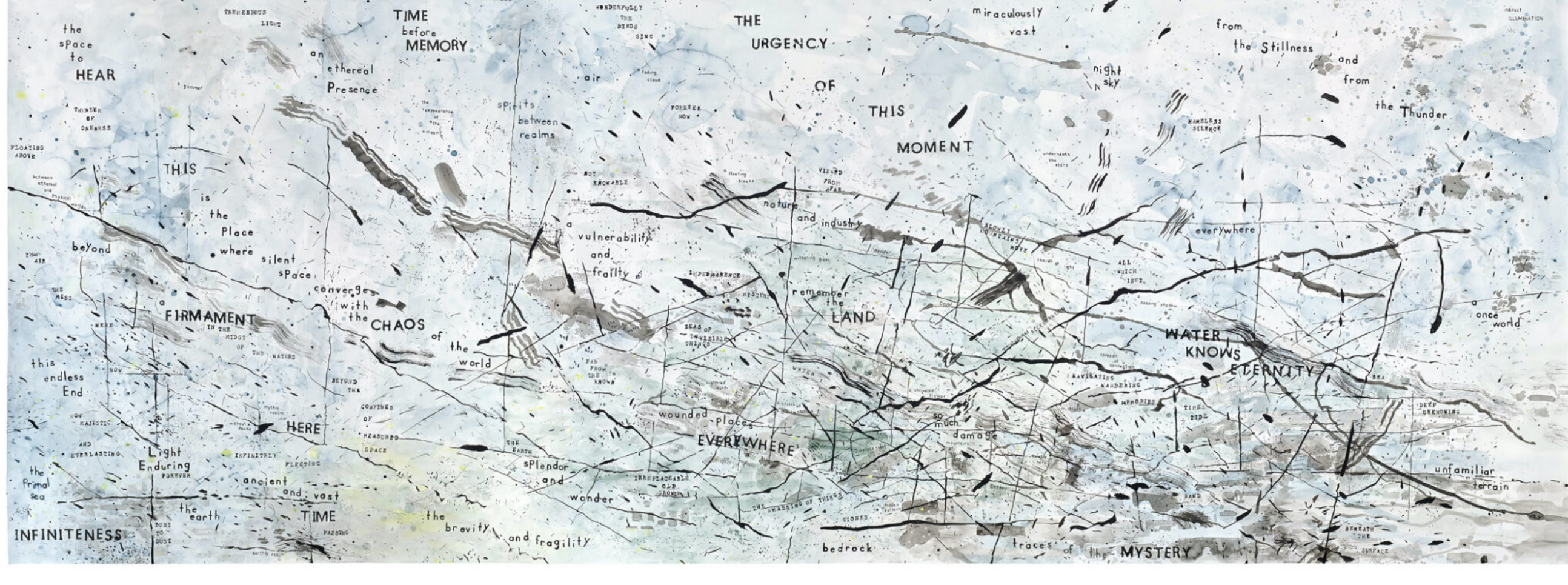


MAKING MAPS FOR AN UNKNOWABLE BUT IMPROVABLE PRESENT BY KAREY KESSLER

March 31, 2021

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An artwork by Karey Kessler, 2021

by Karey Kessler

I am incredibly fortunate to have an art studio I can escape to—especially during these pandemic days when my husband and two sons are working and schooling from home.

I only live a mile from my studio, but I have to walk straight up a huge hill and then all the way down the other side. On my way to my studio, I admire the persistent weeds that peek out in between the cracks of the sidewalk and the moss that grows on just about anything here in the Pacific Northwest. At the bottom of the hill, I reach Magnuson Park, home of the Sand Point Naval Air Station Historic District and a network of soccer fields, dog parks and—most important to me—miles of recently restored wetlands home to frogs, beavers, and countless birds.

My studio is in an Art Deco Navy Administration building from the 1930s that now houses over 30 artist studios. My studio is on the third floor, not far from the Officer's Club where, pre-pandemic, there were conferences, parties and other events. These days, it is eerily quiet with only the occasional humming and singing of one of my studio neighbors.

