

Dom Sylvester Houédard

dsh: optimism is natural but a little excessive

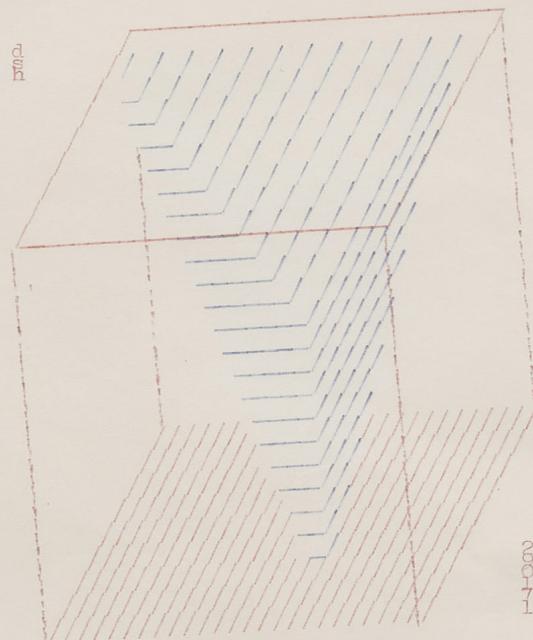
TINA

First Floor
191 Wardour Street,
London. W1F 8ZE

Dom Sylvester Houédard

dsh: optimism is natural but a little excessive

6 December, 2025 - 14 March, 2026



rare jewel of discontent

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.

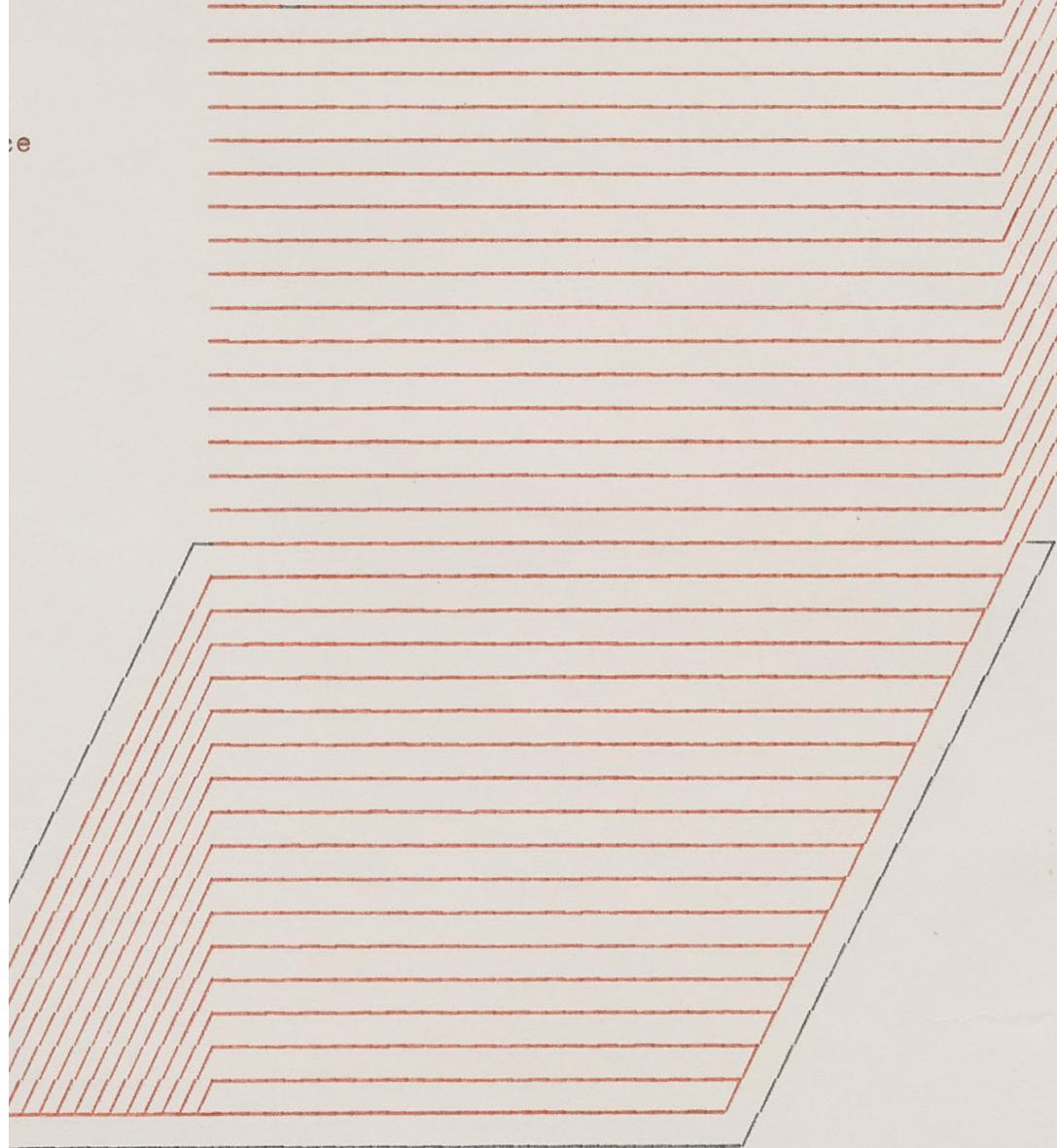
rare jewel of discontent, 1971
(detail)

