

Women and Mail Art: Gendered Perspectives on Marginal Artistic Practices Program

11 October, 16.00-19.00 (Bern/Warsaw time), Panel 1

Introduction

Zanna Gilbert, Getty Research Institute and Elena Shtromberg, University of Utah, Transgresoras exhibition and project.

Alexandra Schoolman, Temple University, Alternative Solidarity Networks in Chile: the Work of Virginia Errázuriz and the Taller de Artes Visuales.

Mela Dávila Freire, Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg, Cruising by the Book – Vaginal Cream Davis' Queer Publishing.

Discussion

Short break (15min)

Marie Meyerding, Technische Universität Dresden, Mail Art and Environmental Activism: Karla Sachse's Subversive Practice Between State Surveillance and Official Art Production.

Emerse Kürti, Museum of Fine Arts - Central European Research Institute for Art History (KEMKI) Budapest, Personal or Professional? Katalin Ladik's gendered position in the Yugoslav and international mail-art network.

Discussion

18 October, 14.00-17.00 (Bern/Warsaw time), Panel 2

Introduction

Maggie Borowitz, Pennsylvania State University, Exhibiting Micro-Exhibitions: Curating Artists' Books in the 1980s.

Agata Jakubowska, University of Warsaw, Mirella Bentivoglio and the Circulation of Women's Visual Poetry.

Discussion

Short break (15min)

Liz Hirsch, Otis College of Art and Design, The Rebirth of Wonder: Linda Frye Burnham, High Performance, and the Art of Correspondence

Ileana Parvu, Geneva University of Art and Design, Chance Encounters: The Circulation of Ana Lupas's Works.

Discussion

25 October, 14.00-17.00 (Bern/Warsaw time), Panel 3

Introduction

Henar Rivière, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, The reproductive work of women as a core metaphor in Graciela Gutiérrez Marx's Mail Art practice.

Rada Georgieva, The Courtauld Institute of Art, A 'White Fly' Crossing Space: Mirtha Dermisache's Asemic Mail Art.

Ine Engels, Ghent University, Between collective and individual expression: Mirtha Dermisache's handprints.

Discussion

Short break (15 min.)

Jenny Graser, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt – "Like a Spider in a Web".

Gabriela Daris, Kingston University London, Ideas in the Air: Yoko Ono's Mail Art.

Discussion/Closing

Abstracts and Bios

Zanna Gilbert and Elena Shtromberg: "Transgresoras exhibition and project"

This field-defining exhibition investigates Mail Art and messages made and exchanged by an intergenerational group of Latinx and Latin American women artists from the 1960s to the present. The exhibition will be accompanied by the first in-depth scholarly publication devoted to this critical but still understudied area of artistic production.

Transgresoras: Mail Art and Messages, 1960s–2020s investigates artworks made and exchanged by an intergenerational group of Latinx and Latin American women artists from the 1960s to the present. The exhibition will be accompanied by the first in-depth scholarly publication devoted to this critical but still understudied area of artistic production. Curated by Dr. Zanna Gilbert, Senior Research Specialist at the Getty Research Institute, and Prof. Elena Shtromberg, Associate Professor at the University of Utah, the exhibition is scheduled to open at the California Museum of Photography, part of the University of California, Riverside, in Fall 2025, and will travel to additional venues thereafter. Mail Art is a mode of artistic production that relies on the postal service for the circulation and exchange of artworks, a practice that reached its height in Latin America in the 1970s and 80s. It allowed artists in repressive societies, such as those living under military dictatorships in Latin America, to evade strict censorship measures, providing a platform for political protest. In the US, Latinx artists engaged the network to create community and a forum for sharing art beyond institutions and art scenes that often ignored their contributions.

Zanna Gilbert is a senior research specialist at the Getty Research Institute. Her research focuses on transnational conceptual art, feminisms, concrete art and poetry, Xerox art, and the international mail art network, with a particular focus on Latin America. She holds a PhD from the School of Philosophy and Art History at the University of Essex, UK, in collaboration with Tate Research.

Elena Shtromberg is Associate Professor at the University of Utah. She specializes in modern and contemporary Latin American visual culture with a particular focus on Brazil. Her interdisciplinary research interests extend to gender and media studies, cultural studies, as well as communications, geography, and postcolonial theory.

