

## Ellen Rothenberg

2007

### *Camouflage Screen*

Art glass with ceramic melting color

*Camouflage Screen*, art glass embedded with a ceramic frit pattern in varying degrees of white opacity, was inspired by the daily activities and dramas that artist Ellen Rothenberg (b. 1949) observed during her many visits to the site. “I was intrigued by the social space of the station,” said Rothenberg. The piece takes over two sets of large windows on opposite sides of the station.

The **Western** station is a nexus for bus routes, and there is a coffee shop inside. It serves Lincoln Square, a neighborhood that is historically German (there is a piece of the Berlin Wall on display) with a sizeable Korean community nearby. Cultural institutions like the Old Town School of Folk Music, the Sulzer Regional Library, and DANK-Haus contribute to the mix, epitomizing the best of Chicago. Rothenberg noticed people from all of these communities and beyond coming together and there always seemed to be a lot of back and forth. Rothenberg noticed that the station functioned as an impromptu community center. Along with commuters waiting for a train or bus, there were plenty of people leisurely talking over cups of coffee.

Rothenberg often explores community, place, and the politics of daily life in her public projects and installations. Her process involves observing and asking questions to arrive at the essence of a space or idea.

In designing this piece, the artist worked to maximize the best feature of the building—the light coming in from the large windows on all four sides. One set of windows faces south, flooding the space with natural light that shifts and casts commuters’ silhouettes against the walls. “I began to think about the windows as cinematic screens for projection.”

Rothenberg worked with experts at Franz Mayer of Munich, a celebrated art glass fabricator, to find the right density for the pattern. “I didn’t want to foreclose the ability to see both in and out from those windows,” she said. The scale of the pattern leaves many areas of clear glass open to exterior views. The choice of camouflage as a design element is an outgrowth of a larger research project where the artist had spent a lot of time looking at patterns and now had the ability to recast those patterns in glass. For the unwitting shadow figures on display, it provides a safe disguise.

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