

# TINGUELY AND THE DECORATIVE: RECONSIDERING THE ARTIST'S LETTER COLLAGES

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## Tinguely, Decoration, and Abstraction

A few years ago, I saw some letter drawings by Jean Tinguely that shared the wall of a private home in Zurich with some equally colourful Meissen porcelain plates. It struck me how the single elements in the drawings—stickers, stamps, decalcomania, letters, and scribbles—were distributed on the background in an all-over design, very much like the flowers and birds floating on the white porcelain surface and defying rules of gravity or perspective. It reminded me of another view into a collectors' home: Louise Lawler's well-known *Pollock and Tureen, Arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, Connecticut* (fig. 1). The photo shows a precious porcelain serving bowl in front of Jackson Pollock's drip painting *Number 6* (1949). The title alone makes for a highly interesting comparison: it's not 'a Pollock' or 'a painting by Pollock' but simply 'Pollock'. It is as if the bottom part of the painting seen in the photograph were enough to carry the essence of Pollock's work. The serving bowl, by contrast, is not attributed to any manufacturer but is just 'tureen'—at least it is not called 'bowl' or 'pot'. Title aside, the decor and the colour scheme of the tureen harmonize with the web of paint streaks in the painting. Or one could say that the all-over pattern—the decor—of the Pollock fits the painted flowers nicely. Lawler's photograph has been used to point out the decorative qualities of Pollock's gestural abstraction,<sup>1</sup> an allegation revealing art-historical biases: while Pollock's paintings clearly have a decorative quality, they also epitomize Abstract Expressionism. Abstraction and decoration have been regarded as a binary opposition since around 1900, as Jenny Anger, David Brett, and others have shown.<sup>2</sup> While abstraction was on the rise, the decorative style was marked as its 'other' and conflated with a vast array of concepts made out to be the opposite of abstraction—read high art—namely cheap industrial decor, handicrafts, Indigenous art, femininity, and popular culture. When Tinguely came of age as an

artist, decoration was still held in disregard. For instance, decoration is merely the foil for abstraction according to Clement Greenberg's influential formalist critique. In his judgement, decorative textiles such as curtains and wallpaper serve as a means of contrast for the all-over design of abstract painting.<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, when Tinguely's work was mass-produced as decor and as a commodity—as were many artworks from the 1960s onwards—the decorative qualities of his collages became clearly visible. In the first two instances of his work being adopted as a pattern, all-over designs with stickers and scraps were chosen for a wallpaper and for the casing of Pontus Hultén's publication *Jean Tinguely: Méta* (1972).<sup>4</sup> The book came in a white briefcase covered with a pattern of one of Tinguely's collages and was presented like a fashion accessory in advertisements.<sup>5</sup> This again shows how the compositional structure of the all-over design lends itself to applications that usually feature an endless pattern.<sup>6</sup>

This paper takes the abovementioned observations—the Tinguely-Meissen arrangement and the relation of abstraction and decoration—as a point of departure to comment on Tinguely's letter collages, especially of the 1970s and 1980s, his choice of technique and materials as well as his mode of production. We should not be surprised to discuss Tinguely and decoration, given that the artist began his career as a window dresser. However, Tinguely's first profession is not of concern here but rather the decorative qualities in his works on paper. I use the term *decorative* as an amalgamation of concepts encompassing applied, minor, and domestic arts and even the realm of popular pastimes and hobbies concerned with adorning and embellishing objects.

My premise is not that—within this allegedly binary relation of abstraction and decoration—Tinguely's work had previously been considered only with regard to abstraction. Tinguely's relationship to abstraction is unquestionably a complicated one: both the output of the artist's *Machines à Dessiner* and the *Méta-Matic*



Fig. 1 Louise Lawler, *Pollock and Tureen, Arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, Connecticut, 1984*, silver dye bleach print, 71 × 99 cm, Purchase, Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Gift, through Joyce and Robert Menschel, and Jennifer and Joseph Duke Gift, 2000, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

series of the late 1950s can be perceived as a humorous take on exactly the kind of gestural abstraction associated with Pollock. At the same time, Tinguely's early reliefs and sculptures clearly relate to the abstraction of the 1910s, referencing Kazimir Malevich, Auguste Herbin, and Wassily Kandinsky, among others.<sup>7</sup> This might be one of the reasons why his collages on paper have been compared to those of Kurt Schwitters and Hannah Höch as well as to the *découpage*—paper cut-outs—of Henri Matisse.<sup>8</sup> His use of everyday items—essentially prefabricated objects—is repeatedly traced back to Marcel Duchamp's concept of the ready-made. In a nutshell: Tinguely's anti-art was often seen in relation to anti-art that exists within art and art history. However, the artist has an evident fascination for everything theatrical, for the spectacular, for the joy of the masses—from his use of mirrors and decoration of bars to his connection to the Basel Carnival—and for popular culture such as racing cars, garden gnomes, and the glitz of fairgrounds. All this encourages me to read his works on paper against creative output often not considered to be art but in the realm of the hobby.

