poetry, eh?

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Poetry, eh?

concrete poetry
the australian experience
1968 – 2011

"Concrete Poetry is a cross-pollination between art and literature that takes many forms, including printmaking, typewriter text, Letraset, sculpture, found objects, and more. Arising in the 1950s, in separate initiatives by Swiss and Brazilian writers, it soon became an international movement, extending out of the literary sphere and into the art world. Treating the poem as an object, artists combined language and visual imagery in the spirit of earlier avant-garde movements – Cubism, Dadaism, Futurism, Surrealism and Fluxus among them – each of which used language in experimental ways…"
Heide Museum of Modern Art. Born to Concrete Exhibition. 16 April - 25 September 2011

"[Concrete Poetry] Conceives of the poem as ideogram, as an instantly assimilable, visually ordered text in which the word stands both as physical spatial object and as a plurality of simultaneous meanings..."
Oxford Companion to Australian Literature: s.v. Concrete Poetry

"Art form developed in the 1950s and 1960s based on the visual aspects of words. In contrast to 'shaped' poetry, in which the meaning of a text is enhanced by the relationship between a sequence of lines and the overall pattern or silhouette that these lines create on a page (as in George Herbert's "Easter-Wings", 1633, and Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, 1918), Concrete poetry largely dispenses with conventional line and syntax. It may bring into use not only a wide range of typefaces but also other elements derived from calligraphy, collage, graphics and computer-generated shapes. It can appropriately be considered a visual art, though it is also a literary one."
**Oxford Grove Art: s.v. Concrete Poetry**

"Concrete poetry, a kind of picture made out of printed type, and regarded in the 1950s and 1960s, when it enjoyed an international vogue, as an experimental form of poetry. It usually involves a punning kind of typography in which the visual pattern enacts or corresponds in some way to the sense of the word or phrase represented: a well-known early example is Guillaume Apollinaire's poem "Il pleut" ('It rains', 1918), in which the words appear to be falling down the page like rain. The Scottish artist and poet Ian Hamilton Finlay is one of the few significant practitioners in English; his works come closer to sculpture than to two-dimensional art. Most concrete poems are apprehended instantaneously by the viewer as visual shapes, since they dispense with the linear sequence demanded by language; these therefore have little claim to the status of poetry. Others are closer to the traditional form of pattern poetry, in which typographical presentation supports an already coherent poem."
Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms: s.v. Concrete Poetry

"Poetry which forms a structurally original visual shape, preferably abstract, through the use of reduced language, fragmented letters, symbols and other typographical variations to create an extreme graphic impact on the reader's attention. The essence of concrete poetry lies in its appearance on the page rather than in the written text; it is intended to be perceived as a visual whole and often cannot be effective when read aloud."
Poetry Glossary: s.v. Concrete Poetry
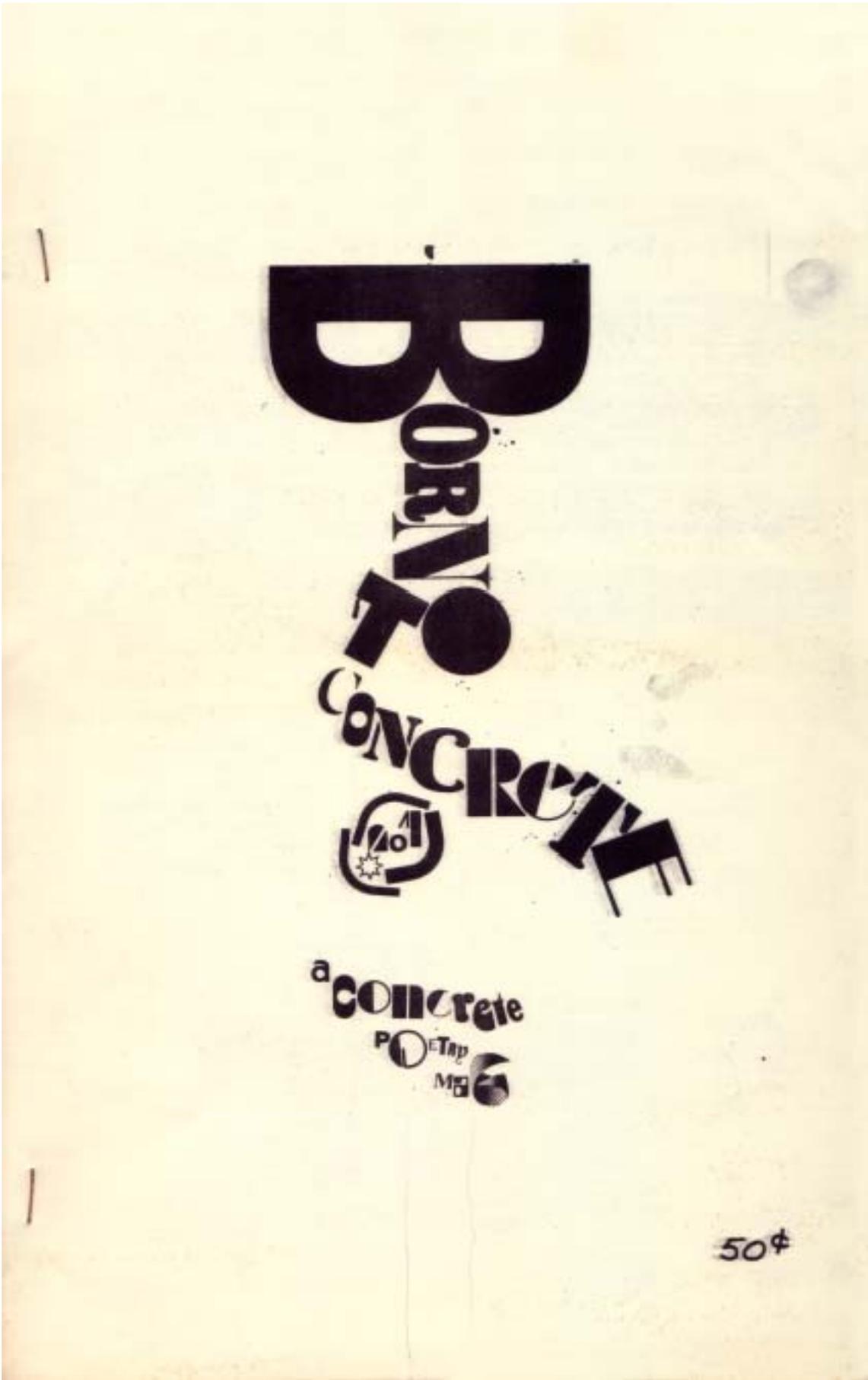
No. 1: *Born to Concrete* was the first Australian journal dedicated solely to Concrete Poetry

1. DUKE, Jas. H., et al. (edited by).

Born to Concrete No 1: a concrete poetry mag [and] born 2 concrete two [and] born to concrete number 3 [and] Born to concrete number four [all published]. *Four issues, foolscap folio and quarto (Number 4); stapled in titling-wrappers as issued; the wrappers with some insignficant use, a fine set preserved in a custom-made cloth folding case.* Melbourne, 1974-79.   **$660**

Rare: a complete set of this important amateur magazine, an crucial voice in the so-called 'visual poetics' of the period and the first Australian journal dedicated solely to Concrete Poetry.

