

Summary

This grant helped fund a collaborative project called Postcards For A Grand Tour. This project investigated the role of the postcard as an object bearing the memories of a place transmitted from one location to another. To complete this project I travelled to Rome, Berlin, Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, and finally to London, on a route tracing many of the cities from the Grand Tour. Before leaving on this journey, I asked people to send me content for postcards and to tell me where to leave them in each city. I also took a portable printer and blank postcards with me so I could print on-the-fly, with contributors reacting to my experiences.

The entire project was an engrossing experiment inverting the typical way a tourist gathers postcards to send to distant contacts. Instead, my trip was deeply impacted by things other people wanted me to experience, and mementos left behind instead of collected and brought home. I found myself taking with seeking out strange places, from playgrounds to sex shops, sites of terrorism to military convoys, cabarets to places where people fart. Going on such an adventure with these sites taking priority certainly changes the way one thinks about travel. The overall experience made me reconsider how questions of familiarity elide with the business of tourism, how some things remain constant in every city (like the search for a public restroom), and how this mundanity brushes up against tourist destinations that derive their popularity from a mixture of spectacle, history, and public and private “recommendations.”

Most of my social media postings from my trip from Rome to London consisted of other people’s cards held up in front of disparate locations, from The Eiffel tower to a public urinal. Looking back on these postings and the documentation of this project, I am struck by how my publicly posted photos differ from most contemporary travel photos in that the site pictured is often mostly obscured by a postcard, often seemingly unrelated to the site, made from an image determined by someone from a far away place, interrupting both my view and the expectation of the perfect “photo opportunity.”

This project taught me many valuable lessons. After traveling for a little over three weeks, and placing roughly 100 cards sourced from over fifty contributors in surprising locations, under sometimes strange conditions, I feel I have come to re-imagine a contemporary notion of The Grand Tour and have learned a great deal about what kinds of images and experiences one expects from a place and what happens when these expectations are challenged or diverted. This re-calibration was liberating, frustrating, and educational.

Also, I gathered many cards from people who don’t consider themselves to be “artists,” and many of the most surprising and successful postcards came from these contributors. This re-affirmed my belief that when given the opportunity to participate, non-artists often come up with the best ideas, perhaps because they have so little to

lose. Additionally, this project made me think about how the postcard operates as a low-stakes, easy, perhaps even “dumb” medium. Anything can go on a postcard; its where the thing goes and then where it goes after that matters.

Background

This project grew from Postcards For America, completed last summer during a cross-country road trip across the U.S.A. from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. and back again. To read more info and view all the documentation from this project, please visit Postcards For America at tuckerneel.com. Throughout my month-long trip through national parks, ghost towns, metropolises, and tiny villages, I found myself understanding America through other people’s images and narratives every time I left a postcard at a bar, monument, museum, car windshield, rest stop, or stranger’s home. When I returned to L.A., I saw these Postcards For America as a reflection of how a dispersed selection of individuals imagines America, travel, and the sites and experiences worth the journey. I also began to think about how this project might work in other scenarios.

If the cross-country road trip is the ultimate icon of American travel, its European equivalent might be The Grand Tour, an 18th-century rite-of-passage for mostly young, wealthy, primarily English men who would travel for months, sometimes years, on prescribed itineraries from London to Rome and far-flung places in-between. During these trips, they were expected to absorb and record their presence at significant sites in ways that would allow them to participate in the solidifying aristocratic class with a kind of cultural authenticity that only comes from actually “being there.” They also used the tour as an opportunity to “sow their wild oats” and affirm notions of cultural supremacy in libidinal, exotic, foreign places. Today, rites-of-passage, from “gap year” adventures, to after-graduation backpacking trips, to importance of “study abroad,” all share a legacy stemming from the ideas and ideals tied up in The Grand Tour.