## Considering Tinguely's Letter Drawings

Tinguely produced a vast oeuvre on paper. Annja Müller-Alsbach has convincingly categorized his graphic works, distinguishing between preparatory sketches for sculptural works, automatic drawings, and the complex of letter drawings, collages, and telephone drawings.<sup>9</sup> I will focus on letter drawings with collaged elements, which first appeared around 1963.<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to estimate how many letter drawings and collages Tinguely made during his lifetime. Some of his written letters have been published: those to his partner Niki de Saint Phalle, to his assistant Seppi Imhof, to his patrons and friends Maja Sacher and Paul Sacher,<sup>11</sup> and to other friends.<sup>12</sup> However, many of the letter drawings and collages were given as tokens of gratitude and have remained with the recipients, who were not only friends and colleagues in the art world but people with whom he also had private dealings. One such recipient was a car mechanic who also happened to be the janitor of a building I used to live in. The pace and production of his graphic output increased during the artist's life. In 1991, a few months

before his death, when Tinguely was asked by Margrit Hahnloser if he was drawing more at that time than he had earlier, his answer was a big 'YES indeed!'<sup>13</sup>

Whether the artist's letters should be considered drawings or collages is open to question. Tinguely's treatment of some of the more delicate decalcomania images in particular raises questions: To what degree are the letter drawings really drawings at all? If they are to be considered drawings, which qualities of drawing do they exhibit? A conventional understanding ascribes more spontaneity to drawings—and especially sketches—than other media, deeming them closer to the *idea*, the artist's mind, and even more authentic. Previous commentary on Tinguely's letters has also attributed those qualities—and especially spontaneity—to these works. Instantaneous, spontaneous scribbles can certainly be observed in some of the letters, and they even turn towards the painterly in Tinguely's later work. However, I find it difficult to attribute these conventional qualities of drawings to most of the letter collages. To take one example: the drawn line is often not very free or gestural; instead, it follows folds in the paper or traces the outlines of items, often tools, that were lying on the paper (fig. 2). This is the case in a letter from Tinguely to Franz Meyer,<sup>14</sup> which contains a traced pair of scissors, while in other instances we can see the outline of a corkscrew or a wrench.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Tinguely also traced the borders of the Scotch tape used to affix images of historic cars and planes with a ballpoint pen. Though the letters *a-n-z* in the name *Franz* are quite freely drawn and there is a single scribble at the top of the right-hand side, the letter *F*, the question marks, and the ampersands have evidently been drawn very slowly. The careful construction of the ampersand and of single letters *P* and *L* is also clearly visible in one of the letters to Paul Sacher (fig. 3).<sup>16</sup>

Even more strikingly, Tinguely's drawings are often only additions set out in relation to the pictures that have already been stuck or stamped onto the page.

In the aforementioned examples, this is visible in the lower-left corner where a speech bubble with a question mark was added to a tiny stamp of a cartoon character and a sticker showing a *Nana* by Niki de Saint Phalle respectively (figs. 2 and 3). A letter to Pontus Hultén in the collection of the Museum Tinguely almost entirely consists of an all-over design of stamped images of animals, vehicles, and a house as well as stickers of flowers and fruit. Tinguely then added speech bubbles to almost every item, and in this way it is not only cats, apes, and birds that talk but also cherries, a pineapple, and a carrot. One could even say that the drawn elements are secondary to the collaged features.

Tinguely himself put the emphasis on the pictorial part of the letters. In 1991 he told Margrit Hahnloser that emotions were too fast to write down, for which the fast gluing of images and fragments was his solution.<sup>17</sup> Here, the possibilities of collage—as opposed to drawing—enabled him to be spontaneous. Hand-drawn lines were often used to follow the edges of the stickers or even the folds of the popular fanfold format, or they were used to add detail to small, carefully constructed, narrative scenes. In the letter to Franz Meyer, the artist also used stickers of Niki de Saint Phalle's drawings (fig. 2). Tinguely and Saint Phalle even had a Letraset sheet made of an alphabet they drew together.<sup>18</sup> Although based on their handwriting, this was another way to substitute the drawn line with affixed or transferred images for the processes of making collages.

