

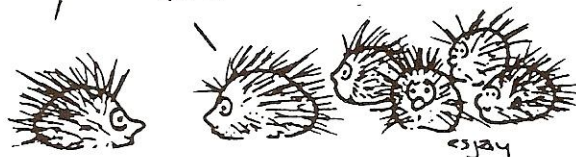
# OPUNTIA

## 44.1B



WE NEARLY HELD  
IT THAT TIME.

YES BUT NEXT TIME you  
GO ON THE BOTTOM.



ISSN 1183-2703

**OPUNTIA** is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIA's are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, and x.5 issues are perzines.

**COVER ART CREDIT:** Steve Jeffery and His Amazing Hedgehogs reside at 44 White Way, Kidlington Oxon OX5 2XA, England. Performances twice nightly during the season, matinees weekends and bank holidays. Tickets at the door.

**I ALSO HEARD FROM:** Dianne Bertrand, Guy Miller, John Hertz, Chester Cuthbert, C.F. Kennedy, Ken Cheslin, Rodney Leighton, Harry Andruschak, Karen Johnson, Joseph Major, Lloyd Penney, Eric Lindsay

## ZINE LISTINGS

by Dale Speirs

[The Usual means \$2 or \$3 cash, trade for your zine, or letter of comment on a previous issue. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable around the world.]

**The Millennium Atom** (L3/US\$7 cash from Ken Cheslin, 29 Kestrel Road, Halesowen, West Midlands B63 2PH) Large anthology of artwork of the late Arthur Thomson. His fillos appeared in SF fanzines for decades. This collection shows the good quality of his work, somewhat disjointed by lack of context or background information; it would have been nice to have some biographical data with this. The artwork ranges from fanzine covers to title heads to fillos.

**Where I've Been #2** (\$1 from Mike Cormen, 1995 Stewart Avenue, Courtenay, British Columbia V9N 3H8) Mini-zine with commentary on trying to communicate emotions with words, making an acquaintance realize that if you read anarchist periodicals you are not therefore a bomb thrower, individual responsibility making a difference, and other topics. More thoughtful than most zines of this class.

**Tortoise #6** (The Usual from Sue Jones, Flat 5, 32/33 Castle Street, Shrewsbury SY1 2BQ, England) Perzine with accounts of moving house, eating a fish, colouring games, letters, and reviews.

**Amapra #9** (The Usual from Guy Miller, 2951 Archer Lane, Springfield, Ohio 45503-1209) Small apazine with an account of the life of a redbud tree in Miller's garden and its death at the hands of the power company. Also a furniture fable from Scott Crow.

**The Geis Letter #67** (US\$1 from Richard Geis, Box 11408, Portland, Oregon 97211-0408) Newszine about conspiracies ranging from TWA Flight 800 shot down by a U.S. Navy missile to FBI escapades in the aftermath of Waco. Lots of SF reviews and letters of comment.

**Historians Anonymous #6** (US\$2 from Scott Garinger, Box 321, El Segundo, California 90245-0321) Cut-and-paste format of various contributions and clippings. Best piece is a consideration of King Charles II's interest in chemistry and how it affected the development of science.

**What I Did On My October Vacation** (\$2.50 from Garth Spencer, Box 15335, Vancouver, British Columbia V6B 5B1) This chapbook is a fundraiser for the Canadian Unity Fan Fund,

a travel fund to send a western Canuck fan to Convention (the national SF convention) when it is in the east, and vice versa. This year Spencer set what will probably be the record for travel at CUFF's expense, flying from Vancouver to Halifax. Once there he then had to take a six-hour bus ride to Fredericton, New Brunswick, where Convention 19 was held. The Maritimes have always been a black hole in Canfandom, as its participants don't mix with the rest of the country and have developed oddities in con-running that strike a come-from-away as peculiar. An interesting look at alien territory.

**The Thought #116** (The Usual from Ronald Tobin, Box 10760, Glendale, Arizona 85318-0760) Not the Millennium issue, which of course is not until 2001 and was probably 1997, but the content ignores Y2K mostly in favour of rants, American politics, dreams, the decline of language, and some reviews.

