



**BRAIN**

**IN THE**

**MAIL**

collection d'art postal  
mail art collection



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HAVE A NICE BRAIN WAVE  
*Monty Cantin*



# INTRODUCTION

by/par Istvan Kantor

Les procédés changeants de l'art du vingtième siècle se meuvent à la vitesse d'un multimoteur à combustible nucléaire, approchant la vélocité de la lumière. Des nouvelles techniques de communication, l'individu et le progrès social ont donné naissance à de nouvelles expressions d'art: la photographie aux rayons X, infra-rouge et polaroid, le vidéo, l'art xérox, la musique d'ordinateur et la sculpture néon. Aujourd'hui, les artistes se servent de leurs corps en action, performant une totalité mass-média. Cette multiplicité développa le créateur moderne: l'artiste multimédia.

Une expression artistique très caractéristique des deux dernières décennies a été le "mail art", un art multimédia agissant vers/pour une universalisation de l'art et servant, en même temps, comme la plus grande forme mondiale de transmission/communication d'art. Les racines du "mail art" nous ramènent à l'ère dada, lorsque les dadaïstes se servirent de lettres, de timbres et de cartes postales comme matériaux pour leurs collages. Apollinaire avait déjà créé des poèmes avec un attrait visuel: les calligrammes. Un groupe de dadaïstes tchèques consentirent à envoyer des photographies "touristes" de leurs voyages sur la face de cartes postales. Néanmoins, l'idée de faire de la correspondance elle-même une oeuvre d'art suivie et en continuelle expansion ne vint que plus tard, après que dada fut déclaré mort.

The changing processes of twentieth century art are, at the speed of a nuclear propelled multi-engine, approaching the velocity of light. New technologies of communication, the individual, and social progress gave birth to new art forms: x-ray, infra-red and polaroid photography, video, xerox art, computer music and neon sculpture. Today artists are using their bodies in action, performing a totality of mass-media. This multiplicity developed the modern creator: the multimedia artist.

A most characteristic art form of the last two decades has been mail art, a multimedia art acting toward a universalization of art, at the same time serving as the world's largest form of art communication/transmission. The roots of mail art reach back to the Dada era when dadaists used letters, stamps and postcards as material for their collages. Apollinaire had already created poems with visual appeal using calligrams. A group of Czech dadaists agreed to send tourists picture poems of their travels on the faces of post-cards. Yet the idea of making correspondence itself a continuing and ever expanding work of art came only later, after Dada was declared dead.

Twenty years ago, Ray Johnson described by FILE as Dada Daddy, tore up his drawings and sent them to friends. This act received great response, and so expanding his mailing





Jindrich Styrsky, Souvenir, tourist picture poem, 1924

Il y a vingt ans, Ray Johnson, décrit dans FILE comme Papa Dada, déchira ses dessins et les envoya à ses amis. Ce geste reçut une grande réaction et, en allongeant sa liste postale, il se mit à jouer un jeu nouveau: l'art correspondance. Aujourd'hui, le "mail art" a atteint les proportions d'un mouvement international. Il est impossible de compter les nombreuses expositions organisées au nom du "mail art", l'art correspondance ou quel que soit le qualificatif que l'on décide d'attribuer à ce phénomène moderne puisqu'il s'est épanoui parmi les serres chaudes conventionnelles des structures mondiales d'art traditionnel et d'idéologies bourgeoises ennuyantes "gratteciel". Il est croissance sauvage, gagnant le monde entier et créant une nouvelle jungle d'art.

Les artistes postaux forment une communauté particulière pour un échange d'idées sans rencontres personnelles, une oeuvre collective entre individus éloignés. L'idée de base est très simple, commune, familière. Elle est ouverte à tous, tout comme le bureau de poste est un service public. On alimente le réseau postal d'information créative et le procédé commence. L'art postal ne nécessite pas une galerie, le système en lui-même constitue un musée vivant continuellement changeant, un appareil transmetteur/receveur. Les nombreuses expositions d'art postal démontrent, au public, que cette méthode de communication d'art existe en tant que geste expressif, un rite dont la fonction originelle est la circulation continue d'idées créatives entre participants. La déclaration de Ray Johnson, "le "mail art" n'a pas d'histoire", n'est pas du tout vraie. Il est vrai cependant que son histoire n'a pas été écrite ou analysée encore. Des phénomènes parallèles, tels que l'art-performance et le vidéo, ont déjà plusieurs publications descriptives et richement illustrées, mais rien

list he started to play a new game: correspondence art. Today mail art has reached the proportions of an international movement. It is impossible to count the many exhibitions organized in the name of mail art, correspondence art, or whatever we decide to call this modern phenomenon, since it blossomed amidst conventional hothouses of traditional art world structures and boring bourgeois "park view" ideologies. It is growing wild the world over, creating a new jungle of art.

Mail artists form a particular community for idea exchange without personally meeting. The basic idea is very simple, common, familiar. It is open for all, just as the post office is a public service. One feeds creative information into the postal network and the process starts. Postal art needs no gallery, the system is itself an everchanging live museum, a transmitting receiving apparatus. The many exhibitions of postal art demonstrates, to the public, that this method of art communication exists as an expressive act, a rite whose original function is the continual circulation between participants of creative ideas. Ray Johnson's statement "Mail Art has no history" is not true at all. It is true however, its history has not been written or analyzed yet. Parallel phenomena, such as performance-art and video, already have a number of descriptive and richly illustrated publications, yet nothing regarding mail art. Why? Probably because the public and official critics don't take it seriously, regarding it as junk mail or something easy to do but hard to sell.

