The Palace of Concrete Poetry

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

Ormet
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.
Introduction

The Palace of Concrete Poetry

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 explain the mention of taboo words which 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.

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 word “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. The word “logos” in Greek (meaning “speech”, “reason”, “thought”, as well as “law” and “concept”), was understood by readers of the Biblical Hebrew in Jesus’s time as an expression of the wisdom of God. “God is the logos” (1:1; 2:7; all that God does, the logos likewise does.” What is created by the word 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 dehyphenologize language through the liberation of words (“parole in liberta”) within an intergenerational dialogue of artists/authors closing or opening a gate towards 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. In the 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.” 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. Many of the concrete poets sought international and intercultural intelligibility; they believed in a supranational verbal (phono) / visual 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), 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 Tsitsiev. 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 Iliya 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 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 notion of new poetry as concrete poetry used to be called by its authors, licit 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 Europe, were more focused on the destruction of the 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. Some authors restored language to its value by using a pure and simple form without ideology, clichés and phrases.

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 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.

Concrete poetry evolved from the French Symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé, whose concepts, 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 Honolulu International Exhibition. This meeting and the establishment of a close relationship between Pignatari and the Noigandres group can be considered the beginning of the International Concrete Poetry Movement.

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 re-established an epilogue to this movement. 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 1980s, this movement gradually began to dilute into various intermediate expression: visual poetry, conceptual art, literature, anti-writing or un-creative writing, typewriter art, mail art, software art, text works, sound and spatial installations, performances, moving and static image, graphic design, typography.

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 Haswell/Maria de Miras), *New Concrete: Visual Poetry in the 21st Century*, Victoria Bean, Chris McCabe, 2015; *Women in Concrete Poetry*: 1959–1979, Alex Băluţ, Măonica de la Torce, 2020; *Concrete Poetry: A 21st Century Anthology*, Nancy Perloff, 2021, etc.) Some digitize books of classics of the movement, including previously unpublished volumes. Retrospective solo and group exhibitions are organized in private galleries and public institutions, such as *Poor Old Tom’s House*, *The Institute of Contemporary Arts – 50 Years*,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 on graphic poetry in the digital environment, is familiar with all of its contemporary digital artefacts such as video, photography and modern digital 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 platforms, 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 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 possibilities, which it thematizes, but is often transferred to the analogue environment – hence the term post-digital.

For example, artists are returning to the typewriter, rubber stamps, typography or the principles of collage with manipulations of cut and paste culture.


12. Sold (Note 10).


15. Małgorzata Dawidek, Kozłowského, in: Ondřej Buddeus – Pavel Büchler – Christiane Welsch (eds.), Neoavantgady na příkladu tvorby o vybraných otázках polské literatury, Prague 2016, p. 23; for more, see Kenneth Goldsmith (Note 2).
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 (2023), 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), šmíčka 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.

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

John 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, “qlobba” means a torrential downpour, when the sky appears to touch the ground, or “5n66_gregga”, 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.

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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. 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.

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 Künstlerforum in Zentrifuge in Bonn (2020), Galerie Gisele 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.

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

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

Barbara Kapusta (born 1943 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 Kunsthäuser 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 28 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.” Like Kapusta, they did so out of the conviction that they were contributing to the revival of linguistic communication. 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.

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 18 Gallery in Reykjavik (2019), greengras 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.
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. 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 Hörtexte (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. In addition to audio works, Kriwet has created text discs (Sehtexte / Rundscheiben / Text Signs) 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 (2014), 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 1947 and 1945 and who also selected the individual designers; in addition to Kriwet, they included Max Bill, Otto Pien and Günter Grass. 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.

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 reincarnate”. 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

Ewa Partum
Active Poetry Installation
based on the poem ჰორშამ ჰორძობო ჰორძობო (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. 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 (2018), 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.” 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.

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 Paolo 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. 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.

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.

Jan Šerých

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

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
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, Keti Kapanadze, Barbara Kapusta, Janice Kerbel, Ferdinand Kriwet, Ewa Partum, Jan Šerých, Sue Tompkins

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Translation
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Copy Editing
Eva Hrubá, Martin Pavlis

Graphic Design
Jakub Samek

Production
Žaneta Vávrová

Printed by
Tiskárna Broumov

Acknowledgements

ISBN
978-80-908566-3-9

Published by the Educational and Cultural Centre Broumov in 2022. www.klasterbroumov.cz

Supported by