



8. 1967 01-02, 67 02 02, 2018.802.45.2

Ray Johnson

c/o

EDITED AND CURATED BY CAITLIN HASKELL
WITH JORDAN CARTER

With contributions by Jordan Carter, Colby Chamberlain,
Jennifer R. Cohen, Johanna Gosse, Caitlin Haskell,
Miriam Kienle, Brian T. Leahy, Ellen Levy, Solveig Nelson,
Thea Liberty Nichols, and Michael von Uchtrup

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Acknowledgments

Much like the William S. Wilson Collection of Ray Johnson, *Ray Johnson c/o* is, among other things, the material record of numerous relationships conducted both in person and from afar over the span of months, even years. Indeed, there is something pleasingly symmetrical in how the mock bureaucracy of the New York Correspondence School, with its formal appointment of an archivist and secretary, contained the genuine camaraderie of Johnson, Wilson, and their associates, and how the structures of the Art Institute of Chicago and other institutions have provided a framework for the similarly meaningful and sometimes novel modes of collaboration that produced this book and the exhibition it accompanies.

Andrew, Ara, and Kate Wilson honored us with the privilege of stewarding and continuing to research their father's collection of Ray Johnson's work. Nancy and Paul Newman, Millicent (Malka) Safro, and Robert Warner have enabled us to contextualize the Wilson Collection more fully by better representing key figures within Johnson and Wilson's orbit. Lorri Gunn and Karl Wirsum, as well as Kathy and Chuck Harper, Dale Taylor and Angela Lustig, and Helen Zell, have generously provided a focused selection of important loans for the exhibition. The Ray Johnson Estate, led by Frances Beatty and Alexander Adler, along with archivist Maria Ilario, supported our scholarship on a daily basis. Their unparalleled friendship and advocacy have reminded us in countless ways what a gift it is to be able to create a book and mount an exhibition about an artist as ceaselessly playful and prolific as Johnson.

Irma Boom, whose books have long been collected by the Art Institute, was an ideal collaborator in the production of this catalogue. She has presented the transformative acquisition of the Wilson Collection in a manner that powerfully shifts the terms of engagement with Johnson's art and facilitates the continued accrual of coincidences and correspondences that give new life to the archive in the ongoing and open-ended spirit Johnson and Wilson intended.

Our preliminary research was enhanced by generous roundtable discussions hosted by the Ray Johnson Estate in New York and, in Chicago, at the Art Institute and the homes of friends of the project. During these conversations, Ina Blom, Hannah Higgins, Kalliopi Minioudaki, Gillian Pistell, Charles Stuckey, and Robert Warner offered new critical points of entry into Johnson's work. The catalogue contributors, many of whom were present at these roundtables as well, also proved a remarkable group of co-conspirators. Colby Chamberlain, Johanna Gosse, Miriam Kienle, Ellen Levy, and Michael von Uchtrup--as well as, from within the museum, Jennifer R. Cohen, Brian T. Leahy, Solveig Nelson, and Thea Liberty Nichols--all approached their essays in a spirit of rigorous play resonant with Johnson's own method. On numerous occasions, we also benefited from firsthand accounts of Johnson and Wilson shared by Coco Gordon, Henry Martin, and Michael Findlay.

At the Art Institute, President and Eloise W. Martin Director James Rondeau and Deputy Director and Senior Vice President for Curatorial Affairs Sarah Guernsey championed this project from the outset. Similarly, the mentorship, sage advice, and steady leadership of Ann Goldstein, Deputy Director, Chair, and Curator, Modern and Contemporary Art, informs both the pages of this book and the walls of the exhibition. In Modern and Contemporary Art, Jennifer R. Cohen's organizational acumen was crucial at every stage in the production of the publication and exhibition. Brian T. Leahy, Natasha

Coleman, and Lilly Reyes were likewise essential partners in thinking through how to catalogue the Wilson Collection and work with it among a geographically diffuse team of researchers and catalogue contributors. Solveig Nelson's expertise in time-based media proved extremely helpful in cataloguing the audiovisual elements of the collection, and Thea Liberty Nichols provided timely support at multiple phases in the development of the catalogue and exhibition. In addition, over the past two years, Molly Brandt, Mary Coyne, Jay Dandy, Robyn Farrell, Hendrik Folkerts, Susanne Ghez, Makayla May, and Suzie Oppenheimer shared their enthusiasm for the project and gave us much support.

In Prints and Drawings, Kevin Salatino, Chair and Anne Vogt Fuller and Marion Titus Searle Curator, Prints and Drawings; Mark Pascale; Jay A. Clarke; Emily Vokt Ziemba; and Kate Howell facilitated numerous critical object study sessions. In the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, Nathaniel Parks helped envision a stewardship plan for the Wilson Collection, and Autumn Mather helped shepherd the companion exhibition, *c/o Tender Buttons*.

In Publishing, Executive Director Greg Nosan and his colleagues expertly and enthusiastically oversaw the extensive production and editorial responsibilities of this volume. Joseph Mohan ably supervised the complex production of the book, supported by Ben Bertin and Lauren Makholt. Amy R. Peltz brought superb editorial insight to the catalogue, with the assistance of Lisa Meyerowitz and Kit Shields. David Olsen carefully proofread the text, and Jane Friedman helped prepare the index of people. Alissa Chanin Kolaj handled finances and contracts with aplomb. Kylie Escudero deftly coordinated images and image rights. Elyse Allen, Owen Conway, Aidan Fitzpatrick, Liana Jegers, Amy Kaczmarek, Robert Lifson, Jonathan Mathias, Shelby Silvernell, Craig Stillwell, Joe Tallarico, and P. D. Young combined forces to tackle the sizeable task of photographing the Wilson Collection for this publication and our ongoing research. Ginia Sweeney, with the assistance of Emily Lew Fry, nimbly shaped the gallery texts.

It has been an honor to work with our extraordinary project team under the direction of Megan Rader and Jennifer Oberhauser, including Kristi Dahm, Christine Fabian, Emily Heye, Christine Conniff-O'Shea, Katrina Rush, and Mardy Sears. Francesca Casadio, Associate Vice President and Grainger Executive Director, Conservation and Science, helped assemble an expanded conservation team including Harriet Stratis. Maria Simon, Jennifer Sostaric, and Troy Klyber shared expert guidance during several phases of the acquisition and its preparation for the show.

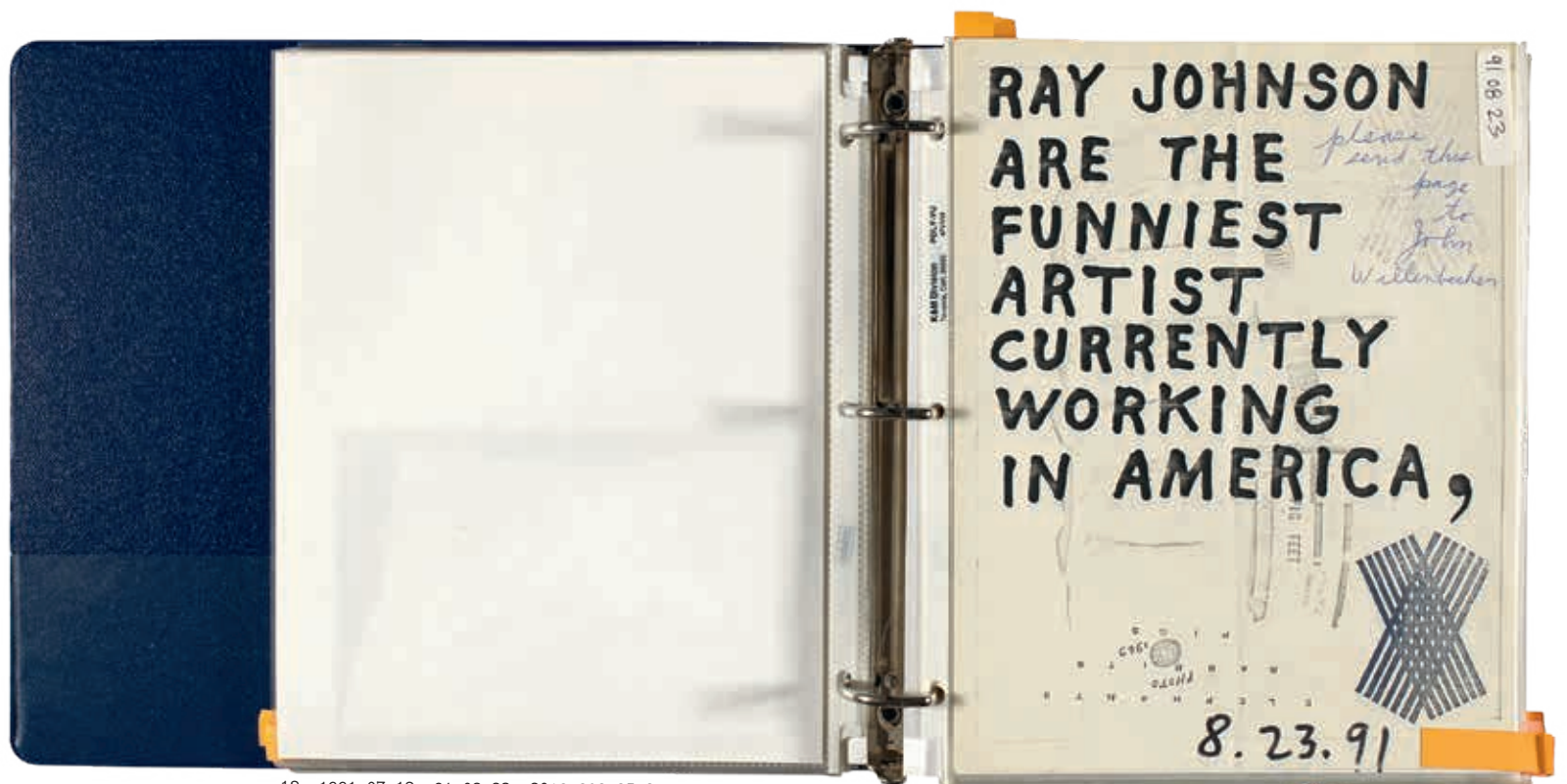
The realization of our ambitious vision for the exhibition was made possible by the impressive skill of Leticia Pardo. Our fruitful collaboration with Leticia enabled us to honor Johnson's legacy by conveying to a new generation how his collages moved through the world. The Experience Design team, led by Michael Neault and including Kristin Best, Bronwyn Gallagher, Gina Giambalvo, Kirill Mazor, Andrew Meriwether, Michel Schwartz, and Kirsten Southwell made savvy contributions to our presentation of the collection and exhibition both online and in the space of the museum. In Education and Live Programming, Nancy Chen, Michael Green, Maura Flood, and Sam Ramos translated Johnson's vision to new audiences. Our partners in Marketing, Communications, and Public Affairs--Eve Jeffers, Shannon Burke, Robyn Day, Nora Gainer, Erica S. Hubbard, Vera Mandilovitch, Kati Murphy, Shannon Palmer, Katie Rahn, Nadine Schneller, Lauren Schultz, Amy Tsegai, and Julie White--conducted their work with consummate collegiality, demonstrating that good communication is, indeed, an art.

The Collections and Loans team, led by Cayetana Castillo Lacabex and including Natasha Derrickson and Michael Hodgetts, meticulously received and unpacked the Wilson Collection and ensured the safety of the loans. Along with Leslie Carlson and the Art Preparation and Logistics team, Nicholas Barron, Thomas Huston, and Kit Rosenberg carefully oversaw the movement and installation of the art. Finally, our impeccable Protection Services staff, led by Lucio Ventura, and our Museum Facilities team, led by Joseph Vatinno, enabled visitors to interact with Johnson's work as the artist intended, while preserving the safety of the objects, through their carpentry, housekeeping, electric work, painting, and patrolling.

Wilson was fond of quoting Johnson's statement "I wait, not for time to finish my work, but for time to indicate something one would not have expected to occur." Although we can only speculate on what insights may be derived from the Wilson Collection in the future, there is no doubt that vast discoveries remain to be made. We are delighted to open this archive to the wider world and to see together what these clever, illuminating, and troublemaking missives from an earlier moment have to show us about our own time.

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 The Art Institute of Chicago



12. 1991 07-12, 91 08 23, 2018.802.85.2

Note to the Reader

One goal of this catalogue is to simulate for readers the feeling of receiving mail from Ray Johnson. Another is to present that experience as mediated by the archival work of William S. Wilson III, the original recipient of nearly all the illustrated materials. At his home in Chelsea, Bill Wilson displayed collages, as well as dozens of letters and drawings, in dense configurations on the walls of a large first-floor study. Bookcases containing nearly two hundred three-ring binders, mostly organized chronologically, spanned the room beneath them. The binders begin with 1927, the year of Johnson's birth, and extend to 2016, the year when Wilson's own death halted the growth of the collection and demanded a change of site. He used folios and banker's boxes for oversized and delicate materials too large or too fragile to be stored safely in binder sleeves and placed three-dimensional objects in cases elsewhere in the room, creating something of an immersive permanent installation of Johnson's work.

To convey the character of Wilson's collection, this book not only emulates his fluid presentation of collages and mail art in its layout, frequently presenting these materials in the sleeves in which he housed them, but also retains his signature dating convention--the "WSW number"--in both its images and their captions. This number (which appears in YY MM DD format) typically derived from the postmark on an envelope or, when that was unavailable, the date of a letter. When neither a postmark nor letter date was present, Wilson prefaced the number with more speculative notations such as "After," "Around," or "Before," or used question marks in noting the date. He recorded these numbers on white stickers that he placed on the upper right-hand corner of the transparent binder sleeves in which he placed the contents of each missive, and he used these sleeves to preserve the elements' relationship to one another, filing related research and secondary material in adjacent sleeves. If an original envelope was extant, it was preserved in the sleeve along with the contents it once held. Wilson often annotated the source of supporting research (such as an archive or another scholar) directly on the sleeve.

The vast majority of image captions in this book consist of the name of the binder, the WSW number associated with the contents (when available), and the Art Institute of Chicago accession or object number. Fragmentary views of adjacent contents are often visible before or after the featured spread, offering incidental context and information related to the event or the broader historical moment. Although specific dimensions are not provided, overhead views of binder pages and spreads appear throughout, and the size of an object is legible in relation to its binder. Some objects are reproduced larger than actual size. Although we have resisted drawing hard and fast distinctions between archival materials sent by mail and collages, captions for objects that historically have been treated as framed works include title, date, and dimensions in addition to the Art Institute of Chicago accession or object number.

ANNOTATIONS

Wilson annotated binder sleeves with the initials of key people and sources of archival materials.

The most common initials include:

REJ	Ray Johnson
WSW	William S. Wilson
MGW	May Wilson
RFCo	Richard Feigen & Co.
MvU	Michael von Uchtrup

AUTHORSHIP

Although Johnson made, mailed, and/or contributed to the vast majority of the material in Wilson's binders, the nature of his correspondence practice suggests that many pieces were, to some extent, collaboratively authored. Often, the names of contributors are noted on the exterior of an envelope or are visible on the contents within. However, this catalogue does not attempt to parse attributions. Instead, it treats the body of work in its totality as a collaborative endeavor choreographed by Johnson and contextualized by Wilson.

