

# OPUNTIA 34



[Editor's remarks in square brackets]

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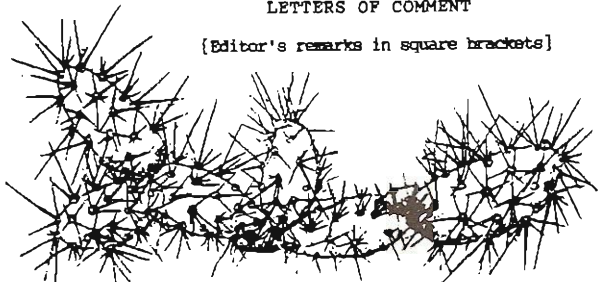
OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. Available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, or for zine trade or letter of comment on the previous issue.

Whole-numbered issues are sercon, .1 issues are re-viewzines, and .5 issues are perzines.

ART CREDIT: The cover art is a rubber stamp collage by Carolyn Substitute, Box 771, Florissant, Missouri 63032-0771. Rubber stamps used were by Dina Melucci (armadillo), Metropolitan Museum of Art (hieroglyphics), Rubber Baby Buggy Bumpers (dead fish), Judikins (small pteroglyphs), unknown (snake, arch), and Carolyn Substitute (all others).

The rubber stamped opuntia on page 8 is a commercial product from the catalogue of Stamp Francisco, 466 - 8th Street, San Francisco, California 94103. The one on page 13 was handcarved by Rusty Clark, 24 Glenview Drive, West Springfield, Massachusetts 01089, who is editor of TABLOID TRASH, a zine devoted to handcarved rubber stamps.

TORONTO IN 2003: Toronto is bidding for the World Science Fiction Convention in 2003. They last had it in 1973 and 1948. (The only other Canadian WorldCon was Winnipeg in 1994.) Pre-supporting memberships are C\$20.03 or US\$15 from: Toronto in '03, Box 3, Stn A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1A2.



FROM: Harry Warner Jr  
423 Summit Avenue  
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

1997-5-17

The Hektograph Fast Polka was indeed composed by Johann Strauss Jr, and given that title by the composer. I came across it years ago in a catalogue of the composer's many compositions. Later some fan, Art Widner, I believe, described in a fanzine the surprise he'd experienced when he heard a recording of it while listening to a public radio station. It is undoubtedly available on CD today, because the Naxos label has just completed its giant task of recording all the Strauss Jr dances and marches on 52 CDs.

[Harry Andruschak also mentioned that he had heard this polka on a Los Angeles radio station.]

Despite the odd names Strauss Jr gave many of his works, most of them relate to some actual occurrence. I haven't been able to find why he named one for the hektograph. Purely on conjecture, I wonder if he utilized this new device to simplify the job of preparing parts for his musicians and felt grateful enough for the labour saved to make this dedication.

[continued next page]

Strauss Jr had a rather large orchestra for his Vienna concerts and introduced many of his new compositions before they were published. So someone had to derive the parts for each instrument from the score. A great deal of time and many possible copying mistakes could be saved if the hektograph was utilized.

FROM: Carolyn Clowes 1997-7-15  
5911 West Pay Drive NW  
Depauw, Indiana 47115

Garth Spencer's series on Ottawa fandom is illuminating and great fun to read. It increases my awareness and respect for well-run cons and my understanding for the ones that aren't. Reminds me a bit of the theatre, where feuds break out over missing eyebrow pencils and outsiders never know what goes on behind the scenes.

FROM: Lloyd Penney 1997-7-26  
1706 - 24 Eva Road  
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

Another addition to the Ottawa fanhistory. The Continuity 2000/2001 WorldCon hoax bid flyer actually had two versions. One had a P.O. box on the flyer and the other had the 146A Woodridge Crescent, Neapean address which was Andre Lieven's address at the time.

FROM: Murray Moore 1997-6-4  
377 Manly Street  
Midland, Ontario L4R 3E2

Reading Garth's history of Ottawa fandom causes me to wonder why Toronto has not had an SF club since OSFIC folded. I have never understood why a metropolitan area of several millions did not throw up a SF club, as opposed to a media club.

Now Tommy Ferguson moves to Toronto [from Northern Ireland], doesn't find a fan scene like the one he enjoyed in N.I., so he is creating one. Good for him.

