25 YEARS in mail-art

(Eraser carving of Ruud Janssen by Tim Mancusi - USA)

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Introduction

In the year 2005 it has been 25 years ago that I started with Mail-Art. As most of my correspondents know, I like to document things, and over the years I have written many texts to prove this. This might be just one of these documents, but I will try to make it a special one. In a way it is a celebration of these 25 years in mail-art, but also a kind of goodbye. Not sure on which I will focus for the next 25 years, if I have another 25 years. I do know that the year 2005 is also connected to large changes in my life. And, not really a surprise; also because of mail-art.

For this publication a special project was started to illustrate the text. Mail-artists in the network were asked to send in digital scans and/of photos of things they received from me. It makes the book a kind of project as well. To illustrate this book I could also use the things I have in my own archive. Somehow it felt right to include the network to contribute something in this. The last years I have fully documented almost anything I produced, but in those early decades things were different and the tools to document things (like nowadays a digital camera, computers, scanners, the Internet) weren't available then.

This publication gives access to many sources for information about Mail-Art and me, Ruud Janssen. It isn't a book with just texts, but it is meant as a sourcebook. One of the appendixes of this book therefore is a list of historical dates, an overview of the sites that are online, and the complete text is fully indexed to make it a good tool for researchers as well. Also I included several interviews I gave over the years. Sometimes also funny for me to realize how I saw things over the years.

I hope you enjoy reading this. In sure had fun in making it possible to put all these words down on paper. The concept of the book was ready in 2005 but only got published in 2008 because in that year these small publications became accessible for the broader public.

Ruud Janssen,
Tilburg, Friday, 22 February 2008.

Publishing Thoughts

Somehow Ruud always felt the need to publish his thoughts. It began after the death of his father. He was only 16 years old, and after this tragic event he started with keeping a diary. Also correspondence with the world was something he inherited from his father, and words and communication were always part of his life. In mail-art It started quite early with the TAM-Bulletin. Then his "History in Mail-Art", and the series that are quite well-known by most mail-artists: "Thoughts about mail-art", "Secret thoughts about mail-art".

When one wants to find out things about how he thinks, it is quite easy. When one wants to find out WHY he publishes his thoughts, that is a more difficult question to answer. In this book you can try to find out by also reading some of the texts that were published over the years and might show clues of why he writes about the subject so much. Especially in the interviews Ruud reveals the private details. The interviews he published over the years also resulted in others interviewing him. The time-setting for the interviews is interesting. It was the time that Internet became available for the artists as well.

The complete set of over 70 interviews caused Honoria to write a special chapter in her thesis about Ruud and his interviews. So plenty of information available there. Copyright of this part of the publication goes to Honoria off course. Somehow all information is available online, but never before combined in one publication.

The IUOMA

The IUOMA was started in 1988. Most aspects connected to the IUOMA are fully documented on the Internet. Just go to www.iuoma.org and go the IUOMA-section.

The IUOMA did start as a joke. But somehow the mail-artists wanted it as a reality. People mention it on their CV's, and because of the real activities of the IUOMA it has become a real union somehow. Certificates, stickers, group-activities, you name it.

It is now even possible to order a real IUOMA-rubberstamp online……..

But the reality is that there isn't a real union-structure. Anyone that says he wants to become a member automatically is a member. The role people play in the union is the role they choose themselves.

Some even react negative to the union. They actually react to a union that is as anarchistic as it can be. It is true though that it is my concept. That I try to stimulate
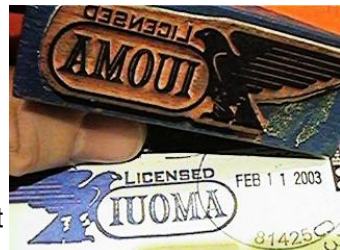
people to use the IUOMA-name. As a union-member the life for an artist is easier……
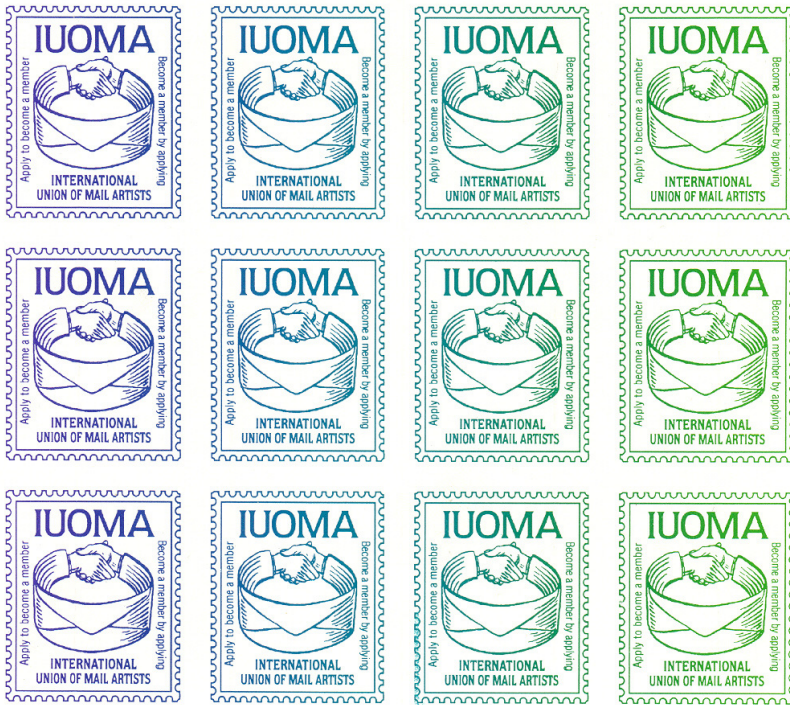
For making the IUOMA looking like a more real union I have had the help of many friends. A nice example you can see above. Stickers of the logo designed by Thomas Kerr and published by the Ragged Edge Press in New York. Thank to Joel Cohen, the Stickerdude, New York, USA.

Fluxus Heidelberg Center

In 2003 Litsa Spathi and Ruud Janssen founded the Fluxus Heidelberg Center. The idea to do something with Fluxus came from Litsa Spathi. She already had done her share of Fluxus-performances. Ruud had interviewed several of the Fluxus-pioneers and so the interest in Fluxus was there for years.

On the main-page of the site one can read:

The Fluxus Heidelberg Center site is the place where all Fluxus activities of the artist-duo Fluxus Heidelberg (Litsa Spathi and Ruud Janssen) are documented. It includes interviews with Fluxus-artists, photos of performances, historic facts, full documentation of all performances by Fluxus Heidelberg, Fluxus Poetry by Litsa Spathi, an overview of all publications by the Center and by other Fluxus related artists. You will find information about how to contact them, links to other sites that are interesting for you and a sitemap.

The Center itself was founded in July 2003 and is building up a large collection of Fluxus material. Both artists are active in the Fluxus-world for years and are in contact with founders and active players of this movement. Their Fluxus-activities is a continuation of the early Fluxus-movement. They use the modern techniques in their performances and document their activities in digital and printed form. A large set of digital photos and digital Fluxus Poetry is published on this site. The modern life with its hectic situations forms the playground for their performances.

More details online at: www.fluxusheidelberg.org

Interviews

Overview

Over the years Ruud gave several interviews. Here is a small selection of the ones that tell a lot of what he has done in the mail-art network:

1. *Interview published in Rubberstampmadness (1985) by Kate Lanxner*
2. *Mail-interview with Hans Ruedi Fricker, published online in 2001*
3. *Mail-interview with Mark Greenfield, published as booklet and online in 1997.*
4. *Mail-interview with Carol Stetser, published as booklet and online in 1997*
5. *Radio-interview on Radio Breda, file available on request.*
6. *Interview published in Rubberstampmadness (1998) by Freya Zabitsky*
7. *Interview by Dobrica Kamperelic, published in his book (1996).*
8. *Interview for Fluxus Heidelberg Center (Ruud & Litsa) for Swedisch magazine "Livraison" (2005).*

The interviews that give the most detailed information are the mail-interviews (2,3,4 and 7). These are reprinted in this publication. Besides these interviews there is also the chapter in Honoria's thesis that deals mainly with the TAM website. It contains lots of details as well and is therefore also reprinted.

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH RUUD JANSSEN

BY HANS-RUEDI FRICKER

Started on: 5-3-1996

HR : Welcome to this mail-interview. You are the founder of the Mail-interview Project and I think that your own thoughts should be part of this project too. Of course you could do a fictive interview with yourself, but in that case I would miss the dialogical process, therefore I invite you to answer my questions.

First let me ask you your own traditional question at the beginning of an interview. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

RJ : Thanks for the invitation. Actually already some more people asked me if I "interviewed myself", and I replied to that question that this is a strange idea. How to ask oneself a question when one knows already the answer?

Yes, that traditional question. The reason why I normally start with the same question in my interview project is that it gives an idea to the readers of the finished interview where to place the interviewed persons. Sometimes it even turns out to be a difficult question to answer. How does one get involved in the network? I invented the name TAM (Travelling Art Mail) in 1980. At that time I was sending out mail to fictive addresses in the hope that they would return to me. Also I mailed letters to my own address to see if the postal office would accept the piece of mails I put in the mailbox. Lots of drawings, colors and also collaged official postal stamps on them. I didn't know the term "mail art", and it is quite funny how the words ART and MAIL came together in this TAM-word.

Before 1980 I was already corresponding to all parts of the world. As soon as I learned to write I inherited this activity from my father, who was in contact with all corners of the world, yet in another network, the postal stamps exchanging. I wrote to

Japan, East-Germany, Argentina, and all kind of countries I know were very far away.

I like drawing and painting also when I was a child, I even started with oil painting when I was about 15 years old. This early correspondence in the 60's had nothing to do with art, and after seeing an exhibition about "creative mail" in a local Art Center I started with TAM in 1980. The year I got involved in the mail art network was 1983. I had put a small ad in the local newspaper to see if anybody else was doing this creative mail too, and believe it or not, the reaction came from a journalist who wanted to do an interview with me. I didn't mind the interview, and the next week the story of my "strange hobby" was on the front-page of the local newspaper, and I got lots of reactions. One of the reactions directed me to Guy Bleus in Belgium, and to my request for more addresses he sent me a huge list. Probably a list of one of his older projects, and from that list I started to write to "interesting names" on the list like Anna Banana, Ben Vautier, Arno Arts, etc. And yes, I got replies and started the learning-process of what mail art is all about.

Question on 16-3-1996

HR : We have been in contact since you invited mail artists to send you their rubber stamp prints. Maybe we started corresponding in 1983. You always answered with an address-list of those who participated to your rubberstamp project. That was great because I was able to see to whom you are corresponding and I saw which artists are using this special art medium (rubber stamps). I never just sent mail to everybody, I was looking for the interesting ones, and your list was a great help. Also your TAM-Bulletin with all the new mail art projects was important to many of us. From the beginning I admired you as a collector and as a wonderful *mediator* and therefore as a real networker. But, I asked to myself often: is Ruud an artist? Today I do not have to answer my own question any longer because *the artist is dead*.

What were Art and the Artist to you when you entered the network in 1983?

RJ : Well, lots of nice words, and than suddenly this difficult but interesting question. For me the "art-part" in mail art wasn't that important in the beginning. I was mostly interested in systems, and how communication in reality works. Also I enjoy

communication (whether it is talking, writing, etc.) from a child, and to be honest, I even remember that I played "post office" with my sister and brother when I was really young (like 6/7 or so). The invention of TAM in 1980, gave me the possibility to mail to firms as well, because the letterhead of TAM looked official enough. The research of the mail system evolved my knowledge of how the postal office works. I even have still some subscriptions from the Dutch KPN (the owner of the postal system in the Netherlands) thanks to the director who helped me with this research. So, in the beginning I was interested in mail (even with a technical approach), communication, and the art of the communication. But I have had always many interests. Drawing & painting was one of them, and as a 15-year old pupil I was already part of an art-group at the high school. Not just small things, but we even started with oil painting, and lateron did with the group and other pupils our own exhibition. Most of the participants of this small art-group went to Art-College after graduating. I choose differently. I started to study Technical Physics, and lateron even Mathematics. The time I graduated (in 1983) was also the moment I entered the mail art network. But I was already working a lot with mail during my whole life. So, back to your question. Art for me was a hobby at that time. I never had the idea to make a living out of art. What was an artist? At that time I probably thought of an artist as someone wanting to make money through his artworks. But, words aren't important when it comes to ART. I am gradually making up with the loss of not having followed Art-University. I already followed some art-courses, and am mastering new techniques. Strangely enough I am also not working with Physics or Mathematics too. Gradually I started to learn more about computers, and at this moment I teach informatics. However, most persons than think that a mail artist which works with computers to make computer-art. And strange enough, that is not the case. Since you are in contact with me for such a long time already, you probably will have noticed how my mail has changed/evolved. I started in 1980 as a 21-year old, and I must say the network has taught me a lot.

Next question on 18-4-1996

HR :   Yes I noticed how your mail has evolved during the last ten years. There is a phenomenon that is typically for many contributors of the network. On one side they act as networkers, they build communication systems through open projects like

shows, magazines, congresses and they prefer the interactive person to person contact instead of performing in front of an anonym audience. They use different medias, even new ones like video, computers and they use fax machines and the information transport on internet which means that they reflect their own, and all other fellow-beings, role as a sender and creator of our world in opposition to the "consumer and hanger-on's".

At the other side, many of those "artists" who act in networks have an old fashion meaning of what art really is and what "artist" means in our society. They want to be painters and they want to make money as painters. Most of them are just horrible painters, without any talent, and it seems that they are not willing to understand what happened in art during the last one hundred years. I am sorry to say, that I never liked your visual (art-) material but I felt that your coming out as a painter, illustrator or graphic artist was very important for you. I see this as a conflict. Flexibility of roles may be typical for a contemporary artist who uses roles and techniques just as a tool for his/her strategies and intentions (as I try to do, sometimes), but what about you?

RJ : I don't get the essence of this question. It seems you are telling me about you views and ideas, and that you try to fit me into a group. The word "artist" is a difficult one. It means something different to everybody. I have gotten the question before, "are you an artist?", and considering that I don't sell my work, seldom exhibit in the official galleries, don't do much performances and installations, have other interests besides art, I guess I am not the artist as society sees the artist. A word is just a word.

But on the other side I am exploring the possibilities that art and technique offer, and spend the free time I have on art, mail art and writing, but also on science & computers. Networking is a big part of this search. Mail artists send lots of impulses to you and if you are open to them, it sometimes guides the next steps. But I also have my paid job that gives me the luxury of having a steady income. When I look at what society calls "artists", it is a problem for them if they aren't able to sell their work. And having to sell work sometimes means making compromises.

I am not that interested if I fit in a certain group or not. I have been studying art-history now for some years, and I found out

that the things that "artists" do besides their art normally is also interesting and gives a better view of their life and goals.

You write: "I am sorry to say, that I never liked your visual (art-) material but I felt that your coming out as a painter, illustrator or graphic artist was very important for you". First, it is funny to read that you never liked my visual (art-) material. I wasn't aware of sending you ever something of my larger artworks. The mail art someone sends out isn't the same as the larger works some mail artist produce. Some mail artists don't produce any larger art. The ones that do, don't send it to mail artists. I have been often positively surprised by the "other art" some mail artists produce, which I could only see on the occasion of meeting them. You never saw my oil paintings, you probably never saw the coloured versions of my concept-drawings, sometimes transferred into larger multicolored silkscreen works, woodprints, mixed media, paintings. And how could you? I only send the graphics to other artist that are doing graphic techniques too, and want to trade, and only had a few of them in "official" exhibitions. I never send them to mail art exhibitions. All my oil paintings are on my wall, or are gifts to special people in my life. So, funny, you judge my "art" on what I send to you by mail, and that is my "mail art". For me they are not the same.

Very important for me? I guess so, that it is important for me to have this creative outlet, to be able to put my thoughts in visuals, images, etc. The things that I have made which are important to me are either still here with me, or I gave them to people that are also special to me or when I meet them. The few times that people wanted to buy something from me, I simply refused. Sounds stupid maybe? I rather select the people I give things to, then sell them for money. The way I have arranged my life, I am able to do that. But you questions started a story that has little to do with mail art. Or has it?

Next question on 11-5-1996 (via e-mail)

HR : If you receive works from other networkers, for example an envelope with stamps, rubberstamps, slogans etc. do you just collect the work or do you think of it as a good or bad, interesting or typical piece of Art?

RJ : First part of your question, "....do you just collect the work?". Well, it depends on what people send me. If someone sends me

prints for the TAM Rubberstamps Archive, then sure, I collect. But I also observe what people send me and try to react to their sending's. Mail art for me mostly has to do with communication. Of course I think of mail art I receive as 'good' or 'bad'. I get some horrible things sometimes. But I always try to figure out why people sent me something. When I have found that out, then the process of replying (or sometimes not-replying) begins. Some mail I get I wouldn't call mail art anymore. Some contacts with networkers have evolved to others stages. Some contacts became correspondents, where the writing of (personal) letters is important. Some contacts evolved into the exchanging of art-works (I do not consider a multicolored silkscreen a piece of mail art since it has little to do with mail. It is art that I happen to mail, the art was not made with the intention to mail).

So I guess basically I think of the mail art I get as good or bad, interesting or typical, as you call it. But this doesn't mean I only react to 'good' things. Sometimes a 'bad' piece might trigger me to respond. And of course the interesting piece doesn't mean I have to react. If I receive a wonderful documentation of a project I can read through it for a long time, but after that I might just put it with the collection and write a small "thank-you" note.

I think again of the word 'collect' you used. When you are in mail art for some years you sometimes start to 'collect' automatically. But it isn't the essence of the mail art, it is just a way to file away all the things you get. An example; I never subscribed to mail art magazines when I got information about them, it isn't interesting to collect the whole series of publications. I sometimes get the publications eventually when I sent the editor something that I produced, or I occasionally DO order a specific issue when I know it is interesting.

Next question on 8-6-1996

HR :   What does rubber stamps say on networking? Is or was the rubber stamp an instrument of the networking discussions? What did they explain and who was the founder. Examples?

RJ :   Of course the rubber stamp is a tool, an instrument, used in networking, but if it stimulates the discussion.....not always. The reason a lot of networkers like rubber stamps is because they can print an image quickly in the color of their choice on a piece of paper, an envelope, or anything else. What this says about

networking is that rubber stamps save time in printing an image or text, and once you have a rubber stamp it saves money too because printing in color in other ways is expensive. The rubber stamp balances between the completely handmade things and the printed matters. It is a handmade reproduction. In the large collection of prints of rubber stamps I can see quite clearly the difference in the use of rubber stamps by several networkers. Some prints are very well though out, others are done in a rush. Just like the difference you see in any other technique.

In general there are two kinds of rubber stamps. The prefab ones that you can easily buy in a store (well, nowadays in the western world that is. It is still an extreme expensive and difficult thing to get rubber stamps in some of the countries where networkers live!). The second ones are the self-made ones (ordered at a store or even completely self-made). The artist is the one who will decide what to do with it. The placing of a stamp print is the art. Some like to make collages with rubber stamps, other use a single print to give a message, there are only few limitations. Some prints show a very special way of using the stamps; others use any kind of rubber they can get their hands on. I myself for instance use silicon rubber sometimes, which I can make myself in any form I wish. To many possibilities to mention in an interview.

Some like to buy lots of rubber stamps to make visuals collages, and especially in the USA this has become big business for the rubber stamp companies. I myself mostly use quite specific rubber stamps. Lots of them bought on my trips to other countries (many in Hagen Germany where I visited most of the "Stempel Mekka's" ; organized by Wolfgang Hein and Diana Arsenau), but the ones I like the most are the self-made rubber stamps and the gifts I have gotten from so many networkers. Some are really precious to me, and all the stamps people give or send in to my archive aren't just stored away. At my desk there are always lying dozens of stamps, and I use most of the stamps on a rotation basis to spread the images and statements into the network.

Well, the two specific parts in your question: "an instrument of the networking discussions?", I guess so, because in networking all kinds of tools that are quick to use seem to be the favorite. Why quick? Because it saves time and mostly money, and I can see from a lot of mail I get in that it was quickly made.......

"What did they explain and who was the founder. Examples?"
Well, Just look at all the stamps that are used on the envelopes
you get. I don't feel like make lists in an interview. About "the
founder" I guess you should read the catalog of the exhibition at
the Postal Museum in Paris, "L'art du Tampon", held in 1995. It
just depends on what you call the first artistic use of stamps.

Next question on 13-6-1996

HR :   When I think of the use of "tools" in society and art I see the
       context and the content of the "instrument". Do you think that
       producers of rubber stamps see and reflect the rubber stamps
       function as a political instrument? (During World War II at the
       border of Switzerland they stamped a big J in every passport of
       a person with jidish religion!) And second, how important was
       the use of the language on rubber stamps. Did the artist turn into
       a writer or what was the language good for?

RJ :   The producers of rubber stamps. You can look at that from two
       sides. The ones that actually make the rubber stamp are
       businessman. Even the mail artists that have started a stamp
       company, they have a business to run, and making money is the
       main point then. If you consider the designers of the rubber
       stamp (who then places the order at a shop/factory or just
       makes/carves it by himself) then he/she is the one who
       determines if it is a political instrument. I know form my visits to
       Eastern Europe that the rubber stamp there IS a political stamp.
       A document that is signed is valid. A rubber stamp for a normal
       person/artist wasn't easy or even impossible to get. I remember
       that in 1991 I used some official stamps, that I got a friend at the
       local government, to invite a friend from Estonia for a visit.
       Because of the stamps, there was no problem. Even when I
       invited her as the director of TAM (as the Tilburg Academy of
       Mail Art), actually a non-existing academy, but the Dutch
       Embassy also worked along. Of course in the last years this has
       changed.

       Your question about language. Communication can be done in
       many ways. Language is just one of the tools for communication.
       I don't see how the language on a rubber stamp turns an artist
       into a writer. The thinking of a text and putting it on paper is
       being a writer. Making a stamp out of it, or buying stamps with
       text is another thing. The rubber stamp is just an instrument for

cheap reproduction and has some other nice uses; it is quick, you can change colors of ink, etc. We both know these things.

Next question on 24-6-1996

HR : At the moment, interviewing your partners, you are using the language as an instrument of your networking activities. What are your experiences?

RJ : First you must understand that I not only interview "my partners" as you say it. Of course I interview mail artists that I am in contact with for lots of years, but others can also advise me to interview someone other. This is how I got in contact for the first time with people like Dick Higgins, Ken Friedman, E.F. Higgins-III and other mail artists from the early days. I wasn't in contact with them before I invited them for the interview.

The experiences could be a long story, but I will keep it short and get the some basic experiences without mentioning specific names of people I interviewed. It is funny to see how some mail artists grab the opportunity to present themselves as an important mail artists, mention all their friends in mail and things they have done. In the interviews I try to let the persons talk about themselves in the way they want to, so that gives the best view of whom the person is all about.

There are also the mail artists that react in a visual way. A typical example in of course Ray Johnson. He took the words on the invitation "choose any length you want for the answer" quite symbolic and indicated the number of inches of his answer. Other mail artists like Robert Rocola and Ko de Jonge also replied in a visual way, but these interviews aren't published yet as I write this. Most interviewed mail artists take the project quite seriously though, and reply in words.

