

# MAIL ME ART

GOING POSTAL WITH THE WORLD'S  
BEST ILLUSTRATORS AND DESIGNERS

DARREN DI LIETO

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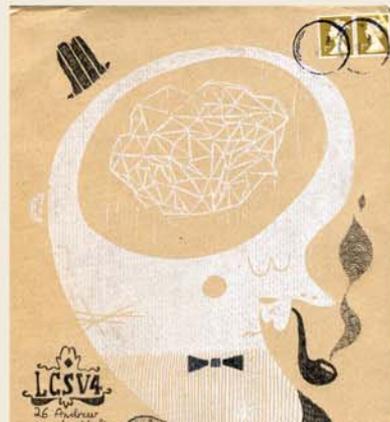
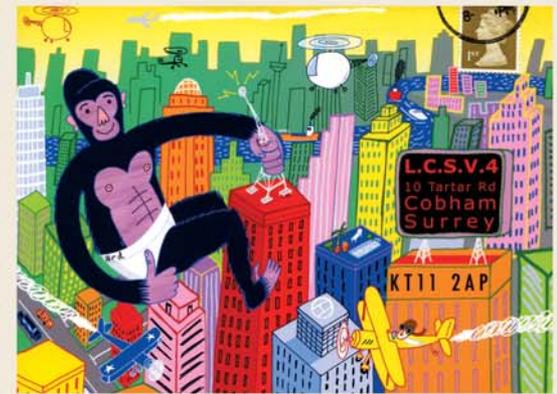
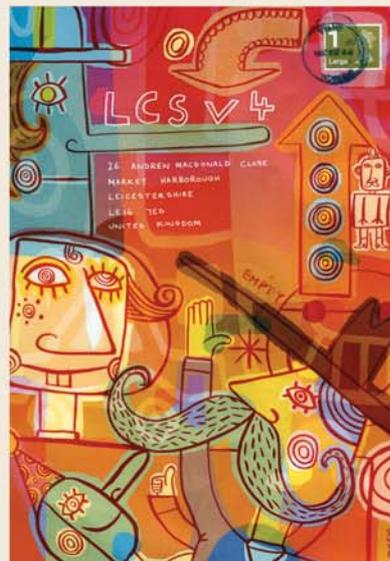
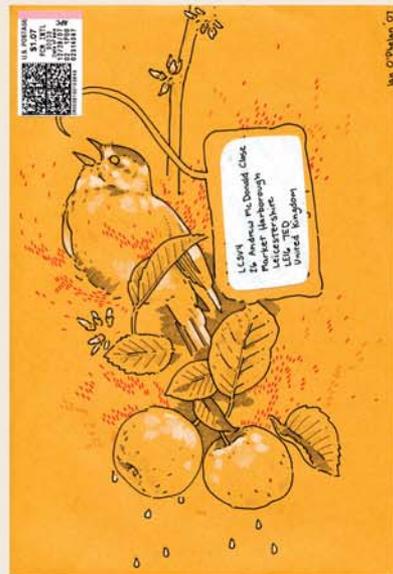
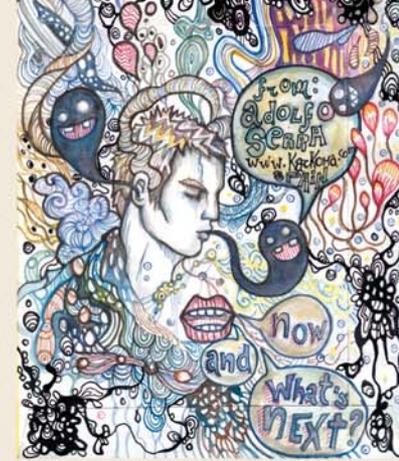


FRAGILE

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**MAIL ME**  
**— ART —**



# **MAIL ME — ART —**

**GOING POSTAL WITH THE WORLD'S  
BEST ILLUSTRATORS AND DESIGNERS**

DARREN DI LIETO

**HOW  
BOOKS**

Cincinnati, Ohio  
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## **DEDICATION**

For Jane, Jack and all of the artists and illustrators who made this book possible.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

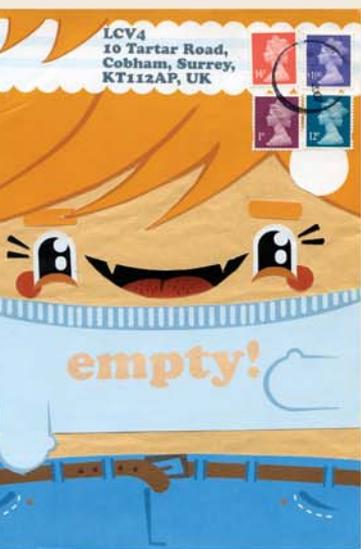
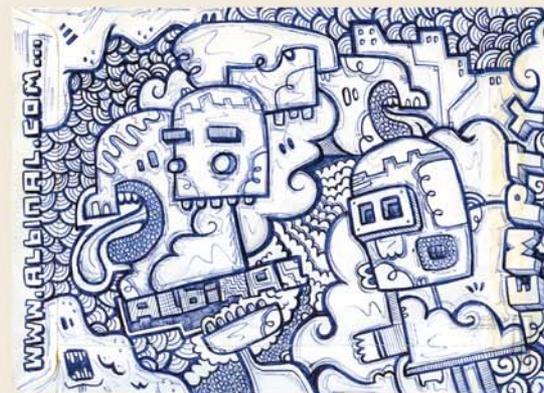
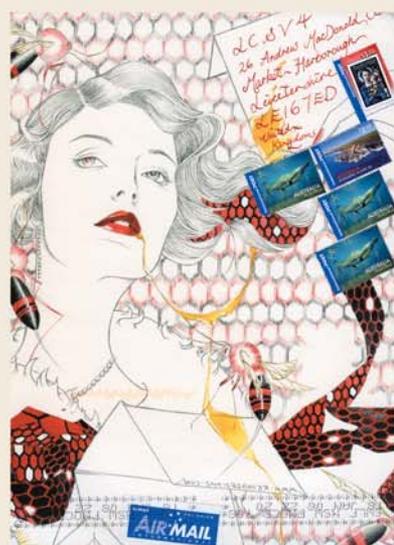
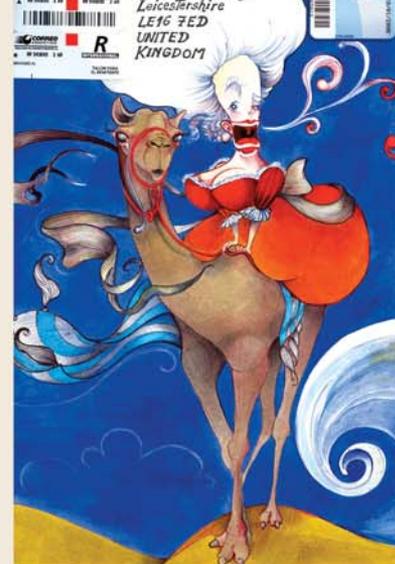
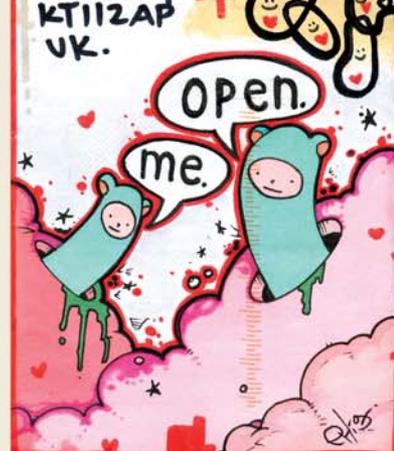
Darren Di Lieto was born in the middle of London in the early 1980s. He was lucky enough to miss the Second World War by a whole thirty-seven years and even luckier to be alive during the birth of the Internet. He spends most of his time chained to a computer designing and building websites. As the founder and joint senior editor of the essential illustration news portal, The Little Chimp Society (<http://thelittlechimpsociety.com>), the promotion of illustration and illustrators has become his life. This passion was the starting point for the Mail Me Art project, which began at [MailMeArt.com](http://MailMeArt.com). Di Lieto lives in Leicestershire with his wife, son and two Lhasa Apso dogs.

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# - TABLE OF CONTENTS -

Introduction.....	1	Interview with <b>BEN O'BRIEN</b> .....	118
Interview with <b>ALEX AMELINES</b> .....	16	Interview with <b>KRISTIAN OLSON</b> .....	130
Interview with <b>JIM BRADSHAW</b> .....	28	Interview with <b>CHET PHILLIPS</b> .....	142
Interview with <b>SAMUEL CASAL</b> .....	40	Interview with <b>KAREEM RIZK</b> .....	152
Interview with <b>CATALINA ESTRADA</b> .....	52	Interview with <b>SAUERKIDS</b> .....	164
Interview with <b>MARK FRUDD</b> .....	62	Interview with <b>MICHAEL SLACK</b> .....	176
Interview with <b>DAN MAY</b> .....	74	Interview with <b>KHAMSAVAN MARTIN WIESNER</b> .....	186
Interview with <b>PETE McEVOY</b> .....	84	Interview with <b>TIM WOLFF</b> .....	200
Interview with <b>JEFF MIRACOLA</b> .....	96	Index of Contributors .....	213
Interview with <b>JACK NOEL</b> .....	108		

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# INTRODUCTION

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*Mail Me Art* is a collection of artistic work that artists across the globe sent as mail over a period of one year. The Mail Me Art project was intended to bring together a wide variety of people from around the world via the medium of mail art. Contributions came from the United Kingdom, North and South America, continental Europe, Scandinavia, Asia, Australia and New Zealand: a truly global collection of artists participated—professional and amateur, old and young. And a wide variety of media were used in an infinitely wider variety of styles. The work arrived on everything from postcards and envelopes to boxes and pieces of wood. Each participant's involvement has made the project a success, and an exhibit featuring all of the mail art, which will coincide with this book's publication, aims to give something back to all of the artists through exposure and possibly the sale of their work.

So, what is mail art? Also known as correspondence art, it originally came to the attention of the media

by way of the late pop artist Ray Johnson, who is often considered the father of the movement. At its simplest, it is a postcard, envelope or package that someone has intentionally decorated on the outside and sent through the post. Unlike regular mail, there is often nothing inside—if indeed there is an inside. If there is an inside, it is generally the least important part of the package. Is there a distinct point at which a piece of mail becomes a piece of mail art? Well, I would say that if you receive an envelope or parcel through the post and its appearance evokes some kind of emotional reaction—amusement or joy, anger or shock—without knowing who it is from or what's inside, then it can be called mail art. Unless, of course, you're only six years old and always look forward to getting mail because you've never received a bill and all you ever get are letters with money inside from Auntie Betty or Uncle Eric.

## **BUILDING PRESENCE AND INCENTIVE**

The idea for Mail Me Art began as a natural progression of the daily interaction I had with a large number of international illustrators. This interaction originated from being the founder and senior editor (along with Alex Amelines) of the online illustration news portal The Little Chimp Society (<http://thelittlechimpsociety.com>). The LCS is an international community of illustrators and artists that operates through a website of the same name. It provides a news portal for the illustration industry and is a celebration of the work the contributors create and post on the site. The LCS is now nearly in its third year and its fifth incarnation, and since its realization in 2006, it has gone from strength to strength. I hoped the mail art project would enable me to strengthen the ties I already had with the community by breaking the restrictions of the Internet and trading in pixels. The idea for the project had been at the back of my mind, persistently sneaking to the

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front every so often, for almost a year before anything was put into action. However, it didn't take that long to get started because the plan wasn't ready. For this project to work, I needed the additional time to build my presence within the illustration community. People only knew me or of me because of the LCS—although the LCS had been recognized as a success, it was still relatively new at the time. I needed people to trust me, and on the Internet trust doesn't come easily, especially when you're the new kid on the block. I needed to establish myself before I started asking people to put their time and effort into my little project.

Along the path to becoming established, I had already interviewed illustrators and artists and published these interviews for all to read and enjoy on the LCS. In the course of these communications, I told a few of the interviewees about the project I was planning. One of the things I mentioned was that, from the outset, I wanted the people who contributed mail art to get something out of the project. I didn't want to sell them the "free publicity" line that others so often use. Some of the interviewees were kind enough to offer advice, and some of them even sent me items that could be used to help promote the project.

Jon Burgerman, one of the first people who agreed to be interviewed for the LCS, was also one of the first to send me something I could use toward the promotion of the project. He contributed an original doodle and some postcards sent in an envelope that just by chance had a doodle on the front next to my address. Just having his name associated with the project was a fantastic

way to get the Mail Me Art ball rolling. I decided that Mr. Burgerman's doodle would be offered as a prize to the contributor of a piece of mail art that would be chosen by a big name illustrator or person of standing in the illustration community. Originally I considered putting together an amazing goody bag full of unique prizes that would get bigger as the project went along, but in the end it made more sense to give away one prize each month. The tactic of having each month's submissions judged and prizes awarded would allow me to link well-known people within the industry to the project, even if they had no time to contribute mail art themselves. I hoped this would give the project more credibility through the trust people had in the judge and give artists something to aim toward and achieve with the winning of a prize. Even before I started to publicize Mail Me Art, illustrators like Nate Williams, James Yang, Andy Smith, Jeremyville and Bob Dob, to name but a few, had sent items I could use as prizes. I knew that the involvement of people well-known within the creative industry would help the project gain attention.

So now when people submitted a pieces of mail art, they had a chance to win a fantastic (and in some cases, unique) prize. But I felt that running the project in this way—i.e., offering a prize to those whose work was selected—made me as bad as those companies that want people to work "on spec," encouraging illustrators or designers to submit work without pay in the hope that they will garner a particular job. Often large companies disguise speculative work as a national or international competition with a large prize or even just the recognition of winning. It's just not right that they

expect large numbers of people to work for free and then only reward the individual whose work they decide to use. Any respected agency, designer or illustrator would require payment for their time and not just their output. Running a speculative competition is just an excuse for taking advantage of people desperate to find work in a highly competitive market. I wanted to avoid all this nonsense with my project and make it clear that both the artist and the work's value were appreciated.

As an incentive and to encourage people to keep track of the project, I scanned in the work as it arrived and posted it on the Mail Me Art website (<http://MailMeArt.com>) for all to see, with links to the contributors' own websites if they had one. After a few months this became increasingly time-consuming. At one point my wife completely took over maintaining the website, a job which consisted of one to two hours of scanning and updating a day. Running a project of this nature isn't for the faint of heart. I wanted the mail art that was posted on the website to look its best. I wanted to promote quality, but I also wanted the project to remain open to the general public, so everything I received was posted on the site.

I knew that running a project that used mail in the form of art wasn't an original idea—other mail art collectives and communities existed—but it wasn't until after Mail Me Art had begun and submissions started to arrive that I began looking at other mail art projects to see what they were doing. What they all had in common was one restriction: The mail art had to be a standard postcard size, or it had to at least fit through an ordinary letterbox. It soon became apparent to me that putting restric-

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tions on the size and format of the submissions might have been a good idea. You can imagine how difficult it is to translate the look of a fantastic three-dimensional object, for example, to a clean, small, single website image without losing the impact the original created. I simply didn't have the right setup to cater to recording such work without it losing something, although I was tempted to video the mail art and showcase it that way.

Part of me thought it would be sensible to limit the size of the work with regard to being able to reproduce it for the website and book (and not having to make trips to the local post office to pick up submissions when I wasn't at home to receive them). But the other part of me was thinking about the 3-D environment of an exhibition. I wanted people to challenge themselves and be creative. The majority of the contributors are professional illustrators and artists, and leaving them with the option to have fun with a three-dimensional object made things a little more interesting. However, storage did become something of a problem as the number of submissions moved into the hundreds and ranged in size from 8cm-long (3.1 inches) envelopes to meter-long (3.28 foot) pieces of cardboard!

