



EXHIBITION

Send Me A Letter

From 25 November 2022
to 26 February 2023
at Museu d'Història de Catalunya

mhcat.cat

ENGLISH

Panel 1

THIS MESSAGE IS FOR YOU

Many of the billions of postcards published in almost a century and a half have come down to us as small life events that can be classified into almost universal themes by carefully reading them. A postcard has a sender and a recipient – or senders and recipients – who usually move in the private, but not secret sphere, given that a postcard is designed to be sent without the intimacy of an envelope, although this is not always the case. News of the family, of a loved one, of friends and of people we have met occasionally journey from one place to another in the world or within the same city to express all manner of wishes and news that we now propose to reveal.

Panel 2

THE POSTCARD, A MULTIFACETED SOUVENIR

In 1869, Austria brought into circulation a card without any illustration and with a cheaper postal rate than that of letters on which short messages could be expressed and openly read. Over the course of a few years, now with one side illustrated using the most varied techniques and the other reserved for writing, it became a mass phenomenon, a souvenir par excellence and a collector's item.

Panel 3

MY DEAREST ONE

Messages of love between couples, whether engaged or married, often appeared on postcards, either because of a permanent or more or less temporary separation, or else to formalise a relationship that was still being consolidated and had its corresponding ups and downs. These postcards were often hidden from prying eyes inside an envelope.

Panel 4

UNDER THE MANTLE OF THE VIRGIN MARY

Marian shrines have been visited by fervent devotees since time immemorial. Miraculous apparitions of the Virgin Mary encouraged the creation of new sanctuaries from the late 19th century, and this led to a veritable phenomenon of religious tourism organised on a large scale. Lourdes and

Fatima became part of the new imaginary of Catalan parishioners, alongside Montserrat, Núria, Queralt and a great many other places. The publication of postcards multiplied and their circulation became a barometer of the level of popularity of each sanctuary.

Panel 5

LOOK AT ME! LIKE A SELFIE, BUT CUSTOM-MADE

Conveying one's own image dates back a long time. Eighteenth-century nobles exchanged portraits in the form of small miniatures painted on glass or ivory, and these were often their first letter of introduction. As self-portrait photographs became more widespread, they were sent in the form of a postcard, either pictured alone or in a group, as a sign of position or as a souvenir.

Panel 6

CONGRATULATIONS!

Events such as a saint's day, birthday, birth, New Year, Christmas or Easter were the most common reasons for sending a postcard. Wishes of happiness with more or less long messages were therefore sent on postcards with a wide variety of themes, often with nice images and especially published for that specific occasion.

Panel 7

ON THE WAY. JOURNEYS IN PROGRESS

Before airplanes became widespread, journeys of varying lengths were made by train or boat, and then later by car. But only the wealthy classes could afford such trips in the early 20th century. Travel, often associated with holidays, became increasingly more popular from the 1960s onwards, and postcards sent from the most diverse destinations became the most numerous.

Panel 8

WE'VE PUT ON OUR SKIS

Putting on some skis and sliding downhill was a real achievement from the early 20th century until the 1940s. The first button ski lift was installed in La Molina in 1943, and another in Núria in 1947. This was the beginning of the first proper ski resorts, which helped to popularise a minority sport that was gradually acquiring new fans. Every winter,

lovers of snow in Pyrenean or Alpine resorts announced that they had already made their first descent or they were learning how to do so.

Panel 9

WE'VE HAD OUR FIRST SWIM OR TAKEN THE WATERS!

Summer was undoubtedly a time of year when most postcards were sent, and it remains so. Bathing was synonymous with a good financial position in the early 20th century, and families and friends announced that they had already arrived somewhere on the coast. The same was true of spas, although a stay there may also have been for health reasons. Later on, the arrival of summer meant the possibility of enjoying a few days at the beach, an affordable pastime for many more people.

Panel 10

MY THOUGHTS OF YOU OVER THE MILES. EMIGRATION

Being uprooted from one's birthplace because of having emigrated to another country, often far away, has led to various types of messages. From a sense of longing written on the back of a very exotic image to a desire to display the success and financial and personal prosperity achieved after a few years, with photo postcards of the family or the business built up through hard work.

Panel 11

DEAR CUSTOMER. DISTINGUISHED SIR

Many companies already had a corporate image that was incorporated into all their advertising. The popularity of postcards led to specific editions to send short announcements to customers. But these small illustrated cards were also occasionally used to advertise specific products or for far-reaching mass campaigns.

Panel 12

DON'T FRET. BUT I'VE SOLD ABSOLUTELY NOTHING

Personal archives can provide us with extremely interesting cases of correspondence in the form of postcards, and these can often be surprising. Pau Maria Turull was a rich, elegant man of refined

tastes who was associated with his uncle Pompeu Casanovas Turull between 1905 and 1912 in a wool import-export business for the textile industry in Sabadell. Pau Maria travelled constantly, stayed in the best hotels and went to Paris, London and Biarritz, theoretically to attract some customers. His message in actual fact was always the same: "I haven't sold a kilo yet, but I'm working hard".

