

# Letters To UMBRELLA

Mail Art in Japan is a conscious extension of an honorable aesthetic tradition. A hundred years ago Japan opened up and joined the world family of nations. After long isolation, however, its geographical remoteness made international communication very difficult. Many young practicing non-artists in Japan sincerely wished to trade opinions, ideas, greetings and images with people in other countries. Who is there in Japan that has not had a pen pal in India, Sweden, Canada, Thailand? When war was declared, this free exchange suddenly encountered rough trade. But soon afterwards Japan surged onward to re-establish and expand its international communications on all levels. The very concept of Mail Art presents no novelty to the Japanese. It is rather thought of as a natural and higher plane of artistic expression from fond remembrances of pen friends in younger days.

We at Art Unidentified are determined to pursue the aesthetic expansion of Japanese Mail Art activities. In the past number of years art exchange has steadily grown between art space, located in Koshienguchi (near Kobe) and Artists in Europe, American North and South and Asia. We have hosted visiting artists from many lands—but exchange opens another avenue of vital aesthetic communications.

You are cordially invited to participate in the project with the theme, We Are For ART UNIDENTIFIED. Send either an essay or a painting (including mail art). Upon receipt of your works, we will supply you with a copy of the brochure as soon as it is printed (and a free copy of the latest edition of the AU Newsletter). When you enter, please indicate: Art Unidentified Department, Kobe, Japan. No membership fees are required, only that the member holds interest in the activities of A.U. by sending us twice a year or more Postcard Art. You will get as part of your membership free copies of the A.U. newsletter, with information about modern art in Japan.

—Artists' Union  
1-1-10 Koshienguchi  
Nishinomiya-City, Hyogo, Japan

Dear Judith:

I'd like to suggest that artist's books presses and related small presses begin lobbying for changes in non-profit status eligibility. It's obvious that none of the arts presses exist for profit, given the severe economics of publishing. Why not subsidize them for the educational service they render to the public? I'm presently involved in seeking non-profit status for Cave Canem Books through Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, 1560 Broadway, Suite 711, New York, NY 10036. There a man named Leonard Easter is trying to set precedents for changing non-profit eligibility. Perhaps Umbrella could serve as a forum for this issue.

(signed) John Miller

Dear Judith:

Got your Umbrella from Wally Darnell when he visited me in West Berlin. Could you announce or print just as it appears in this invitation from a friend of mine in Dresden (East). In East Germany (German Democratic Republic) Mail Art is censored. Sometimes my friends have to pay high fines and are controlled by the Secret Service because of their mail-art activities. So I brought it across the border to send it to ma-

gazines. I think very little mail artists know about the different circumstances in each country and someone should do a show about censored Mail Art!

Yours,  
Volker Harman

*Editor's Note: The Homage to W. Reich Show was the invitation indicated in the letter, deadline: 1 February 1983.*

Mail art is to the art world as the Olympics are to sports, with the substitution of cooperation for competition. Together they form that track of brotherhood along which runs the train of understanding that connects the world. The parallel tracks are of body and of mind/mental and physical. They should be viewed together.

The principles of mail-art activity conform to the philosophy of the Olympic concept like no other phenomenon of modern art. Almost every participating country in the Olympic Games has corresponding mail artists who annually participate in hundreds of shows throughout the world, many at major universities and colleges. Mail art embodies the spirit of cooperation and individualism between east and west in the art world.

If it were expensive to host a mail-art show in conjunction with the theme of the 1984 Olympic Games, then, I would not ask for help. But, it is not. For a minimum dollar expenditure, a major exhibition can be mounted showing the works of thousands of artists from most of the countries participating in the Olympics. (A few thousand dollars as compared to millions.)

feel that it will be psychologically uplifting for the foreign visitors who come to Los Angeles to view an art display featuring works by their fellow countrymen, thus expanding the ties of brotherhood. I know that it would make me feel a little more at home in a foreign land.

The essence of the mail art network allows artists to play together and work things out, distanced only by a postage stamp. It is free and it is democratic. It is social in nature, yet it does not violate the integrity of the individual. In fact, the socialness of mail art is woven from the threads of individualism.

Mail art also points to a political realization which will have to come about if we are to survive on this planet. It typifies the finest points in each of the battling giants (capitalism and communism). Shows are truly a social effort, displaying a whole that is indeed greater than the sum of its individually produced and free parts. It is a collage of the mind, just as the Olympic Games are a collage of man's physical spirit. It would be uplifting if they could be seen together.

I am saddened that the "Olympic Arts Festival" cannot fund this project. It is hoped that someone will read this and realize the parallel between the International-Mail-Art Network and the Olympic Games, thus offering some type of guidance in our search for funding.

Thank you,  
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