A number of the contributors had amazing skills and put a lot of work into their mail art and while I wanted this commitment to quality, I still needed everyone to feel that they could take part. I received a large number of submissions from amateur and leisure artists as well as children, who took part just for the fun of it. I think that the breadth of people involved, from professionals to kids, helped the project reach a wider audience than it may have otherwise, so I think the open invitation

worked well. Mail Me Art was an enterprise trying to get the attention of the creative industry, as well as entice a larger market to take notice.

### **ANSWERING THE MONEY QUESTION**

Getting back to how mail art contributors would get something out of the project: It was simple really; I'd sell their original mail art at the end of the project and send them the money. I did ponder the idea of creating prints from the work instead, but it made more sense to hold an exhibition rather than offer the artists a percentage from sales of prints. Having the actual work for sale and exhibiting it was a more enticing idea and provided an additional incentive to take part. But now I had a problem: who would pay for the show? Normally, in the case of group gallery shows, the artists themselves contribute to the costs, but Mail Me Art consisted of an international community, so this just wasn't a viable option. And I had already paid for the hosting of the project's website, as well as the postage for the delivery of the prizes, so I didn't want the added expense.

It made sense to find a sponsor for the exhibition; I would have someone pay for the show, and the sponsor would get a large amount of advertising from the project in return. The problem was that sponsoring a project like Mail Me Art requires quite a large investment. Depending on the sponsor, our core press coverage might be less inclined to cover the project due to a conflict of interest. If any one of the creative magazine periodicals had sponsored us, the others would be less inclined to write news items about us,

hence less coverage. In addition, at no time did I take into account the considerable amount of man-hours needed to run and organize everything. I didn't have the time to actively pursue a sponsor, and because of the hand-drawn nature of mail art, I was limited in the type of companies the project would appeal to. Fashion or service companies like FedEx or the post office may have been interested due to the tangible nature of mail art, but businesses that promote online and digital service may not. At the end of the day, this project would have made good on its promise to hold an exhibition regardless of a book contract or additional funding, but I really didn't want to sell my laptop or computer in order to fund it if I could help it! You never know—a sponsor may yet come forward before the exhibition.

I decided it would be a good idea and better use of my time if the mail art project became self-funding. A book showcasing the mail art seemed the only option, and proceeds from the book could pay for the exhibition. I considered this the best choice, because a book was only a step away from organizing and cataloging the project, which I would have to do at some point for the exhibition. So if nothing else, combining the funding, book and exhibition was good time management. After I was fortunate enough to gain HOW Books as my publisher, the task of selecting mail art for inclusion in the book began. Sadly, a number of the pieces did not include the artist's contact details, sometimes not even a name, which meant I had no way to obtain signed consent so their work could be published. Those pieces will be seen only at the exhibition along with all the hundreds of other pieces that didn't make the book.



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it inside another envelope. I told her briefly about the project, but in the end she didn't seem convinced. She just put the stamp on and gave me a weird look."

I also asked Nick if he thought it was right of me to force illustrators to be more careless with their artwork by making it mandatory to expose it to the perils of the postal system in order to be part of the project. His reply was this: "Carelessness is what we should strive for. It can be extremely hard to keep your work fresh, so anything that encourages that is positive. We can be too precious."

Very sadly a number of submissions never made it into my possession. Two notable pieces that never arrived were a large box from the Ireland-based illustrator Steve Simpson and another smaller box from the talented Canadian printmaker John Antoski. Fortunately, they both had photographed their mail art and were able to e-mail photos of the work to me. It is still a great shame that they will not be part of the exhibition. I wonder how many other pieces were lost; I guess I'll never know.

## **SURMOUNTING THE UNPLANNED**

For some reason I thought Mail Me Art would be a simple project to run, but when it came to the reality of the project, things just weren't that simple. Planning my wedding was a stroll in the park in comparison; for starters guests don't knock on your door every morning, unlike the postman, nor do you need to find storage for them for the next thirty-six months! And I'm not even going to think about trying to squeeze a rela-

tive onto a flatbed scanner. However, I must point out that I didn't always make it easy for the participants either. I originally pegged Mail Me Art as the "ongoing mail art project," but six months into it I decided to introduce a deadline in order to give me time to write this book and plan the exhibition.

Another unforeseen problem was that I moved house not once, but twice. This wasn't too much of a problem because I was able to set up a postal forwarding service and inform everyone involved of the updates. I was even able to check for post at the old addresses in person on the odd occasion. But people were posting their mail art on their blogs and websites all over the Internet, and many of them displayed the old addresses, which in turn left it open for people to assume those were the correct addresses. I did what I could to make sure everything went to the right place. I gave as much notice as possible before moving, but I know that for some artists the address was an integral part of the art, which meant they had spent weeks incorporating an address that was out-of-date. It would have made sense to set up a post office box at the start of the project, but I was trying to keep costs to a minimum, and the house-moving situation didn't crop up until after the project had begun. Besides, the postal staff would have had a problem squeezing some of the mail art packages into a small post office box! Some suggested that I should have had all of the mail art sent to my office. This would have solved a lot of problems—if I had an office; but I work from home and always have. My house doesn't have an office or a studio, nor do I work in the bedroom like the musician Moby did before he had a hit (my wife has that space). I

basically live and work under the stairs with two small dogs sleeping in between the computer cables under my desk. Since I started the project, my living room has been full of mail art, along with the hundreds of art books and comics that I own. It is not an ideal situation, but until a house that offers me an adequate work space is within reach, I'll have to make do with what I have. (On the plus side, having limited space has enabled me to develop my working practice to the point where I'm able to run all of my operations from any computer in any place that has an Internet connection. Right now I'm sitting in front of my laptop at my local library listening to Linkin Park on my personal stereo while writing this paragraph.)

## **CHATTING WITH ARTISTS**

To provide a greater insight into the project through this book, I interviewed Mail Me Art's contributing artists about their work and motives. Many of them were kind enough to answer a few questions and comment on their involvement with the venture. Unfortunately there is not the space to include every response, but as many as possible have been included. I've interspersed responses throughout the book alongside the images of the artist's work. I hope that doing so will give a feel for the international illustration community.

As I come to the end of my ramblings, I must acknowledge one illustrator I mentioned earlier in the book. He helped the project along more than he knew by lending his name and his marker pen antics to a mail art project, that without the right people cheering it on, might never have seen the light of day. The illustrator



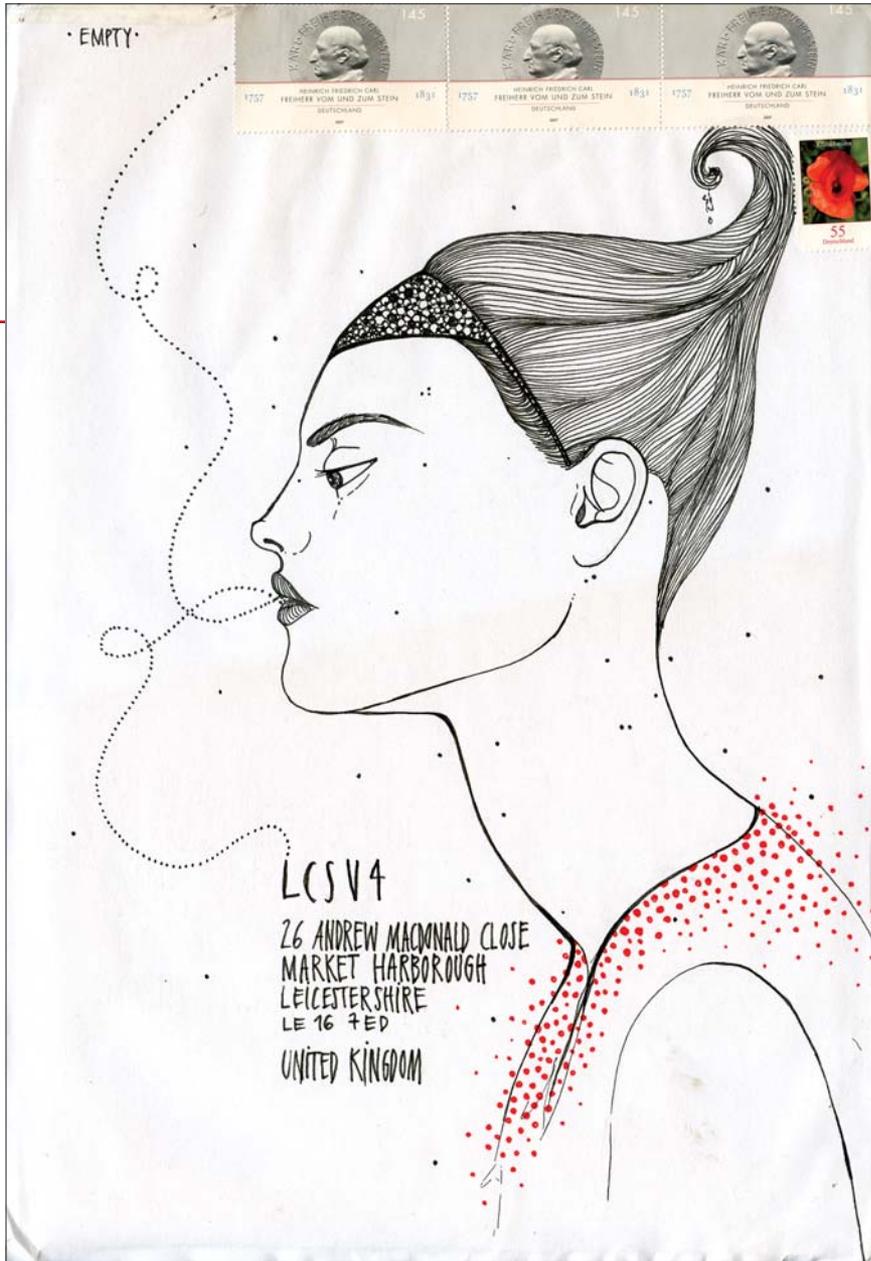
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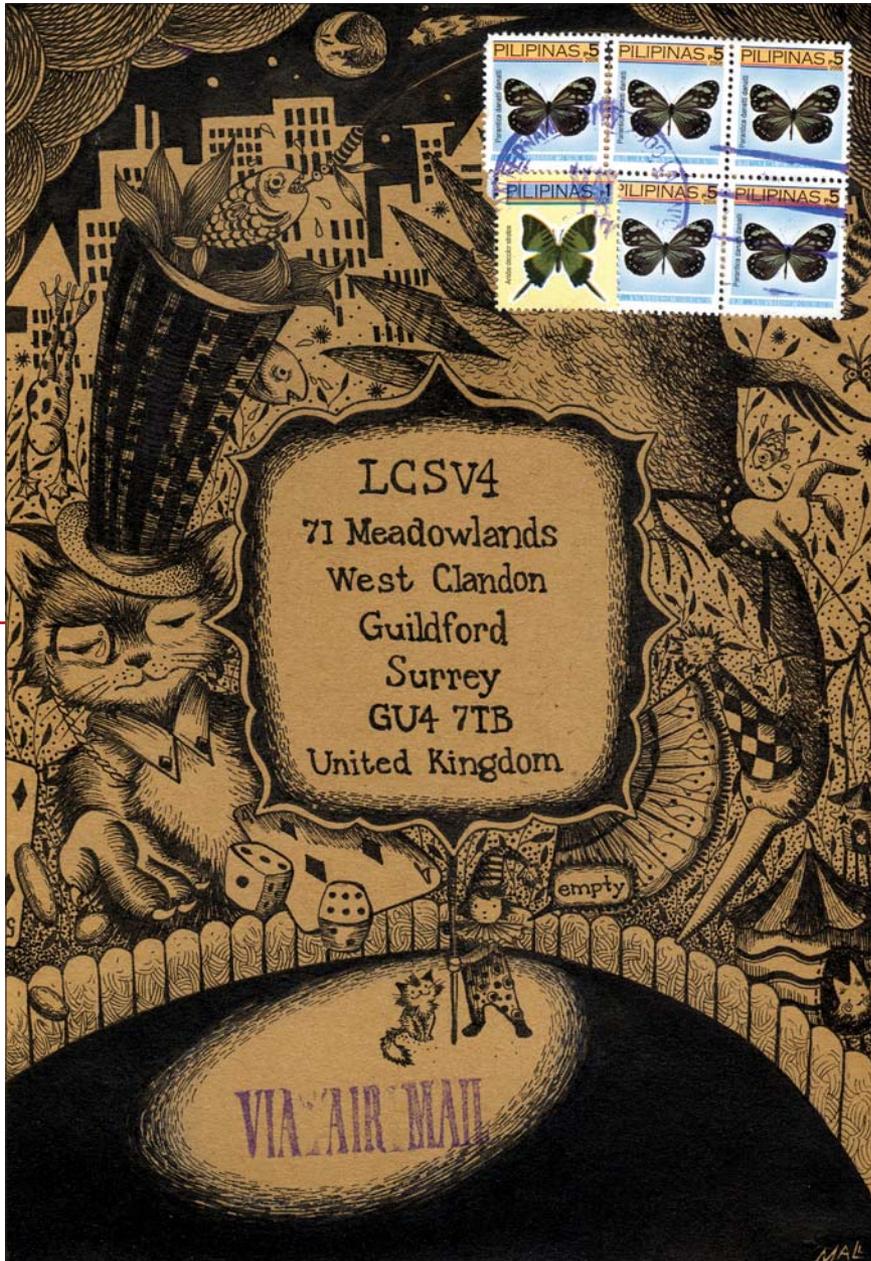


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# JIM BRADSHAW

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Jim Bradshaw grew up in the New Jersey shore area. Art has always been a big part of his life and the world, and from the beginning anything creative has fascinated him. As an art director, the bulk of his time is spent making money, whatever other time he can squeeze out of his day is reserved for what he really loves. He is working on changing that.



## **Why did you choose to take part in the Mail Me Art project?**

I always loved doing little doodles and messages on mail. The idea of doing a full-blown illustration and sending it across the world with a bunch of killer talented people was really cool. It's an honor and privilege that I just couldn't pass up.

## **What was the inspiration for your submission?**

I started with elements from my sketchbooks, and then the creative juices took over.

## **Does your submission reflect your usual style of work? If not, why did you decide to do things differently?**

It was my usual style, but I had to change my technique because I had been mostly digital up to that point. It challenged me and has been infectious. My work has been evolving in unexpected ways since then.

## **Were you worried that your work may be stolen while in transit?**

I thought about it, but it didn't worry me.

## **What value would you put on your work?**

Millions, of course. I shouldn't have said that because I need to be dead to pull in that kind of dough.

## **Have you ever sent mail art prior to taking part in this project?**

Yes, but not at the level of this project. Like I mentioned, I always love doodling and cartooning on anything, including mail.

## **If you had the opportunity to receive mail art from any artist or illustrator, living or deceased, who would it be?**

I hate these kinds of questions because who can narrow it down to just one? Oh, the agony. All right. Living: Joe Sorren. Deceased: Claude Monet. I know. That's two. I'm an artist, not a mathematician.

## **What would be contained inside your perfect parcel?**

An original *Krazy Kat* strip by George Herriman.



