
DC MOORE GALLERY
JOYCE KOZLOFF
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COURLAN
PRUSSIA
POLAND

Joyce Kozloff

MAPS + PATTERNS

INTERVIEW BY CAREY LOVELACE

DC MOORE GALLERY

A Meander through Maps + Patterns

A CONVERSATION WITH JOYCE KOZLOFF BY CAREY LOVELACE

Perhaps fantasy is what you fill up maps with rather than saying that they too contain the unknown.

—Rebecca Solnit

A FIELD GUIDE TO GETTING LOST

CAREY LOVELACE: Looking at this new series, I'm dazzled by your virtuoso handling of different visual energies—a dynamic of balancing patterns. Yet there's always a disguised criticality in your work. You've said what rekindled your interest in these Islamic star patterns that you appropriated earlier was a trip to the Silk Road. The experience of going to the markets…

JOYCE KOZLOFF: …and the mosques. Two years ago, I travelled with some friends on the Silk Road in western China; it was a re-immersion in Islamic ornament, which excited and influenced me in the 1970s. The mosques on this trip were more provincial, but they were a delight to me, recalling the "higher" art that they evolved from. And it invoked previous trips—for example, a visit to Isfahan, Iran, in 2001, which was so glorious that I just stood in the vast central square and thought I'd gone to heaven.

LOVELACE: I don't know Isfahan.

KOZLOFF: Like Florence during the European Renaissance, Isfahan during the 16th century was a high period in Persian Islamic architecture. Under Shah Abbas, there was a massive building program: palaces, mosques, gardens, the bazaar and bridges were designed and built by the greatest architects. The most important buildings are around Iman Square, with the entrance to the bazaar at the far end, so that it is a gathering place for daily life as well as prayer.

LOVELACE: But what was it visually that struck you?

KOZLOFF: The complexity, richness, sophistication, refinement. It's a quiet kind of beauty—both cerebral and sensual. The Shah, Jameh, and Sheikh Lotfallah mosques have multi-faceted, ever-changing tile decoration that captures and refracts the light throughout their interiors, which open into courtyards. It reminded me that the patterning in my earlier works was just so joyous, and that I'd gotten away from it. I was ready to return, but more than a decade passed before I could integrate patterning with the cartography that had become so central to my practice.

If I Were an Astronomer (Mediterranean), 2014.
Mixed media on canvas, 72 x 54 inches

LOVELACE: And it's a "return" on many levels, isn't it? There are six pieces in all—right?—under the heading *If I Were a Botanist* and *If I Were an Astronomer*...

KOZLOFF: In 1977, I made two artists' books based on Islamic star patterns, one called *If I Were a Botanist*, the other *If I Were an Astronomer*. We digitally enlarged the original pages, based on old slides, and printed them on canvas. They were templates, which I worked over with collage and paint. The collage is entirely from my own work—forty years of outtakes and trial proofs, which I've cut up and recycled. It's an attempt to come full circle and bring everything I've done together, a combination of mapping and patterning. I worked on the first one, *If I Were a Botanist (The Journey)*, for about fourteen months, as it grew horizontally. There are nine panels; it's thirty feet long.

LOVELACE: So the titles *If I Were a Botanist* and *If I Were an Astronomer* run throughout, but you also have subtitles, like the "Journey," for example, or "Tasman" or "Mediterranean."

KOZLOFF: Some of the titles are names of places on the collaged maps attached to the paintings.

LOVELACE: But, a question about the original books: Why is one called *If I Were a Botanist*, and the other *If I Were an Astronomer*? Was there a difference between the geometric units in each one?

KOZLOFF: At the time, I was thinking about desert plants with star formations as being possibly the botanical source of this geometric imagery. It is a form of abstraction that was based on mathematics, built on a system of overlapping grids. The early astronomers (eighth-fifteenth centuries) worked in the Islamic world, as did the first modern cartographers. I was imagining what it would be like if I had been a botanist, or an astronomer.

