

Girlhood: 2017

After Joyce Kozloff's mother died in December, 2014, she and her sister-in-law cleaned out the house, one day a week for seven months. On the very last visit, she found her childhood art. As her folks were packrats, she was not surprised. She didn't remember that she had made maps from ages 9-11 as subjects for social studies classes, but she recalled loving geography and history. These cartographic drawings were in organized folders with other assignments inside a rusty filing cabinet lying on its side under the eaves of the dark, unlit attic.

Some months after gathering them up, she gingerly brought them out to study. There was much she recognized about herself: a compulsive attention to detail; fascination with strange, inexplicable images; and experiments with different kinds of representation. Back then, she appropriated meticulously from books, as she still does today from the Internet. This led to a visual dialogue between her childhood and adulthood.

She began to incorporate these schoolroom exercises into paintings. At first, the correspondences were obvious – both the new, painted ground maps and the old, collaged drawings represented New York and New Jersey, for instance. But then, she moved further afield, as her childhood charts covered the globe. She chose antique maps that are geographically incorrect to contemporary eyes for her backgrounds, as she had done on a much smaller scale in a 1998-1999 series of frescoes, "Knowledge." Their "wrongness" gave them a childish quality that complemented her elementary school hand.

From their different stages of life, the young girl and the adult woman began to shift back and forth within the pictorial space. She'd also retrieved her childhood doll collection, and some of those toys found their way into the work, parading along shallow stage-like platforms.

She started to appropriate her other (non-map) childhood drawings, originally book reports or science assignments. Sometimes she arranged them in a row across the top or bottom of the painting, like the *predellas* in Renaissance art, stories within stories.

She copied tiny animals and sea creatures from her girlhood studies onto the dominant maps; they are visible to the viewer if he/she moves up close. Later, she began copying entire childhood drawings - which were by then attached to the paintings - directly onto smaller canvases, creating enclosed, subsidiary works excerpted and reinterpreted from the first series. Paint did not capture the nubby, grainy look of the sources, so she bought children's art supplies - crayons, chalk, craypas - and invented for herself a hybrid art-making process.

The worldview of her naïve public school pictures is that of early 1950s America - cowboys at their bonfires in the wide-open west; factories and smokestacks in small town settings; Eskimo girls and Alpine girls and Brazilian girls in their native costumes. The mindset is further away from the artist today than the places were then. These false scenarios had unraveled for many in her generation, although not everywhere nor for all Americans. And that's why her conventional grammar school innocence felt weirdly relevant to her - within our polarized society, where so many people hold onto fantasies about recovering an imaginary past.