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## ANNA BANANA ON THE ROAD

**Berlin April 6 - 15**

**Transportale** is a series of fifteen artistic interventions in the stations of the S-Bahn line of Berlin's subway system. It is sponsored by Art Berlin, Berliner Stadtraum, and many other cultural institutions. Karla

Sachse's proposal for the Nordbahnhof Station (located next to where the wall between East and West Berlin stood), was one of the 15 chosen for this year's event. Each artist had one station in which to execute their work.

Karla's concept was to work with the theme of knots, crossings, and ties; to reflect the crossings of the subway line and to illustrate the international ties in her artistic life. To this end, she invited four "primary" collaborators; myself, and three others from Asia, Africa and Australia, to represent the major continents of the world. Each of us, in turn, invited 12 artists, "secondary" collaborators, from our continent, to create large knots and a related text, to be installed in the station. The four primary collaborators were invited to Berlin to assist in the installation of the resulting sixty-five works by all participants.

Since Karla still had several days of teaching after our arrival, the first job we had was to photograph all 65 knots for documentation of the project. The following day, we loaded all the boxed knots (most the size of a soccer ball or larger) into a van for transport to the Nordbahnhof, where we unboxed them and worked out and mapped the arrangement in which we would hang them. They were then reboxed and put into a storage room until Friday when we would have the necessary platform to get to the ceiling beams from which they were to be hung.

Thursday each of us collaborators made a presentation of our work (slides and video) and concepts to the students in Karla's school, who had also made knots which were installed elsewhere in the station. Friday, with the help of several students, we installed the knots, hanging them at varying heights from the metal beams that support the ceiling of the station. Two of the collaborators were busy videotaping the process and taking stills. On Saturday we returned to the station to install the texts on the 30 x 30 cm. tiles below each knot. Karla had translated all our texts into German, and they were printed on an adhesive plastic generally used for advertisements placed on floors of shops.

The grand opening took place on Sunday April 13th at the Naturpark Schöenberger, with speeches from the mayor of

Berlin, and several dignitaries from the sponsoring arts organizations. After the formalities, all dignitaries, artists and invited arts people piled into an antique train which ran the length of the 15 stations, accompanied by a spoken commentary about which artists had done what at each of the stations. In an amazing contrast to the wintery snow and winds that greeted my first day in Berlin, these events took place in blazing sun and balmy breezes. The Nordbahnhof station was headquarters for information about the works, and the tour stopped there, giving our installation a plentiful and appreciative audience.

While I had planned to do my "tie a knot on me" interactive event on the 15th, I decided to take advantage of the milling crowd to start immediately, and acquired twenty four knots, the names, ages and places of birth of 24 individuals who accepted my invitation, spoken in German. The act, I explained, is a symbolic gesture to unite all the peoples of the world. I repeated this interactive event on Tuesday the 15th, outside the station, as the room in which our knots hung was the entry to the elevators only, and the majority of persons entering and leaving the station used the escalator, which came up closer to the outside doors. On that day, between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., I collected another thirty-three knots, names, ages and places of birth. Another forty one individuals were approached, but declined to engage with me for a variety of reasons given or indicated by pointing at their watches and looking away.

For these actions, I wore a black jacket with my Specific Research Institute Canada logo stitched on the front. On the back were a series of long, loose woolen threads which I had stitched into the jacket for the purpose of knot-tying. With the assistance of a native German speaker in Canada, I memorized my introduction:

*For my research project, may I ask you to tie a knot on me? Please use the colored threads on the back of my jacket. This is a symbolic gesture to a connection with all people of the world. For my research, Would you give me your name? Your age? Where you were born? Many thanks good-bye.*

Because I mastered this speech fluently, many began to engage in conversation with me, and then I had to resort to: *I can speak a little German, but I don't understand much. Do you speak English? . . .* or Karla would come and speak with them. I received many favorable comments about the message I was conveying.

**Roskilde, Denmark April 21-22**

Visiting with mail-artists Witta and Frank Jensen for the

first time after many years of mailed exchanges. A few years ago, I wrote an article about this creative couple for *Rubberstampmadness*, so I was quite familiar with their story, but wanted to meet them in person and see their archives. Witta was just arriving back from a book fair in Frankfurt the afternoon I arrived, so I had a chance to speak with Frank at length about his archives. Before getting into mail-art (which he did after seeing years of colorful envelopes arrive for Witta), his passion was Tarot Cards . . . and still is. He has complete sets of all decks ever issued, and, for a number of years, published a newsletter about these esoteric cards.

