

The MAIL-INTERVIEW project  
by Ruud Janssen – Netherlands

A 2<sup>nd</sup> compilation of some mail-interviews

After the first two publication (interviews with Ruud Janssen – celebrating the 25 years in Mail-Art and Mail-Interviews Part 1) this is the third publication with 12 more mail-interviews.

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This 2<sup>nd</sup> set of mail-interviews were also done in the years 1994-2007 by Ruud Janssen. This publication contains a small collection out of the 80+ interviews that he did in these years.

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## INTRODUCTION

All the first publication with 16 mail-interviews here is a second collection. They have been published before. Mostly on the Internet, and sometimes in small booklet form with cover and illustrations after an interview was finished. Small circulations always, and sent to the subscribers at that time and some archives like e.g. the MoMa, in New York,

This book is published with a selection of mail-interviews that have historic value and are worth reading for a broader audience. The amount of illustrations is kept to a minimum to make the publication not too thick. Also the Fluxus-related interview are collected in this book. A third and maybe fourth one will appear next year with the other interviews that I did.

I invested several years in gathering all this information. Honoria (Texas, USA) even devoted a complete chapter in her thesis about this project, so I guess these source interviews from the past are worth saving on paper too.

Besides the mail-interview I did with others, there is a selection of mail-interviews some people did with me. Those are published in another book with title "25 Years in Mail-Art". Also published at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com).

Enjoy reading this collection,

Ruud Janssen

Breda, April 2008.





## JOHN HELD JR – DALLAS

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH JOHN HELD JR. (USA)

(PART 1 )

Started on: 3-11-1994

Ruud Janssen : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 22-11-94

John Held Jr. : My first trip to Europe was in 1975. I went to France, Italy, Greece, Austria, Germany, and Holland. In Amsterdam I came across a rubber stamp store by chance. They sold sets of visual stamps (flowers, animals, fairy tales). I bought several, and talked to the director, Mr. Van der Plaats, about his business. When I returned to New York, I began to use them in my artwork (I was then doing pen and ink work). I never heard of artists using rubber stamps in the context of fine art before. I thought I had discovered a new art medium. But as a professional librarian, I began to research if this was true or not.

One day in the New York Times newspaper I saw an article about Bizarro Rubber Stamp Company. They published a catalog of visual rubber stamps. I wrote to the director,

Kenn Spicer, and he informed me that there was an underground art form called mail art, and that they used rubber stamps to decorate envelopes. He gave me the names of two New York artists who were involved in this work: Ray Johnson and Edward Plunkett. Ray Johnson had started this artform in the fifties as a way of distributing his pop art imagery. Ed Plunkett gave a name to Johnson's activities in 1962: The New York Correspondance School of Art. Plunkett sent me dadaesque "free tickets" that were rubber stamped with odd names and images. Johnson sent photocopied works, which he encouraged me to "add and send to" persons unknown to me. They turned out to be other members of the NYCSA, such people as Anna Banana and Richard C. But it was with Johnson himself that I had the greatest correspondence.

Ray Johnson not only introduced me to people through mail, but gave me the address and introductions to well-known artists like the painter Arakawa and his poet wife Madelyn Gins whose work I admired. For a young person not yet thirty, this was a fantastic way to participate in the contemporary art of my time, and actually meet the participants.

I accumulated more rubber stamps and made more and more mail art contacts. In 1976 I returned to Amsterdam to have a show at Stempelplaats, the rubber stamp gallery and museum that Mr. Van de Plaats had just started with the encouragement of myself and Ulises Carrion. While there, I spent one week with Carrion, a Mexican artist who had

started the Amsterdam bookstore and gallery Other Books and So. Carrion was the center of the European mail art scene and exhibited and sold postcards, rubber stamp works, artist's books, photocopy work, artist publications of all kinds, in short the only public distribution point for this very underground art form. From *Ulises* I learned the conceptual side of mail art and the philosophy behind much of my future activity.

RJ : What is this conceptual side of mail art in your eyes?  
How is it connected to your current activities ?

reply on : 20-12-1994

JH : Many of the ideas *Ulises* Carrión expressed on mail art and rubber stamps are contained in his book *Second Thoughts*. In his essay, "Mail Art and the Big Monster," he explains that mail art uses as support the postal system, but the post is not the medium. A mail art piece consists of a series of actions. Production of the piece and posting of the piece are only two of them. In another essay in *Second Thoughts*, "Personal Worlds or Cultural Strategies," Carrión extends the concept of an artwork when he asks the question, "Where does the border lie between an artist's work and the actual organization and distribution of the work?" He answers it by saying, "When an artist is busy choosing his starting point, defining the limits of his scope, he has the right to include the organization and distribution of his work as an element of the same work. And by doing so, he's creating a strategy that will become a constituent formal element of the final work."

So I came to understand through Carrión, and others as well, that mail art is not about the mail, the production of postcards, or other relics of the process, but about communication and the control of distributed creative energy. This is a conceptual exploration that begins with the production of physical objects, but as Carrión has said, "Most artists and the public seem to have lost themselves in the game. They have come to think that making Mail Art means producing postcards." It's not so. Mail Art is a medium itself for the distribution of "personal worlds" and "cultural strategies."

The organization and distribution of the work of which Carrión spoke of is a critical concern of mine. I am not only an artist, but an librarian. Both of these professions deal with information intake and dissemination. I think that my greatest contribution to Mail Art has been the publishing of my book, *Mail Art: An Annotated Bibliography*. It was a five-year project in which I gathered information, put it in a readable form, had it printed, and left it to find an audience. It was not only a research project, but a work of art. So is the curating of a mail art show. Organizing the show, gathering the information, finding a place to exhibit, mounting it for the public in the form of a global collage free of restrictions, these are all elements of a sustained energy, which is conceptualized, harnessed and presented to the public. The Mail Art Congresses of Fricker and Ruch; the Art Strike that Stuart Home conceptualized; Guy Bleus's Administration projects; Neoism as undertaken by Istvan Kantor Monty Cantsin; Picasso Gaglione's Stamp Art Gallery; Pawel Petasz's Commonpress Project; Dobrica Kamperelic's Open World magazine; your own Rubber

Stamp Archive - these, and many other efforts within the network, are other projects that I consider important conceptual artworks within a mail art structure.

Currently I am curating a mail art show at the National Museum in Havana, Cuba, organizing the Faux Post artist stamp that will travel the United States for two years, editing Bibliozone, producing artist postage stamps and other visual works for exhibition, writing and lecturing about my experiences, planning for future travels that will allow me to meet other networkers, and of course, answering the mail that comes to me daily in a creative fashion to ensure maximum information exchange. These are all current projects that are based on my conceptual understanding of Mail Art.

RJ : When I read this answer I realize that mail-art has taken over your way of life a lot. Your travels and work are integrated with the concept you give of mail art. Your travels seem to bring you to the corners of our world that are difficult to reach by mail. Cuba is just a new example after your travels to the USSR, Yugoslavia, etc... Why are you reaching for these outer corners of the network?

Reply on : 13-1-1995

JH : If mail art is about communication, then the greatest challenge is to reach those who are at the "outer corners". If one can overcome language problems, cultural differences, governmental obstacles, and technical difficulties when contacting correspondents from different countries, them

you get a better understanding and appreciation of those closer at hand.

My collaboration with Abelardo Mena, the Curator of Foreign Art at the National Museum of Beaux-Arts in Havana, Cuba, has presented special problems because of the economic and cultural barriers between our two countries. The mail cannot be sent directly to Cuba from the United States, but must be forwarded through a third country, such as Mexico or Canada. Our letters would take from two to six months to arrive at their destination. To overcome this we began to communicate on the Internet. Now our communication is practically instantaneous. This action reveals both the limitations of mail art and its expansion into different areas.

My friendship with Abelardo Mena has given me special pleasure because of the obstacles we have had to overcome to achieve it. I have always thought of mail art networking as a grassroots diplomacy, and this has never been more true than in my recent relation with Abelardo. Because of the situation that exists between our countries, we are both forced to make extra efforts to communicate and collaborate on a project of common concern. I look forward to my forthcoming trip to Cuba, for which I have worked six months to obtain travel visa from the Cuban government and a license from the United States Treasury Department Office of Foreign Assets Control in order for Abelardo and I to meet.

The communication mediums of mail and telecommunication are often preludes to physical contacts. I learned very early in my meetings with mail art participants that there is a mysterious, yet veiled, bonding that is cultivated through the postal system. When distance is stripped away and the contact is manifested in the flesh, the relationship is totally changed. Sometimes this is for the better, sometimes it is not. It is less mysterious, but it is more truthful. Most revealing is that the long-distance/time-delayed encounter is inherently flawed by a lack of essential information that is hidden through mediated communication processes.

This is not to diminish the importance of the mail art experience. I can't think of anything else that better prepares two people to meet. Something very essential is always communicated. And even if there is never a physical meeting between the two, something is gained through the postal contact. At it's best, a spiritual connection can be formed. Of course, it's impossible to meet all of one's correspondents if one is very active in mail art, but it's a great way to explore the greater world. I am curious about the unseen world, and mail art allows me to explore it.

My travels are guided by a search for practical answers that can be used to conduct my life in a more knowledgeable and comfortable fashion. Mystery is a lack of information that is overcome by meaningful communication. It may seem that by traveling to the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Uruguay, Japan, and now Cuba, that I am driven by a desire for exotic experiences. The truth is that



travel, like my use of the postal system, is based on making my life less exotic, more truthful, and to use the "outer corners" to discover the center. I always return home better informed, more aware, of the greater world. This has an influence to my future networking activities.

RJ : What is the vision of these 'future networking activities' for you?. It seems you started to use Internet (just like me) as an alternative for mail just to gain time or to have a communication-form when there is no other way. Do you think that E-mail will gradually take over what Mail-art brings or is it just "an extra tool" for the networker?

Reply on : 28-2-1995

JH : First of all, I have to mention that since we talked last, Ray Johnson died. This happened on January 13th, 1995, just four days before my trip to Cuba. I've talked about Ray before and how he was not only the founder and guiding spirit of Mail Art, but also a personal mentor for my own activities. His death marks a new period for this medium which he gave birth to. It is especially meaningful to me that so shortly after his death, I left for Cuba to curate the first Mail Art exhibition in a National Museum of Fine Arts. The members of Banco de Ideas Z, the Cuban art collective that co-sponsored the show, dedicated this exhibition to Ray.

Now some may say that this event marks a decline in Mail Art, and that this alternative artform has now entered the highest tier of the museum structure. I choose to look at

this differently. Ruggero Maggi has stated that, "Mail Art uses Institutions in the place of Institutions against Institutions." This is true for me as well. Mail Art is infiltrating the mainstream art world through the mainstreams' own institutions, and using them to communicate its message of global art and the diversity of ideas. Museums are one more weapon in the arsenal of Mail Art.

Mail Art is not "selling out." Direct person-to-person contacts continue in the netland. And not only through the post, but through the new communication technologies, like Internet. This is an evolution of great importance. It extends the reach of the Mail Artist making him a Network Artist. I still prefer to use the mail, because of it's intimate nature: one can feel the materials that were created and touched by another person. But I also use faster communication mediums when the circumstances require it. I like this flexibility, and it shows me that the concept of mail art networking is broad enough to escape the limitations of the postal system. Ray Johnson started a spark that has grown to become a firestorm of international creativity.

Mail Art has also become more than person-to-person contact. Now we have Mail Art and Networker Congresses that involve a number of Networkers at any one time. We have exhibitions in important museums, which extend our audience and recruit new participants. Many in the network have give "mail art workshops," which introduce the mail art experience to beginners. Mail artists continue to write about the medium in the vacuum of critical

acceptance by mainstream art writers and scholars. Recently, Crackerjack Kid (Chuck Welch) has published, *The Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology*, which contains over forty essays on the Mail Art and Networking experience.

Mail Art is bigger, more active, and attracting more attention than ever. It's not a sign of getting away from its roots, but an indication that these roots are planted in fertile soil and that growth is taking place. The branches of Mail Art are reaching out and beginning to have an effect on those who have ignored it in the past. When Mail Art began, it was a sideline for mainstream artists. Now it can hold one's attention on a full-time basis.

This is my good fortune. I have done mail art continuously since 1976, and I have grown as it has evolved. I am now able to pursue my interest in Mail Art almost full-time. Of course, it doesn't pay, but that's not so important to me, as I still have a part-time job that I enjoy (at the library), that pays most of my rent and bills. Mail art is not a career for me, but it is a preoccupation. And with this increased acceptance and growth, I have more opportunities to lecture, to curate exhibitions, to write, to exhibit works related to my mail art activities, to give workshops, to sit on panels that discuss such topics as the alternative arts, Fluxus, rubber stamp art, performance, and other subjects that have influenced and are effected by Mail Art.

So these are my future networking activities, which are still rooted in the traditional Mail Art exchange of postal objects. This does not mean that I don't recognize that

others in Netland may be taking a completely different path. After I returned from Cuba, I went to New York City for the publication party of Chuck Welch's new book. I met Mark Bloch there, who I haven't communicated with for four years. But Mark has not been inactive, nor have I. He has been involved in computer networks at the expense of his postal activities. We haven't written to each other, and I haven't seen his name on mail art show lists. But he's been networking, and I've been networking. Just in different networks.

So where once there was a wholeness in the Mail Art Community, there are now divisions. The Networker Congresses of 1992 pointed this out. The Mail Art tree not only has new branches; it now has fellow trees. Mail Art can't control the E-mail experience. E-mail can't control Mail Art. But they can inform each other. They can interact with one another. And they can move forward together. Because despite the differences of the mediums, they still have communication creativity as a common goal. Ray Johnson planted a tree in what has become a forest.

RJ : When I look at the organ of senses a human being has, the computer-network has still only limited choices of communication (for most it is only visual communication!). The mail also has its limitations but adds smell and feel-possibilities, 3D views etc., but with the tourism and congresses, the mail-art networking isn't just a tree, it has to do with open communication. Maybe it is time to get rid of

the term "mail-art" which is getting old-fashion? What do you think?

Reply on : 14-3-1995

JH : It's not so much that Mail Art is old-fashioned, just that it is now in existence for some forty years. It has matured. Mail art is no longer the providence of avant-garde artists as it was when it was begun by Ray Johnson and Fluxus. In the fifties and early sixties, Mail Art had powerful new conceptions about art (democratic art of open systems, non-commodity art, communication art, collaborative art, the question of originality, art activism, multi-culturalism) that were unexplored and unacknowledged by mainstream art. Now these ideas have been brought forward and have entered the dialogue of the art community at large. Through the explosive growth of mail art shows, the medium is no longer a secret exchanged surreptitiously through the postal system, but can be seen on the walls of university galleries, alternative art spaces, and even National Museums.

Networking art expands the concepts that mail art first exposed. Artists are moving into the new communication technologies like computer and fax and applying the lessons learned in Mail Art, especially the collaborative aspect, the respect for divergent opinion, and the notion of originality. Other artists have applied these lessons in performance works that are done in real time and space. Many artists are now involved in a variety of mediums, and they can best be represented as communication or networking artists. As these artists move into new

territories, they find even more information to be examined and new results that push art beyond its present definition.

But Mail Art still exists. The term Mail Art doesn't need to be thrown out. It exists in mailboxes around the world, and is very much a reality. It is useful to many people who still find it an inexpensive and far-reaching tool. But now it is just one weapon in the arsenal of the progressive artist: this new artist - the Networker. And it is the Networker who is now pushing forward the new frontiers of artmaking.

To be a Mail Artist, yes I agree, it's not an avant-garde activity anymore. It has entered the mainstream. To practice only Mail Art is worthwhile for many, but it's nostalgic. It is an activity based in history. For many who began mail art, this rage for the avant-garde still burns. So they move forward into Internet, into fax, into Congressism and Tourism, and even newer means of art communication that have not even been named yet. They move into Networking, but they can still practice Mail Art with effective results. It's just that choices have to be made in getting one's message across in creative ways. If you are stuck in Mail Art, you may not be getting your messages across in the most effective manner. You can't refuse the new computer technologies. Then you lose by omission, just as the painters and sculptors, and other tradition laden artists refused to consider Mail Art a legitimate new art when it first arrived to revolutionize the new art theories.

RJ : With your book and your newsletters it is obvious that you like to document things a lot. Is there a reason for putting all these things on paper? For the Electronic Mail (-

art) it becomes even more difficult to document it because it is connected to hardware and software, and the printed form is just a copy of the art. How should the electronic mail be archived and how do you do that?

Reply on : 5-4-95

JH : It's often difficult being both an artist and librarian. One of my good friends in the network is Dr. Al Ackerman, who is just a complete wild man. He seems to act from a subconscious level, where I am always analyzing. Ackerman is a natural artist because something pure flows through him and he has a very individual way of expressing it. The same was true with Ray Johnson. And for these two, documentation is not a primary interest. Reflection is not a component of their art as much as unfiltered creativity. But this is not my way. It doesn't come naturally, and I have to work hard for my art. I feel an affinity with Marcel Duchamp, who was also a great artist, but more measured. Duchamp was also a librarian for a time, a writer, and a curator as well. Art and the Network have room for these different approaches to the creative process.

It's not so much that I like to document things, but I'm in a position to do it because of my professional training in information science, and I don't see anyone else attempting it. I know if these ephemeral things in the Network don't get documented, in all likelihood they will be lost. Mail art and networking are important to me, and I feel that the work I am doing will make them more accessible to others. Then they will join me in seeing that

something very important is happening as a result of networking activity.

Before I started using a computer I wrote my articles on a typewriter. The first several drafts were thought out on paper. I saved these drafts so that others, if they were curious enough, could see the development of my thought. This is, of course, the same for other writers throughout the centuries. But now writers, myself included, are composing on the computer and corrections are made electronically with no record left behind. This is perhaps a deficiency in the new technology, but there are so many other benefits that this negative is far outweighed. For instance, when I write letters on the computer they can be stored and saved for the future. Previously they were handwritten, and I had no record of them. When I write articles they can be filed for further updating and compilation. And of course there is the matter of easy access. All my letters, articles, and graphics are easily found.

Now as to the archiving of Electronic mail, since I have so little experience in this, it's difficult for me to comment. But can't these electronic messages be printed out and/or stored? If so it's a matter of choosing which message to save. I save all the mail art I receive, so there is no issue of selectivity. I can understand, however, that the personal computer only has so much memory, so the issue of selectivity must be confronted. This is unfortunate, because what appears to be disposable one day becomes important in the future. Whenever I am researching, I am always surprised what I find in the archive. My interests change



from year to year. What is important to me one year is less so another year.

But the thing to remember is that electronic mail is a completely different medium than mail art, and has different demands. It's like the film and video mediums. Although the technology exists to videotape movies from television, I've never recorded programs, because there are always new ones that come along. It's a never ending stream, and yes, sometimes it's nice to dip into the river and try to capture a moment of it, but the nature of the river is that it is constantly changing. Maybe it's the same with the electronic mailstream. It's nature is instant communication and change. So it's not as important to capture the small physical moments as one does in the medium of postal exchange.

Anyway, it's not a question of one medium (electronic) replacing another (postal exchange). Each has it's own benefits, and both can be used to one's advantage. Each has it's own storage requirements, and I'm familiar with those of the postal exchange, but not the electronic one. Since I don't have a modem yet, or even a personal fax machine, I'm not immersed in the archiving of the telecommunication medium at this point.

I am, however, very interested in the question of stored electronic messages, and plan to do a great deal in the future with compilations and anthologies. For instance I'm planning to compile all the issues of Bibliozone I've done to date (30) into one work. This is very easy to do when all the issues are stored electronically and can be manipulated into

a different format without too much effort. I'd also like to anthologize all the essays I've written. In the age of the electronic word this is much more easily done than previously. Copy and paste are commands much more easily done in the electronic medium than the printed one. And isn't it interesting that these words (cut and paste) have been taken from the print medium to the electronic one. It just shows that mediums are interchangeable in certain ways, but have peculiarities that distinguish them one from another.

RJ : After so many years of mail art and writing about it, how would you describe mail art to a non mail artist?

(Between the sending of the answer and the getting of the reply John Held Jr. and Bill Gaglione visited me in Tilburg after their performance at the 'Musée de la Poste in Paris where there is currently an exhibition of rubberstamps used by artists as well as a selection of mail-art including rubber stamping)

Reply on 31-5-1995

JH : When I meet someone for the first time, and they ask me what I do, I tell them I am a Mail Artist. Then they look at me like I'm stupid, because, of course, I'm obviously a "male" artist. Very few people know what "Mail" Art is, even other artists. This is very frustrating because I spend so much of my time thinking, living, and doing Mail Art.

My standard answer in response to the question, "What is Mail Art?" is that it is an international community of artists that exchange art and ideas through the mail. If pushed, I

explain that rubber stamps and artist postage stamps are used to decorate envelopes, and that it is an art open to everyone from professional artists to children, because it is a democratic artform that provides an opening to anyone that wants to participate.

Often I am told that, "Oh, I'm a Mail Artists, because I decorate my envelopes and letters also." I explain that Mail Art is more than the act of decoration, that Mail Art is a process of interaction with a global network of artists. That these artists join together for mail art shows, assembling publications, collaborative performances, and other projects that stress the collaborative nature of the medium.

But as any Mail Artist knows, an explanation of mail Art is very difficult, and that a true understanding of the medium can only be obtained by doing it. Then the intricate weaving of the fabric of the network begins to make sense.

The thing that upsets me the most is that people think that because there is no commercial value to Mail Artworks, it is a hobby, not a valuable contribution to contemporary art. The general public, and other artists alike, tend to judge the importance of an artwork and it's creator by the commercial value assigned to it. There is such a lack of spirituality in mainstream art today that people can't believe that artists would make art for any other reason other than financial gain. And if they do, it's a hobby, because it doesn't generate any income. So I think most people write Mail Art off as an amusement.

But what I hope Mail Art can do is transform people's conception of what art is. That it is a creative transfer of

information that has the power to show the world that a common thread runs through the culture of all people, and that once this thread is discovered in one aspect of life, it can be extended to other sectors such as social welfare and politics. Once we know more about each other it becomes harder to wage war, impose embargoes, and stereotype enemies. Mail art is about living in a shrinking world.

But explaining this is difficult. Each person has to come to their own level of understanding. All you can really do is stress that Mail Art is fun and that it is exciting to receive mail from all over the world. Then if the person gets involved, they can come to their own conclusions.

RJ : Besides the Mail Art you do, you also did and still do a lot of performances as you have mentioned before. Could you describe how such a performance usually works for you?

Reply on 28-7-1995

JH : Do you think it was a performance when I came to see you last month? Showing up at your door with Fake Picabia Brother Picasso Gaglione? When we went to dinner? When I went through your archive, and Picasso took many impressions of your rubber stamps? And you, blowing up the air mattress I was to sleep on. Now that was a performance!

The Fake Picabia Brothers trip to France, Belgium, and Holland in May 1995, was it a performance or just a part of life? Le Musée de la Poste. Daligand. Bleus. Summers. Janssen. The Fake Picabia Brothers. I can't tell you if it was

a tour, an extended performance, an excursion, certainly a meeting of old and new friends interested in the network. And then the documentation Gaglione published through his Stamp Art Gallery, including my travel diary, photographs, and the stamp impressions Picasso pulled along the way.

Certainly, Gaglione and I did a more formal performance at the opening of the exhibition, "L'Art Du Tampon," at the Musée de la Poste in Paris, which was carefully prepared. At least aspects of it. A special rubber stamp commemorating the event was made at Galione's Stamp Francisco rubber stamp company. Stickers were produced. The action was thought out and explained to the curators of the museum exhibition. Modifications were made. Things were improvised during the actual performance, which consisted of Gaglione using my tuxedo as a mount for the rubber stamps he stuck on me. We passed out posters of the action, which were first impressed by the stamp on the sole of my shoe. It involved the participation of others, and fortunately, there was a large crowd that seemed interested in the action.

So that Musée de la Poste performance was more controlled like the more free-flowing exchange we had. Which I consider in some way to have been a performance. At the least, a Mail-Art Meeting in the grand tradition of Ray Johnson's Correspondence Art Meeting, Flux Festivals, Ace Space's "On the Road Travel Diaries" of 1971, the Eastern Europe tours of Anna Banana and Dadaland in the mid-seventies, the Mail Art Congresses of 1986, the Networker Congresses of 1992. This personal interaction among

networkers is always a special moment. When I meet other networkers, I try to focus on the daily occurrences that haphazardly happen, rather than dictate a planned agenda. Nevertheless, it seems more clear than the ordinary acts of life; a crystal-clear moment framed by previous acquaintance in a shared art context.

Gaglione likes to repeat performances. He says only a few people get to see them at a time, so why not do it over again for a new audience. I'm of a similar mind, because you learn something about the piece every time you do it. The technique firms up. Nuances are noted. also like doing working in a series. The shadow performances, the letter-opening events, the electrical tape anti-embargo works, the mail art meetings, the Fake Picabia Brothers; all of these are done till the idea driving them become exhausted.

All of these events come out of the mail art experience. That's the key that informs the entire body of work. I don't do a performance for it's dramatic or visual effect. Usually these are resultant occurrences. Ideas derived from mail art involvement shape the concept, determine collaboration, and conceive the documentation. My performance activities are just fodder for continuing mail art correspondence and visual material.

And dear Ruud, I know it is I who is answering the questions and not you, but don't you think that your Mail Art Interviews are a performance? The writing of letters. Sending faxes. Networker interviews via Internet. Concentrating on asking the right questions. Determining who to interview. Knowing when to end it. Preparing the

documentation. It's difficult to know where the performance ends, and where reality kicks in.

It's the same for me. My life is so full with the different activities of mail art, that the lines between its practice and my personal life get a little fuzzy. Performance, being a real-time component of the Eternal Network, is just cultural interaction made manifest. Like mail art, this type of performance is never good or bad, only useful if it is open enough for people of different cultures and levels of understanding to appreciate it in their own way. And if they want to participate, prepare an opening for them to experience it as well.

RJ : In your "Art from the Rim: The New York Correspondence School of San Francisco Artistamp Travel Diary," sent to me by Picasso, I read that you are making another "performance", you are moving from Dallas to San Francisco. Are the reasons for moving connected to mail art too?

Reply on 12-9-1995

JH: Yes, very much so. In the past years I have been collaborating with Picasso Gaglione on performance and other projects, such as writing for his publications program at the Stamp Art Gallery. I'm very impressed with the work he is doing. You must remember that I started in mail art because of my interest in rubber stamps, and that I was very involved with stempelplaats, the first rubber stamp gallery, in Amsterdam, Holland. I believe strongly in the free-flowing nature of mail art, and its direct communication between artist. But I also think that it can

co-exist with points around the globe where these communication and artistic experiments surface on a regular basis and manifest themselves to the public. I'm for an utopic art, but not a cult art, and this is one manner in which mail art can reach a wider audience.

San Francisco also can claim an important place in the history of mail art. Gaglione and others in the Bay Area during the late sixties (including Anna Banana, Pat Tavenner, La Mammelle Art center, Geoffrey Cook, Tim Mancusi, Jeff Berner, Buster Cleveland and many others) are among the first generation of the true mail artist. Not artists who painted and also did mail art; who performed and also did mail art; or did conceptual art and also did mail art; but who were full-time mail artists. The Bay Area Dada Group, like the Canadian art groups General Idea and Image Bank, were an important evolution beyond the initial impact of Ray Johnson and his Correspondence School. This is something I want to research more when I move to San Francisco and can access to the primary materials that were generated by Bay Area Dada.

In addition, contemporary San Francisco is one of the most important centers for zine culture, and the base of operations of R. Seth Friedman and his publication Factsheet 5. This is an aspect of networking that interests me greatly, and I hope to become more involved in this area.

There is a whole support base in San Francisco for the networking arts that is completely lacking in Dallas. Mike Dyar, Seth Mason. Vicki Manuel, Steve Caravello, R. Seth



Friedman, Gaglione and his wife Darling Darlene, Geoffrey Cook, Patricia Tavenner, Darlene Tong, Steve Lieber, Lure Books: all these people are familiar to me through my activities, and I look forward to closer contact with them. In Dallas I am completely alone. Of course this is the state of most mail artists and what drives them to communication through the mail. But after fifteen years, I've grown too isolated, and have done what I can with the institutions at hand. I look forward to a new start, and must say it is very exciting for me, and I relish the prospects of this new experience.

RJ : Now that you are preparing for the moving to San Francisco, you surely will be confronted with the large amount of mail art that you have received over the years. Have you kept all? How well organized is the archive of a librarian?

Reply on 12-10-1995

JH : I have thought about moving for a number of years now, but it has always worried me that I wouldn't have enough space for the Modern Realism Archive. But in talking to Gaglione about the possible move to San Francisco, he assured me that I could keep the materials in the Stamp Francisco warehouse until I found a place for them. That convinced me that the move was possible.

Not only have I kept and continue to archive all the mail I receive, but I also receive collections from other mail art friends, who don't share my passion for documenting this activity. I was recently staying in Chicago with Ashley Parker Owens of Global Mail, who was busy with the

organization of the Underground Press Conference where I was speaking, and she gave me the first opportunity to go through her collection of over one-thousand zines and mail art catalogues that she was about to distribute to the participants of the conference.

Since Ashley is at the forefront of international communication in facets such as mail art, internet, and zinedom, you can imagine the incredible collection she has amassed. Ashley's approach to collecting mail art is completely opposite of mine. She thrives on the process and concentrates on that. Her's a constant worldwide activity, which has contributed incredibly to the spread of networking arts. The American Ryosuke Cohen.

Ashley doesn't want a collection. That's not what interests her. It's the same for others and I respect their choice, which most of the time is due to storage problems, as much as anything else. But I'm building the tower of Bable. I'm collecting all these different voices and trying to make sense of them - in my language.

I've saved every scrap of paper that has come to me since I moved to Dallas in 1981. Before that, I have scattered correspondence from my start in 1976. I packed 18 small boxes of correspondence, rubber stamps and clothes for my move to Dallas. Fifteen years later I leave having spent the entire Summer organizing the archive for the move to San Francisco.

How does a librarian do it? I started first by sorting all my mail by domestic and foreign correspondents. I have 19 legal size storage boxes of American mail art and 16 boxes

of foreign mail. Each box contains files for about 60 correspondents. That's over 1200 American correspondents and almost 1000 Foreign correspondents

In addition to the storage boxes of correspondents I have special sections of the Archive devoted to artists stampsheets (3000 sheets from 400 artists in 31 countries), posters, mail art catalogues, artist publications and zines (about 750 titles from over 25 countries) personal documentation and artwork, rubber stamps (3000), reference material that formed the Annotated Bibliography, and other subdivisions of special interest (such as Congresses, Art Strike 90-93, Cuba, Ray Johnson, Mohammed, Stempelplaats, and others).

An attempt has been made to house these materials so that they will be preserved. The storage boxes are made of acid free materials so that they will not damage the works within. I remove all tape and paper clips from the works, which will in time damage the works. I lay the posters flat so that they will not become brittle from folding. These are small things that I have learned from my work with ordinary library materials.

In addition I have bookcases holding books and magazines about mail art, fluxus, contemporary art, artist's books, mail art catalogues, and other interests. This is probably the strongest part of my collection, because I have made it a point to gather all the books on the subject of mail art and networking that I can. The annotated bibliography was conceived primarily to ferret out these sometimes very hard to get items (like Poinot book, Italian and French

books on Futurist postal activity, Johnson's Paper Snake, a rare hardcopy of the Dutch PTT mail art catalogue, etc.) I've seen a lot of mail art collections first-hand, but in this category of books about mail art, I have never seen a finer collection than my own.

The Archive is a working reference library. I am constantly to it for information on the articles and other writings I am doing. Therefore, it is organized so I can find things. That's the real reason for the collection: to collect materials rich enough in breath allowing for a substantial overview of networking art. Then in writing about the medium, I can make informed opinions with a foundation of information behind me.

When I went to library school, I had no idea that I would become involved in the arts. It was always an interest, and I loved to read different biographies on artists. I saw them as free spirits in a world that limited our independence of action and style. When I first started writing to artists it was very much as an outsider trying to get a closer look at the monkeys in the cage. I met Jean Brown, who introduced me to many of the Fluxus artists. I met Ray Johnson in 1977. I began to witness first hand the creative personality, and it became an ideal of mine to emulate the freedom I witnessed. All the time, I was working in a library, married, raising children, and this freedom seemed impossible. But I was able to reach out through mail art and convince myself that this ideal was attainable.

Finally, in the mid-eighties, I was able to combine my skills in library work with the world of mail art I was witnessing,

and the Annotated Bibliography was born. I feel now that I have in some measure repaid my many correspondents around the world for all the kindness they have shown to me over the years. Now after years of watching and learning, maybe I'm ready to enter their ranks as an artist myself.

RJ : Since you are now almost moving to San Francisco, I think it is a good moment to end this interview. But somehow I feel the interview isn't finished yet, so I will call it 'PART 1'. When you are settled down in San Francisco we will see if we both have the energy for a 'PART 2'. I want to thank you for your time and I wish you a wonderful next part of your life in California!

Reply on 26-10-1995

JH : I think your idea is great, Ruud! I am very much on the edge now - on the rim of something new. It is now October 19th , 1995. In two days the movers come to pack my large rented truck, and then I will begin my adventure to San Francisco on October 23th. This is the last letter I will write and mail from 1903 McMillan avenue, an address that has served me well over the years.

Last week, on October 14th, I had an opening reception for my exhibition, John Held Jr. / Modern Realism: A Dallas Retrospective, 1981-1995. I had a very nice review of the show in the Dallas Morning News right before the opening ("Always on the Edge, and Always interesting"), and perhaps as a result, over 300 people came to the really beautiful non-commercial art space where it was shown. It was very pleasing to me that Honoria and her friend Miss

Ruby (The fake Picabia Sisters) traveled from Austin, Texas, and buZ blurr came from his home in Gurdon, Arkansas.

It was great to see how much work done over the past decade and one-half on display. There was a room for my work (performance photo documentation, performance relics, mail art, large photocopied works that were colored with oils, a rubber stamp mural, posters of past projects at Dallas institutions), and another room that hosted selections of past shows at Modern Realism (Cavellini, Julie Hagan Bloch eraser carvings, Jenny Soup envelopes, postcards by Buttons, Ken Brown, Open World magazines by Dobrica Kamperelic\_, Printed Matters by Banco de IdeaZ in Cuba, Artistamps by Joki, etc.).

So, yes, dear Ruud, this is the time for summing up and for a new start. I have to tell you also that right before the show opened I had to have surgery for cancer, which was, thankfully, a complete success, so this only adds to the sense of finality and new beginnings.

And just yesterday, the catalog that I was long awaiting came from Banco de IdeaZ and the National Museum of Fine Arts in Cuba, which documented the mail art exhibition that I curated there last January. It has an essay of mine, "The Open World of Netland." Here's the last sentences in it. "Because of the new communication technologies and the continuing desire of individuals of different countries and cultures to reach out to one another, borders are becoming obsolete. The object is not the

creation of one world culture, but a respect and understanding for each other in our fragile, shrinking, world."

I want to continue this search for understanding before my time is through. I think that in San Francisco I will have a firmer base from which to conduct this investigation. Ashley Parker Owens, our friend from Global Mail, will share an apartment with me. We will also share a post office box. I'll be working with Picasso Gaglione at the Stamp Art Gallery. It is a bit of a Mail Art Utopia.

But we'll see in PART 2, yes?

RJ : We sure will, thanks for this part of the interview!





## ARTO POSTO

### THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH ARTO POSTO (USA)

*This interview was almost completely done with E-mail although we exchanged the questions also in printed format to show the lay-out choice we both made for our print-outs.*

Ruud Janssen : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

arto posto : Can't tell exactly when I started mailing art. It was with an artist friend who had moved to California, Susan Petelik, and she always added art to her envelopes, letters, etc., tucked art inside. She inspired me to do the same, and I started sending back to her in like manner, than to other friends. That was during the late 1960s. I wasn't actually aware of the international mail art movement as such until about eight to ten years ago. (So many of us were doing mail art without having a name for it. Still are many such people. I bump into them all the time.) That was when I sent to my first mail art call, and I haven't stopped sending since. It's gotten

to be a serious addiction. Chuck Welch asked me just a little over a year ago about how much mail per year I send and receive and I had no idea. Had never counted. However, because of his question, I started numbering outgoing pieces with a numbering stamp on February 23, 1994. As of today, a little over a year later, I have sent at least 1716. (I sometimes forget to use that numbering stamp on outgoing mail art.) I may have first seen mention of mail art in the Rubber Stamp Album by Joni K. Miller and Lowry Thompson in, first published in 1978 and still in print here in the U.S.A. It inspired me to get involved with rubber stamping and to subscribe to Rubberstampmadness, now a very slick magazine catering more to mainstream rubber stampers than to mail artist types, I think.

When living in Minneapolis, Minnesota about eight to ten years ago, I took a workshop at the Minnesota Center for the Book Arts on mail art. It was done in conjunction with the Walker Art Center, a wonderful contemporary art museum there. We modified text by - draft, can't remember famous artists' name now, type set on an old press - added our modifications and art to it, then mailed it all over the world to a list of mail artists that Scott Helms had, asking these artists to modify our

modifications and mail them back to the Walker museum. The returned pieces were bound into a book that is now in their collection, and the Walker gave each participant a photocopy of the book, and had a wee party when we got back together to see the results. As a result of that, we started a rubber stamp/mail art group in Minneapolis, and it is still going strong, I think. The Bag Lady, whom I introduced to mail art and invited to that wee party, still lives in Minneapolis and participates in that group, and is coming to spend a week with me, to make art and play on the computer, in just a couple of weeks. And so the networking goes. I have since lived in St. Louis, Missouri; Chicago, Illinois; and now in Atlanta. In each of these cities I have formed groups that meet periodically to talk mail art, and have had mail artist visitors and house guests from all over the world, some of whom I had never met in person before, but knew through the mails, coming through or to each city. Part of this is due to my active involvement on Prodigy, then on America Online, two commercial computer bulletin boards on which there is active talk about and resulting exchanges of mail art which I initiated. My internet address is [artoposto@aol.com](mailto:artoposto@aol.com). Ask away if you have additional interview questions.

