

Stitched Cartographies

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My work combines aerial photography, USGS maps, soil surveys, and satellite imagery. I also incorporate the more minute systems of the microbial world. I enjoy the play between the two scales of magnified microbial life and remotely sensed images of huge tracts of land: both deal with the translation of scientific information into a visual form. In my present work, these once-separate themes have merged. The overlap is seen in vessel-like arteries of water, tundra pools that look cellular, and circuit board-shaped canals.

It is the use of maps in organizing our ideas of land that interests me most of all. My focus is usually on human-impacted landscapes and visual evidence of our interaction with land. Many of my pieces are not based on specific places, but occasionally I will work from historic maps or use imagery from existing maps, creating an entirely new

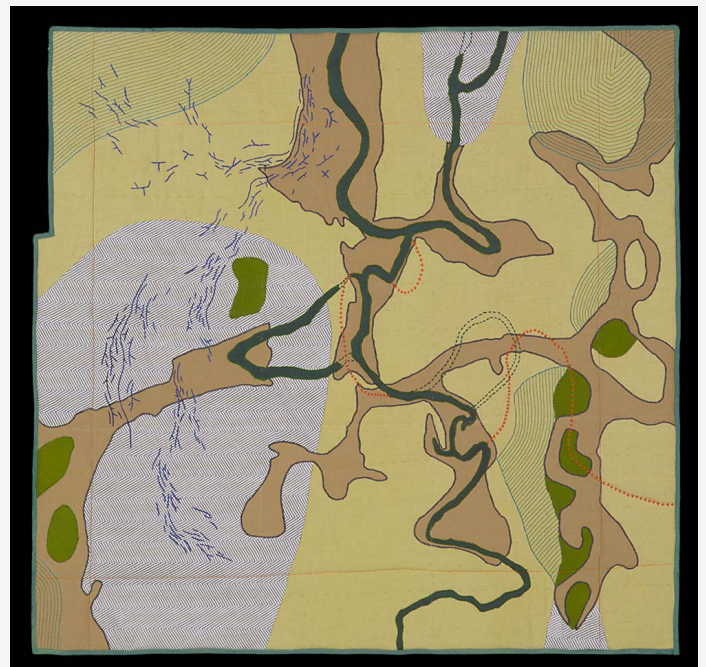
experience. For me, the pieces are intimate explorations of map language and imagined landscapes. The story is enhanced by my use of salvaged materials like secondhand clothing, upholstery scraps, and vintage kimonos. My process involves layering cloth by machine stitching, cutting, and hand sewing. The subtractive technique of reverse appliqué creates water boundaries and mimics erosion. Layering cloth and stitching lends itself to representing development.

While the work relies in part on modern mapping technology for inspiration, my process is relatively low tech. I do not use a computer or any imaging software in creating my work, and I strive to use hand techniques and tools as opposed to electric. Through my research and methodical hand work I have determined that maps create more questions than they answer.

SOIL SURVEY

2016. (23 × 22.5 in). Textile.

This work is inspired by an obsession with an online collection of African soil maps from the 1960s. The idea of analyzing and categorizing soil types intrigues me as much as the energy and color of the maps themselves. Being interested in scientific illustration, I cannot help but connect the map forms to the microscopic realm. In a time where information can be relayed at the touch of a button, it is satisfying to slowly craft work that is inspired by cartographers and biologists of the past.

