

## **Equivocal Topographies**

**Dinah Ryan**

*"Some identical twins are more identical than others."* - Lawrence Wright, Double Mystery

From a vertical axis, the twin sides of Constance Lowe's drawings and felt works bloom outward into brilliantly saturated, gracefully metamorphosing topographies that conjure fleeting but oddly familiar associations. Their sensory effect is similarly heady and multilayered since the color has an almost synesthetic agency, producing concomitant impressions of sound, touch, or taste in conjunction with the visual pleasure they induce. Opacity and clarity oscillate in the drawings, where the color thickens on the translucent surface and then opens into filmy negative space. In the felt works, the strata of cloth, flaps, literal openings, and intricate shadows have a corporeal presence, as if they had been cultivated rather than made, then shed and suspended on the wall.

Lowe's work is rich with such accumulating sensate and imaginative satisfactions, yet each one has a conceptual value, which relates at least in part to the fundamental neurological question of how the brain forms sensory information and how this information emerges. The artist's color choices, for example, are linked to the basic perceptual levels that provide the physical entry point for the mental sense of being in the world. Since perceptions and the sensors that enable them are not uniform within or across species, the inventive selection of color becomes a means of generating unusual reception - sensory and intuitional experience - for the observer. Various studies involving blind or blindfolded subjects suggest that the human brain can generate a sense of color without seeing and that the occipital cortex - the visual processing center of the mammalian brain - is "not 'simply' visual, but... participates in tactile, auditory, and perhaps even linguistic tasks."

Believing that art should work as a similar form of surprise-yielding inquiry, Lowe engages with processes of complexity and discovery. Her

drawings, colored pencil on translucent drafting film, are the result of a series of evolving replications. An ink blot made by the artist is transformed into a complete initial drawing, which is fed into a digital system and changed. The emerging colors become agents of construction and extended imagination, and the medium of colored pencil, often regarded as a hobby or genre medium, is transformed into a vehicle for radiance.

In this way, Lowe admits the viewer into geographies of conceptual and perceptual excess. She says, "I'm interested in the illogical features embedded in but seemingly excessive to otherwise logical systems - for example, characteristics that accompany beneficial evolutionary developments but seem extraneous or nonfunctional." The steps in her process are both necessary to the end result and excessive in some way.

As an example of technique that is conceptually luxuriant, Lowe is faithful to the idiosyncrasies of the original blots. The shapes are symmetrical but not mirror images. In studies of twins and twinning, all kinds of variations and deviations exist. Stemming from double forms, Lowe's drawings and felt works recall the intertwining replications and startling differences in the black and white photographs of twins by Chicago surgeon and photographic artist David Teplica.<sup>(2)</sup> Lowe's work, too, eludes fixation in identity, language, or locus. And, as with the biological process of twinning, it requires multiple generative forces to develop this kind of complexity.

#### **[Footnotes]**

1) Amir Amedi et al. , "The Occipital Cortex in the Blind," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 14 (2005): 311.

2) Lawrence Wright, "Double Mystery," *New Yorker*, August 7, 1995, 89.

Essay by Dinah Ryan