The problem that comes with words is that not everybody speaks the same language. I conduct the interviews in English (or some also in German language). The published result is obviously in English or visual language since that is the international language used in mail art. The better control an interviewed (mail-) artist has over the English language, the better he can express him/herself. But when the English sometime looks like 'broken English' I still print it mostly the

same as the answer arrived. I don't like to censor or edit too much. The answer is best-left authentically so others can see how the communication went. The whole mail interview project has to do with this communication. The way we express our self and the means we choose. The Internet seems to be the fastest way to proceed with the interview, but documenting things and keeping track of the interview seems to be a problem for some. I am lucky to be quite skilled in data processing, and working with large amounts of data. Keeping 25 interviews going simultaneously has proven to be a very time-absorbing job, but it has been the best learning-process for me I ever had.

(After a silence I asked H.R. if he wanted to continue the interview. The next question came by surprise through the e-mail)

next question on 7-5-1997 (e-mail)

HR : Dear Ruud, yes I would like to continue interviewing you. From now on I can do it by E-mail. Question from HRF to Ruud Janssen. Are you glad? from now on you won't need a waste paper basket for my mail. No envelopes, no stamp sheets, no stickers, no pins and no aluminum signs anymore.

RJ : No, I am not glad. I like paper, postage stamps, and all materials I can send. The bits are just bits and don't always get the message across. I have been working a lot with computers, but they haven't replaced everything as you might have noticed.

next question on 16-5-1997

(The next question arrived on paper. It was the printout of an e-mail which was sent to a wrong e-mail address of TAM).

HR : Do not worry.... it was more or less ironical. At the other side, I like breaking bridges behind me (sometimes). That's the reason why I like thinking on art and artists without all those old fashion art techniques. May be you are right "the computers haven't replaced everything" but what are they good for? Isn't it a great chance for art and artists to discover new fields and duties? Making art means making interventions. Just on paper? I don't think so. What would happen if artists could use computers and virtual strategies like Internet only?

(the answer I sent via e-mail and snail-mail on 19-5-1997)

RJ :   The computers are already with us for lots of years. Already in
       1987 I used them for communication, but these methods for
       communication weren't easy for the non-technical people. Since
       1994 the Internet has made electronic communication easy for
       everybody, provided one is rich enough to buy the equipment
       and pay for the phone-costs and provider. It is still a luxury
       communication-form, but when you overcome the first costs it
       becomes a very cheap way of communicating. Because of my
       profession (I earn my money teaching Informatics nowadays) I
       do follow these developments intensively, and I see how the
       electronic communication will be integrated more and more in
       our daily life. Of course there is a role of an artist there, to show
       what these changes mean for us. Artists choose however which
       tools they want to use in theory art, and for me the computer has
       never overtaken the 'traditional art' I like to do. For me this
       computer-stuff isn't all that new. Next year it will be the 20th year
       I am working with those machines. Longer then I am doing mail
       art. What I miss in computers is normally the personal touch.
       The handwriting, the colors, the structures of letters, the smell of
       paper, and the things I can hold in my hand. What artists surely
       will do is bring this personal touch into the computer. I know lots
       of artists who are working with computers (also more then a
       decade ago). That electronic communication is open to
       everybody is still a farce. My first e-mail from Africa came from
       Ayah Okwabi (Ghana), but only because he was lucky enough to
       follow a course in Sweden, from where he could send the e-mail.
       Mail art is still open for everybody (one stamp is the barrier). E-
       mail depends on access and the location one lives. The
       electronic communication I have is mostly with the fortunate
       group that doesn't always realize how fortunate they are.

next question on 9-12-1997 (via e-mail)

       (Hans-Ruedi Fricker is thinking of building his own site with in it
       lots of details about his activities. That undertaking triggers the
       next question which he sends to me by e-mail at the end of a
       personal message to me)

HR :   What do you think about a virtual cemetery for those networkers
       who spent a lot of energy to build a virtual reality who will have
       influences to our reality too ?

(Due to a short break in the interviews and two trips abroad I only could answer this question beginning of March 1998)

RJ :   It is a complex question Hans-Ruedi! We live in a real world and the persons who build these virtual realities also live in real realities, which influence them and trigger them to build these virtual realities. The web site I have created I wouldn't call a virtual cemetery. It is just a digital documentation of some of my activities that I place on the web to show others what I am doing. Virtual realities (in computer-terms) are areas where people can actually move in, but don't really exist. Documenting a virtual reality is impossible since every person who would enter the virtual reality will experience something different.

You speak of a virtual cemetery, but when I hear the word cemetery I think of a place where nothing much changes and something is resting there for a very long time. The Word Wide Web isn't like that at all. The pages online change all of the time. My web site is updated every week or so, and at the moment I even keep a kind of digital diary online with links to other things I find on the web. I don't consider this information to be important enough to save as a 'digital cemetery'. Once I have had enough I can just erase the complete files. I document the things I do in the old-fashioned manners. I make printouts, and even photos of computer-screens. The World Wide Web is a tool. The digital information if difficult to document. Which fase should one save in a cemetery? Things are constantly changing. Also there is the cost factor. Putting things online isn't free of charge most of the time. I use the free accesses I can get, but I realize that one day it will change and the digital information will be gone. The idea is to share it with others, and if others want to save parts of it, that is o.k. Lots of people printout the things they want to save because they know that in a few years that digital information might have vanished.

If someone spends a lot of time on their virtual reality, it means that hopefully a lot of people will be able to see it. The visitors are indeed a select group. To give you an example of my site: I analyzed (thanks to NEDstats) the pages I have put online in the last 4 months:

51% of the visitors came from Europe.
40% came from North America ,

1,2% came from Middle- and South- America.
0,4% came from Australia.
0,3% came from Asia and another
0,3% from Africa.
6,8% was unknown.

I have spent 2 and a half-year building my site now. Is the site my cemetery? I don't like to think so. It is a living thing. Once I am dead the site will vanish as well since the organizations that keep them online expect a working e-mail address for the connection. Once they send you an e-mail that bounces, the site is removed. This happened to me once when I was using a school-account that was ended. The site that was connected to the e-mail address was gone. Saving it on disk and call that the cemetery would also be a bit foolish. Nobody could access this disk. Even when I would 'publish' the disk like a book, it wouldn't be the same as the online files. And online files are a living thing. If they aren't maintained the files become worthless. Too many sites have grown into that direction. The links they have and the informations they offer are outdated. It is a bit like mail art. When the mail art piece is archived it is no longer a piece of mail art, but an artifact ready to be destroyed or framed or archived or whatever. Archiving digital files is necessary, of course. But I have lots of diskettes lying around here that I probably won't be reading again. Some I actually can't read anymore (the 5,25 inch diskettes)

I guess I am not that fond of cemeteries, not even the digital ones. Once you call something a cemetery it becomes static. And talking about the real cemeteries. You are not supposed to build your own are you. The people who keep on living will decide what is important enough what to save. If what I put online is interesting enough for others they will save it (printed form or on diskettes). I know of lots of people who have printed out the texts and thoughts I have put online. They form the cemetery. I myself only document the things I do so I know from where I can go further. Life itself means evolving, not preparing your own cemetery. The portfolio I keep here in Tilburg is a printout of all the current files that are online. The actually web site is what counts, and only is functional when it lives and evolves. Others will save only important things. It is not my task to decide what is important.

(The interview was never continued, and on 10-12-2001 Ruud decided to end all running interviews and to put the results online).

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH RUUD JANSSEN.

BY CAROL STETSER

Started on: 4-2-1996

CS : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on 10-2-1996

RJ : When someone asks for a date of starting, I mostly answer 1980. But I was sending out mail as soon as I mastered writing, and that must have been around 1967 or so. My father had a huge correspondence-circle for his big hobby, collecting postage stamps, and he was in touch with all kinds of collectors all over the world. This fascinated me, and I also asked for addresses to write to. One of my first correspondence-addresses, I am still in touch with. Then a little girl in Japan, but now a married woman with husband and two children. This correspondence was even there before I had drawing-lessons at school, so it was purely communication and sharing interests. At high school I found out that I enjoyed art a lot, and started with drawing, and even oil-painting when I was 15 years old.

When graduated, I had to choose for the next step to study, and the choice was strange. The Art Academy, or Physics...... In 1980 (I was 21 then, and studying Physics) I started with TAM, which stands for Travelling Art Mail. It was the start of combining my art-work and my correspondence. Before that date I only sent out letters, and in 1980, due to an exhibition I saw in Tilburg about "creative mail" an artist sent to himself (don't know the details anymore) I started to do something similar. I sent out lots of envelopes to fictive addresses in the hope that they returned, and also sent out strange mail to myself to see how they would be processed in the mail-system.

Only in 1983 I got in touch with the network. It seems I was doing something others were doing too. How I got in touch the

network is quite a strange story. I put an ad in the local newspaper, and asked for people who thought that mail could be used creatively too. One of the answers came from a journalist, who wanted to do an interview with me. I didn't mind that, and the next week the interview with photo was published in the newspaper. This lead to other reactions, and somehow I also got in touch with Guy Bleus, who I asked for some more addresses. In 1983 he sent me a list of about 800 addresses at the same time. Probably a list of a project he was working on. This really started me, and I began to write to names that sounded interesting, or countries that looked promising. My search in the network started.

Next question on 2-3-1996

CS :   I am glad to learn what the initials TAM stand for. In your early mail art did you make postage stamps (artistamps) in response to your fathers hobby? When did your interest in rubber stamps begin?

RJ :   Actually the initials TAM stand also for "Tilburg's Academy of Mail art" and the Dutch "Tilburgse Automatiserings Maatschappy", but those things came later.

No, my making of artistamps probably has nothing to do with his hobby. Actually the first things I did in mail art was cutting up the official postage stamps and to collage a new one out of them and then see if the postal office would accept that piece of mail. And yes, they did. As I child I used to collect postage stamps as well, that is something I inherit from my father, but I stopped with this immediately when I joined the mail art network. Postage stamps stopped being a collectors item, but become only tools for communication by mail. My first artistamps I made in 1984 or so, a contribution for a project by someone else (this was Bernd Löbach from West-Germany, who then published them in his wonderful "the bible of International Artists' Postage Stamps Exhibition Weddel 1985")

You asked about my interest in rubberstamps. In fact I was interested in rubberstamps also as a child. I remember the first (and very expensive) rubberstamp I made with my name, and I was proud of this "machine" that could reproduce something that quickly and instantly on any surface. The act of placing a

stamp on a piece of paper or carton is something I always liked to do. Why? I really don't know.

So it is no surprise that after getting involved with the mail art network in 1983, I immediately started with sending out papers to others in October 1983, to find out which impressions they were using. The start of the TAM Rubberstamp Archive. Also I started with my first mail art project, the Snip-Xerox project.

(I included a 12 page biographical booklet about myself with the answer together with the newest finished mail-interview of my project)

Next question on 23-3-1996

CS :   Tell me about the Snip-Xerox project and elaborate on your rubberstamp archive. (storage, contributions, and documents). Are your mail art projects primarily for exhibition, publication, or archival collection?

RJ :   Whew, what a question. To start with the last part. The projects are sometimes for exhibition, sometimes for publication, and sometimes for archival collection. It just depends on the project. The first one, the Snip-Xerox project, was my experiment to see how mail artists I didn't know at all, would react to the invitation to make a new story out of a Xerox I sent them with all kind of images. The images were carefully selected by me, and I wondered which story the mail-artists would see in them. The responses were very different from each other. I had no plan for an exhibition, but after the project ended I made photos of all the different contributions and made a catalogue out of it and sent it to the participants. The "no limits" you often see in mail art projects, and which I used too, caused a variety of contributions. Some were very short, like from Ben Vautier (France) who just cut out one image (a face) and let it say (with a balloon): "Who the hell is Ben". The project had over 40 participants, and really taught me a lot.

Most projects I did or am doing hadn't that much planning in advance, they just started with an "inspirational" moment. The "TAM was here" project consisted out of an A5-xerox where I had written on the text "TAM was Here" like a grafitti-spraying (see sample I will enclose for you). I just sent out a few of them, and at that time it wasn't even a project. Suddenly I started

getting the papers back with additions, and then I started to send out more, but this time with the specific instruction "Please add and return" and "add something to the wall". This projects grew and grew. I must have sent out over 1200 papers in one year and in return got over 400 contributions. At the height of the project I also got a sudden invitation from the famous "MELKWEG" (Milkyway) in Amsterdam, if I would be interested in filling their gallery-part of their multi-cultural centre, which includes a pub, a gallery, and the famous concert-hall where so many pop groups I liked have played. Actually my music-interest had made the connection with the "MELKWEG". So the choice was there to use this "TAM was here" project to exhibit there in this large space. Quite an undertaking, because I also made 400 slides which were to be shown at the opening and in the concert-room during the music-evenings. This was an incredible experience. I had no previous contacts with galleries, and this one just invited me, paid my costs for travelling to Amsterdam, even paid the hotel for the three days it took to build up the exhibition, arranged the spreading of invitations, the sending out of texts to explain the exhibition, and also a real opening. This was all in 1985, a very busy and wonderful year. So what started with no real plans in advance ended in project which was documented with a slide-collection, an exhibition, a small document for all participants and a participants list. The exhibition later on also went to Italy (at the gallery of Emilio Morandi in Italy), which I delivered myself and was the guest of Emilio and family. Yes, 1985 was quite a year to remember.

The TAM Rubberstamp Archive, however is still purely an archiving project. I started with this in October 1983, when I just wanted to see some prints of rubber stamps other mail artists used. The start of such an archive is quite simple. I just designed a single sheet and copied it a few times and sent it into the network. After getting back those sheets, it became a regular thing to do, and I have been sending out these sheets for 13 years now. Besides the prints of stamps I also have other items, and the whole story of the archive is published regularly with newsletters. I will send you the latest one so you can see that it has now over 1500 participants, and thousands of contributions. Because the basic part of the archive is all paper, the storage is only a space-problem. The whole collection of printed images is fitted into two big black boxes, where all contributions are sorted by country. Actually, at the

moment from 69 different countries as I just got the first contribution from Turkey. The address list of all participants has been published several times. About 9 years ago I started to put all the data in a computer database, and that means I have quite a large address-list with historical details.

In the last years I haven't done that many mail art projects that should result in an exhibition. Actually I don't participate that much in those kind of projects either. I guess at the moment most things I do are in connection to publications.

next question on 13-4-1996

CS : These mail interviews are obviously one of your publication projects. What prompted you to begin the mail-interviews?

RJ : Like most of my projects, the start is not a very well planned thing. I just get this sudden inspiration to do something, and than spend a day on working it out. The idea of interviewing people by mail isn't new. Sometimes these "interviews" aren't an exchange of questions and answers but rather a sending of a questionnaire and the "interviewed" person can add his replies. The process of the interview is then erased, and the interviewed person can just look ahead to see what the next question will be. These I call questionnaires, and I mostly hate to fill them out, and so I don't like such a concept. I decided to use a different way.

I started with these mail-interviews 2nd November 1994. At that time I also just switched to the use of Internet (I was working with data communication since 1987), and so I had a lot of communication possibilities to send out mail. I remember I just had read one of the interviews in the magazine ND with a mail artist, and realized that I was in contact with so many mail artists without knowing their "whole story". In mail art you only get to see the part of the correspondents they send you by mail. So I realized I would like to read more about a lot of mail artists, but actually there isn't that much to read besides the books with selections others made.

The concept for my mail-interviews is simple. I send the first question, and explain which possibilities the interviewed person has to reply (see separate list). Depending on the answer I will send the next question, etc. Once finished I make a printed

version of the complete interview and send it to the interviewed person, and keep one for myself.

The first week I started the project I invited Klaus Groh, Robin Crozier, Ruggero Maggi, John Held Jr., Dobrica Kampereli_, Guy Bleus, Svjetlana Mimica, Ray Johnson, Michael Leigh, H.R. Fricker, Rod Summers, Michael Lumb. The first series of twelve persons. To my surprise EVERYBODY reacted, and already 8 of these started interviews are finished with a publication. The interview with Ray Johnson was broken up because of his suicide on January 13th 1995, so he never reacted to the third question. Still 3 interviews of this first series are in the process of *questions and answers*, and I never stated a deadline for the project.

Till today six series have been started and already 23 interviews are finished. This wasn't the plan in the beginning; if a project is interesting it grows on its own. Besides the booklets for the interviewed person and myself (the TAM-Archive) I also printed more interview booklets for other mail artists to read, and because the interviews are also an experiment of using the different communication tools, I am working with the traditional snail-mail, the FAX, but also the e-mail on the Internet. Only a few months ago I published the Dick Higgins interview on the internet by sending it in e-mail version to a mailing-list in the USA, so that in just a few minutes hundreds of people got the complete file of the interview (already the next day I got 15 responses to the e-mail, and almost all were quite positive and even brought some new contacts).

In the last series it wasn't only me who decided who to interview. I made these small papers on which people could indicate which mail artists they would find interesting to read an interview from.

(With the answer I included "the communication-forms in Networking" and "Dead mail artists" list)

Next question on 4-5-1996

CS :   I like the personal nature of these interviews. Have you met many of the artists you are interviewing? You seem to have travelled a lot during the Congress year of 1992. What are your

feelings about mail art Tourism in comparison to these mail-interviews?

RJ :   Again a complicated question Carol! Yes, some of the mail artists I am interviewing I have met in person. When I follow the list of finished interviews, I met Michael Leigh (Once when I was in London with a group of students and another time when I was visiting London with Made Balbat), Rod Summers (at the Congress in the Hague in the Postal Museum and at The Zoo-congress by Guy Bleus), Henning Mittendorf (in the Tourism year 1986 in Eeklo in Belgium), Anna Banana (at Stempel-Mekka 2 in Germany in 1994), John Held Jr. (Once in Eeklo, and during the interview he visited me together with Bill Gaglione here in Tilburg after their Fake Picabia Brothers Performance in Paris), Jenny de Groot (several times I visited her in Hengelo, and she has also been here in Tilburg a few times), Mark Bloch (again in the Tourism year in 1986 I met him in Eeklo).

For the other mail artists I am interviewing, I am not mentioning their names yet. Only when an interview is finished I publish all the details. So, Yes, I did meet a lot of them, but sometimes such meetings are so short that you don't have the time to hear all the details. The interviews are intended to give a glimpse of what mail art means to the individual mail artists. For some it is a major part of their live, for some it is a period in their life, for some it is history, etc. Mail art is something different to everybody.

Yes, I travelled a lot in the DNC of 1992. I must confess that not all the travels were congresses but sometimes were more like private vacations. Although I did meet mail artists most of the time when I happened to
be in countries like Denmark, Sweden, Belgium and Estonia. But also earlier, in 1986 during the Tourism-year I met mail artists in Belgium, France and Holland, and in 1985 I met mail artists who lived in Holland (Henryk Gajewski, Ulises Carrion, Sonja & Margot, Joris Meltzer, Ko de Jonge, etc.) and had some visits from abroad (Kate Lanxner, Drew Duncan, Chuck Stake), and went abroad to Italy where I was a guest of Emilio Morandi in Ponte Nossa, and also met Ruggero Maggi.

So, yes the meetings are a part of my life for over a decade now. But I must say I am not that open to just 'anybody' that

wants to visit me. There must be some connection, something like a mail-contact that shows a meeting will be interesting for both. I have had my share of letters in which strangers invite themselves to pass by in Tilburg where I felt I would be like a hotel for them.

Your last part of the question is the comparison of the "Tourism" and the "mail-interviews". Well, the mail-interviews are different from personal meetings where two or more mail-artists meet. It is the time-factor that allows the interviewed people to think of their answer. And if both parts take the interview seriously, the line in the interviews will be there too. A face-to-face interview would always be different since this time-factor isn't there. One has to think of the answer and question immediately. This is also a good way to interview, but the results probably are different.

I realize this difference too now you are interviewing me. In these mail-interviews mail artists start to look back a bit on what they have done and react to it with their views as they are now. Some people I am interviewing currently I will probably meet also during the interview. The interviews are my way of getting to know the individual mail artists better, and as a result others will know them better too with the printed result.

(together with my answer I sent Carol the interview with John M. Bennett, the May 1996-newsletter of the project, and "Thoughts on mail art" Part-9).

Next question on 2-6-1996

CS :   Are there other mail artists living in Tilburg? Are the people in your town aware of your activities in the Network?

RJ :   Yes, there are a few other mail artists living in Tilburg. But actually I never have met them, isn't that strange? I don't treat them different than other mail artists that contact me, and if someone sends me something that isn't that interesting I don't spend time on responding in great detail. That
normally makes the contact fade away, and mail from inside Tilburg
in connection to mail art is quite rare. I do however have a lot of contacts

with mail artists inside Holland, and I have met quite a lot of them.

The most active ones were all there at the mail art congress in 1992 at the Postal Museum in The Hague (also some mail artists from Belgium were there). About 40 or more I must have met. In a few weeks I even made an appointment with Rod Summers in Maastricht to visit him for a weekend.

But your question was about Tilburg. As I told before, in 1983 there was an article about me in a local newspaper. A year later I sent the newspaper some more details about what I was doing, and they published that. Also with the large exhibition in Amsterdam something was written about me in the newspaper. But after that (in 1985) I have kept quite 'a low profile' inside Tilburg. Only friends and family know about all the things that I do, because when someone just visits the apartment where I live it is obvious that I am into mail art. I don't have any contacts with the local art-community (besides the Duvelhok, where I did my silkscreen printing in 1994-95), and I must say I don't miss it a bit. I have sent one of the interviews I have done to a local Art organisation together with the newsletter, but I didn't even get an reaction. It seems there is no interest in mail art from their side, and I must say I don't miss it.

Mail art seems to be completely different to the 'traditional art world'. I guess most people in the 'traditional art world' don't know me, and it doesn't bother me that much. I could have looked for more coverage by the media with the things that I do, but I also know that this attention would only slow things down regarding the things that I am doing. I can now focus on my art and can travel when I need to.

At the College where I teach in Breda, most of my colleagues know about my "hobby" mail art. Since I don't make money with my art, it isn't considered to be an artists in their eyes. And to be honest; I haven't really succeeded yet in the 16 years that I am doing mail art, to explain to someone not considered a mail artist what it is all about. Speaking for myself, I sometimes too wonder what it is all about.

There are however a few special persons in Tilburg that know a lot of my mail art, the post(wo-)men here in Tilburg. I don't know how they react to all the things that I send out, but at the central Postal Office, where I have my mailbox now for about

15 years or so, they are always very friendly to me. I remember that even a postal piece, where the address was : TAM - P.O. Box - Holland (So without the P.O. Box number, and the zip code) arrived without problems in my P.O. Box. I guess the Postal Office knows my work quite well (I send out about 150 pieces of mail on an average each month.

Next question on 17-6-1996

CS :   I know that you have been active with computers as well as snail mail. Have you met any mail artists online that you had not previously known via the post?

RJ :   Yes, I have been active with computers already for a long time. In 1987 there was even the TBHS (TAM Bulletin Host System) where people could upload the newest version of the TAM Bulletin and leave their electronic mail. Only few mail artist used that, but in 1994, when I entered the internet and got my e-mail address things changed.

Somehow I always made a difference between the computer-contacts I had
and the mail-art. I am working with computers since 1978, learned
programming with the Punch hole-cards, and at the moment work with my fifth computer and my fourth modem. Things have changed quickly, and it will keep changing. Only since the last years the electronic communication became accessible for the people who aren't trained to use computers. The modern software is so easy that anybody can learn in a quick way to work with it.

So, mail artists started to use the electronic mail now too because it is cheap and fast. So I have people I am in contact with through e-mail that don't do mail-art at all. To get back to your question. Yes, a few people contacted me through e-mail and said that they are into mail art as well. But I must say I don't get a good idea about what they do in mail art unless they start to send me snail-mail as well. The e-mail isn't that good to send the real interesting things there are in mail art. The colourful envelopes and paper can never be replaced by the digital images.

