

2.2 The Humility to Listen by Karey Kessler



“The Humility to Listen”, Karey Kessler, 2020, watercolor on paper, framed 16” x 26”

One might say that the maps crafted by **Karey Kessler**, from Seattle, WA, expand on the principle of re-visioning the conceptual reality in which Jewish history, interwoven into general history, has played out across time and space—“our sense of knowing exactly where we are,” in the artist’s words—while at the same time interwoven with the *divine* sense of space as spaceless and time as timeless: this is *mayim* intersecting *shamayim*—and *adam(ah)*—in the extreme. It is, moreover, fraught with irony, since one of the many circumlocutionary ways in which Jews refer to the indescribable, spaceless and timeless God, whose very Name is ineffable, is *HaMakom*: “The Place.”

The artist notes that her “maps explore my experience of time, place, and Jewish spirituality. They create a bridge between spiritual places and physical locations, science and Kabbalah. My work explores the fact that the Hebrew word for ‘the Place,’ *ha-Makom*, is also used as a name for God... My maps tell the story of an ever-changing environment, impermanence, and the immensity of time. They tell stories about the interconnected ecosystems of the world that don’t end where one country’s borders end and another’s begins: how both air and water (and therefore pollution), defy borders. The stories include deep time (before humans were on earth) and the eternal things that will remain once we’re gone. There is real ecological grief for the environmental changes happening around us but my maps also tell stories of hope and repair and possibility while also exposing the urgency of the climate crisis and our ever-changing environment.”

Her “maps” therefore very distinctly chart the interconnected realms of her concerns: not only as a Jew and a woman and an artist and a human being but as an inhabitant of this glorious planet that we keep challenging with our arrogance and our pollutionist behavioral patterns. In this exhibition, her “The Humility to Listen” offers—as with all of her “maps”—the hint at something familiar, a topography of water and earth, lowlands and mountains, it would seem, almost familiar but not quite identifiable as locations we have seen before on other maps.

That we are and are not in a world that we can identify is confirmed by the words—in larger and smaller font sizes, like the names of countries and cities: “vanishing and dissolving spaces of wilderness,” “possible futures,” “this thin place... to quiet,” “the whole before and after,” and the eponymous site, “the humility to listen.” All of these large “locations”—together with smaller ones, like “the stillness and silence of trees and stones” or “flashes of insight” (to name two of them)—call the viewer, in studying the topography of Jewish and human existence through the lens of the artist’s mind and brush, to look carefully and to listen with humility, and to reconsider our place in places and in relationship to the *Place*.

Previous

Next



Karey Kessler uses watercolor, stencils, stamps and freehand writing to create map inspired paintings. Her work is in the flat files of the Pierogi Gallery (New York City) and is included in the book, *The Map as Art* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), by Kitty Harmon. She received her BA in Anthropology and Fine Arts from the University of Pennsylvania and my MFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and is currently a member of Shift Gallery in Seattle. www.kareykessler.com, Facebook: Karey Kessler Studio, Instagram: @kareykessler