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.

generative competence, 1972
(detail)



dsh: optimism is natural but a little excessive, 2025
(installation view)





dsh: optimism is natural but a little excessive, 2025
(installation view)

dsh: optimism is natural but a little excessive, 2025
(installation view)





dsh: optimism is natural but a little excessive, 2025
(installation view)



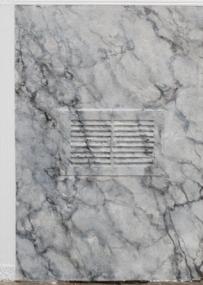
dsh: optimism is natural but a little excessive, 2025
(installation view)



dsh: optimism is natural but a little excessive, 2025
(installation view)

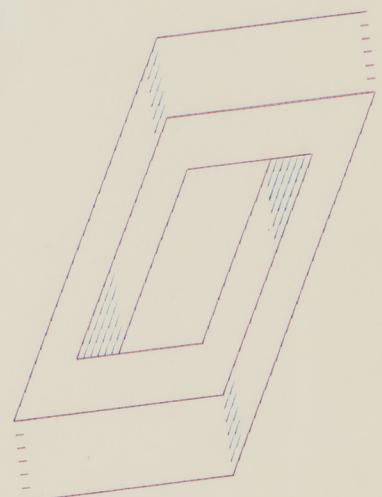


dsh: optimism is natural but a little excessive, 2025
(installation view)



dsh: optimism is natural but a little excessive, 2025
(installation view)

acid
intersection



20.2

acid intersection, 1971
Typed page
33 x 20.2 cms
13 x 8 in
(HOU-E-710065)

