

Sorting Office

About the exhibition

There was a time when Mount Pleasant was one of the largest sorting offices in the world. Founded in 1889 as part of the General Post Office (GPO), Mount Pleasant handled the increasing volume of mail in the city; it became a vital hub for postal operations, known for its vast scale and innovative systems. The London Post Office Railway (Mail Rail) was introduced in 1927 to transport mail underground between sorting offices across London.

Amidst postcards to family members, parcels with new shoes and confidential bank statements, a significant amount of mail art would have and still passes through the walls of this sorting system.

Various forms of art have been sent from one person to another since the creation of the postal system, but the origins of the mail art movement can be traced back to artists like Ray Johnson who pioneered the use of the postal system in the 1950s as a medium for artistic exchange.

Sorting Office features a table top vitrine that displays fifteen pieces of artwork in discussion with post and mail. Some pieces have already made their way through the postal system; some may enter it in the future; a few pieces will never reach delivery. Each work exists in a fictitious curatorial sorting office. Designed for display within the Archive of The Postal Museum, this fictional sorting office is solely a home for mail art and postal sculptures.

Artwork on display

1 Simon Stephens

Untitled, 2024

Handwritten postcard

2 Ray Johnson

Untitled Mailing

(*Letter to Frances X. Profumo*), c. 1957

On loan from the Ray Johnson Estate

3 Micah Lexier

Fill in the blanks, 2022

Digitally printed postcard with one side laminated. Published by Show & Tell Editions

4 Rechonski

Estafa, 2024

Colour proof stamp, paper clip and envelope

5 Jonathan Monk

Track Back, 2024/25

Envelope with postal markings

6 Jonathan Monk

The ground in front of specific post boxes in Edinburgh, Paris, Brussels, Hong Kong, Seoul, Llandudno, Reykjavik, San Francisco, Selva del Montello, Melbourne, Kirby Muxloe, New York, Winnipeg, Berlin, Malmo, Dublin, Mexico City, Tokyo, Basel, Toronto and Turin (not displayed in order), 2025

Collage on paper

7 Gilbert & George

Gentlemen..., 1972

Postal sculpture

8 Gilbert & George

Human Sculpture, 1972

Postal sculpture

9 Lolly Batty

Philatelic Item (11th December 2013), 2013

Postage stamps and ink on envelope

10 Peter Davies

Drawing - circle in squares, 1998

Ink on paper

11 Joshua Leon

Invitation to Steal, 2020

Print on postcard

12 Matthew Peers

Cosmos II, 2025

Ash, match box, newsprint, silver leaf

13 Joseph Beuys

Holzpostkarte, 1974

Screen printing on spruce wood

14 Joseph Beuys

Filzpostkarte, 1985

Felt with screen printing

15 Strange Perfume

Yellow Silence, 2025

Digital Print and envelope

