

Embellishments and Subversions

Dan Mills: MAPS

The map: the magical, conceptual, fascinating representation of a geographic area, a country, a continent, a world.

The map: an unknowable human universe reduced to a two-dimensional concept in human scale.

The map: an entity, familiar since childhood, that carries an implicit sense of authority.

The map as found object is the perfect starting point for this body of work by Dan Mills. It is the ideal foundation for the examination of the larger themes Mills has in mind: themes of political systems, the power generated by these systems, and the impact of that power on all in its path.

In the work entitled *MARGINALIA*, for example, Mills presents a map of "The World: 1763 - 1848", a period of rampant colonization of much of the world by European powers. Letters across the upper margin of the map are blocked or removed so as to read "Net Gross World History". A similar strategy in *(NATIVE) AMERICAN STORY QUILT* results in the emergence of the sentence "Deny Prior Histories" across the margin of a map of North America.

Continuing with the map as ground, Mills twists our minds in another direction, propelling us from the macro world of mapping continents, to the micro mapping of DNA schematics and chromosomes. *COMPOSITION* gathers together images of peoples from various periods and places, superimposes them on a map, and gilds the whole with a beautifully textured, multi-colored enlargement of the artist's fingerprint. This elegant piece actually calls into question the very concept of race. The micro world floats across the surface of *LEGEND*, a map of the ancient Mediterranean collaged with images of period art works and papered with transparent dress patterns. The whole is framed with a DNA spiral adornment.

While the politically critical implications of the art of Dan Mills are central to the work, a formal reading of each object not only reconciles the aesthetic and social awareness, but succeeds in reinforcing the message. Employing devices such as repetition, juxtaposition, transparent layering, and selection, Mills weaves a host of associations that spark the intellect and ignite the imagination. Repetition and layering read as history and the passage of time, while other devices may speak for voices not heard or represented in the original narrative. The grid is used as an organizing element and yet these works maintain a whimsical edge. The materials too reinforce his themes. The use of dress makers' patterns implies multiple metaphors. With a combination of image and text, and through a filter of time and space, Mills has created a complexity of concepts for us to explore.

These evocative collages are manufactured in the editing and arrangement of ideas and images. The artist presents us with a variety of associations and questions useful in the understanding of our world. We are left to supply the answers.

Nancy Einreinhofer, Director
Ben Shahn Galleries

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