optimism is natural but a little excessive, 1971

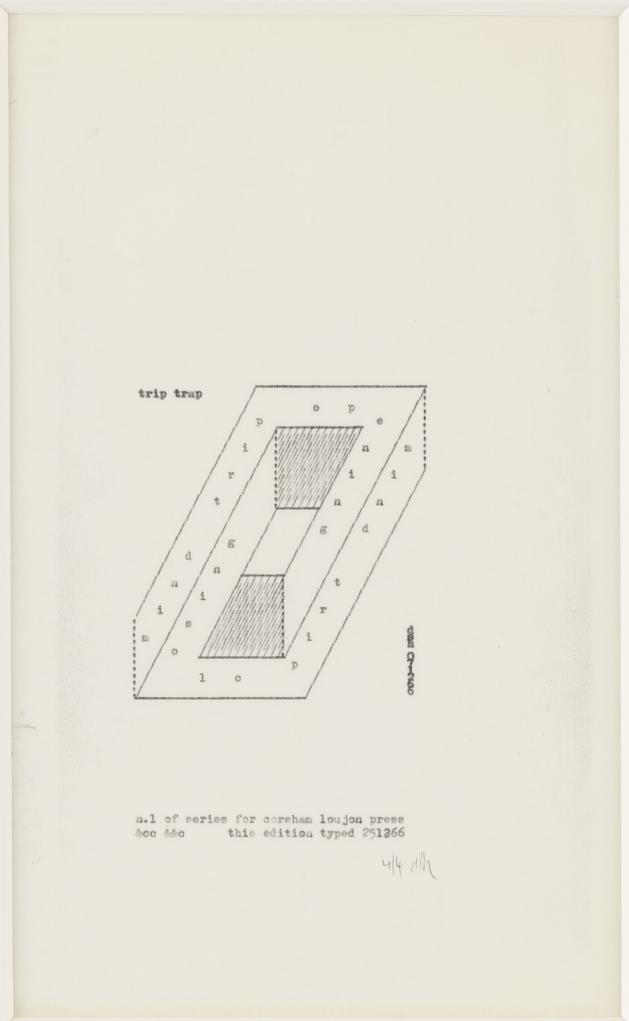
Typed page

29.9 x 21 x 0.1 cms

11 3/4 x 8 1/4 x 0 in

(HOU-E-710025)





trip trap, 1966
Typed page, carbon copy
33 x 20.2 cms
13 x 8 in
(HOU-E-660038)

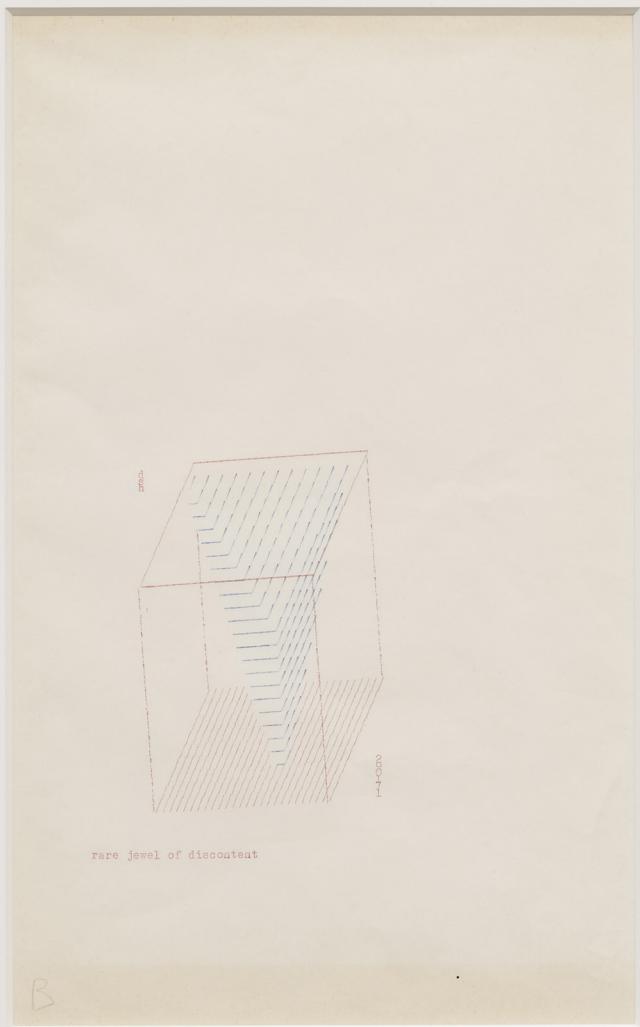
aquarius, 1971
Typed page
29.7 x 21 cms
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in
(HOU E_710082)