COLLECTIONS AND CREDIT LINES

Nearly all the material reproduced in this catalogue is a gift or promised gift of the William S. Wilson Collection of Ray Johnson to the Art Institute of Chicago. A small minority of items come from other collections at the Art Institute of Chicago as well as from the Ray Johnson Estate and elsewhere. For detailed collection and credit line information, see page 375. For a checklist of collages in Wilson's collection, see page 368.

DATING CONVENTIONS

The dates of many of Johnson's works are represented as follows:

1964	executed in 1964
c. 1964	executed sometime around 1964
1964 or 1965	executed in either 1964 or 1965
1964-67	begun in 1964 and completed in 1967
c. 1964-67	executed within or around 1964 to 1967

A slash between dates indicates that Johnson worked on a piece at two or more distinct moments. However, dating Johnson's work is not always straightforward. He often included dates in graphite on his collages to indicate when he made a work; see, for example, Untitled (Ha Ha) (fig. 149) and Mayan Letters (fig. 556). But he employed some idiosyncratic methods, as he liked to problematize the very notion of dating. For instance, these dates variously employ dashes, hyphens, plus signs, and slashes to indicate that a piece was made at multiple periods. In typical fashion, Johnson also wrote dates on collages that do not correspond to their creation dates; instances include the dates on Untitled (Tusk/Love to Bill Wilson) (fig. 597) and Untitled (Tilghman/Phyllis Stygliano) (fig. 598).

SPELLING

Text from Ray Johnson's art, correspondence, and ephemera is quoted as written. Departures from accepted spelling and grammar are not called out, as in many cases these were deliberate. For example, the archive contains references to the "New York Correspondence School," the "New York Correspondance School," the "New York Correspondance [sic] School," and the "New York Correspondence [sic] School." Similarly, Johnson would often misspell names, even of those he knew well, such as Ann Wilson, whose name regularly appears as "Anne."

Black Mountain Johanna Gosse

When Ray Johnson enrolled at Black Mountain College in June 1945, World War II was in its final weeks, and he was still a few months shy of his eighteenth birthday. Having just graduated from Cass Technical High School in Detroit, he narrowly avoided the draft and was eager to begin his studies. In a note sent to Black Mountain professor Anni Albers on June 26 (fig. 48), Johnson confirmed his arrival by train one day before the official start of the college's Summer Art Institute, where he would study with Abstract Expressionist Robert Motherwell and graphic designer Alvin Lustig.¹ This would be the first of four consecutive summer sessions that Johnson attended, culminating with the legendary 1948 summer session with visiting faculty including John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Willem de Kooning, Elaine de Kooning, and Buckminster Fuller.

Johnson's three years at Black Mountain coincided with one of the most dynamic periods in the college's history.² What set his educational experience apart from that of other prominent alumni (such as Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, and Stan VanDerBeek) was his combined exposure to the experimental methods of visiting summer faculty like Cage, Cunningham, and Fuller, alongside more sustained contact with Anni and Josef Albers and their rigorous Bauhaus-derived design pedagogy.³ Arguably more than any other Black Mountain alumnus of his generation, Johnson's work manifests a commitment to fusing these influential, if sometimes conflicting, artistic approaches.

Though he was fond of both Alberses, Johnson actually enrolled in all of Josef's courses and soon emerged as one of his most committed pupils (see fig. 55). In 1947 Albers recommended Johnson for his first graphic design commission, the cover illustration for the November issue of *Interiors* magazine (fig. 52). According to the magazine's editors, Johnson's drawing managed to achieve "riotously colorful effects with only black, red and blue."⁴ Indeed, the drawing's economical use of contrasting colors and grid-like composition reflects the influence of Albers and prefigures the style of much of Johnson's own post-college abstract painting. Though Johnson supposedly destroyed his college notes and most of his early

works--and even claimed to have incinerated them in Twombly's fireplace--one surviving painting, *Calm Center* (see fig. 51), immediately recalls the work of both Alberses: while its vibrant color contrasts and geometric organization rhyme with Josef's *Homage to a Square* series, the complex warp and weft of its quilt-

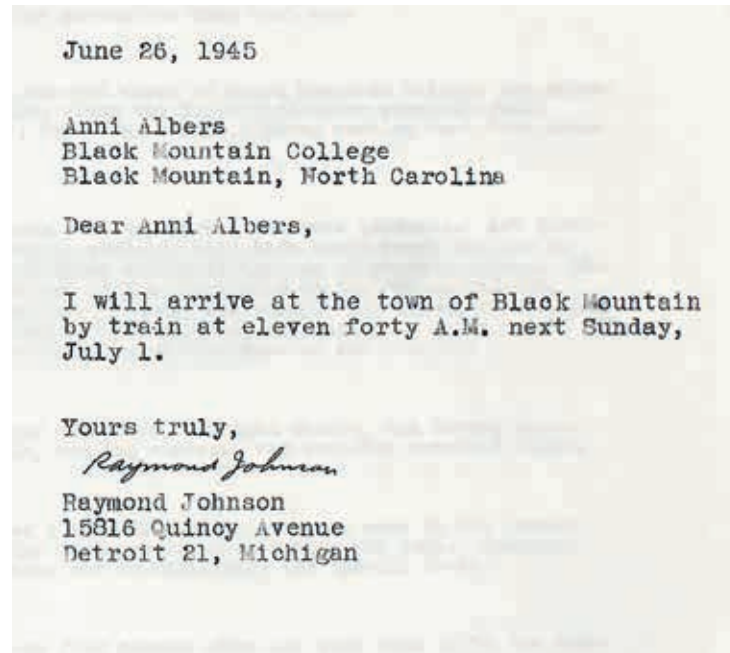
like panels evoke Anni's textile designs. In this sense *Calm Center* represents the young artist's efforts to at once synthesize and renovate what art historian Leah Dickerman has called the "grid logic" of Bauhaus creative production.⁵

If *Calm Center* exemplifies Johnson's Black Mountain education, a slightly later and lesser-known painting, *Ladder Whirled* (fig. 60), registers his attempt to break free from the constraints of this rigorous design training and embrace

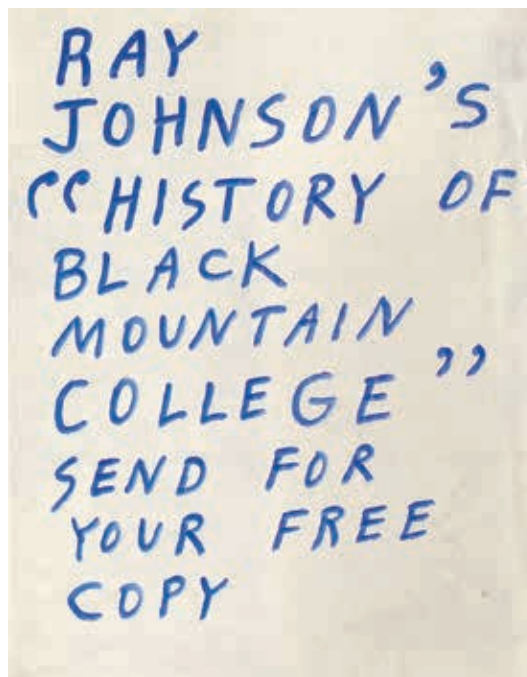
the frenzied rhythms of gritty, industrialized postwar New York, which he now called home. Before entering Bill Wilson's collection, *Ladder Whirled* was acquired by Blanchette Rockefeller (who later served as president of the Museum of Modern Art) from one of Johnson's rare solo exhibitions held at Willard Gallery in 1965. *Ladder Whirled* is a disorienting picture. At first glance, it looks as if the orderly *Calm Center* had been thrust into the automated jaws of a large machine, its serene lattice shredded and splayed into a dense matrix of "whirled ladders." Although both paintings are organized around a focal point, where the former gestures toward an eponymous center of calm, the latter *Ladder* locates itself within the eye of the storm.

Ladder Whirled's textile-like patterns preserve the association between painting and weaving established in *Calm Center*, but it animates (or "whirls") this analogy via its centrifugal composition, which evokes weaving as action rather than medium. Unlike the effect of the quilt-like, rectangular *Calm Center*, *Ladder Whirled* gives an impression of a frayed fishing net cast upon the water's surface, its open mesh splaying and radiating outward. In this sense, *Ladder Whirled* is less like Anni's weavings than the signature coiled wire sculptures of Ruth Asawa, Johnson's classmate and close friend. In fact, the painting's resemblance to a compressed or flattened version of an Asawa sculpture recalls one of Johnson's favorite anecdotes, in which he mailed May Wilson an Asawa sculpture and she responded by sitting on it, smashing it flat, and nailing it to a board (see fig. 313).⁶

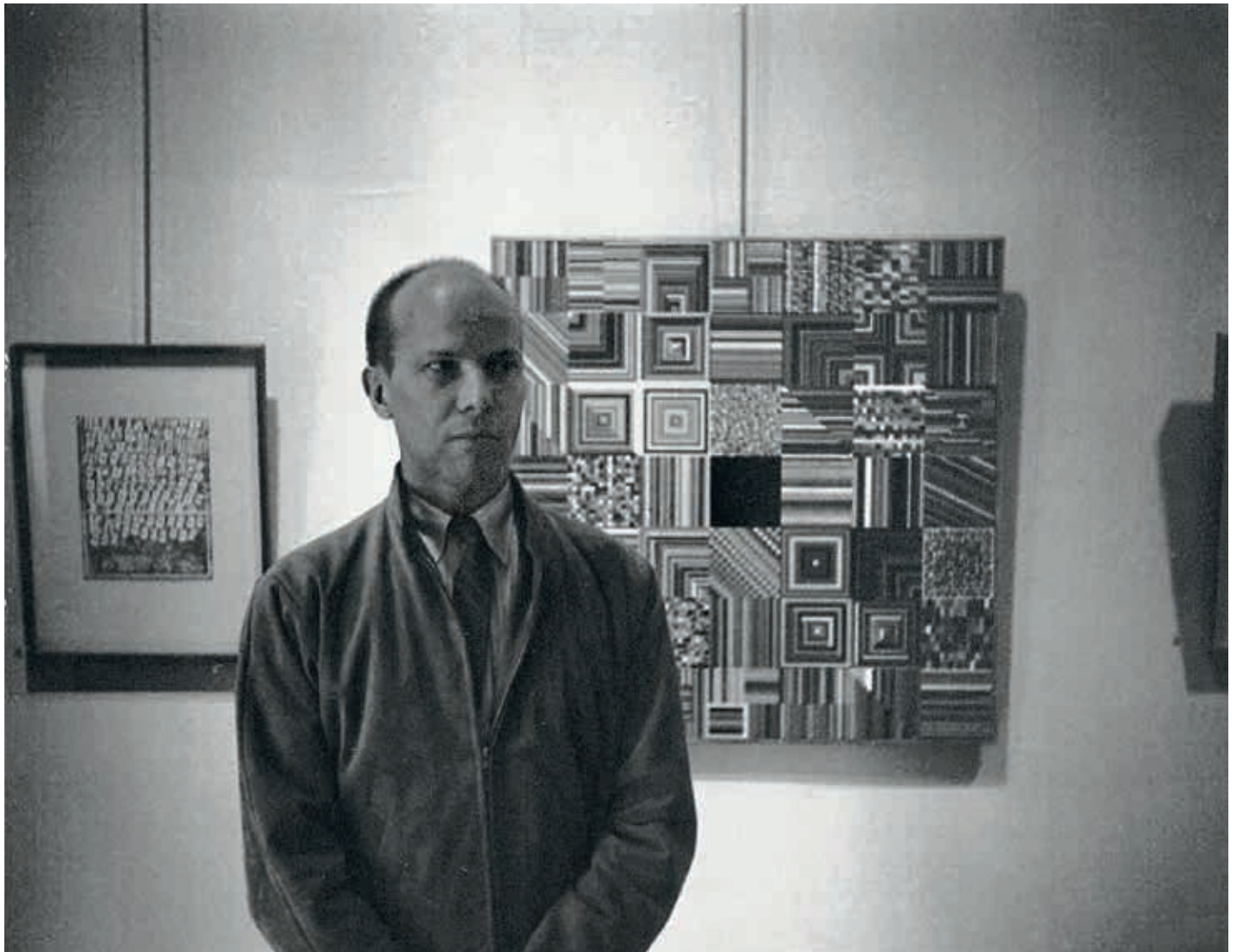
Two additional mysterious elements--the shadowy outline of a human figure, who seems to be tilting a watering can toward the whirled ladder (or perhaps oiling its hinges), and a hazy white orb that suggests a full moon or the glare of a street-light--flank the whirled ladder, once again thrusting the painting out of the realm of pure abstraction and design into the unruly swirl of the everyday.