It was published by the somewhat peripatetic Melbourne collective, which held "regular meetings every Monday… at 86 St David Street, Fitzroy" (Number 1), subsequently at "11 Johnston Street, Collingwood" (Numbers 2-3); the final issue from a Post Office box at the Melbourne GPO (but no regular meetings noted by then). Each issue was edited by a different member of the collective: No. 1 by Jas. H. Duke (1974), No. 2 by Chris Croft (1975), No. 3 by Rosemary Edwards (1976), and No. 4 by Peter Murphy (1979).

Contributors included Ken Bolton, Mimmo Cozzolino, Jas H. Duke, Anthony Figallo, John Jenkins, Rae Desmond Jones, Peter Murphy, Peter Oustabasidis ('ПО'), Alan Riddell, and Thalia.

A rare complete set of an ephemeral publication of limited distribution; there appears to be no complete set in any Australian institution.

2. COLLECTIVE EFFORT PRESS.

Missing Form. Concrete, Visual and Experimental Poems. *Duodecimo, pp. [144], printed on newsprint paper stock; browning but very good in original card wrappers.* Melbourne, Collective Effort Press, 1981.   **$65**

Very scarce: anthology of concrete poetry by a large group of Melbourne practitioners. Includes Jas. H. Duke, Tony Figall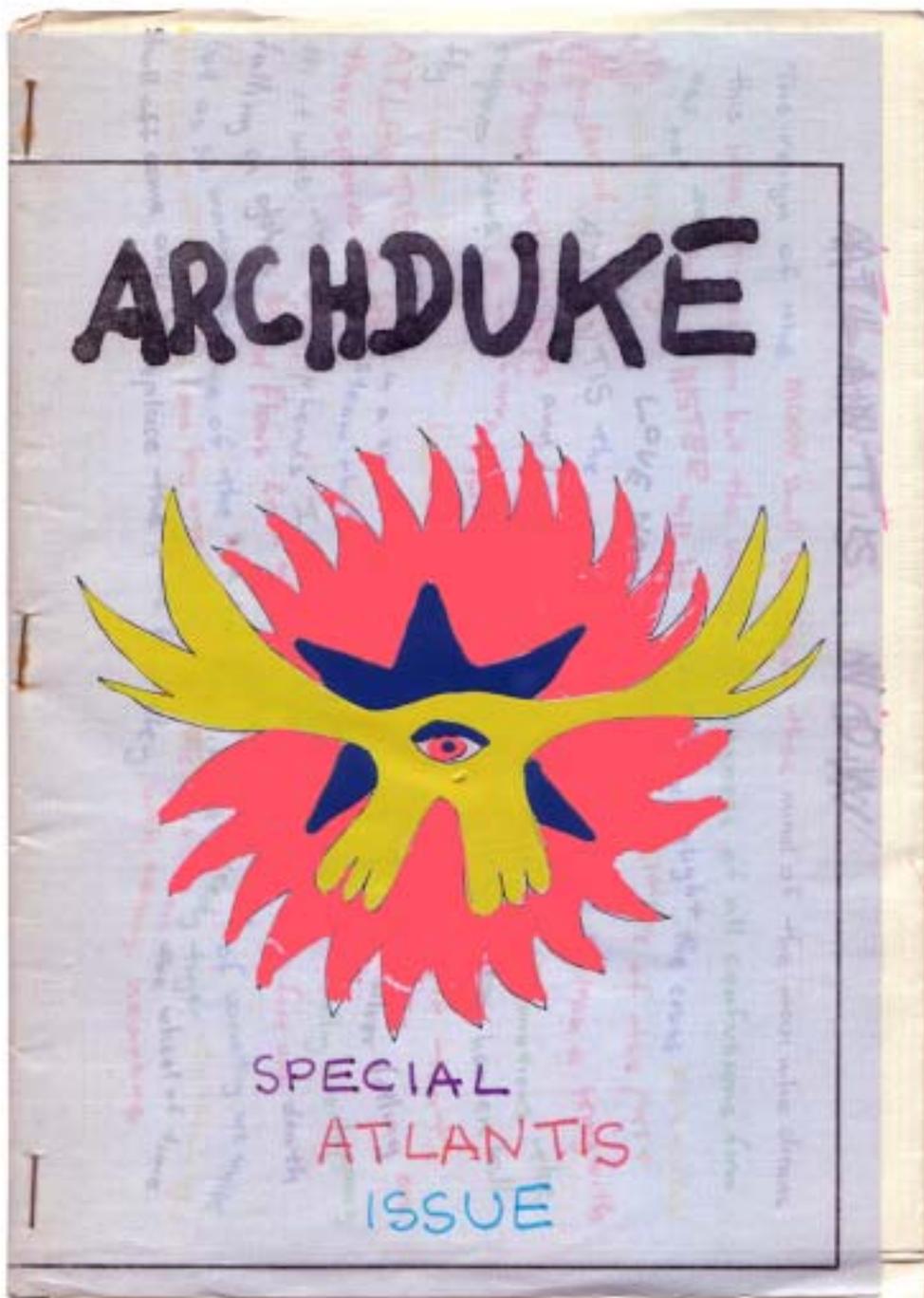o, Peter Murphy, Peter Oustabasidis ('ПО'), Alan Riddell, Richard Tipping, Tony Figallo, Sweeney Reed, and the usual suspects.
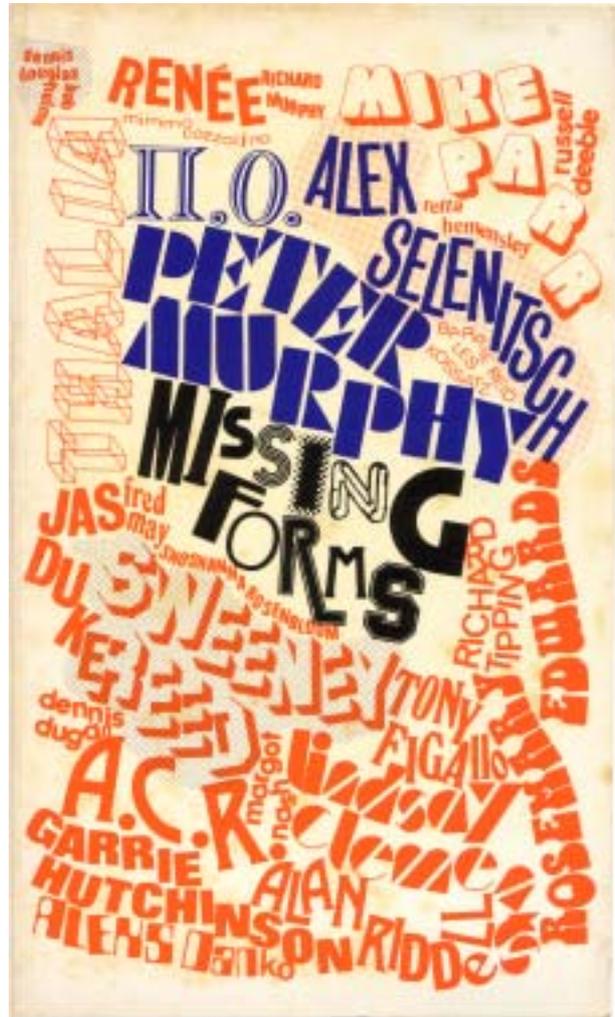
3. DUKE, Jas. H