RJ : Could you tell a bit more about how you got into using the computer for communication. When did it start and when did you enter the internet?

AP: Ruud, I started using computer bulletin boards at the same time I started using a Mac regularly, in 1986. I connected to local bulletin boards in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Didn't know a soul who owned a Mac. Learned lots about how to use them through the help of people on those local boards. Those boards were run by Sysops who did it for the pleasure of it. They weren't commercial boards. When Prodigy came out in the U.S., I signed on and that was where I first started talking with others on-line about mail art, and the movement. Hmm. When was that? 1990 or 1991. We started with a small group of women, mostly women, talking about rubber stamping. I think there were just about twelve of us. They were already exchanging their stamped art, many had been for many, many years, but I was the only one, as I remember, who was involved in the mail art movement internationally, in sending to mail art calls (as opposed to rubber stamping stores contests). Within less than two years we had 400 people that we knew of discussing rubber stamping and mail art and book making and related areas. Lots of people are "lurkers," so who knows actually how

many of us there were reading that board. I did an article on the Prodigy stampers for Rubberstampmaddness (a national publication very popular in the U.S. among rubber stampers - slick paper, color, thick. It carries mail art calls.) I also did an "on-line class" on mail art, and a "by mail class" on mail art. It is hard to explain the difference to those who have never participated in the network between mainstream rubber stamp exchanges and the more quirky type of stuff one so often receive in the mail art network. These "classes" were my attempt to share with the interested people on-line some of the differences - no jury, no fees, less complex work (generally), what artistamps were, what documentation was, how one got involved, matching up people with like interests, how to issue your own mail art calls, what some reference sources were (Correspondence Art, for instance), where to see mail art archives, etc., etc. Public posts and learning and sharing techniques and developing intimate friendships were (are) very common on Prodigy, as they are on America Online, the service I am currently using. (I have also been on E-world, CompuServe, and GENie - all commercial services in the U.S.) Prodigy used to NOT charge by the minute or the hours. You just paid a monthly fee, and you could use it

all you wanted to. They grew so fast - got millions of subscribers - then changed their policy to a basic fee for "x" number of hours, then a per minute charge after that. Many of us jumped ship when that happened. AOL is more user friendly to Mac users, I think, so I switched over to AOL a couple of years ago. When AOL got Internet access (still limited, not total, I think), I started thrashing about a bit in those waters - never became a surfer. Won't, either, because I don't want to spend my time on bbs. Already have too many contacts, too many delicious things to do online, too many questions coming to me. Want to play with my Mac more. Make more mail art. Snail mail more art. (In the past year I sent almost 1700 pieces of snail mail.) I much prefer the kinds of relationships that I have developed on Prodigy and AOL to those via the Internet thus far. Internet messages seem to be sent out with carbon copies to lots of people. Less intimate friendships have developed. Public threads don't seem as interesting to me. Subscribing to things brings in treatises. I love getting Global Mail Electric, though. It's super. Still, there is something lovelier, to me, in the hard copy version. Most people I have met on the Internet have no experience with commercial bbs and really don't know much about them and the very warm

friendships that develop. Such fun to watch people's public posts and decide "I want to KNOW that person. I like the way she thinks. I like how she shares information so freely." Does that happen for you on the Internet in public posts, too?

Well, I'm off with favorite husband to dinner, so will dash. Hope you don't have to pay to receive this long reply to your short question. Fun to contact you on-line.

Hugs, arto posto (note lower case - I'm not "Arto Posto"; AOL won't let me use lower case initial "a" for arto, but all my other mail to you, I think, has been "arto posto")

RJ : For me, the E-mail only seem to have a few advantages (like speed of sending and the fact that you can transfer the texts you get easily), but the snail-mail is still my favorite. I see your wonderful & colorful envelopes (also done by computer) and wondered why you like this computer-work so much?

ap : Ruud, I discovered computers after being in a very bad auto accident that makes handwriting and doing many things by hand painful for me. Keyboarding and working on the computer is not. I think that is, in part, why I do so much of my mail

art by computer. Another is that I am endlessly fascinated by the amazing things that can be done with a powerful Macintosh and PostScript printers. I have always loved the beauty of type and bought an IBM Selectric typewriter because one could change fonts and do variable spacing. This was about twenty years ago, though I first used a Selectric when they first came out, around 1957. Hard to believe it now, but back in the 1970s that TYPEWRITER cost about \$1,000. At the time I felt very guilty about being so self-indulgent as I had no business use for the machine, just a love of seeing the print come out so elegantly on the page. I was writing poetry, and it was right after my accident, and I loved the LOOK of what I was writing so much more as it came from that typewriter. So glad now I did that. It has led to my giving myself permission to buy a DecMate II dedicated word processor and daisy wheel printer to write a book, then, upon seeing what the Mac could do, to buy increasingly powerful Macs. Now you can buy an entry level Mac for less than \$1,000. Amazing, when you think about it - twenty years later something so much more powerful and versatile at the same price.

It is owning Macs that gave me the courage to switch from writing to playing with images. And it



is playing with them that led me into the mail art movement as I wanted to share my computer experiments with others and to get back stuff others were creating on theirs. It took a long time to connect with many who were actually using computers, as you are, in mail art, but meanwhile I have had my mailbox museums fill with art created in so many different ways and enjoy the variety. I also think that my use of my computer and printers has led some others with computers to want to make more use of them in their mail art, particularly women I have met on-line who were primarily rubber stampers. Many had never thought of using their computers to do art and are now happily creating artistamps, wee books, etc. using their computers.

Because my husband bought a color thermal wax printer for his business, and I teach him how to use all new computer equipment and install all the software, I was exposed to the wonderful possibilities of color printing and got one of my own to use in my mail art. And since the thermal wax would print on only special paper, have since bought a PostScript inkjet so I can print on textured papers and envelopes. LEARNING has always been one of the major pleasures in my life, and now that I am physically unable to trot off to universities to

take courses for the joy of it, learning new computer programs and new ways to use my printers has provided substitute joys. I have about 300 megs on my hard drive, and almost all of it is software. (I keep stuff I create on removable disks.) These programs have provided years of learning experiences. Also, it is great to be able to go back and print out some piece of mail art I created several years ago when it is apropos to some call or interest of a new networker I have been exposed to. It also helps me treat mail art as a process, not a product, a process of learning, experimenting, trying new things, and sharing them with others.

I, like you, view e-mail and on-line bulletin board exchanges primarily as a way to get to know people better, to connect with others in the mail art movement, and to introduce new people to the idea of this great back and forth of mailed art.

RJ : What do you tell a newcomer about mail-art to get them interested? Do you think you can succeed in telling what mail-art is to a non-mailartist?

(Ruud, here's my response to your last question. Because of my disability, I can't go back to see if I have repeated myself endlessly, so will trust you to edit out anything that is repetitious or totally

boring. Have the feeling I may have covered much of this in answering previous interview questions.)

ap: Ruud, I find it much more difficult to TELL someone what mail art is than to show it to them. For that reason I got the idea of boxing up dozens of pieces I had had up on my huge bulletin boards and routing it to those who had expressed interested in seeing what mail art is all about. Thus far twenty-seven women requested to be added to the list, and the box of mail art is currently making its way around the U.S. As each person gets the box, she posts enthusiastically on the computer bulletin board America Online. This arouses additional interest, and more people e-mail me to ask that they, too, get a chance to see the box of mail art. Several years ago I did a similar thing with 'zines. Another routed mailing was of documentation. With local people, I invite them into my home to see the mail art archives. I make the same offer to those interested in mail art who will be visiting Atlanta on business or vacation. Because my net is wide, there is such variety in the work I receive that almost everyone falls in love with the work of a number of mail artists whose work they see, and they want to start exchanges immediately. It is great fun to me to see whose work appeals to whom.

Since we have an active group of rubber stampers, paper makers, book makers, collage enthusiasts, painters, etc., all exchanging sources of supplies, new techniques, art enthusiasms, etc., on-line, when I post mail art calls, there are always questions about what a "mail art call" is, and I respond on the public boards about traditions behind these calls. Some get very excited about art shows with no juries, no commercial impetus. They want to know what "documentation" is. They are excited about the prospect of international exchanges. Some want to initiate exchanges with me and learn more about mail art that way. The idea of art as "process" tempts some - to get away from the idea of preciousness and perfection tempts. Others have never heard of the idea that THINGS can be mailed, things that are not enclosed in boxes, but mailed naked, like the life preserver I just received the other day.

Some rubber stamp store owners in other cities have asked to have my mail art calls to display in their stores. Just the past year both my Empty Envelope call and the Abuse call shows have been on display. Some want to issue their own mail art calls and ask about how to go about this and how to do documentation. I've sent two boxes of wee books I have received in mail art exchanges to

Franklin Stein of National Stampagraphic as he learned about wee books on-line, and wanted to do articles about them in his publication. The word about mail art exchanges get spread that way, too. I've shared with him names of wee book makers who might be willing to write such articles for his magazine.

I also tell them about Dada and Fluxus and suggest books they can read to learn more about mail art. I send reprints of articles on the subject from various magazines or pass on copies of essays written by mail artists on the subject. Zines appeal to some, and I either pass on some I have received or give them names and addresses of sources. Some see mail art in quantity for the first time by going to a mail art show in their area that they have heard about on the boards. Some get lured into the movement because they have read about artistamps on the board or want to see sheets of them, and once seeing them try a sheet themselves. I offer names and addresses of other mail artists whose work seems of the type that might particularly interest someone who has sent her first piece to me and want to get more involved. I tell them where archives are located if there are such treasure sources in the cities they live in. I matchmake on-line by telling those new to the board of others

on the board with similar interests. There is a hunger among some to finally connect with others who will exchange with them, enthuse over what they do, share ideas. Many are women who have been doing mail art, sending it to friends and relatives for years, but have never received anything back. To suddenly find a whole network of people all around the world who love doing something similar boggles their minds, makes them feel less "odd," increases their daily joy as they eagerly go to the mailbox. And, of course, once we have a whole network on-line of people who ARE mail artists, who begin participating in the movement, I back off and let THEM explain documentation, mail art calls, 'zines, artistamps, mail art shows, how to connect with others, etc. I'm at this point now with my participation on America Online, as I was on Prodigy several years ago. My e-mail has gotten so heavy that I seldom have time to read the public boards anymore or to post on them. Others have taken over to spread the word to newcomers. The net widens. And I sit back and increase the DEPTH and intimacy of my exchanges with the network I have already developed as a result of on-line participation. Those newer to the movement who are wanting to widen their participation and share their knowledge and

enthusiasm do more of the posting in the Mail Art, Artistamps, Wee Books folders on America Online. I stay in touch with those on other services, including the Internet and pass on to them mail art calls, etc.

I really do think computer bulletin boards can serve as a great impetus to luring people into the movement, but I, like you, continue to prefer the snail mail exchanges. A downside for me for this participation has been that my network is now much too wide to be kept up with. I am always behind in responding to received mail art.

Hundreds see one's posts on a computer bulletin board and one's net can expand so rapidly that it is impossible to keep up. Too much mail art? I used to think that would be impossible. I'm at the point now where I feel somewhat overwhelmed. This can lead to burnout, I think, so I am reevaluating my participation in the movement. I want to keep mail art as a totally guilt free, joyous aspect of my life.

HOW to do this and yet respond to all the new people who send to me is something I have not yet worked out. I wonder how others' participation has evolved over the years, what changes they have made in the way they are active in the mail art movement. Perhaps you have interviewed mail artists who have talked with you about this issue?

RJ : Well, how others have dealt with that, you will have to read in the other interviews. You seem to be very productive when it comes to Arti-stamps. How do you design them? Do you always use the computer for your art?

(Besides the E-mail version I sent arto posto also a snail-version together with Michael Leigh's interview. Together with my questions I normally send some other text to, the normal correspondence besides the interview. Sometimes the interview and the private correspondence mingle, and this happens here too. So the next answer from arto posto is put down here completely as it arrived via internet:)

Date: Mon, 1 May 1995 06:48:16 -0400

From: Artoposto@aol.com

To: tam@dds.nl

Subject: Re: next question

ap : Ruud, just accidentally sent reply to your other e-mail address, and am repeating it to the tam address as I think previous message sent to the other did not reach you.



I would like to see you include your P.S. to me on the subject of managing participation on the movement as I think it is honest and open and would be of interest to others. I'm repeating it below so you can include it if you will.

RJ: P.S. I don't answer all the mail I receive. For the snail mail I probably answer 50% or less, and the computer-messages I get, I answer about 30% or so. I only answer the things that are interesting for me to react. I don't feel obliged to answer the mail I get. I know that most 'older' mail-artists work that way. If you want their attention, then you have to send them something to 'trigger' them to react. I discovered that years ago, and since then I became in contact with some very interesting persons who make wonderful art. Also I only send my larger art to people like that (an example: I just received a large oil painting on wood from America, and in return I sent a large 12-color silkscreen print. But this is not really mail-art, but the exchange of art. Besides a mail-artists I make the traditional 'art' too)

The next question: You seem to be very productive when it comes to Arti-stamps. How do you design them? Do you always use the computer for your art?

ap: Yes, for reasons I've previously discussed in this interview, now I almost always use my computer for my work. I no longer paint or sculpt or do fiber art. Unlike you, I do not make "larger art" or do or exchange art other than mail art.

I am, indeed, very productive of artistamps having made dozens and dozens of sheets in the last couple of years. Did three new sheets just this week. Not sure I understand your question about HOW I design them. Could you tell me more about what you want to know about that?

P.S. Received your snail mailing and the two interviews. Quite fascinating. I've exchanged with A-1 over the years and love Michael's and Hazel's senses of humor and stuff I received from them though I am less a recycler than he, and Rudi Rubberoid and Ian Gunn some of the others in this genre. Participated in A-1's Thematic Tape Exchange a couple of years ago, but I'm not really into video or cassette tape exchanges. I prefer hard copy image exchanges, I guess. ML's comment that "Archives should contain the best work" (page A-4) borders on something which seems anti-mail art to me - isn't it "jurying"? When I sent a box of my archives to Crackerjack, he wrote back asking if he could recycle some of the stuff that was less

interesting to him - a similar idea, I think, but I replied that I wanted the archive intact, or he could send the stuff he didn't want back to me as I think to get a true feel for what mail art is all about, one needs to see the whole range, not just what a particular person particularly likes. And, again, what has appealed to me about the movement is the non-judgmental aspects of it - the hanging of ALL work sent, etc. When I document I also try to include all images if I am going to include any. This would be impossible, of course, if one were to get hundreds of pieces. That's why I went to documenting for every ten pieces received in my most recent calls on abuse. It was a way for me NOT to "jury" or "present only the 'best' in the documentation, but to still be able to afford to send documentation to all with all people's work shown in documentation. Each person will handle her participation in the movement in her own way, and that is as it should be, in my opinion. I bring up these issues only as things to think about...not as RIGHTS and WRONGS. I like it that mail art really does not have hard and fast "rules." I do, at times, though, feel that there are subsections of the movement that function as old boy's networks where the same people's work is commented upon, depicted in documentation, written about in

publications, etc. again and again and again. This seems a bit like repetition of the very reason mail art got started - wasn't it protest against museums and galleries and art magazines showing only insiders work, pre-judging, etc. that led to the idea of mail art networking in the first place? The basic tenants of the movement also make me uncomfortable about "government grants" to do shows, travel, etc., as it is associated with the movement. Personally I like to stick with the "no money exchanges hands" aspects, the exchange of art outside of connections with funding agencies, etc. I see this trend towards sponsored travel, sponsored shows, selecting specific pieces from one's archives to display, offering 'zines for sale, asking others to help with costs, etc. as a veering off from the essence of the spirit of the mail art movement into another realm. I can certainly understand that there are practical reasons WHY it occurs. It's just not a part of the movement that appeals to me, nor one I personally care to get involved with.

You have a government sponsored bulletin board, so obviously you feel differently. I would be interested in your thoughts on this subject. Warm hugs, arto posto

- RJ : It seems your P.S. is as interesting as mine. Although I would like to answer it would make the interview a discussion and that wasn't the intention. If you want my views then you should interview me maybe? In your P.S. you made mention of your newest project. Could you tell a bit more about that?
- ap : For about the past year I have had ongoing mail art calls on the topics of spousal/partner abuse and child abuse. To date there have been 108 submissions, mostly from women, but some from men as well, I'm happy to say. Have received really powerful, touching work! Thus far the show has been up for two months in northern Illinois and Milwaukee, Wisconsin and was just shown the other day at a big rubber stamp convention in California. In September and October of 1995 it will be displayed in Michigan. I'm hoping the show on this important social issue will travel for a couple of years. In the past couple of days I have sent follow-up documentation to all participants, telling them where the show has been and will be mounted. This is in addition to the small book documentations I do for every ten participants. I did the follow-up so that those who were wishing to expand their mail art network would have additional names of people with similar social

concerns, and to let them know where the show would be in case they might be able to see the whole body of work.

There has been discussion on the electronic bulletin board that I am on recently in the Mail Art folder about documentation. Some posted that they had submitted pieces to calls over a year ago, but had never received promised documentation. (I was amazed to learn that so many others actually keep track of when they send to shows and when they receive documentation.) I felt a bit uncomfortable about their unhappiness as I frequently post calls and some send to their first calls in their lives as a result of these posts and I can well remember how eagerly I looked forward to receiving my first few pieces of documentation years ago. I responded to the posts that STUFF few pieces of documentation years ago. I responded to the posts that STUFF happens in life, and that perhaps some who intended to do documentation found themselves unable to do so. I also heard from some snail mail art networkers over the past year that they are getting disillusioned about sending to mail art shows and not receiving promised documentation. Since I send to lots of calls and don't keep track of who documents and who doesn't, I have no feel for how often this happens. I do think it is of interest

that several people apparently feel a change is going on in the network in this area.

Ruud, I feel I've talked on and on - more than anyone could possibly care to read, so if you don't mind, I would like to quit talking about my mail art involvement and spend more time DOING IT.

Thanks for asking me to participate in your Interview Project, and if I've left something out you really want to know more about, let me know. Also if some other person does interview you, hope you will send me a copy of that interview.

RJ: Thank you for the interview!





## TIM MANCUSI

### THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH TIM MANCUSI (USA)

Started on 25-3-1996

Ruud Jansen :Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on 12-4-1996

Tim Mancusi :My involvement with mail art began directly and abruptly in February, 1969. I was 18 years old and a student at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. As an assignment in my Environmental Arts Class our teacher, Stephen Kaltenbach asked us "to find out who Ray Johnson is and get involved with his art". At the time Ray was represented at the Feigen Gallery which was a subway ride away from class. I remember being really impressed with his collages which were embellished with cursive text done with a crow quill pen loaded with India ink. He would also distress the surface of his collages with sandpaper.

At that time I believe Ray had just moved from his Suffolk Street address in N.Y. to his Glen Cove address on Long Island, about 20 minutes from my home town.

I remember telling Stephen Kaltenbach at the end of the school year in May '69 that I was really glad he gave us this assignment and that I believed it would continue after the semester was over. Little did I know that it would continue for 26 years until Ray's death in January 1995. Or that it would put me in touch with hundreds of artists around the world and be the reason I'm currently involved with a career in rubber stamps.

RJ : More students besides you got the same assignment. Did they become all active mail artists? If not, why did you?

Reply on 29-4-1996

TM : As far as I can tell, almost all of the students in my class probably stopped corresponding with Ray after the Spring semester ended. Although there must have been more, I know of only one student, Mike Mahoney who kept involved in mail art for a few years.

In fact one evening in June, 1972 Mike, Bill Gaglione and myself visited Ray at the Pink House in Locust Valley. Why I continued corresponding while most students faded away is probably simply the odds. I loved the process and I loved Ray's drawings, plus it was fun.

RJ : How did you get involved with rubber stamps?

TM : Once again, I can trace my interest in rubber stamps to Ray Johnson. He would often add to his mailings with a stamped expression, usually a one line pun referring to someone he knew in the art world. These stamps were typeset (almost always in 12pt. Helvetica) and stamped in red, blue or purple. What I liked about them was that "stamped" look - uneven coverage, a little blurry, perfectly imperfect.

After I moved from Levittown, N.Y. to San Francisco, I worked with my cousin, Bill Gaglione in an art supply store. Across the street was Patrick's Office Supply store. It was there, that Bill and I had our first rubber stamps made. (The stamp division at Patrick's was run by Bob Grimes, who years later, would be made famous by Leavenworth Jackson). In June 1970, I had Patrick's make 3 different images of clouds I had drawn into rubber stamps. Soon after I drew 2

more, the man on the moon and the planet Saturn for Hervé Fischer's early anthology of international stamp art. It was a precursor of an industry yet to come.

In 1979 a friend, Joel Rossman, bought a small vulcanizer and we all started making stamps like crazy. This collaboration among Joel, Bill and myself led to the publication of STAMP ART which was a compilation of rubber stamped artwork mailed to contributors. The legacy of STAMP ART is that it led directly to the formation of 2 of the world's most successful rubber stamp manufacturers - Gaglione's Stamp Francisco, and the company I work for, Rossman's Personal Stamp Exchange.

RJ : Your move to San Francisco, the Bay Area, I also bring in connection to the "Bay Area Dadaists". What happened there?

Reply on 1-6-1996

TM : What happened in San Francisco was a convergence of creative energy in a place and time that discouraged limitations. The sky was the limit. With an affinity for dadaism, not just as a period of art but as a way of living Bill, myself and other artist friends, (in particular Steve

Caravello, Charles Chickadel and Monte Cazazza) used the City as a backdrop for our numerous activities. We would mail and/or hand out invitations to strangers in the street to come to our gallery openings, group photo's, performances, parties and other events. Anyone who asked us "What's mail art?" soon found themselves corresponding with Ray Johnson, The Northwest Mounted Valise, General Idea, The Western Front and other mail artists throughout Europe and Central America.

Mail art was exploding at the time and we found it easier to keep up with it all by having our collages, statements and drawings printed in small runs of 50 or 100 copies. We were the originators of what Ant Farm called "Quikcopy Art" and we stretched the limits of paper plate printing technology.

Through the years, various artists would visit the Bay Area and join in the art-making. For example, Anna Banana came down from Canada in 1973, stayed, married Bill and contributed immensely throughout the 70's to the Bay Area Dada Scene. The people, the events, the happenings, in retrospect are almost too numerous to record in

such an interview as this. I could go on for pages but I'll end it here so you can ask another question.

RJ :      What is the story about the Weekly Breeder? Do you know how it got started, and can you tell me what it "was all about".....

Reply on 17-6-1996

(Together with Tim Mancusi's answer he sent me 3 original copies of the Weekly Breeder to illustrate in full detail what the magazine was all about. The magazines were also meant as a gift to the TAM-Archive! Thanks Tim!)

TM :      The "New York Correspondence School Weekly Breeder" as it was originally called was started by Ken Friedman in 1970 or '71. Keep in mind that the name "New York Correspondence School" was invented by Ray Johnson as a pun on the "New York School" which referred to that group of painters living and showing in New York during the 50's. Ray Johnson knew these artists and also experimented early in his career with abstract expressionism. So as the concept of mail art was coalescing Ray probably thought it would be funny to stick the word "correspondence" (or sometimes "corresondance") in the middle of New

York School to give what he was doing both an identity and validity. There was always an underlying "tongue-in-cheek" aspect to his motives.

Current art scholars consider Johnson's art to be the numerous collages he made and showed mainly at the Feigen Gallery in New York City. His invention of mail art is still considered by the powers that be in the art world as an interesting sideline but not a true art movement. And I'm sure Ray was aware of that at the time. So he was just having fun with this thing that he knew was both very powerful but also invisible. At least this is my theory on how and why Ray identified his postal endeavors as "The New York Correspondence School" and it explains half of the Weekly Breeder's name.

Ken Friedman was a teenager when he became interested in the activities of the international group of artists known as Fluxus, who had their heydays mainly in the early 60's. Ken identified with the Fluxus artists and formed Fluxus West which was not any real organisation or group. It was just him. Ken was eventually turned on to what Ray was doing probably via Fluxus artists. Dick Higgins, Both Fluxus and the NYCS shared

the commonality of a Zen sensibility and it was in that spirit that Ken started printing and mailing out his single sheet "NYCS Weekly Breeder". (The Weekly Breeder part of the title is a take off on the "Weekly Reader" which was a current affairs newsletter distributed to American public school children). It was also a way for Ken to align himself with Ray's increasing popularity. So Ken published about 10 of these sheets and actually mailed them out every week. In 1971, for whatever reason he asked Stu Horn in Cherry Hill, New Jersey if he would continue to put it out. Stu, an excellent mail artist who corresponded as "The Northwest Mounted Valise" added an extra page or two and continued publishing it for another 6 months or so. The NYCS Weekly Breeder at that time looked like a page from a Dadaist scrapbook. Mainly short, absurd articles and weird pictures taken from the daily newspaper and collaged together. Similar to the type of Xeroxed pages Ray might enclose in his envelopes, just more structured. When Stu decided to travel to Europe for the summer he wrote and asked me if I would continue to publish the Breeder. I was thrilled and jumped on the opportunity.



I put out our first issue in May of 1972. It was 2 pages with a staple in the upper left hand corner. We printed 200 copies and mailed them out to whoever was on mine and Gaglione's combined list. Because we split the printing costs we each got half of what remained after mailing. And of course Bill was assistant editor. That issue was the first time we referred to ourselves as "the Bay Area Dadaists". The second issue was 6 pages long with 2 staples on the left side. The staples were significant because now it was becoming a "zine". Our third issue was about 15 pages. Each issue got bigger and more expensive to print. It was no longer weekly and months would go by between issues.

The weekly Breeder gave me an opportunity to merge my interests in dada and mail art with my skills in graphic arts. I could draw like an underground cartoonist, do interesting designs with type and lettering, make Max Ernst-type collages all while poking fun at politics and religion. We would also invite other artists to contribute a page or two like Lowell Darling, Robert Cumming, Futzie Nutzle, Bill Griffith, Jeff Berner, Monte Cazazza, General Idea, etc. And, of course Ray would occasionally send a page. We would print, collate and bind the issues at our

expense and mail them out free to contributors and newcomers. One of my favorite issues was from May, 1973 (although dated 1953 just to be dada). I did the lettering for the headmast, Steve Caravello did the collage on the cover and Gaglione did about 20 pages of great collages for the guts. It takes hours just to absorb that one issue.

So, there were 3 basic Eras to the Weekly Breeder. Ken Friedman's, Stu Horn's, and the Bay Area Dadaists'. I believe our version was the first true dadazine and influenced other mail artists to publish their own. There have been somewhat similar publications and other commercially published books and magazines, not to mention Grant funded periodicals but the Breeder was self-published, limited to 200 copies and always free. We put out a total of 7 issues over a 2 and a half year period. I'm sure most of those copies are now lost or sleeping in landfills.

RJ : It is fun to look back at things, but how is the mail art network nowadays? Is it still fun being a mail artist?

Reply on 13-7-1996

TM : It is more fun than ever. Obviously, I wish I could still mail stuff to Ray but the fact that the network exists at all is a testament to his vision and diligence. And for me, merely continuing in mail art acts as a tribute to him. Today there are more kinds of mail art than there was in the late 60's and early 70's. I correspond with many people who consider themselves mail artists (which they are) but who have never heard of Ray Johnson. These are the decorative envelope and postcard people who populate the pages of RUBBERSTAMP MADNESS. Their mail art is centered around rubber stamps. There are some really fantastic artists of this genre, people like Janet Hofacker, Rusty Clark, Toby Galinkin, etc. Not to mention the hand-carved eraser crowd which is a whole other category. Then there's the more traditional type of mail artists like Adda Dada, Mike Dyar, Buster Cleveland and Rocola. And, of course hundreds of others. Another offshoot of mail art is the incredible production of artistamps (Perforation is Power). The boundaries between the various styles of mail art can get blurry and that's one of its pluses. I do not compare one type of mail art as being better than another although I believe all current forms

evolved from the New York Correspondence School.

Obviously, as an employee of PSX (Personal Stamp Exchange) I owe a lot to the decorative card and envelope group of mail artists. But I also like the more conceptual or process-oriented "add on and mail to...." type of correspondence. I especially love those daring people who try to mail postcards and envelopes with counterfeit postage just to see if they can get away with it. I recently received a small disposable camera (with the film built in) from La Toan Vinh in Montreal. It was originally sent out by ex post facto in Texas with one rule: take a picture of your mail box, repackage it and mail it out to someone else. I sent it off to Graffiti Grafix. Eventually after the film runs out it will be mailed back to ex post facto. The whole process will probably take 2 years and involve about 24 people - not to mention the actual photographs. Now that's mail art!

In the late 1970's I found myself getting bored with the mail I was receiving. It was slowly being dominated by a lot of minimal-effort, obscure and impersonal photocopied sheets, slapped together with what seemed to be a "just get it out"

mentality. In retrospect I see this as a result of the continuing growth of mail art at that time. It was starting to get watered down by people who saw the excitement in it but thought it necessary to reach everybody on every list. There was a lot of "chain-mail art" at the time which I refused to answer. One of the things that I have always liked about mail art is that anyone could do it. I have often encouraged my non-artist friends to take a chance with the network to see what happens, to see where it might lead. But by 1979 after a full decade of activity, my enthusiasm was waning. It had become more of a chore. So, except for my occasional piece to ray, Bill or Rocola or a camera-ready page mailed to a zine, I was not an active mail artist during the 1980's. I followed my employer, PSX from San Francisco up to Petaluma in 1983 which made it inconvenient to continue to do things with Bill. As a result I never attended any of the Congresses and kept on making art right on through that Art Strike. I was simply unaware of it.

Many months or years would go by inbetween visits with Bill and darlene. It wasn't until Jan. , 1992 when my brother and I had dinner with them in the city that I would begin to get back seriously into mail art. At that dinner I mentioned that it

would be 20 years in May since we put out our first Weekly Breeder. I suggested that we publish a Special 20th Anniversary issue and asked Bill to invite whomever he thought might enjoy contributing to it. From that list of Bill's coupled with the remnants of my own list evolved my current list of correspondents. Plus those people that are always suggesting that I send something to someone they enjoy corresponding with. And the network continues to widen. Since 1992 I have answered every piece of mail sent to me. I absolutely love the fact that when I come home from work there waiting in my mailbox could be something from someone new that will blow my mind. And that my response back to them will start an escalating volley that will lead to a place neither of us knows and might even involve other creative people. Mail art is truly a unique experience the nature of which most people will never know.

Ah, but then there is the Internet. Which is basically digital mail art and no less valid than Ray's traditional form. Its physical and tactile limitations are offset by its immediacy and awesome pervasiveness. I recently bought a MAC computer and have installed some graphic applications. Along with a color ink jet printer I

have found it to be an incredible efficient tool for generating mail art. It lends itself to personalization and is still something that I can stick in an envelope and send off into that old fashioned postal system. I intend to purchase a modem eventually mainly to download software upgrades but not as my main source of mail. Obviously E-mail and home sites will replace the mailbox and probably the telephone in the next century but I hope that takes awhile. First class mail will probably go first leaving Third class and Express services as the most lucrative for the Postal Services. So, instead of me mailing you an actual print from a hand carved stamp of M.B. Corbett you would download that image from the print I had scanned and placed in your web site. No longer would your copy be a unique, one of a kind print. Instead it would be digitally identical to everyone else's varying only by your printers settings.

When I first got into mail art a postage stamp was .08c (US). Today its .32c. Tomorrow it will be on my phone bill. It is with the knowledge that our grandchildren may never experience licking a stamp that I gleefully keep up this tradition.

RJ : Well, how could you know that on the day I received your answer, I just had started with my own web site, and that all the interviews that are finished are now online thanks to the help of Jas W. Felter in Canada. But like you, I still prefer the paper-work and at the same time am open to the new developments. When I first met you, you had this exhibition in Hagen, Germany, with your larger artworks where you included the rubber stamping as well. The small rubber stamp is too small for you?

Reply on 31-8-96

TM : It's not that the typical commercial rubber stamp is too small for me, it's just that I have always realized other potential uses of the act of rubber stamping. A rubber stamp transfers ink onto paper. Being someone who likes to draw and paint I knew that I could use that basic concept to make images that hadn't been done before. The large stamped pieces that I exhibited at the Stempel Mekka in Hagen (Germany) in September 1994 represent a combination of the various mediums that I enjoy exploring; drawing, painting and print-making all under the umbrella of rubber stamps. But the birth of those pieces began at that very same dinner with Bill and Darlene in January



1992 when I asked Bill if I could exhibit at his Stamp Art Gallery. The show was eventually scheduled for July 1993. So, with the opportunity provided by Bill to exhibit and the means to make the type of rubber stamps I had in mind provided by PSX I set out to produce about 20 large pieces of rubber stamp art.

These rubber stamp "paintings" were made in the following manner; I started with a series of small rubber stamps that I cut out of various dot and line patterns from Letrona™ sheets from Letraset™. These were in circular, square and triangular shapes ranging in size from 1 square inch to 5 square inches. I used these stamps in combination with extensive masking techniques the way an airbrush artist might. I would draw in pencil a light picture of a scene I had in mind and mask off parts of the background and foreground to build up color. I used light-fast fabric inks exclusively so that the pieces would not fade when exposed to light over time. I wanted to go beyond the mere "scene-making" that can be accomplished with a tree stamp here and a cow stamp there. For the average stamp user stuff like that is fun but for me it became rudimentary around 1971. So, even though I used small rubber stamps I knew that by combining the airbrush

masking techniques with my knowledge of halftones and color that I could make very large paintings. The paintings were large but the stamps were actually small.

When Diana Arsenau and Wolfgang Hein of HEINDESIGN were in the Bay Area in July 1993, they visited PSX and also saw my exhibit at the Stamp Art Gallery. They asked me if I would show at their Stempel Mekka the following year in Hagen. I added 5 new pieces for the Stempel Mekka show. These were on wood and even larger than the previous years paintings. That trip to Germany, where I met you and Elke Freed and Siggi Wille and Tom Nelson and so many others will always be a special memory.

RJ : Yes, those first stempel-Mekka's were really a pleasure to be at. Just today, as I write this next question, the 5th Stempel Mekka is taking place in Hagen now. It has grown into a large international event with lots of stamp firms and is now located at a place inside a museum (with an original exhibition with stamp-cards to go with it). But the commercial aspect has taken over a lot of the Stempel Mekka. The same goes for the larger rubber stamp magazines (like RubberstampMadness and National

Stampagraphic) which have become more commercial glossy zines instead of meeting points for creative people/artist. What do you think of this development?

Reply on 21-9-1996

TM : This is a very complex question. But my years in the industry make me as qualified as anyone to answer it. It was 1970 when I had those 3 cloud drawings made into stamps. I remember when Joel Rossman bought his first small vulcanizer in 1979 and a couple of years later we delivered our first shipment of cable car stamps (worth about \$ 25,00) to Woolworth's in San Francisco. We walked out of there simply ecstatic. So today it is absolutely amazing for me to walk through our current factory and say "good morning" to an employee who wasn't even born when I was mailing postcards of my stamped clouds to Ray Johnson, Richard C., May Wilson, et al.

But the commercialization of the rubber stamp industry was inevitable. And its potential wasn't realized by me or Gaglione or Personal Stamp Exchange. The first true rubber stamp companies were All Night Media, Hero Arts and Rubberstampede. What I do find significant is that all the major companies are located in the Bay

Area. That rubber stamps became commercial is in and of itself value neutral. If I may get a little political, let me say that I prefer capitalism over socialism as long as its "capitalism with a human face". But I remember when brand names used to be sewn on the inside of clothing - not on the outside. I'm more upset by the commercialization of sporting events than I am of the rubber stamp industry. I don't want to see corporate logos on baseball and football uniforms like I see on European and Latin American Soccer uniforms. But, I'm sure before too long I'll be cheering on the Intel 49ers rather than the San Francisco 49ers.

Not only was the commercialization inevitable but also beneficial. Just taking PSX as an example I can attest to the fact that over the past 15 years we have employed probably over 1,000 people which has enabled about 100 people to purchase new automobiles and a couple of dozen people to move from renting to buying their homes. Think about the subsequent ripple effect of those activities on other industries. And its all centered around the act of rubber stamping which is a fun and good and basic activity. There are worse things to fret about.

And concerning publications such as Rubberstampmadness and national Stampagraphic, I don't lament the over abundance of advertising. I have some early RSMs from around 1980 when Lowry Thompson was editor. Those early issues were definitely more mail art oriented and more fun than current issues but I am still impressed with the skillful management of that magazine by the current editor, Rubberta Sterling and her husband. They've helped promote the industry and have also created many jobs, I'm sure in the Corvallis area. And their classified section is still a great meeting place for rubber stamp pen pals (although not as hip a crowd as one might find in Global Mail). I personally like National Stampagraphic if only because they had the gumption to publish John Held Jr.'s tribute to Ray Johnson after his death. RSM only mentioned him obliquely and I doubt if they understand or appreciate that aspect of traditional mail art. But that's okay. They all serve their purpose.

