

The Palace of Concrete Poetry

Pavel Büchler
Bohumila Grögerová
David Horvitz
Susan Howe
Keti Kapanadze
Barbara Kapusta
Janice Kerbel
Ferdinand Kriwet
Ewa Partum
Jan Serych
Sue Tompkins
Exhibition Curator:
Monika Cejková

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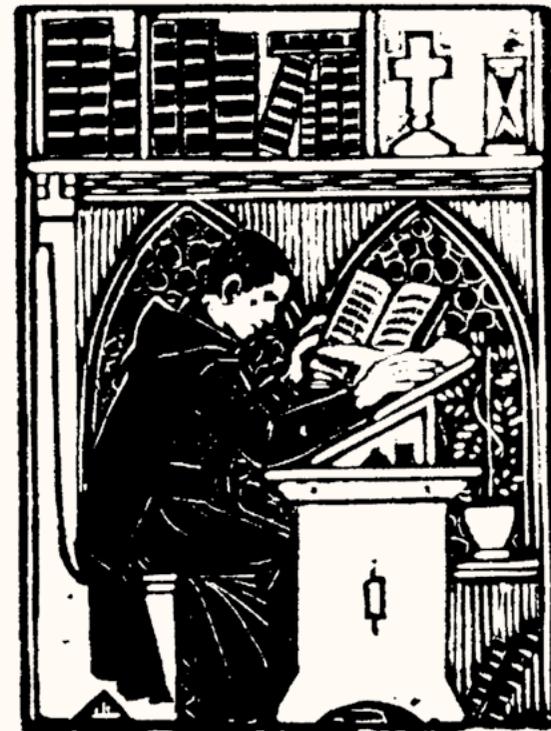
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Writers' House of Georgia
9 September – 9 October 2022

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The image on the frontispiece comes from an anonymous artist and is taken from the magazine *Pax* published by Benedictines of the Emmaus Monastery, 1929, vol. 4, p. 162. It was used even in other years as a divider separating individual sections.
Original dimensions: 37 × 28 mm.

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Introduction

One of the first videos that came up on YouTube when I searched for information about the Georgian Orthodox Church and post-Soviet Tbilisi was a foreign report on the anti-Soviet demonstration of 9 April 1989, later known as the Tbilisi Massacre or the Tbilisi Tragedy. In one shot, the camera caught a group of demonstrating men kissing an Orthodox cross in the hands of a hieromonk.¹ In the background of the scene, the words of the Lord’s Prayer poured from a megaphone.

The scene reminded me of a speech by the Czech Catholic bishop Václav Malý, a former dissident and spokesman for the Civic Forum, who a few months later offered the same prayer to hundreds of thousands of people demonstrating on Letná Plain in Prague (25 November 1989).² This rounded off an earlier appearance by a State Security officer who came to apologize to the crowd for the drastic police repression of a student demonstration on Národní Avenue in Prague,³ which had taken place just a few days before, on 17 November, and had started the Velvet Revolution.⁴ The spontaneous prayer with the people was meant to culminate in a kind of common forgiveness, although most of the demonstrators did not know the words of the prayer and opened their mouths in a purely symbolic way.

In Czechoslovakia and Georgia, religion was not explicitly forbidden during the totalitarian regime, but regular visits to churches and liturgy aroused suspicion among the repressive security forces. In Czechoslovakia, the spiritual activities of Catholic priests were restricted and were under long-term surveillance, and many churches of the Georgian Orthodox Church were closed or converted into secular buildings. However, the development of the two churches after the fall of the Soviet Union differs markedly. While the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia missed its opportunity and its contribution to the shaping of post-revolutionary society was practically minimal, in Georgia the Orthodox Church gained a very strong position based on the deep rootedness of Georgian identity in Christianity, but also on the problematic connection of the Church to the ruling establishment. The Georgian Orthodox Church, with roots going back to the 1st century AD, is an integral part of the national identity. Its importance has continued well into the 20th century, when the political situation in the country has seen the church disappear from the public sphere and spiritual life move to private altars in the home.⁵

The Czech project *Ora et lege* (Pray and Read), which is behind the exhibition entitled *The Palace of Concrete Poetry* held in Writers’ House of Georgia in Tbilisi, is attempting at a long-term critical dialogue between contemporary art and the Benedictine Order and, by extension, Catholic Church in general. In certain aspects, the exhibition goes back to the roots of Christianity and is inspired by the story of the creation of the world, which is common to both religions, the Catholic Church and the Georgian Orthodox Church.

¹ Designation of a monk with priestly ordination in the Orthodox Church.

² The Civic Forum was a political movement that emerged shortly after the beginning of the Velvet Revolution. It was a common platform of civic independent activities that rejected the totalitarian communist regime. The first informal leader of the movement was Václav Havel, who was elected President of Czechoslovakia at the end of 1989.

³ The State Security Service (StB), as a secret political police, carried out intelligence activities aimed at combating “internal” and “external” enemies.

⁴ The Velvet Revolution refers to the period of political change in Czechoslovakia between 17 November and 29 December 1989, which led to the fall of the communist regime. The beginning of the Velvet Revolution is linked to the violent intervention of the repressive forces against a peaceful student parade held on 17 November 1989 to mark the 50th anniversary of International Students’ Day.

⁵ Fabian Weiss, Home Altars, in: idem – Klaus Neuburg – Sebastian Pranz – Aleksi Soselia – Wato Tsereteli – Jesse Vogler (eds.), *Tbilisi – Archive of Transition*, Arthur Niggli Verlag, Tbilisi 2018, p. 154.

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¹ John 1:1.
² Bohumila Grögerová and Josef Hiršal, Deset tisíc změn se znovu mění (March 1993), in: Petr Kotyk (ed.), *Deset tisíc změn se znovu mění. Dno všeho vrchol prázdnoty. Rozhovory a promluvy českých literátů z let 1990–1995*, Cherm, Prague 2008, p. 138.

³ Jan Sokol, Dvoji vyprávění o stvoření, in: idem, *Člověk a náboženství: proměny vztahu člověka k posvátnému*, Portál, Prague 2003, pp. 105–106.

⁴ *Evangelium podle Jana. Studijní vydání*, NF Bible 21 – Biblion, o. s., p. 4, available at: https://www.bible21.cz/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Jan_SB21.pdf, accessed on 11 August 2022.

⁵ *Parole in libertà* was poetry liberated from the conventional verse writing, grammatical norms, syntax and spelling, declared in 1912 by the Futurist artist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (*Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista*). – Nancy Perloff, *Concrete Poetry, A 21st-century Anthology*, Reaktion Books, London 2021, pp. 12–13, available at: https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_20031/?st=gallery, accessed on 3 June 2022.

⁶ Tania Ørum – Jesper Olsson (eds.), *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950–1975*, Brill Publishers, Leiden 2016, p. 480

⁷ Kotyk (Note 2), p. 138.

⁸ Chris McCabe, Feldspar of Symbols: A Motorway Journey into the New Concrete, in: Victoria Bean – Chris McCabe (eds.), *The New Concrete: Visual Poetry in the 21st Century*, Hayward Publishing, London 2015, pp. 214–215.

