

May 4, 1967.

Miss Ann Treer  
133 West 22nd Street  
New York City  
New York  
10011

Dear Ann:

Before talking with you on the telephone this morning, I want to write and apologize - in type - for all the inconvenience and difficulty I must have caused you. This has been such a busy season for me: the photography history class in the Art Institute school and a series of exhibitions to organize and install for the Illinois Arts Council have driven into a state of static insanity so that many things have had to be shelved until some later date. I wish I could hope for your forgiveness for the unfortunate silence this has caused.

Only a few days ago I finished recasting the exhibition schedule so that the date definitely fixed for your show is for its opening on January 20 (1968) to extend through February 25. We would like to have about seventy-five prints as this will give us some latitude for selection and hanging. The mounting of the prints will be done here. It is desirable to have as many 11 x 14" prints as possible, although we will take care of any exceptions, so do not hesitate about including them as they often do much towards making a show interesting.

We like to have the prints in our hands about one month before the exhibition opens. I shall talk with you more than once before that time and I am sure everything will turn out to be quite easy and simple if you are able to pardon the annoying lack of my letters in the past.

Best regards to both of you.

Sincerely,

Hugh Edwards, Curator of Photography.

Ann Treer;  
alias Mrs. A. Vestal,  
715 Carroll St. Apt. 3.1.  
Brooklyn N.Y. 11215.  
Tel.: 212--789-0336.

Mr. Hugh Edwards,  
Print Department,  
The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Michigan at Adams,  
Chicago Illinois 60603.

PERSONAL.

January 8th, 1968.

Dear Hugh Edwards,

The package of (well wrapped) prints went off true to schedule on Dec. 26th, via Railway Express, and was supposed to reach you latest on January 2nd. There doesn't seem to be a limit to insurance amounts, so on a rough basis of \$ 25.- per print I came up with \$ 2200.--, for which I hope they won't charge you too much. ?- I know this is a preposterous amount, as far as actual chances of sales go, but it seems to insure special tender handling by the REA people. Or so they said.... Oh yes, I'm not altogether sure if I have 88 or 87 prints there, having gone through a typical Huckleberry Finn counting and re-counting of silver spoons kind of thing.

Since I have no documentary proof that I am Ann Treer, and having gone through a thing with the Post Office once, trying to reclaim a package of reject prints from Expo, I beg you to have all official things -- from returned prints to (!) cheques (?) to whatnot -- addressed to Mrs.A.Vestal. Only normal mail comes through without a hitch on my professional name.

For various - foremost financial - reasons I very much doubt that I'll be able to see the show myself. I'd love to have some photographs of the show for bragging purposes. Is this possible ?

Forgive my late submission of my life's story, but I've had to fight all manner of inner obstacles. On the one hand, I'd hate to give a brief skeletal account of data, on the other I've never quite overcome the traumatic experience of my flight from behind the Iron Curtain; the flight itself was smooth, but the ramifications were rough : from DP-dom and fear of consequences to my father, to New Australian status, to coming to New York at the height of McCarthy's career, which made me rather unpopular as a refugee from the Workers' Paradise. I also have a recurring nightmare about being kidnapped by Communist agents... However, since I dislike dry data I'll probably get carried away and write you a rambling story. I haven't the time for judicious editing now, so I beg you to be my judicious editor instead. Pick out the data that are fit for public consumption, and keep the rest for your own amusement, hokay ?

January 1968

BIOGRAPHY -- Ann Treer.

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Born 1922 in Vienna, though not an Austrian. Since my father was Hungarian, I was automatically a Hungarian myself, though I lived in that country -- and learned that impossible language -- only in my late teens. Learned to read and write out of curiosity at a precocious age, while also doing some pretty drawings, so my elders thought I was some kind of a genius and put high hopes in a grand career. (A good reason for early neuroses.) Alas, my drawings became sour and stilted, and I hated school.

When I was four, Papa went broke, Mama got her first stage contract as an opera singer, and I started seeing country after country -- sometimes as a piece of bewildered ~~bugg~~ baggage, sometimes as an unhappy inmate of boarding schools among vicious little children who didn't like outlandish exceptions, or rather liked to torment them. At that time I became an outsider, and I haven't seen any reason since to stop being one -- analyst or no analyst.

