

Lisa C. Soto

IN HER OWN WORDS

My experiences, memories and diverse cultural background directly contribute to my work. My grandparents came from Jamaica and Puerto Rico, immigrating to Harlem in New York City in the early 20's. I was born in Los Angeles but grew up in Spain and New York City, in a household of multiple cultures, languages, and arts. Although I was always creative as a child, I hadn't discovered that I was an artist until I was taking graduate courses towards my masters in psychology. At that time, I lived with my boyfriend who was a painter, but had given it up for cinematography. I came home one day to find the coffee table covered in his acrylic paints, boards, and brushes and a note that read, "Start". I did. I left school without completing my masters, and I moved to Paris for a little while, where I indulged in some of the greatest museums in the world. As I continued to explore the process of painting, I realized that this was going to be my lifetime work. I had moved to Amsterdam by then and enrolled in the Amsterdams Instituut voor Schilderkunst directed by Gert Meijerink. After attending the school I returned to the States and began exhibiting and selling my works.

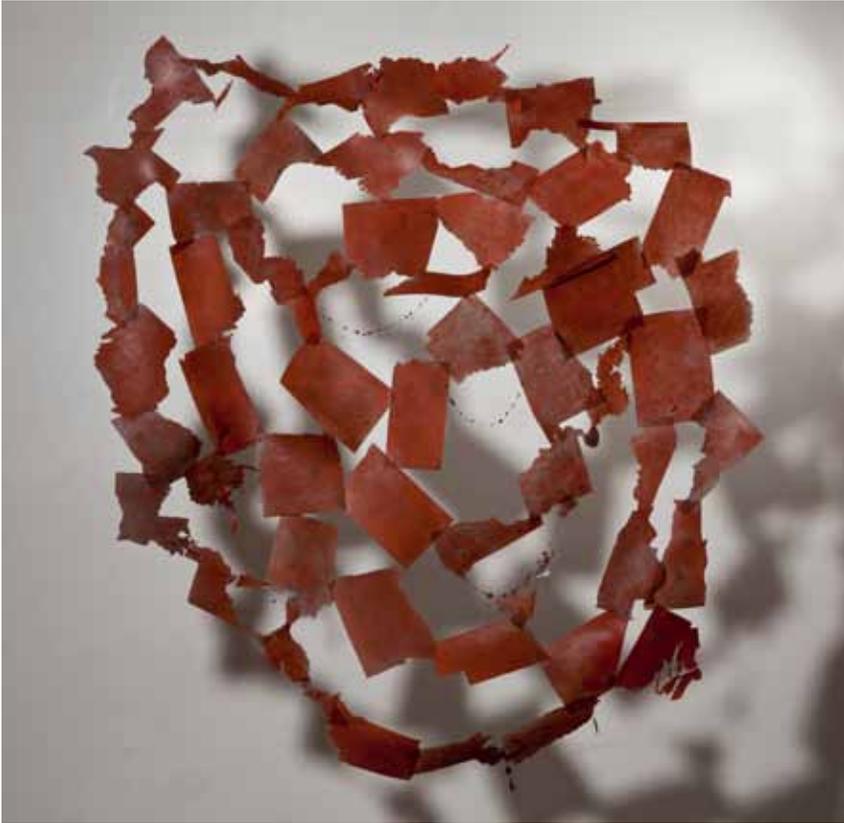
I am drawn to new identities, world cultures and diminishing borders. I am interested in the notion of boundaries, both self-imposed and man-made territories, shifting or opening up. I am fascinated by the idea that technology can allow us to cross even normally restricted boundaries. People are able to communicate, travel and exchange views more than ever before. Aesthetically, my work focuses on colors, textures, and contours through reinvented maps, topography, and landscapes. I am also attracted to details of landscape, to shapes repeating in nature.

For instance, the forms of underwater coral plants look like grooves in dry riverbeds as well as the patterns of Mandelbrot sets in physics. Within these elements and imagery, lies a social political undercurrent, reflecting aspects of the world's interactions.

My work has evolved from faces to maps, though the theme has always been about landscape, even the faces look like landscapes. My early work was very intimate; I painted mask-like faces eventually evolving into paintings of figurative faces emerging from a land-



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scape of color and texture. I wanted to explore this concept of geography further and from a different point of view. I started to think more literally about different kinds of “scapes” (landscape, seascape, mindscape). My paintings began to include diverse imagery appropriated from traditional symbols, patterns, foliage, insects, sea life, bodies of water, tectonic plates and the reinvention of maps to create imaginary and fragmented landscapes.

In the past few years, I have been creating a series of 3D drawings (as I refer to my sculptures) including the world, the U.S. and Europe, as well as a 9-foot fishing net made out of imaginary islands. For the U.S. piece, for instance, I cut out the shape of every state and territory in Mylar. Then drew symbols derived from different tribes of Northern America and colored the states the color of earth. These mostly rectangular pieces were sewn together

in a circle. The configuration symbolizes the circle of life as the different tribes believed. “U.S. & territories”, speaks of how this country has not acknowledge the treatment of the original peoples of this land and this ill treatment still continues to this day.

The latest piece I am beginning is on the continent of Africa in silver and gold Mylar. It will be the first time I am using this kind of Mylar. I am curious as to the different ways the material will lend itself and the different meanings that will be derived out of this work. On one hand, I am bringing up the fact that Africa has been stripped of its wealth for hundreds of years. On the other hand, I am referring to the inner wealth of the African peoples. That it is time for African nations to shine.

Unlike design, which is about solving problems or architecture, which has the function of creating a space for people to inhabit, art traditionally is not

about function but about raising questions. I am asking the viewer what if the boundaries they live within change or diminish altogether? What would that mean to them or provoke out of them? In my 3D drawings, I am taking a place in the world and randomly rearranging its geography, asking what if this country was now next to that one? What would their relationship be like? Would they learn something from each other or would they be at war? I turn these places sideways or upside down because just like anything, when you turn something upside down you to see it completely differently and new meanings can be derived.

Lisa Soto will be participating in the 2012 Biennial of the Perm Museum of Contemporary Art in Russia. For more information, visit lisacsoto.com.