

Locate | Navigate: exercises in mapping (part 1)

Urban Culture Project Space | 21 East 12th Street
January 18-March 8, 2008

Locate | Navigate: exercises in mapping (part 2)

La Esquina | 1000 West 25th Street
February 1-March 22, 2008

Locate | navigate (part 1): Leah Beeferman (Richmond, VA), Timothy Briner (Brooklyn, NY), Joe Faus (Kansas City), Karen McCoy (Kansas City), Johnny Naugahyde (Kansas City), Garry Noland (Kansas City), Jack Rees (Kansas City), Eric von Robertson (Amsterdam, the Netherlands), Michael Schonhoff (Kansas City), Larry Thomas (Kansas City), Andrew Thompson (Detroit, MI), and Cara Walz (Kansas City); curated by Kate Hackman.

A map is a visual representation of an area — a symbolic depiction highlighting relationships between elements of that space such as objects, regions, and themes. Many maps are static two-dimensional, geometrically accurate representations of three-dimensional space, while others are dynamic or interactive, even three-dimensional. Although most commonly used to depict geography, maps may represent any space, real or imagined, without regard to context or scale. - Wikipedia

Maps are pictures. Maps are self-portraits. Maps are manifestations of perceptions. Maps are portraits of the world in the manner in which those portraying them would like the world to be understood. Maps are subjective. Mapping is...an act of power. – Jai Sen, "Other Worlds, Other Maps: Mapping the Unintended City" from *An Atlas of Radical Cartography*, Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press, 2007

In 2008, we are in the midst of a mapping revolution. Thanks to the personal computer, the internet, space satellites for data collection, and an expansive array of related technological tools, the scope of information available for mapping has exploded; we simply choose how we'd like to select, filter, manipulate, zoom in or zoom out. Tracked by GPS, our physical locations and motions may be mapped in real time (never to be lost again), while at the same time we navigate through a vast virtual network, locating and relocating ourselves perpetually. Google Earth-ing one's own neighborhood or childhood home; routinely linking Mapquest directions to e-mailed party invites; building networks of MySpace friends: we have become habitual mapmakers on as well as blips on a vast array of others people's maps.

Locate | Navigate: exercises in mapping, a two-part exhibition presented across two Urban Culture Project venues in Kansas City, together exhibits work by some thirty artists local, national and international artists. *Locate | Navigate* is interested in artists using maps as means of structuring highly personal experiences and investigations, and in mapping as an individualistic, creative process for observing, exploring and representing relationships among particular elements of interest, from places to objects, ideas, actions, and points in time. Throughout is an interest in the artist's "hand," whether



embedded in physical mark or content of the work, and in the subjective nature of the "maps" created. Inviting public participation, the project further aims to encourage new approaches and attitudes toward exploring and examining our surroundings, and to suggest alternative methods for envisioning and depicting such terrains.

A former Kansas Citian now based in Amsterdam, **Eric von Robertson** creates tools and structures for the concerted pursuit of recreation and leisure, inventing and employing rigorously eccentric methods and manners for exploring far ranging environments. *Cloudburst* exemplifies Robertson's

ongoing interest in the umbrella: as a module for constructing vivid architectures; as a tool for indexing relationships among weather, human activity, and urban environment; and as an opportunity for reclaiming and redeeming a failed, discarded object into an otherwise useful instrument.

The grid of photographs on one wall of the gallery documents a series of broken umbrellas discovered after rainstorms in Amsterdam, shot in situ. On the opposite wall is a drawing mapping the specific locations where these umbrellas were found, as well as detailing the unique spike patterns of each. *City Guide – Tbilisi*, adjacent, is a prototype assistant in the collection of these discarded items, with its custom-knit pullover (a 1978 map of Tbilisi, Georgia, produced as a four-color relief) functioning as navigational aid. (The sweater is one of three prototypes originally designed and fabricated with the intent of utilizing stray city dogs as roaming information collectors.) A tag pinned to the sweater marks the original location of an iconic red and white construction screen Robertson discovered while an artist in residence in Tbilisi, recreated here as a scale model providing locational and conceptual context for the City Guide. Independently and together, these works exemplify an artistic practice that challenges typical assessments of function and dysfunction and invites us to reorient ourselves in relation to our environments—toward a greater sense of play. Visit <http://carl.typepad.com/> for more about Robertson’s range of activities, which regularly encompass maps and creative forms of mapping.

In late 2007, we received a postcard in the mail from **Timothy Briner**, marking the 104th day of his Boonville USA project, for which the artist is traversing the country, living in and photographing six different towns named Boonville over the course of a year, staying with families and residents in each place. The towns include: Boonville, Missouri (population 8,202), Indiana (6,834), New York (2,138), North Carolina (1,138), California (600-800) and Texas (extinct.)



