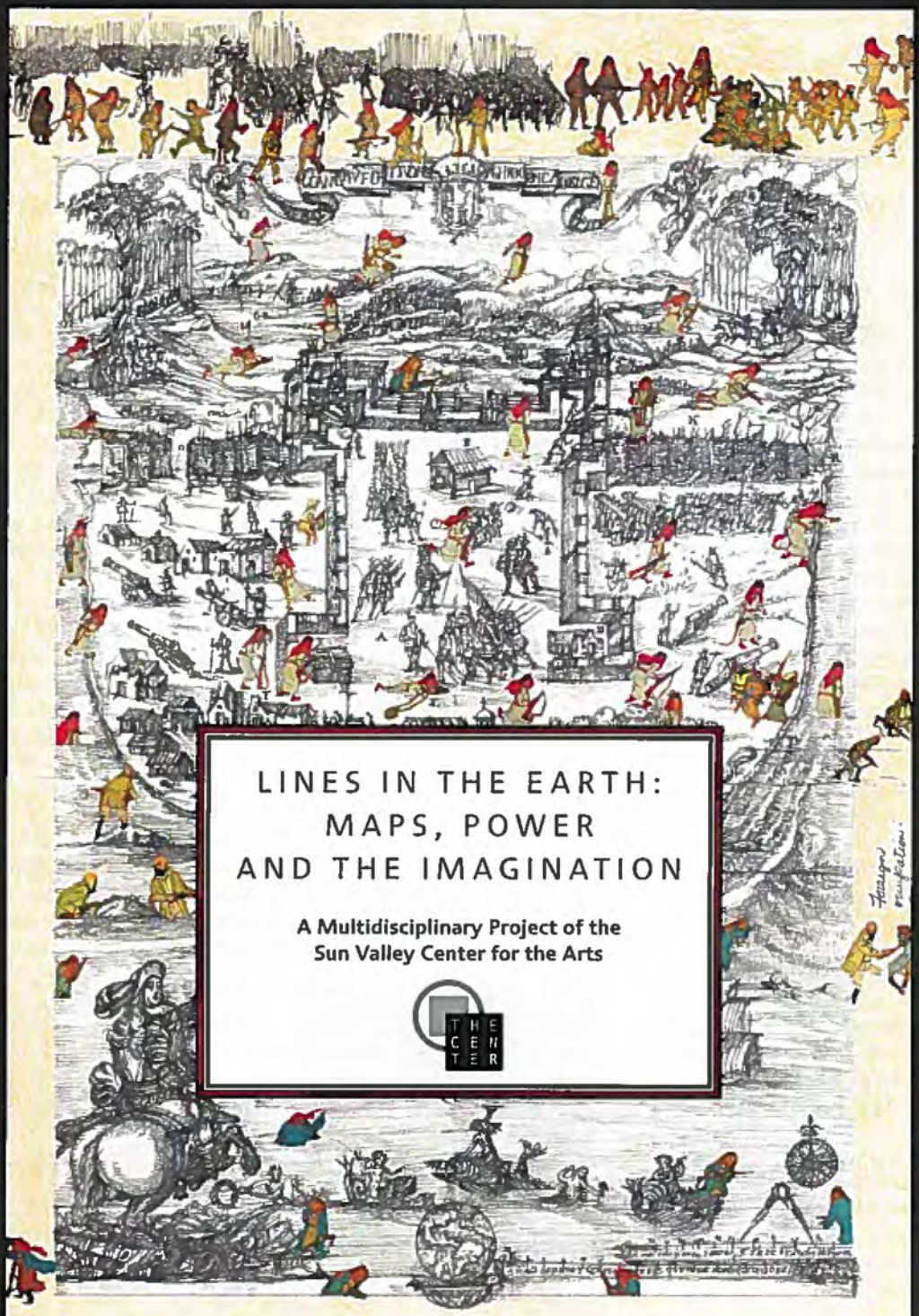


LINES IN THE EARTH: MAPS, POWER AND THE IMAGINATION

A Multidisciplinary Project of the Sun Valley Center for the Arts

THE CENTER

LINES IN THE EARTH: MAPS, POWER AND THE IMAGINATION

COURTNEY GILBERT, CURATOR

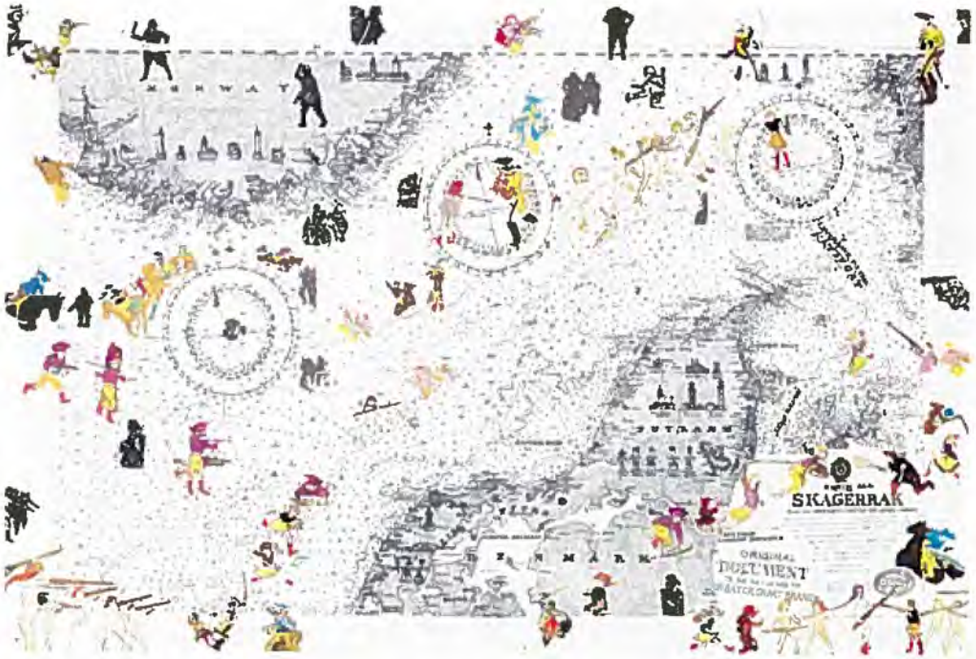
It is not down in any map; true places never are.
—Herman Melville

As I write this essay, the Castle Rock wildfire is burning just miles from downtown Ketchum. More than 1,600 firefighters work day and night to keep this 44,000 acre fire from destroying human lives or property. We are all uneasy, wondering just how far the fire will spread. I find myself compulsively checking Blaine County's website, clicking on a link that leads me to a map. Updated every day, the lines on this map give me different kinds of information: solid black lines tell me where firefighters have secured the edges of the fire and spiky red ones indicate where it continues to burn uncontrolled. Dotted and criss-crossed lines tell me where firefighters plan to back-burn in an effort to deplete the fire's fuel. I can compare each day's map to that from the day before to get a sense of just how much the fire has grown. What I can't see on the map is the smoke that settles every night far beyond the edges of the fire, smoke that seeps into our houses as we sleep. I can't see the heat generated by the fire's flames, nor the bodies of firefighters working to hold the fire back. The maps I look at give me facts and figures, but they do not convey the full reality of what they represent, and in this way, they are like all maps.

Fire map:
Courtesy Benchmark Associates, P.A.
Ketchum, Idaho

JANE HAMMOND,
The Wonderfulness of Downtown,
1997, lithograph and silkscreen with collage, 59½ x 62 in.
Lent by Jerome F. & Judith Weiss Levy, reproduction courtesy of the artist and Universal Limited Art Editions, Inc.

