Widey recognised as one of the leading theorists and outstanding international practitioners of concrete poetry, Dom Sylvester Houédard (1924–1992) is firmly rooted in Lisson Gallery’s early history, with his first solo exhibition held at the gallery during its inaugural year in 1967. A practicing Benedictine priest and noted theologian, Houédard, also known by his initials ‘dsh’ or ‘the Dom,’ wrote extensively on new approaches to art, spirituality and philosophy, and collaborated with artists such as Gustav Metzger, Yoko Ono and John Cage. His works that often incorporate language and known as ‘typestracts,’ (dsh’s friend Edwin Morgan coined this term “a combination of ‘typewriter’ and ‘abstract,” are made with the use of ubiquitous ink ribbons blue, black and red), are made using an Olivetti Lettera 22.

Born Pierre-Thomas-Paul Joseph in 1924 in Guernsey and educated in Rome and Jesus College Oxford, Houédard worked as a military intelligence officer during the war, before joining the community at Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire in 1949, becoming ordained as a Benedictine monk a decade later. Houédard OSB (Order of Saint Benedict) went on to help introduce concrete poetry to Britain in 1961, exploring its links to cybernetics and Wittgenstein’s linguistic theory. He was literary editor of the Jerusalem Bible from 1961-66 and founded the Gloucestershire Ode Construction Company in 1967. As well as publishing prodigiously and lecturing at the Royal College of Art and the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) among other venues, he showed his work at Lisson Gallery, London, UK (2018; 1967-70); Kurimanzutto, New York, USA (2018); Lower Green, Norwich, UK (2018); Richard Saltoun, London, UK (2017); NUCA Gallery, Norwich, UK (2010); Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, UK (2009, 1965); Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A), London, UK (1971); Museum of Modern Art, Oxford; Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, UK (1972). He refocused on religion for the last ten years of his life, as an infirmarian, and died, aged 67, on January 15, 1992.
Tibetan music as a child, while his studies of Zen and Chögyam Trungpa to establish the first British Tibetan transmission of this doctrine to the West and especially an instrumental conduit for the transplantation and practices of Vajrayana Buddhism and was further Dom Sylvester Houédard wrote extensively on the themes that are rooted in the meditative practices of the with specific reference to his use of Buddhist and Tantric to the show written by Simpson, giving context to his Rawson's words about concrete poetry in his 1964 talk FORM: “from this very simple pure FORM comes something hat that is unreal […] it seeks attainment of a blissful words about concrete poetry in his 1964 talk EYEAR: “from this very simple pure FORM comes something that affects the content the absence of the poets self in the poem – concrete it is less”. Houédard’s typestracts are not just “less” in the sense that they contain no narrative or lyrical self, they are “less” in the sense that they undo the selloff of all objects. Such a deconstruction of language on the typewriter led to the visual experiments in his poems as “APERSPECTIVE NONSYNTACTIC POLYRECURSIVE structure”, and then an artistic methodology that transforms forms of his poems of Galaxies into a visual-up the forward typestracts, critically framed within a Tantric practice, are a repetitive, permutational pursuit of the “unselled” and hence non-conscious, which will never and could never submit to noun-thoughts structural.