Quite recently the mail-interviews got on-line thanks to the help from Jas W. Felter. Since there is a lot of interest in these interviews I will probably start to get more e-mails from people who stumble on those pages. But the snail-mail is still what I prefer, and as long as I haven't gotten a snail-mail from someone I probably won't think of him/her as a mail artist.

Next question 0n 2-7-1996

CS :   Do you think computer communication signals the death knell of traditional mail art? Will people be willing to spend the time that snail mail networking requires?

RJ :   The "traditional mail art" will always be there as long as the postal system is there. The problem however is the money it costs to send things. Already some mail artists work mainly on-line because this is a cheaper way to communicate. But I already have written quite a lot on my views. The series of eleven articles on "electronic mail art" and the other articles I wrote in relation to the newer ways of communication. The postal offices everywhere are increasing their rates while the costs for electronic communication go down. The result will be a change from the analogue communication into the digital communication. Economics rule a lot of society, so these changes are eminent but we have still many years to go with out mail art.

Basically there are a few fundamental issues. First, not everybody can and will have access to the computer-communication while the sending of an envelope at the moment is possible for almost everybody. Money is a problem, and the place/country where you live is another one. In Africa you can send and receive mail, but if there is no electricity and computers, then computer-communication is a big problem (unless you are working for CNN of course.....). Second, the digital form doesn't allow the use of different sorts of paper, coloured ink, structures, smell, 3-dimensional works, etc. The results of interesting electronic communication I always put on paper besides storing them in electronic form. So there I have to choose the paper & colour etc. Third, most art-producers who go on-line start with putting their digital artworks on-line. This means the receiver has to go and search for this art. There is no mail-man that brings things to your door! The e-mail however is compatible with the sending of mail art, but it

has to be in a digital form too. Fourth, anybody who gets the digital information can edit it and change it. Who is the maker of digital art? The person or the program that is used for the result? If I visit a homepage and download the graphics, I can print it myself (with or without editing). The copyright seems to be a problem when it comes to digital information.

Well, I could go on for hours on this subject. I notice that most mail artists that start for the first time with computers get fascinated by the possibilities and results. Then some think that they can do all things with the computer, but they soon find out you can't. The computer -in my eyes- is just an extra tool that the artist can explore. But you will have noticed that I use the computer quite specifically. Only when the special elements the computer brings are needed, I use the computer. When hand-work is better, I will do things without the computer......

Your question implies also the factor time. Yes, the computer can save you a lot of time when used in a proper way. Besides time, it can save also money and doing repetitive work, and those elements mean that more and more people are using that machine. But for making new graphics I for instance rarely use the computer. Original concepts & drawings I still make best by hand. And it is more relaxing to work without the computer. Because if the computer saves time & money, you will use that extra time and money to do more. Some choose for doing more on the computer, some just enjoy the free time and spend the money on other nice things.

next question on 25-7-1996

CS :   I notice that besides your interest in the high tech world of computers, you also work in the labour-intensive medium of eraser-carving. When and how did you get started making these stamps?

(Since Carol likes to travel, this summer vacation she will spend on the islands. My next answer I sent to: Carol Stetser, c/o: General Delivery, Avara, Rarotanga, Cook Islands, South Pacific).

RJ :   Well Carol, the "high tech world of computers" is sometimes also a very labour-intense medium, I can assure you. The results may look simple, but getting good results with a

computer is as difficult as getting good things done by hand. The saving of time and money with using a computer comes only after the time-investment because when things ARE digitized, that means access is easy for the 'computer-world'

But your question is about the eraser-carving. I started with this as soon as I found out about the network (in 1983). I already used rubberstamps before I even was doing mail art. The bureaucratic world we live in has influenced me as a child, and I had an address stamp when I was a teenager. The fun of eraser-carving is that you can work on a stamp for some time and then it is immediately ready for use. I don't see it as a very labour-intense medium unless you want to get realistic looking stamps. But for those results I rather order a stamp at some business-address. Use the right things/tools for your goals. The eraser-carved stamps I like the most are the ones where you can still see that it is carved. I admire the results some mail artists get (like Julie Hagan Bloch for instance), but I myself never try to make them so realistic.

(the answer I sent to the Cook Island, where Carol would collect her mail. On November 26th I got the envelope returned with stamps on it proving it reached the Islands, but it wasn't collected. I mailed it again to Carol at her home-address in Sedona USA).

next question on 18-12-1996

CS :   The last question I asked you was mailed 5 months ago and your response travelled around the world. From Europe to the South Pacific to North America - now that's global mail. In the Cook Islands in July and August I checked General Delivery once a week but missed your envelope. I'm not surprised. All the General Delivery mail was piled in a corner of the post office on Rarotonga and patrons had to sort through a mountain of envelopes to find their correspondence. I'm more amazed that the 'unclaimed' envelope was returned to you and now sits on my desk.

While your mail art travelled so did you and I. In October and November you visited the USA for the first time. What was the most memorable moment of the trip?

RJ :   Yes, I did visit the USA for the first time. Actually it was mostly a visit of the town San Francisco and surroundings, and the reason was the exhibition of the TAM Rubberstamp Archive that was at the Stamp Art Gallery during October 1996. San Francisco is NOT typical USA as I realize.

You ask about " the most memorable moment of the trip". In fact I don't think in terms like that. There were lots of moments not to forget. I already published a first report about my trip and these four pages contain a lot of details of what I have done, who I've met, whom I visited, places I saw, etc. If I would have to select one thing, I would probably mention the 26th at the Stamp Art Gallery. Over 30 people attended the lecture I gave about the rubberstamp Archive. I had prepared slides for this as well. Judging from the audience a big success, but somehow I was glad it was over so I had the chance to talk to all those people in person. During my stay in California / San Francisco I met a lot of mail artists I have interviewed (*Anna Banana*, *John Held Jr.* , *Robert Rocola*, *Ashley Parker Owens*) , mail artists I am currently interviewing (*John Held Jr.* again with whom I am doing part 2, *Picasso - Bill - Gaglione* , *Judith A. Hoffberg*, *Patricia Tavenner*, *Tim Mancusi*) , and I also invited someone for a new interview and started the first questions and answers in San Francisco (*Mike Dyar*).

The reason for going was the exhibition and the lecture about the archive, but as it turned out the mail-interview has influenced the stay there as well. But I also had a chance to meet with some other correspondents (like Barbara Cooper, Michael Harford, Diana O. Mars, Bob Kirkman, Dogfish, and more. See the list on the first report).

For myself I kept a travel-diary as well. But the notes I made in that book (over 100 pages) are not for immediate publication. I will see if there will be a second report. I made lots of photos that would be interesting. But I will probably integrate the images & memories in the mail-interview that are yet to be published.

next question on 10-1-1997

CS :   Sounds like you met and re-met many mail artists on this trip. Do you notice any difference between European mail-artists and American mail-artists.

RJ :   Yes, I met a lot of mail artists in this short period. San Francisco and surroundings sure is a place where these people like to be. A lot of the mail artists I met weren't born in San Francisco. They somehow moved to this exciting place. San Francisco (and California) is not a typical example of America as you and I realize, so to notice differences is not easy. I would have to generalize.

When I would generalize between Americans and Europeans, the differences are known. Realizing ones own background is very important here in Europe. The culture doesn't just go back a few centuries (like in the USA people like to think), but we speak in terms of before or after the year ZERO. A part of the place now called New York, once was Dutch. Just a small part of the culture I know from Holland.

Another thing; languages. You must realize that this English I am writing now, is only my second language. I am Dutch and therefore speak and write Dutch the best. In Europe most people also know English (to some level at least), and it is quite common to know more languages (I speak and write German too for instance, and my French is a bit rusty, but I can survive in a city like Paris quite easily). The Americans I normally encounter only spoke the English, but I must admit I was also surprised to find out that some people also spoke languages like Italian or Dutch. Americans sometimes have strong connections to specific European countries.

Of course lots more of generalizations. Americans like to do everything by car (I don't drive a car, and like walking, bicycling and using the public transport, which is quite easy to do here in most European countries), Americans normally don't know that much about what there is outside America.

But I must admit, that these generalizations don't work that well on mail artists. Most mail artists tend to be very internationally orientated and are interested in culture, languages, and art-history. So, the conclusion might be that mail artists are not to be compared with the 'normal people' inside a country. They have this strange urge to communicate and to learn more about what the whole world makes tick.

next question on 16-2-1997

CS :   Do you notice young people today becoming mail artists or is it mainly the pre-computer generations used to snail-mail that participate in the network?

RJ :   Yes, I do get a lot of mail from newcomers to the mail art network. Also people who read about it on the Word Wide Web start to write snail-mail as well. As I see it the electronic communication is just another (important) tool that is available to the people who want to find out what is going on in the world. Don't forget that in a lot of countries the electronic highway isn't accessible yet to most of the people. What I do notice is that most newcomers are having problems with getting information about what is happening in the mail art network. The informations are not that accessible in the private collections that mail artists have built over the years, and only few museums keep a mail art collection that is accessible to the public. The young people who start with mail art nowadays are very much interested in the possibilities to exchange art, ideas, views and objects and to play with the communication-forms that are accessible to them. What I do miss a lot in the things I get from newcomers is the "art-" part in their mail. But being creative is a process one has to learn. The network sure provides them with lots of possibilities to learn more. Learn with a fixed structure like a school or Academy. Just follow what the mail brings you and start to build new contacts. The fault some make is that they all try to write to the same names. To speak for myself, I hardly have time to reply to all those letters. Last week I was away spending my vacation in Germany. When I came back I found 29 pieces of mail in my P.O.Box (not including the other mail, like regular post from firms & banks etc.) The average of 5 pieces of mail art I get each day is quite low since I have dropped the amount of mail I send out the last half year. And I don't even have the time to answer half of it. If you calculate well, you will realize that it still is about 130 pieces of mail I get every month. Just try to deal with that......!

next question on 16-3-1997

CS :   Yes, burnout from <u>too much</u> mail art to answer is something I can relate to and one of the reasons I "retired" from the network. But obviously, you have no intention to retire with all the projects you are currently working on.

I have always believed that the "art" half of mail art is as important as the "mail" part. But many mail artists (especially the text writers) stress the importance of communication (mail) over the art that is sent. Do you think the "art" is as important as the "mail" or is mail art turning into Mailism?

RJ :   A difficult question since I can't give you a clear description of what I think mail art is. It is one of the reasons why I am doing these interviews with other mail artists. Mail art is something else to every participant in this global networking. I myself normally decorate my envelopes, but the content mostly is also more than a letter or an artwork. It is a combination of both. I don't think in terms of letters or artworks, I just react to the things I get in my mailbox. The reason why I have cut down on the amount of mail I send out is because I want to react when I feel like it. I don't want to feel forced to answer every piece of mail that comes is. It is the problem every mail-artist encounters. If you answer all, you are tempted to write letters like "thanks for your mail, I enjoyed it, please keep in touch". Then include some Xeroxes, put a few stamp-prints or stickers on the envelope, and mail it.

I know that a lot of mail artists do this sometimes, just to keep all the contacts going. I have stopped with that, and probably have stressed some people with that. But the contact in the network I have now are more precious then ever. A lot of contacts became good friends, and sometimes meetings are also part of that contact. Mail art is fully integrated in my life, but it doesn't mean that TAM is a service-bureau that answers all incoming mail and takes part in every project that is being offered. The selecting is only natural for me. I like communication, I like to use all kind of tools for it. Sometimes a small drawing or painting tells more then words, sometimes a long letter is what I want to do. No fixed rules in how I communicate, only things I like and dislike.

(Enclosed with this answer there were 4 newsletters about Ruud's mail art activities).

Next question on 17-4-1997

CS: I think this is a good place to conclude this interview, unless you have something else you would like to add. We began this interview February 1996. The next month Mark Greenfield

(England) also began an interview with you. You sent me a copy of this interview and I am amazed at how different these two interviews are, even though they were conducted over the same period of time. All your interviews with other mail artists begin with the same question and then branch off in all different directions. This is the first time we have two different interviewers for the same artist over the same time period and we still end up with different content. MAIL ART LIVES. thanks for an interesting interview and a great mail art project.

RJ :   Yes, it is funny how all these interviews go differently. every mail artist is an unique person. The fact that two different mail artists interview me at the same time (actually there are two more at the moment....) doesn't mean that I give the same answers like a 'machine'. Mail art is always an interaction between two (or more) and I just react to the mail (in this case answers) that I get. I think the reason that the two interviews with me are so different is because the interviewers had different goals when interviewing me.

It is more curious that I am interviewing about 30 mail artists simultaneously (including you at the moment Carol!), and that all these exchanges of words still tells a lot about the whole process and the individual mail artist.

So, yet another interview is finished (the 36st to finish the statistics). I am only halfway of this enormous project. Thanks for interviewing me Carol, and I hope we do stay in touch!

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH RUUD JANSSEN.

BY MARK GREENFIELD

(During the interview I was doing myself with Mark Greenfield, he asked me if he could interview me in return. He started with the interview just after I published his interview - TAM-Publications # 960116 , and here is the final result. The text was printed on my computer. I sent a print-out of the text to Mark Greenfield to make it possible to do the layout. The printing & distribution was done by TAM-Publications in Tilburg, Netherlands)

Started on: 6-3-1996

MG: Dear Ruud, do you consider mail art to be an underground "art form" opposed to established art forms?

Reply on 16-3-1996

RJ :   Such a question raises another question in my head. Is mail art art? Is networking art? Of course the established art forums are mostly avoided by the mail artists, because they select for exhibitions, they ask fees for entering an art show, they in general select who they think is important enough to expose to an audience. This is what makes the mail artists tick. They want to have control over their own art. But this "art" is not the traditional art. It all has to do with communication.

To speak of myself, I never had a traditional art-education at an Art-University or so, although in the last years I have been doing quite specific courses to expand my knowledge of techniques (like e.g. multi-coloured silkscreen-printing). I did my "art-lessons" through the networking I have been doing. Communicating with people that have to live from what their art brings them as well. In mail art there are a lot of participants that do their mail art besides a completely different job. Mail art can be practiced in that many forms, and yes, it doesn't follow the established art with their rules. However they are not opposites. My first mail art exhibition was in an official Gallery, the "Melkweg" 1985, in Amsterdam. I had complete freedom in the presentation, and they even paid my costs and helped me

with the process; the invitations, opening, slideshows, etc. Only because of that, I liked doing it. I mostly avoid working with or within the "established art world", although I do like to visit museums and galleries in different countries sometimes. But my views aren't completely set on art. Communication is also quite interesting.

Next question on 28-3-1996

MG: Learning and communication are important, there are also plenty of other reasons for taking part in mail art. You mention the exhibition in 1985 but I believe you were involved with mail art before this date. What was the first project you took part in and what were your reasons for wanting to participate?

RJ :   Well, TAM itself was started in 1980. I didn't know about the mail art network then, and only in 1983 I got hooked up with the network. Your question is which project I took part in first. You are lucky, because I do have a list of the projects I took part in for the first years (1983 and 1984). After that, I didn't keep track anymore of the contributions I sent in to the various projects. Number one on this list, an audio-cassette that I recorded for Rod Summers in Maastricht (Netherlands). This was a contribution for his VEC-audio exchange that he was doing. As it turned out he had just finished the project with publishing his last collage-audio cassette (I TCHING), so he wasn't able to use my recordings.

Second part of your question, my reasons? I guess there are two. Firstly I was making first contacts with other mail artists, and it makes sense to make contacts with the mail artists in ones own country. So I had already made contact with mail artists like Ko de Jonge, Sonja van der Burg, Bart Boumans (all from the Netherlands) as well as Bern Olbrich, Anna Banana, etc. With these contacts I also received the first invitations. Secondly, in 1983 I was still a student (actually I graduated in this year) and student-life also involves (for me) lots of music. I had the equipment, also keyboards and guitar, microphone, and I had already recorded some tapes for myself. When I heard of Rod Summer's project VEC-audio-exchange, I recorded something for him, and sent it to him. That this first contribution to a project was an audio-cassette is pure chance, but when I look at the list I have of 1983 I see that I did make some other audio-art, mostly collages with sounds, produced

by me or found in my surroundings. Other contributions also included photographs, stamp-works, and drawings.

Next question on 20-4-1996

MG: The name 'TAM' is used, please explain the meaning of these initials. Although you may not have kept a list of all the projects you have taken part in since that first year, you regularly send out printed documentations about your activities in mail art. Why do you place so much importance on this documentation?

RJ : TAM started in 1980, and it stood then for TRAVELLING ART MAIL. Over the years the word TAM also has functioned on it's own and got other meanings too (like *Tilburg's Academy of Mail-Art* and *Tilburgse Automatiserings Maatschappij*). I use the "firm" or "College" TAM also to play with the official institutes. It is funny that in the first meaning the words ART MAIL are there, knowing that I only got hooked up to the network in 1983.

Documentation. Yes, you're right, it is important to me. I have been keeping track of most of the things I have done so far. The fact that I haven't documented the many contributions to the different mail art projects is just because it takes too much time. Once a piece of mail is ready, it is sent out and I go on to the next thing to do. Keeping track of all the mail I sent out was something I did those first two years. In 1991 I started again with keeping track of how much mail I sent out, just because I was curious myself.
Why it is so important for me, this documentation, is a difficult question. I am not sure. Maybe it gives me a certain grip of the process called "my life", to know what I have been up to so far. Because I am always working on so many different things, it is essential to keep track of things in a orderly way. To give a small example, the interview I am now doing with you (the fact that I answer your question) is just one of the over 30 interviews that are taking place in my P.O. Box or internet-address. Another reason for documenting is, of course, to let others see the documented things too. In networking you can't send all your thought, works and words to everybody. So I have chosen to send things out quite randomly, the same goes for the printed documentations you mentioned in your question. It takes less time to document a certain part of your work and then be able to send a copy to anybody you think is interested in it (as a reply to your mail) compared to writing long letters

over and over again. The time it saves I can use on getting to the more personal details, the personal letters I enjoy writing too.

Next question on 2-5-1996

MG: Both in your interviews and in a lot of your texts, you appear to spend a lot of time analysing the network rather than the individual artist or your own art, what is the reason for this?

RJ :   The first part of the question. The interviews and texts are accessible for the network, so it is only natural that 'the network' is central in the interview. By answering the specific questions the interviewed person can decide how many details one wants to give about his/her personal life and personal art. The really personal details and exchange of art with other mail artists is mostly on a one-to-one basis. In the many interviews that have come out you can see how different the interviews go. Analysing the network is interesting for me. It seems everybody has his/her own

views about the network and some mail artists even think that they have grasped the whole concept of the network. With each interview I discover that the network means something else to every specific cell in the network.

The second part of your question, analysing my own art and writing about my own art. Well, I do copy sometimes the drawings that I have made and spread them through the network. But I never choose to write an explanation about my art. Others can judge what they see in it. Also I exchange with some graphic artists my silkscreen prints and water-colour works. This is the one-to-one exchange again. I analyze art I see from others. Judging ones own art and analyzing it is quite a personal thing. If someone asks me about the art I do explain however. I remember writing a book-letter about the first multicoloured silk-screens I made in 1994 for Litsa Spathi in Germany. In this book-letter I included some parts of the original prints and some test prints to explain how I worked. But I did this because she was interested in these techniques and in what I was trying to explain with the silk-screens. Again on one-to-one basis I explain my own art, but not in texts-form accessible for the whole network. I make my own art because I like to make it, because I need to make it.

Next question on 15-5-1996

MG: Although you seem to spend a lot of time creating mail art, you
        also seem to spend an equal amount of time producing art
        which you do not use in your mailings. You mention your
        drawings, what do you do with the originals? You also refer to
        your silkscreen prints, some of which I've been lucky to see
        even though I wouldn't describe myself as a graphic artist! Are
        there any other forms of art that you use, which are not related
        to your mail art? While I was at college I specialized in
        sculpture. Do you create any sculpture?

RJ :   Well, your question contains three question marks, and almost
        sounds like a questionnaire about the art I produce. The word
        'art' is a difficult one, because I am quite confused about what
        to call art, and what to call 'things I want to do in my life'.
        Anyway, back to your questions.

   [1] The drawings. Well, it isn't an 'equal amount of time' as you call
        it. Only when I find the time I work on those other things
        besides the mail art. I do make copies of most of these
        drawings and spread them into the network, but most originals I
        have kept for myself. There is the occasional drawing that I
        make for a project or for a person, or the exception of an
        original I send out to someone. The drawings are a way
        capturing my views. Most subjects of my drawings aren't
        planned in advance. I just feel that something is about to come
        out and make a start. The results mostly show something of
        what is going on inside me, and that probably is the reason why
        I keep most of them myself (paper only takes little space).
        Maybe the making of the drawings is some kind of therapy I
        discovered for myself. I am learning what makes me tick, and
        the drawings help me with that. Sometimes after years I
        discover again something that came out of me through those
        drawings. Must sound strange maybe, but it is how I feel it.
        Maybe in the nearby future I will start to send them out. Maybe
        I will exhibit the collection somewhere if I think it is good
        enough to do so. Also the drawings are a source to look back
        on for subjects of other 'art' I like to do. Some of the drawings
        are transformed into an oil painting, others into silkscreen
        prints, although this last form I don't use that much anymore.
        The silk-screens I sometimes send out into the network are test

prints I made. A selection of some of the colours-parts I used on a larger silkscreen. The final silk-screens are mostly too large to fit in envelopes. I now and then give them to people I meet who are interested in (mail) art, or make large parcels to exchange things with other graphic artists. Also in the last years whenever I visit a mail artist or when someone visits me, they end up with getting a silkscreen. Made Balbat in Estonia has quite a collection. John Held Jr & Bill Gaglione visited me last year and ended up with the silkscreen I made of a portrait of Ray Johnson (originally the portrait was a linocut made by Tim Mancusi in USA). I don't like the gallery system, so I never tried to get into one. Except for the mail art project I mentioned before in the Melkweg-gallery in Amsterdam. The only time some of the silkscreens were exhibited was at the 'Duvelhok' (in 1993 and 1994) ; an artist work center here in Tilburg with their own exhibiting space. Every year they make an exhibition of the people that have worked there.

[2]   Other forms of art, you asked about. Well, no time for other graphic things I guess, although I do write a lot too. Do you call that art too? Also I try to keep up with the changing world of computers and how one can use them to produce things, to communicate, to print things, and is that art? I mostly don't think of myself as an artist, I just want to have a creative life, and that means doing & creating things. And I do think I have succeeded in that so far. Oh yes, just forgot, I recently started with acryl-paint because the oil-paint took so long to dry. Currently I am making small colourful 'things' on carton, to see how I can use this paint. These tests are mostly small and I do send them out to some mail artists. The distinction I made between mail art and art not connected to mail art isn't that clear. It has to do with the intention. Some art I make to mail out, and other wasn't made with that intention.

[3]   The last part of your question; sculpture? Well, as a young boy I liked to do that very much. I still have two works in my living room that I made when I was about 11 years old. They still are a source of inspiration for me, but after elementary school I not done any sculpture at all. I enjoy seeing it though, very much, but a day has only 24 hours and there is only a limited amount of things a person can do. Most of the time goes to the work at College and the mail art anyway.

Next question on 3-6-1996

MG: Much of the visual art that you have sent me has been the "result" of you expressing "what is going on inside". You appear to concentrate in this type of subject and I can not remember seeing any of your art which was expressing an opinion about "what was going on outside" yourself. In your "7th Thoughts about mail art" article you acknowledge the world is still a turbulent place to live in. How and why do you avoid making any social or political statement visual art?

