

# THE ART OF

# MAPPING



Curated by  
*TAG Fine Arts*

# THE ART OF MAPPING

Curated by



14 – 26 November 2011

The Air Gallery, 32 Dover Street, London W1S 4NE

Navigation, wayfinding, orientation: in today's famously complex and connected world, these are potent concepts. Perhaps in direct response to the contours of a modern life that is by turns exhilarating and overwhelming, visual artists in ever-increasing numbers are working with cartographic ideas. The response from their audiences is direct and often passionate. Artists who map have hit a nerve: all of us share an urge to know where we are, now more than ever in an era of hyper-stimulation.

We find maps everywhere today, as Maggie Gray points out in her accompanying essay. A heretofore unparalleled cartographic consciousness has primed us, perhaps, for new kinds of mapping stories. Art has accommodated. On six continents, artists of all ages are showing us that we may not, in fact, be where we think we are – or that it's worth reconsidering our assumptions on this matter.

It is sheer pleasure to view and contrast the works of artists in TAG's exceptional show. Many of the cartographies are reductions; by obscuring, cutting away, or leaving out extraneous elements, the artists Neal Beggs, Claire Brewster, Peter Dykhuis, and Rob Good untether form from place. Jonathan Parsons, Robert Walden, and Jeremy Wood use cartographic lines in arresting ways. Justine Smith and Susan Stockwell use their choices of medium as statements.

Stanley Donwood's brightly painted, named places were inspired by Paula Scher's text-blanketed maps. Whether the labels they use are geographical or arbitrary, the wink is

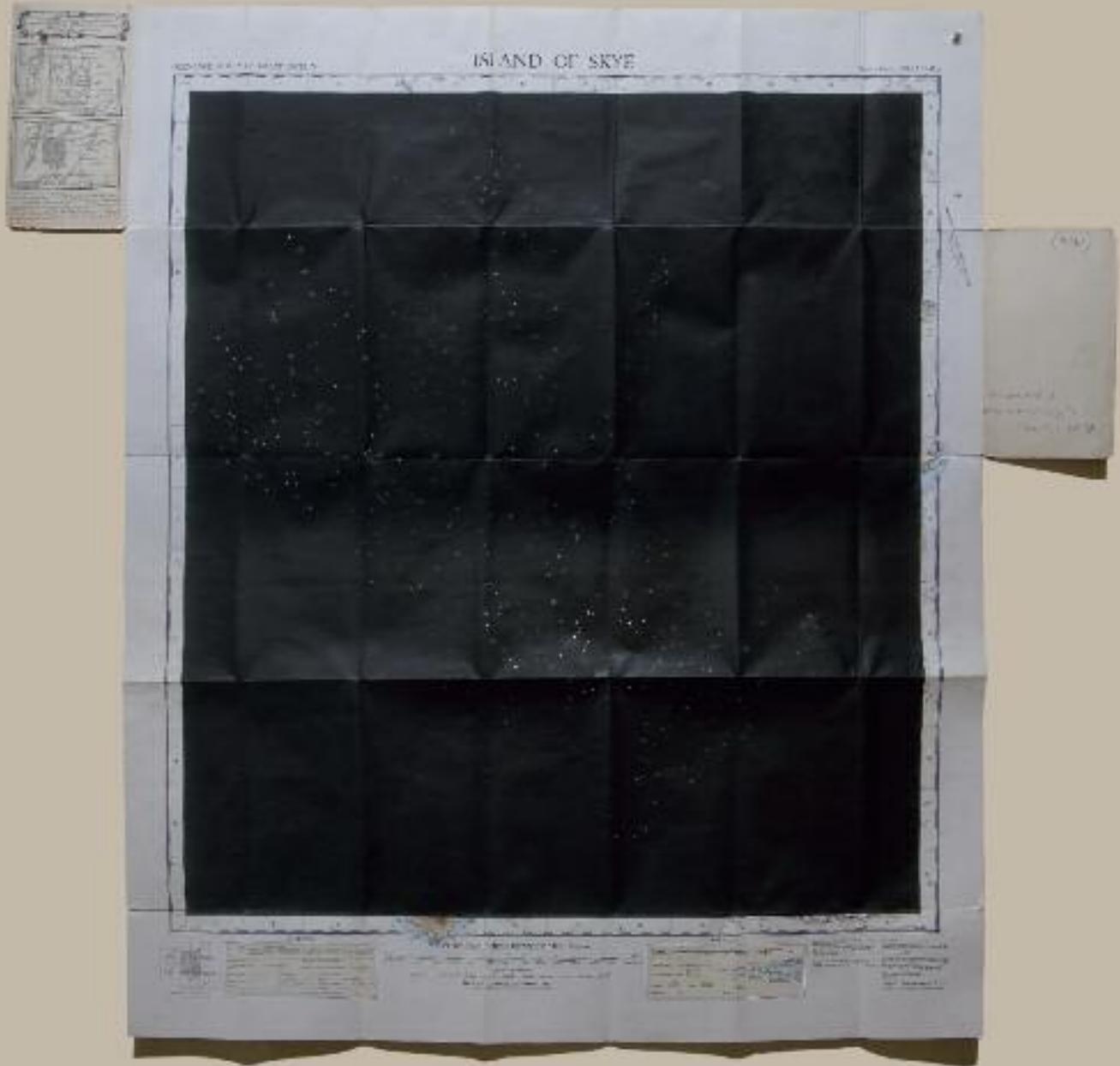
implicit: maps are just colors and shapes and words. Indeed, Scher has said, "The way [my map paintings] work is that they're total abstractions, and yet they have all this meaning attached to them." Dahlia Elsayed also uses words with dramatic flair in her paintings which, she says, synthesize an internal and external experience of place, connecting the topographical with the psychological.