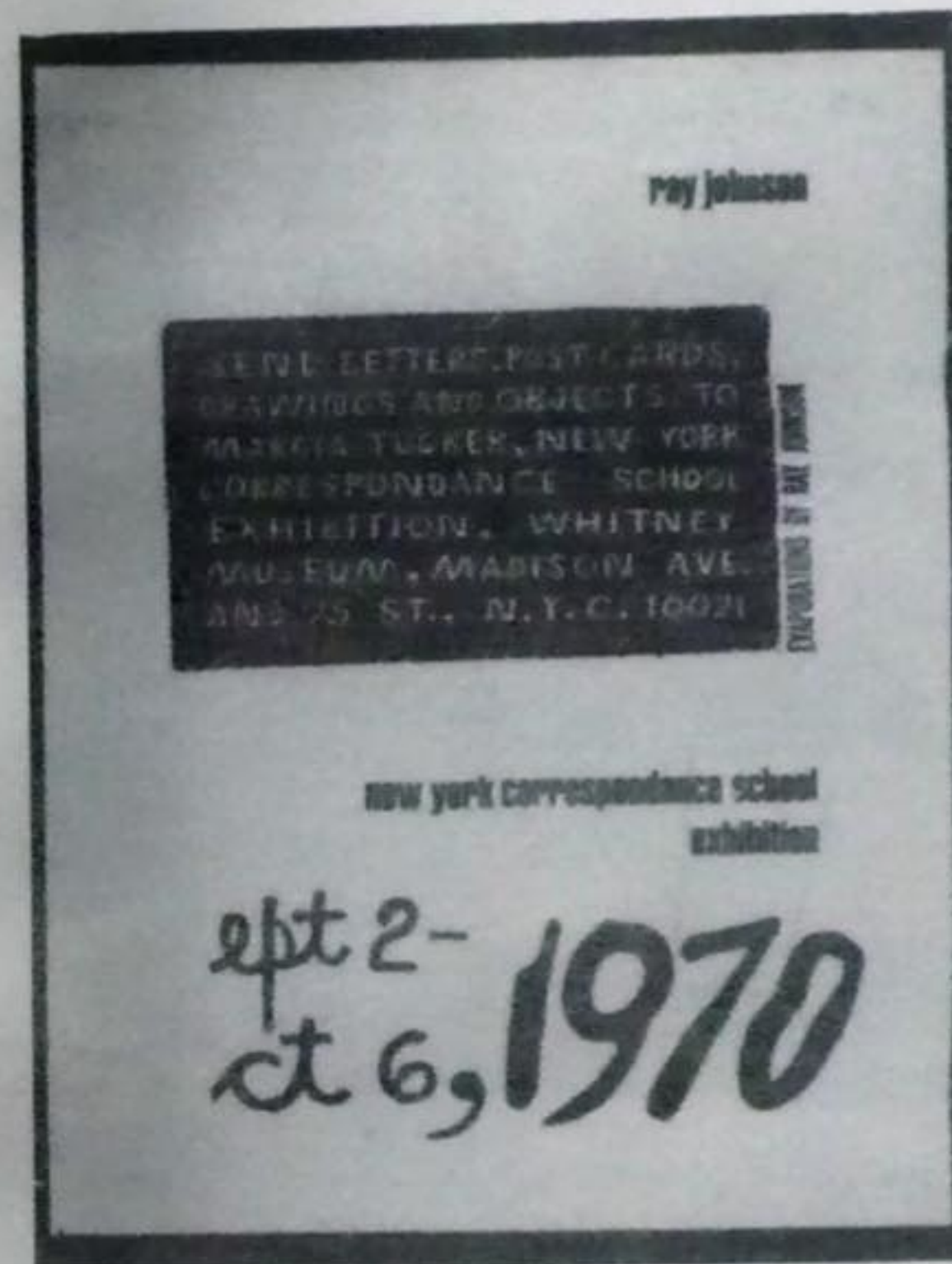
Ray Johnson, described by FILE as Dada Daddy



Ray Johnson, décrit par FILE comme Dada Daddy

concernant le "mail art". Pourquoi? Probablement parce que le public et la critique officielle ne le prennent pas au sérieux, le considérant comme poste-camelote ou quelque chose facile à faire mais difficile à vendre.

Invitation for an exhibition of New York Correspondance School, a project of Ray Johnson



Invitation à une exposition de New York Correspondance School, un projet de Ray Johnson

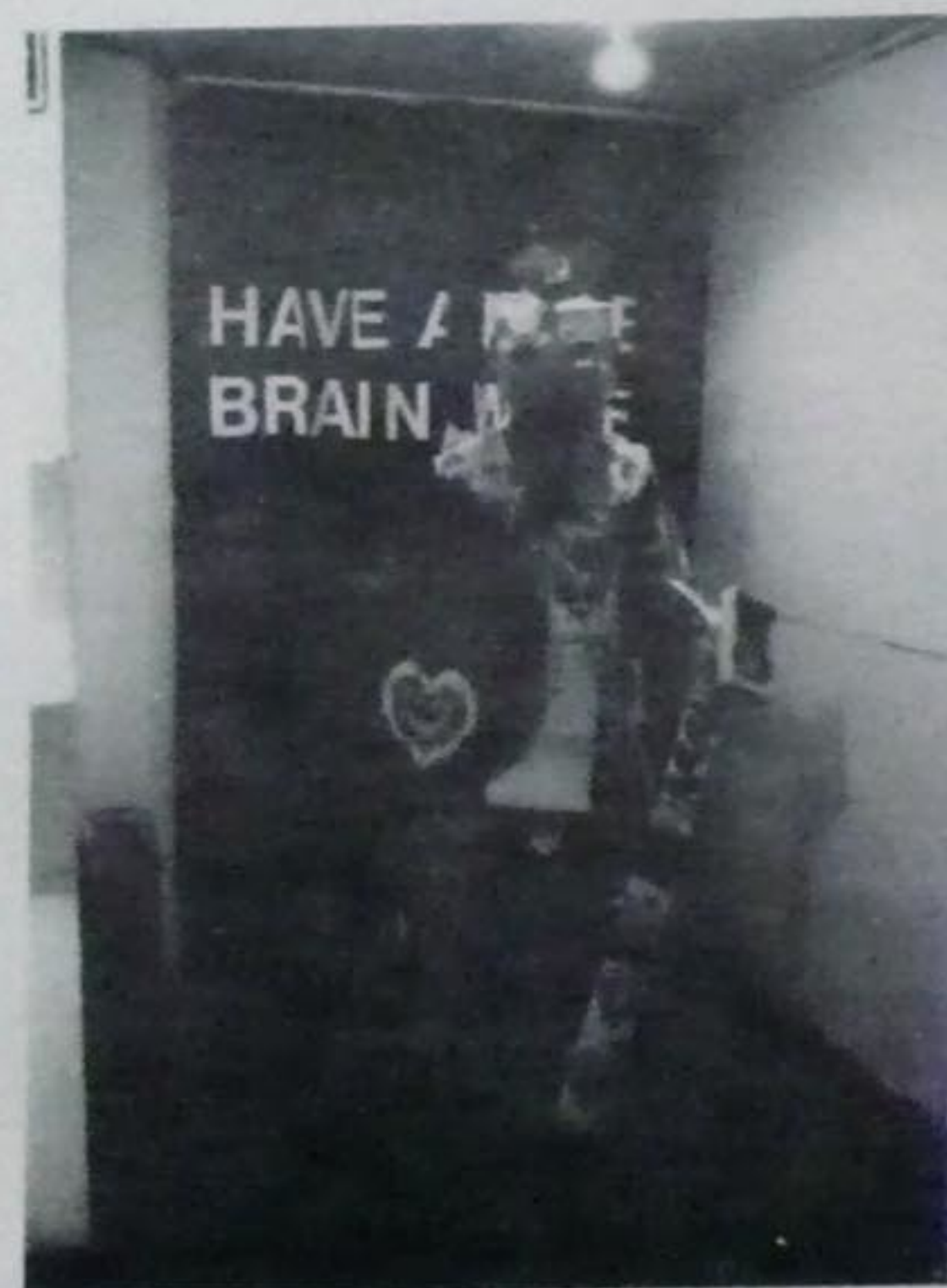
Une pièce de "mail art" peut être n'importe quoi, limitée seulement par les règlements des bureaux de poste, un champ libre pour la stupidité et l'esprit étourdi ou un large pour la créativité non conventionnelle et la subversion. L'art postal porte le poids de la controverse esthétique et la philosophie pratique - Pas de Frais, Pas de Jurys, Pas de Contrôles... mais les individus s'efforcent à organiser des expositions en galerie ou pour se voir inclus dans des catalogues. En échappant les obligations formelles aux structures artistiques, les archivistes du "mail art" recherchent la reconnaissance officielle, le prestige et la compétition entre participants: et fugit ad salices et se cupit aute videsi. Ces attitudes présentent la nécessité pour la fuite du temps.

