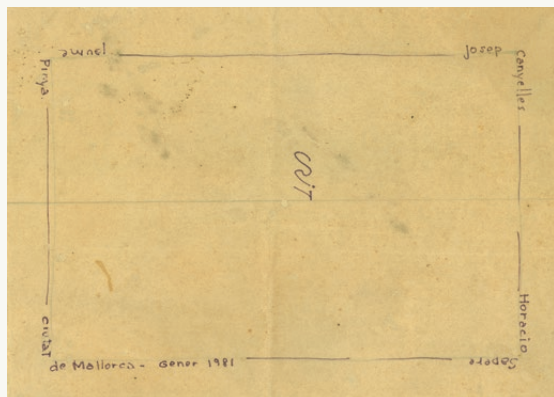


LET'S SEE IF...

14.05–22.08.2021



EXPERIMENTAL POETRY AND MAIL ART IN MALLORCA

ARTIST ARCHIVE —RISK AND RUPTURE— 1973–1983

Jaume Pinya

The first in-depth study on this period was by the writer Lluís Maicas in 1980. Entitled *Dossier de la nova plàstica a Mallorca* [Dossier on New Art in Mallorca], it was an inventory that compiled the activities, texts, publications and exhibitions in Mallorca from 1968 to May 1977, with an introductory text by Damià Pons i Pons that comments on the contributions of this “New Art” to the history of art in Mallorca. It mentions “the attitude of head-on, explicit rupture with the painting that was then dominant on the island”, while making special mention of the actions of collectives in relation to painting competitions, a generation of creators that facilitated “the introduction into the island of artistic languages that had characterised the international artistic vanguard in the previous decades.”

In 1999 the historian Jaume Reus Morro published *Art i conjuntura: la Jove Plàstica a Mallorca 1970–1978* [Art and Conjecture: Young Art in Mallorca 1970–1978], the most complete and exhaustive study on the experiences of artist collectives during the decade. He describes it as “... one of the most complex periods and still one of the most difficult for the researcher; but also, and above all else, one of the most interesting periods, constituting amongst the most vigorous artistic contributions to art in Mallorca in this century that is now about to expire.” These texts are two key references for the history of art in Mallorca. Published almost twenty years apart, they explore the paths taken by artist groups who were able to alter a conformist society.

The term “New or Young Art” refers basically to multidisciplinary practices, and almost exclusively to artists who based their work on such premises, along with protest actions, performance art and happenings. On the other hand, writers and poets begin to collaborate with artists, a circumstance which ends up blurring the frontiers between the arts while creating spaces of exchange

Pep Canyelles, Jaume Pinya, Horacio Sapere, *Crit* [Scream], 1981.
Ink and pencil on paper, 22 × 15,7 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, Risc i Ruptura. Arxiu: 1973-1983
Document Collection long-term loan

through experimentation, self-publishing and the decision by artists to distribute their own creations. Publications are produced using various supports and techniques, with some done as ephemeral craft productions. Silkscreen prints, offset printing and photocopies are the habitual expressive media, altering the social forms of communication in the context of the island's culture, a de-hierarchization based on mutual collaborations where some creators worked indistinctly in writing and the visual arts. Margalida Pons, Professor of Catalan Literature and Literary Theory at the University of the Balearic Islands, speaks of the 1970s as "a period of permanencies and ruptures, and of independent poetry, both in terms of its aesthetic and how works were distributed."

It was in this context that Pep Canyelles, Jaume Pinya and Horacio Sapere began their careers. All the documentary material an artist ends up storing in his studio has an exceptional value that will almost always be overshadowed, despite in fact being the primordial source for art history. The quantity of documentation preserved by Canyelles, Pinya and Sapere, along with its quality, were decisive factors when it came to reflecting on the bounty of material kept for sentimental reasons, having been accomplices and agents of artistic events that were at once local, national and international.

The documentation each artist kept in his studio can be divided into two major categories. One part was shared, as Canyelles, Pinya and Sapere created occasional alliances to exhibit their work in various art galleries, while participating collectively in mail art exhibitions, magazine publishing, visual poetry books and print editions. The second category brings together more personal documentary material, as preserved by each artist. This includes correspondence with other artists, visual poetry, magazines, catalogues, invitations to participate in shows, articles and press clippings, photographs and documentation related to solo exhibitions. The sum total of these collections reveals to us their relationships with local and national artists and their international connections with other artists from Europe, the United States and Latin America.

