

# JOYCE KOZLOFF

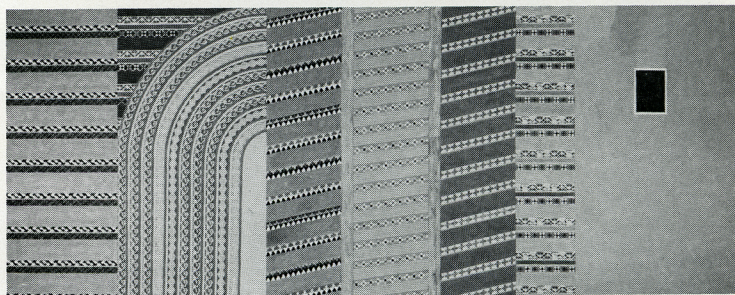
**B**order signals boundary. Countries maintain borders to distinguish their territory from that of a neighboring state. Carpets and blankets sometimes have borders that differentiate interior pattern from containing shape. Often clothing has borders, such as piping, which “finishes” the cloth and in some cases prevents it from unraveling. A border can be useful, it can be decorative, it can be organizational, it can be political. A border signifies neither the beginning nor ending of an area but rather its interface with some beyond. In this sense borders suggest both curiosity and uncertainty about adjacency and can intimate the unknown or infinite of that outside the boundary. In her most recent exhibition, Joyce Kozloff uses the tension of borders to incite the beholders of her paintings, collages, and books to an edge, a boundary of extreme physical and conceptual intensity.

The patterns Kozloff “quotes” in her paintings and collages are the geometries, arabesques, and lattices of Islamic design. Islamic culture, which flourished as far west as Spain and as far east as India, was a rare case of a civilization whose entire heritage stems from the writings of one person whose impact was felt in every aspect of that culture. It has often been suggested that the aniconic nature of Islamic art has to do with a ban on figuration, the assumption that representation was an affront to the creator, but there is evidence of figurative and representational art throughout the history of Islam. Perhaps Islamic patterning achieved its degree of sophistication and complexity because of other factors; the mathematics of pattern makes a connection with infinity, while the continuities of character and landscape limit the allusiveness of figuration and representation.

What Islamic pattern does that Kozloff dramatically accomplishes in her work is the dissolution of plane, and therefore space. Contemplation of the interlacings of these floriated or geometric

Joyce Kozloff, *Striped Cathedral* (detail), 1976-77.

*Arts*  
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Joyce Kozloff, *Striped Cathedral*, 1976-77. Acrylic on canvas, 6 x 15'.  
Courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

shapes produces intellectual vertigo. The complexity of this obsessional overlaying and juxtaposing is overwhelming: the mind and the body are integrated in their dizzied response; plane is suspended, time is extended. This work engages in a silent dialogue with contemporary art as well. To optical painting it says retinal stimulation addresses only one sense. It challenges the assumption of reductive art by suggesting that which has been pared away is worthy of close examination. It goes beyond systems art by arguing that the order of system can be disorder.

The works on view are of three modes: books, border paintings, and collage. The two paintings are problematic because of their largeness and the use of border within the painting rather than at the edges. The panels of border in *Striped Cathedral* run vertically across the horizontal expanse of the canvas and with their startling variety suggest cornering. Since the parallel borders run from top to bottom of the canvas, they are not contained and provoke a series of border skirmishes within the painting. That they are not contained presents an aggressive and threatening quality because these borders

seem to want to spill over into our space. The painting's furthest right section has a green square floating on an orange background which is puzzling because it seems to stand for the center in a deliberately acentric work. Is this painting to be read left-to-right or right-to-left? If right-to-left, then it might trace a progression from the austere square to the foliated borders. If left-to-right, perhaps these borders are an arrangement of ornamental possibilities for this square that might represent the plan of some Islamic or Western building.

The books are voluptuous. Their titles, *If I Were an Astronomer* and *If I Were a Botanist*, refer both to the Islamic concern for the celestial and the vegetable—evinced by the scientific breakthroughs and love of gardens of Islamic culture—as well as the Koran and manuscript illuminations with which some of the collaged patterns within the books connect. The books remind us of the fact that Islamic pride in being “people of the book” gave the language and decoration of the Koran a cultural preeminence, and led to Islamic culture's advances in bookbinding. Kozloff's patterns in these books, rendered

in colored pencil and felt-tip pen, relate to astral and botanical order.

The collages, all on paper with the exception of *Blue and Gold Lattice* which is a relief print and collage on silk, are the richest part of the show. They don't have the provocative edginess of the paintings because here borders are used as borders. They do have a staggeringly complex quality, a result of intertwining different designs and literally collaging and layering the shapes given by colored pencil. *Mad Russian Blanket* is an energetic testament to directionality. Triangles are the basic containing shape within the pattern and they serve as arrows, forcing the eye to travel up and down lanes of border into octagonal interlacings, overwhelming with possibilities. *Longing*, a vertical format, has insets of foil at top and bottom to produce a silvered effect. The foil insets, broken up by columns of pattern, are reflective both in the literal and metaphorical senses. They bring us to borders of awareness and contemplation that exist only at the literal and metaphorical edge. (Tibor de Nagy, *October 30-November 17*)

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