"Mail art", sors de l'underground et bats-toi pour survivre parmi les conditions vitales de l'art contemporain.

A mail art piece can be anything, limited only by regulations of the post offices, a free field for stupidity and dizzy wittiness or a large forum for unconventional creativity and subversion. Post art carries the weight of controversial aesthetics and practical philosophy - no fees, no juries, no controls... yet individuals strive for organized gallery exhibitions or to be included in printed catalogues. While escaping formal obligations to artistic structures mail art archivists seek official acknowledgment, prestige, and competition between participants\* et fugit ad salices et se cupit ante viden. These attitudes present the necessity for the flight of time.

Mail art, came out from underground and fights to survive among the vital conditions of contemporary art.

Andre Farkas wearing his Chain Mail Heart of postcards at Vehicule



Andre Farkas portant son Chain Mail Heart de cartes postales à Vehicule



The Brain in the Mail exhibition at Vehicule Art Gallery, febr/march, 1979



Exposition the Brain in the Mail à la Galerie Véhicule Art, fev./mars 1979

"Brain in the mail" (Cerveau à la poste) est une exposition de "mail art" international, qui fut organisée par Véhicule Art inc., de Montréal. L'exposition eut sa présentation initiale entre les 14 février et 6 mars 1980, à la galerie Véhicule et, plus tard, à Alma (Québec) à la Salle Tremble et à Peterborough (Ontario) chez Artspace. Ces galeries envoyèrent de nouvelles requêtes pour du matériel et le "cerveau" s'agrandit. Deux participants complétèrent l'exposition avec des projets spéciaux, comme le "Chain Mail Heart" d'André Farkas (Montréal) et "Brain Inserts" de Niels Lomholt (Danemark).

Ces pièces furent colligées dans l'ordre de leur arrivée et la plupart furent insérées dans les enveloppes de plastique transparent de la dimension de draps - où l'on pouvait observer les deux côtés des oeuvres - et furent pendues au plafond. Le travail nécessaire à l'organisation fut entrepris par des artistes de Véhicule: Nancy Petry, David Moore, David Rahn, Trevor Goring et Monty Cantsin. Le titre de l'exposition fut suggéré par Cso Kantor en relation à son projet "Brain Building and Cerebrite 79-84". "Brain in the mail" dénote le caractère "source d'idées" et "centre de communications" du réseau art-postal.

"Brain in the Mail" is an international mail art exhibition, organised by Vehicule Art, Montreal. The exhibition was first presented from Feb. 14 to March 6, 1980 at Vehicule and later in Alma, Lac St-Jean (Quebec) at Salle Tremble and in Peterborough, Ontario at Artspace. These places sent invitations for participation and the "brain" became bigger. Two participants supplemented the exhibition with special projects, like Chain Mail Heart by Andre Farkas, Montreal and Brain Inserts by Niels Lomholt, Denmark.

The pieces were collected in order of arrival and the biggest part put in bed-sheet size transparent plastic envelopes - so both side of the works could be seen - and hung from the ceiling. The exhibition was organised by Vehicule artists: Nancy Petry, David Moore, David Rahn, Trevor Goring and Monty Cantsin and the title given by Cso Kantor is related to his Brain Building and Cerebrite 79-84 project. "Brain in the Mail" points to the "idea-source" and "communication-centre" character of postal-art-network.

Ce tome ne peut inclure tout le matériel de l'exposition à cause des difficultés d'imprimerie. Cette sélection se voudrait le reflet de la diversité de l'exposition et démontrer les caractéristiques du "mail art" sans donner aucune échelle de valeurs artistiques. Nous espérons que ce catalogue aidera l'idée de l'exposition-envoyez-oeuvres-gratuites et sa survivance, récompensant ceux qui participèrent à l'exposition et qu'il servira de document instructif pour tous ceux qui s'intéressent à la métamorphose de l'art.

This book cannot include all of the exhibition's material for technical reasons. The selection however, should reflect the diversity of the exhibition and demonstrates the characteristics of mail-art without giving any order of artistic values. We hope that this catalogue will help to keep alive the idea of the send-free-works-exhibit, repay people who participated in a show that most of them will never see and be an instructive documentum for all who are interested in the metamorphoses of art.

The Brain in the Mail Travelling Show starts its tour in Canada



The Brain in the Mail exposition itinérante debute sa tournée au Canada



INTRODUCTION INTRODUCTION INTRODUCTION INTRODUCTION INTRO

Dear Kantor—

You asked me to write an introduction for your catalogue. Here it comes!

I talked with Ackerman on the phone in Portland last night, to tell him about Ruth's call from Calgary. At 7:27 p.m. June 17th, 1979, she gave birth to our fifth child together, a girl, 8 lbs 12 ounces.

Ackerman was very glad, of course, said it is wonderful father's day present, and to be sure it is a wonderful father's day present.