Alexandra Schoolman: "Alternative Solidarity Networks in Chile: the Work of Virginia Errázuriz and the Taller de Artes Visuales"

During Chile's dictatorship, artists employed mail art artists to speak out against the political realities they were living, share their work with other artists, and create transnational communities through the postal system. Art historian Christina Freire has called mail art tactical for its subversive potential for political resistance, but also tactile. While mail art networks established international ideological connections, the mail artworks also created material connections between sender and recipient. Once they arrived at their final destination, the pieces bore the marks of their journey and they could be held and manipulated in the hands of the addressee. This paper will discuss the work of Virginia Errázuriz, whose political activism informed her printmaking practice and co-directorship of the Taller de Artes Visuales (TAV, 1974-1983) in Santiago. The TAV functioned as a creative and educational hub that was also a site of dictatorial opposition, receiving early commissions to print magazines and bulletins for the Church-backed human rights group Comité Pro Paz. This printed material was sent internationally to broadcast the dictatorship's human rights abuses and build networks of solidarity, especially among exiled Chileans. In Errázuriz's mail art series *Cancelados* (c. 1979), she denounced Pinochet's regime through Xerox prints that juxtaposed the everyday materials used to torture the *detenidos-desaparecidos* with state ID photographs of victims, thereby materializing their disappearance. In Chile, the term "cancelado" refers to the payment of a debt or to the person who makes the payment, and thus the stamp is commonly found in administrative settings. Errázuriz appropriated this stamp and its meaning to acknowledge the victims whose lives were "canceled" by the dictatorship. Despite the repression and censorship imposed by Pinochet, Errázuriz challenged the experiences of isolation and censorship by forging material connections across distances and adding new levels of sensitivity to the fight for human rights.

Alexandra Schoolman is a third-year PhD candidate in Art History at Temple University, Philadelphia. Her research interests include conceptualism and social practice, particularly as they address the intersection of human and environmental rights, with a focus on Latin American art. Her dissertation reevaluates conceptualist, political art from the dictatorial periods of Argentina, Brazil and Chile through an ecocritical lens.

Mela Dávila Freire: "Cruising by the Book – Vaginal Cream Davis' Queer Publishing"

Publications, in particular – but not only – fanzines and other forms of underground publishing, have occupied an important place in the overflowing creative activity of Vaginal Cream Davis since her beginnings, in the 1970s. Between 1972 and 1975, almost before she was involved in music and performance, Davis was already publishing her first fanzine, *Dowager* (1972-1975). Davis's fanzines are situated at the point where punk hooliganism, the vindication of queer marginality and contempt for conventional forms of intellectual authority intersect, all sprinkled with a significant command of written and visual language, and a great talent for humour.

This paper will review Davis's publishing practice through its different stages, highlighting its links with other sides of her creative work as well as the different underground contexts in which they circulated, and analysing Davis' different strategies for giving shape to an underground community through her fanzines, on the one hand, and subverting the standards of mainstream publishing production, on the other, tracing the connections that can relate her work to other publishing practices associated with mail art in the conventional sense.

Mela Dávila Freire is a researcher, curator, writer and translator. Her research focuses on art archives and on the genre of artists' publications. Her specific interests include the feminist revision of the history of artist's publications, the theoretical and practical intersections between archives and art collections, and the ideological biases hidden in archival structures. She has been Head of Publications and Head of the Study Center at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), and Director of Public Activities at Museo Reina Sofía.

Marie Meyerding: "Mail Art and Environmental Activism: Karla Sachse's Subversive Practice Between State Surveillance and Official Art Production"

