MAIL ART

Opening
Wednesday September 12, 2018

The post-Fluxus activities of the Genevan artists' group and the Ecart gallery/publishing house have found, since 2017, a site of re-emergence, thanks to a partnership between MAMCO, HEAD – Geneva, and the Print Room of the Musée d'art et d'histoire—and the complicity of John M Armleder. The museum space devoted to Ecart provides the possibility to show the ongoing inventory process, reactivate works from the 1970s, and host artistic projects or performances.

The current exhibition, stemming from Ecart's archives, presents a series of works and documents associated with Mail art, a system of postal communication set up by artists as an alternative to institutions and galleries. Letters, collages, and editions, but also stamps and artists' books, thus circulated among an informal, international network, whose paternity is often attributed to the American Ray Johnson (1927–1995). His exchanges with the Canadian David Zack (1938–1995), which are presented here, attest to a desire to desacralize and democratize art works through Mail art.

In the 1970s, the Ecart gallery became a place of exchanges and encounters for Mail art practitioners. In 1974, David Zack produced the *CV Nut Art Show*, an exhibition in which he presented his abundant correspondence, accompanied by a catalogue in the form of an envelope. The gallery's program also featured other correspondents, such as the American Anna Banana (*1940) or the Hungarian Endre Tót (*1938)—for whom Mail art provided the possibility to elude the censorship of the Eastern Bloc. Finally, the Ecart group was invited to present a project at the Venice Biennale in 1976, where it invited dozens of artists from the entire world to send in their contributions using post cards.

These postal exchanges were also opportunities to use and develop rubber stamps, thus allowing the artists to parody bureaucratic practices. In 1974, in an attempt to draw up a repertory of this phenomenon, the French-Canadian artist Hervé Fischer (*1941) published an anthology, which he presented during an exhibition tour. Fischer's visit to Geneva encouraged the Ecart group to produce with him a second volume of newer rubber stamps. As their production had now become exponential, this work was never to be completed, even if a volume of 310 pages, presented here on pallets, was actually printed.

The exhibition gathers together these different projects, thus reconstructing a fragment of Zack's show, displaying a series of artists' rubber stamps, contributions by Tót, and a documentation on the *Venetian Tools Project*. At the end of the exhibition, the book "Tampons d'artistes. Volume II" will be bound and distributed.

This exhibition has been organized by Lionel Bovier and Elisabeth Jobin. It is part of the research project "Ecart. Une archive collective," conducted by HEAD – Geneva, in partnership with the MAMCO, whose objective is to valorize and index the Ecart Archives.

Ecart's archives website
www.archivesecart.ch

—HEAD Genève

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EXHIBITION VIEWS

Exhibition view
Photos Annik Wetter–MAMCO, Geneva

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