Transatlantica

Revue d'études américaines. American Studies Journal

2 | 2009

Benjamin Franklin / Richard Powers

Ben Franklin, America's Postage Stamp Star — on the Wane?

Notes on a changing image in U.S. postal memory

François Brunet

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/4402>

DOI: 10.4000/transatlantica.4402

ISSN: 1765-2766

Publisher

Association française d'Etudes Américaines (AFEA)

Electronic reference

François Brunet, "Ben Franklin, America's Postage Stamp Star — on the Wane?", *Transatlantica* [Online], 2 | 2009, Online since 25 January 2010, connection on 01 February 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/4402> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.4402>

This text was automatically generated on 1 February 2023.

Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Ben Franklin, America's Postage Stamp Star — on the Wane?

Notes on a changing image in U.S. postal memory

François Brunet

“The history of our Revolution will be one continued lie from one end to the other, The essence of the whole will be that Dr. Franklin’s electric rod smote the earth and out sprung General Washington. That Franklin electrised him with his rod, and thenceforward these two conducted all the policy negotiations, legislation, and war. These underscored lines contain the whole fable, plot and catastrophe.” (John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 4 April 1790¹)

- 1 The lavish four-stamp pane which the United States Postal Service (henceforth USPS) created to celebrate the 2006 tercentenary of Benjamin Franklin’s birth is arguably the most sophisticated (and appealing) stamp creation devoted to the first Postmaster general of the nation, but it is by no means the first, and probably not the last. Ben Franklin was featured — along with George Washington — in the very first regular U.S. stamp issue (1847) and has been second only to Washington in frequency of appearance, appearing as the first, lowest denomination in every regular issue but one from 1847 to 1954, as can be gathered from a search in the National Postal Museum’s richly informative [“Arago” website](#).
- 2 Allowing for Washington’s uniquely mythical status as Father of the Nation, this tends to make Franklin at least as bright a star of American stamps, especially considering the fact that for over a century the Franklin stamp was (followed by the Washington) the most commonly used one. This overexposure of Franklin on U.S. stamps might strike one as ironic, for a figure remembered by some as the leader of the Colonies’ opposition to the Stamp Act. But it is consistent with his broader ubiquity in many different realms of American memory, both popular and official, and especially visual,

as shown by Carla Mulford in her remarkable 1999 article. In the U.S., as we shall see, the postage stamp has always been, since its inception, a site and a tool of public memory, and more specifically a crossing of popular and official memories — indeed, like bank notes, a memorial object usually elaborated and controlled by government authorities for the use of the general population, but generally inspired by ambient memorial imagery and incorporated through use into popular culture.

- 3 In this light, Franklin's postal stardom would seem at first to confirm John Adams's view of the Franklin-Washington couple as the vernacular emblems of "the history of our Revolution", as opposed to more sophisticated or more complex memory figures. When we look at the highly elaborate [tercentenary issue](#), however, we may wonder whether Adams's disgruntled but lucid assessment of celebrity values still applies to postal memory of the 21st century — i.e. whether the Franklin myth, as expressed in the 2006 issue, still belongs to the distinctly low-brow or popular version of history Adams denigrated, or if instead it has not migrated to a different, more educated and even intellectualist, realm of public memory. Such a shift, if demonstrated, might reflect several distinct trends which I will only be able to sketch here: the redefinition of Franklin as a high-brow, enlightened figure, and possibly as a more politically acceptable Founding Father than either George Washington or John Adams, for one, but also and concurrently the estrangement of postage stamp imagery from popular culture in the electronic age. Before addressing these issues, I will recall some important peculiarities of U.S. postage stamp history, notably the representation of the nation by a collective of prominent historical individuals. I must warn, however, that the present paper is offered rather as an essay than a full-fledged scholarly investigation².

1. U.S. postage stamp history: celebrating a collection of historical heroes

- 4 The choice of Ben Franklin as the very first subject to be illustrated on an American stamp (in the [5 c of 1847](#), paired with a black 10 c Washington) is [obviously significant](#), but it should not obscure the larger and radical innovation adopted by U.S. postal authorities when they introduced — seven years after Great Britain, and two years before France — regular postage stamps³: that of featuring the faces of historical heroes of the nation instead of the visages of ruling sovereigns or various emblems, either political or strictly postal. This "American model", so to speak, was notably different from its contemporary foreign counterparts, which can be roughly categorized into four distinct models⁴.

