

## Signals Crossing Borders: Cybernetic Words and Images and 1960s Avant-Garde Art

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## SIGNALS CROSSING BORDERS: CYBERNETIC WORDS AND IMAGES AND 1960S AVANT-GARDE ART

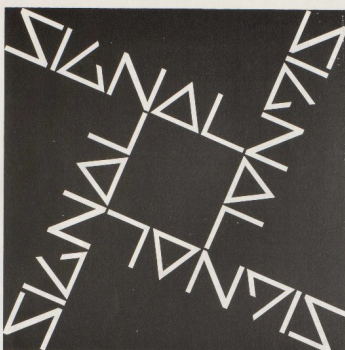
John A. Tyson

We hope to provide a forum for all those who believe passionately in the correlation of the arts and Art's *Imaginative* integration with technology, science, architecture and our entire environment. We believe that such an integration can only be accomplished by most rigorous means: by the exercise of the highest academic standards, and when society gives to the artist its available materials, its support, *and complete freedom in the pursuit of his (the artist's) art.*

—David Medalla and Paul Keeler

This frank, hopeful introduction appears on the front page of the first issue of the avant-garde publication *Signalz: Newsbulletin of the Centre for Advanced Creative Study* (the sole one that employs a deviant “z” spelling) (Fig. 1). Eleven numbers of *Signals* appeared between August of 1964 and March of 1966. The periodical was a textual supplement to the programming of a doubled enterprise: the Signals Gallery, which was coextensive—initially selfsame—with the Center for Advanced Creative Study mentioned in the full title. A pair of young impresarios directed Signals, the Philippine poet and artist David Medalla (b. 1942), the bulletin's primary editor, and British curator and critic Paul Keeler (b. 1942) who oversaw gallery programming. Additionally, musician Christopher Walker, the artists Gustav Metzger and Marcelo Salvadori, and the curator and critic Guy Brett were co-founders of the Centre for Advanced Creative Study and regular collaborators (Brett, *Exploding Galaxies*, 46-47). The less technocratic name, Signals Gallery, was adopted when they shifted operations from an apartment at 92 Cornwall Gardens to a four-story building at the corner of Wigmore and Welbeck streets in Central London, a move which coincided with the *Newsbulletin*'s second issue (the name dropped from the masthead by the third issue).

By their names, there is a suggestion that both Signals undertakings (Gallery and Newsbulletin) were technologies for broadcasting information. The broadsheet was, moreover, the textual manifestation of a London-based multiplatform social network, consisting of an informal band of European and Latin American artists and critics, the Signals Group. Possibly to an even greater extent than the gallery, the



"The actual origin of civilization depended on the simultaneous mastery or possession of a number of techniques, some new, some old, which, taken together, sufficed to turn man from being mainly a food-gatherer into being mainly a producer of food. A permanent surplus of food is the necessary basis for the emergence of civil society. The greater concentration of population became possible, urban life began, and the Neolithic village was overshadowed by the city walls. The fundamental techniques were the domestication of animals, agriculture, horticulture, pottery, brickmaking, grinding, weaving and sewing. These ways of making and cooperating with nature constitute a revelation in man's genius and a revolution in his way of life. The first area where civilization came into existence was in the Near East, in the river valley of the Nile, the Euphrates, and the Indus. The vital period in which the new techniques were developed is roughly the two millennia from 4000 to 400 B.C."

"When history is really taught as it ought to be taught, so that everybody is made to understand, as the foundation of his intellectual life, the true story of human society, one of the most fundamental lessons will be the concrete and detailed exposition of the nature of this great revolution in man's control over his environment. The film, the museum, the workshop, the lecture, the library will combine to make the significance of these vital two thousand years sink into the historical consciousness of mankind. This technical revolution constitutes the material basis of ancient civilization. No comparable change in human destiny made place between it and the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century. The cultures of the ancient empires of the Near East, of Greece and Rome, and of Medieval Europe, all rest on the technical achievements of the Neolithic Age. Their resemblances to one another result from this fact. Their differences from us today can only be understood when we realize that we are separated from them all by the second great technical revolution, the coming of the Machine Age."

Professor Benjamin Farrington  
Greek Science, Pelican Books, 1963

"Not the occupation, not the object to be manufactured, should be put in the foreground, but rather the realization of man's organic functions. With this functional preoccupation, he can then deal with the technical conditions from within. Thus we lay the organic basis for a system of production whose final point is man, and not profit interests."

László Moholy-Nagy

"It is the social function of great poets and artists continually to renew the appearance nature has for the eyes of man. Without poets, without artists, Man would soon wane of nature's monotony"

Guillaume Apollinaire

"Let us first of all kill our egocentricity. From now on only teams, groups, whole disciplines can create: co-operation between thinkers, engineers and technicians, industrialists, architects and sculptors will be the first condition of work."

Victor Vasarely

"I feel there is a need to affirm that, in terms of the building of objects which embody principles of construction not possible through painting and sculpture, we can extend the framework of creative vision; and in the explor-

ation, transformation and use of new materials, we have an unlimited field upon which to develop new analogies between what exists in form, space, time, surfaces, dimensions and what grows in perception."

Marcello Salvadori

"Each material has its specific characteristics which we must understand if we want to use it. We must remember that everything depends on how we use a material, not on the material itself. ... And just as we acquire ourselves with materials, just as we must understand functions as they first become familiar with the psychological and spiritual factors of our life. No cultural career is possible without them. For we are dependent on this spirit of our time."

Hans van der Bufe

"As for me, I don't subscribe to any theory. I have no theories, only a certain way of life. I like these lines by Walt Whitman: 'I do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes.'"

David Medalla

"I shall give up the use of colour, I think, I shall work with the pigmentation of the model, mixed with dust, and even, perhaps, with their own blood, with the sap of plants, the colour of the earth and so on."

Yves Klein

"This conscience brings us, in a future perhaps remote, towards the end of art as a thing separate from our surrounding environment which is the actual plastic reality. But this end is at the same time a new beginning. Art will not only continue but will realize itself more and more. By the utilization of architecture, sculpture and painting in their highest development, a new plastic reality will be created. Painting and sculpture will not manifest themselves as separate objects, nor as 'mural art' which destroys architecture itself, nor as 'applied art', but, being purely constructive, will aid the creation of a surrounding environment not merely utilitarian and rational, but also pure and complete in its beauty."

Piet Mondrian

"The image of man is like the spectrum of a substance. Being like the spectrum, his eyes are never ready to unfold its full radiance the moment we turn our backs on it, of ourselves for him pass through our gaze."

Naum Gabo

**Stele to Takis**  
(Creator of modern aeolian harps/Apollo to the Mignotto-Fusco/Door of Voivre (figures to the Loris & Frances of nuclear war))

Full follow-through  
Chairs erection  
Erecting three antennas  
Simultaneously  
In three widespread  
Locations a high Degree  
Of coordination  
(in all reflector altitudes)  
With inter-connections  
Operational readiness  
Accurate performance  
Full-field operation  
Anywhere in the world

David Medalla,  
Paris 1961.

Takis Magnetic Sculpture. 1964

## Signalz

### Newsbulletin of the Centre for Advanced Creative Study

Director: Paul Keeler  
Flat 4, 92 Cornwall Gardens  
London, S.W.7. Tel. 01-833  
Vol. 1 No. 1 August 1964

**STOP PRESS**  
NOVEMBER: INAUGURATION OF CENTRE  
SHOWROOMS (FOUR FLOORS, 35, WIGMORE  
STREET, LONDON W.1). TAKIS' RETRO-  
SPECTIVE AND LILLIAN LUN.

Signalz, the name of our newsletter, was  
inspired by a series of castles sculptured by the  
Greek artist Takis. Our symbol and the  
layout of this paper were designed by Keith  
Peck.

Price per copy of Signalz is one shilling and  
six pence.

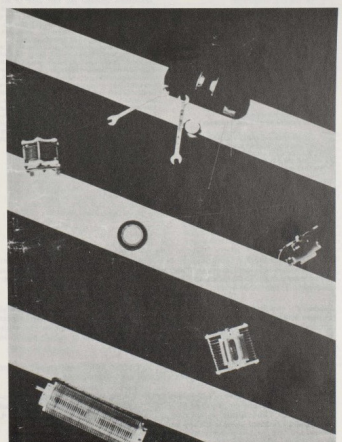
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mitted with a self-addressed stamped envelope.

This is the first number of **Signalz**, the monthly news bulletin of the Centre for Advanced Creative Study. **Signalz** will contain news items on the activities of the Centre, documentation and critical studies on the Centre's artists, as well as original writings by the artists themselves. From time to time **Signalz** shall also publish pamphlets and books of experimental prose and poetry. We hope to expand and increase our pages in the future: to include essays by architects, art historians, scientists, technologists, economists, sociologists and town planners. **Signalz** shall print books, essays, notices of important exhibitions in London and the provinces, as well as accounts of pioneering work in the dance, cinema, theatre and music. **Signalz** shall bring to the attention

of the artist new developments in technology and science which might be of assistance in the formation of the artist's discipline, in the choice of his materials and the improvement of his technique. We hope to provide a forum for all those who believe passionately in the correlation of the arts and Art's imaginative integration with technology, science, architecture and our entire environment.

We believe that such an integration can only be accomplished by most rigorous means: by the exercise of the highest aesthetic standards, and when society gives to the artist its available materials, its support, —and complete freedom in the pursuit of his (the artist's) art.



**Fig. 1.** Front page of *Signalz: Newsbulletin of the Centre for the Advanced Creative Study 1.1* (August 1964).  
© David Medalla and Paul Keeler.

publication amplified group members' artworks and ideas, which circulated internationally via the pages *Signals*. The journal's distribution of words and images served a deterritorializing function: the editors aimed to engender the kind of utopian, transnational "global village" that cybernetician and media theorist Marshall McLuhan imagined the modern media could yield (*Understanding Media* 46). Further licensing Keeler and Medalla's endeavor, McLuhan also believed that it was artists who were best suited to grasp the implications of new technologies: "The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception" (*The Medium is the Massage* 7).