Jensen had not given much thought to his mail art archive, which he never felt any urge to register in the same way as he has the Tarot and playing cards which were a costly collection. However, after my visit and enquiries, he used the reorganization procedure they were going through after having the roof renewed, to attempt to get an overview of the scope of his mail art archive. He reported that by weight, it came to about 90 kilo of mail art stored in filing boxes and ring binders. Besides those, he has about 4 meters of shelves with documentation catalogues, magazines, newsletters and related literature, 30 large PIPS-boxes and a lot of file *charteques* with correspondence from mail artists (without art pieces enclosed). He has also created thematic boxes in which he has archived decorated envelopes (normal and large size in separate boxes), artistamps on envelopes, postcards, copy-art, fax-art, erotic art, artists' books (2 boxes), 3-D art, "arty art" (which are nice art pieces that don't belong in any particular category). He also reports having boxes (6-7) that he considers of minor importance and not really worth keeping; bad documentation (address lists only etc.). invitations he's not responded to, junkmail and stickers, printed postcards of only minor interest..

Then there are the boxes of his own more spectacular projects: Mail Artists' Tarot Deck, Mail Artists' Lenormand Deck, Mail Artists' Trunk, Mail Artists' Personality Boxes. From 1993-1996, he did four Mail Artists' Tarot projects (not the deck project) which are mounted in ring binders. His artistamp sheets are in 14 presentation books with transparent pages plus the single stamps are in a special book. His long-term involvement with Crozier's *Memories and Wanda* projects take up another 11 presentation books, and his co-working with Mike Jennings and Michael Fox is another 9 volumes. In addition, there are 8-9 named boxes with material from artists he corresponded with frequently, like Marilyn Dammann, Louise Heroux, Litsa Späthi and

Gianni Simone.

I did not get to see Witta's studio or archive, but we spent the evening looking at and exchanging Artist Trading Cards. Witta was the only mailartist I visited who had ATC's to trade, so when she went for thirty-two of mine, I was happy I had brought my collection with me. As Witta writes, " My M.A. archive. it is *not* as orderly as Frank's, all labelled, dated etc. I've just got boxes with 'postcards', 'special envelopes', 'compilations' etc. Some artists I corresponded with very much over the years, like Shmuel and Larry Angelo, have their own boxes. Most of my 'spare' time, I spend doing my **Picture Diary of a Danish Housewife** in which I've drawn a picture every day since August 1984. There must be over 6000 small pics now, and about 700 of them I have used as postcard motives for my m.a. activities, further 600+ have been used for artist trading cards. To be able to find each of these many motives on either postcard or ATC is craving quite an ingenious system, especially as I have up to 10 of each motif for trading purposes!"

#### **Edewecht-Klein Scharrel, Germany - April 23**

A brief visit with Klaus & Hanelore Groh, talking late into the night, as I had only one night to visit with them. They have been putting on cabaret shows in their large living space in the past 15 years, with Klaus spending much less time in recent years on mail art, than in the 70's and 80's. However, his archive is well organized and catalogued, and he recently donated his collection of works by eastern European avantgarde and experimental artists to the Institute of Eastern European Research Center at the University of Bremen. He was co-organizer of a big show of mail art in the Museum Schwerin, which is apparently specializing in researching and documenting the works of artists who lived "behind the Iron Curtain." This is the museum, according to Karla Sachse, to which Joseph Huber sold his archive, before his death in the fall of '02. Klaus was the first of three mailartists who demonstrated how they can access individual artists and their artwork through his cataloguing system, especially the huge amount of material from Latin America. He has also been working these past 15 years, on the Micro Hall Art Center/ Literaturium, presenting, besides the performance (theatre-programs) about ninety exhibitions, mainly in the fields of mail art, visual and concrete poetry with international characters. Many of the materials of the Micro Hall Archive have been shown in Vienna, Berlin, Warsaw and Luxembourg.