Spoke perfect Parisian at the age of five (under duress); refused to talk French altogether at seven, in Mainz am Rhein, where I tried hard to be a street urchin. Had chicken pox or something in an awfully healthy "Kinderheim" in Munich, ate fish with two forks and perfect table manners in the dining car of the Simplon-Orient Express (I think, it was) at eight, was commandeered into Arithmetic by my ex-school director Grandfather in a small village in Yugoslavia, where I sneered at country life, Grandpa himself (he was CRUDE; used to beat his children), and at his marvellously sour village brassband, which he conducted at Easter Mass and at funerals, being then the village organist.

Was brought back to Vienna at ten, suffered through four years of "Real-Gymnasium", three of them at convent boarding schools, which in turn made me devout, then dubious, then disillusioned, then aggressively atheist, though only after leaving. My atheism was later superceded by Hinduism, Buddhism, Theosophy, Free Love, Pacifism and others, before it crystallised into my present religion of "There are more things between Heaven and Earth -- long as they're not institutionalised..."

At fourteen studied English (British or King's English) at a girls' college in Prague (where I forgot to learn Czech), which earned me a beautiful diploma from the Prague University ~~which gave~~ <sup>gave</sup> me permission to teach English (privately). I did a bit of teaching later, and since I never bothered to look up exact meanings or prononciations in dictionaries, I may have left a trail of false informations behind. In the meanwhile I kept in practice by reading Edgar Wallace and Wodehouse in the original, learning the lyrics of American popular songs, and talking English loud in public whenever that was most unadvisable, like during the war years.

In 1938 all foreigners were expelled from Prague, and Papa took me to Budapest, where I had to learn Hungarian. I immediately wanted to become a comedienne, but fluffed the examinations <sup>tests</sup> for the Academy; partly because I had to learn several classical poems by heart ( in three days), and I detested poems, partly because my accent was atrocious. When asked if I could recite a German poem, the only one I remembered was Heinrich Heine's "The World is Stupid, The World is Blind", which I duly recited. It later occurred to me that poor Heine had been already excommunicated, and the Academy was run by pro-German elements. Maybe I would have made a good comedienne after all.....

Spent the Second World War and aftermath in Hungary, mostly, though there was a year or so in the High Tatra, in Slovakia, when I lived in various half-empty tourist hotels as their "artist-in-residence", i.e. designing posters and luggage stickers etc. for them -- to my greatest amazement. It was the result of ~~my~~ an energetic lady friend's machinations, because I was really quite bored by commercial designing. Wasn't much good, either. - Tried to make a go of fashion and theater costume design, got equally bored. Finally got a grip on the Hungarian language and started writing short stories, of which some got published, others rejected by the censors. No wonder; the stories were ~~radical, pacifist~~ outspoken anti-war propaganda, and we were in the middle of a war.... (Can't help being wryly amused by today's youngsters with their pacifist movements; first of all, theirs is a mass-movement <sup>ag</sup> against my one-man-stand against the world; second, each one of them wants at least two or three kids AND no war -- I was at least more logical in my muddled way.) After giving up on immediate publication, in the middle of a more ambitious masterwork, I pooped out. - Became briefly a movie extra, ostensibly for background material, but found out soon that ~~it~~ was dull and tiresome. After a while I even gave up writing letters.

In the forties the war became tougher and we had frequent airraids. The cellar of our house wasn't much of a shelter, and the jittery ladies from other apartments made it worse, so I stayed up on the third floor, under a table (in case of glass splinters), clutching my wooden elephant named Ike and in the company of a rum bottle. Felt terribly brave - and drunk, of course. - Survived the bombings, my own dangerous big mouth, my exclusive (and tragic) friendship for underdogs and oppositionists, the German retreat, Hitler, the siege of Budapest, and the Russian occupation (I'm not a blonde). Read a heavy tome on Astrology by candlelight in the cellar (letting others do the cooking -- I didn't know how to cook anyhow), and felt disgusted. Thought the Commies were another passing phase, and that I'd survive them too. Took a job as an air hostess while waiting for "normalization", ~~took part~~ did my duty in the so-called democratic voting procedures (which had rather odd public results, mathematically), observed the old-time, ~~my~~ social-democrat leaders - men of integrity - being publicly denounced for stealing party-funds, marched (with a scowl and a drag) on May-Day parades, and found out in '49 that I couldn't survive the Commies after all. Especially not after Czechoslovakia..... Since I have a thing about police states (nerves, you know) I finally defected. Arrived in Italy with a toothbrush, and was promptly accused by an American Express employee (whose help I needed for a phone call) that I was a DE-serter.-

Was a DP in Italy for half a year -- first Rome then Naples -- and, though out-of-camp, couldn't enjoy the country as I used to as a kid. The city was infested by wolves, which drove me away scared from lonely walks, and I didn't dare go out for an espresso after dark -- an excuse for the police to accuse lonely females for prostitution. When I couldn't get a visa to the U.S. (my mother was already here), I tried to emigrate to Canada on her advice. The Canadian Immigration Committee was taking on females as domestics (a thing I didn't know anything about), and I would have tried it, except there was a Committee Lady who told me to stop painting my face, or I'd be mistaken for a prostitute. That about finished Canada for me.