[Lloyd Penney replies: "OSFiC never seemed to be that friendly a club, even when Robert Sawyer was its moderator. The shrinking membership was a close-knit group, and did not pursue new members. [My wife] Yvonne tried to join OSFiC at one point during a club function, and was abruptly turned away. With this hostile attitude, I never did try to join the club, seeing that it was such a close group, and I never felt comfortable with its members. When Bob Hadji shut the club down in the early 1980s, the attitude seemed to be "Good, let it die". In my initial years in Toronto fandom I was more media SF oriented, and so I went looking for the local media fans and not a literary group. My first exposure to literary fandom was Ad Astra, joining the committee in 1982. I had thought later of starting a Star Trek club, and so, with Yvonne, Juane Michaud, Judy Zoltai, and Laura and Ed Zacharias, Star Trek Toronto was started. The club quickly degenerated into political infighting and we left it after a few years. Other clubs started up and they suffered their own infighting, and fighting with other clubs."

"Over the ten years since our attempts to revive ST fandom in Toronto, with ST Toronto and Toronto Trek Celebration, the Trek clubs and conventions have fought with each other constantly. As a result, the idea of an SF club has been a pretty unpopular one. Anytime the idea is resurrected, deafening silence usually shoots it down. Toronto does have groups such as the Canadian SF&F Society (formerly the Foundation) and the Friends of the Merril Collection, plus the discussion group Space-Time Continuum, but they are also close-knit groups and none of them constitute a general SF club. Fandom is still fairly Balkanized here, and many groups are unaware or uncaring of the existence of others. Tommy Ferguson has been a breath of fresh air for the slice of Toronto

fandom he's met, and has been enough of a fannish activist to do something different, bring something from back home, and introduce us to a regular fannish pub night. He's also a veteran fannish publisher and has increased the number of zines that come from Toronto."

FROM: Joseph Major 1997-5-28  
1409 Christy Avenue  
Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040

The epidemiology of "Dutch" Elm Disease can be compared to syphilis. When introduced into Europe in the late 15th/early 16th century, it engendered an epidemic of catastrophic proportions. Chancres that were fistulas were not uncommon, to recount one of the less repulsive symptoms. Bad as it was, the results of the Tuskegee experiment, where black men infected with syphilis were deliberately left untreated while observed, in order to drive an observational baseline, does not seem to have produced any so obvious symptoms. This would seem to make such pathogens as HIV and Ebola rather poor, given their destruction of hosts.

[Sudden pandemics of fast-acting pathogens are not a wise evolutionary strategy for such pathogens, and they usually cannot spread far or else moderate with time for better long-term survival. No point killing the host before it has time to spread the disease.]

FROM: Harry Andruschak 1997-5-25  
Box 5309  
Torrance, California 90510-5309

Thank you for the article on Somebody's Elm Disease. Now what is being done about it, if anything? Your article seemed to imply that things were still out of control. Are there any wasps that prey on the beetles? Fungicides?

[There are some chemical treatments that involve drilling holes in the root flares and pumping fungicides in under pressure. These are expensive and do not solve the problem of the DED epidemic. The main focus is on breeding resistant cultivars of elms that will not be affected by the disease. Sanitary pruning is effective but a lost cause in areas where elms grow wild.]

FROM: Kevin Welch 1997-7-20  
Box 2195  
Madison, Wisconsin 53701

I never thought about comparing organized philately and SF fandom, but there do seem to be parallels; too many young and passionate hobbyists with typewriters and printing presses. You're bound to have feuds and fanac and zines and all the rest. I've also never figured out why sports card collecting never went through this phase. No national or regional organizations, no hobby press beyond a few commercial publications like BECKETT'S, and the conventions are shows organized by the dealers.

In some ways, philately is actually more fannish today than it was 60 years ago. You see a lot of study groups and thematic units and independent societies now, and most of them publish little newsletters with some frequency. Collectors of plate number coils and self-adhesive booklet panes set up trading circles to swap numbers and share information. This informal activity seems to be taking place in old-fashioned newsletters and letter-writing circles. It has very little to do with the Internet. There is a newsgroup rec.collecting.stamps, but it is largely content-free. The other philatelic resources on the Internet are mainly dealer Web pages and some auction sites.

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Frank Denton, Chester Cuthbert, Scott Crow, Teddy Harvia, Henry Welch, Buck Coulson

## THE ORIGIN OF RUBBER STAMPS

by Dale Speirs

Handstamps date back thousands of years. They were made of baked clay, stone, or metal. Rubber handstamps however, did not become a commercial concern until the late 1860s. Practical mass production of them had to wait in the first instance until Charles Goodyear had patented vulcanized rubber in 1844, and in the second instance until manufacturing methods could make them in large quantities at a cheap price. As with so many other inventions, there are several people who developed the idea at about the same time. Rubber stamps appeared circa 1866. According to Miller and Thompson (1978) the contenders for the first rubber stamps are L.F. Witherall (Knoxville, Illinois), James Woodruff (Auburn, New York), and Henry Leland (Lee, Massachusetts), all working in the period just after the War Between the States. There were about 400 manufacturers by 1880, 4000 by 1892, and in 1911 the first trade association was formed, now called the Marking Device Association.

