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**German Joachim Roemer's Message in a Bottle Exhibit
Reveals Deepest Fantasies
von Andy Eckardt**

BINGEN, Germany — From love letters to postings for two-bedroom apartments, Europe's Rhine River has transported nearly everything — in a bottle.

German artist Joachim Roemer has spent nearly two decades combing the banks of the Rhine for messages in bottles in the name of art. More than 1,000 of the recovered vessels have now gone on display at a museum on river's waterfront in Bingen.

The 58-year-old artist describes his new museum installation as „a book of poetry.“

„Dear century,“ one message, dated 2000, reads, „my wish is that all people become good, that there is no more war and that my family and friends have a long life.“

Another message from a slightly dirty-looking bottle reads: „Please, please dear Christ child, make it happen that he asks me to become his wife.“

Roemer said he never planned to collect bottled messages but got hooked by „the triviality, the happiness and the drama“ of the messages, which are mostly hand-written.

„I have to admit that my excursions have become somewhat obsessive,“ he told NBC News.

Over the years, he expanded his search to a stretch of nearly 62 miles of the Rhine, climbing rocks, sifting through high grass and standing knee-deep in the floods at times.

„Following flood waters in 1999, I found a total of 20 bottles with messages in just one day. I was highly surprised, electrified and knew that I had to turn this into an art project,“ he said.

The bottles on display have been put behind glass in chronological order and are numbered. Their senders all remain anonymous.

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Roemer said people from all parts of the world — including the United States, Canada and Japan — have thrown their bottled messages into the waters „as a homage to the river.“

Most of the messages are from children and contain treasure maps or birthday wishes, Roemer said.

„If people, especially children, leave an address then I always write them a note,“ he added.

Matthias Schmandt, the director of the museum, said many of the messages on display are about lovers that people have lost or would like to find.

„It is a collection of all aspects of emotions,“ he said.

„Father Rhine“ — one of Europe's busiest waterways — has been the setting for myths, legends and fairy tales. Its most picturesque stretch, the Middle Rhine — a UNESCO world heritage site — is flanked by historic castles, medieval fortresses and terraced vineyards on steep mountain sides.

„The Rhine river is a very special element of water. It has been a place to project fantasies, ideas and longings for hundreds of years,“ Schmandt said. „So, it is logical that people even nowadays talk to the Rhine and put messages into the river.“

Roemer described his art installation as “a book of poetry.”