**Challenger #10** (The Usual from Guy Lillian, Box 53092, New Orleans, Louisiana 70153-3092) Not pleasant reading in this issue as the Columbine shootings are the main theme. Several accounts by writers about their harassment in school back when, and accounts by non-conforming students in school now about what they have suffered. Some case reports by Lillian, who is a defense barrister, miscellaneous articles, and lots of letters and reviews.



**The Press Kit - Summer 1999** (\$20 annual dues from Edmonton Small Press Association, Box 75086, Edmonton, Alberta T6E 6K1) A new non-profit zine distro and library, with news and notes, and the philosophy of postering for events in the face of the enemy (the By-Laws Officer enforcing the no-posters prohibition on city streets).

**Sugar Needle #11** (The Usual from Phlox Icona, 1174 - 2 Briarcliff, Atlanta, Georgia 30306) Devoted to candy; with particular emphasis on weird and wonderful obscure brands of candy. This issue's theme is time-honoured chocolate.

**Probe #108** (The Usual from Science Fiction South Africa, Box 781401, Sandton 2146, South Africa) Clubzine in card covers. The usual reviews and letters of comment, but mostly taken up by short stories. Not the usual bad fan fiction, I hasten to add; the South African writers are steadily working their way to the forefront.

**Numero #6** (DM5.00 from Wilfried Nold, Eppsteinerstr. 22, D-60323 Frankfurt am Main, Deutschland) Very nicely produced mail art zine in card covers. Multilingual, anglophones will have no difficulty. Articles on the history and future of mail art, accounts of individual projects, and lots of project listings. Well recommended.

**Olaf #3** (L2 or US\$5 from Ken Cheslin, 29 Kestrel Road, Halesowen, East Midlands B63 2PH, England) 82-page anthology of crudely-drawn cartoons about a Viking who shows up everywhere and everywhen. The humour ranges from laugh-out-loud to just a wry grin. I'm not prepared to condemn the crude artwork, because modern zines generally have cartoons just as bad in technical quality but without the humour to redeem them.

**File 770 #132** (US\$8 for five issues, from Mike Glyer, 705 Valley View Avenue, Monrovia, California 91016) Newszine of SF fandom. Obituaries, who did what to whom, fan funds, awards, letters, and convention reports. Also a dispute about the 100 Best lists that are plaguing us, an unfortunate consequence of the millennial madness afflicting western society.

**FOSFAX #196-#197** (The Usual from Falls of the Ohio SF and Fantasy Association, Box 37281, Louisville, Kentucky 40233-7281) Microprint running to 86 pages. Lots of extended book reviews, convention reports, local American politics, fan feuding, and 43 pages of letters. An full evening's reading for certain.

**Bottle-Fed #7:** (US\$3 from Ann S., Box 260346, Madison, Wisconsin 53726) Fiction, collage, rants, and poetry.

**Popular Reality V436#2** (US\$1.50 from Susan Poe, 1116 Shepard Street, Lansing, Michigan 48912) Newsprint tabloid with cut-and-paste ads, documentation about seizure of a videotape by British Customs, Marxism (Groucho, that is), short fiction, and the trade-off between security and freedom.

**Parakeet #4-#7** (The Usual from Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7HA, England) Single-sheet newszine from Claire and Mark, who are the fannish equivalents of Dave Langford, assuming he is a bisexual schizophrenic with two houses. Published for SF conventions, with reports in succeeding issues from Winchester (England), Australia WorldCon, Croydon (England, not the Australian one), and Novacon (somewhere in England despite all the Scandinavians). Jolly good fun.

**Psyche Out: Voci Ai Confini Del Mondo** (The Usual from Silvano Pertone, Via Gallesi no. 20/32, 16163 San Quirico, Genova, Italy) Multilingual anthology of essays and art on the forthcoming third millennium. A better view than what we've been getting from the newspaper Sunday supplements.