The typestracts, as notebooks in the Lisson Gallery archive exemplary, began with the practice of making graphs built up from the variations on the key words, including colons, apostrophes and quotation marks. Rudimentary circles, spatialist landscapes and co-occillations may range from a back slash and forward slash keys gradually developing towards the deliberately repetitive geometry of the three-dimensional circles, areas, pyramids, triangles, ladders and stumps of his later work. Forms are endlessly revisited, yet each typestract has its own identity and independence. This visual, “intentional” concrete language knowingly engages with a Tantric discourse of coded language. of forms, often found in his immediate environment, Houédard developed a methodology of Tantric collage, that weaved together what he outlined above as forces, events, consciousness and objects. In Houédard’s first solo exhibition at the Lisson Gallery in 1967 these laminate poems were described in the accompanying exhibition leaflet as “cosmic patches (allegedly at repairing the universe)”. At one level they are counter-culturally “cosmic” in the way that the UFO Club and its manifestations, or the performances of The Exploding Galaxy were “cosmic” or mandalas in a very much a seemingly stochastic and kaleidoscopic juxtaposition. They are visually very different from the precision and permutational variations of the typestracts, but they too engage with Tantric practices of transforming the mind and the objects that appear to the mind. Through a seemingly stochastic and kaleidoscopic juxtaposition of forms, often found in his immediate environment, Houédard developed a methodology of Tantric collage, that weaved together what he outlined above as forces, events, consciousness and objects. In Houédard’s first solo exhibition at the Lisson Gallery in 1967 these laminate poems were described in the accompanying exhibition leaflet as “cosmic patches (allegedly at repairing the universe)”. At one level they are counter-culturally “cosmic” in the way that the UFO Club and its manifestations, or the performances of The Exploding Galaxy were “cosmic” or mandalas in a very much a seemingly stochastic and kaleidoscopic juxtaposition.

footnotes
3. ibid., 96.
13. Ibid., 96.
23. Ibid., 96.
1. moiré
One characteristic of Houédard’s typewriter practice was extending the visual space through grids of graphemes, sometimes superimposing one grid on top of another to create a dense surface or a variation on a previous composition. Houédard called these Moiré poems, after the French word meaning an independent, usually optically kinetic pattern, seen when two geometrically regular patterns are superimposed at an acute angle. In his Moiré poems, Houédard experimented with a resolution to the challenge of articulating in language how two di

2. spiritual geometries
Yantras are graphic representations involving geometri
cal designs. They are essentially models, diagrams and devices for concentrating the mind, focusing attention and channelling consciousness. In Indo-Tibetan Tantric art, geometrical figures including the point, the straight line, the circle and the square all have sym

3. architecture
The yantra's well known form of yantra, can be understood as psychosomatics that act as maps used by meditative practitioners in ritual visualizations, to move towards ever more subtle states of mind and outwards again. A spiritual path from the world of form to the formless and back again. This collection of works unfolds the spiritual paths of both Zen and Tibetan Mahayan Buddhist method practices within temple-like configurations that can be termed spiritual architecture.

4. yantra
A mandala is a schematized geometrical image that depicts the entire universe in one diagram. In Buddhist Tantric practice, a mantric imagery of a celestial palace in which a Tantric deity abides. In this collection of works Houédard depicted the mandalas of the Buddhas Green Tathagata (Buddha of the dawn) &- down tradition, the seed syllable of Buddha Amoghasiddhi, the seed syllable of Tārā blanche, the mandala of Vajrayogini (the red dākini), the mandala of Buddha Vairochana (yantra of sex) &- down trajectories &- down tra) &- down tra) &- down tracts as “ziggurats” or “space-probes” that embody the essence of the longer mantra. In the practice of the body mandala these seed syllables are visualised at the chakra points and when sound is loud, they activate the energy of the chakras in order to purify and transform the mind and body. What is notable about Houédard’s bijas is that they are concrete word portraits in the English alphabet not Sanskrit and, alongside much of the work he made in 1968-67, may be considered amongst the first western Tantric yantras, perhaps even the very first visual embodiments of the Tantric deities in Latinate graphemes and phonemes.

5. yantra wheels
In his depictions of the subtle energy body of a med

6. paradigm
Houédard repeatedly engaged with the Vajrayana Buddhist ideas of the ‘womb’ mandala, the metaphysi
cal space of the ‘mother’ and the ‘matrix’, in which the five compassionate Buddha families abide and where the interdependence of the one and the other – by existing the concrete is the nonother – the boundary other/nonother cuts off all that is MAYA (root MATR – whence mer

7. boîte
The cube is a recurrent form in many of Houédard’s typewriter poems and it is repeated with increasing ambition and skill throughout the years, taking on complex philo

8. mind trip trap
This grouping of works hints at the unity of movement, materials and form found in the Mibbks loop, whereby a surface is created with only one continual side. This constant turning of a strip of a paper as the inside and outside become one, symbolic of a mundane, a symbolic ritual gesture of the hands like those employed in the iconography and spiritual practices of Hinduism, Buddhism and Tantric yoga. It is a gesture that invokes the trip of the mind towards enlightenment from the trap of mistaken appearance, but Houédard also has playful references to hallucinogens, like acid, in speeding this trip towards an apprehension of ‘ultimate reality’.

