
Mail Art - Brain Cell - Fractal

Ryosuke Cohen

Fifteen years ago, I received a scarab beetle via mail from Ruggero Maggi in Italy, instead of a kid-amusing beetle or a butterfly with beautiful wings. The insect was with dirt and enclosed in a transparent envelope. Now I still remember the day after, when I talked with Byron Black deep in the night about Maggi's powerful artistic conception inspired by the Amazon River. Black, in those days, taught video art in a Japanese art school, and he gave me a piece of advice to spell my name "Cohen" like Jewish people in place of my real Japanese spelling style, "Kouen"; I am Japanese and was born in Osaka in 1948.

In the Amazon of South America, many kinds of small lives live dependent upon each other, such as aunts, small insects hiding themselves underneath fallen leaves, ferns and lichen parasites on larger trees and fungi native to decayed wood, together with larger trees, animals, or birds. All of them in toto make up tropical forests. However, human beings have gradually learned to recognize the difference between things useful and useless. We make differences between large trees which are useful to build houses from those which are smaller; we differentiate between edible growth and that which is not; we differentiate between birds and fish which are good to have as pets and those which are not. Our ability to differentiate has, however, caused the ruin of numbers of small plants, which are by nature essential to the ecosystem of the Amazon. This tendency of ours is nowadays a recognized issue, and we know that this is not only pertinent to the Amazon but to everywhere on this planet.

The very same ability to differentiate has here also in Japan caused terrible floods in typhoon season. Huge amounts of rain water flow off the artificially planted cedar and hinoki trees, and the water pours over the banks. In springtime, many of us suffer from hayfever. This has resulted from our immunity deficiency inclination. It is we who have created the reason for this deficiency; we planted only conifers on the earth and made our way of life too clean. As for this, some doctors, even insist upon keeping parasites in our body to regain immunity.

We have altered our rich and comfortable way of life by pushing away many things unnoticed or never mentioned before. Accordingly, we are about to lose or, in fact, have lost many things which had been the essence of our old rich and comfortable life. Now we are surrounded by social problems such as juvenile delinquency and discrimination against national minorities, in addition to the ecological problems. The art world, too, is not the exception; people in this world are under the same shadow as mentioned above. They have pushed away financially weak artists from

galleries and art exhibitions. They may have even deformed the artistic sense of school children through rigid educational systems, enough so their artistic skill does not mean much today. They also may have put too much importance upon the Euro-American values of art criticism. During the past 100 years, the planet has lost half of its woods in the so-called "progress" to which we have aspired. Now that we are facing global environmental problems such as acid rain, ozone holes, hothouse effects and so on. Just as Ruggero Maggi advised us in his art pieces from the Amazon, it is time to restart and rebuild our real art, so now is the time to get started.

In Mail Art, the network expands as A to B, B to C, and so on. It is not only limited to peer communication. In fact, you can put collages on the mail you receive and send it back, or you may be able to send other artists' ideas into your own mail. As a whole body, it appears as a brain constructed with numbers of compiled and complex nerve cells, which are created in a non-linear order. So I have named this style of art "Brain Cell", and have been soliciting new Mail Art entries since June 1985. Today we have more than 5000 members from 80 nations, and the entries have amounted to 442 as of March 1999.

I made up a new word, Copy Left, which means free of copyright, and printed the name on envelopes and sent their seals all over the world. As I myself did, in the world of Mail Art, you can use other mail artists' seals, stickers and stamps and also you can use your own concepts through the printed media. In addition, you are able to be willing to alter others' pieces and put collages on them and send them to other artists. In this way, Mail Art pieces often change their appearances and concepts into unimagined ways, which not one individual artist can create.

Andrei Tisma and Nenad Bogdanovic sent me the seal of "No-Ism" from Yugoslavia. *No-Ism* means that there is not just one ideology in the Mail Art World. *No* means Brain in Japanese. So, I ambiguously use "No" as the meaning of *non-existence* and *Brain*. I sent No-ism seals all over the world, too, in return. Likewise I receive in everyday life many kinds of stuff such as postcards, Xerox copies, collage pieces, drawings, computer graphics, show catalogs, photographs, and cassette tapes by mail, fax, e-mail, and Internet. This gives us an amazing view, showing the overwhelmingly plural ways of expression and concepts. I, therefore, regard the huge world of Mail Art full of every kind of ism mixed up like chaos. No wonder not a single rigid ideology survives or dominates.

