

Julie Voyce's Mail Art Fun House

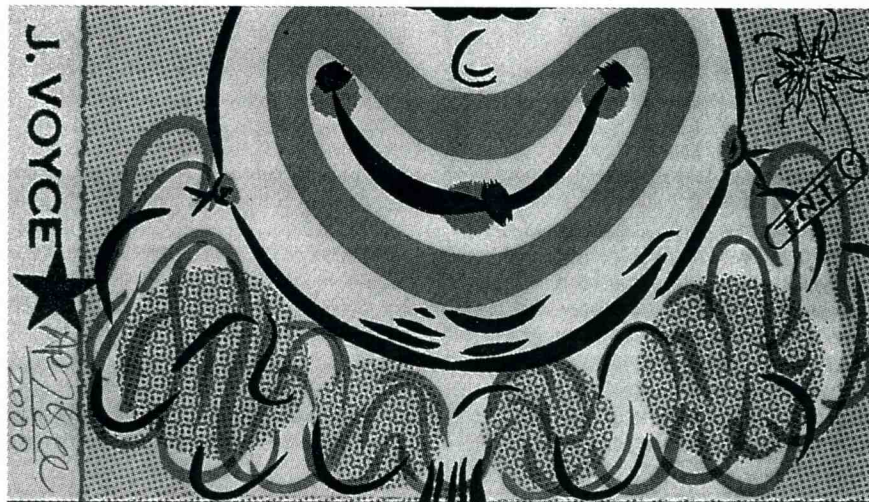
by Paola Poletto and Jon Sasaki

It seems like almost everyone in Toronto's art community owns a piece of work by Julie Voyce. Since discovering the semi-covert networked world of mail-art four years ago, Voyce has been distributing her vibrant silk-screened images via mail. Though she also works in the gallery system, one gets the sense that she finds intense satisfaction in exploring new ways to disseminate art. Lucky us: Rarely is artwork of this caliber so accessible.

The day we visit her studio is the hottest of the summer. Voyce offers to make a snack as we peruse her art, and announces that she's invented a new approach to sandwiches. Instead of slicing pieces of bread, she produces a cabbage roughly the size of a loaf of bread, and proceeds to carve inch-thick cross-sections. These cabbage-slices, topped with chicken salad, are a refreshing hybrid of salad and sandwich. The impression is that Voyce does not challenge convention for the sake of defiance, but because she's invented a better set of rules to play by.

Not unlike her version of the sandwich, Voyce's work oscillates between old and new. Looking at her assorted imagery, one is tempted to associate it with computerized vector graphics. The clean lines and bold chunks of colour appear to have just jumped out of a web browser. For instance, a silk-screened card depicting a strange woman/flower hybrid arm-curling 100-pound barbells is perplexing, gripping and seamless. But these images were not created in Illustrator with a few clicks of a mouse. Voyce is a self-professed luddite who employs the thoroughly anachronistic and relatively painstaking silk screen process in order to craft her images.

It is also noteworthy that snail-mail, not e-mail, is her chosen conduit for artwork. The silk screen process was originally developed as a commercial graphic tool, and it becomes apparent that another dualism is in play, that of high art/low art. In her hands, this traditionally "low



art" medium is a complex and expressive vocabulary for making serious work. Following the protocol with fine art prints, Voyce's editions are usually signed and numbered. Sort-of. Her entire recent edition is numbered identically, with a cryptic "X" hanging over the denominator. Voyce tips her hat to high art procedures, while simultaneously revoking the accepted gestures of the community.

To disseminate her mail-art, Julie has a recipe box. Inside, there is a distribution list of about two hundred indexed individuals who will receive four mailings over the course of a year. The four mailings make up a series of prints that are visually and conceptually connected. From year to year, what ties the prints together is an over-arching quirkiness; a feel-good, inspirational quality.

Julie's list includes relatives, friends, artists and non-artists. She has selected many of these people, and has also requested that a core group of them provide her with names of others who will appreciate receiving her mail art. At the time of our lovely sandwich meeting in her studio, Julie is in the process of sending her third piece of mail-art this year.

What is refreshingly unique about

Julie is that she's not holding her breath for money or acknowledgment. When you consider that she sells her stunning hand-printed artist's books for less than the price of a paperback by Danielle Steele, that's no surprise. It was to subvert the elitist world of high art altogether that Julie turned to mail art. Mail art provides a subjective and tactile sense of connection absent from the gallery system. Accordingly, she is happiest when there is a reciprocated exchange through the mail. When Julie sends out her work, she is disseminating not just art, but little pieces of her own fun house world. In return, she hopes others will share their unique sense of the world with her. Either way, the lucky recipients on her list must live in happy anticipation, waiting by the mail-box to see how the first two sections of a happy clown will grow into something new.

Send Julie Voyce your mail art well-wishes to R.E.D.H.O.T. Productions, P.O. Box 65232, Toronto, ON M4K 3Z2

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