Bill Brown on the

subject of the "unhuman condition," I see in my mother's work an early harbinger of a new way of understanding our place in the world: "This is a history in which Anthropos comes to find itself (and now to recognize itself) relegated to the role of object within a vast assemblage."[9]

Twins is a metaprint, a print about printing, about color, about duplication, about seriality, about inversion, about food, about nature and culture, about the similarity and dissimilarity of twins, and the many different ways that pairs of things (in the world) are also not pairs at all but fluid and sometimes overlapping categories of other things. By gesturing toward nature and culture as both different and the same, through the complex relationship of pair and set, *Twins* models for a blurring of subject and object, human and nonhuman relationality. The side-by-sideness of button and bean, like the set to which each also belongs, images a world of human and nonhuman corelationality.

9. Bill Brown, "The Unhuman Condition," in *Other Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 173.

Touch, Listen, Smell, Eat, Look: Intersensory Perception in the Work of Alison Knowles

Lucia Fabio

The events I perform, the prints I have made and the environments I build are designed to put the spectator/performer in touch with him/herself and the real world. Since all feelings reside in the individual sensibility, I am interested in touching, awakening and activating certain of my own and your own personal responses. Some of this happens through sound, some through the use of found objects in a given environment, some through the glorification of daily occurrences such as eating a sandwich or examining a button. I regard simple routine activities taken for granted and materials cast off as worthless to be extraordinary, precious, magical and worth of all kinds of pursual. My environments and performances are collections of such things. Listen as if you had never heard it; look at it as if you had never seen it before. Investigate again what you already know. —Alison Knowles[1]

Alison Knowles's artistic practice of the past sixty years has consistently encouraged audiences to explore their everyday surroundings through simple actions and sensorial experience. She invites people to see, touch, hear, smell, and taste her work via event scores, environments, and books that utilize familiar objects and materials, eliciting intersensory perception in the manner of everyday interactions.

Intersensory perception coordinates information presented through separate modalities into an integrated experience: it is the way we interact with the world, a unified perception of objects and events. As we move through our environment, we simultaneously take in the sounds around us, inhale the air and its odors, savor residual food in our mouths, and adjust our eyes to changing light levels. While intersensory perception is a universal condition, every culture delegates value differently to each of the senses, creating societally specific standards.

Western culture suffers from the hegemony of vision among the senses. It privileges sight as knowledge, power, and judgment; accordingly, visual media has dominated modern and contemporary art in the West. When Immanuel Kant and other eighteenth-century philosophers divorced aesthetics from content, they also separated the senses.[2] Art became limited to the visual sense and music to the auditory sense. Touch, taste, and smell were considered feminine and "lower" in nature.[3] Such senses relate to intimate bodily experiences and bestow corporeal comforts. Infants first encounter the world through the sounds of the womb, along with the parents' caresses and the taste of milk—not

1. *Art: A Woman's Sensibility*, ed. Miriam Schapiro (Valencia, CA: Feminist Art Program, California Institute of the Arts, 1975), 86.

2. David Howes and Constance Classen, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Sense in Society* (London: Routledge, 2014), 19–20.

3. Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 75.

4. Though John Cage taught several of Knowles's peers, she initially met him on mushroom foraging trips organized by the New York Mycological Society in the late 1950s. These excursions were the beginning of a lasting friendship.

5. On the sensorial work of Fluxus artists, see Hannah B Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), chapter 1.

6. Alison Knowles, *by Alison Knowles* (New York: Something Else Press, 1965), 3.

through sight. The "lower" senses have greater plasticity and lack concrete definitions. Odor, for instance, seems to have no boundaries and tends to dissipate, while taste varies from culture to culture and person to person. It can be difficult to describe the subtleties of touch, taste, or smell, which is perhaps why they do not lend themselves to easy discussion within the traditional canon of Western art.

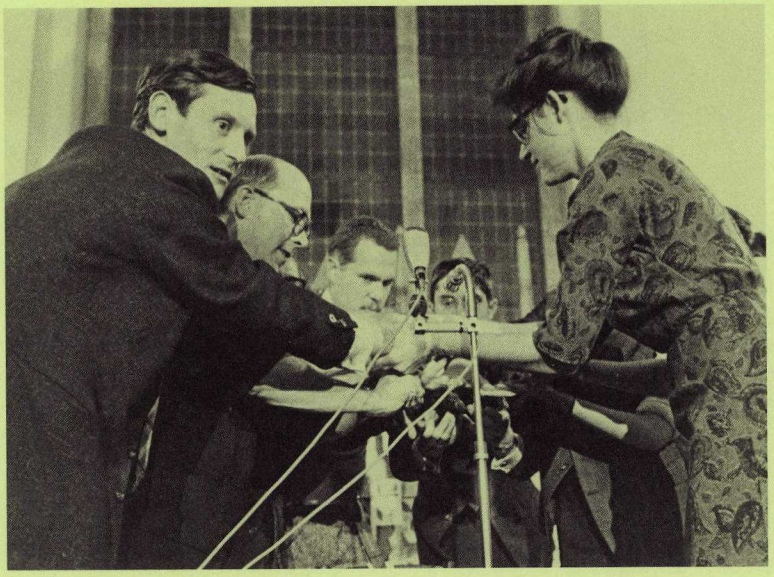
Though Knowles originally studied painting, she burned all but two of her paintings in the early 1960s, in her move away from the pursuit of visual hierarchy. Influenced by the composer John Cage's philosophy of indeterminacy and chance operations, Knowles began writing event scores as simple sets of instructions gleaned from domestic activities, such as cooking and grooming rituals.[4] At the early Fluxus Festivals in Europe, she performed her works *Proposition* (also known as *Make a Salad*, 1962) and *Shuffle* (1961), among others considered to be "open scores," meaning that anyone could execute them. With her Fluxus colleagues Knowles shared the traditional visual and auditory structure of performers in front of an audience, but she also uniquely activated the olfactory, gustatory, and tactile senses.[5]

In collapsing the distinction between performer and audience, Knowles's works multiply sensory reception modalities. Her score for *Nivea Cream Piece—for Oscar Williams* (1962) reads:

> *First performer comes on stage with a bottle of hand cream, labeled "Nivea Cream" if none is available. He pours the cream onto his hands, and massages them in front of the microphone. Other performers enter, one by one, and do the same thing. Then they join together in front of the microphone to make a mass of massaging hands. They leave in the reverse of the order they entered, on a signal from the first performer.*[6]

As the performers slather and smear cream over their hands, a visual and sound piece is created for the audience. For the performers, it is primarily a tactile experience. The term "participant" is used interchangeably for both audience and performer, as Knowles creates scenarios in which no one present is passive. The score's synaesthetic combination of sight, sound, and touch forms a unified experience.

"Make a salad" is the full written score of the second proposition in *by Alison Knowles*, a work that invites the audience to become active participants by eating the salad and ultimately completing the



Knowles and others performing *Nivea Cream Piece—for Oscar Williams* at *Fluxus Musik og Anti-Musik, Det Instrumentale Teater*, Nikolai Kirke, Copenhagen, 1962

performance. For its first iteration, in London at the Institute of Contemporary Arts on October 21, 1962, Knowles prepared a salad, producing the everyday sounds of readying a meal. Her labor in the arhythmic chopping of the vegetables, analogous to the notes of a musical score, brought attention to the commonly ignored sounds produced in food preparation. She served the salad out of a wooden tub to a small audience and the performance ended when the audience, gathered like guests at a home-prepared meal, finished eating. At the ICA, sensations around consumption were heightened due the context of the Western art space—where eating is typically prohibited.

Continuing to perform the score throughout the decades, Knowles changed *Make a Salad* in the early 2000s to adapt to a different audience—one that was no longer surprised to see a salad prepared onstage.[7] As the performances grew in scale, with audiences ranging from several hundred participants into the thousands, Knowles added live music.[8] In 2019, I attended a performance as part of the *Fluxus Spotlight* program organized by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Getty Research Institute.[9] At Walt Disney Concert Hall, Knowles and six more performers, all dressed in white shirts, sliced ingredients and combined them on a large tarp on the stage floor as collaborator Joshua Selman made sounds while adorning an electric guitar with salad greens. In the initially odorless theater, as Knowles applied the dressing, the pungent aroma of vinegar hit high in the nasal cavity. The olfactory sense is said to be the most closely connected to memory, and I was reminded of those times I've added too much vinegar to a dish, causing it to be inedible. Yet Knowles's salad was perfectly balanced, with the oil and vinegar mingling in harmony. I ate the salad in the concert hall—an arena more often reserved for auditory epiphanies—experiencing the full intersensory activation of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch through the performers' chopping and the audience's subsequent mastication. As a participant, I literally consumed the work, beyond its visual metaphor: the salad moved through my body as sustenance.

Knowles's experimental artist's books, produced since the early 1960s, richly foreground physical tactility as a mode of experience. *Bean Rolls* (1963–64), one of her first Fluxus multiples, is often referred to as a "canned book." It consists of a small tea tin containing multiple scrolls printed with information about beans along with different

7. These later iterations begin with a presentation in the exhibition *Work Ethic* (2003–04) at the Baltimore Museum of Art. Knowles has subsequently performed *Make a Salad* at Tate Modern in London (2008), the High Line in New York (2011), and at other sites.

8. About the addition of a musical element, Hannah B Higgins writes that Knowles is "not clear on how and why the musicians appeared, but she likes them." Email to the author, March 3, 2015.

9. *Fluxus Spotlight: Knowles/Ikeda* took place on February 15, 2019, as part of a larger 2018–19 series co-organized by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Getty Research Institute to explore the avant-garde movement through performances, installations, symposia, and publications.

Peter Moore: Knowles inside *The Big Book*, 1966; color photograph. © Northwestern University

varieties of beans. As the participant removes the tin's lid, takes out the scrolls, and unfurls them, the beans rattle around against the tin. Knowles thus transforms the book into a sound piece, activating sight, hearing, and touch all at once.

The book format is explored at monumental scale with *The Big Book* (1966), a walk-through environment with eight-foot-tall pages. The work presents vignettes of Knowles's art, life, and surroundings, including her role as a caretaker, by including various elements such as a kitchen with hotplate and tea kettle, and a commode for bodily elimination. Knowles considers *The Big Book* to be what George Quasha terms a "transvironment," that is, "a transformationally experienced environment": "a construct—it may also be a construction or artifact—that creates opportunity for a fundamental alteration in perception and interpretation of the surrounding world, the context and circumtext."[10] In Knowles's own description, *The Big Book* is a "habitable" installation: "The thing about *The Big Book* is that one could in fact live in it. One slept in the grass tunnel and there was always food by the hot plate in the kitchen."[11] Participants have a kinesthetic experience as they climb through and over the pages. Going beyond the book form as facsimile or representation, *The Big Book* is simultaneously an art object and a real-life environment. It is not sufficient to simply look at *The Big Book*, one is compelled to move through it, to touch it, to eat and drink within in it.

Directing specific movement and corporeal exploration at a much smaller scale is Knowles's three-object series collectively titled *A Finger Book* (1986–88).[12] With an inclination for play, the artist assigns sight to the fingers. These tabletop transvironments require direct touch to be "read," and were first and foremost to be experienced by the visually impaired. They are approximately eleven inches tall, with languages from different cultures and eras carved, embossed, and printed over their surfaces. The third *Finger Book* features, for example, ancient Hindu scripture, quipu from Incan culture, a Sumerian clay tablet from the fourth millennium, and signage from the Ashanti tribes of Ghana. Braille, as translation and decoration, adorns each book while various materials provide disparate sensations: the warmth of wood, the coolness of metal, and the softness of fabric. An accompanying accordion book offers information about the languages as well as instructions such as "a finger ladder at the side of page 13 allows a view from the top into the adjourning garden." In considering how

10. George Quasha, "Auto-dialogue on the Transvironmental Book: Reflections on 'The Book of Bean,'" *New Wilderness Letter*, no. 11 (December 1982): 41; reprinted in the present volume. Knowles's *The Book of Bean* (1981) inspired Quasha's term "transvironment," as discussed in their 1982 conversation reprinted in the present book.

11. "Notes towards *Indigo Island*: A conversation between Alison Knowles and Hannah B Higgins," in *Indigo Island: Artworks by Alison Knowles* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken, 1995), 103.

12. *A Finger Book of Ancient Language*, the full title of the work, was produced in close collaboration with Kari Miller. I would like to thank Miller for sharing information with me about its production.

A Finger Book 3, 1987/88; mixed-media interactive book with aluminum base, various materials, and Braille objects

Knowles and Coco Gordon performing *Loose Pages*, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, 1983

knowledge is accessed, Knowles explores the notion that when one sense is denied, there may be increased intensity of reception by the remaining senses.

Knowles's *Loose Pages* (1983), a collaboration with Coco Gordon, is a performative book that relies on kinanesthesia to be activated.[13] The "pages" are worn by the performer, who acts as the spine of the book. Knowles dresses the performer with arm flaps, pant pages, foot covers, and a hat that entirely covers the head. Often the performance ends with Knowles helping the performer to step off of a platform to then shuffle off together. The handmade paper produces disparate noises: those pages made of linen create soft, muffled sounds, while the fresh flax pages produce crisp, crackling noises. With time, as the piece is repeatedly worn and performed, the sonic qualities of the paper change. Paper is used as a substrate for language, but instead of letting language produce sounds through the expelled breath of the performer, the page against the body creates the auditory experience. The sound of the turning page is there when reading a book, yet usually ignored—much like the chopping sounds of *Make a Salad*.

In embedding intersensory perception into her performances and installations, Knowles creates scenarios to stimulate sensory modalities and direct participants' attention toward acute awareness of their individual corporeal observations. By disregarding the primacy of sight in Western culture, Knowles reclaims full, bodily experience, likening her art to participation in daily life. Rather than idealizing sight and sterilizing the art experience, she creates encounters to situate participants in experiential situations involving the full realm of the senses and the consuming body. As one of the original founders of Fluxus, she began this practice in the 1960s, alongside other artists who were interested in smell, taste, and touch. Knowles has continued this trajectory, unparalleled, throughout her career. Over the decades, her dedication to exploring the common and the everyday has provided numerous opportunities for audiences to absorb, in the fullest experiential sense, the subtleties of life.

13. *Loose Pages* was published as an edition of ten by Watermark Press, Huntington, NY.

Sonic Possibilities, Meditations on Being, and the Mysterious Wisdom of Alison Knowles

Lauren Fulton

> *I must walk more with free senses. It is as bad to* study *stars and clouds as flowers and stones. I must let my senses wander as my thoughts, my eyes see without looking. [. . .] Be not preoccupied with looking. Go not to the object; let it come to you.* —Henry David Thoreau[1]

As an artist, Alison Knowles is wholly invested in reviving our connection with the earth through the activation of our individual bodies. Inquiring into the obligations we have within society, and to nature and ourselves, she shares a great deal in common with the American transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau, who also founded a practice in the service of seeking fundamental truths and maintaining a sensitive relationship with nature.[2] Thoreau wrote about the subtle magnetism to be found in nature, a magnetism that, if we yield unto it, offers guidance. Truths can likewise reveal themselves in Knowles's performances or through the curious experience of her objects, if we pay close attention.

Describing the captivating effect a Knowles object has on its viewer, Henry Martin comments on the sense of possibility her practice presents:

> *[It is] always very spare, and always very factual, and it refuses to release or reveal its poetry until one moves up very close. Its aspect from a distance can be very intriguing, but mainly it is very mysterious, and the mystery is magnetic.*[3]

The experience of a Knowles piece is unmistakable: the work unfolds over time as its mystery becomes legible. The effect of one of her objects, Martin claims, results from its sonic potentiality: "To activate its sounds, you have to move up close enough to touch it."[4] Here, he's referring to a suite of "sound panels" Knowles made in 1991: four large cyanotype and screenprinted muslin panels adorned with beans, buttons, and other found objects. She entitled each with reference to the sounds associated with a season of the year, conjuring Thoreau and their shared naturalist appreciation of cyclical time, the cosmological, and the aeolian. Not firmly fixed to the gallery wall, the panels dance in the wind. Near the bottom of one, *Sommerlaute* (meaning "summer sounds"), threads strung with buttons protrude from the wall, descending to accumulate in a wooden bowl on the floor. Discarded materials, merged by Knowles, build upon one another in layers of timbral and textural complexity that invite touch: the threads extending toward us

1. *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis Allen, vol. 4, *May 1, 1852–February 27, 1853* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 351. Emphasis in original.

2. It should be noted that Knowles is an avid reader of Thoreau's work.

3. Henry Martin, "Thoughts for 'Um-laut'—an exhibition by Alison Knowles," in *Um-laut* (Cologne: Galerie Schüppenhauer; Hamburg: Renate Kammer, 1992), 9.

4. Ibid.

5. In 1978, Knowles produced a series of three similar panels, called *The Four Seasons*, using the I Ching to determine structure. Malcolm Goldstein and Philip Corner referenced Knowles's panels to create their own scores based on the seasons using chance operations, called *Three Songs*, which were performed throughout Europe that same year.

6. Alison Knowles, *Event Scores* (Barrytown, NY: Left Hand Books, 1992), n.p.

7. Critic Tom Johnson describes the space Knowles offers with *The Identical Lunch* (in this case camaraderie and conversation) as her attempt to bring a greater sensitivity to our daily lives. Johnson, "Alison Knowles, Shoes, and Gertrude Stein," *Village Voice*, January 16, 1978.

beckon our interaction. Though the panels do not present sound in the auditory sense to which we are accustomed, nor can they be removed from the wall and "played" like Knowles's *Bean Turners*, they are more than just static objects meant to be experienced through vision alone.[5] Rather, each panel is an event vibrating amid various temporalities, reinforcing John Cage's notion that listening may be intermittent but there is no such thing as silence.

The magnetism and energy in Knowles's work that Martin links with sound is profoundly connected with the haptic. Consider her score for *Tone-Line* (1976):

> *Button together a succession of shirts that you have hung with clothespins on a line across the room. The performers approach the line and put one or two arms into the sleeves. As they do so each makes a single tone. Stay there for a while.*[6]

The action Knowles introduces has that certain tangibility we become attuned to in her sound panels. Through our bodily intervention, Knowles asks us to take a moment to stay dialed in to the work's specificity. As is common with her event scores, and Fluxus performance more generally, the participant takes center stage to produce a variety of sensations that pass through the body and often intermingle to grant some form of ontological knowledge. The garments of *Tone-Line* await activation, like Knowles's meal in *The Identical Lunch* (first performed in 1967), to cite a well-known example where phenomena evolve from ritualistic intention. Sounds ensue in both performances—for instance, humming in *Tone-Line*, or conversation in *The Identical Lunch*—and as slight as they may be, they are moments of meditation on being.[7]

From 1977 until the early 1980s, Knowles produced a series of sound recordings with intermedia artist Charlie Morrow that similarly enchant the listener. Their format relies on the allure of Knowles's voice, which is soft and gentle, though its lure is mighty. The collaboration resulted in two albums released through Morrow's label New Wilderness Audiographics. The pieces incorporate field recordings and meditations on a subject Knowles has ruminated on throughout the course of her career: the bean. Around the same time, in 1982, Knowles was invited to Cologne by Klaus Schöning, director of the Studio Akustische Kunst (Studio Acoustic Art) at Westdeutscher Rundfunk (West German Radio Broadcast Company,

Sommerlaute, 1991; cyanotype, screenprint, and handwork on muslin

Benjamin Patterson, David Tudor, John Cage, and others at Atelier Mary Bauermeister, Cologne, 1960

8. Upon his arrival at WDR in 1961, Klaus Schöning promoted experimentation rooted in the Weimar period but clearly breaking from literary conventions.

9. The scores for her WDR performances can be found in Knowles, *Spoken Text* (Barrytown, NY: Left Hand Books, 1993).

10. Email to the author, May 10, 2016.

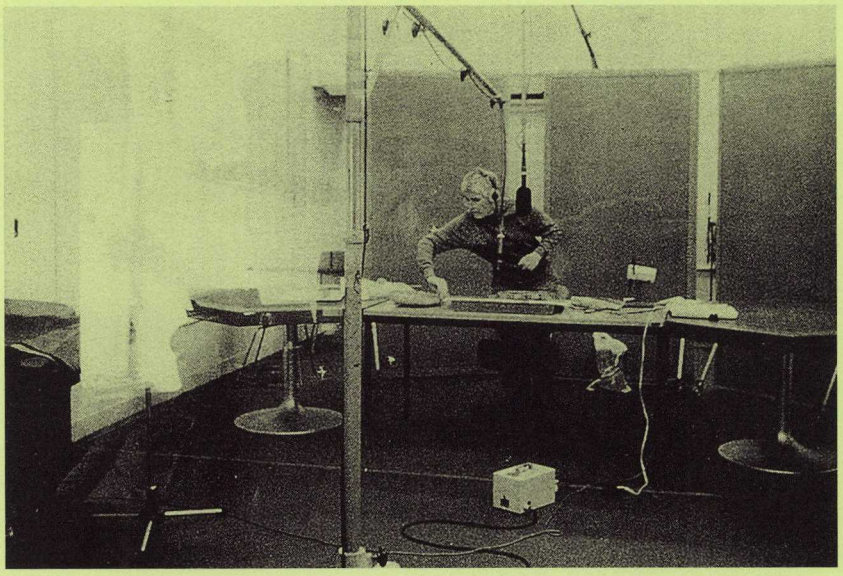
11. As Wilfried Dörstel, Rainer Steinberg, and Robert von Zahn point out, through David Tudor and John Cage the studio events were directly linked to avant-garde activities in the US at Black Mountain College in Asheville, North Carolina. See Dörstel, Steinberg, and von Zahn, "The Bauermeister Studio: Proto-Fluxus in Cologne 1960–62," in *Fluxus Virus 1962–1992*, ed. Ken Friedman (Cologne: Galerie Schüppenhauer, 1992), 57.

WDR), widely acknowledged as the most significant radio station for disseminating new experiments in electronic music internationally. Since the 1970s, the Studio had promoted an open format shaped by experimental sound and literature, spoken and concrete poetry, and montage, resulting in riveting acoustic textures.[8] In 1982, Knowles produced her first WDR *Hörspiel*, or "radio play," called *Bohnen Sequenzen* (*Bean Sequences*), a collaboration with George Brecht and her daughters, Hannah B and Jessica Higgins.

At the Studio, the group performed the spoken-text score using noise-making objects, improvising one at a time while paying particular attention to the typography and spacing within Knowles's script, which specifies aspects of the delivery such as speaking volume.[9] In preparation, Knowles drew on the mention of beans across a wide variety of sources, among them the journals of Thoreau, ancient Mayan culture, and her book *A Bean Concordance*, published the following year. When performed, the score may be read in total or excerpted. As Knowles has said, "In my oral tradition, the composition never overshadows the performance action of reading out loud. I think my mentor John Cage would appreciate this observation."[10] For *Bean Sequences*, WDR awarded Knowles the Karl Sczuka Award in 1982.

Knowles's practice has, for decades, been met with more support abroad than in America, and throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s WDR commissioned more works by her. In fact, decades earlier WDR had established an affiliation with proto-Fluxus activities, most notably those spearheaded by David Tudor (and later John Cage), whose performance engagements were initiated by Karlheinz Stockhausen with the support of Wolfgang Steinecke and others. Elsewhere in Cologne activities were occurring more informally, such as the salon concert series at Mary Bauermeister's atelier, which functioned from 1960–62 like WDR—as a laboratory. Bauermeister's gatherings helped establish an exchange between Cologne (and greater Europe) and New York, aided by Tudor especially, which ignited opportunities for young performers from both sides of the Atlantic—among them Benjamin Patterson, Nam June Paik, and La Monte Young—many of whom were meeting for the first time.[11]

At WDR, Knowles went on to partner with the composer and producer Joshua Selman.[12] One of their most complicated works, *Bread and Water* (1994), the last made with Schöning, is a performance of



Knowles rehearsing *Bread and Water* at Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), Cologne, 1994

indeterminate length, comprised of seventeen separate recordings uniquely arranged each time it is broadcast. Each recording is linked to a specific river, based on Knowles's observation that waterways resemble the cracks in the bottoms of bread loaves. For her larger *Bread and Water* project, she Xeroxed loaves to make photographic prints using palladium processing, allowing close study of the crust, and then consulted an atlas to make comparisons to certain bodies of water.[13] Knowles gathered information from the encyclopedia, newspapers, and other bibliographic sources, expanding her method to include combining rivers with regional literature. The resulting *Bread and Water* cyanotype print *River Stour from Pegwell to Canterbury* enlists text by Geoffrey Chaucer, while another, *Belfast to the Irish Sea*, includes an excerpt from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.[14] The imaginative *Bread and Water* project, like its accompanying radio performance, is an experience much like the transformational process of breadmaking itself.

In the 1960s, WDR had begun producing "soundscapes," a term popularized by composer R. Murray Schafer to describe prolonged recordings that reveal the specificity of place through sound alone. One take on this musical form is Knowles's album *Frijoles Canyon*, composed and produced with Selman in 1992. Named after the site of the recording studio (as if any place else could be as appropriate), *Frijoles Canyon* contains eight distinct tracks created over several years based on trips throughout New Mexico and Alberta, Canada, using fragmented, variously sourced scripts, as with the WDR recordings. On the album, Knowles's voice brings the scripts to life as more than a collection of facts and observations accumulated at libraries, or passed on from hikers met in the Rocky Mountains. At several points, she addresses civilization's changing relationship to nature:

> *Man stages in his program to make the mountain authentic*
> *Like the picture says*
> *First coming by train we stayed a week*
> *And now by car hoping for a picture postcard day*[15]

Knowles's calming voice cautions on the delicate balance to be found between respecting nature and our destructive tendencies—it's almost prophetic, how she delicately harps on the threat of endangerment. We hear of native peoples' rituals as Knowles pays careful attention to

12. Another WDR collaboration to note from this period is *Setsubun* (1990), a project by Knowles, Joshua Selman, and Yasunao Tone based on an annual ceremonial bean ritual in Japan.

13. Knowles's process is documented in her book *Bread and Water* (Barrytown, NY: Left Hand Books, 1995). Catherine Harris contributed her rare expertise in palladium-based photography to produce the prints in the Barrytown studio.

14. Knowles explains this process in "Bread and Water," in *Indigo Island: Artworks by Alison Knowles* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken, 1995), 113.

15. Knowles, *Spoken Text*, 113. On the album, this is part of the track "Descending Clogs Event."

16. Email to the author, September 27, 2015.

17. Steven Zultanski writes on similarities between the work of the poet Alice Notley (and the larger second generation of New York School poets) and Fluxus artists. One shared concern involves the ephemeral—specifically, perception that is "partial, temporary, and in motion." Like Notley's work, Knowles's *Frijoles Canyon* "becomes more about grasping fleeting moments of narrative rather than piecing together a whole." Zultanski, *Thirty-Odd Functions of Voice in the Poetry of Alice Notley* (Brooklyn: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2020), 35–37.

18. Email to the author, September 27, 2015.

19. Quoted in George Quasha, "Time Samples," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 19, no. 3 (2009): 305. Emphasis in original.

local cultures, all the while stressing our interconnectedness. The rhythm and intonation of her voice is exhilarating, giving the sense that the trees and other inanimate matter surrounding her are alive. Selman has explained that he and Knowles edited the script so that the addressee is always in question: "This gives the voice a dual function of being both a conveyor of story and being a sonic element that can detach from logic."[16] The fleeting nature of Knowles's vocals against those sounds of the site is juxtaposed with the historical, monumental content of her words, producing a powerful listening experience.[17] The album concludes with the sounds of thunderstorms and falling rocks, dissolving into the future.

Frijoles Canyon began to really take form in 1991, when Knowles was doing a residency at the Banff Centre in Alberta, where Selman joined her for two weeks. With the exception of some field recordings she had made in New Mexico with producer Steve Peters, the two started from scratch. Selman describes how they assembled a graphic score for multitrack tape construction that moved beyond their former working process for WDR:

> *We did not use her customary instrumentation of wood hens, bean turners, monsters [wind-up toys], etc. These were the objects she was comfortable working with from the WDR recordings. Rather, we set a challenge to find objects at the Banff Centre and use them as sonic objects, such as the lunch trays which were lovely metal resonators and the elevator beep which haunted the empty halls, the stairwell resonance, and other found room tones.*[18]

Selman's description of Knowles's process of finding objects relates to her own insight in a conversation with the poet George Quasha, in 2006:

> *As I find the thing and it passes through my consciousness and onto the table, something is added—I don't know what it is, something of this mystery of* selection *and* quality *and . . .* acts, *almost like nourishing. Another person might look at it and find out something they didn't know about or hadn't felt.*[19]

Always, Knowles relishes the found and the foraged, and how such things can impact and ultimately enhance our consciousness. At another point in the conversation she says that she believes someone

Liner notes (detail) for Knowles and Joshua Selman, *Frijoles Canyon* (¿What Next? Recordings, 1992)

who could love one of her objects would be unlikely to support war.[20] Indeed, Knowles's process is "nourishing." It offers sustenance to those willing to participate in a revelatory awakening, induced differently for every individual.

20. Ibid., 300.

The House of Dust, a Work in Translation

Maud Jacquin and Sébastien Pluot

Alison Knowles's *The House of Dust* is among the earliest computerized poems, consisting of the phrase "a house of" followed by a randomized sequence of 1) a material, 2) a site or situation, 3) a light source, and 4) a category of inhabitants taken from four distinct lists.[1] In 1967, the process generated an extraordinarily large group of unique quatrains printed on dot matrix paper, the lines of which resemble musical staffs.[2] Soon after, using the poem as a score, Knowles translated one of the quatrains into a physical structure that she installed in New York City, in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan.[3] This architecture was then destroyed, restored, and moved to the early California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) campus in Burbank, California, where Knowles taught from 1970 to 1972.

In both New York and California, *The House of Dust* was in a constant state of transformation, altered by various processes including the addition of other artworks. This major work by Knowles is therefore a "panorama" of translation procedures: the ordinary language of the poem is translated by the algorithm's artificial language, generating a score, itself interpreted as an architecture, which is then translated by other artworks and by the activities of its inhabitants.[4]

1—Translating a computer-generated text into architecture

By translating a poem into a physical structure conceived to host people and events, Knowles offered a reflection on the hospitality of language and, by extension, on the welcoming of otherness as a characteristic of a specific conception of translation, one that acknowledges inadequacies and ambiguities. In performing this gesture, she not only prompted the interpretation of others, but also materialized the space of encounter between artist and audience that many of her other scores had likewise sought to open up. At the same time as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and others were theorizing the "death of the author"—arguing that both author and reader participate in the production of meaning—Knowles's language-based scores not only granted considerable freedom of interpretation to the performers—as did most Fluxus scores—they also often created relational spaces or temporary communities, thus emphasizing the inherent hospitality of the text.[5] "A different world (the reader's) slips

1. The poem was coded in the computer language Fortran with the help of James Tenney. Historically, the first poem using computerized permutations was "Stochastische Texte," produced by Theo Lutz in 1959; an algorithm reassembled *The Castle* (1926) by Franz Kafka.

2. A set of prints was published by Walther König Verlag under the title *A House of Dust* (c. 1969).

3. Knowles received a Guggenheim Fellowship that enabled her to build two structures. What we call "the house" in this text was in fact two houses, one smaller and one bigger, that were installed together.

4. In her essay "Notes on the Index" (*October* 3 [Spring 1977]: 68–81), Rosalind Krauss calls Marcel Duchamp's *Tu m'* (1918) "Panorama on the Index." She is referring to Roman Jakobson's theory on the "shifter."

5. Several of Knowles's scores establish temporary communities through the sharing of food, like in *Make A Salad* (1962), or the creation of choirs in which different voices coexist, like in *Piece for Any Number of Vocalists* (1962) or *Newspaper Music* (1965). When her scores produce objects, the focus is often on the relationship generated by these objects, as in *Giveaway Construction* (1963), where performers are encouraged to give their object to others, or in *Composition for Paik* (1964), which involved building a platform for Nam June Paik to perform on.

6. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), xxi.

7. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Language Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 138.

into the author's place. This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient," wrote Michel de Certeau in 1980.[6] By literally inviting readers/viewers to inhabit a poem where, as Foucault stated, "placements are determined for possible subjects," *The House of Dust* extended Knowles's attack on the authority of the author—and more generally, of the subject—to assert the essential multiplicity and relationality of meaning. [7] It also conveyed a vision of translation as an "inn of the remote" (*auberge du lointain*)—to borrow the eloquent expression of linguist and translator Antoine Berman—that is, as a hospitable process that must go beyond the simple search for equivalence and make space for what is foreign to us.[8]

French literary scholar Mireille Calle-Gruber has suggested a way to look at the hospitality of language that resonates with *The House of Dust*. Following Jacques Derrida, who believed that "an act of hospitality can only be poetic," Calle-Gruber claims that language is hospitable when it is poetic, that is, when it enables the "emergence of unexpected, unprecedented, composite, heterogenous, and infinitely transformable forms."[9] This emergence, she writes, allows us to "free language from institutionalization," to overcome syntax (whose etymology refers to order) and therefore to attack the "stranglehold of logocentrism [...] and discriminating laws."[10] In the tension Knowles created between, on the one hand, a computer program, a symbol of order and logic, and, on the other, a poetic text resulting from random encounters, she performed something of the hospitality of language as described by Calle-Gruber. From this perspective, Knowles's *House* becomes a sign of the text's receptivity to the unexpected and thus of the power of art to subvert rational, logocentric logics.

This subversion of rational, logocentric logics is also expressed in *The House of Dust*'s architectural process and form, which both contrast with the way modernist and post-modernist architects have used algorithms. Nothing in the physical structure that Knowles built is evidence of the fact that the work was produced with the help of an algorithm. She ironically used a machine—a technology aimed to create order out of chaos—to generate chaos out of order. As the artist herself has explained, she wanted her architecture to be non-Euclidian, non-geometric, organic; or, in other words, symmetrically opposed to the modernist logic. Indeed, Knowles had another agenda: the structure

Knowles working on *The House of Dust*, Burbank, CA, 1970

8. See Antoine Berman, *La traduction et la lettre ou l'Auberge du lointain* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991).

9. Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 2; and Mireille Calle-Gruber, "L'hospitalité dans la langue," in *Accueillir l'autre: l'hospitalité charnelle* (Paris: Éditions des femmes Antoinette Fouque, 2017), 56.

10. Ibid., 57 and 61.

11. William Breger was known at the time for the Tribeca synagogue whose organic shell and belly-shaped facade became a landmark in the neighborhood.

had to be wide open to the exterior and call for playful and creative interaction. The form of Knowles's *House* was metaphorically interpreted rather than mathematically deducted from one of the quatrains and the building process resulted from a need for mutability, both in terms of aspect and usage. Knowles indeed designed her *House* with the help of architect William Breger, who had been Walter Gropius's assistant at Harvard.[11] To create the nonorthogonal curved shapes for which he became known, Berger used molds made of flexible fiberglass and resin, into which he poured concrete. Made of the same materials as Berger's molds, Knowles's *House* was thus a *counter form*, the negative mold of an architecture not aimed to be stabilized by concrete.

In terms of its architectural program, its form, and its building process, *The House of Dust* thus defies all the rules, trends, and ideologies of modernist architecture while misusing its favorite tools: it negates the use of concrete, shifting the ideal of transparency, both physical and symbolic, to another kind of openness; it also ironically disrupts functionalism's brand-new trick—calculation enhanced by the computer. In the 1960s and 1970s, the use of cybernetics in architecture and urbanism was oriented towards various objectives: optimizing and rationalizing constructive systems; producing new, complex geometric shapes; simulating morphogenetic procedures of nature; solving technical systems of engineering; setting up environments using large statistical data to condition behaviors in architectural space and in cities that were longing to become "smart."

Knowles's evolving project deconstructed the fantasy of a cybernetic universal language, of regulatory control over people's bodies and imagination. Against the clarity and stability of modernist grids and the transparency of large windows and mathematics that pretend to calculate and expose everyone's complexity, Knowles's open-yet-opaque, ever-changing, and ambivalent structure was a site where the unconscious had its place, an alternative to the controlled industrialization of art that promoted clear and transparent understanding.

2—Translating architecture from one context to another

In the same way that *The House of Dust* poem refuses fixity and identity—the same quatrain very rarely reoccurs—transformation is an essential

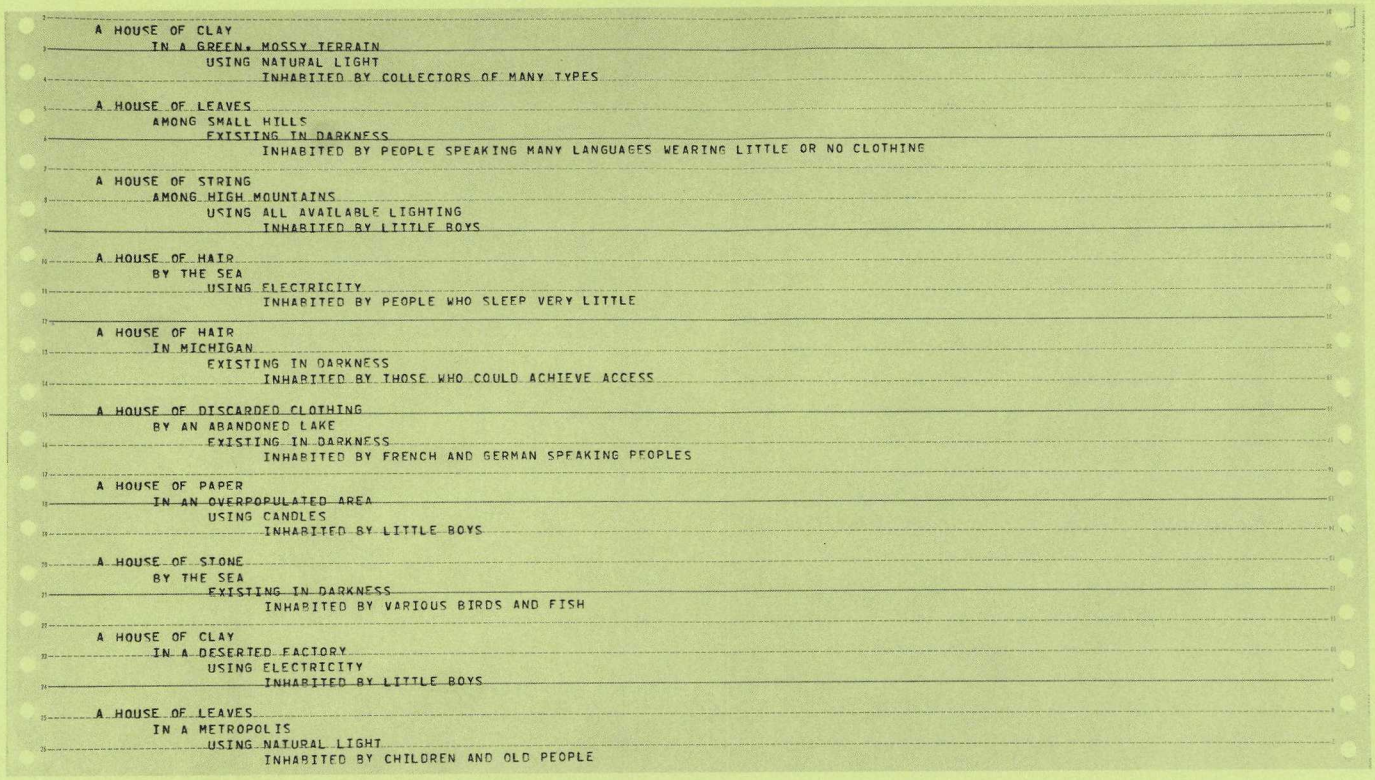
Knowles and Norman Kaplan's *Poem Drop Event*, Burbank, CA, May 20, 1971 **FACING** *The House of Dust* computer printout (detail), c. 1967–68 **FOLLOWING SPREAD** Installation view, *The House of Dust by Alison Knowles, INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO READ*, The James Gallery, CUNY Graduate Center, 2016

condition of Knowles's physical house. Even though it was only moved a few times (from Chelsea to CalArts in 1970 and 1971; then in 1982 to the College of the Canyons, in Santa Clarita, California, where it was turned into a children's playground), Knowles constantly sought new contexts for her work. In each context, she considered the geographical moving of the house to automatically entail the transformation of the quatrain materialized. While in New York the architecture corresponded to the quatrain "A house of plastic / in a metropolis / using natural light / inhabited by people from all walks of life," at the College of the Canyons, it became the materialization of "A house of plastic / in a warm windy terrain / using natural light / inhabited by little boys."

In addition to these spontaneous shifts in meaning, Knowles created various protocols for the forms, textures, and colors of her *House*, to be modified in relation to its usage and to local conditions, usually through the participation of different communities. For instance, in Chelsea, where the structure was placed on the site of a housing cooperative, Knowles organized a collection of objects (shoe heels, used clothing, colored paper, etc.) in the surrounding primary schools and invited children to transform her work by affixing these objects (or their representations) to its surface according to a random principle also controlled by a computer program. At CalArts, Knowles's *House* was repainted and partially covered with tar, stones, and other materials, and activated by multiple artworks.

By privileging displacement, participation, and the constant addition of new elements, each of these examples testifies to the artist's ongoing effort to work against the idea of architecture as stable and immutable. To the universality and "constructed" character of the artwork and of language itself, she opposed the relativity of the local, taking into account the processes of endless mutation generated by changes of context.

Like *The House of Dust*, the myth of the Tower of Babel appeals to architecture to reveal a particular relationship to language. As Derrida emphasizes in "Des Tours de Babel" (1985), the construction of the ziggurat comes to materialize the project of linguistic unification; it is the manifestation of so-called "structures" common to all languages, or more broadly, of a conception of language as a closed and static system. It is thus these systematic conceptions that are radically undermined by the divine destruction or "deconstruction" of the Tower of Babel. In her own



way, Knowles's use of architecture also calls into question the notion of universality and the systematic—which is to say, the closed-off and stable—character of the artwork and of language. By creating organic architectural forms that she subjects to multiple transformations, the artist engages in a reflection on the impermanence of all artworks (and all linguistic utterances), and on the way in which an artwork is constantly translated by the different contexts in which it is embedded.

3—*The House of Dust* disseminated and translated through others

The House of Dust cannot be considered in isolation. The piece is not only constantly modified by its interaction with its contexts; it has also generated a multitude of new artworks by Knowles and other artists. From the beginning of the project in Chelsea, Knowles invited, for example, musician and artist Max Neuhaus to create a sound device. His proposal—to convert thermal variations outside the structure into sonic undulations audible in its interior—represented a particularly appropriate response to Knowles's work, since it activated translation processes while simultaneously testifying to the influence of context on structures that appear otherwise immutable. Yet, it was at CalArts that the work's mutability and generative force was truly expressed. There the artwork not only held all the seminars taught by Knowles, but the students were also constantly encouraged to respond to its architecture and conceptual premises.

For instance, Knowles orchestrated the encounter of *The House of Dust* with another of her poem-scores, *Proposition IV (Squid)* (1970). This score, also based on a principle of random permutations and calling for a multiplicity of performative interpretations, allowed students to transform and organize the space around Knowles's *House*. In response to *Proposition IV (Squid)*—in which each verse is composed of a numeric quantity, a direction, and a color—a dial was drawn on the ground to indicate different directions and invite performative actions. One of Knowles's students, Matt Mullican, placed five (golden)

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by Alison Knowles
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roast chickens on the grass in accordance with one of the directions. Knowles herself interpreted the verse "99 Red North" by composing four lines of red apples that started at the house and were arranged heading north. The way in which Knowles's interpretation itself evolved as a result of the interaction with other artworks, and generated new proposals, is yet again representative of the logic of dissemination at the heart of her work.

Conscious of the evolution and the variability of languages, Walter Benjamin declared that acts of translation and interpretation must not pretend to "reflect" the original. On the basis of this analysis, Derrida claimed that the translation cannot correspond to the original, but must "augment" it. The translation is the condition of the survival of the original, and of its dissemination. Knowles disseminates. She often produces texts which become objects, which themselves generate performative practices that can be documented and become texts in turn. On different occasions, certain stages are individualized and mutate in such a way that many chains of events resist any stable historical recomposition. Reconstructing this nebula's unpredictable chain of events represents a challenge that does not come down to picking up on linear principles, but rather to accepting associative chains of signifiers, which mutate, migrate, and come together, forming recompositions, cuttings, splices.

When our curatorial project, Art by Translation, researched and reactivated *The House of Dust* for an exhibition and event program that extended over 2015–19,[12] we proposed "translation" processes to extend the work's logic and ensure that its *poietic* potentialities survive.[13] Rather than physically reconstructing *The House of Dust*, thus turning it into a relic, we invited contemporary architects and artists, as well as students from various art schools and universities, to respond to Knowles's project either by exploring ideas it potentially embodies or by translating quatrains of their choice into new houses activated by all kinds of performative actions. In the same way that Knowles's *House of Dust* constantly adapted to the contexts in which it was installed, our exhibitions and events were deeply informed by their specific sites and Knowles's relationship to them.

For example, at the James Gallery in New York in 2016, Art by Translation's "reactivations" were presented in dialogue with artworks from the 1960s and '70s also exploring the nexus of art, technology,

12. As co-directors of Art by Translation, we conducted extensive research on *The House of Dust* and reactivated its generative potential in New York (The James Gallery, CUNY Graduate Center; Emily Harvey Foundation; Barnard College), Montreal (Darling Foundry), Paris (CNEAI, Centre National d'art contemporain; La Galerie, Centre d'art contemporain de Noisy-le-Sec), Angers (ESAD TALM), and Los Angeles (CalArts; REDCAT; MAK Center for Art and Architecture). See https://www.artbytranslation.org/

13. The term *poiesis* is used to define the specific aesthetic dimension of an artwork in Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (1923), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 253–63.

FOLLOWING PAGE Peter Moore: Knowles at the 14th Annual Avant Garde Festival, Cambridge, MA, 1978. © Northwestern University

14. The exhibition was co-curated with Katerine Carl.

15. Reframing *The House of Dust* (2018) was a multifaceted project developed with CalArts faculty members Janet Sarbanes and Ken Ehrlich.

16. The exhibition was co-curated with Anna Milone.

17. Rudolf Schindler, "Care of the Body: Shelter or Playground," *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine*, 1926.

18. On the relationship between survival and translation, see Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 253–63.

and architecture.[14] In Southern California, where *The House of Dust* had been at the core of Knowles's pedagogy at CalArts, we worked in 2018 with students and faculty on the design and construction of a structure that served, for a semester, as a site for readings, performances, exhibitions, and discussions of Fluxus, experimental architecture, and housing issues.[15] In addition to fostering openness, collaboration, and experimentation, the recent CalArts "reframing" was meaningful in that it revealed differences between the context now and then: whereas Knowles had chosen to install the original *House of Dust* in a place remote from the modernist campus, to avoid pedagogical constraint, our group decided to position our house in a central location, to generate the interdisciplinarity engagement that characterized CalArts' founding. A year later, at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture in Los Angeles, the exhibition *Shelter or Playground: The House of Dust at the Schindler House* organized the encounter between two generative architectural projects that sheltered experimental performances and served as playgrounds for emancipatory practices and behaviors.[16] Contradicting a functionalist conception of architecture, according to which space is designed to control and regulate human activity, both the architect Rudolph Schindler and Knowles, in their respective projects, promoted the idea of living spaces that "grow with [their] inhabitants."[17] *Shelter or Playground* invited contemporary artists to extend this ethos by exploring new, open-ended ways of inhabiting linguistic and physical space.

Although these examples of Art by Translation's related projects do not convey the totality of our engagement with *The House of Dust*, they do reveal how Knowles's work guided us in developing various series of exhibitions and events, inflected by context, as a form of long-term collective and embodied research. Reflecting Walter Benjamin's ethos, which holds that *Überleben* (survival) and *Übersetzung* (translation) are connected by more than phonetic association,[18] our intention has been to return *The House of Dust* to its role as a generative form, thus reviving the principles of opening and dissemination that lie at the heart of Knowles's oeuvre.

ART/LIFE/EVENTS

Compiled by Lucia Fabio

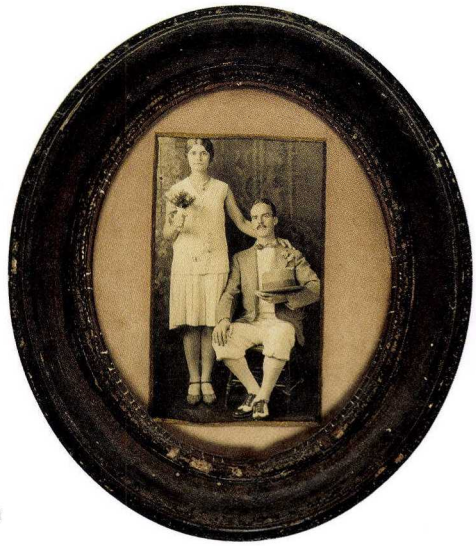
1933–56

Born in Scarsdale, New York

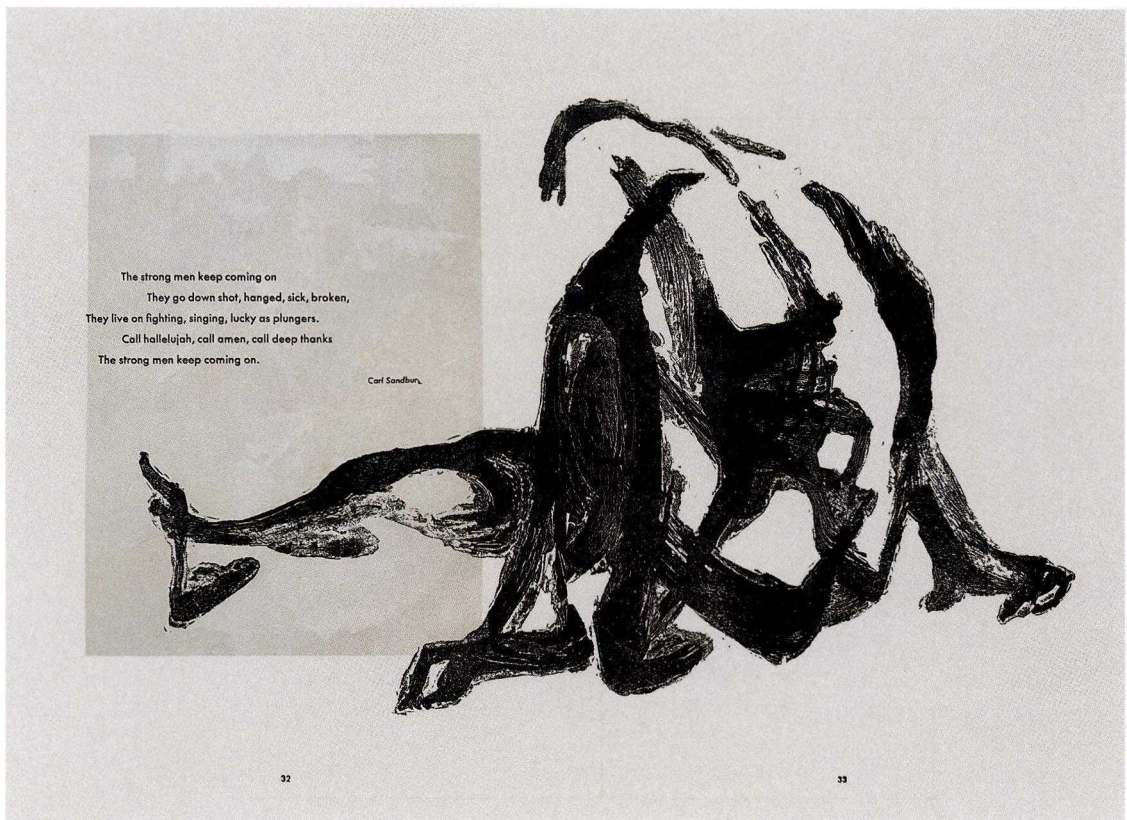
On April 29, 1933, under the sign of Taurus, Alison Knowles is born to Dr. Edwin B. Knowles and Lois Beckwith. Her father's work as an English professor at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn will inspire Knowles's lifelong love of books.

Graduates with BFA from Pratt Institute

After studying French at Middlebury College from 1952–54, Knowles completes her undergraduate studies in 1956 at Pratt Institute, where she takes art classes with Richard Linder and Adolph Gottlieb. While at Pratt, she co-designs her first book, *ADLIB*, with fellow students. After Pratt, when she enrolls in a class with Josef Albers at Syracuse University in 1958, he moves her to the basement for not adhering to his strict Bauhaus-derived methodology.



LEFT Dr. Edwin B. Knowles and Lois Beckwith Knowles, Alison's parents
ABOVE Alison Knowles, age 18 months



ADLIB (student-published, 1956)

Moves into Soho loft

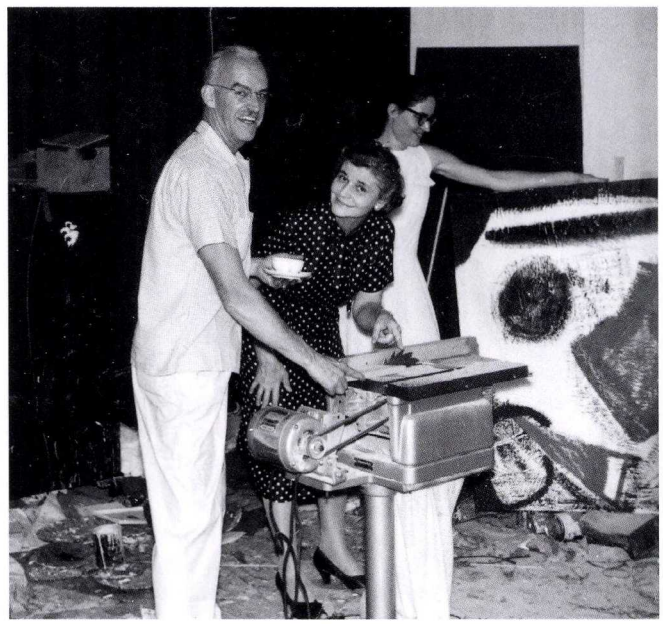
In 1956, Knowles moves into an industrial loft located in Lower Manhattan, at 423 Broadway, near Canal Street. She remains in the loft until she moves uptown to a brownstone in Chelsea in 1965. After seven years, Knowles moves back to Soho, to the loft on Spring Street where she still lives today.

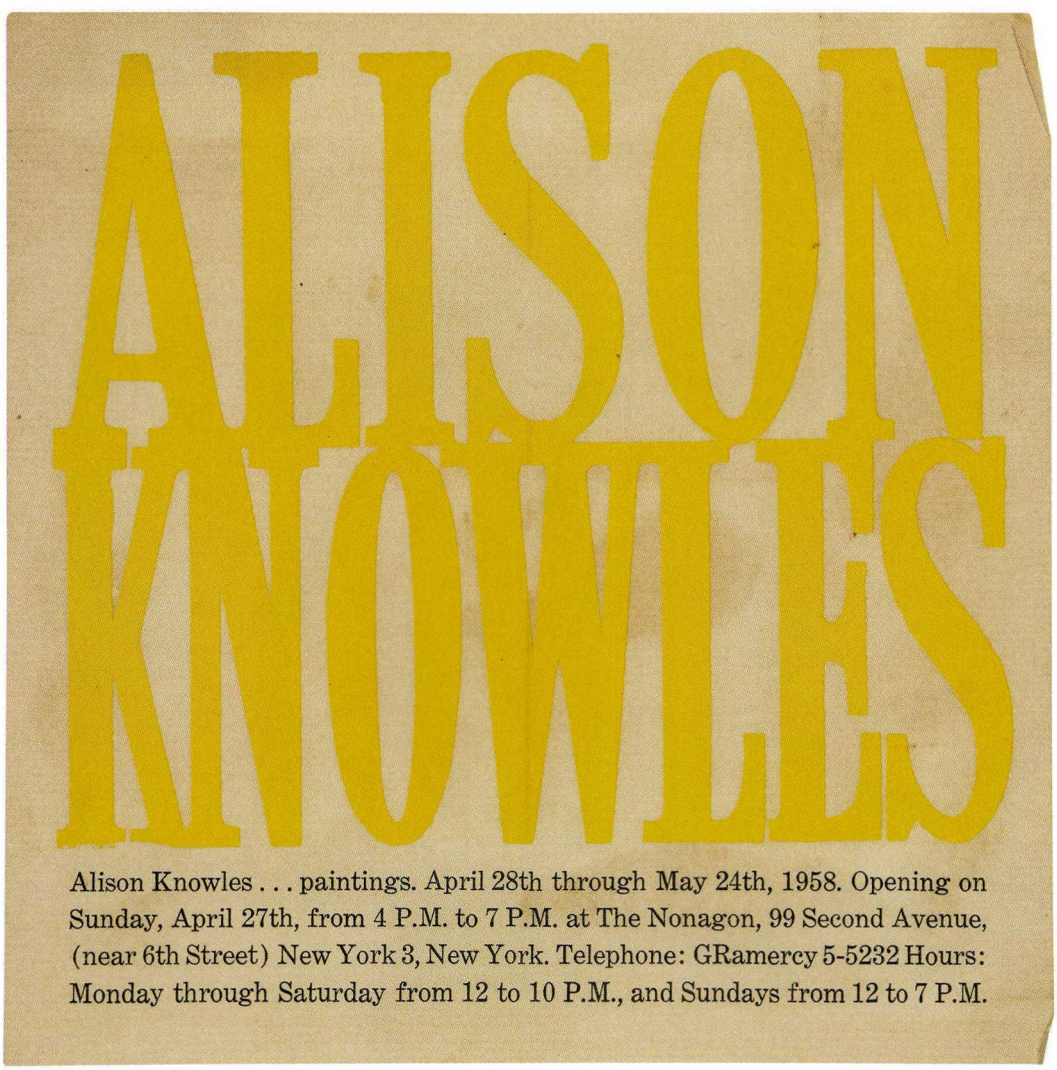
First solo exhibition

Knowles has her first solo exhibition of abstract paintings at The Nonagon gallery. The exhibition opens on April 27, 1958, at 99 Second Avenue in Manhattan.

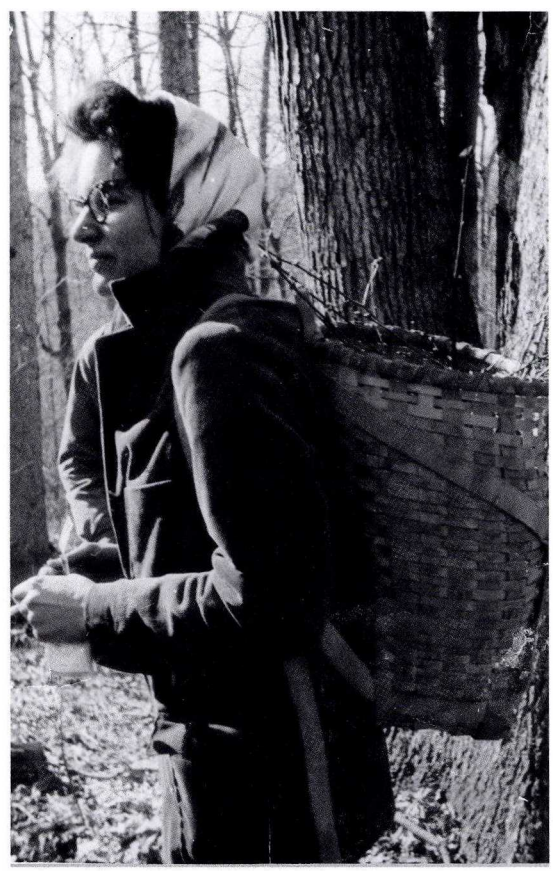
Meets artist Dick Higgins

Dorothy Podber, a friend of Ray Johnson, founder of the New York Correspondence School, introduces Dick Higgins and Knowles at a party in 1959. Shortly after, Higgins moves into Knowles's loft at Broadway and Canal. A student of John Cage's course in experimental composition at the New School for Social Research, Higgins introduces Knowles to Cage. The three hunt for mushrooms together in forays that are the beginning of Knowles's deep and lasting friendship with Cage.





TOP Knowles in her studio with her parents, c. 1958 **BOTTOM** Announcement for solo exhibition at The Nonagon, New York, 1958



TOP Knowles in her studio, New York, c. 1959–60 **BOTTOM** Knowles hunting for mushrooms, c. 1959–62

Begins combining oil painting and screenprinting on canvas

After graduating from Pratt, Knowles finds employment at various advertising companies and production houses. This work begins to influence her art as she moves away from abstract painting to begin screenprinting on canvas. Knowles uses this technique a few years prior to the Pop artists.

Marries Dick Higgins

On May 31, 1960, Knowles and Higgins marry. The pair blur the line between art and life by collaborating with friends and producing ambitious projects in their domestic space. Knowles and Higgins will divorce and remarry during the course of their unconventional relationship, while always remaining close friends and collaborators.

Manhattan School of Printing

Knowles attends the Manhattan School of Printing from 1960–61. Higgins also attends the school, which gives the two a strong foundation for their future publishing work at Something Else Press and Printed Editions.

Miss Knowles Wed To Richard Higgins

Miss Alison Knowles and Richard Carter Higgins were married yesterday afternoon in the All Souls Unitarian Church.

The Rev. Walter Kring performed the ceremony. A small reception for the family was held at the home of the bridegroom's mother, Mrs. Nicholas Doman of 1185 Park Avenue.

The bride is the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Edwin B. Knowles of New York. Mr. Higgins is the son also of Carter Chapin Higgins of Worcester, Mass.

Mrs. Higgins, a painter, attended Middlebury College and graduated from Pratt Institute, where her father is Dean of the School of General Studies.

Her husband is an alumnus of St. Paul's School in Concord, N. H., and attended Yale University. He will be graduated today from Columbia University. A writer, he is known professionally as Dick Higgins.

Mr. Higgins is a grandson of Mason Huntington Bigelow of New York and the late Mrs. Elisabeth MacDonald Bigelow and of Mr. and Mrs. John Woodman Higgins of Worcester. The bride is a granddaughter of Mrs. Frank Beckwith of Lancaster, Pa., and the late Mr. Beckwith.

TOP Wedding announcement, *New York Times*, June 1, 1960 BOTTOM Knowles on her wedding day, New York, May 31, 1960

Alison,

No opening -

No closing -

Nothing.