**MarkTime #59** (The Usual from Mark Strickert, c/o John Sally, 2891 Canyon Crest Drive #58, Riverside, California 92507) Perzine playing catchup with diary remarks and letters of comment, prior to a move from Illinois to California.

**Thyme #127** (The Usual from Alan Stewart, Box 222, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 8005, Australia) SF genzine with publishing news, author interviews, convention reports, and letters of comment.

**Southern Fandom Confederation Bulletin V7#5** (The Usual from Julie Wall, 470 Ridge Road, Birmingham, Alabama 35206-2816) Clubzine with news of SFdom in the southern USA, letters of comment, and convention reports from the Australian WorldCon.

**Never Quite Aboriginal** (The Usual from Christina Lake, 12 Hatherley Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 8QA, England) A 56-page account of Christina's trip through Australia and New Zealand, part of her more extended round-the-world trip. People, places, SF conventions, scenery, photos of people, all quite readable.

**Vanamonde #318 to #332** (The Usual from John Hertz, 236 South Coronado Street #409, Los Angeles, California 90057) Single-sheet apazine, but issued weekly, so a month's worth or a quarterly's worth is equivalent to a regular zine. Commentary and letters on just about every topic in the alphabet, with an SFish slant.

**Twink #15** (The Usual from E.B. Frohvet, 4716 Dorsey Hall Drive #506, Ellicott City, Maryland 21042) SF fanzine with essays on black characters in SF, consideration of anthologies, book and zine reviews, and letters of comment.

**Dixie Phoenix #19** (US\$3 from Michael Munson, 3888 North 30 Street, Arlington, Virginia 22207) A mixture of short fiction, travelogue, reviews, poems, and recipes.

**The Listening Voice #4** (2 IRCs from the Equi-Phallic Alliance, 33 Hartington Road, Southampton SO14 0EW, England) Psychogeographical ranting against archaeological sharp practice in the matter of St. Catherine's Hill and other artificial mounds built 800 years ago in England. It left me rather unmoved, although this may be my own geographical influence; when you live in a country whose biggest problem is too much geography, it's hard to take seriously the tiny European countries like England where every feature in the countryside is manmade.

## MAIL ART LISTINGS

**Reparation De Poesie's Artist Book #11:** (collectif Reparation de poesie, a/s de Jean-Claude Gagnon, 359 rue Laviguer, app. 1, Quebec, Quebec G1R 1B3) We invite you to participate in the next issue of our artist book. Send 100 original pages or multiple

visual art, mail art, visual poetry, postcards, computer art, copy art.

Maximum size 8.5 x 5.5 inches or 14 x 21.5 cm. No selection made. A copy of the book will be sent to each participant. The theme is free. Deadline is March 1, 2000.

**Mani Art #124:** (Pascal Lenoir, 11 Ruelle de Champagne, 60680 Grand Fresnoy, France) 60 copies of 15 cm x 21 cm artwork or 60 postcards. No black-and-white photocopies. Leave 1 cm margin on longest side. Nicely bound volume of mail art assembling, with the postcards slipped into a pocket. Addresses of the contributors are included as part of the usual "doc to all".

**Dada + 2000:** (Postkunst, c/o Lothar Trott, Turnerstrasse 39, 8006 Zurich, Switzerland) Meditation in Dada; a mail art project. What means Dada for you? Only a word or more ... Please send your very special Dada drawing, stamps, postcard, envelopes, all kinds of Dada mail art. Free technics and size, periodical documentation. Works will make an exhibition, no return. Deadline: 1 April 2000.

**Souvenirs D'enfance Perdu:** (Francesca Maniaci, 4315 Drolet, Montreal, Quebec H2W 2L7, Canada) Please help me by sending your lost childhood memories. Ongoing project, periodical documentation. Maximum size A4.