The late 1800s were an exciting time in office technology, as the typewriter, hectograph, mimeograph, the damp-paper copier, telephone, telegraph, cheap printing presses, and the rubber stamp helped make business more efficient. Commercial hand-copying of documents and letters did not die out after Gutenberg; it lasted until the 1890s and was finally killed off by carbon paper and typewriters.

Every new form of office technology has been subverted by its employees for home use. Not a few personal letters were typed on office machines a century ago, just as many a zine is today run off on the photocopier at work. Hectographs were intended for the respectable businessman, but revolutionaries found them every bit as useful. Rubber stamps are a bit harder to reuse around the home, but their cheapness of manufacture meant that one could order custom designs for home or artistic use. Art designs could be gotten from toy

kits intended for children. Blocks of rubber were also cheap enough that one could carve one's own stamps.



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from HARPER'S WEEKLY, 1872-2-24, page 168



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from HARPER'S WEEKLY, 1872-12-7, page 959

At right, an ad from THE GRAPHIC, 1880-2-21,  
page 207. Below is an ad from OFFICE  
EQUIPMENT DIGEST? August 1945, page 41.

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LEFT:

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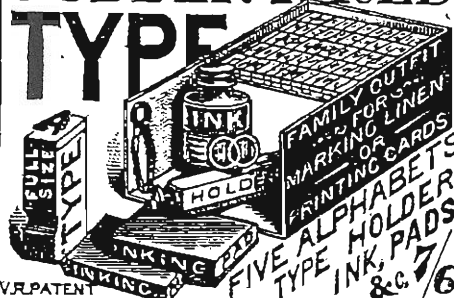
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Artists began using rubber stamps at the turn of the century. Almost from the beginning of rubber stamps, they were used by post offices, mostly official date stamps, but also unofficial fancy cancels. The height of fancy cancels occurred in the USA during the Great Depression. Postmasters in American 4th-class post offices were paid according to the volume of mail they handled. This led to fancy cancels because it was an inexpensive way to collect for philatelists during the hard times of the 1930s, and a good way to boost one's pay as a postmaster. Towns such as Bear, Arkansas or Squirrel, Idaho used animal cancels. Others used a special cancel for holidays, such as a shamrock for St. Patrick Day or a heart for Valentine Day (Walker and Sente 1980). These cancels were almost never authorized by the U.S. Post Office, and eventually would be

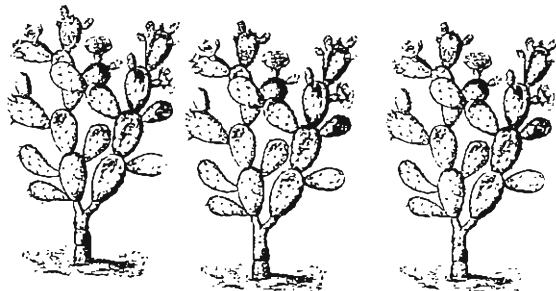
suppressed by a Postal Inspector, thus boosting their value to philatelists.

In the last couple of decades, rubber stamps have become very popular in mail art. Computers will not do away with rubber stamps in business; it is not too easy to run a packing crate through a laser printer rather than stamp a Received date on it. There is a very impressive magazine RUBBERSTAMP MADNESS, perfect-bound in colour with 175 pages, hundreds of ads, and lots of editorial content. (Sample copy US\$9 from RSM, 408 SW Monroe #210, Corvallis, Oregon 97330). Handcarving one's own rubber stamps is also very popular, and there are a number of zines on that topic such as TABLOID TRASH (Rusty Clark, 24 Glenview Drive, West Springfield, Massachusetts 01089) and ERASER CARVERS QUARTERLY (Mick Mather, Box 222, Clay, New York 13041).

#### References.

Miller, Joni, and Lowry Thompson (1978) The Rubber Stamp Album. Published by Workman Publ., New York. pp 8-17

Walker, William, and Marjory Sente (1980 January) Twentieth Century Fancy Cancellations. AMERICAN PHILATELIST 94:39-43





## A BRIEF HISTORY OF RUBBER STAMP ART

by John Held Jr

In many ways, rubber stamp art represents the fruition of the 20th-century avant-garde. Dada artist Marcel Duchamp stated that anything could be art, and Fluxus participant Joseph Beuys concluded that anyone could be an artist. Rubber stamp art, on the surface, is so simple that anyone can instantly create a credible pictorial presentation or conceptually challenging image from a few simple marking devices.

Rubber stamp art is a great leveler that democratizes and demolishes the distinction between artist and non-artist. To a great extent, contemporary rubber stamp usage developed on the shirrtails of mail art, an open system that attracted participation from a worldwide creative community. Mail art, like rubber stamping, is a non-judgemental field stressing collaboration over competitiveness and participation over prizes.

