

MAIL ART NETWORKING HAS CHANGED MY LIFE: 20 Years of Mail Art Mekka Minden

by Peter Netmail

I got infected with mail art by English poet David "Don" Jarvis, when we were reading our poetry each at the National Poetry Society in London. He tried to sell me a few pages of congratulations from all over the world, on the occasion of the 90th birthday of "Quercus Robur", i.e. the Latin name for the oak tree, which faces his color-xerox-equipped council flat. Innocent me bought those photocopies for a horrific sum to help "make up for the postage". No other phrase has ever influenced my life more. I used the fascinating participants' list for my first mail art call "No War in my City". Off the cuff, it brought me over 400 contributions. Half of them about my theme, the other half "just to be in your catalog" - a picture book which became a classic in the scene, and the first mail art show in Minden's old St John's Church in 1983. There was a whole network of artists out there, connected by the mail, long before the www. These days, we all need extended families. That is one advantage of the network. Or Alcoholics Anonymous, as my favorite author Kurt Vonnegut says. As long as I shall work isolated and wage-dependent in a late capitalist mass society in a world of wars, there is reason enough to join a global village peer group like mail art with its visions. Mail art is more exclusive to me than Rotary or the Lions Club. And more creative. **The network made me an author, an editor and a family member.**

It had changed my life for the first time, but not for the last time. Whenever a new ability was needed, I had to learn it by doing. Let me tell you how these changes have become an ongoing process, bringing me closer to my ideal of a holistic life step by step, in the sense of Joseph Beuys' definition of art and the artist. I was a businessman, then a jazz musician, then a teacher, but none of these pursuits satisfied my need for stimulation and growth in the way that mail art networking has. So my first mail art catalog was made by a real publisher. He falsely expected profit from it and almost went bankrupt with that, when every participant got a free copy, according to the strict mail art rule. As a result, I had to make the catalog for my next project myself, all by hand: "Big Brother is Watching You" - of course in 1984. My first handmade original book. Collating was worst. And again: a free copy to every participant. And no rejects, the second iron rule in mail art. But also the third rule: no returns, which meant a big increase for my growing archive. Today Angela invests lots of time and energy to keep it up to date, an immense effort daily. The archive represents large parts of one's personal history which one does not want to miss. And I do not only use it to prepare funeral speeches, as

rumor has it. The network made me a publisher and an archivist.

Quite sometimes, however, I am dissatisfied with the vast impersonal mail art trash in the form of a bad copy of a copy of a copy (that has nothing to do with the theme of your project, not to speak of interpersonal communication). In my own catalogs, I am still polite enough to enter every sender's name in the participants' list of each of the projects I do. But the color pages in our catalogs are reserved for serious contributions. There is a need for beauty in mail art. Our common avantgarde form means not only mail, but also art. That does not imply censorship, but a desire for minimum quality. Another source of frustration, in turn, are many documentations that I receive myself as participant: all those years I have contributed my own mail art to other projects. Meanwhile reliability has become an important issue to me. As much as I do love answering other mail art calls, I am often tempted to select those projects that are properly documented, e.g. in real catalogs. Too often one is annoyed about lousy so-called documentations without respect for the artists, if at all they ever arrive in spite of big announcements. **The network made me a mail artist myself and a connoisseur.**

One beautiful contribution to my early peace book especially intrigued me: a large rubberstamped mandala work by German banker Henning "HeMi" Mittendorf. I asked for more and eventually exhibited a whole series of his original works through Cultural Society Wolkenstein, named after the troubadour. I am second chairman today. Many a name behind a postcard in my books came here in the flesh during the following years, with their wives and works, and not only mail art. At our gallery we can bring network art to the public at large. **The network made me a gallerist.**