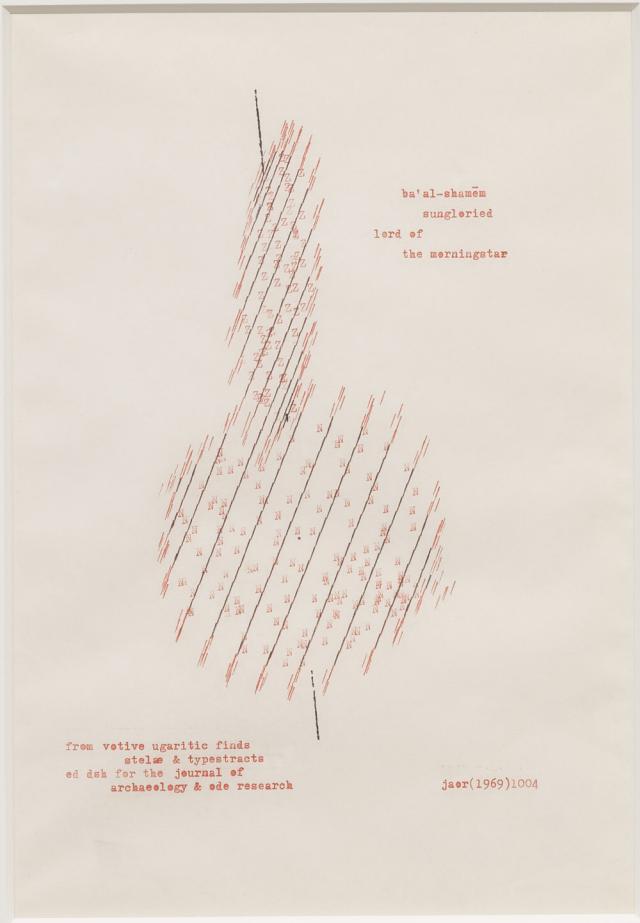




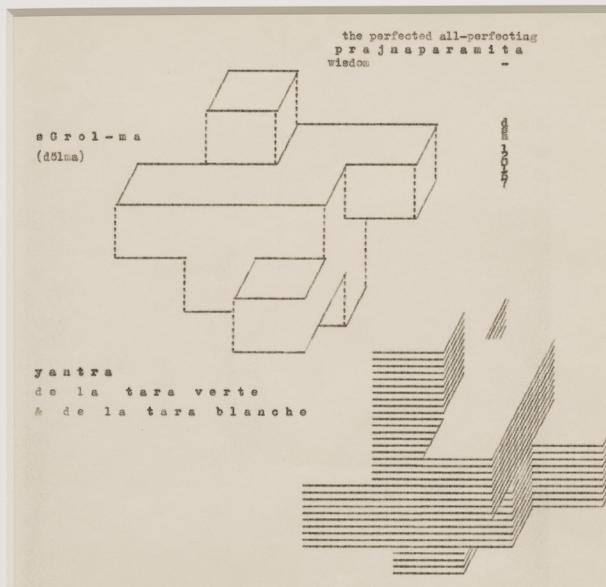
generative competence, 1972
Typed page
21.6 x 21 cms
8 1/2 x 8 1/4 in
(HOU-E-720136)

rare jewel of discontent, 1971
Typed page
33 x 20.2 cms
13 x 8 in
(HOU-E-710066)

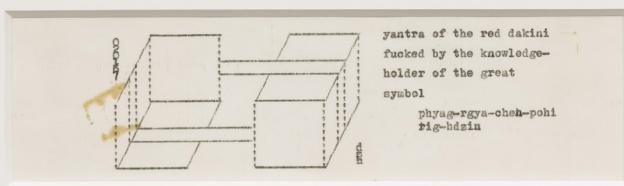




ba'al-shamem, 1969
Typed page
29.6 x 21 cms
11 5/8 x 8 1/4 in
(HOUe-690120)