The archive was given the name "Risk and Rupture", alluding to the risk implied in carrying out certain artistic activities at

the start of the 1970s, a period when exhibitions were still being reported to the authorities and closed. Some were even attacked by fascist groups, as they represented a radical rupture with the ossified values of the Franco regime.

The documentary archive covers a period of ten years, from 1973 to 1983. This decade allows us to reflect on the artistic movements of that time, on their strengths and debilities in the acutely precarious context of Palma in the years previous to democracy. They were frenetic years, with the Franco regime in decomposition. The period known as the Transition was just under way and artistic tendencies were arriving from the rest of Europe or via Latin America exiles.

The archive has a refreshing air, untouched by the heavy summer sun, as it is enlivened by those who stimulated creation and the spirit of struggle. The archive's documentation does not, however, put any emphasis on those artists who lived in neighbourhoods in the upper reaches of Palma's old quarter, who with their masterly expertise, too often silenced, would assist and guide a younger generation of artists who sought to alter the way things were. In neighbourhoods like Calatrava, the historical Jewish quarter called the Call and the parishes of Santa Eulàlia and Sant Nicolau,¹ various generations of artists lived, sharing information and experiences: Pere Martínez Pavia (1927–2020), Mateu Forteza (1931), José María de Labra (1925–1994), Jorge Manuel Pombo (1940–2010), Longino Martínez (1901–1992), Rafael Amengual (1938) and Pere Quetglas *Xam* (1915–2001). These creators did not just lend a hand and offer their knowledge to emerging artists, but would often participate in events supporting social and political causes. Jorge Manuel Pombo had a studio-school on Can Brondo Street, where he gave his classes. In the school's space

1. The urban layout of these neighbourhoods made communication between those living there that much easier. The artists residing there prepared spaces and flats to set up their studios or homes. Mateu Forteza was the one who gave Alfons Sard, Mercedes Laguens and Ramon Canet a space to work in Calatrava. The writer Guillem Cabrer rented what would be Jaume Pinya's studio on Santa Clara Street.

a photograph of the artist Joaquín Torres-García presided over the work area. There was no question that Pombo contributed to making the legacy of Torres-García better known, as the latter was an artist with strong connections to Mallorca, initially as an assistant to Gaudí for the intervention in the Cathedral. He was also connected through his marriage with Manolita Piña de Rubiés, daughter of Jaime Piña Segura, a Mallorcan *xueta*² who had made his fortune in Cuba, and of Mercedes de Rubiés i Berenguer, from a nineteenth century Catalan bourgeois family.

The sculptor Mateu Forteza guided many a young artist in his role as expert master. Alfons Sard, an artist who had close connections to the 1970s, writing in a personal letter, has informed us that he had Mateu Forteza to thank for his beginnings as a sculptor. José María de Labra had long conversations in his studio with other artists, and was one of the promoters of the thought of the philosopher Ernst Cassirer. For his part, the sculptor Pere Martínez Pavia, an artist with strong bonds to poetry and theatre, often acted as the tutor of younger artists.

This new generation of artists who lived or worked in the urban enclave of Palma's historic quarter were fortunate, as we have said earlier, to share in the teachings of a previous generation. Amongst them were Mariann McErlain, Pep Canyelles, Alfons Sard, Mercedes Laguens, Ramon Canet, Jaume Pinya, Miquel Barceló, Margalida Escales, Horacio Sapere and Antoni Fernández. They settled in spaces which, as the decade advanced, would be enriched by the nearby presence of alternative venues for art. The poet Rafel Jaume opened the Cavall Verd bookstore, the only one in Mallorca dedicated exclusively to poetry, which made it more feasible for the poetic works of younger authors to have a presence. Ferran Cano and Àngel Juncosa created the Galeria 4 Gats and organised exhibitions there of Mallorcan artists, while also doing shows of artists from abroad. To what point would foreign and local artists end up contaminating each other with their artistic ideas? Galeria 4 Gats featured a blend of artistic tendencies, alternating between conceptual art, poets and artists

2. TN: The *xueta* are a sector of Majorcan society descended from medieval Majorcan Jews.

more interested in painting, comics and pop art, while also doing showing works by Picasso, Miró, Saura and Brossa. This alternation gave rise to a generational dialogue and including with other artists. Most young artists involved in what was called “Nova/Jove plàstica” [New/Young Art] had their first exhibits there.

