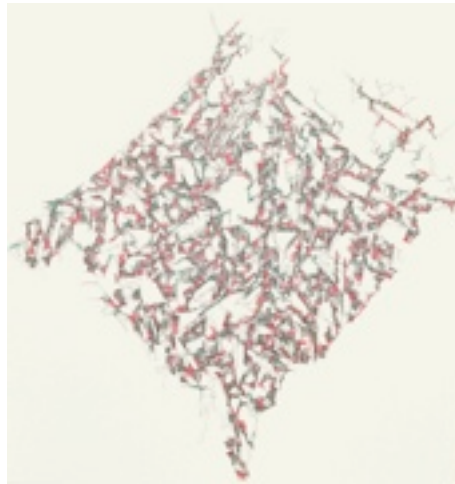


SANDRA HIGGINS

Independent Art Advisor and Curator



### ESMERALDA

Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.

Cities light as kites appear, pierced cities like laces, cities transparent as mosquito netting, cities like leaves' veins, cities lined like a hand's palm, filigree cities to be seen through their opaque and fictitious thickness.

This is the foundation of the city: a net which serves as passage and as support.

The shortest distance between two points in Esmeralda is not a straight line but a zigzag that ramifies in tortuous optional routes; the ways that open to each passerby are never two, but many.



### OCTAVIA

Now I will tell you how Octavia is made. The old walls expand bearing the old quarters with them, enlarged, but maintaining their proportions on a broader horizon at the edges of the city: they surround the slightly thinner newer quarters which also grew up on the margins and became thinner to make room for still more recent ones pressing from inside, and so on and on, to the heart of the city, a totally new one.



## ZORA

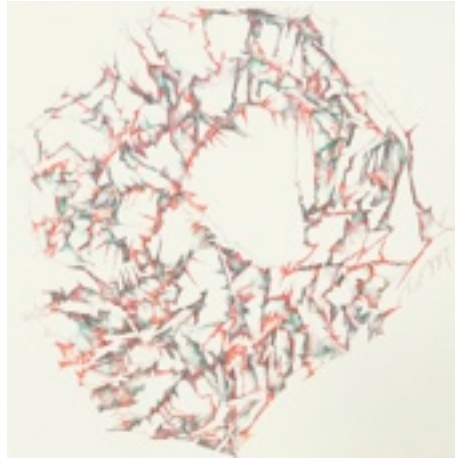
A totally new Zora, which in its reduced dimensions retains the features and the flow of the first Zora and of all the cities that have blossomed one from the other: and within this innermost circle there are already blossoming - though it is hard to discern them - the next Zora and those that will grow after it.



## ERSILEA

Ersilea's secret lies in the way your gaze runs over patterns following one another as in a musical score where not a note can be altered or displaced. The city is transfigured and becomes crystalline transparent as a dragonfly.

Each change implies a sequence of other changes, as among the stars: the city and the sky never remain the same.



### **SPIDERWEB CITY**

I will tell you how the Spiderweb City is made. It becomes a full-size city, enclosed within the earlier city: a city that forces its way ahead in the earliest city and presses it toward the outside. Spiderwebs of intricate relationships seeking a form.

If I tell you that the city toward which my journey tends is discontinuous in time and space, now scattered, now condensed, you must not believe the search for it can stop.

*(Notes adapted from Italo Calvino "Invisible Cities" )*

*Notes from Jeanne Masoero's personal journal, 1977.*

"The journeys through Mexico and Guatemala and Belize were among the most remarkable visits I had ever made anywhere. We had gone to see the Maya sites. The landscape was breathtaking and I had never seen a jungle or huge stretches of bare grassland like these, and the sites were mostly deep inside the jungles and had long since been overgrown and only the excavated parts were now visible. One of the sites **Palenque** was a beautiful site with remains of temples which reminded me strongly of the temples of India I had seen in photographs, with rounded carvings. Everything was rounded in Maya architecture and ornaments like the hieroglyphs on the stelae.



