

A SELECTION OF RAY JOHNSON EPHEMERA

■ Enigmatic in life, deftly funny in his art, Ray Johnson was a quintessential personality of New York's midcentury avant-garde. He counted among his friends such luminaries as James Rosenquist, Roy Lichtenstein, and Andy Warhol, and created a robust mail art network that circulated among them.

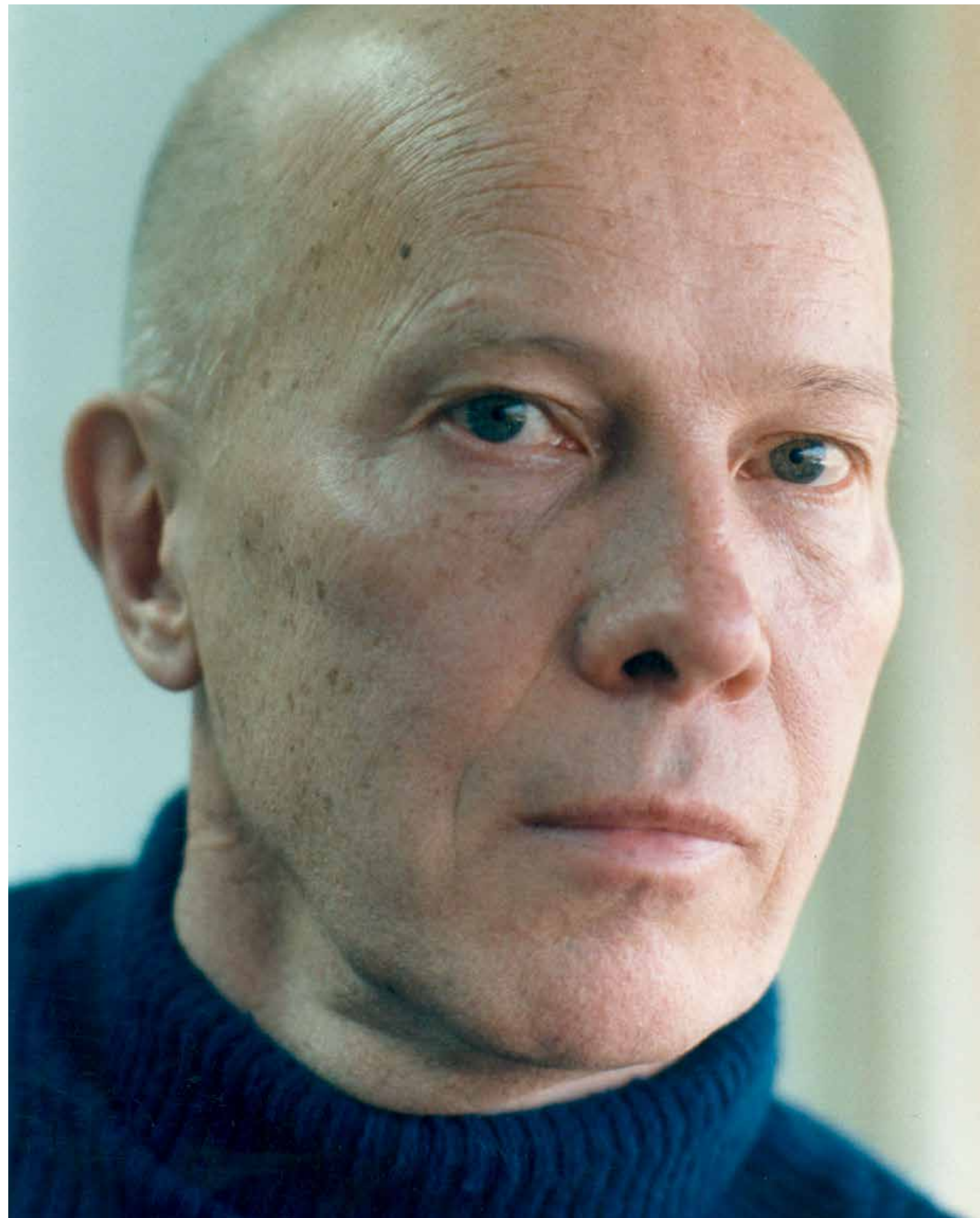
Beyond his art-by-post, Johnson was a prolific creator of collages, performances, and conceptual art, peppered with pop-cultural references, cartoonish imagery, and wordplay. Yet traditional art world gravitas mostly eluded the artist, who died at age 67 in an apparent suicide on January 13, 1995. *How to Draw a Bunny*, a 2004 documentary about Johnson's work, attests to a fringe figure whose death itself might have been a performance. Twenty years after his demise, Johnson's work has attracted renewed attention and inspired a cult following among a younger generation.