RJ :   The question could be answered with a simple NO. I don't avoid it and don't concentrate on the things you mention. Some of my contributions to mail art projects ARE visual statements on social or political issues. Your question probably comes as a reaction to my drawings, because there I must agree that the social or political aspect is not always obviously there. But maybe you should look closer. The views I give of the world that I see INSIDE me is a reflection of the things I see OUTSIDE of me. I am very aware of what is going on in the world and have written also about that. Maybe the choice of words was wrong. I meant that I don't use realistic subjects in my drawings, for that I use photography, something I enjoy also a lot. For sociological and political issues I probably use the text-format a lot. The internet for example is a social issue as well (and not a technical as some try to explain) on which I have written quite a lot.

As for my drawings / texts it seems you like to analyze it. I don't analyze it too much; it just comes out, and I use a visual way (or sometimes a textual way) for that. If someone asks me for a specific social or political statement I participate in those projects too. In my "life besides the mail art", I have chance enough to deal with social or political subjects. I teach students aged 16 to 21 years old, and they are very interested in these aspects as well. In my student-years I was also member of environmental groups here in Tilburg or even national ones. It seems that the balance in my life makes it so that I don't have to find another outlet for social or political subjects. For emotions that exist inside me I DO need another outlet, for example the art that I sometimes like to produce.

Yes, the world is a turbulent place. In the mail-interview project I am trying to document some of that too (interviews with

Svjetlana Mimica in Croatia and Dobrica Kamperelic in Yugoslavia during the war in Bosnia, Clemente Padin in Uruguay who was imprisoned because of his actions, and also more interviews on its way with Andrej Tisma in Yugoslavia, Ayah Okwabi in Ghana, Rea Nikonova in Russia, Edgardo-Antonio Vigo in Argentina, Raphael Nadolny in Poland, etc.). I myself life in a luxury state, where the political and social problems are small compared to those in some other countries. To my surprise a lot of networkers don't realize in what circumstance other mail artists live. I guess I found another way to deal with these issues than just make art about it.

Next question on 17-6-1996

MG: As well as texts and visuals, you also like to visit a lot of mail artists. Do you consider this an advantage? What are the benefits of these 'meetings'?

RJ :   Your question comes at a quite well-timed moment. I am just back from a weekend in Maastricht where I stayed with Rod Summers. A very pleasant weekend, and you are right; I do like to visit a lot of mail artists. Yes, it is an advantage. In many ways. First, thanks to the job at College I have the money to travel and the vacation-times to do that. Secondly, it is always much more interesting to meet the mail artist then to get the mail art from this person. Of course the first meeting is always the most difficult one. You will find out if you have the possibility to discuss interests and visions. Some meetings with mail artists resulted in the breaking of contact. Other meetings made the mail art contact into a friendship that goes further than mail art. In a piece of mail a mail artists can only tell that much about himself. Seeing the circumstances where the persons lives in (especially in other countries) is sometimes quite revealing and explains a lot about the mail you get from them. To take the example of the very recent meeting with Rod Summers. I met him before, at the Zoo-congress in Antwerpen (organized by Guy Bleus), and the congress in the Postal Museum in The Hague (both congresses took place in the DNC-year 1992). But this meeting was the first time I went to Maastricht where Rod lives with his wife Liesbeth, and saw his archive & the huge collection of audio-work he has produced over the years. Lots of things to talk about, and the amount of thoughts you can exchange in such a weekend is impossible to

put in a huge envelope. We both wouldn't have the time to write the words down of all the things we discussed.

More meetings are on the way. In July I probably go to Germany for a short time. In September there is the Stempel-Mekka in Hagen where I want to go to, and in October I will go for the first time to the USA, and meet lots of mail art friends in San Francisco. I feel lucky that I am able to do that all.

Next question on 3-7-1996

MG: You believe therefore that it is necessary to meet the mail artist you are corresponding with before you can fully appreciate that persons art? What about people you have not met, or people who prefer "the working in physical isolation, giving, receiving, bouncing ideas off artists they never meet" or people who do not want to visit or be visited. Is there no ones art who you have 'great' respect for and have never met the artist?

RJ :   You start with "You believe therefore....", but that isn't correct. Appreciating art has nothing to do with knowing why and how a person makes his art. Of course I have great respect for art of people I have never met. I like Van Gogh's work a lot, but he is dead, so I can't meet him. But to understand why Van Gogh made his work, you will have to rely on the stories written down by the people who knew him. With Van Gogh this is easy because he used to write these letters, and they are all published. Therefore the people who know the whole story are the best ones to understand his art.

Meeting the mail artist is an advantage, as I see it. You can exchange & learn more than through the mail, when you meet. Not meeting gives other possibilities. The correspondents in the mail art network can make their own visions about all the mail artists they are in contact with. I am interested in mail art and communication; this is a process. Art is more like a finished product, a painting, a registration of a performance, etc. I like to know why people produce the things they produce. But there is no link to appreciating art and meeting the artists as you said. Meeting mail artists makes it just more easy to understand the art they make.

next question on 25-7-1996

MG: "Art is more like a finished product"? Do you consider there to
        be a finished product in mail art? Surely much mail art is not
        conventional art, certainly not many square canvas for framing.
        The mail art 'by-product' such as Xeroxes, rubberstamped
        envelopes etc. are not what you would expect to find in the
        'traditional gallery'. The important question is: can mail art itself
        be framed? The 'by-products' are like photos, tickets and
        programmes of an event and not the event itself?

RJ :   I once said "mail art is a search". Of course there are 'by-
        products' as you mention. The answer to your question is
        simple. NO; mail art itself can't be framed, it is even difficult to
        explain to a non-practitioner what mail art is. The mail artists
        themselves are often tempted to explain what mail art is. But
        "to know mail art is to do mail art" and it is a personal
        experience. I don't feel the need to give a definition of mail art. I
        have tried too often, and my views are still evolving. I rather
        give these views and tell also that the views that mail artists
        have about mail art depends on the different persons as well.

next question on 24-8-1996

MG :   So what exactly will you be showing at The Stamp Art Gallery
        in San Francisco and how will it be presented? Will you be
        explaining mail art to the audience?

        (together with his answer Ruud Janssen sent the newsletter of
        the TAM Rubber Stamp Archive, August 1996 and some of the
        special stamp-sheets he made for this exhibition)

RJ :   I am not sure what I will be showing there. I'll try to explain.
        Since the Stamp Art Gallery has to do with rubber stamps, Bill
        Gaglione and John Held Jr. thought it would be interesting to
        present my TAM Rubber Stamp Archive at their place and so
        they invited me for the exhibition. But it is just impossible to
        show the complete archive connected to rubber stamps that I
        have. I also felt it would be wrong to make a selection of the
        contributions or the materials I have. The Stamp Art Gallery is
        connected to the Stamp Francisco Company and a part of their
        large store in the heart of San Francisco. The trip to San
        Francisco and meeting some of the many friends I have there
        is more important for me than the exhibition (also I plan to meet
        four or more people I am currently interviewing for my mail-
        interview project while I am there!). In the spirit of mail art I

made special stamp-sheets for this exhibition. They are supposed to be sent directly to the Gallery, and they will form a large part of the exhibition. I send the special stamp-sheets to participants of the archive together with the latest newsletter of the TAM Rubber Stamp Archive, so they can send in prints of any sort as they would like. I like this concept better than the idea that the stamps of ONE single artist are presented (like most of the previous shows of the Gallery this year). What would be the use of printing my entire collection and hang the prints of the wall. These prints are already scattered all over the world with my mail art.

Besides these stamps-sheets I also asked networkers to send old stamp-sheets they still have, directly to the exhibition. Only for historic purpose I probably will select some stamp-sheets that are already in the collection (over 4500 sheets to choose from you know; read about it in the latest newsletter.....).

Another thing that probably will be exhibited is some of the envelopes I sent to John Held Jr. and Bill (Picasso) Gaglione. Since I am in contact with them for over 15 years, they have a lot to choose from. Also most of the publications in connection to the TAM Rubber Stamp Archive are in their procession, so they can easily fill the space. John Held Jr. is now the curator of the Gallery, and he will arrange the exhibition. So, also for me the exhibition will be a surprise. It starts on October 6th, and a few weeks later I will be there too. Just today I booked the ticket, and I will leave on
 October 20th. On October 26th I will tell something about the archive and my work at the Gallery. I am at the moment working on that. It will be illustrated with slides, and I will add a bit of humour and performance to that. We will see how it turns out to be. So your question "will you explain mail art" would have to be answered with a NO. Most people in the Gallery probably already know something about mail art. The idea that most networkers have of mail art is mostly a personal one.

next question on 26-9-1996

MG: I have always thought it commendable the way you continue to promote other artists art. I believe you have your own gallery. What is this gallery, is it part of your home? How is art presented here? Who gets to view the art on display?

RJ: The problem of answering this question is that it breaks down the illusion the word "TAM-GALLERY" brings to people. Especially people who are inside the "official art world" , and sideways stumble on the mail art network, always want to know where ones art has been exhibited, etc... Since in mail art the best exhibitions take place in very small rooms (e.g. the P.O.Boxes or the places where mail artists get their mail), most "full-time" mail artists don't exhibit this kind of work that much. I offer some artists the chance to have another "exhibition" on their list. Since the exhibitions are real, the paperwork is real, and only the "size" of the gallery is small it is easy to arrange these exhibitions. I already got offers from artists who wanted to do an exhibition at my Gallery. But so far I myself select the people I hang on my wall........

Anyhow, the TAM-Gallery is just one wall of my small living-room. I sometimes change the things that are hanging there, and if I select a number of works from a specific artists, I also make an invitation-folder of it and send it into the network and to this artist. I don't distribute it in Tilburg, because I like my privacy. Actually a lot of the works that are hanging at my apartment are connected to mail art or art my own work (mostly the oil-paintings I like to do when I have the time). My living-place is a constant exhibition of the mail I get in and the art I produce myself and still have.

So, who gets to see this "exhibitions" at my Gallery? Anyone that just happens to visit me during the time the works are hanging here. Mostly just family and friends, and rarely a mail artists who passes by.

The TAM-Gallery fits nicely in the big list of organisations that I have build around TAM. The TAM-Publications, The International Union of Mail Artists (IUOMA), the TAM-Academy, etc. Actually in real life I use sometimes these organisations as well. It is always nice to be the director of TAM, and be able to send mail out like that. In "real life" I also teach my students about how organisations work (with as goal to teach them how informatics-systems have to be build for those organisations), so in a way everything in my life is connected to one another.

next question on 17-10-1996

MG :　By exhibiting the 'by-products' of mail art are we providing that there is something to show or collect? Often the art being shown is something very distinctive to mail art, for example the decorated envelopes, I could state many other examples.

There are also some American artists who are writing a lot of texts to establish mail art as an 'ism'. Although this does not appear to be your aim, all texts about mail art help to 'establish' it as an 'ism'. Obviously you have written extensively on the subject and some of the artists concerned and in my opinion your texts would be extremely important if mail art did become classified as an 'ism'.

Mail art is now becoming recognized by the official establishment. What are your opinions on mail art becoming an 'ism'.

RJ :　The exhibition of 'by-products' of mail art doesn't mean that they will be archived! I know of exhibitions where the mail art envelopes, collages, etc. are given to the visitors. Sometimes they are used as collage in the mail art documentation. Some even burn the whole lot and make a performance about it. Of course there is a big part of the mail art that will be saved. The "archives" as we mail artists like to call them are mostly nothing more than collections of the things the receivers found interesting to keep and to collect. Some specialize even and write the network to send them specific things. All this is perfectly o.k. by me. There are no real rules about how to deal with mail art.

The official art-world however is becoming interested because of several reasons. First: Mail artists start to die. If a mail artist has also a name in the official art world, then of course this businessmen will try to get a hold of these 'by-products'. Second: The postal communication is gradually loosing its original form. More and more things are done by the computers. Even if someone doesn't want to, the pens and typewriters are gradually being taken over by these digital machines. The new generations are learning to use and misuse these machines, and it is a way that has obviously no return. If fact with the paid job I have the last years I am even helping in this development since I nowadays teach full-time computer-sciences (and you would be surprised how creative this business is.....).

The main focus of your question is about the texts that are written. Whether mail art becomes an 'ism' or not, isn't at all interesting for me. Normally things are an 'ism' when they over and historians take over. It only becomes an 'ism' if the impact on our society was large enough. For me mail art at the moment has more become a way of life. That I use the postal system to communicate, a pen and paper, make visuals, use the computer , send out an e-mail, publish a text on the internet; it is just the need to communicate and to search for what this life is all about and what possibilities that there are. I don't just live in Tilburg. I live on a planet where lots of things are happening. I want to learn from others what this life is all about and to find out for myself what it is that I am doing or what I want to do. Life is a constant search for new things. It is never a repetition of things so that one does again and again the same things (some people who call themselves mail artists are doing just that, you know....). People who are in constant development you maybe could call artists. But they don't always have to paint. There are lots of things creative people are producing. To see the basic thought behind this creativity, that is something really interesting and it fascinates me to see what search-pattern other people have developed.

To come back on the 'by-products'. Thank god that of other artists things have been kept. In mail art it is for newcomers very difficult to find out what has happened since the sixties. The many books that are made are difficult to get, and also only show a very limited view. I only know very few books on mail art NOT written by mail artists. As long as that is so, mail art won't be an 'ism' as I see it. The Galleries that do exhibit work of mail artists do so because mostly it is a part of the life of a specific artists that has brought something. Whether it is new art or money (for the gallery-owner) that is another question. But as I told before. I am not in contact with the official art world or the gallery-scene........ That postal museums are interested in mail art is nothing new. Mail artists use the mail, and besides the historic stamp-collections and postal items, what artistic things are there that are connected to mail? Right; mail art. But the postal museums mostly let a mail artists currate the show or let them advice the museum. Nothing wrong with a sponsor for a great show on mail art. But showing 'by-products' isn't what mail art is all about.

(This question arrived just after my return from USA / San Francisco, where I was from 20-10-96 till 4-11-1996 for an exhibition at the Stamp Art Gallery about the TAM Rubber Stamp Archive. I also had meetings with 9 mail artists I am currently interviewing or have interviewed, who live in San Francisco or in cities nearby)

next question on 7-11-1996

MG : 'Constant development' appears to be important to you. What do see your future role in mail art as being? Can you tell us of any plans or art projects you have for forthcoming development?

RJ : A future role? The constant development is a learning process. Mail art is just one of the sources that teaches me. I don't have a final goal, I op open to the influences that I encounter in my life. I am not thinking in terms of 'future role'. Since you ask such a question, I guess *you* are!

"......any plans or art projects you have for forthcoming development?". Is this a joke? The TAM Rubberstamp Archive , the mail interviews and publications of booklets and the publishing of a final document connected to this, the WORDS-list, the many articles I write, the acryl painting I am currently doing, and not to forget the teaching job I have........ And I almost forget: keeping up with the developments on the internet! A day has only 24 hours, and the only plan I have at the moment is to cut down on the amount of mail art I send out. I like to produce more quality rather than more quantity.

next question on 29-11-1996

MG : The 'future role' for my art is 'constant development'. However I'm not the person being interviewed, you are! But that was the last question I wanted to as you (this time), so unless you have got anything further to add, I would just like to thank you for an interesting and informative interview.

RJ : Well, for me it was an interesting and informative interview as well. It is always a surprise which question someone comes up with. This is one of the three interviews that mail artists started with me. As it turns out these interviews will all three be completely different........ Till again Mark!

(The finished text was sent to Mark Greenfield. He could then arrange the final layout and send the originals back to me.)

INTERVIEW WITH RUUD JANSSEN.

BY DOBRICA KAMPERELIC

For his book, Dobrica sent me four questions. Here is the complete text as I sent in to publish. He calls it an interview, I prefer the term questionnaire. November 1995, published in "OPEN WORLD / OPEN MIND - OTVORENI SVET / OTVORENA SVEST" in English and translated by Dobrica Kamperelic, Yugoslavia, Dedalus Publishing, pages 141-149. Beograd 1996.

Dear Dobrica,

In your last Open Wor(l)d 86 (thanks for sending this!), I found the four questions you asked me. First I would like to point out that this is not an interview. I have seen many of these questionnaires, and mostly they are just a set of questions about what the person who asks them wants to know about the person he/she asks the questions to. In my mail interview-project I work completely different. I start with one question and then await the reaction of the person I invite for the interview. How and when and in which form and by what communication form, I leave to the person I want to interview. After getting an answer I think of my next question, and also decide about the tools I would like to use to ask the question. In this way, a real interview by mail develops, and it is much more than a set of questions someone forms, and sends out.

Therefore I would like to call your 'interview' not an interview but a questionnaire. Because even before getting a single answer from me you already thought of the next questions, and by that you have influenced my first answer already. An interview is much more interesting, and to be honest, I only have given two interviews and one video-interview so far. This set of questions are no interview in my eyes, but I will try to give you my thoughts on the questions for you anyway.

DK :   Why are you a mail artist?

RJ :   That is a very difficult question to start with. It is the same kind of question as why do I live? I guess it is a result of many things I have encountered in my life. To start with, my father also was doing a lot of mail in his free time, but with a different approach. He collected postage stamps, and decided not just to collect

them, but to get in contact with people in the countries he was interested in. I remember the many envelopes he got every week, and this was in the beginning years of the 60-ies. Contacts with East-Germany, Russia, China,etc... he was very interested in the outer corners to get those strange postage stamps. I guess I inherited a part of it, and when my father died (I was only 16 years old then) I was already involved in correspondence with people in other countries too. But it was not connected to mail art, it was a completely different network.

After my father died (in 1976), I started to answer some of the mail people still wrote to him, and it were also the years I started to study. Although I liked drawing and painting a lot, I started a technical study and kept the artwork as a kind of hobby. Some of my friends of high school went to art academies and I kept interested in art and kept in contact with them. I remember that somehow I must have seen some 'creative mail' too, and started to mail 'strange' envelopes to myself in 1980. I cut up postage stamps and already used rubber stamps on my mail then. This was also the year I started with TAM, because I wanted to have a name for this. TAM stands for Travelling Art Mail, and I invented that name without knowing the name mail art. I've heard of many other mail artists that they were involved in sending out mail without having found out about the network.

In 1983 I put an add in the local paper, and it must have been a quite interesting add, since one of the reactions was from a journalist of that newspaper, and he phoned me that he wanted to interview me about my 'strange hobby' of sending out this creative mail. The interview took place a week later, and the story was published on the first page. At that time I was already graduated and had started teaching. So a lot of people in my surrounding than found out what I was doing. The address was also included in the interview, and I got some mail from people in the mail art network. One of the first contacts lead to Guy Bleus, and he sent me an address list he had used for a project of his. This was the start of my wide range of activities. I started sending letters into the net, and soon I found myself in the middle of friends.

DK : You're permanent in networking action since beginning eighties, isn't it, but your TAM and IUOMA projects made you famous in NET-WORLD? Let us know more about it.

RJ : Famous? There are no famous people in the network. There are only those who are active, and those who are not that active. I must admit that since the beginning I have stayed active until now, and I have always started with new aspects of networking. In 1985 I started with the TAM-Bulletin, which was a mail art information-letter like your Open World is. But the one page newsletter grew into a more-pages bulletin, and soon everybody started to send me news and graphics, just to be included in the TAM-Bulletin. It ran for a long period in this form, but at the end of the 80-ies I started to teach informatics too at the College where I work, and I decided to use the computer for this. Rather than printing the bulletins, I made them accessible through the computer and the modem, and that was a complete new development. It seems I was to early with that because only a few networkers I knew had the access to computers and modems that time. Also the access was a problem for some. My technical background was a reason for this approach to spread information. In 1992, during the DNC I even held some computer-congresses, where mail artists could communicate on-line via computers. But somehow I still prefer the old-fashioned communication. The computers transfer all things into a digital form, and smell, taste, warmth, 3D objects, they can't be digitized!

But my life is not at all completely technical orientated. When I was young I started with drawing too, and at the age of 15 I already was painting with oil-paint on canvas. I am lucky that I still have my first painting, and somehow it shows the beginning of what life means to me. I teach exact sciences and informatics, but in the time I have left I paint, draw, and than there is the mail art. The TAM-Bulletin and the doing of many mail art projects in the late 80-ies was a very pleasant period.

I documented the first ten years in mail art with a booklet of 35 pages in which I tell about how all these things were interconnected. I printed it in an edition of 30 and sent it to my closest contacts in the network. At that time I must have been in contact with hundreds and hundreds of people on a regular basis. I preferred the contacts with people which I probably weren't able to meet in person, but I remember that in 1985 later I have met many mail artists (in Amsterdam, in Italy, in Germany) and things developed quite quickly.

In 1990 I started with the IUOMA (the International Union of Mail Artist). Because many outsiders of mail art don't get the idea, I started with this organization, so people could see it as a complete organized whole. But in contrast to other Unions, the IUOMA had no fixed structure. Anybody could become a member, and also everybody who claimed a function in the Union could act like it. Piermario Ciani designed a logo for it which later also was used for the DCN (Decentralized Networker Congress) in 1992, And lots of people (also yourself) had a part in the forming of the Union. In 1991 the first Union magazine came out, a 30 page booklet with an edition of 400. Because I had made myself the General-President, I travelled in this function to the (then still) USSR. Even when I explained the concept of my 'joke' they still treated me as an important guest, and the four weeks in the USSR were quite impressive. The last week also was quite historic, since the coup inside the USSR lead to the breaking of the Republics into new countries. I was there to hear the proclamation of the independent Estonia, and it is an impressive memory. Also the friends I have made there are persons I won't ever forget. In 1992 I travelled a lot because of the DNC. And I have organized some own congresses too and participated in many others.

DK :   Your drawings and graphics are excellent, but you prefer computers in the last years, right? Why you did that?

RJ :   Thanks for the compliment. I must say that I don't use computers for my drawings at all. I started with making large sets of drawings as a result of the many travels I did in the beginning of the 90-ies. The drawings take a lot of time because I take care of small details all by hand. I don't like computer-drawings that much, although I enjoy using the computer as a tool, as a machine to produce things in a clear way. These answers I for instance type straight on my computer, because I am used to working with computers. But the creativity comes from the artist, not from the machine.

I feel limited by the use of a computer for my art, and maybe it is also some kind of balance I am looking for. The technical sides in my paid job, and the handwork I can do with my art. Some drawings are good enough to develop further, and they might end up as a coloured version of a drawing, a silkscreen print, or even an oil painting. Because these normally get quite large they are not really connected to mail art just because I don't mail

large pieces that easily. That you think that I prefer computers is probably because as a tool for communication the computer is excellent. Any text or visual information can easily be transformed into a digital code and can be sent instantly through the computer-networks. But because working with computers is also a part of my paid job, I also know a lot about the disadvantages these machines bring. Also the access to these machines isn't the same for everybody. It was also a reason to do my mail interview project.

In this project I could choose any communication-form that was available. Some interviews go by internet, others by snail mail, and sometimes even the normal phone or a surprise visit. When John Held Jr. and Bill Gaglione visited me in May this year, they had with them a computerdisk with on it the latest answer to a question I had asked to Rod Summers. They just visited him the day before they came to me. Also I gave them a package with things for Guy Bleus because that was their next place to go. All in the spirit of Peter Küstermann and Angela as they did on their mailmen travels.

So I haven't changed to using computers completely. It is just another tool I use. I know that some networkers in the USA have switched to computer-communication completely, but somehow I find that communication too sterile. The envelopes and handwritten letters tell you more than the clear letters on a computer-screen. The colours on a envelope of a real artwork look better, feel better, even smell better, than my computer screen. I love to produce art, and to see art, but the computer screen is not a tool for art for me. There are others who do that, but for me the computer is a tool only.