A dialectic between center and margin played out with *Signals* globalized operations: the gallery was a technology that brought art from Latin America to a hip European metropolis; conversely, the *Newsbulletin* liberated art and ideas from geographical centers and their conventions of presentation. Albeit to a lesser (but not insignificant) extent, *Signals* worked to bring East and West together too. The periodical resisted the Cold-War era's binary world order by reporting on developments from both sides of the iron curtain. In number 3/4 (October-November, 1964), a photo of cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin appears alongside kinetic sculpture. In the next issue, they ran John Newell's discussion of U.S. and Russian achievements in "The New Space Race" (December-January, 1964/65). Moreover, the Russian Avant-Garde's relevance for the present moment is alluded to in nearly every issue. This Soviet body of work was still extremely fresh in the 60s, as little had been seen in the West until the British art historian Camilla Gray's *The Great Experiment: Russian Art, 1863-1922* (1962). This tome introduced Suprematism and Constructivism to a new generation searching for forms that connoted rebellion, if not revolution. Indeed, Medalla and Keeler's publication and gallery struck a specific political stance. Their focus on Latin American art and artists implied a refusal to view New York and the United States as the center. Rather, they militated to produce alternative artistic constellations.

As this essay's epigraph implies, in addition to crossing geographic borders and considering art as part of its system, *Signals: Newsbulletin* transcended disciplinary bounds. Its creators imagined a resolution of forms of creativity, blurring C.P. Snow's "two cultures" in order to poetically "misuse" science and technology for art.<sup>1</sup> In order to achieve this primary directive, the magazine was highly citational, bringing together words and images that would not typically be imprinted on the same folio. This logic began with the journal's name. Keeler and Medalla borrowed the title from a series of tensile sculptures made by the Greek kinetic artist Panagiotis Vassilakis (known as Takis). Combinations of

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<sup>1</sup> British chemist Charles P. Snow's influential discussion of the arts/sciences divide in *The Two Cultures* was widely discussed within advanced art circles during the 1960s.

text and images were tightly “curated,” juxtaposed for rhetorical and aesthetic ends. The *Newsbulletin* reprinted numerous quotes, articles, scientific reports, diagrams, and poems—defly weaving them together with new content.

Drawing on the insights of art historian Gwen Allen in relation to U.S. magazines, I propose that *Signals: Newsbulletin* was “an alternative space for art” (Fig.1). The broadsheet went beyond mere art documentation or publicity (though it did fulfil both of these functions). The printed page is a platform for display, a place of virtual exhibition. It was arguably equally important, if not more so, than the Signals Gallery for the spread of vanguard art information. The move to the print was not just a translation, but also process of mutation: texts and images (both signals imprinted on the page) inflect and even infect one another; layout and graphic design decisions enabled new meanings and intersubjective author positions to emerge. Through whimsical combinations of content, reader-viewers ideally saw an expansion of their imaginations. Indeed, an advertisement in issue 3/4 impels readers to “join us in our quest for an imaginative life” by paying a modest 30 shillings (about 30 2016 dollars) to subscribe. Blazing new paths for art with techno-poetics, *Signals: Newsbulletin* significantly anticipates developments in art and art publishing that would emerge only a few years later in North America and Europe.



David Medalla led an itinerant existence. Born into a well-off family in Manila, he was a child prodigy. As an adolescent Medalla published poems, translated William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* into Tagalog, and undertook anthropological fieldwork with the Igorot and Ifugao peoples in the Philippines. His continued interest in first-nations peoples is manifest in photos and texts that appear in many editions of *Signals*. He enrolled at Columbia University as a special student at age 12 (Mitichison). After his time in New York, he moved to Paris, where he became a student of philosopher of science Gaston Bachelard and immersed himself in Surrealism. His artistic breakthrough came with pioneering foaming kinetic sculptures entitled *Cloud Canyon* (1963-68). The British half of the partnership was the son of a wealthy optical instruments manufacturer. Keeler initially tried his hand at acting before shifting toward art; in the early 1960s, he started a small business as a canvas primer. Later, he would become an authority on Islamic art and develop a scholarly network for addressing art of the ancient world.

Medalla and Keeler’s relationship predated *Signals*. The men had been flat-mates in Little Venice, Paddington since 1962. In 1963, Keeler organized the first U.K. exhibition of Medalla’s paintings and drawings. Their curatorial collaboration began to take further shape following a

transformative trip Medalla took to Paris. In the French capital he encountered the kinetic works of Takis, the Belgian Pol Bury, and the Venezuelan Jesus Rafael Soto at Galerie Diderot; immediately struck by these artworks, he returned to the U.K. profoundly affected. By 1964, he had turned Keeler on to kineticism: Keeler organized two pioneering exhibitions of kinetic art—*Structures Vivantes: Mobiles/Images* at the Redfern Gallery and *Soundings* at Oxford’s Ashmoleum Museum. A sequel or encore show, *Soundings Two*, was held at Signals from July-September, 1965.

### A Transnational Mosaic

The first edition of the *Newsbulletin* commences with lines from a range of sources, bringing them together in order to produce a modern textual mosaic. This multi-facetted figure was the structure that McLuhan used as a metaphor for the diverse, ever-shifting modern media. Following the Canadian cybernetician, this tiled structure made of “numerous data and quotations in evidence offers the only practical means of revealing causal operations in history” (Gutenberg Galaxy, lxii). In *Signalz*, the words of the classicist and historian of science Benjamin Farrington, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, Bauhaus masters Mies van der Rohe and Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, the de Stijl group’s Piet Mondrian, and constructivist Naum Gabo are mixed alongside contemporary voices: those of the recently deceased Yves Klein, op artist Victor Varasely, and, rather conspicuously, the journal’s principal editor too. Medalla’s quote reflects his interests in citation, his love of poetry, and his publishing approach to open up authorship: “I don’t subscribe to any theory. I have no theories, only a certain way of life. I like these lines by Walt Whitman: *Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes*” (“Signalz,” 1).

Looking back on his career, Medalla described his activities as “a spiritual adventure in understanding contemporary culture in the fields where art and science converged in harmony and energized each other” (qtd. in Nankervis, “A Stitch”). He used nearly the same language for *Signals*. The slogan that ran in a number of the earlier issues (numbers 2, 3/4, and 5) affirms it was “dedicated to the adventures of the modern spirit.” Despite bearing witness to the more dismal side of science with the creation of the atom bomb, there continued to be a great deal of faith placed in new scientific and technological developments in the 60s. According to art critic and *Signals* regular Guy Brett, an important voice on kinetic art, a kind of scientific utopianism unimaginable today characterized the era. For example, Medalla was very influenced by Werner Heisenberg, to whom he wrote a “fan” letter to and viewed as a “pure” scientist—despite Heisenberg’s work with the Nazis (Lee 127). Medalla

republished the physicist's discussion of science and philosophy, "The Role of Modern Physics in the Present Development of Human Thinking" in *Signals* 9 (August-September-October, 1965).

Medalla was not shy about promotion. In the introductory remarks of *Signals* 2, he writes there has been "a big jump for a second number and one that surely heralds bright exciting things to come" ("*Signals* 2" 2). Data about the reach of the journal appears in a column on the second page of the second issue, which also transmits messages about the pool of collaborators. The magazine had quickly augmented in scale, equally in terms of contents and readership. For *Signals* 2 the editors expanded the number of pages to sixteen. The circulation expanded also, more than tripling to 10,000. In addition, the graphic design grew richer over the course of the publication's two-year run: colored and metallic inks—usually of a distinct variety of hues for each issue—appeared in later issues, further enlivening the pages.

The second iteration was "prepared with the cooperation and assistance of the Embassies of Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay, Venezuela and other Latin American countries" (Medalla, "Signals 2" 2). As issue two's introduction highlights, *Signals* had a global reach. It spanned aesthetics and international politics. Coopting the resources of the British Council as well as "many embassies and consulates in London," the periodical apparently traveled to "outposts in all the corners of the world" via diplomatic cultural networks (Medalla, "Signals 2" 2). While it is difficult to determine whether these claims were not a little overblown, *Signals* is today found in libraries in South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, as well as across Europe and North America.

In addition, *Signals* circulated via airmail systems and partook in an epistolary culture. Rather charming photos of the gallery's associates seated on the carpet, working collectively to attach mailing labels provides concrete evidence of this operation. The *Newsbulletin* reached publics in both hemispheres and on both sides of the Atlantic. Various figures in the orbit of the Northeastern United States, as tech-art gurus Jack Burnham and György Kepes, the American critic Dore Ashton (best known for her writings on abstract expressionists at this time, but who later weighed in on tech art), or the German-American artist Hans Haacke received the transmissions. These readers subsequently were activated as collaborators: altering positions, the one-time readers at various times composed letters that *Signals* published (Haacke also contributed photos of Takis's projects).

*Signals* provoked a shift in the art world, in the words of *The Observer's* James Fox (reprinted in *Signals* 1.9), "From North to South." *Signals* introduced many South American artists to the Anglo-American art world. For instance, the first U.K. exhibition of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark was held at



the gallery in 1965. The journal ran extensive features on, Jesus Soto, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Alejandro Otero, and Sergio de Camargo, artists not well known in the UK at the time. Keeler and Medalla met Camargo in Paris, and through his contacts, familiarized themselves with “the whole Latin American, but especially Brazilian art scene” (Brett qtd. in Lee 131). The *Newsbulletin* was a valuable source of texts by the artists themselves as well as critics of their works. Thus, *Signals* was very important for contextualizing their work for British audiences. But it did not solely provide the interpretations by critics or curators, the artists are given the opportunity to help determine the meaning of their works. On one hand this move seems to extend a kind of cult of the artist (which was partially undermined by the other voices and Medalla’s designs); on the other, it tacitly questioned the norms of authority that govern art and art discourse.

Furthermore, the journal anticipates ideas about alternative transnational constellations that developed in the later 1980s. Gerardo Mosquera, curator of the Second Havana Biennial (1986), famously advocated for a reimagining of contemporary art that would promote “south-south-south” connections and contest the English-language hegemony of art. Mosquera decried the way that Manhattan-based institutions had a monopoly on the conferral of “advanced art” status. The Signals Gallery and *Newsbulletin* provided a space to imagine and inscribe this set of relations and transcendence of Anglophone views on art. By showcasing works from artists hailing from the Southern hemisphere and reproducing texts in a range of languages, *Signals* anticipated and even helped commence the global turn in art.

### **A Little Historiography of *Signals***

Suggesting the magazine continued to be of great relevance for transnational art, The Institute of International Visual Arts (commonly known as InIVA) released an exacting boxed facsimile edition of the entire run, complete with a new index, in 1995.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, *Signals Newsbulletin* has not previously received holistic art-historical assessment. In contrast, the later vanguard French publication *Robho* (edited by Jean Clay) was profiled in the journal *Third Text* by Isabel Plante and addressed by Allen in *Artists’ Magazines*. Given the common pool of contributors and artists—as well as the fact that

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<sup>2</sup> Based on a comparison with the original issues of *Signals* held in the library of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, the two editions are nearly identical. Apparently, 1000 copies of the InIVA edition were printed.