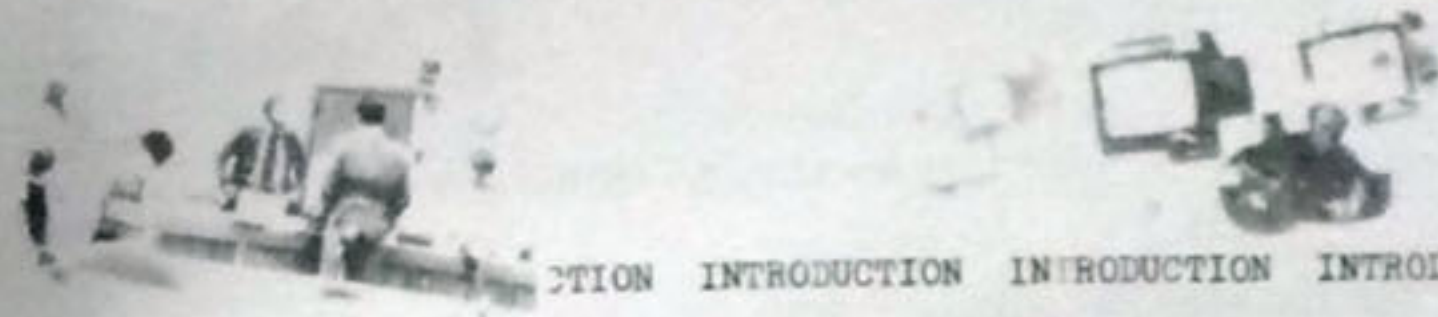
He told me how he is getting the whole Arthur Turner story published in 16 pages, by Genesis P-Orridge over there in London. He said he has been visiting recently with the original Arthur Turner, a computer scientist who went to my own school, the University of Chicago, name of RH Tatum, and Tatum will take part in the Copenaga Copenhagen Correspondence Convention Conference at the Tranegarden Community Art Library, in Hallerup, May 2nd, 1980, more than likely. I am very pleased to hear this—I was pretty drunk when I visited with Ron in Houston in 1974 but I did send him my biggest ever correspondence palimpsest, more than two meters high and was waiting for a payoff on that piece of art, and I can see it coming now.

Because the way things are going, Kantor, we will need computers to handle the 1984 correspondence convention in Denmark, at Tivoli Amusement Park. The problem to face is how to use them so the correspondence is better, and for this we need a smart computer scientist like Tatum. And of course a smart computer scientist ties you into a lot of other smart computer scientists, such as Bob Floyd. Bob Floyd I believe is the Alice Cooper of computer scientists, or perhaps it is the John Lennon because he has been lasting a while. I never knew Ron Tatum because he was at the University of Chicago after I was there. However I was friends with Floyd, when he was working the nightshift at I.I.T. in 1957, programming formulas for Toni hairdry formulae and talking talking about what this equipment is he was working with. Floyd was 19 then, 20, going with a girl called Jan, living in a Spanish style apartment house. I listened to him a great deal, Kantor, much as I listen to you, and of course you must realize I didn't understand a thing except that the subject was very interesting and I knew sometime I would get to where what I was doing would depend very much on using computers right.

This is what Floyd was saying, that computers are very flexible devices. He could see back then they would be manufacturing themselves in time, and the time of course has come. To see a world in a grain of sand (and a heaven in a wild flower) is an image of William Blake, but it is also a computer chip, as everyone can now see.

Now, of course, what you are doing with your show, and the catalogue I am introducing here, and the Monty Cantsin idea and Cerebrite 79-84 and also Neoisim which you tell me people are buzzing about so hard in Montreal—it all requires computerization to be any good.

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By "any good" I mean so it does a lot of good for the individuals involved in the correspondence process.

It was so fine to see you connect with Maris Kundzins, who started Monty Cantsin out in Portland in March of 1978, via Sue Fishbein, who didn't hear of correspondence until she met Maris in San Diego last summer, summer of 78, and got to be friends with him and Barbara Vogel. Then she came to New York, and I gave her that weird neo-doll to give you, and you set in Montreal, and a link of the person to person sort was set up between you and the Monty original. But of y course you are the Monty original as much as Maris is. This is the idea, if there is an idea—that in correspondence each person is an original. There is no point on people being copies of other people in correspondence, though of course the point of the media monster in operation is that one person can be copied by hundreds of people, thus becoming a media monster on two legs, without a head.

Not to worry. I am really a bit worried about your blood soup. What if you drank it? It would ruin your vegetarian standing. To me, Kantor, the fact you are a yoga and a vegetarian is basic to who you are. When you went outside in your underpants and di yoga exercises there in the Albina neighborhood in Portland, and people like Steve Minor learned about it, in my opinion you did more for Monty Cantsin and art than in all the appearances you made at libraries, art galleries, fairs, bars and so on.

The reason for this is that the power of correspondence is like the power of gossip, mouth to ear, and by acting like the normal Hungarian yoga you are, you stimulated a lot of mouths into a lot of ears that hadn't had anything new to talk about since the race riots back in 1964.

Kantor, you really did it in Portland. There were days you didn't eat, days and days, I know. But the miracle of the telephone persisted, and the talk was set in motion. Karli Terri and the Herculean will crew create more Monty Cantsins than any number of Long Goodbyes or Davon Discos.

But the soup, Kantor, the soup. Red soup. From your blood, like you told me. They are to take it out in tubes.

I see, I see. Sure, when John Lennon said the Beatles were more popular than Jesus Christ, this did more to make the Beatles popular in the U.S.A. than anything else he could have said. Right?

And that spread the Beatles to Japan, to Italy, even to Hungary. So big a pop sensation.

And now, you give the people your blood to drink. Even Christ just did this by metaphor—he passed out bread and wine, and said it was blood and flesh. But you give them red soup.

Now, Kantor, I don't know if you ever saw the postcard Beke Lasslo sent me that helped me to go to Budapest in 1976—helped me to decide to go, I mean. It was a tiny red square, and of course I realized what Beke was talking about is that a red square should be a tiny thing, rather than a monster.

And now you did that Kondrashin-Cliburn performance, where Michele shot the piano player. And then you told me how you were working with the piano, and Lion Laser had his hand broken. Believe me, I worried about that a lot. I mean, it isn't good a musician should break a hand. Better a musician should be given a big hand—give the piano player a big hand. Well, I suppose Lion's hand did swell up a bit after being broken. But it is so wrong.

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Yet also so right. Did you read Me, Alice? I mean the story of the pop star, Alice Cooper. How he outraged people by pretending to be gay, but wasn't. How he and the other guys in his band threw glasses and bottles at the audience? And how they became the most popular pop act of their day, which is still going on?

Kantor, you know what you are doing with this Monty Cantsin! You have gone farther than anyone, with your blood soup!

And, because you are a yoga and a vegetarian, you cannot drink it yourself. You are offering people something you can't touch. You remain pure and clean. And so, it is art that is like Brecht, Bertolt Brecht, the old communist playwright, said was the right kind of art. You are acting, and teaching, at the same time.

It drives a person crazy to think about it. Blood soup!  
But at the same time, your pop stardom develops, and this is one hell of a way to generate interest in an idea.

Now, Kantor, listen. There are two things I need to tell you about. One is this Peter Halasz. Remember, Squat Theatre is gone. They are no longer the First Theatre in the world. They are doing something different in July. It will be The Second Theatre in the world.

Now, besides that, you know Neumanyi is in Paris. Yes, you led him there, and he is there. And there is a pile of writing at the Squat Theatre building on 23rd street, part of Neumanyi's movement. It is very clear writing. I hope you get a chance to read it there when you see Peter Halasz.