Going deeper into the mind, Heidi Whitman's paper constructions map the mechanical workings of the brain, weaving experiences, memories, and elements of chance and play into "an impossibly convoluted cartography." Networks of pathways, switchbacks and zones of habitation come together to suggest intuitive mental terrains. The structure of the city and the mind are conflated, Whitman says, allowing her (like Elsayed) to map interior and exterior places as one. Cast shadows on the wall are important elements of her pieces, evoking both the absence and presence of conscious thought – a nice echo of the way we interact with maps generally.

Maps make explorers of us all – and we are all mapmakers. These are the twin messages artists offer, and we are fortunate that they have the creativity and ability to put mapping to such wonderfully subversive uses.

Katharine Harmon

Author, *The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography and You Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination*

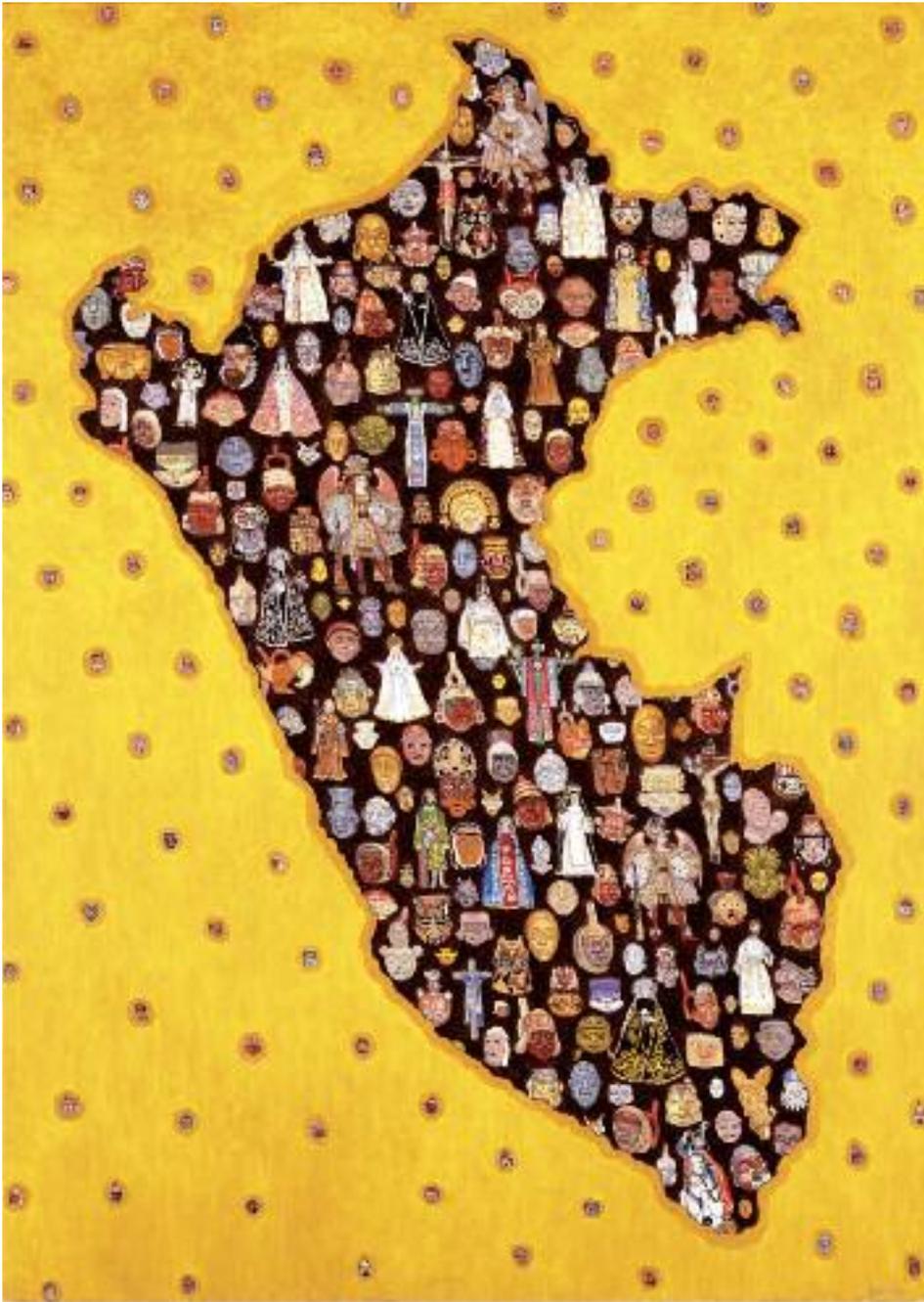


*Skye Starmap* | 2011 | Acrylic paint on a canvas backed Half-Inch to One Mile Ordnance Survey Map of the Isle of Skye dating from 1932 | 70 x 87 cm with front and back cover extended | Image courtesy of the artist and Aliceday, Brussels



**Claire Brewster**

*The Harbingers* | 2011 | Cut geological paper maps and pins | Dimensions variable