In the mid 1980s we used to wonder "when's the bubble going to burst?" It may someday but not for awhile, I think. Rubber stamps are now a mainstay of the gift, craft and stationery industry. Remember that in the 19th century the greeting

card industry grew out of something that was very personal and hand made. Cards used to be made by regular folks and were part of Folk art. Now there is Hallmark and here in the late 20th century they worry about loosing some business because people use rubber stamps to make their own cards. It's ironic. The thing about the rubber stamp industry is that almost anyone can start their own business. Not anyone can start their own car company or decide to start manufacturing refrigerators. So there will always be new, small companies coming into the industry and pushing the older, bigger companies into more precision marketing and efficient assembly.

RJ : You seem to enjoy carving the portraits of ather people, and I am happy to receive the prints of the results. How do you choose "the subjects" and why do you use rubber (on this large size) instead of e.g. wood or linoleum?

Reply on 30-10-1996

*(During my travel to San Francisco / California in October/November 1996, one of the people I visited was Tim Mancusi in Rohnert Park. The first day I was there Tim handed me the next question which he had typed and printed with his computer. I took the answer with me and am retyping it in Tilburg. Because we had*

*lots of other things to discuss besides this interview, I sent the next question end of November from the Netherlands. It was very nice indeed to meet Tim for a second time!)*

TM : The "subjects" I choose for my hand-carved portraits are usually my friends and fellow mail artists. Occasionally someone will ask me to carve a portrait of a relative, usually a child and, of course I will occasionally ask the people. I ask the people I correspond with to send me a photo of themselves so I can "immortalize them in rubber". And I do this as a means to motivate myself to make art. One of the problems I've always had as an artist is in motivation. There is never any lack of ideas - I have more ideas for all kinds of art than I'll ever have time to complete. But I will always finish the art that I promise to make for others. In other words, I have no problem breaking a commitment to myself but not a commitment to anyone else. Once I promise someone that I will carve their portrait there is no doubt that I will complete it. I would have done one of you but your own hand-carved portrait is so good that I doubt if I could improve on it.

I carve in rubber simply because I want these prints to come under the category of "Rubber

Stamp Prints". It's a technicality. And once I adhere the carved rubber onto a block of wood it becomes a true rubber stamp. A few of the prints I displayed at the Stempel Mekka were so large that they probably should have been carved in wood or linoleum. In my opinion, one of the things that distinguishes a rubber stamp print from a traditional linoleum or wood block print is that the stamp is held in the hand and stamped on to paper. Traditional printmaking is usually done in an opposite fashion - the carved block is placed on a table and the paper is layed over it and, with the aid of a precise mechanical device comes in contact with the block.

I intend in the future to buy a small press that would enable me to make large, multi-color prints from linoleum. (But then they could never be considered as "Stamp Art" which I feel still needs to be legitimized as a valid form of art.) One of the disappointing aspects of the type of rubber I currently use is that the surface deteriorates when inked with solvent based inks which, over time ruins the edge of the line. There are some good permanent, water-based inks that have recently been released by the various ink manufacturers. I have often thought back to the silicon type of rubber that you experimented with and showed



me in Hagen. I believe it had a more resilient surface than the rubber I carve in.

RJ : Funny you mention that carved portrait of me that I use on my post. I was carved my Joy E. McManus from Texas, USA who did that one for me years ago as a surprise-present for me. Yes, she did a good job, and I always like to use that stamp. The stamp is a symbol on its own now.....

Another question. You have been doing mail art for a long time now, but haven't kept all the mail art you got in. What eventually will happen with the mail art that is circulating around the globe?

reply on 5-1-1997

*(together with his answer Tim sent reprints of photo's he took of me while I was visiting him in Rohnert Part, November 1996. Also some artworks which mostly are portraits of (mail-) artists he knows).*

TM : That's a difficult question to answer. I don't think anyone really knows what will happen to all that mail art although I can give you anecdotal examples of what has happened to some mail art. Back in my early days I sent out some really neat pieces that I remember were quite good. I would be shocked, and flattered to find out that even one

recipient of that mail thought enough of it to save it. Over the years, as time and mailings accumulate some people started saving their mail, putting it in boxes, recording what came in and what went out. It became, for some a thing to do - perfectly suited for humans' natural organization tendencies. And, with the advent of personal computers, what was starting to get unruly became more manageable. Computers could enable mail artists to keep more precise records of mail art activity. No one knows that better than you.

Ironically, the most important force in creating an awareness of the need to archive mail art came from Ray Johnson's suicide in January, 1995. And, with the Walker Museum's "Spirit of Fluxus" exhibition that toured internationally a couple of years ago it isn't that wild to imagine that mail art, as an off-shoot (or "distant-cousin") of Fluxus activity might be worthy to students of modern art of a deeper examination. If that interest can be generated then all those boxes of mail art that a lot of people have stashed in closets, attics and garages will become the main source of exploration and assimilation. I know, for example that Patricia Tavenner of Oakland, California has saved almost all of the mail art she has received

since the early 1970's. Maybe you saw some during your stay with her this past Autumn.

Sometime around 1977 after about 8 years of accumulating mail from all over the world (and with the previously described boredom setting in) I wound up donating a few hundred pieces of mail to the Oakland Museum. If I remember it correctly, Rick Solloway got me in touch with Michael Bell who was working at the Museum at the time. I gave him a foot locker filled with envelopes and small-press publications, and most of my Ray Johnson mail which I now regret. I kept about 20 or 25 pieces from Ray that were particularly personal. Those pieces of mail, along with a few boxes of other ephemera were later sold to Stephen Lieber (who previously had bought Jeff Berner's collection of Fluxus Art and then sold it to the Walker in Minneapolis). It was Gaglione who got me in touch with Lieber in May, 1992 while we were putting together the 20th Anniversary issue of The NYCS Weekly Breeder. Stephen was mainly interested in Ray's early mail art up until 1975. I find it interesting that Lieber considers Ray's mailings after 1975 to be of less significance. In a way it truly defines a Golden Age.

Now, there is some controversy centered around the ethicalness of selling mail art. I was unaware of this controversy at the time, having just gotten back into mail art but in retrospect I don't think that would have stopped me. It's a personal decision and I'm glad I did it. I was surprised by what Lieber offered me and decided the time was right. For years I had, from apartment to apartment moved all these dusty, old boxes of mail art - occasionally questioning why. And suddenly, here's this collector who not only is going to pay me for my archiving diligence but will, in all likelihood promote and help legitimize mail art. And that will benefit everyone.

I sometimes become weary of those mail art purists who look down their noses at others who sell their collections. During the 3 year period between when I sold the majority of my collection and Ray's death I continued to send and to receive mail from him. He was fully aware of what I had done and never expressed to me any consternation. In fact I believe our best exchanges were during this period. And, besides it's nice to recoup some of the money I had spent over all those years. Not to mention the time spent making a lot of great, little, one of a kind pieces designed to blow the minds of a single recipient.

So, I guess you can break down the eventual fate of all these pieces of mail into the following categories:

- Some mail art is archived and put away in boxes.
- Some mail art is organized in exhibitions and either enjoyed or not understood by its observers.
- Some mail art is thrown away.
- Some mail art is lost and may turn up later.
- Some mail art is destroyed (as was the case in the mid 1970s with the Italian Postal System).
- Some mail art is added on to by other mail artists and kept going in the network.
- Some mail art is framed and displayed on the walls of certain individuals.
- Some mail art is never opened and some is never answered.

My hope is that enough will be saved so that future generations will know that this was and continues to be an exciting, expressive endeavor

that gives people joy in both its giving and receiving.

RJ : Most of the categories you mentioned are quite logical. I only wondered about the part "as was the case in the mid 1970s with the Italian Postal System". Since I only started with mail art in 1980, I wonder if you could tell me a bit more about that. The history of mail art isn't always easy to find in books yet.....

answer on 22-3-1997

TM : In 1975 Bill Gaglione, Anna Banana and myself had met Arturo Swartz at a dinner in San Francisco. Arturo owned a gallery in Milan, Italy where he exhibited dadaist and Fluxus art. In 1976 Bill had the idea to schedule a show for Anna Banana at Arturo's gallery unbeknownst to him. Bill designed a phoney poster announcing the exhibit (called "Hosannah Banana") and mailed it out soliciting mail art at the gallery's address. Arturo was not phased by Bill's unsanctioned exhibition and welcomed the contributions. But, Bill was later informed by Arturo that the show unfortunately coincided with a labor strike by Italian postal workers. During the strike mail was not delivered and continued to pile up. After a

few months most of that mail, both domestic and international was destroyed.

Also, I can tell you for a fact that, during the Vietnam War years of the late 1960s and early 1970s Federal officials in the U.S.A. routinely collected and opened any mail to certain destinations that had any political messages on the envelope or just looked weird to them. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that, at one time a file was kept on me (and other mail artists) by the F.B.I. based on my envelopes of that time.

RJ : Do you like to 'provoke' the system with your (mail-) art?

next answer on 19-4-1997

TM : If, by the word "system" you mean the postal system then, yes I like to provoke them. But one of the definitions of provoke means "to anger" and I certainly wouldn't want to do that. But I do like to bemuse them. It is a tenuous relationship we mail artists have with the postal system. We want to push the limits of the process of mail delivery but not to the point of making it so difficult that we impede this process. That would be self defeating.

I am constantly amazed at some of the mail that shows up in my mailbox since it is sometimes near impossible to find the actual address. I worked for the U.S. Postal System in 1970 and I can tell you that all they want from us is to see a clear written address. In the U.S. the Post Office consists of mail handlers and mail carriers. It is the job of the mail handlers to get the mail to that point in the system where the mail carriers can sort the mail for delivery along their route. We all know where the address and return address should appear on an envelope and any deviation from that begins to annoy them. I, personally try not to make it hard to deliver my mail. I want it there as fast as possible. But, if I am going to provoke the Postal System I want it to be in a non-vicious, conceptual way. Some of the most extreme examples of this were the exchanges I had a couple of years ago with Graffiti Grafix and Bianca Jarvis, a teenager who goes by the name of "Mysterious X". In fact, in my last telephone conversation with ray Johnson he told me that Bianca had mailed him a Hostess® "Snowball™" which, for those who may not know is a commercially baked type of cupcake. She simply wrote his address on the package, stuck some stamps on it and sent it across the country, as is exposed to the system. I



think she was 13 at the time. Graffiti Grafix once mailed me an artificial banana and I mailed her back an artificial cucumber. We had several fruit and vegetable mailings for awhile. All of them unpackaged. I once sent her a stenciled portrait of herself spray-painted on plywood. It was 2ft. by 3ft. and I wanted it to be a gigantic postcard. When I took it into the Post Office the clerk behind the counter said "Don't you want to package this first?" I said "No, that would be missing the point." (you don't package a postcard). "But it might get damaged" she said. "Yes, it might" I replied. The next day it arrived without a problem.

I once mailed her a postcard that consisted of nineteen 1 cent stamps (a postcard was 19 cents at the time). I placed them on a card rows high and 4 columns wide. In the center, in small but clear print was her address contained within the dimensions of a single stamp.

One of my pieces to her was a postcard that consisted of a clear, see-through piece of thin plastic. All that was on it was my return address, her address (both written with a laundry marker) and a stamp. Bill Gaglione did this 25 years earlier for his first wife, Linda. It is very dada to pay for

postage so that you can send nothing. What does the letter carrier think as he delivers a clear piece of mail with no apparent message? It is pure process.

As a preliminary act to answering this question you posed I recently sent you a postcard that had a small envelope glued to one side of it. On the other side was your address and in the message portion it said "This postcard is really a letter". When you turn over the card and open the envelope inside is a letter that says "This letter is really a postcard". So, in actuality I was able to send you a letter, but at the postcard rate. To me this is very provocative and I consider it to be one of my best conceptual mail art pieces.

RJ : Yes, that postcard (or was it a letter?) arrived at my address without any problems, and I liked it a lot too. Sometimes with the large amount of mail I get in, I do miss the humor in the mail, and I notice that for you this is still an essential part. This humor normally develops best in one-to-one mail-contacts that are built up over the years, where mail-art contacts become close friends. Do you experience this as well?

answer on 3-7-1997

(With his answer Tim sent me a copy of the "Earaser Carvers Quarterly" #4, a special edition with the portraiture of Tim Mancusi. Also a copy of the "National Stampagraphic" Volume XV , Number 3 , Spring 1997 , in which a special about Tim's portrait-stamps , and two prints of his most recent carvings of "The Sticker Dude" - Joel S. Cohen and Buz Blurr).

TM : Yes, humor is a strong aspect to my art and sometimes my approach to life. It is an inherent part of my personality and I think it is why I'm drawn to dada and Surrealism. Ray Johnson could not have brought about modern mail art without humor. It is a wry, ironic, zen type of humor and when one can occassionally capture it in an envelope to send along to a friend or stranger that's a special event. The three main components of mail art that I have observed over the years seem to be humor first with politics and sex tied for seconds.

What I find interesting is that it doesn't always take that long to establish a comfortable rapport through the mail. I have corresponded with all types of people - kids, adults, men, women, straight and gay. And since many mail artists often use "nick names" you initially have no

information at all about the person on the other end. Humor can be a great way to broaden the kind of mail art you send and receive. But, because that humor is in the form of correspondence and you are not there in person to add something subtle via body language or a facial expression, the ironic point you were hoping to make may be misinterpreted. I had this problem a couple of years ago with Mallory, the Moadster of Fresno (California), and as a result we no longer exchange mail. Which is sad because her stuff was great. And she's an excellent eraser carver, too. (Now that I think about it, maybe I'll mail her something this week!) You talk about becoming close friends - in one of Mallory's last letters to me she mentioned that she had met her (then) current boyfriend through mail art. That has to be the ultimate satisfaction of answering mail; to actually establish a real relationship with someone. Of course as in any relationship a close proximity helps.

Sometimes I'll correspond with someone for awhile and then I get a postcard or a letter and they'll mention that they'll be visiting the bay area in the near future and we finally meet. Last September I met Sugar Irmer from Berlin and this October I'll be meeting Toby Galinkin from North

Carolina. And, as you know its fun to show them around.

RJ : Yes, I sure remember the time in beginning November of last year, where you even took two half days off from your work, to show me the sunny sides of Norther California and introduced me to Jeff Berner. Time sure flies, and this interview is now going on for more then a year. So, I guess it is time to come to an end. Normally I ask if I forgot to ask you something. So, did I?

reply on 28-7-1997

TM : No, I don't believe so. And I am very appreciative of the fact that the questions you asked gave me the opportunity to record my early memories of mail art, dadazines and rubber stamps. And also to express my opinions. Thanks for your deligence and especially for posting this interview on the internet.

RJ : Thanks for your time and energy as well Tim!



## JENNY SOUP

### THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH JENNY SOUP (USA)

Started on: 7-3-1995

Ruud Janssen : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 2-5-95

Jenny Soup : I first got involved with mail art and the network back in 1987. I was living in San Francisco at the time, going to Art School. I was introduced to the addicting world of mail art by my boyfriend at that time, and thus the enigmatic Gagliones, the wacky and wonderful Radio Free Dada, the ever present (and past and future) John Held Jr., and others. I was instantaneously sucked into the network with full devotion. I have always enjoyed art and correspondence/ writing, and mail art became a perfect way to blend the two. Good friends were made through mail art, wonderful ideas were exchanged and a lot of stamps were used....

RJ : What kind of ideas (wonderful ideas as you mention them) do you mean. Can you give some examples?

Reply on 22-5-1995

*(Together with her next answer Jenny Soup sent me her new poetry-booklet "SORROW'S VELVET GARDEN , Corridors of Madness Publishers, Studio City, CA , USA.)*

JS : I couldn't do justice in talking about all the wonderful ideas that spawned from the mail art medium and from my personal history in corresponding with many great artists. Though justice will not be served.... I will relay a few.

When

I first started receiving mail art, I took great notice, not only in what was within the envelopes I received, but also the

envelopes themselves. This sparked a passion in me, and for a

few years, I adorned envelopes with the greatest of time and

care. Maybe a simple "hello" would be written on a slip of paper within, but the real Art lay on the envelope itself. I would spend hours on one envelope, collaging, painting and

fully decorating each piece. It was a real joy. Now I don't find the same pleasure in doing the Art on the envelopes, though occasionally I will succumb to the urge to do so.

The

past envelope decorating, eventually led to my color collage

Artwork, which has been shown in Galleries here in Los Angeles, the East Coast, and Germany. And along the same lines, the color collages led to my creating full size oil



paintings of the same images. How beautiful the lines of progression.

Now, I find the greatest of pleasure in the letter writing, and the written correspondence among those in the network.

Though this limits the number of people I correspond with.

I

enjoy it so much and it adds immeasurably to my life. It is through the letter writing that I enjoy sharing and receiving personal ideas from artists around the world. Within the last

couple of years, I have had the most wonderful of opportunities to meet a few of those people, including yourself Ruud, which I find a great pleasure and it adds to the depth of all the correspondence with such people.

Another example would be in the realm of "Projects".

Through the mail I have seen and heard of so many different projects, some fascinating, some very simple, yet all have the

possibility of influencing an idea I may have at the time.

Sometimes it can help solve a problem, or be a catalyst to

take an art piece to another level. A wonderful part of all

this has been the introduction to a combined effort in a

single idea. A great influence are the "Mail Art Shows", in

how many people contribute to one thing. The

collaboration

effort is a glorious thing. One singular person does not take

all the credit, or a "First Place" of sorts. Each contributor

is as important as the other.

When I started my Poetry and Art Magazine "in remembrance", I incorporated this idea; to have others contribute to the Magazine, that it wasn't all one person, that it was the efforts and talents of many that would make it so successful.

I hope I have conveyed a few examples of how much mail art has effected (infected) my life, and how ideas have formed and grown through this medium.

RJ : Could you tell a bit more about your magazine "in remembrance". When did you start it? How do you select the work you include in your magazine?

Reply on 27-6-1995

JS : I started my magazine "in remembrance" while in San Francisco. It was around 1987 & at the time, in art school, I was working on extremely large paintings, more like tapestries. These paintings took a lot of time, energy and materials. The work was physically and mentally exhausting to complete. The paintings involved a heavy use of collage and different textures, and each one incorporated the use of language. Through, and because of these paintings, "in remembrance" evolved. My magazine became a small, simple way to express the same ideas as in my paintings. These ideas could then reach more people because of the accessibility through the mail, which I was discovering through the mail art network.

I have always enjoyed Poetry and language. Ever since I was a young child, I can remember writing poems and short stories.

The enjoyment from writing and from reading other works has been a large part of my life, always. I carried this love into my magazine. As the magazine reached more people, in turn, more people would write to me about it. They would send in their work, poems, art, ideas and comments on what they thought of the magazine. All of this helped shape the magazine and helped it to evolve.

I took into consideration all of the submissions I received for "in remembrance". I included those which personally affected me, those which emotionally moved me. In this selection process, a family started. The result of this "family" , was a group of artists who shared the same "visions" and thoughts as I and as I achieved in "in remembrance". The magazine has the feel of haunting beauty. It researches the loveliness that is found in many different areas, by many different means. Many of the works I receive by mail, don't fit the themes, or feel of "in remembrance", and it is hard to turn down these works. Just because they don't fit in the realm of "in remembrance", does not mean they are not strong pieces. Because I choose not to use them doesn't

mean they are not good, or worthy of being published. But that is the job of an editor. To choose what completes and complements the original intentions of the project. It's not always easy, but it is necessary. I want to keep "in remembrance" true to itself, and this is the only way to do that.

RJ : How large is the network you have discovered so far?

Reply on 6-8-1995

JS : The full size of my correspondence is in the hundreds, though it's not a completely consistent network. There will be steady lines of communication for a period of time, and then months without. This depends on factors in my life whoever I am writing to/with. Sometimes I've been wrapped up in a project that will take me out of circulation for months! Same with the other person(s). When I was in Europe last year, though I kept writing to close friends, when I returned 5 months later I had a box full of mail with many letters saying, "where are you? Why haven't we heard from you?". Or sometimes, even years later, I'll receive a letter from someone I lost contact with, and they'll have written about what kept them out of circulation for so long. My network also changes and reforms itself. People send me artwork and write, its all so ephemeral. I doubt I would ever have the

energy to accumulate and organize all the addresses of people I've corresponded with over the years. All of it is stored in boxes and boxes.

I do enjoy the variety of the experience of correspondence, though. That I can have contact with a network of people around the world, is truly an exciting realization.

RJ :Is there a difference in the mail-art here in Europe and in the USA?

Reply on 33-8-95

JS :I think there is a difference in art of all senses, in Europe than in the USA. There is a greater involvement and respect for art, in Europe. Children are raised to believe there is an importance of art in daily living, they are surrounded by it. Or so I observed, in my travels through Europe and during my stay in Paris for 5 months. I was delighted to see very young children in the museums, drawing on paper, on the floor, from great masterpieces of Picasso, Matisse, and others. Art seems to be everywhere in Europe.

From money to stamps to phone cards, to bus stops, murals, galleries, great gardens and architecture. As an artist, I can see the beauty of much of America, but it is very different. There is less of a general social appreciation for 'art'.

As far as mail art goes. I believe there is such a connection

in the network, that any differences fade. Sometimes it seems that European mail artists are much more consistent in their correspondence. Not that us Americans are "flakes" per se, or are we? Just kidding. I feel the mail art network, at least the core of folks I correspond with, are of the same breed, that we all find each other because we are different from everyone else.

RJ :I know you sometimes do work with a computer. Do you also use it for your art? And for communication?

Reply on 26-9-1995

JS :I use my computer for many things. It's for letters, poetry, writing and artwork. Though in my artwork, I am still very "hands-on." I will use the computer to outline a design or for exact measurements in boxes/lines/type, but for the rest, I love to draw by hand. I'll take what I started on the computer and finish the drawing with ink, pencil, paint, whatever. And with my paintings, I never use the computer for anything! The image goes from my mind straight to the canvas , no "middle man"!

I do enjoy the computer, don't get me wrong, and I see wonderful artwork come from such electronic means. But I still respect the "old-fashioned" method when I see art that's been drawn/painted by hand, I feel there's a more "human" aspect to it. Same with letters but when it is hand

written, there's more of a connection with the person, the human-ness of the act of writing.

I think computers have seperated us from much of our "humanness" of our relationship with "nature", and lean us toward the "artificial". In no way do I believe computers are "bad" or technology is "evil", but there is a good balance between science & nature if we keep our heads together.

Computers are a marvel, they're fabulous, and I see a lot of potential for their use, beyond what we have now. But for now, I'll just use mine as I do for work & play. And I will still

be in awe at the work of a human hand, whether it be digging in the dirt of a garden or a child finger-painting, or a drawing of Mary Cassatt, or a surgeon at work, or someone typing at a computer.

RJ : Where do you find your inspiration for your art?

Reply on 10-11-1995

(With her new answer Jenny Soup included a set of 4 photo's of her paintings and also an announcement of her newest "in remembrance #14 which is ready and can be ordered)

JS :The word "inspiration" is so fleeting & ephemeral, to me. I try to find ideas for my artwork, in a multitude of places. Most of my paintings are done out of necessity to create. Of

course, many of my ideas first come from my head, from memory or fantasy & go directly to canvas. Sometimes I look through old photographs to get ideas & some image will jump out at me.

I am not a consistent painter. I lack discipline in this sense. I think much of painting is this discipline... combined with "inspiration". I will go through periods where I'll paint for weeks straight, one painting after another, and then months of nothing at all!

I believe that everything is worth painting. From a piece of fruit, to the human face, to flowers, fantasy or everyday life. It all "inspires" me to create, yet I'll paint whatever I feel "in the mood" to paint!

RJ :Lets go back to the mail art. Globally there are two different attitudes towards the mail art people get. Some want to keep everything and start to create their own "archive" while others rather like to pass on the things they receive and recycle most of the things the get from the network. What do you do?

Reply on 3-1-1996

JS :Well, I'm the third attitude! I tend to pick and choose what I keep and what I pass on. I used to keep literally everything, but as space ran out and box after box got full, I began to reconsider keeping everything.



Whenever I receive two of the same things I will pass on one to someone else. If I receive an abundance from one person, I tend to pass on a few pieces. But mostly I will keep what I receive - especially when I see that a lot of time & energy has been put into making it. Often times I will receive "trash" in the mail, seems people will just rip up a piece of paper or what not, put it in an envelope and pass it on as "mail art". I often don't keep it and frankly, I don't pass it on either. I am not trying to be "elitist" by saying that, because I'm not one to judge what is or is not mail art. I just tend to save the items I receive that I see time and effort in.

I have great respect for those who save and archive the mail art they receive. You, Gaglione, John Held Jr., and others, are providing a great service to all of us by documenting and preserving such a unique communication and genre.

RJ :Well, I'm flattered by such comment. I know that there are many more mail artists that archive a lot of what they receive, and the biggest archive is without doubt that of Guy Bleus in Belgium. Is documenting really that important? Do you document all your art activities (for instance, do you keep a list of all the mail you send out)?

Reply on 21-2-1996

JS :Forgive my initial exclusion in not listing one of the greatest Archivists, Guy Bleus. Where was my mind?

Your question "Is documentation really that important?" brings up a variety of emotions and thoughts. I learned many years ago in Art School, from various sources the phrase...."Documentation is everything". whether a performance, a painting or an impact of a piece of work.

And

this can be advantageous for the Artist in many circumstances. And for historical value, documentation is a great aid in preserving a "happening" or a piece or body of work.

But now, 10 years after I was told "Documentation is everything", I don't believe it. On the other hand of the documentation coin, I see it as a great restraint. Such importance is placed on the past, on what has already happened.

It seems ironic to me, that mail art, such an ephemeral, temporary art form, always in transition and a state of flux, is held in boxes, and files, and forced into an archival existence.

When I first started out in mail art, I did document a great deal of what I received and what I sent out. I would photograph decorated envelopes I made, and keep folders full

of Xeroxed artworks I mailed out. After awhile, I questioned why I was doing all this documenting. Why was I saving the remnants and shadows of my sendings? I took on a different view, and lived in the sending and receiving, not the delicate preservation. When its sent, it's gone. Though I do have a great deal of trouble throwing things away, to this day. Never thrown out a letter. It all goes into boxes, largely marked....MAIL, and that's it. I enjoy the now, and not in reviewing and filing what's in the boxes. So.... why do I hang on to the box? Who knows, maybe one day soon, I will build a giant catapult and send each box off into space, one by one, with a big bang! Or bury each box deep in the ground, to be discovered by archeologists hundreds of years from now. And whatever I choose to do with these boxes of mail, the bigger question is, "Will I document the act of what I do with them?"

RJ :Well, at least you should invite some other mail artists for such an occasion.....! There is another side to documentation of course. The people who don't know anything about mail art normally want to know about what has been going on and what it is all about. The only sources nowadays are the mail artists themselves and (if they keep any) their archives. The books about mail art mostly are

written by mail artists, and non-participants just don't seem to understand what mail art is all about. How would you reply to a person that asks about your "mail art" when you know he/she doesn't know what it is about?

Reply on 16-3-1996

JS :I agree with your point about the documentation - that's why I mentioned that it does have historical value. Much of history is based upon such preserved remnants of an era, or genre of subculture. Of course the other side of that coin is that what "we" base history on, is a very small portion of the overall scene. Historically - the archives that are being kept and written about and looked at, are only a percentage of the overall picture. Usually "history" comes out very one sided & biased. Are the "big names" in mail art, that every one notes, and writes about, are they giving an accurate account of the mail art scene, entirely? I don't know, I'm just throwing out the question. And do people within the scene include or exclude certain people at a whim, when they choose?

From my experiences and observations, I notice the 'cliques' in mail art, the closed circles that are very difficult to enter. I wonder if this will affect the historical representation of mail art. Mail art hasn't truly hit the mainstream of society, so few people do know what it's about.

The popularity of rubber stamps & art made from them did open up a lot of people into the mail art realm, that weren't aware of it before. Many of my friends over the years have admired the mail I receive and ask about it. They see the decorated envelopes, rubberstamp art, Xeroxed stuff inside or whatever, and they are very intrigued. They think it's wonderful & ask what it is all about. The easiest response is that its art that gets about through the mail. Big art, small art, Xeroxed, painted, written, anything goes. And like a chain letter, once you've sent out a few pieces your name and address are picked up and the network process kicks in. You'll always have someone to send things to, and you'll always be receiving something.

I would be so interested in the observations of non-mail-art participants. I would almost be more interested in reading that, than a book written by a mail artist. Hmmmm. A good theme for a mail art show?

RJ :This is probably an essential point, this last remark. Mail art is still for the people that participate in the network. Others who get to see it, haven't gone through the process of networking, and only see the piece of mail as a final result. Exhibiting mail art in a museum or a gallery is therefore always quite difficult. And maybe it isn't even necessary at all. Maybe your theme for a mail art show is interesting. Ask someone in your surroundings to observe the mail artist for a specific time, and make a report.....  
Hmmmm. Actually, I kind of stopped with doing those 'traditional' mail art shows, where you ask the 'network' to send in their works to a specific theme. How about you?

Reply on 13-4-1996

JS :I honestly do about 3 to 4 Mail Art shows per year. For a long time I did every show I heard about, and for awhile it was fun and interesting. I like the general idea of rounding up a variety of perspectives on a singular subject, but I feel the mail art show falls short of what it's potential could be. For example, a call comes through the mail for works on the theme of... Whatever. Maybe it's a trendy theme, such as a certain war that exists, and everyone is really against this war and the violence, and all the work submitted reflects their views on this. All this artwork is sent to one person, who types up the contributors names on a list, puts together a nice booklet and sends them back to those who sent in the work. This seems like a very small, closed circle. Even if the work is shown in a gallery or library or other venue, people come in and look at the work, agree or disagree with the issues set forth, and then they go home. If we can all get together on some level to express our ideas, as in this example, for instance being against a certain war, then let us use all this energy to make a change, make situations better. Use our voices in channels that can cause an affect on a given situation.

I am not implying, in any way, that Art has no power, in fact

it can be a very powerful tool and medium to affect the masses. But it must be directed to do so, and done efficiently. An incestuous mail art show is not using all that creative power efficiently. If a mail art show was arranged on the subject of war or child abuse or even trees, instead of sending all the work to just one mail artist, have everyone send something to a figure in a position to do something about it. Send all the tree mail art, and why we are sending it, to the person or people in charge of our national parks or government officials who can pass stricter environmental laws. If the issue is war then send all the works to the government officials initiating and perpetuating the war. Use this marvelous creative energy to DO SOMETHING, not just fatten ourselves in the glutenous files of mail art and show documentations. I see all of us falling short of what we are capable of doing, of what can be done along the same lines of the mail art show, but it really meaning something.

To further this point, if I was involved (involuntarily) in the war around Bosnia and I heard of someone putting together a mail art show about the war, and thought of all the money and energy and time to mail it all out, collect, document, etc., and all the energy of those sending work to someone somewhere in another country most likely, I would be so utterly offended. I would think and say to myself, "So what? My family was just killed by gunfire, what do I care of artwork in a file, and names of contributors on a list. I

could die tomorrow because of this war." Instead of mailing a Xeroxed art piece to another mail artist, I write letters to government officials.

In the large scheme of things, what is the big deal of a mail art show? I believe the mail art show and the mail art scene need to evolve. They need to evolve for many reasons, to continue their existence, to create importance, and to keep up with evolving mail artists.

RJ :How did YOU evolve through mail art? What did mail art teach you when you look back at almost ten years of being a mail artist?

Reply on 28-5-1996

JS :When you learn and experience a great deal, you automatically evolve (or devolve). I learned a great deal from mail art itself, as well as individual people in the network. Mail art was such an unusual medium at the time, for me. I had always been a "letter-writer" by nature, I do a lot of writing, poetry, stories, journals, etc. But the "mail" became an incredible outlet once I discovered mail art, not just a pen-pal thing anymore. I learned by observance, and experimentation that "anything goes!". It was scary, yet releasing feeling. I began to "push the envelope" (pardon the pun), and this testing of the boundaries naturally reflected



into my Artwork, my paintings and collages. Mail art taught me to express and try new things, not to be scared if they didn't work out completely, that the journey and the action, the "performance", so to speak, was the real essence. There was no real success or failure, it was not a black and white world. At the time it was all gray, and all open for discovery and exploration. I danced in the realms of Dada and Fluxus, began to appreciate Performance Art, and pretty much the Art of Life!

I am so thankful for what I have experienced through mail art.

The people I met and exchanged with. The personal aspect I

experience in mail art, is the real appeal for me. The artwork

received and exchanged is wonderful, but for me it is the people and their lives that I grow fond of, that I wish to stay in touch with, with or without the realm of mail art.

There was a real transition through the years for me. At first

I was absorbed by the Artwork, what I received, what I sent out, and then over the years it became the people. The lives of those I exchange work and letters with, held so much more

importance than the work. In that holds the key to how I have

evolved in mail art.

RJ :Well maybe this is a nice moment to end the interview, or

is there something I forgot to ask you?

Reply on 27-6-1996

(together with Jenny Soup's answer she sent me a copy of her newest "In remembrance" #15.

JS :I would like to say how very much I have enjoyed doing this interview with you. What a tremendous project. In looking back, it has almost taken a year to complete! Your questions set a lot of thoughts into motion, about mail art and life! I had a great time thinking about and answering your questions. I hope your readers enjoy our correspondence, too. Thanks Ruud.

RJ : Thank you too for this interview Jenny!



## CAROL STETSER

### THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH CAROL STETSER (USA)

Started on 12-11-1995

Ruud Jansen : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on 11-12-1995

Carol Stetser :In 1976 I founded Padma Press (see enclosed catalog) and proceeded to publish in the next 3 years, three offset books of my photographs. In July 1978 Judith Hoffberg reviewed one of my books in "Umbrella" and it is in this periodical that I first read about mail art. On March 5, 1979, I participated in my first mail art exhibition "Umbrella", sponsored by Hoffberg and held at the University of California, Riverside. During 1979 I participated in a dozen mail art shows and double that number in 1980. I primarily sent out postcards of my photographs and tear sheets from my books.

Correspondents sent me xeroxes, the first time I encountered that medium. I packed up my darkroom and only shot instant photographs. Then I began making xerographs, both black-and-white and color in 1981. These early pieces were very photographic in nature. For example, the first series of color Xeroxes I ever printed I called "Pollages"; these were collages utilizing Polaroid SX-70 prints. In 1982 I joined the ISCA (International Society of Copier Artists) and from that time up to the present I have made xerography my primary medium.

At the time I began participating in the network I lived in a rebuilt tin shack that was once a miner's cabin in the small town of Oatman in the Mohave desert of Arizona. Retired people and bums made up the population of 200. Wild burros roamed the hills and Main Street. Gunfights entertained the tourists on weekends. My husband, a disabled Vietnam veteran, painted murals and did wood-carving. We lived on his government pension. I also worked at various times as the bookkeeper for the local water company, salesperson at a hardware store, and eventually in the post office (Oatman, where a mail artist delivers the mail). By choice we had no telephone or television. It was 25 miles to a gas station or grocery store. So you

can see we lived a very simple life - and a very isolated one. Mail art was perfect for me because it brought me in contact with the rest of the world.

In a small town you spend a lot of time discussing the weather, the potholes in the road, who is sleeping with whom, and who got drunk last night. This gossip bonds a community together and helps pass the time, but it does have its limits. My correspondence had no limits; mail art opened the world to me. It brought me information and stimulation and friendship from all over the globe. It gave me hope and kept me from becoming as crazy as my neighbors.

RJ : I can guess that in such a small town the people also knew about your mail art..... Didn't your neighbors think that you were crazy? How do the people in your surroundings react to the mail art you receive?

Reply on 5-1-1996

(together with her answer Carol Stetser sent me a 8-page long list with an overview of her activities and publications)

CS : This is an interesting question that I never thought about before. The townspeople knew nothing at

all about the mail art network or my participation in it. The postal employees enjoyed the decorated envelopes that passed through the mail, but that was the only feed back I received. My neighbors knew I did photography, but no one ever visited my darkroom.

When I showed people prints of local buildings the comments usually were, "You make that old tin shack look too good." I gave photographs to the locals who posed for me; they thanked me, but I never saw the pictures hanging in their cabins. When my books were published, the self-portraits, naked from the waist up, generated the most comments, principally from the men. You see, the majority of retired people living in this town were from the working class and lived on social security benefits. Few of the local kids finished high school. Art meant nothing to them.

We artists, whose lives revolve around art, tend to forget that the rest of the world doesn't share our passions. The idea of Art for Art's sake was inconceivable to my neighbors. If you couldn't sell it to buy food, beer, cigarettes, or shelter, what good was it? Art meant the pictures on calendars. Art is realistic and pretty. Anything else was incomprehensible.

RJ : The publishing and making of books, even handmade unique books, seems to be very important for you. Is it a commercial activity for you or is there more to it?

Reply on 20-1-1996

(Besides her answer Carol also sent some info about Padma Press and some artworks. Also she writes that she has sent some more books by surface mail, so I hope to get that during the continuation of this interview).

CS : Ah, books. "Everything in the world exists to end up in a book". isn't that what Mallarmé wrote? When I "retired" from mail art and found I had time to devote to other pursuits, I sat down and thought about what was really important to me, what I believed in, to what organization I should volunteer my time and energy. In my town there's a booklet listing all the groups for the retirees to join. Looking through this I realized that books had always been the focus of my life. I volunteered at the library.

When I was a student I often visited museums but never stepped into galleries. Therefore, in the 1970's when I began making photographs I was not interested in exhibiting my prints in galleries.