Met a friend of friends in Naples; he proposed; we got married. He wanted to emigrate to Australia (The Land For Pioneers)-- so we went. Managed to get the slowest ship of the DP Slave Trade, with the worst kitchen on all seven seas; Almost learned Scottish from the First Engineer, had a food revolt which lead nowhere since the cook was no good, and finally arrived in an Australian camp, named Bonegilla, an ex-army camp. Emigrants ~~live~~ in transit lived in men's blocks or women's blocks, in corrugated tin huts. Emigrants with camp jobs lived in similar huts, but divided into small cubicles with non-soundproof walls.-- Went through

both versions, ~~z~~ (we got jobs there). The food was mostly mutton. (Haven't been able to eat lamb or drink tea for years afterwards.) - Visually maddeningly beautiful country, otherwise frustrating. People suspicious, jeering; climate unbearable; jobs for pioneers and muscle -- or the limited range of city jobs. Rents higher than Manhattan ... Oh well.....

Had a camp director's secretary's job in camp, later a cheque typist's in Sydney. My first boss was a sweet unreasonable paternalistic old gent who was hard of hearing and loved us in an absurd, shouting way; when he was canned I quit. My second boss was a huge oil corporation with huge rooms with thirty ~~thirty~~ clerks and thirty phones -- one on each desk, but no air conditioning. I suffered like a dog in summer, and froze in winter, because countries which aren't supposed to have WINTERS don't have decent heating - only electric or gas heaters - like Australia or Italy, and quite a few others, I hear.... Sydney has a beautiful harbour -- from the air. The city itself was a mistake : totally out of place.

After quitting that job I took an aptitude test; they concluded that I would make a good draftsman. Having learned a bit of photography at that stage (printing first -- my first husband bought a small enlarger that we couldn't afford, and I got interested against my will, not being able to read at night without lights in the camp cubicle) I asked them 'what about photography?' and they said 'not at your age dear, they start 'em when they're kids' -- so that was that since I was about thirty then. However, I did get a half-day job with a photographer, printing postcard size enlargements of people at parties, ship arrivals and departures, etc.,. One day my boss was short of operators and needed someone to cover a children's birthday party (at a restaurant), so he taught me to handle his oldest Leica and electronic flash equipment in half a day, and off I went. (My left shoulder hasn't been the same ever since that electronic flash.) - The first roll of film seemed to last forever, from first arrivals to the blowing-out-of-candles routine, so when I went to check it, I found it was a complete blank -- hadn't moved from the first frame. Good old Leicas, can't touch them ever since ! Since the other rolls seemed to please my boss (though not the customers, who didn't order <sup>any</sup>), he didn't give up on me, but sent me to other assignments -- mostly parties, one Barmitzvah, a string of Olde Scottish Competition tests from dancing to bagpipes. At one party I came out into the sunlight, but found out I had no instructions about how to unhook the flash and what exposure where when and how. Oh well ..... After that I got curious and started to make rich, melodramatic portraits of my friends. The largest prints I made were  $4\frac{1}{2}'' \times 6\frac{1}{2}''$  -- enlarging paper was frightfully expensive there, I couldn't see any REASON for anything larger -- also I didn't believe in spotting; sounded UNNATURAL to me. - Anyhow, when I showed my first results to my boss, he was delighted and paid me the biggest compliment he could think of : he said they were a cross between Karsh and Mortensen. Since then I haven't heard a more sincere compliment.

Came to New York on a visit in '54, and after having decided to stay and start from ~~scratch~~ scratch, asked my husband for a divorce. Studied with Sid Grossman for a semester, and again for a few weeks shortly before his death. Didn't understand a single thing he said about pictures (the rest being tired rhetoric), but found out years later that it had worked on my subconscious, or something, just as he had predicted. Am still puzzled about rumors about his cruel and destructive ways with students; must have had semantic blocks against his verbal deathrays, if there were such.