The various stamp models in the mid-19th century: a brief typology

The "imperial portrait" model

- 5 The "imperial portrait" model, launched in 1840 by Great Britain's famous "[penny black](#)", which featured the profile (and later the face) of Queen Victoria not only on British stamps but on the countless issues of British colonies and possessions, was adopted, among others, by Belgium (1849), Prussia and Spain (1850), Cuba and [Puerto Rico](#) (1855), etc.

The “national portrait” model

- 6 The “national emblem” model, was arguably inaugurated by the famous [“Basel Dove”](#) of 1845, but more commonly imperial and war-like in intent, as in the [Austrian eagle of 1850](#), the eagle and coat of arms of Russia (1858) and [Poland](#) (1861), and more loosely represented by the Ottoman crescent and moon of 1863 or the so-called [“Japanese dragon”](#) of 1871.

The “postal-numeric” model

- 7 In the “postal-numeric” model representational imagery is replaced by the mere expression of monetary value, more or less adorned ([Brazil 1843](#), Zurich 1843, German states later); in the case of Brazil and other places, this choice appears to have been motivated by a reluctance of authorities “to obliterate the effigy of Emperor Dom Pedro II”⁵.

The “republican allegory” model

- 8 The “republican allegory” model was represented primarily by France, where it fell to the Second Republic to introduce (in 1849, thus 2 years after the U.S.) regular postage stamps and to inaugurate a long series of [feminine allegorical and/or mythological representations of the Republic](#). The first embodiment of the Republic was the Greek goddess of fecundity [Ceres](#), replaced by the imperial profile of Napoleon III after 1851 and later echoed by figures of Marianne or the Sowing Woman. This model was not common elsewhere in the 19th century, with exceptions such as [Switzerland](#) (“Helvetia” allegory, 1854, which, like the Britannia figure used on some stamps in British colonies, was more of a national image than a republican emblem), Greece (1861, [“Hermes Head”](#), which was printed in France and followed a French design), Uruguay ([“Sun”, 1856](#)), Argentina (emblem of the Confederation, 1858) or Haiti ([1881, “Liberty Head”](#)).

The “American model”

- 9 The “American model”, by contrast, typically featured heads of historical figures, usually patriots, and thus may be called a “republican portrait” model. It is indeed American in that it was invented in and largely confined to U.S. postage in the 19th century — and that, even before the regular issues of 1847, it was already at work in the [“postmasters’ provisionals”](#) (local stamps which predated Federal issues) of New York and Millbury (Mass.) (1846–47), both of which featured portraits of Washington⁶. It was notably adopted by [Mexico in 1856](#) with a portrait of Hidalgo, but hardly anywhere else. What was peculiar to this model was both the creation of a commemorative function in stamps and the specialization of this postal memory as a political or civic one. Let me detail these innovations somewhat more.

The American “republican portrait” model

- 10 In contrast to European stamps, U.S. postal images thus foregrounded historical figures —and, starting in the 1860s, some historic scenes, — rather than living sovereigns or national / political emblems. This historical imagery was used consistently, throughout

the 19th century and beyond, in the most common issues (called “definitives” in USPS jargon), though in the 20th century some national emblems — especially the U.S. flag (search “flag” in 1847usa.com) — have been used on common stamps. This American innovation amounted to identifying postal imagery with a commemorative function, rather than a representation of governmental or postal authority; though it would later be adopted by European postal services, in the 19th century it remained a distinctive feature of U.S. stamps. From 1893 on, with the “[Columbian issue](#)”, other types of stamps appeared besides the “definitives” — ambiguously referred to as “commemoratives”, and featuring not only great men but events and institutions as subjects; these gained more and more prominence in the second half of the 20th century. Still, from 1847 to the “[Liberty Issue](#)” of 1954, the model of the Founding Fathers gallery prevailed in all U.S. definitive issues.

