

## *Boys' Art, 2002*

Joyce Kozloff remembers the detailed naval battles that her brother Bruce drew when they were kids, knowing that many of the other boys were making military art too. The girls were creating their own imagery: pictures inspired by fashion, fan magazines and domestic interiors. Much later, she watched her son Nikolas sketching elaborate, fanciful, wild, and angry works, warfare among his comic book superheroes. After adolescence, most young men move on to other activities (unless, of course, they become artists). Her brother and son are not at all bellicose, quite the contrary. Friends with preadolescent children today say that the boys don't draw much: they play video games instead. Psychoanalysis might characterize this phenomenon as a step in the formation of masculinity - she wanted to explore it for herself, by simulating the activity.

During the fall of 2001, she was granted a nine-week residency at the Bogliasco Foundation on the Ligurian coast of Italy, outside Genoa. She arrived by plane from New York the morning of September 11. She had brought source materials, maps and diagrams about the sites of historic battles. Her boxes of art supplies - paint, brushes, colored pencils - were held in Italian customs for ten days. Feeling restless, she began to draw in pencil, holed up in her quiet studio, a sanctuary in an olive grove overlooking the sea. This daily process was an effective mechanism for blocking out the horrendous news from home, and those two dozen drawings (military maps from the Han dynasty to the second half of the twentieth century) became the basis for a book.

Back in New York, she opened six boxes of Nik's childhood drawings that had been preserved high on a shelf in her storage area. They were fantastic, as fresh as when first created. She started xeroxing the figures down to twenty-five percent of their original scale, that is, to the scale of her own military stage sets.

Then she inserted his struggling, shooting, stabbing, screaming creatures into her artworks - and new, sometimes surreal narratives emerged. Once initiated, it became easier and easier to further violate her pristine grisaille drawings with absurd and/or tragic incursions from high and popular culture.

There are plots and subplots, linear moments and irrational leaps of faith. The microscopic men are touching and vulnerable, a reminder of her son's childhood and of an earlier period in her own life. She had learned more about global politics from Nikolas, a political writer, than from anyone else, and it therefore seemed fitting to have entered into this strange, asymmetric and unexpected "collaboration."