Now, Kantor, the other thing I have to tell you. I was at Morning Raga presented by Pandit Pran Nath yesterday. It was in the old stock exchange of New York, the same room where the stock market once operated, a big white room. Hundreds of people sat on the floor.

I was talking with a man from Montreal who comes to study with Pran Nath as much as he can. Pran Nath is the living master of the Kirani style of Indian vocal singing. Vocal singing? Yes, well, all singing is vocal, or almost all. But this is a special thing. He practiced it as a boy in India, at night, in the jungle. He was so eager to practice he learned how to do without sleep, you know. It is a saga.

Go to New York, Kantor! Study vocal singing with Pran Nath! He will make your work famous—the Pandit can show you how.

Ordinarily, I don't believe in pandits and Gurus and the like, you know. Think it is a bunch of hogwash. But I know media gold when I see it—always have, always will. So don't worry. Get yourself in with Pran Nath, Kantor—do you hear me? This is all you have to do in New York.

To make a living, you have to start a fad. I have these strange rubber dolls you can sell at carnivals and create a fad. If you sell a million for two dollars, you will make a million dollars. Think how many catalogues you can print for a million dollars.

O.K., O.K. I don't have much more to say. You can stay here on Coney Island if you want, by the sea, so New York is not too hard on you. All New York comes here on hot days anyhow.

I have to take a trip to Canada and see my new daughter. So you and your friends can stay here while I'm away. There is a building behind this one for sale cheap, only 25,000 dollars, and the post office is 150,000. These would be a great correspondence center, lot of rooms. Between us, we'll arrange to buy and use them.

In the Correspondence Center, we can get the Luna/Sea gallery going. Moon-Ocean, New-Motion, Neotism. Nothing more to say now. Please space  
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these pages so they are neat enough to read, OK? I suppose we are introducing the catalogue to show people how correspondence works. For example I got this poster in the mail recently and don't know who is doing the luna/sea gallery. But they obviously need a good place for it, and it seems to me Coney Island is the place, since the sea is here. And the moon too. Maybe the Luna-seed gally gallery. Or papoona? Who can say, and why

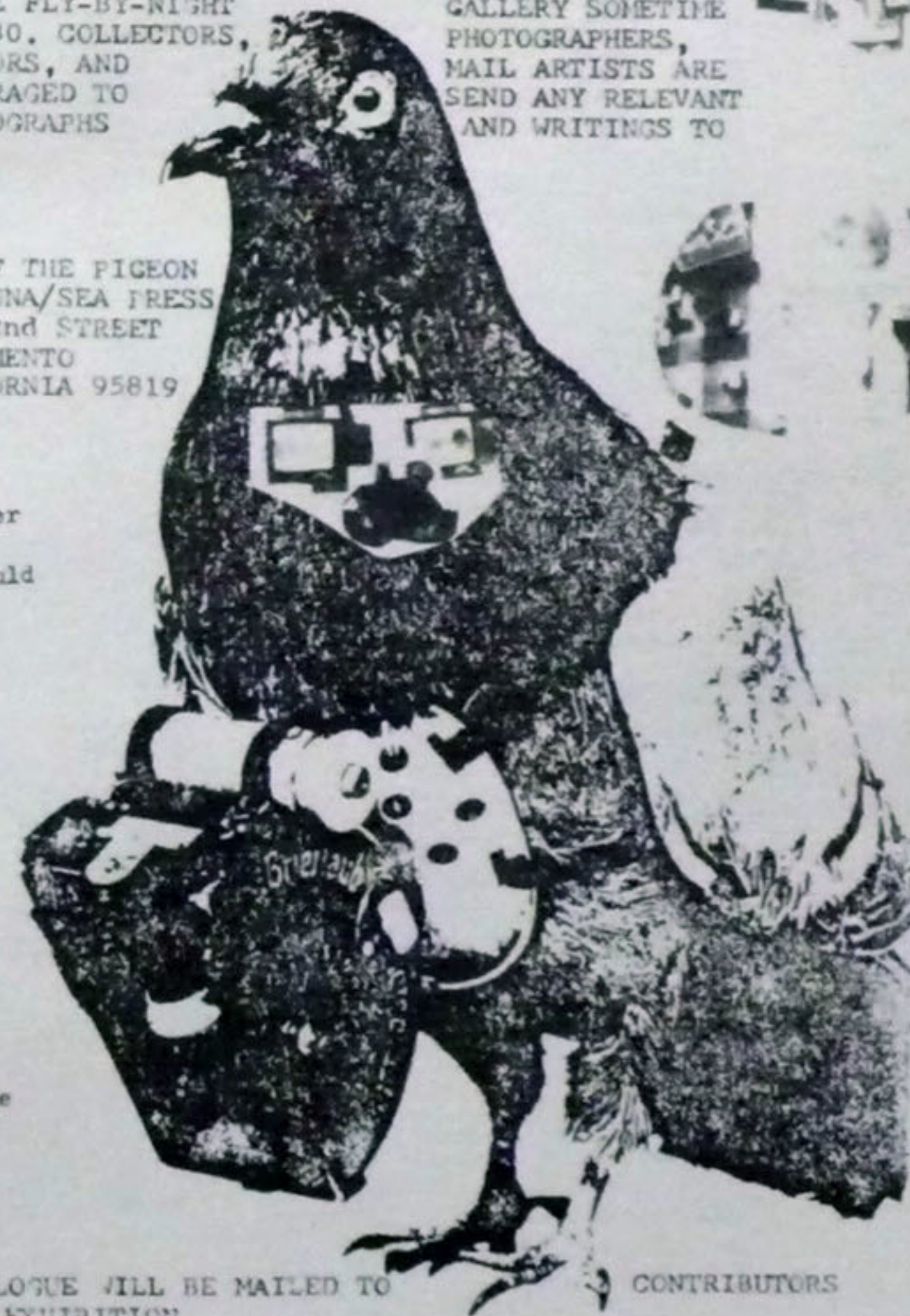
try? I really like Sam Goodman. His shit show is just the surfacing of the legend of this unknown artist.