9. chakrometers
In his depictions of the subtle energy body of a med

10. chakra wheels
In Hindu Kundalini Yoga, for example, this subtle body of channels (nadis) through which the energy (prana) may flow around

11. wombword
Houédard repeatedly engaged with the Vajrayana Buddhist ideas of the ‘womb’ mandala, the metaphysi
cal space of the ‘mother’ and the ‘matrix’, in which the five compassionate Buddha families abide and where the interdependence of the one and the other – by existing the concrete is the nonother – the boundary other/nonother cuts off all that is MAYA (root MATR – whence mer

12. parabox
This collection of works all hint at the spiritual energies that exist beyond an ordinary conceptualization of the world. If the ‘box’ can represent how the unenlightened mind categorises phenomena as separate inherently

13. helioic investigations
It can be easy to focus on the primacy of the visual in Tantric practice too. As the eye traverses one work

14. bija
In many tantric visualisation practices the vowels and the consonants are imagined in circular rosaries of speech with the vowels circling in a clockwise direction and the consonants revolving anti-clockwise. When a vocalised mantra is inscribed into a yantra it is the form of a mono

15. tantric paths
The Vajrayana path is said to be the quick path to enlightenment. As one typewriter states this is to be achieved, “quam primum”, or as soon as possible. These works also hint at the spiritual dialogues present in the typewriter.

16. tantric staircases
A tantric path can co-exist with any other spiritual path. It is a staircase between heaven and earth, and a stair

17. The Exploding Galaxy
The computer-generated and laminated vinyl works reveals dsh’s engagement with countercultural London. He counted himself as an o

18. prayer flags
This grouping of mixed-media and laminated vinyl works also hint at the spiritual dialogues present in the typewriter. Like in the Egyptian-Greek wisdom texts of the second century, the Hermetica, this dialogue is the transmission of knowledge from teacher to disciple.

19. vajrayana laminates
Many of the laminated works can be understood in terms of dsh’s wider ecumenism and the spiritual shapes and forms he employed in the typewriter. For example, the meaning and magic of the trans-historical Cosmic Tree are alluded to in the actual collaging of leaves. Some poems use branches that hint at the central channel and chakra wheels at the centre of the mandala. One poem makes a tantric staircase of flower petals. Another poem balances a trinity of petals in a brightly coloured mobile.

20. JÅVÀ one red laminate poem with the text “wide love eros a gape” can be said to synthesize dsh’s religious ethos and teachings into just four words. It unites physical desirous love “eros” with the highest form of spiritual love, “a gape” and as such can be said to embody the essence of the Tantric path to enlightenment.

Produced on the occasion of: Dom Sylvester Houédard tantric poe

dated by Nicola Simpson
12 March – 2 May 2020
67 Lisson Street, London

Notes

Lisson Gallery
Dom Sylvester Houédard, *tantric poetries*, installation view, Lisson Gallery London, 67 Lisson Street
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Dom Sylvester Houédard

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

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2018  Lisson Gallery, New York, NY, USA
2012  ‘Dom Sylvester Houédard and the Cosmic Typewriter’, One Day Creative Symposium, South London Gallery, London, UK
2010  ‘Frog-Pond-Plop: the yoga of concrete’, NUCA Gallery, Norwich, UK
1992  Memorial exhibition, Cairn Gallery, Nailsworth, UK
1975  ‘Begin Again’, LYC Museum and Gallery, Brampton, UK
1972  ‘Dom Sylvester Houédard’, organised by the Ceolfrith Arts Centre and Victoria & Albert Museum, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, UK