- 11 Indeed, this commemorative function was specified, in the United States, as essentially human (few material or cultural topics appeared before the 1960s) and as primarily political or civic. American stamps honored politics and political figures — more precisely, political heads, following the Roman-style “capito-centrism” that Jefferson’s Republic had adopted in its self-representation⁷ —, mostly Presidential and all masculine (as has been the case until today with U.S. bank notes). Thus they echoed the broader “civic religion” that developed in the 19th century, adding tremendously to the popular imagery of the nation as primarily a civic-political entity. Dead white males they showed — yet in so doing they propagated a profoundly progressive political imagery, as compared to the European taste for abstract imperial or allegorical emblems. In particular, the Britannia-like “gigantic feminine”, which Marion B. Ross analyses as a patriarchal, “cross-gendering” figure, often used as a mask for “cultural-historical strife” (Ross 1-4), was and remained notably absent from U.S. stamps, though the [Columbia figure](#) was widely used in larger displays of public American memory; a fact which might confirm that stamps were construed rather as images of the state than of the (mother) land⁸. In this context, it is significant that Franklin — not a President, and not primarily known as a statesman — was, as the first and lowest denomination, the foremost figure to be represented in the first issue and subsequent early series of “definitives” until 1954 included. I will now turn to this particular status of Franklin.

2. Representations of Benjamin Franklin on U.S. stamps

The traditional model

- 12 Generally speaking, Franklin is the foremost non-Presidential figure honored by American stamps (as he was, in the 19th century, in virtually every form of popular and official imagery), and evidently this has less to do, on the whole, with his historical role as first U.S. Postmaster general or even as diplomat than with his mythical status as the prototypical American success story, linking Poor Richard self-made-manship with both Enlightenment values and the creation of the U.S. The Ben Franklin image thus embodied a postal and memorial principle defining America as humanity rather than authority, and in that sense formed a kind of substratum for the rows of Presidential figures that otherwise populated the definitive issues. The fact that Franklin images

were durably assigned to the lowest denominations in these regular issues can thus be appraised in relation to Franklin's status as prototype of the all-American, common man; the Franklin stamp served as a kind of common ground from which the higher denominations detached themselves.

- 13 Interestingly, the Franklin portraits on U.S. stamps were often [profiles](#) — derived from classic painted or sculpted effigies — and together cut a fairly homogeneous and rather austere image of their subject, which contrasts with his multi-faceted historical persona. The “vernacular” status of the Franklin image is also apparent, even in contrast to Washington stamps, in the generally “homely” appearance of his figure — for instance in the popular 1908 series of [“Washington Franklins”](#) —, even conceding that stamp designs typically tended to erase the stylistic and more generally painterly features of their source models.
- 14 The very sober image that was thus circulated in millions of copies is consistent, broadly speaking, with the larger association of Franklin, in 19th-century popular culture, with “the virtues of Christianity, cleanliness, industry, frugality, and scientific inquisitiveness”, particularly as they were framed by popular biographies from the early 19th century on, as explained by Carla Mulford. According to Mulford, such virtues tended to make “the body and life of Franklin [serve] as the figural body of the nation”, particularly aimed at and consumed by immigrants. In this same period, Franklin's face (especially in the Roman-like profile mode) was probably the most circulated image overall in the U.S., especially on stamps, coins, medals, and various ephemera. “It is likely, writes Mulford, that those making decisions about such matters were well aware of the power Franklin's image had accumulated to enlist trust and assent”. In other words, Franklin was put on stamps, presumably, because his face was already, by 1850, the most common icon of America — a solid feature of American popular culture. During the Civil War, when stamps were used for currency, the one-cent Franklin was even more widely circulated and “Franklin's face thus increased in its exchange value” (Mulford 423, 428, 430). Thus it would seem that public, official memory was not only nourished by the very kind of popular folklore that John Adams wished he could have kept under control, but, what is more, highly instrumental in further propagating it.

