

p.p. & f.f.f.: Postcards and fiction - How imagery keeps on influencing our vision

* Letizia Ragaglia *

In 1975, Christian Boltanski realised the photo project *Le voyage de nocces à Venise (Honeymoon in Venice)* with Annette Messager, and noticed that for tourists, the city of Venice embodies a fictive reality. Every tourist believes he knows and recognizes Venice by its public places. They want to clip photos corresponding to the images known by everyone, without ever having been to the lagoon city.

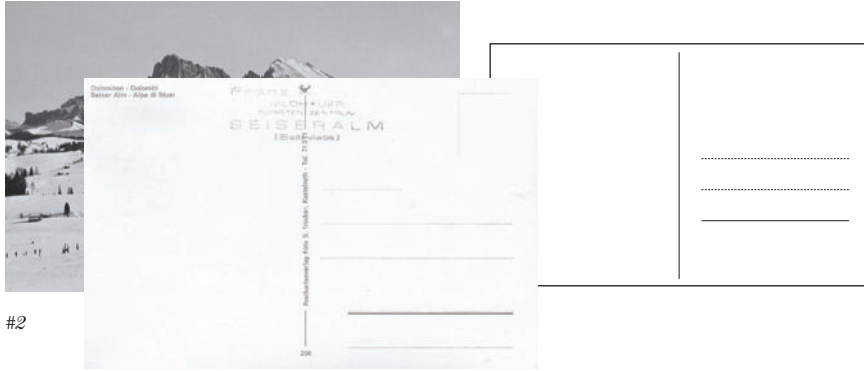
In 2006, Hubert Kostner exhibited his *postcard works (posta-prioritaria)* stigmatising tourism's introduction of picture postcard aesthetics in mountain regions. The immaculate appearance of the idyllic landscape, undisturbed by tourism and the leisure industry, is carved into wood blocks and embellished with a yellow lacquer patina, styling the image definitively according to visitors' expectations. Art critic Jeffrey Deitch says that *form follows fiction*, thus describing the indefinable border between fiction and reality to which we, in our perceptions, have rapidly become accustomed. Thus, it has become almost obligatory that skiing and trekking areas remain faithful to the romantic ideal of vast, untamed nature and to adapt their images to suit this model. Ski lifts, chairlifts, aerial cable cars and increasingly monstrous gondolas are scarcely present in promotional pictures: the panorama must appear as undisturbed as possible, a point raised by Hubert Kostner in *Painters*.

To send a postcard from your own environment after having visited it with disenchanting eyes is not a simple task, but Hubert Kostner repeatedly succeeds and with freshness in an ironical way. Along his artistic course, constant remains the



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contraposition of a subjective and disillusioned look at a standardized cognitive system. By his photographic mappings of towns like Munich, Madrid and Bolzano he has substituted his own personal and fragmented perception to the anonymous and generalizing one of urban transport nets and of their codes. By many other works with different expressive means he faces the consumption of stereotyped landscape images. I like to see Hubert Kostner as a foreigner, as a flâneur of Baudelairean reminiscence who goes on hikes in the Alpine lands and compares his actual perception with the generally recognized one. The phenomenon of tourism and in particular the promotion of tourists' destinations significantly influence our way of seeing and of understanding both familiar and exotic spaces: artistic reception still constitutes the possibility of looking in a distinct way at a universally renowned subject. I much appreciated Dan Cameron's introductory essay to the 8th Istanbul Biennial titled *Poetic Justice* by which he defines the artist as a global citizen who, beyond inevitable individualisms and nationalisms of any kind, can still highlight universally valid values that are based on the supremacy of a shared humanity. For many artists today the connection between their own work and the phenomenon of global nomadism has become fundamental. Artists move today around the world to perform their research or to develop their own projects or to take part in shows; the trip they undertake never has a strictly economic aim, it rather takes place within the aim of expanding their own knowledge, of widening their own experiences. Numerous artworks are directly developed from the experience of a trip, from the meeting with other people,



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from the exchange of ideas with other cultures.

We can thus consider the artist also as a foreigner who moves on the territory and can give a meaningful contribution in virtue of the difference and especially of the distance that mark him. «The foreigner strengthens himself in virtue of the distance that he keeps from the others and from his own self that grants him the proud notion of not holding the truth but of having the faculty of seeing all, himself included, within a sense of proportion while the others are a prey to the routine of a mono-value.»¹... «The space of the foreigner is a train on tracks, a plane in flight, the same transition that excludes a stop»².

Contemporary art is often identified with an élite practice while like never before have artists looked for a common and hybrid ground with the audience to ease a non specialized approach.

Hubert Kostner also presents himself as a nomad who, through his by its travels and observations, has developed a special sensitivity for the environment. In this case, he is like a stranger in his own country, and his view is cast upon the territory where he grew up, to which he, with his affection, can bring another appropriation, turning away from the tourist's eye and exposing clichéd landscape motifs. The common denominator of Hubert Kostner's work is hardly accusation, but falls instead within the ironic sphere, if not outright parody. The young artist from Castelrotto wants not only to point fingers, but a to awaken a new consciousness; his work follows the conviction that art can elicit change, even if this change consists



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of simply shifting our perspective of the world slightly. So we are requested to climb stairs leading to view a panorama of miniature mountains through a small opening in a 265 x 265 x 375 cm box. Their cotton-wad bedded peaks compose a unique, giant plastic postcard, facing us with the myth of romantic confrontation between nature's infinity and human limitation. Although our relationship with nature has changed dramatically since the publication of Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* 250 years ago, the ideal of an overpowering nature with which we seek harmony persists in our imagination. That this agreement with the «vision landscape» is usually experienced only fictitiously, and that true unity with nature free from other disturbances is becoming more and more rare, is another issue entirely.

In this respect, Hubert Kostner's art undoubtedly has a Dadaistic shade as well: based on quite ironic questioning, it attempts to expose cultural conventions and thus release subjective modes of thought perspectives and horizons of experience. According to Dada, nature and life in academic painting are mere pretence, and art must therefore re-conquer direct reference to reality via an anti-formalist aesthetics. Kostner's work, too, is concerned with exposing the original meaning and true reality that are concealed by a idealistic conception of the world.

For example his artwork *Scène d'amour* can be included within the always living spirit of Dada in which an elegant armchair of a probable bourgeois origin is



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deprived of its function as a piece of furniture and covered by green miniature trees: many prototypes taken from the perfect model of a wood tree are joint and contrast the symbol of an apparently comfortable interior. Reality, fiction and game are mixed also in *Jump around* where the concept of the selection of a tree made of several concentric rings gives the artists the image of a target-shooting, the inside of its sight is actually made by a hollow trunk. Dadaist word games and incomprehensible witticism constitute an antirational modality which becomes mainly free in revealing the sense of what seems apparently senseless. Such attitude partly belongs also to Hubert Kostner's artistic production that often uses subtle associations and metonymies. In *Edmund und Tenzing* two tiny figures tower on a white sphere formed by 8.850 m of string, allusion made to the height of the Everest. The first climbers of the legendary mountain who have never officially been portrayed together, jointly support a small flag with a figure that reminds the price label of a product on sale: reference to the great effort of the two men, but maybe also a further veiled allusion to the commercialization of mountaineering.

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1. Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1988, p. 16
 2. *idem*, p. 18



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