In the following 20 years I did not only launch a new mail art call about every two years, but I have also curated over 60 (mail) art shows at Café Prütt and then at Culture Centre BÜZ, among them in one year alone Géza Perneckzy from Hungary, Richard Meade from the US, Ruggero Maggi from Italy, and Robert Rehfeldt from East Germany with their own works. Later also Dadi Gudbjornson from Iceland, Hans Braumüller from Chile, Dawn Redwood from England, Reiu Tür from Estonia, the Au Artists Group from Japan, Manuel Montaña from Panama, Migdalia Acosta from Costa Rica, Roland Szefferski from Poland plus the collective send-and-add-to-project "Ovidius" of the six European fe-mail artists Carola van der Heyden, Marlies Mulders, Bogdana Blasewicz, Magda Lagerwerf, Pips Dada, and Edith van Hoef. This gallery work establishes a link between mail art and other contemporary art forms as a point of crystallization, speaking alone of all those who

performed on our stages: Body painting Ilka Juhani Takalo-Eskola from Finland, John Held from the US as Rose Mmutt in an homage to Dadaist Marcel Duchamp, Andrzej Dudek-Dürer from Poland as reincarnation of the famous German painter Albrecht Dürer, Luc Fierens from Belgium reading his peace poetry, Renata and Giovanni Strada from Italy with their "Qui l'ha visto" - performance, Heino Otte with his Pneumatic Schwitters Theatre, and Dr Klaus Groh from the German Literaturium with his Lost Letters performance - just to name a few. I experience mail art as the net structure of culture producing communication. As a mail artist you may choose to sit alone in your own proudly gained anonymous pigeon hole post box, but that pleasure is clearly exceeded by the thrill of becoming a networker by exposing your home sphere to the full personalities behind those funny pseudonyms you have been writing to for years. **The network made me a curator and a host.**

So much the more in 1986, when the network celebrated its first great get-togethers since Ray Johnson's days due to Swiss mail artists Fricker's and Ruch's perseverance. I organized a 10-day-decentralized-marathon in our mail-art-mekka Minden together with the other local mail artist "Joki" Josef Klaffki, as one of many DNC-networking-congresses worldwide. It is in such days that mail art transforms into a new dimension, when we met those creatives in person for the first time whose multifold wonders have been pouring into our P.O. boxes for years. Oldtimers like the Barbots from the US, PLG Pit Grosse from Frisia and Documenta-activist Jürgen Olbrich met here upon new names, faces, and ideas, like Swiss Marcel Stüssi, who thereafter organized his own actions and archive until his untimely death, and Berliner Rolff Wancke, who later sent me one of the first pieces from China. **The network made me a mediator and a focalizer.**

And vice versa, mail artists have organized in their places one-man-exhibitions of my own acrylic paintings, gouaches and drawings and of course: mail art. Among them Lotte Rosenkilde in the old cinema "Den Gamle Biograf" in Denmark, Sonja van der Burgh in her window gallery in Holland, Kum Nam Baik in a classy art gallery in Korea, Walter Goes in an old castle in the former GDR East Germany, State of Being at Oberlin College in the US, Anu and Helena in their Finnish art café near the Polar Circle, and Bill Gaglione in his San Francisco Stamp Art Gallery. My portrait drawings of many networkers appeared in Fagaga's "Face" booklets. We were interviewed for radio, television, and newspaper stories and could spread the word. Vladimir Sutjagin invited me as honored guest to officially open the First Mail Art Exhibition in White Russia's capital Minsk, entitled "Apokalipsis". And for the opening of

Netmail 's 20th anniversary show, Jurij Gik has me recite this text in Russia, and in Russian again. **The network made me an invited migrant artist.**

