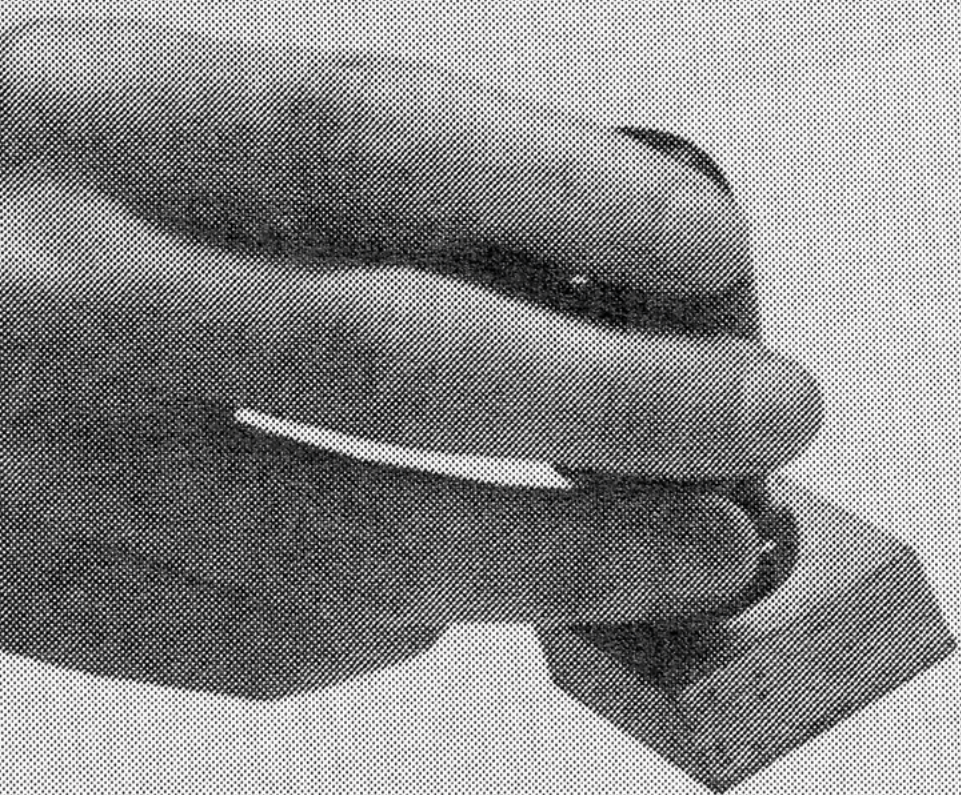




Poster for two performances by Ulises Carrión at Galerie St Petri, Lund, 1979, including his first presentation of "Mail Art and the Big Monster"

Ulises Carrión

The Big Monster

Ulises Carrión was a pioneering figure in mail art, a movement and a medium that produced a unique international network of creative exchange in the 1970s and 1980s. Throughout his life, he developed an important oeuvre that spanned performance, video art, and books. But above all, Carrión was a cultural agitator and a social mediator. His ability to build networks was reflected not only in his prominent role in the mail art movement but also through Other Books and So, the gathering space he founded and ran in Amsterdam. His influential essay “Mail Art and the Big Monster” delineates the principles and goals of mail art, outlines its evolution, and classifies it according to its formal characteristics and modes of circulation. More radically, it brings light to the fact that, up to that moment, mail art depended on the postal system, and was thus able to “knock at the doors of the big monster.”

Ulises Carrión: The Big Monster, curated by Aimé Iglesias Lukin, Visual Arts at Americas Society, brings together a selection of mail art projects that Carrión developed between 1973 and 1983, erasing the boundaries between artwork, archive, and document while questioning fundamental notions of modern art. Carrión’s interventions allow us to rethink the status of the autonomous work of art and the commercial and bureaucratic systems under which it circulates, but also the role of authorship and property in contemporary culture.

November 2019–March 2020

King Kong Archives: Ulises Carrión on Mail and Art

Ever since the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA) was established in 2011, offering access to the archives it has collected over the years has been one of its fundamental goals. In its dedication to fostering academic initiatives related to modern and contemporary Latin American art, ISLAA has partnered with universities to develop an extensive program of conferences and publications that have situated it among the most important promoters of Latin American art in the United States. After ISLAA opened its offices in New York's Upper East Side in 2018, the next logical step was to make its archive visible through an exhibitions program, to which I had the honor of being invited as its first guest curator. The choice of Ulises Carrión as the subject of ISLAA's inaugural exhibition was almost obvious: what better way to promote a collection of documents such as ISLAA's than by exhibiting the work of Carrión, archivist-artist par excellence?

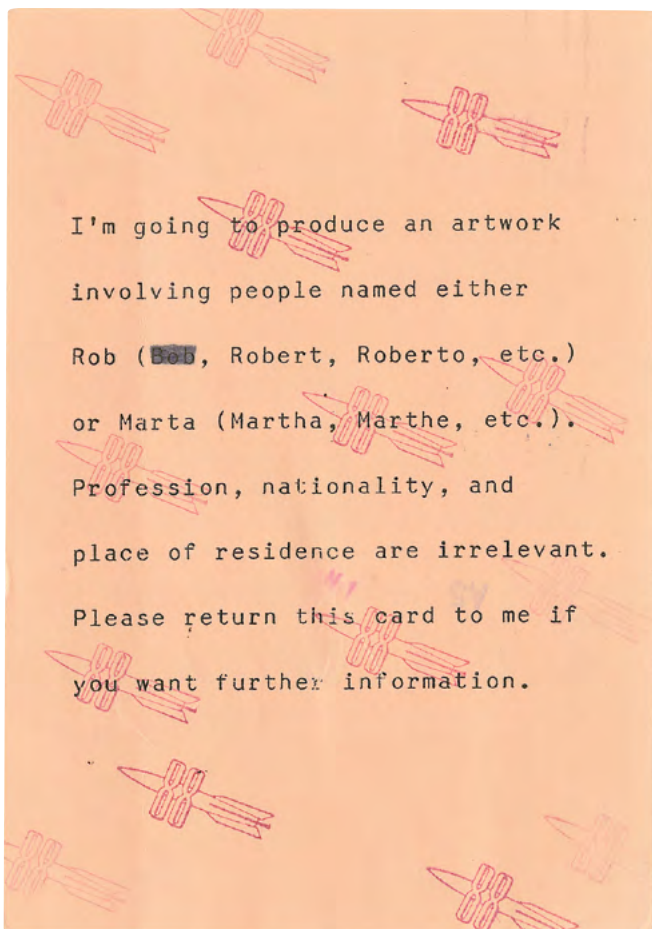
Ulises Carrión was a pioneering figure in mail art, a movement and a medium that produced a unique international network of creative exchange in the 1970s and 1980s. Throughout his life, he developed an important oeuvre that spanned performance, video art, and book works. But above all, Carrión was a cultural agitator and a social mediator. His ability to build networks was reflected not only in his prominent role in mail art, but also in the work he created with other artists and in the gathering spaces he founded and managed in Amsterdam. Between 1972 and 1974 he ran the independent art space In-Out Center, with Michel Cardena, Raúl Marroquín, Hreinn Fridfinnsson, Sigurdur Gudmundsson, Kristján Gudmundsson, Hetty Huisman, Pieter Laurens Mol, and Gerrit Jan de Rook. In 1975, Carrión founded the legendary cultural hub Other Books and So, which served as an artists' meeting center, bookstore, library, and open archive.

One can wonder to which degree the nomadic paths of Carrión's personal life related to his participation in and leadership of a project as internationalist as the mail art network. Born in 1941 in San Andrés Tuxtla, in the Mexican state of Veracruz, Carrión studied philosophy and literature at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, in Mexico City. In 1964 he moved to Paris to study at the Sorbonne, and later to the Goethe-Institut in Achenmühle, Germany. Soon after, he went to the University of Leeds, from which he graduated with

Ulises Carrión was a pioneering figure in mail art, a movement and a medium that produced a unique international network of creative exchange in the 1970s and 1980s.



Portrait of Ulises Carrión at Other Books and So, ca. 1975. Courtesy of the Estate of Ulises Carrión



Intervened invitation for *Rob and Marta*, 1983

a master's degree in English literature. In 1972, this decade-long journey led him to Amsterdam, where he lived until his premature death, in 1989.

"The Big Monster" refers to an essay in which Carrión delineated his position on mail art. It is also the title given by Carrión to the archive exhibited here, which compiles a selection of projects he developed between 1973 and 1983. This exhibition brings together several magazines, edited by Carrión, that compiled mailed submissions, including *Ephemera* (1977–78), *Box Boxing Boxers* (1978), and the project *The Stampa Newspaper* (1980), which was never completed. Also included are a series of "response projects," in which Carrión sent out invitations with instructions for the recipients, who then returned the intervened pieces to him. Among these are *A Poem* (1973), *Definitions of Art* (1977), *Feedback Pieces* (1981),

"The Big Monster" refers to an essay in which Carrión delineated his position on mail art.

and *Rob and Marta* (1983). Finally, the show also includes works in which Carrión attempted to analyze and intervene in the mailing system itself: the Erratic Art Mail International System (E.A.M.I.S., 1978), *Artist's Postage Stamps and Cancellation Stamps* (1979), and *Anonymous Quotations* (1979).

