

Figure 9.1

**Nien Schwarz**

*From Legend to Market, 1997-99 (detail)*

map (NT Geological Series, 1962), drill core, vinyl  
*Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999*

## 9. "Shopping Around"<sup>1</sup> 1997-1999

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"Why did we want to dig to China? Why does every kid want to dig to China? And why was I so positive that when you fell through the Earth feet-first, you would come out the other side head-first?"

William Bryant Logan<sup>2</sup>

"The map allows one to see something that otherwise might be invisible."

Svetlana Alpers<sup>3</sup>

### From Legend to Market

"Implicit in the contemporary artist's manipulation of the map, is an appreciation of its coded nature"

Wynstan Curnow<sup>4</sup>

#### Part One: Geological Bags

During my summers working in the Arctic, when I was not busy preparing food for the crew or wandering across the land with air photos and compass in hand, I would often sit for hours on end, hunched over a large table in the kitchen tent patiently hand-colouring a new geological map in the making. I loved colouring these maps, especially if I was familiar with the terrain and all its little creeks, lakes, and hills. The bubble gum pink colour was my favourite because there was lots of it to add to each map and it contrasted so nicely with the red, yellows, and blues. It represented the oldest rock, known geologically as "basement," and was exposed extensively because the land had been recently scraped clean during the last ice age by glaciers pushing south.

But my fingers would all too quickly refuse to keep the pink within the precise black lines plotted on the mylar; the cold rendered my hands useless for detailed work. I would laugh to myself as I fumbled with the matches,

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<sup>1</sup> "Shopping Around" is the title of a course taught by Gordon Bull of the Art Theory Workshop, CSA.

<sup>2</sup> Logan, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Svetlana Alpers, "The Mapping Impulse in Dutch Art," The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century, London, John Murray, 1983, p. 133.

dropping them before they lit, in an effort to light the oil stove. I would sigh with relief when absorbing heat through a large mug of steaming coffee.

There were days when I was particularly intent to assist in colouring these maps and to absorb myself in the coded nature of some other place. It was a form of escapism, to keep my level of agitation and nervousness in check. There were grizzly bears in the vicinity and I had already been charged by a bear one night when the rest of the camp lay asleep. Luckily the bear's charge in my direction came to a full stop when somebody else emerged from their tent to relieve their bladder as well. Possibly the bear could not decide which human looked tastier and headed instead for the tantalising smell of our coolers in which I stored the meat. During the day, when I was left on my own, I knew the only way out of a determined bear's charge was to shoot the bear behind the shoulder and straight into the heart. I coloured with my head cocked to the side, listening for the slightest sound, knowing full well that my level of expertise with a shotgun was insufficient to do more than just scare the bear. The number of times I envisioned a horrible death is staggering and I wondered often how the crew would deal with it on their return home in the evening.

While colouring a map, I had lots of time to reflect on my relationship to the depiction of ground unfolding on my kitchen table. I often felt a bit sad because I knew that, if the lines and colours on the map converged in certain ways and the numbers were deemed interesting, the very spot I was colouring might next season be overrun by prospectors and economic geologists. On the fragile skin of the tundra the imprint of their numerous activities would be highly visible until the advance of the next ice age would smooth the scars away. In contrast, the relocation of stones into circular rings marking Inuit tent sites, *inukshuks*, meat caches, or grave sites were the only indication of First Nations' people occupation of the same country for thousands of years.

I often pondered at how people so far removed from our remote little cluster of cotton tents could read the land through the legends or keys that

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<sup>4</sup> Curnow, Wynstan, Putting the Land on the Map, Govett- Brewster Art Gallery, 1989, p. 6.

accompanied geological maps. How was it that decisions to invest millions of dollars in further exploration of a particular stretch of ground could be based on swirling configurations of almost psychedelic fields of brilliant colour (Figure 9.1). Susan Sontag states that the “ability to read surfaces is essential to our industrialised cultures” because we are constantly targeted with “new improved” products.<sup>5</sup> Sontag quotes Oscar Wilde, who wrote that “Reading surfaces - according to codes and signals that we can see and read - the mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.”<sup>6</sup> This 20th century geoscientific reading of the land differed remarkably from indigenous readings of “the lay of the land.”<sup>7</sup> As outlined below, for me it was not a far-fetched idea to turn these maps, as keys to economic prospects, into shopping bags.

In my view, grocery bags and geological maps are related intimately. Without geological research to locate ore deposits, from which machinery and fertilisers are produced, our grocery bags and stomachs would remain empty. In this sense, the bags and their imaginary contents map our contemporary needs and material desires.

The wildly colourful bags are placed, one behind the other, forming rows of bags radiating outward from the back corner of the gallery (Figure 9.2). The bags are all similar in size to old-fashioned brown paper grocery bags, but are constructed from obsolete 1:63,000 geological maps of the Northern Territory dating from the early sixties. The top edges of the bags are serrated, like their discontinued supermarket counterparts. Each bag is raised from the floor using four geophysical core samples to create a stronger figure-ground relationship (Figures 9.3). The repetition of these identical forms is somewhat mechanical; like a fragment of a much larger production line. On closer inspection, each individual object is unique, describing a particular

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<sup>5</sup> Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1992, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> “Lay of the land” is an extract from the title page to a catalogue of the exhibition *Nai Ngarrambai Wanggirali Burrangiri Nangi Dyannai Ngurui*, held at Canberra Contemporary Art Space in conjunction with the Canberra National Sculpture Forum of 1995. The extract in its entirety reads “the lay of the land is how you know your country: when you look behind you, you always see your tracks”.



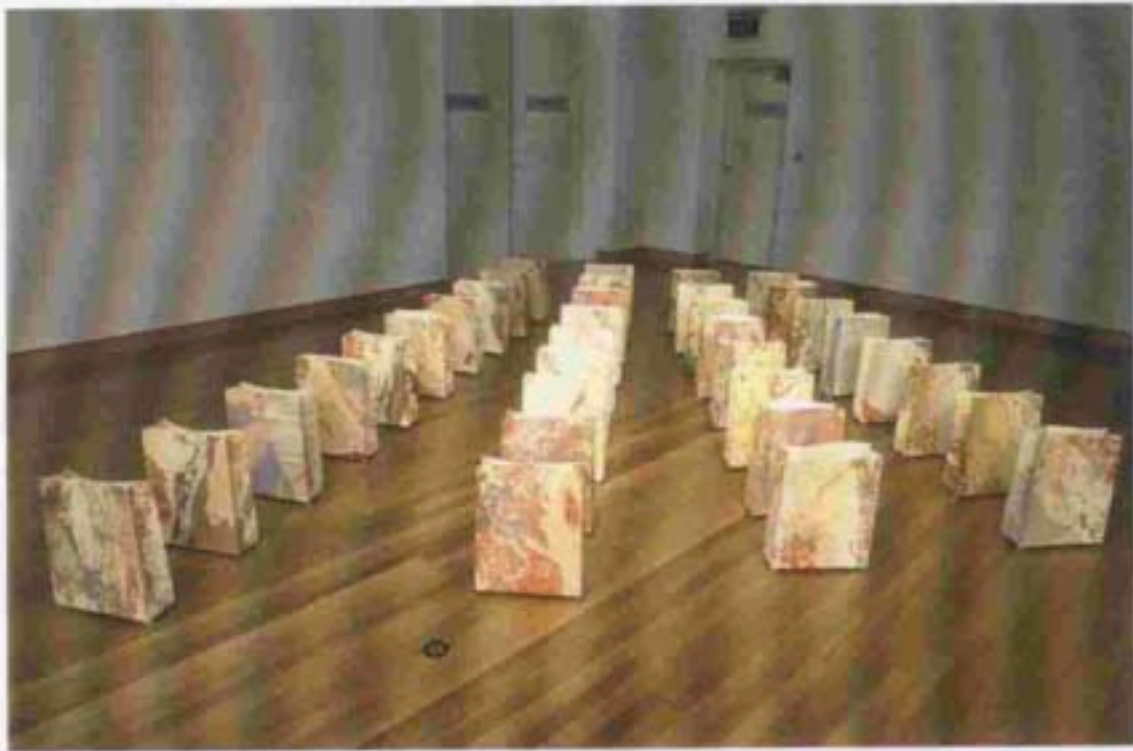


Figure 9.2 (top)  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*From Legend to Market, 1997-99*  
54 maps (NT Geological Series, 1962), drill  
core, vinyl  
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG,  
Canberra, 1999

Figure 9.3 (bottom)  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*From Legend to Market, 1997-99 (detail)*  
maps (NT Geological Series, 1962), drill  
core, vinyl  
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG,  
Canberra, 1999

section of ground in a design that would never occur on any other map of any other part of the world.

In the bottom of each bag, and corresponding to the most prominent colour on its exterior, is a section of vinyl flooring, contact paper, or linoleum. The patterns on these manufactured materials reflect rock patterns commonly used in domestic environments, such as granite, marble, slate, baked clay tiles, etc. These manufactured products, their designs made to reflect the ground or how we modify it (such as clay), have caused me to consider the variety of ways we manipulate the earth to suit our needs. Placed deep within each bag, the flooring material invites scrutiny and is intended to draw the viewer's body closer to ground level like a geologist searching the ground for clues to decipher an outcrop.

My inclusion of the geophysical drill core samples (complete with sample location and orientation numbers) as "feet" for the bags was intended primarily as a framing device and to lend the bags a sense of motion; that they were not rooted to the ground. However, I included them also because they are so familiar to me and form a natural extension of the geological maps. In an instant, the cores help to recall the various sites at which I have worked in assisting geophysicists in the drilling of samples. All my life I have had little cores such as these in my possession - first through my father and later my husband; both men working as geophysicists. It is the anticipation of discovering what is unearthed that I find so exciting. Logan writes: "holes are the archetypal place of discovery," and for me it is in the form of these colourful and sometimes exquisitely beautifully patterned pieces of ground, that triggers a multitude of other discoveries through memory, place, and people, and my ongoing desire to understand how we perceive the ground beneath our feet.

But these geological maps are as much about not understanding the ground as they are an expression of packaged information and knowledge. Most people, unless they are trained geologically, do not understand this kind of reading of the land. The rock-patterned inserts are a stand-in for reality, yet

their manufactured quality reflects simultaneously our detachment from the ground.

### Part Two: The Legends

Standing adjacent to the bags, and echoing their vibrant colours, are three columns (Figure 9.4). The columns are composed of painted steel boxes, one stacked above the other (Figure 9.5). Each unit of colour has been chosen to reflect the composition of the ground as depicted in the legends printed in the margins of the geological bags. The modular composition in relation to the bags is a combination of sculptural and painterly concerns.

Geological maps, in particular, are brilliantly coloured. Colour codes on maps are typically standardised, with shades of pink used for granite and blue for limestone, for example. My idea was to use this abstract system of codification and take it a few steps further by physically creating objects based on the maps' legends, using materials derived from geological exploration.

Each unit was constructed of galvanised steel using a single sheet of metal to minimise blemishes caused by spot welding. The units were designed to be compatible, each folded to fit snugly with its neighbours above and below. I delighted greatly in designing these vertical progressions and simultaneously exploring further the works of Minimalists, and in particular, echoing the work of Donald Judd, a long time favourite (Figure 9.6). I intended these columns to be very physical in the space for which they were designed. The three columns are of different heights - the tallest intended to overwhelm the viewer. Viewing the stacked boxes "straight-on," they appear almost two-dimensional, pictorial; their three-dimensional quality virtually denied by the minimal reflectivity of the matte paint. The colours are quirky, "off the wall" and playful, and accentuate the volume of the hollow columns by disavowing their mass and industrial origins.

