



**Zoe Leonard** was born in 1961 in Liberty, New York, and now lives and works in New York City. She has exhibited internationally since 1990, including recent solo presentations at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2007); Villa Arson, Nice, France (2007); Paula Cooper Gallery, New York (2003); Center for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (1999); Centre National de la Photographie, Paris (1998); Kunsthalle Basel (1997); and the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (1993). In 2007, Leonard was the subject of a 20-year career retrospective at the Kunstmuseum in Winterthur, Switzerland, which will travel to the Reina Sofia in Madrid in winter 2008. *You see I am here after all* is a new project by Leonard currently on view at Dia:Beacon.

#### **bibliography**

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Dia would like to thank Director Mitchell Coddling and the staff at the Hispanic Society for their generous collaboration and in particular John O'Neill, Curator of Manuscripts and Rare Books, for his guidance and expertise in assisting the artist with her selection of works from their collection.

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Please note that the rarity and fragility of the historic artifacts in this presentation requires that they cannot be put on public view for long periods of time, even if displayed under low light levels. A second group of works, to be shown from February 2009 through April 2009, will consist of topographical representations of cities and towns in the Old and New Worlds. Once again the exhibits will range across maps, charts, and plans.

Exterior photo: Sallimaster's hand-stitched hempen cover for a derrotero made for ships near the Philippine Islands, ca. 1790. Courtesy of The Hispanic Society of America. Interior photo: Zoe Leonard, image from *Analogue*, 1998–2007. C-print. 11 x 11 inches (28 cm x 28 cm). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne.

**Zoe Leonard**  
Derrotero  
November 5, 2008–April 12, 2009



**Dia at the Hispanic Society of America**  
**Audubon Terrace**  
**Broadway between 155th and 156th Streets New York City**  
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## Zoe Leonard Derrotero

More than any other medium, photography is able to express the values of the dominant social class and to interpret events from that class's point of view, for photography, although strictly linked with nature, has only an illusory objectivity. . . . The importance of photography does not rest primarily in its potential as an art form, but rather in its ability to shape our ideas, to influence our behavior, and to define our society.

—Gisèle Freund

"Derrotero," Zoe Leonard's 2008 project for Dia at the Hispanic Society, contains two distinct parts: her epic compilation of photographs, *Analogue*, shot between 1998 and 2007, and her selection of navigational charts and cartographic maps drawn from the Hispanic Society's remarkable historical collection.

Begun in the rapidly gentrifying Lower East Side, where Leonard had a studio for over twenty years, *Analogue* initially included photographs of diverse, moribund storefronts in the area but gradually expanded to other boroughs in the city and beyond. Long renowned as a center of the garment industry, this once working-class neighborhood with its numerous tailors and fabric stores had attracted new and used clothing merchants. By the late 1990s, however, many of these small, individually owned businesses were closing as a consequence of the influx of large chain stores, such as J. Crew, Old Navy, the Gap, and others. As she documented the loss of these retailers along with other kinds of local commerce, from pawn shops to independent jewelers and butchers, Leonard became particularly fascinated by the textile recyclers, whose premises were filled with giant bundles of worn goods ready for shipment to third-world markets in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. Perceiving in the rag trade, as it's familiarly known, a microcosm from which to explore shifts in global marketing, she began to trace the dispersal of these products abroad.<sup>1</sup>

Traveling to Uganda in 2004 enabled her to witness firsthand the complex and subtle ways African culture absorbed discarded Western goods. While some items, such as pillow cases, were transformed into dresses for little girls, men's suits were displayed in two rows with jackets hung in lines above trousers in roadside stalls, and T-shirts with what might be considered quintessentially American imagery, like Mickey Mouse or Barbie, were worn with different styles and significations from those of American youth. Additional trips abroad, including to Poland and Cuba, deepened her insight into the substrata of economic and cultural interdependence on which global markets are premised.

For Leonard, such direct experience illuminates the intimate networks of relations in what she modestly calls her mundane daily life. The handwritten signage of her own

neighborhood's jewelry store, like the Coca-Cola advertisements on East African roadside stalls, serves as a reminder of the fact that most consumer products—whether food, fuel, clothing, or video games—are produced elsewhere and reach us through an intricate system of exchange. While the interpenetration of multinational markets might suggest that a hegemonic uniformity is gradually supplanting the idiosyncratic expressions particular to indigenous cultures, Leonard found plentiful evidence of playful and subversive forms of resistance—such as the dramatic posters for reduced prices at her local butcher shop and the improvised Kodak billboards on the outskirts of Kampala.

