

# TIME OUT NEW YORK

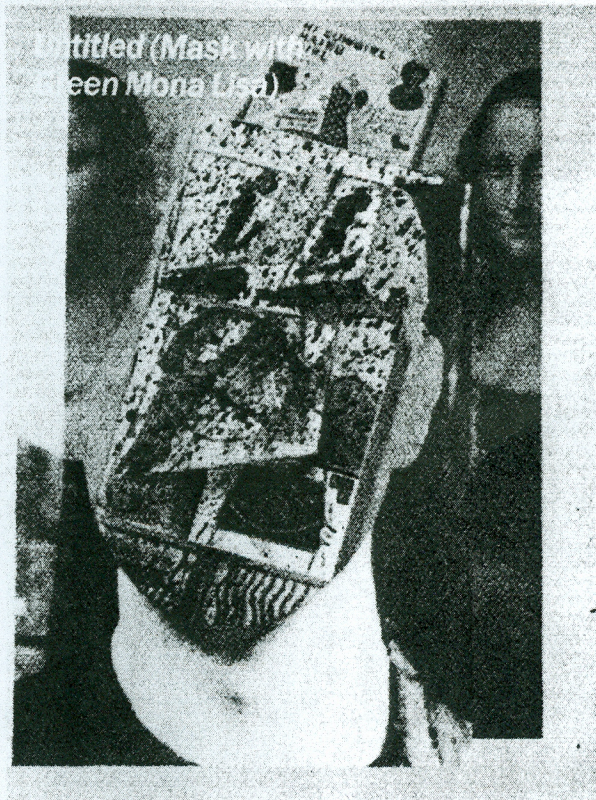
## “Ray Johnson... Dalí/Warhol/ and others... ‘Main Ray, Ducham, Openheim, Pikabia...’”

★★★

**Richard L. Feigen & Co.**, through  
July 31 (see Uptown)

For a young artist with connections, the New York art world of the 1950s and 1960s could be an extraordinary social milieu, one in which Fluxus neo-Dadaists, Abstract Expressionists, young Pop Artists and old Surrealists rubbed elbows constantly. Ray Johnson, collagist and inventor of mail art, made this fertile environment the frequent subject of his own practice. This exhibition comprises a selection of Johnson's correspondence and collages from the 1950s to the 1990s.

High art, celebrity culture, death, religion and gender ambiguity are the underlying themes of Johnson's collages, which combine ink drawing with laminated and sanded cardboard shapes, found materials and photocopies, and are claustrophobically packed with references, wordplay and visual puns. Recurring images and motifs include Botticelli's *Venus* and Duchamp's *Mona Lisa*, along with Debbie Harry, Jesus Christ and Johnson's signature cartoon bunny. Vitrines packed with



letters attest to Johnson's vast network of correspondents. So negligible was the difference between his life and his art that Johnson's 1995 suicide by drowning was thought by many to be a final performance piece. His oeuvre was resolutely subcultural, unheroic, singular and deeply felt. It not only served as a bridge between Surrealism and Pop Art, but it should also have relevance for artists working in Conceptual and Relational art today.—Anne Doran