We tend to read maps as objective, truthful documents, but in fact, maps always represent the interests of those who make them. As geographers and cartographers have pointed out, no map can re-create the world and thousands of different maps could represent any single place. In part because they use two dimensions to try to represent the three-dimensional world, every map contains omissions, distortions and exaggerations. Nevertheless, we have been using maps for thousands of years to define our world. We draw lines on them to represent rivers, roads and borders. Historically, the lines that represent borders have been defined by actual geographical features (rivers, mountain ranges), by imaginary lines (the 49th parallel) and by arbitrary political processes (the colonial division of Africa or the post-World War II division of Berlin). We use maps to navigate and to explore, but they have also been tools for colonization and for war.



JOYCE KOZLOFF,
Boys' Art #19: Skagerrak, 2001–2002, mixed media on paper, 11⅝ x 16¾ in. Courtesy of the artist and DC Moore Gallery, New York

We are so bombarded by maps in our everyday lives that we often take them for granted—we see them in newspapers, newscasts, weather reports and subways; at ski lifts, trailheads, rest stops and gas stations. Computer programs like Google Earth and MapQuest increasingly define the way we view the world and how we find our way around. Some of these maps are useful. Others are used to persuade us of a particular environmental, economic, political or historical viewpoint.

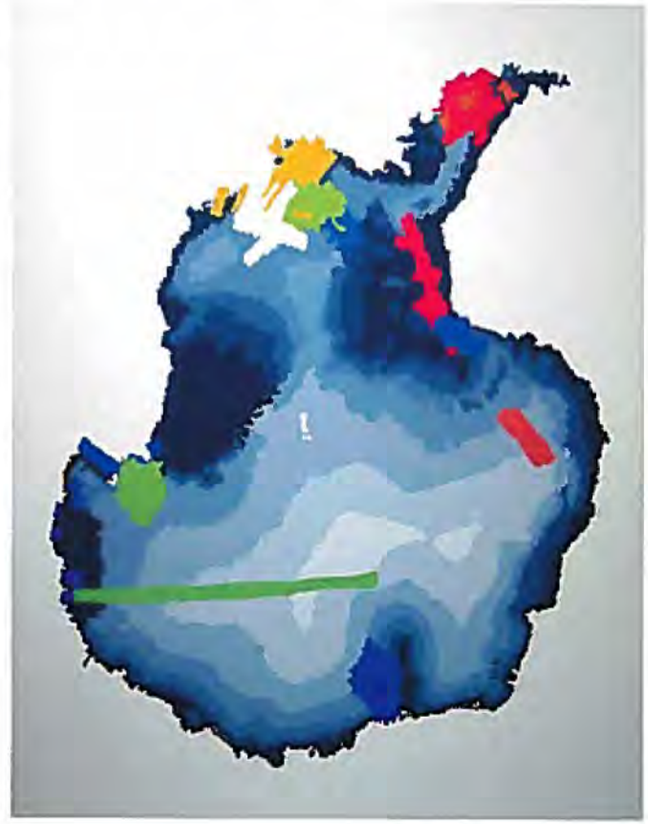
According to geographer Denis Wood and writer Peter Turchi, the first known maps appeared around 3,500 B.C. in Mesopotamia, where they developed not only as a means of organizing the world but also as a way to keep tax records. Thus economic and political interests have embedded themselves into maps from their beginnings. Religion, too, has long played a role in cartography; medieval European world maps, for example, sometimes depicted biblical places like Eden. In the sixteenth century, mapmaking was an important tool for colonization. Soon after establishing control over what is now Mexico, the Spanish crown began a systematic geographical inventory of its new colony, the *Relaciones geográficas* (Geographical Reports), as if the very act of mapping a territory secured its dominion. This tradition of mapmaking as a means of establishing territorial power continued into the nineteenth century; explorers like William Clark mapped the American West as a prelude to the expansion of the United States. Maps have, of course, also been important military tools for centuries.

