

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/open-arts-objects>

Teaching Support Sheet

Presenter: Amy Charlesworth

Martha Rosler, *Service: a trilogy on colonization*, 1976-78, postcard novel/performance

In this short film, Dr Charlesworth examines a durational performance and text-based project by American artist Martha Rosler. The form taken is that of the postcard, the dissemination of the work is through the USA postal service and the subject comments on experiences of the domestic. Dr Charlesworth points to the new social movements and political climate of the time prompting students to think about the relation between art and everyday life. Some key terms and mediums students may wish to think about in relation to Rosler's practice are Pop art, Conceptual art and performance and photography. You might also want to think about how this artwork predates some of the questions raised by contemporary art-works seen today, such as the two Open Arts Objects films by Prof. Gill Perry on installation art, a term also rooted in the art historical debates of the 1960s and 1970s.

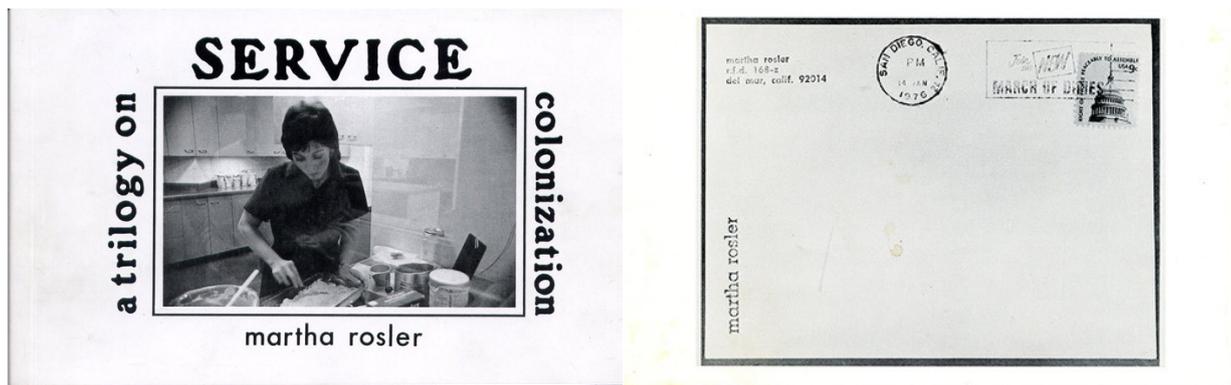
<http://www.openartsarchive.org/resource/open-arts-object-martha-rosler-1970s-postcard-novel>

Before watching the film

Before watching the film, take a look at the entry for Martha Rosler on the Tate website with your class:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/ey-exhibition-world-goes-pop/artist-biography/martha-rosler>

and look at these two images of the work : <https://www.printedmatter.org/catalog/23591/>



Questions to ask your students before watching the film (students to complete on the attached form)

1. What do you know about 'modern' and 'post modern' art? What are the similarities, what are the differences? It might help to draw up a comparative table for this exercise.

For example, while it is problematic to draw strict definitions between the modern period and the later (1970 -) post modern such a comparative exercise here may allow students to address how something such as *Service* by Rosler could be considered an art work (the later online exercise further down is a more sophisticated exercise that enables students to see a much longer history to these types of work often

situated only in the postmodern where students can note differences and similarities as opposed to a strict 'break')

You can find a definition of modernism in Tate's Art Term Glossary here <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/modernism>

And a definition of postmodernism here: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/postmodernism>

Modern art	Postmodern art
Art for art's sake (autonomous <i>from</i> the world)	The 'everyday' (heteronomy, art's connection <i>to</i> and/or place <i>in</i> the world)
Painting and sculpture	Mixed media, lens (photography, film, video), installation, performance
Lasting materials	Ephemera
Originality	Copy
Authorship and singularity	Collaboration and removal of assumed hierarchies
Concern with formal technique	Focus on subjectivities and identities (a preoccupation with context)

2. What do you think this work/object depicts or represents? Describe what you see on the screen. (you might think of things like scale, how a viewer might interact with the object, or even use it). Can you identify any recognisable elements (plants, humans, animals, landscape features, architectural details, forms)?
3. How is the different media displayed in the work?

After watching the film

Questions to ask your students after watching the film.

