

Newton
Harrison
Helen Mayer
Harrison

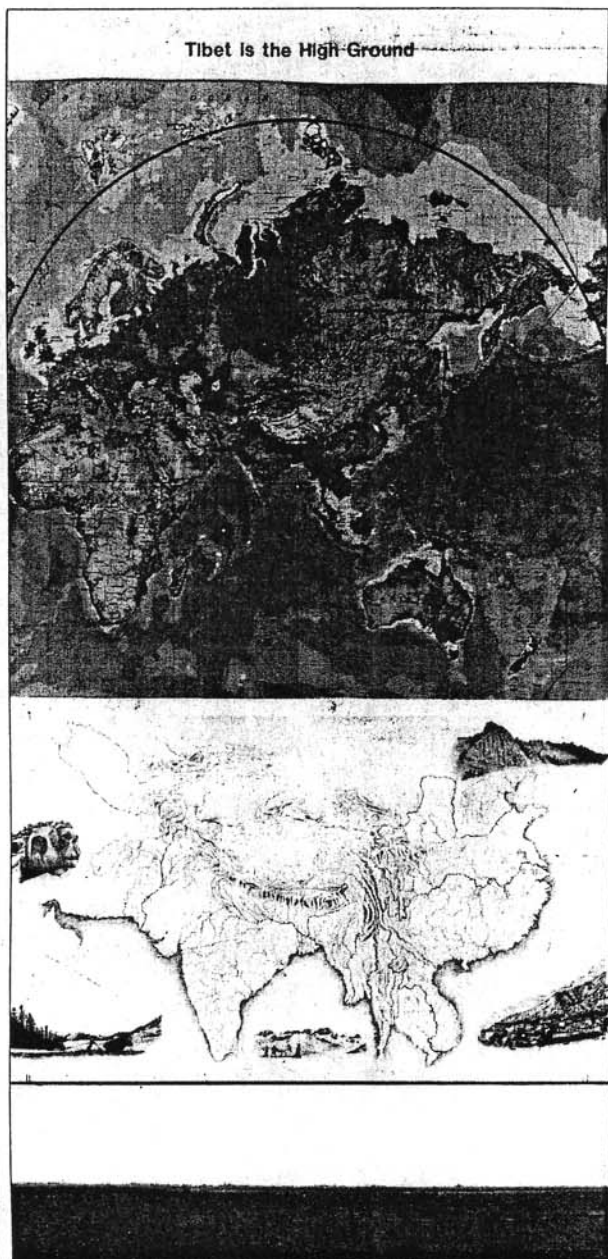
RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS

STUART NICHOLSON

Handwritten between photos pieced together to form two panoramas is the phrase "something awful happened here." The site in the panoramas is an eleven acre pile of rubble in the center of Berlin which was the center for interrogation and torture; the organizational and nerve center for the Nazi regime.

This proposal by Newton Harrison and Helen Mayer Harrison called *Trummerflora on the Typography of Terrors* includes creating a memorial (not a monument) by demarcating the site with *Trummerflora*, a flower which grows well in rubble. Although this piece is atypical of the Harrisons, the use of nature to console and regenerate itself is their hallmark. Indeed, the Harrisons look for problems, specifically those confronting the environment and the continued genocide of the planetary ecosystem has been their focus for the past two decades.

The Harrisons' work is a slow and deliberate process that involves each aspect of a community's and man's relationship to the environment. A proposal often begins with an invitation by a government or a community. They visit a site, explore it, discuss it with many people who live, work, or study there. They then depict and document their ideas in photos, maps,



Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison Tibet—Tibet Is the High Ground 1991 map with mixed media, drawing and text, 2 panels, map: 69x75", drawing: 41x75"

BALANCING ACT

Something Awful Happened Here

literature, and performance. The show at Feldman consists of four proposals; for Berlin, Yugoslavia, Pasadena, Santa Monica. Lining the walls are maps and aerial

photos, interspersed with fragmented panoramas in a Hockney-like breakup of nature, mountains, streams, mountain lakes, rivers surrounded by farmland, city

rivers.

In the main room is a proposed nature corridor in Yugoslavia which would run along the Sava River from the Austrian border to the

Danube at Beograd. The idea is to create a strip of preserved land that would shield the river as a natural filter from farm and town pollution. In #5, emphasizing waste disposal, photos of waters white with contaminants and laced with sludge are pieced together and juxtaposed with lush green wetlands.

The accompanying text between the Harrisons or the Harrisons and scientists which reads as a cadenced conversation maintains a largely positive attitude. "You said, despite the burden the waters look

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beautiful. I said, from one perspective or another anything can look beautiful." Or, "There is still time for a new history for the Sava which while polluted is not poisoned."

However, one wonders whether radioactive waters from an atomic plant can be drained through holding ponds, ponds raising warm water fish, and minibasins to return refreshed to their source. One wonders about the far-out nature of some of the theories. One piece targets Tibet, claiming that the drought in California could be from a shift in the jet stream to avoid the "chimney effect" over the Tibetan mountains.

One wonders. This is the key to the Harrison's work. For although their views are utopian, their proposals, unlike the earthworks of even Serra or Christo, create a dialogue with the total environment not a monumental intrusion into it. Their dialogue includes many neglected issues, the history of the neighborhood, the relationship of pedestrian and vehicular thoroughfares, and the pattern of open and closed spaces. As balancing one's soul, an attempt is made to balance the ecosystem without taking away what is essential to man, recreation and survival.

This art makes the viewer work. One must read the often repetitive text and change with the shifting view of the photos. But it is work not unlike meditation where little bits of information and realization are obtained after intense observation. The photos are clear, almost serene, and only a few are dramatic. There is a beauty to the photos, not only a natural beauty, tree-lined cliffs and white-capped peaks, but a resonating sense of the temporality of every site. The Harrisons call it "The poetry of the whole." The viewer is left with a pervading sadness. †