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## GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE PRESENTS CONCRETE POETRY: WORDS AND SOUNDS IN GRAPHIC SPACE

*The exhibition presents more than 100 works, largely from the Getty Research Institute's collections*



*Open (Abre)*, 1969. Augusto de Campos (Brazilian, b. 1931) and Julio Plaza (Spanish, 1938–2003). From *Poemobiles* (São Paulo: Ed. de autor, 1974) Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (92-B21581). Courtesy Augusto de Campos / Courtesy Anabela Plaza

**March 28, 2017 through July 30, 2017**  
**at the Getty Research Institute**

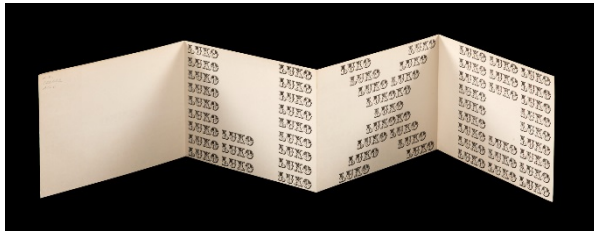
LOS ANGELES – A concrete poem employs language, space, sound, color, and design to communicate meaning, rendering the poem a work of art. In the mid 1950's an international movement known as concrete poetry sought to break down existing barriers between the visual arts and the written word. Concrete poets were committed to the idea that a poem was not just a column of words on a page, but a spatial construct whose design was central to its content. Employing new technologies such as magnetic tape and video, concrete poetry distinguished itself from other postwar movements by making language visible.

On view at the Getty Research Institute (GRI) from March 28 through July 30, 2017 and featuring more than 100 works from leading poets in the movement, ***Concrete Poetry: Words and Sounds in Graphic Space*** explores the visual, verbal, and sonic experiments of the foundational decades of concrete poetry, the 1950s through the 1970s.

"Art historically, concrete poetry is a fascinating international development with antecedents in the European avant-gardes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This exhibition draws from the Getty Research Institute collections, rich in visual and sound poetry as well as in artists' books, prints, and postwar art history, and exemplifies the possibilities for deep research at the GRI," said **Thomas W. Gaehtgens**, director of the Getty Research Institute. "Additionally, these rarely seen poems are remarkable when experienced in person, and we are delighted to give our audiences the opportunity to do that at the Getty."

The exhibition centers around two seminal figures of the concrete poetry movement, **Ian Hamilton Finlay** (Scottish, 1925-2006) and **Augusto de Campos** (Brazilian, b. 1931), and also displays works by their contemporaries including **Henri Chopin** (French, 1922-2008), **Ernst Jandl** (Austrian, 1925-2000), **Mary Ellen Solt** (American, 1920-2007), and **Emmett Williams** (American, 1925-2007). The concrete poetry of Finlay and Augusto took many forms in diverse media, ranging from small hand-made and screen-printed works on paper, to three-dimensional fold-outs, sculpture in glass and stone, and immersive projected digital poems.

"In the years following World War II, a far flung but cohesive community of poets working in North and South America and in Europe developed a new form of poetry," said exhibition curator **Nancy Perloff**. "Concrete poets turned to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to rediscover the *parole in libertà* of the Italian futurists, the *zaum* of the Russian futurists, the collages and letter sequences of German Dada, the expressive typography of British vorticism, and the abstract visual language of artists like Kazimir Malevich and Kurt Schwitters and drew from these inspirations to create their poetry. By rejecting syntax and utilizing graphic space as both structure and content, they made the sound and shape of words their explicit field of investigation. Concrete poets combined the visual, verbal, and sonic dimensions in order to craft *verbivocovisual* poems, a term coined by James Joyce and adopted by the Brazilians"



*Luxo* (Luxury), 1965. Augusto de Campos (Brazilian, b. 1931). Published in São Paulo, 1966. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Museum of Modern Art Library. Courtesy Augusto de Campos

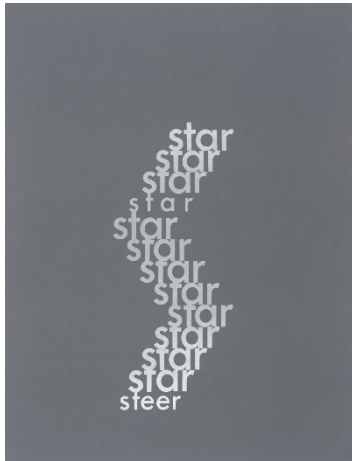
Along with his brother **Haroldo de Campos** (Brazilian, 1925-2003) and his friend **Décio Pignatari** (Brazilian, 1927-2012), **Augusto de Campos** launched the literary magazine *Noigandres* in 1952. Published in five issues over a decade, *Noigandres* marked the origin of the Noigandres group, which

initiated the international concrete poetry movement in Brazil. The second issue of the publication contained the inaugural appearance of the term *poesia concreta* (concrete poetry), and the fourth issue featured the group's manifesto, "Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry." The word *Noigandres* is not Portuguese, but derives from the American poet Ezra Pound's *The Cantos*, a work the Brazilian poets greatly admired.

In the 1965 poem *Luxo* (Luxury) Augusto designed repetitions of *luxo* to produce the large letter forms of *lixo* (garbage), a word almost identical in spelling but opposite in meaning. The kinetic foldout reveals the word gradually. Decorative typography adds to the wordplay.

