

Paper Trail

By Adam Stone

Artist probes the contemporary and abstract through the medium of collage.

Anna Fine Foer tears up bits of paper and turns them into art. From scraps and shreds, she crafts images not just of great beauty but also of intellectual depth.

"The challenge is to make it aesthetically cohesive, just as much as the idea is cohesive," she says.

An exhibition of Foer's collage work, "Camougraphy In Cartopolis," will open tonight, Nov. 11, at the Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts in Annapolis. The show runs through Dec. 15.

Foer's most recent works use maps as their basis, reworking their abstract topographies into creative elements. Images reflect on contemporary themes, often in absurdist renderings. In "GPS: Globally Positioned Sheep," for example, several sheep wander in downtown Washington, D.C., guided by their navigation devices.

"I was on K Street at 9 o'clock on a weekday morning and here were all these young people walking to work, all of them without exception looking down at their BlackBerries and their iPhones, never looking up at where they were going," recalls Foer. "I started

to think about how our experiences are more and more about technology, and how that is isolating us."

Other images take a more serious, often political, tone. One collage uses maps and cellphones to depict the security wall dividing Israel from the West Bank — a commentary, perhaps, on our ability to divide ourselves from one another, despite the wealth of communication tools at our fingertips.

The Intersection

Now in her 50s, Foer ought to know a bit about the complexities of geography. Born in Boulder, Colo., she grew up in Indianapolis and lived in Israel long enough to become a citizen. She now resides in Annapolis, where she attends Kneseth Israel Congregation and the Chabad of Anne Arundel County.

Foer's art is similarly well-traveled. Her work has appeared at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, the Maryland Governor's Mansion and the Israeli Embassy in Washington. In addition, it is in the permanent collection of the Haifa Museum of Art and the Beersheva Biblical Museum. Foer was awarded a prize for the Encouragement of Young Artists for work exhibited in the Artist's House in Jerusalem, and she received a Maryland State Arts Council grant for Individual Artists in 2008.

In addition to her more secular projects, she has used maps to craft *ketubot*, Jewish wedding contracts, incorporating into the imagery the hometowns and other places significant to the bride and groom. She also has crafted elaborate scenes depicting various Torah portions, in honor of *b'nai mitzvah*.

The work with maps reflects an

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artistic sensibility that straddles the fence between the natural and the artificial, the complex interplay between the world we make and the world around us. "A map is man-made, trying to describe something in nature," says Foer, who finds special satisfaction in exploring the intersection of society and nature.

Such concerns give an intellectual underpinning to Foer's work, but she doesn't want the art to be all about ideas. Rather, she says, the images themselves must make the stronger statement.

"One of my most important goals is that it be aesthetical, that you can respond to it without knowing anything about it," she says. "I came from a design sensibility, so I want the composition to be strong. It has to be visually at least as compelling as the idea that got me started."

While it isn't always easy to strike that balance, the artist has other challenges to overcome. Foer recalls

an encounter some years back in which a fellow artist cautioned her that she would "never make it" in Annapolis if she couldn't produce representational works.

"People think there is an arts community here because you can go and buy a picture of a sailboat or crabs," she said. "It's all touristy."

Foer has done what many artists do who feel themselves working in isolation, seeking out like-minded colleagues in the nearby cities. When she isn't attending events and artists' gatherings in Baltimore and Washington, she continues to shred maps, looking for a way to strike that balance between the visceral energy of the art and the power of the idea behind it.

It's the nature of the medium that makes it work. With artistic renderings "it can be about more than one thing, more than one event, at the same time," Foer says. "You can get it all at once, and it doesn't have to be linear." Jr

Adam Stone is a freelance writer in Annapolis.

The exhibition "Camougraphy In Cartopolis" by Anna Fine Foer will open tonight, Nov. 11, at the Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts, 801 Chase St. in Annapolis. The exhibition, which runs through Dec. 15, will be presented Mondays through Fridays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For information, visit mdhallarts.org or call 410-263-6544.

For information about Foer, visit annafineart.com.