

the Balcony
Toronto

In Oona Stern's work, art papers the world in its own image. In projects that pursue the most literal of representations, Stern plays with appearances to deliver a message about the complex nature of art's mimetic function. All of Stern's works stage a confrontation between the built world and its visual representation. In the "Stone Curtain Wall" pieces, cast gypsum, a construction material of considerable weight, was made to look two-dimensional. In another work the artist created a sculpture mere millimeters in depth by cutting a pattern of wood grain into the painted surface of a floor. In a third she overlaid a carpet with the image of floor planking. In all of these projects the representations are crudely rendered, Stern's intention being not to trick the eye but to persuade the soul of art's value as a form of epistemological enquiry. For her exhibition at the Balcony, located on a terrace facing a small park in Toronto, the artist used the simplest of means to identify the space of representation—in this case the billboard—with its actual material edifice. In place of the sign of art Stern put a sign of the building:

bricks. Drawn with cartoonlike simplicity, the artist's graphic administered to her concern to make the structure whole again. Closing the gap between the sign and the thing itself, Stern effaced the site's mock commercial potential. Part of an ongoing series of works called "ReSurfacing," the project allowed viewers to imagine a world without signs and without the referential directives of advertising. Instead of the figurative space of commerce—or of art, for that matter—we got the literal space of architecture. Unassuming in style, Stern's work expressed a straightforward fidelity to this task, exposing bricks as the sine qua non of its existence. Because brick is hardly a twenty-first-century material, the artist beguiled us with a fantasy of a simpler time, of a world built from the ground up with spatial and temporal integrity. Art's true redundancy was put to good use here as a stopgap. Stern's project of manufacturing the sign in order to suppress it helped affirm the value of a world that is whole and not fragmented by the incessant demands of the virtual.

Rosemary Heather



Oona Stern *bricks (balcony)*, 2002, adhesive vinyl on coroplast, three panels, 140 x 96 cm each.