I have a large window that lets in natural light as well as motion sensitive overhead lights that click off when I don't move around a lot—like when I'm working on one part of my painting for an extended period (the lights click off to fulfill environmental codes for the newly renovated building). I usually work on a table (and occasionally on the floor), with my work flat in front of me.

I consider painting as an act of meditation. I use watercolor, inks, stencils, stamps and freehand writing to create map-like paintings. When I'm making the repeated dots and lines of my paintings, I stop thinking about the everyday mundane events and obligations in my life as a mother, and I start thinking about more spiritual and expansive ideas about the environment, geological history, the Mystery and Grandeur of the universe, and the fleetingness of each moment.



A quick selfie on the walk to her studio.



Kessler's studio space

I think about how we live in a world that is mapped all the way from outer space right down to our front-doors, and yet we still have no idea why we are here, or what here really means. I recently presented a show called, *here is the Place*. The title played on the fact that in Hebrew the word for 'the Place', ha-Makom, means a specific physical place, but is also one of the Hebrew words for G-d.

I use words in my paintings. I collect words from poetry books, novels, science texts and Jewish texts; I add to and re-combine those phrases to create a map of thoughts about the world and universe we live in. Recently, I've been reading a lot about the current geological epoch which many geologists propose to call the "Anthropocene" because of the significant impact humans have on the earth's geology and ecosystems.

Last month I finished a painting titled, "The Urgency of this Moment," 8 feet long and 3 feet high and painted

using black ink and Payne's-grey watercolor. I began the painting right after the Black Lives Matter protests started; I felt the urgency of racial and environmental justice, and how they directly relate to the pandemic and climate change. One area of the painting reads, "The place where silent space converges with the CHAOS of the world" and another reads "seas of invisible things." Although the pandemic and climate change are scarcely visible to many of us, these global crises are upending the whole world.

I'm currently working on another large map painting titled, "This Ungraspable Whole," which is 6 feet long and 3 feet high and is painted using burnt orange and mahogany inks. These earth tones reference geologic layers and tectonic plates but also an otherworldly place with phrases like "the mystical journey," "a digital landscape," and "an odyssey to nowhere."



In the studio: "This Ungraspable Whole"

My maps explore feelings of uncertainty and ecological grief for the environmental changes happening around us. There are species becoming endangered and extinct, coastal cities flooding, forest fires growing stronger, and viruses spreading faster. Awareness of these facts can be overwhelming, and it feels like we're all wandering around in the dark without a map. I hope that my maps—which embrace the fact that we don't truly know where we are in this life—may exist as a kind of prayer for guidance for individuals and our planet.



Headshot: Karey Kessler

Karey Kessler is a member of Shift Gallery in Seattle and her work is in the flat files of the **Pierogi Gallery** (New York City) and is included in the books: *The Map as Art* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), by Kitty Harmon and *From Here to There: A Curious Collection From the Hand Drawn Map Association* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2010). Her art was also published in the academic journal *Imaginary Cartographies*, *English Language Notes* (Issue 52.1, 2014) and most recently in *Le Paysage est une traversée* (Editions Parentheses, 2020). Kessler has shown her work widely, including exhibits at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Museum (PA), the Weatherspoon Art Museum (NC), the Tacoma Art Museum (WA), Shift Gallery (WA), and most recently at the Bellevue Art Museum (WA). Her work was included in *Time Sensitive*, at the **Broto: Art-Climate-Science convention** in 2020 (Provincetown, MA) and in 2019 she was a resident in the **SciArt Initiative Bridge Residency**. From 2018-2020 Kessler had a temporary public art piece, *A Path of Wonderment and Connection*, along the Rainier Valley Greenway in Seattle. She currently has an installation, once, there was WILDERNESS here, on the **Tacoma Tollbooth Gallery** in Tacoma, WA. Follow her on Instagram at

@kareykessler and visit here website: www.KareyKessler.com

Karey Kessler is a featured artist in "Authenticity and Identity", a visual arts exhibition curated by Ori Z. Soltes on display at Adas Israel Congregation, Washington, D.C., April 6 to May 15, 2021. To learn more about the exhibition visit <https://authenticityandidentity.com/>.

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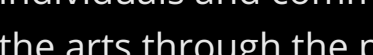
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