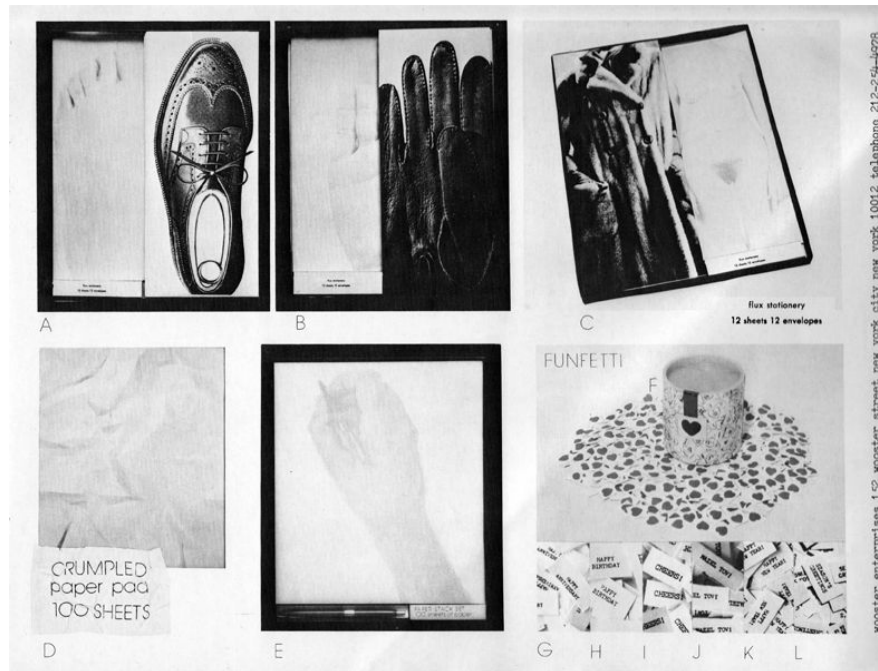


CLASSIC WIT: WOOSTER ENTERPRISES AT CHURNER AND CHURNER

BY: SERENA QIU

Churner and Churner's Wooster Enterprises, 1976-78 is some mix of a historical art exhibition and a paper goods boutique set up in a previous generation of downtown New York City. It is a small monument to the tremendous undertaking of Wooster Enterprises, and also is without precedent in being the first show that presents the complete range of output by this stationary and design venture.



Jaime Davidovich and Judith Henry founded Wooster Enterprises in 1976 on Soho's Wooster Street as an experiment in creating affordable art objects for broad distribution. While not formally affiliated with any movement, Davidovich and Henry were sympathetic to the Fluxus group's mission to integrate art with daily life. For Davidovich, there was a difference between their approach and that of their pop-art contemporaries: "Andy Warhol was the problem, the one who was playing to the collectors, not devising an alternative system of distribution." Henry explains that in comparison, "We were doing the opposite. This was art and we were putting it in the real world."

Their line of products -- ranging from exuberantly self-explanatory greeting cards (blank "This is an All Occasion Card" cards) to placemats printed with sloppy food refuse -- also shares in Fluxus's humorous irreverence. The humor of Wooster Enterprises has an immediacy and accessibility that reasonably explains their wholesale contracts with large department stores like Bloomingdales and Macy's. Their iconic crumpled paper stationery remains one of MoMA gift shop's top sellers after 27 years. Other creations demonstrate a timelessness and effectiveness in succinct visual metaphors like Hand in Glove, Torso in Fur, and Foot in Shoe cards and envelopes.

For the exhibition, Churner and Churner fittingly set up shop in their gallery with a glass retail display case in the front, while account books and archival images were stored in the backroom. The objects feel natural in their setting, and so become especially compelling as souvenirs of Soho in the 1970s. Wooster Enterprises is an exhibition that delights in recalling a classic and demonstrating its staying power.