

# arts & Entertainment

Your guide to entertainment, culture and dining

## Geography of memory, scenes of science

*Different inspirations, like minds:  
Freeark showcases two artists*

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**A**t first glance, Shona Macdonald's paintings appear entirely removed from recognizable reality.

Their textured surfaces, forest color schemes and island-like contours create the image of another world.

A closer look, however, betrays an affinity with this world. Jagged coasts and roadways emerge from the camouflage of paint strokes and lines. Topographical approximations of rivers, highways and hills become discernible under the painted surface.

Macdonald paints on sectioned paper maps. These pieces of cartographic documents form the tangible foundation of her paintings. It is no coincidence they also serve as an imaginative foundation for the artist.

With Chicago painter Molly Briggs, Macdonald is exhibiting her work at the Freeark

Gallery in Riverside Arts Center through Saturday, Feb. 16.

By way of topographic maps, Macdonald's paintings incorporate the places familiar to her from her childhood, which was spent in Aberdeen, Scotland.

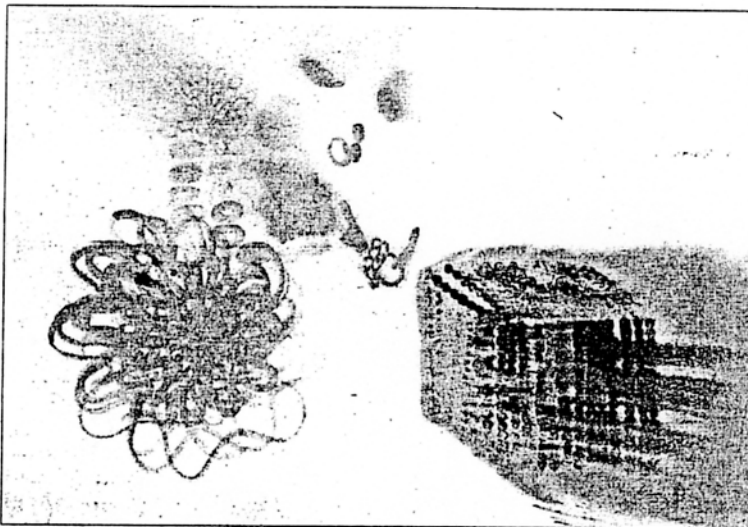
By referencing these locations, the artist explains, her paintings take on an autobiographical dimension, telling a story almost as dizzying as the spiralling imagery of her art.

### The journey home

After leaving her native Scotland in March 1994 to study art in Chicago, Macdonald found herself unable to renew her visa and forced to return to her motherland.

This left her in the precarious position of not knowing exactly when she would return to Chicago to finish her master's degree.

Her layover in Scotland could have lasted a few weeks, several months or



Molly Briggs' scientifically inspired "Pink Light I."

over a year, she says while on semester break from teaching at Illinois State University in Bloomington.

During this time, Macdonald recognized her dilemma: Despite the fact that she was living in her native country surrounded by the people she knew, her feeling of displacement remained acute.

Her stay in Scotland was temporary, as were her feelings of comfort there.

"I felt un-fixed in the country I grew up in, as if, in a way, I had no real business being there," Macdonald says. "I wasn't quite a refugee. My leaving was a voluntary thing, but my return still felt so peculiar."

Being a stranger in a familiar land pushed Macdonald to find a way to re-connect with Scotland. She turned to her artwork as a means of doing this.

She began by taking pieces of regional topographical maps and overlaying them upon each other.

Macdonald then drew lines

over the cartographic collage with a paintbrush, suggesting fantastical roads creeping through heather-encrusted hills.

In the end, Macdonald's paper creations described spaces of her own choice, evoking a mental geography that existed solely within her imagination.

### Mapping memories

When she returned to the United States several months later to continue her master of fine arts degree program at the University of Illinois in Chicago (which she completed in 1996), her painting style remained a means to re-create her native country.

"That spectacular landscape, so rugged, I keep returning to it in my work," she says. "The Scottish climate and geography gets into your blood and never leaves."

Ordinary aspects of her daily life became aesthetic landmarks, cornerstones of her memory. Through these she was able to revisit every-

day routines of her past.

When she was most out of place, her artwork somehow fell into place, Macdonald admits.

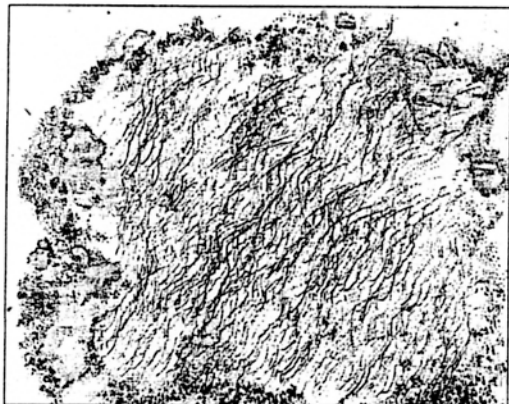
Her painting "Route 55," featured in the Freeark exhibit, uses a map of her morning route to work in Scotland as its basis.

The markers of that daily journey - lakes, ponds and mountains - are discernible among the paint strokes.

Gary Henderson, director of the Riverside Arts Center, finds Macdonald's style effective in her presentation.

"Shona's works are very interesting in the way they are presented: crumpled pieces of paper that have been wonderfully painted upon, covered with all sorts of beautiful marks," Henderson said.

"They have the fascinating look and feel of an indecipherable map - something that may have been dug up in an archaeological dig," he said.



Shona Macdonald's painting, "Route 55," is on display at the Freeark Gallery in Riverside Arts Center, 32 E. Quincy.

See SCIENCE, Page 27