

The Museum of Modern Art

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PROJECTS: MAGDALENA JETELOVÁ
March 14 - April 28, 1987

The Museum of Modern Art continues its PROJECTS series with the first American exhibition of the sculpture of Magdalena Jetelová, opening on March 14, 1987. Organized by Diane Farynyk, curatorial assistant in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, the exhibition features two recent works by this Czechoslovakia-born artist.

Jetelová's massive, rough-hewn wooden sculptures of houses, chairs, and stairways often give the impression of being incomplete, damaged, or abandoned. Houses lean dramatically and seem to be in danger of collapsing, and huge wood steps turn in on themselves as they reach precariously toward the ceiling. In these works, Jetelová transforms utilitarian structures into sources of amusement or anxiety.

The exhibition features two works that exemplify the recent developments in Jetelová's series of chairs and stairways. Boban (1986) consists of huge, barely smoothed logs that form the arms and legs of a chair, but it lacks seat and back; its oddly angled appendages create a sense of awkward movement. Crossing (1986), an ascending trail of raw oak with sporadic steps, seems to totter on feeble legs--thin wooden strips that seem barely able to bear the work's weight--and ends abruptly in midair. "Both works generate uneasiness about their stability," writes Diane Farynyk in her essay for the brochure accompanying the exhibition, "and symbolically instill a vague angst over man's survival."

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Magdalena Jetelová was born in 1946 in Semily, Czechoslovakia. After a brief period of study with Italian sculptor Marino Marini in Milan (1967-68), the artist was cut off from the international art scene as a result of the political upheaval that closed the Czechoslovakian borders. During this period major exhibitions of contemporary art became increasingly rare, and the Czech avant-garde grew more dispersed. In relative isolation in Prague, Jetelová developed the unique and powerful vocabulary that she continues to explore today.

Jetelová relocated to West Germany in 1985 after having worked there on a grant the year before. Farynyk states, "Although her rudimentary, representational sculpture has certain affinities with contemporary German art--work that she did not know until she left Czechoslovakia--Jetelová stands apart from the German mainstream in her singular iconography, avoidance of the human figure, and focus on structure. In her monumental sculpture Magdalena Jetelová confronts us with objects that are not foreign relics after all, but the reflection of certain aspects of contemporary civilization much magnified."

PROJECTS, a series of exhibitions devoted to the work of contemporary artists, is made possible by generous grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Lannan Foundation, and the Wallace Funds, established by the founders of Reader's Digest. MAGDALENA JETELOVÁ is followed by PROJECTS: MIKE GLIER (May 9 - June 23, 1987).

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