U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
MULLICA HILL, NJ  
08062  
APR 17, '07  
AMOUNT  
**\$3.35**  
0000 00122 00036033-04

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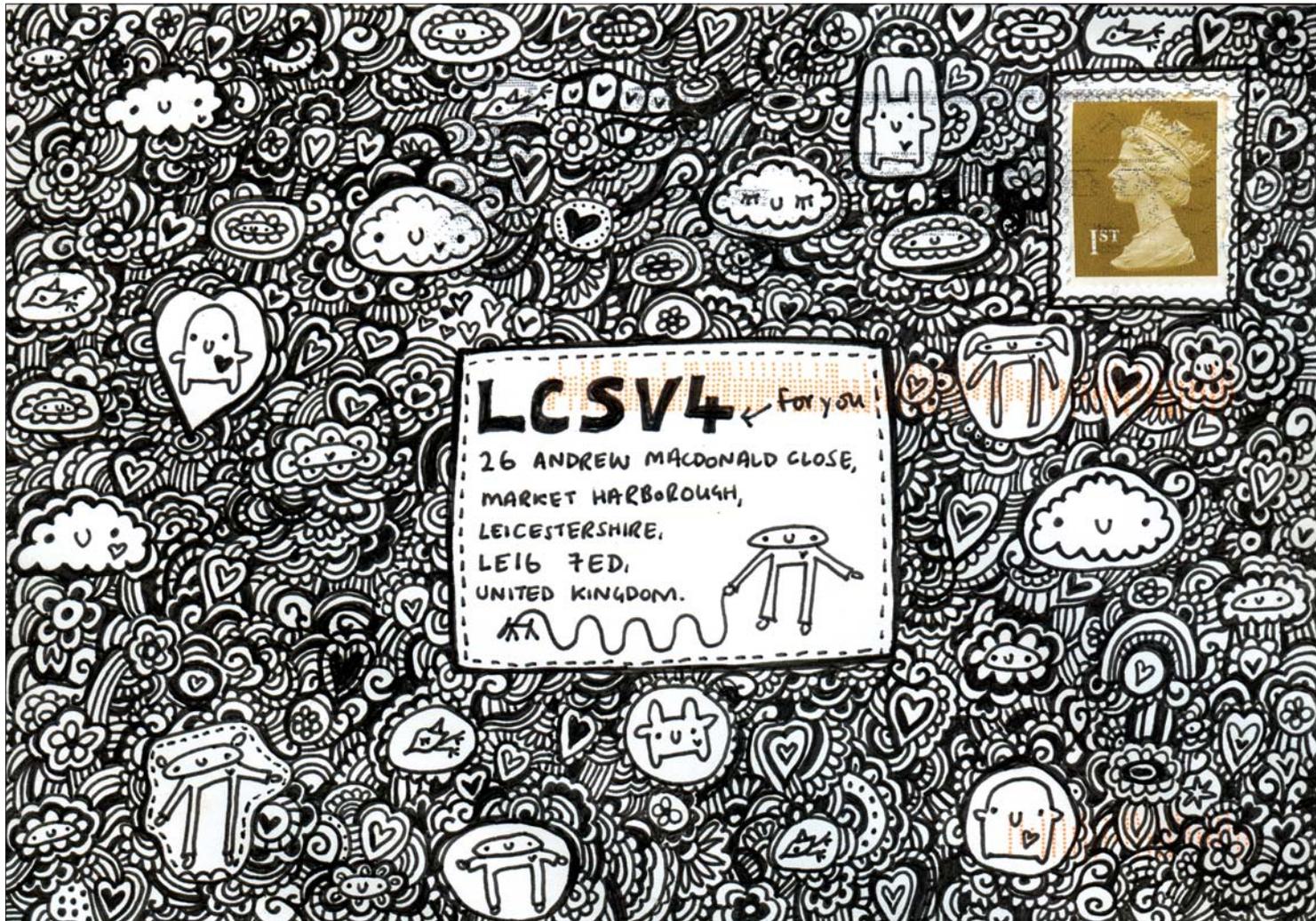




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JORGE BERNARDINO

Portugal



# SAMUEL CASAL

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Samuel Casal was born in 1974 and is a freelancer illustrator. He lives in Brazil and uses vector software to produce his illustrations. Casal also makes linoleum carvings, and his work has been published in books, newspapers and magazines in Brazil and other countries. When Samuel isn't working, he likes playing his guitar and tattooing his friends.



## **Why did you choose to take part in the Mail Me Art project?**

I thought it was a very cool project, because the art stays on the outside of the package and everybody can see it and think, "What's in this envelope?"

## **What was the inspiration for your submission?**

Nothing, I just put my carving tools to work.

## **Does your submission reflect your usual style of work? If not, why did you decide to do things differently?**

Yes, I love to use a lot of black-and-white art and wood-carvings.

## **Were you worried that your work may be stolen while in transit?**

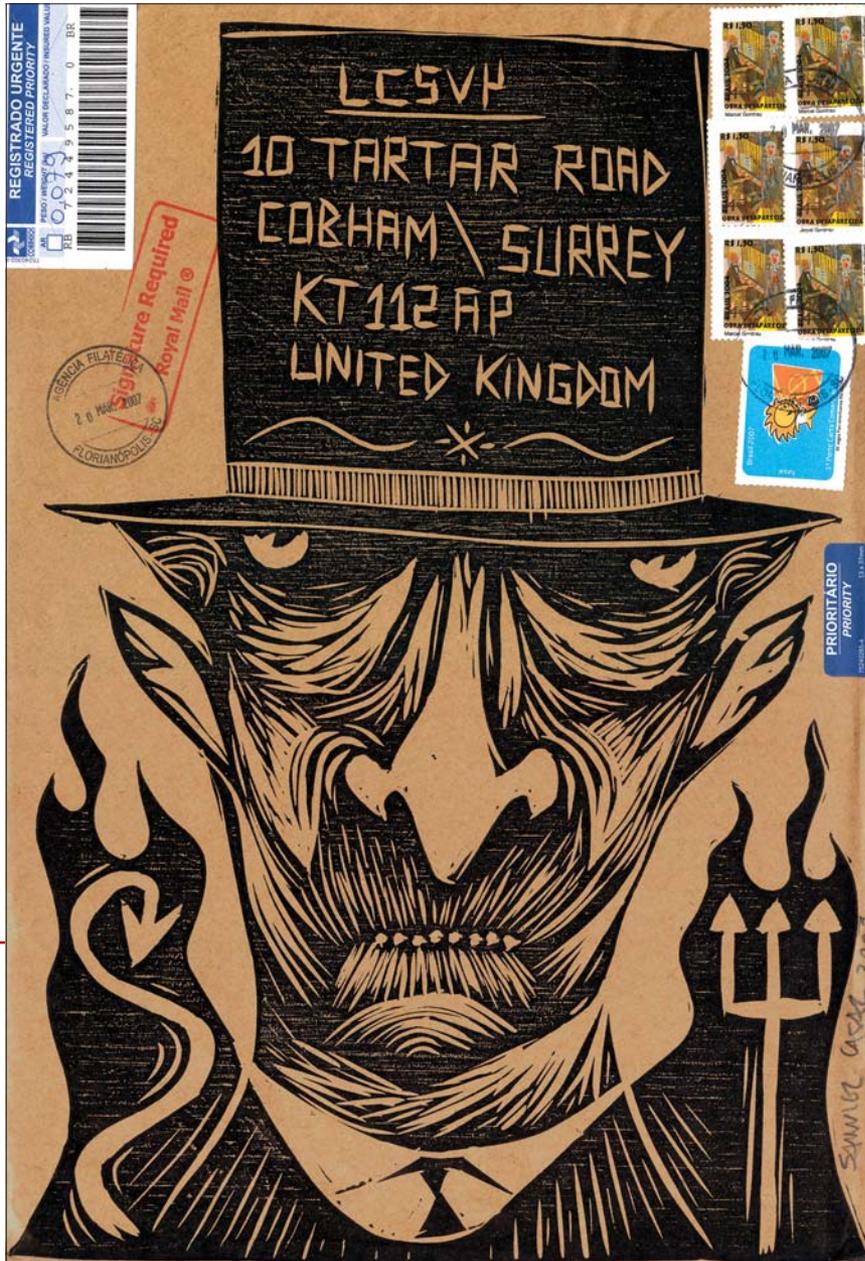
If it was stolen, I think the person that stole it would put it on their wall and think, "Wow, it's mine! I have a masterpiece!" Ehehehe.

## **What value would you put on your work?**

Zillions of euros.

## **If you had the opportunity to receive mail art from any artist or illustrator, living or deceased, who would it be?**

José Guadalupe Posada.



**SAMUEL CASAL**

Brazil

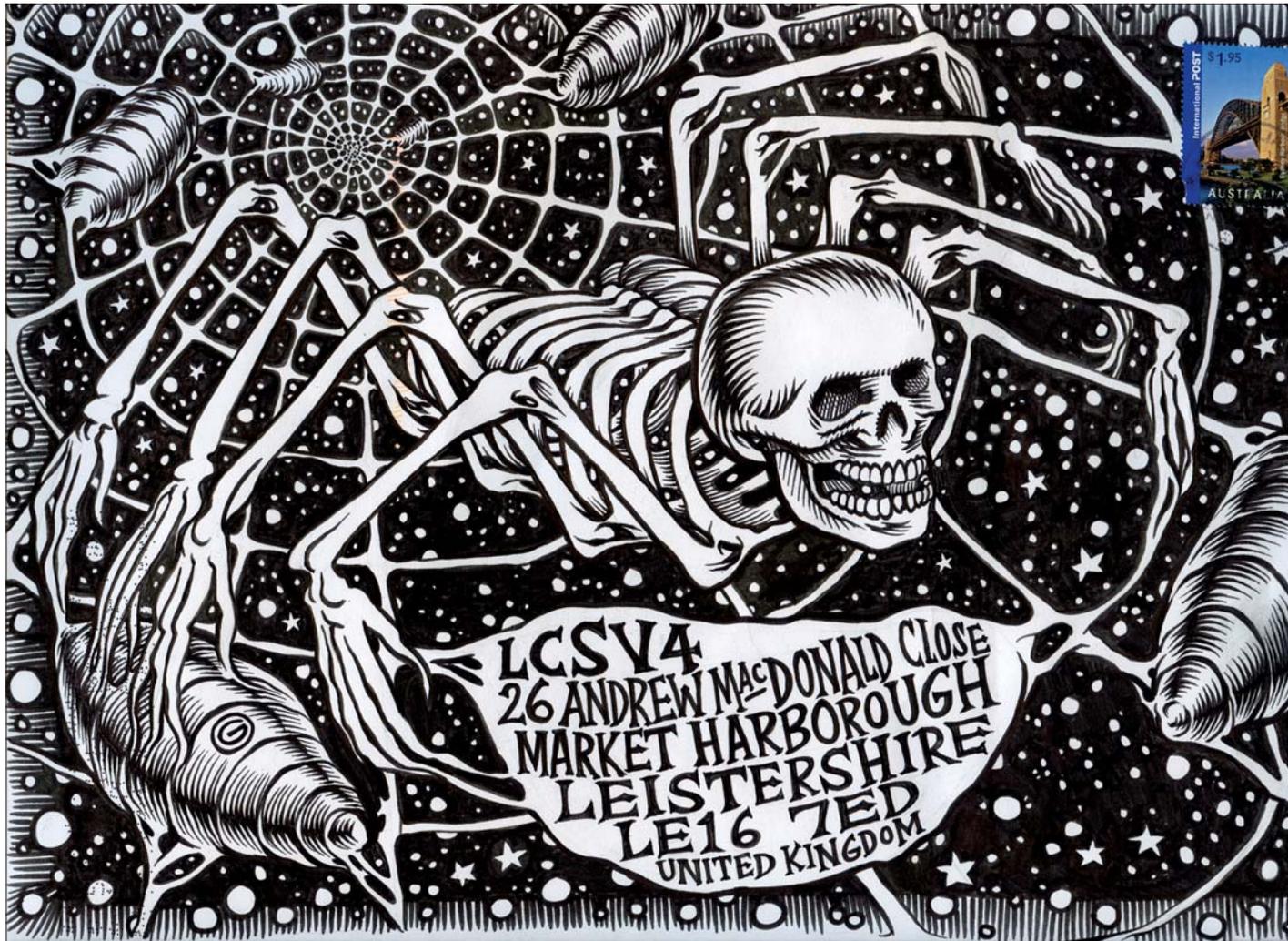
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**CHRIS THORNLEY**

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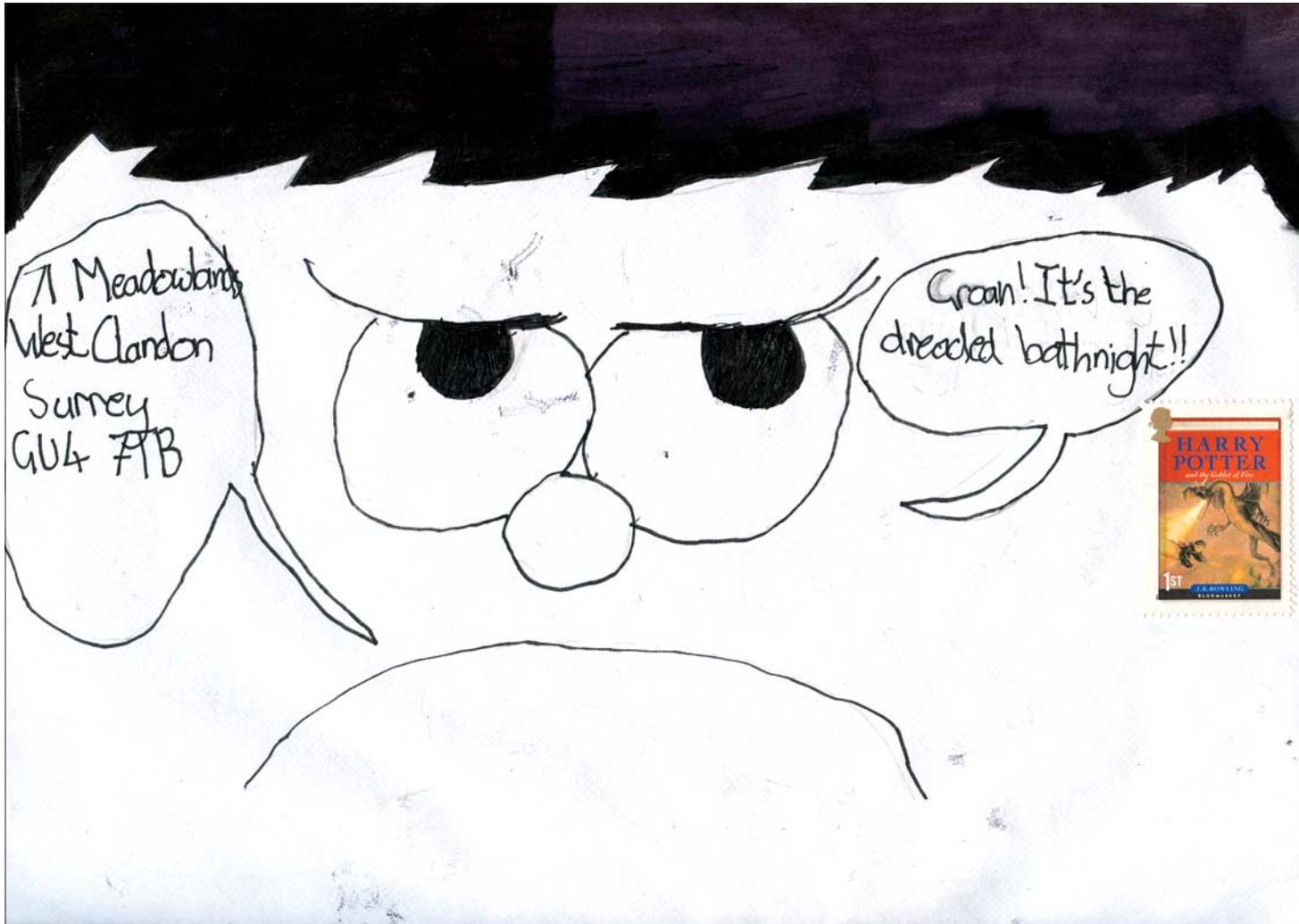


