

# The Fluxus Word IUOMA

By Ruud Janssen

When people enter the Mail Art network, there is a world for them to discover. A lot of aspects, techniques, communication forms and even platforms that bring an overload of information. Fluxus and Mail-Art are not the same. Fluxus is the network started with George Maciunas and that led through another thought to the mail-art network where artists communicate and send and receive their art in a direct way. No need for an in-between contact. Also no judging of the works. All is accepted in a mail-art project. The network always attracts new people. Once you stumble upon a part of this network, you search begins. What is this Mail-Art all about?

On this search they might discover Fluxus and IUOMA, two aspects that are somewhere connected in a strange way. The IUOMA (International Union of Mail-Artists) started in 1988 as a kind of Fluxus Score. The original score is placed besides this text and deals with the inventing and making known new words. Well, IUOMA is such a word that has grown over the years into a union that has thousands of 'members' that make it a real network. So the word comes first, and then the rest....

The history of the IUOMA has been documented in many ways. The original paper start is documented in the TAM-Archive. In these early years the Xerox machine was the best way to distribute thoughts and ideas. So a lot of paperwork was produced. Application forms, membership cards, logo's and even stickers to promote the idea of the IUOMA. Anyone inside the network could decide on being a member or not. Also they could claim any role and/or function they would like. When the IUOMA went digital it was the times of discussions groups to exchange ideas. The latest platforms have been documented in book form as well. In fact the IUOMA will be heading to a 25 jubilee next year and things are being prepared for that right now. SO in the search nowadays a lot of information and visual ideas can be found. The 'fictive' union has become an active one in which people say 'they are a member', but yet the application is nothing more than to say you are a member.

## FLUXUS WORDS

There are so many words that have a meaning. Try to invent a new one and give it meaning. Promote the words and get it into the head of as many others as possible.

### SCORE : FLUXUS WORDS

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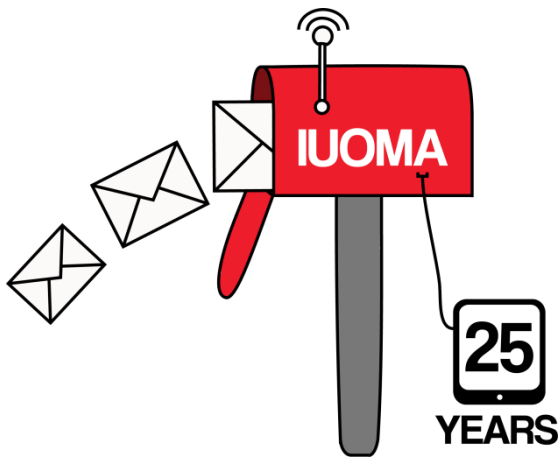
1. Think of a new word that doesn't exist
2. Promote it as a new word
3. Determine the meaning of the word
4. Promote the word worldwide

September 1988

So what is the IUOMA you might wonder. The basic principle of the union (after thinking of the word) was stated like: If you say you are a member you are a member. You can choose the role you would like in the Union. So quite an anarchistic point of view. It has stayed this way over the decades.



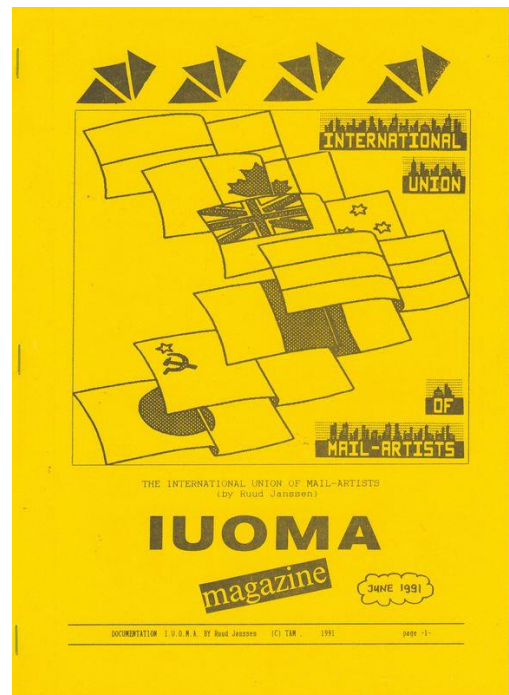
To choose the opposite side of this thought I claimed myself from the start to be the General-Manager of the IUOMA. In fact that fits quite well since I run all the activities to keep the word alive and well. The current platform is just one point, but the members itself do form the union and give it its shape, form and activities.



Besides the NING platform there is a older yahoo platform, a newer Facebook platform, and when you Google for the word IUOMA you find a wealth of the history as IUOMA has left quite some traces. Also a bright source of visuals; logo's designed by members, special rubberstamps for the IUOMA, and what members can think of has been created over the years on a worldwide platform. Even my own students from the media design department get an assignment to make a new logo every few years to see if they can make a design for a various group like

the IUOMA-members. The last one (the 25 years celebration logo with the envelope that transforms into a tabloid) was a very successful one.