Poems of War and Peace. *Octavo, pp. iv, 268; one leaf with a touch of mechanical markig (in printing or binding) and bump at the bottom of the spine, otherwise fine in original light card wrappers.* Melbourne, Collective Effort Press, circa 1987.   **$30**

First edition: Duke's only substantial free-standing book collection includes concrete poetry.

4. **DUKE, Jas. H.**
Archduke [4]. Special Atlantis Issue. *Octavo (A4 folded and stapled), pp. [24], hand-lettered wrappers featuring original three-colour hand-painted motif in enamel and flourescent paint, the wrapers improvised from the standard drafting form of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works; preserved in a cruciform cloth folder, letered in gilt.* Melbourne, The Author, 1974. **$880**

Extremely rare: effectively unique. Duke published Archduke I, 2, and 3 in Brighton, England, between 1968 and 1972. This fourth and final number was created between 1973 and 1974 after his return from England. The 'edition' was said to have comprised 100 copies but this is not credible since each one is hand-written and contains original artwork through-out.

Each is accord-ingly a time-taking production and a unique object – poems and 'con-crete poems', illustration, imag-es that are texts and texts that are images, even one page of pasted-in grass clippings! The resulting pieces were not for sale but were given away to recipients chosen by the writer.

Along with Peter Murphy, Allan Riddell, Alex Selenitsch, Richard Tipping, and Peter Oustabasidis ('ΠΟ'), Jas. H. Duke (1939 – 1992) was responsible for promoting the concept of 'concrete poetry' in Australia and raising Australia's international profile among practitioners.

5. DUKE, Jas. H., et al. (publishers).
9-2-5. *17 issues (of 20), octavo; very good in original wrappers.* Melbourne, 1979 – 1983. **$185**

A good run comprising nos. 2, 4-11,13-20 of this collective poetry magazine, largely publishing Melbourne performance and concrete poets, although the magazine opened its pages to anyone who wrote on "work". From issue no. 15 a cover charge of 80 cents was asked but the early issues were distributed free, although copies offered in bookshops were sold for 50 cents. The final issue, no. 20, includes good personal accounts of the magazine from its inception by its financial backers and mainstays: Jas. H. Duke, Peter Oustabasidis ('ΠΟ'), Cathie Johns, Jeltje, Barry McDonald, and Thalia. Among others of any consequence who contributed to the magazine were: Jenny Boult, David Harris, Rae Desmond Jones, Peter Lyssiotis, Judith Rodriguez, Michael Sharkey, Richard Tipping, and Michael Wilding.

Included are issues of two subsequent – and short-lived – little magazines from the same collective: Migrant Seven (nos. 2 and 6) and r (nos.1 and 6).

Ephemeral in style and addressed to a fairly transitory audience, good runs of 9-2-5 are quite uncommon.

6. FITZROT POETRY READING [Sydney].
Good Shit. *Oblong broadsheet (280 x 440 mm), folded twice vertically, printed on brown paper (i.e. wrapping paper); fine.* Royal Exchange, Sydney, [Fragment Press], 1975. **$220**

Rare and ephemeral: produced as a souvenir "At Fitzrot Poetry Reading, February, 1975" (colophon).

The piece comprises one 'concrete' work Peter Oustabasidis (how did he read it?) and two readable poems (you know, in actual words) by Rae Desmond Jones ("The Coronation")and Eric Beach ("Perseus Electrified").

Although boasting an ISBN number (0909275068), the only copy institutionally held is in the Library at ADFA (thanks to Lynn Hard).