Selected Group Exhibitions, Projects & Publications

2019  ‘New Typographics: Typewriter Art as Print’, The Print Center, Philadelphia, USA
2018  ‘Signals: if you like I shall grow (part ii)’, Kurimanzutto, New York, USA
      ‘Concrete Poetries’, Lower Green, Norwich, UK
2011  ‘Concept as Concrete Form: Visual Poetry, Texts and Typography’, University of Derby, School of Arts, Design and Technology, Derby, UK
      ‘Roland: The magazine of the ICA’s Visual Art Programme’, Issue 2
‘Commentaries on Meister Eckhart Sermons’, Beshara Publications, 2000

1987
Reading, Cambridge Poetry Festival
‘The Space in the Heart of the Lotus: Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine in India’ (documentary)

1984
Reading with Peter Middleton, King’s Poetry Series, King’s College London, UK

1983
‘le petit troglodyte, yes but if…, sibyl & psalmist…. t’ai: peach’ (typewriter poems, circulated as folded photocopied sheets, 1983-1986)

1979
‘Cratylus’, XV Bienal de São Paulo, Brasil

1977
Reading, Cambridge Poetry Festival (recording at British Council)

1976
‘key impressions’, New 57 Gallery, Edinburgh, UK (with exhibition catalogue)
‘For the 5 Vowels, Quintet’, typestract (British Council Collection)

1975
Reading with Paula Claire, King’s Poetry Series, King’s College London, UK
‘Begin Again: A Book of Reflections & Reversals’, LYC Publications, Brampton, UK (pamphlet published on the occasion of the exhibition at LYC Museum and Gallery)
‘Portrait of Robin Crozier (Ceolfrith 25)’, Ceolfrith Arts Centre, Sunderland, UK (Artists book)

1974
‘GLOUP and WOUP’, Arc Publications, Gillingham, UK

1973
‘Eurovispo–73: An Exhibition of Visual Poetry by Four Europeans’, Burleighfield House, Loudwater, UK
‘Typewriter Art: Half a Century of Experiment’, New 57 Gallery, Edinburgh, UK

1972
‘Dom Sylvester Houédard (Ceolfrith 15)’, Ceolfrith Arts Centre, Sunderland, UK (exhibition catalogue)

1971
‘Dorothy’s Umbrellas’, Nottingham Festival, Polytechnic School of Art, Nottingham, UK; travelled to Bristol Arts Centre, Bristol, UK; Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, UK
‘Tom Phillips, Dom Sylvester Houédard’, Bear Lane Gallery, Oxford, UK
‘Konkrete poëzie, klasteksten, visuele tekst’, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Germany; travelled to Institut für modern Kunst; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK
‘Panache’, Future’s Fictions special issue
‘Words as zips’, Audio recording, British Library, UK
BBC Radio 4 World at One (21 February)
‘gay – fab – bat’, Chelsea College of Art & Design Library, UK
‘O big nil – (Epitaph for) Lin Piao’, The John Rylands Library

1970
‘Visual Poetry’, Ceolfrith Gallery, Sunderland, UK
‘Exempla: Documenti di Poesia Concreta e Visuale Raccolti da Maurizio Nannucci’, Exempla, Florence, Italy (anthology)

1969
‘Mostra di Poesia Concreta’, Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy
‘Shelter’, Arnolfini, Bristol, UK
‘Concrete Poetry’, Fine Arts Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada (exhibition catalogue)
‘to catch a whiteman by his manifesto’ Bath Academy of Art, Corsham, UK
’12 dancepoems from the cosmic typewriter by dsh’, South Street Publications, Sherborne, UK (pamphlet)