This exhibition features the work of contemporary artists who engage with the idea of mapping. For many of these artists, mapping provides a physical means of exploring social, cultural and political geographies. Some use maps to rearrange the world; others use them to explore the way that maps reinforce political and metaphorical fictions. Still others use maps to create their own fictional and fantastic worlds. The exhibition considers the many ways artists have used maps—which have traditionally defined our view of the world—as the basis for questioning the very order they impose.

Painter **JANE HAMMOND's** incorporation of mapping into her work reflects her deep curiosity about the world around her as well as her penchant for organizing the world through systems of images. Hammond has developed a personal visual language or alphabet based on 276 individual images, drawn from sources as diverse as beekeeping and board games, that she employs in her artwork in series that she compares to a code. Interested in the way that signs and symbols construct meaning, Hammond utilizes imagery in her paintings, prints and collages that invites viewers to create their own sets of interpretations. Maps have long played an important role in her work. *The Wonderfulness of Downtown* takes the idea that maps enabled explorers and colonizers to conquer new lands and reverses it. She depicts a woman dressed as an explorer, a female Columbus, standing next to a map of lower Manhattan. Hammond sprinkles the map with snapshots of everyday life in that city, placing them at points that correspond to the locations where she took the photos. Hammond lives in lower Manhattan and she describes this map as a map of home—the kind of map a conquistador never needed. *All Souls (Villavicencio)* is part of a series of butterfly maps Hammond has made since the beginning of the Iraq War. Inspired by a dream of a map of Iraq and its neighbors covered with butterflies, the maps depict places in Africa, Asia and South America covered with a layer of startlingly lifelike butterflies made of rice paper, horse hair and scanned images. Hammond suggests there are parallels between the butterflies' short life spans and precarious political or economic situations in these countries. She often arranges the butterflies in patterns that make them look like pinned specimens, anchored to the places represented in the maps below them and collected like colonial possessions. Sometimes, though, they appear to be migrating and to offer the possibility of flight and escape.

JOYCE KOZLOFF shares Hammond's interest in the notion that maps represent political and historical events in ways that aren't always immediately apparent. As an artist, she also takes on the role of historian and archivist, combing the history of car-

DAN MILLS,
USAntarctica, 2005, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 37 in. Courtesy of the artist and Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago



tography for the maps that become the basis for her works. Her *Boys' Art* series combines historical military maps from multiple cultures and eras with hand-drawn embellishments, art historical quotations and images taken from her son's childhood drawings of wars and battles. With *Targets*, Kozloff uses maps to make more immediate comment on the relationship between cartography and war. A 9 x 9 foot globe that visitors can enter, *Targets*' plain wooden exterior belies its painted interior, covered with reproductions of maps Kozloff began ordering from U.S. government agencies during the Gulf War in the 1990s. Each of the countries represented has, at some point, been a U.S. military "target." Kozloff is interested not only in the history of maps as military and political tools, but as documents that record the shifts in the way we perceive the world. Her *Knowledge* globes take two-dimensional maps from different moments in history and translate them into three dimensions, allowing us to imagine the Earth as it would look if cartographers hundreds of years ago had been accurate in their imaginings of the world. Kozloff uses the flaws in these worldviews to remind us of the malleability and flexibility inherent in mapmaking.

Like Kozloff's, **DAN MILLS'** map-based works probe the relationship between militaristic activity and cartography. The drawings and paintings in his *US Future States* series mimic the topographical tradition of mapmaking at the same time that they draw on the history of abstraction. A set of fictitious and amusing proposals for U.S. acquisition of new territories throughout the world (such as *USArabia*, *Tunisiana*, and *USAntarctica*), Mills' atlas contains a narrative that presents strategies, motives and rationale for the takeover of various countries, alongside short briefs on their histories. These imaginary maps of impossible U.S. states provide darkly humorous commentary on the role maps have historically played as part of geopolitical strategy.

