BRAIN IN THE MAIL

collection d'art postal
mail art collection
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Table des matières
Contents

INTRODUCTION par/by ISTVAN KANTOR........9
UNE LETTRE/A LETTER de/from DAVID ZACK ....14
SELECTION........................................19
PARTICIPANTS....................................73
ARTICLES........................................76

HAVE A NICE BRAIN WAVE
Monty Cusson
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 polaroïd, le vidéo, l’art xérox, la musique d’ordinateur et la sculpture néon. Aujourd’hui, les artistes se servent de leur 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’ére dada, lorsque les dadaistes 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 dadas tchèques consentirent à envoyer des poèmes “touristes” de leurs voyages sur la face de cartes postales. Néanmoins, l’idée de faire de la correspondance elle-même une œuvre 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 polaroïd 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
Il y a vingt ans, Ray Johnson, décrit dans FILE comme Papa Dada, déchirait ses dessins et les envoyait à ses amis. Ce geste récita une grande réaction et, en allongeant sa liste postale, il se mit à jouer un jeu nouveau : l’art de la correspondance. Aujourd’hui, le “mail art” a atteint les proportions d’un mouvement international. Il est impossible de compter les nombreuses expositions organisées sous le nom du “mail art”, l’art correspondant ou quel que soit le qualificatif que l’on décide d’attribuer à ce phénomène moderne puisqu’il s’est épaçé parmi les serres chaudes conventionnelles des structures mondiales d’art traditionnel et d’idéologies bourgeoises énigmatiques “grattes-ciel”. Il est coûteux savant, gagnant le monde de l’entête et créant une nouvelle jungle d’art.

Les artistes postaux forment une communauté particulière pour un échange d’idées sans rencontrer personnellement, une œuvre collective entre individus désignés. L’idée de base est simple, comme familiale. Elle est ouverte à tous, tout comme le bureau de poste international. On alimente le réseau de communication avec une thématique créative et le procédé est simple. L’art postal ne nécessite pas une mise en forme préalable, et le système en lui-même constitue un appareil de communication créative. Les pièces postales échangent des idées, des formes, des techniques et des ressources. L’enveloppe de l’art postal est un vecteur de communication et une forme d’autonomie artistique.

Concernant le “mail art”. Pourquoi ? Probablement parce que le public et la critique officielle ne le prennent pas au sérieux, le considérant comme post-caméléo ou quelque chose facile à faire mais difficile à vendre.

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

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 artists seek official acknowledgement, prestige, and competition between participants, and are often antivides. 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.

André Farkas wearing his Chain Mail Heart of postcards at Vehicule

Invitation à une exposition de New York Correspondence School, en 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 les poids de la controverse esthétique et la philosophie pratique - Pas de Frais, Pas de Juries, Pas de Contrôles... mais les individus s’efforcent à organiser des expositions en galerie ou pour se voir inclus dans des catalogues. En échappant aux obligations formelles aux structures artistiques, les archistes du “mail art” recherchent la reconnaissance officielle, le prestige et la compétition entre participants, et fuient les juries et les coupes antivides. Ces attitudes présentent la nécessité pour la survie du temps.

“Mail art”, sortis de l’underground et bat-les-tous pour survivre parmi les conditions vitales de l’art contemporain.

André Farkas portant son Chain Mail Heart de cartes postales à Vehicule
“Brain in the Mail” (Cerveau à la poste) is an international mail art exhibition organised by Vehicule Art Inc., 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, Trevor Goring and Monty Cantisin. The title of the exhibition was suggested by Cso Kantor in relation to his Brain Building and Cerebrite 79-94 project. “Brain in the Mail” points to the “idea-source” and “communication-centre” character of posterior network.

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 document 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 exhibition at Vehicule Art Gallery, fev/mars, 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 œuvres du matériel et le “cerveau” s’agrandit. Deux participants compléteront l’exposition avec des projets spéciaux, comme le “Chain Mail Heart” d’André Farkas (Montréal) et “Brain Inserts” de Niels Lomholt (Danemark).

Dear Kantor—

You asked me to write an introduction for your catalogue. Here it is:

I talked with Ackerman on the phone in Portland last night, to tell him about the call from California. At 7:27 p.m. June 17th, 1975, she gave birth to our fifth child together, a girl, 8 lbs 12 ounces.