*Signals* artist Carlos Cruz-Diez designed the layout—*Signals* must be seen as foundational. *Robho* was certainly inspired by the earlier magazine and in some sense, assumed the mantle of promoting Latin American art in Europe (Cruz-Diez and Jiménez 72).

Guy Brett, a pioneering curator and critic of kinetic art, who wrote for both magazines, discusses *Signals* in *Exploding Galaxies*, his monographic study of the oeuvre of his friend David Medalla. Brett views Keeler and Medalla's publication and gallery as epitomizing the experimental spirit of their time. Brett suggests that their embrace of material from assorted disciplines and tendencies may have contributed to art historians' unease or inability to deal properly with Keeler and Medalla's project: "'Orders' of art history tend to be linear and chronological. But movements can also be understood in the way they spread out sideways or in all directions" (40). He also emphasizes the parity between poems and criticism in *Signals*. Brett argues that Medalla had an amazing capacity to blend the playful and fantastic with pragmatic organizational skills, which carried over to the "lavish" *Newsbulletin* (49). He specifically points to the "MMMMMMM . . . Manifesto" that Medalla published in *Signals* 1.8—which oneirically outlines alternate functions for new technology—as an instance of the artist "weav[ing] together the roles of pragmatic 'maker' and unrestrained 'dreamer'" (63).

Pamela Lee discusses the Signals Gallery and *Newsbulletin* in tandem in *Chronophobia*, an important treatment of shifting relations to a time in 1960s art. Lee identifies their lack of interest in North American art and hones in on what she calls Signals Gallery's "'imaginative' character" (127). She insightfully suggests that "its interests were in articulating new perceptual modes for the spectator, anticipating the effects introduced by modern science through seeing works of art as vehicles of energy" (127). Perceptively, Lee argues that a parallel drive for expansion might conceptually link Medalla's expanding "living" foam sculptures to the group (128; 130). Though she does not state it explicitly, Lee's arguments about art as a "vehicle of energy" capable of "retraining" the imagination should be extended to the gallery's publication as well (127).

### **The Backdrop of "Swinging London"**

In 1966, Paul Hogarth and Malcolm Muggeridge created an insider's view of London in word and image with caricatured line drawings, updating William Hogarth's satirical and moralizing views of British life in ironical tone proper to the later twentieth century. They are frank in their view of the metropolis as the epitome of modern, urban life:

Our hopes and dreams are written up in coloured lights, presented on screens in movement and colour; enlarged in a close-up of a body, a face, a magnified morsel of delectable flesh [...]. Our heaven is earth, and London is its capital. London growing ever larger, sprawling ever further [...] going ever faster. London! (104; 108)

It was in this environment of kaleidoscopic sensory overload that Signals emerged. Located at the 39 Wigmore Street, in London's fashionable West End, a mere two blocks north of the major commercial artery of Oxford Street, the gallery introduced many new artistic forms to the U.K. scene. By its cutting edge contents, the art space and its associated *Newsbulletin* progressed very much in lockstep with the hip, bubbling metropolis. While transnational, Signals surely capitalized on the cool reputation of its location, much like more traditional commercial ventures. For example, advertisements for a boutique in walking distance, *I was Lord Kirchner's Valet*, similarly tout their situation in London.

International audiences increasingly viewed the British capital as a happening global city. Just a month after the final issue of *Signals*, a *TIME* cover story profiled the city's changing climate. After describing the "great" metropolises of other decades of the twentieth century, the periodical affirms: "Today, it is London, a city steeped in tradition, seized by change, liberated by affluence [...]. In a decade dominated by youth, London has burst into bloom. It swings; it is the scene./ This spring, as never before in modern times, London is switched on" (38). The *TIME* article in many ways echoes Hogarth and Muggeridge's assessment. The "Swinging London" report is structured like a movie script, suggesting that the images reported perhaps also conform to Hollywood notions of 60s England.<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact *TIME* presents some of the stereotypes the magazine's primarily North American readership expected, the profile captures the city's youthful energy and cultural trends: London was a "groovy" place where rock and rollers were the new royalty, disco, sexiness, verve, and vulgarity were in, sartorial sharpness and shaggy haircuts prevailed, and a vibrant art scene incubated op and pop—tendencies which extended beyond the galleries to color everyday design and fashion. The revolutionary spirit that characterized the 1960s certainly extended to the world of art: Kinetic art was often quite literally "switched on" (*TIME* 38.).

### **The Political Stakes of the "Kinetic Kraze"**

Much as in broader Western society, the new generation positioned itself against the old status quo. Within art, the critical paradigm of "arch-modernist" Clement Greenberg and the associated

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<sup>3</sup> The writer mentions Michelangelo Antonioni's classic depiction of the London scene, *Blow-Up* [1966], which was being shot on location at the time.

styles of Abstract Expressionism (termed “American-type painting” by Greenberg) and Post-painterly Abstraction became anathema to younger advanced artists. Artists rejected traditional competence, ideas of working in a single, traditional medium, such as painting or sculpture, and the autonomy of art (the idea that works should not react to the presence of viewers).

Modes of artmaking that today are often separated into distinct taxonomies in museums or undergraduate survey courses were all part of one unruly field of contemporary culture. *Signals* brought together neo-concrete art, kinetic art, tech art, and minimal art—works which at the time were all understood under the rubric of “constructivism.” Kinetic artist George Rickey’s *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution* (1967) as well as various exhibitions (perhaps most notably *Plus by Minus, Today’s Half Century* [1968], and *The Machine at the end of the Mechanical Age* [1968]) helped to concretize this field of production. The use of the term constructivism, which was also employed to describe earlier projects by Gabo, Mondrian, or Lissitsky, linked new art of the 1960s with works hailing from the first decades of the twentieth century. Rickey locates many *Signals* artists, including Cruz-Diez, Clark, Soto, Takis, Medalla, Le Parc, and Haacke within this category.

One of the clearest commonalities found in the new varieties of art that emerged in the 1960s was a concern for time and temporality. Critic Michael Fried celebrated “presentness” and took to task the “theatrical” aspects of minimalism in his famous censure “Art and Objecthood.” Comparatively, the projects of the American minimal artists whom Fried took objection with seem downright inert beside the kinetic works shown at *Signals* Gallery. Medalla strived for all of his projects to approach the condition of dynamic life. By existing coextensively in time with spectators and often reacting directly to them, the new art seemed capable of resisting the notion of art as precious and timeless: it was real.

The Frankfurt school theorist Herbert Marcuse, a major figure in the 1960s, supported this notion. Marcuse affirms: “And history perhaps now is catching up with art, or art is catching up with history. The historical locus and function of art are now changing. The *real, reality*, is becoming technique in a literal, ‘practical’ sense; making and remaking things rather than painting pictures [...]” (121). As his words indicate—in what now may seem like a slightly naïve rhetorical sleight of hand—new art forms were understood to possess an automatic political charge. Undergirding this belief about art’s transformative powers was the reasonable assumption that art reflects the society that it was produced in. Artists aimed to reverse engineer this process: they held that radical types of art contained the promise of societal change.

Greenberg's term, "American-type painting," contributed to a further sense that abstract expressionism constituted a national school approved by the U.S. Government that tacitly forwarded its agenda.<sup>4</sup> Another 1966 *TIME* magazine article describing the tendency to make artworks that actually travelled through time and space dubbed kineticism "the movement movement"—implicating the tendency in a field of other counter-cultural—and not just artistic—movements. Further suggesting that resisting the status quo in art was tantamount to resistance of the hegemonic order of things in the socio-political realm, only a few years after *Signals* was published, MoMA curator Kynaston McShine affirmed that given the political climate: "If you are living in the United States, you may fear that you will be shot at, either in the universities, in your bed or more formally in Indochina. It may seem too inappropriate, if not absurd to get up [...] and apply dabs of paint from a little tube to a square of canvas" (unpaginated).<sup>5</sup>

### A Newspaper Aesthetic ...

*Signals Newsbulletin* was in many ways different from contemporary art journalism. It diverged from most "little magazine" artists' publications as well as the larger, codex format that continues to characterize trade journals like *Artforum*. Medalla and Keeler's broadsheet adopted a periodical aesthetic. The bi— or tri—monthly journal took on the form of newspapers, though not their cheaper pulp paper. Its use of bold color, graphic design, varied typeface, and touch of red in issue one, all make the glossy broadsheet resemble tabloids of the day. *Signals* included sections with the heading "Stop Press," a phrase commonly printed in British papers to indicate that even more up-to-date news had been added. As well as mimic the techniques of the media by vocabulary, *Signals*'s use of "stop press" sections—in courier type and sometimes with more than one per issue—suggested that the authors were packing in as much data as possible, continuously out on the beat for information or receiving wires—like the writers of standard dailies. Though it may have been as well the result of a lack of organization, the inclusion of "stop press" served to add a clear sense of temporality and contemporariness into the publication.

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<sup>4</sup> These concerns were not unfounded. As Eva Cockcroft and Max Kozloff have proven, the Rockefeller Brothers in tandem with the CIA instrumentalized Abstract Expressionism, turning it into a Cold War weapon.

<sup>5</sup> A number of the artists whose work was featured in *Signals* were included in McShine's important *Information* (1970) at MoMA, for which he composed the quote.

Indeed, *Signals* emphasizes contingency and the possibility of re—use, over absolute timelessness for the art and texts it contains. Because the publication was folded rather than bound, the possibilities of pulling, spreading it apart over space or reconfiguring the text do certainly exist. Moreover, by paralleling the “low,” even throwaway form of the paper, it confounds hierarchical divisions of “high—” and “low—” brows of culture.



Newspapers are an ephemeral, mass medium that in the sixties— like today— typically transmitted factual information in a single language. With a geo-politically bounded readership, newspapers traditionally build perceived connections between citizens of one nation-state.<sup>6</sup> A sense of belonging to a common polity can be born out of simultaneous reception of common content. Transcending monolingualism (and thus, nationalism), *Signals* variously contains texts in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Greek, as well as many translations. The *Newsbulletin* brought together many kinds voices, yielding a decidedly polyphonic and cosmopolitan montage of content that aligned with their globalized vision of the art world. *Signals* served to foment an imagined transatlantic community of artists and thinkers.