### Bricolage—Collage—Femmage

The fact that Tinguely also used leftover materials in his collages, as in his sculptural works, may lead us to view the letter collages within the context of the term *bricolage*, which has been used to describe the artist's sculptures. The term was also referenced by the artist himself as being part of his own neologism *débriscollages*.<sup>19</sup> Tinguely's series of *Débriscollages* were based on commonplace

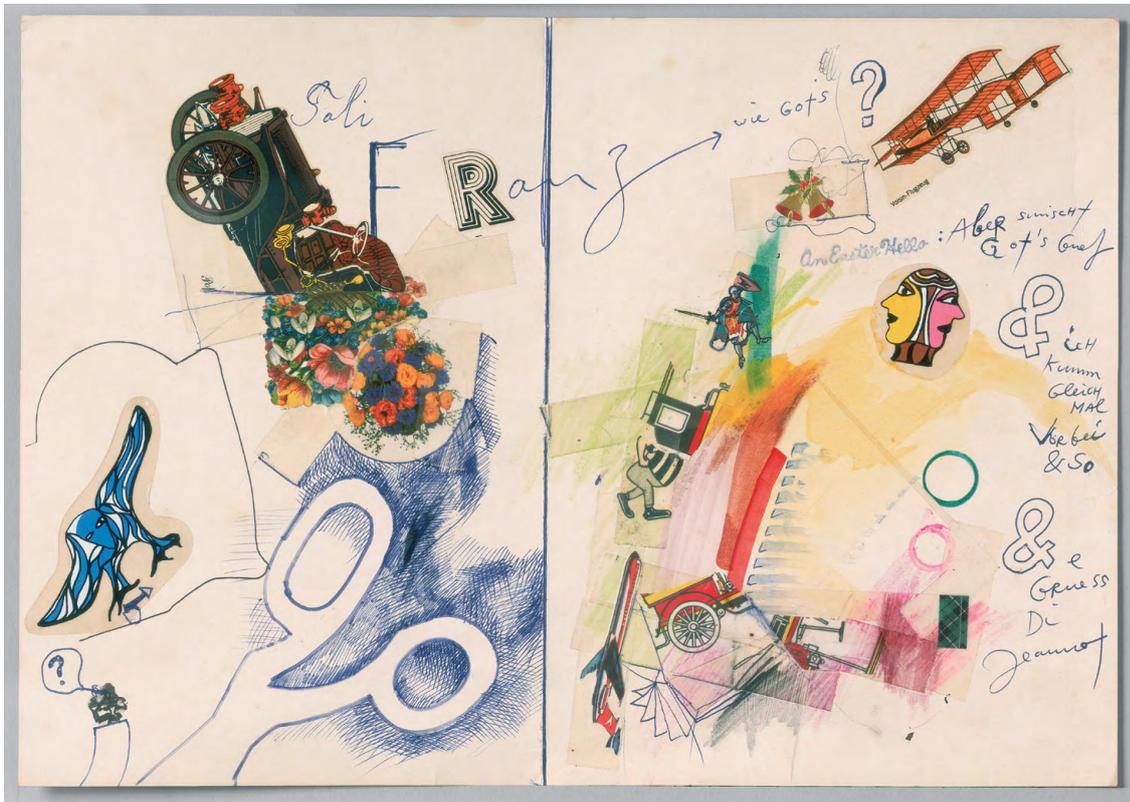


Fig. 2 Jean Tinguely, *Sali Franz—An Easter Hello*, 18.4.1977, blue ballpoint pen, felt-tip pen, and collage on beige cardboard, folded once with envelope, 28 x 39.5 cm, Archive Museum Tinguely, inv. no. 003703



Fig. 3 Jean Tinguely, *Ich habe am Radio dieses gehört* [I've listened to this on the radio], to Paul Sacher, 1974 or 1975, ballpoint and felt-tip pen, sticker, paper scraps, Victorian scraps, scotch tape, beige paper, folded, private collection



