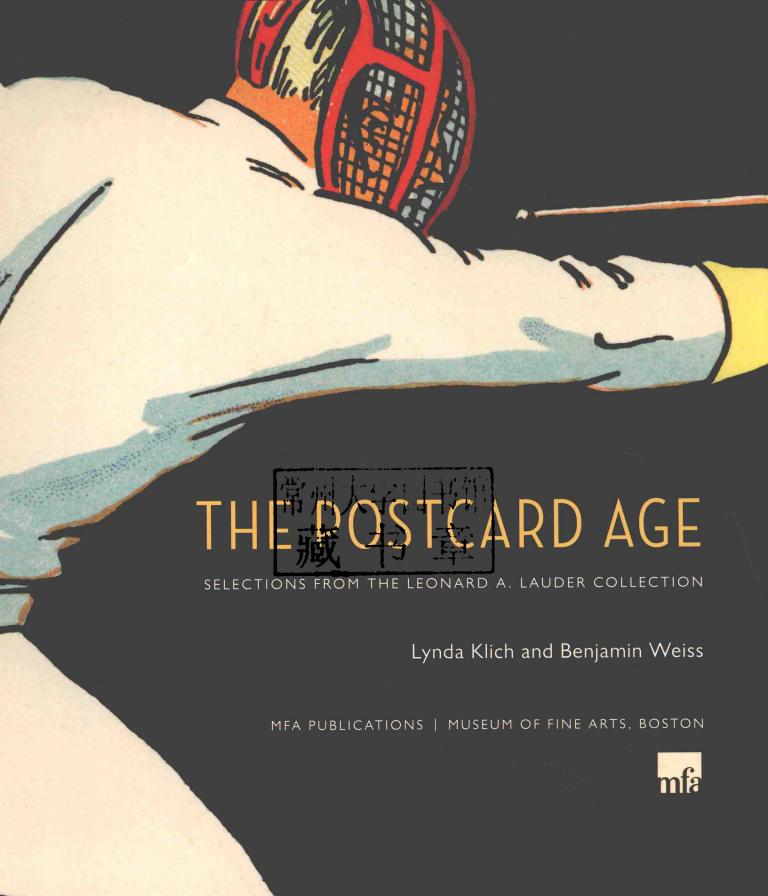


# THE POSTCARD AGE

SELECTIONS FROM THE LEONARD A. LAUDER COLLECTION







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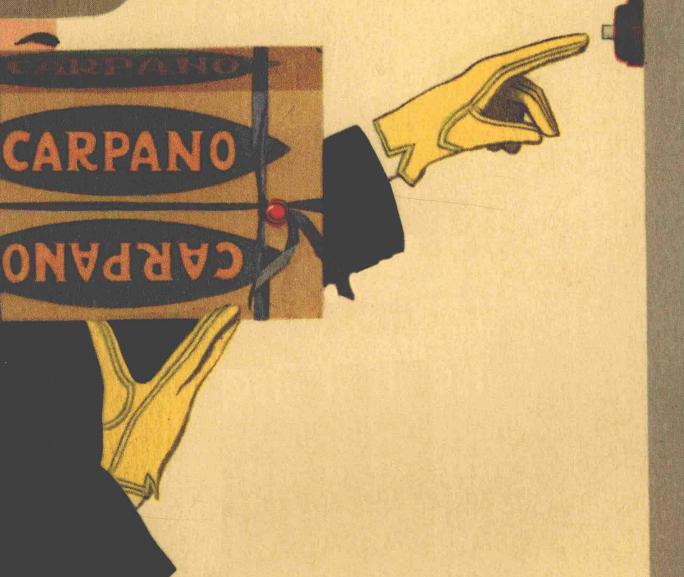
