

Sonya Rapoport

October 25, 2003 Alumni Symposium, University of California, Berkeley

Having survived Art 2A, I eventually landed in Cyberspace.

I have been asked "why" many times; and every time I give a different answer. I really don't know "why."

It was by no means a direct route nor a quick decision.

Well, today, I am going to give you another answer.

Gardiner asked me to describe how my "art practice has taken me to another idea of art, other than that represented by the old Art 2A."

I contend that my use of digital media and computers is of a continuum of the old 2A rather than a departure to "another idea of art."

The next few slides are of my work from my exhibit at the Palace of the Legion of Honor in 1963, painted during the decade after I left school, still reflecting a 2A internship, or should I say internment.



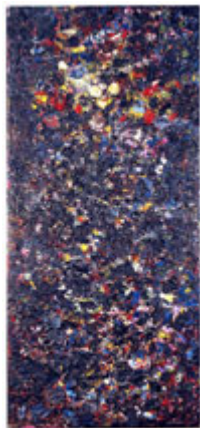
Portrait with white Gloves

I poured my guts out on canvas, metaphorically speaking, while mixing oil painting with child rearing.



Painting detail

One critic called the work a huge bouquet of unruly flowers, others said I was dispensing Manzoni cow-patties. I see the work as floral feces indicative of my struggle between creating immortal art and dealing with diaper details. Perhaps that was why I was wearing the white gloves.



Embers

During this period I deposited left over scraps in a cigar box, The box became a reliquary for odd decals and textures, gender shapes, canned fruit labels, wall paper designs, toy anatomy templates, a bridge from a billiard set, a fallen leaf. Instead of forbidden holdings, my pandora box sequestered an arcane language



Pandora box

In an antique architects desk that I purchased at the University's discarded furniture warehouse, I uncovered a series of geological survey charts, printed on linen paper, dated 1905. Some were of sites destined to become Japanese internment camps during World War II.



Chart #21



Chart #25

The survey charts coalesced my attraction for the visual geometry of scientific data, and my interest in quantifying qualitative information. I saw the opportunity to use the earth and water profiles and the structural diagrams as a background upon which to assemble my vocabulary of shapes. Perhaps the documented dams that prevented the water from flowing freely would be opened to the birthing canals of my superimposed imagery.

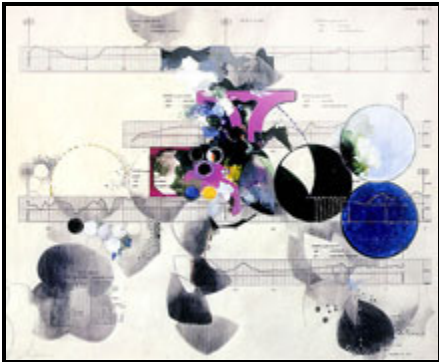


Chart #24

My early watercolor style of two contrasting calligraphies seemed a feasible method for using on the charts; the found "lines" were already there with which to activate my visual vocabulary.

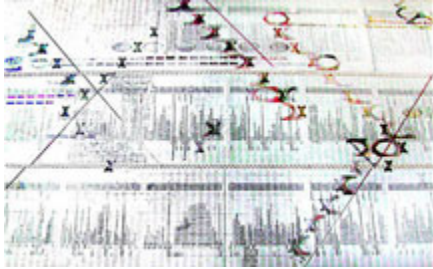
Directly onto the survey charts, I traced the shapes, integrating and interweaving a litany of motifs into the topographical swirls and grids. The shapes cried out to me in a language that incorporated cross cultures, gender, current events and technical information.



Chart #15

I was still practicing composition 2A -keeping the picture plane intact. Within the picture plane I inserted the shapes in a scriptory procedure.

After two years, I began searching for another workable surface. While scavenging among the wastebaskets in the math department's basement I found my next background, the computer printout.



Journey

I helped myself to the contents in the recycling bins. Liberating them. The typography, the encoded grouping and imagery, especially that which represented scientific research, fascinated me. Where many saw only columns of raw data, I saw graphic structures and rhythms, art and poetry. I selected output upon which I could create a totally active surface area. - a 2A indoctrination: Do not neglect the negative space.



Vance detail

At the beginning I felt the need to imitate the canvas's traditional shape so I stitched together, with my turkey stuffing needle, two or three of the continuous computer forms, assembling them into a new whole, ready to communicate as a unit



Uterus pattern

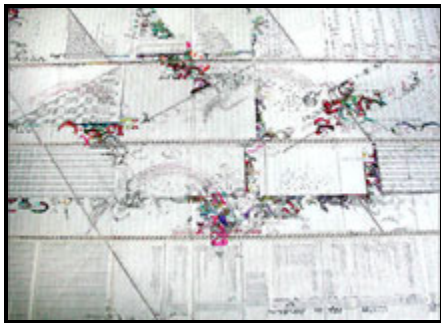
The uterus shape became a dominant theme. It was repeated side by side in a row and its up-side-down reflection was superimposed. An X, the extra female chromosome, was formed- moving the work's imagery further and further toward a feminist perspective.