DK : What's your and rest networkers position on Holland alter-art scene?

RJ : In the late eighties I had lots of contacts with mail artists in other pasts of Holland. But some very active workers have left the mail art network. Sonja van der Burg and Margot van Oosten left quite suddenly. Ulisses Carrion died. And I must admit that the mail art network is a real international network, and the contacts with people abroad are the most interesting. In my daily life I am dealing with Dutch people and students all the time, while the mail art keeps me in contact with the whole world. The life of a mail artist is an international one, and the coming of internet

means that any information can travel from one place to another instantly.

The alter-art scene..... I have worked for two years at an art-centre here in Tilburg to make larger silk-screens than I can make at home, but somehow the artists that don't work in networks don't seem to grasp what it is all about. They work to get their works in local Galleries, and see being in such an exhibition as an success. For me the communication with people who I see as an artist is more important. The traditional art-world is something I mostly avoid. The only exceptions are when I am asked to do an exhibition or to give something for a group-exhibition. But I rather share my art with a mail art friend who will be interested in the artist too then to hang it is a gallery where everybody is only interested in "does it sell....?".

I have divided my life in two parts that fit perfectly together. My work with students and computers, the College, it gives me the possibilities and free time to be able to do my mail art. I have noticed that most mail artists are having a paid job to support their costly mail. I find it important that I am not depending on selling my art, and that I can sometimes just give it away. It is a luxury, I know. But it is always rewarding to see the results when someone I share my work with uses it to hang on his wall, to include it in his catalogue, or just to send me something nice in return too.

But as a mail artist I don't live on an island here in Holland. I have many mail art friends here, and some I have met several times in person or just by the mail. But Holland is just a small country. I am only five minutes away from Belgium, and if I take the train I am in 30 minutes in Germany. It is wonderful to live near the border and to be able to see another culture just around the corner.....

Well, these were my answers/reactions to your questions. I hope you enjoyed reading them. A pity it wasn't an interview where you could ask something when I jump from one subject to another, but that is the case when you send me a questionnaire. I will enclose some other information for you because as you might know I have many things I am working on at the same time. It seems that in the beginning of the 90-ies there was the travelling and the meeting of mail art friends, and the last years I

have started in writing my thoughts and the thoughts of others down on paper.

Ruud Janssen and the TAM Web Site

Chapter 4 from a thesis on the effects of the Internet on an international community of artists who have exchanged art through postal systems for 40 years. The methods of grounded theory are employed to collect and analyze three types of data. The data are: literature collected from Internet communities where the artists converse and publish artworks, interviews with artists who have experience in both electronic and traditional network environments, and artworks made by artists to express their visual and poetic responses to the Internet.

By Honoria Madelyn Starbuck, PhD.

This chapter is a case study of Ruud Janssen's Travelling Art Mail (TAM) projects including his 1994-1998 interview project and his 1,000 page Web site. This case study illustrates how one mail art networker pioneered uses of the Internet that dramatically departed from traditional mail art norms. Janssen's interview project in which he asked artists about their uses of the Internet provides a historical base to ground my research.

Janssen's interview project shows a mail artist who is determined to learn more about his network by interviewing other artists in the mail art network as the Internet becomes available to use as a communication tool. Janssen's networking art is influenced by his interest is in computers. In the 1994-1998 TAM interview project Janssen asked each artist about their own integration of computers into their art. So the TAM interview project set the stage for this research because I want to find out the effects of the Internet on the Mail Art Network.

This research continues the work of Janssen who asked mail artists about their uses of the Internet for mail art. Unlike Janssen, who let the interviews develop as they went, I used a questionnaire to ask the same questions of each interviewee. These questions were about the artists' adaptation to the Internet. The answers revealed a wide range of responses. My interviews are parallel to Janssen's original and will be valuable to future research as the Internet continues to influence the Correspondence Art Network.

Introduction to Ruud Janssen

When Ruud Janssen was a child in the Netherlands, he first connected to international correspondence through his father's hobby of collecting

postage stamps. In high school Janssen became interested in drawing and painting. In 1980 Janssen studied physics in university and started a project called TAM for Traveling Art Mail. (Stetser, 1996) In those early years of TAM, Janssen combined art with postal experiments that included sending mail to fictitious addresses and mailing unusual envelopes to himself to see how they were processed through the postal system. In 1983, after several years of isolated mail experiments, Janssen discovered the Correspondence Art Network.

As Janssen became increasingly active as a correspondence artist he also became involved with computers, computer networks, and informatics. Informatics, a term for information science, investigates the properties and behavior of information, the forces that govern the flow and use of information, and the techniques of processing information for storage, retrieval, and dissemination. (Borko, 1968) At the time of this research, Janssen taught informatics at Baronie College in the Netherlands.

The combination of mail art and computers: the TAM web site

As Janssen's connections multiplied, he became an important node for transmitting mail art information by publishing a newsletter called the TAM-Bulletin. In 1985 Janssen responded to his rapidly expanding mail art network by creating a version of the TAM-Bulletin that could be accessed through an electronic bulletin board system (BBS.) (Janssen, 1997c) Since that first experiment in combining computer networks and mail art, Janssen's TAM electronic initiatives have grown into the World Wide Web's largest Web site dedicated to correspondence art. Janssen describes the natural progression that lead to his substantial web presence:

Why did I build my site? ...In 1985 I already experimented with data communication, my first modem was an acoustic one (300/300 baud) and even before Internet was available for the masses, I had a short e-mail address and worked in the BBS-world... When the Internet got affordable ...I entered the Internet at the DDS (Digital City of Amsterdam), and got the e-mail address tam@dds.nl. After that things went automatically. Joy McManus was already online and informed me of the Geocities community. There I started to build my site in 1996 because I was publishing texts and the postage and sending was getting [to be] a problem. So, [I built the site as a result of] a combination of experimenting with new techniques and looking for practical purposes.... Now that the Internet-sites are normal for everyday work, I tend to not work that much on building them, but looking at the new ways that are possible. I guide my students in this and let them build the new things. (Janssen, 2002)

By the time the TAM Web site was three years old it was probably larger than any of the books ever written about mail art. The site has visitors from a wide range of places as Janssen mused in 1998:

The last 3 years I have been building this site, and as a result now [it is] over 1000 pages… In a way it is strange to experience that everybody has access to these pages. The mail art network, personal friends, unknown people, people from college....at the moment there are about 10 hits each day on the pages. About 40% comes from the Netherlands, another 30% from the USA, 26% from the rest of Europe, and only 4% from Africa, Asia, and South-America. (Janssen, 1998b)

The TAM Web site brings together an impressive amount of mail art history. An auxiliary of the TAM Web site is the IUOMA message board established in 2001. Janssen's original 1996 TAM message board was not very active, possibly because the link to it was hard to find in all the other information on TAM. With Janssen as moderator, the message board is permeated with his questioning personality and research style. . The IUOMA message board has 100 members and is an active discussion of mail art.

Look and feel of TAM

The TAM Web site is alive with color, icons, animations, flashing text, and blue underlined words. The aesthetic effect is busy and cluttered; hypertext links jam closely together crammed into dense paragraphs, and flashing animations dot the screen. Janssen comments on why the design is frenzied:

Those animated gifs are always fun. They bring life to the computer-screen, and make the texts on the screen different from the printed versions on paper. That is why I like them so much. These animated gifs aren't always quickly made; it is like a little video-film in which you have to make every frame. (Janssen, 1998c)

The visually busy TAM pages do not seem strange to seasoned mail artists because paper-based mail art products are also routinely cluttered with small appropriated icons from popular culture around the world. Mail art aesthetics include hodgepodge juxtapositions of rubberstamps, artist stamps, paintings, collage, photographs, Xeroxes, drawings, and postal ephemera.

TAM in context

Artpool in Hungary and Vorctice Argentina are two artists' organizations that compiled large correspondence art Web sites built in 1995-1996 at

the same time as the TAM site. These two Web sites contain historical material and essays on correspondence art networking.

ARTPOOL

Artpool is a collaboration between Júlia Klaniczay (editing), György Galántai (conception and design), and László Tölgyes (web technique).

Artpool is a non-profit alternative art institution in Hungary, with the objective to register changes in art, to present and document the most interesting art experiments and to promote artistic communication. (Artpool, 2002)

Artpool's Web site, built in 1996, consists of sections devoted to correspondence art texts, publications, and on-line shows documenting Artpool projects, and the chronology of Hungarian mail art. The art pool site map reflects the deep integration of mail art aesthetics and icons into the site design.
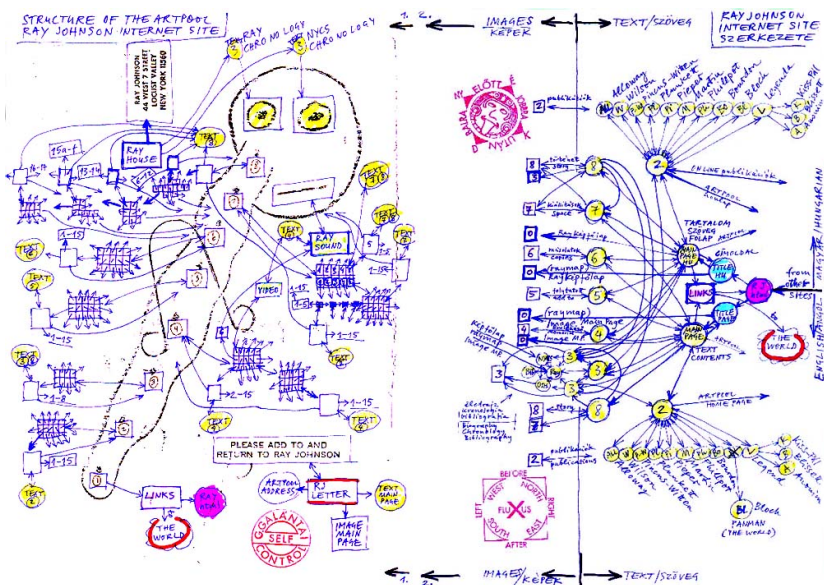
Illustration 6: 1996 Artpool Web design
(http://www.artpool.hu/Ray/map.html)

Illustration 6 is a sketch for the design of the Artpool Web site. The sketch represents a site map showing relationships of the conceptual parts of the site. The sketch uses an underlying sketch of a Ray Johnson bunny with an especially long nose to depict the chronology of

images in Artpool's Web galleries. Artpool provides a centralized location of material by and about Johnson including a large collection of digitized Johnson mailings and a collection of essays on Johnson written by mail artists. Most of the published material about Ray Johnson is by curators of Johnson exhibitions. Their essays center on Johnson's fine art products and his relationships to other members of the 1960s art world. In contrast, the Artpool essays, written by mail artists and people who knew Johnson, concentrate on Johnson's key role as creator of the Mail Art Network. Artpool has a physical gallery and a public mail art archive in Budapest.

Vortice Argentina

Vortice Argentina is similar to Artpool because both organizations have extensive Web sites as well as physical locations that serve as galleries and community resources. Like Janssen, with his TAM Bulletin, Vortice Argentina has an electronic bulletin called Blast: Mail Art e-Bulletin published from March 1999 to January 2001. Distributed as an email, Blast contained information, news, visual poetry, and project invitations. Vortice Argentina's physical location in Buenos Aires is the Casa Argentina del Arte Correo, known as CADAC, a place for active meeting and participation. The purposes of CADAC are: to create a place of communication, exhibitions, and events by national and foreign artists; an experimental space to test new art proposals with [the] public, publicize artists' works outside and inside the city and [to publicize] artists contacted through the art mail circuit; and to provide the opportunity to facilitate dialog between the artworks, producer and the viewers. The CADAC library contains historical and current publications, fanzines, videos, photos, and catalogs related to correspondence art and visual poetry, and are designed to serve students, artists, researchers, critics, and the general public. Artists' stamps, envelopes, postcards, seals, art objects, artists' books are on permanent exhibition and there is a place to purchase artworks by artists who wish to commercialize their work. The components of Vortice Argentina's Web site are listed in a spiral arrangement on their black and white interface site map in Illustration 7.
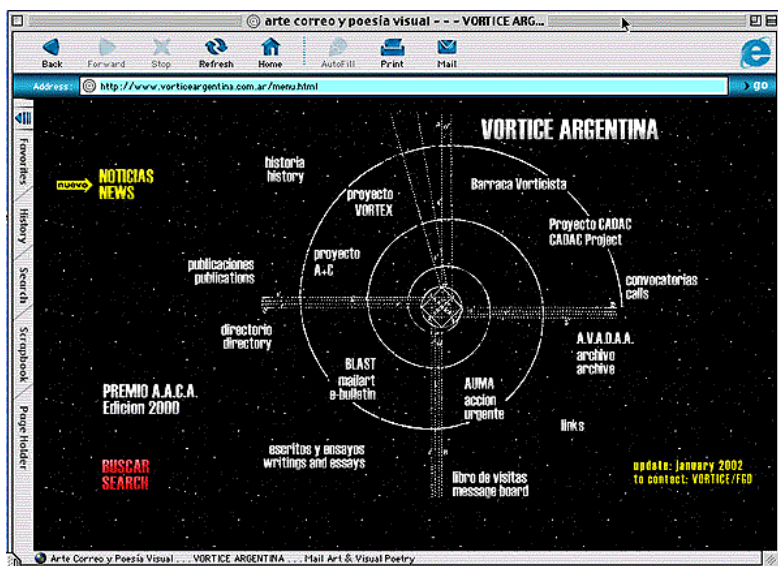
Illustration 7: Vortice Argentina's Web site map and home page

Artpool and Vortice Argentina are teams of artists who initiate community outreach services in their local communities and reach out into the international correspondence art movement. The goals of both organizations are oriented to the public as well as to the correspondence art community. In contrast, Janssen's Web site provides one artist's in-depth perspective on correspondence art phenomena and mainly serves the mail art community. Janssen investigates a variety of both traditional and online mail art activities including; interactions via message board and guest book, creation and distribution of small publications, organization of a mail artists' union, collection and display of an archive of rubber stamp impressions, autobiography, and display of examples of his mail art and fine art. The complex growth of the TAM Web site is a digitized record of Janssen's investigations. No other correspondence art Web site reaches the depth of Janssen's scrutiny into the ways that correspondence art is affected by computer networks. The TAM Web site itself is a project that transmediaed from the snail mail world to the Internet. The TAM Web site has never been static for long; Janssen constantly adds to it in seven simultaneous directions:

> -TAM publications
> - Interview project
> - International Union of Mail Artists (IUOMA)

- Mail Art Links
- Biographical information on Ruud Janssen and examples of his fine art and documentation of some of his mail art
- Janssen's recording of thoughts, secret thoughts and updates to the site
- Two interactive areas: the Mail Art Message Board and the guest book

The TAM Web site expands through additions of art, interviews, reflections, links, performances, personal thoughts, and writings from other net workers.
Janssen's Web site expands in the way that a mail art archive multiplies, in ratio to artistic activity; the more Janssen sends, the more he receives.

TAM as literature review

The TAM Web site is a source of literature for my research on the effects of the Internet on the Correspondence Art Network because all seven areas of TAM contain information on ways in which electronic networks influence the traditional network. Three key TAM areas are: a) Janssen's *Thoughts* and *Secret Thoughts*, b) Janssen's chart of communication forms (Table 1), and, c) the interview project, a series of 49 interviews with mail artists that take up the bulk of the Web site. Although the TAM interview project's questions range over a variety of issues, this literature review concentrates on Janssen's questions and artists' answers about computers and the Internet. Patterns in the TAM interviews show how artists reacted to the Internet as it first became available to them during the period from 1994 to 1998. In addition to the content of the interviews, Janssen himself implements a number of new communication-forms. Janssen's experimentation creates a case study of the effects of the Internet on Janssen's own mail art networking as the Internet and the postal service simultaneously delivered Janssen's virtual packets and physical envelopes around the globe.

I interviewed Janssen intermittently between 2000 and 2002. We primarily used email but we also chatted via instant messenger in my early Texas mornings and his early Dutch afternoons. In addition, we exchanged letters in decorated envelopes via airmail. Janssen also reviewed, suggested changes, and approved this chapter.

Janssen's thoughts on mail art

Much of the TAM Web site features text and digitized representations of mailed art works, but there is a more intimate section of the Web

site in which Janssen records his personal reflections on mail art changes over a period of years. "Thoughts," numbered 1 through 18 from August 1993 through March 1998, and "Secret Thoughts," numbered 1 through 9 from September 1997 to May 1998, offer a record of Janssen's own responses to changes in the networks. The "Thoughts" were written for a public audience and provide a sequence of snap shots of Janssen's observations. Although posted online and therefore not very secret, the "Secret Thoughts" have a more personal quality in which Janssen notes his approval or disapproval of specific actions or attitudes of networkers.

Janssen's evaluations of communication formats. Janssen's Communication-form chart (Table 1) compares the different communication formats ranging from snail-mail to telepathy.

FORM	ADVANTAGE	DISADVANTAGE
S-mail	• *Relatively cheap* • *Access for everybody* • *Sending of smells, structures* • *3-D objects is possible*	• *Takes relatively a lot of time* • *Archiving takes a lot of space*
E-mail	• *Speed* • *Manipulation of text and graphics* • *Archiving takes little space* • *One simple address is enough to determine where the message goes to*	• *Access to expensive hardware is needed* • *Costs for access* • *Reading of the message depends on the receiver to contact his / her host-computer*
Fax	• *Speed* • *Message on paper arrives instantly at the receivers address*	• *No color yet* • *Not always paper good for archiving* • *Phone bill for fax to foreign countries*
Phone	• *Direct line* • *The voice is very personal communication form, and compared to a cassette the immediate reaction is there*	• *Archiving only possible on tape* • *Expensive* • *Only possible when receiver is at home (or you need a machine)*
Personal Delivery	• *Cheap or expensive* • *Anything is possible* • *Speed depends on messenger*	• *Depending on someone to pass by and going to the place you want your mail to go*
Telepathic	• *Everything is possible*	• *They haven't found out how to do this yet*

The chart illustrates Janssen's systematic thinking about issues of communication in relation to the techniques used or dreamed of by mail artists. He is concerned about expenses, technological implications, and pragmatic issues of space and archiving. Janssen's analysis of the advantages and disadvantages named in the chart also illustrate his concern for fairness and his awareness of the pros and cons of a variety of communication systems.

Generations in mail art

The most distilled discussion about changes Janssen witnessed over the years appears in the Thoughts section of the TAM Web site. In Thoughts about mail art part 11 he describes five generations of mail artists including a sixth, pre-mail art network, that he calls the "zero generation:"

The first generation; Ray Johnson who started…NYCS with a selective group he chose to write to and asked them to play the game with him. Of course there is also the zero generation. Artists that already used the mail system for communication, art & play (Marcel Duchamp, Van Gogh…) where individual artists were in contact with other artists through the mail in a creative way on a one-to-one basis. The second generation in the 60s - 70s when FLUXUS joined up and a selective group experimented with the mail system, the third generation where mail art rapidly grew in 70s - 80s because of the exhibitions and publications within the mail art network that spread the news to newcomers (this is where I joined the mail art network for the first time, and lots of the people I am still in contact with nowadays are from this 3rd generation). Not a limited group anymore,…the concept that anybody could take part and be a member of the mail art network really took shape. This lead to the Congress-year in 1986, where anybody could organize a congress, as long as two or more mail artists had a meeting…. The fourth generation, after the congress in 1986 … the mail art population grew into a very large group…. The end of the 80s and the beginning 90s was also the gradual beginning of the fifth generation, where communication was done with the use of computers. Mark Bloch (USA), Charles François (Belgium) and me (in Holland) already were working with BBS's to send out electronic mail. One of the congresses in the DNC-year [Decentralized Networking Congress-year] 1992 was done by Charles and me with a session of computer-congresses where we exchanged our thoughts without meeting. Our computers were our tools. In 1991 there was also the first networking-project REFLUX that use[d] the then elitair system of Internet, but in 1994 till now the Internet became a real option to communicate for the 'wealthy' countries. (Janssen, 1996f)

Janssen's definition of generations of correspondence artists provides a sense of continuity and a timeline to project into the future of mail art.

During the mid-1990s when he composed the "Thoughts" and "Secret Thoughts" Janssen conducted the interview project. Between November 1994 and March 2001 Janssen published 49 completed

interviews and 16 incomplete interviews on the TAM Web site. The bulk of the interviews were conducted between 1994 and 1998. In contrast to the inward-focus of the reflective "Thoughts" sections, the interview project focuses outward into the network. In the November 1998 Mail Interview Newsletter, Janssen writes that the purpose of the interview project is "to find out why others do mail art, how they started and how the new communication-forms affect the way the mail artists work." (Janssen, 1998a) Each interview progresses according to its own evolving path:

The concept for my mail-interviews is simple. I send the first question, and explain which possibilities the interviewed person has to reply. Depending on the answer I will send the next question, etc. Once finished I make a printed version of the complete interview and send it to the interviewed person, and keep one for myself. (Stetser, 1996)

Every TAM interview is a conversation between the interviewee and Janssen, but all those interviewed are aware that the interviews are to be published and distributed through the network. The artists are aware they are addressing the larger audience of all other mail artists. As the interview project was put on the Web, the audience expanded to new networkers and to anyone online.

Illustration 8 shows a small section of the busy interface of the TAM Web site. This screen shot shows the textured blue background with densely packed blue underlined names of the interviewees as links to the interviews. Scattered around the paragraph of links are images of the covers of the printed interview booklets. The covers of the booklets are made up of collaged pieces of text and graphics in irregular patterns with the name and country of the interviewees, Mark Bloch (USA) and Michael Leigh (England) visible on two of the covers.
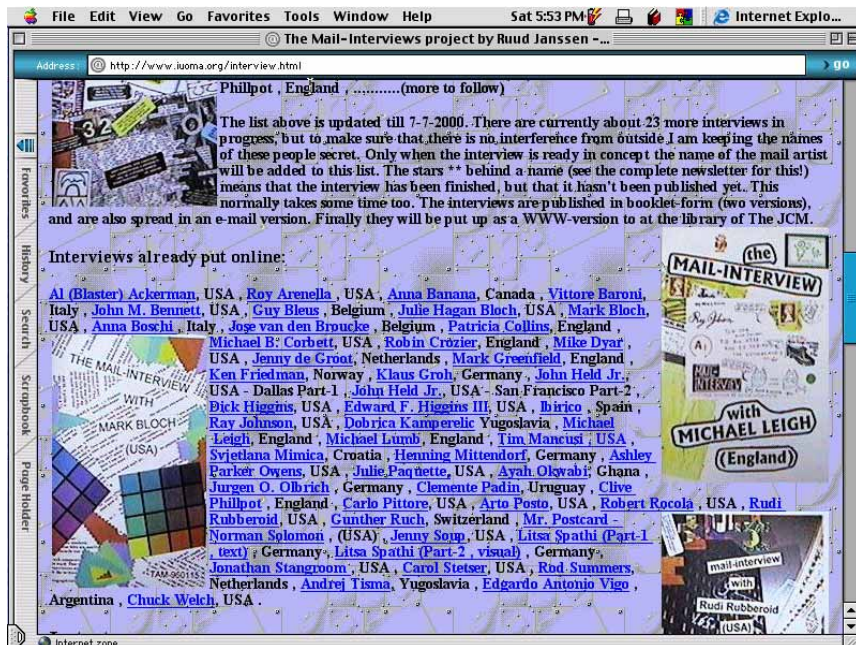
Illustration 8: Closely-packed text links on the TAM Web site lead to individual interviews.

