

# Art, cartography meet at juncture where philosophical issues reside

by Alan G. Artner  
tribune art critic

Links between maps and art were forged as far back as the early 15th Century, but many periods thereafter strengthened the associations in ways that previously had not been imagined, and one of those periods is our own.

Eight exhibitions in Chicago's Festival of Maps are devoted to contemporary artists' involvement with maps and mapping systems. He shows represent an interest that has grown during the last 45 years in countries around the world. Before Jasper Johns' 1961 "Map" of the United States, the history of 20th Century art turned up few works inspired by maps or their use as a tool of exploration. But by 1994 the Chicago Cultural Center could mount a group show in which 24 artists presented nothing but work with maps, and now we're about to see many more in a range that stretches from humble diagrams on paper to installations, videos and such sophisticated new technologies as the Global Satellite Navigation System.

What is the basis for this attraction? And why now?

"There's always been a kind of wanderlust at I think artists probably share with curators," said Gregory Knight, curator of the '94



show and co-curator for "HereThereEverywhere," which again will explore the issue of artists and maps at the Cultural Center beginning in January. "In general, there is an idea of wanting to travel and know the world in a broad way. But there's also a focusing very specifically on certain continents ... or regions or experiences.

## 'Need to locate oneself'

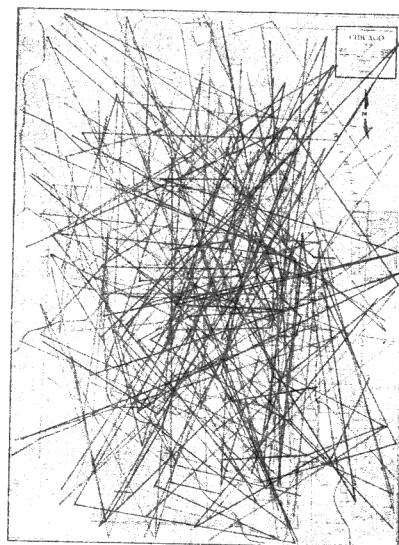
"The need to locate oneself in the broad scheme of things is maybe more now than ever. To be a citizen of the world is a metaphor ... But ultimately we all still locate ourselves within the town or state or country from which we came. And that has to do with identity: Where did I come from? Where am I going? Who am I? So some existential issues I think are certainly raised."

Maps, Knight acknowledges, were traditionally a way-finding device. But in art today he sees them more as springboards to a spectrum of other things, from politics and protest to a fantastic reimagining of the world as one might hope it to be. "HereThereEverywhere" will have pieces relating to maps as we have known them but also way-finding devices of the 21st Century, which use satellites and the Internet.

"My show is less about maps than about artists locating or demarcating themselves in a geographical or metaphysical space," said Tricia Van Eck, curator of "Mapping the Self," which opens Saturday at the Museum of Contemporary Art. "That's the first half. Then the second half explores ideas and presents works that use maps as a tool to raise levels of consciousness or bring about social awareness."

The earliest works here go back as far as 1969, to Conceptual photo and book pieces that were part of a movement to have artists move out of the gallery system and perform their work in the streets and countryside. These works are about artists mapping themselves in space, something we all do on a daily basis, just by walking our own routes. But more recent pieces are a means of discussing more difficult issues. Van Eck feels the artists have gravitated to maps because maps are capable of holding a great deal of complex information and can visually explain it better than, say, a treatise.

Artist Adelheid Mers has been creating maps and diagrams since 2000. She will be represented in more than one of the exhibitions. Additionally, her graduate students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago have organized another contemporary show on maps and mapping, and she is editing an issue of the journal "WhiteWalls," which early in 2008 will feature



Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art

John Cage's "A Dip in the Lake" from 1978.

map-related works by local and national artists.

Mers has noticed three dominant strains of mapping activity. The first, and most common, is mapping with the attitude of an activist, that is, to use maps to look at events and examine both their causes and results. The second strain has what Mers calls a "pedagogical attitude," which is exercised on various belief systems and sets of rules that people follow. The third strain turns to maps mainly out of a formal interest, using its ways of organization to visualize data or tell stories.