**Artist Trading Cards:** (Chuck Stake, 736 - 5 Street NW, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1P9, Canada) ATCs are works of art created on 64 mm x 89 mm card stock. They are the same size as hockey trading cards, but the similarity stops here. Cards may depict anything, be 2-D or 3-D, they may be original, a series, an edition, or a multiple. Cards are signed on the back by the artist and, if necessary, an edition number is included. ATCs are paintings, drawings, collages, photographs, rubberstamp works, mixed-media, etchings, found images, recycled works of art, assemblages, etcetera. In effect they are miniature works of art, the only stipulation being that the card fits in the standard plastic sheets that hockey cards are normally stored within. Cards can be traded in person or by mail.

**Collage d'aujourd'hui:** (Diane Bertrand, Art terre, 9109 Deschambault, Saint Leonard, Quebec, H1R 2C6) Mail art collage.

**Stampzine:** (Picasso Gaglione, 450 Taraval Street, #276, San Francisco, California 94116) Edited and published by Picasso Gaglione and friends. STAMPZINE is an assembling collection of rubber stamp art featuring the hand-stamped works of international artists. Anyone wishing to contribute should send 75 hand-stamped copies of rubber stamp artwork on 8.5 x 11 pages. All contributors will receive a free copy.

**Voices At The Edge Of The World:** (Silvano Pertone, via Gallesi 20/32, 16163 S. Quirico, Genova, Italy) The 20<sup>th</sup> Century is ending. The powerful, who have been establishing rules for a long time, are planning a taken-for-granted future for us. They are telling us to carry on, just trying to control our minds and emotions, and to make us forget ourselves and our past. PSYCHE OUT is asking you for your help in order to fight against any kind of false new century celebration, because it's from our roots that we want to start the future. Why don't we try to leave a sign of our presence in the century that we're going to leave? Send us your free musical, graphic, or written message expressing fears and hopes about the future. Your message and a lot of other underground artists' ones will be collected and published as a someone looking beyond self-interest, indifferences, and "HAPPY OBEDIENCE!!" track. I hope to receive your news as soon as possible.

## ALIENS BEAM INTO TOWN

Review of: **Cool Conventioneering** by Astor Gravelle (US\$12.95 from Landwaster Books, Box 3223, Frederick, Maryland 21705) ISBN 0-966298-4-5-4, trade paperback, 122 pages. There have been many guides to SF fandom produced over the years,

mimeographed or photocopied. With the advent of the World Wide Web, my belief is that such guides should move there, since that it the first place a neofan will look for advice. And indeed, sites such as [www.fanac.org](http://www.fanac.org), the Memory Hole, and others will provide assistance. Having said that, there is still a place for a properly printed book such as COOL CONVENTIONEERING.

Gravelle writes from her point of view in comics fandom but the basic principles are the same. Only the details differ from fanzine fandom. The book may seem condescending to a veteran congoer, and reads in places more like a juvenile. Nothing wrong with that, though, given the audience she is aiming for. Gravelle takes the time to guide the neo reader step by step through the very basics of con-going. Anyone who has been to five conventions a year for the last twenty years, was a GoH, works on WorldCon committees, in short, a SMOF/BOF, can skip the first part of the book and go straight to the horror stories about fanboys.

The book has sections on the types of fans, the various activities of a convention, and what constitutes acceptable behaviour. There is a lengthy section on the horrors of fanboys, and, because she comes from comics fandom, the trials and tribulations of artists.

A few minor errors are evident. Gravelle seems to think apas and zines were invented in the 1960s, not the middle 1800s. The book

could have been proofread a bit more. In addition to the usual typos, the text constantly fluctuates back and forth between 'Internet' and 'internet', even on the same page. I trust a subsequent edition, and I hope there is one, will clean up these mistakes.

I suppose the main problem with this book, as with any con guide, is that the people who need it the most are the ones least likely to heed its advice. No fault of the author, for fanboys will not recognize themselves as one of the guilty, and neos will not know of the book unless it gets advertised in all the Websites where they might look for advice. A well recommended book.

## THE ART WARS.

**The Assault On Culture** by Stewart Home (AK Press, 1991, trade paperback, ISBN 1-873176-30-9) An interesting history of those opposing the art gallery system and small-c conservative politics, an often indecisive blend that split more than a few groups when one faction decided they were artists and the other felt politics was the more important.