**Fig. 4** Miriam Schapiro, *Baby Block Bouquet*, 1981, acrylic and fabric on canvas, 161 × 175 cm, Courtesy of Hallmark Art Collection, Hallmark Cards, Inc., Kansas City, Missouri

electronic appliances used for DIY activities, such as drilling machines. Famously, the practice of the bricoleur has been described by Claude Lévi-Strauss as the antagonist of the engineer. While the latter plans, the bricoleur makes do with the material available, shaping the work/construction along with the process involved.<sup>20</sup> The motif of making do with the materials available, however, also occurs in essays by feminist artists and critics in the 1970s with regard to the domestic creative practices of women, which until then had not been thought of as art (with a capital A).<sup>21</sup> Using the term *femmage*, Melissa Meyer and Miriam Schapiro drew attention to collage practices traditionally carried out by women, such as quilting, scrapbooking, and the decoration of prayer cards or valentines.<sup>22</sup> The authors included many historical examples in their essay, especially nineteenth-century scrapbooks and friendship books that predate modern collage. While Schapiro's interest was clearly reflected in her own artwork of the time, which combines aspects of quilting with painting (fig. 4), it is only recently that the text has been used to rethink the history of the collage. Like Meyer and Schapiro, Freya Gowrley in *Fragmentary Forms: A New History of Collage* challenges the contention that the origins of collage, including its very invention, date to the 1910s. She outlines how in the nineteenth century paper collage, *découpage*, silhouettes, botanical

clippings, and even photomontage were already popular and associated with practises by upper-class women in their leisure time.<sup>23</sup> When considering Tinguely's letters, this gendered history of collage should be kept in mind because several accounts attribute the artist's adoption of collage to his collaboration with Saint Phalle.<sup>24</sup> Gowrley concludes that 'the proliferation of collage at this time highlights its importance long before the advent of modernism ... [as] a process of knowledge formation and organization; a leisure practice; and a means of personal expression.'<sup>25</sup> These collages often included items 'from personal collections of objects and materials, such as collected and found items, or souvenirs.'<sup>26</sup> In their aforementioned essay, Meyer and Schapiro had already stressed the relation of *femmage*s to souvenirs and especially diaries. They reference Virginia Woolf's musings about diary writing: 'Virginia Woolf talks about the loose, drifting material of life, describing how she would like to see it sorted and coalesced into a mold [sic] transparent enough to reflect the light of our life and yet aloof as a work of art.'<sup>27</sup>

## Material Concerns

Apart from the very personal quality of collage practices of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is relevant how they also reflect the advent of consumer culture.



Fig. 5 Anonymous, *Victorian Scraps*, ca. 1890, die-cut chromolithographs on paper, various sizes, private collection

The nineteenth century saw the fabrication of paper decorations that were marketed for upper-class women and their pastimes, including scrapbooking (fig. 5). Known as Victorian scraps—and referred to in German as *Glanzbilder*, *Oblatenbilder*, or *Poesiealbum-Bilder*—they became popular at this time and are still available today. Lesser known but no less popular were tinsel pictures, which involved the decoration of preprinted motifs with elements punched out of thin metal foil.<sup>28</sup>

Among the materials in Tinguely's letter collages we find leftovers of this Victorian scrapbooking culture. Victorian scraps are very frequent, such as the flower basket Tinguely juxtaposed here with the picture of a historic car and the parakeet (figs. 2 and 3).<sup>29</sup> Less common are images and letters of punched-out paper coated with metal foil, the twentieth-century version of tinsel. A letter from Tinguely to Stefanie Poley dated 19 May 1983 contains several metal foil icons, including a red heart and arrow, a green four-leaf clover, and a golden pig (fig. 6). In this collage, Tinguely also uses more contemporary items for glueing and decorating, such as stickers and decals. Some of them are stickers with motifs of Niki de Saint Phalle, while the decals show a knight and peasant with wooden shoes and a pitchfork. The light-blue triangle and two light-pink circles at the bottom and top of the middle axis of the paper are from a set of geometrical shapes on gummed paper. These also occur frequently in Tinguely's collages and were very popular as educational kindergarten and hobby materials in the 1970s and 1980s.

Looking at those decades, from which most of the letter collages date, the types of material Tinguely uses stem from the popular realm of children's knickknacks, stationery, party decoration, and hobby materials. In this light—and similar to Tinguely's junkyard sculptures, which are made of discarded material—the letter collages can be seen as a comment on consumer culture, even if in a different register: the materials of the collages point to pastimes traditionally associated with

a younger and/or female group of consumers working on scrapbooks or decorating the pages of friendship albums—either with the enduring Victorian scraps or their newer variants. The specificity of some of the materials also marks Tinguely as a contemporary, as is evident from my own experience as a child in kindergarten where I collaged with stencilled geometric shapes of gummed paper, and in 1988 when I opened a Kinder Surprise Egg to discover the same kind of minuscule plastic sailing boat that is glued on to one of the artist's collages.<sup>30</sup> Through this world of children's gimmicks and stickers, the letter collages also record other aspects of popular culture, for example, when they contain images of Star Wars or Disney characters.<sup>31</sup>

