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With Postcards for Democracy, Mark Mothersbaugh and Beatie Wolfe Deliver Priority Mail Art

If you like it, then you better put a stamp on it

BY ROBERT FAIRES, MARCH 12, 2021, ARTS

Maybe you can't credit Beatie Wolfe and Mark Mothersbaugh with *saving* the U.S. Postal Service, but it's no stretch to say these two artist/musicians got more people actively supporting it than anyone else in 2020. Thousands showed their love for the 225-year-old civic institution after the pair launched Postcards for Democracy, a demonstration/collective art project that expressed support for the post office by using the post office. Participation was as simple as 1-2-3: 1) Buy stamps; 2) make art on a postcard; 3) mail the card to Mothersbaugh and Wolfe. That activity generated funds for the postal service *and* reaffirmed its value.

If you recall, the post office's value was seriously questioned last year. Politicians denounced it as a vehicle for voter fraud, and new Postmaster General Louis DeJoy aimed to fix its "broken business model" with radical changes that caused widespread delivery delays. Mothersbaugh and Wolfe take such threats to the postal service personally: He's been devoted to the mail since his Devo days and before, when he was an art student at Kent State University and would send postcard art to the likes of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg and actually get replies; for her, the old-school, no-tech act of writing and mailing letters has helped keep her sane during the lockdown, and she says "it's always a joy" to see her mail carrier, LaTonya. But both saw the latest post office attacks as also endangering the election process. So in addition to "reminding people of this amazing service we both love (that we'll lose if we don't use!)," as Wolfe puts it, the duo's campaign came to support both the USPS and the right to vote.

The response was immediate and enthusiastic: postcards by the sackful on which were drawn, painted, and collaged messages about saving the postal service and exercising the right to vote, yes, but also life under COVID and conservation, capitalism and community, potatoes and nothing at all – mail art for mail art's sake. ("There was a lot of excitement and interest from the USPS head office about this project," adds Wolfe, "but sadly that got slightly DeJoy-ed!") Seeing how many people answered their call to action and what they've said has meant a lot to Mothersbaugh and Wolfe, especially since November. "Seeing how much PFD connected with people, and seeing all the different cards pouring in, has been incredible," Wolfe wrote by email. "I think it offered a non-digital creative outlet at a time when we're all so disconnected, isolated, and just trying to survive 2020 and beyond. And the cards now reflect this collective experience we've been having since the beginning of lockdown. So it's almost like a time capsule capturing the various



l-r: Untitled by Denise Woodward; The Rare Joy, The Fine Hell by Mark Mothersbaugh and Beatie Wolfe; Big ST by Vicente Marti (Courtesy of Postcards for Democracy)

events and themes that we've been going through."

Wolfe and Mothersbaugh always planned to exhibit the postcards they received – and that will happen May 17-Aug. 8 in a site-specific installation at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida Southwestern State College in Fort Myers – but they never set an end date for the project itself. And they still don't know what will happen with it. "Maybe if we eventually go more digital with bills, advertisements, and other official information, mail art could take over the postal system and mutate into our own Highway of Information in the future," Mothersbaugh writes. "I like thinking of all those mail trucks and mail carriers with bags exclusively delivering art and postal cards around the world to a network of postcard artists of every shape and size."

So, having engaged all these people to make art who may not think of themselves as art makers and these people in activism who may not think of themselves as activists, what do the Postcards for Democracy creators see for its participants?

"I hope the collection of all this creative force feels like a gathering of human energy, and I hope our exhibition at the Rauschenberg Gallery conveys that feeling," Mothersbaugh says. "There is a lack of community in the world these days that digital conveniences don't make up for. I hope all the contributors to our upcoming show feel that they are connected in some way, I know it has made Beatie and I feel more like we are part of this world in ways we hadn't imagined before."

To participate in Postcards for Democracy, mail your postcard to 8760 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA, 90069-2206.

Postcards for Democracy – A Collective Art Demo

FEATURED SESSION

Saturday, March 20, 11:30am, Channel 1