**Christa Dichgans**

Stanley Donwood



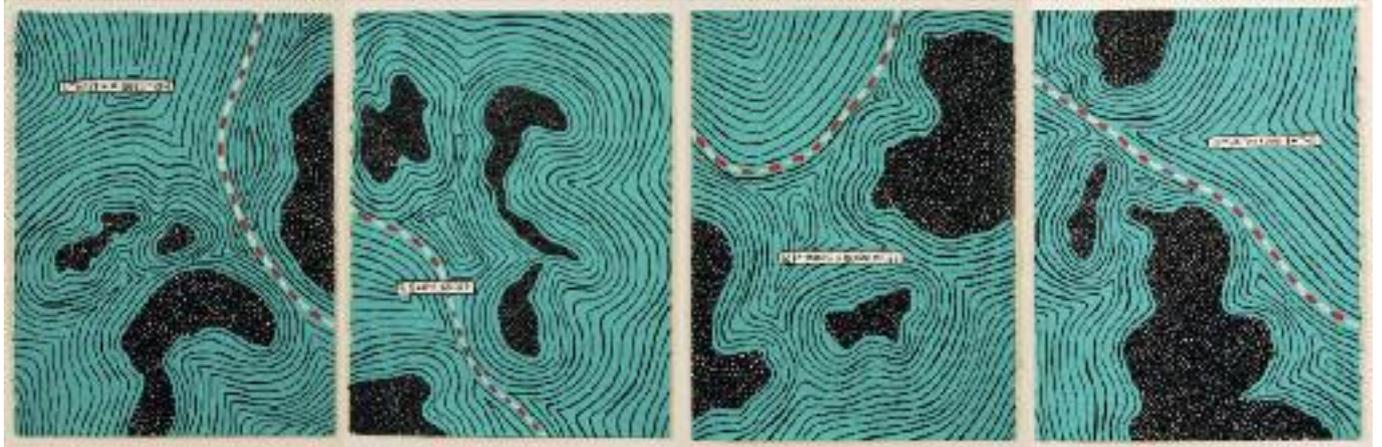
London | 2011 | Seven colour screenprint | Edition of 100 | 58 x 64 cm



**Peter Dykhuis**

*Inventory #1* (left) | 2011 | Mixed media on eight clipboards | 137.2 x 48.3 cm installed

*Inventory #2* (right) | 2011 | Mixed media on ten clipboards | 170.2 x 48.3 cm installed



**Dahlia Elsayed**

*A Twist, A Question* | 2011 | Acrylic on paper | Series of four works, each 38.6 x 28.9 cm

**Rob Good**

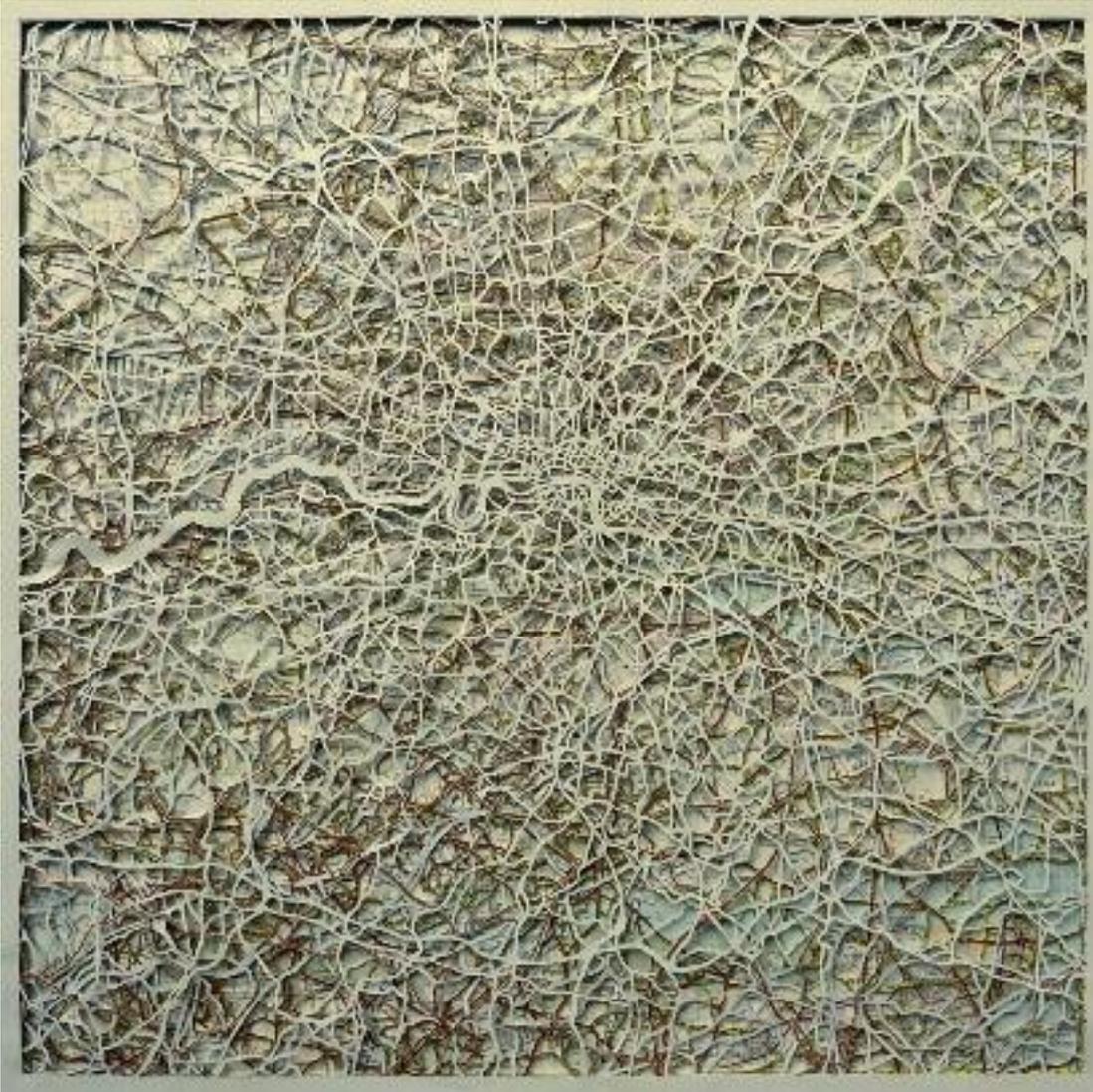


*Two Cities* | 2011 | Limited edition laser cut on oiled Manilla stencil card, mounted on stainless steel | Edition of 10 | 44 x 84 cm framed