The links are illustrated by covers of the original interview booklets.In character with Janssen's multimedia interests, the interviews range in media. Even within the same interview the communications tools shift between snail mail, fax, disks sent through the post, e-mail, phone, and personal visits. As with other TAM experiments, the interview project starts in the postal systems and moves online. Initially the interviews were published in photocopied or printed booklets and were available by subscription. The booklets were produced in two versions: a full booklet complete with illustrations, and a text-only version but the interviews posted on the TAM Web site were text-only. Many interviews document changes that mail artists felt in response to

the Internet. The interview project itself is an extensive example of how the Internet influenced one long-term mail art project because it transforms from the pre-Internet technique of small individual booklets into the core of the biggest Web site about mail art.

Interview project: the search for the whole story

Janssen believes that the only way to know the mail art network is to be a mail artist. Being a mail artist himself gives Janssen the best qualifications to explore other artists' views:

I choose the mail artists that I was in contact with or the mail artists I had heard about. Mail art is a strange thing. Only by doing it one can find out what it actually is all about…. after becoming involved in mail art I couldn't explain to others what mail art was, unless they were involved themselves too. The interviews were meant to find out what mail art was according to other mail artists. (Janssen, 2001)

In the 1980s and 1990s the zine scene was full of interviews with mail artists and other underground artists, such as musicians in the "cassette culture." The cassette culture, also known as the "tape culture," is made up of people who exchange cassettes of tape-recorded experimental sound works through the mail. Interviews are a common feature of zines dedicated to these subcultures. The subcultures' democratic ideals permit no jury, no authority to determine who is a more or less valuable artist. The interview is a neutral method of learning more about an artist's contexts directly from the source, without a critical voice providing a filtering overview. Of course, the selection of who is to be interviewed is a selection process by the editors of the zines. Nevertheless many zines, such as ND, review every piece of art sent to them. I was the mail art editor of ND for several years and familiar how contributions are all respectfully handled and reviewed. Janssen discusses how his interview project grew out of the zine scene:

I started with [the TAM] mail-interviews 2nd November 1994. At that time I also just switched to the use of Internet …and so I had a lot of communication possibilities to send out mail…. I just had read one of the interviews in the magazine ND with a mail artist, and realized that I was in contact with so many mail artists without knowing their "whole story". In mail art you only get to see the part of the correspondents they send you by mail. So I realized I would like to read more about a lot of mail artists, but actually there isn't that much to read besides the books with selections others made. (Stetser, 1996)

Janssen 's investigations are respectful and open opportunities for artists to reflect in unedited length upon their work. The resulting TAM interviews provide a wealth of data for research in correspondence art,

communication methods of distributed communities, and collaboration across cultures.

Recurring themes in the 1995-1998 TAM interviews

The quotations in this section are from the TAM interview project. They illustrate mail artists' diverse opinions about the Internet during the mid-1990s, the period in which electronic networks were becoming widely available. These opinions are a starting point for the Clashing and Converging research I conducted in 1999-2001. This chapter contains the trends in the TAM interviews. The trends from the Clashing and Converging research are detailed in chapter 5 and 6. In almost every TAM interview, Janssen asks artists how using computers and the Internet affect their art activities. The TAM interview project yields a wealth of information about ways in which artists embrace or reject new technology. TAM interviews reveal recurring themes such as concerns about costs of Internet access, the physicality of mailed art compared to digital artworks, increased contacts precipitated by connecting to the Internet, and ways in which mail art culture reflects or ignores world cultures.

Mail art culture: networking as the overarching theme of mail art

Thousands of mail artists had years of experience in international networks by the time the Internet arrived on the scene. To some experienced artists the Internet is just networking without the art, for others the Internet is an aftereffect of the mail art network. Vittore Baroni views mail art as a subset of networking when he discusses his vision of two directions in mail art activity:

There are two main attitudes towards…"mail art" activity as a whole: one attitude consists in escaping the prison of the closed official art system (artist-critic-dealer-gallery-museum-passive audience) just to end up building another (more satisfactory) small ghetto-utopian fairyland (the "network" seen as a circle of "friends," where everyone knows each other and what is going on (mail artists - catalogues - exhibitions - magazines - meetings …). The other attitude consists (and I subscribe to this one) in seeing the mail art practitioners as just a tiny fragment of a global networking phenomenon (including the small and underground press, the tape network, what happens in free BBS, in some areas of the Internet, and then again fax-zines, phone-phreeks, etc.) where no one is physically able to keep trace of every net-focused thing that is going on in the planet, and where really anything can happen to link human consciousnesses together (without necessarily the need of an "art" tag). (Janssen, 1995h)

Baroni feels that mail art is an escape from the fine art culture and an entrance into a wider culture of linked human consciousness

impossible to grasp in its entirety. The Internet facilitates the kinds of unlikely connections that spark creative human links.

Another correspondence artist, H. R. Fricker regards mail art experiments as a global preparation for the Internet:

… active mail art networkers have a wealthy experience in worldwide exchange and also in connection to direct communication and the cooperation they can share their stories, they should participate immediately in the current discussions, wherever they take place. In particular during the 80s the mail art movement has developed its own field for world culture and discussion. In many aspects the mail art network was a preparation of Internet. (Janssen, 1997a)

To artists like Fricker, with world connections a part of daily life, the Internet seems almost inevitable.

Ken Friedman, a member of both the Fluxus and mail art movements, is an important contributor to the early writings on the Correspondence Art Network. In his 1995 interview Friedman elaborates on the limits of mail art in terms of the Internet:

Most mail artists don't understand what Internet is good for. I'm not speaking in a technological sense. I'm speaking in terms of culture and communication. Mail art has hardly ever been about broad communication. It's based on small town culture writ large. The mail art network is insular, internalized, self-centered. There's little understanding of history and culture, even little knowledge about the history of mail art. The idea of artists who think this way of using the Internet as a new way to communicate is a joke. The results aren't interesting. (Janssen, 1995e)

Friedman levels strong criticism of the laisse-faire attitudes of mail artists as well as their lack of theoretical critique of the Correspondence Art Network. He believes that "mail art will remain a disappointment without a richer foundation in knowledge, culture and communication theory." (Janssen, 1995e)It is not surprising that Friedman dropped out of mail art although he continues to participate in Fluxus initiatives. He is not the only artist to drop out. Yugoslavian artist, Andrej Tisma also ceased his mail art activities in favor of digital media, but in his 1997 interview Tisma felt that the Internet was only an interim stage between geographic travel, known as "tourism," and the ability for networkers to teleport. Tisma's belief in teleportation influenced Janssen to respectfully include teleportation in his chart of mail art techniques (Table 1), even though Janssen does not himself believe in teleportation. Tisma explains his vision of the relationship between tourism, Internet, and teleportation in his TAM interview:

Instead of Internet I suggested another solution for the networking, more advanced than Tourism: The Networkers' Teleportation….teleportation is [the] ability to transport physical bodies instantaneously to a new location without moving through the intervening space…. In that case, if such vehicle will be available to us, meetings will be immediate, without exhausting traveling, and … will make creative communication faster, more direct, amusing, unexpected and richer than Tourism and Internet are. (Janssen, 1997b)

Mail art culture accepts a wide range of strategies for connecting creative thinkers. In spite of Friedman's doubts, the Internet is a tool that correspondence artists adapt for innovation, expression, and conversations, as well as for exchanging their work. Perhaps it is a step to teleportation. Correspondence artists will not rule that out as long it is an idea, such as Tisma's, born of mail art networking. As the correspondence art culture changes with time and technology many details must be considered. Cost is one of the basic details of daily networking.

Costs of postage compared to computers

Artists are traditionally short of cash and feel that money spent on artistic endeavors is an important commitment of resources. Some artists such as Gunter Ruch consider the high costs of postage, while others, such as Ayay Okwabi discuss the expense of computers and infrastructure necessary to support a network. In his interview Swiss artist, Gunter Ruch talks about both the speed and the costs involved in Internet use for artists:

The other side of E-mail is of course the speed of the DIRECT-transmission and through Internet the elusion of high postal rates. But for whom (?)...only for people who have…computer tools with access to Internet (you can forget practically 90% of the third world, they haven't got access to that technology), also most European artists are today not equipped with [their] own computers. (Janssen, 1996-97)

Mail artist from Africa, Ayah Okwabi comments on the lack of computers in Ghana in his 1996 interview:

… computers are beyond the means of the average person in my country, Ghana. Besides, even when one has a computer it costs 100 dollars a month to have access to internet which means that it is only companies who make a good profit can afford this facility….it would be impossible for me to get on the internet. (Janssen, 1995a)

This imbalance is a theme in several of the TAM interviews and continues to be a consideration for many. Correspondence artists do not want to close the doors on networkers who cannot access

communication tools, yet at the same time many wish to experiment with new media. As a result printouts of digitized artworks are hand-delivered into the physical mail boxes of mail artists who don't have computers. As access to computers extends, experimentation in digital creations will also extend more directly from computer to computer.

Speed of communication

Other artists besides Ruch mentioned speed of communication as an important distinction between postal delivery and electronic networking. Rod Summers, a Dutch mail artist and audio artist since 1974, encapsulates the feelings of artists accustomed to the tempo of the postal services when he describes the capabilities of his computer, "with this beige box I can both create and communicate simultaneously!" (Janssen, 1995g) Klaus Groh discovered correspondence art in 1967 in San Francisco while he was researching the new Dadaism of the American West for his doctoral thesis in art education. Groh teaches art, has a small salon, theater and exhibition gallery in his home in Germany. He works in collage, visual poetry, and performance. He regrets the loss of creativity and original art works in trade offs for Internet speed:

… the art results, CREATIVITY! -- will [be] lost by using the E-mail. The electronic Communication has only one survival content: The SPEED! Look how fast I get your answer! But it comes from a machine, ONLY COPIES! You have the original. Mail Art always are personal ORIGINALS! ….The beginning of mail art included one very important point: the personal individual touch, a human sign, the intimacy of communication. You remember - Person to Person, activities in art!….I hope there will start another personal NETWORK!! And I hope, the real consequence of mail art could become the visual & concrete Poetry by MAIL, that means the small site and easy distribution. Digitalization of mail art will be a very poor variation of the roots. (Janssen, 1994-1995b)

Although both digital and mail artists value interactivity as part of their back and forth, electronic copies can be a stumbling block for mail artists.

Physicality of the art works

Satisfaction derived from making and receiving physical pieces of mailed art is another recurring theme in the interviews. New York artist, Mark Bloch, like Janssen, is an early adopter of the Internet. In the 1995 interview about exchanges of digital information, Janssen comments on the lack of sensual information in e-mails:

Now, in 1995, the sending of this question to you by E-mail via INTERNET costs me half the price a normal envelope with the question would cost.... But the difference is that I send you the question in digital form. Just ASCII, and no color, no smell, no touch of my hand that you can trace. Is the electronic communication ready for artists? (Janssen, 1995f)

Bloch replies that limits to ASCII text required the aesthetic abilities of artists:

You say ... just ASCII, and no color, no smell, no touch of my hand that you can trace…. I say- YES YES YES. I think you have given a good case in favor of it with your question. The electronic communication IS ready because there is no color, no smell, no handprints! The Internet needs artists! (Janssen, 1995f)

The importance of physical art to the receiver compared to the speed and future expansion of the Internet was also important to Tim Mancusi, San Francisco mail artist, West Coast Dadaist, and publisher of the The Weekly Breeder zine, who pondered these issues in his 1996 interview:

Ah, but then there is the Internet. Which is basically digital mail art and no less valid than Ray's traditional form. Its physical and tactile limitations are offset by its immediacy and awesome pervasiveness… Obviously E-mail and home sites will replace the mailbox and probably the telephone in the next century but I hope that takes awhile. (Janssen, 1996e)

Early uses of digital media by artists show ways in which they are excited by the new technologies. On the other hand, critiques by mail artists indicate that there is a resentment of Internet exchanges based on copies, and for a system whose participants do not share values that members of the correspondence art community hold in common. A few artists consider the Internet a threat to individuals and to social structures.

Danger
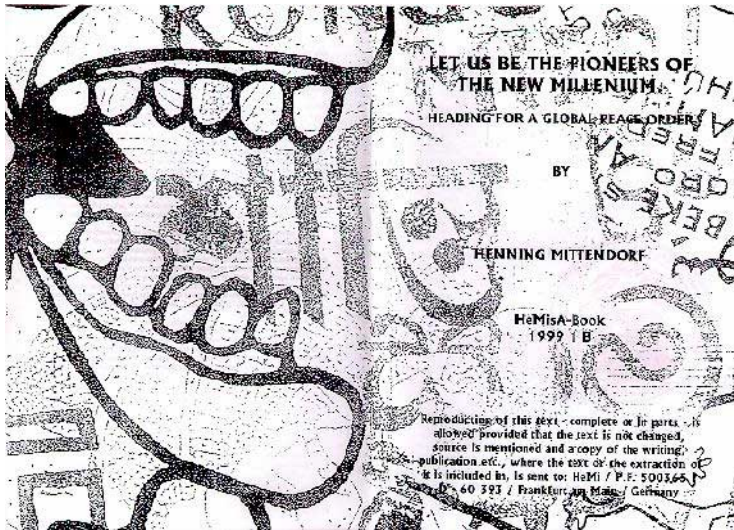
Illustration 9: Hand-carved rubber stamp impressions by Henning Mittendorf

Henning Mittendorf, a German banker, creates and distributes prints from hand carved rubber stamps. Figure 1 shows impressions from several of Middendorf's stamps. The most dominant part of the composition in Figure 1 depicts a huge mouth with gaping teeth opening toward the words "Let us be the pioneers of the new millennium." The threat in Mittendorf's image is echoed in his TAM interview in which he warns that electronic media cause floods of information capable of splintering a person's sense of self, causing addiction to media novelties, and creating a risk to socially integrated systems in many parts of society, not just correspondence art culture. (Janssen, 1995c)

The electronic media and appliances extend man's normal common presence in an unexpected manner transgressing the mesocosmos, i.e. the world of the middle, "slow", dimensions, that man is able to perceive without artificial expedients, to the world of velocity, speed, i.e. the microcosmos, macrocosmos and the fictions' cosmos, the dimensions of which man is able to perceive only by expedients.…the use of electronic media creates big dangers. As to the construction of reality by cognition and communication the "blind" use of electronic media…contains the risk that the media push themselves between men, that the media become the message, that the media create, simulate reality, that they overoll cognitive autonomy of man and his communicative competence…reality can become manipulated or vanish... (Janssen, 1995c)

Mittendorf's description of the ways in which electronic media change people's perceptions and his warnings of risks to human cognition are echoed in Judith Hoffberg's concern for isolating factors of the Internet in her 2000 interview. While some artists express the stress caused by the Internet, others use the Internet enthusiastically to expand their network.

Expanding electronic contacts

A number of artists mention the importance of contacts to their creative postal experiences. American artist, Ashley Parker Owens reflects on the Internet as a world of real networks. Owens uses computers to organize her records for contacts and to create Global Mail, for years the most widely distributed and complete publication of correspondence art news. In her TAM interview, she reflects on exciting shifts in information technology during her lifetime:

Instead of being a passive observer in front of the TV, and feeling alienated from the existence I am programmed to lead, I have created a real world, real networks, and real friendships. I am enthralled by the possibilities for a real development of global community. It's so different than the image presented on TV for our consumption. It actually is a free exchange of ideas. Now that I have experienced this electrical connection, I feel I am electricity itself, hurling through the universe. (Janssen, 1994-1995a)

The Internet not only gave new powers to artists like Owens, it also brought new artists into the network. Unlike many artists who were part of the network first, Texas artist, Julie Paquette, known as ex posto facto, entered the correspondence art network from the Internet in 1991 when she met arto posto on the bulletin boards of the Prodigy network service.

My computer was very important in my introduction to the mail art network. I was on-line in the early days of Prodigy and there were a lot of people there interested in mail art. For me the most important contact I made was arto posto. She opened the door to the vastness of the network. (Janssen, 1996d)

Expanding contacts is a core ingredient of correspondence art; and the Internet provided vast new capabilities to connect to others. These interpersonal contacts that form the Correspondence Art Network culture can also be viewed from a cultural perspectives.

Networking cultures and their branches

John Held Jr., a professional librarian, is an experienced and active mail artist who is an acknowledged authority on the Mail Art Network. Held gathered and cataloged an important collection of mail art publications

part of which was acquired by the Getty Museum of Modern Art. In 1995 he published one of the few reference books on the mail art network, the MAIL ART 1955 TO 1995 : Bibliography. In his TAM interview, Held envisions the parallel systems of mail art and the Internet as branching trees that grow into a forest:

The Mail Art tree not only has new branches; it now has fellow trees. Mail Art can't control the E-mail experience. E-mail can't control Mail Art. But they can inform each other. They can interact with one another. And they can move forward together. Because despite the differences of the mediums, they still have communication creativity as a common goal. Ray Johnson planted a tree in what has become a forest. (Janssen, 1994-1996)

Held's view of mail art as a tree of many media shows his trust that the network started in the mails will grow organically in any medium and that the Internet offers a branch for the same kind of creativity.

Vittore Baroni, an Italian mail artist since 1977, publishes the mail art zine, Arte Postale!, several books on mail art, and numerous artists' books in collaboration with other artists. In his interview Baroni commented on the value of mail art culture to the emerging Internet culture:

[The mail art network] is founded on over thirty years of intensive experiences in the field of free and open exchange-communication. It is a wealth of wisdom that you just can't sum up in a few words or even in a single book, but I believe a mail artist approach to Internet will always be much more free-and-easy than the approach of people who had no previous networking experiences. (Janssen, 1995h)

In addition to Held's trust in organic growth, Baroni trusts mail art networkers to teach their strategies to people new to networking. We have seen artists talking about mail art in an interpersonal perspective and as a networking culture. Artists also view the effects of the Internet more abstractly.

Internet as context

Swiss artist H. R. Fricker is the founder of a branch of mail art called the Aggressive School of Cultural Workers and co-creator of the Decentralized World Congresses. The congresses encourage networkers to increase their level of communication by meeting to discuss all aspects of networking. Fricker seeks to affect systems of communication with his ideas, and his views of cyberspace reflect his systems view of mail art:

For my interests as an artist the Internet is not a transport system it is a context. This context is a communication system and a space system. The cyber space... As an artist I prefer to act in spaces. That means I have to change strategies and instruments all the time. Each artistic act is an intervention that changes the system and I know that I am a part of the system too. (Janssen, 1997a)

While some artists see the Internet as a mechanical machine of reproduction or a very fast distribution system, Fricker abstracts the Internet into a cyber space system that opens new spaces in which artistic actions take place.

Held's tree-branch trust, Baroni's belief that the networking experiences of mail artists will ease the way for Internet communications, and Fricker's concept of cyber performance space are countered by considerations of impermanence and constant displacement.

Impermanence

Dick Higgins saw a number of communications trends in his life as a correspondence artist, small press publisher, and writer. Higgins describes the perpetually changing facets of the 1995 Internet:

"Yes, 'exploring' is the only possible word, since the Internet is constantly changing. You can "know" yesterday's Internet, but today's always contains new variables." (Janssen, 1995b)

Argentinean poet Edgardo-Antonio Vigo mailed concrete poetry and stamp art poetry into the network. Vigo's theoretical writings place his work in context with dada and surreal object poems. His view of

"a TOTAL ART… [in which] we will arrive at the conquest in which the CONSUMER passes into the category of CREATOR. " (Vigo, 1998)

is very much in keeping with ideals of openness supported by mail artists. His TAM interview was not finished at the time of his death in 1997. Vigo expresses his opinion of the Internet as a foreshadowing of an ominous future of permanent impermanence:

Actual technology invents permanently new ways of communication. For the moment INTERNET is the "boom" but I think, before this can be used by the artists, it will be another system, better, surpassing its possibilities. I am certain, that dramatic situation is due of a technology which progresses in a permanent way. Before analyzing the results, there are other ones, more sophisticated and better….This 'CONSTANT DISPLACEMENT' has brought an evident displeasure, its result are rather ominous for Society.   (Janssen, 1996b)

American poet and mail artist, John Bennett saw printed material as more permanent than digital when he told Janssen:

I don't see electronic media as replacing books, say, but as another kind of media with its own values. There's something about a book, a physical object you can hold in your hands, completely self-contained, that you can deal with in your own time, that has permanent value.(Janssen, 1995d)

Permanence and impermanence continue to be important considerations, not only for individual art works, but also for whole collections of art works and publications in archives.

Correspondence art, the Internet, and artists with physical disabilities

Two artists discuss physical access to computers. For example, the computer helped arto posto to communicate after she was injured:

I discovered computers after being in a very bad auto accident that makes handwriting and doing many things by hand painful for me. Keyboarding and working on the computer is not. I think that is, in part, why I do so much of my mail art by computer. (Janssen, 1996c)

On the other hand, the computer screen causes physical discomfort for John Bennett:

I do have an email address at work, but I happen to have a complex and weird vision problem, and I myself can't do much with a computer: I can't do more than glance at the screen occasionally without getting severe headaches that last for days, so this means I can't enter anything into one, or edit anything on screen. The most I can do is glance at what I think I might want to read, and then print it ….In order to reply to anything, I have to have a postal address. .(Janssen, 1995d)

The Internet has been interpreted as an environment that "levels the playing field" for people with disabilities. The Internet allowed arto posto more access to the Correspondence Art Network, but the Internet did not open additional opportunities for John Bennett. New research in Web accessibility (World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and the Institute for Techology and Learning at The University of Texas) report new tools and methods for sharing text, sound, and video files that may open networks of exchange to more artists with disabilities, but at the time of the TAM interviews accessibility tools and guidelines were very limited. The TAM interview files contain hundreds of observations on changes in correspondence art activities caused by increased availability of computers and electronic networks. The quotes from the 1990s TAM interview project indicate the range and intensity of mail artists' responses to the new technologies. The TAM interview project provides a background in which to place findings of the Clashing and Converging 1999-2000 research.

Criticism of Janssen's project

Although the TAM Web site is generally accepted as an important collection of mail art information, several mail artists critique it. Cracker Jack Kid is one of the early and most enthusiastic endorsers of mail artists' use of the Internet for trans-network experiments that he calls Telenetlink. Although Janssen is also an early adopter of networked

technology, Cracker Jack Kid expresses concern that the interview project and the TAM Web site presents a conservative view of mail art to newcomers who learn about the movement from Janssen's perspective:

While I enjoyed his tireless line of questioning...I often longed for more challenging and less conservative varieties of questions in regard to how online mail art could be an innovative, groundbreaking intermedia form. (Welch, 2001)

Cracker Jack Kid also wonders if Janssen's Web site will dull the perception of younger artists who learned about mail art via the TAM web site.