Briner writes of the project: “In 2003 I visited a small village near the Adirondack Mountains in New York State, named Boonville. I began asking myself: what is in a name and where does it come from? I grew up in a small town surrounded by cornfields and farms, and it was often referred to as the “boonies.” For the last four years I have explored and researched all the towns in the United States named Boonville, and two years ago I began raising money to live in and photograph each. The notions of the boonies, a boon (or blessing), and the legend of Daniel Boone (the great American pioneer), all became a driving force behind my “Boonville” journey... I’m using these six towns, their evocative name, range in populations, and diverse geographical locations as my muse in creating images and stories of small-town America. This journey is about my connection to these towns, theirs to each other and to the rest of the country. Much of America is changing, and Boonville is my way of documenting and exploring this inevitable and complex transition.”



Engaging mapping both as point of entry and ongoing process, the scope of Briner’s project spans from location to navigation; from initial concept, to research, to the experiential investigation of these places. The snapshots on exhibit are a small selection from a much larger body of images that will continue to expand over the course of the year. Visit Briner’s project blog (www.boonvilleusa.com) to track his experiences and sign up to receive a postcard from the road.

Garry Noland’s *Scenes from The Route of Amundsen’s South Pole Expedition November 15 - December 2, 1911 and January 2-9, 1912* maps Norwegian explorer Raold Amundsen’s successful venture as the first person to reach to the South Pole, beating out American explorer Robert Falcon Scott in the quest to arrive at the world’s southernmost point. Included is a geographical map tracing a segment of Amundsen’s journey in dashed lines, with blue map pins marking dates and locations on his inbound trip, and white pins pointing to stops on his outbound course. Accompanying the map are 25 delicate collages by Noland, each one corresponding to a specific day on Amundsen’s expedition and offering a

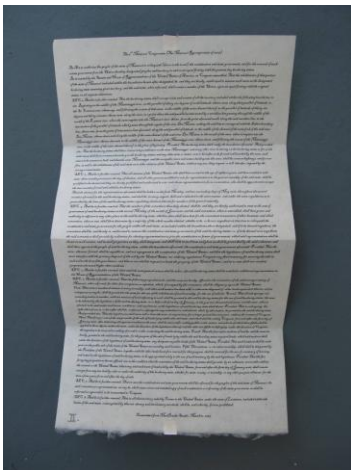
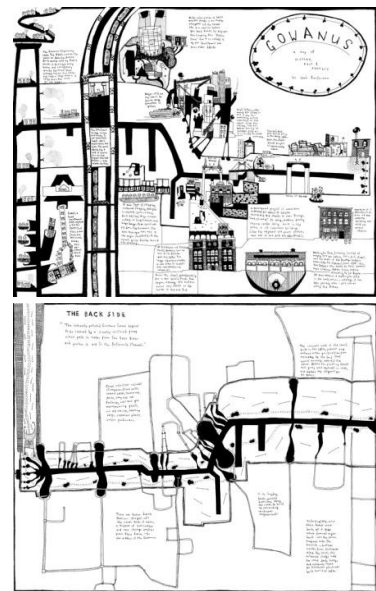
"fictitious account" of the polar landscape at that location. Collages to the left of the map correspond to dates and locations on the inbound trip, with the outbound trip envisioned in the works to the right.



Imagining landscape views at specific locations along Amundsen's route, Noland transforms a journey plotted on a static, two-dimensional geographic map into a three-dimensional story, or series of stories. The intimate, almost precious nature of the collages, themselves incorporating maps, invests these landscapes with a sense of the special, rare, and privileged, as if handmade sketches by the explorer himself, carefully rendered in a travel journal, late at night by candlelight. Closer inspection reveals that these landscape vistas are partially comprised of images of red meat, alluding to the blood thirst of the explorers competing to arrive at the South Pole first, and more generally pointing to the imperialistic pursuit of land, like prey, as an object of desire to be chased, captured, conquered and consumed.

Leah Beferman's drawings and prints exhibit a combination of pragmatism and whimsy, as the artist's interests in real-world architecture, landscape, and urban planning inform fantastical maps of imaginary worlds. Structures drawn from the artist's immediate surroundings are recontextualized in these invented terrains, which seem in perpetual process of unfolding as the real and unreal collide, forcing (enabling) a lyrical reconfiguration of roles and relationships.

