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SUMMER 1980

## EUROPE, SUMMER 1980: on the road with jah

NEW YORK: 30 May - 2 June

The heat was unbearable in New York (mostly the humidity), but the stopover was well worth it not only to see Picasso, but also to attend the Nevelson opening at the Whitney just hours after I arrived. It was a sterling event, and Nevelson looked young, sophisticated, and queenly. The work spoke for itself, although I preferred the black pieces so dramatically lit to the white or gold pieces.

Luckily, Felipe Ehrenberg and Lourdes Grobet were in town and by chance we met at Franklin Furnace to listen to David Antin talking. After that we saw a lot of each other, and I can announce that Beau Geste Press will resurrect in Mexico City very soon.

Even got to meet an old school chum I haven't seen in over 20 years over drinks at the Four Seasons, and then a performance by Pauline Oliveros at the Kitchen.

The next day I explored as many galleries as I could before stopping off at Mythology, a delightful and charming shop which sells anything and everything from rubber stamps to kites, and artists' books as well. It's at 370 Columbus Avenue.

There were many Californians in town and the word *bicoastal* was bandied around as a new-found word, for those who seem to flit from coast to coast and never seem to nest, for art is everywhere and one must get around to see it.

And to top it all off, the Picasso Retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art is truly worth the trip! It is vastly important, for it changes the mind of all those who wrote him off the past thirty years. Yes, he was hiding the best, the best of his genius, the best of his whimsy, the best of his fantasy and skill. Wouldn't you know that in the last room was a *Still Life With Umbrella* to end it all! And that night, the TV film on *Picasso: A Painter's Diary* was shown, which further enhanced the image of the artist and the man in my eyes, and rounded off the day with great awe and inspiration. That same day (since I am a glutton for aesthetic punishment), I saw 10 years work of the Visual Studies Workshop at Pratt's Manhattan Center, which was inspiring, confirming the steady excellence of this marvelous institution in Rochester, New York.

Thunderstorms, lightning and then sunshine and humidity were all in store for me the last day in New York, as well as the exhibit of Oldenberg's *Crusoe Umbrella* models at Castelli, which were magnificently installed. Then off on the JFK Subway to the airport and only relaxed when I



stepped on the plane. A census-taker asked questions about how I got to the airport, why I took that flight, etc. It was to be an omen for the return flight as well.

### GENEVA

The air was crisp and fresh at 6:30 a.m. The airport literally empty was inviting me out to a beautiful city. The sun was warm, no coat was needed. In the Old Town, there was the old church being restored, lovely galleries, antique shops, and a sense of history, with a carousel and bookstalls. Marika Malacorda was packing for Basle, but greeted me warmly and showed me the Ben Vautier show, which was also being packed partially for Basle. I even saw roller skaters on the streets of Geneva, and how small the world is! From Venice to Geneva, in one small stride!

A visit to Ecart was the first important stop. John Armleder, director of this famous artists' bookshop and publishing house, greeted me warmly and showed me how he was setting up the Andy Warhol show, a group of books which came from the Ecart Archive tracing the whole history of Warhol's books, since he was coming to Geneva on Saturday. I ambled down the aisles and saw the huge Fluxus collection on the shelves, but so much more. Every current magazine and book was there, and the shop (although only open afternoons) was the meeting and greeting place of many artists in the community. And to top it all off, it is in the middle of this bustling and elegant town! He is sharing a space with the Centre d'Art Contemporain, run by Adelina von Furstenberg, in a beautiful building owned by Migros, a very large diversified corporation in Switzerland. There at the Centre, they were preparing the Warhol exhibition of Joseph Beuys' prints, and of the young Italian artists, who seemingly will follow me throughout the trip. The

Italian avant-garde (or so they are called) were installing their exhibitions in separate rooms on the upper floors of the building. They put me to work helping the installations, and I was pleased to pitch in.

Then off to Carouge to visit with Patricia Plattner, an artist who had been in California during the Artwords & Bookworks show and who had been a part of Galerie Gaetan in Carouge for several years. Carouge is a small-Italian village suburb outside of Geneva that is charming, old-world, and quiet, and yet only a stone's throw from the center of Geneva. It was a good visit, with a stopover at Gaetan.

Then the entire Italian entourage arrived, including Luciano Bartolini, as well as Martin Disler, Ernesto d'Argento, Enzo Esposito, Marcello Jori, Nino Longobardi, Filippo di and Ernesto Tatafiore, among others. The critic Fulvio Salvadori was also present. He had written the essay for the catalog.

In Geneva, there is an alternative space, called The Apartment, which shows films, has performances, and is indeed an apartment of some artists who feel the need for an alternative as necessary for survival.