The book surveys a lineage of groups from COBRA to Situationist International to mail art to Class War, stretching from the post-



WW2 period to the 1980s. The groups follow one another in the belief that Art with a capital A is not something the exclusive ability of a 'genius'. That art is a commodity hardly needs profound essays to demonstrate, as a walk down the art gallery row of any large city will prove. Academics are worse than businessmen in commodifying art. The latter are honest about making money from it, while the former do so indirectly by building careers in learned institutions on the basis of unreadable theses and pretentious exhibits.

The groups that take on the gallery system run a gauntlet of commodifiers waving money or prestige at them on the one side, and the anarchists shouting epigrams and spitting, on the other side. Few reach the far end of the run, most having been seduced by mammon or succumbed to the chaos typical of the average underground group more interested in infighting than reform. Stewart Home shows the progression over the decades of these groups. Some are taken out by police, but most take themselves out of action, leaving behind a trail of zines, letters, and artifacts.

A fascinating read. One single sentence leapt out at me, a highlight of the book, but strangely enough an incidental footnote of Stewart Home on a topic unrelated to the main theme of the book. On page 93 he writes: "*However, the speed with which electronic communications systems operate does serve to pressurize those using them into reducing the time they take to*

*reach any given decision, thus lowering the overall quality of human thought and the rationality of individual choice making.*" This is an excellent summary of the neo-Luddite view of the Internet, ignoring the trivial concerns about hardware and software problems, and focusing on the core of the resistance to the wired world. Usenet newsgroups represent what happens when speed takes precedence over thought.

**The Festival Of Plagiarism** by Stewart Home (Sabotage Editions, 1989, ISBN 0-9514417-01) This chapbook is an account of the antecedents and production of a small avant-garde festival held in London, England, during January and February 1988, with some afterthoughts about the events and processes that led to them.

Stewart Home starts off with a history of some performance art events from 1984 that were part of the origin of the Festival of Plagiarism (FOP). Not the only causes, direct or indirect, but as he states in the introduction to this history, he was excluding important elements such as zines and concentrating on exhibitions, festivals, and performances for the purpose of the narrative. He chooses the Eighth International Neoist Apartment Festival as a starting point, held in London in May 1984, and lists a number of other events in Scotland and England. Discussion for

FOP began in 1987 after Home was disillusioned by the self-centered behaviour of the Neoists he was associating with. FOP was partly a reaction against the Neoists, but also inspired in a more positive way by events such as the Fluxus Festivals of the 1960s and the Destruction in Art Symposium staged by Gustav Metzger.

The group of which Home was part included Graham Harwood. Harwood wanted to produce a book for FOP. It wasn't until later in the organizational process that Home discovered that Harwood was dyslexic and limited in any administrative tasks that might be done, much less edit and publish a book. The group ran out of steam. As Home writes (page 6): *"After the initial enthusiasm for the Festival had thus been spent, the unstructured nature of our meetings became a serious problem. Without any formal agenda, the conversation would either wander haphazardly from debate of organisational problems to argument over theoretical issues and on into slanging sessions directed against mutual acquaintances, or else just splutter to a halt. My response to this situation was myopic in the extreme; rather than addressing theoretical disagreements, I attempted to find some common ground between participants."*

Matters were not helped by artists participating in FOP who didn't want to publicize their contributions because "... *they wanted the content of their exhibition 'to be a surprise'* ..." ". Gallery space

rentals were often an administrative nightmare, not through the fault of the galleries, but because of artists who obviously needed a wake-up call about how the real world operates.

However, FOP stumbled its way into existence at the beginning of 1988, with a number of galleries and art spaces participating throughout London. Home discusses some of the installations and performance art events. The themes covered plagiarism in relation to originality in art, copyright law, mail art, censorship, and commodification of art. Overall, Home considers FOP turned out to be a success.