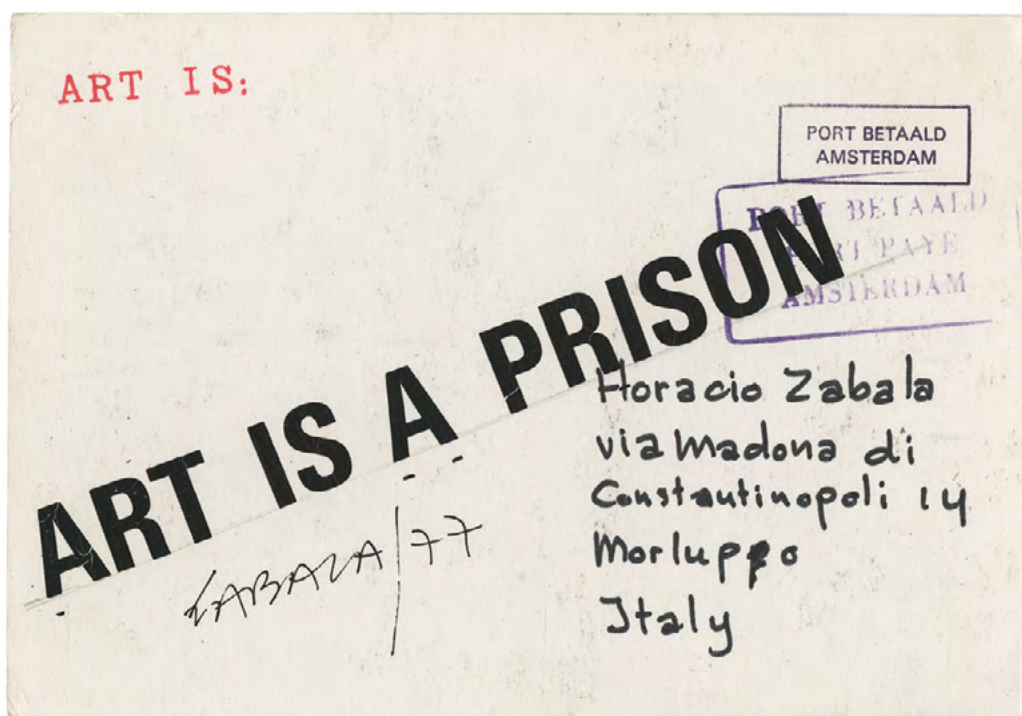
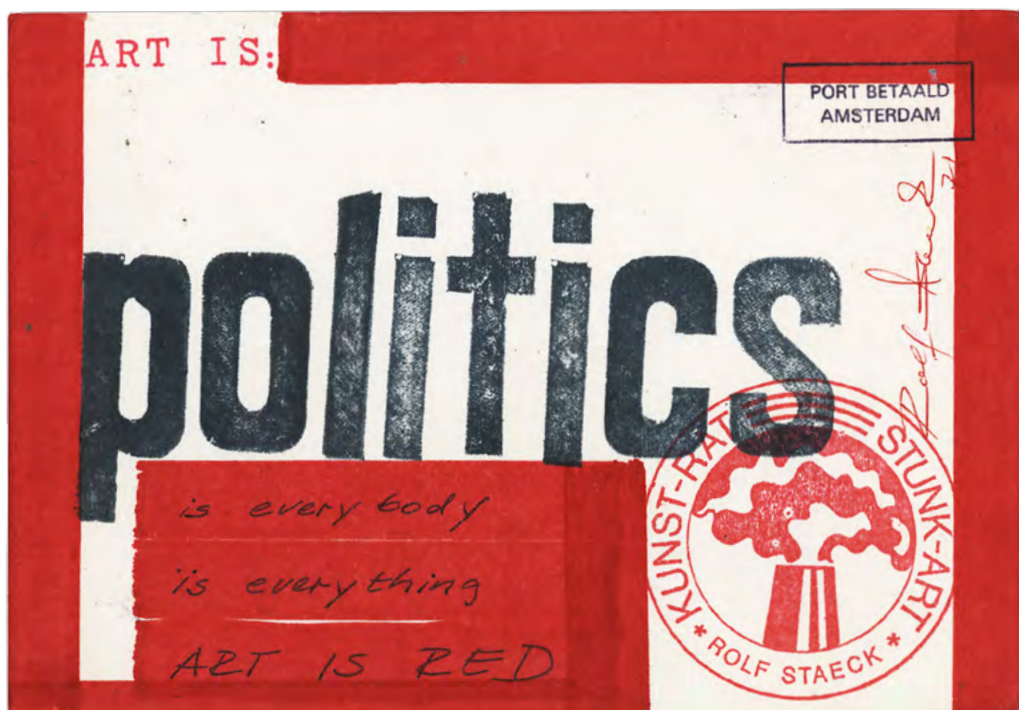
Published for the first time in 1977 for *I Am: International Artist Meeting* at Galeria Remont in Warsaw, Carrión's influential essay "Mail Art and the Big Monster" delineates the principles and goals of mail art, outlines its evolution, and classifies it according to its format, scope, subject and the type of anomaly proposed by the work (alteration of format, of scope, etc.). More radically, the essay brings light to the fact that, up to that moment, mail art was not able to interfere with or modify the postal system, making the focus of the movement more about experimenting with the art object to be mailed—the type of parcel, stamp or envelope—and with the participants—the senders and addressees—than about the distribution system, which was always the mail. Postal systems, whether private or operated by the state, were for Carrión controlling, Big Brother-like systems, and the fact that these artists were not interfering in them limited the extent to which they could experiment with the "mail" part of mail art. "Mail art knocks at the door of the castle where the Big Monster Lives," Carrión said of the movement's relation to the postal service. For Carrión, mail art's war was thus, the battle against the Big Monster. With this statement, Carrión raised the most profound formal reconsideration of mail art as a medium: not only did it have to question what art is and what is mailed, but it also had to deconstruct the postal service itself as a communication system (see image on p. 19).

To fight, or at least escape, the powers of the bureaucratic and state-controlled systems of postal transmission that mail art depended on, Carrión proposed the E.A.M.I.S.—the Erratic Art Mail International System. Presented for the first time at Galeria Remont in Warsaw in 1978, E.A.M.I.S. was to be a free, alternative system for the delivery of mail art, using people travelling around the world as couriers. Carrión named himself the postmaster and drafted a series of rules in an eight-point manifesto that was to be distributed among mail art networks. His proposal was pragmatic but also political—the last point of the document read, "By using the E.A.M.I.S. you support the only alternative to the national bureaucracies and you strengthen the international artists community" (see p. 21).

"Mail art knocks at the door of the castle where the Big Monster Lives," Carrión said of the movement's relation to the postal service.



Bag for E.A.M.I.S., 1978



Postcards sent in response to the project *Definitions of Art*, 1977

ART IS:

What I
want it
to be.

PORT BETAALD
AMSTERDAM

PORT BETAALD
PORT PAYE
AMSTERDAM

Dorothy Iannone
Mommenstr 9
1 Berlin 12
B.R.D.

ART IS:

LEARN TO
DRAW

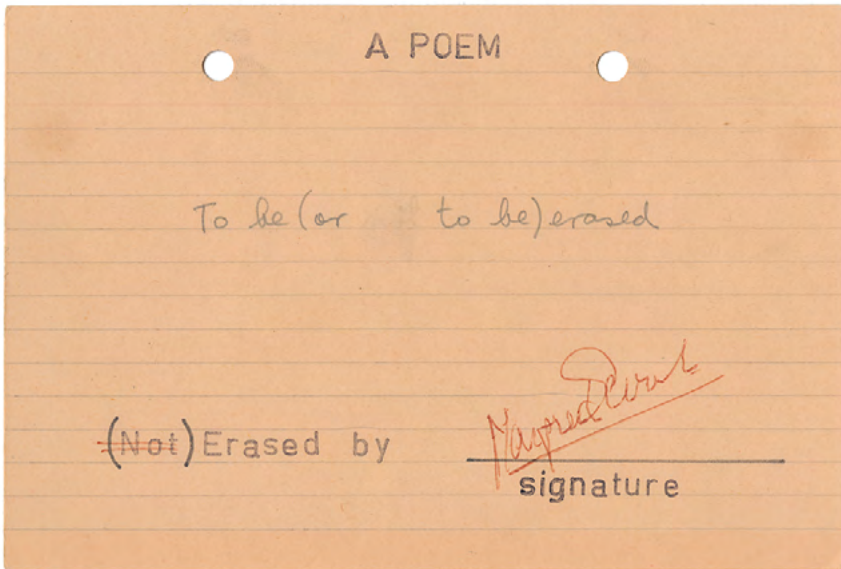
LUCHTPOST
PAR AVION

P 4579

PTT

PORT BETAALD
PORT PAYE
AMSTERDAM

John Baldessani
2405, 3rd Street
Santa Monica,
Calif. 90405
U.S.A.



One of the cards sent in response to the project *A Poem*, 1973

In the Cold War context in which mail art developed, seeking independence from the government did not simply represent an anti-state ideology but also reflected the necessity of bypassing the censorship—and the risk of punishment—that affected many mail artists from Eastern Europe and Latin America living under repressive regimes during that era. The incarceration of Clemente Padín and Jorge Caraballo (denounced on the cover of issue number 5 of *Ephemeria* magazine with the statement “Padín and Caraballo are in jail!”) is probably one of the best examples of the denunciatory and incriminatory possibilities of mail art (p. 27). The two artists were arrested in August 1977 due to the political content of their art. The following year a campaign was organized through the mail art channels, demanding their liberation and exposing the human rights violations taking place in Uruguay.