Although rumors had it that Audrey Hepburn would also arrive, Andy Warhol did arrive with entourage such as Bob Colacello, the editor of *Interview*. The jet set of Geneva came out with hunks of jewelry, coordinated colors, silks and cottons, safari suits and khaki, supersuede and everything else to see. After all the videotaping and photographs, we retired to a beautiful villa along Lake Geneva owned by Philippe Woog, the inventor of the electric toothbrush, and collector of African sculpture and contemporary art (Schwitters (3), Arman who did a Broxodent piece for him, Beuys, etc.). It seemed like paradise, with champagne, all kinds of beautiful food, strawberries and/or creme fraiche as well as glace (ice cream), good music (live), etc. But I knew this had to end, and so I left for Zurich amidst the festivities.



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#### ZURICH

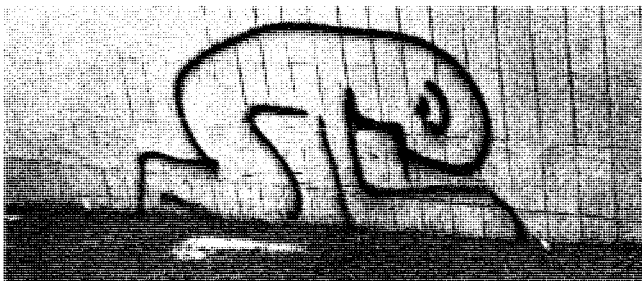
After the sunshine of Geneva, it was rainy in Zurich—at least it was damp and gray. Police barriers foretold of demonstrations on the part of the young people for the city to give them a hall for rock concerts, not only for the Opera House. Yet Zurich was magical, a beautiful city situated so perfectly on the lake, offering so much in its Kunsthaus, a marvelous museum which taught me a great deal about the Swiss greats like Hodler, Giacometti, Vallotton, and Boeckli, as well as showing me Chagall at his best. The old building is beautifully meshed with the new wing—it is a large collection which takes much time to grasp, and I even discovered a Monet painting with umbrella.

But the highlight of the visit to the Kunsthaus was to see on the last day the exhibition of Dada in Zurich, a complete collection of Dada documents and artifacts not only from Switzerland but from the whole movement of Dada throughout Europe and the U.S. It was a remarkable coincidence, and how fortunate to see the world of Marcel Ianco, of Tzara, Arp, Schwitters, Richard Huelsenbeck, Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings, as well as Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia, Ernst, Grosz, and the rest. The exhibition was to wile collectors, bankers, corporations to raise funds to buy the collection and keep it intact in Zurich. Whether they have succeeded only time will tell.

On that Sunday afternoon, cloudy but not gray, I ambled through churches, since I did not have a map. The churches were clean, pristine, remarkably perfect. One church in particular caught my eye, the Fraumunster, where something told me to turn the corner, and there I was in a chapel with the most beautiful Chagall windows, which I learned later were donated to the church anonymously and to this day no one knows who paid for it. Although the sky was overcast, the light was brilliant and slowly the sun pierced the clouds and the windows shown with unworldly light, with the Old Testament and the New Testament portrayed in oranges, rubies and golds. Almost anything after that would be anticlimactic except a cocktail party given in my honor by my friend and hostess, Warja Lavater-Honegger, an artist who makes beautiful books. At the party were all the book people of Zurich such as Thomas Howeg, Jan Hubertus (the book artist), Schlegl, Scheidegger, but also Lucia Moholy,

the first wife of Moholy-Nagy and a photographer in her own right. A woman well over 80, she has the strength, fortitude and stamina of a woman half her age. She will be exhibiting in San Francisco this fall because Van Deren Coke is giving her an exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. We are trying to prevail upon her to come to California. With the marvelous refreshments we also had a fire in the fireplace, since it was rainy and cool outside--and this was June! Yet the company was very warm.

The next day I met with the librarian of the Kunsthau who buys artists' books and also houses the drawing collection of Giacometti. Then I discovered Bahnhofstrasse, the most beautiful, elegant street I have ever seen. In addition, I discovered a whole series of graffiti of men's heads all over town called skinheads, which I finally discovered were the work of one man, who put it all in a book which was in the window of Gallery Apropos near the Kunsthau. Seemed aesthetically pleasing, rather than a total defacement.



Walking along the lake, the sun was beautiful and warm. I noticed that the Poster Awards for 1979 were exhibited outdoors, along the walkway, among which was a poster advertising the work of Jochen Gerz which was exhibited at the Museum in Luzern.

I went to see Fellini's new film, *La Città delle Donne*, which necessitated getting an assigned seat. There was also an intermission, but what was more interesting was that the Italian film had subtitles both in French and in German. That's Switzerland for you! On the way back to my room, I witnessed a quiet demonstration of young people who were demanding funding for a space for rock concerts. This time it was a quiet demonstration, later I was to read about violent activities and arrests.

