

Reviews

Bomb After Bomb: A Violent Cartography

by elin o'Hara slavick

Foreword by Howard Zinn, essay by Carol Mavor,
interview by Catherine Lutz.

Milano, Italy, Edizioni Charta, 2007.

111 pp., 13 figures, 48 plates, annotations, endnotes,
author's bibliography, sources, exhibitions.

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*Reviewed by Daniel G. Cole**Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC*

Let me start by stating that this is an unusual book, and an especially unusual one to be reviewed in this journal. This book was not compiled by a cartographer, nor was it meant for use by cartographers alone. Slavick's bibliographic sources are a mix of artists, historians, political scientists, and geographers. She is an artist who employs cartography in her paintings and exhibitions to illustrate the horrors of war. The book is primarily a collection of slavick's cartographic artwork, along with an accompanying foreword, an art essay, and an interview with the artist.

Howard Zinn notes in the foreword that even though she does not show us "bloody corpses, amputated limbs, skin shredded by napalm . . . her drawings, in ways that I cannot comprehend, compel me to envision such scenes" (9). He also points out how her artistic cartography reminds us that while "[t]he horrors of the means are certain, the achievement of the ends [are] always uncertain" (11).

The essay by art historian Carol Mavor, "Blossoming Bombs," is presented as a series of topical discussions tangentially related to slavick's artwork. In Mavor's first discussion, subtitled "Flowers," she posits that like the wildflowers that blossom after nuclear devastation, a blossoming of memories is extracted from slavick's paintings. In "Memory," Mavor explains that, "Scratched, smudged, layered like the residue of toppled buildings after an air strike; these maps are worthless for actual navigations. Without legends, without clear markings of any kind, they are, instead, maps for thinking or rethinking" (15). Further, she notes that slavick's depressing artwork was made with the hope for peace by focusing on places that the U.S. has bombed, either at its testing grounds or in war.

Within "Hiroshima," Mavor presents a comparison of slavick's abstract drawings of Hiroshima's epicenter

and other bombed and nuclear test sites to other war remembrance images. The "Abstract," "I Do Not Understand," "Beauty," and "I Am Looking for Summer inside a Black Marble" sections try to help us understand the horrors of war through art, photography and prose. For example, Mavor discusses the photograph of a Japanese woman "who was violently mapped with abstractions" of her kimono patterns burned onto her skin by exposure to the atomic bomb (25). Mavor finishes with "Terrible Beauty," where she finds four intermittently spaced pressed pansies within the pages of *Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings*, followed by "Terrible Beauty by Air" in which she describes the beauty of air flight contrasted with the seductive and destructive impersonal power of aerial bombing.

Slavick's map paintings are exhibited on plates covering the center of the book's fifty-three pages. Unfortunately, the short descriptive annotations to the works fall on the eight pages following the plates, whereas they could have easily been placed in the white space above or below the plates to facilitate the reader's understanding of these artistic maps. The first map, also reproduced on the book's cover, presents a non-facsimile world in an Armadillo projection (but with no credit to Erwin Raisz cited) illustrating selected locations of U.S. bombing and bomb testing from 1854 onward, covered by watercolor blotches of red and black symbolizing explosions and smoke. She uses plenty of cartographic license here with land-masses that were obviously rendered independent of the graticule, and some locations deviate greatly from reality.

The artist's next cartographic drawing is of Nicaragua, a country of multiple episodes of intervention along with multiple epicenters of bombings. This image is followed by a number of World War II maps of the fire bombings of Dresden and Tokyo, numerous battle sites in the European and Pacific theaters, and the hypocenters of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Interspersed within these pages are mapped paintings of bombing ranges and test sites in Puerto Rico, the mainland U.S., and islands in the South Pacific. Additional plates cover large and small wars to the present in Korea, Central America, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, Peru, the Belgian Congo, Southeast Europe, and the Middle East. One domestic aerial bombing is painted, that of the 1985 firebombing of MOVE in Philadelphia. Again, sprinkled within these pages are

nuclear test site locations in map drawings of Nevada, the South Pacific, Mississippi, and Alaska.