Before writing this manifesto about mail art and attacking its distribution system, Carrión had, for years, experimented and expanded the possibilities of the medium through the postal service. An early example of his mail art is *A Poem*, from 1973. For this project, he sent thirty index cards to his friends, with the sentence “To be (or not to be) erased” handwritten in pencil on each of them. Stamped on each card was the title “A Poem,” with space below that allowed responders to clarify whether they had erased some text or not, and to add their signature. Participants were to mail back their interventions to the In-Out Center.

A similar project, *Definitions of Art* (pp. 8–9) was conceived for a March 1977 exhibition at Other Books and So, based on an idea developed in 1973 by Hans-Werner Kalkmann in West Germany. The invitation proposed that everyone participate, “regardless of profession, sex, age, etc.,” and instructed recipients to write their own definition of art on the back, to be exhibited along with the other returned cards. Carrión received 367 answers, twenty-three of which were mailed in a support other than the original invitation postcard. The project received responses from artists from all over the world, including Jeremy Adler, Jorge Caraballo, Robin Crozier, Guillermo Deisler, Michael Gibbs, Alison Knowles, Hervé Fischer, Carolee Schneemann, Michael Snow, Horacio Zabala, Ben Vautier, and Martha Wilson.

The most expansive project included in this exhibition is without a doubt *Feedback Pieces*. In 1981, when the Print Gallery Pieter Brattinga invited Carrión to exhibit his work there, Carrión thought of a response project in which he instructed participants to reconstruct, in any way they desired, the bottom half of an invitation, which had been shredded. They were then to sign it and mail it back to the gallery. The lower section of the invitation included a definition of mail art, which the artist had torn up and from which he had then removed a small fragment. This way, the definition of mail art could never be reconstructed and the instruction given by the artist was impossible to accomplish. The project resulted in 243 responses in all sorts of formats; not only intervened letters but also objects. By making participants reconstruct the invitation, the project had a cyclical component that was emphasized by having the word “feedback” in its title. In this way, *Feedback Pieces* takes one step further Carrión’s intentions to reformulate not only the artwork but also the communication system through which it travels (see pp. 12–13 and 35).

With *Anonymous Quotations* (1979) Carrión avoided the mailing system completely, while still making a reference to it. For that project, he selected fragments from fifty-one private letters he had received and typed each on lined paper. These extracts were then exhibited along with a photograph of the letter they came from, with the sender’s signature and any other potentially identifying information scratched out. Exhibited at the premises of Void Distributor in Amsterdam, the project was atypical of mail art in that it did not involve any circulation and was instead more in line with the conceptualist proposals that had been prevalent since the 1960s. In *Anonymous Quotations*, the mail was the subject of representation of the work, by means of citation and photographic documentation. However, the contents of the letter were not the true subject of the work, which focused instead on the role of text in the reproducibility of language and communication systems.

Dit is een Mail-Art project van Ulises Carrión. Iedereen, ook u, is uitgenodigd deel te nemen. Het onderste gedeelte van deze uitnodiging is in stukjes gescheurd. Alles wat u moet doen is het complete vel zo snel mogelijk retourneren aan Print Gallery, Pieter Brattinga, Prinsengracht 628, 1017 KT Amsterdam nadat u alle stukjes bijeen gevoegd hebt en het resultaat ondertekend hebt. U kunt deze aanwijzing zo vrij opvatten als u wilt, het is alleen belangrijk dat u iets terugstuurt. De tentoonstelling laat alle inzendingen zien. Graag wil ik u bij voorbaat danken voor uw medewerking.

This is a Mail-Art project by Ulises Carrión. Everybody, including you, is invited to participate. The lower part of this invitation has been torn to pieces. All you have to do is returning the completed sheet to Print Gallery, Pieter Brattinga, Prinsengracht 628, 1017 KT Amsterdam, Netherlands as soon as possible, after having put all the pieces back together and signed the resulting piece. Feel free to interpret this instruction any way you like, but it's essential that you send something back. The exhibition will consist of all the answers. I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Dies ist ein Mail-Art Projekt von Ulises Carrión. Jedermann, auch Sie, ist zur Teilnahme eingeladen. Der untere Teil dieser Einladung ist in Stücke gerissen. Alles, was Sie zu tun haben, ist möglichst bald das vollständige Blatt an die Print Gallery, Pieter Brattinga, Prinsengracht 628, 1017 KT Amsterdam, Niederlande zu retournieren, nachdem Sie alle Stücke zusammengefügt und das Ergebnis unterschrieben haben. Diese Anweisung können Sie völlig frei interpretieren. Wichtig ist lediglich, dass Sie etwas zurückschicken. Die Ausstellung wird alle Einsendungen zeigen. Für Ihre Mitarbeit danke ich Ihnen im Voraus.

Ulises Carrión: Feedback pieces 2 maart - 11 april 1981

Een 'Mail-Art' project is een onderzoek naar aanleiding van concepten zoals eenling/groep, betekenis/interpretatie, input/output, creatie/destructie (meervoudig auteurschap). De deelname van het publiek vormt een kollektieve vaststelling van een belangrijk probleem in de hedendaagse kunst, 'hoe komt kunst tot stand'. In 'Mail-Art' is de vraag zowel als het antwoord, ongeacht haar eventuele esthetische waarde, een formeel element in een nieuw kunstwerk.

A Mail-Art project is a research on concepts such as individual/group, meaning/interpretation, input/output, creation/destruction (plural authorship). The participation of the public represents a collective re-enactment of a main problem in contemporary art, 'how does art come into existence?' In Mail-Art the question as well as the answer, regardless of their eventual 'aesthetic' quality, become formal elements of a new artwork.

Ein 'Mail-Art-Projekt' ist eine Untersuchung aufgrund von Konzepten wie Individuum/Gruppe, Absicht/Interpretation, input/output, Schöpfung/Zerstörung (mehrfache Urheberschaft). Die Teilnahme des Publikums verkörpert eine kollektive Neubestimmung eines Hauptproblems in der Kunst unserer Zeit, 'wie entsteht Kunst?' In Mail-Art ist sowohl die Antwort, unabhängig von ihrer eventuellen 'ästhetischen' Qualität, ein formales Element eines neuen Kunstwerks.

Print Gallery, Pieter Brattinga, Amsterdam

Ma Mon Mon 12-16
Woe Wed Mit 12-16
Vrij Fri Frei 12-16

en na afspraak
and after appointment
und nach Vereinbarung
Telefoon 020-2242 65

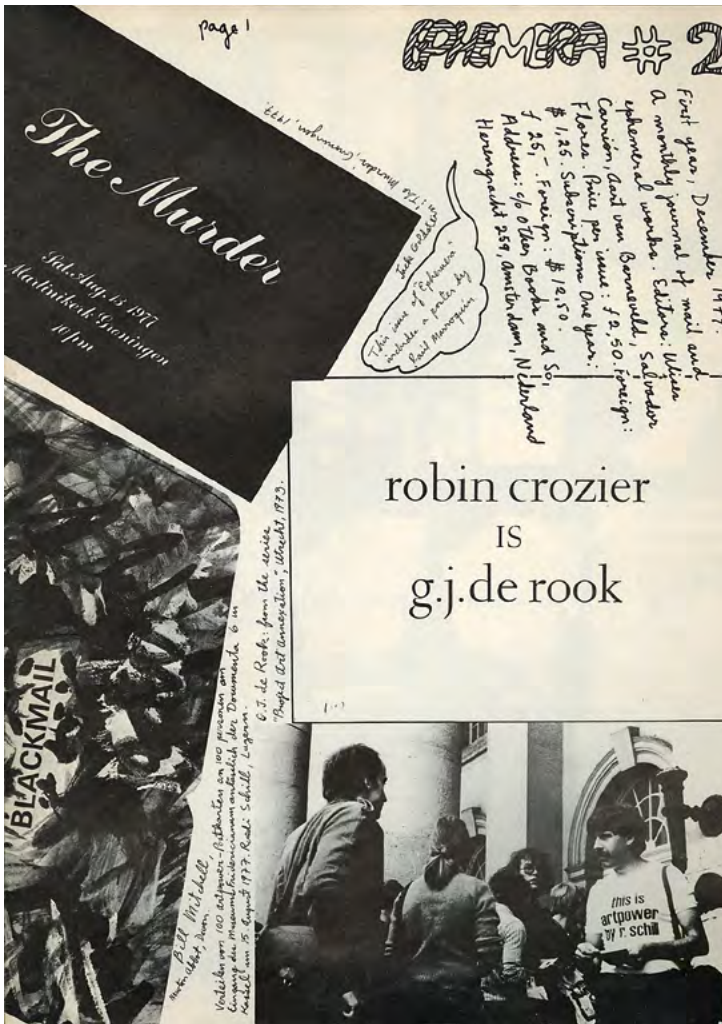
Prinsengracht 628
1017 KT Amsterdam
Netherlands
Telex 12532 (merlo nl)