In 1967 Augusto created *Linguaviagem*, a monumental "cubepoem" measuring 25 x 25.5 x 25.5 cm, for the international Brighton Festival, which featured an exhibition of concrete poetry. Three letters appear on each face of the cube: *LIN / GUA / VIA / GEM*. In assembling and exploring the work inside and out, the viewer encounters the words *linguagem* (language), *viagem* (voyage), *lingua* (tongue), and *via* (via). Augusto returned to his poem *Linguaviagem*, transforming it each time in scale, color, and font. He also digital animations of his poetry by projecting verbal, visual, and sonic components on walls and screens. Three of these can be experienced in the exhibition. For example, *SOS* (1983) is an animated poem in which the letters of words of longing and loneliness spiral to form the international distress signal SOS.

Still active today, Augusto continues to exhibit, perform and publish his poetry. He embraces emerging technologies and many of his concrete poems from the 1950s to the 1980s can now be experienced electronically.



*Star/Steer*, 1965. Ian Hamilton Finlay (Scottish, 1925–2006). Screen print  
Published by Tarasque Press, 1968. Getty  
Research Institute, Los Angeles (890144).  
Courtesy of the Estate of Ian Hamilton Finlay

In the early 1960s, Augusto de Campos and **Ian Hamilton Finlay**, while working independently, became aware of one another's poetry, corresponded, and developed a mutual admiration. At that time Finlay's approach to poetry shared affinities with the minimalist verbal language and visual structures of the Swiss poet Eugen Gomringer.

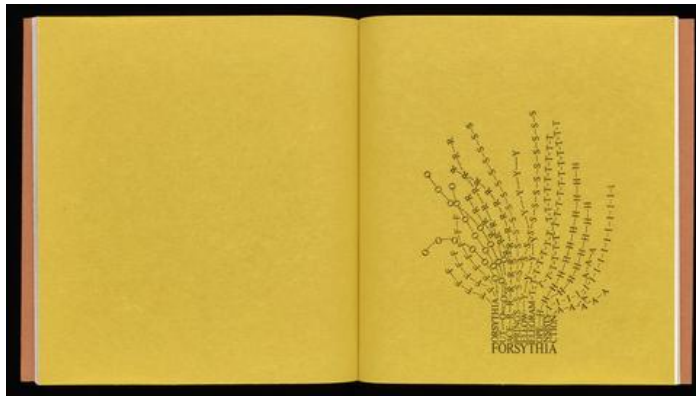
Unlike Augusto, who often designed his own poetry, Finlay collaborated with graphic designers and visual artists to make distinctive printed poems that creatively employed color, scale, and typography. He also published his own works and the works of other concrete poets.

Finlay's poems often featured nautical themes. For example, *4 Sails* from 1966 is a folded work printed on bright paper that evokes the shape of boat sails. The poem consists of four mysterious lines: *roSY fAr black / patcheD BroKen fAded / luckY fULI / GreeN FainteR LoatH*. The strategic use of capital letters refers to the registration letters of ports in Scotland (for example, "A" for Aberdeen). The poem was created in different colored versions – red, blue, and yellow – each of which are represented in the GRI's exhibition.

Like Augusto, Finlay reinvented his work in different formats and typographic settings. At times Finlay's media shifted from type and paper to sculptural works of wood, stone, and glass. For instance, he transformed his 1968 screen-printed poem *Star/Steer* into a large glass version using a deep blue that evokes the sea. In each iteration, the star sails in space like a ship. With the light that it casts, the star steers a boat, hence this poem's second word, the verb *steer*, which creates consonance with the *st* and *r* of *star*.

Finlay also created standing poems, which he described as "structures of folded paper with printed texts." *Standing Poem 1 (Pear/Apear)* is a four-sided object with three words or partial words on each side. Like other poems in the exhibition it is kinetic – words shed letters and then regain them as the reader turns the poem around.

In the 1970s Finlay took his work in a new direction, lessening his focus on concrete poetry in order to explore neoclassical and militaristic themes. Calling himself an "AVANTE-GARDENER," he developed the project for which he is best known: the magnificent garden *Little Sparta* at his home near Edinburgh, Scotland. Over 270 of Finlay's poems exist in physical form in the garden, inscribed in wood and stone.



*Forsythia*. 1965. Mary Ellen Solt (American, 1920–2007) From *Flowers in Concrete* (Bloomington: Fine Arts Department, Indiana University, 1966). Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (94-B19512). Gift of Susan Solt. Courtesy of the Estate of Mary Ellen Solt

Visual and sonic poems by concrete poets including **Mary Ellen Solt** and **Henri Chopin** complement those by Finlay and Augusto. In her influential publication, *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1968), Solt wrote that "all definitions of concrete poetry can be reduced to the same formula: form = content/content = form." Two works from her artist's book *Flowers in*

*Concrete* (1966) -- *Zinnia* and *Forsythia* -- exemplify this statement. Moreover, witty and dazzling poems by the French poet Chopin can be both seen and heard in the exhibition, for instance, *Vite* (Fast) (1961) from the novel, *Le dernier roman du monde*. Eight audio stations will allow visitors to listen to poems by Schwitters, Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, Finlay, Chopin, and Jandl.

*Concrete Poetry: Words and Sound in Graphic Space* is curated by Nancy Perloff, curator, modern & contemporary collections, and Christina Aube, curatorial assistant, at the Getty Research Institute. For more information about the exhibition or to find a schedule or public programs, the public may go to [www.getty.edu/concretepoetry](http://www.getty.edu/concretepoetry).

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