Ray

* *

Alison Higgins

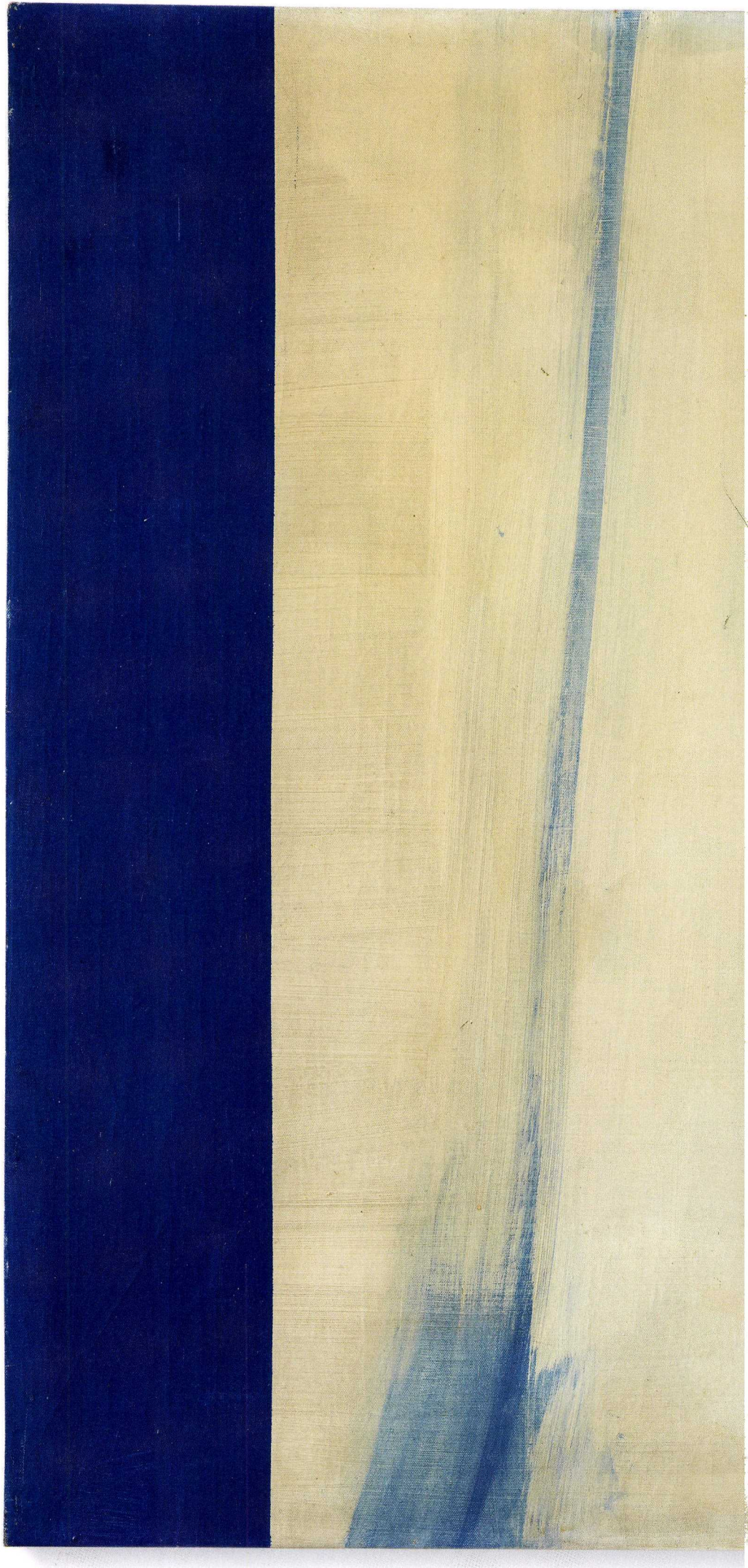
423 Broadway

New York City, N.Y.

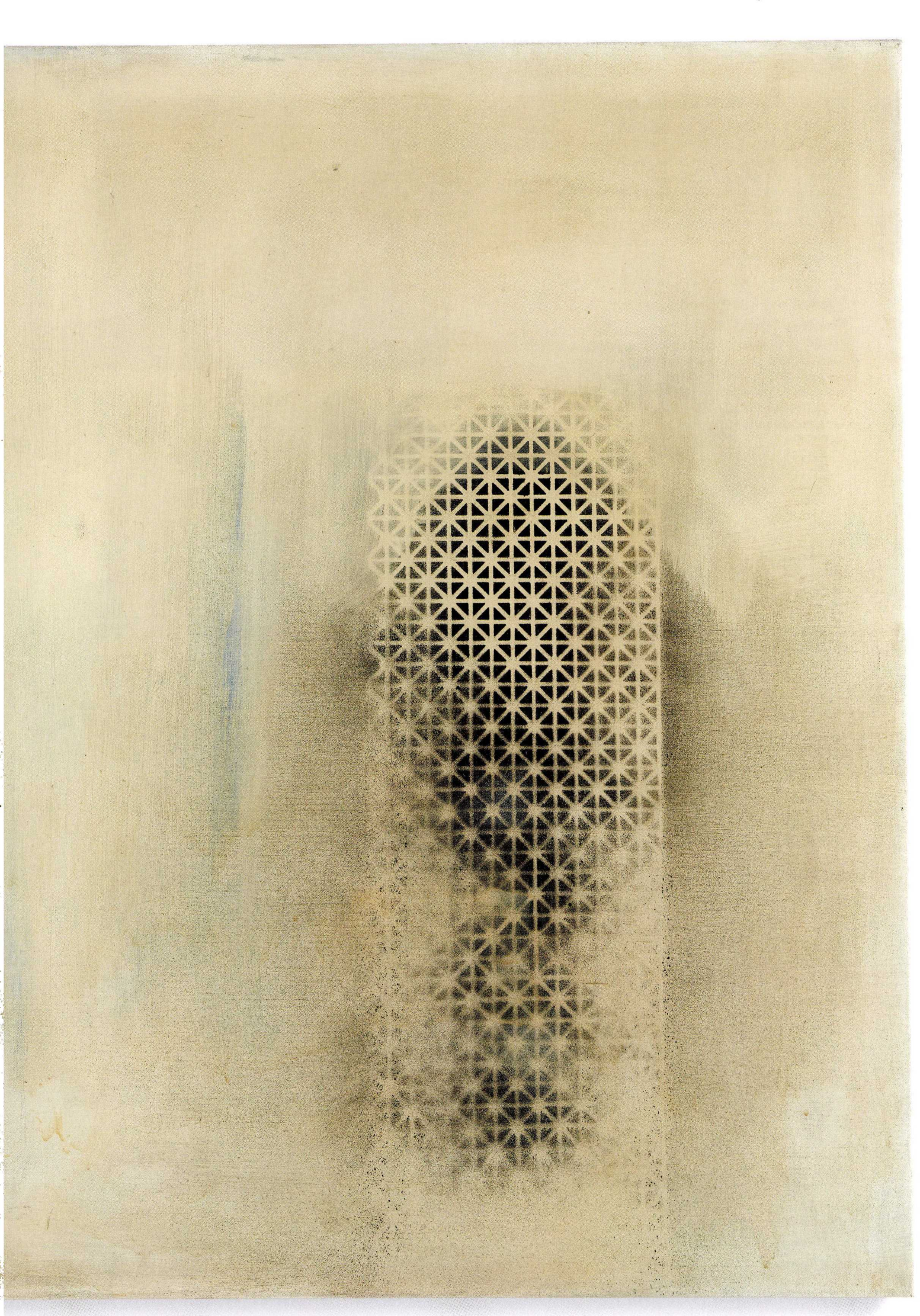
Mail art from Knowles's friend Ray Johnson, 1960

CHARLESTON
EXTRA
Passed unanimously at
UNION
DISSOLVED
TAXIS
BUSSES
CIRCUS
CIRCUS

FACING *Taxis and Busses*, c. 1959–60; oil and screenprint on canvas **ABOVE** George Brecht and Knowles: *Room*, c. 1960; screenprint on canvas



Untitled, c. 1960–61; oil and screenprint on canvas

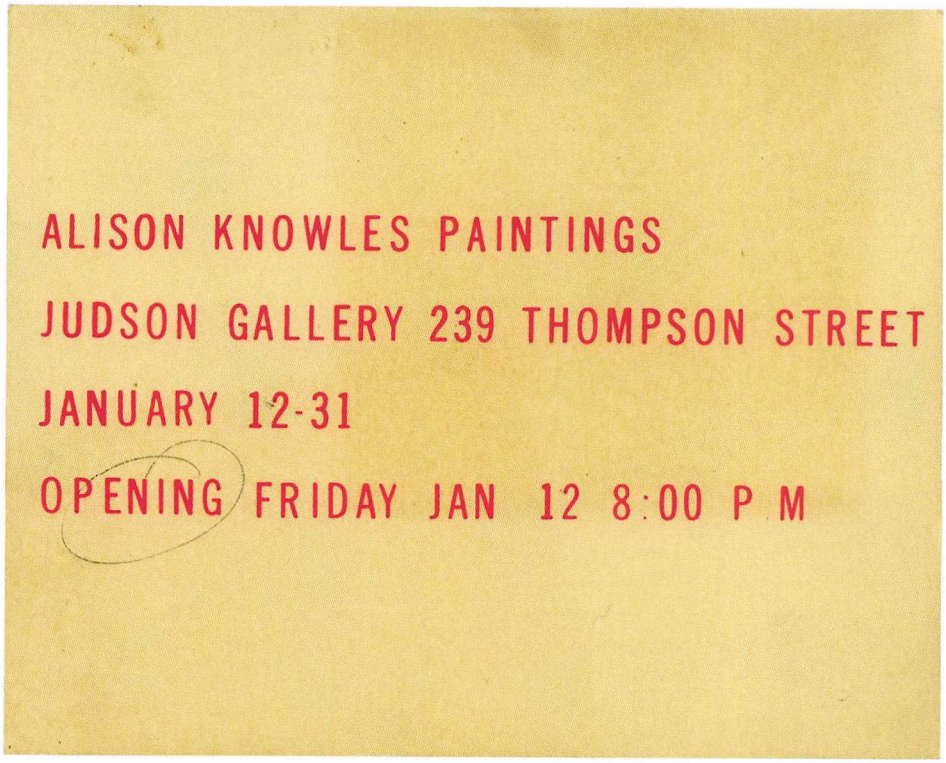


Solo exhibition at Judson Gallery, New York

Knowles's Judson exhibition in 1962 includes her screenprinted paintings on canvas. After the exhibition, she gives away all the unsold works. Later, following her involvement in the early Fluxus festivals, she will intentionally destroy her early paintings by burning them. The only two that survive are *Taxis and Busses* and *Untitled* (p. 86 and pp. 88–89).

Performs at European Fluxus Festivals

As the only woman among the founding members of Fluxus, Knowles tours Europe. She performs alongside George Brecht, George Maciunas, Benjamin Patterson, La Monte Young, and others in London, Wiesbaden, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Paris, Amsterdam, and Madrid.



TOP Knowles and others performing Philip Corner's *Piano Activities* at *Fluxus Internationale Festpiele Neuester Musik*, Städtischen Museum Wiesbaden, Germany, September 1, 1962 **MIDDLE** Nam June Paik, Knowles, Emmett Williams, George Maciunas, and Benjamin Patterson performing Maciunas's In *Memoriam to Adriano Olivetti, Version 1 Poem*, Städtisches Museum Wiesbaden, September 8, 1962 **BOTTOM** Announcement for Knowles's exhibition at Judson Gallery, New York, 1962

NIKOLAI KIRKE

23. og 24. samt 26., 27. og 28. november 1962 kl. 20

samt

ALLÉ SCENEN

Søndag den 25. november 1962 kl. 15

FLUXUS

MUSIK OG ANTI-MUSIK
DET INSTRUMENTALE TEATER

6 PRO- ET CONTRAGRAMMER

Medvirkende:

Nam June	**Paik**
Dick	**Higgins**
Alison	**Knowles**
Emmett	**Williams**
Arthur	**Køpcke**
Albert	**Mertz**
Wolf	**Vostell**
Robert	**Filliou**
George	**Maciunas**
Jørgen	**Friisholm**
Musica	**Vitalis**
med	flere

Arr. af: Det Unge Tonekunstnerselskab - Galerie Køpcke - Kunstbiblioteket, Nikolai Kirke

---

Entré 4 kr. - Abonnement 15 kr. Billetsalg hos Wilhelm Hansen, Gothersgade 9, Central 5457
samt ved indgangen. Billetsalg til søndag den 25. november: Allé scenen, Central 1490

A. W. Henningsens Plakattryk, Sølvgade 32, K.

Poster for Fluxus Festival at Nikolai Kirke, Copenhagen, 1962

Knowles and others performing *Proposition #2: Make a Salad* at the *Festival of Misfits*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1962

Proposition

Make a salad.

Premieres October 21, 1962, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. The performance becomes known as *Proposition #2: Make a Salad*, or simply *Make a Salad.*

Serenade for Alison

At Galerie Monet, Amsterdam, in 1962, Knowles performs *Serenade for Alison*, a score written by Nam June Paik. Aware that she would be instructed to remove her undergarments, Knowles wears dozens of extra pairs of underwear, in addition to hanging radios from her belt. In 1964, she reciprocates by writing *Composition for Paik*, which calls for the artist to sit on a platform for the duration of the performance.

ABOVE Knowles performing Nam June Paik's *Serenade for Alison* at *Parallel Performances of New Music*, Galerie Monet, Amsterdam, October 5, 1962 **FOLLOWING SPREAD** Knowles, Arthur Køpke, Emmett Williams, Dick Higgins, and George Maciunas performing *Nivea Cream Piece—for Oscar Williams* at *Fluxus Musik og Anti-Musik, Det Instrumentale Teater*, Nikolai Kirke, Copenhagen, 1962

Nivea Cream Piece—for Oscar Williams

First performer comes on stage with a bottle of hand cream, labeled "Nivea Cream" if none is available. He pours the cream onto his hands, and massages them in front of the microphone. Other performers enter, one by one, and do the same thing. Then they join together in front of the microphone to make a mass of massaging hands. They leave in the reverse of the order they entered, on a signal from the first performer.

Premieres at the Fluxus Festival on November 25, 1962, at Allé Scenen Theater, Copenhagen. This work, which comes to be referred to as simply *Nivea Cream Piece*, is dedicated to the artist Oscar (Emmett) Williams. Knowles later creates *Variation #1 on Nivea Cream Piece*, for which participants lather the lotion over their arms and face.

Street Piece

Make something in the street and give it away.

Knowles writes the score for *Street Piece* in 1962 and premiers the work in August 1963. *Color Music #2* and *Printing Piece* are variations on this piece.

Piece for Any Number of Vocalists

Each thinks beforehand of a song, and, on a signal from the conductor, sings it through.

Written in 1962, *Piece for Any Number of Vocalists* premieres on May 11, 1963, at Hardware Poets' Theater, New York, during the Yam Festival, organized by George Brecht and Robert Watts. This work is also known as *Song of Your Choice.*

Celebration Red

Celebrate each red thing.

This 1962 score marks the beginning of Knowles's observations on the color red and is the precursor to *Homage to Each Red Thing* (1994).

Shoes of Your Choice

A member of the audience is invited to come forward to a microphone if one is available and describe a pair of shoes, the ones he is wearing or another pair. He is encouraged to tell where he got them, the size, the color, why he likes them, etc.

Premieres April 6th at the Old Gymnasium of Douglass College, New Brunswick, New Jersey. This score is the first in a long line of Knowles's works about shoes.

First performs Shuffle

The performer or the performers shuffle into the performance area and away from it, above, behind, around, or through the audience. They perform as a group or solo: but quietly.

Though *Shuffle* is dated 1961 in the publication *by Alison Knowles*, it premieres in August 1963 at the National Association of Chemists and Perfumers in New York, at the Advertisers' Club.

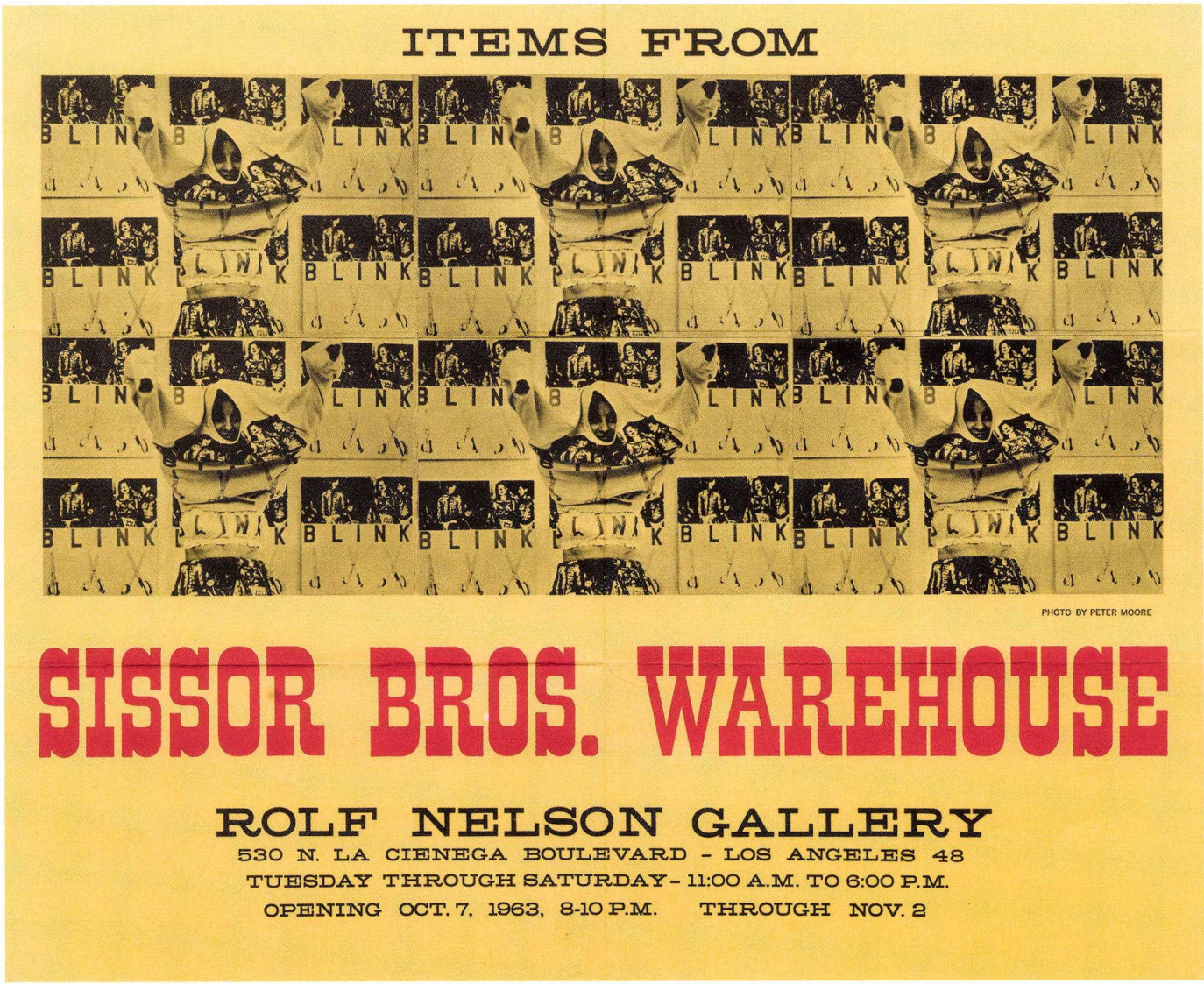
Collaborates on Sissor Bros. Warehouse's BLINK exhibition

Knowles, George Brecht, and Robert Watts use the pseudonym Sissor Bros. Warehouse for their collaborative exhibition at Rolf Nelson Gallery in Los Angeles. Each artist contributes an image: Watts, a Guinean dance; Brecht, the word *BLINK*; and Knowles, three pairs of scissors. Using a Cagean chance operation to randomly arrange them, Knowles screenprints the three images onto canvases as well as everyday objects. These objects are auctioned off starting at 99 cents—a biting critique of the hyper-commodification of Pop art.

Peter Moore; Robert Watts, Lette Eisenhauer, Knowles, and George Brecht at *BLINK* photo shoot, New York, 1963; black-and-white photograph.
© Northwestern University

Sissor Bros. Warehouse: *BLINK*, 1963; screenprint and synthetic polymer on canvas

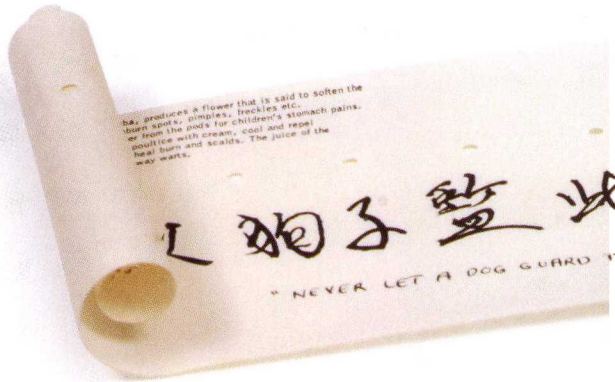
BLINK



FACING Peter Moore: Lette Eisenhauer modeling apparel at *BLINK* photo shoot, New York, 1963; color photograph. © Northwestern University **ABOVE** Sissor Bros. Warehouse: Poster for exhibition at Rolf Nelson Gallery, Los Angeles, 1963; color offset lithograph

Bean Rolls

Knowles's first major work about beans, *Bean Rolls* is a "canned book" of real beans and scrolls printed with various information about beans that Knowles collected at the New York Public Library. George Maciunas includes *Bean Rolls* in *Fluxkit* (1965), the second box of multiples he produces. Knowles returns to this initial research throughout her career as she continues to create work about and with beans.



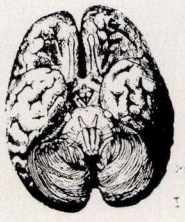
FACING AND FOLLOWING SPREAD *Bean Rolls*, 1963–64, tin can, beans, and labeled paper rolls with rubber bands

AN ALISON KNOWLES
Bean
Rolls
DIRECT FROM
THE GARDENS
FAMOUS SONG OF THE 1930s, ASSOCIATED WITH ZARAH LEANDER
Ganz Ernsthaft
Ich bean ein Star - , ein Kino- star - ,
Ta ta ta ta ta ta -
etc

Pollination in the bean plant was studied extensively by Charles Darwin and goes like this:
The end of the style which is coiled, has a brush of hairs on which pollen collects, just beyond this is the stigma. A bee, visiting the flowers, removes the nectar; In doing so its proboscis comes into contact first with the receptive stigma effecting cross polination; afterwards its proboscis touches the stylar brush and fresh pollen is thus dusted onto the insect.

"När du ser blommor på sreen och hägg, den första bönen i jorden lägg."

Johanna Lundström of Västa Vemgåker, Södermanland.



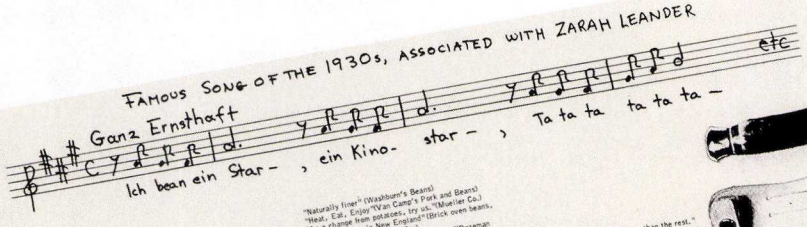
To 5 pounds of red kidney beans add several gallons of water and allow to sit for a few days. Then simmer until the beans are soft, adding another gallon while cooking , of fresh water. Strain off into crock.
Now add fruits and flowers to your taste; a handful of rose petals, a handful of marigolds, a box of raisins, 5 oranges, some lemons, a dozen peaches. Taste.
Now add spices lightly: some cloves, nutmeg and cinnamon and sweeten to your taste with honey. Allow all this to ferment for three weeks in a covered crock. When "done", bottle and cork. Sometimes it's better a year later.

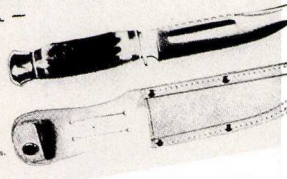
A Darius Sippern recollection:
"I was a little once with James Dean. In this film his mother was a mother I seem once with James Dean. In this film his mother was a mother. So this boy James Dean makes money so he can realize his wish to playing boy James Dean makes money so he can realize his wish to playing boy James Dean makes money so he can realize his wish to Dear I talk down and says, "I am in the beans now."

Bury a roasted bean to prevent toothache and snake
If it sprouts one of the other will appear.

L. L. Bean, Inc. Freeport, Me.

FAMOUS SONG OF THE 1930s, ASSOCIATED WITH ZARAH LEANDER





"Naturally finer" (Washburn's Beans)
"Heat, Eat, Enjoy "(Van Camp's Pork and Beans)
"As a change from potatoes, try us. "(Mueller Co.)
"As they eat'em in New England" (Brick oven beans, Burnham and Morrill Co.)
"Some like 'em big, some like 'em little "(Bozeman Pea Canning Co.)
"Wash and bathe in running water."(Speakman Co.)
"It's extra B one content makes one be extra content" (Sherry Wheat hearts Inc.)
"All out aid for a hungry man "(Campbells)

"As good as the best and better than the rest."
We specialize in white kidneys and yellow eyes.
Rowe & Kennedy
Canaseraga, new york
from the Bean-Bag and Pea Journal

The garden pea, Vicia faba, produces a flower that is said to soften the skin, freeing it from sunburn spots, pimples, freckles etc.
Many people distill a water from the pods for children's stomach pains.
The leaves beaten into a poultice with cream, cool and repel inflammatory tumors, and heal burn and scalds. The juice of the bean leaf is said to take away warts.

莫以狗子監此麴鼓

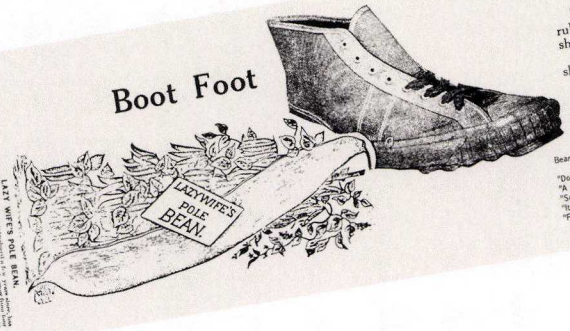
"NEVER LET A DOG GUARD THE BEAN PASTE"
CALIGRAPHY BY AYO
(VERSION #1)

Bean's Wading Sneaker

Has a canvas upper in lace-to-toe pattern as shown. Cleated rubber sole for non-slip protection. Screened eyelets as shown, which let water go out but stop sand from coming in.
We recommend these for wear with our Plastic Waders shown above.
Height 6". Color, Grass Green.
Sizes 6 to 13. Whole sizes only.
Price, $7.50 postpaid.

Bean and some other slogans
"Down East Feast" (B & M Baked Beans)
"A Feast for the Least " (Van Camp's Pork and Beans)
"See it and Forget it " (Walker and Pratz Mfg. Co.)
"It's Uncanny" (Norge Leak Soup)
"Flavor baked in Labor baked out" (Heinz Baked Beans)

Boot Foot



NEW EARLY GOLDEN CLUSTER WAX POLE BEAN.

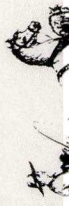
LAZY WIFE'S POLE BEAN

Buffalo bean
In Lewis and Clark's westward journey in 1804, when in the region of South Dakota, they exchanged gifts with the Indians, they record among the things received a quantity of a large, rich bean which grew wild and was collected by mice. The Indians hunted for these deposits, collected the beans and cooked them as a delicacy. The mice referred to were actually prairie dogs, then practically unknown, and the bean is the Buffalo.

Ancient Greek remedy against ghosts:
spit beans at them.

In Japan beans were used to dispel evil spirits, and were scattered around the house on the last day of winter.

BEAN AND CLOVER HARVESTERS. 2



Bean facts and sayings

"Never set out in a quest for gold without your quota of beans."
"The bulk of the working classes would starve without beans."
"Beans mean savages. Beans mean civilization."
"Beans are best and this is why.
Cheapest protein you can buy."

莫以狗子監此麴鼓

"NEVER LET A DOG GUARD THE BEAN PASTE"
CALIGRAPHY BY AYO
(VERSION #2)

Hungarian Wax Beans
To half a cup of white sauce add lots of fresh dill and a little sugar and vinegar. Marinate the wax beans when cooked in this mixture. Store in Refrigerator, serve chilled. Improves with time.

the Chinese symbol of good luck is the bean

Haricot beurre nain très hâtif.
Béd. au huitième.

Beans are in flower, and this will account for their being so stiffly, old French saying

g Bean States

- 4,292,000 .....
- 4,281,000 .....
,455,000 .....
- 1,809,000 ....
- 1,292,000 ...
- 1,118,000 ...
ton - 664,000 ..
g - 636,000 ..
a - 217,000 .
exico - 176,000 .

500,000 bags of dry edible beans.
g weighs 100 pounds.

Planting
Early plowing is essential to best results with beans. A large quantity of moisture is held in the subsoil and becomes available to the growing bean later in the season. Weeds are also given a chance to germinate and to be killed before planting, so the after-tillage of the crop is less expensive. Probably no one thing aids the yield of beans to bean growers as late and hasty listing of the land. When planting beans figure 1/2 bushel per acre. Beans are usually grown in drills. The distance between rows varies from 24 to 32 inches.

In New York, kidneys are usually planted in the last half of May while the pea and medium varieties should be planted June 5-20. The marrows and yellow-eyes come intermediately. Beans planted too early, in ground too cold or wet don't get an even start. This shows up in flavor and vigor of the whole plant later on, and an uneven ripening at harvest time.

a reference to blessed beans in Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy.
"Then breviaries, bullies, hallowed beanes, exorcisms, pictures, curious crosses, fables and babies."
The meal of the kidney bean was so much liked in certain parts of Scotland, that farm servants would not take a place unless their masters agreed to give them a fixed quantity as wages.

The bean plant much harm but not too much to scorn.

The word was a term of contempt applied to nomads and shepherds who were hated and who depended on beans to feed their flocks.

The Bean moth lives as larvae inside the jumping bean. Wagers are decided by whose bean jumps out of the circle.

"The steamship Ferncliff en route from Madagascar with a load of lima beans, went aground in the Red Sea early in April."

Value of total dry edible bean exports in millions of dollars, 1958-1961.

	dried beans	soy beans	$total
1958 -	15.6	213.8	229.4
1959 -	26.6	238.3	264.9
1960 -	29.8	297.9	329.7
1961 -	17.6	344.4	362.0

Bean superstitions

Pythagoras and Hippocrates conceived somehow that beans were bad for the eye-sight.

Black flower on a bean plant is a prophetic sign that maladies will ensue.

Pythagoras believed that beans contained the spirits of the dead.

Hippocrates trembled for his patients when beans were in blossom.

Chinese bean sprouts can be grown in a dish in the kitchen in three to five days. No soil, sunshine or chemicals are necessary.

The Strider bean was developed in 1945. It is a cross between the Stringless Refugee Wax and the Princess of Artois.

s Sawback Knife

est high carbon steel. Weight 4¾ ounces. shed blade, which runs through stag handle, noh as shown.
o sawback is extra good for scaling fish and limbs for building fire.
ade leather sheath with snap button safety own. Large belt loop that will accommodate t.

Price, $2.70 postpaid.

The lima bean was first discovered in the vicinity of Lima, Peru.

Dwarf Limas:

Peerless
Fordhook 242
Fordhook
Baby Potatoe
Improved Bush
Henderson Bush*
*suitable for quick freezing.

The cowpea (vigna sinensis) cultivated in Georgia and all through the south. This bean is edible, and much like the pea. Also used for forage.

The lowland islanders blest the beans when they plant, for the bean is also the garden beans' flower and it is then that the garden beans are blessed.

Twelfth Night.
In this play, the King of the company may have been appointed by his finding the bean in his piece of cake. The Queen found the pea in hers.

A bean cake in China is made of beans deprived of oil and pressed into shape. A bean cake is used for both fertilizer and food.

Asiatic beans
Adzuki- Japan, Manchuria, China, Korea.
Rice bean- China, India, Japan, the Phillipines.
Mung- All Asia
Urd and Moth- India

From the San Francisco News Call Bulletin - Feb. 18 1964
"On the Universal birthday of mankind, it's best to remain at home and eat red beans, seven for a man and fourteen for a woman. This will protect against sickness for the remainder of the year."

Anchovy Egg plant looked at the peas as an unclean food.

lowing quote is from the key speech delivered
nown bean-bigot at the St. Louis conference of

er thing. There have been imported into the country
ntities of foreign beans, some good, some bad. Your
tection against the bad foreign sacked beans is to buy
n grown beans, guaranteed by American firms; sold by
ible brokers whom you have reason to believe in...
leave the thought with you then, and it is a sincere
tion, that if you buy American grown goods guaranteed
erican shippers, your difficulties in regard to the bean
ess will be eliminated."

The kidney, phaseolus vulgaris was once held to be an excellent diuretic, "to cleanse the kidneys and ureters of gravel and fabulous concretions."

Climbing beans climb by the twining action of the main stalk around poles or branches of trees or other plants. Pea plants cling to their support with curling green threads at the ends of their leaves.

The varieties of dry beans resistant to common bean mosaic fall into several classes. The resistant varieties of Pea beans are Robust and Michelite. Some of the best resistant strains of Great Northern are U.I.21 no. 15, U.I. no. 59, U.I. no. 81, U.I. no. 123, and Montana N.III. Very recently three mosaic-resistant strains of Pintos have been released. These are U.I. no. 72, U.I. no. 78, and U.I. no. III. Many of the varieties that are resistant to the common mosaic virus are tolerant to the variant strains of it.

BLACK-EYED WAX BUSH BEAN.

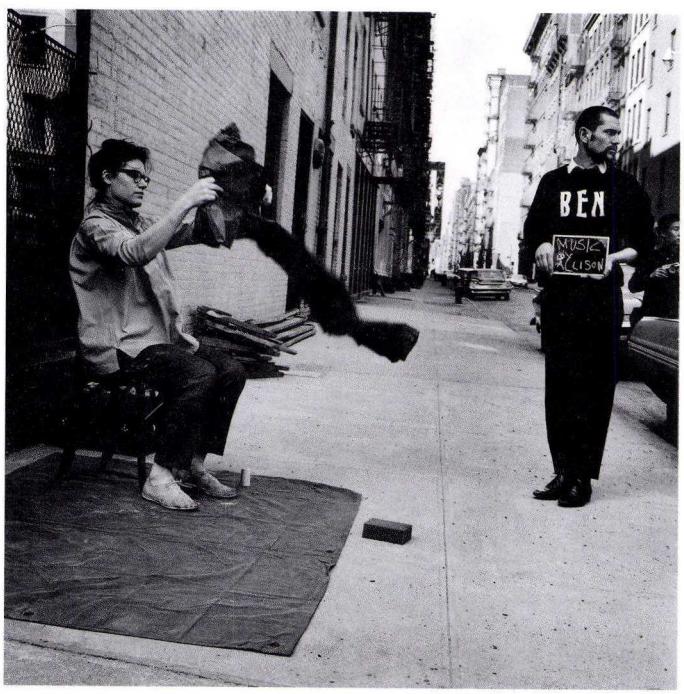
NATURAL SIZE.

Something Else Press

When Dick Higgins wants to name his new printing venture Shirtsleeve Press, Knowles suggests that he call it "something else," and he does. After Something Else Press is founded, Knowles becomes its special editor from 1964–70. The avant-garde press publishes books by John Cage, Marshall McLuhan, Gertrude Stein, and others until it files for bankruptcy in 1974.

Participates in Fluxus events in New York

Knowles and fellow Fluxus artists perform at multiple spaces including the Fluxhall, located at 359 Canal Street in Soho, which hosts *Fully Guaranteed 12 Fluxus Concerts* from early March to late May.



ABOVE Poster for *Fully Guaranteed 12 Fluxus Concerts*, 1964; double-sided offset lithograph with screenprint **TOP LEFT** Knowles and Ben Vautier performing *Music by Alison* as part of *Fully Guaranteed 12 Fluxus Concerts*, New York, May 23, 1964 **BOTTOM LEFT** George Maciunas: Knowles and Vautier performing Takehisha Kosugi's *Anima I* as part of *Fully Guaranteed 12 Fluxus Concerts*, New York, May 1964

George Maciunas: Poster for *Fully Guaranteed 12 Fluxus Concerts*: Fluxhall, New York

Gives birth to twin daughters

Knowles and Dick Higgins's daughters, Jessica and Hannah B Higgins, are born on August 21, 1964, in New York.

Variation #1 on Proposition

Make a Soup.

A variation of *Make a Salad* premieres on November 9, 1964, at Café au Go-Go in New York. The variation is not performed as often as its predecessor because of the time it takes to cook soup in front of an audience.

Simultaneous Bean Readings

Using the Alison Knowles Bean Rolls and six to eight performers, unroll the rolls over the audience and start reading aloud. Have the audience join in. A single performer goes among the other performers with scissors, cutting out large sections of the rolls. This performer determines the length of the performance.

Premiers November 16, 1964, at Café au Go-Go, New York.

Newspaper Music

Performers who speak at least five different languages use newspapers or books in the different languages as scores. They read the texts in time and volume according to the instructions of a composer. (Can go from very soft to extremely loud and stop, soft-loud-soft again, varied tempos, etc.)

Knowles frequently conducts the 1965 score *Newspaper Music*, giving hand instructions to modulate the volume and pace of the reading.

Wounded Furniture

This piece uses an old piece of furniture in bad shape. Destroy it further, if you like. Bandage it up with gauze and adhesive. Spray red paint on the wounded joints. Effective lighting helps. This activity may be performed with one or more performers, and simultaneously with other events.

Premiers July 19, 1965, at Café au Go-Go, New York.

Birth announcement for Jessica and Hannah B Higgins, 1964

TOP Knowles performing *Newspaper Music* with Dick Higgins, Dr. E. B. Knowles, Rene Block, and Hans Jäg Meyer at Stuttgart Fluxus Festival, Amsterdam, 1966 **BOTTOM** Peter Moore: Knowles and Higgins performing *Variation #1 on Proposition* at Café a Go-Go, New York, 1964; black-and-white photograph.
© Northwestern University

Publishes by Alison Knowles

As part of its Great Bear Pamphlet series, Something Else Press releases *by Alison Knowles* (1965), the first book-length collection of Knowles's early event scores.

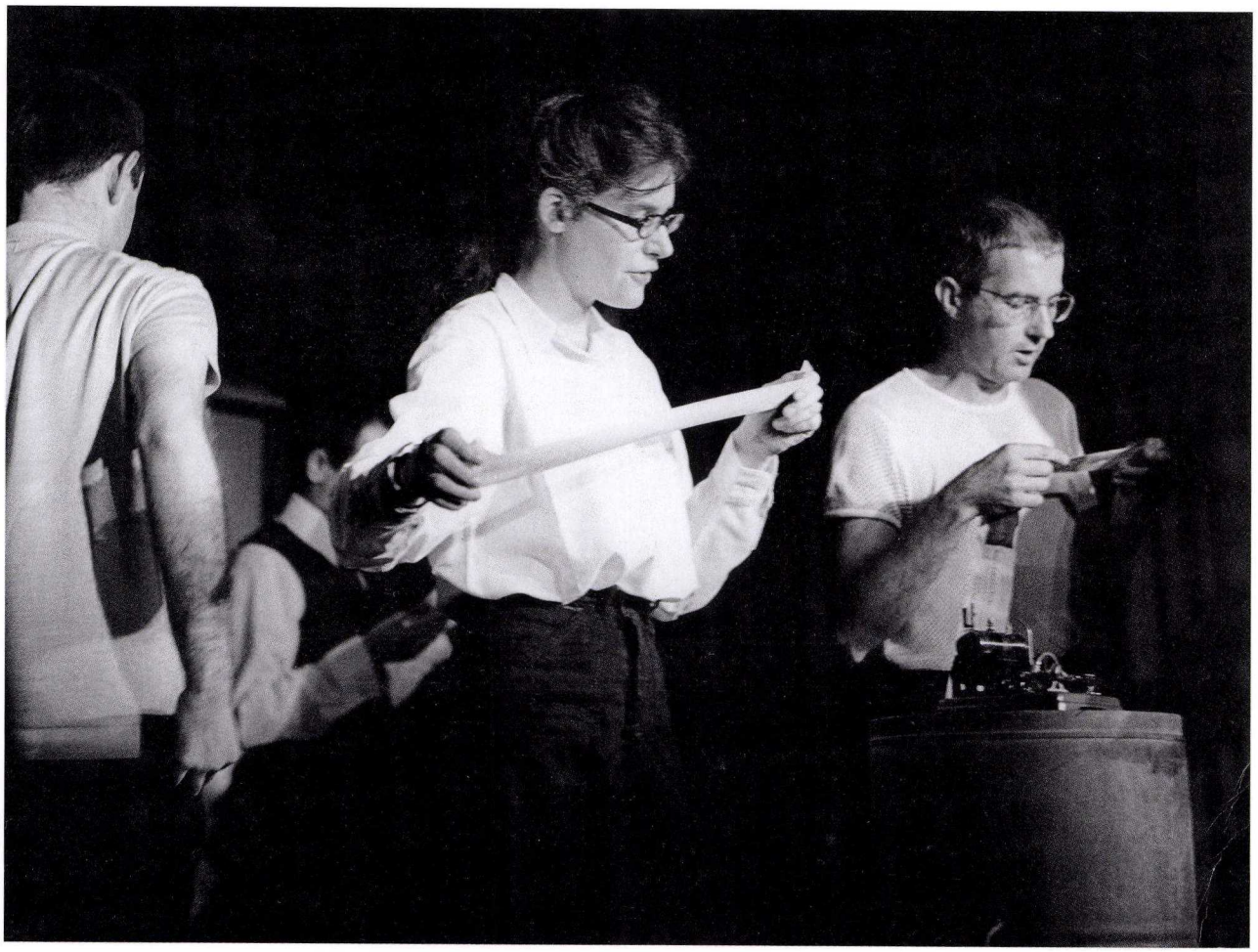
Performs in Madrid

In November 1966, the group of experimental artists and composers known as the Zaj group invite Knowles to the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura to perform *Simultaneous Bean Readings* and *Shoes of Your Choice* at *Events y New Music*.

Pick a number from 1-10
Pick a day of the week
Pick a color

Act on it

ALISON KNOWLES 1966



ABOVE *Act on It*, 1966; score printed on postcard **BELOW** Knowles performing *Simultaneous Bean Readings* with scrolls from *Bean Rolls*, Madrid, 1966

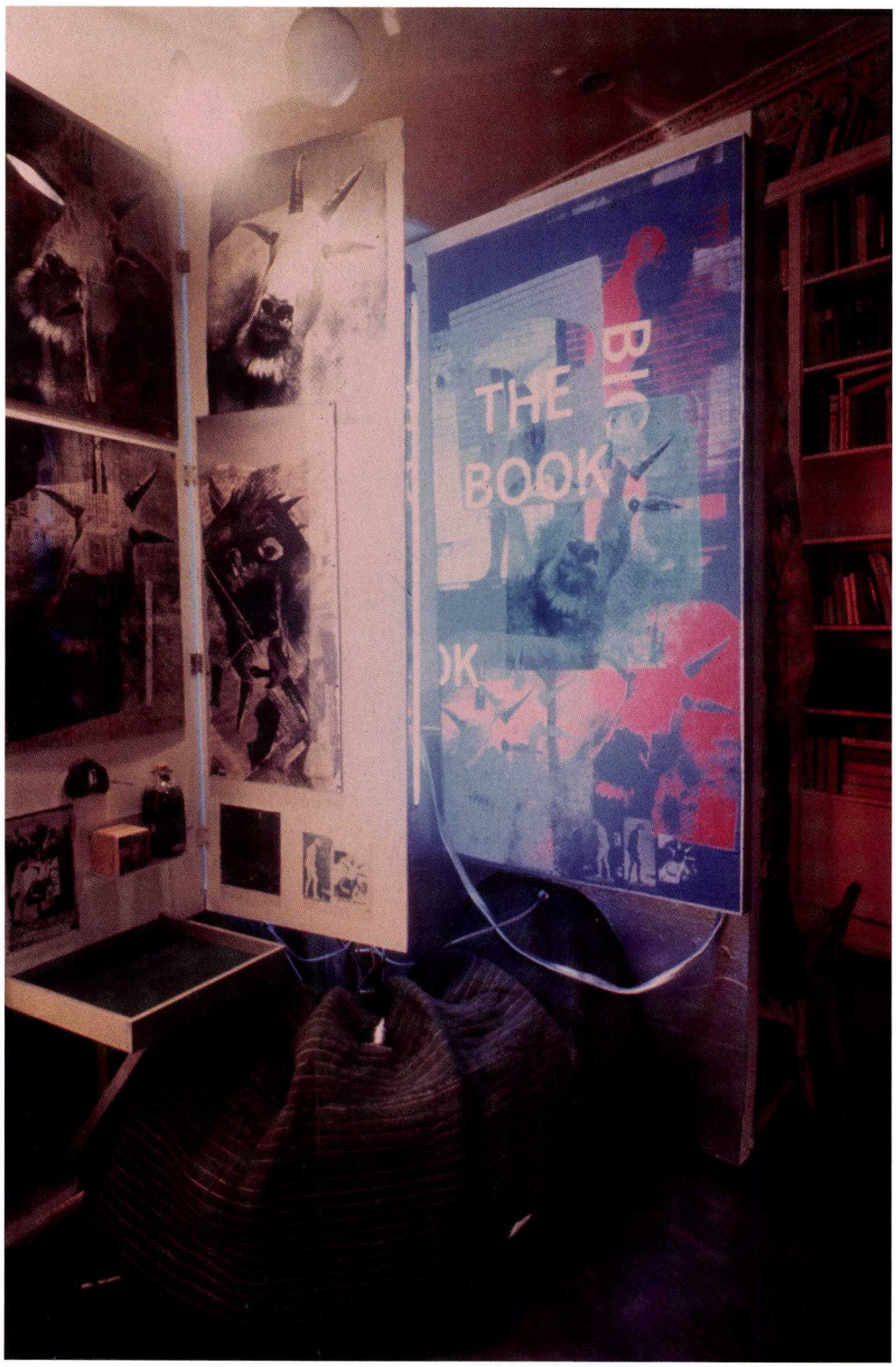
by
Alison
Knowles

1965
A Great Bear Pamphlet
New York

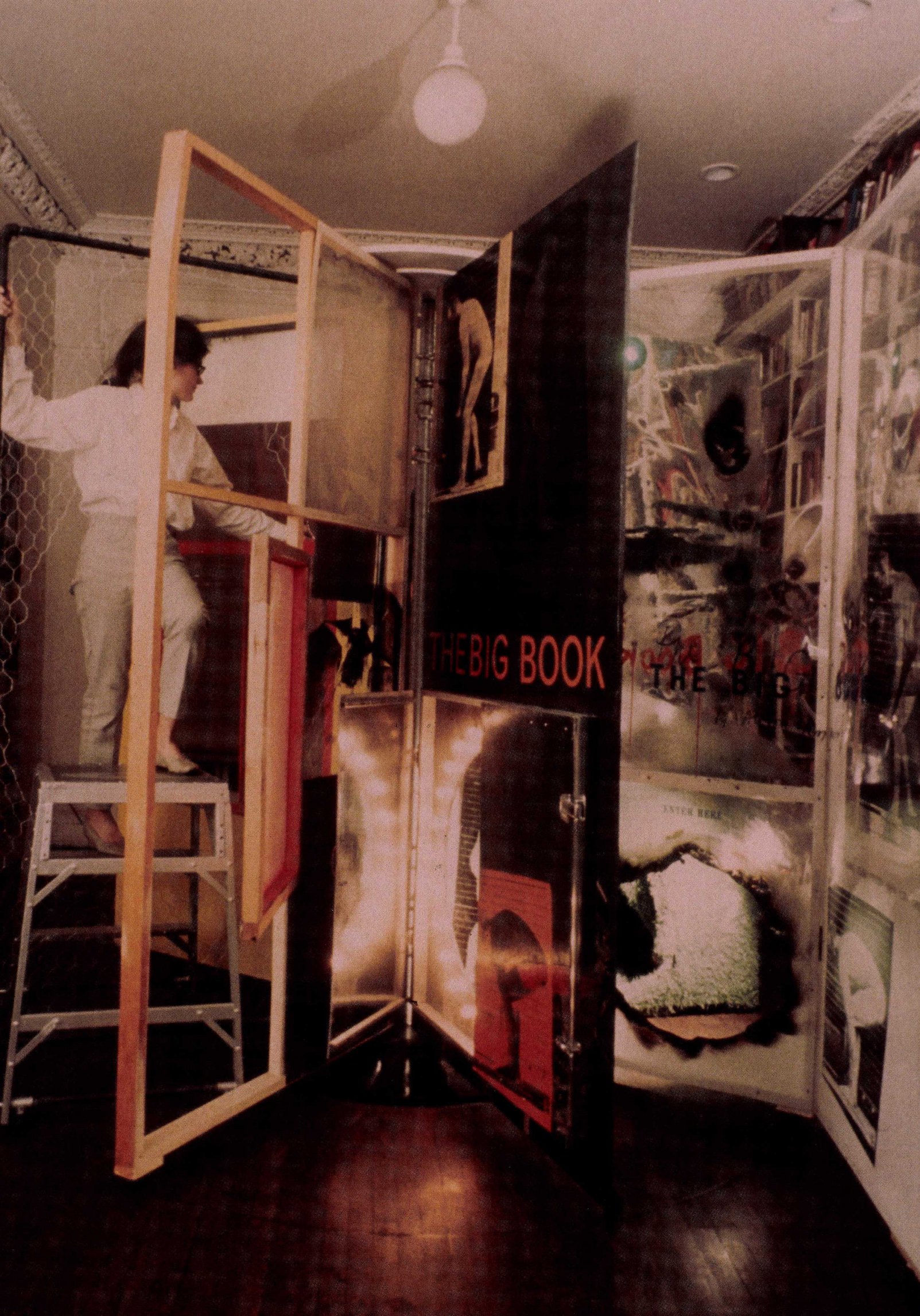
by Alison Knowles (Something Else Press, 1965)

The Big Book

Knowles premiers *The Big Book*, a "transvironment" comprised of eight-foot-tall, walk-through "pages" embedded with images and objects at Something Else Gallery, New York. After traveling to Toronto and Chicago (1967) and Frankfurt and San Diego (1968), *The Big Book* falls apart at the Jewish Museum in New York (1969).

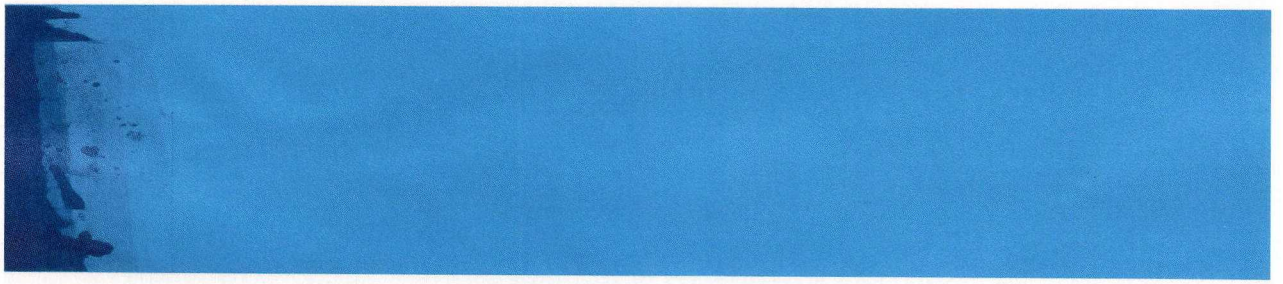


ABOVE, FACING, AND FOLLOWING SPREAD
Peter Moore: Installation views, *The Big Book*, Something Else Gallery, New York, 1966; color photographs.
© Northwestern University


THEBIG BOOK

G BOOK

SOMETHING ELSE PRESS



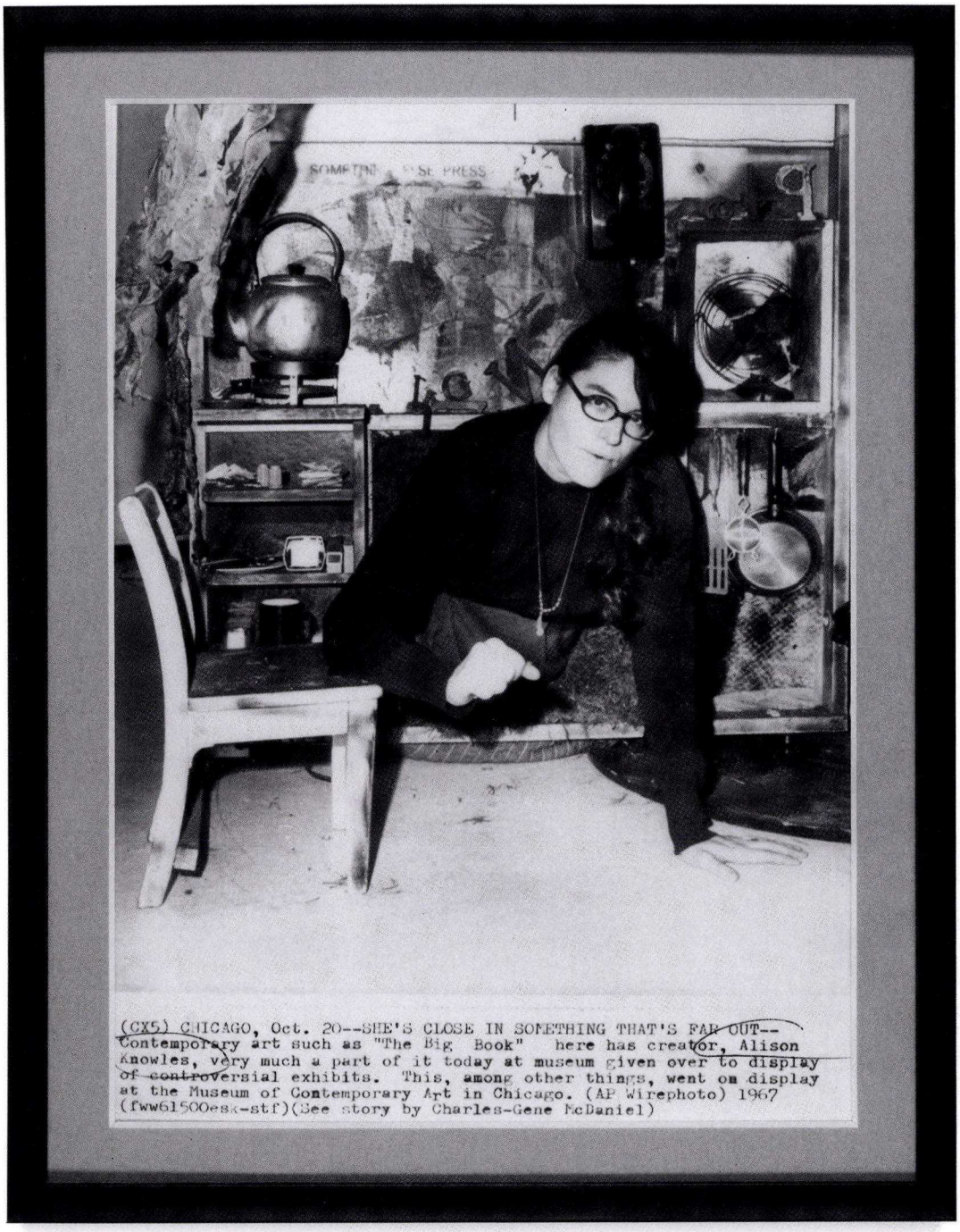
WHITE STRIPES FOR JOHN CAGE BY ALISON KNOWLES

White Stripes for John Cage, 1967, printed 1968; offset lithograph, edition of 1000 published by ED 912, Milan

1967

The Big Book at MCA Chicago

The Big Book travels to Chicago for the Museum of Contemporary Art's inaugural exhibition, *Pictures to be Read/Poetry to be Seen*. During the exhibition, Knowles, Dick Higgins, and John Cage perform *Make a Salad*, *String Piece*, *Newspaper Music*, and other works in an evening program called *What did you bring?*



Knowles with *The Big Book*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 1967

The House of Dust

Working with experimental composer and Bell Labs resident James Tenney, Knowles produces one of the first computerized poems, originally titled *Proposition No. 2 for Emmett Williams*. The first line of the poem score is used to build the physical sculpture *The House of Dust* in 1969. In the coming years, regardless of the materials used or the specific stanza being activated, the entire project is known as *The House of Dust*.

The Identical Lunch

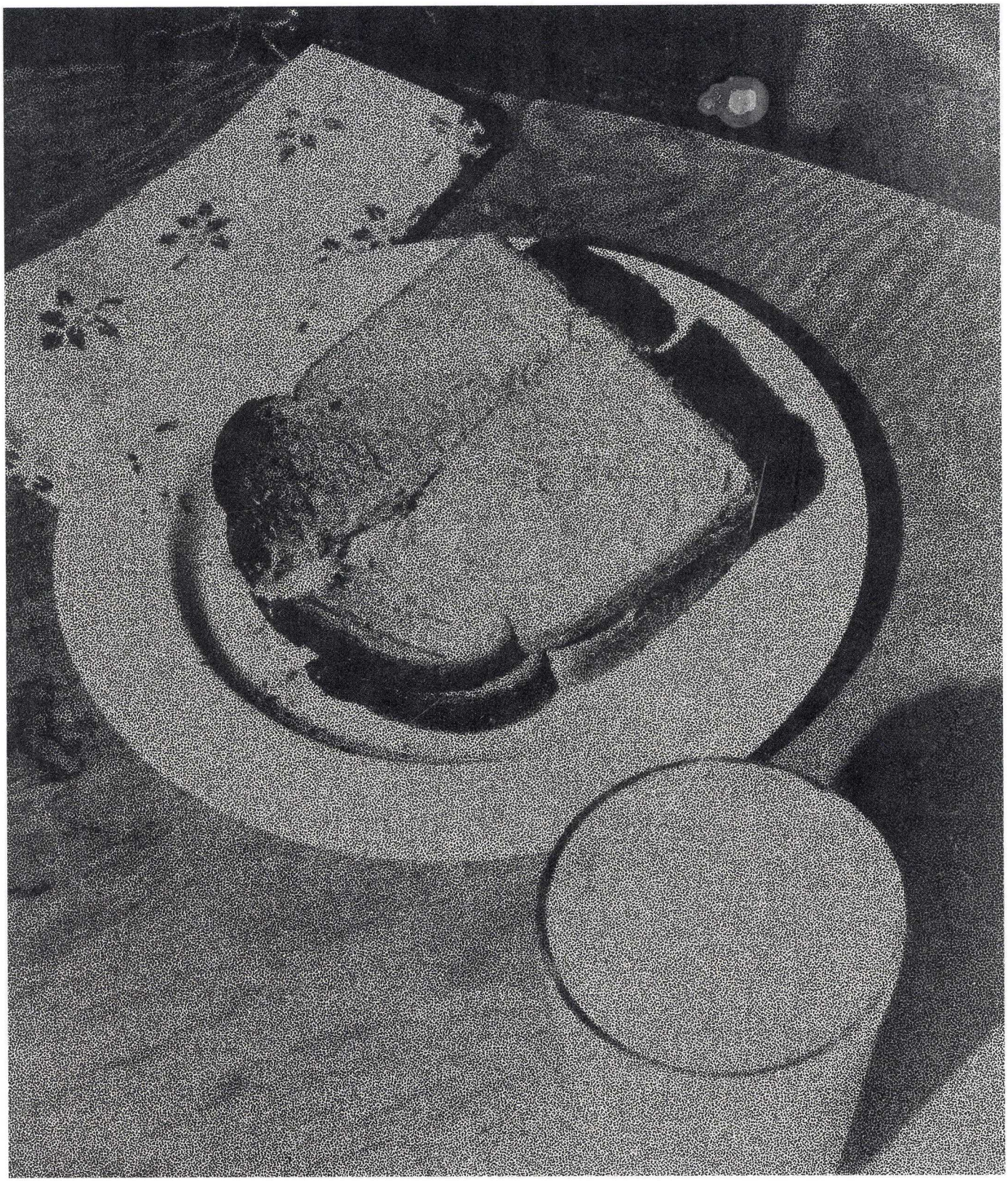
A tuna fish sandwich on wheat toast with lettuce and butter, no mayo, and a large glass of buttermilk or a cup of fresh soup was and is eaten many days of each week at the same place at about the same time.

After Philip Corner, Knowles's studio mate, notices that she eats an identical lunch every day at Riss Restaurant in Chelsea, she scores the event.

Program for Proposition No. 2 for Emmett Williams, **by Alison Knowles, realized by James Tenney.**

```
EE317M      TENNEY                                  FORTRAN SOURCE LIST
        ISN         SOURCE STATEMENT
          0 $IBFTC ARCH    LIST,REF
          1         DIMENSION MAT(3,17),SIT(8,25),LIT(4,4),INH(11,22)
          2         INTEGER SIT
          3         CALL RAND1
          4         READ(5,101)(((MAT(I1,J1),I1=1,3),J1=1,17)
         15  101    FORMAT(6X,3A6)
         16         READ(5,201)((SIT(I2,J2),I2=1,8),J2=1,25)
         27  201    FORMAT(6X,8A6)
         30         READ(5,301)((LIT(I3,J3),I3=1,4),J3=1,4)
         41  301    FORMAT(6X,4A6)
         42         READ(5,401)((INH(I4,J4),I4=1,11),J4=1,22)
         53  401    FORMAT(6X,11A6)
         54         DO 200 N=1,50
         55         WRITE(6,102)
         56  102    FORMAT(1H1)
         57         DO 200 M=1,12
         60         JM=1.+RAND(17.)
         61         JS=1.+RAND(25.)
         62         JL=1.+RAND(4.)
         63         JI=1.+RAND(22.)
         64         WRITE(6,202)(MAT(I1,JM),I1=1,3),(SIT(I2,JS),I2=1,8),(LIT(I3,JL),I3
                   1=1,4),(INH(I4,JI),I4=1,11)
        105  202    FORMAT(1HO,5X,11HA HOUSE OF ,3A6/12X,8A6/18X,6HUSING ,4A6/24X,13HI
                   1NHABITED BY ,11A6)
        106  200    CONTINUE
        111         CALL RAND3
        112         STOP
        113         END
```

Score for *The House of Dust*, reproduced in Dick Higgins's *Computer for the Arts* (Abyss Publications, 1970)



Performance documentation of
The Identical Lunch, New York, date
unknown; mezzotint

Prints Coeurs Volants with Marcel Duchamp

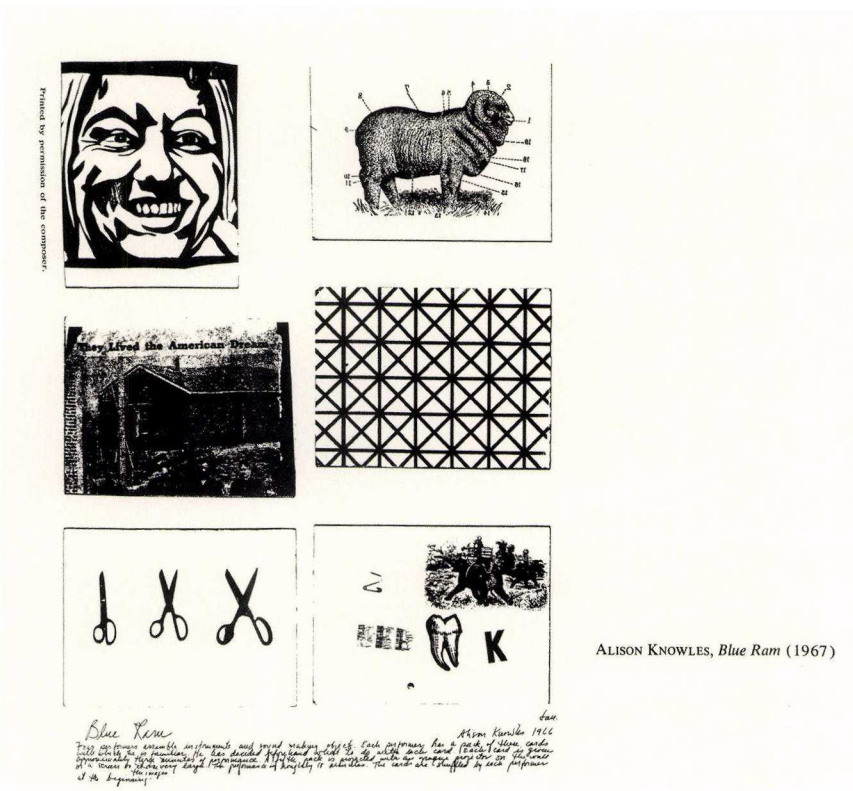
At Something Else Press, Knowles works directly with Duchamp to print his last edition of *Coeurs Volants* (*Fluttering Hearts*), first published as the cover of the French journal *Cahiers d'art* in 1936. The print is used on the cover of the English-language translation of Emmett Williams's *Sweethearts*. While the press dates the edition as 1967, Duchamp signs it in 1968.