Evolution since 1950

- 15 The general profile of the U.S. stamp collection slowly evolved in the first half of the 20th century, the progressive context of the New Deal allowing for some diversification of the memories honorable by stamps (see Brunet 1995). In 1940 a commemorative series of [“Famous Americans”](#) — closely resembling the definitives but still functionally distinct from them — opened up the postal pantheon to a large array of intellectual or cultural figures and some minority representatives (such as [Booker T. Washington](#)). This evolution did not affect the style or the place of the Franklin image until the 1950s, although from then on things changed rapidly. The inaugural model of Franklin as the lowest value and most common American stamp in the issues of “definitives” lasted until [1954](#). Later series of small stamps marginalized or even skipped Franklin, as in [1965](#), while at the same time opening up the subject range of definitives to non-political types, notably artistic and professional ones.
- 16 In the context of this shift, the [1956 commemorative issue](#) for Franklin's 250th anniversary arguably marks a turning point and the climax of the traditional Franklin

image. It is, if I am not mistaken, the first major commemorative stamp — as opposed to “definitive” — dedicated to the figure of Franklin; that it comes in the wake of the last traditional definitive issue is certainly significant. Commemoratives have, since 1893, typically expressed more distinctly *cultural* values — as opposed to the ordinary images of civic religion. Yet at the same time this stamp, based on the [famous painting](#) *Franklin Taking Electricity from the Sky* by Benjamin West (c. 1805), is clearly epic in style, recalling exactly the kind of popular, spectacular memory John Adams descried. It unequivocally celebrates Franklin in his most popular image — that of the “taker” of electricity — but at the same time frames this image (by means of the commemorative format and the “grand style” West painting) as a fully-sanctioned cultural monument, rather than a popular icon.

- 17 Later Franklin stamps, both commemorative and definitive, clearly reinforce this evolution towards a more highbrow image. The [1972 issue](#), a definitive blue 7 c depicting Franklin as a printer, an intellectual and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, marks a shift from the stamps of the 1950s. The reading glasses as well as the generally august style of the figure are noteworthy here. We find the same air of nobility, and an even stronger emphasis on Franklin the political strategist, in his [1976 representation](#) in the Bicentennial series. This image is consistent with the spirit of the whole series, which described the Revolution not as a single, inaugural and decisive moment, but as a long and diverse process, anchored in intellectual achievements as much as in military feats, and calling for a plurality of interpretations and memories, as was made explicit in the prolixity and the very [length of its postal commemoration](#) (see Brunet 1995).
- 18 In keeping with this evolution, the [2006 Franklin tercentenary issue](#) — as I have said, certainly the most elaborate stamp representation of the Postmaster general to date — has clearly broken away from traditional images of the common man or the Promethean wizard. The four stamps — based on original designs — depict Franklin in four roles — “statesman”, “scientist”, “printer”, and “postmaster”; such a multiplication of roles is in itself an innovation, especially considering that these roles, here incarnated by full Franklin bodies, are subtly deviant from his traditionally popular attributes.
- 19 That “statesman” comes first is arguably an innovation with respect to the tradition of the definitives where Franklin embodied something larger and more “common” than his political role in the Revolution. The “scientist” label and the stamp image have little to do with the electrical wizard image à la West. The youthful “printer” and the concentrated “postmaster” allude very explicitly to professional and cultural achievement, and of course to Enlightenment values, more than they do to a popular or epic folklore. The pane as a whole shows Franklin surrounded by writing, paper, and pamphlets — ultimately, as an intellectual, an (American?) Enlightenment figure, rather than as the “electrizer” of the Revolution Adams was poking fun at in his letter to Rush.

Conclusion

- 20 This reconfiguration of Franklin as Enlightenment figure, though not entirely novel, reflects the broader post-1960 trend of American commemoratives to widen the scope of public memory and favor professional and cultural achievement — especially in

[minority figures](#)— over political stature. Ironically, but surely very consciously, the depiction of Franklin as a champion of writing, printing, and postal or paper-borne communication underplays his decisive contribution to the harnessing of electricity — this in an age dominated by electronic communication and where, in particular, the use of (illustrated) postage stamps is on the decline. Similarly, Franklin's previous appearance in the 1997 pane celebrating the sesquicentennial of U.S. postage stamps (["Pacific 97"](#)) tended to inscribe the Franklin image — if not postage stamps in general — in the realm of the past, whereas the previous postal anniversary, in [1947](#), still unambiguously associated Franklin and the Post Office with Progress and Modernity.