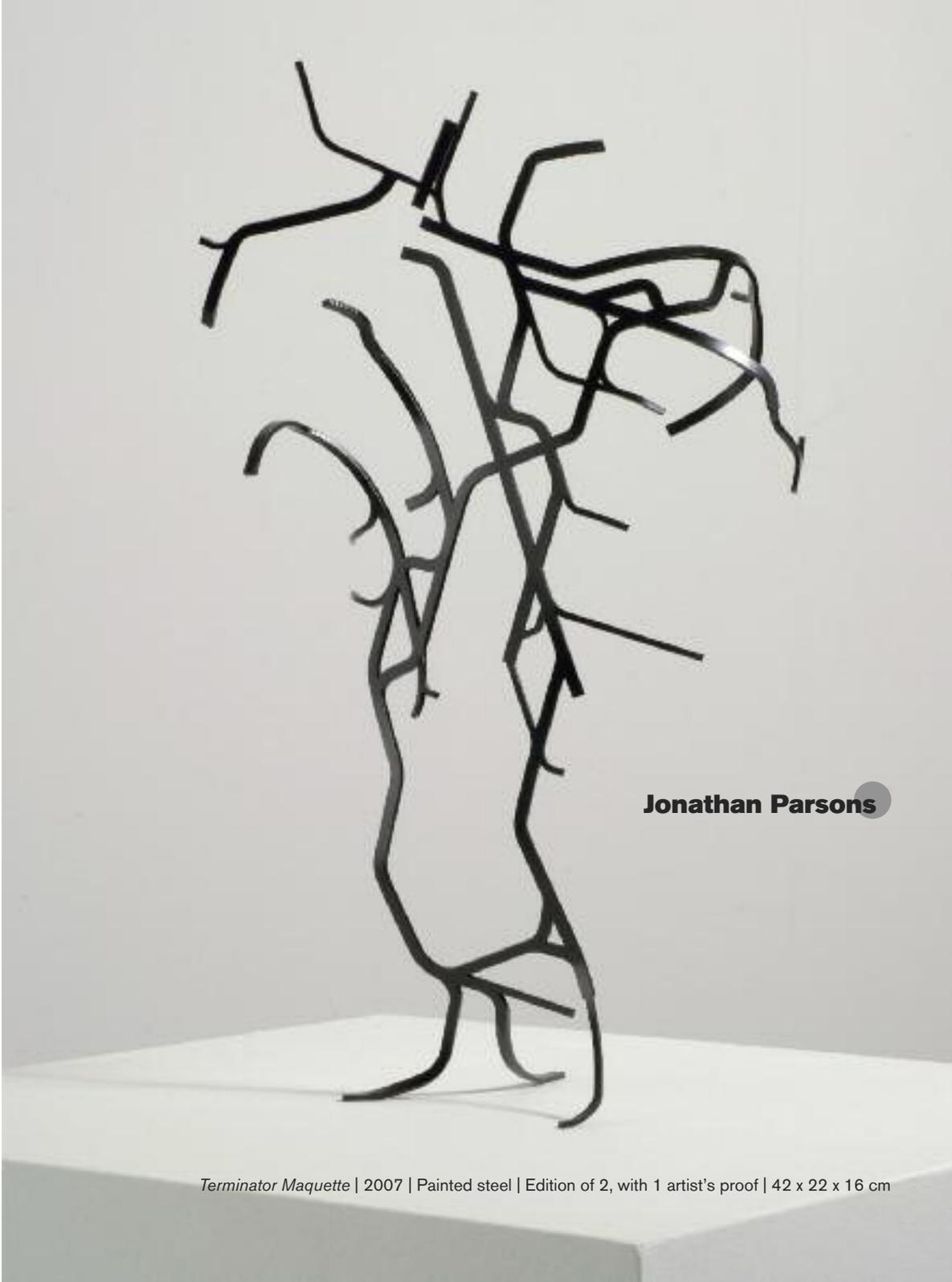


*Buddha In Our Times* (detail) | 2010 | Mixed media screen prints, silk screen varnished with silver and gold | Edition of 16 | 152.5 x 122 cm

**Emma Johnson**



*Dislocation: Time and Place* | 2011 | Cut paper maps | 41 x 41 cm



**Jonathan Parsons**

*Terminator Maquette* | 2007 | Painted steel | Edition of 2, with 1 artist's proof | 42 x 22 x 16 cm







**Grayson Perry**

*Map of Nowhere* | 2008 | Original etching from five plates on paper | Edition of 68 | 153 x 113 cm | Image courtesy of Paragon Press

**Rob Ryan**



*The Map of My Entire Life* | 2011 | Original hand-cut papercut | 51 x 64 cm



**Paula Scher**

Europe | 2009 | Hand-pulled screenprint on paper | Edition of 90 | 117.5 x 105.4 cm