⁹ Jakub Guziur, *Konkrétní poezie a její (post)digitální obdoby*, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356749571_Konkretni_poezie_a_její_postdigitální_obdoby_Concrete_Poetry_and_its_PostDigital_Variants, accessed on 10 February 2022.

¹⁰ *Ora et lege*: Ed Atkins, Kamilla Bischof, Jesse Darling, Liam Gillick, Martin Kohout, Florian Meisenberg, Slavs and Tatars; 19 June – 30 September 2021.

The exhibition *The Palace of Concrete Poetry* is loosely inspired by the answer of the Czechoslovak artist Bohumila Grögerová to a question about the origin of spiritual impulses in her experimental poetry. Grögerová quoted the famous prologue of the Gospel of John, which reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” She added, “Language, then, according to the Bible, precedes creation, and that which is not named is not created.” Grögerová went on to mention the existence of taboo words that cannot be spoken for many different reasons (social, religious or political), as well as words that are spoken in times of greatest need as a plea for hearing or help.²

The verses quoted from the Gospel of John refer to the creation story in the Old Testament, when God gave man dominion over the world “created by the word, not by hands. The emphasis on the creation ‘by the word’ means two things: first, that the world corresponds to the word, that it therefore ‘makes sense’, and, second, that the Lord does not have to exert any effort to create: his word is enough for it to happen.”³ The word, “logos” in Greek (meaning “speech”, “reason”, “thought”, as well as “law” and “concept”), was understood by readers of the Hebrew Bible in the Jesus’s time as an expression of the wisdom of God. “God is the logos (1:1–2); all that God does, the logos likewise does.”⁴ What is created by God is always “good”.

The exhibition *The Palace of Concrete Poetry* is a reflection on this statement and the position of taboo words, especially from the perspective of faith and society. It attempts to demythologize language through the liberation of words (“parole in libertà”)⁵ within an intergenerational dialogue of artists/authors closely or loosely related to concrete poetry. The starting point for the exhibition was the conviction that language as a linguistic material, which should be dealt with in a tactile way (“kneading” – Öyvind Fahlström), always has a spiritual dimension.⁶ In this vein, the reference is made to the aura of the word and its energy, by which concrete poetry distinguishes itself from other kinds of visual poetry that emphasize the visual dimension. For example, in the above-mentioned interview Grögerová says: “Language is not only a combinatorial tool, but also a living organism charged with energy, and it has the power to provoke a reaction.”⁷ Concrete poetry does not deal with an object from the real world, it deals with language, its (in)ability to capture extra-linguistic reality and the processes of communication.⁸ Many of the concrete poets sought international and intercultural intelligibility; they believed in a supranational verbal (phono) / visual language superior to national languages.⁹ This ambition largely contributed to the artists’ interest in graphic design and typography.

The thing on display is the “word”, which is further processed as a linguistic material. Concrete poetry is featured in the exhibition in many forms and through a wide range of media. Many of the realizations devalue language to varying degrees to emphasize the loss of its informational relevance due to external interventions (Susan Howe, Ewa Partum). They deal with the issue of politically or religiously authorized language and the possibility of its misuse to legitimize a certain system (Pavel Büchler, Ferdinand Kriwet, Janice Kerbel, Sue Tompkins). Other works touch upon the issue of gender linguistics

and gender stereotypes rooted in national languages (Bohumila Grögerová, Keti Kapanadze). Some other works explore the inability of language to capture extra-linguistic reality, as mentioned above, exacerbated by the transformations in the ways we write as a result of new technologies and the digital world (David Horvitz, Barbara Kapusta, Jan Šerých).

The decision to work with the influences of concrete poetry reflects the long-term orientation of the *Ora et lege* project towards contemporary artists working with text and thinking about the ways of its exhibiting. Compared to the previous *Ora et lege* exhibition in the Broumov Monastery (2021),¹⁰ the project in Tbilisi focuses on the International Concrete Poetry Movement, which is gaining renewed interest at the beginning of the new millennium. The exhibition brings together both the pioneers of concrete poetry (Bohumila Grögerová, Susan Howe, Ferdinand Kriwet, Ewa Partum) and their followers (Pavel Büchler, Janice Kerbel, Jan Šerých, Sue Tompkins) who approach this heritage in a critical way, including the youngest generation (David Horvitz, Barbara Kapusta) who move the issue forward to (post)digital ways of working.

The exhibition’s production respects the given space of the Art Nouveau building of the Writers’ House of Georgia. It was constructed between 1903 and 1905 for the family of the Georgian philanthropist David Sarajishvili by the German architect Carl Zaar in collaboration with architects Aleksandr Ozerov and Korneli Tatishev. The family house immediately turned into an important center of Tbilisi’s cultural life.

The artists created new realizations or adapted their existing artworks specifically for the exhibition. The works are intended to blend the historical wood panel interior by the Georgian craftsman Ilia Mamatsashvili as well as the garden of the house.

Concrete Poetry

The golden age of concrete poetry is considered to be the period from the mid-1950s to the 1970s, during which it developed simultaneously in many places around the world – in Eastern and Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Brazil and Japan. The aim of this text is not to map out specific authors or groups in detail, but rather to provide the visitor to the exhibition with an introduction to the basic issues of concrete poetry.

Concrete poetry is represented by a variety of approaches. Some of them border on music (e.g., sound poetry), others on visual poetry, and still others touch on graphic design or typography. The roots of new poetry, as concrete poetry used to be called by its authors, lie in the need to transcend the genre in terms of linguistic and social criticism. The authors reflected modern mass communication and projected new findings from the sciences, especially cybernetics, information technology, mathematics or semiotics, into their working practices.

Authors, particularly in Eastern and Central Eastern Europe, struggled with frustration at the loss of credibility of the language after the Second World War. The established totalitarian regimes took the path of uncompromising devastation of the spoken and written word, coupled with pervasive censorship of independent culture. As a result, poets began to focus increasingly on the visual arts. Their tool for “healing” language was its total reduction, rethinking its established manifestations and consciously resigning to its laws, structure and function. The authors restored language to its value by using a pure and simple form without ideology, clichés and phrases.¹

From a historical point of view, inspiration by concrete poetry can be traced in the works of authors such as James Joyce, Stéphane Mallarmé, Gertrude Stein as well as in some works of a much earlier date. Examples include Laurence Sterne’s novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, published in parts between 1759 and 1767, George Herbert’s early 17th-century poem *Easter Wings* with lines forming the shape of wings, or even the works of ancient Roman writers such as Publius Optatianus Porphyrius.