There are few limits to inventiveness and imagination in the network, whether you "cast your shadow" like H.R.Fricker on the world, or "print your stamp on it" like Robert Rehfeldt. And often you have to go there to understand, which may involve learning new foreign languages. After my early retirement as a college teacher in 1987, I learned Spanish as fifth language and visited Edgardo Antonio Vigo in Argentina. Only there I understood his postcard "Palomo vive" in my first book. It expressed the grief of a father who, though being a judge himself, could not prevent his own beloved son from "being disappeared" by the military junta, clinging still after years to the belief that his son Palomo was alive, somewhere. I understood the message, when he showed me the exhibition of paintings that his son and his fellow art students *would* have painted had they been alive, in reality he had painted them all himself. I had to go and see to understand. Like Clemente Padin had to *show* me how the Uruguayan militia had tortured him. Mail art had gotten him into prison and out of it. "Going there" also meant "joining their projects". Soon invitations in my P.O. box led me to decorating arty shopwindows for Dutch arts teacher Ko de Jonghe 's "symmetry" project in the Netherlands, as well as recycling mail art in the GDR with B.E.R.M. mail artists group. About all that, I started reporting in mail art zines like *Smile* magazine. And found myself very soon, as a studied anglicist, translating articles and forewords by other mail artists, too. **The network made me a reporter, and a commentator, and a polyglottal translator.**

Indeed personal meetings with other networkers call for temporary joint ventures. So I have done and enjoyed more than shaking hands and visiting archives like the archetypal, huge, well-organized one of Guy Bleus in Belgium, in those days above a sex shop opposite the village church. Many a collective collage was created spontaneously on my extensive travels in mail art country between Pawel Petasz in Poland and Ed Varney in Canada, between Sofia Martinou in Greece and Peter Meyer in Sweden, between Jonas Nekrasius in Lithuania and the Larters in Australia, between Graciela Gutierrez Marx in Argentina and Pablo del Barco in Spain, between Julia and György Galantai in Hungary and Tamotsu Watanabe in Japan. And here is a witty joint venture for all booklovers, and that is no April Fool 's joke: every 1st of April between 2 and 4 p.m. your local time is your chance to share your self-baked books with your friends, put them in the internet - and then: eat them all up! Find your nearest event under "ediblebooks". For example in Hamburg at book-and-mail art-lovers

Bartkowiaks' garden party . I find it an honor to see not only my self-baked books , but also the ones that we produced more traditionally piece by piece, in his excellent compilation Forum Book Art. **The network made me an active cul-tourist.**

Most of my envelopes and the books that I've made with Angela by hand each year since 1988 are decorated with self-produced "artistamps" (=artists' postage stamps). They represent an individual alternative to the poststamps of the official national GPOs: everything that the post forgot, e.g. Dobrica Kamperelic in Serbia during the war, whom we commemorated with our Netmail artistamp "Dobrica, are you still alive?" Luckily he survived. Or the "Nude Postman" as which I appeared in Peter Riden's Nudist camp in Canada and in his magazine "the Affiliate" among contact ads and mail art calls, not embarrassed of rubbing shoulders. We made our first stamps on labels for marmalade jars because they are optimal material: empty, perforated, and adhesive. Actually Netmail artistamps started in real museums and libraries, always together with local networkers: our "porto edition" comprises a long series of collaboratively handstamped artistamp sheets, that were indeed made in (and mailed out into the network from) such sounding places like the gallery Uffizi in Florence, the ZDCh Central Artists House in Moscow, the Historic Museum in Tozeur/Tunisia and the Louvre in Paris. In the beginning, this "Mail Art from the Museum" was produced tongue-in-cheek during meetings in the resp. museum cafeterias. Meanwhile we are listed in Jas Felter 's comprehensive *International Directory of Artistamp Creators* together with Ed Varney and John Held Jr, from whom we learned a lot. Today we perforate our own stamps in the basement under the Netmail archive on the 100-year-old cast-iron perforator of the late Joki. **The network made me an artistamp producer.**

In 1987 I invited networkers to come and create an "Open Air Gallery" on 100 large size public billboards all over Minden. Just imagine busy rush hour traffic passing all those big originals instead and in the place of Marlboro ads. That changed quite some viewing habits in my city , and the participating networkers had a strong public response. Among them Emilio Morandi from Italy, Rinus Groenendaal from Holland, Buz Blurr from Arkansas. And fe-mail artist Lotte Rosenkilde from Denmark, who got infected then and here, like later Petra Weimer, who found her love for artistamps in Mail Art Mekka Minden. **The network made me a godfather myself.**

In search for a new medium, I learned to film with semi-professional video equipment, an activity I enjoy with