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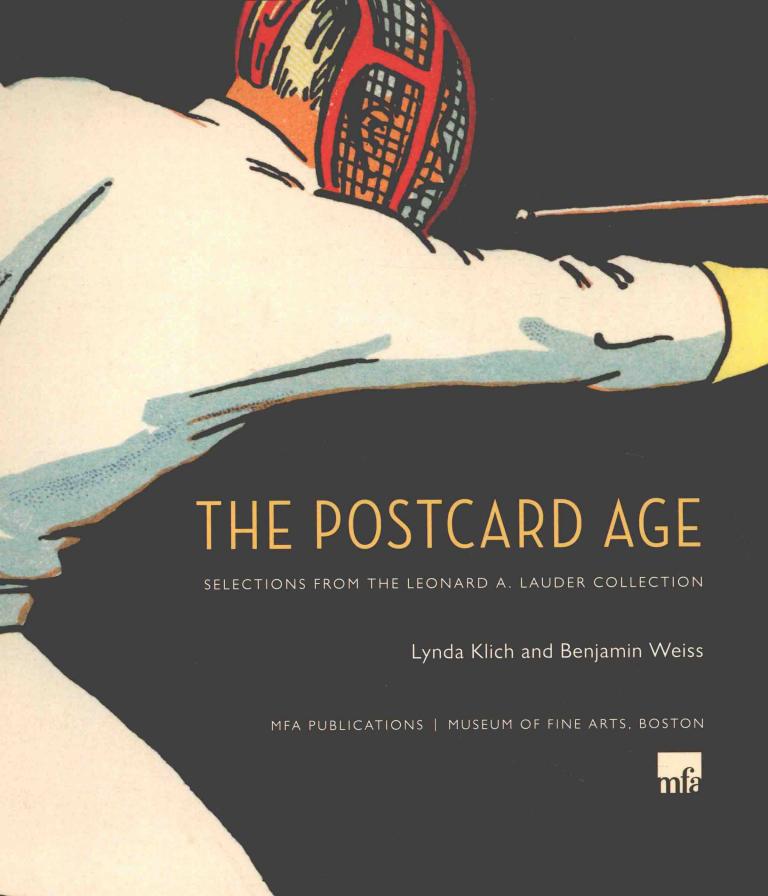
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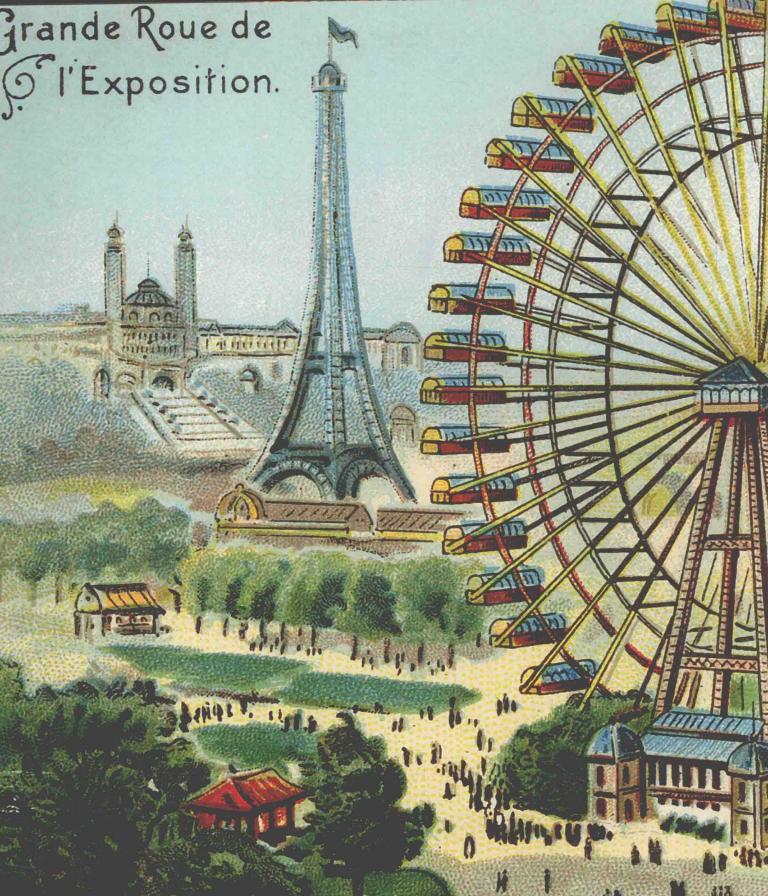
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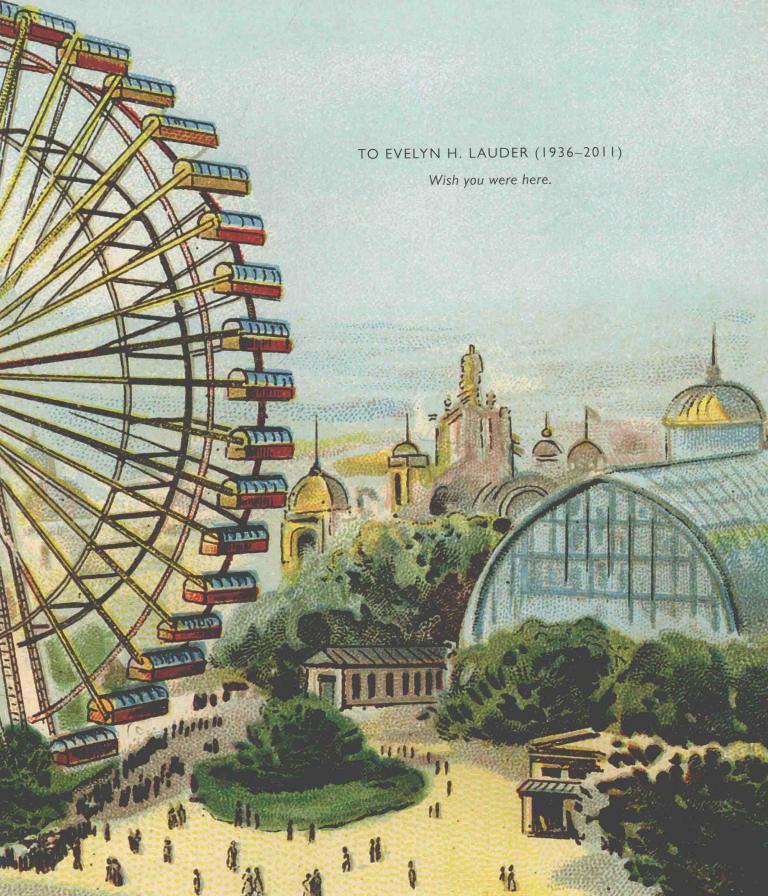


