

Ray Johnson's Rubber Stamps

Finding aid prepared by Diana Bowers

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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9/24/2013
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Summary Information

Repository	Ray Johnson Estate
Creator	Johnson, Ray, American painter, draftsman, and performance artist, 1927-1995
Title	Ray Johnson's Rubber Stamps
Date	c.1955-1995
Extent	4.9 Linear feet ; 5 boxes.
Language	English
Abstract	This collection contains 116 rubber stamps that were owned by Ray Johnson. Most of the stamps are branded with the names of commercial manufacturers, but a small number are marked with the names of other mail artists. The bulk of the stamps are textual in nature, but some are images only.

Preferred Citation

Ray Johnson's Rubber Stamps. Ray Johnson Estate, Richard L. Feigen & Co.

Biographical Note

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 late 1950s, Johnson supplemented his work in collage with mail art, i.e. he sent drawings, texts, xerographic copies and ephemera, to an international network of recipients. Johnson labeled this network The New York Correspondance [sic] School, and often encouraged his recipients to alter his mailings with the phrase, "Please add to and return to Ray Johnson." This mail art practice often incorporated the use of rubber stamps, which is still a part of mail art practice today.

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.

Scope and Contents Note

This collection contains Ray Johnson's rubber stamps, which he used in his prolific mail art practice from the late 1950s to his death in 1995. The stamps were found in a box in his home after his death. The collection includes 116 stamps, most of which have handles marked with commercial brands. Some of the stamps have no handles and bear the names of other mail artists. The bulk of the stamps are textual in nature, but there are some stamps with images only.

Of the stamps which have other mail artists' names, the most prominent name is Rocola, referring to Robert Rocola. There are also references to William "Picasso" Gaglione's Stamp Francisco. Of the stamps with commercial brands, Douglas and Front are the most prominent.

The impressions of these stamps may be seen throughout Johnson's mail art oeuvre and have inspired other mail artists to the present day.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Ray Johnson Estate 9/24/2013

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

The collection is arranged in five boxes. The stamps are not stored within the boxes in a set order; however, each box has a set inventory of which stamps it contains. There was no previous arrangement; the stamps had been housed in a cardboard box in Ray Johnson's home in no discernible order.

Related Materials

Related Materials

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

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Richard L. Feigen & Company.

Genre(s)

- Mail Art.
- Rubber Stamps

Personal Name(s)

- Gaglione, Bill, American performance and mail artist, born 1943
- Rocola, Robert

Subject(s)

- Art, Modern--20th century--United States

Collection Inventory

Box 150. 0.98 Linear feet

1. Text: THIS PROJECT IS SUPPORTED BY A GRANT FROM THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS IN WASHINGTON D.C. A FEDERAL AGENCY

2. Abstract pattern of two sets of seven lines each in an X shape. Made by Robert Rocola.

3. Inverted pyramid composed of alternating black and white triangles and containing text RAY JOHNSON 1927-1989. Made by William "Picasso" Gaglione at Stamp Francisco.

4. Clear bunnyhead with shadow. Labeled ABRACADADA Rubber Stamp Co.

5. Pyramid composed of alternating black and white triangles. Made by Robert Rocola.

6. Text: Fake RAY JOHNSON Stamp Prints, Mail Art, Correspondence STAMP ART GALLERY 466 8th St. S.F. CA 94108 1 Sept. to 10 Sept. '92. Image: black bunnyhead with crossed eyes and text NOTHING.

7. [Box with lines and cursive writing] Dear Whitney Museum, i hate you. Love, Ray Johnson. Made by Robert Rocola.

8. Text: COLLAGE BY RAY JOHNSON

9. Girly face with heart-shaped mouth and long eyelashes. "dadaland" handwritten in cursive on the side.

10. Text: My Funny Verlainetine

11. Ray Johnson's laughing face with text RAY JOHNSON. Image on back of man with mustache and sunglasses, possibly John Tostada.

