

THE MAGIC MAILBOX



by Cork Marcheschi

In 1986 I left Minneapolis to return home to San Francisco. I had been teaching in Minneapolis since 1970. Even though I never felt comfortable in that very white city, it was extremely good to me. Within the first year of being there, I was in museum shows and by 1973 I was showing in New York and Europe. BUT in 1982 my world fell apart. My two best friends died. Jim had a heart attack on his motorcycle and Helga was hit by a car going very fast. They were my best friends. They were my art dealers and I loved them. I went to pieces. I stopped sleeping. Every time I approached my bed the pounding of my heart would become a drum beat in my ears, so I started taking sleeping pills and washing them down with cognac. Even with the pills and booze I could only muster three hours of sleep a night.

One morning in the midst of this I received a letter from the NEA. I opened it with no

expectation. I was in the front hall and Donna was upstairs in the kitchen. I read the note and I made a sound, a primal sound.

Donna came running down stairs thinking the sound was that of a stroke, heart attack or the final gasp of air exiting my body. She looked at me and I whispered, "I just won \$25,000 from the NEA." She screamed and I dropped down onto the stairs.

The money came at such an odd time. I didn't want to work. I was not in a studio mood. I wanted to quit. As I think about this moment I can't believe me. I was hot and had a career that was going somewhere. I had galleries in NYC, KCMO, Chicago, Toronto, San Francisco and Germany. They were selling my work and I was participating in good museum shows.

I tossed it. Again, I say, I can't believe I walked away. In the art world you must be present. It doesn't matter what you are being present for as long as you there.

Kinda like a chair around the family table. If you are famous this rule doesn't hold true; but for the rest of us part of our job is continuously to remind people that we are alive.

You have about a six month grace period. Let it go any longer than that and grass is starting to grow where you used to stand. Give it two years and you might as well have died. I took the 25 grand and quit! I stopped working. I stopped living. I went to a really bad place. I spilt up with Donna and had "LOST WEEKEND" experiences. In the summer I drove the 1800 miles home to San Francisco and moved back in with my Mom and Dad. I was 37 years old.

Within three days of being home I was sleeping again. This little miracle got my attention. By the end of that summer I was healthy again and knew that I had to get back home to San Francisco.

It took another 3 years but in September of 1986 I packed up an old VW van and headed home. By this time it had become clear that art is what I know and I'd better go back to it. What a surprise I had. All of the currency that my good name had held was now Monopoly money. I had a comeback at the last possible moment to salvage my life as a professional artist but it wasn't going to look like it had. I moved into an unfinished space and started to put a new life together. My family gave me a job delivering cookies for their bakery. I needed to make some

money and find a new path in art but money was an immediate consideration. I had left a tenured professorship, a number of galleries and the flow I had started 15 years earlier, for a very uncertain, vague and misty future. Nothing was happening!!!!

What to do? Magic seemed to be the only way to change the direction that the energy was flowing. Magic had to be the answer: practical magic, do-it-yourself magic, ART MAGIC.

I thought about all the bits and pieces of magic and spirituality that I knew and pieced together some ideas about transformation: fire, smoke, chanting, gongs, wine and Joseph Campbell (he was hot at that moment - he was selling bliss and I was borrowing some). I went to see the touring version of Ghandi on ice. (the Disney production) and I got some Zen. I had gone to a Catholic church as a kid and knew the surface of some of the rituals. I never knew the chants but they sounded like this: "I bet I can play dominos better than you can." And then from the pews: "I bet you can't!" and then they passed the basket and took bets.

Where does my money come from? Not in the abstract but in the very real world. Where is the place where my hand descends from heaven and reaches out to touch the CHECK! Not the Sistine Chapel but the mailbox! I needed to influence what appears in my mailbox. OK. I go to the hardware store and buy a traditional mailbox. The

kind that looks like a loaf of bread with a flag on the side. I took it to the studio and put it in on the table amongst many bits and pieces of stuff. There was the bell off a fire sprinkler alarm – that would become the gong. There were some decorative yellow globe lights that were six inches in diameter. Four of those would become glowing feet to support the magic mailbox. I start to modify the mailbox and notice that there are large embossed words on the side and the back of the box.