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**JACK DI LIETO-DANES**

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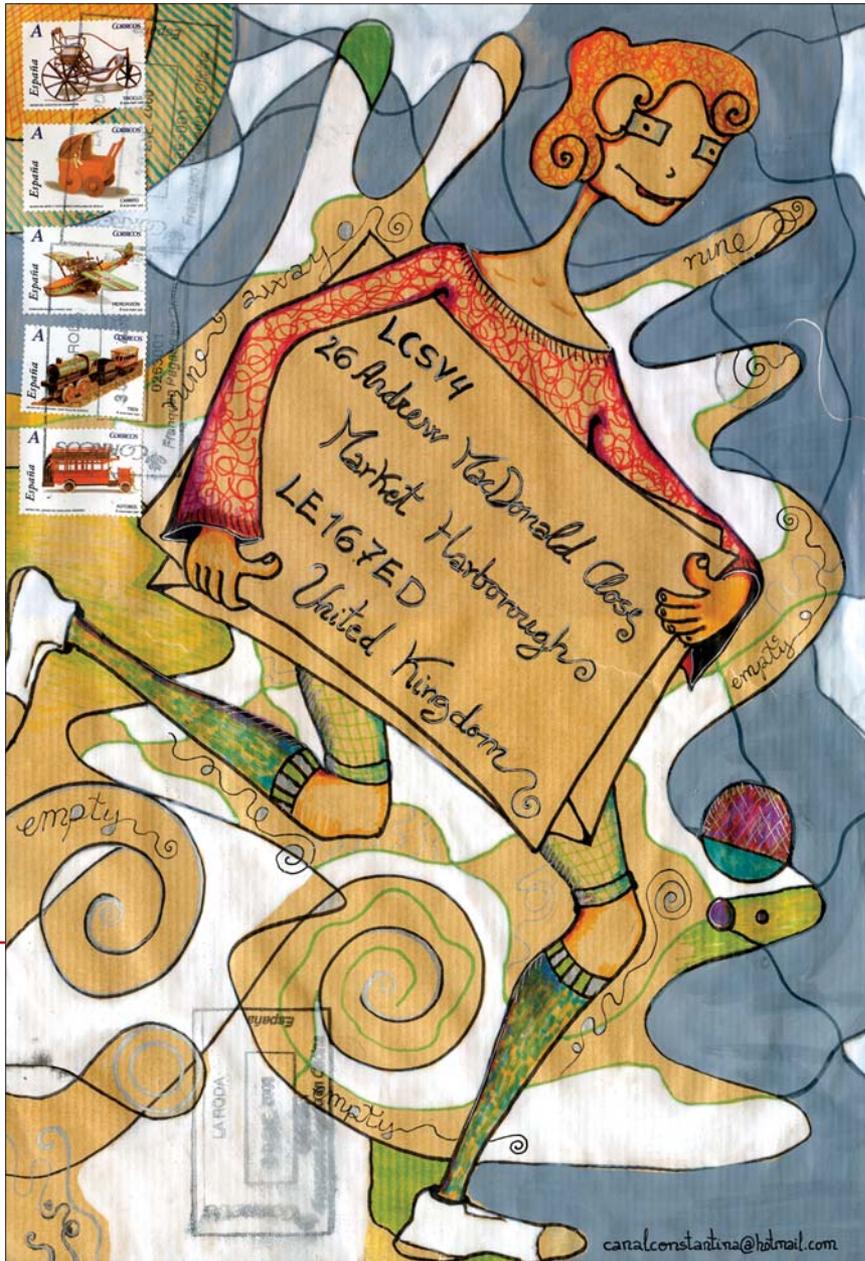


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United Kingdom

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**MONTSE HERRAIZ**

Spain



**LUISA URIBE**

United Kingdom



# MARK FRUDD

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Mark Frudd spent several years working within a UK design and marketing company. He moved into freelance illustration in 2005 after relocating to America but returned to England during the summer of 2007. Mark is now focusing on his freelance career and has received commissions from many important clients.



## **Why did you choose to take part in the Mail Me Art project?**

It was a really good idea that I wanted to support; I only wish I had submitted more. In fact, I'm going to do one now.

## **What was the inspiration for your submission?**

I was living and working in America at the time, and the piece was all about the envelope flying across the Atlantic Ocean.

## **Does your submission reflect your usual style of work? If not, why did you decide to do things differently?**

A little bit. I used paint for a change to make it more of a limited, one-off piece of art.

## **What value would you put on your work?**

The price of the stamp.

## **If you had the opportunity to receive mail art from any artist or illustrator, living or deceased, who would it be?**

Joe Morse.

## **What would be contained inside your perfect parcel?**

The meaning of life.



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**KAROSHI**

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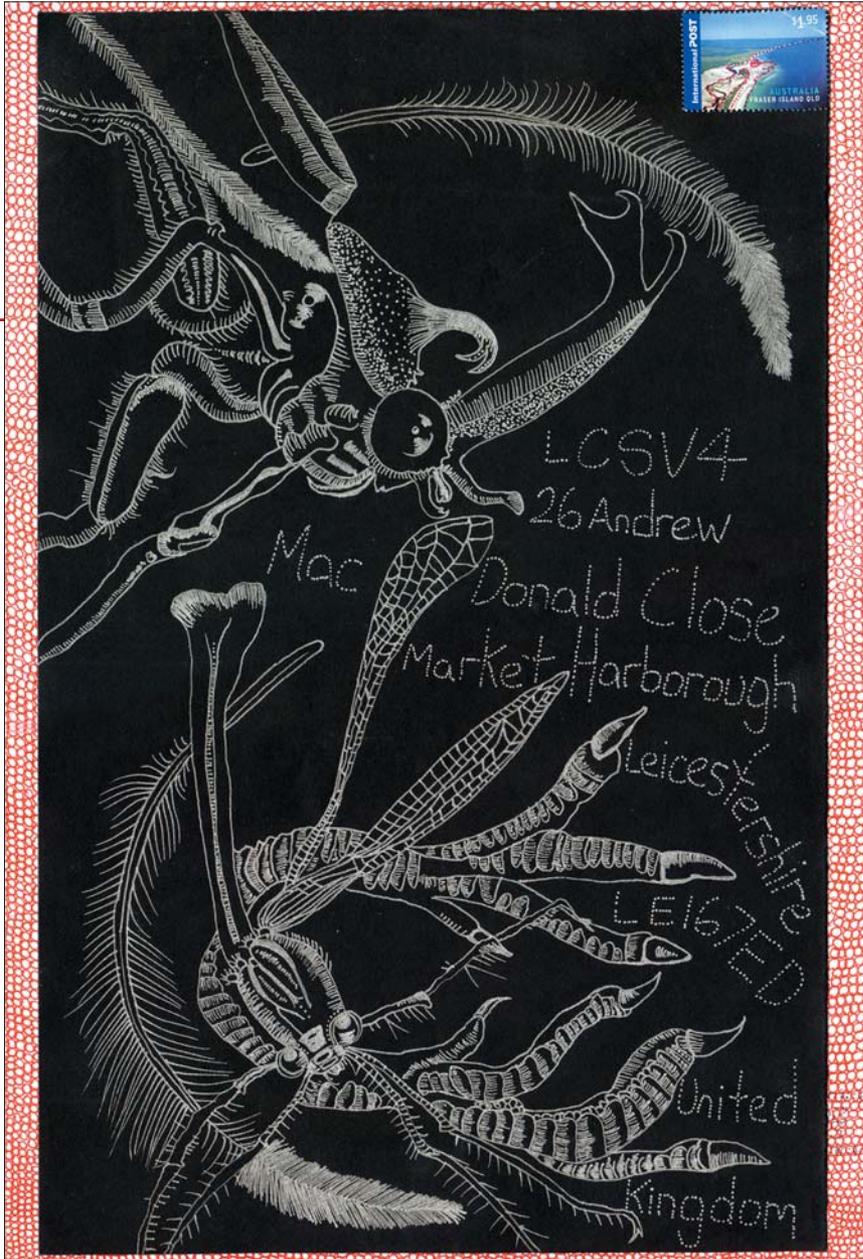
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**GINA MONACO**

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**RIOT68**

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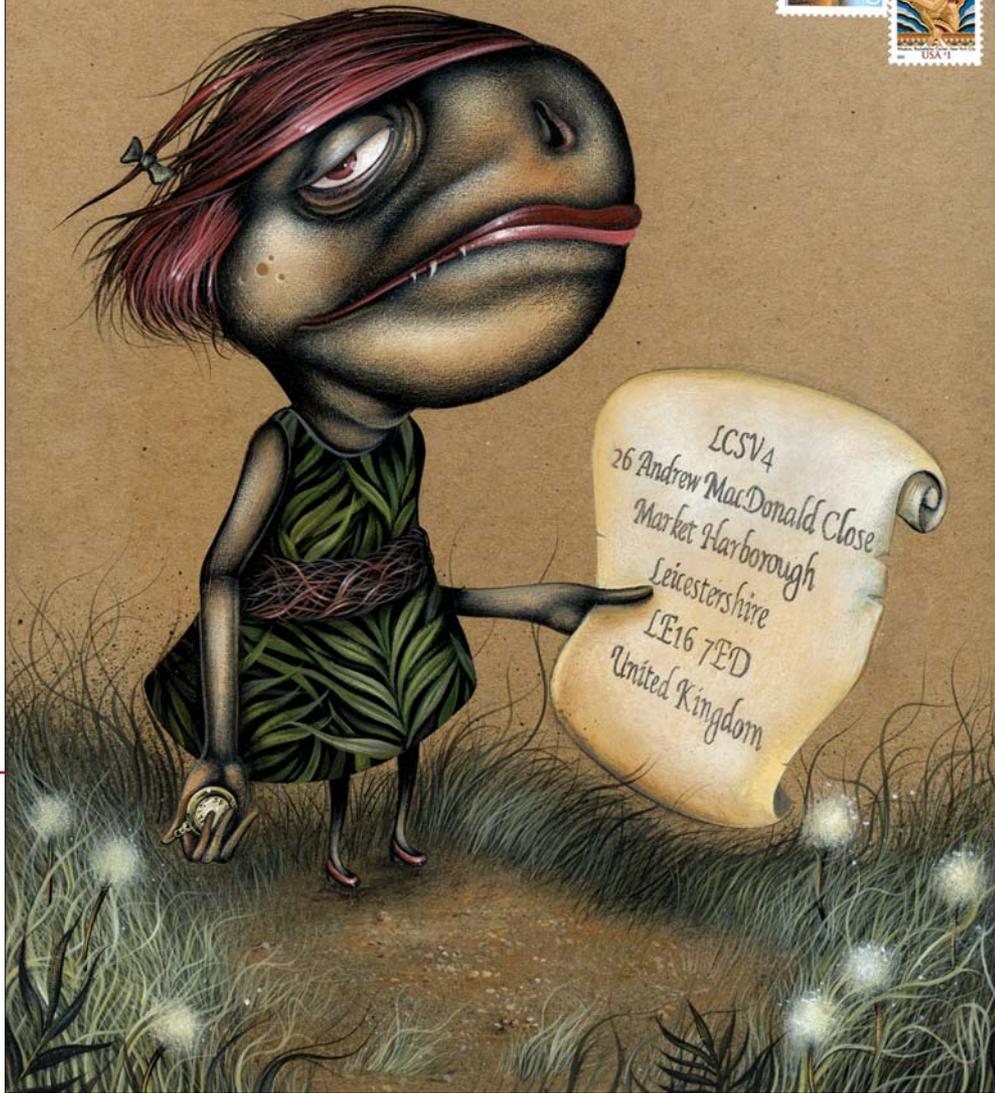
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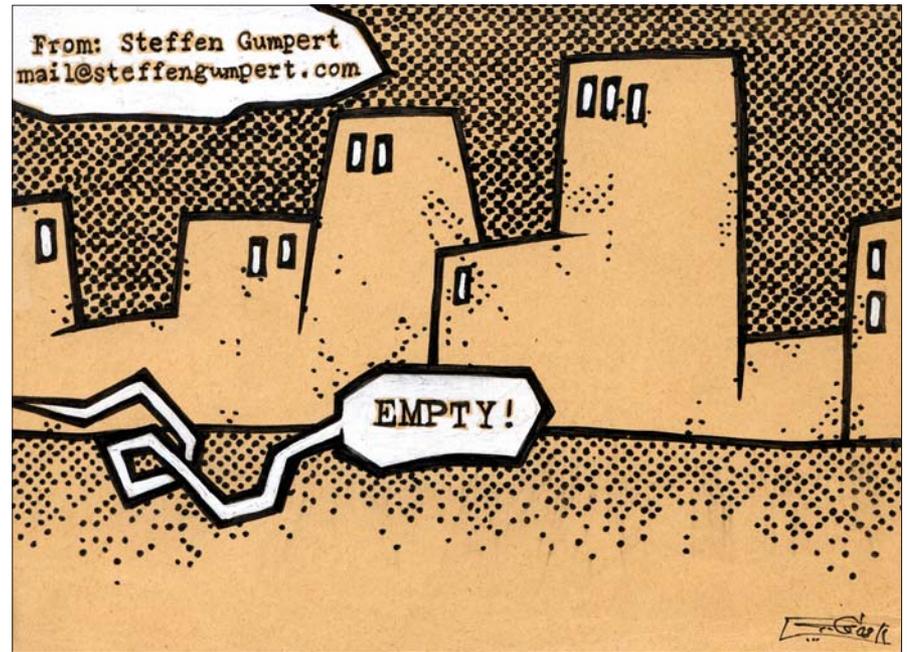


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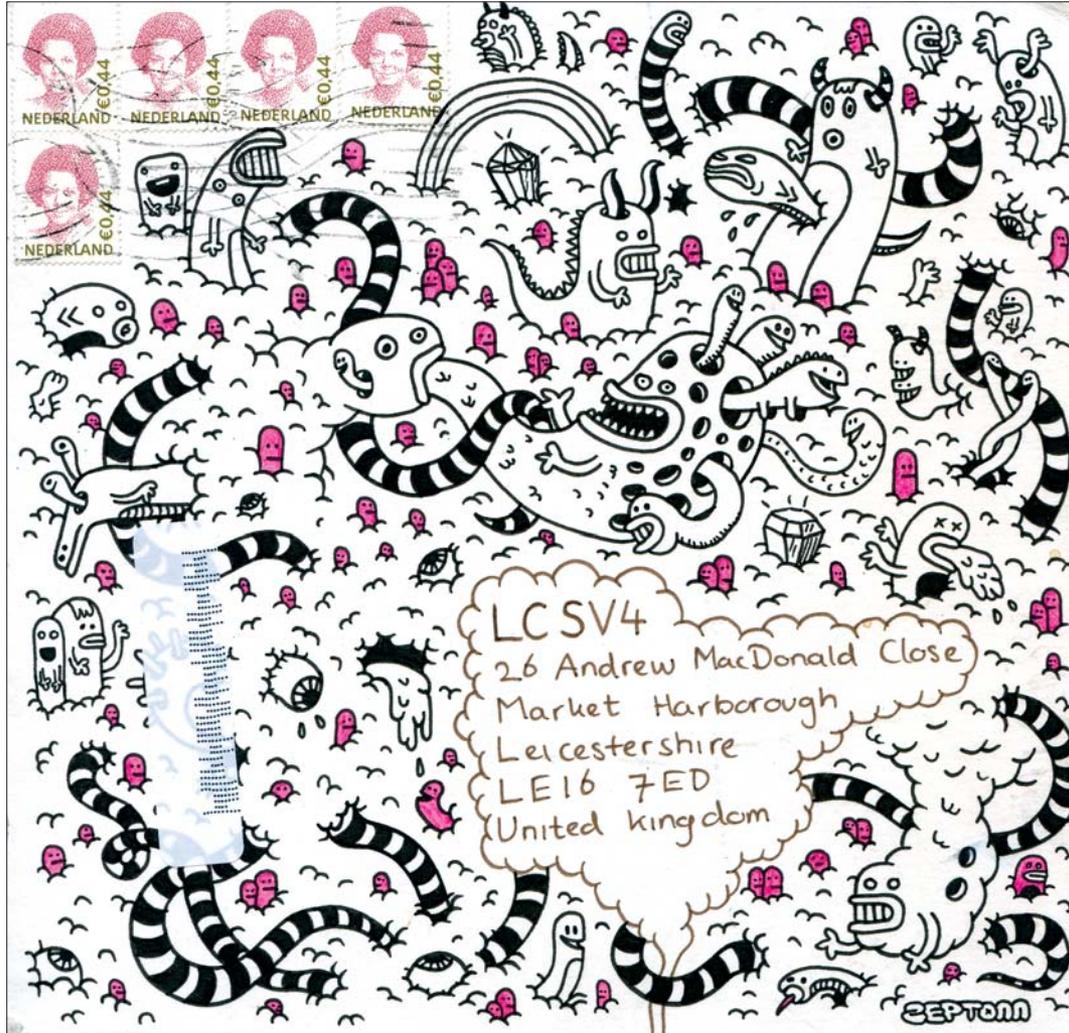