## Objects of Devotion

Tinguely's interest in and use of mobile decor—stickers, decals, feathers, anything small that could be pasted—includes many items and materials that might be considered kitschy or tacky. In the examples given above, we find metallic pictures, ribbon, and glitter alongside confetti. A letter to Paul Sacher even contains a sequin heart, a very grand—one could say exaggerated—gesture.<sup>32</sup> In a similar manner, Tinguely has in other collages embellished the initials or even the whole first name of the recipients with a bouquet of Victorian scraps, decals, and stickers.<sup>33</sup> A heart for Maja Sacher, his friend and supporter of many years, is made in the same fashion (fig. 7). This trait of Tinguely has been described as an 'inordinate delight in embellishment and abundance',<sup>34</sup> seen also in his take on the tradition to illustrate initial letters, arranging numerous small images in a bouquet. His language is also excessive. To Maja Sacher, he often finishes letters as follows: 'with love and always thinking of you, forever yours, Jeannot'.<sup>35</sup> Margrit Hahnloser concluded: 'He only wrote love letters. Even when he was complaining, there were flowers, hearts, and well-wishes.'<sup>36</sup>



Regarding a new history of collage, rooted in popular culture, we could say that many of his letter collages are valentines, which also grew in popularity during the scrapbook craze of the nineteenth century. Interestingly, as we can see from the sequin heart and from the case of a parakeet delivering a love letter (fig. 3),<sup>37</sup> all these hearts and flowers are as much addressed to Paul Sacher as the heart-shaped bouquet was to his wife, Maja. Like the parakeet, Tinguely by way of his collages acted as a 'postillon d'amour'.<sup>38</sup> This leads me to the view that Tinguely transgressed the traditional concept of the nuclear family not only through his way of living and working with his partners but also with his notion of love to include close friends who in turn became part of a family-like network.<sup>39</sup>

## A Diary, Dispersed

Through the letter collages, it is possible to trace Tinguely's network of lovers, friends, assistants, and patrons. Frequently used as a communication medium, even with profane messages that could have been delivered over the telephone, the letter collages do more than simply refer to the artist's projects and strengthen the bonds to patrons; they also reflect Tinguely's moods and the seasons. The tinsel fragments in the collage for Stefanie Poley, for instance, all belong to imagery associated with New Year's (fig. 6). Other collaged items in the letter refer to Christmas: a printed metal foil piece, which probably had once belonged to a chocolate wrapper, shows a Christmas tree; two other fragments of the same material offer a glimpse of holly as well as of an angel's blonde hair and white wing. Another letter containing pieces of gingerbread underneath the picture of a Santa Claus is a nod to one of the origins of Victorian scraps: decoration on top of sweets.<sup>40</sup> Thus Tinguely's letters reflect the seasons, albeit that the seasonal materials and items often appear in a letter sent after the event, therefore also serving as a record. Again, one

is reminded of Virginia Woolf's phrase about the 'loose, drifting material of life', quoted by Meyer and Schapiro.<sup>41</sup> This is especially poignant when the 'drifting material' is as ephemeral as the *Räppli*—confetti—depicted in the letter to Stefanie Poley and glued to other collages related to the Carnival season.<sup>42</sup>

Read as a diary, the letter collages have an ephemeral character themselves because Tinguely dispersed them—and thereby the account of his life and feelings—among his friends. He did not keep a diary in notebook form. The Museum Tinguely holds five notebooks with press clippings tracing Tinguely's exhibitions and itinerary, but these do not convey any personal remarks and indeed their authorship is yet to be determined. However, Tinguely knew that some of the recipients of his letters would keep them all, as, for example, Pontus Hultén did.<sup>43</sup> There are also accounts of his assistants, Seppi Imhof and Ricco Weber, winning collages in card games with instructions about who should keep the notes (turned into artworks) after the artist's demise.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Tinguely, who knew of the habits of his friends, used the letter collages to construct an externalized, dispersed diary.

