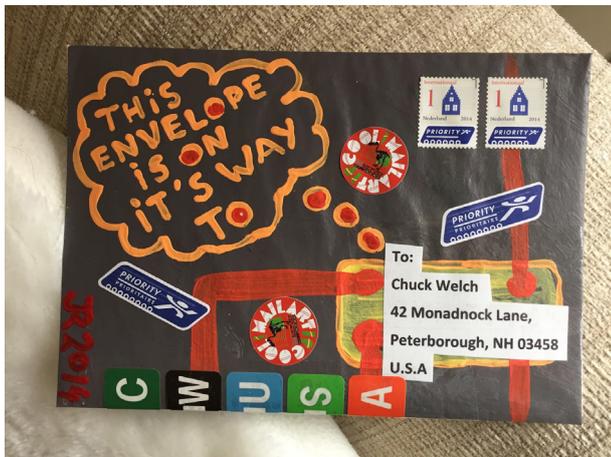


MAIL ART

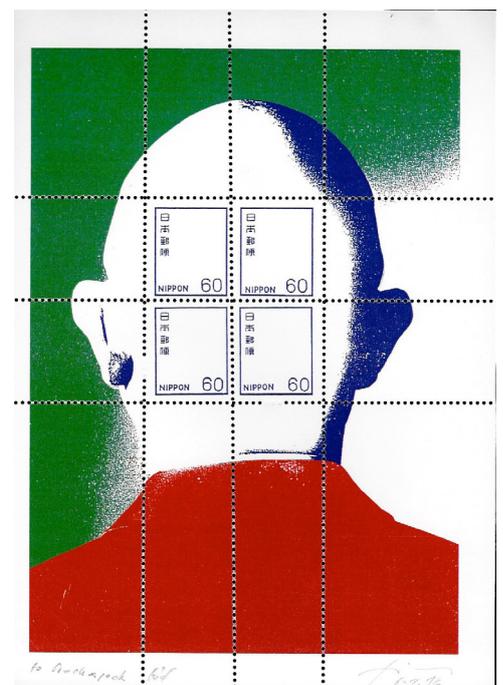




“Tele” is a Greek word for “far off,” “at a distance.” Netlink is terminology meaning “to interconnected networks,” especially communication networks that are perceived to be distant. Artists impart attitudes, values, and sensibilities in their shared communication with others. Mail art is communication that travels a physical/spiritual distance between senders and recipients. For nearly forty years mail artists have been enjoying interactive mail characterized by free, open, often spirited visual/textual correspondances. Mail artists have worked hard to abolish copyrights through dispersed authorship. In the distant, parallel world of high technology, telecommunication artists often work in the same collaborative fabric interwoven with mail art. But emailartists network online in a simulated, textual, paperless world. No wonder there are mail artists who prefer the tangible, tactile, handcrafted encounter of pen, pencil, collage, paint, and handmade paper.

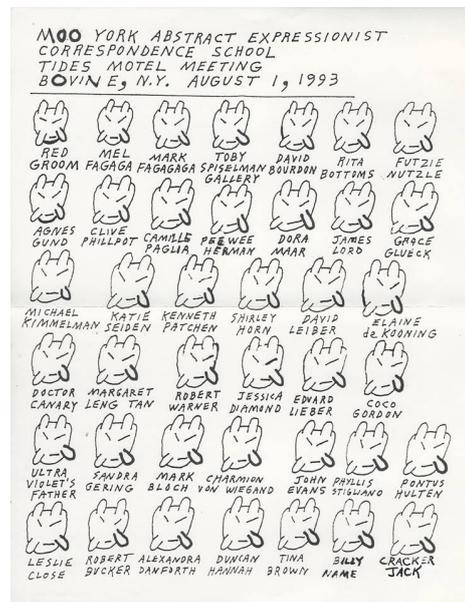
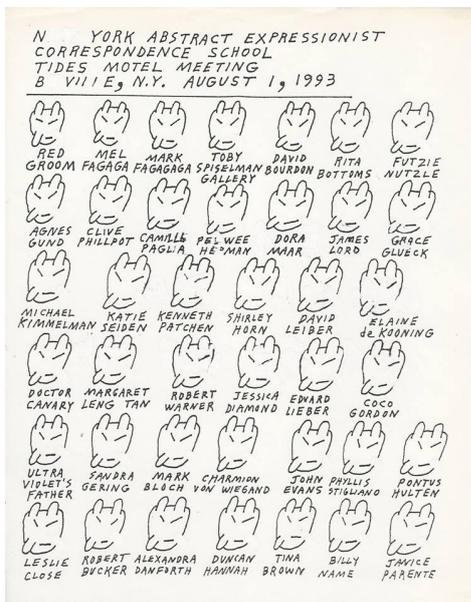


Networkers use both telecommunications and mail art as tools rather than boundaries. These intermedia networkers embrace immediate, direct concepts of exchange that sometimes lead to real-time, face-to-face conferences. Networkers are equally comfortable using the postal mailstream to meet vicariously as “tourists.” The hallmark of both mail and telecommunications art resides in attitudes of creative freedom, collaboration, the abolition of copyrights, and independence outside mainstream art systems. Telenetlink is a forum created to celebrate this interactive spirit between mail art and telecommunications artists. It bridged the telecommunications art community and the mail art culture. Internet is a parallel world to mail art, but Telenetlink envisioned mail art as emailart; an effective global tool for electronically altering art images, building network interaction, assembling large numbers of people for online conferences and creative workshops.