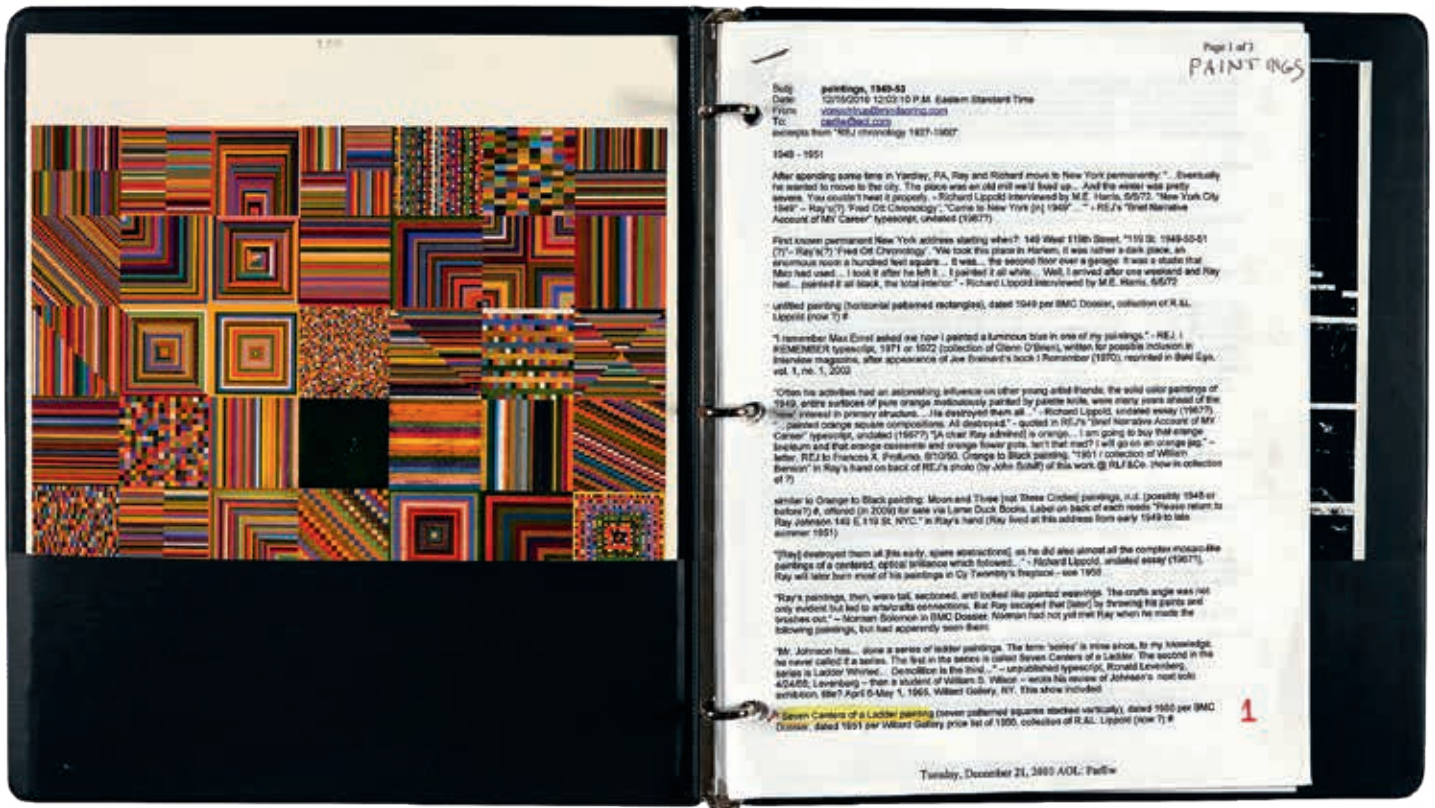
48. Cass Tech Course Cards Blossom Tom Gam BMC NC Archives, unnumbered, 2018.802.154.1



49. REJ Only Mail No Dates 1970s-90s 4, unnumbered, 2018.802.116.8



50. REJ BY WSW 1, 65 04 06: at Willard Gallery, 2018.802.107.15



51. Geometric Paintings, unnumbered, 2018.802.7.2

After leaving North Carolina, Johnson settled in New York but remained in Black Mountain's social orbit. He lived on and off with Richard Lippold until 1953, the same period in which he was transitioning away from painting and toward collage. But instead of abandoning the compositional and formal techniques he had initially pursued through painting, Johnson translated and adapted them for his collage practice, whose products he called 'moticos.'⁷⁷ For instance, *Untitled (Soprano)* (fig. 58) is a "whirled" collage that substitutes fragments of previous works for the painted rungs of the ladder. A palimpsest of painting and collage, cross-referenced with weaving and sculpture, Johnson's post-Black Mountain practice exemplifies the cross-disciplinary, experimental spirit of his alma mater, while retaining its dual commitment to the Bauhaus's emphasis on craft and "grid logic."

Starting in 1951 Lippold and Johnson resided for two years in an apartment at 326 Monroe Street on the Lower East Side. In a striking moment of pre-Stonewall queer domesticity, they lived down the hall from Cage and Cunningham; the experimental composer Morton Feldman also lived in the building. The group socialized frequently and sarcastically referred to their dilapidated residence as the Boza Mansion, a reference to their negligent landlord's last name. In 1952 *Harper's Bazaar* published a profile titled "Four Artists in a 'Mansion,'" which identifies Cage, Feldman, Johnson, and Lippold (Cunningham is, for unknown reasons, omitted) as members of an emergent avant-garde: "Fresh, seemingly capricious winds in music, sculpture and painting come from an ancient ramshackle structure . . . in the shadow of the Williamsburg Bridge. There, in a neighborhood of grime and garlic, four friends --experimental, even stratospheric artists--have established three uncluttered studios with a spectacular view of the East River."⁷⁸ The fact that these capricious (or, better yet, whirled) winds first emerged not from the "grime and garlic" of the industrialized city but from a bucolic lakeside campus in the rural South points to the catalytic role of Black Mountain, not only in Johnson's own career but in the network of intersecting tributaries that comprised the American neo-avant-garde.



52. *Summr 1945-Summr 1948*, 47 11 00, 2018.802.4.2



53. "Four Artists in a 'Mansion,'" *Harper's Bazaar* (July 1952), 79.



54. Negroes, Churches, Stars, 1947-48, 2018.802.399



55. 1971 07-12, 71 09 31, 2018.802.58.4

10/22

John,

I made a special drawing-collage-painting for you and the Found of Performing Art and it is at the Willard Gallery any time you want to peek it up.

Ray Johnson

Post Card to:
John Cage
Willow Grove Road
Stony Point, N.Y.

56. REJ: Notable Collages, Writing No Dates 1, unnumbered, 2018.802.113.4

**BLACK MOUNTAIN
COLLEGE
SUMMER ART
INSTITUTE**

July 2-Sept. 8—Teachers, lecturers: Gropius, Boidler, architects. Painting: Feininger, Hillsmith, Motherwell. Sculpture: Zadkine, Mary Callery. Advertising Art: Paul Rand, Alvin Lustig. Art History: Alexander Dörner, Karl Gregory. Wood Work: Berfa Rudofsky. Leather Work: Berfa Rudofsky. Textile Design: Anni Josef Albers. Basic Design and Color: Josef Albers.

Write to Art Department, Black Mountain College, Black Mountain, North Carolina

Black Mountain College Music Institute concurrently.

57. 1927-45 With Dates, Before 45 05 21, 2018.802.2.2

NOTES

1 For more on Johnson's Black Mountain experience, see Michael von Uchtrup, "Chro No Logy," in this book, 358.

2 During the war years, Black Mountain assembled an international roster of renowned faculty in architecture, design, fine arts, literature, music, and the sciences. Approximately half were European émigrés fleeing wartime persecution; this included Anni and Josef Albers, who fled Germany in 1933 on the heels of the Nazi's shuttering of the Bauhaus.

3 Besides Johnson, Rauschenberg was the only one of this group who studied, albeit briefly, with the Alberses before they left Black Mountain in 1949. Anni taught weaving and jewelry and is today considered one of the foremost textile artists of the twentieth century. Josef taught courses in color theory, design, drawing, and painting, all adapted from the Bauhaus curriculum.

4 Interiors was an influential interior design magazine published from 1945 to 1974. Johnson designed the cover illustration for Interiors 107, no. 4 (November 1947), and was profiled in "Interiors' Cover Artists," Interiors 107, no. 6 (January 1948), an issue edited by Francis de N. Schroeder.

5 Leah Dickerman, "Bauhaus Fundamentals," in Bauhaus: Workshops for Modernity, 1919-1933, ed. Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 15-39.

6 Johnson recounts the story in the "Invoice #4" mailing to Bill Wilson, April 1965. See "Invoice Final" #7, in Invoice #4 (figs. 313-14).

7 For more on moticos, see my essay, "Moticos," in this book.

8 "Four Artists in a 'Mansion,'" Harper's Bazaar 85, no. 2888 (July 1952), 78-79.



58. Untitled (Soprano), c. 1953-58. 27.4 x 19 cm (10 13/16 x 7 1/2 in.). Obj. 248629.



59. Untitled (Strips Whirled), c. 1953-58. 18 x 18 cm (7 1/16 x 7 1/16 in.). Obj. 248612.

Elvis

Johanna Gosse

In September 1958 Ray Johnson gave Bill Wilson a collage later known as Elvis Presley #1 (Oedipus) (fig. 198). Johnson modified a publicity close-up of Elvis Presley derived from a fan magazine, a source he often mined for its displays of garish but sincere ardor.¹ The collage exemplifies Johnson's transformation of mass media ephemera into precious personal relics--his knack for putting the cult in mass culture. Today it is recognized as an inaugural work of Pop Art; or, in Henry Geldzahler's words, as "the Plymouth Rock of the Pop movement."² As evidence of the work's prescience, consider Andy Warhol's later Red Elvis (see fig. 184), which closely resembles Johnson's collage in color and source imagery. As Wilson might have put it, Elvis Presley #1 "mashes up" or conflates the everyday thrills of consumer culture and celebrity worship with more private and potentially illicit forms of desire and identification. Yet, as an artifact of the early years of Wilson's friendship with Johnson, the collage also contains more intimate resonances and oblique gestures to the ideas and interests that drew them into correspondence in the mid-1950s.

Although Presley's salacious performances often inspired comparisons to Adonis, the Greek god of desire and eternal youth, in Elvis Presley #1 Johnson casts him as the doomed hero of a Sophoclean tragedy, who stabbed out his own eyes to atone for committing the taboo offenses of patricide and incest. Johnson used a photograph of Elvis in profile, his deep-set eyes cloaked in shadow, an allusion to the self-inflicted wounds to come. Then he glazed the image with a translucent layer of red tempera but allowed streaks and drips to remain as indexes of his handiwork. Two red drips trickle from Elvis's eyes like tears, beads of flop sweat, or, in keeping with the myth, droplets of blood. Indeed, Johnson once commented, "I'm the only painter in New York whose drips means anything."³ This remark, like the winking title of the New York Correspondence School, deflates Abstract Expressionism's heroic pretensions, especially the masculinist rhetoric surrounding Jackson Pollock's action painting. However, in Elvis Presley #1 Johnson eschews comic relief in favor of tragic elegy, the dark flipside of his theatrics of critical refusal.

Elvis/Oedipus's mouth is surrounded by a cluster of rectangular red tiles--those irregular forms that Johnson also called "moticos" and Wilson described as "letters in a personal alphabet, or words in a private

language."⁴ But if these are words, what is the message? Following the ancient tale, does Elvis cry out in agony, imploring the gods for forgiveness? Or does he direct his pleas to a mortal lover, begging "Love Me Tender" and "Don't Be Cruel"? According to the King himself, his greatest heartbreak was the death of his mother, the appositely named Gladys Love Presley, who died of hepatitis in August 1958 at age forty-six. Elvis was inconsolable and wept openly during interviews, telling one reporter: "She was always my best girl."⁵ Considering Johnson's close friendship with Wilson's mother, the artist May Wilson, might his gift of Elvis Presley #1 in September 1958, just weeks after Elvis's mother died, suggest an Oedipal fixation shared by Bill and Ray, or perhaps a queer kinship between them and Elvis, as similarly tortured "mama's boys"?

A second Elvis collage that also belonged to Wilson, Elvis Presley #2 (fig. 199), helps unlock the rock star's aura of existential guilt. In this pendant to Elvis Presley #1, Elvis stares directly into the camera, his bedroom eyes accented with kohl and mascara, emphasizing his androgynous allure. He poses with his chin in his hands, pinky fingers gently prying open his plump bottom lip as the top lip hints at its signature curl: a cross between Auguste Rodin's Thinker, Edvard Munch's Scream, and sultry pinup.

Here the red tiles have migrated away from the mouth to form a haphazard pattern across the forehead and cheeks, like a mask or veil.⁶ Two tiles appear gouged from the surface of his face, leaving a pair of checkered black voids along the imagined trail of blood, sweat, and tears on either side of his nose. The eyes remain intact but wear a shocked expression, as if captured in the precise moment of heartbreak or epiphany. As in Oedipus, the second collage's crimson tint lends not only an air of romance (valentine) and vice (red-light district) but also a sinister quality that recalls rock 'n' roll's reputation, inherited from the blues, as the "devil's music." A connoisseur of puns and wordplay like Johnson would not have missed the anagram of "Elvis" and "Evils."

Like his Sophoclean predecessor, the young Elvis was known for his swagger, deviance, and pathos. With his virtuosic imitation of African American musical genres, Elvis mobilized racial and sexual taboos to earn the title of King. Regardless of his talents as a singer and performer, some critics have argued that Elvis capitalized on white audiences' hunger for Black music sans Black musicians, especially since his fame overshadowed that of many Black contemporaries and precursors. Like Oedipus, then, Elvis has been viewed by some as a pretender to the throne instead of its rightful heir, and by extension, as a King destined for a fall. Oedipus atoned for his transgressions by blinding himself, an act of symbolic



184. REJ 3 Metadata B Box, Warhol File, 2018.802.397.1

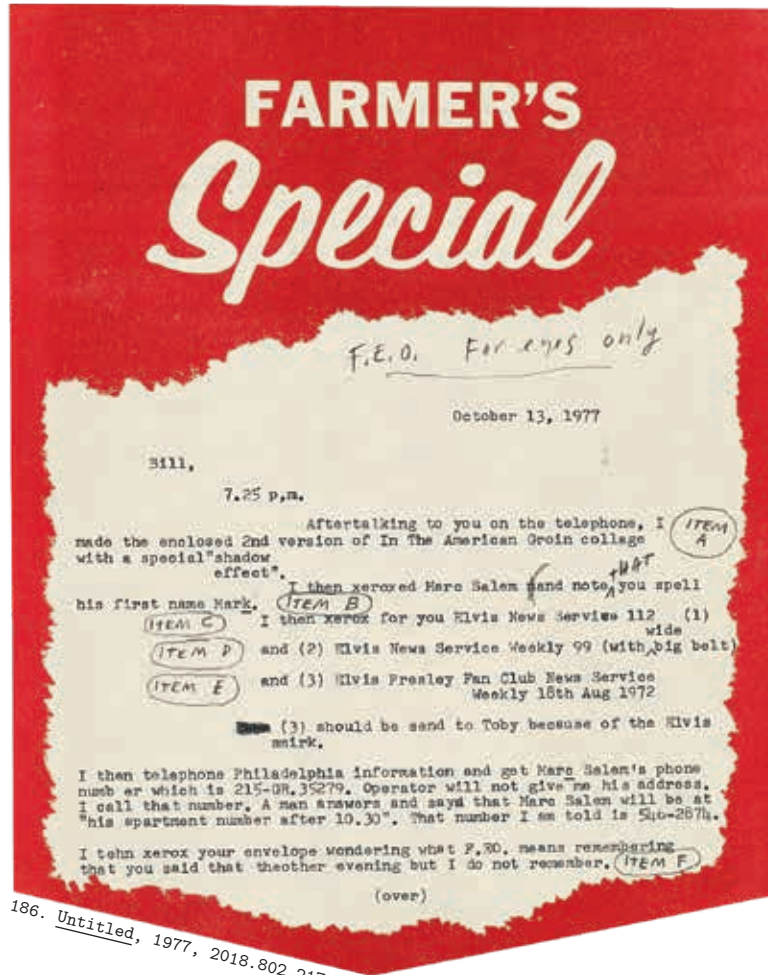


185. 1959 01-05, 59 04 27, 2018.802.17.6

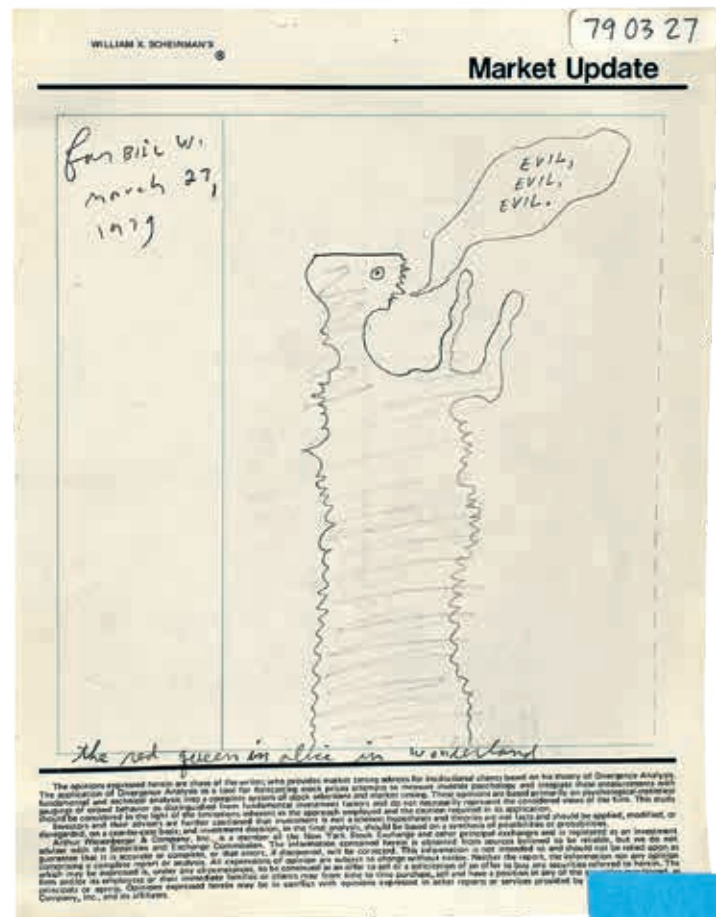
castration that calls to mind the prurient public fixation on the rocker's gyrating hips, which earned him the nickname Elvis the Pelvis. Likewise, when his hip thrusts were censored from live television programs like The Ed Sullivan Show, it functioned as a double symbolic castration, at once "blinding" his audience and cutting Elvis off below the waist.

