

Dom Sylvester Houédard

dsh: optimism is natural but a little excessive

6 December, 2025 - 14 March, 2026
Private view on 5 December, 18:00 - 20:00

TINA presents *dsh: optimism is natural but a little excessive*, an exhibition of framed works on paper, made with an Olivetti Lettera 22 typewriter by Dom Sylvester Houédard dated from the 1960s and 70s. What appears at first as playful experiments with mechanical keystrokes and grids, as marks made on paper, could be better understood as the implosion of language's very function. These *typstracts* are neither text nor image but the place where writing sabotages its own communicative promise and the image, despite legible forms, collapses into a complex unreadability. They expose the typewriter as a machine that, once stripped of semantic service, generates only an excess of form. Marks without meaning, grids that shimmer only to dissolve, punctuation that refuses to punctuate. Language as an image, the aesthetic form of language, and the simultaneous dependence and incommensurability of both.

Houédard's *typstracts* exemplify this antagonism by layering one order upon another. The work produces not synthesis but interference, a flickering that destabilizes perception. They are not necessarily beautiful patterns but instead ontological accidents, visual stutters where meaning short-circuits. Each form asserts its identity only to immediately undermine it, as though every stroke of the key carries within it the anticipation of erasure.

The exhibition at TINA examines these works from an aesthetic and linguistic perspective, and considers what is at stake formally. While dsh's own biography as a Benedictine Monk and polytheistic scholar has been mined in the past, and it is true that this insight informed his perspective on the philosophical nature of thought and creation expressed through images and text, to consider these works within a strictly formal register is to reveal nothing less than the undoing of the subject itself. Perhaps the most 'spiritual' and 'philosophical' contemplation here is that these are poems without a clear indication of the self, but more radically, they are works in which the very category of the self is revealed as a fiction. The subject does not disappear, rather, it is shown to have never existed in the first place, dissolved into the mechanical repetitions of the typewriter. They are ontological diagrams of thought-in-formation, materializations of conceptual processes that precede and exceed semantic capture.

Yet, to read these *typstracts* only as modernist formalism is to also miss the point. They are the negation of form itself, diagrams of collapse masquerading as compositions. They enact a poetics that is also a catastrophe, in which writing becomes nothing other than the exposure of its own impossibility. It is precisely in this impossibility and this refusal of closure, and this oscillation between sense and nonsense that a new field emerges: a language without language, a poetry that exists only as the echo of its own failure.

The works presented at TINA mark a rupture in the logic of inscription itself. They neither conform to language's communicative function nor to the image's representational demand but occupy a threshold where the two collapse into one another. The *typstracts* expose the typewriter as a machine not of writing but of difference, generating marks that oscillate between legibility and abstraction, signal and noise.

Alongside this presentation of *typstracts*, TINA has invited poet CAConrad to curate a series of screenings and read poetry at 7 pm on Saturday the 13 December 2025. Films by Beatrice Gibson and Andrea Luka Zimmerman will be included. More events to be announced soon.

Dom Sylvester Houédard (b. 1924, Guernsey, Channel Islands; d. 1992, UK), often known simply by his initials *dsh*, was a British Benedictine monk, theologian, writer, and pioneering concrete poet. Born in Guernsey, he studied at Oxford and served in military intelligence before joining the Benedictine order at Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire, where he was ordained in 1959. Emerging as a key figure in London's 1960s counterculture, Houédard combined deep theological inquiry with radical experimentation in language and form. Dividing his time between Prinknash Abbey and London's Soho, he worked on an Olivetti Lettera 22 typewriter, producing intricate visual poems he called 'typestracts' (coined by his friend Edward Wright) abstract compositions that fused poetry, typography, and spiritual meditation. His work explored connections between linguistics, cybernetics, and mysticism, positioning him as a bridge between faith and avant-garde art.

Beyond poetry, Houédard became literary editor of the Jerusalem Bible in 1961, wrote widely on Meister Eckhart and comparative mysticism, and corresponded with leading poets and thinkers of his time including Robert Graves, Edwin Morgan, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Lionel Kearns, Mark Boyle, John Blofeld, Michael Horovitz and Ian Hamilton Finlay and collaborated with artists such as Yoko Ono and Gustav Metzger. His ideas on spirituality, art, and communication resonated across disciplines, influencing both literary and visual practices. During his lifetime, he exhibited internationally, including Lisson Gallery, the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Stedelijk Museum. Posthumous exhibitions continue to reaffirm his legacy as an artist who merged intellect, faith, and experimental form into a singular vision of spiritual modernity.

In 2012, Occasional Papers published *Notes from the Cosmic Typewriter*, a book devoted to Houédard, edited by Nicola Simpson, with essays by Gustavo Grandal Montero, Rick Poynor, David Toop and Charles Verey. In 2018, *dsh* was published by Lisson Gallery, on the occasion of *Dom Sylvester Houédard* at Lisson Gallery New York, curated by Hana Noorali and Matt O'Dell. *dsh* was edited by Hana Noorali and Matt O'Dell and includes essays by Laura McLean Ferris and Jonathan P. Watts, as well as contributions by Nicolas Logsdail, Nicola Simpson and Charles Verey.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Breaking Lines*, The Estorick Collection, London, UK (2025); *Lisson Gallery*, London, UK (2020); *Lisson Gallery*, New York, USA (2018); *Dom Sylvester Houédard: Typestracts*, Richard Saltoun, London, UK (2017); *Frog-Pond-Plop: the yoga of concrete*, NUCA Gallery, Norwich, UK (2010); *Begin Again*, LYC Museum & Gallery, Brampton, UK (1975). Recent group shows and projects include *New Typographics: Typewriter Art as Print*, The Print Center, Philadelphia, USA (2019); *Signals: if you like I shall grow (part ii)*, Kurimanzutto, New York (2018); *Concrete Poetries*, Lower Green, Norwich (2018); *Concept as Concrete Form: Visual Poetry, Texts and Typography*, University of Derby (2011); *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*, ICA London (2009); *Force Fields*, Hayward Gallery, London (2009); *Typewriter Art: Half a Century of Experiment*, New 57 Gallery, Edinburgh (1972); *Mostra di Poesia Concreta*, XV Biennale di Venezia, Venice (1969); *Intermedia*, Subscription Rooms, Stroud (1966).

Collections include the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Tate, London; British Council, UK; Fondazione Bonotto, Italy; Pérez Art Museum Miami; Sackner Archive of Visual and Concrete Poetry; William Allen Word & Image Collection; The Poetry Collection, University at Buffalo.

TINA is located on the first floor of 191 Wardour Street, London, W1F 8ZE. Unfortunately, there is no lift. Parking is a little tricky around Wardour Street so if you require parking assistance or if you have any other access requirements not listed here, please be in touch with the gallery.

For further information please contact info@tinaofficial.co.uk