I IN THE DULL TASTE MY EAR ENDURES THE SLIDE OF SOUNDS
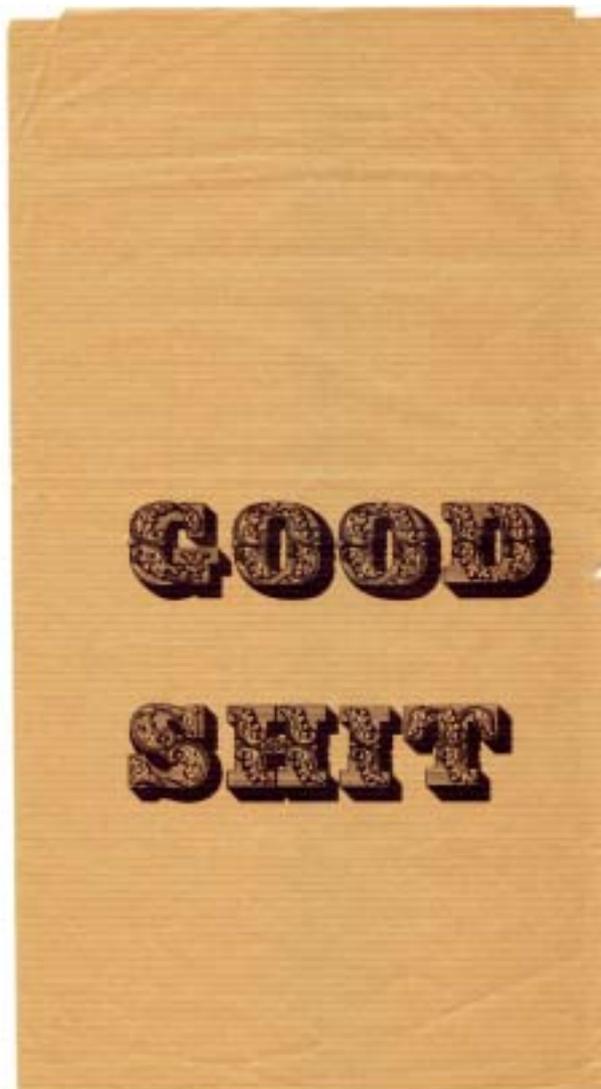
7.   LEWIS, Ruark.
False Narratives [cover title]. *Octavo, pp. [152] (including wrappers); near fine in original light card wrappers (these commence and conclude the text and so have been counted in the pagination).* Melbourne, NMA Publications, 2001.   **$75**
Edition limited to 300 copies: "published on the occasion of three project exhibitions by the author at the Experimental Art Foundation Adelade April – May The Wollongong City Gallery from August – October and the RMIT Gallery Melbourne November 2001".

8.   MURPHY, Peter.
Seen & Unseen: concrete poems [wrapper title]. *Tall octavo, pp. [20]; fine, sewn in bright and sharp original titling-wrappers with overlapping edges.* Melbourne, flying duck enterprises, 1975.   **$65**
First edition, limited to 300 numbered and signed copies.

9.   MURPHY, Peter.
Glass Doors and other poems. *Small duodecimo, pp. [24] (numbered [73]-96); fine (unread) in original light card wrappers.* Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1977.   **$45**
First edition: signed on the title-page.
This was one of the pamphlets in the third series of Angus & Robertson's 'Poets of the Month', an enterprising attempt to broaden the market for contemporary Australian poetry by issuing six-monthly volumes in parts. The sheets of each successive monthly part in the different series intended to be bound up into one volume every six months "for general sale and library acquisition".

10.   [MURPHY, Peter]
An excellent collection of early exhibition ephemera 1981 – 1987. *Eight pieces and one duplicate (one broadside A3, one broadsheet A3 folded three times vert-ically, five pieces A4, one piece oblong A5, one piece one third of a (portrait) A4 sheet), all appear to be screen-printed or offset-printed; fine, two folded as issued, all loose as issued.* Melbourne, 1981 – 1987.   **$125**
Comprising ephemera relating to the following early exhibitions of concrete poetry/visual language:
(i) "See Hear", Niagara Lane Galleries, 1981 (Folded broadside A3 group show exhibition programme, illustrated). This was apparently the first Australian exhibition of such material. Exhibitors: Jas.H. Duke, Richard Tipping, Peter Murphy, Lindsay Clements, Alex Selenitsch, Anthony Figallo, and Mimmo Cozzolino.
(ii) "Melbourne Hieroglyphs", Gallery 18, 1983 (Three pieces: broadside A4 solo exhibition flyer, illustrated; broadside oblong A4 review article by Simon Plant from The Heidelberger, 23 November 1983, illustrated, reprinted for distribution at the exhibition; narrow reduced broadside A4 review article by Anthony

Clarke from The Age, 13 December 1983, reprinted for distribution at the exhibition).

(iii) "Three", State Film Centre, 1984 (broadside A4 group show exhibition flyer, illustrated; folded broadsheet A3 Fringe Arts Festival Visual Arts programme, includes the exhibition "Three" at the State Film Centre, illustrated). Andrew Donald, Jenny Dunbavan, Peter Murphy.

(iv) "Just Wot!? An Exhibition of Visual Poetry", Artists Space Gallery, 1987 (broadside A4 group show exhibition flyer, illustrated (two copies); oblong A5 "Background notes" – these days it would be an 'Artist's Statement" by Peter Murphy). Exhibitors included Mimmo Cozzolino, Graeme Cutts, Jas. H. Duke, Anthony Figallo, Peter Murphy, Alex Selenitsch, Pete Spence, Thalia.

11.   **MURPHY, Peter.**
K *Photographic print (of text/type), (280 x 22 mm); in artist's original window mount.* [Melbourne, circa 1981].   **$110**
Concrete poem: signed on the mount and on the print verso.

12.   **MURPHY, Peter.**
Word Power Game. *Photographic print (of text/type), (280 x 22 mm); in artist's original window mount.* [Melbourne, circa 1981].   **$110**
Concrete poem: signed on the mount and on the print verso.

