

CRISTIN TIERNEY

# HYPERALLERGIC

## Vintage Postcards for the Apocalypse

David Opdyke has taken scores of vintage postcards and altered each image in a way that completely changes its meaning.

Jessica Holmes

October 14, 2016

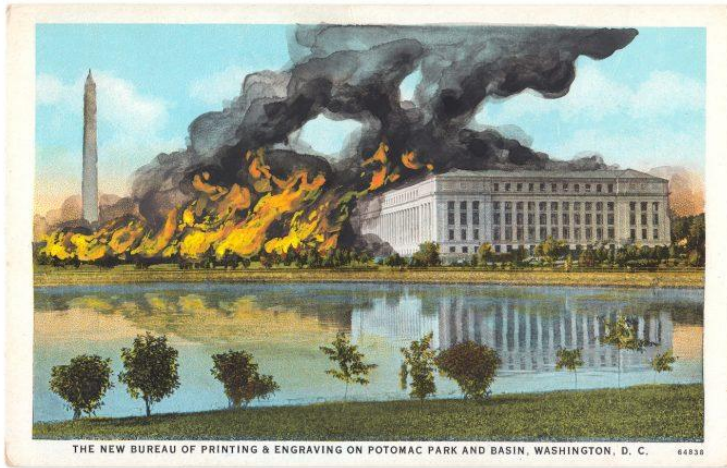


In a profile of journalist Tony Schwartz by Jane Mayer in a July issue of the *New Yorker*, Schwartz recounted his coining of the phrase “truthful hyperbole” when he ghostwrote Donald Trump’s 1987 memoir *The Art of the Deal*. “People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular,” he wrote in Trump’s voice at the time. “I call it truthful hyperbole. It’s an innocent form of exaggeration — and it’s a very effective form of promotion.” Artist David Opdyke has taken this phrase, with its inherent contradiction, as the title of his current show at Magnan Metz.

Opdyke, who has critiqued US culture and politics since his early career — through tongue-in-cheek sculptures and drawings that suggest a societal decay driven by squabbles over guns, oil, and other material possessions — continues in this vein. In the present show he has taken scores of vintage postcards and intervened with gouache and

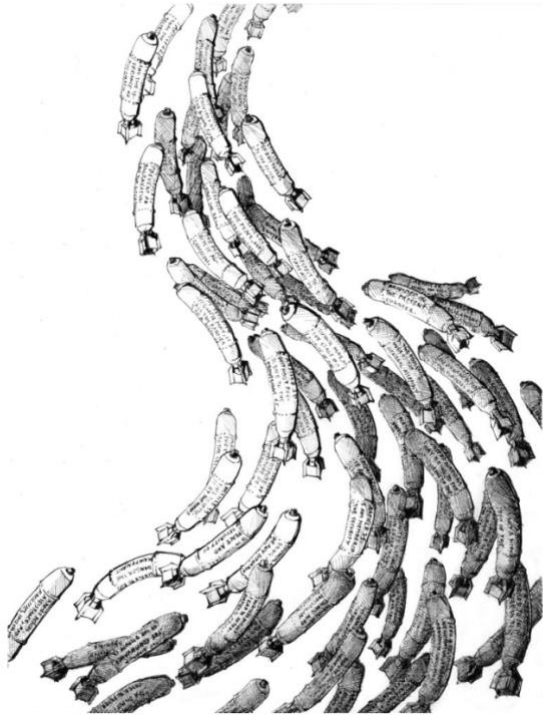
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ink, altering each image in a way that completely changes its meaning. Most of these cards depict well known buildings, monuments, or historic sites. As propaganda, they are determinedly cheerful, their rosy or sepia tones and earnest vernacular meant to invoke that particular swell of American patriotism that believes in the nation's perpetual innocence and wide-eyed enthusiasm. Opdyke seizes upon this pictorial language and turns it on its head.



