

Claire Brewster sees the world through maps and birds. Her work reflects journeys, those taken and those only dreamt about.



Photo: Martin Evening

In her most recent work, she began with a geological map of Wyoming. “It’s a place I’m not familiar with,” she says. “I’ve always been fascinated with the birds there.”

For Brewster, Wyoming is a place of dreams. She lives in London, and Wyoming is about as far from there as one could get. “I do a lot of drawing,” she says. “I want the birds to have the feeling of the right breed and to catch that movement. Capturing them in midflight is the thing I’m really interested in.”

The resulting work puts both the birds and the place together, incorporating the way maps can open possibilities and the way birds can carry those possibilities away.

“I make a template and affix it onto the back of the map. Then I cut it out. I don’t really know at this point what it’s going to look like, but I have an overall idea,” she says. “Until I start arranging the birds, it doesn’t really come together — sometimes it can go easily and sometimes it can take a while.”

She pins them to a foam board with tiny, nearly invisible, wedding dress pins so the whole assemblage has a three-dimensional feel and an increased sense of movement. When the light drops shadows across the birds, the piece comes alive.

“Birds and shadows, like a frenetic group of hummingbirds, and that’s what it’s all about, capturing that energy,” Brewster says.

The idea came to her while working on a series of collages. Still incorporating the map motif, she’d paint on them. One day she decided to cut them out instead. The



Artwork photos: Paul Minyo

*All Things are Impermanent* (detail)  
Hand-Cut Soil Survey Map, Uinta County, Wyoming | 32 x 45 inches | 2016



*From the Earth*  
Hand-Cut Vintage Geologic Atlas of United States, Larami Sherman Folio | 23.5 x 19.5 inches | 2016



***Are You Going My Way***

Hand-Cut Vintage Land Classification and Density of Timber Bald Mountain Quadrangle  
24 x 16.5 inches | 2016

colorful marks of geography added an ephemeral beauty to her imaginative images.

“I didn’t know what to do with the first ones,” she says. “I started with flowers, but I was painting a lot of birds at the time. Then the two things just came together.”

Once she started exploring and developing the ideas of connecting the birds with the places, it made a lot of sense. “Maps are such colorful things, and they hold so much meaning — how countries define themselves,” she says. “Borders are so important these days politically; maps are the way we show ourselves in the world. And they have a romantic side, very poetic. When you look at a map you can dream of things that don’t even exist anymore, so I feel like I’m subverting the power of the map. Sometimes it feels like I’m setting the birds free from the maps.”

This year, Brewster had her first show in the United States at the Diehl Gallery in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. She finally got to visit the place of her dreaming. “That really was a high point in my career. I’ve been wanting to work in America for a long time.”

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