13.   **MURPHY, Peter.**
Untitled [original exhibition title "Approach to Crossing "]. *Black and white photographic print, 230 x 170 mm (sight); in artist's original window mount.* [Melbourne], 1984.   **$220**
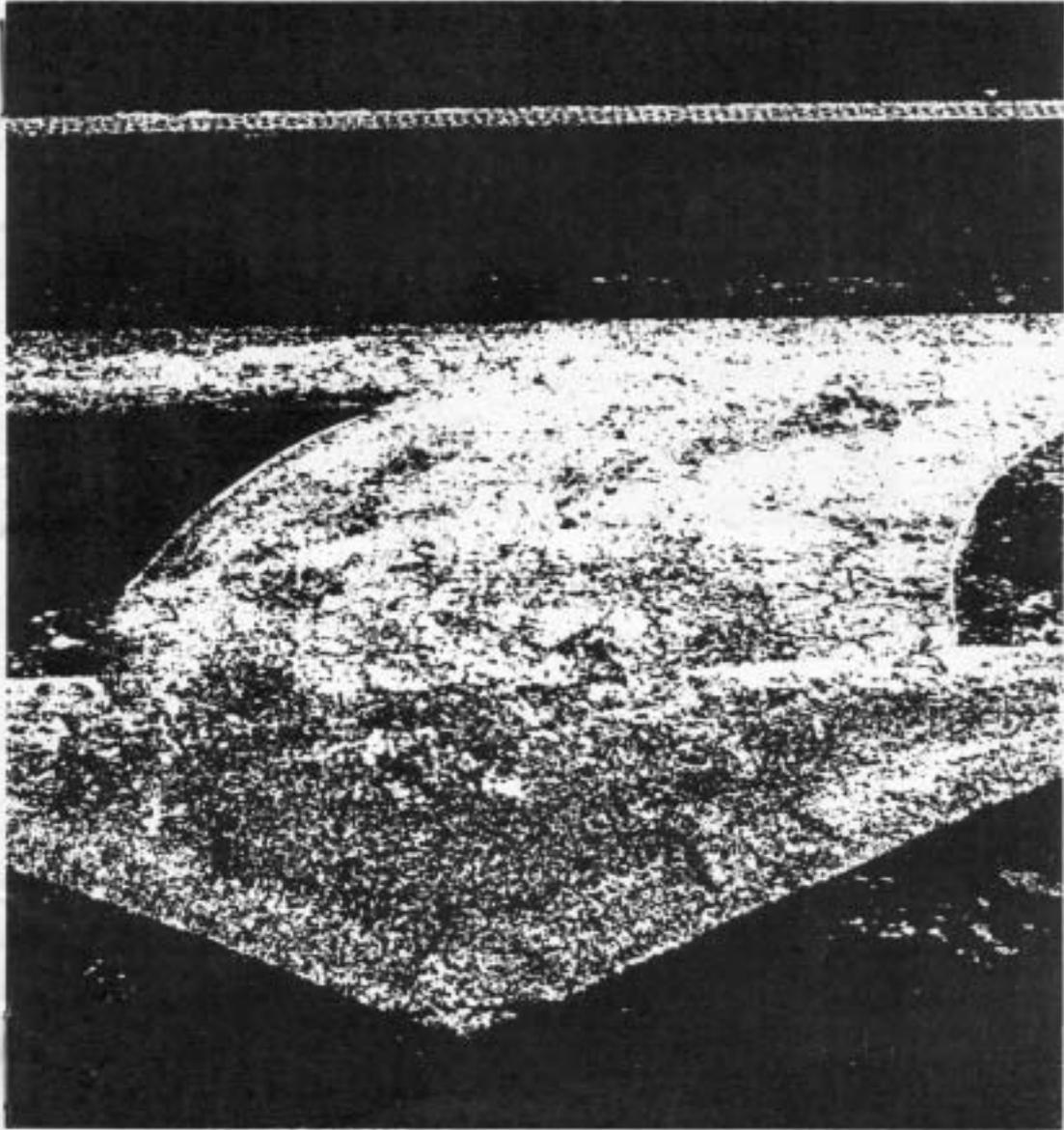A 'visual language' photograph: numbered 1 of five copies, numbered, signed, and dated on the mount.

14.   **MURPHY, Peter.**
Untitled [original exhibition title "Crossing "]. *Black and white photographic print, 170 x 230 mm (sight); in artist's original window mount.* [Melbourne], 1984.   **$220**
A 'visual language' photograph: numbered 1 of five copies, numbered, signed, and dated on the mount.

A STAB IN THE DARK

PETER MURPHY

No. 18: Murphy's *Stab in the Dark* reproduces a number of his 'visual language' exhibition pieces.

15.   MURPHY, Peter.
Untitled [original exhibition title "Snow Arrow"]. *Colour photographic print, 192 x 180 mm (sight); in artist's original window mount.* [Melbourne], 1984.   **$220**

A 'visual language' photograph: numbered 1 of five copies, numbered, signed, and dated on the mount.

16.   MURPHY, Peter.
Untitled [original exhibition title "Telecom Totem "]. *Colour photographic print, 200 x 190 mm (sight); in artist's original window mount.* [Melbourne], 1984.   **$220**

A 'visual language' photograph: numbered 1 of five copies, numbered, signed, and dated on the mount.

17.   MURPHY, Peter.
Untitled [original exhibition title "A Personal Statement of Some Kind "]. *Black and white photographic print, 235 x 185 mm (sight); in artist's original window mount.* [Melbourne, 1984].   **$165**

A 'visual language' photograph: signed on the mount but not numbered or dated. Although not numbered, this was also limited to 5 copies

**18.   MURPHY, Peter.**
A Stab in the Dark [wrapper title]. *Octavo, pp. [10] (photocopied); stapled in titling wrappers.* No imprint [Melbourne, The Author, circa 1980s].   **$95**

Rare: self-published 'concrete'. Perhaps, since most of the pieces are photographic, this is really better described as a photobook, a genre which, strictly defined, is surprisingly rare in Australia.

19.   MURPHY, Peter.
Snapshots. *16mo (A6), pp. [48]; fine in original wrappers.* Melbourne, Collective Effort Press, n.d. circa 1994.   **$35**

First edition: like all these small format Collective Effort Press books, issued in a modest edition.
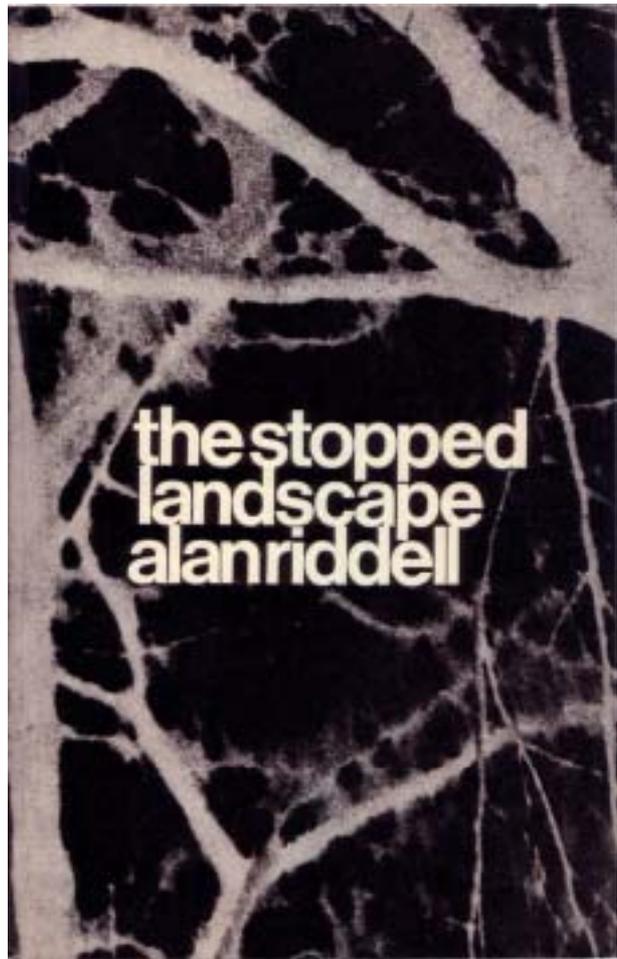
20.   RIDDELL, Alan.
The Stopped Landscape and other poems. *Octavo, pp. [viii], 56; bookplate on pastedown, an excellent copy in original boards with like dustwrapper.* London, Hutchinson, 1968.   **$75**

First edition: an early work by Riddell – his first 'real' book publication. Written in conventional verse form "some of the poems at the end of this volume show the direction his verse is taking now – towards the 'concrete' idiom" (dustwrapper blurb).