Let's see if...

The exhibition “Let's see if...Experimental Poetry and Mail Art in Mallorca” reveals the artistic relationships Canyelles, Pinya and Sapere were part of during the 1970s, as interpreted through the Risk and Rupture archive. These relationships include their participation in group and individual exhibitions, their publications and their rather interesting participation in international mail art circuits.

While the archive's chronology begins in 1973, the exhibition starts with 1974, with the aim of showing documentation from two groups, Criada 74 and Grupo de Pintores Termonucleares, which were known for their political and social activism, especially as expressed in actions and happenings. Their initial firmness against a cultural system in decadence would falter over time, and the groups were eventually dissolved: both Criada 74 and the Pintores Termonucleares disappeared in 1977. The friendship of some artists trained within these groups made it possible for occasional alliances to be made, so that they continued to do exhibitions together. At first these activities were included in more peripheral spaces, while later, on an individual basis, their work was presented in art galleries.

As an example of the artistic effervescence being experienced at the time and what was happening in terms of collective participation in all creative sectors of the city of Palma, in August 1978 the artists who had been part of the collectives Criada 74, Termonucleares and Taller Llnàtic, with other independent creators, actors, poets, musicians, writers and friends, united in Palma with environmentalist groups of a more libertarian anarchist nature, such as Terra i Llibertat and the members of Talaiot Corcat; their goal was to protect Dragonera island, just off the coast. Together they did an action entitled “Fester Salvatge” [Wild Party] at the Plaça de la Llotja, which for many would be

recognised as one of the most festive, entertaining protests of the decade. The goal was to raise money for the defence of the Dragonera. Works especially made for the occasion were put on sale, including posters, postcards, objects and prints. In this way the event condensed a good part of the artistic activity of the 1970s, which would end up evolving towards a diaspora of Mallorcan artists towards more individualistic propositions.

Mail art in Mallorca

The lack of studies on this period impedes us from detailing the beginning of experimental poetry in Mallorca, as well as tracing mail art; furthermore, it is difficult to offer a chronological review to gauge their presence amongst the artistic currents traditionally dominant in the 1970s. Jaume Reus links mail art to *Neon de Suro*, published in Palma from 1975 to 1982, as it was one of the most interesting and significant aspects of the publication, which was run by the artists Steva Terrades, Bartomeu Cabot, Sara Gibert and Andreu Terrades. The magazine, pioneer in Mallorca, was a collective experience with an international impact in mail art circuits.

Fernando Millán, in his *Escrito está. Poesía experimental en España* [Written It Is: Experimental Poetry in Spain], traces out the beginnings of experimental poetry and refers to the 1960s as the starting point for the development of experimental poetry in Spain.

Reviewing the documentary material in the Risk and Rupture archive has enabled us to broaden information that had been left uncommented, not so much because it was unknown, but most likely due to a lack of studies on the practice of mail art in Mallorca. We refer to the gestation of Palma's Atelier Bonanova in 1974 by the artists José Luis Mata (1942) and Antonia Payero (1940). The Atelier Bonanova was located on Francesc Vidal i Sureda Street in the Bonanova neighbourhood of Palma, and the works it produced, printed at the Mossèn Alcover printshop, point to their own origins as well as the day, time and address they were done. The first production, a visual poem dedicated to Marcel Duchamp, is dated 6 July 1974, and was printed at midnight.

In the mid-1970s, the Occitan writer Patrick Gifreu sent us a list of addresses of international poets, while inviting us to participate in events. The publication of *Elements per a un any nou*

[Elements for New Year], a selection of visual poems produced as silkscreens and offset prints by Pep Canyelles, Mariann McErlain, Joan Manresa, Jaume Pinya and Horacio Sapere, was made known through international channels. The positive reception of their work in the network led to exchanges with other mail art artists. The poet Joan Manresa published a series of visual poems, which he participated in various international exhibitions with. The artist Esther Olondriz presented her work in mail art exhibitions, thus broadening the list of Mallorcan authors present in the international context. The presence of these island authors in exhibitions and publications would never flag.