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**Koln, Germany - April 24 - 26:**

**Geza Perneckzy's** archive is the largest, best organized, and completely catalogued of all the collections I saw during this trip. It occupies two long walls in his studio, and is divided into categories and sub-categories. The longer wall, perhaps 10 meters long, and stacked from floor to ceiling with shelves of archive boxes, containing publications; books and periodicals, in sub-categories such as Bookworks, Book(or single publication), Catalogue/Network, Catalogue/Graphic, Catalogue/Literature, Catalogue/Artists books, Magazine, Magazine/Graphic, Magazine/Fanzine, Magazine/Radical-Political, Mailart Network Assembling, Mailart Network, Mailart Network/Magazine Art, Magazine Literature/concrete and visual experiments.

The second wall, perhaps 8 meters long, is divided into color-coded sections. The largest of these is of binders containing individual works, each in a protective sleeve, arranged in alphabetical order by the artists; 90% is mailart, 10% visual poetry. Another section of about 8 binders is all artistamps, another contains "all the rest," ie. envelopes, letters, etc. There are 5 binders of his Atlantis project, and 24 binders of invitations to shows, projects and publications that have circulated in the network.

He gave me copies of the three large catalogues that are printed out from his database of all the material in his archive. He is interested in selling his archive to support his retirement, and has had curators from the Stuttgart Staatsgalerie (which houses Archive Sohm) come to see his collection, but no offers or negotiations have been forthcoming as yet. The other institution he is considering for this impressive collection, is the Museum Schwerin. He says if he is unable to sell it, he will leave it to one or the other after his death. . . but it seems an impossibility that some museum would not leap at the chance to have such a comprehensive collection all ready catalogued.

The other half of his storage space is crammed full of his own works; paintings, book works of a beautiful and experimental nature, most of it never shown. The man is a well known critic/art historian in his native Hungary, but scarcely known outside the mail-art network in Koln or Germany at large.

**Thomas Baumgärtel/Banana Sprayer**

The other outstanding artist I visited in Koln is Thomas Baumgärtel, otherwise known throughout Germany as the Banana Sprayer. Twenty years into his work, Baumgärtel is still using his distinctive banana stencil design in his works,

but has branched out from graffiti onto large canvasses and 3-D works. I first learned about him years ago, when a friend sent me a full color book of photos of his bananas sprayed on the galleries and art establishments of Koln. When I was doing my 1993 research into the New German Banana Consciousness, I intended to meet and get him to do my two tests (the Roar Shack Banana Peel test, and the Personality Inventory for Banana Syndrome), but he was in New York at the time, spraying his bananas on the galleries there.

The first work he showed me on my tour of his studios, was half a giant 3-D banana, constructed from yellow plasticized fabric stretched over a huge aluminum pipe frame. This item sits collecting dust and pigeon droppings in a giant industrial space, but in its heyday, it was assembled and installed, in a brief 6 minutes (they rehearsed it) at the main entry to the Koln cathedral . . . without any official permissions. Unfortunately, I left behind the CD documenting the project, so I can't say how long it got to stay there, but to be sure, it was well photographed and video-taped however long it took the authorities to get him to clear it away.

The next project of that scale he has planned is to install a giant banana inside the Brandenburg Gate. He's done paintings of this scenario, and had sponsors lined up to proceed, but then the sponsoring company was split up, and the new powers that be decided against it. I'm sure in due course, he will accomplish this project as well.

Of his other two studios, one houses works coming back from shows, and a large spray booth where he works. The other is his show room, with a wall displaying a large number of smaller canvases (perhaps 2' x 2') which are all variations on his banana stencil, a meeting area with large coffee table and leather couches to seat eight, his desk and computer, and a wall of files and records of past works, a rack of postcards, catalogues, etc.

The most I could get out of him regarding his choice of bananas (a question I'm always asked myself), was that it started while he was doing his conscientious objector service in a Catholic hospital. Each bed had a crucifix above it, and one morning he came into a ward to find a broken crucifix on the floor. He took it and affixed a banana peel to it in the configuration of the Christ figure, and that was the start of it all. I wanted to get a more detailed discussion out of him on the subject, but time was short, and he got a call from his dealer. Then we had to go to an opening where he'd had his last exhibit, and after that, it was time for my train, so I

never did get the whole story. . . and while I have two of his catalogues which *might* tell the story, they are, of course, in German, which makes them virtually impenetrable to me. The pictures, however, speak to me.

