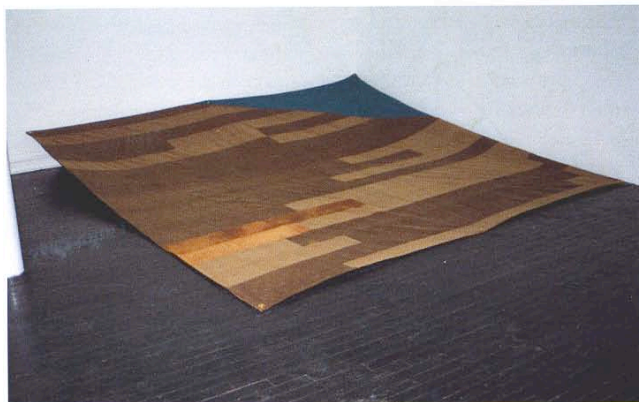


Helen Mirra

Chicago Project Room

The 17 works in Helen Mirra's exhibition, 'Map, Film, Record, Picture, Sculpture' refer to each other in a dense network of allusions and



translations. Mirra's exquisite 16mm silent film *A Map* (1998) transforms the 52nd parallel into alternating watercolour washes of blue and green painted directly onto clear film stock. The colours are based on that imaginary intersection between water and land. At a scale of one foot to one degree longitude, the film is 360 feet long and takes 11 minutes to encompass the

globe, beginning and ending off the coast of Labrador.

Over a few evenings, Mirra screened the film in person, planning to make a print from the partly decayed original which registered its travels through the projector. Each showing was a kind of performance: the few locations the artist

called out along the way ('this is Canada', 'the New Hebrides, 'the Atlantic...'), punctuated the reverie induced by the film's sinuous rippling brushstrokes, semi-subliminal shapes and flickering lights. Mirra's emphasis on the physicality of the film references structural experiments from the 70s, but her simultaneous attempt to lasso spatial expanses and render imaginary

experience in a distilled form suffuses structural rigour with a poetic ambition.

Mirra also made one-inch-wide fabric maps of sections of the 52nd parallel and the Tropic of Capricorn. In the latter, yellow-brown dessert appears among the blue and the green. They hang horizontally on the wall, referring back to the material proportions of the film, but arrest its liquid whizzing motion and eat the light, as if the cotton's dulled opacity were testimony to the here and now. In *Sidewalk Cover* (1999) the squares of the pavement are posited as film frames, sewn in green canvas. They also suggest a greening of the city, at least in strips. Ink on paper drawings, folded and re-opened like maps, were titled after geographic coordinates. Blue drawings referred to water, while green signified points traversed by railroad tracks – locations that used to be green before the tracks were laid.

Relationships between 'there' and 'here' are also associated with 'then' and 'now'. Made from corduroy to look like floorboards *Portable Deck* (1999) transformed a corner of the room into an old-fashioned tilting ship. In her vinyl record *Along, Below* (1999) (piles of which became a sculpture, reminis-

cent of Gonzalez-Torres' paper stacks), Mirra plays repeated guitar chords while speaking or singing in a monotone voice about walking and sailing. The guitar is mesmerising while her voice is embarrassingly breathy and present, offering earnest and awkward poetics that seem to come from a different time. It is hard to know what to make of her intimate offer to send you a tailor-made poem if you type your address on an ancient manual typewriter. Mirra is able to risk such nostalgia in a future-hungry world through the steady and rigorous relationships that she has built in and among the pieces.

Garanimal (1988-98) is a tightly packed line of all of the artist's clothes folded up and ordered into colours that mimic the green-blue-yellow-brown colour scheme of the show. A gar is a long fish – linked with the word 'animal', it becomes an amphibious construction that stands in for the artist, built from what she might pack for her imaginary travels. The fact that the artist is borrowing clothes for the duration of the exhibition seems contrived and oddly self-referential, but as a fictionally shed skin – a self put on and taken off – it nestles into the rest of the show.

Laurie Palmer

Helen Mirra
Portable Deck
1998
Corduroy, wool
300x300cm