Art in the late German Democratic Republic (GDR) was one of the central sites for addressing the increasingly pressing environmental issues. The GDR was governed by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany which enforced its communist ideology through an immense surveillance network of state agents and informants led by the Ministry of State Security, an apparatus commonly referred to as Stasi. This surveillance apparatus influenced all parts of society including the art world which was strongly affected by censorship and undermining. Another notorious intervention of the Stasi was the concealment of the consequences of large-scale environmental pollution in the GDR. In this presentation, I explore how the artist Karla Sachse dealt with environmental issues and the associated state interventions through mail art. The wife of famous mail artist Joseph Huber, Sachse's artistic practice has received far less scholarly attention. Yet, together with her Chilean friend Guillermo Deisler she organised the first exhibition of visual poetry in the GDR, drawing international attention to the country's critical art scene. Heavily supervised by the Stasi, she created globally circulating mail art, addressing environmental issues, as in her post cards with the slogans 'save the birds' or 'air is life-help to clean it' held at the Joseph Huber Archive, Museum Schwerin. As she herself, unlike her works, was not able to travel, Sachse addressed the theme of international flights in an official mural painting made for the 750th anniversary of Berlin in 1987. This oscillation between official and subversive art production in the GDR and the opening and closing spaces of travel possibilities is the subject of my analysis. Through Karla Sachse's Environment Mail Art, I highlight the complex relationships between socialist governments and women artists dealing with local and global environmental issues in the GDR.

Marie Meyerding is an art historian. Since May 2024, she has been working as a postdoc with a Walter Benjamin position (DFG) at the Institute of Art and Musicology at the Technical University of Dresden, where she conducts research on 'Landscapes of Surveillance: Environmental Art and the Stasi in the Global GDR'. She holds a PhD with summa cum laude in the History of Art of Africa from Freie Universität Berlin and an MA with Distinction in the History of Art from the Courtauld Institute of Art. Her dissertation examined the representation of women in the history of photography in apartheid South Africa.

Emese Kürti: "Personal or Professional? Katalin Ladik's gendered position in the Yugoslav and international mail-art network"

In the predominantly masculine Eastern European cultural scene, the poet and performer Katalin Ladik represented the provocative linguistic of post-World War II *écriture féminine*, which was able to move away from the margins of avant-garde subculture. Her mail art involvement started in 1968 with a correspondence with the Budapest-based poet and happener Tamás Szentóby. The consequences of this early mail art relationship were significant in a performative sense and defined Ladik's position in the Hungarian public sphere for decades. The voices articulated around her ranged from stardom to criticism, but the important role in cultural transfer she played between the two countries and thanks to which the works of Tamás Szentjóby, Tibor Hajas, Miklós Erdély reached publicity in Yugoslav organs, remained invisible.

The duality of invisible labor and professional recognition has also defined Katalin Ladik's position in her local community, including the Bosch+Bosch group, which she joined in 1973. In the same year, she began a personal relationship with the group's founder, the artist and editor Bálint Szombathy, with whom she also participated in the international mail art network. Ladik primarily converted her visual poems, scores, and performances into the medium of mail art postcards, but they also created stamp works and postcards together. Throughout the 1970s, she was the subject of numerous mail art inquiries, letters, and mail art exhibitions, despite regarding the genre as a sideline activity. In this period, Szombathy sent Ladik several mail art pieces, with personal and political statements. Their professional relationship, however, was not symmetrical as the conventions of traditional gender roles defined it. According to my thesis, the emancipatory position of women in neither the Hungarian nor the Yugoslav neo-avant-garde was synchronous with their professional achievements. Focusing on Katalin Ladik's mail art activity, this paper examines how women's emancipatory aspirations have become unintelligible in the convergence of private life and professional artistic practice.

Emese Kürti Ph.D. is an art historian and researcher, working as a deputy director for research at the Museum of Fine Arts - Central European Research Institute for Art History (KEMKI) in Budapest. Previously, she was a researcher at Artpool Art Research Center, a lecturer at the Central European University (CEU), and an art historian at the Ludwig Museum - Museum of Contemporary Art. She is a member of the Hungarian Section of AICA and the NEP4Dissent international research network. Her research focuses include transregional discourses of the neo-avant-garde in Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia, the concepts of minorities, and women's positions in experimental art (*Screaming Hole. Poetry, Sound and Action as Intermedia Practice in the Work of Katalin Ladik* (2017).