Receives Guggenheim Fellowship

Knowles is awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1968 to build a sculpture based on the first line of her computerized poetic quatrain: "a house of dust / on open ground / lit by natural light / inhabited by friends and enemies."

Co-edits and designs John Cage's Notations

As the co-editor of Cage's book *Notations* (1969), Knowles implements chance operations to organize music manuscripts by 269 composers. The entries are organized alphabetically and each includes a paragraph with a randomly selected number of words. The size and intensity of the typeface are also determined by chance operations as Knowles designs—or composes—each page.



ALISON KNOWLES, *Blue Ram* (1967)

TOP Knowles and Marcel Duchamp, New York, 1967 **BOTTOM** Knowles's entry in John Cage's *Notations* (Something Else Press, 1969)

Marcel Duchamp with Knowles: *Coeurs Volants*, 1968; color screenprint proof on paper, edition of 24 published by Something Else Press **FOLLOWING SPREAD** *Do You Remember (for Emmett Williams)*, c. 1969; film projector, mixed media on canvas, and typescript on paper

TIME
LONG
SILENCE, A
TIRED, FOR
HIGH GRADE
MACHINE
TOOLS
TIME
LONG
SILENCE A
FOR
HIGH GRADE
MACHINE
TOOLS

1969

Publishes A House of Dust

Circa 1969, publisher Walther König prints the entire *House of Dust* poem on the only computer in Germany that is able to run the program. König releases it as an edition of multiples, each featuring a section of the poem encased in a plastic cover.

The House of Dust public sculpture in New York

Using her Guggenheim grant, Knowles produces a large-scale fiberglass sculpture from the opening quatrain of her computerized poem. Composer Max Neuhaus produces a sound composition for the installation that is activated by light levels. While Knowles is still completing the installation at the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union housing complex, the work is damaged by arson.

Sculpture Is Burned On Penn South Lawn

A large sculptural work by Chelsea artist Allison Knowles was almost destroyed by fire last Thursday evening as it sat on a Penn Station South lawn at 26th Street near Eighth Avenue.

A guard from the co-operative who witnessed the fire said that dense black smoke billowed out of the burning fiberglas work and flames shot up as high as the two-story power house building behind which the sculpture had been placed.

Firemen found evidence—kerosene-drenched trash—that the fire had been started deliberately.

Mrs. Knowles, who lives on West 22nd Street, said there was 'no question' in her mind that the fire had been set by a Penn South resident who was angry that the sculptural work had been placed on that lawn.

Charging that residents had been 'absolutely vicious to me' ever since the piece was first put there two weeks prior to the fire, the artist said that even before the eventual burning of the work there was evidence that people had been attempting to destroy it.

Three small electric eyes buried in the surface had been hacked at with an instrument Mrs. Knowles believes was a chisel.

A second piece of sculpture three times as large as the first and weighing about four tons was to have been placed nearby, but the artist has decided against it. She has also decided to remove the first work from Penn South as quickly as possible.

On Wednesday morning, it was to be hoisted from the lawn and placed on a flat-bed truck which would transport it to Philadelphia. There it will undergo extensive repairs before it is shipped to its permanent home at the California Institute of Arts.

Before the fire, the play sculpture was extremely popular among the children.

The work, an unusual piece of play sculpture that was meant to have children clambering all over and in it, was a year in the making. The actual physical construction took about three or four months. Mrs. Knowles said she had asked neighborhood school children to contribute objects, like old shoes, to be affixed in the surface of the work. The placement of the objects was to be determined by computer.

Sound equipment had been set into the walls and the electric eyes were to trigger tiny sounds inside the work as light reached different levels of intensity. But the destruction of the tiny pink bubbles containing the electric eyes made the sound system useless.

The whole project was based on a poem called 'House of Dust.' It had been financed by a grant from the Carnegie Foundation. A film about the work by a Penn South resident, Gladys Washburn, was being shot.

Henry Margulies, the manager of Penn South who died recently, had liked the idea of placing the sculpture in Penn South when it was first suggested to him. The Board of Directors had also approved the idea last spring.

But they failed to foresee the amount of opposition that would be generated. As soon as it became known that the work would be placed behind Building 4, residents began to complain. They said the lawn would be destroyed; they worried that the already high noise level would be increased.

When the sculpture arrived, they warned that the hollowed-out work would make a convenient hiding spot for muggers on a street that had had muggings before.

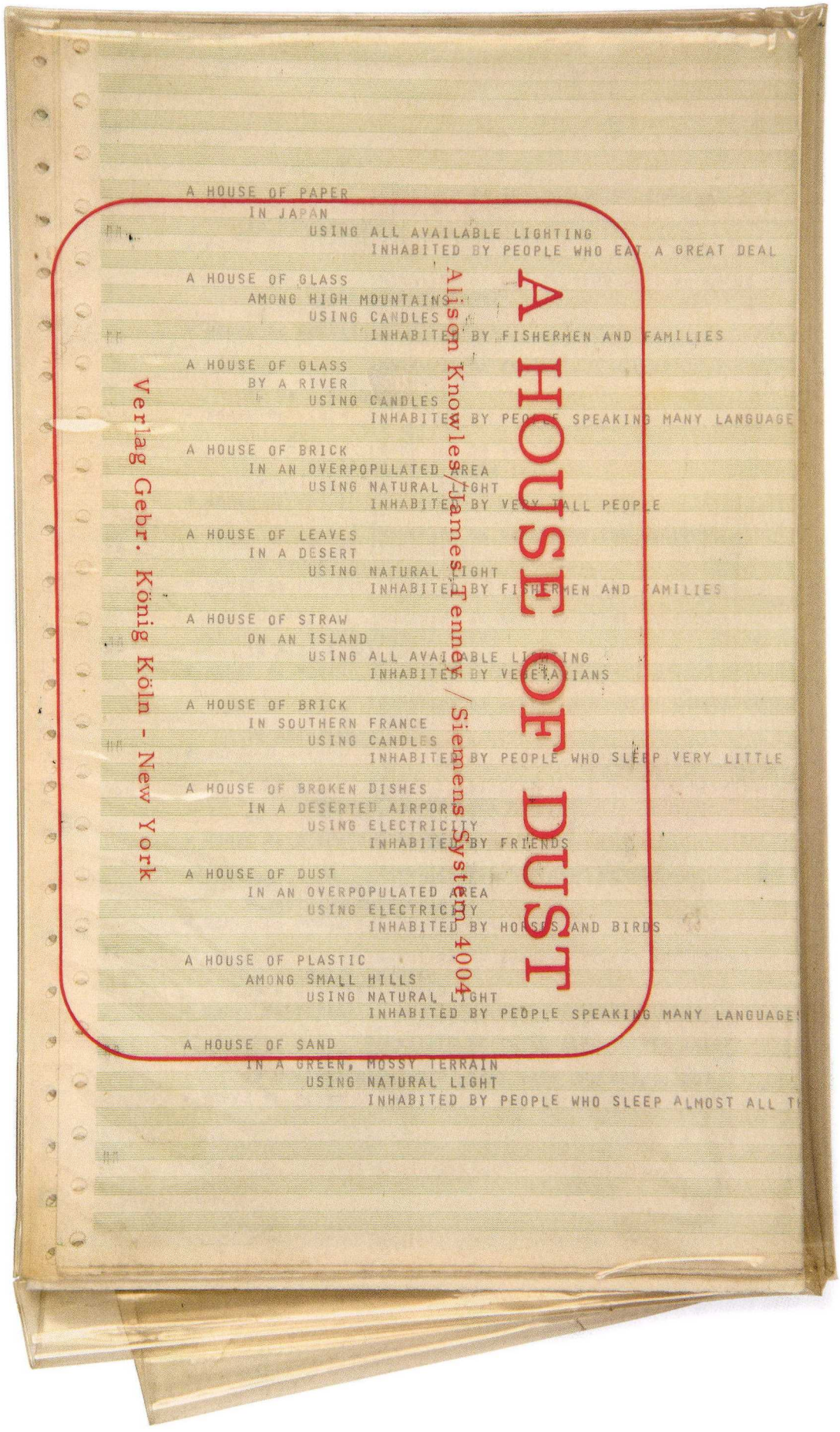
The opposition reached a crescendo with the collection of over 600 names on a petition. Before the summer, it was decided by the Recreation Sub-Committee of the Board to seek another location for the work.

Then Margulies died and the work arrived earlier than expected and it was decided to place it behind Building 4 temporarily.

Two days before the fire, the Board of Directors met again and rescinded their previous commitment to the artist's work. They decided to ask Mrs. Knowles to take her sculpture out of Penn South, since they couldn't see any place in the co-op where it could be located without sparking opposition.

The artist, who has lived in Chelsea for about five years, had intended to keep the two works in Chelsea for about a year.

Newspaper clipping from the *Chelsea News* (New York), October 23, 1969

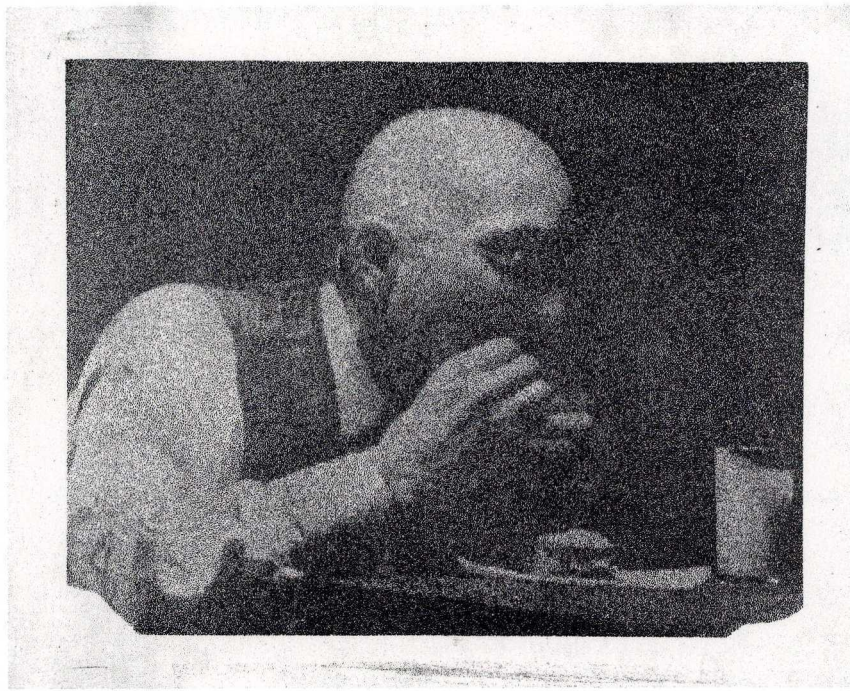


A House of Dust, c. 1969; computer printout in plastic with screenprint, published by Verlag König

The Identical Lunch print series

Knowles builds a photobooth and serves *The Identical Lunch* score to guests at a New Year's Fluxbanquet at George Maciunas's Soho loft. She documents the meals with Polaroids and uses them for a black-and-white screenprint series that features artists Anne Brazeau, Ay-O, Shigeko Kubota, and Maciunas. Knowles later makes two additional series with additional photographs, in 1973 and 1992.

CLOCKWISE *The Identical Lunch with Shigeko Kubota*, *The Identical Lunch with George Maciunas*, *The Identical Lunch with Ay-O*, *The Identical Lunch with Anne Brazeau*, c. 1969; screenprints on canvas



the Identical Lunch with Ayi C

Alison Knowles

the Identical Lunch with Anne Bragaas

Alison Knowles

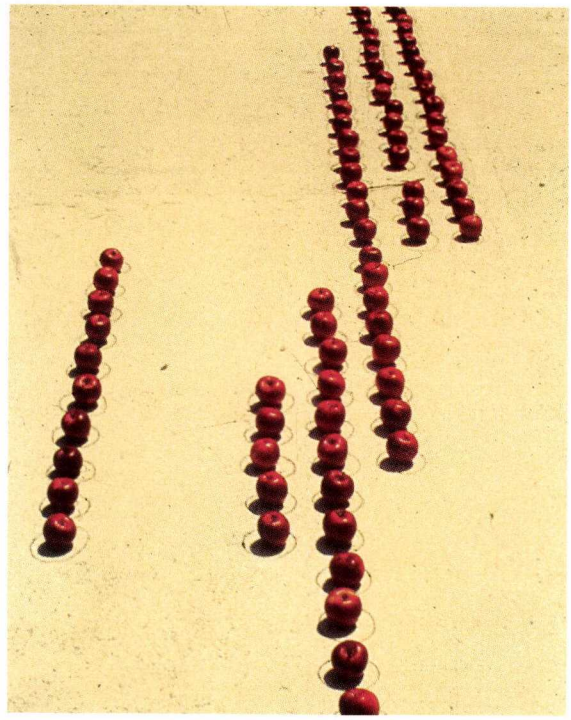
1970

Begins teaching at CalArts

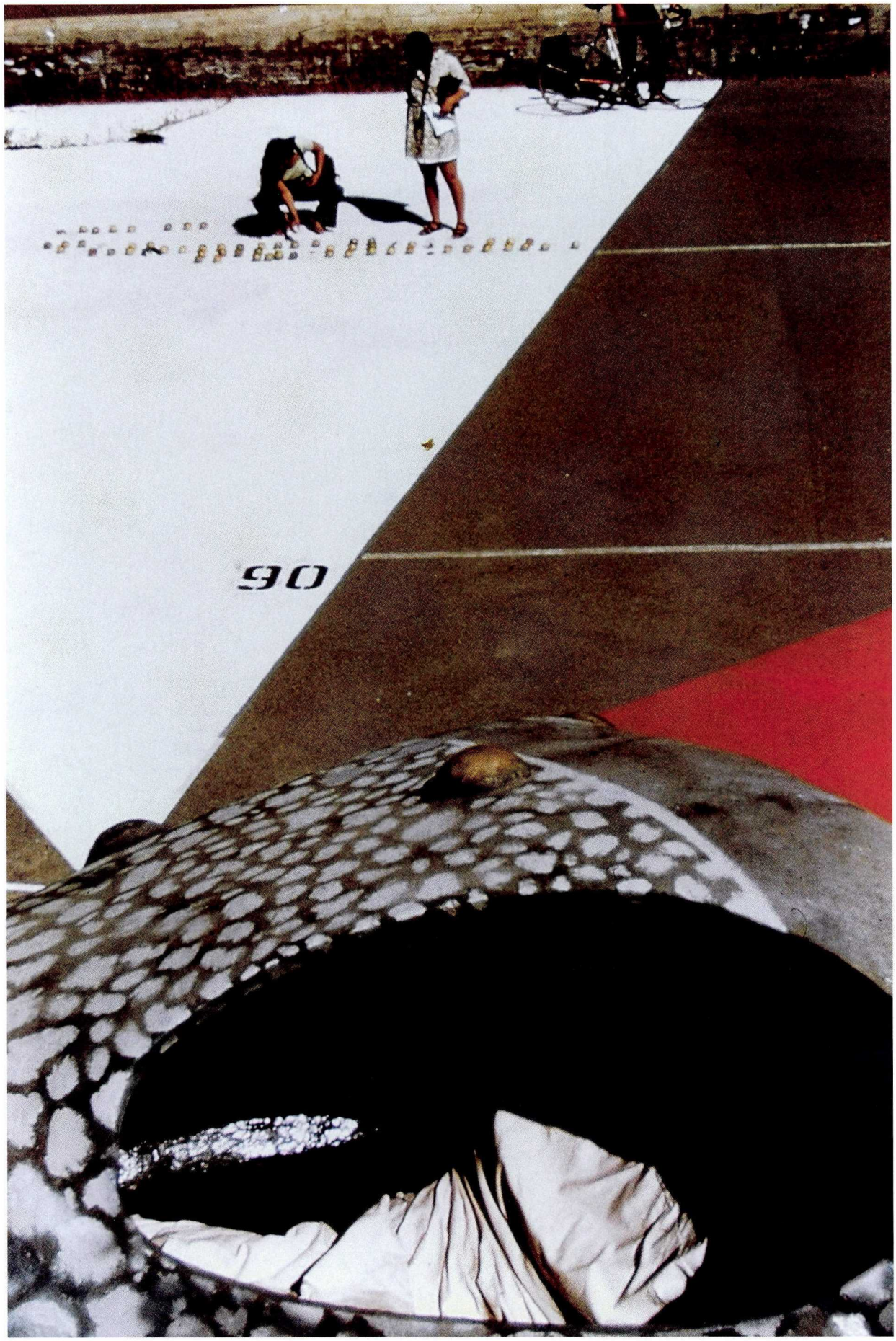
Paul Brach and Allan Kaprow invite Knowles and Dick Higgins to teach at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), newly founded from the merger of the Chouinard Art Institute and the Los Angeles Music Conservatory. Knowles is the inaugural director of the Graphics Print Lab at the school. She teaches printmaking, photography, and performance classes using event scores for students to activate and interact with *The House of Dust*.

The House of Dust sculpture in Burbank, California

As part of Knowles's CalArts teaching contract, *The House of Dust* is transported from the East Coast to the school's temporary campus at the Villa Cabrini in Burbank. Performances occur around the sculpture, such as *99 Red North*, in which an apple is taken in exchange for an object. *Poem Drop Event*, by Knowles and Norman Kaplan, marks the one-year anniversary of CalArts in 1971: printouts of the computerized score of *The House of Dust* are dropped onto the campus from a helicopter (pp. 128–29).



ABOVE *99 Red North*, performed at *The House of Dust*, CalArts, Burbank, CA, 1970 **FACING** View of *The House of Dust* with *99 Red North* in distance, CalArts, Burbank, CA, 1970



FOLLOWING SPREADS *Poem Drop Event*, CalArts, Burbank, CA, May 20, 1971; Printout from *Poem Drop Event*, 1971; *Visit the House of Dust: Poem in Progress*, 1970, screenprint with handwritten notes in ink on paper

A HOUSE OF DUST
IN A DESERTED FACTORY
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY VERY TALL PEOPLE

A HOUSE OF WOOD
IN AN OVERPOPULATED AREA
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY VERY TALL PEOPLE

A HOUSE OF GLASS
IN A DESERTED FACTORY
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO ENJOY EATING TOGETHER

A HOUSE OF PAPER
AMONG SMALL HILLS
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY LITTLE BOYS

A HOUSE OF TIN
IN A HOT CLIMATE
USING CANDLES
INHABITED BY LOVERS

A HOUSE OF GLASS
IN A GREEN, MOSSY TERRAIN
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO SLEEP ALMOST ALL THE TIME

A HOUSE OF WOOD
UNDERWATER
USING ELECTRICITY
INHABITED BY VEGETARIANS

A HOUSE OF SAND
IN DENSE WOODS
USING ELECTRICITY
INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO SLEEP ALMOST ALL THE TIME

A HOUSE OF WOOD
IN A COLD, WINDY CLIMATE
USING ELECTRICITY
INHABITED BY FISHERMEN AND FAMILIES

A HOUSE OF WOOD
AMONG SMALL HILLS
USING ELECTRICITY
INHABITED BY LITTLE BOYS

A HOUSE OF MUD
IN A COLD, WINDY CLIMATE
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY HORSES AND BIRDS

A HOUSE OF BRICK
IN A COLD, WINDY CLIMATE
USING ELECTRICITY
INHABITED BY VARIOUS BIRDS AND FISH

A HOUSE OF DISCARDED CLOTHING
ON THE SEA
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO SLEEP ALMOST ALL THE TIME

A HOUSE OF SAND
IN A DESERTED CHURCH
USING CANDLES
INHABITED BY COLLECTORS OF ALL TYPES

A HOUSE OF STONE
IN A METROPOLIS
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY VARIOUS BIRDS AND FISH

A HOUSE OF STEEL
BY AN ABANDONED LAKE
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY FRIENDS

A HOUSE OF WEEDS
IN A COLD, WINDY CLIMATE
USING ELECTRICITY
INHABITED BY COLLECTORS OF ALL TYPES

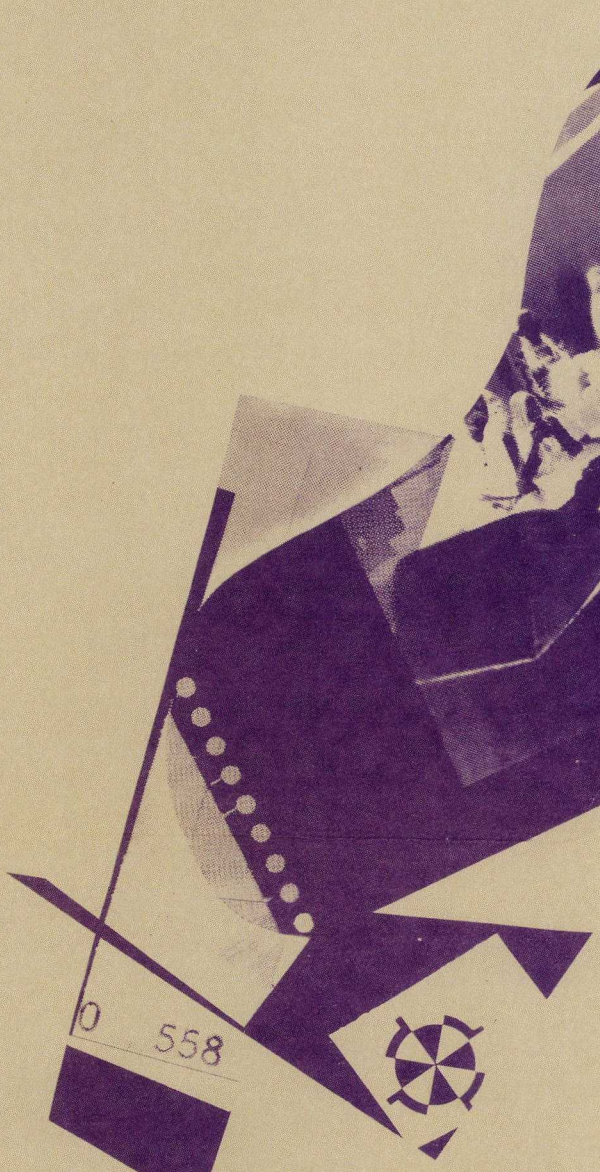
A HOUSE OF ROOTS
IN JAPAN
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO SLEEP VERY LITTLE

A HOUSE OF LEAVES
ON THE SEA
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY FISHERMEN AND FAMILIES

A HOUSE OF MUD
BY THE SEA
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY ALL RACES OF MEN REPRESENTED WEARING PREDOMINANTLY RED CLOTHING

A HOUSE OF STONE
IN A DESERTED CHURCH
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO SLEEP VERY LITTLE

A HOUSE OF PAPER
IN HEAVY JUNGLE UNDERGROWTH
USING CANDLES
INHABITED BY PEOPLE SPEAKING MANY LANGUAGES WEARING LITTLE OR NO CLOTHING



VISIT THE HOUSE OF DUST
Sound (Max Neuhaus) turned on at 1:00 P.M.

D 558

poem in progress by Ati Sm

(more stars added)

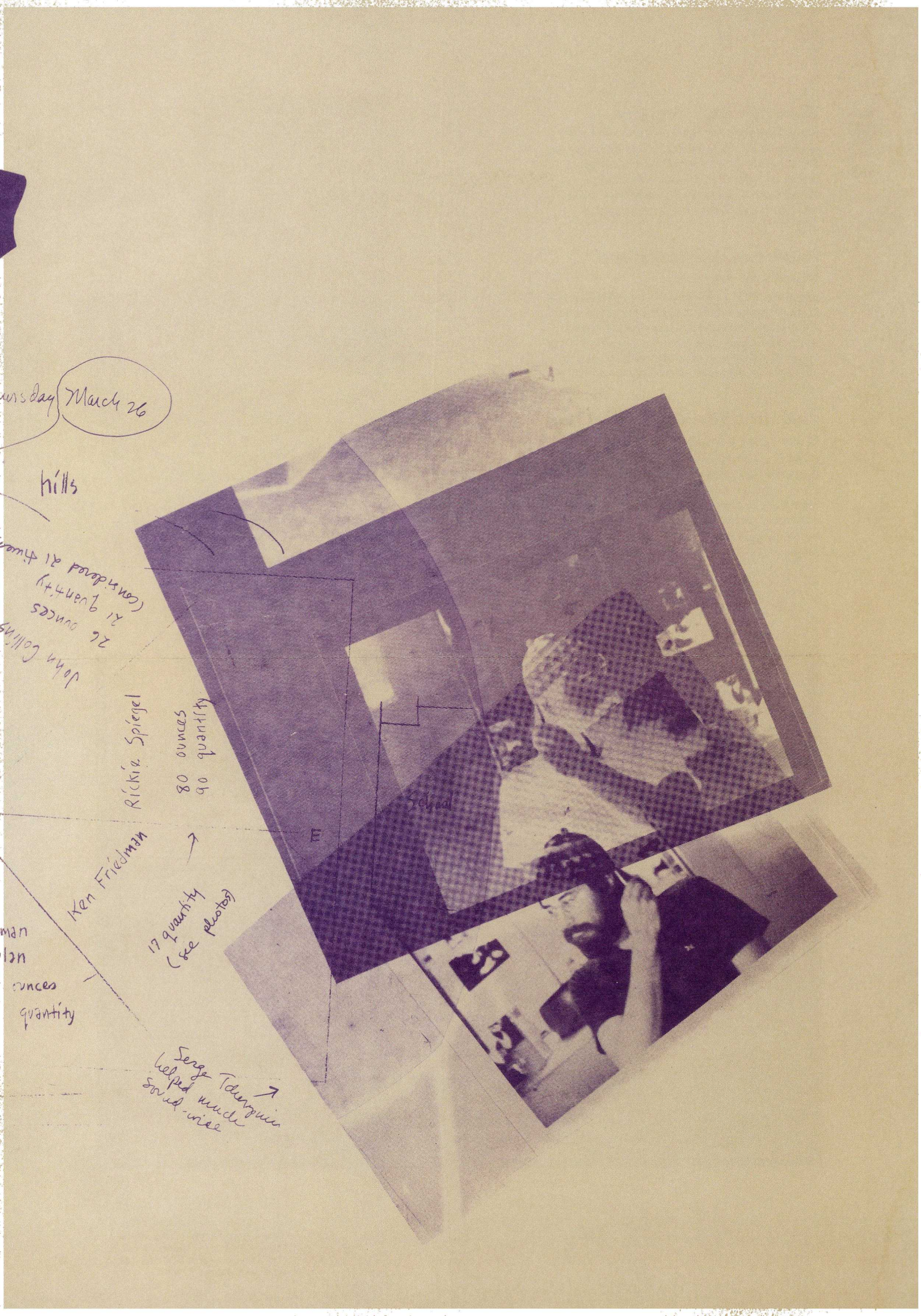
19 quantity
23 ounces

Alison Knowles
Jean St. Pierre
Carol Kirby
153 ounces
16 quantity

(many thin q. entwined (wire) stems all from the area grass designed by Dick Bakker

Peter van Riper
157 ounces
51 quantity
skies will be here

golden state 5 fwy.


March 26
hills
Ken Friedman
Ricki Spiegel
80 ounces
90 quantity
17 quantity
(see photos)
Serge Tcherepnin
helped much
sound-wise

1971

Divorces Dick Higgins

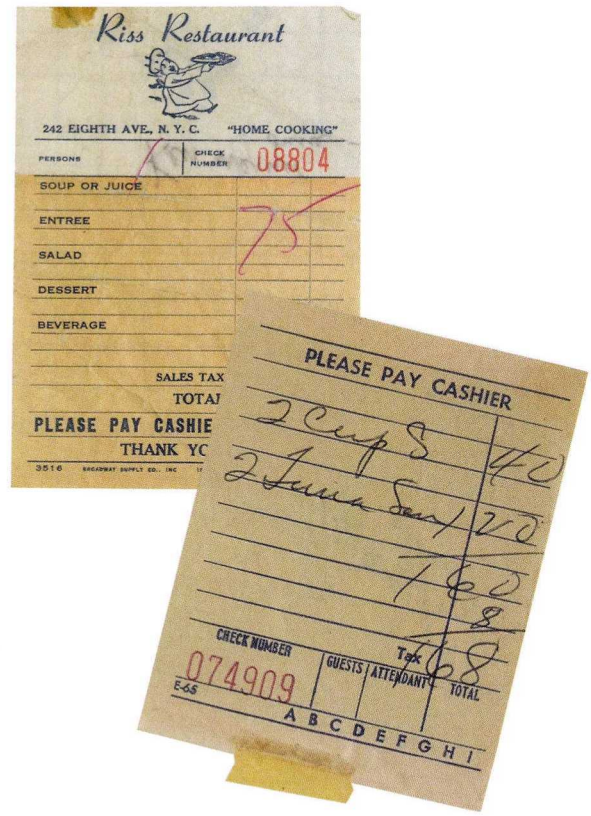
Following a year-long separation, Knowles and Higgins finalize their divorce. After the Sylmar Earthquake hits Southern California, Higgins moves with their daughters to West Glover, Vermont. Knowles continues to teach at CalArts while traveling, performing, and making art.

Publishes Journal of the Identical Lunch

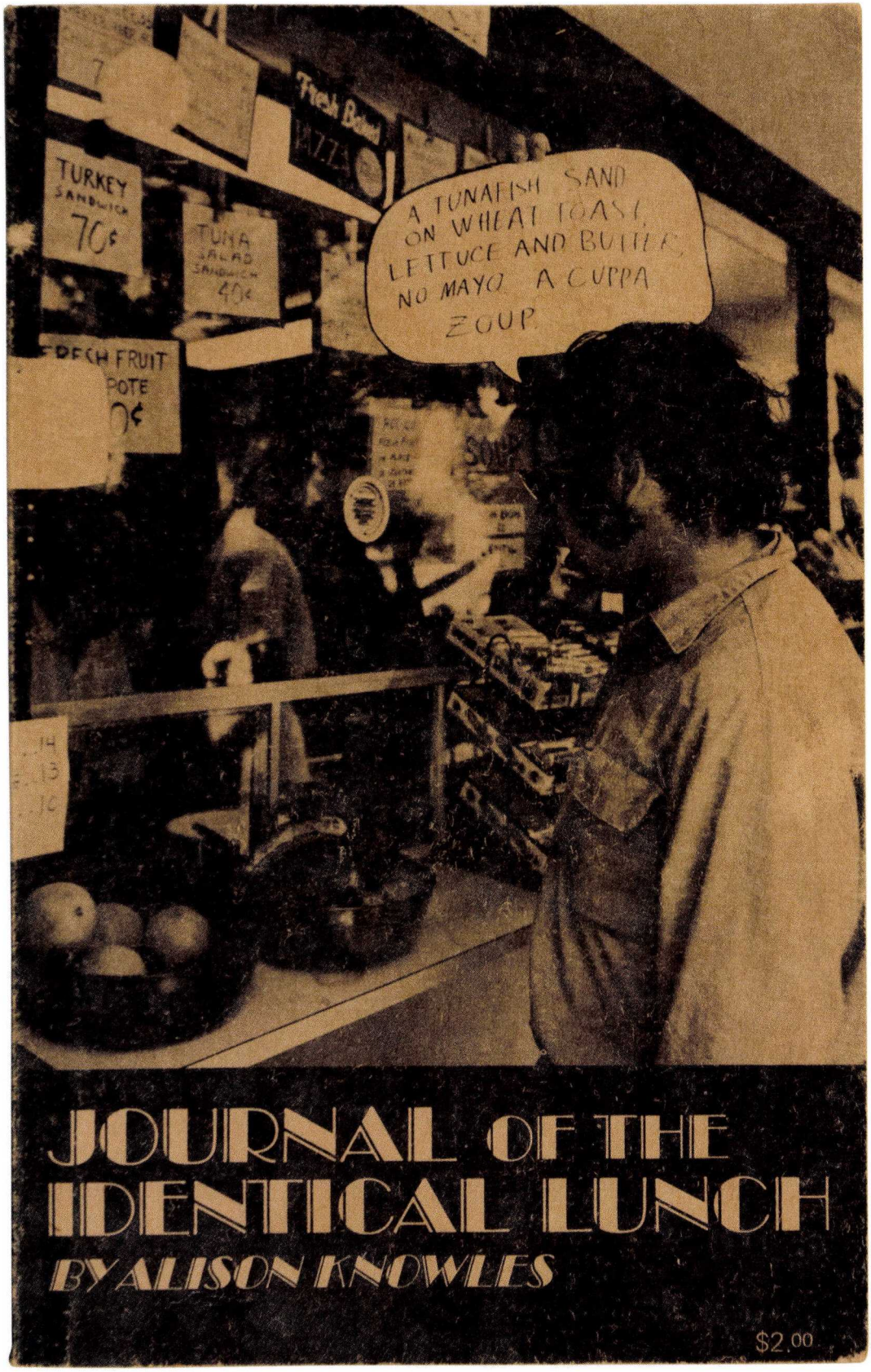
Knowles's artist's book documenting *The Identical Lunch* includes writing about her own experiences and those of the collaborators who performed the score. Studio mate Philip Corner, who initially observed Knowles performing the score, publishes his own artist's book of *The Identical Lunch* in 1973.

Performs The Identical Lunch throughout California

Knowles's performances of the score include the Duchamp Festival at the University of California, Irvine. For that occasion, the food company StarKist Tuna donates a crate of fish, but communication is discontinued when the corporation comes to suspect that Knowles is a spy for their competitor Bumble Bee.



TOP Food ticket and receipt from Riss Restaurant, New York, c. 1970 **BOTTOM** Knowles holding a StarKist tuna can at a performance of *The Identical Lunch*, Southern California, c. 1971



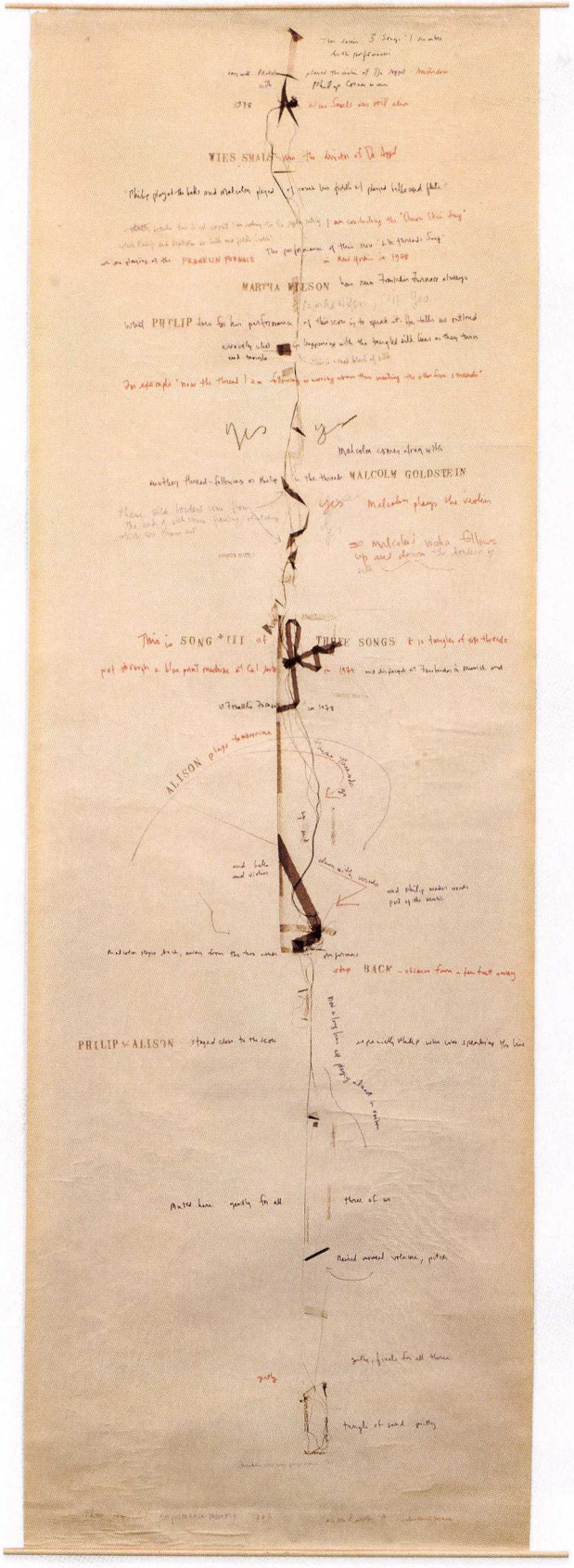
Journal of the Identical Lunch
(Nova Broadcast Press, 1971)

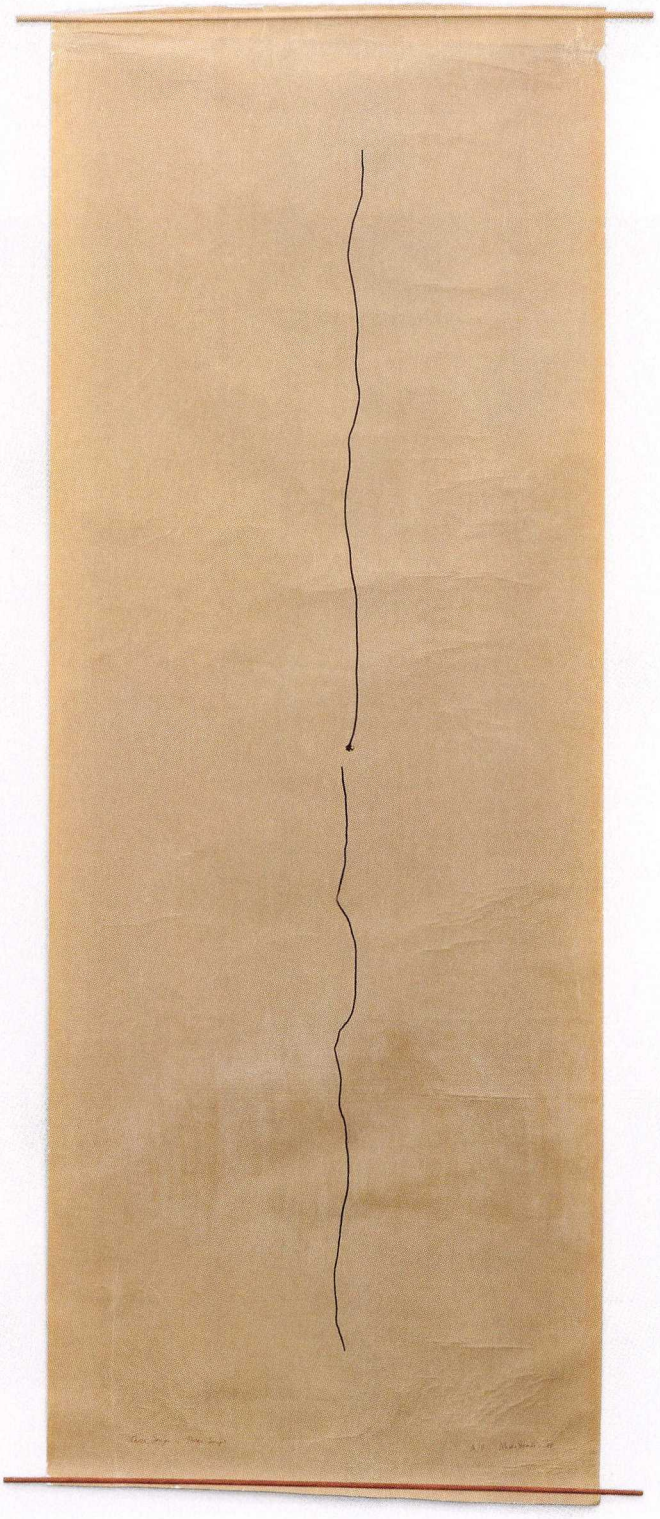
1971

Three Songs

Knowles produces *Three Songs* while teaching at CalArts, the first in a series of sepia ink prints on vellum scrolls. *Three Songs* includes *Shoestring Song*, *Silk Thread Song*, and *Onion Skin Song*, which, when turned horizontally, can be used as visual scores for sound performances. *Onion Skin Song* is also performed live by pressing and arranging onion skins between two long pieces of plastic wrap. Not only are the randomly placed onions used as musical notations, but the crinkling sounds created during the process become part of the score.

Installation view, *Three Songs* at *Alison Knowles*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 2016


WIES SMALS
MARTHA WILSON
PHILIP
MALCOLM GOLDSTEIN
ALISON
PHILIP & ALISON
stop BACK – distance from – fast fast away
three of us
gently



The House of Dust sculpture in Valencia, California

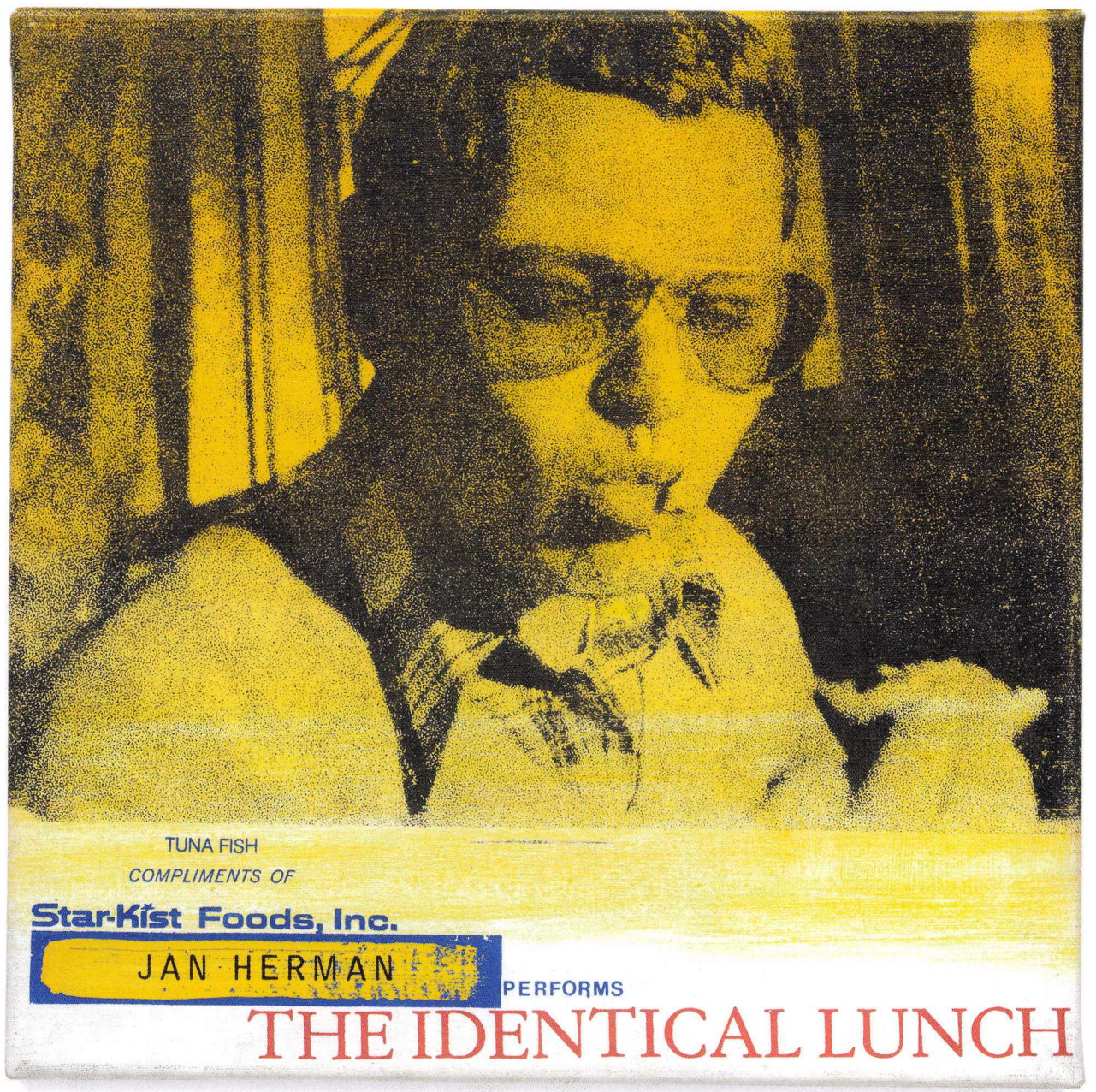
When the campus of CalArts moves to Valencia, *The House of Dust* is reinstalled there. During this time, Knowles lives in nearby Piru with Simone Forti, Shigeko Kubota, Nam June Paik, Peter van Riper, and others. *The House of Dust* continues to be a pedagogical space activated by Knowles's classes in performance and printmaking. It is also a site for student concerts, film screenings, and even a pig roast celebrating the new campus.

FACING Knowles with student inside *The House of Dust*, CalArts, Valencia, CA, c. 1971
ABOVE AND FOLLOWING SPREADS Students gather at *The House of Dust*, CalArts, Valencia, CA, 1971

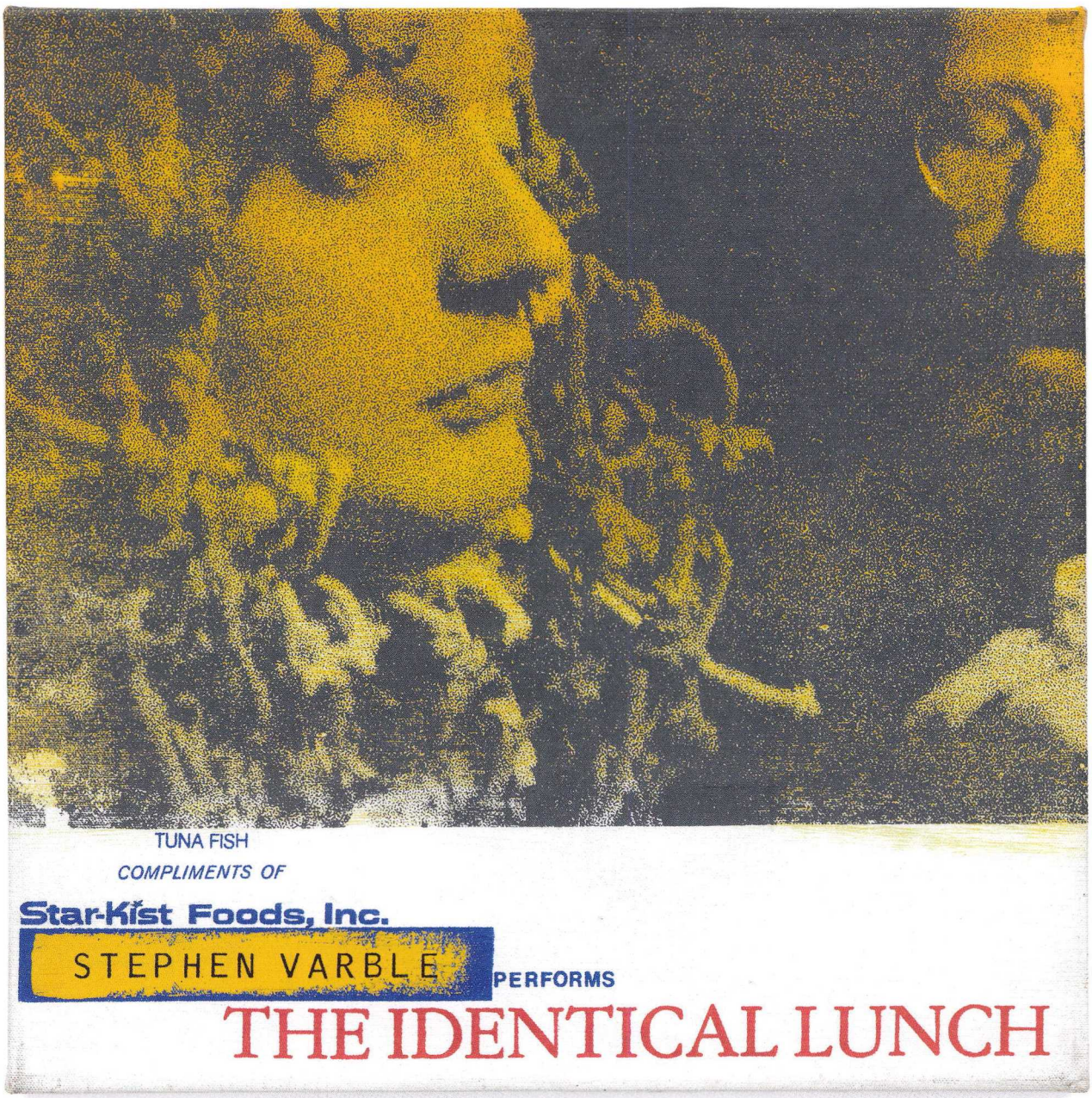
HOUSE OF DUST
POEM IN PROGRESS
FOR INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES RELATING
SEE ALISON KNOWLES / ART
OPEN

Prints second The Identical Lunch series

Knowles creates a new series of prints using Polariods that were taken at the New Year's Fluxbanquet performance of *The Identical Lunch*. The eleven canvases—printed in yellow, red, and blue ink—are emblazoned with the StarKist Tuna logo.



Jan Herman Performs The Identical Lunch, 1969, realized 1973; screenprint with hand additions on canvas

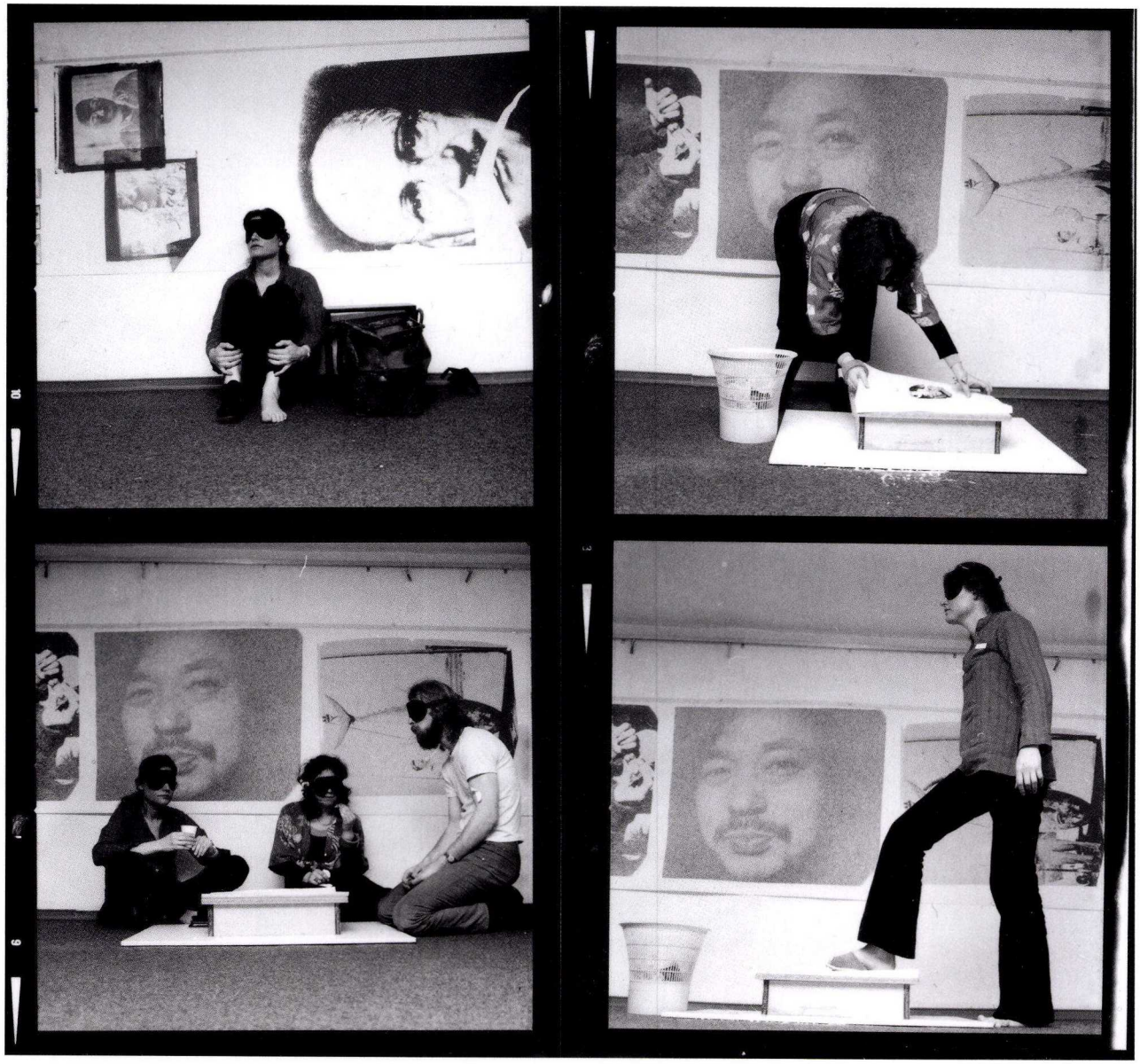


Stephen Varble Performs The Identical Lunch, 1969, realized 1973; screenprint with hand additions on canvas

1973

The Identical Lunch exhibition in Germany

Knowles's exhibition at Galerie Inge Baecker in Bochum features screenprinted images of performers of *The Identical Lunch* and a large tuna. Knowles performs *Blind Lunch* and *Step-Up Lunch*, variations on her original score.



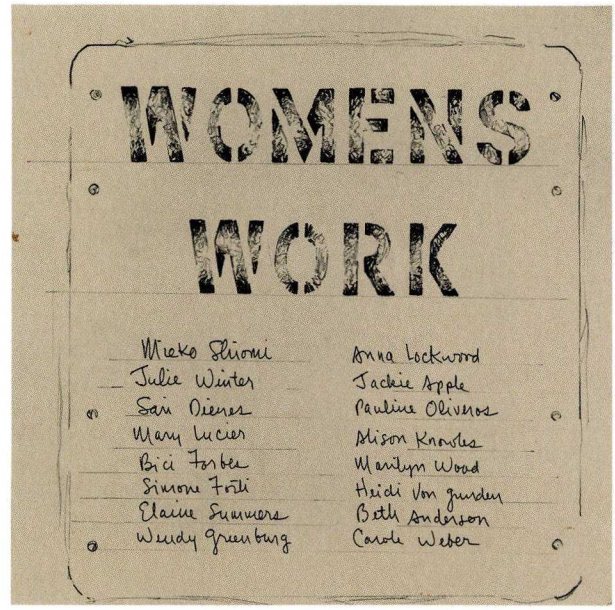
Knowles and others performing *Blind Lunch* and *Step-Up Lunch*, Galerie Inge Baecker, Bochum, Germany, 1973

Gentle Surprises for the Ear

Knowles's performative installation and collaboration with artist-composers Philip Corner and Bill Fontana includes eighty objects on a field, each tagged with sound-making instructions for participants. The work is the first of many where Knowles provides score-like instructions for an audience to activate the work.

Publishes WOMENS WORK

Knowles collaborates with composer Anna (Annea) Lockwood to produce the publication *WOMENS WORK* (1975), a collection of scores created exclusively by women.



TOP Knowles and Anna (Annea) Lockwood: *WOMENS WORK* (Unpublished Editions, 1975) **BOTTOM** Knowles performing *Gentle Surprises for the Ear*, c. 1974 **FOLLOWING SPREAD** *Gentle Surprises for the Ear* (detail), c. 1974; installation

hold close to one
or your ears and
scratch with your
fingernail and hear
the sound travel
through the cord-
board the cord-
surprise someone
else's ear with
this sound

Proposition X: Build a Bean Garden

> **The floor of the gallery is covered with white navy beans that are raked in waves around some real stones. As the audiences/ participants walk in the bean garden they hear chimes. This sound is the result of transposing the foot resonances through a microphone and into bell jars. (sound concept by Bill Fontana)**

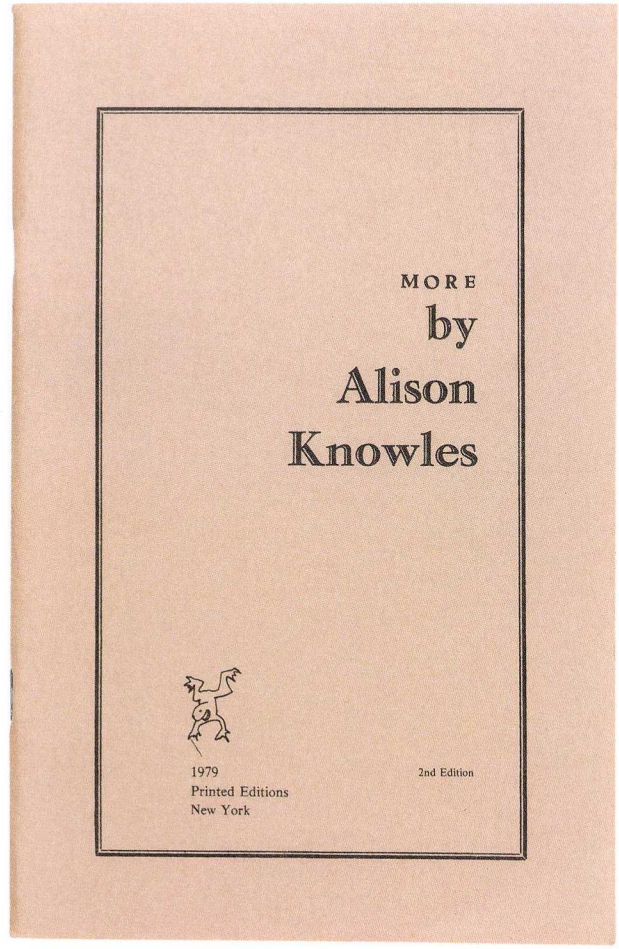
Knowles uses the score *Proposition X* to produce *Bean Garden* at Charlotte Moorman's 12th Annual Avant Garde Festival at Floyd Bennett Field in New York in 1975. When participants step into the large, low wooden box filled with white navy beans, they activate a sound component by Bill Fontana.

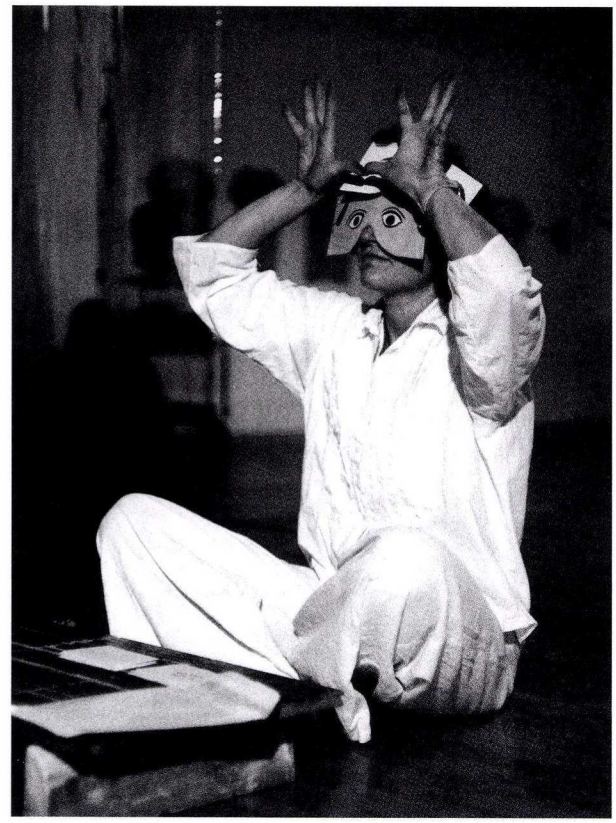
Exhibition and performance at De Appel, Amsterdam

Over two evenings, Knowles performs her new works *Objects in Hand* and *A Shoemaker's Assistant*, a performance about shoes and shoemakers. The 1976 exhibition includes a slideshow, small objects, graphics, and paintings.

Publishes MORE by Alison Knowles

A follow-up to *by Alison Knowles*, the collection *MORE by Alison Knowles* (Unpublished Editions, 1976) includes additional scores and performance notes. A second edition is published in 1979 by Printed Editions.





TOP *MORE by Alison Knowles* (Unpublished Editions, 1976) **BOTTOM** Knowles performing *A Shoemaker's Assistant*, De Appel, Amsterdam, May 1976

Bean Garden, 12th annual Avant Garde Festival, Gateway National Recreation Area, Floyd Bennett Field, New York, 1975

Begins publishing with Edizione Pari & Dispari

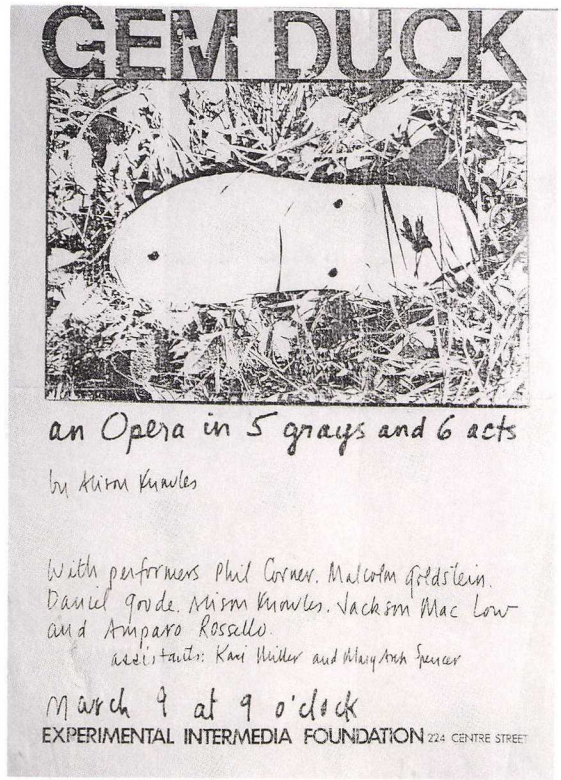
Publisher and gallerist Rosanna Chiessi meets Knowles and other Fluxus artists while visiting New York for the first time. Knowles prints *Moon Bean* (p. 154) with Chiessi at Pari & Dispari soon after. She continues to work with Chiessi on prints and performances in the coming years, including *La fine dei fagioli* (1983) and *Cena Rossa* (1989).