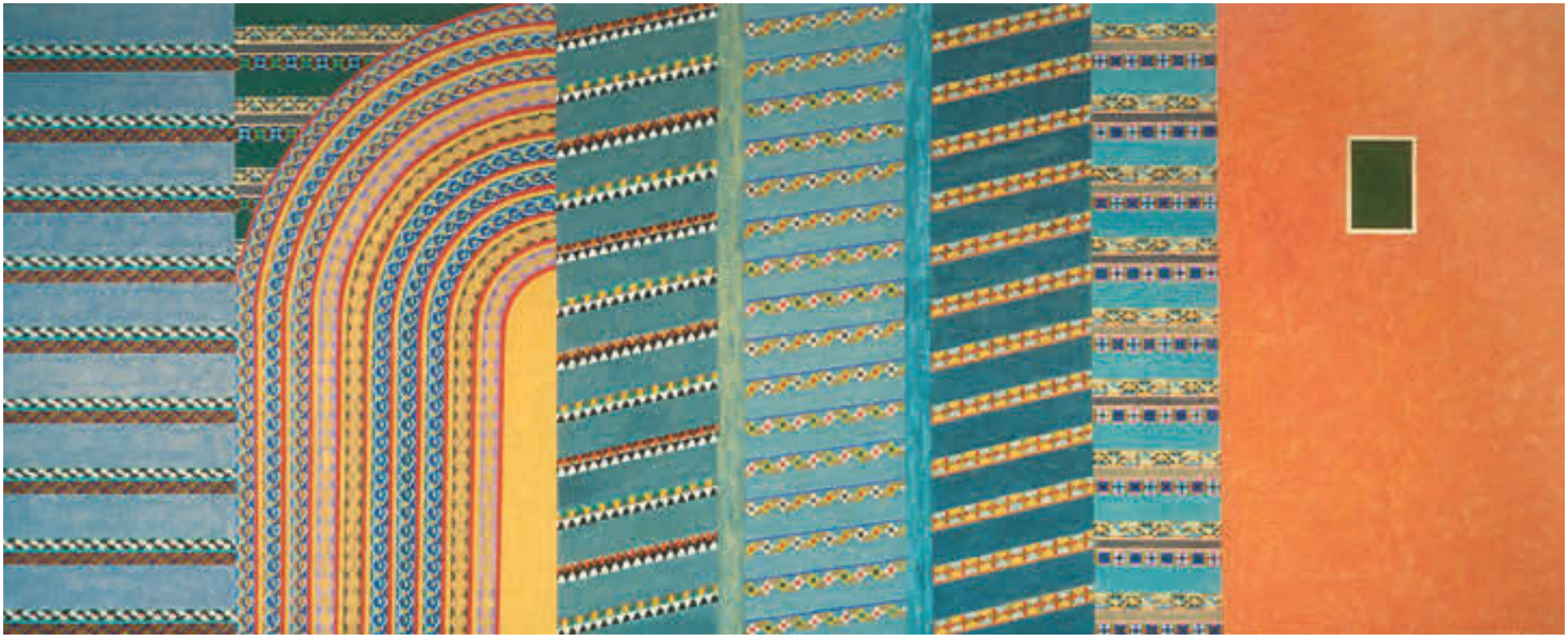
LOVELACE: The elements resemble snowflakes, or cells—components of growth. There is not that much Islamic aesthetic theory available in English, but one Western thinker, Titus Burkhardt, wrote that ornamental repetition in Islamic art represents the "divine unity" underlying the inexhaustible variety of the world. A reference to stars is one that recurs in your work, doesn't it?

KOZLOFF: The duality between the terrestrial and the celestial has been in my art going far back. And during this century, I worked with navigational and aeronautical charts.

LOVELACE: In the seventies, you began utilizing different patterning systems, seemingly drawn from different cultures. How did that evolve? They manifested such surface exuberance, visual opulence. But as an artist coming of age in the late sixties, it was quite a departure from Abstract Expressionism or Ad Reinhardt-ian Minimalism...