Maggie Borowitz: "Exhibiting Micro-Exhibitions: Curating Artists' Books in the 1980s"

Discussing an early artists' book project, the Mexican artist Magali Lara described making books as "the possibility of having a paper gallery and taking it with you to other places." Artists' books, she suggested, could serve as portable micro-exhibitions. The capacity to put a set of images into direct dialogue with one another offered a route towards exploring issues and stories that mainstream exhibition spaces might not be interested in presenting. For Lara, this meant conversations around women's experience that were often ignored in both popular culture and the male-dominated experimental art scene in Mexico City in the 1970s and 80s. In addition to producing her own books, Lara organized several of the earliest exhibitions of Mexican artist's books, both locally and abroad. These included the show *Libro-Objeto* (Book- Object) at the gallery Artworks in Venice, California in 1980 and the artists' book portion of the Mexican section of the XIV São Paulo Bienal in 1981. At the same moment that she was exploring the book format as a means of constructing micro-exhibitions, she was curating exhibitions of books themselves. Over the next several years, Lara spoke repeatedly about the importance of alternative art spaces and exhibitions. She argued they could open up new modes of viewing and radically expand audiences. She advocated particularly for womanfocused exhibitions, suggesting that they could serve as a path towards legitimizing women's voices. My proposed presentation explores the relationship between curating and DIY publications by women artists through the multifaceted approach Lara took to artists' books in the 1980s. How did alternative processes of publishing relate to alternative exhibition spaces in Mexico and abroad? What was the import of organizing exhibitions of artists' books and other DIY publications? How might those exhibitions have facilitated new connections and dialogues between women artists?

Maggie Borowitz is an art historian whose research focuses on the relationship between art and politics in late-twentieth-century Latin America, with special emphasis upon feminist practices in Mexico. She received her PhD in art history from the University of Chicago in 2022 and she will begin as an Assistant Teaching Professor at Penn State this fall. She is at work on a book manuscript entitled "Magali Lara: Feminist Artistic Tactics and the Mexican 1980s," which investigates the political potency of expressions of female subjectivity through a study of the art of Magali Lara.

Agata Jakubowska: "Mirella Bentivoglio and the Circulation of Women's Visual Poetry"

This presentation will discuss the activities of Mirella Bentivoglio (1922–2017), an Italian artist and curator. Bentivoglio belongs to women whose contribution to the art field is being acknowledged now. Especially her 1978 Venice exhibition, "Materializzazione del Linguaggio", receives substantial critical interest. One can mention, for example, the re-print of its catalogue or the reconstruction of the exhibition at the Antonio Dalle Nogare Foundation in Bolzano (both in 2022). In my presentation, I will discuss one aspect of Bentivoglio's activities that has so far not attracted much scholarly attention - an international network of women artists who shared her interest in concrete and visual poetry. Instead of focusing on the exhibitions (such as), I will analyse how Bentivoglio built this network that manifested itself at her subsequent shows. I'm particularly interested in the nature of contacts between Bentivoglio and the women artists she invited, and among the latter. The main question I'm going to ask is: did the circulation of ideas accompany the circulation of works and information between them? My presentation will be based to a great extent on research at the Mirella Bentivoglio Archive in the National Library in Rome.

Agata Jakubowska is professor at the Institute of Art History of the University of Warsaw. Author and editor of numerous publications on women's art. Recently, she published *Horizontal Art History and Beyond. Revisioning Peripheral Critical Practices* (ed. with Magdalena Radomska, Routledge 2022), a monograph on Polish sculptor Maria Pinińska-Bereś under the title *Art and Emancipation of Women in Socialist Poland. The Case of Maria Pinińska-Bereś* (in Polish, Warsaw University Press, 2022) and an *IKONOTHEKA* issue titled *Feminist Art Historiographies in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (33/2023, ed. with Andrea Giunta). Currently, she is conducting research on the transnational history of all-women exhibitions (funded by the Polish National Science Center). Within the framework of this project, she is preparing a book, *Real and Imagined Communities in All-Women Exhibitions*. She is a member of the editorial team of *Avant-Garde Critical Studies* (Brill) and of the international *TEAM* (Teaching, E-learning, Agency, Mentoring) initiative led by *AWARE* (Archives of Women Artists Research & Exhibitions).

Liz Hirsch: "The Rebirth of Wonder: Linda Frye Burnham, High Performance, and the Art of Correspondence"

As editor and publisher of the influential Los Angeles-based performance art journal *High Performance* from 1978-1997, Linda Frye Burnham (born 1940) served as a vital liaison connecting artists across the United States and internationally. While *High Performance's* focus was on contemporary performance art, the magazine's pages frequently featured examples of mail art, concrete poetry, artist books, and other marginal art forms that arrived in Burnham's mailbox. Many prominent artists like Suzanne Lacy, Jerry Dreva, Jerri Allyn, Anna Banana, Bill Gaglione, Guglielmo Achille Cavellini, and Ray Johnson engaged in lively correspondence with Burnham, sending works created specifically to be published or simply as gifts acknowledging their friendship and creative kinship. Suzanne Lacy's postcard series, *Travels with Mona* (1977) constitutes just one example. Burnham's openness to these artistic mailings positioned her as an important figure within the often male-dominated mail art movement of the 1970s-90s.