Lawrence Weiner's response to *Feedback Pieces*, 1981



Various objects sent as responses to *Feedback Pieces*, 1981

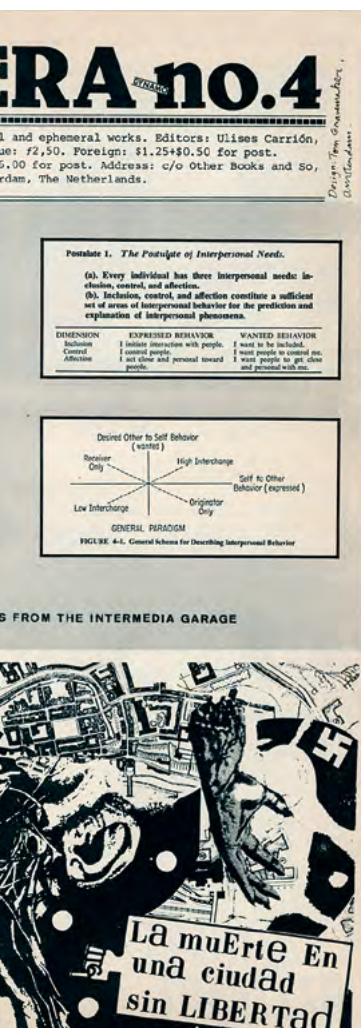


Cover of *Ephemera* 2, December 1977



Cover of *Ephemera* 4, January 1978

Ulises Carrión also explored the idea of copies and the multiple through his involvement in publications, three of which are exhibited in this show. Created in 1977 by Carrión, Aart van Barneveld, and Salvador Flores, *Ephemera* was a monthly magazine that published mailed submissions concerning particular topics. Almost 250 participants contributed works on paper, stamps, and collages for each of the twelve issues of the publication. As Zanna Gilbert describes in her essay for this exhibition, *Ephemera* gave the mail art network a means of communication and a space for self-definition, expressed in references to the influences of the movement and the adscription to other aesthetic proposals.



Cover of Ephemera 9, July 1978

Ephemera was also a creative space for format experimentation, where the aesthetics of collage and the suggestion of interactive modalities of artmaking affected the artists' submissions but also the magazine itself, which in some cases could be transformed into a poster or an object.

Presented at Other Books and So in 1978, *Box Boxing Boxers* was the fifth issue of *Commonpress*, a magazine created in 1977 by Polish artist Pawel Petasz with a rotating editorship among important mail artists. It was, again, conformed by contributions mailed by different artists, in this case thirty-two, including Paulo Bruscky, Graciela Gutiérrez Marx, and Edgardo Antonio Vigo. As Carrión wrote



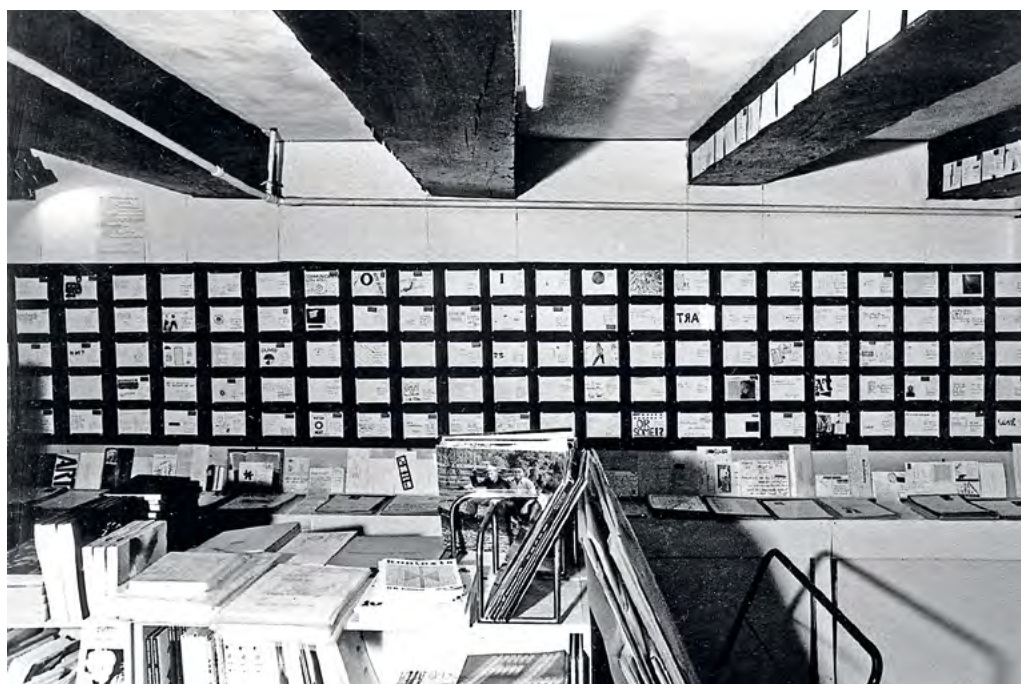
Stamp art show at Other Books and So, 1976

in its opening pages: “The question now arises: *has this anthology primarily to do with art? Or, has it to do with box?* (And this question is valid, regardless of the plurality of meanings of the word ‘box,’ which lead some participants to take it as meaning ‘sport’ and some others as ‘receptacle’).”

As noted earlier, Other Books and So was a bookstore but also a gathering and exhibition space and an archive. It is important to note that an archive is, of necessity, a provisory device; a living organism in a constant state of growth and exchange, much like mail art. Given that Other Books and So exhibited documents and also constituted Carrión's archive, the installations avoided the formality of traditional art spaces, instead promoting crowded and dynamic displays that represented the multiplicity of the space's functions. In this spirit, this exhibition at ISLAA presents the documents in archival sleeves and fills up the space on the walls.

In the interactive mail art projects presented here, authorship is confusing and questionable. Is the author the person inviting others to participate? Is it the person sending a response piece, or the author of the cited letter? In turn, Carrión's oeuvre proposed multiple authorships, which conflated and overlapped in the answers sent by

Carrión's interventions allow us to rethink the status of the autonomous work of art and the commercial and bureaucratic systems under which it circulates.



Exhibition at Other Books and So, Amsterdam, 1978

artists, the dialogue between them, and their relationship to Carrión's invitation—an authorial gesture of its own. Erasing the boundaries between artwork, archive and document, and questioning basic notions of artistic modernity, Carrión's interventions allow us to rethink the status of the autonomous work of art and the commercial and bureaucratic systems under which it circulates, but also the role of authorship and property in contemporary culture. In this, his work was definitely a big monster of King Kong-like proportions, destabilizing the foundations of our existing social contract (see p. 2).

Some Notes on Ulises Carrión's Mail Art Systems

Ulises Carrión was part of a cadre of artists who, in the 1970s, participated in what became known as the international mail art network. These artists aimed to disseminate their work beyond the strictures of juried exhibitions, salons, galleries, and institutions, without the censoring presence of curators and critics, in a long-distance exchange with like-minded artists. In addition to their mail art correspondence, these artists were often active in their local scenes, like Carrión, who founded the bookshop and exhibition space Other Books and So in his chosen city of Amsterdam. Through Carrión's dedicated work in the local sphere, the space became a book and mail art hub, where he organized a number of exhibitions featuring artists from the network. He also thought deeply about the implications of book art, mail art, and the associated art of rubber stamps, interrogating the terms of engagement for artists in these networks in key texts such as "The New Art of Making Books" (1975), "Rubber Stamp Theory and Praxis" (1978), "From Bookworks to Mailworks" (1978), "Mail Art and the Big Monster" (1977), and "Personal Worlds or Cultural Strategies?" (1979).¹ While Carrión produced a number of mail art projects and exhibitions, this text focuses on three of his key actions in this realm: the Erratic Art Mail International System (E.A.M.I.S, 1977), *Ephemera* magazine (1977–78), and the project *Feedback Pieces* (1981) (see pp. 19–20).

The Erratic Art Mail International System

Of the numerous mail art projects conceived by Carrión, none was as probing of the foundational structure of the movement as the E.A.M.I.S—the Erratic Art Mail International System (p. 21). This system was parodically envisaged by Carrión as a mail art network independent of the postal system, in which correspondence would be carried to its destination by traveling friends and acquaintances in a slow but deliberate trajectory "by any way other than the official Post Offices."² The idea occurred to Carrión while writing the essay "Mail Art and the Big Monster," in 1977. One of the questions the text explored was the restriction of creative freedom when sending works through the mail, which as a vehicle of the State was constricted by bureaucratic control and, in some contexts, direct censorship. Carrión reflected, "When we are producing the piece ... we are free ... What about the mailing?"

E.A.M.I.S. was parodically envisaged by Carrión as a mail art network independent of the postal system.

<u>Table of Mail Art Works</u>	
<u>1. Format</u>	
1.1. Total	
1.1.1. Postcard	
1.1.2. Letter	
1.1.3. Package	
1.1.4. Telegram	
1.2. Partial	
1.2.1. Envelope	
1.2.2. Post Stamp	
1.2.3. Rubber Stamp	
<u>2. Scope</u>	
2.1. Individual	
2.1.1. One sender, one mailing	
2.1.2. One sender, serial mailing	
	2.1.2.1. One addressee
	2.1.2.2. Several addressees
	2.2. Group
	2.2.1. All the invitations to participate plus all the answers
	2.2.2. The answers alone are part of the work
	<u>3. Subject</u>
	3.1. Free
	3.2. Given
	<u>4. Anomalies</u>
	4.1. Alteration of Format
	4.2. Alteration of scope
	4.3. Alteration of subject
	4.4. Alteration of the table

This table of mail art works was drawn by Ulises Carrión on a postcard to be published alongside his text "Mail Art and the Big Monster," 1978, but remained unpublished until the publication of the collection of his works *Second Thoughts*, in 1980.