KOZLOFF: When I was in grad school, everybody made hard-edged paintings with simple, flat shapes. There, you kept taking things out, reducing and reducing. At a certain point, I joined a group of artists who went the other way and put everything back in. We were young, we were "nose-thumbers." We'd been educated in Greenbergian formalism. In 1970, I began thinking about the word "decorative"—one I was always afraid of someone applying to my paintings, realizing that it was gender-loaded. My world was turned upside- down by feminism, as it was for many women in the early seventies. It made me look outside—particularly at the traditional arts of women and people from other cultures, a revelation because of the way I had been educated in mainstream Western art history. I stopped being afraid and embraced it all. "Let's make the most decorative work we can and rub their noses in it!"

If I Were an Astronomer (Mediterranean), 2014.
Mixed media on canvas, 72 x 54 inches (detail)



Striped Cathedral, 1977. Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 180 inches.

LOVELACE: Current theory frames feminism around issues such as the performative nature of gender, the female body as contested territory, and so forth. But the transgressive use of materials associated with the "feminine," the approach that was your focus in the 1970s, is not part of that paradigm. Yet, it played a part in the feminist "argument" then.

KOZLOFF: Some of us were looking at *sociopolitical* issues around art traditions associated with women. In many parts of the world, including the West, textiles and ceramics were "women's work" and not considered art. The bias against our creativity is so profound! I don't address the subject regularly, but every once in a while, I make a polemical piece (usually when something makes me mad).

Around 1977, I decided to follow the logic of breaking down high/low barriers, and I left painting to begin *working in* craft media, creating installations *with* hand-painted ceramic tiles and silkscreened textiles—moving onto the walls and floors. These led me into public art, which preoccupied me for more than twenty years. I didn't make a painting on canvas between 1977 and 1997. Eventually, I extricated myself from public projects to return to more intimate, personal, and political concerns. But knowing there were ideas left unexplored, I am revisiting earlier preoccupations—not forever, but for now.

LOVELACE: One duality in your work is its sensuality versus the play of form. But then you also have political commentary, manifest in particular in the maps you started

pilaster, *longing*, pilaster, 1977–79. Ceramic tile, wood, lithographs, collage, colored pencil on paper, 92 x 75 inches. Installation in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, 2008, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, NY. Collection Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky, and Popeo, P.C., Boston.

doing in the early 1990s—a theme which interweaves this body of work on a number of levels. It brings an unexpected combination of elements.

KOZLOFF: Many people miss the political content in my work because it doesn't look like "political art," which is usually black-and-white, and not pretty. Cartography was useful as a structure into which I could incorporate that kind of content. Maps just *are* political! But then, simply making decorative works in the seventies was political if you were a feminist. It was a statement, an embrace of women's anonymous art.

LOVELACE: Where did the interest in maps come from?

KOZLOFF: During the 1980s and 1990s, when a public project was initiated, I would receive floor plans and blueprints. So that I could imagine myself inside the space and how one would move through it, I would commission an architecture student to build me a small cardboard model. The plans were the underlying structure of the building, on which I would later create a surface--ornamenting, adding content, constructing a narrative for visitors to experience.

Then I considered bringing that process into my private work. The maps could be a scaffolding for politics, decoration, humor, local histories. I decided to draw maps of cities I was familiar with, that I'd lived in or liked. Then I started cutting up those maps, interspersing and layering them with leaps of association and memory.

LOVELACE: With the body of work in *Maps + Patterns*, some which is very large-scale, you also refer to this concept of the "meander"—seeing a piece far away, and then getting up close…

KOZLOFF: It's a metaphor for travel, for eye-movement. Like when you're walking the streets of a foreign city and there are many things to look at—which I love. In the markets of Western China by the end of the day, my eyes were so tired they were popping out of my head. And layers! One thing

next to another, next to another. I try to do the same, in my own way.

LOVELACE: The author Rebecca Solnit says, "The magic of the street is the mingling of the errand and the epiphany." She writes about the metaphysics of getting lost, of wandering. And when I "wander" into these pieces, I find the microelements fascinating. There are fragments of words that bring to mind Picasso and Braque's very first Cubist collages. I see echoes of your earlier works, *Boys' Art* and *Voyages*, for example, and of course all the mapping projects of fanciful cities or warring nation-states. References to mosques and Islam. Or little bits, like line drawings of bombers that, in turn, serve as components of sunburst-like flowers. And there's an interesting combination of abstraction and figuration—figuration sort of sits inside the abstraction.