From an artistic point of view, concrete poetry was based mainly on a wide range of experiments with text, which beginning in the 1920s were conducted by avant-garde movements such as Futurism, Constructivism, Dadaism, the De Stijl movement and later Surrealism. The closest resemblance to concrete poetry can be found in non-conformist Dadaism, in writings of Hans Arp, Hugo Ball and Kurt Schwitters and their playful experiments, in which, for example, a written text is cut up and rearranged to create a new content, which is not necessarily semantic. This technique was popularized in the late 1950s by the American writer William Burroughs and the artist Brion Gysin, who called it the cut-up method.²

During the 1950s several manifestos of concrete poetry were written. Among the first, which, however, became widely known more than a decade later, was a text entitled *Hipy Papy Bthuthdth Thuthda Bthuthdy* (1953) by the Brazilian-born Swedish poet and artist Öyvind Fahlström.³ It starts with two quotes. The first expresses the author’s wish to move from lyric poetry to writing “wordlets” (a new form of words-letters), while the second one

from F. T. Marinetti’s *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista* (1912) calls for “parole in libertà” (liberated words aka the words in freedom).⁴ This referred to a new poetic style, free from the usual norms of grammar and the conventional poetry writing.⁵ Marinetti called for the destruction of syntax and the rejection of adjectives, adverbs and all verbs except those in the infinitive.⁶ Such demands corresponded with Fahlström’s notion of poetry as a linguistic material which should be kneaded: “Don’t just manipulate the whole structure; begin rather with the smallest elements – letters, words.”⁷ Fahlström’s manifesto quite clearly sets out the requirements for a concrete poet, but he himself did not follow it very closely and soon began to devote himself to another field of art. This partly explains his ignorance of the Brazilian movement of concrete poetry, the Noigandres group, despite Fahlström’s Brazilian roots, or the work of Eugen Gomringer, a Bolivian-born, Swiss-based artist with whom Fahlström shared similar ideas.

Eugen Gomringer is considered the father of concrete poetry in German-speaking countries.⁸ His first manifesto *From Line to Constellation* (1954), published a year later than that of Fahlström, presents ideas similar to Fahlström’s views. Both authors emphasize the materiality of language and the study of its structure, including all elementary signs.⁹ At that time, Gomringer became acquainted with concrete poetry through his knowledge of the work of concrete artists and his acquaintance with Max Bill, the founder and director of the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, for whom Gomringer worked as a secretary. Gomringer transferred his experience of concretism into his own poetry. He initially called his poems “constellations”, a term borrowed from the French Symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé, whose constellations/works with pages, where words are arranged with respect to the surrounding blank space, inspired many concrete poets. In 1955, Décio Pignatari, a member of the Brazilian concrete poetry group Noigandres, visited the Hochschule für Gestaltung. This meeting and the establishment of a close relationship between Gomringer and the Noigandres group can be considered the beginning of the International Concrete Poetry Movement.¹⁰

The Noigandres group was founded in 1952 by the poets Haroldo de Campos, Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari. Between 1952 and 1958, they published a concrete poetry journal of the same name with contributors from Great Britain, France, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Spain, Hungary, as well as Japan, Canada and the United States, thus advancing the spread of the international movement.¹¹ With their concept of ideogram, in which the word has a three-dimensional “verbivocovisual” character, the Noigandres poets proclaimed the supremacy of non-verbal communication over national languages. The members of the group were interested in the pictorial sign as the primary way of graphically recording human ideas, a visual shorthand, a telegraphic message comprehensible not only across cultures and languages, but also to the illiterate. From the beginning, concrete poetry was to be an international movement, so it was important for it not be narrowly bound to particular national languages.

Especially in the 1960s, the Noigandres group made the Brazilian branch of concrete poetry famous all over the world. During his travels to Europe, Haroldo de Campos

met many representatives of the movement, including the French concrete poets Ilse and Pierre Garnier, Henri Chopin, the Italian poet Carlo Belloli, and the Czechoslovak experimental poets Bohumila Grögerová, Josef Hiršal, Ladislav Novák and Jiří Kolář. An important link between Brazilian and German concrete poetry was also developed through association with the renowned Stuttgart group of concrete poetry around Professor Max Bense, who invited Haroldo de Campos to lecture at the Technische Hochschule in Stuttgart in 1964. The influence of the Noigandres group was strong in many countries, but it reached them at the time when individual poets had already been engaged in concrete poetry, and so the movement retained its specific (national) character in each country despite all the efforts to create a supranational language.¹²

During the 1950s and 1960s, the International Concrete Poetry Movement grew stronger throughout the world. In Europe, we should briefly mention Austria, where concrete poetry began to appear in the early 1950s in the work of several poets known as the Wiener Gruppe (Vienna Group), such as Gerhard Rühm, Friedrich Achleitner, H. C. Artman and Konrad Bayer, who experimented with visual and phonetic forms.¹³ They also incorporated humor and the grotesque into their texts. Other poets in Vienna, working along concrete lines, included Ernst Jادل and Friederike Mayröcker. In France, the beginning of experimental poetry is linked to Pierre Garnier’s *Manifesto for a New Poetry Visual and Phonic* (1962), who for the new poetic movement coined the term Spatialism (1963).¹⁴ The French environment was also productive in the field of Lettrism and numerous phonetic compositions (Henri Chopin, François Dufrêne and his cri-rythmes, etc.). Italian poets developed the optical nature of poems and created complex visual methods of working. Carlo Belloli, as the most famous of these, published his concrete poems as early as the 1940s. In the Great Britain, concrete poetry was written by the Benedictine monk Dom Sylvester Houédard, by John Furnival and by the Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay. In Czechoslovakia, concrete poetry appeared in the work of Bohumila Grögerová and Josef Hiršal, as mentioned above, as well as in texts by Emil Juliš, Jindřich Procházka, Jiří Valoch, Václav Havel and others. In Poland, it is represented by Stanisław Drózdź, who was inspired by the authors of the new wave and radically aimed at “isolating the word from the context”.¹⁵ In both Czechoslovakia and Poland, poetry moved into the sphere of the visual arts, also in view of the ubiquitous censorship of independent underground culture.

During the 1970s, concrete poetry became more “classical”. A second wave of concrete poets moved away from “pure” modernism by steering their production toward “dirty” typewriters (*dirty concrete poetry*), which represented an epilogue to this movement.¹⁶ The easily available typewriter, which could preserve the authenticity of expression in contrast to the elaborate typesetting, provided a democratic way of working and made the poetry writing accessible to different social classes. In the following decade, the movement gradually began to dilute into various intermedia expressions: visual poetry, conceptual art, literature, anti-writing or un-creative writing,¹⁷ typewriter art, mail art, software art, text works, sound and spatial installations, performances, moving and static image, graphic design, typography, etc.

Concrete poetry became a focus of attention again at the beginning of the new millennium. This interest continues to persist, and there is a new appreciation for it. For example, it is no longer seen as a purely male affair. Old and new anthologies of concrete poetry are being published (such as the reprints of *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, Emmett Williams, 1967; *Concerning Concrete Poetry*, Bob Copping, Peter Mayer, 1978; *The New Concrete: Visual Poetry in the 21st Century*, Victoria Bean, Chris McCabe, 2015; *Women in Concrete Poetry: 1959–1979*, Alex Balgiu, Mónica de la Torre, 2020; *Concrete Poetry: A 21st-century Anthology*, Nancy Perloff, 2021, etc.) together with books by classics of the movement, including previously unpublished volumes.¹⁸ Retrospective solo and group exhibitions are organized in private galleries and public institutions, such as *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts – ICA (2009) with a rich accompanying program; *Concrete Poetry: Words and Sounds in Graphic Space* at the Getty Research Institute (2017), in 2021 complemented by the above-mentioned anthology; an extensive retrospective of Augusto de Campos entitled *Rever* at the SESC Pompéia in São Paulo (2016) and that of Bohumila Grögerová entitled *Setiny* at the Star Summer Palace in Prague (2021) and many others. Concrete poets also make their way into various art biennials; for example, at the 59th Venice Biennale this year, the main exhibition includes a “cabinet” devoted to the historical exhibition *Materializzazione del linguaggio*, prepared for the 38th Venice Biennale in 1978 as a women-only exhibition. Considering the fact that concrete poetry and the art world in general used to be dominated exclusively by men, this exhibition can be considered groundbreaking.

