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ALLAN McCOLLUM

## ***The New City Markers***

Pontus Kyander



Allan McCollum.  
*New City Marker*. 2001.  
Brushed aluminum, 9" high.

Like and unlike. We like to imagine that we are unique yet we generally expect to be treated equally — at least that is what it is like in an open and democratic society. In other societies and at other times, distinctions and inequalities have been the preconditions for the entire social structure and for the individual's legal rights. In a class society one could mark belonging to a particular class by having a family coat of arms. We associate this mostly with the nobility, but priests and the upper middle classes could also provide themselves with a heraldic sign as did, later, cities and organizations. Heraldry generally makes use of recognizable

signs, based either on the name or on conventional symbols like lions, crowns, lilies and other objects placed on a shield-like frame.

In Västra Hamnen all the inhabitants will be more similar yet more dissimilar than usual. The American artist Allan McCollum has provided each building, house and apartment with it's own emblem of aluminum— over 1000 “New City Markers,” total. Each emblem combines a lower part that is particular to the building and an upper part that is unique to each apartment. The buildings' symbols are somewhat larger (25 cm high) and are placed somewhere on the facade while the people living their have theirs placed at the entrance to their apartments. It will be possible to use the symbols on letter-headings and for other purposes, perhaps even in company logotypes for activities in the area.

The “New City Markers” is a project in which the individual has forced upon him a symbol that is a part of a comprehensive system of signs. Each of them is unique but exchangeable. In some ways this is like a uniform



Allan McCollum. *The New City Markers*, 2001. Brushed aluminum. Every apartment in the “City of Tomorrow” section of Malmö, Sweden, was given its own unique symbol for the front door. All the different symbols were archived on computer disks and are permanently maintained by the building owners for creative use by the apartment tenants. Project sponsored by the City of Malmö, Sweden.

system, like the staff grades on some future space station out of Aniara or Star Trek but with an element of playfulness; even an invitation to the person living there to assume the sign into his daily life. Allan McCollum thinks that the emblems can become aspects of games activities involving children and adults — “or perhaps the symbols could be used in sending secret notes between lovers,” as he writes in his proposal.

McCollum’s question is whether the sign will introduce more individualism in that everyone will receive his or her sign, or less because the sign is forced upon them from without and forms part of a strict and impersonal system. This is the sort of repetition and variation that he has played with previously in his art. If one wants one can see the “Markers” as yet another installation but on a scale that is much larger than in earlier works, and in a concrete and daily interplay with thousands of people. Perhaps like a giant playing board with counters in which the rules are altered by the players while the game is in progress and where the point is not that the game should end but that the symbols should be used in an unexpected manner.