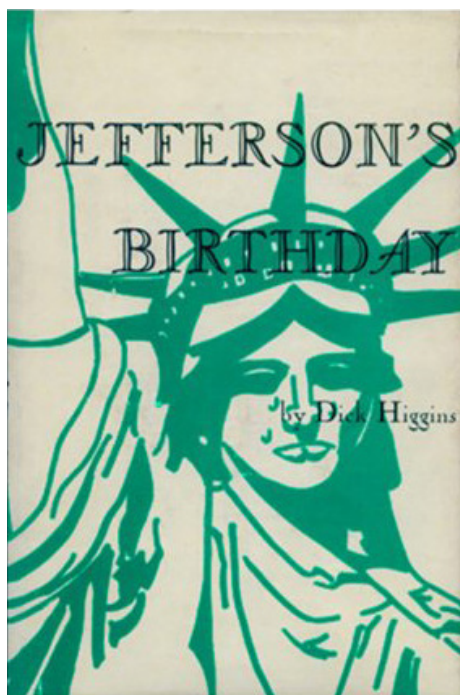


Exhibition 27 September 2023 - 22 January 2024

Sabatini Building, Floor 3

Call It Something Else

Something Else Press, Inc. (1963-1974)



Dick Higgins, *Jefferson's Birthday/Postface*, New York, Something Else Press, 1964

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In conceiving an exhibition on a publishing house that is the work of an artist but not, *stricto sensu*, a work of art, one may ask: What is the *object*? That question is especially apt for a subject like the Something Else Press (hereafter SEP). The multivalence of that word resonates across the field of interpretation, splitting into many pertinent questions and a spectrum of possible answers.

Defining *object* as “aim” allows us to become more specific and ask: What was Higgins’s object when he launched the Press in the early 1960s, calling it a “necessity”? What was he taking on (in the sense of *supporting* as much as *confronting*)? And to what did Higgins object? The usual answer points to a 1963 dispute he had with George Maciunas, who had delayed publishing Higgins’s *Jefferson’s Birthday* (soon to become the first SEP book) to focus on preparing works submitted by artists for collective publication under the imprint of Fluxus. That Higgins’s frustration with Maciunas led to his decision to found a press is not in doubt. But this story is almost anecdotal in comparison to the entire, decade-long history of the SEP, which this exhibition seeks to illuminate.

The SEP’s object from the start was to seize and build upon the burgeoning creative experiments by composers, dancers, authors, and artists of all kinds (many in Higgins’s circle) and to give their ephemeral work the *necessary* buttressing to carry it into the future. If the book itself is an object (a fact Higgins made impressively concrete when he noted that four hundred pages equals one inch in thickness), its covers, paper, and binding, like canvas and primer, constitute its support. Could high-quality paper, striking layouts, and new distribution methods imbue creative gestures and statements with enough substance to be graspable? At the time, advanced art (in certain circles) was avoiding the object at all costs. In committing himself to book-objects, Higgins confronted object

With the compliments of the editors —

Something Else Press, Inc.
160 Fifth Avenue New York, N. Y. 10010
WAtkins 9-2699

With the compliments of the editors, n.d. Business card included in the books published by the Something Else Press
Emily Harvey Foundation Collection, New York

status, including but not limited to the objectification of the creative act and the rise of art as a commodity object.

Decades ago, when asked if the apparent conformity of the SEP's forms (as opposed to the radicality of its content) was a strategic decision on his part to allow the avant-garde to infiltrate the establishment, or whether it was purely an aesthetic decision, Higgins's pithy response was that one could not "infiltrate the establishment for any length of time": the best one could do was to act as if one were already part of it.

One last aspect of our initial question about the object begets another, which will bring us into the present. What was/is the museum's object—above all, *this museum's*—in mounting an exhibition on

the SEP? Indeed, what are the museum objects for such a show? That we all (the entire team) have addressed these challenges has not only *made* the project, but made it hold up, we hope, as a Reina Sofia project.

Already by 1960, artists in the downtown New York scene had begun to distrust galleries and to seek out more neutral spaces to present their developing work. It remains striking that Higgins had already been deeply involved for a good five years in dissolving the boundaries between the individual arts, in seeing (and activating) one *through* another, before he bore down on his concept of intermedia, which he formulated in 1964/5 and published on in 1966. Split off from the terms then in use, *mixed media* and *multimedia*, intermedia would gain



John Armleder and Patrick Lucchini, *Intermedial Object No. 1*, 1977. Model, painted wood, glass, plastic, sand, electric light, 43 × 23 × 12 cm. Coll. MAMCO, gift of Jean-Pierre Favre

ground in lockstep with the mandate of the SEP.

In 1966, Higgins wrote a score titled *Intermedial Object #1*. He intended this piece to be the first of a series that never materialized. Insofar as it exceeded the conventional limits of any one medium or

platform—including that of publishing—the SEP aligns with the concept of intermedia. In the final analysis, we might even call it the example of intermedia par excellence. Perhaps we could go so far as to think of the Something Else Press as the *Intermedial Object #2* Dick Higgins never deemed it necessary to name.

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