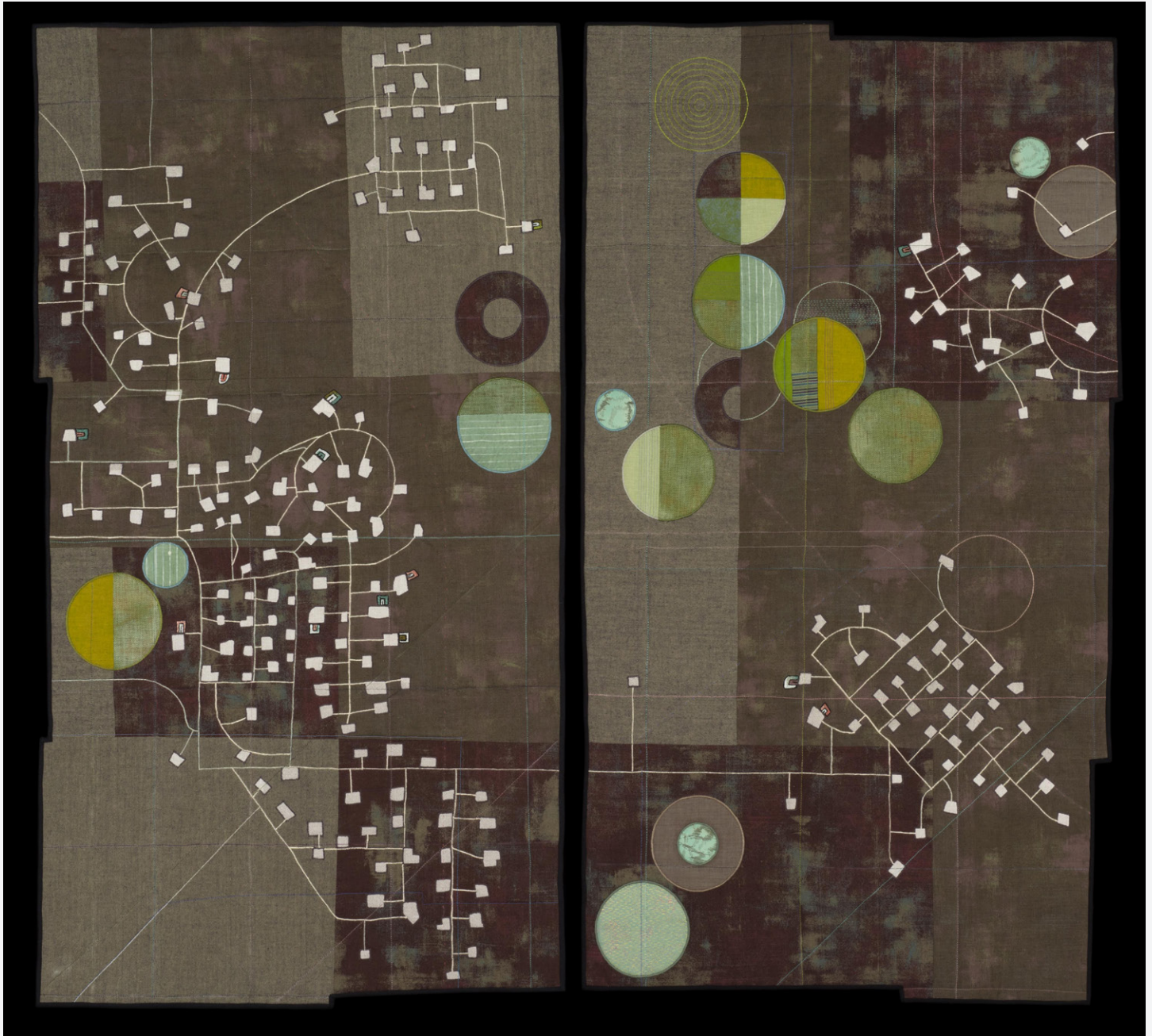


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OIL AND WATER DIPTYCH

2015. (47 × 41 in). Textile.

This piece is based on the West Texas landscape of oil pump jacks and pivot irrigation arms. Following my brother's relocation to that area, I searched online to see what it looked like. I was surprised by the expanses of the oil fields interspersed with patches of irrigated farmland. It made me wonder what it all might look like when the oil and water reserves inevitably run dry.



CHANGING COURSE

2015. (33.5 × 33 in). Textile.

This piece is a study of how riparian farmland can record the changes a river goes through over the years. In aerial photos, the previous banks of the river can be seen etched into the fields.



FISK'S GHOST

2014. (25 × 41 in). Textile.

This piece is based on Harold Fisk's map created for the Mississippi River Commission in 1944. While it is not an accurate portrayal of Fisk's map, it is inspired by how his map shows "traces of [the rivers'] previous courses, twisting and writhing in a vast intestinal tangle." The white silk represents the idea of "tamed" boundaries of a river after being set by the Corps of Engineers. I think of it as the skeleton left behind after the more lively parts of the river, the muscle and sinew, were suppressed. The numbered long lots show a history of people re-establishing ownership in response to the changing river.



SOIL SURVEY

2016. (23 × 22.5 in). Textile.

This piece is inspired by a fascination with the imagery of soil maps and years of working with microbial imagery. The abstract qualities of the soil surveys invite people to find recognizable images. They remind me of the liveliness and narrative qualities of old scientific illustrations.



CROSSING OVER: GEE'S BEND

2010. (38 × 37 in). Textile.

This is a fairly accurate map of Gee's Bend, Alabama and is inspired by J. R. Moehringer's Pulitzer Prize-winning article titled *Crossing Over*. The article explores the journey of life and death as it relates to the history of the bend in the Alabama River, near Boykin, Alabama. This is a place where freed slaves were marginalized, yet found ways to thrive. The piece is also inspired by the quilt traditions of the women who lived and worked on the land. The pieced sections reference the strip quilting of the women and property divisions common to the South. In the article, the Alabama River becomes a metaphor for the River Jordan. The place names are those of existing cemeteries and the dotted lines represent the passage between the graves and the river.



Visual Fields focuses on the appreciation of cartographic aesthetics and design, featuring examples of inspirational, beautiful, and intriguing work. Suggestions of works that will help enhance the appreciation and understanding of the cartographic arts are welcomed, and should be directed to Section Editor Matt Dooley: mapdooley@gmail.com.