

ART ON THE MAP

CHICAGO CULTURAL CENTER

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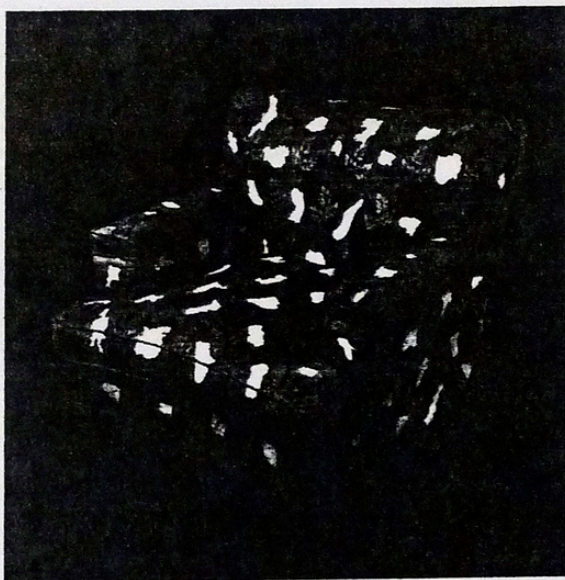
Maps, themselves abstracted representations of physical space and temporal experience, were displayed in their many associations with other art-making processes in this particularly fine exhibit curated by Gregory G. Knight. Fascinated by maps as various kinds of representations—of social and political ideas, of changing notions of national boundaries, and of artists' perceptions of their environments and their individual positions in them—Knight assembled a wide variety of works by 24 artists. In the process he elicited a fresh way of thinking about abstraction itself, and the fundamental abstraction of all art-making endeavors.

The varied works were at times informative, humorous, didactic, and inventive. Nancy Chunn's two large paintings, *China V: Sung Dynasty 960-1279 AD* and *China VI: Yuan Dynasty (Mongol), 1264-1368 AD*, incorporate versions of the artistic styles, compositions, landscapes, costumes, and events of these respective periods. Carol Emmons's installation, *Mneme XXIX: Tourism*, playfully comments on maps as vehicles for ordinary tourism. Filling two rooms with the prosaic paraphernalia of vacations, she lined the soles of shoes with maps, placed banal souvenirs in various relationships with suitcases, and displayed cheap lamps and furniture imitating the styles of exotic places. To further allude to the souvenir "uses" of travel, she arranged her displays in a simulated '40s-style "rum-pus room," where such treasures were often displayed.

Further removed from the actual experiences of travel are Dan Mills's "Armchair Traveller" pieces. In one, an old, soft armchair's faded red upholstery incorporating interwoven green vines and purple flowers becomes a "naturalized" background for

the texts of his cutout maps glued to the surface. Julia Fish's three paintings exemplified, in this context, how abstractions work both as maps and as art objects. Her schematized, visceral explorations of our relationship to places and landmarks are also aesthetic treasures, with clearly defined and satisfying shapes, sensual surfaces, and meandering lines bisecting, bordering, and energizing her forms.

The few disappointing pieces included Julian Schnabel's rather ordinary palimpsest drawings on maps, and Alex Flemming's triptych of layered map-like shapes and words. The conceptual components of these pieces were obscured for many by the untranslated texts written in German and Portuguese. More successful



Dan Mills

Armchair Traveller, 1992-94, collage and acrylic on upholstered chair, 34 1/2" x 34 1/2" x 37", from "Art on the Map." Photo courtesy of the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs.

was Paul Coffey's conceptual map of an imaginary place consisting of translucent curtains covering the gallery's immense windows, spotted with green felt areas suggesting floating continents and red strips alluding to roads or mapped routes. The city outside could be seen through the scrim, and became part of the piece.

Armed with a seemingly simple fascination with maps themselves and the ways in which artists use them, curator Knight captured in this show a glimpse of the depths and complexity of art-making, which is, in a way, the mapping of existence itself.

Claire Wolf Krantz