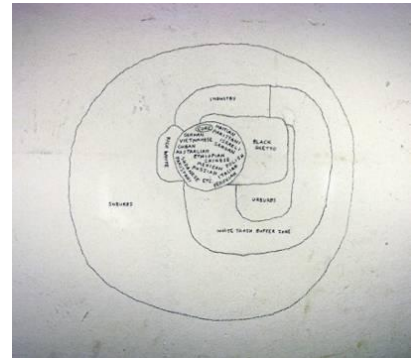
The eight drawings that make up Beferman's handmade book, *The Step-By-Step Process of Building a Landscape of Freshly Fallen Hills into an Industrious Winged City* map the construction, development, recycling, and recreation of a metropolis landscape—an open-ended, cyclical process of perpetual becoming. More explicitly referential, Beferman's originally double-sided 9x12" hand-drawn annotated map of the Gowanus canal neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY (here presented as two prints) maps what is built above ground on the front side, while the back side depicts the sewage tunnels underground. The map combines historical research, investigation into developers' plans for the neighborhood, exploration and documentation of the neighborhood, and the artist's own thoughts about what the neighborhood might need—all conveyed in an appealingly casual manner that engages the viewer as active navigator. (This work was originally copied and distributed from the Empty Vessel Project, a now-defunct boat-turned-art space which resided on the canal itself.) The artist's elegant newest drawings, *Metes and Bounds*, reflect an emerging interest in the circuitous ways architecture and nature coalesce to form our total environment, with gorgeous passages of markmaking energizing evocative, hybrid forms.



With *Missouri ReCompromise* **Michael Schonhoff** imagines an alternate history for our state. What if the Missouri Compromise, granting Missouri statehood and status as a slave state in 1820, had instead divided it into eight parcels to be incorporated into the surrounding states, dissolving Missouri entirely? Through a careful manipulation of this historic text, Schonhoff makes this fictional outcome manifest, and further envisions three scenarios for how the state might have been physically divided, from the somewhat logical to the entirely ridiculous. Reminding us that the establishment of statehood and state lines was once part of an ongoing, shifting, highly political process (Missouri was allowed to annex as a slave state only because Maine, a free state, would counterbalance it), Schonhoff invites us to imagine other histories for this place, and for ourselves as a result. Schonhoff's abstract systems of division, divorced from reference to population concentrations or physical characteristics of the land itself, for

example, perhaps further comments on the manner in which doctrines may be authored from a removed position, distanced from the real lives they will impact.

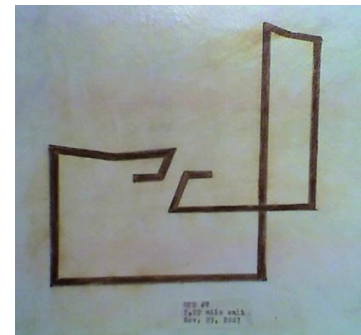
Drawn low to the ground on an inconspicuous wall of the gallery, **Cara Walz's** *the city* speaks "like an embarrassed whisper" about racial and socio-economic divisions. This simplified demarcation of territory, among "black," "rich white," "white trash," "industrial," and a mix of others, is grounded not in true demographics but rather general impressions, assumptions, and a sense of collective memory. That we immediately begin to map neighborhoods and even streets, the river, highways and train tracks onto this abstraction, and begin to populate it with specific mental images and memories, alerts us to its resonance and potency as a generalized portrait of our city and, with some alterations and reorientations, of most cities in America. With a few pencil marks, Walz invokes a highly charged terrain for consideration and discussion.



Begun for this exhibition and still in progress, the multi-layered map by Kansas City artist and longtime resident **José Faus** exemplifies a storyteller's approach to mapping a specific neighborhood, in this case the Crossroads District. Layered with personal anecdotes, observations, photographs, and audio recordings, this map in progress bears witness to the evolution of the area, from before it was ever known as an Arts District to its current moment. Faus's work is the antithesis of the authoritative map; rather, it embodies and relishes its own subjective, partial, imperfect nature, and invites visitors to contribute memories, references, and Polaroids of their own. This inclusive approach to the mapping of a neighborhood locates importance in the collection

of individuals who occupy it and shape its character—a wildly participatory, complex ongoing process informed by, and revealing, a vast array of social, economic, political and aesthetic interests.

At a glance, three drawings by **Johnny Naugahyde** may read simply as abstractions, interested in line, form, and surface. However, these are in fact accurate maps of specific walks around Kansas City, which Naugahyde tracked using a hand-held GPS unit. Inspired by recent readings about the history of walking and unplanned, experimental walks, such as "The Lonely Planet Guide to Experimental Travel," the artist embarked on walks around Union Cemetery, Loose Park, and other specific areas of the city. Letting the flow of the GPS "drawing"—tracked and displayed on his handheld GPS device—inform his continued path in real time, Naugahyde is essentially walking in order to draw, with his steps determining the composition, which unfolds in real time. Following the walk, Naugahyde transfers the digital image from the GPS unit to paper, attempting to make the final work appear "as traditional and non-digital as possible," thus returning it to simple acts of walking and drawing.



