

The Project

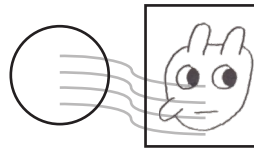
In April and May of this year, Printed Matter/St Marks put out an open call for mail art submissions with the prompt “We live in real time.” Mail art has a deep association with Printed Matter’s mission of circumventing the institutional spaces through which art is usually consumed by widely distributing artworks to be experienced within our daily lives. As a medium, mail art felt especially relevant at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic—sending art through the postal system allows for a new type of physical connection between people, places, and ideas. On view now in the windows of our storefront at 38 St Marks Place at the Swiss Institute is an exhibition of selected mail art submissions that we received from around the world.

Mail Art!

We Live in Real Time: A Window Exhibition of Mail Art Made During the Pandemic



38 St Marks Pl
New York, NY 10003



Over 43 days, we received
1209 pieces of mail
and 613 email submissions from
1137 artists in at least 34 countries.



Jonathan Stangroom

They were artworks on postcards, envelopes, plywood, telephone receivers, velvet, coffee creamer bottles, textiles, plastic skeletons, and cellophane.

Front Page: Juan Santiago Uribe

An Abbreviated History of Mail Art

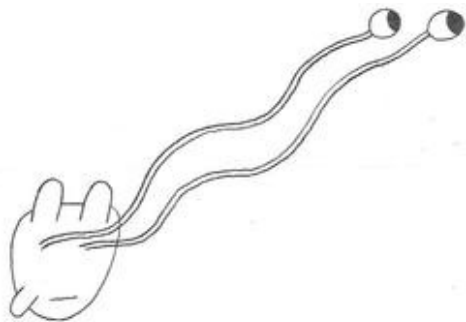
Lynn Maliszewski

Mail Art as we know it grew out of the Dada movement of the early 20th century. Techniques now closely associated with Mail Art developed from Dada: photomontages, collages, prints, and layered assemblages transforming photographs, advertisements, doodles, text, and manufactured objects into artwork. Dada rallied around “anti-art,” a term coined by Marcel Duchamp in 1913, and informed the decentralized international networks that define Mail Art. Dada disciples circulated magazines, manifestos, and newsletters through the mail, allowing each outpost—from Italy to Yugoslavia, Japan to New York—to reflect and critique the cultural and political moment.

After World War II, Neo-Dada and Nouveau Réalisme continued to challenge the valuation of art itself within restrictive political systems. Both groups embraced correspondence-based art and utilized stamps, postcards, and other symbols of bureaucracy for anti-imperialist critique. The Fluxus movement, shortly thereafter, further decentralized the arts. A counterculture newspaper with invitations to festivals and performances around the globe was mailed to members with a contact list for future collaborations. Simultaneously, networks of “sewer literature” circulated by the Nadaísmo movement connected countercultures across South America via printed matter. In the late 1960s, artist Robert Filliou proposed “the Eternal Network,” a manifesto seeking to dismantle the notion of “an art center.” With this momentum, Mail Art began to look outward.

The 1960s catapulted Mail Art into mainstream consciousness. Artist Ray Johnson sent collages, letters, and poems to a network of over 200 artists, friends, acquaintances, and strangers—in 1962 Johnson’s network of mail artists was dubbed The New York Correspondence School (NYCS) by Ed Plunkett. Johnson’s mailings were often accompanied by instructions for the recipient, dictating the next leg of the letter’s journey and sustaining a dialogue.

In the 1970s, Mail Art networks were expanded and electrified. Art historian Jean-Marc Poinsot, who coined the term “Mail Art” in 1971, specified that the medium “remains outside



YOU ARE INVITED
TO A NEW YORK CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL
MEETING
DECEMBER 17
2-5 PM
TRUMAN GALLERY
38 E 57 ST NYC
212-688-3516

Ray Johnson, *Untitled*
(*You Are Invited to a
New York Correspondence
School Meeting*), 1977
Courtesy of the Ray Johnson Estate



Margaret Rizzio



Mitsuko Brooks

Including submissions from:

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Germany | Norway | Ecuador |
| Italy | Argentina | Russia |
| Japan | Ireland | South Korea |
| United States | Portugal | Austria |
| United Kingdom | Czech Republic | Peru |
| Brazil | Spain | Thailand |
| Netherlands | Belgium | United Arab
Emirates |
| Switzerland | Turkey | Cyprus |
| France | Taiwan | Finland |
| Colombia | Denmark | Lithuania |
| Canada | Greece | |
| Mexico | Macedonia | |

the system and partially undermines it, since it affirms the viability of a system opposed to the dominant system in our world.” Mail Art reported on the realities of war and totalitarianism in the Soviet Bloc, Mexico, and Central and South America. Uruguayan poet Clemente Padín wrote that Mail Art could “seek revenge on...cultural entropy.” Mail Art fashions a populist network of correspondence with the power to expose and reimagine unprecedented circumstances, and for that reason it was often censored or intercepted, and artists could be jailed or exiled for their participation during this time period.

History of Mail Art, con't:

throughout the 1990s and 2000s, infiltrated by digital mash-ups and faxes, amplified by affordable and ubiquitous printing methods. Now, collections of Mail Art continue to be discovered and donated to museums and archives. Contemporary projects including Diya Via and Theodore (ted) Kerr’s collaborative Mourn on the 4th (2020) and Ground Floor Gallery’s Mail Art Biennial underscore the continued relevance of the form. We hope that this exhibition will inspire you to begin or expand your own creative correspondences.

Directories of mail artists’ contact information became ubiquitous in the 1970s: FILE, a magazine composed of Mail Art from around the world, was launched by General Idea in 1972; and Umbrella, a publication dedicated to artists’ books and mail art, debuted in 1978. In Central America, Mail Art gathered the sparks of revolution and supported socio-political redefinition of newly-independent nations. Per Mexican arts collective Colectivo 3, Mail Art allowed “people to come into contact with unfamiliar circumstances and problems, encouraging comprehension and solidarity.”



Charlotte Zinsser



Paper casting of Ray Johnson’s belly by Chuck Welch, member of the NYCS. Submitted by Crackerjack Kid’s New York Naval Academy.

Independent and museum exhibitions appeared in the 1970s, but Mail Art remained an experimental, irreverent medium throughout the 1980s. Mail Art maintained a community