

Joyce Kozloff: Mapping Works

"Los Angeles Becoming Mexico City Becoming Los Angeles"

While installing my subway piece in Los Angeles during the fall of 1993, I was conscious of the racial tension and visible damage from the recent riots and earthquakes. Returning to New York, the airplane flew low; it was night, and every city in America was lit like a flickering string of pearls. You could clearly "read" their plans. I blackened Los Angeles, as if it were smoldering, leaving only the radiant lines of roads and freeways. I painted pre-Columbian patterns in an ocher and umber crazy quilt onto the various zones of Mexico City and then chopped up and interspersed the two maps, so neither city was recognizable. On two additional panels, I added historic material. The left one is based on a nineteenth century real estate map of LA with numbered plots on which I "planted" trees; it is bisected and bordered by vertical rows of sad angels, and is followed by a reconfigured Mexico City. Next there's a watercolor based on pictographic maps of Tenochtitlán, the Aztec metropolis, which lies under modern Mexico City, divided by death heads and edged by weeping willows. In the last panel, LA is landlocked by chunks of Mexico City and bordered by funeral urns. There is a mysterious blood red river, indicating cultures coming together discordantly.

"Imperial Cities"

Living in Rome in 1993, I was bemused by the triumphal arches and obelisks. I sliced and recombined maps of four former imperial capitals: Rome, Vienna, Istanbul and Amsterdam. Since Amsterdam and Vienna both radiate out in concentric ring formations (in Amsterdam, the spokes and bands are canals and in Vienna, they're roads), the diagrams fit together almost seamlessly. Their languages are both Germanic, and on first glance, street titles blend undetected. Istanbul and Rome are quite different linguistically and structurally, but once I had crossbred them, they merged into the artwork's overall camouflage. Separating the reconstituted capitals are views of them, which I appropriated from old etchings, fragments of my earlier lithographs, and images from books about the conquered peoples in their various empires. I cut up tiny pieces of paper and encrusted the streets with faux mosaic, inspired by the luminous glass mosaics in Rome's early Christian churches.

"The British Were Here"

It's a montage of tongue-in-cheek observations about colonialism with a running (visual) commentary in the frames. I had a teaching gig in New Zealand for three weeks during the Gulf War. Returning, I stopped in India for

three more weeks. There was a sameness to the way the English had put their stamp on both countries – and I'd felt that earlier in Egypt. For this piece, I developed an unfolding plot about four cities – Cairo (Egypt), Bombay and Madurai (India), and Dunedin (New Zealand). The street names are painted in two different colors, one for those in English and one for those in the local language – Arabic, Maori, Marathi and Tamil. Beginning on the left at Cairo, I recycled and doctored older work to approximate the hieroglyphics of tomb inscriptions and excised Egyptian images from clunky Hollywood biblical epics to set into the frame. Bombay is collaged with paisley-like patterns; Madurai, a South Indian Hindu temple town, has walls within walls, temples within temples. I separated the representations of these two contrasting Indian cities with silhouettes of Brits in top hats and bonnets, and this section is framed by photographic stills from tony English movies about the Raj. Lastly, I embedded sheep into the map of Dunedin. (The British introduced sheep farming there to create inexpensive produce for home consumption, and you see them everywhere, a nubby texture across the hills.)

"The French Were Here"

I chose three far afield cities I had once visited: Quebec (Canada), Port-au-Prince (Haiti), and Fez (Morocco). We begin at Quebec with the first known European map of the New World, rendered by an Italian draughtsman, depicting Frenchmen cockily approaching the fortifications of a native American settlement. Then there is a 1775 view of Quebec City, and surrounding them both, a modern road map, transparently washed with light creamy tones to sometimes reveal and sometimes disguise the streets below. In the borders, there are excerpts from French films, as well as Hollywood confections about the French. In 1985, after visiting Haiti, I had designed a banner that was embroidered with sequins and beads in the traditional manner. The sample for that hanging became the foundation for the second of three panels. Over it, I traced Port-au-Prince in colored pencil, collaging the tracing paper with cut prints and glitter, and bordering it with reproductions of Haitian art. In the final section, Fez, I isolated the city's walled casbah and embellished its convoluted intersecting blocks with reproductions of tessellated, inlaid Moroccan faience tile. Above is a gridded sheet of translucent vellum; both the top and bottom pages are affixed with Arabic letters from children's calligraphy books. Fez is bordered by miniature film stills from archaic foreign legion and Arabian nights movies.

"The Spanish Were Here"

In the first panel, the Caribbean is infested with frightening sea monsters drawn by European cartographers. Above them, I copied a colonial engraving of the conquistadors torturing native Indians. Moving across, one encounters Havana, Cuba, turquoise and pink to evoke its spirit. Next is an early painting of Cholula, Mexico, location of the largest pre-Columbian pyramid in the Americas. Contemporary Quito is last, with its eccentric shape stretched across two Andean mountains. In an enclosure, I placed a centuries old view of it as a small pueblo. Throughout, there are antique maps of South America in various odd configurations, as imagined by the explorers, surrounded by expanses of high-keyed, even jarring hues. The frame enfolds a multitude of "quotes" from movie stereotypes of Latinas like Carmen Miranda to folkloric Spanish tiles.

