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"A sinister cabal of superior writers."

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Author: Richard Marcus — Published: Jun 09, 2009 at 9:07 pm

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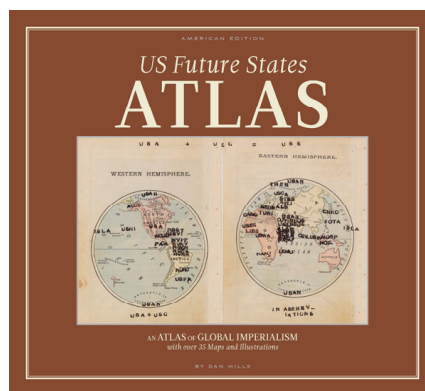
Book Review: *US Future States Atlas* by Dan Mills

Richard Marcus, June 09, 2009 <http://blogcritics.org/books/article/book-review-us-future-states-atlas/>

I've always had something of a problem with political art. Far too often people expect you to lose your objectivity and only look at the message, not at how the message is delivered. It's like all of a sudden we're supposed to forget about the quality of the art because the message is so important. Maybe I'm just an elitist snob, but it pisses me off when people expect you to say how wonderful something they did was because it was about this or that, not because it was a beautifully written story or exquisitely drawn illustration.

I'm in agreement with saying art should hold a mirror up to society and there's nothing wrong with deliberately setting out to create a piece of art that makes a political statement. However, it's equally important for whomever is doing the creation that he or she are able to set aside the issue that originally inspired them and be able to focus on how best to communicate it for an audience. No matter what you do, though, creating political art is such a difficult balancing act, as you try to meet the needs of both the art and the issue you're dealing with, that not many can pull off.

However, if you're interested in seeing an example of one artist who does an exemplary job of accomplishing it check out the recent release from Perceval Press, *US Future States Atlas* by visual artist Dan Mills. Subtitled "An Atlas Of Global Imperialism" the book gathers together a series of satirical maps Mills created delineating countries the United States could invade in the future and annex as additional states in the union.

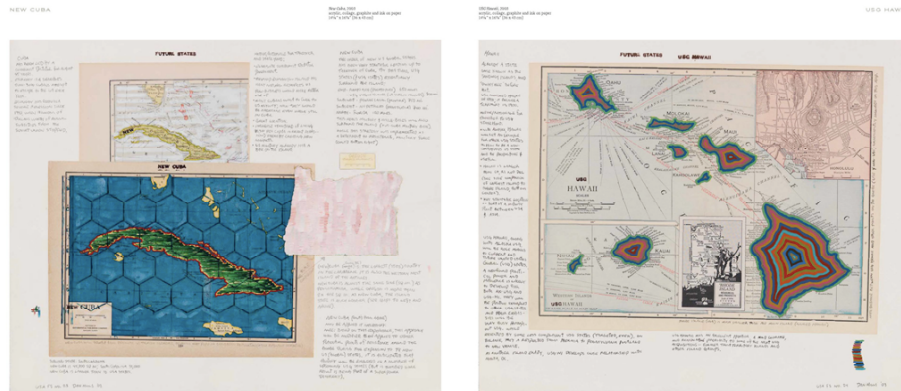


For each country, or "state", Mills has taken an actual image of it from an atlas and then begun its transformation into being part of United States Global (USG). (Note: USA + USG = United States Empire [USE]). First, if these new states are more than one country, made up of bits and pieces of a few adjacent countries, or as in the case of "New Venice" (formally Venezuela) divided up into separate states, their new boundaries have to be defined on the atlas. The new regions are painted in either one or a few exceptionally garish colours that make them stand out from those in their immediate vicinity. While in some instances it makes them appear to be a mockery of the way in which relief maps designating altitude and geographical formations are drawn, the distinctiveness of the colours also puts me in mind of

the way in which maps used to designate countries that were once part of the British Empire with bright pink. Even in post colonial days you could look at a world map and spot Commonwealth countries, former colonies who still wanted to be part of the same club, dotted all over the world.

In fact if you turn to the back of the book you'll see that Mills has created two new maps of the world, one of which depicts the countries of USE picked out in a sickly purple, washed out blue, and shades of green. The other is crammed full of initials as it designates all the territories through abbreviations. Looking at the new map of the world where the 47 new states appear like random blotches against a pale background it's hard to find any rhyme or reason for why these particular spots were chosen to become parts of the new empire.

Not to worry, for on each of the individual maps of the new states Mills has outlined the reasons why this particular country was chosen to become part of USE, and the benefits to be derived by USA, or US50, from their inclusion. These include everything from the geo-political, a country is situated such that an American presence can easily exert influence on a region of the world, to the natural resources made available through their inclusion. Of course one country can't just annex another without so much as a by your leave, I mean wasn't the first Gulf War fought because Iraq annexed Kuwait?



That's all right, Mills has covered those bases as well. For on each map he's itemized the reasons for US50 to take over the country. Take the new state of Panama Canal as an example. First of all the country of Panama wouldn't have existed without US aid in the first place as they were part of Columbia until 1903 and only seceded with American aid. Immediately upon declaring sovereignty they gave the US control over a swathe of land through the middle of the country until 1999 in order to build the canal and run it. Therefore a good chunk of the country was ruled by America for the majority of its existence anyway. Aside from that it will fulfill the need for military bases in the region to assist in future plans for the region and provide a beach head in Central America.

With his US Future States Atlas Mills has created a wickedly biting satire of America foreign policy dating back to the days of the Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny. In the later parts of the twentieth century and early twenty-first we've seen the US invade countries all over the world with impunity for what has turned out to be the most spurious of rationale. Somalia, Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan, and Iraq have all been treated to visits by American armies since the 1980s, while other countries have had to deal with forces armed and funded by various US governments. Mills' creations are not only visually arresting with their garish colours, but they also provide insightful and intelligent commentary on American foreign policy and how truly ridiculous some of the rationale given for those previous actions has been.

Perceval Press has done its usual masterful job of presenting artwork in a book form. The works are laid out in such a way that we are able to see both their scope and the detail of each piece. Blow-ups of the actual states themselves allow us to appreciate the lurid details of the colours Mills has chosen to illuminate them with, while the scale reproductions of each map are clear enough that we can make out details like the accompanying text. US Future States Atlas accomplishes the delicate act of balancing of art and politics with grace and style. While that's in large part due to Dan Mills' sensibilities, Perceval Press has to be given some credit as well as they have created an effective and accessible means for people to view the artist's work.