**Justine Smith**

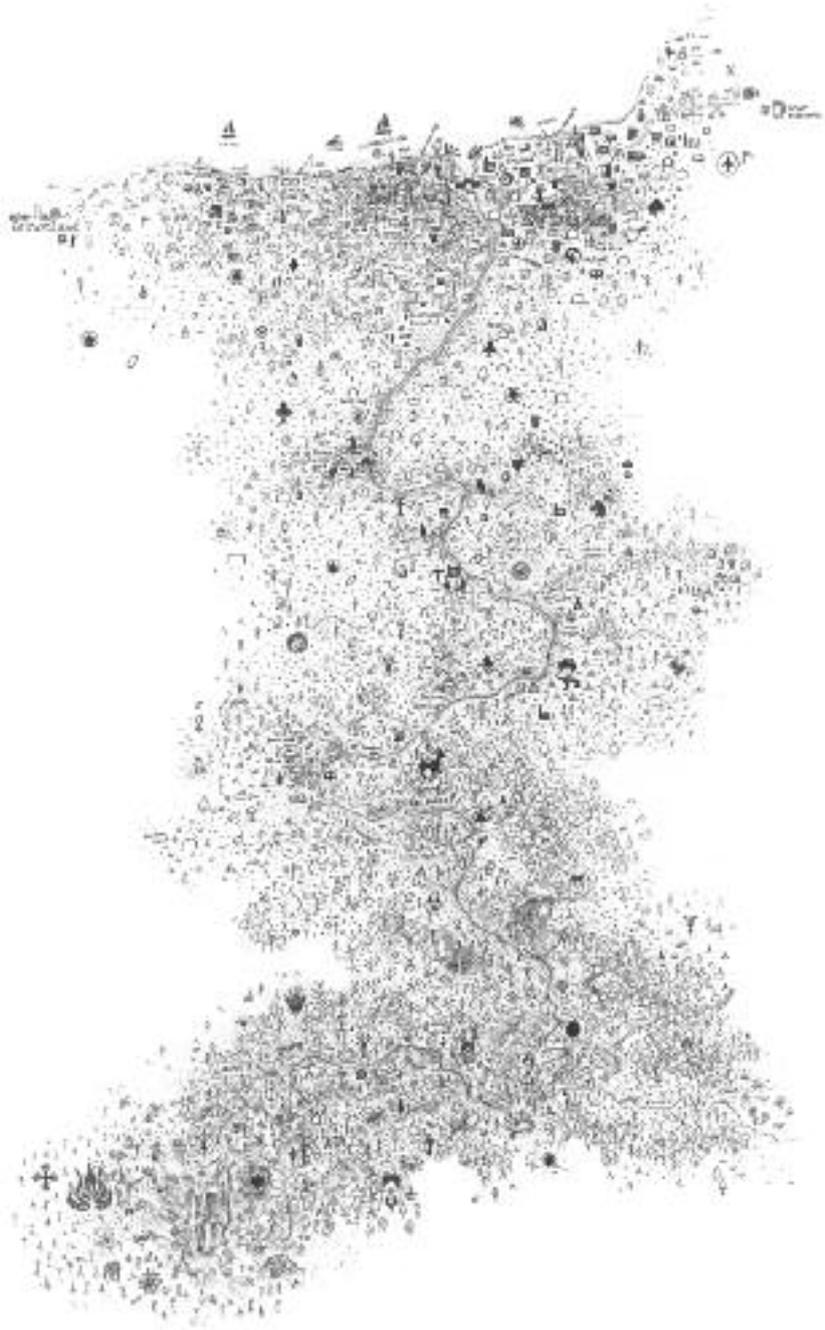


*Time is Money Map* | 2011 | Limited edition archival inkjet with pearlescent screen printing on fine art paper | Edition of 90 | 78 x 114 cm



**Susan Stockwell**





**Stephen Walter**

**Heidi Whitman**



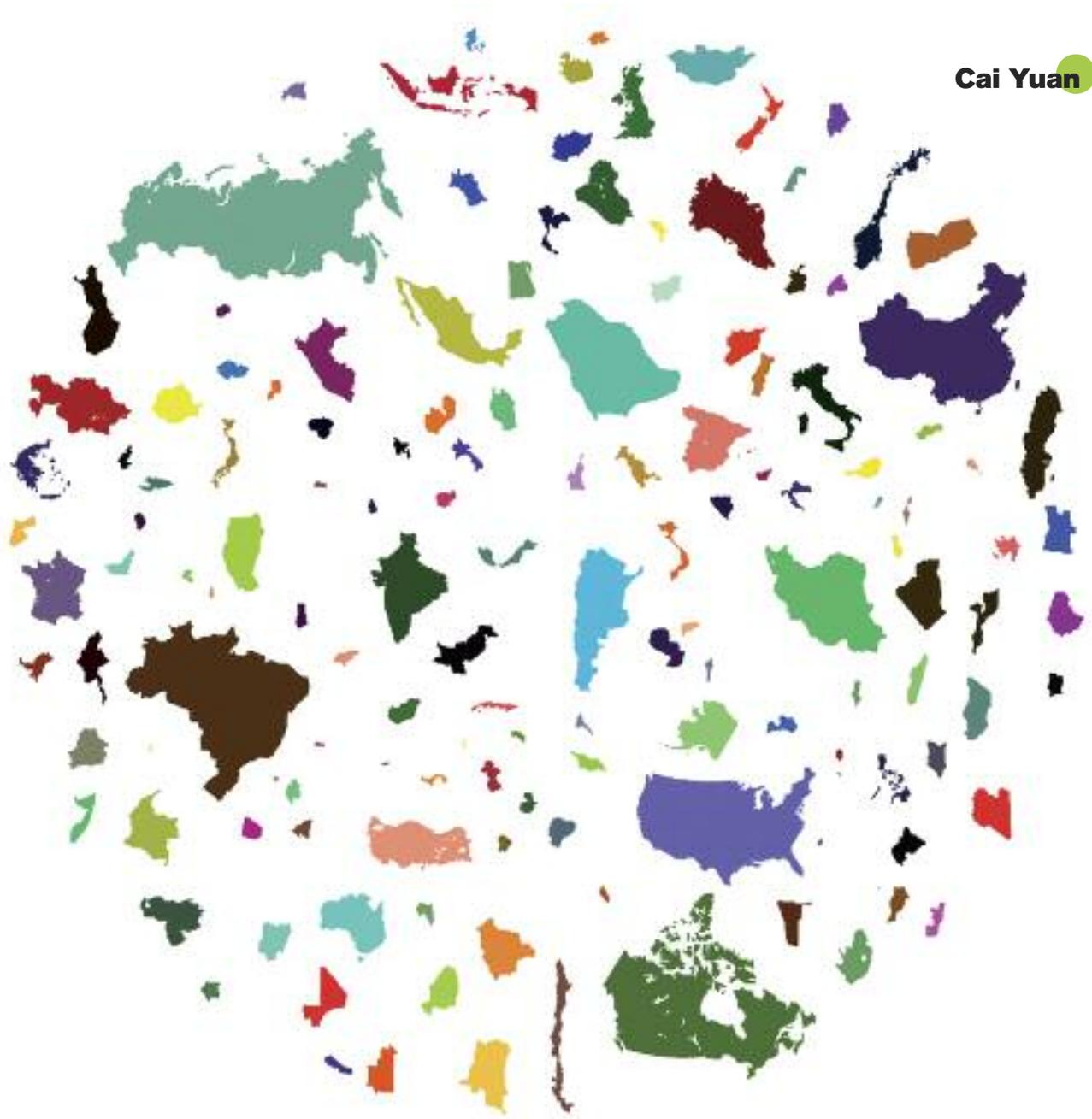
*Invisible Cities / Brain Terrain (318)* | 2010 | Ink, gouache, acrylic, paper, and cast shadows | 63.5 x 83.8 cm

