Rich in images, poor in mail art history, 1 April 2009
By Vittore Baroni

I have been involved in the international network of mail art, as a practising author and chronicler, for over three decades, so I have the habit of checking periodically the Internet to see if any new book on the subject has appeared. I had Di Lieto’s Mail Me Art in pre-order long before the publication date, and I had visited the author’s website, the Little Chimp Society, so I knew beforehand more or less what to expect. The book is not disappointing at all in its visual contents, since it permits to see what a specific group of authors - illustrators and designers, mostly young and at the start of their career - is able to devise when confronted with the request to regard the surface of an envelope or package as an empty page, and then drop their completed artwork into a mailbox. A few items designed by children or by more traditionally oriented illustrators are mixed here with a colourful variety of images drawing inspiration from the language of comics, from the bold world of Pop Surrealism, the doodles and tags of street art, the cute characters of toy art. With only an handful of established “big names” in sight, these are by no means “the world’s best illustrators and designers”, as the cover promises, yet the selection is varied and exuberant. It is particularly interesting and amusing to see how each artist has solved the challenge to incorporate the postage stamps, the address and other postal insignia into their piece.

What in the book is really conspicuous by its absence, though, is any real knowledge of over forty years of mail art activities. Even if art by correspondence remains an underestimated and underground art phenomenon, it has been nevertheless documented in thousands of catalogues, art magazines, books, articles (see John Held Jr.’s Mail Art: An Annotated Bibliography, The Screamcrow Press, 1991), and also in many web sites. You simply cannot sweep the complex history of correspondence art under the carpet. If Di Lieto had made the effort of a little research into the tradition and the present of mail art, he would not have come up with such an inaccurate piece of information as when he states that “unlike regular mail, there is nothing inside (a mail art envelope)”; quite the opposite is true! Since Di Lieto name-drops in his introduction “the late pop artist Ray Johnson, who is often considered the father of the (mail art) movement”, he cannot plead complete ignorance. With a little insight into the motivations that lie behind the growth of a planetary “eternal network” of creative correspondents, still involving today hundreds of postal networks, the author would have found out, for instance, that mail art is traditionally considered “a gift” and not something in need of a price tag (as he requests in his interviews to the participating authors).

The global mail art community is not restricted only to illustrators and graphic designers, but also includes painters, sculptors, performers, poets, novelists, musicians, filmmakers, philosophers, mad scientists, amateurs and people from all walks of life. The aim of mail art is not (only) to produce spectacular images on envelopes. In actual fact, the medium usually tackles a broad range of counter-cultural, social, ecological and utopian issues: as an introduction to mail art theory and practices, see Networked Art by Craig J. Saper (University of Minnesota Press, 2001) and the collection of essays At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet (The MIT Press, 2005). Mail art works are rarely “art for art’s sake”: they tend to be part of an ongoing collective dialogue, a process of open, free, anti-hierarchical and interactive communication that long predated the so called “social networks” of the Web 2.0.

Only a handful of works reproduced in Mail Me Art deal with the concepts of communication and postal transmission, even these in a rather shy and mild way. We do not see attempts at challenging the postal medium (for example, by using fake “artist’s stamps”), or at projecting art statements that go much beyond the sheer demonstration of wit and pictorial prowess. Above all, these nice pieces of postal art do not attempt to become part of a networking process by requesting in some way a feedback from the receiver, they are “finished” and ready to be framed (though Di Lieto also proposes to buy them and forward them to a new addressees).

In the broader context of the history of correspondence art, Mail Me Art (with its online companion website) is therefore an interesting project, but only shows one side of the multifaceted mail art phenomenon. A few lines of clarification in the introduction would have been sufficient to place the book in a more correct perspective (since Di Lieto’s website promises a second book, he will have a chance to set the records straight!). All this said, and partially in defence of the author, most books on mail art are no more in print or are rather difficult to find, though Internet offers huge reference sites like the Artpool Archive or Ruud Janssen’s TAM. I still find it amazing that more books are available in the English language about niche phenomena like ATCs (Artists’ Trading Cards), that developed in recent years from the mail art milieu, rather than about the history of mail art itself. It is a gap in the book market that begs to be filled, the sooner the better (but of course, this is another story).
Praise the Lard!
An Open Mail Art Call
BACON!

All art must feature bacon. Anything goes. Video, sound work, 2-D, 3-D, poetry; surprise me, shock me, make me sizzle, raise my cholesterol. All art shown on this blog. Exhibition(s) to follow. A short film about bacon will include much of the received art. Deadline is 04/01/2010.

Send art to:

BACON!
Scott Ray Randall
21294 Leslie Drive
Grass Valley, CA 95945, USA

http://www.baconmovie.blogspot.com/

Dear Diary Mail Art Call!
Topic: DEAR DIARY
Any Size, Any Medium
Returns and Documentation to all
Send your diary pages, journaling, postcards --anything on the theme
There will be a show at Gail Borden Library
Deadline is August 1, 2009

Send to: Dear Diary Mail Art Project
407 South Liberty Street Elgin IL 60120
Un timbre d’artiste de: 
Bruno Chiarello, P.O. Box 163, 17014, Cairo Montenotte, ITALIE
PROJETS....

Open for submissions!
MAIL ME ART!!!

The address for all entries is:
Mail Me Art
37 Thames Court
Victoria Avenue
West Molesey
Surrey KT8 1TP
United Kingdom

Information about the project is available here

Contact: darren@mailmeart.com
if you need further details.