This paper argues for recognizing Burnham's role as both recipient and disseminator of mail art and related practices. Through her willingness to publish and engage with artworks that arrived daily, Burnham helped elevate these marginal forms while using *High Performance* to broadcast their existence to a wider audience. Her editorial embrace of mail art exemplified feminist ideology through its inherent decentralization, embrace of collaboration, and circumvention of the mainstream art world's institutional hierarchies.

Examining Burnham's archives reveals her as a key connector within the sprawling, intergenerational networks of the neo-avant-garde. By integrating mail art and performance art, she facilitated cross-pollination between these underground movements in a spirit of radical acceptance and wonder at art's continual rebirth in new forms. As such, Burnham should be recognized as a pioneering feminist curator and archivist of correspondence art.

Liz Hirsch is an Assistant Professor of Contemporary Art/Media Studies at Otis College of Art and Design. She received her Ph.D. in Art History in 2021 from The Graduate Center, City University of New York. Her dissertation, "Inevitable Associations: Art, Institution, and Cultural Intersection in Los Angeles, 1973-1988," considered alternative institutions and cultural intersections in bicentennial-era Los Angeles. She is the co-founder of 839, a contemporary art gallery located in Los Angeles, California.

Ileana Parvu: "Chance Encounters: The Circulation of Ana Lupas's Works"

In 1982, Romanian artist Ana Lupas took advantage of her exhibition at the Cantonal Museum of Fine Arts in Lausanne to hand out a postcard that depicted a human fetus enclosed in a jar. It is worth noting that Lupas, although choosing the form of the postcard, preferred not to send it as mail art, undoubtedly for security reasons. However, various archives of exhibitions held before 1989 in Western Europe show that she did not always try to bypass postal services. These archives contain numerous photographs of her works, which the artist often sent in multiple copies, probably hoping that the organizers could use them to disseminate her work more widely.

My proposal examines the ways Lupas chose to circulate her works. I will investigate how the means of dissemination transform her creations. Among all of Lupas's pieces, the one whose photographic reproduction was most frequently sent is a monumental installation of weavings manually executed by women. This work primarily circulated through a photograph presenting it in an overview, which precisely erases the artist's interest in the materiality of the woven pieces.

It is this photograph that the editors of the American feminist journal *Heresies* published in a 1981 issue titled "Earthkeeping/Earthshaking: Feminism & Ecology." In the absence of direct contact with Lupas, they reinterpreted her work in light of their own concerns. My paper addresses these transformations in the meaning of Lupas's works as they circulate and encounter different contexts. It will focus on the notion of feminism shaped by Lupas's work. Like other Romanian artists, Lupas did not have access to American or Western European feminist theories, and I will examine in my paper what notion of feminism is constructed by the postcard prepared for the Lausanne exhibition and the installation of woven pieces.

Ileana Parvu is professor of history and theory of contemporary art at the Geneva University of Art and Design (HEAD – Genève, HES-SO), and a lecturer at the University of Basel. She has recently been working on Romanian art from the 1970s ("Reenactment, Repetition, Return. Ion Grigorescu's Two Dialogues with Ceausescu," *Art Margins Online*, 2018; "Another Realism: Ion Grigorescu, Photography and Document in 1970s Romania," *RIHA Journal*, 2024; "Craftsmanship from the World Before. Artisanal Skills in Ana Lupas' Participatory Actions," in: *A Show of Hands*; "Wiederholte Anfänge. Textilkunst und kollektive Aktionen bei Ana Lupaş", in: A. Matyssek and F. Nowel Camino (eds.), *Wann fängt Kunst an? Das ‚variable‘ Frühwerk in der Gegenwartskunst*, Edition Metzler [in press]).