**Jeremy Wood**



*My Ghost* | 2009 | Nine years of movement around the city of London mapped with GPS satellite navigation technology:  
Archival inkjet print on fine art paper | Edition of 5 | 50.8 x 50.8 cm

Cai Yuan



*One World One Dream* | 2011 | Silkscreen and giclee print on fine art paper | Edition of 50 | 79.5 x 79.5 cm

## The Art of Mapping

Maps are useful, beautiful and powerful things. In daily life we find them everywhere: online, on dashboards, in the street, and at our fingertips, part of an indispensable routine. Despite updates and technological advances, such examples stay relatively predictable, necessarily following certain rules and generally of such ingrained value to our society that we don't question their presence in it. Older maps have a different hold over us. Hand-crafted, embellished and unusual, they tend to be the ones in which we most consciously admire the traces of the maker's hand, the fictions of their imagination, and the innovation of their imagery. We also recognise, with collective hindsight, the loaded symbolism and occasional misrepresentation that have for centuries made cartography an ideological and political tool. These qualities are not confined to the past; they are just more obvious there. Contemporary cartography is as influential (for better or worse) as ever, and inventive design is still paramount to its success. And in contemporary art, an ever-building wave of cartographic work is openly reclaiming the beauty and the bias that makes mapping so compelling.

Modern artists have exploited the potential of maps for decades. Part of the appeal is aesthetic: maps use a strikingly abstract visual language, independent of traditional artistic styles. They are also excellent starting points for comment and critique, full of explicit and hidden meaning, and inextricably bound up with the places they depict. Maps have emerged as a popular motif over a period characterised by war and political manoeuvre, when boundaries (geographical, social and artistic) have been redrawn, effaced or jealously enforced. Today's artists use maps to highlight and challenge the way we order our world.

Often this means cultivating disorder in their own, introducing surprise twists on the otherwise familiar paths of map-making and map-reading. The majority of pieces on display in *The Art of Mapping* are useless, pragmatically.

Exaggerated, embellished, crowded, abstracted, dissected, rearranged and sometimes wholly imaginary, they point in completely unexpected creative and conceptual directions.

Many of the artists question what can, and should, make it onto the map in the first place. Cartography is an inherently selective discipline; in the pursuit of clarity only that which is deemed relevant or important can be set down. While certainly necessary, this distillation of information can potentially shape the subject of the map itself, from tourist maps listing only the biggest attractions (and so cementing their success) to propagandist ones emphasising one part of the world over another.

Stephen Walter and Paula Scher respond by being, if not unselective, then certainly less so. Crowding their maps with textual information has the incongruous effect of making some parts nearly illegible. Picking out the details is enjoyable, but also a reminder of the futility of our attempts to 'pin down' a place. Justine Smith points to limitations in traditional geographical maps by proposing a different, but equally valid, legend. She divides her *Time Is Money Map* into time zones, collaged together out of international banknotes to highlight an aspect of global life – the economy – that is every bit as important as its topography. In a different approach, Simon Patterson swapped (like an ironic conquering leader) the station names on Harry Beck's classic London Underground diagram with his own selection to create the iconic *The Great Bear*. As a map it is absurd because it no longer matches what we know to be the original subject, but without that prior knowledge a station called Geoff Hurst is really no more arbitrary than one called Victoria. We use maps in the assumption that more often than not, they will display what we already expect to see. These maps draw attention to that reciprocal, self-enforcing relationship by tripping it up.

Cartography is always the product of its time, but a peculiar problem of modern life is that times change rapidly.

More than this, many of the changes that matter most are not physical ones, but more nebulous developments in the way we think, operate, and interact. Maps are developing dynamically in kind, particularly in the digital sphere where they can be more instantly updated and fundamentally restructured. Anyone with internet connection can zoom in on far-flung corners of the world or construct a map with their living room at its centre, but other questions remain, such as how to navigate the virtual world where these journeys are actually being realised. Today's streams of information and communication have the paradoxical ability to both widen horizons and turn the world in on an individual, creating new personal, social and political territories in the process; brilliant testing grounds for the map as art.

In art as in life, responses are diverse. Peter Dykhuis makes his works out of the sort of incidental physical ephemera – post-it notes, envelopes, business cards, paper maps – that are gradually losing out to digital equivalents. His pieces deliberately re-anchor themselves in a particular physical and personal space, whereas artists such as Gonkar Gyatso (who describes his lifestyle as 'nomadic') put travel and the confusion of world cultures at their work's centre. Others grapple more directly with new technologies. Jeremy Wood uses GPS imagery to digitally track his own movements, creating evocative visual traces of personal journeys – nostalgic after-images that are largely absent from the technology's more typical real-time functions. Susan Stockwell began making maps out of discarded computer components after noting their visual similarities to the built environment: in her new piece, *Jerusalem*, deep green circuit boards resemble fields, wires echo transport routes, while other elements stand in for hills, buildings and rivers. Her deliberate conflation of the 'green and pleasant land' and a computer hub plays tradition and modernity off against each other, while her recycling method highlights the physical waste our virtual lives create.