**ANNA MULLIN (SNEAKY)**

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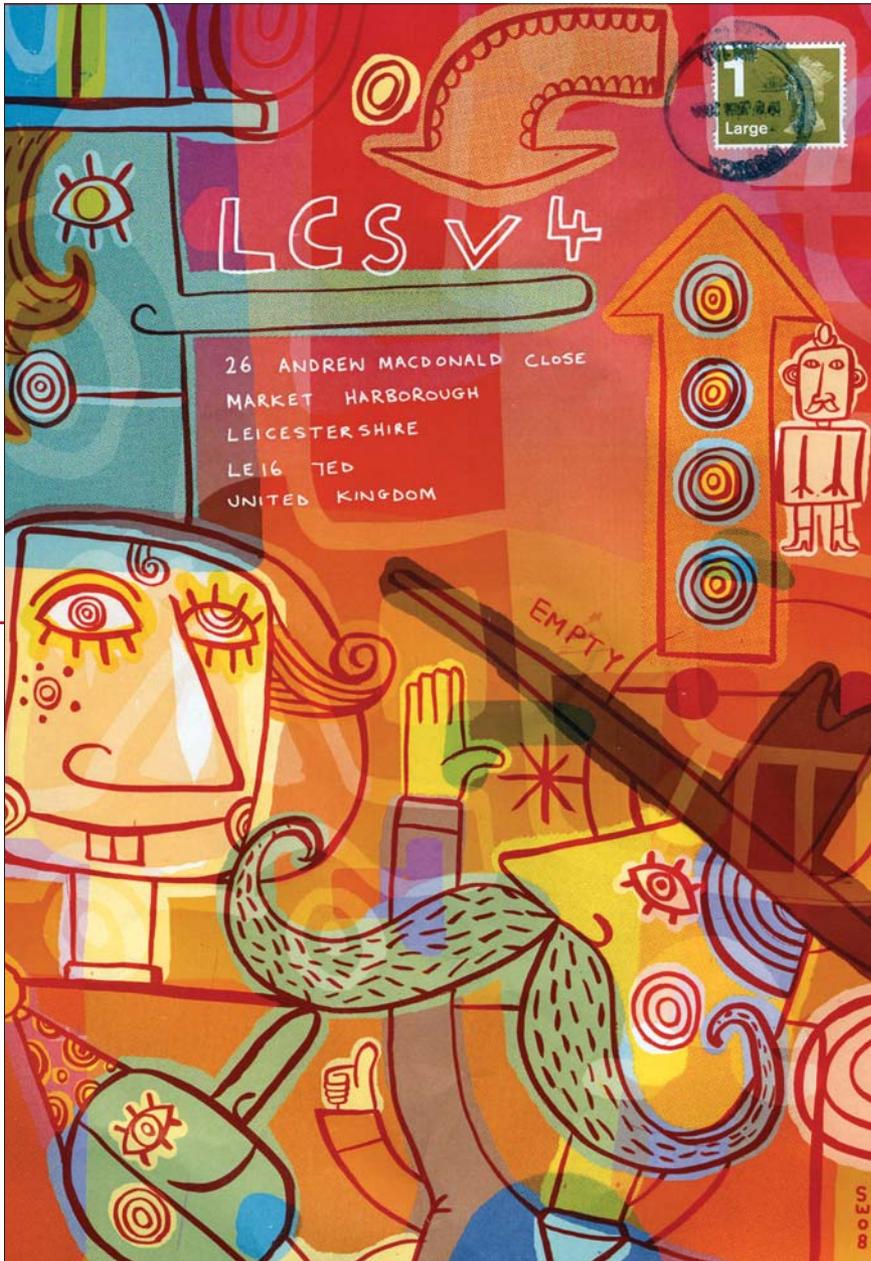




**ZEPTONN**

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**SIMON WILD**

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# PETE McEVoy

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Pete McEvoy has been a designer and illustrator for the past three years, and his influences include computer games, packaging design and cartoons. He currently works as a motion graphics designer in his hometown of Dublin, Ireland.



## **Why did you choose to take part in the Mail Me Art project?**

I love taking part in big projects that other illustrators get involved in! I thought it might be a chance to correspond with some other artists.

## **What was the inspiration for your submission?**

Packaging design and those paper toys I used to make in play school.

## **Does your submission reflect your usual style of work?**

### **If not, why did you decide to do things differently?**

It reflected the style of work I was doing at the time. I try to change my style the minute I get bored with it.

## **Were you worried that your work may be stolen while in transit?**

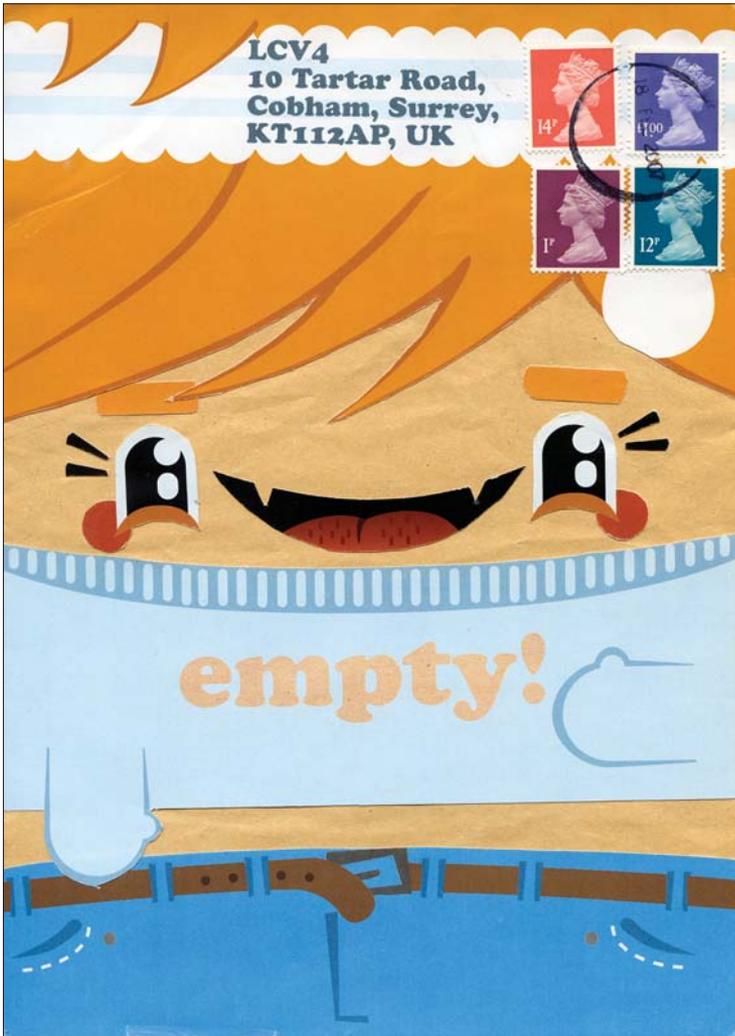
Not really. I would have sent another!

## **What value would you put on your work?**

Let's see ... I think the envelope and letter cost around 3 pound sterling (approximately \$6 USD). I'm back in Ireland now, so will we call it €4.50 (about \$7 USD).

## **What would be contained inside your perfect parcel?**

A letter from God or a drawing from R. Crumb.

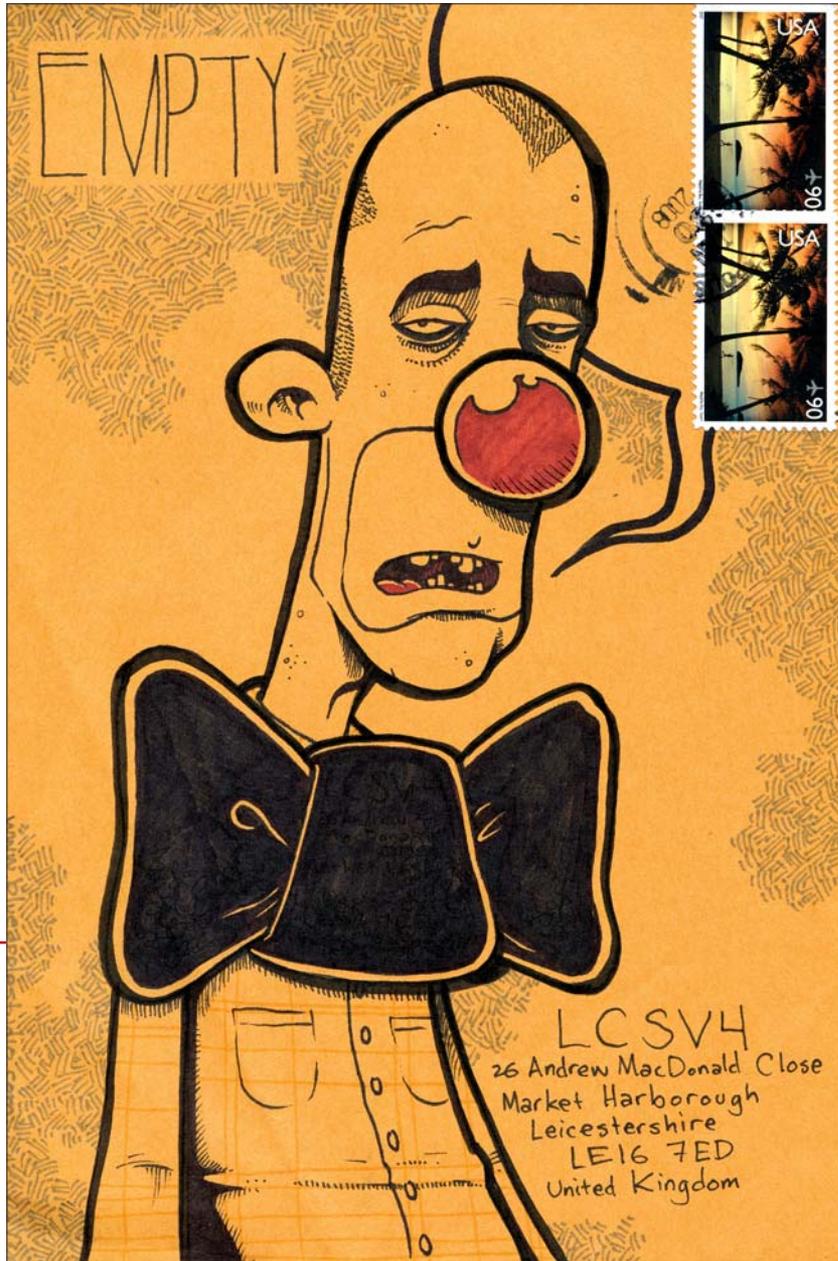


**PETE McEVOY**

Ireland

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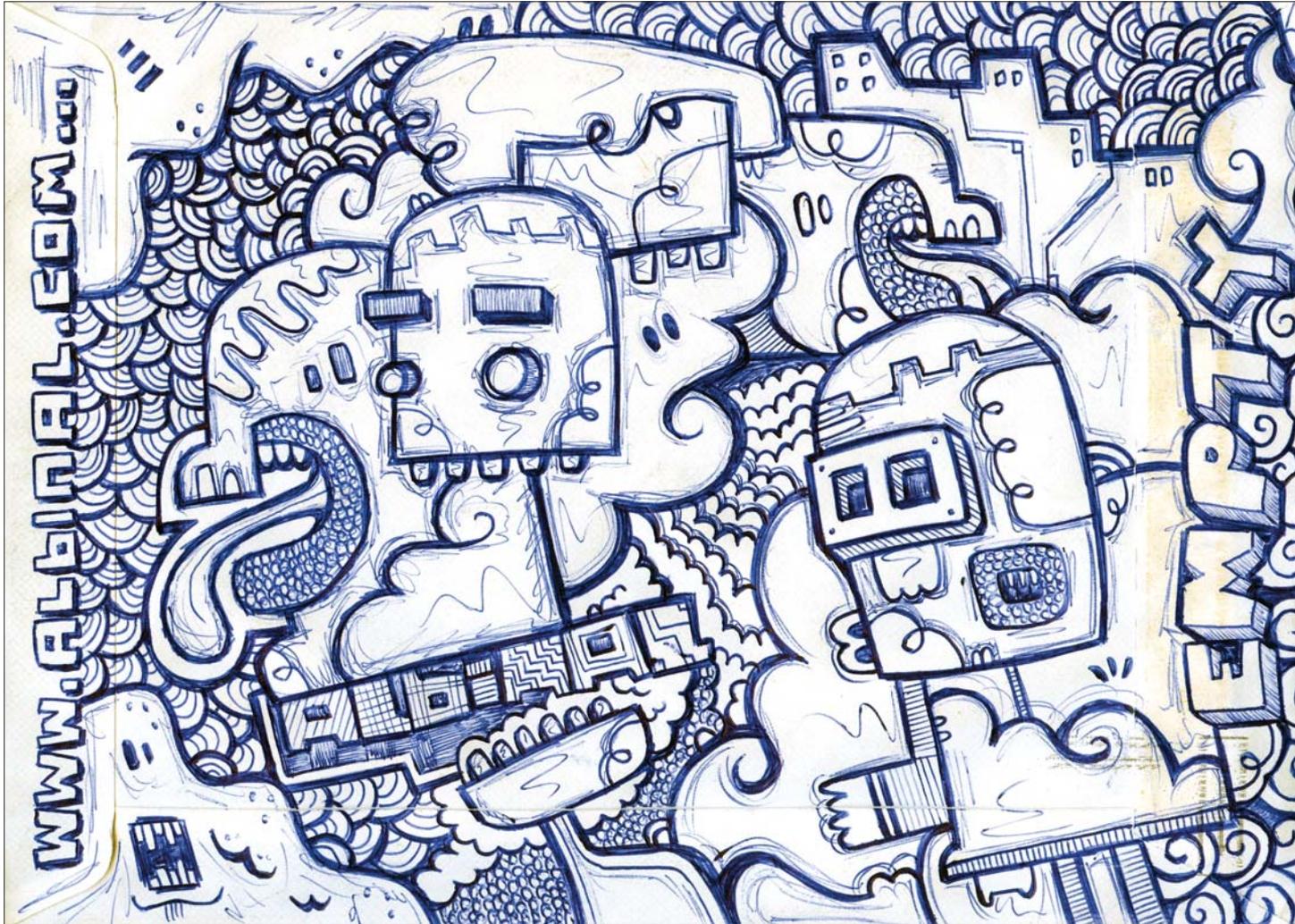