Angela. In a 20-minute-interview I can convey so many more typical features of an artist and his or her work and works, mimics, gestures and speech in order to estimate the whole creative personality. "Peter 's Endless World Art Video" is now in its 26th volume in PAL VHS. It was shown in US television and got rather popular through features of networking artists like Guillelmo Achille Cavellini from Italy, Daniel Daligand from France, and Pawel Petasz from Poland. **The network made me an interviewer, a cinematographer, a director and a cutter.**

Networking has become for me also a source of very physical challenges. Not only did I have to get used to different climates quickly between -45 Centigrade in Siberia and +45 Centigrade in Australia, but networkers also used my skin: Ilkka Juhani Takalo Eskola from the National Gallery in Helsinki half-drowned us in his Swamp Academy surrounded by thirsty Finnish mosquitoes. And giving up your hair is a sacred act in Japan, where Hair Artist Mayumi Handa shaved my head completely , so that I could transport handwritten peace messages of the present mail artists on the headskin of my skinhead across the international dateline to our mail art friends in Canada. There I had to sit together with Terry Reid in a bathtub filled with jelly and deliver the mail. Buz Blurr from Arkansas portrayed me in "Caustic Jelly" on a very graphic artistamp from a polaroid negative. And Ryosuke Cohen from Japan drew my silhouette as postman in black ink on a large roll of his unique multicolor "Braincell" collages. In Paris I became part of a sculpture of naked people in Galerie L'Usine, and I had to swim through a lake in Finland to deliver mail art to Reima Määkinen. Dobrica Kamperelic's article about this in his book "Umetnost" and Anna Banana's "Netmail story" in the glossy magazine "Rubberstampmadness" brought many new contacts among the readers. **The network made me a body artist and an art object.**

Mail art networking as a style of life lead to superlatives. The highest Netmail art ever was carried by elephants from the Himalayas, when we went tracking in Nepal. The deepest mail art ever we took to the bottom of the Red Sea in Egypt: one hundred laminated documentary cards tied to our scuba diving suits. The northernmost mail art we sent from the North Cape in Norway, the southernmost from the Museum in Ushuaya / Fireland. All of the 2nd year of DNCs = Decentralized Networking Congresses in 1992 we spent completely as art post carriers in historic uniforms. The combination of travel and congress reminded us of Los Angeles mail artist Creative Thing, who transported mail art from and to his local networking friends along the route in the course of running a one-day marathon. What took him one day for 42 kilometers, we did a whole year through

around the world, hit and run. We carried mail art from one congress to the other, e.g. on January 1st by sled in deep snow from H.R.Fricker in the Swiss Alps mountains an envelope beautifully decorated with his artistamps, which we delivered half a year later by highspeed train Shinkansen to Shozo Shimamoto in the Mail Art Museum of Koshienguchi/ Japan. Shozo in turn gave us his AU newsletter for personal delivery to Eat Artist Mike Dyar in San Francisco, whose heavy weight love-story in a photo album we carried to Jose Oliveira in Portugal. We got to transport a kangaroo bone from Australia to Texas, and an umbrella covered with Mickey-Mice images to Mickeymouologist Daniel Daligand in Paris, for his definitive Mickey collection. Within 365 days we delivered over 200 kilos of Net-mail (hence the artists name) by hand in all continents. Each of the 4000 pieces carries the Netmail project artistamp plus registration number, countersigned as proof by the recipient in our big registration book, which has become an original piece of art in its own right. All in all, we saved the participants an estimated \$20,000 US in postage. More important: every single numbered piece of mail art, bearing our own postmark and project artistamp, has become a precious collectors' item by now, since their number is more limited than an official First Day Cover by any GPO. Apart from such philatelist rarities, those 100,000 kilometers made us "imbibe the personal intensity of a circumnavigator", as Clive Phillpot of the New York MOMA observed emphatically at the mail art congress in the New York Hilton. Since nobody ever before thought of and realized such a seeming anachronism in times of electronic communication at your fingertips within a second, this project brought us a World Champion's Title from the publisher of the Guinness Book of Records. Had they checked our data carefully! Most information they got from our biggest book so far: the travelogue "Free Personal Netmail Delivery Service". The foreword was written by the German Post Minister, and we got the Pope's Apostolic Blessing in Rome for Angela and Peter Netmail as a pledge of heavenly favors. You find it in the book (and meanwhile on our URL homepage www.netmailart.de, like the stories of hundreds of networkers who participated as senders and receivers, among them truck drivers and millionaires, arts teachers and railwaymen. And Anna Boschi, who pays homage in her work to Ray Johnson, one of the fathers of mail art almost 50 years ago. Among our participants were also such established art institutions as the Museum of Modern Art MOMA in Manhattan and the Tate Gallery in London. They "keep a foot in the door". You never know, some day mail art might be famous—hopefully before I die. The richly illustrated volume, written in Australian tents, Russian airports, American living rooms, and wherever