Gem Duck

Knowles collages together information gathered about shoes for the bilingual publication *Gem Duck*, published by Pari & Dispari. She and her daughter Jessica Higgins perform the book at Franklin Furnace, New York. Each reads a page and then flutters it to create different sounds.

7712A—Natural Assemblages and the True Crow

Knowles's audio cassette album of the work *Natural Assemblages and the True Crow*, produced with Charlie Morrow and New Wilderness Audiographics, is released on April 27th. She produces a second album with Morrow, titled *8112A*, in 1981.



TOP Poster for *Gem Duck* performance at Experimental Intermedia Foundation, New York, 1977 **BOTTOM** Knowles and Jessica Higgins performing *Gem Duck*, Franklin Furnace, New York, December 20, 1977

New Wilderness Audiographics

The New Wilderness Foundation is a non-profit arts organization.
We produce events and publications, working to cross lines between artists
in a variety of cultures and disciplines.

This cassette is part of the first New Wilderness Audiographics series, 24 cassettes
co-produced by Ondina Fiore and Charlie Morrow, with help from Barbara Baracks.
Post-production engineering by Robert Miller at the New Wilderness studio, NYC.

1980 by The New Wilderness Foundation Inc.
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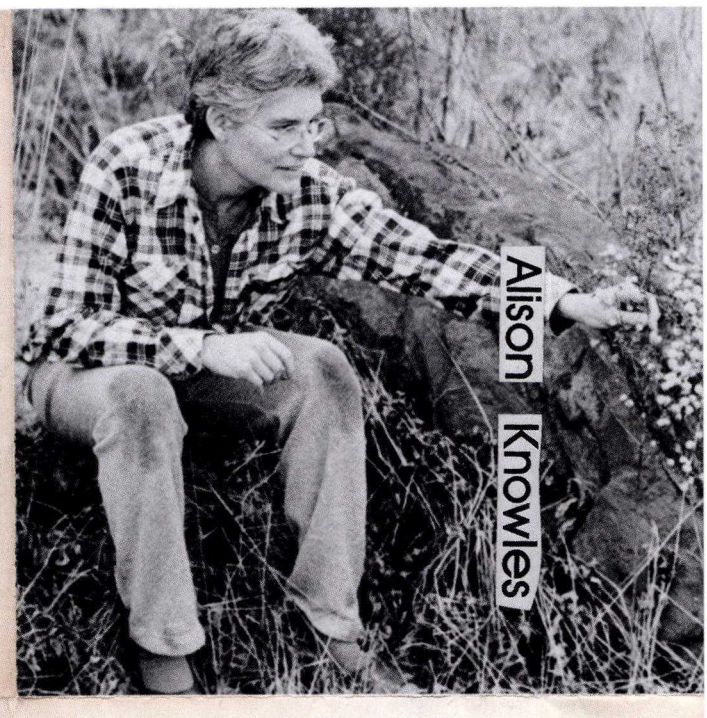
on publication.

Photograph by Dick Higgins

Graphic Design by Mary Nell Hawk

The New Wilderness Foundation Inc.
365 West End Avenue
New York, New York 10024
(212) 799-0636

7712A



NAATTC.

This first half hour of the cassette is a combination of two sound streams from the same time and location: midsummer 1978, Barton, Vermont.

One stream consists of found text fragments from old nature books read by the artist in a dome just across the road from the house where the books turned up in the library.

The other stream is audio material gathered sequentially in one afternoon by the artist with a small cassette recorded in the bathroom of the studio behind the house with the library.

The two streams were balanced and spaced separately in the New Wilderness Studio by the artist working with the engineer Robert Miller. Then the two parts were joined together, unchanged, as two channels of a master tape.

The voice of Alison Knowles was recorded on location by Charlie Morrow, who planned and supervised this production.

BEAN SEE ALSO BEIN (for George Maciunes)

is a text based on the New York City phonebook BEAN entries of 1965, then updated to 1978, with appropriate deletions and additions.

The voice of Alison Knowles was recorded at the New Wilderness Studio, New York City, in autumn 1978 by Charlie Morrow.

JAPANESE BEAN GARDEN

Sound from a small portable environment consisting of real Japanese chime, beans, water, & rocks. This sound poem is based on the garden of Ryoanji in Nara, Japan, which has a chime, white sand, water, and 15 stoves and was visited by the artist in 1973.

This solo performance by the artist was recorded live and without edit by Charlie Morrow in the New Wilderness Foundation Studio, New York City, in autumn, 1978, Charles Doria observing.

MANTRA FOR JESSIE (some help in sleeping)

a "found" poem overheard by Alison Knowles and spoken by Jessie Higgins as she knitted a scarf with a single strand of multi-colored wool.

A sequence may be indicated but is never enforced. In a way, the Big Book concretizes Alison Knowles' event pieces. It not only sets the stage for, but through various additive devices such as light and sound partakes in the action. Offering art within art, life within life and a world within a world, the Big Book comes closer than any work in this exhibition to a radical dissolution of the barriers that separate art from life: it proposes life as art.

Jan van der Marck
Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, Illinois
Museum Catalogue '68

(her work in) audio-visual performance and responsive environments. (she tells us) that the existence of an object at any instant is a repetition of its existence at all prior moments and that continuity in time is a continuous restatement of all material elements from their beginning to their end points. . . the slight shifts in after image suggest that repetition with changes in position - a bringing back of the past in terms of the present.

Charlie Morrow
Soho Weekly News '74

Knowles sense of scale - shoe parts, metal drum, ladder, all align with the human body and its movements within an interior environment, suggestive of a larger psychic space.

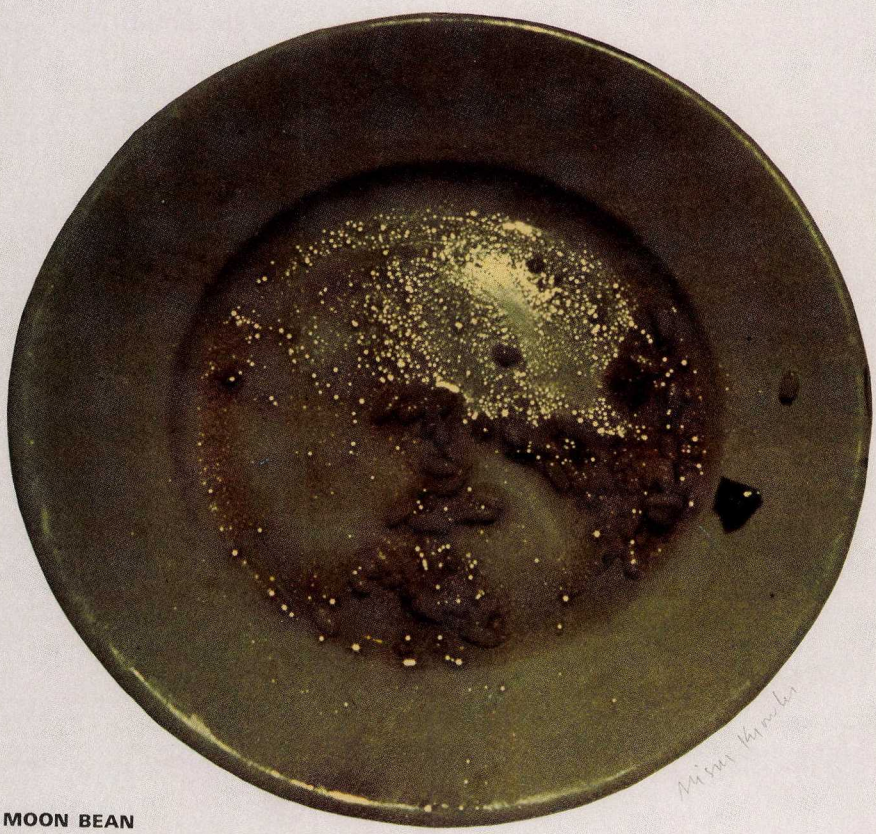
Ann-Sargent Wooster
Soho Weekly News '76

Perhaps most characteristic of all, every Knowles piece seems designed to allow her to remove herself eventually from her artistic role. She is hoping that the process will go on. . . she seems to be wishing that people would bring a greater sensitivity into their daily lives, so that artists would no longer have to encourage them to do so.

Tom Johnson
The Village Voice '78

Alison Knowles was born in New York City in 1933, and graduated from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. She is a visual and performance artist, a member of the original Fluxus group. Her environments, the Big Book, the House of Dust and the Bean Garden are collections of discarded street objects, gift materials, and taken for granted daily occurences such as eating a tunafish sandwich. She uses chance operations to structure her collections, and upscaled size to put sound and image into contact.

Liner notes for *7721A—Natural Assemblages and the True Crow* (Charlie Morrow and New Wilderness Audiographics, 1977)



MOON BEAN

AP 38

Moon Bean, 1977; silkscreen on paper, edition of 200 published by Edizione Pari & Dispari

1978

Starts Printed Editions with Dick Higgins

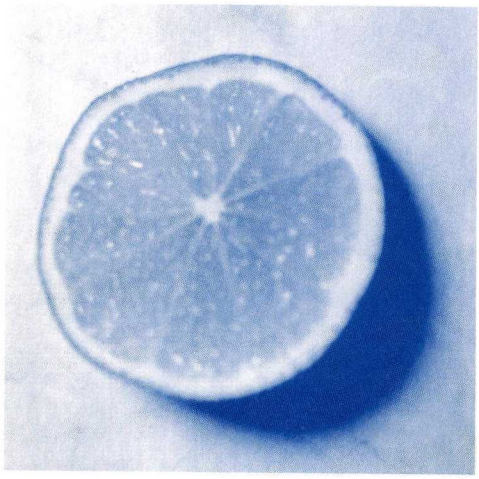
Six years after Higgins conceived of a press called Unpublished Editions, he co-founds a new press with Knowles that they call Printed Editions. Located in West Glover, Vermont, Printed Editions not only produces multiples such as Knowles's *Bean Bag* (1978), but also traditional publications by Higgins, Philip Corner, Jackson Mac Low, and others. The publishing venture ends in 1985.

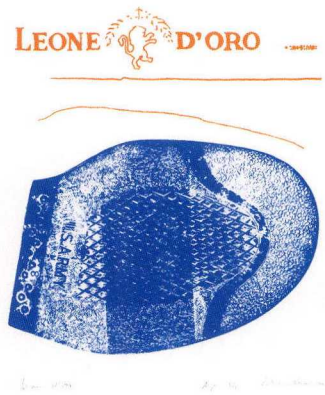
Bean Bag, 1978; cardboard box, cotton bag, beans, and printed paper, edition of 22 published by Printed Editions

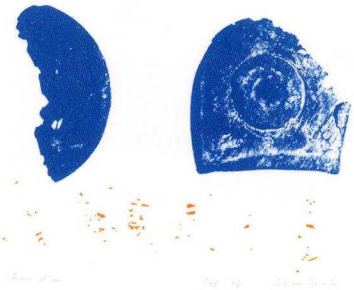
1978

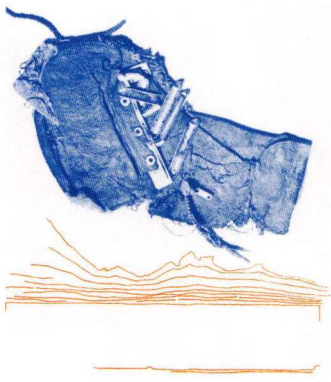
Publishes Leone d'Oro

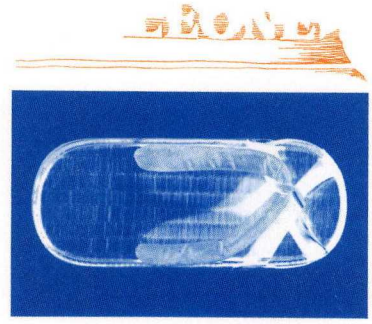
From burnt shoes found on the Bay of Naples and images from a Sicilian orange crate, Knowles produces the screenprint collection *Leone d'Oro* as her first multiple with the collector and patron Francesco Conz. He also publishes *The Great Bear Fluxus* (1985).

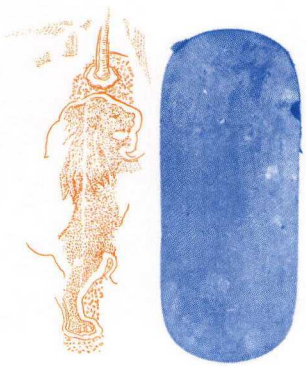


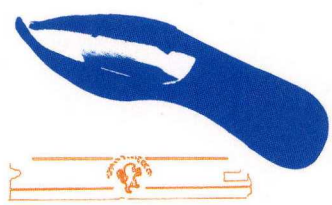






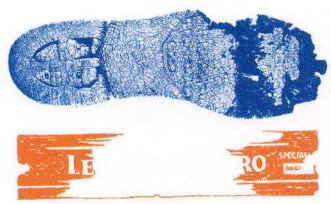






ABOVE *Leone d'Oro*, 1978; 18 screenprinted color prints in box, edition of 40 published by Edizioni Francesco Conz **FOLLOWING SPREAD** *Twins*, 1979; screenprint and pencil on paper

ORO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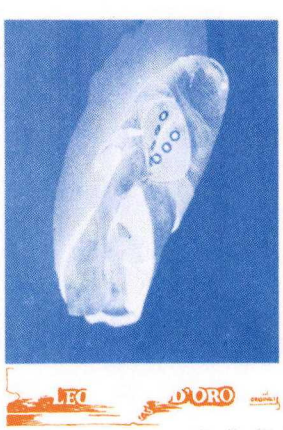
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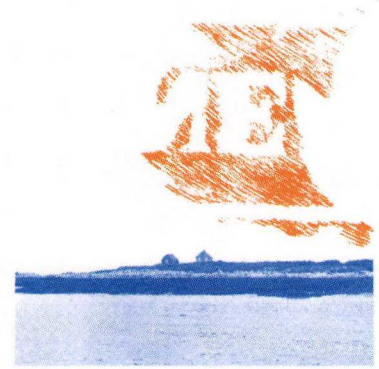
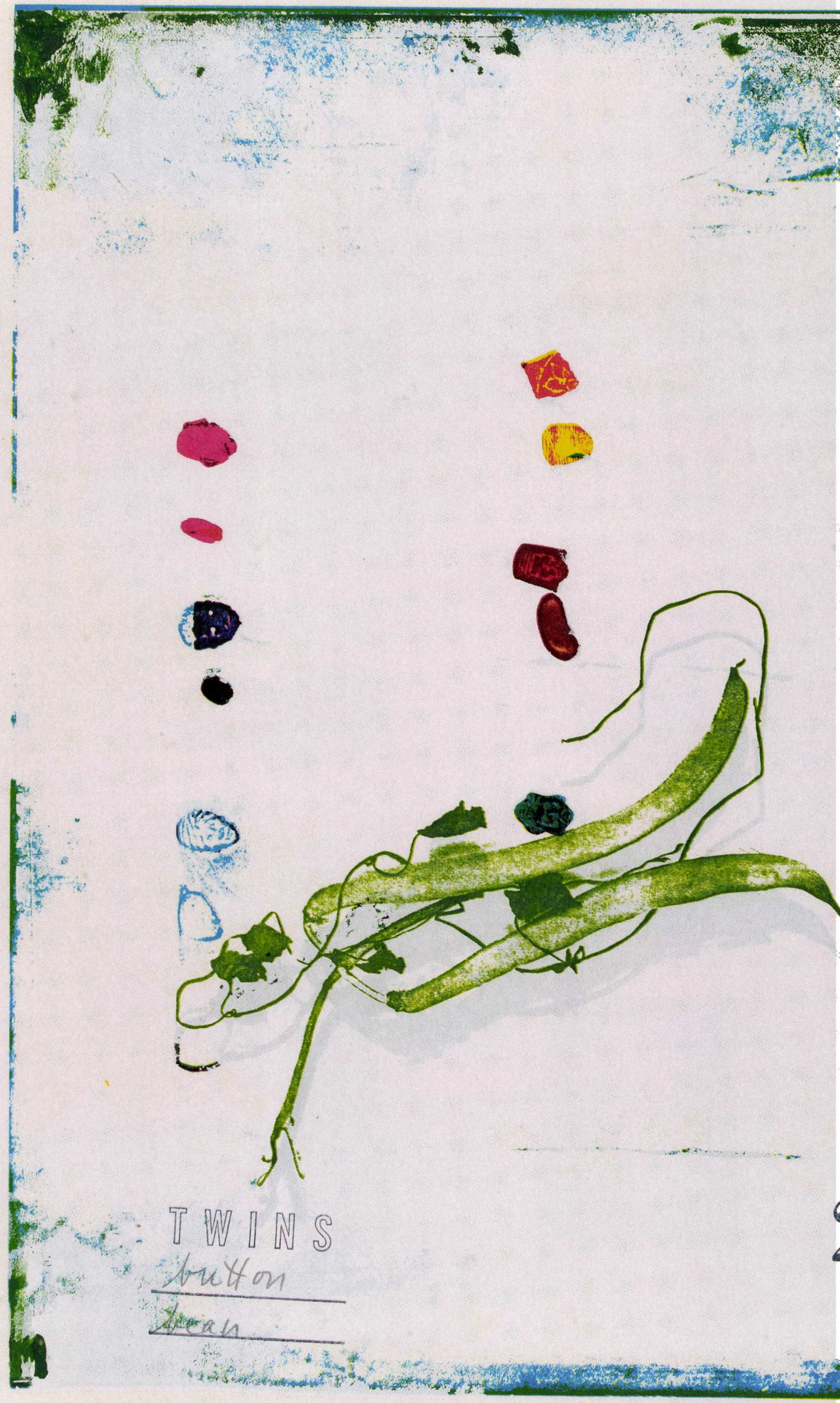




Twins

TWINS
button
bean

1980–83

Publishes Natural Assemblages and the True Crow

Using the 1977 audio tape *7712A—Natural Assemblages and the True Crow*, Knowles creates a performance with a violinist, a dancer, and found objects. For the book version, published in 1980 by Visual Studies Workshop Press and Printed Editions, she utilizes photocopying processes to further explore two objects found on the streets of New York.

The Book of Bean

After receiving a National Endowment for the Arts grant, Knowles creates *The Book of Bean* (1981) at the Franklin Furnace exhibition space in New York (pp. 161–63). It incorporates her knowledge of beans in a walk-through "transvironment."

WDR broadcasts Bohnen Sequenzen

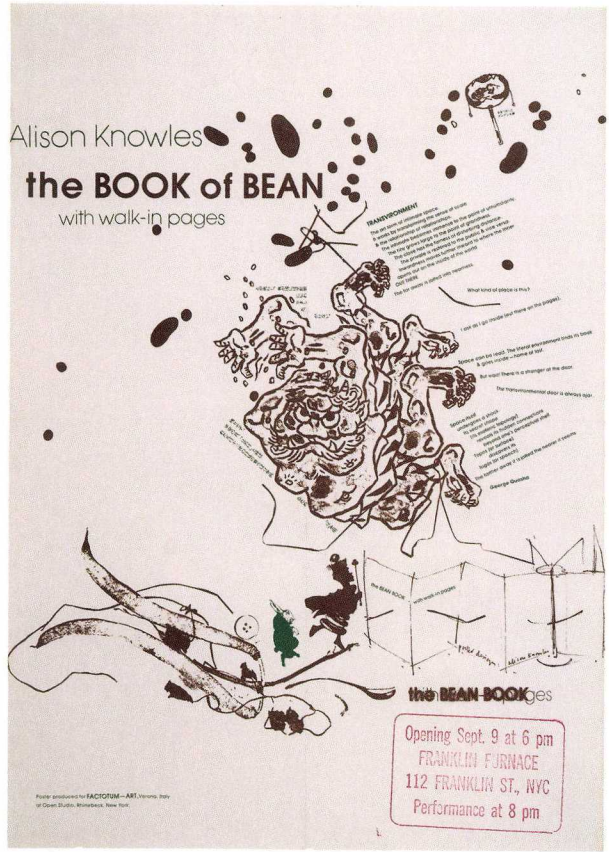
Knowles receives the prestigious Karl Sczuka Award for Best Radio Work, for performing *Bohnen Sequenzen* (*Bean Sequences*, 1982) on Westdeutscher Rundfunk with George Brecht, Hannah B Higgins, and Jessica Higgins. WDR, well-known for its avant-garde programming of radio plays and sound art (*Hörspiele*), commissions three additional plays from Knowles.

Builds studio in Barrytown, New York

First used by Dick Higgins, the Barrytown studio becomes Knowles's space in 1983. She renovates it in 1984 by adding a sleeping loft, art storage, and a paper-making studio.

Publishes A Bean Concordance

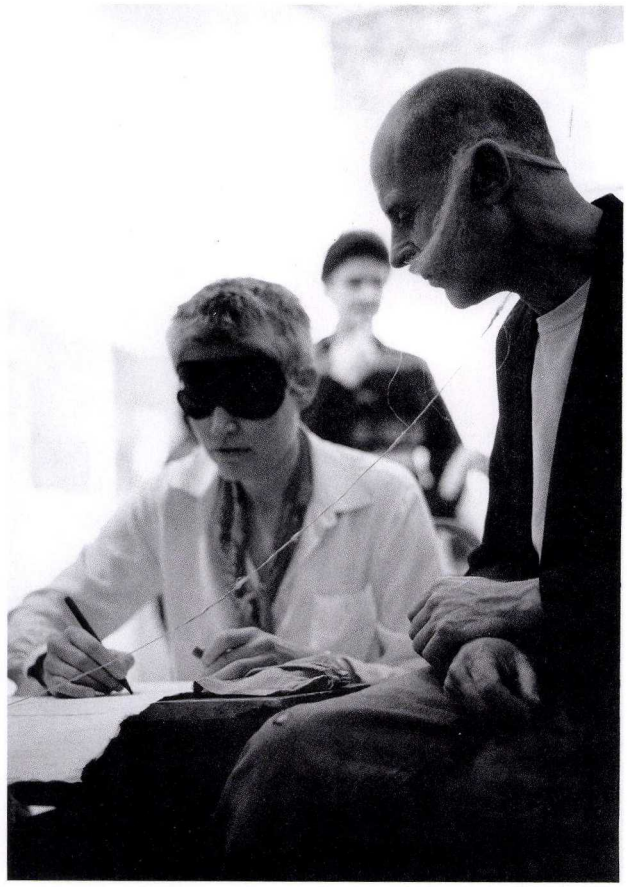
Intended to be an ongoing publication continuing her research into beans, *A Bean Concordance* (Printed Editions, 1983) includes information collected from artists, composers, and friends, much like *Journal of the Identical Lunch*, from fifteen years earlier.



ABOVE Poster for *The Book of Bean*, 1981; ink-stamped printed matter **FACING AND FOLLOWING SPREAD** Installation views, *The Book of Bean*, Franklin Furnace, New York, 1981

Loose Pages

A collaboration between Knowles and Coco Gordon, *Loose Pages* is a multiple made of handmade cotton and flax paper pieces and worn by the performer as a "book." During the opening of the exhibition at Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, Jessica Higgins performs the multiple while Knowles and Gordon perform as the Scribe and Wet Skin Collagist (p. 167). The exhibition includes 537 works involving handmade paper and pulp from carded, dew-retted flax and linen yarns, including *Pagina Lenticchia* (p. 166).



Knowles performing as the Scribe at the opening of *Loose Pages*, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, February 14, 1983

PERFORMANCES: Alison Knowles & Coco Gordon 2/14/83

A Alison: Scribe (after the performance)

The scroll was part of the performance actions of Feb 14.

During the performance at the opening of the exhibition LOOSE PAGES, this scroll was made by Alison Knowles. The performer sat blindfolded at the table and recorded with three brown markers and a graphite pencil the sounds in the room and the voices of people nearby. People in the room spoke to the performer on a variety of topics ranging from descriptions of the weather to such interrogations as, "who are you? and "what are you doing?" The effort was made to record timbre and intensity with certain markers. Some people joined the performance by putting objects in the way of the scribe.

—Alison Knowles

B Coco: Wet Skin Collagist

Contact of skin with skin. Wet freshly made paper. Alive. Flexible. I reach to your cheek, put it on, circle or fragment. Wherever your skin shows you are vulnerable. No appointment, operation none. It happens when you least expect. You talk and I am silent.
I reach to your free skin, there, how is it?

If you let it dry, it will constrict or grow around you. If it constricts it will have its own configuration, it has a memory & will want to stay the way it is born. If it grows around you it will be transparent & will want to stay a part of you.

To make your own: pour half glass or measuring cup of pulp into ricer (a found press), hold over water bowl, let drain, place small blanket on top, press down slowly till all water is pressed out, lift handle, remove circle, separate fiberglas circle from pulp, reinsert in ricer (a found press). Skin.

—Coco Gordon

Ephemera from *Loose Pages* exhibition, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, 1983

LIFT/LOOK

FACING *Pagina Lenticchia*, 1983; flax panel **ABOVE** Jessica Higgins performing *Loose Pages* at Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, 1983

Takes part in international residencies

In 1984, Knowles is awarded a DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) Residency Grant in Berlin. She also participates in a residency at Shion International Paper Mill in Japan, where a storm destroys her work following an outdoor opening.

Publishes Great Bear Fluxus Events

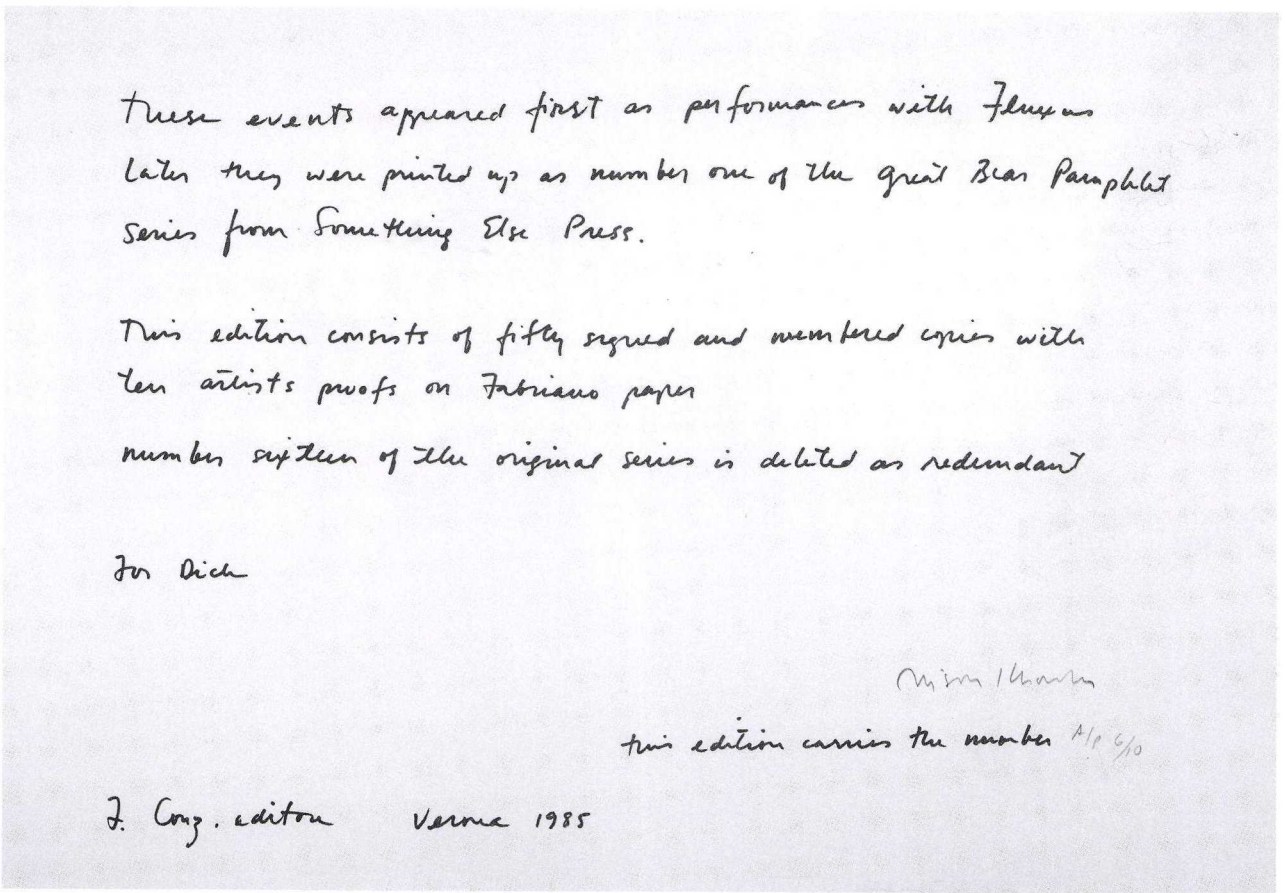
After remarrying Dick Higgins in 1984, Knowles dedicates *Great Bear Fluxus Events* to him, a collection of handwritten scores produced with the publisher Francesco Conz.

Receives NEA grant with composer Malcolm Goldstein

Recognized in 1985 by the National Endowment for the Arts in the Experimental Intermedia grant category, Knowles and Goldstein plan an interactive sound installation using electronically amplified natural objects.

Cena Per Otto

Knowles gathers objects she has recently used in performances or installations, organizes them on plates by color, and photographs the arrangements for an edition of eight monochromatic prints published by Pari & Dispari in 1985. A feast for the eyes, *Cena per Otto* (*Dinner for Eight*) commemorates the objects' participation in Knowles's work, which she captures in the phrase *grazie e arrivederci*.


These events appeared first as performances with Fluxus
Later they were printed up as number one of the great Bear Pamphlet
series from Something Else Press.

This edition consists of fifty signed and numbered copies with
ten artists proofs on Fabriano paper
number sixteen of the original series is deleted as redundant

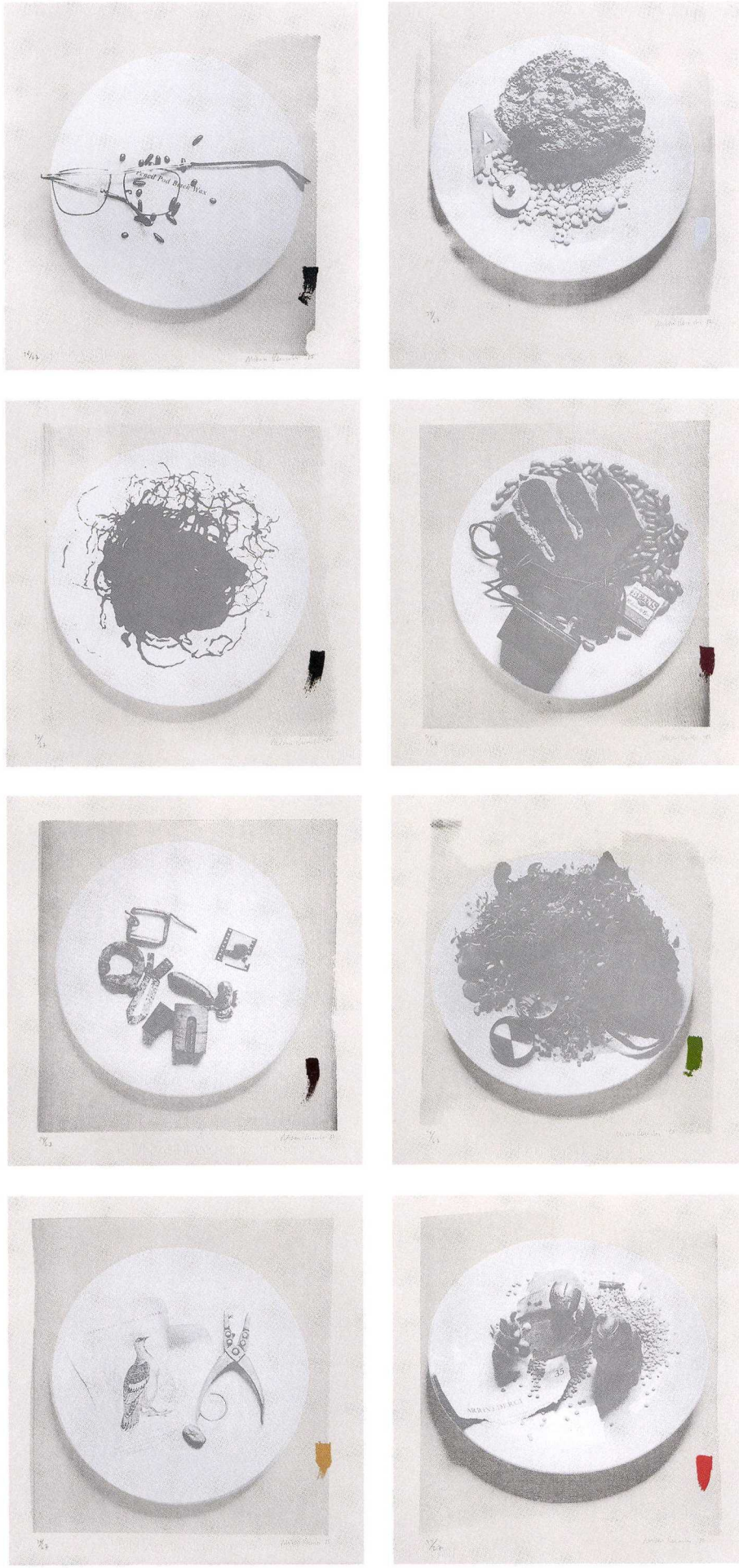
for Dick

Alison Knowles

this edition carries the number A/P 6/10

F. Conz. editore Verona 1985

First page of *Great Bear Fluxus Events by Alison Knowles*, 1985; 16 sheets, edition of 50 published by Edizioni Francesco Conz



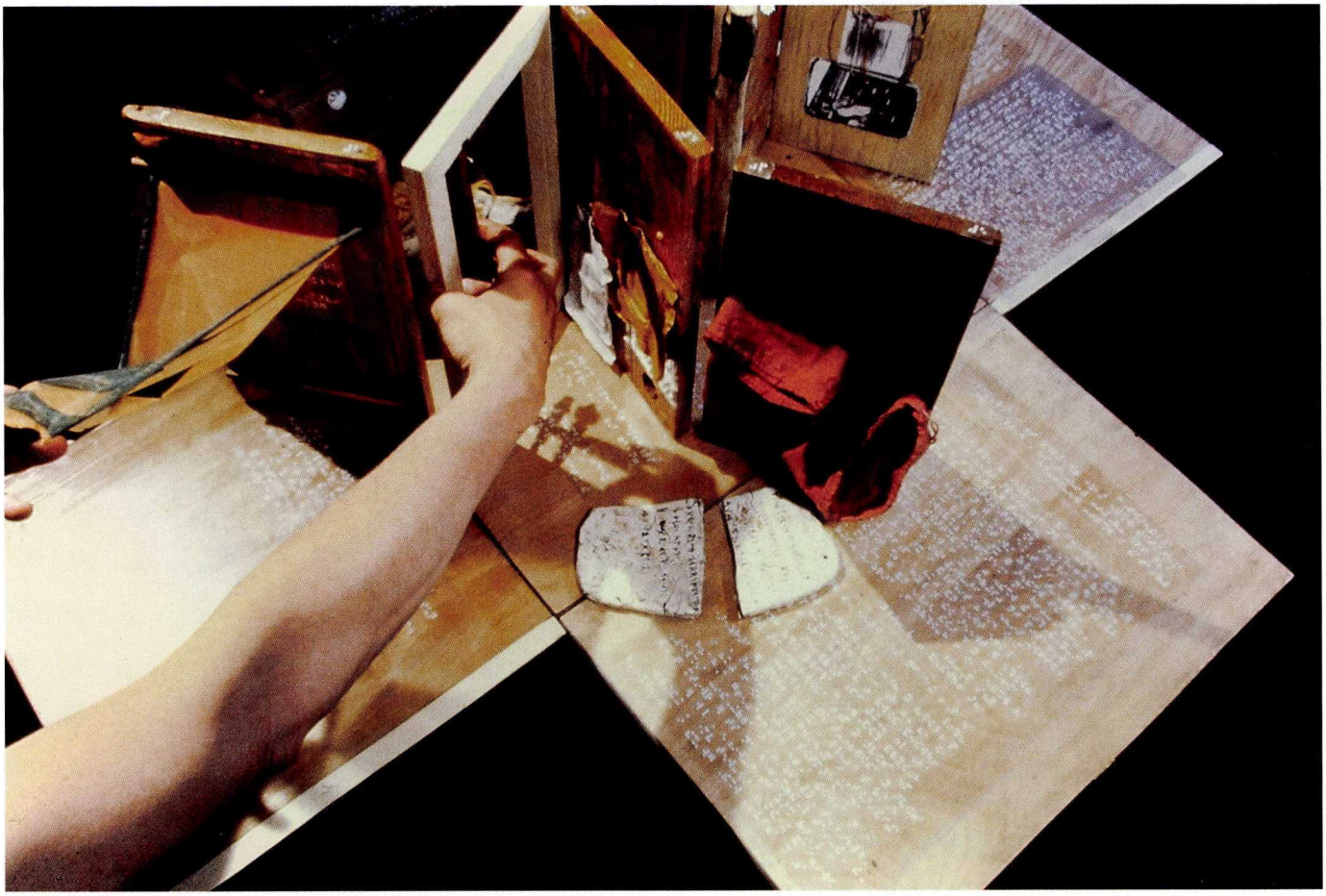
Cena per Otto, 1985; 8 black-and-white screenprints with acrylic color interventions, edition of 67 published by Edizione Pari & Dispari

Lentils Over Cotton Slippers, 1986–88;
lentils and cotton paper pulp

1986

Debuts Finger Book of Ancient Language

At the Lighthouse for the Blind in New York, a visually impaired audience is the first to experience Knowles's initial tactile tabletop installation. *Finger Book of Ancient Language*, a collaboration with Kari Miller, incorporates various textures through assorted materials, languages, and Braille translations. Knowles creates two additional versions of the book, the third of which is exhibited at Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, in 1987, along with a video and the print series *Indigenous Weeds*.

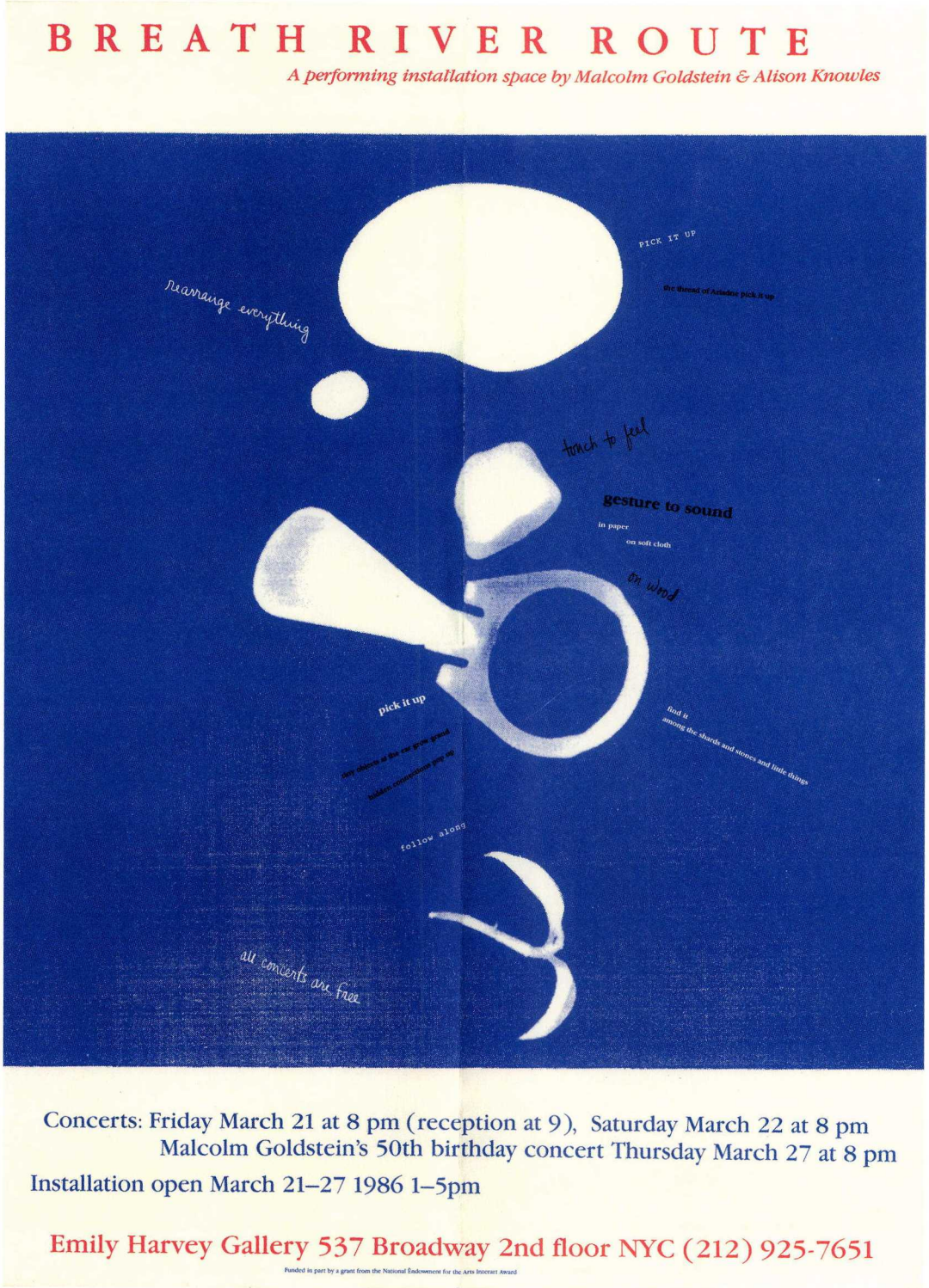


TOP Installation view, *A Finger Book*, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, 1987 **BOTTOM** Knowles with Kari Miller, *Finger Book of Ancient Language*, 1986; mixed media

1986

Breath River Route

Using their NEA grant, Knowles and Malcolm Goldstein open their collaborative seven-day exhibition *Breath River Route* on March 21st at Emily Harvey Gallery, New York. It includes unique sound installations for the public to activate. Knowles and Goldstein perform concerts for the exhibition's opening and closing.

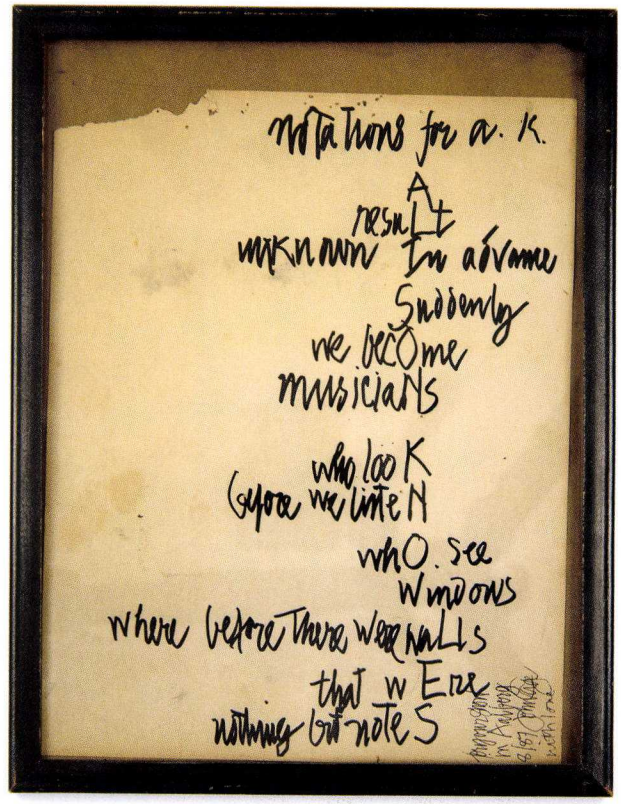


ABOVE Poster for *Breath River Route*, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, 1986
FACING Knowles at *Breath River Route*, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, 1986

SPORTSWEAR

John Cage dedicates a mesostic to Knowles

On the occasion of Knowles's solo exhibition *Unique Cloth and Paper Works* at Nordjyllands Kunstmuseum in Aalborg, Denmark, Cage creates a poem for her. *Notations for A.K.* is arranged so that her name intersects with lines of horizontal text. The work bears the inscription: "For your show in Aalborg. 8/87 John Cage with Love."



Knowles and Cage continue to collaborate

Knowles and Cage's exchange of ideas, including their preparation of food together, is ongoing over decades. In 1987, filmmakers Arlene Schloss and Edmund Chibeau shoot video of the pair reading from Stéphane Mallarmé's poem "Un coup de dés" ("A Throw of the Dice," 1897) while they cook. In 2012, this footage becomes "Cooking with Cage," the fifteenth episode of *SWITCH TV,* an artists' television program with Jessica Higgins as its creative director.

Exhibits with Carolee Schneemann at Women's Studio Workshop

After Knowles participates in a two-person show with Schneemann at WSW in Rosendale, New York, in 1988, she receives a studio residency grant in 1993 and is invited to return again in 2003 for *From Seed to Sheet: The Women's Studio Workshop's ArtFarm Project*. For the latter, she creates paper works from plants and seeds grown at a nearby farm.

TOP John Cage: *Notations for A.K.*, 1987; ink on paper **BOTTOM** Stills from "Cooking with Cage," *SWITCH TV*, episode 15, Western Massachusetts Public Access Television (ECAT)

Quecha (7 Indian Moons Panel), 1987; cyanotype, screenprint, and pencil on canvas

Cena Rossa

Rosanna Chiessi organizes *Cena Rossa* (*Red Dinner*, 1989), an evening of performances at 7 Torri Ristorante in Reggio Emilia, Italy. For *Concerto di Fagioli* (*Bean Performance*), Knowles screens a video in which she prepares a mushroom dish with John Cage and performs a sound work with red beans. The event also includes performances by Philip Corner and Corrado Costa.

Seven Indian Moons exhibition

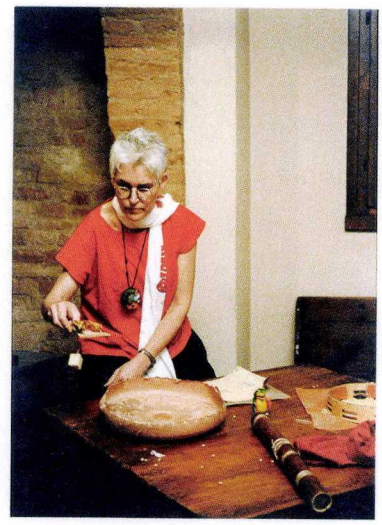
For a 1990 exhibition at Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, Knowles produces the print series *Seven Indian Moons* and the floor installation *Moon Circle* (pp. 178–79). The latter is comprised of a painted-white circle and found objects labeled with instructions for the viewer similar to those for *Gentle Surprises for the Ear*, from 1974.

WDR broadcasts Setsubun

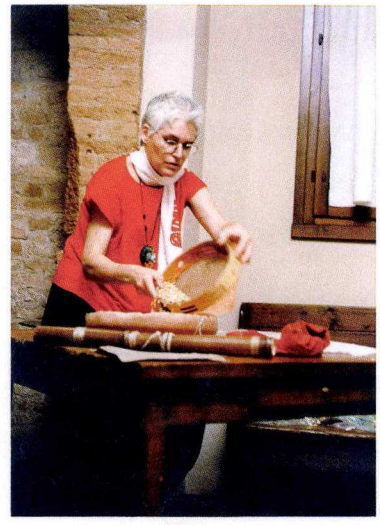
Inspired by a Japanese New Year's tradition involving beans, Knowles and collaborators Yasunao Tone and Joshua Selman produce a radio play in 1990 for the German radio station Westdeutscher Rundfunk using recordings made in Japan, spoken word, and sounds from objects collected by Knowles.

Residency at Banff Centre

Knowles creates many works during her 1991 residency at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in Alberta, Canada, including *Broken Line with Slippers*, which is activated when a performer wears the work's slippers, and *Non Hai Pan*, four large, black-and-white cotton page-panels with interactive floor objects. *Non Hai Pan* is exhibited in 1994 at Caterina Gualco Gallery in Genoa, Italy.

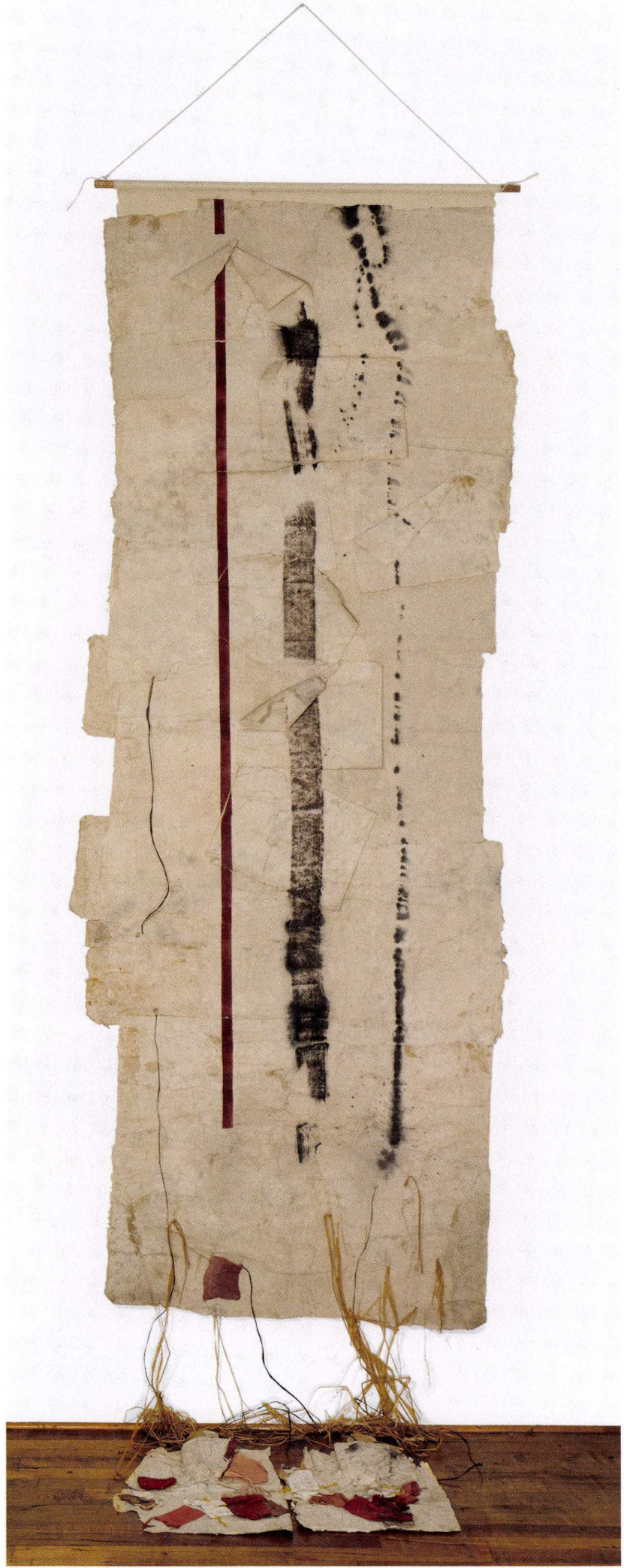


1989
Cena Rossa Ristorante "7 Torri"
performance
di
Alison Knowles



1989
Cena Rossa Reggio Emilia
Performance di
Alison Knowles.
"Concerto di fagioli"

Knowles performing *Concerto di Fagioli* at *Cena Rossa*, Reggio Emilia, Italy, 1989



Broken Line with Slippers, 1991; Japanese mulberry leaf paper **FOLLOWING SPREAD** Installation view, *Moon Circle*, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, 1990

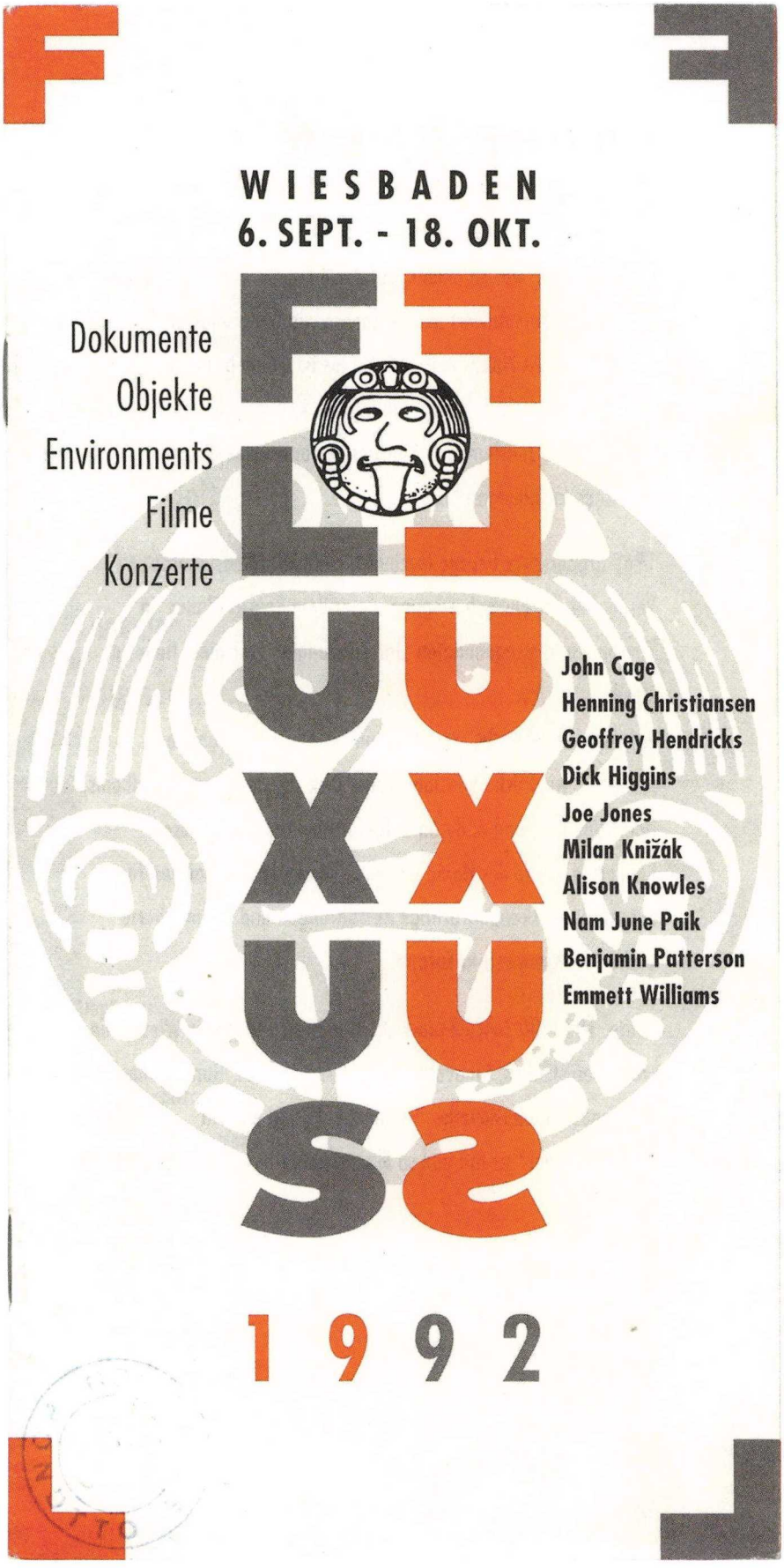
Exhibitions commemorate the 30th anniversary of Fluxus

Knowles participates in exhibitions in the US and Europe including *Fluxus Da Capo* in Wiesbaden (1992); *Fluxus Virus* at Galerie Schüppenhauer, Cologne (1992); *Fluxattitudes* at the New Museum, New York (1993); and *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (1993). *In the Spirit of Fluxus* travels to museums including the MCA Chicago, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and the Fondació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona.

Um-laut exhibition

At the opening of her 1992 solo exhibition *Um-laut* at Galerie Schüppenhauer, Cologne, Knowles performs *Onion Skin Song* and other works with her daughter Hannah B Higgins. The exhibition is accompanied by a bilingual catalog and John Cage redesigns his mesostic for Knowles from 1987.

TOP Knowles performing at the Santa Barbara Courthouse as part of *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, 1994 **BOTTOM** Knowles and Hannah B Higgins performing at the opening of *Um-laut*, Galerie Schüppenhauer, Cologne, 1992

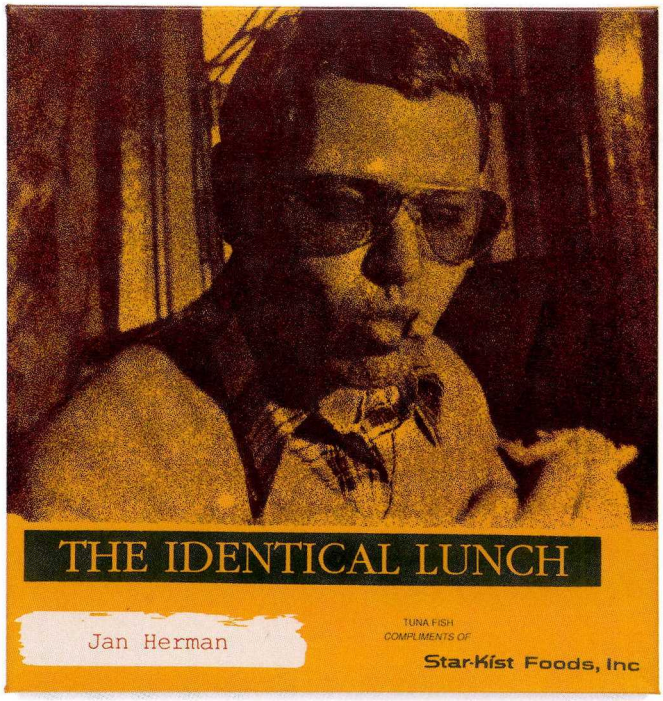


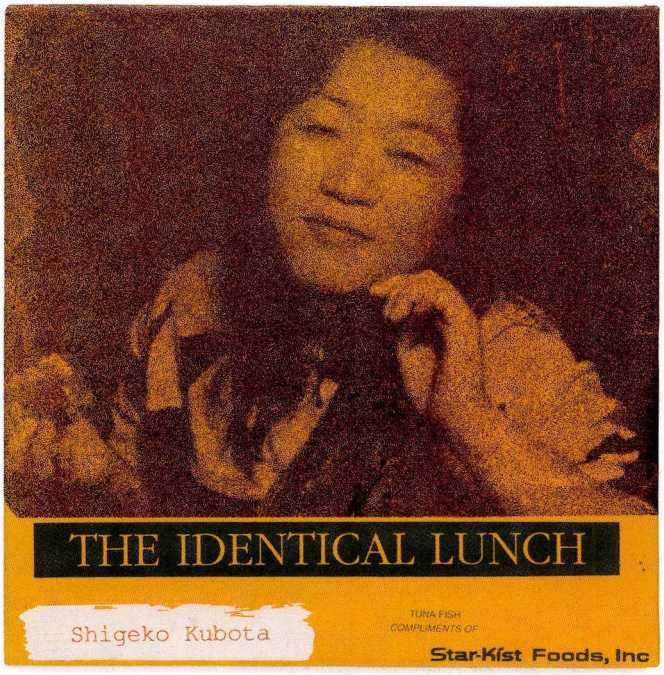
Program for *Fluxus Da Capo 1962 Wiesbaden 1992*, 1992; color offset on folded paper

1992

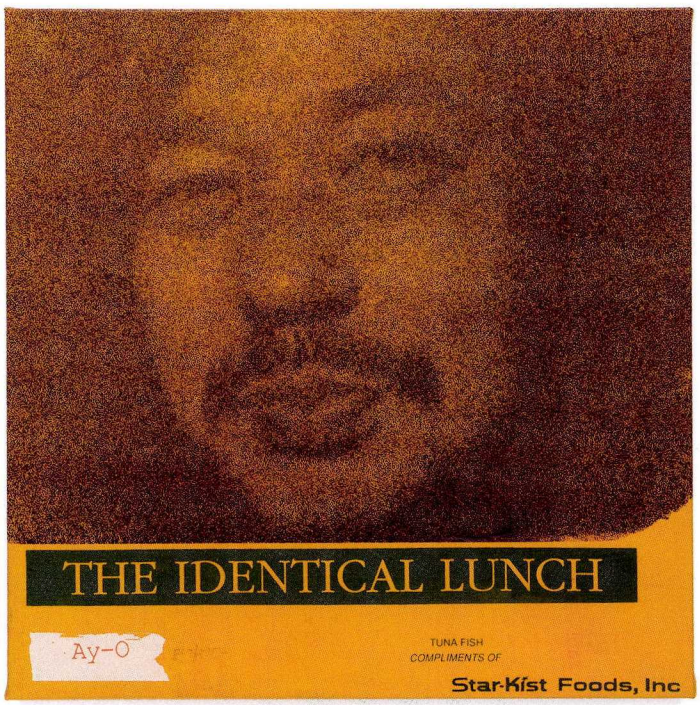
Prints third The Identical Lunch series

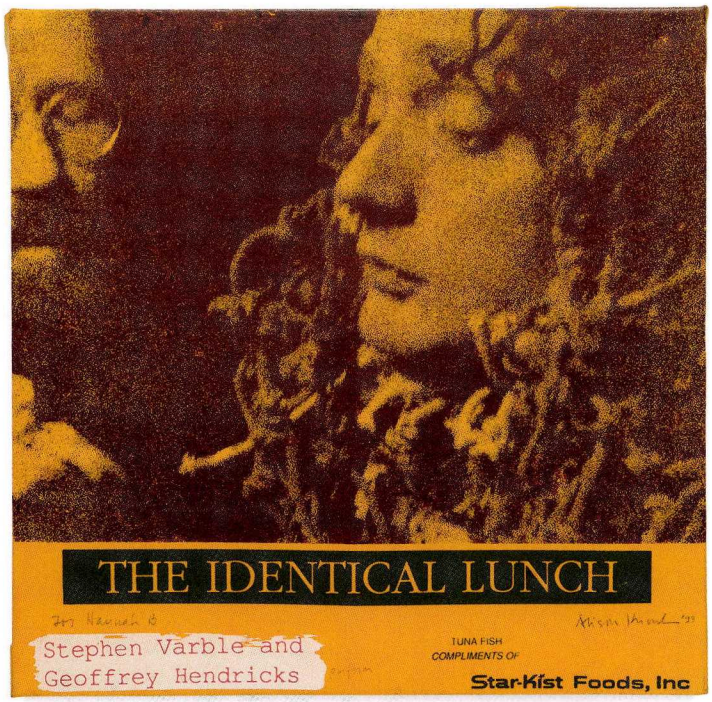
Knowles revisits the prints she first produced in 1972 featuring the StarKist Tuna logo and performers of *The Identical Lunch*. For this version, she screenprints the images on yellow-painted canvases and adds a canvas of her daughters performing the score.