Using the train like a bus, Warja and I decided to go to a vernissage in Basle where New York artists were showing, among whom were Karen Shaw, Jon Borofsky and many more. Karen was there, and what a surprise I gave her! The show was a preface to the Basle Art Fair which was to open in two days.

#### LUZERN

On the way to Basle, I stopped in Luzern to visit with Ruedi Schill and his wife, and to see the home of Apropos Alternative Space. I documented the small space in which there has been so much activity. Ruedi is a printer and runs a very large printshop in order to support his interest as an artist and as a gallery director. This is a very beautiful town, and Ruedi and Suzi are marvelous people. I saw his archive of sound tapes and of all the activities of the Gallery, and then a walk through this glorious town before getting back on the train to Basle.

#### BASLE

As I got off the train and went to the tram to get to the Kunstmuseum or Basle Art Fair, I met Ingebor Luscher, a most ravishing photographer and bookmaker, whom I had met in Geneva. With my press card in hand, I visited the Fair before it opened that night and bumped into everybody from Paul Shanley of Art in America to Jim Collins, from David Buchan of Art Metropole to Angela Flowers of London. The Fair is immense, and it was good to see people before the onslaught of the invited guests and press.

Basle is beautiful, situated on the Rhine, and being Swiss, most perfect indeed. The weather here was hot, and after visits to the Kunsthalle (the Italian avant-garde were there in full force) and the Kunstmuseum (all the drawings of Stella, for instance, as well as the sterling permanent collection), I went down to the new Museum of Contemporary Art (the Hoffmann collection) which is five floors of everybody who is making art now—from Nauman to Tinguely, from Merz to Warhol. It is a remarkable collection in a new building along the Rhine in St. Alban-Tal. Yet something is missing—I just can't put my finger on it, but there is some adhesive that is missing. Perhaps it takes some time to jell.

One of the highlights of the Basle Art Fair was the exhibition of Russian Constructivist Women Artists offered by the Galerie Gmurzynska in Cologne. The costumes, which are now in Los Angeles for the Russian Avant-Garde show, are reproductions of originals designed by Popova for various performances, and they were stunning as were the paintings of women such as Popova, Goncharova, Delaunay etc. There was also a retrospective of Austrian films from 1960 to 1980 presented by Stampa, one of the most livewire artists' bookshops in Europe. That night a group of us (Canadians and Americans) went to the beautiful Wenkenpark where outstanding works of 20th century sculpture were set all through this 18th century park, and where Jochen Gerz performed *Welcome Home*, at twilight (close to 9:30 - 10 p.m.) I met the students from the University of Freiburg who had invited me to speak at their Book-Object show and we went out for beer and saw Basle by night, a mysteriously beautiful town on the Rhine. Bumped into Dennis Oppenheim, who had also installed a very large "machine" in the middle of the park.



ROBIN PAGE: Latest work at Basle Fair

## FREIBURG

Luckily, I drove into Freiburg with Jochen Gerz, and crossing the border allowed us to see the difference between Germany and Switzerland. I was to cross this border many times in the next few days. The Buch-Objekte show was to open that evening, but we got a glimpse before all the activities. It was beautifully installed, and it was good to start meeting the students who had worked so long and so well to put this whole thing together. At the opening was Hans Sohm, Ulises Carrion, Hubert Kretschmer from Munich, Mirella Bentivoglio (critic and lecturer on book objects from Italy, Ulli Bernhardt, director of the Künstlerhaus in Stuttgart, and many more. Lots of food and wine were served in the large conference space near the University Library while university students were demonstrating in the streets of Freiburg against the destruction of buildings in the middle of town without notice (since there is a housing shortage in Freiburg). This was southern Germany, and it has a feeling of still another country.

After speaking French, English and Italian in Geneva, English and Italian in Zurich, and any language you please in Basle, I found myself in southern Germany, in a beautiful town from every point of which you can see the Black Forest. Its lacy-spired Cathedral is most beautiful (especially at night), and its Rombach Center, a most unusual bookstore. First opened as an automobile showroom (for Mercedes), it now combines automobiles in the windows with books everywhere else. It is truly impossible to believe, but there is the Rombach Center (cars & books). There were books on display there for sale—multiples—in collaboration with the students' bookshow. The program for the morning was to make wax books with Waydelich from Strasbourg, who does that as an art piece. I took *Bonjour Tristesse* by Françoise Sagan, from my host's collection of books. I thought it was for a good cause. You were to put some kind of document inside the book before binding it for dipping into this deep rich cordovan-colored red wax. You dip the book several times, the string serving as a handle for dipping as well as for binding. All of us were quite pleased with our products.