In the July-August 1965 issue Medalla published an excerpt of a 1964 letter sent from Germany by Hans Haacke alongside a French language telegram he wrote in reply to the German-American artist: given the layout and deployment of typographic elements—a vector of full stops and larger black dots that mark section breaks—there is an implication that *Signals* is the high-velocity delivery device for the electronic message. The journal’s temporality of exchange was of course not that of the rapid telegraph. Nevertheless, Keeler and Medalla were not the first to evoke modern communication technology as part of an endeavor in newspaper publishing: the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*, established respectively in 1896 and 1855, also make a similar link between papers and other modes of communication.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For more on newspapers and national identity see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> The Spanish translations of these terms, *el telegrama* and *el correo* are also periodical names in Spain and Latin America.

## Works on Paper

In some issues of *Signals*, depictions of works appear with limited text on a spare white ground, recalling the display of objects within the white cube gallery. For instance, works by Alejandro Otero occupy almost the entirety of the space and are accompanied by limited captioning, characteristics that prompt them to read as presentation rather than representation. Flows of depictions of works by Carlos Cruz-Diez, selected and captioned by the artist, snake through *Signals* 1.9—emphasizing the spatial aspects of the paper (Fig. 2). The reader-viewer must “make an effort to discover” the images, navigating through the pages to view the entire photo-strip (Cruz-Diez 5).

*Signals* was at the crux and vanguard of a variety of period artistic tendencies: the print renaissance saw the creation of an increasing number of printed portfolios that collect the work of various artists. While in 2016 kinetic art might seem a world away from printmaking, they were both understood as instances of a mastery of technics and requiring skillful manipulation of complex tools.<sup>8</sup> *Signals* can also be set into a voguish genealogy of co-productions, collections of multiples that include poet Walasse Ting’s *I-Cent Life* (1963); the Wadsworth Athenaeum’s *X + X (TEN WORKS BY TEN PAINTERS)* (1964) (which was curated by Samuel Wagstaff Jr.); Jack Sonenberg’s *Artists and Writers Protest Against the War in Viet Nam* (1967); and gallerist Leo Castelli’s *Ten from Leo Castelli* (1968).

In Europe, artists like Victor Vasarely advocated for the creation of reproducible abstract “prototypes.” Vasarely helped found the Parisian Galerie Denise René, which produced prints and multiples by kinetic and op artists. Cologne’s Galerie Der Spiegel operated similarly in Germany. Again revealing that *Signals* was ahead of the curve: a broader renewal of interest in Bauhaus notions (which had always percolated in the U.S. thanks to Moholy-Nagy, Josef Albers, and Gyorgy Kepes) of

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<sup>8</sup> This idea about printing relating to tech art is clearly expressed in the essay for the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition surveying the output of the pioneering Los Angeles print studio, Gemini G.E.L. See Riva Castleman, *Technics and Creativity: Selections from Gemini G.E.L.* exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, May 5—July 6, 1971), 7-31. Castelman touches upon constructivism and the Bauhaus in the process of tracing art history in relation to printmaking. The fact that Gemini was willing to undertake projects in all manner of media, including a kinetic ice bag sculpture, *Ice Bag—Scale C*, with Claes Oldenburg surely aided in making the association. The press release for the exhibition further highlights the hydraulic press and rag paper Gemini developed to the meet artist’s needs.





collective artistic labor and the ideal of a mechanically made mass-produced art can in part account for the “multiplicity” trend.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, by modeling vanguard strategies of reading and writing, *Signals* anticipates primarily American magazines being used as alternative exhibition spaces. Moreover, in the years following its production magazines like *Artforum* or *Arts*, *Signals* would host for printed artworks. Unlike these magazines, in which the art was disguised as articles or advertisements in an otherwise straight publication, *Signals* functioned as a total art network. It was a technology that blurred the bounds between art and science, article and work; as new content appears simultaneous to reproduction, typical designations between *presentation* in the gallery and *representation* in the publication break down and merge. Like the “wordworks” found in many other publications of the period, *Signals* disregarded traditional notions of aesthetics and veered toward an art that was liberated from gallery presentation and conventions of artistic media. Thus, the publication spanned what the critic of Lucy Lippard called “dematerialization” and a concern for materiality.

The 1960s did not just see a return of the Bauhaus. Marcel Duchamp’s influence was increasingly felt. For all the cases named above, Duchamp’s famous *Boîte-en-valise* must be viewed as an important precedent. The *Boîte* is a multiple issued various times between 1940 and 1973 (and again in 2015). The artwork consists of deluxe, hand-colored miniaturizations of the French Dadaist’s oeuvre. It is almost certain that *Signal*’s director and editor would have been familiar with the *Boîte*. Duchamp’s writings appeared in the broadsheet and Keeler exhibited his work in the gallery. In fact, the flow of influence between Duchamp and Medalla was multi-directional. Duchamp was an important precedent for the Cloud Canyons, as he was (likely) the first artist to use foam; he playfully converted himself into a demon or fawn for the self-portrait on *Monte Carlo Bond* (1924). According to Medalla’s collaborator Adam Nankervis, the Philippine kineticist showed his first bubble-machine sculpture to Duchamp’s friend Man Ray in Paris; apparently, Keeler also shared images of Medalla’s works with Duchamp, who was inspired to produce a multiple, *Medallic Sculpture* (1964/68) (“David Medalla”). This multiple is a multivalent pun on the younger artist’s name and the round form (medal) and material (metal) employed, which paid “tribute to David Medalla and his bubble-machines” (Nankervis, “A Stitch”).

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<sup>9</sup> Susan Tallman argues that for Albers it was important for him that Ken Tyler, the master printer at Gemini, apply the ink to the stone for his lithographs in 1966 and 1967. Interestingly, the Bauhaus artist also employed post systems for the works done with Gemini: he developed his nested squares compositions on a piece of cardboard and mailed half from New Haven to Tyler in Los Angeles (68-71).

While *Signals Newsbulletin* contrasts with Duchamp's boxed set in terms of preciousness and detail, it possesses a similar logic of display. Duchamp described his project in the following manner: "Then I thought of the idea of the box in which all my works would be mounted like a small museum, a portable museum, so to speak" (qtd. in "Boîte-en-valise"). Keeler and Medalla's publication is a mass-media update for the post-modern era.

### **The Art of Information Processing**

With the *Newsbulletin*, *Signals* becomes a galaxy of interwoven data.<sup>10</sup> The operations of the magazine seem to parallel the shifts Marshall McLuhan saw occurring in other facets of society. The cybernetic theorist argues that: "When IBM discovered that it was not in the business of making office equipment or business machines, but that it was in the business of processing information, then it began to navigate with clear vision" (*Essential McLuhan* 151). Similarly, while not exactly in business, it appears that Medalla and Keeler's vision for their venture also involved the art of processing and repackaging information.

The *Newsbulletin* was an expansive project at the crux of various disciplines and genealogies. Demonstrating an impressive capacity for administration, Medalla secured permission to reprint articles from a diverse range of sources, such as the *New Scientist*, *TIME*, and a selection of dailies as well as more specialized texts laying out artistic ideas. Anthropological photographs of non-western people engaged in creative acts juxtaposed against vanguard art and science as well challenge received ideas about the difference between the "primitive" and modern (Fig. 3). *Signals* possessed the logic of a digest, archive, or anthology. Appropriating content from other sites and in a sense converting it into art discourse, *Signals*, in its published articles and images, served to enrich and illuminate the works reproduced—at times words illustrate images. Training constituents in a new kind of spectatorship, they further demonstrated that the divisions that exist between areas of thought and creative expression that are normally deemed unrelated could be more permeable. Especially for an informed, free-associating reader-viewer, the diverse elements seem to connect in myriad ways.

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<sup>10</sup> The McLuhanite idea of media galaxies surely influenced Medalla's thinking. His subsequent venture was an art space called Exploding Galaxy, seemingly a riff on McLuhan's *Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962).



Music, art, poetry, and science could potentially cross—pollinate one another. Many covers render their art contents more scientific (or scientific) and vice-versa. For number 5, Camargo's *Wood Relief* (1965) is juxtaposed against a small photo of cumulo—nimbus clouds. Each photo has an arrow signaling its respective caption, seeming to suggest that their resemblance was so uncanny that the scientific image could easily be confused with the art documentation. In the next issue, Marcelo Salvadori's circular shaped, plastic window installations appear with morphologically similar photographs of "the changing conditions of the sun" (Medalla, "Untitled," *Signals* 1. 6, 1). In this case, the solar logic was possibly catalyzed by the artist himself; he made a work titled *The First Eclipse* (1964), which is illustrated later in the issue. In the same number's interior, photos of Salvadori's *Trace Project for Doors and Windows* (1965) and a close-up image of a botanical specimen flank an article on Salvadori's work with polymers reprinted from the *New Scientist*.

Jesús Rafael Soto playing the guitar next to songs by Alasdair Clayre embodies interdisciplinarity of another stripe (Fig. 4). Indeed, it is difficult not to imagine him playing precisely the compositions that surround his photo. The image and text pairing extends the classical *ut pictura poesis*, a notion that is certainly important for *Signals* Gallery (which had a permanent collection of poetry books) and *Newsbulletin* too; here there is a suggestion that the artist can perform the role of the singer-songwriter and poet. With his guitar in hand, Soto becomes a folk singer—the most romantic figure in the landscape of the 60s counter—culture—in the context of the broadsheet.

### Networked Multitudes: Virtual Curation and Collaboration

Looking back on Medalla's career, the art historian Yve-Alain Bois affirms that the *Signals* editor produced artworks that operated with a certain kind of virtuality. Bois goes on to explain that he believes he saw very few of Medalla's biokinetic projects in the flesh; but, as a result of regular exposure to distribution of documentation, he felt familiar with the artist's oeuvre. Bois asserts, "his real performances were his narrations" (Bois 212). Hence, it was both the framing and the art action that constituted Medalla's artwork for the art historian. The same tendency that Bois identifies for Medalla's works equally extends to the diverse output that he selected for *Signals: Newsbulletin*.

Moreover, like with Duchamp's *Boîte*, Keeler and Medalla's embrace of multiplicity and moves to decentralize art did not entail an absolute rejection of materiality. Even while acting as "virtual" curator, Medalla certainly did not abandon an aesthetic and material sensibility. The paper's pages



SEPTEMBER, 1962

Oh claro honor del liquido elemento por Luis de Gongora

Oh claro honor del liquido elemento... de la mano de un poeta...

