

# Art in America

REVIEWS JAN. 24, 2014

## Kim Rugg

LOS ANGELES,  
at Mark Moore

by Leah Ollman

Kim Rugg: *Blue Map*  
(detail), 2013,  
reconfigured paper world map,  
32¾ by 54½ inches overall; at  
Mark Moore.



Matter is neither created nor destroyed in **Kim Rugg's** work, but surgically, strategically repurposed. Rugg reconfigures familiar printed materials: here newspapers, magazines and maps; previously also postage stamps, comic books and cereal boxes. By altering their forms and tweaking or altogether eliminating their legibility, she slams on the visual brakes, forcing a closer, slower inspection of objects we typically look *through* rather than *at*. The raw materials of her enterprise give up their transparency and functionality as information delivery systems to become instead sculptural interpretations of those same systems. They sacrifice one type of authority, but assume another.

Rugg, born in Montreal and based in London, breaks down the front page of the *New York Times*, for instance, into its constituent parts, removing individual letters, numbers and punctuation marks with a scalpel. She then reassembles the minute pieces according to an order other than the conventional linguistic one designed to yield meaning. In many works here (all but one 2013), she organizes letters alphabetically, transforming the discrete words of the text into continuous, uninterrupted rows of diminishing type size, the units no longer message carriers but autonomous graphic entities. Photographs on the newspaper page receive similar treatment, the diced bits realigned as a graduated tonal field. In *d NY Tys*, Rugg performs an agile act of translation, rendering each front-page story into phonetic text-speak, the paper's motto now reading "Il d Nws d@s Fit 2 Print." Spelling becomes egregious in this hilarious, discursive shift from elite to street, but the news remains readable, with effort.

Rugg slices up world maps to comparably provocative effect. In one piece, she rejoins a sheet's slivered strips in reverse order, from right to left. The continents stutter and quake, their contours newly provisional. In *Blue Map*, the image is diffused into a fine mirepoix of green, blue, white and pale yellow squares. Rugg redistributes the crisply cut confetti evenly, so it suggests no landmasses or bodies of water but instead—invoking one impact of globalization—comprises a single uniform field. Her hand-drawn maps consisting of place names only, no territorial boundaries, are geography deboned. Representations of a world without borders, they feel vaguely utopian. Most of the newspaper pages, in contrast, report from a babel-like state doomed to miscommunication.

In a stunning 30-panel work from 2011, titled *Things to Say About Dinner Guests*, Rugg re-presents the same New York Times front page on every panel, each time blocking out all content apart from a given letter (starting with "A" and working through the alphabet) or other component on the page: punctuation marks, numbers, dollar signs or areas of solid black. She is on a mission of omission here. In offering 30 different ways to read a single page, none of them correct, coherent or complete, she illustrates with graphic punch the notion that perception is relative, meaning never fixed. Her semantic acrobatics bring to mind the constraint-driven efforts of the Oulipians, early text manipulations by Tauba Auerbach (including a bible with its letters alphabetized), and the entire lineage of artists investigating language as historically determined, value-laden code. By engaging in such meticulous and meditative piecework, Rugg dials down the pace of information transmission to the truly digital, based on the work of the hand. Her motivation seems equally divided between reverence and resistance.

Source: <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/kim-rugg/>