
Jeremy Cooper’s new book on artists’ postcards is an immediately useful reference work. The copiously-illustrated volume takes a broad tour through the genre and provides useful categories which distinguish the various art practices involving postcards. The content is relevant to students not already acquainted with the artists and projects represented but also a functional tool for scholars interested in historical and contemporary experimental printed projects and artists’ publications.

The text outlines a chronology of artists’ postcard projects of the last century and also features chapters on these specific categories that distinguish different ways of using the structure of the postcard. This attempt to configure categories reveals how numerous and nuanced the uses of the postcard has been in modern and contemporary art practices. Postcards have pictorially announced and described events and exhibitions. An interesting history of happenings and performance can be traced through these little cards, like the announcement cards for Claes Oldenburg’s Store in the 1960s. Examples of Richard Long and Carl Andre postcards directly relate how this ephemera serves as an essential document for time-based or site-specific artworks. Cooper shows how artists used postcards as material elements of larger collage and assemblage work. There are good illustrations of Gilbert and George collage works that typify this visual strategy. Another of Cooper’s categories is “artist-designed postcards.” These examples are described as works unto themselves, as opposed to being documents of existing or future art projects. Terrific publishers like Klaus Staeck, René Block, and Hansjorg Mayer produced postcard editions with artists such as Joseph Beuys, Dieter Roth, and Richard Hamilton. Eleanor Antin’s wonderful One Hundred Boots postcard project stands one of the great works of this genre. She created postcards from photographs of a set of one hundred boots which she would place in different landscapes and interior settings as she traveled across the United States. In this case too, Antin would mail the individual works, and the travel of the cards to friends and colleagues was inherently part of the piece. For many of these projects, this element of postal correspondence is an essential aspect to the projects’ conceptual basis. Cooper’s text provides good historical information for these projects, explaining how and where they were made, where they were sent, and edition size of works. He also takes the reader into the present context, presenting works by artists like Aleksandra Mir and Jonathan Monk to describe recent postcard projects.

As an introduction to college students or as an addition to the growing reference shelf of recent publications on artists’ publishing practices, Artists’ Postcards is a helpful and graphically compelling new release.

David Senior, Bibliographer, Museum of Modern Art Library, david_senior@moma.org