

## Néon

In January 1948 the first postwar periodical of the Paris Surrealist Group, *Néon*, published its inaugural issue. *Néon* was Heisler's idea and was largely organized by him. Starting a journal in a completely new environment was a daring proposition. Although Heisler made progress in French more rapidly than is generally believed, he did not contribute any texts to *Néon*; in fact, he published very little in French. The challenges were not only linguistic; Heisler quickly observed that Paris, while stimulating, was full of small, antagonistic groups and strong personalities who appeared at the top of the pecking order one day but disappeared the next. In a 1947 article for the Czech review *Cíl* (Target), he commented on this situation with some humor, recognizing its challenge and its promise: the roads of contemporary poetry in Paris, he wrote, "drift apart but cross

again wonderfully." Nonetheless, he insisted (in vain) on pacifism in a letter to Frederick Kiesler: "[*Néon*] will pronounce itself against all militant action or spectacular activism, to which it will oppose magic action—love being the key to all magic" (see p. 133).

*Néon* is far from sumptuous in appearance. Illustrations are in simple black-and-white; there is no photography. The journal is not even typeset. Large sections are typed or handwritten, while sheets are printed back-to-back on newsprint. At the same time, as Heisler stated to Kiesler, this potpourri look is made possible entirely through photographs, as the magazine was printed from copy photography of the assemblages of diverse elements.

Heisler's layout decisions can be understood as cost-saving measures, but they also uncannily anticipate the look of little magazines of ten to twenty years later,

from the Fluxus movement or guerrilla formations in the counterculture. (The radiant title, drawn by Heisler, also points toward a fascination with neon that became current in the 1950s–60s.) As with so much of Heisler's work, an economy of means is exploited to yield a previously untested aesthetic that presages future avant-garde developments. Issue number two is the most distinctive (cats. 46a–b). It was produced in collaboration with Frederick Kiesler, who drew a banner, or strip, that continued across all the pages of the journal. A variety of artists inscribed their own graphic contributions within this banner, marking out individual territory while helping to strengthen Kiesler's overarching evocation of what he called "endless architecture," an all-enveloping built environment. For this issue, along with the title, Heisler created calligraphic experiments, such as his design for a text by the American Surrealist Charles Duits.