



I was also intrigued with the notion of the blackboard as a place where things appear to exist in perpetual jeopardy, where things are susceptible to being 'rubbed out.'

VERNON FISHER

Vernon Fisher

***Private Africa*, 1995**

Oil on blackboard slating on wood

92 ⁷/₈ x 93 ⁹/₁₆ inches

Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth,

Museum purchase

Acquired in 1995

Vernon Fisher is well known for the evocative use of text and images in his paintings. This combination of modes of communication results in complex and layered work that gives the viewer the opportunity to dig for meaning. In *Private Africa*, the multiple layers of information offer many ways to interpret the meaning of the piece. The most visible elements in *Private Africa* are the map of Africa, the image of the parachuting figure floating towards the earth, and a large waterfall that may or may not be part of the scene containing the parachute. The map depicts colonial Africa, rather than contemporary Africa. Fisher creates his work on a blackboard, and has painted erased shapes and text "underneath." All of these elements suggest different ways of understanding the continent of Africa. The map is an abstract, miniaturized version of the continent that highlights certain features to give the viewer specific information. The waterfall offers a romantic vision of the wilderness contained there. The parachuting person might suggest an outsider's view of a continent that sparks curiosity, fear, and wonder, as he or she arrives in (or lands in) this new place. The blackboard shows faint words and diagrams, perhaps notes or memories of the place, erased or faded by time. Fisher's title offers another set of associations – is the "Private" a Private in the army, or does it refer to an individual's, or Fisher's, secret idea of what Africa is (or may be) like? Fisher was certainly interested in all the ways we begin to form what we think Africa is, knowing that no single entry point will be accurate. In describing the multiple ways images and text inform us, Fisher has called them "the edges of understanding," suggesting that all these representations of Africa will lead us to, but never expose, what Africa really is.