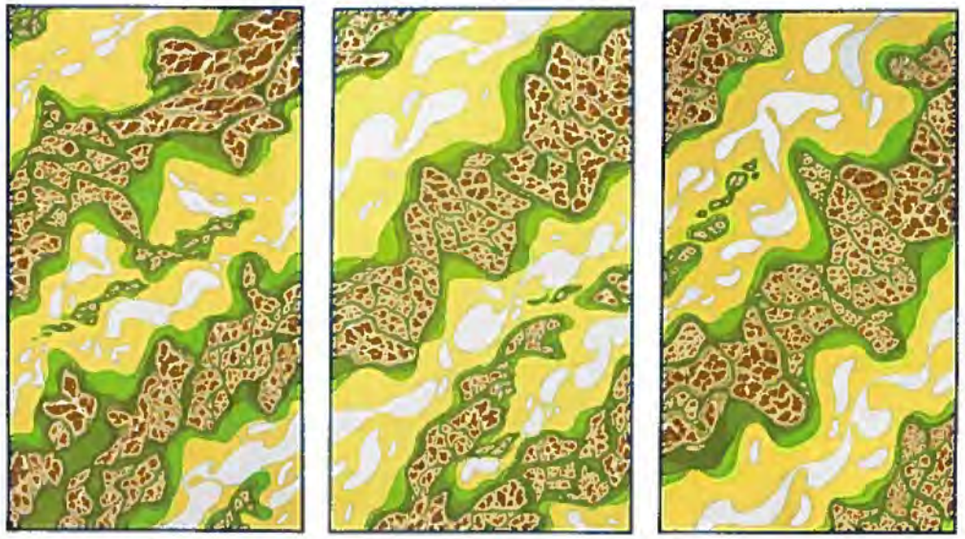
MATTHEW PICTON, *Berlin, A Historial Portrait, 1932, 1962, 2006*, 2007, painted Duralar, pins and enamel, 30 x 38 in. Courtesy of the artist and Toomey Tourell, San Francisco

SANTIAGO SIERRA, stills from *Position Exchange for Two Distinct, 30 Metre Volumes of Earth*, 2005, DVD. Courtesy of the artist and Galería Helga de Alvear, Madrid

MATTHEW PICTON's city sculptures play with the notion that maps are usually flat representations of the round Earth. Reversing that paradox, he takes two-dimensional maps of various cities and carefully translates the streets and roads that run through them into delicate three-dimensional painted Duralar sculptures. Like Mills', Picton's work engages with the modernist tradition of abstraction. He imbues his sculptures with a historical dimension, too, by sometimes pairing them with maps drawn onto transparency sheets that he layers to show changes through time. His Berlin sculpture, for example, appears alongside a three-layer text map showing the changes in street names throughout that city at three key historical moments—1942, 1962 and 2002. Picton thus illustrates the effects that changes in political power have on place names in maps, as well as the notion that maps are documents that record history.

SANTIAGO SIERRA is a Spanish-born, Mexico-based conceptual artist whose performances and interventions offer commentary on issues of race, class and politics. The video *Position Exchange for Two Distinct, 30 Metre Volumes of Earth* records a 2005 project Sierra conducted on the North Korea/South Korea border. With the supervision of the South Korean army, Sierra arranged for two bulldozers to excavate holes of precisely the same size on either side of the border, exchange the excavated earth, and then fill the holes. Sierra suggests that the border dividing these two nations is essentially an arbitrary, imaginary line—that no real difference exists on either side. This imaginary line has created, of course, all too real political and economic differences that have led to grave political instability in the region. Sierra's project prompts viewers to consider the history and origins of other national borders and their socio-economic effects.

Two of the artists in this exhibition work not with maps based on real places, but with maps based entirely in their imaginations. **LORDY RODRIGUEZ's** maps often reflect his personal experience of geography.



