

REAL PHOTO POSTCARDS: PICTURES FROM A CHANGING NATION

ON DISPLAY



by Federica Barrios Carbonell

The celebrated Museum of Fine Arts in Boston presents an overview of one of photography history's most exciting shifts into the portable personal medium. The Kodak postcard camera, released in 1903, offered the public individualized opportunities to create their own postcards in the midst of a worldwide postcard craze. Through this invention, Kodak paved the way for what we now recognize as the printed common photo card. This invention generalized the use of photography as an expressive medium.

Rather than commercial renderings of the quotidian world, members of society were now able to share their firsthand experiences and explore the world through their own lens. The subjects were no longer replicates and overused pictures of praised sites and celebrities; thanks to Kodak, people were now able to easily share family members and individualized experiences with those around them. This form of new media allowed for the correctness and precision of photography to flash away in favor of a genuine experience.

The innovative exhibition includes over 300 postcard photographs selected from the MFA's Leonard A. Lauder Postcard Archive. They incomparably provide the viewers with unfeigned perspectives and stories of life in America during the early 20th century in lieu of history book portrayals.

The exhibition tugs at the heartstrings with an ever-popular sense of nostalgia—one that is so sought after in our modern-day society. With a lively spirit, the pictures in the selection provide an array of tones ranging between themes like devastation, youth, playfulness, uncertainty, and love, truly fulfilling the curiosity of the viewer while leaving them wanting more.

The hard-hitting yet lively images put history into perspective and give us a friendly reminder of the path to where we stand today. From an image of a woman holding up signs labeled "Votes for Women" in a pre women's suffrage era to a picture of young girls having portraits taken of them with what one can assume are their families surrounding them, a woman taking control of the telephonic communication system that we have come so far from, and candid shots of people enjoying their day at the Bi-County Fair, the fine selection of pictures present endless aspects of life ready to be explored and enjoyed by the modern spectator.

The intimate aura of the exhibit is created by the history that surrounds the discourse behind it, the beginning of photograph sharing as we know it today provided to us by an elite group of amateur artists unaware of what their vision would provide for future generations. Inviting and touching, this exhibition is one for all ages that will inspire a comparison between our present-day society's relationship to photography and that of the early 1900s. At a time when the concept of the cultural melting pot in the United States was becoming ever-more prominent, the portable camera normalized photography as a form of personal artistic expression.

The Real Photo Postcard: Pictures from a Changing Nation exhibition will be available to the public in an in-person display at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston from March 17th to July 25th, 2022.

From top to bottom, Column 1: *Mary F. Mitchell Feeding Chickens, Wichita, Kansas, about 1912; Photographer and Sitter with Dog, about 1907; Woman with Flowers, American, about 1914; Flood at H. H. Miller's Palace Sample Room, Galena, Illinois, 1911, Unidentified artist, American, 20th century* Column 2: *Teacher in the Classroom, American, about 1914; Advanced Room, Indian School, Wittenberg Wisconsin, About 1919; Photographer in the Field, American, 1907 or later.*