To Basle by car again to discover all the artists' bookshop owners together at the Ecart stand: Bernard Marcellin from Post-Scriptum in Brussels, Ruedi Schill from Apropos, John Armleder himself, and yours truly. In addition, Dr. & Mrs. Marvin Sackner (collectors of concrete and visual poetry) passed by, as well as Hubertus, Ulises Carrion, and Hubert Kretschmer (from Produzentengalerie in Munich) who has put on two artists' book shows. After a strenuous day of looking at more art, and meeting more people, we returned to Freiburg while watching a spectacular lightning storm—five minutes after arrival in Freiburg, we had the most remarkable hailstorm with baseball-size hail, which did not melt right away. That night we had a marvelous dinner in the country, exchanging book conversation and art with Yugoslavians, Germans and this American.

The Basle Art Fair opened on 11 June, and I was in Freiburg from the 13th on, commuting back and forth to Basle. But Freiburg also has much to offer, being small enough to see the Black Forest from any point in the city. And what can you say about the Black Forest! The long walks, the endless vistas, the blue skies, the deer and fawn, the many shades of green! Then there is kirsch, brautsalat, marvelous torte and great white wine—oh, such wine, and it is local and not exportable! I even went into a barn and saw how cows are milked automatically. City girl that I am, it was an amazing feat to watch! On top of which, the milk is conducted through tubes to another building, where the heat that is drawn from the milk is then recycled to heat the water for the farmhouse! Now that is energy-saving indeed!

At a supper given by the students to celebrate the opening of the exhibition, Mirella Bentivoglio and I were honored guests. I decided to bring my rubber stamps from California and every one of the students made impressions and I took orders to send them a large box of rubber stamps as a gift. The Renaissance has returned for Rubber Stamps on the Rhine! From that supper on, we had Spargel (White Asparagus) everytime we were to meet again. It was the height of the season for this delicacy, and this is the way the Germans celebrate, and why not!

Back in Basle on the last day of the Fair, I visited with Walter Storms who had visited Artworks in Venice earlier in the year. He runs an art gallery in Munich, and also distributes fine artists' books. I also visited the studio of Regula Huegli, where she makes envelopes, postage stamps, and now beautiful handmade books, one-of-a-kind painted books oftentimes reworked from existing books which she finds in flea markets, etc. I learned how she approaches the books she finds and how the book allows her to rework it, telling her how and why. Later Thomas Wessel, the catalyst for the bookobject show, and the rest of the group retired to Cafe Hasenburg in Basle to eat rosti (marvelous potato dish) and then taking the long road through the Black Forest, we saw a blue and pink sunset, a town famous for its pretzels, and Tutti Schlemmer's house, as well as the legendary village where Dr. Faustus was said to live. It would not be bad to live in those villages today—watching the mist accumulate above the hills of the Black Forest, a mystical ambience which creates a magic world.

I lectured to the students on 18 June about object books in America, having brought with me hundreds of slides.

Later in the evening, I was to lecture on artists' books to a larger public. Afterwards, the students who had sat around the table in the kitchen cleaning spargel (white asparagus) for hours were able to serve spargel and kartofflen (potatoes) with a marvelous Hollandaise sauce prepared by my host to a large party—we ate and we drank until 4 a.m. I truly hated to leave Freiburg, for it had a spirit and a sense of hospitality and warmth that I had never anticipated. I want to return, and the Black Forest calls me. I felt part of an extended family, and I know I must return.

## STUTTGART

Met by Angelika Schmidt, mail artist extraordinaire, I talked mail art for a couple of hours before walking through Stuttgart, hearing a Carl Orff concert in Schillerplatz, attending a Souvenir & Jeans Show where souvenirs collected by the citizens of Stuttgart were put on display from all over the world. I then lectured at the Amerika Haus on artists' books to an audience in which Hans Sohm was a part.

Stuttgart is a new city, having been bombed for the most part during World War II. But it is what it has to offer that is more important such as free openair concerts with good musicians and an incredible sound system, fine museums, good collectors, alternative spaces, performances, and fine galleries.

A walk through the Markethalle in Stuttgart showed that the fruit and vegetables are picture-perfect. In addition, I saw a marvelous exhibition of art by mental patients in the 19th century collected by one doctor who thought this work was important. After seeing this art, I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing new in decorative art, pattern painting, or any other kind of art. It has already been done, and by mental patients at that!

At the Kunstlerhaus (the Artists' Space), a four-story old factory building, we gathered our supplies and then travelled to the Rank Xerox Copy Center (a new one) where we started making pages for a Xerox book (ed. of 9). What we showed the technicians is what can be done to stretch the confines of what the color Xerox machine can do—and they were awe-struck! We enjoyed working together. (\$2.50 a copy, German marks).

We also attended the last performance by Lil Picard, who brought her array of wigs, and talked politics in German, but the performance was sterling. This grand young-old lady of 80 made a hit with her audience, and also with yours truly. Also met Albrecht D., as well as Chris Welby, who makes experimental films.

