

AIMÉE RANKIN

Postmasters

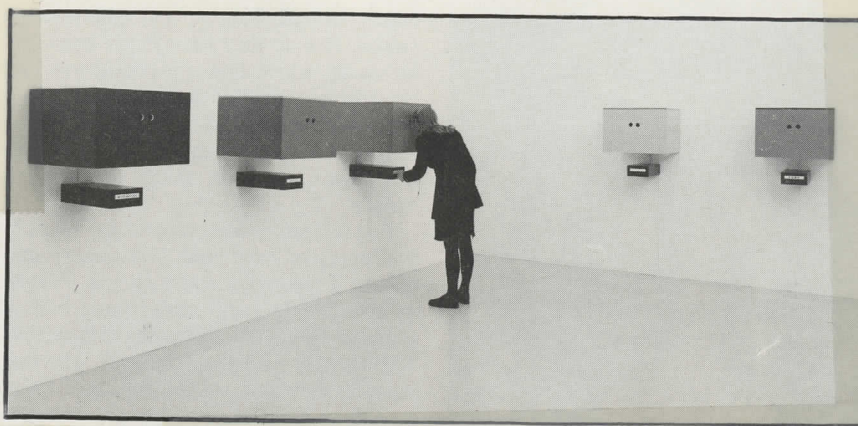
Ecstasy is not about feeling good, Aimée Rankin says in the press release accompanying her show of small assemblage environments. It's the point where there is no longer much difference between pleasure and pain. Thirteen white boxes were mounted on the wall at eye level, each defining stereotypical emotions and arranged in a narrative sequence from *Attraction* and *Bliss*, through *Sex*, *Possession*, and *Jealousy*, to *Loss* and *Memory*. Each of the playful, funky environments is packed with thematic clusters of junk-shop artifacts, toys, mirrors, and strobe lights. The basic scheme revolves around a bed (of golden crab claws for *Possession*), a magazine or

postcard reproduction of a painting (Max Ernst collages for *Cruelty*), a color (green for *Jealousy*), and a pop song (Judy Garland's "The Man That Got Away" for *Loss*). The mise-en-scène is like something from MTV; spectators "enter" these reliquaries of desire through peepholes and earphones, sealing themselves off from the outside world and sinking into Rankin's fantasy boudoirs. Each box is so fully packed that the associations start ricocheting, and the overload finally throws you out again.

The environments are all great fun, conceptual toy boxes for a rainy afternoon. But on another level, they are also about the codified nature of emotions—about the clusters of associations and objects signified for us by language and used to make sense of experience. Rankin's Pop flotsam is often predictable—the green-eyed monster in *Jealousy*, the rotating plastic phalluses in *Sex*, the magnets in *Attraction*—and its arrangement is like the plot of a country-and-western song. If the rooms look familiar, it's because we've already learned the emotional taxonomy of this culture. These assemblages resist any attempt to read them for information about the artist; the references to Freud and Lacan in the show's press release allude to the unconscious in general, not personal experience. Even the sign reading For E.M., accompanying *Cruelty*, can be interpreted as an example of the trait rather than a personal message.

Still, many of the associations and choices of objects are poetic and insightful about the ways images can interact to create new and surprising metaphors. Rankin's assemblages demonstrate both the ways in which culture defines and categorizes experience—by producing clusters of associations—and the ways in which that cultural language keeps reinventing itself.

—Dan Rubey



ABOVE Aimée Rankin, "Ecstasy Series," 1987, installation. Postmasters. BELOW

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