

The Many Selves of Pioneering Feminist Artist Eleanor Antin, by Artsy Editorial (April 13, 2014)



Pioneering conceptual and feminist artist Eleanor Antin once said, with obvious relish: “I used to think that I didn’t have a self that was mine...if I don’t have a self of my own, I can borrow other people’s.” While most might feel a lack of self as a void, for Antin it was a source of art. For more than half a century, Antin has been inventing and embodying a wide-ranging cast of alter egos, mash-ups of real and fictional, historical and contemporary figures. Through these and her studied, delicate drawings and *découpages* (collaged paper cutouts), and deadpan

photographs— currently on view in “Eleanor Antin: Passengers” at Diane Rosenstein Fine Art—she critiques the way in which history is told.

Among the works on view is Antin’s exquisite and absurd *Dance of Death* (1974-75), a suite of pastels she made to tease out her ideas. They feature the skeletal reaper in positions not necessarily of power; the voluptuous maiden he dominates in one drawing becomes his dominatrix in the next. The soldiers whose lives he has supposedly come for instead induce him into a smoke and a chat.

The exhibition also includes one of the artist’s most iconic pieces: *100 Boots Facing the Sea* (1971/2005). Part of her *100 Boots* series (1971-73), in which she photographed 50 pairs of black rubber boots traipsing in increasingly mischievous formation around Southern California and New York, this photograph is the first in the narrative. Lined up at the seashore, facing away from the viewer, the boots appear both ordered and defiant—hinting at the cast of their coming adventures.



Referring to the ancient Egyptian poem that serves as the conceptual nucleus of the exhibition and the source of its title, Antin claims: “I think that the idea of ‘passing through’ has been a trope of mine throughout my career as an artist.” The poem’s opening question, “where are you going,” is answered, “I don’t know...I’m only a passenger—just like you.” Here is the lens through which the often hapless, always humorous figures populating her works should be seen, as they, like us, ride through life, each one a small part of the greater historical narrative.