The audience seemed too limited. Instead, I thought about arranging the material around a theme in the format of a book. The mid-70's in America was the hey-day of small-press, offset-printed books. I took all my money and put it into printing 3 books of my photographs. At the time I was naive enough to believe that publishing artists books was a commercial venture and would generate jobs and income for me. I'd been much better off to have purchased land and a house which is what my "hippy" brother did at the time. The books did receive good reviews, but I never made enough money to break even. You could say that my publishing was supposed to be a commercial activity but didn't turn out to be. I still have stacks of cartons of books stashed in my closet.

But I did it and now I don't have to do it again. When I reached the age of 40 I didn't have the usual middle-age regrets about never having risked following a dream. It's actually pretty amazing to realize I conducted the business with printers and binderies in New York City through the mail and over a pay phone on a rural Arizona main street. I don't have that kind of naive optimism anymore, it's something I'm glad I did in my twenties.

Eventually I realized my audience was a very limited one: other artists, a few university libraries and archives, who understood what artists books and visual poetry are all about. Then I could make very small runs or limited editions of xerographic books and at least recoup my expenses. But I continue to think about everything as it relates to a book. I haven't done any audio work, performance art, or any more gallery exhibitions. My communication is always one-to-one through a book: personal, visual, and tactile.

Besides the 3 offset photography books I also made xerographic bookworks exploring photographic themes. *Positive Negatives* (1984) are collages using contact sheets. *Persistence of Memory* (1985) manipulates old family photos to explore the relationship between memory and photography. Fashion is another theme that interests me, women as portrayed photographically by the media. I edited two compilations on the theme of fashion and style in 1986 and 1990, put together a humorous assortment of accessories for mail artists in *Letter Fashion* in 1987, and made the color Xerox bookwork of collages called *Vogue Patterns* which got me in trouble with Condé Nast and led to the mail art contest to rename the bookwork. I've also

printed 5 travel journals and 3 visual poetry bookworks since 1988.

RJ : I can guess that living in a small town also means one wants to travel to other parts of the world. Since you wrote journals about your travels they must have been quite interesting. Am I right?

Reply on 10-2-1996

CS : Traveling has always been important to me. I met two husbands while traveling! In 1968 I met my first husband in the airport in Paris. We made 3 other trips to Europe including our honeymoon to Turkey and Iran. Then in 1973 I met Jim, my present husband, in a campground in Nevada. We spent 8 months on the road in America photographing Indian ruins in the Southwest. After we settled in Oatman we camped in the mountains every summer.

In 1988 when I was 40 we sold our cabin, our truck, and most of our possessions and spent a year in Fiji, New Zealand, and Australia. That's when I first made visual travel journals to send to my family and mail art friends. We've made 6 trips to the South Pacific in the past decade. I love it there - it's such a change from the desert. I like sharing

my experiences and my correspondents seem to enjoy reading about our journeys.

RJ : Have you also traveled with the purpose to meet mail artists/correspondents? Any interesting stories about that?

Reply on 2-3-1996

CS : I haven't met many mail artists. Julia and Gyorgy Galantai (Artpool, Hungary) spent some time at the University in Phoenix where I met them one afternoon for lunch. Opal Nations visited me in Oatman, Peter Küstermann and Angela stopped in Sedona during their Congress travels. And once I met Richard Meade and Minoy at Michael Hyatt's house in Los Angeles.

I have mixed feelings about mail art tourism. I'm a very shy person and find these social gatherings difficult. Also, personal encounters can dim the participants' enthusiasm for correspondence. I prefer mail art in the mail.

RJ : That is probably one of the interesting aspects of mail art. It doesn't matter where you are, but you are the center of your own network, and you decide yourself when you send out responses to

the others in the network. You are the center and yet, it is completely solistic and anonymous. Does this make any sense to you?

Reply on 1-4-1996

(Besides her answer Carol also sent some color-xeroxes of her work and a statement on the "Politics" of Photocopier Artist's Books, she wrote in February 1992).

CS : I think the notion of each mail artist being the center of her own network is very important. It's the reason I believe it's impossible to write a history of mail art. I "retired" from mail art in 1992 partly because I felt the personal nature of communication that first attracted me to the network was being lost. Xeroxed mailing lists of participants passed for exhibition catalogs. Books and articles outlined a "his story" of the network and profiled mail art stars. Workshops "taught" people how to participate in mail art. The network is too messy, too individualistic, too complex to fit into a neat restrictive outline. I think these interviews that you are conducting are an appropriate method of conveying something of the organic nature of the Eternal Network - which is why I'm participating in retirement!

There are as many stories about mail art as there are participants. We don't need critics, judges, or historians. We need openness and freedom. The pathways of communication are infinite.

RJ : Well, I'm flattered with this kind of comment about my interview-project. Yes, every mail artist has his or her own story. And the reason why I started with this interview-project was because I could not find information about these stories. I wonder how it is like to have "retired" in mail art. Was it a sudden decision or was it planned in advance? Did you tell others about this or did you just stop answering the mail?

Reply on 22-4-1996

(The documents Carol mentioned in the next answer were enclosed in the envelope, so I could see the whole story of her answer).

CS : I loved participating in the mail art network for many years. I gave my time, energy, and financial resources to mail art. I have nothing but good memories about my participation in the network.

But in 1991 I began to notice a change -in myself, and in the network. In the spring of that year I wrote an article, "Questioning the Historification

of Mail Art" that summarized my dismay with the direction I saw the network heading. I questioned the motivation behind the urge among mail artists to become historians. I believed that mail art was being packaged for consumption by the art market. I saw mail art being turned into a commodity. I hated to see mail art touted as one more "ism" in art history. I didn't want to see it co-opted by the establishment. I hated to once again see women's participation in the network undermined or ignored by the white males writing their his-stories of the network.

My disillusionment with the direction mail art was heading was one reason I considered retiring from the network. The other reason was personal. I realized that a full mail box often elicited from me a groan rather than a smile. I began to look upon answering my mail as a chore instead of a pleasure. I was suffering from mail burn-out; mail art had ceased to be fun.

I tried cutting back but soon realized, that like all junkies, I would have to go cold turkey. I spent a year mulling over the idea of retirement. Then I read about all the activities planned around 1992 as the year of networker congresses and hit upon the idea of holding a congress through the mail.

Since Arizona was not on the major route of artists' travels I knew it would be difficult for me to physically attend any of these meetings. I also felt it was appropriate to hold my congress in the mail which is where I believed mail art belonged.

I mailed notices to my contacts and asked them to copy and pass around my invitation to a networker Congress through the mail to be held November 10, 1992 on the theme: "One day in the Eternal Network; One day in the life of a Networker." This event would also celebrate my retirement after 14 years in the network.

Ironically, this project recreated for me the thrill I had first experienced when I began participating in the network. Each letter brought fresh revelations and insights into the life of the sender. I learned more during this project about various individuals than I had known after years of correspondence in the network. I wrote in my documentation of the event that this project demonstrated to me once again that the strength of the mail art network comes from its marvelous diversity. The mundane details of our lives are fascinating, often of greater interest to others than much of the "art" we produce.



I mailed out documentation of the congress in January 1993 and then ceased participating in network activities. When I received notices about mail art exhibitions I forwarded them to other artists. I responded to inquiries from new participants with a postcard stating that I had retired. I continue to correspond with 5-6 mail artists on a regular basis - as friends whom I met in the network. I continue to participate in exhibitions of visual poetry and to send out copies of travel journals to MA friends but these are not mail art activities.

One interesting postscript to my 1992 Congress: I was so interested in the daily accounts of the mundane events in people's lives that I vowed to continue the project by yearly writing down what I did on November 10. This didn't work. I missed Nov. 10, 1993. But beginning in December of 1993 I wrote down what I did on the 10th of each month. And by keeping to this regular schedule I've been able to maintain a journal for the past 2 years and hope to continue recording the events of the 10th as long as possible. For me this is a legacy of mail art.

I do believe "once a mail artist, always a mail artist." In the same way that you can't explain mail

art to someone who doesn't immediately grasp the concept, you can't ever cease to be a part of the network. It's in your blood, it's part of who you are. I'm just a retired practitioner!

RJ :      What did you do on the 10th of this month, April 1996?

Reply on 2-6-1996

*(Together with her answer Carol sent a copy of her notes made of April 10th 1996).*

CS :      Today, when I am sitting at my desk responding to your interview question, it is Memorial Day, May 27th, 1996. I don't remember at all what I did on April 10. Isn't it amazing how quickly we forget the details of our past. We seem to remember only the highlights of our lives - either the very good or the very bad experiences are stored in our memories.

Each month when I write in my notebook, I try to mention the weather, the major news stories of the day, what I ate (when I travel I am fascinated by what people eat), the mail I received, and my activities for the day. Since my birthday is April 11, I always add the highlights of that day to my April entry.

Let's see: April 10 was a Wednesday. Here's the entry for that day (copy enclosed)

RJ : Do you still have all the mail art that you once got in?

Reply on 24-6-1996

CS : I still have all my personal correspondence. In 1987 when we sold our cabin in Oatman and put our belongings in storage before spending a year in the South Pacific I sent boxes of mail art exhibition notices to John Held. But I kept the binders of my personal mail art. Now, the binders sit on my library shelves next to my photo albums. I look at them periodically the same way I look at the photos. They reflect my life at a certain period of time in the same fashion as my snapshots do.

I am a very organized, methodical person. During the year, after I had responded to a piece of mail, I put it in a box in my studio. Then, every January, my first act of the new year was to archive. I put all my photographs and snapshots in an album and arranged them by month. Then I tackled my box of mail art. I sorted the year's mail by sender making piles of art on the floor of my studio. I put all exhibition announcements and documentation

in a separate box (these eventually went to John Held Jr.). I put catalogs that I liked in my library.

Then I alphabetized the piles of mail art by sender's last name and mounted everything in 8½ x 11 sheet protectors and put the pages in 3 ring binders housed in slipcases. As it happened, it's a good thing that I was this fanatical or all my archives would have been destroyed.

A very bizarre incident occurred to me in 1983. After Jim and I rebuilt a cabin in Oatman I converted the trailer we had previously occupied into my studio. The town bully (it seems that every town has one) put a stick of dynamite in the planter box at the end of the trailer and blew it up. The incident had nothing to do with me - it was committed in retaliation for testimony Jim had given in court against this man. But he was so stupid he didn't know he was blowing up my studio instead of Jim's.

(The answer of Carol was written on a copy of photos taken just after the blast to show how her archive looked because of this).

The blast shattered the windows and hurled metal and wood projectiles the length of the trailer. If I had been inside I would have been seriously

injured or possibly killed. Papers and artwork were torn to bits and strewn everywhere. My archives had been on the shelf right below the site of the blast. I found the binders scattered around the room, the rings had popped open, some of the binders had separated from the slipcases, but the mail art inside remained unharmed! To this day I still find pieces of glass and splinters of wood inside some of the notebooks. To me it was miraculous. Mail art survives dynamite! Art is mightier than the sword!

I learned many things from this event. I had always been terrified of losing everything in a fire (every summer one of the old wooden buildings in town burnt to the ground) And now my studio had been blown up - and I survived - and my artwork survived. I also understood that even if everything I owned had been destroyed it wouldn't mean the end - my work had a life of its own. You couldn't take away what I had shared with others. I lost that great fear we have that we have to hold on to all our possessions, that we exist only in terms of our possessions. A great liberation.

The whole incident backfired on the bully. I received tremendous support from the local

townspeople. He was totally ostracized (although never brought to justice). Mail artists responded with solicitude. I greatly appreciated the personal and written comments of concern that I received. How's that for a story of the indestructibility of mail art!

RJ : Yes, quite a story!. Another subject; collages. It is obvious that you like to make collages, and I am happy to get color-copies of some of them. Why are you so fond of this kind of work?

(During the summer vacation Carol spent her time on The Fiji-islands & surroundings.)

Reply on 12-10-1996

CS : I think collage is the perfect medium for American artists living in the late 20th century. In our consumer society we are constantly bombarded with colorful, glossy throw-away material. Daily our mailboxes are stuffed with brochures, catalogs, magazines, newspapers, etc. This is the material that surrounds us in our lives. Therefore it is the perfect material for the artist to use to communicate about our time period.

I just returned from a 2½ month trip to 3 South Pacific nations. You would not be a collage artist if

you lived there. The printed matter is simply not available; therefore, collage doesn't reflect those societies. Craftspeople in Fiji and Western Samoa weave mats, make tapa, or carve wood out of the local materials. In the Cook Islands the women make bright quilts called tivaevae out of the bolts of cloth that are readily available. Paper, on the other hand, is expensive and scarce.

When I lived in Oatman, my neighbors knew I cut up old magazines. They'd give me stacks of periodicals when they had finished with them. The post office where I worked was another rich source of material. In our tiny one-person office there was rarely more than an hour's worth of work a day. Therefore, we were given the task of filing change-of-address cards for all the newspapers, magazines, and newsletters sent to customers who had moved from the surrounding towns. Every week I went through boxes and boxes of periodicals clipping off address labels and then throwing away the publications. Of course, I managed to cut out the images I wanted before relegating the magazines to the trash bin. The variety of publications printed in this country is astounding. Every conceivable subject has spawned a magazine. I gathered a wealth of

material in this job. It was the only time I got paid to work as a collage artist!

Now in Sedona I work at the library. Here also we receive boxes and boxes of donated material. Some of the magazines are sold, some are placed on the "Free" rack, and many are tossed in the trash. Again, a wealth of material is available to me.

I arrange all my cut-outs in expanding-file-folders according to subject. Food, Furniture, Cowboys, Holidays, Houses, War, Snakes, Flowers, Cities, Outer-Space are some of the categories. I also keep one file for bright colors. In the past, the fashion magazines provided me with the patterns and colors I liked. Now clothes tend to be black or white and I have to depend on Travel or House magazines for the vibrant colors I use in collages influenced by my Polynesian travels.

I do not intend the collages to be the finished product however. They are equivalent to a photographic negative to be printed in a darkroom. I make collages to print on a copy machine. I always keep the characteristics of xerography in mind when arranging a collage. When I work in color I visualize the tones the copier can reproduce. The pasted collage is an



intermediate step for me. I keep the "original" collage in binders the same way I file my older negatives. I consider the xerographic print the final image.

(After receiving Carols's answer I also got more mail with documentation about her travels to all those exotic islands. During her stay in those places she has also mailed me some 'touristic' cards which gave an impression of the places she was visiting)

RJ : After seeing how people live in these islands with the sometimes poor economical situations, do you think that mail art is for the 'rich countries' only?

answer on : 5-1-1997

CS : You must have the time, energy, and inclination to make mail art. That means money and education. To give away your art, to not ask for financial remuneration, is a luxury only the "rich" can afford. Wealth is relative, but in my experience, mail art is for the "rich". The concept of mail art is as inconceivable to the poor in America as it is to the poor in the so-called Third World. You are not going to spend your time on mail art if you have no food or shelter.

RJ : The time it takes for my questions to reach you and your answers to reach me is sometimes very long because we both like to travel a lot (thanks for your beautiful travel journal on Western Samoa, I hope you received my report on my trip to San Francisco and California....). So, 6 days before I travel abroad again I would like to send you the next question. If you could travel without problems (like time, money, and other restrictions). Where would you like to go right now?

Answer on 1-4-1997

CS : The Moon.

RJ : Well, since it very difficult to send you mail there, or for you to send a reply to me, maybe it is time to end this interview. After all, we started it at the end of 1995 and it is time that others in the network can read your thoughts as well. Thanks for the interview Carol!



## CLEMENTE PADIN

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH CLEMENTE PADIN  
(Uruguay)

Started on: 3-12-1994

Ruud Janssen : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 31-12-1994

Clemente Padin : My first experiences in Mail Art date from 1967 when with my latin-american friends Edgardo Antonio Vigo, Guillermo Deisler and Dámaso Ogaz we started to exchange our reviews : Diagonal Cero, Ediciones Mimbre , La Pata de Palo & Los Huevos del Plata (Diagonal Zero , Osier Editions , Leg of Wood and The Eggs of the Silver ) and our mail-art works. The Uruguayan review OVUM 10 published 6 post-cards with my visual poems in 1969. Later, in 1974, during the Uruguayan military dictatorship, I organized the First Latin-American Mail Art

Exposition documented at the Gallery U, in Montevideo and I was editing the second epoch of OVUM, about which Géza Pernecky says: "The periodical and private publications that had midwived in the birth of the network ( File of Canada, the American Weekly Breeder and Mail Order Art , Poland's NET , Padin's OVUM , etc ) displayed, to different degrees, motives that emphasizes the need for social contacts or were based on more commercial interests." (A Halo, 1991, p.232). After the history continues...

*(Clemente Padin typed his answer and made under the text a collage with some artistamps with texts like "Junio 1973" , "Zona Militar" , "Ay" )*

RJ : The mail-art I have seen from you mostly has a political meaning as well. Did mail art have an effect on the political situation?

Reply on : 21-01-1995

CP : I am not sure but in my personal case the answer is: YES! You know, I was imprisoned for the Uruguayan dictatorship the 25th August, 1977 for my opposition to the military government. An edition of rubber-stamps and false mail-stamps denouncing the

suppression of human rights and the death, torture and disappearance of many people opposite to the regimen led my incarceration and the sentence by four years for "transgression that hurt the moral and reputation of the army". Also, for organizing the Counter-Biennial in front of the latinoamarican section of the X Biennial of Paris, France, curated by the Director of the Fine Arts Museum of Uruguay, in the fall on 1977. But an intense and supported mobilization of hundred and hundred of artists in the whole world freed me after only two years and three months!

Mail art (and the network) could have effect in the social-political situation because it is a product of the human work and reflects and reproduces the social relations. Like artistic product is specifically art, with a value in the market interchangeable by money (in our concept the value is high but the price or its expression in money is contemptible for the merchants). Like product of communication, mail art is inseparable part of the social production and it can not leave to express the reality but symbolically. Thus, mail art is a subliminal form of social conscience and an instrument of knowledge (like science). So,

also, it can be a tool of change (or status's legitimation) and transformation (or retrocession).

RJ : You call mail art 'an instrument of knowledge'. After so many years of doing mail art, how would you describe the things you learned from the network? What does the network bring that you could not have learned in any other way?

Reply on : 14-2-1995

CP : First, it is an instrument of knowledge of myself. And the others. After, there are many things that you can learn by personal experience through networking. Network (and art) discovers dark and secret zones of our spirit an existence. Also, it brought us to understand the entangled of our present world. By means of networking we have learned what things like solidarity and true friendship are. Sometimes we can question and change undesirable reality. Only by networking the people know all the possibilities of the new instruments of communication that technology have putted in their hands. On the other side, art and network have discussed and anticipated the scientific knowledge's like

impressionists that discovered the corpuscular nature of light. It happens because artists that experiment with artistic supports or new instruments of communication also discover its structure and physical properties.

RJ : Can you give some examples of 'new instruments of communication' that you have worked with?

*(On February 23th Clemente sent out his first E-mail message, which I read on February 25th. It was not an text-answer, but in a way an answer to my last question. Clemente has entered the Internet too. I sent him an E-mail reply to confirm arrival of his message and wrote to him that he could sent his next answer by E-mail too).*

Reply on : 11-3-1995

CP : By a side the new instruments of communication work like tools of inscription: pencil, brush, chisel, etc. By other side they use different supports like paper, frame, painting, wood, books, etc. Now for the inscripts we use the scanner of the P.C. and like support of the Facsimile or the P.C. sconce or the modem. Before we use air or



sea mail for communication between us. Now, we use the electronic space. Before we sent objects, post-cards, envelopes, letters, DIN A4, etc. Now we transmit electronic impulses and, in the near future, R-laser.

We know that the works are altered by the medium, because each medium has its own in-put and out-put, id est, its own codes of entrance and exit, included its own channel of transmission. All these items integrate the form of expression that determinate the form of contents inevitably. If you obtain a competent expression to a peculiar content, using the new instruments of communication, perhaps you gain an artistical message. Personally I have used fax and through a job-friend I'm trying to use E-mail. Also "new instruments of communication" involve all the last discoveries of the graphic industries.

RJ : Can you tell me a bit more about your first experiences with E-mail. To make the question more concrete I will send this question by E-mail and by the traditional mail on the same day.

Reply on : 2-4-1995 (by Internet) , 4-4-1995 (by snail-mail)

CP : A friend, from AEBU, is an associate of a database called "Chasque" and he consents the use of his e-mail to me. Finally, February 23th 1995, I did my first e-mail communication to Chuck Welch, Fagagaga, Reid Wood, Harry Polkinhorn and you. After Ashley Parker Owens sent me the e-mail directory from Global Mail. I also connected with Abelardo Mena from de Banco de Ideas Z de Cuba. In Uruguay there are only three e-mail services connected with Internet: the Republic University; URUPAC, a public institution belongs to the official telephonic service and RED CHASQUE ("chasque" is the ancien and primitive communication system between the latino american first people) depending of the private institution: the Third World Institute.

The first communication by Internet in Uruguay was the August 23th 1994, to the SECIU (Informatic Centre Service of the Republic University). You see, we are too young! The costs for transmission in minimum between 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. and for nothing between 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. A Kilobyte received costs one cent and each kilobyte sent costs five cents of a dollar, but you must add the cost of the CHASQUE subscription.

The first world sells us the computer technology, but also the rules of its use.

RJ : In 1986 you and others proposed the constitution of a Universal Federation of Mail Artists (see MA-Congress 86, edited by G. Ruch, page 50). Some years later I invented the International Union of Mail-Artists, as a fake union in which everybody could take his own role (see IUOMA-magazine, june 1991). Do you think that there should be some real organization for mail-artists or would it undermine the whole game of mail-art in which there are no written rules?

Reply on : 9-5-1995 (internet)

CP: The Institutions are born when they are necessary. Mail Art doesn't need Federations or Syndicates for to act but the mail-artists need institutions in particular situations of their lives.

Near 1986, almost all Latino america went out of dictatorships and we need to defend our rights. The unity of people was essential for to consolidate the reconquered liberty. Our Universal Federation of Mail Artists was defined itself "by the principle of freedom, justice and social solidarity" and was

pronounced for "the respect of the human rights and for economy political according to the social interest". Also it proposed lines programmatic action for to defend the interests of the mail- artists in front of private and public institutions. Like you have said, Mail Art doesn't need rules and, if you read the text in MA-Congress 86, our proposal didn't impose ones. Only it just joined efforts to struggle for our dignity, first like humans and second like artists.

RJ : Currently you are very busy with the mail-art project: "Jose Marti: 100th Anniversary" with an exposition for AEBU. Why did you start this project?

Reply on 11-6-1995 (E-mail) 15-06-1995 (snail-mail)

CP: If you see, all my mail-art projects regard these considerations: join the people to struggle for their rights and demand situations political-economics that permit us a peaceful life. It is the case of the "Jose Martu, 100 Anniversary". He died liberating his country, Cuba, and he died raising the flags of solidarity and equality between men. Those are not only words. He really sacrificed his life for our rights. Not only he struggled against the spanish and north-american

colonialism but, also for the elemental human rights, like to love, to eat, to work, to sleep, to be restored to health, to have two square meters of land for to be buried on, to have a roof ... don't have to struggle for the food with the rats like more of the half of the latino-american population. Jose Marti is not dead and never will he rest while there was anybody hungry on the world.

RJ : Is the project a succes? Did the mail-artists who contributed to the project understand what it was about?

Reply on 28-7-1995

CP : Almost all networkers that have participated in the Martí's homage have understood his thought. For many people to convoke a mail art show over José Martí was a surprise and also an anachronism because the network don't exalt the individualism neither the official history (always placed in hands of those who have the power). But to talk about Martí is not to talk about the past or the individual person but the heroic fighting for the liberty and dignity of the peoples, like him, 100 years old before.

To talk about Martí is not to talk about Cuba or "Our America" (as he called America Latina) but the whole world, there where there is an outcast or a starving man for bread and justice. I have rather chosen to evoke his gigantic figure in these critical instances for his small mother country and people, arbitrarily and unilaterally blockaded since decades by the largest economic and military power of all the times, as well as in these instances of sharp crises in our Latin America, where underdevelopment and neo-liberalism oblige to more than a half of our population to infraconsume and hungry.

I like his maxim "Doing is the better way of saying", leaving to the rhetoric of words and symbols its mere role of being the frame of the action. During all his life Martí proclaimed his humanist thought and cultivated the essential values of life: equality, dignity and fortitude before difficulties, the total offering to just causes, love to his people and liberty, thirst of justice that admits no bribery. And network has understood it in this way, supporting this initiative in a great number with the participation of 315 networkers from 38 countries.

RJ : How do the Postal Offices in Uruguay look at mail-art nowadays. Is it different compared to the times you started?

Reply on 20-8-1995

CP : Yes, it is different. In 1967, when I started with mail art and when I was editing "Los Huevos del Plata", generational uruguayan review, the post was costly. Nowadays, it is the same as in the countries of the First World. Also, we have the SAL service, more cheap but slow. I have a post office box that costs US\$ 40,- each year.

In jail I knew the President of the Postal Union. He told me that in the Uruguayan Post Office there are always police investigators (civil policemen). He was imprisoned ten years under dictatorship because he was the employers representative (!). Now, I do not know if there are investigators but we know that the repressive apparatus from dictatorship was not removed in Uruguay.

RJ : In all the years you have been active in mail art you must have received a lot. Do you keep it all? How does your archive look like?

Reply on 13-9-1995

(by separate mail I received the beautiful catalog of the Marti's exhibition with a large list of all the participants and some samples of contributions)

CP : In fact my first archive was formed by visual poetry since 1967. Remember that the visual poetry exhibitions in Latino American (that we called "New Poetry") first were shown in Argentina by Edgardo Antonio Vigo in 1967, and after, in Uruguay, in 1968 by me. All these works from more than 400 poets (fonics, visuals, process-poets, etc.) were exhibited in the "Exhaustive International New Poetry Exposition", at the Gallery U in Montevideo, Uruguay, 1972. After I packed it for an exhibition at the Fine Arts Museum of Santiago, Chile, directed by Nemesio Antúnez.

The ten wood-boxes with all the works were sent to the Chilean Embassy in Montevideo, in September 1973. But one month later, there was the Pinochet's state-stroke and I couldn't return to the Chilean Embassy because we had our own dictatorship in Uruguay and I was afraid for my freedom. So I lost my visual poetry archive. After my first mail art show in the exterior (the "Image Bank Post Card Show", Vancouver, Canada, 1971,



and the well known "Omaha Flow Systems", Omaha, USA, 1973, by Ken Friedman) I began to organize the "Festival de la Postal Creativa" ("Creative Post-Card Festival") in 1974 and I re-organized my archive. But, when I was imprisoned by Uruguayan dictatorship in 1977 I lost 20 suitcases with all the works and correspondence; letters and cards from Beuys, Ulrichs, Higgins, Friedman, Albrecht/D, Blaine, Carrión, Sarenco, Groh, Gappmayrs, Tilson, Dowd, Deisler, Zabala, Vigo, Ben, Garnier, Moineau, Filliou, Urban, Xerra, Jandl, Plant, Atchley, Davi, Det Hompson, Crozier, Nannuci, Miccini, Spatola, Gerz, Nichol, Arias-Misson, Kooman, Meltzer, Ockerse, Cook, Toth, Beltrametti, Ehrenberg, Varney, etc., etc.

After that, from 1983, when I was re-born to art and life, I organized the "May 1st., Workers-Day" at AEBU, Montevideo and many other shows about freedom to Chile, Panamá, Paraguay, Nicaragua, against apartheid and United States Interventions, etc. All these exhibitions were donated to the social institutes that had sponsored them, like the "Uruguayan Association for Mandela's Freedom", etc. par example, the José Martí: 100th Anniversary" that I curated in this year

was donated to the "Americans' House" of Cuba, because José Martí was the Cuban National Hero. And so.....

Now, I am cataloguing and placing anything that I receive. My archive is stored in suitcases and is available for viewing and studying to all people. Also, I'm preparing slides and documentation for my periodical statements and conferences. In the future, I wait till somebody transforms my archive in a Latino American Networking Space for to preserve the memory of these years, so much rich and actives.

RJ : After so many years of doing mail art, do you see any changes that have appeared in the network over the years?

Reply on 1-11-95

CP : Sure! Mail never stops, always it is transforming. First, the beginning with Ray Johnson in the mid. 1960s with the sendings to his friends and the foundation of the New York Correspondence School. After the apparition of the first lists of mail artists by the action of Ken Friedman and others. The political and social situation of countries of the Third World and East Europe propitiate

the birth of the network like an artistic resource for to surpass the isolation and the institutional arbitrariness through communication and interactivity toward freedom and dignified life. This part was studied exhaustively by Géza Perneczky in his book "A Haló". We read: "Accordingly, the network started to expand around the year 1972 through the almost simultaneous emergence of the Image Bank in Canada, the File magazine and other pioneering experiments with international lists of addresses that involved the Polish Koksal Gallery, a couple of Czech artists and Clemente Padin of Uruguay."

More later the new media increase extraordinarily the connections and the participants in network was more and more. Also the fall of the Berlin's wall and the incorporation of new countries in mail art did that, today, there are hundreds and hundreds of exhibitions each year and the networkers sum thousands and thousands in all the world.

Now, we assist to the inclusion of the fax and e-mail increasing the interactivity between networkers and, also, to the growing mercantilization and institutionalization of the

mail art. Money and mail art don't mix: precisely, the force of the network lies in this norm. The theme is to maintain art in the area of use, and not in the area of the market or change. By now network only has value. It has not a price with search for profit or lucre, out of its social function like the market art.

RJ : I have noticed that some mail artists that are in the network for a longer time, build their own "correspondence school" and don't always react to newcomers who try to contact them. One reason is of course time and money, but another is that they get tired of explaining again and again the concept of mail art and rather just play the game with old friends. Do you ever get tired of explaining what mail art is all about?

Reply on 27-12-1995

CP : (here, a memento for my old chilean friend, Guillermo Deisler, who died the fall of October 1995 in Halle, Germany).

No, I am not tired of explaining to all what is mail art and networking, especially to newcomers. They have in their hands the future of these forms of communication. The

change and the transformation of the Network are absolutely necessities to preserve the principles of the eternal communication. When the network stops, it dies and disappears. For the newcomers, I have edited a small booklet about latino american mail art with exhaustive notes about mail art's characteristics and I am answering all the correspondence that I receive (the money only does speed up or slow down that process).

So, it is impossible I can build my own "correspondence school" though I have my old friends, naturally, like Edgardo Antonio Vigo, Graciela Gutiérrez, Brusky, César Espinosa, Klaus Groh, The Barbot's, John Held, Bill Gaglione, Geoffrey Cook, Blaine, Hamann, Polkinhorn, Braumuller, Hoffberg and many others.

RJ : The last networker we lost was Guillermo Deisler, as you mentioned. I also heard this news earlier from Birger Jesch in Germany. Did you know Guillermo for a long period? How will you remember him?

Reply on 6-2-1996

CP : Yes, I knew Willy postly from 1967 when we interchanged our publications "Ediciones Mimbres" and "Los Huevos del Plata" and our incipient mail art. Personally, I met him in 1971 during the "International Expo of Propositions to Realize", in the CAYC, Art and Communication Centre, conducted by Jorge Glusberg. The event was curated by Edgardo Antonio Vigo. From that moment we were friends for ever. Guillermo was professor at the Visual Arts Department of the Chilean University in Antofagasta, a northerly city. During the state-stroke by Pinochet and the Chilean Army, in 1973, Will and his family had to escape quickly from their mother country. After a stay in Paris, with Julien Blaine, they established at Plovdiv, a Bulgarian city and, later they mover to Halle, Germany, where he died in fall, October 1995.

In my first public opportunity, at the beginning of the V Biennial International of Visual/Experimental Poetry, curated by César Espinosa in Mexico City, from 10th to 20th of January, 1996, I performed an homage to Guillermo, with a lecture of his poems and tales about our friendship ( I recorded when Guillermo sent me Bulgarian official stamps

that I bought in Montevideo for financing the "OVUM's" mail). I ended my performance, called "Willy, for ever..." showing the video of "Memorial America Latina" (Philadelphia, Penn, U.S.A., 1989) where it is possible to read, in the portals which closes the cemetery-memorial: "They have not died, they are sleeping and dreaming with the freedom". Like Guillermo now.

I am organizing two events in homage to Willy. First: a great exposition at The Chilean University with his works, in the fall of 1996. I am asking the network to send me works, letters, postcards, or anything that is related to him. All the works will be donated to the Chilean University, and documentation will be sent to all. And second: a mail art show "Guillermo Deisler, our friend...", without restrictions (no jury, no return, no size-limits), documentation to all. The deadline for this will be October 30th 1996. Contributions to both projects can be sent to my mailing address.

RJ : Well, I guess the interview is coming to an end. Anything you would like to say while you have the chance?

Reply on 4-3-1996

CP : Sure. Now, we assist to the globalization of the culture of the First World and the greater expansion of the transnational capitalism. This is meaning that our old cultures of the Third World are disappearing because they are not equipped to defend themselves. If the tolerance before the multiplicity of focuses and expression possibilities as well as respect to the personality of the "others" through pluralism (social, politic, economic, ethnic, religions, cultural, sexual, etc.) are the irrenounce bases of network, then here is a contradiction between networking that aspires to the universality of communication and the small communities, in defensive and fragile in front of satellites, computers and modem technology. We know that this signifies the expansion of a commercial culture (Coke, McDonalds, Disneyland's, etc.) and not most communication and understanding between peoples. Marketing doesn't care who you are or what your culture is like, because it wants to make everything everywhere the same for its good business. How could we resolve this contradiction.

RJ : Well, maybe someone out in the network can comment on that. Time to finish the



interview so others can read your views as well. I would like to thank you for you time to do this interview, and I wish you good luck with all your activities.



## E.F.HIGGINS – III

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH E.F HIGGINS – III (USA)

Started on: 16-05-1995

Ruud Janssen :Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 15-9-95

E.F.Higgins : Thanks for the invite to the interview. I haven't been doing much international mail art for a number of years, due to the postal rates, & I was spending US\$ 700 a year on postage there for a while. To answer your question, I got involved in the mail art network about 1975-'76. At the University of Colorado, I was working with paintings & printmaking, working from "2-D" objects as my models. Posters, Postcards, Play money, Stamps, envelopes, etc. I produced the first sheet of Doo Da art stamps in 1975. Right around that time a visiting artist. Edwin Golik

Golikoff, a N.Y. Artist, living in Denver, told me about mail art, Buster Cleveland, Ray Johnson, Anna Banana, etc. I started mailing the stamps, collages etc. around then.

RJ :     What were the first reactions of the people you started to mail your works to?

Reply on 5-10-1995

EFH:     That would be hard to figure, as I wasn't there, when they got their mail. Mail art is neither a wrapped gift to a friend at their birthday Party, nor a Rauschenburg, in a show, in a Museum, in a collection, reproduced in an Art Business Magazine, commented about by "Art Critics" etc. etc.

Judging from the responses, from other artists, through the mails, some of my stuff must have interested some to respond. The many different mail artists' correspondances revealed the miraid various influences affecting these artists. Golikoff used a typewriter, & puns in many of his letters & postcards. Ray Johnson, his grey copies of drawings, gossip, & puns. His surreal puns, sometimes understood. Concrete poetry, newspaper & picture collage,

pornography, manifestos, self-documentation, self-historification, self-promotion, were some of the things sent, received, & seen in mail art show catalogues.

One of these things were stamps; on the letters from real countries, artists stamps, & rubber stamps. Due to my background interest, I gravitated to corresponding, with these concerns, to other artists & shows having this as a format or main idea. The 1975 Show of Artist Stamps at Simon Frazier university, B.C., Canada, organized by Jas. W. Fetler, visually introduced me to the world of the following artists from that show: Pat Tavenner, Joel Smith, Donald Evans, Ken Friedman, Robert Watts, Bernd Lobach, Endre Tot, Klaus Burkhardt, Carl Camu, Dieter Roth, George Ashley, & Ed Varney of the Coach House Press.

I was a painter & printmaker, and carried these disciplines into my mail art activity, most notably, Painting Doo Da Stamps. Often these 16" x 18" paintings were photographically reduced, and printed as sheets of stamps with the color copier, perforated, & used in mail art. As a printmaker in the traditional methods, the

color copier was an explosive discovery to me. No longer did time & money restricted the imagery, edition, distribution etc. To spend 2 hours each pulling an edition of Etchings, tends to discourage mailing off a dozen or so to friends, and push one more into the \$ Art Gallery system.

RJ : I can understand the influence of a color copier. Some choose for a large color copy, but it seems you like to reduce your works to even smaller pieces, into artistamps. Why is this artistamp so interesting for you?

Reply on 17-10-1995

EFH: To color copy print from a large un-related artwork, such as a painting, sculpture, etc. , as an edition print seems silly except as documentation, doing huge injustice to both the original medium & the traditional printing process. Picasso may have done a series of etchings based on his painting "Guernica", but the prints intrinsic method, process, & look, have more to do with these concerns, than reproducing the painting. He didn't print 300 color copy prints of a photo of the painting.

When Warhol painted a 12 ft. square "Hammer & Sycle", "Deaths Head", or whatever, he probably had a pretty good idea it would "Read" when reproduced, 4 inches by four inches in some art magazine. Hireonimus Bosch probably didn't have this thought occur to him... check it out. Photography has changed the making of art, & definitely Art & Business. Wouldn't a 12" x 12" Warhol have sufficed?

