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 —more—
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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For further information or photographs, please contact Helen Bennett, the
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