As Ray Johnson once mentioned, Mail Art is not a single art movement, but is quite a megatrend that insists that we change our consciousness.

Many artists, in fact, were in sympathy with Swiss H.R. Fricker's Tourism concept. I also had opportunities to make tours and meet many mail artists when I visited Europe (1987), North America (1989), and again Europe (1990). Then I was able to sense the trend of Mail Art and its creators' multiple situations. I had a very different experience, because at home I usually occupy myself at making and arranging art pieces, and learned a lot through fellowship with other artists. Some mail artists live a very natural way of life, others were very sensitive to peace in the world. And for them there were those who were willing to realize their art pieces to their utmost. All of them were not free from financial and political problems nor to postal communication, but they overcame those problems and remain with a very positive attitude. I found their attitude really different from that of Japanese. Tourism, I discovered through my experience, has the potential to stimulate looking at the world with aesthetic eyes. It is not just for making a trip and sightseeing.


Angela and Peter Netmail have put the Tourism concept into practice globally, and they have sent me mail from all over the world. I believe that their experiences may be far beyond our imagination and reach a deep understanding in the future of what mail art truly represents.

I have been sending mail since 1997 with the concept of *Fractal* in addition to that of the usual *Brain Cell*. *Fractal* is a word for mirror figures and was advocated by the French mathematician B. Mandelbrot at the IBM Watson Institute. Picasso and Cezanne were influenced by African sculptures, Van Gogh by Hokusai and Hiroshige, Pollock by Dali and Miro, so we are influenced by numerous artists and mail artists. Needless to say I myself am completely influenced by some mail artists, Dadaists and Fluxus. I have been teaching art to school children for 25 years. Recently I have been involved in teaching physically challenged children, and I have been greatly influenced by these wonderful children. Deep within me exist many mixed fragmented parts of those artists and children. These and original fragments do not erase each other like spines on a cactus, but lead to a higher plane. This inner world gives me a real feeling that I am sharing many other artists' fragments, what with the experience that I have personal free-from-copyright relationships rearranging other masterpieces with other artists, as well as the freedom that is represented by the word "Copy Left" not bound to ideologies, which is No-IsM.

What I think, by making Mail Art pieces everyday, is that Mail Art is a dynamic medium. In other words, Mail Art consists in dynamism, because you can be more than a mere individual, able to be free to create art pieces with a new attitude, just being a fragment of the whole Network and sharing fragmental parts of many other artists.

Editor's Note: Ryosuke Cohen has been producing *Brain Cell* with his Gocco printer and you receive a huge sheet of contributors to his mail art mailbox from 40 - 50 images on each sheet, including rubberstamps, stickers and seals. He has often gathered these sheets into beautiful bookworks as well. Cohen lives the spirit of Mail Art by receiving, adding to and sending out to those who send to him. Join the Network and honor this noble Mail Artist, by sending Mail Art to Ryosuke Cohen, 3-76-1-A-613, Yagumokitacho, Moriguchi-City, Osaka 570 Japan.

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Stampland: Fine Art Rubber Stamps is now located at 5033 N. Mozart St., Chicago, IL 60625. Phone/fax: (773)728-8425. <http://rubberstampmuseum.com>

See *Utne Reader* for September-October 2000 and read Chris Dodge's article on Mail Art, "Going Postal" on pp. 102 - 105.

Kairan 1: Mail Art Forum is the continuation of Wilfried Nold's *Número*, now edited by Gianni Simone, who has been living in Japan for the past 8 years. *Kairan* means "read and pass on" in Japanese, and that's the intention of Simone. Contributions include those of Ruggero Maggi, Clemente Padin, the AUMA Collective, Theo Breuer has an A through Z Mail Art News chapter, the article about the Stamp Art and Postal History of Michael Thompson and Michael Hernandez De Luna (with stamps on several pages), an article by Vittore Baroni about Mail Art and the Internet, and much more. What you want to imagine is not a list of all the mail art shows in the world, but a pithy, international, incisive exploration of the mail art world today. To get a copy, send \$2.00 or a contribution to Gianni Simone, 105 Hillside Morooka, 1094-1 Morooka-cho, Kohoku-ku, Yokohama-shi, 222-0002 Kanagawa-ken, Japan.