Rubber stamps are currently associated primarily with alternative artforms, such as artist periodicals and books, zines, and artist postage stamps, but it is a medium, nevertheless, that has been cast in a fine art context for some eighty years. Rubber stamps developed after the Civil War, and it is safe to say that they did not find their way into fine art before the beginnings of the Modernist period, when Picasso led the march beyond the reigning Impressionism. It's hard to imagine Cezanne, Matisse, or Van Gogh incorporating rubber stamps into their work, although to his credit Van Gogh did paint his postman.

However, there was one Modernist movement that allowed no boundaries, and was ever on the lookout for new horizons. Dada art, arising in various cities of Europe (Zurich, Paris, Berlin) almost by spontaneous combustion in the first quarter of the century, was not above incorporating these commonplace marking devices into their quest for all that was new in art.

Kurt Schwitters, a German Dadaist from Hannover, was the first to incorporate scraps of life into the newly developed field of collage. Rubber stamps and bus tickets vied for attention in abstract compositions, in harmony with Modernist painting theories. The words of the rubber stamps Schwitters used were unimportant. It was the repeating geometric forms they produced which fascinated him. His "stamp drawing", *Stempelzechnugen* (1919), is an early example of what we would now call visual poetry.

Unlike Schwitters, Fernand Leger attempted to shape rubber stamp impressions into recognizable images. In 1914 he stamped out a purple wine bottle and a glass accompanied by the words "Service. Service. Service." Later he would paint mechanical-looking pictures. He was a believer in machines, tools that relieved man of repetitive tasks. Naturally he embraced the rubber stamp.

The Italian Futurists, who formed even earlier than Dada, had rubber stamps made up for their various functions, such as their first Futurist Congress in 1924. Here we find rubber stamps used in one of their traditional roles as logos for identity. The Futurists were nothing if not brilliant publicists. Their letterheads were equally inventive, and they sent some of the first mail art by distributing tin postcards.

Many of the early Modernist movements experimented with typography and this carried over to rubber stamp design. The Russian Constructivists used rubber stamp text to accompany illustrations by Olga Rozanova in a book published in 1916. Artists of the Bauhaus, attempting to develop a functional art blending Modernist thought with consumer items, produced innovative rubber stamp designs, shaping their personal seals in innovative fashions. Oskar Schlemmer, later a well-known Hollywood animator, adopted a stark Art Deco design for his personal stamp.

[continued next page]

Kasimir Malevitch, a Russian Modernist and early proponent of minimal design and monochrome painting, painted a letter complete with rubber stamp postmark in 1918. No doubt there were other such paintings closer to home incorporating rubber stamps and postmarks on letters, as the early American trompe l'oeil painters often painted missives set in landscapes of arranged interior settings.

Marcel Duchamp, who seems to have initiated every art-form of interest to the contemporary artist, including mail, performance, kinetic, and conceptual art, was also a forerunner of the carved eraser rubber stamp. In 1919, then living in Buenos Aires, he began a game of postal chess with his New York City patron Walter Arensberg, carving a pawn, knight, bishop, king, and queen to stamp out his moves.

The uncertainty of World War Two and the period previous to its outbreak brought a halt to the avant-garde experimentation so prevalent in the earlier part of the century. Dada and Futurist activities, often described as anti-art, went into decline, and so too, their use of the rubber stamp. This fallow period in the 1930s and 1940s bloomed again at the conclusion of WW2 with the rise of several neo-Dada groups. Nouveau Realism, the New York Correspondence School, Fluxus, and even elements of Pop Art, accounted for a new interest in the revolutionary performance, publishing, and conceptual approaches of the first generation of the avant-garde.

Nouveau Realism was a French art movement (including several Swiss artists) brought together by the art critic Pierre Restany on the occasion of a 1960 Paris exhibition. Joined together by a "sensibility", rather than a particular style, the artists included Yves Klein, Arman, Tinguely, Daniel Spoerri, Niki de Saint-Phalle, and others.

Yves Klein and Arman had been teenage friends in Nice arriving in Paris to make their mark in the world of art in the early 1950s. Around the same time that Klein was producing paintings of only one colour (the most famous was his patented international Klein Blue), Arman was becoming interested in rubber stamps. Influenced by the work of Kurt Schwitters and the Dutch printer H.N. Werkmann, Arman began a series of works he called Cachets. This series, lasting from 1954 through 1959, evolved as he became more familiar with the medium. Arman had become aware of Kurt Schwitters' use of rubber stamps at an exhibition he attended of the German artist's work in 1954. He had come across the work of H.N. Werkmann some years earlier in an art magazine.

