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On Kawara  
*I Got Up*

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\*Obligatory mention : © Vera Kotaji pp. Michèle Didier

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### About *I Got Up* by On Kawara

*I Got Up*, following *I Met* and *I Went*, closes out the trilogy by On Kawara. *I Got Up* begins on 10 May 1968 and ends on 17 September 1979. On every day of this period, On Kawara sent two postcards showing where he was. On the back of each card, he stamped the words «I GOT UP AT» in capital letters, followed by the time at which he stood up that day. The name and the address of both recipient and artist are also stamped on the card. *I Got Up* brings this corpus together in twelve volumes. They total up 4160 pages.

The final and missing piece *I Got Up* intersects with the facts reported in *I Met* and *I Went*. That the artist was such day in such a place, as it is precisely documented by the geographical maps of *I Went*, is proven by the postcard, purchased in the same place, and postmarked the same day.

This work is a daily one – it is fundamentally «of the day» – but the resulting «diary» is not necessarily intimate. While the time at which the artist got up, reported on the back of the postcard, recovers in itself from a private matter, when an artist has faithfully reported the facts of his everyday life, this time becomes an important objective datum: the time at which the artist's day begins stands de facto for the starting point of his work. This time becomes a scientific descriptive element of the work. *I Got Up* gives us its starting time of departure.

We should note, however, that at least two aspects of *I Got Up* differentiate it from *I Met* and *I Went*. The first is the highly media oriented quality of *I Got Up*: the postcards not only contain a message to be read but they intend it to a given addressee. As a result, the work once created is disseminated. The postcards get independent, they live their own lives, they travel around... Because the aim of the postcard is to be sent, the work is also fated to be given (up). Creating the work leads to its own dispersion. Therefore, the consequent paradox is that in order to show the work, one must inevitably turn it away from its initial purpose.

Let's consider this message. Could it be an incipit, the incipit of an autobiographical novel in which the story is restricted to the incipit itself? How tempting then to refer to another famous incipit: Proust's «For a longtime, I Went to bed early...» from *In Search of Lost Time*. *I Got Up* would in that case be related to the other side of the same search: the forgetting, the draining away of memory which, in the artist's work, becomes crystallized within the boundaries of a strict archive.

The second peculiarity of *I Got Up* is its comic dimension. While the postcard constitutes the traditional medium of the anecdote, the anecdote is here so tenuous that it verges on the tautological. Moreover, the shallowness of the information «I GOT UP AT...» written on the back of the card contrasts strongly with the visual appeal of the picture on the front. The invariability of the message cuts through what looks like a whirlwind of exciting travels.

It should also be pointed out that the artist does not fill the postcard with the usual handwritten text but with a text applied with a stamp. Thus, he in some sense anticipates and doubles the stamp which is going to postmark the missive. The date has been stamped as well in *I Met* and *I Went* but in this instance, the artist's inscription turns the postcard into a selfreferential object.

The use of pre-existing images is a typical resource of conceptual art. The cliché printed on the postcard is supposed to represent for a communal, even universal, awareness, a commonplace. When On Kawara selects a postcard, he selects an object, an object available in thousands of copies, and makes an artwork of it. But this ready-made, if we may say so, is immediately returned to its common utilization, since it is immediately put to the traditional, conventional use required of it.

Besides, the postcard initiates its own temporal system as the time between mailing and receipt of the message must be taken in account. Sent the same day, the message implies the word «TODAY». The message consists of a «(Today) *I Got Up* at...» which will always be read too late, never on the stated day. It is, in fact, odd to realize that nowadays, a means of communication such as the Post is on the point of becoming as obsolete as the message it is

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intended to convey. (And what can be said about the telegram used for I AM STILL ALIVE?). However, the date, as an absolute value stamped by the artist on each card, breaks the hesitation generated by these spatial and temporal gaps. The proof is not provided by the postmark, but by the date stamp of On Kawara.

The series of postcard images, printed in chronological order - one page per day - deploy once in a while the equivalent of a historiated frieze or of a film montage, which is, after all, much the same. For example, the postcards the artist sent from Mexico between 11 and 17 September 1968 show a torero fighting a bull from different angles and at different moments. A struggle which, considering the last of the batch, concludes with the animal's victory... The secret intelligence caught in these images and the kinetics they sometimes generate as a group were obviously waiting to be ordered page by page, thanks to a brief «Return to sender».

Vera Kotaji pp. Michèle Didier\*

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### **Specifications**

- 12 volumes
  - Each volume is 21cm x 14,85cm
  - 4160 pages in total
  - Printed on 150 g Phoenix Motion Xantur
  - Signatures are double-stitched with linen thread
  - Cover : bound in Brillianta Calandré Linen
  - Front cover and spine : embossed gilding and foil-blocking in black
  - Ivory headband
  - The twelve volumes come in a grey slipcase, measuring 51,2 x 19,2 x 25,8 cm
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- Printed by Arte-Print, Brussels
  - Bound by Delabie, Kortrijk
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### **Production**

- Limited to 90 numbered and signed copies + 10 A.P.
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Produced and published in 2008 by mfc-michèle didier

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