- 21 Thus in 2006, Benjamin Franklin somewhat oddly appeared as a superior value in a distinctly cultural heritage — no longer so much as a popular civic hero. Though one first-day-cover envelope stamp revived the kite image (strangely absent from U.S. stamps), Franklin was thus turned into a paper hero, a founding writer rather than a founding father — and in that sense, perhaps, in the double context of Internet communication and identity politics, something of a minority figure. As a master of paper, pen, printing and the post, Franklin is now the representative of a bygone era in the history of communication, moving away from the realm of political memory and towards that of cultural history. Yet as an intellectual worker, Franklin is perhaps more palatable or valuable a figure for the politically affirmative code of U.S. postage stamps than Washington or Adams, who, no matter how intellectually eminent, could not plausibly pass for minority achievers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALTMAN Dennis, *Paper Ambassadors: The Politics of Stamps*, North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1991.

BLOUNT Winton M., Symposium on Postal History held in 2006 at the National Postal Museum [online], consulted September 1, 2009. URL : <http://www.postal.si.edu/symposium2006/papers.html>

BRUNET François, "Mémoires timbrologiques américaines: quelques repères", *Annales de l'Université de Savoie*, n° 18, 1995, "Lieux de mémoire aux Etats-Unis", 129-145.

BRYANT John, "Coin and Stamp Collecting", in Thomas Inge, ed., *Handbook of American Pop Culture*, vol. 3, Westport [CT]: Greenwood, 1981, 459-496.

CHILD Jack, "The Politics and Semiotics of the Smallest Icons of Popular Culture: Latin American Postage Stamps", *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 40, No. 1 (2005), 108-137.

DEANS Phil and Hugo DOBSON, "Introduction: East Asian postage stamps as socio-political artefacts," *East Asia*, vol. 2, No. 2, June 2005, 3-7.

MULFORD Carla, "Figuring Benjamin Franklin in American Cultural Memory", *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 72, No. 3, Sept. 1999, 415-443.

OVERMANN Pam, "Images of Past Futures/ World's Fairs, Postage Stamps, and the Impact of Modernism". Paper presented at the BLOUNT symposium, 2006.

ROSS Marlon B., "Cross-Gendering the Racial Memory", *Transatlantica* [online], 1 | 2006, consulted September 11, 2009. URL: <http://transatlantica.revues.org/index1007.html>

SCOTT David, *European Stamp Design: A Semiotic Approach to Designing Messages*, London, Academy Editions, 1995.

SCOTT David, "The semiotics of the lieu de mémoire: The postage stamp as a site of cultural memory", *Semiotica* No. 142 (2002), 107-124.

SKAGGS David Curtis, "Postage Stamps as Icons," in Ray B. Browne and Marshall Fishwick, eds., *Icons of America* (Bowling Green: Popular Press, 1978), 198-208.

Smithsonian Institution, National Postal Museum, website "Arago: People, Postage and the Post" [website], accessed March 10, 2009. URL: <http://www.arago.si.edu/>

Website 1847 USA [website], accessed March 9, 2009. URL: <http://www.1847usa.com/>

NOTES

1. Author's underlining. Letterbook copy in Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, quoted in Marcus Cunliffe, "Congressional Leadership in the American Revolution," in Library of Congress, ed., *Leadership in the American Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1974), 41 (the underlining is Adams's). See also Alexander Biddle, ed., *Old Family Letters: Copied from the Originals by Alexander Biddle*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1892), 1:55-56, as quoted in Mulford 1999.
2. While the history and cultural functions of stamps have not, on the whole, been given enough scholarly attention, existing contributions tend to interpret them either as semiotic and artistic artefacts (Scott 1995), or, more commonly, as markers of ideology, politics or "propaganda" (Altman, Child, Deans and Dobson). Indeed, insofar as the memorial and iconographic functions of stamps are controlled by governmental authorities, they must be considered political, and generally speaking they belong to a politics of identity as much as to a politics of memory. Thus, in focusing on the memorial function of stamps, this essay does not intend to isolate it from the larger issues of American identity construction and representation, as addressed especially by Michael Kammen. Meanwhile, stamps—construed as imagery—and stamp collecting are frequently included in guides or handbooks of American popular culture (see Bryant) and several recent studies argue convincingly in favor of including them in pop culture in spite of their institutional origin (Child 109-111). For a recent, full-scale investigation of stamps as sites of cultural memory, see Scott 2004; for a broad presentation of memorial trends and functions in U.S. stamps, see Brunet 1995. It is a matter of regret that, due to narrow copyright and procedural regulations enforced by the U.S.P.S., the present article is not illustrated.
3. In this paper I am not addressing the history of administrative procedures governing the choice of subjects, designs, values, techniques, etc., which were under the sole authority of the Postal service until the end of the 19th century. It is worth noting, however, that U.S. postal authorities early on admitted some input into the choice of subjects and artwork from philatelic groups and, since the 1960s, increasingly solicited suggestions from citizens. See Brunet 1995 and Blount Symposium.
4. The following categorization is only a tentative one. For a thorough discussion of the design of 19th-century European stamps, see Scott 1995.
5. This and other bits of postal history are gathered from the Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum's website, "Arago, People, Postage & the Post": <http://www.arago.si.edu/>. Also very useful, for US stamps, are the annual editions of the U.S.P.S.'s *Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps* and the excellent collector's guide provided by the site 1847 USA, <http://www.1847usa.com/>

