

# **Projects 14 : Kate Ericson, Mel Ziegler : the Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 22-November 29, 1988**

Author

Ericson, Kate, 1955-1995

Date

1988

Publisher

The Museum of Modern Art

Exhibition URL

[www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2142](http://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2142)

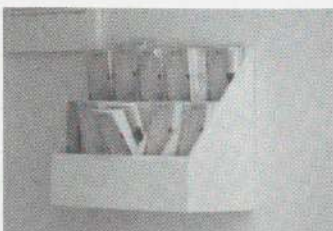
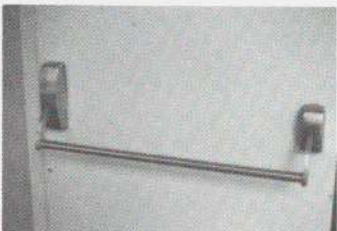
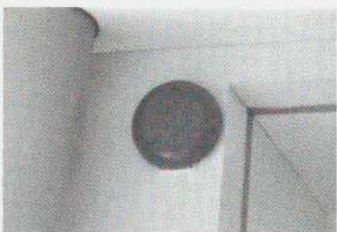
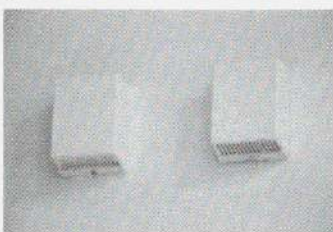
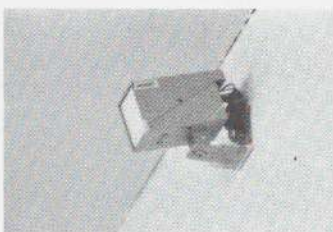
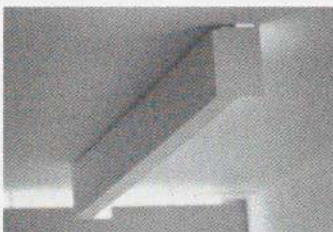
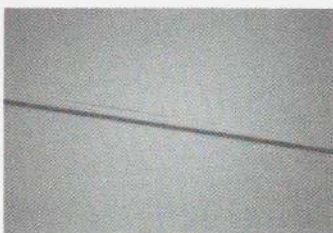
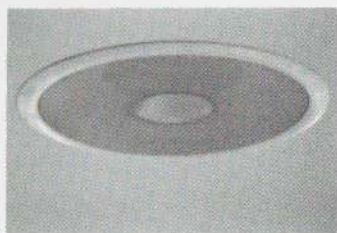
The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition history—  
from our founding in 1929 to the present—is  
available online. It includes exhibition catalogues,  
primary documents, installation views, and an  
index of participating artists.

The Museum of Modern Art  
New York  
October 22–November 29, 1988

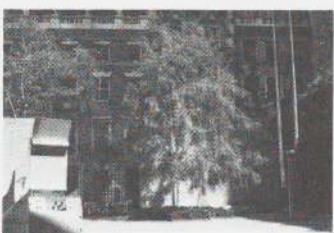
# projects: kate ericson mel ziegler

14

BRONZE GLASS	WILLIAM E. ABERNATHY
DOOR HANDLE	CLARIN BACOTE
MOONLIGHT	BERNAT BERMAN
LIGHTING FIXTURE	HANK BRUER
LIGHTING TRACK	DIANE BUTZ
LIGHTING SHIELD	JAKE CAMBI
MARBLE VENEER	LEON CHASTAIN
GLASS	DIANE CHAVIS
LIGHT BULB	THOMAS I. CHIPLEY
BRICK	C. LOWELL GAHAGEN
THERMOSTAT	KARL-HEINZ HARLAND
EXHAUST VENT	ROBERT HILKER
CHAIR	JIM HILL
ACCENT LIGHT	MARY AMANDA HOOSIER
TREE	CHARLES H. HORNER
EXIT SIGN	LAURA JENSEN
ELECTRICAL BOX	JOCELYNE KELLEY
AWNING COVER	RICHARD C. KUNZ
AIR DIFFUSER	ROY L. LAMB
MOTION DETECTOR	RICHARD J. LINDEMANN
ASH URN	ROBERT MAYEN
SPEAKER	SYLVIANN McGLAUGHLIN
WASTE RECEPTACLE	RON MOORE
DOOR	ARTHUR J. OLIVER
SMOKE DETECTOR	LUZ A. OPSAL
LETTERING	JULIO PAIZ
SEALANT	THEODORE H. POPPE
STANCHION	CURTIS POWELL, JR.
MARBLE FLOORING	ROBERT E. PRATT
PIPE	OWEN M. ROWLANDS
TWINDOW	DALE H. SAYLOR
PAINT	ROBERT E. SHANER
MARBLE PAVEMENT	JEFF SHARROW
WINDOW BLIND	MARION SLATTERY
HOSE	DENVER SMITH
ELECTRICAL OUTLET	RUTHANN SOFFE
BROCHURE BOX	MIACHEL THOMAS
AIR CONDITIONER	SHIRLEY TKADLEC
SHEETROCK	CHRIS TOEPHER
RUBBER ROOFING	ROY ZULLINGER







