

JOYCE KOZLOFF Exterior and Interior Cartographies by Eleanor Munro
(Catalogue essay for exhibition at Regina Gouger Miller Gallery, Carnegie Mellon University, 2006)

When I was a girl in school, we traded cards on the playground during recess. My friends liked Shirley Temple or the Dionne Quintuplets, but I liked the cards with maps. They gave me the world, and I wanted it already. I wanted the lives of Ulysses and Aeneas, Columbus and Marco Polo, their dreams, their heroism and their maps. Their stories came down to me through the men in my family, who traveled immigration routes and sometimes went to war. But a love of maps is the beginning of a mental widening that, for children of the developed West back then, was promise of a life to come. That optimism lasted until our prideful West felt the first shocks of the nuclear terrorist age.

This exhibition by the artist-activist Joyce Kozloff speaks to me as I was then, a hopeful future traveler, and as I am now, a traveler and writer rather more anxious than I was before. Kozloff's singular and compelling map works, made over the past ten years, are talismans of voyages made in response to royal and other ruling pressures and, of course, as a result of the yearnings of the explorers, daredevils, voracious assimilators, exploiters and traders who, collectively, created the age we live in, and frequently dread. For centuries, as we know, women were largely excluded from the symbolic world of maps. Their travel was local, their talisman not the sailing ship or the overland carriage but the needle, the bed. A lost treasure for them was a voyage denied, made only in fantasy or, if the woman was an artist, in images of what might have been. Kozloff is a leading feminist, one of the instigators of the feminist art movement of the 1970s. Falling in thrall to the power of maps to represent imperial and individual ambitions and enterprises set her off on a new trajectory. And what are maps, after all, but diagrams of trajectories?

Kozloff's intent has been to discover, reveal and interpret the world from a new point of view, one that takes into account both the heroism and the exploitative aspects of the ages of discovery. Her aesthetic project has been to deploy formal elements (color, line, shape, placement of shapes in space) to describe shifts of political and economic power over the

centuries. Kozloff illuminates how these evolutionary changes in West-centered society have changed the boundaries and energy fields of the world's cities, continents and seas. Her impulse has been to make, and remake, the world again and again, whole and enduring.

To begin work, Kozloff prepares multiple ground plans in paint or fresco on panel, canvas or paper, adding passages of scumbled color and luminous washes, overlaying these basic terrains with outlines of cities and networks of trails —ghostways of ancient expeditions and sites of discovery. Her goal is, again, to envision in a single, layered image, the cumulative achievements and depredations of the human community. But her ultimate intention is to move people toward a more rational and balanced mode of life. Such concentration on a perhaps utopian end—the safety and preservation of the human species—may have had a subjective origin. The artist, however, wants it understood that she doesn't work from imagination. "I'm an appropriator. All my imagery is lifted, but then reconfigured, reimagined, recontextualized, operating on a prayer that it will become a new way of looking at the world."

When I first talked with Kozloff some years ago about such matters, she told me a story. In childhood she lived near a factory that manufactured "stuff," as she called it. The stuff was asbestos. "No one knew how dangerous it was. In summer it fell like snow. Factory workers looked like snowmen. When the scandal broke, the company closed shop and moved to the sun-belt to make fiberglass. Now the site is a shopping mall." Most young people experience passing fears and doubts about their security, while uncountable others endure childhoods irrevocably ruined by war. Whatever the source of her intense and focused concentration on the map project, Joyce Kozloff's trajectory has been toward the outer reaches of intent to act and speak out against the causes of fear. Inevitably then Kozloff must meet the most confounding issues in the world right now: Why war? How do we stop it?

Kozloff came of age in a world already ruptured by ideologies. Lithuanian by remote origin, her assimilated Jewish family was both observant and actively liberal on political

and social issues. She herself is a determined secularist. Graduating from Carnegie Institute of Technology, as it was called then, and Columbia University, she then followed a designated trail for one with her interests to Southern California and Mexico, and eventually, to Spain, Turkey and Morocco. In these places, she fell under the spell of Islamic design, that mesmerizing mode of linear pattern that, theoretically, can foliate in every direction through an endless process of repetition and variation—a metaphor, if one wants, for global expansion. Back home in the United States, she translated that principle into important architectural commissions in tile and mosaic, designing her own patterns for walls and entranceways to urban passageways like subway and railroad lines. By the late 1970s, she was known for pioneering work in the Pattern and Decorative idiom. One of the most seductive of these designs was a Chinese-spirited flower-filled *Public Pool for Daytime Swimming* [1984]. In 1990 she turned out a ravishingly beautiful volume of erotic watercolors, *Patterns of Desire*, showing pairs of lovers on a journey that has no words, only gestures.