Myths, like moticos, tend to metamorphose. By the end of 1968, Elvis temporarily regained his status as a serious musician and sex symbol in his iconic NBC comeback special, Elvis, in which he delivered a career-best live performance while clad in a skintight black leather suit. In "Presliad," the Homeric title of the chapter on Elvis in his book Mystery Train, rock critic Greil Marcus mythologizes the broadcast as a kind of Oedipus redux: "If ever there was music that bleeds, this was it." But this second coming would last less than a decade.

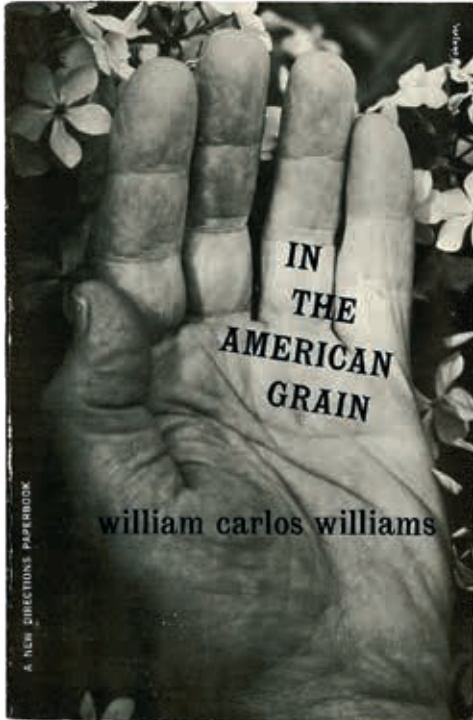
On October 13, 1977, two months after Presley's fatal heart attack at age forty-two, Johnson sent Wilson a letter replete with Elvis references (fig. 186).⁸ Typed on humble "Farmer's Special" signage, the mailing's scarlet hue and deckle-edge design are reminiscent of the Elvis moticos' rough-hewn red surfaces. The letter mentions an enclosed collage titled In The American Groin, a pun on the title of William Carlos Williams's book of essays, for which Johnson designed the cover of the 1956 New Directions edition. On the letter's back, Johnson mentions Mark Stevens, a name shared by a New York art critic and a notoriously well-endowed adult film star; Johnson attaches the latter Stevens's moniker, 10 1/2. Together, these priapic in-jokes produce a domino effect, circling back to Elvis the Pelvis. A relic of mourning, fandom, and coded speech, the "Farmer's Special" letter reveals how for Johnson, Elvis was an allegory of virtuosic imitation, taboo desire, and polymorphous suggestion, part of a language shared by Johnson and Wilson across four decades of correspondence.



186. Untitled, 1977, 2018.802.217

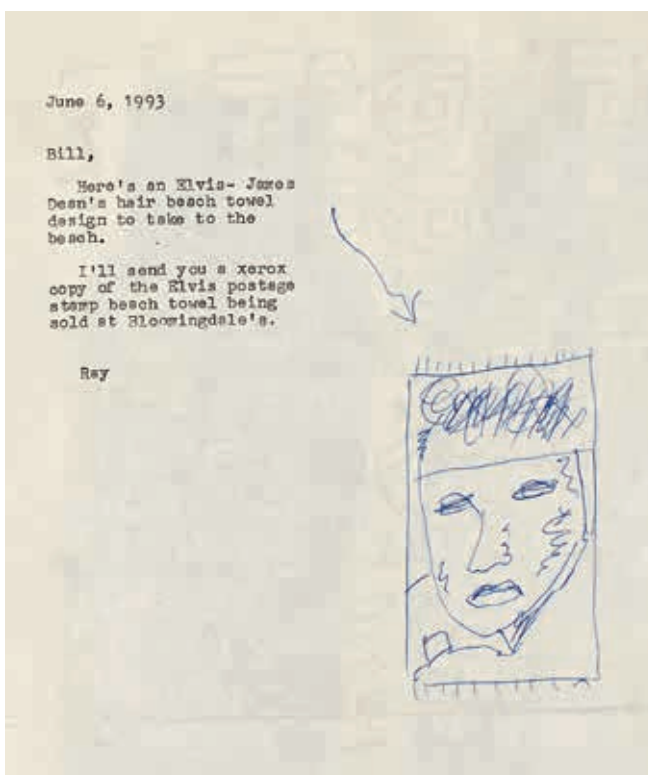
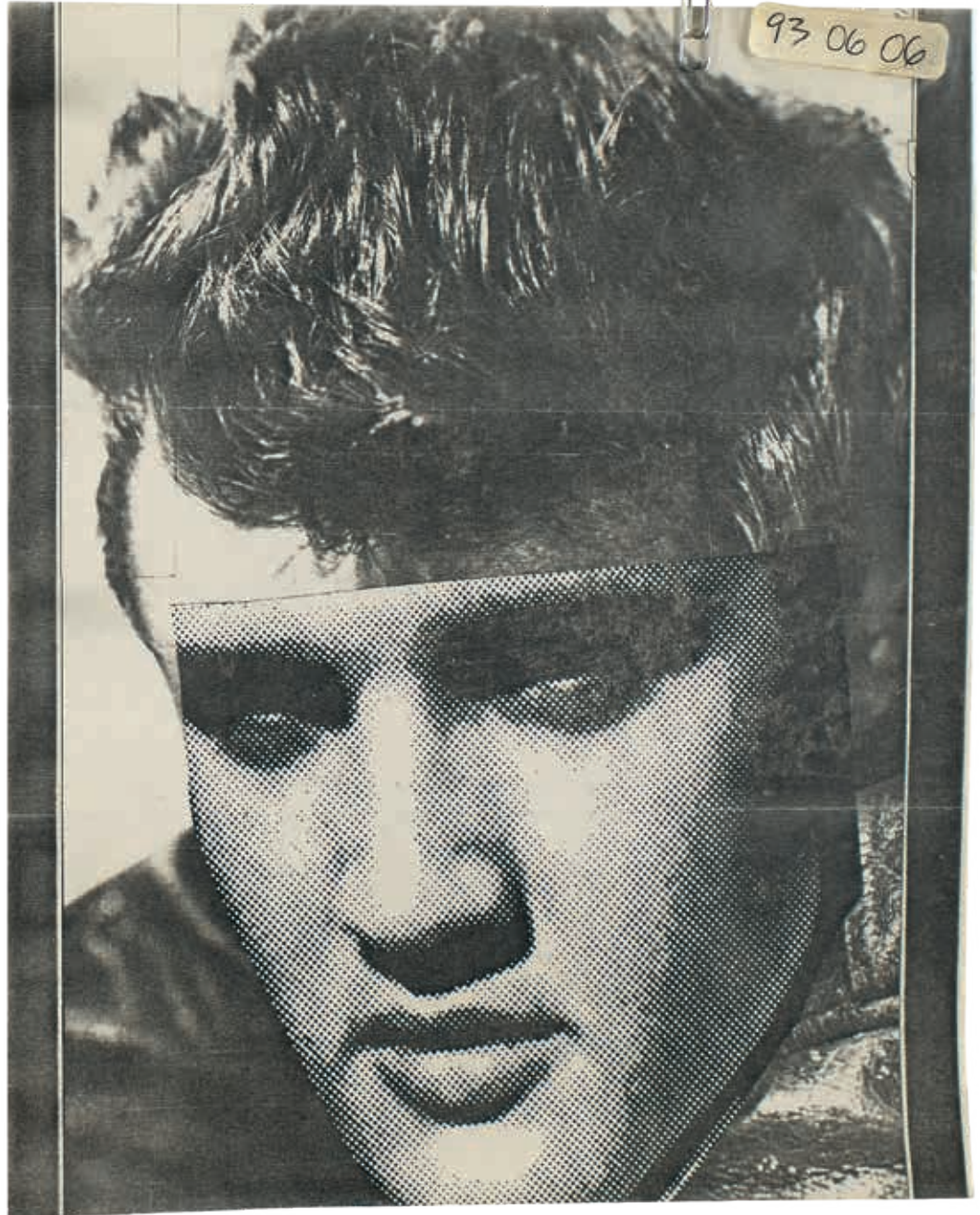


187. 1979, 79 03 27, 2018.802.71.3



188. William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain*, 1956 ed., 2018.802.206

190. 1993, 93 06 06, 2018.802.87.5



189. 1993, 93 06 06, 2018.802.87.6

NOTES

1 The genesis of Johnson's Elvises circa 1956 coincides with Presley's commercial breakthrough and initial Hollywood crossover. After he was drafted into the US Army in March 1958, Elvis released a string of hits, prerecorded to tide fans over until his return from active duty in Germany. When he returned in 1960, he was primarily engaged in Hollywood films. For Elvis's career in Hollywood, see David E. James, Rock 'N' Film: Cinema's Dance with Popular Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

2 Henry Geldzahler, Pop Art: 1955-1970 (Canberra, AU: International Cultural Corporation of Australia, 1985), 34-35. Lucy R. Lippard concurs: "The Elvis of 1956 . . . heralded Warholian Pop." See Lippard, "Special Deliverance," in Ray Johnson: Correspondences, ed. Donna De Salvo and Catherine Gudis, exh. cat. (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1999), 142.

3 Wilson quotes Johnson in "Vibration and Reverberation," in Ray Johnson Ray Johnson, ed. William S. Wilson (New York: Between Books, 1977), n.p. See also John Russell and Suzi Gablik, Pop Art Redefined (London: Thames and Hudson; New York: Praeger, 1969), 236.

4 Wilson, "Ray Johnson: Vibration and Reverberation."

5 Biographer Peter Guralnick characterizes Elvis as a mother-fixated adolescent who was teased by his classmates for their affectionate relationship and was devastated by her early death. See Guralnick, Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994), 474-75.

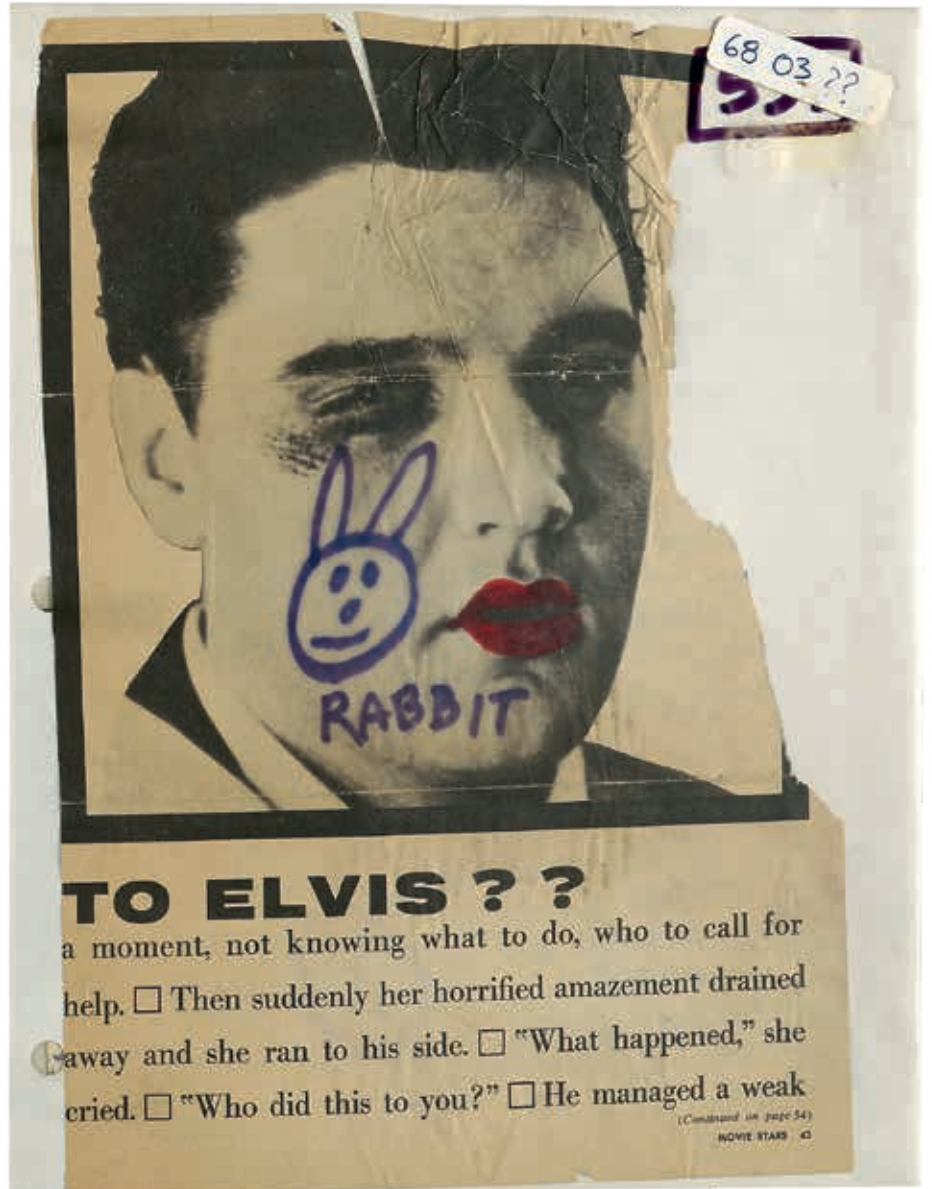
6 This motif recurs in numerous undated moticos featuring photographs of Elvis on which black tesserae form an irregular grid across his visage, resembling a mask, freckles, or blemishes.