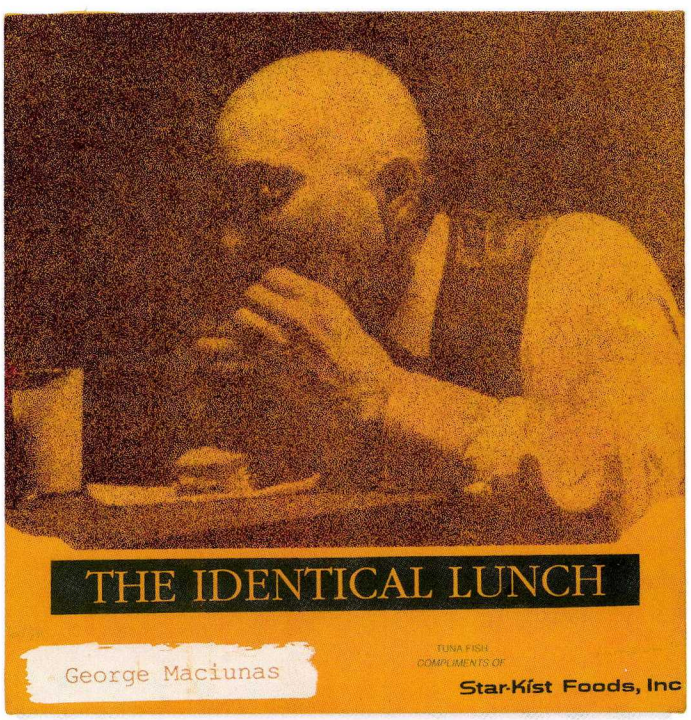


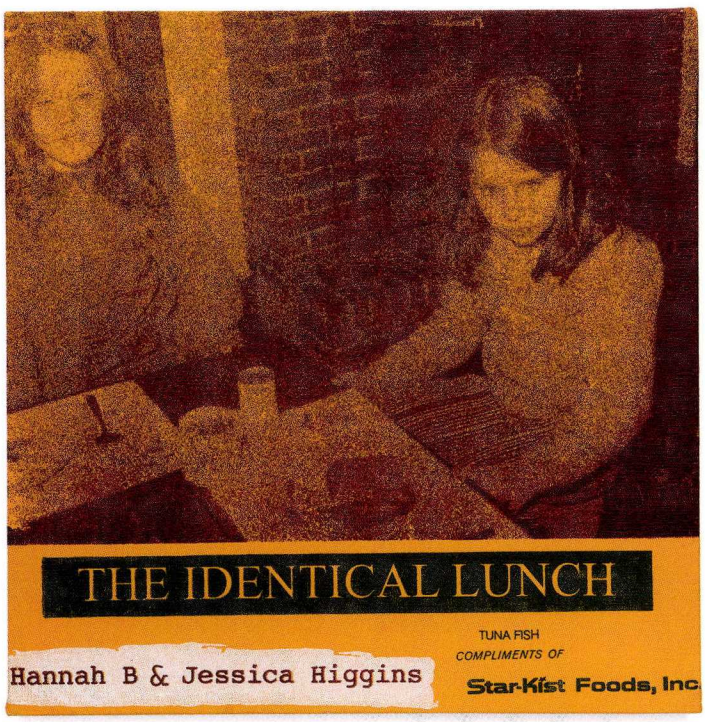


CLOCKWISE *Jan Herman Performs the Identical Lunch*, *Anne Brazeau Performs the Identical Lunch*, *Ay-O Performs the Identical Lunch*, *Stephen Varble Performs the Identical Lunch*, *Hanna B and Jessica Higgins Perform the Identical Lunch*, *George Maciunas Performs the Identical Lunch*, and *Shigeko Kobota Performs the Identical Lunch*, 1969, realized 1992; screenprints on canvas


THE IDENTICAL LUNCH
Ay-O
TUNA FISH
COMPLIMENTS OF
Star-Kist Foods, Inc


THE IDENTICAL LUNCH
Stephen Varble and
Geoffrey Hendricks
TUNA FISH
COMPLIMENTS OF
Star-Kist Foods, Inc


THE IDENTICAL LUNCH
George Maciunas
TUNA FISH
COMPLIMENTS OF
Star-Kist Foods, Inc


THE IDENTICAL LUNCH
TUNA FISH
COMPLIMENTS OF
Hannah B & Jessica Higgins
Star-Kist Foods, Inc

Publishes Event Scores

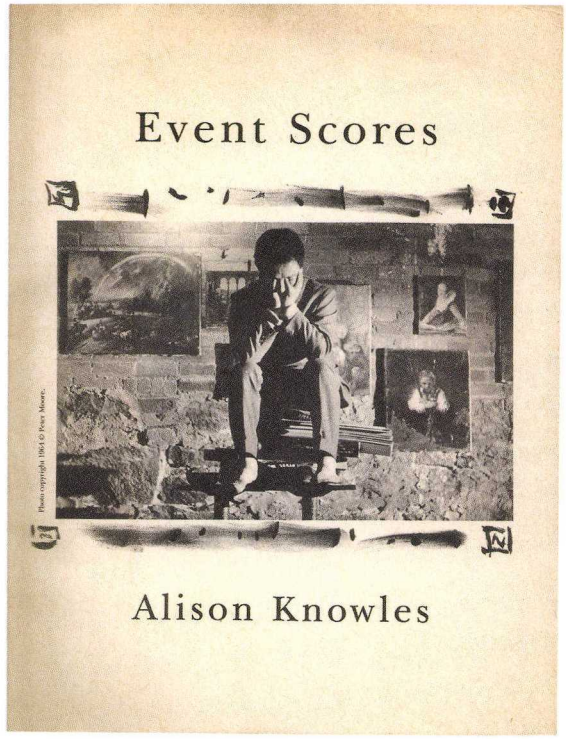
This publication of Knowles's *Event Scores* includes iconic works accompanied by hand-drawn illustrations and notations. The cover shows Nam June Paik sitting on a platform for the durational performance of Knowles's *Composition for Paik*, from 1964.

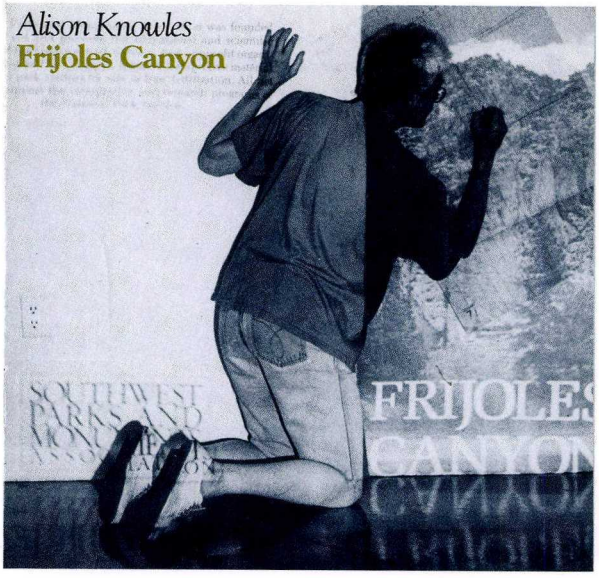
Frijoles Canyon album

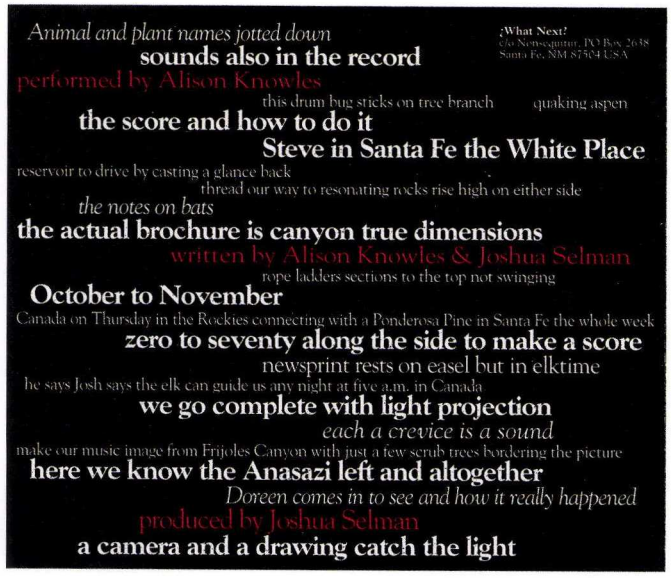
For the radio play–like sound work *Frijoles Canyon*, Knowles and Joshua Selman mix spoken text and field recordings made in New Mexico and in Canada during her residency at the Banff Centre the previous year.

Bread and Water exhibition

The exhibition of *Bread and Water* at Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, includes palladium prints and cyanotypes made from photocopied images of cracks in the bottoms of bread loaves. Knowles matches them to different rivers around the world and writes the score for each river.







TOP *Event Scores* (Left Hand Books, 1992) **BOTTOM** Front and back covers of *Frijoles Canyon* (¿What Next? Recordings, 1992) **FACING** *The Amazon at Belém*, from *Bread and Water*, 1992–95; palladium print and screenprint

The Amazon at Belém

Plumed grasses a gold and rock salt river

outside Don Pecho and the Sea

all species considerable voice the Toucan clatter

Annual high density valuables travel the motor road

Lichens as puffy corals brown the ground and the whippoorwill

Sediments clearly express the rapids of white water

weathered diversity enhanced by micronutrients

Second also eaten capybara

Backwater latex trade expands three million miles

This longest river on the earth is unknown at the source

From dusk 3 million bats to watch and wait in

particularly water to Atlantic at Belém

Morning and evening raucous voice the toucan clatter music

streamside bush goatsucker and the whippoorwill dead tree stumps

Giant armadillo and the second also eaten capybara

Through day the harpy eagle hunts to watch ceremonial processions

with night alert to work in dead tree stumps

Bread and Water

'95

The Dnieper at the Black Sea, 1992; cyanotype with acrylic, ink, crayon, and pencil on cloth

Publishes Spoken Text

For the book *Spoken Text* (Left Hand Books, 1993), Knowles collects performance scripts of her radio plays, among them *Bean Sequences*, *Fishes of the Philippine Seas*, *Sestburn II*, and *Frijoles Canyon*.

Participates in Performance Days Honoring John Cage

At Cage's posthumous exhibition *Rolywholyover A Circus* (1993) at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Knowles, Dick Higgins, and Jackson Mac Low perform works in memory of their dear friend who died on August 12, 1992.

Indigo Island exhibition travels throughout Europe

A retrospective of Knowles's work with an accompanying catalog travels beginning in 1994 to Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken, Germany; Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw; and the Museet for Samtidskunst, Roskilde, Denmark. Three large *Bread and Water* cyanotypes and *Moon Circle* are among the various works featured.

WDR broadcasts Bread and Water

Knowles and Joshua Selman produce and perform a radio play consisting of seventeen randomly ordered recordings, each named for a river.

Basta Fagiogli exhibition

After years of eating navy beans salvaged from Knowles's 1975 *Bean Garden* installation several times a week, Dick Higgins proclaims, "Enough beans!" Knowles prints the exclamation in Italian—*Basta fagiogli!*—on a fabric work displayed at Unimedia Gallery in Genoa, Italy.

TOP *Il Mostro è Godzilla*, 1994; mixed media in bottle, edition of 100 realized by M. Lunardon, Molvena, Italy
BOTTOM *Basta Fagiogli*, 1994; cyanotype

Homage to Each Red Thing included in Do It

Knowles is one of the twelve original artists in *Do It*, a group exhibition curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist that begins traveling internationally in 1994. Each host institution interprets and installs scores written by artists. Knowles revises her score *Celebration Red* to create *Homage to Each Red Thing*, which she sends via fax to the first venue, Ritter Kunsthalle in Klagenfurt, Austria.

Installation view, *Do It*, Ritter Kunsthalle, Klagenfurt, Austria, 1994

"DO IT "

Alison Knowles

Hommage to Each red thing

Any floor is divided into squares of any size. Into each square put one red thing :

a piece of fruit

a doll with a red hat

a shoe

for example. Completely cover the floor this way.

246 caractères

07/07 '94 12:44 ☎44052100 AFAA 011

Homage to Each Red Thing, 1994; fax printout to Ritter Kunsthalle, Klagenfurt, Austria

1995

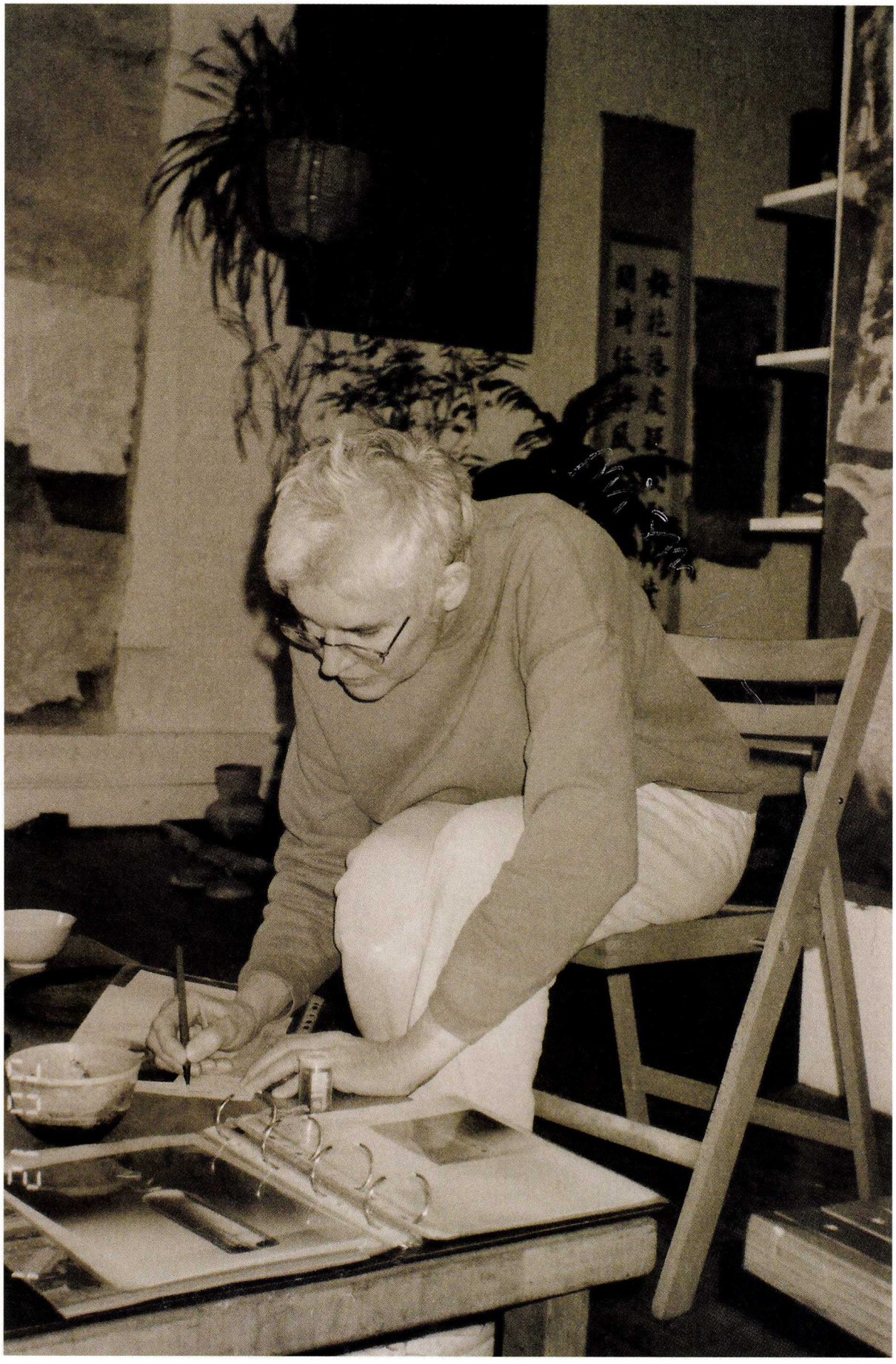
Performs Mantra for Jessie in Italy

Luigi Bonotto invites Knowles and Philip Corner to perform inside his textile manufacturing factory in Molvena, Italy. Among the industrial looms, Knowles delivers *Mantra for Jessie* in Italian. The Fondazione Bonotto holds one of the largest collections of Knowles's work.

Publishes Bread and Water

Knowles receives a Richard Florsheim Grant to publish an artist book of her *Bread and Water* series with Left Hand Books. With this project, as with *The Identical Lunch* and *Assemblages of the True Crow*, Knowles conceives ongoing projects that she continues transcribing through different media over time.

TOP Luigi Bonotto and Knowles: *Mantra for Jessie*, 1995; photograph by Bonotto with hand lettering by Knowles **BOTTOM** Knowles performing *Mantra for Jessie*, 1970/1995, at Lanificio Bonotto, Molvena, Italy, July 29, 1995



Knowles in her New York loft, 1994

Sea-change exhibition

Sea-change, in 1997 at Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, includes found objects covered in paper pulp. At the opening, visitors are asked to grasp a piece of wet paper pulp and make a fist. These *Fist Grips* are then labeled with the names of endangered species and displayed in the exhibition.

Participates in Out of Actions

For the 1998 group exhibition *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Knowles reinstalls *Gentle Surprises for the Ear,* the collaborative interactive sound work she first realized with Philip Corner and Bill Fontana in 1974.

Dick Higgins dies

On October 25, 1998, while attending the *Art Action 1958–1998* colloquium in Quebec City, Canada, Dick Higgins dies of a heart attack.

Vintage Themes exhibition

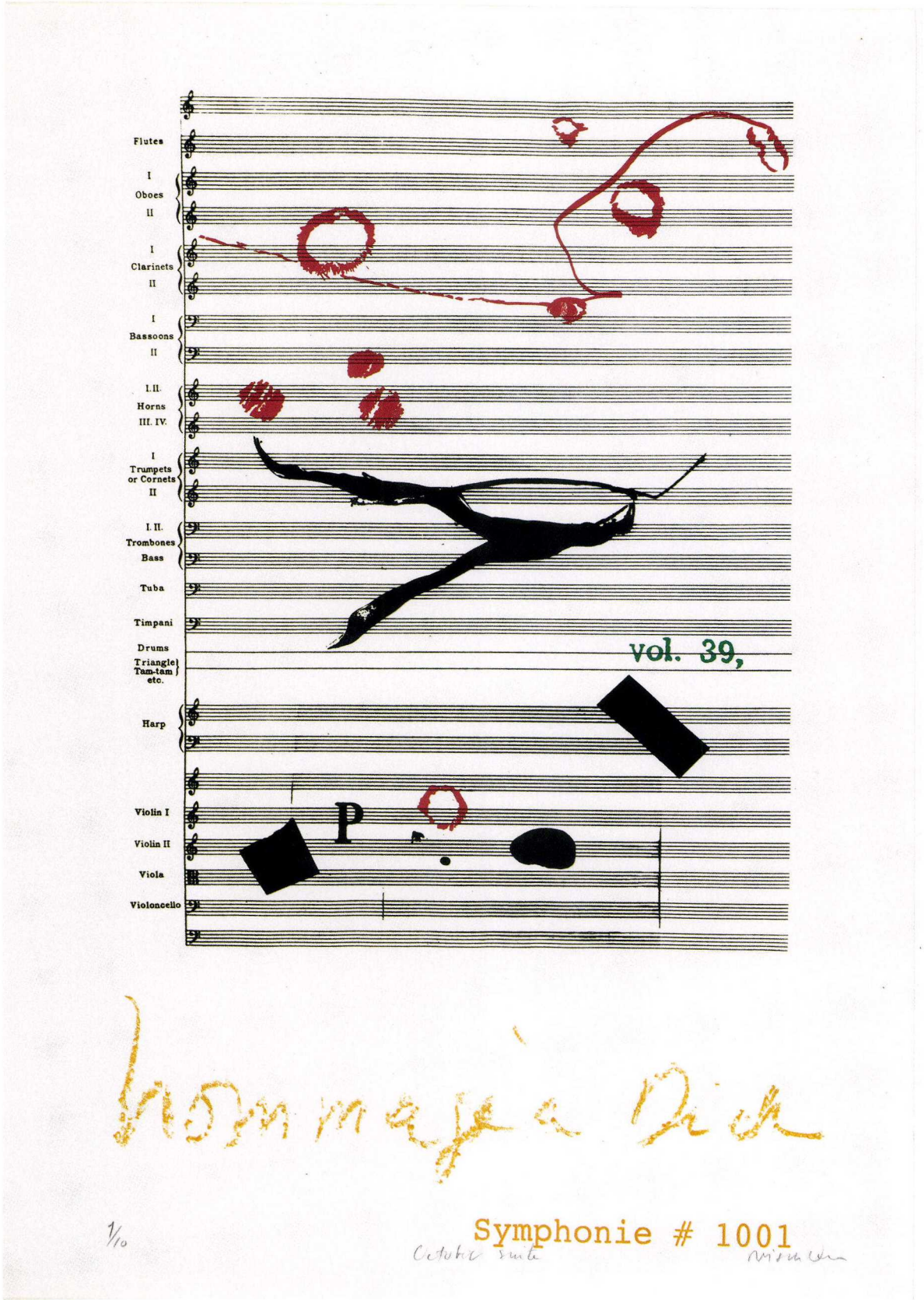
For the announcement card for her 1998 solo exhibition *Vintage Themes* at Gracie Mansion Gallery in New York, Knowles repurposes the image of three scissors that she contributed to Sissor Bros. Warehouse's collaborative screenprint of 1963.

Sea-change Event

Collect shoes from beaches
embed them in paper, cement, ice
stamp each one with the
name of an endangered species.

TOP Announcement for *Sea-change*, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, 1997 **BOTTOM** Announcement for *Vintage Themes*, Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York, 1998

Flat Paper Gong, 1998; molded flax pulp

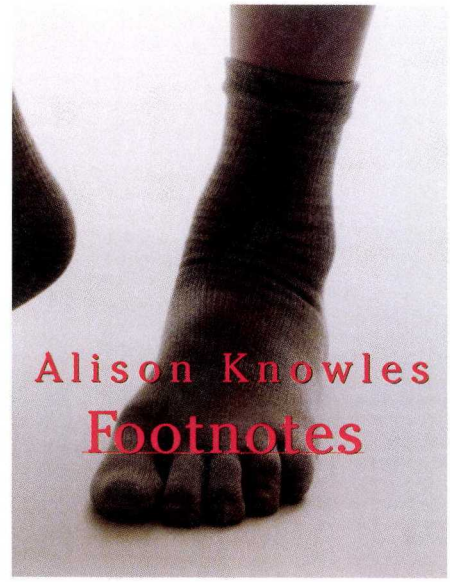


Fluxus Smiles, hommage to Dick Higgins, 1999, from *The October Suite*; screenprint on paper

You just never quite know, hommage to Emmett Williams, 1999, from *The October Suite*; screenprint on paper

Footnotes exhibition

At Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, in 2000, Knowles installs an environment made from relics and other objects collected during her lifetime, embedding them in paper pulp. The works on view include *A Change of Seasons*. For the book *Footnotes: Collage Journal 30 Years*, published by Granary Books to accompany the exhibition, she rips out pages from personal notebooks ranging from the 1970s to the '90s and rearranges them on blank pages.

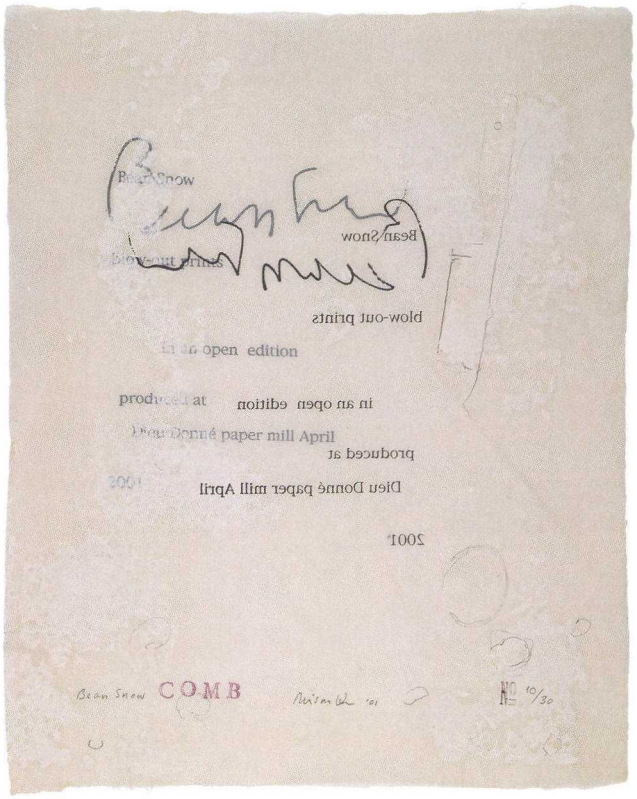


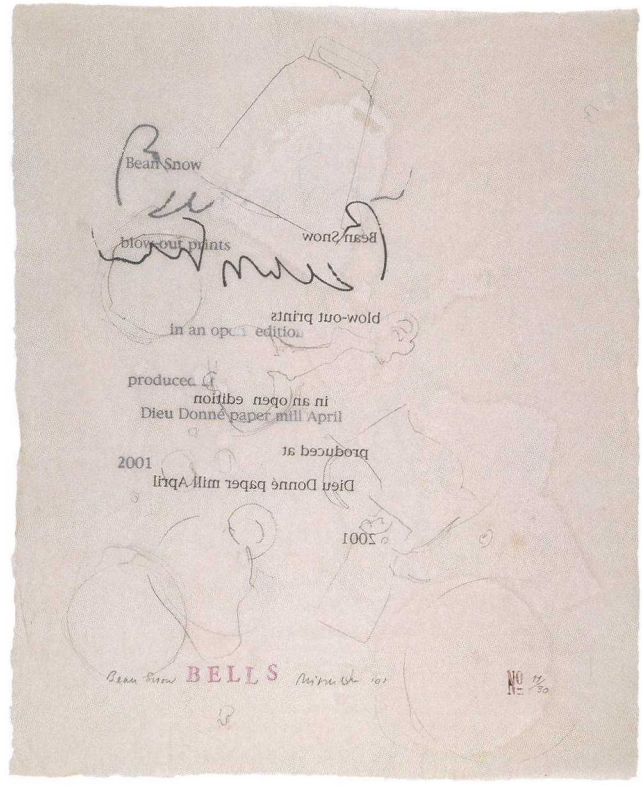
Bean Turners

Knowles begins producing *Bean Turners* (pp. 198–99), handmade flax-paper sculptures filled with beans that become sound instruments when rotated.

Performance Drawings exhibition

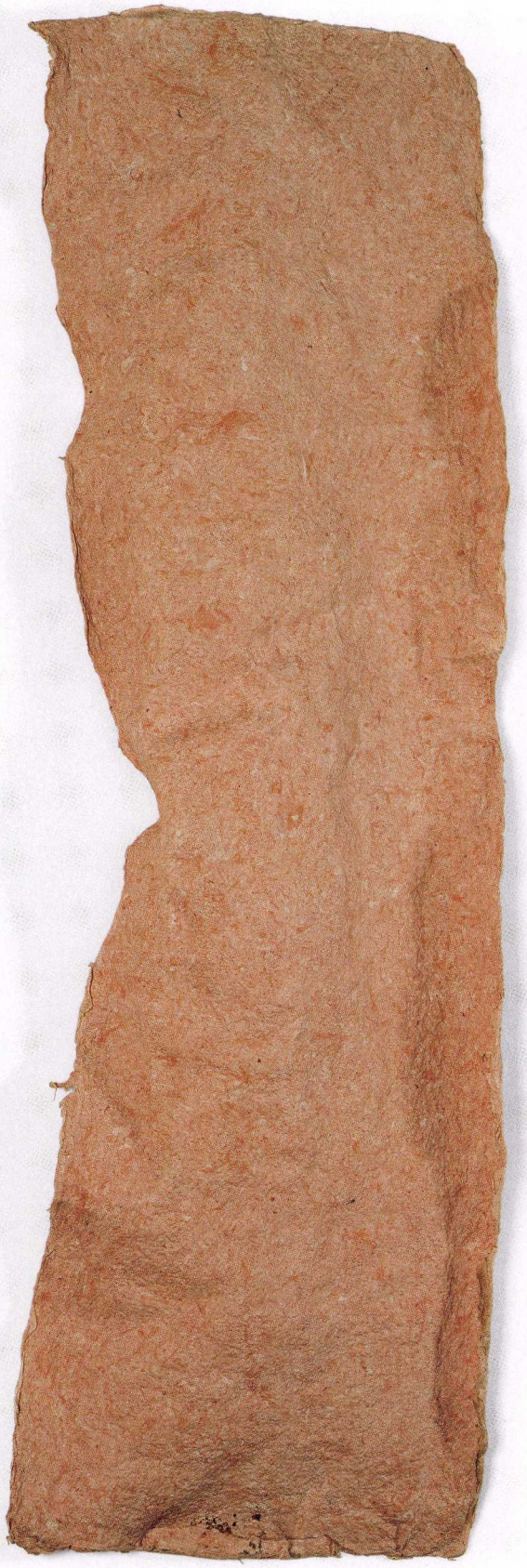
The Drawing Center in New York includes Knowles in a series of five exhibitions of artists exploring the intersections of drawing and performance (pp. 200–01). Her works are activated during two performance evenings in 2001. A concurrent exhibition is held at Dieu Donné Paper Mill, Brooklyn, where Knowles produced several of the works on view, including the multiple *Bean Snow.*





TOP Ephemera from *Footnotes*, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York **BOTTOM** *Bean Snow*, 2001; silkscreen, graphite, and stenciled cotton pulp on abaca base sheet **FACING** *A Change of Seasons*, 2000; screenprint on Abaca paper with botanical elements

under an old helmet a cricket cricket
Caution Hidden driveway
footnotes



Bean Turner, Coral, 2000;
flax paper and beans

Bean Turner, Brown, c. 2000; flax paper and soybeans **FOLLOWING SPREAD** Installation view, *Alison Knowles: Performance Drawings*, The Drawing Center, New York, 2001

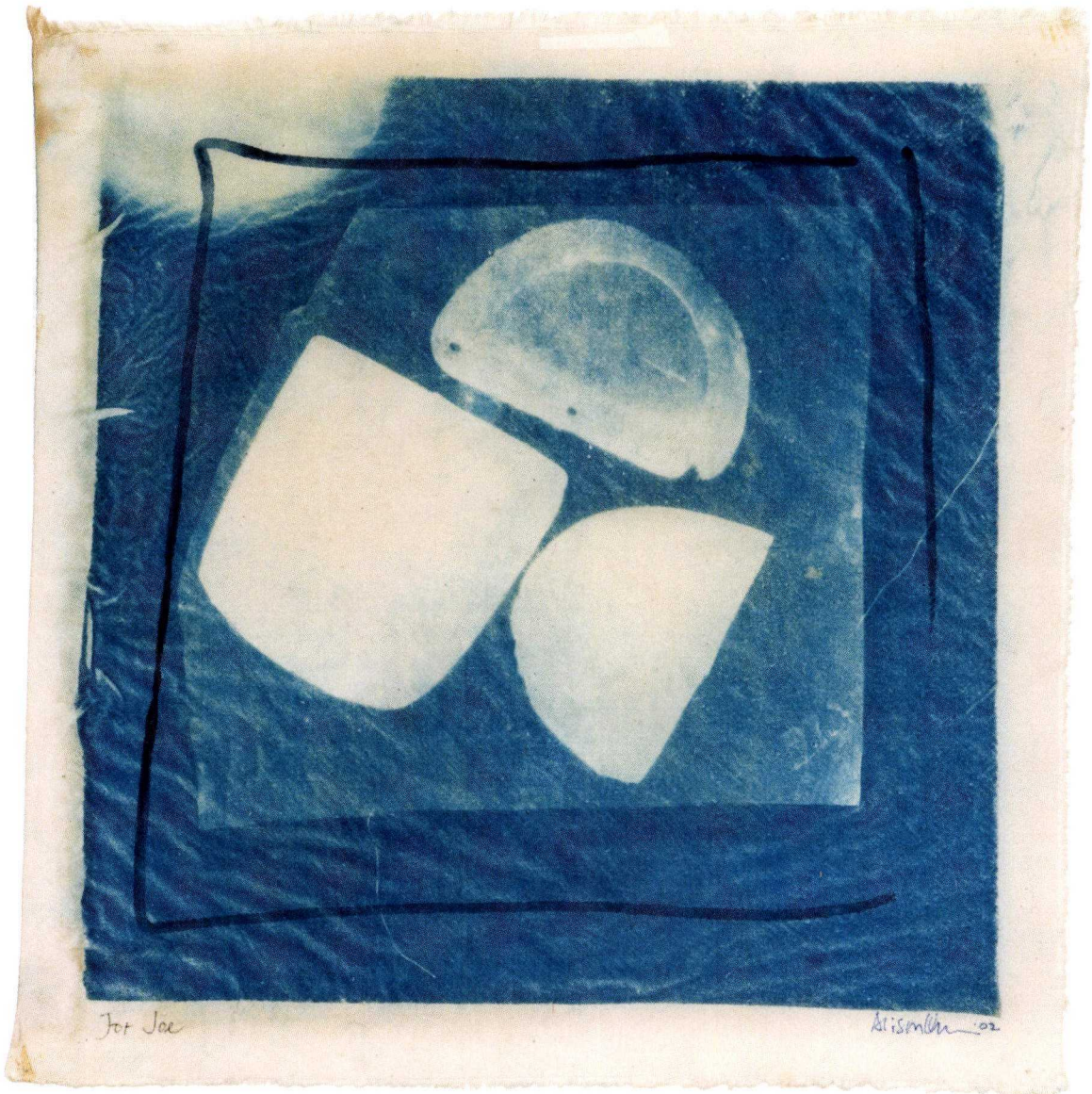
2002

For Joe

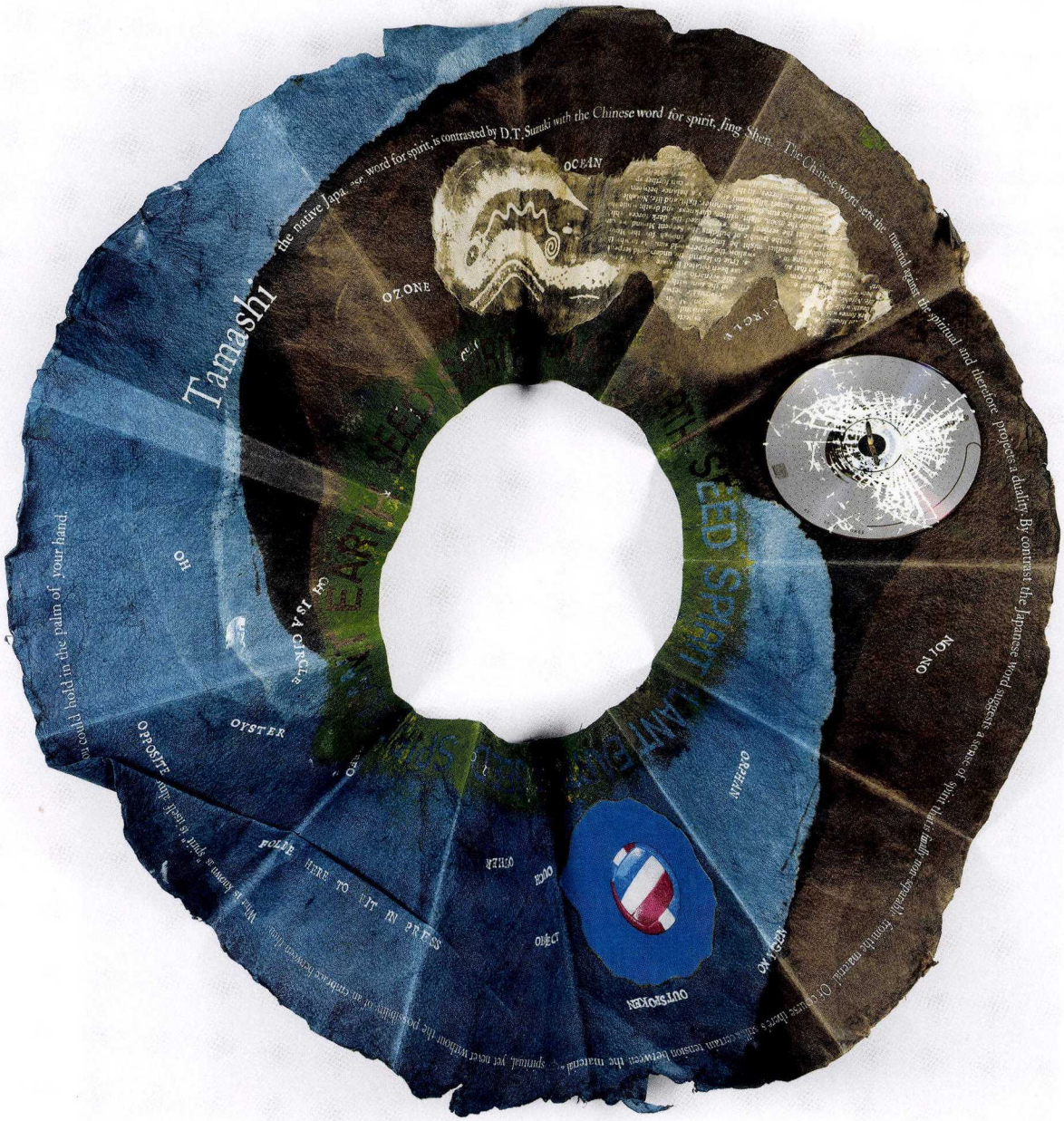
Knowles dedicates a cyanotype of shoe heels to Joseph Reinstein, her son-in-law. The image of the shoe heels was originally used in her *Leone d'Oro* series of 1978. Knowles continues to be drawn to everyday objects that she revisits again and again.

Tamashi

Created in collaboration with papermaker Amanda Degener, the organically dyed book *Tamashi* unfolds into a circle. Including texts from George Quasha and Chie Higaswa's *Ainu Dreams* (1999), William Romain's *Mysteries of the Hopewell* (2000), and *O* words from the *American Heritage Dictionary*, the book is accompanied by a CD recording of sound works.



For Joe, 2002; cyanotype on fabric



Knowles and Amanda Degener: *Tamashi*, 2002; screenprint on indigo- and walnut-dyed handmade flax paper in box, published by Cave Paper

Receives Lifetime Achievement Award from the College Art Association

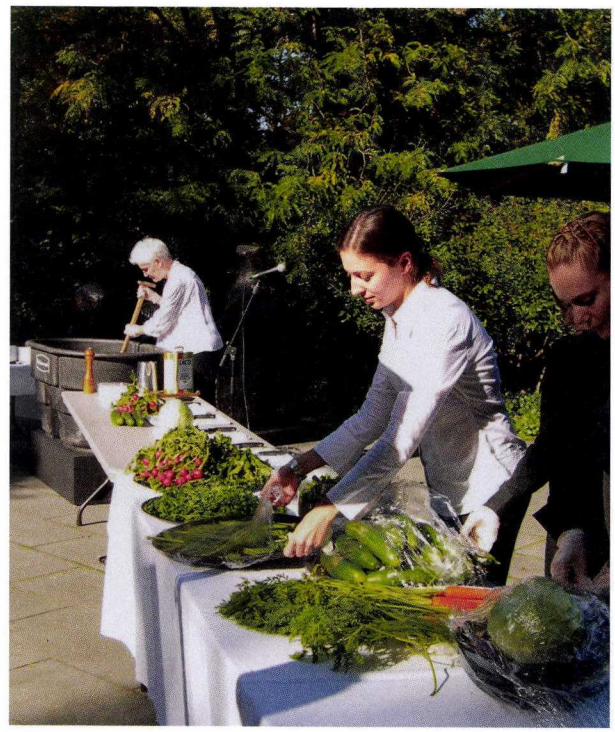
Secrets of Ordinary Things exhibition and residency

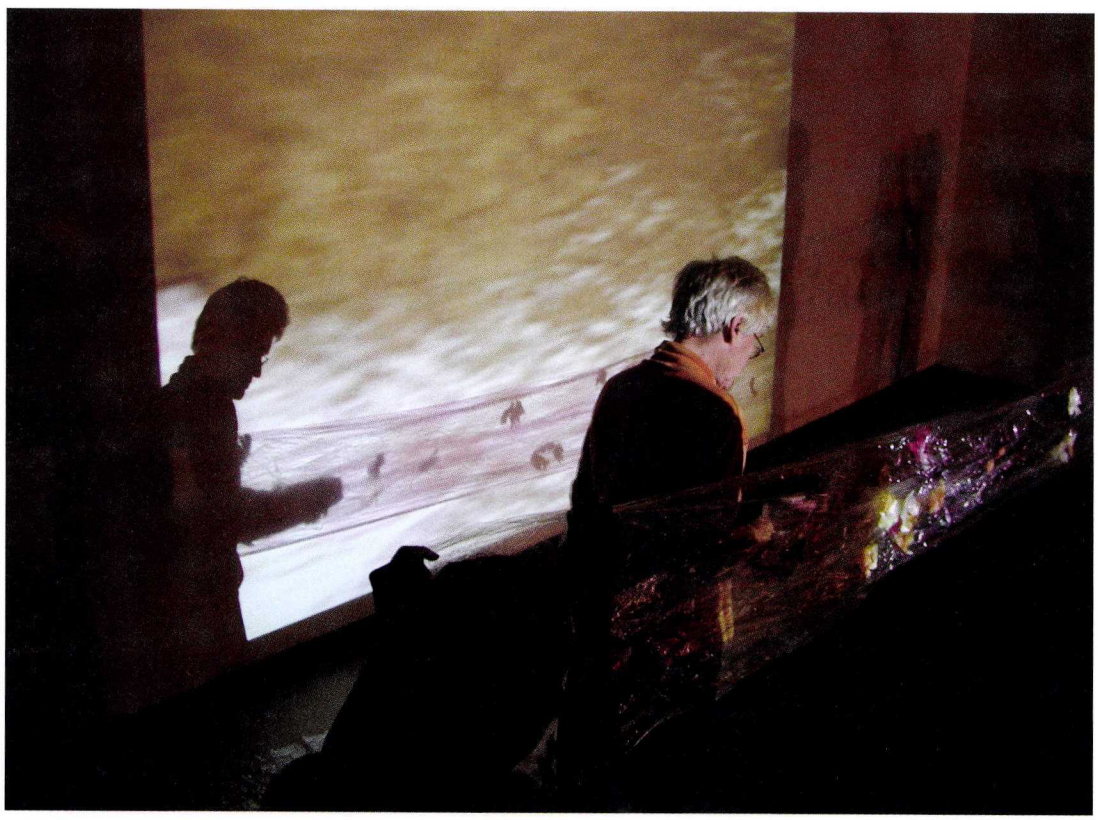
Knowles's solo exhibition at the San Francisco Art Institute in 2003 includes cyanotype prints and small interactive sound sculptures. During her residency she works with students to create a table installation with everyday objects for the public to take, hearkening back to her early "gift events." Knowles also performs *Onion Skin Score*, *Newspaper Music*, and a banquet based on *Celebration Red*.

Performs Make a Salad at Work Ethic exhibition

The beginning of a series of recent iterations of *Proposition #2: Make a Salad*, first performed in 1962, is revived at the Baltimore Museum of Art in 2003. This time Knowles adds live classical music.

Receives honorary doctorate from Maine College of Art & Design





TOP Knowles performing *Make a Salad*, 1962/2003, at Baltimore Museum of Art, October 12, 2003 **BOTTOM** Knowles performing *Onion Skin Song*, 1971/2003, San Francisco Art Institute, April 1, 2003 **FACING** *Book Jacket (Suit Piece)*, 2005; mixed media

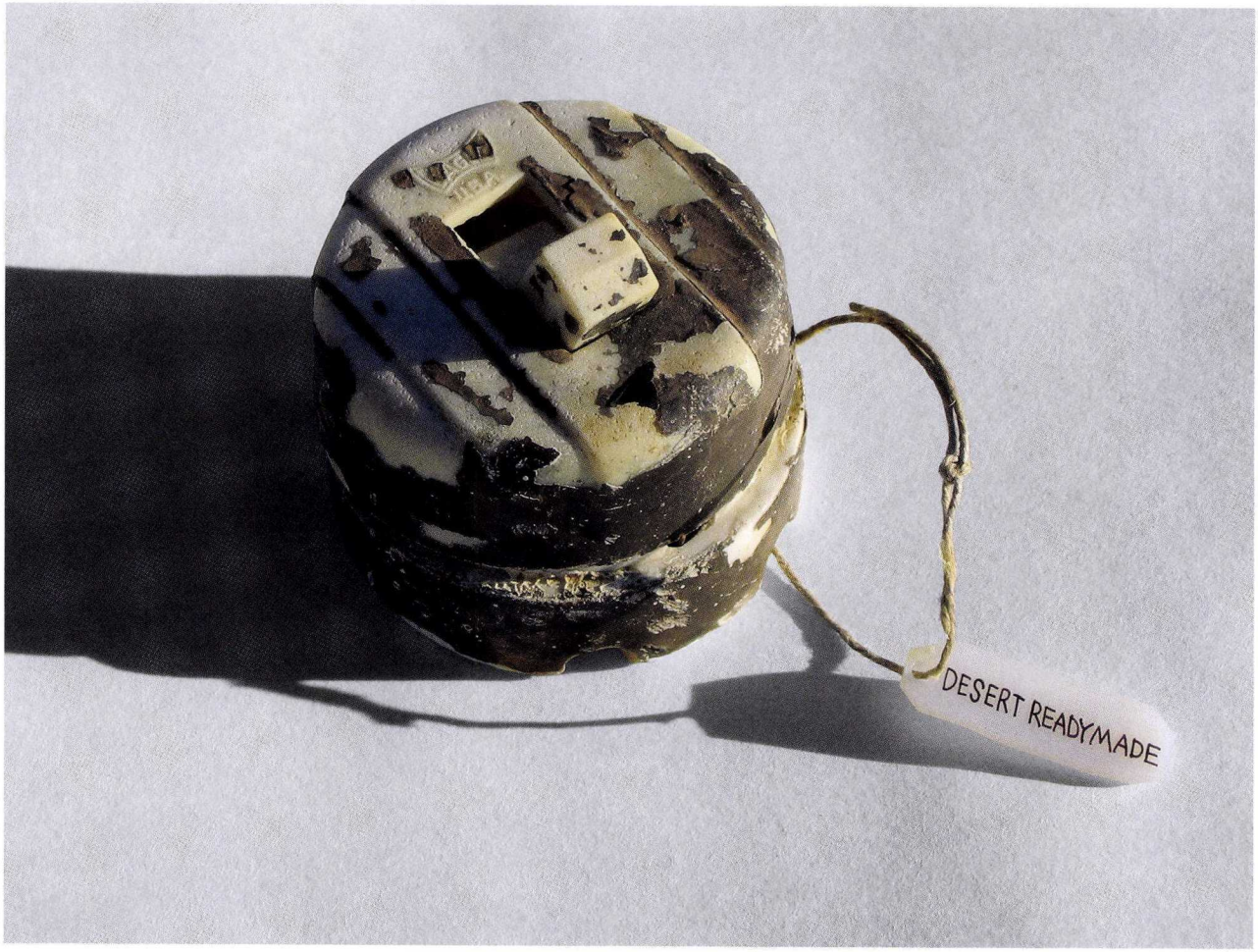
NEXT PAGE
NEXT PAGE

Time Samples exhibition and publication

For an exhibition curated by Italian gallerist Caterina Gualco at Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, in 2005, Knowles asks an assortment of collaborators to finish her manipulated paper works and found objects by titling them. The exhibition travels to the Emily Harvey Foundation, Venice; the Musée des Moulages, Paris; and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Knowles also publishes *Time Samples* (2005, Granary Books), an edition of forty-five unique artist's books created with squares of left-over studio materials from various moments in her career. The accordion-style publication is designed to be hung on the wall or read as a book.

The Rake's Progress

Knowles begins making a series of prints titled *The Rake's Progress*, recalling both Igor Stravinsky's opera and William Hogarth's print series and paintings about an infamous spendthrift. Knowles uses an actual rake—the garden tool—to make her marks—in a visual pun on the word of "scoring." She includes a part of the rake alongside the prints in her *Time Samples* exhibition.



TOP Knowles at work on *The Rake's Progress*, Barrytown, NY, c. 2005 **BOTTOM** Announcement for *Time Samples*, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, 2005

The Rake's Progress, 2006; screenprint and ink on handmade paper

Performs Event Scores in Venice

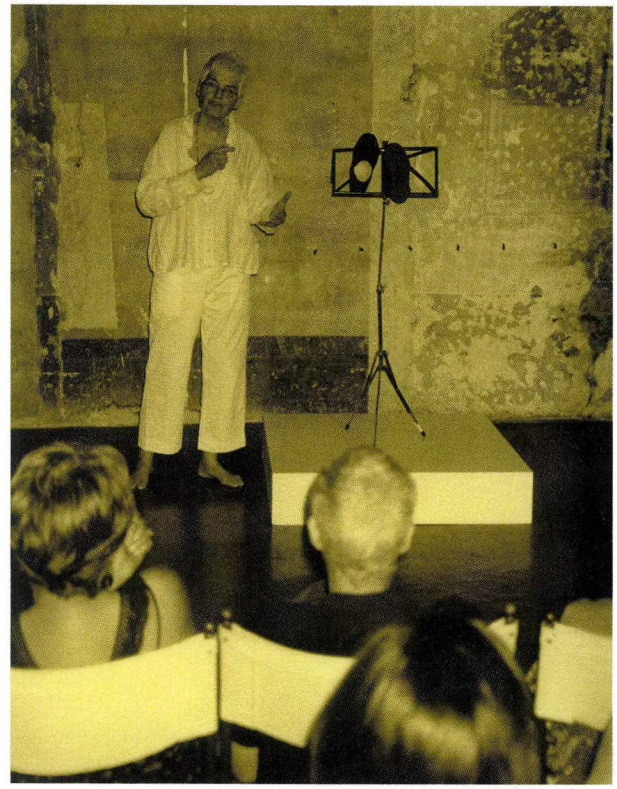
The *Time Samples* exhibition travels to Italy in 2006, where Knowles performs event scores including *Shoes of Your Choice* at the Museo Fortuny, located in a Venetian palace. Luigi Bonotto documents the evening in photographs printed on colored paper and collected in a spiral-bound artist's book iteration of *Time Samples*.

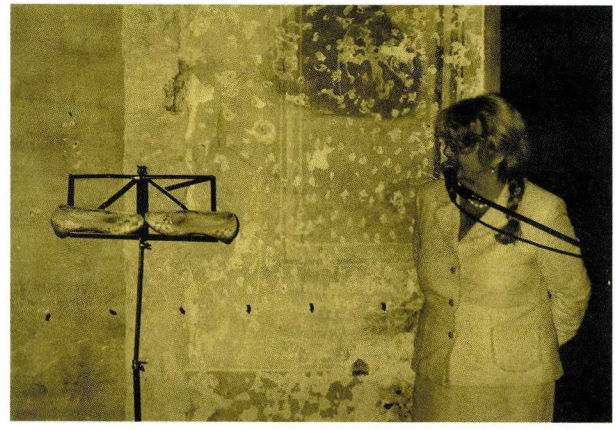
Event Threads

Beginning in 2006, Knowles starts to assemble found objects and other materials on long, thin threads that she calls *Event Threads*. These works offer a nonlinear history of her personal collections of everyday materials.

Debuts Fluxus with Tools

In 2007, Knowles and Hannah B Higgins present the performance-lecture *Fluxus with Tools* at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin. The event is later performed internationally at various museums and universities including at the *Flux-Us Performance Festival*, Caberet Voltaire, Zurich (2008), and the *Our Literal Speed* conference at the University of Chicago (2009).



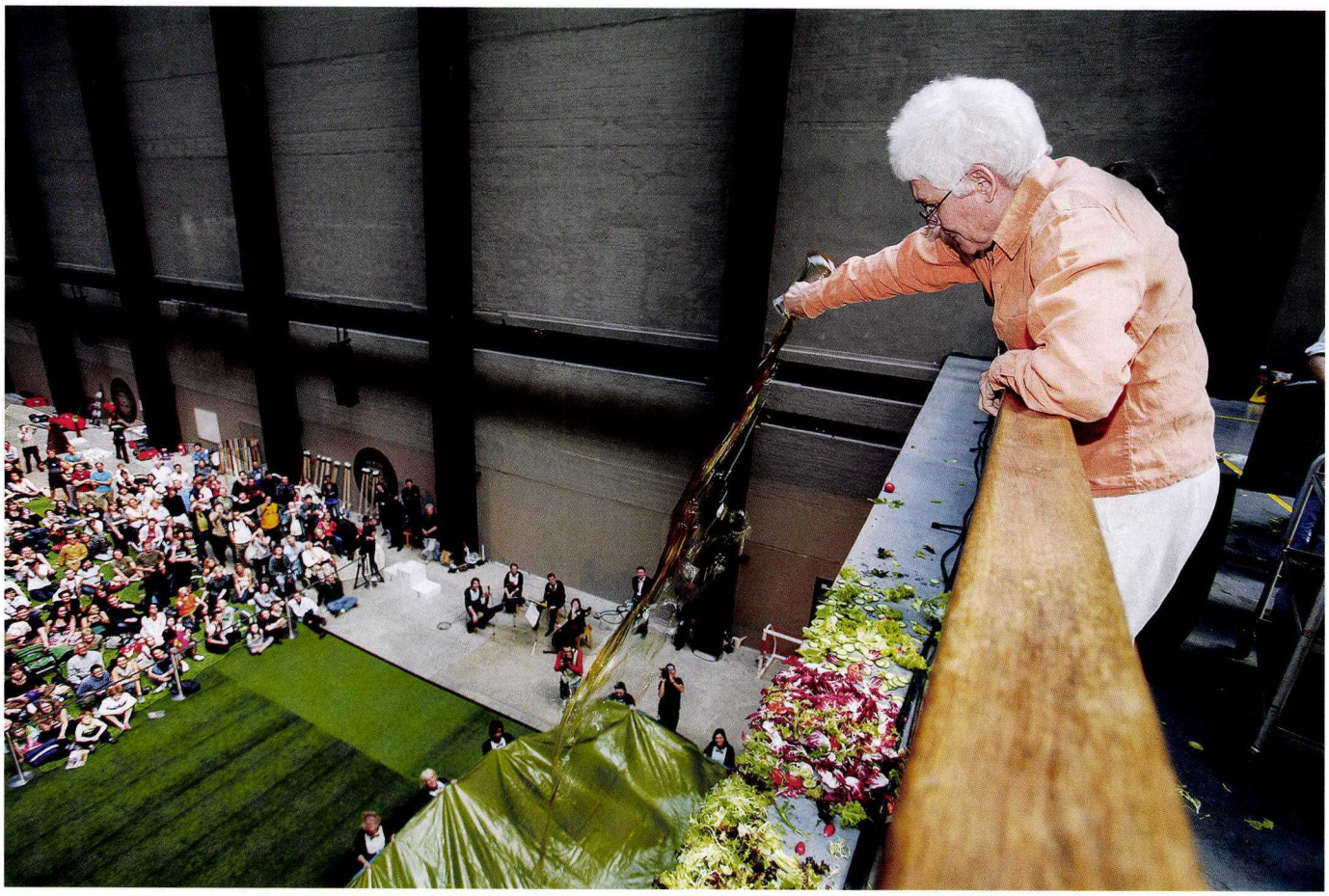


ABOVE Knowles and others performing *Shoes of Your Choice*, Museo Fortuny, Venice, 2006 **FACING** *Event Thread*, 2006; found objects threaded on wire

2008

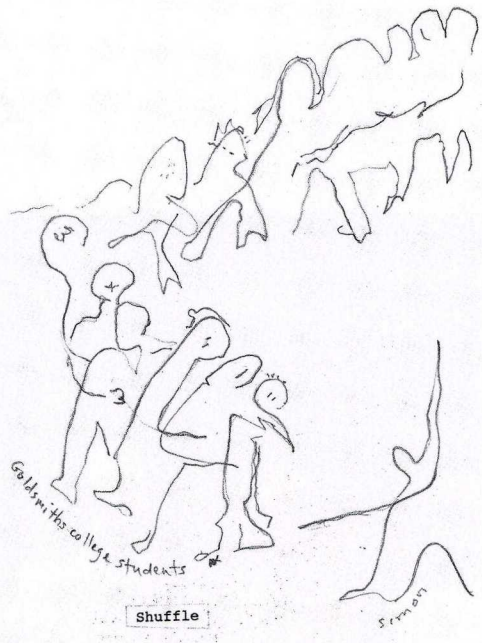
Performs at Fluxus Long Weekend

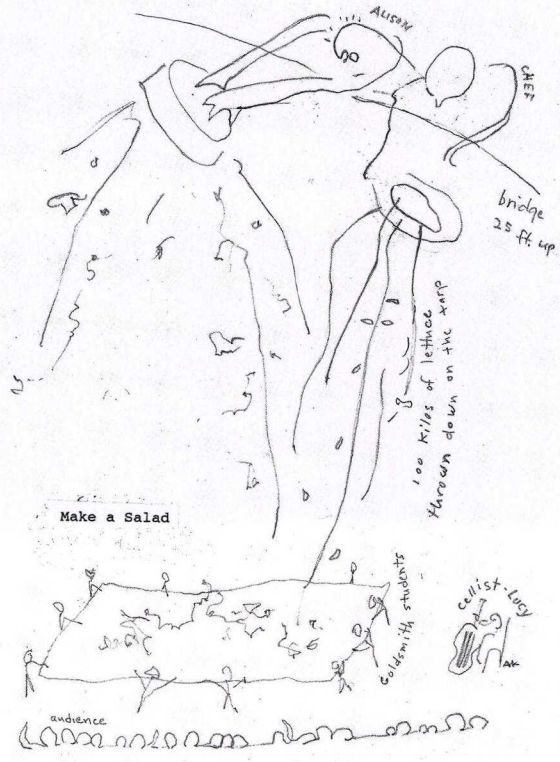
At Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in London, Knowles presents *Make a Salad*, which feeds an audience of over 3,000 people. She also performs the largest presentation of *Newspaper Music* to date, with more than twenty readers speaking in twenty different languages (pp. 212–13) and performs *Shuffle* with a long line of participants.



Knowles and others performing *Make a Salad*, 1962/2008, *UBS Openings: The Long Weekend—States of Flux*, Tate Modern, London, May 24, 2008

We expect the Goldsmiths students to show up for this performance each with a newspaper in their native tongue. Volume is provided by the conductor. Here, "full voice" with arms raised is indicated.





Newspaper Music, *Shuffle*, and *Make a Salad* drawings, 2008; pencil on laid paper

Knowles and others performing *Newspaper Music*, 1965/2008, *UBS Openings: The Long Weekend—States of Flux*, Tate Modern, London, May 24, 2008

2009

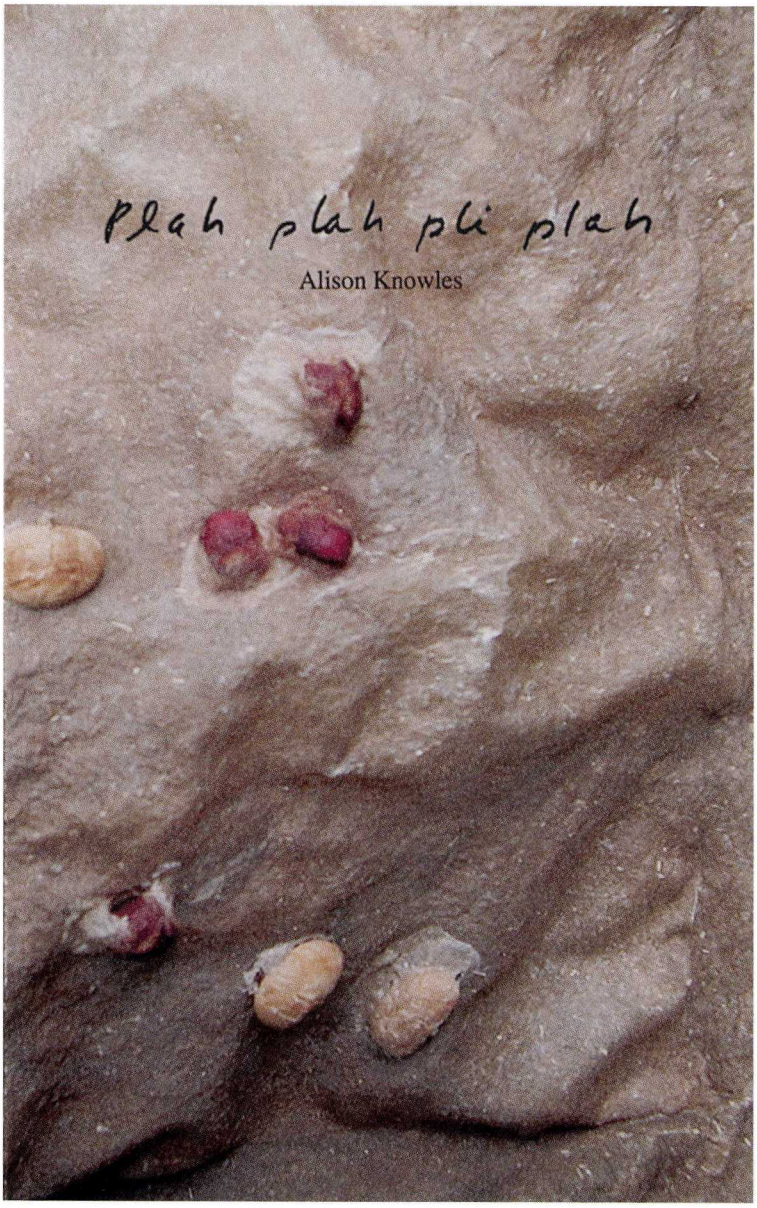
Receives honorary doctorate from Columbia College, Chicago

Publishes Plah, Plah Pli, Plah

The book *Plah, Plah Pli, Plah* (Sara Ranchouse Publishing) documents the sounds and performances of Knowles's *Bean Turners*. Each copy includes a paper insert embedded with lentils made at the Columbia College Chicago Center for Book and Paper Arts in Chicago.

Performs with Giant Bean Turner

At the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, for the exhibition *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989*, Knowles plays her *Giant Bean Turner* weekly.