KOZLOFF: Yes, there are excerpts from all my past art in this series. I've always juxtaposed disparate elements. It's never been rational! Bruce Chatwin wrote a book about wandering off from one's moorings, *Songlines*, which influenced my thinking earlier.

LOVELACE: Then there's the large wallwork, *The Tempest*—quite different from the star-pattern series of works.

KOZLOFF: *The Tempest*, 10' x 10', is the companion piece to *JEEZ*, 12' x 12'. *JEEZ*, which I finished in 2012, was based on the thirteenth-century Ebstorf map, one of the great works of Christian Medieval art, destroyed in Germany during World War II bombing. It was circular, 12' in diameter. The head of Jesus was at the top, his feet at the bottom, hands on the left and right sides. So the whole world was embraced or contained by Jesus's body. Medieval maps are very inaccurate, as you would imagine, based on the world that they knew. Bible stories are imbedded into them; often they mapped the Crusades. Into this now archaic vision of our planet, I wove 135 other images of Jesus, appropriated from Old Master paintings as well as internet schlock.

The Tempest was originally called *BUDD*, a reference to Buddha. Its source is an eighteenth-century Chinese world map. I'd planned on incorporating scores of Buddhas into its topography. But after I went to China, traveling to Buddhist caves and temples, my conception of the piece, then in progress, changed. Perhaps I felt uncomfortable lampooning their religion. Little by little, I've been adding things into and onto it, actual objects, tiny globes or worlds. It's open-ended. It can absorb anything. The other paintings in this exhibition are more predetermined because the patterns were set from the beginning.

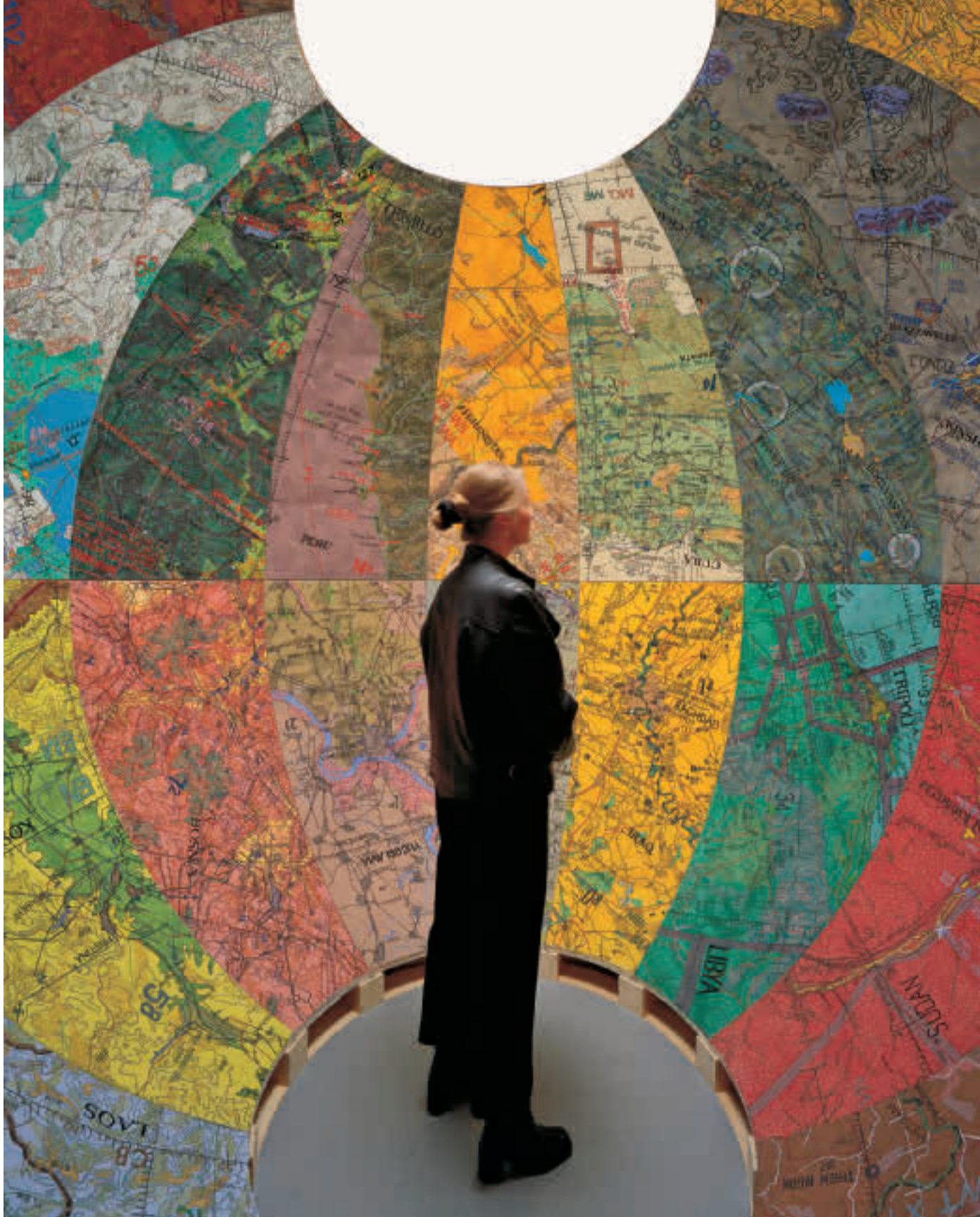
LOVELACE: Is the current title a reference to the Shakespeare play?

