

The Maps Are Art

by Rani Molla

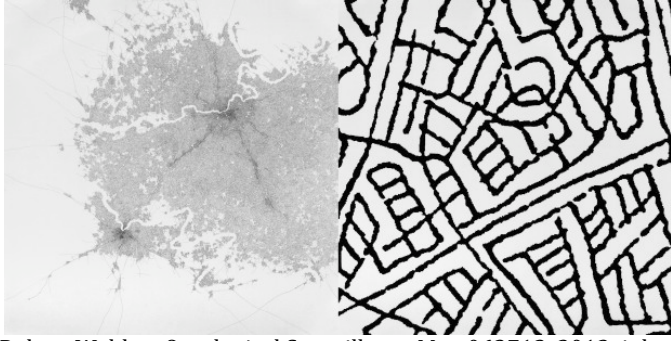
The Map As Art, an exhibition at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, fortifies what many artists and data visualizers have long known: maps are art. In their quest to transmit geographical data, maps borrow from and inform traditional art, all while employing a similar — if usually more constricted — process.

The Kansas City exhibition takes its title from the eponymous book by Katharine Harmon, its curator together with museum Director and Chief Curator Barbara O'Brien. The Map As Art features more than 30 large-scale maps by seven artists, completed in varying degrees of abstraction. Maps are loaded — with boundaries, travel, conflict, treaties, distance, data — and, though they've been treated ably over the years, they are rife for more artistic consideration. The exhibition could easily accommodate a wider breadth of artists. Still, for a small museum, the variation in style is admirable.



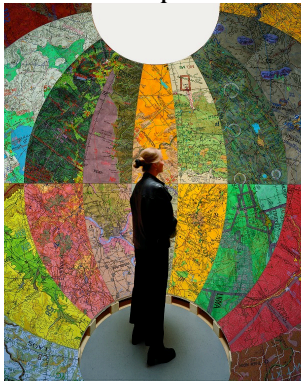
Tiffany Chung, Berlin Wall Map (Scratching the Walls of Memory Project), 2010; embroidery, metal grommets, buttons on canvas, 33 x 44 1/4 inches; Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, New York Here, Tiffany Chung recreates maps of cities using embroidery and grommets. The over-under stitching provides a human touch to lifeless boundaries like the Berlin Wall.

In Robert Walden's distance shots and closeups of the same maps, he takes cues from maps around the world to create new maps of places that don't exist—but look like they could. The ink and gouache diptych series "Ontological Surveillance Maps" demonstrates that we're so accustomed to the language and lines of maps, that the places they represent can be irrelevant.



Robert Walden, *Ontological Surveillance Map 062712*, 2012; ink and gouache on paper, 38 x 76 inches; Courtesy of the artist

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a walk-in sculpture by Joyce Kozloff. Museumgoers enter a towering patchwork globe that represents in acrylic the 24 countries U.S. warplanes have bombed since 1945. The experience of talking within the center of the structure is isolating and booming loud—perhaps not unlike the attacks it represents.



Joyce Kozloff, *Targets (detail)*, 2000; acrylic on canvas with wood frame, 108 inches diameter; Courtesy of the artist and DC Moore Gallery, New York, photo: Jon and Anne Abbott, courtesy DC Moore Gallery, New York

Overall, the exhibition demonstrates how maps have so saturated our visual language that they carry meaning — with or without a corresponding place.

The Map As Art
Through April 21
Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri

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