Returns to concrete poetry are related to the revival of visual poetry in the form of the everyday use of the digital environment, as well as to the rise of self-publishing and experimental literary work of the younger generation. Some of the working methods of concrete poets have become commonplace with the advent of new technologies and become part of everyday life and communication, where, for example, text editors allow for easy processing of text by editing, montage (copy and paste) as well as inserting of web links and images. Texts can be easily visually modified – it is possible to select a font and its size, add color or emphasize text in another graphic way, export it to different formats – and via e-mail, text message and simple mobile and computer applications easily distribute them to almost every corner of the world. Of course, one cannot forget social media posts, which are a specific form of communication combining image, text and graphic tags.

Kenneth Goldsmith compares the Internet and contemporary digital artefacts such as video, photography and music based on alphanumeric codes with some of the experiments of the classics of concrete poetry. According to Goldsmith, alphanumeric codes are “identical material” to the typewriter that the concrete poets used to create their works. He also notes that contemporary visual or concrete poetry, if we allow for its existence, fully reflects the digital environment, is familiar with all of its possibilities, which it thematizes, but is often transferred to the analogue environment – hence the term post-digital.¹⁹ For example, artists are returning to the typewriter, rubber stamps, typography or the principles of collage with manifestations of cut and paste culture.

Pavel Büchler

Pavel Büchler (born 1952 in Prague; lives and works in Manchester) belongs to the generation that entered the art scene in the 1970s and was active in Czechoslovakia outside the official sphere. In 1981 Büchler emigrated to England. Since the beginning of his artistic practice, he has been concerned with the dematerialization of art and the conceptual work with text, e.g., by intervening in books and exploring the limits of language, which has resulted in an increasingly sophisticated form of his literary practice. In the late 1980s, he taught at the Slade School of Fine Art in London; in 1997 he became the head of the fine art department at the Glasgow School of Art. In 1997 he was appointed Professor of Fine Art at the Manchester Metropolitan University, where he actively taught until 2016 and now is Emeritus Professor.

Büchler’s work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions, e.g., at the Moravian Gallery in Brno (2021), Galerie PCP in Paris (2018), the Künstlerhaus Palais Thurn und Taxis in Bregenz (2014), as well as group exhibitions, e.g., at the National Gallery Prague (2019–2020), the Fondazione Prada in Milan (2018), the Palazzo Fortuny in Venice (2016), Galerie Rudolfinum in Prague (2015) and the Tinguely Museum in Basel (2010).

Büchler is presented in the exhibition by his realization entitled *Secondary Information*, documenting the breadth of his conceptual approach to text and language. It is a formally simple performance that introduces an unusual situation into the exhibition space. It features an actor / gallery invigilator sitting at a small typist’s desk with a mechanical typewriter. Every time he is approached by a visitor, the invigilator types the words “სიჩუმი თუ ზვიძლუბა” (silence please) on a piece of paper and without any further comment hands it to the visitor by whom he was addressed.

The performance has taken place twice so far, first at the Pratt Institute in New York (2011) and later at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham (2020). Compared to previous performances, its presentation at the *Ora et lege* exhibition provides it with new interpretative frameworks. The words “silence please” refer not only to the habit of moving silently in the exhibition hall, but also to the conditions of the sacred space of a Catholic or Orthodox church, where silence is part of the liturgy and contemplation of God. In the case of the Benedictine Order, the phrase also refers to one of its fundamental characteristics, accompanied by peace, humility, gentleness and serenity, which are reflected in the quiet and deliberate outward appearance of the Benedictine monk. For this exhibition, the performance has been updated by the use of a typewriter with the Georgian alphabet.

Pavel Büchler
Secondary Information 2011
performance
courtesy of the artist

1 Bohumila Grögerová and Josef Híršal, Deset tisíc změn se znovu mění (March 1993), in: Petr Kotyk (ed.), *Deset tisíc změn se znovu mění*.

Dno všeho vrchol prázdnoty. Rozhovory a promluvy českých literátů z let 1990–1995, Cherm, Prague 2008, pp. 117–118.

2 Kenneth Goldsmith, A Brief Overview of Anti-Writing, in: Mathieu Copeland – Balthazar Lovay (eds.), *The Anti-Museum*, Fri Art, Fribourg 2017, p. 642..

3 Fahlström took inspiration for the title from the Owl character in the children’s book about Winnie the Pooh and his attempt to translate “A Happy Birthday” into Swedish and subtitled it *Manifesto for Concrete Poetry*.

4 Nancy Perloff, *Concrete Poetry, A 21st-century Anthology*, Reaktion Books, London 2021, pp. 12–13.

5 The manifesto is available at: https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_20031/?st=gallery, accessed on 3 June 2022.

6 Perloff (Note 4), pp. 12–13.

7 Tania Örum – Jesper Olsson (eds.), *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950–1975*, Brill Publishers, Leiden 2016, p. 480.

8 Perloff (Note 4), p. 16.

9 Manifesto is available at: <http://www.broodthaers.us/MEDIA/00965.pdf>, accessed on 3 June 2022.

10 Mary Ellen Sold, Brazil, in: eadem (eds.), *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, available at: <https://ubu-mirror.ch/papers/solt/brazil.html>, accessed on 2 February 2022.

11 For more, see Kenneth Goldsmith, Make it New: Post-Digital, Concrete Poetry in the 21st Century, in: Victoria Bean – Chris McCabe (eds.), *The New Concrete: Visual Poetry in the 21st Century*, Hayward Publishing, London 2015, p. 11. – Charles Eppley, *Concrete Poetry of the Noigandres, 1958–1965*, available at: <http://avant.org/event/noigandres/>, accessed on 3 June 2022.

12 Sold (Note 10).

13 For more, see Gerhard Rühm, *The Phenomenon of the Wiener Gruppe in the Vienna of the Fifties and Sixties*, available at: https://ubu-mirror.ch/papers/ruhm_vienna.html, accessed on 3 June 2022.

14 The manifesto is available at: <https://391.org/manifestos/1962-manifesto-new-poetry-visual-phonice-pierre-garnier/>, accessed on 4 June 2022

15 Małgorzata Dawidek Gryglicka, Konkrétní poezie a konceptuální umění. Odlišnosti a společná východiska. Studie o vybraných otázkách polské neoavantgardy na příkladu tvorby Stanisława Drózdze a Jarosława Kozłowského, in: Ondřej Buddeus – Markéta Magidová (eds.), *TPřítí slova, Literatura a konceptuální tendence 1949–2015*, Tranzit, Prague 2015, p. 99.

