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Daniel Joseph Martinez:

**‘The Enemy of My Enemy Is My Friend and
My Friend Is My Enemy.**

Did You Know It Snows in Los Angeles in the Summer Time’

By HOLLAND COTTER

*Simon Preston Gallery
301 Broome Street
SoHo*

In August 2009, Daniel Joseph Martinez traveled the length of the Alaskan oil pipeline and documented the trip with tourist postcards, hand-stamped with messages and sent to friends and colleagues. A series of those cards make up roughly half of a show that has the hard-to-gauge feel of a slow-working hallucinogen.

A few of the messages record specific news events, but in warp-time: Senator Edward M. Kennedy’s death that month is duly noted, but so are the Watts riots, which took place 40 years earlier in Los Angeles, Mr. Martinez’s home city. A few cards are funny, borderline scary. The words on one with a picture of a grizzly report the sighting of Timothy Treadwell, the eco-activist killed by a bear in Alaska in 2003. He’s alive and well, we’re told, and working in an oil field.

Other messages are ominous. A picture of the far-northern town of Deadhorse, basically a glorified barracks for an army of oil workers, has on its flip side the words: “The extent of our affluence is seemingly unimaginable.” They’re from a book by the security analyst P. W. Singer, author of “Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry.”

A card postmarked from Nome sounds desperate: “I was on all fours convulsed with spasms of nausea.” Is it a report of a bad bout of traveler’s tummy? No, it’s William S. Burroughs detailing a very bad drug trip in “The Yage Letters.” Finally, on a novelty card depicting a freaky creature called a “fur fish,” comes an end-of-time account of falling, fiery angels, as described in the poetry of William Blake and quoted, or misquoted, in “Blade Runner.”

Compared with the building weirdness of the postcards, the rest of the show feels undernuanced, even unrelated, but it’s all of a piece. On three gallery walls the artist has jotted the statistics — time, place, numbers killed — for 31 historical genocides. From the ceiling he’s suspended a scrawny assemblage: a child’s-toy version of an improvised explosive device strapped to the stuffed form of an Alaskan hare.

The message? Mr. Martinez isn’t into closure. For 30 years he’s been pushing his violent, funny, corrosive images and ideas through art’s pipeline, and the meanings still flow free.

HOLLAND COTTER