## 1960s a critical time

Mers writes: "A precursor for much of this work is [the] Fluxus [network of artists, composers and designers in the 1960s], with George Maciunas' maps of the art world ... and John Cage's event and music scores. The next generation picking up on this seems to be mine, artists born from 1956 to 1965. I think that a reason for our mapping activities is an increasing ability to hold in mind multiple points of view, even multiple truths."

"To the generation of my students, all this seems entirely natural. They grew up on the Web, and the simultaneity of everything is a commonplace to them. What that means to me is that there is no longer a perception of linear history, but that there are piles of simultaneously existing artifacts that can be multiply interpreted. Maps emphasize the availability of not a point of view but a range of views."

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## Festival of Maps: The numbers

2 Maps by men who later became U.S. president (by Abraham Lincoln at the Field Museum, by George Washington at the Newberry Library)

8 Maps of 19th Century Paris (at the Art Institute of Chicago)

30+ Institutions and organizations taking part in the festival

60 Works of art on mapping themes (at the Museum of Contemporary Art)

113 Antique maps of Africa (at the Northwestern University Library)

800+ Total maps and maplike objects in the festival

675,000 Galaxies in the Sloan Digital Survey map (at the Adler Planetarium)

## Celebrating cartography

### The Festival of Maps

**What:** Exhibits, lectures and other events throughout Chicago and the suburbs about important, historic and interesting maps.

**Who:** More than 30 institutions and organizations — Adler Planetarium, Around the Coyote, Art Institute of Chicago, Balzeas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, Brookfield Zoo, Carrie Secrist Gallery, the Center for Neighborhood Technology, Chicago Architecture Foundation, Chicago Botanic Garden, Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago History Museum, Chicago Humanities Festival, Chicago Metropolis 2020, City of Chicago, Columbia College, Encyclopaedia Britannica, The Field Museum, Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Illinois Humanities Council, Illinois State Geological Survey, Illinois State Museum Chicago Gallery, Joliet Area Historical Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art, Museum of Science and Industry, Newberry Library, Northwestern University Library, the Openlands Project, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Polish Museum of America, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Spertus Museum, the University of Chicago's Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics, the University of Chicago's Graham School of General Studies, the University of Chicago's Special Collections Research Center, the University of Illinois' Richard J. Daley Library and the bimonthly magazine WhiteWalls.

**When:** Starting Nov. 2 and continuing into 2008. Some exhibits are already open.

**Web site:** www.festivalofmaps.com

### Maps: Finding Our Place in the World

**What:** The centerpiece of the Festival of Maps, organized by the Field Museum and the Newberry Library.

**Where:** The Field Museum, 1400 S. Lake Shore Drive.

**When:** Nov. 2 to Jan. 27.

**Phone:** 312-922-9410

**Web site:** www.fieldmuseum.org

## See the exhibitions

**"Forks, Tables and Napkins,"** School of the Art Institute of Chicago Gallery 2 and Project Space, 847 W. Jackson Blvd., Nov. 2-21. 312-563-5162.

**"Field Guide by Antonia Conro with Joseph Meredith and Dan Wheeler,"** Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, 2430 N. Cannon Drive, Nov. 2-Jan. 31. 773-755-5100.

**"Mapping the Self,"** Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 E. Chicago Ave., Nov. 3-Feb. 10. 312-280-2660.

**"An Atlas of Radical Cartography,"** University of Illinois at Chicago, Gallery 400, 400 S. Peoria St., Nov. 27-Jan. 19. 312-996-6114.

**"The Legend Altered — Map as Method and Medium in Contemporary Art,"** Carrie Secrist Gallery, 835 W. Washington St., Nov. 30-Jan. 5. 312-491-0917.

**"Multiples and Miniatures: Mapping,"** Around the Coyote Gallery, 1935½ W. North Ave., Dec. 8-22. 773-342-6777.

**"HereThereEverywhere,"** Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington St., Jan. 19-April 6. 312-744-6630.

**"Imaginary Coordinates,"** Spertus Museum, 610 S. Michigan Ave., May 2-Sept. 7. 312-322-1700.