

Kenny Jones, Artist Statement for Terra Incognita, 2013

In this show I have included works from the last 5 years that follow the organizing concept of this exhibit: Terra Incognita. It turns out; this has been a major, though hidden, goal for me – to allow a painting to take you to an unknown place.¹ During this time period I have travelled to more countries than at any other time in my life. I experienced the shock of the familiar when I met people who are similar and yet very different. This was probably the same response that Marco Polo had during his travels. Even today we are discovering new lands, albeit, around other suns. At last count we have discovered 861 extrasolar planets.² Each discovery seems to change our place in the universe. Our imagination need never want for unknown terrains, thankfully.

When travelers of the 15th century saw areas of incognito on maps, I imagine it elicited one of two responses. Either, “That place is to be avoided at all costs” or an invitation to the explorer, “Possibly there is the kingdom of Prester John or a holy Grail.” Going there turns you into a wanderer, since no map has been made of that terrain. Finding our place in the world requires searching - sometimes in a circular manner. I am inspired by the strategy of triangulation³ to make my paintings - forking vectors of crossing paths.

My artwork is abstract as a result of the process rather than a dogmatic rejection of realism. When I was first learning to draw, I noticed that whenever I would draw “realistically” it would work best if I let the first mark dictate the image and not the other way round. This is not a criticism of other ways of working; it is simply where I start in the art process – a kind of dyslexia of the imagination. Paradoxically, I find less initial control creates a better outcome. An abstract image also results from a desire to include my experiences from the world of seeing. These collusions can generate a richer image – it is like inserting a bit of the journey into the map. This desire to include footnotes of visual experience into the artwork is something Leonardo Da Vinci wrote about. A paraphrase from his journal: “draw hair as though it were a waterfall, water as though it were a garment flowing in the wind, cloth as though it was a mountain range.” Art is an invitation to travel to a foreign land, with its own weird customs and sayings.⁴ It is another way to say, “This painting is a new place I’d like to visit, a place of surprise and wonder”. The language of Abstraction is how I hope to keep the visual map mobile for both the viewer and myself. Mobility keeps me from getting stuck in a rut⁵ and thereby confusing the map for the territory. This seems closer to how I make my way in the world, using known maps to triangulate unknown terrains.

¹ “I wish to make an apple as striking as a place”, attributed to Cezanne at CAA Conference session, New York, February 2013. Also presented in the same session, “Looking is inhabiting instead of decoding”.

² As of 3/16/2013 according to *The Extrasolar Planets Encyclopaedia*: <http://exoplanet.eu>

³ “Triangulation is the process of determining the location of a point by measuring angles to it from known points at either end of a fixed baseline, rather than measuring distances to the point directly (trilateration). wikipedia.org

⁴ Art... is a foreign city, and we deceive ourselves when we think it familiar... *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery*, Jeanette Winterson.

⁵ Ruts figure in journeys to known places. “The ancient Greeks constructed roads with artificial wheel-ruts. The ruts. . . thus constituted grooves that guided the carriages on the rutway . . . connecting major cities with sacred sites. wikipedia.org