

**CONCRETE POETRY
THE EARLY YEARS**

Alan Riddell
Öyvind Fahlström
Diter Rot
Robert Filliou
Gerhard Rühm
Ian Hamilton Finlay
Aram Saroyan
Ilse and Pierre Garnier
Mary Ellen Solt
Jochen Gerz
Ludwig Gosewitz
Eugen Gomringer
Ake Hodell
Frank Trowbridge
Paul de Vree
Herman de Vries
Ernst Jandl
Emmett Williams
Ronald Johnson
Max Bense
Jiri Kolar
Claus Bremer
Kjöpcke Gallery
Augusto de Campos
Franz Mon
Haroldo de Campos
Hansjörg Mayer
Bob Cobbing
Decio Pignatari
Herman Damen
Vladan Radovanovic

July 1-31 and September 2-26, 1986

Thomas J. Watson Library
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Fifth Avenue at 82nd Street
New York, New York 10028

Library hours: 10:00 AM to 4:45 PM, Tuesday through Friday.
(Closed weekends and holidays, and for the month of August).

This exhibition has been made possible by a grant from The J.M. Kaplan Fund, and has been organized by the Franklin Furnace and curated by Matthew Hogan.

Poster designed by Dick Higgins.

Curator's Acknowledgements

Work was loaned for the exhibition by Sharon Avery-Fahlström, Jon Hendricks and the Kempe Collection.

Thanks to Dick Higgins for his patience and advice, to Martha Wilson for giving me the time to work on the exhibition, and thanks to The Thomas J. Watson Library and Mindell Dubansky for asking the Franklin Furnace to curate the exhibition.

Working on this show has made me realize how contemporary Concrete Poetry really is, and how innovative the Concrete Poets truly were.

Dedicated to all the Concrete Poets who are not in the exhibition.

Matthew Hogan

PÓS-TUDO

by Augusto de Campos
(1984)

QUIS

TUDO

TUDO

TUDO

TUDO

TUDO

POST-EVERYTHING

I WANTED
TO CHANGE EVERYTHING
I CHANGED EVERYTHING
NOW POST EVERYTHING
EXEVERYTHING
(I study)

I CHANGE
(Mute)

Concrete Poetry, 1986

by Dick Higgins

Now that nearly thirty five years have elapsed since the early 1950s when concrete poetry got its name, covering the work that was being done in Germany, Brazil, Sweden and perhaps elsewhere, its contours and its uniqueness within the general field of visual poetry have become clear. Three of the unique and fascinating things about concrete poetry are 1) it centers upon the alphabet, enabling us to look at our letters in new ways; 2) there is the assumption that each work should create its own form, thus consciously opposing itself to genres and traditions of all kinds; and 3) concrete poetry works typically bear the assumption that each work should be a complete statement of something or other, with only minimal references to anything off the page. Since most of us were raised to think of poetry as including symbols and allusions to other works and to the poet's life, to experience a work in such a pure way, in spite of the intermedial nature of the form, is, even today, rather startling. It is, therefore, almost a violation of the spirit of concrete poetry to stress its history in terms of its poets or even of the history of the genre, even though, obviously, it has both.

Furthermore, concrete poetry is another side of the stream in the same intellectual current that produced modern semiotics; but, where semiotics minimizes stylistic concerns and concentrates on the meanings of the form and content, to the point where it resembles scientific linguistic analysis more than aesthetic criticism (and is, thus, suitable as an approach to pattern poetry, with its endless pyramids, labyrinths, chalices, hearts, crosses, etc.), concrete poetry focuses on novel arrays of letters in which the viewer is sometimes at a loss to explain the impact of the work on him or her. Each work of concrete poetry is, or is intended to be, so unique that categorizing sets and identifying conveyors of meanings is a difficult task indeed; this is part of the excitement of the genre.

Visual poetry itself has been with us since around 1700 BC, with the Phaistos disk from Crete. What we now know as pattern poetry has made a strong case for the universality of the attempt of artists to combine their visual and literary sensibilities. It has been with us, more or less strongly, ever since then in Greek, Latin, and in most modern literatures, though with peaks in the Carolingian period and in the renaissance and baroque in Europe, with the *hui-wen* of China and with the *citra-kāvya*s of Sanskrit and half a dozen other Indian literatures. In our own century several kinds of visual poetics have been prominent: the *parole in libertà* of the Futurists at the start of the century, the type poems of the Dadaists and Constructivists following World War I, the *metagraphies* and *hyper-graphies* of the lettristes following World War II, and, most recently, *poesia visiva* (which sometimes preempts the term "visual poetry") in the 1970s and since.

Concrete poetry is not and never was a movement in the sense that so many other artistic tendencies of our time have been movements, with a recognizable program, an exclusive and inherent viewpoint, and a historical beginning, middle and ending as the works are either absorbed into the mainstream or rejected by it. It is, like collage, a characteristic genre of work, and few of its main practitioners have concentrated exclusively upon it, but have, instead, gone on to do other things such as text-sound and sound poetry, performance poetry, fluxus, and even paintings and graphic art. The poets came from many disciplines—poetry, music, and fine art—and they had many artistic viewpoints. The genre which they developed in the 1950s, when concrete poetry first announced itself, and which peaked in its popularity in the 1960s, is still available as a possible and viable kind of work. If it seemed out of date in the 1970s, because of the confusion with our normative, historicistic movement orientation, now in the 1980s it again seems current as an available conveyor of our present cultural and artistic experience, no longer new but certainly of interest, quite capable of becoming stock in trade for our new poetics.

State University of New York
Purchase, New York

Eugenio Miccini

"The term 'poesia visiva' was coined in 1960 by Luciano Ott to cover a kind of visual poem which, typically, combines literature with elements of photography and conceptual art, at times ignoring the alphabet altogether."



Fx 1011