Panel 13

FROM THE FRONT AND THE REARGUARD

The First World War (1914-1918) was the first major conflict in which photography in general and the postcard in particular were used as weapons of war to manipulate, indoctrinate and encourage combatants, their families and also public opinion.

These propaganda aims were even more direct during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Images of leaders and institutions from each side were disseminated, and it was common to find postcards illustrated by prestigious artists with a strong ideological load.

Panel 14

MILITARY SERVICE STORIES

All men over the age of twenty were enlisted, drafted, called up and declared soldiers until compulsory military service was finally abolished in 2001. This constant movement of recruits and soldiers throughout Spain led to a great deal of correspondence with families, friends and girlfriends from young men, some of whom had never even left their hometown.

Humorous

Humorous postcards about situations experienced during military service began to abound from the 1950s onwards and these became very popular.

Panel 15

FROM POSTCARD TO WHATSAPP

In a world where social media has taken over the way we relate to family, friends and acquaintances, and has even entered the workplace and the community, transforming our perception of space and time, postcards can become a memory of the past. Indeed, the immediate communication provided by WhatsApp, Instagram or Facebook has swept are

away for many people the habit of sending postcards to express emotions, memories and news. Although receiving a postcard today is still a symbol of esteem that involves a few minutes of dedication on the part of the sender. Choosing it, buying it, writing it, affixing the stamp and, finally, dropping it in a postbox in any corner of the world are acts that make the recipient feel a special emotion.

TIMELINE

1865

Heinrich von Stephan proposes to the Austrian Postal Conference a new method of communication on card, without envelopes and with cheaper postage. The idea is rejected as it is considered a violation of the secrecy of communications.

1869

The first postcard, without an illustration, circulates in Austria on 1 December.

1870

The German lithographer Miesler reproduces engravings of views of Berlin in a postcard format.

1873

The First Spanish Republic issues so-called “entero postales” (official postcards) for the first time, with printed postage stamps but without any illustrations.

1878

The General Postal Union, established by industrialised countries in 1874, is renamed the Universal Postal Union.

1890

Switzerland's Oscar Hauser and Adolf Menet set up a large graphic arts company in Madrid. It is the first postcard publishing company in Spain to reproduce photographs using the collotype technique.

1896

First edition of a Barcelona postcard, published in Madrid by Hauser and Menet, entitled *Recuerdo de Barcelona* (Souvenir from Barcelona).

1898

The Badalona firm of Vicente Bosch, owner of Anís del Mono, publishes advertising postcards with the winning posters of its competition held that year.

1901

J. Thomas publishes two sets of postcards in Barcelona of Camprodon and the surrounding countryside. He greatly expands his catalogue later to become one of the most powerful postcard publishing companies.

Publication in Barcelona of the first *Boletín de la tarjeta postal il·lustrada* (Illustrated Postcard Bulletin).

The Sociedad Cartófila Española Hispania (Hispania Spanish Cartophilic Society) is set up in Barcelona.

1905

The back of a postcard is divided: the right-hand side reserved for the name and address of the recipient and the left-hand side for the text.

A.T.V. Àngel Tolrà Viazó (1867-1956) begins publishing postcards. The company continues until 1930.

c. 1906

The Associació Protectora de l'Ensenyament Catalana (Association for the Protection of Catalan Education) publishes a number of postcard sets on Artistic and Picturesque Catalonia in order to raise funds.

1910

The photographer Josep Boixadera joins forces with the printer Josep Obradors to commence publishing postcards in Sabadell.

1912

The Parisian photographer Lucien Roisin Besnard starts producing postcards.

1914

Outbreak of the First World War. Postcards become weapons of propaganda.

c. 1930

Lucien Roisin opens his shop in Rambla Santa Mònica and starts publishing both collotype and platinum print postcards, as well as mass-produced bromide print postcards.

1936

The Commissariat for Propaganda is set up on 3 October, directed by Jaume Miravittles, and a number of postcard sets are published: Republican Flora, Aragon Front and Refugees. Trade unions and political parties also join in the publication of postcards.

1940

Glossy postcards, smaller than conventional postcards, begin to be published.

1950

Postcard accordions begin to be issued as souvenirs.

1956

The Escudo de Oro publishing house is set up in Barcelona, dedicated to printing colour tourist postcards measuring 10 x 15 cm.

CREDITS

MUSEUM PROJECT

Direction

Margarida Sala

Coordination

Raquel Castellà

Curator

Àngels Casanovas

MUSEUM DESIGN

Museum project

Pep Vilà (Munt art)

Graphic design and image

Victòria Rovira

PRODUCTION AND ASSEMBLY

Constructions and installations

DEC (Dissenys en cartró)

TURS (Take Your Selfie)

Printing

Munill Estudi

Assembly

Munt art

AUDIOVISUAL

Photography and Postcards

Director and camera operator: Clara Durán and Roc Busom

Interview with David González