The colours were considered very carefully, with much emphasis placed on testing brands of latex paint and choosing optimum colours. Some of the colours are vivid, almost sharp, while others are more subdued and earthy. To "knock back" the steel surfaces, and render them similar in appearance to

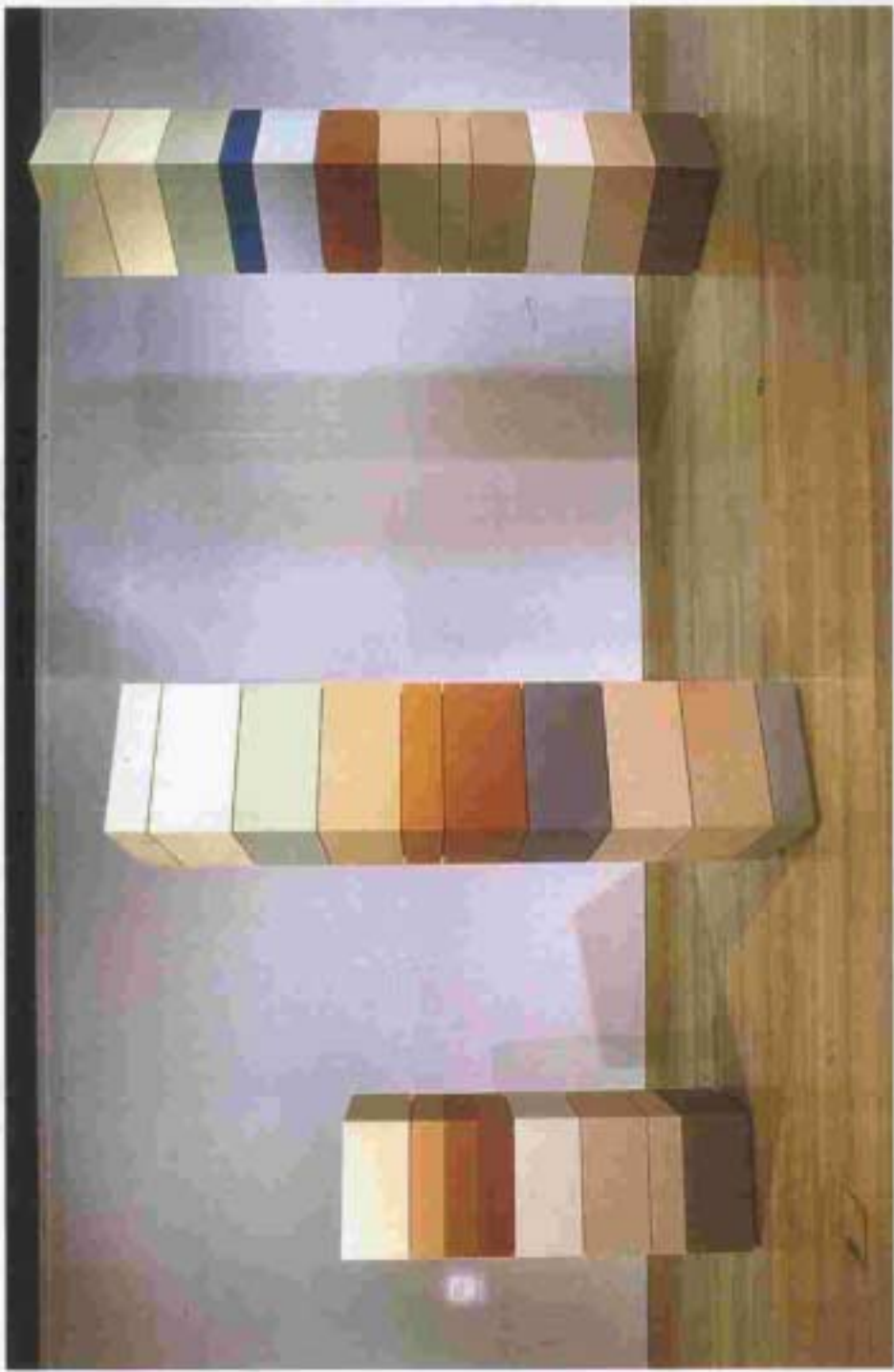


Figure 9.4

**Nien Schwarz**

*From Legend to Market, 1998-99 (detail)*

galvanised steel, acrylic paint

Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999

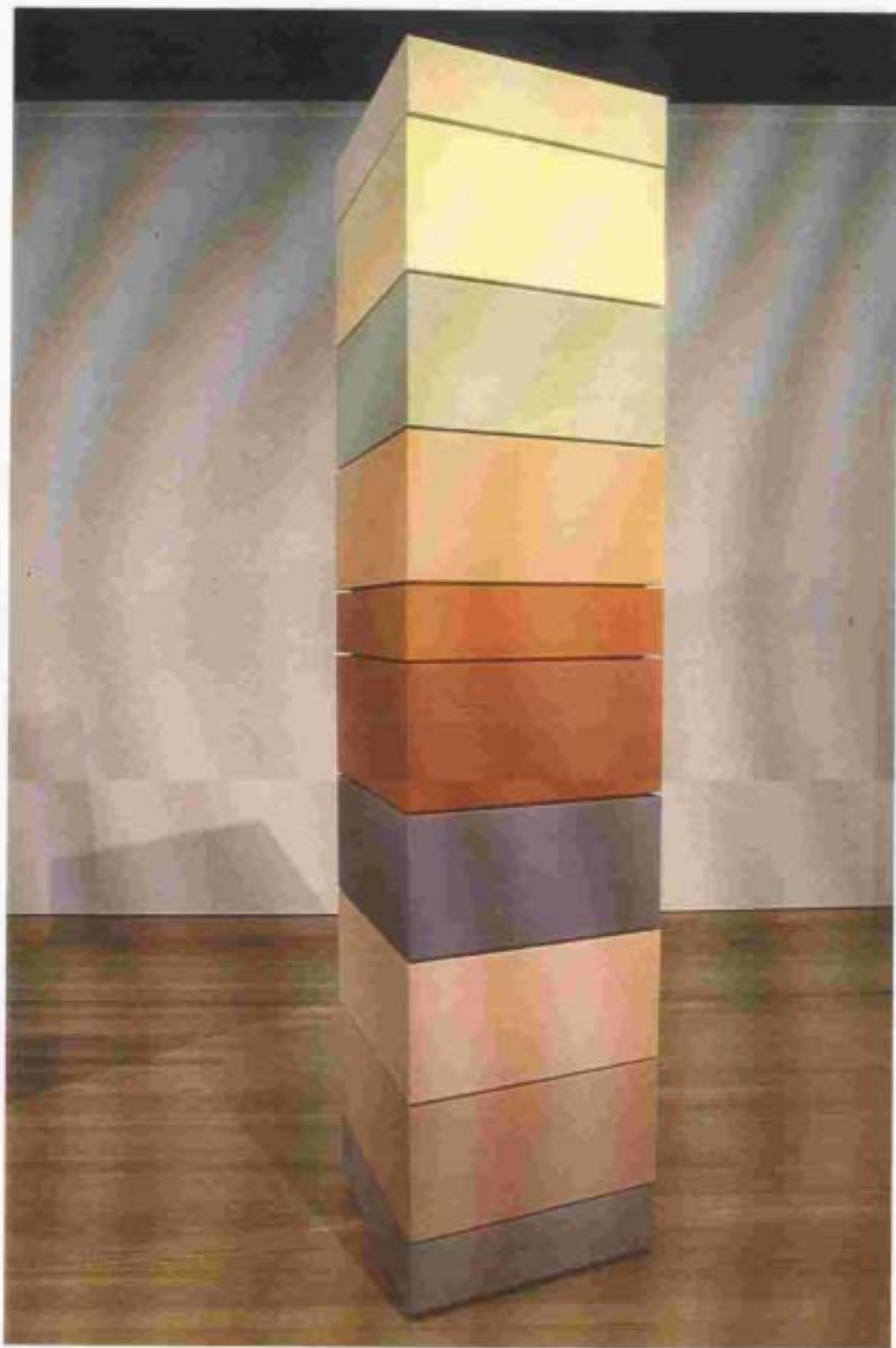


Figure 9.5  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*From Legend to Market, 1998-99 (detail)*  
galvanised steel, acrylic paint  
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999



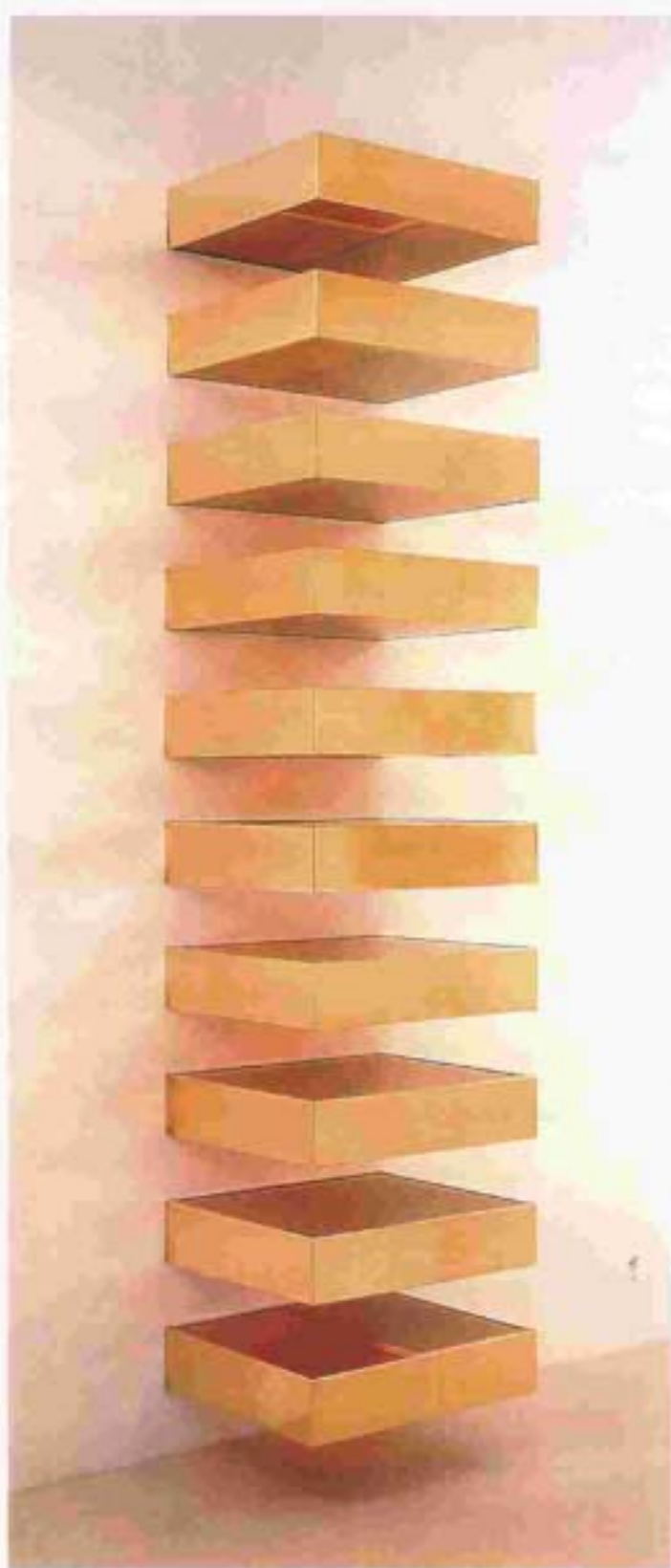


Figure 9.6  
**Donald Judd**  
*Untitled*, 1972  
copper, enamel, aluminium  
D. Batchelor, *Minimalism*, Cambridge University Press

the paper maps on which they were based, the most matte paint available was employed.

The bags and accompanying columns reflect structural, compositional, and chromatic aspects of an abstract system of knowledge and sign related to geological mapping. I have approached this work with an enthusiasm for seeking ways of linking science and art, and as well painting and sculpture.

### *Search, the international series*

**search** verb. 1. to look through (a place, records,, etc.) thoroughly in order to find someone or something. 2. to examine (a person) for concealed objects by running one's hands over the clothing. 3. to look at examine (something) closely: *to search one's conscience*. 4. to discover by investigation. 5. *Surgery*... 6. *Military*. to fire all over (an area). 7. *Computer technol.* to review (a file) to locate specific information. 8. *Archaic*. to penetrate. 9. search me. Informal. I don't know. Search from old French *cherchier*?