#### **Maastricht, Holland, April 27 - 29**

**Rod Summers** is one of my earliest correspondents whom I first visited in 1978, when touring Futurist Sound. He is an audio artist, with a long-term, serious interests in long term serious interests. Currently he is the possessor of a considerable quantity of a fine selection of unused tea bags. Just prior to my visit, he was busy revisiting and digitally recording (audio and photos) three locations; in Holland, Germany and England for the second stage of his Environmental Reactions 1978-2003 project. This work will be exhibited in the Natural History Museum of Maastricht in the fall of 2003. Interested in everything, with a special love for birds, and Iceland, which he has visited 13 times, he is a dynamic live wire full of questions and stories.

As for his archive, it is completely catalogued, a process he began when he began exchanging works through the mails. For starters, he has a card file with the name and address of each correspondent, on which he has date stamped his incoming and outgoing mail. From there, he goes to a second card file on which he has recorded by name and number, audiotapes he's received and from there, he can go to the drawer where the tapes are stored, and pull out anyone's exact tape. Needless to say, I was impressed. The other materials that arrive with the tapes, letters, postcards, printed catalogues, invitations, etc., are accumulated in a file box, which is then numbered, dated and put on the shelf with the 30+ years of similar files.

While it requires a little shuffling of papers in order to find something in one of these boxes, the boxes are small enough that there are not that many items to go through, and of course, the dated entry on the original file cards directs you to the exact box. Like Perneczky, Rod has a complete system of classification of works which includes: AC/Art Catalogue, PO/Poetry, LI/Literature, MA/Mailart, MC/Mailart Catalogue, AB/Artist Book, NP/Newspaper (clippings/ reviews), FZ/Fanzine, MZ/Magazine, NM/New Music, AU/ Audio Publication, MI/miscellaneous, AR/Art Review, AS/Artistamp, EA/Electronic Art, OS/Outsized, SB/Small Book, CA/Copy Art. John Bennett has generously offered to take this highly accessible collection of Rod's into the archive of Ohio State University in Columbus, but was not able to offer

compensation for it, not very useful to anyone with an artist's income. Rod plans to hang on to his archive because it is his reference library, and still very active with new projects planned for 2004. Eventually, he hopes to find an even more glorious home for it.

Rod has year long, ongoing projects with Vittore Baroni (an email collaboration creating an epic poem) and experimental poetry works with John Bennett, Jesse Glass Jr., and Tom Winter Jr., and probably many others that didn't get mentioned in our lively conversations. Rod also gets the top award for banana cookery . . . the only host in the course of this trip who prepared a dish involving bananas . . . well, actually, plaintains. It was delicious, and I must get that recipe.

#### **Hengelo, Holland April 30-May 3**

**Jenny de Groot** is another long-term correspondent who has slowed her participation in the network in recent years, and moved most of her correspondence over to the Internet where she has a diary/site where visitors can leave messages and make comments. The transition came for her, I think, when she found she had insufficient funds to produce a catalogue for her last mail-art project, and decided to put the works onto a web site as a way of documenting the project. I think many of us have slowed our postal activities due to the constantly rising costs of mailing, not to mention the problems of storing and moving our archives, and the development of new ideas and ways of working.

While initially denying she had an archive, in the course of my visit, Jenny brought out more and more binders of mail-art works documenting her exchanges with many artists, and of course, her projects. Her most recent was the Devil's Picture Book; a set of playing cards created by herself and 3 other artists, (each taking one suite), which she exhibited with playing card designs by many networkers in the Turnhout National Museum of Playing Cards in Belgium, and again in a gallery in a former bomb shelter in Dalfsen, Holland.

Of her other binders, three consisted of postcards, 1986-88, '89-91 and '91-97. There was also a book of Memory Pages from her interactions with Robin Crozier's Memory Project; probably the longest-running mail-art project ever. Besides our discussions about the network and archives, Jenny and I took a bicycle ride (something we did in '86 when I visited), to the next town where we visited the Twickel Castle, garden estate and nursery. Now a vast commercial nursery for all manner of flowering plants, it

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was once the walled garden for growing the foods consumed on the estate.