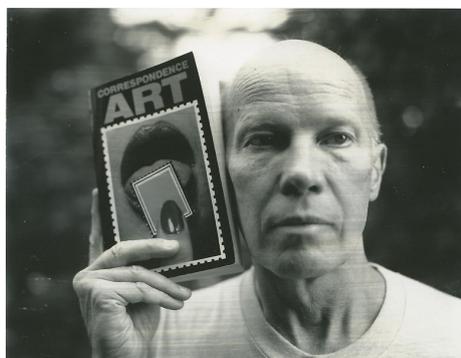


Ray Johnson, the father of Mail Art

As a young student just turning eighteen, Johnson's experiences at Black Mountain College (1945-1947) in Asheville, NC would have a very major impact on his future and life. He studied the relativity of colors taught by the legendary German artist and teacher, Josef Albers. And Ray Johnson met illuminating figures of the American avant-garde including Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller, Walter Gropius, Robert Motherwell and John Cage. Ray Johnson returned to New York City in 1949 and began creating small collages of shaped snippets and scraps he called moticos. These mailings collaged with pop culture logos were shared in NYC by Johnson in Grand Central Station, at sidewalk cafes and in the mail with friends and strangers.



His art took on an intimate and private persona described as “correspondence art” and became known to his correspondence friends as The New York Correspondence School of Art. At any given time, Johnson's mailing list included over 200 individuals he chose to correspond with.

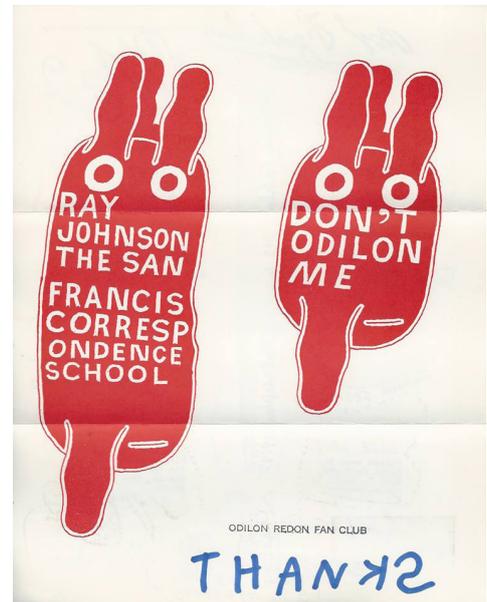


In May 1972, during the early years of ARPANET, before a telematic art presence, mail artists birthed the protointernet. In retrospect, this is the greatest contribution of mail art, it birthed the first global networking cul-ture.



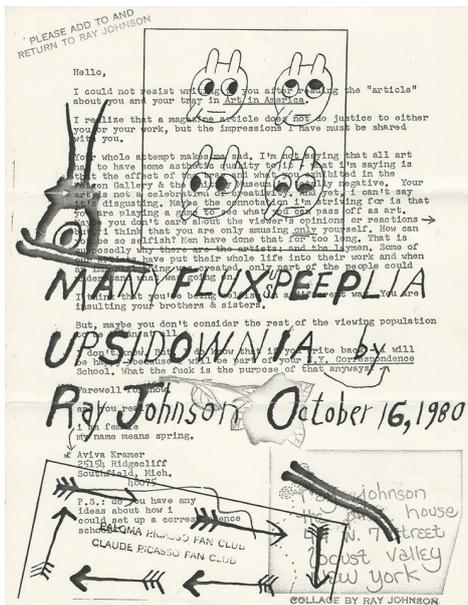
A piece of underwear, in more generalized form, also looms in the foreground of a repetitive collage of artist' and critics' names from Impressionism on down, entitled "Monet's List" (1969). Each name on the list - naturally including that of Monet - is embolished with a tinny bunny head that trails a long, wriggly tail. It is a quintessential Johnson symbol that becomes a cartoony drawing of a Kilroy head with bunny ears.

Told of the art world's burning curiosity about the bunnies' symbolism, Mr. Johnson related them to Mickey Mouse, by whose early presence he was haunted as a child. "The larger ones are self-portraits, the smaller ones are used as stock symbols for people" he explained.



As the patriarch of mail art emanating from New York Correspondence School (his inventions) he is a hero to thousands. His signature bunny head has appeared in homage to him in works by many other artists, yet he seldom permits an exhibition of his iconoclastic cartoonish poetic collages and mail art missives.

He constantly uses art as a personal Duchampian form of communication in appropriated print images, drawing and words. Mail art is the most subversive form of art in the world today. it bypasses the art systems of buying and selling and judging art. Mail art exhibitions always show all the art that is submitted.



Johnson's personal practice of mail art doesn't bypass self-promotion. A lot of his mail is directed to famous, influential people. A favorite ploy is to mail something to one person with instructions to forward it to someone else.

On the other hand his mail art is brutally satirical. Some people must hate it. Johnson is related to the pop artists who find their identities in exposing our cultural feet of clay: mocking our heroes, and our susceptibility to advertising. he is of the macho branch of that schools, exhibiting a manly interest in phallic-looking objects (his bunny ear signature) a disdain for effete sorts of things and a commitment to sneering in general.

