Foreign Language: Erica Van Horn’s *Italian Lessons*

In a variety of printed formats—small books to postcards to a commercially printed eraser—Erica Van Horn’s *Italian Lessons* explores the experience of living in a foreign country, learning the language of a new community, and the relationship of language to place. Van Horn (b. 1954) makes use of narrative, humor, nostalgia, image, and rhetoric to demonstrate a fraction of the ways one encounters a foreign language and the ways unfamiliar words can shape a traveler’s experience. Van Horn’s work focuses on words and their meaning, though she never loses sight of the visual qualities of language and the ways in which handwriting and printing can inform our reading of both public and private documents. Part travel diary, the Lessons also detail something of Van Horn’s time spent in Italy, recording daily experiences alongside her attempts to learn a new language. In text and image, narrative and abstraction, Van Horn considers Italian culture, landscape, and character. *Italian Lessons* interrogates the ways language marks one as a foreigner, an outsider in a linguistically defined community. Documents from Van Horn’s literary archive at the Beinecke Library provide a window into her creative process; a list of fellow artists and friends who received individual lessons underscores Van Horn’s practice of making artworks that double as personal communication, progress report, or travel bulletin.

*Italian Lessons* 1-17, [Docking, Norfolk, England: Coracle, 1992]; unrealized draft lesson and distribution list from the Erica Van Horn Papers

*Objects*

Italian Lesson – 1-19
2004 Folio 53
DL: https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Search/Results?lookfor=italian+lessons&type=AllFields&submit=Find&limit=16&sort=relevance

Production Materials, Unresolved Lessons
Erica Van Horn Papers
YCAL MSS 863 Box 1; 2 marked folders