Then we are not free, we are subject to certain rules established beforehand."³ In the same text, the artist envisioned a mail art system not dependent on "the Big Monster": "Let's imagine a piece of Mail Art that uses a substitute for the Post System. For instance, we can give letters to a number of friends that set out in different directions. We can give these friends precise instructions regarding when and how and to whom our messages should be delivered. All this is perfectly possible, is it not? But normally we use the Post Office because it happens to be the most convenient and widely used network."⁴ When this text was republished in the artist's volume of collected writings, *Second Thoughts*, Carrión added a note stating that it was this observation that inspired the E.A.M.I.S. project.

E.A.M.I.S. was, as art librarian Sarah Hamerman has pointed out, "largely a conceptual piece."⁵ It consisted of eight programmatic and bureaucratic-sounding statements by Carrión, who denominated himself "postmaster."⁶

Essay on Correspondance Art

Is Rehfeldt a correspondance artist?
Is Crozier a correspondance artist?
Is Nations a correspondance artist?
Is Zack a correspondance artist?
Is Hompsen a correspondance artist?
Is Marroquín a correspondance artist?
Is Held a correspondance artist?
Is Elsasser a correspondance artist?
Is Spector a correspondance artist?
Is van Raay a correspondance artist?
Is Story a correspondance artist?
Is Barboza a correspondance artist?
Is Galli a correspondance artist?
Is Albrecht a correspondance artist?
Is Carter a correspondance artist?
Is Santiago a correspondance artist?
Is Duch a correspondance artist?
Is Silviera a correspondance artist?
Is Sellem a correspondance artist?
Is Hubert a correspondance artist?
Is Cleveland a correspondance artist?
Is Sir Q a correspondance artist?
Is Cavellini a correspondance artist?
Is Beau Geste Press a correspondance artist?
Is Evans a correspondance artist?
Is Berkamn a correspondance artist?
Is Ferlaute a correspondance artist?
Is SPUDZ a correspondance artist?
Is Heriike a correspondance artist?
Is Johnson a correspondance artist?
Is Deisler a correspondance artist?
Is Fonteles a correspondance artist?
Is Lesson a correspondance artist?
Is Cook a correspondance artist?
Is Szombathy a correspondance artist?
Is Mizukami a correspondance artist?
Is Sullivan a correspondance artist?
Is Lisboa a correspondance artist?
Is Doe-Da Postage Works a correspondance artist?
Is Buchwalder a correspondance artist?
Is Haddock a correspondance artist?
Is Higgins a correspondance artist?
Is Caraballo a correspondance artist?

ERRATIC ART MAIL INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

-an alternative to the official Post Offices.



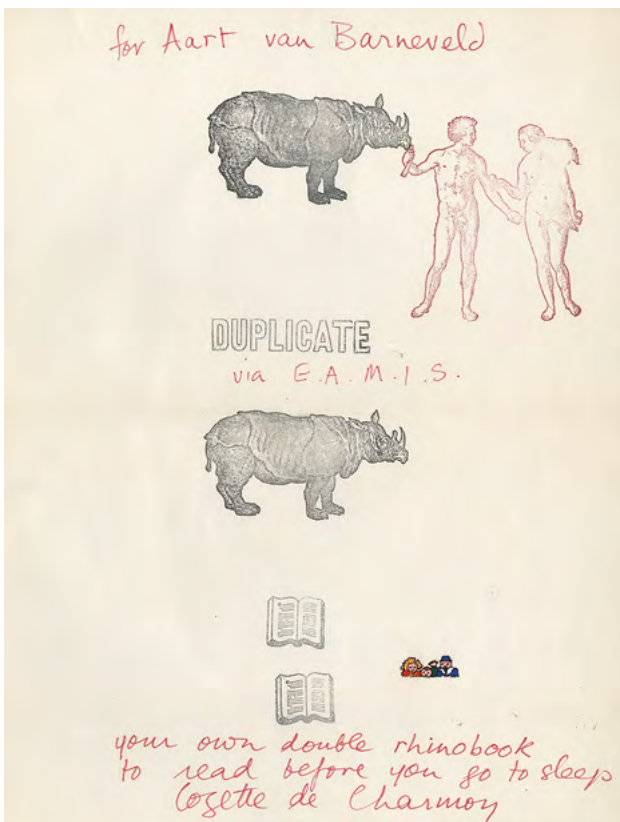
1. The E.A.M.I.S. will carry messages in any format -cards, letters, parcels, etc., and realized in any medium -book, cassette, tape, film, etc.
2. The message must reach the E.A.M.I.S. office by any way other than the official Post Offices. It can be delivered by the author or by any other person.
3. The E.A.M.I.S. is free of charge. Any piece, however, intended for delivery should be accompanied by a second copy or duplicate. This second copy or duplicate shall be kept in the archives of the E.A.M.I.S. after delivery of the original.
4. The E.A.M.I.S. guarantees delivery of the entrusted pieces by any means other than the official Post Offices. If for any reason a piece remains 3 years undelivered, it will be sent back to the author by any means other than the official Post Offices.
5. The E.A.M.I.S. will keep on its premises, open to any potential receiver, a stock of yet undelivered pieces. On the other hand, it is not necessary to be a potential receiver in order to visit the archives.
6. Mail pieces are accepted regardless of size, country of origin and country of destination.
7. The E.A.M.I.S. is not responsible for fakes and falsifiers. Every piece from the E.A.M.I.S. must carry our own stamps and seals.
8. By using the E.A.M.I.S. you support the only alternative to the national bureaucracies and you strengthen the international artists community.

Ulises Carrión
(Post Master).

ERRATIC ART MAIL INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM
Herengracht 259, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Office Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 14.00-18.00.
Telephone 020-257041.

The E.A.M.I.S. principles guaranteed free delivery within three years (otherwise the item would be returned to its sender—by E.A.M.I.S., naturally); asked that the E.A.M.I.S. archive receive a duplicate for the purposes of record keeping; ensured that packages of any size, destination, or origin could be sent through the system; and protected against “fakes and falsifiers” through verification by E.A.M.I.S. stamps and seals. The final point of the list stated: “By using the E.A.M.I.S. you support the only alternative to the national bureaucracies and you strengthen the international artists community.”⁷ Carrión had thus deciphered one of the fundamental contradictions of the mail art network: its egalitarian, democratic, and “alternative” model for exchanging art was deeply dependent on an agency of the state. His Erratic Art Mail International System playfully proposed to replace the postal service with an inefficient but independent alternative specifically for the purposes of exchanging art. (see pp. 22–23)."

Carrión stated “By using the E.A.M.I.S. you support the only alternative to the national bureaucracies and you strengthen the international artists community.”



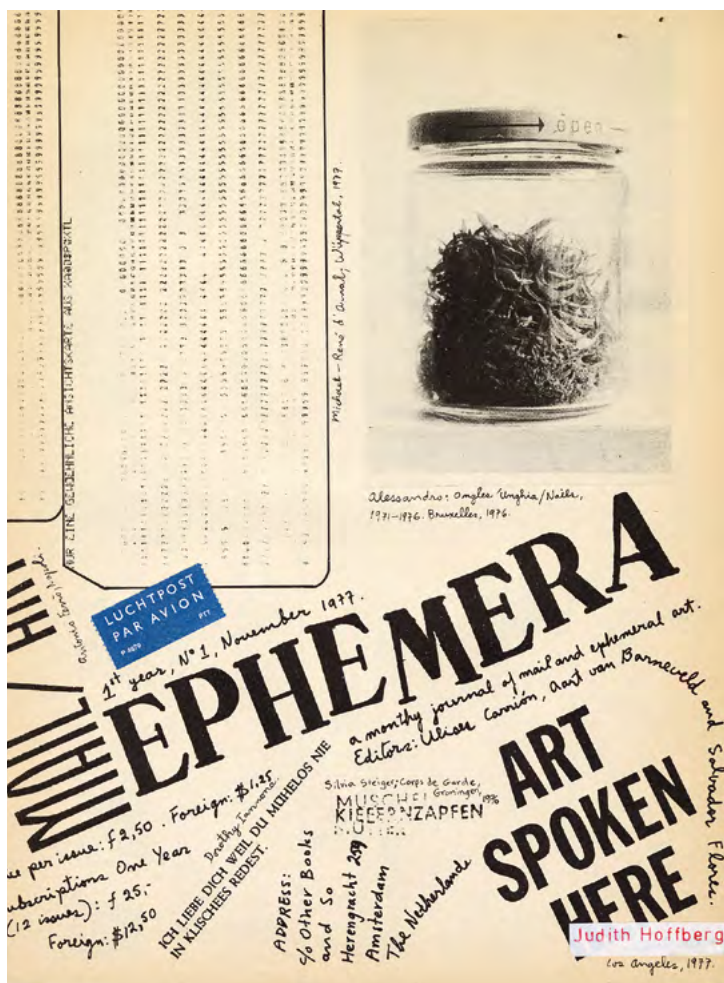
Letter sent by Cozette de Charmoy to Aart van Barneveld via E.A.M.I.S., undated



Letter sent by Henryk Bzdok to Ulises Carrión via E.A.M.I.S., undated

corr.nr. 69-72	TELEGRAM		2 5-nr. 4	sangen.door
Telegram voort: Cable to: Telegramme pour: Telegram für:	COZETTE & RODNEY GREY-DE CHARMOY Via E.A.M.I.S. 16, Chemin de la Touraille 1209 GENEVE - Suisse			
Inhoud en naam van afz: Text and senders name: Texte et nom d'expéditeur: Inhalt und Name Absender:				
20-4-78				
Seinkosten f				
LX "				
RP "				
Tot.prijs				
Naam en adres afzender: Name and address sender: Nom et adresse d'expéditeur: Name und Adresse Absender:	VOOR NAVRAGEN: FOR REQUESTS: FOUR DEMANDS: FÜR NACHFRAGEN: GUY SCHRAENEN Loket-TELEGRAMFORMULIER Telefoondistrict Amsterdam - PTI			