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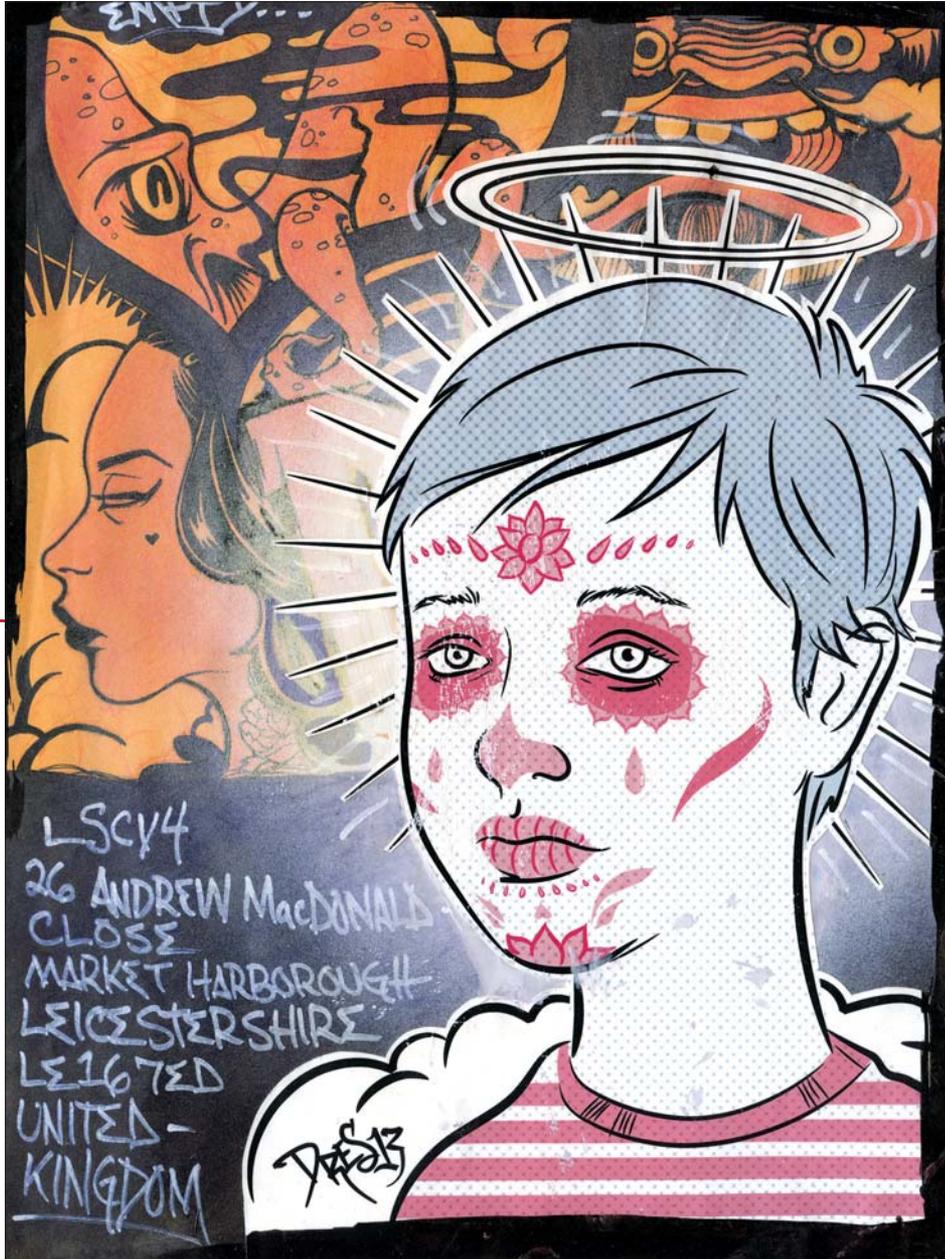
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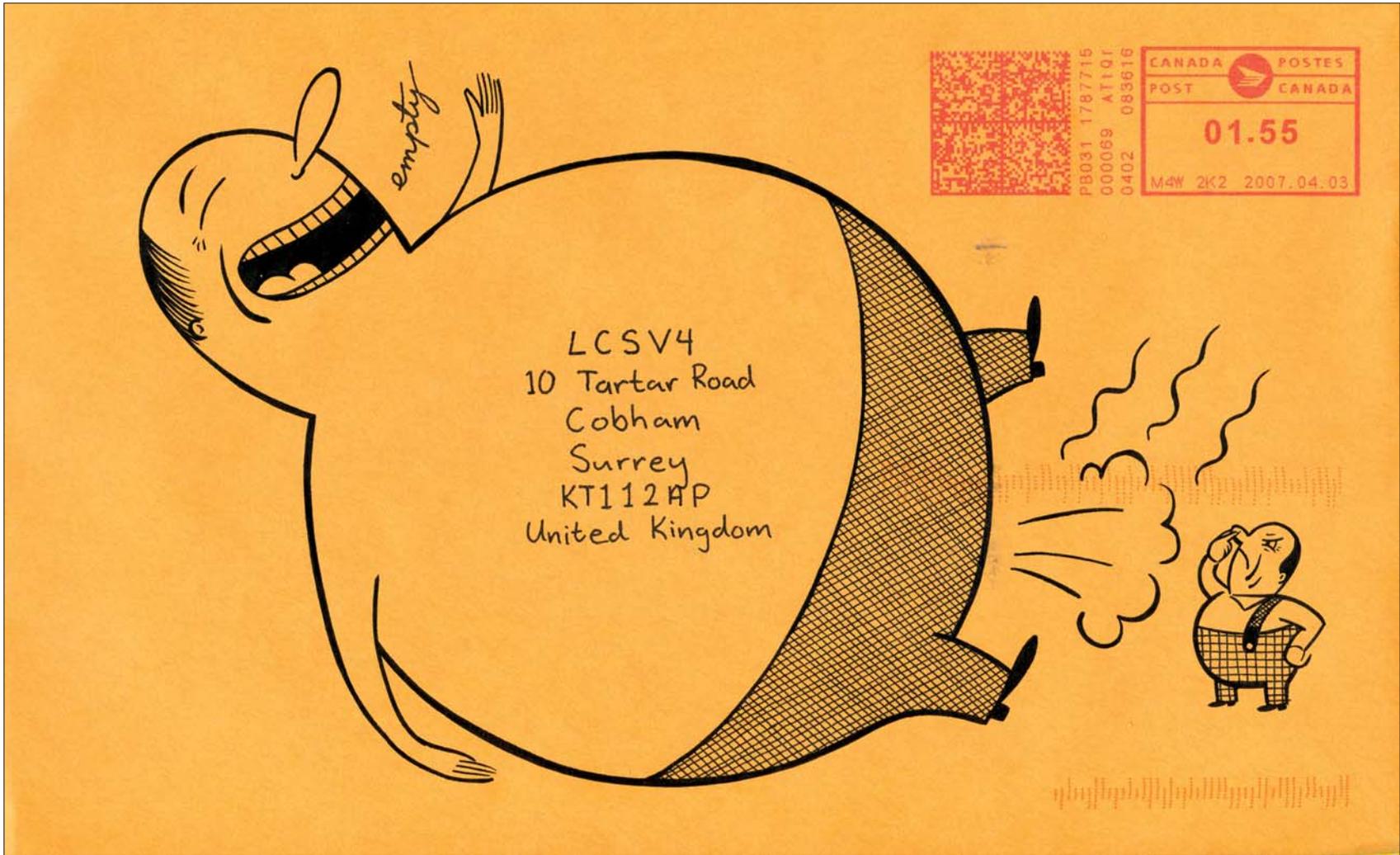


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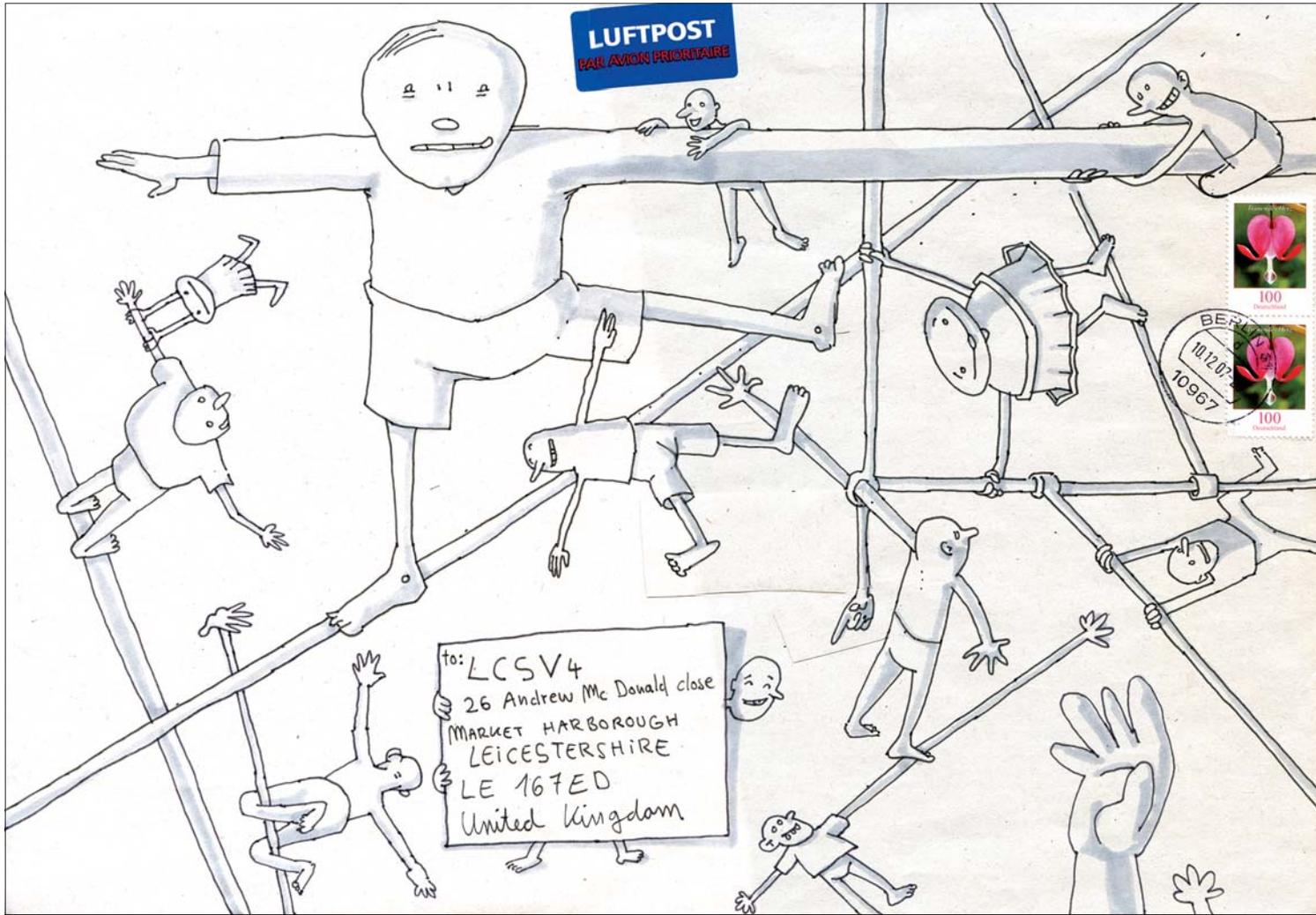


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**NINA CORONATO**

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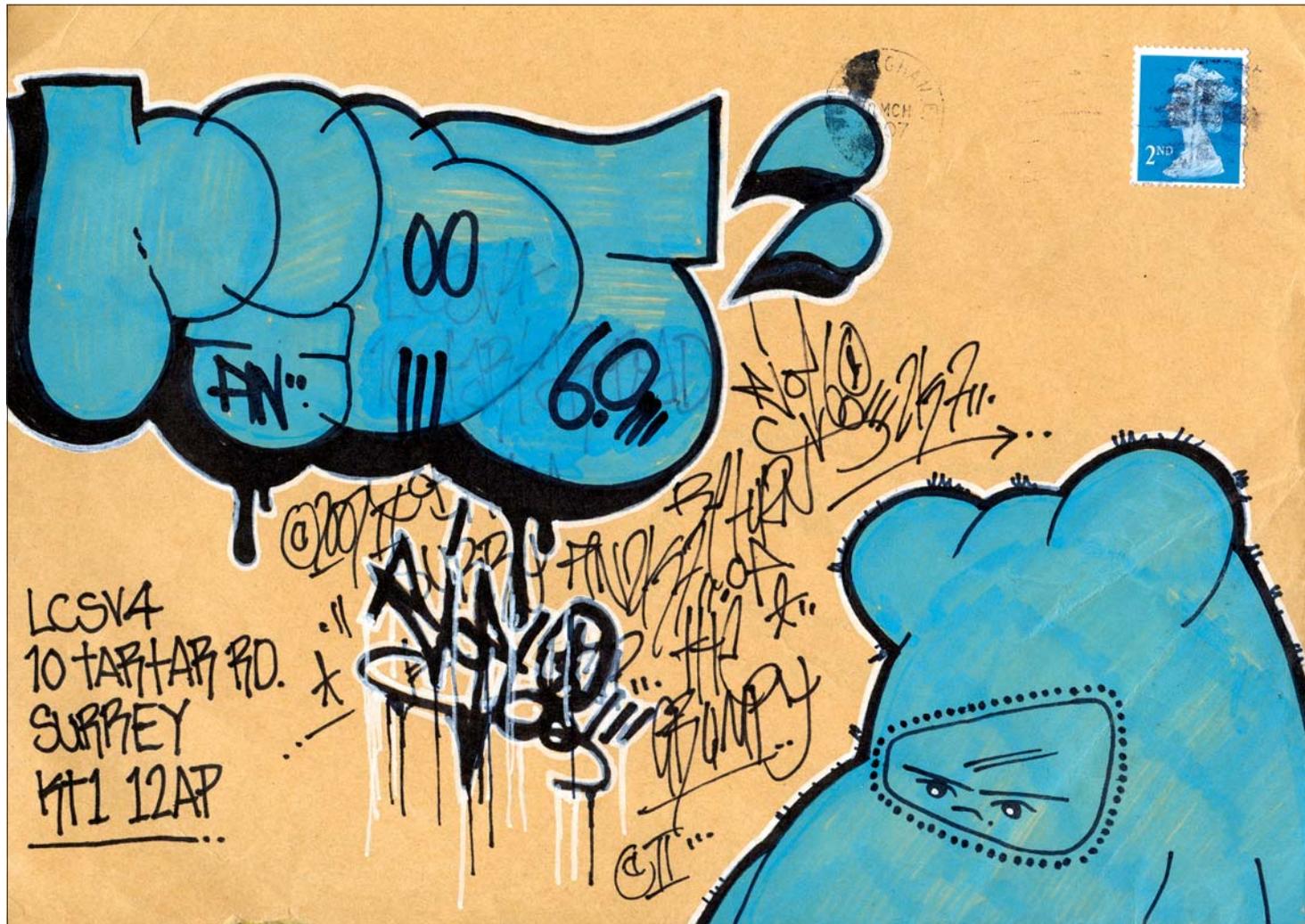




