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On Kawara, telegram sent to Dr. Zdenek Felix, 1972

An idea for a parlor game: Rank artworks that have astonished you with the absolute slimmest of means. The spare [telegrams](#) of the Japanese conceptual artist [On Kawara](#) (1932-2014) would be near the top of my list. Between 1969 and around 2000, as telegrams declined to extinction, Kawara sent some 900 to collectors, curators and other art types — sometimes in response to inquiries, sometimes unprompted. From 1970 on, they state simply: “I am still alive.”

Twelve with those words are on view in a moving short-run doubleheader organized by the artist Cooper Campbell and the bookseller Yoshi Hill in a one-room office in Lower Manhattan and at Turquoise, a scrappy gallery run out of a Brooklyn apartment by the artist and curator Bennett Smith. They were all originally sent from New York to the curator Zdenek Felix, a supporter of the artist who was working at museums in Germany and Switzerland from 1972 to 1992.

Kawara probably never touched any of these once-private messages. Some of the thin papers were torn awkwardly from printers, some have pen marks, and some were stamped with the date.

Thanks to Felix, whose name was sometimes misspelled, they survived. When they were first transmitted, they delivered a basic fact and perhaps some deadpan self-promotion, while modeling one of art’s great powers: to connect people across time. “I am still alive.” That message may now register as a memento mori, but in some sense it’s still true.