Known in his day, to his friends, yearning toward the sun, dying of cancer. This is where red soup is real.

well, Kantor, there is only one more page of this introduction, the letter from Musicmaster. And Ackerman said I should get a message to you, relating to where you went to that party in Eugene at Haddock and Mappo's, and there was this girl who took off her b, blouse and danced, and Ackerman said he asked you if you thought she danced for you, and you said, No, she is lesbian, and Ackerman said I should say this is not what is important, it is just that she is, uh, he said, just that she was

THIS PERSON'S PIGEON/PHOTOGRAPHER LIVED AND WORKED IN GERMANY AROUND 1908. RECENTLY HER FRAGMENTARY BUT POTENTIALLY REVOLUTIONARY WRITINGS ON ALL ASPECTS OF PHOTOGRAPHY WERE DISCOVERED WITH HER NEGATIVES AND PERSONAL PAPERS. AS A CONSEQUENCE, A RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION IS IN PREPARATION AND WILL BE HELD AT THE FLY-BY-NIGHT GALLERY SOMETIME IN 1980. COLLECTORS, CURATORS, AND PHOTOGRAPHERS, MAIL ARTISTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO SEND ANY RELEVANT AND WRITINGS TO

EYE OF THE PIGEON  
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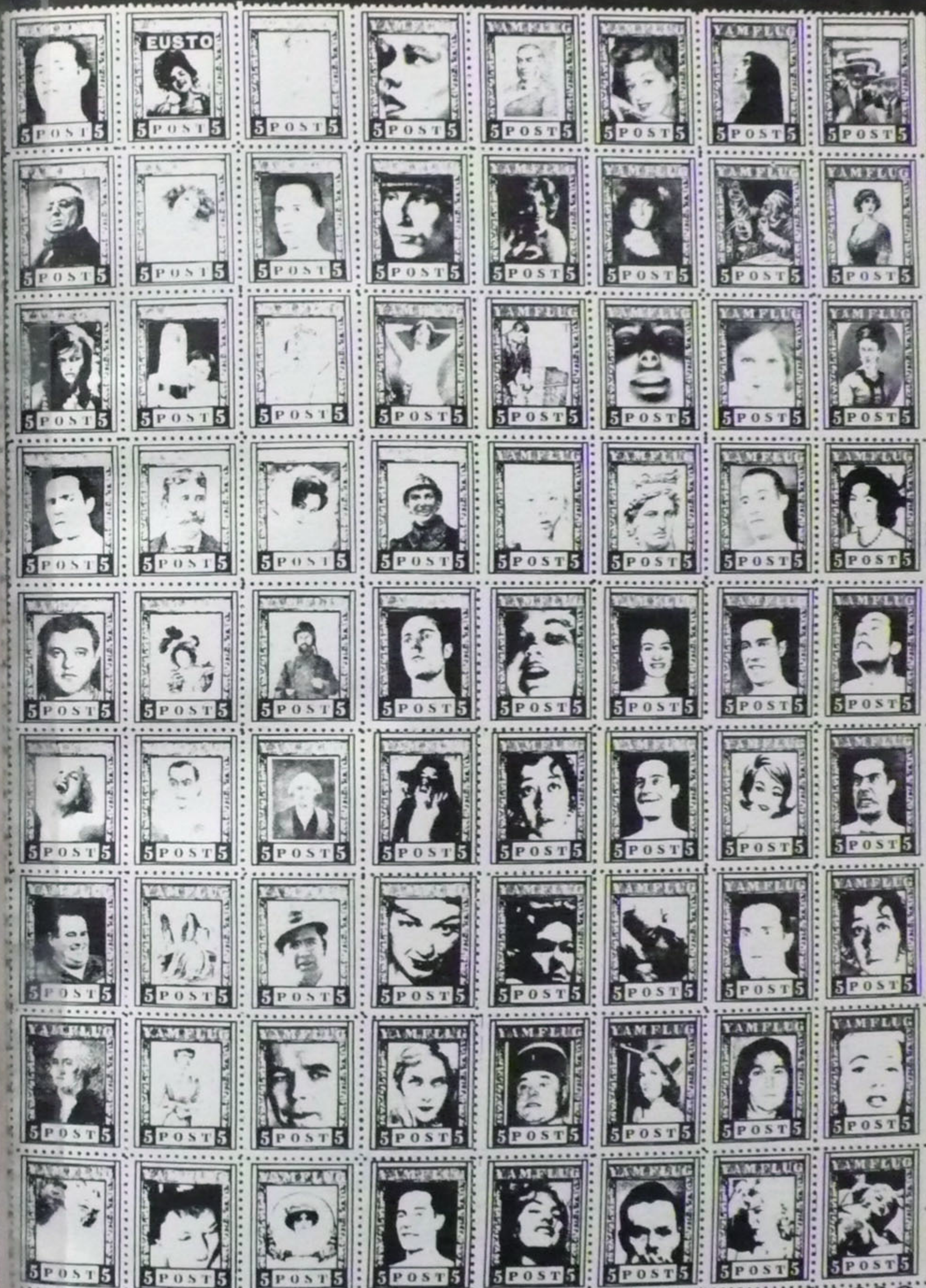
A CATALOGUE WILL BE MAILED TO CONTRIBUTORS TO THE EXHIBITION

crazy, Kantor. So, do well, and best wishes to you and thanks also for the chance to write for you the birth announcement for my ~~ix~~ new daughter, born last night, and still not named.

