

News release for October 12, 2005

Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler retrospective opens at Tang

During their 17-year collaboration, the artist team of Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler produced some of the most profound and influential conceptual art projects of the times. Their work has not been widely recognized, however--many of their strongest pieces were public-art projects, shown outside major urban art centers and dismantled by the artists after exhibition.

America Starts Here: Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler offers a fresh assessment of the artists' contributions to late 20th-century art. On view at the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery through Dec. 30, 2005, the exhibition is a joint project of the Tang Museum and the MIT List Visual Arts Center. Organized by the respective museums' curators, Ian Berry and Bill Arning, *America Starts Here* features 20 works made between 1984 and 1994, and documents the artists' complete oeuvre in a comprehensive catalogue containing full-color reproductions and new scholarship from prominent curators and critics.

Ericson and Ziegler transformed ordinary materials--books, lumber, house paint, canning jars, tap water, and more--into radical artworks luminous with social meaning. The title artwork, *America Starts Here*, is a 1988 mixed-media installation named after a 1980s 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.

Public events include an opening reception from 7 to 9 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 29. The museum's inaugural Dunkerley Dialogue, at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 26, will feature artist Mel Ziegler in conversation with Michael Arnush, Skidmore associate professor of classics and director of the College's First-Year Experience. Tang Curator Berry will conduct a noon curator's tour Thursday, Nov. 10.