Para la gran gloria de un poeta...

de la mano de un poeta...

de la mano de un poeta...

de la mano de un poeta...

de la mano de un poeta...

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Musical score for 'Tost to the Live' by Alasdair Clayre. Includes lyrics and musical notation.

Musical score for 'The Old Man's Song' by Alasdair Clayre. Includes lyrics and musical notation.

Musical score for 'SONGS' by Alasdair Clayre. Includes lyrics and musical notation.



JESÚS RAFAEL SOTO playing the guitar at SENEZAS LINDEN.

Musical score for 'The Old Man's Song' by Alasdair Clayre. Includes lyrics and musical notation.

Fig. 4. Detail of Jesús Rafael Soto photo by Clay Perry in Signals 1.10 (November-December, 1965), 10-11. © David Medalla and Paul Keeler.

are exercises in design as art as well as virtual display. *Signals* experimented with layout, graphics, different combinations of fonts, layouts, and boldly colored inks. Medalla's deliberate pairings of texts and images produce a range of new meanings and influence aesthetics. *Signals Newsbulletin* should be viewed as an instance of publishing as a form of art: a move aligning with conceptual artists' turn away from traditional artistic media toward the "aesthetics of administration" (Buchloh 105). Medalla's work as editor, layout designer, and curator might constitute an early form of conceptualism—a mode of making that privileges ideas over traditional aesthetics and materials. Indeed, Alexander Alberro reads many of the multiply produced works of conceptual art that would come only a few years later as a deviant form of publicity. Alberro argues that by employing "the infrastructure of publicity as medium," artists "problematized the traditional boundaries of artistic production" (152). He notes they both expand art and potentially bring it closer to commerce.

Form as well as content clearly mattered in the textual enterprise. Medalla had met a number of surrealist and beat poets in France and New York and was certainly aware of a longer trajectory of publishing developments related to concrete poetry. In the late 1950s and 60s, poet William F. Burroughs and the painter, poet, and performer Brion Gysin revived Tristan Tzara's the poetic techniques of *découpé* (or cut-up) and developed their own method: "the fold in." The former involved new configurations of rearranged found materials; the latter, which Burroughs defined in 1961, consisted of "placing a page of one text folded down the middle on a page of another text (my own or someone else's). The composite text is read across half from one text and half from the other." In the 1970s Medalla created collage books that employ these tactics and bear a striking resemblance to Gysin and Burrough's *The Third Mind* (1978). Much like the poets' text-image project, *Signals* adapted the poetic techniques in order to meld a multitude of minds and disciplines. Thus, it both embraced the aesthetic possibilities of modern publishing and, via its poetic combinations of text and image, pushed back against what McLuhan saw as the homogenizing "visual logic of Gutenberg technology," which tended to render all it transmitted similar combinations of black signs on white ground.<sup>11</sup>

Working with many others—as both raw material and partners—Medalla artfully produced new creations. He danced a fine line between collaboration and appropriation. While Medalla was at the helm, *Signals* authorship was networked. Various voices speaking distinct verbal and visual languages supplement and supplant one another. Indeed, literary theorist Jacques Derrida's concept of the *supplement* quite aptly captures the *modus operandi* of the experimental periodical's contents.

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<sup>11</sup> McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 136. In fact, McLuhan's (and Quentin Fiore's) layouts with text and found images in *The Mechanical Bride* and *The Medium is the Massage* reveal a similar logic to Medalla's.

Derrida describes the supplement as “a plenitude enriching another plenitude” (Derrida 144). By layering and suturing disparate and related words and images, *Signals* enriched their meanings.

While Medalla certainly engineered many of the pairings, he did not direct all of the utterances he published. For instance, Duchamp’s assessment of Takis (“gay laborer of magnetic fields and indicator of gentle railways”) appears in large font among other articles (*Signals* 1.3/4 4). In the same issue, the potential for art and poetry to drive one another forward is made clear by a variety of homage poems: Gysin’s “Magnetic Word-Music for Takis’s Sculptures” (*Signals* 1.3/4 22), B. Farman-Farmaian’s “Two Poems for Takis, Sculptor of Cosmic Light and Perpetual Forces” (*Signals* 1.3/4 15), and Alan Ansen, “A Poem for Takis” (*Signals* 1.3/4 12).

Color played an important role both in establishing the “Signals look” and enabling coproduction. A constant push and pull regarding authorship played out on the pages. Taking on the role of semi-authorized collaborator, Medalla boldly colored areas of photos of other artists’ works. By tinting them with the sharp hues of “Swinging London,” they arguably became more eye-catching. For instance, compared to the drab grey tones or garish rainbow inks of much “straight” art reporting of the time, *Signals*’s striking signature design—black and white plus two colors—was extremely elegant. *Signals* was equally cool and countercultural: on the one hand, the bold text-image compositions recalled graphic design of the historic avant-gardes (the Bauhaus or INKhUK [Moscow Institute of Artistic Culture]); on the other, their dynamic-yet-limited color palette is similar to hip posters advertising rock concerts too. For instance, Soto and Otero’s works in *Signals* 1, no 10 (November-December, 1965) and *Signals* 2, no 11 (January, February, March, 1966) respectively appear in stinging lemon and navy or acid pink and electric blue—color pairings found in contemporaneous ads for performances by British rock outfits as well as foreign musicians like Jimmie Hendrix or the Grateful Dead.

For example, in the Soto issue (1.10), the artist dominates the front page. There is a handwritten statement in French by the artist regarding the role of chance and movement in environmental art paired with the artist standing before his works with serial forms. Despite submitting some works to his designs, Medalla often respected the original hues in the artwork; he simply intensified them in his translations to Technicolor pulp. Yet, the blue and yellow inks are given further inflections by Medalla’s front page publication of the “Korosta Katzina Song” of the Hopi Indians of Arizona, which describes yellow and blue butterflies. In a couple of cases Medalla’s interventions verge on effacement. In the coloring of *Grand Relation-Vibration, 24 black squares + 24 Blue Squares* (1965) and *Grand Vibration-Relation: Blue and Black* (1965), Medalla seems to turn the Venezuelan into a monochromist of the stripe of Yves Klein, famous for his trademark blue canvases.



On the back cover of *Signals's* Soto special there is a color artwork, *The Little Yellow* (1965) (Fig. 5) that is not simply a colored photograph. Instead, a square of electric yellow appears about a black square nested in a series of regular black lines imprinted on the glossy stock. Because there is not a photo suggesting another deferred location, the printed page becomes the direct site of interface. *The Little Yellow* is presented in the magazine, rather than illustrated in it. Right above the work and to its left are a blurb from Charles Spencer's *New York Times* review of Keeler's Soto show and an announcement of the exhibition with the Signals Gallery address—in a sense illustrating the work shown in the *Newsbulletin*. These articles serve a provocative function: they conjure up an image of the Soto show in a brick-and-mortar place, removed from the space of the page. Nonetheless, the mass distributed cellulose support actually expands the exhibition beyond the gallery. Because of *The Little Yellow's* material qualities, there is a sense that a little bit of the show is now in the hands of the reader-beholder.

A grid of 20 Soto signatures appears above the crease on the same page as *The Little Yellow*. When folded down these repeated assertions of the presence and authority of the artist caress the nested squares. The Soto signatures are more complex than simply stamps of authenticity or claims to territory. Anticipating Belgian conceptualist Marcel Broodthaers's repeated initialing of "M.B." in his screenprint

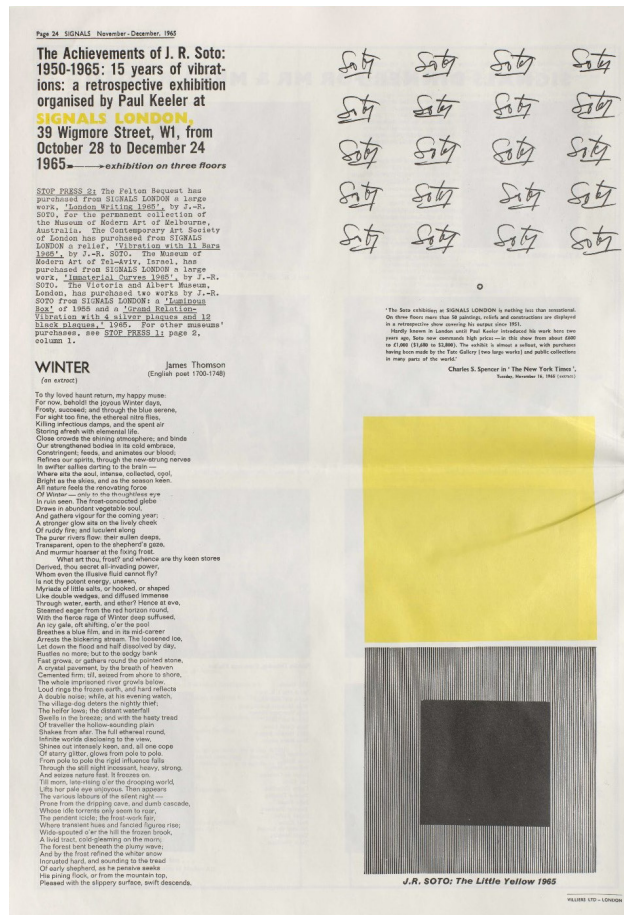


Fig. 5. Back cover of *Signals* 1.10 (November-December, 1965), 24 with Jesus Rafael Soto, *The Little Yellow*, 1965. © David Medalla and Paul Keeler; © Jesús Rafael Soto.

*La Signature, Serie 1. Tirage illimité* (1969) (Fig. 6), the multitude of Sotos are also printed on the page via a process of mechanical reproduction. Each is slightly different, but their individuality is only perceptible with close study. While the names could seem like an over-determined assertion of the authorial presence, singular authorship is a shaky proposition with the *Newsbulletin*. The process must have been collaborative; at the least, Medalla would have had to request the autographs—a simultaneous act of collection, homage, and certification. Repetition hollows out the sign, turning it from unique, hand-made, marker of authorial authority into a serial pattern—which is subsequently lithographically reproduced ever more times. The composition employs the mark of artistic authenticity to interrogate art. On the broadsheet, the Soto signature becomes a readymade design, just one more ordered configuration of information. In an inversion of Burroughs's method, it is by folding out the entire recto that the beholder reveals the *Newsbulletin*'s poetry: it is clear the signatures rhyme with the layout elements on the front page. Hence, the back and front together both celebrate and undercut the cult of the artist genius (Fig. 7).