## Image Issues

However, the mode of production Tinguely chose for the letter collages points to the intimacy of these 'un-monumental pictures'<sup>45</sup>. It is well known that Tinguely would compose his letters almost anywhere in the studio or at the kitchen table, but also on his travels, on airplanes, in galleries, museums, or restaurants.<sup>46</sup> Though it is documented that he drew in social environments while spending time with friends,<sup>47</sup> there are at least two photographs showing the artist on his own, surrounded by sheets with stickers, decals, paper scraps, and tubes of gouache, carefully cutting out decals or Victorian scraps or putting each delicate letter or image into place (fig. 8).<sup>48</sup> Despite the chaotic arrangement on the desk,



Fig. 8 Jean Tinguely at his desk in his studio in Neyruz, 8 April 1972

the photographs illustrate how much the letter collages are concerned with detail.<sup>49</sup> A letter by Tinguely in the popular fanfold format in the collection of the University Library in Basel contains a minuscule scene of two divers seemingly fighting for a green square.<sup>50</sup> The square is less than a centimetre in width. It took care to arrange this minute scene, as it takes care to transfer whole decalcomania images from the foil to the paper without blemishes. The quiet, intimate feel of the photograph is enhanced by the way in which Tinguely is placed between the drawing table in the foreground and sewing table and bed in the background.

This picture of the artist working at a desk is rather unfamiliar considering the plethora of photographs that show him next to heavy machinery—tinkering or carrying scrap metal while dressed in his signature work overalls. The convention to show Tinguely engaging with and working on the machine sculptures continued into his later works, maybe even perpetuating the image of the (still) virile workman.<sup>51</sup> However, the uniform of work overalls was merely an image—a far cry from the photographs of the artist (fig. 8) meekly sitting at a desk covered with stationary, sheets of minuscule ornaments and geometrical shapes as he meticulously cuts paper, adorns the next love letter, and collects the ‘loose, drifting material of life’.

- 1 Jenny Sorkin, ‘Patterns and Pictures: Strategies of Appropriation, 1975–85’, in *Burlington Contemporary*, May 2019, <https://contemporary.burlington.org.uk/journal/journal/patterns-and-pictures-strategies-of-appropriation-197585> (accessed on 15 July 2025).
- 2 Jenny Anger, ‘Forgotten Ties: The Suppression of the Decorative in German Art and Theory, 1900–1915’, in Christopher Reed, ed., *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996), 130–46; and David Brett, *Rethinking Decoration: Pleasure and Ideology in the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- 3 Elissa Auther, ‘The Decorative, Abstraction, and the Hierarchy of Art and Craft in the Art Criticism of Clement Greenberg’, *Oxford Art Journal* 27, no. 3 (2004): 339–64.
- 4 In 1971 xartcollection Zurich developed an edition of artists’ wallpapers with the German company Marburger Tapetenfabrik. Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle both contributed a wallpaper design.
- 5 Two commercial images show women from their navel to their ankles carrying the suitcase. One wears a miniskirt, the other jeans, but her bare belly is visible. See Dominik Müller, ‘Biographie’, in Andres Pardey, ed., *Museum Tinguely Basel: Die Sammlung* (Heidelberg and Berlin: Kehrer, 2012), 421, figs. 123 and 124.
- 6 In contrast to the wallpaper and the suitcase, Tinguely’s design for the necktie and official poster for the seven-hundredth anniversary of the Swiss confederation in 1991 was very painterly, probably because both needed to be iconic rather than patterned. Moreover, his drawings became more painterly and abstract towards the end of his life. A biscuit tin of the Swiss brand Kambly adorned with a collage by Tinguely in 1989 was the first artist’s tin from the Kambly Art Collection and has been republished for the centenary of his birth. The choice of a collage with Victorian scraps for the tin box is especially fitting because of their historic connection to gingerbread, chocolate, and other sweets.