**signature piece:**

**kate ericson**

**mel ziegler**

Anonymous industrial and horticultural activities have produced much of the architectural setting for The Museum of Modern Art's collection. These labors are the focus of Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler's installation, *Signature Piece*. The artists have traced the manufacturers and suppliers of the Museum's building elements, fixtures, and plants by consulting Museum staff members, records, and contractors. Vendors were in turn asked to identify employees who produced or prepared their products at the time that they were ordered for the Museum. Ziegler and Ericson then invited these workers to mail them their signatures, and used their first-name autographs as primary visual elements in the installation. The signers' full names appear on the cover of this brochure, in acknowledgment of their role in this project and of their tangible contribution to the formation of public sites such as the Museum.

*Signature Piece* is composed of clear Plexiglas panels bearing the commissioned autographs, magnified and silkscreened in white. These signs are displayed on or next to corresponding crafted elements or objects throughout the gallery, its adjacent hallway, and the sculpture garden, as well as on neighboring buildings visible from the garden. Names appear to float in proximity to materials such as track lighting, a windowpane, a Bertioia chair, and the Vermont Delft marble flooring. An array of signs is focused in the gallery, after which the labyrinth of names out of doors comes into view.

In their installations, Ericson and Ziegler adopt the organic languages of particular places. The Museum uses signatures to identify and authenticate art works and relies on labels to publicize data known about the origins of those works: the name of the artist, his or her nationality and life dates, and the title, date, and medium of the work. In contrast, earlier art and anthropological objects are often classified by cultural origins that indicate broader geographic and temporal domains. Varied approaches to labeling highlight factors that create an artist's public identity. The laborers' informally signed first names make loose, poetic reference to the typed texts with which the Museum labels its collection. Perusal of these names leaves the viewer with impressions about the signers' personalities and histories and evokes those contexts of family, friends, labor, and culture in which first-name address is a prized ingredient.

The multiple readings implicit in *Signature Piece* provide a context for exploring the ways in which individuality is expressed and suppressed in societies—a recurring concern of Ziegler and Ericson. Their installations raise public consciousness about how personal decisions become confined by predetermined societal conditions. Broadening the social bases of their own artistic production, their works enter our daily experience alongside and echoing other forms of production.

In *Signature Piece*, the autographs arrest the viewer's visual habits by linking an unexpected array of names to the *setting* for public art-viewing. Attention is drawn toward the fact that manufacturing and nursery employees typically perform in environments that



preclude a public professional identity, in which one individual's tasks may not be distinguished in quality from another's. To temporarily dispel the anonymity of such production, Ziegler and Ericson have orchestrated an unprecedented signing of commercially crafted and grown materials. Without intending to equate artistic and industrial handiwork, they question the scales on which our culture values modes of socially worthwhile production.

*Signature Piece's* social genesis compels thoughtful scrutiny. The laborers' aestheticized autographs now overlay prefabricated materials and nursery foliage, while the artists' creative ideas and design evidence production phases situated in diverse industrial locales. This focus on anonymous, nonartistic, skilled handiwork and its blending with artistic labors probes how we judge the known artist whose works attract a typical museum visit.