*Palenque*



*Tikal*

We had seen the Chipultepec Park Archeological Museum where most of the Maya artifacts were housed, but it was marvellous to go and see the actual sites and stand where the ancient Maya had stood. **Tikal** in Guatemala was the most famous of them all, right in the middle of a jungle which could only be reached by dirt track after a day's ride by bus. We slept in hired hammocks slung between poles under a thatched roof over a small compound to one side of the site. We had an invasion of little pigs one night but I'm not sure what they really were, and we'd be serenaded by the crowd of wild turkeys up on the roof of the only hotel nearby. There was no water and one didn't hope to wash unless one braved the muddy pond said to be inhabited by an alligator. It was good being there and I had never slept out in the open like this and in such an extraordinary place.

**Tikal** had two thin very tall pyramids facing each other across a grassy space, with steep high steps cut into the front part and at the top were roof crests with a small open chamber under them. It was fascinating to speculate on what these structures must have been used for but it remains a mystery, and it remains a mystery too that the Maya seemed to disappear without trace of an upheaval or any reason whatsoever. There were a few of their descendants left with those superb Maya heads you see on the stelae, but mostly the Indians had mixed blood. The cloth they dressed in was a deep red with rows of



*Tikal*

different colours woven into it, and we saw the women at Santiago Atitlán weaving on small hand looms that had been in use two thousand years ago. All the males, even toddlers, wore straw hats although they went barefooted. We saw men carrying tree trunks on their backs up the mountain paths and the women carry large bundles on their heads over a folded cloth.



*Monte Alban*

One site I loved especially was **Monte Alban** south of Mexico city, it was high on a hill and the wind swept through it in such a way as to make it seem totally isolated and almost savage. There were many other sites we saw, and it was always the topmost layer only of the ancient structures that one could see, these would be built over the pre-existing layers which in their turn had been built on earlier deeper layers. There would be many layers to one pyramid, and this fascinated me.

I saw the most beautiful lakes, Lake Peten, and **Lake Atitlán** which was inside the crater of an extinct volcano and high above the cloud level so that the clouds would float upwards towards you. The colour was bleached out and translucent almost and the water very still always, on the other side opposite ours was a small village called Santiago Atitlán where we spent a day. The women there had their hair in one great plait wound round their heads with strands of coloured cloth woven into the plait and it looked very beautiful. Travel was always in decrepit buses some of which had holes in the floor and you could see the road, or wheels that seemed only half on.



*Lake Atitlán*

Staying in Livingstone just inside Belize was a strange experience. We had crossed over in a fishing boat and had landed at the Casa Rosada. It was a *pensione* comprising of the main house with the usual veranda all round it and built on stilts, and a row of small thatched huts for guests. There was a wooden jetty in front of the house, and the lady of the house would walk to the end of it with her tiny dog under her arm in the late evenings and stand there with the sea breezes wafting her long clothes. Whilst there we became aware of being followed by a CIA man disguised as an anthropologist. He clearly wasn't one since he had never heard of Uxmal and the other sites, and he had landed a few days after us on the tiny plane strip somewhere nearby.



*Chichen Itza*

The sand along the beaches was dark grey and palm trees overhung the beach, but only the locals used these beaches to pull in their fishing boats. It was a very small community somehow stranded on the tip of this strange country full of swamps. The river estuary was the only safe bathing spot and we were taken there in the hotel canoe dug out of a tree trunk and not entirely safe. It nearly overturned one day on the way back. We lost our anthropologist and travelled up into the Yucatan to see Uxmal and **Chichen Itza** and some of the other sites, and this was a wild windswept flatland where the rain came suddenly at exactly the same hour each day. The sites were all different and had been built by different peoples who had come and gone after the first Maya, and had been overtaken in their turn by other still later civilizations."



*Chichen Itza*