

Eleanor Antin American b. February 27, 1935

100 Boots, 1971-1973

Half tone reproductions of photographs

(51 total, 38 shown here)

4 1/2 x 7 inches each

An author, an actress, a sculptor, creator of assemblages, an installation artist, photographer, filmmaker, and Professor of Art (University of California, San Diego), Eleanor Antin first became known for her Blood of a Poet Box, a prefabricated wood box that contains one hundred microscope glass slides with blood specimens of one hundred poets (1965-68). By offering the viewer the "real thing,"¹ in the form of the poets' blood, instead of the standard form of illusionism in an artwork, Antin became an early innovator in the postmodern era and a pioneer in the development of conceptual, performance, video, and installation art.² Her investigations of real versus illusion and of "what makes a person tic"³ have continued in works that have combined seemingly contradictory aspects of biography and fiction, drama and documentary, fantasy and fact, humor and pathos.

Born in the Bronx in 1935, Eleanor Antin (née Fineman) is the daughter of ardent Communists who emigrated from Poland in the 1930s. Her mother, once an actress in the Yiddish Theater in Poland, later ran hotels in the Catskill Mountains, where the importance of culture in the programs offered superseded a concern for the number of guests attending.⁴ Influences upon Eleanor at this time were writers Sholem Aleichem, whose stories were adapted for *Fiddler on the Roof*, Isaac Babel, Isaac Bashevis Singer, artists Marc Chagall and Ilya Schor, photographers Roman Vishniac and Alter Kacyzne, and filmmakers D. W. Griffith, Charlie Chaplin, and Vsevolod Pudovkin, all of whom were made known to her through the stimulating intellectual environment created for her by her parents.⁵ After attending the High School of Music and Art in Manhattan, Antin studied acting at the Tamara Daykarhanova School for Stage, then studied writing and art at City College.

In 1968, she moved to Solana Beach with her husband David Antin, performance poet and art critic, and, in 1971, she began mailing photographic postcards of an "invented hero."⁶ 100 Boots, a narrative series of black and white photos, documented her installation of fifty pairs of black rubber boots in their travels from Southern California to New York. In various stances—facing the sea, trespassing, marching through a grocery store—100 Boots "captured the imagination of thousands across the country who followed the character's every move, right through the door of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where the entire series and the Boots themselves were exhibited in 1973."⁷ Antin sent the 51 postcards to art professionals, colleagues, and friends. With titles like *100 BOOTS on the Job*, and *100 BOOTS on the Ferry*, the empty boots emerged "as a persona with real pathos, an earnest, slightly downtrodden...character...outsider, disenfranchised, and undervalued."⁸

Since the 1970s, Antin has transformed herself into three alter egos--a king, a nurse, and a black ballerina--and has presented them by using a combination of photography, video, performance, drawings, and writings. Her previous work and her latest feature length silent films explore with fatalistic humor the idea of the self as well as issues of gender, identity, and social consciousness.

Donna Krapf 8/07/01

¹ "Eleanor Antin: A Retrospective," Gallery of Art, Washington University in St. Louis, 8 Sept. 2000.

² "Eleanor Antin," At the Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, May 1999.

³ Leah Ollman, "Ever the 'Wicked Little Girl'," Los Angeles Times, 2 April 1995: Calendar, p. 6.

⁴ Sara Nuss-Galles, review of "The Man Without a World," The Jewish Standard, 4 Sept. 1992.

⁵ Jeffrey Shandler, "It's Deja Vu All Over," The Forward, 4 Sept. 1992.

⁶ Ollman

⁷ Ollman

⁸ Leah Ollman, LA Times Calendar, 27 May 1999.

100 BOOTS HEAD EAST

Projects: 100 Boots by Eleanor Antin, a mailwork consisting of approximately 50 postcards of photographs of 100 black rubber boots in special, often dramatic or enigmatic situations, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from May 30 through July 8, when the boots themselves will conclude their peripatetic adventures with a stay in New York. In addition to the entire set of postcards, the exhibition will include photographic blow-ups of the boots' forays into New York. One entire gallery will be converted into the boots' New York "crash pad," complete with mattresses, sleeping bags, radio, and a front door equipped with a peep-hole and a chain lock.

Eleanor Antin conceived of 100 Boots 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 has been executed during the past two-and-a-half years. The postcards have been mailed at irregular intervals, ranging from 3 days to 5 weeks, to 1000 people and institutions around the world.

Antin originally thought of 100 Boots as a picaresque novel in the manner of Huckleberry Finn or Kerouac's On the Road. However, she quickly saw its potential as a film "so I sold myself the movie rights." As more cards were produced she began to see them as highlighted frames from a lengthy movie serial such as "The Perils of Pauline." Each postcard includes a photograph of the boots (all photographs have been taken by Philip Steinmetz), a title for the particular adventure (e. g. "100 Boots on the Way to Church," "100 Boots at the Saloon," "100 Boots Taking the Hill"), and the date, time, and place at which the picture was taken.

Individual images were not necessarily mailed in the same sequence in which they

(more)

were taken. Rather, the artist re-orders distinct events into a continuous narrative, the structure of which emerges with the distribution of the work over a period of time. The boots started in the establishment 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, and even had a love affair with a sad ending.

While most of the boots' adventures have taken place in California, where Ms. Antin lives, their exploits now conclude in New York City-- on the Staten Island Ferry, in Central Park, at a Greek night club, under the Brooklyn Bridge, and at various other locations -- before they settle in the Museum, where the complete record of their wanderings will be shown in its entirety for the first time. The exhibition is directed by Jane Neol, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture.

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Additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Mark Segal, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7501, -7296.