1. What effects (aesthetic, social, political etc) do you think the artist was trying to achieve in this work?

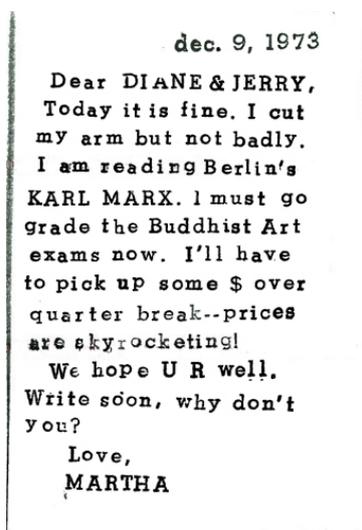
This is of course a complex question but it might be easiest to begin with how viewers would have first encountered this work, that is through the postal system and not on a standard art gallery wall. It might be useful to debate whether or not such work aimed to speak to a wider audience and to those who may not necessarily visit museums and galleries, and how successful (or not) this strategy could be.

2. Ask the students to consider the scale of the work, the material and whether being able to hold this work makes a difference to how one might appreciate it and perceive it.

For example, what might change if these postcards were enlarged to resemble a large scale painting, framed and hung on the walls of a gallery?

3. Has the film helped you define some of the formal elements of the work/object? Consider scale, subject matter, medium, and other formal elements

One example might be to think about the choice of typeface used by the artist in the work. Rosler experimented with lots of different typefaces around this time. For example, the artist has provided us with the below example, have a think about how the example here produces a different effect to that seen on the postcards? You may want to pause on some of the recorded close up footage of the book in the film so students can cross-examine.



(image provided by artist Martha Rosler)

4. Does it have a recognisable purpose or function? Does this relate to the time period in which it was made?

For example, you might want to begin with the question, how might we understand such a project as an artwork? You might then follow this up with a debate around how the social unrest of the time period in US history impacted on the function and purpose of art, asking is art connected to the social? And if so, how might that be visible through formal expression and use of different materials? It might be useful to also relate it to the larger political landscape, such as the Vietnam War to tie in with the A-level spec on war and how the home can be seen as a political space.

5. What is its relevance for today?

It might be useful to compare this with OAO films made on contemporary art, such as *Seizure*, *Cold Dark Matter*, or *Hanging Trees*. Ask the students to list any comparable aspects between a work such as this made in the 1970s and later works of installation art.

You can find a definition of installation art in Tate's Art Term Glossary here:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/i/installation-art>

Online Activity

1. Take a look at another American artist, Eleanor Antin's work [*100 Boots*](#) (1971-73) for comparison with Rosler's work *Service* <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/83.116.1-51#view-artwork>

How would you list the materials used in each?

Do they both invite a similar physical engagement from the viewer?

What role does text play and what role might the image play in Rosler's project and in Antin's?

2. Do a google image search for work by Martha Rosler, you'll see she often uses photomontage. Then read this interview with her on the Tate website: <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/ey-exhibition-world-goes-pop/artist-interview/martha-rosler>

Thinking about the medium of photomontage have a go at discussing points of similarity between Rosler's work and other artists from the periods associated with Pop and Dada:

Richard Hamilton [*Just what was it that made yesterday's homes so different, so appealing?*](#) (1956/2004) <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hamilton-just-what-was-it-that-made-yesterdays-homes-so-different-so-appealing-upgrade-p20271>

Hannah Höch [*Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany*](#) (1919-1920)

These three artists span the 20th century in the west, what points of comparison and differentiation can you make between them?

How has this activity been informed by what you have learnt looking at the Open Arts Objects film on Rosler's *Service: a trilogy on colonization*? In addition, consider how thinking about these works impacts your understanding of the postcard novels.

You can find information about Dada and Surrealism here: <http://smarthistory.org/tag/dada-surrealism/>

- a film about Hannah Höch's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* here: <https://smarthistory.org/hannah-hoch-cut-with-the-kitchen-knife-dada-through-the-last-weimar-beer-belly-cultural-epoch-of-germany/>

And information about Pop Art and Richard Hamilton's 1956 collage, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing* here: <https://smarthistory.org/pop-art/>.

Pearson Topic Guide C5 Pop life: British and American contemporary art and architecture (1960–2015): https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A%20Level/history-of-art/2017/teaching-and-learning-materials/C5_Contemporary_art_-_topic_guide.pdf

Bibliography

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Hopkins, D., (2003) *After Modern Art 1945-2000*, Oxford University Press

Rosler, M. (2004). *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected writings, 1975-2001*, Massachusetts: MIT

ed. De Zegher, C. (1999). *Positions in the Life World*, Massachusetts: MIT

Resources online

Martha Rosler, *Semiotics of the Kitchen* 1975 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vm5vZaE8Ysc>

Martha Rosler, <http://www.martharosler.net/> (artist's website)