- 7 These include *Métra-Malevich*, *Relief métra-mécanique*, 1954, Museum Tinguely, inv. no. 011102; *Métra-mécanique*, 1955, Museum Tinguely, inv. no. 011103; and *Wundermaschine*, *Métra-Kandinsky I*, *Relief polychrome*, 1956, Museum Tinguely, inv. no. 011107.
- 8 Annja Müller-Alsbach, 'Das Medium der Zeichnung im Werk von Jean Tinguely', in Andres Pardey, ed., *Museum Tinguely Basel: Die Sammlung* (Heidelberg and Berlin: Kehrer, 2012), 246–375, esp. 327.
- 9 Müller-Alsbach, 'Medium der Zeichnung'; see also Thomas Köllhofer, 'Ewig fährt am längsten: Zeichnungen als ordnendes Chaos', in Manfred Fath, ed., *Jean Tinguely—Stillstand gibt es nicht!* (Munich: Prestel, 2002), 104–9.
- 10 Müller-Alsbach, 'Medium der Zeichnung', 331.
- 11 Through his marriage to Maja Hoffmann-Stehlin, later known as Maja Sacher, Paul Sacher was connected to the pharmaceutical company Hoffmann-La Roche. He was decisive in the conception of a museum for Tinguely's works in Basel.
- 12 See Margrit Hahnloser, ed., *Briefe von Jean Tinguely an Maja Sacher* (Bern: Benteli, 1992); Margrit Hahnloser, ed., *Briefe von Jean Tinguely an Paul Sacher und gemeinsame Freunde/Letters from Jean Tinguely to Paul Sacher and Common Friends* (Bern: Benteli 1996); Annja Müller-Alsbach, ed., *Jeannot an Franz: Briefe und Zeichnungen von Jean Tinguely an Franz Meyer* (Bern: Benteli, 2003); and Museum Tinguely, ed., *Tschau Sepp* (Basel: Museum Tinguely, 2008).
- 13 Translation by the author. The original German reads: '–Zeichnest du mehr als früher? –JAwohl'. See Jean Tinguely, 'Thema Liebe', in *Briefe von Jean Tinguely an Maja Sacher*, 13–19, 17.
- 14 Franz Meyer was director of the Kunstmuseum Basel and before that of the Kunsthalle Bern, where he had exhibited Tinguely's work as early as 1960. Correspondence from then until the artist's death mirrors a friendship of three decades. Most of Tinguely's letters to Franz Meyer are now in the collection of the Museum Tinguely. See also Müller-Alsbach, *Jeannot an Franz*.
- 15 Another object, which is traced on the left margin of the paper, is not fully recognisable. It could be a Scotch tape dispenser because Tinguely not only used Scotch tape for his collages but also glued the wrappings of the tape rolls onto some.
- 16 To list but two examples for the slowness of drawing and a line that follows folds and traces objects: Jean Tinguely, letter collage to Franz Meyer, 26 December 1980, Museum Tinguely, inv. no. 003972, and a letter collage to Maja Sacher, 1973, Museum Tinguely, inv. no. 003461.
- 17 Tinguely, 'Thema Liebe', 16.
- 18 Lea Kamecke, 'Kunstkommunikation—Briefzeichnungen von Niki de Saint Phalle und Jean Tinguely', in Bloum Cardenas, Ulrich Krempel, and Andres Pardey, eds., *Niki & Jean: L'Art et l'amour* (Munich: Prestel, 2005), 202–18.
- 19 The *Débriscollages* were shown in an exhibition of the same title, Galerie Bischofsberger, Zurich, 15 November 1974–15 January 1975.
- 20 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966).
- 21 'Making Something from Nothing' is the title of a text on Women's 'Hobby Art' by American art critic Lucy R. Lippard: Lucy R. Lippard, 'Making Something from Nothing (Toward a Definition of Women's 'Hobby Art')', in 'Women's Traditional Arts/The Politics of Aesthetics', special issue, *Heresies: A Journal of Art and Politics* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 62–5.
- 22 Melissa Meyer and Miriam Schapiro, 'Waste Not—Want Not: An Inquiry into What Women Saved and Assembled—Femmage', in 'Women's Traditional Arts/The Politics of Aesthetics', special issue, *Heresies: A Journal of Art and Politics* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 66–9.
- 23 Freya Gowrley, *Fragmentary Forms. A New History of Collage* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2024), esp. 150–225.
- 24 Hahnloser, *Jean Tinguely/Maja Sacher*, 48; and Müller-Alsbach, 'Medium Zeichnung', 331.
- 25 Freya Gowrley, 'Collage Before Modernism', in Patrick Elliott, ed., *Cut and Paste: 400 Years of Collage* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2019), 25–33, esp. 26.
- 26 Gowrley, 'Collage Before Modernism', 29–30.
- 27 Meyer and Schapiro, 'Femmage', 66. The passage continues with a list of materials and techniques: 'She makes us think of the paper lace, quills and beads, scraps of cloth, photographs, birthday cards, valentines and clippings, all of which inspired the visual imaginations of the women we write about.'
- 28 Gowrley, *Fragmentary Forms*, 180–3.
- 29 Tinguely used a variety of Victorian scraps with motifs reaching from flowers and baskets to historical depictions of children, to animals—especially birds—putti, and eighteenth-century scenes of gallantry.
- 30 Jean Tinguely, *Frohe Weihnachten 87* (Merry Christmas 87), 1987, ink, gouache, metallic and decorative ribbon, stickers, toys, chocolate heart, plastic Scotch tape wrapper, paper scraps, Scotch tape, in chocolate box, 21.5 × 35 cm. In Hahnloser, *Jean Tinguely/Maja Sacher*, cat. no. 138.
- 31 See, for example, Jean Tinguely, letter collage to Franz Meyer, 26 December 1980, Museum Tinguely, inv. no. 003972.
- 32 Jean Tinguely, *Gli kummi go d'Lampe repariere* (I'm Coming Soon to Repair the Lamps), letter to Paul Sacher, 1 November 1989, pencil, felt-tip pen, ink gouache, paper and Victorian scrap,