7 Greil Marcus, Mystery Train: Images of American in Rock n' Roll Music, 5th rev. ed. (New York: Plume, 2008), 127. First published in 1975, Mystery Train has been reissued in multiple editions, a number of which use Johnson's Oedipus as the cover illustration; by contrast, one Spanish-language edition uses Warhol's Double Elvis (1963; Museum of Modern Art, New York)

8 The "Farmer's Special" letter references the newsletters for the "Elvis Presley Fan Club" and instructs Wilson to forward enclosed items to Johnson's close friend Toby R. Spiselman on the basis of its inclusion of an "Elvis smirk."



191. 1967 03-12, 67 03 26, 2018.802.46.2



193. 1968 01-03, 68 03 ??, 2018.802.47.4



192. Malka Safro, Without Dates, unnumbered, 2018.802.131b.3



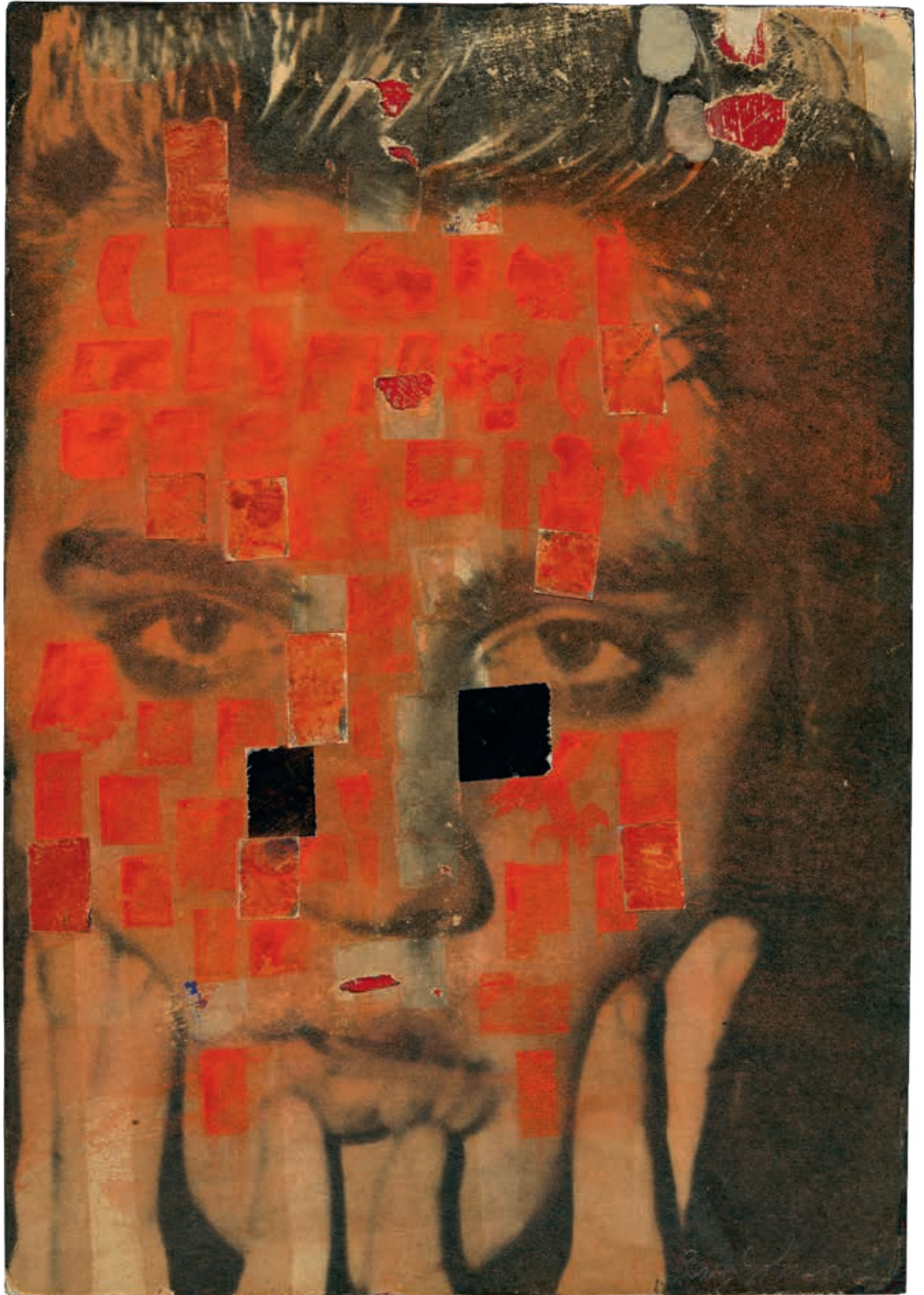
194. REJ: Notable Collages, Writing No Dates 1, unnumbered, 2018.802.113.11



195. 1990, 90 12 27, 2018.802.82.14



198. Elvis Presley #1 (Oedipus), 1956-58. 27.7 x 21 cm (10 15/16 x 8 1/14 in.). Obj. 248595.



199. Elvis Presley #2, 1956-58. 27.5 x 19.1 cm (10 13/16 x 7 1/2 in.). Obj. 248596.

Moticos

Johanna Gosse

HAVE YOU SEEN A MOTICOS LATELY? PERHAPS YOU HAVE.
THEY ARE EVERYWHERE. AS I WRITE THIS I WISH
SOMEONE WERE HERE TO POINT ONE OUT TO ME BECAUSE
I KNOW THEY EXIST.
--RAY JOHNSON, 1955 (SEE FIG. 311)¹

What is a moticos? A moticos is like a letter: in an alphabet, in a bottle, in the mailbox. It is a bit of everything (a scrap, a clipping, a void) and part of everything (the cosmos), an artifact from the past, an index of the present, and a premonition of things to come. The moticos is an invention of Ray Johnson, serial founder of imaginary movements and new genres. He coined the term in the mid-1950s to describe his collage practice, around the same time that fellow Black Mountain College alumnus Robert Rauschenberg started referring to his hybrid painting-collage-assemblages by his own neologism, "combines" (see figs. 487, 496). Both artists invented new forms that required new language. But for Johnson, the moticos was more than mere terminology; it offered a currency of exchange through which art could connect and correspond to the surrounding world.

According to the moticos' probably apocryphal origin story, Johnson asked his friend Norman Solomon to select a word at random from a dictionary--a book that John Cage also used to orchestrate chance operations.² Solomon chose "osmotic," the adjectival form of "osmosis," a term that refers to liquid flow between two semipermeable membranes and, more colloquially, to the gradual assimilation or absorption of ideas. The name stuck, in part because Johnson's collages embody osmotic properties like porosity, flow, and exchange in their distribution, interpretation, and production. And in this sense, the invention of moticos set the stage for the networks of postal exchange that Johnson later mobilized through the New York Correspondance School.

Like its dictionary namesake, "moticos" is a leaky neologism, denoting both singular and plural, whole and

part, original and simulacrum. As an anagram, moticos references the word "osmotic" but also resembles the word "semiotic" (give or take a few vowels); their coincidence links a biological process involving cellular porosity to an interpretive ocean of free-floating signification. The prefix "mot-" recalls the classic portmanteau "motel," a fusion of "motor" and "hotel"; following this logic, "moticos" suggests a fusion of the word "motor" and the Spanish and Italian suffix "-ico," which makes a noun into an adjective (as in, for instance, "tropicos" or "classico"). Hence, moticos could describe the quality of being-in-motion.

Alternately, we might read the suffix "-os" as a modified version of pig Latin, a language that, like moticos themselves, conflates high and low via a logic of absurdist repetition. Like that playful schoolchild vernacular, moticos is a coded language that does not totally stall communication but instead leaves the engine running, lingering in wait for new directions and itineraries to emerge. Johnson's osmotic semiotics flow and float, seep and soak, idle and tease, forming chains of affinity that permeate membranes, cross boundaries, and co-contaminate the communicative act.

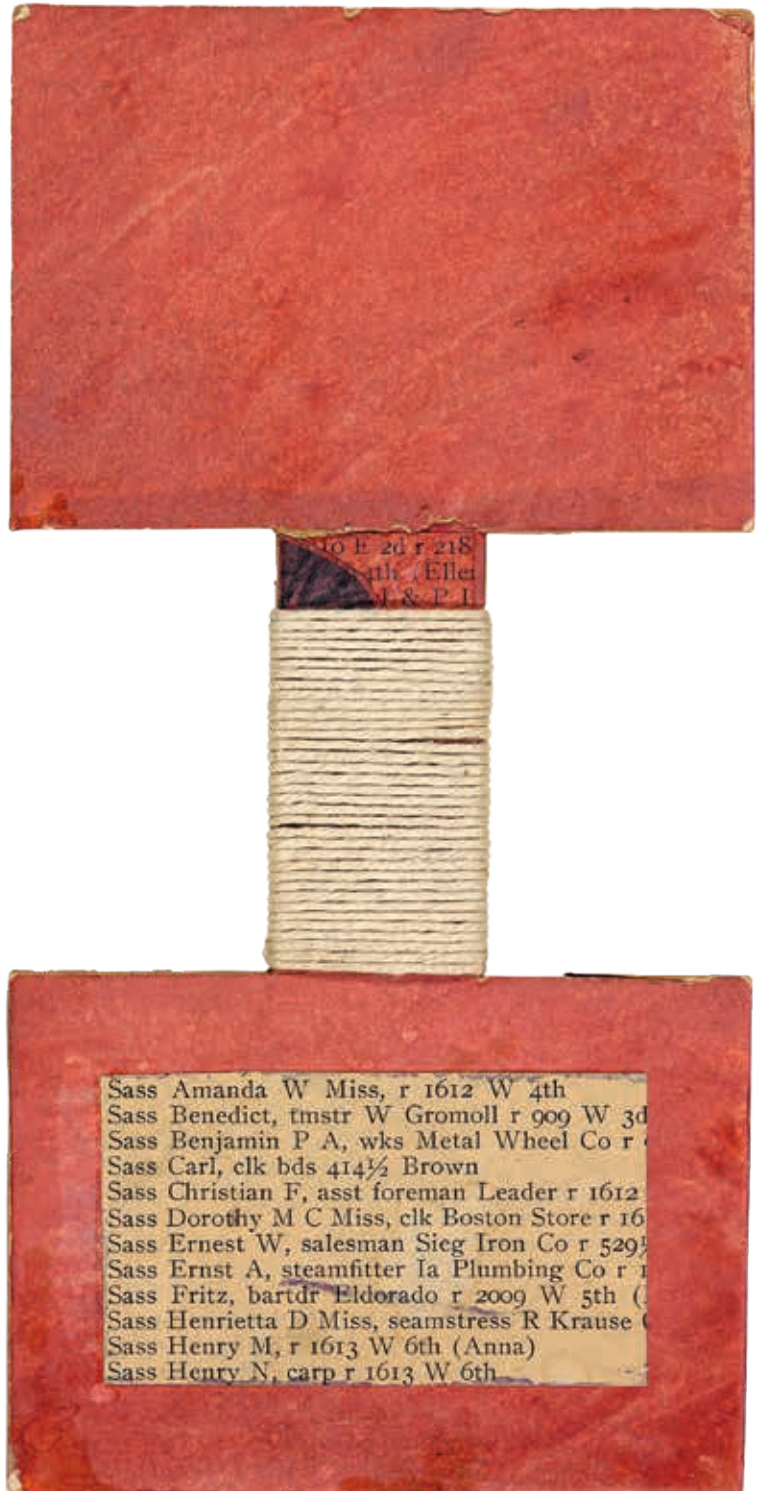
But what exactly are moticos? They are fragments of meaning severed--quite literally--from their original context, a cut that unleashes their potential and renders them mobile and fungible but also fundamentally unstable. Physically, moticos are complete collages (see, for example, fig. 284) as well as their component materials, often consisting of everyday ephemera intricately arranged in small-scale compositions. Although standardization runs against their grain, a typical moticos might contain commercial packaging, magazine and newspaper clippings (see fig. 289), and hand-drawn elements that bear enigmatic pictograms, Chinese calligraphic writing (see fig. 307), and a wide range of obscure references, typically arranged atop the approximately eight-by-ten-inch cardboard sheets that dry cleaners insert into starched shirts (see fig. 292). Moticos

are also small ink silhouettes that Johnson traced from preexisting, scaled-down collage elements, like those on a 1956 chart (fig. 282) that functions like a Rosetta stone of moticos in all their jagged, hand-drawn asymmetry. Subject to perpetual revision, moticos were cut, sliced, glued, painted, sanded, traced, and even burned, often over periods of many years, in a mise-en-abyme of artistic recursion.

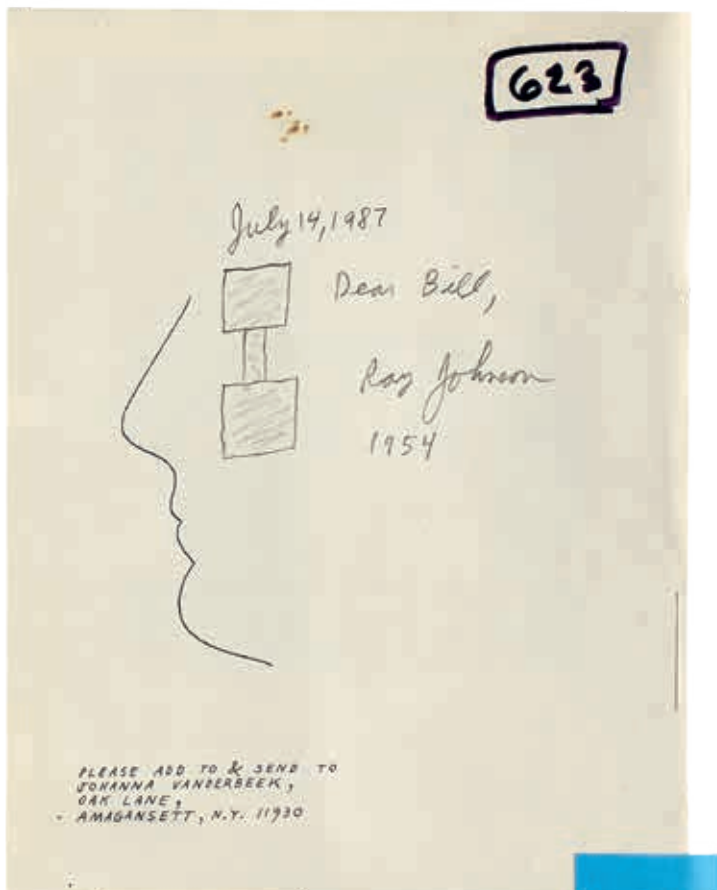
During the 1950s Johnson was a moticos machine, creating, exchanging, displaying, recycling, and destroying collages and fragments in rapid succession. As performance props, collections of moticos could appear in unexpected settings--for instance, attached to a screen and used as a backdrop for dances choreographed by James Waring, inserted between the