Happy Birthday Johannes documents the Mail Art Project in the Gutenberg Pavilion in Mainz from 24 June - 23 July 2000 including 700 mail art pieces by 547 artists from 67 countries around the world. 547 are pictured in stamp-size images in full color, the texts are in German and in English (essay by Judith A. Hoffberg) and the book is delicious!

The New York Times for 27 June 2000 had an article about personalized postage stamps, introduced in Canada in May, which have been a big hit since 6 May. Canada Post has received 400 to 500 orders per day. All you do is mail in a photo and send payment and within 3 weeks, applicants receive in the mail a sheet of 25 self-sticking printed "gilt frames," marked "Canada" and "46"- for Canada's domestic letter rate. This comes with a second sheet of 25 "personalized self-adhesive photo stickers," or "vignettes autocollantes" in French.

The Mail Art Event organized by Amnesty International and AUMA opened on 1 September in the Port of Tarragona, Spain with art based on Peace and Duality. There were performances of Shop of the Sun, Txalo Toloza and Matriz Grupal. Poetry of Lorca, Gabriely Galan and Jose Carlos de Luna was recited. 735 works by 350

participants from 30 countries were on exhibit. For more information read <http://www.fut.es/~boek861>

The Popular Art of Postal Parody is an exhibition of artistamp sheets, individual stamps and mailed envelopes using these stamps, curated by Anna Banana. There are over 200 works by 60+ network artists in the exhibit which was shown in Sechelt in March of 98, and at the Richmond Art Gallery in October of 99. It was scheduled for the Works Festival in Edmonton this June, but was cancelled at the last minute for financial reasons. It will be shown again this fall at Open Space, 510 Fort St, in Victoria, B.C., October 6 through 28th. The gallery will publish a monograph - introduction to artistamps, but not a catalogue. If there's a gallery in your area that might be interested in hosting this show, please let me [know.<a banana@sunshine.net>](mailto:banana@sunshine.net)

Ray Johnson: Correspondences, curated by Donna De Salvo, at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio from 17 September - 31 December 2000.

CALL FOR ENTRIES

Leaves and Leave-takings. Any medium, no deadline, reply to all and new documentation to expect. Send to Bonita McLaughlin, 41A Richardson Rd., Leverett, MA 01054 USA.

Artist's Book Exchange. Send one of your artist's books to Pat. She will send you one of hers in return along with a list of all the addresses of other members of the exchange (currently 199 people from across the planet). After that it's up to you to negotiate exchanges with others on the list. Send to Pat Collins, Artist's Book Exchange, 128 Kingston Rd., Teddington, Middlesex, UK.

Child Abuse. All media, no returns, no fees, no jury, max. size A4, documentation to all. International Art Project of "Catarinense Human Rights Society" and "Museum of International Contemporary Art". **Deadline: 30 September 2000.** All works must be sent to Dorian Ribas Marinho, Caixa Postal No. 676, Florianopolis (SC), Brazil 88010-970.

Visual Poetry Wanted.. The magazine Signs of Santa Clara, the city where Che Guevara is buried, is preparing a special edition of visual poetry and they want work from around the world, because they don't have enough poems, and because visual poetry is not well known in Cuba. Send contributions to Revista Signos, gaveta Postal 19, Santa Clara, c.p. 50100, Villa Clara, Cuba.

Signal has a new e-mail address for Mirosljub Todorovic at signal@ptt.yu. For those of you who may not know, **Signal** is a resurrected visual and word poetry periodical published in Belgrade which was suspended in the 1970s. It welcomes essays about all aspects of word art and visual poetry.

Mani Art, mail art magazine. Send 60 pages, size 15x21 cm. Or 60 postcards. No black and white photocopies. Leave 1 cm. on longest side. Every contributor gets one issue with all works. No deadline. Send to Pascal Lenoir, 11 Ruelle de Champagne, 60680 Grandfresnoy, France.

Polarities. The world is full of polarities, and we as humans are usually pulled between them. Empty/full, light/dark, good/bad, busy/still, complex/simple, hot/cold, love/hate...what are the polarities in your life now? Maximum size: 6 x 9 inches. Documentation to all. Exhibition will be posted on the website. Send to Polarities, c/o Cat, 5831 SE Taylor, Portland, OR 97215.