*Search* consists of approximately one hundred shopping bags. Each has been constructed carefully from a topographic mapsheet of a country or region located beyond Australia's borders. The bags, with connotations of consumerism and consumption, but constructed of maps, are intended to suggest intimate connections to the ground (Figure 9.7). The use of maps in the bags' construction, and including maps of so-called "Third World" countries, was a response to a thematic exhibition on dislocation and relocation, organised by a graduate student of CSA during her stay in Cape Town, South Africa, for six months.

I had in my possession, numerous topographic mapsheets of many African nations. I have never been to Africa, but I recognised many of the place names and was surprised to note the number of mines indicated on these maps. My husband, a geologist, recently returned from Southern Africa after several months of fieldwork. His impression of the region was of staggering wealth and widespread abject poverty and his accounts helped shape my ideas.

Constructing bags from maps of this region, and titling the work *Search*, materialised from the notion of searching for a better life. I was thinking of the context of the exhibition and how displaced Africans worldwide struggle

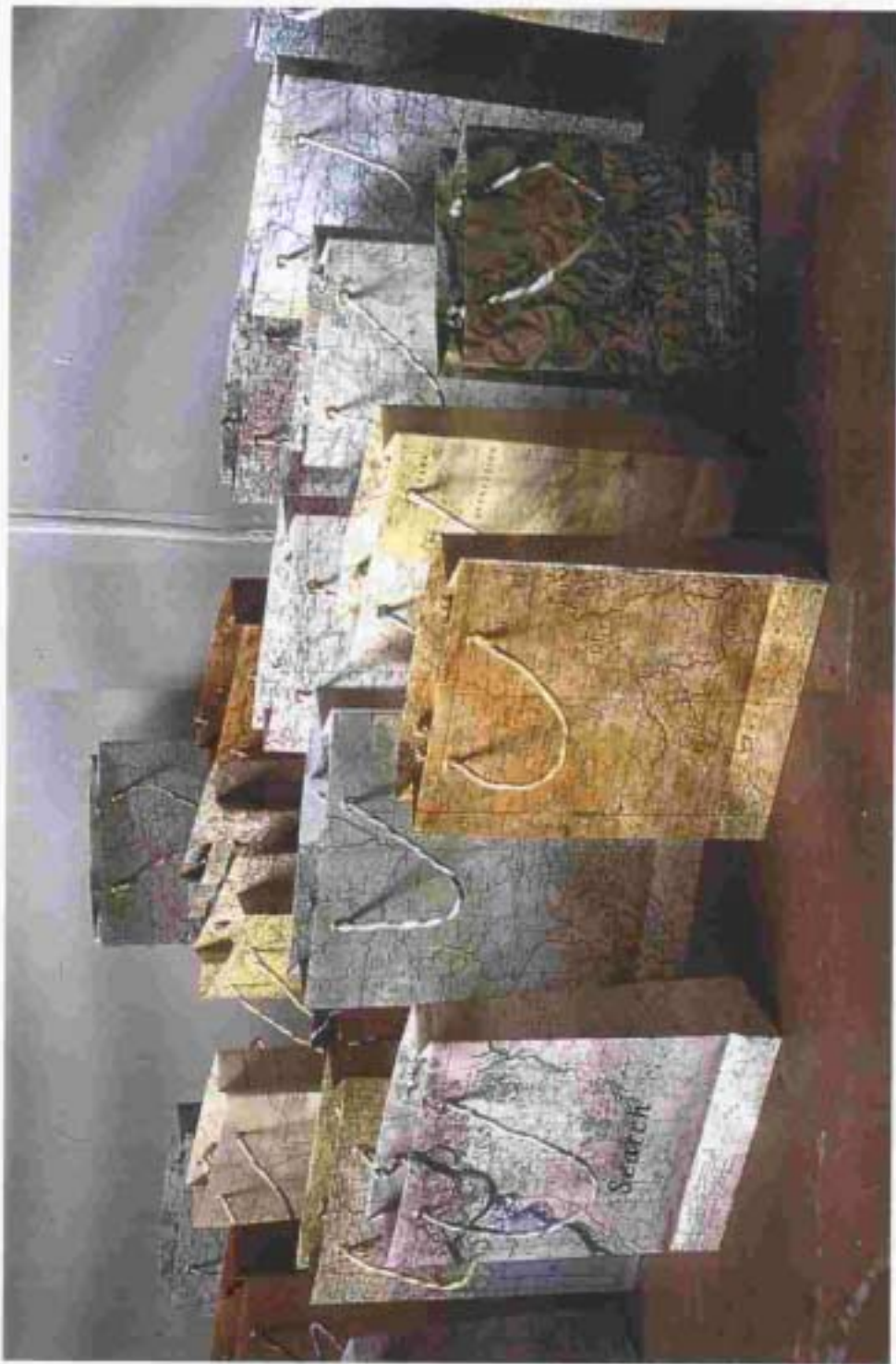


Figure 9.7  
Nien Schwarz  
*Search*, 1997-99 (detail)  
maps, paper cord, brass eyelets, vinyl

for equality and, in many instances, search for ways to reconnect with their homelands. At the same time, the image of the black African gold miner in one of the Time Life books I explored as a child, kept reminding me of the economic geological connections between people and places. In a short catalogue essay that accompanied the bags to Cape Town, I wrote:

*Search* is a sculptural work that materialised from my long-standing interest in exploring the kinds of relationships that people have with both familiar and unfamiliar territories. Each bag incorporates a different topographic mapsheet and sports a **Search** label that resembles a brand name or corporate logo. The word "search" is commonly used as a verb and is associated with activities of looking, exploring, investigating, locating, discovering, and finding. "Search" operating on its own has an air of the imperative, whereas used as a noun then becomes "a search" or "the search." We may search a particular place, search for a particular thing, or we may search our conscience. Generally speaking, "to search" or to conduct "a search" means that we are looking for something not readily apparent, as reflected in the expression "search me" - used often in place of the more formal "I don't know." Search in the context of these shopping bags is intended as a prompt to provoke viewers into taking a closer look at the bags and to search for meanings that lie behind their creation and the geological resources that would be used in the manufacturing of objects that would otherwise fill them.

Shopping bags are containers with handles used to facilitate the transport of goods between the site of purchase and the destination where the goods are consumed. Such bags are also an effective advertising medium for retailers and manufacturers, and fancy designer label shopping bags are especially popular in retail of higher priced goods and luxury items. Among consumers, designer label bags are often considered to be symbolic of an individual's purchasing power and economic status. In this instance, the bags are the ubiquitous 20th century symbol in the search for a better life, whether through international trade of goods, or on a more personal level, such as the immigration to a more promising country. Never before have there been such mass migrations of people from all over the world in search of a better life. These empty bags are yet to be filled with the desires of those searching.

The bags were hung at various heights, with most placed at waist level, to facilitate links between the work, the notion of possession/dispossession, and viewer's body (Figure 9.8).

For a subsequent exhibition in Canberra, I changed some of the bags. I deleted several of the African maps and added maps of China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Papua New Guinea. I became





Figure 9.8 (top)  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*Search*, 1997-99 (detail)  
maps, paper cord, brass eyelets, vinyl  
Vital Signs, St Michaelis School of Art,  
Cape Town, South Africa, 1998

Figure 9.9 (bottom)  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*Search*, 1997-99 (detail)  
maps, paper cord, brass eyelets, vinyl, oil  
Vital Signs, Photospace, CSA, 1998



interested in the exchange of goods and services between Australia and these countries. The construction of these fancy paper shopping bags, using maps of places where many people have little purchasing power, was intended as a paradox and a reflection on our wealth in Australia in relation to other not-too-distant places. To emphasise the links between here and there, I incorporated text.

To the exterior surface of one side of each bag I added vinyl text, laser-cut in reverse. Oiling the paper gave the bags a translucent parchment- or skin-like quality, and made the text, and some of the printed detail of the map, legible on the inside of the bag (Figure 9.9). The text, in conjunction with placement of the bags at various heights, was designed to prompt viewers to explore both the interiors and the exteriors of the bags and to link the distant geographies of each map to the viewer's own space. The arrangement of the text changed as the bags were switched around to take advantage of their colourful exteriors, but a basic version read as follows:

Feel/ground/underfoot/explore/water/river/sea

See/from/far or near

what/lies in between?

Going/here to there/there to here

*Search* is currently on exhibition in Poland. There the bags have been placed in a large space of their own. They sit on the ground, placed loosely in a circle - a small island of empty bags pointing beyond Europe. The search here is what each viewer brings to the work.

*(Dis)comfort Zone: Mine/Mine*

"...we tend to see the world in circles while our non-Aboriginal brothers and sisters tend to see the world in straight lines."

Patrick Dodson<sup>8</sup>

- a. mine* 1. something or someone belonging to or associated with me.
- b. mine* 1. a system of excavations made for the extraction of minerals, esp. coal, ores, or precious stones. 2. any deposit of ore or minerals. 3. a lucrative source or abundant supply; she was a mine of information. 4. a device containing an explosive designed to destroy ships, vehicles, or personnel, usually laid beneath the ground or in water. 5. a tunnel or sap dug to undermine a fortification. 6. a groove or tunnel made by certain insects, esp., in a leaf. 7. to dig into (the earth) for (minerals). 8. to make (a hole, tunnel, etc.) by digging or boring. 9. to place explosive mines in position below the surface of (the sea or land).

The centre of the gallery floor is occupied by a sweeping pattern of shopping bags, placed in arcuate rows two or three bags thick. The bags sit directly on the ground and are placed end to end with spaces in between. *En masse* they form three arcs, like the beginnings of circles (Figures 9.10, 9.11). Both sides of each bag are labelled in the centre with an adhesive vinyl logo, much like a brand name, but the words, such as *Amangu*, *Balardung*, *Dharug*, *Kalaamaya*, *Ngadjuri*, *Waka Waka*, *Woiwurung*, *Wonnarua*, and *Yuggera*, are all different and they appear unfamiliar (Figures 9.12, 9.13). The colours of cream, black, red, light blue, brilliant blue, mint green, sepia, brown, in which the text is printed, suggests that the text has something in common with the maps of the same colours from which the bags are constructed. The dominant colours are picked up again, this time in the handles of the bags, thereby linking the map directly to the hand and metaphorically to the body as a whole. Collectively, the map bags appear to depict the entire country of Australia. The interiors of the bags are a matte black that draws the eye deep down inside, possibly even below the floor on which they sit. In the bottom

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<sup>8</sup> Patrick Dodson, "Cycles of Survival for Indigenous Australians", *ANU Reporter*, Australian National University, Vol. 29, No. 18, 1998, p. 12.