Ackerman was very glad, of course, said it is a 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 10 parts, by Germaine Beaudry over there in London. He said he has been talking recently with the original Arthur Turner, a computer scientist who went to my own school, the University of Chicago, and in the same way will take part in the Copenhagen Correspondence Conference at the Transgarden Community Art Library, in Ballyrup, May 2nd, 1980, more than likely, I am very pleased to hear this—I was pretty down when we visited 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 1974 correspondence convention in Denmark, at Holsten Amusement Park. The problem to face is how to use them so the correspondence is better, and for that we need a smart computer scientist like Kantor. Of course a smart computer scientist ties you into a lot of other smart computer scientists, such as Rob Floyd. Rob Floyd believes in the Alice Cooper of computer scientists, or perhaps it is the John Lennon because he has been a lasting a while, I never knew Ron Ackerman because he was at the University of Chicago after he was there. However, I was friends with Floyd, when he was working on the right hairdresser formula and taking talking about what this equipment is.

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 (in a cloud of a wild flower) is an image of william Blake, now, of course, what you are doing with your show, and the catalogue and also Mexico which you told me how people are hearing about so hard in the introduction.

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 Mika Kusumita, who started Monty Canteen out in Portland in March of 1975, via Sue Fishbin, who didn't hear of correspondence until she met Mika 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 neon-doll to give you, and you met in Montreal, and a link of the person person sort was set up between you and the Mika original. But of course you are the Mika original as much as Mika is this 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 be Kantor, the last you are a yogi and a vegetarian in basic to who you are, when you went outside your underpants and di yoga exercises there in the Alkina neighborhood in Portland, and people like Steve Minor learned about it, in my opinion you did more for Monty Canteen and art than in all the appearances you made at libraries, art galleries, fair, bars and so on.

The reason for this is that the power of correspondence is like the power of gravity, what's to be, and by acting like the normal Hungarian soup you are, you nodulated a lot of mouths into a lot of ears that hadn't had anything new to talk about since the race state back in 1964, Kantor, you really did it in Portland. Those were days you didn't eat, days and days, I know. But the miracle of the telephone persisted, and the tail was set in motion. Karl Christ and the Japanese all crew create more Monty Cantines than any number of Long Goodbyes or Bavor Dancers.

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

I see, I see. When John Lennon said the Beatles were more popular than Jesus Christ, this did more to take the Beatles popular from a Jesus Christ, this did more to take the Beatles popular.

And that spread the Beatles to Japan, to Italy, even to Hungary.

And now, you give the people your blood to drink. Even Jesus Christ did this by means of the consecrated bread and wine, and said it was blood and flesh, but you give them red soup.

Now, Kantor, I didn't know if you ever use the postcard back (I meant that helped me to go to Budapest in 1975—helped me to decide to go, I mean, it was a tiny red square, and of course I realized what he was talking about as that a red square should be a tiny thing, rather than a monster.

And now you did that Kostroma-Clumber performance, where Michael shot the piano player. And then you told me how you were playing with the piano, and Ian Leaver had his hand broken. Believe me, I worried about that a lot, I mean, it can't be 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 breaking, but it is no worse.

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Let's do it right. Did you read Mr. Alice? I mean the story of the pop star, Alice Cooper. How is the average person by pretending to be gay, but isn't. How he and the other guys in drag have got the 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 Montly Contain! You have gone further than anyone, with your blood soup!

And, because you are a yogi and a vegetarian, you cannot drink it yourself. You are offering people something you can't touch. You remain pure and clean. And so, in art, he is like Dreyfus, 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 absurdism develops, and this is one hell of a way to generate interest in an idea.

Kantor, listen. There are two things I need to tell you about. One is this Peter Halas. 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, you know Newman in Paris. Yes, you led him there, and he is there, and there is a pile of writing at the Squat Theatre building on 6th street, part of Newman's movement. It is very clear writing. I hope you get a chance to read it there when you see Peter Halas.

Mr. Kantor, there is only one more page of this introduction, the letter from Musée-Musée. And in answer, I should get a message to you, relating to that party in Eugene at 800 West Magnolia, and there was this girl who took her for her W. Bloom and danced, and Ackerman said he would ask you if you thought she danced for you, and you said, she was a lesbian, and Ackerman said I should say this in an important way, in just that she was, just that she was.

A CATALOGUE WILL BE MAILED TO CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE Exhibition.

Kantor, so, as well, and best wishes to you and best chance to write for you the birth announcement for your new born child, last night, and still not named.

June 10, 1979

A letter from David Zack

Une lettre de David Zack