At the flea market on Saturday, I saw a dress covered with small umbrellas, but it was not the right size. Talked to Max Hetzler in his beautiful gallery space, as well as with Achim Kubinski, who also has a gallery and predicted that most art will be seen through documentation. Then at the Kunstlerhaus, I showed slides of mail art to a small audience. I had the great pleasure, afterwards, to visit a private collection of great note, after which we ate dinner with Heinz Hirscher, one of the artists in the Buchobjekte show and a beautiful dinner it was with spargel (again!) We visited his studio, and this assemblage artist has been doing it for years!



Left to right: Rot, Mayer, Sohm

## SOHM, ROT AND MAYER

The 22nd of June was a stellar day in my calendar, for I was picked up by Hans Sohm and whisked to Markgroningen to spend the day looking at the documents of my immediate past, the Fluxus movement, the Beat Generation, and the rest of the 50s, 60s and 70s. We started with Diter Rot's archives, every piece of paper of which is housed in Sohm's house, even the page proofs of all the books! The works of art are framed by Sohm himself, an amateur carpenter who with found pieces of wood constructs simple frames that please Rot very much.

Fortuitously, Rot and Hansjorg Mayer were to arrive later in the day. Impressions of Spargel and strawberries and cream, and marvelous Bad-Wurtemberg wine well up in my mind, and Fluxus, and talk and talk and talk, and boxes and boxes, and Mr. Information Man himself who formulated the Hans Sohm Arkiv to keep for posterity the documents of the

Fluxus movement, and so much more. Here is a dentist whose rare acumen and keen eye have gathered an archive that is organized, accessible and overwhelming, done with love, with passion, and with a great deal of time and energy.

When Diter Rot and Hansjorg Mayer came over, we sat drinking coffee and eating freshly made strawberry cake with whipped cream in the Diter Rot room, and I was awe-struck! To say that this made my trip would be putting it mildly! I was in heaven, Fluxus or otherwise, and so glad to have been there, if but for a short time.

What struck me in the Sohm collection was the breadth of collecting, as well as the diversification, for there in the basement was a great collection of the Beat Generation—everything he could get his hands on, and the collection is very, very good. It goes to the museum in Stuttgart, which is building a new building designed by the English architect, James Sterling.

## AUSTRIA & ITALY

The train trip was long, the scenery spectacular with snow still on the mountains, the run-off creating falls everywhere, cascades and green forests, small Austrian churches, steam engines, and lots of rain! In Verona, my friends and I went out to eat gorgonzola pizza—che gioia!

Verona is a beautiful town—with or without Romeo and Giulietta. It is a hub of good printing (like the Plain Wrapper Press) as well as fine wine (Soave, Valpolicella, etc.) and has one of the most beautiful squares in the world with its white umbrellas, Piazza Erbe. In addition, there is the tradition of Mardersteig, San Zenso (my favorite church) and the blend of medieval and Renaissance, 17th century and contemporary taste all blended. Surrounded by countryside, Verona also has a river going through it, thus making water an important part of its life, as well as very good wine!

Read a poster and found out I had just missed Alison Knowles, Phil Corner, Sarenco and Franco Verdi's Fluxus concert in Verona by two days. Also saw the elegance of women's fashions, the joy of living exuding from window displays of food, wines, clothes, and sporting gear. Adidas were everywhere in Europe, jeans costs double what they cost in the States. But what made Italy the best of them all for so many people and will remain so is the good food, the food prices being lower than anywhere else, yet the cuisine was excellent most everywhere. In fact, only food was lower than the States. Otherwise, it is hard to beat inflation in Europe.

## VENICE

Since President Carter was in Venice, all confirmed reservations were turned away because of security, so waiting until he left Venice, I then used Verona as my home base and traveled to Venice by train. My first stop was the Biennale, where the Spanish were showing pornography, the Dutch were clouting a political stance as far as artists go, the Belgians had a bit of caricature and surrealist fun, and the Italians looked at themselves from the 70s to the young Italian artists. Canada showed only video, Portugal showed an artist who used ribbon, the Israelis should have avoided this year's exhibition (really bad art), and the Germans seemed to have discovered a new thrust of nationalism. The Marcel Broodthaers room seemed to be outstanding, Kounelis' work was strong, and everyone was talking about the critic Bonito Oliva's stance about these little drawings by these young Italians. At any rate, I proceeded to the Magazzini del Sale (the old Salt Warehouses), winding my way through familiar lanes to see about lunch before going to see the exhibit. And then I bumped into James Lee Byars and entourage eating lunch. What a smashing good time it was, and you can see by the picture that James Lee was at his best. He was giving performances each day in Piazza S. Marco, having printed up thousands of little pieces of paper saying "Be Quiet" which he threw down on the square during the opening of the Biennale.