What caught my eye, and the reason I felt this chapbook deserved a review, was in the final few pages where Home sums up lessons learned from organizing FOP. Much like science fiction fans putting on their first convention, avant-garde artists organize cultural events on little money and less experience. The process is unnecessarily troublesome due to carelessness, ignorance, or denial of reality on the part of most of the organizers. If anything happens successfully, it is due to the usual stolid few who muddle through the mess somehow despite the hindrance of 'helpers'. At times, Home's writing seems interchangeable with Garth Spencer's histories of Canadian SF fandom; the catalogues of disasters and mis-behaviours that both write about differ only in details of name and place.

Much of this is due to lack of knowledge of the history of such events. It is not specific to SF or avant-garde art. Other hobbies stumble through the same troubles, whether aquarium-keeping or stamp collecting. Home writes (page 21) about this, and his text could be applied most anywhere else with little change: *"Progress within radical culture is often painfully slow due to a general lack of information. ... This is because most of the work in this area has been carried out by small groups who had no knowledge of earlier false starts and failures (or, indeed, of the achievements attained in the field). Producing adequate documentation of activities is a crucial part of the cultural process ... "*

**Smile Classified** is an exhibition handbook by Simon Ford, issued in 1992 by the National Art Library, London, England, on the occasion of a display "SMILE: A Magazine Of Multiple Origins". This odd branch of the Papernet began in 1984 when Stewart Home published the a magazine called SMILE and suggested that others do likewise. A year later, numerous people were producing SMILEs, often using the same multiple-name Monty Cantsin or Karen Eliot. A multiple-name is a name that can be used by anyone; a more current one is Luther Blissett. If said name users are all producing magazines, each with the same name SMILE, from various countries around the world and on different topics, one can quickly agree with Ford's statement: *"SMILE is a librarian's nightmare."* Standard bibliographic methods are

useless when 150 different issues of a magazine title are at hand, each published concurrently by Karen Eliot, some from Britain, others from United States, often with false or no ISSN's, dates, and issue numbers.

Ford discusses some of the art movements, seldom more than twenty people at a time, such as Neoism, Praxis, the Art Strike, and Shiz-lux. Neoism began in Montreal in 1979. Its adherents used Monty Cantsin as a multiple-name, although one individual eventually became so identified with it that Karen Eliot was invented as a new multiple-name. This incident illustrates the hazard that a multiple-name can become a pseudonym identified with one individual instead of being a group name for anyone to use.

Ford, however, was emphasizing the zine, not art history, so I'll quote a pertinent remark of his (page 7): *"Many works are only given in exchange for items received and are not commercially available. In this scenario it is almost impossible for those not part of the Eternal Network (a term coined to describe the Mail-Art network by the Fluxus artists Robert Fillou) to acquire work, other than retrospectively. Some producers are also suspicious and hostile to institutions. This type of material, unpromoted by big marketing campaigns, is often invisible to librarians. Dealing with small publishers rather than large distributors is not cost*

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*effective and is very difficult to fit into bureaucratic work practices.”.*

There has long been discussion as to how a zine collection (or mail art) should be disposed of come death. Libraries or museums are not always the perpetual repositories that some people fondly imagine, especially if the zines are peripheral to the institution's main interests. Collectors are more likely to preserve zines but such a market has very low liquidity even for an expert, much less the grieving widow who would just as soon dump them in the trash if no quick sale is evident.

Ford's observation is that zines are the only form of media covering the genuinely new and marginal that mass media does not even know exists. One of the duties of a library to provide sources of alternative thought different from institutional thinking. He closes his chapbook with an observation that all libraries should, but don't, follow: *“It is important for libraries to collect these new forms of publishing as they emerge regardless of contemporary received notions of quality and taste. This must be done to enable future generations to tap into and recognize the cultural diversity that exists today.”.*

**Rubber Soul: Rubber Stamps And Correspondence Art** by Sandra Mizumoto Posey (University Press of Mississippi, ISBN 0-87805-903-2, C\$25.45 via special order desk at Indigo). This

book is part of a series of volumes on folk art. In looking at the other titles listed in the endpapers I'm not sure which was more alarming, the one on punk body art or the title STAR TREK FANS AND COSTUME ART. But to retreat to the book at hand, RUBBER SOUL starts with a brief introduction to the history of rubber stamping and mail art. It uses the Rubber Amateur Press Society (RAPS) as an example to illuminate current stamping and mail art practices.

