

HYPERALLERGIC

GALLERIES

Contradictory Patterns and Decorative Illusions

by Patrick Neal on April 7, 2015



Zoe Pettijohn Schade, "Crowd of Crowds 4" detail (2015), gouache on paper, 10 x 18 inches (courtesy Kai Matsumiya Gallery)

One of the more promising avenues that Postmodernism explored was to seek out the nether regions that Modernism forgot. The art of non-Western cultures, artisanal practices not deemed high-brow, or obscure artistic tangents lost to the history books were all grist for the PoMo mill. This imaginative possibility for retelling art history sometimes crosses my mind when wandering through the big New York City art museums. I'll have a yearning to crack open a permanent collection to see the unfamiliar; works that could be on display but for whatever reason curators omit, or paintings that have been stowed away, left languishing in warehouse X.

This sort of reevaluation was indelible to the [Pattern and Decoration movement](#) of the 1970s which sought to elevate the maligned status of craft and the applied arts. A few years ago the [Hudson River Museum](#) in Yonkers revisited the art of P&D's main practitioners and it was enlightening to see how potent a strategy this was and the variety of approaches the artists took. [Joyce Kozloff](#), one of the founding members of P&D, has been working in this vein for decades and her new work, on view in Chelsea, looks better than ever, even as it embraces



Joyce Kozloff, "If I were an Astronomer: Paris and Brooklyn" (2015), mixed media on canvas, 36 1/2 x 26 5/8 inches (courtesy DC Moore Gallery)

Zoe Pettijohn Schade, "Conflict Arrows 2" (2014), gouache on paper, 10 x 10 inches (courtesy of Kai Matsumiya Gallery)



digital possibilities. Meanwhile, down on the Lower East Side, it is easy to imagine Kozloff has a kindred spirit in [Zoe Pettijohn Schade](#), an artist a generation apart who is invigorating the P&D tradition with an intensity uniquely her own.

Kozloff and Pettijohn Schade's works are meticulously fashioned and formally extravagant and imbue formalism with global and feminist politics. Despite the ravishing beauty of their paintings, there are underlying themes of death and warfare and the contradictions of world history. They fuse high and low, the serious and frivolous, terror and joy, and appreciate absurdist juxtapositions involving pop culture and the pitfalls of civilization. Both artists work in a painstakingly detailed manner that is complex and labor intensive with many small, repetitive bits. And both utilize textile and lace patterns strung on a triangular or isometric grid with motifs often breaking free from a uniform design.

Kozloff's new paintings at [DC Moore Gallery](#) bring together the hybridized Islamic stars she invented during the '70s with the maps and cartography that have occupied her for the last few decades. She combines the two bodies of work into newly fashioned pieces that are large and expansive, filling the bright gallery space. One such piece, "If I Were a Botanist: the Journey" (2014), measures over 30 feet long, demonstrating the potential in revisiting the stars which were initially conceptualized as pages in books. Although the star patterns are very apparent, they have been disrupted with varying degrees of shape and scale shifts and are covered with collaged bits — figures, maps, and words recycled from earlier works. When you stand back and take in the room, there is an easy fusion of high and low sources. What looks like stained glass cathedral windows morph into spirographs and dreamcatchers then into Moroccan and Islamic tiles and finally into crocheted quilts and doilies.

As with Pettijohn Schade's work, Kozloff's paintings compound all sorts of source material into a flat surface. The effect is like looking through the shifting bits and colored pieces of a kaleidoscope that has its lens cast across the globe as different cultures turn and fall in front of us. I thought of Christopher Columbus trying to justify a round vs. flat world as Kozloff visually sources images from assorted epochs that compete for different versions of the truth. This conceit of how knowledge morphs and devolves is not only intellectually compelling, it is a nifty device for creative riffing. "The Tempest" (2014) with its main motif of an eighteenth-century Chinese World map manages to be both cosmic and autobiographical. There's a white landmass surrounded by gray ocean waves, gnarly tributaries with sailers and ships at sea, and soldiers, animals, and ancient cartographers occupying earth. Parallels of Kozloff's own meditations and travels materialize by way of eccentric and colorful swatches (the artist's outtakes and trial proofs) and collections of tchotchke globes stuck all over the surface.



Joyce Kozloff, "If I were an Astronomer (Mediterranean)" (2014), mixed media on canvas, 72 x 54 inches (courtesy DC Moore Gallery)

Pettijohn Schade's work at [Kai Matsumiya Gallery](#) couldn't look any more different. Mostly small in scale, her gouache paintings are exactingly rendered and the intimate gallery space is reverently lit to allow close scrutiny of brushstroke and technique.