When I paint the Doo Da Stamp Paintings, it is understood by me that they are ment to be used to make stamps. The lettering is there, the 3P or what-ever denomination is there. It isn't, in most cases, added later. Hence, the painting becomes, what traditionally was known as a rough sketch, ie, a creative work done in the process to achieve the invisioned final "Work". To delegate painting to this role, "making color copy artstamps", turns tradition on its head, & really pisses off the Art Gallery system.

If creativity, through a process, isn't TRANSFORMED BY THAT PROCESS, it is hardly creative in my opinion. A photo, slide, or color copy may be functional, helpful, or useful in describing another artwork, but unless it is transformed, it's work\$job.

ARTISTAMPS, like their traditional cousins, "Govn't minted miniature prints", share significant similarities - the main one being, I think, the imagery on them, ie "relating to the people, lands, ideas, nature, accomplishments, celebrations, religions, etc. of the country." The correspondence carried by the regular stamps, becomes the correspondance, carried by the Artistamps in mail art, that joyous dance of the muses amongst us.

How wonderful to have perhaps correspondanced with a guy from the "country" of Gauguin, Cavellini apparently correspondanced with some amazing "countries" to hear him tell it!!!

What kind of artstamps would a "country" of Picasso have produced?, & my!, wouldn't that have been fun!!!!?

The "COUNTRIES" of TUI-TUI, Blurr, BANANA, TRIANGLE, JOKI, & NETLAND, to name a few, are alive & well!!! By in large, unlike the Govn't issues, these countries have the continuity of one or two creative beings in charge of the postal issues for many, many years.



If you ever got a letter from someone in a different country, the stamps, & rubber stamp cancellation marks were a wonderful part of getting that letter. Sometimes their correspondence to you reflected the stamp imagery or not. Artistamps on mail art is a BEAUTY!

I have seen wonderful stamps from countries I may never visit - some even with that country's art I may never see. With artistamps, the ART VISITS YOU, not you visiting the museum! I am not against travel or museums, actually, I love both, but to have these "COUNTRIES" visit YOU, sometimes unexpectedly, is a treat!!!

P.S. During construction work, that I do to make a living, when somebody screws-up, I put two things to them: #1 "There's 4 things you gotta remember if you want to be a plumber:

- (1) "H" stands for hot.
- (2) "C" stands for cold.
- (3) Friday's payday,
- (4) & SHIT DON'T RUN UP-HILL.

The other thing I put to them is more insidious. After they've escaped a major disaster, for themselves, as well as others on the job, I ask 'em, "HEY! WHO PAYS YOU?????" & before they can answer, I yell in their face, "SAFETY PAYS!!!"

Not too long ago, here in America, some young kid burned down the house, a trailer actually, having learned fire is lighters & fun from some cartoon character named Bevis & Butthead. And now, to legally sell lighters here in America, they have to be "Child-Proof". The only swear word or obscenity I ever heard my father utter, in 50 years, was \_\_\_\_\_, as he was teaching me power tools when I was, .... oh, maybe 13 or 14 years old, when he nearly cut off his finger.

RJ : Are there other stories of your childhood that have had an impact on your the art you produce nowadays?

Reply on 14-11-1995

EFH: Stories? ...?

RJ : Ah...

EFH: Well, there once was a gal from Nantucket...

RJ :     Actually, influences.... were there any other significant ...

EFH:     Oh, ... you mean like stuff places, & people?

RJ :     Yea.

EFH:     I suppose, in everyone's' life, there's things to remember; if you asked anyone else, they'd say something like, "What?", even if they knew them very well, when they heard the reply. When I meet people in bars, I tell 'em: "I'm 59 years old." I think I've been doing this for the last 10 years or so.

As a youngster, growing up in a small town outside of Chicago, I had the good luck, or some may say, the "IMPRINTING" (like you see the T.V. show showing you how to have the young condors learn the wild, by eating raw meat from a puppet hand, that looks like a (they suppose) adult), to learn many things.

Probably, if anybody's still around, from back then, they'd tell you a different story, than what'd you figure from .. say the writings of Jules Verne, Lewis Carrol or Edgar Allen Poe. "So the guy sez to me in a bar in Kankakee, Ill. , he was out of work or

something...., 'apparently this guy breaks into the PICASSO museum ... didn't like a painting, or sumptin',,,, & PAINTS OVER A PART OF IT!!!!!!..' "so the story goes,";& Picasso himself was in town, or sumptin'....& they get him out there for insurance purposes, you know, to ascertain the damage, & whadda think he sez... you know, after looking at it and all...???' 'I look into the distance, trying to figure what the pablo might have'a said, as I looked him up & down, figuring iz this guy crazy or can he buy me another beer, when he says something....'

You mean that kind of story?

RJ : What's Picasso say?

EFH: Well, He looked at the "Damage, & pulling at his jaw, said "Not Bad."

RJ : "Did he actually..."

EFH: "Oh, Not that story..... O.K. , Hello Buster, to assume a painter, Stamp maker, or whatever didn't used to have some fun at writing would be to deny Claes Oldenbug & all of Chicago humor.

Here's the thing: Since RJ asked the question about other stories of my childhood, "that have had an impact... etc....", I have invented his "dialogue" or return questions. I don't have a computer or e-mail....& have been corresponding with a young cartoonist that..... He does the drawing. I'll do the story line. Met 'em on the train from Chicago to GRAND CENTRAL.

So, If RJ decides to run this part of the interview, please understand, we didn't just send mail to undrstand one short word... Sometimes people talk like that. Ruud, my apologies.

Trying not to get side-tracked, on the interview, but it depends on how you're traveling, & but, anyway, we all gotta stop for eats, piss & Clear Stars.

THE ASS HOLE MUST THINK HE'S A WRITER  
Chapter 2 , Hemmings' typist gor \$25. Bucks a page (back then)

Well, enough of my....a....ah....., well, anyway, if this is supposed to be about Artistamps , or mail art, ....here's a reply from Joel Smith, from Illinois, Illinoise. (One of the best, in my opinion, that makes Art Stamps).

(E.F. Higgins included a copy with a small text about Joel Smith's Artistamps where is explained shortly how he makes them and motivated why....)

RJ : What do you think is important enough that I should ask you? Don't start to think too much, just figure out what you think I should know, and than give the answer.....

*(After some silence I first received a postcard from E.F. Higgins, and a bit later his answer with in the envelope also some of his new artistamps).*

Reply on 4-3-1996

EFH: Art. At some point, in the development of human beings, we noticed our ability to control our bodies. At first this was mostly useful, to survive. & reproduce. At this early stage, was the start of many future developments, that chrystalized for thousands of years, to get to the point of drawing bison on cave walls.

The brain was developing also. Cause & Effect. We get together to chip the flint this way, (the 'ol guy said so), tie the gut rope, such way on the wood (tree-part), & we stick into the big eatable-thing.

28 years old, was OLD.  
GrandPaw,.....maybe.

And so they persevered. These Humanoids.  
With their brain growing, their skills  
developing, & & The strongest leader,  
always led. But, DRAWING the sticking on  
the wall!!!! WOW What is that?

Apparently, or maybe, the early OLD,  
(previously BIG STRONG) learned how to run  
a crew & explain, in whatever "language"  
they had back then, how to get the food, &  
not get dead, on account of getting  
hooked on one of those nasty tusks.

Survival instincts have thousands of years  
over religions, Philosophy, & Art. Somewhere  
in there, as we tribes got bigger, needing a  
sort of Organization, Heireicy happened  
again. And what do you suppose they used  
as an argument:?"Doesn't matter, BOB, you  
usta be good on the hunt, These drawings,  
& (& I admit) along with these guys decide  
you don't know what you're doing." .... &  
besides,.....

Did that cave drawer get amazed at his or  
her DRAWING, or do you suppose it was a

survival instinct? And today, Here in 1996, I wonder who's doing what for what reason.

Back to you R.J.

RJ : What are YOU doing EFH? (to make it easy, what did you do today?)

*(On 12-3-1996 I received an envelope from E.F. Higgins with in it two artistamps with an envelope on them with the text "Artist Creative, Originator, Genius, Hommage a Ray - Mail Art". No letter was included, and the envelope the artistamps were sent in was one of the special stamped envelopes I normally use to send my answers/questions in. The envelope was decorated in the typical style of Higgins with artistamps and rubberstamps.)*

RJ : How way you correspondance with Ray?

Reply on 30-3-1996

EFH: Kennedy had been shot. I may have been young, but I wasn't old. Yesterday I thought of asking people that write me to send me a batch of stickers or address labels because it seems to take so long to walk around &



look up their addresses, after figuring where I put it.

The knees ain't what they used to be. Like most 59 year old men, other than the normal regrets, Ray's Death bothered me. Kennedy's death bothered me in a younger way...Then. I was 25 when my 21 year old brother died, of the bends, working on a oil-rig off Bankock. The T.V. says americans go there to get young sex, & maybe get AIDS. This was before that. & that's that. This is what?

Somewhere in there Bukowski refused to bowl with the Midgets, & I howled it last Saturday in SOHO, N.Y.C., where all the Art Galleries have turned into women's shoe shops, and Harry was good news: two things: Couple thou for one of his big Paintings, & the other guy traded him a Jean Michael Basquait.... Buster 'n I used to lend him a buck now & then years ago, when we would sit out on the corner of West-Broadway & Spring St,'s & he was spray painting his poetry.

I have been reading up on computers. Wow! The best way to bowl is get some salad, beers, warm weather, & try your best

as you remember saturday mornings in the midwest in the junior bowling league. Remember the bigness of the place. Head high pin-ball machines. DON'T DROP IT! & don't touch those! swimming lessons. The Balanger Brothers stealing those maybe same balls years later to drop them on cemi's... off the overpass. I-94.. Or maybe it was ol 66. Joliet, Illinois inmates make liecense Plates for the cars. No state has anything about bowling on their Liescence Plates. What does it say on the plates of the country of Doo Da? It's a small country

(Here was printed the stamp of Higgins mentioning: "The country of DooDa is 12 feet in any direction from where Higgins is, at any given time.")

& then the girls get there, bringing out the salad, as we're drinking beer, turning over the hamburgers, the new one hours later, sang a better Hank than Hank Williams. & No she wasn't wearing a poka dot dress, but when I went into the kitchen, to see how she'd do on the ice-cube thing, they had the T.V. on, & I noticed how the guys that got strikes, had a Right handed kind of glove, & aimed at the right side of the lane way down there, & they gave it a right

handed twist, so's it would look like it's almost ginna get in the gutter, & then would come back, & BOOM!!! hit the #1 ball at about 5:23 (O'Clock)

I don't know where to begin. Fortunately, thats taken care of. Many stories have the average person. But how to end it? I for one don't believe for a minute, Ray jumped into that River. But as we say in Hollywood, But will it make Mney\$\$\$????????

If this interview (to the reader) seems a bit disjointed, it's because the obstinastance of mailed Q. & A through the mails: When the Galantois where here, we goofed around with a power tool called a "Router". We had great fun drawing on wood with this machine. What it does, this machine, is carve into wood, at 32,000 R.P.M. to facilitate WOOD Prints, on such, usuallly non-traditional materials as Plywood. Man!, you can ink it up with a hard rubber roller, & Print on anything, & I wonder if it will wear out faster than them Copper Plates that Rembrandt worked on.

Back when I was in Highschool, I had a Professor, by the name of Dr. Eastwood, encouraged me in the creative writing,

since then, I've more gone into the Visuals,  
than the writing.

(Perhaps it shows!)

Creativity is a wondermunt!... It should  
definitely be encouraged. The IDEA is not a  
few, well distributed images or Poems, to  
Fakely tell somebody, that they're better  
than anybody else.

OK Here's the Story:

" Diego Rievera, Esher, & Wan Gris  
walk into this bar in Kankakee, Illinois,  
(U.S.A.), they have cartoons playing  
on the T.V.. Diego Rievera brought  
with him a \$100.00 painting of some  
sort of a Gun-fight, he'd got at the  
antique shop. Esher was trying to buy  
schnopps for the bar, as I put in Two  
bucks worth of Hank on the Juke,  
trying to remember where I put the  
Halstead line.....

Written interviews to Creative Genieuses  
tend to look like this in print.

RJ : Any more news about the country of DOO  
DA? Do they use firecrackers there?

Reply on 1-6-1996

EFH: Dear RJ: When I was a child, there was a Museum called the "Knight". It was somewhere in Chicago & had a pile of chains, stacked up out in front. The size of the links were about 3 feet, and this was from the Civil War era, used, they said or remembered them saying, "Used to shut the port of Charleston.... had it across the RIVER!!!... no ships could come in or out!"

Inside were neat suits of armor, & miniture little diarammas, similar to what you might see at the N.Y.C. Museums' of Natural history, depicting say something, like... eskimo villages, or early American Indians in their Long-Houses, with part of the little roofs cut away so you could see in, except these diaramas showed people impaled on sharpened trunk-roots on living trees.... & as I remember, the scale was about the same, but I was smaller back then, & only seen the Teddy Roosevelt/Indian statue after I got there.

But I disgress, ....You asked about Doo Da, & If we use firecrackers here.

Firecrackers, traditionally are used to CELEBRATE. The spirit of Independence & all that. Gunpowder, attributed to being invented by the Chinese, before Marco Polo went there, was modified within the last century to give off more of a silver Bang, than a KA-BOOM, when used in the aforementioned, "Firecrackers".

The "KA-BOOM" fork in the road has certainly been traveled by not only them guys inventing "C-4", Clamore, & assorted other Big Booms, but apparently the Uni-Bomber, several major Govn'ts, & a whole host of greedy "El Ka-Boomers!!!" This is not "FIRECRACKERS", as we have come to know & love the celebration. Thomas Pane, or the guy that wrote the other things other than Gullivers Travels, ...what was his name...? 1 Tom Jefferson. Or maybe you were 12 years old, & you had a friend, name of Jonnie Vance, with a brother that was astationed down in Georgia, & you made a list, & saved up your Paper-route money to get some Lady-Fingers, Bottle-Rockets, & some "16's".

I was 14, she was 13. I told her I'd been shot in a gang war. It was at Chicago beach. I still had the bandage on my right arm, &

couldn't get it wet..... I peeked the white, plastic to show her the 32 black stitches & she was duely impressed. She had the most beautiful Blue-Green eyes & not so bad looking in her swim-suit, that I'd seen in days!!!! (Hard Drive on the Typing fingers today after, once again, becoming,... THE TILE MAN)!!!!

When the Doctor stitched me up, he asked "Doorknob?". "Empty CO2" I said.

"Gorgonzola!!!" I initially said, looking at the Blue Cheese Brand Firecracker Painting. stacked against the Perforator, "Stilton!!!" I thought loudly to myself, somewhat pleased.

"When we were kids," the doc said, "we used to do doorknobs."

Later, I found out that, he & his gang were making firecrackers, out of matchheads. (Look it up on the Internet). But I swear to you, the guy I talked to, kinda creepy, Ya know? come to my Painting Show at the "X OXO" Gallery, didn't get the idea from me..... Hells Bells, .....Midwest farmers been making trout ponds for years.... WATER IN, WATER OUT.

"The Stream Runs Trou!" (Ray Kelly & the Rivington School)

I've been doing this stuff for years long enough, to respect, when it says on the lable, "THIN SET-MORTER MIX". (1/4 contains PORTLAND CEMENT) I try not to use my hands that are rapidly turning into gravel-scoops, as the mixer-things. I left the hand lotion on the job day before yesterday, & was amazed it wasn't home, after a prefuntctory clean-up. I told them, if they want to use some you're welcome, but, I'm taking it home, 'cause yesterday, I missed it.

I am working this job to save up money to get a computer. All winter I didn't feel like painting, I didn't deal much cards, I was as they say HIBERNATING. The guy I'm working for, 's 26....he said he'd been watching T.V. all winter & .....

We're working on 42nd St/10-11th sts. Avenues. I'm supposed to be there tomorrow in 3 hours. If they fire me, who they gonna get?

It's the Theatre district, Film. (Till this job, haven't been there in years.....& WOW.... will



ya look at what they're trying to do! "What'd he say?"

THE IDEA BEING CELEBRATION of the use of Firecrackers in the country of Doo Da. Something for the kids... Legal! Ah, but it's all now well so compartmentalized. "AH, don't worry about that!...Let the experts handle it. Like Dan Rather experting on the NEWS? Like Phil Donahue experting on United Statesers too much fat time, & interest in Perversions? "Look," I'm gonna say to my kids someday, I hope, "That's horsemanure... the reason it don't smell's they eat grain. Mix it with that leaf stuff. (& later) Now this batch is what the tomatoes eat!....got that? Put a batch of it in that old tire, set it in a sunny place, & we're gonna grow some of the best tasting tomatoes (with appologies to Dan Quale) you ever had."

Celebration is not every night. When rare becomes normal, then what do they want. Travelers would bring back strange & unusual things. Probably from indigenous peoples & some of their stuff or/the food.

With mail art, in the Raw, artists are exposed to these images, ideas, & thoughts poems directly. If we can't, do you think the Normal

can? & lets get the ambassadors not appointed by political connections or contributions, but... hey, we are the ambassadors! SEND WHAT YOU WANT.! People without a culture are more apt to....

Ruud, how long you wanna go on with this thing? This kid I met on the train from Chicago, I'm working on the second "Mc" detective thing, sent him 7 pages, & we haven't got him to Australia yet, but he called today, saying maybe it's O.K. If the comic book goes a little long..... Said it was probably right he didn't send the 50 Bucks till I finished the story, but he just got out of school, & was starting on the picture part.

RJ : O.K. I can understand the hint. I will rap up this interview now and see how it would fit in a printed booklet. Unless there was something I really forgot to ask you?

reply on 23-8-1996

EFH: How about "How's the Fishin'?" Just got back from my cousins wedding out west & saw batches of Kids, all related to me, went to a day of Poderosa Ranch & Trout fishing. Kids are great. My Hat's off to Pawel Petaz, C.T. Chew, Ed Varney, Pat Beilman, Anna

banana & All the rest of 'em (stamp artists)  
that keep at it in the face of this  
wonderment. That's the Art.



## CHUCK WELCH

Mail-interview with Chuck Welch (Crackerjack Kid) USA

### About the interviewed artist

Chuck Welch has been a leading practitioner of mail art since 1978. His first book : "Networking Currents," (1986) is a pioneering text about mail art subjects and issues. Last year he edited mail art's first "ezine" "Netshaker On-Line". Currently, Welch's *Eternal Network Mail Art Anthology* is being published by University of Calgary Press. Copies are available (see address artist at the end of the interview)

### The interview

Started on: 14-02-95

Ruud Jansen : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 28-2-1995

Chuck Welch : My first exposure to mail art and subsequent participation is linked to the historic "Omaha Flows System" held at Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska and curated by Fluxus artist Ken Friedman. So my evolvment began in April 1973, but at the time I didn't know that this major exhibition was the precedent for all mail art shows that followed. My active involvement in mail art occurred in 1978 when I began corresponding under the nom de plume of crackerjack kid. I chose that pseudonym because crackerjack is a well-known American phrase and is also a candied popcorn which contains a surprise in every box. I turned the candy box phrase to suit my own mail art objectives, "to place a surprise in every mailbox."

In a paragraph I can best describe how I've come full circle in my mail art interest. My initial attraction to mail art is difficult to analyze. I must be crazy because I spend about \$1,600 each year on postage, enough to buy a new powerMac computer. Who says mail art isn't expensive? But the mail art form fascinated me not because of the media, but because the message is what bonds us all in a global community. You see, mail art crosses borders between individuals, nations and cultures and makes your mailbox a central grounding space for the merging of art and life. At its best mail art is open, honest, democratic and collaborative. At its worst mail art is selfish, petty, factionalistic and clubish. Historically, mail art has traveled an intermedia course that diminished distances between communication forms as divergent and

different as copier machines and telecommunication. As the international post declines will mail art too? I think not! The spirit of mail art is already transforming as the ethereal, eternal network in cyberspace-what I've termed in my 1991 telenetlink neologism, "emailart".

RJ : It seems that at the moment two networks, that have existed beside each other for many years, are gradually being influenced by each other. What can the Internet mean to mail-art and visa-versa?

Reply on : 11-3-1995 (internet)

CW : I developed the idea of Telenetlink in 1991 to explore how the on-line internet and mail art communities might interconnect. That process is still evolving primarily through my widespread distribution of contact lists, but if mail art is a house and internet is the street, both forms will link in private homes and public spaces. In North America even the homeless have access to Internet through countless public libraries. The story is quite different in Europe where governments and industries must decentralize to join Internet. This means letting go of control, de-regulating authority. Some experts say Europe is four years behind North America in understanding the potential of internet and Japan is almost without a clue. An interesting historical link exists between the internet and mail art and that occurred when pioneering mail artists quit the mailstream in the mid-1970s and created the first on-line artists networks. Today, there are thousands more on-line artists in North America than there are

mail artists. Both communities will become acquainted and merge through Telenetlink. Then we'll begin to understand what both communities will become to one another.

RJ : For me the internet with the E-mail and speed is still different compared to the mail art network because of the digital form. Digital art is just a fragment of the total art that is produced. Some say that the Internet is just another way of communication besides the traditional mail-,fax-, telex- and phone-networks. What is this potential of the internet in your eyes compared to the other networks I mentioned?

Reply on : 18-3-1995

CW: To network or knotwork, that is the question. The message (emailart) and messenger (networker) are the medium, not cyberspace or snail mail. The emailartist is an invisible messenger who breathes the ether of cyberspace. The aesthetic of form in cyberspace is formlessness. Form is fluxed forever: time, speed, and distance are distorted, fragmented, diffused, and shattered. And, as if this induced anxiety isn't enough, we can expect our notions of a virtual reality will continually change as technology transforms the tools at hand.

When you talk about cyberspace being primarily a digital experience, I would point out that Internet carries sounds, visual images, and motion through software like Macromind Director. Internet then, IS MAIL, IS FAX, IS TELEX, IS SOUND, IS MOTION, IS



VISUAL IMAGE all wrapped together through the existing telephonic technology such as fiber optics.

Is this better than what traditional mail art offers? It isn't a question of what's better. Perhaps it is a choice, or preference we make based on what we already know. Cyberspace isn't paradise, but neither is mail art. Both have major pitfalls and both share problems of community, of censorship, of systems regulating, controlling, and centralizing authority. Mail art networkers have grappled with these issues long before cyberspace came along. How can our experiences help shape and form new communication spaces? I think mail artists have much to offer as does cyberspace. Both forms will merge in the streets of networking. This is the inevitable future of mail art, whether mail artists like it or not.

RJ : One of the things you do on the internet is your magazine Netshaker, which I received through the net from you too. Does the concept from a e-zine differ a lot from the zines we know in mail-art? Does the e-zine bring new possibilities (or problems) besides the speed of sending?

Reply on : 25-3-1995 (INTERNET)

CW: If concept includes the objective of building on-line communities, encouraging collaboration, debate, presenting projects, etc., then my "Netshaker On-Line" is almost identical to the snail mail version of "Netshaker.". But as a networking tool, "Netshaker On-Line has a much greater

potential for reaching an enormous international on-line audience with speed and with little expense.

In discussing "ezines" I want to clarify that this term is an invention of my own, an abbreviated form of "electronic zine." Prior to "Netshaker On-Line" there were no mail art zines on Internet, only formal "magazines" such as Art Com and Post Modern Culture. Part of the challenge of the Networker Telenetlink has been to lead the way in pointing out possibilities. The definition of mail art "ezines" will evolve as other mail artists experiment with the form. For now, it is important to start the idea of "ezines" moving. Now, I see that Mark Bloch and Guy Bleus have made their zines available over Internet. Vittore Baroni wrote last week that he would be going on-line next Fall, so it is possible that his "Arte Postale" will go on-line too.

Ezines are primarily text based rather than visual, but this doesn't mean I can't replicate visual images as seen in mail art zines. Graphics can be scanned, compressed, and transmitted over internet by GIF, an acronym for Graphics Interchange Format. How can you move a graphic image over the network?

Pictures can be shipped as ASCII text, but the recipient must have software on their own computer to put it in shape. Downloading visual images can be a boring, consuming process if you've got a slow modem, say 2,400 bps. rather than 19,000 bps. Plus visual images consume a lot of

space on disks and computers. If your personal computer is directly linked to a mainframe, computer speed isn't an issue. But quite a few artists like me are connected to mainframes with modems, and this is a problem because I can tie up my phone lines for one or two hours downloading a single photograph. These access problems will be solved as fiber optic technology evolves.

I think it would be a mistake to think that the ezine should function in the fashion that hands-on mail art zines do. Mail art zines combine sound, vision, and touch with tangible form. Even the smell of fresh off-set print has an appealing sensation that is first-hand, and not simulated. Remember, I am a papermaker, a craftsman who likes to work by hand. It's ludicrous to think of taking a computer monitor to bed like you can a mail art zine.

Mail art zines appeal directly to our senses and there is nothing simulated or compromised in the interaction. So I think it would be foolish to expect the ezine to replicate this experience. But you must remember that mail art zines will not compete with the virtual reality of an electronic zine - a magazine that can stimulate the senses with mixed media techniques combining sound, vision, and motion. I can present, for instance, an ezine snapshot to my readers of a group mail art portrait taken at Katz's Deli in NYC. Readers can click any mail artist in the portrait and hear the actual voice of that person speaking. Or with buttons mixed with text, readers could click a button for a video clip of Carlo Pittore eating salami. The interactive play could be

hilariously interactive, even inviting the reader to add-on, splice in all kinds of outrageous information. Ezines will be entirely interactive forms available on internet listservers, the World Wide Web or newsgroups.

RJ : Yes, I know it is all technically possible, the things that you mention. But the computer-tools that the mail-artists have at hand normally aren't up to it. An example is the TAM-Bulletin I tried to upload to the DDS-Unix server. I then found out that it doesn't accept 'extended ASCII-signs like :  
üüüééééüüüéé±ëëè (when you read this question, you will see what the computer has done to the signs), so on Internet I even have less possibilities at the moment compared to the BBS-services that I am used to work with. I still get this feeling that with Internet I'm back to basics as far as the E-mail is concerned. Internet surely needs some artists to change it. Maybe you can tell me a bit about the Telenetlink '95? How is it going so far?

reply on : 31-3-1995 (internet)

(As I expected the "üüüééééüüüéé±ëëè" -part of my e-mail got distorted into other signs during the internet-communication. Because of the EDI-protocols the extended ASCII-signs aren't understandable for all participating hosts yet.)

CW : It's a shame that you're stuck with archaic protocol. Artists aren't needed to change it, European politicians and businesses will be the ones to open the gates to Internet. As I'm writing this,

European deregulation of telecommunication industries is ever nearer with preparation for full deregulation by 1998. French Telecom and Deutsche Telekom are planning an alliance with Sprint, a major U.S. long-distance carrier. Italy's Societa Finanziaria Telefonica per Azioni, otherwise known as STET, began talks with IBM last month (February 1995) in an alliance that could offer global internet connections to Europe. In the alliance with I.B.M. STET would provide specialized skills like transmission and switching. STET is also in the middle of a five billion dollar program to upgrade its lines with fiber glass cable - technology needed for interactive television. This forthcoming deregulation in European communications is comparable to U.S. deregulation of the Bell System in the 1980s.

It isn't true that American mail artists lack necessary computer tools to participate in Internet. Your statement relates more to European mail artists than here, but exceptions definitely include Guy Bleus and Charles François. As far as basic e-mail goes, H.R. Fricker, and Clemente Padin have joined the Telenetlink and today Jim Felter from Vancouver, British Columbia sent his first email Telenetlink message to me. Many mail artists are finally coming online partly because the Telenetlink has helped create a cyberspace community that has spread the original emailart lists since early 1991. Just got email today from Judith Hoffberg, Robert Ashworth, and Ramcell, all online mail artists. My current Telenetlink Emailart Directory lists over 200 participants. Albeit controversial, the Telenetlink has

challenged the larger snail mail art community with a call for direct interaction rather than more congress talk.

RJ : O.K. , lets talk about your book that just has come out. Tell a bit about the concept of it, and how it differs from your previous book.

CW : Neither "Networking Currents" (1986) or Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology (1995) are scholarly histories of mail art, although EN was published by a university press and "Networking Currents" was self-published by me. I am known in and outside of the network as a mail artist and not an art historian. Moreover, my purpose for editing EN wasn't to add to previous historical surveys of mail art.

In "Networking Currents" I discussed mail art subjects and issues with a pioneering focus upon the concept of networking and networkers. I have been told by some academic scholars that "Eternal Network Mail Art Anthology" is much akin to Robert Motherwell's "Dada Painters & Poets." That is, the EN anthology is more of an illustrated philosophy of mail art than a history book.

I think it's unfortunate that few major mail art books have surfaced in recent years. John Held's "Mail Art Bibliography" is a librarian's tool to accessing rare mail art sources. Winnes, Wohlrab, Jesch and Huber have recently produced "Mail Art Szene DDR 1975-1990," a focused book about mail art behind the Berlin Wall. And Peter R. Meyer recently co-edited a marvelous catalogue/book "Mailed Art

in Uppsala: Choosing Your Partner." But all of these books including my own edition have been written by active mail art "insiders." This can be interpreted as a boon or bane depending on one's viewpoint about what constitutes "authoritative texts." It is possible that EN will be an important sourcebook that will open doors to others where doors were once locked shut.

RJ : Besides the Telenetlink and your books you also used to make beautiful artistamps and handmade books. Do you still have time for that?

Reply on : 19-04-1995 (internet)

CW: Yes, in fact I collaborated from 1992-94 in person and by mail with Marilyn Rosenberg, David Cole, and Sheril Cuning in the creation of "Spring Garden Mail Art Installation Bookwork". 32 signatures were made with my handmade paper as a support for painting, drawing, printmaking, collage, and readymade objects. All four of us worked on all aspects of the bookwork , first in a workshop at my home and then for a year through the mail. Our installation will be on display at the University of Nebraska's Museum of Nebraska Art through September of this year.

Two months ago my handmade paper artworks (artistamps, etchings, and engravings) were displayed at Adirondack Community College in Queensbury, NY. I've been invited to exhibit my bookworks at Boise State University in November 1995 and also in Scarborough, New York.

I prefer creating artwork by hand and now that my period of writing about mail art is over for awhile, I intend to focus more on handmade paper artistamps and/or painting and sculpture. My M.F.A. degree work was in studio art at Boston Museum School and my creations were whimsical stamp machines, three dimensional handmade paper stampworks and paper pulp paintings. I don't have a lot of room now for large work so I expect I'll scale down to stampworks again. I have a handmade paper mill in my studio and some small presses for making intaglio prints.

RJ : It is funny you mention the fact that you don't have a lot of room. Maybe this is the result of keeping all the mail-art you get. How is you 'archive' organized?

Reply on : 5-5-1995 (internet)

CW: Yes, my archive takes up a lot of space on shelves, in cabinets, in bookcases, and fileboxes. Having an organized archive has saved me hours of time searching for materials, but what hours I've saved have been spent organizing the Eternal Network Archive and I've been doing such with a Hypercard database for over three years now. I'm proud of what I've accomplished, but the price has been a tremendous amount of time and energy.

I have sections of my archive devoted to Mail Art Projects, 3-D objects, Mail Art Catalogues, Zines, Books, audio cassettes, posters, T-Shirts, Videos, Artistamps (The International Register of Artistamps),



The Networker Databank, and Fluxus related materials. Files from 1978-1991 include numerous materials collected from old correspondences with over 300 mail artists from fifty countries. Those materials sit in eight large fileboxes and in a crammed closet I haven't reached yet.

From 1991 to present I've assembled 145 catalogued folders, each folder representing a week of mail art. All of the items in these stuffed folders are recorded by the day, month, and year each arrived, ie materials arriving on May Day 1995 are tagged 050195. The database reflects this number and the last name of each sender. In an instant I can scan my files and tell you what mail I received on any day of the year, or I can reveal how much interaction I've had with other network friends.

Why do I do it? As a child I was a compulsive stamp collector. I loved making books, saving correspondences and drawings. I've always been a packrat and I know many other mail artists with the same proclivity. But collecting isn't my passion! I collect mail art because have an abiding belief that what we and our network mail art friends are doing is important art in the age we live in. That is, to give our works is a radical act. Nobody else in the mainstream does that because if they did it would undermine the entire commodity art system. I don't create mail art to collect it. My biggest love is giving my work to others and collaborating with other artists.

I stay on top of nearly all the mail art I get, so I'm never behind on the cataloguing. Last year I catalogued 1,500 pieces of mail art and I mailed out that much too. Sounds like lots, but I know of other mail artists who are more prolific than I. I spend too much money on mail art.

Somewhere along the line I'll decide to quit doing this librarian's work. I'm an artist and this is my first love, not bookkeeping. So if it gets to be too much, I'll stop. I'll know when that time comes. My publisher tells me that in the creation of "Eternal Network Mail Art Anthology" they amassed a huge collection of ephemera, more than any other publication they've ever produced.

From the investigations I've made about mail art archives, I'm certain that the Eternal Network Archive is the largest private catalogued mail art collection in the United States. The Networker Databank (in duplicate) collection alone includes over 2,000 networker congress items donated to the University of Iowa's Alternative Traditions in the Contemporary Arts Archive, plus records mailed to the Museum of Modern Art in NYC.

Because my space is limited, I'm selective about what I receive. I'm not very interested in picked over, rejected items that would have found their way into someone's garbage bin. I do save, however, all mail art catalogues, videos, zines and artistamps that are donated to the Eternal Network Archive.

RJ : How do you archive your electronic Mail? Do you just extract the ASCII-part and save this or do you also collect all the 'bits and bytes' that come along with it?

Reply on : 7-5-95 (internet)

CW: The electronic mail is filed (ASCII) on disk in chronological order by day, month, year, similar to the way I archive all my traditional mail art copy.

RJ : You say you do save all mail art catalogues. What kind of catalogues do you like the most?

Reply on : 7-5-95 (internet)

CW: I like them all, really, but I certainly appreciate those with some effort and originality beyond the usual listing of names and addresses. Guy Bleus creates some of the most eloquent, beautiful mail art documentation in the network. His recent "In Memory of Ray Johnson" is a beautiful, lyrical work. Gianni Broi's "La Posta in Gioco" (1990) is one of the most beautiful mail art show catalogues ever made, perhaps rivaled by Peter R. Meyer's "Mailed Art in Uppsala" (1994). Andrej Tisma has a proclivity for creating wonderful mail art show documents too. His "Nature Gives" International Mail-Art Exhibition Catalogue is a case in point.

I have about 300 mail art catalogues in the Eternal Network Archive. But there are another 300 mail art project documents too, and I like these as well, if

not better than the exhibition catalogues. Some of the projects I've grown to love over the years are Pawel Petasz' works, Edgardo Vigo's international stamp projects, and more recently Rea Nikonova's superb "Double" assembling projects. I love Mail Art Assemblings like Pascal Lenoir's "Mani Art," Baroni's "Arte Postale," M.B. Corbett's "Tensetendoned," Dirk Frohlich's Buchlabor assemblings, Bruno Pomney's "Lola Fish" also and many others.

RJ : Sometimes an organizer of a mail-art show makes a beautiful catalog and then offers it for sale to the participants. You surely know Lon Spiegelman's views in the 80-ies, that "Mail art & money don't mix". What are your views? How are things in the 90-ies?

Reply on 6-6-1995

CW: The death of Ray Johnson, January 13th, 1995 has proven that mail art and money make a nice honey pot. Ray's early letters and postcards can go for \$300,00 a piece. In the last 3 years as many as five dealers have been selling mail art archival materials. It is mail artists who sell the archives so I think Spiegelman's ism is hardly a mail art altruism. A myth, perhaps.

Italian painter Paolo Barrile invited mail artists to submit work to his "Earth Age Plastic Age" project and is now asking these participants to help pay for the catalogue book. I think that's a cheap shot, paying for one's book on the backs of those who submitted artwork that will be used. That's not how I

produced Eternal Network. All essayists received free copies. Eventually, those who sent artwork will get copies too. And it is very costly, we have given away nearly 20% of the edition!!! Maybe this is why so few publishers take on mail art books.

Barrile wrote to me that, "I haven't any publisher, any sponsor, bank, collector, gallery behind me. He claimed a thousand reasons, including his high blood pressure, for not being able to afford publishing. My question is simple, why didn't Barrile just be honest in the beginning and tell mail artists they wouldn't get a free copy in X-change for their work. Honesty can be respected but Barrile went about it all wrong. He is as bad as the art system that juries artists by slide, charging them to help finance the show, and then rejecting their work. I hate this form of chicanery and it is a big reason why I left the art system years ago!

RJ : During this interview you managed to get you own homepages on the Internet and started the EMMA. In my eyes the homepages are a strange step in mail art. The sender is preparing something, but then the receiver has to reach out and get the homepages himself. The sending of information/graphics/etc. isn't automatically there in homepages. The homepages look like a cybergallery but with a completely different access-level for all. What is the function of homepages for email-art?

CW: Ruud, I don't know how many homepages you've browsed on the World Wide Web, but I will

have to tell you from my experience that the sending of information/graphics etc. IS there on World Wide Web homepages IF the homepage creator provides for such access. Conceptually, EMMA pokes fun at the idea of museums, and since she is an electronic museum there is certainly more to her than looking at a cybergallery.

Home pages are powerful, interactive pages utilizing hypertext tags. Homepages on the World Wide Web require addresses as in traditional snail mail art. The World Wide Web homepage address is known as a URL (Uniform Resource Locator). Without a URL there can be no homepage. As in snailmail, the address is the art. Placing a homepage on the Web is also like posting a message except the website can also be an interactive mailbox whereby viewers are given a window to create and transmit email to the website artist. In one sense you could call a website mail art's new hyper-media post office where the community can once again gather to exchange ideas, debate, gossip, greet one another, and co-create on visual and textual art projects. Sight and sound are now possible points for real time interaction on internet websites. Websites will be wonderful mail art resource centers for community access in the global village.

