

Postage Stamps, Fine Art, Landscape

Text by Juliane Wolschina, Artist's book by Birgit Schuh.

Artist's book, 1st edition: 9 copies

84 pages (20 x 25 cm), 38 original postage stamps, hand binding, manual typesetting, slipcase

The Artist's book contains 38 original postage stamps of West- and East-Germany from 1970 up until publishing in 2014 with artwork depicting landscapes.

POSTAGE STAMPS – A stamp is the proof that a fee has been paid and is an entitlement to certain expectations. A postage stamp represents the face value of the fee given to the postal service, which is printed on it. This is the official definition of a postage stamp. However, for our interests, a stamp is also covertly a voucher, a ticket to travel and a coupon for a free ride. Stamps enable congratulatory wishes, large and small requests, extraneous and important thoughts, hidden intentions, explanations and decisions, and many more of those things that are a part of our personal and private lives, to be sent. Actually, they also help drafts, lists and forms – as parts of the organization of the ordered rhythm of every day human life – on their way. We send them to a person in a faraway place; someone that we don't have before us physically and who we cannot reach at the moment either personally or bodily. In this manner, these folded and glued together desires pass through roads, countries and borders.

The letter is free and is able to reach beyond our outer and inner fences and barriers. Yet at the same time, a letter remains a part of the structures and networks of the postal service. The cancelled postage stamp reveals these pathways and social fabric, and together with its recipient, tells the story of its journey. In this way, the deployed stamps combine and connect a divided country. Although they reflect political and cartographic divisions, they also give testimony to the deeply held virtues that are the backbone of human character. In contrast to the official stamp sorting found in the Michel catalog, the artist Birgit Schuh decided to arrange the stamps chronologically; disregarding country, cancellation marks or where they were printed. Going even further, she chose only postage stamps with landscapes depicting artwork from 1970 (the year she was born) up until the present. The thread of her own life's path is then unconsciously and mysteriously connected with the small pathways and stories of the letters – the tales told by the cancelled stamps in the collection. Juxtaposed to these are the unmarked stamps, which stand for words and ideas that were never said, congratulations that were missed, the unfulfilled desires, as well as the forgotten tasks and the tasks that were undertaken. These stamps never arrived at the unknown addressee and are reminiscent of the letters that are never sent, that remain only as thoughts. However, an observer can be transformed into a traveler just by looking at a map...

LANDSCAPE – ... to a traveler in a faraway or familiar, in a imaginary or a real landscape. The mail is sent through many lands. The matters carried by our letters travel through and are connected to a landscape by a network of pathways – free, casual roads, hills and valleys, remote trails and pulsating streets are all connected through the deliberate destinations of a traveling letter.

The theme of landscape is an important focus in the work of the artist as she has continually engaged with the ways and structures of humans and the landscape; the ways they both affect and influence each other. However, it is not only the routes that proffer an insight into this relationship, but we also take in the colors and background hues when we view a landscape. In this way, when we look at the stamps, we also see the landscape in the shadows, in the colors that move through the sky, in the reflections in bodies of water, in the shimmering and flickering of swishing skirts, in proud hats and dark trees, between the grooves of the engraving plate or in the city of stone that is molded from roof shingles and asphalt into roads and plazas. Mankind is a part of this landscape and it is here that we see our desires, hopes, fears and uses for it. The diversity in our moods, plans and their transformations is also reflected in the nuances of the landscape – in the colors and lighting. There is always a basic hue that lies under everything, that holds the inner composition of the landscape together or that takes over or blows over it. That is why the back of each stamp has something special, the bleed of color from the landscape depicted on its face.

The carpet that lies before us
Is a part of every person's dress
We carry it in bags, books
In letters and cards
They crisscross, remind, warn or love
One look and we pause
They obligate us to wait
As a garden, the message lies ahead of us
– from every angle, another perspective –
As a picture or as a word
They lead us directly
From place to place