In New York I tried to get a photographer's assistant's job, but they all wanted strong young boys, not women in their thirties. Though, come to think of it, I did work for a photographer, who taught me spotting, since he needed me

for that and for drying prints on a large gadget, and for answering the phone. Otherwise I didn't work out too well; when he took me on assignments, I would get all tangled up with stands and flash equipment.... After that the only jobs I could get were with photographic screen outfits, as contact printer. In the first of these I was superceded by a young boy (half pay), in the second I found myself in one of four printing booths, with a radio blaring popular songs (the same twelve songs each day) at all times, which drove me nuts. I don't know how the other people could stand it; apparently they could stand it better than me. Ever since I haven't even tried to get another job; my own idiosyncrasies are no match for popular idiosyncrasies in a mass culture.

In the meanwhile learned printing the hard way -- at night, with bathroom setups, driven by the principle of "high craftsmanship or bust". Am still hostile to young gifted photographers who bat out a 30 or 40 print show in a couple of days (having commercial darkroom experience), because even if I can't find fault with their prints, I find this extremely unfair. It takes me three to four hours to come to my final print of a negative, and in a whole night I can tackle two or three negatives maximum -- with five or six ~~prints~~ acceptable prints each. I still think of "fast looking" as "shallow looking", and see no reason to change my ways of working in middle age. Of course I'll never get a job in a commercial lab again.....

When David Vestal started teaching, I studied with him, and - incidentally - got married to him. Which ought to teach a moral, only I don't quite know yet what it is. Naturally, I got quickly tagged as a Vestal student-and-imitator; we used to go to the same places at weekends, and, consequently, were faced with the same things -- woods, meadows, beaches. But go and fight City-Hall. All this at a time when everybody imitated everybody else, according to the fads : the jazz musicians, the Italian festivals, the square dances, the clowns;; the grainy existing-light fad, the wide-angle fad, the long-lens fad, the fish-eye.... Sorry, the past tense is an oversight.)

Feeling a moral obligation toward making a career, I made the Art-Directors' circuit. First yearly, then every second year, ~~later~~ later only now and then, till I petered out. Tried popular magazines, fashion magazines, advertising, record covers.... Got the whole gamut from "beautiful - wish we could use it" to the snide and bored attitudes. After finding out that I was dealing with a professional neurosis (the A.D. with the worst bite became the sweetest, most appreciative guy once he was retired and approached at home), and that my essay on "what's wrong with record covers" complete with cover dummies to sell myself only led to a new fashion in record covers without selling myself at all -- I quit.

Found out that every small sale or publication I had was sheer accident; a few prints to the Museum of Modern Art, a print or two in a huge show, a page or two in an Annual, a funny story about road pictures in Pop.Photo, a Brazil portfolio in Infinity, even a one-man show at the Architectural League - which, being in the League's dining room, was practically invisible most of the time. The last thing I did -- and even got paid for -- was an assignment for a Federal project on roads and highways in the city, in '66. I chose the George Washington Bridge and approaches, got more and more involved, and ended up with a Homeric epos of such ~~propria~~ proportions that it took days to edit it down to 42 pictures. This doesn't seem right for the professional approach, so I'm left without great hopes for more of same.

In the meanwhile, the darkroom has changed from a cosy retreat into a hostile, back-breaking saltmine. Middle age and failing eye sight doesn't exactly help ~~sixties~~ either. My print boxes are overflowing, and who wants photography anyhow? There are almost as many photographers in this country as there are citizens.

So, ever since completing my last "job", I've taken another sabbatical leave. My first one was in the early ~~sixties~~ and went into knitted woollen hats -- became a rage with Harper's Bazaar and was a complete commercial flop -- the present one goes into making earrings from colorful plastic boxes and things, and I don't even try to sell them. (The last one also got interrupted by our moving to Brooklyn, and my getting drowned in spackle and wall paint, not to speak of floor paint which I can't get out ~~of my fingernails~~ from under my fingernails.)

The trouble is, I talked my husband into buying a most expensive stainless steel sink, ~~si~~ so I'll probably have to get back to photography before long.

Nothing wrong with ~~photography~~ photography, mind you, but there is so much WORK involved -- and WORK is a four letter word -- and then you're stuck with tons of prints which make moving a nightmare. And when you're ambitious, your ego gets bashed in a gutted market; and when you're nonchalant, you don't feel like printing or selling or something.