This Grand Tour history has also cemented many hallmarks of tourism that stick with us today. The souvenir has moved from the stolen (or fake) ancient ruin to the pocketable local craft and miniaturized monument. The on-site portrait was once an expensive, life-size, commissioned painting, and now it’s the selfie and the Leaning Tower of Pisa prop shot. The Guidebook as we know it was born from Grand Tour itineraries and its legacy lingers in multiple iPhone apps. And the idealized scene rendered for posterity has moved from large Piranesi prints to glossy postcards of cats lounging on Roman ruins.

Future Plans

I have placed all the postcards, documented them, and posted these images to social media. In the next few months I will update the project website (grandtourpostcards.com) with this documentation. I will also assemble all the cards, documentation, and a short text into a book I will then donate to the Otis College Library. I also plan to create a book of postcards from the postcards I designed for this project.



1. These are Alex Schub's cards for the #postcardsforagrandojour project. Alex wanted me to place these cards in souvenir shops near the Eiffel Tower so that's just what I did. Awesome. Thanks Alex!



2. This is Dana Berman Duff's card for the Postcards for A Grand Tour project. The title is "Le Notti di Cabiria Fine." This side of the card is The end title of the film *Le Notti di Cabiria*, 1957 by Federico Fellini, enacted in Rome by Giulietta Mesina. The other side says "Buona notte, Dana Berman Duff." When she was in Rome Dana made a work tracking Cabiria's path down the river from the Fellini movie. Cabiria keeps getting pushed into the Tiber river by insincere suitors. She is a prostitute, so Dana wanted the postcard to be left in an area where a sex worker might find it. I chose the Ponte Sant'Angelo because I imagine someone going to or from St Peters after a long night. Thanks Dana!



3. This is Allegra Frazier's card for the Postcards for A Grand Tour project. Allegra made this fantastic card by placing one of her signature illustrations on "Cassell's history of the war between France and Germany." She pointed out that the grand tour coincided with 250+ years of grand, continent-wide warfare in Europe. I immediately thought of this card when I visited the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe today because after sitting and watching people interact with the site I realized it's very odd that the first thing people tend to do at this huge memorial is take selfies (you can see two dudes doing just this in the background)- many, many selfies. I've seen so many of these selfies on hook-up apps-Grindr, Tindr, etc. so strange. Tourism. It's a constant. Berlin is pretty amazing,especially bathed in warm sunlight. Wish you were here.