I've created a cyberspace Artistamp Gallery as one of the rooms in EMMA and there I've posted an invitation to participate in "Cyberstamps," mail art's first exhibition on the World Wide Web. Artoposto has sent a stamp encoded as a GIF which I've

decoded and placed in the Artistamp Gallery. Cyberstamps can be created on or offline, so I'm inviting all mail artists to contribute to the exhibition. It's a great way to have your artwork shown to a huge international online audience. So send your stamps to Cyberstamps, PO Box 370, Etna, NH 03750, or as GIFS via email to Cathryn.L.Welch@dartmouth.edu. Deadline will be November 1, 1995. Oh yes, not having a computer isn't an excuse for not entering!

Increasingly, you'll be finding mail artists without computers gaining access to internet through those who do - there's the inherent generosity and goodwill among mail artists that will generate that possibility. The Electronic Museum of Mail Art, the first World Wide Web site entirely devoted to mail art in cyberspace, will be a forum, gallery space, and meeting place for all mail artists. At this early stage, I've used my website to help interconnect website artists, unix artists, and commercial internet servers. Current postings in the Emailart Directory alert online artists to the existing cyberspace (internet) community of mail artists (numbering about 200). My mail art website has since March, incited other online mail artists such as GeORge Brett to revamp their websites to include mail art. Mark Bloch just went online May 1, and James Warren Felter, a well known artistamp curator, phoned last week to say he would be placing a homepage on the web next month. Mario Lara, longstanding California mail artist, sent email today notifying me of his new online address. There are scores of North American

mail artists linking to the internet every day. I think Telenetlink has been a good motivator for progressive mail artists who have taken up the Telenetlink challenges. It has created a great deal of controversy, especially as related in Gianni Broi's new edition "Alternative Creativity and Human Values: Free Dogs in the Galaxy." In that book, Broi comments that "the Telenetlink project by Chuck Welch can be defined as 'accelerated conversion.'" Mail art in cyberspace has broadened the horizons of what it means to be a mail art networker."

RJ : I'm also very much interested in statistics. Could you tell me how much E-mail, snail-mail & visitors to your homepages you got in June. Which percentage of the mail did you answer or will you finally be able to answer?

Reply on 28-07-1995

(Besides this e-mail Chuck also sent a snail-mail with a sample-list of the e-mail he receives)

CW: Like you, I get a lot of junk emailart. I'd say roughly the same amount of worthless, thoughtless junk I get in the postal mailstream. I just don't have time to answer anything that doesn't show creative initiative, curiosity, or genuine person-to-person warmth and interaction. I love getting correspondence art, but so few send it. So what do I do with stuff I can't or won't answer? I put it in the trash can by my desk or the trash can icon on my PC.



How many visit me via email as a result of the Electronic Museum of Mail Art on the World Wide Web? There's a way to tell at Dartmouth College, but I haven't had time to check. When I arranged a website at Arleen Schloss' May 20th exhibition at A's Gallery (SoHo, NYC), "Homage to Ray Johnson." Judith Hoffberg emailed me that she helped many in attendance access my website "Tribute to Ray Johnson." This emailart exhibition is still posted on the World Wide Web at the Emailart Gallery:

<http://mmm.dartmouth.edu/pages/user/cjkid/EmailartGallery>.

Back to your question. I'd say I get ten emailart messages a day. Many contacts are in response to my website, my mail art edition "Eternal Network," or to my own queries in cyberspace. In comparison, I get about six or seven pieces of snail mail each day. Today I got eight pieces of snail mail, half from Europe. I gotta tell ya, I can't continue to pay the current postage rates. Just last week the United States Postal System hiked their overseas airmail rates from 50 cents per half oz. to 60 cents. Rates to Canada changed from 40 cents per half oz. to 46 cents. The cost of a postcard to Canada jumped up 25% from 30 cents a card to 40 cents. This makes my emailart a very competitive second choice to mail art.

Hey, I've got a new "Netshaker Online" ready for you. The current issue is about Clemente Padin's work bringing Telenetlink to South America. Maybe I'll have that issue to you by tonight. Just read your

"Mail-Interview With Rod Summers" and found one of your questions rather strange. You stated, "Last year Crackerjack Kid tried to start the TELENELINK 95 project. I'm not sure if it really started or not. I was surprised by the question because obviously during the months that have elapsed in this interview, you've known all about Telenetlink. You have told me and written many times in your publications that you are a participant in the Networker Telenetlink 95. Are you, and if so, how are you helping to bring the Telenetlink concepts to the European mail art community? Also, when are you going to send me a "cyberstamp" GIF for Mail Art's first online mail art exhibition?"

RJ : Well, I will answer you questions by separate mail, but here is my next question for you. I know that some mail-artists sold or traded their mail-art archive to the postal museums. Do you think this is a good thing to do?

CW: I hadn't heard about mail art archives purchased by postal museums. What parties are you referring to? Without knowing the names or reasons for those mail artists who are selling/trading their personal archives, I can't make a judgment as to whether such activities are good or bad.

I suppose there isn't much I can do if you wanted to destroy your own archive. There have been mail artists who have performed such acts. I once had a girlfriend I wrote to while I served in Vietnam. When I came home we dated awhile and months later broke up. Then years later I asked if she would xerox

certain of my letters containing poems and drawings. She replied that her ex-husband in a fit of jealousy burned every letter I ever mailed. I was outraged and felt that an old sacred bond had been violated by a stranger. Don't you think that letters and art are gifts of the heart?

I guess there's always the risk that some mail artists are not above ripping your heart out. Ray Johnson called last year complaining that other mail artists were selling his postcards for up to \$300.00 each. He said, "They can't do that, I want to stop it from happening." I said, "You have two choices, 1) start placing copyright notices with each work, or 2) stop mailing art" What is left of mail art when it becomes a copyright? Where is the cutting edge at that point?

You have the right to sell my "gifts" if that is your objective, but anyone doing such is going to have trouble maintaining connections in the network. As you know, word gets out fast in the network. Of course, if you drop out of the network, what others think may not matter to you at all. I know a lot of mail artists who feel they have earned the right to sell their archives. Most everything in an archive was acquired through a great amount of personal cost in time, energy and finances. I'm certain, for example, there are some mail artists who are holding their archives like an IRA retirement account.

RJ : What will be the future of your archive?

Reply on 23-8-1995 (internet)

CW: I have given away The Networker Databank to the University of Iowa's "Alternative Traditions in the Contemporary Arts Archive" but I will continue to maintain the Eternal Network Archive as long as I'm involved in mail art. At present it is the largest catalogued mail art archive in North America. As such, I hope it will become an important center for study and research to anyone interested in the role of the networker.

RJ : Well, I guess it's now time to end this interview. Maybe there is something I forgot to ask you?

Reply on 29-8-1995 (internet)

CW: Hey Ruud, you've got so many questions and I've got to go change the triplet's diapers. I suppose that's a good enough reason to end the talk. Good luck with all your other interviews in netland and I hope other mail artists will appreciate the hard work you're doing. I do. See you in the mailstreams (cyberspace & mail artdom).

RJ : Thanks for the interview!



## JOHN HELD JR. – SAN FRANCISCO

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH JOHN HELD JR

(PART-2 )

Started on 2-5-1996

RJ : Well John, I think it is time now to start the second part of our interview. During the first part of the interview you were living in Dallas, and now you are already some time in San Francisco. How big is the difference between Dallas and San Francisco?

Reply on 25-5-1996

JH : As I write this Ruud, I am in Helena, Montana, to open the Faux Post artist stamp exhibition on another of its travels, which will continue until 1998. I'm not sure if the European newspapers have reported much about it, but there is a man imprisoned here called the Unabomber. For twenty years he was sending bombs through the mail. So he's like an extremist mail artist, right? I'm not sure mail art is as

dangerous an activity as the actions of this terrorist (whose target was a technological society), but it is still my firm believe that mail art can be an agent of change, a subversive activity, a way of examining the society in which we live.

There is an exhibition now being formed in Germany, which is exploring the effect mail art had on the East German intellectual and artistic community. And just recently I've received a letter from Alexandor Jovanovic, documenting his Cage magazine, and the anti-embargo actions of himself and Tisma, Kamperelic, Bogdanovic, and Gogolyk in Yugoslavia. So here are but two instances of mail art playing an important role in the public sector, and the power it has to effect ideas. Between my move from Dallas to San Francisco, I have not changed my ideas about the importance of mail art in my life, and in that of society.

What changes have occured since my move from Dallas to San Francisco? Ruud, this has been the happiest and most productive period of my life. The differences

of living in the two cities are great, and I'll try to explain it to you.

You have to understand that the cultural climate in the United States has become more and more conservative in the nineties. Dallas is a particularly traditional city with its emphasis on business and as a stronghold of conservative religious feeling. When I left the city, I had a retrospective show of my years there and I was called an eccentric in the critical reviews. Of course, I welcome the controversy. I would have been disappointed if all my ideas were totally embraced. I like to think of myself as an artist out of the mainstream, dealing with issues that most artists don't even know exist, but still this reaction to my work was indicative of my stay in Dallas. I was an outsider. So I, like many of my fellow mail artists, reached out through the postal system to others that were more sympathetic to our view of life.

The artistic climate is completely different in San Francisco. It is one of the last bastions of liberal thought in the United States, and has a long history of tolerance (beatniks, the drug culture, gays). There is a whole



community here that is engaged in the alternative arts.

As you know, I moved into an apartment with Ashley Parker Owens, the editor of "Global Mail", and the subject of one of your Mail Interviews. When I lived in Dallas, I had very few people to talk to about mail art. Ashley and I are in constant dialogue about it. And with Ashley I have built in social life because we go to dinner together, for walks, and to events around the city. Ashley and I are very different people, but we understand each other. Ashley doesn't save things like I do. After she enters her mail for listings in "Global Mail", she passes it on to me. Ashley is concerned with the process of mail art, while I am also concerned with the preservation of its history. Ashley doesn't believe in history, because it singles out certain people, to the exclusion of others. I don't think that I operate in this way, although certain people are connected with ideas that I find interesting and deserve mention.

Ashley also has a broad reach into the zine community, and we've met a lot of people in this field. She sets up little dinners where we meet people who publish. I'm also

reviewing for "Factsheet Five", which is the big zine that reviews other zines. Seth Friedman is the editor, and I go over to his apartment to enter my reviews. I get to see the zines sent in for review and have gained a perspective on this huge publishing phenomena. Seth takes much of the really good stuff for himself to review, but I've become very interested in the sex zines, which is a whole sub-culture of various fetishes. I'm really curious about the sex subcultures of San Francisco. It's a fascinating world that is at the forefront of preserving freedom of expression.

I haven't even mentioned my work with Picasso Gaglione at the Stamp Art Gallery, which is really my main focus in San Francisco. Gaglione and I have corresponded since the mid seventies, when I first discovered mail art. We are on the same wavelength. We know the same people and are very much interested in the history of mail art.

Bill and I are hard workers. We know that we have an unique situation and we want to take advantage of it. Bill is a famous graphic artist, and his catalogs have always been real interesting. But now I am here to

add some written texts to his design skills, and isn't just a perfect situation. We have two or three shows a month and we put together catalogs for many of them. So far we've done catalogs on Yves Klein (his "Blue Stamp" of 1957), Robert Watts (the Fluxus Artist), Andrej Tisma, M.B. Corbett, Yugoslavian Networkers, a travel diary of our trip to "Alternative Artfest" in Seattle and a visit to Western Front in Vancouver, Canada, Paulo Bruscky, Cavellini, and Ken Friedman. We've also done artist stamp portfolios for E.F. Higgins, Donald Evans, and Harley. And since the gallery is connected with Stamp Francisco rubber stamp company, we have done boxed sets of rubber stamps on the works of Tisma, Friedman, Corbett, Endre Tot, and Luce Fierens. We are going to New York City very soon to show all this work at Printed Matters bookstore, one of the leading artist book stores in the world.

Gaglione and I have also curated a show of "Our Fifty Favorite Mail Art Exhibition Catalogs" for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Library. It was a great show, and the first show that I know of that focused on this particular aspect of mail art.

Every month we organize performances of classic Fluxus works by people like Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Ben Vautier, and Robert Watts as part of the gallery's "Fluxfest 96". We also have classes at the gallery and have featured Seth Friedman, about making zines, Mick Mather on eraser carving, and I gave a class on rubber stamp publications.

I've have also many friends in San Francisco! Joolee Peeslee has just moved here from Boulder, Colorado. She's a long time correspondent. Barbara Cooper is another correspondent I like very much also. Mike Dyar is a wonderful friend, and there are many others like Patricia Tavenner, Diana Mars (who works with Gaglione and me at the Gallery), Ted Purves, and Seth Mason.

There is an opportunity to meet interesting people here in San Francisco, which I didn't have in Dallas. I met Timothy Leary at a book signing party, and I did an interview with V. Vale of Re/Search publications, who is doing a two volume set on zines. I talked to him about the international zine scene, and the important role played by the mail art community.

RJ : Well, a long answer that triggers a lot of questions in my head. But first a question about the previous interview (Part-1). Did you get any reactions on the answers you gave?

Reply on 29-6-96

JH : Sorry for the very long answer to your first question. I was on a trip and was trapped on a plane. I had to do something. It's hard for me to sit still.

I had some people mention that they read the interview. But I don't have any specific memories about their response. It's enough for me to put out signals, hoping that they will land in a place where it's appreciated. You never know exactly what words will effect some people. I get enough indications that my work is appreciated to satisfy me, and I also get my fair share of criticism. I don't let the good words me too high, or the negative ones too low. I do my work because it's what interests me. I try not to get sidetracked by the opinions of people who don't really know me or my work. I have very specific goals, both long range and short, which take a very sharp focus to complete.

RJ : Never say sorry for a long answer. I enjoyed reading about the changes because I am about to see San Francisco/USA for the first time myself. You mentioned that you have quite specif goals, both long range and short. You might guess I am curious about these goals....., especially the long range ones.

Reply on 1-8-1996

JH : Right now I'm very involved in the day-to-day activities of the Stamp Art Gallery, and we are half-way through our schedule for the year. In the next months we will be showing Guy Bleus, yourself, Pawel Petasz, and Géza Perneczky in our rubber stamp exhibition program. We will also be showing the artistamp works of Ed Varney, James Warren Felter, Dogfish, and Bugpost.

I'm certainly awaiting your arrival here, and we have already been receiving many works for your TAM Rubber Stamp Archives show, in which you have been mailing out special sheets for the eveny that have been sent directly to the Gallery.

I'm also looking forward to putting together catalogs on the collected writings of Guy

Bleus, who has been an active and incisive writer on mail art over the years, and on the artistamps writings of James Warren Felter. For each catalog I will be writing an introduction. We will also be doing a catalog on Pawel Petasz, who has been an important figure in Eastern European mail art. It is a region of the mail art map that interests me very much.

I'm currently working on a project not connected with our exhibition schedule, but which is of great interest. Gaglione was involved in the Bay Area Dada group in the early seventies, and they produced a variety of publications, like the New York Weekly Breeder, the West Bay Dadaist, Punks, Nitrous Oxide, and Dadazine, which preceded the explosion of photocopy zines, and the punk and industrial music scenes, later in the decade. I've gathered some one hundred publications produced from 1970 to 1984 by the members of this group, which include Gaglione, Tim Mancusi, Steve Caravello, Charles Chikadel, Mony Cazazza, Anna Banana, Patricia Tavenner, Irene Dogmatic, Ric Soloway, Buster Cleveland, Winston Smith, Rocola, Ginny Lloyd and others.

The Bay Area Dada group was an important link between the New York Correspondence School and Fluxus, and an important influence on a completely new generation of mail artists that sprang up in the seventies. In the future I'd like to explore other pockets of early mail art activity, like the Canadian groups Image Bank and General Idea, who were also responsible for the international spread of mail art.

But if I can do only one more project before I die, I'd like to do some major research on Ray Johnson and the beginnings of the New York Correspondence School. There's almost nothing written on this, and now is the time to interview the participants, who are now becoming older. Ray Johnson is already dead, and so is May Wilson, who was an important link in this history. Next year I'll get my chance to begin work on this, as The Stamp Art Gallery will have a two month show on the NYCS. I'll start my research with William S. Wilson, the son of May Wilson and the most informed authority on Ray Johnson, John Evans and E.M. Plunkett (who gave the school its' name). Then I'll see were else I'll be lead.



Next year the Gallery's direction will be totally different from this year. Instead of two or three shows a month (sometimes even four or five), Gaglione and I will be organizing only six shows that will run for two months each. This will give us more time to concentrate on bigger topics that interest us. One of these will be on the New York Correspondence School. Another will be on Arman, the Nouveau Realist artist, who did a series of rubber stamp works in the mid-fifties. I am already in communication with him and his staff on this, and it will be a major research project that will be the first in-depth of this important series.

Another exhibition will feature Fluxus rubber stamp works, and Gaglione and I intend to do as many rubber stamp box sets with these artists as is possible. Our biggest influence at the Gallery is Fluxus, so it will be a great opportunity to work with those artists who have directed our work.

We will also be doing a show on the late San Francisco Robert Fried, who was best known for his psychedelic poster art, but who also did several large sheets of postage stamps. It is very important to me to explore the works of San Francisco artists

who participated in mail art, used rubber stamps, and produced artistamps. I am not a writer and artist that can forget my immediate environment. I want to absorb its' history so I can move it forward.

Last May when I was in New York for our show at Printed Matter I was at William S. Wilson's apartment, and he dropped a remark that caught me off guard. He said something to the effect that "when you finish your ten volume set on mail art..."

I don't seriously consider doing such a thing, but it began me thinking what the titles in that series would be. I can see them sitting on a library shelf. All bound in similar bindings. It's a tempting but improbable vision.

RJ : Together with your answer you also sent the info about your new homepage on the internet. As you know I have mixed feelings about mail art and the internet, although I do use the internet quite often for my job and for communication and the placing of information on the net (all interviews that are finished are on the net, and also the newsletters of the TAM Rubber Stamp

Archive and other projects). What do you expect from your new site on the internet?

Reply on 23-8-1996

JH : Not very much. I was doing some editing for a Brazilian women in San Francisco, who manages the website for the Rainforest Coalitions and also has her own website. I was initially excited about it because her internet address is <http://www.artnetwork.com>, which was just too close to what I'm involved in to be coincidental. So she put up my essay, From Moticos to mail Art, and some biographical information up on it. She had a plan to offer space on her website to mail artists for a nominal rate, but as you yourself have told me, it's possible to get on the web for free, and I feel a little funny pushing her site in the mail art network, despite the nominal costs. It would be one thing if I had continual access to update and more space for more writings. But I don't, and that's why I'm not too interested in it at this point.

I have an interest in website construction because it provides wide and fast access to information, but most of it strikes me as too promotional and not enough interaction. I

have less and less interest in electronic information transfer, as it is increasing difficult for me to answer all the postal correspondence I receive. Why take on an added responsibility, and one that doesn't give me what I want, which is printed materials, either hand constructed by the artist, or catalogs and other materials that document the mail art phenomena.

Besides, Ruud, I spend too much time in front of the computer keyboard writing. It's a relief to get away from it once and awhile. Letter writing and mailing out has always been a way for me to relax. I like the quiet time at the desk and chance to work with my hands.

I'm aware that this reluctance to dive headfirst into cyberspace dates me. A certain aspect of the world is passing me by. But then again, I don't get cable television either. There's such a thing as too much information.

RJ : Well, believe it or not, I am also not that enthusiast about the internet as a substitute for my mail art. For me the computer-work was always there for almost 20 years, and the art I produced kept the balance just

right, so just like you I am happy to leave the computer keyboard now and then and to get into the real world instead of the cyber world. For me the person BEHIND the mail art is always the most interesting part of the communication. Is that also the case for you (of course I know the answer is yes, but I wonder WHY it is so for you.....)

reply on 18-9-1996

JH : Way back in the beginning of this interview (Part One) I'm sure I mentioned that when I began in mail art it was because of my isolation, and I was reaching out through mail art to others that shared my interests. I found that mail artists were perfect companions for me, even though they did not share my physical proximity. I have had many interests that have demanded much of my time, and unfortunately, one thing you have to do when you are concentrating on your art or your writing is eliminate the casual friendships that so many take for granted. It's often very lonely, and so I am grateful for the relationships I've formed through the mail. It has helped me over some very difficult times. My fellow mail artists are my best friends. I've

corresponded with many of them over twenty years.

Of course, things have changed somewhat since I've moved to San Francisco. The mail artists are here. The zinesters are here. Many of my correspondents are here. So now, many of my friendships and mail art relations are intertwined. Gaglione and I see each other almost every day, and God knows what will happen in the future, but for now, it's the most remarkable thing for me. We keep pushing each other towards new and better things. Because of our mutual knowledge of mail art, we are almost psychically joined. And although I am constantly amazed by his creativity, the most amazing part to me is that we are best friends in real time as well as mail time. These things can sometimes work out!

In this regard, it would be wrong of me not to mention Ashley Parker Owens, who has been my roommate for the last year. Has this ever happened before I wonder? When two active mail artists have spent so much time with one another? Netlandia is like a little island where we wait for the bottles to wash ashore for us. And when they arrive, we share our catch and our stories of the

people who float them to us. I've gained much by living with Ashley, but our time together is growing short. Not only are we both moving to separate parts of San Francisco in the next month, but Ashley is no longer going to be the editor of Global Mail. She always envisioned her mission as a spiritual one, and now the time has come for her to pass on the work to another. Am I upset about this? Yes, because like all of us I have grown to depend on her and respect her work so much. But the opportunity to know her far outweighs my dependency.

But let me make no mistake about my true feelings. The structure of mail art is important to me. This vehicle of linking the world, cutting through cultures, and teaching us how to live with one another, is paramount. The characters enter and exit, but the play remains. My correspondents come and go. Eventually, I too will depart. What gives me strength is knowing that there will always be a means for people to explore and grow closer on a planetary scale. And the result is never an accumulation of mail, or artist books, or artistamp sheets, or rubber stamps.... it's the

friendships paving the avenues on the way to tomorrow.

(John's answer came just before my departure to San Francisco where I went for the exhibition about the TAM Rubber Stamp Archive at the Stamp Art Gallery in October 1996. John helped me a lot during this trip and as friends we undertook lots of things together. Besides the exhibition and the meeting of old and new friends I also met 9 of the people I have interviewed, or am currently interviewing, including John Held. Since we discussed on lots of topics and issues I never could decide on the next question, and therefore it took me some time to come up with a next question).

RJ : Well, it took me some time to come back to you with a next question. As you might guessed from the report I wrote on my trip to the USA, I enjoyed it very much indeed. Due to these and other travels it took some time to send the next question, but here it is. It is about an observation I have on the mail art network, and I would like to hear your views on it.

A problem I see in mail art is that the 'oldies' in mail art have selected their fixed circle of



mail art friends around them and do not easily answer the mail of newcomers. Sometimes they even don't take part in the open mail art projects again, so newcomers don't even know about their existence and can't easily grasp what the history is of the network. Is this a correct observation?

next answer on 8-4-1997

(With his answer John Held enclose some more recent artistamps and also two photo's taken at the Pacific Rim Artistamp Congress , Feb 22-23 1997).

JH : There is a built in problem in mail art, because at first there is a lot of energy. You are meeting new people and receiving incredible things. Your energy encourages their energy.

Soon your contacts grow larger. You are not only writing letters to an ever widening circle of correspondents, but entering mail art shows, organizing your own projects, making tourism to meet your distant friends, working on enclosures like artistamps and perhaps publishing your own small zine.

Under the right circumstances this process can go on for years. But sometimes the

system breaks down. As your contacts become more numerous, questions of time and money begin to enter the picture. If you're an artist in another medium, or a banker, or a physical therapist, you have to ask yourself the question, which takes precedent - your profession or this uncommercial yet life sustaining activity of mail art. It's a difficult decision.

So far I have been able to continue answering almost every piece of mail I receive. I enjoy newcomers as well as my long time correspondents. People drop away and others come. I don't have a fixed circle. The only fixture in my mail art life is the constant stream floating around me.

But I understand all too well the difficulties. In the last year I've witnessed the fading away of Ashley Parker Owens from the Network. Nobody was more active than her. She is an administrator on a grand scale, as your interview with her about her editorship of Global Mail testifies.

Global Mail was a mission; a spiritual giving. God only knows the effect she had on many lives around the world as a result of her compiling mail art information on

different shows, publications and projects. The people she was able to bring together was legion.

But Ashley literally went bankrupt as a result of funding Global mail out of her own salary. Time became a problem when she wanted to concentrate on Yoga - and on a life. Unmarried for a long time, she had a vision of a baby girl and six months later she became pregnant. People often say that there is no gender barriers in mail art. I've said it myself. But watching Ashley, I've learned that priorities shift, and motherhood is a strong pull.

Ashley passed on the editorship of Global Mail , which may or may not reappear. If not, another publication will eventually come along to take it's place, or attempt to take it's place. Ashley set a very high standard for the compilation of mail art information. And with what a heart. Global Mail was no intellectual exercise. It was a spiritual quest.

And who can blame Ashley for moving on? As much as she gave to the Network, she received a lot too. You never truly leave the Network. It's in your guts, and it impacts on

your life, even if you're unable to keep up with former correspondents.

But will the newcomers realize that the Network is larger than just the current mailing list of a mail art show? If you stick around long enough and pay attention, things begin to fall into place. We all start in ignorance and gain by our diligence.

Life in San Francisco is very different for me then it was in Dallas. Before I had a stable environment in which to do my mail art. Things are a bit more chaotic here. There are many more things to do, and it's hard to find the time to sit down and answer mail, prepare enclosures, and return the energy that flows into me.

I feel guilty that I can only answer very briefly someone who has obviously put in a lot of time to send me something. I can see how this guilt can keep one from activity. If you are known for a certain style and quality of mail art, you don't want to disappoint your correspondent by mailing out a half-hearted effort.

This conflict causes many old time mail artists to depart. I haven't reached that

stage yet. I'm hoping that my correspondents realize my situation, and that as much as I would like to send them a substantial reply each time, sometimes it is impossible.

But I can't separate myself from the Network. My life is too enmeshed in the day to day ritual of going to the mailbox and seeing what life has washed up on my shore. An empty mailbox is my greatest fear. Sometimes I'm mailing out of desperation. Fear wins out over guilt.

Correspondents find their own level, however. If newcomers are not getting the type of reply they want from the 'oldies' then they form a circle with others who are giving them what they want. This is o.k. Mail art is about process, and it's more important to partake in the process than it is to communicate with any one person. That's what the Eternal Network is all about. It's a constant shifting.

Some people don't want to know about the history of Mail Art. That's fine. You just go ahead and do it and make your own history. Others are more curious about what went before. There are ways to find out.

There is no ultimate level to reach for in mail art. You find your own.

RJ : A lot of mail artists still refer to the 'rules' of a mail art project. Is it necessary to have these rules (no jury , no rejection , documentation to all), or can mail artists make their own rules if stated in advance (like e.g. someone in Germany asking for a financial contribution to receive the basic material on which one has to work. If sent in one does get the documentation for free...). Does mail art need rules at all?

next answer on 28-8-1997

JH : Absolutely not. Because the whole point is to keep an open system going (The Eternal Network), and people should be participating solely for the joy and ease of it. Rules only weed people out.

That being said, organizers of exhibitions should realize that by charging for exhibition expenses, materials, documentation, or return postage, they are not going to get the fullest range of work they would normally receive. One reason for the popularity of the mail art show is that it doesn't have the roadblocks that normal

mainstream shows have: the expenses of slides, juries, fees to enter, paying for documentation.

In the beginning (as formulated by Lon Spiegelman, Mario Lara and others), the "no jury, no rejection, no fees, documentation to all," were "considerations," not rules. Those that are not considerate of mail art principles don't last long. They may be able to obtain works for a project or two, but the word eventually circulates through the network that someone is taking advantage of the free circulation of ideas and artworks, "Fool me once - shame on you. Fool me twice - shame on me", as the saying goes.

No, I have no trouble with people twisting the "rules" of mail art, if they are upfront about it. Such strategies as auctioning mail art works for a good cause such as Amnesty International at the end of an exhibition make perfect sense to me. What's the difference between this and having the works just sit in a box at the conclusion of the show? Just tell me about it first. Then I can decide whether I want to participate or not.

People who are too didactic about "the rules of mail art" are no better than the art academicians of the nineteenth century. Modern art was a rebellion against these traditions. Mail artists have extended this rebellion even further.

We know that mail artists come from every walk of life. Nothing infuriates me more than a wealthy mail artist, someone with the latest computer equipment, often living off the wages of a spouse, telling me what I can and cannot do with my own collection of mail art. Another rule-mail art and money doesn't mix. Well, I tell you it does, because I've spent thousands of dollars over the years not only on postage, but acquiring mail art publications and works from dealers into whose hands they fall.

I have the same problems that many long time participants in mail art face: how does an alternative artist, with little or no income coming from his activities, pay for their mailings in the light of higher postage rates, increased correspondents, and the storage of work received as a result of participating in mail art over a number of years?



As a result of my move to San Francisco from Dallas, I am no longer able to archive materials in my home. Most of my collection is in storage, which costs me \$100 a month. That's \$ 1,200 dollars a year to preserve these works. I don't sell any of it because it's important to me to keep all the material together so that a full record can someday be obtained from it.

But I wonder how this can go on. I'm an artist, not a rich collector. This is not some hobby of mine. It's my life. You don't sell your life, or view it as an investment. You preserve it as long as you can, and then hope that the accumulated body of it can inform and inspire someone else after you are gone.

But holding it intact is a growing concern of mine. And if I wish to sell some of the duplicate publications I've received over the years, I'll have no compunction in doing so when the time arises. Or selling some of the duplicate stampsheets that I've perforated for others in exchange for my services. It's my choice alone to do what is necessary in regard to my own unique

situation. When I hear of someone with no financial worries stating that under no circumstances must mail art be sold, it worries me that there is an art Gestapo at our borders.

RJ : I think it is time now to let others read this second part of the interview. Normally I ask the people I interview if I forgot to ask them something? Did I?

(At the MAIL ART ONLINE assembly I found John Held's message that he sent me the last reply but it hadn't reached me. So I sent him the last question and text again so he could react again. John Held uses the account of a friend to surf now and then)

next answer on 29-5-1998 (via e-mail)

JH : Well, dear Ruud, as you know, we are both very busy people, and we've let some time go between our questions. In concluding this interview, let me bring you up to date on my life "in the jungle of art," as the late Cavellini put it. In December 1997, Gaglione was forced to close Stamp Francisco and The Stamp Art Gallery, due in part, I think, because of all the money he spent on the artistic, rather than the business aspects of

it. But he has started a new rubber stamp company, Stampland, in his basement, just as Stamp Francisco was started all those years ago. Bill and I continue to meet on a regular basis. We are working on a book together for Vittore Baroni. Also we meet with Tim Mancusi, Rocola and Arthur Craven (of Bay Area Dada fame) frequently to socialize. That's a little funny too, because Rocola is practically a hermit otherwise. In September 1998, I will be curating an exhibition at the San Francisco Public Library on the publications of the Bay Area Dadaists, 1970-1984. I've spend much time these past two years reviewing zines for "Factsheet 5", for which my roommate, Chris Becker, has been the editor the past two issues. In the last issue, I had a big article called, "From Dada to DIY: The Rise of the Alternative Arts." I'd like to do more work on this subject, because I see mail art as the natural conclusion of avant-garde activity in this century. It's almost over you know, and for me it's a time for reflection. I don't see myself going on to something new-producing web pages, for example. Instead I want to write about the activity I have been witness to and document it before all traces of it vanish, which it will

unless mail artists, like ourselves, bear witness to it. I haven't seen too much interest in mail art from traditional art historians. Maybe that's right around the corner or thirty years down the road. For me, it doesn't matter. Mail art has provided me a lifetime of enjoyment participating in the radical art of our time. Maybe I wasn't around to walk down the streets of Paris with Duchamp and Picabia, but do you remember your last day in San Francisco, when you, Dogfish and I marched in a Mexican parade for the Day of the Dead, with people dressed as skeletons holding candles in the night? For me, that was a worthwhile adventure in the late Twentieth Century.

RJ : Thanks for this interview John!



## JULIE HAGAN BLOCH

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH JULIE HAGAN BLOCH  
(USA)

Started on: 7-3-95

RJ : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 20-6-1995

JHB: Well, It was probably around the early '80's.... 1983 maybe. It sort of pounced.... I'd been carving eraser-stamps for a few years & heard of a couple of rubberstamp magazines, Rubberstamp-madness & National Stampagraphic. I wrote to them and they both showed favorable interest in my carvings right away. Very quickly I was corresponding with some folks via the rubberstamp magazines, and also got in a group that exchanged mail-art on a monthly basis. I forget the name of the group now; it was in 1984 or 1985 , but I still

correspond with Kay Sluterbeck & Tom Nelson whom I met in that group. That group may still be going on as far as I know; after a while I had to drop out because of being short of extra time! I'm still short of "extra" time, but I work around it!

Anyhow, these few contacts led to others & I just kept going with it! Always, though, what intrigued me most was eraser-carving. Still does. Other things get put aside so I can do more carving. One thing that's so great about mail-art is it's an ideal form for sharing carved images. Mail-art lets me feel in touch artistically, even though I live in a very small town. I truly cherish my fellow-artists/correspondents. I have the best of it all here - peace, quiet, & lovely surroundings, and contact with other artists. Our post-office enjoys the unusual variety that gets sent to me too. I give them samples of the artistamps I make, and they put them up behind the counter. Like my own refrigerator-display! (In your country, do the mothers of small children tape up the kids' artworks on the refrigerator door?) Well, enough for that question, nu?

RJ : Well, maybe you should do a project on refrigerator's doors? Mine is decorated with

magnet-artworks I received through the mail.... Your eraser-carvings are quite well known in the network. Sometimes your work is even used as illustrations in books. How did you become so good? Maybe you could tell me how the proces of making one stamp evolves.

Reply on 21-9-1995

JHB: The first part is having an idea you want to work with! Then, tools assembled, do your drawing, work with it until you're pleased with it, transfer it to the eraser, and carve it! Often, I continue the drawing process with the carving tools: refining, deleting, adding texture, or re-designing if I either change my mind or make a mistake! And I'll let you in on a little secret: the end result is hardly ever exactly as I had envisioned it! But also, it's hardly ever worth re-doing; time's better spent on trying not to make the same "mistake" on another carving - or else using the information gained deliberately to create a similar effect.

The key to gaining skill in the process is not unique to eraser-carving. Practice. A lot



(I've carved over 2,000 stamps by now.)  
Love the work. Put your heart & mind to it.  
Concentrate. Have fun with it! Be open to  
learn whatever you can from a variety of  
sources. Recognize that all your skills are a  
gift, and use them with love & respect.  
Practice. Love. Attention.

I made a stamp about this topic too: "ALL-  
PURPOSE MAGIC TRICK LEARNED WHILE  
CARVING STAMPS: Don't work carelessly,  
thinking, "why be careful? I can't do it well,  
anyhow." because then, you'll probably be  
right. Take the time and care needed,  
WORK AS THOUGH YOU EXPECT TO BE ABLE  
TO DO IT VERY WELL because then, you'll  
probably be right."

(This complete text Julie carved in a eraser  
sometimes in very tiny and precise letters.  
The carving shows her very wonderful skills  
when it comes to making eraser-carvings  
with very fine details)

Oh - a few, actually: "CHECK OUT the work  
of wood engravers and wood block  
carvers!" , "What to carve? Look around  
you! Look inside you!" , "Contents: Helpful, I  
hope, but NOT TO BE TAKEN TOO

SERIOUSLY.... Do whatever works for you!  
Invent something new! JUST CARVE!!!"

(These are all on the back cover of my little carving book.)

Another point about skill in carving is keeping the enthusiasm fresh. One way I do that is to apply eraser carving to whatever my current interest happens to be. (For heavens sake, one can carve anything!) Lately I've been fascinated with ancient Egyptian art & hieroglyphs. (Sadly, I'm lacking a teacher for hieroglyphs, but I do have a couple of excellent texts to work with.) I'm having a wonderful time with it all, and of course it shows up in carved stamps!

RJ: Yes, it sure does! Do you also carve in wood and make larger works?

Reply on 12-10-1995

JHB: I have carved in wood in the past, but haven't for years. The grain of the wood always seemed to have a different opinion than I did about where a line should go, & we never reached a mutual understanding.

I also used to do larger works - when I was in art school ( a little over 20 years ago!) I

preferred large canvases, say 4 x 6 feet, & 18 x 24 inch watercolors & drawings.... But as the time goes by I find that I prefer to work much smaller for many reasons: large pieces require physical strength to manipulate & lots of space for storage, & are harder to share with people many miles away. And large sized works are easy to accept as they are, in the sense of size, and the viewer remaining as is..... Small works seem to ask the viewer to become of a size to enter the work, because it's too hard to see it well otherwise. One must change & enter into a different view of the world. I guess that sounds weird. That's okay. Weird is fine too. It's good to help shake off the idea that some people may have that this existence is "normal", whatever THAT is. Magic is normal, & it's everywhere! Just walking outside today, in this gorgeous Autumn weather one breathes magic! It's more than just the delightful beauty of scent & color.... it's a feeling.... I love it!

