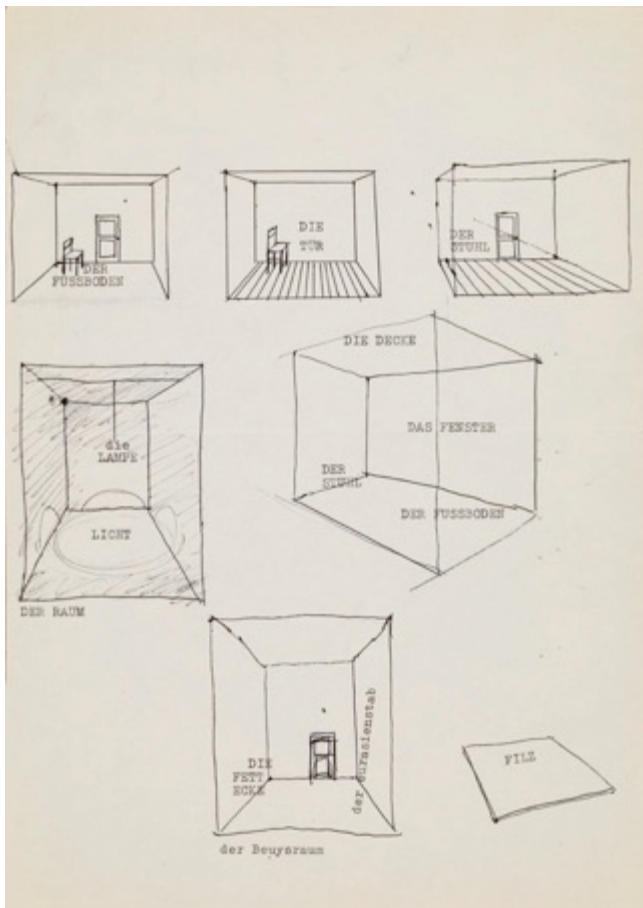


Claus Böhmler TYPOGRAMME – Schreibmaschine

18.8. – 29.10.2021

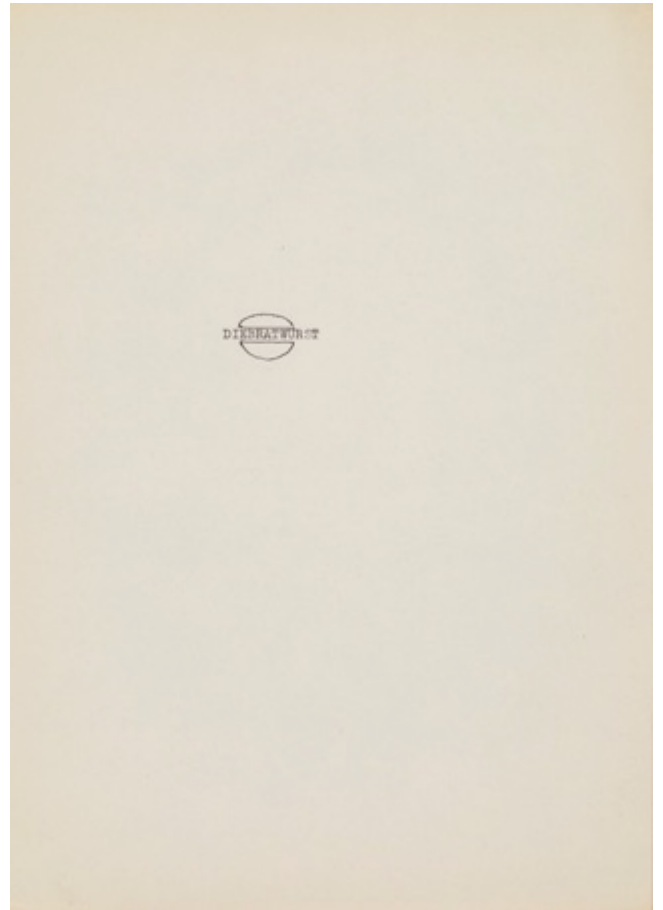
Claus Böhmler, by his own account, was a “low-tech media artist”. During his in-depth investigations and observations he repeatedly explored not only current technological standards, but also those of the art establishment. Even early on as a student at the Düsseldorfer Akademie, he scrutinized his domestic and urban environment just as intensely as he did the accomplishments and world of ideas he encountered in the diverse and innovative art scene of the 1960s. Yet he quickly realized that even if one wanted to disrupt tradition and time-worn notions of art, one would encounter the pursuit of higher ideals, which Böhmler – acting a bit like a jester or trickster – brought back down to the earth of everyday life.



