

PROFILE: mohammed, genova

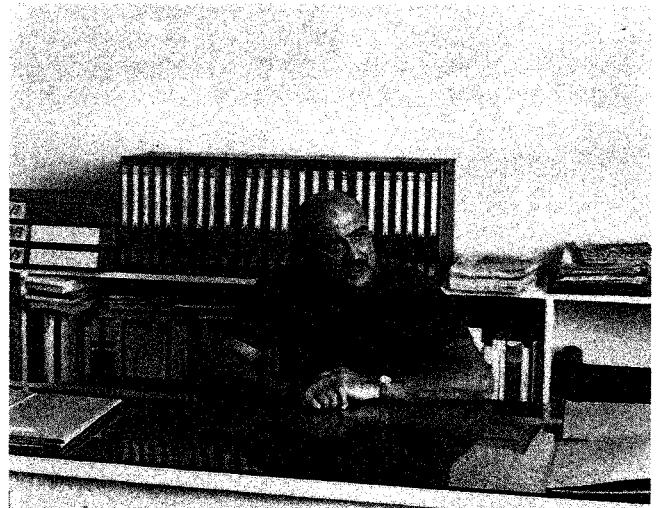
Leaving Milano on a warm sunny day to go to Genova, I felt a bit of excitement, for I had an appointment with Mohammed to spend the day and then return to Milano in late afternoon. I felt I was representing all the mail-artists who have used this amazing network to communicate with other artists all over the world. Luckily, I speak Italian which facilitated matters completely. We never talked about what we would wear, in fact what we looked like, but we both assumed we would recognize each other. The landscape changed as I left Milano, for the closer to the sea we came, the cloudier and more *sfumato* the environment appeared. But the sunshine seemed to penetrate the cloud cover, and I arrived (a bit late, since the train was quite late in Milano). Ah, well, Mussolini doesn't live there anymore.

At any rate, I looked for him everywhere and felt that since the train which I had taken was another one than the one which I had indicated, since that one was to have been 45 minutes late, then perhaps I should wait in the central waiting room. Then I heard that my original train was arriving, so I went to the track and looked for him—and there was this swarthy, exotic-looking Italian man whom I had known at the Artefiera in Bologna in 1977, and I introduced myself. Sure enough, there he was, and we then proceeded to his home where his wife prepared a beautiful lunch for me.

Born of a Turkish father and a Genovese mother, we find a rather striking man, energetic, vital and full of life. What he has devised is a network, a system whereby as he says, "Mohammed goes to the mountain, rather than vice-versa. Mohammed goes to you."

Starting in 1976, he set up his Centro di comunicazione ristretta (Center of restricted communication), whereby an artist sends work to him with a list of 12 recipients. Mohammed Centre then prints and sends copies to the 12 persons indicated. All work must be done on paper measuring 21 x 23 cm. or on a paper provided by the Centre. Black and white or color are acceptable. Mohammed then keeps three copies for his archive: the original, one copy for the archive, and one copy for Jean Brown. Although they have never met, he respects Jean Brown highly for her work in setting up an outstanding archive in Tyringham, Massachusetts and feels it his duty to share this with her

By a short notice in *Flash Art*, thanks to Franco Vaccari, he started receiving work from Dick Higgins, Peter Frank, John Held and Klaus Groh, among others. Anna Banana and Robert Kushner followed, and so now he has gone far beyond 1,000 "unità" or what the communications are called in Italian. Each "unità" is completed in itself; but some can be connected with others, and so the net-



work continues. According to Mohammed, "the history of art is finished, but art is not finished." From these communications, one reaches the inner soul.

Mohammed, upon receipt of the communication, logs it in in a special diary. Then he and his collaborators send the original to the Xerox Center in Bologna, which according to him is the best color Xerox machine in all of Italy. Then he logs in the work giving it a number (all are numbered progressively) and labels them according to the instructions of the original author, whether the individual who is to receive the work is a known addressee (red label) or a hidden addressee (green label). The labels read: "known to the other eleven" or "hidden to the other eleven". Besides the item getting a number, each correspondent also has a number in his log. After addressing all the envelopes and starring the name on the document, he rubber stamps the known or hidden statement and also enhances the envelope with a little collaged piece of paper taken from magazines or whatever and sends it. He also enhances the envelope with a little collaged piece of paper taken from magazines or whatever and sends the pieces on their way. He has also logged in the date of shipment of each piece. Around 50 a month arrive and right now he is quite behind, for it is difficult to keep up with the mass of works that come through.

There is a spiritual content to this operation. As Mohammed says, "unita" means unit, which to him means harmony.

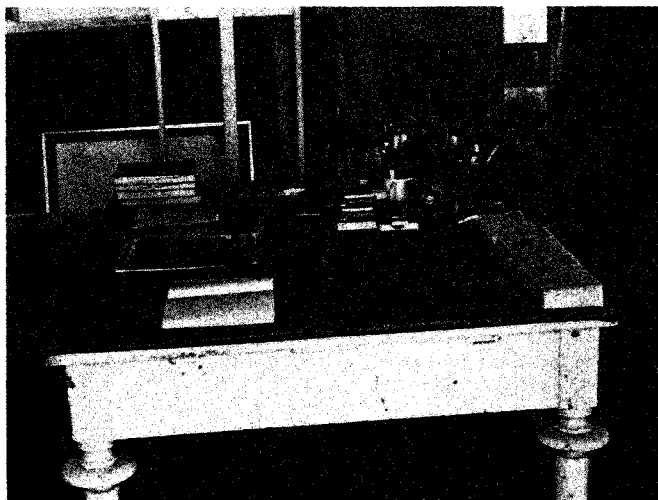
This leads to a creation of a world, if not the world. Someone once said to him, "You are not Mohammed, you are Allah." He is not trying to play God, but only serve as a medium, an intermediary between an author-artists and 12 recipients. The receiver can throw the message away, or send it back to the sender, or intervene by communicating with the others in the group of 12, or in fact keep it. And if he or she keeps it, he or she comes a collector, thus giving the message the connotation of a piece of "art." So Mohammed reverses the usual relationships between the artist and the collector, because the collector is here chosen instead of choosing.

His archive is beautifully bound and gets bigger so that the volumes increase, as you see in the photograph. Mohammed sits at his desk behind which are the copies which he retains. The other photograph shows his worktable, where he logs in the work, assigns it a number, also from which he addresses all the envelopes, stamps them, seals them, and logs them out so-to-speak.

This does not deny Mohammed's own art work, but it takes a great deal of time out of a day to do this networking. He still paints, draws and does performances, but not as much as before. He also is ambidextrous which allows us to see why some of his work looks extraordinarily unique.

He lives modestly in an apartment on one of those beautiful hills of Genova. What they have done is utilize the living room as a studio and workroom, converting the dining room into a multipurpose room. The light through the windows is beautiful, and the warmth in the home reflects the energy and vitality of this important artist. For more information, or if you wish to participate by getting the set of rules, etc., write to Mohammed, Centro di comunicazione ristretta, Corso Montegrappa 23/13, 16137 Genova, Italy.

-jah



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JUDITH A. HOFFBERG, Editor
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