Werkmann had begun to hand stamp with the letters and numbers found in his printing shop, as well as using rollers and stencils, in a manner consistent with the typographical experimentation of the era in avant-garde circles. By 1943 he was incorporating hand stamps into his work.

Arman's use of rubber stamps drew from all that went before. His first efforts were made with stamps found in the drawers from his father's antique shop. These were printed in black and white, at first simply documentary in nature, and then overlapping one another in more intricate abstract patterning. As his use of the rubber stamps became more assured, Arman began adding colour to his work, often dragging the rubber stamp across the page to heighten the abstract quality of the work. Later the rubber stamps were used with paints, rather than ink, culminating in the 1959 exhibition "Grands Cachets" at the Galerie Apollinaire in Milan, Italy. The large works shown were similar to the "all-over" paintings of Jackson Pollack, abstract except for the numbers and words produced by the rubber stamps. Still later, Arman began inking objects such as jars, egg shells, necklaces, pins and needles, leaving the trace of their existence on the paper. He called these works Allures, a forerunner of the "found" rubber stamp.

Andy Warhol was also using rubber stamps to create works of art at the end of the 1950s. He did a series of carved stamps (hearts, flowers, birds, fruits) used in his commercial work, before becoming known for his silkscreen works, which were used like rubber stamps in their repetition of images over the surface of the canvas. Warhol also contributed to a 1976 portfolio of rubber stamp prints, which included the work of other mainstream art figures such as Sol LeWitt, Richard Artschwager, and Carl Andre.

At the same time that the Pop Art movement was creating such a stir in the mainstream artworld, a little known avant-garde movement named Fluxus also appeared. It was an international mix of artists: Yoko Ono from Japan, George Maciunas from Lithuania, video artist Nam June Paik from Korea, Robert Filliou and Ben Vautier from France, Joseph Beuys from Germany, Robin Page from Canada, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Ken Friedman from the United States, as well as many others at home and abroad.

In order to keep the far-flung band in touch with one another, the postal system was used to disseminate information among them. According to Fluxus historian Jon Hendricks (author of the Fluxus Codex) the first "official" Fluxus work to employ rubber stamps was Nam June Paik's "The Monthly Review of the University for AVant-Garde Hinduism". By stamping mailing envelopes and objects with the name of the publication, Paik was able to expand the concept of a "periodical". "Flux Post Kit 7", assembled by George Maciunas in 1968, was a culmination of postal ideas conceived by several Fluxus artists. It contained postage stamps by Robert Watts, postcards by Ben Vautier, and rubber stamps by James Riddle (EVERYTHING) and Ken Friedman (INCONSEQUENTIAL IS COMING).

While Arman had used rubber stamps for their pictorial possibilities, Fluxus artists opened the way for the conceptual use of rubber stamps. It remained for

the artist Ray Johnson to examine their poetic possibilities. Unlike Warhol, who came from advertising, Ray Johnson was an artworld insider, who attended Black Mountain College in the late 1940s, where he was influenced by such cultural icons as John Cage, Buckminster Fuller, Merce Cunningham, and Robert Rauschenberg. This group of artists and thinkers were responsible for challenging the prevailing Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s with a new brand of chance imagery and neo-dadaism.

Johnson began using the postal system to distribute poetic correspondence to an ever-widening circle of friends, famous personalities in popular culture, and artworld insiders. By 1962, his activities were given a name: The New York Correspondance School. It was a parody of art taught by mail. Instead, Ray Johnson and his students made art from the postal system, transmitting cryptic messages cloaked in typical postal iconography such as rubber stamps, cancellation marks, and postage stamps.

Rubber stamps mocked the bureaucratic approach the postal system took for granted. Yet there was a certain admiration for the power these miniature artforms were capable of conveying. Rubber stamps were like logos, making an artist's impression instantly recognizable.

Like Warhol's soup cans, Marylins, and Elvies, Johnson was famous for his bunny heads, which changed expression as the whim struck him. He created rubber stamps announcing "fan clubs" for Paloma Picasso, Shelley Duval, and the artists Japer Johns and Odilon Redon. He spoofed his New York Correspondance School by creating Silhouette, Buddha, and Buddhette Universities, which existed only in rubber. In addition to his postal activity, he was a master collagist, and had several rubber stamps which reflected this interest: Collage by Ray Johnson, Cool Age by Ray Johnson, and Coilage by Ray Johnson.

In an interview I did with Ray Johnson in 1977, I asked about his use of rubber stamps:

JH: ... You use rubber stamps. Do you have a philosophy concerning them?