This can also be seen in the typograms he produced in 1968, in which he combined simple drawn elements with words written on the pages using a typewriter. Together, they initially recall a sketchbook in which everything from individual objects and interior spaces, to landscape situations or reconstructions of a traffic accident at an intersection, are all distilled into humorous word-pictures. A direct allusion to the art and artists of the time occurs only once, in a “Beuys’ Room” in which that artist’s “Fettecke” (“Fat Corner”) and “Eurasienstab” (“Eurasia Staff”) are not seen as objects, but formed instead by the words or rather by their letters.

Without being direct references, motifs employed more grandly and more laboriously by other artists also appear. This particularly pertains to objects from the consumer world, that great theme of American Pop Art, which at the time was prominently represented in Germany at the 1968 documenta, and in the Ludwig and Ströher collections.

Let us compare one of his typograms with the Hot Dog Roy Lichtenstein put into play in 1964, boldly and monumentally enlarged in his famous comic and print-raster style. In contrast, Böhmler's work reveals only the schematic outlines of a dinner roll, almost like a vignette on an otherwise empty page, and where he could have drawn the sausage the German word BRATWURST is written with a typewriter in capital letters.



On the surface, Böhmler's handling of image and language is reminiscent of Conceptual Art with its more brittle staging methods inspired by linguistics, such as in Joseph Kosuth's famous installation "One and Three Chairs" (1965). Kosuth linguistically and semiotically deciphers the often irrational jumble of (post) expressionistic art theories circulating at the time: a real chair; a picture (photo) of the chair; and a description of the term "chair" taken from a dictionary.

Many of Böhmler's typograms also stem from this in a similarly textbook-like, if also far more humorous fashion. For example let us look at the grandfather clock Böhmler shows us only in outline, with all the individual elements then placed as words where they would be found in or on the clock housing.

A “textbook” Kosuth directly referenced, and which Böhmler could also have been familiar with at the time, originates from an artist from the sphere of surrealism, and in a small manifesto written in 1929 it summarizes his original handling of words and pictures. René Magritte’s “Les mots et les images” consists of eighteen “paragraphs” presented to us in text and sample images, for example: “Parfois le nom d’un objet tient lieu d’une image” (“Sometimes the name of an object takes the place of a picture”). Beside the schematic illustration of a hand and a box stands a form outlined by an oval in which stands the word “Canon”.

Many of Böhmler’s typograms also contain the words for things which are not depicted as images, or which occupy the space their portrayal might have occupied. Thus a table “lacks” one of its legs, which has been replaced with the text DAS TISCHBEIN (the table leg). Or an empty canvas is furnished with all the terms for things required to complete a painting: from paint and stretcher bars all the way to a studio easel.

Or we see a MAUER (wall) on which the words or letters appear like a portrayal of a wall’s outline. Here we find a distinct difference from the work of Magritte. The wall motif also appears in this work, but as an example of an “object”, that allows one to “speculate that there are some other ones behind it” (“Un objet fait supposer qu’il en a des autres derrière lui”).



This possibility of the letters forming the shape of an object, as Böhmler presented in the wall example, is completely missing in Magritte's work, and there is a reason for that. For in the latter's work, the letters of the words are connected to one another in flowing cursive script, and not placed separately as is the case with typewritten letters.