Matchbook. Send us your name and address and we will mail you a plain matchbook. Use any medium to transform it and return it to Paper Source, 2404 Hennepin Ave., S., Minneapolis, MN 55405. **Deadline: Unknown.**

Collage. Please send small and colorful paper things to me, I am building a mail art collage. All contributors will receive a color copy of the collage and a list of current participants. Any collage - type materials are welcome (magazine cut outs, original art, unoriginal art, artistamps, stickers etc). No deadline, Ongoing project. Scientist Sam, 11514 N. Rockaway Dr. Spokane, WA 99218 USA E-mail: messiah070@aol.com

Home Sweet Home. I've recently moved and am struggling with the concept of *home*. I know it's not even necessarily where the heart is. Do you carry HOME within you? Or on your back like a snail? What do you need to feel "at home"? Any medium, any size, documentation to all. **Deadline: October 2000.** Send to Gingersnaps, P.O. Box 39168, 3695 West 10 Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6R 1G0 Canada.

120 years of Picasso. Gandha Key of London wants to invite artists interested in doing an artist book to communicate with her. Send an image of a face you know or one you have created. Any medium that can be scanned or sent via e-mail. Size up to A4. Write to G. Key, 12 Corwallis Rd., London N19 4LU, UK or <http://colophon.com/zybooks>

Don't be Coy, be Nishikigoi. Nishikigoi is the name of the Japanese carp. 8 x 10", any medium, no returns, no

deadline. Work will be integrated into an internet site. Documentation assured twice a year. Send to Koi, c/oDragonfly Dream, PMB #286, 223 N. Guadalupe, Santa Fe, NM 87501. <http://www.dragonflydream.com>

Nude Climbing the Staircase. A5 (15 x 21 cm.), documentation to each 10 participants. **No deadline.** Send to Pascal Lenoir, 11 ruelle de Champagne, 60680 Grandfresnoy, France.

Chance Future at Artpool. Deadline: 31 December 2000. Participants should ask themselves at what point the past and the future determines the present. Exhibitions and other events will be produced during the duration of the project. For more information, contact Artpool, H-1277 Budapest 23, pf. 52, Hungary. Or artpool@artpool.hu

Body Transfer: The Man of Third Millennium. How many lives do we live? Do you trust in parallel universe? I am waiting for your answers. Please send me one of your original works. Any size. **Deadline: 1 December 2000.** Send to Cesare Iezzi, perspezialista, Via S. Camillo de Lellis 97/B, 66100 Chieti, Italy. Catalogue for all.

The Art is in the Mail (ing). Organized by FaGaGaGa at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Attn: Anne Burkhart, 1871 N. High St., Columbus, OH 43210 USA. This will run concurrently with the exhibition **Ray Johnson: Correspondences. Deadline: 15 Sept. 2000.**

Motorgliderdropoffmail. Send mail in a separate envelope. Send as many self-addressed postcards or envelopes as you like. Max. size: 9 cm x 16.5 long. US citizens are kindly requested to add postage on their cards or covers. Pilot: Ralf Grv_lein Flight: A triangle flight over Brandenburg. Drop off point not known! Mail will be stored in a colorful tube on a parachute. Take off probably near end of September. Send to Uwe Bresse, Kantine, Millerstrasse 146, 13353 Berlin, Germany. **Deadline: 15 September 2000.**

Key #164. I've found a strange key, and I don't know what it opens. Help me solve this mystery. Please send me a text (fiction, poetry, rants, etc.) with or without images (any media is OK) on a B5 paper. The best story gets a present from me. Documentation to all. Send to Gianni Simone at Kairan (address above). **Deadline: 31 January 2001.**

Eat Your Art Out. Artwork on the subject of food on an open postcard to join Pat Collins, Alan Turner, Julia Tant and Martha Aitchison during Christmas at a busy restaurant in London. Documentation of the event later. **Deadline: 1**

November 2000. Send to The Shopping Trolley Gallery, P.O. Box 108, Beckenham BR3 1GY, Great Britain.