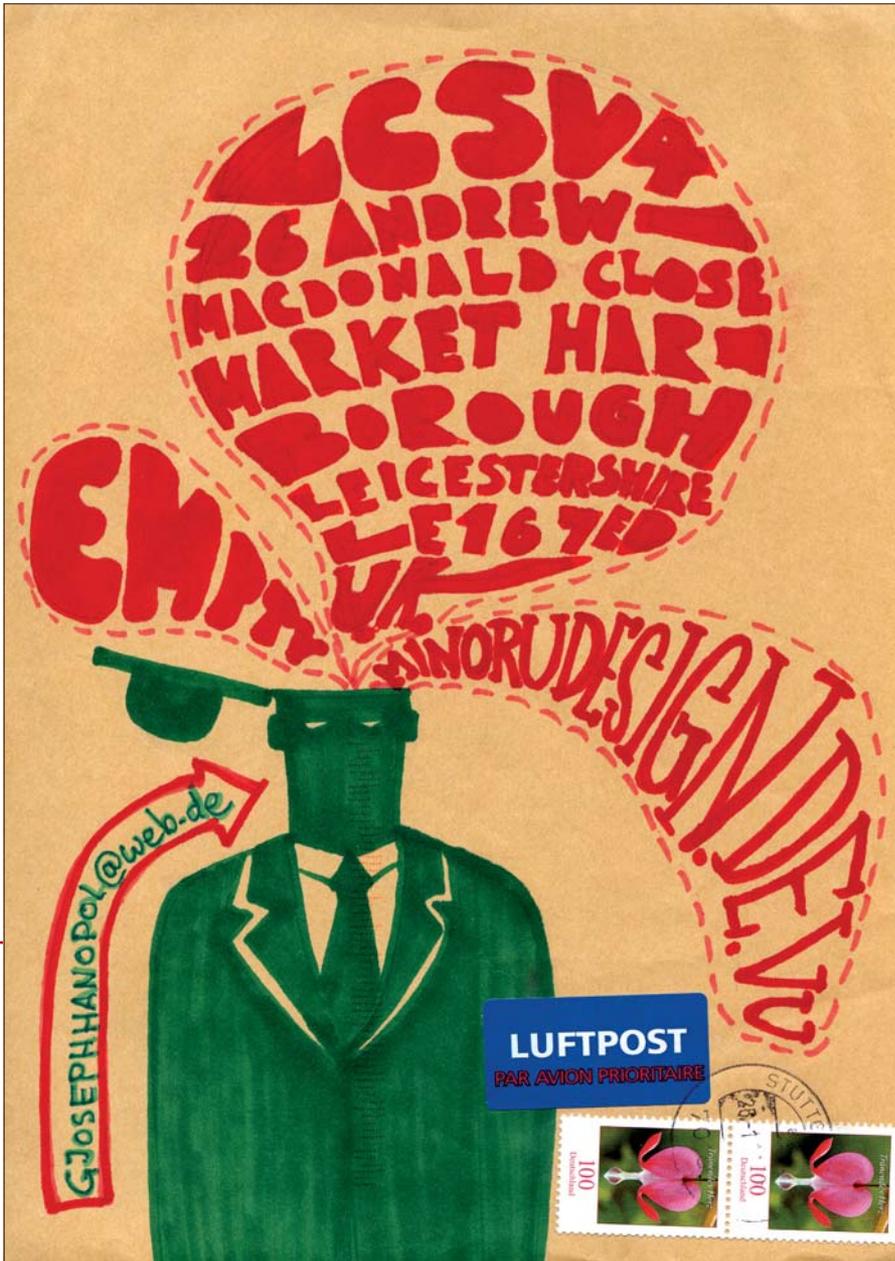
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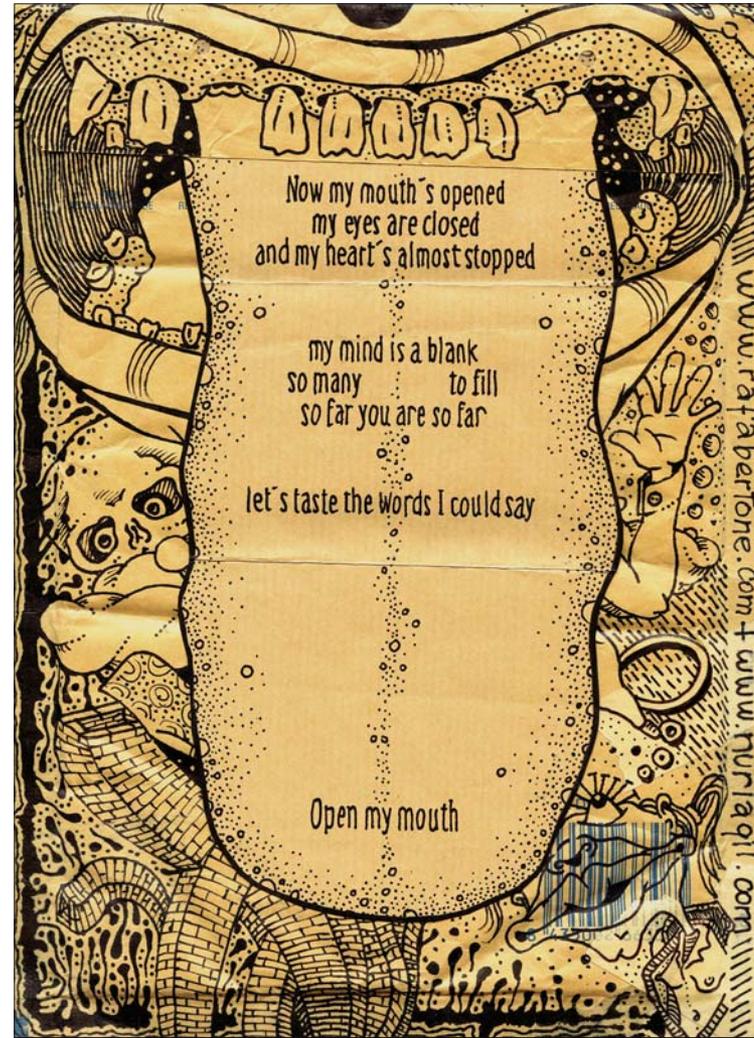
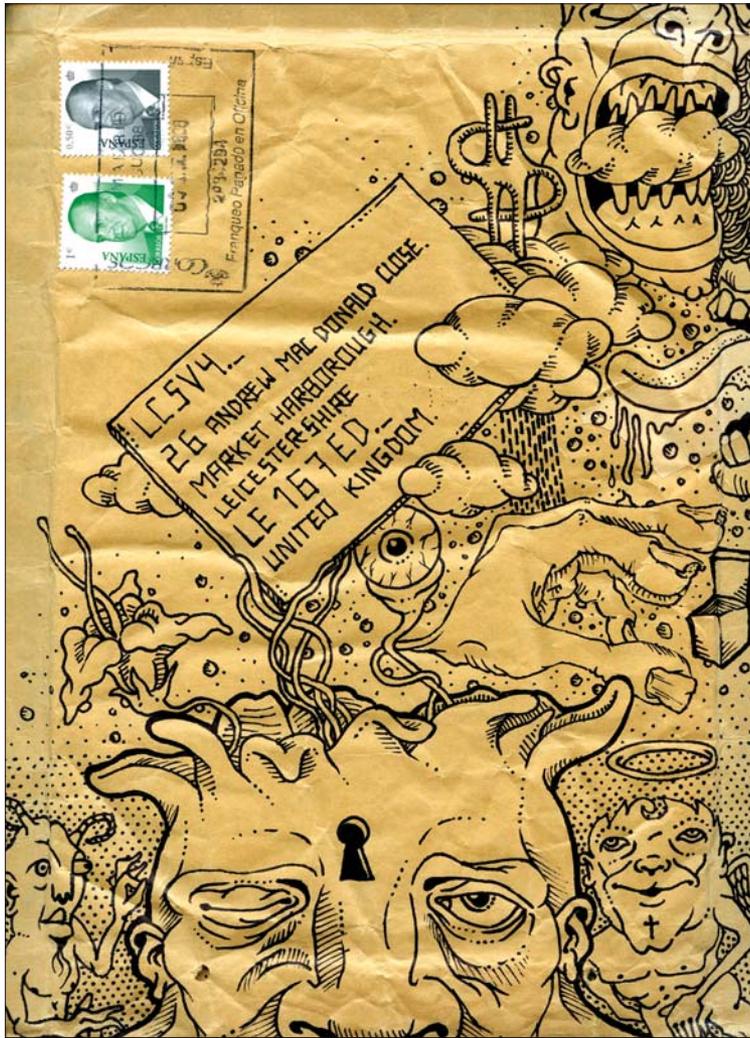


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**NURIA GIL & RAFAEL BERTONE**

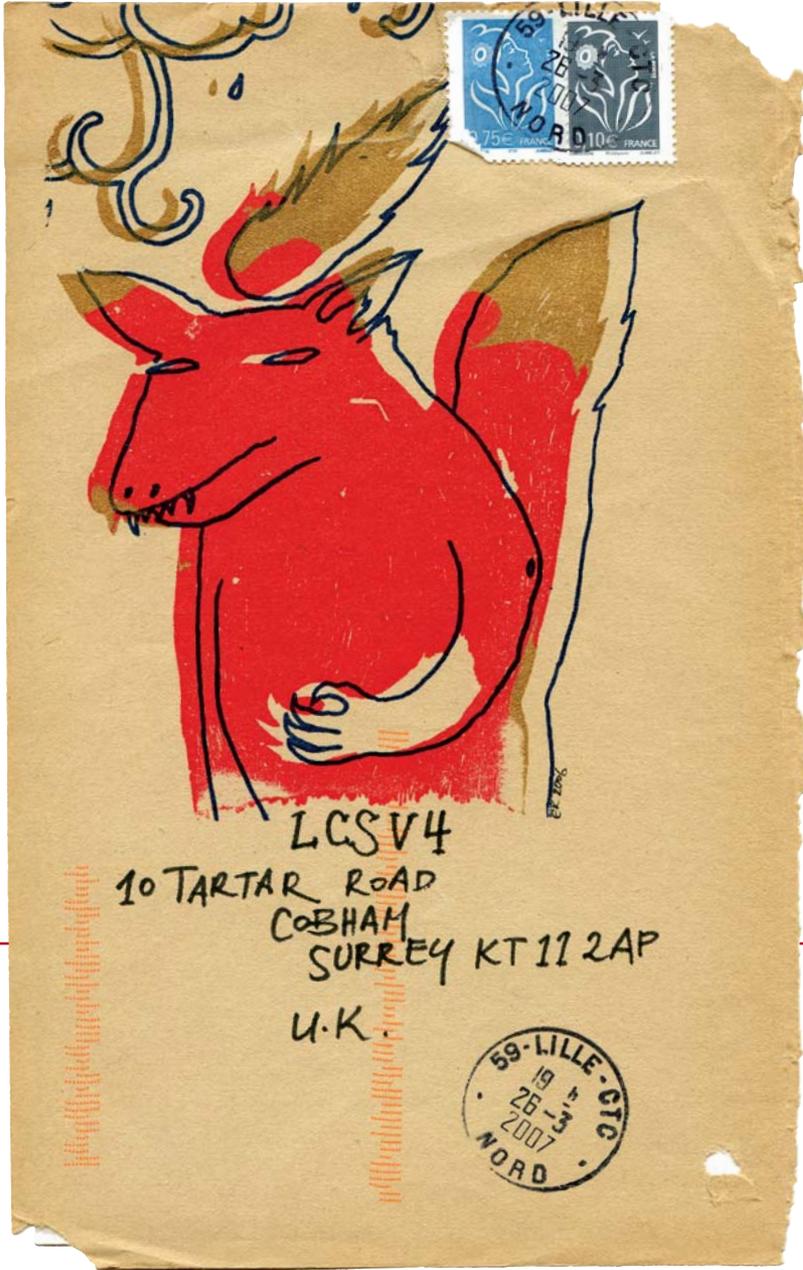
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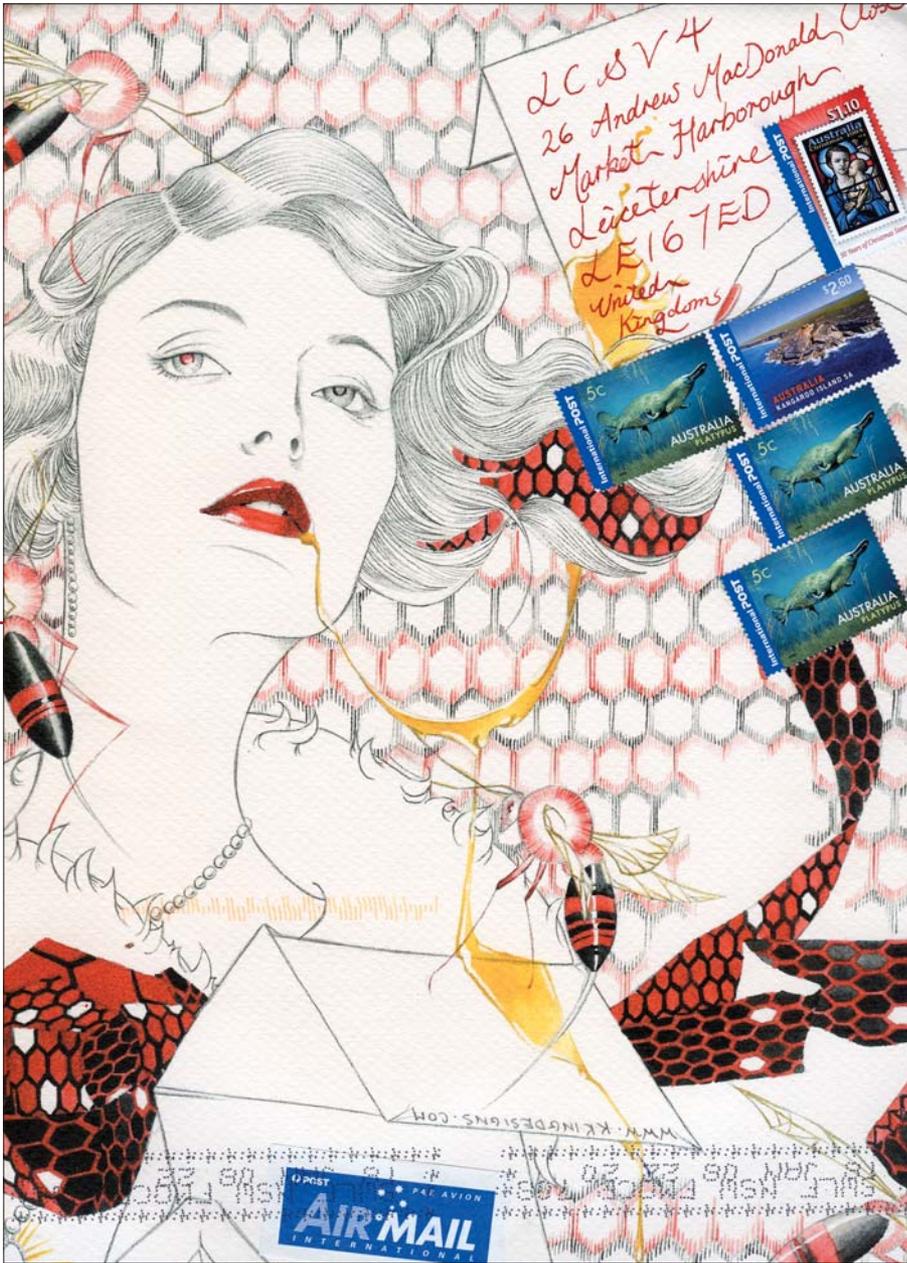


