

Joyce Kozloff: Knowledge

Frescos: The 72 Knowledge frescos were begun during the summer of 1998 at Skowegan, where Kozloff apprenticed herself to Daniel Bozhkov, the resident fresco instructor. All of them are wrong, often absurdly wrong, like when an island named Brasil occurs off the coast of Ireland. But they represent the best understanding of the world during the times when they were created. The Age of Discovery, also the age of European global expansion and the Renaissance, was the great age of cartography. Cartographers were on board the ships that explored the world, and their charts were made into engravings and avidly circulated throughout Europe. Errors were repeated and translated into many languages, further compounding the mistakes. To the artist, this was a cautionary tale: that all knowledge is arbitrary and subject to later reinterpretation.

Globes: Created during a residency in Rome, these globes are a continuation of Kozloff's Knowledge series of flat fresco paintings, which also incorporated antique maps full of geographically incorrect information. The fresco format helped emphasize the nature of maps as craft, while also placing them within an historical period.

Kozloff's new works employ standard Rand McNally globes, covered with a layer of plaster, and then painted with watercolor, thus sustaining the aura of fresco. They are based on iconic cartographic pieces dating from 1st-century Rome to early 17th-century Europe and encompass the Western world's key eras of global exploration and conquest. But despite the makers' efforts at accuracy, by modern standards these maps are full of errors. For instance, in Knowledge #77 (15), a globe based on Giacomo Maggiolo's 1564 Mappamundi, Europe is well realized and Asia is recognizable, but the southern hemispheres are tiny, reflecting, one assumes, the Italian Renaissance's lack of interest in that part of the world. In contrast, in Knowledge #76 (14), a globe based on a 1602 map of China by Jesuit priest cartographer Matteo Ricci, the South Pole is dominated by a huge landmass that seems to be purely the result of Ricci's fantasy.

From a present-day perspective, such errors can be read as geographical Freudian slips, whose distortions reveal their users' underlying assumptions about the world. But in Knowledge #78 (16) Kozloff reminds us that we are not without such biases ourselves: In this work, based on a world map created by Arab cartographer al-Idrisi in 1154 for King Roger II of Sicily, she has

followed the cartographer in inverting the usual north-south orientation of the globe, a reversal which underscores the fact that there is no up or down in space.

The more we examine these globes, the more ambiguous the title of this series becomes. Knowledge is always partial, always conditioned by our assumptions, and the search for it is more likely to be motivated by the desire for mastery than by mere curiosity about the universe. Powerful nations and individuals pursue knowledge in order to enhance their positions, yet its quest has also contributed to the betterment of mankind...These works by the great cartographers of the past are a reminder that ours is not the only age in which globalization represents a struggle between diversity and homogeneity.

Excerpts about the globes from Joyce Kozloff Targets, "Maps as Metaphors: Recent Works by Joyce Kozloff" by Eleanor Heartney. New York: DC Moore Gallery, 2001.