The archive features rather heterogeneous documentary content on experimental poetry. One part unites pieces published in peripheral publishing houses or directly self-published, done by experimental creators who had been born before the Spanish Civil War, such as Joan Brossa, Antonio Fernández Molina, Francisco Pino, José María Iglesias, Felipe Boso, Juan Hidalgo-Grupo Zaj, Isidoro Valcárcel Medina and Guillem Viladot. In the 1960s and 1970s these artists would begin to do experimental work.

The largest part of the archive corresponds to artist exchanges in mail art networks, both on a national and international level. Mail art artists, besides doing their own work, created participative projects that were expanded through such networks. This led to a wave of correspondence detailing the subjects to be worked on. Its diversity came with heterogeneous responses. In other cases, they sent personal pieces to other authors while exchanging poems and reflections. At the end of the 1970s some academic institutions began to sponsor visual poetry exhibitions, using the valuable information that was circulating through mail art networks. Some examples came from Italy, where *poesia visiva*, as it was called there, had a strong presence. Art institutes, universities and cultural centres made a concerted effort to include exhibitions of marginal art in their programmes. Academic support helped in developing more ambitious projects, while the mail art system being free and artist generosity would be positive for its development, with lower costs involved in organising an event.

Part of this documentation reveals the difficulty for authors subject to political conflicts in countries with military

dictatorships. Writers from South America and Eastern Europe share common conditions, such as police control, material humility, censorship and, in some cases, prison. There are many such examples. Polish artist Pawel Petasz (1951–2019) stitched envelopes shut to confound censorship, so that those receiving a letter knew if it had been altered. Uruguayan artist Clemente Padín (1939), one of the pioneer visual poets of South America, was imprisoned in 1977 for his activity, which led to international protests, as a solidarity campaign was begun featuring various images that were created to call for his freedom. This lasted for two years, until the poet was released.

Edgardo A. Vigo (1928–1997), a poet from Argentina, fought against the military regime in Argentina using artistic methods. His son Palomo was one of the thousands of Argentines who disappeared without a trace. The Chilean poet Guillermo Deisler (1940–1995) was imprisoned in Antofagasta and shortly afterward went into exile to Bulgaria. Deisler was the creator of the *UNI/vers*(;) project, conceived for artists and mail art. Before his death he was able to visit Mallorca. From Brazil, in turn, Leonhard Frank Duch³ (1940), out of concern for repressive actions being put into place, created a project entitled *I AM AN ARTIST*, where he invited artists from all over the world to create protective images in the face of dictatorial regimes.

Another section of the archive shows us relationships and pieces from artists in Western Europe and North America. The numerous contributions resonate for experimental behaviour of any kind: visual poetry, concrete poetry, experimental literature, Lettrism, magazines, publications, artist books. The section presents eleven bodies of work that correspond to documents by artists from eleven countries, alluding to the system traditionally used when doing mail art exhibitions. There are more than a hundred creators in the archive, some of whom are quite relevant in terms of artistic production. We refer to creators of what is called

3. Leonhard Frank Duch, son of a German father and Brazilian mother, arrived in Mallorca at the age of nine as part of a program to receive German children through the Spanish Red Cross. He was taken in by the family of the businessman Josep Casasayas Casajuana.

the second generation of experimental poetry in the history of mail art: Fernando Millán, Bartolomé Ferrando, J. M. Calleja, Antoni Gómez, José Antonio Sarmiento, José Luis Mata, Xoan Anleo and Andreu Terrades, amongst other national artists. We should likewise point to the presence of international artists such as Julien Blaine, Patrick Gifreu, Ulises Carrión, Klaus Groh, J. O. Olbrich, Robin Crozier, Giovanni Fontana, Eugenio Miccini, Vittore Baroni and Ruggero Maggi, to mention just a few of those who continued and still today continue to work experimentally.