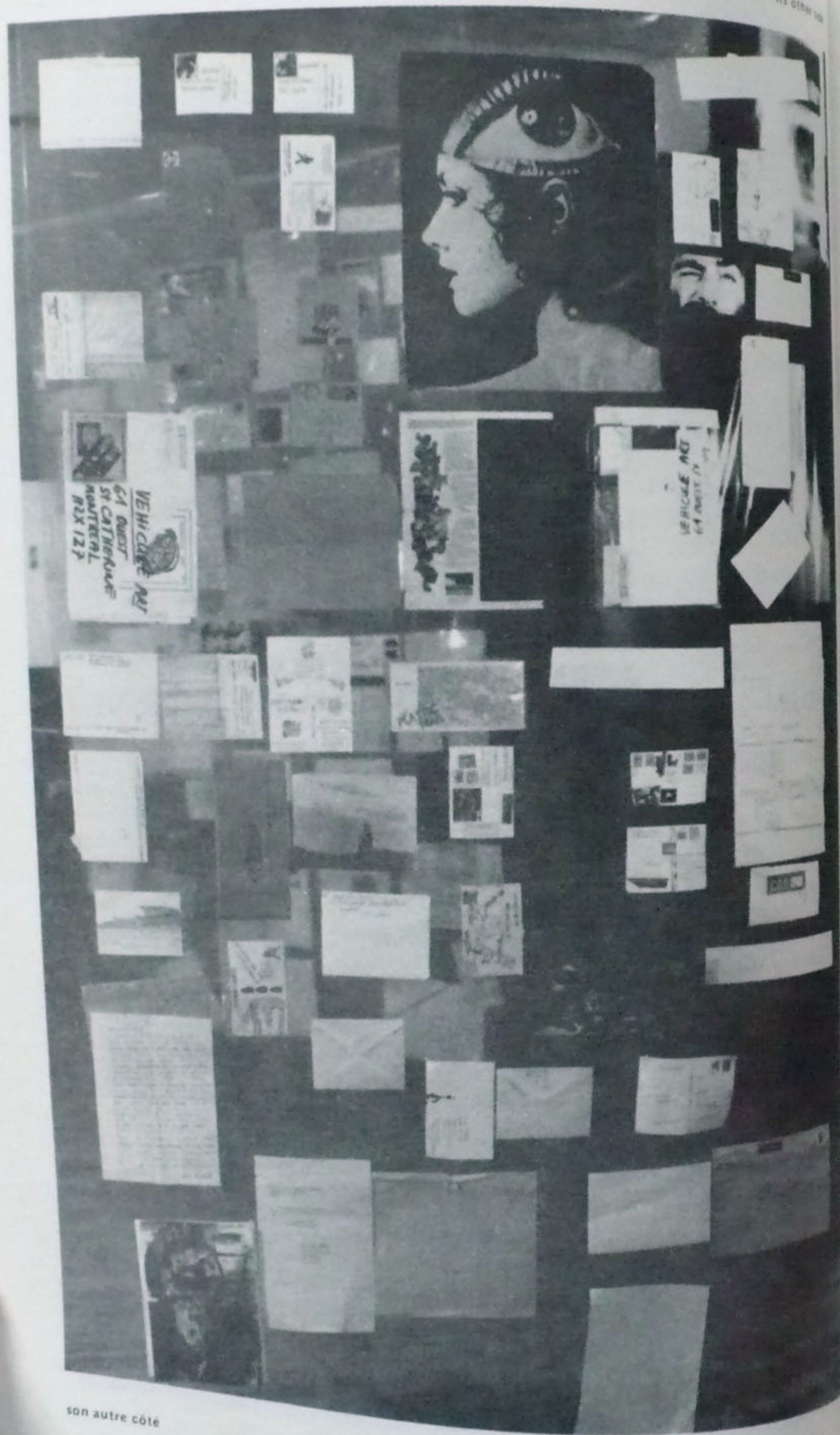
love, David Zack

Coney Island, NY, June 18, 1979







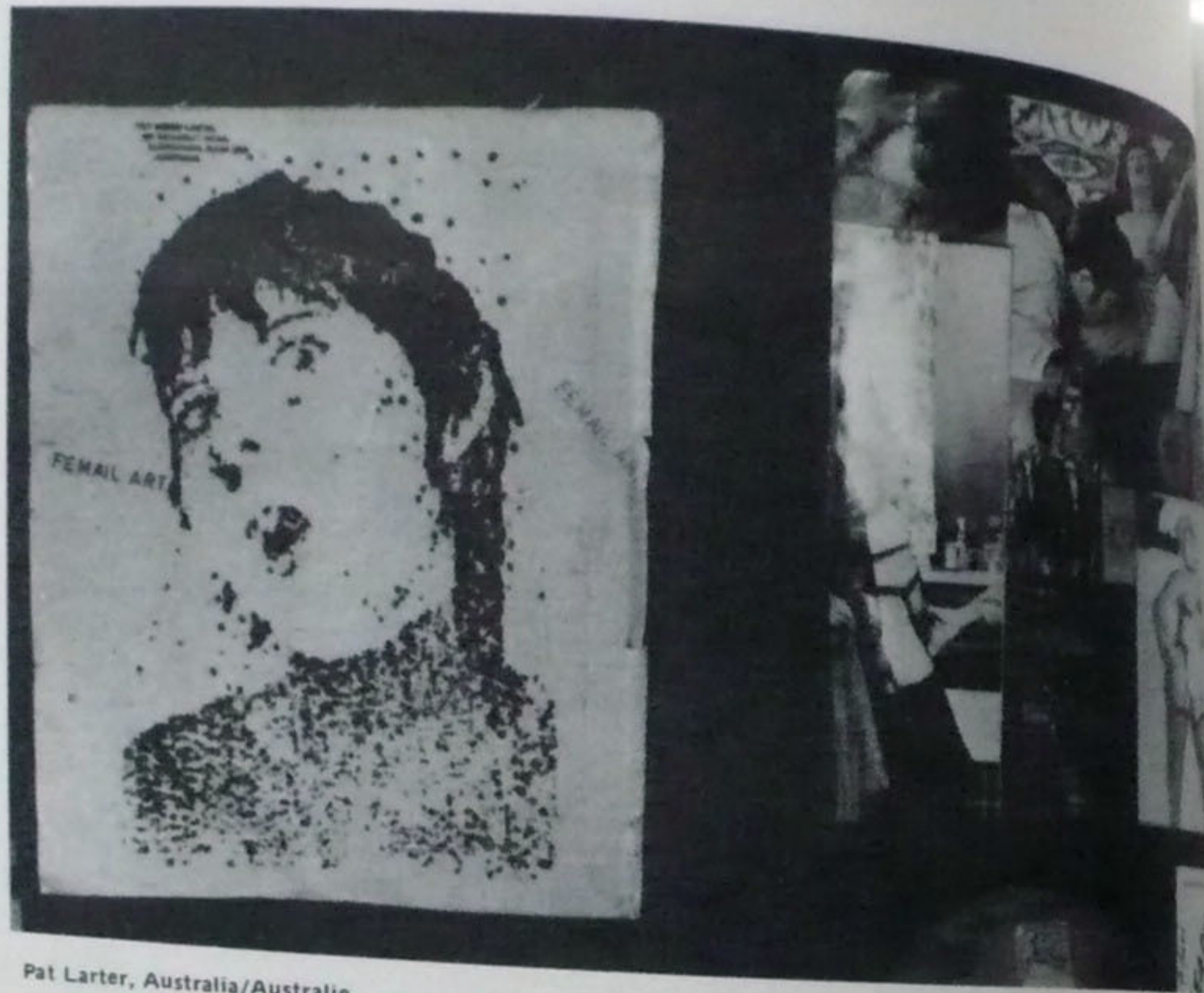


son autre côté