"Calvino's Cities on the Amazon"

The piece is an elaborate illustration of the book *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino. The plot: Marco Polo is in the court of Kublai Kahn and every night, his job is to describe for the Great Kahn a city in his empire. Each is an extraordinary series of metaphors and images, imaginary yet evocative of real places. All 56 are named after women, and can be seen as male fantasies. I have inserted, almost like windows, 4 x 4" pictures of the cities into a map of the Amazon River and its tributaries, isolating in each something that affected me in their descriptions. Going down the Amazon is another fantasy with a long literary tradition, so I collapsed these two preoccupations into one artwork. The text was so important to me that I created a 90-minute "sound track" of my son Nikolas reading excerpts from the book, which is part of the work's installation.

"Mekong and memory"

The Mekong River had a richness of metaphor and memory for me, so I decided to recycle an old collage (from 1981), which had originally been horizontal and decorative, made from the rejects of a colored etching. Since the river runs North/South, it had to be a vertical hanging, and as my wall wasn't 13' tall, I created the canopy, which is evocative of structures in the Imperial City. Besides gluing the river over it, I painted out much of the original work, and added fragments of post cards and paper ornaments purchased in the markets of Vietnamese cities. Guests in the studio talked about how "beautiful" it was, not seeing the implicit tragedy, so I added a tile pilaster on either side. My tiles are working as framing devices, as well as pointed commentary. On them are painted stills from movies made during 1965-1973 (the years are scratched into them). These films were not literally about the war, but recall the violence and conflict of that time. The piece is accompanied

by a seven-hour audiotope, in which I read the full text of *The Sorrow of War* by Bao Ninh, who was a North Vietnamese soldier during the war with the US.

"Bodies of Water"

I started "Bodies of Water" upon my return from a sailing trip in the Baltic Sea with friends, fascinated by the nautical charts by which we navigated the 35,000 islands in the Swedish archipelago. At that time, I was in recoil from public art. It was suggested to me that the rivers looked like the inside of the body, or even the brain, and that mapping them was a reflection of my inward mood. This was so provocative that I ordered life-size diagrams of the human digestive, circulatory and respiratory systems from a catalog. I found myself dissecting and paring them down – and then laying remnants of five or six bodies over the Baltic. Spinal cords, organs and limbs float gracefully among its ocean and landforms.

"Bodies of Water: Cities of China"

I departed from the palette of the charts to explore more subjective, expressive tones. "Cities of China" has a golden iridescence; the topography is overlaid with frail, lacy maps of Chinese cities from a 1924 guidebook. Skipping across the waters, there is an absurd string of fancy French food on elaborate platters excerpted from an engraved menu someone sent me from Paris.

"Bodies of Water: Songlines"

Hovering over the cobalt water and mossy islands in "Songlines" are the crimson linear remains of a split body and the midriff of a mother connected by an umbilical cord to her baby. Additionally, I've woven into the navigational routes excerpts from *The Songlines* by Bruce Chatwin, specifically the parts in which he absents himself from his adventures among the Australian aborigines to quote people (both famous and obscure) from all over the world and across time - about their urge to leave home and roam the planet.

Excerpts from *Crossed Purposes* Joyce & Max Kozloff, "Conversation with Joyce Kozloff" by Moira Roth. Youngstown, OH: The Butler Institute of American Art, 1999.

"Spheres of Influence" and "Dark and Light Continents" are made of twelve narrow, tapering canvases, which together form a single painting. In these works Kozloff flattens the world – and the canvases – into one of those projections we recall from geography class, with the panels linked together at the "equator" to form an 8 x 16' canvas.

“Spheres of Influence”

In the libraries of Renaissance palaces, there are always 2 huge globes, the terrestrial globe and the celestial globe. Kozloff saw “Spheres of Influence” as her terrestrial globe. “Spheres” is based on an atlas of the Greco-Roman world; the artist assigned to each of the separate canvases a different region from around the Mediterranean and overlaid it with information drawn from US Government Tactical Pilotage charts. While Kozloff is not the first to draw parallels between the Roman Empire and the United States, seeing their similarities illustrated in this manner succinctly makes the point.

“Dark and Light Continents”

Of the same shape but with a different focus, “Dark and Light Continents,” the artist’s celestial globe, presents a cohesive projection of the world based on a satellite photograph of Earth’s surface at night. The stars across the surface are positioned according to a 17th century cosmological chart of the heavens. Kozloff’s painting not only indicates relative energy consumption – and, by implication, technological development and wealth – it is also a metaphor for the legacy of the Enlightenment. It is no wonder, then, that the mother of the Enlightenment (Europe) and its child prodigy (the United States) glow so brightly. Those who seized the power of rational scientific thought were destined to rule and shape those in shadow, whose lives, lands, and resources serve them.

Excerpts from Co+Ordinates, “Joyce Kozloff: Mappae mundi” by Phillip Earenfight. Carlisle, PA: The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College, 2008.