It's necessary for me to try to convey some of this in the thing I do. Whether it comes across or not, well, who knows? But it is important that I try, & the magic is ALL of it - the form, color, feeling, & my state of being

as I work. I think people would do well to remember we can all do magic. Putting one's heart and spirit into a made object - that's magic and very healing for the doer & the viewer. I think one also receives the blessings of whatever the attention focuses on, and of course blessings are extended to the object or place or person or animal that is drawn or carved.

RJ : In the latest pieces of mail I received from you, I noticed that you are influenced by old historic subjects these last months. What is so attractive about the Eastern culture?

Reply on 2-12-1995

JHB: Ruud, I could say any number of things about this, but the main thing is that it just touches my heart. It is beautiful in a way that for me is magic, and it makes me want to be closer to it.

I was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (in New York City) several months ago, standing before some ancient Egyptian tomb carvings: scenes & hieroglyphs... tears came to my eyes and I wanted to know the heart of them, to be closer to that beauty. So since then I've been studying hieroglyphs

when I can, & looking at the drawings, paintings and sculpture, in books or in museums. It's magical, mysterious, seductive, lovely. It's for the same reason I studied Chinese 15 years ago: the art captures my heart.

RJ : Is it the story of your life, that you always follow what your heart tells you to do?

Reply on 3-2-1996

JHB: What a beautiful question! I think that's probably true for the major events of my life, and I believe that a lot of the time heart & head are in agreement.... or at least they conspire to make it seem so.... Even contemplating the question brings a smile to the heart & a feeling of love. What treasures these feelings are! To be in a space of love & beauty, just by thinking about them. Now there's magic! Thank you for bringing it on!

ps. Sometimes the pull of love is so strong, it's not a matter of choice: the only possible thing to do is to follow one's heart. Nothing else exists.

RJ : Again you sent me some beautiful prints of your newest rubber stamps. Do you keep all your erasers? How large is your collection?

Reply on 21-2-1996

JHB: No, I don't keep all my carvings. Some I make as gifts, some end up as gifts, a very few are commissioned pieces. But I do keep most of the carvings I make. I probably have about 2,000 and I like always to have at least around 50 uncarved erasers on hand, plus some of the larger sizes of carving material like Nasco's carving block, April Pease's "P-Z cut", & a few others which I can't recall just now. Sometimes I get an idea to do a series of carvings that eats up my supply of erasers, so I need to be prepared! It's best to go with the idea when it takes you by the hand. I love it when I'm able to just flow with the idea & draw and carve for long, uninterrupted stretches.

RJ : You sure are lucky that you can do that, and the results are really wonderful. When I myself got involved with the mail art network the magazine Rubberstampmadness was quite interesting for mail artists (as you told also in one of your previous answers). The most recent

issues I saw of the magazine were completely different to the ones from the beginning of the 80's. It has become a very large glossy magazine with lots of advertisings. What are your thoughts on these developments, that rubberstamping has become big business?

Reply on 5-3-1996

JHB: There is room for everybody & for all of it. RSM has evolved from charming, down-home small publication to classy, professional larger publication. It reaches more people now, yet has information on networking for many levels, some really cool artists, & so forth. Folks who wish to be less "glossy" are not prohibited from being so, for heaven's sake! I think it's a waste of good energy to get upset with people or entities for changing, as long as others are still free to go their own way. National Stampagraphic is a lot like it used to be years ago, very low-key, & lovable. That's the key, I think, to why these 2 (RSM & NS) are still around - love. It's not how "glossy" you are or aren't; it's how much love you work with - (and, of course, simply staying in business is due in part to luck!) - and both are full of love. There's so much "us" versus

"them" in this world - it's time people realized that there is no "THEM" ; it's ALL JUST "US".

And what's wrong with glossy, anyhow? I can't find fault with better reproduction of original pieces, more information on cool toys (via - 'gasp!' advertising!) - show me where this causes harm? If there's to be a complaint, let it be with real problems - like polluting our lovely Earth, torturing animals or people, stupid wars, supressing of others' beliefs, other forms of bigotry (religious, racial, social, etc.) OY VAY! You want problems? EASY to find. You know what else? I'm a lot different than I was in the beginning of the 80's too! And it's great! (and so are you, dear; you got me going on that one, didn't you!)

P.S. I bet there are lots of other rubberstamp publications out there that are very low key - this world is full of surprises!

P.P.S.I could get more in-depth philosophically, but it makes my ears itch. Enough philosophy already, let's make art!



RJ : Yes, I got you going there for a while. Sometimes it seems that art & money don't mix, but in reality they seem to be completely connected. In the 70's and 80's there were these discussions that mail art and money don't mix. Nowadays, with the high postal rates everywhere, the mail artists of the 90's know too well that money is needed to keep the post going and lots of recent larger mail art shows are sponsored to pay for the costs. What are your thoughts on this subject?

Reply on 2-4-1996

JHB: It seems to me a bit like complaining about the weather. Like it or not, what can one do about it? Individual solutions: make more intense (whatever THAT means!) art & correspond with fewer people, making a stronger individual connection; do mass-mailings but less frequently; get a grant; work with people in a smaller area & personal contact (within art schools, for example); pray for postal rates to go down! In fact, Ruud, I saved (somewhere - can't find it at the moment) a little quote you mailed me a year or two ago, something to the effect that one might reconsider methods if one is continually sending a

mass-produced letter about "Sorry I'm sending a mass-produced letter, but I don't have time to write". Why not pare down the number to those with whom quality correspondence is enjoyed? Mail art is supposed to be for enjoyment (isn't it??). Or, admittedly, at times to make a social or political point - but I suspect most of us do mail art because we like to. And in honesty I must admit that I seldom respond to "calls for mail art" for any given event unless the call is accompanied by a personal letter of some kind. Of works to do, I have plenty already, thank you! As I said: for me, it's about love, not how many pieces of mail I can move in a day.

As far as art & money mixing - well, sometimes they do & sometimes they don't! Clearly, one needs to survive; and clearly, art needs energy, love, time, & other resources. It can be more subtle, too. In 1991 I got breast cancer. I know why I got it; I was depressed because, due to having to take a "real" job, I couldn't make art.

*(...wow - I had to stop a moment & the moment stretched to over 2 weeks! Time-ways!)*

...so - with that diagnosis came the renewed determination to do what I believe I came here to do: show love for this amazing All-of-creation with my art. Please understand, this doesn't imply I'm any kind of world-class master artist. It just means that, for my own personal life, I must work with beauty, with love. Like birds who must sing, no matter what their song: crow or lark (I like them all!); no matter if they're heard or not.... though, to be sensible, I suppose the song often serves to attract mates or announce territorial borders... but I bet they'd sing anyhow. Lovely things, birds. Like listening to Kiri te Kanawa, for example, or Kathleen Battle.... like angels singing. Healing to the spirit.

Back to the question - yes, it is a shame when folks can't afford to mail as they'd like. When I was first married, money was very tight - though we had enough to physically survive, thank god - & I do remember not mailing as often as I would have liked, in order to save money... but what I did then is to do what I could do, & not get my shorts in a bunch, so to speak, because of what I couldn't do. I don't have enough time to

waste it on being critical like that. As I said before, do what you can do, and with love.

RJ : The envelope you sent your answer in was made from a page about astrology. What does astrology mean to you?

(On April 25th I received a first e-mail message from Julie Hagan Bloch. Nothing special, but just a test if she could reach me that way. I replied that here first e-mail arrived and that she could send in her answers that way too. However, I also told her that I would enjoy her snail-mail more because of the wonderful stampings she always uses).

Reply on 4-6-1996 (internet)

Hi, Ruud!

Yes, I will be sending you some goodies in the mail but I'm feeling a tad guilty at how long it's taken me to respond to the last question so I'm answering with the help of Thoth Ram-Dos (I did tell you that's our computer's name, didn't I?).

Astrology. I guess for me it's another bit of potentially useful information. Seems to me that this whole universe is pretty much all of

a piece, as it were, and that everything is therefore interconnected. I'm not an astrologer. Not enough time to devote to it. But now and then something I'll read in an astrology journal or an ephemeris will ring a bell and help me to gain a little insight. For example, the time I got breast cancer was when transiting Pluto was squaring my ascendant. (Yes, I know it sounds like gobbledygook. Well, it can't be helped.) Pluto has to do with deep transformation, sometimes pretty heavy duty. The ascendant is one's self-in-this-body, for lack of a more succinct explanation. So. Does that help?

On a different subject, David does the grocery shopping for our household, bless his heart. Last time he went, he brought back a golden-orange pepper, "just because it was so pretty". Now, I ask you, is that man a treasure or what? I'll be sending you a few little eraser-carvings I did using that pepper as a model. It really is a lovely thing, that pepper. The color is exquisite, and the shape of it is wonderful. The funny thing about it is that, since the U.S. Post Office recently issued a commemorative stamp of one of Georgia O'Keeffe's

paintings (the red poppy), I was looking through a book I've had (for almost 20 years!) of her work. I had in mind to think a bit about her and what she did, and perhaps carve a print or two in her honor. Looking through that lovely book, I was struck most by her just working with what delighted her eye. And that evening, David brings home the pepper. Aha! So in a way, the pepper prints are in honor of Georgia. What an incredible woman she was.

I'm also thinking that perhaps I'll go to the grocery store myself (I hate to shop, but maybe it wouldn't be so bad if it's for art supplies, so to speak), and see the shapes and colors in the produce department. In the seed catalogues I see lovely fruits and flowers and vegetables...peppers, for example, in red, green, yellow, orange, white, purple, just to name a few!

I'll send the prints off to you in the morning. Meanwhile, happy Spring!

RJ : Now I think of the subjects of your eraser carvings, it has mostly to do with daily life as well. Your latest answer came in by e-mail (you actually wrote it a few hours before I got it today!) and I wonder, what is a

computer too you, and what do you think of e-mail?

(this next question was sent only 30 minutes after I received her answer, by e-mail of course!)

reply on 2-7-1996 (internet)

JHB: HA! I just remembered where I put the interview question. Oy... when I get behind with paperwork, things do get lost! Okay, the question was about Thoth Ram-Dos, our computer, or computers in general.

Computers are great. E-mail is a big help for quick communication (well, it CAN be...!) and can be fun besides. What's not to like? The regular postal system still can be used for sending pictures and what-not. It's good to have both. The more options, the better. It's not as though use of the more traditional mail systems is now prohibited, for heaven's sake!

Besides the e-mail, I hope eventually to be able to use the computer for producing our books, which is the reason we got it in the first place. We still need to get a scanner, though, and until we do we can't do the books from the computer. There's a

program that can use my own calligraphy and use it as a font. (First have to have the scanner!) I like doing a LITTLE calligraphy, but it's getting so that my hand and shoulder cramp up too quickly to really enjoy doing an extended session of it. I do want to use my own lettering in our books, though, and having it available as a font is the way to go. Besides, that way I can spend more time drawing and carving, which I prefer. There I think the computer will be a help, too. In fact, that's the argument my husband used to get me to consider a computer in the first place. He said: "Think of being able to have your original artwork, blow it up big on the computer, touch it up, reduce it back to the original size, and have it camera-ready." I told him, "Oh, you tempter!"

And so Thoth Ram-Dos came to live in our house. I love the drawing and carving but I do not like to do the fiddly work involved in getting an image camera-ready. Once an image is carved, I want to do something else! There are so many things that I'd like to carve!



RJ : Besides the e-mail there are also the sites and homepages where people put their information on-line. What do you think of that?

Reply on 11-7-1996 (via e-mail)

JHB: I don't yet have a lot of experience with this part of the internet. I've played a bit with it, of course, but it still feels like getting a new foreign language textbook and skipping to the middle or end chapters: sometimes one is able to make sense of bits of it, and it is fun to work with it, but to really GET it a bit more study is required.

My impression as a novice is that one could easily spend a great deal of time in it.... So far, I've not had a lot of luck using it as a research tool. Although it seems almost everything is represented in some capacity, the representation usually is rather superficial. At present, I have far better luck in a good big bookstore. It isn't as time-consuming to "download" pictures in a bookstore, either! Using Georgia O'Keeffe as a reference again, I found a scant few illustrations of her work on the internet, but in a bookstore, aaah! Lovely illustrated

volumes, and the main problem is to choose which to buy! Such riches...

At any rate, I'm sure there is much good material in magic cyberspace, for one who knows how to access it. I'm sure I will eventually. I did have some luck, surprisingly enough, in finding eraser-carving-related items on the internet! The luck consisted mainly in having friends tell me the home page addresses (if that is the correct term) for them. I found yours, Ruud, and a few others. What fun! Yes, I can see how one could spend a LOT of time there!

Incidentally, Ruud, my lack of expertise is the reason for the delay in responding to your question. I don't have a lot to say that means much. But heavens, for not having much to say, I sure did natter on, no?!

This kind of communication is a far cry from that of even 50 years ago. I wonder what will be available in another 50 years! I guess that's all for now. Be well, dear. Love and blessings, Julie

RJ : Another subject I would like to ask before we end our interview is, "your archive". Do you keep all the mail that you get in? How do you deal with the flow of incoming mail?

reply on 5-10-1996 (e-mail)

JHB: Your last question related to archiving: "Do you keep all the mail that you get in? How do you deal with the flow of incoming mail?" As you can tell, sometimes the flow of incoming mail does not have a corresponding outflow very soon! Some mail is answered quickly, such as orders for the small books I publish; I try to fill orders and mail them out again within 48 hours. Questions about carving I put at the front of my "mail to be answered" stack. I must confess that though I like to answer mail promptly, often that stack waits a while for me to attend to it. The nearly three-month interval between your last question and my answering of it is surely a case in point! It was an interval, however, that saw the completion of the camera-ready copy for the next haiku book, which is now at the printer's awaiting its turn on the press. (I am glad about the book's reaching that stage, for sure!) Usually when I begin a correspondence with somebody, I warn

her/him that while I do answer my mail, the timing of the answer is totally unpredictable.

I don't keep all the mail that comes to the house. There's just too much of it. I keep what is special to me personally for one reason or another; and most of the rest of it I pass along. Some things that are not "keepers" but are of a large enough size, I use to line the bottom of the rabbits' cages when I clean them. I have to use something, after all! Mail art is sacred in the sense of the communication that takes place, but not necessarily as an object once its purpose has been fulfilled. Besides, paper does not keep forever, and space is somewhat limited. The more one has, the more time is necessary to take care of it. I have fantasized about dumping the entire contents of my files into a bonfire, and enjoying the lightening of spirit that accompanies lightening of possessions... but then when I go to weed out some of the files, I end up keeping most of them after all. "I can't throw THIS away...". The trick in not becoming inundated in paper is to be strong in the first place and not let the paper enter the file at all; pass it along right

away. It isn't easy. When a piece has been put together with a lot of care and love, it is hard to let it go. But then, it is also fun to share nice work with mail art friends. It is a bit of a paradox for me. I like to have interesting things on hand to look at and respond to, but I don't like to be responsible for a lot of stuff to take care of. And I like things to be fairly tidy and clean, and of course the more things there are in a space, the more complicated that becomes. I find it easier to think clearly in a clean space. Not only a physically clean space, but also a mentally clean one. If I have too many things to do, I often find it hard to accomplish anything beyond the most essential tasks. The mental system (or mine does, anyhow) gets overloaded with too many things to do, it seems, and fizzles out. Poof! It's a great exercise in focus, though, to concentrate on one bird in the flock, as it were. It is an interesting question: if a system is best served by simplicity, then why is there the tendency towards complexity?

Ummmm, I dunno. I'm a slow learner, maybe???

;-) Back to you, Ruud, and I hope you are having a fine Autumn. It is so

very lovely here now. I love this time of year. The trees are so spectacular in their blazing brightness, and the clean, crisp air is ambrosial. Aaaaahhh!

P.S The lift of spirit that follows the letting go of possessions is mild compared to the lift felt after completing a major task. It's almost as though a physical weight were removed from me. ( I wonder if it's like that at the time of death, the feeling of a major job completed, great relief and lightness, and now it's time to move on to the next thing...) I love the work I do, but completion is nice too.

There, that was my after midnight nattering!

RJ : Well, maybe it is time to round up this interview. It started in March last year, so if we don't stop now we might 'natter' on year after year (just joking). Was there anything I forgot to ask you?

reply on 26-11-1996 (e-mail)

JHB: I don't know if you forgot to ask anything or not, but there is one more thing I'd like to

put out there for people: There is a great light at the very core of your being that is made of nothing but love. Find it. And realize that the light wears your form, has your tendencies, your loves, your brain, your skills, everything that makes you who you are. You ARE good enough. You are great, just as you are. You must do what makes your heart happy, what you know is right for you in your own circumstances. Honor who you are. Everyone has this light; it is everywhere and in everything. We are surrounded by love.

One of the finest things about mail art is that people share their own unique vision, freely and without external judging. They share who they are. We are surrounded by love.

Well, Ruud, no doubt there will be something else I'll remember after this is all done, but I can live with that! I suspect that the "nattering" will continue in any case! In the snail mail printout of this that I'm sending, I'll enclose the latest haiku book, hot off the press, as it were. I hope you like it! Now it's back to answering other mail, trying to fit in as many projects as possible (one of the first of which is revising my carving book. It's hard to believe it's been

out for almost ten years...products have changed, and there is more I want to share with those who'd like to carve! The more I teach, the more I notice patterns of things people keep asking, or not realizing that they need to know. I need to address that in the book) , and not wear myself out...well, not too much, anyhow. Bless you for doing this project. It's led me into some helpful contemplations, and I hope that it may be of some interest to the readers. Be well, be happy, and remember that you are fine, just as you are, and made of love.

Love and blessings,

Julie

RJ : Thanks for this interview Julie!



## ANNA BOSCHI

### THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH ANNA BOSCHI (ITALY)

Started on: 15-5-1995

Ruud Janssen : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 19-8-1995

Anna Boschi : I have been involved in mail art since 1986, when I exhibited my artistic works in Milano (Italy) - by Centro Lavoro Arte - where I met Ruggero Maggi who talked to me about mail art and invited me to participate in a project "DON'T KILL THE 'PEACE' WORD". I took part in that project with pleasure and when I visited the show (by the way, it was made just in Bologna) I felt immediately a strong emotion. I realized to be in front of a wonderful networking circuit. From that moment I have never left off to make mail art.

RJ : How did things developed after participating in this first project, how did you get in touch with other networkers?

Reply on 25-9-1995

AB : The mail artist MARCO LORENZONI, living at that time near Bologna, sent to me a beautiful colored envelope, duly signed and numbered, containing one elaborate on which I put my intervention and returned it to him. This was my first personal contact in mail art. Marco said to me he was moving to another Region and in fact I never had any news from him since. Successively I participated in the "WINDOW" project by Maria Rosa Simoni, and also to the "SELF PORTRAIT" project in Ireland, and other mail art projects in Italy and abroad.

At the beginning I made mail art in small doses, because I wanted to realize well its meaning. I wrote to some networkers asking more information about mail art and at once m.a. notes, magazines, fanzines etc. etc. reached me.

RJ : At a certain point you probably thought of doing your own mail art project. How did you realize your first project?

Reply on 23-10-1995

AB : In 1990 there was the centenary of the GIORGIO MORANDI's birthday, the famous artist of Bologna (Italy), sensible interpreter of humble things, as just the bottles. I wanted to pay homage to him with the "BOTTLE PROJECT", a mail art project. I received 100 wonderful works (30 real bottles and 70 bi-dimensional works) from 19 Nations and I organized the exhibition in Bologna -

by KAOS ex MABUSE space. I was very happy for the success of my first project.

In the catalogue I expressed the connection between mail art and the bottles: .... MAIL ART as container of different emotion's states, expressive potentiality free from markets an system conditions, wish to make and transmit art, but especially container of sensitive human relations overcoming any geographical/cultural/ideological frontier.....

..... BOTTLE as container of thoughts, ideas, messages (in fact, in the past, it was thrown in the sea to send appeals or call for help), but mainly container of human history, as time symbol.....

RJ : Doing a first mail art project is mostly a difficult task. What did you learn from this first project?

Reply on 1-12-1995

AB : Before I got involved in the mail art network, I attended only the "official" circuit but, notwithstanding my great passion for the artistic work, I often felt uneasy, probably caused from the unreasonable competition that originates false friends, from the personal interests, from the criticism' conditioning and discrimination etc. After my first mail art project I immediately realized to be in human contact and especially freedom. Yes, I learnt this: MAIL ART IS A FREE ARTIST! And this is not a small thing!

RJ : How large is the network you are in contact with nowadays?

Reply on 24-1-1996

AB : Nowadays I am in contact with a great number of mail artists all over the world and, like you, I have to select. I am very sorry for it, but it is not possible for me to write to everybody. So I prefer to stay in touch with the networkers with whom already exist a "mail art feeling", a mutual exchange, a frequent mail and work, friendship etc. etc.

However, often, beginning artists write me asking about mail art and in this case I send them a little documentation with projects, addresses and other news, and naturally my contacts augment. Usually, when I organize a mail art project, I receive works from 25-30 nations (thanks networker friends!!).

RJ : Which mail art project are you working on at the moment?

Reply on 4-3-1996

AB : At the moment, besides several participations to various mail art projects, I am working on **two** of my projects: Centenary of the Radio's invention (GUGLIELMO MARCONI) and PREHISTORY IN FORLI, the last one together with Lia Garavini of Forlì.

Concerning the MARCONI project, now I am taking care of organizing the show soon. I received 180 works from 25 Nations and I hope to exhibit them inside a private "Marconiano" Museum of wonderful old radios, phonographs and other communication sets. This museum is denominated "THOUSAND VOICES.... THOUSAND SOUNDS....." However I am not yet sure to realize this initiative. In a different way, I shall care for another space.

Regarding instead the PREHISTORY project, the show will be on next September, just during the XIII Congress of the International Union of Prehistoric Sciences in Forlì (8-14th September 1996). Even if there is to do so much, I am always glad to organize mail art exhibitions, because I think it is good to make known this international artistic circuit, as fraternity message, without frontiers and discrimination. Also during the III-rd edition of the MAILARTINCONTRIAMOCI a CASTEL S.PIETRO TERME (8-9-10th September 1995)", besides many performances and installations made by the participant networkers, I prepared a mail art show with fragments of the "Bottle Project" - "1962-1992 - 30 years of M.A. in homage to RAY JOHNSON" and "FELLINI" projects, with one installation of envelopes from all over the world in the centre of the room. It was so much visited and many young artists asked me how to be involved in this circuit. And thus the mail art goes....

RJ : How do you explain the mail art network to those new young artists that want to participate?

Reply on 12-4-1996

AB : I don't make particular effort, because the exhibition tells by itself. The artists who feel (as you say: TO FEEL MAIL ART) something different from the "official" artistic circuit, want to know better this network and ask me information's about the possibility to come into communication. So, I give them explanations about mail art projects, with some addresses, notes, articles, etc., etc.

Many young artists think the mail art is like a chain of postcards and enveloped, without knowing the real meaning of this circuit, besides the various ways to interpret mail art.

Personally, I don't like chain-letters because I find them "very cold", without soul, only made to receive an avalanche of works, and I prefer to participate to mail art projects and write directly to the networkers, privileging the human contact, the personal acquaintance, the friendship etc. , etc.

RJ : In 1992 there were the Decentralized Networker Congresses (DNC), where mail artists were encouraged to organize meetings. Were you active in this too?

Answer on 18-6-1996

AB : Yes, I was active in that period. In April 1992 I organized the show about my mail art project: "30 YEARS of M.A. in homage to RAY JOHNSON", in Bologna (Italy) at "PRIMA PAGINA space". Baudhuin Simon from Belgium came to Italy to visit it and during the exhibition we also met Fabio Sassi and Rosa Biagi of Bologna, and we had one little congress.

At the inauguration were present many other mail artists too (Alberto Rizzi, Fulgor C. Silvi, Marco Pasian, Giovanni Strada, Nielsen Gavina, etc.)

Successively, Baudhuin Simon (on August 1992) returned to Italy and together we went to VILLORBA (TV), where Ruggero Maggi and M. Pia Fanna Roncoroni had organized one big Congress (4 days), very interesting, with installations, performances and video - meetings, etc. I stayed there 2 days because then I started to SPOLETO (PG) where I redid the show in homage to RAY JOHNSON, in public space. On October 1992 I took part in the meeting at the ARTESTUDIO SUMITHRA by Rosetta Berardi in Ravenna, a whole day with collective works, performances, poetry, etc. Very beautiful meeting, with friendship and human contacts! I finished the year (on december 1992) with another show in Milano (Italy) by Avida Dollars Gallery - always dedicated to Ray Johnson.

RJ : Why do you focus so much on Ray Johnson?

Reply on 24-7-1996

AB : At the beginning I strongly admired this artist who gave life to an artistic universal networking circuit, beyond every cool, conditioning and restrictive rule of the "official art". And in the 1992 DECENTRALIZED CONGRESS YEAR, I considered dutiful to pay homage to his (HE)ART, so I dedicated to him one big mail art project. (Sincerely, today I am very glad to have celebrated Ray Johnson when he lived!)

Successively, reading about him, I was more and more interested to understand this artist, so ironic in his art and in the same time so lonely and private in his life. I'd have wanted to know him personally for better realizing the extraordinary sensibility of a man able to refuse the personal success (a thing so rare in the artist!), in behalf of an artistic collective expression, without celebration, money and honours.

RAY is an interesting and mysterious rebus, like his death. Why 13? Day 13 - Hours 13 - Room 13 !

A great man, with a great art, with a great idea debouching in the international mail art circuit, but I think also with a great human solitude. WHY? I often ask myself. Yes, it's true, I focus on Ray.

RJ : Another great mail artist that is dead for some time is the Italian Cavellini. What do you think was his role in the mail art network?



reply on 14-10-96

(together with Anna's answer she sent me two beautiful catalogs of mail art projects she has worked on)

AB : I like very much Cavellini. He was (is) a great artist, but I find his role in the network much different in respect to Ray Johnson's. First of all, I think Ray gave life to the mail art circuit without being aware of this, through his choice, nearly oriental, to send small signs, little ironical messages, discreet provocations, pointing on the commonplace and myth's absurdity, while Cavellini utilized mail art to autocelebrate himself, affirming the artist's freedom.

He came from the collectionism, had money and could easily travel round the world to meet other artists, playing funnily with his performances, affirming "I am the sole, I am a free genius!" Therefore, I admit to know superficially Cavellini. I read his book "A GENIUS LIFE" where is descibed also the funny meeting between him and Ray. Wonderful! However Cavellini is loved very much from the artists, and I like his work strongly, too, but my "feeling" is with Ray.

When I payed homage to Ray Johnson with the mail art project "1962-1992- 30 YEARS OF MAIL ART", the american Lon Spiegelman sent me one poetry dedicated to Cavellini, writing me : "....Anna, don't forget to homage Cavellini!". In Italy, as you

surely know, there is the networker Fausto Paci called "AMBASCIATORE CAVELLINIANO"; he knew Cavellini personally, admired strongly this big artist, and now he goes on with Cavellini's artistic thought!.

RJ : You have been active now in mail art for ten years and must have received lots of stuff. Do you keep all the things that you receive? How does your 'archive' look like?

answer on 5-1-1997

AB : My mail art "archive" is in the studio where I paint and I try to keep it in good order, to consult it with facility at any moment, but receiving so much stuff, this is not always possible for me! The mail is contained in "gatheres" (in alphabetical order for Italian networkers - for abroad in alphabetical order of the Nations).

Moreover, when there is more correspondence with one mail artist, I make a particular "gather" for him. Then I keep the artistamps, the original postcards, the artistic envelopes in separate books.

Concerning instead my mail art projects, a good deal of mail art works is still framed, so as they have been exhibited. Yes, I keep all the things I receive, and now I have also much mail in big boxes to set in order.

Some time ago, a mail artist made the project about circulation (not preservation) in mail art, a provocation against the private little museums. In general, I can agree with this concept, but the major part of the works is dedicated personally, therefore to send them away it seems a "break-gesture" - without appreciation - so contrary to the mail art soul! In any case, I participated to that project, doing my proposal, that is to send to some networkers during the year one portfolio containing mail art works of different artists, as gift. In this way, I think the sense of the personal ties of friendship remains.

Together with my participation-proposal, I sent my first portfolio, as Christmas-gift, being December 1995. I didn't receive an answer, but the worst is I haven't had more news from that mail artist! It is impossible to enter in the head of the people! I didn't think certainly to hurt him. I thought to suggest a good idea!

RJ : Most mail artists write mainly about all those good things that are happening in the mail art network. Are there also negative sides to working within the mail art network?

next answer on 8-4-1997

AB : All beautiful, all beautiful, all beautiful!..... I have strong doubts when I hear this! Although I love very much mail art and the network, I must

however admit the negative sides concerning the mail artists 'contradictions'!

Some of them preach the "false purity" in mail art, but really they don't practice what they preach! They shout to the scandal when they receive the catalogue printed and sponsored, because they say to be out of the mail art soul, while then they send round the world a big quantity of the Xerox regarding their mail art activity! This is opportunism because they use mail art to make publicity to themselves, not for community! Instead, the printed catalogue referring to one mail art project regards all participants!

So, I think they have the straw tail. In my opinion, this is a big fault of the network: mail art is free art, well, no money in mail art, very well, alternative art, well too, but why, if possible naturally, don't improve the documentation? Pay attention to the hypocrisy, she is always in wait.

RJ : Well, I fully agree with you on that. I don't mind at all if someone has a sponsor who pays for a wonderful catalogue, but I also do appreciate the small catalogues people make by themselves without any sponsor. These unwritten rules, like "mail art & money don't mix" sometimes are misinterpreted by mail artists. Maybe we should make the new rule "there are no rules in mail art". What do you think Anna?

next answer on 24-6-1997

AB : Yes, wonderful! "No rules in MAIL ART"! I can completely agree with this. I find it right, because - on the contrary - where is the 'freedom' of mail art? Our mouth is always full of this phrase: "MAIL ART is FREE ART", but when, how, where? If the mail artist is always prompt to criticize and misinterpreted.

Therefore I think it is important to make the new rule "there are no rules in mail art" and every networker will decide his/her choice! With his/her conscientious.

Concerning the sponsor in mail art , to pay a big catalogue, I accept with pleasure this opportunity, but - like you - I appreciate very much the small catalogues "hand-made" in Xerox, that I receive always with great pleasure. I appreciate also a simple list of names, and , in particular, I love every thing sent to me by mail. And just for this "my feeling" regarding the circuit, I find these limits very 'stupid'.

Other thing: When I participate to one mail art project, I send my work with pleasure, without thinking of a catalogue. If this reaches me successfully, I am glad to receive it and it is always a surprise for me; on the contrary it is not a problem for me! The important thing is the contact that was there!

RJ : Two new things you started to work on during this interview is the mail-art magazine "WILD RABBIT

NEWS" which you do together with Graziella Caroni, and I also noticed the new stamp "MAILARTMEETING ARCHIVES". What is the story behind those two? Why start another zine, why create another archive?

next answer on 27-9-1997

AB : The story is very simple. Unfortunately, two important mail-art bulletins stopped: NET INFORMER of Andrea Ovcinnicoff (Genova) and TRANSFUSION of Alessandro Ceccotto (Adria). One day, after a long talk about this situation with Graziella Caroni, we decided with enthusiasm to give life to the WILD RABBIT NEWS, thinking it could be useful for the mailart circuit. In fact, after the first number, we received demonstration of interest, request to insert projects and particularly we receive various rabbits from many networkers and we put them in every number.

Concerning MAIL ART MEETING ARCHIVES, this was already existing, but I wanted to mention it, and referring to the MAIL ART IN CONTRIAMOCI meeting, I have chosen MAILARTMEETING Archives. What do you think of it? I feel it is right for mail art? Therefore the story is very simple, but I ask you: Why another?

RJ : With the question "Why another" I also was referring to your motivation to keep on doing this mail art and collecting material. Hasn't repetition of doing things started in, or is mail art still a surprise to you every new day again?

*(With her answer Anna Boschi sent a photo of a recent meeting of mail-artists in Italy, the "mailartincontramoci" on 30/31 August 1997 in Castel S. Pietro , and the newest issue of Wild Rabbit News)*

AB : Yes, mail art is still a surprise to me every new day again! When the mail arrives, I am happy and I feel in artistic conversation (through the "RED WIRE" joining every soul) with friends all over the world. It is wonderful!

For this reason, I like to do every thing about communication and mail art. I would strongly like to be in the possibility to answer always to old and new networkers, but my days must be of 48 hours!

I am a painter since many years (structures, recycled and assembled materials, etc.) and I love my work, but in mail art I find freedom, fraternity, exchanges , human contacts so much rare in the artistic (and not) universe. When I shall not more find these sentiments in my mail art, I shall stop, but always I shall thank the friends of the circuit for that they gave me!

Therefore, in this moment where various bulletins have stopped (also Global Mail! Do you know? Is it true?) It is a great pleasure for me to give the "service" to the circuit. In fact, from this month it will start the first number of the "Mailartmeeting Bulletin" with mail art projects, while Graziella Caroni will

continue "Wild Rabbit News", with rabbit images, projects, notes etc. soon in Internet .....AND MAIL ART GOES .....

RJ : Do you think that mail art is a term one can also use for the activities that mail artists undertaking on the internet?

reply on 4-1-1998

AB : Really, I think the right term for the activities undertaken on the internet is Electronic Mail Art , because mail art is for me only when there is transmission by post-box, and internet never will replace the paper poetry, the colour harmony , the sign strenght. This is MAIL ART! (I think , naturally).

In any case E-mail art is very interesting, important , USEFUL and too much capturing.

*(With her mail Anna Boschi sent me some magazines. Also another mailing arrived with the newest issues of "Mailartmeeting bulletin" and the documentation of Anna's project "What do you inspire this house?". The next question was only sent out middle of March 1998 due to a little break I took - RJ)*

RJ : Are you participating in Vittore's IM98 project? Since it is initiated in Italy I suspect this will cause a lot of activities in Italy.....

next answer on 7-5-1998



(because of a small break in the interview-process I only retyped the answer on January 16th, and sent the next question on that day. The IM98 project has already come to an end and Vittore probably is working on the documentation right now. In the period between the two questions Anna Boschi has been busy. She has sent me several copies of her "MAILARTMEETING BULLETIN, and also I received the catalogue of her project "LIBRI d'ARTISTA e POESIA VISIVA - MAIL ART 4", a book of 143 pages with illustrations of the contributions to this project.)

AB : Yes, I received some months ago the invitation to take part in the Incongruous Meetings during 1998 (IM 98), but I think to continue the MAILARTINCONTRIAMOCI meeting, because it is already an incongruous meeting! It can be an intelligent meeting, an intolerant meeting, an impossible meeting, an insuperable meeting etc. etc. However I suspect too there will be in Italy a lot of activities. In fact, Emilio Morandi will make the IM 98 on July 20th 1998, just when there is his birthday, the same day of GIORGIO MORANDI's birth, the big and international artist "bolognese" (he was born in Bologna , Italy on July 20th 1890). Do you remember my mail art project "Bottle project" dated 1990 in homage to him? Did you participate? Now, I don't remember. His poetry were the bottles (full of silence, art and lirism). Emilio Morandi wants to refer to this solitary and great artist, being born the same day, many years after.

Besides, I am sure other Italian networkers will make an Incongruous Meeting. But, sincerely, this is a hard year for me, on account of serious family problems; I shall continue to make mail art and to not break the "red wire" with the circuit, but with less participation and contacts. However my heart will be always with you all!

next question sent on 16-1-1999

RJ : I guess it is right time now to end the interview. I understand all too well the busy periods in one's life since I have one right now as well. Was there anything I forgot to ask you before we end the interview and publish it?

(together with the last question I sent Anna the complete text of the interview to proofread and some more info's)

next answer on 15-5-1999

AB : Dear Ruud, I am sending you the corrections of the typing mistakes of your interview with me. I thank you very much for what you did and for all the interesting and important documentation you sent me. I like the interview and I hope you make the book, when you can, naturally.



## GÜNTHER RUCH

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH GÜNTHER RUCH  
(SWITZERLAND)

Started on: 4-2-1996

Ruud Janssen : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on 14-2-1996

Günther Ruch : During 1970-74 I realized several postal actions with contributions of friends and unknown persons in a small frame.

My first involvement with the mail art network goes back to 1974, through my contact with the group "ECART" (Geneva), which had in that time an extensive correspondence exchange with the first mail-networkers (look hereby this old rubber stamp which mentioned 1974 as begin of my "NETWORK" activity).

One of my first participations to an international MA-show was 1975 in your country, organized by G.J. de Rook ("STAMP-ART", Utrecht), followed by several other MA-shows and contacts with artists-editors (R. Rehfeldt / (CONTART) - P. Petasz / (COMMONPRESS) - Vittore Baroni / (ARTE POSTALE) - A. Banana / (VILE) - J. Juin / (SPHINX) - and so on).

In 1980 I published the commonpress issue no 36 ("IDEA & CO") with 120 participants of 23 countries and with whom I exchanged later (weekly & daily) correspondence, which influenced at least my private life.

RJ : How did mail art influence your private life?

Reply on 29-2-1996

GR : At the beginning of my mail art involvement I received every month about a dozen of postcards, which grew rapidly in the following years to something like 600 mailings yearly (that means every day 2-3 letters).

Participating and answering to some hundreds of mail-invitations brought several time-problems for me, I had the choice

during a limited time of 2-3 hours the day to develop my own artistic projects or to answer only to other's mail-projects.

With my wife Colette I had a very pleasant private life, but after a time my interest for the mailbox became bigger and bigger. Our 3-persons' house-hold (Colette, the mailbox and I) had some charming aspects, until several difficulties between the mailbox and my wife appeared.