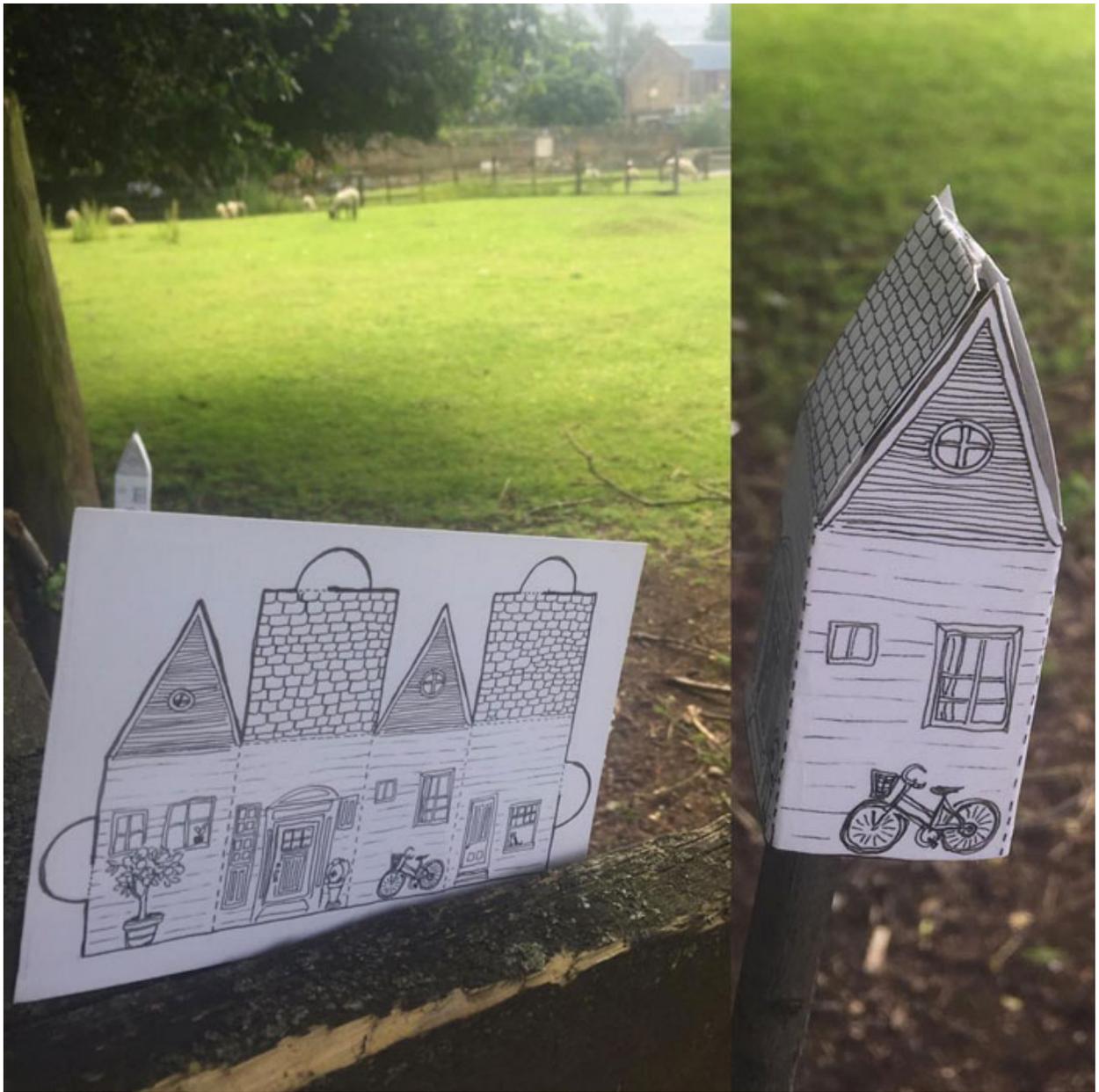
4. This is one of Rachel Block's cards for the #postcardsforagrandtour project. Rachel sent me many candid, poetic photos to place in various cities. I was so bummed I didn't get to place her Florence card but I'll be sure to find a way... So Rachel wanted this card left in Berlin. Since I love Rachel so much and I know she loves her cat and all the love reminds me of the ideal of home and comfort and rest I decided to leave this card on my bed in the apartment I stayed in in Berlin. After very very very long days/nights out dancing and exploring, coming home to this bed was always like falling into a gargantuan hug. I miss you Rachel and I miss all my friends back home. But Berlin has been so kind to me and I've met eye-opening people and made some amazing new friends. I'm sad to leave but excited for what's to come. Thanks Rachel!



5. This is Soo Kim's card for the #postcardsforagrandoortour project. While Soo didn't explicitly say where she wanted me to leave this card, I got to thinking about how her image involves the overlay of multiple landscapes and topographical phenomena. So I thought it would go well on the train from Berlin to Amsterdam as I spent hours gazing out the window at the changing scenery. I'm so thankful for the sun and great weather I've been lucky to experience so far. Thanks Soo!



6. This is one of Matt Wardell's cards for the #postcardsforagrando project. I love this one. Matt wanted me to place these cards in any public restroom. I left it in a fairly clean public restroom on the Insel der Jugend, or the island of the young. It was a real nice day. I hope Matt's card made someone happy. Thanks Matt!



7. This is Anna Magnuson's card for the #postcardsforagrandtour project. Anna wanted me to colonize London with these awesome little houses one can cut out and assemble from her postcard. I left this little house at the Hackney city farm where i knew a little kid would find it. Thanks Anna!