



Ketty La Rocca. *Non commettere sorpassi impuri* (1964-65). Plastic collage, 100 x 65,5 x 1,5 cm.
Courtesy of Ketty La Rocca Estate managed by the artists' son Michelangelo Vasta, Florence

Eroticism, Poetic Concretism, and Visuality (1960-1970)

Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Pompidou, Paris
September 17 – 18, 2021

An International Symposium organized by Maria Elena Minuto (Université de Liège; KU Leuven) and Mica Gherghescu (Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Pompidou)

Conference language: French and English

Open to the public. The event will be also accessible online

“The function of criticism should be to show how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means. In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.”
Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 1964.

“Concrete Poems Just Are.”
Dom Sylvester Houédard, “Concrete Poetry and Ian Hamilton Finlay,” *Typographica* no. 8, 1963.

The erotic imaginary and the relation between body and text nourished the daring experiences of neo-avant-garde visual poetics in the 1960s and 1970s by establishing themselves at the core of “verbi-voco-visual explorations” (McLuhan, 1967). In 1960, the Romanian-born French poet and artist Isidore Isou published *Initiation à la Haute Volupté*, a provocative experimental novel widely considered as a founding text of erotic art history and literature. Inspired by Dada and Surrealism, the author created one of the most compelling examples of hypergraphisme in post-war literature, presenting sophisticated interactions between erotic desire and verbo-visual experimentations. In using letters as a visual medium, Isou wanted to find out “how a letter could be *just as beautiful* as a figurative or non-figurative object in art.”¹

Isou’s book is just one of many examples of neo-avant-garde *verbo-visual eroticism* with examples ranging from Lettrist metaphor novels and Gerhard Rühm’s poetic montages (*Erotic scale studies*, 1966) to Dieter Roth’s artists’ books (*Mundunculum*, 1967), and Ketty La Rocca’s photocollages (*Intellettuali in collegio*, 1965-66). While there is no dearth of studies on the connections between eroticism, gender, and visual arts (see Rachel Middleman, *Radical Eroticism: Women, Art, and Sex in the 1960s*, 2018; Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism & Art*, 2005; Robert C. Morgan, *Carolee Schneemann: The Politics of Eroticism*, 1997), there are at present no critical analyses available on the impact of erotic imagery on Concrete and Visual Poetry within the context of post-war visual poetics.

Thanks to a fruitful interinstitutional collaboration between Centre Pompidou, University of Liège, and KU Leuven, the conference aims at reconstructing and assessing the intriguing relationship between poetic eroticism and visibility in the 1960s and 1970s in a rich corpus of literary works, magazines, and ephemera starting with the Bibliothèque Kandinsky – Centre Pompidou collections and expanding the reflection to other relevant examples (e.g., L. Pignotti, *Albo d’oro. Poesie vivive d’amore*, 1989; S. M. Martini, *Il libro dei segni d’amore*, 1979; E. Miccini, *Eros & Ares*, 1979; A. Spatola, *La vergine di Norimberga*, 1978; G. Baruchello and G. Lascault, *Alphabets d’Éros*, 1976; J. Blaine and J. F. Bory, “L’erotisme dans la poésie matérielle,” *Approches* no. 2, 1966).

Concrete and visual poems such as *Sink Hole* (Alain Arias-Misson, 1977), *Eeroo-tic* (Paul De Vree, 1971), *Homage to Claus Bremer* (Klaus Peter Dencker, 1970), *Sweethearts* (Emmett Williams, 1967), *Rose-Eros* (Timm Ulrichs, 1962-69), and *Organismo* (Décio Pignatari, 1960) eroticised the space of printed pages and materials by creating typewriter compositions to be assembled and disassembled while picture-poems and verbal-visual writings such as *Io sono io, io sono me* (Tomaso Binga, 1977), *Una questione di principio* (Lucia Marcucci, 1965), and *Non commettere sorpassi impuri* (Ketty La Rocca, 1964-65) engaged with a feminised eroticism and radical sexuality by employing a large variety of different techniques (collages, cut-ups, fold-ins, ready-mades) to include context and media fragments. These are just a few examples of an extraordinary body of intermedia and interdisciplinary works that are “neither word nor image alone but somewhere or something in between” (Kostelanetz, 1970) combining an analytical reflection on language with a “dialectical tension between textuality and visibility” (Goldsmith, 2008).

Without losing sight of the vast cultural heritage and references of historical avant-gardes as well as of Beat Poetry, Fluxus and Situationist visual-erotic production, the symposium concentrates more specifically on some pivotal questions regarding the interrelationship between *Eroticism, Poetic Concretism, and Visibility* in neo-avant-garde experimental writings: What happens when eroticism encounters the visual forms of poetry and the verbal elements of art? How does erotic imagination work in Concrete and Visual Poetry and

¹ Isou, Isidore. *Les Champs de Force de la Peinture Lettriste*. Edited and translated by David W. Seaman in *Visible Language* 17, no. 3. Ohio: The Cleveland Museum of Modern Art, 1983.

how does it inform our understanding of and experiences with? To what extent and in which ways does eroticism affect and trigger verbo-visual research, interartistic practices, and cross-disciplinary inquiries? How does the neo-avant-garde's verbivocovisual poetry perform "desire in language" (Kristeva, 1982), and how does it still reverberate today through engaged visualities, performative, and activist bodies?

In addition to keynote lectures and academic presentations, the conference will host poetry readings and performances in order to prompt an interdisciplinary and international debate on the issues, and to examine a unique body of works that illuminate the far-reaching conceptual and poetic implications of post-war *verbo-visual eroticism*.

Key Words: Avant-Garde; Neo-Avant-Garde; Eroticism; Concrete and Visual Poetry; Interdisciplinarity; Intermediality

Topics will include, without being limited to:

1. Historical and cultural legacies (e.g., Kurt Schwitters' *To Anna Blume*, 1919; Hannah Höch's *Die Erotische Freiheit*, 1920; Marcel Duchamp's phonetic anagram *Rose Sélavie*, 1920; Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's *Scatole d'amore in conserva*, 1927; Claude Cahun's *Aveux non avenues*, 1930; Antonin Artaud's *Le Théâtre et son double*, 1938).
2. Theoretical and aesthetic shifts: the avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde's verbo-visual eroticism.
3. Transnational and transcultural perspectives: erotic imagery in Lettrist metagraph novels, Concrete, and Visual Poetry and experimental writings from Bresil, to Sweden, and Central Europe.
4. Interdisciplinary approaches to the neo-avant-garde's verbi-voco-visual eroticism including concrete, visual, phonetic, sound, and performative poetry.
5. Politics and eroticism: the Italian *poesia visiva* phenomenon and beyond.
6. Intermedia forms and interartistic practices: poetic eroticism in typewriter compositions, verbal-collages, permutations, objects, and picture-poems.

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