Hated to leave the luncheon scene, but onward to the Magazzini del Sale, where we saw the young Italians, Germans, and Americans, hinting at what the 80s might hold. The space is beautiful, and the art was far more stimulating and indicative of the decorative, expressionistic



Above, JAMES LEE BYARS

art that is coming out of every country. Met a Swedish gallery director and his wife, friends of Christo, and then we ambled together over to Palazzo Grassi to see the stunning Pop Art show as well.

The next day I returned to Venice to visit the Archives of the Biennale (more in a later issue of *Umbrella*) after which I visited the Balthus show at S. Giovanni Evangelista. There had been a terrific thunderstorm, after which the sun shone brightly and the sky was so very blue making Venice resplendent, as is its fame. After lunch in the open and a quick visit to Piazza S. Marco which was full of tourists, I hastened back to Verona for a dinner in the country with great wine, great food, and great conversation.

Train travel in Italy is so very interesting—they do not run on time for the most part, so if you can gauge that fact with your own timetable, more than likely you can make the train by being late for it. And you meet such interesting people like Australians, Venezuelans, and people from so many other countries, including Americans. And with a Eurail pass, you don't even have to wait in line for tickets, since your red and white pass is sufficient to get on any train in first class.

## BRESCIA

I went to visit Cavellini in Brescia, in his own surroundings. A journalist was coming to interview him for three days, so we had little time except to see his vast collection of mail art—almost 1000 pieces of which 500 are framed and ready to be shown either in a museum or a gallery. In addition, the home is a literal self-historification museum with works about Cavellini and by Cavellini everywhere. The graciousness yet unpretentiousness of the home make it a perfect setting for the amount of art it includes. Brescia, by the way, is the heart of industrial Italy with the steel-making machines and forming machines being manufactured there and sold there. Yet there are Roman ruins, a new museum coming up over the excavation of a Roman city, 17th century villas and townhouses, and medieval churches. A city that hides itself behind its facade, but which has much natural and man-made beauty!

Saw Ken Damy, the photographer for Cavellini, who took me all over Brescia to taste of its beauty. It was a fine reunion, and I got to see the unedited film he did on Cavelli-

ni in California!

For the occasion, mail artist **Bruno Talpo** and his wife came from Bergamo to have lunch with us, and it was a very good time had by all! Besides lunch, we posed for pictures with Cavellini's hat, coat and umbrella.



#### GENOVA

Genova is the home of Mohammed, one of the most outstanding mail artists today, largely because of his network of 12 people for each work, and his use of the color Xerox machine. Mohammed, unbeknown to me, is a friend whom I met at the Arte Fiera of Bologna in 1977, so it was like old home week when we met at the train station. He took me to his studio/home where we lunched and then talked shop for four hours. We looked at his archive, his system of keeping records, and talked about the color Xerox machine, which is in Bologna, for that is the best machine in Italy. (More about Mohammed in a later issue).

But Mohammed is a dedicated, devoted and talented archivist. His registry is precise, his record-keeping takes as long as his execution of the work, and his passion is endless. Even his wife helps him with the Archive. Although we will talk about Mohammed in depth later in the year, he is for real, an Italian whose father was a Turk. His real name is Plinio Mesciulam!

#### MILANO

Betty Danon is also a mail artist, delicate, lyrical and poetic. She has created Rainbowland, a mythical land in which the rainbow is everywhere. She works in a studio near her apartment in Milano, and music is the basis of much of her work. She is a delicate, sympathetic artist whose work has been sent around the world. Dots and lines are the basis of her work, and we will be publishing some of her things in later issues of *Umbrella*.

In Monza, **Nicola Frangione** has an archive of mail art and is preparing an exhibition supported partially by the Comune of Monza, which involves a module prepared by artists throughout the world. He is a dedicated and devoted mail artist, whose work has appeared in the form of books. He too has convinced the Assessore in Monza to support the exhibition of mail art. But of course, the city fathers never felt it was necessary to print up another 200 forms to complete the requests for modules from the international network, so either Nicola must pay for them himself or write to each person with the dimensions necessary to fill the form. At any rate, Nicola deserves credit for doing what he has done up to now.

#### PARMA



As you see, there was a concerted effort to visit mail art archives and extraordinary book archives—as many as I could—within the short time available to me. A visit to Parma was a necessity, since c.d.o. is such an active mail art archive. Nurtured by **Romano Peli** and **Michaela Versari**, c.d.o. is a part of their home, an alternative space, as well as a very beautifully organized archive. The room is lined with boxes, dedicated to artists throughout the world. I saw the one-hundred hand-made book show, which had already been taken down, and the books were beautiful.

In addition, all the mail art that comes in is registered, and is being cataloged slowly and well in English by the couple. It is a labor of love, since they also have jobs and a child. One of the inroads into art and galleries and help in Italy is to get friendly with your local assessor, the "county" official who dictates where the money goes for culture. If you get to know this person, sometimes with great effort there can be a way to get money from the State, but usually it is almost a futile struggle.

