

Eleanor Antin

100 BOOTS

100 BOOTS, a mailwork consisting of 51 photographic postcards of 100 black rubber boots in special, often dramatic or enigmatic, situations was conceived as a means of circumventing some of the spatial and temporal limits imposed on an artist whose work is shown in a gallery situation. The piece was distributed through the mails between March 1971 and July 1973 when the postcards were mailed to approximately 1000 people at irregular intervals, ranging from 3 days to 5 weeks, depending upon what the artist took to be "the internal necessities of the narrative", to approximately 1000 artists, writers, dancers, critics, museums, galleries, libraries, magazines around the world - what is commonly known as the Art World.

Individual images were rarely mailed in the same sequence in which they were photographed. Rather, the artist re-ordered distinct events into a continuous narrative which only emerged as the work unfolded in real time, in which it was continually interrupted by the intervals between the mailings. 100 BOOTS started in the establishment suburban culture (At the Bank, In the Market), then committed their first crime (100 BOOTS Trespass), after which they embarked on a series of adventures at deserted ranches, on river boats, in and out of odd jobs, went to war, and even had a love affair with a sad ending.

The piece officially became ART when 100 BOOTS had a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, May 30 - July 8, 1973. There, the legendary heroes were installed in their own crash pad and a gallery was hung with the 51 postcards celebrating the BOOTS' earlier career, while MOMA mailed out weekly cards with new images of their New York adventures.

100 BOOTS was one of the first "outsider" works to make a dent in the traditional art world distribution system, and its critical and popular success helped free artists from the passive dependency of relying upon a reactionary commercial system for distribution of their work. It was also one of the first contemporary narrative works to burst upon an art world still mired in modernism's antagonism to narrative.

These 51 photographs are a new numbered edition in which the actual implications of the modern day odyssey of 100 BOOTS take center stage. The emphasis can now shift from the experimental nature of the distribution system - the mail - to the experimental nature of the narrative. Now we can take a more leisurely, perhaps a more philosophical approach, and follow the migrations of our Everyman hero as he navigates a path for himself within a changing and often dangerous world. Happily, his old tools still remain - wit, empathy and guts.