16 The typewriter is noisy, there are misprints, ghost prints, overprints, doubling and wobbly lines etc. For more, see Goldsmith (Note 2), p. 12.

17 A term used by American poet Kenneth Goldsmith to describe the crossover of conceptual art and poetry. This manifests itself in the use of techniques not traditionally thought of as belonging to the realm of literature. Examples include the use of the Google search engine to create poetry, generating text with software, working in a word processing environment, repeatedly forwarding a blank email or copying the numerical code of jpgs, etc., that is, the treatment of text through methods of cutting, editing, copying, and the transfer of documentary and archival practices from the digital sphere to the literary environment.

18 A more detailed overview is provided, for example, in Jakub Guziur’s text *Konkrétní poezie a její (post) digitální obdoby*, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356749571_Konkretni_poezie_a_jeji_postdigitalni_obdoby_Concrete_Poetry_and_its_PostDigital_Variants, accessed on 10 February 2022.

19 Goldsmith (Note 2), pp. 14–15.

Bohumila Grögerová

Bohumila Grögerová (1921–2014, Prague) was a Czech translator, editor and writer who beginning in the 1950s worked closely with the poet Josef Hiršal. In their joint work, they focused mainly on visual and sound poetry, radio plays, poetic prose and extensive translation activity. In the 1960s they became part of the international artistic movement of experimental poetry and pioneers of concrete poetry in Czechoslovakia. At the same time, they were drawn to the issues of cybernetics and new technologies, which Grögerová also explored in her own textual works. Her creative work long oscillated between sound poetry, visual art and distinctive philosophical puzzles.

Grögerová's works have been presented in numerous solo exhibitions, e.g., at the Star Summer Palace in Prague (2021), Literaturhaus in Berlin (2012) and Brno House of Arts (2009), as well as included in group exhibitions, e.g., at the Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Bolzano (2019–2020), 8mička Gallery in Humpolec (2019) and Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe (2016).

The diverse oeuvre of Bohumila Grögerová, a pioneer of concrete poetry in Czechoslovakia, is represented in the exhibition by her text *Love*, originally published in the book *JOB-BOJ*, which she authored in collaboration with Josef Hiršal in the years 1960–1962.¹ The type-written text is part of the *Grammar Texts* chapter. It is a visual constellation of the pronouns *on* (he) and *ona* (she), which are combined together in sixteen lines and gradually merge into one word. The text concludes with the gender-neutral pronoun *ONO* (it) in capital letters, which is the culmination of a play with the grammatical structures of Grögerová's mother tongue.

For Grögerová and Hiršal, the book *JOB-BOJ* represented not only an attempt at interdisciplinary expression and a new form of poetry, but also a tool against the misuse of language to legitimize a certain (political) system. This social-critical dimension is also present in the above-mentioned text, which, from today's perspective, also touches on the issue of gender linguistics and the degree of representation of femininity versus masculinity in the Czech language, and also develops the theme of gender-neutral language and non-binary grammar.

The text is presented on the steps of the lobby of the Writers' House of Georgia. It becomes visible from the frontal view upon entering the exhibition, and while the visitor ascends the stairs, he/she is able to read its individual lines.

Bohumila Grögerová

Love

from the book of experimental texts *JOB-BOJ*, in collaboration with Josef Hirschal
1960–1962

text printed on the stairs

courtesy of the heirs

¹ Josef Hiršal – Bohumila Grögerová, *JOB-BOJ*, Československý spisovatel, Prague 1968, p. 33.

David Horvitz

David Horvitz (born 1982 in Los Angeles; lives and works in Los Angeles) focuses on artistic and research projects on environmental and social issues in his work. He employs various media such as artists' books, photography and performance and mail art. He extends the boundaries of mail art in the virtual sphere using Internet communication (e-mail or chat). This is then juxtaposed with natural systems, natural phenomena and living organisms.

Horvitz's work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions, e.g., at the Centre Pompidou-Metz (2022), CURA HQ in Rome (2021), SCAI The Bathhouse in Tokyo (2019), the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York (2014), Blum & Poe in Los Angeles (2014), Kunsthall Stavanger (2014), as well as group exhibitions, e.g., at the K11 Art Foundation in Hong Kong (2021), the E. A. Shared Space in Tbilisi (2021), Pirelli HangarBicocca in Milan (2017), the Palais de Tokyo in Paris (2017) and MoMA in New York (2015).

For the exhibition, Horvitz has created a series of artist's rubber stamps and a publication, reflecting on the water cycle as a circulatory system necessary for life contrasted with the symbol of the bureaucratized world embodied in rubber stamps. Horvitz's realization is based on his long-standing interest in mail art, a now traditional artistic expression developed by the Fluxus movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

The rubber stamps feature words associated with water, such as "cloud", "rain", "fog", "puddle", "sea", "ocean" and "pond". They are accompanied by the prayer-book-sized publication serving as a guide to Georgian expressions whose equivalents in English are virtually non-existent. All of the 65 words that appear in it refer to different forms of rain, for example, "ქსმა" means a torrential downpour, when the sky appears to touch the ground, or "წინკლვა", which designates barely audible drops of water.

The words refer to the natural water cycle, but they also open up a symbolism within religion – holy water, which in the Orthodox Church, in addition to baptisms and blessings of all kinds (especially of liturgical and sacred objects, but also secular dwellings, etc.), is also intended for drinking – especially for the faithful who are not admitted to Holy Communion.

David Horvitz

you შენ ღრუბელ წვიმ fog ნისლი გუბ ზღვა ოკეანე pond გუბურა ცვარი river
მდინარე ნაკადული მყინვარი ბურუსი ზესხმა კოხშინხალი წინკლვა
ლელეხი 2022

participatory custom wooden hand stamps to be stamped in an infinite variety
of visual poems

dimensions infinite

courtesy of the artist and ChertLüdde, Berlin

Susan Howe

Susan Howe (born 1937 in Boston; lives and works in Guilford) is an American poet, essayist and critic, who has been closely associated with the Language poets, an avant-garde group that emerged in the late 1960s in the United States. Since the beginning of her career, Howe has worked across many media and disciplines and has been interested in the visual and sonic possibilities of language. Her work is often classified as Postmodern because it expands traditional notions of literary genres, including their theoretical foundations and approaches to their history. Howe's texts are multi-layered and allusive, often mirroring the early history and ancient mythology of the Americas as well as the work of other authors.

Howe's work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions, e.g., at the Yale Union in Portland (2013), as well as group exhibitions, e.g., at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (2014), the Bureau des Réalités in Brussels (2018), the ISSUE Project Room in New York (in collaboration with David Grubbs, 2013), and repeatedly at MoMA in New York.

Although Howe's oeuvre has long straddled the boundaries between visual art and auditory production (in the form of sound poetry), she often realizes her artistic experiments with text in the traditional book form. Up to now she has authored over thirty such publications. At *The Palace of Concrete Poetry* she is represented by her most recent book entitled *Concordance*. It was first published in a limited edition in 2019 (46 copies, The Grenfell Press) and in a larger edition a year later.¹ It is presented at the exhibition for viewers to browse through its pages.