Figure 9.10

**Nien Schwarz**

*(Dis)Comfort Zone: Mine/Mine*

400 maps (Australian topographic), mirror, vinyl, text, enamel, paper cord

Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999



Figure 9.11

**Nien Schwarz**

*(Dis)Comfort Zone: Mine/Minz, 1998-99 (detail)*

400 maps (Australian topographic), mirror, vinyl, text, enamel, paper cord  
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999



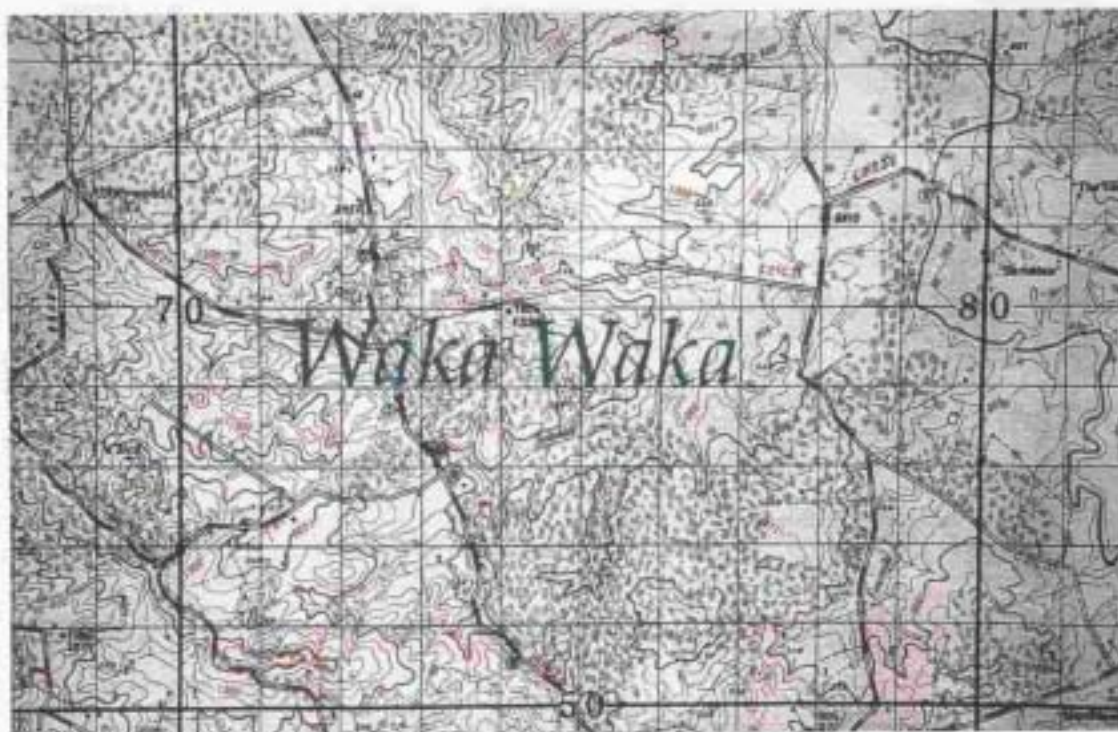
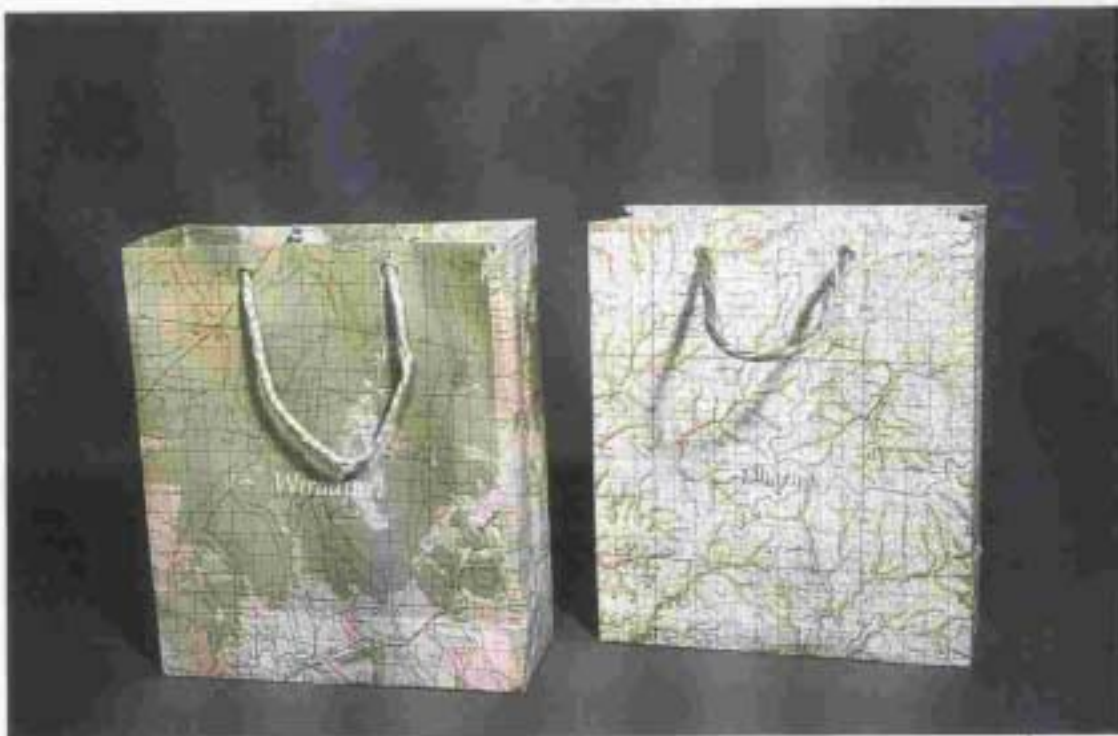


Figure 9.12 (top)  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*(Dis)Comfort Zone: Mine/Mine*, 1998-99  
 (detail)  
 maps (Australian topographic), mirror,  
 vinyl, text, enamel, paper cord  
 Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG,  
 Canberra, 1999

Figure 9.13 (bottom)  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*(Dis)Comfort Zone: Mine/Mine*, 1998-99  
 (detail)  
 maps (Australian topographic), mirror,  
 vinyl, text, enamel, paper cord  
 Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG,  
 Canberra, 1999



of each bag, a word has been extracted from the black and is revealed as a glistening and reflective projection that reads "*Mine*" (Figure 9.14).

On a nearby wall are rows of similar bags stretching almost from floor to ceiling and from wall to wall (Figure 9.10, 9.15). These bags are arranged carefully according to colour and, in an orderly progression, fade from one colour into the next. Each bag is equidistant from its neighbours and together the three hundred bags form a vast grid that dwarfs the viewer and contrasts sharply with the circular arrangement of black bags on the floor. The shelves on which the bags sit tilt downward, tipping the rows of bags forward at an inviting angle at which to peer inside each bag (Figure 9.16). The insides of these bags are white, not black, and their bases boldly reflect vernacular words, such as "penetrate," "underground," "crust," "blast," "crush," "bull doze," "aluminium," "lead," "bauxite," and "copper" (Figure 9.17). The bags with these words are juxtaposed with other bags that reflect the titles of books, which in turn reflect our relations to land through art, ecology, and mining. A sampling of titles includes: *The Experience of Landscape*, *In Search of the Modern Landscape*, *Art in the Landscape*, *Art and the Environmental Crisis*, *The Consumption of Paradise*, *Everyday Experiences of Mass Consumption*, *Wasteland: Landscape From Now On*, *Mines in the Spinifex*, *The Australian Geologist*, *Uranium: Australia's Decision*, and *The Rush That Never Ended*.<sup>9</sup>

The shopping bags in the two parts to this work are constructed from Australian topographic maps and are intended as a sort of interplay between the dual meaning of the word "MINE," as in the commercial excavation of mineral resources and current national issues regarding native title.

In her article "The Body Maps the Other: Alfredo Jaar," Ruth Philips discussed Jaar's work *Geography=War*, for which the artist used the Peters projection (which reflects accurately the relative area of each country), as opposed to the more common Mercator projection (designed for navigating on a sphere, but which distorts greatly the areas of land masses at higher

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<sup>9</sup> The titles for me reflect four years of intensive research and the anticipation I felt for discovering something new every time I picked up new book to peruse.



Figure 9.14

Nien Schwarz

(Dis)Comfort Zone: *mine/mine*, 1998-99 (detail)  
maps, mirror, vinyl, text, enamel, paper cord  
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999



Figure 9.15

Nien Schwarz

(Dis)Comfort Zone: *Mine/Mine*, 1998-99 (detail)

400 maps (Australian topographic), mirror, vinyl, text, enamel, paper cord

Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999

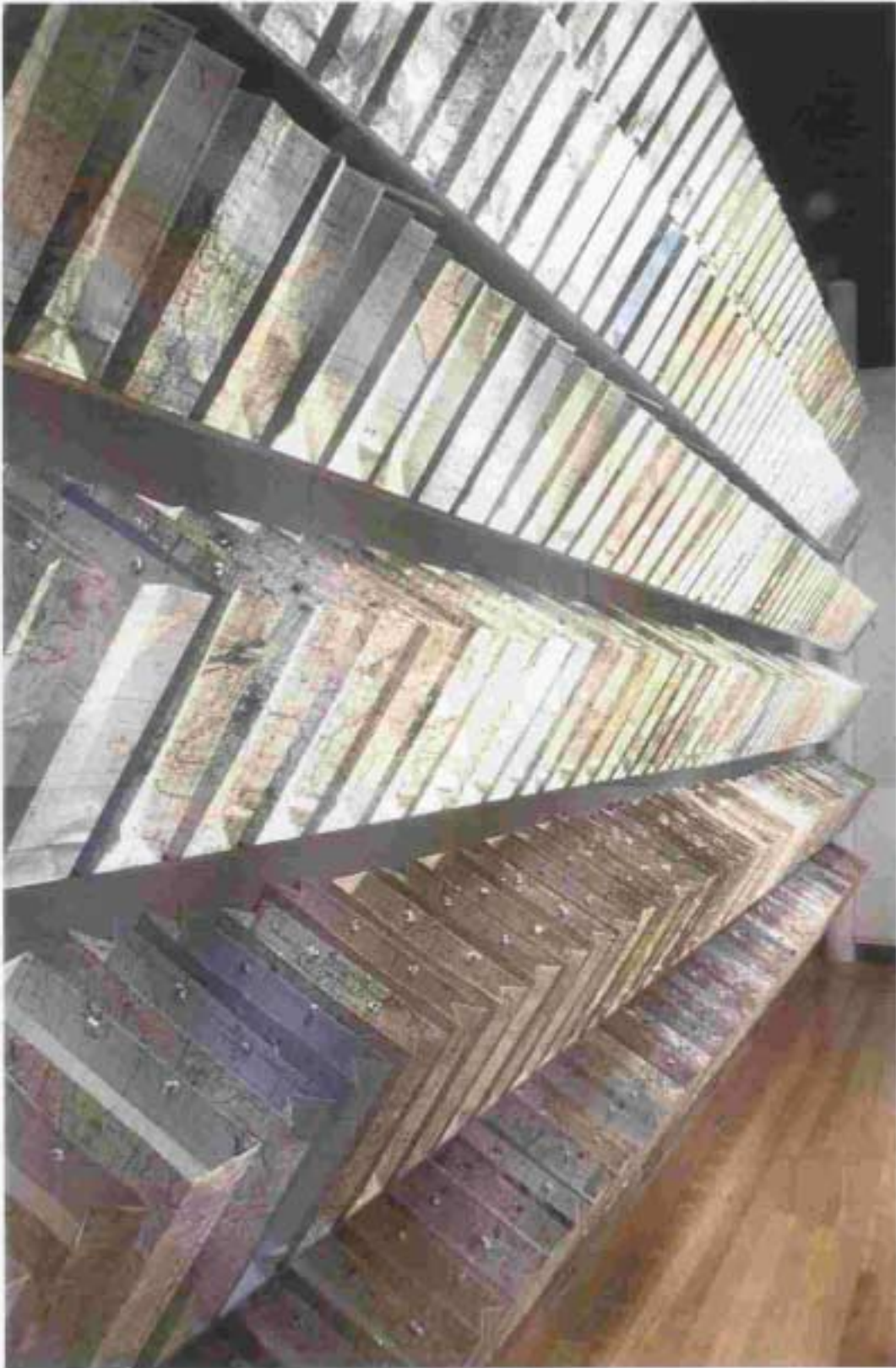


Figure 9.16

**Nien Schwarz**

*(Dis)Comfort Zone: Mine/Mine*

400 maps (Australian topographic), mirror, vinyl, text, enamel, paper cord  
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999



