
On Kawara
I Went

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About *I Went* by On Kawara

I Went begins on June 1, 1968 and ends on September 17, 1979. Except for the years 1968 and 1979, each volume contains one year. Throughout this twelve-year period, On Kawara used a red line to trace each of his daily trips from their starting point on a black and white photocopy of a map. Each day is represented in the twelve volumes of *I Went*. The date of every trip is stamped on the map at the bottom of each page. As in *I Met*, the trips made by the artist are recorded in the book with grey pages bearing the names of the cities he roamed through. Each volume therefore contains a different number of pages, depending on the frequency of On Kawara's travels that year. The twelve volumes total 4740 pages. Publication of *I Went* allows people to view the entirety of the document, making them more sensitive to the temporal dimension of the work. Thumbing through the twelve volumes of *I Went*, readers unroll a timeline which would otherwise have remained compressed.

Publication of *I Went* follows that of *I Met* and it documents the daily life of the artist in a similar way. But contrary to *I Met*, in which lists of the names of people the artist has met follow one another, page after page, like so many typographical characters aligning signifiers on the naked surface of the paper, the purpose of *I Went* can not easily be reduced to certifying the presence of the artist in a given place at a given time. *I Went* is also a book of pictures.

In On Kawara's work, *I Went*, through its plastic materialization, is among those which retain the most connections to traditional representation. The red line which retraces his journeys on the map brings to mind the outlines of a rupestrian figure. In fact, the question posed by the Altamira site is found upstream of the artist's work. Just as prehistoric art works the cracks of cave walls into its drawings, following pre-existing fractures and fault lines, the red furrow of *I Went* plows a network of tangled patterns. These creative gesture demonstrates a striking resemblance to cave art, but *I Went* sends the reader to other sources as well.

At the very least, publishing *I Went* in twelve volumes confers the function of an atlas on this sequence of maps. If maps galvanize the imagination and invite to self-projection, then, in this case, we are reading an annotated atlas. And, if these lines are of interest to us, it is because they are the beginning of a story, the embryo of a fictional account.

Moreover, there is an amazing visual closeness between the photocopied maps and ancient engravings. It is helpful to remember that early maps were actually engravings. Like engraving, the cartographic image is an image intended for private use, an impulse to dreaming.

In *I Went*, it is without a doubt this very resemblance which leads us to look at these images as if they were representations of landscapes. A single volume of *I Went* may be viewed as a collection of bird's-eye views of landscapes crisscrossed by the artist. On Kawara's drawings recall the patterns of paths, of furrows, to which the landscape painters of the 16th and 17th centuries gave prominence in order to evoke the walker's experience.

Like a studio painter who paints landscapes from memory, On Kawara, as a traveling artist, reports his travels after the fact, in a state of mind in which he already sees himself walking, as if from above, from a distance, in a state of «disincarnating» consciousness. If we view the landscape as the trace left by the artist's walk, then On Kawara is giving us the essence of landscape and, more precisely, of «landscape with figures».

This is an appropriate time to revisit many of John Constable's remarkable landscapes, inhabited by such perfectly represented tiny human figures. This landscape painter painted commissioned portraits, but has he ever been fully recognized for his excellence as a painter of portraits «from a distance» ?

Closer examination of these far-off silhouettes, going about their daily business, relegated to the background of the landscapes, captured by the brush with a self-assured hand, a hand so aware of the relationship between man and the universe, one wonders if it isn't this same consciousness which, in *I Went*, guides the travels of the red line.

On Kawara

I Went

Specifications

- 12 volumes
 - Each volume is 21 cm x 14,8 cm
 - 4740 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 wooden slipcase, measuring 57,3 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 edition of 90 numbered and signed copies + 10 A.P.
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Produced and published in 2007 by mfc-michèle didier

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