

# **Box 97: "Rimbaud Box"**

**Finding aid prepared by Diana Bowers**

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This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit

November 15, 2013

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Ray Johnson Estate  
11/15/2013  
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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	Ray Johnson Estate
<b>Title</b>	Box 97: "Rimbaud Box"
<b>Date</b>	c. 1971-72
<b>Extent</b>	1.42 Linear feet , 1 box.
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	Ray Johnson printed a photocopied image of Arthur Rimbaud in the November 1971 issue of Arts Magazine, with instructions to detach the page, alter it, and mail it to his home address. The bulk of this box is made up of about 100 responses to that prompt, in some cases with their original envelopes. The remainder of the box is a folder of responses from a similar project with an image of Paul Verlaine as well as miscellaneous correspondence, mail art, and envelopes.

### Preferred Citation

Box 97: "Rimbaud Box," Ray Johnson Estate, Richard L. Feigen & Co.

## Biographical Note

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Ray Johnson, collage artist, performance artist and pioneer mail artist, was born in 1927. Raised in Detroit, Michigan, Johnson studied drawing and graphic design at Cass Technical High School from 1942-1944. He attended Black Mountain College (BMC) from 1945-1948 and studied under Josef Albers, Ilya Bolotowsky, Lyonel Feininger, Alvin Lustig, Robert Motherwell and Paul Rand.

In 1949, Johnson moved to New York City with BMC colleagues Richard Lippold and John Cage. Throughout the early 1950s, Johnson painted geometric abstractions and exhibited with the American Abstract Artists group. Around 1952, Johnson began working in collage, which quickly became his primary medium; he combined drawings, poetic texts, glyphs and Pop imagery cut-outs. Johnson stated that he did not create pop art, but rather "chop art."

In the November 1971 issue of Arts Magazine, Johnson published a photocopied image of Arthur Rimbaud. The reverse side of the page had the instructions "Detach Along Dotted Line/Participate by adding words, letters, colors or whatever to face. All material submitted will be documented in a future issue/And mail to: Ray Johnson, 44 Seventh St., Locust Valley, N.Y. 11560." The responses poured in during December 1971 and even afterwards. In fact, some mail artists are still using the same Rimbaud template today in homage to Johnson.

In 1965, Grace Glueck, art critic for The New York Times, labeled Johnson as "New York's most famous unknown artist." Although Johnson stood at the heart of a vast network of active mail artists, he lived and worked reclusively. He was a prolific and dynamic collage artist, but he refused to exhibit with commercial galleries after 1978. Johnson remained both "famous" and "unknown" for the duration of his career. He committed suicide on January 13, 1995.

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## Scope and Contents note

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This collection consists of one box from the Estate of Ray Johnson. The box contains roughly 100 responses to Johnson's Rimbaud project in the November 1971 issue of Arts Magazine (some with their original envelopes), as well as miscellaneous correspondence, mail art, and envelopes. Most of the materials date to the end of 1971 or beginning of 1972.

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## Administrative Information

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## **Publication Information**

Ray Johnson Estate 11/15/2013

## **Access**

Open to qualified researchers.

## **Copyright**

Copyright Ray Johnson Estate, Courtesy Richard L. Feigen & Co. For permission to publish, please contact the Estate.

## **Provenance**

Purchased by Richard L. Feigen & Co. in 1995 as part of the Ray Johnson Estate.

## **Processing Note**

This collection was removed from Ray Johnson's home in a cardboard box bearing the label "Rimbaud" in his handwriting. Folder 1 was on the top of the box and has been left as is, including the handwritten label "Verlaine," except any materials which were inside envelopes have been removed and flattened and placed alongside the envelopes in the folder. The rest of the materials were minimally processed to create the present arrangement, which is consequently a rough approximation of the original box's arrangement. The original cardboard box was discarded for preservation reasons but has been documented with photographs and written descriptions. Folders 2, 3 and 4 in Series II are arranged alphabetically by sender's last name; otherwise there is no arrangement within the folders.

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## **Related Materials**

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### **Related Materials**

Images of related mail art and collages can be viewed on the Ray Johnson Estate website, [www.rayjohnsonestate.com](http://www.rayjohnsonestate.com). Additional archival materials are available at the Estate Archive at the Richard Feigen Gallery, 34 East 69th Street, New York, NY.

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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## Personal Name(s)

- Abbott, Gregory L., American artist, born 1945
- Amacker, Ferrill
- Barker, Clive, British sculptor, born 1940
- Bentivoglio, Mirella, Italian poet, artist, born 1922
- Brown, Robert Delford, American painter and performance artist, 1930-2009
- Carey, Ted
- Cazazza, Monte
- Cleveland, Buster, 1943-1998
- Dowd, John
- Ettenberg, Frank, 1945-
- Felts, Neil
- Francisco, Richard, American painter, born 1942
- Friedman, Ken, American sculptor and art historian, active 20th century
- Marandel, J. Patrice
- Metcalfe, Eric W., Canadian artist, born 1940
- Picard, Lil
- Plunkett, Edward M.
- Porter, Bern, American artist, author, and physicist, born 1911
- Spiselman, Toby
- Will, John A., American painter and printmaker, born 1939, active in Canada
- Willenbecher, John, American sculptor and painter, born 1936

Series I: Non-Rimbaud Materials

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## Collection Inventory

### **Series I: Non-Rimbaud Materials**

Folder 1: Verlaine

Folder 2: Miscellaneous Correspondence/Mail Art

Folder 3: Envelopes

### **Series II: Rimbaud Project**

Folder 1: Unknown Senders

Folder 2: Known Senders, no envelopes. Arranged alphabetically by sender's last name.

Folder 3: Known Senders, with envelopes (see Folder 4). Arranged alphabetically by sender's last name.

Folder 4: Envelopes for Folder 3 Materials. Arranged alphabetically by sender's last name.