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(translation)

World Artist - Nancy Chunn

Geopolitical Map – Nancy Chunn Geopolitical Map – Nancy Chunn

Arranged by Park Sung Hee Materials Provided by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

Nancy Chunn¹ has always been inspired by the historical, cultural, and political aspects of society. Her inspirations also come from different times and different places: the West and the East, the past and the present. Born in Los Angeles, U.S.A. in 1941, Nancy Chunn graduated from the California Institute of the Arts. In her early works, she used images of maps and tools in order to describe countries in conflict. Although the political turmoil of each country is the focal point of her paintings, she doesn't seem to ask the viewer to see the geopolitical conflicts through a specific, political point-of-view. She rather seems to ask the viewer not to forget these places that are affected by conflict. Through the visual metaphors of struggle and imprisonment, Chunn depicts the predicament of each country. The subjects of her paintings are countries like Iran, Iraq, Ethiopia, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, and Korea.

<China> Sequence², her most representative work during this period, superbly describes the unbelievably rich and complicated process of development of the region, which is comprised of works that range from paintings of simple images to paintings filled with ideograms, China's unique cultural heritage, in a very diverse style. **Nancy Chunn had long been interested in the history of China, but the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4th, 1989 really prompted her to start working on the Sequence. In this project, by researching and chronicling the vast and complicated history of China from the ancient past to the present, she tries to find out what caused the Tiananmen incident.** The stories in the paintings are narrated by the forms of the maps, the divisions in scale or other similar structural elements. While working in chronological order, Chunn incrementally uses more complicated language in order to reflect China's geography, history and culture, including its development of industry and technology. Icons, poems and details are borrowed from actual Chinese history. These elements allow the author as well as the viewers of the paintings to participate in the periods the paintings represent. When four (4) of these early paintings were exhibited in Washington D.C. at the 42nd Painting Biennial, art critic Ken Johnson, referring to the paintings, said, "By choosing a preposterously vast and overwhelming subject like Chinese history, she asserts that, even though there must be some guiding rules in Modernism, paintings should do more than just endlessly reinvestigate the limits of the self only to reach immediate goals."

For more than 20 years, Chunn has been working on a diverse range of paintings, and all of her works are meticulously produced with rich contents. **The world in her paintings originates from a basic, humanistic point-of-view. She delves deeply into the history of humankind, and only with the essences collected from long and painstaking research and effort, creates not only portraits of the society itself, but also works that demonstrate**

a great human interconnectedness. For example, <Kurdistan>³, which was exhibited at the Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York and at the Capitol's Rotunda in Washington D.C. made the Kurds⁴ and other people who viewed the painting excited. This work embodied the detailed aspects of the land so much that the people could mutually understand each other without speaking to one another about their native land.

The <Front Pages> Sequence is the most well known and easily accessible of all of Nancy Chunn's works. Over the period of more than a year, she had read the New York Times and accumulated her own reactions to its articles. In this sequence, she edited and arranged her own witty, unique and pointed comments, using pastels and rubber stamps. Using metaphors and texts, Chunn not only comments on the events in the newspaper, but also on the power of mass media. Her paradoxical, but somewhat humorous tone tests our reactions to the comedies and tragedies in the news. The natural energy, along with the decorative and interesting surface, contradict the seriousness and focus of the project. From line-drawings and cartoonish expressions to traditional expressions in painting, Chunn employs a variety of drawing styles. Various visual images and more than 500 alphabet shaped rubber stamps are either designed by the painter herself or adapted from ideograms.

As each month passes, simplicity gives way, and splendor and complexity develop. Clauses turn into sentences and color photographs transform. Drawings overwhelm symbols and images spill over the boundaries of the pages. By using visual metaphors, Chunn draws our attention to patterns in the scope of the news. Angels and flames remind us of the significance of the TWA flight crash, and the rubbed out figures scattered around, suggest that the Gulf war will be etched in our minds for a long time to come. Warning signs resembling traffic signs represent violence and turmoil in the troubles of the future. Repeated symbols signify the power of media through which the news is systematically defined and controlled. Green dollar signs signify the news items related to financial affairs and the lack of color pink is related to the near absence of any women-oriented articles on the front pages. Annexation of World Aids Day ribbons draw people's attention to the lack of articles addressing this subject and news coverage about the events celebrating this day. **By using rubber stamps representing war, famine, disease, irrationality, and disaster, Chunn explains these are everyday occurrences.** As in her previous works, Nancy Chunn is dealing with political themes.

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Through these sequence projects, she reveals her deepening and visually stunning obsession with details. It is quite clear that Chunn has a unique talent in chronicling time. This particular sequence chronicles special news scoops during the period between 1998 and 2000, including all the events that attracted strong interests from the general public, such as the scandal between former President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, the deadly earthquake in Turkey, the war in Kosovo, and news items about the Star Wars movie. Detailed descriptions and pictures with splendid colors deliver controlled confusion through visual metaphors and obtrusive slogans. **Chunn documents emotional reactions such as anger, cynicism, sneering, sadness and mistrust toward tragic and banal events. She emphasizes that these tragic events are a part of the continuously repeating cycle that is history.** Her works are like present-day prophecies.

Nancy Chunn's recent works are different in style. While still rooted in geopolitical subjects, which have been the basis of her work since early on in her work, and using meticulously studied subjects, Chunn has created a new language in painting. This new language creates tensions between her subject and her style of expression, as well as the distance between documented objects and emotionally connected objects. Her works seem to follow the orbit connecting the real and the ideal. Her work <9/11>, which mimics New York's World Trade Center's twin towers, explores America's current crisis through the use of flight schedules of the day when the terror occurred and events developing in a place where there are no emergency exits. Ideograms and slogans used in this project have been chosen from a computer image-bank, Art History and rubber stamps. The <Chicken Little and the Culture of Fear> sequence is a large project comprised of over 200 panels, and is a fable about a timid chicken. Chunn's funny comic book-like story defines the cultural map for us with encyclopedic research about contemporary fears and hints at contemporary politics, which regresses a country to its early, underdeveloped stage.

During her 25-year career, Nancy Chunn's consistent subject matter and stylistic diversity conveys a full maturity in her artistic vision. Her works clearly display an integration of unique painting techniques, and, through a delicate, modern aesthetic, reveal a complex social conscience, which one can only rarely experience today.

1. Although Nancy Chunn is often mistaken for an Asian because of her last name, she is a Caucasian-American.
2. Her paintings once elicited a project proposal from China.
3. Highland region in Southwest Asia, Turkey, Iran and Iraq.
4. People of Kurdistan.