"Mail art anticipates the idea of the network," says Frances Beatty, the director of Johnson's estate and president of the New York gallery Richard L. Feigen & Co. She adds that the Internet "has made Ray Johnson fascinating to younger people." Describing his work as "radical, brave, and hilarious," Beatty says that his exquisite-corpse mail art experiments—adorned with commands to alter the work and send it back—"flies in the face of what the market demands."

The recent focus on Johnson has keyed in on his expansive network. Karma, a bookstore and project space in New York's East Village, mounted an exhibition of Johnson's work last fall, which included a wall with his mail art. Earlier in 2014, Siglio Press in Los Angeles published *Not Nothing*, a collection of his writing. "Ray Johnson's Art World," on view through January 16 at Richard L. Feigen & Co., traces the relationship between the artist and his creative correspondents. The show includes work by John Baldessari, Lynda Benglis, Chuck Close, Yoko Ono, and many others. In the spirit of Johnson's rhizomic oeuvre, we present a collection of images from his archive, many of which have not been previously published.

—Wendy Vogel

OPPOSITE:
Ray Johnson
in 1986.



LOMBARDO AND RAY JOHNSON ESTATE AT RICHARD L. FEIGEN & CO., NEW YORK



ALL IMAGES: KRISTINE LARSEN AND RAY JOHNSON ESTATE AT RICHARD L. FEIGEN & CO.



FROM TOP:
Two views of a jacket worn in 'The Ray Johnson Correspondence School Jean Dubuffet Fan Club Meeting' in 1986.



Drawings from Johnson's high school sketchbook, ca. 1941-42.

OPPOSITE:
A photocopied mailing. Johnson often altered magazine or book images by adding a bunny head or obscuring a face. Here he has done both. He labeled the bunny head Cy Twombly, in whose fireplace, according to legend, Johnson burned his early works.

