

# ARTFORUM



**Courtney Cooper, untitled, 2015, ballpoint pen on paper, 61" x 108".**

CHICAGO

## **Courtney Cooper**

INTUIT: THE CENTER FOR INTUIT AND  
OUTSIDER ART

756 N. Milwaukee Avenue  
February 5–May 29, 2016

The conventions of mapping that organize Courtney Cooper's immense ink drawings of Cincinnati, Ohio, provide a structure for his more cognitive cartographies. An array of landmarks punctuate dark congestions of scribbled grids and city blocks on collaged sheets of paper portraying the psychology of these spaces where the mood contradicts revelry with riot. These works—which mostly span the past decade—depict a city, perhaps an alternate reality called "Zinzinnati," per the exhibition's title, that is perpetually in celebration, evinced by the balloons and banners decorating some of the maps for the city's Germanic Oktoberfest.

But the party above belies the social tensions below: Gradually, one notices scrawled writing layered underneath Cooper's landscapes, the text erupting in the blank passages of the streets. In one drawing from 2015 (all works are untitled), visitors see the phrase "The bitch, you fucking bitch" echo across a neighborhood, and in another, the capitalized word *police* drifts at the horizon line between an amusement park and a street festival. The metropolis is portrayed in a more modestly scaled 2007 drawing with agitated districts extending in all directions from three prominent buildings labeled "Hamilton County Court House," "Hamilton County," and "Justice Center" across their broad rooftops.

Given Cincinnati's history of police violence toward black men—the shooting of unarmed nineteen-year-old Timothy Thomas provoked riots in 2001, and in 2015, unarmed Samuel DuBose was shot dead during a routine traffic stop, to name a few—Cooper's maps uneasily juxtapose the city's jubilation and social unrest simultaneously. Each street conjured here questions and fantasizes how men of color like him can survive and thrive in these public, urban spaces.

—Matt Morris