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America Starts Here: Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler

Curators:

Bill Arning, MIT List Visual Arts Center
Ian Berry, the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College

February 9–April 9, 2006

Reception: Thursday, February 9, 5:30–7:30 PM

Artist Talk by Mel Ziegler: Friday, February 10, 6:30 PM

A List of Public Programs is attached.

Cambridge, MA– January, 2006. The MIT List Visual Arts Center is pleased to present ***America Starts Here: Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler*** from February 9 to April 9, 2006. Organized by the MIT List Visual Arts Center and the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, this is the first retrospective exhibition of the art-making team's decade-long career, which was cut short by Ericson's death of cancer at the age of 39 in 1995. The exhibition features 20 works made between 1984 and 1994, including: five installations; more than a dozen object-based works; numerous drawings; and plans for unrealized works; and documentation of public art projects for which they were known. ***America Starts Here: Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler*** offers a fresh assessment of the artists' contributions to the re-definition of public art in the early '80s in a way that was re-engaging with the diverse communities.

Ericson and Ziegler's work focuses on unnoticed aspects of public life, by transforming ordinary materials—books, lumber, house paint, canning jars, tap water, to name a few—into artworks with social meaning and commentaries. Rather than impose a conspicuous work of art upon a site or situation, the artists devised projects that altered sites subtly, using poetic language and their idiosyncratic wit to illuminate mainstream American contexts and highlight individual community

issues.

While their public art projects often focused on cultural institutions—including museums, monuments, and civic buildings—as sites for active engagement, their work incorporated voices of the ordinary people too often unheard in the world of contemporary art.

The title artwork, *America Starts Here*, is a 1988 mixed-media installation named after a 1980's slogan promoting tourism to Philadelphia, once the nation's capital. To suggest the city's cycle of early history, industrial boom, and urban decay, Ericson and Ziegler removed more than a hundred broken windowpanes and green plastic replacement panels from an abandoned factory in South Philadelphia, sandblasted them with maps of transportation arteries such as rivers, rails, and roads, and displayed them in positions corresponding to their original places in the old factory's façade.

Other mixed-media works incorporate farmers' feed and seed bags, jars of baby food, etched architectural stone samples, and some 80 perfumes custom-designed to capture the scents of pies from many regions of the U.S. A flat-screen presentation will display early works such as Ericson's *Rock Extension* (1979), a New England-style stone wall that crossed a Houston lawn, mounted the porch, and proceeded straight through the house.

In the mid- to late-1980s, the couple began to redefine the terms of public art, then widely castigated for its generic-looking artworks. "We tried to fit ourselves into an existing urban pattern, to infiltrate something about to happen anyway and to make art out of it," said Ziegler. Their *Loaded Text* (1989) featured the two artists handcopying the 65-page text of a downtown-revitalization plan for Durham, N.C., onto one of the city's badly cracked sidewalks.

The exhibition is accompanied by a 216-page exhibition catalogue includes descriptions of all Ericson and Ziegler projects as well as photographs and installation views of their exhibitions and previously unpublished and never-before-exhibited plans and drawings from their archives. The catalogue contains essays by exhibition curators Arning and Berry, an interview with Ziegler, and an extensive biography and bibliography. In addition, curators who originally commissioned Ericson and Ziegler's public works—Judith Hoos Fox, Kathy Goncharov, Mary Jane Jacob, Patricia Phillips, Lane Relyea, Ned Rifkin, Valerie Smith, and Judith Tannenbaum—provide texts about their experiences of working with the artists.

This exhibition will tour to the following U.S. museums:

February 10 – May 6, 2007, Austin Museum of Art, TX,
July – October, 2007, H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute
November 10 – January 12, 2008, Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati

America Starts Here: Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler has been generously sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency, Peter Norton Family Foundation, The Judith Rothschild Foundation (given in recognition of Kate Ericson), and the Elizabeth Firestone

Graham Foundation. The Cambridge presentation is generously supported by Massachusetts Cultural Council and Council for the Arts at MIT. Media sponsor: *Phoenix Media Communications Group*.



