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Larry's Christmas Cards

December 11, 2016 Larry Racioppo 2 Comments

*I didn't so much as **meet** Larry Racioppo as **find** him. Home from NYC and working on this piece, I admired his photographic work on the 9/11 Memorial & Museum site and he agreed to lend me an image. Turns out, he's lived a fascinating life; he's been a NYC taxi driver in the early 80's, staff photographer for the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development during the city's lowest (and scariest) point, and a well-respected photo documentarian and keeper of knowledge of life, pre-gentrification, in Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan. Check out his site at www.larryracioppo.com.*

When I think about Christmas cards, I think about growing up in my large Italian-American family in South Brooklyn. Even though our family members lived within a few

blocks of each other, sending and receiving cards was a Holiday tradition. Only adults sent them, not kids. My cousins and I often had to sell Christmas cards to raise money for our Catholic grammar schools.

But on our own we also answered ads found in the back of comic books and sold preordered cards to our families and neighbors. We were not paid in money but in redeemable toys or sporting goods we ordered from the company's catalog. Man, did we ever look forward to getting our 'rewards' in the mail!

I did not start sending Christmas cards until I had my own apartment in 1972. I began making my own cards around 1976 - 5x7 inch Black & White prints that I mailed as post cards.



Santa in the Rain, Fifth



Avenue, Brooklyn: 1972

Aunt Kitty's End Table, Sixth Avenue: 1972



St. John's Display, 21st



Street: 1974

Store Window

Santa, 9th Street: 1976

In the mid-70's, the Brooklyn Museum had a show of artist-made Christmas cards in the small *Corner Gallery* outside the first floor cafeteria. I submitted a partially hand-colored photo and was excited to be included.



Santa Poster on Door,

Prospect Avenue: 1975

I always had a bunch of 'Christmassy' junk around – Santa decorations and Santa saltshakers, etc. I stuck them on the wall or set up a small table to photograph them as still lives. I made small color prints and glued them to folded paper with properly sized envelopes.



Crucified Santa, My studio:



1984

Plastic Santa Face, My

studio: 1984

I also would photograph Christmas street scenes and apartment tableaux, first in my own neighborhood, and later on throughout New York City. Sometimes I was just lucky as when I opened my car door in Coney Island and almost stepped on a little Santa figure next to a crushed cigarette.