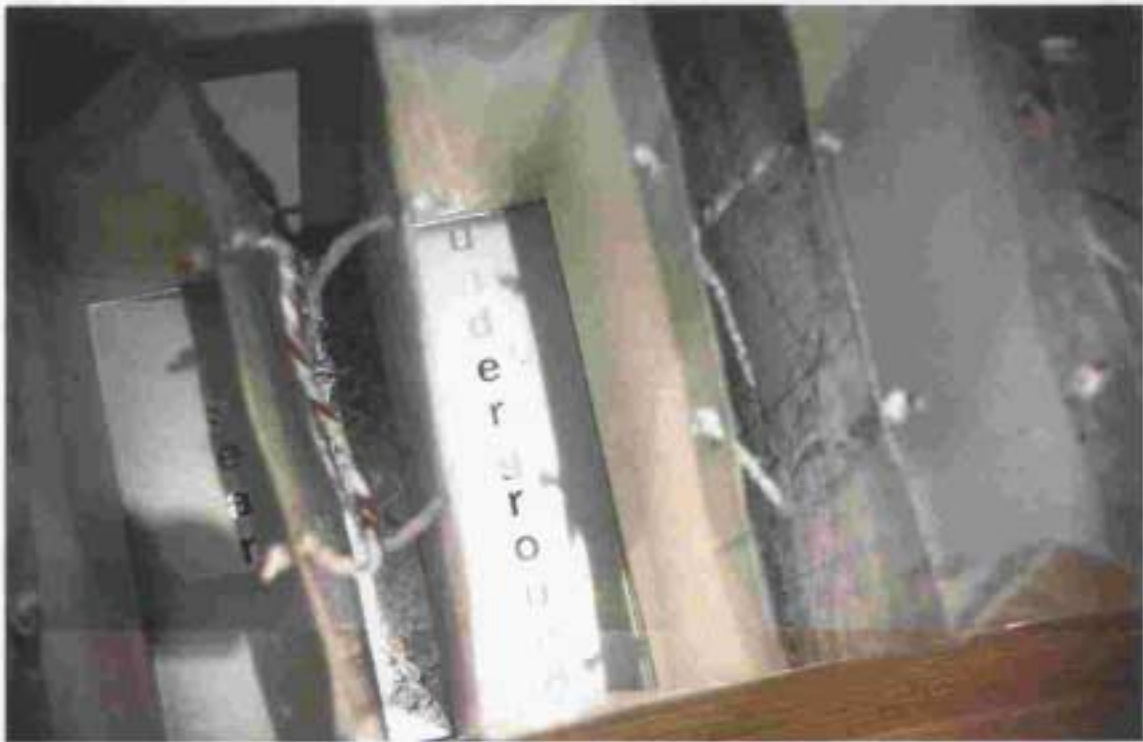


Figure 9.17

**Nien Schwarz**

*(Dis)Comfort Zone: Mine/Mine* (detail)

400 maps (Australian topographic), mirror, vinyl, text, enamel, paper cord

Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999



latitudes relative to those at the equator). Encountering this different view of the world through the Peters projection, Philips recounted her astonishment at discovering how deceiving maps can be and that they do not necessarily reflect the world as we know it. Maps are culturally constructed artifacts, and what is left out is as indicative of the culture creating the map as the information presented.<sup>10</sup> Trevor Fairbrother has posited the questions:

“Who is in the picture and who isn’t? Who seems to belong there and who doesn’t? Whose voice is being heard?”<sup>11</sup>

It was with these questions in mind that I undertook the making of bags in *(Dis)Comfort Zone: Mine/Mine*.<sup>12</sup>

According to Benjamin Buchloh, “the superimposition or doubling of a visual text by a second text requires a shift of attention.”<sup>13</sup> It was what had been left out of the maps, the colonising egoism so readily apparent on these cultural constructions, that compelled me to overprint them with a second text. Although I have used only one word per map, the individual Aboriginal language group names, superimposed on the maps as colourful logo-like labels, at once locate the original owners and caretakers of the land. Including indigenous names on government-printed maps was intended as an intervention and as a form of contestation of non-Aboriginal ownership. Placed in the centre of each bag, the names repossess symbolically what was taken and decentre authority by “collapsing the binary of centred and peripheral culture.”<sup>14</sup> I consider the reunion of the names on the maps with their associated territories to be a kind of re-mapping, by making Aboriginal language groups more present within the past (all the maps date from the

<sup>10</sup> Patricia C. Philips, “The Body Maps the Other: Alfredo Jaar,” *Artforum*, 1990, Apr., p. 136.

<sup>11</sup> Trevor Fairbrother, in *In and Out of Place: Contemporary Art and the American Social Landscape*, Boston: Museum of Fine Art, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> *(Dis)Comfort Zone: Mine/Mine* was facilitated by my reading of “Land, Memory and Representation” by Peter Stewart in response to a public art work by Richard Grayson titled *Title*. Stewart makes references to “colonial titling” and also a “comfort zone” which he defines as a collective kind of amnesia in relation to a nation in denial of its ongoing poor history with the Aboriginal people of Australia. Published in *Salient: South Australian Visual Art 1992-1995*, p. 46-48.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Buchloh writing about Rauschenberg’s erasure of de Koonig - in Gabriele Guerico (ed.) *Rooted Rhetoric*, Naples: Guida Editori, 1986, p. 102.

<sup>14</sup> Gavin Jantjes in *Fruitful Incoherence*, London: inIVA, 1998, p. 12.

1940s - 1960s) and more visible within the present.<sup>15</sup> Craig Owens has written that language is the "return of the repressed."<sup>16</sup> For Robert Houle, like many other artists of Native North American descent whose culture and identity has been impinged upon by government endorsed assimilation policies, language "becomes the site of meaning."<sup>17</sup>

When making this work, I often considered those "sites of meaning" and reflected on how language is the defining character of a culture and identity. I reflected as well on the extent to which oral histories have been supplanted by written text and that Aboriginal people often express their dismay that most Australians would not be able to name three Aboriginal groups. The eighty-nine bags with corresponding Aboriginal language group names are a symbolic act of negating the European naming frenzy that has taken place with the resultant marginalisation of Aboriginal people from their own land.<sup>18</sup> As with the words NIÑ and NGUNU, sandblasted permanently into the lift mirror, I was motivated again to imply a kind of "counter-memory" to the edict of the Namadji Park ranger described in Section 8. That some of the bags are empty of the word "Mine" alludes to the extinction of groups that has occurred in the past 211 years.

Mirrors, in general, appeal to our narcissistic tendencies, but in this instance, the pleasure of seeing is disrupted. The mirrors in both the white bags and the black bags are intended to be beautiful, but also to create a sense of discomfort, despite the pleasure and comfort that the contents of shopping bags bring to our lives. Many people have vested interests in how land and ground is used and managed and this is reflected in the texts that accompany both the black bags and the white bags. The mirrors in the depths of each bag force a kind of intimacy and, combined with the text, become poetic signifiers intended to implicate viewers in the meaning of the text and as consumers of the ground. I had hoped, as Joseph Kosuth has said, that the

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<sup>15</sup> Australia, like any other colonised country, has been constructed of maps and imposed names.

<sup>16</sup> Craig Owens, "Earthwords," in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture* (ed. Scott Bryson), University of California Press, 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Houle, Museum of Contemporary Art.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History*, London: Faber & Faber, 1987, Ch. 2.

text would “demand attentive, meditative contemplation from the viewer - instead of just passive reception” and would prompt the viewer to experience the “experience of experience” of seeing what is written between the lines, and to reflect on their own relations to land and to the maps, rather than just looking.<sup>19</sup> I wanted the bags with the mirrored texts to be a form of re-inscription of who we are in relation to how we consume.

The sheer volume of shopping bags suggests that all consumers are implicated in the struggle to find a balance between people and resources. But, although on one hand, the bags can be read as a celebration of our high standards of living through our consumer culture, on the other hand, the work is also a reminder of our atrocities towards both land and people under the guise of a so-called civilised and highly developed society. We are now bound equally to the land through our joint dependency on its resources, and the key to land use lies in coexistence.<sup>20</sup>

The beginnings of three circles reflected in the layout of the black bags on the floor are a response to many things, in particular, to Patrick Dodson’s article “Cycles of Survival for Indigenous Australians.” Dodson described three circles. The first circle “was formed when European people brought their values and culture... the circle that encloses us all in some form or other.” The second circle is the “government circle... [of] laws, policies, programs.” The third circle is “the blackfella circle: This circle nourishes us. It refers to where we come from and live within - our lands, our seas and the traditions, cultures and laws that are part of the land - our people and our country.” The article was written in response to the death of Nugget Coombs and his understanding for the people and cultures that make up the third circle. Dodson reflects on Coombs’ drive to create what Dodson refers to as the “fourth circle, where Australians of goodwill, of compassion, of integrity can work together to make into the dreams of Nugget Coombs for a reconciled Australia.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Kosuth, *Rooted Rhetoric*, 1986, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Hal Foster, “The Writing on the Wall,” in *Lothar Baumgarteh: America Invention*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1993, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Dodson, 1998, p. 12.

*(Dis)Comfort Zone: Mine/Mine* is dedicated to the memory of Wandjuk Marika, formerly a senior ritual and ceremonial leader of the Rirratjingu clan of the Yolngu people of North East Arnhem Land. Like many other Yolngu, Wandjuk Marika spent a lifetime trying to forge "bridges" of better communication with non-Aboriginal people. He was active in defending his clan's land from the incursions of a bauxite mine, for which tracts of land belonging to the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve were expropriated without prior consultation in 1962. To the question "Whose country is this, in your view?" Wandjuk replied "Mine."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See paragraph 704 in the House of Representatives, Report from the Select Committee on Grievances of Yirrkala Aborigines, Arnhem Land Reserve, Part II. Minutes of Evidence, 1963.



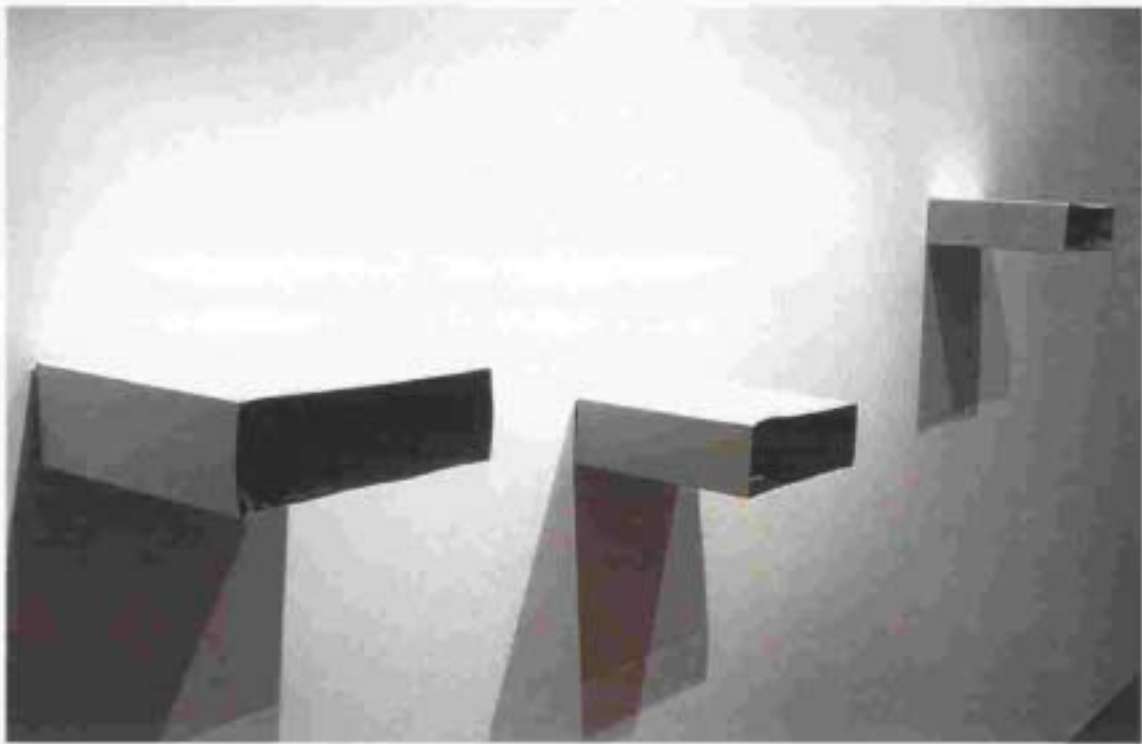


Figure 10.1 (top)  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*Sight/ Site/Cite* 1999  
maps (orthographic), mirror, vinyl, ink,  
text  
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG,  
Canberra, 1999

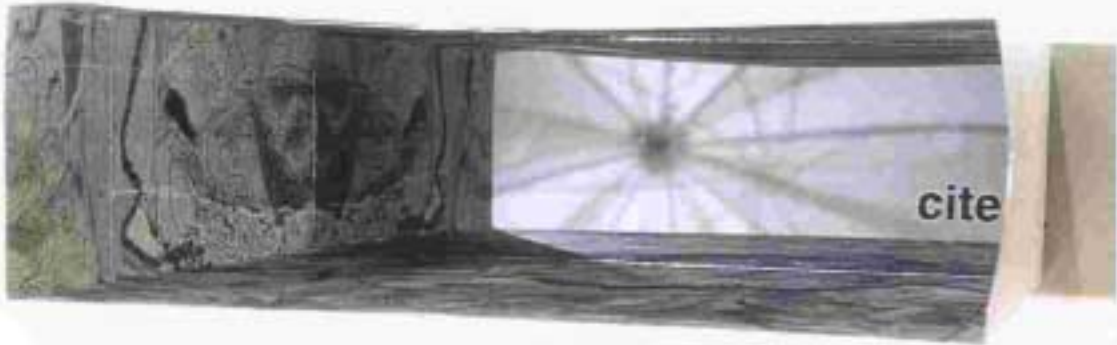


Figure 10.2 (bottom)  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*Sight/ Site/Cite*, 1999 (detail)  
maps (orthographic), mirror, vinyl, text  
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG,  
Canberra, 1999

## 10. Lenses, 1999

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"The terms 'mirror,' 'before our eyes,' and 'glasses' were applied equally to maps and to pictures of the time."