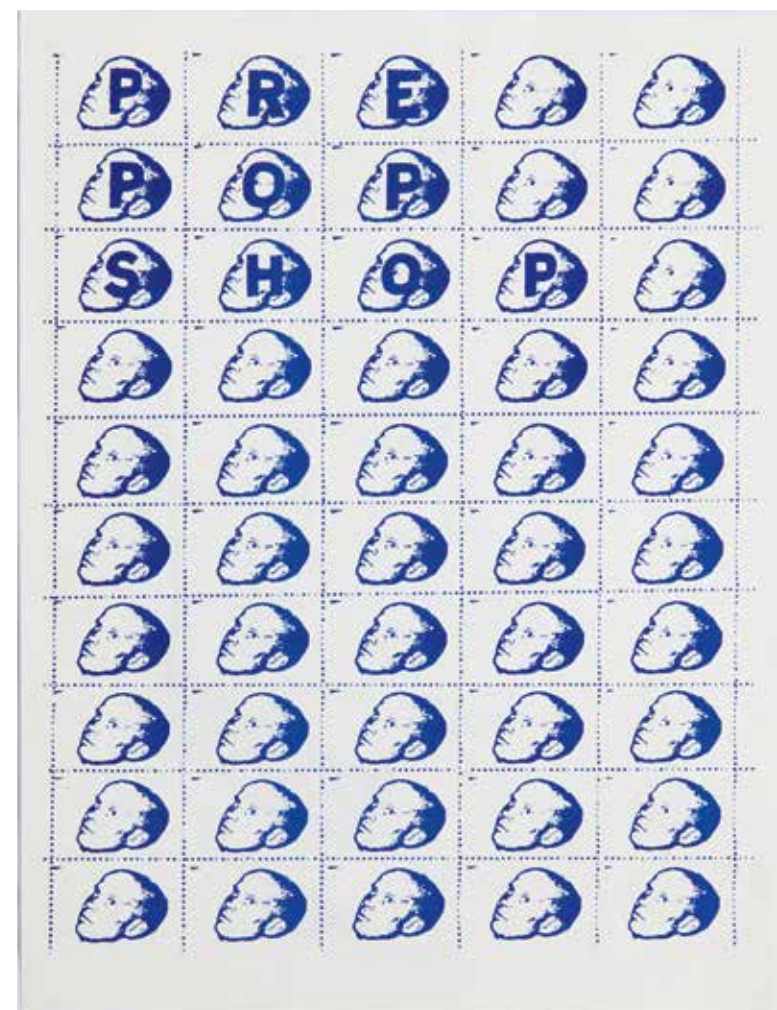
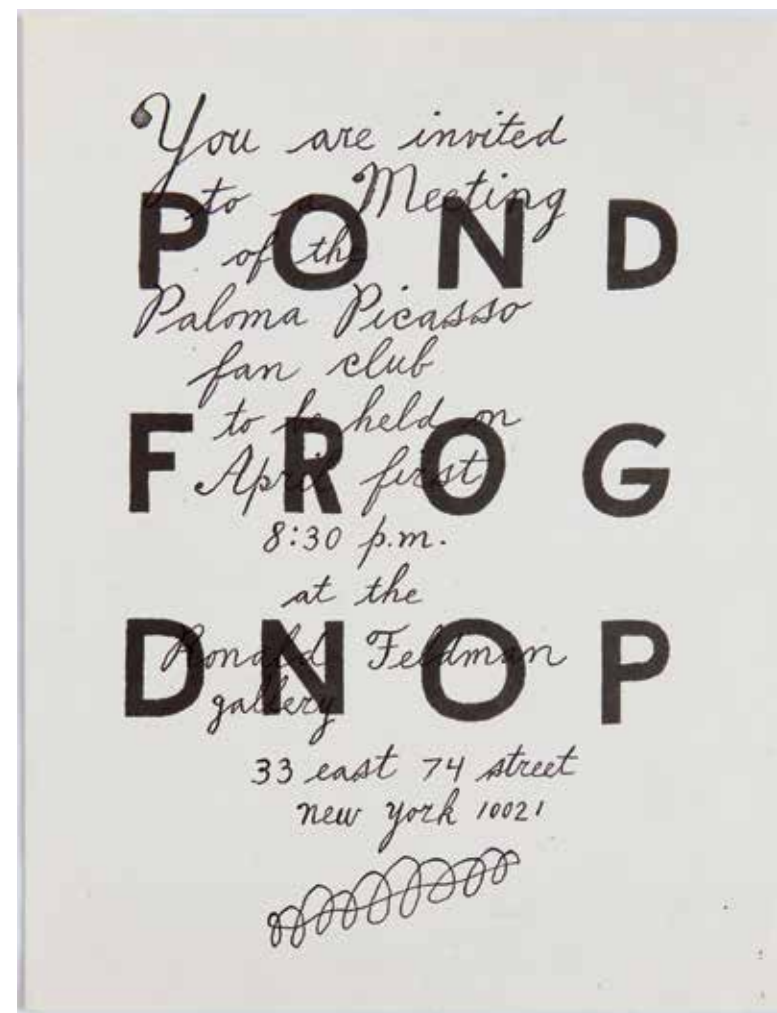