12. Square stamp with half circle cutout. Decorative designs around edges. Above half circle, text U.S. POSTAGE; each bottom corner has a number 24; in the center below half circle, text CENTS. Made by Robert Rocola.

13. Long-eared bunnyhead image. Made by William "Picasso" Gaglione at Stamp Francisco.

14. Image of Ray Johnson in profile. Handwritten on side: Re-Roc 86. Image on back: man with sunglasses.

15. Text: THIS IS NOT BUNNY

16. Text: COLLAGE BY SUZY KNICKERKNOCKERS

17. Text: EMILY DICKINSON UNIVERSITY

18. Text: COLLAGE BY SUZY KNICKERKNOCKERS. Rubber portion of stamp has come loose and is separate from mount/handle.

19. Abstract shape w/ circle and lines. Made by Robert Rocola.

20. Text: RUBBAGE BY RAY JOHNSON

21. Text: MY FUNNY VALENTINE

22. Text: RAY JOHNSON 100 CUPIDS 44 WEST 7 STREET LOCUST VALLEY NEW YORK
11560

23. Cow outline with sections like a butchery diagram, each section with a name: ROC/OLA, PSX, RAY, LEAVENWORTH, BEAU-REGARS, CYNDY FOX, PIZZA GAGLIONE, RUBBERTA STAMPLING, CHARRON, BARONI, M X BENSON, NANCY FRANK, CAMPBELL SOUP, BUSTER CLEVELINI, NICK VANZETTI, SKOOTER, RONAN, SAINT-KIMMEL, LA TEX BLAKE, CARL LOEFFLER, GINA L., ARTURO G. Made by Robert Rocola.

24. Text: RAY JOHNSON THE PINK HOUSE 44 WEST 7 STREET LOCUST VALLEY NEW YORK
11560

Box 151. 0.98 Linear feet

1. Text: DO NOT SPEAK

2. Image of a man running. Side has letters RUN-NER.

3. Text: RAY JOHNSON Golden File Award

4. Text: FETUS JOHNSON

5. Text: SPAM BELT CLUB

6. Text: RAY JOHNSON 65 LANDING ROAD GLEN COVE, N.Y. 11542

7. Text: DOUGHNUT FESTIVAL

8. Text: BUDDHA UNIVERSHITY OF VANCOUVER

9. Text, in italics: "EARLY COLLAGE BY RAY JOHNSON".

10. Same as #9, except the LY is missing from EARLY.

11. Text: COLLAGE BY A MAJOR ARTIST

12. Text: MADAME ANY COLOR

13. Text: COLLAGE BY BILL MAULDIN

14. Text: FACE COLLAGE BY RAY JOHNSON

15. Text: SANDRA BERNHARD FAN CLUB

16. Text: COLLAGE BY ALEXANDRA FINDLAY. Rubber damaged—I, L, Y missing or scraped out.

17. Text: COLLAGE BY JUDY C. VAN WAGNER

18. Text: JEAN DUBUFFET FAN CLUB

19. Text: GARTER BELT CLUB

20. Text: NINE JASPER JOHNS FAN CLUB

21. Text: COLLAGE BY RAY JOHNSON 1973

22. Text: DICK CAVETT FAN CLUB

23. Text: PLEASE REPLY

24. Cyclops and/or profile bunnyhead image with text underneath: Stamp Francisco Networker Congress and International Mail Art Show January 10, 1992. Small circular seal next to bunnyhead with text: Decentralized World Wide Networker Congress. Rubber only—no mount. Appears clean, as if never used.