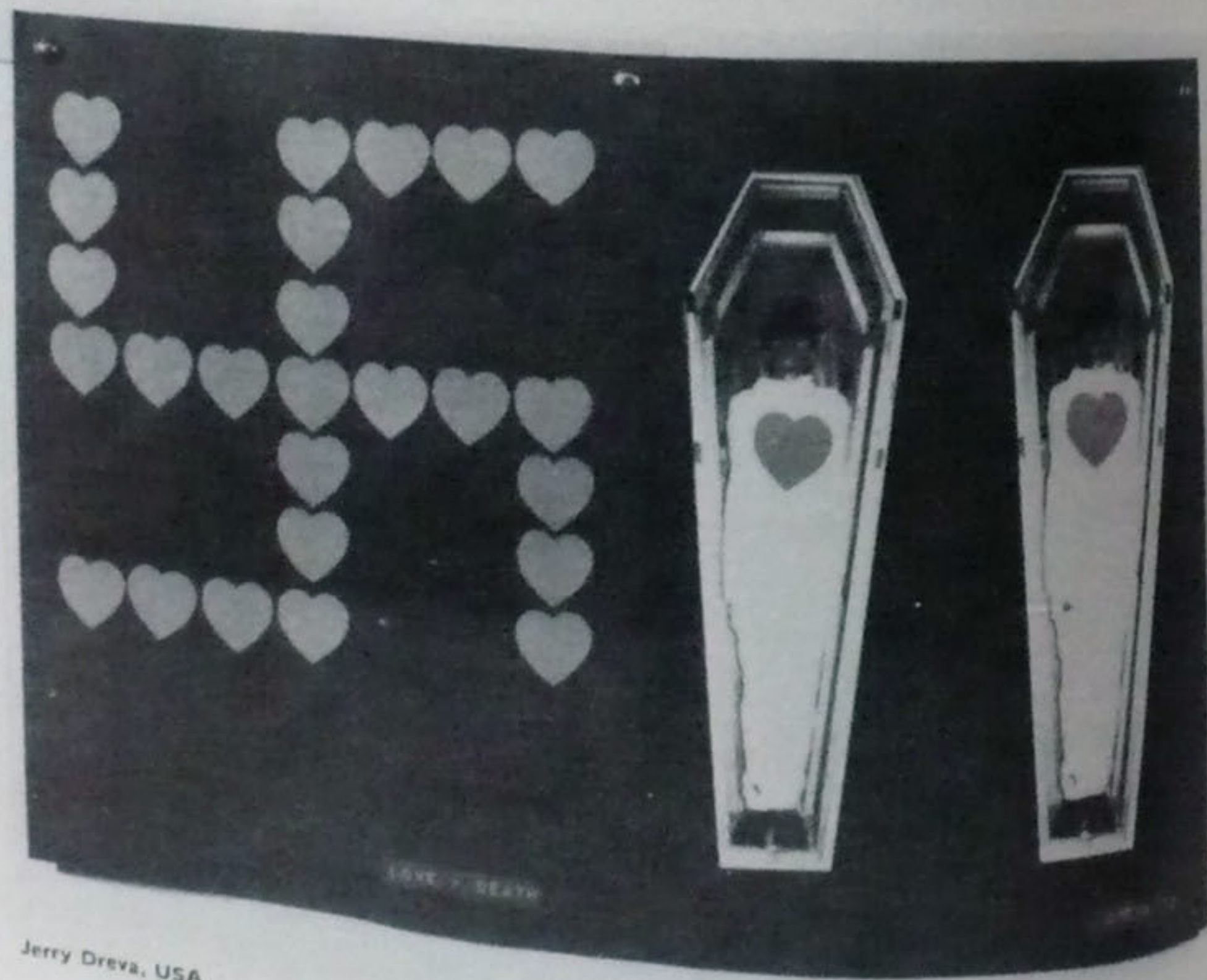


Pauline Smith, England/Angleterre

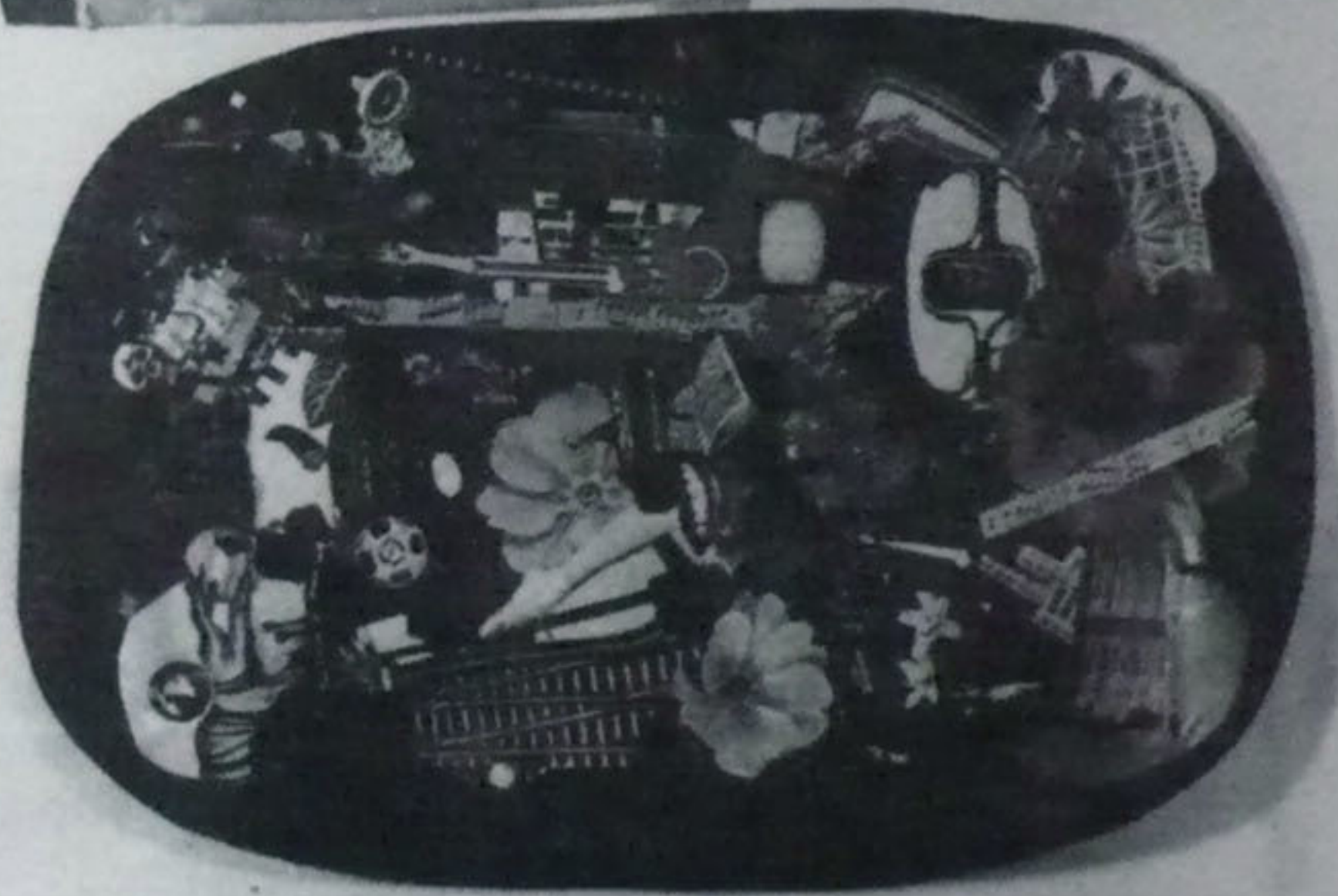




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