Kozloff's submission to a design aesthetic seductive as meditation or a sung chant wouldn't last forever, however. Her politics were sharpening in response to the increase of violence in the world, and a new subject was rising in her mind. "Mapping almost seamlessly arose out of public art," she says, "working with diagrams and floor plans, layering my own content onto them. In the beginning I worked only with places I knew intimately, but later my choices were based on other things." The other things were conceptual and crossed boundaries of historical time. The many suites of map works here carry that kind of layered information. Upon topographical maps and nautical charts, she marked the routes of explorers and invaders, silk and slave traders; on contemporary aeronautical charts she outlined the tracks of bombing attacks on cities in the news in the 1980s and 1990s. She worked with celestial maps to describe the glowing and dimming of the planet as sun and stars compete with electric systems on earth for dominance of the skies. She showed how the outlines of great cities expand, merge and collapse. She found ways to represent spheres of knowledge, their spread and deforming misconstructions, their widening and shrinking spheres of influence. And her uses of materials trace a history of traditional technologies, fresco giving way to watercolor,

collage to oil on canvas. In only one sense did Kozloff initially hold back: as she herself puts it, she “studiously avoided moving into the third dimension...I was fearful.” But fear is a driving motivation in the production of important art today. In this case, it lifted her into the making of the three-dimensional globes on view here and, eventually, the culminating icon of this series of work, *Targets* [2000].

On the way, Kozloff turned out a series of map works called *Boys' Art* [2001-2003], twenty-four drawings of famous battlegrounds from China to Sevastapol overlaid with collaged drawings made by Kozloff's son, Nik, when he was a child. They represent soldiers, supermen, war-monsters and so on, flaunting amazing weapons. Reduced in size by Xerox, the tiny figures' “sadness and strangeness” touched her and moved her into an “asymmetric and unexpected collaboration.”

The process went this way. I can almost see it happening. In her Soho studio, Kozloff laid out the battlefield drawings and began adding a few, then dozens, finally scores of these little images across them. I can imagine her moving back and forth above the ground plans, sowing them with figures, letting clouds of them drift and fall over the land masses like seeds or pollen (or snowflakes). Except that these seeds don't portend spring flowers or ripening grain but terror and war; the little figures are not life generating, but death shedding. All Kozloff's map works fascinate, but *Boys' Art* speaks out and we listen.

In fact, this series amounts to an essay on global political violence. It exposes the tender roots of the fury that threatens the world these days and shows how it spreads across the earth. Here is the origin of war, the defensive coil and thrust, arms upraised with a weapon, the terrorizing figure seen at a distance, burned into the memory of whoever sees it. With patience and skill masked in whimsy, the artist delivers the message that humanity itself is the cause of the violence, for its source isn't rational politics but the human child-mind itself, graced with ability to imagine and invent and then, years later (the child having become the man), to enact catastrophe on those he may, in fact, dearly love. I myself love the little stick figures brandishing their terrible weapons. I find them witty and scary (the bits out of famous European paintings including the elephant Babar

weren't nearly so scary). I asked my own son what he thought about these maps sprinkled with killers, invaders and bombers and so on (my son is a professor, author of a book about how people think about Evil), and he said the works looked like game boards.

The drive to game board war-play, Kozloff even implies, may be bred into the species, laid down in the fields of the brain by ancient experience, for on prehistoric cave walls, stick figures assume just such postures of attack, threat, and kill, laid out there to bring down animals. If Kozloff's visual choreography is valid, such combat is a function of the natural order, like whirlwinds, tsunamis, explosions of semen and pollens, those "tiny, egg-shaped male cells on flowering plants ...[whose] frenzied plant-mating covers the entire globe at one time or another..." So says my book on seasonal allergies.

There's one more work I want to mention but only briefly because it isn't in this exhibition (it's the iconic centerpiece of Kozloff's current show in Venice). This work is called *Targets*. As the name suggests, it represents the collective object of all deliberate attacks. A couple of years ago, I spent an afternoon in Chelsea watching Kozloff supervise the assembling of this ten-foot high globe of carpentered wood. It is enterable through a door on one flank and painted inside with brilliantly hued maps marking where U.S. bombs hit civilian populations between 1945 and 2000. This Kozloffian statement about political violence serves as a powerful anti-war proclamation wherever it's installed. For me, it's a cornerstone of her work.

In the Chelsea gallery that day, bubble wrapped segments of *Targets* lay like apple slices on the floor. One by one, helpers set each section in place. The bottom row took shape, and then, as the upper sections were bolted into place, the structure began to assume new character. As if the bones in a columnar spine stood up erect, the great parabolas of *Targets*' flanks lifted up, swelled out, and curved in toward the apex, like the dome of the Pantheon, that transcendently harmonious Roman temple to all the gods: a painful irony of influence.

Then, something else happened. The organism began to emit sound. It began to hum, a sound sustained and eerie, not a heartbeat but a sound that lived in and around the sphere. In fact, scientists say such self-generated sound is “an incontrovertible natural phenomenon, the response of certain geometric shapes to the space they fill” (some scientists say the fireball of the original Big Bang “rang like a bell, whose frequency indicated the geometry of space-time”). Kozloff’s maps on these walls, taken all together, describe an orb as it floats in space. And now we know—or whoever has stood inside *Targets* knows—that it hums as it goes, a parabolic arc of sound that speaks for natural law in the universe.

Stable, steady, calm, never moving, *Targets* could be *Death, Time, Irrevocable Loss*. It's what all the combined forces of humanity, armed with whatever weapons, cannot stand off. Here then are the two sides of the primordial contradiction--life and non life. Kozloff's metaphor has brought us to this very point. Between those alternatives, Eros, the boy guardian of human life on earth, plays with his crayons and scissors.

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