

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
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PROJECTS: ERIKA ROTHENBERG

July 11 - August 25, 1992

House of Cards, an installation of painted satirical greeting cards by Los Angeles-based artist Erika Rothenberg, opens at The Museum of Modern Art on July 11, 1992. The exhibition, part of the ongoing **PROJECTS** series, was organized by Edna Russak Goldstaub, curatorial assistant, Department of Photography. **PROJECTS: ERIKA ROTHENBERG** displays ninety works that address the complacency of our society, assaulting the systems that perpetuate such social ills as misogyny, crime, and political and racial intolerance. The exhibition remains on view through August 25.

Rothenberg's cards are placed in a plexiglass rack running the length of the gallery walls, which are painted in vertical bands of pastel colors. Each area of color forms the back-drop for one of thirteen card categories, ranging from *Foreign Affairs* and *Civil Rights* to *Health, Education, and Welfare*. The last section, *Hope*, has a solitary card. The installation also contains a mock entry made of aluminum, paper, and plexiglass, as well as a free-standing glass case displaying mostly pop-up cards.

The cards are painted in gouache on paper with simplified forms, little shadowing, and flat, high-key color. Following the standard greeting-card format, the covers either announce an occasion or introduce a puzzle. Yet, whereas the inside flaps of most store-bought cards offer witty or banal messages, Rothenberg's punch lines compel the viewer to confront unexpectedly such issues as serial murder, corrupt politics, child abuse, health care, and art world excesses. In the brochure accompanying the exhibition, Ms. Goldstaub writes, "Rothenberg's intentionally manipulative cards are the rude

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twins of generic greeting cards. Opening them is lifting the lid off a Pandora's box of embarrassing situations and unspoken prejudices, which most of us would prefer to ignore."

Although Rothenberg's use of the upbeat visual language of mass communications reflects her eight years of experience as an art director in an advertising agency, her appropriation of advertising strategies and styles is a deliberate artistic choice. The accessibility and apparent simplicity of her work conceals an intricate set of artistic choices, including language and gesture as well as composition and color.

Rothenberg, who was born in New York City in 1950, began her artistic career in the late 1970s. She associated with artists who dealt with social and political issues, sometimes participating in thematic group shows and public projects organized by Collaborative Projects Inc. (Colab) and Group Material. Unlike some artists who have appropriated the images of popular culture and then used them in a grand scale, Rothenberg's style remains insistently "low tech," retaining a flat-footed appearance and home-spun lines, thus enhancing its urgent direct appeal. The desire to place art in the context of contemporary life inspired Rothenberg to employ a wide range of formats and display her works in artists' books, newspaper inserts, shop windows, and on billboards and posters.

The Projects series is made possible by generous grants from the Lannan Foundation, The Bohen Foundation, and The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art. The next exhibition in this series is **PROJECTS: SUZANNE LAFONT** (October 2 - November 15, 1992).

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