1847usa.com/. A detailed bibliography on the history of US stamps is available on the following Postal Museum webpage: <http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/millercollection/bibliography.html>

6. By contrast one American provisional, the St Louis issue of 1845, featured [three bears](#), and what is usually called the first Canadian stamp of 1851 displayed the image of a beaver.

7. On Jefferson's and the early Republic's taste for heads, see the work of Margaretta Lovell, notably presented in two conferences in 2006 and the object of an upcoming publication, on "Trophy Heads: The Public Use of Portrait Painting in the Late Eighteenth Century".

8. I thank Mark Meigs for emphasizing to me the durable ubiquity of feminine allegories of "America" (Columbia, Liberty, etc.) outside of the realm of postage stamps, and Matthew Dennis for pointing out the possible specialization of masculine allegories as images of the state, as opposed to feminine images of the land.

ABSTRACTS

This paper is an assessment of Ben Franklin's evolving figure in U.S. postage stamps, focusing especially on the contrast between the 2006 tercentennial Franklin 4-stamp panel, a rather high-brow representation of Franklin as an intellectual, and his traditional image as a homely, common face. The singular history of U.S. postage stamps, with their innovative choice of historical figures as subject matter and their broader emphasis on commemoration, is briefly summarized. The evolution of the Franklin figure — the most common postal image, along with George Washington — is then detailed, showing how the traditional image prevailed until the 1950s, before being progressively displaced by a more cultural and, lately, intellectual image of the nation's "electrizer".

Cet article vise à interpréter l'évolution de la figure de Benjamin Franklin dans les timbres-poste des Etats-Unis, en se fondant notamment sur le contraste entre le bloc de quatre timbres émis lors du tricentenaire en 2006, qui représente Franklin dans les différents métiers d'un intellectuel des Lumières, et son image traditionnelle d'Américain simple et moyen. On retrace tout d'abord l'histoire singulière des timbres américains, caractérisée par le choix innovant de figures historiques comme sujets et plus généralement par la prééminence de la fonction commémorative. Puis on étudie en détail l'évolution de la figure de Franklin — sujet le plus fréquent des timbres américains avec George Washington — en montrant que l'image traditionnelle s'est perpétuée jusqu'aux années 1950, avant de céder progressivement à une image plus culturelle et, récemment, plus intellectuelle.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Benjamin Franklin, mémoire nationale américaine, politiques de mémoire, timbres-poste

Keywords: American national memory, Benjamin Franklin, politics of memory, postage stamps

AUTHOR

FRANÇOIS BRUNET

Université Paris Diderot – Paris 7, Professor, francois.brunet@univ-paris-diderot.fr

François Brunet est professeur en art et littérature des Etats-Unis à l'université Paris Diderot (Paris 7). Il a notamment publié *La Naissance de l'idée de photographie* (Paris, PUF, 2000) et *Photography and Literature* (Londres, Reaktion Books, 2009) et dirigé l'exposition *Visions de l'Ouest: photographies de l'exploration américaine 1860-1880* au Musée d'art américain de Giverny (2007). Ses recherches portent sur l'histoire des images et de la culture américaines.