RJ: I don't use them visually. I use them as verbal information. I was explaining my oldest rubber stamp reading "Collage by Ray Johnson" as to how and where and why I use and stamp it, which in the collage process, or ceremony, after I apply tape or glue to a surface, which technically makes it a collage. I then stamp it rather than signing my name, although I might sign my name after it. But the stamping is rather like the stamping of an envelope. Final. A letter is licked and stamped before it's cancelled. It's then dropped into a box, and so forth. Process involving the Post Office Department.

Johnson's use of the postal system as a poetic medium of art and exchange encouraged the growth of an international network of artists, which grew in numbers over the next three decades. Rubber stamp usage, both visual and textual, became a popular artistic medium among mail artists.

Mail art became an open international pool into which anyone was free to dip. Focus shifted from the object to the process. Everyone who participated became an important and essential component in this interactive art. Mail artists elaborated upon forms common to the Post Office. Along with postcards, postage stamps, and cancellation marks, rubber stamps became a primary means of interaction. Rubber stamps not only toyed with postal stereotypes, they allowed artists to develop indelible images in representing themselves.

The first phase of contemporary rubber stamp activity within the mail art network culminated in the 1974 publication of Hervé Fischer's ART ET COMMUNICATION MARGINALE. 146 artists were represented in the anthology, which presented brief biographies and examples

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of their rubber stamp works. Soon after the appearance of the Fischer book, many of the participating artworld stars either dropped out or distanced themselves from the scene. Spearheaded by Fluxus participant Ken Friedman, there was much discussion about the amount of "kwick-kopy krap" that had entered into mail and rubber stamp art. It was as if those who had opened the floodgates had second thoughts, rushing to stem the unwanted tide that ensued.

But rubber stamp art continued to flourish away from the mainstream. After the first flush of using readymade commercial imagery, rubber stamp artists began devising new strategies breathing new life into the medium. Eastern European artists became increasingly innovative in the field. Perhaps this was because the rubber stamp assumed such serious political and social implications in their daily living under repressive regimes. The mere possession of a rubber stamp was unlawful, and institutions kept their sensitive marking devices locked up in vaults when not in use. Eastern European artists such as Pawel Petasz became particularly adept at eraser carving. These self-produced stamps allowed them to participate in the growing artform, despite the restrictions imposed on their commercial cousins. In the 1990s, Serbian artist Andre Tisma would use his eraser carved stamps to protest the imposition of a cultural embargo against his country.

Rubber stamps were also used in conceptual artworks. In Cologne, Germany, Geza Pernecky took a stroll along a river bank collecting found objects and attached them to rubber stamp mounts. They were then stamped in a book as documentation of his process. Rubber stamps would be used as a part of body art. Hungarian artist Endre Tot produced a stamp reading "I am glad when I can stamp", impressing it on a number of people and documenting the process.

[continued next page]

Exhibitions of rubber stamp art were beginning to appear for the first time at the start of the 1970s. In 1970, a Neo Merz Show of rubber stamped postcards was organized by Bill Gaglione and Tim Mancusi at the San Francisco Art Institute. The following year Gaglione and fellow Bay Area Dadaist Steve Caravello mounted Rubber Stamp Works at the Goodman Hall Gallery. San Francisco was a hotbed of rubber stamp activity owing to the presence of Patrick and Company, one of the few manufacturers of visual rubber stamps at the time. This culminated in the International Rubber Stamp Exhibition, the first large exhibition of rubber stamp art at La Mamelle Art Centre in 1976. Andrew Nevai held the first rubber stamp convention at his Big Island Gallery in Florida, New York, in May 1978. Among those attending were Joni Miller and Lowry Thompson, who brought out the first comprehensive book on rubber stamps later in the year. Following the publication of THE RUBBER STAMP ALBUM, Lowry went on to edit RUBBERSTAMPWADNESS, which initiated the widespread use of rubber stamps in the USA.

Rubber stamp usage was spreading in the mail art network to the extent that Stempleplaats Gallery opened in Amsterdam, Holland, in 1976, showing many artists interested in the rubber stamp medium. The work was of a decidedly conceptual bent under the guidance of active mail artists Ulises Carrion and Art van Barneveldt. In the United States, rubber stamp usage took a more playful turn. This was typified by the work of Leavenworth Jackson, who ran her own rubber stamp company in San Francisco. In a map of Fire Island she created, bunnys jump over trees, couples waltz, and teeth have wings. Leavenworth was just one of the many women involved in the field, which included Anna Banana, Cozette de Charmoy (France), Jackie Leventhal, Pumpkin Speiser, and Patricia Tavenner, among many other female rubber stampers of the 1970s.

Through the rise of publications and conventions, rubber stamp activity has grown to unprecedented proportions. While much current activity is craft

orientated, it should not be forgotten that the recent explosion in the field is in part due to the interest taken by artists throughout the century, who transformed a simple marking device into a medium of wonder.

