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Ray Johnson, 67, Pop Artist Known for His Work in Collage

By CAROL VOGEL

Ray Johnson, a collage artist who was a pioneer in using images from popular culture, died on Friday in Sag Harbor, L.I. He was 67 and lived in Locust Valley, L.I.

A spokesman for the Sag Harbor Police Department said that Mr. Johnson checked into the Baron's Cove Inn in Sag Harbor on Friday afternoon and either fell or jumped from the Sag Harbor-North Haven bridge that evening. The death is still under investigation, the spokesman said.

Raymond E. Johnson was born in Detroit and went to Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where he studied with Josef Albers and Robert Motherwell.

He came to New York in 1948 and began producing geometric paintings that were shown along with the work of such artists as Ad Reinhardt, Leon Polk Smith and Charmion von Wiegand in exhibitions mounted by the American Abstract Artists group. By the mid-1950's, influenced by Cy Twombly and Robert Rauschenberg, Mr. Johnson began producing collages, some of which centered on popular cult figures like Elvis Presley and James Dean. Also in the late 1950's, he made a number of small collages from overpainted printed images cut into strips and then rearranged.

Besides being one of the earliest Pop artists, Mr. Johnson became known for creating whimsical works known as "mail art," art created out of scraps of correspondence. In 1968, he founded the New York Correspondence School, an international postal network whose members exchanged works and objects through the mail. Like Joseph Cornell's work, Mr. Johnson's art combined deadpan relief drawing, painting, lettering and found objects as well as abstract mosaic elements.

Mr. Johnson's work was the subject of several one-man exhibitions. He was represented by the Marian Willard Gallery and the Richard Feigen Gallery, both in Manhattan.

No immediate family members survive.