282. *Oversized Material, Moticos*, 1956, 2018.802.347



284. Untitled (Sass), c. 1955-59. 20.3 x 10.5 cm (8 x 4 1/8 in.). Obj. 248628.



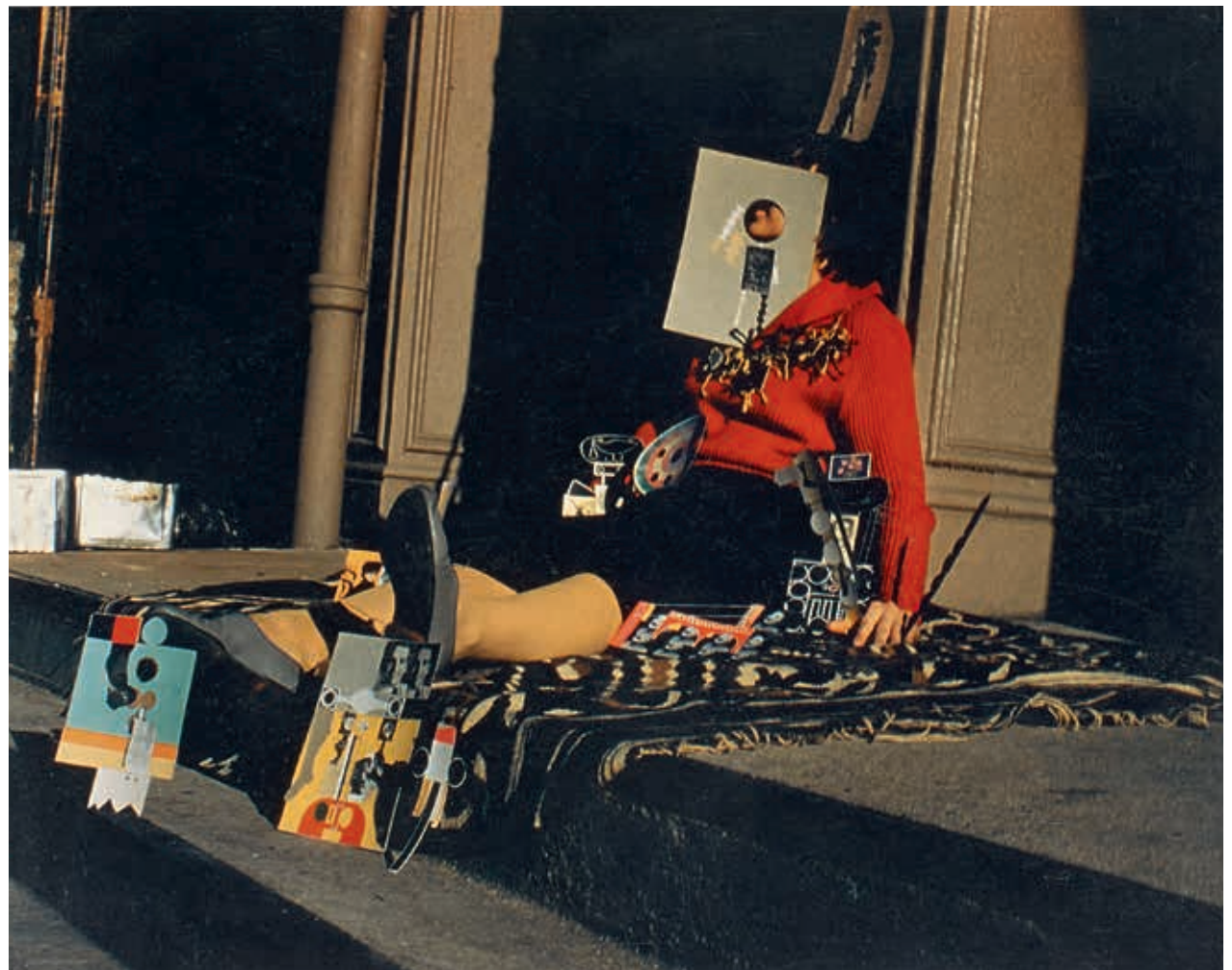
283. 1987, 87 04 14, 2018.802.79.7

floorboards of Ad Reinhardt's studio, or arrayed across the body of Suzi Gablik as she posed in a spontaneous sidewalk event (see fig. 285) that she later referred to as potentially "the first informal Happening."³ When exhibited, moticos were more commonly installed in a friend's backyard garden or strewn across a coffee table than hung in a gallery or museum; their natural environment, it would seem, was the living city, not the inert confines of the white cube.

On October 26, 1955, Johnson published a brief profile, "What is a Moticos?," in the *Village Voice's* inaugural issue. This text mirrors the fragmentary, poetic, inchoate sensibility of the collages themselves. Per the popular 1950s game show, the reader is invited to wonder about the nature of moticos: are they animal, vegetable, or mineral? We learn that moticos "love moving and rain water," and their singular and plural forms are the same, like the words "deer" and "sheep." A catalogue of moticos' characteristics, behaviors, and last-known whereabouts, "What is a Moticos?" is less an encyclopedia entry than a gossip column's blind item or an FBI Most Wanted poster. At one point, Johnson warns that a moticos might attach itself to the side of your car without your knowledge: auto-moticos. What initially sounds like a mischievous lost pet increasingly reads as a description of a runaway or fugitive: "The next time a railroad train is seen going its way along the track, look quickly at the sides of the box cars because a moticos may be there." Like graffiti on the side of a train car, moticos are illicit messages, perpetually in motion: loco-moticos. Restlessly refusing to sit still, they attach themselves to trains and automobiles. But what better way to stay on the move than through the mail?

Johnson used his mail art network to distribute large quantities of moticos-related documentation, such as his record of the results of a survey of passersby on Thirty-Fourth Street about the meaning of moticos (fig. 312). Most of those surveyed struggled to respond, but a handful mentioned that the word reminded them of motors or automobiles--confirmation of their portability and transitoriness. Johnson identifies his subjects by profession ("a shipping clerk," "a nun"), origins ("a woman visiting from Puerto Rico," "a young man visiting from Quebec"), and, in one case, race ("a colored woman"), giving his survey an air of sociological authority. Johnson also surveyed, besides these random strangers, close friends such as Richard Lippold and Frances X. Profumo but, notably, not Bill Wilson, which could imply that they had not yet met. None of the participants offer satisfying answers. The longest entry is Johnson's, a nonsense-poem rife with red herrings and mysterious allusions and no definitive information. The hunt for moticos continues.

Walter Benjamin, fellow lover of Baudelairean "correspondance," provided a conceptual blueprint for moticos in his counter-history of capitalist modernity, *The Arcades Project*. Written between 1927 and 1940, this unfinished collection of aphoristic writings attempts to "carry over the principle of montage into history"--in other words, to conjure history as a series of fragmentary events in which the "small individual moment [acts as] the crystal of the total event."⁴ Rejecting the notion of eternal truth, Benjamin writes, "the eternal, in any case, is far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea."⁵ Like Benjamin's ruffle, moticos are fragile scraps of eternity, at once highly particular and resolutely universal. Moticos narrate the conditions of midcentury modernity in a fractured tongue, part Benjaminian historical montage, part Baudelairean "correspondance," part pig Latin. Osmotic, auto-loco-motive, cosmic trifles, ever in motion, they chant: moticosmoticosmoticos.



285. Moticos Pix, Ca. 1955, 55 10? ??, 2018.802.9.1



286. 1965 04-05, 65 05? ??, 2018.802.40.7



287. Untitled (Orange Dress), c. 1960. 17 x 9.5 cm (6 11/16 x 3 3/4 in.). Obj. 248604.

NOTES

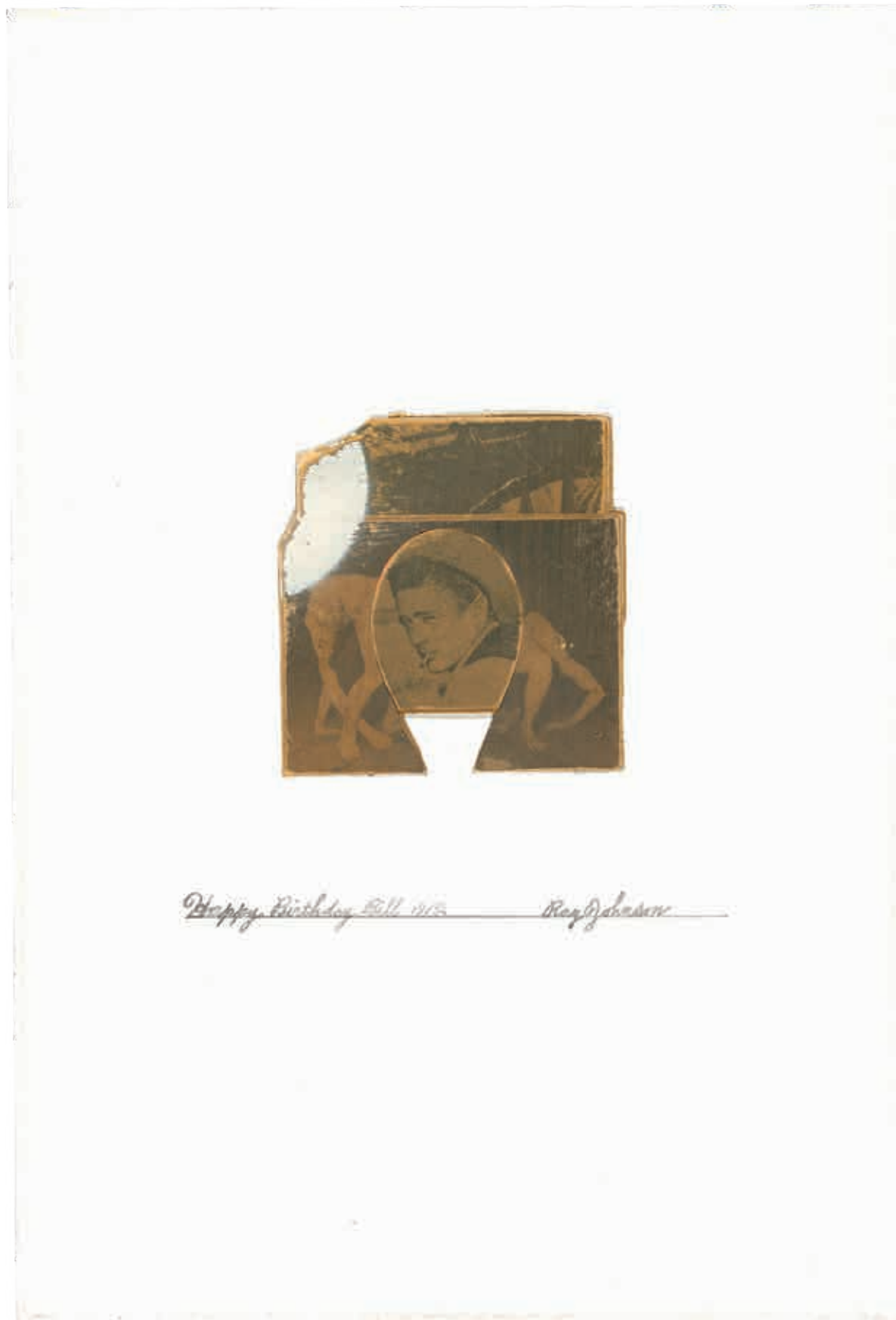
1 The text, "What Is a Moticos?," is reprinted in Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 356.

2 See Richard Kostelanetz, Conversing with Cage, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 135, 166, 181.

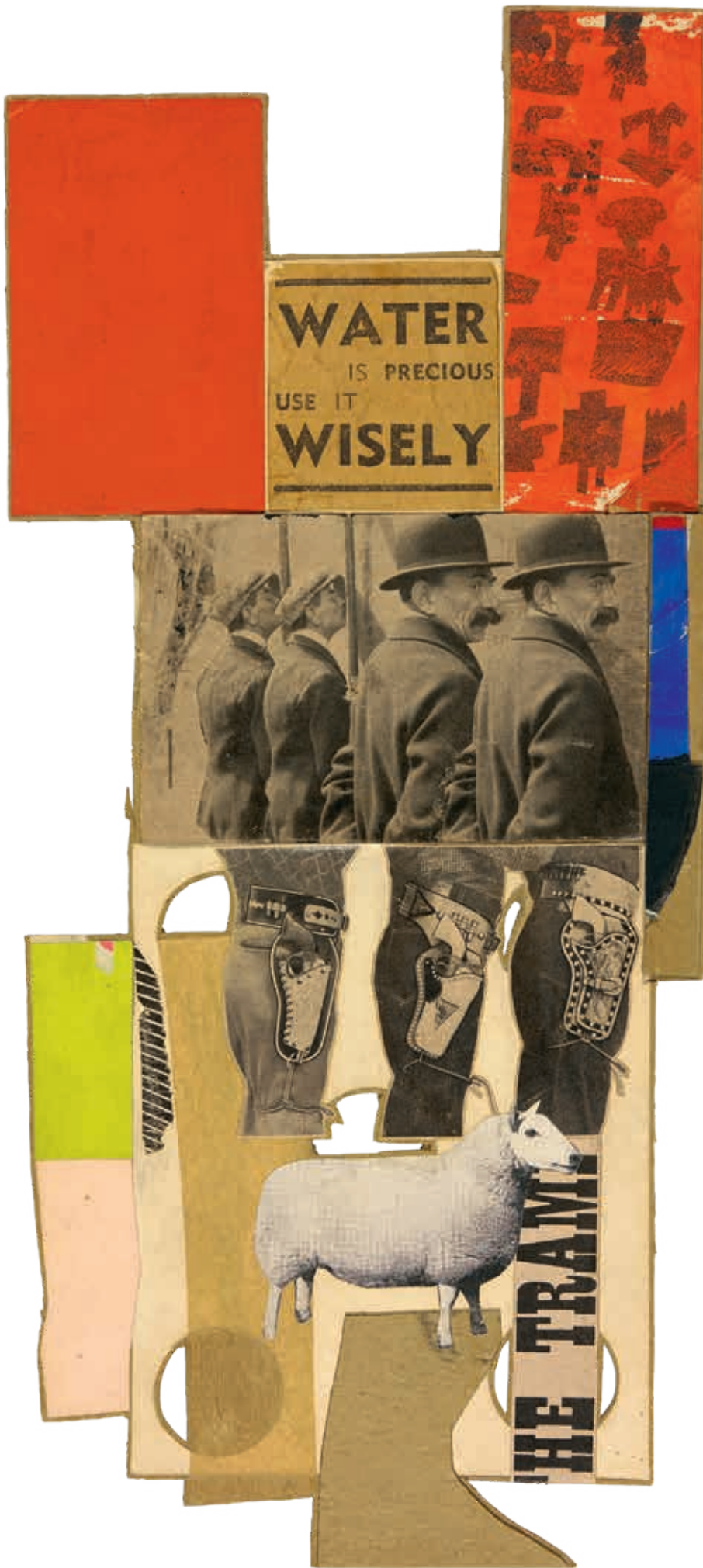
3 John Russell and Suzi Gablik, Pop Art Redefined (London: Thames and Hudson; New York: Praeger, 1969), 17.