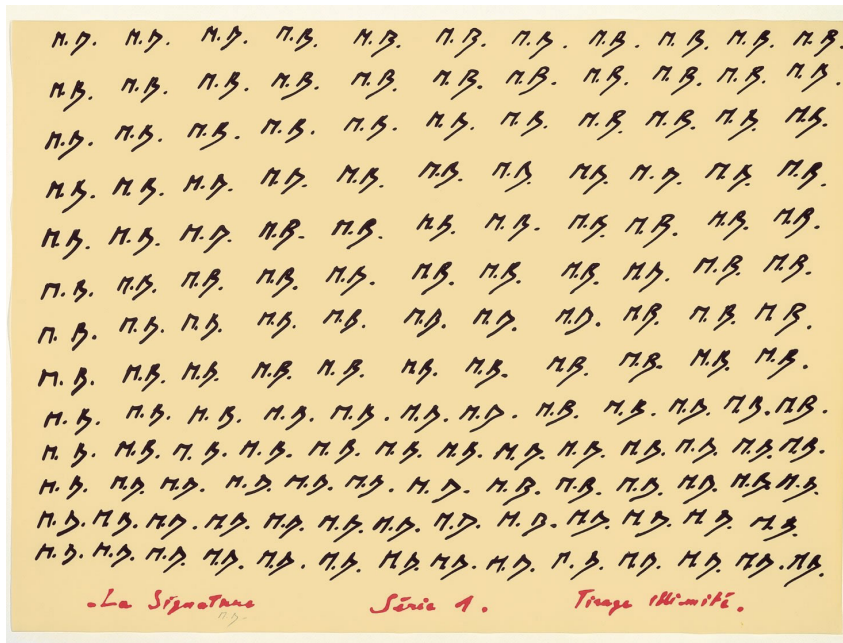


Fig. 6. Marcel Broodthaers, *La Signature, Serie 1. Tirage illimité*, 1969. Silkscreen on paper. © Marcel Broodthaers.

er, December, 1965

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Paul Keeler at  
LONDON,  
treet, W1, from  
December 24  
ibition on three floors

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by J.-R.  
mest collection of  
to Art of Melbourne,  
emporary Arts Society  
used from STUBALS  
hibition with 11 bars  
O. The Museum of  
ve, Toronto, has  
ALS LONDON a large  
aves "Lobby" by J.-R.  
and Albert Museum,  
and two works by J.-R.  
ONDON a "Lobby"  
"Grand Relation"  
from 1958 (see 12  
). For other museums"  
FOSS 11 page 2.

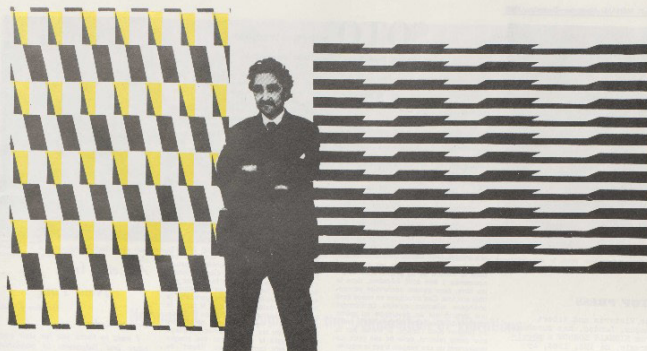
James Thomson  
(English poet 1700-1748)

happy muse:  
fitter days:  
the blue serena,  
sire flies,  
the spent air  
the  
osphere, and binds  
a cold entrance,  
sates our blood,  
to the driving nerves  
a brain—  
collected, oyd,  
a ocean vein,  
I force  
helix eye  
red glow  
ing year:  
my cheek  
to  
let sleeps,  
her's gone,  
no frost:  
at whence are thy keen stores  
to power  
almost lit?  
en,  
ed, or shaped  
sac't marrow  
er? Hence at eve,  
corns round,  
deep suffused,  
to soul  
I mid-career  
The loosened ion,  
labeled by day,  
slip hand  
the pointed stone,  
sore of heaven  
on slope to shore,  
round beds,  
not hard reflects  
sneezing wack,  
pity blast:  
satisfied  
the happy tread  
ing plain  
sere'd round,  
we view,  
at, all one cope  
sile to the pile:  
Flumes falls  
the, heavy, strong,  
uses on  
sloping world,  
then appears  
ent night—  
and dumb cascades,  
in to ear:  
work far,  
used figures rise:  
I from brook,  
I the moon,  
lumpy waves,  
alter snow  
to the tread

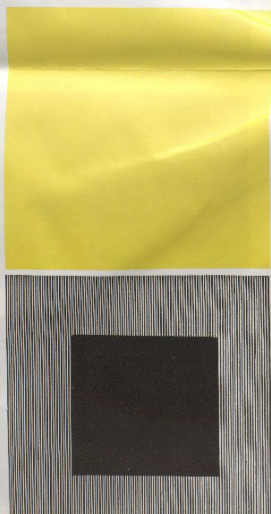


"The four exhibitions at SIGNALS LONDON is nothing less than sensational. On three floors more than 100 paintings, reliefs, and constructions are displayed in a retrospective show opening by winter show 1965. Nearly 5000 in London with Paul Keeler introduced by work here two years ago. So far one common high price—see this show from about 400 to £200 (£100 to \$200). The exhibit is almost a million, with perhaps 100000 being made by the Tate, Gallery (see long works) and public collectors. In many parts of the world."

Charles S. Spencer in "The New York Times",  
Tuesday, November 16, 1965 (1965)



SOTO AT SIGNALS LONDON with two of his repetition-reliefs painted in 1961. Photo: Clay Perry



Nous constatons l'existence de Relations  
dans tous les instants lucides de notre  
comportement

Nous nous émerveillons des lois du Hasard,  
sans nous rendre compte que nous ne faisons  
que perdre conscience de réalités aux quelles  
nous n'avons pas songé

Les éléments flottent dans l'océan  
comme le poisson dans l'eau: toutes ces  
directions, vitesses, accidents, positions, sont  
ordonnées par un tout environnant dont  
ils sont tributaires et qui conditionne  
leurs variations. Leur force se mesure au  
nombre de leurs révélations

et il est conscient au nom de l'artiste  
contemporain a donné à l'art de notre  
temps cette surprenante richesse de  
possibilités

Soto

SIGNALS

director : paul keeler

editor : david medalla

vol one number ten

nov - dec 1965

Four shillings

Korosta Katzina Song  
(Com-planting Time)  
of the Hopi Indians  
of Arizona

Yellow butterflies  
Over the blossoming violet corn  
With pollen passed down  
Chase one another in brilliant dancing

Blue moths,  
Over the blossoming violet corn,  
With pollen passed down  
Chase one another in brilliant dancing

Over the blossoming corn,  
Over the violet corn,  
With bare feet:  
Over the blossoming beans,  
Over the violet bean  
With bare feet

Over some field of growing corn  
All day shall hang the thunder cloud  
Over some field of growing corn  
All day shall come the melting rain.

Translated from the Hopi story by Helen Cline Bantz, 1917

Note: The Hopi are the origin of the three letters of  
Korosta. They are made up of the letters K, O, R, O, S, T, A.  
The Hopi are the origin of the letters K, O, R, O, S, T, A.  
The Hopi are the origin of the letters K, O, R, O, S, T, A.  
The Hopi are the origin of the letters K, O, R, O, S, T, A.

To Our Readers:  
A Happy New Year!

Fig. 7. Detail of front and back covers folded out of *Signals* 1.10 (November-December, 1965). © David Medalla and Paul Keeler; © Jesús Rafael Soto.



However, the existence of the principle colors in each monographic edition operates as a kind of branding exercise as well. In the Otero issue (2.11 [Jan, Feb, March, 1966]), pink and blue does not just mark Medalla's hand in the process. They also become shorthand for the entirety of Otero's artistic identity. While Otero worked in a wide range of colors and materials, pink and blue do appear at various moments in his output. In *Signals*, the colors dominate *49 por ciento* (1965), a painted newspaper on wood artwork that graces the journal's cover (Fig. 8). As it runs without any text above the fold (a deviation from nearly all other issues of *Signals*), Otero's artwork—itsself made of titles, ads and articles—becomes the headline. The composition furthermore yields a kind of mise-en-abyme effect when printed on broadsheet paper. This effect might cause a short circuit for Anglophone readers, for whom the content of Otero's work was a foreign pattern instead of legible signals. Here, due to scale, and Otero's employment of the news media as medium, the printed version of the work possesses a directness normally experienced with art encounters in a gallery.

The same blue and pink of *49 por ciento* also appear in the titles and author names running through the entire number. The pair of hues imply that Otero's influence colors the surrounding elements of the news bulletin, which is equally true for each issue's protagonist. Below Otero's front-page artwork, Medalla reproduces an excerpt from William Shakespeare's *Troilus and*



Fig. 8. Front cover of *Signals* 2.11 (January, February, March, 1966) with Alejandro Otero *49 por ciento*, 1965. © David Medalla and Paul Keeler; © Alejandro Otero.

*Cressida* (Act III, Scene 3) discussing time, motion, and impermanence. The title, “Ulysses’ Advice to Achilles,” and citation information appear in the electric azure ink and the bard’s name is pronounced in the bubblegum pink. Thus, not only is England’s foremost author marshalled to help the international readership understand Otero, but Shakespeare and his anglicized Greek characters too experience a slight expatriation. When made to relate to the artist’s work, they become a bit more Latin American. The seventeenth-century words literally—and figuratively—take on the same tint as the Venezuelan’s artwork. The choice to caption contemporary art with Shakespeare may seem peculiar or esoteric by today’s standards. However, quotes from his plays pepper McLuhan’s writing (something to be expected from a professor of English) on media and would not have seemed out of place to period viewers who had cut their teeth on popular cybernetics. In *Understanding Media* (1964), he argues: “*Troilus and Cressida* [...] is almost completely devoted to both a psychic and social study of communication” (24).

### Adventures in Networking

As well as gathering interdisciplinary content, *Signals Newsbulletin* propagated the activities around Signals Gallery as well as the exhibitions held inside it. Fulfilling a role a bit like “Scene and Herd” in today’s *Artforum.com*, the paper traced the social network that crystallized around the gallery and their stable. Because it could be seen to yield an imagined community of readers, the paper produced this network too. The publication was part newsletter and part society page. It made an inexpensive gift or souvenir with which to link in new contributors, sponsors, or (though not a major concern) buyers and catalyze memories of the gallery.

