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University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive Presents

## ***Tables of Content: Ray Johnson and Robert Warner Bob Box Archive***

### ***MATRIX 241***

January 27–May 20, 2012

*First West Coast Presentation of the Rarely Viewed Contents of the Thirteen “Bob Boxes,” Given by the Legendary Artist Ray Johnson to Robert Warner*



Ray Johnson: Untitled valise from *Bob Box Archive*, 1988–95; mixed media; dimensions variable. Photo: Tod Lippy, from *Esopus 16*

Berkeley, CA, December 19, 2011—The University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) presents **Tables of Content: Ray Johnson and Robert Warner Bob Box Archive / MATRIX 241**, an exhibition exploring the seven-year exchange of correspondence between legendary artist Ray Johnson (1927–95) and collagist Robert Warner. The presentation features the contents of thirteen cardboard boxes given to Warner by Johnson in 1990.

Warner, an optician working in New York City, first encountered Johnson’s work on a postcard sent by a mutual friend in 1988. Intrigued by the possibilities of corresponding with an artist, Warner initiated what evolved into an intense exchange between the two that continued until Johnson’s death of an apparent suicide in 1995. Over the course of their friendship Warner received hundreds of pieces of mail art from Johnson, ranging from collages to a piece of driftwood that was hand-delivered. On one occasion, Johnson Xeroxed a copy of Declaration of Independence and requested that Warner have it signed by John Cage—which he did.

While they spoke on the phone nearly every day, Johnson and Warner met in person only seven times. At one of their rare in-person meetings, Johnson gave Warner thirteen cardboard boxes tied with twine, labeled “Bob Box 1,” “Bob Box 2,” and so on. Although never stated, the understanding was that Warner would preserve the boxes.

In June of this year, fifteen years after Johnson’s death, Warner unpacked the boxes one at a time and cataloged their contents in public view through the course of an exhibition at Esopus Space in New York City. The opened “Bob Boxes” reveal an array of found objects, drawings, photocopies, and correspondence. Warner has described the contents as “a window into the world of Ray Johnson in the ‘70s and ‘80s: everything from signed-and-dated empty toilet paper tubes to a box that contained nothing but hundreds of envelopes that were addressed but never mailed.

**Tables of Content** displays all thirteen boxes and their contents for the first time on the West Coast. Warner has selected and arranged the letters, drawings, photocopies, and found objects like t-shirts, tennis balls, and random beach trash—the material of Johnson’s art—on an assembly of thirteen tables and surrounding gallery walls. Johnson annotated many of these things with personal codes, puns, and dark, irreverent jokes. Johnson’s work—collages, correspondence art, and performance events—remains mysterious and a bit hard to pin down. But his influences are obvious and surface repeatedly, among them Andy Warhol, Joseph Cornell, Rauschenberg, and Elvis Presley. His collage approach was diaristic, a stream-of-consciousness flow through the matter and memory of everyday life, shifting from one topic to another, across all variety of things. Johnson once remarked, “My work is like driving a car. I’m always shifting gears.”

**Artist’s Talk: Robert Warner**  
**January 27, 2012; 12:00 p.m.**

In conjunction with **Tables of Content: Ray Johnson and Robert Warner Bob Box Archive / MATRIX 241**, collage artist Robert Warner illuminates the intriguing contents of the “Bob Boxes,” gifts to him from artist Ray Johnson.

*Included with price of museum admission*

**Support**

**Tables of Content** is organized by Lucinda Barnes, chief curator and director of programs and collections, in collaboration with Robert Warner. The MATRIX Program at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive is made possible by a generous endowment gift from Phyllis C. Wattis and the continued support of the BAM/PFA Trustees.

**About BAM/PFA**

Founded in 1963, the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) is UC Berkeley's primary visual arts venue and among the largest university art museums in terms of size and audience in the United States. Internationally recognized for its art and film programming, BAM/PFA is a platform for cultural experiences that transform individuals, engage communities, and advance the local, national and global discourse on art and ideas. BAM/PFA's mission is "to inspire the imagination and ignite critical dialogue through art and film."

BAM/PFA presents approximately fifteen art exhibitions and 380 film programs each year. The museum's collection of over 16,000 works of art includes important holdings of Neolithic Chinese ceramics, Ming and Qing Dynasty Chinese painting, Old Master works on paper, Italian Baroque painting, early American painting, Abstract Expressionist painting, contemporary photography, and video art. Its film archive of over 14,000 films and videos includes the largest collection of Japanese cinema outside of Japan, Hollywood classics, and silent film, as well hundreds of thousands of articles, reviews, posters, and other ephemera related to the history of film, many of which are digitally scanned and accessible online.

**Museum Information**

**Location:** 2626 Bancroft Way, just below College Avenue across from the UC Berkeley campus.

**Gallery and Museum Store Hours:** Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m. Open **L@TE** Fridays until 9 p.m. Closed Monday and Tuesday.

**Information:** 24-hour recorded message (510) 642-0808; fax (510) 642-4889; TDD (510) 642-8734.

**Website:** [bampfa.berkeley.edu](http://bampfa.berkeley.edu)

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