Across the road, we went into the gardens proper, and were amazed at the extent of the landscaping, the wonderfully whimsical topiary in the formal gardens next to the moated castle, the lakes, pen of small deer, and incredible variety of imported trees, beautiful flowering shrubs, etc. It was a blustery, cold day with clouds racing across the sun in rapid succession. Then the sky filled with dark clouds the purple of a bruise, and it became apparent that a thunderstorm was about to happen. We kept walking until the first flash of lightening and crashing thunder, then took shelter in a little garden hut with a tall pointy thatched roof. To our relief, it was furnished with wicker chairs, where we sat for half an hour, watching the storm do its thing; continuous overhead lightening and booming thunder, sheets of rain, then hail, bouncing off the grass, and wind whipping the trees and shrubbery as birds dashed across the grass and fluttered into the bushes. When the storm was spent, the sun returned, glinting off all the rain drenched greenery. It was one of the highlights of the trip for me.

#### **Minden & Kalletal, Germany - May 3-4**

**Petra Weimer** is a relative newcomer (5-7 years?) to the network, entering through rubber stamping. After meeting Peter & Angela Netmail at Hein Design's annual stamp fair, she got connected to the network, and hasn't looked back since. While she started out using commercially produced rubberstamps (she has thousands!), she began carving her own designs, and since then has not purchased another stamp. (one of the reasons stamp magazines like RSM rarely feature carvers!). Fascinated with artistamps, Petra pursued (as many have) the purchase of her own pin-hole perforator. Just missing the one Kusterman sold to Hein Design after he got Joki's, she approached Hein only to find they had sold it to someone in California! In the end, however, she purchased a desk-top perforator, and launched into a very productive time of creating sheets of artistamps. Given the short duration of her involvement with the network, her archive is small, and while not catalogued, is filed by artist in alphabetical order, in expanding file boxes, or displayed on her kitchen wall.

**Peter Kusterman & Angela Paehler/the Netmails**, on the other hand, have been diligently networking for the past 20 years, and have produced mountains of documentation from

their travels abroad ( their round-the-world, private mail delivery project, conducted wearing German Postal uniforms) and their many mail-art projects and local festivals at the Buz Centrum in Minden. Every year they put out an annual catalogue of their activities, each a gigantic tome in itself. While I did not participate in their annual Mail-art Mekka Minden festival in September last year, I was gifted with the deluxe edition (with pages of color reproductions of their *Make your own Euro* project and artistamps and tickets tipped in) of their *Net Mail Year Book 2002*. A smaller format than in other years, this annual has a table of contents and page numbers to guide you through the many events and performances hosted by the Netmails at the Buz Centrum, and their visits to artists in other countries.

Another venue where Peter organizes cultural events is in the senior's home, Robert-Nussbaum-Haus. During my previous visit to Minden in 1993, (when I was researching the "new German banana consciousness," with my Roar Shack Banana Peel test and Personality Inventory for Banana Syndrome) he arranged for a bus full of the residents to come to Buz Centrum to do a Bananology workshop. All participants received a Master's Degree of Bananology for completing the Roar Shack test. This year, Peter arranged for me to do a session at the home, and to my amazement, one of the participants from the previous event, 87-year-old Hildegard Peitsch came in brandishing her Bananology Degree, gung-ho to complete the test again! I came away from that event with fourteen completed Roar Shack forms.

Given the incredible number of events and travels Peter and Angela undertake each year, I was hardly surprised to find that their archive is not catalogued. What was surprising was to find it in such relatively organized (alphabetical, except for some filed by artist name or country) and up-to-date order. Like many working mail artists, they have opted to spend the majority of their time creating events, publications and connections, rather than tending to the more secretarial tasks involved in filing and cataloguing the material that comes in.

#### **Noordgouwe, Holland - May 6-7**

**Johan Everarts** is a French teacher at the Pieter Zeeman Zierikzee high school, where he has voluntarily run the Gallery "Galerij" for the last 15 years, presenting mail-art exhibitions and works by individual mail artists in the halls of the school. During that time, he has presented solo exhibits of works Paolo Barile, Piermario Ciani, Lucien Suel, Ryosuke Cohen, among others. He has twenty large

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frames at his disposal, and I was fortunate to get there in time to see his exhibition of Cees Francke's computer-generated sculptures in the landscape.