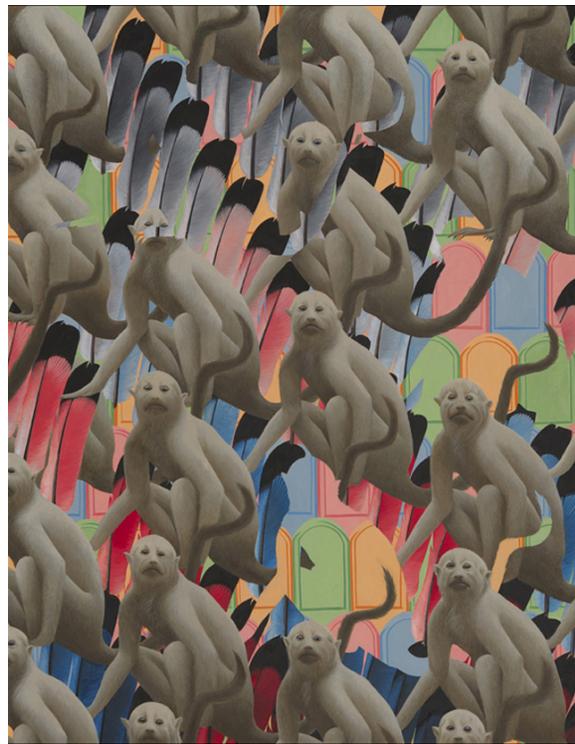
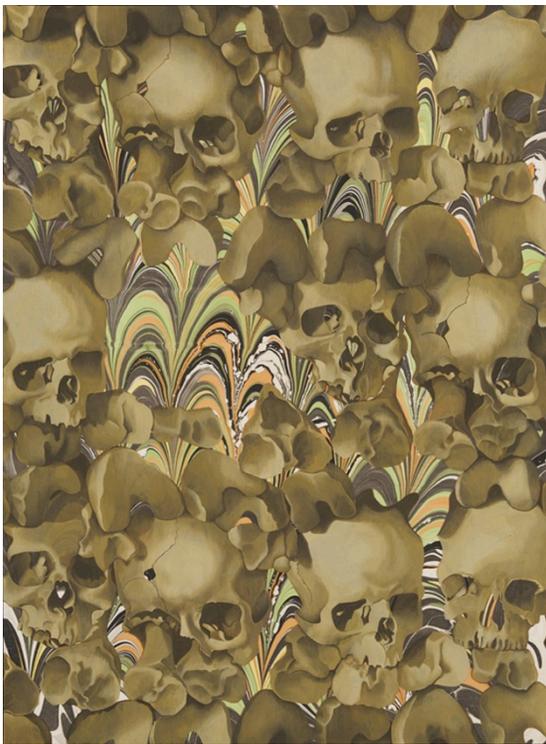
Pettijohn Schade has been researching the tradition of French textile painting that dates back to the 1700s, the often anonymous gouache paintings of designs that would serve as prototypes for woven cloth. She spent time at the [Bibliothèque Forney](#) in Paris drawing copies of this work into a sketch book, a process that allowed her to deeply absorb the structure and application of these patterns. The scholarship and verisimilitude of the project are impressive. An obscure tradition with very few examples in public collections, Kai Matsumiya has managed to obtain several examples of these works from [The Design Library in Hudson](#) where they can be viewed in a back room alongside Pettijohn Schade's work.

Inspired by these strange yet surprisingly modern designs, Pettijohn Schade layers several sets of patterned motifs one on top of the other. She often begins with what looks like candy-colored

spin art or straw-blown swirls and then overlays this with crowds of monkeys, skulls, statuary, gravestones, arrows, clouds, feathers, or gunmen. The human and animal subjects are in somber gray and brown tones set against the pastel pinks, greens, and blues of the more symbolic objects. As she places one set of motifs atop another, there are imperfections here and there — a figure reversed, broken, or negated; even though the compositions are tightly controlled there are misregistrations, skips, and bleeds. Looking closely, the artist delineates volumes with vertical streaks that articulate light and shadow, a method that allows her to meld and integrate disparate subjects as they reticulate and break apart.

Pettijohn Schade's work brings to mind Henry James's novella "[The Figure in the Carpet](#)" and the suggestion of a secret structure or meaning underlying a given work of art. In the same way the subconscious combines real events and repressed desires, her works build in associative power as we look through layers and come back to the surface; the latticework harnesses cultural histories, dreamworlds, and signs that appear as talismans or omens. Through her careful analysis of the substructures of patterns, the artist plays with metaphors and amps up the synergy between very different images mingling in an optical field.

In learning about Kozloff and Pettijohn-Schade, it is refreshing to hear how, in different ways, they have bucked the system. Pettijohn Schade [in an interview](#) mentioned how she has routinely ignored the advice "to scale up and simplify the detail level of my work." And, Kozloff, in the catalog for her current show, discusses her education in reductive, hard-edged abstraction, choosing instead to look outward "at the traditional arts of women and people from other cultures." Both artists have rejected the all-in-one quick read of much contemporary art, preferring instead to work within fields of glittering maximalism. The difference being that



Zoe Pettijohn Schade, "Crowd of Skulls" (2014), gouache on paper, 23.5 x 17.5 inches (courtesy Kai Matsumiya Gallery)
Zoe Pettijohn Schade, "Crowd of Crowds I (Monkeys, Feathers, Graves)" (2014), gouache on paper, 21.5 x 16.5 inches (courtesy Kai Matsumiya Gallery)

while Kozloff's large works envelope the body, Pettijohn Schade's draw the viewer in for total absorption. Both artists, without proselytizing, have managed to assert the relevance of pattern and craft simply through the example of their own powerful.



Joyce Kozloff, "The Tempest" (2014), mixed media on panel, 120 x 120 inches (courtesy DC Moore Gallery)

Joyce Kozloff: [Maps + Patterns](#) continues at DC Moore Gallery (535 West 22nd Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through April 25. Zoe Pettijohn Schade: [Crowds](#) continues at Kai Matsumiya Gallery (153 1/2 Stanton Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through May 9.

<http://hyperallergic.com/196164/contradictory-patterns-and-decorative-illusions/>