The James Gallery

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THE HOUSE OF DUST, BY ALISON KNOWLES

EXHIBITION, JAMES GALLERY, GRADUATE CENTER, NEW YORK, 7 SEPTEMBER - 29 OCTOBER. OPENING RECEPTION: 7 SEPTEMBER FROM 6 TO 8PM.

September 2016

The House of Dust is a poetry project created by Alison Knowles and James Tenney and the Siemens 4004 computer in 1967 using fortran language. An early example of a computer generated poem, creating stanzas by working through iterations of lines with changing words from a finite vocabulary list. An early example of computerised poetry that plays on the unlimited possibilities of the random juxtapositions of words. To create this work, Knowles produced four word lists that were then translated into a computer language and organised into quatrains according to a random matrix. Each of the four lists contains terms that describe the attributes of a house: its materials, location, lighting, and inhabitants. The computer program imposed a non-rational ordering of subjects and ideas, generating unexpectedly humorous phrasing and imagery.

Printed on perforated tractor-feed paper common to dot matrix printers of the time, Knowles printed out numerous pages of these phrases in the form of a long scroll. She then created a book of sorts by tearing off a block of approximately twenty pages at a time, folding it in the manner of an accordion, and placing it in a plastic pouch. Hundreds of variations of houses are possible, as every version of the poem begins and ends with a different set of quatrains. Knowles's collaboration with the computer highlights the underlying arbitrariness of language, demonstrating how words acquire different meanings through structural relationships and shifting contexts.

A house of dust
on open ground
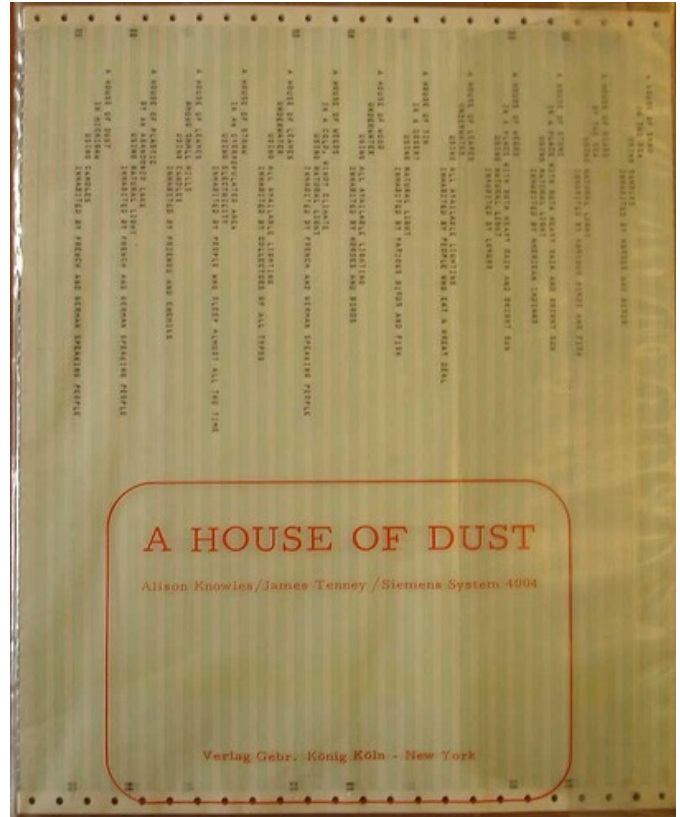*lit by natural light*
inhabited by friends and enemies

A house of paper
among high mountains
using natural light
inhabited by fishermen and families

In 1968, the computer-generated poem was translated into a physical structure when Knowles received a Guggenheim fellowship to build a house in Chelsea, New York. This architecture was later destroyed, restored and moved to Cal Arts Burbank, California, where Knowles was invited to teach in 1970-72. She enjoyed teaching her classes in the House and invited artists to interact with its open structure by creating new works.

Reactivating the pedagogical model proposed by *The House of Dust* (and by Fluxus with which Knowles was associated), this project at the James is the outcome of collaboration between artists and scholars in disciplines including art, architecture, poetry, literature, music, computer science, and performance. Over the fall semester, reactivations of Knowles' workshops will engage students in Social Practice Queens at Queens College and Spitzer School of Architecture, City College as part of their curriculum. The exhibition publication includes texts by Ph.D. students in English, Art History, and Theatre at The Graduate Center connecting their research interests on this project to their dissertation topics.

Artists: Alison Knowles and Ay-o, Chloë Bass, Keren Benbenisty, Jérémie Bennequin, George Brecht, Hugo Brégeau, Marcel Broodthaers, John Cage, Alejandro Cesarco, Jagna Ciuchta, Constant, Jean-Pascal Flavien, Yona Friedman, Mark Geffriaud, Beatrice Gibson, Eugen Gomringer, Dan Graham, Jeff Guess, Geoffrey Hendricks, Dick Higgins, Maria Hupfield, Toshi Ichiyanagi, Norman C. Kaplan, Allan Kaprow, Frederick Kiesler, Nicholas Knight, Katarzyna Krakowiak, Mikko Kuorinki, Theo Lutz, Stephane Mallarmé, Alan Michelson, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Jenny Perlin, Nina Safainia, Carolee Schneeman, Mieko Shiomi, James Tenney, Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, and Emmett Williams.

Curators: Katherine Carl, Maud Jacquin and Sébastien Pluot.

Cristina Guadalupe Galván is a visual artist, architect and writer from Spain based in New York. She is principal at Idée Fixe, a trans-disciplinary studio of art and architecture where she addresses social and cultural issues through critical thinking and media-specific projects.