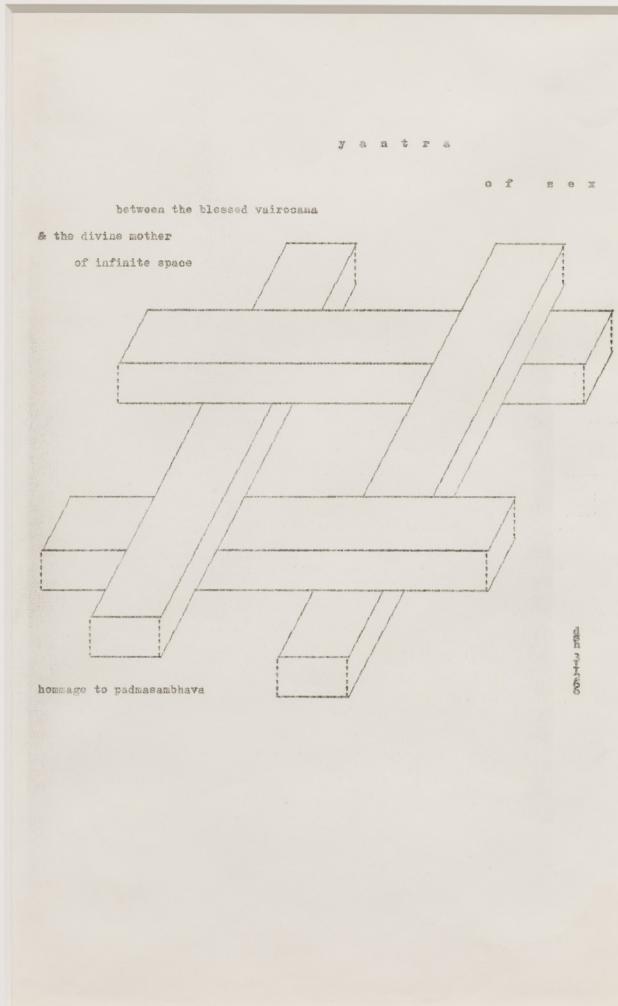


the perfected all-perfected, 1967
Typed page, carbon copy
24.5 x 20.3 cms
9 5/8 x 8 in
(HOU-E-670220)



*yantra of the red dakini fucked by the
knowledge-holder of the great symbol, 1967*
Typed page, carbon copy
9.8 x 20.3 cms
3 7/8 x 8 in
(HOUe-670199)

yantra of sex, 1966
Typed page
33 x 20.3 cms
13 x 8 in
(HOU-E-660025)



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.

optimism is natural but a little excessive, 1971
(detail)

optimism is natural but a little excessive

Dom Sylvester Houédard

Born 1924, Guernsey, Channel Islands, UK
Died 1992, UK

EDUCATION

1949 MA, Modern History, Jesus College, Oxford, UK

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2025 *Breaking Lines*, The Estorick Collection, London, UK
2020 Lisson Gallery, London, UK
2018 Lisson Gallery, New York, NY, USA
2017 *Dom Sylvester Houédard: Typestracts*, Richard Saltoun, London, UK
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
1971 *Visual Poetries*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK
1967 *Dom Sylvester Houédard: extinct 1*, Lisson Gallery, London, UK

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

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

2009 *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*, ICA London, UK
2000 *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-75*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK
Force Fields, Hayward Gallery, London, UK
1979 *Cratylus*, XV Bienal de São Paulo, BR
1976 *key impressions*, New 57 Gallery, Edinburgh, UK (with exhibition catalogue)
1974 *Typewriter Art: Half a Century of Experiment*, Concourse Gallery, Polytechnic of Central London, London, 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
1971 *Tom Phillips, Dom Sylvester Houédard*, Bear Lane Gallery, Oxford, UK
1970 *Concrete Poetry*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; travelled to Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, UK (1972)
Peter Joseph, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Hove Dara and Others, Lisson Gallery, London, UK
Visual Poetry, Ceolfrith Gallery, Sunderland, UK
1969 *Mostra di Poesia Concreta*, Biennale di Venezia, Venice, IT
Shelter, Arnolfini, Bristol, UK
1968 *Ken Cox, Mira Schendel, Dom Sylvester Houédard*, Lisson Gallery, London, UK
Arlington-Quadro, Arlington Mill, Bilbury, UK
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
International Festival of Concrete Poetry, Falmouth School of Art, Falmouth, UK
Brighton Festival, Brighton, UK
1966 *Six Concrete Poems: Brighton Festival 1967*, Chelsea School of Art, London, UK
Intermedia, Subscription Rooms, Stroud, UK
The Golden Mile: An Exhibition of Kinetic + Concrete + Related Work, Arnolfini, Bristol, UK
Arlington-Une: International Exhibition of Spatial Poetry and Sound Poetry, Arlington Mill, Bilbury, UK