Art Call – DAVID ZACK

Please send "Mail Art" re- is the great mail artist David Zack really in the spirit world... all works will be posted at:
http://www.medwolf.blogspot.com/
Project is on going, no fee, no jury, no returns and the theme is “Zack Sightings”... if you know some one who looks like Zack then send me a pic, create a pic, become a pic etc etc... Some have said that Zack was a shape-shifter and may still walk among us not in human form but as an animal or bird... Send mail to:

Zack Sightings
c/o Medwolf–PO Box 2174
Battleford, SK
S0M 0E0, CANADA

I will send something back.

The David Zack Show

The David Zack Show opened at The New Gallery (TNG) in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, October 10, 2008. It is a retrospective / commemorative installation of Zack’s work mostly focusing on the 70’s and 80’s. The show is based on Istvan Kantor’s archival collection extended with contributions from many other artists, he is still collecting material... A book/catalog will be published after the TNG show therefore it will include details of the installation together with essays and additional information and visuals... The exhibition will travel across Canada in 2009/2010 and hopefully it will also get to the US, Europe, Asia and elsewhere... All mail art sent to me for "Zack Sightings" will be part of the next David Zack show in 2009. (place and time soon to be posted).

MONTRE-MOI TON RÉSEAU

Dans le numéro 4 de la Circulaire132 (juin-juillet 2006), j’avais inséré un carton postale illustrant un cerveau qui permettait aux participants d’inscrire les personnes avec qui elles correspondent régulièrement. Afin de vérifier les changements, progression etc..., je récidive encore une fois.
Toutes les cartes retournées seront publiées dans un prochain numéro de la Circulaire132.

SHOW ME YOUR NETWORK

In the CIRCULAIRE132 June-July 2006 issue, I inserted a postcard illustrating a brain in order for participants to fill in the mailartists which they maintain contact with or exchange the most. I will try this exercise again. All received cards will be published in an upcoming issue of CIRCULAIRE132.

RFC

For consultation tous les précédents numéros de CIRCULAIRE132 voir le blogalere suivant:
To consult all CIRCULAIRE132 previous issues, go to the following blogalery:
http://circulaire132.blogspot.com
Qué haces?
Remos a una farmacia y compraremos una pomada, con lo cual esta cosa... No!
Donna...
Ahora no.
No entiendes...
Lo sé, puede resultar peligroso. Si que entiendo, Mel. Eso sólo puede pasar en un día como hoy.
Por una hora o dos no me voy a morir, ¿no?
No, moriré, no.
Por favor, Mel.
Está bien —conviene echar un informe de mal estado—. Pero avisame si necesitas una segunda opinión.
Está bien. —Lo has hecho muy bien. —Gracias.
Pero esperaremos dos horas, a lo sumo.
Dos horas y media —dijo ella, sonriendo—. Dos días —dijo con determinación—. Fin de discusión.

Además de las horas y veinte minutos hasta que llegué a la policía, ruedo Ford y entran en el camino particular del 1220 de Cove Lane.
Alguien vuelve a casa —dijo Mel, despertando a Donn—. Hasta que la última hora había estado muy inquieto, co-
argado, aunque había rehusado firmemente ir a ninguna parte.
¿Es victor?
No alcanzo a ver. —Abrió la puerta del auto. —¿Serás el del auto?
¿Bromeas?
No abrí la puerta de su lado, también.
¿Estás bien?
Mucho bien.
Un 8 cm X 8 cm de: Bruno Sourdin, 147 rue Vieille-Rue, 50000, Saint-Lô, FRANCE

Un 8 cm X 8 cm de: Chantal Laurin, 5114 Dolorès, Rawdon, QC, J0K 1S0, CANADA

Nouvelle adresse / New address

Une œuvre de: Joel The Sticker Dude, 121 Varick Street, New York, NY, 10013, USA

http://www.libererlesquebecs.com

Un ATC de: Diane Bertrand, 9109 rue Deschambault, Saint-Léonard, QC, H1R 2C6, CANADA

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CIRCULAIRE 132
12465 Avenue de Troyes
Québec, QC, G2A 3C9

Destinataire:
RF COTE
12465 AVE. DE TROYES
QUEBEC QC G2A3C9
CANADA

Participants:
François Frisch, B.P. 61, L-7201, Beeldange, LUXEMBOURG
Éric Bensidon, 14 rue Sauffroy, 75017, Paris, FRANCE
Roland Halbritter, Muehlweg 15, 97720, Nuedlingen, ALLEMAGNE
Ed Gieck, 4222-176th Place NE, Arlington, WA, 98223, USA
Christian Alle, 9 rue du Pré de la Mer, 50460, Urville-Nacqueville, FRANCE
Samuel Montalvetti, Av. Rivadavia 2109 1a dto 3, 1034, Buenos Aires, ARGENTINE
R.F. Côté, 12465 Avenue De Troyes, Québec, QC, G2A 3C9, CANADA
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Bruno Chiarlane, P.O. Box 163, 17014, Cairo Montenotte, ITALIE
Giovanni StraDaDa Ravenna, C.P. 271, 48100, Ravenna, ITALIE
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Denis Charmot, 15 rue de Vanne, 74460, Marnaz, FRANCE
Diana Marshall, 6400 Karlens Road, Rome, NY, 13440, USA
Miguel Jimenez, El Taller de Zenon, C/Santa Maria de Guia 1-40C, 41008, Sevilla, ESPAGNE

Participants:
Bruno Sourdin, 147 rue Vieille-Rue, 50000, Saint-Lô, FRANCE
Chantal Laurin, 5114 Dolorès, Rawdon, QC, J0K 1S0, CANADA
Joel The Sticker Dude, 121 Varick Street, New York, NY, 10013, USA
Diane Bertrand, 9109 rue Deschambault, Saint-Léonard, QC, H1R 2C6, CANADA

Bob Dylan