Andrew Thompson's *Here's Looking at You, Kid...* was a 2005 performance in which the artist walked the perimeter of Auburn Hills, MI, clockwise, over a three day period, wearing a shirt he had constructed, printed with a map of the town, taking "tourist" pictures with slide film. Thompson writes: "Auburn Hills has an idiosyncratic boundary, cupping the older and better known city of Pontiac, MI, which I found lent itself to the shape of my body. Over the three day period of walking, I only moved while extending my right arm, so the map of Auburn Hills was essentially pointing back at itself. This performance walk was to commemorate my first location living away from my parents, and now I would finally live away from that place. In researching the city I discovered that it had only been incorporated since 1982, making it technically a year younger than myself. I was struck by the notion of leaving home to make it out in the big bad world and then learning that sometimes the big bad world is your

junior. The use of the Casablanca quote in the work is both to signify the city as younger than me, and to also express some sense of loss and longing for the past. The green line stitched along the shirt demonstrates my route during the walk. Also curious were the many times I ran off the map because there were no through points in many locations, or because I read the map (the shirt I was wearing at the time) incorrectly.”



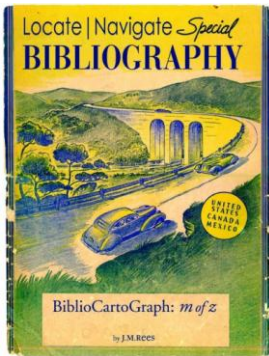
Thompson’s handmade shirt, exhibited here, functions as a map on multiple levels: as an actual map, as a map of his route, and as a map of his exertions: black stains mark the rub of the camera as it hung against his chest; dirt and sweat stains testify to the August heat. Eighty images taken on the tour are presented as a slide show, with the clicking of the slides as they drop into the slide projector evincing the steady rhythm of feet hitting the pavement, one after the other. With a few humble, mindful gestures and devices, Thomson frames a walking excursion as poignant performance, connecting personal identity to place and process.

Larry Thomas’ *Maps our Us*, created specifically for this exhibition, incorporates a scanned map of central Missouri where he grew up, contoured on top of a photographic image of Thomas himself. All numbers and letters from the map - signifying highways, towns and cities - have been erased, thwarting the map’s utilitarian function as a navigational guide and veiling potentially familiar points of reference. This compromised map, absent a referent, invites a range of readings. It reminds one of being lost, whether the experience – and often all-consuming frustration - of being physically lost, or the overwhelming sense of feeling lost in life, longing for direction. For Thomas, a painter whose work often explores ideas of camouflage, this piece alludes to the idea of blending into our surroundings; dislocating ourselves in order to integrate, or relocate, within a different context. Overlaid on top of a body, this de-specified map also alludes to the circulatory system of the body, suggesting that who we are is inextricable from the places we have been, whether embedded in our genes, or experienced over a lifetime, and often despite our best efforts to overcome their influence. The installation of this two-sided piece in a downtown window, allows it to operate outside of an art context, in immediate view of commuters waiting at the bus station just outside.



Karen McCoy’s *Flight: Los Angeles to St Louis, January 15, 2007* incorporates a series of aerial photographs taken from the window of a commercial airplane, on a clear day, flying fairly low. A selection of these images, corresponding to the progression of an eastward path as they are read from left to right, map the radical diversity of landscape observed over the course of just a few hours, enabled via the elevation and speed of the plane. Most often engaged with hands-on processes in her work -- McCoy notes having hiked in the canyons west of the Rockies a few months earlier, where in typical fashion she collected earth colors while hiking, with the idea in mind to make a series of map-like memory drawings using the colors of ochre, sienna and umber that she found on her hike – McCoy similarly contextualizes these images within an environmental consciousness, though in a different manner. Learning that the 1,592 mile flight is calculated to have emitted 104.1 tons of carbon dioxide into the earth’s atmosphere, with one person’s share amounting to .363 tons of CO2 emissions, McCoy translates these figures into relational terms and personal action: “one tree offsets .73 tons of carbon dioxide. The cost of planting one tree is \$14.20. I just planted my first tree.”





Finally, artist, architect and avid reader **Jack Rees** contributes a bibliography of map-related materials to the exhibition, *BiblioCartoGraph: m of z*, one incarnation of a much larger, ongoing bibliographic project organized as an abecedarium (m is for map.) The bibliography encompasses a wide range of materials, from Charles and Ray Eames' *Powers of Ten*, to Heinz-Otto Peitgen's and P. H. Richter's *The Beauty of Fractals: Images of Complex Dynamical Systems*, to Peter S. Stevens' *Patterns in Nature*, as well as works by Rees himself, including the 2006 *Review* special issue, *Urban Stories of Place*, loaded with maps and map-related discourse. Rees has further brought some twenty of the books and publications cited in the bibliography to share, allowing for visitors to navigate as they desire.