there was a bit of time and space, gets now used as a reference book to mail art. Since then, every year a handmade multifunctional volume documents Mail Art Mekka Minden and more, as vivid readers and resource books, full of original artistamps and stempelkunst in true Dada style. **The network made me an artpostman and a world champion.**

Many newcomers got involved during our exhibitions under way, eg. in Split/Croatia and Oberlin/Ohio, and during our slide shows, e.g. in Lebanon/New Hampshire and in Brisbane/Australia, and during our class lectures, e.g. in Hannover/Germany, where Kurt Schwitters was born, and in Naples/Italy together with mail art practicing teachers. And we attended the Serbian congresses in Odzaci in Nenad Bogdanovic's courtyard and in Belgrade. Yes, we went to a country at war, though all other invited 70 mail artists had canceled their participation. I agree to Andrej Tisma's defense of mail art in the face of war. For me, the Serbian mail artists belong to the network family as well as Svetlana Mimica in Croatia. Though in this extreme situation, every aspect of life becomes automatically related to the terrible war situation, including art, mail art, and networking, our friends took great efforts to stay pacifist within the narrow horizons that were set to them. And we carried their mail from one to the other at a time, when there was no official postal service. So the artistic game became obviously political. Like our attendance, in full regalia, at the Court Session with mail artist Michael Duquette's postal workers union in Toronto against the closing of postal stations. Many of my own contributions go to socio-political projects: "Free Nelson Mandela" in the eighties, and ever again "No Nukes in My Backyard" - and in nobody else's either. **The network made me a missionary and a political artist.**

Until 1994 we were on world tour, meeting and filming mail artists from Honduras to India, producing yearbooks "from the backpack" -written in strange places, and printed at night on color copiers in Oxford as well as on a 100-year-old handprinting press in the Tasmanian bush without electricity, full of dadaist "Found Objects" and artistamps. In Nairobi we did a rubberstamp carving workshop with street children in the German Cultural Goethe Institute, in Tanzania with handicapped workers through the Young Artists Association. Byron Black in Djakarta edited our first theoretical book "Networking Discussions", that includes chapters like "Criteria for a Mail Art Archive", "The Role of Women in Mail Art", "The Re-use of Images in the Network", "Computers in Networking", "The Social Impact of Networking", "The Use of Pseudonyms in the Network", "The Role of Networking Magazines", "Should the Network be More Political?", "Why does the Network Not Include

Developing Countries?", "The Ego and the Network", "The Psycho-sociology of the Network", "Can We Influence Society Against Fascism?", "Contact With Established Art Institutions", and "Copyart and the Network". **The network made me a world art traveler and a critic.**

