



*Das Wesentliche (The Essence)* 1993  
forty-four leather belts with  
stamped text, foam rubber  
Courtesy of the artist



# Ellen R O T H E N B E R G

## *to travel:*

**Look:** out the window of a moving train at an unfamiliar landscape.

**Conversations:** fragments in two or three languages with many pauses, searching for the right word.

**Glances:** understanding existing in the gaps and spaces between cultures, in the unspoken

**Laughter:** the joke explained: “cow head” the right insult for the passing motorist

**Friendship:** outside of history, because of history: long dinners at the table

**Intimacy:** an invitation for “a kitchen action”: potatoes

**Shop windows west:** chocolates carved in the shape of a shoe, leather goods, baskets of breads of all sizes and shapes, fat sculpted into rosebuds, money

**Shop windows east:** net curtains blocking the view inside the shop, a careful arrangement of items, packaging from another time, a few small objects: heels, tacks, shoe cream, thread: tools and parts, the process explicated

**Courtyards:** leading to courtyards, leading to courtyards, moving back in time, passageways for the resistance.

**Views:** of a burnt brewery, small abandoned factory workshops, traces of painted lettering from shops and communities that no longer exist, empty streets

**Utilities:** coal heat, large ceramic stoves, deliverymen with wooden boxes strapped to their backs climbing stairs

**Silence:** without images, sounds of singing, clapping and dancing, a wedding in the courtyard of the refugee center around the corner

**Commerce:** people standing in the mud, a piece of cloth or a cardboard box on the ground in front of them, two or three items for sale: a shirt, a package of biscuits, a dish.

**location:** between the walls/no-man’s land

**Commerce:** everything is for sale: medals, binoculars, army uniforms, watches, membership cards, a culture, a way of life: the oppressor becomes a souvenir.

**location:** under the commemorative gate

**Commerce:** more sausages than you have seen anywhere, a salami larger than a body

**location:** the top floor of the department store

**Commerce:** quickly!

**location:** a line forms in front of a store

**Commerce:** shopping carts full of beer, of transistor radios, of sweaters

**location:** lurching across the sidewalks towards the buses going east, irritating the local citizens



*the czech thermometer* 1994  
German scale, Russian bread, butter,  
paper, Czech thermometer  
Courtesy of the artist



*MOTHERLAND* 1994  
slate, metal, hot water bottle,  
embroidery on cloth  
Courtesy of the artist