In past projects Ericson and Ziegler have explored the home as a site in which public and private space coexist; they have traced the building material used in Washington, D.C.'s public monuments, and compared the erosion of those monuments with the decline of factory-based industry in America. They share with Michael Asher and Daniel Buren an interest in dissecting sites of cultural institutions; with these artists, Gordon Matta-Clark and Jannis Kounellis an interest in marking or otherwise intervening in existing architecture; with Christo the design of projects requiring wider social support; and with Lothar Baumgarten an interest in installing vanishing or ephemeral appellations on public buildings and sites, in effect renaming them. Ziegler and Ericson make singular use of languages of place and manmade materials to fleetingly suggest their ideas within inhabited locales. Their work thus opens a dialogue about other possibilities for those environments.

*Signature Piece* participates in an unfolding field of interdisciplinary art activity that incorporates elements of landscape and architecture, a field within which modern sculpture is one viable form of expression. For the Museum this work is an occasion to exhibit a form of contemporary expression that addresses itself beyond the limits of the gallery space. For the viewer it is a proposal to venture outside the orbit of cultural sites one typically frequents in order to participate in developing art forms.

Kathleen Slavin  
Curatorial Assistant  
Department of Prints and Illustrated Books

Designed to present recent work by contemporary artists, the new **projects** series has been based on the Museum's original **projects** exhibitions, which were held from 1971 to 1982. The artists presented are chosen by the members of all the Museum's curatorial departments in a process involving an active dialogue and close critical scrutiny of new developments in the visual arts. The **projects** series is made possible by generous grants from the Lannan Foundation and J. P. Morgan & Co. Incorporated.

Archive  
MoMA  
1500

## biographies

### kate ericson

Born New York,  
December 25, 1955

### mel ziegler

Born Campbelltown, Pennsylvania,  
January 24, 1956

Both educated at California Institute of the Arts, Valencia (MFAs 1982), and Kansas City Art Institute (BFAs 1978). Both reside in New York.

### selected collaborations

La Garenne Lemot, Clisson,  
France (FRAC)  
*La Nature des Choses* in *Cinquième  
Ateliers Internationaux des  
Pays de la Loire\**

Institute of Contemporary Art,  
Philadelphia  
*America Starts Here\**

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture  
Garden, Washington, D.C.  
*The Conscious Stone\**

Storefront for Art and Architecture,  
New York  
*Temporary Public Art: Changes and  
Interventions*

Wolff Gallery, New York  
*Dark on That Whiteness*

## 1987

DiverseWorks, Houston  
*If Landscapes Were Sold*

## 1986

White Columns, New York  
*Stones Have Been Known to Move*

Los Angeles Institute of  
Contemporary Art  
*House Monument*

### selected bibliography

Phillips, Patricia C. *Investigations 24:  
Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler* (brochure).  
Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary  
Art, forthcoming, December 1988

Relyea, Lane. "Kate Ericson & Mel  
Ziegler's Open House," *Forehead* (Venice,  
Calif.), vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter 1987),  
pp. 4-23

\*A publication accompanied the exhibition.

The artists wish to thank the following companies and individuals for their participation in the project: Air Devices Inc., Anchor Swan, Architectural Supplements Inc., ASI Sign Systems, Atlas/Soundolier, Bethlehem Steel Corporation, Caltron Security, Carlisle SynTec Systems, Cerverus Technologies Inc., E. J. Electric, Fib-Con Corporation, Fox Valley Manufacturing/Lightolier, Friedrich Air Conditioning & Refrigeration Co., Georgia Marble Company, Glen-Gery Corporation, GTE Products Corporation, Keymark Corporation, Kim Lighting, Knoll International, Lawrence Metal Products, Inc., Levolor Lorentzen, Inc., Libbey-Owens-Ford Company, McPhilben and Omega, Microwave Sensors Inc., The Museum of Modern Art staff, Museum Tower Condominium, O-Z/Gedney, John Parnon, the participating signers, Permagile Industries Inc., PPG Industries, Inc., Edison Price Inc., Princeton Nurseries, Privatbanken, Revere Copper Products, Sargent Manufacturing Co., Joyce Pomeroy Schwartz, Slater Electric, T.S.B.A. Controls, U.S. Gypsum, United States Trust Company of New York, Vermont Marble Company, Vistawall Architectural Products, Kenneth H. Walker Associates Inc., Weickert Sheet Metal Inc.