RAPS was created in 1992 by Donna Nassar. It has 20 members, who create 21 sets of rubber stamp art every second month, which are sent in to the editor. The pages are then collated into sets, and each participant gets a set, with one left over for the archives. A colour portfolio of sample works is included as an appendix to this book.

Much of this book is taken up by a consideration of why long-distance communities such as RAPS form, whose members are scattered over the world and communicate by mail. Like stamp collectors or science fiction fanzine publishers, the participants in mail art and rubber stamping are initially drawn together by mutual interest. They are marginal outsiders who don't do 'real' art. Real art is supposedly what you find in a museum or gallery, not a nicely decorated envelope with a nice postage stamp and appropriate postmark.

In the interviews with several RAPS members, one of them comments that their mail art is a reaction to a world where money and material possessions are the signs of success. The mail art community is formed of people who seldom meet, and may not want to do so. Like high school classmates who see each other only at once-a-decade reunions, or science fiction fans who only meet one or two times a year at conventions, the community can nonetheless sustain itself. Such communities are increasingly important in a world running headlong to a 24/7 work week.

## **MAIL ART - BRAIN CELL - FRACTAL**

by Ryosuke Cohen

3-76-1-A-613, Yagumokitacho  
Moriguchi-City, Osaka 570, Japan  
(translated by Yukio Teratani)

[Ryosuke Cohen publishes a regular mail art assembling called BRAIN CELL FRACTAL. Participants send 150 stickers or some other type of small mail art image. These are collated into a collage on an 11" x 17" poster, and a copy sent back to each contributor, along with a list of names and addresses of those participating.]

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 included 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 of the Amazon. Black, in those days, taught video art at a Japanese art school. 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 a Japanese and was born in Osaka in 1948.

In the Amazon of South America, there also live many kinds of small lives dependent on each other, such as ants, small insects hiding themselves underneath fallen leaves, fernery, lichen parasitic on large trees, and fungi native on decayed wood, together with large trees, animals, or birds. All of them in total make up tropical forests.

Human beings have gradually learned to make recognition between things useful and un-useful. We make difference between large trees which are useful to build houses with from smaller ones. We make difference between edible lives between those which are not. We make difference between birds and fish which are good to have as pets and those which are not. Our difference-recognizing attitude has, however, caused the ruin of numbers of small natures, which are in their nature essential to the ecosystem of the Amazon. This bad trend of ours is nowadays a focused-upon issue, and we know that this is not only the case for the Amazon but also to everywhere on the planet.

The very same difference-making attitude has, here in Japan, caused terrible floods in typhoon season. Huge amounts of rain water flows off the artificially planted cedar and hinoki trees, and the water floods out of the banks. In springtime, many of us suffer from hay fever. This has resulted from our immunity deficiency inclination. It is we who have made the cause of this deficiency. We planted only conifers on the earth and made our living way of life too clean. As for this, some doctors even insist upon keeping parasites in our body to regain the immunity.

We have altered our way of life living rich and comfortable by pushing away many of things not noticed or mentioned ever before. Accordingly we are about to lose or in fact lost many things which had been the essence of our old rich and comfortable life. Now we are surrounded with 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 trend as mentioned above. They have pushed away financially weak creators from mannered galleries and art expositions. They may have even deformed the artistic sense of school children through the rigid educational system, even though

their artistic skill does not

mean much today. They also may

have put too much importance upon the Euro-American values even in art piece critic. During the past hundred years, the planet lost half its woods in the progress of alteration of our life. Now we are facing the global-sized environmental problems like acid rain, ozone hole, hothouse effects, and so on. In the times as this, Ruggero Maggi's art pieces 'Amazon' preach to us to restart and rebuild our real art. They tell us insistently now is the time to get started.