The heart of the book is a dynamic collage of slivers of poems and novels by classics of the English-speaking world, including John Milton, Charles Dickens, Jonathan Swift and William Butler Yeats. They are juxtaposed with information from various field guides to birds and trees, the "poetry" of marginalia and the author's interventions. As is characteristic of Howe, there is the repetitive use of the same grapheme, the printing of verse upside down, the crossing out of parts of the text, the overlapping of words or the covering of text with text of a different origin, etc. With a few exceptions, the poems are placed in the center of the page and appear as visual constellations counting on the surrounding emptiness. This principle of work, in which the pages are treated as images and the words are positioned on the surface of the page with respect to the blank space that surrounds them, was already purposefully utilized by the French Symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé in his work, which has inspired many concrete poets.

Susan Howe
Concordance
publication, published by New Directions, 2020
21.8 × 15.3 cm
courtesy of the artist and New Directions Publishing, New York
copyright © 2019, 2020 by Susan Howe

¹ Susan Howe, *Concordance*,
New Directions Books, New York 2020.

Keti Kapanadze

Keti Kapanadze (born 1962 in Tbilisi; lives and works alternately in Bonn, Germany and Tbilisi) produced her first graphic and photographic works in the early 1980s, which placed her among the pioneers of conceptual art in Georgia. From the beginning of her artistic activity, Kapanadze has investigated the semantic and visual aspects of the (mother) tongue and the possibilities of a visual sign that could be understood across cultures and national languages. Through painting, photography, performance and installation, Kapanadze explores the deconstruction of word and image and their mutual rearrangement. Her works have a poetic character and a specific, almost self-ironizing humor. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Kapanadze worked abroad and settled in Germany in 2000.

Kapanadze has had many solo exhibitions, e.g., at the Kunstforum in Zentrifuge in Bonn (2020), Galerie Gisela Clement in Bonn (2019), Gallery for Contemporary Art, Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi (2018) and NADA Miami in Florida (2018), and featured in many group exhibitions, e.g., at the 4710 Gallery in Tbilisi (2021), the State Silk Museum in Tbilisi (2018) and the National Gallery of Georgia in Tbilisi (2018).

For *The Palace of Concrete Poetry*, Kapanadze has created an object whose shape resembles the Rolling Stones logo known as Hot Lips in the form of an open mouth with a protruding tongue. The words *Mother Tongue* in the artist's native language are formed into this shape, which, along with a reference to the Rolling Stones band founded in the year of her birth, becomes a metaphor for the artist's childhood and adolescence. The mother tongue is presented here as a formative element that, through its specificities, influences our thinking and reasoning about the world. Kapanadze touches upon the issue of gender linguistics and gender stereotypes rooted in national languages, manifested, for example, in the gender as a grammatical category. The use of the logo refers to the pictorial symbol as a universally comprehensible pictogram. It thus recalls the idea of some representatives of concrete poetry of a supranational verbal (phono) / visual language superior to national languages.¹

Keti Kapanadze
Mother Tongue 2022
lacquered metal
100 × 100 × 0.6 cm
courtesy of the artist

¹ Jakub Guziur, *Konkrétní poezie a její (post)digitální obdoby*, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356749571_Konkrétní_poezie_a_její_postdigitální_obdoby_Concrete_Poetry_and_its_PostDigital_Variants, accessed on 10 February 2022.

Barbara Kapusta

Barbara Kapusta (born 1983 in Vienna; lives and works in Vienna) is a writer and artist who in her works interconnects human bodies with the language of the digital world. Her texts are literary fiction that, in the form of fragments or whole stories, penetrate into artists' publications, performances, film works and object installations on the border between physical and virtual environments. The texts touch upon environmental issues, cyberculture, queerness, as well as the ideas of a post-gender world and post-humanism.

Kapusta's work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions, e.g., at the Kunsthalle Bratislava (2022), Gianni Manhattan in Vienna (2020), the Kunstraum in London (2019), as well as group exhibitions, e.g., at the Kunsthaus Hamburg (2022), the Belvedere 21 in Vienna (2021), the Kunsthalle Wien (2021), the Futura Gallery in Prague (2021), the Kunstforum Wien (2020) and the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin (2017).

Kapusta is represented in the exhibition by her site-specific work entitled *Futures Spread Like Flames*, based on a text printed on fabric. The text is written in the font Futures, which Kapusta designed for her solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bratislava (2022) in collaboration with the graphic designer Sabo Day. Futures is an alphabet of 26 characters stylized into moving flames of fire, complicating the overall readability of the text, which in this work is written from the bottom up. Typography here is taken into account as one of the psychological tools. The flame-like silhouettes of the letters, or words for that matter, seem to recede from the present, foreshadowing a threatening and inevitable (climatic) apocalypse.

In this work, Kapusta refers to the tradition of visual poetry and the work of concrete poets who sought to "free the linguistic sign from arbitrariness and to reveal or create a connection between the signifier and the signified."¹ Like Kapusta, they did so out of the conviction that they were contributing to the revival of linguistic communication.² The affinity with the concrete poetry of the 1950s and 1960s can also be found in the need to shape language by the means of our time, i.e., by the technological possibilities of digital media, and that not only in terms of form but also in terms of content.

Barbara Kapusta
Futures Spread like Flames 2022
cotton fabric, digital print, metal
300 × 150 cm
courtesy of the artist and Gianni Manhattan, Vienna

¹ Jakub Guziur, *Konkrétní poezie a její (post)digitální obdoby*, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356749571_Konkretni_poezie_a_jeji_postdigitalni_obdoby_Concrete_Poetry_and_its_PostDigital_Variants, accessed on 10 February 2022.
² Ibid.

Janice Kerbel

Janice Kerbel (born 1969 in Toronto; lives and works in London) is a conceptual artist whose work explores communication – and sometimes the lack thereof – through prints, performances and light and sound. Her constant shift of media is a result of the artist's interest in transcending established notions of particular disciplines. It becomes a tool for her to explore the indeterminate space between reality and fiction, abstraction and representation. Her work often involves extensive research in the form of plans, proposals, scripts or scenarios that cannot or will not happen in reality. She draws on the potential of language and text to convey these imagined events.

Kerbel's work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions, e.g., at i8 Gallery in Reykjavik (2019), green-grassi in London (2018), the Tate Britain in London (2010), the Moderna Museet in Stockholm (2006), as well as group exhibitions, e.g., at Peak in London (2019), the Liverpool Biennial (2018), the Hamburger Kunsthalle (2017), MoMA in New York (2013) and the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin (2010). In 2015 she was nominated for the Turner Prize.