The flat strip of X's and O's anticipated my work with the three-dimensional double helix image.



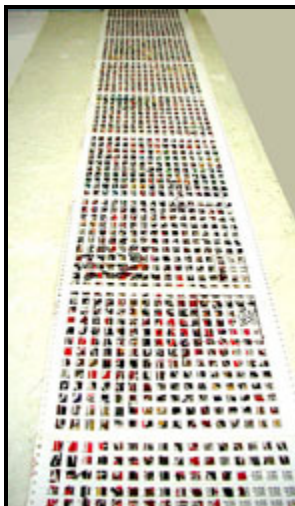
Caution

The superimposed uterus shapes created an oval, an egg shape. A new ordering system was created on the original plane by the overlaying of clustered tracings and stamped foreign words, thus adding a thematic context to the work, as well as a push/pull spatial dimension -another requirement for Art 2A composition.



Charles Simonds

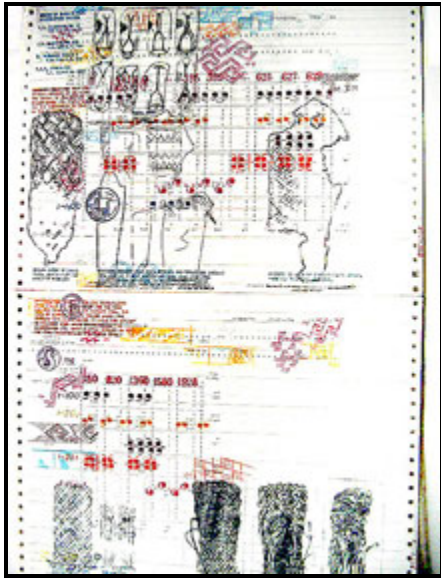
Visual ideas from the survey charts became integrated with those of the computer output



Hovenweep

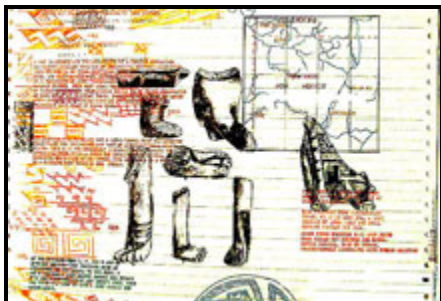
I later dispensed with the stitching. On single continuous computer forms I decoratively manipulated letters from references to fit directly on top of the printout data. The original text source was soon included as a syntax to the work.

Compelled to find out how the printout was encoded, I collaborated with Dr. Dorothy Washburn, researcher on Anasazi Indian pottery designs. She taught me how to punch the cards, check the peep holes, retrieve printouts, and how to decipher them.



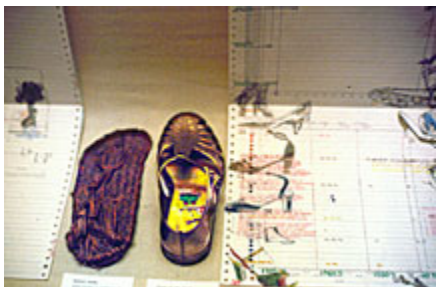
Bonita-Shoes, Commas.

I decoded the printout into commas and overlaid these and other related graphics and information directly on to the output. The comma was Dr. Washburn's tool for transposing the structural patterns painted on the Indian pottery. By following the changes in the comma configurations, tribal migration could be traced throughout the USA.



Foot Effigy

During my research, I found an image of a foot effigy wearing a Mexican sandal. This find corroborated early trade relations between the United States and Mexico and triggered my multi-media shoe events.



Donnell Library Installation

The Donnell Library installation consisted of descriptive panels of Pueblo Bonita /Rapoport footwear comparisons . Below the Indian panel I placed an actual Anasazi sandal from the year 500. Below the computer analysis of my own shoes my studio jelly sandal was displayed.

From my PERSONAL SPACE the work went into INTERACTIVE SPACE where people put their best foot forward.



Why my shoes?

In the interactive shoe event, A SHOE-IN, 1982, participants explained why they wore their shoes.



Which Shoe?

In a later shoe event, SHOE-FIELD, 1986, participants selected which shoe they would like to interact with.



SHOE-FIELD Installation

On a floor field of tiles that had been silk-screened with shoe-charge patterns participants interacted with other shoe wearers.



Shoe book

The shoe information was compiled into an interactive digital book from which the viewer received a Shoe-Psyche reading.

IN CONCLUSION:

just as in life where

ONTOGENY RECAPITULATES PHYLOGENY

I feel that

ART SHOULD FOLLOW THE SAME EVOLUTIONARY COMPULSION.

Bio:

Sonya Rapoport, at first an abstract expressionist painter, became a multi-media artist whose pioneering computer-assisted work dates from the mid-1970s. Her cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary art form evolved into interactive installations and art created for the web. She serves on the board of Directors for Leonardo/ISAST.

This is my web site.

www.sonyarapoport.net

e-mail: sonyarap@lmi.net