21.   RIDDELL, Alan.
Eclipse. *Octavo pp. 64; very good in original boards with like dustwrapper.* London, Calder & Boyars, 1972.   **$125**

First edition: uncommon. Collection of concrete poems by one of the earliest serious Australian practitioners.

See illustration overleaf.
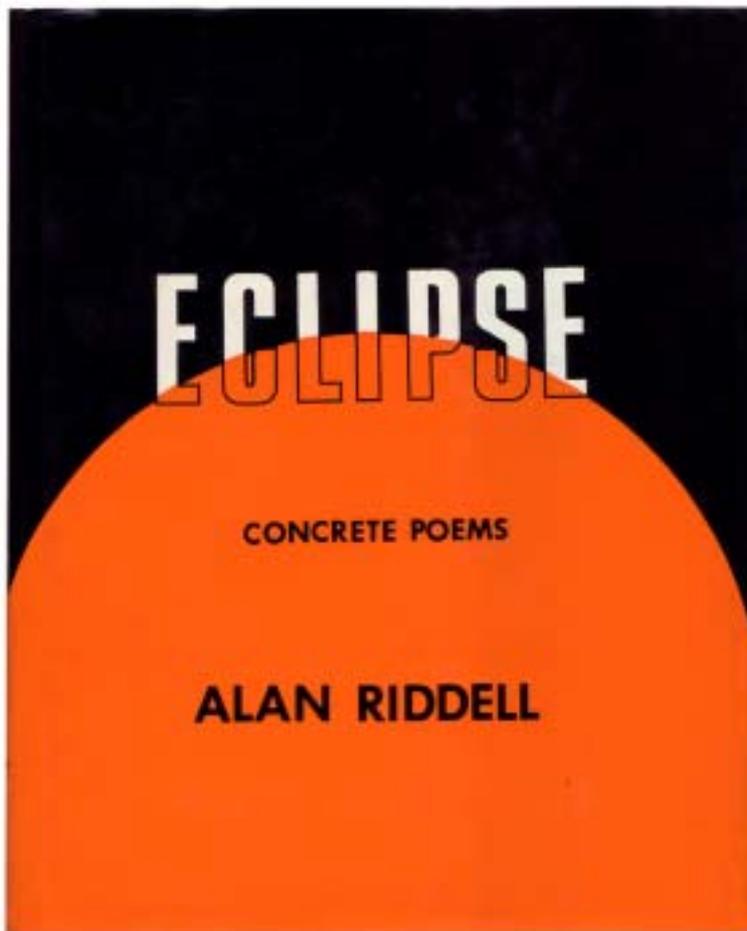
22.   **SELENITSCH, Alex (compiled by).** Australia Poet [box title]. *Leaves of printed paper, tissue, cord, plaster of Paris, wax birthday candle, glass tube, etc., and four loose leaves of 'index' in paper folder, all contained in a printed box of light-weight corrugated cardboard, with printed title "Australia Poet" in imitation of the Australia Post logo, overall dimensions 270 x 230 x 35 mm; contents fine, the box a little creased at the not very stiff extremities.* Canberra, Graphic Investigation Workshop, Canberra Institute of Arts, November 1989. **$220**

Self-styled "concrete poetry", mercifully limited to 40 numbered copies (this number 32).

It stretches our patience to describe this piece of meretricious, solipsistic, self-indulgent 1980's tripe but this is the sort of infantile nonsense still being encouraged in our 'arts' institutions and still being paid for by our taxes (which is the real problem).

In lieu of objective and relatively sane description, here follows a partially intelligible self-description (no misplaced commas have been corrected): "We write for print, but normally deny it. Here are some poems by poets who have found that print is not a nuisance but a language: all-pervading (the binding equivalent of gravity), subtle and open to individual expression and vision. Here too, are some artists who know something about print. Beyond the paper's surface, they work with solids and liquids, rituals and apparatus, using another language that is equally capable of paraphrasing (illuminating) poems and generating ideas out of matter".

The participants were: David Powell, Leslie Petersen, Christopher Croft, Richard Tipping, Paul Uhlmann, Therry Bouchard, Anthony Figallo, Brian Hincksman, Peter Oustabasidis ('ΠO'), Jennifer Hawkins, Peter Murphy, Frances Rhodes, Pete Spence, Peter Finlay, Heidi Jackson, Geoffrey Hinchcliffe, Gustavo Geissbuehler, Karen Cherry, Ruth Cowen, Peter Herel, Katharine Nix, Alex Selenitsch.

A characteristic monument to 1980s pomposity, self-evidently rare and something that in another two decades will only exist in collecting institutions.

23.   SELENITSCH, Alex.
8 monotones. *Quarto, printed titling-envelope, 270 x 270 mm, with eight printed cards, 260 x 260 mm; fine.* Melbourne, 1970.   **$65**
Extremely scarce: published in a limited edition of, probably, about 70 copies: this numbered "062".

24.   SELENITSCH, Alex.
7 more monotones. *Quarto, printed titling-envelope, 270 x 270 mm, with seven printed cards, 260 x 260 mm; fine.* Melbourne, 1973.   **$65**
Extremely scarce: published in a limited edition of, probably, about 70 copies: this numbered "047".

25.   SELENITSCH, Alex.
some-one. *Octavo, pp. [12]; fine in original wrappers.* Melbourne, Post Neo Publications, 1985.   **$35**
First edition, limited to 350 numbered copies.

26.   SELENITSCH, Alex.
Yarns & Threads: a pattern book. *Octavo, pp. [16], with 'visual language' illustration throughout; fine in plain card wrappers and decorated dustwrapper.* Melbourne (Heidelberg), Up to Something, 1990. **$35**
Scarce: "This pattern book was devised by Alex Selenitsh and published… on the occasion of the performance of Yarns & Threads".