Kerbel's digital posters on display at the exhibition are from the *Fight* series, which was first presented as part of the 2018 Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art. The series documents a fight between twelve dancers, whose moves were choreographed by the artist. The fight was monitored in such a way that every move appears in words on a poster at the height it happened in relation to someone's body. The words thus faithfully demonstrate the course of staged physical violence. Later, these verbal records were transferred onto silkscreen prints, whose visual form, along with their placement on the wall, resembles that of commercial billboards and posters. However, the violence of the brawl expressed in words such as "choke" or "slam" (a move in which a fighter lifts his opponent and slams him to the ground), is paradoxically visually attractive. In the area of the upper body and head, for example, the intensity of the words in combination with typography almost becomes visual poetry, distracting the viewer from the fact that they are watching a record of human aggression.

This piece is reminiscent of body art performances from the 1960s and 1970s, in which artists explored the limits of the human body, especially the degree of pain that a person is able to bear. Most of the actors used their own bodies to express themselves, but Kerbel uses mostly the bodies of others, who are manipulated from the position of a higher authority.

Janice Kerbel
Fight 2018/2022
digital print on campaign poster paper
216 × 85.8 cm
courtesy of the artist and greengrassi, London

Ferdinand Kriwet

Ferdinand Kriwet (born 1942, Düsseldorf – died 2018, Bremen) was a German multimedia artist belonging to the Düsseldorf neo-avant-garde scene and the International Concrete Poetry Movement.¹ Beginning in the early 1960s, he engaged with phonetic, semantic and visual components of text. He experimented with the format of radio pieces in the spirit of the New Radio Play (*Neues Hörspiel*). His series *Hörtex* (Radio Texts), produced for German public radio stations, is a sound collage of edited sound bites taken from mass media broadcasts – political speeches, news, advertising slogans as well as prayers.² In addition to audio works, Kriwet has created text discs (*Sehtexte / Rundscheiben*) and artist's books, and dealt with film, performance media, installation and painting.

Kriwet's artwork has been presented in many solo exhibitions, e.g., at the Georg Kargl Fine Arts in Vienna (2017), BQ in Berlin (2013), the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2011), the Modern Institute in Glasgow (2008), as well as group exhibitions, e.g., the BQ in Berlin (2022), Kunsthalle Wien (2020–2021), the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (2018), the Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe (2016), the Institute of Contemporary Art in London (2012) and MoMA in New York (2012).

Kriwet, one of the pioneers of concrete poetry, is represented in the exhibition by a plate designed in 1975 for the German luxury porcelain manufacturer Rosenthal. It is an artist's plate No. 8 from a broader collection of plates in the limited edition of 5,000 pieces created for Rosenthal by contemporary artists. The artistic director of the collection was Eugen Gomringer, who had worked with Rosenthal between 1967 and 1985 and who also selected the individual designers; in addition to Kriwet, they included Max Bill, Otto Pien and Günter Grass.³ Gomringer himself is considered the father of concrete poetry in German-speaking countries and his close relationship with the Brazilian group Noigandres was the beginning of this international movement.⁴

Kriwet's design consists of a group of various slogans written in capital letters that cover part of the plate's surface in circles. In many cases, the words recall the Old Testament story of the creation of the world and the Garden of Eden – there are names Adam and Eve, as well as words such as “passion”, “desire”, “serpent”, but also manifestations of Hermeticism taking the form of the verb “to incarnate”. In the middle of the plate there is a cross consisting of the words “kunst teller” (artist's plate). The design of the plate corresponds to other discs by Kriwet with circular text (*Sehtexte / Rundscheiben / Text Signs*) that made him famous and exist in many forms. In the context of religious taboo, let us mention the *HOMODELIGHT* disc, where the words on the theme of love and same sex desire appear in concentric circles.

Ferdinand Kriwet
Text-Teller / Text-Plate
Rosenthal Künstler-Teller Nr. 8 / Rosenthal Artist's Plate No. 8
1975
porcelain, diameter 26 cm, in box 27 × 27 cm
edition 5,000 copies
private collection

¹ <https://www.pavelnovotny.net/preklady/ferdinand-kriwet/>, accessed on 10 May 2022.

² Ibid.

³ In 1974, Eugen Gomringer designed plate No. 3 for this Rosenthal collection with the inscription *Der einfache Weg ist einfach der Weg*.

⁴ Nancy Perloff (ed.), *Concrete Poetry, A 21st-century Anthology*, Reaktion Books, London 2021, p. 16. – Mary Ellen Sold, Brazil, in: eadem, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, available at: <https://ubu-mirror.ch/papers/solt/brazil.html>, accessed on 2 February 2022.

Ewa Partum

Ewa Partum (born 1945 in Grodzisk Mazowiecki; lives and works in Berlin) belongs to the generation of the first Polish conceptual artists. She is also considered one of the pioneers of feminist art in Eastern Europe. Since the late 1960s, her multimedia work has been concerned with linguistics and the materialization of language in an attempt to discover a new artistic expression for her social activism. Her practice was loosely related to the tradition of Constructivism in Poland and its experiments on the border between visual art and poetry, which Partum updated within the conceptual discourse of the time. Often ephemeral realizations and formally temperate performances conceal a radical destructive gesture that appears as a kind of rebellion against the totalitarian regime in Eastern Europe.

Partum has had many solo exhibitions, e.g., at the Hunt Kastner in Prague (2019), the Museum of Art in Łódź (2015), the Wyspa Institute of Art in Gdańsk (2006), as well as group exhibitions, e.g., at MoMA in New York (2015–2016), the Tate Modern in London (2012–2013), the Palais de Tokyo in Paris (2012), the Centre Pompidou in Paris (2010), the Museum moderner Kunst in Vienna (2009) and MoCA in Los Angeles (2007).

Partum's poetic and politically engaged work is presented in the exhibition by an installation from her *Active Poetry* series of actions, which the artist first realized in 1971 in Warsaw. At that time, she used a page from a James Joyce novel and scattered single alphabet letters, cut out of cardboard, around the city's arcades. With the movement of passers-by, they dispersed through the space, randomly creating scrambles of new words. Partum later took this performance outdoors, letting the letters drift in the open air across the countryside or flow on rolling sea waves. The series of actions was based on the repetition of texts by modernists such as James Joyce or Marcel Proust, and later on philosophical texts by Immanuel Kant or letters by Franz Kafka to Milena Jesenská. These excerpts were presented by thousands of letters cut out of cardboard, used as an official propaganda tool in the 1960s and 1970s in Poland by the communist regime, placed in offices, workplaces, schools, etc. When the action ended, Partum left the scattered letters in place to blend in with their surroundings.

These process-oriented works explore the limits of language through the deconstruction of its grammatical, syntactic and semantic structure and disrupt the principle of linear reading. The new text is shaped by coincidence and external conditions such as the movement of bodies or confrontation with elements associated with femininity (water, wind). For *The Palace of Concrete Poetry*, Partum opted for a Polish translation of the poem სიმფონია ფესვიების (The Symphony of the Roots) by one of the most important Georgian writers of the first half of the 20th century, Galaktion Tabidze (1892–1959). Here, the letters of his much-multiplied 1943 poem are scattered all around the garden of the Writers' House of Georgia.