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*Opuntia speirsi*

THE LACK OF PRINTING IN ANTIQUITY  
by Frederic Drew Bond

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Among fragments from the Graeco-Roman world which have come down to us, not a few imply the use of some sort of stamping, or rudimentary printing. Seals and stamps bearing reverse legends are not infrequent, and in 1908 the Italian Archeological Committee at work in Crete discovered a terra-cotta inscription whose letters had been impressed separately. According to Lacroix (ARTS IN THE MIDDLE AGES, English translation, p. 486) Cicero had at least the idea of movable type, for in arguing against the Epicurean conception of the world as formed by the chance concourse of atoms, he uses this curious line of reasoning: "Why not believe, also, that by throwing together, indiscriminately, innumerable forms of letters of the alphabet, either in gold or in any other substance, one can print on the ground with these letters, the annals of Ennius?"

D'Israeli in his "Curiosities of Literature" has a quaint passage in which he suggests that the Roman Senate, fearing the effects of printed books, prevented movable type from coming into use. Another suggestion is that of De Quincey, who expresses the view, which he states he derives from Archbishop Whately, that the reason the Romans did not use the press was not from lack of knowledge of movable type but from lack of paper with which to make use of it. The ancients, as is well known, used not paper, but papyrus, on which to write. Shreds of this river plant (which, according to the ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA, still grows in the Nile valley) were split apart in long pieces, interwoven with one another and the whole then heavily pressed til a smooth and polished surface suitable for writing was obtained.

But though lack of paper might have impeded the development of typography in antiquity had its invention otherwise been feasible, this does not seem to have been the main cause accounting for its absence. For, after the fall of Samarcand in 704, the Saracens became acquainted with the manufacture of paper and also, no doubt, learned of block printing among the Chinese; yet printing did not appear in the caliphates of Arabia or of Spain any more than it did among the Romans. (Among the Chinese, needless to say, it was the multitude of written characters which prevented the development of typography from block printing.) It may thus be suspected that printing was wanting in the Roman Empire for much the same reasons that it was wanting among the Saracens. By the end of the first century of our era there were already written nearly all the works which we call classics and a number of each large enough to supply the reading demand had been turned out in manuscript. The literary output of new works in the Roman Empire was, from our modern standpoint, extraordinarily small. Aside from a few romances nothing existed in prose which would fall under our head of fiction. More than this, the output of scientific, descriptive, and even historical writings was scanty in the extreme. Poetry, satire, philosophy, and religion seem to have made up the greatest part of the output of new books in the Roman shops. Reading never became in the Roman Empire the necessity it has been to an educated man for many centuries past. Those who read habitually in the Empire were the school children and scholars, and the wants of these last were supplied by the great libraries of Alexandria, Athens, and Rome. Reading and writing were to others rarely more than a means of communication and of casting accounts or other commercial business.

Nevertheless, had printing been invented in the Roman Empire it would, no doubt, in the end have created a demand for the books which it almost certainly have called into being. Now the idea of typography, to

nations possessing an alphabet, is so obvious that its failure to appear at all in Rome seems at first puzzling. Commercial enterprises are frequently started with no more prospect of gain than a printing office, if ready for work, would have faced in Rome. The real reason why in the conditions in the Roman Empire printing did not appear at all is revealed when we turn to the history of the early printers who invented the art in the fifteenth century. Though the idea of typography is obvious, the means first to make the idea actual were, we find, very far indeed from being so. Obscure though the early history of the art is, it is certain that effort after effort was made by several small groups of men in Holland and on the borders of Germany to make a commercial success of printing in the years between 1420 and 1450. The difficulties they encountered were manifold; a workable ink, a press which would give even impressions, but most of all, type, both as regards its cutting or its casting and as regards its wear, we find giving them endless difficulties. We get some idea of the labours connected with the invention when we find Gutenberg trying to print at Strasburg as early as 1436. About 1442 he went to Mayence. There he exhausted his means in various experiments. In turn he took up and laid aside the different processes he had tried: xylography, movable types of cast iron, wood, and lead. He invented new tools and experimented with a press made on the principle of a wine-press. He began work on nearly a dozen books and could finish none of them. In 1450 he entered into partnership with John Fust, a rich goldsmith of Mayence. Fust agreed to advance Gutenberg 800 gold florins for the manufacture of implements and tools and 300 for other expenses. In 1451 Peter Schoeffer, an employee in the establishment, at last hit on a commercially feasible method of casting type. This discovery, which enabled printing to become a business success, he communicated to Fust, and the two, after getting rid of Gutenberg by a legal device, then printed the famous "Great Bible" of 1456.