The first functional typewriters were developed in the 19th century. Not until 1865 did a model appear in larger quantities on the market. Thereby the printed letters of the "Gutenberg Galaxy", as the era of letterpress printing characterized by linearity was called in 1962 by the famous Canadian media theoretician Marshall McLuhan, were able to spread from printing workshops into private writing rooms, and above all into innumerable business offices. There, traditionally male writers were now mostly being replaced by women. Due to the "feminine" activities such as sewing and embroidery traditionally allocated to them, they were apparently more skilled at typewriting. The age of the secretary had begun.

Friedrich Kittler, who became famous in the 1980s with a study of literature based on McLuhan's media theories, also describes the social and aesthetic effects of the typewriter on the writing process: "The continuously coherent flow of ink, this material substrate for all bourgeois in-dividuals or indivisibilities" gave way to "keystroke, backspace, automatic discrete block letters."¹ Kittler also quoted Martin Heidegger, whose conservative criticism of technology was only able to see in this an "increasing destruction of the word": "The typewriter snatches writing away from the natural realm of the hand, and thus of the word (...) Machine writing replaced the hand in the realm of the written word, and degrades words to a means of transportation".²

Counter to such conservative cultural criticism, however, was the great enthusiasm with which many writers and artists turned to the typed word.

¹Friedrich Kittler, *Grammophon. Film. Typewriter*, Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose 1986, P. 287.

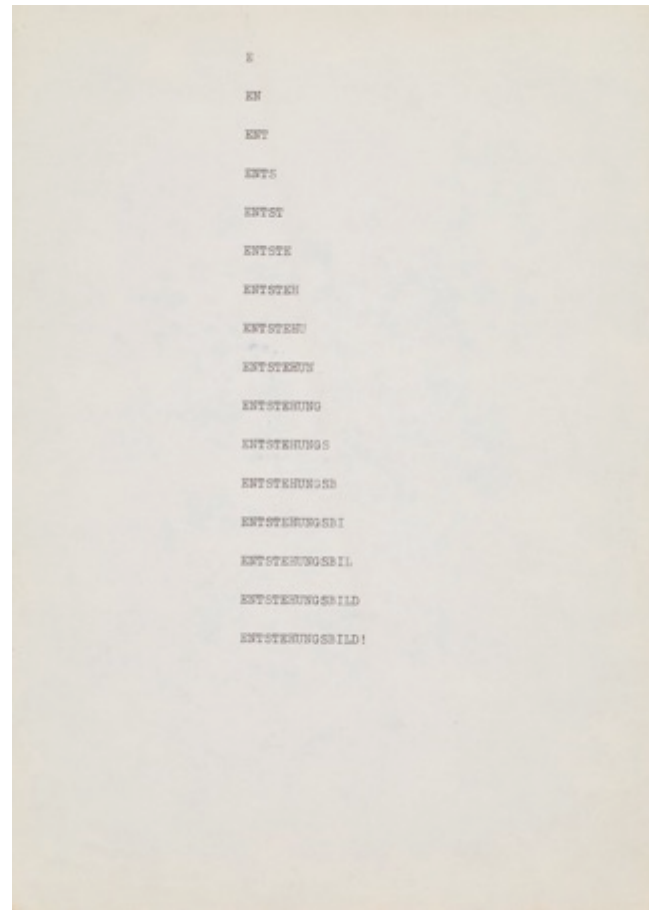
²Martin Heidegger, *Vorlesungen 1942/43*, cited in Kittler, P. 291.