So, a strange day I went with Colette on one hand and the mailbox on the other hand to a psychiatrist<sup>1</sup> to try to save the rest of our private life. His (Psy) observation could be set in a short statement: - more information you receive, less personal communication you can do, e.g..... quantity is not quality - (the problems between Colette and the mailbox are now resolved). And of course I heard from similar problems of the network, a reason why I asked years later during the first international MA-Congress 86 my mailpartners about their experiences in this

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<sup>1</sup> PSYCHATRIST is here not to take textually, but more as a metaphor!

field (Look under "phone-congress 86" in the catalog-report).

RJ : What was the story behind this MA-congress 86 when you look at it ten years later?

Reply on 19-3-19962

GR : Well, a good question. Ten years later several "network" ideas have changed and the earlier congress-matter has influenced different meetings of mail artists, which were named later "congress-meetings". It was surely one of the biggest mail art events of the eighties (including some 500 participants with 80 sessions in 25 countries). An interesting interpretation about the congress-idea was written under others by Géza Perneckzy in his book "THE MAGAZINE NETWORK"; you find other statements and articles about those sessions in some artists' conclusions, newspaper articles and at last in my congress report.

Network-problems in the eighties came through contrary views about mail-communication. For some people an

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<sup>2</sup> Günther's answer came on paper. The paper was folded in the shape of an airplane

exchange had only to do with a social (political) character in which the "artistical" point was secondary (e.g. : "everybody is an artist"). For some other people an exchange had only to do with a artistical (cultural) character in which the "social" point was secondary (e.g. : "every artwork implicates a social context"). So, I don't know if today these problems are resolved, what I know is that a lot of networkers of the eighties don't participate today to all so-called "MA-Shows". Some of them are definitively "out", others have new occupations with medias like computer-tools, which encloses other artists circuits.

My own idea to initiate such a big undertaking like that congress came through the wish to discuss together with networkers own problems of information / autonomy / cooperation / artcontext.... (and accumulated time-problems / correspondence-selections / history-interpretations / financial difficulties in relation to mail art). For that reason I produced too a formulary to be answered by the participants (organizers of own sessions). But with all my engagement, printed informations and answerings to



hundreds of mailings (including 5 visits to congress sessions in 4 countries) all became a little bit too much for me. My co-partner to this congress-event H.R. Fricker, who I invited to work together with me, didn't help very much. He used the background of that event to circulate his "tourism"-ideas and own printed postage stamps. "Tourism" was never for me a good development of expanded mail art (on one hand through its relation to any "ism", on the other hand through its advertising "mass-tourism", contrary to individual meetings). Of course the "meeting" idea behind Fricker's slogan which he interpreted as "new" couldn't be looked as such; several networkers, especially Ray Johnson, proposed from the beginning of their mail-communication "meetings". So, at least Fricker got angry with me and our co-working finished in quarrels and fights, a reason why I ended the congress-project alone (most of the congress material was sent to my address).

Concerning my questionnaire and other mailed informations, I received nearly thousand letters with some 200 specific answers to my request, of which I selected 76 responses (look at page 30 of my congress

report). Naturally you can say it was a very personal selection, because it was ME who questioned, searched and choosed the content of the answers, but it was probably also the first time that mail art was discussed by hundreds of participants in a "open & public way". The show was this time not about mail art, the show was about the mail artist. I have to add that these meetings were especially created in a informal way (sometimes like a house-party, sometimes like a festival) and the thematic discussions developed themselves during the meetings. The "decentralized matter" allowed that the independent aspect of the sessions wasn't touched, the result was not the meeting-idea in itself, but the face to face contact of individuals which knew each other before only through mail-exchanges.

RJ : What about the Decentralized Networker Congresses in 1992? Was this just a reproduction of the 1986 congress meetings, or was there a new aspect?

Reply on 4-4-1996

GR : In my eyes the "NC-92" was a copy of the earlier "MAC-86", therefore I haven't participated to that repetition, but I saw that

my name was anyway in the 92-list. Of course the NC-92 included not alone mail art but also E-mail communication and it was said that more people participated in the NC-92 than in the MAC-86. Some of those "participants" told me later that they haven't met in reality their partners, like it was done in 1986 (they connected them through postal mail and/or electronic mail). As next, some argued that instead of "discussing future network possibilities" in a decentralized manner, a centralized databank was set up and is now to reach at the University of Iowa (USA).

So, I don't know, it seems that the "new aspect" was an old aspect, a sort of remake in electronic media without new strategies. If I'm interested on collaborative working my first interest goes to the work of my partner (idea / concept / creativity) and only secondly to his E-mail tools. I'm not against communication medias like computer tools and Internet, but the substance of the transmitted message shouldn't be anachronic. To produce a "cyberstamp" in electronic media and send it via Internet through the space is a little bit like a Hong Kong-copy of a Van Gogh Picture. In Internet

you don't need stamps & envelopes, it goes without the postal system, to use a stamp (even symbolic) has really nothing to do with that media nor with a networker development. By the way, I remember a statement by Vittore Baroni (printed in REAL CORRESPONDENCE / 92): "... the congresses I've seen simply failed to convey any useful information about the development of such a new networking landscape. The short collective discussions verged once again on MA-topics that have been widely debated in the past - in the 1986 MAC for example....".

RJ : For people outside the network it is quite difficult to find information about mail art. Many books written about mail art are produced by mail artists, published in very small editions and collected/bought by mail artists. Sometimes it seems only mail artists are interested in their history, but not all (newcomers..) are well informed about that. Is this true and should it be changed?

Reply on 22-4-1996

GR : Indeed, that's a basic difficulty, books are essential for the MA-development. But it's also a mistake from newcomers to think that information came up itself (and could be

exchanged against a B&W xerox). To understand mail art you need to study the mechanism (and publication links) of that exchange system. Every searched work, book, information in and about mail art can be found individually, through several MA-archives (and/or by writing directly to concerned editors). There are existing lists of special books & magazines which will inform everybody who wants to search. Last week I became from a german museum several demands regarding documents and publication-material of the old DDR. This material couldn't be found elsewhere, that means that my small archive is listed and known for specific research.

We are naturally very far from a "centralized" information (mail art is a decentralized system per se) and diversity is an important factor. So the general problem is not the "limited information", the problem is that a newcomer took his own "reduced" view (or source) as the only information for the whole network, ignoring other books and archive-sources.

I could give you lots of examples where not alone newcomers but "oldies" too, bring their own personal sight as the "complete

information" for the network. Do you remember the "CORRESPONDENCE ART" book by Crane & Stofflet, which was part of anger and frustration for several not-mentioned mail artists. My own book documentation "MA-Congress 86", in the hands of perhaps 300 mail artists and several archives (also in museum libraries & bookstores), was not mentioned in the last so-called sourcebook "ETERNAL NETWORK" of Chuck Welch<sup>3</sup>.

Things like that could be changed through inclusion of additional databanks from more networkers or archives. A step in this direction was done for example by Géza Pernecky, who searched -before making his book- not alone in his own big archive, but in several other MA-files. Everybody who wishes to have information about mail art zines & reviews can order this book directly by Pernecky himself (and at least the price isn't higher than in any commercial mass-edition).

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<sup>3</sup> Welch had in his archive not alone the congress-book, but also several articles about that book.

RJ : The museum in Schwerin isn't the first museum that wants to exhibit a selection of mail art from various archives of mail artists. Does mail art fit in a 'traditional' museum? What do you think of this development?

Reply on 9-5-19964

GR : The Schwerin museum wasn't the first institution that asked me about MA-documents (during the last years I became requests from various museum-corners in Europe & USA). These demands were mostly bound with specific questions related to archive-documents, less with invitations asking my personal contribution. You have to differentiate between "invitational" MA-shows and "documentary" MA-shows...

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<sup>4</sup> Together with Günther's answer I received some documents with historic information; CLINCH, 25.000 stamps & stickers from the whole world 1983-88 ; Schweizer Mail-Art Szene, 1970-1980 , with participantlist, publications and projects ; Information about a donation by Günther to the Swiss Postal Museum with 100 Network- artistamps in 1992.

Personally I think a "invitational" MA-show would probably better fit in his marginal character outside of a museum, a "documentary" MA-exhibition, addressed to a larger public would fit in a museum (a museum is a cultural public place, which should show all facettes of contemporary art-informations, even alternative or unknown ones). A MA-show in a museum should be curated & organized by someone who knows well the MA-community (the Schwerin museum will give an overview about a MA-period of the old GDR-regime, curated by an ancient MA-member, Guy Schraenen, and prepared with help of GDR-artists, Birger Jesch u.o.).

If several artists said years ago that mail art "must get out of its ghetto" , then of course museal institutions can't be excluded - it has a logic. Counting all the museum-shows of the last years (PTT-museums & Country Museums), which included mail art I want to know which mailer hasn't participated in his life to a museum-show? (I saw always big participants-lists).... the first MA-shows under the trade-mark "CORRESPONDENCE ART" started in museums like the Whitney Museum N.Y. , the Joslyn Museum Omaha, or the



Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. My own first solo-show 1975, related to marginal media (rubber-stamps / xerox / flyers / S-8 films / small offset) was held in a museum<sup>5</sup> and became through this "official" space another impact for the audience.

RJ : Most mail artists connect your name with the magazine CLINCH. What was the concept of this magazine?

Reply on 24-5-1996

GR : The concept of CLINCH was bound with the wish to have a selfmade assembling-magazine, cheap in its production-costs, simple and complicate at the same time, open to everybody and every world-conception, -including contributing artists from the whole globe. A relatively strong conceptualized idea developed itself through the small stamp-size of the contributed originals (stickers/stamps).

CLINCH was founded as "alternative" artpaper, was looked as "exchanged" proposition, mailed as "marginalized"

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<sup>5</sup> Palais de l'Athenee / Geneva - Switzerland 1975.

information, exposed as "visualized" archive, and collected as "historified" MA-fragment by hundreds of participants. The magazine included in his 10 issues from 1983-88 (foundation 1982) some 400 participants, of which nearly 100 mailers contributed with own sticker-originals (it circulated also outside of the network in libraries and book archives).

Collecting, organizing & glueing all single stickers in each issue gave a lot of time-problems, which could only be resolved during nights (partly with the help of Colette). Together 25,000 originals were pasted with their glueing substance of auto-adhesive, water-glueing, or hand-sticking basis.

CLINCH brought such different individuals in company like "MA-kings" (Ray Johnson and G.A. Cavellini), "poetry-writers" (Dick Higgins or Richard Kostelanetz), "MAG-inventors" (Pawl Petasz or Vittore Baroni), "stamp-editors" (Anna Banana or György Galantai), "book-producers" (Ulises Carrion or Jürgen O. Olbrich), "poetry-performers" (Julien Blaine or Guillermo Deisler), "archive-conceptionalists" (Guy Bleus or Géza Pernecky), "social fighters" (Lon Spiegelman or Clemente Padin), "realism-painters" (Carlo Pittore or

Leonard Duch), "myth-constructors" (Istvan Kantor or Al Ackerman), and so on.... impossible to mention them all. CLINCH was an overlapping "mixed media" product with interdisciplinary weight of eighties MA-development (the projected theme of each issue was going from visual poetry to random material, in which originals at a stickerbasis became special values). Some contributed works focused directly on the medium as source of information and meaning. Every participant received a copy free for himself, another part was exchanged with publications of the network, a third part was sold (which payed a little bit the distribution-costs, never the production-costs). Naturally my aim was not to make money, but to spread information and receive "other" publication-material in exchange.... and that aim was plenty fulfilled.

During the years a lot of articles were written about this magazine, Guy Bleus organized last year a retrospective exhibition of CLINCH in Belgium<sup>6</sup>. If CLINCH was open during 5

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<sup>6</sup> 1995 (3 October - 25 November)  
"RETROSPECTIVE CLINCH (1982-88)",

years to everybody, I invited and choosed in my other selfmade editions (OUT-PRESS) only artists which worked similar to my own art-conception, or had at least experience in such network development.

RJ : When you 'sum up' the different individuals that participated to your CLINCH (like "poetry-writers" or archive-conceptualists"), I wonder in which group you would place yourself. What is special in your art-conception?

Reply on 17-6-19967

GR : Firstly, I hope you don't regard my description of MA-individuals as "categorized" group seperated in art-disciplines (myth-constructors or MA-stars can't be categorized under disciplines). If I have mentioned them, than by illustrating their diversity, each of them is searching and experimenting his own way of seeing or

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Provinciaal Centrum voor Kunsten - Begijnhof  
/ Hasselt / Belgium.

<sup>7</sup> Together with Günther's answer he sent informations about his work, exhibitions, perfomances, etc.

thinking which isn't always clear in the beginning.....

Mixed media is for me one overlapping small media-concept in which disciplines are used in a simultaneous way (the media-tool itself can be either a rubberstamp or a soundtape). The weight lays on the creative act of using cheap media in a direct and simple context with multiple reflections. Besides mixed media exists intermedia (another field, largely explained by Dick Higgins in his interview with you), and it exists multimedia (which would fit better with the use of electronic media).

My own mixed work includes small media-concepts which could be partly realized only through collaboration with invited artists using themselves small media (choosing to collaborate means to negotiate the use of time, effort and materials that are available). To explain these processes hereby some examples:

- In 3 months I will perform a sound-poetry collaboration in Geneva together with 5 invited networkers (J.O. Olbrich / Rod Summers / Guy Bleus / Fernando Aguiar / Robin Crozier) at the "Festival de Genève /

POESIES SONORES". The projected transmission includes several communication-instruments (telephone / fax & others) ; besides the media-tools things like "cooperation" / "time" / "moment" / "interval" will play an important role. The mixed project will create a situation in which every participant is responsible and simultaneous depending of collaborators work.....

- A year ago I organized & performed an event called "DIRECT" with 5 invited artists ("THE NOMADS") where we used during 8 days & nights found objects to produce a book-object and a film (35-mm). Parallel to that there was an artistamp-show with hundred participants (catalog)<sup>8</sup>.

- In 1994 the PTT-museum Bern invited me (together with H.R. Fricker and M.V. Stirnemann) to collaborate to a documentary MA-Show, there I performed a short telephone-transmission with 8 artists from 8 countries (without knowing before

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<sup>8</sup> Gallery "FORDE" & cinema "SPOUTNIK" / Geneva (4-11 oct. 95)

what will happen, which call-interventions will produce, and what they want me to do.....<sup>9</sup>.

- Similar actions & performances with inclusion of small media and a reduced number of participants were realized through me years before (the french television "CANAL PLUS" broadcasted a sort of overview about the international MA-network-communication, enclosing a documentary streetaction of mine from 1975). It was a personal performance in a public park of Geneva, implicating the "head-multiplication" of the cultural minister of that time, different media-support became instructions authorizing multiple interpretations.....<sup>10</sup>

- To complete my concept I produced between 1976-86 a very small message-paper ("POSTPRODUCT") which was partly sent through marginal transportation channels like swimming bottles / tram-ways /

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<sup>9</sup> PTT-Museum Bern / "Netzwerk der Künstler" (22 Feb, - 29 May 1994)

<sup>10</sup> CANAL PLUS / Terminal Image "Z comme Reseaux" / Paris 1994

train-wagons / paper-flyers / folded paper-airplanes / and so on. (of course, only a part of all "flyers" came to their destination and indicated addresses). The point of mixed media departures involves "everyday objects & actions" - parallel to these events & performances several artists were invited to contribute their media-originals to my edition OUT-PRESS.....

In the beginning of the eighties I tried to create another term for my mixed media concept, I called it "CO-ART" (COnccept / COntacts / COoperation / COrrespondence / COmmunication / COpyart / and so on.) So to your question "what is special in my art-conception" is the inclusion of different media-tools under different circumstances with different artists presence -and that differs drastically from the traditional form of mail art in which the influence of participants to the aim-strategy of the project is reduced to one medium and to one distance.

Only through personal contact and media-collaboration can you discover the social and human aspects of your partner (hardly through his mailings). From a visual point of view: my symmetrical "lines" which I often used in my picture-concepts could be



looked partly as metaphor for "communication-lines" (telephone-lines / letter-lines / transportation-lines), partly as aesthetical form similar to minimal art, partly as ironical use in relation to prefabricated industrial products.....

RJ : Over the years that you were active in mail art you also used a lot of rubber stamps. What is a rubber stamp for you?

Reply on 29-6-1996

GR : An artist rubber stamp is for me a small visual media-signal, quickly utilizable, cheap in its production-costs and easy to transport - practical in all senses. Through its endless- & overprint possibilities the stamp refer to a repetition-code containing personal message fragments. Prints are easy to reproduce, to combine and to mail them around the world (there is no other miniaturized artist medium which could be directly multiplied on such small surfaces). Networkers stamps includes a communication vocabulary of our daily life which is immediately comprehensible.

I used rubberstamps since the end of the sixties and stamped one of my first R into my

passport between official customs stamps of different countries ( R = Ruch / Rubber / Registrated - official meaning: R = Refused. My passport of the sixties was full of exotic custom rubberstamps from Europe and Orient, where I had travelled, hitchhiked, walked and lived during some time.

As you know, in two weeks (July) the "STAMP ART GALLERY" in San Francisco by Bill Gaglione will exhibit a big part of my rubber stamps and will produce a catalog "LIVING ROOM EXHIBITION". (With your own "TAM-RUBBER STAMP ARCHIVE" you have probably a good overview about a lot of networker's stamps from the last 15 years - also mine).

The first overview about rubberstamps (since the sixties) were given through book-publications like Hervé Fischers' "ART & COMMUNICATION MARGINALE" (Paris/1974). The second volume of this book with some hundred new rubberstamping artists was printed & assembled years later through "ECART" in Geneva, but never bound and therefore never distributed. Other catalogs from that time are "STAMP ART" (G.J. de Rook / Amsterdam 1976) and "TIMBRES & TAMPONS D'ARTISTES" (Cabinet des Estampes /

Geneva, 1976) .... followed by a lot of different rubberstamp shows & publications.

RJ : Again I notice in your answer that you are quite fascinated in the use of letters and their meanings (like the R you mentioned now). Is there a specific reason for that?

Reply on 28-08-96

GR : Sorry for the long time to wait at my answer. I was a whole month away from Geneva (in South-France) and another month I had to work for a special occasion here in Geneva.....

Yes, of course alphabetical codes, abbreviations and letterfragments are playing an important role in my work - so, look at that "A" to you "Q" : In every word can be a semantic content and a similarity to fragments of other words (in the same or other languages). In a visual poem the word has not only verbal function but signify a state which can be unfolded, can be a new compound, or can bring a visual image through an alphabetic composition. Abbreviations help to underline the fragmentaric sense of "A to BE" , filled with new possibilities of exploring a "WOR(L)D".

"EYE" (I) was always interested how letters or short words could function in a double or triple sense with different determinations.

In the beginning of the eighties single letters like "N" (from "N-tity" = entity) were sent from several mailers, demonstrating their involvement as "N"-guild (N-ETWORK N-TITY). Other mailers used the word "ON" and his rotation "NO" for their short and limited answer to a participation-project. Another letter-sign on envelopes was "W" (from "W-ork), coming from his returned rotation "M" (M-ail). So, a sunny day I built with these 3 letters "N", "O", "W" a rubberstamp which could be read in all directions: "MON NOM: WON NOW". Only insiders could really understand why and from who these words turned off "NOW" with 2 significations in english and 2 other significations in french (Do it "NOW", than you have "WON"your name).

An older visual poem of me was built with the simple word "ART" in 4 languages (in every language-version the same word "ART" became a single letter-addition or a letter-rotation). The english version were read: "TART / RAT / TAR", the french version: "ARA / RATA / RAT", the german version: "RAT / TAT /

RAR", the italian version: "TARA / RATA / ARA"..... together 12 different points of views in 4 languages by a 3 letter-combination).

In general "experimental" poetry begins there, where the letter has lost his normal verbal function, but could be decoded simultaneous in relation to another signification. Today we are living in an age of communication-speed in which abbreviations or hint-signals are used as quick transmission-vocabulary, why not integrate them into sound- or visual poetry? ... You have not only to READ, you have also to THINK about their fragmental signification, a sort of pulsing life reflection. "OR" is in english a way for alternative (see "either"), the same "OR" means in french "GOLD" and in a phonetic understanding "OR" (OHR) means in german "EAR" - you can always play with another function of the same word<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Besides some own statements & MA-participations of experimental & visual poetry there is a small booklet, including Ruch's poetry-concept ("TEXT-LINES" / by Günther Ruch / Out-press 1993)

During the cultural "festival of Geneva" 1993 (POESIE SONORES) I worked & collaborated with Ward Tietz in a co-piece of alphabetical code-deciphering. We had small and big letter-objects (for example an "A" two meter high, or an "H" which I used as stilts by going with them on the stage). We cooperated, created, played and read that piece in several mixed materials, through flags the content was partly transmitted in a semaphoric way..... Coding - Decoding - Co ..... De.....

RJ : You mention that ".....Today we are living in an age of communication-speed" and I guess you also mean the FAX and the E-mail. I know you have worked with the FAX-machines. What do you think of the E-mail and the use of Internet?

reply on 14-10-1996

GR : Telephone / Fax / Internet are diffusion (transportation-) tools, Photocopy / Audiotape / Computerprinter are reproduction -tools. Sometimes they are used together, sometimes they are integrated in one computersystem, alltogether they are looked as electronic medias. Diffusion and reproduction are separate through their

destination of "distribution" and "product" (a copy-art product isn't automatically linked to be mailed after his printing). So, we have to reflect about what (diffusion or product) we speak.

The idea , the function and the result of E-mail are very different to postal art (and of course people which use only E-mail are often never in contact with the MA-network). Several mailers - like you too - told me that computer-mail is sometimes boring (no hand touched paper / no smell / no 3-D project / no special stamps, stickers or rubber stamps).

The other side of E-mail is of course the speed of the DIRECT-transmission and through Internet the elusion of high postal rates. But for whom (?)... only for people who have themselves such fax or computer tools with access to Internet (you can forget practically 90% of the third world, they haven't got access to that technology), also most european artists (mailers) are today not equipped with own computers.

The question is now, do you prefer to communicate with a small group of computerfreaks or with a larger group of individuals (?). Depends the content of your

message on transmission-speed (?). Can E-mail replace the substance of human contacts (?) --- look back to the big differences of the MA-congress 1986 (personal meetings) and the congress 1992 (computer-connections). Who needs more mailings, more contacts, more networkers, more speed and more technology (?).

Everybody knows that we are living in an age of information & communication in which computer-tools play a very important part, but our role - the role of an artist - is to question the media-percussion in our society. The "highways of information" are full of clichés which are bound with products of technology, and clichés which are bound with the distribution of such products. Communication-speed is one thing, how to look at it or to react against it is a complete other thing.... Independence and a certain liberty brought me during my MA-engagement to choose small reproduction-tools like the photocopy machine or the rubberstamp, daily diffusion-tools like the letter or telephone.

If I used very sporadically Fax and other diffusion technologies then because I had a short (paid) possibility through institutions to



communicate with those instruments. At home I haven't any Fax or E-mail tool (but I have a telephone, a small photocopy-machine, an old Macintosh without access to Internet & CD-ROM).... and I have to add that in all my public events - in contrast to my MA-exchanges - telephone & fax played only a role for the speed during the time-limited spectacle (otherwise the public couldn't follow what happened).

Background of these events are not to underline the importance of contemporary communication-tools, but on the contrary to question them and the often praised "media-consumer" ideology in an ironic way.

In the past it was said that somebody who writes postcards wouldn't be automatically a MA-artist, today we can say that somebody who uses Internet wouldn't be automatically an E-mail artist. Conclusion: it is not the medium alone which makes someone to an artist, it is the concept behind (how & why) which someone brings to choose his medium (...and that's a life-conception).

RJ : Some older mail artists say that mail art nowadays is just a repetition of what happened in the 70's and 80's , and that mail

art in the 90's isn't interesting at all. What do you think?

answer on 31-1-1997

GR : Of course mail art only as mailing-system is surely no longer interesting, look back to my statements about that matter and my publication "THE RISK"<sup>12</sup> (by the way this question was hot discussed years ago during the "BIG MAC" 1986). Personally I reduced end of the eighties drastically my MA-communication and stayed since then in contact with a limited group of individuals with whom I had something in common.

Mail art is not an art-form or style in itself, but an artistical communication-structure which invites you to take part in it with new collaborative art-processes. These processes depend not of technological tools or computers (they can - the don't must), they depend on real "cooperation", "group-thinking" and similar "information-knowledge"

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<sup>12</sup> "THE RISK" (cutted fragments of network-experiences) / 1990 , Co-edition : ARTE POSTALE No. 62 / (I)

from participants about the subject which will be developed together.

The word "Mail-Art" is today used for everything and nothing (I saw in some so-called "documentary" MA-catalogues printed declarations from people who have never participated to the MA-network). So is the word "Mail-Art" today really used in his original sense (?). For me that was one reason why I called developed cooperations on a mail-basis "CO-ART" (the co-operative concept in co-laboration has more importance than the mailed envelope).

The first number of my magazine CLINCH featured a "CO-WORK" diagram, described under others by Géza Pernecky in his book "MAGAZINE NETWORK"<sup>13</sup> :

„...a parallelogramme whose sides were meant to represent relationships between

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<sup>13</sup> "THE MAGAZINE NETWORK" , Book by Géza Pernecky, Germany/ Soft Geometry / Köln 1993 - page 7

correspondence partners. The diagonal stood for 'communication energy' which increased between partners in direct ratio to time & space. In other words, this diagram was meant to illustrate something else than just the traditional relationship between the 'sender' and 'receiver' . It featured numerous receivers, who then became senders in the next step. On the other hand, the diagram highlighted not the components of their direct relationships, but instead their 'vectors' or 'force' , i.e. the amount of 'total communication' present in the formula. This force exceeded the personal contacts between the partners, since it represented their 'collective projection'..... "

RJ : Well, this interview has gone now for over one year. What do you think of the result so far of this project?

answer on 10-5-1997

GR : The whole interview-concept with different participants is a brilliant idea and in straight line as continuation of discussions developed during the congress-sessions 1986. For me personally your interview is my fourth interview and the largest one over the last 10 years (not included some tape-recorded interviews of me from which I never saw the result).

The various thoughts of different interviewed people, you sent me, are very interesting (even if I don't always agree with all personal declarations). I saw under others that the propagated "computerized future" of MA divides your interviewed artists (globally there are links between Mail-art / E-mail & Internet , but real MAIL has to do with distance-concepts formalized through stamps, rubberstamps and other selfmade material, produced by senders / receivers / PTT-offices.....)

The last interview-booklet of Ken Friedman, you sent me, is a demonstration to see how difficult it is to generalize the whole Mail-art

field. I totally agree with Ken's statement about Internet:<sup>14</sup>

".....There is no need for mail-art on the Internet. The net is a different kind of medium. It needs play, ideas and exchange, it doesn't need mail-art. People who see the Internet as an arena for mail-art are missing the point. Information technology has opened old fields to entirely new approaches....."

Other MA-interpretations of him are more difficult to eat:

".....The mail-art network is insular internalized, selfcentered, there is little understanding of history and culture, even little knowledge about history of mail-art....only

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<sup>14</sup> The Mail-Interview with Ken Friedman was conducted entirely through E-mail in 1995 and published by TAM-Publications under number TAM960104 in 1996.

a handful of mail-art writers make sense to outside scholars, you can count them on your fingers - Chuck Welch , Mike Crane , Judith Hoffberg , Anna Banana , John Held Jr. , John Jacob ..... The Fluxus-writers knew their own history well, and many have been broadly conversant in general culture, culture theory and art-history. This makes a qualitative difference between fluxus and mail art, few mail artists know their own history well, they tend to oppose historical writing and thinking, they are often anti-experimental and judgemental about intellectual issues....."

So, from what and from whom talks Ken (?) , what does Ken know about MY MAIL-CONTACTS and the people with whom I communicate (?). Should I buy a "flux-ticket" from Ken to enter in the "right" MA-circle (?). Mail-art doesn't know any leadership or hierarchic concipation, Mail-art literature is not only limited to 6 north-american writers,

Fluxus in Mail-art is a fact under several other facts.....

- 1 - To the leadership : feedback in that exchange system with other artists depends of receivers answer much more than of senders purpose.
- 2 - To the MA-writers : contrary to Ken I would say that "important literature" about Mail-art consists in european literature (a handful of those writers : Géza Perneckzy (H/D) / Vittore Baroni (I) / Klaus Groh (D) / Guy Bleus (B) / Ulisses Carrion (MEX/NL) / Manfred Strinemann (CH) / and others). Then it gives "east-european writers", "latin-american writers" and so on.....
- 3 - To the "qualitative differences": if I take Harry Ruhe's documentation "who is who" in "FLUXUS" (1979 / Amsterdam) which mentioned practically all fluxmembers, some of them have sporadically participated to my own MA-projects (besides Ken himself I received mail from such documented fluxpeople like Ben Vautier / Joseph Beuys / Davi det Hompson / Dick Higgins / Marcel Alocco / Dietrich



Albrecht / Barbara Moore / Mauricio Nannucci / Tamas Szentjoby and at least Ray Johnson). Also I had during the seventies some short conversations with BEN / BEUYS / FILLIOU and an afternoon with H. SOHM in Stuttgart. Are these (mail) people all "selfcentered with little knowledge about their history"(?) , or because they are (flux)members "they know their own history and are broadly conversant in general culture"(?).

A lot of flux-people - mentioned in Harry Ruhe's documentation - I saw in original (live) in their events / concerts / performances during the seventies & eighties (e.g.: John Cage / Ben Vautier / Joseph Beuys / Milan Knizak / Guiseppe Chiari / Emmet Williams / and so on). I saw also most (probably all) "flux-films" produced by flux-members at special occasions, presented partly through the "american filmmakers cooperative" as too through "Ben Vautier" personally.

To illustrate my own involvement with flux-related history I have to go back to the sixties: my first information about "fluxus" came in 1964 through a small bookstore in

Stuttgart, the town where I lived and studied graphic-design then. In this bookstore I found by chance some issues of Wolf Vostell's magazine "DECOLLAGE" , the number 4 brought a short overview about some flux- & happening people (in that time nobody spoke about that movement). A year later Vostell's bookdocumentation "HAPPENINGS" (Rowohlt / 1965) was published (including lots of flux-related pieces) and some months later came Jean-Jacques Lebel's "LE HAPPENING" (Denoël / Paris 1966) at the desk. The wellknown bookdocumentation of H. Szeemann & H. Sohm "HAPPENINGS & FLUXUS" (Köln / 1970) introduced that movement in museums and the gallery-system.

Well, between the time Colette had made a lecture at the Artschool in Basel (1966 / AGS-Basel) about "DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FLUXUS & HAPPENING" , in which she used the quoted documents. Some years later (in the earlier seventies) I came in contact with the group "ECART" (Geneva) which run a gallery / bookshop / and printing-room and where I found and bought some books of the legendary "SOMETHING ELSE PRESS" (Dick Higgins). It was the beginning of a fruitful

communication-exchange and performance-collaboration with that group, we did together a lot of flux-pieces from partitions of known flux-authors. Parrallel to that the first Mail-art shows in Switzerland were presented through ECART15 (e.g. : ENDRE TOT / DAVID ZACK / ROBIN CROZIER / HERVE FISCHER'S RUBBERSTAMP BOOK / ANNA BANANA'S & BILL GAGLIONE'S PERFORMANCES / and others)

In the same time I founded in Geneva - together with Colette - my own edition "OUT-PRESS" (1973) , after having done some self-organized street-actions (this more marginal & small artist-edition published later several collaborating MA-networkers).

So far, influence from fluxus to the earlier Mail-art is a fact that I always underlined (look e.g. my interview with Dobrica

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<sup>15</sup> "ECART" (CH) was in the seventies -besides Carrion's "OTHER BOOKS & SO" (NL) / Blaine's "DOCKS" (F) / Ehrenberg-Mayor's "BEAU GESTE PRESS" (UK) / - the most active MA-publications center in Europe.

Kamperelic 1987<sup>16</sup>) - but fluxus was not the only influence. For example, in the moment I'm preparing a documentary lecture with slides, tapes & video's about SOUND & MAILBOX ("SON & BOÎTE POSTALE") to show them here in Geneva during the annual festival. An interesting view to understand how known sound-poets, visual poets and mail-poets participated in the past together in mail-projects, resulting in published records or audio-cassettes. There you can see and hear influence of concrete poetry, lettrism, as too experiments in new wilderness.

Some other influential aspects on the earlier Mascene were described in my "SHORT UNCOMPLETE CHRONOLOGY OF MA" (1980). That chronology had a relatively success and was reprinted by half-dozen of MA-zines & catalogues<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> "INTERVIEW" / ISKRA (NP) / Beograd oct. 1987 (influence of fluxus to mail-art) / Ruch interviewed by Kamperelic, Yugoslavia.

<sup>17</sup> Document: "AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY" (by John Held) 1991 USA / (Page 280) / "A short chronology of MA" - often reprinted.

In 1981 it was Vittore Baroni who printed the chronology at the cover of "ARTE POSTALE! No 19" , and sent to several A.P. - readers (under others to Ray Johnson , who reacted weeks later by mailing me a "FAN-CLUB" letter, insisting directly to one point of that "chronology"). It was my first contact with Ray going over a 5-6 years period.

O.K. , after discharging my flux-constipation - overbearing history is difficult to digest - I can entrust you that sometimes my criticism is very near to Ken's one: qualitative differences are often not between flux-artists & mail-artists, qualitative differences are often between (mail) artists & (mail) artists.....

Back to your question of "THE RESULT OF THESE INTERVIEWS": They will stay as clarification & overview about different (sometimes contrary) standpoints, which are bound together in the "historicity" of Mail-art.....  
Thank you for your help & hard work to realize this network-puzzle.

RJ : I guess it is time now to end the interview.  
Thank you for your time and energy too. Now let others read the words that are produced, or did I forget to ask you something?

answer on 10-5-1997

GR : It was a pleasure to answer to your "Q's" , big thanks for the reflection-massage. Of course it would give much more to tell but we are at the end of our conversation, perhaps only a short post-script to the begin of my ART-COMMUNICATION :

The sixties were a overboarding creative time with revolutionering culture - & society chngements, including new art-forms (besides fluxus it gave pop-art / minimal-art / land-art / street-art / sound-poetry /photo-realism and distance-concepts in form of "correspondence-art") , that all in front of a background of student revolts / anti-Vietnam war-protests / hippie-movements / worldecological reflections.....

In this "hot" time of society-innovations I undertook as student some larger trips to get out of "traditional" life-problems , to smell fresh air, stimulated by chance , adventure , exploring unknown countries , free life , essays of survive without consume and testing alternative communication & travel-forms (that all without having any money). My venturous trips with the most cheap transport-tools (hitch-hiking / trekking)

brought me to countries like Turkey / Syria / Jordanie (3 months) / to Sicily (6 months) / to Greece (3 months) / to France and different stays in Scandinavia / Spain / Holland / as Jougoslavia too. There I learned a lot of communication without using language , of trips without maps , roadsigns without roads, the risky entering of passing rail boggie-waggons , repetition-music from railroad tracks, smells of strange perfums, miles & miles with truck-trailers, alpcrossing in snow 3000 meter high, of do-it yourself directions with donkeys & camels , sleeping in train-waggons, on sand or by inhabitants..... The only relicts of these trips were customs-stamps in my passport and some overpainted postcards, mailed to family & friends (all other stayed ephemere, archived in my memory or the memories of persons I had met).

This earlier colorful maze of world-exploration influenced later my perception of ART-COMMUNICATION , by using cheap do-it yourself material, coin-wrapped photocopies , publicity-trash at street-corners , road-signs in my picture-concepts, telephone-performances with unknown persons, over-painting of newspaper headlines, numbering

of repetitions code, parking places instead of gallery places, street-actions in a non-verbal, visual communication structure (some older S-8 films of these actions were shown to several occasions).....

Later in the eighties I coupled my travels with visits of correspondence-partners (e.g. : in Jougoslavia - Kamperelic / Tisma / Sindic , in Italy - Maggi / Baroni / Morandi , in Hungary Galantai , in Germany - Olbrich / Schnyder/Hainke , in New York - Bloch/Kostelanetz/Gerlovins , in Belgium - Bleus/De Boever/Francois.... and so on.... During the congress-sessions 1986 I saw probably some hundred different MA-artists and I became visits from over 20 networkers (to name only those who have slept in my house: R. Meade (USA) / C. Stake (CDN) / J.Olbrich (D) / M. Bloch (USA) / A. Schnyder (D) / M. Pawson (UK) / H.R.Fricker (CH) / J.N. Laszlo (F) / M.Stirnemann (CH) / B. Hetlovana (PL) ..... 600 names of correspondence-partners were listed in my "MA-Congress '86" , with 900-1000 persons from the whole world (60 countries) I had a correspondence-exchange, together I received something like 8000-9000 mailings - to much to can go deeper in real communication-exchange



(therefore my reason to reduce Mail-art to those with a common-background).

For me MA was only one of my different ART-COMMUNICATIONS , but even than it was partly a fulltime job<sup>18</sup>.

Ruud, if you will come one time to Geneva - please, not as "tourist" - you are always welcome at home.... there we could communicate and discuss several points which are not mentioned here,

RJ : Well, that is a very kind invitation. I do tend to meet mail artists every year since I travel a lot, so I might be in Switzerland one of these days.....Thanks for the interview Günther!

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<sup>18</sup> Note : Critical remarks about mail art inclusion into the E-mail sector (Internet) are of course linked with the proposed "personal" ART-EXCHANGE ON A MAIL-BASIS - not with general communication contacts / browsing / or interviews in that field.



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