The archive also has a section of the collection dedicated to publications from all over the world, some of which only involved a single issue. It was not odd to publish a magazine with a sole issue, or magazines with a limited life span, or just as well limit the printing run. *Ephemera*, for example, was a monthly magazine dedicated to mail art and ephemeral work, published by Ulises Carrión, Aart van Barneveld and Salvador Flores; it was published over 12 issues by Other Books and So, Amsterdam, from 1977 to 1978. Other magazines were *OVUM*, published by Clemente Padín in Montevideo, *Zootropo*, published in Zaragoza by Sergio Abrain, and *Blanc d'ou*, whose driving force was the poet Àngel Terron, published in Palma. In Paris, Julien Blaine published *DO(K)S*, one of the most important magazines of visual poetry, along with *Texto Poético*, published by Bartolomé Ferrando and David Pérez in Valencia. In Italy Vittore Baroni published the magazine *Arte Postale!*, dedicated fully to the network. One of the most charismatic publications was *Commonpress*, published by Pawel Petasz in 1977. The idea of *Commonpress* was that each participant should become in turn the editor and assume responsibility for the issue. After this, he would have to ensure all contributions would be reproduced and propose a defining theme. In this way, as soon as new artists were added to an issue, this system theoretically became autonomous, so that to a certain degree it would be able to infinitely repeat itself.

Mail art was the cover for many artists, many of them innovative and transgressive. It enabled international militant activism. Using state postal services, it was able to tell the world about the repressive activities of dictatorial states while privileging communication that fully surpassed aesthetics, turning itself

into a marginal art. In its many calls for artists, everything that was sent was accepted, without applying censorship, norms or conditions of sale. Mail art work was neither bought nor sold, as it involved an effort to be free from the traditional market and encourage experimentation with full freedom. Its spirit was open and democratic and its contribution was not founded so much on the work itself but on the communication network it gave rise to. This belief about the creative possibilities of individuals opened a new path in the world of art.

There is no question that the Risk and Rupture archive deserves to be studied in depth, constituting as it does a source for study and research into an exceptional period of experimentation, contributing to the historiography of experimental poetics in the history of Mallorcan art. It testifies to the presence of Mallorcan artists in an international current, mail art, which in recent years has been greatly revalued.

The exhibition “Let’s see if...Experimental Poetry and Mail Art in Mallorca” seeks to evoke a brief notion by the philosopher María Zambrano: “‘Let’s see if...’, which means: stop and reflect, look again and look at yourself at the same time, if that were even possible.”

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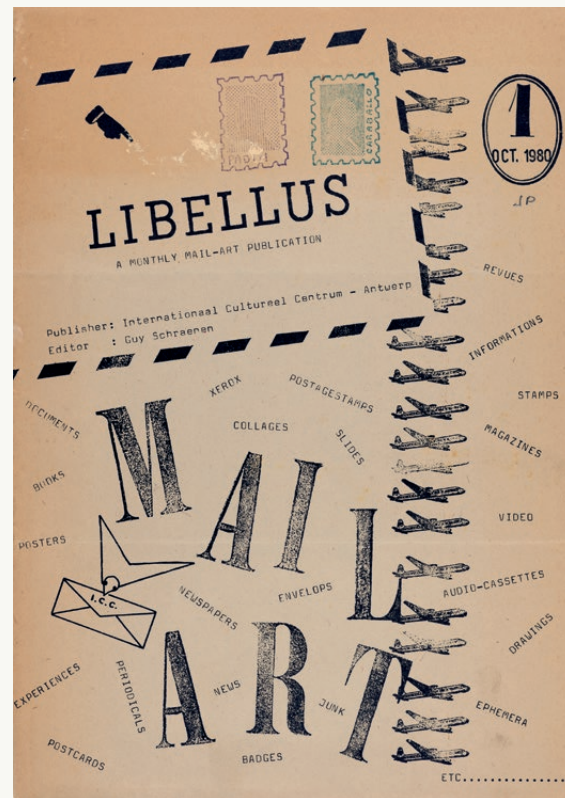
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Mariann McErlain, *Beso Embolsado (4 seg)* [Bagged Kiss (4 sec)]. From the collective work *Elements per a un any nou* [Elements for New Year], 1978. Offset printing and silk-screen print on paper, 18,2 × 26 cm. Es Baluard Museu d’Art Contemporani de Palma, Risc i Ruptura. Arxiu: 1973-1983 Document Collection long-term loan



Joan Manresa, *T'estim* [I love you], 1978. From the collective work *Elements per a un any nou* [Elements for New Year], 1978. Offset print on paper, 21,6 × 26 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, Risc i Ruptura. Arxiu: 1973-1983 Document Collection long-term loan