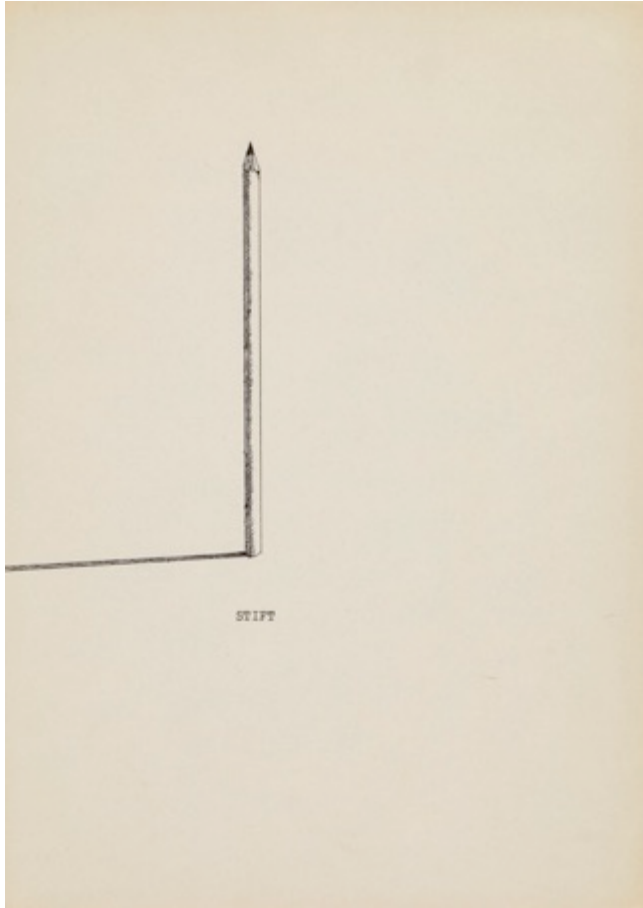
They were able to tease completely new and imaginative detours out of the typewriter roller, which normally moved linearly. Thus the letters could be distributed seemingly at random across the page as in Stéphane Mallarmé's poem "Un Coup de Dés..."(1897). Or they could rain like drops from above as in Guillaume Apollinaire's calligram "Il Pleut" (1918).

The primary "heirs" of these pioneering pieces were the representatives of visual poetry whose work moved in the border area between literature and visual art. The word-pictures – often reminiscent of architectural constructions – with which Eugen Gomringer, Ferdinand Kriwet, Franz Mon or Gerhard Rühm became famous in the 1960s find their closest echo in Böhmler's work where the word ENTSTEHUNGSBILD (origin painting) grows line-by-line one letter at a time like a staircase seen from the side.

But Böhmler is not a visual poet, just as he cannot really be categorized in any "artistic direction" (not even in the Fluxus movement, which he was close to not just through his many-year friendship with gallery owner, publisher and curator René Block).

Except in "Entstehungsbild", the written or typewritten material is always linked to the direct pictorial illustration – mostly as a word taking the place of an object, as described above. And if the same object occasionally appears in word and image, there is an underlying self-referential connection.





The word STIFT (pencil) beneath a realistically drawn pencil complete with cast shadow references the fact that the pencil's image was drawn with a pencil. And pencils are an object increasingly pushed out of everyday business life by the typewriter.

Even more than most other artists who use or used the typewriter, Böhmler – with playful nonchalance – also allowed glimpses of its use in offices: the repetitive reproduction, the empty-headed typing up of dictation. Claus Böhmler's bureau was a home office, but outwardly it was quite different from the interior spaces which can be seen in many of the typograms, though just hinted at via linear perspective, reminiscent of Magritte's theatrical sets, and populated only by

single words. On the other hand, Claus Böhmler's Hamburg live-in studio where he died suddenly in 2017 was full of books and records, and innumerable drawings and other works by the artist, most of which had never been publicly exhibited. This refuge was also an observation post, however, from which Böhmler constantly remained a vigilant observer of the world – and not least of its changes due to new media and technical standards – as evidenced even by his earlier typograms.