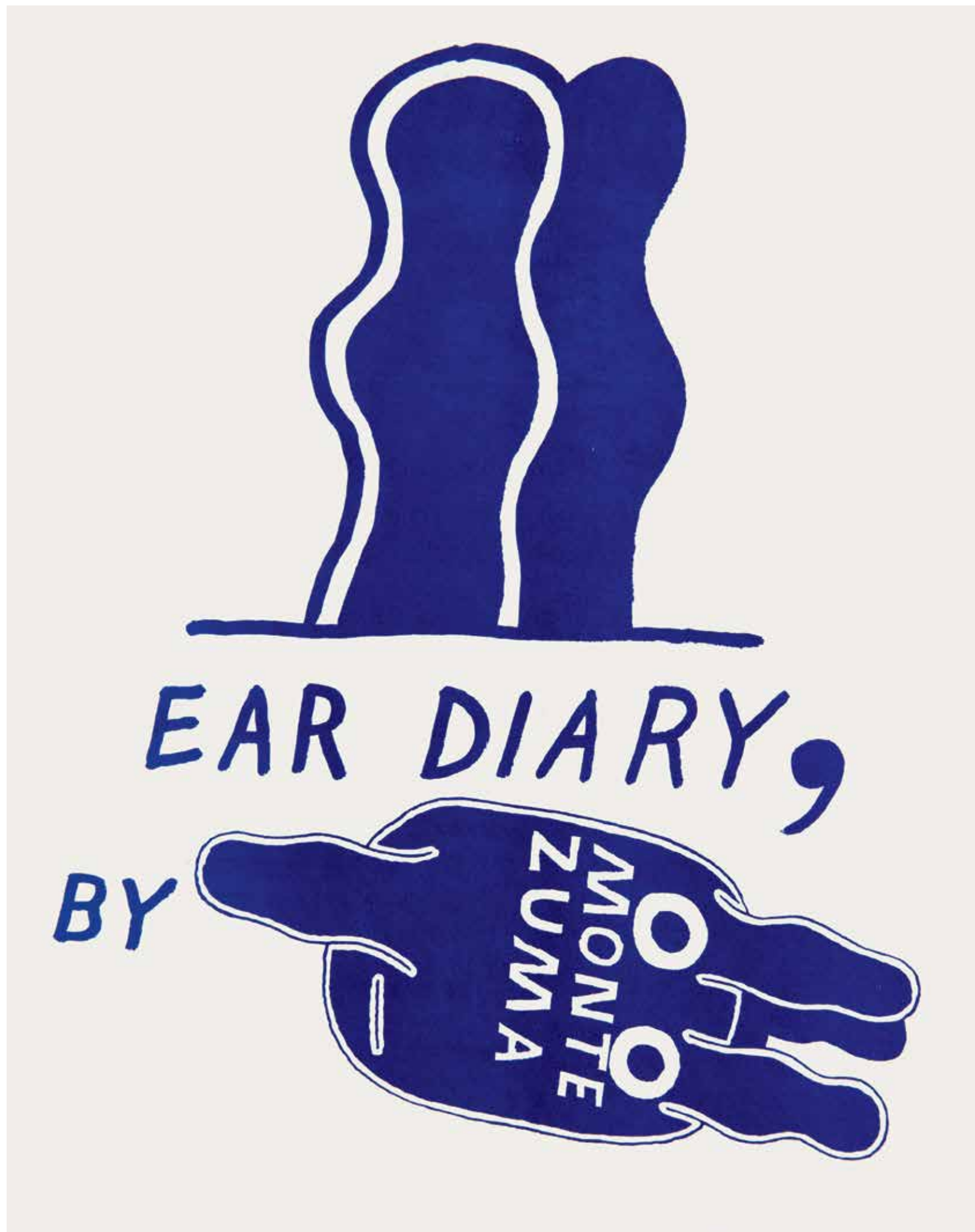