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C(ART)A N:5

**EL MAIL ART
UNA EXTRAÑA
ECUACION
CUYOS
ELEMENTOS
SON:
ACCION=ESPERA**

DAMASO OGAZ

Dámaso Ogaz, *C(ART)A N:5*, 1979. Print on paper, 27,9×21,5 cm.
Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, Risc i Ruptura.
Arxiu: 1973-1983 Document Collection long-term loan



LEONHARD FRANK DUCH

Leonhard Frank Duch, *I AM AN ARTIST*, 1979. Offset printing
on card, 10,6×15,4 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani
de Palma, Risc i Ruptura. Arxiu: 1973-1983 Document Collection
long-term loan

THE INFINITE SPACE BETWEEN VISUAL POETRY AND MAIL ART: A PIONEERING WORLD WIDE WEB

Eduard Escoffet

In January 1946, Lettrism organised its first public activity. The movement founded by Isidore Isou, which centred its interest on letters rather than verse or words, was to become an inflection point between the poetic world prior to the Second World War and what was to come afterwards, more interested in building networks than in destroying the past. On the one hand, Lettrism reproduced the development of earlier avant-garde movements—a more or less defined group, with splits and expulsions, led by an ardent poet—and focused much of its evangelising activity on controversy and confrontation with the “old world”. On the other, however, it held on to a clearly international vocation—even though its radius of action was basically restricted to one neighbourhood of Paris—and aspired to take in all spheres of creation and society, with no limits. From Lettrism onward, the poetic avant-garde set out to weave international networks as opposed to closed groups, and to propose open creative systems rather than uniform aesthetics, but Lettrism certainly smoothed the way opened up by the Dadaists and Futurists: irreverence and criticism, autonomous circuits, journals and typography, rejection of literary and artistic glory, art as an attitude to life and a commitment to the present rather than the past.

Concrete poetry, surely the most international poetic movement of the second half of the 20th century, was born in Brazil and Switzerland at the same time. In 1956, the Noigandres group, set up in 1952 in São Paulo by the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos and by Décio Pignatari, officially launched the name *concrete poetry* and in 1958 published



Edgardo A. Vigo, *Análisis (in) poético de 1 m. de hilo* (1970)
[(Un) Poetical Analysis of 1m of Rope (1970)] 1980. Ink, string,
rope, card and cardboard, 23,7 × 10 cm. Es Baluard Museu
d'Art Contemporani de Palma, Risc i Ruptura. Arxiu: 1973-1983
Document Collection long-term loan

Plano-piloto para poesia concreta [Pilot plan for concrete poetry], in which the outlines of the genre were laid down. The group developed a new way of writing poetry based on the study of authors like Ezra Pound, e.e. cummings, James Joyce and Arnaut Daniel—the source of the group's name—and with the incorporation of João Cabral de Melo Neto—also a decisive influence on Joan Brossa, with whom he became great friends during his time as Brazilian vice-consul in Barcelona (1947–1950). Concrete poetry argued for a break with traditional discursive reading, calling for both visual and aural reading of poetry: feelings are set aside and writing materials—and silences—take on value in themselves. In short, a precise balance between concentrated idea and text seen as physical material created in space with a new syntax. Verbal-vocal-visual artefacts, complex constructs that allow rapid but at the same time profound reading. The first concrete poems by the Brazilian group are those in *Poetamenos* by Augusto de Campos (1953), and the members of the group embarked on a furious output, with a far-reaching impact at a time of a great explosion of creativity in Brazil.

In parallel to the story of Noigandres we find the figure of the Swiss Eugen Gomringer, who published his first constellations in 1953. He is considered the founder of German concrete poetry and one of the fathers of the genre, the author of a highly expressive body of work constructed out of minimum elements. Noigandres and Gomringer met and began to work together from 1956 onwards. The same type of poetic expression had arisen in two different parts of the world, fitting into the present through its use of contemporary typographic and visual tools. Also worth mentioning is Öyvind Fahlström, who in 1953 published his *Manifest for konkret poesie* in Sweden. Fahlström ploughed his own furrow, but is the first bridge between comic and experimental poetry, as bpNichol was to do in Canada a few years later with his self-published fanzines. Very soon concrete poetry reached every corner of Europe, the Americas and even Japan. An international network of exchange was created, leading to numerous anthologies, exhibitions and journals, especially from 1965 onwards. Among the many initiatives and agitators, Hansjörg Mayer stood out

