

## LAURA F. GIBELLINI AND THE DOMESTICATION OF SPACE.

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lmost despite ourselves, we claim the space around us more effectively than we could ever imagine. But also less willfully, maintaining a looser grasp than we think over our unique and personal design. Our desires and experiences manifest themselves through a subversion of our intent, but also in tandem with it, informing it, and are further intertwined with unforeseeable experiences, nature, history, others. Laura F. Gibellini's work deftly and playfully explores these conflicting forces of the very human need to conquer and make whole and comprehensible, and the equally mortal constraints that shall always push up against it, our habits and patterns betraying us. Throughout Gibellini's work, an exploration of maps and domestic interiors, present the endlessly layered manifestations of the human inhabitation of space.

Despite our increased awareness that we understand so little and control even less, we keep grasping for ultimate control, trying to harness the forces of nature in an alchemical effort to transform the elements into a solid reality we can describe with human words, human images, human scales. Even if, while doing so, we tell ourselves that actually, we are not seeking to conquer or control, we are, rather, merely trying to understand and describe, and perhaps guide a little. Big Ideas and Big Solutions are dead we agree, but we can't help but reach for them and their simplicity, like so many intrusive thoughts that are comfortable habits we do not really want to let go.

Gibellini's subtle, painstakingly drawn and stenciled installations, such as "(In) Habitation" (160 x 200 cm) Hacia Afuera, Outdoor Art & Music Festival, New York, 2010), seem to excavate the process of map-making and domesti-

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cation itself. Her drawing takes the eye along deceptively familiar isometric patterns that do not, after close examination, describe the types of phenomena we instinctively expect them to symbolize. These lines do not eventually converge to form a topographic description of a place, of a climate, or any other kind of observable event. So much visual art plays with familiar symbols, using them as reference points for self-conscious reinterpretation, dislocation or just basic subversion. What sets Gibellini's work apart, is that even though we are highly aware that we are looking at a simulation of contouring and mapmaking, we cannot repress our strong, nearly involuntary, need to find a recognizable pattern – to construe something truly familiar out of the so nearly familiar. An irrepressible urge arises to conquer the image we are looking at. To fill in the gaps and map the work itself. It does reassure us that at last, at least one clear object, the form of a lamp, emerges from the web of intricate lines that until now were almost frustratingly vague, clearly not meant merely as decoration since the seemingly systematic lines seem to indicate purpose, but without clear indications of any reality either.

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The shape of the lamp that arises from this almost-map teases us with promises of the comfort of a domestic setting, a clearly delineated space we know from our own lives, something recognizable and intimate. That Gibellini's installation also takes on the qualities of a wallpaper pattern further deepens the feelings of intimacy. It also interposes another layer of domestication since the wall upon which this drawing of something that is nearly a map, nearly wallpaper, nearly a depiction of domestic serenity, is outdoors, in a garden, a communal one in East Harlem, into which artists, mostly from elsewhere, were invited to intervene. Gibellini's drawing – further domestication of a highly planned small urban patch of a garden, which itself, as New York is dramatically bereft of communal space, especially green communal space, provides a domestic intimacy that may seem forced but which most New Yorkers strongly crave, respond to, and quickly inhabit.

New Yorkers seem to have a special instinct, a need, to create intimacy and familiarity wherever they find themselves, and aggressively seek to conquer and appropriate their territory, partly because it is so limited, but also because the general anonymity and novelty they encounter on an almost daily basis can only be countered by creating these intimacies, whether they be illusory or real, temporary or permanent. The High Line is, of course, the most popular recent example of reclamation and domestication of a previously uninhabited and disinviting space. And it is not surprising that it has become perhaps too popular, failing to provide quiet moments of intimacy because everyone is seeking them at once. New York thus betrays its own

humanness by trying to carve out a distinct haven, tightly controlled by beautiful spare design, but also, ultimately, characterized by those qualities of New York that New York cannot escape – the crowds, the tourists, the need for more space, the brutal realities of expensive real estate.

New Yorkers, and other inhabitants of densely-populated cities, have a very unique relationship with interiority and domestic intimacy, often seeking it elsewhere, outside of the home. In their own home they often cannot create their ideal domestic space since personal space is so limited; or, in other cases, it is a home that is felt to be temporary, either as a space between the spaces of work and play, or as a temporary place where they live in New York before they “move on” to the more solid and permanent parts of their life, where they will invest more of themselves and seek to more actively cultivate their physical surroundings, many seeming to walking around the city with the wider expanses of other regions always in the back of their minds. Grander horizons and “more than this” are also highly native qualities in this city, perhaps betraying the desire to want more than New York can offer, while seemingly, and consciously, fully committed to it.

A garden wall provides Gibellini’s work with an additional lovely effect – at the right time of day some of the sun breaks through the branches and imposes its own sun-dappled pattern on the drawing. In her work, Gibellini has often sought to recreate the wallpapers of the 50’s and 60’s, which sought to bring indoors some semblance of the nature outside – leaves, flowers, birds. With the sun intruding on this already nearly-domesticated scene, the ambition of those wallpapers, and of Gibellini’s effort to depict, archive and create the various meanings and effects of maps and domestication, are both exposed and somehow completed. ✨