- feather, heart of sequins, Scotch tape, 30.5 × 50 cm. In Hahnloser, *Jean Tinguely/Paul Sacher*, cat. no. 57.
- 33 See, for example, Jean Tinguely, *Hoj Sepi—Wio a gat's dr? so elei in Paris?* (Hi Sepi—How Are You? So Alone in Paris?), letter collage to Josef Imhof, 1978, felt-tip pen, ballpoint pen, gouache and collage on paper, 29.5 × 21 cm, see also in the collection of the Museum Tinguely, inv. no. 004281, 003773, 007049.
- 34 Hahnloser, *Jean Tinguely/Paul Sacher*, cat. no. 70.
- 35 Translation by the author. The original German reads: 'mit grosser Liebe und immer an dich denkend Ewig eurer Jeannot'. Jean Tinguely, *Lieber Paul, Sali Maja* (Dear Paul, Dear Maja), 12 August 1984, in Hahnloser, *Jean Tinguely/Maja Sacher*, cat. no. 125.
- 36 Translation by the author. The original German reads: 'Der Künstler schrieb eigentlich nur Liebesbriefe. Selbst, wenn er sich beklagte, fehlten neckisches Beiwerk und farbiges Kunterbunt nicht.' In Hahnloser, *Jean Tinguely/Maja Sacher*, 47.
- 37 Hahnloser, *Jean Tinguely/Paul Sacher*, cat. no. 57.
- 38 Hahnloser's words. See Hahnloser, *Jean Tinguely/Maja Sacher*, 47.
- 39 Cardenas, Krempel, and Pardey, *Niki & Jean*, esp. 14–23.
- 40 Jean Tinguely, *Wie got's* (How Are You?), letter to Fritz Gerber, 29 November 1987, pencil, felt-tip pen, gouache, sticker, gingerbread with Victorian scrap, paper scraps, Scotch tape, folded white paper. In Hahnloser, *Jean Tinguely/Paul Sacher*, cat. no. 3.
- 41 Meyer and Schapiro, 'Femmage', 66.
- 42 See Jean Tinguely, *Konfetti* [Confetti], letter to Maja Sacher, 1 March 1982, ink gouache, ribbon, paper scraps, sticker, confetti, folded white paper, 27 × 25 cm.
- 43 I would like to thank Annja Müller-Alsbach, Andres Pardey, and Roland Wetzel for their helpful remarks regarding the question of whether Tinguely kept a diary.
- 44 Museum Tinguely, *Tschau Sepp*, 69.
- 45 I owe this term to the title of the exhibition *Collage: The Unmonumental Picture*, New Museum, New York, 2008.
- 46 Müller-Alsbach, 'Medium Zeichnung'.
- 47 Müller-Alsbach, 'Medium Zeichnung', figs. 60, 120, and 150.
- 48 A second photograph shows the artist in a similar manner with letters and stickers at a desk in Columbus, 1974. In Müller-Alsbach, 'Medium Zeichnung', fig. 139.
- 49 Historically the concern for detail, especially as an aesthetic category, is gendered. See Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 2007).
- 50 Jean Tinguely, letter to Werner Muster, fanfolded paper, University Library Basel, inv. no. 245845.
- 51 *Museum Jean Tinguely Basel: The Collection*, Monica Wyss, ed. (Bern: Benteli, 1996), 252.

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- Fig. 1: Courtesy the artist and Sprüth Magers  
 Figs. 2, 6, 7: © Museum Tinguely  
 Fig. 3: Margrit Hahnloser, ed., *Briefe von Jean Tinguely an Paul Sacher und gemeinsame Freunde/Letters from Jean Tinguely to Paul Sacher and Common Friends* (Bern: Benteli 1996), cat. no. 3.  
 Fig. 4: Courtesy of Hallmark Art Collection, Hallmark Cards, Inc., Kansas City, Missouri  
 Fig. 5: National Galleries of Scotland  
 Fig. 8: © Nachlass Leonardo Bezzola, photo: Leonardo Bezzola

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