The booklet is part programme for the performance of Yarns & Threads conducted by Rosanna Baptist congregation together with residents of special accommodation homes in the area, and part – the major part – Selenitsch's response through concrete poetry and visual language to the performance and the preparation for it, with which he was involved.
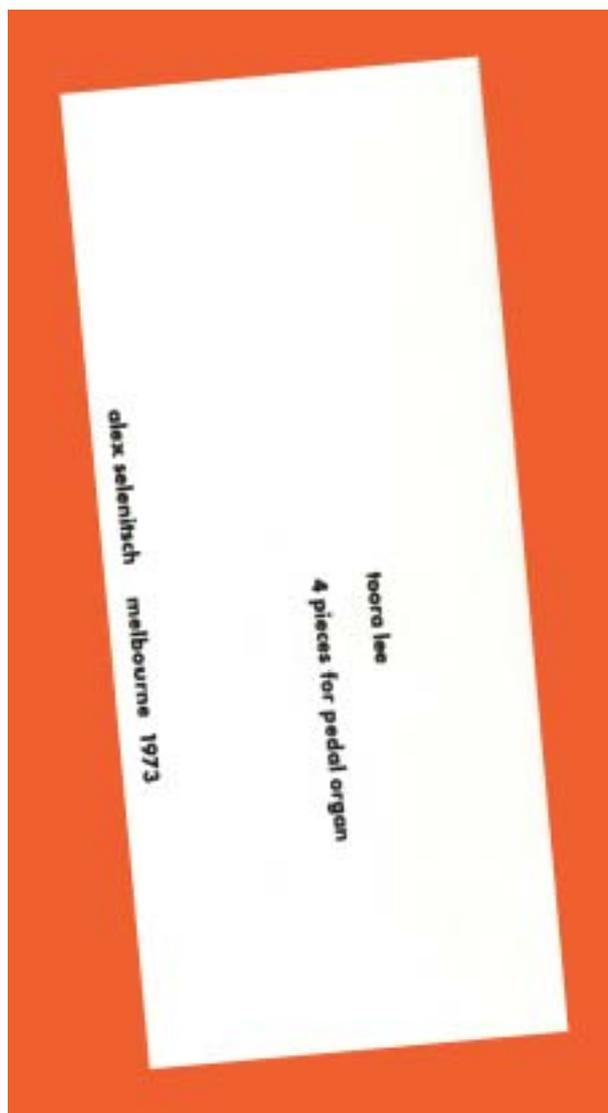
27.   SELENITSCH, Alex.
toora lee: 4 pieces for pedal organ. *Oblong printed titling-envelope, 115 x 265 mm, with four printed cards, 110 x 260 mm; fine.* Melbourne, 1973.   **$165**
Rare: evidently not held in any Australian institution. Part of a limited production, although without any indication of limitation.
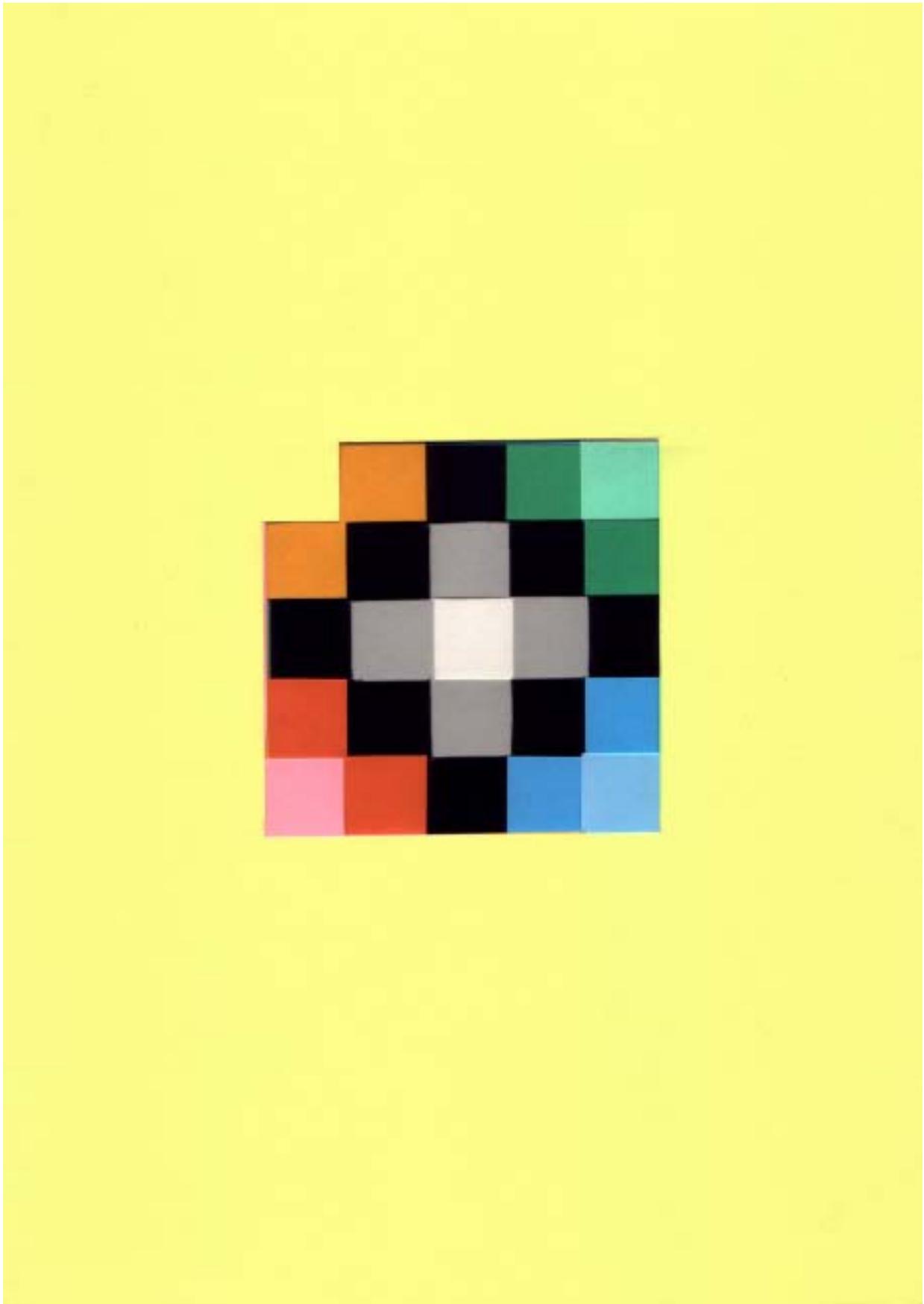
No. 28: series of coloured papers with cut-outs by hand from Selenitsch's *1-9…*

28. SELENITSCH, Alex.
1 to 9: texts words buildings & colour. *Quarto (A4), pp. [88], a section on various coloured papers, some added manuscript, complete with the loosely-inserted screen-printed "Reading Guide" (at the second page of the introduction); fine in original plain wrappers with printed tissue dustwrapper.* Melbourne (Clifton Hill), 1987.   **$165**

Rare: self-published edition limited to 91 numbered and signed copies but rare beyond that limitation. Very much a handmade book, with coloured pencil manuscript annotation at a few points in the introductory text (and minimally elsewhere), as well as a series of coloured papers with cut-outs by hand at one point; the binding by Ernestine Selenitsch.