Chance Future. You must ask whether the past and the future determine the present. There will be exhibitions and other events produced during this project. **Deadline: 31 December 2000.** Send to Artpool, H-1277 Budapest 23, pf. 52, Hungary. Artpool@artpool.hu or <http://www.artpool.hu/>

Mail Art Hit Parade 2000. Clemente Padin has been invited to participate in the 7th Biennial of Havana, Cuba in November 2000. Padin will do a street event, Mail Art Hit Parade 2000. By doing this, he will try to promote the exchange of communication among the people and the participating artists. The parade will be preceded by a popular music group, as well as the distribution of postcards (with a project "add and send back") to publicly proclaim the inauguration of the Biennial for all those gathered in the center of the city of Havana. Padin has already received the disguises and masks from the festival that David Dellafiora carried out in Australia, and he now invites people to participate in the Mail Art Hit Parade 2000 in Havana by sending many many more. Send a shipment of simple and lightweight disguises and masks realized in nylon or any other material that will tolerate the postal system, in any technique and size that is wearable for participants. No returns (the disguises will be given to the public). **Deadline: 5 October 2000.** Don't forget to include your personal data for the catalog that I will send to all the participants. Also I will install a page on the internet with photos and reports of the event. Send to Clemente Padin, C. Correo Central 1211, 11000 Montevideo, Uruguay. If you send registered mail or as a "small package", please, write on the envelope SIN VALOR COMERCIAL.

SQUINT. Artist book makers for collaborative assembling booklet. Send 10 photocopies A5 size (21x15 cm) to be folded in middle to make four pages per artist. Color and rubberstamping etc. encouraged. Copy of Squint sent to all participants every 6 - 8 entries. Send to A1 Waste Paper Co. Ltd., 33 Shipbrook Rd., Rudheath, Northwich CW9 7EX. **Deadline: Ongoing.**

Postage Stamp Design Competition. All entries must be standard postage stamp size. Stamps can be single compositions, in a block format of four stamps, or in sheet form. Stamps need not be perforated. All stamps will be exhibited to the public in standard philatelic presentation pages. Images should be suitable for viewing by children of all ages. All entries will be exhibited and there will be no returns. This exhibition is a non-profit enterprise. A website

list of artists participating, the exhibition and venues of this exhibition will be posted on 30 October 2000. An exhibition list will be sent to all artists. Artists' statements are welcomed and will be used as space permits. Please send entries to Ground Zero Studios, A.H. Krieger, 1309 Irving St NW, Washington, DC 20010 or <http://www.tribalpop.com/postage> or gkstudios@hotmail.com **Deadline: 1 October 2000.**

International Hungarian Exhibition of Mail Art. No restrictions. **Deadline: 30 September 2000.** Send to Voros Ansdras, Kulture-Center Somogy County, P.O. box H-7401Kaposvar, Pf. 77, Hungary.

In love with the Vampire. No sex, no pornography. **Deadline: 15 October 2000.** Any medium. Documentation to all. Send to Juliana Martinez, 3665 Kelton Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90034.

Homage to TinTin. **Deadline: 29 October 2000.** Send to Reine Shad, 108 Av. De Paris, 71100 Chalon sur Saone, France.

Wipe: Light Weight Bookwork. Please send 40 sheets of printed toilet tissue. Open theme and technique, rubber-stamp, etc. No organic materials or traces please. Ongoing project, **no deadline.** Edition made every 20 participants. Max size: 14cm x 11cm. Send to Field Study, P.O.Box 1838 Geelong, VIC 3220 Australia

The Story of Noah. Any medium. **Deadline: 2 March 2001.** Send to North Carolina Wesleyan College, 3400 N. Wesleyan Blvd., Rocky Mount, NC 27804.

Social Duty: International Mail Art Project dedicated to the memory of Roberto Vitali (1926-2000) the art historian who loved and appreciated mail art from a social-political cultural point of view). Any media, any format. **Deadline: 30 November.** Documentation to all. No returns. Exhibition. Send to Patrizia Campani, Via Paolazzo n. 6, 40053 Bazzano (BO), Italy. Or to Anna Boschi, Via G. Tanari n. 1445/B, 40024 Castel S. Pietro Terme (BO), Italy.

E-mail art, the first recognition. Please send me your e-mail art. **Deadline: 15 November 2000.** Documentation on AH!e-zine. <http://www.dadacasa.com/ah!> Send to bnet@libero.it