

POSTCARDS

Max Oettli



Figure 1: From the *Postcard Series*, 2007.

On the 26th of June 2007 I was spat out of a whale on Tomahawk Beach.

Seriously though, when I arrived in this chilly southern city, a migrant labourer, it would be mild to say that my emotions were mixed. They'd gone through the dirty cycle of an industrial washing machine, been wringed out with a few tears here and there, and then jumbled in a damp foetid tumble dryer that ran out of coins.

The light though in this chilly southern place grabbed me, caressed me; it is clearer, sweeter even than in the tepid north. Bright day and sodium vapour night.

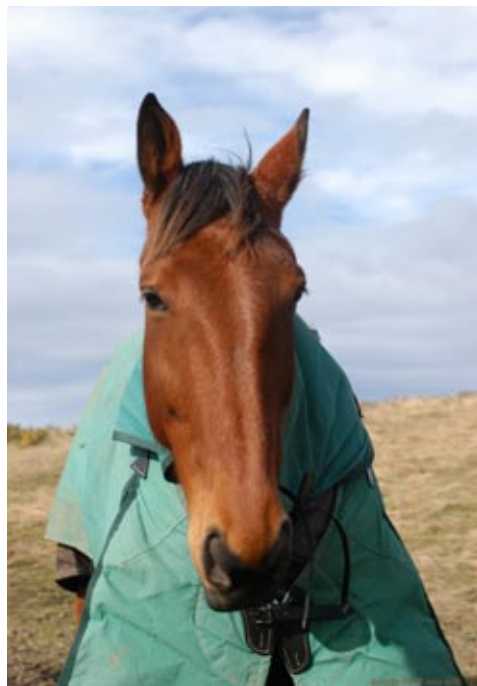


Figure 2: From the *Postcard Series*, 2007.

Suddenly I saw again why Francis Pound and Terry McNamara had got into a fist fight over New Zealand light and painting (1988 court report *New Zealand Herald*).

Christ, a country that keeps its culture on the simmer and where people fight for the light is worth coming to. Boils over once in a while and messes up the stovetop (see above) but the energy is there.

My *Postcards* were the first couple of hundred grabby little digital photos I took, wandering about the place, looking into shop fronts and picking up on the city's signals. It's important for people to get my address



here. In Europe it was important to feel out directions in which I wanted things to happen; important – as a third drone string on my thin banjo – to get a few pictures made, to get a few pictures out there.

I chose sixty-four pictures, designed a postcard back and did them in an edition of three at ol' Uniprint, Dunedin. Then, I lost the file in a hard drive meltdown, so you won't see those sixty-four again.

However, the series goes on, with the odd spontaneous photo coming in, but there's little sense of urgency nudging me, and I'm also upping the quality so they will be slicker, choosier and maybe not necessarily as vital as those first urgent sixty four.

**Max Oettli** lived in New Zealand for 20 years. He studied at the University of Auckland and taught at Elam School of Fine Arts. He was an important New Zealand photographer in the 1969-75 period and then spent 32 years in Geneva, teaching mainly Architecture students. He returned to New Zealand in 2007 and is now principal lecturer in Photography at the Otago Polytechnic School of Art.

Images: From the *Postcard Series*, 2007  
(courtesy of the artist).