Telegram sent by Guy Schraenen to Cozette & Rodney Grey de Charmoy via E.A.M.I.S., undated



Cover of *Ephemera* 1, November 1977

Ephemera Magazine

In November 1977, Ulises Carrión, Aart van Barneveld, and Salvador Flores published the first issue of *Ephemera*, "a monthly journal of mail and ephemeral art," as stated on the cover of the slim publication. The magazine was a compendium of works received through the mail. The frequency of the magazine's publication is indicative of the sheer amount of material being received by the artists, which they laid out with a quick method of paste-up and print, likely with a mimeograph machine. The front and back covers were adorned with slogans by participants of the mail art network such as "ART SPOKEN HERE" (Judith Hoffberg); "mail art it's fine art" (a. ferro et al.); "do as you like

R.F" (Robert Filliou); "EACH DAY TO COME FOR ONE YEAR MORE—ROY GRAYSON, LONDON." Mailing labels, rubber stamps, and photocopies were scattered across the page, each neatly annotated by Carrión by hand with each artist's name, title, date, and the work's place of origin, with a distinctly Dada-inflected approach to typography. The pages are mostly black and white but they are scattered with colorful stamps and mailing labels. Carrión's distinctive cursive gives the issue a personal touch.

Prominent on the front cover of its first issue, a photograph of a jar full of fingernail clippings by an artist identified only as "Alessandro" is dated 1971–76, indicating that the jar contains half a decade's worth of nail clippings, presumably the artist's own. Among many other items reproduced from Carrión's mailbox is *Postman's Choice*, a postcard created by Ben Vautier in 1965. The postcard has an address section on both sides, enabling the sender to fill in two addresses and letting the postman decide which to send it to. In *Ephemera*, it is shown in its sent form, with "Ulises & Art" being the eventual recipient and "Beste Helen" losing out. Carrión writes on the reproduced piece, "We (Ulises & Art) got it," as if they have won a prize. The following pages continue in the same vein, with contributions from artists as far flung as Dick Higgins, Richard Prince, Gábor Tóth, and Paulo Bruscky. On one page, the editors succinctly cite other mail art publications that have inspired their own:

We like Diego Barboza's "Arte Correo."
We like Raúl Marroquín's "Fandangos."
We like Anna Banana's "Vile."
We like Klaus Groh's "Info."

The cited publications were mail art magazines that were assembled as news and digest-style compilations, with differing editorial perspectives. The deliberate choice to name them in *Ephemera* further indicates the ways in which mail art networks were propagated by the publication—not only through postal exchange and by printing the resulting artifacts, but also by naming other publications of influence and ostensibly encouraging readers to take note of the work of the artists' peers. In this way the mail art network created a mirror of itself and a feedback system of galvanizing effort.

Later issues of *Ephemera* continue in the same vein. Each of them is carefully conceived and produced, incorporating additional elements or distinct formats that elevate the publication from a mere compilation. The cover of *Ephemera* 6, for example, features brown paper receipts sent by the poet and artist Robin Crozier and is headlined by poet, artist, and performer Gábor Tóth's slogan "Sorry, no art today" (p. 26). *Ephemera* 5 is notable in that, in order to be read, it has to be cut open along a dotted

gabor toth

Budapest, 1978.



**EPH
M
E
R
A**

first year April 1978. A monthly journal of mail
and ephemeral works. Editors: Ulises Carrion, Art
van derveeld, Salvador Flores. Price per issue:
\$ 4.50, foreign: \$ 12.50 + .50 for post.
Subscription for 1 year: \$25, -foreign: \$ 12.50 + \$ 0.00 for post.
Address: c/o Other books and So, Heringstraat 259, Amsterdam, NL.

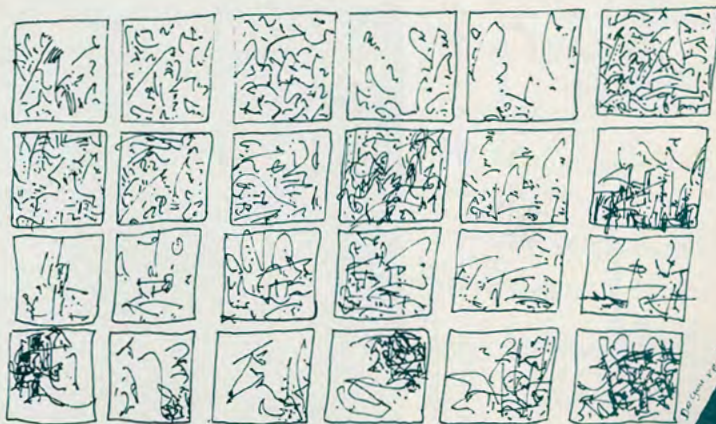


"Overprints" by Michla Amsterdam.

EPHEMERA#5

PADIN AND
CARABALLO
ARE
IN
JAIL!

Info for information. Transmit it.
Julius Garrison



Page 1

Jeremy Adler, London, n.d.



Journal?

Cover of Ephemera 5, February 1978



Cover of *Ephemera* 12: the "Brazil special," October 1978

line, an action suggested by a scissor icon (p. 27). This format mischievously combines censored information and playful participation. The exclamation “Padín and Caraballo are in Jail!” is scrawled on the cover of the issue and just below it, written in Carrión’s familiar handwriting, the directive, “Ask for information. Transmit it,” raising concerns about freedom of information and calling for an active, participatory engagement with media and information distribution. The final two issues are dedicated to specific countries: the “Hungary special,” issue 11 (p. 28), is almost a poster, with each work subordinated to the overall design, while the “Brazil special,” issue 12 (p. 29), consists of pieces mailed by people associated with the experimental Brazilian poetry movement *Poema/Processo* (Poetry/Process), which aimed to bring poetic discourse into the performative and participatory realm. Works from Latin America and Eastern Europe were well represented in the other issues of *Ephemera* as well, as Hamerman has noted, but these two issues were noteworthy in that, as she points out, “on the one hand, the Hungary and Brazil issues serve to showcase the aesthetic specificity and disciplinary origins of mail art practices within these regions. On the other, by showcasing mail art practices in local contexts outside Western democracies, *Ephemera* deepened artistic exchange across geographic and ideological borders, making a small but significant political intervention.”⁸

Curator and publisher Guy Schraenen writes that *Ephemera* reveals “an immense diversity in the aesthetics, conception, and geographical origins of the works,” with each participant’s contribution “forged into a collective work.”⁹ The mail art network itself was a multi-authored conceptual project made of hundreds of thousands of works. Cutting, pasting, and collaging these disparate pieces together formulates the aesthetic of the network, giving the magazine a multivocal, interdialogic, and process-based character that likewise gestures to its participation in the larger network of mail art publications. Indeed, around the time of its publication Carrión wrote “From Bookworks to Mailworks” (1979), in which he explored the question of authorship in mail art, and in another text, “Personal Worlds or Cultural Strategies,” he stated: “In a project containing 150 pieces, am I to be considered the author of only that one showing my signature? Am I innocent of the other 149? All 150 pieces should rather be considered as ‘one’ element in a complex artwork.”¹⁰ For Carrión, multi-authored, or “plurally-authored” work indicates a shift from “artwork” to “cultural strategy,” which also encompassed his daily activity of reproducing and distributing mail art. In this essay, he goes on to observe that “... mail art shifts the focus from what is traditionally called ‘art’ to the wider concept of ‘culture.’ And this shift is what makes mail art truly contemporary. In opposition to ‘personal

Ephemera magazine is an analogy for the network itself, becoming, through collaborative collage, a multi-authored work and a portable archive.

worlds,' mail art emphasizes cultural strategies. This radical shift gives birth to quite a number of theoretical and practical questions, the most evident of them being: where does the border lie between an artist's work and the actual organization and distribution of the work? As a project in which the end product is collated from individual works that have circulated in the mail art network, *Ephemera* illustrates this idea aptly. The magazine is an analogy for the network itself, becoming, through collaborative collage, a multi-authored work and a portable archive.

Feedback Pieces

Ephemera magazine's focus on the feedback of the mail art network was further explored in 1981 in another project, titled *Feedback Pieces*. Carrión had been invited by Pieter Brattinga to conceive a mail art project and exhibition for his gallery. The artist devised a project in which he sent out an exhibition invitation, the lower part of which was torn into shreds, encouraging participants to reconstruct it in any way they wanted, sign it, and return it to be exhibited. Carrión received around 250 responses.¹¹

This is a mail art project by Ulises Carrión. Everybody, including you, is invited to participate. The lower part of this invitation has been torn to pieces. All you have to do is returning [sic] the completed sheet to Print Gallery, Pieter Brattinga, Prinsengracht 628, 1017KT Amsterdam, Netherlands as soon as possible, after having put all the pieces back together and signed the resulting piece. "Feel free" to interpret this instruction any way you like, but it is essential that you send something back.¹²

Although many mail art projects functioned in this call-and-response way, Carrión's project synthesized the process by making the actual invitation the material for the artists' responses. The visible changes and interventions made to the invitation by the participants constituted "feedback" in the project. The participants of the mail art network had already conceptualized the feedback of the post office as "noise"; the traces of their works' journeys such as rubber stamps, and other signs of their travel, such as damage to the surface, became marks of these chance occurrences as well as bureaucratic records of their routes.