Right from the beginning the artists who claim to be a member of the IUOMA have also started to produce logo's and texts for the union. In the early years all with copiers and sent out through the snail-mail system. This even resulted in a first IUOMA magazine that was published in 1991. Most copies ended up in collections, and to my surprise even the MoMa Library has two copies in their collection (see: <http://research.moma.org/mailart/i.html>). In the early years of the Internet the IUOMA had it's own Yahoo-group as well. It is still active but not so lively anymore. The newest place is its own social network at NING. Each year another 500 members came and joined in, so it has become a very lively place itself and the thousands of members exchange ideas and mail each other envelopes, objects, etc... Even special projects are started using this platform. The new communication platforms fit in these modern times. When the postage goes up every time you want to prepare the things you send out in a better way. Also documenting projects on paper has changed into online catalogues, or as at the IUOMA happens, instant documentation in a group that supports a mail-art project.

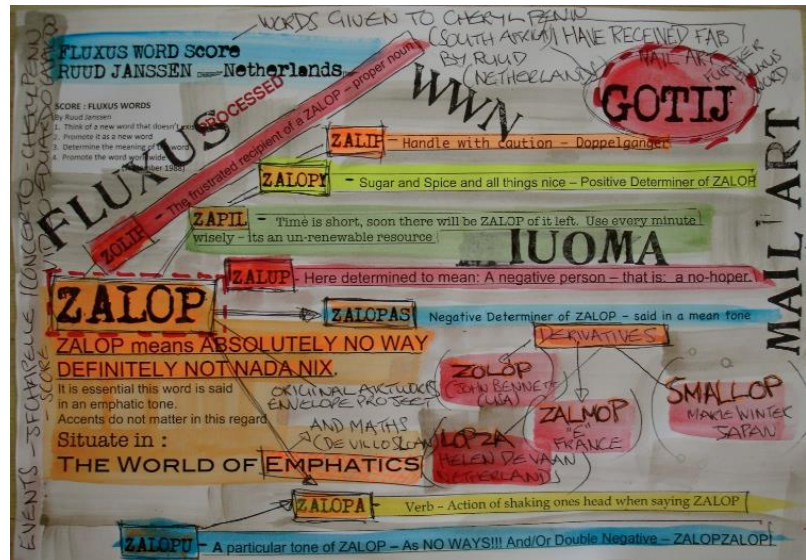


The idea of IUOMA has also had some negative reactions. I won't mention names here. Probably when an idea gets successful, people tend to get envious. The IUOMA is not about controlling the network, it has nothing to do with having a central leader, it has all to do with the common feeling of being part of a larger group that doesn't really fit into any other art organisation. That is why being a member of the IUOMA keeps as simple as it can be. If one says he wants to be a member, he automatically is a member. Over the years it has become a group of very different but creative



members, that learn together and keep a network alive. The growth of the IUOMA is managed by the members. I only facilitate the name and the communication platform.

IUOMA is just one of the many Fluxus words. Another Fluxus word is ZALOP. First thought of some years ago, and Cheryl Penn decided to follow up on this word and made it now also a well-known word with the specific meaning she gave the word. So the connection between a simple Fluxus Score that has been going on for decades now is that it resulted in certain words that actually have started new groups, ideas, and illusions. What is in a word? As much as you claim



it to be. It is very zalop to think otherwise. The modern world needs new words, and the way is open for you to think out a new word and give it a meaning and start to make it known to the world.

When you feel a bit confused and want to know more about Fluxus Words and the IUOMA, then the start is quite easy. If you are online just visit a few websites to get you started:

The IUOMA current home: <http://iuoma-network.ning.com/>

Sample of some Fluxus Words : <http://fluxuswords.blogspot.nl/>

No guarantee that you will find what are looking for. But to be honest, that is the charm of the mail-art network. You mostly don't know what you are looking for and the network lead you to new paths and visions that enriches your life so much. For me mail-art is like a path you choose to follow and it brings you the surprises that fit your life.

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In the year 1988 the idea of the IUOMA was born. No computers then. The Mail-Art network exchanged ideas, texts and roles inside the IUOMA. In the year 2002 a Yahoo group was started. Online discussions about mail-art projects that were done. In November 2008 NING became the IUOMA platform and the home for members.

Ruud Janssen was born at Tilburg, Netherlands. He studied Technical Physics at the University in Eindhoven and Physics/Mathematics at the Teachers College in Tilburg. He became active with mail art in 1980 and organized many international mail art projects. Janssen publishes articles, magazines and booklets with his TAM-Publications. In 1988 he founded the IUOMA (International Union of Mail-Artists) Since 1983 he is the curator of the TAM-Rubberstamp Archive. In 1994 he started with his legendary Mail-Interviews which have been published as booklets and online which are now also available at the MoMa in New York. He conducted interviews with Fluxus and mail artists in different communication forms. The interviews have a new concept where the question is sent in a specific communication form and the interviewed person chooses his own way to get the answer back. This way the factor time is involved in each specific interview. In 2003 Ruud Janssen was co-founder of the Fluxus Heidelberg Center that was initiated by Litsa Spathi. Since 2005 Ruud Janssen lives in Breda, Netherlands.



IUOMA 1988-2008

# International Union Of Mail-Artists overview 1988-2008

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Appendix: The first book with texts about IUOMA can be found and ordered at the IUOMA bookshop located at the address: <http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/iuoma> . A new publication about the 25 years celebration is in the making and will be published in the year 2013.