	<i>An Exhibition of Concrete/Spatial Poetry</i> , Midland Group Gallery, Nottingham, UK	
1965	<i>Between Poetry and Painting</i> , ICA London, UK (accompanying pamphlet with chronology and essay by Houédard)	<i>Astronauts of inner-space: an international collection of avant-garde activity</i> , Stolen Paper Review Editions, San Francisco, CA, USA (anthology)
	<i>2nd International Exhibition of Experimental Poetry</i> , St. Catherine's College, Oxford, UK	<i>Eyearun</i> , Writers Forum, London, UK
PROJECTS		
1987	Reading, Cambridge Poetry Festival, <i>The Space in the Heart of the Lotus: Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine in India</i> (documentary)	
1984	Reading with Peter Middleton, King's Poetry Series, King's College London, UK	
1977	Reading, Cambridge Poetry Festival (recording at British Council)	
1976	<i>For the 5 Vowels</i> , Quintet, typestract (British Council Collection)	
1975	Reading with Paula Claire, King's Poetry Series, King's College London, UK	
1971	<i>Dorothy's Umbrellas</i> , Nottingham Festival, Polytechnic School of Art, Nottingham, UK; travelled to Bristol Arts Centre, Bristol, UK; Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, UK	
	<i>Konkrete poëzie, klankteksten, visuele teksten</i> , Würtembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Germany; travelled to Institut für modern Kunst; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK	
	<i>Visual Poetries</i> , Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK (exhibition card)	
	<i>Words as zips</i> , Audio recording, British Library, UK	
	<i>gay – fab – bat</i> , Chelsea College of Art & Design Library, UK	
	<i>O big nil – (Epitaph for) Lin Piao</i> , The John Rylands Library	
1969	<i>to catch a whiteman by his manifesto</i> , Bath Academy of Art, Corsham, UK	
1967	<i>o-zone</i> , performance of Tristan Tzara's 'Coeur a gaz', translated by Dom Sylvester Houédard	
	Collaboration with David Medalla's <i>Exploding Galaxy</i> (later published as '12 dancepoems of the cosmic typewriter')	
	<i>Mudras: silent gesture poems</i> by Dom Sylvester Houédard and Jon Willcocks	
1966	<i>Aesthetics of the death wish?</i> , (discussion and participant)	
	<i>Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS)</i> (co-organiser and participant)	
	<i>Concrete Poetry: Britain, Canada, United States</i> , London (group folder)	
1965		Member, National Liturgical Commission
		Corresponding Member, International Committee for English in the Liturgy
1965		<i>International Poetry Incarnation</i> , Royal Albert Hall, London, UK
		<i>Sprechgedichte</i> , Writers Forum, London (pamphlet introduction and chronology by Houédard)
1964		<i>Eyear</i> , Talks on concrete poetry at Royal College of Art and ICA London, UK
1963		<i>International Beat Movement</i> , BBC 3 Radio
PUBLICATIONS		
		<i>Roland: The magazine of the ICA's Visual Art Programme</i> , Issue 2
		<i>Commentaries on Meister Eckhart Sermons</i> , Beshara Publications, 2000
1983		'le petit troglodyte, yes but if..., sibyl & psalmist..., t'ai: peach' (typewriter poems, circulated as folded photocopied sheets, 1983-1986)
1979		<i>Cratylus: The English Artist and the Word</i> , British Council, London, UK (catalogue)
1977		<i>Kontextsound: A Compilation of Sound-Poetry</i> , Text-Sound Compositions, Poésie Sonore, Auditive Texts, Optophonetics, Verbosonics, Lingual Music, Kontext Publications, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (anthology)
1975		<i>Begin Again: A Book of Reflections & Reversals</i> , LYC Publications, Brampton, UK (pamphlet published on the occasion of the exhibition at LYC Museum and Gallery)
		<i>Portrait of Robin Crozier (Ceolfrith 25)</i> , Ceolfrith Arts Centre, Sunderland, UK (Artists book)
1974		<i>GLOUP and WOUP</i> , Arc Publications, Gillingham, UK
1972		<i>Dom Sylvester Houédard (Ceolfrith 15)</i> , Ceolfrith Arts Centre, Sunderland, UK (exhibition catalogue)
1971		<i>Panache</i> , Future's Fictions special issue
1970		<i>Exempla: Documenti di Poesia Concreta e Visuale Raccolti da Maurizio Nannucci</i> , Exempla, Florence, IT (anthology)

