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# Oh, the Places You'll Go: Jean Richardson at Granary Art Center

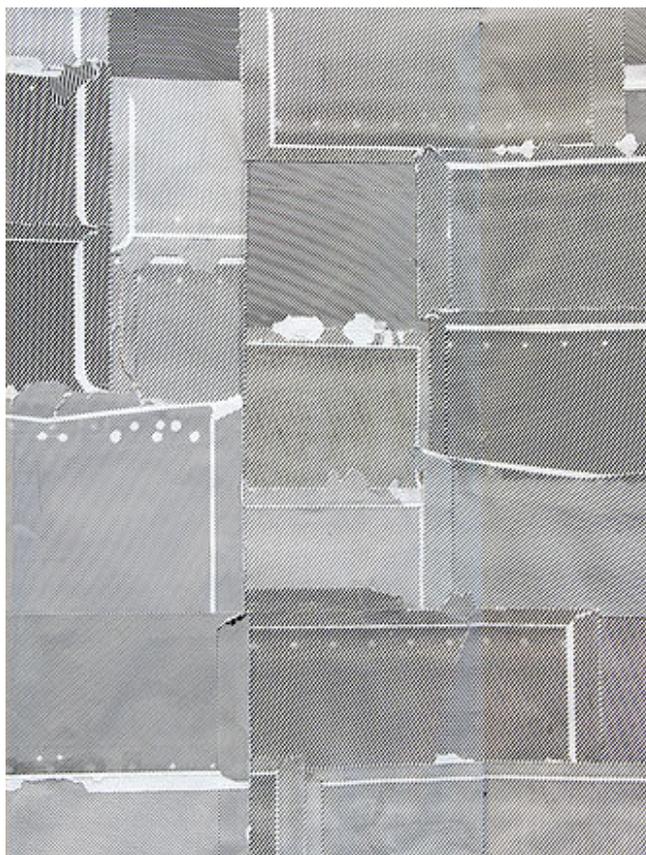
BY HANNAH SANDORF DAVIS ON NOVEMBER 7, 2017 • ( 1 COMMENT )



Since the advent of the Internet, mailings have dropped dramatically, yet millions of letters are still sent every day. What happens to all those used envelopes? At least some of them find their way into the inventive collages of Jean Richardson. In her exhibition *Destination Unknown*, at the Granary Art Center in Ephraim, Richardson explores themes of displacement and space, using envelopes and packaging to examine what it means to move or to inhabit a different place. An immigrant from Scotland, the artist has lived in several different countries and has sent more than her fair share of letters. Though she says she loves to travel and have new experiences, she can be crippled by missing her family and home. To illustrate these feelings of conflicting desires to travel and be with family, she makes envelope

collages, using traditional map folds to give the glued collages a three-dimensional form.

Richardson's exhibition is an engaging examination of pattern and form. Particularly intriguing is the way, in many of her works, the envelopes are cut so that their interior shows. Many envelopes, especially those used to send bills, have a patterned interior which adds opacity, and therefore security, to whatever is being mailed. The inclusion of security-envelope patterns can be seen as a reflection on senses of security in place, understanding one's



purpose and function. Finding a niche to fit in and insert oneself. It is also an interesting visual element, creating a rolling surface to the folds that are reminiscent of crashing waves or tumbling cloud banks. Other pieces, like "Whereabouts," are rolled like older maps, like envelopes of journeys long past carrying messages of where a sailor should travel and where "there be monsters," advice to future sailors just as so many envelopes now contain advice from parents, friends, or even insurance and credit-card companies.

Added to this theme of finding security is the patchwork pattern of the envelopes which resembles quilting. These quilt patterns bring to mind feelings of home, comfort, family, and hearth, creating a

strange sense of longing: The paper is not permanent, but ephemeral. Unlike cloth, paper is more easily disintegrated, more easily burned. Like paper and cloth, memories are much more ephemeral than objects, easily altered. Paper is malleable, and so is memory. The patchwork pattern is a momentary placeholder for memory, but it is not much more stable than it.



The title of her collage “Wandering” alludes to themes of travel but also placelessness. These envelopes are unpatteredened, creating an endless landscape of white where the eye is easily lost. From a distance the composition seems seamless or just one

giant piece of paper. Stepping closer, however, one begins to see the edges of the envelopes faint against the white background. The composition is carefully studied with each envelope fitting neatly against another. This piece is strongly contrasted by “Traverse,” which is composed of repurposed Manila envelopes. Unlike “Wandering,” these envelopes show their use with traces of red and black ink from postal stamps and addresses. They are worn, imperfect, and the composition is large, covering a good portion of the wall. Like the title “Traverse,” these paper artifacts communicate having passed over a large portion of land and seeing many different people from various backgrounds. They speak of the hodgepodge of the International mail system where somehow, almost miraculously,

a few lines on an envelope become a code for a person anywhere in the world. Addresses become definitions just as the artist has felt defined differently in the various places she has lived.

Altogether, Richardson's show is an intimate expression of her self-identity as a wanderer. Though she has lived in and loved many places, placelessness radiates from her pieces but they are still hopeful. The light colors of the envelopes speak to a brighter future, a hearth-lit home just over the horizon.

*"Destination Unknown," collages by Jean Richardson, Granary Art Center, Ephraim, through Jan. 26, 2018, [granaryartcenter.org](http://granaryartcenter.org) (<http://granaryartcenter.org>), [www.jean-richardson.com](http://www.jean-richardson.com) (<http://www.jean-richardson.com>)*



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So excellent! I love Jean's work. Always such thoughtful uses for forgotten thi **REPLY**