

## Siemon Allen

### Fusebox

This edgy installation by Siemon Allen consisted of hundreds of wallet-size trading cards arranged in a huge grid covering the gallery's walls. The vintage and contemporary collectibles, which Allen amassed through eBay, commemorated



Siemon Allen, *Cards II* (installation view), 2005, trading cards in protective sleeves, dimensions variable. Fusebox.

American wars from the Spanish American War to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

The presentation was relatively straightforward. Allen let the cards speak for themselves. One of the earliest sets of cards, "World in Arms," dating to 1939, reproduced illustrations of World War I mayhem worthy of Goya: bloody corpses, hand-to-hand combat, gas attacks, and flamethrowers. Even so, the original intent of the cards was to intrigue, not horrify—and, of course, to reap whatever tiny profit a five-cent pack of cards could yield.

A set of World War II cards called "Defending America" boasted bold graphics and vibrant saturated colors. Oddly, in spite of their jingoistic fervor, the designs presented an attractive pastiche of left-wing styles, from Constructivism to Soviet Socialist Realism.

And, along the way, changes in the zeitgeist are discernible. A Desert Storm set included a card called "No Blood for Oil," depicting protests.

Does the juvenile fascination with blood and guts tell us anything about the devastation of real war? Allen leaves it to the viewer to decide. Certainly, this project suggests that after all the "logical" justifications for war are proved illusory, the acting out of latent bellicose fantasy may be the only plausible explanation that remains.

—Rex Weil