Henar Rivière: "The reproductive work of women as a core metaphor in Graciela Gutiérrez Marx's Mail Art practice"

The Argentinian artist Graciela Gutiérrez Marx sent 200 missives from La Plata in 1980, inviting the recipients to participate in a mail art project initially called Family Group. *Assembling a Myth*. She received 138 responses from 16 countries in Latin America, Eastern and Western Europe, as well as the United States. This was the beginning of a long-term project that underwent different stages of realisation, taking on various shapes, such as performances (Mamablanca's Treasure), mail art publications (The Marginal Codices of Mamablanca) and an editorial venture (the Con-fusion Editions). At the core of all of them, one metaphor is at work: gestation. Challenging the patriarchal commonplace, according to which women's biological ability to gestate life would be inversely proportional to their inability to be intellectually creative, Gutiérrez Marx claimed gestation as the image par excellence for the (re)generative power of art in general, and particularly for the 'underground' quality of mail art as a countercultural artistic practice.

On the one hand, Gutiérrez Marx's approach stressed the economic value of the reproductive work of women, likening its historical marginality within the structures of the capitalist system to the marginality of mail art and its practitioners within the economic and ideological (art) systems of their time. On the other hand, she asserted the power of marginality as an aesthetic-political strategy, which she did not only practice through her mail art projects, but also theorised about through the concept of 'arte íntimo', translated by her into English as 'inmost art'. This paper analyses the different stages and shapes taken by Family Group. *Assembling a Myth/The Marginal Codices of Mamablanca* through the lens of the theory of inmost art, showing the richness of Gutiérrez Marx's mail art as a form of "poetry in action", to use her own words. Genuine interpersonal communication, shared intimacy and community creation are some of the key ideas put into practice by the artist through a feminist approach to creativity that outdoes her male colleagues' radicalness in challenging the traditional conception of authorship in art. Ultimately, *The Marginal Codices of Mamablanca* also shines a light on the resistance of women, personified in the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, during the Argentine civilian-military dictatorship (1976–1983).

Henar Rivière holds a PhD in Art History and is Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History at Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM). She has been Research and Project Manager at Archivo Lafuente, Santander (Spain), as well as PI of the research project OBASA & Artpool: Collecting, Connecting, Archiving. The 'Active Archive' as Transcultural Alternative during the Cold War. She was a postdoctoral intern at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, as well as a predoctoral scholar at the Freie Universität, Berlin. She is a scholar of Fluxus, Zaj and the new intermedia, performative and conceptual art practices developed from the end of the 1950s onwards, with a special focus on experimental writing and artists' networks. Her more recent lines of research concentrate on mail art (see i.e. "The Marginal Codices of Mamablanca and Graciela Gutiérrez Marx's Inmost Art"), as well as on the archival practices developed by the exponents of these expanded artistic practices.

Rada Georgieva: "A 'White Fly' Crossing Space: Mirtha Dermisache's Asemic Mail Art"

The Argentinian critic Jorge Romero Brest considered the art of Mirtha Dermisache (1940-2012) so unique that he called it a 'white fly'. Known for her groundbreaking explorations in asemic writing—texts devoid of semantic meaning—Dermisache's work occupies a liminal space between drawing and the written word. During Argentina's military dictatorship, conceptual art often sought to circumvent censorship and to question the role of language in the circuits of mass communication. Nonetheless, Dermisache's work never bore any reference to politics, as she developed a self-contained practice, which Roland Barthes classified as 'illegible writing'.

Concurrently, the mail art network emerged as an alternative to state-controlled, market-oriented, and gallery-sponsored art. In 1975, Dermisache began creating postcards with her illegible writing, which she sent to Ulises Carrión in Amsterdam. He published them in a mail art edition of his assembled magazine *Ephemera*. Dermisache's 'letters' further explored this form. Given the mail art ideal of free communication, particularly through the visual rather than the linguistic, Dermisache's incommunicable postcards raise critical questions about the network's function when a work bears no decipherable message. This is especially relevant given the rarity of asemic writing in mail art.

I propose an analysis of Dermisache's asemic postcards and letters through Juri Lotman's concept of the semiosphere—the semiotic space where communication, meaning and cultural production occur. Using his notions of center and periphery, and boundary and translation, I argue that Dermisache's work functioned as a heterogeneous semiotic system contributing to the larger cultural and semiotic exchange within the mail art network. This study aims to expand our understanding of the network's complexity and Dermisache's contribution to it.