Nearly every issue includes “thanks yous” to donors, salutations, reports on attendance. Their list of private patrons was quite impressive. Aware of the potential to attract future sponsors and further augment their own prestige, donors—including a number with noble titles—appear on the front page. This presentation recalls the way many museums list trustees at the front entrance. By the eighth issue, Cresse Crosby, inventor of the modern bra and an important patron of progressive arts initiatives on both sides of the Atlantic was at the front of the list.<sup>12</sup> Others recognized hailed from the art world, including Mrs. H. D. Molesworth (Eve Galloway), wife of the keeper of sculpture at the Victoria & Albert; Sir John Rothstein, director of the Tate; the British surrealist, Roland Penrose; the champion

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<sup>12</sup> Crosby helped run the G Place Gallery in Washington, D.C. This gallery was important venue for showing the work of African-American artists: for instance, Romare Bearden’s second solo show was held there in 1945.

of kineticism, art historian and curator Frank Popper; and the painter Frank Avray Wilson. The names of Keeler's parents, who paid for the building and shouldered many of the costs of the *Newsbulletin*, follow Sir Robert and Lady Mayer, philanthropists best known for supporting musical programs for children. Guy Brett's parents—Vicount and Viscountess Esher—were also sponsors.

In an almost ingenuous fashion, Medalla dropped the names of visitors to *Signals* or notable people who had corresponded with them. For instance, sharing the page of issue 11 with Haacke's letter, are acknowledgements and thanks offered to Nina Gabo, the daughter of the famed constructivist (Naum Gabo), "for providing contact with Mr. Lewis Mumford," the important architectural critic.<sup>13</sup> The text continues, detailing a chain of connections, "The Editor thanks Mr. Lewis Mumford for sending over from New York a transcript of his address to the American Academy of Arts and Letters and a Photostat of the letter from the poet Robert Lowell to President Lyndon B. Johnson."<sup>14</sup> The editors extend congratulations to Naum Gabo for his solo exhibition at the Tate alongside letters by Kepes and Dore Ashton. Demonstrating a certain degree of ironic self-awareness, in issue 3/4 the title "Name Dropping" appeared just below a list of *Signals*'s collaborators; it actually corresponded to a section discussing the decision to stop using the "mouthful" of a name, Centre for Advanced Creative Study, Name Dropping. In one case, they ran a photo shoot documenting a dinner held for Jesús Rafael Soto, complete with a guest list. This type of exclusive event is typically solely for insiders: the artists represented by the gallery, possible buyers, or critics. Not quite gossip, the lists of names and photos of artist-celebrities private moments, augment the glamour of *Signals*. Moreover, rather like the logic of citations in academic writing, the multitude of proper names invoked provides authority for the gallery and its contents.

With the exception of announcements for shows at other galleries and museums—often featuring artists to whom they were sympathetic, *Signals* was free of advertising. How closely "curated" the ads were however, is unclear. The magazine included an advisement for its own ad space in issue 3/4. Another notable, apparently paid announcement ran in the tenth issue: it heralded the opening of the countercultural bookshop and art gallery INDICA. Of course, in many ways the paper was an elaborate advertisement for the exhibitions and artists shown at the gallery. For example in the issues on Carlos Cruz-Diez and Sergio de Camargo, the dates of their shows are clearly stated. In Camargo's case, his prior accolades and the copy "first-one man show in Europe"—perhaps recalling a film poster or performance— seem to slide his work toward the realm of the culture industry.

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<sup>13</sup> See *Signals* 2, no 11 (January-February-March, 1966): 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

We can equally view *Signals Newsletter* as a venture not just in publicity but as widely disseminated and advancing developments new art. Certainly, the projects the publication promoted were not typical commodities. According to Medalla and Keeler's statements in *Signalz* 1.1, "Signals London is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the adventures of the modern spirit." The slogan was emblazoned on the front pages of issues three/four and five. They lived up to their goal and the gallery did not provide them with any commercial windfall. Surely it served as a form of what would today be called "networking," augmenting the young men's social capital (six years later Lawrence Alloway would analyze art and its institutions this way in "Network: The Art World Described as a System"). Medalla and Keeler's enterprise employed strategies of capitalist promotion and distribution to "sell" a different kind of product, knowledge and art experience that was ideally free and open to anyone who visited 38 Wigmore Street or picked up the *Newsletter*.

### **Returns and Revolutions: From Cold War to Hot War and the End of *Signals***

The expression of various generations of the avant-garde were woven together in a collage of word and image in *Signals*; these juxtapositions served a historicizing function, setting the contemporary works of the signals artists into a common genealogy with modern "masters." Perhaps most clearly demonstrated by a special Gabo issue (*Signals* 1.8), *Signals* connected the historic avant-garde with that of the present. For instance, re-contextualized in the journal (April-May, 1965), Lygia Clark's *Architecture Fantastique* transforms into a monstrous, monumental construction, recalling the stables of Alexander Calder, a relationship that *Signals* also proposes in issue 8; in the same issue, Brancusi appears along with a collage by Medalla recalling a work by Lissitsky. In the Soto issue Medalla translates the Venezuelan artist's output into a form of "simple arithmetic," or as he also dubs it, "Signs": - Malevich + Mondrian = Soto (*Signals* 1.10 21). Keeler's exhibition *Soundings Two* multiplied these connections in the gallery space: artworks by Albers, Brancusi, Calder, Duchamp, Moholy, Lissitsky, and Malevich were exhibited alongside those of Clark, Soto, Helio Oiticica, Mira Schendel and Medalla. Achieving similar results by scaling, *Signals* 8, presents equally sized photos documenting sculptural works to establish a relationship between Medalla and Kurt Schwitters.

In issue 2 Medalla wedded his own work to fragments of poetry by Venezuelan poet Roberto Ganzó that were originally penned in French, but here translated into Ganzó's native tongue. The poems had initially had a career accompanying works by the modern artist Ferdinand Leger. Hence, by amending the same text but in Spanish, Medalla suggests there is a parity of the images appended: his



work, though more Southern, belongs in a lineage with Leger. Also in the second number Medalla ran words of Vladimir Mayakovsky alongside his work: “If you like I shall grow/ irreproachably gentle/ not a man, but a cloud/ in trousers ...” (*Signals* 1.2 8) (Fig. 9). The late Soviet poet had collaborated with Alexandr Rodchenko during the 1920s, composing slogans to accompany the Russian artist’s designs. Hence, by pairing his poetry with documentation of Medalla’s biokinetic foam sculptures, they again acquired a radical inflection.

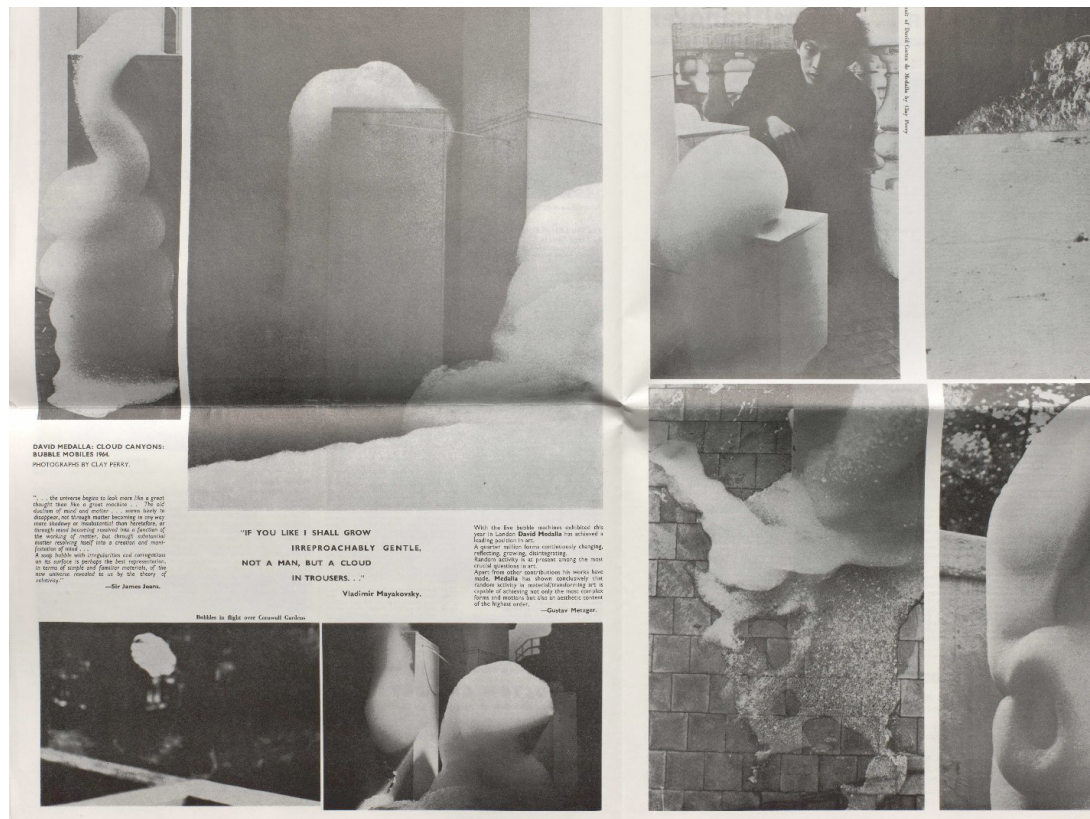


Fig. 9. Medalla *Cloud Canyon* images in *Signals* 1.2 (September, 1964), 8. © David Medalla and Paul Keeler.

Importantly, this valence of radicalism continued in the design: *Signals*' bold duo-chrome design plus dynamic text seems to owe something to early Soviet advertising and posters. A number of the projects that Mayakovsky and Rodchenko worked on together rely on the same formula—albeit almost always with the crimson of the USSR and not the psychedelic colors of 60s London. Hence, by citing revolutionary poets and emulating revolutionary design, *Signals*'s project both connected to historic constructivism and the revolutionary promise of the early U.S.S.R.—before purges, gulags, repression, and scarcity came to characterize the communist polity.