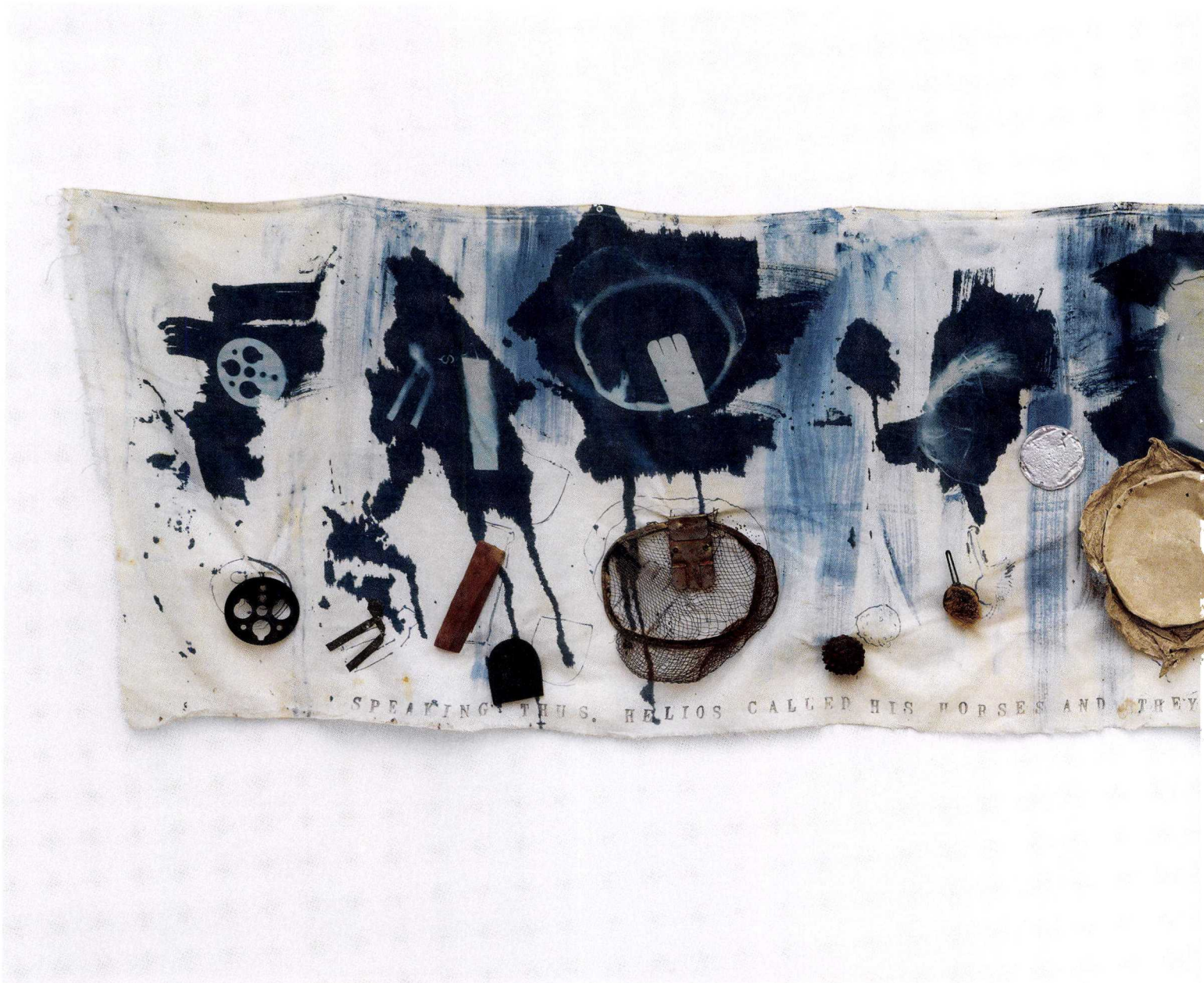
Plah, Plah, Pli, Plah (Sara Ranchouse Publishing, 2009)

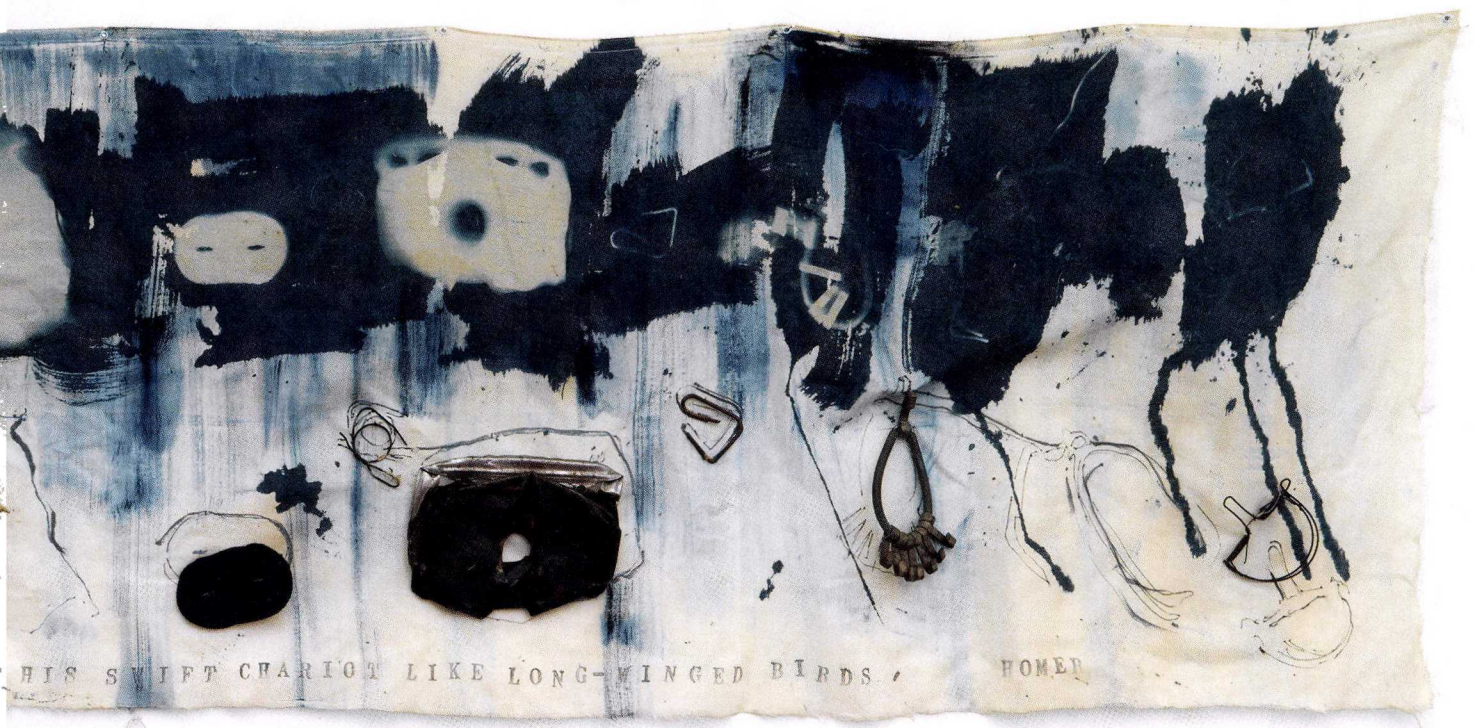
Knowles performing with *Giant Bean Turner* at *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2009

2010

Iliad Oddities (Greene Street)

Knowles makes *Iliad Oddities (Greene Street)*, a cyanotype on fabric with hanging found objects. She later includes it in her solo exhibition *Clear Skies All Week* at James Fuentes, New York in 2011.





Iliad Oddities (Greene Street), 2010; found objects and cyanotype on cloth

2010

A Bean Concordance 3

On handmade paper embedded with actual red lentils, Knowles writes the names of different types of beans in graphite for the work *A Bean Concordance 3*. She screenprints images among the names, making reference to her 1983 publication *A Bean Concordance*.

A Bean Concordance 3, 2010; screenprint and pencil on handmade paper with lentils

2011

Performs The Identical Lunch at MoMA Café

For *Performance 10: Alison Knowles*, a section of the café at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, is transformed into a 1950s-style diner resembling Riss Restaurant, where Knowles first performed *The Identical Lunch* in 1967. She performs the event score twice weekly while her 1973 *The Identical Lunch* screenprints are on view in MoMA's galleries.

Knowles and others performing *The Identical Lunch*, 1967/2011, MoMA Café, New York

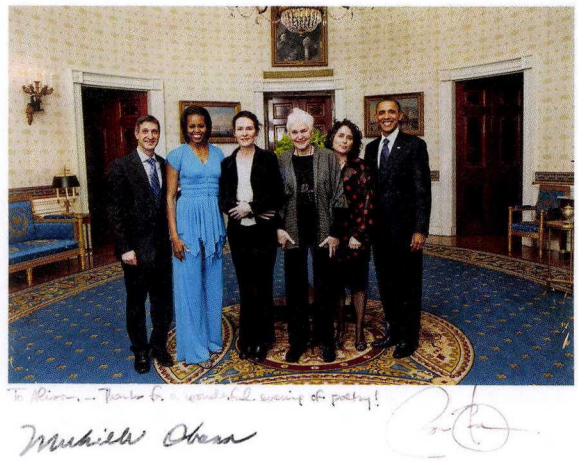
2011

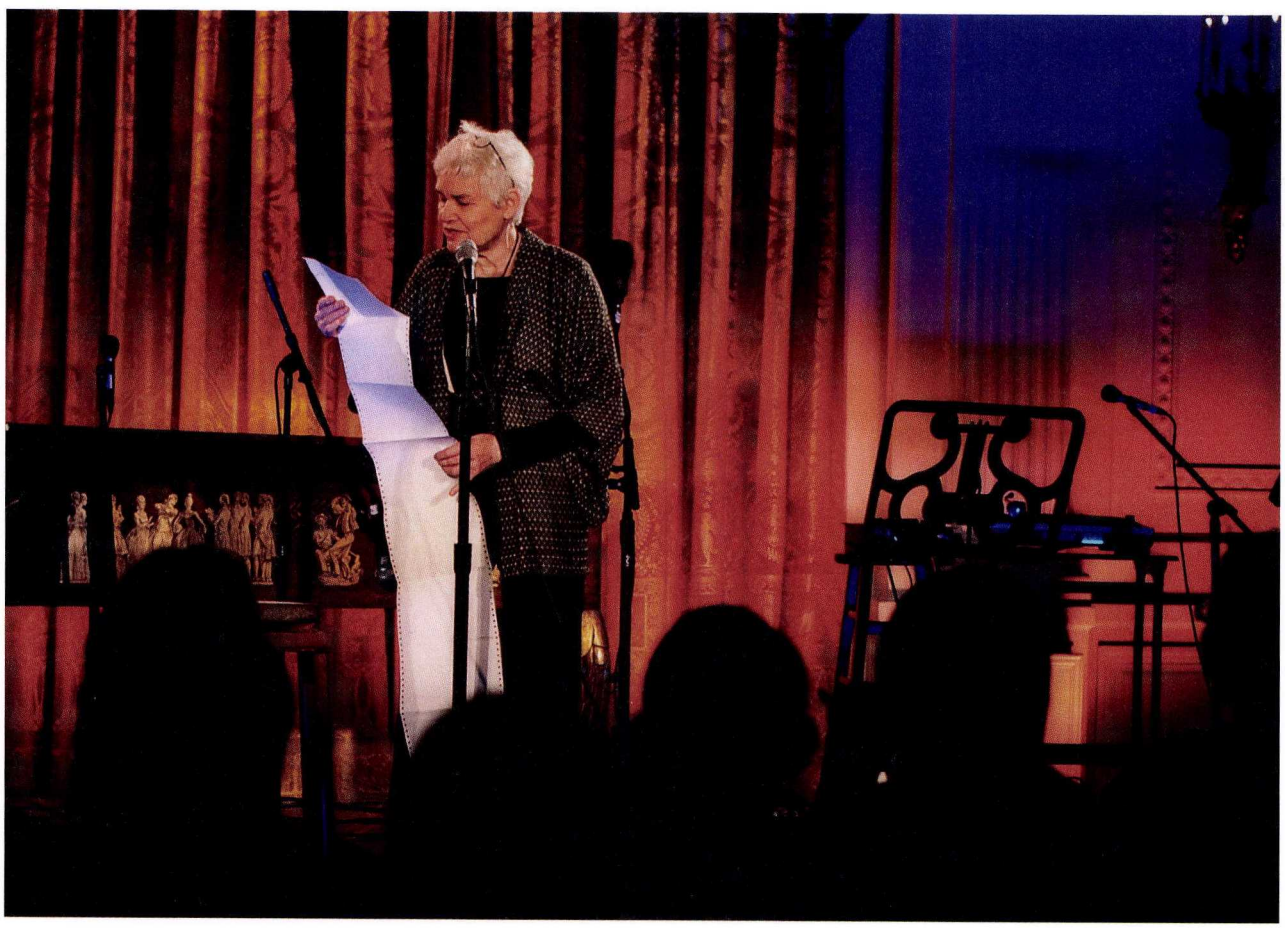
Performs at An Evening of Poetry at the White House

On May 11, 2011, Knowles reads *The House of Dust* poem and performs the event score *Shoes of Your Choice* at a celebration of poetry at the White House in Washington, DC.

Clear Skies All Week

At James Fuentes, New York, Knowles's exhibition *Clear Skies All Week* includes sculptural works made from paper and found materials. The show is accompanied by an eponymous publication, published by Onestar Press, that uses "situations," "weather/time," and "place" to create a poem through the same randomization process as *The House of Dust*.





TOP From left to right: Joe Reinstein, Michelle Obama, Jessica Higgins, Knowles, Hannah B Higgins, and President Barack Obama at the White House, Washington, DC, 2011 **BOTTOM** Knowles onstage at the White House reading *The House of Dust*, May 11, 2011

2012

Performs George Maciunas's Identical Lunch Symphony

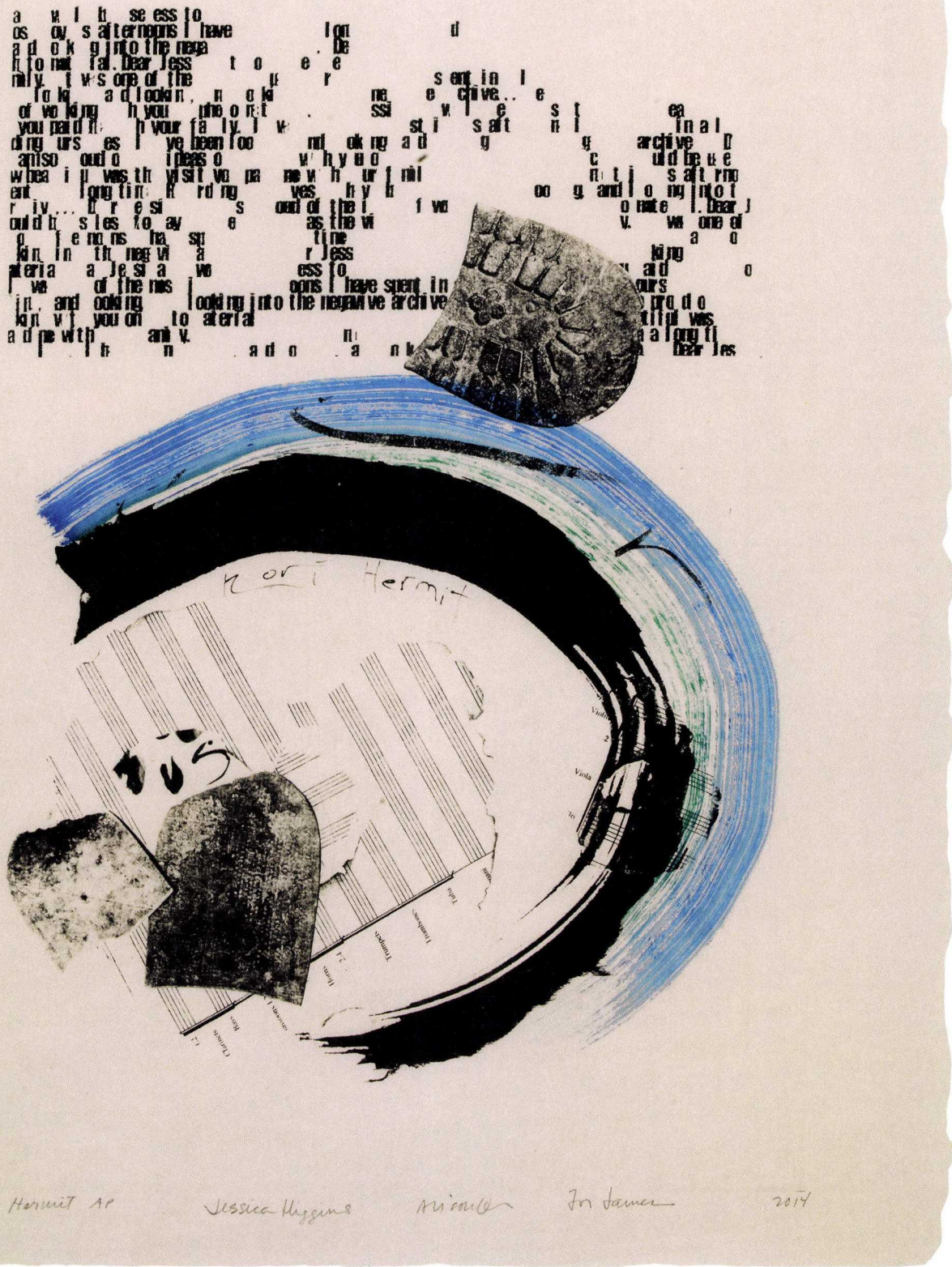
Dear Alison,
Here is my idea of the Identical Lunch–
Put tuna fish, wheat toast, lettuce,
butter, soup or buttermilk–all into a
blender–blend til all is smooth–drink it.
Best regards, George

For the exhibition *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art* at the Smart Museum at the University of Chicago, Knowles performs *Identical Lunch Symphony*, Maciunas's reinvention of her 1967 score as a liquid meal to accommodate his dietary needs. Multiple *The Identical Lunch* works are included in the exhibition.

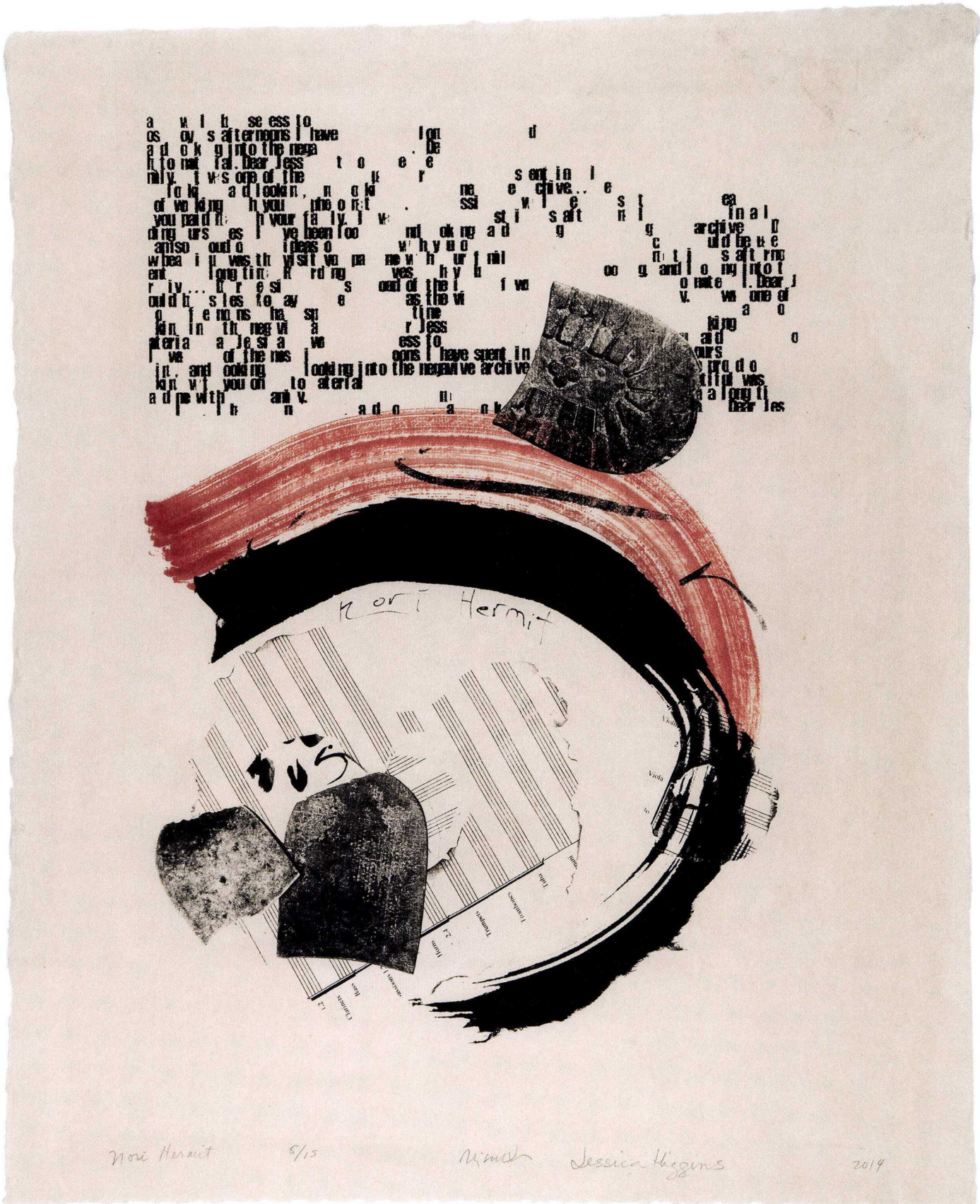
Performs Make a Salad on the High Line, New York

In celebration of Earth Day, Knowles performs *Make a Salad* by tossing the ingredients from an elevated pedestrian passageway to participants below, who catch the salad and toss it on an outstretched tarp.

RIGHT Knowles and others performing *The Identical Lunch Symphony (Blended version)* at *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art*, Smart Museum, University of Chicago, 2012 **FOLLOWING SPREAD** Knowles and others performing *Make a Salad*, 1962/2012, on the High Line, New York



Nori Hermit 14 Jessica Higgins 2014



FACING AND ABOVE Knowles with Jessica Higgins: *Nori Hermit*, 2014; unique woodblock prints on paper

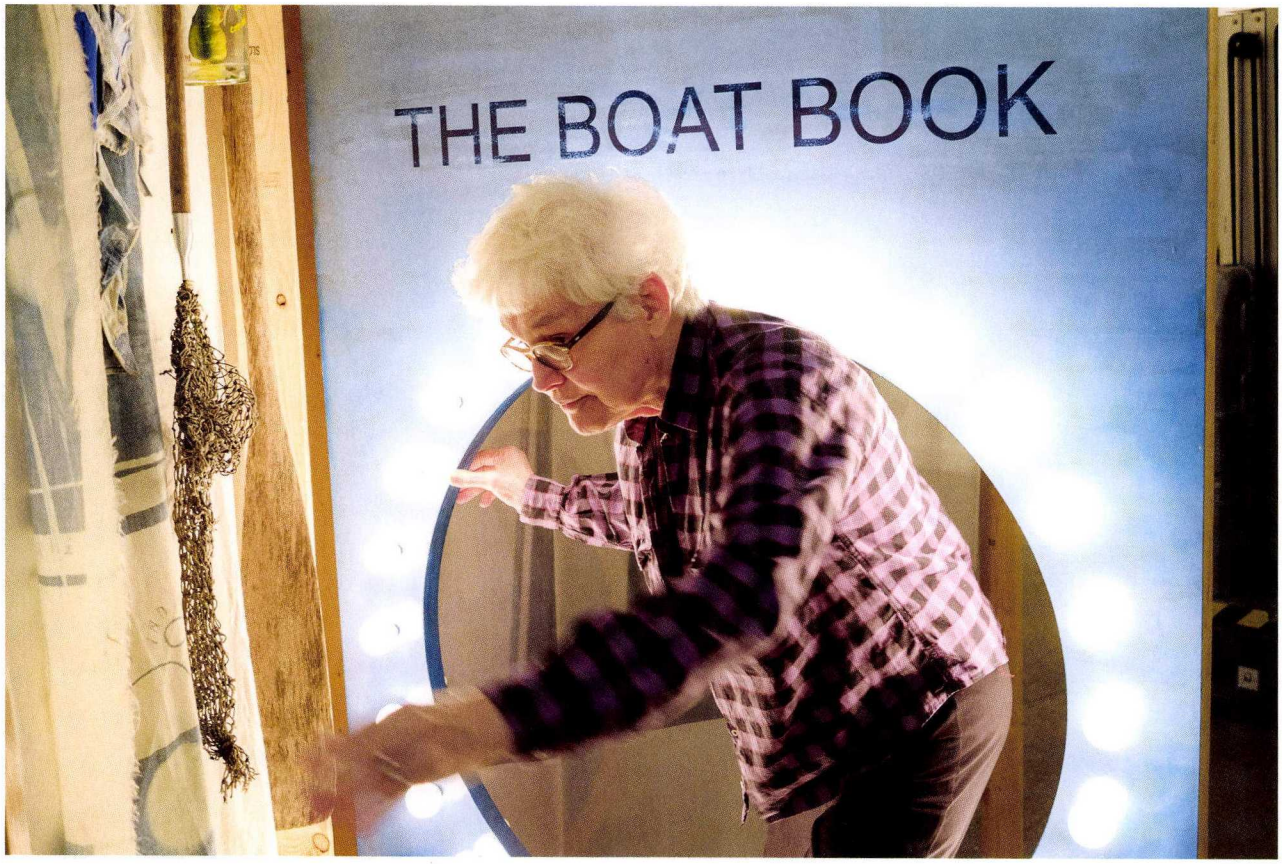
The Boat Book debuts at Art Basel Miami

The Boat Book, completed in 2014, is Knowles's ode to her older brother, Lawrence Beckwith Knowles, a fisherman in East Hampton, New York. With eight-foot-tall pages featuring nautical references, beans, personal ephemera, and prints, it is an example of the "transvironment" form she began exploring in the 1960s, notably through *The Big Book*. In 2015, *The Boat Book* is exhibited at James Fuentes, New York.

Receives honorary doctorate from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn

Performs Red Beans All Day

As part of *The Value of Food* (2015), Knowles serves a meal of red beans to guests at the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine in New York. Her *Bean Garden*, *Bean Rolls*, and other bean-related works are also included in the exhibition.



ABOVE Installation view, *The Boat Book*, 2014, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 2015 **FACING** Installation view, *The Boat Book*, James Fuentes, New York, 2015

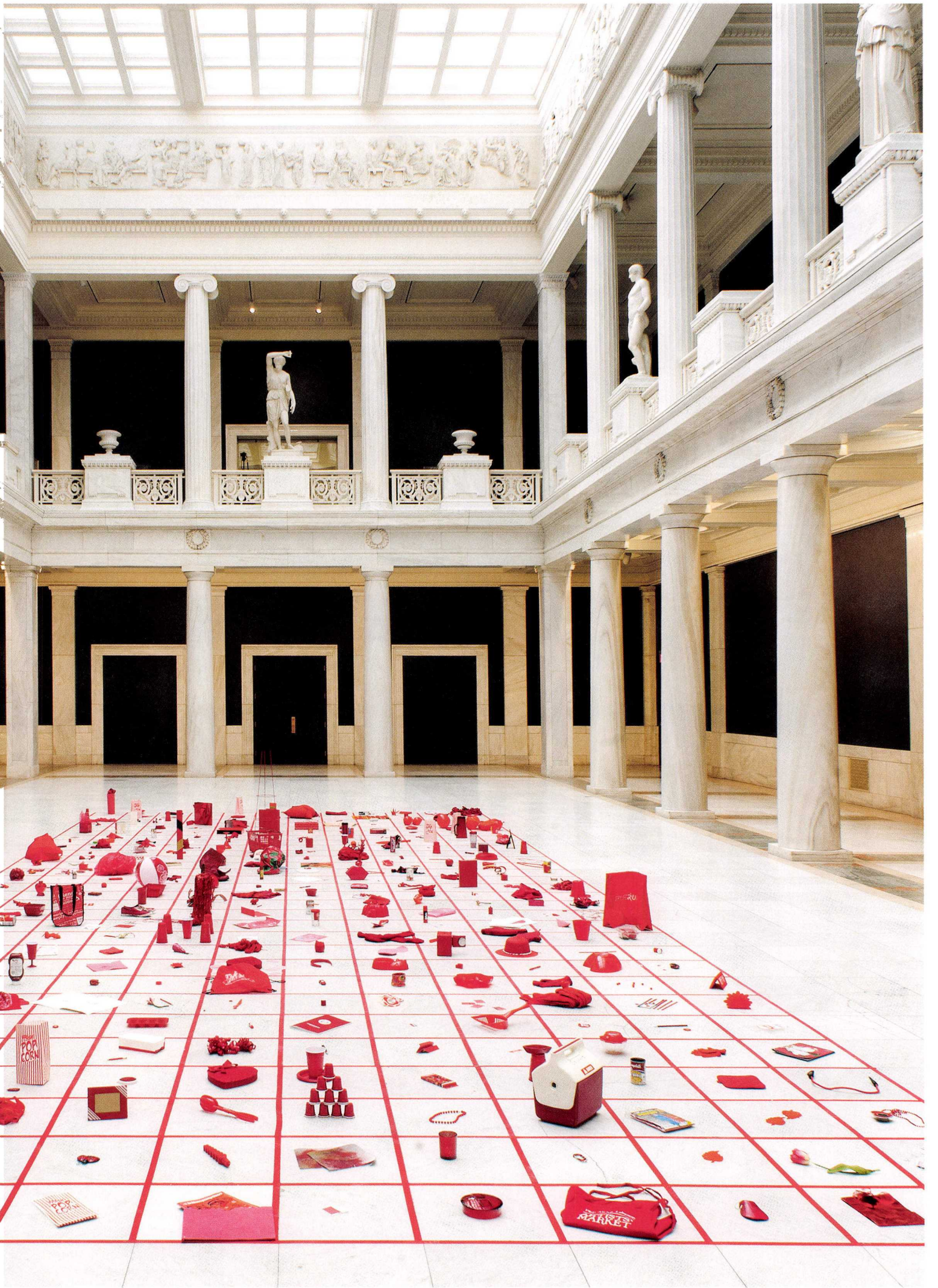
BUILT IN BALTIMORE
EXIT
THE BOAT BOOK
ENTER

2016

Solo exhibition at Carnegie Museum of Art

In Pittsburgh, the first museum survey of Knowles's artistic practice includes interactive works such as *Bean Garden*, a selection of *Bean Turners*, and *The Boat Book*, among other large paper and fabric works and personal ephemera. On the floor of the Hall of Sculpture at the Carnegie, *Homage to Each Red Thing* is activated on the opening night by visitors bringing red items.

Installation view, *Celebration Red (Homage to Each Red Thing)*, 1994/2016, at *Alison Knowles*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh


POP CORN
POP CORN
MARKET

Art by Translation reactivates The House of Dust

Maud Jacquin and Sébastien Pluot, co-directors of Art by Translation, organize *The House of Dust by Alison Knowles, INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO READ* at the James Gallery at CUNY Graduate Center, New York. It is the first of a series of exhibitions at which artists, architects, and students are invited to engage with Knowles's work by translating the poem's quatrains into new structures and performance events. The project's international venues include, among other spaces, Darling Foundry, Montreal; Cneai=, Pantin, France; and La Galerie, CAC Noisy-le-Sec, France.

Make a Salad (Plein air variation)

On July 15, 2018, in the rooftop sculpture garden of the Aspen Art Museum, Colorado, Knowles performs a new outdoor version of *Make a Salad* that lasts ninety minutes. The performance marks the third iteration of the exhibition *Ritual*, which also includes Knowles's *Journal of the Identical Lunch*.

Reframing the House of Dust at CalArts

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of CalArts, Art by Translation works with Ken Ehrlich, Janet Sarbanes, and their students to select a stanza from *The House of Dust* in order to build *House of Glass*, which they activate with performances. In conjunction, "Reframing the House of Dust: A Symposium" takes place at the Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater (REDCAT) in Los Angeles.

ART BY TRANSLATION — RESEARCH & ARCHIVES

THE HOUSE OF DUST
BY ALISON KNOWLES

HANNAH B. HIGGINS — BENJAMIN H.D. BUCHLOH — JANET SARBANES — MAUD JACQUIN & SÉBASTIEN PLUOT

The exhibition and research project "*The House of Dust* by Alison Knowles" was created in the context of the international research program in art and curatorial practices *Art by Translation*, whose first three-year session (2016-2019) is dedicated to the processes and ideological stakes of translation in the arts. *Art by Translation* develops research and organizes exhibitions and discursive events in a variety of European and North American contexts. Each time, the research is enriched by local and international contributors – artists, professors and doctoral students from different disciplines. As part of this broader context, this project will examine the myriad implications of Alison Knowles' major, but still little known work, *The House of Dust*. By making *The House of Dust* a platform for both artistic experimentation and theoretical and historical reflection, it aims to extend its generative potential into the present.

The House of Dust installed at the Valencia campus, CalArts, 1971.

Front page of *The House of Dust* newspaper produced for exhibition at the James Gallery, CUNY Graduate Center, New York, 2016

TOP Knowles and others performing *Make a Salad (Plein air variation)*, 1962/2018, Aspen Art Museum, Colorado, 2018 **BOTTOM** Knowles conducting students performing *Newspaper Music*, 1965/2018, at *House of Glass*, CalArts, Valencia, CA, 2018

2019

Performs Make a Salad at LA Philharmonic

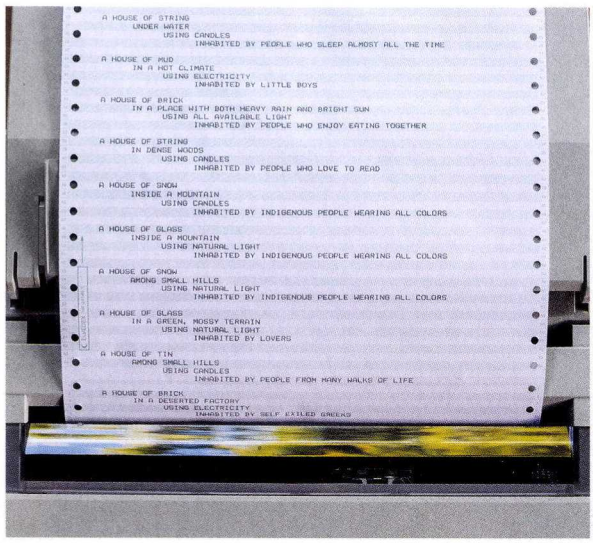
The Getty Research Institute and the Los Angeles Philharmonic present *Fluxus Spotlight: Knowles/Ikeda* at the Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles. Knowles performs her 1962 score for the orchestra's centennial celebration.

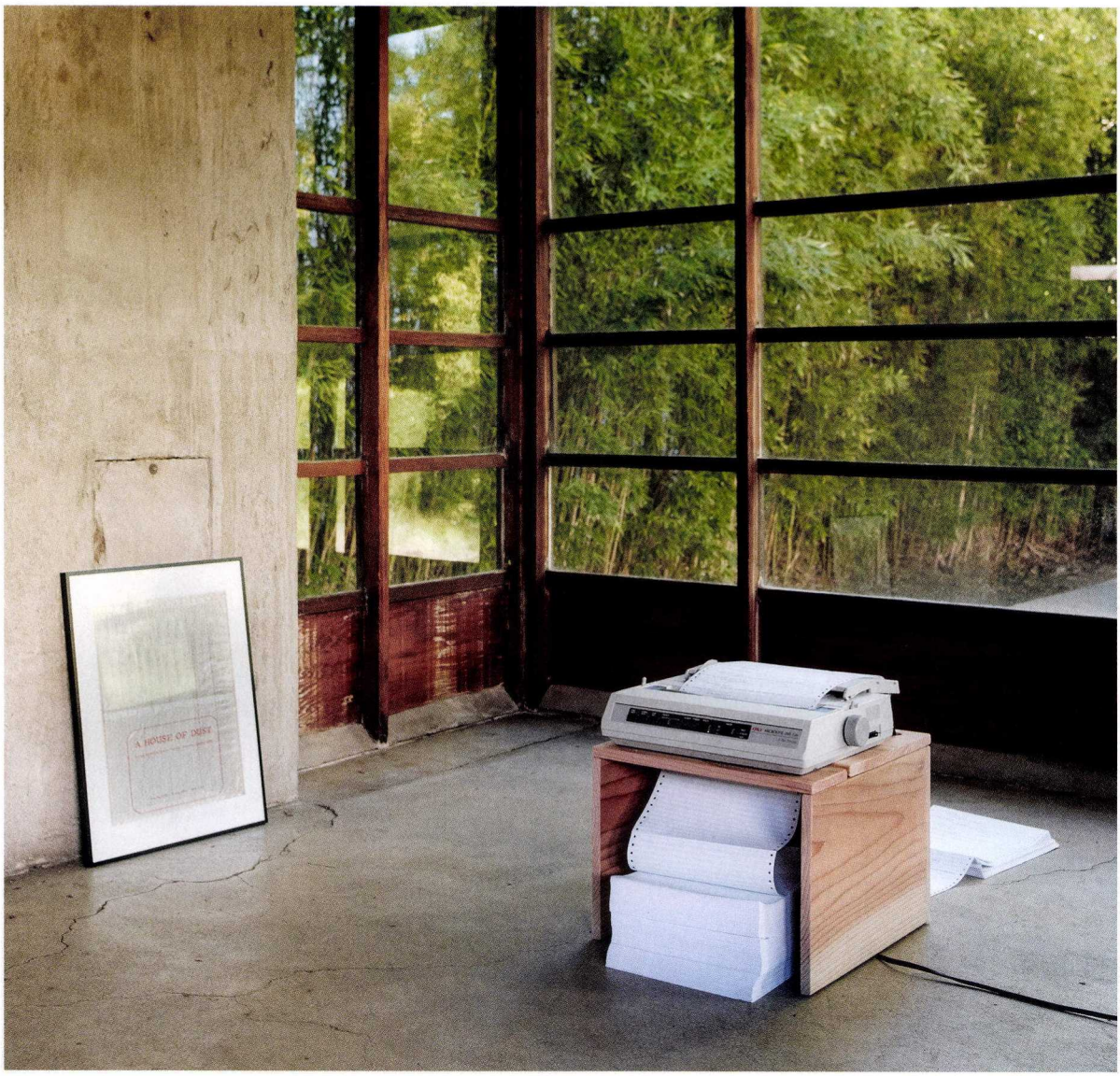
Knowles and others performing
Proposition #2: Make a Salad, 1962/2019,
Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles,
February 15, 2019

2019

Shelter or Playground exhibition

In Los Angeles, the group exhibition *Shelter or Playground: The House of Dust at the Schindler House* is organized by Art by Translation, the MAK Center for Art and Architecture, France Los Angeles Exchange, and CalArts. It includes a live printing of *The House of Dust* score, as reprogrammed in 2014. For the opening, Knowles's *Wounded Furniture* and *Make a Soup* are performed in the Schindler House garden.





TOP *The House of Dust*, 1967/2019; computer printout **BOTTOM** Installation view, *Shelter or Playground*, MAK Center for Art and Architecture at the Schindler House, Los Angeles, 2019

TOP CalArts students performing *Wounded Furniture*, 1965/2019, as a part of *Shelter or Playground* **BOTTOM** Art by Translation and others performing *Make a Soup*, 1964/2019, as a part of *Shelter or Playground*

2021

Sounds from the Book of Bean album

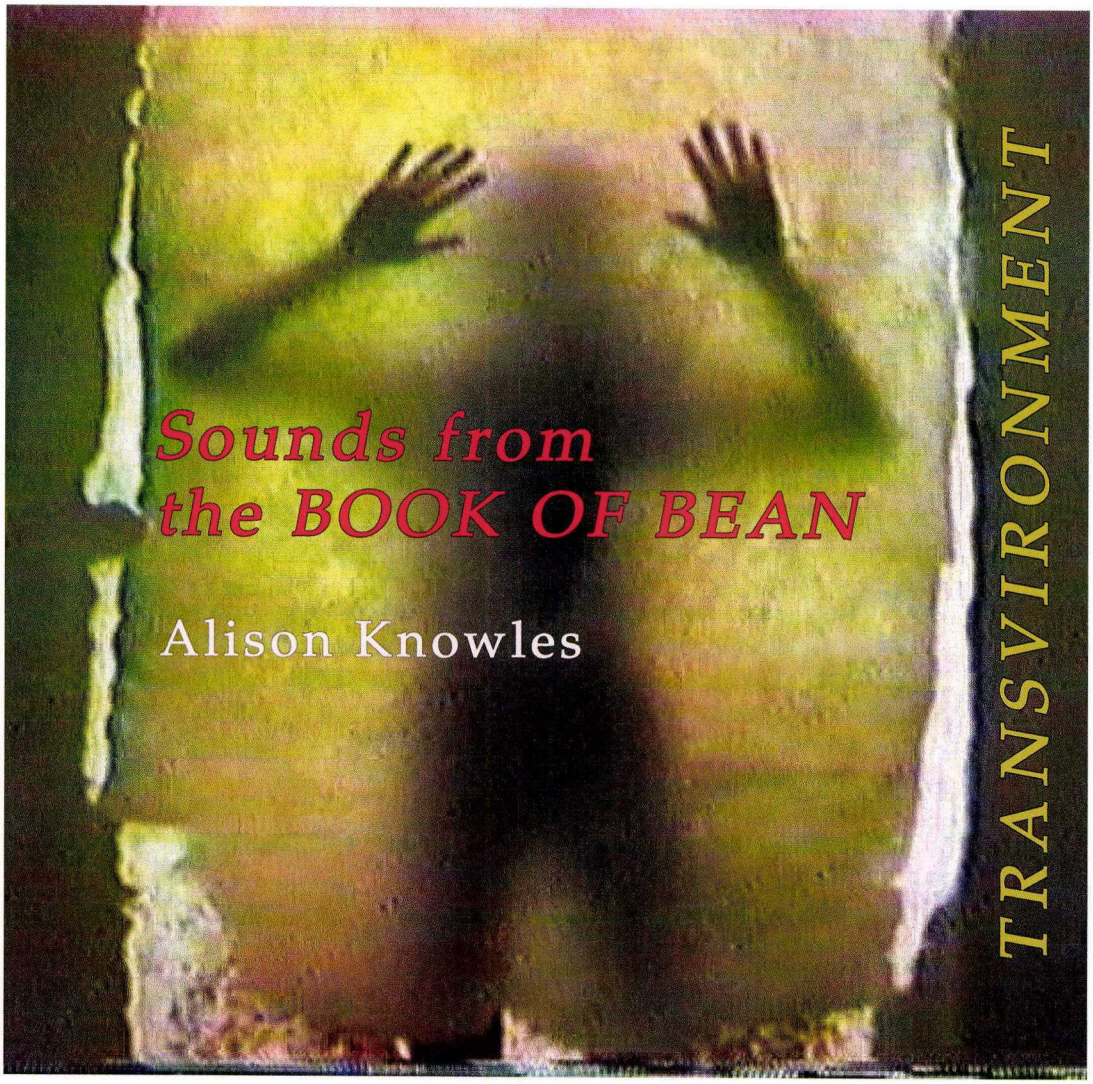
Knowles's first vinyl LP, *Sounds from the Book of Bean*, is a remastered release of the New Wilderness Audiographics cassette tape *8112A* that Charlie Morrow produced in 1981. It includes the audio component of the original installation of *The Book of Bean* along with several tracks of sound works. A twenty-page booklet with writings by Knowles, Morrow, and George Quasha accompanies the LP.

Live Printing of The House of Dust

At Art Basel, James Fuentes's booth features a live printing of *The House of Dust* score. The press acclaims it as a highlight of the fair.

Being with Paper

For a new print, Knowles returns to a favorite subject—shoes—that she first explored in her 1963 score *Shoes of Your Choice*. The printed image resembles handmade paper, a medium she has experimented with since the 1980s, and its title, *Being with Paper*, puns on another frequent subject, the bean.

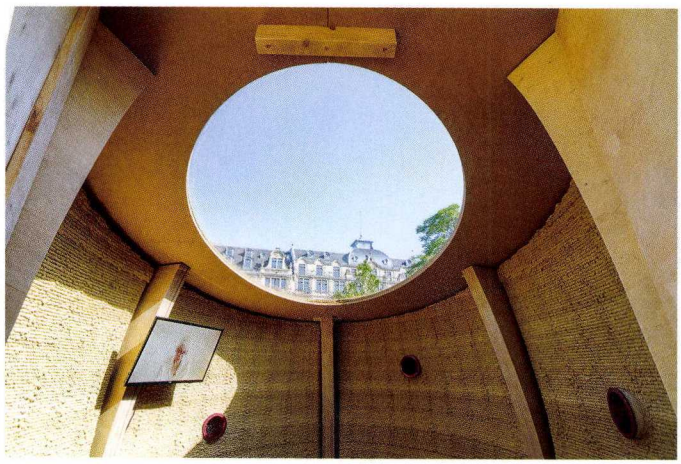


Cover of *Sounds from the Book of Bean* (Recital, 2021)

Being With Paper, 2021; Ultra Chrome XD2
ink printed on Arches paper

The House of Dust at Living in a Sculpture exhibition

Knowles revisits *The House of Dust* by making a drawing on a computer printout of the poem, inspired by an abalone shell—the discarded home of a small sea creature (p. 240). Following the drawing, tinyBE, an artistic platform for visions of sustainable living, organizes a life-size earthen iteration made using 3D-printing technology by WASP (World's Advance Saving Project). A relationship is formed between the original computer-generated poem and the 3D-printed house, both created using cutting-edge technology. The habitable sculpture is on public view in Wiesbaden, Germany, where the first Fluxus Festival took place in 1962. Knowles's newly fabricated "transvironment" is on display through 2022 in celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of Fluxus.



ABOVE AND FACING Installation views, *The House of Dust*, 3D-printed mixture of earth and natural fibers, Kranzplatz, Wiesbaden, 2021 **OVERLEAF** *The House of Dust*, 1967/2021, preparatory drawing, 2020; dot matrix ribbon printed on continuous tractor paper overprinted with drawing and signed in ink

IN A GREEN, MOSSY TERRAIN
EXISTING IN DARKNESS
INHABITED BY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WEARING ALL COLORS

A HOUSE OF STEEL
IN DENSE WOODS
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY VARIOUS COLLECTORS OF ALL TYPES

A HOUSE OF STRAW
ON AN ISLAND
LIGHTEN BY MATCHES
INHABITED BY HORSES AND BIRDS

A HOUSE OF STONE
IN A HOT CLIMAT
EXISTING IN DARKNESS
INHABITED BY VEGETARIANS

A HOUSE OF MUD
UNDER WATER
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY LITTLE BOYS

A HOUSE OF STRING
AMONG HIGH MOUNTAINS
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY LITTLE BOYS

A HOUSE OF DUST
IN AN OVERPOPULATED AREA
EXISTING IN DARKNESS
INHABITED BY VEGETARIANS

A HOUSE OF STRAW
IN AN OVERPOPULATED AREA
USING CANDLES
INHABITED BY VARIOUS COLLECTORS OF ALL TYPES

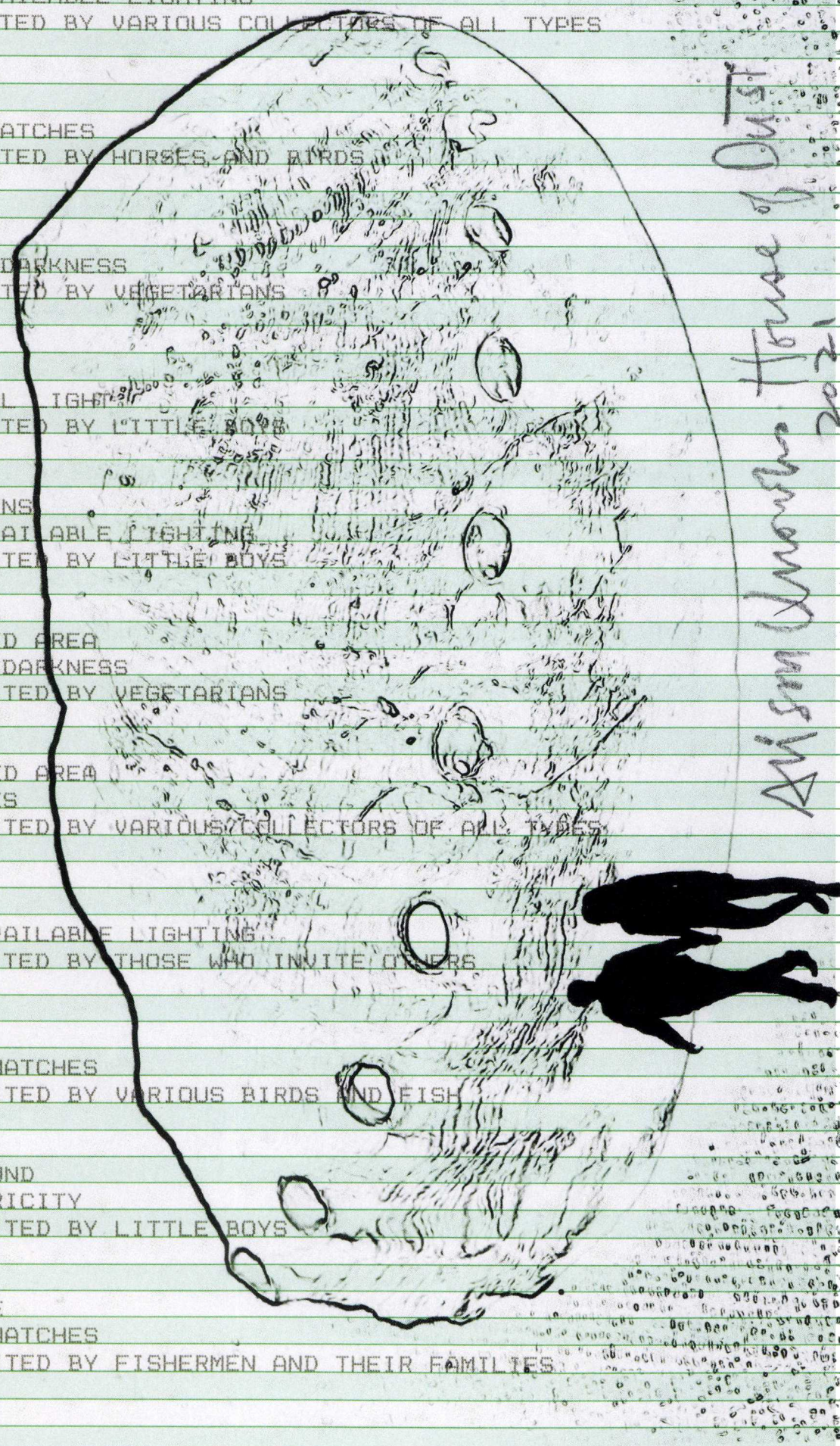
A HOUSE OF PLASTIC
AMONG SMALL HILLS
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY THOSE WHO INVITE OTHERS

A HOUSE OF WOOD
IN A DESERT
LIGHTEN BY MATCHES
INHABITED BY VARIOUS BIRDS AND FISH

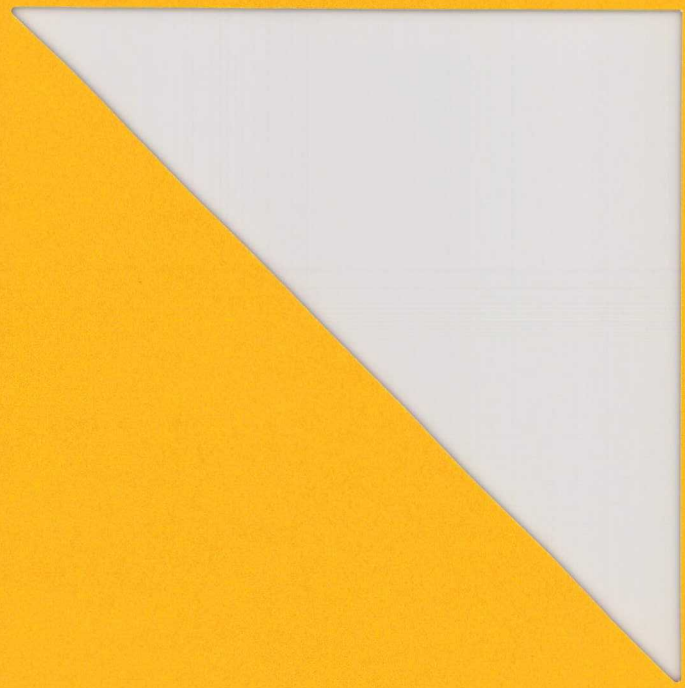
A HOUSE OF BRICK
BURNED TO THE GROUND
USING ELECTRICITY
INHABITED BY LITTLE BOYS

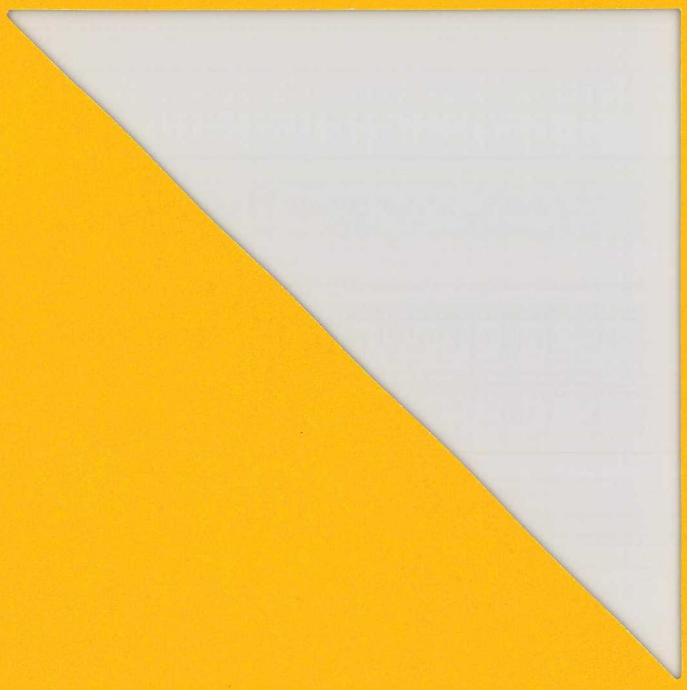
A HOUSE OF CLAY
IN SOUTHERN FRANCE
LIGHTEN BY MATCHES
INHABITED BY FISHERMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES

A HOUSE OF PAPER
UNDER WATER
USING CANDLES
INHABITED BY PEOPLE FROM MANY WALKS OF LIFE



REPRINTS





From a Dialogue on Transvironmental Books Between George Quasha and Alison Knowles (1982)

Originally published in *New Wilderness Letter 11: The Book, Spiritual Instrument* (December 1982), edited by Jerome Rothenberg and David Guss, and subsequently published in *The Book, Spiritual Instrument*, their edited volume (New York: Granary Books, 1996).

AK The night *The Book of Bean* opened in New York was the night of the blackout in lower New York. Remember? It happened two hours before things were going to begin.

GQ Synchronistically the whole city became a transvironment.

AK I came back several times in disbelief. Jess [*Alison Knowles's daughter*] and I talked to disappointed visitors. A friend of Dan Goode's, a blind saxophonist who was to have performed, was there and asked to be led through the installation. So, we proceeded through the dark, unlighted, unsounded pages. He was delighted with it. He said, "I can see this book with my fingers."

GQ The roles are reversed. The blind person who is indifferent to the loss of light, reads its texture as the text. He was the only competent reader that night.

AK With him as a guide I saw things I had not at all considered.

GQ The artist became the transvironmental reader returned to darkness and incoherence to rediscover the essential book.

AK And then very dramatically, the lights came on and the tape came up just as we were making our exit. At that point we closed the *Book* for the night. Another remarkable reader was a dancer named Ramon. I was reading by the soup when he came in one Saturday afternoon to the Franklin Furnace. There was a lot of racket and typing. He took off his shoes and proceeded right into page one, through the tunnel, and passed where I was sitting. Then a voice from upstairs said, "Do you see what that guy is doing?" I looked up to see him climbing the ladder. The typewriters ceased. He walked with perfect balance and arms outstretched toward the center spine. "Please don't touch the page," he murmured. He returned with equal grace. The only person to not just climb the ladder but walk to the middle of the top! I was very impressed and entered him in the roll deck.

GQ Did you ask him about the experience?

AK Yes.

—

AK *The Book of Bean* has a center where things are plugged in, a spine around which the circle turns, and a truck tire inner tube to step through and begin climbing and tunneling through the pages. To help get people into it there are many transparent surfaces to look through and push aside. I notice that I rarely use opaque surfaces. You can always see through something. One is never trapped.

GQ The idea that you will be surrounded, once inside, is implicit in the transvironmental book. One might get lost in a novel. What we want in a transvironment is to allow this getting lost while supplying a guiding principle that cannot be overly concretized. A book provides a set of perspectives determined by convention: the book in hand, the prayer book or psalter, the view into the world with the head bent slightly forward. When the root metaphor of the book changes, the physiognomy—the posture and attitude—of the reader also changes. The book might be a ceiling, the fresco overhead, the sunroof of the vehicle, an escape-hatch, something you could, if you wished, stick your head through and get a look at another world. One goes through the Looking Glass or the Mirror in Cocteau's *Orphée*, reversing the flow of life-time. The transfer between book and reader, the transaction, is mediated or translated by a sort of third entity, the conduit of otherness, arising as the genie of reading, the speaker or speakers in the mind's audium, the "impersona" that is always additional to identity. This entity is empty and cannot be defined. It cannot be the object of attention except by a certain intermedial reflection inside the gap.

AK Your concept of transvironment applies easily to a lot of my work. The first one I made was a hat, a six-foot circle that lowered onto the head from a rope and pulley. It was all transparent paper printed in transparent ink. The sound was made by moving the head and making the cellophane rustle. The colors were backlighted as one looked out, and the visual field was a circle again. It was shown at the hat show on Yam Days.

GQ That's related to the transvironments I'm building. The simplest model for a transvironment—a dollhouse that one is inside of—is a construction suspended from the ceiling, a "head space" that one gets up under in order to be surrounded by a particular aural and visual field. It contains language, audio and video devices, images, non-images, empty spaces, and communication channels disrupting the boundary between inside and outside.

AK George, couldn't we extend the scale further and have a whole city as the contents of a book? Huge pages as the side of an office building, a single page with water pouring down the front in the park, a page out flat as bridge, as door to the city.

GQ I've dreamt of such a city all my life, the house or castle with a vast interior. In the transvironmental city one travels to the depths of inside while extending the roads and gardens of outside. It's all one transrupting surface where anything leads to anything else, governed only by imaginal necessities. The book is the instrument by which we tap in on the reading that produced it. We not only could read it, we live in it. Our limbs leave invisible pollen on the pages for the next readers.

Visitor inside *The Book of Bean*, Franklin Furnace, New York, 1981

Auto-dialogue on the Transvironmental Book: Reflections on *The Book of Bean* (1982)

George Quasha

Originally published in *New Wilderness Letter 11: The Book, Spiritual Instrument* (December 1982), edited by Jerome Rothenberg and David Guss, and subsequently published in *The Book, Spiritual Instrument*, their edited volume (New York: Granary Books, 1996).

What is a transvironment?

Awkwardly stated, a transvironment is a transformationally experienced environment. It is a construct —it may also be a construction or artifact—that creates an opportunity for a fundamental alteration in perception and interpretation of the surrounding world, the context and circumtext. It causes a rupture in plane, a psychotopological catastrophe, a radical transstructuring of texture and text, a literal transfiguration of appearances. It alters the phenomenon of scale, including the relation of self to object (e.g., the book, the window), the function of distance in knowing identity, the comparison of micro- and macro-worlds.

That sounds like art. It is art? If so, is it not all art?

It is art. Art is essentially transvironmental. In fact, life is transvironmental. The environment is always changing, and that keeps us going. But to use so awkward a word as *transvironmental* is to imply a difference of degree that is a difference of kind. Life perceptions in the ordinary are half asleep in their transformations. Art steps up the process. Transvironmental art steps over the edge. The mind goes into freefall and breaks through the membrane of identity. It does this, so to speak, by putting windows in the mirrors and mirrors in the windows.

How does transvironmental art differ from environmental art and installation art?

It may or may not. The term implies a high concentration of context-altering energy within a frame-construct. It not only calls attention in a new way to specific surroundings, as interesting environmental art does; it calls attention as well to the mode and process of attention itself: there is a reflexivity, a rupture of perception onto the plane of conception. And it not only invokes the activity of engaging in the conception, as interesting concept- and installation-art often does; it catastrophizes the concept, floods it with perceptions more radically engaging than the conception, flexes the viewing in its least apparent ocular muscles. It flicks its data at the viewer, causes a blink, and, presto, the scene changes.

I see. But how or in what sense is a book transvironmental?

As an object the book is subject to phenomenological qualification. Unlike most other objects it has the power to address its viewer with thoughts, feelings, propositions, images, etc. and in very specific senses it has the power to dialogue with its reader. In this respect it has a range of transvironmental potential that belongs especially to the book. Once it finds its way into your hands or otherwise before your eyes it can play any role. It can tell you what to eat (including, theoretically, itself), thus altering your environment. It can tell you what to think, what to think about *it*, what *not* to think (thus *insuring* that you think it, as in: Do not think of a white horse), what to read other than itself, what to think about the act of reading the text you are reading—and it can at any moment cause a *rupture in the plane of reading*, as, for instance, if you should turn the present page and find the book henceforth blank, or if the ink should begin gradually to fade away, or if the text convinces you that the thoughts you are reading are literally your own and are being plagiarized before your eyes; that the money you paid for the book has gone into the wrong pocket; that the self who lives in your mind has visited this page before you and is now recognizing itself for the first time and you are but its voyeur; that yet other selves who live there and here too are just now coming into view having previously been hidden behind the shadowy image of yourself that blocks the light of past and future alike; that the plane of discourse has been changing bit by bit so that you can no longer be sure of the cognitive routes by which you have reached the present place in the text and therefore you no longer know what to think or what you actually feel; that the text has curiously reserved for itself the right to command you to behave in ways not necessarily appropriate to the book/reader relationship with which you willingly began to read only moments before; that, in short, anything can happen. Imagine that the page you are reading is blank. Relish its blankness. Watch the present words persist even against your best efforts to imagine a blank space here. Stop reading. Now read. Notice that the difficulty experienced in reading such a text may be matched by the difficulty experienced in trying not to read it. Notice the almost palpable presence of your choice to be reading and the obscure boundary of the reading act, the membrane between it and the not-reading that resides on the outside of the book—the outside that may begin with the cover of the book or which may appear at any point within the book itself, where the attention falls off and other thoughts rush in. A book is a kind of Klein bottle: the outsides of the text are linked to the insides of the text via the gaps in attention. Perhaps there is a sentence somewhere in the book which threatens to lead beyond the confines of the book, which takes advantage of the involuntary onrush of the reading

mind hooked on the unfolding story long after any trace of a story has failed to appear, leaving only the words in their stubborn persistence as objects indifferent to a readerly agreement yet strangely capable of invoking ad hoc contexts attractive enough to keep alive the memory of meaning and the hope of eventual edification about who, how, why, when, wherefore, in short, the great questions taking on a personality of their own, speaking to you now as if alive in their own right, emissaries from the great beyond which one hopes is meaningful, strange voices cropping up at random, hauntings and other lacks able to say, for instance: Hello, I am here where you least expect me, I am the voice of , I am the impersona come to ask a favor of you. Keep reading. Imagine that the words on this page are written in disappearing ink. Imagine that in their place a mirror-like surface is appearing. The words you have written are reading themselves back to you now. They have no other motive but to be here with you. They are hungry for a little late-night conversation. They remember you even if you have forgotten them. And yet it is equally true to say of them that this is their first moment of being, that in reading them you give them their only existence, and that therefore they are yours except in the sense that nothing is yours, and that their desire to persist is your desire to continue to be. Their only motive is your fear of death. And their ability to exist here independently of meaning or motive is directly proportionate to your lack of fear of dying. As life energy surges back within you the words become text-degradable and the concepts become mind-degradable. This is an oscillation that is not often experienced directly. Its effect is transvironmental and belongs to the potential of book. Reader reads book and book books reader. If the pattern of this process were projected onto the page in an image of recursive torsion it might describe the figure 8 or, on its side, the sign used for infinity, and the point of self-intersection of the line might be called the event of reflexivity, the catastrophe by which the Klein Book is itself (and not itself), the rupture in the plane of reading where one perceives the text as circum-text or the environment as contained in the frame through which it is seen—the frame that is obviously and inevitably but a small part of the environment. Under no circumstances should you stop reading.