Svetlana Alpers<sup>1</sup>

### *Site/Sight/Cite*

The three wall-mounted objects that make up *Site/Sight/Cite* were made in response to Robert Smithson's pun on these words in relation to his *Site/Non-site* works of 1968-69. The *Site/Non-sites* were based simultaneously in two geographically separated sites, one of which was always a particular geographic site beyond the gallery, which he referred to as the "site," and the other was the site of the gallery, which he referred to as the "Non-site" The *Nonsite* was so-called because everything about it pointed to the *Site* (which was out of sight). Gary Shapiro has said of Smithson's work:

"The sites/nonsites, are designated by pun (sights/nonsights; and there is also a play upon "cite" here, since the sites become available, or sighted, only by the documentation that cites them). He takes jokes very seriously and he transforms what others take seriously into jokes."

Gary Shapiro<sup>2</sup>

The titles explain the ideas behind the work and so I include here only a brief description of the components. The work was made in response to my Dissertation topic in which the artists I have been examining all have endeavoured to connect their audiences with a greater insight of a distant and unfamiliar geographic site. Physical and conceptual reflection features prominently in this Dissertation research as it does in my own work.

Each piece of *Site*, *Sight*, and *Cite* is constructed from an orthographic map in much the same way as the shopping bags. Unlike the shopping bags,

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<sup>1</sup> Alpers, 1987, p. 67, 88.

however, here the map is on the inside of each bag, which forms a white, box-like "container that contains itself." The containers are mounted at various heights with their bases parallel to the wall, so that the viewer can look within. At the back of each is a grey-tinted mirror.

In *Site*, the mirror is marked with a grid that suggests lines of latitude and longitude. Peering into the piece, the reflections of both the viewer and the map are transected by the grid. The mapping of the body in relation to the map is a kind of remapping of the land in relation to self.

In *Sight*, the mirror is marked with a lattice based on a two-point perspective. Although the mirror draws the viewer into the piece, the lines on the mirror draw the eye into the corners of the work suggesting two perspective lines that continue beyond the frame. *Sight* was deliberately placed lower than the others to make it more difficult to look inside. In this sense, the piece alludes to non-perceiving and how people tend not to see what is difficult to see whether it be of a physical or more intellectual nature.

In *Cite*, the mirror is unaltered except for the word "cite" printed on its surface. Placed in conjunction with the mirror it is a reflection of (Re)Cite (section 6) in which I recite my recollections of travelling and working in the bush as a navigator.

It was Smithson's pun on words that led me to explore the dual meaning of the word "mine" in *(Dis)Comfort Zone: Mine/Mine* and in a previous version of the geological bags in which I had repetitiously placed the mirrored word "content" and allowed its dual meaning of contentment or containment to be played out within the grocery bags.

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<sup>2</sup> Gary Shapiro, *Earthwards: Robert Smithson and Art After Babel*, Berkeley: University California, Press, 1995, p. 182

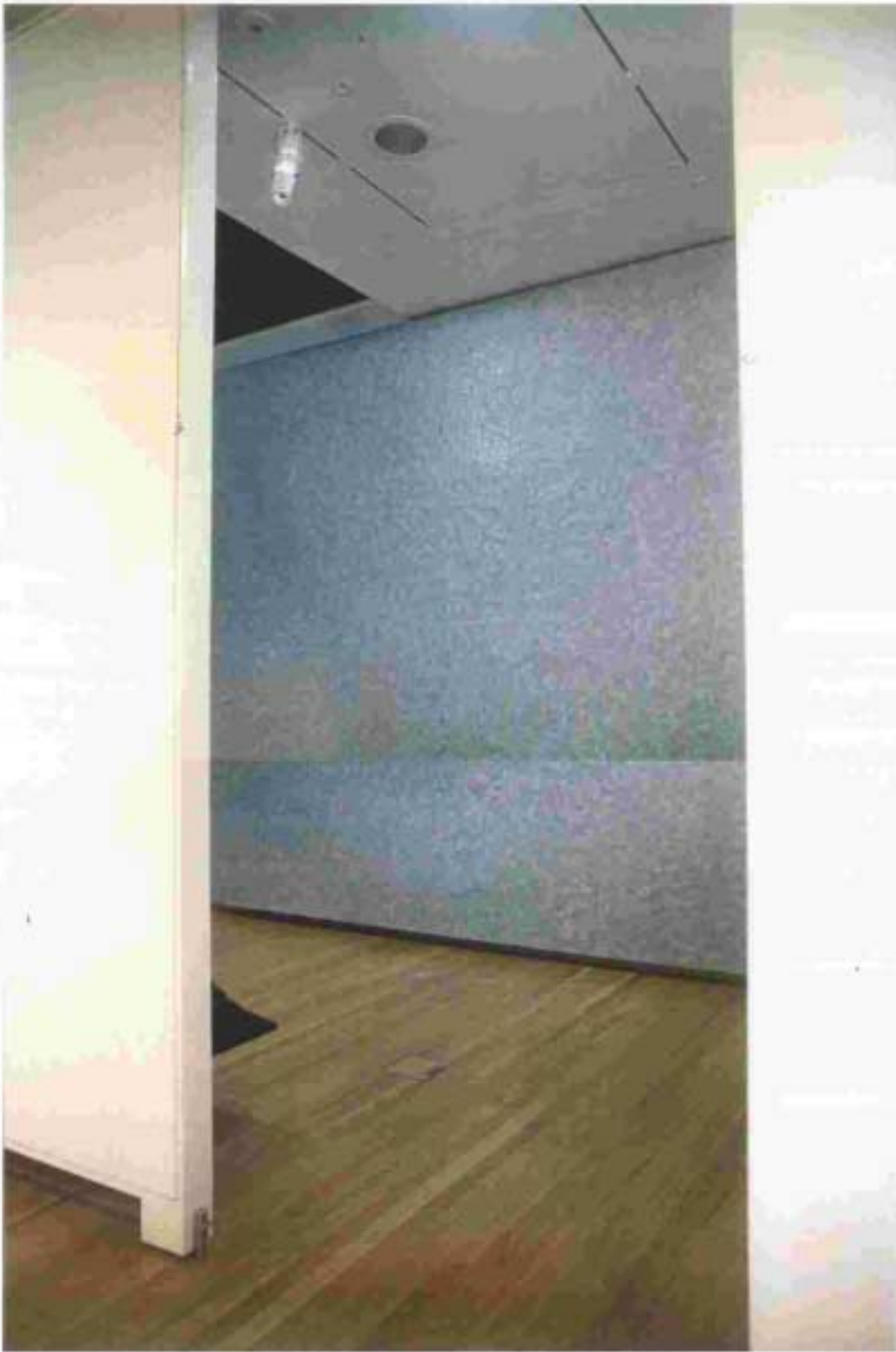


Figure 11.1  
Nien Schwarz  
*Myigrations*, 1998-99  
maps, polymer binder, calico  
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999



## 11. Mygrations: Beyond Familiar Territory

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“The history contained in the wall map was meant to inform domesticity as evidenced in Vermeer’s *The Art of Painting*.”

Svetlana Alpers<sup>1</sup>

### *Mygrations*

*Mygrations* is probably the last work anyone would notice in the exhibition. The work is in its own room - set apart from the other works - as though in its own little world (Figure 11.1). From a distance, the entire wall behind the entry to the space is a muted aquamarine blue in colour. The blue stretches from ceiling to floor and then out of sight behind a wall. It is a blue that cannot be paint; it does not have that uniformity of colour, yet its scale makes one think of a domestic-sized wall. A closer look reveals that the blue panel hangs 15 cm away from the wall and that its upper edge is curved and blue cascades forward to form a kind of screen.

Entering the space, one is drawn first to a brightly lit spot (Figure 11.2). The illuminated surface reflects hundreds of slightly irregular rows of patchworked pieces of blue that together form a mosaic pattern. The view appears to be aerial, as if seen from the window of a plane ten kilometres high, and in the distance far below, we see what could be long rolling swells broken by a chain of small islands (Figure 11.3).

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February 19th, it’s the day after my birthday. For the first time since I finished the work I have a desire to see it. I’ve come to the gallery to copy some diary entries recounting a journey written several years before and now forming part of *Groundwork: An Illustrated Poem in 10 Parts*. There’s a man sitting on the bench (the gallery’s contribution) in front of the collage and I sit down too so that I can more easily copy my notes contained within the packages. I wonder if he is irritated by my scribbling, but he sits there for a very long time. Eventually he stands to leave. Intrigued by the duration

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<sup>1</sup> Svetlana Alpers, “The Mapping Impulse in Dutch Art” in Woodward, David (ed.) *Art and Cartography: Six Historical Essays*. University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 95.

