

Jalan Hutton, 2016 (detail 1)  
hand cut maps on paper  
21x21cm

“Working with maps is becoming quite a hallmark of Wilson’s recent exhibitions, friends sending special and rare finds unsolicited is perhaps an indication of this!”



Lebuh Chulia, 2016 (detail 1)  
hand cut maps on paper  
21x21cm



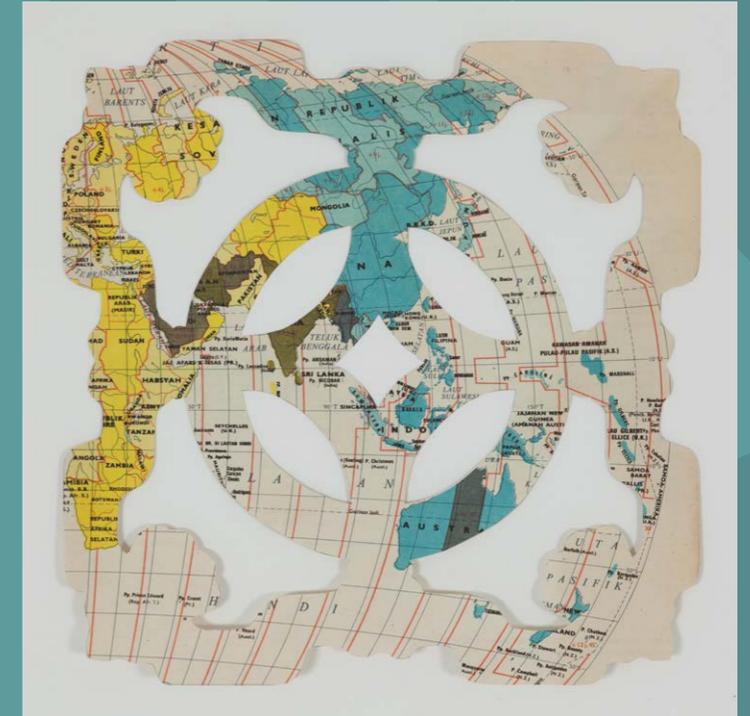
Lorong Ceylon 4, 2016 (detail)  
hand cut & stitched maps on paper  
31.5x27cm (unframed)



Lorong Ceylon 2, 2016 (detail)  
hand cut & stitched maps on paper  
31.5x27cm (unframed)

Cover:  
Jalan Hutton, 2016 (detail 2)  
hand cut maps on paper  
21x21cm

## Field Notes Penang



Carole Wilson  
May 28 - June 25 2016

**120** langford120  
120 Langford Street  
North Melbourne Vic 3051  
Australia

# Carole Wilson, *Field Notes – Penang*

Langford 120 Gallery

The works in this exhibition bring together Carole Wilson's sensitive observations and intuitive reading of pattern and colour as experienced while on an artist's residency in George Town Penang in 2014. Inspired by the tiles found on the walls and floors of the small shophouses that are such a feature of the city, Wilson has responded to the rich heritage of place and the manner in which small recurring details and motifs speak of the lives of people shaping their communities and their histories.

As one of Malaysia's oldest cities George Town bears the evidence of people who have come to live and trade in the area over the centuries. The array of significant buildings placed side by side on these streets conveys the different religious, cultural and economic activities of generations of people from many countries including Malaysia, Great Britain, China, India, and led to the city being recognised as an UNESCO World Heritage Site. The architectural forms of the mosques, temples and churches present that heritage writ large but it is also very visible sign in the smaller dwellings, the shophouses, where the commerce of the everyday took place. And it is here in the shophouses, with their distinctive tiles that are a dominant feature of the entrances, that the cultural melting pot was enacted. Also known as the Peranakans, the people who lived on these streets adapted their own cultures to both those of the locals and those of the other immigrants, thereby creating something new and unique. The tiles represent that mix of cultures as while many could just as easily be seen in the fashionable homes of London at the turn of the century, many others include motifs and colours distinctive to similar wares coming from China and elsewhere.



*Lebuh Armenian*, 2015 (detail 2)  
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By working with maps from old school atlases sourced in second-hand bookstores Wilson draws our attention to the role of maps in denoting the specifics of place and yet by cutting into them or using small segments, sometimes scraps, that role is challenged. As the audience for these atlases were children, the various maps record a great deal of information about Penang Island, Malaysia and South East Asia more broadly, but do so in a fairly straightforward and intensely coloured manner. The territories that the settlers traversed, the sea-lanes that the traders navigated, and conditions such as rainfall and topography are all shown in clear and colourful detail. Yet by cutting into these maps to highlight the patterning found in tiles in the shops Wilson brings us back to the realities of lives lived in these places, the commercial interaction of people and shopkeepers on the streets.

Jalan Chowrasta, for example, is the name of one of the streets which border the market, a market which was established by the Indian community in the nineteenth century. It is also the title of one of Wilson's large grid works. The patterns of the tiles are cut out of map pieces which are then repeated to create an overall pattern resembling a section of a wall. Computer technologies mean that we now expect repeated shapes and patterns to be machine made, each component an exact replica of the one before and the one after. But this is not the case here. The maps themselves are carefully selected for their colouring and density of lines and forms and then the incisions are very delicately made by hand. Each shape that is cut into the surface is true to a part of a tile, and each part is true to the pattern.

This is similarly the case with the *Lorong Ceylon* works in that they too are made from maps but here it is the motifs and shapes on the tiles themselves that are cut out as positive forms. Each of these components is then hand stitched onto paper. In *Lorong Ceylon 2*, for example, the beautiful floral form in an array of colours from delicate whites and soft blues through to rich reds and vibrant yellows is positioned on the paper by a simple red stitch on a black spot. Here Wilson is also drawing on the activities that went on in these shophouses. Indeed it is still possible to see the shopkeepers making their traditional handicrafts ready for sale. This includes such things as handmade paper, objects woven with rattan and bamboo, through to delicate and intricate beaded shoes. In *Lorong Ceylon 7* the numerous small circles stitched onto the paper in a running stitch evokes the sense of beading and of the way that numerous small stitches and many small components are held together to create something new.

Working with maps is becoming quite a hallmark of Wilson's recent exhibitions, friends sending special and rare finds unsolicited is perhaps an indication of this! However, as with the maps themselves, each exhibition and each series of works has its unique narrative, a distinctive response to the sense of place and a perceptive use of detail to represent larger concerns. In *Field Notes Penang* the maps of the country, land formations suitable to settle and seas to navigate, have been transformed into quiet reflections on the beauty of colour and pattern in a place when many cultures came together and lived and worked in harmony.

Jennifer Jones-O'Neill



*Lorong Ceylon 1*, 2016 (detail)  
hand cut & stitched maps on paper  
31.5x27cm (unframed)