Transactions Between Reader and Text

Life is about taking something from one place and moving it somewhere else. Often the something goes from the outside of something else to the inside of yet another something, or vice versa, such as food, money, germs, genitals, information, etc. Life is a series of transactions to which specific values are given, and culture arises in part from the effort to regularize and assure these transactions. Art plays a paradoxical role, since on the one hand it too attempts to make certain transactions effectively or efficiently happen; yet on the other hand, it attempts to disrupt the more familiar transactional patterns in the interest of reviving or adding to the power of the somethings. The transvironmental is an extreme statement of the latter. It sometimes turns nothings into somethings, or shows the presence of somethings where nothing had appeared. The transvironmental is an enhancement or enlargement of the transactional possibilities, showing that there are more somethings to go more places than was previously known. It does this partly by altering the perceptual organs by which we know any something. A simple texture can become a text which one learns to read. Move some stick around on the beach and it becomes a book. *The Book of Bean* turns beans into signs, notes, conceptual elements, designs. Sperm. It makes the book big enough to encompass or "environ" that which was previously outside the frame of meaning.

List of Possible Transactions Between the Reader and *The Book of Bean*:

01 — Stepping up to begin.
02 — Walking through a page.
03 — Looking at the pictures.
04 — Climbing the ladder to the top.
05 — Crawling through a page.
06 — Pushing back the curtain.
07 — Eating its soup.
08 — Listening to the sounds from the time of its making.
09 — Focusing on the audible realtime images and sounds.
10 — Turning and going in another direction.
11 — Leaving it altogether.
12 — Turning out the lights.
13 — Looking up information in the rolldeck.
14 — Stealing a bean and idea from the drawer.
15 — Studying books by Beans.
16 — Contemplating entering the tunnel.
17 — Watching others before and behind.
18 — Choosing to read.
19 — Choosing not to read.
20 — Kneading the beans at the exit.
21 — Adding a suggestion to the suggestion box.
22 — Sitting down to shoot the breeze.
23 — Thinking of additional pages for *The Book of Bean*.
24 — Wondering what was meant by burning all that old clothing.
25 — Figuring out how the *Book* was made. Would you like to do it?
26 — Trying to move the pages.
27 — Being distracted.
28 — Thinking and talking about the *Book* after you leave it.
29 — Trying to get the recipe from the artist.
30 — Calling people to visit the *Book*.
31 — Following somebody else's heart's desire.

Tuna and Other Fishy Thoughts on Fluxus Events (1992)

Kristine Stiles

First published in *FluxAttitudes* (Buffalo, NY: Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center; New York: The New Museum, 1991), 25–33.

In 1969, Alison Knowles shared a Chelsea studio in New York with Philip Corner. During this period she engaged in a "noonday meditation . . . eating the same lunch at the same time at the same place each day."[1] Corner had the opportunity, but equally the good sense and sensitivity, to observe her repetition, perhaps even ritualized reflection. She remembers that he then "midwifed if not actually preconceived" her meditation into a performative score that, together, they began to methodically investigate: "The Identical Lunch: a tunafish sandwich on wheat toast with lettuce and butter, no mayo and a large glass of buttermilk or a cup of soup."

In her meditation, Knowles isolated a set of objects, foods, and their uses in ways that Corner realized permitted them to function as components of an action that might be undertaken in private or public performances, alone or with others. Knowles remembered that Corner became "so obsessed" with performing the score that she decided to abandon her habit for a time, but not before various individuals undertook the performance of the *Identical Lunch* at Riss Food, a diner advertising "Home Cooking" located on 8th Avenue between 22nd and 23rd Streets, just up the street from Knowles's studio.

Identical Lunch is about the body that eats. Motion (mastication, drinking, and swallowing) and sound (chewing, crunching, nibbling, gnawing, gulping, champing, sipping, lapping, and other mandibular functions) determine its formal structural elements. Finally, along with consumption, eating might result in the disgorgement of food and certainly includes the excretory functions of salivating, sweating, urinating, and discharging excrement.

Now the body that eats and drinks is alive. It is nourished, gains sustenance, and survives. The profundity of the *Identical Lunch* is sustained by the simplicity with which edible organic matter ("a tunafish sandwich on wheat toast . . . ") signifies the primary nurturing action of life. But the eating and drinking body quickly seeks pleasure in nurture, a pleasure that social privilege provides. Thus the body that eats is classed and gendered with dietetic entertainments, amusements, and obsessions that range from gluttony to anorexia. Degrees of excess and limitation shape the permission accorded the body. Where it eats, what it eats, with whom it eats, how much is allowed be eaten, eating and its relationship to seduction and clothing—all these and more elements relate to the body as an eating figure.

Once that body begins to eat and drink, the variety of types belonging to any single category of foods plays a central role in the gastronomic performance. Individual variations in the process of eating, from eater to eater, expose the impossibility of an *Identical Lunch*. For, despite the attempted repetition of elements, chance determines the composition. One of the greatest variables in the score was the kind of soup served to different performers. For example, Knowles's *Journal of the Identical Lunch* (1971) includes a record of Lynn Lonidier being served a "homemade clear" soup with a few vegetables "dangling in it."[2] Vernon Hinkle's soup was "peppery" clam chowder. Dick Higgins forgot to order soup altogether, a lapse of memory that not only momentarily unveiled the heterogeneity of these performances but raised the specter of economics.

Higgins's soupless *Identical Lunch* is a variation in the score that altered the semiotic layer of the piece. Now the performance involved problems of exchange since the cost of the soup should have been subtracted from the cost of the lunch. Participants in the *Identical Lunch* almost uniformly reported that Riss Foods charged 75 cents (in 1969) for this lunch. But variations exist. In his account of the *Identical Lunch*, Philip Corner compared the money-value of other items on a menu—an egg and meat dish was 80 cents, a steak, $1.30, the cost of the "SPECIAL" affected the fluctuating price of the bill, as did "extras" added by an eater. Other performers noted the additional costs and tips, and one performer was charged 80 cents by mistake. *Identical Lunch* requires the reader/performer to compare a series of variables ranging from urban economics, issues of inflation, the quality and status of the restaurant, the class of its clientele, the ethics of exchange, and so forth.

Furthermore, the *Identical Lunch* reveals the body that eats as a thinking, feeling, desiring, and determining personality who exists in relation to acts. For, the particular phenomenological condition of the object relates specifically to the noumenological conditions of the individual's performative experience of them. Lonidier is a personality who "suck(s) loose" tuna "from teeth." Higgins has a propensity to classify and describe. His tuna is "pulped and mashed into something viscous, like melted ice cream." Vernon Hinkle also enjoys description, makes evaluative judgments, and seeks to resolve "problems." His tuna sandwich has a "tangy" pickle on top but "suffers as a sequel to his clam chowder." His sandwich is "easily two inches thick at its bulging middle and tapers to 1½ inches at each of three remaining corners" which causes problems "when you bite on middle" because "the tuna fish pours out of the sandwich sides, or rather squishes." Hinkle resolves his performance problem inventively and discovers that "by pushing bottom bread toward you you can bite bottom half of sandwich, and then top of

sandwich rendering knife and fork (which is on counter) unnecessary."

These individual peculiarities and habits of consumption resonate even more when individual performers particularize conditions of ego and place. Higgins carefully located himself historically: date (March 14, 1969), time (12:40 p.m.), street address on and from which he departed for Riss Foods (238 West 22nd Street in New York City). He meticulously described his dress: "Black Italian shoes, black socks, underpants decorated with tiny black and white or black, white, green, or blue geometric patterns (arranged alternately in rows), black gaberdeen slacks, a red turtleneck jersey, a brown tweed sports jacket, and a beat-up brown overcoat with a synthetic fur lining." Higgins also expands from an attentive description of his own grooming and body type—its size, the color of his eyes and hair, the shape of his glasses and his "pale complexion"—to offer a picture of his intellectual concerns. He carried with him *The Saturday Review* (March 15, 1969 issue) and a "Late City" edition of the *New York Post* ("March 14th, 1969"). Higgins "jaywalks," a notation that suggests his attitudes regarding rules and laws. He cannot begin his lunch without first securing his existential reality: when he arrives at Riss Food, he has obsessively recorded the time, and so on.

Philip Corner, on the other hand, begins his action with a detailed account of relationships. He recalls the conditions that "Mrs. Higgins" established for his performance. He notes his deviation from her instructions (he substituted rye toast for whole wheat), and he promises that "When I eat with Miss Knowles, I will revert to the whole wheat." Unlike Higgins, Corner mentions nothing about his own personal appearance. He is preoccupied with identifying the artist by both her married name—Mrs. Dick Higgins—and by her maiden name—Alison Knowles—and so established the gender and social relations implicit in his *Identical Lunch*. The potential encounter with Miss Knowles then assumes the intonation of a sexual encounter since it is "Mrs. Higgins" who gives the instructions but "Miss Knowles" with whom Corner will "eat," wry or whole as this may be.

The above account of *Identical Lunch* is just a brief sketch of the myriad details and performable features that may be discussed in the *Identical Lunch*. I have offered this bare framework as a model of the ways in which *any* Fluxus performance accounts for the elemental, ontological, ideological, and metaphysical content of private and collective life. In this way, *Identical Lunch* negotiates sameness, unity, and homogeneity, all aspects of individual identity unmitigated by the social, simultaneously with the foil of opposition, counterpoint, and heterogeneity characteristic of the communal. Knowledge is acquired in a Fluxus event through inversion.[3] *Identical Lunch* is the diachronic advance of an individual through a set of complex, overlapping, simultaneous, planned, and chance events that account for social relationships. It provides multiple views into the labyrinthine constructions of knowledge that commence on the basic level of bodily need and transform into desire. *Identical Lunch* crystallizes the range and diversity in which *all* Fluxus events must be considered. Each Fluxus performance provides an archaeology of behavior concerning the formations of value that proscribe both individual and collective practices.

As an object of history, the entity "Fluxus" has become synonymous as a category of art with Performance Art. Indeed, many critics have conferred on Fluxus a radical position within the visual arts.[4] I believe the radicality of Fluxus derives uniquely from the ways in which Fluxus artists deemphasized the object and positioned it in relation to the body. The body then became in Fluxus performance both an objective and subjective sign at the center of all action. The body refigured the signifying conditions of representation in terms both of the production and reception of art. By locating existential meanings in the framework of the social, Fluxus elevated the body—its thoughts, experiences, perceptions, processes, and actions—to the center of aesthetic concern and destabilized objects, thereby liberating them from their privileged iconic status within theocratic traditions.

But while this revolutionary shift in the paradigm of visual communication was centered in the action of human bodies, the radical potential of Fluxus performance is increasingly deemphasized by the plethora of Fluxus objects and ephemera that are reevaluated and elevated to the condition of "art" and displayed in exhibitions and books.[5] Although these "items" are precisely the vehicles through which Fluxus values have penetrated more widely into social discourse, the materialist fascination with the archival and museum Fluxus object threatens to deflect attention away from the social and political import of the Fluxus performance. No longer simply "ample food for stupid thought," the phrase that Robert Filliou so lovingly accorded the queer and marvelous relationships Fluxus artists had with objects and ideas,[6] in the most reductivist terms, the object-production of Fluxus—these mere things—are being reinvested with the materialist conditions of power. Fluxus performance also risks being objectified as a mere series of identifiable events, chronologically ordered, vividly and seductively illustrated. Such a situation shaves the hairy sensuous surface, ambiguity, and texture of Fluxus events. Stripped of their paradigmatic value as models that motivate a self-conscious repositioning of the body in relation to the mysterious qualities and values of objects, these acts and the objects of their attention are being returned to culture aestheticized for use.

In the rush to exhibit, historicize, and theorize the profuse production of Fluxus, the critical content of Fluxus objects themselves equally threatens to be lost. For the telling element in the Fluxus object is its relationship to performative acts whether mundane or quixotic. On the one hand, these things often display a quirky resistance to the logics of bodily function, as for example George Maciunas's series of altered ping-pong paddles that are—in Duchampian terms—assisted readymades, assisted in a fashion that perplexes their use and confounds the body. On the other hand, the Fluxus objects are identified in understated, direct, and particular representations, droll commentaries on human epistemology. For what is "a tunafish sandwich on wheat toast with lettuce and butter, no mayo and a large glass of buttermilk or a cup of soup" without the intercession of the performing body?

Fluxus performance must not only be conceptualized in terms of its relationship to the production of Fluxus objects, but must be rethought in terms of the identity of Fluxus itself. In this sense, I

want to argue that Fluxus as a social entity must be regarded as a performance.[7] For Fluxus is self-perpetuating construction, an intricate, social order with a tightly self-managed hierarchy that spirals out from generations of Fluxus artists to Fluxcollectors, Fluxarchivists, Fluxphotographers, and Fluxcritics. Each of these categories of social and cultural practice is a performance. As such the entity "Fluxus" provides a theater of social hierarchies. The discreet structure of Fluxus is a trope for larger cultural configurations.

From the earliest Fluxus festivals, in 1962, Fluxus actions have ranged from the individual, to the collaborative, and the collective. But whether individual or collective, Fluxus events are remarkable for the way in which these artists fixed their attention on single processes. Fluxus events were not a collage of polymorphous events (as in the Happening), but rather the pursuit of a focused project, the construction, realization, and observation of a single focused occurrence. Fluxus events are economical, nuanced actions that required only a modicum of engagement with a manipulation of common objects. In an era of excess, such performances unveiled shades of difference, the minutiae of human preference, tastes, attitudes, and behavior; they attended to the neglected and forgotten content that both inscribes meaning and, equally, leeches meaning from life. But Fluxus performances were also, from the beginning, about spectacle. The spectacle and the quotidian coexisted not as polarities but as points in a continuous cycle. By the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s, when Fluxus events included complex spectacles like marriage, divorce, and funerals, these rituals crystallized a single moment in a celebratory context. In the 1980s, I believe that Fluxus performance may be understood to have extended to acts that reveal the spectacle of the "artworld," acts that entail recording, collecting, exhibiting, popularizing, moneymaking, and finally historicizing. The social infra-structure that I want to equally identify as Fluxus performance is an internal tapestry of incestuous events, celebrations, ceremonies, professional territories, disputes, and loyalties that exaggerate and parody the performative super-structure of all societies. In this sense, the political conditions and content of the Fluxus clan kinship lines, so obsessively drawn by George Maciunas and perpetuated by others, recapitulate the seductive codes of social spectacle. In this sense, Fluxus events perform their most seditious function. They reconstitute, rupture, and expose the structures that inscribe patterns and relationships of power.

Alison Knowles collected the record of the performances of the *Identical Lunch* in her *Journal of the Identical Lunch*. Corner memorialized his own performances in *The Identical Lunch*, a diaristic interlacing of forgotten and unobserved events, memories, observations, and reflections upon the quotidian, a text that threads together intercultural practices into a theater of remembered scenes drawn from the interstices of life. Only a handful of individuals consciously performed, participated in, or observed Knowles's and Corner's *Identical Lunch*. But Knowles and Corner memorialized units of experience and communicated them in the body of the text. Thus, the text registered the potential for multitudinous, yet unconscious, although similar and anonymous identical lunches as events of note. Such conditions of reception, namely the absence of direct experience, characterize Fluxus events in general. For few people actually ever "see" a "performance." But unlike other genres of Performance Art, Fluxus events must also be distinguished primarily by their relation to a text, the Fluxus Score. These texts are the agents that engage the reader in the theater of the act. Mere reception of the text constitutes performance and Fluxus events have been described as "language happenings."[8]

John Cage's mentorship of Fluxus is legendary and his interpretation of "Composition as Process" (the title of a three-part lecture from 1958) is particularly central to the ways in which Fluxus artists adapted the compositional technique of textual notation from the musical paradigm.[9] While the production of sound-works initially motivated the Flux-Fests and concerts, Fluxus artists found the arrangement, or scoring, of actual material objects to be increasingly compelling. They employed objects in an action in which sound became only one of many complex results. This attention to the condition and manipulation of the object recalls Immanuel Kant's "things-in-themselves," an aesthetic that situates the body as an interpreter of phenomena in relationship to objects. Through the vehicle of the Fluxus score, the body—any body—is an equivalent ideological presence in the arena of human action. That body, which is anybody, which is all bodies democratized and deprivileged, is at once the means by which the existential content of privileged individual perceptions is recentered at the core of social formations.

The French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé observed that the book "replaces all theaters."[10] In his last poem, *Un Coup de Dès jamais n'abolira le Hasard* (1895), he composed the text in a graphic spatial display that visually externalized the temporal conditions of the narrative as well as the interpretive action of the reader. The spatio-temporal performative "form" that Mallarmé pioneered began a critical intervention against the linear text that is, in part, a cornerstone of the movement to disestablish the "author," to unmask that role, and to disentangle it from its instrumentality in the construction of a univocal morality. The spatio-temporal display of *Un Coup de Dès* anticipated the different democratized voices that emerged internationally in experimental media of the 1960s. Fluxus performance, specifically, grew from the hybrid roots established in a variety of disciplines that began to incorporate physical action in previously presentational, literary, or musical modes. Action painting, action poetry, and action music, kinetic sculpture, assemblage, environments, installations, and happenings virtually exploded as new media whose interest and effort it was to mark moments of contingency, identify points in time and place, reveal causes, anticipate or set in motion results, and always situate the body at the center.

George Brecht's invention of the *Event Score*, in the late 1950s, cannot be overestimated as a contribution to the decentering of the author, the revisioning of the objects and its relationship to process, but most significantly, to the establishment of the receiver as central in the production of consciousness. The *Event Score* consisted of simple words or short sentences that Brecht typed on small cards and sent to his friends.

An exemplary score from 1960 reads: "Three Aqueous events: Ice, Water, Steam."

The spare economy of the Fluxus score opened the phenomenological aspects of the object to an indefinite variety of human encounters and experiences and positioned the author as a kind of archivist, a statistician, someone who merely names things already existing in the world. In this sense, the Fluxus scores reposition the artist. No longer an analogue of God—the namer and creator—the Fluxus artist only identifies already preexisting objects and thereby rekindles the memory of a once-innocent relationship between body and things. Such an act prepares a space for the process of revaluation.

Fluxus performance is the act of revaluation. Fluxus events depart from what Nietzsche identified as the catastrophic plunge of European nihilism "headlong, like a river that wants to reach the end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect." Fluxus performance is a countermovement that constructs a performative space where the human body may pause, to examine, to reflect, to meditate so that we might, as Nietzsche cautioned, "find out what value these 'values' really had—We require, sometimes, *new values*."[11]

1. Philip Corner, *The Identical Lunch: Philip Corner performance of a score by Alison Knowles* (San Francisco: Nova Broadcast Press, 1973). Rather than litter the text with notes, I refer readers to this text.

2. Alison Knowles, *Journal of the Identical Lunch* (San Francisco: Nova Broadcast Press, 1971). Again, I have deferred from using footnotes liberally in this text and refer the reader to Knowles's text.

3. On inversion, see particularly Patrick Hughes and George Brecht, *Vicious Circles and Infinity: An Anthology of Paradoxes* (London: Penguin Books, 1975).

4. See, for example, especially Harry Ruhé, *Fluxus: The Most Radical and Experimental Art Movement of the Sixties* (Amsterdam: "A," 1979).

5. See, for example, the essential but massive catalog of Fluxus documents, objects, and ephemera by Jon Hendricks entitled *Fluxus Codex* (Detroit: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988).

6. Robert Filliou, *Ample Food For Stupid Thought* (New York: Something Else Press, 1965). See also Filliou's exploration of the reciprocal relationship of artist and viewer in the transformation of aesthetic objects to educational tools in *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* (Cologne and New York: Verlag Gebr. Koenig, 1970).

7. This essay was written as part of a larger study of Fluxus performance during the preparation for the Walker Art Center's 1993 exhibition, *In the Spirit of Fluxus*.

8. Ronald Gross and George Quasha with Emmett Williams, John Robert Colombo, and Walter Lowenfels, eds., *Open Poetry: Four Anthologies of Expanded Poems* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), 385. See also the editors' comments on Benjamin Patterson's *Methods & Processes*, in which Patterson attempted "to structure specific environments for conditioning . . . micro-environments composed of instructions." Such works anticipate the aesthetic formulations of Lawrence Weiner, who insisted that conceptual "receivership" constituted "ownership" of his art. See Weiner's "October 12, 1969," in Ursula Meyers, *Conceptual Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972), 218.

9. John Cage, "Composition as Process," in *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 18–56. Cage gave the first of these lectures at Rutgers University. Excerpts were published in the *Village Voice* in April 1958. In September, he delivered all three parts—Changes, Indeterminacy, Communication—in Darmstadt, Germany.

10. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1961), 334. "Un livre . . . supplée à tous les théatres."

11. Friedrich Nietzsche, preface to *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 4.

The Sculpture of Indeterminacy: Alison Knowles's Beans and Variations (2004)

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> Sometimes the piece of tempura is in stages . . . but the contour is so light that it becomes abstract: the foodstuff has for its envelope nothing but time, the time (extremely tenuous, moreover) which has solidified it . . . refined by the Japanese techniques of cancellation and exemption, it is the nutrient of another time . . . a kind of meditation, as much spectacular as alimentary (since tempura is prepared before your eyes). . . . [It is] on the side of the light, the aerial, of the instantaneous, the fragile the transparent . . . but whose real name would be the interstice without specific edges, or again: the empty sign
>
> [The chef's] activity is literally graphic, he inscribes the foodstuff in the substance; his stall is arranged like a calligrapher's table; he touches the substances like the graphic artist (especially if he is Japanese) who alternates pots, brushes, inkstone, water, paper; he thereby accomplishes . . . [an] arrangement, not of time but of tenses (those of a grammar of tempura) makes visible an entire gamut of practices, recites the foodstuff not as a finished merchandise . . . but as a product whose meaning is not final but progressive, exhausted, so to speak, when its production has ended: it is you who eat, but it is he who has played, who has written, who has produced.
>
> —Roland Barthes[1]

> In the process of papermaking particularly the shapes formed by the wet pulp as it is left to air dry are respected and become indigenous to the sculpture. In performances I am drawn to objects for their sound. My orchestra consists of beans, toys, papers, and words. . . . Each instrument comes out of silence makes its performance and returns to silence.
>
> —Alison Knowles[2]

Prelude: Proposition #1—Make a Salad

As Alison Knowles stood with her assistants before an audience of more than a hundred people, preparing to perform her renowned 1962 score *Make a Salad* at the Baltimore Museum of Art in fall 2003, there was an air of uncertainty as to how this now "historical" piece would be understood. More than forty years since the inauguration of Fluxus and more than a decade since the death of John Cage, the original motivations and intentions behind such works have become somewhat opaque. The short, "open" score (or "proposition," as Knowles calls it) using everyday objects as instruments can hardly make the same points it made to its first audience in 1962, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, but perhaps now it makes different points. In the afterglow of the presentation Knowles made in Baltimore as part of the touring exhibition *Work Ethic*, new questions emerged about the conceptual bases of early 1960s performance and about Knowles's role as a key figure in the "labor-oriented" artistic practice defined by this exhibition.[3]

The 2003 *Make a Salad* looked very different from earlier interpretations of the score, all of which occurred more than three decades ago. Before a vast audience (by 1962 standards) and on the grounds of a major visual arts institution as opposed to in a concert hall, the sense that this was a musical piece extending the boundaries of composition seemed to require particular emphasis. "After two or three generations," Knowles has observed, this kind of piece "no longer comes as a surprise."[4] Although she knew she would not shock her audience as she stood before them with her fellow performers, their knives poised for a marathon of swift and rhythmic chopping, the sheer aesthetic pleasure of piles of carrots, radishes, lettuces, and cucumbers loaded on the long table in front of the performers threatened to dilute the reading of the piece. Knowles sensed the value of bracketing her own music of chopping, pouring, and tossing with conventional musical performances (selections from Mozart were chosen and a cellist and a violinist played their pieces before and after Knowles's performance). The juxtaposition of conventional musical pieces with one composed of everyday sounds dramatized the sense of both rupture and continuity within Knowles's composition. Without the Mozart these aspects may have been elided, the *Make A Salad* performance reduced to a gesture of mere iconoclasm. The audience was therefore given the opportunity to perceive the radical expansiveness of Knowles's practice, its role in extending musicality, through the subtle explicatory power of its presentation.

The brevity and openness of Knowles's textual "proposition" allows for great freedom in the realization of the piece, and it includes the audience from the outset. Although it was Marcel Duchamp who first argued that the spectator completes the work, it

was the sphere of performance and the radical scoring practices developed by John Cage that provided the impetus for Knowles and her peers to incorporate duration and experience into the very conception of the works they created. Disavowing convention and sacrificing structure, they made experience a kind of medium, as important as any other. The *Work Ethic* exhibition rightly includes Knowles as a representative of Fluxus strategies, but what seems called for now is a closer examination of the ways in which Knowles has developed devices like the score and other Cagean and Fluxus models toward a sustained practice that demands its own unique terms.[5]

Shaping Indeterminacy

The concept of indeterminacy stands as a source of the earliest affinity between Knowles and certain of her peers—particularly those closest to Cage—in the years leading up to the 1962 inauguration of Fluxus. While Cage had established (and taught) indeterminacy within the framework of his course "Experimental Composition," those artists who adopted the concept took it in substantially different directions in their own projects. Indeterminacy created the preconditions for a work of art (or a performance) to be arranged by an artist without the artist knowing exactly how it would turn out.[6] So rather than composing a score note by note, so to speak, the artists developed scores that operated as templates, open to expansion in the arena of realization. Elements of chance were incorporated into the temporal framework so that each performance of a single score might differ greatly, far beyond the expectations of the composer. The radicality of the concept of indeterminate composition lies in its mandate that the artist intentionally give up control of the work's outcome. Such a notion flies in the face of every idea of mastery bonded to the traditional work of art. In its complete disavowal of the unilateral decision-making process that would define a work of art in its entirety, indeterminacy split artists of the early 1960s between those who felt liberated by it and those who could not accept it.

For several artists momentarily associated with the Fluxus group who did not adopt Fluxus but instead made Happenings or shifted in altogether different directions—artists such as Allan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys, and Wolf Vostell—the purely indeterminate work closest to the musical model of Cage was not desirable.[7] The obvious divide between Fluxus and Happenings, which turns on this issue, is illustrated by the great difference between works by these latter artists and those of an artist like Knowles or her close colleague George Brecht (both of whom made the release of the work a kind of ur-principle of its formation). As two well-known modes of 1960s performance that have so often been discussed together, Fluxus and Happenings might be set apart through consideration of the level of the artist/composer's control over the work, from conception through to realization. This division emerges partly from the enduring proximity of Fluxus to music. Scores by Fluxus artists premiered at New Music festivals in Europe, inserted into the programs of a vast, preexisting sphere of radical musical production. In contrast, Happenings were defined almost exclusively in America (specifically out of the New York scene) and quickly abandoned music, save for transplanting the score component of the Cagean model and transforming it into a set of increasingly programmatic instructions.[8] For the few artists (like Knowles and Brecht) who pursued the bilateral operation of indeterminacy (as conceptual foundation) and the score (as structural foundation), the combination of openness and preestablished limitations proved enormously generative.

Score and Sole: Proposition #6—Shoes of Your Choice

> **A member of the audience is invited to come forward to a microphone if one is available and describe a pair of shoes, the ones he [*sic*] is wearing or another pair. He is encouraged to tell where he got them, the size, color, why he likes them, etc.**[9]

In the period that Knowles conceived and premiered *Make a Salad*, she produced another important score, *Shoes of Your Choice*, which was performed at the same concert in London at the ICA in fall 1962. On that occasion Knowles walked out on the stage and announced the score to the audience. In a now memorable response, the British Pop artist Richard Hamilton rose to his feet, removed one shoe, and embarked upon a long and detailed description of it, one that involved intricate justifications for the particular heel height and witty explanations about the color and the overall rationale for his "choice."

Shoes of Your Choice is a lucid illustration of indeterminate composition. It suggests the difference between Knowles's term, a "proposition," and a conventional score, which would be composed from beginning to end. Like much of the art of the early 1960s, *Shoes of Your Choice* incorporates the everyday, the found object, into the frame of aesthetic consideration. But through its indeterminate nature, this score allows for an open work whose ultimate form and duration can never be known until each performance of it is complete. A dynamic of spontaneity helps define the found object (which also is or becomes a readymade). *Shoes of Your Choice* represents shoes as if for the first time, constructing them out of a kaleidoscopic constellation of perspectives. Unlike the consumer items that appear as painting or sculpture in Pop art, for example, the shoes Knowles represents do not parrot reified object relations. They are neither the simulacra of the shop window (echoed in art) nor the unilateral view of an object from the mind of the artist. Knowles's shoes take shape in unfolding time; they are performed into being, continually defined and redefined according to the idiosyncrasies of successive personal accounts.

In contrast to this, we might think of another important depiction of shoes from the same year, Claes Oldenburg's *White Gym Shoes* (1962). Since Oldenburg also began his career privileging performance and went on to deal with objects like shoes and food, placing them (significantly) in an "active" space (*The Store*), his commitment to challenging the work of art with the real is relevant here.[10] Of the group of artists who came to be associated with Pop art, Oldenburg was one of the closest to the

Fluxus and Happenings groups. While he did not share the collectivist ethos that informed Fluxus, he was acutely aware, at this early stage, of the powerful tension between real actions or objects and a composed, framed setting. "The aim of putting the store in an actual neighborhood is to contrast it to the actual object(s) . . . ," Oldenburg has explained, "not as might be thought in neo-realist terms to point up similarities. . . . The store title is in fact a play on words . . . the store means for me: my consciousness."[11]

In the two titles—*Shoes of Your Choice* and *White Gym Shoes*—we already gain a sense of the difference between what might be considered an open work and one that is fully defined from the outset. Without looking at the Oldenburg, we already know what kind of shoes to expect. The real surprise is delivered through texture. Two white sneakers, ruddily structured and erratically overpainted, must have confronted the visitor to *The Store* like a cross between vanilla pudding and a child's papier-mâché work. This disquieting morphological address was Oldenburg's visceral manner of translating his own experience of commodities by rendering them as somehow psychically animate. He gave all these early sculptures a polymorphous perversity and an abjectness that has rarely been equaled in the history of sculpture, but what is notable is the subjective aspect of the enterprise. Oldenburg himself said of such pieces: "I have tried to represent my consciousness in relation to the actual object at the moment of my perception of it."[12]

Between the rendering of one perception and that of many stands the intervention of the score. Oldenburg's art works through the object, Knowles's through the subject experiencing it.[13] Where Oldenburg created a loaded-up sandwich, a lumpy, drippy hamburger, or food items in a glass display case, Knowles dealt with the topic of the sandwich by creating a shareable performance like *The Identical Lunch* (1967). Knowles's *Identical Lunch* score evolved from her daily meal at Riss Restaurant in Chelsea, a diner not far from her home in those years. The score demanded wheat toast, butter, tuna fish, lettuce, and soup or buttermilk to be assembled and consumed in any manner the performer wished. *The Identical Lunch* was famously taken up, over a period of years, by many of Knowles's artist friends.[14] Later Knowles made a series of screenprints of friends performing *The Identical Lunch*, which included a prominent display of the StarKist Tuna label.

Knowles was probably the only Fluxus artist to incorporate real product labels into her work. The StarKist Tuna in *Identical Lunch* is one example, the blue and white Nivea container in her *Nivea Cream Piece* of 1962 is another:

> **First performer comes on stage with a bottle of hand cream, labeled "Nivea Cream" if none is available. He [*sic*] pours the cream onto his hands, and massages them in front of the microphone. Other performers enter, one by one, and do the same thing. Then they join together in front of the microphone to make a mass of massaging hands. They leave in the reverse of the order they entered, on a signal from the first performer.**[15]

The various products in Knowles's scores are taken up by performers and activated in unexpected ways: one touches them, tastes them, feels their texture and hears them, while the label or container is relegated to secondary concern. We might think of this as the unique province of the performance context, that the status of a brand can be unraveled in the process of experiencing. In opposition to the way the product is defined in the marketplace, it becomes strange or even abject under the intense focus of its enactment. Nivea Cream *as sound* can cause squeamishness, and tuna as a programmatic and unvaried daily meal can take on an inexplicable pathos. Of course George Maciunas's interpretation —putting all the ingredients of *The Identical Lunch* into a blender—recognizes this unsettling dimension and gives it full emphasis by pushing the desublimation to an extreme.

In its role of recasting the product as contingent and changeable, the indeterminate score demarcated the Fluxus approach to readymade items. As Fluxus and Pop art inevitably forked along two distinct paths, away from their chaotic crossings-over of the early days, the contrast between delivering a hypothesis versus a blank fact became significant. If the reified object is featured as a *fait accompli* in Pop art, the limits of that condition are everywhere questioned in Fluxus. Hypothetical, other lives are sought for objects (and subjects) through the mediation of the score and the performance.

Reorienting the Object: Beans, Books, and Variations

After the first hectic period of Fluxus Festivals (in Europe, 1962–63), Knowles returned to New York and began to make objects, some commissioned by Maciunas as Fluxus multiples.[16] No longer exclusively score-based, these pieces embodied the idea of the open work, their ultimate form and appreciation left in the hands of the subject who would look, touch, and interact with them. This openness served the goals of Fluxus as much as it would serve Knowles, as both strategy and ethic, in all the work she made outside of Fluxus.[17] Though the indeterminate score was no longer always physically present, Knowles used its conceptual basis to redefine sculpture: altering expectations, reorienting and redefining found elements, and constituting the object itself as much out of durational and experiential structures as out of matter. Indeterminacy persisted in the work to unstructure expectations.

The found item most associated with Knowles's art is the bean. In the early 1960s, when she first began to use it, this item was quite distinct, even categorically oppositional to the readymades, street detritus, and assemblage objects other artists were using. While Knowles, when asked, is fairly pragmatic about the reasons for her choice of the bean, it is through her art that we see its spectrum of characteristics and even a politics to its use.[18] We also understand the way the conceptual basis of the work transcends its elements to the extent that the bean becomes its vehicle, the catalyst for a particular kind of attention. Another important item that Knowles has returned to is the book, rendering the "reading" experience indeterminate or transforming it into a walk-through performance in different works.

Quite often, the bean and the book have shown up together in one work.

The bean made its first appearance in Knowles's art in 1963 in the form of a Fluxus multiple called *The Bean Rolls*. The work consisted of a found tea tin containing fourteen tiny paper scrolls with text describing all manner of detail about beans—including people named Bean, proverbs and stories about beans, bean recipes, and ads for L. L. Bean—accompanied by real (dried) beans. This object was given a dramatic label designed by Maciunas, distinguishing it as a Fluxus "anticommodity."[19] But essentially Knowles was presenting *The Bean Rolls* as something to be read and experienced. This multifaceted representation of the bean—drawn from card files at the New York Public Library—is given as a kind of open research: one initiated in the process of the work's conception that the artist invites the person contemplating the piece to pursue.

Knowles called *The Bean Rolls* "a canned book." This point is crucial. To underscore the book as the point of reference for *The Bean Rolls* calls attention to the principle of indeterminacy and its unstructuring operation. *The Bean Rolls* is a kind of pseudolexicon of bean information presented to the reader as dehierarchized and arbitrary excerpts. Unlike a conventional book that we might consult to learn about beans—or any other subject, for that matter—one accesses *The Bean Rolls* by opening the tin, selecting one of the long scrolls, and reading the texts in the order in which one finds them. There is the choice of tipping them all out and ordering them according to one's own sense of their respective relevance—but any such organization is entirely in the hands of the reader.[20]

Four years after *The Bean Rolls*, in 1967, Knowles made *The Big Book*, a walk-through environment that offered the "reader" the opportunity of thinking about the book in radically new terms, principally in relation to her/his own body. Seven eight-by-four-foot "pages" gave an account of the rituals of daily life excerpted from Knowles's own experience of downtown loft living. It contained Canal Street crockery, a Chinatown tea kettle, makeshift heating coils for cooking, even a toilet and a telephone. A primary element distinguishing this work from sculpture, for example, is duration (the temporality associated with both physical action and with narrative). *The Big Book* activates all the so-called negative spaces of experience—fusing moments of meditation, as when one has a book in hand but is not reading, with the more devalued ones in life, such as cooking, eating, sleeping—and makes them the subject of the "reader's" experience. In *The Big Book*, argued William Wilson in a 1968 *Art in America* article, "The necessary routines of life that must be repeated everyday have the feeling of a ritual, not because it is necessary to do them but because it is possible to do them."[21] Never losing its potential for rearticulation or reinvention, the book has remained a leitmotif of Knowles's oeuvre.[22]

For many artists emerging in the 1960s, the book (like Maciunas's Fluxus multiple) was a crucial means of contesting the notion of the work of art as a unique, precious object delivering an elitist experience. One year after Knowles's *Bean Rolls*, the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers used the book—its traditional form radically ruptured, in a very different manner—as the focus for his 1964 work *Pense-Bête*.[23] Unlike Knowles's act of delivering the text in fragments, readable only in chance order, or blown out to the scale of architecture, Broodthaers inserted a stack of books (of his own poetry) into a thick tomb of white plaster, never to be read again. In destroying one form of artistic production to create another, Broodthaers emphasizes polemically the disproportionate value given to object status in art, as what is intended to be read is transformed into a mute object, to be owned. Knowles also turns the book into a sculptural object, but she immediately exceeds that object, placing most of the emphasis on the complex spectrum of experiences it generates in all its parts. Both artists force the viewer into an unexpected position and role. In *The Bean Rolls*, *The Big Book*, and *Pense-Bête* the familiar object is reoriented, presented in a manner that confounds the viewer/reader's habitual relationship (or means of making a relationship) with it.

The Politics of Objects

While the above suggests two substantially different modes of reorienting objects, in this case books, the comparison of Knowles and Broodthaers is an important one for several reasons.[24] There are certain links between the interests of Fluxus and those of Broodthaers that he shares with almost no other group or figure of his generation, principally concerning the poignant choice of disarmingly simple items to incorporate into the work of art.[25] Rudimentary simplicity has long been a source of agency within Fluxus—simple scores and events, banal or quaint objects, basic game principles—bringing primary relationships between subjects and objects into an intense focus, sometimes to the utter consternation of the audience, as a kind of un-functioning device.[26] Knowles and Broodthaers (as well as their mutual friend Robert Filliou) were unique in their pointed choices of raw and humble objects mobilized in the work to address reified object relations and anachronistic conventions of art. The centrality Knowles has given to the bean and other objects sometimes verging on the abject—like soiled inner soles or dirty, worn-down, or rotting heels—from her performance work through to her later collages, compares with Broodthaers's choice of mussels and eggs in works such as his *Panneaux de moules* (1964) series and his *Table blanche* (1965).[27]

In the early to mid-1960s Pop artists were raiding the icebox to represent by painterly or sculptural means—food and other store-bought commodities as the omnipresent reality of a new, postwar generation. So what did it mean, at this time, to insert foodstuffs into the frame of art in almost a natural state? The bean, the mussel, and the egg have in common that they are among the least packaged foods available. They also share the attribute of a kind of natural seriality that seems subversively to contest the perfect serial sameness of the mass-produced commodity.

Broodthaers's early use of mussels mounted a staggering assault on the sacred monochrome of high modernism, which for him was part of a tradition that had ineluctably succumbed to the commodity, to the point of tautology.[28] With biting irony, he fought platitudinous purity with lumpen seriality, turning what was originally deployed as a

powerful lateral sweep of regimented monochromy into a kind of piled-up, repetitious *anti-form*, the more impure the better.[29] Broodthaers's canvases, brimming with black shells, proffer a literal (or real) excess in opposition to the theoretical excess (or surplus) of the commodity. Somewhat disconcertingly, these mussel "monochromes" brandish excess as a kind of unsavory proliferation, or breeding, right there on the canvas. Not only does this reflect (back) on development of the monochrome, sullying its ground, stifling its entropic progression, it permeates the space (of life and art) around it, troubling the precise, serial sameness of the perfect commodity and the art that showcases it. Broodthaers's mussels, like Knowles's beans of different shapes and sizes, assert a kind of fugitiveness of the object—in form and behavior—redeeming it from the registers of cultural control.

Knowles and Broodthaers both exhibit a concern with the emphatic presence of the simple objects they select, which shifts to a deeper and broader concern with the space of experience generated around the objects.[30] For both artists, it is important for the different elements in the work to have a "readable texture," articulated, as Broodthaers has explained, "morally and materially."[31] Both Knowles and Broodthaers privilege the unregistered spaces of daily experience: those that are repressed or unacknowledged (like silence was in relation to sound for Cage), or those spaces colonized by institutional control in ways that remain obscure to all who are subjugated to it. Broodthaers deliberately banishes distracting elements in favor of so-called white space, creating what he has called "absences . . . necessary to give speaking presence to the egg."[32] With a similar conviction about the validity of deploying unlikely food items in a work of art or music, Knowles gives the bean its own means of expression, shifting it from the gustatory or merely visual to the aural. She points out unexpected properties, like the fact that "Beans roll and make a sound." And that each has its own specificity: "Beans don't all sound the same."[33]

It becomes clear that the agency in a work of art can be resident in each and every object choice, that it can in fact precede the work's completion. And agency can be generated as much by how the work is made as by what is made or finally presented. Knowles's and Broodthaers's mutual friend Filliou was particularly concerned with the ways in which a politics of objects could be extended through a politics of making. As part of his larger project, involving a pseudosystematic, utopian defiance of the conventions for judging art and commodity objects, Filliou began to ratify his works with a stamp that designated them as:

Bien Fait _____
Mal Fait _____
Pas Fait _____

(Well made, badly made, not made.) When the work was finished he would stamp it and check one of the different lines.[34] For Filliou, who likewise used humble materials—such as poor-quality plywood hammered together in a makeshift fashion, or cardboard, paper, glue, and tape—the "badly made" was an ideal. It was an important register available to the artist to implicate the viewer and prompt her/him away from aesthetic passivity, using a lack of perfection to generate curiosity and engagement. Knowles's choice of objects and her opening up of the process of making—initiated in the context of Fluxus performance and continued to the present—are illuminated by noticing the effects of similar strategies in the work of those artists who were genuinely her peers, like Broodthaers and Filliou.

Performative Performance

The potential for humble objects or fabrication procedures to be confrontational and political points to the operative dimension of "the performative" in the art that works in this way. While there has always been performativity in Fluxus, its actual operation has often been obscured in the critical conflation of performativity and performance. Performativity as defined by its chief contemporary theoretician, Judith Butler, designates the act of altering or undoing certain semantic conditions through their own means and terminologies.[35] Performativity involves a (re)structuring, or in the terms we have been using here, an act of (re)orientation, that has a political effect.

The choice of the found item verging on the abject as the linchpin for a work of art is one strategy for motivating performativity. The use of language to perform against itself, against its established usage, is another. The indeterminate, textual score as it has been expanded to implicate objects and subjects can operate as a matrix for performativity. As Henry Martin has defined it, in the context of Knowles's work, "A score is a text that's couched in a language the very purpose of which is to see itself transformed into another and more ample language."[36] The score itself has always worked in this way for Knowles, its transformation taken a step further as her objects come to acquire score-like attributes: a found sole is tagged to identify the sound it can make; a vegetable skin is used serially as musical notation, each fragment a catalyst for sound. Speaking of Knowles's sculptural pieces, Martin continues: "When we consider these works to be scores, and not simply as things to be looked at in some more generic way, it's not only clear that we're expected to read them quite carefully, but as well that they require to be completed. They aspire to originate acts of our own."[37]

In the art we have discussed, performativity works to fight reification, and in the case of Knowles, this work becomes fully developed in the register of performance itself. If one can think of "performative performance"—performance that literally *unperforms* an existing attribution of meaning, or reinvents a lost relationship with objects—then one can begin to appreciate this operative register in Knowles's work as well as the stakes of such a project.[38] It is precisely what performance affords, the way it thickens the experience of things, sounds, bodies, and words, that has made it such a durable structure for Knowles.

A Postfeminist Stance

Although Knowles's practice has not ever been extensively discussed in feminist terms, the dimension of *performative performance* that operates in all

her work—to introduce it to her audiences through their senses of sound and, importantly, of touch—suggests a crucial aspect that differentiates her from her male colleagues, with the possible exception of Cage. It also suggests that new terms might be required to speak of this dimension as a politics. With the record of more than four decades of Knowles's production now available for consideration, it seems possible to argue a postfeminist reading of her oeuvre.[39]

Knowles has never been as direct or explicit in her confrontations as certain of her female peers—two of the closest being Shigeko Kubota and Carolee Schneemann. Certainly, Kubota's *Vagina Painting* (1965) in the context of Fluxus and Schneemann's later *Interior Scroll* (1975) arguably constitute two of the most important moments in postwar art—particularly in the case of Schneemann, whose sustained critical contributions have been consolidated over decades. But it does seem increasingly urgent to develop the terms to accommodate theoretically approaches that make similar leaps with opposite means: withdrawal rather than frontal attack.

Knowles relinquished the strategies of attacking painting and criticism and developed an entirely new vocabulary for her art.[40] If she addressed a male model, it was not a masculine one. Cage's dogged efforts to create systems that dismantled enforced conventions of every kind proved crucial for Knowles. In Knowles as in Cage, this project of dismantling is revealed in disavowing convention from the outset, in the very process of composing. Knowles's art moves easily through discipline boundaries—from sculpture to music and back—and opens up the monolithic edifice of artistic authorship to the effects of chance and to the audience. As I have argued elsewhere in the context of Cage, the term *unmanning* (*Entmannung*) seems more appropriate for this operation than, say, feminizing the medium.[41] This is because the point is not to replace one structure or institution with another but to dissolve the existing one in favor of a precarious openness. What is at stake is precisely the act of disengaging certain forces and preestablished structures and proceeding without them, as though they did not constitute the entire system but only an option, like one language we choose not to learn. For those unfamiliar with the large body of visual art Cage produced, who know him exclusively through his music, it might be tempting to ask the question: "How would Cage have translated his ideas into visual media?" The answer is that the result would (and did) show significant affinities with the work of Knowles, exhibiting a preference for chance over structure, though perhaps without the same sense of decades of devotion to the plastic properties of paper, glue, staining, and the media of art.[42]

The arena of performance and the deauthoring dictated by indeterminate scoring, both of which define Knowles's production, are also the crucial criteria that have come to distinguish her work from that of her male peers. In almost all cases, when we see an Oldenburg, a Broodthaers, or even a Filliou, it is finished and, usually, we are not meant to touch it. The way the score has infused Knowles's practice of object-making has delivered an oeuvre that is always shareable: objects that are never complete at the moment of their presentation but only prepared to be handed over to the viewer.

(Wo)Manhandling the Monochrome

In the past decade and a half, from the early 1990s to the present, Knowles has produced a series of works that apparently allude to the modernist monochrome and at the same time dismember it. This is quite different from Broodthaers's corruption of that model, for it begins with a fundamental disavowal of its hegemony. Far from the taut canvas or even the upright and parallel, wall-bound plane, Knowles offers monochrome works that show color and form thrown to the forces of chance. They confront the viewer as rumpled, torqued topographies, seeming to slouch on the wall. Works like Knowles's *Broken Line with Slippers* (1991), her *Giant Bean Turner* (2000–03), and the *Onion Skin Song* (1998–2003) embody their built-in potential: they are meant to be worn, manipulated, sounded, and performed.

In a May 2001 event at New York's Drawing Center, viewers entered to find the gallery filled with Knowles's paper pieces, save for one patch of wall that remained inexplicably void, as if waiting to be filled. They came at an appointed time to witness a performance by Knowles, with no information about what to expect. As the lights when down, the audience, cued by the sounds of moving paper, turned to see Knowles entering the gallery *wearing* one of her monochromes, the *Broken Line with Slippers*, on her feet. The paper slippers were attached to a long scroll trailing behind the artist as she gradually made her way through the room, her movements *in her work* filling the entire space with the texture of sound. When Knowles came to a stop, in front of that empty patch of wall, *Broken Line* was released and hoisted upward, revealing a surface (nearly three meters long, now high) of rumpled, off-white paper. Its length was emphasized and punctuated by dramatic vertical lines made to break through the chance effects of wet sheets of paper that had been built up on the surface and left to dry in different ways, falling as they would.

The surprise of seeing an artist standing on her art and dragging it across the floor was only the first the audience would witness. During her performance Knowles dressed an assistant entirely in paper, creating a kind of personification (or embodiment) of sculptural sound. She then launched into a performance with another musician in which her art was transformed into musical instruments, taken off the wall, and unexpectedly handed to members of the audience, offering them direct, expansive experience of it, no longer only visual but now aural and tactile as well. Knowles initiated a process of discovery in which these extraordinary wall sculptures were revealed to double as bean rattles and paper saws with a spectrum of sonic properties. By the last moments of the performance the gallery had been transformed: the art was off the walls, being manipulated by the crowd in a bewildering and picturesque atmosphere of cacophonous musicality.

Since 2000, Knowles has developed the scope for paper as a musical instrument (a sculptural object to be performed) in her series of *Bean Turners*. Works like the *Giant Bean Turner* also appear first as extraordinary wall pieces somehow related to the lineage of the monochrome. As the pieces are made from paper pulp allowed to dry naturally, the process also seals in quantities of beans that will

Knowles performing with *Giant Bean Turner*, location unkown, 2000

give the object the potential for an entirely alterable identity. If one is adventurous enough to remove the work from the wall, it can be rotated manually to produce a roar, much louder than expected, of beans running up and down the inside. With the *Bean Turners*, the discrete divisions between painting and sculpture, art and instrument, score and object, passive viewing and active sounding can fall away, in the experience of one work.

As if to complete the logic of her oeuvre, Knowles's *Onion Skin Song* is pure score. It fuses the unlikely role of the foodstuff in the work and the exhortation to perform or to sound. But despite its formal elegance, it is not meant to be preserved as an art object. The *Onion Skin Song* is made in the very moment of its performance, before the eyes of the audience. Pieces of real onion skin are sandwiched in plastic film, which is stretched across the space to form an "environmental" score. The onion skins are the unorthodox material that promotes experimental musical action, persuading the performer away from old musical habits as a traditional score never could. Some read the natural striations of the onion skin as the graphemes of musical notation, while others take the pieces whole as a moment of sound, the gaps between them signaling silences. Once again the audience becomes fully involved, at all levels of action, sounding, and observation, and *none can tell the dancer from the dance*.

Acting in tandem with a score like the *Onion Skin Song* as well as independently, as hybrids between score, instrument, and art object, Knowles's paper pieces are the quintessence of indeterminate sculpture. As the artist (modestly) explains: "I think the main thing I've discovered about paper in the past five years is that it can form itself.... [Y]ou get something which you could never predict."[43] Sculpted paper as hanging sheet or molded form is identified as *Aduki Bean Turner* or *Oat Flax Chime*. All exist as sculpture, at once robust and ephemeral, only to be reoriented and reordered to fit the body or to represent a particular sound-making capability. Of her hard, white shells of paper, titled *Robes of the Saints*, Knowles explains: "I dried about seven of them and only one fit my arm..."[44] She then demonstrates how she saws on this arm-shaped form to sound it. There are no hierarchies. A noisemaker belongs on the wall with other works of art, and a vast, impressive expanse of sculpted paper should be just as at home out of the frame, manipulated by the crowd, all its internal beans racing through it apace.

There is an effortlessness with which Knowles now reorients her objects, shifting them from the inalienable and rarefied space of the museum wall—unhesitatingly, with her own hands—passing them to members of the audience, as though it were their right to know them. "I don't ever want the art to be still, finished," says Knowles. "I want it to be available for somebody to do something else with it... [something] that I wouldn't have thought of."[45]

Finale

Knowles's present work has the quality of a lifetime of developing a certain ease and wisdom with a full gamut of materials. Her use of experience as a continually operative force has acceded to the

conditions of pedagogy, though of a high order—more Zen lesson than school. In a recent statement, Knowles described the process of discovery in her work with these words:

> **I collect shoe heels. . . .**
> **I am not hunting usually, just rushing to get somewhere like everybody else, but suddenly, unexpectedly, akin to the found item, a *found time* opens up. . . .**
> **The heel I pick up . . . quickly, offhandedly . . . gets stashed in my pocket.**
> **There is a chemistry peculiar to the mysterious terrain I find myself in at that time. . . .**
> **I love to surf the street. . . .**
> **At home it gets cleaned, studied, it is drawn in silhouette, perhaps screen-printed with the name of an animal. . . .**
> **You know that worn shoe heels cannot be bought. Not for sale anywhere.**
> **Isn't it special to have recognized the energy expended in a shoe heel.**[46]

In that very description she renders what I have called the sculpture of indeterminacy in an inimitable manner that took a lifetime to learn. For it is surely this "found time" that Knowles always creates, sculpting it into a form in which apprehension is possible, attentiveness to that moment and to the self. As if to reverse our alienation, she places brackets around apparently incidental details so they might not go by unnoticed. Recognizing "the energy expended in a shoe heel" seems like an inordinately modest reckoning of a life's work. But then perhaps it is not.

Contrary to most readings of Knowles's work, her own representations included, it seems more and more apparent that such a project contains a far-reaching politics that has yet to be fully theorized.[47] It is work against all odds. The way in which it restores time and labor to our experience of objects—be they shoe soles or beans and paper—is partly captured by Knowles's statement: "As we know, time spent on shoes is never wasted."[48] Beginning at the moment of Pop art, Knowles's work has opened up time, where commodity culture has sought to squander it or erode it altogether. It has picked up the cast-offs of that system, those items suddenly rendered "out of the running" (in a market-driven sense)—the used, the soiled, the broken—and inducted them into a hypothesis about a level of experience that still might be possible, if everyone is willing to perform.

1. "The Interstice," in *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), 24–26.

2. Unpublished statement (2003), typescript page provided by the artist.

3. The *Work Ethic* exhibition, curated by Helen Molesworth, was on view at the Baltimore Museum of Art (October 12, 2003–January 4, 2004). It toured to the Des Moines Art Center (May 15–August 1, 2004) and the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (September 18, 2004–January 2, 2005).

4. Alison Knowles, conversation with the author, February 2004.

5. Such an expanded sphere of interpretation is certainly suggested by Judith Rodenbeck in her brief entry on Knowles in the catalog for the *Work Ethic* exhibition. See *Work Ethic*, ed. Helen Molesworth (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2003), 184–85.

6. Cage distinguished works that used chance operations in the process of composing from those that were "indeterminate with respect to performance." See John Cage, "Lecture on Indeterminacy," in *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 35–40, for a more detailed definition of Cagean indeterminacy. An important example of indeterminacy in Cage's work is the oft-cited (silent) composition *4'33"*. Cage said that he composed every note of this score, but that they all happened to be silent. What emerged from those silences would be markedly different with every performance. Artists who adapted Cage's term, including many Fluxus artists, used it to expand the conceptual scope of the work they were creating. Knowles's colleague George Brecht adapted the term "arrangement," specifically from its use in musical composition, to define and frame his "event" concept. (He called his first solo exhibition, at the Reuben Gallery, New York, 1959, *Toward Events: An Arrangement*.) "Arrangement" (as distinct from, say, "assemblage") suggests that the conditions for the "work" are set up—whether it be an object requiring audience participation or an action proposed for the stage—but not predetermined as to their execution.

7. In this formative period, c.1958–63, it is really a proto-Fluxus group to which we are referring. Allan Kaprow, Dick Higgins, Al Hansen, George Brecht, Jackson Mac Low, and others attended John Cage's "Experimental Composition" classes at the New School in New York together (peaking in 1958 and 1959, when this entire group was present). All would branch off in different directions, with only Brecht and Higgins completely identified with Fluxus. Kaprow had already coined the term Happenings and realized the concept as a public presentation by 1959 with his *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* at the Reuben Gallery, New York, while Fluxus would not be launched until 1962.

8. Appearing in European concerts and New Music festivals, the scores by Fluxus artists always functioned with a notional matrix of musical convention informing them. In contrasting this with Happenings, I am thinking particularly of Kaprow's brand of Happenings (bracketing provisionally the related activities of the Gutai Group, Hi Red Center, and others). Artists such as Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, and Red Grooms produced slightly different models, which were arguably less programmatic. Kaprow had learnt scoring in Cage's classes and used that structure, released from Cage, to propose his own new set of conventions for artistic practice.

9. Knowles, "Shoes of Your Choice," reprinted in *by Alison Knowles* (New York: Something Else Press, 1965). In this Great Bear pamphlet the work is dated March 1963, with the premiere announced as Douglass College, New Brunswick, NJ. Knowles has explained that this was a mistake on the part of the publisher and editor, Dick Higgins, and that the piece was actually conceived and performed several months earlier (at the ICA in London, October 21, 1962).

10. At this time Oldenburg was deeply committed to performance, as he declared: "Theater is the most powerful art form there is because it is the most involving. . . . I no longer see the distinction between theater and visual arts very clearly." He went on to clarify that "plot to me is sentimentality, pre-determination, an arrogance on the part of the author, a harmful fabrication which creates a residue of sentimental patterns that keep man from perceiving experience." Claes Oldenburg, "Statement" (1962), in *Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1995), 130. He qualifies this by adding that painting and sculpture are essential correlates to theater. This point corroborates our earlier suggestion (in regard to Kaprow) of certain important differences between Fluxus and Happenings.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. In its redeployment of real shoes, Knowles's piece expands the idea of the readymade—meeting Oldenburg's de Chiricoesque reflexivity with the decidedly Duchampian. As I have argued elsewhere, for the work of Knowles's comrade George Brecht, this expansion is accomplished in the shift from the (original, Duchampian) act of (re)defining an object, calling it art, to that of ultimately defining a subject with the score as catalyst. See Julia Robinson, "The Brechtian Event Score: A Structure

in Fluxus," in *Performance Research* 7, no. 4 (Fall 2002). If Brecht is more purely Duchampian it is because he very often deployed unaltered readymades in his scores. For Knowles the Oldenburg comparison seems more apposite because so much of her work privileges a tactile, sculptural address.

14. George Maciunas's interpretation of 1971 in the form of a letter to Knowles reads as follows: "Dear Alison, Here is my idea for the—Identical Lunch—Put tuna fish, wheat toast, lettuce, butter, soup or buttermilk—all into blender—blend till all is smooth—drink it. Best regards, George." (This letter is archived in the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Detroit.) For an account of many of Knowles's performances of *The Identical Lunch* and those of several of her friends, see Knowles, *Journal of the Identical Lunch* (San Francisco: Nova Broadcast Press, 1971), unpaginated. One exchange over the details of the piece between Knowles and Dick Higgins is particularly illuminating. Higgins: "Dear AKH, the endless summer is a marvelous surfing movie in which two young people do what they want to or must, and follow the summer around the world in search of the perfect wave, which eludes them enough to keep up the excitement. the endless lunch [*sic*] seems to be the discovery of either the ultimately abominable or the absolutely perfect tuna fish sandwich, and the attempt to recreate it at all times as a recapitulable performance. as a phenomenon i like your account of the matter better. but then who likes phenomena anyway? dh." Knowles: "RH: The Identical Lunch—not endless as we stop eating sometimes—has nothing to do with the pursuit of perfection—I find The Endless Summer a very superficial poor parallel. Steve Reich's piece that dealt with all middles—no extremes—and varieties arising there from is more like it. Then add a dash of Raymond Queneau, see *Exercises de Style*, but then I'm not dealing with language. . . . I am interested in what various people do with the problem. [*Next sentence partially cancelled out.*] There is a social concern evident too—if a bit heavy handed in the choice of the lunch—the simplest and most accessible known in these parts. I pursue no perfect wave.—so Dick, do it again . . . eat the lunch again I mean. AK."

15. Score for *Nivea Cream Piece (November 1962)—for Oscar Williams*, in *by Alison Knowles*. This piece premiered at the Alle Scenen Theater, Copenhagen, on November 25, 1962. The repetition of the word "he" for each performer in many of Knowles's early scores is partly explicable by the fact that Dick Higgins wrote out her performance notes as scores in order to publish them. Secondarily, since Knowles was the first woman to participate in Fluxus (whose premiere concerts were staged in Europe), her fellow performers (apart from some audience members) were all male.

16. The Fluxus multiples Maciunas assembled were mostly collections of readymades, Canal Street *trouvés*, etc.—based on ideas supplied to him by the Fluxus artists, which he would often request or "commission." He produced these items (many resembling boxed games) in editions, designed exuberant labels for them, and offered them for sale by mail order. For Maciunas this was a crucial strategy in devaluing the art object and proceeding toward the utopia of an art that could be produced by all and accessible to all.

17. By the goals of Fluxus here I mean insofar as Maciunas (the only person making organizational claims) was defining them. In a series of printed pamphlets, sometimes referred to as manifestos (after the first one of 1963, which was titled manifesto), Maciunas laid out the terms of Fluxus's mission as he saw it (see n. 14). Knowles's "open" work ruptured the elitism attached to the art object, decentered artistic authorship, and made the work itself broadly accessible. This anti-elitist legacy of Maciunas and Fluxus has endured in all of Knowles's later work.

18. Knowles usually explains that she was often cooking for large groups of people and the bean was cheap and filling, and she knew how to prepare it (and that from there it found its way into her work).

19. In brief, what I call Fluxus anticommodities were packaged "products" (see n. 16) that troubled their real-world counterparts by being esoteric, unusable, or downright repellant. Maciunas wittily and cunningly developed his own system parallel to that of commodification and met its bright, multicolored brandings with his own oddly antiquated, black-and-white "Flux-" simulacra. (Maciunas created "brand labels" for each of the Fluxus artists.) If *The Bean Rolls* fell on the esoteric side, there are other examples—from Ay-O's *Finger Boxes* to Larry Miller's *Flux Orifice Plugs*—which pushed harder toward detonating the repressive character of ubiquitous commodification.

20. Knowles's later *House of Dust* (1967) functions almost oppositely to this. A continuous scroll of early (Fortran) computer text, it delivered a finite set of words in quatrains that unfurled in all sorts of combinations until, eventually (perhaps ten thousand permutations later), a complete repetition would occur. Such limited means are in line with the ascetic restrictions New Music was placing on itself at that time, which Theodor Adorno subsequently diagnosed as historically appropriate to register the violence done to the idiom (of music, in that case); see Theodor W. Adorno, "Music and New Music" and "Vers une musique informelle," in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Verso, 1998).