I first met Francke in 1978 during my Futurist Sound tour, and participated in his various mail-art projects over the years. We lost touch for a number of years, but he contacted me again in the last 5 years, after he had moved to northern Holland and was growing a garden. I'd sent him some Hollyhock seeds, and after his death, Johan sent me a packet of seeds from the plants Cees had grown from the seeds I'd sent him; a kind of "operation round trip" of the plant world.

Tien Heestermans is Johan's wife, an artist in her own right, but not involved in the network. studio. Back at their home, Tien and I walked the short block to her studio, where I got to see some of the components of her upcoming installation, and a previous work. She used a lot of broken wine glasses, contents spilled onto a canvas or board. Time, clocks and the passage of time are combined with old photographs of artists and authors illustrate her concern for the passage of time... something we're all grappling with as it marches incessantly on.

We then sat in their wonderful garden, had a glass of wine and talked about mail art, gardens, life, and had a good laugh about it all. I photographed Johan's archive which is very orderly, all works filed in boxes by the name of the artists, except for a few maybe ten, which are filed by country when he hasn't enough from anyone to constitute a box. While he hasn't got it catalogued, he can easily access individual works because the artists have their own boxes. This part of his archive constitutes a wall of about 12 feet in his office. The other part, a small room, contains boxes and suitcases of the works sent to his various projects; Birds and Borders, a collaboration he did with Rod Summers, The Oil Seal, L'Heure Bleue, Etc. His most important project is "Professor Zeeman goes Crea," which is in a large crate which Johan lugged around to five towns in Holland and Belgium, in order to install the exhibit, before he got fed up of all the work involved for no remuneration. We opened this enormous box and went through some of the works, but I only took a few shots because it is so difficult to photograph small works without the proper lighting and lens. Unfortunately I didn't make notes about the other shows, but the materials are all properly preserved in these tidy travelling cases.

#### **Sint Niklaas, Belgium - May 8 -12**

**Geert de Decker**, the youngest mailartist I visited, is an intense, highly focussed man with a mission... to create a comprehensive Mail Art Encyclopedia, amongst other equally demanding projects. Geert has been doing mail art since 1986, but because his archive is so well organized it takes less space than one less organized. As an example, Geert explains, a tape in a box of letters, makes a lot of air, but that does not happen in his Archive. The reason I mention his age at all, is that I found the majority of mailartists don't get around to thinking about archiving or cataloguing until they reach their 60's; a time when it becomes apparent one can no longer look forward to endless years of creative work, and thoughts about what will become of one's collection come to mind. Obviously Geert won't have to worry about that, as his collection is being catalogued as he goes along. He started organizing it when he noticed that when he wanted to find something, it took lots of time or had to say to the person "sorry I cannot find, next time. Today it takes me only a few seconds or minutes to find specific artworks or an artist among specific artworks." If you want to check it out, you can view it at his web site: <http://www.sztuka-fabryka.be/>

Besides this painstaking work, Geert is dedicated to bringing live, experimental art to his home town of Sint Niklaas, not an easy row to hoe, since there isn't exactly a lively artist community there, youthful or grey-haired. However, he has developed a good working relationship with the O.J.C. Kompas Youth Center, where he staged this year's Independent Music and Art Festival, and 15th International Mail Art meeting. His enthusiasm is quite amazing given the stress and fatigue he was feeling prior to the Saturday festival; the evening after the events were over, he was already planning next year's event!

Geert spared no energy when it came to decorating the room in which I presented Banana Splitz; he hand cut over 300 individual bananas, and these were taped all over the walls of the room, and up through the stairwell from the 1st to the 3rd floor. Banana Splits is a risky interactive event, in that depends on having a large audience, and flamboyant audience members who can play the contestants. It wasn't the exuberant presentation of the piece I had hoped for, as we had a small audience (maybe 30, four of whom spoke no English), and the six contestants struggled to "make it up" in response to the questions from the Bananica. Obviously none of them were "born liars!" Geert's comment was that "There is a large difference between the Belgians, for

example and the Dutch. Probably in the Netherlands you would encounter more "liars" and a more lively public. Belgians are more quiet and difficult to get them crazy lively."