Endre Tót's response to *Feedback Pieces*, undated

Carrión took this one step further by making the feedback—the artists' responses and distortion—an explicit part of the piece. This puzzle with no correct answer unleashed a barrage of creativity from Carrión's correspondents. In "Personal Worlds or Cultural Strategies?" Carrión had argued that a system or method could become part of the formal makeup of an artist's work, if they so determined, which was perhaps another way of saying that process and strategy should be considered integral to an artist's production (see images on pp. 31 and 33–34).

"Your ideas help my ideas" was a slogan employed by the mail artist Robert Rehfeldt that hinted at the plural and multivocal nature of mail art. The projects by Ulises Carrión outlined here reveal a deep interest in exploring these facets of the mail art system as a formal device, celebrating the value of artists' creativity within the parameters of group participation. Carrión asserted that by sending mail art he was "knocking at the door where the Big Monster lives." This active knocking was enabled by a constant flow of information and a surge of defiant creativity from a group of like-minded artists who refused to comply with the systems presented to them for making art, and reflected Carrión's deep interest in the infrastructure and interpersonal connections that enabled artmaking and communication.

Part of this text was previously published in the article "Via Postal: Networked Publications in and out of Latin America" in Meghan Forbes, ed., *International Perspectives on Publishing Platforms: Image, Object, Text* (London: Routledge, 2018).

¹ These texts were published in the collection *Second Thoughts* (Amsterdam: Void, 1980).

² Ulises Carrión, "Mail Art and the Big Monster," *Second Thoughts*, 42.

³ Carrión, "Mail Art and the Big Monster," 44.

⁴ Carrión, "Mail Art and the Big Monster," 41.

⁵ Sarah Hamerman, "Beyond Bookworks: Ulises Carrión's Cultural Strategies," (MA Thesis, Pratt Institute, 2017), 46, https://monoskop.org/images/b/b3/Hamerman_Sarah_Beyond_Bookworks_Ulises_Carrions_Cultural_Strategies_2017.pdf

⁶ Ulises Carrión, "Erratic Art Mail International System: An Alternative to the Post Office," in Juan J. Agius, *El arte correo y el gran monstruo: Archivo Carrión II* (Mexico City: Tumbona, 2013), 83.

⁷ Carrión, "Erratic Art Mail International System," 83.

⁸ Hamerman, 39.

⁹ Guy Schraenen, *Ulises Carrión: Dear Reader, Don't Read* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2015), 22.

¹⁰ Ulises Carrión, "Personal Worlds or Cultural Strategies?," 1979. Available at: <http://www.artpool.hu/MailArt/chrono/1979/Carrion.html>

¹¹ Carrión, "Personal Worlds or Cultural Strategies?"

¹² Text printed on the *Feedback Pieces* invitation card.



Pat Fish's response to *Feedback Pieces*, undated

Dit is een Mail-Art project van Ulises Carrión. Iedereen, ook u, is uitgenodigd deel te nemen. Het onderste gedeelte van deze uitnodiging is in stukjes gescheurd. Alles wat u moet doen is het complete vel zo snel mogelijk retourneren aan Print Gallery, Pieter Brattinga, Prinsengracht 628, 1017 KT Amsterdam nadat u alle stukjes bijeen gevoegd hebt en het resultaat ondertekend hebt. U kunt deze aanwijzing zo vrij opvatten als u wilt, het is alleen belangrijk dat u iets terugstuurt. De tentoonstelling laat alle inzendingen zien. Graag wil ik u bij voorbaat danken voor uw medewerking.

This is a Mail-Art project by Ulises Carrión. Everybody, including you, is invited to participate. The lower part of this invitation has been torn to pieces. All you have to do is returning the completed sheet to Print Gallery, Pieter Brattinga, Prinsengracht 628, 1017 KT Amsterdam, Netherlands as soon as possible, after having put all the pieces back together and signed the resulting piece. Feel free to interpret this instruction any way you like, but it's essential that you send something back. The exhibition will consist of all the answers. I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Dies ist ein Mail-Art Projekt von Ulises Carrión. Jedermann, auch Sie, ist zur Teilnahme eingeladen. Der untere Teil dieser Einladung ist in Stücke gerissen. Alles, was Sie zu tun haben, ist möglichst bald das vollständige Blatt an die Print Gallery, Pieter Brattinga, Prinsengracht 628, 1017 KT Amsterdam, Niederlande zu retournieren, nachdem Sie alle Stücke zusammengefügt und das Ergebnis unterschrieben haben. Diese Anweisung können Sie völlig frei interpretieren. Wichtig ist lediglich, dass Sie etwas zurückschicken. Die Ausstellung wird alle Einsendungen zeigen. Für Ihre Mitarbeit danke ich Ihnen im Voraus.



Ulises Carrión: Feedback pieces 2 maart - 11 april 1981

Een 'Mail-Art' project is een onderzoek naar aanleiding van concepten zoals eenling/groep, betekenis/interpretatie, input/output, creatie/destructie (meervoudig auteurschap). De deelname van het publiek vormt een kollektieve vaststelling van een belangrijk probleem in de hedendaagse kunst: 'hoe komt kunst tot stand'. In 'Mail-Art' is de vraag zowel als het antwoord, ongeacht haar eventuele esthetische waarde, een formeel element in een nieuw kunstwerk.

A Mail-Art project is a research on concepts such as individual/group, meaning/interpretation, input/output, creation/destruction (plural authorship). The participation of the public represents a collective re-enactment of a main problem in contemporary art: 'how does art come into existence?' In Mail-Art the question as well as the answer, regardless of their eventual 'aesthetic' quality, become formal elements of a new artwork.

Ein 'Mail-Art-Projekt' ist eine Untersuchung aufgrund von Konzepten wie Individuum/Gruppe, Absicht/Interpretation, input/output, Schöpfung/Zerstörung (mehrfache Urteiler-schaft). Die Teilnahme des Publikums verkörpert eine kollektive Neubestimmung eines Hauptproblems in der Kunst unserer Zeit: 'wie entsteht Kunst?' In Mail-Art ist sowohl die Frage als auch die Antwort, unabhängig von ihrer eventuellen 'ästhetischen' Qualität, ein formales Element eines neuen Kunstwerks.

Print Gallery, Pieter Brattinga, Amsterdam

Ma Mon 12-16
Wo Wed 12-18
Vrij Fri 12-16

en na afspraak
and after appointment
und nach Vereinbarung
Telefoon 020-224265

Prinsengracht 628
1017 KT Amsterdam
Netherlands
Telex 12532 (merfo nl)

Regina Silveira

List of Works in the Exhibition

A Poem

Mail project, 1973

Definitions of Art

Mail project, 1977

Ephemera

Monthly mail art magazine: twelve issues, 1977–78

Box, Boxing, Boxers

Issue #5 of *Commonpress*, 1978

E.A.M.I.S

Erratic Art Mail International System, 1978

Artists' Postage Stamps and Cancellation Stamps

Mail projects, 1979

Anonymous Quotations

Mail project, 1979

The Stampa Newspaper

Mail project, 1980

Feedback Pieces

Mail project, 1981

Rob and Marta

Mail project, 1983

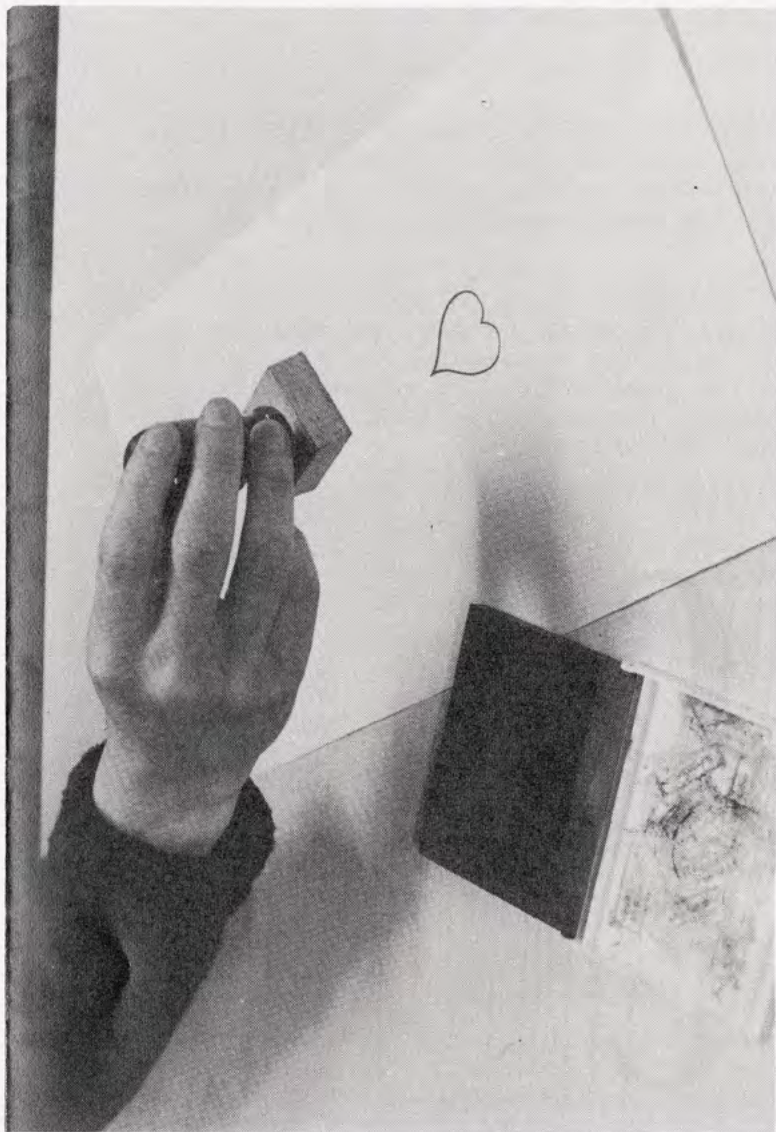
Aimé Iglesias Lukin

Iglesias Lukin is currently the director and chief curator of visual arts at Americas Society. An art historian and curator, she was born and raised in Buenos Aires but has lived in New York since 2011. Iglesias Lukin is a PhD candidate in art history at Rutgers University. Her dissertation, titled "This Must Be the Place: Latin American Artists in New York 1965–1975," seeks to map the international networks through which migrant artists from the Western hemisphere created communities in New York, analyzing themes of travel, exile, and identity in their artworks. She holds an MA from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University and a BA in art history from the Universidad de Buenos Aires.