Rada Georgieva is a doctoral candidate at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, where she is working on her thesis titled "Parallel Cultures': Mail Art Magazines and Samizdat from the Eastern Bloc and Latin America, 1975-1995'. Her research explores Cold War exchanges between Latin America and the Eastern Bloc, focusing on artists' publications, book art, mail art, and visual poetry. Rada's interests lie in the interplay between the visual and the linguistic, and the art of countercultures during the Cold War. She holds an MA in Art History and Russian from the University of St Andrews and an MSt in the History of Art and Visual Culture from the University of Oxford.

Ine Engels: "Between collective and individual expression: Mirtha Dermisache's handprints"

In 1972, Argentine artist Mirtha Dermisache (°1940-2012) organized the first edition of the talleres de Acciones Creativas (tAC) in her Buenos Aires studio. The idea behind the workshops was to teach adults graphic techniques that enabled them to create freely, fostering a form of self-expression that was ultimately therapeutic. To reinforce the pedagogical vision behind the tAC's, Dermisache chose the image of the handprint. Two overlapping handprints symbolize the act of expressing oneself through the body as well as the act of collective creation, the latter becoming increasingly important as Argentina's political climate grew more repressive. In 1978, Dermisache revisited the handprint motif, this time employing it in a different context. Alongside twenty-two artists, including Ulises Carrión and Anna Banana, she included her handprint in *Guestbook*, an artist book published by Guy Schraenen éditeur in Antwerp. Schraenen, who was Dermisache's first editor in Europe, asked artists who frequently visited his printing workshop to include their handprint in a compound volume. The result is a collection of autographic gestures, reflecting the status of each individual artist in the international avant-garde network surrounding Schraenen. Dermisache's use of the handprint motif in *Guestbook* stands in stark contrast to its appearance in the tAC's.

This paper explores Dermisache's dual use of the handprint motif – both as a collective and individual form of expression – to examine the varying ways she positioned herself in the art world. As one of the few women artists active in the Buenos Aires art scene who exclusively worked with graphic techniques, she often felt alone in her work. Nevertheless, despite the characterizations of Dermisache as a solitary artist, male figures such as Jorge Glusberg, Roland Barthes, and Guy Schraenen played a prominent role in distributing her work internationally. In this paper, I argue that Dermisache navigated between erasing her role as an artist for the benefit of the collective experiment while also reinforcing her artistic position in avant-garde networks to avoid self-marginalization. More broadly, by understanding the ways in which Dermisache positioned herself in the art world, larger conclusions can be drawn on the notion of the 'artistic genius', which despite its demystification under the influence of conceptual art, remained a valuable parameter in the postwar art world.

Ine Engels holds a master's degree in Linguistics and Literature: English-Spanish and a master's degree in Art History from Ghent University. In November 2023, she started her PhD research as an FWO fellow on the phenomenon of transnationalism in the postwar art world. The project aims to define the 'transnational' by focusing on the cultural exchange between Argentina and Belgium and the subsequent cross-border activities of seven Argentine artists in Europe. She is also part of the research group Art in Belgium since 1945 (KB45, Ghent University)

Jenny Graser: "Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt – "Like a Spider in a Web"."

The German typewriter and mail art artist Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt (Wurzen 1932 – 2024 Berlin) created her graphic works between 1972 and 1989/90 in East Berlin on her "Erika" typewriter. These typewritten images, composed of letters and symbols, have an affinity to concrete poetry and conceptual art, tend toward the abstract and architectural, and were expanded into playful collages in the 1980s. Wolf-Rehfeldt actively participated in the international Mail Art scene and sent her "typewritings" to artists both inside and outside the borders of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) that were closed to her. In so doing she developed a global network of communication. At the age of 90, Wolf-Rehfeldt recalled: "I had the ambition, like a spider in a web, to spin my threads to every place on earth." Wolf-Rehfeldt sometimes asked the recipients of her graphics to artistically augment them, resulting in the creation of collaborative collages.