Remember that essential phrase at the beginning of my personal mail art history? "I must make up for the postage". And that is getting harder these days, even if you exploit your own working power whole nights through. Do not even think of making money through networking, rather consider it a valuable investment of your time, money, and energy. Mail art is not something you live on, but you live for. Today I can raise funds for the local presentation of mail art projects, when I manage to interest partners in my city in cooperation. I had to learn the difficult lesson that one needs to cooperate with cultural bureaucracy and the business world, if one wants mail art to be seen and enjoyed *not* only by us few insiders, but in public, as a contemporary art form. I learned from Guy Bleus who presented mail art in a Belgian postal museum and had them edit a beautiful catalog. And I respect Anna Banana's professional fund applications. She deserves a world champion title for that, too. Mind you, the Canadian Arts Council sponsored her research project Proof Positive that Germany is Going Bananas, because we have the highest per capita consumption worldwide. She even got the Banana Seminar supported that she did at our BÜZ including the Masters Degree of Bananology for our participating senior citizens! West German television repeatedly reported about Mail Art Mekka Minden, and it is now officially recognized by the city's tourist office. We all need the courage not to shy away from established media and cultural institutions. To use them without prostituting oneself indeed means often enough the squaring of the circle and needs much awareness. Still I am convinced that "mail art and money don't mix", as Lon Spiegelman phrased it and Clemente Padin legitimately insists - but they may touch. **The network made me an independent fund raiser.**

So the communal project "Art in the City" allowed me to put up 6 telephone booths full of mail art in the pedestrian zone, and a fax artist with a mailart project in the shopfront window of a big department store. Minden Marketing supported these art actions, without censorship, in order to attract consumers back into the city centre. They consider mail art today a feature in Minden's corporate identity. In spite of mutual fears in the beginning, the cooperation proved a successful "win-win-situation" so that in 1998 we could launch a new project on the occasion of Minden's 1200th birthday. The film that shows all mail art

congratulations was presented on a supersize screen in front of Minden's cathedral at New Year's Eve Party.

The next year, we presented artistamps in an original mail art post office at a big local department store, which attracted quite some real postmen and some faithful mail artists from our region Michael Fox, Ruediger Axel Westphal and Ralf Schröder. Then, for our end-of-the-millennium project in the year 2000, Culture Centre BÜZ got enough funds from The Ministry of Cultural Affairs to invite over 20 mail artists who came here to celebrate and perform for a whole week during the opening of the mail art exhibition "Time of Change". In a collaborative collage work, they painted a giant artistamp sheet as part of the UNESCO action Global Mural on a public wall. It links us to a worldwide program of 70 murals for the Agenda 21. They all loved the experience so much that they'd like to come every year again, not least to meet Minden's nightwatchwoman again and hear her proclaim medieval verses in her traditional dress. Mind you, she got into mail art herself and has meanwhile produced her first own artistamp! **The network made me a local-global coordinator.**

I have seen the Mail Art network undergo changing phases, and I have happily joined them. For example I was one of many Monty Cantsins during the Neoist period in the Eighties, writing articles in those *Smile* magazines, that sprang up like mushrooms everywhere in Netland. I experience net-zines and other media as necessary for broad, effective and inexpensive distribution of project invitations and for documenting. I admire the energy of mail artists who edit periodicals like Anna Boschi's "Wild Rabbit News" and Dobrica Kamperelic's "Open World" and Gianni Simone's "Kairan" and Dale Speir's "Opuntia", just to name a few. They give me as much new impulse as new online-zines like "Vortice" from Argentina and Sztuka Fabryka's online forum. That's where the internet comes handy. I use it, but still I love "snail mail" as aesthetic phenomenon and challenge. E-mails easily make me miss the nostalgic time-lagging waiting until you receive a long-expected colorful envelope full of stamps: "This piece has gone through so many hands, before it reached me". And I find it an important chance to express myself not only by orally rendering the stories and histories from my networking pals, but also writing about our art form in mail-art-related magazines, even if they comprise much more than mail art like Judith Hoffberg's "Umbrella" or the glossy "Rubberstampmadness". For I consider constant documentation of the status quo of mail art and our individual histories as important as its new production, before historians from outside can falsify our holistic and

vulnerable realities in order to build up their own theories. **The network made me a critic and a historian.**

