



THE ART NEWSPAPER

A hose, by any other name...

Before Banksy there was Bradshaw. And this is a story with more bends than the Metropolitan Museum firehose that artist Dove Bradshaw “claimed” by putting up a DIY label, naming herself as the artist, in 1976. The label was routinely taken down and she would as routinely replace it until the time of the Tutankhamun exhibition when she saw it still on the wall. “I was thrilled.

And that emboldened me to take the next step,” she says.

Bradshaw had her piece photographed and made an edition of 1,000 postcards, using the Met logo and listing her details, and the

materials, the way actual Met postcards do.

“I slipped it into the 20th-century rack amongst my peers and bought two right away. The salesclerk just charged me the same as other cards. Whenever they ran low I stocked them again. They knew. They thought it was amusing.

“Then Maria Hambourg, then head of the Met’s photographic department, decided to make it an official postcard. [The original photograph] was bought for her by New York collectors, Robert and Susan Klein. I charged \$1,000. It went missing for a few years but it became an official Met postcard in 1992. They published 10,000 but only once. There was a lot of pressure, even though it was a hot seller and sold out very soon. Sol LeWitt did a drawing on it. I sent it to Ray Johnson. And he did a very clever pun on it.”

Bradshaw decided these reactions merited a book and asked various artists to contribute. Flotsam’s contribution was a cartoon burn. Bradshaw then produced a really burnt postcard. So the book was made. And is now about to be remade by the Copenhagen printer, Niels Borch Jensen in an edition of 36 in the spring. Will the saga continue? Longer than the hose, which has been refabricated three times.



Dove Bradshaw
American, born 1949

Performance
Brass, paint, canvas, reinforced glass
1976

Calling it a *claimed object*, Dove Bradshaw in 1976 quietly affixed her label next to this fire hose. In 1978 the artist made a guerrilla postcard of her work and placed it in the museum postcard racks. She purchased two. In 1980 the museum acquired the original photograph used for that card. In 1992 the museum issued an official postcard telling its history. The card sold out. In contrast to an *objet trouvé*, the fire hose is integrated into the art context. It exemplifies one of the major shifts in art since the 1960’s — refocused attention from the object and picture plane to the site itself. A second distinction from the *objet trouvé* is the fact of the hose’s potential function. Both the City’s Fire Department and the Metropolitan Museum’s Fire Department who inspects the hose regularly assures all concerned that in the case of its need this label would not in any way be a deterrent — thus the title *Performance*.

Purchase: Rosalind Jacobs, 2006
In honor of Melvin Jacobs

The hose, top; the latest wall label, below