for his publications, which were produced with care in every way: choice of poets, typography, printing and formats. *Futura* is probably his best-known work: a journal lasting for 26 issues and consisting of a 48×64 sheet folded into eight panels of up to 24×16 cm, each one devoted to one author. Relatively simply-produced on white paper, it was a poster that could be put in an envelope and sent easily anywhere in the world. It featured authors like Augusto de Campos (Brazil), Ian Hamilton Finlay (Scotland), Mathias Goeritz (Mexico), Reinhard Döhl (Germany), Robert Filliou (France), Carlo Belloli (Italy), Bob Cobbing (England), Emmett Williams (USA) and Hiro Kamimura (Japan), among others. In Spain, the practice, the theory and the agitation of poets like Fernando Millán, Felipe Boso, Francisco Pino and Julio Campal were crucial in generating a first community of experimental poets in the sixties in Spain, where despite the dictatorship they were in touch with what was happening in the rest of the world.

In 1968—a time of intense activity in concrete poetry—in the United States Mary Ellen Solt published *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, which surveyed the activity of concrete poetry in 19 countries: Switzerland, Brazil, Germany, Austria, Iceland, Czechoslovakia, Turkey, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Japan, France, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Scotland, England and the United States. In the introduction, she herself admits that even then it was hard to determine exactly what concrete poetry was. “Generally speaking the material of the concrete poem is language: words reduced to their elements of letters (to see) syllables (to hear). Some concrete poets stay with whole words. Others find fragments of letters or individual speech sounds more suited to their needs. The essential is *reduced language*.” In other words, a quickly-read item of communication that crosses language borders and is easily reproducible; in its most utopian form, an immediate, universal poem. Moreover, concrete poems could travel easily via the postal system.

At the same time, a series of artists and poets went even further, turning the post itself into a medium for creative art: they exchanged galleries and journals for the almost infinite space of postal distribution systems in an act of direct

communication between artists. Thus, the envelope itself became a canvas subject to all the alterations it could suffer in the post. It was in the mid-fifties that the artist Ray Johnson started using the post to distribute his collages and work on the envelopes in which he sent them: he gave his work away to establish a dialogue with other artists, avoiding hierarchies and escaping the restrictions of the art market. Collage recalled the original avant-garde, especially the Dadaists and Surrealists, but also the increasing role of the mass media and consumerism in everyday life. In the material he sent he took advantage of previous work, created new versions of it, incorporated pictograms and, inspired by his years at Black Mountain College and by John Cage (a lecturer at the school and a neighbour of his in New York), he included random visual associations. He also incorporated—and subverted—formal contributions by artists with whom he corresponded (including Motherwell and Warhol). From 1960 onwards he began his mass mailings. Close to Fluxus—another important part of this map, as was the Spanish Zaj group—Ray Johnson helped to spread the mail art movement all over the world, in a horizontal, open network in opposition to the market. The widespread use of the photocopier towards the end of the seventies did help the movement, even though some of its members also insisted that mail art works had to be somehow originals. In any case, it is a free social network in which a wide variety of propositions and manners have coexisted.

One of the fundamental features of mail art and international experimental poetry networks was that they did not require big infrastructures and worked outside the margins of the market and of political power. This encouraged experimental poets and mail art artists to cross over into political struggle in their work, especially in Latin America. A good example of this is Edgardo A. Vigo, one of the essential names when it comes to discussing the broad field in which mail art met with visual poetry, who in 1962 started publishing the journal *Diagonal Cero* in La Plata (Argentina). This journal, which he published until 1965, featured the new poetic propositions from the Americas and Europe: from French sound poetry to

Brazilian concrete poetry, taking in visual poetry from around the world and a then unknown Joan Brossa. It was a journal that set out to spread the word, but in a special format: the different articles were separate, carefully-typeset pieces in an envelope. Between 1971 and 1975 Vigo published *Hexágono '71*, in which he turned his attention to mail art: the journal consisted of a series of pieces by a range of poets and artists. Vigo was heavily involved in political life in his country, in the same way as Clemente Padín in Uruguay, who edited the journal *OVUM*, in which mail art and visual poetry were joined by poetic action, and Guillermo Deisler in Chile and during his long exile in Germany, where he embarked on the adventure of the *UNI/vers(:)* project (1987–1995), covering visual poetry and mail art, one of the most influential publications in this sphere and one that reforged relations between Europe and Latin America. Poetic artistic practice lay at the centre of all of them, nearly always rejected by the traditional literary and artistic scenes in their respective countries. Another example of this is the Brazilian Paulo Bruscky, who in a prolific output based on firm principles stood out for, among other things, his use of the photocopier for aesthetic purposes.