Directions:

The MIT List Visual Arts Center is located in the Wiesner Building, 20 Ames St., at the eastern edge of the MIT campus. It is in close proximity to Kendall Square, Memorial Drive, and the Longfellow Bridge.

By T, take the red line to the Kendall/MIT stop, follow Main St. west to Ames St., turn left, and walk one block to the cross walk. The MIT List Visual Arts Center housed in a building identifiable by its white gridded exterior, will be on your left. Signage is on the building.

By car, coming across the Longfellow Bridge or from Memorial Drive, follow signs for Kendall Square. Limited metered parking is available on Ames Street. A parking garage is located at the Cambridge Center complex (entrance on Ames between Main and Broadway) during business hours and on campus after business hours and on weekends.

Gallery Hours:

Tuesday–Thursday: 12–6 PM; Friday: 12–8 PM; Saturday and Sunday: 12–6 PM; Closed Mondays

Information:

617.253.4680 or <http://web.mit.edu/lvac>

All exhibitions at the MIT List Visual Arts Center are free and open to the public. Wheelchair accessible. Accommodations are provided by request. Please call Hiroko Kikuchi at 617.452.3586 for inquiries.

Public Programs:

Artist Talk by Mel Ziegler with co-curators Bill Arning and Ian Berry

Friday, February 9, 6:30 PM

Discussion: *No Longer "New"--- Public Art of the 80s and 90s in Retrospect*

Mel Chin, Wendy Jacob, Miwon Kwon

Friday, March 17, 6:30 PM

Ericson and Ziegler's public works were part of a shift in how public art was made in the late '80s. This panel will look at the changes that occurred; the efforts to write the history of that period; and the ways that generation's innovations affect art-practice today.

Mel Chin is an artist living in North Carolina whose politically engaged projects challenge the idea of the artist as the exclusive creative force behind the artwork. His project Knowmad, for which Chin worked with software engineers to create a video game based on rug patterns of nomadic peoples facing persecution was shown at the List visual Arts Center in 2000.

Wendy Jacob is an artist and associate professor in MIT's Visual Arts program. Jacob is also a member of the Chicago-based collaborative group Haha. Working together since 1989, their work focuses on the exploration of social positions relative to a particular site. Haha has produced projects incorporating a wide range of media including video installation and broadcast, audio tours, community gardens, live performance and interactive installations.

Miwon Kwon is associate professor of Contemporary art in the Art-History department at UCLA. She is a founding editor and publisher of Documents, a journal of art, culture, and criticism, and serves on the advisory board of October magazine. She is the author of *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (MIT Press, 2002).

Slide Lecture by Bill Arning

Wednesday, April 5, 6 PM

Curator Bill Arning will discuss Ericson and Ziegler's celebrated and complex public artworks, contextualizing them within the discourse of their time and their influence on the art of today.

Film Nights: Organized by John Gianvito, Bartos Theatre

Thursday, March 16, 7 PM:

***Home Suite* (UK/1993-94/96 min.) Dir. John Smith**

Director John Smith takes us on a real time tour of the home from which he is being evicted, chronicling the history of the everyday items he has lived with and bringing them back to life.

Thursday, March 30, 7 PM:

***66 Scenes from America* (Denmark/US/1981/43 min) Dir. Jorgen Leth**

This film is reminiscent of a pile of postcards from a journey consisting of a cross section of the eccentricity and individuality of America.

***New Scenes from America* (US/2002/43 min.) Dir. Jorgen Leth**

Inspired by Edward Hopper's paintings and the photographs of Robert Frank, the film features a group of cinematic postcards celebrating America in all its eccentric individuality. Poetic snapshots taken all over the States feature minimalist portraits of the filmmaker's personal heroes - actor Dennis Hopper, poet John Ashbery, and documentarian Albert Maysles.

Gallery Talks

Bill Arning:

Friday, February 17, 6 PM; Saturday, March 18, 2 PM; Wednesday, March 29, 12:30 PM

Jane Farver:

Wednesday, March 22, 12 PM

Sunday Talks @ 2PM

February 26; March 12 and 26; April 2 and 9