LORDY RODRIGUEZ,
Salt Flat Desert Valley, 2006, ink on paper, 60 x 36 in. (each of 3 panels). Courtesy of the artist and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco

Born in the Philippines and educated in Texas, New York and California, Rodriguez has made "self-portraits" using maps from the places that have been important to his life. He makes portraits of others, too, based on their personal geographies. In one body of work, *Final States*, Rodriguez remapped each of the 50 United States and added five more (including "Disneyland" and "Internet"). He based his reconfigurations on his memories of his own travels as well as extensive research. Rodriguez's latest series of meticulously drawn ink on paper maps abandon the text included in his earlier works—the text we rely on in maps to help us locate our place in the world. Their vaguely geographical titles (*Lake Land* or *Salt Flat Desert Valley*) and standard topographical imagery allow us to recognize them as maps, but their deep level of abstraction and lack of text frustrate our desire to actually use them as maps. Rodriguez's maps either dislocate viewers or allow them to locate themselves within his imaginary landscapes.

NICK LAMIA, too, makes maps based on worlds that exist only in his mind. Although primarily a painter, he also works in ink on paper, drawing tiny, precisely delineated maps. Their intimate scale (most are 7 x 6 inches) creates the sense that we are viewing them either through a microscope or a telescope, and it is precisely this ambivalence that Lamia seeks to exploit. He sees his maps as a metaphor for our desire to chart the unknown. The unknown, for Lamia, is no longer geographical, but lies instead at the intersection of technology and nature. Although his drawings visually resemble maps, they use color and imagery in ways that disorient and confuse us. Are we looking at land or water? Roads or rivers? Fields or buildings? Lamia's maps remind us of the futility we face in trying to completely organize and understand our world.

Each of these artists prompts us to ask what role maps play in our own lives. Through tools like the Internet, we have access to so many different kinds of maps. We use maps to envision the war in Iraq or to figure out how to get from the airport to our hotel when we go on vacation. While we use maps to explore the planet, though, we don't often use them to consider our local universe. How might a map help us better understand the Wood River Valley?

As residents of the Wood River Valley, many of us use trail maps, topographical maps and maps of Bald Mountain. Most of us use road maps, whether in the valley or on trips out of it. But what kinds of maps would emerge if we started charting our personal geographies and geographical histories? What are our travel patterns within the valley? How deeply do we inscribe these patterns? How are we connected to other parts of Idaho and the United States or to other countries? The Sun Valley Center for the Arts has invited artist and mapmaker Lize Mogel to help us answer some of these questions. Mogel has worked with communities around the country to create maps that give them greater insight into their cities and towns. She has collaborated with groups like the Center for Land Use Interpretation and the Center for Urban Pedagogy and has done projects in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Tennessee. When she visited our community in late summer of this year, Mogel worked with student and adult volunteers to compile information about the migration patterns of Wood River Valley human and animal residents. The Center will be distributing and posting her resulting project, *Migration Map*, throughout the valley. It will help us better understand the travel patterns of various groups of people (students, laborers, part-time residents, tourists, seasonal workers) and animals (sheep and birds, for example) both within and outside the valley and allow us to locate points of intersection and divergence.

Mogel's *Migration Map*, along with the other artwork in this exhibition, should offer us insight not only into our community, but also into our individual relationships with maps. Perhaps the next time we pick up a map, we will each ask a new set of questions. Who made the map? Why? What did they choose to emphasize? What did they leave out? How might this map look if the mapmaker had applied a different set of criteria? In considering these questions, we might also stop to think about the fact that many maps are works of art—and not only maps made by artists. For centuries cartographers have used color and line to create beautiful interpretations of the world around them. A new generation of artists is continuing this tradition of making aesthetically appealing maps. They use the visual language of cartography but also transcend it, illuminating the effects maps have on our world.

NICK LAMIA,
Untitled, 2007, ink on paper, 7 x 6 in. Courtesy of the artist