

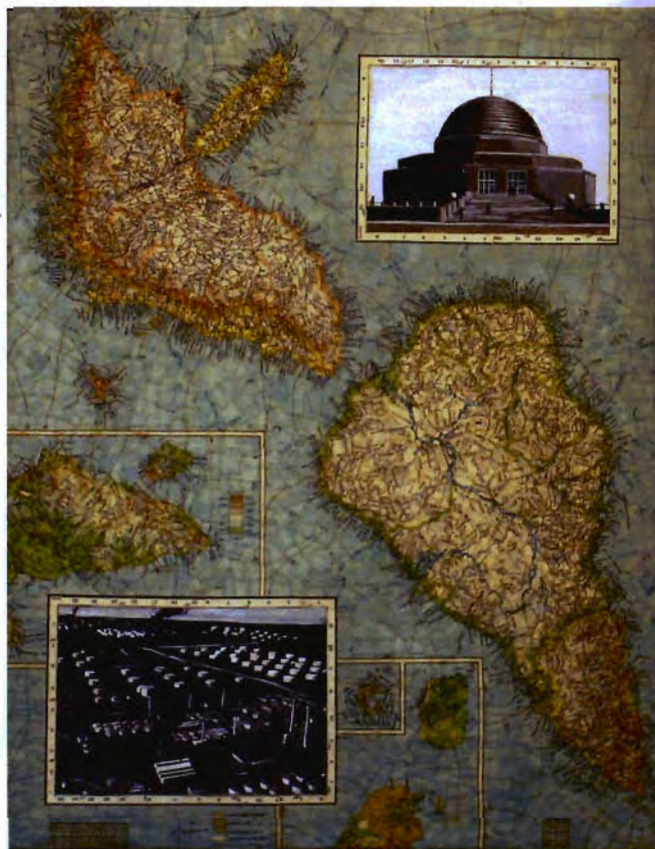
# : artist profile **francesca berrini**

Everyone remembers the cracked, peeling roller-blind wall maps from high school that presented "The World" with such commanding clarity. Francesca Berrini takes such outdated maps and shreds them into ragged squares roughly half an inch per side, which she then rearranges like overlapping puzzle pieces



into collages on canvas. The results are scrambled alternate geographies that seem to embody, unlike Rand McNally, uncertainty writ large. She writes: "I aim to slowly create a separate world from the scraps of my current fascinations. I am reforming the world that is available to me piece by piece to reflect my imagination of what I do not know. A pointless precision beautifully mirroring nothing." Like other artists of her generation, Berrini ruefully and humorously reflects on our growing awareness of the complexity and difficulty of life in a society that until recently took prosperity for granted, and is now as a result, reaping the whirlwind.

Berrini's artistic career seems to have been less tumultuous than her fractured, reassembled geographies might suggest. Growing up in Philadelphia in an art-friendly family ("art was something that you could, and ought, to pursue just like math or science"), she studied Furniture Design at Rhode Island School of Design and learned the metal-fabricating and graphic-design skills that provided her a living later in Oregon, which she picked for its "close proximity to wilderness combined with an active arts scene with reasonable living costs." An avowed "hoarder of books and objects," she works in her large studio surrounded by scavenged and salvaged objects that she slowly de- and reconstructs, in an artistic version of the geologic processes (seismicity, volcanism, sedimentation and mountain-building subduction) that created and occasionally rattle our Pacific Rim



"MYOPIA"  
2007  
TORN MAP COLLAGE  
AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS  
20" x 15"



topography, jolting us from our beds while jolting our artwork askew.

While Berrini's collages subvert Geography-class verities, they do have a humorous and ironic side, which is irresistible: such is our appetite for imaginary worlds, even obviously fictive ones. Early maps had their inaccuracies and anomalies due to ignorance and supposition (here live the one-footed people; there, the large-eared), and fake maps have long been part of the artist's vocabulary.

Memorable examples include Saul Steinberg's Manhattan-centric drawing of the nation, looking west from the Village, and the Surrealists' doctrinal world map, with that banal homeland of philistinism that used to separate Mexico and Canada neatly deleted. Combining fantasy and satire, Berrini endows her planet with patchworked continents, rivers, oceans and peninsulas; truncated and sometimes unpronounceable place names; and countries with such odd, evocative names as *The Republics of Chaos and Entropia*; *Myopia*; and that confused democracy, *Studen Testui*. Her recombining geography, with its parodic scale bars, legends, gazetteers, inset maps, and bird illustrations, and photos of blimps, trains, planetaria and other techno-icons of yesterday, constitutes both a critique of and homage to the classical, rational pursuit of order and structure. DeChirico's WWI-era metaphysical landscapes, and Joseph Cornell's mid-century neo-Victorian keepsakes under glass come from the same "nostalgia for... faraway places" that exist, tenuously, only in the imagination.

Planet Berrini, despite its unreality, is not, however, impervious to change, any more than our shared consensus reality is. The artist plans "a series of sculptures that will be 'activated' by man-made disasters like climate-change-related fires and floods. The sculptures will be located within the hypothetical landscapes of my map collages to play with the idea that disaster is something that happens somewhere else. I think people are used to the idea that calamity is something that usually happens to other people in faraway places."

—DEWITT CHENG

Francesca Berrini's work can be seen at Mark Wolfe Contemporary Art, 49 Geary Street, Suite 202, San Francisco. (415) 369-9404 [www.wolfecontemporary.com](http://www.wolfecontemporary.com)

BOTTOM LEFT:

"THE REPUBLICS OF CHAOS AND ENTROPIA"  
2007

TORN MAP COLLAGE ON CANVAS,  
8½" x 16½"

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARK WOLFE CONTEMPORARY ART

## MONTEREY NOW Peter K. Brooks



Peter K. Brooks, Untitled, 2007, Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 48"

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Top: Susannah Israel, "American Reader", Middle: Matthew Zupnick, "Heads Will Roll", Bottom: Nina Lyons, "Transport"

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