Of all the unfamiliar territories we are confronted with today, the human mind remains, ironically, one of the most impenetrable. Unburdened by the pragmatic, collaborative concerns that characterise the mapping industry, artists can stray more regularly and farther into muddy psychological waters. Grayson Perry named his map of his thoughts,

anxieties and belief systems the *Map of Nowhere*. Playing with the idea of Utopia, which translates equally plausibly as 'good place' or 'no place,' it presents our cherished sense of self as something immaterial, mysterious and occasionally menacing, akin to the shadowy territories that lurk in the corners of antique maps, or the modern no-man's-land with no fixed identity its own. The unexpected twists, curls and shadows in Heidi Whitman's cut paper 'Shadowlands' resemble bizarre city grids but also suggest the processes of her own brain which, like a city, is constantly building new connections, synapses firing across complex, interconnected routes. In Dahlia Elsayed's drawings, snatches of poetic but mysterious text (nothing like the labels we are accustomed to on maps) combine with loosely configured topographies to create remembered territories, each piece like a stop on a daydreamed journey. Robert Walden works in the other direction, building his maps not from specific memories but by making instinctive linear connections to create new territories. They grow outwards like living organisms, from dense thickets of grid-like streets into a looser suburban sprawl. In their own way, each artist gives exterior expression to a confusion of inner thoughts.

These artworks propose numerous analogies between cartography and other disciplines such as computing, anatomy, brainstorming and language. In essence, they are all the same; human systems specifically designed to structure our lives, symptoms of our enduring compulsion to find order in confusion. Jonathan Parsons' *Lifeblood* recognises this need of ours to navigate the world by explaining, charting or predicting it: by lifting only the text off a map of the Thames, the piece becomes a record of our efforts to understand the river as much as a celebration of the thing itself. Without the map, nature (human or physical) has as much potential to disrupt as it does to sustain.

The reasons behind our creation and admiration of maps are more various and complicated than the simple fact of their usefulness. *The Art of Mapping* seeks to chart not just places or even abstract territories, but the ideas and concerns we attach to cartography itself.

Maggie Gray

**Neal Beggs'** *Skye Starmap* resembles the night sky but is, in fact, a terrestrial map of the Isle of Skye, systematically painted over so that only the peaks of hills and mountains show through. Inspired in part by the Dead Sea Scrolls, whose ancient characters reminded him of mountain maps and star system diagrams, Beggs focuses on geographical summits where earth and sky meet. Cartographic systems are deliberately confused, forcing us to view this abstract constellation with fresh eyes.

Flora and fauna thrive in neglected areas of the city: **Claire Brewster** uses out of date maps to create delicate paper-cuts of this urbanised natural world. In *The Harbingers* she creates a flock of sparrows from maps of the United Kingdom. Historically, sparrows are symbols of death, supposedly alerting the Romans to Jesus' on-going suffering on the cross. They thrive alongside humans. Brewster's work, like nature itself, is beautiful and menacing. In subject and method she reveals the vibrant potential of the overlooked.

**Christa Dichgans** is a renowned European Pop artist with almost half a century of artistic experiment behind her. In her maps, she crowds humdrum images from what she calls 'the debris of life' into cartographic boundaries, alongside specific local and personal symbols. Dichgans drew on her Catholic upbringing to map *Peru*, exploring the influence of religion and colonialism over the country through a collection of icons. Removing traditional keys and foregrounding cultural over geographical concerns, Dichgans injects her maps with subversive suggestions.

**Stanley Donwood**, renowned for his on-going graphic work with Radiohead, developed his maps after a visit to LA. Confronted with a city 'scaled for private motor vehicles,' he was struck by the size, abundance and uniform design of roadside advertisements. Donwood used a similar colour scheme to create his maps, dividing his compositions 'like real estate' into vibrant, crowded planes. In *London* and *LA*, different sections compete for attention, mimicking the busy, jostling cities that inspired them.

**Peter Dykhuis'** artistic materials – paper maps, envelopes, hand-written notes – are being replaced steadily by digital equivalents. Gathered on clipboards in a 'cut and paste' style, these are physical manifestations of the incidental information that we also collect online in social networks. The superimposed map-like grids (derived from Google Earth) suggest the overlap of old and new social territories, and remind us that everyday technologies often have impersonal, military roots. These layered maps link geo-political issues with personal and domestic realities.

**Dahlia Elsayed** views writing and painting as interconnected: since childhood, she has kept painted journals and in her work she continues to construct visual narratives. These drawings were made after a trip to the pacific northwest of the United States, where she found the irregularly shaped, sparsely populated islands both fascinating and foreign. The images evoke the colours, sights and even sounds of the area, while the words distil her most potent memories and emotional responses associated with the visit.

**Rob Good** is interested in the relationship between art and the natural world. He is fascinated by Google Earth, harnessing this technology to painstakingly extract whole rivers from the map, from source to mouth. *Two Cities* is deceptively simple and his use of laser cut beautifully enhances the natural delicacy pervading all his river works. Rob says of the subject: 'The Thames is my river. From my childhood in Oxford to my current life in London, it is a constant.'

**Gonkar Gyatso** is interested in material and pop culture and the sense that we are repositories of our time and location, and his work responds to his experiences across the globe. Gyatso's own stickers are designed to represent social or political trends, while Buddhist and Tibetan iconography suggests his personal history. Gyatso feels he is nomadic in nature, and his works are metaphors for how he lives his life; maps of sorts, tracing his personal relationship with the world.

**Emma Johnson** explores the fragmented, multifaceted nature of memory and history. *Dislocation: Time and Place* is part of a project for which she obsessively collects, deconstructs and recombines maps in response to personal experience through time. Johnson cuts multiple paths and layers into each piece, transforming the maps from functional objects into symbols of a private journey. She sees her work as a continued attempt to communicate and pin down the streams of information and thought that characterise our lives.