Box 152. 0.98 Linear feet

1. Text: MY FUNNY VERLAINETINE

2. Text: COLLAGE BY U.S. POST OFFICE

3. Text: PRINCESS STEPHANIE FAN CLUB

4. Text: CLAUDE PICASSO FAN CLUB

5. Text: MADAM RED

6. Same as #5.

7. Text: NANCY SINATRA FAN CLUB

8. Text: THE WILSON-ASHLEY MEMORIAL LIBRARY

9. Text: Coll Ages By Ray Johnson

10. Text: BRUE EYES CRUB

11. Text: COPYRIGHT © 1979 BY RAY JOHNSON. Rubber of 79 missing/scraped off (would make stamp usable for other years).

12. Text: COLLAGE BY TOBY SPIELMAN

13. Text: Cool Ages By Ray Johnson. S at end of Ages missing/scraped off.

14. Text: BARBARA ROSE FAN CLUB

15. Text: COLLAGE BY BILL MAULDIN

16. Image of Ray face with wings. Made by Robert Rocola.

17. Text: BOOTA UNIVERSITY

18. Text: PEANUT BUTTER FESTIVAL. "Festival" missing/scraped off.

19. Text: RAY JOHNSONG

20. Text: PHOTO BY JOAN HARRISON

21. Text: TED DRAGON FAN CLUB

22. Text: SILHOUETTE UNIVERSITY

23. Text: EDIE BEALE FAN CLUB

24. and 25. Two w/ foreign characters, maybe Japanese. First two words on both are the same, last two are different. One has handwritten on the side: REY JONSHON.

Box 153. 0.98 Linear feet

1. Text: SANDRA BERNHARDT FAN CLUB

2. Text: SHELLEY DUVAL FAN CLUB

3. Text: ED PLUNKETT FAN CLUB

4. Text: KOOL CLUB

5. Text: BILL DOBBS FAN CLUB

6. Text: COLLAGE BY GEORGE BRECHT

7. Text: MATT COLLINS FAN CLUB

8. Text: JOHN DOE. Rubber is missing.

9. Text: ODILON REDON FAN CLUB.

10. Text: OTTO ERBAR FAN CLUB.

11. Text: IRENE PINN FAN CLUB

12. Text: RAY JOHNSON 44 WEST 7 STREET LOCUST VALLEY NEW YORK 11560

13. Text: SANDRA BERNHARD FAN CLUB

14. Text: TALKING SILHOUETTE UNIVERSITY

15. text: UNTITLED LITHOGRAPH BY RAY JOHNSON. "Untitled" has been made into "tit."

16. Text: JOHN ROE 1967. R appears to be missing its tail so that it now reads as a P.

17. Text: MAT COLLINS FAN CLUB

18. Text: MY FUNNY VALESTINE. S missing/scraped out.

19. Text: DOROTHEA TANNING FAN CLUB

20. Text: SPAM BELT CLUB

21. Text: DEAD PAN CLUB

22. Text: TALKING SILHOUETTE UNIVERSITY

23. Text: PALOMA PICASSO FAN CLUB

24. Text: BLUE EYES CLUB

25. Fleur-de-lis image. Looks clean/unused.

Box 154. 0.98 Linear feet

1. Text: BUDDHETTE UNIVERSITY PRESS

2. Text: COLLAGE BY SHERRIE LEVINE

3. Text: BUDDHA UNIVERSITY PRESS

4. Text: COLLAGE BY RAY JOHNSON

5. Text: PRE POP SHOP

6. Text: ERNIE BUSHMILLER FAN CLUB

7. Text: PLEASE ADD TO AND RETURN TO RAY JOHNSON

8. Text: DORA MAAR FAN CLUB

9. Text: SHELLEY DUVALL FAN CLUB

10. Text: TOILET PAPER

11. Text: BUDDHETTE UNIVERSITY

12. Text: GEORGE BRECH FESTIVAL. "Festival" missing all letters except T

13. Text: EVAPORATIONS BY RAY JOHNSON

14. Text: BUDDHA UNIVERSITY

15. Text: SPAM RADIO CLUB

16. Text: BROWN EYES CLUB

17. Text: EDIE BEALE FAN CLUB

18. Man w/ beard image. No backing, just rubber without a mount/handle. Clean/unused.