From a corpus of more than ten thousand photographs shot over a decade, Leonard selected approximately four hundred to comprise the installation version of *Analogue*. (Its two variants are a book and a smaller series of forty dye transfer prints.) Arranged conceptually—that is, by idea rather than by typology or chronology—the chapters or groups of images are displayed in grids. Any exploration of the political, social, economic, and cultural strands that connect image to image, chapter to chapter, becomes a means of charting the course of Leonard's twin impulses, one elegiac, the other investigatory. Like other cartographic devices, this personal mode of mapping structures and defines the terrain while providing knowledge about it.

From the moment she began to photograph, Leonard was fascinated by her medium's utilitarian functions, by the panoply of roles it has assumed over the past century and a half. Yet far from a mere document, *Analogue* offers a viewpoint that is unequivocally personal: it offers what she describes as "subjective truth." For her, art provides "a different kind of space and time" from that which informs a news report; in permitting her "to make larger philosophical leaps and connections . . . art offers a way of drawing from a slightly deeper well," she contends.<sup>2</sup>

Invited to participate in Dia's ongoing series of presentations at the Hispanic Society, Leonard seized the opportunity to contextualize this monumental project and illuminate its critical agenda by mining the rich vein of cartographic material in the society's noteworthy collection. After familiarizing herself with the wide range of its holdings, she found in the distinction between *mappa mundi* and portolan charts a crucial guideline for her inquiry. Whereas "the medieval *mappa mundi* (world maps in the Christian tradition) are the cosmographers of thinking landmen," portolan charts, by contrast, "preserve the Mediterranean sailors' firsthand experience of their own sea, as well as their expanding knowledge of the Atlantic Ocean."<sup>3</sup> The portolan resonated strongly for her, in that it echoed her firsthand approach to unknown territory

in *Analogue*. But she was also drawn to its aesthetic qualities. The sumptuous decoration in many of these examples indicates that they were not working charts used on board ship. Rather, they replicated essential navigational data in a stylized form that was embellished with symbols, such as anchors and rectilinear blocks (to indicate passages of safe, shallow, or perilous waters); with emblems, notably gilded compass roses; and other motifs, like fortified castles (for cities).

These rare treasures are counterpointed by a selection of more utilitarian books and charts, including astronomical and topological documents, such as *derroteros*. Also known as rutters or coastal pilots, these guides, with their close focus on elevational views, aided mariners who plied both local and more international waterways. A highlight, for Leonard, of this particular group is one kept in a hand-stitched canvas case that contains a journal with entries describing the features of ports and harbors, indexed by place names in the margins. In addition to written descriptions, *derroteros* may also contain birds-eye views and/or shoreline elevations, since it was only by reading back and forth between different depictions that a mariner was able to orientate himself. Working documents, they offer clues to how all such documents operate in the space between experience and knowledge. Through her inclusion of this range of working documents in the second part of the display, Leonard emphasizes both the multiple forms through which knowledge was acquired and the fact that compilations of different types of data were necessary for sophisticated navigation.<sup>4</sup> As an ensemble, this selection of artifacts reiterates questions fundamental to the genesis of *Analogue*: questions like where are you in the world, how are you connected to places elsewhere, and what are the ways by which you can document and trace a path through the world?

Lynne Cooke, Curator, Dia Art Foundation

### notes

1. For a fuller discussion, see my interview with the artist in the forthcoming *Zoe Leonard: Fotografías* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Reina Sofía, 2008).
2. *Ibid.*
3. Zoe Leonard, email to the author, October 6, 2008.
4. For further information, see two books published by the Hispanic Society: *Cinco Séculos de Exploração: Fondos cartográficos da Hispanic Society of America* (A Coruña, Spain: Fundación Caixa Galicia, in association with the Hispanic Society of America, New York, 2005); and *Maps, Charts, Globes: Five Centuries of Exploration* (New York: Hispanic Society of America, 1992).