

‘Explosion of Words’  
New Installation Creates an Imaginary Library of Modern Poetry in Translation



Installation image of *Explosion of Words*, courtesy Nunnery Gallery, photo Jonathan Bassett

Hannes Schüpbach & Stephen Watts | Explosion of Words  
Open until 17 April 2022 | [Installation Images now available](#)

*Explosion of Words* creates an imaginary library of modern poetry in translation, extending as an ocean of text over 24 metres of the Nunnery Gallery’s walls, celebrating the power of language. The exhibition is the culmination of a long-time collaboration between Swiss artist Hannes Schüpbach (\*1965) and East End poet and language activist Stephen Watts (\*1952), whose work encompasses extensive research on poetry and the co-translation of poetry from many languages.

Approximately 1600 pages of Watts’ ongoing *Bibliography of Modern Poetry in English Translation* has been mounted directly onto the gallery’s four-metre-high walls to resonate with Schüpbach’s intimate and expressive reading of the poet’s lived and working spaces in east London. The *Bibliography*, which is 40 years in the making, will be transformed into a physical experience, creating a ‘storehouse of language’, reminding us of the renewing power of exchange that lies at the heart of translation. In the nave space of the gallery, selected *Drawn Poems* by the poet and an excerpt of Schüpbach’s new silent film *Essais* (2020), with Stephen Watts and the American dancer Kira Blazek, are also on display.

Praise for the previous Swiss iteration of *Explosion of Words* in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (June 2021):

“A quiet but haunting portrait of the poet and his work. In a sequence of twenty-four photographs and excerpts from poems, Swiss artist Hannes Schüpbach provides insights into the cosmos of a poet for whom language is not so much a means of describing the world as a tool for understanding it.”

Excerpt from review (6 June 2021) in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of *Explosion of Words* at Literaturmuseum Strauhof, Zurich



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Watts' *Bibliography* opens up perspectives on the rich wealth of poetry that comes out of many different histories and environments, and this exhibition realises the true scale of the project for the first time. An artists' limited edition of the remarkable *Bibliography* has been printed for the exhibition in four large volumes and will be walked across London to the National Poetry Library as a celebratory performance event near the end of the exhibition.

The unique *Explosion of Words* event programme includes many chances for visitors to experience poetry from different languages, including Bangla and Urdu, through poetry workshops, readings and family events supported by east London poetry groups. A panel discussion exploring Watts' ground-breaking *Bibliography* will also be staged in partnership with Queen Mary University London, led by Chris McCabe (National Poetry Library) amongst others together with Schüpbach and Watts.

The exhibition travels from Switzerland where it was first exhibited at the Literaturmuseum Strauhof in June 2021 to great acclaim. A two-part publication has been published to coincide with the exhibition: *Hannes Schüpbach: Explosion of Words. Dedicated to Stephen Watts, with an essay by Jo Catling / Stephen Watts: Explosion of Words, 19 Poems, with German translations by Hannes Schüpbach* (192 pages, 19.5 x 26 cm, designed by Raphael Drechsel, GREAT,

published by Verlag für moderne Kunst, Vienna; RRP £28.00). The project has been supported by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia and the Swiss Cultural Fund UK.

ENDS

For more info and images contact

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All events can be [found online](#) or [listed in the exhibition leaflet](#)

Notes to editors

Exhibition: Explosion of Words

Exhibition dates: 28 January – 17 April 2022

Admission: Free

Opening Hours: Tues to Sun, 10am – 4pm

Address: Nunnery Gallery, 181 Bow Road, London E3 2SJ

Travel: Bow Road Tube Station, Bow Church DLR

Contact: [nunnery@bowarts.com](mailto:nunnery@bowarts.com)

### **Hannes Schüpbach**

(b. 1965 in Winterthur, Switzerland) is a visual artist. His recent work has mainly involved 16mm silent films, which are shown in museums as well as at major film festivals. In London, his films have been screened at Tate Modern in 2009 (curated by Stuart Comer) and in 2013 at the Zilkha Auditorium of Whitechapel Gallery (curated by Gareth Evans). In 2009 his recent and earlier work was presented in the solo exhibition *Hannes Schüpbach: Stills and Movies* at Kunsthalle Basel (curated by Adam Szymczyk). Several of his films, among them *Erzählung* (2007) *L'Atelier* (2007), the trilogy *Spin / Verso / Contour* (2011), *Instants* (2012), and *Essais* (2020), deal with the moments from which art is created. With his translation of 19 poems by Stephen Watts and the installation *Explosion of Words*, dedicated to Watts and his oeuvre, he continues his 'reading' of fellow artists.

### **Stephen Watts**

was born in London in 1952 (of partly Swiss-Italian heritage), where he still lives and works in Whitechapel. He has published seven books of poetry – *The Lava's Curl* (Grimaldi Press, 1990), *Gramsci & Caruso* (Periplum, 2004, with Czech translation by Petr Mikeš, reissued by Mille Gru, 2014, with Italian translation by Cristina Viti), *The Blue Bag* (Aark Arts, 2004), *Mountain Language / Lingua di montagna* (2008) and *Journey Across Breath / Tragitto nel respiro* (2011, both: Hearing Eye, with Italian translations by Cristina Viti), *Ancient Sunlight* (Enitharmon, 2014, repr. '20), and *Republic of Dogs / Republic of Birds* (Test Centre, 2016; new edition, Prototype 2020) – and edited several anthologies – *Houses & Fish. A book of drawings with writing by 4 & 5 year olds* (Parrot Press, 1991), *Voices of Conscience* (an international anthology of censored poets, Iron Press, 1995), *Mother Tongues* (a special issue of *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 2001), and *Music While Drowning* (an anthology of German Expressionist poems that accompanied an exhibition at the Tate Modern in London, Tate Publishing, 2003). His numerous translations and co-translations include books of modern Kurdish, Georgian and British Bangladeshi Poetry as well as volumes by A.N. Stencl, Meta Kušar, Amarjit Chandan, Adnan al-Sayegh, Golan Haji and Ziba Karbassi (from Yiddish, Slovenian, Punjabi, Arabic, Persian). He has also curated bilingual readings at several exhibitions (including Emil Nolde, Joan Miró, Arshile Gorky, Renato Guttuso and Francisco Toledo). He has worked in schools and hospitals as a writer on issues of well-being and creativity. *The Republics*, a film directed by Huw Wahl and based on Stephen Watts' book *Republic Of Dogs / Republic Of Birds* has been premiered in 2020, and his book *Swirl of Words/Swirl of Worlds* was published by PEER Gallery in 2021. Since 1980 Stephen Watts has compiled an ongoing *Bibliography of Modern Poetry in English Translation*.

### **About Bow Arts**

Established in 1995, Bow Arts Trust has grown to become one of London's leading affordable workspace providers for emerging artists and creative professionals. With a community of near 500 artists, they champion lifelong learning and inspire future generations of young people to access the arts. Alongside workspace provision, Bow Arts Learning runs an innovative programme of workshops, projects and training in schools, working with over 100 schools in London boroughs. Bow Arts also runs the Nunnery Gallery, a free public gallery with a local focus, championing the work of emerging artists and uncovering local history and heritage.