In Italy, at the same time and closer to concrete poetry like that of Carlo Belloli and Arrigo-Lora Totino, *poesia visiva* developed, a specifically Italian branch of visual poetry in which the de-contextualised image and collage were pressed into service to express a critical view. The same mechanisms of mass communication—magazines, recurrent images and stereotypes—were perverted to create a critical, spontaneous, free poetry. Ketty La Rocca, Eugenio Miccini, Sarenco, Lamberto Pignotti, Lucia Marcucci and Nanni Balestrini, among many others, opted for direct action by cutting up newspapers and magazines to deconstruct the dominant discourse and make word and image coexist. This vibrant Italian scene lasted through the sixties and especially in the seventies, when it took on its whole political and socially critical dimensions. As in Latin America and Franco's Spain, the easily copiable and distributable formats of experimental poetry helped to express a form of political dissidence.

In 1964 Josep Iglésias del Marquet, born in Lleida (Catalonia), moved to Vancouver to work at the University of British Columbia, lecturing in Spanish language and literature. He was there until 1965 and during this time he sent his fiancée a series of postcards in which he used collage to explore typography, consumer society and the mass media. The postcards also stand out for their tasteful composition, particularly clean technique and the different series or schemes he created, which were as varied as his interests. Nine of these postcards were included in *Postals nord-americanes per a una noia de Barcelona* [American Postcards for a Girl in Barcelona], published in 1972 by Lo Parda, a publishing house he set up in Agramunt together with Guillem Viladot, which stood out for the quality of its editions. During his stays in Glasgow (1962) and Vancouver (1964–1965) and on his trips to Paris and New York, Iglésias del Marquet, inquisitive by nature, found out at first-hand about the latest trends in art and poetry. And he put all his taste for typography and composition into artefacts that travelled across the Atlantic via the postal system. In 1971 he was behind an exhibition of concrete poetry at the Petite Galerie in Lleida, which featured Joan Brossa, Guillem Viladot and Iglésias del Marquet himself, who was responsible for the exhibition poster and catalogue. His influence was undoubtedly decisive in the development of Brossa and Viladot's poetic-visual language, and they in turn were decisive for subsequent generations of visual poets, especially in the seventies and eighties. In this way ideas and definitions, like the artworks, passed from hand to hand and mixed and merged in different ways.

Concrete poetry, mail art, visual poetry and sound poetry have several features in common: international networks, and an instinct for cooperation rather than competition, working outside the usual circuits for legitimacy, together with commitment to politics or the community, reproducibility and use of the technologies of the day. With a tape recorder or a photocopier, or using rubber stamps, magazine cuttings and labels or simple techniques and everyday materials of all kinds, this mixed bag of artists and poets without clear labels

spread across their networks rather as we do today. A pioneering world wide web, with no rules (or ads). Today's conception of the world is the one they sketched out with more rudimentary systems. Open mail art events, international visual poetry exhibitions, patched-together journals, cheap editions. Envelopes, photocopiers, typewriters, product labels, newspaper cuttings, zero-budget imagination. A sense of community, a need for cooperation, independence from the market and power of any kind, opposition to established codes, horizontality. Experimentation, unlimited possibilities, total openness, networks that broke out of frontiers and boxes, the international postal system. It is on the basis of these coordinates that we should plunge into the exhibition "Let's See If... Experimental Poetry and Mail Art in Mallorca". It is impossible not to get lost in it. And this is the way it has to be.

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Let's see if...
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From 14th May
to 22nd August 2021

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Es Baluard Museu d'Art
Contemporani de Palma

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Imma Prieto

Curatorship
Jaume Pinya

Exhibition Coordination
Catalina Joy
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