KOZLOFF: I call it *The Tempest* because of the sea all around, that whirling energy.

LOVELACE: The play *The Tempest*, interestingly, takes place over the territory of an island. In fact, you could make a Joyce Kozloff map of it! And it, too, addresses power and politics, and also journeying. And it, too, is about getting lost.

KOZLOFF: The piece is lighthearted, but it does contain warriors if you look closely, from Napoleon to Mao. And there are many Renaissance and Baroque engraved images depicting famous cartographers pointing to globes, explaining the world that Europe was then colonizing.

LOVELACE: When I get up close, it reminds me of a vintage children's adventure book. In terms of the elements, tchotchkes, that you attached to the surface of *The Tempest*—is this the first time that you've used relief?



Targets, 2000. Acrylic on canvas with wood frame, 108 inches diameter. (detail)

KOZLOFF: I guess so. It has been fun because I have a great love of kitsch. For me, the kitschier, the better.

LOVELACE: But they seem to blend so well with the storytelling. Yet, often in your mapmaking, what is being charted out is not so much a journey, but power struggles between entire societies and frameworks of ideas. It's on an epic scale. Walter Benjamin once said, "All efforts to make politics aesthetic culminate in one thing, war." *If I Were a Botanist (The Pale)* and *If I Were a Botanist (Gaza)* bring to mind your earlier mapping pieces. Each has two panels, and those are based on star-pattern book pages. But these side panels enclose a map. So it's as if the maps are hemmed in—contained. You see the two as companion pieces?

KOZLOFF: I do, I do. They don't have to be hung next to one another, but they talk to each other. I started to think about the shtetls in the Pale of Settlement. That was the part of Europe where the Jews were confined between 1835 and 1917—today's Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania, where my family came from. Nik, my son, went to Ukraine in September and visited the village that the Kozloff family fled in 1910.

If I Were a Botanist (Gaza) contains a map of another place where people are confined, their mobility and rights restricted. In a not-so-subtle way, I'm making an analogy. People who are supporters of Palestine have compared the occupation to the Holocaust. It occurred to me that this comparison is more appropriate, and I've never seen it made.

LOVELACE: The critic Amy Goldin wrote back in 1978 that you were "mainly a painter," that the richest element in your work was color, and that you have "always enjoyed the slow painstaking work involved in developing texture and detail." *Maps + Patterns*, although made decades later, manifests that same incredible detail. It's kind of a mini-retrospective—but taking the form of floating bits and pieces, like a tangle of Freudian "primary-process" images about to formulate into a dream.