21. William S. Wilson, "The Big Book," *Art in America* 56, no. 4 (July–August, 1968): 100–03.

22. The book has continued to function for Knowles in a manner related to the score, as a kind of template for researching experience. In 1981 she added to her repertoire of books the environmental installation *The Book of Bean*, a walk-through book installed at New York's Franklin Furnace. In 1987 Knowles made *The Finger Book*, an explicitly tactile sculpture/installation comprising a metal table imprinted with Braille in multiple languages, surmounted by objects that were to be likewise interpreted through touch. This work privileged touch over the quick read of sight and negated the centrality of one language in favor of many. More recently Knowles published a book composed entirely from those habitually negated elements of the story, called *Footnotes* (New York: Granary Books, 2000). Despite its conventional scale, *Footnotes* nonetheless revisits elements of *The Big Book* by charting perambulations through the artist's life. *The Big Book* and *The Book of Bean*, with their architectural scale and idiosyncratic devotion to the presentation of the personal—items the artist has collected, found important, or made, or items friends have left, which then turn up in odd wall boxes and other caches—recall similar details in Kurt Schwitters's grotto-filled *Merzbau*, Hannover (1919–37).

23. Broodthaers had up to this point been a writer and poet, albeit already making ruptured poems, with Mallarmé-inspired spatial intrusions such as colored paper glued over parts of the text. These were the poems permanently sealed shut in *Pense-Bête*, which was the point of departure for Broodthaers's artistic career.

24. It is significant that Knowles and Broodthaers both chose phrases composed of oppositional terms to describe their work. Knowles's term "Natural Assemblage" and Broodthaers's "Industrial Poems" suggest projects riven by fundamental dialectics, projects that comprehend the stakes (and the paradox) involved in confronting reification through the art object.

25. The most obvious connection between Broodthaers and Fluxus is Broodthaers's close friendship with the French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou. In the mid-1960s George Brecht went to join Filliou in France to start an artists' workshop called La Cédille qui sourit. In this period Filliou and Brecht were in ongoing contact with Broodthaers.

26. In my use here of the word "un-functioning," which does not exist in English, I refer to Bertolt Brecht's *Umfunktionierung*—or functional transformation. He enacted this through extremely humble means and sought to radically alter expectations in a manner that seems to serve as a profound precedent for Fluxus (as I have argued elsewhere: "The Great Experiment II: Maciunas as Producer," unpublished paper for Branden Joseph seminar, Princeton University).

27. Although the inner soles and heels, like Broodthaers's mussels, get thoroughly cleaned before entering the compositions, in the context of the new framing, they still bespeak their manifold other lives (through patinas and imperfections). The mussel panels are all over canvases completely covered in black mussels (a staple food in Broodthaers's native Belgium) and the *Table blanche* is a simple, white kitchen table whose entire top surface is similarly covered in eggs; see the Broodthaers issue of *October* (42, Fall 1987).

28. As Broodthaers said at this time: "I doubt, in fact, that it is possible to give a serious definition of art, unless we examine the question in terms of a constant, I mean the transformation of art into merchandise. This process has sped up nowadays to the point where artistic and commercial values have become superimposed. And if we speak of the phenomenon of reification, then art is a special instance of the phenomenon, a form of tautology." Ibid., 72.

29. I am thinking here of the way the agglomeration of mussels confronts two things at once: the one-after-the-other seriality of Abstract Expressionism from Jackson Pollock to Barnett Newman (see Yve-Alain Bois, "Newman's Laterality," unpublished talk given at the Newman symposium at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002) and the product-line seriality, redeployed as painting in Pop art.

30. Of course, it is a very different project for each of these artists: Broodthaers's is political, Foucauldian; Knowles's experiential, experimental, Cagean. A more detailed look at the work of Filliou would demonstrate a number of more credible links between Knowles and Broodthaers, but this is beyond our present scope.

31. Broodthaers in conversation with Irmeline Lebeer, "Ten Thousand Francs Reward," *October* 42: 40.

32. Ibid.

33. Interview with the author, New York, May 2003.

34. The notion of calling into question the making of the work and even proposing that it might not be made relates interestingly to George Brecht's insistence that his event scores could be realized variously as objects or performances, or not realized at all, remaining purely verbal. While I would link Brecht to later conceptual propositions, such as Lawrence Weiner's statement "The artist may construct the work. The work may be fabricated. The work need not be built . . . ," as their precursor, and have done so elsewhere, to extend this link to Filliou would seem to rob him of his politics. Filliou's qualification is less an elision of process (as it is for Brecht and Weiner), than an insistence that we stop and contemplate the very ramifications of making in a world of surplus production.

Of course, the brief statement—*Bien Fait, Mal Fait, Pas Fait*—does not begin to describe Filliou's expansive philosophical and pedagogical project; see the catalog for the recent retrospective, *Robert Filliou: Genie ohne Talent* (Düsseldorf: Kunstpalast and Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2003).

35. Butler focuses on how the performance of language methodically alters reality on an ideological level. She cites drag or cross-dressing as a powerful strategy of polarizing the naturalized and the constructed: "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitation structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency. Indeed, part of the giddiness of the performance is the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinction and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity." See especially "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions," in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 163–80. This bears crucially on the lineage of drag and cross-dressing that extends from Duchamp to Maciunas, which has certainly been part of the Fluxus context but is, however, beyond our present scope.

36. Henry Martin, in *Alison Knowles: Umlaut* (Cologne: Galerie Schüppenhauer, 1992), 10.

37. Ibid.

38. It is crucial that we keep these two terms apart. A great deal of the discussion of Fluxus and other performance-based work has conflated them, with terms like "performative objects," meaning an object that can be picked up and used as part of a performance. The "performative" is a theoretical term with a politics, while performance is merely a long-standing genre of the visual arts. One might even want to revise the blank use of the generic term "performance" altogether in regard to Knowles's art—never singularly performance, work on paper, printmaking, or sculpture—which I would want to set apart further and characterize as (disruptively) *infragenre*.

39. Just as structuralism was extended (along political lines) in poststructuralism, so might feminism offer the foundation for interpreting a broader project that uses the condition of un-structure as always and already the point of departure.

40. Kubota's attack on painting and Schneemann's litany against criticism were among the most important moments in the history of feminist art. By contrast, Knowles gave up on the battle with painting at the outset (and burnt all her early works), realizing that her intentions lay precisely beyond these conventions. We are reminded here of Cage's response to his teacher Arnold Schoenberg, when he was faced with the conventions of music. If, as Schoenberg intimated, certain conventions were unavoidable, Cage said he would simply have to spend his life beating his head against that wall. Knowles had a similar experience working with two patriarchs of painting, Adolph Gottlieb and Josef Albers. In a course Knowles took with Albers, he told her it was not possible to work in the way that she was working. He resolved that if she must continue like that she could not be with his other students. He told her to go to the basement to work and that he would come and see her at the end of each day. (Interview with the author, November 2003.)

41. I take the term *unmanning* from *Entmannung* as Eric Santner uses it in *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). Santner discusses the renowned case of Daniel Paul Schreber, a judge appointed to the Saxon Supreme Court in 1893. (Freud, Benjamin, Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault were among the many important thinkers to discuss this case.) The book traces the personal crisis brought on when the subject was faced with investiture, the call to submit to the institutional structure (in this instance, as a judge in the supreme court). The case achieves symbolic dimensions when Schreber disintegrates, psychically, under the pressure of his profession (bound up with "the letter of the law," so to speak), with one outcome being that he begins to imagine himself as a woman. So the macro (institutional) crisis is handled by the subject in the micro realm of gender. Hence, the term *Entmannung*, which also transcends the literalness it might first suggest, comes to imply the unraveling of institutions at large (gender being only the primary one). For our discussion, Santner is speaking of a kind of symbolic mandate that issues from the institution itself implicating the subject. A discussion of Knowles and Cage in this context would begin by considering the relationship of their works to the institutions of "art" and "music" respectively.

42. I am thinking here of Cage's *Variations II* of 1991, made from paper, smoke, and ash. See the exhibition catalog *Rolywholyover: A Circus/John Cage* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1993). It is no accident that among the artists Cage chose to be part of the only major retrospective exhibition of his life's work (the *Rolywholyover* exhibition) was Knowles. The synergy between Cage and Knowles is also reflected in several book and film projects on which they collaborated, such as the collection of scores called *Notations* (New York: Something Else Press, 1969).

43. Knowles, interview with the author, May 2003.

44. Ibid.

45. Knowles, interview with the author, July 2003.

46. Knowles, acceptance statement, College Art Association Lifetime Achievement Award, New York, 2003.

47. As we have begun to suggest, the tools of feminist theory are not adequate for addressing what Knowles has achieved by relinquishing structure. And certainly, the established canons of art history and criticism have no proper place for her work. This essay and its proposition of a postfeminist approach that leans on the term *Entmannung* attempt to begin this essential theoretical project. The Cage comparison is intended here to underscore the more expansive or "generalizable" stakes of the project. By extension, I consider *Entmannung* an apposite theoretical model for Fluxus at large.

48. Knowles, acceptance statement, CAA Lifetime Achievement Award.

The Book of the Future: Alison Knowles's *The House of Dust* (2012)

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

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Each social formation generates its own conventions to bar the subject from experience and speech, and each social formation accordingly requires specific and urgent discoveries of linguistic strategies that rupture such collectivization of silence and prohibition. From the perspective of the bourgeois division of labor (with its assignment of cultural specializations and its principles of condensing talents in chosen individuals, and investing them with mythical expertise), the capacity to rupture the collectively imposed interdiction of subjective speech has been identified conventionally as "poetry" within the domain of language, and as "art" within the realm of visual representation or alternate perceptual models of object experience.

Diverse social groups have been barred, perpetually or for extended periods of history, from access to language on the grounds of class, race, or gender. Likewise, individual subjects descending from these groups have found themselves condemned to silence by the sheer immensity of the trauma and lack that socially and politically imposed prohibitions leave in the subjects' psychic formation. As for the collectively imposed censorings of speech in the twentieth century, these have appeared in the most contradictory configurations: either as the results of political oppression under totalitarian regimes in the first half of the twentieth century, or as the effects of massively enforced repressive tolerance under advanced forms of capitalist consumer culture in the present.

They have led to social and subjective pathologies, inasmuch as one would have to call a society in which the subject is barred from access to authentic experience and all its linguistic representations a pathological one. And it is difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle collective silences from the subject's individual pathological speechlessness or, worse yet, as in the present, from the infinity of substitutional speech acts that provide the subject with an ever-expanding simulacrum of seemingly available forms of experience and language.

As a result of the increasingly necessary specialization of the linguistic and visual interventions that could potentially oppose and rupture these collective silences, "poets" in the late nineteenth century who understood the ramifications of their involuntary position of assigned and condensed talent saw themselves confronted with two contradictory tasks that—if they wanted to fulfill their "poetic" projects at all—had to be addressed simultaneously.

First, they had to invent an array of possible tools and strategies to undermine the vast number of socially produced simulacra and substitutions. Yet, under the conditions of a rapidly advancing modernity, these strategies could not be inserted any longer within the gratuitous spaces of exemption that traditional culture had provided. Rather, from now on, as Stéphane Mallarmé was the first to recognize, these interventions had to operate at the very sites and within the very patterns of speaking and reading where the subject's silences and the collective reification of language were socially encrypted; in the newspapers, where the industrialized and instrumentalized forms of linguistic production were touted as promises of universal "information" and "communication" (to be replaced in the twentieth century by the new technologies of media culture, radio, advertising, and industrial music). What might have been at one point the communal conversations of social groups now would be performed by professional "speakers." And the industrial voices of these "experts," compensating for the lack of public enunciation, while producing these substitutions, actually enforced the internalization of the language regulations of the prefabricated idioms of media culture.

In the second task, no less urgent and no less difficult to imagine, the "poet" of modernity had to undermine the seemingly inevitable creation of a new myth of the poet's privileged access to speech, a myth that poetry already had traditionally corroborated by the mere fact of its existence. In every word and every syntactical construction, writers had simultaneously to oppose the most advanced forms of linguistic alienation and to make them the very parameters of their intervention in language. This conflict, however, would be confronted only by the very great poets of modernity, from Mallarmé to the Dadaists, even though the intensity of the dialectics of industrial silence and subjective speech would become ever more intensified with each decade. Thus, it might at first seem surprising that in 1967 Alison Knowles would have chosen one of the most traditional metaphors for the subject's identity formation in language, the "house," as the key concept of her book project *The House of Dust*, published in 1969 by Walther and Kasper König in Cologne.

In 1967, Knowles was offered the opportunity to participate in a workshop taught by the electronic composer and computer engineer James Tenney. Tenney wanted to introduce artists and writers who—like himself—were involved in the post-Cagean aesthetic of chance operations and aleatory permutations to the potential usage of the new digitalized language systems processed by computers. Each participant was required to submit a project at the end of

the seminar, and Knowles submitted four-word lists to be translated into the computer language Fortran to generate the largest possible number of constellations and permutations.

The four lists were defined by a series of interlocking terms that formed a new sentence each time the aleatory operations of the computer language united them in a new configuration (thus the first list consisted of seventeen materials from which the *House* could be built; the second list counted twenty-five sites where the *House* could be situated; the third list, quite astonishingly, listed only four possible light sources to illuminate the *House*; and the last list enumerated twenty-three different potential inhabitants of the *House*).

The "list" as a format of textual presentation is, of course, one of the key epistemes of an emerging conceptual (rather than a "poetic") usage of language at that very moment, the mid- to late 1960s, and word—or verb—lists could be found in various applications in works by such different artists as Ed Ruscha, Dan Graham, Richard Serra, and Lawrence Weiner. The list as an antiliterary and antipoetic form could credibly claim to be merely the indexical accounting of accumulated qualities or serially aligned objects, taking on the guise of a readymade text that might have been generated, if not written, by these objects themselves. While the artists' reasons for their attraction to this peculiar format, the mere mechanical enumeration of objects, were undoubtedly somewhat different in each case, the various preoccupations with lists still shared certain qualities that allow for a historical comparison.

First, the lists were pronounced in a passive voice that appears to be as far from subjectivity, intention, and authorial presence as it is from any type of intervention, control, and agency. Beyond the comparability of the passive voice, the elusive and eccentric choices of Knowles's four lists share several features, for example, with the often outlandish sites and peculiar banality of Weiner's materials and processes identified in his book *Statements*, which was published at the same time as *The House of Dust*.[1]

Both Knowles's and Weiner's approaches to language not only are defined by the manifest absence of grammatical subjects that function as speakers to convey authorial intentions, but they also align performative enunciation with the material processes that the language describes. Both refer constantly to either the most eccentric or the plainest of locations (e.g., Weiner's "arctic circle" or "the boundaries between two countries," or Knowles's *in a deserted airport* or in *a green, mossy terrain*).

This not only situates their textual operations outside of the discursive and institutional frames where a poetic or artistic intervention could have been traditionally expected, but it positions them manifestly at the intersection of altogether different discursive orders (e.g., the mapping of the legalistic and political onto the geographic and topographic in the concept of "boundaries" or the conflicting temporalities and the extreme opposition between activity and passivity in the vision of a "deserted airport"). Equally, in their choice of materials, both Knowles and Weiner alternate rapidly from the most peculiar to the most common, seemingly in order to avoid predictability or systematicity of any kind, and in order to achieve the type of nontaxonomy that Borges famously invented in his description of a Chinese encyclopedia.

The House of Dust is one of the foundational works in the formulation of a conceptual aesthetic of language that considered the displacement of the conventional promises of poetry to be among its primary functions, in the same manner that conceptual art insisted on the dismantling of traditional forms of visuality in painting and sculpture.

In accordance with the technical needs of the computer that served to print out the permutational program that Tenney had fed into the machine (and certainly the technical needs of the computers of the late 1960s), the "poem" was printed on the green striated paper typical of computer printouts of the time, including the sprocket holes necessary for the paper's transportation within the computer's printing system. These features alone convey to the *House* an additional, if perhaps involuntary or innocent, affiliation with the aesthetics of administration that governed conceptual art in the late 1960s. On each of the perforated detachable sheets, 11 quatrains appear, and a copy of *The House of Dust* on the average seems to contain 27 pages, bringing the total number of quatrains to 297, far from the 400 necessary to reiterate one of the permutations.

Unfolding the sheets in order to read the "poem," one becomes aware that the printout functions like a scroll without beginning or end, as is only appropriate for a poem that does not know either of these traditional ordering principles (there is neither a first nor a last quatrain, quite simply, and every printout of the poem begins and ends with a different page of quatrains). *The House of Dust* has consciously jettisoned the traditional spatio-temporal demarcations of textual structures. Instead of turning pages, we read by folding and scrolling a textual band (in this respect the poem anticipates the radical transformation of the reading order that computers have brought about in general). The effect of a textual rotation results from the semblance of limitless permutations as much as from the seemingly endless number of possible and different printouts. As for its distribution form and presentational devices, it is important to recognize that *The House of Dust* as a book is equally open-ended, refusing to have been bound, and the folds of the printout paper determine the sequence of the pages, not the cuts of the page or the binding of the book. It is only appropriate, then, for the poem to appear in a transparent plastic pouch, a container within which one would usually carry a set of maps or construction plans.

This emphasis on anonymity and mechanical enumeration, and in particular on the actual production process of a computer-generated set of permutations, in Knowles's project stands in the greatest possible contradiction to the concept and image of the *House* that Knowles made the center of her project. And this conflict surfaces more emphatically with the emerging metaphorization of language itself as the *House* of the subject, and as the foundation of identity. After all, the "house of language" as a system of phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and syntactical articulations preexists us, and it continues to exist and operate in our absence, even after our departure from the language. Therefore it appears to be a system that offers us a guaranteed "foundation" of an infinity of combinatory options,

generating the subject's fragmentary role in the performative self-constitution of language.

Of course, it has to be recognized that the actual lists that Knowles handed to Tenney, while they seem to have been motivated by the artist's desire for indeterminacy, were also far from being totally aleatory and were marked by very particular "poetical" features. Nevertheless, from their inception, the four strands of language that Knowles provided were as diverse and heterogeneous as possible, so that neither lexicality nor semantics would conventionalize the quatrains. Even the inevitable grammatical logic of the ensuing sentences eventually would serve as an additional principle of lexical and semantic disseminations, splintering and differentiating the quatrains' various linguistic functions even further.

Thus we might be surprised at first when Knowles enumerates both conventional construction materials (such as *brick*, *stone*, *steel*, and *glass*) and rather unlikely, not to say unthinkable, ones (such as *discarded clothing*, *leaves*, *sand*, *paper*, *weeds*, *roots*, and *broken dishes*, among others) as the materials from which a large number of *Houses* could be built in various configurations of sites, illuminations, and occupants. Clearly, Knowles corroborates her principles of total openness and indeterminacy by foregrounding the fact that her lists allow for the simultaneous inclusion of the most conventional and the most unthinkable choices of materials and sites.

A similar range of all possible options, from the most eccentric and outlandish to the most plausible and commonsense, governs the third list, that of the sites and places where the *House* could be built, from lapidarily specific geographical destinations such as *In Michigan* or *In Japan*, to general topographical descriptions such as *Among high mountains* or *In a desert* or *On an island*, to peculiar botanical descriptions such as *green mossy terrain* or *heavy jungle undergrowth*, to a sudden shift into merely meteorological identification such as *in a hot climate* or *in a cold and windy climate*.

The fourth list enumerates the potential inhabitants of the *House* under construction, ranging from very plausible groups of *friends* or *lovers* or *American Indians*, or the perfectly possible combination of *people who enjoy eating together* or *children and old people*, to much stranger, and far less likely, social groups. Among these we find *collectors of all kinds* or *French and German speaking people*, leading to outright fairy-tale populations of *people who sleep very little* or *little boys* or *all races of man represented wearing predominantly red clothing* or *people speaking many languages wearing little or no clothing*, concluding with groups of *horses and birds* or *birds and fish*, not quite fulfilling the principle of Noah's ark.

Once again, as with the choice of possible construction materials, the diversity and contradictory nature of the possible sites and potential inhabitants do not add up to a particular kind of revolutionary or even radical vision in which a new social formation would be anticipated in utopian spaces and relations. The extreme tension between the most elusive and the most concrete of materials is mirrored in a similar span of sites that range from the most probable to the most phantasmagoric. Both find users and inhabitants who themselves appear to be drawn from a vast gamut of subject positions and social relations, thereby ultimately affirming that the *House* in Knowles's linguistic permutations is anticipated as disseminated and fluctuating, as dispersed, and as evading fixities of any kind. It is not the house or the book of the future that will be inhabited by a new class or a new social group or a newly found gendered identity. It is a house whose very dispersal concretizes the undesirability and impossibility of such fixity: undesirability because fixity of the subject entails its immediate atrophy, and an impossibility that originates in the insight that the technical and mechanical forms of controlling and determining the subject's potential access to experience are in continuous flux. And only in that state of perpetual dissemination and dissolution could the subject at least temporarily evade the experience of control and the subjection of the self to the mechanisms of reification.

Moreover, the choice of materials, sites, inhabitants, and lighting conditions also gives *The House of Dust* a peculiarly theatrical framework, as though we were witnessing the construction of a stage for an imminent performance. Yet what is to be performed on the stage of the *House* are, first, linguistic actions, such as the suspension of the denotative principles of any instrumentalizing typology or taxonomy as systems of a dubious linguistic order.

Thus one could argue that Knowles has succeeded in constructing an extreme opposition between the (involuntary?) poetics of her choices and the anonymous and aleatory, yet totally deterministic and controlling, principles of their electronic permutations. The contradictory diversity resulting from these permutations generates an experience of a total decentering of its subjects: not one material, site, or inhabitant is privileged over any other. Every element from the four lists can enter into mutual interaction with the others, acquiring in each instant a whole new spectrum of meaning. Thus the experience of the singularly "poetic" linguistic instantiation is suspended in a permanent process of fluctuation (or flux) in which every element redefines every other element as the result of a perpetually shifting set of mutual and modular relationships.

In many instances, though typically once again not in *all* instances, the combinatory logic of materials, sites, and inhabitants can promise at best a rather preliminary, precarious construction of meaning. In fact, Knowles's quest for the ephemeral and transitory nature of her architecture seems to mimic the very precariousness of her poetic project. It is a project that has understood the contradictory nature of the claims that conceive identity exclusively within a linguistic model of the subject at this point in history.

The House of Dust recognizes how such a process—in order to record the actual conditions of experiencing language and its disappearance from the tools of constructing the subject—has to be self-effacing and self-destructive in order to be poetic at all. Furthermore, Knowles's project seems to have also understood what Friedrich Nietzsche meant when he conceived of language as "the prison house," as the total opposite of language as a matrix of the self-constituting subject.

One aspect of Nietzsche's concept seems to

have articulated the insight that the most consequential execution of the subject's desire to be "at home" within language would be its utter bodily and psychic "subjection" to the rules and institutions of the nation-state, guaranteeing an identity within rigorously enforced systems of linguistic regulations, idiomatic certainties, and lexical availability. Thus the subject would feel most "at home" where language had become the ground for deeply ingrained prejudices, false belief systems, and all forms of psychic and political (self-)deception: a home where language had become the house in which the self could hide behind the organized and prefabricated articulations that serve repression and disavowal, or where the house of language provided the articulations of socially mobilized forms of irrationality that—when unleashed—allowed again and again for the politically and psychically vengeful aggression of defrauded subjects.

In extreme opposition to such a subject written in stone, Knowles's *The House of Dust* conceives of the process of subject formation as a perpetual process of construction and undoing, precisely to prevent it from becoming an inhabitant of the prison house of language, a merely substitutional system of fraudulent and aggressive convictions. It recognizes that the formation of the subject at this point in history has become a more complex and, by necessity, a more open process, since the subject's intersections with language (and the supposed identificatory guarantees that language had promised) are certainly no longer the primary, and possibly not even its most desirable, foundations.

The House of Dust has taken into consideration that the very process of subject formation has become infinitely more fluid—in fact, that subjectivity itself is no longer thinkable as fixity of any kind, but only as the continuous undoing of all fixities (of language first, of course, since it is in language that all the other moral and ideological phantasms and fixities are deeply anchored and violently defended). Thus *The House of Dust* provides a linguistic structure that recognizes this infinity of additional factors that enter into the processes of subject formation in the present. Perhaps the most important such process is the one to which Knowles subjected her poetic project: advanced electronic technology. As Maurice Blanchot stated once:

> **For example, it is accepted as a certainty that Foucault, adhering in this to a certain conception of literary production, got rid of, purely and simply, the notion of the subject: no more oeuvre, no more authors, no more creative unity. But things are not that simple. The subject does not disappear; rather, its excessively determined unity is put in question. What arouses interest and inquiry is its disappearance (that is, the new manner of being which disappearance is), or rather, its dispersal which does not annihilate it but offers us, out of it, no more than a plurality of positions and a discontinuity of functions (and here we re-encounter the system of discontinuities which rightly or wrongly seemed at one time to be a characteristic of serial music).**[2]

FACING Knowles in Burbank, CA, c. 1971

1. Lawrence Weiner, *Statements* (New York: Seth Siegelaub/Louis Kellner Foundation, 1968).

2. Maurice Blanchot, "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him," in *Foucault/Blanchot* (New York: Zone Books, 1987), 76–77.

Works in Exhibition

As of May 2022. All works are by Alison Knowles unless otherwise indicated.
Credits lines are listed for lenders other than Alison Knowles and James Fuentes.

Early Works

Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles in the studio, c. 1959–60
Black-and-white photograph printed by Edizione Pari & Dispari, 1979
Approx. 15 × 18 in. (38 × 45 cm)
Dick Higgins Papers, 1960–94, Getty Research Institute

Taxis and Busses, c. 1959–60
Oil and screenprint on canvas
96½ × 54 in. (245.5 × 137.5 cm)
Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

George Brecht and **Knowles**, *Room*, 1960
Screenprint on canvas
18⅛ × 18⅛ in. (45.8 × 45.8 cm)
Museum of Modern Art, New York

European Fluxus Festivals

Cinematographer unknown, Philip Corner, Dick Higgins, Knowles, George Maciunas, Emmett Williams, and Benjamin Patterson at Fluxus Festival, Wiesbaden, Germany, 1962
Broadcast footage transferred to video, 5:54 min.
Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR)

Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Knowles and others performing Philip Corner's *Piano Activities* at *Fluxus Internationale Festpiele Neuester Musik*, Städtischen Museum Wiesbaden, September 1, 1962
Photoreproduction
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Jesper Stormly, George Maciunas, Albert Mertz, Arthur Köpke, and Knowles performing Maciunas's *In Memoriam to Adriano Olivetti, Version 1 Poem*, at *Fluxus Musik og Anti-Musik, det Instrumentale Teater*, Nikolai Kirke, Copenhagen, November 23, 1962
Photoreproduction
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Photographer unknown, Knowles, George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, and Emmett Williams performing Maciunas's *In Memoriam to Adriano Olivetti, No. 5*, Städtisches Museum Wiesbaden, September 8, 1962
Photoreproduction
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Photographer unknown, Knowles and others performing *Nivea Cream Piece—for Oscar Williams* at *Fluxus Musik og Anti-Musik, det Instrumentale Teater*, Nikolai Kirke, Copenhagen, November 23, 1962
Photoreproduction
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Bruce Fleming, Knowles performing *Proposition #2: Make a Salad* at *Festival of Misfits*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1962
Photoreproduction
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Archives, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Hartmut Rekort, Dick Higgins and Knowles performing Higgins's *Danger Music Number Two* at *Fluxus Internationale Festspiele*, Neuester Musik, Städtisches Museum Wiesbaden, September 8, 1962
Photoreproduction
Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Hans de Boer, Nam June Paik's *Serenade for Alison* performed at *Parallel Performances of New Music*, Galerie Monet, Amsterdam, October 5, 1962
Photoreproduction
Hans de Boer, Nederlands Fotomuseum

Artist unknown, Poster for *Festum Fluxorum Music og Anti-Musik det Instrumentale Teater—6 Pro—Et Contragammer*, Nikolai Kirke, Copenhagen, 1962
Photoreproduction
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York

George Maciunas, Poster for *Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik*, Städtisches Museum Wiesbaden, 1962/92
Offset lithograph
8½ × 11 in. (21.6 × 27.9 cm)
Karen Moss, Santa Monica, CA

Dick Higgins and **Knowles**, Poster for *Danger Music*, Alléteatern, Stockholm, 1963
Letterpress
11⅝ × 8³⁄₁₆ in. (29.5 × 20.8 cm)
Fondazione Bonotto

Willem de Ridder, Poster for *Fluxus Festival, Theatre Compositions, Street Compositions, Exhibits, Electronic Music*, 1963
Offset lithography on paper
16⅔ × 21³⁄₆₄ in. (42.5 × 61 cm)
Fondazione Bonotto

Sissor Bros. Warehouse

George Brecht, **Knowles**, and **Robert Watts**, Poster for Sissor Bros. Warehouse exhibition, Rolf Nelson Gallery, Los Angeles, 1963
Color offset lithograph
14 × 18 in. (35 × 50 cm)
Collection of Hannah B Higgins and Joseph Reinstein

George Brecht, **Knowles**, and **Robert Watts**, *BLINK*, 1963
Screenprint and synthetic polymer paint on canvas
18¼ × 18¼ in. (46.3 × 46.3 cm)
Collection of Hannah B Higgins and Joseph Reinstein

Peter Moore, Lette Eisenhauer modeling *BLINK* dress at Sissor Bros. Warehouse exhibition, Rolf Nelson Gallery, Los Angeles, 1963
Photoreproduction
Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries

George Brecht, **Knowles**, and **Robert Watts**, *Sissor Bros. Warehouse Sale Newspaper*, 1963
Offset lithography on paper, printed on both sides
18³⁄₁₆ × 6⅞ in. (46.2 × 17.5 cm)
Getty Research Institute

George Brecht, **Knowles**, and **Robert Watts**, *BLINK* postage stamps and stationery, 1963/86
Offset lithograph with brown ink on kraftpaper
8½ × 11 in. (21.6 × 27.9 cm)
Karen Moss, Santa Monica, CA

New York Fluxus Performances

George Maciunas, Knowles and Ben Vautier performing Takehisha Kosugi's *Anima I* at *Fully Guaranteed 12 Fluxus Concerts*, New York, May 1964
Photoreproduction

George Maciunas, Knowles and Ben Vautier performing *Music by Alison* at *Fully Guaranteed 12 Fluxus Concerts*, New York, May 23, 1964
Photoreproduction
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Peter Moore, George Maciunas, Knowles, and Ay-O performing at *Fully Guaranteed 12 Fluxus Concerts*, New York, May 23, 1964
Photoreproduction
Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries

Peter Moore, Knowles and Ay-O perform *String Piece* at Third Annual Avant-garde Festival, Judson Hall, New York, 1965
Photoreproduction
Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries

George Maciunas, Poster for *Fully Guaranteed 12 Fluxus Concerts*, New York, 1964
Photoreproduction
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Poster for *Fully Guaranteed 12 Fluxus Concerts: Street Events*, New York, 1964
Double-sided offset lithograph with screenprint
49⅞ × 13⅞ in. (124.5 × 33 cm)
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Peter Moore, Dick Higgins and Knowles performing *Variation #1 (Make a Soup)*, Café a Go-Go, New York, 1964
Photoreproduction
Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries

George Brecht and **Robert Watts**, Poster and flyer for *Monday Night Letters* performance series, Café a Go-Go, New York, 1964
Photoreproductions
Fluxus West Collection, Special Collections & Archives, University of Iowa Library

George Maciunas, Foldout with *Make a Soup, Make a Salad, Child's Art Piece,* Takehisha Kosugi's *String Piece*, and Robert Watts's *Two In*, in *Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965)
Folio: 7½ × 30 in. (19.5 × 77 cm)
Karen Moss, Santa Monica, CA

New York Fluxus Publications

George Maciunas, *FLUXUS 1* with Knowles's *Glove to be Worn While Examining*, c. 1964
Wooden box with metal bolts and stamped ink, containing objects in various media
7½ × 8¼ × 2½ in. (19.3 × 21 × 6.5 cm)
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Museum purchase: Bequest of Phoebe Apperson Hearst, by exchange

George Maciunas, Name card for Knowles, from *FLUXUS I*, c. 1964
2⅝ × 2⁹⁄₁₆ in. (6.6 × 6.5 cm)
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Museum purchase: Bequest of Phoebe Apperson Hearst, by exchange

Bean Rolls, 1963–64, from **George Maciunas** et al., *Fluxkit*, 1965
Tin can, beans, and labeled paper rolls with rubber bands
3¼ × 3¼ × 3⅛ in. (8.3 × 8.3 × 8 cm)
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

The Big Book

Peter Moore, Installation view, *The Big Book*, Something Else Gallery, New York, 1966
4 photoreproductions
Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries

Dick Higgins, *The Big Book*, 1966
Super 8 film transferred to video, 5 min.

The Big Book model, c. 1966
Paper, tape, and pencil
5 × 8 in. (12.7 × 20 cm)

The Big Book maquette, 1966
Index cards and tape
5 × 3 in. (12.7 × 7.6 cm)

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, *Pictures to be Read/Poetry to be Seen*, 1967
Publication for exhibition on view October 24–December 3, 1967
10 × 10 in. (25.4 × 25.4 cm)

Knowles, **John Cage**, and **Dick Higgins**, *What did you bring?*, 1967
Offset brochure for *Pictures to be Read/Poetry to be Seen*, MCA Chicago
4 × 2⅝ in. (10 × 6.7 cm)
Collection of Hannah B Higgins and Joseph Reinstein; Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Norway

Photographer unknown, Knowles inside *The Big Book*, 1967
Black-and-white photograph
8 × 10 in. (25.4 × 25.4 cm)

Photographer unknown, Installation view, *The Big Book*, 1966, University Gallery, University of California, San Diego, 1969
3 photoreproductions
Each: 8 × 10 in. (25.4 × 25.4 cm)
University Art Gallery Records, Special Collections and Archives, University of California San Diego Library

Howard Junker, Review of *Pictures to be Read/Poetry to be Seen*, MCA Chicago, *Newsweek*, April 29, 1968
Photoreproduction
Collection of Meghan DellaCrosse

The Boat Book

The Boat Book, 2014
Oil-based and acrylic ink on paper, edition of 10
20¼ × 16½ in. (51.4 × 41.9 cm)

The Boat Book, 2014
Mixed media
Dimensions variable
Each page: 96 × 48 in. (243.8 × 121.9 cm)

The Identical Lunch

The Identical Lunch, c. 1969
Screenprints on canvas

The Identical Lunch with George Maciunas
19⁵⁄₁₆ × 23⅛ in. (49 × 58.7 cm)

The Identical Lunch with Ay-O
19⅜ × 26⅜ in. (50.5 × 67 cm)

The Identical Lunch with Shigeko Kubota
19⁵⁄₁₆ × 23⅛ in. (49x 58.7 cm)

The Identical Lunch with Anne Brazeau
15⅞ × 19¹¹⁄₁₆ in. (49.3 × 58.3 cm)
Walker Art Center

The Identical Lunch, 1969, realized 1992
Screenprints on canvas
Hannah B Higgins and Joseph Reinstein

George Maciunas Performs the Identical Lunch
19 × 18 in. (49.5 × 45.7 cm)

Ay-O Performs the Identical Lunch
20 × 18 in. (48.3 × 45.7 cm)

Shigeko Kubota Performs the Identical Lunch
19½ × 18 in. (49.5 × 45.7 cm)

Anne Brazeau Performs the Identical Lunch
20 × 19 in. (50.8 × 48.6 cm)

Stephen Varble (and Geoffrey Hendricks) Performs the Identical Lunch
19½ × 18 in. (49.5 × 47 cm)

Jan Herman Performs the Identical Lunch
19 × 19½ (48.3 × 49.5 cm)

Hannah and Jessica Higgins Perform the Identical Lunch
19 × 19½ (48.3x 49.5 cm)

The Identical Lunch Children's T-shirt, date unknown
Screenprint on cotton
17 × 17 in. (43.2 × 43.2 cm)
Collection of Hannah B Higgins and Joseph Reinstein

The House of Dust

A House of Dust, c. 1969
Computer printout in plastic with screenprint, published by Verlag König, Cologne
Folded: 12 × 8 in. (30.5 × 20.3 cm)
Getty Research Institute

Knowles and **James Tenney**, *The House of Dust* poem, 1967/71
Computer printout on dot matrix paper from Jet Propulsion Laboratory
47½ × 18⅛ × 1½ in. (120 × 45.7 × 2.1 cm)
Carnegie Museum of Art

Live computer printout of *The House of Dust* poem, 1971/2022
Software, vintage computer and printer, and paper
Dimensions variable

Photographer unknown, View of *The House of Dust*, CalArts, Burbank, CA, 1970–71
4 photoreproductions
California Institute of the Arts Institute Archives

Photographer unknown, View of *The House of Dust*, CalArts, Valencia, CA, 1970–71
Photoreproduction
California Institute of the Arts Institute Archives

Photographer unknown, View of Knowles and Norm Kaplan's *Computer Poem Drop Event*, Burbank, CA, 1971
Photoreproduction
California Institute of the Arts Institute Archives

Allan Kaprow, *Computer Poem Drop Event*, 1971
8 mm film transferred onto DVD, looped
Getty Research Institute

Photographer unknown, Students inside *The House of Dust*, Valencia, CA, 1971
Photoreproduction
California Institute of the Arts Institute Archives

Photographer unknown, Knowles and CalArts student inside *The House of Dust*, Valencia, CA, c. 1971
Photoreproduction
California Institute of the Arts Institute Archives

Photographer unknown, Simone Forti and Shigeko Kubota inside
Photoreproduction
California Institute of the Arts Institute Archives

Photographer unknown, CalArts students interacting with *The House of Dust*, Valencia, CA, 1971
Photoreproduction
California Institute of the Arts Institute Archives

Piece of *The House of Dust*, from *The Box*, 1970
Handwritten text with small pebble
Photoreproduction
California Institute of the Arts Institute Archives

The House of Dust postcards, 1968
2 color lithographs published by Edition Tangente Heidelberg
5 × 7 in. (12.7 × 17.8 cm)

Gift Objects for The House of Dust, postcards sent by Charles Amirkhanan, Paul Brach, Philip Corner, and Dr. Klaus Groh, c. 1970
Color lithographs
5 × 7 in. (12.7 × 17.8 cm)

Gift Objects for The House of Dust, 1971
Poem with mixed paper, plastic, and found objects, edition of 47
Approx. 8½ × 11 in. (21.5 × 28 cm)

Program for Proposition No. 2 for Emmett Williams, 1967
Paper facsimile realized by James Tenney
8 × 10 in. (20.3 × 25.4 cm)

Gift Event II instruction piece, 1971
Offset lithograph
7⅞ × 12 in. (19.7 × 30.5 cm)
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

Photographer unknown, "The House of Dust: Play Sculptures and Public Art," 1969, *Chelsea News*, October 23, 1969
Photoreproduction
c. 5 × 7 in. (12.7 × 17.8 cm)

Photographer unknown, View of *Small House of Dust*, 1971, reinstalled at College of the Canyons, Santa Clarita, CA, c. 1982
Color photograph
5 × 7 in. (12.7 × 17.8 cm)
Karen Moss, Santa Monica, CA

Visit the House of Dust: Poem in Progress, 1970
Screenprint on paper with handwritten notes
17⅜ × 22 in. (44 × 56 cm)
Special Collections, Hesburgh Library, University Notre Dame

Homage and Collaboration

A Bean Garland for John Cage, 1984
Collage
11¾ × 11⅜ in. (29.9 × 28.9 cm)
Emily Harvey Foundation, New York

White Stripes for John Cage, 1967, printed 1968
Offset lithograph, edition of 1000 published by ED 912, Milan
27 × 19 in. (68.6 × 48.3 cm)
Lucia Fabio and R. Andrew Mueller

Knowles and **Marcel Duchamp**, *Coeurs Volants*, 1968
Color serigraph on black proof paper, edition of 24 published by Something Else Press, New York
23½ × 17¾ in. (61 × 45.7 cm)
Collection of Hannah B Higgins and Joseph Reinstein

William Wilson, Marcel Duchamp, and Knowles in Duchamp's residence, New York, January 9, 1967
Black-and-white photograph
8½ × 11 in. (21.6 × 28 cm)

Marcel Duchamp, *Coeurs Volants* cover from *Cahiers d'Art*, no. 1/2, 1936
Color reproduction
8⅝ × 9⅛ in. (21.9 × 23.2 cm)
Collection of Hannah B Higgins and Joseph Reinstein

Coeurs Volants T-shirt, 1968
Screenprint on cotton
24 × 12 × in. (60 × 30 cm)

Leone d'Oro, 1978
18 screenprints, edition of 40 published by Edizioni Francesco Conz
15¾ × 15¾ in. Each: (40 × 40 cm)
Collection of Hannah B Higgins and Joseph Reinstein

For Dick, 1976
Mixed-media print with photocopy
13½ × 18¾ in. (34.3 × 47.6 cm)

Twins, 1979
Screenprint and pencil on paper, edition of 28
10 × 14 in. (25.4 × 35.6 cm)
Collection of Hannah B Higgins and Joseph Reinstein

You just never quite know, hommage to Emmett Williams, from *The October Suite*, 1999
Screenprint on paper
20 × 13.7 in. (50 × 35 cm)

1001 Symphonies, hommage to Dick Higgins, from *The October Suite*, 1999
Silkscreen on paper
20 × 13.7 in. (50 × 35 cm)

Knowles with **Jessica Higgins**, *Nori Hermit*, 2014
Woodblock print (red)
22¼ × 16½ in. (56.5 × 41.9 cm)

Knowles with **Jessica Higgins**, *Nori Hermit*, 2014
Woodblock print (blue)
22¼ × 16½ in. (56.5 × 41.9 cm)

Moon Bean, 1977
Screenprint on board, edition of 200 published by Edizione Pari & Dispari, Reggio Emilia, Italy
19¾ × 13¾ in. (50 × 35 cm)

Knowles and **Rirkrit Tiravanija**, *Men and Women Dress Alike*, 2011
Digital print on canvas with bamboo, edition of 10 published by Three Star Books, Paris
61 × 28 16/17 in. (155 × 73.5 cm)
Three Star Books

Lucas Allen, Knowles and Rirkrit Tiranvanija and in Knowles's New York loft with *Men and Women Dress Alike*, 2011
Photoreproduction
Three Star Books

John Cage, *Notations for A.K.*, 1992
Lithograph
c. 10 × 19 in. (25.4 × 48.3 cm)

Cena per Otto, 1985
Screenprint with hand-applied paint, edition of 67 published by Edizione Pari & Dispari, Reggio Emilia, Italy
15 × 15 in. (38 × 38 cm)

Iliad Oddities (Greene Street), 2010
Found objects and cyanotype on cloth
24 × 108 in. (61 × 275.6 cm)

Quecha (7 Indian Moons Panel), 1987
Cyanotype, screenprint, and pencil on canvas
49 × 37 in. (124.5 × 94 cm)

The Dnieper at the Black Sea, 1992
Cyanotype with acrylic, ink, crayon, and pencil on cloth
60 × 36 in. (152.4 × 91.4 cm)
Adam and Beth Lustbader, Bannockburn, IL

Bread and Water, Yangtze from Lake Dongting to the Yellow Sea, 1994
Cyanotype with acrylic, ink, crayon, and pencil on cloth
60 × 36 in. (152.4 × 91.4 cm)
Collection of Hannah B Higgins and Joseph Reinstein

The Amazon at Belém, 1992
Palladium print and silkscreen with pencil on rag paper
23½ × 16½ in. (59.7 × 41.9 cm)

Bread and Water, 1994
Composed, produced, and recorded with Joshua Selman
17 separate recordings available for programming in any order, duration variable
Commissioned and mastered by Westdeutcher Rundfunk (WDR)

Assemblages and Mixed-Media Works

A Change of Seasons, 2000
Screenprint on abaca paper with botanical elements
89 × 47½ in. (226.1 × 120.7 cm)

Broken Line with Slippers, 1991
Japanese mulberry leaf paper
Approx. 145¼ × 43 in. (368.9 × 109.2 cm)

Event Thread 3, 2006
Found materials, thread, and white flax
Approx. 67 × 8 in. (193 × 10.2 cm)

Event Thread, 2006
Found objects threaded on wire
Approx. 67 × 3 in. (170.2 × 7.6 cm)

Untitled (Event Thread), 2008
Found objects threaded on a wire
Approx. 75 × 12 in. (190.5 × 30.5 cm)

Untitled (Event Thread), 2008
Found objects threaded on a wire
Approx. 75 × 12 in. (190.5 × 30.5 cm)
Rebecca and Marty Eisenberg

Loose Pages

Coco Gordon and **Knowles**, *Loose Pages*, 1983
Handmade paper with linen, flax, beans, yarn, and aluminum rods, edition of 10 published by Watermark Press, Huntington, NY
Dimensions variable

Ephemera from *Loose Pages* exhibition at Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, 1983
Typescript on handmade paper
8 × 11½ in. (20.3 × 29.2 cm)
Emily Harvey Foundation, New York

Melanie Hedlund, Jessica Higgins performing *Loose Pages* at Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, 1983
Photoreproduction

Melanie Hedlund, Knowles performing as Scribe at Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, 1983
Photoreproduction
Emily Harvey Foundation, New York

Photographer unknown, Knowles performing *Loose Pages* with Coco Gordon, New York, 1983
Photoreproduction

Photographer unknown, Knowles and Jessica Higgins performing *Loose Pages—North Water Song*, with sound by Joshua Selman and Jeffrey Boyle, for the Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, New York, 2008
Photoreproduction
Collection of Jessica Higgins

Knowles and Jessica Higgins performing *Loose Pages* for "Paper City," *SWITCH TV*, episode 6, Western Massachusettes Public Acess Television (ECAT), 2012, Video, 18 min.
Collection of Joshua Selman

Flax Instruments and Paper Works

Flat Paper Gong, 1998
Molded flax pulp
19 × 19 × ¼ in. (48.3 × 48.3 cm)

White Bean Turner, 1998
Soybeans in flax, mounted on heavy-cotton base
23 × 10 × 3 in. (58.4 × 25.4 × 7.6 cm)

White Bean Turner Drawing, 1998
Acrylic over cyanotype on cloth
61 × 19 in. (154.9 × 48.3 cm)
Walker Art Center, Gift of Joan Rothfuss and Paul Shambroom

Coral Bean Turner, 2000
Flax paper and beans
23 × 7 × 2½ in. (58.4 × 17.8 × 6.4 cm)

Brown Bean Turner, c. 2000
Flax paper and soybeans
72 × 24 in. (182.9 × 61 cm)
Collection of Hannah B Higgins and Joseph Reinstein

Pagina Lenticchia, 1983
Flax panel
89 × 43 × 2½ in. (226.1 × 109.2 × 6.4 cm)

Rice and Beans, c. 1995
String, red lentils, and flax on muslin
43 × 23½ in. (109.2 × 58.4 cm)

Lentils Over Cotton Slippers, 1986–88
Lentils poured onto cotton paper pulp molded to slippers
18 × 10 × 4½ in. (45.7 × 25.4 × 11.4 cm)

Onion Skin Scroll Scores

Onion Skin Song, from *Three Songs*, 1978
Sepia blueprint on vellum, AP
120¾ × 36½ in. (304.8 × 92.7 cm)

Shoe String Song, from *Three Songs*, 1971
Sepia blueprint on vellum, AP
106¼ × 36½ in. (269.9 × 92.7 cm)

Silk Thread Song, from *Three Songs*, 1978
Sepia blueprint on vellum, AP
112½ × 39½ in. (224.8 × 104.8 cm)

Knowles performing *Play Paper* as part of *Fluxsweet* at Harvestworks, New York, 2005
Video, 3:28 min.

Photographer unknown, Knowles performing *Three Songs* with Malcolm Goldstein and Philip Corner at Franklin Furnace, New York, December 20, 1977
Photoreproduction
Franklin Furnace Archive

Sound Performances and Installations

Photographer unknown, Knowles with Bill Fontana, *Gentle Surprises for the Ear*, 1975
Photoreproduction

Knowles with **Bill Fontana**, Program booklet for *Gentle Surprises for the Ear*, an evening of performances at Tranegarden, Denmark, c. 1975
Photoreproduction

John Cage and Knowles on "Cooking with Cage," 1987, *SWITCH TV*, episode 15, Western Massachusettes Public Acess Television (ECAT), 2012
Video, 28:02 min.
Collection of Jessica Higgins

Knowles with Joshua Selman performing *Frijoles Canyon*, 1992, at *Fluxus Trial: Destructive Performances for Piano & Computer*, National Museum of Art, Osaka, 2001
Video, 9:14 min.
Fondazione Bonotto

Luigi Bonotto and **Knowles**, *Mantra for Jessie*, 1995
Photograph by Bonotto with hand lettering by Knowles
Fondazione Bonotto

Knowles performing *Mantra for Jessie* at Lanificio Bonotto, Molvena, Italy, July 29, 1995
Video, 7:33 min.
Fondazione Bonotto

Bean Garden

Peter Moore, *Bean Garden*, Floyd Bennett Field, New York, 1975
Black-and-white photograph
c. 8 × 10 in. (21.6 × 25.4 cm)
Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Announcement for *Bean Garden*, 1975, Floyd Bennett Field, New York, 1975
Folded printed paper
14⅛ × 8½ in. (36 × 21.5 cm)
Fondazione Bonotto

Knowles performing *Build a Bean Garden* at De Appel, Amsterdam, 1976
Video, 7:28 min.
De Appel and LIMA

Bean Garden, 1976/2022
Wood planter filled with dried white navy beans
Planter: 144 × 144 in. (365.8 × 365.8 cm)

Bean Multiples and The Book of Bean

Bean Bag, late 1970s
Collection of beans and ideas in bag
Bag: 7 × 8 × 3 in. (17.8 × 20.3 × 7.6 cm)

Bean Bag, 1978
Cardboard box, cotton bag, beans, and printed paper
5¼ × 5 × 5¼ in. (13.5 × 12.5 × 13.5 cm)
Emily Harvey Foundation, New York

Sea Bean, 1978
Paper box, printed label, plastic bottle, and bean
3¼ × 2 × 1¾ in. (8.3 × 5.1 × 4.5 cm)

Blue Box, 1981
Paper box, printed label, and bean
3⁵⁄₁₆ × 2½ × 1 in. (10 × 6 × 1 cm)

Potage Sec, 1989
Pyrex ramekin, cloth, beans, light bulbs, coins, glass, rocks, and paper
9 × 7½ × 1½ in. (20.3 × 17.8 × 12.7 cm)

The Book of Bean, 1981
Photoreproductions of 2 panels of original *Book of Bean*
Collection Gino di Maggio; Fondation du Doute, Blois, France

Photographer unknown, View of *The Book of Bean*, Franklin Furnace, New York, 1981
Photoreproduction
Franklin Furnace Archive

Photographer unknown, View of *The Book of Bean*, Franklin Furnace, New York, 1981
Photoreproduction
Franklin Furnace Archive

Knowles with **Jessica Higgins** and **George Quasha**, *The Book of Bean Video*, 1982
Video, 12 min.

Sounds from the Book of Bean, 2021
Vinyl record, 20:13 min., edition of 300 released by Recital

A Finger Book

A Finger Book 3, 1987/88
Mixed-media interactive book on spine aluminum base with various materials and Braille objects
33 × 16 in. (83 × 40 cm)
Emily Harvey Foundation, New York

Barry Bryant, *A Finger Book Journey*, 1987
Video, 20:10 min.
Samaya Foundation

Performance Events in the 2000s

Howard Korn, Knowles and participants performing *Make a Salad* at *Work Ethic*, Baltimore Museum of Art, 2003
Photoreproduction
Baltimore Museum of Art

Tate Photography, Knowles and participants performing *Make a Salad* at Tate Modern, London, 2008
Photoreproduction
Tate Modern, New York

Liz Ligon, Knowles and participants performing *Make a Salad* on the High Line, New York, April 22, 2012
Photoreproduction
The High Line

Photographer unknown, Knowles and participants performing *Make a Salad* for Open Field, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, July 10, 2014
Photoreproduction
Walker Art Center

Seth Beckton, Knowles and participants performing *Make a Salad (Plein air version)*, Aspen Art Museum, Colorado, July 15, 2018
Photoreproduction
Aspen Art Museum

Ian Byers-Gamber, Knowles and participants performing *Make a Salad* as part of *Fluxus Spotlight*, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, February 15, 2019
Photoreproduction
Los Angeles Philharmonic

Yi-Chun Wu, Knowles performing *The Identical Lunch* at MoMA Café, January–February, 2011
Photoreproduction
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Knowles performing *The Identical Lunch Symphony (Blended version)* at *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art*, Smart Museum, Chicago, 2012
Video, 4:10 min.
The David and Alfred Smart Museum, The University of Chicago

Knowles performing *Make a Salad* at *UBS Openings: The Long Weekend—States of Flux*, The Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London, 2008
Video, 3:48 min.
Tate Modern

Knowles performing *Make a Salad* on the High Line, New York, 2012
Video, 3:10 min.
The High Line

Harmut Jahn, Knowles performing *Identical Lunch Variation* at *Fluxus at 50, 1962–2012*, Museum Wiesbaden, Germany, June 2, 2012
Video, 3:10 min.
Museum Wiesbaden

Documentation of *Celebration Red (Homage to Each Red Thing)*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 2015
Video, 2:45 min.
Carnegie Museum of Art

Recent Exhibition and Installation Views

Ernst-Peter Prokop, View of *Homage to Each Red Thing*, in *Do It!*, 1994
Photoreproduction
rittergalerie/Kunsthalle Ritter

Photographer unknown, View of *Alison Knowles: Performance Drawings*, The Drawing Center, New York, April 19–July 28, 2001
Photoreproduction
The Drawing Center

David Familian, View of *Alison Knowles: Secrets of Ordinary Things*, Walter and McBean Galleries, San Francisco Art Institute, April–June 2003
Photoreproduction
David Familian

Nicholas Knight, View of *The House of Dust: A Poem in Process*, The James Gallery, CUNY Graduate Center, September 7–October 29, 2016
Photoreproduction
Sebástien Pluot

Esteban Schimpf, View of *Shelter or Playground: The House of Dust at the Schindler House*, MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles, February 9–June 2, 2019
Photoreproduction
MAK Center for Art and Architecture

Lucia Fabio, View of *House of Glass* at *Reframing the House of Dust*, CalArts Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration, Valencia, CA, March 1, 2018
Photoreproduction
Lucia Fabio

Drawing for 3D-printed version of *The House of Dust*, 1967/2021
Ink on dot matrix paper
c. 8½ × 11 in. (22 × 28 cm)

Wolfgang Günzel, View of 3D-printed *The House of Dust* produced by World 's Advance Saving Project (WASP), Massa Lombarda, Italy, installed at Wiesbaden Kranzplatz, Germany, June, 2021–August, 2022
Photoreproduction
Cornelia Saalfrank, tinyBE

Being With Paper, 2022
Archival Ultra Chrome XD2 ink printed on Arches paper
Approx. 24 × 36 in. (61 × 91.4 cm)

Documentary Videos

Knowles discussing *Fluxkit* and *Bean Rolls* for the exhibition *Thing/Thought: Fluxus Editions, 1962–78*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2011–12
3:53 min.
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Knowles discussing *The Identical Lunch*, March 28, 2012
4:09 min.
Smart Museum, University of Chicago

Knowles discussing her collaboration with John Cage on *Notations,* 1968, Methods of Art

Lars Molvin, Knowles discussing her work at Fondazione Bonotto, Molvena, Italy, in *The Misfits: 30 Years of Fluxus*, 1992
8:18 min.
Fondazione Bonotto

Knowles discussing her work at Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 2016
3:02 min.
Carnegie Museum of Art

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Lucia Fabio is an independent curator and researcher. She received her MA in Art and Curatorial Practices from Roski School of Art and Design at the University of Southern California (USC), Los Angeles. Her project *From Seed to Earth*, a public program of the City of Los Angeles's public art exhibition *CURRENT LA: FOOD* (2019), focused on complete food production—planting, tending, and composting—to compare the life cycles of plants and humans. In 2016, she started an exhibition space, The Homer Project, at her 1910 bungalow in LA, where she invites artists to do site-specific installations for extended amounts of time. After receiving her BFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Fabio ran the apartment gallery mini dutch. She has also curated *Crickets* (2017), a solo exhibition of works by Aitor Lajarin at the Heritage Square Museum in LA, and co-curated *FUCK! Loss, Desire, Pleasure* (2016), at ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries. Fabio's recent writings include her contribution to the publication for Suzanne Lacy's retrospective exhibition *We Are Here* (2019), co-organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

Lauren R. Fulton is an independent curator, researcher, and current PhD candidate at the State University of New York (SUNY) Stony Brook. She is writing her dissertation on the artist, poet, and composer Dick Higgins's practice and activities from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s. Fulton has held curatorial positions at the Aspen Art Museum, Colorado; the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; and the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas. At the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she completed an MA thesis on the sound works and recordings of Alison Knowles, and at the Aspen Art Museum she organized *Alison Knowles: Proposition #2: Make a Salad (Plein air variation)* in 2018.

Hannah B Higgins is University Professor in the School of Art and Art History at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), where she has been teaching Intermedia and Avant-Garde Art and Culture since 1994. She is the founding associate director of the interdisciplinary IDEAS program, which is modeled on the experimental pedagogies of Black Mountain College and CalArts. In addition to articles on the historic and neo-avant-gardes, Higgins has written the books *Fluxus Experience* (University of California Press, 2002) and *The Grid Book* (MIT Press, 2009); with Douglas Kahn, she co-edited the anthology *Mainframe Experimentalism: Early Computing and the Foundations of Digital Art* (University of California Press, 2012). Select recent articles by Higgins include "Fluxus with Tools" (2021), "Intermedial Perception Or, Fluxing Across the Sensory" (2021), "John Baldessari's Guessing Game" (2019), "Reading Art and Objecthood While Thinking about Containers" (2018), and "The Eyes Have Ears: Sound in WJT Mitchell's Pictures" (2017). Higgins has received many fellowships and research grants, including from the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst), the Getty Center, and the Philips Collection. She is co-executor of the estate of Dick Higgins and Something Else Press.

Maud Jacquin and **Sébastien Pluot** are the co-directors of Art by Translation, an international research program in art and curatorial practices that has organized exhibitions in the United States and Europe to engage with Alison Knowles's *The House of Dust* (first realized in 1969). Jacquin was formerly associate curator of Residency Unlimited, the New York–based residency program for international artists and curators. She received her MA from the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, and her PhD from University College London (UCL). Her research interests as an art historian and curator include moving image and performance practices, expanded cinema, feminist media histories, and theories of narrative and translation. Pluot has published widely and is the editor of two recent publications, *Art by Telephone Recalled* (Mix, 2014) and *A Translation From One Language to Another* (Les Presses Du Réel, 2015). He earned his MA in art history from the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), Paris.

Karen Moss is an art historian, independent curator, and professor of Critical Studies at the Roski School of Art and Design at the University of Southern California (USC). She has worked with Alison Knowles for more than twenty-five years, including on the exhibition *In the Spirit of Fluxus* at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (1993), and on an artist residency and solo exhibition at San Francisco Art Institute (2003). Moss's PhD dissertation includes a chapter on Knowles's pivotal years teaching at the then-new California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), when her event scores and *The House of Dust* were integral to her pedagogy. Moss has organized exhibitions, artists' residencies, performances, public programs, and pedagogical projects locally, nationally, and internationally, including co-curating *Talking to Action: Art, Pedagogy and Activism* (2017–18) and *State of Mind: New Art from California Circa 1970* (2010–13) for the Getty's PST initiative. Moss has held senior curatorial positions at the Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa, California; San Francisco Art Institute; and the Walker Art Center. She has a BA in studio art and art history from UC Santa Cruz, as well as MA and PhD degrees in art history from USC.

Nicole L. Woods is assistant professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, where she holds concurrent appointments in the Department of Film, Television, and Theater and the Program in Gender Studies. Woods's research focuses on the Euro-American neo-avant-gardes, performance, conceptual art, intersectional feminism, globalism, taste cultures, and the history of photography and time-based media. She is the author of the first monograph on Alison Knowles's art and life, *Performing Chance: Alison Knowles In/Out of Fluxus* (University of Chicago Press, forthcoming). Woods has published widely on Fluxus and experimental artists of the post-World War II era. Her research has been supported by the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; an Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant; the Graham Foundation; and the Getty Research Institute.

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Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has served, since 2005, as the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at Harvard University. Buchloh is the author of the essay collections *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (MIT Press, 2006) and *Formalism and Historicity: Models and Methods in Twentieth Century Art* (MIT Press, 2016); with Yve-Alain Bois, Hal Foster, David Joselit, and Rosalind Krauss, he is co-author of *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, and Postmodernism* (Thames & Hudson, 2004).

George Quasha is a poet whose collections include *Amanita's Hymnal* (1970), *Magic Spell for the Far Journey* (1971), *Somapoetics* (1973), *Word-Yum: Somapoetics 64–69* (1974), *Giving the Lily Back Her Hands* (1979), *Ainu Dreams* (with Chie Hasegawa, 1999), and *Verbal Paradise (preverbs)* (2011). His art explores common principles within language, sculpture, sound, installation, and performance. Quasha's work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame; WhiteBox, New York; and the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, State University of New York (SUNY) New Paltz. Since the 1970s, Quasha and his wife Sasha have run Station Hill Press in Barrytown, New York, which is committed to publishing innovative and experimental writing. He has taught at SUNY Stony Brook; Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; The New School, New York; and Naropa University, Boulder, Colorado.

Julia Robinson is associate professor in the Department of Art History at New York University, where her teaching and research are focused on topics from the 1960s to contemporary art, including score- and language-based artistic strategies, performance, and the shift from medium to media in contemporary art. She curated *The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Art* (2009–10) at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona, and the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo, and *New Realisms: 1957–1962: Object Strategies Between Readymade and Spectacle* at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2010); Robinson was editor of both accompanying exhibition catalogs.

Kristine Stiles is a historian of contemporary art who specializes in interdisciplinary experimental art. Her latest book is *Concerning Consequences: Studies in Art, Destruction, and Trauma* (University of Chicago Press, 2016). With Peter Selz, she edited the first edition of *Theories & Documents of Contemporary Art* (University of California Press, 1996) and revised, expanded, and edited its second edition in 2012. Stiles edited, annotated, and wrote the survey essay for *Correspondence Course: An Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann and Her Circle* (Duke University Press, 2010) and she is also the author of *Raphael Montañez Ortiz: Years of the Warrior, Years of the Psyche, 1968–1988* (El Museo del Barrio, 1988).

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Alison Knowles was born in New York City in 1933, and graduated from Pratt Institute
in Brooklyn. She is a visual and performance artist, a member of the original
Fluxus group. Her environments, the Big Book, the House of Dust and the Bean Garden
are collections of discarded street objects, gift materials, and taken for granted
daily occurences such as eating a tunafish sandwich. She uses chance operations to
structure her collections, and upscaled size to put sound and image into context.
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