After all that seriousness of the DNCs in 1986 and 1992, followed by Vittore Baroni 's collection of "Incongruous Meetings" results in 1998, now the time for fun seems to have started. After all we do not get younger, and I did have to use the archive four times already to write funeral speeches for deceased mail art friends: Germans Heino Otte and Jo Klaffki, Japanese Minoru Nishiki, and Dutch Kees Francke. I see everywhere networkers who want to enjoy life, art, and togetherness. Give them good food, a warm bed, a travel ticket - and a stage to perform, and you will have a great festival full of their energy and ideas, and wonderful memories, too! After all, this means to me a piece of practical peace work, which our fathers generation could not even think of in times of world wars. To me this is a chance to heal, since historically, a German in uniform is a disastrous tradition. It is not only a chance, but an obligation. And as much as organizing festivals, I also love participating. The new millennium has started for me with a series of performance festivals. In Paris, I participated in the Peintre Nato 's Nude Happenings. Live on stage at Geert de Decker 's music and mail art festival in St. Niklaas/Belgium, together with my godfather Don, who has meanwhile turned into lovely Dawn Redwood even in his British passport, I had the honor to perform his/her Dada piece as an homage to our mail art ancestor Kurt Schwitters, while I was dressed as lascivious female character "Petra". And John Held co-curated the mail art festival on Korean peace island Jeju, where I played a requiem as Nude Cellist for the victims of the attacks on the World Trade Center. Jas Felter pictured my performance on an artistamp in his "Mraur Post Edition". Morandi organized my participation in the Venice Festival in front of a wall with hundreds of mail art postcards about the Nude Cellist- all these venues in the year 2002 alone. **The network made me a performance artist.**

I wear my postman 's uniform on a blue Netmail postcard, the third in a series of artistamp portrays in annual continuation . The artpostman 's dress has accompanied me as a hallmark through many performances into my 20th year in mail art now. But no reason to fear there is nothing new to come after 20 years of mail art! At documenta 11, the world renowned exhibition of Contemporary Art in Kassel / Germany, that takes place every five years, I distributed in front of Museum Fridericianum hundreds of the postcards as invitations for my Mail Art project "The Postman comes at Low Tide" to an interested international audience. Barefoot again and in the same uniform, I later carried their contributions at low tide, accompanied by several local

artists, through the North Sea across mudflats and salty tideways to small German island Hallig Süderoog, two hours off the coast. It is inhabited only by thousands of seagulls, a dozen sheep, one horse, and one friendly human couple of coastguardmen, who were very pleased to have all those colorful mini-artworks delivered personally, though they had never known mail art before. They put them on display among the cakes for their visitors. Through interaction with persons in the public domain, I try to keep the network open to many sides. If you want to see the Mail art collection yourself on Süderoog, hire the official local part-time-postman as a guide - to make sure you return before high tide! In this project, local and global aspects were interlinked again through the combination of two art forms of today: mail art and performance. The postcard + the mail art project + the performance + the book: **the network made me a synesthetic artist.**

To sum this all up, Geert de Decker asks me why I love mail art. My answer: because it feeds my wife, children and grandchildren well after tax and postage, because it is an easy pastime between the hardships of my life, because it fills me with spiritual growth in sleepless nights, because it fills my archive with handmade valuable original art works from everywhere, because they are all exactly about my project themes and arrive long before the deadline, because the mail art family of polyglottal cosmopolitans welcome me at their doorsteps any time, because they are all enduring and tolerant vegetarian non-smoking peace workers, because mail art floods my P.O.box with documentary catalogs that include my works in color and in full size, because it secures me fame in art history and opens the biggest museum doors for me, because it has deeply befriended me with all postal workers in my city, because it is easy to explain to newcomers and to journalists and to my mother, because I prefer licking stamps to any other indoor activity and any other outdoor activity, because I love bad photocopies and bad English from all over the world, and because I truly appreciate new creative spellings of my name and address twice weekly. You see: **the network made me a satirist.**