Anthropologist Catherine Lutz interviews slavick concerning the exhibited map drawings. Several statements in this interview are instrumental to understanding slavick's motivations, concerns, and point of view. Slavick states that "[t]he drawings are also beautifully aerial to seduce and trap the potentially apathetic viewer, so that she will take a closer look, slow down, and contemplate the accompanying information that may implicate her. I also chose the aerial view to align myself, as an American, with the pilots dropping the bombs, even though I would not drop them. As a photographer aware of the military's use of the aerial view that flight and photography provide, using the aerial view seems like a natural choice. I utilize surveillance imagery, military sources and battle plans, photography and maps, much of which is from an aerial perspective" (97). She feels that her drawn maps "are a *visual* interpretation or depiction of, reaction against, reflection on, and emotional response to the world around us" (99). She also comments upon how her artworks "protest the age-old power of maps; power utilized by governments and individuals in the name of private ownership, border control, and imperialism" (100).

While slavick's slim volume is aimed more at the general public than at our profession, cartographers should be aware of how maps can be used in art and elsewhere to transmit powerful messages to the viewing public. Hers are not maps to be judged on their accuracy; nonetheless, they are drawings to spatially communicate the fractures and effects of war and war preparations. Indeed, her maps are terrific or terrible reminders of the manner in which spatial data and imagery are displayed, be it in historical atlases of war or in art exhibits.

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*Reviewed by Mark Denil
Cartographer at Large*

Bomb after Bomb is an atlas of aggression. It is built around a folio of individual maps depicting sites of bombings carried out by United States government

agencies—primarily federal military agencies, but in one case a domestic municipal police force. As a thematic atlas, it is a clear and well-focused compendium of individual works that hangs together exceptionally well and carries a forceful and unambiguous argument about its central issue. This book should be on the shelf, and regularly in the hands, of every practicing cartographer.

This small (6¾ x 9½ inches, ½ inch thick) atlas is divided into six sections. A foreword by the historian Howard Zinn introduces the work, and a longer essay by British art historian Carol Mavor frames some of the issues that could be raised by the works for an engaged reader or viewer. The forty-eight map works selected from the series *Protesting Cartography: Places the United States Has Bombed* make up the bulk of the volume with one work to each page, except for a single two-page spread and three pages given over to lightly manipulated source material. Each original map is 30 x 22 inches, and each is reproduced in color on the page at 5½ x 4 inches (except, of course, the one double spread). After the maps comes a short section of annotations for each work, which is itself followed by an interview with the artist carried out by Catherine Lutz (co-author, with Jane Collins, of the book *Reading National Geographic*). *Bomb after Bomb* closes with an appendix that includes a short biography, a bibliography, and list of exhibitions for the artist, plus source notes for the works and annotations.

The maps themselves are produced in ink and watercolor on Arches paper. In most of the works, a ground of color stains and blotches is overlaid with linear drawing and more hard-edged colored areas, often outlined (*cloisonné*). The source material is either another map or an aerial photograph, and often some vestige of that source is carried into the final work: an unlabeled grid (*The Firebombing of Tokyo, Japan, 1945* (53)), the wreckage of assorted map furniture (*Eniwetok Atoll, Republic of the Marshall Islands, 1948–1958* (55)), troop movement arrows (*D-Day or Invasion Beaches, Normandy, France, Operation Overlord, 1944* (45)), or a hand-drawn photogram metric aid (*Hypocenter in Hiroshima, Japan, 1945* (48)). Some, like *Johnston Atoll, US, 1958–1962* (62), are clearly based on high oblique photo images. Slavick's maps themselves are tortured and stricken, echoing or displaying the fate of the represented place. The stains and streaks evoke explosions and conflict, and the smeared and bleeding line work connotes the smashing and smearing of the land and infrastructure by high explosive.

Certainly, this is not the usual type of publication one finds reviewed in *Cartographic Perspectives*. Similarly, elin slavick's presentation at the 2007 NACIS conference (and, indeed, the entire presentation session of which it was a part) was not the usual fare one expects at a cartographic conference. Nonethe-