Ruud's Web site mirrors the snailmail world of mail art collecting and exchange… I worry that all those online mail art interviews might give younger cyberwarriors a rather one-sided image of a conservative world of snailmail art exchange. Then again, it may be these younger artists who will grasp an alternative notion of intermedia networking that will make that quantum jump of imagination many of us were not ready to make throughout the 1990s. (Welch, 2001)

While Cracker Jack Kid's reservations about the TAM Web site are concerned with its effects on newcomers to mail art, Stephen Perkins, in his 1996 interview, regrets that Janssen is not analyzing or theorizing from the interview data:

I must admit I am finding this e-mail interview is turning into a very fragmented experience. With all the time between question and answer it seems a certain thread and coherence is getting lost. I am also finding your questions to be very broad and generalized, not that I want specificity as such but at least some kind of conceptual approach to this whole area of networking, a kind of critical rigor, something that I can bounce my responses off.... While I appreciate the enormous task you have taken on, and the importance of these kind of oral histories, it just seems that that is all the publications on networking seem to contain at the moment. (Janssen, 1996a)

In contrast to reservations voiced by Cracker Jack Kid and Perkins, Vittore Baroni enthusiastically appreciates the importance of the mail interviews as a collective reflection of the raw history of mail art. Baroni writes that the whole network is often invisible to people who are not already involved; he emphasizes the value of the interview project to the "spirit of mail art:

... a project like your (mail-interviews) is very important to the spirit of mail art, exactly like the Decentralized Congresses of past years, because it activates on a (semi)public level A COLLECTIVE REFLECTION on a phenomenon that tends naturally to remain invisible and private. Yours was a very simple idea, but that will surely be fertile of positive results, and for this I must thank you enormously. (Janssen, 1995h)

Regardless of pro and con responses to his work, Janssen is passionate about learning as much as possible about mail art. He invests a

significant amount of time and money making, sending, and documenting mail art products, actions, and trends. As the story of mail art unveils around him, Janssen knows the difficulty of locating and accessing mail art literature and feels that the Internet has potential to make foundational information available to the next generations of mail artists:

The new mail art networkers that started in the 90s have the advantage that they have lots of material to look back on. Especially in the 80s the publications about mail art hit the network. Although the written history never is the complete story, reading these publications gives indeed a wealth of information. The problem however is to get access to the information. Not many libraries have these publications, and the many mail artists that have them in their 'archives' are quite hesitant to lend them to others most of the time. The Internet is bringing a solution. More and more texts are being made on the computer. These files can be accessed through the Internet. I know that a lot of networkers don't have access, but the new generation learns to use Internet at college. The shift is eminent. (Janssen, 1996f)

As a result of his years of active mail art exchange, the stories in the interview project, and his profession in informatics, Janssen observes first hand the massive changes in the several networks in which he is involved.

Implications

Janssen places a significant slice of unedited history onto the World Wide Web thereby providing a wealth of raw data for researchers. From the gold mine of TAM data I used only nuggets relating to the effects of the Internet, but other researchers can look at the same interviews, and Janssen's reflections, to find clues to other aspects of art history, aesthetics, political views, and the clashing and converging of radical art trends in late 20th century art and communication.

Comparing the mailed versions of the interview project with the web versions presents an illustration of the effects of the Internet on access to mail art history. For example, Janssen's little interview booklets, mailed out over years as slim volumes of single interviews, were small individual elements of mail art. Each booklet was a brief look into the thoughts of one other networker. The booklets are a stark contrast to the bulk and density of information on the TAM Web site where all the interviews are surrounded by hundreds of pages of observations, links, and images. Janssen's meticulous personality, preference for raw interview data, and his profound respect for mail art permeate the entire 1,000 Web pages. The information massed on the TAM Web site is simultaneously the whole interview collection plus records of Janssen's

life devoted to mail art. As he documented changes in the Correspondence Art Network Janssen was also responsive to continuous changes in creative uses of rapidly developing communication tools. In Janssen's view, most mail artists do not achieve the potential of the Internet with their Web sites because they create static HTML pages and do little to maintain them. In contrast, Janssen determinedly updates the TAM Web site because he feels a strong responsibility to provide a true representation of the mail art network, its evolution, and himself as part of its dynamic history.

Janssen's combination of art, science, and his intense focus, explains why there is so much raw data on the Web site. Janssen sees his duty, as an insider with growing computer skills and knowledge of both networks, to publish his research so that others can access the wealth of information that he has collected. Janssen's sense of fairness and mail art generosity dictates that he publish the stories of other networkers and his own story in order to inform people who come to the mail art network through electronic connections. The stories on the TAM Web site are part of a still-unfolding tale, an account of what it was like when the Internet first entered the lives of mail artists. Viewing the interviews as a whole, it is evident that many mail artists feel that the Internet brings profound changes to the international mail as depicted in Chapter 8. The TAM interviews are close ups of artists meditating upon the meaning of the Internet to their community, to their practices, and to world culture.
Did the predictions in the interviews come true? Did Cracker Jack Kid's cyber warriors make quantum leaps? Were mankind's cognitive competencies splintered, as Henning Mittendorf predicted? Did an exodus of mail artists leave the postal system in favour of digital media? The questions in this 1999-2001 research follow leads from the 1994-1998 TAM interviews in order to record and analyse the continuing effects of the Internet on the mail art network. The next two chapters consist of stories from the 1999-2001 Clashing and Converging interviews and a collection of mailed artworks to illustrate the effects of the Internet on the Correspondence Art Network.

Abstract

This study examines the effects of the Internet on an international community of artists who have exchanged art through postal systems for 40 years. The methods of grounded theory are employed to collect and analyze three types of data. The data are: literature collected from Internet communities where the artists converse and publish artworks, interviews with artists who have experience in both electronic and

traditional network environments, and artworks made by artists to express their visual and poetic responses to the Internet. The collected data reveal three clusters of artists' concerns: social, artistic, and art historical. With global electronic networks contributing toward technological change and aesthetic shifts in their art, artists express concerns about shifting structures in their social networks, as well as threats to their traditions and to the relics of their own history. Artists identify complex interrelationships and strategies that emerged during the 40-year history of the Correspondence Art Network that are in jeopardy of being replaced by new technologies and new forms of networking.

The conclusions suggest future research in the fields of aesthetics, women artists, the archives of the correspondence art movement, and emerging networked art. Continued research into, and analysis of, creative networked systems will serve to protect the correspondence art archives, increase our understanding of a long-lived art movement, and highlight strategies for successful implementation of distributed communities across disciplines.

Appendix 1 – Overview in years.

This is an overview with most important details over the years. This way it is easy to get a historical perspective of the things Ruud Janssen did in Mail-Art. In the overview we mosly focus on the details connected to his mail-art activities.

1959:

Ruud Janssen was born on July 29th in Tilburg, Holland. He is the third child in the family Janssen that lives in the Tongerlose Hoefstraat in Tilburg, Netherlands.

1966:

When he was 7 years old he started traditional correspondence with pen pals all over the world. Contacts worldwide are started. Also with the countries unreachable like Argentina, Japan en Eastern-Europe.

1974:

Starts with oil painting and is part of an art group at high school, followed by his first group-exhibition. Because the art-teacher uses a liberal form of education the pupils are allowed to experiment with the techniques they like the most.

1976:

His father died in the beginning of this year. Somehow it caused the need to write things down on paper. Ruud starts with a diary that he even keeps till today. He also experiments with poetry.

1977:

After finishing highschool (Paulus Lyceum in Tilburg, where he did Atheneum-B) he worked the whole vacation to earn money for a professional camera. He studies Technical Physics at the Technical University in Eindhoven and Physics/Mathematics at the Educational Faculty (NLO) in Tilburg. Besides these subjects he also follows as a hobby the fast changing world of computers.

1980:

In this year Ruud Janssen started with combining his correspondence and his artworks under the name 'Travelling Art Mail' (TAM). First mail-art is sent out. He didn't knew about the worldwide network then, and only a few years later he comes in contact with other mail-artists. His first works is mostly playing with the postal system and trying to see what still is possible in the sending of mail.

1983:

He gets his degrees in Physics and Mathematics, (Professional Teacher Education, Faculty Tilburg) and starts with teaching. In this year he gets connected to the international Mail Art network in which he uses the (now) well-known name TAM. Under this name he organized several mail art projects like: Snip-Xerox-Project, TAM was here, Computer Mail Art, TAM is everywhere, Bank-Art, etc. He also founded in 1983 the TAM-Rubberstamp Archive, which today contains Rubberstamp-prints from more than 3000 mail artists in 74 countries.

1984:

At one of the schools where Ruud Janssen worked he gave some lessons about mail art. He meets some mail artists from the 70-ies in Amsterdam (like Henryk Gajewski, Sonja van der Burg, Joseph Semah and Ulises Carrion). Starts to work at a graphical college in Boxtel (St. Lucas).

1985:

In this year he started editing the Mail art info-magazine 'TAM-Bulletin'. In 1985 he exhibited his 'TAM was here' project in the famous Milkyway-gallery (MELKWEG) in Amsterdam. The collection could also be seen in Italy (Arte Studio, Ponta Nossa). He also participates in the many mail art projects all over the world, and his work has been scattered over the mail art world. In this year he also visited the mail art archive of Guy Bleus. Kate Lanxner from USA visited Tilburg to do an interview for the magazine 'Rubberstamp Madness'. In the summer vacation he visited the mail art exhibition in 'the Schottenburgh' (Amsterdam) and met several mail artists from Holland and abroad. This is also the year that Ruud moves to the centre of Tilburg.

1986:

In the congress-year 1986 Ruud Janssen visited the Eeklo congress-session in Belgium where he did one of his lectures on mail art. He also organized his own congress-sessions in Tilburg (Holland) and Paris (France) and met many mail artists. In this year he starts teaching informatics.

1987:

The TAM-bulletin gets computerized and accessible by computers connected to the international phone-network. He writes articles about using the computer in networking.

1988:

He founded (as a joke) the International Union of Mail Artists (IUOMA) of which he proclaims to be the General-President. The name IUOMA

is integrated in all kind of systems and functions as a platform for lots of mail-art activities.

1990:

In this year he published the 32 pages booklet 'My history in Mail art' which documents his first 10 years in mail art. Mail art has guided his life and brought many changes. In this year he meets Shozo Shimamoto, Ryosuke Cohen, Myumi Handa from Japan (and lots of German and Belgium mail artists) during their Net-Run passing in Köln.
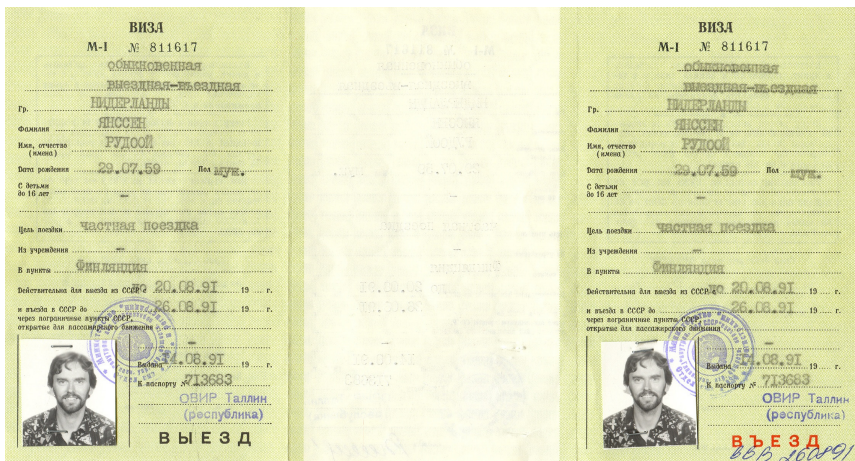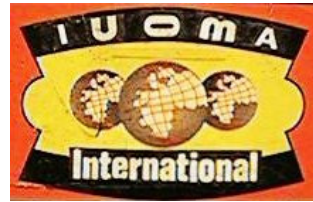
1991:

The first (and last) issue of the IUOMA-magazine is released. In August 1991 the first 'Union-meetings' were in Estonia and Russia. While he was there he also experienced the changes of the USSR from the inside and met several mail artists in this country (Balbat, Yudin, Shashkin, Tüür). In the Art-Strike Years (1990-1993) like many other mail artists Ruud Janssen started writing more articles about mail art. He also starts with collecting statements about mail art. The publication of a book with these statements got postponed (see 1994).

1992:

In this congress-year he travelled several times. Three times to Estonia (saw the first mail art exhibition in free Estonia), once to Sweden, three times to Belgium, once to Germany, once to France. Some of the travels were connected to the Decentralized Networker Congress (DNC). Besides the travels for DNC he also arranged some computer-congress sessions. As a result of the many travels in this year he started to work on a collection of drawings and some have been published in the many mail art zines that are issued all over the world. Peter and Angela (Germany) delivered some personal mail by train during their mail-postmen-travels. In this year the National Postal Museum in 'Den Haag' organized a mail art congress together with an exhibition ('Als kunst bestempeld') about mail art. Ruud Janssen also went to the ZOO-congress in Antwerpen (organized by Guy Bleus) , the 'Stempel-Mekka' in Hagen , Germany, and the Temple (together with Made he meets José van den Broucke and his family) in Deerlijk, Belgium. The TAM-gallery starts with exhibitions in this year.

1993:

During his visit to London he met Michael Leigh (A1 Waste Paper Co. Ltd.). Also he travelled to Denmark (and meets Lotte Rosenkilde Hansen) and Germany (where at Stempel Mekka-2 he met with Anna Banana). In September of this year he issues the first International Poetry Magazine (IPM) which brought him in contact with Litsa Spathi in Germany. He starts with silk-screen printing at the 'Duvelhok' in Tilburg and starts with larger art-works including airbrush techniques. Several other publications (booklets and articles) were published by TAM-Publications. Produces 10,000 blue stickers with the text "*this part is censored*" (Censorism).
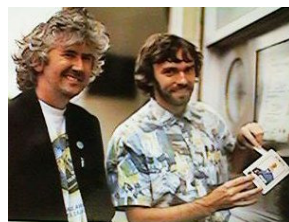
1994:

He focuses more on the traditional art forms and includes them in his artwork. The Rubberstamp-Archive is more structured and publications about this archive are prepared.

New publications about mail art themes are written and the TBHS (TAM Bulletin Host System) is used for spreading mail art texts too. Statements about mail art are sent out randomly with his mail. A special rubberstamp for the Rubber Stamp Archive is made and sent to special contributors and sponsors. In this year he travelled again to Estonia (the whole month of July), England (meets again Michael Leigh and family and Julia Tant) and Germany (Stempel-mekka-3). End of this year he starts with his largest project ever, the mail-interviews. Several mail artists are interviewed by mail, where all possible communication-forms are used (fax, BBS, E-mail, phone, tourism or the 'traditional' mail).
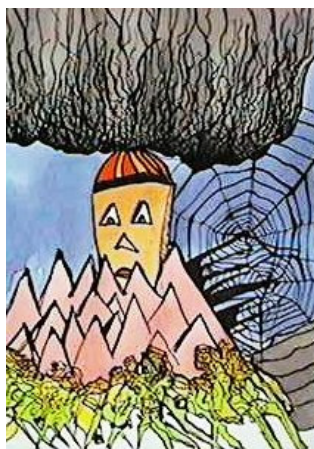
1995:

The first 12 mail-interviews are published in booklet-form, and more interviews are started. John Held Jr. and Bill (Picasso) Gaglione visit him and a trip to the USA next year is planned. He spends his summer-vacation in Estonia again. In this year he experiments more with Internet and the use of E-mail and publishes several articles and booklets on this subject. Gets mentioned in the Dictionary of International Biography, Cambridge, England. Designs a series of 10 Fluxus Bucks for *ex posto facto* in USA and circulates them in the mail art network. Originals are sent to the Galantai Archives in Hungary.

1996:

A new series of interviews is published. Exhibitions of his art and mail art in Split (Croatia) and of his work with rubber stamps and the "TAM Rubber Stamp Archive" in San Francisco (USA). Starts with the first homepage from TAM on the Internet and the first mail interviews are put online at the internet with the help of Jas W. Felter in Canada. Visits Rod Summers in Maastricht. Visits Litsa Spathi in Germany. Starts Internet-site *"Interested in Mail-Art?"*

1997:

*His drawings are published on covers of publications by the IWA. He visits the 14th MiniPress event in Mainz, Germany. More interviews are published and sometimes the interviews are now published on the Internet before the booklet is made. Starts making larger acrylic works. Site on the Internet is expanded and gradually texts from TAM-Publications become accessible online. An exhibition about the mail-interview project is held at the 'Centrum voor Beeldende Kunsten' in Hasselt, Belgium. He writes an online diary during the months September 1997 till May 1998 (Secret Thoughts About Mail-Art) in which he react to the mail he gets both traditio*nal as electronically.
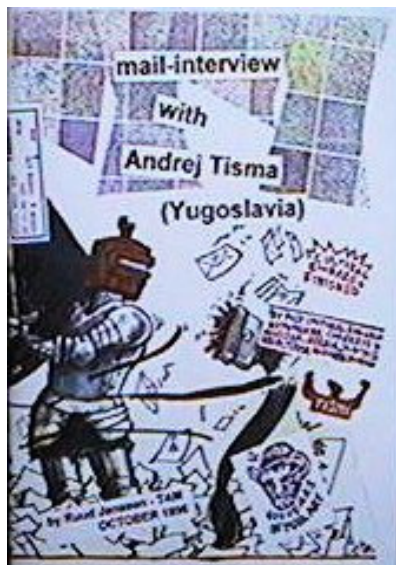
1998:

The work on the Internet is expanded and graphics get the attention as well and all possibilities of programming in HTML are explored. More mail-interviews get published and translations in Spanish and German are integrated in other publications. Puts the Thesis of Michael Lumb (UK) - 'Mail Art from 1955 till 1995' online and also builds a site for one of the schools he works at (VHBO). One of his site gets reviewed in the national Dutch computer-magazine PCM. The summer-vacation

he spends in South-Germany and Greece. In September he starts with the project 'Digitized snail-mail' where mail-artists are encouraged to digitize his snail-mail and return it in electronic form to him. The results are published as a digital exhibition. The mail-interview with Guy Bleus was published by Joel Cohen at Ragged Edge Press (New York, USA) and a large edition of a special designed envelope for distributing the booklets is designed & printed.

1999:

A 3-page article / interview for Rubberstampmadness (RSM) is published in the January/February issue. A second time this magazine devotes an article to him. The mail-interview project, artefacts connected to this project, acrylic-painted envelopes and a selection from the TAM-Archive are exhibited in "Fluxus, Mail-Art and Networks" in the Queens Library Gallery in New York (USA). He becomes editor of the Unit-magazine of the college he works for. He gets engaged to Litsa Spathi.

2000:

Starts to work more with acryl-paint. The mail-interview project is broken off after publishing 50 interviews. He paints a series of CD-ROM's with acrylics that are framed 3 by 3 CD's. Follows a summer-course in Acryl-painting – Think big in Acryl (by Litsa Spathi in Heidelberg) This year is the last year he sends out invitations for the TAM Rubberstamp Archive and end of this year the archive is closed. The mail-art in the TAM-Archive received during the 80-ies from Eastern-Germany is sent to the State Museum in Schwerin (They organized the exhibition "Mail art in Easter Europe"). Mail from the East returns to the east.

2001:

Starting from this year no new stamp-steets for the TAM Rubberstamp Archive are sent out. The archive will be closed and a final destination will be searched. All further sheets end up in the Administration Archive of Guy Bleus, Belgium. Preparation of the "2002 CD's in 2002" exhibition results in the building up of a collection of hundreds of painted CD's. In October of this year the proposal is sent in for Documenta XI. In a radio-show the proposal and concept was explained. Documenta didn't accept the proposal. He starts to work at a new department of his College called IT-Lycée where he is part of a project to give form to a new form of education. The correspondence with his fiancee results is the exchange of over 500 letters from Holland to Germany and the same amount gets returned. A proposal is prepared to exhibit these over 1000 envelopes. Putting 18 unfinished interviews online officially ends the mail-Interview Project. At the end of this year the official IUOMA-site was located at: www.iuoma.org which is a central point for all his online work from then on.

2002:

Honoria (Texas, USA) works on a PhD based on the Changing situation of Mail-Art because of Internet and used the Mail-Interview series as a basis. An IUOMA-group was launched June 2002 on the Internet. All IUOMA-members can exchange their mail, documents, digital photo's etc. Also several Polls were added to investigate the current status of the Mail-Art movement on the Internet. In the first half year the group grew into 100 members.

2003:

Plans are made to move to Breda. Buying a house there and to make the place he works also the place he does his other activities. Visits with Litsa Spathi the

Mainzer Minipressen in Mainz (17th MMPM) Germany, and meets there with Peter & Angela Küstermann, Luc Fierens & Reed Altemus, Francis Maele and Serge Segay). Experiments with several Yahoo-groups to build online groups for mail-artists. Visits the exhibition "The name of the game" in Sittard with works of Ray Johnson who's work now is shown in the museums. In July of this year he founds together with Litsa Spathi the "Fluxus Heidelberg Center" and under the name "Fluxus Heidelberg" they do performances in Germany and the Netherlands. First Public appearance is in Heidelberg. Second one in Minden. Thesis by Dr. Honoria Starbuck is published on the Internet with a special 30-pages chapter on Ruud Janssen in it. The Thesis deals with the effects of the Internet on the mail-art community. He starts with Litsa the website for Fluxus Heidelberg Center and builds: www.fluxusheidelberg.org. During the summer vacation he stays 4 months in Heidelberg – a sabbatical leave from the College he works for. A project he wrote for his College wins the Euro 10,000 – price "Albertus Magnus" in Breda. During this year he experiments with more online groups. A high resolution scanner is bought which is used to digitize the works he sends out. In this year it became possible to order your personated IUOMA-stamp in the USA.

2004:

The decision is made to move to Breda together with Litsa Spathi. A new house will be build in the centre of Breda and will be ready in 2005. The ground floor is an atelier for Litsa Spathi. A 2nd exhibition of the TAM-Rubberstamp Archive is done at the L-Gallery in Moscow, Russia. Mail-Art sent on October 15th 1997 finally arrives at Saturn's. This thanks to the ESA (European Space Agency) who attached a CD-ROM to their Huygens-Probe. The IUOMA-online group has grown over the years and attracts new participants in the Mail-Art network. In September 2004, 240 members joined the IUOMA. The production of painted envelops continues with a yearly production of over 600

envelopes. The project "Return my envelopes in digital form" is the shortest project started ever by Ruud Janssen. The text and distribution took only 18 minutes. For the 25th anniversary in Mail-Art he starts this project to try to get digital images back of his older envelopes. In this year Ruud starts with his BLOG. More mail-artists have their own digital diary online, and it becomes a new way for communication in Mail-Art.

2005:

25 Years active in Mail-Art is celebrated with a special publication in which Ruud documents his activities in this art form. Also the secret project in the 90-ies: "Fake Projects" is documented and causes some disturbances in the mail-art net. He moves to Breda and starts to live together with his wife Litsa Spathi. In their newly build house the ground floor is Litsa's atelier. The 3rd floor is the room for the TAM-Archive. For the college he works for he contributes to an exhibition with some of his acrylic paintings.

Appendix 2 – URL Addresses

Most know my correspondence address. Since I plan to move to Breda in the year 2005, this address will change. The e-mail addresses are not connected to my home, nor are the URL's of my websites. So you can always reach me through them.

Ruud Janssen
Managing Director T.A.M.
P.O.Box 1055,
4801 BB Breda
Netherlands

Hits TAM / IUOMA each Year at: www.iuoma.org
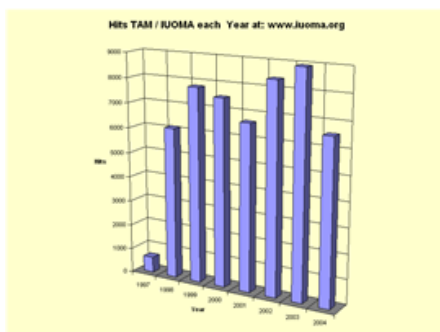
E-mail :

r.janssen@iuoma.org

Over the years I have started a lot of internet sites. This is the first overview of all those sites and a short description of what they contain.