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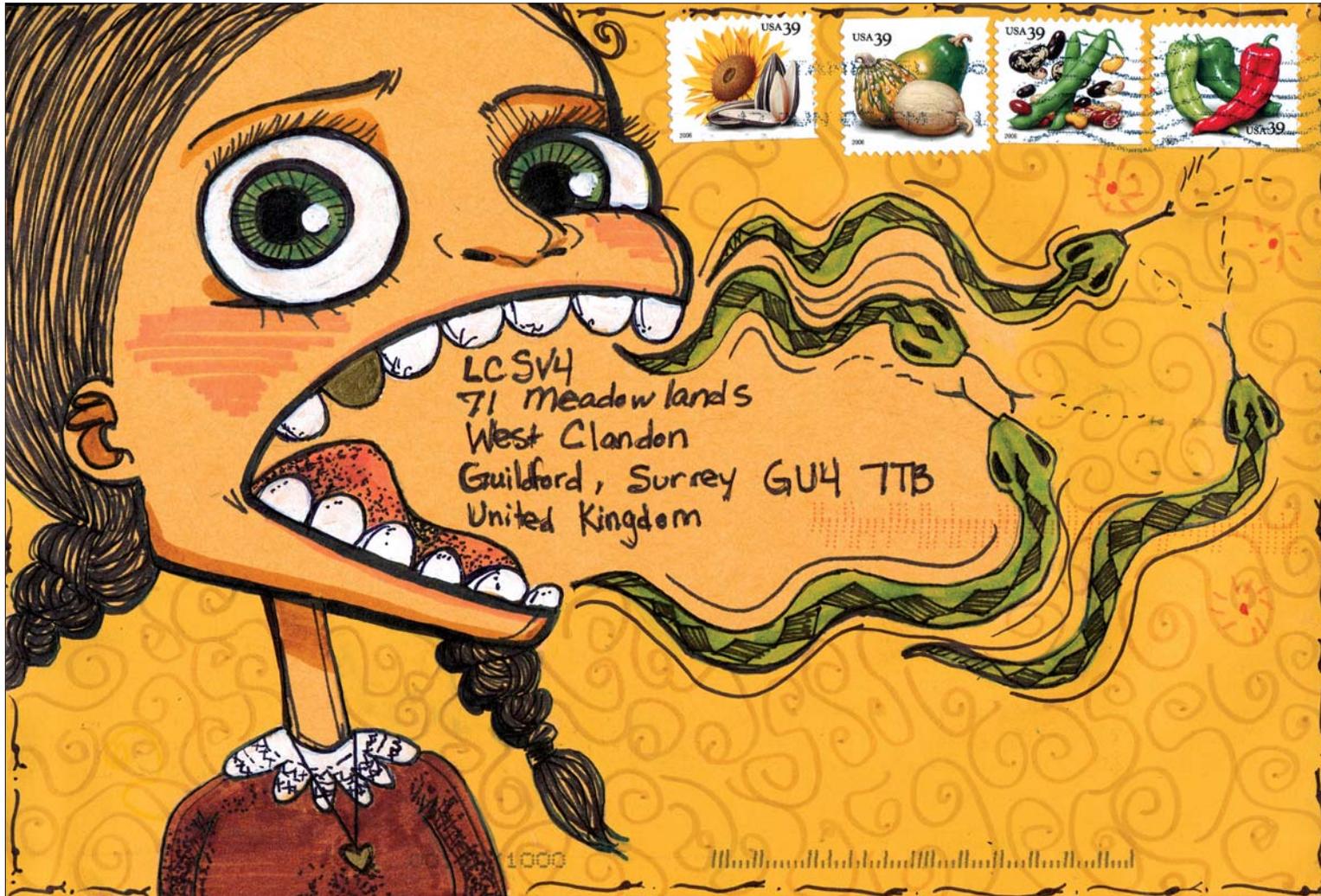


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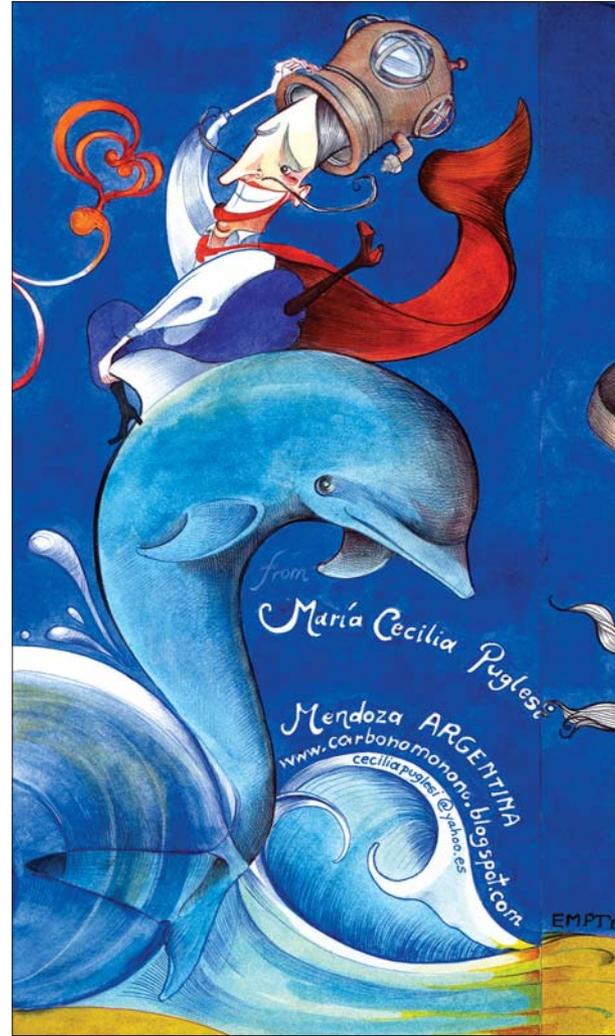


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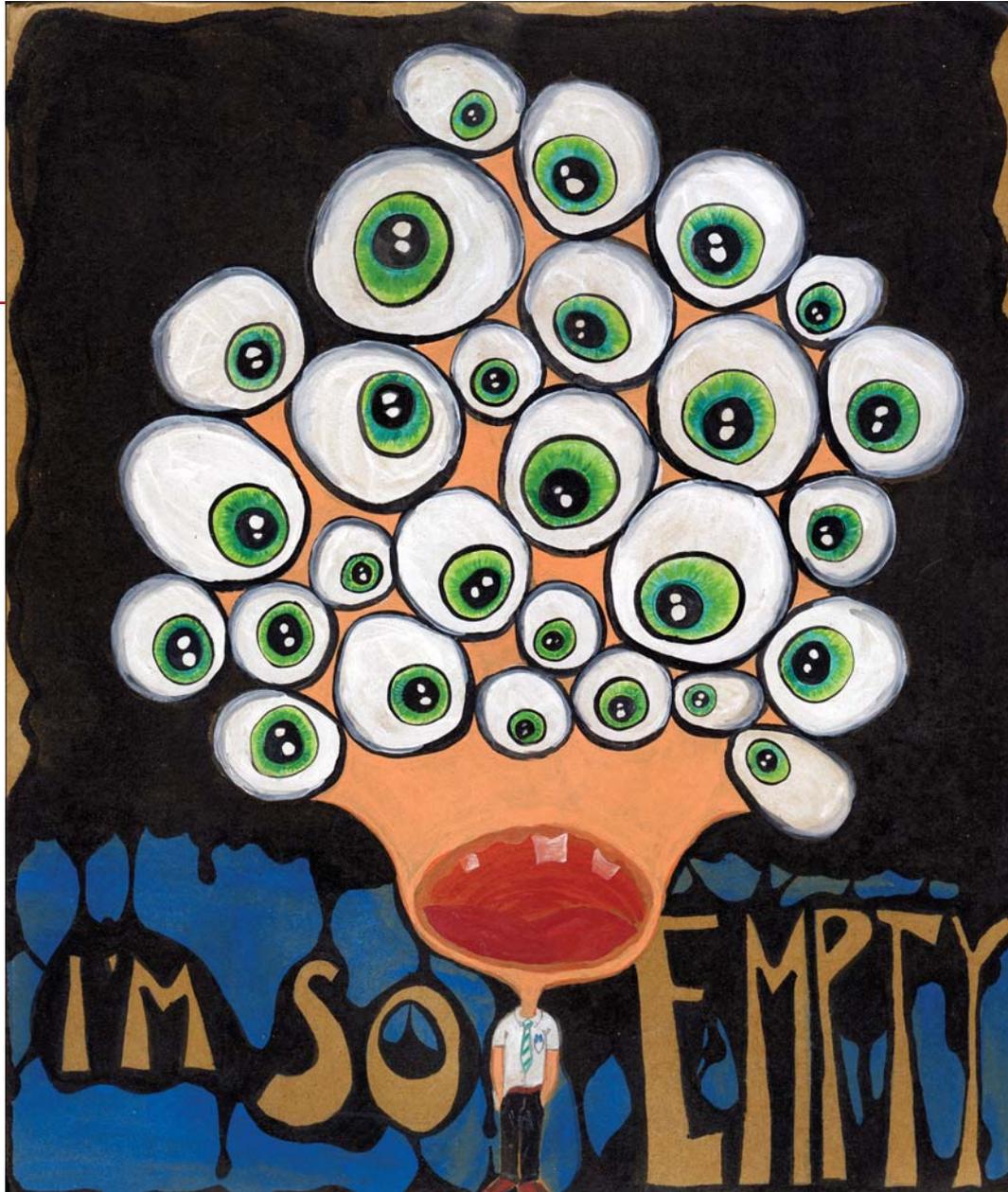


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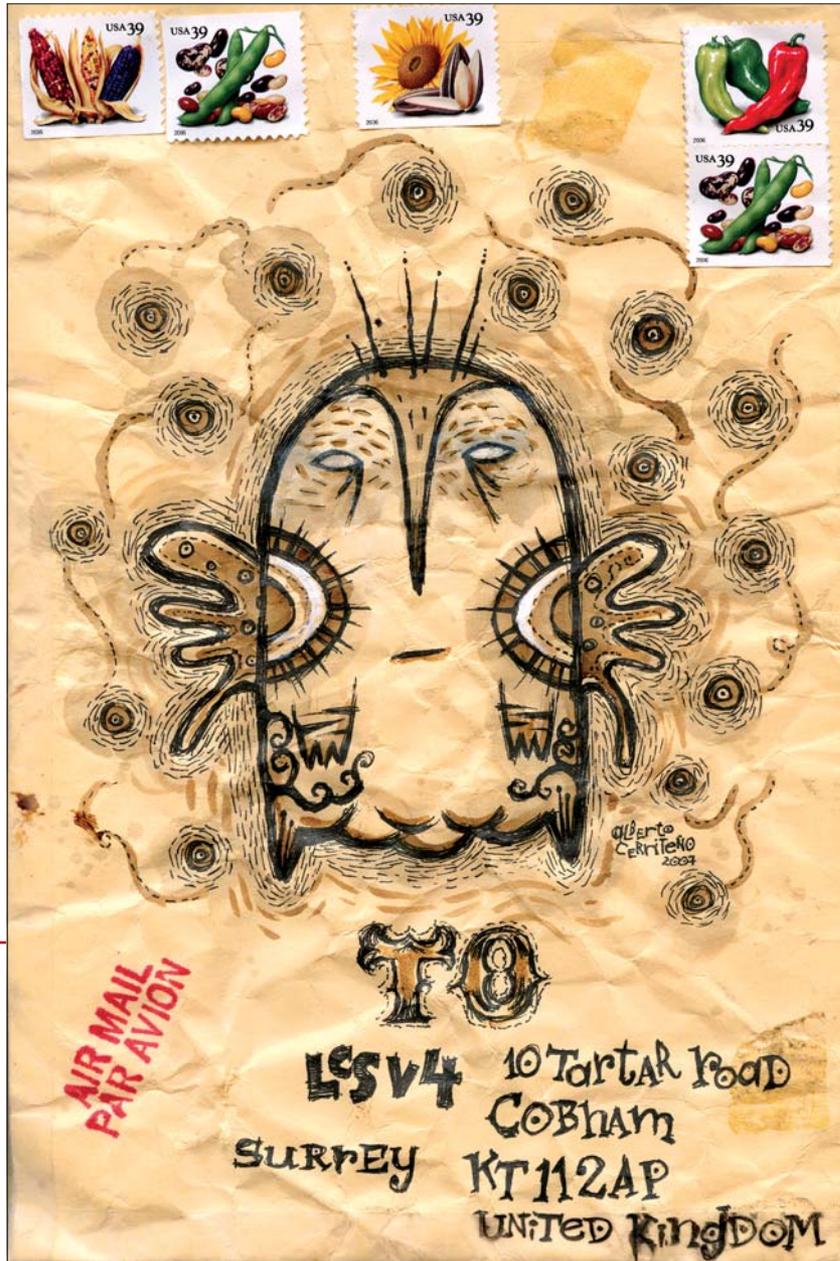


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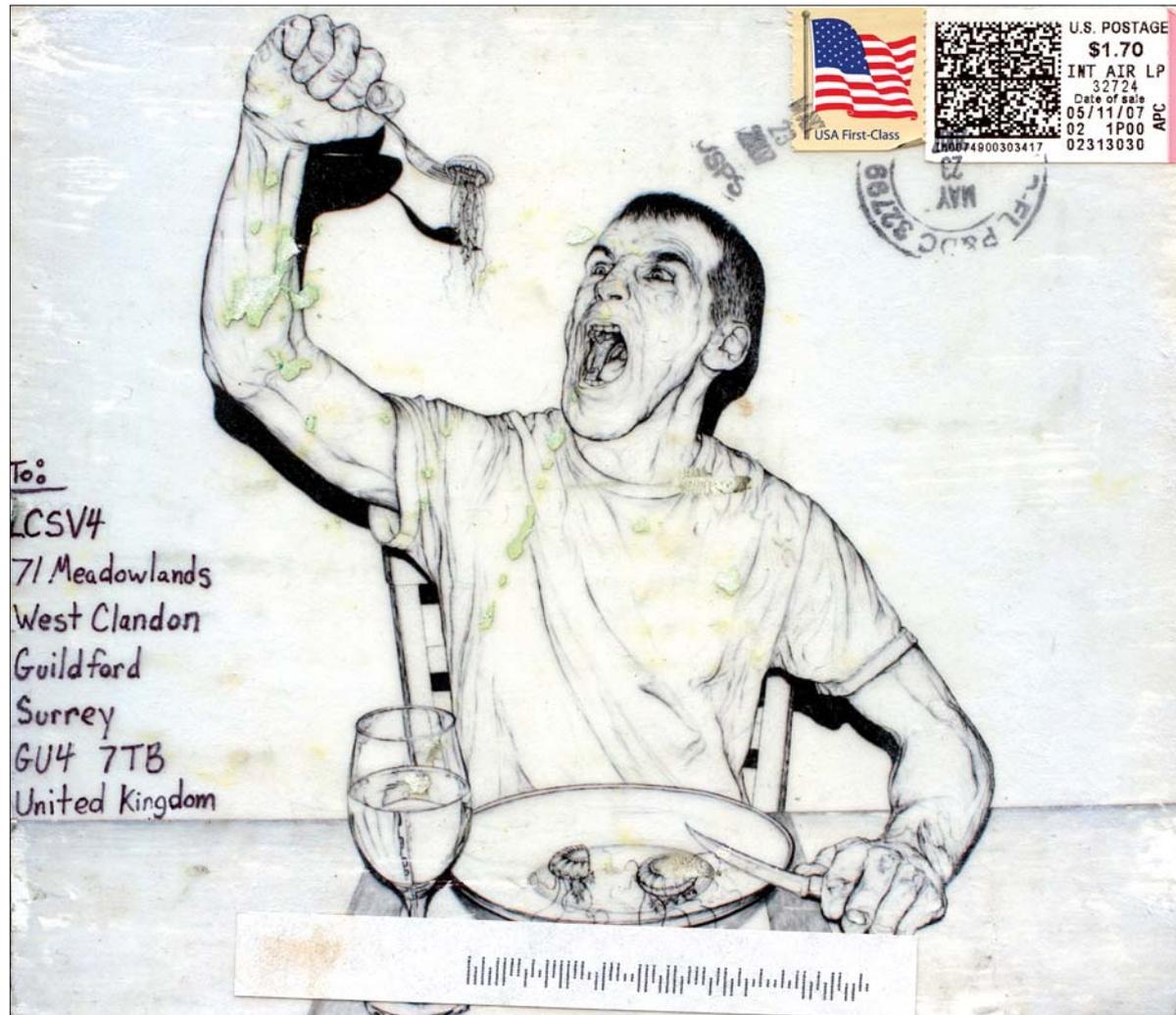
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