Their attempt to catalog their collection, stemming from 1976, is to do it in English and make it accessible to researchers as well. They work assiduously, with a nervous energy that drives them into doing things well.

After a marvelous dinner with Nello Castaldo, Bill Gaglione's cousin and his wife, we all walked through Parma, lit mystically by night, and dropped into the Garibaldi Pub where we bumped into **Tiziano Spatola**, a member of the famous Spatola family and a sound poet in his own right.

## FLORENCE

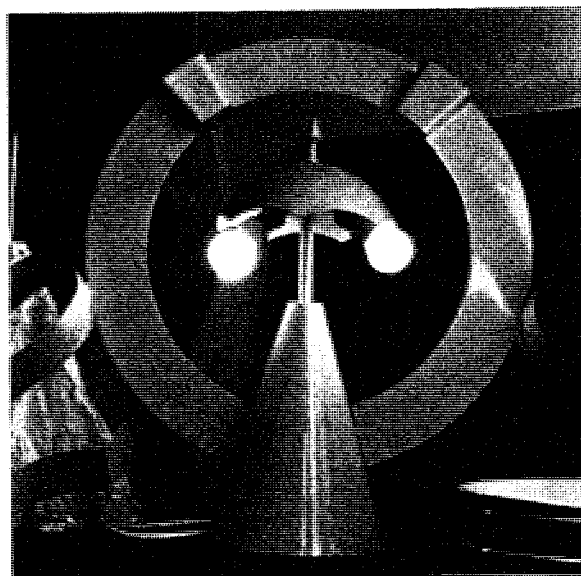
Due to the shortage of time, I had to avoid Bologna which was on the way to Florence, and which is the home of several small publishing firms of artists' books, as well as so many friends (since I used to live there). All through Florence I bumped into old friends, and decided to take in some of the Medici shows, since there were 7 Medici-related exhibitions supported by the Council of Europe. I went to the Palazzo Vecchio, Orsanmichele and Palazzo Strozzi that first day, showing me the influence on the life of Florence, the growth and development of printing and publishing, and the sensitivity toward drawing during the Medici era. Then I walked over to Zona, where Massimo Nannucci was having an opening, and where I met Giuseppe Chiari, U.F.O., and Maurizio Nannucci among others.

Zona is an alternative space nurtured by eight artists in a cooperative effort. The archive of Zona is housed in Nannucci's studio, and contains artists' books, sound poetry, concrete and visual poetry, besides general books from the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, Maurizio tries to keep abreast of all current magazines and journals. Maurizio Nannucci is one of the most creative artists of Italy, using the printing press to print magazines and books, dedicated in building his archive as much as making art.

That night, we went up to the Villa Romana to see German experimental films by artists in the community as well as a small film by Massimo Nannucci.

The next day I tried to cover the rest of the Medici exhibitions which cover science & technology, spectacles and shows, religion and religious art, astrology, magic and alchemy, as well as architecture. All of these exhibitions were housed in newly renovated, restored and cleaned exhibition spaces. The planning of this must have taken years, but it came off so well. As I walked through the streets of Florence, the stones of Florence spoke to me of my past, of growing up in Florence in the late 1950s, of progress (not always positive), of this country so rich with beauty and sensitivity, and yet in turmoil economically. It taught me what living to the fullest means, and as I visited Villa Gamberaia, a former Medici villa which had been bombed during World War II, but was now restored to its former brilliance by the present owner Marchi, I looked over the terraced vineyards and the silver olivegroves, over to the city of Florence and saw this jewel of a city from a distance golden as its Renaissance, still thriving, still sharing its beauty with the world. Drinks with Sir Harold Acton, Dennis Hill, the portrait painter, and a couple of San Franciscans with our hostess, Alessandra Marchi, seemed to be a fitting end to the day, with a formal Italian Renaissance garden to look down upon.

At the Medici-Riccardi Palace, I saw a marvelous exhibition of the influence of the Medicis on spectacles and theater, after which I went to the Laurentian Library where I saw the two codexes of Leonardo found in Spain, Piero della Francesca's theory of Perspective (original), Vesalius' tome on Anatomy, the great early printed works of the Renaissance in science, the wonderful botanical surveys, the history and growth of cartography, perspective, etc. all in the science and technology part of the Medici exhibition.



UMBRELLA LAMP designed by U.F.O., Florence

A visit to a few more friends, and then back to Milano to have a reunion with Augusto Concato and Vittore Boggieri, book and performance artists, and then to pack and leave for Holland.

## TRAIN TO HOLLAND

The 13-hour trip through Lake Como (full of sunshine) and Switzerland in all its beauty was an aesthetic experience. Switzerland remained self-satisfied, calm, expensive, and so-so perfect, where even the trains run on the split-second! Travelling from Basle over the border to Germany, I decided to treat myself to lunch on the train, saying goodbye to Basle, goodbye to Freiburg, goodbye to the Black Forest, woodlands and hillsides, and the Rhine. Along the Rhine, we travelled in the rain, but the pleasure boats were all along the Rhine from Koblenz and Düsseldorf with castles high on the hills around it.

