John Cage, Alison Knowles, Merce Cunningham, Emmett Williams, Gertrude Stein, Claes Oldenburg, Ruth Krauss, Diter Rot and many others featured in

The Something Else Press Collection

Designed, edited, and produced by Dick Higgins, the Something Else Press books contained offbeat and avant-garde writing in a neat and tidy, yet quirky and distinctive form. The press began in 1964 following Higgins’ break with Fluxus founder George Maciunas and embodied many of the concerns of the then nascent art movement.

Early titles included Jefferson’s Birthday / Postface, Higgins’ collection of performance scores and art polemics; correspondence art pioneer Ray Johnson’s The Paper Snake, Al Hansen’s A Primer of Happenings & Time/Space Art; and Rumanian-born Nouveau Réaliste artist Daniel Spoerri’s An Anecdoted Topography of Chance (Re-Anecdoted Version). Higgins’ foew&ombwhnw (a 1969 collection disguised as a prayer book) contains his important essay, “Intermedia,” in which he describes artworks which “fall between media,” arguing that the social conditions of the time (early to mid-1960s) no longer allowed for a “compartmentalized approach” to either art or life.

Indeed, the range of works published by Something Else exemplifies a very diverse approach: first American editions of several Gertrude Stein works, including The Making of Americans; a reprint of Henry Cowell’s New Musical Resources; Merce Cunningham’s Changes: Notes on Choreography; John Cage’s anthology of unusual musical scores, Notations; Jackson Mac Low’s Stanzas for Iris Lezak; R. [Richard] Meltzer’s The Aesthetics of Rock; One Thousand American Fungi by Charles McIlvaine and Robert K. Macadam; as well Emmett Williams’ seminal An Anthology of Concrete Poetry among many others.

Artists’ books, critical theory, concrete poetry, Fluxus, back-to-the-land hippie culture, amusement — through the use of conventional production and marketing strategies, Dick Higgins was able to place unconventional works into the hands of new and often

### Selected Highlights from the Collection


Two books in one, this is the first publication of the press. *Jefferson’s Birthday* includes “…all of the things Dick Higgins wrote, composed, or invented between April 13, 1962 and April 13, 1993.” *Postface* is a polemical work on the “new art,” i.e. the sort of art pursued by Higgins, Alison Knowles, and a wide circle of avant-garde artists comprising the community of Fluxus and Happenings. Higgins said: “I wrote Postface to try to help end a line of degeneration that leads directly from Wagner and Strindberg to Koch and Leroi Jones and Stockhausen. It is necessary to have an art which creates a tough, uncompromising, revolutionary mentality capable of expressing, handling, and extending scientifically the great tendencies of our times.” (From the dust jacket, probably written by Dick Higgins.)


Richard Hamilton wrote a fine short essay on Williams for the dust jacket where he says “Emmett Williams’ *Sweethearts* is a breakthrough. It is to concrete poetry as *Wuthering Heights* is to the English novel; as “Guernica” is to modern art. *Sweethearts* is the first large scale lyric masterpiece among the concrete texts, compelling in its emotional scope, readable, a sweetly heartfelt, jokey, crying laughing, tender expression of love.”


Peter Frank describes *A Sailor’s Calendar* as “a masterpiece of collaboration; Huntly has been one of Finlay’s most frequent and successful co-workers. His design enhances the droll wit of Finlay’s word-musics, which lie somewhere between pun, glossolalia, and old fisherman’s tales compended into a brief almanac for a Hebridian village.” (Peter Frank. *The Something Else Press*. McPherson & Co., 1983, p. 41.)

“Souvenirs from the first masterpiece of Pop Art, The Store (1961–62) selected and arranged by Oldenburg with the assistance of Emmett Williams. Many pages in full color, many many photographs.” (Publisher’s description found on the rear dust jacket panel of *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*.)


“The first principle of Ray Johnson’s art is that anything isolated is beautiful, albeit opaque. The second principle is that meaning awakens in that isolated beautiful thing when it is juxtaposed to something like it (counterparts, like rhymes, for the romantic; counterpoints, like puns, for the ironic)...To Dick Higgins he was written, ‘I want to live and die like an egg.’ Ray Johnson’s art is always *see and say, show and tell*; it is also imaginary, inarticulate, and eggshaped.” (From the dust jacket essay by William S. Wilson, M.A., Ph.D.)

“A dancer (for once, thank god) talking about the dance (and not biography). Pages from the notebooks of Merce Cunningham, edited by Frances Starr, a collage called Changes: Notes on Choreography: 176 pages, color, illustrated, 6 1/8 x 9 ¼, $8.95.” (Ad copy, probably written by Higgins, found in The Something Else Newsletter, vol. 1, no. 12, February 1970.)


