

## Art at a Distance: Mail Art in Latin America, 1969-2019

Curated by Alexandra Schoolman

Opening Reception: Thursday June 27, 6-9 pm

Exhibition runs through August 16, 2019

Gallery Hours: Monday to Friday 11-6 pm

Henrique Faria Fine Art is pleased to present *Art at a Distance: Mail Art in Latin America, 1969-2019*, a group exhibition that examines the legacy of Mail Art, or Arte Correo/Arte Correio, through both archival material as well as contemporary responses to the movement. While Mail Art has always been a global practice, this exhibition looks specifically at the work created in Latin America and by Latin American artists in response to the social and political unrest caused by authoritarian governments and military dictatorships during the 1960s-80s as well as to international avant-garde trends as expressed in the mail art received from artists outside of the region, and how this art form remains useful today. This exhibition demonstrates the breadth of Mail Art through the variety of materials used—ranging from paintings and works on paper, to intervened postcards and letters, artist stamps and seals, to mass-produced prints, to video and performance—and the range of themes addressed. Although physical distance and government-imposed censorship and repression imposed overwhelming obstacles, as curator and art historian Alexandra Schoolman writes in the exhibition text, Mail Art “gave artists an outlet and initiative to seek creative responses to the restrictions that surrounded them, to continue creating and sharing work directly with other artists and to participate in a global art movement, all from a distance.”

With roots in Readymade art, Fluxus poetry, performance and Conceptual art, the work of Mail Art has only one requirement: that it be sent in the mail from sender to recipient. As Edgardo Antonio Vigo and Horacio Zabala, two of Argentina’s leading Mail Art figures, explain in their 1975-76 text “Mail Art: A New Form of Expression”, “the fact that the work [of Mail Art] must travel a set distance is part of its structure, is the work itself. The work has been created to be sent by post, and this factor conditions its creation [...] The mail’s function, therefore, is not limited to transporting the object; instead, this function forms part of the work and conditions it. In turn, the artist alters the function of this medium of communication.” In this way, Mail Art promoted a complete artistic freedom, not only in creating a work but also in letting it go and disseminating it across a wide audience. The movement also highlighted the performative nature of communication by acknowledging that it is an action of expression and relationship. Paulo Bruscky’s 1975 work *PostAção (PostAction)* was both a performance and submission to Vigo and Zabala’s *Last International Exhibition of Mail Art* in Buenos Aires, in which Bruscky created an oversized envelope and letter measuring 3 x 6 ft. (90 x 180 cm) and walked from his house through the streets of Recife, Brazil to the post office with a group of friends where he would hand over the work to be sent out. The performance exists today as slides, which capture the mundane task of going to the post office instilled with a sense of humor and the absurd as we see Bruscky waiting on lines and postal workers attempting to deal with the extraordinary parcel of mail.

And while communication and the sharing of ideas were principal goals of Mail Art, there were also fervent antiestablishment and anti-commercial sentiments expressed by many of the participants. As the censoring of mail was a common practice under the authoritarian regimes in Latin America, the use of the Post Office to transmit art and the coopting of official seals and stamps was an effort made to undermine the “officialness” of this government institution and subvert governmental authority. Artists Vigo, Graciela Sacco and Humberto Márquez made printed stamps in their practices to raise awareness about political issues while others such as Zabala, Anna Bella Geiger and Sigfredo Chacón used rubber stamps, cartography and typography to challenge censorship and official representation. By sending artwork directly to one another, mail artists not only worked to avoid galleries and disrupt the art market but also questioned the value of the work of art by treating it as a quotidian object, as seen in Liliana Porter’s *Mail Exhibition #3 – To Be Wrinkled and Thrown Away* (1969). Although the efforts to avoid the commercialization of their work weren’t ultimately successful, as Schoolman notes, these artists, however, did succeed in further “opening up the art market [...] by demonstrating that art can exist as a document, record or archive, that art can exist simultaneously as both object and action”.

As our lives have become increasingly digitized, and the misuse of power and the abuse of privacy by governments and corporations continue, contemporary artists, including Emilia Azcárate, Esvin Alarcón Lam and Plinio Ávila, have used Mail Art to share personal anecdotes and express opinions that challenge institutional power and the status quo. As Schoolman concludes, “As this exhibition demonstrates, people will use the means necessary and available to them in order to make their voices heard and circulate their messages. The use of Mail Art presented, and still encourages to this day, a unique solution to expressing resistance to, and ultimately overcoming, obstacles presented by physical distance and by political and economic machinations.”

### Participating Artists:

Esvin Alarcón Lam (Guatemala, b. 1988)	Mirtha Dermisache (Argentina, 1940-2012)	Clemente Padín (Uruguay, b. 1939)
Luis Arias Vera (Peru, 1932-2016)	Eugenio Dittborn (Chile, b. 1943)	Liliana Porter (Argentina/US, b. 1941)
Plinio Ávila (Mexico, b. 1977)	Anna Bella Geiger (Brazil, b. 1933)	Graciela Sacco (Argentina, 1956-2017)
Emilia Azcárate (Venezuela/Spain, b. 1964)	Graciela Gutiérrez Marx (Argentina, b. 1942)	Edgardo Antonio Vigo (Argentina, 1928-1997)
Diego Barboza (Venezuela, 1945-2003)	Eduardo Kac (Brazil/US, b. 1962)	Horacio Zabala (Argentina, b. 1943)
Paulo Bruscky (Brazil, b. 1949)	Leandro Katz (Argentina/US, b. 1938)	Carlos Zepa (Venezuela, b. 1950)
Sigfredo Chacón (Venezuela/US, b. 1950)	Humberto Márquez (Mexico, 1925-2013)	
Guillermo Deisler (Chile/Germany, 1940-1995)	Dámaso Ogaz (Venezuela, 1924-1990)	

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