Nancy Chum
China. V. Song Dynasty, 900-1279 A.D.

Peggy Guggenheim
Some Recreations

Vernon Fisher
Pendelo en el Mar

Julia Fish
Great Divide

John Cage
A Dip in the Lake

Alex Flemming
Untitled (magazine)
ARTISTS’ MAPS AND DEVICES

The buzzword of our time—global—is the new appellation of every corporate ad campaign that appears on television or in print today. Strictly defined, “global” refers to a worldwide or universal phenomenon, which relates tangentially to, but is not synonymous with, a map. Maps usually are two-dimensional representations of the features of an area of the earth or heavens. The true vicarious experience that maps offered people in the past has been lost by the ease of travel in our current era. Still, an ongoing fascination with maps as a slice of reality or a complete fantasy persists, even as we world conceptually shrink by the day.

Although artists have for centuries helped to craft maps as a usable scientific tool, they also have found inspiration by including maps or spheres in still-life paintings and metaphorical works from later centuries of art history. New today, though, is the sheer volume of artworks that evoke the earth in small or large part as an inspiration. Prominent in recent decades was the American Pop artist Jasper Johns’ iconic Map, of the United States, from 1962. Concurrent with his efforts and those of other Pop and Funk artists creating map-like images in the 1960s and 1970s was a swell of now-famous Earthworks artists from several countries. Addressing the land in distinctly physical ways, artists such as Dennis Oppenheim, Michael Heizer, and Robert Smithson used the actual elements of the earth’s surface to raise formal or conceptual issues on a scale seldom derived from the traditional topographical studios existing. Suddenly, after the middle of the 1960s, all the world was a stage for artists whose works still serve as the foundation for a mostly younger generation of artists showcased here. Where a commitment toward changing society has mostly flagged in the 1990s, still to be found is a sense of social mission that uses maps to illustrate a point. ART ON THE MAP investigates the recent proliferation of map usage and map imagery by selected contemporary artists from approximately the last twenty years.
politics and ecology. Whereas Nancy Chen re-creates Chinese dynasties through meticulous research and visualization, Cheryl Cobo and Alex Flegmattıe take a more conceptual approach to meanings suggested by outlines of continents, and through the inclusion of words and phrases, Peggy Dugg and Berna Hewitt comment on issues of social injustice and cultural migration through maps that are composed of politicized shapes and symbols. Ecology goes to the heart of most works by Newton and Helen Meyer Harrison, taking on global themes while creating works of great physical beauty. Cameron Zeftian uses actual maps or simply the silhouette of a continent to further his appreciation of nature and its preservation.

Many artists address aesthetics of the map as their point of departure. Jesse Hickman and Julian Schnabel use actual maps as grounds on which to apply mud and pigment, respectively, to obscure or enhance what lies beneath. Greg Colin fabricates relief sculptures suggesting identifiable urban centers—perhaps as seen from above—in simple materials, just as Rob Rees paints vivid surfaces inspired by aerial views of the Great Lakes or the islands of New Zealand, re-configured as will.

Also dealing with island images is Paul Coffey, whose 30-foot high installation of hand-painted blue "veils" from imaginary island shapes against the sky visible through the gallery windows. His inspiration is that same desire to travel that captivates as many artists seen here, including Robert Minchin. Machin's sculptures of foreign countries or American states, where he may have been working at the time, are constructed with steel and found objects, and resemble or comment on those places. Camilla Ventzi's mapped "portraits" merge features from actual maps with images of the human figure "to make people's mental maps visible." Guillermo Kuitca's map-making is highly interpretive but, usually, evocative of earth-bound realities. His meticulous painting shown here—Heaven—fixes us of the earth's terrain so we look skyward, like the ancients, with a sense of wonder.

Art on the Map explores the interweaving of art and everyday culture in relation to the blurring of borders between aesthetic concerns and social concerns. The sheer beauty in Vernon Fisher's Pursuit of the Map, with our planet split apart to reveal its complex structure, is further complicated by the human element. Either banal or provocative, the central figure in his image is mysterious, yet it suggests issues of "vision" through an act of cleaning the eyes beneath a faucet.

The vision of these 24 artists, in relation to their concepts of map-making, raises many interesting questions for our time. And, hopefully, it opens the doors of our imaginations to the possibilities of the next century—perhaps with a leavened sense of personal or political boundaries.

Gregory K. Knight

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank the artists, lenders and sponsors for making this exhibition possible. Also, I extend my deep gratitude to Sofia Zarraza, curatorial assistant, for her dedication to the success of this project. G.G.K.

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City of Chicago
Richard M. Daley, Mayor
Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs
Lois Weinberg, Commissioner
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Photo Tino Van Eynde Ed. II, 118. Dennis Crowley Ed. II, Ellen Page Wilson inside, all others courtesy of the artists

Design: Asia Communications

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Design: Asia Communications

Collection of the artist
Leah McSweeney, 1992
Acrylic on paper
30" x 34"

Collection of the artist
JULIAN SCHNABEL
New York, NY

From the Names of Our Children, 1989
Contract paper on map
41 1/4" x 29"
Collection of Judith Neisser
Not on a Bad Summer, 1987
Oil on map
19 3/4" x 15"
Collection of Refco Group, Ltd.

Names on a Bad Summer, 1987
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CRITICALLY VENTI

Ve. Frenesi, 1988
Relief and silkscreen
30" x 22"
Collection of the artist
Mystic, 1986
Relief and silkscreen
30" x 22"
Collection of the artist
Pugger Piverman Nov., 1988
Relief and silkscreen
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