“This book, described in ‘The Village Voice’ by David Bourdon as a fascinating and absolutely delightful nouveau roman, is an accumulation of associations, direct and indirect, from the objects that happened to be on Spoerri’s breakfast table one day.” (Publisher’s description found on the rear dust jacket panel of An Anthology of Concrete Poetry.)

“Done with the help of his [Spoerri’s] very dear friend Robert Filliou and Translated from the French, and further anecdoted at random by their very dear friend Emmett Williams with One Hundred Reflective Illustrations by Topor.”

“If this work is simply a journal of objects found and meals consumed on a small Greek Island, then *Gulliver’s Travels* is surely just a highly improbable travelogue. Anybody who knows Spoerri knows he can cook up a meal of astounding proportions; anybody who reads this book will know he cooks up quite a story too.” (From *Catalogue Fall/Winter 1973–1974*, n.d. Book description by Jan Herman.)


“For years there has been both idle chatter and serious discussion of the expansion of the possibilities in fiction of the broadest sort—the art of narrative, of time applied to language. And so, the writer and editor Richard Kostelanetz, has prepared the international anthology you are holding of the *Breakthrough Fictioneers*. Included are visual works, schematic legends, linguistic sequences and even a few almost-traditional yarns, but all of them are in some sense stories. The intention was to be inclusive rather than exclusive, informative rather than hermetic (hence the biographies at the end), to present a rare text by Gertrude Stein side by side with works by the most recent figures and to treat it all as contemporary. We of *Else Press* hope that prose will never again be the same. (From *Catalogue Fall/Winter 1973–1974*, n.d. Book description by Jan Herman.)

“Concrete Poetry is not one style but a cluster of possibilities, all falling in the Intermedium between semantic poetry, calligraphic and typographic poetry, and sound poetry,” notes Emmett Williams from his concise dust jacket statement. With its commentaries, author biographies, and preface, this fifty-year old anthology is as relevant and useful today as it was when first published.


“Bern Porter is, like Charles Ives (whom he resembles in the inventiveness and originality of his work, which is produced in isolation but is thoroughly cosmopolitan), a one-man movement, Science and Art, Sciart.

“When one speaks of Porter, one has to ask which Porter one is speaking of: the atomic physicist, the poet, the surrealist, the first US publisher of Henry Miller and a number of the best poets of his generation, the sculptor, the early practitioner of ‘found poetry,’ the graphic illustrator, etc.”

“Eugen Gomringer is best known as a founder of concrete poetry, which is usually equated, indiscriminately, with all visual poetry and therefore expected to be highly visual. But Gomringer concentrates the visual element of his poems in what I have called elsewhere ‘geometrical structures’ of the underlying logic: and the work is therefore not apt to be visually obvious, which is why he has not yet shared in the recent plethora of concrete poetry exhibitions and in its general vogue.

“This book is an attempt to make it clear what he has accomplished, what his work really entails.”

(From the dust jacket essay by Dick Higgins.)


This title was first published in an edition of 500 postcard sets (each set comprises 96 cards) of which 104 sets were issued in a wooden box. Shown here is the title page card.

“This is a collection of useless but interesting questions, printed on postcards. The book slowly gets mailed away. The effects of receiving the postcards depend on the appropriateness of the question to the person receiving it. The person to whom one mails ‘Why is he dying?’ might not be the same person to whom one would send ‘Isn’t it a bit too late to get another girl?’ or ‘What happened in Boston?’ So that one doesn’t lose the questions, we also made an edition as a book. Book edition, $5.00. Card edition, $9.00. Refills for card edition (only available to buyers of the card edition), $5.00.”

(Described in *Arts in Fusion/Something Else Press Catalog*), 1966.
This is the first of five titles by Gertrude Stein published by Something Else including Geography and Plays, Lucy Church Amiably, Matisse Picasso and Gertrude Stein, and A Book Ending With As a Wife Has a Cow. Higgins wrote and printed the essay “Why Do We Publish So Much Gertrude Stein?” in The Something Else Newsletter, vol. 2, no. 4, Sept. 1972. Following three pages of discussion of the context and reception of Stein’s work, Higgins finally answers his question with the words “WHY NOT!” in read-all-about-it headline type.

“With texts by William Burroughs and Ian Sommerville, here is the story behind the experimental discoveries which Gysin made as applied to writing, primarily the early ‘cut/up’ techniques (so successfully employed by Burroughs). It includes a history of The Dream Machine, and the permuted poems.”

“Gysin...has injected intoxicating doses of music and magic into the mainstream of modern writing.” (Both quotes from Catalogue Fall/Winter 1973–1974, n.d.)


