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## Mapping Joyce Kozloff: The Political and The Decorative Intertwined

by Jack Hartnell

**Art historian Jack Hartnell, whose work focuses on intersections between medicine and art in both the medieval and modern periods, considers recent shows by Joyce Kozloff, including her contributions to the survey “Mapping Brooklyn,” continuing at the Brooklyn Historical Society.**

Exhibitions considered in this review: Joyce Kozloff: Social Studies at French Institute: Alliance Française, February 25 to April 25, 2015; Joyce Kozloff: Maps + Patterns at DC Moore Gallery, March 26 to April 25; Mapping Brooklyn at BRIC, February 26 to May 3, 2015 and at the Brooklyn Historical Society, February 26 to September 6, 2015.

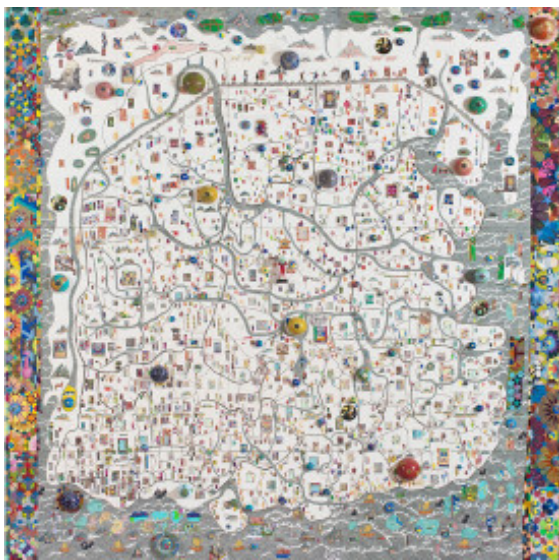


Joyce Kozloff, *If I Were a Botanist (Gaza)*, 2015. Mixed media and collage on canvas, 54 x 91-1/4 inches.  
Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery

Maps have always sought to express more than mere geographical information. In ancient Assyrian carved stones, traditional compass-based cartographic inferences sat

alongside pointers to more epic, mythic realms at the very edges of the earth. In medieval *mappaemundi* the contorted shapes of Europe, Africa, and Asia appeared pockmarked not just with major rivers and cities but with biblical events and monstrous races. In the maps of the modern period this same terrain was re-imagined as a political geography, with emergent states and historic empires battling for prominence across documents that drew cultural borders and affirmed legal assertions to territory. Today, even, Google Maps allows us to pepper the ground beneath our feet with personalized information of our own or of our peers: routes and recommendations layered atop of streets in a manipulatable, ever-evolving cityscape.

These ideas of subjectivity and fiction make maps particularly fertile ground for those contemporary artists who, like cartographers for millennia before them, remain invested in both expressing and re-shaping the world around them. Perhaps foremost amongst them is Joyce Kozloff, whose work appears in recent exhibitions in four spaces across New York City: at DC Moore Gallery, the Alliance Française, BRIC, and the Brooklyn Historical Society.



Joyce Kozloff, *The Tempest*, 2014. Acrylic, pencil, collage, and assemblage on panel, 120 x 120 inches. Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery

First rising to prominence in the early 1970s as an original member of the Pattern and Decoration movement, Kozloff became known as much for her politics as her work. She advocated against the dominance of a predominantly painterly, male, and overly-conceptual art world, arguing for the patterned and the decorative – with its sense of craft, femininity, repetition, triviality, and a more colorful or traditional “beauty” — as a foil to this status quo. As Kozloff wrote in her 1976 statement, “10 Approaches to the Decorative,” (a withering rejoinder to the Minimalist “negations’l” of Ad Reinhardt et al.), work must be: “anti-pure, anti-purist, anti-puritanical, anti-minimalist, anti-post minimalist, anti-reductivist, anti-formalist, anti-pristine, anti-austere...” In place of these

negations Kozloff affirmed the “subjective, romantic, imaginative, personal, autobiographical, whimsical, narrative, decorative, lyrical...”

It is not hard to see how the cartographic, with all its intricacies, subjectivities, and imagination, might become incorporated into such a project. Formally, the tessellated, patchwork blocks of pieces like *Hidden Chambers* (1975-76) or the more recent *If I Were An Astronomer (Mediterranean)* (2014) recall plan views of cityscapes or the repeated contour lines of geographical surveys; and materially too, her ceramic floor and wall mosaics, such as *An Interior Decorated* (1978-79) or *Tile Wainscot* (1979-81),

evoke the sixth-century map of the Byzantine world set into the floor of the church of Saint George in Madaba, Jordan.

But more often, historical maps are deliberately knitted into her two-dimensional works, recreating and then reworking them in a number of different ways. Two of Kozloff's contributions to *Mapping Brooklyn* (BRIC and BHS), *Waves* (2015), rework maps of the borough with her trademark patterns that serve to draw focus onto or away from particular aspects of the original cartography: swirling patchwork rivers lead the eye towards the monotone land, or streets blocked out in green washes and red tessellated stickers ping out amongst otherwise white street grids. At the Alliance Française, collaged octopi stretch their tentacles portentously over classroom maps of Europe; the didactic qualities of geographical and historical knowledge merge with a playful air of schoolchild fantasy that the contents of textbooks enjoy amongst their intended readership. Elsewhere in her work, the recent *The Tempest* (2014), beveled squares of traditional South Asian maps act as a backdrop for appliqué figures with a more political edge. Masculine military figurines — the sort of guys with a tendency to carve up and dominate the mapped land beneath them — abound in cut-out roundels, while counteracting these, the hemispherical domes of halved globes rise from the canvas, maternal and breast-like, their brass-embossed spinning tips transformed into pointed metallic nipples.



Joyce Kozloff, *Targets*, 2000. Acrylic on canvas with wood frame, 108 inches diameter. Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery



The Madaba Map, Church of St George, Madaba, Jordan. 6th Century CE. Photo: Wikipedia

The political and the decorative remain intertwined in Kozloff's work, the urgency of her social commentary never far from view. This is felt most keenly in one of her largest and most affecting works, *Targets* (1999-2000), a sculptural arrangement of 24 curved canvases into a nine-foot walk-in globe, the centerpiece of *Mapping Brooklyn*. From the outside, the cartographic sense of a constructed world could not be more apparent. A structural, wooden, rib-like shell, is held together by exposed bolts to create a definable yet insistently fictional sphere for the viewer to enter. Upon stepping through a

removable segment into the shape, stooping one's way to a sonically muffled space, one is struck first visually by the surrounding canvases: abstract (but not minimalist), the segmented and patinated blocks appeal to an aesthetic that runs throughout Kozloff's work, bright tones and wiggly bands of contoured color creating a patchwork sense of stepped and enveloping depth. Yet upon closer inspection, the markings on the maps are not only abstract colours and more typical cartographics — city names, roads, compass points, and weather signals — but also the hatched vertical and horizontal notches of a target scope. Red pinpoints of heat seeking missiles and the coordinates of radar grids shift perception from the artistic to the militaristic: each location represented is in fact a site of major US military activity since the Second World War, their unnervingly close-cropped focus in this pre-9/11 work a prescient foreshadowing of the Drone Wars of today.

The appearance of Kozloff's art in happy coincidence across three contemporaneous shows seems to mark a moment of reflection on a career stretching back over forty years. But if anything, the simultaneous presence of her work across the city serves to emphasize Kozloff's consistency, and her constitution for a change in world perceptions: not just a reclaiming of the

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