**Jonathan Parsons** is an interdisciplinary artist who uses materials as diverse as steel, Perspex and maps. His fascination with cartography stems from a wider interest in our relationship with the outdoors. *Lifeblood* celebrates the Thames, and our efforts to chart it, by isolating the places and features that we have identified along its banks. *Terminator Maquette* and *Mon Coeur* reshape transport maps, drawing out their abstract potential. Parsons' manipulations defy our expectations of how and where cartography can be used and appreciated.

**Simon Patterson's** *The Great Bear* reimagines a classic design and in doing so has become an icon in its own right. Patterson replaced the names of stations in Harry Beck's famous map of the London Underground with those of philosophers, actors, politicians and other celebrities, punningly naming the piece after a famous constellation of stars. His intervention upends our expectations of the map, comically suggesting associative paths across the names. Created in 1992, its light-hearted subversion remains pointedly relevant today.

**Nigel Peake** studied architecture and works in the countryside. His recent artwork tackles subjects as diverse as cycling, farms, university campuses and great cities such as London. Peake's drawings are simultaneously delicate and bold, often working in combination as parts of a series or pages in a book. *London Crossings* explores the city's bridges. Like so much of the capital, they exist as a tangle of routes and connections, picked out in different colours like transport maps or diagrams.

**Grayson Perry** frequently takes up traditional art-forms and creates his own eccentric versions, questioning established attitudes in the process. *Map of Nowhere* superficially resembles antique examples, but it documents Perry's own self and belief systems: sensory, emotional and imaginary terrain. Perry's conflation of body and landscape has historical precedent (he was inspired by early examples such as the Ebstorf Map, where Christ's head and hands encircle a globe) but he takes the secular potential of personal cartographies to modern extremes.

**Rob Ryan** tells heartfelt stories through his art; some amusing, some poignant, some melancholy. His works look effortless and whimsical but are painstakingly and superbly crafted. He has always used art and text to suggest and describe journeys, but *The Map of My Entire Life* is the first directly to reference the map. Rob takes an aerial viewpoint to suggest the full breadth of life experience seen at a remove, remembered by figures that he describes as ghosts or gods.

**Paula Scher** is a prizewinning graphic designer and a longstanding partner in the design consultancy Pentagram. Her maps belie a different side to her creative talents. Dense, colourful and displaying a wealth of wordy detail, they potently mix popular opinion and personal significance. Scher sees these works as an antidote to the bureaucracy of design. Brimming with surplus information, they are products of the modern age, where constant deluges of data confuse rather than confirm our understanding of the world.

**Justine Smith** combines banknotes and mapping to explore how money touches every aspect of our lives, while also exploiting their visual beauty. On a physical level banknotes are just paper, but their symbolic value and worldly influence is considerable. Smith explores money as a conduit of power, binding and dividing communities. *Time is Money Map* is structured along time zones and includes an international array of currencies: it comments on how our world functions instead of what it looks like.

**Susan Stockwell** recycles everyday materials to comment on issues of ecology, geo-politics, and global commerce. Maps allow her to identify society's networks of power and communication. *Jerusalem* re-uses obsolete computer components to map Great Britain. Aside from revealing their surprising colourful beauty and map-like physical set-up, she also questions the social impact of computers: in many ways, virtual communities are displacing traditional national identities. The discarded parts are only years old, highlighting the speed at which technology and lifestyles are changing.

Ontology is defined as 'the study of the essence of things, or being in the abstract.' **Robert Walden** draws on these concepts to examine time, location, space and identity in his 'ontological road maps.' The elegant maps begin with the ordered grid of a New World city and build into the convoluted confusion of urban sprawl. They never coalesce into a particular place, but act as abstract metaphors for existence, while also tracing Walden's private effort along painstakingly-produced lines of communication.

**Stephen Walter's** maps are a tangle of words and symbols that slowly reveal the artist's intricate worlds. *The Island - London Series* (published by TAG Fine Arts) combines history, trivia, memory and imagination to explore the city's contradictions. *Down River* depicts an imaginary waterway, symbols proliferating along its banks. Inspired by Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' and the film adaptation 'Apocalypse Now,' he charts a sinister journey into unsafe territory. Real or fictional, Walter's maps are idiosyncratic challenges to the status quo.

**Heidi Whitman's** paper constructions resemble city grids, ancient ruins and floor plans, but they also act as metaphors for the complicated processes of the mind. Unpredictable curls and twists of paper, switchbacks and meanderings all form part of this intuitive terrain, while the changing shadows cast by the cut paper hint at the unknowable and transitory nature of human consciousness. In these enigmatic layered constructions, Whitman is able to conflate her internal and external geographies.

**Jeremy Wood** fuses art and science in a creative exploration of space. Using GPS satellite technology he records his own movements over land, water and air, creating personal cartographies which reveal his tracks via their residual image. Wood's work both requires and excites a deeper awareness of our own movements; of travel, navigation and local areas. *My Ghost* reveals nine years of his own movements across London, transforming the city into a mysterious web of daily journeys and memories.

**Cai Yuan** is one half of the performance duo 'Mad for Real,' and in 1999 famously jumped on Tracey Emin's bed. His prints expertly combine strong colour and composition with creative social commentary. *One World One Dream* deliberately disrupts our view of the globe. By shaking up the countries, removing their labels and breaking up the networks that typically tie them together he creates a colourful new world. The balanced scattering of shapes looks like an archipelago of islands, close but independent.



With thanks to:



Unless otherwise stated images are courtesy of the artist and TAG Fine Arts.  
All works are signed by the artist.

Edited by Maggie Gray, Hobby Limon, Diana Ewer and Hannah Shilland.

TAG Fine Arts | 129a BDC | 52 Upper Street | London N1 0QH  
+44 (0)20 7688 8446 | [info@tagfinearts.com](mailto:info@tagfinearts.com) | [www.tagfinearts.com](http://www.tagfinearts.com)

Designed and printed by ArtQuarters Press

Cover image – Susan Stockwell | Red Road Arteries | 2011 | (detail)