Ewa Partum
Active Poetry Installation
based on the poem სიმფონია ფესვიების (The Symphony of the Roots) by Galaktion Tabidze in Polish translation (Pieśń korzeni) 1971/2022
white cardboard letters
dimensions infinite
courtesy of the artist

Jan Šerých

Jan Šerých (born 1972 in Prague; lives and works in Prague) is a Czech conceptual artist. His multimedia work deals with the fragile border between reality and fiction, or mystification. Visually, his works are characterized by formal reduction and monochromatic execution, based on rational work with new technologies and computer software, but which is mixed with the emotional content of individual works.¹ Šerých's works are a post-digital analogy of visual poetry influenced by the experience of the digital environment, whose features the artist transfers to the analogue world, often in the form of a painted canvas or a site-specific mural.

Šerých's work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions, e.g., at the Týn nad Vltavou Town Gallery (2017), the Hunt Kastner in Prague (2016), Plato Ostrava (2014), České Budějovice House of Art (2003), as well as group exhibitions, e.g., at the Fotograf Gallery in Prague (2022), Prague City Gallery (2021), the National Gallery Prague (2019), the Cursor Gallery in Prague (2019) and the National Museum of Art of Romania in Bucharest (2017).

Snake (2022) on the glass wall of the Writers' House of Georgia conservatory is a paraphrase of a popular quote whose origin is not entirely known, but which is attributed to the short story *Le Joueur généreux* (The Generous Gambler) by Charles Baudelaire published in 1864. Šerých borrowed the quote from the popular neo-noir crime movie *The Usual Suspects* of 1995, where this line is part of a monologue delivered by Roger "Verbal" Kint, a guileful character played by Kevin Spacey: "The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was to convincing the world he didn't exist."² With his variation of the quotation, Šerých has created a symmetrical sentence, which can be read from left and right like a palindrome, while maintaining the same meaning, and had it engraved on panes of glass. However, he has complicated the reading not only by spreading the words over several lines, but also by manipulating the Latin alphabet.

The *Snake* installation represents the transition between digital and analogue environments, characteristic of the artist. With the individual letters engraved on the identical panes of glass, the work resembles a set of glyphs or a non-proportional script from the typewriter keyboard, where all characters are the same size in width and height. In contemporary text editors, this is reminiscent of monospace fonts, the use of which is less frequent than a number of expressive fonts that allow for any kind of modification of letters. From today's perspective, the non-proportional script seems anachronistic, and so Šerých's realization is evocative of the beginnings of concrete poetry, produced principally on the typewriter.

Jan Šerých
Snake 2022
vinyl text on glass
300 × 250 cm
courtesy of the artist and Hunt Kastner Gallery, Prague

¹ Karel Cisař, *Věci, o kterých s nikým nemluvim*, Agite/Fra, Prague 2010, p. 38.

² E-mail correspondence with the artist, 15 February 2022.

Sue Tompkins

Sue Tompkins (born 1971 in Leighton Buzzard) is a British artist whose work explores language through the spoken, sung and written word. Over the years, her projects have included text works, audio works, installations and performances. In these, Tompkins works with fragments of words, phrases and texts gathered from everyday encounters and experiences, creating collages of often absurd associations. The performances involve a rash stream of speech that presents the artist as an ironist and provocateur.

Sue Tompkins has held multiple solo exhibitions, such as at the Halle für Kunst in Lüneburg (2022), the Modern Institute in Glasgow (2018), the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow (2014), the Portland Museum of Modern Art (2013), as well as group exhibitions, including La Galerie – Centre d'art contemporain in Noisy-Le-Sec (2022), the Tenderbooks in London (2018), the Tate Modern in London (2012), ICA in London (2012), the São Paulo Art Biennial (2010) and the Whitechapel in London (2010).

The exhibited series of works on A4 paper is devoted to taboo words from the perspective of a person who criticizes the process of tabooing itself and opposes any (un)conscious acceptance (or rather rejection) of such words by society and individuals. The aim is to demythologize language and reflect the state in which the ideas of higher authorities are collectively obediently accepted. Language is understood here as a peculiar reality defining itself not only against grammatical principles, but also as a kind of rebellion against socio-political or religious pressures and generally proclaimed moral values. The slogans that appear here are written on a typewriter, which loosely refers to its use by concrete poets for whom the typewriter, as a readily available tool, represented a democratic way of working.¹ With all its characteristic features and shortcomings, it is now a nostalgic return to the analogue environment, providing a sense of security and a kind of escape from the pitfalls of the digital world.²

The series of works is presented in a glass showcase along with archival material – old photographs and correspondence relating to the history of the Art Deco Writers' House of Georgia. It also includes the story of the family of the original owner, Georgian philanthropist David Sarajishvili. Here, Tompkins's typewritten works blend with the historical material to further distance themselves from the present.

Sue Tompkins
Untitled 2022
a series of typewritten texts on newsprint
format 29,7 × 21 cm
courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute / Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow

¹ Kenneth Goldsmith, *Make it New: Post-Digital, Concrete Poetry in the 21st Century*, in: Victoria Bean – Chris McCabe (eds.), *The New Concrete: Visual Poetry in the 21st Century*, Hayward Publishing, London 2015, p. 13.

² Jakub Guziur, *Konkrétní poezie a její (post)digitální obdoby*, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356749571_Konkrétní_poezie_a_její_postdigitální_obdoby_Concrete_Poetry_and_its_PostDigital_Variants, accessed on 10 February 2022.

Ora et lege (Pray and Read) is a dialogue between contemporary art and the essence of the teachings of the Benedictine Order and Catholic Church in general. This is a unique project thematically focused on the work of contemporary visual artists with text. From the very beginning it has been conceived as a small biennial with the main exhibition in the Broumov Monastery in Eastern Bohemia (next one to be held in 2023), while in the “odd” year there will be lectures and exhibitions in the Czech Republic as well as abroad. The project is organized by the Educational and Cultural Centre Broumov in collaboration with the curator Monika Čejková. <https://oraetlege.com>

Writers’ House of Georgia was built in the years 1903–1905 by the prominent Georgian philanthropist David Sarajishvili. The building is a great example of Art Nouveau architecture and is acknowledged as a brilliant blend of Georgian and European architectural styles. The house immediately turned into an important center of Tbilisi’s cultural life. In October 2008 the building was passed on to Writers’ House of Georgia. The main task of Writers’ House of Georgia is to popularize Georgian literature, strengthen international relations and support writers from different parts of the world. Writers’ House of Georgia hosts more than 200 literary evenings and events each year. Since 2015, it has been organizing the Tbilisi International Festival of Literature, one of the main cultural events in Georgia. <https://writershouse.ge>

E. A. Shared Space is an independent project space founded by the curator and writer Elene Abashidze. It focuses on contemporary art practices with a strong political dimension. The project space has a curated bookstore and a communal library built through donations by local and international art practitioners and non-profit organizations. <https://easharedspace.ge/en>



The Palace of Concrete Poetry
Writers' House of Georgia
9 September – 9 October 2022

Exhibiting Artists

Pavel Büchler, Bohumila
Grögerová, David Horvitz, Susan
Howe, Ketí Kapanadze, Barbara
Kapusta, Janice Kerbel, Ferdinand
Kriwet, Ewa Partum, Jan Šerých,
Sue Tompkins

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