As abundant and attractive as all these abilities seem that you may acquire through networking, take my advice after 20 years: do not overdo it, rather develop your own biography in the network at your own pace. I have all these options today to choose from, but not to practice them all at the same time. Guy Bleus described the vicious circle. The more mail art you do, the more you get, especially new invitations, and there is always more projects than one individual can join. In the nineties already, I found in Ashley Parker Owen 's wonderful "Global Mail" publication more than 700 (!) running projects listed simultaneously,

including "audio" and "gender". If you try too hard, you might end up like me with a nervous breakdown. When I thought I would never be able to open my own mail again, not to speak of sending some myself, it was Angela and networker Ignazio Corsaro from Italy with his wife who visited me in the psychiatric ward in 1994, where I experienced detox and recovery. They made me feel like a human being again. Eventually I got back into life and the network. I knew that I had made it when my underwater umbrella linocut motif appeared on the cover of Judith Hoffberg's "Umbrella" magazine - a souvenir from occupational therapy. My personal mail art story continues. I keep learning from my networking friends and others in personal interchange. For the future I plan new mail art performances, e.g. as magician "El Magnifico". And recently I attended a clowns'seminar with Patch Adams - both attractive ideas to me. With pleasure I will perform them in Belgrade soon, nothing about the war, but some new ideas, "after the war at 5p.m." as the brave soldier Schweijk used to make appointments. This June, from under Dottore Tiziana's poe-tree in Mestre / Italy, I sent my congratulatory verses for the 110th birthday of Quercus Robur to my meanwhile transgendered mail-art godmother, a stamp with an oaktree on the envelope. And I still feel as a member of the family: in September our Euro-Art-Festival takes place at Culture Centre BUEZ in Mail-Art-Mekka Minden with many a friend from Netland on the stages of old St. John's Church, and with the original self-made Euros from still many more mail-artists framed on the wall. Motto "Make your own Euro" - as a(critical) comment on Europe and its new money. Of course, every participant gets a free documentary book after the festival, which contains a picture of his / her work in color.

And if you want to join the next project, send your congratulations for "20 Years of Mail Art Mekka Minden", postcardsize only, in color, free technique, until 20-03-2003. No nonsense please. Your card will become part of the Netmail archive, and it will be reproduced in the next Netmail Yearbook at the end of the year 2003, in a handmade limited edition again, full of dada, poetry, painting, graphics, artists postcards, ATC artist trading cards, faxart, theory, reports, and of course: mail art. This is a mail art call.

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ART READER

ARTnews for May-June contains a narrative guide to all the art sections of Manhattan, Brooklyn, Chelsea, Soho, Lower Manhattan, as well as a survey of major architects on what Lower Manhattan should look like.

Art papers for July/August includes an interview with the curator of documenta 11, Okwui Enwezor, a discussion of the Cedar Bar, his new film by Alfred Leslie, and an in-depth look at Bruce Mau's Life Style.

The May/June issue featured an article about the Surrealism of Mona Hatoum, packaging foreignness.

The *Circuits* section of the **New York Times** on 23 May 2002 is dedicated to Digital Photography.

The Travel Section of the **New York Times** on 5 May featured an article by Bob Tedeschi, the Cyberscout, who feels that the electronic book is getting easier to use, especially for travelers. Read it and don't weep! It's just a phase.

"Artist at Work: Sarah Sze" was documented in the **NY Times** for 12 June 2002, showing how she assembles totems of a disposable culture.

"Is the Go-Go Guggenheim Going, Going..." by Deborah Solomon in the **New York Times Magazine** for 30 June 2002 discusses Tom Krens and his ambitious new museum building, but his forgetting about the art.

Mel Gussow writes about Miranda Carter, biographer of "Anthony Blunt; His Lives": (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), covering not only his life as an art historian of great note, but also as a spy for the Soviet Union. **New York Times**, 9 July.

"Not Going by the Book" was an article about Book Arts teacher Marcia Moore, who guided her students to create a unique, spiral-bound yearbook using stamps, art papers and hand decorated paper, rubberstamps, collage as well as a deck of cards, dice, and for those who ordered before the book was finished, a magic potion packet tucked inside. This all was done at Santa Monica's private, highly progressive