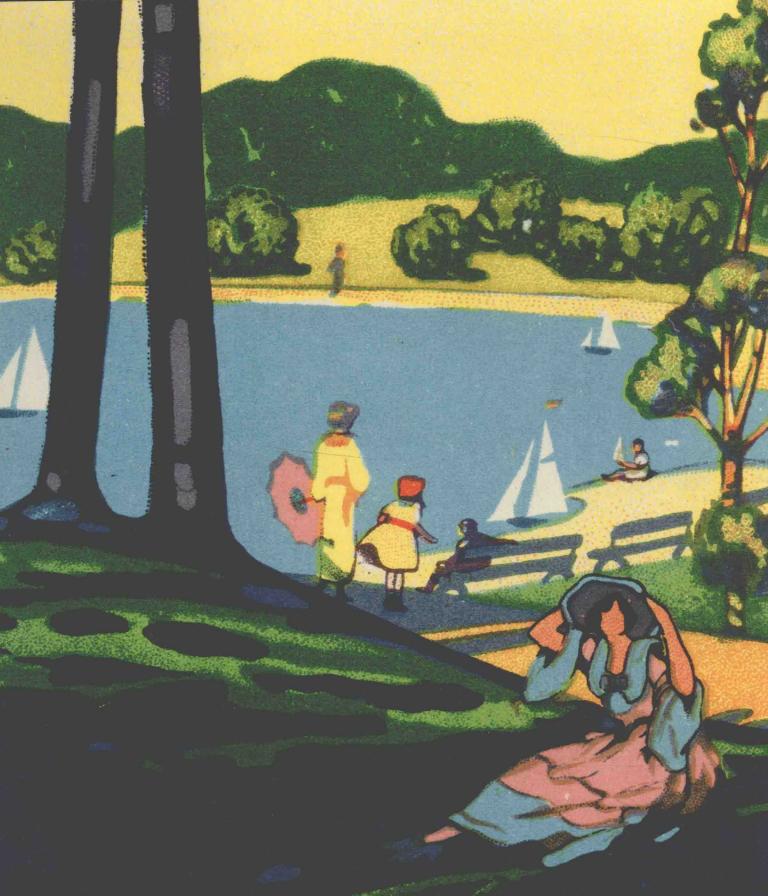
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#### DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

