

Art

Karen Lebergott and Edra Soto

When	Nov 7 - Dec 13 Fridays/Saturdays, 11-5
Where	Rowland Contemporary (1118 W Fulton Market, 312.421.6275)
Price	FREE
Details	http://rowlandcontemporary.com



For Karen Lebergott, mapping is a conceptual departure point that sets off multiple trajectories. Her oil paintings suggest Chinese landscapes or city plans stacked up on monochromatic backgrounds, while mixed-media works erupt in vivid swells of painted, cut-up paper that evoke the chaotic growth of cities like Shanghai. It isn't immediately evident that she's exploring notions of identity and memory, but these themes rise to the surface in Edra Soto's paintings in the neighboring gallery. Shaking up Latina archetypes in pop culture, Soto depicts Puerto Rican bombshell Iris Chacón on her '70s TV variety show while campily transmuting her male dancers into gorillas or other hairy beasts.



– *Karsten Lund*



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By enabling us to resize terrain, shift vantage points, and chart personal landmarks with the ease of a mouse click, virtual mapping applications like Google Maps and Google Earth (along with built-in automobile GPS systems) are making street maps interactive and customizable: psychogeography, meet Web 2.0. In an exhibition titled "Coming Apart—In-Visible Cities," Karen Lebergott uses city maps as the metaphorical starting point of an investigation into personal narratives and historical landscapes. Palpably handmade and willfully poetic, Lebergott's densely collaged works collapse numerous distinctions, starting with past and present. Different iterations of city space are layered in colorful, gleefully anarchic pastiches. Nameless streets and highways twist and fold in on each other, sometimes bulging from the walls like tunnels or hidden passageways. City blocks scrawled hastily in black ink may be partially painted over in bright hues, like color codes without a key. While Lebergott's paintings certainly invite top-down forms of archaeological scrutiny, their success also depends on how well they hold together as paintings and/or as sculptural objects (yet another categorical distinction this artist's works implicitly question). The show's largest piece, a floor-to-ceiling collage executed on twin scrolls of paper spilling out onto the floor, provides an affirmative answer. Titled "Disruption," the painting can be read as an aerial map, an expressionist collage and a simulated urban edifice (from a distance, its surface recalls the graffiti-tagged exterior of a crumbling building). Viewed in its entirety, the show's kaleidoscopic perspectives on urban space add up to something Google Maps can't come close to capturing. (Claudine Isé)



Through December 13 at Rowland Contemporary, 1118 W. Fulton, (312)421-6275.

Older ways of painting get their due in series

By Alan G. Artner

November 14, 2008

Karen Lebergott: The artistic use of maps and mapping systems was explored in a number of Chicago exhibitions last season, though few artists employed them more successfully than Lebergott does in her works on paper at Rowland Contemporary. Simpler pieces, as much drawn in graphite as collaged, reveal the grids, aerial views or city plans that apparently underlie all the works. Then more elaborate essays superimpose layer upon layer of painted cutouts that obscure the map association, at times transforming the surfaces into abstract creations.

Each part of the overlay is less a sheet than an irregular, spindly template that the artist has brightly painted around the irregular geometric figures she has cut. So we not only look at the surface but also into it, through several layers that also have been painted and irregularly cut. Sometimes, too, individual sections buckle or peel away from others, putting "air" between the layers that allows us further penetration. Sorting all this out, especially on the largest piece that cascades from wall to floor, is a most satisfying visual experience.

But, of course, these days the visual is not enough. So there is an attempt to add more far-reaching conceptual baggage, and it seems grafted on rather than arising naturally.

***1/2 At 1118 W. Fulton Market, through Dec. 13. 312-421-6275.*

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