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The Transversal Network: Mail Art Practices and International Contacts in Atelier 35, Oradea, and the MAMŪ group, Tîrgu-Mureș, in the early 1980s

In this paper I will discuss mail art practices in Romania from the early 1980s, focusing on two artistic groups - Atelier 35 from Oradea and the group MAMŪ from Tîrgu-Mureș. I will focus on the mail art exchanges and projects developed by some of the artists in these artistic communities, as well as on the contacts and collaborations they established with the wide international and/or regional mail art networks, especially through the artist Ioan Bunuș. Comparing and discussing bibliographical and archival documentations, with visual mail art artefacts and oral history testimonies, I will try to show how the local mail art practices were strongly shaped by specific local and regional characteristics – such as a rather “isolationist” tendency, as opposed to an eagerness to connect and communicate throughout the “unknown” world, or the prerequisite of direct contacts among artists, of pre-existent networks of collaboration that should have informed future mail art exchanges between them. As such, the local mail art practices seem to describe “transversal movements of cultures” (Lionnet, Shih, 2005), processes of hybridisation which, while not fully separated from the “major” cultural scenes, were actively generating a non-Western idiom of mail art that was to a large extent effective in diversifying and consolidating the artists’ interest in non-conventional languages.