Collecting Selenitsch's work drawn from his contributions to Architect, Overland, Transition, Missing Forms, On the Earth's Surface, and the exhibition "New Classicism".

29. THALIA.
A collection of signed and numbered broadsides. *Nine pieces, broadside A4 in format, in black on blue-green designer paper; as issued either laminated with eyelets (five pieces) or loose (four pieces); mint.* [Melbourne?, The Author], 1987.**$745**

Rare and highly ephemeral.

In the late 1980s Thalia, Melbourne-born Greek concrete poet, worked with the adaptation of Pitman shorthand, presenting words and concepts in an adapted, superimposed, or in some other way varied calligraphic form. These broadsides, each numbered, signed, and dated 1987, were limited to fifty numbered copies only.

The collection comprises the following pieces: "Literature", "Migration", "Nuclear Fears", "Radical Actions", "Wake Alarm" (these five laminated and with eyelets, as issued); and "Army", "Avenging",

"Eugenics", "Movements" (these four loose as issued).

A number were exhibited at the 1990 international exhibition of concrete poetry held in Moscow ("Literature", "Migration", "Nuclear Fears" , "Wake Alarm").
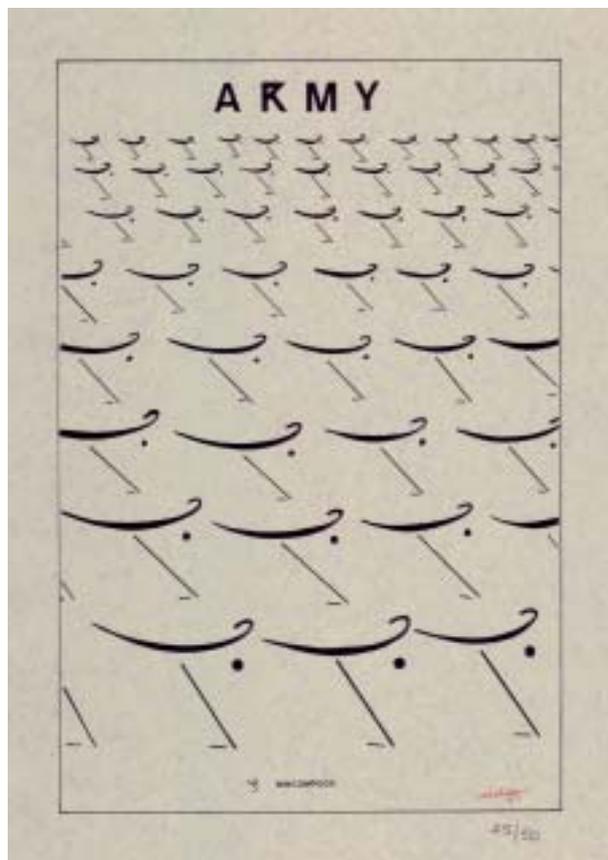
No. 29 (part): A Thalia broadside

30. THALIA.
New & Selected Poems. *Octavo, pp. 136; slight bump to the top forecorner, otherwise fine.* Melbourne, Collective Effort Press, 1998.   **$30**

First edition.

31. TIPPING, Richard Kelly.
Private Poetry Trespassers Welcome [drop title]. *Octavo flyer, pp. [4] on yellow paper; folded as issued, near fine.* Wangi Wangi, Thorny Devil Press, 1995.   **$35**

Scarce: paper variant of the catalogue.

32.   TIPPING, Richard Kelly.
Private Poetry Trespassers Welcome [drop title]. *Octavo flyer, pp. [4] on blue paper; folded as issued, near fine.* Wangi Wangi, Thorny Devil Press, 1995.   **$35**

Scarce: catalogue of an outdoor installation of Reflective Sign poems at Monsalvat, Eltham, Victoria, December 1995; comprising poet's statement and reproduction of three concrete poems.

33.   TIPPING, Richard Kelly.
Hear The Art [cover title]. *Large card sheet, folded twice vertically to form three panels, quarto, with colour illustration; an excellent copy, folded as issued.* London, The Eagle Gallery, 1997.   **$65**

Uncommon: exhibition catalogue accompanying Tipping's London exhibition of his three-dimensional word works, most photographed in colour. Includes exhibition history and publications.

34.   TIPPING, Richard Kelly.
Multiple Pleasures. Multiples and (sub) Versions. *Small octavo by dimensions, folding brochure of ten pages on five panels + 24 mainly photographic postcards; original plastic folder, printed in colour; near fine.* Sydney, Thorny Devil Press and Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2000. **$75**
Uncommon: concrete poetry/word art/visual language…

35.   TIPPING, Richard Kelly.
The Sydney Morning. Volume I. *Quarto, portfolio of prints on fine paper, in a cloth folder and slipcase in series style, as issued, fine.* Newcastle, Thorny Devil Press, 1988. **$110**
First in a series of portfolios of "word works" by Tipping, limited to 50 numbered copies. Livre d'artiste cum concrete poetry.

No. 37 (part): "Ned Nolan Kelly, 1992" print from Tipping's portfolio *The Sydney Morning. Volume III*, limited to 88 numbered, titled, and signed copies.

36.   **TIPPING, Richard Kelly.**
The Sydney Morning. Volume II. *Quarto, portfolio of prints on fine paper, in a cloth folder and slipcase in series style, as issued, fine.* Newcastle, Thorny Devil Press, 1991.   **$110**
Limited to 50 numbered copies.

37.   **TIPPING, Richard Kelly.**
The Sydney Morning. Volume III. *Quarto, portfolio of prints on fine paper, in a cloth folder and slipcase in series style, as issued, fine.* Lake Macquarie, Thorny Devil Press, 1992.   **$110**
Limited to 50 numbered copies, signed by the author.