URL-1 :   www.iuoma.org
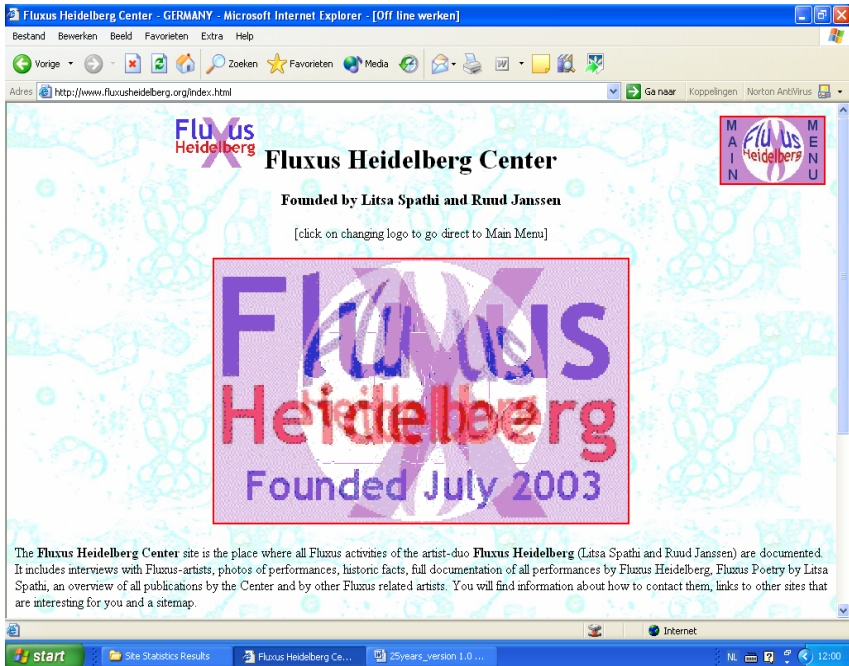
This is the main-site that I started in 1996. Also to use a digital place to learn as one goes this digital path. The site is updated even till now, and contains a lot of historic material connected to my mail-art activities. The site got about 9000 hits in the year 2003. The statistics image on the previous page was made on October 3rd 2004 and shows how things developed.

In the beginning the site was freely hosted by Geocities. Yahoo! Took over this firm and limited the use by pop-up banners and a limited amount of data-traffic. That cause Ruud to purchase the domain name and pay for more space and transmission possibilities. Since the year 2001 the site if free from adds and has his own e-mail addresses.

URL-2 :   www.fluxusheidelberg.org

This is the site for the Fluxus Heidelberg Center (FHC). Litsa Spathi and Ruud Janssen founded the Center in 2003 and are building up this huge collection of texts, visuals and Fluxus work as a symbol for their joining forces. The entrance page contains an animated gif that shows the logo of the FHC in many variations.

The site is maintained on a weekly basis and grows over the years. It also shows how the collaboration of Litsa and Ruud gets form and shape.

URL-3 :   ***www.iuoma.blogspot.com***

On this site, which started in June 2004, I write occasionally about my recent activities. It contains also visuals and reactions of visitors. Beginning October I also placed a statistical program on the site and discovered that it attracts many visitors. The first day I counted 50 visitors. The blog is still active till today (and has many 'children' as well).

URL-4 :   http://www.fortunecity.com
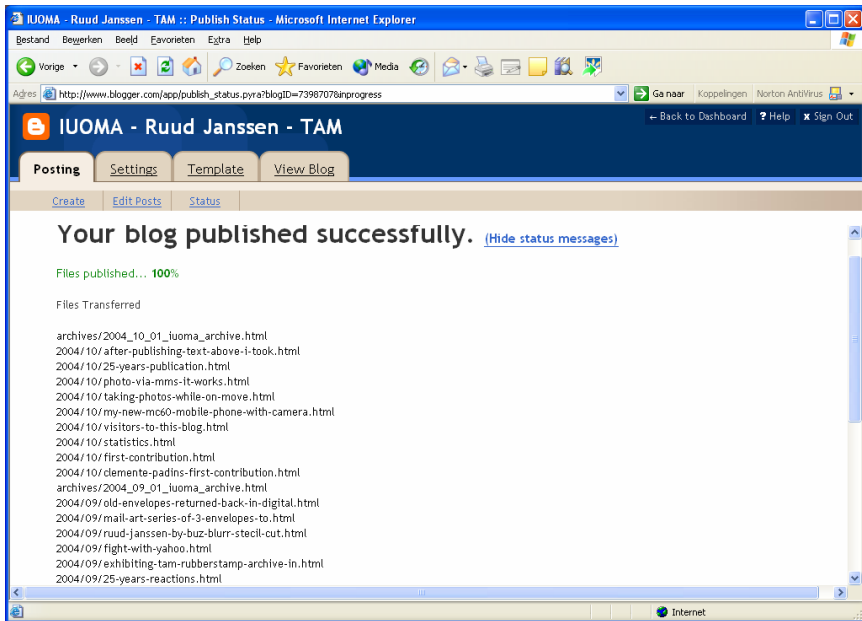
This site contains the Thesis by Michael Lumb, written in 1998 which deals about the Mail Art with the title: "a democratic art as social culture".

I placed it online end 1998 to make it accessible for all mail-artists since a paper copy wasn't available.

Since then thousands of visitors found their way to these texts. The funny thing is that there was no advertising for the site by me. The network found the texts because of the increasing power of the Internet searching tools.
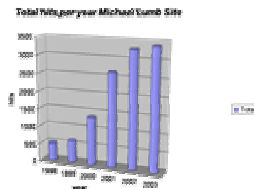
URL-5 :   www.geocities.com/nobodypress
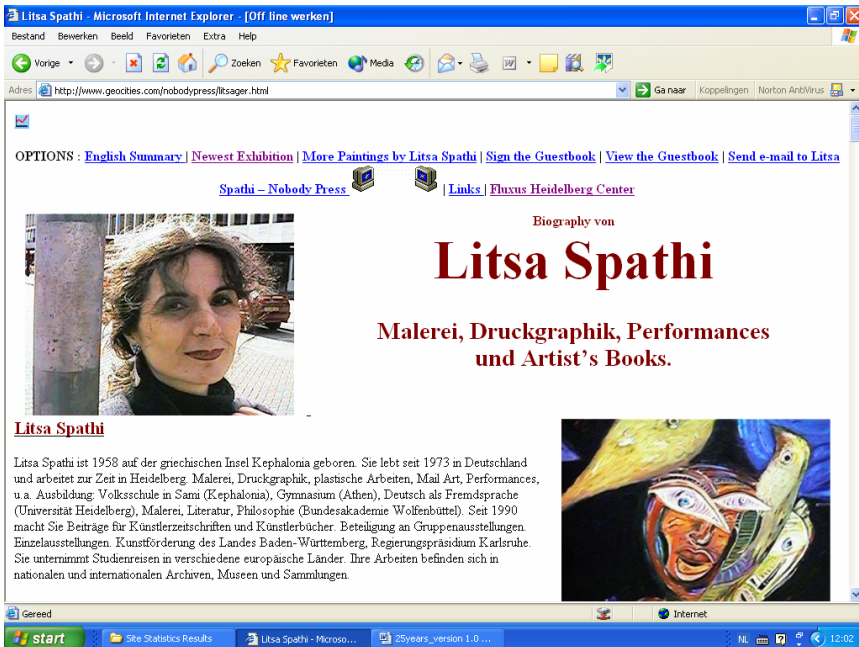
This site contains the biography of his wife Litsa Spathi and info on Nobody Press. Besides the complete biography it also contains an English summary and a link-list. Most of the site is in German Language.

URL-6 : http://forum.onecenter.com/iuoma/
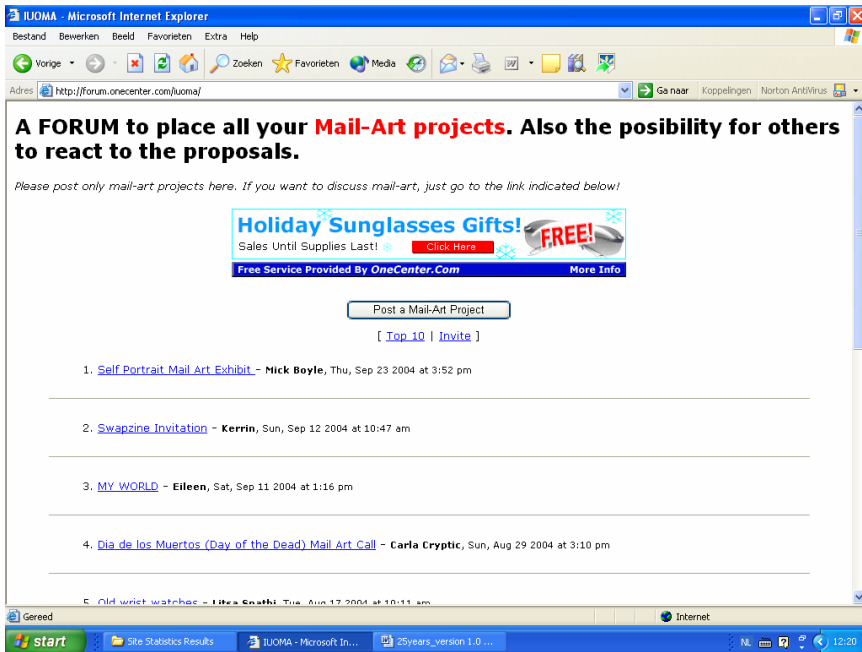
A forum where mail-artists can leave their projects and reactions. Ruud only checks now and then to see if it functions and if spammers haven't taken over.

URL-7 :   http://groups.yahoo.com/group/iuoma/
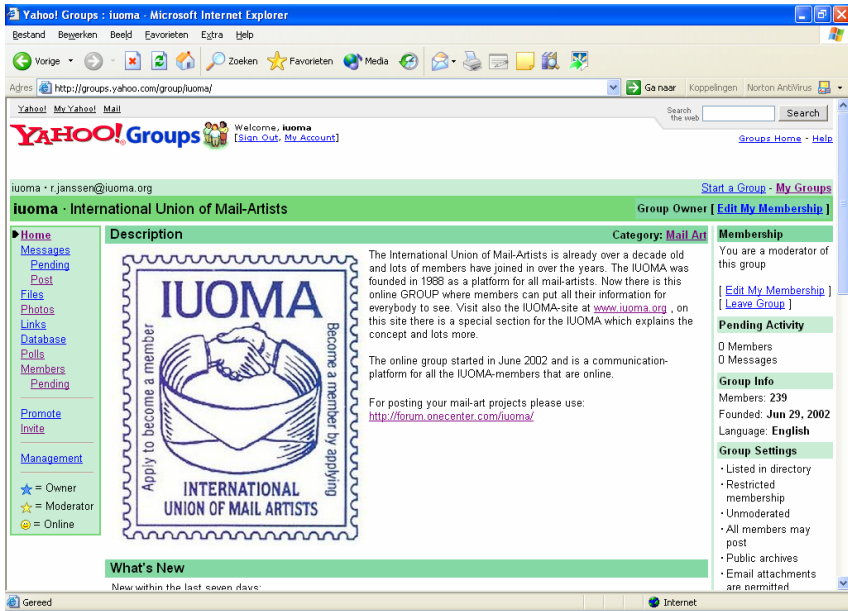
An online group for the IUOMA-members where they can discuss things, post messages, files, photos. Also polls are held. In 2004 there were already 245 members online and it belongs to the largest online groups of mail-artists.

Ruud moderates several more groups. Too much to illustrate them all here. But the people online know where the groups are since any search-engine fully indexes all these sites.

URL-8 :   http://iuoma.freeservers.com/
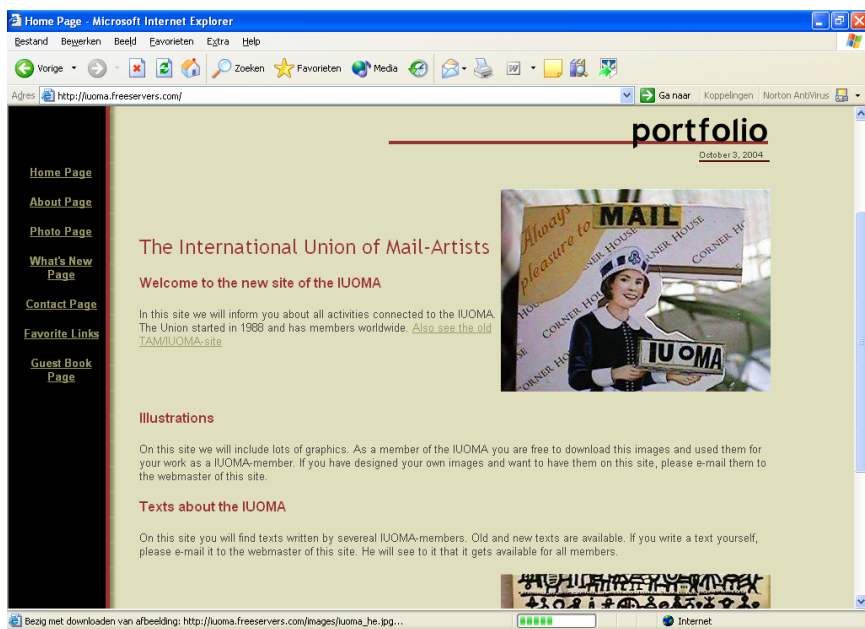
A test-site for the IUOMA. Never really finished, but kept online to attract people for getting information about the IUOMA

Appendix 3 - Literature

Overview of some of the magazines / books published by Ruud Janssen.

TAM-Bulletin. A mail-art newsmagazine issued from 1984 till 1990. First as a hardcopy. Later as a digital magazine of which also print-outs were distributed.

Newsletters TAM-Rubber Stamp Archive (several issues were published over the years with always the basic history and most recent details about the collection). A newsletter to inform the mail-art network about the archive. Over the years about 500 booklets were issued.

Catalogue exhibition in San Francisco at the Stamp Art Gallery (1996) with illustration of contributions to the exhibition and a text by John Held Jr. (reproduced in this catalogue). Edition:100 copies

The IUOMA-magazine. Only one issue was published in an edition of 300 copies

Mail-Interviews. About 35 magazines were published during the periode 1996 till 2000. Mostly editions of 50+, but an exception is the Guy Bleus – interview that got published at the Ragged Edge Press with the help of Joel Cohen (The Sticker Dude) in an edition of 3000.

Catalogue exhibition in Moscow at the L-Gallery (2004) with illustration of contributions to the exhibition and several texts connected to rubberstamping. The catalogue is also published on the Internet as .PDF-file and is available as book on:
http://www.lulu.com/content/1862885

10 Year History in Mail-Art is a 35 pages thick publication issued in 1990 when Ruud was 10 years active in Mail-Art. He reported about his activities, projects and reflects on what he has leaned.
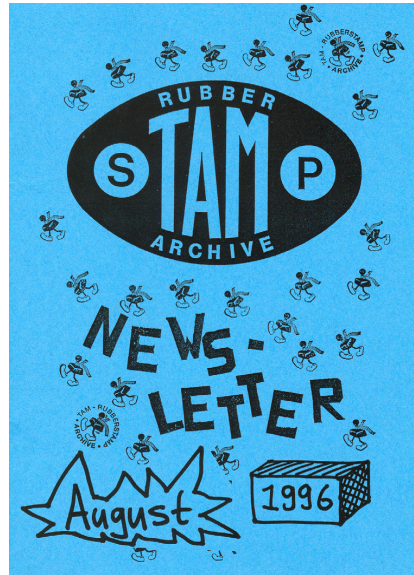
Dreams stay inside is a small poetry booklet issued by the IWA (International Writers Assiociation) run by Teressinka Pereirra in the USA.

Nipkov Go Home. Poetry-booklet with translated poems into Portuguese language (by Dr. Teresinka Pereira). Published at University of Colorado, USA. Library of Congress registration International Poetry TX - 1.246.333 - 1984 (reprinted by TAM-Publications in 1993).

Als In Een Doolhof. Poetry-booklet (Dutch language). TAM-Publications, Netherlands

DREAMS STAY INSIDE
DENTRO DA GENTE, OS SONHOS
RUUD JANSSEN

Appendix 4 - The TAM Rubberstamp-Archive
by John Held Jr.

written by John Held Jr. (USA), and published in the catalogue issued by the Stamp Art Gallery, San Francisco, October 1996.
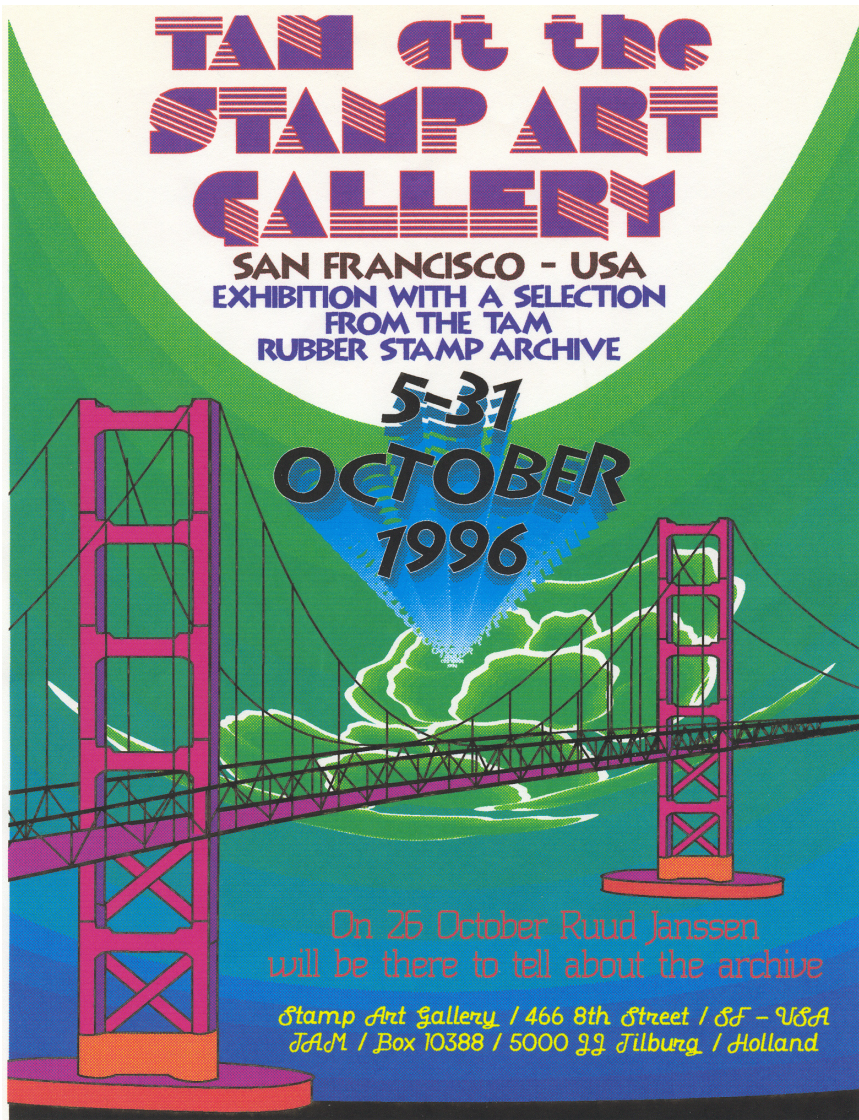
It has been sixteen years since Ruud Janssen became aware of mail art, and because of his interest in documentation, we have an excellent overview of his activities. In this catalogue we have reprinted both his lengthy Curriculum Vitae, and his latest "information-newsletter" of the TAM Rubberstamp-Archive.

To write a factual account of his work would therefore be repetitive. Let me instead impart some personal impressions of the man and his work, and why I believe Ruud has become such an important link in the mail art network.

I have been involved in mail art since 1976, beginning from an experience the previous year when I took my first trip to Europe and found myself at a rubber stamp store in Amsterdam, Netherlands, called Posthumous. I brought some stamps home with me and began research to learn if other artists were using them in creative ways. Soon, I discovered the mail art network, and began doing my own rubber stamp art.

I returned to Amsterdam for the first exhibition at the gallery Posthumous opened in a section of their store, which they named Stempelplaats. I spent two weeks there, and spent much of my time in the evenings going to a nightclub called the Melkweg (the Milky Way). So when I received an invitation in 1985 for a show at the Melkweg, it reminded me of my first steps in mail art, and I became interested in the organizer, Ruud Janssen.

Since then, we have become close friends. We met first in 1989, when I gave a talk and held an exhibition at De Media in Eeklo, Belgium. Our second meeting occurred in 1995, when I travelled to Europe with Picasso Gaglione for the opening of the Musée de la Poste exhibition, The Art of the Rubber Stamp, in Paris.

After the Paris show, Gaglione and I went to visit two mail art archivists, Guy Bleus in Wellen, Belgium, and Ruud in Tilburg, Holland. We stayed with both, and a fuller description of our adventures can be found in The Stamp Art Gallery catalogue, The Fake Picabia Brothers: L'Art Tampon.

Suffice it to say, that our visit with Ruud was a most enjoyable one, and we were able to view firsthand his living and working space. Ruud is a good example of what sustaining interest and hard work are capable of. His apartment is small. He works a full-time job that demands much of

his time and energy. Yet somehow he has found a way to make himself an undeniable presence in an international art network.

The activity starts early in the morning. While others on the train are reading their morning papers, Ruud has been to the Post Office to pick up his mail, and is busily reading the latest news from his worldwide correspondents on his way to work.

At home that evening, he is at the computer working on the Mail Art Interview project, creating stamp sheets and colourful envelopes, enclosing the TAM Rubberstamp-Archive sheets in his correspondence, issuing membership cards to newcomers in the IUOMA (International Union of Mail Artists) and responding to those all too frequent requests that demand more then a simple letter.

His training in computers prepared him well for his use of this new technology in mail art activities, and Ruud was one of the first mail artists to extend the communicative and archival potentials by combining these interests.

Now all the data concerning his Travelling Art Mail - Rubberstamp-Archive can be retrieved easily from the computer, and distributed in both printed and electronic formats. And it's a good thing too, for since the beginning of the Archive in 1983, some 15,000 thousand forms have been distributed to over 60 countries, with the purpose of documenting the rubber stamp impressions of artists involved in the mail art network. To date of this article, over 1,600 artists have responded.

It is to his credit that Ruud is not only interested in the output of the artists, but what motivates them to continue their work. His Mail Interview Project is the first systematic attempt to gather in-depth information about the participants in the network.

How he does this along with all his other projects, I will never know. He does not have any sponsors for his projects. All the research and publishing activity results from his own limited resources. This is the same for most mail artists, whose work is under appreciated by the mainstream art institutions.

Without sponsorship of any kind, Ruud has amassed the most complete information on the creative use of rubber stamps. Someday, someone from the mainstream will come knocking on his door seeking to borrow the art and information for an exhibition or a publication.

Until that time, The Stamp Art Gallery has arranged to show some of the collection, as well as the many publications Ruud has produced in support of the collection, to a wider audience.

For the exhibition, Ruud has created a special form for the contributing artists in the TAM Rubberstamp-Archive to respond, and also in which to participate. Instead of having the artists imprint their rubber stamps on the form, and returning them to Ruud, as is the normal procedure, a special form has been developed, and the artists have been instructed to forward it directly to The Stamp Art Gallery.

All work received has been displayed, and we have reproduced at least one work by each participating artist in this catalogue. In this way, Ruud has used the opportunity of a gallery show to erect a structure by which all who want to can contribute.

This generosity of shared creativity is characteristic of Ruud's work, and we are grateful that he has collaborated with us in the first partial public exhibition of the largest rubber stamp archive in the world.

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