KOZLOFF: I wanted to demonstrate that when you're patterning, you could be mapping, and vice versa. These patterns keep merging into other patterns. It's like—when you're lost and trying to find your way through a city with a map. You're walking among different districts and piecing it together. Or the map may simply confuse you more.

LOVELACE: Maps convey possibility—places yet to be visited. And patterns give a sense of infinity—they have no beginning or end. Both have allover surfaces and are ways of describing the world, aren't they? And they converge in your art.

Carey Lovelace, Co-Commissioner of the U.S. Pavilion of the 2013 Venice Bienalle, was a 2010 Andrew and Marilyn Heiskell Fellow at the American Academy in Rome and is former Co-President of the International Association of Art Critics, U.S. Chapter. Lovelace has written for *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *The New York Times*, and the *Performing Arts Journal*, among many publications. She is working on a book on the Women's Movement in art in the 1970s, *An Army of Lovers Cannot Fail*, scheduled for a 2016 release.

JEEZ (2012), Installation in *The Map As Art*, 2013, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

The Tempest 2014

Mixed media on panel, 120 x 120 inches

(detail following)


Lever
Lever
Lever

If I Were a Botanist: the Journey 2014

Mixed media on canvas, 54 x 361 inches

If I Were a Botanist (Gaza) 2015

Mixed media on canvas, 54 x 91 1/4 inches

(detail following)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If I Were a Botanist (the Pale) 2014

Mixed media on canvas, 54 x 104 1/4 inches


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If I Were an Astronomer (Tasman) 2014

Mixed media on canvas, 72 x 54 inches

(detail opposite)

Biography

Joyce Kozloff was born in Somerville, New Jersey in 1942. She received a BFA from Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pittsburgh, PA in 1964 and an MFA from Columbia University in 1967. She became active in the Feminist movement in 1970, joining the LA Council of Women Artists and later participating in the founding of the journal *Heresies*. Kozloff also pioneered the Pattern & Decoration movement with a group of artists committed to exploring the global applied and decorative arts, as source and inspiration, in order to challenge the hierarchies of the Western, modernist canon. Throughout the 1970s, she exhibited her work at institutions including A.I.R. Gallery; Franklin Furnace; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art; and Women's Building, Los Angeles, as well as the Kunsthaus, Hamburg, Germany; the American Pavilion, Venice Biennale; the Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium; among others.

Between 1979 and 2003, Kozloff dedicated her practice to site-responsive public art. She completed sixteen ceramic tile, glass, and marble mosaics for transportation centers, plazas, schools, and libraries across the United States and in Turkey and Japan. Working with architectural diagrams in connection with these large-scale projects fired her interest in mapping. By the 1990s, maps had become a new conceptual and formal locus for her exploration of social and political issues. In 1999, Kozloff received the Jules Guerin Fellowship/ Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome. During this yearlong residency, she completed *Targets*, a nine-foot walk-in globe painted with an aerial maps of U.S. bombing targets since World War II. A 2001 residency at the Bogliasco Foundation in Liguria, Italy provided the genesis for *Boy's Art*, a series of collaged drawings that examine fascination with war. Distributed Art Publishers (DAP) published an oversized artist's book of these works in 2003.

In 2006, Kozloff featured Targets and debuted the *Voyages* series in a solo exhibition at Spazio Thetis in Venice. Two years later, Dickinson College, PA presented *Joyce Kozloff: Co+Ordinates*, a ten-year survey of paintings, collages, sculptures, and installations created since 1998. A major monograph with essays by Nancy Princenthal and Phillip Earenfight accompanied the exhibition. In 2010, Kozloff published *China is Near*, a book of photography and collage based on her travels to America's Chinatowns. Her most recent body of work, presented here, furthers her career-long investment in expressing feminist and pacifist activism through exuberant, beautiful art.

Artist's studio, New York, 2015

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Artist's studio, New York, 2015

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