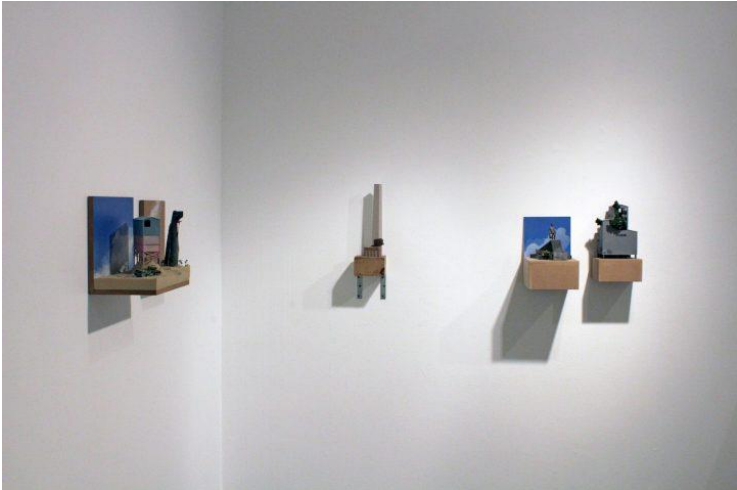
In “Front and Center” (2016), he fluidly inserts a ball-and-chain shackle attached to an image of the Custis Lee Mansion, once the home of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. The alteration highlights the gruesome absurdity of treating as a shrine the home of a man who led the charge to maintain slavery as an American institution. In “Insurrection” (2016), a raging fire overwhelms the Bureau of Printing and Engraving (where US paper currency is produced) as the Washington Monument stands helplessly in the background. It’s an unmistakable comment on the nation’s all-consuming adherence to capitalism, even when it comes at the cost of personal liberties. In another poignant piece, “Unauthorized Campground” (2016), Opdyke has transformed an image of Kansas City’s bucolic Al La Ma Wum Ke Trail into a shanty town road lined with makeshift shacks and hand-pitched tents. While this sort of archival intervention is not new, Opdyke’s painting so nimbly coalesces with the original postcard iconography that it often takes several moments to realize where the postcard ends and the paint begins. But once the eyes alight on Opdyke’s added details, the acidity of his commentary becomes instantly clear. Examining every postcard on view here could easily consume a quick hour or two.

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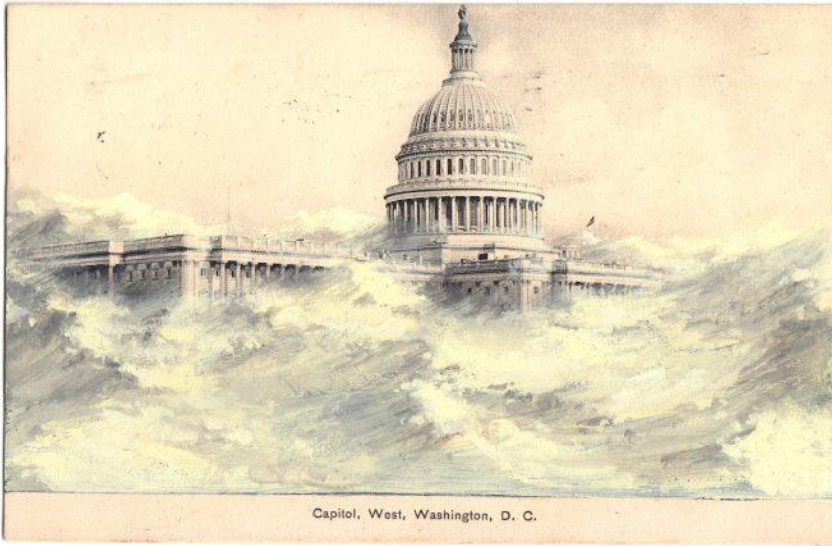


The postcards also take on other dimensions as the artist puts them to service in several short animations. These maintain the cheekiness and spirit of Opdyke's postcards and are pleasing — even fun — to watch, but are hampered by their heavy-handed narrative structures. In the trio of scenes depicted in “Three Follies” (2016), for instance, a large hook uproots a postcard Washington Monument, followed by a handsaw hacking the Capital Building in two. In the third scene, a cluster of helicopters drops the Washington Monument onto Montezuma's Temple, a rock formation in Colorado Springs said to resemble an Aztec ruin in Mexico. A background din of helicopter blades, clips from Congressional hearings, and news media snippets provides the soundtrack. A selection of small sculptures inspired by the modified postcards and made mostly from styrene is also included. Reminiscent of Opdyke's earlier work, they display a deftness that may be due to the artist's 12 years of experience working as an architectural model maker. A group of pen-and-ink drawings, illustrating clusters of bombs or barren trees also testifies to Opdyke's fine hand. His work makes no claims to subtlety in conveying its message — that beneath its cheery veneer, the United States harbors dark forces and virulent cynicism within its political system. But in this noisiest and most debased of election cycles, it's no truthful hyperbole to say it's a message worth screaming.

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David Opdyke: Truthful Hyperbole continues at Magnan Metz Gallery (521 West 26th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through October 22.