Iglesias Lukin has received research grants from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Terra Foundation for American Art, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and, in 2016, the ICAA Peter C. Marzio Award for Outstanding Research in Twentieth-Century Latin American and Latino Art from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Her writing has been presented at conferences internationally and has been published by prestigious academic journals and museums, including the New Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Guggenheim Museum. Iglesias Lukin has curated exhibitions independently at museums and cultural centers and previously worked at the Modern and Contemporary Art Department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA), New York; and Fundación Proa in Buenos Aires.

Dr. Zanna Gilbert

Gilbert is a senior research specialist in the Getty Research Institute's curatorial department. She completed her PhD at the School of Philosophy and Art History at the University of Essex, United Kingdom, in collaboration with Tate Modern. Her research focuses on transnational conceptual art, concrete art and poetry, Xerox art, and the international mail art network. From 2012 to 2015, Gilbert was Andrew W. Mellon postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Drawings and Prints at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, where she was responsible for research focusing on art in Latin America and was founding coeditor of MoMA's online publication post. She has curated a number of exhibitions, including *Daniel Santiago: Brazil Is My Abyss* (Museu de Arte Moderna Aloisio Magalhães, Brazil, 2012 and Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niterói, Brazil, 2014); *The Unmaker of Objects: Edgardo Antonio Vigo's Marginal Media* (MoMA, 2014); and *Home Archives: Paulo Bruscky and Robert Rehfeldt's Mail Exchanges from East Berlin to South America* (Chert, Berlin, 2015) and contributed a section on artistic exchange for the exhibition *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960–1980* (MoMA, 2015). Most recently, she was co-curator of the Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA exhibition *Making Art Concrete: Works from Argentina and Brazil in the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros* at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Gilbert's texts have appeared in *Art in America*, *ARTMargins*, *Fillip*, *OEI*, *Arte y Parte*, *Caiana*, *Blanco sobre Blanco*, and *Art in Print*, as well as in a number of exhibition catalogues and books.



The stamp my hand is holding is not a stamp
of a heart.

Photograph published in *Rubber Bulletin* in conjunction with Ulises Carrión's essay
"Rubber Stamps Theory and Praxis," 1978

Ulises Carrión: *The Big Monster*
November 2019–March 2020

Exhibition organized by the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA)

Curated by Aimé Iglesias Lukin, Visual Arts at Americas Society

Published by the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA)

ISLAA is proud to present its new exhibitions program on modern and contemporary Latin American art. These exhibitions respond to ISLAA's mission to advance arts from Latin America and to support future generations of experts on Latin American art. This initiative provides emerging scholars the opportunity to execute object-driven curatorial inquiries that integrate the context of the works in each exhibition with their proposed theoretical framework. Participating curators are asked to provide an innovative and unique approach to the exhibition theme; to write a thoughtful, well-researched essay for its publication; and to propose a dynamic and cohesive exhibition layout. The exhibitions draw from ISLAA's library, archive, and graphic arts collection—which are currently being catalogued—and curators work closely with our team of archivists to classify and study the materials. Through its exhibitions program, ISLAA seeks to trigger new research on understudied figures, areas, and periods of the history of Latin American art, and to offer new generations of scholars, curators, and arts professional a hands-on curatorial experience.

Special thanks to Ariel Aisiks, Mercedes Cohen, Jordi Ballart, Natacha del Valle, Diana Iturralde, Ernesto Rivera, Ricardo Ocampo, Juan J. Agius and the Estate of Ulises Carrión.

Cover image: Detail from photograph by Ulises Carrión in "Rubber Stamps Theory and Praxis," *Rubber Bulletin* 1, no. 6 (1978): 5

Copyright © Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA), 2019
"King Kong Archives: Ulises Carrión on Mail and Art" © Aimé Iglesias Lukin, 2019
"Some Notes on Ulises Carrión's Mail Art Systems" © Zanna Gilbert, 2019

All images belong to the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA) unless otherwise noted

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic, or mechanical, without prior permission from the publisher

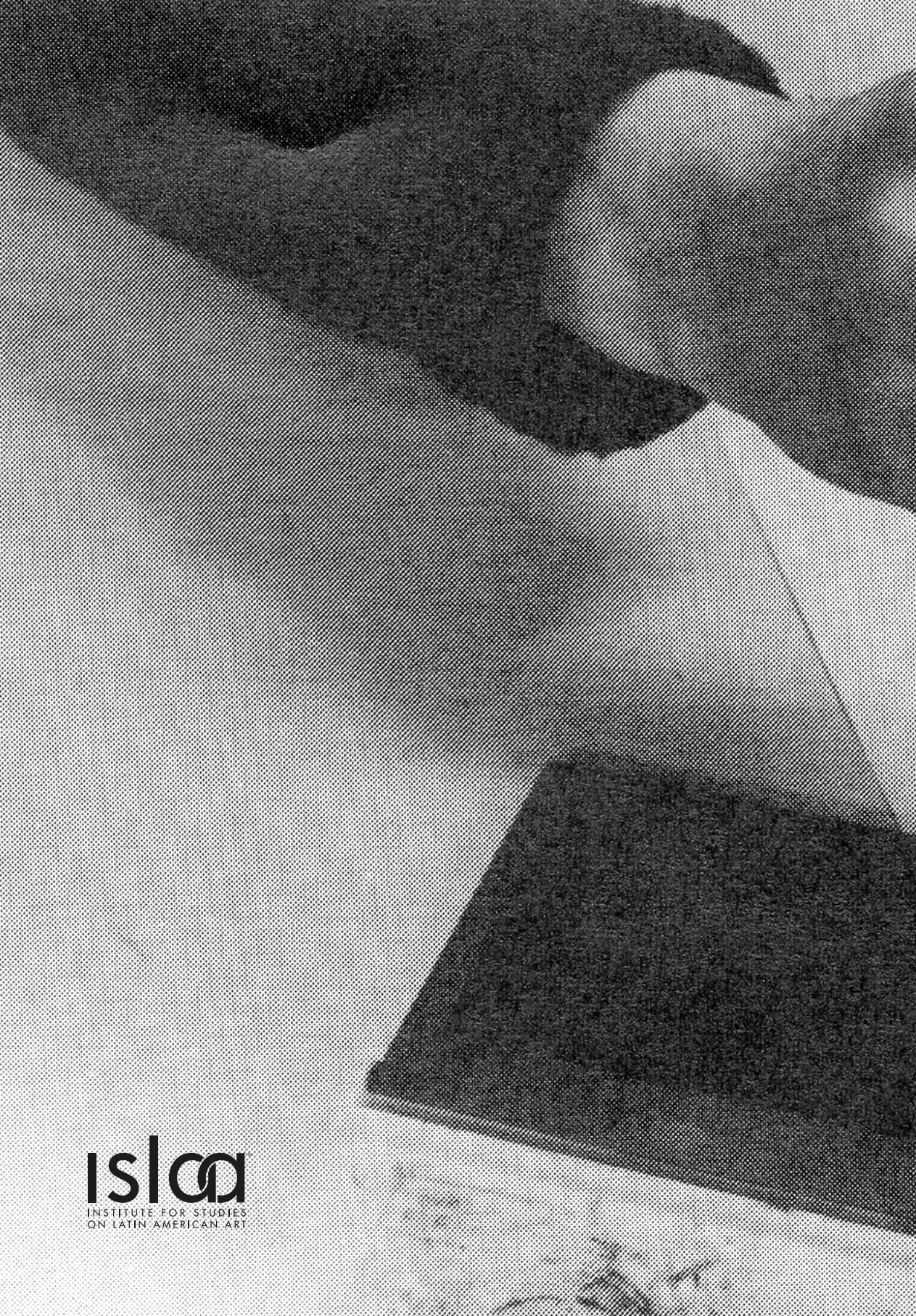
Edited by Blanca Serrano Ortiz de Solórzano and Guadalupe González

Copy editing and proofreading by Jessica Ruiz DeCamp

Designed by El vivero

Printed by Palermo Artes Gráficas

ISBN: 978-1-7334164-0-5



islaa
INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES
ON LATIN AMERICAN ART