

# ART PAPERS

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## KATHRYN REFI ATLANTA

According to National Public Radio (NPR), the East Coast of the United States is the most important place in the world. Of lesser importance are swaths of Africa and Asia, and a large corridor of Middle-America—often snootily referred to as “fly over territory.” On the NPR map of the world constructed by Kathryn Refi in her solo show *All Things Considered, 2007-2008*, America is, naturally, the center of the universe [Solomon Projects; September 5–October 11, 2008]. The rest of the world is a random smattering of tiny dots—like dandelion fluff lost on the wind.

Refi spent one year listening to the first hour of NPR’s—ironically titled—news program “All Things Considered.” She then pinpointed all the cities mentioned during the broadcast on a world map. Tiny red pinpricks—not unlike the dots used to signal a sold artwork in a gallery—indicate the cities, mountain ranges, lakes, oceans, and ultimately the countries on NPR’s radar. Like so much allegedly neutral statistical information, the results are open to interpretation. The conceptual map may reaffirm certain red state stereotypes about blue state priorities, evident in that gaping white swath of the dot-less—and thus inconsequential—Midwest, which is like the Bermuda Triangle of news: nothing goes in and nothing goes out. Of course, Refi’s emphasis on “All Things Considered” also discounts NPR’s frequent inverse fetishization of Middle-America’s folksiness, seen in Ira Glass’ “This American Life” or Garrison Keillor’s “A Prairie Home Companion.”

Refi’s map could also just as easily confirm leftist notions of the unjust hierarchy that places the developed First World above the Third World, or West above East.

There is something fleeting and ethereal about *All Things Considered, 2007-2008*. But it is in keeping with her previous work. Mapping or recording has been central to many of Refi’s projects such as *Color Recordings, 2005-2006*, a series of oil paintings based on the colors Refi saw during a given day. In focusing on media in a time of increased scrutiny, *All Things*

*Considered* may initially hint at a fresh agenda, suggesting a promising new—and maybe socially engaged—dimension to Refi’s work. But other pieces contradict that notion. The non sequitur placement of *African Violet Drawings, 2001*, a lackluster suite of colored pencil-on-paper, blueprint-stark drawings of a varying healthy and wilting houseplant, illustrates that Refi’s underlying project may well boil down to documenting the small poetic tracings of an individual’s life, and ultimately to asserting her subjective place in the world. And so, it seems perfectly logical that Refi is making art about listening to a radio station that forms the white noise of so many artists’ studio practice.

Ultimately, however, the impact of Refi’s work may lie elsewhere, in its abstraction. Her reduction of experience to charts and maps suggests the insubstantiality of our realities. If our identities are often reduced to income levels, buying habits or Social Security numbers, Refi’s wispy, quirky alternative measurements and gauges pillory the dehumanizing effects of such statistical operations. Her work questions the crisp absolutes and hard numbers of science, replacing facts and figures with something akin to a shrugged shoulder and a meek assertion of self against the enormous weight of the world.

—Felicia Feaster

ABOVE: Kathryn Refi, *All Things Considered, 2007-2008*, adhesive red dots on paper, 34 x 51 inches each (framed) [courtesy of the artist and Solomon Projects, Atlanta]