4 Walter Benjamin, Convolute N2, 6, "N: [On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress]," The Arcades Project, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 461.

5 As Benjamin explains, "Resolute refusal of the concept of 'timeless truth' is in order. Nevertheless, truth is not--as Marxism would have it--a merely contingent function of knowing, but is bound to a nucleus of time lying hidden within the knower and the known alike. This is so true that the eternal, in any case, is far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea." *Ibid.*, 463.



288. James Dean (Happy Birthday Bill), c. 1955/1972. 37.2 x 24.8 cm (14 5/8 x 9 3/4 in.). Obj. 248597.



289. Untitled (Water is Precious), c. 1956/58. 34.5 x 15.7 cm (13 9/16 x 15 11/16 in.). Obj. 248614.

New York Correspondence School Johanna Gosse

Throughout the 1950s Ray Johnson kept a working list of addresses of friends and acquaintances to whom he mailed announcements, collages, flyers, letters, postcards, and questionnaires. Although many twentieth-century artists utilized the postal service to distribute their work, Johnson's activities were exceptional in scope, scale, duration, and conceptual consistency. His early mailing lists formed the basis of an expansive network of postal exchange that, in 1962, his friend and fellow mail artist Ed Plunkett formally christened the New York Correspondence School (NYCS). On April 8th of that same year, Johnson sent Bill Wilson a letter that starts out with a birthday greeting but then turns abruptly to mail-art business, deputizing Wilson to "send along any other names, addresses and phone numbers of those worthy." This simple request illuminates Wilson's prominent role as a founding member and the foremost archivist of the network that Johnson maintained until his death in 1995. Unlike the "eternal" lifespan of networked correspondence imagined by mail artist Robert Filliou, as well as the more dispersed, electronic, and thus more resilient network topologies of the internet, the NYCS was inextricably bound to the space and time occupied by Johnson himself and was not designed to outlive its founder.

The NYCS mailings constitute a vast, eclectic archive of hand-written, typed, mimeographed, and xeroxed documents, ranging in genre from diaristic to journalistic, epistolary to bureaucratic, and encompassing an array of formats, including gossip column, inventory, invoice, meeting agenda, news bulletin, obituary, questionnaire, and seating chart. Johnson frequently embellished mailings with drawn, painted, collaged, and stamped elements, as in an undated mailing to Wilson (fig. 329) that features a pyramidal cluster of "Chuck Close Finger-nails" and a quacking cartoon duck.

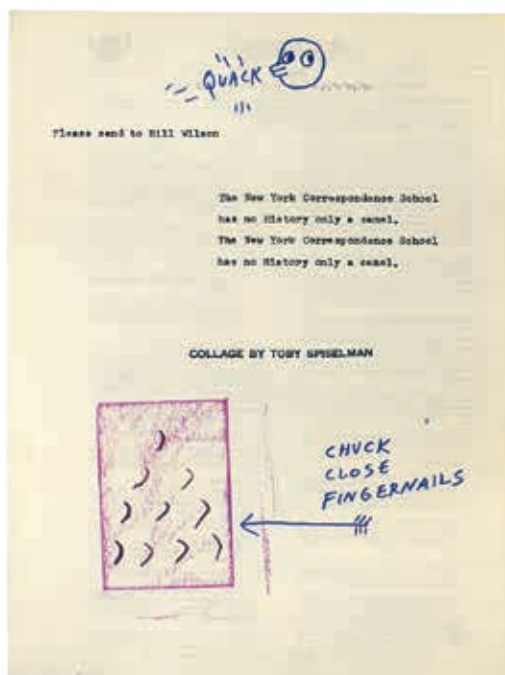
Cluttered with cryptic references, idiosyncratic word-image pairings, and instructions on who or where to mail them next, these mysterious missives acted as postal Trojan horses waiting to reveal their contents--a performative disclosure that marked their transfiguration from mail into art.

Insofar as the NYCS adopted a networked form, it also operated according to the logic of the gift, a critical alternative to market-based commodity exchange. Following one of Johnson's favorite puns, the NYCS was a provisional gift economy, a school with "no history, only a present." Importantly, though, the NYCS demonstrated that gift giving is neither frictionless nor a strictly altruistic act.¹ Anyone who has received an unexpected letter, package, or email understands that even a seemingly innocuous delivery can incur a

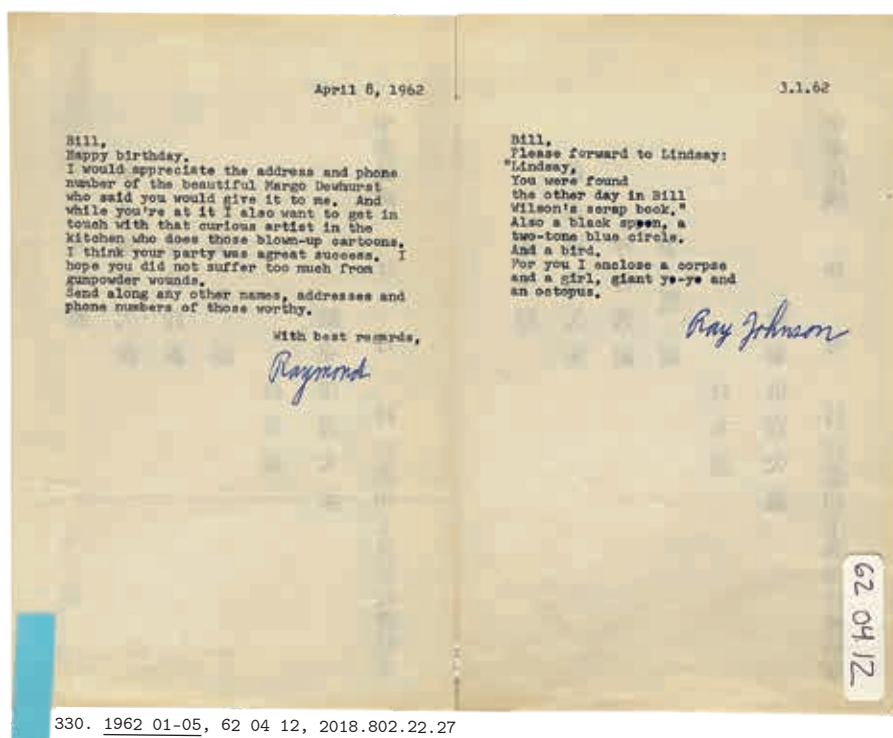
sense of obligation, nuisance, or invasion of privacy. An unsolicited gift may even take on a menacing character by forging an unwanted relational connection where none previously existed. Using the NYCS as a kind of artistic alibi, Johnson exploited the nonconsensual dimensions of networked communications while retaining control over who was "in" and who was "out" of network--or, as he put it to Wilson, who was "worthy" and who was not (see fig. 315). In this sense, the NYCS provided not just an alternative to the art market and gallery exhibition but also served as a cover for relational experiments over which Johnson could exert executive authority.

Johnson's 1970 solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum is a case in point. In lieu of supplying the museum with works to show, he invited the NYCS to "send letters, postcards, drawings and objects" to curator Marcia Tucker. In a mailing to Wilson dated July 3, 1971 (fig. 334), Johnson includes a modified version of the Whitney exhibition announcement, which features a reproduction of the initial instructions of "please send," as well as a master list of those members who participated. Conducted under the auspices of the NYCS, artistic and curatorial authorship of the exhibition was networked and distributed--but nevertheless authorized, its final checklist of works subsumed under Johnson's name. Thus, while Johnson invited Tucker, the Whitney, and the members of the NYCS to participate in the exhibition, he remained firmly at the helm.

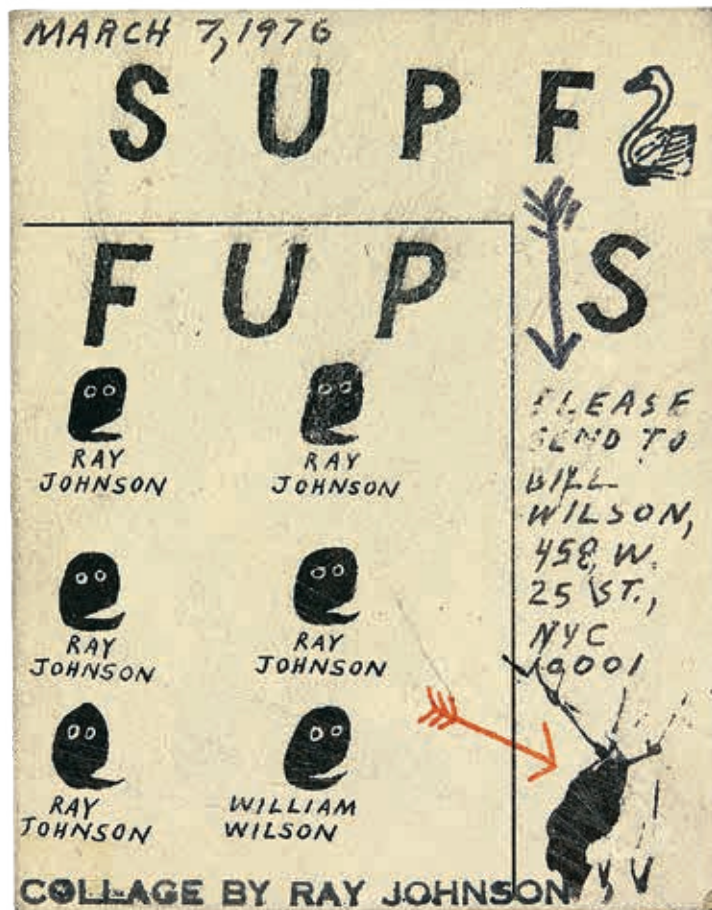
The Whitney show reveals a paradox at the heart of the NYCS: the coexistence of, on the one hand, Johnson's preference for dispersed authorship, his queer skepticism toward artistic patrilineage and the very notion of "influence" and "father figures," and on the other, the total authorial control he ultimately exerted over his work's



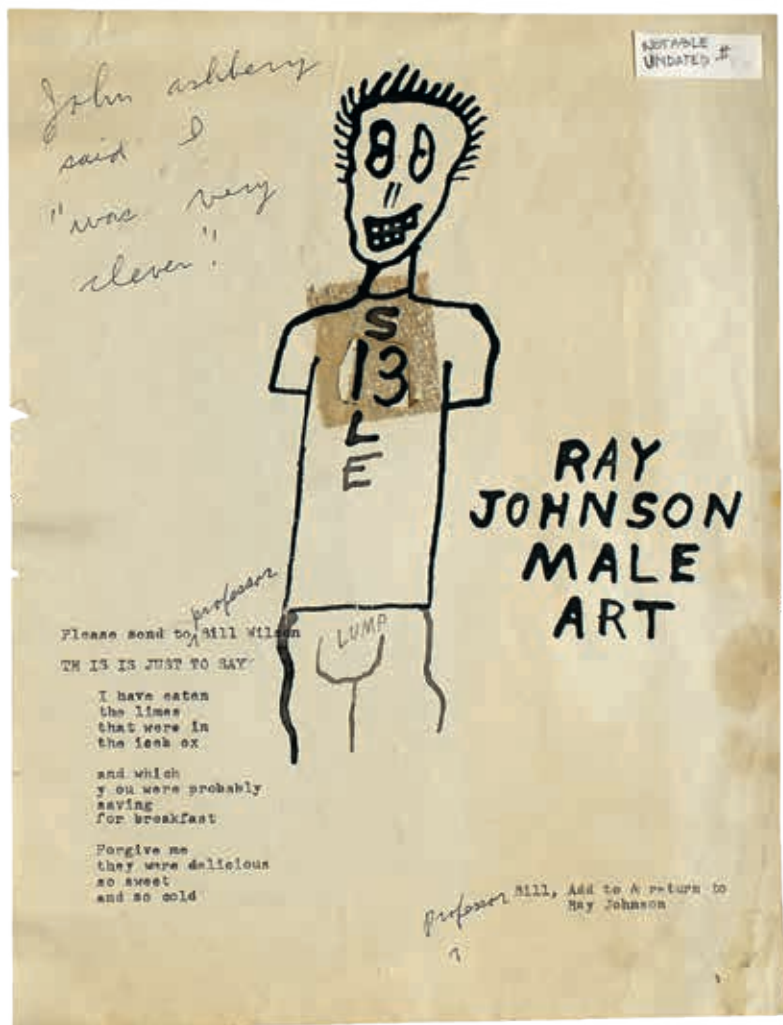
329. 1976, 76 02 02, 2018.802.66.10



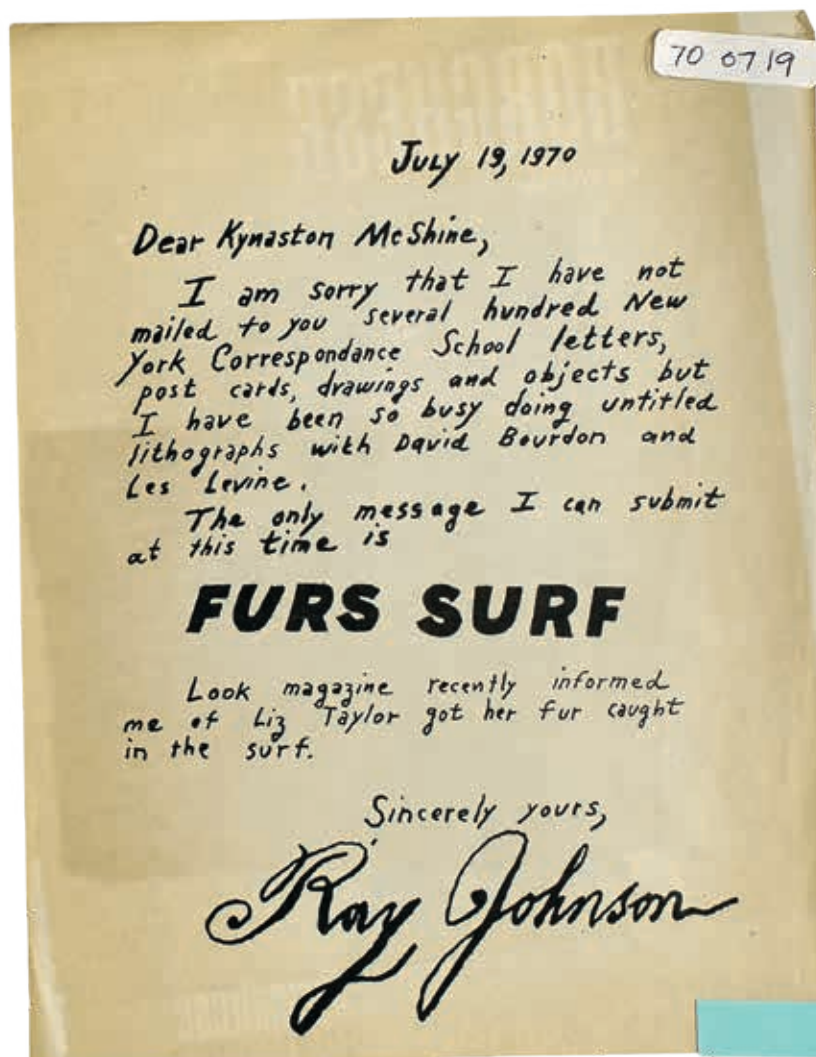
330. 1962 01-05, 62 04 12, 2018.802.22.27



332. Untitled (Supf Fups), 1976. 11 x 8.5 mm (4 5/16 x 3 3/8 in.). Obj. 248672.



331. REJ Only Mail No Dates 1970s-90s 4, unnumbered, 2018.802.116.22



333. 1970 07-10, 70 07 19, 2018.802.55.2

exhibition. The NYCS internalizes this tension at the level of its title, which conjoins the “New York School” of Abstract Expressionist painting to the sham tutelage offered by correspondence art schools.² As advertised in magazines, on matchbook covers, and on subway placards, commercial correspondence art schools solicited amateur artists to replicate an image (often a cartoon animal like a rabbit or turtle) and mail it in, promising tutoring, scholarships, and professional advancement. The NYCS parodied these questionable mail-order operations, prompting members “please add to and send to” and offering step-by-step instructions on “how to draw a bunny,” accompanied by cartoon avatars like Johnson’s signature bunny head.