Great museums are born of great collectors. Any museum whose holdings have the depth, richness, or sheer audacity to make visitors pause and catch their breath has likely been the beneficiary of the unbridled enthusiasm of a driven private collector. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, has a number of such names in its history, individuals whose passions have, time and again, transformed the character of our collections.

Leonard A. Lauder is one such collector. Beginning with the gift of his Japanese postcards in 2002, and now with the even greater promise of his Western cards, which number about 100,000, he has shifted the center of gravity of the Museum's collection of works on paper. The two gifts are among the largest we have ever received, but they have also opened our eyes to objects of beauty and historical importance that had almost completely eluded our attention before.

We cannot know how a gift like the Lauder Archive will play out in the decades to come, for it is only with the passage of time and the attention of visitors and scholars that the collection will find its full meaning. Leonard Lauder, who has spent a lifetime building the collection, knows its secrets; but even his knowledge cannot predict what others will find and what connections they will make. For that is what institutions do: they provide the place where collections meet the world.

No single book or exhibition can do justice to an achievement as large and various as the Lauder Archive. Instead, *The Postcard* Age provides something akin to a tasting menu. Each of the sections here could be the nucleus of a book of its own. Some, in fact, may become so, for, like a tasting menu, this book is meant to lure readers and visitors back for much more in the years to come.

MALCOLM ROGERS

Ann and Graham Gund Director

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



### MESSAGES FROM THE POSTCARD AGE

#### LEONARD A. LAUDER

People often ask me, "Why postcards?" The answer is both easy and complex. At heart, my postcard collection represents excitement, pleasure, and adventure. It is hard to top the thrill of the chase, the satisfaction of finding a long-sought-after card, or the delight of discovering a new collecting category after all these years. Postcards also bring aesthetic enjoyment, a spark that comes from looking at an exceptionally well-designed object that brings together an artist's graphic ingenuity and individual style into a miniature masterpiece. When I look at a postcard from my collection today, I can often recall the first moment I held it in my hand, in a dealer's shop or at a postcard show. Each one takes me back over decades of collecting and ties together diverse aspects of my deeply personal engagement with art, design, and history.

At the same time, postcards open countless windows onto a broader collective past. An individual card makes a specific historical moment come alive in a vividly intimate way, whether it be the smartly clad figures in an illustrated advertisement that lured patrons into a busy turn-of-the-century Berlin café or a spectacular photograph that decades later captured the *Hindenburg*'s fiery end. The postcard bears witness to events, such as one series that chronicled the last moments of the life of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, before he was shot in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. The last card of the series in my collection has a cross inked above the head of one of the assailants, conjuring up the card's original owner, who might have

marked it as if to say, "That's him—I saw him do it," before he sent it along to a friend [1]. The messages written on cards bring the past back to life as well, like "From Your Soldier Boy," an embroidered card sent from a young man in the trenches of the First World War to his sweetheart in England, "with best love from France" [2]. Postcards help remind us that history is lived and experienced by individuals.

Perhaps more important, as mass-produced multiples, postcards are what I consider "the best history lesson" about the time we are calling the Postcard Age. They record the technological, social, political, and artistic developments of the decades before and after World War I, a time when rapid and broad transformations shook the world. Postcards make tangible the excitement and novelty of the era's inventions, from new electrical products, like the lightbulb, that altered daily life, to even more astonishing ones, like the airplane, that permanently changed humanity's relationship with space and time. They make vivid what was at stake in the social and political issues of the early decades of the twentieth century, such as the alarm felt by those opposed to giving women the vote or the nationalist passions that united countries but ultimately fractured the Western world. These small pieces of card stock recall the excitement of the avant-garde, when artists used postcards to experiment with new styles and strategies. The Italian Futurists, for example, issued their own postcards to agitate for Italy's entrance into



I The bomb-thrower Čabrinovič, 1914

the First World War. The artist Giacomo Balla then decorated one of these cards by hand and dedicated it to the Futurist leader F. T. Marinetti, pledging to be with him in his activist endeavors [3]. Like others experiencing the broader changes of the early twentieth century, such artists understood that the era's transformations necessitated completely new means of seeing, representing, and communicating. In short, postcards encapsulate the urgency of the past in a way that is impossible to contain in words.