Following my event, Gunter Schroth presented his very popular bar code music. He uses a laser to read the bar codes, which are interpreted by some computer programs, and amplified so the audience can hear the sounds. A whole new media component of the weekend's program which was to include workshops, had to be cancelled due to illness on the part of the presenter. Schroth's bar code music was all that was left of that part of the program, but one what was much appreciated by the audience. Two floors down, the club's usual fare of beer and supersonic rock music thudded through the building.

In the afternoon, performances were presented by Giovanni and Renata Strada, Emilio Morandi from Italy, Dawn Redwood from England, Peter Netmail and Karl Friedrich Hacker from Germany. Jose vdBroucke came with his archive of mailart, to give it away, and what was left (most of it) was taken by Geert for inclusion in his archive. Guy Stukens and Luc Fierens also came for the festivities, and the only outstanding absence was Belgian mailartist Guy Bleus, who is apparently suffering from post operation pain and depression. I was disappointed not to be able to visit him, as I've seen his archive on two previous visits ('86 and '93) and had hoped to photograph them and discuss his plans for their future. The week after our festival, Belgian Post Office was releasing a new, official postage stamp commemorating Mail Art, designed by Guy Bleus and Jean Spiroux, with the usual postal tradition of First Day Covers. We all lamented that this historic occasion couldn't have been the weekend of Geert's festival.

Besides the performances there were a number of videotapes to be viewed, one in particular of interest to me, on French artistamp makers. *Mail-Art - Art Postal*: a TV-production shown on French television from Christian Balmier (France). In French language but with lots of images and information about Mail-Art and with interviews of Mail-artists. (Ben Vautier, Fernand Barbot, ...). Another video was about performance experiments into the world of electronic and mechanical extensions of the body, including interviews with Australian artist Stelarc, who hangs his body from hooks, swallows a miniature video camera, etc., and San Francisco's Mark Pauline who, in spite of losing most of his hand to one of his misfires, still creates explosive/destructive machinery and events I would think better fit for the movies. There were also displays of mail-art

chess sets and chessmen created by networkers, a large chess board sent piece by piece as postcards by Christian Balmier, and various artworks by De Decker's young collaborators.

#### **Paris, France - May 13-17**

**Enrico Sturani** was my host and guide in Paris. To get from Sint Niklaas to Paris, I had to transfer in Brussels, and my train was cancelled due to the transit strike, but I only had to wait an hour and a half for another. I was met by Enrico, and by the time we battled through the line-ups for a cab, and got to where I was staying, all there was time for that day was a meal out. However the days after that were crammed with galleries and visits and lots of walking due to the transit strikes. While not a native to Paris, Sturani has spent plenty of time there, so was anxious to show me the sights.

We first visited the Buren Columns at the Palais Royal — a huge courtyard of columns of diminishing height, in lines which exaggerate the perspective. While simple, the work is spectacular. After that, it was the Magritte exhibit in a wing of the Louvre, with the most peculiar entry and exits . . . difficult to find, tents stuck against the side of the building. It was a huge exhibit with many works I had not seen before, and I was certainly impressed with both the man's ability to paint, and his conceptualization.

The next day we had a lunch date to meet sculptor/collector Yvette Dubois, and Mona Lisa collector Jean Margat. Dubois' collections are impressive and well housed; African art, both contemporary and early sculpture, a huge teapot collection, and many smaller items. Then at her studio, came the really amazing collection, 230,000 postcards, all filed in boxes according to subject matter!

Later, we visited the Musée de la Poste, and found the tiny room which houses "mail art" amongst the many many rooms of historical exhibits. There were works by a few mailartists, but I would say most of the works were what I am calling "postal art," i.e. those works that play with postal forms (including sculpture of mail-boxes, or large canvases with stamps affixed), rather than mail art as most of us have come to know it; a networking process of exchanges between artists. We also caught a Ben Vautier exhibit which was a huge installation/sculpture, the size of a summer cottage, and inside and out covered with all manner of useless things our civilization produces, along with poignant quotes in Ben's famous handwriting.

Souvenir shopping, meals, and then had an early morning departure the next day, with a flight from Paris to Frankfurt, transfer to flight to Vancouver . . . end to an exciting, stimulating, trip.