In mail art, the network expands as A to B, B to C, C to D, D to A, C to A, and so on. It is not only limited to peer-to-peer communication. Not only that, you can put collage effects on the mail you receive and send it back, or you may be able to get others' ideas into your own mail. As a whole body it appears as if a brain construction with numbers of compiled and complexed nerve cells, which is made up in non-linear order. So I have named this style of art BRAIN CELL, and have been recruiting new Mail Art entries since June 1985. Today we are more than 5,000 of members from 80 nations, and the entries have amounted up 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 over the world. As I myself did in the world of mail art, you can



use other mail artists' seals, stickers, and stamps. Also you can prevail your own concept by means of the printed media. In addition you are able to be glad and willing to alter others' pieces and give collage on them and send to other artists. In this way, the mail art pieces often change their appearances and concepts into an unimagined way, which not any individual artist can create.

Andrei Tisma and Nenad Bogdanovic sent me the seal of No-ism from Yugoslavia. No-ism refers that there exists no one ideology for the mail art world. In return, I, Too, sent No-ism seals over the world. Likewise I receive in everyday life many kinds of stuff such as postcards, Xerox copies, collage pieces, drawings, computer graphics, show catalogues, photographs, and cassette tapes by mail, fax, e-mail, and Internet. This gives us an amazing sight and it shows overwhelmingly plural ways of expression and concepts. I, therefore, regard upon that in the huge world of mail art every kind of ism is mixed up like chaos. No wonder there survives or reigns not a single rigged ideology. As Ray Johnson once mentioned in his statements, so mail art is not a single art movement, but it is a megatrend that insists that we change our consciousness.

Many artists were in sympathy with Swiss H.R. Fricker's Tourism concept. I also had opportunities to make tours and have fellowship with many mail artists when I visited Europe in 1987, North America in 1989, and again Europe in 1990. Then I was

able to sense the trend of mail art and its providers' plural situation.

I had a very different experience because at home I usually occupy myself at making and arranging art pieces, and learned a lot through the fellowship with the artists. Some lived a very natural way of life; others were very sensitive to peace of the world. And for them there were those who were willing to realize their art pieces at their fullest. All of them were not free from financial and political problems and that of postal communication, but they got over the problems and had a very positive attitude. I found their attitude really different from that of us Japanese. The Tourism concept is, I found through those tours, potentially able to brush up the sense of art by looking at the world with an artistic eye. This is not for just making a trip and seeing sights.

Germans Angela and Peter Netmail put the Tourism concept into practice globally, and they send me mails from all over the world. I believe that their experiences may be far beyond our imagination and reach the revelation into the future and tell the sense of the art.

I have been sending mail since 1997 with a concept of Fractal, in addition to that of the usual Brain Cell. Fractal is a word for self-similar figures and was advocated by a French mathematician B. Mandelbrot at the IBM Watson Institute.

Picasso and Cezanne were influenced by African sculptures, Gogh by Hokusai and Hiroshige, Pollock by Dali and Miro, so we are influenced already by numerous artists and mail artists. Needless to say I myself am fully influenced by some mail artists, Dadaists, and Fluxus. I have been instructing art to children in the school for 25 years. Recently I have been involved in the instruction of physically-challenged children, and I have been influenced quite a lot by them.

Inside of me exist many mixed fragmental parts of those artists and children. These and original parts do not exclude each other as if spines of a cactus, but tend to the most high. This inner world within me gives me a real feeling that I am sharing many of other artists' parts, what with the experience that I have personal free-from-copyright relationships rearrange other masterpieces with other artists, what with the freedom that is represented as the word Copy Left, not bound to ideologies, that is, No-ism.

What I think, making mail art pieces everyday, is that mail art is a dynamic medium. Rather I had better put this like "Mail art consists in dynamism". Because you can be more than a mere individual and able to be free to create art pieces with a new mind, just being a part of the whole network and sharing fragmental parts of many other artists.



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