Envelopes from various mail art that Johnson sent to artists. The letter at the center right is from Talking Heads frontman and artist David Byrne. At the lower right is a letter that Johnson sent to his parents from Black Mountain College, where he studied from 1945 to 1948.

OPPOSITE:
A photocopied mailing for the Paris Correspondence School, a fictional institution.

RAY JOHNSON THE PARIS CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Photocopied mailing for Paloma Picasso Fan Club meeting with added text "Pond Frog Dnop."

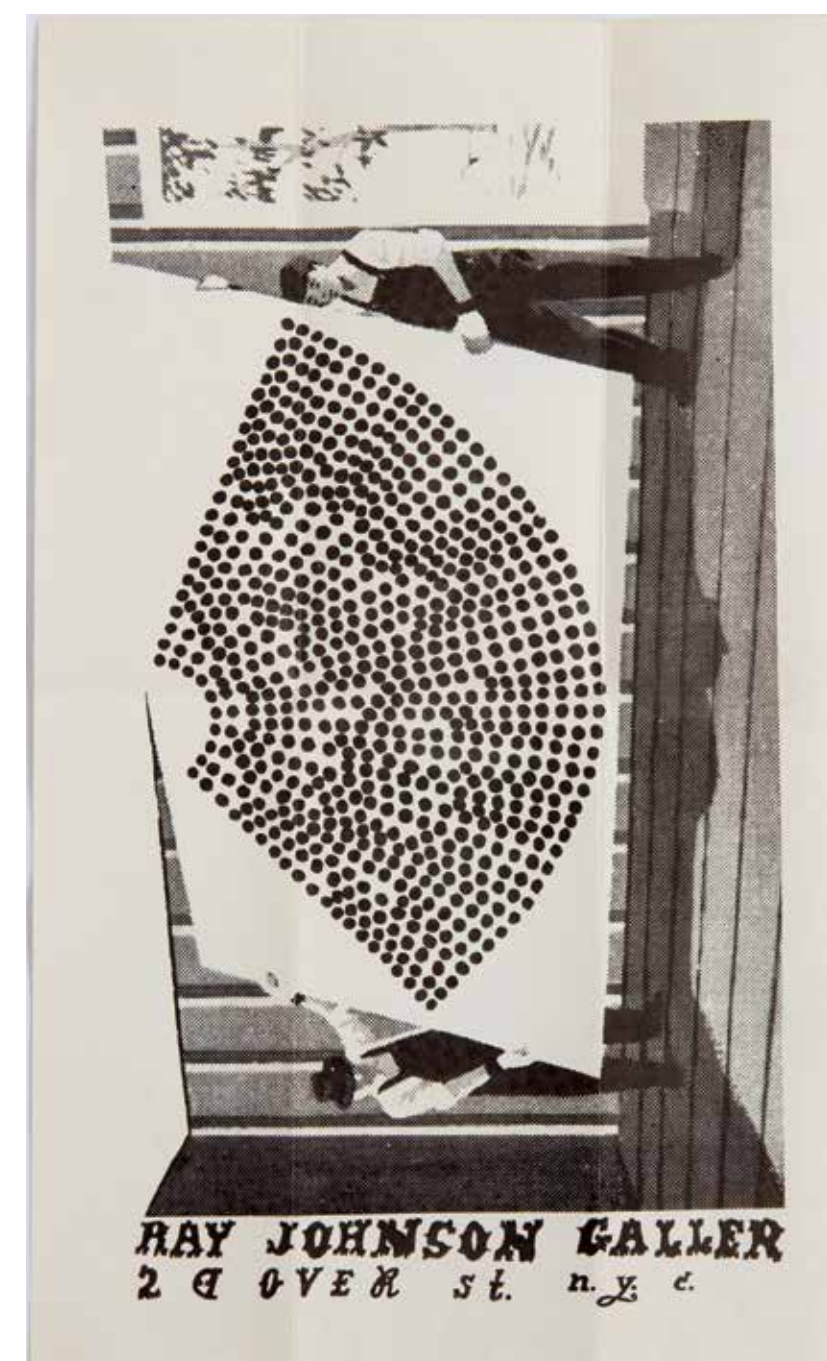
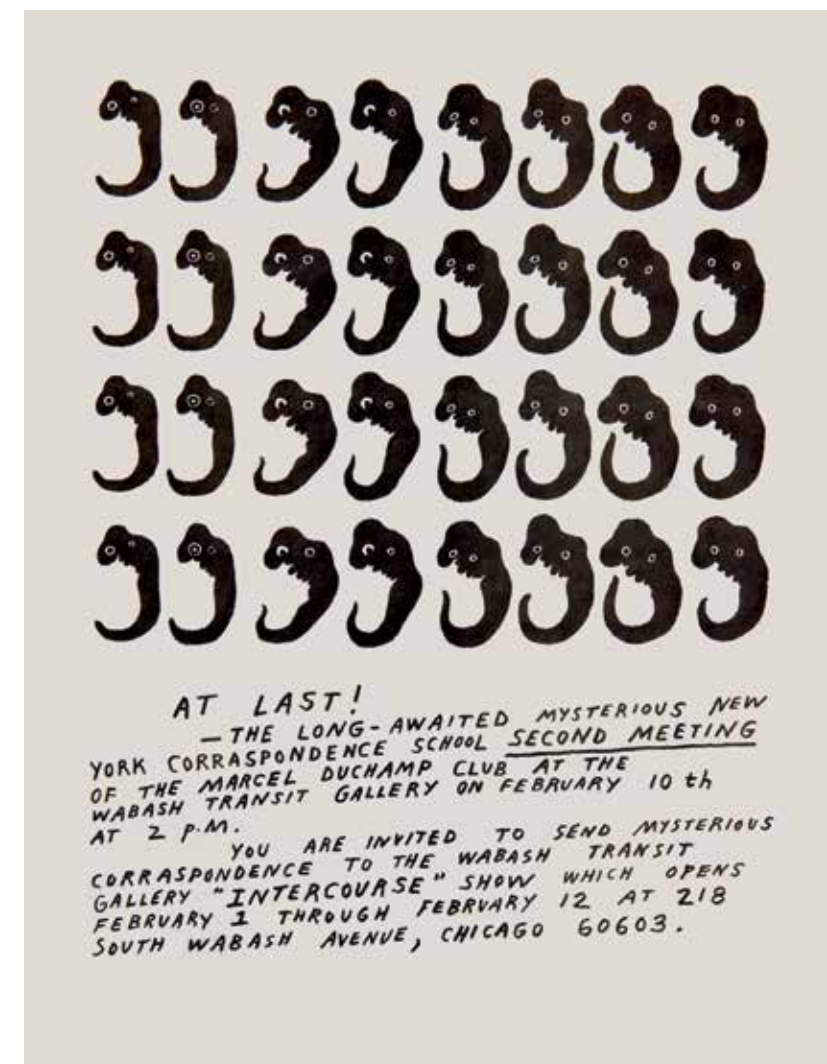
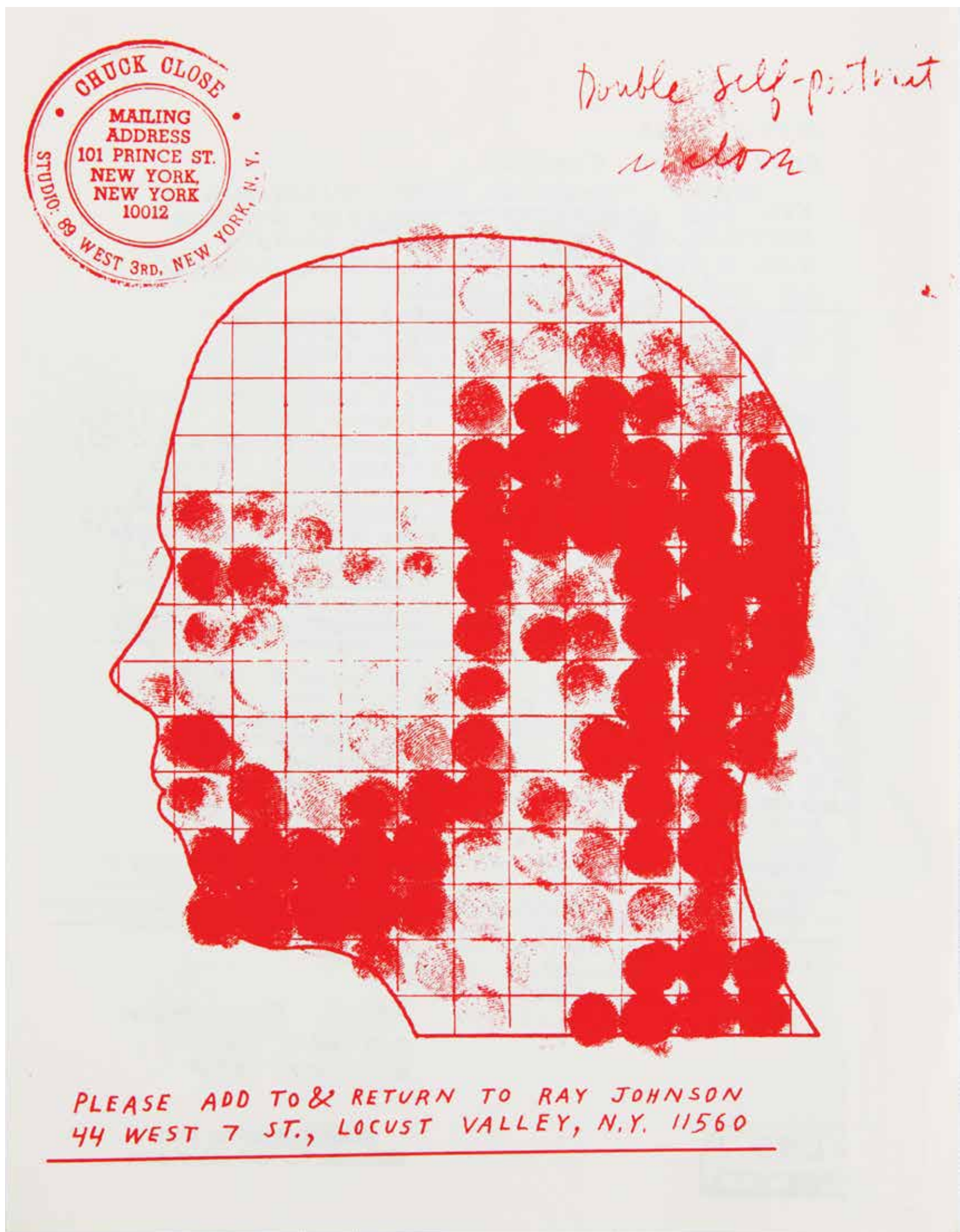
Untitled (Duane Michals), 1993.
Two collage halves on corrugated cardboard, 13¼ x 8½ in.

Two "Fake Ray Johnson" bunny heads with inscription "Fake Ray Johnsons Bill Dobbs Gallery New York City." The artist often played with concepts of authenticity.

Double-sided photocopied mailing with Ray Johnson head stamps. The verso of this image shows an image of Naomi Sims, who played the actress Anna May Wong in a performance Johnson organized in 1972.

OPPOSITE:
Verso of photocopied mailing of the Marcel Duchamp Fan Club Meeting, 1972. "Ear Diary" is a play on words and a reference to the ears of Johnson's ubiquitous bunny heads, which appear in the composition.

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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Photocopied mailing with "fetus" motifs announcing Marcel Duchamp Fan Club Meeting, 1972.

An ad for Johnson's graphic design business.

A stamp produced by the artist. He later scratched out the word festival.

A collage with images of bathing beauties. Johnson is pictured at center; an image of May Wilson, a frequent collaborator, is inserted at top right.

OPPOSITE: "Double Self-Portrait" photocopied mailing by Chuck Close and Ray Johnson. Close modified a silhouette portrait by Johnson, adding a grid and his thumbprints in the shape of his own beard and facial features. IMP



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