The story of the invention of printing thus shows clearly that without a strong money-making stimulus, the years of thought, labour, and expense necessary to make a business success of the art would not have been hazarded. This money-making stimulus existed in the fifteenth century but was lacking in ancient times. The first printers came on the scene at the beginnings of the Renaissance when in Germany, where the awakening took a religious direction, there was a strong commercial demand for Bibles and works of devotion, which was not supplied by the manuscript output. Moreover, eager readers for the literature of Greece and Rome and for the writings of the Church fathers could be found in every European country touched by the early Renaissance. This antique and religious literature and the Bible, in the Vulgate and in translations, furnished materials for the first printers til the controversies of the Reformation brought more grist to the mill. Between 1456 and 1478 the new art had been exercised in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Spain, and Scandinavia. By the beginning of the sixteenth century it is computed that 16,000 editions of books had been printed.

On the other hand, in the Roman Empire, the popular old books were already in sufficiently large manuscript circulation, and what there was of new material was amply cared for by the few publishing houses of Alexandria and Rome. In the Roman Empire the demand either for new books or for new copies of the old was too well supplied for inventor after inventor to take up some thirty-five years in perfecting movable type. It was the insight that the demand for more books would afford great gain if gratified which induced the long labours which ended in a practicable method of producing and using movable type. No such prospect existed in antiquity. To a Roman of the Empire, a printing press would have seemed a commercially useless contrivance.

## GRAPHEIN

by Dale Speirs

Being a review of *THE PENCIL: A HISTORY OF DESIGN AND CIRCUMSTANCE*, by Henry Petroski (Knopf, 1996). The idea of writing with a piece of lead, charcoal, or graphite is millenia old, obvious to think of, but a devil of a thing to put into practical execution at a reasonable cost. Petroski covers the history of the pencil in a very readable manner. As is the case of many common items of technology (as I have found out in researching the hectograph), the written history is sparse to non-existent. Pencil manufacture was and still is ridden with trade secrets and no documentation.

The word 'pencil' comes from the penicillum or fine-pointed brush of the Romans. The poor of today live better than the greatest emperor of ancient times in many respects. We can hear any amount and type of music on the radio or player, instead of waiting for a band or orchestra performance. We can view movies or television instead of waiting for a troupe to come by. We can write with pencils or pens that would be worth their weight in gold back when, and write on smooth paper so cheap that we throw it away with no concern. Wax tablets have been replaced by scratch pads, and pounce (absorbant powder) is no longer used to dry ink from a quill pen. "The pen is mightier than the sword" is an epigram that had real meaning in the days of metal stylus and wax tablet books. As Petroski tells us, more than one Roman senator was wounded or killed by a well-aimed stylus. Wooden wax tablets were bound into books called pugillares, which blackened more than one eye or bruised a head in their time. There was a constant but unsuccessful search for a better writing implement. A lump of lead or graphite was awkward to hold, did not draw lines of consistent thickness or shade, and got the hands dirty. The last complaint was addressed by wrapping with string or paper, but it was centuries before any reasonable success.

The earliest illustration of a pencil appeared in the 1565 book *DE RERUM FOSSILIIUM LAPIDUM ET GEMMARUM MAXIME* by Konrad Gesner. Other evidence suggests that pencils in the form of wood-encased graphite had only just made their appearance about that time, probably sometime in the 1560s. The earliest centre of the pencil industry was at Borrowdale, England, which had a large deposit of nearly pure graphite. The stuff was as valuable as its other carbonaceous cousin the diamond, and as was the case at diamond mines, workers were searched when they finished their shift. It was said that a mouthful of graphite was as good as a day's wage.

Nicolas-Jacques Conté patented the basic process of pencil making in 1795; today the details are different but the idea of a graphite mixture encased by wood remains the same. Manufacturing pencils has always involved secret process in making the graphite core of a pencil, and was usually a family business. One of those families was John Thoreau and Co., the son of the household being done other than Henry David Thoreau of Walden Pond fame. This literary light was actively involved in engineering a better pencil for the American market. (He is said to have also invented raisin bread.) Thoreau eventually got out of the pencil business when it proved more profitable to sell graphite to printers for electrotyping than to make it into pencils.

When the Borrowdale mine ran out, pencil makers had a difficult time finding a quality replacement. Siberia proved to be the next motherlode of graphite, and the Faber family of Germany began bringing it in circa the late 1860s. The next supply crisis came in the 1910s, when the red cedar best suited for wood cases ran out. Today incense cedar from California keeps the pencil factories humming smoothly. Other constant struggles in the development of the industry involved mechanical pencils and rotary sharpeners instead of whittling a new point with a knife.

A very readable book, and one that makes you appreciate the toil and thought that goes into commonplace items.