In the Gabo issue, Medalla rebrands an image of men laboring on a pylon with signs reading “Signals” and “London” (Fig. 10). Sending mixed and doubled signals, he amended the following caption: “david medalla: found-foto (SEÑALES LONDRES) 1965 ●” While Medalla effectively used the surrealist technique of the *objet trouvé*, the particular picture he encountered, when paired with text, recalls Lissitsky's *Lenin Tribute* (1920) (Fig. 11), which shows the Soviet leader at the top of a similar structure (in terms of form and color) with text on a sign. However, rather than just suggest *Signals* is the amplifier of the constructivist inheritors of Russian avant-garde art, his label performs a more complex maneuver: it translates the revolution into Spanish, the language of Latin America.

According to Carlos Cruz-Diez, Latin American art in the 60s possessed a similar radical, revolutionary charge as Russian Constructivism. When asked by art critic Ariel Jiménez about *Signals*, the artist proposed a link between vanguard art and revolution:

Why Russian Constructivism? [...] A revolution took place in Russia, and [...] a great many artists saw that revolution as an exceptional constellation of historic events that demanded a radically new form of art [...] the same thing happened with Latin America. It was an explosion, and Latin America was exceptionally validated with the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. This marked a critical juncture in time which the planet took notice of the continent (Cruz-Diez qtd. in Cruz-Diez and Jiménez 71).

On the pages of the magazine Medalla helps to crystallize a “fourth international” of art. The resolution of art and science as creativity the publication engenders as well might be viewed as an update of Karl Marx's affirmation: “*We recognize only one science, the science of history.*” Confounding (and conflating) North-South and East-West divisions, *Signals* flaunts the binaries of the Cold War era globe.

It was their stance on the hot war in Vietnam, however, that led to Gallery and Newsbulletin's demise. Medalla reproduced Lewis Mumford and Robert Lowell's respective critiques of Lyndon





Johnson's foreign policy in their entirety (1.8 [June-July, 1965]). Their primary financial backer, Charles Keeler, Sr., understood these reprinted missives not as harmless citations, but as incitement against the proper order of things. A conservative with a strong business acumen, the senior Keeler disapproved of the critiques of the Vietnam War republished in the art journal. Nevertheless, his officially cited reason for concluding his financial support of the textual enterprise and gallery was their lack of commercial viability. The final issue of the *Newsbulletin* came out in January of 1966 and the Gallery's last exhibition was held in September of the same year. Both Keeler and Medalla, as well as many of the other artists *Signals* broadcast, would continue to enjoy successful careers.

### Found Poems, Lasting Transmissions

In a number of issues of *Signals* Medalla composed poems dedicated to other artists. Two of the most provocative ran with the title "found poem." As their name suggests, these consisted of fragments of other images and texts that the artist-publisher encountered. He intervened in them, adding a personal touch with his own hand-written notations and dedication. The act of composition as homage is a tendency that courses throughout Medalla's printed output. This form of empathetic, intersubjective, artistic production particularly characterizes his poetry in *Signals*. In his poem-like "Stele to Takis" (1961), Medalla appears to have taken a similar approach: it is a composition with found language.

"Found-Poem for Otero" is a fragment that pairs a series of line-drawn tools and their names (Fig. 12). Rows with variations of trowels, cleaners, and smoothers become rhyming stanzas when reframed as poetry. The seemingly tautological diagram recalls Otero's collage reliefs, projects which saw the artist affixing tools to wooden planes. Medalla's text-image is a cipher for the Venezuelan's works. Paralleling his shift of the everyday into poetry, Otero, in this artistic act, removes their use value and prompted them to become artistic signs; according to critic Jonathan Bell the artist discovered "the unknown in the obvious" (Bell 12).

Medalla's image-poem seems to epitomize Americanist George Kubler's notions about form laid out in *The Shape of Time* (1962). At the cutting edge of period thought, Kubler rejected authorship-based art history and emphasized the need to view expressions of culture as linguistic utterances. The Yale professor importantly begins his study by proposing an expansion of "art" to encompass "the whole range of man-made things, including all tools and writing in addition to the useless,



beautiful, and poetic things of the world” (Kubler 1). Indeed, capturing ideas of transmission, Kubler discusses art in relation to “signals” in the book’s framing chapters. Moreover, a mere ten pages into the tome, we find him discussing art-science connections.

Especially given his early interests in ethnography and the material culture of indigenous peoples in the Philippines, it seems very likely Medalla would have been familiar with Kubler’s text. Kubler’s book was *de rigueur* in New York art circles. John Baldessari created *Painting for Kubler* (1968); Robert Smithson channeled the Americanist’s ideas as well in his November 1966 *Arts Magazine* project, “Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space,” an artwork-article that combines diagrams, text, and images in a mode reminiscent of *Signals*.

Medalla is responsible for the two elements on the back page of the April-May, 1965 issue. In the top half of the sheet there is a close up of Medalla’s *Cloud Canyon* (1964). Below it, is his “Found Poem for Takis” (Fig. 13). The “Found Poem” combines a diagram of celestial signs with a mosaic of nearly 120 alphabetized words—many related to the war in Vietnam, the Cold War, and information technology. The poem is transmitted by ink in the metallic copper hue that is the “theme color” of the issue as well as the standard midnight black. The text-based work blends conceptualism and performance. A box with text prompts the reader-viewers to penetrate the pages and sends them to *From the Editor’s Desk*. This other site in the publication outlines the rules of the game: in order to produce the poetry, the words should be alighted upon in the manner of a Ouija board game.

Medalla makes pedagogical points with his poem. It proves how fields of language and ideas thread through one another. Moving though the nearly 120 terms—including “advance,” “aircraft,” “ammunition,” “arc of observation,” “casualty/ casualties,” “guided weapon,” “own troops,”—this work very much speaks to the bellicose realities of the era; but, by appropriating them for poetic performance sends them in new ludic directions. Engaging in a tabletop finger scale choreography with the paper, reader/poets interpreted and composed Medalla’s text, becoming co-authors of sorts. The poem could be viewed as an extended caption for his adjoining sudsy project. Like the soapy tech art, the found poem fulfills Herbert Marcuse’s call for “a science and technology released from their service to destruction and exploitation, and thus free for liberating exigencies of the imagination” (*Essay on Liberation* 31). Moreover, there is a suggestion that the poem is of equivalent value to Medalla’s ever expanding, ephemeral, irregular kinetic foam sculpture reproduced above it.

Looking back at the history of what she called “dematerialization” of art, the critic Lucy Lippard argued that the important shift away from physical objects in galleries towards more conceptual

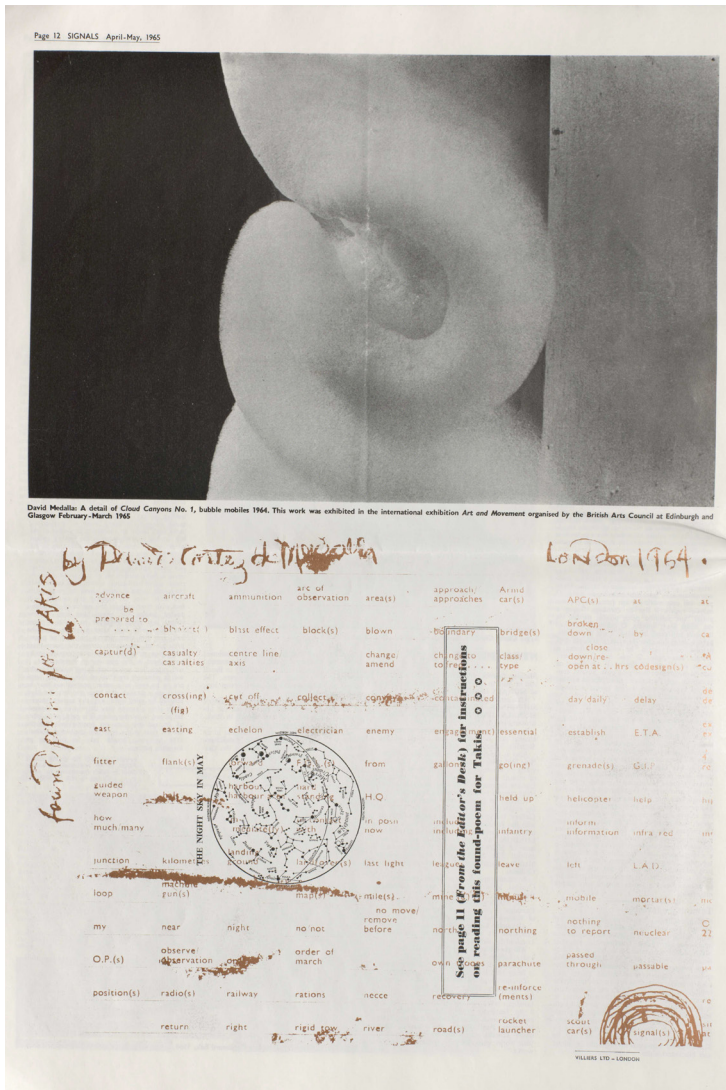


Fig. 13. David Medalla, "Found-Poem for Takis," *Signals* 1.7 (April-May, 1965), 12. © David Medalla and Paul Keeler.



projects in which art took the form of decentralized information began in c.1966: the year *Signals* dissolved. Art as signals—moving towards data rather than things—was to become the next vanguard. The publication confounded bounds between representation and reality, potentially expanding the production of art far beyond brick-and-mortar institutions.

According to Guy Brett, Medalla's key contribution as artist was his works's tendency to encourage audience participation. This quality extends to *Signals*, which enabled audience interaction as well; the "Found Poem for Takis" marks its zenith. Crossing borders between past and present, this playful poem can still conjure up memories of the era and be completed by readers today. The process of composing the poem prompts the reader-viewer to become biokinetic performer—fulfilling Medalla's goals of producing a living art even more successfully than the *Cloud Canyon* above it. When pulled off the library shelf, *Signals*'s appropriations continue to hold the potential for turning on and tuning in contemporary collaborators.

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- Fig. 9. Medalla *Cloud Canyon* images in *Signals* 1.2 (September, 1964), 8. © David Medalla and Paul Keeler.
- Fig. 10. Back cover of *Signals* 1.8 (June-July, 1965). © David Medalla and Paul Keeler.
- Fig. 11. El Lissitzky, *Lenin Tribune Proposal*, 1920, gouache, india ink, and photomontage on cardboard, 63.8 x 48 cm.
- Fig. 12. Detail of David Medalla, “Found-Poem for Otero,” *Signals* 2.11 (January, February, March, 1966), 24. © David Medalla and Paul Keeler.
- Fig. 13. David Medalla, “Found-Poem for Takis,” *Signals* 1.7 (April-May, 1965), 12. © David Medalla and Paul Keeler.