1969	<p><i>Concrete Poetry</i>, Fine Arts Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada (exhibition catalogue)</p> <p><i>12 dancepoems from the cosmic typewriter by dsh</i>, South Street Publications, Sherborne, UK (pamphlet)</p>	<p><i>Concrete poetry & Ian Hamilton Finlay</i>, Typographica, pp.47-62. (also in The Aylesford Review)</p>
1968	<p><i>Arlington-Quadro</i>, South Street Publications, Sherborne (group exhibition catalogue with cover and introduction by Houédard)</p> <p><i>Concrete Poetry: A World View</i>, University of Indiana Press, Bloomington, Indiana, USA (anthology)</p> <p><i>Once again</i>, New Directions, New York, NY, USA (anthology)</p> <p><i>ken cox memorial: the sun-cheese wheel-ode</i>, a double-rolling-gloster memorial for kencox, South Street Publications, Sherborne, UK</p> <p><i>mini-posters</i>, South Street Publications, Sherborne, UK (pamphlet)</p>	<p>COLLECTIONS</p> <p>Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK</p> <p>The British Council, UK</p> <p>Tate Collection, London, UK</p> <p>Fondazione Bonotto, Molvena, IT</p> <p>Pérez Art Museum Miami, FL, USA</p> <p>The Sackner Archive of Visual and Concrete Poetry</p> <p>William Allen Word & Image Collection</p> <p>The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, The State University of New York at Buffalo</p>
1967	<p><i>Aktual Art International</i>, SFMOMA, San Francisco, CA, USA and Stanford Art Gallery, Stanford, CA, USA (group exhibition catalogue)</p> <p><i>Je reviens dans 5 minutes</i>, proposal for typing ballet on giant typewriter, Festival de Fort Boyard, Rochefort, France, FR</p> <p><i>An Anthology of Concrete Poetry</i>, Something Else Press, New York, NY, USA</p> <p><i>The Chicago Review Anthology of Concretism</i>, Swallow Press, Chicago, IL, USA</p> <p><i>Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology</i>, London Magazine, London, UK</p> <p><i>Freewheel: An Exhibition of Graphics and Poetry</i>, Arts Council, London, UK (catalogue)</p>	
1966	<p><i>The Golden Mile: An Exhibition of Kinetic + Concrete + Related Work</i>, Arnolfini, Bristol, UK (catalogue)</p> <p><i>A book of chakras: 8 yantric poems</i>, Watford School of Art, Watford, UK</p> <p>Beloit Poetry Journal, v.17 (Chapbook 9)</p> <p>Ikon, n.3 (cover design)</p>	
1964	<p><i>Wider Ecumenism</i>, Talk at St Anne's Society, London, UK; published in The Aylesford Review</p> <p><i>Beat and Afterbeat — poetry and theology</i>, The Aylesford Review</p> <p><i>Ou</i>, Henri Chopin</p> <p><i>Paradada</i>, published in Times Literary Supplement issue dedicated to Anglo-American avant-garde</p>	
1963	<p><i>Moire Poem 6 Typestract</i>, Sachner Archive</p>	

Please inquire to view more works or for further information.

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TINA

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