



As tactile objects, drawing jointly on the associations of both photograph and fabric, embroidered photo postcards' tactility and reality effects powerfully materialised feeling in a medium renowned for its compressed communicative capacities. Via visual and haptic pleasures, embroidered photographic missives combined presence and depth, making their forms especially suitable for communicating proximity across distance, not only as greetings cards and travel souvenirs but also as devotional objects. Catholic postcards, depicting popes and saints, or visualising religious mottos, often featured embroidered elements, drawing on the Church's textile traditions.

Portrait photographs are intensely peopled objects that can be redolent of relics. Their associations are enhanced by the addition of textiles. The language of 'binding' ties, and of 'knitting' matters together, is prevalent across discussions of the form. As Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider note in *Cloth and Human Experience*: 'its constituent fibres can evoke ideas of togetherness'. Scholars of photography, such as Elizabeth Edwards, have argued persuasively that a full understanding of the medium must consider photographs as material objects rather than disembodied images.

Contemporary artists who bring photography and textiles together speak of the power of the needle to intervene in the photograph, puncture its veneer, bring hidden stories to the surface and fill its silences. Critics and curators who analyse their work recognise its intensity and density. Can these insights be reverse-engineered onto popular historical forms that have been considered low culture? Can mass-produced, machine-made productions carry the same values? Are historic embroidered postcards conformist sentimental pleasures rather than disruptive critical engagements? Can anonymous producers be compared with named artists? I suggest that there is more that unites these two bodies of work than divides them. Perhaps the characteristic that best cuts across historic and contemporary embroidered photographs is that both are predominantly women's cultures. Women's bodies are the most common stitched subjects and women are the main producers, dominating current embroidery art. Historically, women operated embroidery machinery and were assigned the photographic work of enhancement as colourists and decorators. Women were, and are, by far the largest body of senders and receivers of greetings cards; they speak the language of social relations. •••**Annebella Pollen**