Rain, cool weather, and a grayness were representative of the summer of 1980. Only I had been blessed with only one full day of rain (in Florence) and only one other (in Amsterdam). The trip seemed magical to me!

## AMSTERDAM

Amsterdam proved to be full of friends. Ulises Carrión and Aart van Barneveld, of course, since I stayed with them and talked shop for hours. But then there was Hetty Huisman (Void Distributors) and Flavio Pons and Claudio Goulart (Brazilian artists who live in Amsterdam), Raul Marroquin and Martha Hawley (video and printing) and so many more.

I visited the Stedelijk again and saw a lamp designer from the 1920s who designed an umbrella lamp. Visited the new quarters of Art & Project, as well as Stempelplaats (the rubber stamp gallery and emporium run by Aart van Barneveld, as well as the new Other Books & So Archive.

The new Other Books & So Archive is a meeting place for artists and researchers alike, for Ulises has gathered all his mail and his artists' books and organized them by artists. There you can leave mail for people and have them pick it



up. The walls are lined with the boxes containing correspondence of artists from around the world, as well as their artists' books and artists' publications—all are together. Ulises is open from Wednesday through Saturday, 2 - 5 p.m. and is situated along a canal, which makes it quiet and comforting. He is busily cataloging all the works, and is trying to arrange for expansion especially for oversize works. Since his mail adds to the archive each day, this is a continuous project. The latest hot-out-of-the-mailbox additions are available to see before he includes them in the boxes. As he says, his archive is his medium.

Art Something (formerly Other Books & So) is still thriving now under the aegis of Karen Kverenes, an American artist. Books still pour in there, exhibitions of exceptional art still abound, and it is still a meeting place for artists. It too is open in the afternoons.

A visit to Gallery A run by Harry Ruhé was a treat, largely because Harry has been quite perceptive about books made by artists and has a selective but interesting collection of books for sale. In addition, he works very hard at having artists showing that are important and not well recognized by institutional systems. It was a good visit.

In addition, a visit to the Museum Fodor showed me that this showcase for Amsterdam artists indicated that a great many Amsterdam artists are foreigners. Videotapes were being shown by Italian, American, English, Columbian and other foreign artists. The Fodor is a showcase for art made by Amsterdam artists, and this video show was fascinating.



UMBRELLA LAMP, Willem Hendrik Gispen, ca. 1930

A visit to Haarlem to visit the Franz Hals museum proved to be a delight in this quaint town where history has stood still, except for some contemporary murals. There also was an exhibit of Kathe Kollwitz, so it made the trip doubly worthwhile. Later in the day, in Amsterdam, I asked a policeman directions, he indicated to me to get in the car and took me to the address I wanted. Only in Amsterdam would that happen, believe me!

Leaving Amsterdam is always difficult, even in the rain, but leaving Europe was even more difficult this time. It is good to look at yourself and your country from a different point of view. Europe is in flux, economic and spiritual, and from an art point of view, we have an interesting combination of factors not blending well—painting is back with a flourish (in the market) and new art is in transition. The 1980s only begin in 1981, I say, and only with time will we be able to see what transpires in the art world.

In conclusion, the trip was magical, and oddly enough as I got on the plane in Amsterdam, there was a young lady taking a census of those who answered her questions about how one got to the airport, at what time did one leave, why were we taking that flight, etc. A replay of the New York flight. Was it all a dream? Were the six weeks just a mirage, or did I really meet all those people, enjoy their hospitality and generosity and warm friendship? Not only is the Museum the Mailbox, but Friendship and Community come from the Mailbox.

Just a tip or two. Remember, if you travel, write ahead to let your friends know you are coming. Learn a couple of languages, for it helps so very much. English isn't the only language in the world, and how wonderful to be able to understand a culture through its language! And by all means, get a copy of *Art Diary*, a Flash Art publication for \$10.00 or 10,000 lire, because it is a remarkable tool, even though it has its defects. It has the names and addresses of artists, hotels, photographers, restaurants, galleries, etc. It is the handy guide to the contemporary art world. It became a very good friend.

As a verbal base, I see my trip using "verse" as a springboard:

adverse—the weather  
 perverse—some of the art at the Venice Biennale  
 diverse—the depth of Hans Sohm's Archive  
 subversive—Bonito Oliva's critical push for the Italian avant-garde  
 conversation—what Europeans do so well  
 controversy—Italian critics have it all the time  
 reverse—the direction I would like to be in right now  
 back to Europe  
 diversion—my trip to Europe this summer, mixed with solid work and reporting!

—jah

All the archives visited by the Editor of Umbrella will be profiled in future issues.