1968
‘Arlington-Quadro’, Arlington Mill, Bilbury, UK
‘Ken Cox, Mira Schendel, Dom Sylvester Houédard’, Lisson Gallery, London, UK
‘Concrete Poetry: A World View’, University of Indiana Press, Bloomington, Indiana, USA (anthology)
‘Once again’, New Directions, New York, NY, USA (anthology)
‘Arlington-Quadro’, South Street Publications, Sherborne (group exhibition catalogue with cover and introduction by Houédard)
‘ken cox memorial: the sun-cheese wheel-ode, a double-rolling-gloster memorial for kencox’, South Street Publications, Sherborne, UK
‘mini-posters’, South Street Publications, Sherborne, UK (pamphlet)
‘Lisson 68’, Ken Cox, Timothy Drever, Michael Ginsborg, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Peter Joseph, Li Yuan-Chia, Mira Schendel, Peter Schmidt, Lisson Gallery, London, UK

1967
‘Antonio Sena, Dom Sylvester Houédard, David Medalla’, Lisson Gallery, London, UK
‘Aktual Art International’, SFMOMA, San Francisco, CA, USA and Stanford Art Gallery, Stanford, CA, USA (group exhibition catalogue)
International Festival of Concrete Poetry, Falmouth School of Art, Falmouth, UK
Brighton Festival, Brighton, UK
‘Je reviens dans 5 minutes’ proposal for typing ballet on giant typewriter, Festival de Fort Boyard, Rochefort, France
‘Six Concrete Poems: Brighton Festival 1967’, Chelsea School of Art, London, UK
‘o-zone’, performance of Tristan Tzara’s ‘Coeur a gaz’, translated by Dom Sylvester Houédard
Collaboration with David Medalla’s ‘Exploding Galaxy’ (later published as
'12 dancepoems of the cosmic typewriter')
'Mudras: silent gesture poems by Dom Sylvester Houédard and Jon Willcocks'
'An Anthology of Concrete Poetry’, Something Else Press, New York, NY, USA
'The Chicago Review Anthology of Concretism’, Swallow Press, Chicago, IL, USA

1966

'Intermedia’, Subscription Rooms, Stroud, UK
'The Golden Mile: An Exhibition of Kinetic + Concrete + Related Work’, Arnolfini, Bristol, UK
'An Exhibition of Concrete/Spatial Poetry’, Midland Group Gallery, Nottingham, UK
'Aesthetics of the death wish?, (discussion and participant)
Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) (co-organiser and participant)
'A book of chakras: 8 yantric poems’, Watford School of Art, Watford, UK
'The Golden Mile: An Exhibition of Kinetic + Concrete + Related Work’, Arnolfini, Bristol, UK (catalogue)
'Concrete Poetry: Britain, Canada, United States’, London (group folder)
'Astronauts of inner-space: an international collection of avant-garde activity’,
Stolen Paper Review Editions, San Francisco, CA, USA (anthology)
'Eyearun’, Writers Forum, London, UK
'Beloit Poetry Journal’, v.17 (Chapbook 9)
'Ikon’, n.3 (cover design)
Member, National Liturgical Commission
Corresponding Member, International Committee for English in the Liturgy

1965

'Between Poetry and Painting’, ICA London, UK (accompanying pamphlet with chronology and essay by Houédard)
'International Poetry Incarnation’, Royal Albert Hall, London, UK
2nd International Exhibition of Experimental Poetry, St. Catherine’s College, Oxford, UK
'Sprechgedichte’, Writers Forum, London (pamphlet introduction and chronology by Houédard)
'The wider concrete’, Link

1964

'Eyear’, Talks on concrete poetry at Royal College of Art and ICA London, UK
'Wider Ecumenism’, Talk at St Anne’s Society, London, UK; published in The Aylesford Review
'Beat and Afterbeat — poetry and theology’, The Ayelsford Review
'Ou’, Henri Chopin
'Paradada’, published in Times Literary Supplement issue dedicated to Anglo-American avant-garde
1963

‘Moiré Poem 6 Typestract’, Sachner Archive
‘International Beat Movement’, BBC 3 Radio
‘Concrete poetry & Ian Hamilton Finlay’, Typographica, pp.47-62. (also in The Aylesford Review)

Collections

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