Early on, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt campaigned for nature protection and peace between conflicting groups. "Human beings cause the greatest harm to nature," wrote Wolf-Rehfeldt in 1972. In the 1970s and 80s, she devoted numerous typewriter graphics and collages to themes of environmentalism and – since it was the time of the Cold War – of peace and sent them out into the world to bundle the forces of peace globally. Wolf-Rehfeldt's entire oeuvre is impressive despite its reduced form and it is highly relevant even today, in an age when our planet again seems divided in many ways.

As a resident of Berlin for over seventy years, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt has received the Hannah Höch Prize 2022 – the most important art prize of the German capital – for her unique and wide-ranging artistic oeuvre. Thus, she experienced the long overdue honor. As a jury member of the Hannah Höch Prize and curator of the exhibition at the Kupferstichkabinett (Museum of Prints and Drawings) of the State Museums in Berlin in 2022 that accompanied the prize, it is one of my greatest concerns to keep the memory of Wolf-Rehfeldt's work alive. The aim of my contribution to the workshop "Women and Mail Art: Gendered Perspectives on Marginal Artistic Practices" is therefore to anchor the artist Wolf-Rehfeldt in art history in the long term.

Jenny Graser (Dr. phil.) studied art sciences, media sciences and recent history at the University of Arts Braunschweig (HBK) and the TU Braunschweig from 2002 to 2008. This was followed by a doctorate at Freie Universität Berlin, supervised by Prof. Dr. Gregor Stemmerich. After completing her thesis, she worked at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt am Main from 2015 to 2019, first as a curatorial assistant and then as an assistant curator. Since 2020, Jenny Graser has been the curator responsible for contemporary art at the Kupferstichkabinett (Museum of Prints and Drawings) of the State Museums in Berlin. There she curated the exhibitions, among others, "Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt. 'Like a spider in a web'" (2022/23) and "Zorawar Sidhu and Rob Swainston – Plague and Protest" (2024). With a special interest in the socially relevant issues of our time, Jenny Graser organizes exhibitions and expands the Kupferstichkabinett's collection of contemporary art.

Gabriela Daris: "Ideas in the Air: Yoko Ono's Mail Art"

The international network of Fluxus artists opened the route in the sky to Mail Art in the late 1950s to integrate art back into life. Their 'fluxpostings' were a new communicational genre with an anti-capitalist, counter-institutional alternative strategy for the production and distribution of art outside of the art circuit. Yoko Ono, a key player of Fluxus and one of a handful of women artists associated with it, was engaged in a two-way free exchange artistic practice using the art/non-art social form of 'instruction' to get an 'event' started from the flow of actual life. As a neo-Dada form instruction was always destined to be absorbed in the midst of ordinary everyday affairs and the postal network facilitated this. With instructions circulating as interventions into the social process, the artist gives up a measure of control over the work and gives over to the recipients to imagine, enact or materialize the artwork however they choose, in any form, anywhere, anytime and even simultaneously, breaking down conventional spatial-temporal and material boundaries of art. Drawing on new findings from archival research I conducted in Japan, Europe and the US, this paper examines how Ono, through her mail art and self-publications, assumed the role of networker, salesman, gallerist and publisher. In the 1960s, Ono employed various printing techniques and the mail as a way to disseminate her critical, conceptual and witty responses to traditional ideals of womanhood, unmistakable lack of visibility of and institutional support for women artists, but also to counter prejudice, activate the social imaginary and insist on the need for harmony between people. In the early 2000s, under renewed social and technological conditions, Ono set-up an ongoing project with an open invitation to all the women in the world to send in a testament of harm done to them for being a woman. All these notwithstanding, I argue that Ono's persistent commitment to world peace is evidence that her art triggers an egalitarian imaginary on the basis of social bonds and interdependency and her stance has always been humanist in scope; thus, her contribution to 'feminist art' falls within a wider trajectory of universalism.

Gabriela Daris Tsavdari is an art historian, theorist, critic, curator and lecturer focusing on European, North American and Japanese avant-garde, especially Dada, Gutai, Fluxus and conceptual art. I am completing a philosophy of art doctoral project at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, Kingston University London. My thesis problematizes the instruction/institution dialectic in a 1960s context and examines critically the ontological distinctiveness, metaphysical importance, and social significance of Yoko Ono's conceptual art. Formerly a critic at Blouin Artinfo and Modern Painters, I work within a critical theoretical tradition and publish across academic and non-academic readerships.