On the back was FULTON CORPORATION, FULTON, INDIANA. I modified this into my mailbox chant: FULTO _ CORPO _ ULTO _ INO. The D in “Indiana” was squared off, so it was easy for me to make the jump to O. It was for a good cause! It had that good Latin sound. Try it slowly and in



a sonorous tone: FULTO (gong) CORPO (gong) UNO (gong) INO (gong!).

Now for a way to practically get your prayer – your desire, your request – from where you are to where the MAILBOX deity is. To complete the surface treatment I attached a sheet metal black cat from France, originally designed to scare away birds.

I needed some fast acting spiritual relief. I had to cut through the chatter

of everybody else’s wishes and get to the cosmic head of the line!

I decided to use the magician’s friend – flash paper. If you are not familiar with flash paper, it is the material that a magician uses to have a ball of fire exit his hand (very biblical). I picked up a few packs of the tissue like paper and decided that people would write their wishes on these little





pieces of paper and then somehow they would ceremoniously be transformed from this tangible world through a flash of heat and light into the ethereal material. I put a ring of nichrome wire into the mailbox; nichrome wire is the stuff in your toaster that gets red-hot and makes your toast toasty. Finally I mounted the fire bell on top of a bowling ball that I had drilled and tapped for a quarter inch stud. I was ready for the beginning of the FIRST CHURCH OF FUN. I called ten artist friends and invited them to my place. They were asked to bring food, wine and be in a good mood. Fun was the key to all of this: laughter and good spirits are the balm for the funky moment.

By 8 o'clock that night we were ready. We were all at a stuck moment in time. Everybody was broke, no energy seemed to be moving in anybody's life so this little exercise was met with enthusiasm.

After dinner the ceremonial paraphernalia went onto the table - we wrote our little

hopes and needs onto the six-inch squares of flash paper and then plugged in the magic mailbox.

The 46 inch yellow light globes supporting the mailbox lit up and the crowd uttered a satisfying OOOOOHHHHH! Then I switched on the internal nichrome wire. I had drilled numerous holes all over the mailbox and soon the internal red glow seeped out of the perforations. We were ready.

The gong was struck and the chanting began - FULTO (gong) CORPO (gong) ULTO (gong) INO (gong) and then into the hot mailbox went the first wish - WHOOSH - white/orange fire shot out the holes in the side and out of the front. It was really cool!!! More wishes went in. More fire and light came out. Everybody laughed and cheered. We hadn't felt this good in months. This was a good thing.

It was decided that we should meet bi-monthly and have everybody come up with

their own rituals. Tommy hung out and we talked about the possibility of sending wishes skyward in rockets. From this point forward for the next two years we all laughed our ways into better states of being. Tommy and I started to build rockets with payloads of flash paper wishes. We would send those rockets up about 1200 feet and then we would see the ball of fire in the sky and laugh with a force to touch everybody you had ever loved. We sent up 6-foot diameter helium balloons with huge payloads of fireworks. Six rockets were simultaneously sent up with payloads of purple dry tempera powder. When they got to 200 feet a purple cloud appeared in space and floated out over San Francisco Bay.

All of us came out of this period with direction, work and great memories. We laughed our way into a better place. The first church of fun was a NO WHINER ZONE! We followed bliss - we ate tandoori chicken and had waffle cook-offs. We took back our lives as artists who had been attached to somebody else's vision.

Art as a professional way of life is really stupid and in America is triple stupid. I get to say that being that I have driven nails into my head for 40 years doing it.

If you decide to go down this uncertain path may I recommend you have some magic close at hand. Do-it-yourself, make-it-yourself magic. Your magic is the best

magic for you and it is free. You can't do it wrong, so give it a try!

PS. "We all have a great power within us and if we chose not to use it, it recedes from us." LORD BUCKLEY

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