My Parent's Table, 18th



Street: 1982

Chuck's



House, 18th Street: 1989

St. Lucy's Nativity, Mace Avenue, the Bronx: 2005



PEACE, 3rd Avenue: 2006

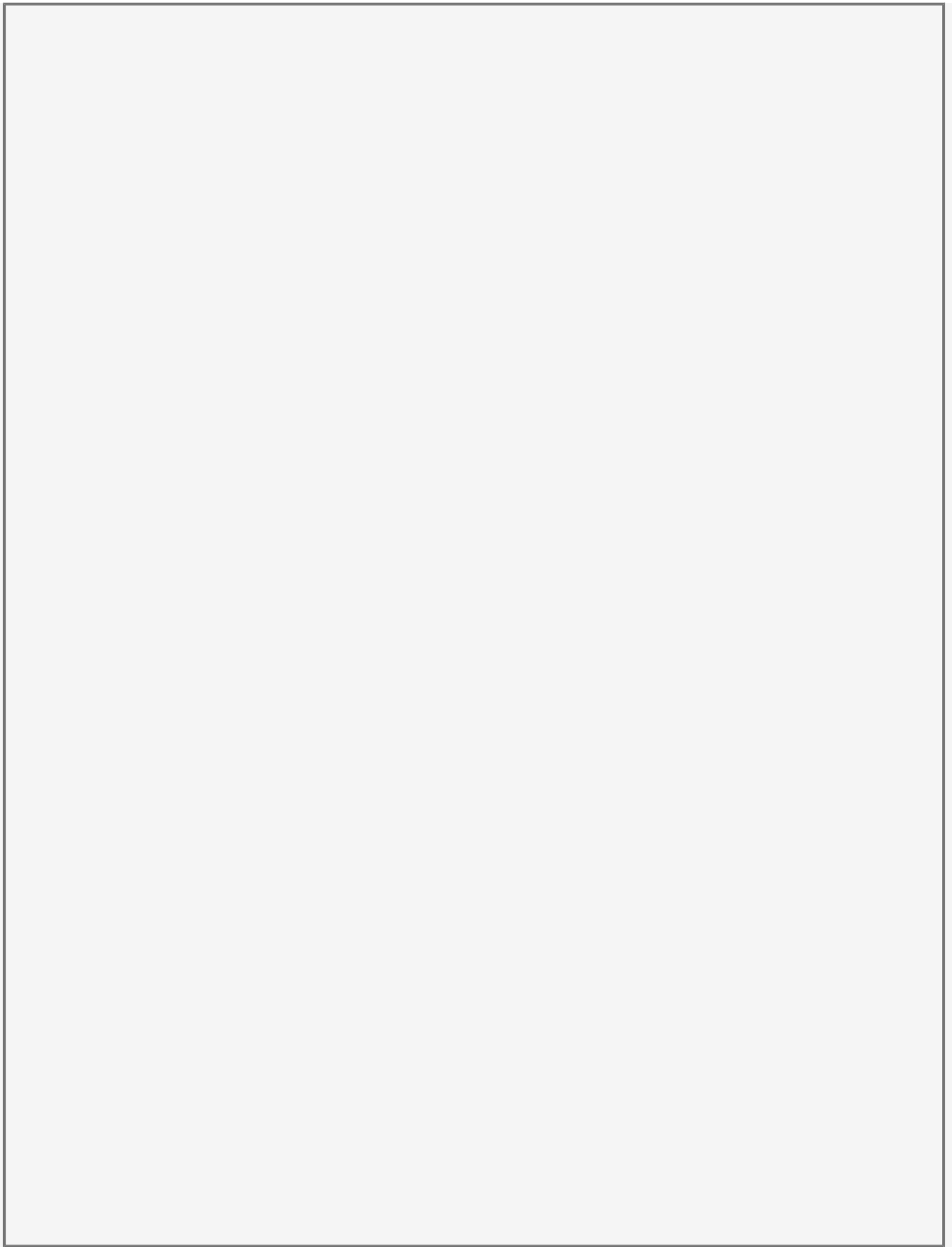


Abandoned Santa,

Richmond Terrace, SI: 2008



Street Santa, West 23



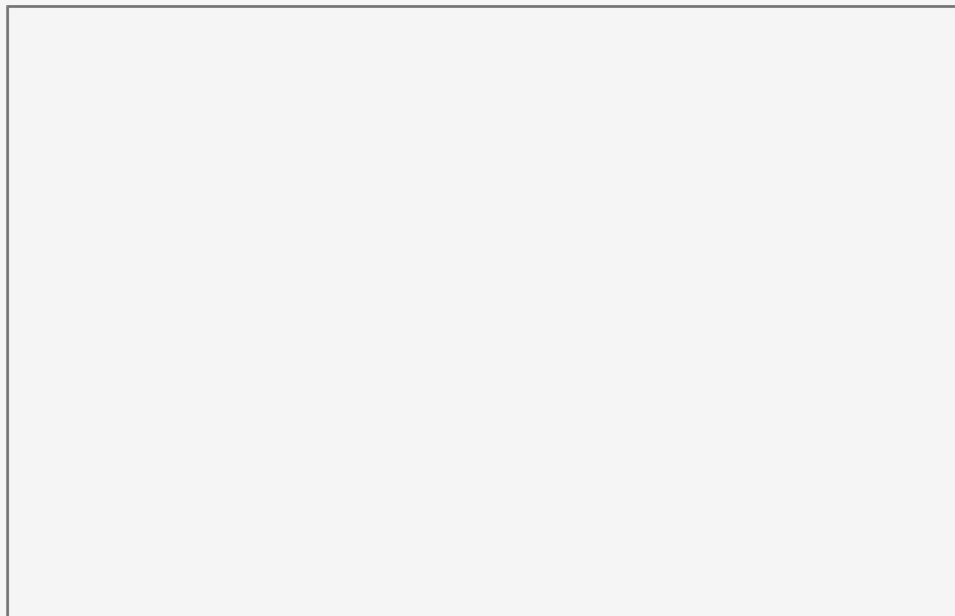
Street, Brooklyn: 2007

Hanged Santa, Bushwick Avenue: 2006

As I made more non-Catholic friends, I started making some 'Holiday' cards without traditional Christmas images.



Pizza Boxes, Gold Street,



Manhattan: 2007

Bulletin

Board, Gold Street, Manhattan: 2007

In 1991 I got married and moved to Rockaway Beach, Queens where I continued to photograph Christmas subjects. My cards became a bit more dramatic after Hurricane Sandy.



Nativity Scene, Beach

130th Street, Queens: 2001



Snowman, Beach 132nd



Street, Queens: 2008

Dirty

Santa, Beach 126th Street, Queens: 2011



Kevin's Santa, Beach 129th

Street, Queens: 2011

These days I prefer to create still lives for my Christmas cards. I have a really nice studio with good light and equipment. Shooting digitally also makes it easier to light and print my little setups. I have been trying to be more serious, while still having a lot of fun.



PEZ Santa, My studio: 2005



Santa/Doll/Squash, My



studio: 2006

Santa, Shell,



My studio: 2010

Box of

Xmas Stuff, My studio: 2010

Cards for my interior designer wife Barbara Cannizzaro must be simple and beautiful, with a very clean look. Working with her has made me a better photographer.



Pole Jacks, Manhattan:



2007

Mannequin & Wreath,

Beach, 129th Street, Queens: 2009

I am 'looser' with my own cards and recently included a blue 3D print of myself – made by artist Fred Kahl – with a group of old friends.



Larry & Friends, My studio:

2015

It is time to make my 2016 cards but I do not have my usual enthusiasm this year. So many of the people I exchanged cards with are no longer alive.

I have saved the names and addresses of my mother and my aunts, but my most dependable Christmas card customers are long gone. I think of their kindness and generosity as I look forward to receiving the homemade cards of my grandchildren.

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