But postcards did not just record or represent this dynamic era-they also participated actively in it. My collection contains a section entitled simply Postcard History, which includes cards depicting the history of the postcard industry, including production, dissemination, and collecting. These cards attest to the enormous popularity of postcards during the period that ran roughly from the mid-1890s to the First World War (though the postcard still remained an important visual and communications medium through the Second World War). During the craze, postcards were everywhere, sold in shops dedicated completely to them or by individual vendors on street corners. People clamored to buy the latest offerings from publishers who constantly fed the astronomical demand with novel formats or subjects.



2 Embroidered card, about 1915

Postcards generated such passion because they conveyed the exhilaration of the turn of the century. Postcards were fast, and postcards were new. When in 1869 the postal service of the Austro-Hungarian Empire began to issue cards that could go through the mail on their own, without envelopes, other nations quickly followed suit. By the 1890s, postcards had become an essential part of everyday life. They were the very cheapest things to mail—at half the price of a letter—and people did so with an enthusiasm verging on mania. Postcards were a seemingly instant communications technology—in some cities, a card mailed in the morning could reach its destination later that same day. They also offered an inexpensive way to communicate with loved ones who were far away. They even created new connections between likeminded aficionados of the new medium, who relied on fellow enthusiasts around the globe to help them build their own collections.

Postcards, which joined word and image, were just as up-to-date as the Internet is today. In fact, nearly every role the postcard played in the decades around 1900 has an analogue in the electronic technologies of the early twenty-first century. Just as today people issue invitations by e-mail, send quick messages by text, or share collections of images on Flickr, a hundred years ago they did the same things using the





3 The Futurist flag, March, don't rot; decorated by Giacomo Balla ("With you"), 1915; front and back

postcard. Postcards carried short notes about when visitors would arrive, messages about how much it might cost to paint a house, and orders for the goods and services pictured on their fronts. Whole businesses ran on postcards. The medium also spread the latest news, as photographers using film specially made to print directly on postcard stock could capture a key moment, print it right away, and immediately begin distributing the cards. Postcards thus offered pictorial records of the latest newsworthy events, whether global or local. At a time when telephones were used only on special occasions, movies were still a novelty, and newspapers were typically illustrated with line drawings rather than halftone photographs, postcards were new media. They allowed the current events and burning issues of the day to spread quickly and over long distances.

During the postcard craze, the industry was an important economic engine in many countries. For example, sixty factories employed more than twelve thousand people in Germany; and more than thirty thousand worked in the French industry.\(^1\) Companies printed billions upon billions of postcards that would be bought, sold, sent, gathered into albums, stored in boxes, or played with by children. Taken together, the cards capture the dynamism of an age when people generally went out to be entertained

rather than having amusements beamed into their houses. They reflect every concern of the day and mirror the fashions, styles, and fads that flourished in the teeming new cities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—epitomized by Paris but echoed by towns large and small throughout Europe and the Americas. As a new form of communication that traveled quickly, postcards not only portrayed but also produced the excitement of the turn-of-thecentury world.

The thrilling images of an era found on postcards and the suggestion of the urgent moment embodied by the medium are foremost among the reasons that I remained dedicated to collecting them for over half a century. My collection is inseparable from my life's experience. I have told of my long history with the postcard in previous publications about my Japanese and Wiener Werkstätte collections.2 I have recalled my vivid childhood memories of the stunning postcards of New York City buildings that I bought at Woolworth's with my five-cent allowance; my first real collection, which contained postcards depicting the sleek and strikingly modern designs of Miami Beach's Art Deco buildings; and my teenage years as a charter member of the Metropolitan Postcard Club in New York. (I still have my original membership card, with number 75.) My early interest in post-