

MEMORY MAPS

2014

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I was very pleased to be able to see the recent work of Jo Roberts on my visit to her home and studio in Kenilworth during the Warwickshire Open Studios event in July 2014. All visitors to this comfortable and easy going family home are greeted warmly and are invited to wander freely around house, garden and studios where the work may be found in windows, on tables and on walls and in the garden. For the open studios event, Jo has conceived and made a new work entitled '26 Memory Maps' from the series 'Maps of Jo's World'. Each 'memory map' is made onto a rectangle of white paper measuring 18 x 11 cm. (roughly postcard size) and each consists of text and drawing relating to a particular event recalled during a period of meditation. At first the artist has made written notes of each memory and then proceeded to 'fill out' the image as the particular event was recalled later in greater detail. The subject matter of these images is the familiar, the commonplace and each is the recollection around instances of ordinary family events. These delicate and sensitive images are displayed facing outwards on the insides of windows around the home and as we move from one to the next, in this sequence of 26, an autobiographical story unfolds. The decision to exhibit these small fragmentary images on the surface of the building resolves the concept beautifully since we are invited to peer into the windows of a private property but are allowed only partial access into the artist's world. This environmental display has both a poetic, personal and practical character (26 images because of the number of windows in the property) and acts, quite successfully, as the artist intended, as a 'metaphor of the mind'. In the information sheet prepared for the visitor, the artist explains that the idea of the memory map has been instigated through changes in the environment, 'both internally and externally' and by excerpts from talks on Radio 4. The importance of memory, certainly to the creative life and work, is emphasised by the selection of brief references to memory by three well-known writers. These include Max Seebald who in his last recorded interview said that "memory... will come back at you and re-shape your life and there is very little you can do about it" and Clive James who has said that memories become clearer all the time .. "past experiences into immediate experiences" The Open Studio idea has an extremely valuable social and educational role in allowing and encouraging the visitor, often local, to drop in, chat and experience the artist's process and lifestyle. In this particular case and during my short visit the atmosphere was relaxed and friendly with the artist demonstrating her willingness and generosity to share ideas and insights with visitors and fellow artists. This artist's industry, imagination and enthusiasm continue to be inspiring and I look forward to seeing the next installment.