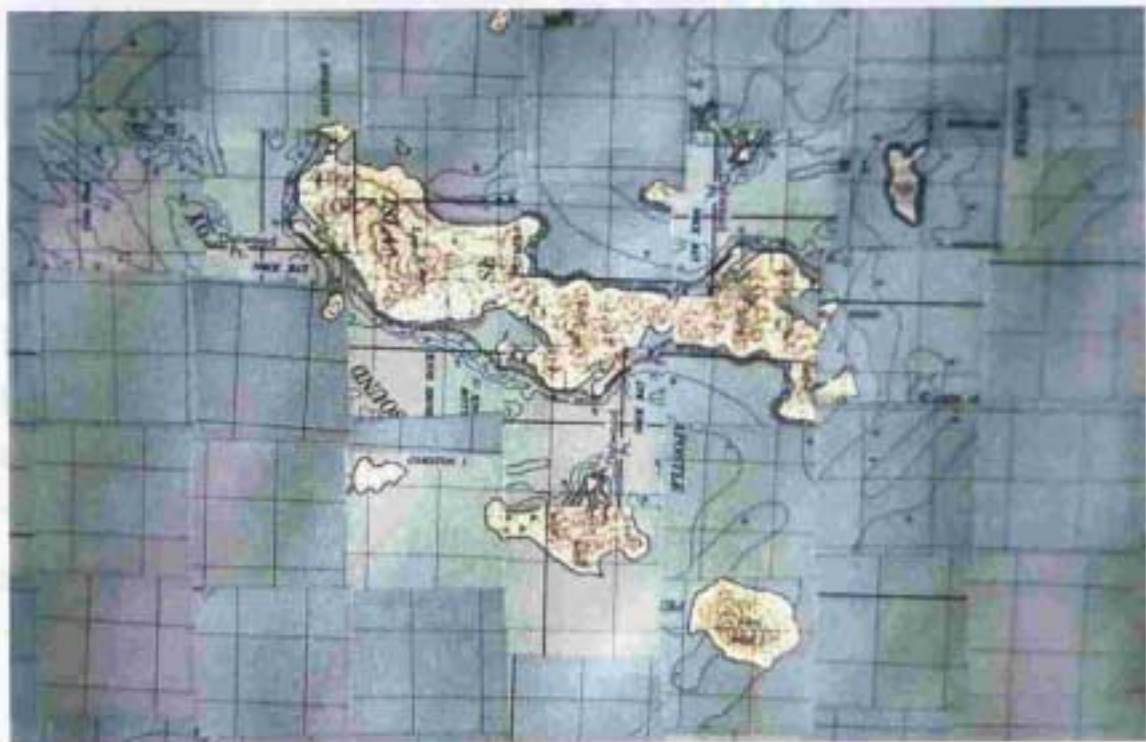
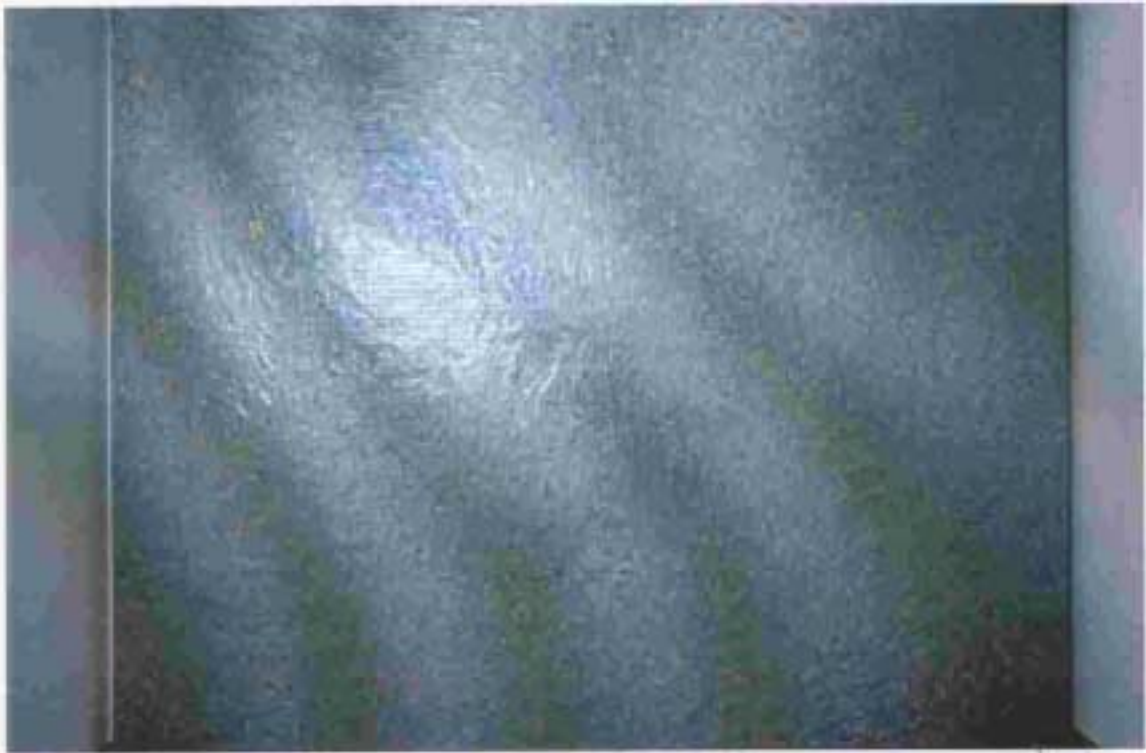


Figure 11.2 (top)  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*Myigrations, 1998-99*  
maps, polymer binder, calico  
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, 1999

Figure 11.3 (bottom)  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*Myigrations, 1998-99 (detail)*  
maps, polymer binder, calico

of his stay, I ask "what does the work say to you; how do you read the work." He looks back at the wall. He takes so long to answer that I don't know where to look and so I stare at his feet. He's wearing white running shoes. I recognise immediately that he isn't local, but something of an import, possibly not unlike myself. He sighs, and still looking at the collage says quietly with a North American accent "homelessness," and after a lengthy pause adds "no permanent place." No further words are exchanged between us.

Marjorie Perloff has written: "...what the collage-piece unravels from the surface of the canvas... is after all, the flight coupon we thought we had lost."<sup>2</sup>

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The collage is taking ever so long. It's already the day after Boxing Day and it's uncomfortably hot. I am restless, feel troubled, yet am fixed to this spot. I sit on a canvas sheet almost 4 square metres in size (Figure 11.4). To make it this size I sewed one edge to another. A spine is beginning to emerge down the centre of the work although I did my best to keep the stitching as flat as possible with no edges of fabric overlapping. I like to touch that spine. It forms the backbone of this work that is intended to be the size of an entire wall.

Underneath me is a concrete floor. I could use a cushion to soften its hardness, but I need to feel the ground beneath me as much as possible. Somehow this is important for the work. The floor is much cooler than the air around me so I don't mind too much. I shift my position every few minutes because my legs get in the way. I cross one, sometimes both, or tuck them away beneath me. Other times I stretch them straight out on the ground in front of me or I lie on my side. I have already done five hours today; carefully choosing the right colour blue and then painting each square onto the cotton (Figure 11.5). I feel driven and am determined to do at least eight hours. There is nobody here - as usual. It is almost silent except for

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<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Perloff, The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. xix.

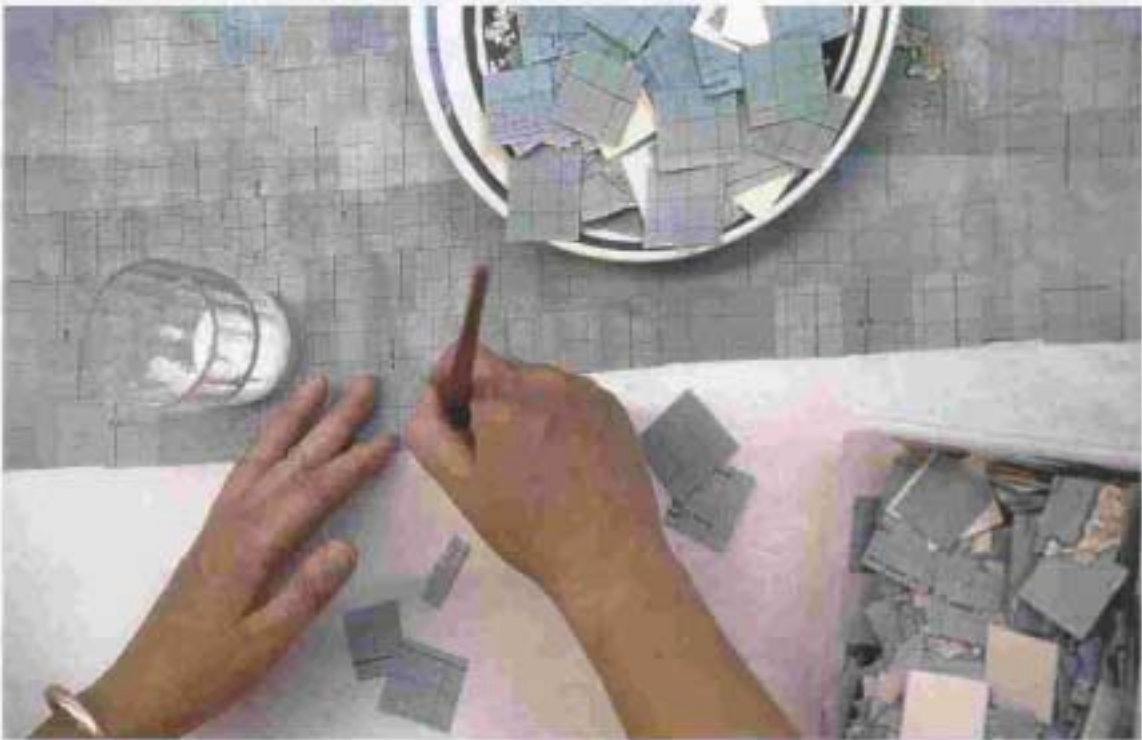


Figure 11.4 (top)  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*Myigrations*, 1998-99  
maps, polymer binder, calico

Figure 11.5 (bottom)  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*Myigrations*, 1998-99  
maps, polymer binder, calico

the occasional arresting squawk of a cockatoo. I am so absorbed with the colour, and the stillness of the day is so heavy, that my mind keeps wandering.

“geography of the land is probably to a large degree geography of the mind.”

Svetlana Alpers<sup>3</sup>

A picture-map of the world hangs above my bed. The original must have been painted in watercolours because the oceans are translucent currents of cool blues and warmer turquoises, while the deserts are hot wavering yellows and orange. The map has a plain white border which I imagine keeps the Earth from spilling into the depths of space.

This Earth has a smattering of stately animals and people of various colours and in different kinds of dress. I see forests and mountain ranges, and in some places the kinds of houses in which people live, including icy igloos, painted teepees, and mud huts. I search for a brick house on a hill overlooking a river, but I can't find one. Instead, Canada, our new home, is a vast, snow-and-tree covered expanse. Many wild animals, such as moose, beavers, wolves and grizzly bears, are strung out across the land.

I don't remember which icons hovered over Holland. Possibly the country is too small to warrant an icon of its own, but, had there been one, it undoubtably would have been a windmill.

Papa and I often look at maps together. My father likes to emphasise over and over how the entire country of Holland can fit into Lake Ontario, the smallest of the Great Lakes that straddle part of the Canadian - American border. I have visions of windmills pumping furiously and all the people in Holland building their dykes higher and higher so that the country will not slip beneath the watery depths of Lake Ontario. Yet, despite their valiant efforts, the boldly striped red, white, and blue flag sinks below the Great Lake's surface. This, I tell myself, must be why we left Holland and sailed to Canada. I have the intense desire, however, to prove my father wrong; surely Holland could not be so small! If I had the guts, I'd cut Holland out of

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<sup>3</sup> Alpers, 1987, p. 51.



our National Geographic atlas and place it on top of Lake Ontario, just to see if his story is true.

“In collage, hierarchy gives way to parataxis - “one corner is as important as another corner.”

Marjorie Perloff and Greg Ulmer<sup>4</sup>

From the vantage point of my homemade bed, innumerable journeys are plotted across this beautiful picture map of the world. Across treeless deserts, over mountains shrouded in clouds, through the seven seas, and over the North and South Poles. I never get tired of these journeys. Where there is water to cross I travel in a boat with red sails, all by myself.

Standing on my bed I like to trace an awkward route between Holland, Indonesia, and Canada. I have an Indonesian grandmother, but have met her only twice.

Sometimes I fantasise about travelling to Indonesia and imagine how my father, his little brother, and his mother survived the Japanese internment camp. If I beg Papa to tell me a story about his childhood there, he always tells me the same story. It is a story about playing pranks on his Japanese captors by sticking fruit, too rotten to eat, in the exhaust pipes of the military jeeps. The excitement of course was watching this mess come shooting out when the vehicles started up their engines.

On the occasion that Papa and I find ourselves shopping together, he sometimes pauses at small piles of past-their-prime exotic fruit. He carefully picks up some variety nameless to me. There is silence. I just look at his beautiful slender fingers, too afraid to look at his eyes because I know this routine all too well. I hold my breath.

The prickly or pock-marked fruit sits cradled in his cupped hands. Then I see him, and I hate this vision, of my Papa as a hungry child with adult-sized hands, ravenous, devouring this same fruit, also past its prime. I can only imagine his pain, his hunger. My chest feels like it could explode, I get so angry and sad all at once. I hate war, I hate it, I hate it all! Louder and

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<sup>4</sup> Perloff, 1986, p. 75. Perloff quotes Greg Ulmer from Rosalind Krauss, The Originality of the Avante-Garde and Other Modernist Myths, p. 38.

louder my heart beats. I'm afraid he will hear my panic, but I must be strong for him. *Wil je dit proberen?* he finally asks.

I can never decline his offer to share an overly bitter or sickly pungent sweet fruit. I do it out of respect, but secretly hoping he'll also share with me a different Indonesia story. He never does though, only the story about the rotten fruit in the exhaust pipe. He never talks about the years of internment and won't even share his memories with Mama. It was when he knew he was dying, then in one interminably long night, he told us all his stories.

It's so hot that the polymer binder keeps stiffening my brush. My Papa, Indonesia and the picture map I loved so much slip away. I'm having trouble piecing together the western shore of an island. I keep searching in the box for an appropriate piece of map, but I can't find one. I put this island aside and start afresh this time beginning with a western edge.

“Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on the map (but they all look like that) I would put my finger on it and say, when I grow up I will go there. The North Pole was one of those places, I remember.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*<sup>5</sup>

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A strike of the match. I don't smoke, but I'm nervous even though I tell myself I'm not. My excuse for lighting up is that life is so incredibly healthy up here that I just need to do something unhealthy. My other excuse is that the smoke keeps the hordes of mosquitoes at bay. Sometimes they are so thick that it sounds like its rain falling on the tent.

I sit quietly in the doorway of my canvas tent matching the stillness of an Arctic summer day. There is not a breath of wind. My outstretched legs are cushioned by a spongy layer of moss and lichen-encrusted rocks. I feel a small but sharp rock protruding through the tent floor and so I shift slightly to the right.

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983, p. 33.

I hardly draw on the cigarettes, but I keep lighting them - almost one after the other as each white tube falls away. I am listening - acutely - cocking my head to the left and then to the right. The hill drops off sharply below me and it continues behind the tent for several more hundred feet. Below me an iceberg- and island-studded expanse of emerald blue Arctic ocean sweeps out toward where I know Greenland must be (Figure 11.6). From the helicopter we can sometimes make out those distant shores.

I am almost too afraid to move. I feel silly feeling this way on such a gorgeous summer afternoon, but I have every reason to be afraid. I don't look at the black shaft of the gun peeping out from under the doorway of my calico home, but the cold steel against my thigh is reassuring. For a moment I wish for safety on one of those islands, out there in the icy blue ocean, but I know that I am deceiving myself. It is just as likely that there are polar bears out there. I chastise myself for my fear, but the memory of being charged by a grizzly bear ten years ago, on a similar geological expedition, adds to my fear.

The frigid island-studded waters are gone, as are the bears. Nine-tenths of the map is complete and I have made a significant dent in the pile of 170 maps that I cut up into 2 cm square fragments (Figure 11.7). I am at a loss, unable to find a suitable square of blue colour. I need the darkest blue colour but in all the thousands of unused squares in the box I just cannot find one. I think back to the previous two years, and how every time I felt out of sync with being in Australia, fragmented by the distance between myself and my loved ones, I had torn or cut maps into these little squares and woven them back together to form a new cloth, a new kind identity, an imaginary land.

I have several rolls of collaged paper maps in a variety of vivid patterns. These I had intended to install commercially, in a manner reminiscent of printed textiles, wall paper, or floor coverings, and as an invitation to create a domestic space using a material that represents outdoor spaces. These rolls evoke the artificial rock inserts in the geological bags, the printed fabrics depicting scenes from nature added to the plaid flannel work shirts that were worn in activities to destroy nature, and the interplay between the gingham and plaid that questioned the ways in which we separate the

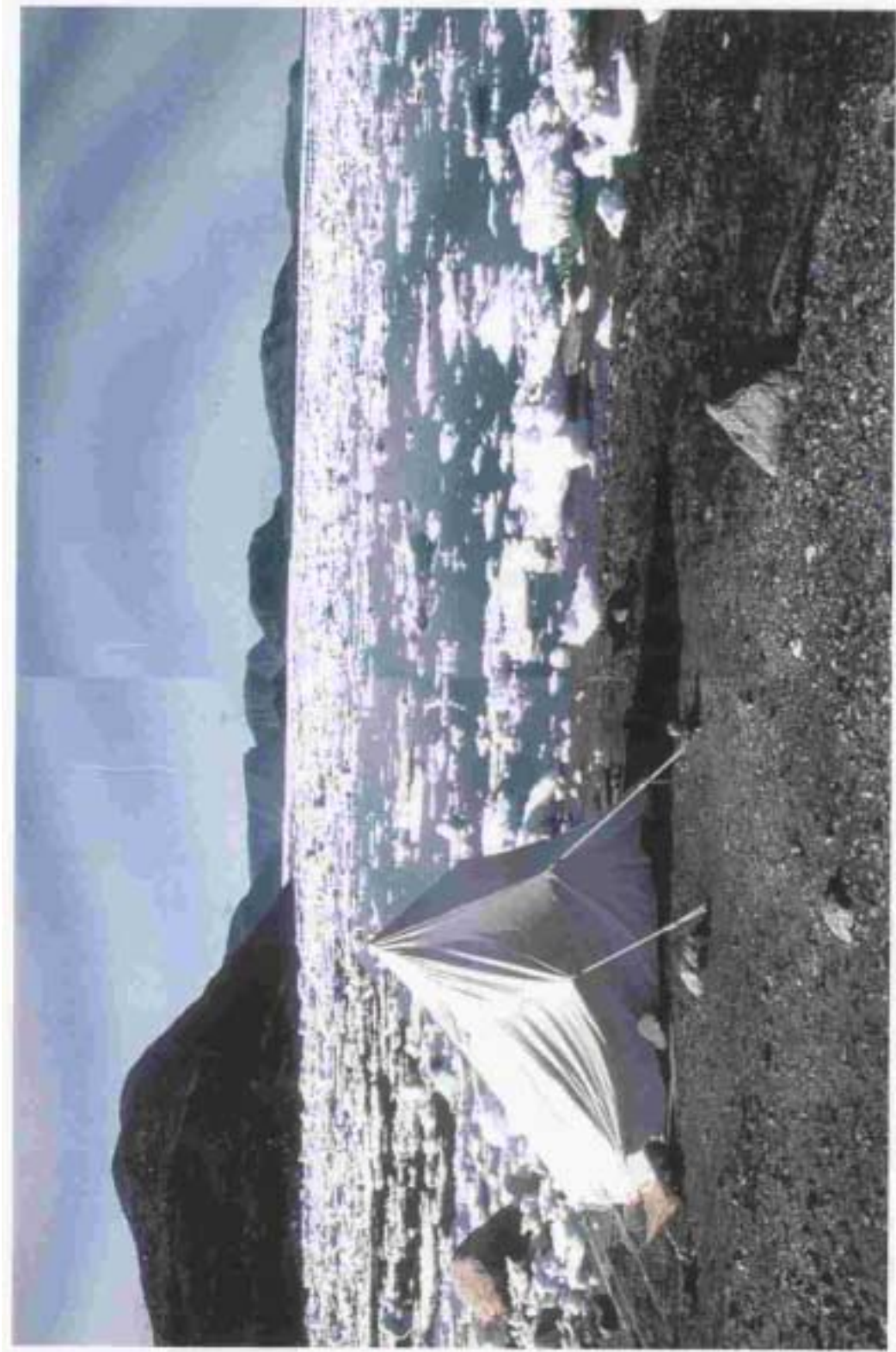


Figure 11.6  
64°45'N, 58°00'W

outside from the domestic interior. These unfinished collages are about how we remove material from the outdoors and process them to suit our needs and desires within the geography of the home. These collages, however, remain unresolved. I found that sticking paper maps onto paper was too insubstantial and awkward for my liking. From some of these collages I created large shopping bags with handles that are so long that the bags are impossible to lift off the floor, but I abandoned them feeling that they were more suited for a performance.

*Myigrations*, as I later titled the collage, revisits *Migrations: An Illustrated Poem in 300 Parts*, and the *Nagasaki*, *Rotterdam*, and *Whitespring* map works, but without the written narrative components. It is related to the *Nagasaki* work in that the maps for this collage were printed also in the 1940s for wartime distribution in Australia. They have caused me to reflect on tensions between different parts of the world and my utopian desire for no more war. I look at the circle of islands that has emerged before me and I wish people would realise the many different ways in which we are all linked. The islands cause me to think back to my experiences of working with international artists in the National Gallery of Australia's 1996 exhibition, *Islands*. I delighted in exercising my French and making friends with visitors from Thailand, and recoiled in horror at the first hand experiences of a Chilean man at the scene of the Rwandan genocide and imagined the thoughts of a German artist whose wartime experiences haunted him as well.

These thoughts about interconnections between people and places were manifest also in the isolation I experienced constructing the collage during the Christmas holidays while being separated from my friends and family during the festive season (for which they all gathered in Canada). In the centre of the map there is only a vast expanse of ocean. That not even the tiniest island was afforded to me expresses an anxiety about trying to find *a sense of place* as I had never experienced before.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Sense of Place* is also the title of an exhibition catalogue of works by Rosalie Gascoigne and Colin McCahon. One of my first entries into this report was in 1995, returning to Australia from an exhibition in Holland and travelling via Canada. Taken from a KLM inflight



It was this void, this internal loneliness, that the gentleman sitting in front of my collage, also a foreigner, picked up on. I think back to Michel Foucault's words "instead of finding reassurances... one is forced to advance beyond familiar territory..."<sup>7</sup> and I recall the de-centred maps of Robert Smithson that do not allow the viewer to focus on any particular place. Gilles Tiberghien has written about Smithson's map for his *Mono Lake Nonsite* (1968):

"...the center disappears, the map is non-centered; it does not begin at a particular point, or it begins at all of them at once... this de-centring is a method of voluntarily siting oneself at the boundaries of known worlds."<sup>8</sup>

The intensity with which I approached the pasting and painting of the colours in the collage recalled my immersion in the colouring of geological maps in the Canadian Arctic so many years before. It is about escaping reality and collapsing distances by weaving together fragments of the past, the present, and the future, and about finding something lost or something new through the construction of the collage. Perloff has stated "... the collage can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable."<sup>9</sup>

While making the collage I thought often of Jan Vermeer's painting *Woman Reading A Letter* and I yearned so much to receive a letter myself, someone else's thoughts I could hold onto and absorb, read between the lines, instead of the fast-paced and awkwardly timed long distance phonecalls. I thought back to the thousands of letters I have written in the quiet moments of a day when icebergs gleamed in the distance, the ocean lay as flat as a mirror, with islands and clouds impossible to separate from their reflections, and the momentary splash of a narwhale slicing through still

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magazine I copied "Our day-to-day existence is lived in a familiar land: the place where we work, the place where we sleep and the places we go when we're doing neither. Together, these locations give us a geography of existence; a sense of self and place." *KLM Herald*, Nov., 1995, p.34. Svetlana Alpers has written that "Maps give us quantifiable data - the measure of a place in relation to another place whereas landscapes give us a feeling or sense of a place" in Alpers, 1987, p. 5. In consideration of this I believe I endeavoured to homogenise the two.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Pantheon, 1972, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Gilles Tiberghien, *Land Art*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995, p. 191.

<sup>9</sup> Perloff, 1986, p. 75.



Figure 11.7  
**Nien Schwarz**  
*Myigrations*, 1998-99  
maps, polymer binder, calico

waters and spouting air. I tried to explain in those letters what it was like to be alone all day, to work with geologists who also loved their work and exploring the ground. I described my joy at “discovering” endless shorelines, the interface between land and water where the Inuit people draw their sustenance. I tried to explain these things, but I know that unless you’ve been to that kind of place, where you are humbled by the beauty, the isolation, and realise your insignificance in the larger scheme of things, you won’t understand my letters because they are slow and very detailed. Perhaps, in the recesses of my mind, I was trying to explain all these things to the woman in Vermeer’s painting. I always felt sorry for her in that she appeared to be excluded from the journeys of discovery unfolding on the map behind her.

*Myigrations* is also about denying empirical systems we create to study and understand nature, as explored in the works *From Legend to Market* and *Groundwork: An Illustrated Poem in 10 Parts*. And like the shopping bags, the collage is about processing, manufacturing, and commodifying land. The assembling and pasting together of small bits of land into a homogenous sheet is a metaphor for the way consumer environments are constructed of so many things from so many places and the cycle of destruction and creation that this entails. Fueling these ideas are my memories about going to the docks in Rotterdam, London, New York, Fremantle, and Port Hedland, and connecting ships with countries of origin, their cargo, and destinations. I think also about human cargo; my friend’s escape from Vietnam and absorbing the ambiguous identity of “refugee.” I wonder when that identity starts and if it ever ends. And I always meant to ask, but forgot and then it was too late, what my father remembered of his journey from war-ravaged Indonesia to war-ravaged Holland and what kind of ship it was that carried him across so many lengths of ocean. Perhaps there lies a clue in his last drawing - a ship - which I had asked him to draw when we both knew he was dying.