No, I'm not a pessimist, and I don't think in terms of that Heine poem any more. But I realize that good photographs are not enough to get you wherever you think you want to go; in addition you need selling personality, the ability to fill a need within a limited demand, and lots of lucky coincidents. You can't be a magazine photographer, if you're bored by magazines -- like I am. You can't be a fashion photographer, if you get sick of Seventh Avenue -- like I do. You can't be a successful port~~rait~~rait photographer, if you don't believe in people's self images -- like I don't. And so forth. And, of course, you can't be a photographer with ~~Profound~~ Messages, once you've found there really aren't any; I've seen and heard too many, and they're all phony (sincerity notwithstanding)....

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God help me, Hugh, I've ended with a sermon. Please lock it up and don't show anybody. Can't possibly spend more time on editing all this, so ~~Dease~~ take over for me. - Hope the pictures have arrived safely, and that my additions don't bug you. - Would love to have a few invitations for staunch friends, relatives, and one for the wall. Greetings from David. And next time you're here, our place will be ready for a little comfort between ~~break~~ ballet sessions -- am painting it in a colorful way, like the Beatles say.

Greetings and thanks,

alias A. Vestal

Tree, Ann

March 8, 1968

Mrs. A. Vestal  
715 Carroll Street  
Apartment 3.3  
Brooklyn  
New York  
11215

Dear Ann:

At last I am back at the museum, slowly collecting the pieces which were so widely scattered by my December debacle. I returned to find your show very popular and as I mentioned before, the date of its closing has been moved forward to March 31.

I have had Robert Pottinger make installation photographs so that you may have some idea of how the exhibition looks. I wish you could have been here before its close. I am sending you a set of the photographs as well as a paragraph from the Daily News Panorama concerning the exhibition. Don't be too disappointed by the reference to landscapes of the Middle West.

The trip to New York I had planned to make in December I still have hopes of realizing in April. I trust I shall be able to see you and David. I am very grateful for all your efforts and patience: selfishly I can say it has been much to our advantage to have your prints here.

All good wishes to both of you and more soon.

Sincerely,

Hugh Edwards, Curator of Photography.



Ann Treer/ A.Vestal,  
715 Carroll Street Apt. 3.1.  
Brooklyn N.Y. 11215.

Mr. Hugh Edwards,  
Photography Department,  
The Art Institute of Chicago,

June 18th, 1968.

Dear Hugh,

Your letters are always such a pleasure.

Not only is it still agreeable with me, but I'll only be too happy and proud to have some pictures in your permanent collection. (Eight ? Wow !)  
And yes, the price is correct.- Am touched and encouraged by your remarks, and feel emboldened to make the following suggestion : if the committee's choice should differ from yours and leaves out some of your particular pets, please feel free to keep those too, any number, on a no-charge basis. I understand that "gifts" are suspect and not greatly valued in our age, even in museums; but I trust that you are immune to modern superstitions. It would please me; I couldn't hope for a better home for my work, and I would naturally use it for tax deductions, upon receipt of official proof.... Okay ?

The storage problem of the 18x22" mats won't faze me; after all, we've survived moving our lives' work last fall.- I wonder if Barbara Crane ever got around to making slides of some of my prints; she intended to when she met David in Washington, and I sent her the "go-ahead" through him.

After April had come and gone (the original date of your last planned visit to New York) I felt like writing you a "what gives?" note, but was afraid it might sound like a hint about the prints and would put additional pressure on you. Your letter suggests that you had been playing down your illness in winter. And I've heard through the grapevine that you had to move after a fire (?) at your residential hotel. So it is really up to me to thank YOU for YOUR concern and patience; not vice versa.

I'll be happy to welcome you back to New York, whenever your long-delayed visit materializes, but short of a miracle won't be able to show you new work. Haven't been to the darkroom since early '67, and doubt that I could interest you in my latest works of art : MOD earrings and plastic reading lamps, for own use. Brooklyn doesn't excite me visually, and I'm positively homesick for the Hudson River docks -- smog, stink, noise and all. But mainly I'm just stale. Your letter prodded me into looking at new contact sheets, but there it stopped. To start WORKING again I'll need at least a lion tamer with a whip.

David sends his best regards; I send mine together with many thanks, and do let me know eventually (no hurry) if my suggestion is acceptable. And we're looking forward to your next visit here (terribal town, but think of Lincoln Center).

Sincerely,

*Ann*