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FRANÇOISE SCHEIN GALERIE JEAN-MARC PATRAS

Françoise Schein was trained as an architect, and she works "between" art and urban design. Hers is a peripatetic vision that roams "between" science and philosophy, geography and politics, history and myth. Appropriately, the matrix/metaphor that she uses to organize the resulting intersections and interstices is the map.

Schein's first public commission, entitled *Subway Map Floating on a New York Sidewalk*, 1985, consisted of a steel and glass model of the New York subway system intended to give passersby an overview of the vast nexus underneath Manhattan. Subsequent public-scale proposals exhibited as models have included the ambitious *Time Zone*, 1987—a wall relief for the World Trade Center, with schematic maps of the world's largest cities embedded in a twisted grid of time zones—and a series of light boxes entitled *Dazibao*, 1986, inspired by the Chinese public information walls of that name, which reconstitute individual cities as multilayered composites of topography, cosmology, circuitry, and history.

Over the past few years, Schein's urban cartography has given way to a more lyrical and ultimately nostalgic geography of open spaces. For the most part, these "*Espèces d'espaces*" (Species of spaces), as the show was called, come from the Great North, the vast region that, for Schein, is above all, an idea—a myth of the eternal Elsewhere.

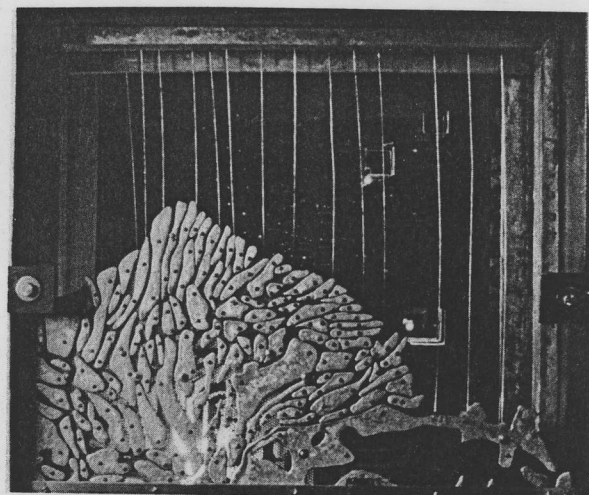
In *Oriental Dreams*, 1990, North is the route of the 19th-century explorers who discovered the North Pole in the process of

seeking the shortest route to China. As such, it is mapped in metal—gray and cold like the place is supposed to be—while behind it, the countermyth of the exotic East glows from the depths of a light box that contains swathes of gauzy fabric, bordello-red feathers, tiny compartments filled apothecary-style with spices, herbs, incense, chopsticks, and parasols. In *Lena*, 1990, meanwhile, North is the Lena River delta that fans out toward the Arctic Ocean. Translated into plates of metal, it now spreads across the front of a light box. The cold is countered here by the warmth of tiny windows, glowing through a distance created by thick layers of glass.

In *Le Jardin de Linné* (The garden of Linnaeus, 1990), Schein's North finds its most intimate expression. An homage to the Swedish botanist and explorer Carl von Linnæus, this work is intellectually and visually encyclopedic, with maps and drawings, travel texts, and abundant specimens of plants and flowers, all carefully placed in compartments labeled "life" and "garden." On the "life" side, there is a map of Lapland tracing Linnaeus' travels in tiny blinking lights; on the "garden" side there are 27 compartments filled with dried plants and flowers, but also, inscribed on the glass that encloses them, phrases from his travel notebooks. These compartments allude to the botanical classification system for which he is famous; but here, the dividers are hinged to avoid rigidity.

Admittedly, these anecdotal details—Schein's own "garden" of facts, puns, and personal secrets—are far from obvious to the casual viewer. Yet despite the layers of meaning, the works are not hermetic. What is not accessible through the intellect is available to the eye: the contrast between order and disorder (the clean geometry of the metal boxes and the welter of objects and images

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Françoise Schein, *Lena*, 1990, mixed media, 24 x 74½ x 14".

they contain), between what is fixed and what is mobile (the compasses gone haywire), between public and private space (the map and what literally lies behind it). For all of their erudition, these works are ultimately poetic, passionate, seductive, and mysterious voyages between the known and the unknown. Schein acknowledges that her small-scale works began as an accommodation to the gallery system, but she is still intent on making public art and has just completed a major project for the Concorde station of the Paris metro. The question remains whether the public art system can accommodate her increasingly personal style.

—Miriam Rosen