Ludwig Seyfarth

(Translation: Sean Gallagher)

Biography

Claus Böhmler (1939 Heilbronn – 2017 Hamburg) worked in the fields of drawing, media art and performance. Böhmler was among those first German artists who since 1969 have consistently employed video as an artistic medium. Immediately after studying with Joseph Beuys at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, he had his first solo exhibition in the Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf. Subsequently Böhmler took part in many pioneering exhibitions such as, for example, *intermedia '69*, *documenta 6* (1977), the ifa show *Video-Skulptur in Deutschland seit 1963* (1994), the exhibition *Who killed the Painting?* (Neues Museum, Nürnberg, 2008, and the Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst, Bremen, 2009). Internationally he exhibited works in San Francisco (*Behind the Eyes*, Museum of Modern Art, 1986), Seoul (*Concern on the Way*, Total Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005), and Istanbul (*Starter*, Vehbi Koç Foundation Contemporary Art Collection, 2010). His institutional solo exhibitions began in 1971 at the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld (*Cafeteria*) followed by presentations in such places as the Kölnischen Kunstverein (*Über Claus Böhmler*, 1974), the Hamburger Kunsthalle (*Standpunkte*, 1985 / *An- und Ausmalen*, 1999), and the Albrecht-Dürer-Gesellschaft, Nürnberg (*Denkbilder - Bildräume*, 1993). A comprehensive retrospective of his work was presented in 2001 by René Block, entitled *Instant – aber sofort!* in the Fridericianum in Kassel.

In 1969 Böhmler produced *Pinocchio – Ein lineares Programm* published by the Verlag Gebrüder König, Cologne/New York. This was followed by numerous artist's books and editions, particularly in a cooperation of many years with Edition Hundertmark (Berlin/Cologne). From 1975 to 2005 Claus Böhmler taught as a Professor at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg. In 1984 he received the Edwin-Scharff Prize of the City of Hamburg.

For more about Claus Böhmler: www.clausboehmler.de

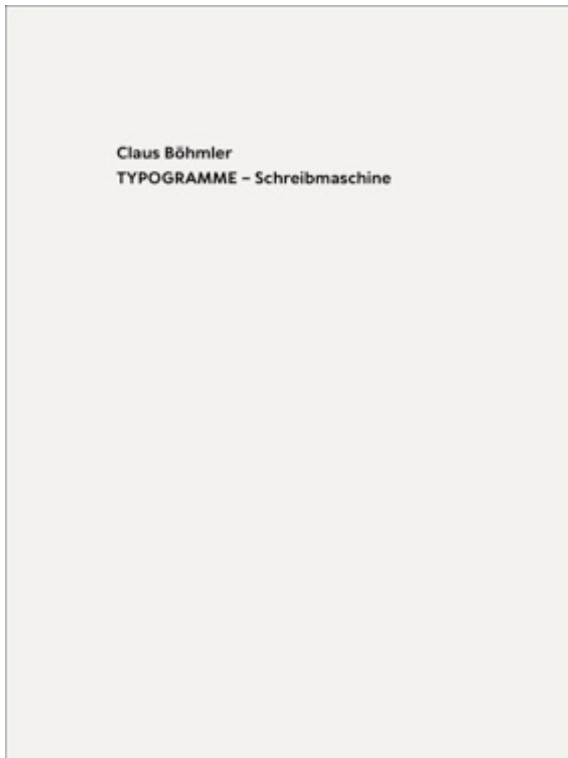
Claus Böhmler TYPOGRAMME - Schreibmaschine

August 18th – October 29th, 2021

Opening hours: Tuesday to Thursday 12 pm – 7 pm and by appointment

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Claus Böhmler: TYPOGRAMME - Schreibmaschine

Exhibition catalogue edited by Esther & Alexander Sairally. Hamburg 2021

Text by Ludwig Seyfarth. 18 x 24 cm. 96 p. with 57 (54 col.) ill., hardcover.

Text in German & English.

€ 28,00