"Geoff Hendricks is a cloudsmith, specializing in cumulus and altocumulus formations on a northlight background. This has been transferred, for aesthetic purposes, not only to canvas but also to shirts, clotheslines, packages, stairs, windows, porches, VW busses, and all kinds of other appropriate surfaces."

(From back cover copy written by Dick Higgins.)


"A very grey book from a grey December voyage on a tramp steamer where the not-so-grey Icelandic poet/designer drew many grey conclusions and produced this, his first and not-at-all grey text in English. With an introduction by Emmett Williams, an explanatory appendix, and almost 200 drawings by the author." (From ad in *The Something Else Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 9, Dec. 1968.)

“This documentation of ideas and concepts of a new polymorphous reality is offered as evidence of the new methods and processes that were introduced by Fluxus, Happenings and Pop. A demand for new patterns of behavior — new unconsumed environments. The accent in all the works in this book lies on change — i.e. expansion of physical surroundings, sensibilities, media, through disturbance of the familiar. Action is architecture! Everything is architecture!” (An excerpt from the prefatory text by Wolf Vostell.)


“After all, it does get boring to see the same old writers and artists appearing together in book after book. So we refused to be anthologists in this one. Most anthologies are artificial reprints anyway, pure literary hocus-pocus, unless they’ve exhaustively mapped out a new terrain. We like to think of this Yearbook as more in the spirit of a workbook, something to record a year’s worth from lots of people.” (From back cover copy by Jan Herman.)

*The Aesthetics of Rock* “...is the summation, *summa cum laude*, of ‘mere’ (one of Meltzer’s key words) philosophical inquiry as applied to rock ‘n’ roll. It is a masterpiece of the academic language of category and definition; applied to the antithesis of that language, rock. It is not explanation. It is phenomenological. It is n-dimensional: rock as the only complete expression of body and soul and mind of our time — — — — rock slipping through the guises of art and non-art and anti-art — — rock as the contemporary free and endlessly self-creating thing, resisting all attempts to identify it, plagiarizing itself and innovating with equal un-selfconsciousness.” (From dust jacket copy probably written by Dick Higgins.)


“A cross-section of the varieties of musical experience of our times, with nearly 300 reproductions of manuscripts, and with a mosaic text collaged from the words of the composers themselves. The result is a poem and a portrait, not of individuals but of a state of being, of one art among others.” (Publisher’s description found on the rear dust jacket panel of *New Musical Resources*.)
Richard Huelsenbeck, ed. *Dada Almanach*. 1966. Cloth over boards with dust jacket. Facsimile of the 1920 edition. The contents of the book were written or translated into German, with some pieces in French and one in Italian. The first of many reprints issued by Something Else Press, *Dada Almanach* was published on the fiftieth anniversary of Dada.

“Dada is like the weather. Everybody talks about it, but nobody does anything about it. Even worse, in fact, because while two people might well agree on what a thunderstorm is, they could probably not agree on what dada is. The main reason for this is obvious. The more that is written about dada the more far-fetched one must become in order to be original, and the more obfuscated scholarship in the field in its turn, becomes, until we reach the present situation, where literally nobody knows what he has been talking about all these years…the *Dada Almanach* is, then, the statement of the various dada positions on the basis of which our present misconceptions must be reformed. The dada attitude, it will be seen herein, is profoundly contemporary. Without understanding it, it is simply not possible to evaluate accurately a great deal of the art and philosophy which is most current today.” (From the dust jacket description by Dick Higgins.)

*If You Can’t Do It Twice You Haven’t Really Done It*. [1974]. Pin-back button. 1 5/8 inches in diameter. (Listed, with a date in *The Fluxus Reader* edited by Ken Friedman with documentary research by Owen Smith.)


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This is one of three Camille’s Reports issued by the press (Camille Gordon being one of Dick’s pseudonyms). In addition to the Newsletter, Camille’s Reports provided another venue for Dick to stay in touch with friends of the press.

Contents of the Something Else Press Collection

(which is offered as a collection rather than as individual items)

Listed in three sections: Books, Great Bear Pamphlets, and Other Publications

Books


We also include the very rare postcard edition lacking two of the 96 cards (supplied in photocopy). There were 500 loose postcard sets of which 104 were issued in a wooden box. Our set is not in the wooden case, however, it is housed in an archival box.


Ruth Krauss. There’s a Little Ambiguity Over There Among the Blue Bells. 1968. Cloth over boards with dust jacket.


Diter Rot. 246 Little Clouds. 1968. Cloth over boards with dust jacket.


Toby MacLennan. 1 Walked out of 2 and Forgot It. 1972. Cloth over boards with dust jacket.


Great Bear Pamphlets

All Great Bear Pamphlets are issued in stapled wrappers.


Other Publications


*If You Haven’t Done It Twice You Really Haven’t Done It*. 1974. Button.