By conflating these two mutually opposed “schools” of high- and low-brow art under one banner, the NYCS drew a comparison between the desperate sincerity of aspiring commercial artists and the overbearing seriousness of Abstract Expressionism’s heroic, Promethean rhetoric—think of Barnett Newman’s famed declaration that the New York School was “making cathedrals . . . out of our own feelings.”³ Both models, Johnson suggested, are founded on exaggerated claims for art as a means of transcendence (whether spiritual or economic), a promise destined to be broken. Johnson delighted in deflating such aspirations, not out of cynicism but because they misrecognize and instrumentalize the relation between art and life; for him, art was an experiential process inextricably embedded in day-to-day routines, not a means for transcending the ordinary, nor a ticket to elevating everyday experience through upward mobility. To Newman’s sublime cathedrals of feeling, the NYCS irreverently responded: “The New York Correspondence School has no History only a camel.”⁴

Whereas the punning title of the NYCS conflates the highest and lowest aspirations for art, Johnson’s frequent, deliberate misspelling of “Correspondence” as “Correspondance” adds two additional associations into the mix. Following the francophone pronunciation, the “a” evokes Charles Baudelaire’s theory of “correspondance,” which redeems the fugitive elegance of the everyday through a poetic (or in the case of the NYCS, postal) praxis of “flâneurie.” However, an anglophone reading of the “a” spells “dance,” a word that allows us to reimagine postal exchange as a pas de deux between sender and receiver. If, in Wilson’s words, Johnson acted as the postal dance’s “mild-mannered choreographer who sets people in motion,” this division of labor permitted Wilson to work mainly behind the scenes as the NYCS’s primary archivist.⁵ Their separate roles are evident in a circa 1963 Mad Libs-style survey in which NYCS members were asked to answer questions and submit materials regarding “the Life and Labors of RAY JOHNSON.” In a copy of the survey completed by artist Robert Morris (figs. 316-17), each blank field is filled in with some version of the name “Ray Johnson,” a deliberate redundancy that simultaneously affirms and pokes fun at Johnson’s role

as the central node in the network and the biggest star in the NYCS constellation. Looking even more closely, though, one notices that the return address provided for the NYCS Archives is not Johnson’s but Wilson’s, a bureaucratic detail that points to Bill’s enduring, if less visible, role as the devoted chronicler of the NYCS and, by extension, primary caretaker of Johnson’s artistic legacy.



334. 1971 07-12, 71 07 03, 2018.802.58.2

NOTES

1 The practice of gift giving has been widely theorized, notably by Marcel Mauss in his 1925 essay, "Essai sur le don," later published in *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950). The first English edition was *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen and West, 1954).

2 Johnson was no stranger to Abstract Expressionism; at Black Mountain College, he encountered prominent figures like Robert Motherwell and Willem de Kooning, and after moving to New York he joined the American Abstract Artists group, which counted his former professors Josef Albers and Ilya Bolotowsky as members, and through which he befriended Ad Reinhardt. For more on Johnson's education at Black Mountain College, see Johanna Gosse, "Black Mountain," in this book, and Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

3 Barnett Newman wrote: "We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth," and "instead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man, or 'life,' we are making it out of ourselves, out of our own feelings." Newman, "The Sublime is Now," *Tiger's Eye* 1, no. 6 (December 1948): 51-53. (Newman emphasized the word "cathedrals.")

4 Many moticos Johnson gave as gifts to Wilson include coded references to and critiques of the New York School. *Untitled* (Robert Motherwell) (fig. 345) and *Action Jackson* (fig. 346) link the painters to images of phallic excess. Three

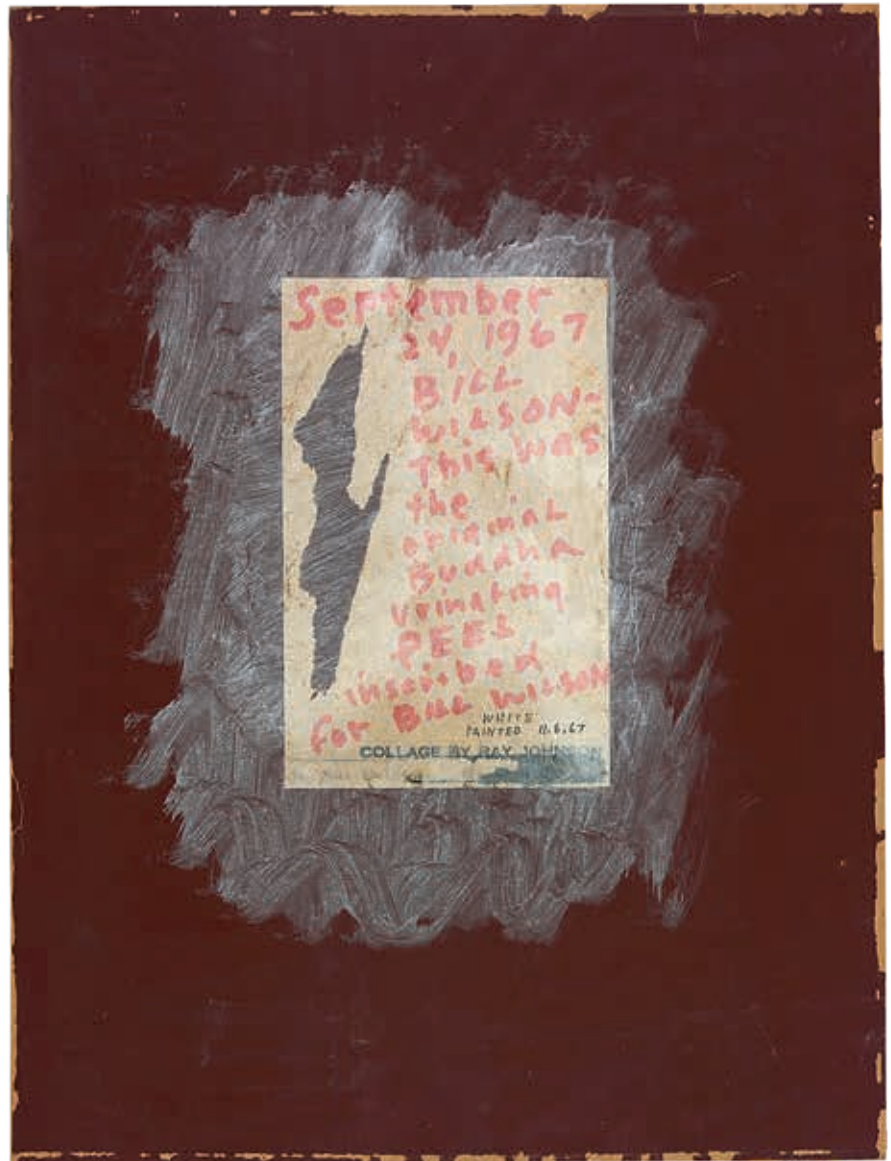
moticos specifically target Barnett Newman: *Untitled* (Barnett Newman Heavenly) (fig. 344) transposes the painter's face onto a Conway Twitty 45; *Newman's Onement* (figs. 347-48) features layered images of Newman's paintings *Onement* and *Abraham* and is adorned with Abraham Lincoln stamps postmarked at Church Street Station, generating a dense web of allusions about American art, history, masculinity, and religion. Finally, *Untitled* (Vir Heroicas Sublimas) (fig. 343) references Newman's famed painting *Untitled* (Vir Heroicus Sublimis) (Latin for Man, Heroic and Sublime). Johnson responds to Newman's sublime with comic levels of mundanity, modifying a clipping of a man and woman standing before the painting so that they stand inside an aluminum tub labeled "Dover," a reference to his street address.

5 William S. Wilson, "The Comedian as the Letter," in *Correspondence: An Exhibition of the Letters of Ray Johnson*, exh. cat. (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1976), n.p.; quoted in Lucy R. Lippard, "Special Deliverance," in *Ray Johnson: Correspondences*, ed. Donna De Salvo and Catherine Gudis, exh. cat. (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1999), 146.

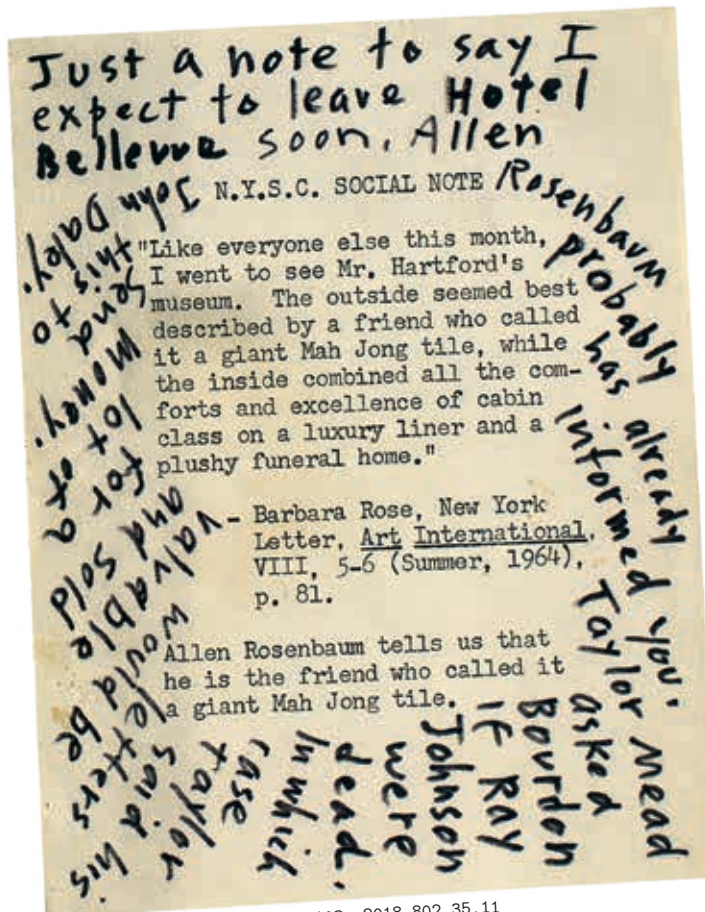
Johnson

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335. *Untitled* (Buddha Urinating), 1967. 30.7 x 23.5 cm (12 1/16 x 9 1/4 in.). Obj. 248663.



336. *Ray in Bellvue*, 64 09 10?, 2018.802.35.11



337. 1977 06-12, 77 08 04 or after, 2018.802.68.1

SILHOUETTE UNIVERSITY DECEMBER 16, 1976

I HAVE DRAWN SILHOUETTES OF THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE
KINDLY POSED FOR ME!

MONDAY
OCT 4, 1976 51. ROY LICHTENSTEIN
CAROLE SPEARIN McCAULEY

77 08 04 or after

1. EDWARD ALBEE
2. MARIO AMAYA
3. ARAKAWA
4. ARMAN
5. DOUGLAS BAXTER
6. PETER BEARD
7. MIKE BELT
8. RICHARD BERNSTEIN
9. WILLIAM BURR
10. CRAIG CLAIBORNE
11. CHUCK CLOSE
12. LESLIE CLOSE
13. PAULA COOPER
14. BILL COPLEY
15. WILLEM de KONING
16. JEANNIE DIAMOND
17. JIMMY ERNS
18. CHARLES FAHNE
19. NOELLE FAHL
20. YVES FERNA
21. PHYLLIS FLO
22. CHARLES HEA
23. NANCY GROS
24. DAVID HART
25. ROBERT HUL
26. VICTOR HU
27. BILL KING
28. BILL KING
29. ERO LIPPO
30. JOHN LOM
31. JOHN LOR
32. GERARD MURRELL
33. LOUISE NEVELSON
34. ALFONSO OSSORIO
35. HUGH ROBERTS
36. TOBY SPISELMAN
37. SAUL STEINBERG
38. JEFF TURTLETAUB
40. ANDY WARHOL
41. MAY WILSON
42. WILLIAM WOLGIN
43. TOM ARMSTRONG
44. ATIRNOMIS
45. LYNDA BENGLIS
46. MICHAEL BENNETT
47. HOWARD KANOVITZ
48. KLAUS HERTESS
49. POLLY KRAFT
50. DOROTHY LICHTENSTEIN



106. CAROLINE KAPLOWITZ
107. GARY LAJESKI
108. JOHN MACWHINNIE
109. DAN RATTINER
110. HAROLD ROSENBERG
111. HALINA ROSENTHAL
112. TONY ROSENTHAL
113. JOHN RUSSELL
114. TITO SPIGA
115. HEDDA STERNE
116. SUSAN SUTTLE
117. JOHANNA VANDERBEEK
118. JANE WENNER
119. JANN WENNER

- AUGUST 4, 1977
91. ELAINE BENSON
 92. BETTY BENTON
 93. JOHN BELUSHI
 94. ROSAMUND BERNIER
 95. TED CAREY
 96. ROBINLEE CRUTCHFIELD
 97. ROBERT DASH
 98. WILL FARRINGTON
 99. NORMAN FISHER
 100. DAN FLAVIN
 101. SUZI GABLIK
 102. GINGER GETTLING
 103. CRAIG GHOLSON
 104. MADELINE GINS
 105. JOEL GREY

81. ...
82. ROBERT ROSENBLUM
83. ARTURO SCHWARZ
84. CHRISTOPHER SCOTT
85. SYLVIA SLEIGH
86. HOLLY SOLOMON
87. HORACE SOLOMON
88. MARC STEVENS
89. JOHN WILLENBECHER
90. ED HIGGINS

39. AMEI WALLACH

Handwritten signature: mandal jart

K&M Division
POLY-VU
Terrence, Calif. 90503
#PVH119



338. 1972 01-02, 72 01 30, 2018.802.59.3



339. 1978 07-12, Before 78 09 17, 2018.802.70.6